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ÉMILE GABORIAU
MONSIEUR LECOQ

PART I

THE ENQUIRY
CHAPTER I.

THE SEARCH.

AT about eleven o'clock in the evening of the 20th of February, 186—, which chanced to be Shrove Sunday, a party of detectives left the police-station near the old Barriere d'Italie to the direct south of Paris. Their mission was to explore the district extending on the one hand between the highroad to Fontainebleau and the Seine, and on the other between the outer boulevards and the fortifications.

This quarter of the city had at that time anything but an enviable reputation. To venture there at night was considered so dangerous that the soldiers from the outlying forts who came in to Paris with permission to go to the theatre, were ordered to halt at the barriere, and not to pass through the perilous district excepting in parties of three or four.

After midnight, these gloomy, narrow streets became the haunt of numerous homeless vagabonds, and escaped criminals and malefactors, moreover, made the quarter their rendezvous. If the day had been a lucky one, they made merry over their spoils, and when sleep overtook them, hid in doorways or among the rubbish in deserted houses. Every effort had been made to dislodge these dangerous guests, but the most energetic measures had failed to prove successful. Watched, hunted, and in imminent danger of arrest though they were, they always returned with idiotic obstinacy, obeying, as one might suppose, some mysterious law of attraction. Hence, the district was for the police an immense trap, constantly baited, and to which the game came of their own accord to be caught.

The result of a tour of inspection of this locality was so certain, that the officer in charge of the police post called to the squad as they departed: "I will prepare lodgings for our guests. Good luck to you and much pleasure!"

This last wish was pure irony, for the weather was the most disagreeable that could be imagined. A very heavy snow storm had prevailed for several days. It was now beginning to thaw, and on all the frequented thoroughfares the slush was ankle-deep. It was still cold, however; a damp chill filled the air, and penetrated to the very marrow of one's bones. Besides, there was a dense fog, so dense that one could not see one's hands before one's face.

"What a beastly job!" growled one of the agents.

"Yes," replied the inspector who commanded the squad; "If you had an income of thirty thousand francs, I don't suppose you'd be here." The laugh that greeted this common-place joke was not so much flattery as homage to a recognised and established superiority.

The inspector was, in fact one of the most esteemed members of the force, a man who had proved his worth. His powers of penetration were not, perhaps, very great; but he thoroughly understood his profession, its resources, its labyrinths, and its artifices. Long practice had given him imperturbable coolness, a great confidence in himself, and a sort of coarse diplomacy that supplied the place of shrewdness. To his failings and his virtues he added incontestible courage, and he would lay his hand upon the collar of the most dangerous criminal as tranquilly as a devotee dips his fingers in a basin of holy water.

He was a man about forty-six years of age, strongly built, with rugged features, a heavy moustache, and rather small, grey eyes, hidden by bushy eyebrows. His name was Gevrol, but he was universally known as "the General." This sobriquet was pleasing to his vanity, which was not slight, as his subordinates well knew; and, doubtless, he felt that he ought to receive from them the same consideration as was due to a person of that exalted rank.

"If you begin to complain already," he added, gruffly, "what will you do by-and-bye?"

In fact, it was too soon to complain. The little party were then passing along the Rue de Choisy. The people on the footways were orderly; and the lights of the wine-shops illuminated the street. All these places were open.

There is no fog or thaw that is potent enough to dismay lovers of pleasure. And a boisterous crowd of maskers filled each tavern, and public ballroom. Through the open windows came alternately the sounds of loud voices and bursts of noisy music. Occasionally, a drunken man staggered along the pavement, or a masked figure crept by in the shadow cast by the houses.

Before certain establishments Gevrol commanded a halt. He gave a peculiar whistle, and almost immediately a man came out. This was another member of the force. His report was listened to, and then the squad passed on.

"To the left, boys!" ordered Gevrol; "we will take the Rue d'Ivry, and then cut through the shortest way to the Rue de Chevaleret."

From this point the expedition became really disagreeable. The way led through an unfinished, unnamed street, full of puddles and deep holes, and obstructed with all sorts of rubbish. There were no longer any lights or crowded wine-shops. No footsteps, no voices were heard; solitude, gloom, and an almost perfect silence prevailed; and one might have supposed oneself a hundred leagues from Paris, had it not been for the deep and continuous murmur that always arises from a large city, resembling the hollow roar of a torrent in some cavern depth.

All the men had turned up their trousers and were advancing slowly, picking their way as carefully as an Indian when he is stealing upon his prey. They had just passed the Rue du Chateau-des-Rentiers when suddenly a wild shriek rent the air. At this place, and at this hour, such a cry was so frightfully significant, that all the men paused as if by common impulse.

"Did you hear that, General?" asked one of the detectives, in a low voice.

"Yes, there is murder going on not far from here—but where? Silence! let us listen."

They all stood motionless, holding their breath, and anxiously listening. Soon a second cry, or rather a wild howl, resounded.

"Ah!" exclaimed the inspector, "it is at the Poivriere."

This peculiar appellation "Poivriere" or "pepper-box" was derived from the term "peppered" which in French slang is applied to a man who has left his good sense at the bottom of his glass. Hence, also, the sobriquet of

"pepper thieves" given to the rascals whose specialty it is to plunder helpless, inoffensive drunkards.

"What!" added Gevrol to his companions, "don't you know Mother Chupin's drinking-shop there on the right. Run."

And, setting the example, he dashed off in the direction indicated. His men followed, and in less than a minute they reached a hovel of sinister aspect, standing alone, in a tract of waste ground. It was indeed from this den that the cries had proceeded. They were now repeated, and were immediately followed by two pistol shots. The house was hermetically closed, but through the cracks in the window-shutters, gleamed a reddish light like that of a fire. One of the police-agents darted to one of these windows, and raising himself up by clinging to the shutters with his hands, endeavoured to peer through the cracks, and to see what was passing within.

Gevrol himself ran to the door. "Open!" he commanded striking it heavily. No response came. But they could hear plainly enough the sound of a terrible struggle—of fierce imprecations, hollow groans, and occasionally the sobs of a woman.

"Horrible!" cried the police-agent, who was peering through the shutters; "it is horrible!"

This exclamation decided Gevrol. "Open, in the name of the law!" he cried, a third time.

And no one responding, with a blow of the shoulder that was as violent as a blow from a battering-ram, he dashed open the door. Then the horror-stricken accent of the man who had been peering through the shutters was explained. The room presented such a spectacle that all the agents, and even Gevrol himself remained for a moment rooted to the threshold, shuddering with unspeakable horror.

Everything denoted that the house had been the scene of a terrible struggle, of one of those savage conflicts which only too often stain the *barriere* drinking dens with blood. The lights had been extinguished at the beginning of the strife, but a blazing fire of pine logs illuminated even the furthest corners of the room. Tables, glasses, decanters, household utensils, and stools had been overturned, thrown in every direction, trodden upon, shivered into fragments. Near the fireplace two men lay stretched

upon the floor. They were lying motionless upon their backs, with their arms crossed. A third was extended in the middle of the room. A woman crouched upon the lower steps of a staircase leading to the floor above. She had thrown her apron over her head, and was uttering inarticulate moans. Finally, facing the police, and with his back turned to an open door leading into an adjoining room, stood a young man, in front of whom a heavy oaken table formed, as it were, a rampart.

He was of medium stature, and wore a full beard. His clothes, not unlike those of a railway porter, were torn to fragments, and soiled with dust and wine and blood. This certainly was the murderer. The expression on his face was terrible. A mad fury blazed in his eyes, and a convulsive sneer distorted his features. On his neck and cheek were two wounds which bled profusely. In his right hand, covered with a handkerchief, he held a pistol, which he aimed at the intruders.

"Surrender!" cried Gevrol.

The man's lips moved, but in spite of a visible effort he could not articulate a syllable.

"Don't do any mischief," continued the inspector, "we are in force, you cannot escape; so lay down your arms."

"I am innocent," exclaimed the man, in a hoarse, strained voice.

"Naturally, but we do not see it."

"I have been attacked; ask that old woman. I defended myself; I have killed—I had a right to do so; it was in self-defence!"

The gesture with which he enforced these words was so menacing that one of the agents drew Gevrol violently aside, saying, as he did so; "Take care, General, take care! The revolver has five barrels, and we have heard but two shots."

But the inspector was inaccessible to fear; he freed himself from the grasp of his subordinate and again stepped forward, speaking in a still calmer tone. "No foolishness, my lad; if your case is a good one, which is possible after all, don't spoil it."

A frightful indecision betrayed itself on the young man's features. He held Gevrol's life at the end of his finger, was he about to press the trigger? No, he suddenly threw his weapon to the floor, exclaiming: "Come and take

me!" And turning as he spoke he darted into the adjoining room, hoping doubtless to escape by some means of egress which he knew of.

Gevrol had expected this movement. He sprang after him with outstretched arms, but the table retarded his pursuit. "Ah!" he exclaimed, "the wretch escapes us!"

But the fate of the fugitive was already decided. While Gevrol parleyed, one of the agents—he who had peered through the shutters—had gone to the rear of the house and effected an entrance through the back door. As the murderer darted out, this man sprang upon him, seized him, and with surprising strength and agility dragged him back. The murderer tried to resist; but in vain. He had lost his strength: he tottered and fell upon the table that had momentarily protected him, murmuring loud enough for everyone to hear: "Lost! It is the Prussians who are coming!"

This simple and decisive manœuvre on the part of the subordinate had won the victory, and at first it greatly delighted the inspector. "Good, my boy," said he, "very good! Ah! you have a talent for your business, and you will do well if ever an opportunity——"

But he checked himself; all his followers so evidently shared his enthusiasm that a feeling of jealousy overcame him. He felt his prestige diminishing, and hastened to add: "The idea had occurred to me; but I could not give the order without warning the scoundrel himself."

This remark was superfluous. All the police-agents had now gathered around the murderer. They began by binding his feet and hands, and then fastened him securely to a chair. He offered no resistance. His wild excitement had given place to that gloomy prostration that follows all unnatural efforts, either of mind or body. Evidently he had abandoned himself to his fate.

When Gevrol saw that the men had finished their task, he called on them to attend to the other inmates of the den, and in addition ordered the lamps to be lit for the fire was going out. The inspector began his examination with the two men lying near the fireplace. He laid his hand on their hearts, but no pulsations were to be detected. He then held the face of his watch close to their lips, but the glass remained quite clear. "Useless," he murmured, after several trials, "useless; they are dead! They will

never see morning again. Leave them in the same position until the arrival of the public prosecutor, and let us look at the other one."

The third man still breathed. He was a young fellow, wearing the uniform of a common soldier of the line. He was unarmed, and his large bluish grey cloak was partly open, revealing his bare chest. The agents lifted him very carefully—for he groaned piteously at the slightest movement—and placed him in an upright position, with his back leaning against the wall. He soon opened his eyes, and in a faint voice asked for something to drink. They brought him a glass of water, which he drank with evident satisfaction. He then drew a long breath, and seemed to regain some little strength.

"Where are you wounded?" asked Gevrol.

"In the head, there," he responded, trying to raise one of his arms. "Oh! how I suffer."

The police-agent, who had cut off the murderer's retreat now approached, and with a dexterity that an old surgeon might have envied, made an examination of the gaping wound which the young man had received in the back of the neck. "It is nothing," declared the police-agent, but as he spoke there was no mistaking the movement of his lower lip. It was evident that he considered the wound very dangerous, probably mortal.

"It will be nothing," affirmed Gevrol in his turn; "wounds in the head, when they do not kill at once, are cured in a month."

The wounded man smiled sadly. "I have received my death blow," he murmured.

"Nonsense!"

"Oh! it is useless to say anything; I feel it, but I do not complain. I have only received my just deserts."

All the police-agents turned towards the murderer on hearing these words, presuming that he would take advantage of this opportunity to repeat his protestations of innocence. But their expectations were disappointed; he did not speak, although he must certainly have heard the words.

"It was that brigand, Lacheneur, who enticed me here," continued the wounded man, in a voice that was growing fainter.

"Lacheneur?"

"Yes, Jean Lacheneur, a former actor, who knew me when I was rich—for I had a fortune, but I spent it all; I wished to amuse myself. He, knowing I was without a single sou in the world, came and promised me money enough to begin life over again. Fool that I was to believe him, for he brought me to die here like a dog! Oh! I will have my revenge on him!" At this thought the wounded man clenched his hands threateningly "I will have my revenge," he resumed. "I know much more than he believes. I will reveal everything."

But he had presumed too much upon his strength. Anger had given him a moment's energy, but at the cost of his life which was ebbing away. When he again tried to speak, he could not. Twice did he open his lips, but only a choking cry of impotent rage escaped them. This was his last manifestation of intelligence. A bloody foam gathered upon his lips, his eyes rolled back in their sockets, his body stiffened, and he fell face downward in a terrible convulsion.

"It is over," murmured Gevrol.

"Not yet," replied the young police-agent, who had shown himself so efficient; "but he cannot live more than two minutes. Poor devil! he will say nothing."

The inspector of police had risen from the floor as if he had just witnessed the commonest incident in the world, and was carefully dusting the knees of his trousers. "Oh, well," he responded, "we shall know all we need to know. This fellow is a soldier, and the number of his regiment will be given on the buttons of his cloak."

A slight smile curved the lips of the subordinate. "I think you are mistaken, General," said he.

"How—"

"Yes, I understand. Seeing him attired in a military coat, you supposed—But no; this poor wretch was no soldier. Do you wish for an immediate proof? Is his hair the regulation cut? Where did you ever see soldiers with their hair falling over their shoulders?"

This objection silenced the General for a moment; but he replied, brusquely: "Do you think that I keep my eyes in my pocket? What you have remarked did not escape my notice; only I said to myself, here is a young man who has profited by leave of absence to visit the wig maker."

"At least—"

But Gevrol would permit no more interruptions. "Enough talk," he declared. We will now hear what has happened. Mother Chupin, the old hussy, is not dead!"

As he spoke, he advanced towards the old woman, who was still crouching upon the stairs. She had not moved nor ventured so much as a look, since the entrance of the police, but her moans had not been discontinued. With a sudden movement, Gevrol tore off the apron which she had thrown over her head, and there she stood, such as years, vice, poverty, and drink had made her; wrinkled, shrivelled, toothless, and haggard, her skin as yellow and as dry as parchment and drawn tightly over her bones.

"Come, stand up!" ordered the inspector. "Your lamentations don't affect me. You ought to be sent to prison for putting such vile drugs into your liquors thus breeding madness in the brains of your customers."

The old woman's little red eyes travelled slowly round the room, and then in tearful tones she exclaimed:—"What a misfortune! what will become of me? Everything is broken—I am ruined!" She only seemed impressed by the loss of her table utensils.

"Now tell us how this trouble began," said Gevrol.

"Alas! I know nothing about it. I was upstairs mending my son's clothes, when I heard a dispute."

"And after that?"

"Of course I came down, and I saw those three men that are lying there picking a quarrel with the young man you have arrested; the poor innocent! For he is innocent, as truly as I am an honest woman. If my son Polyte had been here he would have separated them; but I, a poor widow, what could I do! I cried 'Police!' with all my might."

After giving this testimony she resumed her seat, thinking she had said enough. But Gevrol rudely ordered her to stand up again. "Oh! we have not done," said he. "I wish for other particulars."

"What particulars, dear Monsieur Gevrol, since I saw nothing?"

Anger crimsoned the inspector's ears. "What would you say, old woman, if I arrested you?"

"It would be a great piece of injustice."

"Nevertheless, it is what will happen if you persist in re

maining silent. I have an idea that a fortnight in Saint Lazare would untie your tongue."

These words produced the effect of an electric shock on the Widow Chupin. She suddenly ceased her hypocritical lamentations, rose, placed her hands defiantly on her hips, and poured forth a torrent of invective upon Gevrol and his agents, accusing them of persecuting her family ever since they had previously arrested her son, a good-for-nothing fellow. Finally, she swore that she was not afraid of prison, and would be only too glad to end her days in jail beyond the reach of want.

At first the general tried to impose silence upon the terrible termagant: but he soon discovered that he was powerless; besides, all his subordinates were laughing. Accordingly he turned his back upon her, and, advancing towards the murderer, he said:—"You, at least, will not refuse an explanation."

The man hesitated for a moment. "I have already said all that I have to say," he replied, at last. "I have told you that I am innocent; and this woman and a man on the point of death who was struck down by my hand, have both confirmed my declaration. What more do you desire? When the judge questions me, I will, perhaps, reply; until then do not expect another word from me."

It was easy to see that the fellow's resolution was irrevocable; and that he was not to be daunted by any inspector of police. Criminals frequently preserve an absolute silence, from the very moment they are captured. These men are experienced and shrewd, and lawyers and judges pass many sleepless nights on their account. They have learned that a system of defence cannot be improvised at once; that it is, on the contrary, a work of patience and meditation; and knowing what a terrible effect an apparently insignificant response drawn from them at the moment of detection may produce on a court of justice, they remain obstinately silent. So as to see whether the present culprit was an old hand or not, Gevrol was about to insist on a full explanation when someone announced that the soldier had just breathed his last.

"As that is so, my boys," the inspector remarked, "two of you will remain here, and I will leave with the others. I shall go and arouse the commissary of police, and inform him of the affair; he will take the matter in hand: and

we can then do whatever he commands. My responsibility will be over, in any case. So untie our prisoner's legs and bind Mother Chupin's hands, and we will drop them both at the station-house as we pass."

The men hastened to obey, with the exception of the youngest among them, the same who had won the General's passing praise. He approached his chief, and motioning that he desired to speak with him, drew him outside the door. When they were a few steps from the house, Gevrol asked him what he wanted.

"I wish to know, General, what you think of this affair."

"I think, my boy, that four scoundrels encountered each other in this vile den. They began to quarrel; and from words they came to blows. One of them had a revolver, and he killed the others. It is as clear as daylight. According to his antecedents, and according to the antecedents of the victims, the assassin will be judged. Perhaps society owes him some thanks."

"And you think that any investigation—any further search is unnecessary."

"Entirely unnecessary."

The younger man appeared to deliberate for a moment. "It seems to me, General," he at length replied, "that this affair is not perfectly clear. Have you noticed the murderer; remarked his demeanour, and observed his look? Have you been surprised as I have been—?"

"By what?"

"Ah, well! it seems to me—I may, of course, be mistaken—but I fancy that appearances are deceitful, and—Yes, I suspect something."

"Bah!—explain yourself, please."

"How can you explain the dog's faculty of scent?"

Gevrol shrugged his shoulders. "In short," he replied, "you scent a melodrama here—a rendezvous of gentlemen in disguise, here at the Poivriere, at Mother Chupin's house. Well, hunt after the mystery, my boy; search all you like, you have my permission."

"What! you will allow me?"

"I not only allow you, I order you to do it. You are going to remain here with any one of your comrades you may select. And if you find anything that I have not seen, I will allow you to buy me a pair of spectacles."

II.

THE young police-agent to whom Gevrol abandoned what he thought an unnecessary investigation was a debutant in his profession. His name was Lecoq. He was some twenty-five or twenty-six years of age, almost beardless, very pale, with red lips, and an abundance of wavy black hair. He was rather short but well proportioned; and each of his movements betrayed unusual energy. There was nothing remarkable about his appearance, if we except his eyes, which sparkled brilliantly or grew extremely dull, according to his mood; and his nose, the large full nostrils of which had a surprising mobility.

The son of a respectable, well-to-do Norman family, Lecoq had received a good and solid education. He was prosecuting his law studies in Paris, when in the same week, blow following blow, he learned that his father had died, financially ruined, and that his mother had survived him only a few hours. He was left alone in the world, destitute of resources, obliged to earn his living. But how? He had an opportunity of learning his true value, and found that it amounted to nothing; for the university, on bestowing its diploma of bachelor, does not give an annuity with it. Hence, of what use is a college education to a poor orphan boy? He envied the lot of those who, with a trade at the ends of their fingers, could boldly enter the office of any manufacturer, and say:—"I would like to work." Such men were working and eating. Lecoq sought bread by all the methods employed by people who are in reduced circumstances! Fruitless labour! There are a hundred thousand people in Paris who have seen better days. No matter! He gave proofs of undaunted energy. He gave lessons, and copied documents for a lawyer. He made his appearance in a new character almost every day, and left no means untried to earn an honest livelihood. At last he obtained employment from a well-known astronomer, the Baron Moser, and spent his days in solving bewildering and intricate problems, at the rate of a hundred francs a month.

But a season of discouragement came. After five years of constant toil, he found himself at the same point from which he had started. He was nearly crazed with rage

and disappointment when he recapitulated his blighted hopes, his fruitless efforts, and the insults he had endured. The past had been sad, the present was intolerable, the future threatened to be terrible. Condemned to constant privations, he tried to escape from the horrors of his real life by taking refuge in dreams.

Alone in his garret, after a day of unremitting toil, assailed by the thousand longings of youth, Lecoq endeavoured to devise some means of suddenly making himself rich. All reasonable methods being beyond his reach. it was not long before he was engaged in devising the worst expedients. In short, this naturally moral and honest young man spent much of his time in perpetrating—in fancy—the most abominable crimes. Sometimes he himself was frightened by the work of his imagination : for an hour of recklessness might suffice to make him pass from the idea to the fact, from theory to practice. This is the case with all monomaniacs ; an hour comes in which the strange conceptions that have filled their brains can be no longer held in check.

One day he could not refrain from exposing to his patron a little plan he had conceived, which would enable him to obtain five or six hundred francs from London. Two letters and a telegram were all that was necessary, and the game was won. It was impossible to fail, and there was no danger of arousing suspicion.

The astronomer, amazed at the simplicity of the plan, could but admire it. On reflection, however, he concluded that it would not be prudent for him to retain so ingenious a secretary in his service. This was why, on the following day, he gave him a month's pay in advance, and dismissed him, saying : "When one has your disposition, and is poor, one may either become a famous thief or a great detective. Choose."

Lecoq retired in confusion ; but the astronomer's words bore fruit in his mind. "Why should I not follow good advice ?" he asked himself. Police service did not inspire him with repugnance—far from it. He had often admired that mysterious power whose hand is everywhere, and which, although unseen and unheard, still manages to hear and see everything. He was delighted with the prospect of being the instrument of such a power. He considered that the profession of detective would enable him

to employ the talents with which he had been endowed in a useful and honourable fashion; besides opening out a life of thrilling adventure with fame as its goal.

In short, this profession had a wonderful charm for him. So much so, that on the following week, thanks to a letter from Baron Moser, he was admitted into the service. A cruel disenchantment awaited him. He had seen the results, but not the means. His surprise was like that of a simple-minded frequenter of the theatre, when he is admitted for the first time behind the scenes, and is able to pry into the decorations and tinsel that are so dazzling at a distance.

However, the opportunity for which he had so ardently longed, for which he had been waiting during many weary months, had come, he thought, at last, as he reached the Poivriere with Gevrol and the other police-agents. While he was clinging to the window shutters he saw by the light of his ambition a pathway to success. It was at first only a presentiment, but it soon became a supposition, and then a conviction based upon actual facts, which had escaped his companions, but which he had observed and carefully noted. He recognised that fortune had, at last, turned in his favour when he saw Gevrol neglect all but the merest formalities of examination, and when he heard him declare peremptorily that this triple murder was merely the results of one of those ferocious quarrels so frequent among vagrants in the outskirts of the city.

"Ah, well!" he thought; "have it your own way—trust in appearances, since you will see nothing beneath them! But I will prove to you that my youthful theory is better than all your experience."

The inspector's carelessness gave Lecoq a perfect right to secretly seek information on his own account; but by warning his superior officers before attempting anything on his own responsibility, he would protect himself against any accusation of ambition or of unduly taking advantage of his comrade. Such charges might prove most dangerous for his future prospects in a profession where so much rivalry is seen, and where wounded vanity has so many opportunities to avenge itself by resorting to all sorts of petty treason. Accordingly, he spoke to his superior officer—saying just enough to be able to remark, in case

of success : " Ah ! I warned you ! "—just enough so as *not* to dispel any of Gevrol's doubts.

The permission which Lecoq obtained to remain in charge of the bodies was his first triumph of the best possible augury ; but he knew how to dissimulate, and it was in a tone of the utmost indifference that he requested one of his comrades to remain with him. Then, while the others were making ready to depart, he seated himself upon a corner of the table, apparently oblivious of all that was passing around. He did not dare to lift his head, for fear of betraying his joy, so much did he fear that his companions might read his hopes and plans in the expression of his face.

Inwardly he was wild with impatience. Though the murderer submitted with good grace to the precautions that were taken to prevent his escape, it required some time to bind the hands of the Widow Chupin, who fought and howled as if they were burning her alive. " They will never go ! " Lecoq murmured to himself.

They did so at last, however. Gevrol gave the order to start, and left the house, addressing a laughing good-bye to his subordinate. The latter made no reply. He followed his comrades as far as the threshold to make sure that they were really going, for he trembled at the thought that Gevrol might reflect, change his mind, and return to solve the mystery, as was his right.

His anxiety was needless, however. The squad gradually faded away in the distance, and the cries of Widow Chupin died away in the stillness of the night. It was only then that Lecoq re-entered the room. He could no longer conceal his delight ; his eyes sparkled as might those of a conqueror taking possession of some vast empire : he stamped his foot upon the floor and exclaimed with exultation : " Now the mystery belongs to us two alone ! "

Authorised by Gevrol to choose one of his comrades to remain with him at the Poivriere, Lecoq had requested the least intelligent of the party to keep him company. He was not influenced by a fear of being obliged to share the fruits of success with his companion, but by the necessity of having an assistant from whom he could, in case of need, exact implicit obedience.

The comrade Lecoq selected was a man of about fifty,

who, after a term of cavalry service, had become an agent of the prefecture. In the humble office that he occupied he had seen prefect succeed prefect, and might probably have filled an entire prison with the culprits he had arrested with his own hands. Experience had not, however, made him any the shrewder or any the more zealous. Still he had this merit, when he received an order he executed it with military exactitude, so far as he understood it. Of course if he had failed to understand it, so much the worse. It might, indeed, be said of him, that he discharged his duties like a blind man, like an old horse trained for a riding school.

When he had a moment's leisure, and a little money in his pocket, he invariably got drunk. Indeed, he spent his life between two fits of intoxication, without ever rising above a condition of semi-lucidity. His comrades had known, but had forgotten, his name, and his partiality for a certain beverage had accordingly induced them to call him "Father Absinthe."

With his limited powers of observation, he naturally did not observe the tone of triumph in his young companion's voice. "Upon my word," he remarked, when they were alone, "your idea of keeping me here was a good one, and I thank you for it. While the others spend the night paddling about in the slush, I shall get a good sleep."

Here he stood, in a room that was splashed with blood, that was shuddering so to speak with crime, and yet face to face with the still warm bodies of three murdered men he could talk of sleep!

But, after all, what did it matter to him? He had seen so many similar scenes in his time. And does not habit infallibly lead to professional indifference, making the soldier cool and composed in the midst of conflict, and rendering the surgeon impassible when the patient shrieks and writhes beneath his operating knife.

"I have been upstairs, looking about," pursued Father Absinthe; "I saw a bed up there, and we can mount guard here, by turns."

With an imperious gesture, Lecoq interrupted him. "You must give up that idea, Father Absinthe," he said, "we are not here to sleep, but to collect information—to make the most careful researches, and to note all the probabilities. In a few hours the commissary of police,

the legal physician, and the public prosecutor will be here. I wish to have a report ready for them."

This proposition seemed anything but pleasing to the old police-agent. "Eh! what is the use of that?" he exclaimed. "I know the General. When he goes in search of the commissary, as he has gone this evening, there is nothing more to be done. Do you think you can see anything that he didn't see?"

"I think that Gevrol, like everyone else, is liable to be mistaken. I think that he believes too implicitly in what seems to him evidence. I could swear that this affair is not what it seems to be; and I am sure that if we like we can discover the mystery which is concealed beneath present appearances."

Although Lecoq's vehemence was intense, he did not succeed in making any impression upon his companion, who with a yawn that threatened to dislocate his jaws, replied: "Perhaps you are right; but I am going to bed. This need not prevent you from searching around, however; and if you find anything you can wake me."

Lecoq made no sign of impatience: nor in reality was he impatient. These words afforded him the opportunity for which he was longing. "You will give me a moment first," he remarked. "In five minutes, by your watch, I promise to let you put your finger on the mystery that I suspect here."

"Well, go on for five minutes."

"After that you shall be free, Father Absinthe. Only it is clear that if I unravel the mystery alone, I alone ought to pocket the reward that a solution will certainly bring."

At the word "reward" the old police agent pricked up his ears. He was dazzled by the vision of an infinite number of bottles of the greenish liquor whose name he bore. "Convince me, then," said he, taking a seat upon a stool, which he had lifted from the floor.

Lecoq remained standing in front of him. "To begin with," he remarked, "whom do you suppose the person we have just arrested to be?"

"A porter, probably, or a vagabond."

"That is to say, a man belonging to the lowest class of society: consequently, a fellow without education."

"Certainly."

Lecoq spoke with his eyes fixed upon those of his com

panion. He distrusted his own powers, as is usual with persons of real merit, but he felt that if he could succeed in making his convictions penetrate his comrade's obtuse mind, their exactitude would be virtually proved.

"And now," he continued, "what would you say if I showed you that this young man had received an excellent, even refined education."

"I should reply that it was very extraordinary. I should reply that—but what a fool I am! You have not proved it to me yet."

"But I can do so very easily. Do you remember the words that he uttered as he fell?"

"Yes, I remember them perfectly. He said; 'It is the Prussians who are coming.'"

"What do you suppose he meant by that?"

"What a question! I should suppose that he did not like the Prussians, and that he supposed he was offering us a terrible insult."

Lecoq was waiting anxiously for this response. "Ah, well; Father Absinthe," he said gravely, "you are wrong, quite wrong. And that this man has an education superior to his apparent position is proved by the fact that you did not understand his meaning, nor his intention. It was this single phrase that enlightened me."

Father Absinthe's physiognomy expressed the strange and comical perplexity of a man who is so thoroughly mystified that he knows not whether to laugh, or to be angry. After reflecting a little, he decided to adopt the latter course. "You are rather too young to impose upon an old fellow like me," he remarked. "I don't like boasters—"

"One moment!" interrupted Lecoq; "allow me to explain. You have certainly heard of a terrible battle which resulted in one of the greatest defeats that ever happened to France—the battle of Waterloo?"

"I don't see the connection—"

"Answer, if you please."

"Yes—then! I have heard of it!"

"Very well; you must know then that for some time victory seemed likely to rest with the banners of France. The English began to fall back, and the emperor already exclaimed: 'We have them!' when suddenly on the right, a little in the rear, a large body of troops was seen

advancing. It was the Prussian army. The battle of Waterloo was lost."

In all his life, worthy Father Absinthe had never made such a strenuous effort to understand anything. In this case his perseverance was not wholly useless, for, springing from his stool, and probably in much the same tone that Archimedes cried "*Eureka!*" he exclaimed, "I understand. The man's words were only an illusion."

"It is as you have said," remarked Lecoq, approvingly. "But I had not finished. If the emperor was thrown into consternation by the appearance of the Prussians, it was because he was momentarily expecting the arrival of one of his own generals from the same direction—Grouchy—with thirty-five thousand men. So if this man's allusion was exact and complete, he was not expecting an enemy, but a friend. Now draw your own conclusions."

Father Absinthe was amazed but convinced: and his eyes, heavy with sleep a few moments before, now opened to their widest extent. "Good heavens!" he murmured, "if you put it in that way! But I forget; you must have seen something as you were looking through the shutters."

The young man shook his head. "Upon my honour," he declared, "I saw nothing save the struggle between the murderer and the poor devil dressed as a soldier. It was that sentence alone that aroused my attention."

"Wonderful! prodigious!" exclaimed the astonished old man.

"I will add that reflection has confirmed my suspicions. I ask myself why this man, instead of flying at once, should have waited and remained there, at that door, to parley with us."

With a bound, Father Absinthe sprang again to his feet. "Why?" he interrupted; "because he had accomplices, and he wished to give them time to escape. Ah! I understand it all now."

A triumphant smile parted Lecoq's lips. "That is what I said to myself," he replied, "and now it is easy to verify my suspicions. There is snow outside, isn't there?"

It was not necessary to say any more. The elder officer seized the light, and followed by his companion, he

hastened to the back door of the house, which opened into a small garden. In this sheltered enclosure the snow had not melted, and upon its white surface the dark stains of numerous foot-prints presented themselves. Without hesitation, Lecoq threw himself upon his knees in the snow ; he rose again almost immediately. "These indentations were not made by the men's feet," said he. "There have been women here."

III.

OBSTINATE men of Father Absinthe's stamp, who are at first always inclined to differ from other people's opinions, are the very individuals who end in madly adopting them. When an idea has at last penetrated their empty brains, they twist and turn it, dwell upon it, and develop it until it exceeds the bounds of reason.

Hence, the police veteran was now much more strongly convinced than his companion that the usually clever Gevrol had been mistaken, and accordingly he laughed the inspector to scorn. On hearing Lecoq affirm that women had taken part in the horrible scene at the Poiveriere, his joy was extreme—"A fine affair!" he exclaimed ; "an excellent case!" And suddenly recollecting a maxim that has been handed down from the time of Cicero, he added in sententious tones : "Who holds the woman holds the cause !"

Lecoq did not deign to reply. He was standing upon the threshold, leaning against the framework of the door, his hand pressed to his forehead, as motionless as a statue. The discovery he had just made, and which so delighted Father Absinthe, filled him with consternation. It was the death of his hopes, the annihilation of the ingenious structure which his imagination had built upon the foundation of a single sentence. There was no longer any mystery—, so celebrity was not to be gained by a brilliant stroke !

For the presence of two women in this vile den explained everything in the most natural and commonplace fashion. Their presence explained the quarrel, the testimony of Widow Chupin, the dying declaration of the pretended soldier. The behaviour of the murderer was

also explained. He had remained to cover the retreat of the two women; he had sacrificed himself in order to save them, an act of gallantry so common in the French character, that any scoundrel of the *barrieres* might have performed it.

Still, the strange allusion to the battle of Waterloo remained unexplained. But what did that prove now? Nothing, simply nothing. However, who could say how low an unworthy passion might cause a man even of birth and breeding to descend? And the carnival afforded an opportunity for the parties to disguise themselves.

But while Lecoq was turning and twisting all these probabilities in his mind, Father Absinthe became impatient. "Are we going to remain here until doomsday?" he asked. "Are we to pause just at the moment when our search has been productive of such brilliant results?"

"Brilliant results!" These words stung the young man as deeply as the keenest irony could have done. "Leave me alone," he replied, gruffly; "and, above all, don't walk about the garden, as by doing so, you'll damage any foot-prints."

His companion swore a little; but soon became silent in his turn. He was constrained to submit to the irresistible ascendancy of superior will and intelligence.

Lecoq was engaged in following out his course of reasoning. "The murderer, leaving the ball at the Rainbow, a dancing-house not far from here, near the fortifications, came to this wine-shop, accompanied by two women. He found three men drinking here, who either began teasing him, or who displayed too much gallantry towards his companions. He became angry. The others threatened him; he was one against three; he was armed; he became wild with rage, and fired——"

He checked himself, and an instant after added, aloud: "But was it the murderer who brought these women here? If he is tried, this will be the important point. It is necessary to obtain information regarding it."

He immediately went back into the house, closely followed by his colleague, and began an examination of the foot-prints round about the door that Gevrol had forced open. Labour lost. There was but little snow on the ground near the entrance of the hovel, and so many persons had passed in and out that Lecoq could discover

nothing. What a disappointment after his patient hopes ! Lecoq could have cried with rage. He saw the opportunity for which he had sighed so long indefinitely postponed. He fancied he could hear Gevrol's coarse sarcasms. "Enough of this," he murmured, under his breath. "The General was right, and I am a fool !"

He was so positively convinced that one could do no more than discover the circumstances of some commonplace, vulgar broil, that he began to wonder if it would not be wise to renounce his search and take a nap, while awaiting the coming of the commissary of police.

But Father Absinthe was no longer of this opinion. This worthy man, who was far from suspecting the nature of his companion's reflections could not explain his inaction. "Come ! my boy," said he, "have you lost your wits ? This is losing time, it seems to me. The authorities will arrive in a few hours, and what report shall we be able to give them ! As for me, if you desire to go to sleep, I shall pursue the investigation alone."

Disappointed as he was, the young police officer could not repress a smile. He recognised his own exhortation of a few moments before. It was the old man who had suddenly become intrepid. "To work, then !" he sighed, like a man who, whilst foreseeing defeat, wishes, at least, to have no cause for self-reproach.

He found it, however, extremely difficult to follow the foot-prints in the open air by the uncertain light of a candle, which was extinguished by the least breath of wind. "I wonder if there is a lantern in the house," he said. "If we could only lay our hands upon one !"

They searched everywhere, and, at last, upstairs in the Widow Chupin's own room, they found a well-trimmed lantern, so small and compact that it certainly had never been intended for honest purposes.

"A regular burglar's implement," said Father Absinthe, with a coarse laugh.

The implement was useful in any case ; as both men agreed when they returned to the garden and recommenced their investigations systematically. They advanced very slowly and with extreme caution. The old man carefully held the lantern in the best position, while Lecoq, on his knees, studied each foot-print with the attention of a chiromancer professing to read the future in the hand of a

rich client. This new examination assured Lecoq that he had been correct in his first supposition. It was plain that two women had left the Poivriere by the back door. They had started off running, as was proved by the length of the steps and the shape of the foot-prints.

The difference in the tracks left by the two fugitives was so remarkable that it did not escape Father Absinthe's eyes. "Sapristi!" he muttered; "one of these jades can boast of having a pretty foot at the end of her leg!"

He was right. One of the tracks betrayed a small, coquettish, slender foot, clad in an elegant high-heeled boot with a narrow sole and an arched instep. The other denoted a broad, short foot growing wider towards the end. It had evidently been incased in a strong, low shoe.

This was indeed a clue. Lecoq's hopes at once revived; so eagerly does a man welcome any supposition that is in accordance with his desires. Trembling with anxiety, he went to examine some other foot-prints a short distance from these; and an excited exclamation at once escaped his lips.

"What is it?" eagerly inquired the other agent: "what do you see?"

"Come and look for yourself, see there!" cried Lecoq.

The old man bent down, and his surprise was so great that he almost dropped the lantern. "Oh!" said he in a stifled voice, "a man's foot-print!"

"Exactly. And this fellow wore the finest of boots. See that imprint, how clear, how neat it is!"

Worthy Father Absinthe was scratching his ear furiously, his usual method of quickening his rather slow wits. "But it seems to me," he ventured to say at last, "that this individual was not coming *from* this ill-fated hovel.

"Of course not; the direction of the foot tells you that. No, he was not going away, he was coming here. But he did not pass beyond the spot where we are now standing. He was standing on tip-toe with out-stretched neck and listening ears, when, on reaching this spot, he heard some noise, fear seized him, and he fled."

"Or rather, the women were going out as he was coming, and—"

"No, the women were outside the garden when he entered it."

This assertion seemed far too audacious to suit Lecoq's

companion, who remarked:—"One cannot be sure of that."

"I am sure of it, however; and can prove it conclusively. If you doubt it, it is because your eyes are growing old. Bring your lantern a little nearer—yes, here it is—our man placed his large foot upon one of the marks made by the woman with the small foot and almost effaced it." This unexceptionable piece of circumstantial evidence stupefied the old police-agent.

"Now," continued Lecoq, "could this man have been the accomplice whom the murderer was expecting? Might it not have been some strolling vagrant whose attention was attracted by the two pistol shots? This is what we must ascertain. And we will ascertain it. Come!"

A wooden fence of lattice-work, rather more than three feet high, was all that separated the Widow Chupin's garden from the waste land surrounding it. When Lecoq made the circuit of the house to cut off the murderer's escape he had encountered this obstacle, and, fearing lest he should arrive too late, he had leaped the fence to the great detriment of his pantaloons, without even asking himself if there was a gate or not. There was one, however—a light gate of lattice-work similar to the fence, turning upon iron hinges, and closed by a wooden button. Now it was straight towards this gate that these footprints in the snow led to the two police-agents. Some new thought must have struck the younger man, for he suddenly paused. "Ah!" he murmured, "these two women did not come to the Poivriere this evening for the first time."

"Why do you think that, my boy?" inquired Father Absinthe.

"I could almost swear it. How, unless they were in the habit of coming to this den, could they have been aware of the existence of this gate? Could they have discovered it on such a dark, foggy night? No; for I, who can, without boasting, say that I have good eyes—I did not see it."

"Ah! yes, that is true!"

"These two women, however, came here without hesitating, in a straight line; and note that to do this, it was necessary for them to cross the garden diagonally."

The veteran would have given something if he could have

found some objection to offer ; but unfortunately he could find none. "Upon my word !" he exclaimed, "yours is a droll way of proceeding. You are only a conscript ; I am a veteran in the service, and have assisted in more affairs of this sort than you are years old, but never have I seen—"

"Nonsense !" interrupted Lecoq, "you will see much more. For example, I can prove to you that although the women knew the exact position of the gate, the man knew it only by hearsay."

"The proof !"

"The fact is easily demonstrated. Study the man's foot-prints, and you, who are very sharp, will see at once that he deviated greatly from the straight course. He was in such doubt, that he was obliged to search for the gate with his hand stretched out before him—and his fingers have left their imprint on the thin covering of snow that lies upon the upper railing of the fence."

The old man would have been glad to verify this statement for himself, as he said, but Lecoq was in a hurry. "Let us go on, let us go on !" said he. "You can verify my assertions some other time."

They left the garden and followed the foot-prints which led them towards the outer boulevards, inclining somewhat in the direction of the Rue de Patay. There was now no longer any need of close attention. No one save the fugitives had crossed this lonely waste since the last fall of snow. A child could have followed the track, so clear and distinct it was. Four series of foot-prints, very unlike in character, formed the track ; two of these had evidently been left by the women ; the other two, one going and one returning, had been made by the man. On several occasions the latter had placed his foot exactly on the foot-prints left by the two women, half effacing them, thus dispelling all doubt as to the precise moment of his approach.

About a hundred yards from the Poivriere, Lecoq suddenly seized his colleague's arm. "Halt !" he exclaimed, "we have reached a good place ; I can see unmistakable proofs."

The spot, all unenclosed as it was, was evidently utilised by some builder for the storage of various kinds of lumber. The ground was strewn with large blocks of granite, some

chiselled, some in the rough, with numerous long planks and logs of wood in their midst. In front of one these logs, the surface of which had been evidently wiped, all the various foot-prints came together, mingling confusedly.

"Here," declared the young detective, "our fugitives met the man and took counsel with him. One of the women, the one with the little feet, sat down upon this log."

"We ought to make quite sure of that," said Father Absinthe, in an oracular tone.

But his companion cut short his desire for verification. "You, my old friend," said he, "are going to do me the kindness to keep perfectly still: pass me the lantern and do not move."

Lecoq's modest tone had suddenly become so imperious that his colleague dared offer no resistance. Like a soldier at the command to halt, he remained erect, motionless, and mute, following his colleague's movements with an inquisitive, wondering eye.

Quick in his motions, and understanding how to manœuvre the lantern in accordance with his wishes, the young police-agent explored the surroundings in a very short space of time. A bloodhound in pursuit of his prey would have been less alert, less discerning, less agile. He came and went, now turning, now pausing, now retreating, now hurrying on again without any apparent reason; he scrutinised, he questioned every surrounding object: the ground, the logs of wood, the blocks of stone, in a word, nothing escaped his glance. For a moment he would remain standing, then fall upon his knees, and at times lie flat upon his stomach with his face so near the ground that his breath must have melted the snow. He had drawn a tape-line from his pocket, and using it with a carpenter's dexterity, he measured, measured, and measured.

And all his movements were accompanied with the wild gestures of a madman, interspersed with oaths or short laughs, with exclamations of disappointment or delight. After a quarter of an hour of this strange exercise, he turned to Father Absinthe, placed the lantern on a stone, wiped his hands with his pocket-handkerchief, and said: "Now I know everything!"

"Well, that is saying a great deal!"

"When I say everything, I mean all that is connected with the episode of the drama which ended in that bloody

bout in the hovel. This expanse of earth covered with snow, is a white page upon which the people we are in search of have written, not only their movements, their goings, and comings, but also their secret thoughts, their alternate hopes and anxieties. What do these foot-prints say to you, Papa Absinthe? To me they are alive like the persons who made them; they breathe, speak, accuse!"

The old agent was saying to himself: "Certainly, this fellow is intelligent, undeniably shrewd; but he is very disagreeable."

"These are the facts as I have read them," pursued Lecoq. "When the murderer repaired to the Poivriere with the two women, his companion—I should say his accomplice—came here to wait. He was a tall man of middle age; he wore a soft hat and a shaggy brown overcoat; he was, moreover, probably married, or had been so, as he had a wedding-ring on the little finger of his right hand—"

His companion's despairing gestures obliged the speaker to pause. This description of a person whose existence had but just now been demonstrated, these precise details given in a tone of absolute certainty, completely upset all Father Absinthe's ideas, increasing his perplexity beyond all bounds.

"This is not right," he growled, "this is not kind. You are poking fun at me. I take the thing seriously; I listen to you, I obey you in everything, and then you mock me in this way. We find a clue, and instead of following it up, you stop to relate all these absurd stories."

"No," replied his companion, "I am not jesting, and I have told you nothing of which I am not absolutely sure, nothing that is not strictly and indisputably true."

"And you would have me believe—"

"Fear nothing, papa; I would not have you do violence to your convictions. When I have told you my reasons, and my means of information, you will laugh at the simplicity of the theory that seems so incomprehensible to you now."

"Go on, then," said the good man, in a tone of resignation.

"We had decided," rejoined Lecoq, "that the accomplice mounted guard here. The time seemed long, and growing impatient, he paced to and fro—the length of this log of wood—occasionally pausing to listen. Hearing

nothing, he stamped his foot, doubtless exclaiming : 'What the deuce has happened to him down there !' He had made about thirty turns (I have counted them), when a sound broke the stillness—the two women were coming."

On hearing Lecoq's recital, all the conflicting sentiments that are awakened in a child's mind by a fairy tale—doubt, faith, anxiety, and hope—filled Father Absinthe's heart. What should he believe ? what should he refuse to believe ? He did not know. How was he to separate the true from the false among all these equally surprising assertions ? On the other hand, the gravity of his companion, which certainly was not feigned, dismissed all idea of pleasantry.

Finally, curiosity began to torture him. "We had reached the point where the women made their appearance," said he.

"Yes, indeed," responded Lecoq, "but here all certainty ceases ; no more proofs, only suppositions. Still, I have every reason to believe that our fugitives left the drinking den before the beginning of the fight, before the cries that attracted our attention. Who were they ? I can only conjecture. I suspect, however, that they were not equals in rank. I am inclined to think that one was the mistress, the other her servant."

"That is proved," ventured the old man, "by the great difference in their feet and in their shoes."

This shrewd observation elicited a smile from Lecoq. "That difference," he replied, seriously, "is something of course ; but it was not that which decided me in my opinion. If greater or less perfection of the extremities regulated social distinctions, many mistresses would be servants. What struck me was this : When the two women rushed wildly from Mother Chupin's house, the woman with the small feet sprang across the garden with one bound, she darted on some distance in advance of the other. The terror of the situation, the vileness of the den, the horror of the scandal, the thought of safety, inspired her with marvellous energy. But her strength, as often happens with delicate and nervous women, lasted only a few seconds. She was not half-way from the Poivriere when her speed relaxed, her limbs trembled. Ten steps farther on she tottered and almost fell. Some steps farther, and she became so exhausted that she let go her hold upon her skirts ; they trailed upon the snow, tracing a

faint circle there. Then the woman with the broad feet came to aid her. She seized her companion round the waist; she dragged her along; their foot-prints here are mingled confusedly; then, seeing that her friend was about to fall, she caught her up in her strong arms and carried her—for you will see that the foot-prints made by the woman with the small feet suddenly cease at this point.”

Was Lecoq merely amusing himself by inventing this story? Was this scene anything but a work of imagination? Was the accent of deep and sincere conviction which he imparted to his words only feigned?

Father Absinthe was still in doubt, but he thought of a way in which he might satisfy his uncertainty. He caught up the lantern and hurried off to examine these foot-prints which he had not known how to read, which had been speechless to him, but which yielded their secret to another. He was obliged to agree with his companion. All that Lecoq had described was written there; he saw the confused foot-prints, the circle made by the sweeping skirts, the cessation of the tiny imprints.

On his return, his countenance betrayed a respectful and astonished admiration, and it was with a shade of embarrassment that he said: “You can scarcely blame an old man for being a little like St. Thomas. ‘I have touched it with my fingers,’ and now I am content to follow you.”

The young police-agent could not, indeed, blame his colleague for his incredulity. Resuming his recital he continued: “Then the accomplice, who had heard the fugitive coming, ran to meet them, and he aided the woman with large feet in carrying her companion. The latter must have been really ill, for the accomplice took off his hat and used it in brushing the snow off this log. Then, thinking the surface was not yet dry enough, he wiped it with the skirt of his overcoat. Were these civilities pure gallantry, or the usual attentions of an inferior? I have asked myself that question. This much, however, is certain, while the woman with the small feet was recovering her strength, half-reclining upon this board, the other took the accomplice a little on one side, five or six steps away to the left, just beside that enormous block of granite. There she talked with him, and, as he listened, the man leant upon the snow-covered stone. His hand left a

very distinct imprint there. Then, as the conversation continued, he rested his elbow upon the snowy surface."

Like all men of limited intelligence, Father Absinthe had suddenly passed from unreasoning distrust to unquestioning confidence. Henceforth, he could believe anything for the very same reason that had, at first, made him believe nothing. Having no idea of the bounds of human reasoning, and penetration, he saw no limits to the conjectural genius of his companion. With perfect faith, therefore, he inquired: "And what was the accomplice saying to the woman with the broad shoes?"

Lecoq smiled at this simplicity, but the other did not see him do so. "It is rather difficult for me to answer that question," replied the young detective, "I think, however, that the woman was explaining to the man the immensity and imminence of the danger that threatened his companion, and that they were trying to devise some means to rescue him from it. Perhaps she brought him orders given by the murderer. It is certain that she ended by beseeching the accomplice to run to the Poivriere and see what was passing there. And he did so, for his tracks start from this block of granite."

"And only to think," exclaimed Father Absinthe, "that we were in the hovel at that very moment. A word from Gevrol, and we might of had handcuffs on the whole gang! How unfortunate!"

Lecoq was not sufficiently disinterested to share his companion's regret. On the contrary, he was very thankful for Gevrol's blunder. Had it not been for that, how would he ever have found an opportunity of investigating an affair that grew more and more mysterious as his search proceeded, but which he hoped to fathom finally.

"To conclude," he resumed, "the accomplice soon returned, he had witnessed the scene, and was evidently afraid. He feared that the thought of exploring the premises might enter the minds of the police. It was to the lady with small feet that he addressed himself. He explained the necessity of flight, and told her that even a moment's delay might be fatal. At his words, she summoned all her energy; she rose and hastened away, clinging to the arm of her companion. Did the man indicate the route they were to take, or did they know it themselves? This much is certain, he accompanied them

some distance, in order to watch over them. But besides protecting these women, he had a still more sacred duty to perform—that of succouring his accomplice, if possible. He retraced his steps, passed by here once more, and the last foot-print that I can discover leads in the direction of the Rue du Chateau-des Rentiers. He wished to know what would become of the murderer, and went to place himself where he might see him pass by with his captors.

Like a dilettante who can scarcely restrain his applause until the close of the *aria* that delights him, Father Absinthe had been unable during the recital to entirely suppress his admiration. But it was not until Lecoq ceased speaking that he gave full vent to his enthusiasm, “Here *is* a detective if you like!” he exclaimed. “And they pretend that Gevrol is a shrewd! What has he ever done to compare with this? Ah! shall I tell you what I think? Why, in comparison with you, the General is a mere John the Baptist.”

Certainly the flattery was gross, but it was impossible to doubt its sincerity. This was the first time that the balmy dew of praise had fallen upon Lecoq’s vanity, and it greatly delighted him although he modestly replied, “Nonsense, you are too kind, papa. After all, what have I done that is so very clever? I told you that the man was of middle age. It was not difficult to see that after one had examined his heavy, dragging step. I told you that he was tall—an easy matter. When I saw that he had been leaning upon that block of granite there to the left, I measured the block in question. It is almost five feet five inches in height, consequently, a man who could rest his elbow upon it must be at least six feet high. The mark of his hand proves that I am not mistaken. On seeing that he had brushed away the snow which covered the plank, I asked myself what he had used; I thought that it might be his cap, and the mark left by the peak proves that I was right. Finally, if I have discovered the colour and the material of his overcoat, it is only because when he wiped the wet board, some splinters of the wood tore off a few tiny flakes of brown wool, which I have found, and which will figure in the trial. But what does this amount to, after all? Nothing. We have only discovered the first clues of the affair. Still, we are on the right scent—so, forward then!”

The old officer was electrified, and, like an echo, he repeated: "Forward!"

IV.

THAT night the vagabonds, who had taken refuge in the neighborhood of the Poivriere, had a very bad time of it; for while those who managed to sleep were disturbed by frightful dreams of a police raid, those who remained awake witnessed some strange incidents, well calculated to fill their minds with terror. On hearing the shots fired inside Mother Chupin's drinking den, most of the vagrants concluded that there had been a collision between the police and some of their comrades, and they immediately began prowling about, eagerly listening and watching, and ready to take flight at the least sign of danger. At first they could discover no particular reasons for alarm. But later on, at about two o'clock in the morning, just as they were beginning to feel secure again, the fog lifted a little, and they witnessed a phenomenon well calculated to arouse anxiety.

Upon the unoccupied tract of land, which the people of the neighborhood called the "plain," a small but very bright light was seen describing the most capricious evolutions. It moved here and there without any apparent aim, tracing the most inexplicable zigzags, sometimes sinking to the earth, sometimes rising to a height of four or five feet at others remaining quite motionless, and the next second flying off like a ball. In spite of the place and the season of the year, the less ignorant among vagabonds believed the light to be some *ignis-fatuus*, one of those luminous meteors that rise from the marshes and float about in the atmosphere at the bidding of the wind. In point of fact, however, this *ignis-fatuus* was the lantern by the light of which the two police-agents were pursuing their investigations.

After thus suddenly revealing his capacity to his first disciple, Lecoq found himself involved in a cruel perplexity. He had not the boldness and promptness of decision which is the gift of a prosperous past, and was hesitating between two courses, both equally reasonable, and both offering strong probabilities of success. He stood between two paths, that made by the two women on the one side, and that made

by the accomplice on the other. Which should he take ? For he could not hope to follow both. Seated upon the the log where the women had rested a few moments before, with his hand pressed upon his forehead, he reflected and weighed the chances.

"If I follow the man I shall learn nothing that I do not know already. He has gone to hover round the party; he has followed them at a distance, he has seen them lock up his accomplice, and he is undoubtedly prowling round about the station house. If I hurried in pursuit could I hope overtake and capture him? No; too long a time has elapsed."

Father Absinthe listened to this monologue with intense curiosity, as anxious as an unsophisticated person who, having questioned a clairvoyant in regard to some lost articles, is waiting the oracle's response.

"To follow the women," continued the young man, "to what would that lead? Perhaps to an important discovery, perhaps to nothing."

However, he preferred the unknown, which, with all its chances of failure, had chances of success as well. He rose, his course was decided.

"Father Absinthe," said he, "we are going to follow the foot-prints of these two women, and wherever they lead us we will go."

Inspired with equal ardour they began their walk. At the end of the path upon which they had entered they fancied they observed, as in some magic glass, the one the fruits, the other the glory of success. They hurried forward. At first it was only play to follow the distinct foot-prints that led towards the Seine. But it was not long before they were obliged to proceed more slowly.

On leaving the waste ground they arrived at the outer limits of civilization, so to speak: and strange foot-prints mingled constantly with the foot-prints of the fugitives, at times even effacing them. In many spots, either on account of exposure or the nature of the soil, the thaw had completed its work, and there were large patches of ground entirely free from snow. In such cases they lost the trail, and it required all Lecoq's sagacity, and all his companion's good-will, to find it again.

On such occasions Father Absinthe planted his cane in the earth, near the last foot-print that had been discovered,

and Lecoq and himself hunted all over the ground around this point, much after the fashion of a couple of blood-hounds, thrown off the scent. Then it was that the lantern moved about so strangely. More than a dozen times, in spite of all their efforts, they would have lost the clue entirely had it not been for the elegant shoes worn by the lady with the little feet. These had such small and extremely high heels that the impression they left could not be mistaken. They sank down three or four inches in the snow, or the mud, and their tell-tale impress remained as clear and distinct as that of a seal.

Thanks to these heels, the pursuers were able to discover that the two fugitives had not gone up the Rue de Patay, as might have been supposed. Probably they had considered this street too frequented, and too well lighted. They had only crossed it, just below the Rue de la Croix-Rouge, and had profited by an empty space between two houses to regain the open ground.

"Certainly these women were well acquainted with the locality," murmured Lecoq.

Indeed the topography of the district evidently had no secrets for them, for, on quitting the Rue de Patay, they had immediately turned to the right, so as to avoid several large excavations, from which a quantity of brick clay had been dug.

But at last the trail was recovered, and the detectives followed it as far as the Rue du Chevaleret. Here the foot-prints abruptly ceased. Lecoq discovered eight or ten foot-marks left by the woman who wore the broad shoes, but that was all. Hereabouts, moreover, the condition of the ground was not calculated to facilitate an exploration of this nature. There had been a great deal of passing to and fro in the Rue du Chevaleret, and not merely was there scarcely any snow left on the footpaths, but the middle of the street was transformed into a river of slush.

"Did these people recollect at last that the snow might betray them? Did they take the middle of the road?" grumbled the young police agent.

Certainly they could not have crossed to a vacant space as they had done just before, for on the other side of the street extended a long factory wall.

"Ah!" sighed Father Absinthe, "we have our labour for our pains."

But Lecoq possessed a temperament that refused to acknowledge defeat. Animated by the cold anger of a man who sees the object which he was about to seize disappear from before his eyes, he recommenced his search, and was well repaid for his efforts.

"I understand!" he cried suddenly, "I comprehend—I see!"

Father Absinthe drew near. *He* did not see nor divine anything! but he no longer doubted his companion's powers.

"Look there," said Lecoq; "what are those marks?"

"Marks left by the wheels of some carriage that plainly turned here."

"Very well, papa, these tracks explain everything. When they reached this spot, our fugitives saw the light of an approaching cab, which was returning from the centre of Paris. It was empty, and proved their salvation. They waited, and when it came nearer they hailed the driver. No doubt they promised him a handsome fare; this is indeed evident, since he consented to go back again. He turned round here; they got into the vehicle, and that is why the foot-prints go no further."

This explanation did not please Lecoq's companion. "Have we made any great progress now that we know that?" he asked.

Lecoq could not restrain an impulse to shrug his shoulders. "Did you expect that the tracks made by the fugitives would lead us through Paris and up to their very doors?" he asked.

"No; but—"

"Then what would you ask more? Do you think that I shall not know how to find this driver to-morrow? He was returning with his empty vehicle, his day's work was ended; hence, his stable is in the neighbourhood. Do you suppose that he will have forgotten that he took up two persons in the Rue du Chevaleret? He will tell us where he drove them; but that will not do us any good, for of course, they will not have given him their real address. But at all events he can probably give us a description of them, tell us how they were dressed, describe their appearance, their manner, and their age. And with that, and what we already know—"

An eloquent gesture expressed the remainder of his

thought, then he added :—"We must now go back to the Poivriere, and go quickly. And you, my friend, may now extinguish your lantern."

While doing his best to keep pace with his companion, who was in such haste to get back to the Poivriere that he almost ran, Father Absinthe's thoughts were as busy as his legs, and an entirely new train of ideas was awakened in his mind.

During the twenty-five years that he had been connected with the police force, the good man—to use his own expression—had seen many of his colleagues walk over him and win, after only a few months' work, a promotion that his long years of service had not gained for him. In these cases he had not failed to accuse his superiors of injustice, and his fortunate rivals of gross flattery. In his opinion, seniority was the only claim to advancement—the only, the best, the most respectable claim; and he was wont to sum up all his opinions, all his grief and bitterness of mind in one phrase :—"It is infamous to pass over an old member of the service."

To-night, however, Father Absinthe discovered that there is something else in the world besides seniority, and sufficient reasons for what he had formerly regarded as favouritism. He secretly confessed that this new comer whom he had treated so carelessly, had just followed up a clue as he, veteran though he was, would never have succeeded in doing.

But communing with himself was not this good man's forte; he soon grew weary of reflection; and on reaching a place where they were obliged to proceed more slowly on account of the badness of the road, he deemed it a favourable opportunity to resume the conversation. "You are silent, comrade," he ventured to remark, "and one might swear that you were not exactly pleased."

This surprising result of the old man's reflections would have amazed Lecoq, if his mind had not been a hundred leagues away. "No, I am not pleased," he responded.

"And why, pray? Only ten minutes ago you were as gay as a lark."

"Then I did not see the misfortune that threatens us."

"A misfortune!"

"A very great misfortune. Do you not perceive that the weather has undesirably changed. It is evident that

the wind is now coming from the south. The fog has disappeared, but the sky is cloudy and threatening. It will rain in less than an hour."

"A few drops are falling now; I just felt one."

These words produced on Lecoq much the same effect as a whip-up on a spirited horse. He sprang forward, and, adopting a still more hurried pace, exclaimed:—"Let us make haste! let us make haste!"

The old police-agent followed him as in duty bound, but his mind was, if possible, still more troubled by the replies of his young companion. A great misfortune! The wind from the south! Rain! He did not, he could not see the connection.

Greatly puzzled, and not a little anxious, Father Absinthe asked for an explanation, although he had but little more breath than was absolutely necessary to enable him to continue the forced march he was making. "Upon my word," said he, "I have racked my brains—"

His companion took pity on his anxiety. "What!" he exclaimed, as he still hastened forward, "you do not understand that our investigation, my success, and your reward, are dependent upon those black clouds which the wind is driving toward us!"

"Oh!"

"Twenty minutes of merely gentle rain, and our time and labour will be lost. If it rains, the snow will melt, and then farewell to our proofs. Let us get on—let us get on more quickly! You know very well that in such cases words don't suffice. If we declare to the public prosecutor that we have seen these foot-prints, he will ask, where? And what can we say? If we swear by all the gods that we have seen the foot-prints of a man and of two women, the investigating magistrate will say, 'Let me see them.' And who will feel sheepish then? Father Absinthe and Lecoq. Besides, Gevrol would not fail to declare that we were saying what was not true, in order to enhance our own value, and humiliate him."

"What an idea!"

"Faster, papa, faster; you will have all day to-morrow to be indignant. Perhaps it will not rain. In that case, these perfect, clear, and easily recognisable foot-prints will prove the culprits' ruin. How can we preserve them? By what process could we solidify them? I would deluge

them with my blood if that could only cause them to congeal."

Father Absinthe was just then thinking that his share of the labour had hitherto been the least important; for he had merely held the lantern. But here was a chance for him to acquire a real and substantial right to the prospective reward. "I know a method," said he, "by which one could preserve these marks in the snow."

At these words the younger man stopped short. "You know—you?" he interrupted.

"Yes, I know," replied the old detective, with the evident satisfaction of a man who has gained his revenge. "They invented a way at the time of that affair at the *Maison Blanche*, last December."

"I recollect."

"Ah! well, on the snow in the court-yard there was a foot-print that attracted a detective's attention. He said that the whole evidence depended on that mark alone, that it was worth more than ten years' hard work in following up the case. Naturally, he desired to preserve it. They sent for a great chemist—"

"Go on, go on."

"I have never seen the method put into practice, but an expert told me all about it, and showed me the mould they obtained. He explained it to me precisely, on account of my profession."

Lecoq was trembling with impatience. "And how did they obtain the mould?" he asked abruptly.

"Wait: I was just going to explain. They take some of the best gelatine, and allow it to soak in cold water. When it becomes thoroughly softened, they heat it until it forms a liquid, of moderate consistency. Then when it is just cool enough, they pour a nice little covering of it upon the foot-print."

Lecoq felt the irritation that is natural to a person who has just heard a bad joke, or who has lost his time in listening to a fool.

"Enough!" he interrupted, angrily. "That method can be found in all the manuals. It is excellent, no doubt, but how can it serve us? Have you any gelatine about you?"

"No."

"Nor have I. You might as well have counselled me to pour melted lead upon the foot-prints to fix them."

They continued their way, and five minutes later, without having exchanged another word, they re-entered the Widow Chupin's hovel. The first impulse of the older man would have been to rest to breathe, but Lecoq did not give him time to do so.

Make haste; get me a dish—a plate—anything!" cried the young detective, "and bring me some water, gather together all the boards and old boxes you can find lying about."

While his companion was obeying him, Lecoq armed himself with a fragment of one of the broken bottles, and began scraping away furiously at the plastered wall that separated the two rooms. His mind disconcerted at first by the imminence of this unexpected catastrophe, a fall of rain, had now regained its equilibrium. He had reflected, he had thought of a way by which failure might possibly be averted—and he hoped for ultimate success. When he had accumulated some seven or eight handfuls of fine plaster dust, he mixed one half with a little water so as to form a thin paste, leaving the rest untouched on the side of the plate.

"Now, papa," said he, "come and hold the light for me."

When in the garden, the young man sought for the deepest and most distinct of the foot-prints, knelt beside it, and began his experiment, trembling with anxiety. He first sprinkled upon the impression a fine coating of dry plaster, and then upon this coating, with infinite care, he poured his liquid solution drop by drop.

What luck! the experiment was successful! The plaster united in a homogeneous mass, forming a perfect model of the impression. Thus, after an hour's labour, Lecoq possessed half-a-dozen of these casts, which might, perhaps, be a little wanting in clearness of outline, but which were quite perfect enough to be used as evidence.

The young detective's alarm had been well founded, for it was already beginning to rain. Still, he had plenty of time to cover a number of the foot-prints, with the boxes and pieces of board, which Father Absinthe had collected, thus, placing them as it were beyond the reach of a thaw. Now he could breathe. The authorities might come, for the most important part of his task was completed.

V.

IT was some distance from the Poivriere to the Rue du Chevaleret, even by way of the plain, and fully four hours had been occupied by Lecoq and his colleague in collecting their elements of information.

All this while, the Widow Chupin's abode had remained open, accessible to any chance visitor. Still, when, on his return, the young police-agent remembered this neglect of elementary precautions, he did not feel alarmed. Considering all the circumstances, it was very difficult to believe that any serious harm could have resulted from this carelessness.

For who would have been likely to visit this drinking-den after midnight? Its bad name served the purpose of a bulwark. The most daring vagrants did not drink there without some disquietude, fearing that if the liquor caused them to lose consciousness, they might be robbed or perhaps even murdered. Hence, if anyone had been attracted to this notoriously dangerous drinking-shop by the light that streamed through the open door, it could only have been some very reckless person returning late at night from the ball at the Rainbow, with a few sous left in his pocket. But, even then, a single glance inside would have sufficed to put the bravest to flight.

In less than a second the young police-agent had weighed all these possibilities, concerning which he did not breathe a word to Father Absinthe. When, little by little, the excitement caused by his successive hopes and disappointments, and by the accomplishment of the experiment with the foot-prints had died away, and he had regained his usual calm of mind, he made a careful inspection of the abode, and was by no means satisfied with himself. He had experimented upon Father Absinthe with his new system of investigation, just as an aspiring orator tries his powers before his least gifted friends, not before the cleverest. He had certainly overwhelmed the old veteran by his superiority; he had literally crushed him. But what great merit, what wonderful victory was this? Why should he boast of having out-witted Father Absinthe, one of the least sagacious men in the service?

If he could only have given some startling proofs of his

energy or of his penetration ! But, after all, what had he accomplished ? Was the mystery solved ? Was his success more than problematical ? When one thread is drawn out, the skein is not untangled. This night would undoubtedly decide his future as a detective, so he swore that if he could not conquer his vanity, he would, at least, compel himself to conceal it. Hence, it was in a very modest tone that he said to his companion, " We have done all that we can do outside," said he, " now, would it not be wise to busy ourselves with the inside of the house ? "

Everything looked exactly in the same state as when the two men left the room. A candle, with a charred smoking wick, cast its flickering light upon the same scene of disorder, revealing to view the rigid features of the three victims. Without losing a moment, Lecoq began to pick up and study the various objects scattered over the floor. Some of these still remained intact. The Widow Chupin had recoiled from the expense of a tiled floor, judging the bare ground upon which the cabin was built quite good enough for the feet of her customers. This ground, which must originally have been well beaten down, had, by constant use and damp, become well-nigh as muddy as the soil outside.

The first fruits of Lecoq's search were a large salad-bowl, and a big iron spoon, the latter so twisted and bent that it had evidently been used as a weapon during the conflict. On inspecting the bowl, it became evident that when the quarrel began the victims were regaling themselves with the familiar mixture of water, wine, and sugar, known round about the barrières as *vin à la Française*. After the salad-bowl, the two men picked up five of the weighty glasses ordinarily used in wine-shops, and which, while looking as though they would contain half a bottle, are in point of fact so thick at the bottom that they hold next to nothing. Three of these glasses were broken, two were whole. All of them had contained wine—the same *vin à la Française*. This was plain, but for greater surety, Lecoq applied his tongue to the bluish mixture remaining in the bottom of each glass. " The deuce ! " he muttered, with an astonished air.

Then he examined successively the surfaces of the three over-turned tables. Upon one of these, the one nearest the fire-place and the window, the still wet marks of the

five glasses, of the salad-bowl, and even of the spoons could be distinguished. Lecoq very properly regarded this circumstance as a matter of the greatest importance, for it proved clearly enough that five persons had emptied the salad-bowl in company. Who were these five persons?

"Oh! oh!" suddenly exclaimed Lecoq in two entirely different tones. "Then the two women could not have been with the murderer!"

A very simple mode of discovery had presented itself to his mind. It was to ascertain if there were any other glasses, and what they had contained. After a fresh search on the floor, a sixth glass was found, similar in form to the others but much smaller. Its smell showed that it had contained brandy. Then these two women had not been with the murderer, and therefore he could not have fought because the other men had insulted them. This discovery proved the inaccuracy of Lecoq's original suppositions. It was an unexpected check, and he was mourning over it in silence, when Father Absinthe, who had not ceased ferreting about, uttered a cry of surprise.

The young man turned; he saw that his companion had become very pale. "What is it?" he asked.

"Some one has been here in our absence."

"Impossible!"

It was not impossible—it was true. When Gevrol had torn the apron off Widow Chupin's head he had thrown it upon the steps of the stairs; neither of the police-agents had since touched it. And yet the pockets of this apron were now turned inside out; this was a proof, this was evidence. At this discovery Lecoq was overcome with consternation, and the contraction of his features revealed the struggle going on in his mind. "Who could have been here?" he murmured. "Robbers? That is improbable."

Then, after a long silence which his companion took good care not to interrupt, he added: "The person who came here, who dared to penetrate into this abode and face the corpses of these murdered men—this person could have been none other than the accomplice. But it is not enough to suspect this, it is necessary to know it. I must—I will know it!"

They searched for a long time, and it was not until after an hour of earnest work that, in front of the door forced open by the police, they discovered in the mud, just inside

the marks made by Gevrol's tread, a foot-print that bore a close resemblance to those left by the man who had entered the garden. They compared the impressions and recognized the same designs formed by the nails upon the sole of the boot.

"It must have been the accomplice!" exclaimed Lecoq. "He watched us, he saw us go away, and then he entered. But why? What pressing, irresistible necessity made him decide to brave such imminent danger?" He seized his companion's hand, nearly crushing it in his excitement: "Ah! I know why!" continued he, violently. "I understand only too well. Some article that would have served to throw light on this horrible affair had been left or forgotten, or lost here, and to obtain it, to find it, he decided to run this terrible risk. And to think that it was my fault, my fault alone, that this convincing proof escaped us! And I thought myself so shrewd! What a lesson! The door should have been locked; any fool would have thought of it—" Here he checked himself, and remained with open mouth and distended eyes, pointing with his finger to one of the corners of the room.

"What is the matter?" asked his frightened companion.

Lecoq made no reply, but slowly, and with the stiff movements of a somnambulist, he approached the spot to which he had pointed, stooped, picked up something, and said: "My folly is not deserving of such luck."

The object he had found was an earring composed of a single large diamond. The setting was of marvellous workmanship. "This diamond," declared Lecoq, after a moment's examination, "must be worth at least five or six thousand francs."

"Are you in earnest?"

"I think I could swear to it."

He would not have troubled about such a preamble as "I think" a few hours before, but the blunder he had made was a lesson that would not be forgotten so long as he lived.

"Perhaps it was that same diamond earring that the accomplice came to seek," ventured Father Absinthe.

"The supposition is scarcely admissible. In that case, he would not have sought for it in Mother Chupin's apron.

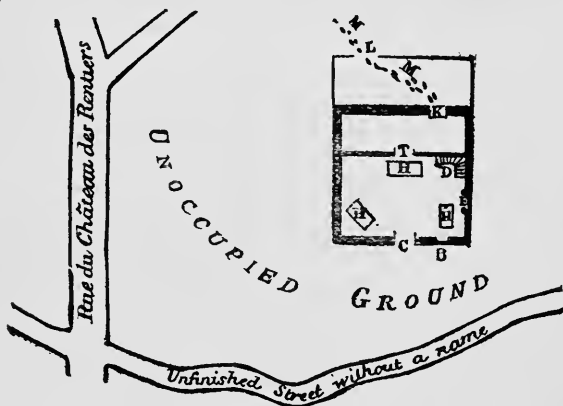
No, he must have been seeking for something else—a letter, for example.”

The older man was not listening; he had taken the earring, and was examining it in his turn. “And to think,” he murmured, astonished by the brilliancy of the stone, “to think that a woman who had ten thousand francs’ worth of jewels in her ears should have come to the Poivrière. Who would have believed it?”

Lecoq shook his head thoughtfully. “Yes, it is very strange, very improbable, very absurd. And yet we shall see many things quite as strange if we ever arrive—which I very much doubt—at a solution of this mysterious affair.”

Day was breaking, cold, cheerless, and gloomy, when Lecoq and his colleague concluded their investigation. There was not an inch of space that had not been explored, carefully examined and studied, one might almost say, with a magnifying glass. There now only remained to draw up the report.

The younger man seated himself at the table, and, with the view of making his recital as intelligible as possible, he began by sketching a plan of the scene of the murder.



A.—The point where the squad of police, under the command of Inspector Gevrol, heard the cries of the victims.

(The distance from this point to the wine-shop known as the Poivrière, is only one hundred and twenty-three yards; hence, it may reasonably be supposed that these cries were the first that were uttered, and consequently that the conflict had just commenced.)

B.—The window closed with shutters, through the cracks of which one of the police-agents was able to see the scene within.

C.—The door forced open by Inspector Gevrol.

D.—The staircase upon which the Widow Chupin was seated, crying.
(It was upon the third step of this staircase that the Widow Chupin's apron was afterwards found, the pockets turned inside out.)

F.—Fire-place.

HHH.—Tables.

(The remnants of the salad-bowl and of the five glasses were found scattered on the floor between the points F. and B.)

T.—Door communicating with the back room of the hovel, before which the armed murderer was standing with the table H. before him as a rampart.

K.—Back door of the hut, opening into the garden, by which the agent of police, who thought of cutting off the murderer's retreat, entered and secured him.

L.—Gate of the garden, opening upon the unoccupied ground.

MM.—Footprints on the snow, discovered by the police-agent remaining at the Poivriere, after the departure of Inspector Gevrol.

It will be seen that in the memoranda appended to this explanatory diagram, Lecoq had not once written his own name. In noting the things that he had imagined or discovered, he referred to himself simply as one of the police. This was not so much modesty as calculation. By hiding one's self on well-chosen occasions, one gains greater notoriety when one emerges from the shade. It was also through cunning that he gave Gevrol such a prominent position. These tactics, rather subtle, perhaps, but after all perfectly fair, could not fail to call attention to the man who had shown himself so efficient when the efforts of his chief had been merely confined to breaking open the door.

The document Lecoq drew up was not a *proces-verbal*, a formal act reserved for the officers of judiciary police; it was simple report, that would be admitted under the title of an inquiry and yet the young detective composed it with quite as much care as a general would have displayed in drawing up the bulletin of his first victory.

While Lecoq was drawing and writing, Father Absinthe leaned over his shoulder to watch him. The plan amazed that worthy man. He had seen a great deal; but he had always supposed that it was necessary to be an engineer, an architect, or, at least, a carpenter, to execute such work. Not at all. With a tape-line with which to take some measurements, and a bit of board in place of a rule, his inexperienced colleague had soon accomplished the miracle. Father Absinthe's respect for Lecoq was thereby greatly augmented. It is true that the worthy veteran had not noticed the explosion of the young police-agent's vanity, nor his return to his former modest demeanour. He

had not observed his alarm, nor his perplexity, nor his lack of penetration.

After a few moments, Father Absinthe ceased watching his companion. He felt weary after the labours of the night, his head was burning, and he shivered and his knees trembled. Perhaps, though he was by no means sensitive, he felt the influence of the horrors that surrounded him, and which seemed more sinister than ever in the bleak light of morning. He began to ferret in the cupboards, and at last succeeded in discovering—O, marvellous fortune!—a bottle of brandy, three parts full. He hesitated for an instant, then he poured out a glass, and drained it a single draught.

"Will you have some?" he inquired of his companion. "It is not a very famous brand, to be sure; but it is just as good, it makes one's blood circulate and enlivens one."

Lecoq refused; he did not need to be enlivened. All his faculties were hard at work. He intended that, after a single perusal of his report, the investigating magistrate should say: "Let the officer who drew up this document be sent for." It must be remembered that Lecoq's future depended upon such an order. Accordingly, he took particular care to be brief, clear, and concise, to plainly indicate how his suspicions on the subject of the murder had been aroused, how they had increased, and how they had been confirmed. He explained by what series of deductions he had succeeded in establishing a theory which, if it was not the truth, was at least plausible enough to serve as the basis for further investigation.

Then he enumerated the articles of conviction ranged on the table before him. There was the flakes of brown wool collected upon the plank, the valuable earring, the models of the different foot-prints in the garden, and the Widow Chupin's apron with its pockets turned inside out. There was also the murderer's revolver, with two barrels discharged and three still loaded. This weapon, although not of an ornamental character, was still a specimen of highly-finished workmanship. It bore the name of one Stephens, 14 Skinner street, a well-known London gunsmith.

Lecoq felt convinced that by examining the bodies of the victims he would obtain other, and perhaps very valuable information; but he did not dare venture upon such a course

Besides his own inexperience in such a matter, there was Gevrol to be thought of, and the inspector, furious at his own mistake, would not fail to declare that, by changing the attitude of the bodies, Lecoq had rendered a satisfactory examination by the physicians impossible.

The young detective accordingly tried to console himself for his forced inaction in this respect, and he was re-reading his report, modifying a few expressions, when Father Absinthe, who was standing upon the threshold of the outer door, called to him.

"Is there anything new?" asked Lecoq.

"Yes," was the reply. "Here come Gevrol and two of our comrades with the commissary of police and two other gentlemen."

It was, indeed, the commissary who was approaching, interested but not disturbed by this triple murder which was sure to make his arrondissement the subject of Parisian conversation during the next few days. Why, indeed, should he be troubled about it? For Gevrol, whose opinion in such matters might be regarded as an authority, had taken care to re-assure him when he went to arouse him from his slumbers.

"It was only a fight between some old offenders; former jail birds, habitués of the Poivrière," he had said, adding sententiously, "If all these ruffians would kill one another, we might have some little peace."

He added that as the murderer had been arrested and placed in confinement, there was nothing urgent about the case. Accordingly, the commissary thought there was no harm in taking another nap and waiting until morning before beginning the inquiry. He had seen the murderer, reported the case to the prefecture, and now he was coming—leisurely enough—accompanied by two physicians, appointed by the authorities to draw up a medico-legal report in all such cases. The party also comprised a sergeant-major of the 53rd regiment of infantry of the line, who had been summoned by the commissary to identify, if possible, the murdered man who wore a uniform, for if one might believe the number engraved upon the buttons of his overcoat, he belonged to the 53rd regiment, now stationed at the neighbouring fort.

As the party approached it was evident that Inspector Gevrol was even less disturbed than the commissary. He

whistled as he walked along, flourishing his cane, which never left his hand, and already laughing in his sleeve over the discomfiture of the presumptuous fool who had desired to remain to glean, where he, the experienced and skillful officer, had perceived nothing. As soon as he was within speaking distance, the inspector called to Father Absinthe, who, after warning Lecoq, remained on the threshold, leaning against the door-post, puffing his pipe, as immovable as a sphinx.

"Ah, well, old man!" cried Gevrol, "have you any great melodrama, very dark and very mysterious, to relate to us?"

"I have nothing to relate myself," replied the old detective, without even drawing his pipe from his lips, "I am too stupid, that is perfectly understood. But Monsieur Lecoq will tell you something that will astonish you."

The prefix, "monsieur," which the old police-agent used in speaking of his colleague, displeased Gevrol so much that he pretended not to understand. "Who are you speaking of?" he asked abruptly.

"Of my colleague, of course, who is now busy finishing his report—of Monsieur Lecoq." Quite unintentionally, the worthy fellow had certainly become the young police-agent's god-father. From that day forward, for his enemies as well as for his friends, he was and he remained "Monsieur" Lecoq.

"Ah! ah!" said the inspector, whose hearing was evidently impaired. "Ah, he has discovered—"

"The pot of roses which others did not scent, General." By this remark, Father Absinthe made an enemy of his superior officer. But he cared little for that: Lecoq had become his deity and no matter what future might reserve, the old veteran had resolved to follow his young colleague's fortunes.

"We'll see about that," murmured the inspector, mentally resolving to have an eye on this youth whom success might transform into a rival. He said no more, for the little party which he preceded had now overtaken him, and he stood aside to make way for the commissary of police.

This commissary was far from being a novice. He had served for many years, and yet he could not repress a gesture of horror as he entered the Poivriere. The sergeant

major of the 53rd who followed him, an old soldier, decorated and medalled—who had smelt powder many scores of times—was still more overcome. He grew as pale as the corpses lying on the ground, and was obliged to lean against the wall for support. The two physicians alone retained their stoical indifference.

Lecoq had risen, his report in his hand ; he bowed, and assuming a respectful attitude, was waiting to be questioned.

"You must have passed a frightful night," said the commissary, kindly ; "and quite necessarily, since any investigation was superfluous."

"I think, however," replied the young police-agent, having recourse to all his diplomacy, "that my time has not been entirely lost. I have acted according to the instructions of my superior officer ; I have searched the premises thoroughly, and I have ascertained many things. I have, for example, acquired the certainty that the murderer had a friend, possibly an accomplice, of whom I can give quite a close description. He must have been of middle age, and wore, if I am not mistaken, a soft cap and a brown woollen overcoat : as for his boots—"

"Zounds ! " exclaimed Gevrol, "and I—" He stopped short, like a man whose impulse had exceeded his discretion, and who would have gladly recalled his words.

"And you ? " enquired the commissary, "pray, what do you mean ? "

The inspector had gone too far to draw back, and, unwittingly, was now obliged to act as his own executioner. "I was about to mention," he said, "that this morning, an hour or so ago, while I was waiting for you, sir, before the station-house, at the Barriere d'Italie, where the murderer is confined, I noticed close by an individual whose appearance was not unlike that of the man described by Lecoq. This man seemed to be very intoxicated, for he reeled and staggered against the walls. He tried to cross the street, but fell down in the middle of it, in such a position that he would inevitably have been crushed by the first passing vehicle."

Lecoq turned away his head ; he did not wish them to read in his eyes how perfectly he understood the whole game.

"Seeing this," pursued Gevrol, "I called two men and

asked them to aid me in raising the poor devil. We went up to him; he had apparently fallen asleep: we shook him—we made him sit up; we told him that he could not remain there, but he immediately flew into a furious rage. He swore at us, threatened us, and began fighting us. And, on my word, we had to take him to the station-house, and leave him there to recover from the effects of his drunken debauch."

"Did you shut him up in the same cell with the murderer?" inquired Lecoq.

"Naturally. You know very well that there are only two cages in the station-house at the *barriere*—one for men and the other for women; consequently—"

The commissary seemed thoughtful. "Ah! that's very unfortunate," he murmured; "and there is no remedy."

"Excuse me, there is one," observed Gevrol, "I can send one of my men to the station-house with an order to detain the drunken man—"

Lecoq interposed with a gesture;—"Trouble lost," he said coldly. "If this individual is an accomplice, he has got sober by now—rest assured of that, and is already far away."

"Then what is to be done?" asked the inspector, with an ironical air. "May one be permitted to ask the advice of Monsieur Lecoq?"

"I think chance offered us a splendid opportunity, and we did not know how to seize it; and that the best thing we can do now is to give over mourning, and prepare to profit by the next opportunity that presents itself."

Gevrol was, however, determined to send one of his men to the station-house; and it was not until the messenger had started, that Lecoq commenced the reading of his report. He read it rapidly, refraining as much as possible from placing the decisive proofs in strong relief, reserving these for his own benefit; but so strong was the logic of his deductions, that he was frequently interrupted by approving remarks from the commissary and the two physicians.

Gevrol, who alone represented the opposition, shrugged his shoulders till they were well nigh dislocated, and grew literally green with jealousy.

"I think that you alone, young man, have judged correctly in this affair," said the commissary when Lecoq had

finished reading. "I may be mistaken ; but your explanations have made me alter my opinion concerning the murderer's attitude while I was questioning him (which was only for a moment). He refused, obstinately refused, to answer my questions, and wouldn't even give me his name."

The commissary was silent for a moment, reviewing the past circumstances in his mind, and it was in a serious tone that he eventually added : "We are, I feel convinced, in presence of one of those mysterious crimes, the cause of which are beyond the reach of human sagacity—this strikes me as being one of those enigmatical cases which human justice never can reach."

Lecoq made no audible rejoinder ; but he smiled to himself and thought, "We will see about that."

VI.

No consultation held at the bedside of a dying man ever took place in the presence of two physicians so utterly unlike each other as those who accompanied the commissary of police to the Poivriere.

One of them, a tall old man with a bald head, wearing a broad-brimmed hat, and an overcoat of antique cut, was evidently one of those modest *savants* encountered occasionally in the by-ways of Paris—one of those healers devoted to their art, who too often die in obscurity, after rendering immense services to mankind. He had the gracious calmness of a man who, having seen so much of human misery, has nothing left to learn, and no troubled conscience could have possibly sustained his searching glance, which was as keen as his lancet.

His colleague—young, fresh-looking, light-haired, and jovial—was somewhat foppishly attired ; and his white hands were encased in handsome fur gloves. There was a soft self-satisfied smile on his face, and he had the manners of those practitioners who, for profit's sake, invariably recommend the infallible panaceas invented each month in chemical laboratories and advertised *ad nauseam* in the back pages of newspapers. He had probably written more than one article upon "Medicine for the use of the people ;" puffing various mixtures, pills, ointments, and plasters for the benefit of their respective inventors.

"I will request you, gentlemen," said the commissary of police, "to begin your duties by examining the victim who wears a military costume. Here is a sergeant-major summoned to answer a question of identity, whom I must send back to his quarters as soon as possible."

The two physicians responded with a gesture of assent, and aided by Father Absinthe and another agent of police, they lifted the body and laid it upon two tables, which had previously been placed end to end. They were not obliged to make any note of the attitude in which they found the body, since the unfortunate man, who was still alive when the police entered the cabin, had been moved before he expired.

"Approach, sergeant," ordered the commissary, "and look carefully at this man."

It was with very evident repugnance that the old soldier obeyed.

"What is the uniform that he wears?"

"It is the uniform of the 2nd battalion of the 53rd regiment of the line."

"Do you recognize him?"

"Not at all."

"Are you sure that he does not belong to your regiment?"

"I cannot say for certain: there are some conscripts at the depot whom I have never seen. But I am ready to swear that he had never formed part of the 2nd battalion—which, by the way, is mine, and in which I am sergeant-major."

Lecoq, who had hitherto remained in the background, now stepped forward. "It might be as well," he suggested, "to note the numbers marked on the other articles of clothing."

"That is a very good idea," said the commissary, approvingly.

"Here is his shako," added the young police-agent. "It bears the number 3,129."

The officials followed Lecoq's advice, and soon discovered that each article of clothing worn by the unfortunate man bore a different number.

"The deuce!" murmured the sergeant; "there is every indication.—But it is very singular."

Invited to consider what he was going to say, the brave trooper evidently made an effort to collect his intellectual

faculties. "I would stake my epaulettes that this fellow never was a soldier," he said at last. "He must have disguised himself to take part in the Shrove Sunday carnival."

"Why do you think that?"

"Oh, I know it better than I can explain it. I know it by his hair, by his nails, by his whole appearance, by a certain *je ne sais quoi*; in short, I know it by everything and by nothing. Why look, the poor devil did not even know how to put on his shoes; he has laced his gaiters wrong side outwards." Evidently further doubt was impossible after this evidence, which confirmed the truth of Lecoq's first remark to Inspector Gevrol.

"Still, if this person was a civilian, how could he have procured this clothing?" insisted the commissary. "Could he have borrowed it from the men in your company?"

"Yes, that is possible; but it is difficult to believe."

"Is there no way by which you could ascertain?"

"Oh! very easily. I have only to run over to the fort and order an inspection of clothing."

"Do so," approved the commissary; "it would be an excellent way of getting at the truth."

But Lecoq had just thought of a method quite as convincing, and much more prompt. "One word, sergeant," said he, "isn't cast-off military clothing sold by public auction?"

"Yes; at least once a year, after the inspection."

"And are not the articles thus sold marked in some way?"

"Assuredly."

"Then see if there isn't some mark of the kind on this poor wretch's uniform."

The sergeant turned up the collar of the coat and examined the waist-band of the pantaloons. "You are right," he said, "these are condemned garments."

The eyes of the young police-agent sparkled. "We must then believe that the poor devil purchased this costume," he observed. "Where? Necessarily at the Temple, from one of the dealers in military clothing. There are only five or six of these establishments. I will go from one to another of them, and the person who sold these clothes will certainly recognise them by some trade mark."

"And that will assist us very much," growled Gevrol.

The sergeant-major, to his great relief, now received permission to retire, but not without having been warned that very probably the commissary would require his deposition.

The moment had come to search the garments of the pretended soldier, and the commissary, who performed this duty himself, hoped that some clue as to the man's identity would be forthcoming. He proceeded with his task, at the same time dictating to one of the men a *procès-verbal* of the search; that is to say, a minute description of all the articles he found upon the dead man's person. In the right hand trousers pocket some tobacco, a pipe, and a few matches were found; in the left hand one, a linen handkerchief of good quality, but unmarked, and a soiled leather pocket-book, containing seven francs and sixty centimes.

There appeared to be nothing more, and the commissary was expressing his regret, when, on carefully examining the pocket-book he found a compartment which had at first escaped his notice, being hidden by a leather flap. This compartment contained a carefully folded paper. The commissary unfolded it and read the contents aloud:

"My dear Gustave,—To-morrow, Sunday evening, do not fail to come to the ball at the Rainbow, according to our agreement. If you have no money pass by my house, and I will leave some with the concierge, who will give it to you.

"Be at the ball by eight o'clock. If I am not already there, it will not be long before I make my appearance. Everything is going on satisfactorily.

"LACHENEUR."

Alas! what did this letter reveal? Only that the dead man's name was Gustave; that he had some connection with a man named Lacheneur, who had advanced him money for a certain object; and that they had met at the Rainbow some hours before the murder.

It was little—very little—but still it was something. It was a clue; and in this absolute darkness even the faintest gleam of light was eagerly welcomed.

"Lacheneur!" growled Gevrol; "the poor devil uttered that name in his last agony."

"Precisely," insisted Father Absinthe, "and he declared that he wished to revenge himself upon him. He accused him of having drawn him into a trap. Unfortunately, death cut his story short."

Lecoq was silent. The commissary of police had handed him the letter, and he was studying it with the closest attention. The paper on which it was written was of the ordinary kind; the ink was blue. In one of the corners was a half-effaced stamp, of which one could just distinguish the word—Beaumarchais.

This was enough for Lecoq. "This letter," he thought, "was certainly written in a cafe on the Boulevard Beaumarchais. In which one? I must ascertain that point, for this Lacheneur must be found."

While the agents of the prefecture were gathered around the commissary, holding council and deliberating, the physicians began their delicate and disagreeable task. With the assistance of Father Absinthe, they removed the clothing of the pretended soldier, and then, with sleeves rolled up, they bent over their "subject" like surgeons in the schools of anatomy, and examined, inspected, and appraised him physically. Very willingly would the younger doctor have dispensed with these formalities, which he considered very ridiculous, and entirely unnecessary; but the old physician had too high a regard for his profession, and for the duty he had been called upon to fulfil, to neglect the slightest detail. Minutely, and with the most scrupulous exactitude, he noted the height of the dead man, his supposed age, the nature of his temperament, the colour and the length of his hair, and the degree of development of his muscular system.

Then the doctors passed to an examination of the wound. Lecoq had judged correctly. The medical men declared it to be a fracture of the base of the skull. It could, they stated, only have been caused by some instrument with a very broad surface, or by a violent knock of the head against some hard substance of considerable magnitude.

But no weapon, other than the revolver, had been found; and it was evidently not heavy enough to produce such a wound. There must, then necessarily, have been a hand-

to-hand struggle between the pretended soldier and the murderer; and the latter, seizing his adversary by the throat, had dashed him violently against the wall. The presence of some very tiny but very numerous spots of extravasated blood about the neck, made this theory extremely plausible.

No other wound, not even a bruise or a scratch, was to be found. Hence, it became evident that this terrible struggle must have been exceedingly short. The murder of the pretended soldier must have been consummated between the moment when the squad of police heard the shrieks of despair, and the moment when Lecoq peered through the shutter and saw the victim fall.

The examination of the other murdered men required different but even greater precautions than those adopted by the doctors in their inspection of the pseudo soldier. The position of these two victims had been respected; they were still lying across the hearth as they had fallen, and their attitude was a matter of great importance, since it might have decisive bearing on the case. Now, this attitude was such that one could not fail to be impressed with the idea that with both these men death had been instantaneous. They were both stretched out upon their backs, their limbs extended, and their hands wide open.

No contraction or extension of the muscles, no trace of conflict could be perceived; it seemed evident that they had been taken unawares, the more so as their faces expressed the most intense terror.

"Thus," said the old doctor, "we may reasonably suppose that they were stupefied by some entirely unexpected, strange, and frightful spectacle. I have come across this terrified expression depicted upon the faces of the dead people more than once. I recollect noticing it upon the features of a woman who died suddenly from the shock she experienced when one of her neighbours, with the view of playing her a trick, entered her house disguised as a ghost."

Lecoq followed the physician's explanations, and tried to make them agree with the vague hypotheses that were revolving in his own brain. But who could these individuals be? Would they, in death, guard the secret of their identity, as the other victim had done?

The first subject examined by the physicians was over

fifty years of age. His hair was very thin and quite grey and his face was closely shaven, excepting a thick tuft of hair on his rather prominent chin. He was very poorly clad, wearing a soiled woollen blouse and a pair of dilapidated trousers hanging in rags over his boots which were very much trodden down at the heels. The old doctor declared that this man must have been instantly killed by a bullet. The size of the circular wound, the absence of blood around its edge, and the blackened and burnt state of the flesh demonstrated this fact with almost mathematical precision.

The great difference that exists in wounds made by fire-arms, according to the distance from which the death-dealing missile comes, was seen when the physicians began to examine the last of the murdered men. The ball that had caused the latter's death had scarcely crossed a yard of space before reaching him, and his wound was not nearly so hideous in aspect as the other's. This individual, who was at least fifteen years younger than his companion, was short and remarkable ugly; his face, which was quite beardless, being pitted all over by the small-pox. His garb was such as is worn by the worst frequenters of the *barriere*. His trousers were of a grey checked material, and his blouse turned back at the throat was blue. It was noticed that his boots had been blackened quite recently. The smart glazed cap that lay on the floor beside him was in harmony with his carefully curled hair and gaudy necktie.

These were the only facts that the physicians' report set forth in technical terms, this was the only information obtained by the most careful investigation. The two men's pockets were explored and turned inside out; but they contained nothing that gave the slightest clue to their identity, either as regards name, social position, or profession. There was not even the slightest indication on any of these points, not a letter, nor an address, not a fragment of paper, nothing—not even such common articles of personal use, as a tobacco pouch, a knife, or a pipe which might be recognised, and thus establish the owner's identity. A little tobacco in a paper-bag, a couple of pocket-handkerchiefs that were unmarked, a packet of cigarettes—these were the only articles discovered beyond the money which the victims carried loose in their pockets. On this

point, it should be mentioned that the elder man had sixty-seven francs about him, and the younger one, two louis.

Rarely had the police found themselves in the presence of so strange an affair, without the slightest clue to guide them. Of course, there was the fact itself, as evidenced by the bodies of the three victims; but the authorities were quite ignorant of the circumstances that had attended and of the motive that had inspired the crime. Certainly, they might hope with the powerful means of investigation at their disposal to finally arrive at the truth in the course of time, and after repeated efforts. But, in the meanwhile, all was mystery, and so strangely did the case present itself that it could not safely be said who was really responsible for the horrible tragedy at the Poivriere.

The murderer had certainly been arrested; but if he persisted in his obstinacy, how were they to ascertain his name? He protested that he had merely killed in self-defence. How could it be shown that such was not the case? Nothing was known concerning the victims; one of whom had with his dying breath accused himself. Then again, an inexplicable influence tied the Widow Chupin's tongue. Two women, one of whom had lost an earring valued at 5,000 francs, had witnessed the struggle—then disappeared. An accomplice, after two acts of unheard of audacity, had also made his escape. And all these people—the women, the murderer, the keeper of the saloon, the accomplice, and the victims—were equally strange and mysterious, equally liable *not* to be what they seemed.

Perhaps the commissary of police thought he would spend a very unpleasant quarter of an hour at the prefecture when he reported the case. Certainly, he spoke of the crime in a very despondent tone.

"It will now be best," he said at last, "to transport these three bodies to the Morgue. There they will doubtless be identified. He reflected for a moment, and then added; "And to think that one of these dead men is perhaps Lacheneur himself!"

"That is scarcely possible," said Lecoq. "The spurious soldier, being the last to die, had seen his companions fall. If he had supposed Lacheneur to be dead, he would not have spoken of vengeance."

Gevrol, who for the past two hours had pretended to pay no attention to the proceedings, now approached. He

was not the man to yield even to the strongest evidence. "If Monsieur, the Commissary, will listen to me, he shall hear my opinion, which is a trifle more definite than M. Lecoq's fancies."

Before he could say any more, the sound of a vehicle stopping before the door of the cabin interrupted him, and an instant afterwards the investigating magistrate entered the room.

All the officials assembled at the Poivriere knew at least by sight the magistrate who now made his appearance, and Gevrol, an old habitue of the Palais de Justice, mechanically murmured his name: "M. Maurice d'Escorval."

He was the son of that famous Baron d'Escorval, who, in 1815, sealed his devotion to the empire with his blood, and upon whom Napoleon, in the Memorial of St. Helena, pronounced this magnificent eulogium: "Men as honest, as he, may, I believe, exist: but more honest, no, it is not possible."

Having entered upon his duties as magistrate early in life, and being endowed with remarkable talents, it was at first supposed that the younger d'Escorval would rise to the most exalted rank in his profession. But he had disappointed all such prognostications by resolutely refusing the more elevated positions that were offered to him, in order to retain his modest but useful functions in the public prosecutor's officers at Paris. To explain his repeated refusals, he said that life in the capital had more charms for him than the most enviable advancement in provincial centres. But it was hard to understand this declaration for in spite of his brilliant connections and large fortune, he had, ever since the death of his eldest brother, led a most retired life, his existence merely being revealed by his untiring labours and the good he did to those around him.

He was now about forty-two years of age, but appeared much younger, although a few furrows already crossed his brow. One would have admired his face, had it not been for the puzzling immobility that marred its beauty, the sarcastic curl of his thin lips, and the gloomy expression of his pale-blue eyes. To say that he was cold and grave, did not express the truth, it was saying too little.

He was gravity and coldness personified, with a shade of *hauteur* added.

Impressed by the horror of the scene the instant he placed his foot upon the threshold, M. d'Escorval acknowledged the presence of the physicians and the commissary by a slight nod of the head. The others in the room had no existence so far as he was concerned. At once his faculties went to work. He studied the ground, and carefully noted all the surroundings with the attentive sagacity of a magistrate who realises the immense weight of even the slightest detail, and who fully appreciates the eloquence of circumstantial evidence.

"This is a serious affair," he said gravely; "very serious."

The commissary's only response was to lift his eyes to heaven. A gesture that plainly implied, "I quite agree with you!" The fact is, that for the past two hours the worthy commissary's responsibility had weighed heavily upon him, and he secretly blessed the investigating magistrate for relieving him of it.

"The public prosecutor was unable to accompany me," resumed M. d'Escorval, "he has not the gift of omnipresence, and I doubt if it will be possible for him to join me here. Let us, therefore, begin operations at once."

The curiosity of those present had become intense; and the commissary only expressed the general feeling when he said: "You have undoubtedly questioned the murderer, sir, and have learnt——"

"I have learnt nothing," interrupted M. d'Escorval, apparently much astonished at the interruption.

He took a chair and sat himself down, and while his clerk was busy in authenticating the commissary's *procès-verbal*, he began to read the report prepared by Lecoq.

Pale, agitated, and nervous, the young police-agent tried to read upon the magistrate's impassive face the impression produced by the document. His future depended upon the magistrate's approval or disapproval; and it was not with a fuddled mind like that of Father Absinthe that he had now to deal, but with a superior intelligence.

"If I could only plead my own cause," he thought, "What are cold written phrases in comparison with spoken, living words, palpitating with emotion and imbued with the convictions of the speaker."

However, he was soon re-assured. The magistrate's face retained its immobility, but again and again did M. d'Escorval nod his head in token of approval, and occasionally some point more ingenious than the others extorted from his lips the exclamations : " Not bad !—very good ! "

When he had finished the perusal he turned to the commissary and remarked : " All this is very unlike your report of this morning, which represented the affair as a low broil between a party of miserable vagabonds. "

The observation was only too just and fair ; and the commissary deeply regretted that he had trusted to Gevrol's representations, and remained in bed. " This morning, " he responded evasively, " I only gave you my first impressions. These have been modified by subsequent researches, so that— "

" Oh ! " interrupted the magistrate, " I did not intend to reproach you, on the contrary, I must congratulate you. One could not have done better nor acted more promptly. The investigation that has been carried out shows great penetration and research, and the results are given with unusual clearness, and wonderful precision. "

Lecoq's head whirled.

The commissary hesitated for an instant. At first he was sorely tempted to confiscate this praise to his own profit. If he drove away the unworthy thought, it was because he was an honest man, and more than that, because he was not displeased to have the opportunity to do Gevrol a bad turn and punish him for his presumptuous folly.

" I must confess, " he said with some embarrassment, " that the merit of this investigation does not belong to me. "

" To whom, then, shall I attribute it—to the inspector ? " thought M. d'Escorval, not without surprise, for having occasionally employed Gevrol, he did not expect from him such ingenuity and sagacity as was displayed in this report. Is it you, then, who have conducted this investigation so ably ? " he asked.

" Upon my word, no ! " responded Inspector Gevrol. " I, myself, am not so clever as all that. I content myself with telling what I actually discover ; and I only give proofs when I have them in hand. May I be hung if the grounds of this report have any existence save in the

brains of the man who imagined them." Perhaps the inspector really believed what he said, being one of those persons who are blinded by vanity to such a degree that, with the most convincing evidence before their eyes, they obstinately deny it.

"And yet," insisted the magistrate, "these women whose foot-prints have been detected must have existed. The accomplice who left the flakes of wool adhering to the plank is a real being. This earring is a positive, palpable proof."

Gevrol had hard work to refrain from shrugging his shoulders. "All this can be satisfactorily explained," he said, "without a search of twelve or fourteen hours. That the murderer had an accomplice, is possible. The presence of the women is very natural. Wherever there are male thieves, you will find female thieves as well. As for the diamond—what does that prove? That the scoundrels had just met with a stroke of good luck, that they had come here to divide their booty, and that the quarrel arose from the division."

This was an explanation, and such a plausible one, that M. d'Escorval was silent, reflecting before he announced his decision. "Decidedly," he declared at last, "decidedly, I adopt the hypothesis set forth in the report. Who prepared it?"

Gevrol's face turned red with anger. "One of my men," he replied, "a clever, adroit fellow, Monsieur Lecoq. Come forward, Lecoq, that the magistrate may see you."

The young man advanced, his lips tightly compressed so as to conceal a smile of satisfaction which almost betrayed itself. "My report, sir, is only a summary," he began, "but I have certain ideas—"

"Which you will acquaint me with, when I ask for them," interrupted the magistrate. And oblivious of Lecoq's chagrin, he drew from his clerk's portfolio two forms, which he filled up and handed to Gevrol, saying: "Here are two orders; take them to the station, where the murderer and the landlady of this cabin are confined, and have them conducted to the prefecture, where they will be privately examined."

Having given these directions, M. d'Escorval was turning towards the physicians, when Lecoq, at the risk of

a second rebuff, interposed. "May I venture, sir, to beg of you to confide this mission to me?" he asked of the investigating magistrate.

"Impossible, I may have need of you here."

"I desired, sir, to collect certain evidence and an opportunity to do so may not present itself again."

The magistrate perhaps fathomed the young man's motive. "Then, let it be so," he replied, "but after your task is completed you must wait for me at the prefecture, where I shall proceed as soon as I have finished here. You may go."

Lecoq did not wait for the order to be repeated. He snatched up the papers, and hastened away.

He literally flew over the ground, and strange to say he no longer experienced any fatigue from the labours of the preceding night. Never had he felt so strong and alert, either in body or mind. He was very hopeful of success. He had every confidence in himself, and his happiness would indeed have been complete if he had had another judge to deal with. But M. d'Escorval overawed him to such a degree that he became almost paralyzed in his presence. With what a disdainful glance the magistrate had surveyed him! With what an imperious tone he had imposed silence upon him—and that, too, when he had found his work deserving of commendation.

"Still, never mind," the young detective mentally exclaimed, "no one ever tastes perfect happiness here below."

And concentrating all his thoughts on the task before him, he hurried on his way.

VII.

WHEN, after a rapid walk of twenty minutes, Lecoq reached the police-station near the Barriere d'Italie, the door-keeper, with his pipe in his mouth, was pacing slowly to and fro before the guard-house. His thoughtful air, and the anxious glances he cast every now and then towards one of the little grated windows of the building sufficed to indicate that some very rare bird indeed had been entrusted to his keeping. As soon as he recognized Lecoq, his brow cleared, and he paused in his promenade.

"Ah, well!" he inquired, "what news do you bring?"

"I have an order to conduct the prisoners to the prefecture."

The keeper rubbed his hands, and his smile of satisfaction plainly implied that he felt a load the less on his shoulders.

"Capital! capital!" he exclaimed. "The Black Maria, the prison van, will pass here in less than an hour; we will throw them in, and hurry the driver off—"

Lecoq was obliged to interrupt the keeper's transports of satisfaction. "Are the prisoners alone?" he inquired.

"Quite alone: the woman in one cell, and the man in the other. This has been a remarkably quiet night, for Shrove Sunday! Quite surprising indeed! It is true your hunt was interrupted."

"You had a drunken man here, however."

"No—yes—that's true—this morning just at daybreak. A poor devil, who is under a great obligation to Gevrol."

The involuntary irony of this remark did not escape Lecoq. "Yes, under a great obligation, indeed!" he said with a derisive laugh.

"You may laugh as much as you like," retorted the keeper, "but such is really the case; if it hadn't been for Gevrol the man would certainly have been run over."

"And what has become of him?"

The keeper shrugged his shoulders. "You ask me too much," he responded. He was a worthy fellow who had been spending the night at a friend's house, and on coming out into the open air, the wine flew into his head. He told us all about it when he got sober, half an hour afterwards. I never saw a man so vexed as he was. He wept, and stammered: "The father of a family, and at my age too! Oh! it is shameful! What shall I say to my wife? What will the children think?"

"Did he talk much about his wife?"

"He talked about nothing else. He mentioned her name—Eudisia Leocadie, or some name of that sort. He declared that he should be ruined if we kept him here. He begged us to send for the commissary to go to his house, and when we set him free, I thought he would go mad with joy; he kissed our hands, and thanked us again and again!"

"And did you place him in the same cage as the murderer?" inquired Lecoq.

"Of course."

"Then they talked with each other."

"Talked? Why, the drunkard was so 'gone' I tell you, that he couldn't have said 'bread' distinctly. When he was placed in a cell, bang! He fell down like a log of wood. As soon as he recovered, we let him out. I'm sure, they didn't talk to each other."

The young police-agent had grown very thoughtful. "I was evidently right," he murmured.

"What did you say?" inquired the keeper.

"Nothing," replied Lecoq, who was not inclined to communicate his reflections to the custodian of the guard house. These reflections of his were by no means pleasant ones. "I was right," he thought; "this pretended drunkard was none other than the accomplice. He is evidently an adroit, audacious, cool-headed fellow. While we were tracking his foot-prints he was watching us. When we had got to some distance, he was bold enough to enter the hovel. Then he came here and compelled them to arrest him; and thanks to an assumption of childish simplicity, he succeeded in finding an opportunity to speak with the murderer. He played his part perfectly. Still, I know that he did play a part, and that is something. I know that one must believe exactly the opposite of what he said. He talked of his family, his wife and children—hence, he has neither children, wife, nor family."

Lecoq suddenly checked himself, remembering that he had no time to waste in conjectures. "What kind of fellow was this drunkard?" he inquired.

"He was tall and stout, with full ruddy cheeks, a pair of white whiskers, small eyes, a broad flat nose, and a good-natured, jovial manner."

"How old would you suppose him to be?"

"Between forty and fifty."

"Did you form any idea of his profession?"

"It's my opinion, that what with his soft cap and his heavy brown overcoat, he must be either a clerk or the keeper of some little shop."

Having obtained this description, which agreed with the result of his investigations, Lecoq was about to enter the station-house when a sudden thought brought him to a

stand-still. "I hope this man has had no communication with this Widow Chupin!" he exclaimed.

The keeper laughed heartily. "How could he have had any?" he responded. "Isn't the old woman alone in her cell? Ah, the old wretch! She has been cursing and threatening ever since she arrived. Never in my whole life have I heard such language as she has used. It has been enough to make the very stones blush; even the drunken man was so shocked that he went to the grating in the door, and told her to be quiet."

Lecoq's glance and gesture were so expressive of impatience and wrath that the keeper paused in his recital much perturbed. "What is the matter?" he stammered. "Why are you angry?"

"Because," replied Lecoq, furiously, "because——" Not wishing to disclose the real cause of his anger, he entered the station-house, saying that he wanted to see the prisoner.

Left alone, the keeper began to swear in his turn. "These police-agents are all alike," he grumbled. "They question you, you tell them all they desire to know; and afterwards, if you venture to ask them anything, they reply: 'nothing,' or 'because.' They have too much authority; it makes them proud."

Looking through the little latticed window in the door, by which the men on guard watch the prisoners, Lecoq eagerly examined the appearance of the assumed murderer. He was obliged to ask himself if this was really the same man he had seen some hours previously at the Poivriere, standing on the threshold of the inner door, and holding the whole squad of police-agents in check by the intense fury of his attitude. Now, on the contrary, he seemed as it were the personification of weakness and despondency. He was seated on a bench opposite the grating in the door, his elbows resting on his knees, his chin upon his hand, his under lip hanging low and his eyes fixed upon vacancy.

"No," murmured Lecoq, "no, this man is not what he seems to be."

So saying he entered the cell, the culprit raised his head, gave the detective an indifferent glance but did not utter a word.

"Well, how goes it?" asked Lecoq.

"I am innocent!" responded the prisoner, in a hoarse, discordant voice.

"I hope so, I am sure—but that is for the magistrate to decide. I came to see if you wanted anything."

"No," replied the murderer, but a second later he changed his mind. "All the same," he said, "I shouldn't mind a crust and a drink of wine."

"You shall have them," replied Lecoq, who at once went out to forage in the neighbourhood for eatables of some sort. In his opinion, if the murderer had asked for a drink after at first refusing to partake of anything, it was solely with the view of conveying the idea that he was really the kind of man he pretended to be.

At all events, whoever he might be, the prisoner ate with an excellent appetite. He then took up the large glass of wine that had been brought him, drained it slowly, and remarked. "That's capital! There can be nothing to beat that!"

This seeming satisfaction greatly disappointed Lecoq, who had selected, as a test, one of those horribly thick, bluish, nauseous mixtures, in vogue around the barrières—hoping, nay almost expecting, that the murderer would not drink it without some sign of repugnance. And yet the contrary proved the case. However, the young detective had no time to ponder over the circumstance, for a rumble of wheels now announced the approach of that lugubrious vehicle, the Black Maria.

When the Widow Chupin was removed from her cell she fought and scratched and cried "Murder!" at the top of her voice; and it was only by sheer force that she was at length got into the van. Then it was that the officials turned to the assassin. Lecoq certainly expected some sign of repugnance now, and he watched the prisoner closely. But he was again doomed to disappointment. The culprit entered the vehicle in the most unconcerned manner, and took possession of his compartment like one accustomed to it, knowing the most comfortable position to assume in such close quarters.

"Ah! what an unfortunate morning," murmured Lecoq, disconsolately. "Still I will lie in wait for him at the prefecture."

When the door of the prison-van had been securely closed, the driver cracked his whip, and the sturdy horses

started off at a brisk trot. Lecoq had taken his seat 'in front, between the driver and the guard; but his mind was so engrossed with his own thoughts that he heard nothing of their conversation, which was very jovial, although frequently interrupted by the shrill voice of the Widow Chupin, who sang and yelled her imprecations alternately.

It is needless, however, to recapitulate her oaths; let us rather follow the train of Lecoq's meditation. By what means could he secure some clue to the murderer's identity? He was still convinced that the prisoner must belong to the higher ranks of society. After all, it was not so extraordinary that he should have succeeded in feigning an appetite, that he should have concealed his distaste for a nauseous beverage, and that he should have entered the Black Maria without hesitation. Such conduct was quite possible, indeed almost probable on the part of a man, endowed with considerable strength of will, and realising the imminence of his peril. But granting this, would he be equally able to hide his feelings when he was obliged to submit to the humiliating formalities that awaited him—formalities which in certain cases can, and must be, pushed even to the verge of insult and outrage?

No; Lecoq could not believe that this would be possible. He felt sure that the disgraceful position in which the prisoner would find himself, would cause him to revolt, to lose his self-control, to utter some word that might give the desired clue.

It was not until the gloomy vehicle had turned off the Pont Neuf on to the Quai de l'Horloge, that the young detective became conscious of what was transpiring around him. Soon the van passed through an open gateway, and drew up in a small, damp court-yard.

Lecoq immediately alighted, and opened the door of the compartment in which the supposed murderer was confined, exclaiming, as he did so "Here we are, get out." There was no fear of the prisoner escaping. The iron gate had been closed, and at least a dozen agents were standing near at hand, waiting to have a look at the new arrivals.

The prisoner slowly stepped to the ground. His expression of face remained unchanged, and each gesture

evinced the perfect indifference of a man accustomed to such ordeals.

Lecoq scrutinized his demeanour as attentively as an anatomist might have watched the action of a muscle. He noted that the prisoner seemed to experience a sensation of satisfaction directly his foot touched the pavement of the court-yard, that he drew a long breath, and then stretched and shook himself, as if to regain the elasticity of his limbs, cramped by confinement in the narrow compartment from which he had just emerged. Then he glanced around him, and a scarcely perceptible smile played upon his lips. One might have sworn that the place was familiar to him, that he was well acquainted with these high grim walls, these grated windows, these heavy doors—in short, with all the sinister belongings of a prison.

“Good Lord!” murmured Lecoq, greatly chagrined. “does he indeed recognize the place?”

And his sense of disappointment and disquietude increased when, without waiting for a word, a motion, or a sign, the prisoner turned towards one of the five or six doors that opened into the court-yard. Without an instant’s hesitation he walked straight towards the very doorway he was expected to enter—Lecoq asked himself was it chance? But his amazement and disappointment increased tenfold when, after entering the gloomy corridor, he saw the culprit proceed some little distance, resolutely turn to the left, pass by the keeper’s room, and finally enter the registrar’s office. An old offender could not have done better.

Big drops of perspiration stood on Lecoq’s forehead. “This man,” thought he, “has certainly been here before; he knows the ropes.”

The registrar’s office was a large room heated almost to suffocation by an immense stove, and badly lighted by three small windows, the panes of which were covered with a thick coating of dust. There sat the clerk reading a newspaper, spread out over the open register—that fatal book in which are inscribed the names of all those whom misconduct, crime, misfortune, madness, or error have brought to these grim portals.

Three or four attendants, who were awaiting the hour for entering upon their duties, reclined half asleep upon

the wooden benches that lined three sides of the room. These benches, with a couple of tables, and some dilapidated chairs, constituted the entire furniture of the office, in one corner of which stood a measuring machine, under which each culprit was obliged to pass, the exact height of the prisoners being recorded in order that the description of their persons might be complete in every respect.

At the entrance of the culprit accompanied by Lecoq, the clerk raised his head. "Ah!" said he, "has the van arrived?"

"Yes," responded Lecoq. And showing the orders signed by M. d'Escorval, he added: "Here are this man's papers."

The registrar took the documents and read them. "Oh!" he exclaimed, "a triple assassination! oh! oh!" The glance he gave the prisoner was positively deferential. This was no common culprit, no ordinary vagabond, no vulgar thief.

"The investigating magistrate orders a private examination," continued the clerk, "and I must get the prisoner other clothing, as the things he is wearing now will be used as evidence. Let someone go at once and tell the superintendent that the other occupants of the van must wait."

At this moment, the governor of the Depot entered the office. The clerk at once dipped his pen in the ink, and turning to the prisoner he asked—"What is your name?"

"May."

"Your Christian name?"

"I have none."

"What, have you no Christian name?"

The prisoner seemed to reflect for a moment, and then answered, sulkily: "I may as well tell you that you need not tire yourself by questioning me. I shan't answer anyone else but the magistrate. You would like to make me cut my own throat wouldn't you? A very clever trick, of course, but one that won't do for me."

"You must see that you only aggravate your situation," observed the governor.

"Not in the least. I am innocent; you wish to ruin me. I only defend myself. Get anything more out of me now, if you can. But you had better give me back what they took from me at the station-house. My hundred and thirty

six francs and eight sous. I shall need them when I get out of this place. I want you to make a note of them on the register. Where are they?"

The money had been given to Lecoq by the keeper of the station-house, who had found it upon the prisoner when he was placed in his custody. Lecoq now laid it upon the table. "Here are your hundred and thirty-six francs and eight sous," said he, "and also your knife, your handkerchief, and four cigars."

An expression of lively contentment was discernible on the prisoner's features.

"Now," resumed the clerk, "will you answer?"

But the governor perceived the futility of further questioning; and silencing the clerk by a gesture, he told the prisoner to take off his boots.

Lecoq thought the assassin's glance wavered as he heard this order. Was it only a fancy?

"Why must I do that?" asked the culprit.

"To pass under the beam," replied the clerk. "We must make a note of your exact height."

The prisoner made no reply, but sat down and drew off his heavy boots. The heel of the right one was worn down on the inside. It was, moreover, noticed that the prisoner wore no socks, and that his feet were coated with mud.

"You only wear boots on Sundays, then?" remarked Lecoq.

"Why do you think that?"

"By the mud with which your feet are covered, as high as the anklebone."

"What of that?" exclaimed the prisoner, in an insolent tone. "Is it a crime not to have a marchioness's feet?"

"It is a crime you are not guilty of, at all events," said the young detective, slowly. "Do you think I can't see that if the mud were picked off, your feet would be white and neat? The nails have been carefully cut and polished—"

He paused. A new idea inspired by his genius for investigation had just crossed Lecoq's mind. Pushing a chair in front of the prisoner, and spreading a newspaper over it, he said: "Will you place your foot there?"

The man did not comply with the request.

"It is useless to resist," exclaimed the governor, "we are in force."

The prisoner delayed no longer. He placed his foot on the chair, as he had been ordered, and Lecoq, with the aid of a knife, proceeded to remove the fragments of mud that adhered to the skin.

Anywhere else, so strange and grotesque a proceeding would have excited laughter, but here, in this gloomy chamber, the ante-room of the assize-court, an otherwise trivial act is fraught with serious import. Nothing astonishes; and should a smile threaten to curve one's lips, it is instantly repressed.

All the spectators, from the governor of the prison to the keepers, had witnessed many other incidents equally absurd; and no one thought of inquiring the detective's motive. This much was known already; that the prisoner was trying to conceal his identity. Now it was necessary to establish it, at any cost, and Lecoq had probably discovered some means of attaining this end.

The operation was soon concluded; and Lecoq swept the dust off the paper into the palm of his hand. He divided it into two parts, inclosing one portion in a scrap of paper, and slipping it into his own pocket. With the remainder he formed a package which he handed to the governor, saying: "I beg you, sir, to take charge of this, and to seal it up here, in presence of the prisoner. This formality is necessary, so that by and bye he may not pretend that the dust has been changed."

The governor complied with the request, and as he placed this "bit of proof" (as he styled it) in a small satchel for safe keeping, the prisoner shrugged his shoulders with a sneering laugh. Still, beneath this cynical gaiety Lecoq thought he could detect poignant anxiety. Chance owed him the compensation of this slight triumph; for previous events had deceived all his calculations.

The prisoner did not offer the slightest objection when he was ordered to undress, and to exchange his soiled and blood-stained garments for the clothing furnished by the government. Not a muscle of his face moved while he submitted his person to one of those ignominious examinations which make the blood rush to the forehead of the lowest criminal. It was with perfect indifference that he allowed an inspector to comb his hair and beard, and to

examine the inside of his mouth, so as to make sure that he had not concealed either some fragment of glass, by the aid of which captives can sever the strongest bars, or one of those microscopical bits of lead with which prisoners write the notes they exchange, rolled up in a morsel of bread, and called "postilions."

These formalities having been concluded, the superintendent rang for one of the keepers. "Conduct this man to No. 3 of the secret cells," he ordered.

There was no need to drag the prisoner away. He walked out, as he had entered, preceding the guard, like some old *habitué*, who knows where he is going.

"What a rascal!" exclaimed the clerk.

"Then you think—" began Lecoq, baffled but not convinced.

"Ah! there can be no doubt of it," declared the governor. "This man is certainly a dangerous criminal—an old offender—I think I have seen him before—I could almost swear to it."

Thus it was evident these people with their long, varied experience, shared Gevrol's opinion; Lecoq stood alone. He did not discuss the matter—what good would it have done? Besides, the Widow Chupin was just being brought in.

The journey must have calmed her nerves, for she had become as gentle as a lamb. It was in a wheedling voice, and with tearful eyes, that she called upon these "good gentlemen" to witness the shameful injustice with which she was treated—she, an honest woman. Was she not the main-stay of her family (since her son Polyte was in custody, charged with pocket-picking) hence, what would become of her daughter-in-law, and of her grandson Toto, who had no one to look after them but her?

Still, when her name had been taken, and a keeper was ordered to remove her, nature re-asserted itself, and scarcely had she entered the corridor than she was heard quarreling with the guard.

"You are wrong not to be polite," she said; "you are losing a good fee, without counting many a good drink I would stand you when I get out of here."

Lecoq was now free until M. d'Escorval's arrival. He wandered through the gloomy corridors, from office to office, but finding himself assailed with questions by

everyone he came across, he eventually left the *depot*, and went and sat down on one of the benches beside the quay. Here he tried to collect his thoughts. His convictions were unchanged. He was more than ever convinced that the prisoner was concealing his real social standing, but, on the other hand, it was evident that he was well acquainted with the prison and its usages.

He had also proved himself to be endowed with far more cleverness, than Lecoq had supposed. What self-control ! What powers of dissimulation he had displayed ! He had not so much as frowned whilst undergoing the severest ordeals, and he had managed to deceive the most experienced eyes in Paris.

The young detective had waited during nearly three hours, as motionless as the bench on which he was seated, and so absorbed in studying his case that he had thought neither of the cold nor of the flight of time, when a carriage drew up before the entrance of the prison, and M. d'Escorval alighted, followed by his clerk.

Lecoq rose and hastened, well-nigh breathless with anxiety, towards the magistrate.

"My researches on the spot," said his functionary, "confirm me in the belief that you are right. Is there anything fresh ? "

"Yes, sir ; a fact that is apparently very trivial, though in truth, it is of importance that—"

"Very well !" interrupted the magistrate. You will explain it to me by and bye. First of all, I must summarily examine the prisoners. A mere matter of form for to-day. Wait for me here."

Although the magistrate promised to make haste, Lecoq expected that at least an hour would elapse before he reappeared. In this he was mistaken. Twenty minutes later, M. d'Escorval emerged from the prison without his clerk.

He was walking very fast, and instead of approaching the young detective, he called to him some little distance. "I must return home at once," he said, "instantly, I cannot listen to you."

"But, sir—"

"Enough ! the bodies of the victims have been taken to Morgue. Keep a sharp look-out there. Then, this evening make—well—do whatever you think best."

"But, sir, I must—"

"To-morrow!—to-morrow, at nine o'clock, in my office in Palais de Justice."

Lecoq wished to insist upon a hearing, but M. d'Escorval had entered, or rather thrown, himself into his carriage, and the coachman was already whipping up the horse.

"And to think that he's an investigating magistrate," panted Lecoq, left spell-bound on the quay. "Has he gone mad?" As he spoke, an uncharitable thought took possession of his mind. "Can it be," he murmured, "that M. d'Escorval holds the key to the mystery? Perhaps he wishes to get rid of me."

This suspicion was so terrible that Lecoq hastened back to the prison, hoping that the prisoner's bearing might help to solve his doubts. On peering through the grated aperture in the door of the cell, he perceived the prisoner lying on the pallet that stood opposite the door. His face was turned towards the wall, and he was enveloped in the coverlid up to his eyes. He was not asleep, for Lecoq could detect a strange movement of the body, which puzzled and annoyed him. On applying his ear instead of his eye to the aperture, he distinguished a stifled moan. There could no longer be any doubt. The death rattle was sounding in prisoner's throat.

"Help! help!" cried Lecoq, greatly excited. "The prisoner is killing himself!"

A dozen keepers hastened to the spot. The door was quickly opened, and it was then ascertained that the prisoner, having torn a strip of binding from his clothes, had fastened it round his neck and tried to strangle himself with the assistance of a spoon that had been left him with his food. He was already unconscious, and the prison doctor, who immediately bled him, declared that had another ten minutes elapsed, help would have arrived too late.

When the prisoner regained his senses, he gazed around him with a wild, puzzled stare. One might have supposed that he was amazed to find himself still alive. Suddenly a couple of big tears welled from his swollen eyelids, and rolled down his cheeks. He was pressed with questions, but did not vouchsafe so much as a single word in response. As he was in such a desperate frame of mind,

and as the orders to keep him in solitary confinement prevented the governor giving him a companion, it was decided to put a straight waistcoat on him. Lecoq assisted at this operation, and then walked away, puzzled, thoughtful, and agitated. Intuition told him that these mysterious occurrences concealed some terrible drama.

"Still, what can have occurred since the prisoner's arrival here?" he murmured. "Has he confessed his guilt to the magistrate, or what is his reason for attempting so desperate an act?"

VIII.

LECOQ did not sleep that night although he had been on his feet for more than forty hours, and had scarcely paused either to eat or drink. Anxiety, hope, and even fatigue itself, had imparted to his body the fictitious strength of fever, and to his intellect the unhealthy acuteness which is so often the result of intense mental effort.

He no longer had to occupy himself with imaginary deductions, as in former times when in the employ of his patron, the astronomer. Once again did the fact prove stranger than fiction. Here was reality—a terrible reality personified by the corpses of three victims lying on the marble slabs at the Morgue. Still, if the catastrophe itself was a patent fact its motive, its surroundings, could only be conjectured. Who could tell what circumstances had preceded and paved the way for this tragical *dénouement*?

It is true that all doubt might be dispelled by one discovery—the identity of the murderer. Who was he? Who was right, Gevrol or Lecoq? The former's views were shared by the officials at the prison; the latter stood alone. Again, the former's opinion was based upon formidable proof, the evidence of sight; whilst Lecoq's hypothesis rested only on a series of subtle observations and deductions, starting from a single sentence that had fallen from the prisoner's lips.

And yet Lecoq resolutely persisted in his theory, guided by the following reasons. He learnt from M. d'Escorval's clerk that when the magistrate had examined the prisoner, the latter not only refused to confess, but answered all the questions put to him in the most evasive fashion. In sev

eral instances, moreover, he had not replied at all. If the magistrate had not insisted, it was because this first examination was a mere formality, solely intended to justify the somewhat premature delivery of the order to imprison the accused.

Now, under these circumstances, how was one to explain the prisoner's attempt at self-destruction? Prison statistics show that habitual offenders do not commit suicide. When apprehended for a criminal act, they are sometimes seized with a wild frenzy and suffer repeated nervous attacks; at others they fall into a dull stupor, just as some glutted beast succumbs to sleep with the blood of his prey still dripping from his lips. However, such men never think of putting an end to their days. They hold fast to life, no matter how seriously they may be compromised. In truth, they are cowards.

On the other hand, the unfortunate fellow who, in a moment of frenzy, commits a crime, not unfrequently seeks to avoid the consequences of his act by self-destruction.

Hence, the prisoner's frustrated attempt at suicide was a strong argument in favour of Lecoq's theory. This wretched man's secret must be a terrible one since he held it dearer than life, since he had tried to destroy himself that he might take it unrevealed to the grave.

Four o'clock was striking when Lecoq sprang from his bed on which he had thrown himself without undressing; and five minutes later he was walking down the Rue Montmartre. The weather was still cold and muggy; and a thick fog hung over the city. But the young detective was too engrossed with his own thoughts to pay attention to any atmospherical unpleasantness. Walking with a brisk stride he had just reached the church of Saint Eustache, when a coarse, mocking voice accosted him with the exclamation, "Ah, ha! my fine fellow!"

He looked up and perceived Gevrol, who, with three of his men, had come to cast his nets round about the markets, whence the police generally return with a good haul of thieves and vagabonds.

"You are up very early this morning, Monsieur Lecoq," continued the inspector; "you are still trying to discover our man's identity, I suppose?"

"Still trying."

"Is he a prince in disguise, or only a *marquis*?"

"One or the other I am quite certain."

"All right then. In that case you will not refuse us the opportunity to drink to your success."

Lecoq consented, and the party entered a wine-shop close by. When the glasses were filled, Lecoq turned to Gevrol and exclaimed, "Upon my word, General, our meeting will save me a long walk. I was going to the prefecture to request you, on M. d'Escorval's behalf, to send one of our comrades to the Morgue this morning. The affair at the Poivriere has been noised about, and all the world will be there, so he desires some officer to be present to watch the crowd and listen to the remarks of the visitors."

"All right; Father Absinthe shall be there when the doors open."

To send Father Absinthe where a shrewd and subtle agent was required was a mockery. Still Lecoq did not protest, for it was better to be badly served than to be betrayed; and he could at least trust Father Absinthe.

"It doesn't much matter," continued Gevrol; "but you should have informed me of this last evening. However, when I reached the prefecture you had gone."

"I had some work to do."

"Yes?"

"At the station-house near the *Barriere d'Italie*. I wanted to know whether the floor of the cell was paved or tiled." So saying, Lecoq paid the score, saluted his superior officer, and went out.

"Thunder!" exclaimed Gevrol, striking his glass violently upon the counter. "Thunder! how that fellow provokes me! He does not know the A B C of his profession. When he can't discover anything, he invents wonderful stories, and then misleads the magistrates with his high-sounding phrases, in the hope of gaining promotion. I'll give him advancement with a vengeance! I'll teach him to set himself above me!"

Lecoq had not been deceived. The evening before, he had visited the station-house where the prisoner had first been confined, and had compared the soil of the cell floor with the dust he had placed in his pocket; and he carried away with him, as he believed, one of those crushing proofs that often suffice to extort from the most obstinate criminal a complete confession.

If Lecoq was in haste to part company with Gevrol, it was because he was anxious to pursue his investigations still further, before appearing in M. d'Escorval's presence. He was determined to find the cab-driver who had been stopped by the two women in the Rue du Chevaleret; and with this object in view, he had obtained at the prefecture the names and addresses of all the cab-owners hiring between the road to Fontainebleau and the Seine.

His earlier efforts at investigation proved unsuccessful. At the first establishment he visited, the stable boys, who were not yet up, swore at him roundly. In the second, he found the grooms at work, but none of the drivers had as yet put in an appearance. Moreover, the owner refused to show him the books upon which are recorded—or should be recorded—each driver's daily engagements. Lecoq was beginning to despair, when at about half-past seven o'clock he reached an establishment just beyond the fortifications belonging to a man named Trigault. Here he learned that on Sunday night, or rather, early on Monday morning, one of the drivers had been accosted on his way home by some persons who succeeded in persuading him to drive them back into Paris.

This driver who was then in the court-yard harnessing his horse proved to be a little old man, with a ruddy complexion, and a pair of small eyes full of cunning. Lecoq walked up to him at once.

"Was it you," he asked, "who, on Sunday night or rather on Monday, between one and two in the morning, drove a couple of women from the Rue du Chevaleret into Paris?"

The driver looked up, and surveying Lecoq attentively, cautiously replied: "Perhaps."

"It is a positive answer that I want."

"Aha!" said the old man sneeringly, "you know two ladies who have lost something in a cab, and so——"

The young detective trembled with satisfaction. This man was certainly the one he was looking for: "Have you heard anything about a crime that has been committed in the neighborhood?" he interrupted.

"Yes; a murder in a low wine-shop."

"Well then, I will tell you that these two women are mixed up in it, they fled when we entered the place. I

am trying to find them. I am a detective ; here is my card Now, can you give me any information ? ”

The driver had grown very pale. “ Ah ! the wretches ! ” he exclaimed. “ I am no longer surprised at the luck-money they gave me—a louis, and two five franc-pieces for the fare—thirty francs in all. Cursed money ! If I hadn’t spent it, I’d throw it away ! ”

“ And where did you drive them ? ”

“ To the Rue de Bourgogne. I have forgotten the number, but I should recognise the house. ”

“ Unfortunately they would not have let you drive them to their own door. ”

“ Who knows ? I saw them ring the bell, and I think they went in just as I drove away. Shall I take you there ? ”

Lecoq’s sole response was to spring on to the box, exclaiming : “ Let us be off. ”

It was not to be supposed that the women who had escaped from the Widow Chupin’s drinking den at the moment of the murder were utterly devoid of intelligence. Nor was it at all likely that these two fugitives, conscious as they were of their perilous situation, had gone straight to their real home in a vehicle hired on the public highway. Hence, the driver’s hope of finding them in the Rue de Bourgogne was purely chimerical. Lecoq was fully aware of this and yet he did not hesitate to jump on to the box and give the signal for starting. In so doing, he obeyed maxim which he had framed in his early days of meditation—a maxim intended to assure his after fame and which ran as follows : “ Always suspect that which seems probable ; and begin by believing what appears incredible. ”

As soon as the vehicle was well under way, the young detective proceeded to ingratiate himself into the driver’s good graces, being anxious to obtain all the information that this worthy was able to impart.

In a tone that implied that all trifling would be useless the cabman cried, “ Hey up, hey up, Cocotte ! ” and his mare pricked up her ears and quickened her pace, so that the Route de Choisy was speedily reached. Then it was that Lecoq resumed his inquiries.

“ Well, my good fellow, ” he began, “ you have told me the principal facts, now I should like the details. How did these two women attract your attention ? ”

"Oh, it was very simple. I had been having a most unfortunate day—six hours on a stand on the Boulevards, with the rain pouring all the time. It was simply awful. At midnight I had not made more than a franc and a half for myself, but I so wet and miserable and the horse seemed so done up, that I decided to go home. I *did* grumble I can tell you. Well I had just passed the corner of the Rue Picard, in the Rue du Chevaleret, when I saw two women standing under a lamp, some little distance off. I did not pay any attention to them; for when a man is as old as I am, women——"

"Go on!" said Lecoq, who could not restrain his impatience.

"I had already passed them, when they began to call after me. I pretended I did not hear them; but one of them ran after the cab, crying: 'A louis! a louis for yourself!' I hesitated for a moment, when the woman added, 'And ten francs for the fare!' I then drew up."

Lecoq was boiling over with impatience; but he felt that the wisest course was not to interrupt the driver with questions, but to listen to all he had to say.

"As you may suppose," continued the coachman, "I wasn't inclined to trust two such suspicious characters, alone at that hour and in that part of the city. So, just as they were about to get into the cab, I called to them, 'Wait a bit, my little friends, you have promised papa some sous; where are they?' The one who had called after the cab at once handed me thirty francs, saying: 'Above all, make haste!'"

"Your recital could not be more minute," exclaimed Lecoq, approvingly. "Now, how about these two women?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean what kind of women did they seem to be: what did you take them for?"

"Oh, for nothing very good!" replied the driver, with a knowing smile.

"Ah! and how were they dressed?"

"Like most of the girls who go to dance at the Rainbow. One of them, however, was very neat and prim, while the other—well! she was a terrible dowdy."

"Which ran after you?"

"The girl who was neatly dressed, the one who——"

The driver suddenly paused: some vivid remembrance passed through his brain, and abruptly jerking the reins, he brought his horse to a stand-still.

"Thunder!" he exclaimed. "Now I think of it, I did notice something strange. One of the two women called the other 'madame,' as large as life while the other said 'thee' and 'thou,' and spoke as if she were some body."

"Oh! oh! oh!" exclaimed the young detective, in three different keys. "And which was it that said 'thee' and 'thou?'"

"Why, the dowdy one. She with shabby dress and shoes as big as a gouty man's. You should have seen her shake the prim-looking girl, as if she had been a plum-tree, 'You little fool!' said she, 'do you want to ruin us? You will have time to faint when we get home; now come along. And then she began to sob, 'Indeed, madame, indeed I can't!' she said, and really she seemed quite unable to move: in fact, she appeared to be so ill that I said to myself: 'Here is a young woman who has drank more than is good for her!'"

These facts confirmed even if they corrected Lecoq's first suppositions. As he had suspected, the social position of the two women was not the same. He had been mistaken, however, in attributing the higher standing to the woman wearing the shoes with the high heels, the marks of which he had so particularly noticed in the snow, with all the attendant signs of precipitation, terror, and weakness. In reality, social pre-eminence belonged to the woman who had left the large, broad foot-prints behind her. And not merely was she of a superior rank, but she had also shown superior energy. Contrary to Lecoq's original idea, it now seemed evident that she was the mistress, and her companion the servant.

"Is that all, my good fellow?" he asked the driver, who during the last few minutes had been busy with this horses.

"Yes," replied the cabman, "except that I noticed that the shabbily dressed woman who paid me had a hand as small as a child's, and in spite of her anger, her voice was as sweet as music."

"Did you see her face?"

"I just caught a glimpse of it."

"Could you tell if she were pretty, or whether she was a blonde or a brunette?"

So many questions at a time confused the driver. "Stop a minute!" he replied. "In my opinion she wasn't pretty, and I don't believe she was young, but she certainly was a blonde, and with plenty of hair too."

"Was she tall or short, stout or slender?"

"Between the two."

This was very vague. "And the other," asked Lecoq, "the neatly dressed one?"

"The deuce! As for her I did not notice her at all; all I know about her is that she was very small."

"Would you recognize her if you met her again?"

"Good heavens! no."

The vehicle was now rolling along the Rue de Bourgogne. Half way down the street the driver pulled up, and turning to Lecoq exclaimed, "Here we are. That's the house the hussies went into."

To draw off the silk handkerchief that served him as a muffler, to fold it and slip it into his pocket, to spring to the ground and enter the house indicated, was only the work of an instant for the young detective.

In the concierge's little room he found an old woman knitting. Lecoq bowed to her politely, and displaying the silk handkerchief exclaimed, "Madame, I have come to return this article to one of your lodgers."

"To which one?"

"Really, I don't exactly know."

In a moment the worthy dame imagined that this polite young man was making fun of her. "You scamp!"—she began.

"Excuse me," interrupted Lecoq; "allow me to finish. I must tell you that at about three o'clock in the morning, of the day before yesterday, I was quietly returning home, when two ladies who were seemingly in a great hurry, overtook me and passed on. One of them dropped this handkerchief which I picked up. I hastened after her to restore it, but before I could overtake them they had rang the bell at your door and were already in the house. I did not like to ring at such an unearthly hour for fear of disturbing you. Yesterday I was so busy I couldn't come; however, here I am at last, and here's the handkerchief." So saying, Lecoq laid the handkerchief on the

table, and turned as if to go, when the concierge detained him.

"Many thanks for your kindness," said she, "but you can keep it. We have no ladies in this house, who are in the habit of coming home alone after midnight."

"Still, I have eyes," insisted Lecoq, "and I certainly saw—"

"Ah! I had forgotten," exclaimed the old woman. "The night you speak of someone certainly did ring the bell here. I pulled the string that opens the door and listened, but not hearing anyone close the door or come upstairs, I said to myself: 'some mischievous fellow has been playing a trick on me.' I slipped on my dress and went out into the hall where I saw two women, hastening towards the door. Before I could reach them, they slammed the door in my face. I opened it again as quickly as I could and looked out into the street. But they were hurrying away as fast as they could."

"In what direction?"

"Oh! they were running towards the Rue de Varrennes."

Lecoq was baffled again; however, he bowed civilly to the concierge, whom he might possibly have need of at another time, and then went back to the cab. "As I had supposed, they do not live here," he remarked to the driver.

The latter shrugged his shoulders in evident vexation, which would inevitably have vent in a torrent of words, if Lecoq, who had consulted his watch, had not forestalled the outburst by saying: "Nine o'clock—I am an hour behind time already: still I shall have some news to tell. Now take me to the Morgue as quickly as possible."

When a mysterious crime has been perpetrated, or a great catastrophe has happened, and the identity of the victims has not been established, "a great day" invariably follows at the Morgue. The attendants are so accustomed to the horrors of the place, that the most sickly sight fails to impress them; and even under the most distressing circumstances, they hasten gaily to and fro, exchanging jests well calculated to make an ordinary mortal's flesh creep. As a rule, they are far less interested in the corpses laid out for public view on the marble slabs in the principal hall, than in the people of every age and station in life

who congregate here all day long; at times coming in search of some lost relative or friend, but far more frequently impelled by idle curiosity.

As the vehicle conveying Lecoq reached the quay, the young detective perceived that a large, excited crowd was gathered outside the building. The newspapers had reported the tragedy at the Widow Chupin's drinking den, of course, more or less correctly, and everybody wished to see the victims.

On drawing near the Pont Notre Dame, Lecoq told the driver to pull up. "I prefer to alight here, rather than in front of the Morgue," he said, springing to the ground. Then, producing first his watch, and next his purse, he added, "we have been an hour and forty minutes, my good fellow, consequently, I owe you—"

"Nothing at all," replied the driver, decidedly.

"But—"

"No—not a sou. I am too worried already to think that I took the money these hussies offered me. It would only have served me right if the liquor I bought with it had given me the gripes. Don't be uneasy about the score, and if you need a trap use mine for nothing, till you have caught the jades."

As Lecoq's purse was low, he did not insist.

"You will, at least, take my name and address?" continued the driver.

"Certainly. The magistrate will want your evidence, and a summons will be sent you."

"All right, then. Address it to Papillon (Eugene), driver, care of M. Trigault. I lodge at his place, because I have some small interest in the business, you see."

The young detective was hastening away, when Papillon called him back. "When you leave the Morgue you will want to go somewhere else," he said, "you told me that you had another appointment, and that you were already late."

"Yes, I ought to be at the Palais de Justice; but it is only a few steps from here."

"No matter. I will wait for you at the corner of the bridge. It's useless to say 'no'; I've made up my mind, and I'm a Breton, you know. I want you to ride out the thirty francs that those jades paid me."

It would have been cruel to refuse such a request.

Accordingly, Lecoq made a gesture of assent, and then hurried towards the Morgue.

If there was a crowd on the roadway outside, it was because the gloomy building itself was crammed full of people. Indeed, the sightseers most of whom could see nothing at all, were packed as closely as sardines, and it was only by dint of well nigh superhuman efforts that Lecoq managed to effect an entrance. As usual, he found among the mob a large number of girls and women ; for, strange to say, the Parisian fair sex is rather partial to the disgusting sights and horrible emotions that repay a visit to the Morgue.

The shop and work girls who reside in the neighbourhood readily go out of their way to catch a glimpse of the corpses which crime, accident, and suicide bring to this horrible place. A few, the more sensitive among them, may come no further than the door, but the others enter, and after a long stare return and recount their impressions to their less courageous companions.

If there should be no corpse exhibited ; if all the marble slabs are unoccupied, strange as it may seem, the visitors turn hastily away with an expression of disappointment or discontent. There was no fear of their doing so, however, on the morrow of the tragedy at Poivriere, for the mysterious murderer whose identity Lecoq was trying to establish, had furnished three victims for their delectation. Panting with curiosity, they paid but little attention to the unhealthy atmosphere : and yet a damp chill came from beyond the iron railings, while from the crowd itself rose an infectious vapour, impregnated with the stench of the chloride of lime used as a disinfectant.

As a continuous accompaniment to the exclamations, sighs, and whispered comments of the by-standers, came the murmur of the water trickling from a spigot at the head of each slab ; a tiny stream that flowed forth only to fall in fine spray upon the marble. Through the small arched windows a grey light stole in on the exposed bodies, bringing each muscle into bold relief, revealing the ghastly tints of the lifeless flesh, and imparting a sinister aspect to the tattered clothing hung around the room to aid in the identification of the corpses. This clothing, after a certain time, is sold—for nothing is wasted at the Morgue.

However, Lecoq was too occupied with his own thoughts

to remark the horrors of the scene. He scarcely bestowed a glance on the three victims. He was looking for Father Absinthe whom he could not perceive. Had Gevrol intentionally or unintentionally failed to fulfil his promise, or had Father Absinthe forgotten his duty in his morning dram ?

Unable to explain the cause of his comrade's absence, Lecoq addressed himself to the head keeper : "It would seem that no one has recognised the victims," he remarked.

"No one. And yet, ever since opening, we have had an immense crowd. If I were master here, on days like this, I would charge an admission fee of two sous a head, with half-price for children. It would bring in a round sum, more than enough to cover the expenses."

The keeper's reply seemed to offer an inducement to conversation, but Lecoq did not seize it. "Excuse me," he interrupted, "didn't a detective come here this morning ?"

"Yes, there was one here."

"Has he gone away then? I don't see him anywhere?"

The keeper glanced suspiciously at his eager questioner, but after a moment's hesitation, he ventured to inquire : "Are you one of them ?"

"Yes, I am," replied Lecoq, exhibiting his card in support of his assertion.

"And your name ?"

"Is Lecoq."

The keeper's face brightened up. "In that case," said he, "I have a letter for you, written by your comrade, who was obliged to go away. Here it is."

The young detective at once tore open the envelope and read "Monsieur Lecoq—"

"Monsieur ?" this simple formula of politeness brought a faint smile to his lips. Was it not, on Father Absinthe's part, an evident recognition of his colleague's superiority. Indeed, our hero accepted it as a token of unquestioning devotion which it would be his duty to repay with a master's kind protection towards his first disciple. However, he had no time to waste in thought, and accordingly at once proceeded to peruse the note which ran as follows :

"Monsieur Lecoq,—I had been standing on duty since the opening of the Morgue, when at about nine o'clock three young men entered, arm-in-arm. From their manner and appearance, I judged them to be clerks in some store or warehouse. Suddenly I noticed that one of them turned as white as his shirt; and calling the attention of his companions to one of the unknown victims, he whispered, 'Gustave!'

"His comrades put their hands over his mouth, and one of them exclaimed, 'What are you about, you fool, to mix yourself up with this affair! Do you want to get us into trouble?'

"Thereupon they went out, and I followed them. But the person who had first spoken, was so overcome that he could scarcely drag himself along; and his companions were obliged to take him to a little restaurant close by. I entered it myself, and it is there I write this letter, in the meantime watching them out of the corner of my eye. I send this note, explaining my absence, to the head keeper who will give it you. You will understand that I am going to follow these men. "A. B. S."

The handwriting of this letter was almost illegible; and there were mistakes in spelling in wellnigh every line; still, its meaning was clear and exact, and could not fail to excite the most flattering hopes.

Lecoq's face was so radiant when he returned to the cab, that, as the old coachman urged on his horse, he could not refrain from saying, "Things are going on to suit you."

A friendly "hush!" was the only response. It required all Lecoq's attention to classify this new information. When he alighted from the cab in front of the Palais de Justice, he experienced considerable difficulty in dismissing the old cabman, who insisted upon remaining at his orders. He succeeded at last, however, but even when he had reached the portico on the left side of the building, the worthy fellow, standing up, still shouted at the top of his voice: "At M. Trigault's house—don't forget—Father Papillon—No. 998—1,000 less 2—."

Lecoq had entered the left wing of the Palais. He climbed the stairs till he had reached the third floor, and was about to enter the long, narrow, badly-lighted corridor

known as the *Galerie de l'Instruction*, when finding a door-keeper installed behind a heavy oaken desk, he remarked : " M. d'Escorval is of course in his office ? "

The man shook his head. " No," said he, " M. d'Escorval is not here this morning, and he won't be here for several weeks. "

" Why not ! What do you mean ? "

" Last night, as he was alighting from his carriage, at his own door, he had a most unfortunate fall, and broke his leg. "

IX.

SOME men are wealthy. They own a carriage drawn by a pair of high-stepping horses, and driven by a coachman in stylish livery ; and as they pass by, leaning back on comfortable cushions, they become the object of many an envious glance. Sometimes, however, the coachman has taken a drop too much, and upsets the carriage ; perhaps the horses run away and a general smash ensues ; or, maybe, the hitherto fortunate owner, in a moment of absent-mindedness, misses the step, and fractures his leg on the curbstone. Such accidents occur every day ; and their long list should make humble foot-passengers bless the lowly lot which preserves them from such peril.

On learning the misfortune that had befallen M. d'Escorval, Lecoq's face wore such an expression of consternation that the door-keeper could not help laughing. " What is there so very extraordinary about that I've told you ? " he asked.

" I—oh ! nothing—"

The detective did not speak the truth. The fact is, he had just been struck by the strange coincidence of two events—the supposed murder's attempted suicide, and the magistrate's fall. Still, he did not allow the vague presentiment that flitted through his mind to assume any definite form. For after all, what possible connection could there be between the two occurrences ? Then again, he never allowed himself to be governed by prejudice, nor had he as yet enriched his formulary with an axiom he afterwards professed : " Distrust all circumstances that seem to favour your secret wishes. "

Of course, Lecoq did not rejoice M. d'Escorval's

accident ; could he have prevented it, he would have gladly done so. Still, he could not help saying to himself that this stroke of misfortune would free him from all further connection with a man whose superciliousness and disdain had been painfully disagreeable to his feelings.

This thought caused a sensation of relief—almost one of light-heartedness. “In that case,” said the young detective to the door-keeper, “I shall have nothing to do here this morning.”

“You must be joking,” was the reply. “Does the world stop moving because one man is disabled ? The news only arrived an hour ago ; but all the urgent business that M. d’Escorval had in charge, has already been divided among the other magistrates.”

“I came here about that terrible affair that occurred the other night just beyond the Barriere de Fontainebleau.”

“Eh ! Why didn’t you say so at once ? A messenger has been sent to the prefecture after you already. M. Segmuller has charge of the case, and he’s waiting for you.”

Doubt and perplexity were plainly written on Lecoq’s forehead. He was trying to remember the magistrate that bore this name, and wondered whether he was a likely man to espouse his views.

“Yes,” resumed the door-keeper, who seemed to be in a talkative mood, “M. Segmuller—you don’t seem to know him. He is a worthy man, not quite so grim as most of our gentlemen. A prisoner he had examined said one day : ‘That devil there has pumped me so well that I shall certainly have my head chopped off ; but, nevertheless, he’s a good fellow !’”

His heart somewhat lightened by these favourable reports, Lecoq went and tapped at a door that was indicated to him, and which bore the number—22.

“Come in !” called out a pleasant voice.

The young detective entered, and found himself face to face with a man of some forty years of age, tall and rather corpulent, who at once exclaimed : “Ah ! you are Lecoq. Very well—take a seat. I am busy just now looking over the papers of the case, but I will attend to you in five minutes.”

Lecoq obeyed, at the same time glancing furtively at the magistrate with whom he was about to work. M. Segmuller’s appearance corresponded perfectly with the description

given by the door-keeper. His plump face wore an air of frankness and benevolence, and his blue eyes had a most pleasant expression. Nevertheless, Lecoq distrusted these appearances, and in so doing he was right.

Born near Strasbourg, M. Segmuller possessed that candid physiognomy common to most of the natives of blonde Alsace—a deceitful mask, which, behind seeming simplicity, not unfrequently conceals a Gascon cunning, rendered all the more dangerous since it is allied with extreme caution. He had a wonderfully alert, penetrating mind; but his system—every magistrate has his own—was mainly good-humour. Unlike most of his colleagues, who were as stiff and cutting in manner as the sword which the statue of Justice usually holds in her hand, he made simplicity and kindness of demeanour his leading trait, though, of course, without ever losing sight of his magisterial duties.

Still, the tone of his voice was so paternal, and the subtle purport of his questions so veiled by his seeming frankness, that most of those whom he examined forgot the necessity of protecting themselves, and unawares confessed their guilt. Thus, it frequently happened, that while some unsuspecting culprit was complacently congratulating himself upon getting the best of the judge, the poor wretch was really being turned inside out like a glove.

By the side of such a man as M. Segmuller, a grave and slender clerk would have excited distrust; so he had chosen one who was a caricature of himself. This clerk's name was Goguet. He was short but corpulent, and his broad beardless face habitually wore a silly smile, not out of keeping with his intellect, which was none of the brightest.

As stated above, when Lecoq entered M. Segmuller's room the latter was busy studying the case which had so unexpectedly fallen into his hands. All the articles which the young detective had collected, from the flakes of wool to the diamond earring, were spread out upon the magistrate's desk. With the greatest attention, he perused the report prepared by Lecoq, and according to the different phases of the affair, he examined one or another of the objects before him, or else consulted the plan of the ground.

A good half-hour elapsed before he had completed his inspection, when he threw himself back in his arm-chair. "Monsieur Lecoq," he said, slowly, "Monsieur d'Escorval has informed me by a note on the margin of this file of

papers, that you are an intelligent man, and that we can trust you."

"I am willing, at all events."

"You speak too slightly of yourself; this is the first time that an agent has brought me a report as complete as yours. You are young, and if you persevere, I think you will be able to accomplish great things in your profession."

Nervous with delight, Lecoq bowed and stammered his thanks.

"Your opinion in this matter coincides with mine," continued M. Segmuller, "and the public prosecutor informs me that M. d'Escorval shares the same views. An enigma is before us; and it ought to be solved."

"Oh!—we'll solve it, I am certain, sir," exclaimed Lecoq, who at this moment felt capable of the most extraordinary achievements. Indeed, he would have gone through fire and water for the magistrate who had received him so kindly, and his enthusiasm sparkled so plainly in his eyes that M. Segmuller could not restrain a smile.

"I have strong hopes of it myself," he responded; "but we are far from the end. Now, what have you been doing since yesterday? Did M. d'Escorval give you any orders? Have you obtained any fresh information?"

"I don't think I have wasted my time," replied Lecoq, who at once proceeded to relate the various facts that had come to his knowledge since his departure from the Poivriere.

With rare precision and that happiness of expression which seldom fails a man well acquainted with his subject, he recounted the daring feats of the presumed accomplice, the points he had noted in the supposed murderer's conduct, the latter's unsuccessful attempt at self-destruction. He repeated the testimony given by the cab-driver, and by the concierge in the Rue de Bourgogne, and then read the letter he had received from Father Absinthe.

In conclusion, he placed on the magistrate's desk some of the dirt he had scraped from the prisoner's feet; at the same time depositing beside it a similar parcel of dust collected on the floor of the cell in which the murderer was confined at the Barriere d'Italie.

When Lecoq had explained the reasons that had led him to collect this soil, and the conclusions that might be drawn from a comparison of the two parcels, M. Seg-

muller, who had been listening attentively, at once exclaimed: "You are right. It may be that you have discovered a means to confound all the prisoner's denials. At all events, this is certainly a proof of surprising sagacity on your part."

So it must have been, for Goguet, the clerk, nodded approvingly. "Capital!" he murmured. "I should never have thought of that."

While he was talking, M. Segmuller had carefully placed all the so-called "article of conviction" in a large drawer, from which they would not emerge until the trial. "Now," said he, "I understand the case well enough to examine the Widow Chupin. We may gain some information from her."

He was laying his hand upon the bell, when Lecoq stopped him with an almost supplicating gesture. "I have one great favour to ask you sir," he observed.

"What is it?—speak."

"I should very much like to be present at this examination. It takes so little, sometimes, to awaken a happy inspiration."

Although the law says that the accused shall first of all be privately examined by the investigating magistrate assisted by his clerk, it also allows the presence of police-agents. Accordingly, M. Segmuller told Lecoq that he might remain. At the same time he rang his bell; which was speedily answered by a messenger.

"Has the Widow Chupin been brought here, in compliance with my orders?" asked M. Segmuller.

"Yes, sir; she is in the gallery outside."

"Let her come in then."

An instant later, the hostess of the Poivriere entered the room, bowing to the right and to the left. This was not her first appearance before a magistrate, and she was not ignorant of the respect that is due to justice. Accordingly, she had arrayed herself for her examination with the utmost care. She had arranged her rebellious grey locks in smooth bandeaux, and her garments, although of common material, looked positively neat. She had even persuaded one of the prison warders to buy her—with the money she had about her at the time of her arrest—a black crape cap, and a couple of white pocket-handker-

chiefs, intending to deluge the latter with her tears, should the situation call for a pathetic display.

She was indeed far too knowing to rely solely on the mere artifices of dress ; hence, she had also drawn upon her *repertoire* of grimaces for an innocent, sad, and yet resigned expression, well fitted, in her opinion, to win the sympathy and indulgence of the magistrate upon whom her fate would depend.

Thus disguised, with downcast eyes and honeyed voice, she looked so unlike the terrible termagant of the Poirvriere, that her customers would scarcely have recognised her. Indeed, an honest old bachelor might have offered her twenty francs a month to take charge of his chambers—solely on the strength of her good looks. But M. Segmuller had unmasked so many hypocrites that he was not deceived for a moment : “What an old actress ?” he muttered to himself, and glancing at Lecoq he perceived the same thought sparkling in the young detective’s eyes. It is true that the magistrate’s penetration, may have been due to some notes he had just perused—notes containing an abstract of the woman’s former life, and furnished by the chief of police at the magistrate’s request.

With a gesture of authority M. Segmuller warned Goguet, the clerk with the silly smile, to get his writing materials ready. He then turned towards the Widow Chupin. “Your name ?” he asked in a sharp tone.

“Aspasie Claperdty, my maiden name,” replied the old woman, “and to-day, the Widow Chupin, at your service, sir ;” so saying, she made a low curtsy, and then added ; “A lawful widow, you understand, sir ; I have my marriage papers safe in my chest at home ; and if you wish to send anyone——”

“Your age ?” interrupted the magistrate.

“Fifty-four.”

“Your profession ?”

“Dealer in wines and spirits outside of Paris, near the Rue du Chateau-des-Rentiers, just beyond the fortifications.”

A prisoner’s examination always begins with these questions as to individuality, which gives both the magistrate and the culprit time to study each other, to try, as it were, each other’s strength, before joining in a serious struggle ;

just as two duellists, about to engage in mortal combat, first try a few passes with the foils.

"Now," resumed M. Segmuller, "we will note your antecedents. Have you not already been found guilty of several offences?"

The Widow Chupin was too well versed in criminal procedure to be ignorant of those famous records, which render the denial of identity such a difficult matter in France. "I have been unfortunate, my good judge," she whined.

"Yes, several times. First of all you were arrested on a charge of receiving stolen goods."

"But it was proved that I was innocent, that my character was whiter than snow. My poor, dear husband had been deceived by his comrades; that was all."

"Possibly. But while your husband was undergoing his sentence, you were condemned, first to one month's and then to three months' imprisonment for stealing."

"Oh, I had some enemies who did their best to ruin me."

"Next you were imprisoned for having led some young girls astray."

"They were good-for-nothing hussies, my kind sir, heartless, unprincipled creatures. I did them many favours, and then they went and related a batch of falsehoods to ruin me. I have always been too kind and considerate towards others."

The list of the woman's offences was not exhausted, but M. Segmuller thought it useless to continue. "Such is your past," he resumed. "At the present time your wine-shop is the resort of rogues and criminals. Your son is undergoing his fourth term of imprisonment; and it has been clearly proved that you abetted and assisted him in his evil deeds. Your daughter-in-law, by some miracle, has remained honest and industrious, hence, you have tormented and abused her to such an extent that the authorities have been obliged to interfere. When she left your house you tried to keep her child—no doubt meaning to bring it up after the same fashion as its father."

"This," thought the Widow Chupin, "is the right moment to try and soften the magistrate's heart." Accordingly, she drew one of her new handkerchiefs from her pocket, and, by dint of rubbing her eyes, endeavoured to

extract a tear. "Oh, unhappy me," she groaned. "How can anyone imagine that I would harm my grandson, my poor little Toto! Why I should be worse than a wild beast, to try and bring my own flesh and blood to perdition."

She soon perceived, however, that her lamentations did not much affect M. Segmuller, hence, suddenly changing both her tone and manner she began her justification. She did not positively deny her past; but she threw all the blame on the injustice of destiny, which, while favouring a few, generally the less deserving, showed no mercy to others. Alas! she was one of those who had had no luck in life, having always been persecuted, despite her innocence. In this last affair, for instance, how was she to blame? A triple murder had stained her shop with blood; but the most respectable establishments are not exempt from similar catastrophes. During her solitary confinement, she had, said she, dived down into the deepest recesses of her conscience, and she was still unable to discover what blame could justly be laid at her door.

"I can tell you," interrupted the magistrate. "You are accused of impeding the action of the law."

"Good heavens! Is it possible!"

"And of seeking to defeat justice. This is equivalent to complicity, Widow Chupin; take care. When the police entered your cabin, after this crime had been committed, you refused to answer their questions."

"I told them all that I knew."

"Very well, then you must repeat what you told them to me."

M. Segmuller had reason to feel satisfied. He had conducted the examination in such a way that the Widow Chupin would now have to initiate a narrative of the tragedy. This excellent point gained; for this shrewd old woman possessed of all her coolness, would naturally have been on her guard against any direct questions. Now, it was essential that she should not suspect either what the magistrate knew of the affair, or what he was ignorant of. By leaving her to her own devices she might, in the course of the version which she proposed to substitute for the truth, not merely strengthen Lecoq's theories, but also let fall some remark calculated to facilitate the task of future investigation. Both M. Segmuller and Lecoq were of opinion that

the version of the crime, which they were about to hear, had been concocted at the station-house of the Place d'Italie while the murderer and the spurious drunkard were left together, and that it had been transmitted by the accomplice to the widow during the brief conversation they were allowed to have through the wicket of the latter's cell.

Invited by the magistrate to recount the circumstances of the tragedy, Mother Chupin did not hesitate for a moment. "Oh, it was a very simple affair, my good sir," she began. "I was sitting by my fireside on Sunday evening, when suddenly the door opened, and three men and two women came in."

M. Segmuller and the young detective exchanged glances. The accomplice had evidently seen Lecoq and his comrade examining the foot-prints, and accordingly the presence of the two women was not to be denied.

"What time was this?" asked the magistrate.

"About eleven o'clock."

"Go on."

"As soon as they sat down, they ordered a bowl of wine, *a la Francaise*. Without boasting, I may say that I haven't an equal in preparing that drink. Of course, I waited on them, and afterwards, having a blouse to mend for my boy, I went upstairs to my room, which is just over the shop."

"Leaving these people alone?"

"Yes, my judge."

"That showed a great deal of confidence on your part."

The widow sadly shook her head. "People as poor as I am don't fear the thieves," she sighed.

"Go on—go on."

"Well, I had been upstairs about half an hour, when I heard someone below call out: 'Eh! old woman!' So I went down, and found a tall big-bearded man, who had just come in. He asked for a glass of brandy, which I brought to a table where he had sat down by himself."

"And then, did you go upstairs again?" interrupted the magistrate.

The exclamation was ironical, of course, but no one could have told from the Widow Chupin's placid countenance whether she was aware that such was the case.

"Precisely, my good sir," she replied in the most composed manner. "Only this time I had scarcely taken up

my needle when I heard a terrible uproar in the shop. I hurried downstairs to put a stop to it—but heaven knows my interference would have been of little use. The three men who had come in first of all had fallen upon the new comer, and they were beating him, my good sir, they were killing him. I screamed. Just then the man who had come in alone drew a revolver from his pocket ; he fired and killed one of his assailants, who fell to the ground. I was so frightened that I crouched on the staircase and threw my apron over my head that I might not see the blood run. An instant later Monsieur Gevrol arrived with his men ; they forced open the door, and behold—”

The Widow Chupin here stopped short. These wretched old women, who have trafficked in every sort of vice, and who have tasted every disgrace, at times attain a perfection of hypocrisy calculated to deceive the most subtle penetration. Anyone unacquainted with the antecedents of the landlady of the Poivriere, would certainly have been impressed by her apparent candour, so skilfully did she affect a display of frankness, surprise, and fear. Her expression would have been simply perfect, had it not been for her eyes, her small gray eyes, as restless as those of a caged animal, and gleaming at intervals with craftiness and cunning.

There she stood, mentally rejoicing at the success of her narrative, for she was convinced that the magistrate placed implicit confidence in her revelations. Although during her recital, delivered, by the way, with conjuror-like volubility, not a muscle of M. Segmuller's face had betrayed what was passing in his mind. When she paused, out of breath, he rose from his seat and without a word approached his clerk to inspect the notes taken during the earlier part of the examination.

From the corner where he was quietly seated, Lecoq did not cease watching the prisoner. “She thinks that it's all over,” he muttered to himself, “she fancies that her deposition is accepted without question.”

If such were, indeed, the widow's opinion, she was soon to be undeceived ; for, after addressing a few low-spoken words to the smiling Goguet, M. Segmuller took a seat near the fireplace, convinced that the moment had now come to abandon defensive tactics, and open fire on the enemy's position.

"So, Widow Chupin," he began, "you tell us that you didn't remain for a single moment with the people who came into your shop that evening!"

"Not a moment."

"They came in and ordered what they wanted; you waited on them, and then left them to themselves?"

"Yes, my good sir."

"It seems to me impossible that you didn't overhear some words of their conversation. What were they talking about?"

"I am not in the habit of playing spy over my customers."

"Didn't you hear anything?"

"Nothing at all."

The magistrate shrugged his shoulders with an air of commiseration. "In other words," he remarked, "you refuse to inform justice——"

"Oh, my good sir!"

"Allow me to finish. All these improbable stories about leaving the shop and mending your son's clothes in your bedroom, are so many inventions. You have concocted them so as to be able to say to me: 'I didn't see anything; I didn't hear anything; I don't know anything.' If such is your system of defence, I warn you that it will be impossible for you to maintain it, and I may add that it would not be admitted by any tribunal."

"It is not a system of defence; it is the truth."

M. Segmuller seemed to reflect for a moment; then, suddenly, he exclaimed: "Then you have nothing to tell me about this miserable assassin?"

"But he is not an assassin, my good sir."

"What do you mean by such an assertion?"

"I mean that he only killed the others in protecting himself. They picked a quarrel with him; he was alone against three, and saw very plainly that he could expect no mercy from brigands who——"

The colour rose to the Widow Chupin's cheeks, and she suddenly checked herself, greatly embarrassed, and evidently regretting that she had not bridled her tongue. It is true she might reasonably hope, that the magistrate had imperfectly heard her words, and had failed to seize their full purport, for two or three red hot coals having fallen from the grate on to the hearth, he had taken

up the tongs, and seemed to be engrossed in the task of artistically arranging the fire.

"Who can tell me—who can prove to me that, on the contrary, it was not this man who first attacked the others?" he murmured, thoughtfully.

"I can," stoutly declared the widow, already forgetful of her prudent hesitation, "I can swear it."

M. Segmuller looked up, intense astonishment written upon his face. "How can you know that?" he said slowly. "How can you swear it? You were in your bedroom when the quarrel began."

Silent and motionless in his corner, Lecoq was inwardly jubilant. This was a most happy result, he thought, but a few questions more, and the old woman would be obliged to contradict herself. What she had already said sufficed to show that she must have a secret interest in the matter, or else she would never have been so imprudently earnest in defending the prisoner.

"However, you have probably been led to this conclusion by your knowledge of the murderer's character," remarked M. Segmuller, "you are apparently well acquainted with him."

"Oh, I had never set eyes on him before that evening."

"But he must have been in your establishment before?"

"Never in his life."

"Oh, oh! Then how do you explain that on entering the shop while you were up-stairs, this unknown person—this stranger—should have called out: 'Here, old woman!' Did he merely *guess* that the establishment was kept by a woman; and that this woman was no longer young?"

"He did not say that."

"Reflect a moment; you, yourself just told me so."

"Oh, I didn't say that, I'm sure, my good sir."

"Yes you did, and I will prove it by having your evidence read: Goguet, read the passage, if you please."

The smiling clerk looked back through his minutes and then, in his clearest voice, he read these words, taken down as they fell from the Widow Chupin's lips: "I had been up-stairs about half-an-hour, when I heard someone below call out 'Eh! old woman.' So I went down," &c., &c.

"Are you convinced?" asked M. Segmuller.

The old offender's assurance was sensibly diminished

by this proof of her prevarication. However, instead of discussing the subject any further, the magistrate glided over it as if he did not attach much importance to the incident.

"And the other men," he resumed, "those who were killed : did you know them ?"

"No, good sir, no more than I knew Adam and Eve."

"And were you not surprised to see three men utterly unknown to you, and accompanied by two women, enter your establishment ?"

"Sometimes chance—"

"Come ! you do not think of what you are saying. It was not chance that brought these customers, in the middle of the night, to a wine-shop with a reputation like yours—an establishment situated far from any frequented route in the midst of a desolate waste."

"I'm not a sorceress ; I say what I think."

"Then you did not even know the youngest of the victims, the man who was attired as a soldier, he who was named Gustave ?"

"Not at all."

M. Segmuller noted the intonation of this response, and then slowly added : "But you must have heard of one of Gustave's friends, a man called Lacheneur ?"

On hearing this name, the landlady of the Poivriere became visibly embarrassed, and it was in an altered voice that she stammered : "Lacheneur ! Lacheneur ! no I have never heard that name mentioned."

Still despite her denial, the effect of M. Segmuller's remark was evident, and Lecoq secretly vowed that he would find this Lacheneur, at any cost. Did not the "articles of conviction" comprise a letter sent by this man to Gustave, and written, so Lecoq had reason to believe, in a cafe on the Boulevard Beaumarchais ? With such a clue and a little patience, the mysterious Lacheneur might yet be discovered.

"Now," continued M. Segmuller, "let us speak of the women who accompanied these unfortunate men. What sort of women were they ?"

"Oh ! women of no account whatever !"

"Were they well dressed ?"

"On the contrary, very miserably."

"Well, give me a description of them."

"They were tall and powerfully built, and indeed, as it was Shrove Sunday, I first of all took them for men in disguise. They had hands like shoulders of mutton, gruff voices, and very black hair. They were as dark as mulattos—"

"Enough!" interrupted the magistrate, "I require no further proof of your mendacity. These women were short, and one of them was remarkably fair."

"I swear to you, my good sir——"

"Do not declare it upon oath. I shall be forced to confront you with an honest man, who will tell you to your face that you are a liar!"

The widow did not reply, and there was a moment's silence. M. Segmuller determined to deal a decisive blow. "Do you also affirm that you had nothing of a compromising character in the pocket of your apron?" he asked.

"Nothing—you may have it examined; it was left in the house."

"Then you still persist in your system," resumed M. Segmuller. "Believe me, you are wrong. Reflect—it rests with you to go to the Assize Court as a witness, or an accomplice."

Although the widow seemed crushed by this unexpected blow, the magistrate did not add another word. Her deposition was read over to her, she signed it, and was then led away.

M. Segmuller immediately seated himself at his desk, filled up a blank form and handed it to his clerk, saying: "This is an order for the governor of the Depot. Tell him to send the supposed murderer here at once."

X.

IF it is difficult to extort a confession from a man interested in preserving silence and persuaded that no proofs can be produced against him, it is a yet more arduous task to make a woman, similarly situated, speak the truth. As they say at the Palais de Justice, one might as well try to make the devil confess.

The examination of the Widow Chupin had been conducted with the greatest possible care by M. Segmuller,

who was as skilful in managing his questions as a tried general in manœuvring his troops.

However, all that he had discovered was that the landlady of the Poivriere was conniving with the murderer. The motive of her connivance was yet unknown, and the murderer's identity still a mystery. Both M. Segmuller and Lecoq were nevertheless of opinion that the old hag knew everything. "It is almost certain," remarked the magistrate, "that she was acquainted with the people who came to her house—with the women, the victims, the murderer—with all of them, in fact. I am positive as regards that fellow Gustave—I read it in her eyes. I am also convinced that she knows Lacheneur—the man upon whom the dying soldier breathed vengeance—the mysterious personage who evidently possesses the key to the enigma. That man must be found."

"Ah!" replied Lecoq, "and I will find him even if I have to question every one of the eleven hundred thousand men who constantly walk the streets of Paris!"

This was promising so much that the magistrate, despite his pre-occupation, could not repress a smile.

"If this old woman would only decide to make a clean breast of it at her next examination!" remarked Lecoq.

"Yes. But she won't."

The young detective shook his head despondingly. Such was his own opinion. He did not delude himself with false hopes, and he had noticed between the Widow Chupin's eyebrows, those furrows which, according to physiognomists, indicate a senseless, brutish obstinacy.

"Women never confess," resumed the magistrate; "and even when they seemingly resign themselves to such a course, they are not sincere. They fancy they have discovered some means of misleading their examiner. On the contrary, evidence will crush the most obstinate man; he gives up the struggle, and confesses. Now, a woman scoffs at evidence. Show her the sun; tell her it's daytime: at once she will close her eyes and say to you, 'No, it's night.' Male prisoners plan and combine different systems of defence according to their social positions; the women on the contrary, have but one system, no matter what may be their condition in life. They deny everything, persist in their denials even when the proofs against them is overwhelming, and then they cry. When

I worry the Chupin with disagreeable questions, at her next examination, you may be sure she will turn her eyes into a fountain of tears."

In his impatience, M. Segmuller angrily stamped his foot. He had many weapons in his arsenal; but none strong enough to break a woman's dogged resistance.

"If I only understood the motive that guides this old hag!" he continued. "But not a clue! Who can tell me what powerful interests induces her to remain silent? It is her own cause that she is defending? Is she an accomplice? Is it certain that she did not aid the murderer in planning an ambushade?"

"Yes," responded Lecoq, slowly, "yes; this supposition very naturally presents itself to the mind. But think a moment, sir, such a theory would prove that the idea we entertained, a short time since, is altogether false. If the Widow Chupin is an accomplice, the murderer is not the person we have supposed him to be; he is simply the man he seems to be."

This argument apparently convinced M. Segmuller. "What is your opinion?" he asked.

The young detective had formed his opinion a long while ago. But how could he, a humble police-agent, venture to express any decided views when the magistrate hesitated? He understood well enough that his position necessitated extreme reserve; hence, it was in the most modest tone that he replied: "Might not the pretended drunkard have dazzled Mother Chupin's eyes with the prospect of a brilliant reward? Might he not have promised her a considerable sum of money?"

He paused; Goguett the smiling clerk had just returned. Behind him stood a private of the Garde de Paris who remained respectfully on the threshold, his heels in a straight line, his right hand raised to the peak of his shako, and his elbow on a level with his eyes, in accordance with the regulations.

"The governor of the Depot," said the soldier, "sends me to inquire if he is to keep the Widow Chupin in solitary confinement; she complains bitterly about it."

M. Segmuller reflected for a moment. "Certainly," he murmured, as if replying to an objection made by his own conscience; "certainly, it is an undoubted aggravation of suffering; but if I allow this woman to associate with the

other prisoners, she will certainly find some opportunity to communicate with parties outside. This must not be ; the interests of justice and truth must be considered first." The thought embodied in these last words decided him. "Despite her complaints the prisoner must be kept in solitary confinement until further orders," he said.

The soldier allowed his right hand to fall to his side, he carried his right foot three inches behind his left heel, and wheeled around. Goguet, the smiling clerk then closed the door, and drawing a large envelope from his pocket, handed it to the magistrate. "Here is a communication from the governor of the Depot," said he.

The magistrate broke the seal, and read aloud, as follows : "I feel compelled to advise M. Segmuller to take every precaution with the view of assuring his own safety before proceeding with the examination of the prisoner, May. Since his unsuccessful attempt at suicide, this prisoner has been in such a state of excitement that we have been obliged to keep him in a strait-waistcoat. He did not close his eyes all last night, and the guards who watched him expected every moment that he would become delirious. However, he did not utter a word. When food was offered him this morning, he resolutely rejected it, and I should not be surprised if it were his intention to starve himself to death. I have rarely seen a more determined criminal. I think him capable of any desperate act."

"Ah!" exclaimed the clerk, whose smile had disappeared, "If I were in your place, sir, I would only let him in here with an escort of soldiers."

"What! you—Goguet, you, an old clerk—make such a proposition! Can it be that you're frightened?"

"Frightened! No, certainly not; but—"

"Nonsense!" interrupted Lecoq, in a tone that betrayed superlative confidence in his own muscles; "Am I not here?"

If M. Segmuller had seated himself at his desk, that article of furniture would naturally have served as a rampart between the prisoner and himself. For purposes of convenience he usually did place himself behind it; but after Goguet's display of fear, he would have blushed to have taken the slightest measure of self-protection. Accordingly, he went and sat down by the fireplace—as he had

done a few moments previously while questioning the Widow Chupin—and then ordered his door-keeper to admit the prisoner alone. He emphasized this word “alone.”

A moment later the door was flung open with a violent jerk, and the prisoner entered, or rather precipitated himself, into the room. Goguett turned pale behind his table, and Lecoq advanced a step forward, ready to spring upon the prisoner and pinion him should it be requisite. But when the latter reached the centre of the room, he paused and looked around him. “Where is the magistrate?” he inquired, in a hoarse voice.

“I am the magistrate,” replied M. Segmuller.

“No, the other one.”

“What other one?”

“The one who came to question me last evening.”

“He has met with an accident. Yesterday, after leaving you, he fell down and broke his leg.”

“Oh!”

“And I am to take his place.”

The prisoner was apparently deaf to the explanation. Excitement had seemingly given way to stupor. His features, hitherto contracted with anger, now relaxed. He grew pale and tottered, as if about to fall.

“Compose yourself,” said the magistrate in a benevolent tone; “if you are too weak to remain standing, take a seat.”

Already, with a powerful effort, the man had recovered his self-possession. A momentary gleam flashed from his eyes. “Many thanks for your kindness,” he replied, “but this is nothing. I felt a slight sensation of dizziness, but it is over now.”

“Is it long since you have eaten anything?”

“I have eaten nothing since that man”—and so saying he pointed to Lecoq—“brought me some bread and wine at the station-house.”

“Wouldn’t you like to take something?”

“No—and yet—if you would be so kind—I should like a glass of water.”

“Will you not have some wine with it?”

“I should prefer pure water.”

His request was at once complied with. He drained a first glassful at a single draught. The glass was then re-

plenished and he drank again, this time, however, more slowly. One might have supposed that he was drinking in life itself. Certainly, when he laid down the empty glass, he seemed quite another man.

Eighteen out of every twenty criminals who appear before our investigating magistrates come prepared with a more or less complete plan of defence, which they have conceived during their preliminary confinement. Innocent or guilty, they have resolved on playing some part or other, which they begin to act as soon as they cross the threshold of the room where the magistrate awaits them.

The moment they enter his presence, the magistrate needs to bring all his powers of penetration into play; for such a culprit's first attitude as surely betrays his plan of defence as an index reveals a book's contents. In this case, however, M. Segmuller did not think that appearances were deceitful. It seemed evident to him that the prisoner was not feigning, but that the excited frenzy which marked his entrance was as real as his after stupor.

At all events, there seemed no fear of the danger the governor of the Depot had spoken of, and accordingly M. Segmuller seated himself at his desk. Here he felt stronger and more at ease for his back being turned to the window, his face was half hidden in shadow; and in case of need, he could, by bending over his papers, conceal any sign of surprise or discomfiture.

The prisoner, on the contrary, stood in the full light, and not a movement of his features, not the fluttering of an eye-lid could escape the magistrate's attention. He seemed to have completely recovered from his indisposition; and his features assumed an expression which indicated either careless indifference, or complete resignation.

"Do you feel better?" asked M. Segmuller.

"I feel very well."

"I hope," continued the magistrate, paternally, "that in future you will know how to moderate your excitement. Yesterday you tried to destroy yourself. It would have been another great crime added to many others—a crime which—"

With a hasty movement of the hand, the prisoner interrupted him. "I have committed no crime," said he, in a rough, but no longer threatening voice. "I was attacked, and I defended myself. Anyone has a right to do that

There were three men against me. It was a great misfortune ; and I would give my right hand to repair it ; but my conscience does not reproach me—that much !”

The prisoners “that much,” was a contemptuous snap of his finger and thumb.

“And yet I’ve been arrested and treated like an assassin,” he continued. “When I saw myself interred in that living tomb which you call a secret cell, I grew afraid ; I lost my senses. I said to myself ! ‘My boy, they’ve buried you alive ; and it is better to die—to die quickly, if you don’t wish to suffer.’ So I tried to strangle myself. My death wouldn’t have caused the slightest sorrow to anyone. I have neither wife nor child depending upon me for support. However, my attempt was frustrated. I was bled ; and then placed in a strait-waistcoat, as if I were a madman. Mad ! I really believed I should become so. All night long the jailers sat around me, like children amusing themselves by tormenting a chained animal. They watched me, talked about me, and passed the candle to and fro before my eyes.”

The prisoner talked forcibly, but without any attempt at oratorical display ; there was bitterness but not anger in his tone ; in short, he spoke with all the seeming sincerity of a man giving expression to some deep emotion or conviction. As the magistrate and the detective heard him speak, they were seized with the same idea. “This man,” they thought, “is very clever ; it won’t be easy to get the better of him.”

Then, after a moment’s reflection, M. Segmuller added aloud :—“This explains your first act of despair ; but later on, for instance, even this morning, you refused to eat the food that was offered you.”

As the prisoner heard this remark, his lowering face suddenly brightened, he gave a comical wink, and finally burst into a hearty laugh, gay, frank, and sonorous.

“That,” said he, “is quite another matter. Certainly, I refused all they offered me, and now I will tell you why. As I had my hands confined in the strait-waistcoat, the jailer tried to feed me just as a nurse tries to feed a baby with pap. Now I wasn’t going to submit to that, so I closed my lips as tightly as I could. Then he tried to force my mouth open and push the spoon in, just as one might force a sick dog’s jaws apart and pour some medicine down

its throat. The deuce take his impertinence ! I tried to bite him : that's the truth, and if I had succeeded in getting his finger between my teeth, it would have staid there. However, because I wouldn't be fed like a baby, all the prison officials raise their hands to heaven in holy horror, and point at me saying : 'What a terrible man ! What an awful rascal !' "

The prisoner seemed to thoroughly enjoy the recollection of the scene he had described, for he now burst into another hearty laugh, to the great amazement of Lecoq, and the scandal of Goguet, the smiling clerk.

M. Segmuller also found it difficult to conceal his surprise. "You are too reasonable, I hope," he said, at last, "to attach any blame to these men, who, in confining you in a strait-waistcoat, were merely obeying the orders of their superior officers with the view of protecting you from your own violent passions."

"Hum !" responded the prisoner, suddenly growing serious. "I do blame them, however, and if I had one of them in a corner——But, never mind, I shall get over it. If I know myself aright, I have no more spite in my composition than a chicken."

"Your treatment depends on your own conduct," rejoined M. Segmuller, "If you will only remain calm, you shan't be put in a strait-waistcoat again. But you must promise me that you will be quiet and conduct yourself properly."

The murderer sadly shook his head. "I shall be very prudent hereafter," said he, "but it is terribly hard to stay in prison with nothing to do. If I had some comrades with me, we could laugh and chat, and the time would slip by ; but it is positively horrible to have to remain alone, entirely alone, in that cold, damp cell, where not a sound can be heard."

The magistrate bent over his desk to make a note. The word "comrades" had attracted his attention, and he proposed to ask the prisoner to explain it at a later stage of the inquiry.

"If you are innocent," he remarked, "you will soon be released : but it is necessary to prove your innocence."

"What must I do to prove it ?"

"Tell the truth, the whole truth : answer my questions honestly without reserve."

"As for that, you may depend upon me." As he spoke

the prisoner lifted his hand, as if to call upon God to witness his sincerity.

But M. Segmuller immediately intervened: "Prisoners do not take the oath," said he.

"Indeed!" ejaculated the man with an astonished air, "that's strange!"

Although the magistrate had apparently paid but little attention to the prisoner, he had in point of fact carefully noted his attitude, his tone of voice, his looks and gestures. M. Segmuller had moreover done his utmost to set the culprit's mind at ease, to quiet all possible suspicion of a trap, and his inspection of the prisoner's person led him to believe that this result had been attained.

"Now," said he, "you will give me your attention; and do not forget that your liberty depends upon your frankness. What is your name?"

"May."

"What is your christian name?"

"I have none."

"That is impossible."

"I've been told that already three times since yesterday," rejoined the prisoner impatiently. "And yet it's the truth. If I were a liar, I could easily tell you that my name was, Peter, James, or John. But lying is not in my line. Really, I have no christian name. If it were a question of surnames, it would be quite another thing. I have had plenty of them."

"What were they?"

"Let me see—to commence with, when I was with Father Fougasse, I was called Affiloir, because you see—"

"Who was this Father Fougasse?"

"The great wild beast tamer, sir. Ah! he could boast of a menagerie and no mistake! Lions, tigers, and bears, serpents as big round as your thigh, paroquets of every colour under the sun. Ah! it was a wonderful collection. But unfortunately—"

Was the man jesting, or was he in earnest? It was so hard to decide, that M. Segmuller and Lecoq were equally in doubt. As for Goguét, the smiling clerk, he chuckled to himself as his pen ran over the paper.

"Enough," interrupted the magistrate, "How old are you?"

"Forty-four or forty-five years of age."

"Where were you born?"

"In Brittany, probably."

M. Segmuller thought he could detect a hidden vein of irony in this reply.

"I warn you," said he, severely, "that if you go on in this way your chances of recovering your liberty will be greatly compromised. Each of your answers is a breach of propriety."

As the supposed murderer heard these words, an expression of mingled distress and anxiety was apparent in his face. "Ah! I meant no offence, sir," he sighed. "You questioned me, and I replied. You will see that I have spoken the truth, if you will allow me to recount the history of the whole affair."

"When the prisoner speaks, the prosecution is enlightened," so runs an old proverb frequently quoted at the Palais de Justice. It does, indeed, seem almost impossible for a culprit, to say more than a few words in an investigating magistrate's presence, without betraying his intentions or his thoughts; without, in short, revealing more or less of the secret he is endeavoring to conceal. All criminals, even the most simple-minded, understand this, and those who are shrewd prove remarkably reticent. Confining themselves to the few facts upon which they have founded their defence, they are careful not to travel any further unless absolutely compelled to do so, and even then they only speak with the utmost caution. When questioned, they reply, of course, but always briefly; and they are very sparing of details.

In the present instance, however, the prisoner was prodigal of words. He did not seem to think that there was any danger of his being the medium of accomplishing his own decapitation. He did not hesitate like those who are afraid of misplacing a word of the romance they are substituting for the truth. Under other circumstances, this fact would have been a strong argument in his favour.

"You may tell your own story, then," said M. Segmuller in answer to the prisoner's indirect request.

The presumed murderer did not try to hide the satisfaction he experienced at thus being allowed to plead his own cause, in his own way. His eyes sparkled and his nostrils dilated as if with pleasure. He sat himself down,

threw his head back, passed his tongue over his lips as if to moisten them, and said: "Am I to understand that you wish to hear my history?"

"Yes."

"Then you must know that one day about forty-five years ago, Father Tringlot, the manager of a travelling acrobatic company, was going from Guingamp to Saint Brieuc, in Brittany. He had with him two large vehicles containing his wife, the necessary theatrical paraphernalia, and the members of the company. Well, soon after passing Chatelaudren, he perceived something white lying by the roadside, near the edge of a ditch. 'I must go and see what that is,' he said to his wife. He stopped the horses, alighted from the vehicle he was in, went to the ditch, picked up the object he had noticed, and uttered a cry of surprise. You will ask me what he had found? Ah! good heavens! A mere trifle. He had found your humble servant, then about six months old."

With these last words, the prisoner made a low bow to his audience.

"Naturally, Father Tringlot carried me to his wife. She was a kindhearted woman. She took me, examined me, fed me, and said: 'He's a strong, healthy child: and and we'll keep him since his mother has been so wicked as to abandon him by the roadside. I will teach him; and in five or six years he will be a credit to us.' They then asked each other what name they should give me, and as it happened to be the first of May, they decided to call me after the month, and so it happens that May has been my name from that day to this."

The prisoner paused again and looked from one to another of his listeners, as if seeking some sign of approval. None being forthcoming, he proceeded with his story.

"Father Tringlot was an uneducated man, entirely ignorant of the law. He did not inform the authorities that he had found a child, and, for this reason, although I was living, I did not legally exist, for, to have a legal existence it is necessary that one's name, parentage, and birthplace, should figure upon a municipal register.

"When I grew older, I rather congratulated myself on Father Tringlot's neglect. 'May, my boy,' said I, 'you are not put down on any government register, consequently

there's no fear of your ever being drawn as a soldier.' I had a horror of military service, and a positive dread of bullets and cannon balls. Later on, when I had passed the proper age for the conscription, a lawyer told me that I should get into all kinds of trouble if I sought a place on the civil register so late in the day; and so I decided to exist surreptitiously. And this is why I have no christian name, and why I can't exactly say where I was born."

If truth has any particular accent of its own, as moralists have asserted, the murderer had found that accent. Voice gesture, glance, expression, all were in accord; not a word of his long story had rung false.

"Now," said M. Segmuller, coldly, "what are your means of subsistence?"

By the prisoner's discomfited mien one might have supposed that he had expected to see the prison doors fly open at the conclusion of his narrative. "I have a profession," he replied plaintively. "The one that Mother Tringlot taught me. I subsist by its practice; and I have lived by it in France and other countries."

The magistrate thought he had found a flaw in the prisoner's armour. "You say you have lived in foreign countries?" he inquired.

"Yes; during the seventeen years that I was with M. Simpson's company, I travelled most of the time in England and Germany."

"Then you are a gymnast and an athlete. How is it that your hands are so white and soft?"

Far from being embarrassed, the prisoner raised his hands from his lap and examined them with evident complacency. "It is true they are pretty," said he, "but this is because I take good care of them and scarcely use them."

"Do they pay you, then, for doing nothing?"

"Ah, no, indeed! But, sir, my duty consists in speaking to the public, in turning a compliment, in making things pass off pleasantly, as the saying is; and, without boasting, flatter myself that I have a certain knack—"

M. Segmuller stroked his chin, according to his habit whenever he considered that a prisoner had committed some grave blunder. "In that case," said he, "will you give me a specimen of your talent?"

"Ah, ha!" laughed the prisoner, evidently supposing this to be a jest on the part of the magistrate. "Ah, ha!"

"Obey me, if you please," insisted M. Segmuller.

The supposed murderer made no objection. His face at once assumed a different expression, his features wearing a mingled air of impudence, conceit, and irony. He caught up a ruler that was lying on the magistrate's desk, and flourishing it wildly, began as follows, in a shrill falsetto voice: "Silence, music! And you, big drum, hold your peace! Now is the hour, now is the moment, ladies and gentlemen, to witness the grand, unique performance of these great artists, unequaled in the world for their feats upon the trapeze and the tight-rope, and in innumerable other exercises of grace, suppleness and strength!"

"That is sufficient," interrupted the magistrate. "You can speak like that in France; but what do you say in Germany?"

"Of course, I use the language of that country."

"Let me hear, then!" retorted M. Segmuller, whose mother tongue was German.

The prisoner ceased his mocking manner, assumed an air of comical importance, and without the slightest hesitation began to speak as follows, in very emphatic tones: "Mit Bewilligung der hochloeblichen Obrigkeit, wird heute, vor hiesiger ehrenwerthen Burgerschaft, zum erstenmal aufgefuehrt—Genovesa, oder—"

This opening of the prisoner's German harangue may be thus rendered: "With the permission of the local authorities there will now be presented before the honourable citizens, for the first time—Genevieve, or the—"

"Enough," said the magistrate, harshly. He rose, perhaps to conceal his chagrin, and added: "We will send for an interpreter to tell us whether you speak English as fluently."

On hearing these words, Lecoq modestly stepped forward. "I understand English," said he.

"Very well. You hear, prisoner?"

But the man was already transformed. British gravity and apathy were written upon his features; his gestures were stiff and constrained, and in the most ponderous tones he exclaimed: "Walk up! ladies and gentlemen, walk up! Long life to the queen and to the honours

ble mayor of this town! No country, England excepted—our glorious England!—could produce such a marvel, such a paragon—” For a minute or two longer he continued in the same strain.

M. Segmuller was leaning upon his desk, his face hidden by his hands. Lecoq, standing in front of the prisoner, could not conceal his astonishment. Goguet the smiling clerk, alone found the scene amusing.

XI.

THE governor of the depot, a functionary who had gained the reputation of an oracle by twenty years' experience in prisons and with prisoners—a man whom it was most difficult to deceive—had advised the magistrate to surround himself with every precaution before examining the prisoner, May.

And yet this man, characterized as a most dangerous criminal, and the very announcement of whose coming had made the clerk turn pale, had proved to be a practical, harmless, and jovial philosopher, vain of his eloquence, a bohemian whose existence depended upon his ability to turn a compliment; in short, a somewhat erratic genius.

This was certainly strange, but the seeming contradiction did not cause M. Segmuller to abandon the theory propounded by Lecoq. On the contrary, he was more than ever convinced of its truth. If he remained silent, with his elbows leaning on the desk, and his hands clasped over his eyes, it was only that he might gain time for reflection.

The prisoner's attitude and manner were remarkable. When his English harangue was finished, he remained standing in the centre of the room, a half-pleased, half-anxious expression on his face. Still, he was as much at ease as if he had been on the platform outside some stroller's booth, where, if one could believe his story, he had passed the greater part of his life. It was in vain that the magistrate sought for some indication of weakness on his features, which in their mobility were more enigmatical than the lineaments of the sphinx.

Thus far, M. Segmuller had been worsted in the encounter. It is true, however, that he had not as yet ven-

tured on any direct attack, nor had he made use of any of the weapons which Lecoq had forged for his use. Still he was none the less annoyed at his defeat, as it was easy to see by the sharp manner in which he raised his head after a few moments' silence. "I see that you speak three European languages correctly," said he. "It is a rare talent."

The prisoner bowed, and smiled complacently. "Still that does not establish your identity," continued the magistrate. "Have you any acquaintances in Paris? Can you indicate any respectable person who will vouch for the truth of this story?"

"Ah! sir, it is seventeen years since I left France."

"That is unfortunate, but the prosecution can not content itself with such an explanation. What about your last employer, M. Simpson. Who is he?"

"M. Simpson is a rich man," replied the prisoner, rather coldly, "worth more than two hundred thousand francs, and honest besides. In Germany he travelled with a show of marionettes, and in England with a collection of phenomena to suit the tastes of that country."

"Very well! Then this millionaire could testify in your favour; it would be easy to find him, I suppose."

"Certainly," responded May, emphatically. "M. Simpson would willingly do me this favour. It would not be difficult for me to find him, only it would require considerable time."

"Why?"

"Because at the present moment he must be on his way to America. It was on account of this journey that I left his company—I detest the ocean."

A moment previously Lecoq's anxiety had been so intense, that his heart almost stopped beating; on hearing these last words, however, he regained all his self-possession. As for the magistrate, he merely greeted the murderer's reply with a brief but significant ejaculation.

"When I say that he is on his way," resumed the prisoner, "I may be mistaken. He may not have started yet, though he had certainly made all his arrangements before we separated."

"What ship was he to sail by?"

"He did not tell me."

"Where was he when you left him?"

"At Leipsic."

"When was this?"

"Last Wednesday."

M. Segmuller shrugged his shoulders disdainfully. "So you say you were in Leipsic on Wednesday? How long have you been in Paris?"

"Since Sunday afternoon, at four o'clock."

"It will be necessary to prove that."

Judging by the murderer's contracted brow it might be conjectured that he was making a strenuous effort to remember something. He cast questioning glances first towards the ceiling and then towards the floor, scratching his head and tapping his foot in evident perplexity. "How *can* I prove it—how?" he murmured.

The magistrate did not appear disposed to wait. "Let me assist you," said he. "The people at the inn where you boarded while in Leipsic must remember you."

"We did not stop at an inn."

"Where did you eat and sleep, then?"

In M. Simpson's large travelling-carriage; it had been sold, but he was not to give it up until he reached the port he was to sail from."

"What port was that?"

"I don't know."

At this reply Lecoq, who had less experience than the magistrate in the art of concealing one's impressions, could not help rubbing his hands with satisfaction. The prisoner was plainly convicted of falsehood, indeed driven into a corner.

"So you have only your own word to offer in support of this story?" inquired M. Segmuller.

"Wait a moment," said the prisoner, extending his arm as if to clutch at a still vague inspiration—"wait a moment. When I arrived in Paris I had with me a trunk containing my clothes. The linen is all marked with the first letter of my name, and besides some ordinary coats and trousers' there were a couple of costumes I used to wear when I appeared in public."

"Well, what have you done with all these things?"

"When I arrived in Paris, I took the trunk to a hotel, close by the Northern railway station—"

"Go on. Tell us the name of this hotel?" said M. Seg-

muller, perceiving that the prisoner had stopped short, evidently embarrassed.

"That's just what I'm trying to recollect. I've forgotten it. But I haven't forgotten the house.. I fancy I can see it now ; and, if some one would only take me to the neighbourhood, I should certainly recognize it. The people at the hotel would know me, and besides, my trunk would prove the truth of what I've told you."

On hearing this statement, Lecoq mentally resolved to make a tour of investigation though the various hotels surrounding the Gare du Nord.

"Very well," retorted the magistrate. "Perhaps we will do as you request. Now, there are two questions I desire to ask. If you arrived in Paris at four o'clock in the afternoon, how did it happen that by midnight of the same day you had discovered the Poivriere, which is merely frequented by suspicious characters, and is situated in such a lonely spot that it would be impossible to find it at night-time, if one were not familiar with the surrounding localities? In the second place, how does it happen, if you possess such clothing as you describe, that you are so poorly dressed?"

The prisoner smiled at these questions. "I can easily explain that," he replied. "One's clothes are soon spoiled when one travels third-class, so on leaving Leipsic I put on the worst things I had. When I arrived here, and felt my feet on the pavements of Paris, I went literally wild with delight. I acted like a fool. I had some money in my pocket—it was Shrove Sunday—and my only thought was to make a night of it. I did not think of changing my clothes. As I had formerly been in the habit of amusing myself round about the Barriere d'Italie, I hastened there and entered a wine shop. While I was eating a morsel, two men came in and began talking about spending the night at a ball at the Rainbow. I asked them to take me with them ; they agreed, I paid their bills, and we started. But soon after our arrival there these young men left me and joined the dancers. It was not long before I grew weary of merely looking on. Rather disappointed, I left the inn, and being foolish enough not to ask my way, I wandered on till I lost myself, while traversing a tract of unoccupied land. I was about to go back, when I saw a

light in the distance. I walked straight towards it, and reached that cursed hovel."

"What happened then?"

"Oh! I went in; called for some one. A woman came downstairs, and I asked her for a glass of brandy. When she brought it, I sat down and lighted a cigar. Then I looked about me. The interior was almost enough to frighten one. Three men and two women were drinking and chatting in low tones at another table. My face did not seem to suit them. One of them got up, came towards me, and said: 'You are a police-agent; you've come here to play the spy; that's very plain.' I answered that I wasn't a police-agent. He replied that I was. I again declared that I wasn't. In short, he swore that he was sure of it, and that my beard was false. So saying, he caught hold of my beard and pulled it. This made me mad. I jumped up, and with a blow of my fist I felled him to the ground. In an instant all the others were upon me! I had my revolver—you know the rest."

"And while all this was going on, what were the two women doing!"

"Ah! I was too busy to pay any attention to them. They disappeared!"

"But you saw them when you entered the place—what were they like?"

"Oh! they were big, ugly creatures, as tall as grenadiers, and as dark as moles!"

Between plausible falsehood, and improbable truth, justice—human justice, and therefore liable to error—is compelled to decide as best it can. For the past hour M. Segmuller had not been free from mental disquietude. But all his doubts vanished when he heard the prisoner declare that the two women were tall and dark. If he had said: "The women were fair," M. Segmuller would not have known what to believe, but in the magistrate's opinion the audacious falsehood he had just heard, proved that there was a perfect understanding between the supposed murderer and Widow Chupin.

Certainly, M. Segmuller's satisfaction was great; but his face did not betray it. It was of the utmost importance that the prisoner should believe that he had the succeeded in deceiving his examiner. "You must understand

how necessary it is to find these women," said the magistrate kindly.

"If their testimony corresponds with your allegations, your innocence will be proved conclusively."

"Yes, I understand that; but how can I put my hand upon them?"

"The police can assist you—our agents are always at the service of prisoners who desire to make use of them in establishing their innocence. Did you make any observations which might aid in the discovery of these women?"

Lecoq, whose eyes never wandered from the prisoner's face, fancied that he saw the faint shadow of a smile on the man's lips.

"I remarked nothing," said the prisoner coldly.

M. Segmuller had opened the drawer of his desk a moment before. He now drew from it the earring which had been found on the scene of the tragedy, and handing it abruptly to the prisoner, he asked: "So you didn't notice this in the ear of one of the women?"

The prisoner's imperturbable coolness of demeanor did not forsake him. He took the jewel in his hand, examined it attentively held it up to the light, admired its brilliant scintillations and said: "It is a very handsome stone, but I didn't notice it."

"This stone," remarked the magistrate, "is a diamond."

"Ah!"

"Yes, and worth several thousand francs."

"So much as that!"

This exclamation may have been in accordance with the spirit of the part assumed by the prisoner; though, at the same time, its simplicity was undoubtedly far-fetched. It was strange that a nomad, such as the murderer pretended to have been, acquainted with most of the countries and capitals of Europe, should have displayed this astonishment on learning the value of a diamond. Still, M. Segmuller did not seem to notice the discrepancy.

"Another thing," said he. "When you threw down your pistol, crying; 'Come and take me,' what did you intend to do?"

"I intended to make my escape."

"In what way?"

"Why, of course by the door, sir,—by——"

"Yes, by the back door," retorted the magistrate, with freezing irony. "It remains for you to explain, how you—you who had just entered that hovel for the first time—could have known of this door's existence."

For once, in the course of the examination, the prisoner seemed troubled. For an instant all his assurance forsook him. He evidently perceived the danger of his position, and after a considerable effort he contrived to burst out in a laugh. His laugh was a poor one, however, it rang false, and failed to conceal a sensation of deep anxiety. Growing gradually bolder, he at length exclaimed: "That's nonsense, I had just seen these two women go out by that very door."

"Excuse me, you declared a minute ago that you did not see these women leave: that you were too busy to watch their movements."

"Did I say that?"

"Word for word; the passage shall be shown you. Goguët, find it."

The clerk at once read the passage referred to, whereupon the prisoner undertook to show that his remark had been misunderstood. He had not said—at least, he did not intend to say—that; they had quite misinterpreted his words." With such remarks did he try to palliate the effect of his apparent blunders.

In the meanwhile, Lecoq was jubilant. "Ah, my fine fellow," thought he, "you are contradicting yourself—you are in deep water already—you are lost. There's no hope for you."

The prisoner's situation was indeed not unlike that of a bather, who, unable to swim, imprudently advances into the sea until the water rises above his chin. He may for a while have preserved his equilibrium despite the buffeting of the waves, but now he totters, loses his footing—another second, and he will sink!

"Enough—enough!" said the magistrate, cutting the prisoner's embarrassed explanation short. "Now, if you started out merely with the intention of amusing yourself, how did it happen that you took your revolver with you?"

"I had it with me while I was travelling, and did not think of leaving it at the hotel any more than I thought of changing my clothes."

"Where did you purchase it?"

"It was given me by M. Simpson as a souvenir."

"Confess that this M. Simpson is a very convenient personage," said the magistrate coldly. "Still, go on with your story. Only two chambers of this murderous weapon were discharged, but three men were killed. You have not told me the end of the affair."

"What's the use?" exclaimed the prisoner, in saddened tones. "Two of my assailants had fallen; the struggle became an equal one. I seized the remaining man, the soldier, round the body, and threw him down. He fell against a corner of the table, and did not rise again."

M. Segmuller had unfolded upon his desk the plan of the Poivriere, drawn by Lecoq. "Come here," he said, addressing the prisoner, "and show me on this paper the precise spot you and your adversaries occupied."

May obeyed, and with an assurance of manner a little surprising in a man in his position, he proceeded to explain the drama. "I entered," said he, "by this door, marked C; I seated myself at the table, H, to the left of the entrance: my assailants occupied the table between the fireplace, F, and the window, B."

"I must admit," said the magistrate, "that your assertions fully agree with the statements of the physicians, who say that one of the shots must have been fired about a yard off, and the other about two yards off."

This was a victory for the prisoner, but he only shrugged his shoulders and murmured: "That proves that the physicians knew their business."

Lecoq was delighted. This part of the prisoner's narrative not merely agreed with the doctor's statements, but also confirmed his own researches. The young detective felt that, had he been the examiner, he would have conducted the investigation in precisely the same way. Accordingly, he thanked heaven that M. Segmuller had supplied the place of M. d'Escorval."

"This admitted," resumed the magistrate, "it remains for you to explain a sentence you uttered when the agent, you see here, arrested you."

"What sentence?"

"You exclaimed: 'Ah, it's the Prussians who are coming; I'm lost!' What did you mean by that?"

A fleeting crimson tinge suffused the prisoner's cheek.

It was evident that if he had anticipated the other questions, and had been prepared for them, this one at least, was unexpected. "It's very strange," said he, with ill-disguised embarrassment, "that I should have said such a thing!"

"Five persons heard you," insisted the magistrate.

The prisoner did not immediately reply. He was evidently trying to gain time, ransacking in his mind for a plausible explanation. "After all," he ultimately said, "the thing's quite possible. When I was with M. Simpson, we had with us an old soldier who had belonged to Napoleon's body guard and had fought at Waterloo. I recollect he was always repeating that phrase. I must have caught the habit from him."

This explanation, though rather slow in coming, was none the less ingenious. At least, M. Segmuller appeared to be perfectly satisfied. "That's very plausible," said he; "but there is one circumstance that passes my comprehension. Were you freed from your assailants before the police entered the place? Answer me, yes or no."

"Yes."

"Then, why, instead of making your escape by the back door, the existence of which you had divined, did you remain on the threshold of the door, leading into the back room, with a table before you to serve as a barricade, and your revolver levelled at the police, as if to keep them at bay?"

The prisoner hung his head, and the magistrate had to wait for his answer. "I was a fool," he stammered at last. "I didn't know whether these men were police-agents, or friends of the fellows I had killed."

"In either case, your own interest should have induced you to fly."

The prisoner remained silent.

"Ah, well!" resumed M. Segmuller, "let me tell you my opinion. I believe you designedly and voluntarily exposed yourself to the danger of being arrested in order to protect the retreat of the two women who had just left."

"Why should I have risked my own safety for two hussies I did not even know?"

"Excuse me. The prosecution is strongly inclined to believe that you know these two women very well."

"I should like to see anyone prove that!" So saying

the prisoner smiled sneeringly, but at once changed countenance when the magistrate retorted in a tone of assurance, "I will prove it."

XII.

MAGISTRATES are frequently non-plussed when dealing with these difficult and delicate questions of personal identity. Railroads, photography, and telegraphic communication have multiplied the means of investigation in vain. Every day it happens that criminals succeed in deceiving justice in regard to their true personality, and thus escape the consequences of former crimes. This is indeed so frequently the case that an eminent French public prosecutor once ventured to remark : "Uncertainty as regards a criminal's identity will only cease when the law prescribes the branding of a number on the shoulder of every child whose birth is reported to the mayor."

M. Segmuller certainly wished that a number had been branded upon the enigmatical prisoner before him. And yet he did not by any means despair, and his confidence, exaggerated though it might be, was not at all feigned. He was of opinion that the weakest point of the prisoner's defence so far, was his pretended ignorance concerning the two women. He proposed to return to this subject later on. In the meanwhile, however, there were other matters to be dealt with.

When he felt that his threats as regards the women had had time to produce its full effect, the magistrate continued : "So, prisoner, you assert that you were acquainted with none of the persons you met at the Poivriere."

"I swear it."

"Have you never had occasion to meet a person called Lacheneur, an individual whose name is connected with this unfortunate affair?"

"I heard the name for the first time when it was pronounced by the dying soldier. Poor fellow! I had just dealt him his death blow; and yet his last words testified to my innocence."

This sentimental outburst produced no impression whatever upon the magistrate. "In that case," said he, "I suppose you are willing to accept this soldier's statement."

The man hesitated, as if conscious that he had fallen into a snare, and that he would be obliged to weigh each answer carefully. "I accept it," said he at last. "Of course I accept it."

"Very well, then. This soldier as you must recollect, wished to revenge himself on Lacheneur, who, by promising him a sum of money, had inveigled him into a conspiracy. A conspiracy against whom? Evidently against you; and yet you pretend that you had only arrived in Paris that evening, and that mere chance brought you to the Poivriere. Can you reconcile such conflicting statements?"

The prisoner had the hardihood to shrug his shoulders disdainfully, "I see the matter in an entirely different light," said he. "These people were plotting mischief against I don't know whom—and it was because I was in their way that they sought a quarrel with me, without any cause whatever."

Skilfully as the magistrate had delivered this thrust, it had been as skilfully parried; so skilfully, indeed, that Goguet, the smiling clerk, could not conceal an approving grimace. Besides, on principle, he always took the prisoner's part, in a mild, platonic way, of course.

"Let us consider the circumstances that followed your arrest," resumed M. Segmuller. "Why did you refuse to answer all the questions put to you?"

A gleam of real or assumed resentment shone in the prisoner's eyes. "This examination," he growled, "will alone suffice to make a culprit out of an innocent man!"

"I advise you, in your own interest, to behave properly. Those who arrested you observed that you were conversant with all the prison formalities and rules."

"Ah! sir, haven't I told you that I have been arrested and put in prison several times—always on account of my papers. I told you the truth, and you shouldn't taunt me for having done so."

The prisoner had dropped his mask of careless gaiety, and had assumed a surly, discontented tone. But his troubles were by no means ended; in fact, the battle had only just begun. Laying a tiny linen bag on his desk, M. Segmuller asked him if he recognised it.

"Perfectly! It is the package that the governor of the Depot placed in his safe."

The magistrate opened the bag, and poured the dust that it contained on to a sheet of paper. "You are aware, prisoner," said he, "that this dust comes from the mud that was sticking to your feet. The police-agent who collected it has been to the station-house where you spent the night of the murder, and has discovered that the composition of this dust is identical with that of the floor of the cell you occupied."

The prisoner listened with gaping mouth.

"Hence," continued the magistrate, "it was certainly at the station-house, and *designedly*, that you soiled your feet with that mud. In doing so you had an object."

"I wished—"

"Let me finish. Being determined to keep your identity secret, and to assume the character of a member of the lower classes—of a mountebank, if you please—you reflected that the care you bestow upon your person might betray you. You foresaw the impression that would be caused when the coarse, ill-fitting boots you wore were removed, and the officials perceived your trim clean feet which are as well kept as your hands. Accordingly, what did you do? You poured some of the water that was in the pitcher in your cell on to the ground and then dabbled your feet in the mud that had thus been formed."

During these remarks, the prisoner's face wore, by turns, an expression of anxiety, astonishment, irony, and mirth. When the magistrate had finished, he burst into a hearty laugh.

"So that's the result of twelve or fourteen hours' research," he at length exclaimed, turning towards Lecoq. "Ah! Mr. Agent, it's good to be sharp, but not so sharp as that. The truth is, that when I was taken to the station-house, forty-eight hours—thirty-six of them spent in a railway carriage—had elapsed since I had taken off my boots. My feet were red and swollen, and they burned like fire. What did I do? I poured some water over them. As for your other suspicions, if I have a soft white skin, it is only because I take care of myself. Besides, as is usual with most men of my profession, I rarely wear anything but slippers on my feet. This is so true, that on leaving Leipsic, I only owned a single pair of boots, and that was an old cast off pair given me by M. Simpson."

Lecoq struck his chest. "Fool, imbecile, idiot, that I am!" he thought. "He was waiting to be questioned about this circumstance. He is so wonderfully shrewd, that when he saw me take the dust, he divined my intentions; and since then he has managed to concoct this story—a plausible story enough—and one that any jury would believe."

M. Segmuller was saying the same thing to himself. But he was not so surprised nor so overcome by the skill the prisoner had displayed in fencing with this point. "Let us continue," said he. "Do you still persist in your statements, prisoner?"

"Yes."

"Very well; then I shall be forced to tell you that what you are saying is untrue."

The prisoner's lips trembled visibly, and it was with difficulty that he faltered: "may my first mouthful of bread strangle me, if I have uttered a single falsehood!"

"A single falsehood!—wait."

The magistrate drew from the drawer of his desk the moulds of the foot-prints, prepared by Lecoq, and showing them to the murderer, he said: "You told me a few minutes ago that the two women were as tall as grenadiers; now, just look at the foot-prints made by these female giants. They were as 'dark as moles,' you said; a witness will tell you that one of them was a small, delicate featured blonde, with an exceedingly sweet voice." He sought the prisoner's eyes, gazed steadily into them, and added slowly: "And this witness is the driver whose cab was hired in the Rue de Chevaleret by the two fugitives, both short, fair-haired women."

This sentence fell like a thunderbolt upon the prisoner; he grew pale, tottered, and leant against the wall for support.

"Ah! you have told me the truth!" scornfully continued the pitiless magistrate. "Then, who is this man who was waiting for you while you were at the Poivrieve? Who is this accomplice who, after your arrest, dared to enter the Widow Chupin's den to regain possession of some compromising object—no doubt a letter—which he knew he would find in the pocket of the Widow Chupin's apron? Who is this devoted, courageous friend who feigned drunkenness so effectually that even the police

were deceived, and thoughtlessly placed him in confinement with you? Dare you deny that you have not arranged your system of defence in concert with him? Can you affirm that he did not give the Widow Chupin counsel as to the course she should pursue? "

But already, thanks to his power of self-control, the prisoner had mastered his agitation. "All this," said he, in a harsh voice, "is a mere invention of the police! "

However faithfully one may describe an examination of this kind, a narrative can convey no more idea of the real scene than a heap of cold ashes can give the effect of a glowing fire. One can note down each word, each ejaculation, but phraseology is powerless to pourtray the repressed animation, the impassioned movements, the studied reticence, the varied tones of voice, the now bold, now faltering glances full of hatred and suspicion which follow each other in rapid succession mostly on the prisoner's side, but not entirely so, for although the magistrate may be an adept in the art of concealing his feelings, at times nature cannot be controlled.

When the prisoner reeled beneath the magistrate's last words, the latter could not control his feelings. "He yields," he thought, "he succumbs—he is mine! "

But all hope of immediate success vanished when M. Segmuller saw his redoubtable adversary struggle against his momentary weakness, and arm himself for the fight with renewed, and, if possible, even greater energy. The magistrate perceived that it would require more than one assault to overcome such a stubborn nature. So, in a voice rendered still more harsh by disappointment, he resumed: "It is plain that you are determined to deny evidence itself."

The prisoner had recovered all his self-possession. He must have bitterly regretted his weakness, for a fiendish spite glittered in his eyes. "What evidence!" he asked, frowning. "This romance invented by the police is very plausible, I don't deny it; but it seems to me that the truth is quite as probable. You talk to me about a cabman whose vehicle was hired by two short, fair haired women: but who can prove that these women were the same that fled from the Poivriere? "

"The police-agent you see here, followed the tracks they left across the snow."

"Ah! at night time—across fields intersected by ditches, and up a long street—a fine rain falling all the while, and a thaw already beginning! Oh, your story is very probable!"

As he spoke, the murderer extended his arm towards Lecoq, and then, in a tone of crushing scorn, he added: "A man must have great confidence in himself, or a wild longing for advancement, to try and get a man guillotined on such evidence as that!"

At these words, Goguet, the smiling clerk, whose pen was rapidly flying across the paper, could not help remarking to himself; "The arrow has entered the bull's eye this time!"

The comment was not without foundation: for Lecoq was evidently cut to the quick. Indeed, he was so incensed, that forgetful of his subordinate position, he sprang to his feet exclaiming: "This circumstance would be of slight importance, if it were not one of a long chain—"

"Be good enough to keep silent," interrupted the magistrate, who, turning to the prisoner, added: "The court does not utilize the proofs and testimony collected by the police until it has examined and weighed them."

"No matter," murmured the prisoner. "I should like to see this cab-driver."

"Have no fear about that; he shall repeat his evidence in your presence."

"Very well. I am satisfied then. I will ask him how he can distinguish people's faces when it is as dark as—"

He checked himself, apparently enlightened by a sudden inspiration.

"How stupid I am!" he exclaimed. "I'm losing my temper about these people when you know all the while who they are. For of course the cab-man drove them home."

M. Segmuller saw that the prisoner understood him. He perceived, moreover, that the latter was doing all he could to increase the mystery that enshrouded this essential point of the case—a point upon which the prosecution was particularly anxious to obtain information.

The prisoner was truly an incomparable comedian, for his last observation was made in a tone of remarkable can-

dour, just tinged with sufficient irony to show that he felt he had nothing to fear in this direction.

"If you are consistent with yourself," remarked the magistrate, "you will also deny the existence of an accomplice, of a—comrade."

"What would be the use denying it, since you believe nothing that I say? Only a moment ago you insinuated that my former employer was an imaginary personage; so what need I say about my pretended accomplice? According to your agents, he's at all events a most faithful friend. Indeed, this wonderful being—invented by Monsieur—(with these words the prisoner pointed to Lecoq) was seemingly not satisfied at having once escaped the police, for, according to your account, he voluntarily placed himself in their clutches a second time. You gentlemen pretend that he conferred first of all with me, and next with the Widow Chupin. How did that happen? Perhaps after removing him from my cell, some of your agents obligingly shut him up with the old woman."

Goguett the clerk wrote all this down admiringly. "Here," thought he, "is a man of brain, who understands his case. He won't need any lawyer's eloquence to put his defence favourably before a jury."

"And after all," continued the prisoner, "what are the proofs against me? The name of Lacheneur, faltered by a dying man; a few foot-prints on some melting snow; a sleepy cab-driver's declaration; and a vague doubt about a drunkard's identity. If that is all you have against me, it certainly doesn't amount to much—"

"Enough!" interrupted M. Segmuller. "Your assurance is perfect now; though a moment ago your embarrassment was most remarkable. What was the cause of it?"

"The cause!" indignantly exclaimed the prisoner, whom this query had seemingly enraged; "the cause! Can't you see, sir, that you are torturing me frightfully, pitilessly! I am an innocent man, and you are trying to deprive me of my life. You have been turning me this way and that way for so many hours, that I begin to feel as if I were standing on the guillotine. Each time I open my mouth to speak I ask myself, is it this answer that will send me to the scaffold? My anxiety and dismay surprise you, do they? Why, since this examination began, I've felt the cold knife graze my neck, at least twenty times.

I wouldn't like my worst enemy to be subjected to such torture as this."

The prisoner's description of his sufferings did not seem at all exaggerated. His hair was saturated with perspiration, and big drops of sweat rested on his pallid brow, or coursed down his cheeks on to his beard.

"I am not your enemy," said the magistrate more gently. "A magistrate is neither a prisoner's friend nor enemy, he is simply the friend of truth and the executor of the law. I am not seeking either for an innocent man or for a culprit; I merely wish to arrive at the truth. I must know who you are—and I do know—"

"Ah!—if the assertion costs me my life—I'm May and none other."

"No, you are not."

"Who am I then? Some great man in disguise? Ah! I wish I were! In that case, I should have satisfactory papers to show you; and then you would set me free, for you know very well, my good sir, that I am as innocent as you are."

The magistrate had left his desk, and taken a seat by the fire-place within a yard of the prisoner. "Do not insist," said he. Then, suddenly changing both manner and tone, he added with the urbanity that a man of the world displays, when addressing an equal: "Do me the honour, sir, to believe me gifted with sufficient perspicuity to recognize, under the difficult part you play to such perfection, a very superior gentleman—a man endowed with remarkable talents."

Lecoq perceived that this sudden change of manner had unnerved the prisoner. He tried to laugh, but his merriment partook somewhat of the nature of a sob, and big tears glistened in his eyes.

"I will not torture you any longer," continued the magistrate. "In subtle reasoning I confess that you have conquered me. However, when I return to the charge I shall have proofs enough in my possession to crush you."

He reflected for a moment, then lingering over each word, he added: "Only do not then expect from me the consideration I have shown you to-day. Justice is human; that is, she is indulgent towards certain crimes. She has fathomed the depth of the abyss into which blind passion may hurl even an honest man. To-day, I freely offer you

any assistance that will not conflict with my duty. Speak. Shall I send this officer of police away? Would you like me to send my clerk out of the room, on an errand?" He said no more, but waited to see the effect of this last effort.

The prisoner darted upon him one of those searching glances that seem to pierce an adversary through. His lips moved; one might have supposed that he was about to make a revelation. But no; suddenly he crossed his arms over his chest, and murmured: "You are very frank, sir. Unfortunately for me, I'm only a poor devil, as I've already told you. My name is May and I earn my living by speaking to the public and turning a compliment."

"I am forced to yield to your decision," said the magistrate sadly. "The clerk will now read the minutes of your examination—listen."

While Goguet read the evidence aloud, the prisoner listened without making any remark, but when asked to sign the document, he obstinately refused to do so, fearing, he said, "some hidden treachery."

A moment afterwards the soldiers who had escorted him to the magistrate's room, conducted him back to the Depot.

XIII.

WHEN the prisoner had gone, M. Segmuller sank back in his arm-chair, literally exhausted. He was in that state of nervous prostration which so often follows protracted, but fruitless efforts. He had scarcely strength enough to bathe his burning forehead and gleaming eyes, with cool refreshing water. This frightful examination had lasted no less than seven consecutive hours.

The smiling clerk, who had kept his place at his desk busily writing the whole while, now rose to his feet, glad of an opportunity to stretch his limbs, and snap his fingers, cramped by holding the pen. Still, he was not in the least degree bored. He invariably took a semi-theatrical interest in the dramas that were daily enacted in his presence; his excitement being all the greater owing to the uncertainty that shrouded the finish of the final act—a finish that only too often belied the ordinary rules and deductions of writers for the stage.

"What a knave!" he exclaimed after vainly waiting for the magistrate or the detective to express an opinion, "what a rascal!"

M. Segmuller ordinarily put considerable confidence in his clerk's long experience. He sometimes even went so far as to consult him, doubtless somewhat in the same style that Moliere consulted his servant. But, on this occasion he did not accept his opinion.

"No," said he in a thoughtful tone, "that man is not a knave. When I spoke to him kindly he was really touched; he wept, he hesitated. I could have sworn that he was about to tell me everything."

"Ah he's a man of wonderful power!" observed Lecoq.

The detective was sincere in his praise. Although the prisoner had disappointed his plans, and had even insulted him, he could not help admiring his shrewdness and courage. He—Lecoq—had prepared himself for a strenuous struggle with this man, and he hoped to conquer in the end. Nevertheless in his secret soul he felt for his adversary, admiring that sympathy which a "foeman worthy of one's steel" always inspires.

"What coolness, what courage!" continued the young detective. "Ah! there's no denying it, his system of defence—of absolute denial—is a master-piece. It is perfect. How well he played that difficult part of buffoon! At times I could scarcely restrain my admiration. What is a famous comedian beside that fellow? The greatest actors need the adjunct of stage scenery to support the illusion, whereas, this man, entirely unaided, almost convinced me even against my reason."

"Do you know what your very appropriate criticism proves?" inquired the magistrate.

"I am listening, sir."

"Ah, well! I have arrived at this conclusion—either this man is really May, the stroller, earning his living by paying compliments, as he says—or else he belongs to the highest rank of society, and not to the middle classes. It is only in the lowest or in the highest ranks that you encounter such grim energy as he has displayed, such scorn of life, as well as such remarkable presence of mind and resolution. A vulgar tradesman attracted to the Poivriere by some shameful passion would have confessed it long ago."

"But sir, this man is surely not the buffoon, May," replied the young detective.

"No, certainly not," responded M. Segmuller, "we must, therefore, decide upon some plan of action." He smiled kindly, and added, in a friendly voice: "It was unnecessary to tell you that, Monsieur Lecoq. Quite unnecessary, since to you belongs the honour of having detected this fraud. As for myself, I confess, that if I had not been warned in advance, I should have been the dupe of this clever artist's talent."

The young detective bowed; a blush of modesty tinged his cheeks, but a gleam of pleased vanity sparkled in his eyes. What a difference between this friendly, benevolent magistrate, and M. d'Escorval, so taciturn and haughty. This man, at least, understood, appreciated, and encouraged him; and it was with a common theory, and an equal ardour that they were about to devote themselves to a search for the truth. Scarcely had Lecoq allowed these thoughts to flit across his mind, than he reflected that his satisfaction was, after all, a trifle premature, and that success was still extremely doubtful. With this chilling conclusion, presence of mind returned. Turning towards the magistrate, he exclaimed: "You will recollect, sir, that the Widow Chupin mentioned a son of hers, a certain Polyte——"

"Yes."

"Why not question him? He must know all the frequenters of the Poivriere, and might perhaps give us valuable information regarding Gustave, Lacheneur, and the murderer himself. As he is not in solitary confinement, he has probably heard of his mother's arrest; but it seems to me impossible that he should suspect our present perplexity."

"Ah! you are a hundred times right!" exclaimed the magistrate. I ought to have thought of that myself. In his position he can scarcely have been tampered with as yet, and I'll have him up here to-morrow morning; I will also question his wife." Turning to his clerk, M. Segmuller added: "Quick, Goguet, prepare a summons in the name of the wife of Hippolyte Chupin, and address an order to the governor of the Depot to produce her husband!"

But night was coming on. It was already too dark to

see to write, and accordingly the clerk rang the bell for lights. Just as the messenger who brought the lamps turned to leave the room, a rap was heard at the door. Immediately afterwards the governor of the Depot entered.

During the past twenty-four hours, this worthy functionary had been greatly perplexed concerning the mysterious prisoner he had placed in secret cell No. 3, and he now came to the magistrate for advice regarding him. "I come to ask," said he, "if I am still to retain the prisoner, May, in solitary confinement?"

"Yes."

"Although I fear fresh attacks of frenzy, I dislike to confine him in the strait-jacket again."

"Leave him free in his cell," replied M. Segmuller "and tell the keepers to watch him well, but to treat him kindly."

By the provisions of Article 613 of the Code, accused parties are placed in the custody of the government, but the investigating magistrate is allowed to adopt such measures concerning them as he may deem necessary for the interest of the prosecution.

The governor bowed assent to M. Segmuller's instructions, and then added: "You have doubtless succeeded in establishing the prisoner's identity."

"Unfortunately, I have not."

The governor shook his head with a knowing air. "In that case," said he, "my conjectures were correct. It seems to me evident that this man is a criminal of the worst description—an old offender certainly, and one who has the strongest interest in concealing his identity. You will find that you have to deal with a man who has been sentenced to the galleys for life, and who has managed to escape from Cayenne."

"Perhaps you are mistaken."

"Hum! I shall be greatly surprised if such should prove the case. I must admit that my opinion in this matter is identical with that of M. Gevrol, the most experienced and the most skilful of our inspectors. I agree with him in thinking that young detectives are often over zealous, and run after phantoms originated in their own brains."

Lecoq, crimson with wrath, was about to make an an-

gry response, when M. Segmuller motioned to him to remain silent. Then with a smile on his face the magistrate replied to the governor. "Upon my word, my dear friend," he said, "the more I study this affair, the more convinced I am of the correctness of the theory advanced by the 'over-zealous' detective. But, after all, I am not infallible, and I shall depend upon your counsel and assistance."

"Oh! I have means of verifying my assertion," interrupted the governor; "and I hope before the end of the next twenty-four hours that our man will have been identified, either by the police or by one of his fellow-prisoners."

With these words he took his leave. Scarcely had he done so, than Lecoq sprang to his feet. The young detective was furious. "You see that Gevrol already speaks ill of me; he is jealous."

"Ah, well! what does that matter to you? If you succeed, you will have your revenge. If you are mistaken—then I am mistaken, too."

Then, as it was already late, M. Segmuller confided to Lecoq's keeping the various articles the latter had accumulated in support of his theory. He also placed in his hands the diamond earring, the owner of which must be discovered; and the letter signed "Lacheneur," which had been found in the pocket of the spurious soldier. Having given him full instructions, he asked him to make his appearance promptly on the morrow, and then dismissed him, saying: "Now go; and may good luck attend you!"

XIV.

LONG, narrow, and low of ceiling, having on the one side a row of windows looking on to a small court-yard, and on the other a range of doors, each with a number on its central panel, thus reminding one of some corridor in a second rate hotel, such is the Galerie d'Instruction at the Palais de Justice whereby admittance is gained into the various rooms occupied by the investigating magistrates. Even in the day-time, when it is thronged with prisoners, witnesses, and guards, it is a sad and gloomy place. But it is absolutely sinister of aspect at night-time, when deserted, and only dimly lighted by the smoky lamp of a

solitary attendant, waiting for the departure of some magistrate whom business has detained later than usual.

Although Lecoq was not sensitive to such influences, he made haste to reach the staircase and thus escape the echo of his footsteps which sounded most drearily in the silence and darkness pervading the gallery.

Finding an open window on the floor below, he looked out to ascertain the state of the weather. The temperature was much milder; the snow had altogether disappeared, and the pavement was almost dry. A slight haze, illumined by the ruddy glare of the street lamps, hung like a purple mantle over the city. The streets below were full of animation; vehicles were rolling rapidly to and fro, and the footways were too narrow for the bustling crowd, which, now that the labours of the day were ended, was hastening homeward or in search of pleasure.

The sight drew a sigh from the young detective. "And it is in this great city," he murmured, "in the midst of this world of people that I must discover the traces of a person I don't even know! Is it possible to accomplish such a feat?"

The feeling of despondency that had momentarily surprised him was not, however, of long duration. "Yes, it is possible," cried an inward voice. "Besides, it *must* be done; your future depends upon it. When there's a will, there's a way." Ten seconds later he was in the street, more than ever inflamed with hope and courage.

Unfortunately, however, man can only place organs of limited power at the disposal of his boundless desires; and Lecoq had not taken twenty steps along the streets before he became aware that if the spirit was willing, the flesh was weak. His limbs trembled, and his head whirled. Nature was asserting her rights; during the last forty-eight hours, the young detective had taken scarcely a moment's rest, and he had, moreover, now passed an entire day without food.

"Am I going to be ill?" he thought, sinking on to a bench. And he groaned inwardly, on recapitulating all that he wished to do that evening.

If he dealt only with the more important matters, must he not at once ascertain the result of Father Absinthe's search after the man who had recognized one of the victims

at the Morgue ; control the prisoner's assertions regarding the box of clothes left at one of the hotels surrounding the Northern Railway Station ; and last, but not the least, must he not procure the address of Polyte Chupin's wife, in order to serve her with the summons to appear before M. Segmuller ?

Under the power of urgent necessity, he succeeded in triumphing over his attack of weakness, and rose, murmuring : " I will go first to the Prefecture, and to the Morgue ; then I will see."

But did not find Father Absinthe at the Prefecture, and no one could give any tidings of him. He had not been there at all during the day. Nor could anyone indicate, even vaguely, the abode of the Widow Chupin's daughter-in-law.

On the other hand, however, Lecoq met a number of his colleagues, who laughed and jeered at him unmercifully. " Ah ! you are a shrewd fellow ! " they said, " it seems that you have just made a wonderful discovery, and it's said you are going to be decorated with the Legion of Honour."

Gevrol's influence betrayed itself everywhere. The jealous inspector had taken pains to inform all his colleagues and subordinates that poor Lecoq, crazed by ambition, persisted in declaring that a low, vulgar murderer trying to escape justice was some great personage in disguise. However, the jeers and taunts of which Lecoq was the object had but little effect upon him, and he consoled himself with the reflection that, " He laughs best, who laughs the last."

If he were restless and anxious as he walked along the Quai des Orfèvres, it was because he could not explain Father Absinthe's prolonged absence, and because he feared that Gevrol, mad with jealousy, might attempt, in some underhand way, to frustrate his, Lecoq's, efforts to arrive at a solution of the mystery.

At the Morgue the young detective met with no better success than at the Prefecture. After ringing three or four times, one of the keepers opened the door and informed him that the bodies had not been identified, and that the old police-agent had not been seen since he went away early in the morning.

" This is a bad beginning," thought Lecoq. " I will go

and get some dinner—that, perhaps, will change the luck; at all events, I have certainly earned the bottle of good wine to which I intend to treat myself.”

It was a happy thought. A hearty meal washed down with a couple of glasses of Bordeaux sent new courage and energy coursing through his veins. If he still felt a trifle weary, the sensation of fatigue was at all events greatly diminished when he left the restaurant with a cigar between his lips.

Just at that moment he longed for Father Papillon's trap and sturdy steed. Fortunately, a cab was passing: he hired it, and as eight o'clock was striking, alighted at the corner of the square in front of the Northern Railway Station. After a brief glance round, he began his search for the hotel where murderer pretended to have left a box of clothes.

It must be understood that he not present himself in his official capacity. Hotel proprietors fight shy of detectives, and Lecoq was aware that if he proclaimed his calling he would probably learn nothing at all. By brushing back his hair and turning up his coat collar, he made, however, a very considerable alteration in his appearance; and it was with a marked English accent that he asked the landlords and servants of various hostelries surrounding the station for information concerning a “foreign workman named May.”

He conducted his search with considerable address, but everywhere he received the same reply.

“We don't know such a person; we haven't seen any one answering the description you give of him.”

Any other answer would have astonished Lecoq, so strongly persuaded was he that the prisoner had only mentioned the circumstance of a trunk left at one of these hotels in order to give a semblance of truth to his narrative. Nevertheless he continued his investigation. If he noted down in his memorandum book the name of all the hotels which he visited, it was with a view of making sure of the prisoner's discomfiture when he was conducted to the neighbourhood and asked to prove the truth of his story.

Eventually, Lecoq reached the Hotel de Mariembourg, at the corner of the Rue St. Quentin. The house was of modest proportions; but seemed respectable and well

kept. Lecoq pushed open the glass door leading into the vestibule, and entered the office—a neat, brightly-lighted room, where he found a woman standing upon a chair, her face on a level with a large bird cage, covered with a piece of black silk. She was repeating three or four German words with great earnestness to the inmate of the cage, and was so engrossed in this occupation that Lecoq to make considerable noise before he could attract her attention.

At length she turned her head, and the young detective exclaimed—“Ah! good-evening, madame; you are much interested, I see, in teaching your parrot to talk.”

“It isn’t a parrot,” replied the woman, who had not yet descended from her perch; “but a starling, and I am trying to teach it to say ‘Have you breakfasted?’ in German.”

“What! can starlings talk?”

“Yes, sir, as well as you or I,” rejoined the woman, jumping down from the chair.

Just then the bird, as if it had understood the question, cried very distinctly: “Camille! Where is Camille?”

But Lecoq was too pre-occupied to pay any further attention to the incident. “Madame,” he began, “I wish to speak to the proprietor of this hotel.”

“I am the proprietor.”

“Oh! very well. I was expecting a mechanic—from Leipsic—to meet me here in Paris. To my great surprise, he has not made his appearance; and I came to inquire if he was stopping here. His name is May.”

“May!” repeated the hostess, thoughtfully. “May!”

“He ought to have arrived last Sunday evening.”

The woman’s face brightened. “Wait a moment,” said she. “Was this friend of yours a middle-aged man, of medium size, of very dark complexion—wearing a full beard, and having very bright eyes?”

Lecoq could scarcely conceal his agitation. This was an exact description of the supposed murderer. “Yes,” he stammered, “that is a very good portrait of the man.”

“Ah, well! he came here on Shrove Sunday, in the afternoon. He asked for a cheap room, and I showed him one on the fifth floor. The office-boy was not here at the time, and he insisted upon taking his trunk up stairs

himself. I offered him some refreshment ; but he declined to take anything saying that he was in a great hurry ; and he went away after giving me ten francs as security for the rent."

"Where is he now ?" inquired the young detective.

"Dear me ! that reminds me," replied the woman. "He has never returned, and I have been rather anxious about him. Paris is such a dangerous place for strangers ! It is true he spoke French as well as you or I ; but what of that ? Yesterday evening I gave orders that the commissary of police should be informed of the matter."

"Yesterday—the commissary ?"

"Yes. Still, I don't know whether the boy obeyed me. I had forgotten all about it. Allow me to ring for the boy, and ask him."

A bucket of iced water falling upon Lecoq's head, could not have astonished him more, than did this announcement from the proprietress of the Hotel de Mariembourg. Had the prisoner indeed told the truth ? Was it possible ? Gevrol and the governor of the prison were right, then, and M. Segmuller and he, Lecoq, were senseless fools, pursuing a phantom. These ideas flashed rapidly through the young detective's brain. But he had no time for reflection. The boy who had been summoned now made his appearance, and proved to be a big overgrown lad with frank chubby face.

"Fritz," asked his mistress, "did you go to the commissary's office ?"

"Yes, madame."

"What did he say !"

"He was not in ; but I spoke to his secretary, M. Casimir, who said you were not to worry yourself, as the man would no doubt return."

"But he has not returned."

The boy rejoined, with a movement of the shoulders that plainly implied : "How can I help that ?"

"You hear, sir," said the hostess, apparently thinking the importunate questioner would now withdraw.

Such, however, was not Lecoq's intention, and he did not even move, though he had need of all his self-possession to retain his English accent. "This is very annoying," said he, "very ! I am even more anxious and unde

cided than I was before, since I am not certain that this is the man I am seeking for."

"Unfortunately, sir, I can tell you nothing more," calmly replied the landlady.

Lecoq reflected for a moment, knitting his brows and biting his lips, as if he were trying to discover some means of solving the mystery. In point of fact, he was seeking for some adroit phrase which might lead this woman to show him the register in which all travellers are compelled to inscribe their full names, profession, and usual residence. At the same time, however, it was necessary that he should not arouse her suspicions.

"But, madame," said he at last, "can't you remember the name this man gave you? Was it May? Try to recollect if that was the name—May—May!"

"Ah! I have so many things to remember. But now I think of it, and the name must be entered in my book which, if it would oblige you, I can show you. It is in the drawer of my writing table. Whatever can I have done with my keys?"

And while the hostess, who seemed to possess about as much intelligence as her starling, was turning the whole office upside down looking for her keys, Lecoq scrutinized her closely. She was about forty years of age, with an abundance of light hair, and a very fair complexion. She was well preserved—that is to say, she was plump and healthy in appearance; her glance was frank and unembarrassed; her voice was clear and musical, and her manners were pleasing, and entirely free from affectation.

"Ah!" she eventually exclaimed, "I have found those wretched keys at last." So saying, she opened her desk, took out the register, laid it on the table, and began turning over the leaves. At last she found the desired page.

"Sunday, February 20th," said she. "Look sir: here on the seventh line—May—no Christian name—foreign artist—coming from Leipsic—without papers."

While Lecoq was examining this record with a dazed air, the woman exclaimed: "Ah! now I can explain how it happened that I forgot the man's name, and strange profession—'foreign artist.' I did not make the entry myself."

"Who made it, then?"

"The man himself, while I was finding ten francs to

give him as change for the louis he handed me. You can see that the writing is not at all like that of other entries."

Lecoq had already noted this circumstance, which seemed to furnish an irrefutable argument, in favor of the assertions made by the landlady and the prisoner. "Are you sure," he asked, "that this is the man's handwriting?"

In his anxiety, he had forgot his English accent. The woman noticed this at once for she drew back, and cast a suspicious glance at the pretended foreigner. "I know what I am saying," she said, indignantly. "And now this is enough, isn't it?"

Knowing that he had betrayed himself, and thoroughly ashamed of his lack of coolness, Lecoq renounced his English accent altogether. "Excuse me," he said, "if I ask one more question. Have you this man's trunk in your possession?"

"Certainly."

"You would do me an immense service by showing it to me."

"Show it to you!" exclaimed the landlady, angrily. "What do you take me for? What do you want? and who are you?"

"You shall know in half-an-hour," replied the young detective, realising that further persuasion would be useless.

He hastily left the room, ran to the Place de Roubaix, jumped into a cab, and giving the driver the address of the district commissary of police, promised him a hundred sous over and above the regular fare if he would only make haste. As might have been expected under such circumstances, the poor horse fairly flew over the ground.

Lecoq was fortunate enough to find the commissary at his office. Having given his name, he was immediately ushered into the magistrate's presence and told his story in a few words.

"It is really true that they came to inform me of this man's disappearance," said the commissary. "Casimir told me about it this morning."

"They—came—to inform—you——" faltered Lecoq.

"Yes, yesterday; but I have had so much to occupy my time. Now, my man, how can I serve you?"

"Come with me, sir; compel them to show us the trunk, and send for a locksmith to open it. Here is the authority

—a search warrant given me by the investigating magistrate to use in case of necessity. Let us lose no time. I have a cab at the door.”

“We will start at once,” said the commissary.

The driver whipped up his horse once more, and they were soon rapidly rolling in the direction of the Rue St. Quentin.

“Now, sir,” said the young detective, “permit me to ask if you know this woman who keeps the Hotel de Mariembourg?”

“Yes, indeed, I know her very well. When I was first appointed to this district, six years ago, I was a bachelor, and for a long while, I took my meals at her table d’hôte, Casimir, my secretary, boards there even now.”

“And what kind of a woman is she?”

“Why, upon my word, my young friend, Madame Milner—for such is her name—is a very respectable widow (highly esteemed by her neighbours) and having a very prosperous business. If she remains a widow, it is only from choice, for she is very prepossessing and has plenty of suitors.”

“Then you don’t think her capable of serving, for the sake of a good round sum, the interests of some wealthy culprit?”

“Have you gone mad?” interrupted the commissary. “What, Madame Milner perjure herself for the sake of money! Haven’t I just told you that she is an honest woman, and that she is very well off! Besides, she informed me yesterday that this man was missing, so——”

Lecoq made no reply; the driver was pulling up; they had reached their destination.

On seeing her obstinate questioner re-appear, accompanied by the commissary, Madame Milner seemed to understand everything.

“Good heavens!” she exclaimed, “a detective! I might have guessed it? Some crime has been committed; and now my hotel has lost its reputation forever!”

While a messenger was dispatched for a locksmith, the commissary endeavoured to re-assure and console her, a task of no little difficulty, and which he was some time in accomplishing.

At last they all went up to the missing man’s room, and Lecoq sprang towards the trunk. Ah! there was no deny

ing it. It had, indeed, come from Leipsic ; as the labels pasted upon it by the different railroad companies, only too plainly proved. On being opened, it was, moreover, found to contain the various articles mentioned by the prisoner.

Lecoq was thunderstruck. When he had seen the commissary lock the trunk and its contents up in a cupboard and take possession of the key, he felt he could endure nothing more. He left the room with downcast head ; and stumbled like a drunken man as he went down the stairs.

XV.

MARDI GRAS, or Shrove Tuesday, was very gay that year ; that is to say, all places of public resort were crowded. When Lecoq left the Hotel de Mairembourg about midnight, the streets were as full as if it had been noon-day, and the cafes were thronged with customers.

But the young detective had no heart for pleasure. He mingled with the crowd without seemingly seeing it, and jostled against groups of people chatting at the corners, without hearing the imprecations occasioned by his awkwardness. Where was he going ? He had no idea. He walked on aimlessly, more disconsolate and desperate than the gambler who had staked his last hope with his last louis, and lost.

"I must yield," he murmured ; "this evidence is conclusive. My presumptions were only chimeras ; my deductions the playthings of chance ! All I can now do is to withdraw, with the least possible damage and ridicule, from the false position I have assumed."

Just as he reached the boulevard, however, a new idea entered his brain, an idea of so startling a kind, that he could scarcely restrain a loud exclamation of surprise. "What a fool I am !" cried he, striking his hand violently against his forehead. "Is it possible to be so strong in theory, and yet so ridiculously weak in practice. Ah ! I am only a child, a mere novice, disheartened by the slightest obstacle. I meet with a difficulty, and at once I lose all my courage. Now, let me reflect calmly. What did I tell the judge about this murderer, whose plan of defence so puzzles us ? Did I not tell him that we had to deal

with a man of superior talent—with a man of consummate penetration, and experience—a bold, courageous fellow of imperturbable coolness, who will do anything to ensure the success of his plans? Yes; I told him all that, and yet, I give up the game in despair as soon as I meet with a single circumstance that I cannot instantly explain. It is evident that such a prisoner would not resort to old, hackneyed, commonplace expedients. Time, patience, and research are requisite to find a flaw in his defence. With such a man as he is, the more appearances are against my presumptions, and in favor of his narrative, the more certain it is that I am right—or else, logic is no longer logic.”

At this thought, Lecoq burst into a hearty laugh. “Still,” continued he, “it would perhaps be premature to expose this theory at head-quarters in Gevrol’s presence. He would at once present me with a certificate for admission into some lunatic asylum.”

The young detective paused. Whilst, absorbed in thought, his legs obeying an instinctive impulse, had brought him to his lodgings. He rang the bell; the door opened, and he groped his way slowly up to the fourth floor. He had reached his room, and was about to enter, when someone, whom he could not distinguish in the dark, called out: “Is that you, Monsieur Lecoq?”

“Yes, it’s I!” replied the young man, somewhat surprised; “but who are you?”

“I’m Father Absinthe.”

“Oh! indeed! Well, you are welcome! I didn’t recognize your voice—will you come in?”

They entered the room, and Lecoq lit a candle. Then the young man could see his colleague, and, good heavens! he found him in a most pitiable condition.

He was as dirty and as bespattered with mud as a lost dog that has been wandering about in the rain and the mire for a week at the very least. His overcoat bore the traces of frequent contact with damp walls; his hat had lost its form entirely. His eyes wore an anxious look, and his moustache drooped despondently. He spoke, moreover, so strangely that one might have supposed his mouth was full of sand.

“Do you bring me bad news?” inquired Lecoq, after a short examination of his companion.

"Yes, bad."

"The people you were following escaped you, then?"

The old man nodded his head affirmatively.

"It is unfortunate—very unfortunate!" said Lecoq.

"But it is useless to distress ourselves about it. Don't be so cast down, Father Absinthe. To-morrow, between us, we will repair the damage."

This friendly encouragement only increased the old man's evident embarrassment. He blushed, this veteran, as if he had been a school-girl, and raising his hands towards heaven, he exclaimed: "Ah, you wretch! didn't I tell you so?"

"Why! what is the matter with you?" inquired Lecoq.

Father Absinthe made no reply. Approaching a looking-glass that hung against the wall, he surveyed himself reproachfully and began to heap cruel insults upon the reflection of his features.

"You old good-for-nothing!" he exclaimed. "You vile deserter! have you no shame left? You were entrusted with a mission, were you not? And how have you fulfilled it? You have got drunk, you old wretch, so drunk as to have lost your wits. Ah, you shan't escape punishment this time, for even if M. Lecoq is indulgent, you shan't taste another drop for a week. Yes, you old sot, you shall suffer for this escapade."

"Come, come," said Lecoq, "you can sermonize by and bye. Now tell me your story."

"Ah! I am not proud of it, believe me. However, never mind. No doubt you received the letter in which I told you I was going to follow the young men who seemed to recognise Gustave?"

"Yes, yes—go on!"

"Well, as soon as they entered the cafe, into which I had followed them, they began drinking, probably to drive away their emotion. After that, they apparently felt hungry. At all events they ordered breakfast. I followed their example. The meal, with coffee and beer afterwards, took up no little time, and indeed a couple of hours had elapsed before they were ready to pay their bill and go. Good! I supposed they would now return home, not at all. They walked down the Rue Dauphin; and I saw them enter another cafe. Five minutes later I glided in

after them ; and found them already engaged in a game of billiards."

At this point, Father Absinthe hesitated ; it is no easy task to recount one's blunders to the very person who has suffered by them.

"I seated myself at a little table," he eventually resumed, "and asked for a newspaper. I was reading with one eye and watching them with the other, when a respectable looking man entered, and took a seat beside me. As soon as he had seated himself he asked me to let him have the paper when I had finished with it. I handed it to him, and then we began talking about the weather. At last he proposed a game of bezique. I declined, but we afterwards compromised the matter by having a game of piquet. The young men, you understand, were still knocking the balls about. We began by playing for a glass of brandy each. I won. My adversary asked for his revenge, and we played two games more. I still kept on winning. He insisted upon another game, and again I won, and still I drank—and drank again—"

"Go on, go on."

"Ah! here's the rub. After that I remember nothing—nothing either about the man I had been playing with, or the young men. It seems to me, however, that I recollect falling asleep in the cafe, and that a long while afterwards a waiter came and woke me and told me to go. Then I must have wandered about along the quays until I came to my senses, and decided to go to your lodgings and wait on the stairs until you returned."

To Father Absinthe's great surprise, Lecoq seemed rather thoughtful than angry. "What do you think about this chance acquaintance of yours, papa?" asked the young detective.

"I think he was following me while I was following the others, and that he entered the cafe with the view of making me drunk."

"What was he like?"

"Oh, he was a tall, stoutish man, with a broad, red face, and a flat nose ; and he was very unpretending and affable in manner."

"It was he!" exclaimed Lecoq.

"He! Who?"

"Why, the accomplice—the man whose foot-prints we

discovered—the pretended drunkard—a devil incarnate, who will get the best of us yet, if we don't keep our eyes open. Don't you forget him, papa; and if you ever meet him again—”

But Father Absinthe's confession was not ended. Like most devotees, he had reserved the worst sin for the last.

“But that's not all,” he resumed; “and as its best to make a clean breast of it, I will tell you that it seems to me this traitor talked about the affair at the Poivriere, and that I told him all we had discovered, and all we intended to do.”

Lecoq made such a threatening gesture that the old tippler drew back in consternation. “You wretched man!” exclaimed the young detective, “to betray our plans to the enemy!”

But his calmness soon returned. If at first sight the evil seemed to be beyond remedy, on further thought, it had a good side after all. It sufficed to dispel all the doubts that had assailed Lecoq's mind after his visit to the Hotel de Mariembourg.

“However,” quoth our hero, “this is not the time for deliberation. I am overcome with fatigue; take a mattress from the bed for yourself, my friend, and let us get a little sleep.”

Lecoq was a man of considerable forethought. Hence, before going to bed he took good care to wind up his alarum so that it might wake him at six o'clock. “With that to warn us,” he remarked to his companion, as he blew out the candle, “there need be no fear of our missing the coach.”

He had not, however, made allowance for his own extreme weariness or for the soporific effect of the alcoholic fumes with which his comrade's breath was redolent. When six o'clock struck at the church of St. Eustache, the young detective's alarum resounded faithfully enough, with a loud and protracted whirr. Shrill and sonorous as was the sound, it failed however to break the heavy sleep of the two detectives. They would indeed, in all probability, have continued slumbering for several hours longer, if at halfpast seven a sturdy fist had not begun to rap loudly at the door. With one bound, Lecoq was out of

bed, amazed at seeing the bright sunlight, and furious at the futility of his precautions.

"Come in!" he cried to his early visitor. He had no enemies to fear, and could, without danger, sleep with his door unlocked.

In response to his call, Father Papillon's shrewd face peered into the room.

"Ah! it is my worthy coachman!" exclaimed Lecoq. "Is there anything new?"

"Excuse me, but it's the old affair that brings me here," replied our eccentric friend the cabman. "You know—the thirty francs those wretched women paid me. Really, I shan't sleep in peace till you have worked off the amount by using my vehicle. Our drive yesterday lasted two hours and a half which, according to the regular fare, would be worth a hundred sous; so you see I've still more than twelve hours at your disposal."

"That is all nonsense, my friend!"

"Possibly, but I am responsible for it, and if you won't use my cab, I've sworn to spend those twelve hours waiting outside your door. So now make up your mind." He gazed at Lecoq beseechingly, and it was evident that a refusal would wound him keenly.

"Very well," replied Lecoq, "I will take you for the morning, only I ought to warn you that we are starting on a long journey."

"Oh, Cocotte's legs may be relied upon."

"My companion and myself have business in your own neighbourhood. It is absolutely necessary for us to find the Widow Chupin's daughter-in-law; and I hope we shall be able to obtain her address from the police commissary of the district where the Poivriere is situated."

"Very well, we will go wherever you wish; I am at your orders."

A few moments later they were on their way.

Papillon's features wore an air of self-satisfied pride, as sitting erect on his box, he cracked his whip, and encouraged the nimble Cocotte. The vehicle could not have got over the ground more rapidly if its driver had been promised a hundred sous gratuity.

Father Absinthe alone was sad. He had been forgiven by Lecoq, but he could not forget that he, an old police agent, had been duped as easily as if he had been some

ignorant provincial. The thought was humiliating and then in addition he had been fool enough to reveal the secret plans of the prosecution! He knew but too well that this act of folly had doubled the difficulties of Lecoq's task.

The long drive in Father Papillon's cab was not a fruitless one. The secretary of the commissary of police for the thirteenth arrondissement informed Lecoq that Polyte Chupin's wife lived with her child, in the suburbs, in the Rue de la Butte-aux-Cailles. He could not indicate the precise number, but he described the house, and gave them some information concerning its occupants.

The Widow Chupin's daughter-in-law, a native of Auvergne, had been bitterly punished for preferring a rakish Parisian ragamuffin to one of the grimy charcoal burners of the Puy de Dome. She was hardly more than twelve years of age when she first came to Paris and obtained employment in a large factory. After ten years' privation and constant toil, she had managed to amass, sou by sou, the sum of three thousand francs. Then her evil genius threw Polyte Chupin across her path. She fell in love with this dissipated, selfish rascal; and he married her for the sake of her little hoard.

As long as the money lasted, that is, for some three or four months, matters went on pleasantly enough. But as soon as the last franc had been spent, Polyte left his wife, and complacently resumed his former life of idleness, thieving, and debauchery. When at times he returned home, it was merely with the view of robbing his wife of what little money she might have saved in the meanwhile; and periodically, she uncomplainingly allowed him to despoil her of the last penny of her earnings.

Horrible to relate, this unworthy rascal even tried to trade on her good looks. Here, however, he met with a strenuous resistance—a resistance which excited not merely his own ire, but also the hatred of the villain's mother—that old hag the Widow Chupin. The result was that Polyte's wife was subjected to such incessant cruelty and persecution that one night she was forced to fly with only the rags that covered her. The Chupins—mother and son—believed, perhaps, that starvation would effect what their horrible threats, and insidious counsel had failed to accomplish. ~~But~~ shameful expectations were not, however gratified.

In mentioning these facts to Lecoq, the commissary's secretary added that they had become widely known, and that the unfortunate creature's force of character had won for her general respect. Among those she frequented, moreover, she was known by the nickname of "Toinon the Virtuous"—a rather vulgar, but, at all events, sincere tribute to her worth.

Grateful for this information, Lecoq returned to the cab. The Rue de la Butte-aux-Cailles, whither Papillon was now directed to drive, proved to be very unlike the Boulevard Malesherbes, and one brief glance sufficed to show that opulence had not here fixed its abode. Luck seemed for the moment to have turned in Lecoq's favour. At all events when he and Father Absinthe alighted at the corner of the street, it so happened that the very first person the young detective questioned concerning the virtuous Toinon was well acquainted with her whereabouts. The house in which she resided was pointed out, and Lecoq was instructed to go upstairs to the top floor, and knock at the door in front of him. With such precise directions the two detectives speedily reached Madame Polyte Chupin's abode.

This proved to be a cold and gloomy attic of medium size, windowless, but provided with a small skylight. A straw pallet, a broken table, two chairs, and a few plain kitchen utensils constituted the sole appointments of this miserable garret. But in spite of the occupant's evident poverty, everything was neat and clean, and to use a forcible expression that fell from Father Absinthe, one could have eaten off the floor.

The two detectives entered, and found a woman busily engaged in making a heavy linen sack. She was seated in the centre of the room, directly under the skylight, so that the sun's rays might fall upon her work. At the sight of two strangers, she half rose from her chair, surprised, and perhaps a little frightened; but when Lecoq had explained that they desired a few moments' conversation with her, she gave up her own seat, and drawing the second chair from a corner, invited both detectives to sit down. Lecoq complied, but Father Absinthe declared that he preferred to remain standing.

With a single glance, Lecoq took an inventory of the humble abode, and so to speak, appraised the woman. She was short, stout, and of commonplace appearance. Her

forehead was extremely low, being crowned by a forest of coarse, black hair; while the expression of her large, black eyes, set very close together, recalled the look of patient resignation, one so often detects in ill-treated and neglected animals. Possibly, in former days, she might have possessed that fleeting attraction called the *beaute du diable*; but now she looked almost as old as her wretched mother-in-law. Sorrow and privation, excessive toil and ill-treatment, had imparted to her face a livid hue, reddening her eyes, and stamping deep furrows round about her temples. Still, there was an attribute of native honesty about her which even the foul atmosphere in which she had been compelled to live had not sufficed to taint.

Her little boy furnished a striking contrast. He was pale and puny; his eyes gleamed with a phosphorescent brilliancy; and his hair was of a faded flaxen tint. One little circumstance attracted both detectives' attention. If the mother was attired in an old, thin, faded calico dress, the child was warmly clad in stout woollen material.

"Madame, you have doubtless heard of a dreadful crime, committed in your mother-in-law's establishment," began Lecoq in a soft voice.

"Alas! yes sir," replied Toinon the Virtuous, quickly adding: "But my husband could not have been implicated in it, since he is in prison."

Did not this objection, forestalling as it were suspicion, betray the most horrible apprehensions?

"Yes, I am aware of that," replied Lecoq. "Polyte was arrested a fortnight ago——"

"Yes, and very unjustly, sir," replied the neglected wife. "He was led astray by his companions, wicked, desperate men. He is so weak when he has taken a glass of wine, that they can do whatever they like with him. If he were only left to himself, he would not harm a child. You have only to look at him——"

As she spoke, the virtuous Toinon turned her red and swollen eyes to a miserable photograph hanging against the wall. This blotchy smudge portrayed an exceeding ugly, dissipated-looking young man, afflicted with a terrible squint, and whose repulsive mouth was partially concealed by a faint moustache. This rake of the barrieres was Polyte Chupin. And yet despite his unprepossessing aspect there was no mistaking the fact that this unfortunate woman

loved him—had always loved him ; besides, he was her husband.

A moment's silence followed her indication of the portrait—an act which clearly revealed how deeply she worshipped her persecutor ; and during this pause the attic door slowly and softly opened. Not of itself, however, for suddenly a man's head peered in. The intruder, whoever he was, instantly withdrew, uttering as he did so a low exclamation. The door was swiftly closed again ; the key—which had been left on the outside—grated in the lock, and the occupants of the garret could hear hurried steps descending the stairs.

Lecoq was sitting with his back to the door, and could not, therefore, see the intruder's face. Quickly as he had turned, he had failed to see who it was : and yet he was far from being surprised at the incident. Intuition explained its meaning.

"That must have been the accomplice !" he cried.

Thanks to his position, Father Absinthe had seen the man's face. "Yes," said he, "yes, it was the same man who made me drink with him yesterday."

With a bound, both detectives threw themselves against the door, exhausting their strength in vain attempts to open it. It resisted all their efforts, for it was of solid oak, having been purchased by the landlord from some public building in process of demolition, and it was, moreover, furnished with a strong and massive fastening.

"Help us !" cried Father Absinthe to the woman, who stood petrified with astonishment ; "give us a bar, a piece of iron, a nail—anything !"

The younger man was making frantic efforts to push back the bolt, or to force the lock from the wood. He was wild with rage. At last, having succeeded in forcing the door open, they dashed out in pursuit of their mysterious adversary. On reaching the street, they eagerly questioned the bystanders. Having described the man as best they could, they found two persons who had seen him enter the house of Toinon the Virtuous, and a third who had seen him as he left. Some children were playing in the middle of the street added that he had run off in the direction of the Rue du Moulin-des-Pres as fast as his legs could carry him. It was in this street, near the corner of

the Rue de la Butte-aux-Cailles, that Lecoq had left old Papillon waiting with the cab.

"Let us hasten there!" proposed Father Absinthe; "perhaps Papillon can give us some information."

But Lecoq shook his head despondingly. He would go no further. "It would be of no use," he said. "He had sufficient presence of mind to turn the key in the lock, and that saved him. He is at least ten minutes in advance of us, and we should never overtake him."

Father Absinthe could not restrain his anger. He looked upon this mysterious accomplice who had so cruelly duped him as a personal enemy, and he would willingly have given a month's pay to be able to lay his hand on his shoulder. Lecoq was quite as angry as his subordinate, and his vanity was likewise wounded; he felt, however, that coolness and deliberation were necessary.

"Yes," said he thoughtfully, "he's a shrewd and daring fellow—a perfect demon. He doesn't remain idle. If we are working, he's at work too. No matter what side I turn, I find him on the defensive. He foiled you, papa, in your effort to obtain a clue concerning Gustave's identity; and he made me appear a fool in arranging that little comedy at the Hotel de Mariembourg. His diligence has been wonderful. He has hitherto been in advance of us everywhere, and this fact explains the failures that have attended all my efforts. Here we arrive before him. But if he came here, it was because he scented danger. Hence, we may hope. Now let us get back and question Polyte's wife."

Alas! poor Toinon the Virtuous, did not understand the affair at all. She had remained up stairs, holding her child by the hand, and leaning over the baluster; her mind in great perplexity, and her eyes and ears on the alert. As soon as she perceived the two detectives coming up the stairs again, she hastened down to meet them. "In the name of heaven, what does this all mean?" she asked. "Whatever has happened?"

But Lecoq was not the man to tell his business on a landing, with inquisitive ears all around him, and before he answered Toinon he made her go up into her own garret, and securely close the door.

"We started in pursuit of a man who is implicated in the murders at the Poivriere," he said; "one who came

here hoping to find you alone, who was frightened at seeing us."

"A murderer!" faltered Toinon, with clasped hands. "What could he want of me?"

"Who knows? It is very probable that he is one of your husband's friends."

"Oh! sir."

"Why, did you not tell me just now that Polyte had some very undesirable acquaintances? But don't be alarmed; this does not compromise him in the least. Besides, you can very easily clear him of all suspicion."

"How? In what way? Oh, tell me at once."

"Merely by answering me frankly, and by assisting me to find the guilty party. Now, among your husbands friends, don't you know any who might be capable of such a deed? Give me the names of his acquaintances."

The poor woman's hesitation was evident; undoubtedly she had been present at many sinister cabals, and had been threatened with terrible punishment if she dared to disclose the plans formed by Polyte or his associates.

"You have nothing to fear," said Lecoq, encouragingly, "and I promise you, no one shall ever know that you have told me a word. Very probably you can tell me nothing more than I know already. I have heard a great deal about your former life, and the brutality with which Polyte and his mother have treated you."

"My husband has never treated me brutally," said the young woman, indignantly; "besides, that matter would only concern myself."

"And your mother-in-law?"

"She is, perhaps, a trifle quick-tempered; but in reality, she has a good heart."

"Then, if you were so happy at the widow Chupin's house, why did you fly from it?"

Toinon the Virtuous turned scarlet to the very roots of her hair. "I left for other reasons," she replied. "There were always a great many drunken men about the house; and, sometimes, when I was alone, some of them tried to carry their pleasantry too far. You may say that I have a solid fist of my own, and that I am quite capable of protecting myself. That's true. But while I was away one day, some fellows were wicked enough to make this child drink to such an excess, that when I came home I found

him as stiff and cold as if he were dead. It was necessary to fetch a doctor or else—”

She suddenly paused ; her eyes dilated. From red she turned livid, and in a hoarse, unnatural voice, she cried : “Toto ! wretched child !”

Lecoq looked behind him, and shuddered. He understood everything. This child—not yet five years old—had stolen up behind him, and ferreting in the pockets of his over-coat, had rifled them of their contents.

“Ah, well—yes !” exclaimed the unfortunate mother, bursting into tears. “That’s how it was. Directly the child was out of my sight, they used to take him into town. They took him into the crowded streets, and taught him to pick people’s pockets, and bring them everything he could lay his hands on. If the child was detected they were angry with him and beat him ; and if he succeeded they gave him a sou to buy some sweets, and kept what he had taken.”

The luckless Toinon hid her face in her hands, and sobbed in an almost unintelligible voice : “Ah, I did not wish my little one to be a thief.”

But what this poor creature did not tell was that the man who had led the child out into the streets, to teach him to steal, was his own father, and her husband—the ruffian, Polyte Chupin. The two detectives plainly understood, however, that such was the case, and the father’s crime was so horrible, and the woman’s grief so great that, familiar as they were with all the phases of crime, their very hearts were touched. Lecoq’s main thought, however, was to shorten this painful scene. The poor mother’s emotion was a sufficient guarantee of her sincerity.

“Listen,” said he, with affected harshness : “Two questions only, and then I will leave you. Was there a man named Gustave among the frequenters of the Poivriere ?”

“No, sir, I’m quite sure there wasn’t.”

“Very well. But Lacheneur—you must know Lacheneur !”

“Yes, sir ; I know him.”

The young police-agent could not repress an exclamation of delight. “At last,” thought he, “I have a clue that may lead me to the truth. What kind of man is he ?” he asked with intense anxiety.

"Oh! he is not at all like the other men who come to drink at my mother-in-law's shop. I have only seen him once; but I remember him perfectly. It was on a Sunday. He was in a cab. He stopped at the corner of the waste ground and spoke to Polyte. When he went away, my husband said to me: 'Do you see that old man there? he will make all our fortunes. I thought him a very respectable-looking gentleman——'"

"That's enough," interrupted Lecoq. "Now it is necessary for you to tell the investigating magistrate all you know about him. I have a cab downstairs. Take your child with you, if you like; but make haste; come, come quickly!"

XVI.

M. SEGMULLER was one of those magistrates whose profession is their only love, and who devote to its duties all the energy, intelligence and sagacity they possess. As an investigator, he displayed, in his constant searches after truth, the same tenacity and zeal that distinguishes a conscientious physician struggling against some unknown disease. the same enthusiasm that is shown by the artist, enamoured of the beautiful, who seeks to realise the ideal of art. Hence, it is easy to understand how greatly this mysterious case attracted and interested him. The magnitude of the crime, the peculiar circumstances attending it, the mystery that enshrouded the identity of both the victims and the murderer, the strange attitude the latter had assumed, everything combined to make a profound impression on his mind. Even the romantic element was not lacking in this strange case; being represented by the two women who had disappeared.

The extreme uncertainty of the result was another attraction for M. Segmuller's investigating mind. Given the magnitude of the difficulties that were to be overcome, he rightly considered that if his efforts proved successful, he would have achieved a really wonderful victory. And, assisted by such a man as Lecoq, who had a positive genius for his calling, and in whom he recognised a most valuable auxiliary, he really felt confident of ultimate success.

Even on returning home after the fatiguing labours of the day he did not think of freeing himself from the burden

of responsibility in relation to the business he had on hand, or of driving away care until the morrow. He dined in haste, and as soon as he had swallowed his coffee began to study the case with renewed ardour. He had brought from his office a copy of the prisoner's narrative, which he attentively perused, not once or twice, but several times seeking for some weak point that might be attacked with a probability of success. He analysed every answer, and weighed one expression after another, striving as he did so, to find some flaw through which he might slip a question calculated to shatter the structure of defence. He worked thus, far into the night, and yet he was on his legs again at an early hour in the morning. By eight o'clock he was not merely dressed and shaved, he had not merely taken his matutinal chocolate and arranged his papers, but he was actually on his way to the Palais de Justice. He had quite forgotten that his own impatience was not shared by others.

In point of fact, the Palais de Justice was scarcely awake when he arrived there. The doors had barely opened. The attendants were busy sweeping and dusting; or changing their ordinary garments for their official costumes. Some of them standing at the windows of the long dressing-room were shaking and brushing the judges' and advocates' gowns; while in the great hall several clerks stood in a group, chaffing each other whilst waiting for the arrival of the head registrar and the opening of the investigation offices.

M. Segmuller thought that he had better begin by consulting the public prosecutor, but he discovered that this functionary had not yet arrived. Angry and impatient, he proceeded to his own office; and with his eyes fixed on the clock, growled at the slowness of the minute hand. Just after nine o'clock, Goguet, the smiling clerk, put in an appearance and speedily learnt the kind of humour his master was in.

"Ah, you've come at last," gruffly ejaculated M. Segmuller, momentarily oblivious of the fact that he himself scarcely ever arrived before ten, and that a quarter-past nine was certainly early for his clerk.

Goguet's curiosity had indeed prompted him to hurry to the Palais; still, although well aware that he did not deserve a reprimand, he endeavoured to mumble an excuse—an excuse cut short by M. Segmuller in such unusually

harsh tones that for once in a way Goguet's habitual smile faded from his face.

"It's evident," thought he, "that the wind's blowing from a bad quarter this morning," with which reflection he philosophically put on his black sleeves and going to his table pretended to be absorbed in the task of mending his pens and preparing his paper.

In the meanwhile, M. Segmuller who was usually calmness personified, and dignity *par excellence*, paced restlessly to and fro. At times he would sit down and then suddenly spring to his feet again, gesticulating impatiently as he did so. Indeed, he seemed unable to remain quiet for a moment.

"The prosecution is evidently making no headway," thought the clerk. "May's prospects are encouraging." Owing to the magistrate's harsh reception the idea delighted him; and, indeed, letting his rancour have the upper hand, Goguet actually offered up a mental prayer that the prisoner might get the better of the fight.

From half-past nine till ten o'clock M. Segmuller rang for his messenger at least five times, and each time he asked him the same questions. "Are you sure that M. Lecoq has not been here this morning? Inquire! If he has not been here he must certainly have sent someone, or else have written to me."

Each time the astonished door-keeper replied: "No one has been here, and there is no letter for you."

Five identical negative answers to the same inquiries only increased the magistrate's wrath and impatience. "It is inconceivable!" he exclaimed. "Here I am upon coals of fire, and that man dares to keep me waiting. Where can he be?"

At last he ordered a messenger to go and see if he could not find Lecoq somewhere in the neighbourhood; perhaps in some restaurant or cafe. "At all events, he must be found and brought back immediately," said he.

When the man had started, M. Segmuller began to recover his composure. "We must not lose valuable time," he said to his clerk. "I was to examine the widow Chupin's son. I had better do so now. Go and tell them to bring him to me. Lecoq left the order at the prison."

In less than a quarter of an hour Polyte entered the room. From head to foot, from his lofty silk cap to his gaudy

coloured carpet slippers, he was indeed the original of the portrait upon which poor Toinon the Virtuous had lavished such loving glances. And yet the photograph was flattering. The lens had failed to convey the expression of low cunning that distinguished the man's features, the impudence of his leering smile, and the mingled cowardice and ferocity of his eyes, which never looked another person in the face. Nor could the portrait depict the unwholesome, livid pallor of his skin, the restless blinking of his eyelids, and the constant movement of his thin lips as he drew them tightly over his short, sharp teeth. There was no mistaking his nature: one glance and he was estimated at his worth.

When he had answered the preliminary questions, telling the magistrate that he was thirty years of age, and that he had been born in Paris, he assumed a pretentious attitude and waited to see what else was coming.

But before proceeding with the real matter in hand, M. Segmuller wished to relieve the complacent scoundrel of some of his insulting assurance. Accordingly, he reminded Polyte, in forcible terms, that his sentence in the affair in which he was implicated would depend very much upon his behaviour and answers during the present examination.

Polyte listened with a nonchalant and even ironical air. In fact, this indirect threat scarcely touched him. Having previously made inquiries he had ascertained that he could not be condemned to more than six months imprisonment for the offence for which he had been arrested; and what did a month more or less matter to him?

The magistrate who read this thought in Polyte's eyes, cut his preamble short. "Justice," said he, "now requires some information from you concerning the frequenters of your mother's establishment."

"There are a great many of them, sir," answered Polyte in a harsh voice.

"Do you know one of them named Gustave?"

"No, sir."

To insist would probably awaken suspicion in Polyte's mind; accordingly, M. Segmuller continued: "You must, however, remember Lacheneur?"

"Lacheneur? No, this is the first time I've heard that name."

"Take care. The police have means of finding out a great many things.

The scapegrace did not flinch. "I am telling the truth, sir," he retorted. "What interest could I possibly have in deceiving you?"

Scarcely had he finished speaking than the door suddenly opened and Toinon the Virtuous entered the room, carrying her child in her arms. On perceiving her husband, she uttered a joyful exclamation, and sprang towards him. But Polyte, stepping back, gave her such a threatening glance that she remained rooted to the spot.

"It must be an enemy who pretends that I know anyone named Lacheneur!" cried the barriere bully. "I should like to kill the person who uttered such a falsehood. Yes, kill him; I will never forgive it."

The messenger whom M. Segmuller had instructed to go in search of Lecoq was not at all displeased with the errand; for it enabled him to leave his post and take a pleasant little stroll through the neighbourhood. He first of all proceeded to the Prefecture of Police, going the longest way round as a matter of course, but, on reaching his destination, he could find no one who had seen the young detective.

Accordingly, M. Segmuller's envoy retraced his steps, and leisurely sauntered through the restaurants, cafes, and wine-shops installed in the vicinity of the Palais de Justice, and dependent on the customers it brought them. Being of a conscientious turn of mind he entered each establishment in succession and meeting now and again various acquaintances, he felt compelled to proffer and accept numerous glasses of the favorite morning beverage—white wine. Turn which way he would, however, loiter as long as he might, there were still no signs of Lecoq. He was returning in haste, a trifle uneasy on account of the length of his absence, when he perceived a cab pull up in front of the Palais gateway. A second glance, and oh, great good fortune, he saw Lecoq, Father Absinthe, and the virtuous Toinon alight from this very vehicle. His peace of mind at once returned; and it was in a very important, and somewhat husky tone that he delivered the order for Lecoq to follow him without a minute's delay. "M. Segmuller has asked for you a number of times," said he. "He has been extremely impatient, and he is in a very

bad humour, so you may expect to have your head snapped off in the most expeditious manner."

Lecoq smiled as he went up the stairs. Was he not bringing with him the most potent of justifications? He thought of the agreeable surprise he had in store for the magistrate, and fancied he could picture the sudden brightening of that functionary's gloomy face.

And yet, fate so willed it that the door-keeper's message and his urgent appeal that Lecoq should not loiter on the way, produced the most unfortunate results. Believing that M. Segmuller was anxiously waiting for him Lecoq saw nothing wrong in opening the door of the magistrate's room without previously knocking; and being anxious to justify his absence, he yielded, moreover, to the impulse that led him to push forward the poor woman whose testimony might prove so decisive. When he saw, however, that the magistrate was not alone, and when he recognized Polyte Chupin—the original of the photograph—in the man M. Segmuller was examining, his stupefaction became intense. He instantly perceived his mistake and understood its consequences.

There was only one thing to be done: He must prevent any exchange of words between the two. Accordingly, springing towards Toinon and seizing her roughly by the arm, he ordered her to leave the room at once. But the poor creature was quite overcome, and trembled like a leaf. Her eyes were fixed upon her unworthy husband, and the happiness she felt at seeing him again shone plainly in her anxious gaze. Just for one second; and then she caught his withering glance and heard his words of menace. Terror-stricken she staggered back and then Lecoq seized her around the waist and lifting her with his strong arms carried her out into the passage. The whole scene had been so brief, that M. Segmuller was still forming the order for Toinon to be removed from the room, when he found the door closed again, and himself and Goguet alone with Polyte.

"Ah, ah!" thought the smiling clerk, in a flutter of delight, "this is something new." But as these little diversions never made him forget his duties, he leant towards the magistrate and asked. "Shall I take down the last words the witness uttered?"

"Certainly," replied M. Segmuller, "and word for word, if you please."

He paused; the door opened again, this time to admit the magistrate's messenger, who timidly, and with a rather guilty air, handed his master a note, and then withdrew. This note, scribbled in pencil by Lecoq on a leaf torn from his memorandum book, gave the magistrate the name of the woman who had just entered his room, and recapitulated briefly but clearly the information obtained in the Rue de la Butte-aux-Cailles.

"That young fellow thinks of everything!" murmured M. Segmuller. The meaning of the scene that had just occurred, was now explained to him. He understood everything.

He bitterly regretted this unfortunate meeting; at the same time, casting the blame on his own impatience, and lack of caution, which, as soon as the messenger had started in search of Lecoq, had induced him to summon Polyte Chupin. Although he could not conceal from himself the enormous influence this seemingly trivial incident might have, still he would not allow himself to be cast down, but prepared to resume his examination of Polyte Chupin in hopes of yet obtaining the information he desired.

"Let us proceed," he said to Polyte, who had not moved since his wife had been taken from the room, being to all appearance sublimely indifferent to everything passing around him. To the magistrate's proposal he carelessly nodded assent.

"Was that your wife who came in just now?" asked M. Segmuller.

"Yes."

"She wished to embrace you, and you repulsed her."

"I didn't repulse her."

"You kept her at a distance at all events. If you had a spark of affection in your nature, you would at least, have looked at your child, which she held out to you. Why did you behave in that manner?"

"It wasn't the time for sentiment."

"You are not telling the truth. You simply desired to attract her attention to influence her evidence."

"I—I influence her evidence! I don't understand you."

"But for that supposition, your words would have been meaningless?"

"What words?"

The magistrate turned to his clerk: "Goguet," said he, "read the last remark you took down."

In a monotonous voice, the smiling clerk repeated: "I should like to kill the person who dared to say that I knew Lacheneur."

"Well then!" insisted M. Segmuller, "what did you mean by that?"

"It's very easy to understand, sir."

M. Segmuller rose. "Don't prevaricate any longer," he said. "You certainly ordered your wife not to say anything about Lacheneur. That's evident, why did you do so? What are you afraid of her telling us? Do you suppose the police are ignorant of your acquaintance with Lacheneur—of your conversation with him when he came in a cab to the corner of the waste-ground near your mother's wine-shop; and of the hopes of fortune you based upon his promises? Be guided by me; confess everything while there is yet time; and abandon the present course which may lead you into serious danger. One may be an accomplice in more ways than one."

As these words fell on Polyte's ear, it was evident his impudence and indifference had received a severe shock. He seemed confounded, and hung his head as if thoroughly abashed. Still, he preserved an obstinate silence; and the magistrate finding that this last thrust had failed to produce any effect, gave up the fight in despair. He rang the bell, and ordered the guard to conduct the witness back to prison, and to take every precaution to prevent him seeing his wife again.

When Polyte had departed, Lecoq re-entered the room. "Ah, sir," said he, despondently, "to think that I didn't draw out of this woman everything she knew, when I might have done so easily. But I thought you would be waiting for me, and made haste to bring her here. I thought I was acting for the best—"

"Never mind, the misfortune can be repaired."

"No, sir, no. Since she has seen her husband, it is quite impossible to get her to speak. She loves that rascal intensely, and he has a wonderful influence over her. You heard what he said. He threatened her with death if

she breathed a word about Lacheneur, and she is so terrified that there is no hope of making her speak."

Lecoq's apprehension was based on fact, as M. Segmüller himself perceived, the instant Toinon the Virtuous again set foot in his office. The poor creature seemed nearly heart-broken, and it was evident she would have given her life to retract the words that had escaped her when first questioned by Lecoq. Polyte's threat had aroused the most sinister apprehensions in her mind. Not understanding his connection with the affair, she asked herself if her testimony might not prove his death-warrant. Accordingly, she answered all M. Segmüller's questions with "no" or "I don't know;" and retracted everything she had previously stated to Lecoq. She swore that she had been misunderstood, that her words had been misconstrued; and vowed on her mother's memory, that she had never heard the name of Lacheneur before. At last, she burst into wild, despairing sobs, pressed her frightened child against her breast.

What could be done to overcome this foolish obstinacy, as blind and unreasoning as a brute's? M. Segmüller hesitated. "You may retire, my good woman," said he kindly, after a moment's pause, "but remember that your strange silence injures your husband far more than anything you could say."

She left the room—or rather she rushed wildly from it as though only too eager to escape—and the magistrate and the detective exchanged glances of dismay and consternation.

"I said so before," thought Goguet, "the prisoner knows what he's about. I would be willing to bet a hundred to one in his favour."

A French investigating magistrate is possessed of almost unlimited powers. No one can hamper him, no one can give him orders. The entire police force is at his disposal. One word from him and twenty agents, or a hundred if need be, search Paris, ransack France, or explore Europe. If there be anyone whom he believes able to throw light upon an obscure point, he simply sends an order to that person to appear before him, and the man must come even if he lives a hundred leagues away. Such is the magistrate, such are his powers. On the other hand, the prisoner charged with a crime, but as yet unconvicted, is

confined, unless his offence be of a trivial description—in what is called a “secret cell.” He is, so to say, cut off from the number of the living. He knows nothing of what may be going on in the world outside. He cannot tell what witnesses may have been called, or what they may have said—and in his uncertainty he asks himself again and again how far the prosecution has been able to establish the charges against him. Such is the prisoner’s position, and yet despite the fact that the two adversaries are so unequally armed, the man in the secret cell not unfrequently wins the victory. If he is sure that he has left behind him no proof of his having committed the crime; if he has no guilty antecedents to be afraid of, he can—impregnable in a defence of absolute denial—brave all the attacks of justice.

Such was, at this moment, the situation of May, the mysterious murderer; as both M. Segmuller and Lecoq were forced to admit, with mingled grief and anger. They had hoped to arrive at a solution of the problem by examining Polyte Chupin and his wife, and they had been disappointed; for the prisoner’s identity remained as problematical as ever.

“And yet,” exclaimed the magistrate impatiently, “these people know something about this matter, and if they would only speak—”

“But they won’t.”

“What motive is it that keeps them silent? This is what we must discover. Who will tell us the price that has been promised Polyte Chupin for his silence? What recompense can he count upon? It must be a great one, for he is braving real danger!”

Lecoq did not immediately reply to the magistrate’s successive queries, but it was easy to see from his knit brows that his mind was hard at work. “You ask me, sir,” he eventually remarked, “*what* reward has been promised Chupin. I ask on my part *who* can have promised him this reward?”

“Who has promised it? Why, plainly the accomplice who has beaten us on every point.”

“Yes,” rejoined Lecoq, “I suppose it must have been him. It certainly looks like his handiwork—now, what artifice can he have used? We know how he managed to have an interview with the Widow Chupin, but how

has he succeeded in getting at Polyte, who is in prison, closely watched?"

The young detective's insinuation, vague as it was, did not escape M. Segmuller. "What do you mean?" asked the latter, with an air of mingled surprise and indignation. "You can't suppose that one of the keepers has been bribed?"

Lecoq shook his head, in a somewhat equivocal manner. "I mean nothing," he replied; "I don't suspect any one. All I want is information. Has Chupin been forewarned or not?"

"Yes, of course he has."

"Then, if that point is admitted it can only be explained in two ways. Either there are informers in the prison, or else Chupin has been allowed to see some visitor."

These suppositions evidently worried M. Segmuller; who for a moment seemed to hesitate between the two opinions; then, suddenly making up his mind, he rose from his chair, took up his hat, and said: "This matter must be cleared up. Come with me, Monsieur Lecoq."

A couple of minutes later, the magistrate and the detective had reached the Depot, which is connected with the Palais de Justice by a narrow passage, especially reserved for official use. The prisoners' morning rations had just been served to them, and the governor was walking up and down the court-yard, in the company of Inspector Gevrol. As soon as he perceived M. Segmuller he hastened towards him and asked if he had not come about the prisoner May.

As the magistrate nodded assent, the governor at once added, "Well I was only just now telling Inspector Gevrol that I was very well satisfied with May's behavior. It has not only been quite unnecessary to place him in the strait-waistcoat again, but his mood seems to have changed entirely. He eats with a good appetite; he is as gay as a lark, and he constantly laughs and jests with his keeper."

Gevrol had pricked up his ears when he heard himself named by the governor, and considering this mention to be a sufficient introduction, he thought there would be no impropriety in his listening to the conversation. Accordingly, he approached the others, and noted with

some satisfaction the troubled glances which Lecoq and the magistrate exchanged.

M. Segmuller was plainly perplexed. May's gay manner to which the governor of the Depot alluded might perhaps have been assumed for the purpose of sustaining his character as a jester and buffoon, it might be due to a certainty of defeating the judicial enquiry, or, who knows? the prisoner had perhaps received some favourable news from outside.

With Lecoq's last words still ringing in his ears, it is no wonder that the magistrate should have dwelt on this last supposition. "Are you quite sure," he asked, "that no communication from outside can reach the inmates of the secret cells?"

The governor of the Depot was cut to the quick, by M. Segmuller's implied doubt. What! were his subordinates suspected? Was his own professional honesty impugned? He could not help lifting his hands to heaven in mute protest against such an unjust charge.

"Am I sure?" he exclaimed. "Then you can never have visited the secret cells. You have no idea, then, of their situation; you are unacquainted with the triple bolts, that secure the doors; the grating that shuts out the sunlight, to say nothing of the guard who walks beneath the windows day and night. Why, a bird couldn't even reach the prisoners in those cells."

Such a description was bound to re-assure the most sceptical mind, and M. Segmuller breathed again: "Now that I am easy on that score," said he, "I should like some information about another prisoner—a fellow named Chupin, who isn't in the secret cells. I want to know if any visitor came for him yesterday?"

"I must speak to the registrar," replied the governor, "before I can answer you with certainty. Wait a moment though, here comes a man who can perhaps tell us. He is usually on guard at the entrance. Here, Ferraud, this way!"

The man to whom the governor called hastened to obey the summons.

"Do you know whether anyone asked to see the prisoner Chupin yesterday?"

"Yes, sir, I went to fetch Chupin to the parlour myself."

"And who was his visitor?" eagerly asked Lecoq, "wasn't he a tall man; very red in the face—"

"Excuse me, sir, the visitor was a lady—his aunt, at least so Chupin told me."

Neither M. Segmuller nor Lecoq could restrain an exclamation of surprise. "What was she like?" they both asked at the same time.

"She was short," replied the attendant, "with a very fair complexion and light hair: she seemed to be a very respectable woman."

"It must have been one of the female fugitives who escaped from the Widow Chupin's hovel," exclaimed Lecoq.

Gevrol, hitherto an attentive listener, burst into a loud laugh. "Still that Russian princess," said he.

Neither the magistrate nor the young detective relished this unreasonable jest. "You forget yourself, sir," said M. Segmuller severely. "You forget that the sneers you address to your comrade also apply to me!"

The General saw that he had gone too far; and while glancing hatefully at Lecoq, he mumbled an apology to the magistrate. The latter did not apparently hear him, for, bowing to the governor, he motioned Lecoq to follow him away.

"Run to the Prefecture of Police," he said as soon as they were out of hearing, "and ascertain how and under what pretext this woman obtained permission to see Polyte Chupin."

XVII.

ON his way back to his office, M. Segmuller mentally reviewed the position of affairs; and came to the conclusion that as he had failed to take the citadel of defence by storm, he must resign himself to a regular protracted siege. He was exceedingly annoyed at the constant failures that had attended all Lecoq's efforts: for time was on the wing, and he knew that in a criminal investigation delay only increases the uncertainty of success. The more promptly a crime is followed by judicial action the easier it is to find the culprit, and prove his guilt. The longer investigation is delayed the more difficult it becomes to adduce conclusive evidence.

In the present instance there were various matters that M. Segmuller might at once attend to. With which should he begin? Ought he not to confront May, the Widow Chupin, and Polyte with the bodies of their victims? Such horrible meetings have at times the most momentous results, and more than one murderer, when unsuspectedly brought into the presence of his victim's lifeless corpse has changed colour and lost his assurance.

Then there were other witnesses, whom M. Segmuller might examine. Papillon, the cab driver; the concierge of the house in the Rue de Bourgogne—where the two women flying from the Poivriere had momentarily taken refuge; as well as a certain Madame Milner, landlady of the Hotel de Mariembourg. In addition, it would also be advisable to summon, with the least possible delay, some of the people residing in the vicinity of the Poivriere; together with some of Polyte's habitual companions, and the landlord of the Rainbow, where the victims and the murderer had apparently passed the evening of the crime. Of course, there was no reason to expect any great revelations from any of these witnesses, still they might know something, they might have an opinion to express, and in the present darkness one single ray of light, however faint might mean salvation.

Obedying the magistrate's orders, Goguet, the smiling clerk, had just finished drawing up at least a dozen summonses, when Lecoq returned from the Prefecture. M. Segmuller at once asked him the result of his errand.

"Ah, sir," replied the young detective, "I have a fresh proof of that mysterious accomplice's skill. The permit that was used yesterday to see young Chupin, was in the name of his mother's sister, a woman named Rose Pitard. A visiting card was given her more than a week ago, in compliance with a request endorsed by the commissary of police of her district."

The magistrate's surprise was so intense that it imparted to his face an almost ludicrous expression. "Is this aunt also in the plot?" he murmured.

"I don't think so," replied Lecoq shaking his head. "At all events, it wasn't she who went to the prison parlor yesterday. The clerks at the Prefecture remember the widow's sister very well, and gave me a full description of her. She's a woman over five feet high, with a very dark

complexion ; and very wrinkled and weather-beaten about the face. She's quite sixty years old ; whereas, yesterday's visitor was short and fair, and not more than forty-five."

"If that's the case," interrupted M. Segmuller, "this visitor must be one of our fugitives."

"I don't think so."

"Who do you suppose she was, then ?"

"Why, the landlady of the Hotel de Mariembourg—that clever woman who succeeded so well in deceiving me. But she had better take care ! There are means of verifying my suspicions."

The magistrate scarcely heard Lecoq's last words, so enraged was he at the inconceivable audacity and devotion, displayed by so many people : all of whom were apparently willing to run the greatest risks, so long as they could only assure the murderer's incognito.

"But how could the accomplice have known of the existence of this permit ?" he asked after a pause.

"Oh, nothing could be easier, sir," replied Lecoq. "When the Widow Chupin and the accomplice had that interview at the station house near the Barriere d'Italie, they both realized the necessity of warning Polyte. While trying to devise some means of getting to him, the old woman remembered her sister's visiting card, and the man made some excuse to borrow it."

"Yes, such must be the case," said M. Segmuller, approvingly. "It will be necessary to ascertain, however——"

"And I *will* ascertain," interrupted Lecoq, with a resolute air, "if you will only entrust the matter to me, sir. If you will authorise me I will have two spies on the watch before to-night, one in the Rue de la Butte-aux-Cailles, and the other at the door of the Hotel de Mariembourg. If the accomplice ventured to visit Toinon, or Madame Milner, he would be arrested ; and then we should have our turn !"

However, there was no time to waste in vain words and idle boasting. Lecoq therefore checked himself, and took up his hat preparatory to departure. "Now," said he, "I must ask you sir, for my liberty ; if you have any orders, you will find a trusty messenger in the corridor, Father Absinthe, one of my colleagues. I want to find out something about Lacheneur's letter and the diamond earring."

"Go, then," replied M. Segmuller, "and good luck to you!"

Good luck! Yes, indeed, Lecoq looked for it. If, up to the present moment, he had taken his successive defeats good-humouredly, it was because he believed that he had a talisman in his pocket, which was bound to ensure ultimate victory.

"I shall be very stupid if I can't discover the owner of such a valuable jewel," he soliloquized, referring to the diamond earring. "And when I find the owner I shall at the same time, discover our mysterious prisoner's identity."

The first step to be taken was to ascertain who the earring had been bought from. It would naturally be a tedious process to go from jeweller to jeweller and ask, "Do you know this jewel, was it set by you, and if so who did you sell it to?" But fortunately, Lecoq was acquainted with a man whose knowledge of the trade might at once throw light on the matter. This individual was an old Hollander, named Van Numen, who as a connoisseur in precious stones, was probably without his rival in Paris. He was employed by the Prefecture of Police, as an expert in all such matters. He was considered rich. Despite his shabby appearance, he was rightly considered rich, and, in point of fact, he was indeed far more wealthy than people generally supposed. Diamonds were his especial passion, and he always had several in his pocket, in a little box which he would pull out and open at least a dozen times an hour, just as a snuff-taker continually produces his snuff-box.

This worthy man greeted Lecoq very affably. He put on his glasses, examined the jewel with a grimace of satisfaction, and, in the tone of an oracle, remarked: "That stone is worth eight thousand francs, and it was set by Doisty, in the Rue de la Paix."

Twenty minutes later, Lecoq entered this well known jeweller's establishment. Van Numen had not been mistaken. Doisty immediately recognized the earring, which had, indeed, come from his shop. But who had he sold it to? He could not recollect, for it had passed out of his hands three or four years before.

"Wait a moment though," said he, "I will just ask my wife, who has a wonderful memory."

Madame Doisty truly deserved this eulogium. A single

glance at the jewel enabled her to say that she had seen this earring before, and that the pair had been purchased from them by the Marchioness d'Arlange.

"You must recollect," she added, turning to her husband, "that the Marchioness only gave us nine thousand francs on account, and that we had all the trouble in the world to make her pay the balance."

Her husband did remember this circumstance; and in recording his recollection, he exchanged a significant glance with his wife.

"Now," said the detective, "I should like to have this marchioness's address."

"She lives in the Faubourg St. Germain," replied Madame Doisty, "near the Esplanade des Invalides."

Lecoq had refrained from any sign of satisfaction, while he was in the jeweller's presence. But, directly he had left the shop, he evinced such delirious joy that the passers-by asked themselves in amazement if he were not mad. He did not walk, but fairly danced over the stones, gesticulating in the most ridiculous fashion, as he addressed this triumphant monologue to the empty air: "At last," said he, "this affair emerges from the mystery that has enshrouded it. At last I reach the veritable actors in the drama, the exalted personages whose existence I had suspected. Ah! Gevrol, my illustrious General! you talked about a Russian princess, but you will be obliged to content yourself with a simple marchioness."

But the vertigo that had seized the young detective gradually disappeared. His good sense re-asserted itself, and looking calmly at the situation he felt that he should need all his presence of mind, penetration, and sagacity to bring the expedition to a successful finish. What course should he pursue, on entering the marchioness's presence, in order to draw from her a full confession and to obtain full particulars of the murder, as well as the murderer's name!

"It will be best to threaten her, to frighten her into confession," he soliloquized. "If I give her time for reflection, I shall learn nothing."

He paused in his cogitations, for he had reached the residence of the Marchioness d'Arlange—a charming mansion with a court-yard in front and garden in the rear.

Before entering, he deemed it advisable to obtain some information concerning the inmates.

"It is here, then," he murmured, "that I am to find the solution of the enigma! Here, behind those embroidered curtains dwells the frightened fugitive of the other night. What agony of fear must torture her since she has discovered the loss of her earring!"

For more than an hour, standing under a neighbor's *porte-cochere*, Lecoq remained watching the house. He would have liked to see the face of any one; but the time passed by and not even a shadow could be detected behind the curtain; not even a servant passed across the court-yard. At last, losing patience, the young detective determined to make inquiries in the neighbourhood, for he could not take a decisive step without obtaining some knowledge of the people he was to encounter. While wondering where he could obtain the information he required, he perceived, on the opposite side of the street, the keeper of a wine-shop smoking on his doorstep.

At once approaching and pretending that he had forgotten an address, Lecoq politely asked for the house where Marchioness d'Arlange resided. Without a word, and without condescending to take his pipe from his mouth, the man pointed to the mansion, which Lecoq had previously watched.

There was a way however, to make him more communicative, namely, to enter the shop, call for something to drink, and invite the landlord to drink as well. This was what Lecoq did, and the sight of two well-filled glasses unbound, as by enchantment, the man's hitherto silent tongue. The young detective could not have found a better person to question, for this same individual had been established in the neighbourhood for ten years, and enjoyed among the servants of the aristocratic families here residing a certain amount of confidence.

"I pity you if you are going to the machioness's house to collect a bill," he remarked to Lecoq. "You will have plenty of time to learn the way here before you see your money. You will only be another of the many creditors who never let her bell alone."

"The deuce! Is she as poor as that?"

"Poor! Why, every one knows that she has a comfort

able income ; without counting this house. But when one spends double one's income every year, you know—"

The landlord stopped short, to call Lecoq's attention to two ladies who were passing along the street, one of them, a woman of forty, dressed in black ; the other, a girl half-way through her teens. "There," quoth the wine-seller, "goes the marchioness's grand-daughter, Mademoiselle Claire, with her governess, Mademoiselle Smith."

Lecoq's head whirled. "Her grand-daughter!" he stammered.

"Yes—the daughter of her deceased son, if you prefer it."

"How old is the marchioness, then?"

"At least sixty: but one would never suspect it. She is one of those persons who live a hundred years. And what an old wretch she is too. She would think no more of knocking me over the head than I would of emptying this glass of wine—"

"Excuse me," interrupted Lecoq, "but does she live alone in that great house?"

"Yes—that is—with her grand-daughter, the governess, and two servants. But what is the matter with you?"

This last question was not uncalled for; for Lecoq had turned deadly white. The magic edifice of his hopes had crumbled beneath the weight of this man's words as completely as if it were some frail house of cards erected by a child. He had only sufficient strength to murmur "Nothing—nothing at all."

Then, as he could endure this torture of uncertainty no longer, he went towards the marchioness's house and rang the bell. The servant who came to open the door examined him attentively, and then announced that Madame d'Arlange was in the country. He evidently fancied that Lecoq was a creditor.

But the young detective insisted so adroitly, giving the lackey to understand so explicitly that he did not come to collect money, and speaking so earnestly of urgent business, that the servant finally admitted him to the hall, saying that he would go and see if madame had really gone out.

Fortunately for Lecoq, she happened to be at home, and an instant afterwards the valet returned requesting the young detective to follow him. After passing through a large and magnificently furnished drawing-room, they reached a

charming boudoir, hung with rose-coloured curtains, where, sitting by the fireside, in a large easy-chair, Lecoq found an old woman, tall, bony, and terrible of aspect, her face loaded with paint, and her person covered with ornaments. This aged coquette was Madame, the Marchioness, who, for the time being, was engaged in knitting a stripe of green wool. She turned towards her visitor just enough to show him the rouge on one cheek, and then, as he seemed rather frightened—a fact flattering to her vanity—she spoke in an affable tone. “Ah, well! young man,” said she, “what brings you here?”

In point of fact, Lecoq was not frightened, but he was intensely disappointed to find that Madame d’Arlange could not possibly be one of the women who had escaped from the Widow Chupin’s hovel on the night of the murder. There was nothing about her appearance that corresponded in the least degree with the descriptions given by Papillon.

Remembering the small foot-prints left in the snow by the two fugitives, the young detective glanced moreover at the marchioness’s feet, just perceivable beneath her skirt and his disappointment reached its climax when he found that they were truly colossal in size.

“Well? are you dumb?” inquired the old lady, raising her voice.

Without making a direct reply, Lecoq produced the precious earring, and placing it upon the table beside the marchioness, remarked: “I bring you this jewel, madame, which I have found, and which, I am told, belongs to you.”

Madame d’Arlange laid down her knitting and proceeded to examine the earring. “It is true,” she said, after a moment, “that this ornament formerly belonged to me. It was a fancy I had, about four years ago, and it cost me dear—at least twenty thousand francs. Ah! Doisty, the man who sold me those diamonds, must make a handsome income. But I had a granddaughter to educate! and pressing need of money compelled me to sell them.”

“To whom,” asked Lecoq, eagerly.

“Eh?” exclaimed the old lady, evidently shocked at his audacity, “you are very inquisitive upon my word!”

“Excuse me, madame, but I am anxious to find the owner of this valuable ornament.”

Madame d'Arlange regarded her visitor with an air of mingled curiosity and surprise. "Such honesty!" said she. "Oh, oh! And of course you don't hope for a sou by way of reward—"

"Madame!"

"Good, good! There is not the least need for you to turn as red as a poppy, young man. I sold these diamonds to a great Austrian lady—the Baroness de Watchau."

"And where does this lady reside?"

"At the Pere la Chaise, probably, since she died about a year ago. Ah! these women of the present day—an extra waltz, or the merest draught, and it's all over with them! In my time, after each galop, we girls used to swallow a tumbler of sweetened wine, and sit down between two open doors. And we did very well, as you see."

"But, madame," insisted Lecoq, "the Baroness de Watchau must have left some one behind her—a husband, or children—"

"No one but a brother, who holds a court position at Vienna: and who could not leave even to attend the funeral. He sent orders that all his sister's personal property should be sold—not even excepting her wardrobe—and the money sent to him."

Lecoq could not repress an exclamation of disappointment. "How unfortunate!" he murmured.

"Why?" asked the old lady. "Under these circumstances, the diamond will probably remain in your hands, and I am rejoiced that it should be so. It will be a fitting reward for your honesty."

Madame d'Arlange was naturally not aware that her remark implied the most exquisite torture for Lecoq. Ah! if it should be as she said, if he should *never* find the lady who had lost this costly jewel! Smarting under the marchioness's unintended irony, he would have liked to apostrophize her in angry terms; but it could not be, for it was advisable if not absolutely necessary that he should conceal his true identity. Accordingly, he contrived to smile, and even stammered an acknowledgment of Madame d'Arlange's good wishes. Then, as if he had no more to expect, he made her a low bow and withdrew.

This new misfortune well-nigh overwhelmed him. One by one all the threads upon which he had relied to guide him out of this intricate labyrinth were breaking in his

hands. In the present instance he could scarcely be the dupe of some fresh comedy, for the murderer's accomplice had taken Doisty the jeweller into his confidence, he would have instructed him to say that the earring had never come from his establishment, and that he could not consequently tell who it had been sold to. On the contrary, however, Doisty and his wife had readily given Madame d'Arange's name and all the circumstances pointed in favor of their sincerity. Then, again, there was good reason to believe in the veracity of the marchioness's assertions. They were sufficiently authenticated by a significant glance which Lecoq had detected between the jeweller and his wife. The meaning of this glance could not be doubted. It implied plainly that both husband and wife were of opinion that in buying these earrings the marchioness engaged in one of those little speculations which are more common than many people might supposed among ladies moving in high-class society. Being in urgent want of ready money, she had bought on credit at a high price to sell for cash at a loss.

As Lecoq was anxious to investigate the matter as far as possible he returned to Doisty's establishment, and, by a plausible pretext, succeeded in gaining a sight of the books in which the jeweler recorded his transactions. He soon found the sale of the earrings duly recorded—specified by Madame Doisty at the date—both in the day-book and the ledger. Madame d'Arange was first paid 9,000 francs on account and the balance of the purchase money (an equivalent sum), had been received in instalments at long intervals subsequently. Now, if it had been easy for Madame Milner to make a false entry in her traveller's registry at the Hotel de Mariembourg, it was absurd to suppose that the jeweler had falsified all his accounts for four years. Hence, the facts were indisputable; and yet, the young detective was not satisfied.

He hurried to the Faubourg-Saint-Honore, to the house formerly occupied by the Baroness de Watchau, and there found a good-natured concierge, who at once informed him that after the Baroness's death, her furniture and personal effects had been taken to the great auction mart in the Rue Drouot; the sale being conducted by M. Petit, the eminent auctioneer.

Without losing a minute, Lecoq hastened to this indi

vidual's office. M. Petit remembered the Watchau sale very well ; it had made quite a sensation at the time, and on searching among his papers he soon found a long catalogue of the various articles sold. Several lots of jewellery were mentioned, with the sums paid, and the names of the purchasers ; but there was not the slightest allusion to these particular earrings. When Lecoq produced the diamond he had in his pocket, the auctioneer could not remember that he had ever seen it ; though of course this was no evidence to the contrary, for as he himself remarked—so many articles passed through his hands ! However, this much he could declare upon oath ; the baroness's brother, her only heir, had preserved nothing—not so much as a pin's worth of his sister's effects : although he had been in a great hurry to receive the proceeds, which amounted to the pleasant sum of one hundred and sixty-seven thousand five hundred and thirty francs, all expenses deducted.

"Everything this lady possessed was sold?" inquired Lecoq.

"Everything."

"And what is the name of this brother of hers?"

"Watchau, also. The baroness had probably married one of her relatives. Until last year, her brother occupied a very prominent diplomatic position. I think he now resides at Berlin."

Certainly this information would not seem to indicate that the auctioneer had been tampered with ; and yet Lecoq was not satisfied. "It is very strange," he thought, as he walked towards his lodgings, "that whichever side I turn, in this affair, I find mention of Germany. The murderer comes from Leipsic, Madame Milner must be a Bavarian, and now here is an Austrian baroness."

It was too late to make any further inquiries that evening, and Lecoq went to bed ; but the next morning, at an early hour, he resumed his investigations with fresh ardour. There now seemed only one remaining clue to success : the letter signed "Lacheneur," which had been found in the pocket of the murdered soldier. This letter, judging from the half-effaced heading at the top of the note-paper, must have been written in some cafe on the Boulevard Beaumarchais. To discover which precise cafe would be mere child's play ; and indeed the fourth landlord to

whom Lecoq exhibited the letter recognized the paper as his. But neither he, nor his wife, nor the young lady at the counter, nor the waiters, nor any of the customers present at the time, had ever once heard mention made of this singular name—Lacheneur.

And now what was Lecoq to do? Was the case utterly hopeless? Not yet. Had not the spurious soldier declared that this Lacheneur was an old comedian? Seizing upon this frail clue, as a drowning man clutches at the merest fragment of the floating wreck, Lecoq turned his steps in another direction, and hurried from theatre to theatre, asking every one, from door-keeper to manager: "Don't you know an actor named Lacheneur?"

Alas! one and all gave a negative reply, at times indulging in some rough joke at the oddity of the name. And when any one asked the young detective what the man he was seeking was like, what could he reply? His answer was necessarily limited to the virtuous Toinon's phrase: "I thought him a very respectable-looking gentleman." This was not a very graphic description, however, and besides, it was rather doubtful what a woman like Polyte Chupin's wife might mean by the word "respectable." Did she apply it to the man's age, to his personal aspect, or to his apparent fortune.

Sometimes those whom Lecoq questioned would ask what parts this comedian of his was in the habit of playing; and then the young detective could make no reply whatever. He kept for himself the harassing thought that the *role* now being performed by the unknown Lacheneur was driving him—Lecoq—wild with despair.

Eventually, our hero had recourse to a method of investigation, which strange to say, the police seldom employ, save in extreme cases, although it is at once sensible and simple, and generally fraught with success. It consists in examining all the hotel and lodging-house registers, in which the landlords are compelled to record the names of their tenants, even should the latter merely sojourn under their roofs for a single night.

Rising long before daybreak, and going to bed late at night Lecoq spent all his time in visiting the countless hotels, and furnished lodgings in Paris. But still and ever his search was vain. He never once came across the name of Lacheneur; and at last he began to ask him-

self if such a name really existed, or if it were not some pseudonym invented for convenience. He had not found it even in Didot's directory, the so called *Almanach Boitin*, where one finds all the most singular and absurd names in France—those which are formed of the most fantastic mingling of syllables.

Still, nothing could daunt him or turn him from the almost impossible task he had undertaken, and his obstinate perseverance well nigh developed into monomania. He was no longer subject to occasional out-bursts of anger, quickly repressed; but lived in a state of constant exasperation, which soon impaired the clearness of his mind. No more theories, or ingenious deductions, no more subtle reasoning. He pursued his search, without method and without order—much as Father Absinthe might have done when under the influence of alcohol. Perhaps he had come to rely less upon his own shrewdness than upon chance to reveal to him the substance of the mystery, of which he had as yet only detected the shadow.

XVIII.

WHEN a heavy stone is thrown into a lake a considerable commotion ensues, the water spouts and seethes and bubbles, and frequently a tall jet leaps into the air. But all this agitation only lasts for a moment; the bubbling subsides as the circles of the passing whirlpool grow larger and larger; the surface regains at last its customary smoothness; and soon no trace remains of the passage of the stone, now buried in the depths below.

So it is with the events of our daily life, however momentous they may appear at the hour of their occurrence. It seems as if their impressions would last for years; but no, they speedily sink into the depths of the past, and time obliterates their passage—just as the water of the lake closes over and hides the stone, for an instant the cause of such commotion. Thus it was that at the end of a fortnight the frightful crime committed in the Widow Chupin's drinking-den, the triple murder which had made all Paris shudder, which had furnished the material for so many newspaper articles, and the topic for such indignant comments, was completely forgotten. Indeed, had the

tragedy at the Poivrière occurred in the times of Charlemagne, it could not have passed more thoroughly out of people's minds. It was remembered only in three places, at the Depot, at the Prefecture de Police, and at the Palais de Justice.

M. Segmuller's repeated efforts had proved as unsuccessful as Lecoq's. Skilful questioning, ingenious insinuations, forcible threats and seductive promises had proved powerless to overcome the dogged spirit of absolute denial, which persistently animated, not merely the prisoner May, but also the Widow Chupin, her son Polyte, Toinon the Virtuous, and Madame Milner. The evidence of these various witnesses showed plainly enough that they were all in league with the mysterious accomplice; but what did this knowledge avail? Their attitude never varied! And, even if at times their looks gave the lie to their denials, one could always read in their eyes an unshaken determination to conceal the truth.

There were moments when the magistrate, overpowered by a sense of the insufficiency of the purely moral weapons at his disposal, almost regretted that the Inquisition was suppressed. Yes, in presence of the lies that were told him, lies so impudent that they were almost insults, he no longer wondered at the judicial cruelties of the Middle Ages, or at the use of the muscle-breaking rack, the flesh-burning red-hot pincers, and other horrible instruments, which, by the physical torture they inflicted, forced the most obstinate culprit to confess. The prisoner May's manner was virtually unaltered; and far from showing any signs of weakness, his assurance had, if anything, increased, as though he were confident of ultimate victory and as though he had in some way learnt that the prosecution had failed to make the slightest progress.

On one occasion, when summoned before M. Segmuller, he ventured to remark in a tone of covert irony: "Why do you keep me confined so long in a secret cell? Am I never to be set at liberty or sent to the assizes. Am I to suffer much longer on account of your fantastic idea, that I am some great personage in disguise?"

"I shall keep you until you have confessed," was M Segmuller's answer.

"Confessed what?"

"Oh! you know very well."

The prisoner shrugged his shoulders at these ~~last~~ words and then in a tone of mingled despondency and mockery retorted: "In that case there is no hope of my ever leaving this cursed prison!"

It was probably this conviction that induced him to make all seeming preparations for an indefinite stay. He applied for and obtained a portion of the contents of the trunk found at the Hotel de Mariembourg, and evinced great joy when the various knick-knacks and articles of clothing were handed over to him. Thanks to the money found upon his person when arrested, and deposited with the prison registrar, he was, moreover, able to procure many little luxuries, which are never denied to unconvicted prisoners no matter what may be the charges against them, for they have a right to be considered as innocent until a jury has decided to the contrary. To while away the time, May next asked for a volume of Beranger's songs, and his request being granted, he spent most of the day in learning several of the ditties by heart, singing them, in a loud voice and with considerable taste. This fancy having excited some comment he pretended that he was cultivating a talent which might be useful to him when he was set at liberty. For he had no doubt of his acquittal; at least, so he declared; and if he were anxious about the date of his trial, he did not show the slightest apprehension concerning its result.

He was never despondent save when he spoke of his profession. To all appearance he pined for the stage, and, in fact, he almost wept when he recalled the fantastic, many-coloured costumes, clad in which he had once appeared before crowded audiences—audiences that had been convulsed with laughter by his sallies of wit, delivered between bursts of noisy music. He seemed to have become altogether a better fellow; more frank, communicative, and submissive. He eagerly embraced every opportunity to babble about his past, and over and over again did he recount the adventures of the roving life he had led whilst in the employ of M. Simpson, the showman. He had, of course, travelled a great deal; and he remembered everything he had seen; possessing, moreover, an inexhaustible fund of amusing stories, with which he entertained his custodians. His manner and his words were so natural that

head-keepers and subordinate turnkeys alike were quite willing to give credit to his assertions.

The governor of the Depot alone remained unconvinced. He had declared that this pretended buffoon must be some dangerous criminal who had escaped from Cayenne, and who for this reason was determined to conceal his antecedents. Such being this functionary's opinion he tried every means to substantiate it. Accordingly, during an entire fortnight, May was submitted to the scrutiny of innumerable members of the police-force, to whom were added all the more notable private detectives of the capital. No one recognised him, however, and although his photograph was sent to all the prisons and police stations of the empire, not one of the officials could recognise his features.

Other circumstances occurred, each of which had its influence, and one and all of them speaking in the prisoner's favour. For instance, the second bureau of the Prefecture de Police found positive traces of the existence of a strolling artist, named Tringlot, who was probably the man referred to in May's story. This Tringlot had been dead several years. Then again, inquiries made in Germany, revealed the fact that a certain M. Simpson was very well known in that country, where he had achieved great celebrity as a circus manager.

In presence of this information and the negative result of the scrutiny to which May had been subjected, the governor of the Depot abandoned his views and openly confessed that he had been mistaken. "The prisoner, May," he wrote to the magistrate, "is really and truly what he pretends to be. There can be no further doubt on the subject." This message, it may be added, was sent at Gevrol's instigation.

So thus it was that M. Segmuller and Lecoq alone remained of their opinion. This opinion was at least worthy of consideration, as they alone knew all the details of the investigation which had been conducted with such strict secrecy; and yet this fact was of little import. It is not merely unpleasant, but often extremely dangerous to struggle on against all the world, and unfortunately for truth and logic one man's opinion correct though it may be, is nothing in the balance of daily life against the faulty views of a thousand adversaries.

The "May affair" had soon become notorious among the members of the police-force; and whenever Lecoq appeared at the Prefecture, he had to brave his colleagues, sarcastic pleasantry. Nor did M. Segmuller escape scot free; for more than one fellow-magistrate meeting him on the stairs or in the corridor, inquired, with a smile, what he was doing with his Caspar-Hauser, his man in the Iron Mask, in a word, with his mysterious mountebank. When thus assailed, both M. Segmuller and Lecoq could scarcely restrain those movements of angry impatience, which come naturally to a person who feels certain he is in the right and yet can not prove it.

"Ah, me!" sometimes exclaimed the magistrate, "why did d'Escorval break his leg? Had it not been for that cursed mishap, he would have been obliged to endure all these perplexities, and I—I should be enjoying myself like other people."

"And I thought myself so shrewd!" murmured the young detective by his side.

Little by little, anxiety did its work. Magistrate and detective both lost their appetites and looked haggard; and yet the idea of yielding never once occurred to them. Although of very different natures, they were both determined to persevere in the task they had set themselves—that of solving this tantalizing enigma. Lecoq, indeed, had resolved to renounce all other claims upon his time, and to devote himself entirely to the study of the case. "Henceforth," he said to M. Segmuller, "I also will constitute myself a prisoner; and although the suspected murderer will be unable to see *me*, I shall not lose sight of *him*!"

It so happened that there was a loft between the cell occupied by May and the roof of the prison, a loft of such diminutive proportions that a man of average height could not stand upright in it. This loft had neither window nor skylight, and the gloom would have been intense, had not a few faint sunrays struggled through the interstices of some ill-adjusted tiles. In this unattractive garret Lecoq established himself one fine morning, just at the hour when May was taking his daily walk in the courtyard of the prison accompanied by a couple of keepers. Under these circumstances there was no fear of Lecoq's movements attracting the prisoner's notice or suspicion.

The garret had a paved floor, and first of all the young detective removed one of the stones with a pickaxe he had brought for the purpose. Beneath this stone he found a timber beam through which he next proceeded to bore a hole of funnel shape, large at the top and gradually dwindling until on piercing the ceiling of the cell it was no more than two-thirds of an inch in diameter. Prior to commencing his operations, Lecoq had visited the prisoner's quarters and had skilfully chosen the place of the projected aperture, so that the stains and graining of the beam would hide it from the view of any one below. He was yet at work when the governor of the Depot and his rival Gevrol appeared upon the threshold of the loft.

"So this is to be your observatory, Monsieur Lecoq!" remarked Gevrol, with a sneering laugh.

"Yes, sir."

"You will not be very comfortable here."

"I shall be less uncomfortable than you suppose, I have brought a large blanket with me, and I shall stretch myself out on the floor and manage to sleep here."

"So that, night and day, you will have your eye on the prisoner?"

"Yes, night and day."

"Without giving yourself time to eat or drink?" inquired Gevrol.

"Excuse me! Father Absinthe will bring me my meals, execute any errand I may have, and relieve at times if necessary."

The jealous General laughed; but his laugh, loud as it was, was yet a trifle constrained. "Well, I pity you," he said.

"Very possibly."

"Do you know what you will look like, with your eye glued to that hole?"

"Like what? Tell me, we needn't stand on ceremony,"

"Ah, well! you will look just like one of those silly naturalists who put all sorts of little insects under a magnifying glass, and spend their lives in watching them."

Lecoq had finished his work; and rose from his kneeling position. "You couldn't have found a better comparison, General," said he. "I owe my idea to those very naturalists you speak about so slightly. By dint of studying those little creatures—as you say—under

a microscope, these patient, gifted men discover the habits and instincts of the insect world. Very well then. What they can do with an insect, I will do with a man ! ”

“ Oh ho ! ” said the governor of the prison, considerably astonished.

“ Yes ; that’s my plan,” continued Lecoq. “ I want to learn this prisoner’s secret ; and I will do so. That I’ve sworn ; and success must be mine, for, however strong his courage may be, he will have his moments of weakness, and then I shall be present at them. I shall be present, if ever his will fails him, if believing himself alone he lets his mask fall, or forgets his part for an instant, if an indiscreet word escapes him in his sleep, if his despair elicits a groan, a gesture, or a look—I shall be there to take note of it.”

“ The tone of resolution with which the young detective spoke made a deep impression upon the governor’s mind. For an instant he was a believer in Lecoq’s theory ; and he was impressed by the strangeness of this conflict between a prisoner, determined to preserve the secret of his identity, and the agent for the prosecution, equally determined to wrest it from him. “ Upon my word, my boy, you are not wanting in courage and energy,” said he.

“ Misdirected as it may be,” growled Gevrol, who, although he spoke very slowly and deliberately, was in his secret soul by no means convinced of what he said. Faith is contagious, and he was troubled in spite of himself by Lecoq’s imperturbable assurance. What if this debutant in the profession should be right, and he, Gevrol, the oracle of the Prefecture, wrong ! What shame and ridicule would be his portion, then ! But once again he inwardly swore that this inexperienced youngster could be no match for an old veteran like himself, and then added aloud : “ The prefect of police must have more money than he knows what to do with, to pay two men for such a nonsensical job as this.”

Lecoq disdained to reply to this slighting remark. For more than a fortnight the General had profited of every opportunity to make himself as disagreeable as possible, and the young detective feared he would be unable to control his temper if the discussion continued. It would be better to remain silent, and to work and wait for success. To succeed would be revenge enough ! Moreover,

he was impatient to see these unwelcome visitors depart ; believing, perhaps, that Gevrol was quite capable of attracting the prisoner's attention by some unusual sound.

As soon as they went away, Lecoq hastily spread his blanket over the stones and stretched himself out upon it in such a position that he could alternately apply his eye and his ear to the aperture. In this position he had an admirable view of the cell below. He could see the door, the bed, the table, and the chair ; only the small space near the window, and the window itself, were beyond his range of observation. He had scarcely completed his survey, when he heard the bolts rattle : the prisoner was returning from his walk. He seemed in excellent spirits, and was just completing what was, undoubtedly, a very interesting story, since the keeper who accompanied him lingered for a moment to hear the finish. Lecoq was delighted with the success of his experiment. He could hear as easily as he could see. Each syllable reached his ear distinctly, and he had not lost a single word of the recital, which was amusing, though rather coarse.

The turnkey soon left the cell ; the bolts rattled once more, and the key grated in the lock. After walking once or twice across his cell, May took up his volume of "Beranger" and for an hour or more seemed completely engrossed in its contents. Finally, he threw himself down upon his bed. Here he remained until meal time in the evening, when he rose and ate with an excellent appetite. He next resumed the study of his book, and did not go to bed until the lights were extinguished.

Lecoq knew well enough that during the night his eyes would not serve him, but, he trusted that his ears might prove of use, hoping that some tell-tale word might escape the prisoner's lips during his restless slumber. In this expectation he was disappointed. May tossed to and fro upon his pallet ; he sighed, and one might have thought he was sobbing, but not a syllable escaped his lips. He remained in bed until very late the next morning ; but on hearing the bell sound the hour of breakfast, eleven o'clock, he sprang from his couch with a bound, and after capering about his cell for a few moments, began to sing, in a loud and cheerful voice, the old ditty :

"Diogene!
Sous ton manteau, libre et content,
Je ris, je bois, sans gene——"

The prisoner did not stop singing until a keeper entered his cell carrying his breakfast. The day now beginning differed in no respect from the one that had preceded it, neither did the night. The same might be said of the next day, and of those which followed. To sing, to eat, to sleep, to attend to his hands and nails—such was the life led by this so-called buffoon. His manner, which never varied, was that of a naturally cheerful man, terribly bored.

Such was the perfection of his acting, that, after six days and nights of constant surveillance, Lecoq had detected nothing decisive, nor even surprising. And yet he did not despair. He had noticed that every morning, while the employes of the prison were busy distributing the prisoner's food, May invariably began to sing the same ditty.

"Evidently this song is a signal," thought Lecoq. "What can be going on there by the window I can't see? I must know to-morrow."

Accordingly on the following morning he arranged that May should be taken on his walk at half-past ten o'clock, and he then insisted that the governor should accompany him to the prisoner's cell. That worthy functionary was not very well pleased with the change in the usual order of things. "What do you wish to show me?" he asked. "What is there so very curious to see?"

"Perhaps nothing," replied Lecoq, "but perhaps something of great importance."

Eleven o'clock sounding soon after, he began singing the prisoner's song, and he had scarcely finished the second line, when a bit of bread, no larger than a bullet, adroitly thrown through the window, dropped at his feet.

A thunderbolt falling in May's cell would not have terrified the governor as much as did this inoffensive projectile. He stood in silent dismay; his mouth wide open, his eyes starting from their sockets, as if he distrusted the evidence of his own senses. What a disgrace! An instant before he would have staked his life upon the inviolability of the secret cells; and now he beheld his prison dishonoured.

• A communication ! a communication ! ” he repeated, with a horrified air.

Quick as lightning, Lecoq picked up the missile. “ Ah,” murmured he, “ I guessed that this man was in communication with his friends.”

The young detective’s evident delight changed the governor’s stupor into fury. “ Ah ! my prisoners are writing ! ” he exclaimed, wild with passion. “ My warders are acting as postmen ! By my faith, this matter shall be looked into.”

So saying, he was about to rush to the door when Lecoq stopped him. “ What are you going to do, sir ? ” he asked.

“ I am going to call all the employes of this prison together, and inform them that there is a traitor amongst them, and that I must know who he is, as I wish to make an example of him. And if, in twenty-four hours from now, the culprit has not been discovered, every man connected with this prison shall be removed.”

Again he started to leave the room, and Lecoq, this time, had almost to use force to detain him. “ Be calm, sir ; be calm,” he entreated.

“ I *will* punish——”

“ Yes, yes—I understand that—but wait until you have regained your self-possession. It is quite possible that the guilty party may be one of the prisoners who assist in the distribution of food every morning.”

“ What does that matter ? ”

“ Excuse me, but it matters a great deal. If you noise this discovery abroad, we shall never discover the truth. The traitor will not be fool enough to confess his guilt. We must be silent and wait. We will keep a close watch and detect the culprit in the very act.”

These objections were so sensible that the governor yielded. “ So be it,” he sighed, “ I will try and be patient. But let me see the missive that was enclosed in this bit of bread.”

Lecoq could not consent to this proposal. “ I warned M. Ségmuller,” said he, “ that there would probably be something new this morning ; and he will be waiting for me in his office. We must only examine the letter in his presence ? ”

This remark was so correct that the governor assented ;

and they at once started for the Palais de Justice. On their way, Lecoq endeavored to convince his companion that it was wrong to deplore a circumstance which might be of incalculable benefit to the prosecution. "It was an illusion," said he, "to imagine that the governor of a prison could be more cunning than the prisoners intrusted to him. A prisoner is almost always a match in ingenuity for his custodians."

The young detective had not finished speaking when they reached the magistrate's office. Scarcely had Lecoq opened the door than M. Segmuller and his clerk rose from their seats. They both read important intelligence in our hero's troubled face. "What is it?" eagerly asked the magistrate. Lecoq's sole response was to lay the pellet of bread upon M. Segmuller's desk. In an instant, the magistrate had opened it, extracting from the centre a tiny slip of the thinnest tissue paper. This he unfolded, and smoothed upon the palm of his hand. As soon as he glanced at it, his brow contracted. "Ah! this note is written in cipher," he exclaimed, with a disappointed air.

"We must not lose patience," said Lecoq quietly. He took the slip of paper from the magistrate and read the numbers inscribed upon it. They ran as follows: "235, 15, 3, 8, 25, 2, 16, 208, 5, 360, 4, 36, 19, 7, 14, 118, 84, 23, 9, 40, 11, 99."

"And so we shall learn nothing from this note," murmured the governor.

"Why not," the smiling clerk ventured to remark. "There is no system of cipher which cannot be read with a little skill and patience; there are some people who make it their business."

"You are right," said Lecoq, approvingly. "And I, myself, once had the knack of it."

"What!" exclaimed the magistrate; "do you hope to find the key to this cipher?"

"With time, yes."

Lecoq was about to place the paper in his breast-pocket, when the magistrate begged him to examine it a little further. He did so; and after a while, his face suddenly brightened. Striking his forehead with his open palm, he cried: "I've found it!"

An exclamation of incredulous surprise simultaneously escaped the magistrate, the governor, and the clerk.

"At least I think so," added Lecoq, more cautiously. "If I am not mistaken the prisoner and his accomplice have adopted a very simple system called the double book-cipher. The correspondents first agree upon some particular book; and both obtain a copy of the same edition. When one desires to communicate with the other, he opens the book hap-hazard, and begins by writing the number of the page. Then he must find on the same page the words that will express his thoughts. If the first word he wishes to write is the twentieth on the page, he places number 20 after the number of the page; then he begins to count one, two, three, and so on, until he finds the next word he wishes to use. If this word happens to be the sixth, he writes the figure 6; and he continues so on till he has finished his letter. You see, now, how the correspondent who receives the note, must begin. He finds the page indicated, and then each figure represents a word."

"Nothing could be clearer," said the magistrate, approvingly.

"If this note," pursued Lecoq, "had been exchanged between two persons at liberty, it would be folly to attempt its translation. This simple system is the only one which has completely baffled inquisitive efforts, simply because there is no way of ascertaining the book agreed upon. But in this instance such is not the case; May is a prisoner, and he has only one book in his possession. 'The Songs of Beranger.' Let this book be sent for——"

The governor of the Depot was actually enthusiastic. "I will run and fetch it myself," he interrupted.

But Lecoq, with a gesture, detained him. "Above all, sir," said he, "take care that May doesn't discover his book has been tampered with. If he has returned from his promenade, make some excuse to have him sent out of his cell again; and don't allow him to return there while we are using his book."

"Oh, trust me!" replied the governor, hastily leaving the room.

Less than a quarter of an hour afterwards he returned, carrying in triumph a little volume in 32mo. With a trembling hand Lecoq turned to page 235, and began to count. The fifteenth word on the page was '*I*;' the third afterwards, '*have*;' the eighth following, '*told*;' the twenty-fifth, '*her*;' the second, '*your*;' the sixteenth, '*wishes*.' Hence, the

meaning of those six numbers was: "I have told her your wishes."

The three persons who had witnessed this display of shrewdness could not restrain their admiration. "Bravo! Lecoq," exclaimed the magistrate. "I will no longer bet a hundred to one on May," thought the smiling clerk.

But Lecoq was still busily engaged in deciphering the missive, and soon in a voice trembling with gratified vanity, he read the entire note aloud. It ran as follows: "I have told her your wishes; she submits. Our safety is assured; we are waiting your orders to act. Hope! Courage!"

XIX.

YET what a disappointment it produced, after the fever of anxiety and expectation that had seized hold of everybody present. This strange epistle furnished no clue whatever to the mystery; and the ray of hope that had sparkled for an instant in M. Segmuller's eyes speedily faded away. As for the versatile Goguet he returned with increased conviction to his former opinion, that the prisoner had the advantage over his accusers.

"How unfortunate," remarked the governor of the Depot, with a shade of sarcasm in his voice, "that so much trouble, and such marvellous penetration, should be wasted!"

"So you think, sir, that I have wasted my time!" rejoined Lecoq in a tone of angry banter, a scarlet flush mantling at the same time over his features. "Such is not my opinion. This scrap of paper undeniably proves that if any one has been mistaken as regards the prisoner's identity, it is certainly not I."

"Very well," was the reply. "M. Gevrol and myself may have been mistaken: no one is infallible. But have you learned anything more than you knew before? Have you made any progress?"

"Why, yes. Now that people know the prisoner is not what he pretends to be, instead of annoying and hampering me, perhaps they will assist us to discover who he really is."

Lecoq's tone, and his allusion to the difficulties he had encountered, cut the governor to the quick. The knowledge that the reproof was not altogether undeserved,

increased his resentment and determined him to bring this discussion with an inferior to an abrupt close. "You are right," said he, sarcastically. "This May must be a very great and illustrious personage. Only, my dear Monsieur Lecoq (for there is an only), do me the favour to explain how such an important personage could disappear, and the police not be advised of it? A man of rank, such as you suppose this prisoner to be, usually has a family, friends, relatives, proteges, and numerous connections; and yet not a single person has made any enquiry during the three weeks that this fellow May has been under my charge! Come, admit you never thought of that."

The governor had just advanced the only serious objection that could be found to the theory adopted by the prosecution. He was wrong however, in supposing that Lecoq had failed to foresee it; for it had never once been out of the young detective's mind; and he had racked his brain again and again to find some satisfactory explanation. At the present moment he would undoubtedly have made some angry retort to the governor's sneering criticism, as people are wont to do when their antagonists discover the weak spot in their armour, had not M. Segmuller opportunely intervened.

"All these recriminations do no good," he remarked, calmly; "we can make no progress while they continue. It would be much wiser to decide upon the course that is now to be pursued."

Thus reminded of the present situation of affairs, the young detective smiled, all his rancour was forgotten. "There is I think, but one course to pursue," he replied in a modest tone; "and I believe it will be successful by reason of its simplicity. We must substitute a communication of our own composition for this one. That will not be at all difficult, since I have the key to the cipher. I shall only be obliged to purchase a similar volume of Beranger's songs; and May, believing that he is addressing his accomplice, will reply in all sincerity,—will reveal everything perhaps——"

"Excuse me!" interrupted the governor, "but how will you obtain possession of his reply?"

"Ah! you ask me too much, I know the way in which

his letters have reached him. For the rest, I will watch and find a way—never fear!”

Goguet, the smiling clerk, could not conceal an approving grin. If he had happened to have ten francs in his pocket just then, he would have risked them all on Lecoq, without a moment's hesitation.

“First,” resumed the young detective, “I will replace this missive by one of my own composition. To-morrow, at breakfast-time, if the prisoner gives the signal, Father Absinthe shall throw the morsel of bread enclosing my note through the window, while I watch the effect, through the hole in the ceiling of the cell.”

Lecoq was so delighted with this plan of his, that he at once rang the bell, and when the magistrate's messenger appeared, he gave him half-a-franc and requested him to go at once and purchase some of the thinnest tissue paper. When this had been procured, Lecoq took his seat at the clerk's desk, and provided with the volume of Beranger's songs, began to compose a fresh note, copying as closely as possible the forms of the figures used by the unknown correspondent. The task did not occupy him more than ten minutes, for, fearing lest he might commit some blunder, he reproduced most of the words of the original letter, giving them however an entirely different meaning. When completed, his note read as follows: “I have told her your wishes; she does not submit. Our safety is threatened. We are awaiting your orders. I tremble.”

Having acquainted the magistrate with the purport of the note, Lecoq next rolled up the paper, and enclosing it in the fragment of bread, remarked: “To-morrow we shall learn something new.”

To-morrow! The twenty-four hours that separated the young man from the decisive moment, he looked forward to, seemed as it were a century; and he resorted to every possible expedient to hasten the passing of the time. At length, after giving precise instructions to Father Absinthe, he retired to his loft for the night. The hours seemed interminable and such was his nervous excitement that he found it quite impossible to sleep. On rising at daybreak he discovered that the prisoner was already awake. May was sitting on the foot of his bed, apparently plunged in thought. Suddenly he sprang to his feet and paced restlessly to and fro. He was evidently in an

unusually agitated frame of mind: for he gesticulated wildly, and at intervals repeated: "What misery! My God! what misery!"

"Ah! my fine fellow," thought Lecoq, "you are anxious about the daily letter you failed to receive yesterday. Patience, patience! One of my writing will soon arrive."

At last the young detective heard the stir usually preceding the distribution of food. People were running to and fro, sabots clicked noisily in the corridors, and the keepers could be heard engaged in loud conversation. By-and-bye, the prison bell began to toll. It was eleven o'clock, and soon afterwards the prisoner commenced to sing his favourite song:—

"Diogene——!
Sous ton manteau libre et content——"

Before he commenced the third line; the slight sound caused by the fragment of bread as it fell upon the stone floor, caused him to pause abruptly.

Lecoq, at the opening in the ceiling above, was holding his breath, and watching with both eyes. He did not miss one of the prisoner's movements—not so much as the quiver of an eyelid. May looked first at the window, and then all round the cell, as if it were impossible for him to explain the arrival of this projectile. It was not until some little time had elapsed that he decided to pick it up. He held it in the hollow of his hand, and examined it with apparent curiosity. His features expressed intense surprise, and any one would have sworn that he was innocent of all complicity. Soon a smile gathered round his lips, and after a slight shrug of the shoulders, which might be interpreted: "Am I a fool?" he hastily broke the pellet in half. The sight of the paper which it contained seemed to amaze him.

"What does all this mean?" wondered Lecoq.

The prisoner had opened the note, and was examining, with knitted brows, the figures which were apparently destitute of all meaning to him. Then, suddenly rushing to the door of his cell, and, hammering upon it with clenched fists, he cried at the top of his voice:—"Here! keeper! here!"

"What do you want?" shouted a turnkey, whose foot

steps Lecoq could hear hastening along the adjoining passage.

"I wish to speak to the magistrate."

"Very well. He shall be informed."

"Immediately, if you please. I have a revelation to make."

"He shall be sent for immediately."

Lecoq waited to hear no more. He tore down the narrow staircase leading from the loft, and rushed to the Palais de Justice to acquaint M. Segmuller with what had happened.

"What can all this mean?" he wondered, as he darted over the pavement. "Are we indeed approaching a denouement? This much is certain, the prisoner was not deceived by my note. He could only decipher it with the aid of his volume of 'Beranger;' and he did not even touch the book; plainly then he hasn't read the letter."

M. Segmuller was no less amazed than the young detective. They both hastened to the prison, followed by the smiling clerk, who was the magistrate's inevitable shadow. On their way they encountered the governor of the Depot, arriving all in a flutter having been greatly excited by that important word, "revelation." The worthy official undoubtedly wished to express an opinion; but the magistrate checked him by the abrupt remark. "I know all about it; and I am coming."

When they had reached the narrow corridor leading to the secret cells, Lecoq passed on in advance of the rest of the party. He said to himself that by stealing upon the prisoner unawares, he might possibly find him engaged in surreptitiously reading the note. In any case, he would have an opportunity to glance at the interior of the cell. May was seated beside the table, his head resting on his hands. At the grating of the bolt, drawn by the governor himself, the prisoner rose to his feet, smoothed his hair, and remained standing in a respectful attitude, apparently waiting for the visitors to address him.

"Did you send for me?" inquired the magistrate.

"Yes, sir."

"You have, I understand, some revelation to make to me."

"I have something of importance to tell you."

"Very well ! these gentlemen will retire."

M. Segmuller had already turned to Lecoq and the governor to request them to withdraw, when the prisoner motioned him not to do so.

"It is not necessary," said May, "I am, on the contrary, very well pleased to speak before these gentlemen."

"Speak, then."

May did not wait for the injunction to be repeated. Throwing his chest forward, and his head back as had been his wont throughout his examinations, whenever he wished to make an oratorical display, he began as follows ; "It shall be for you to say, gentlemen, whether I'm an honest man or not. The profession matters little. One may, perhaps, act as the clown of a traveling show, and yet be an honest man—a man of honour."

"Oh, spare us your reflections !"

"Very well, sir, that suits me exactly. To be brief, then, here is a little paper which was thrown into my cell a few minutes ago. There are some numbers on it which may mean something ; but I have examined them, and they are quite Greek to me."

He paused, and then handing Lecoq's missive to the magistrate, quietly added : "It was rolled up in a bit of bread."

This declaration was so unexpected, that it struck all the officials dumb with surprise, but the prisoner, without seeming to notice the effect he had produced, placidly continued : "I suppose the person who threw it, made a mistake in the window. I know very well that it's a mean piece of business to denounce a companion in prison. It's a cowardly act and one may get into trouble by doing so : still, a fellow must be prudent when he's charged with murder as I am, and with something very unpleasant perhaps in store for him."

A terribly significant gesture of severing the head from the body left no doubt whatever as to what May meant by the "something very unpleasant."

"And yet I am innocent," continued May, in a sorrowful, reproachful tone.

The magistrate had by this time, recovered the full possession of his faculties. Fixing his eyes upon the prisoner and concentrating in one magnetic glance all his power of

will, he slowly exclaimed: "You speak falsely! It was for you that this note was intended."

"For me! Then I must be the greatest of fools, or why should I have sent for you to show it you? For me? In that case, why didn't I keep it? Who knew, who could know that I had received it?"

These words were uttered with such a marvellous semblance of honesty, May's gaze was frank and open, his voice rang so true, and his reasoning was so specious, that all the governor's doubts returned.

"And what if I could prove that you are uttering a falsehood?" insisted M. Segmuller. "What if I could prove it—here and now?"

"You would have to lie to do so! Oh! pardon! Excuse me; I mean——"

But the magistrate was not in a frame of mind to stickle for nicety of expression. He motioned May to be silent; and, turning to Lecoq, exclaimed: "Show the prisoner that you discovered the key to his secret correspondence."

A sudden change passed over May's features. "Ah! it is this agent of police who says the letter was for me," he remarked in an altered tone. "The same agent who asserts that I am a grand seigneur." Then, looking disdainfully at Lecoq, he added: "Under these circumstances there's no hope for me. When the police are absolutely determined that a man shall be found guilty, they contrive to prove his guilt: everybody knows that. And when a prisoner receives no letters, an agent, who wishes to show that he is corresponding knows well enough how to write to him."

May's features wore such an expression of marked contempt that Lecoq could scarcely refrain from making an angry reply. He restrained his impulse, however, in obedience to a warning gesture from the magistrate, and taking from the table the volume of Beranger's songs, he endeavoured to prove to the prisoner that each number in the note which he had shown M. Segmuller corresponded with a word on the page indicated, and that these various words formed several intelligible phrases. This overpowering evidence did not seem to trouble May in the least. After expressing the same admiration for this novel system of correspondence that a child would show for a

new toy, he declared his belief that no one could equal the police in such machinations.

What could have been done in the face of such obstinacy? M. Segmuller did not even attempt to argue the point, but quietly retired, followed by his companions. Until they reached the governor's office, he did not utter a word; then, sinking down into an arm chair, he exclaimed: "We must confess ourselves beaten. This man will always remain what he is—an inexplicable enigma."

"But what is the meaning of the comedy he has just played? I do not understand it at all," remarked the governor.

"Why," replied Lecoq, "don't you see that he wished to persuade the magistrate that the first note, the one that fell into the cell while you and I were there yesterday, had been written by me in a mad desire to prove the truth of my theory at any cost? It was a hazardous project; but the importance of the result to be gained must have emboldened him to attempt it. Had he succeeded, I should have been disgraced; and he would have remained May—the stroller, without any further doubt as to his identity. But how could he know that I had discovered his secret correspondence, and that I was watching him from the loft overhead? That will probably never be explained."

The governor and the young detective exchanged glances of mutual distrust. "Eh! eh!" thought the former, "yes, indeed, that note which fell into the cell while I was there the other day might after all have been this crafty fellow's work. His Father Absinthe may have served him in the first instance just as he did subsequently."

While these reflections were flitting through the governor's mind, Lecoq suspiciously remarked to himself: "Who knows but what this fool of a governor confided everything to Gevrol? If he did so, the General, jealous as he is, would not have scrupled to play one such a damaging trick."

His thoughts had gone no further when Goguet, the smiling clerk, boldly broke the silence with the trite remark: "What a pity such a clever comedy didn't succeed."

These words startled the magistrate from his reverie. "Yes, a shameful farce," said he, "and one I would never have authorised, had I not been blinded by a mad long

ing to arrive at the truth. Such tricks only bring the sacred majesty of justice into contempt!"

At these bitter words, Lecoq turned white with anger. This was the second affront within an hour. The prisoner had first insulted him, and now it was the magistrate's turn. "I am defeated," thought he. "I must confess it. Fate is against me! Ah! if I had only succeeded!"

Disappointment alone had impelled M. Segmuller to utter these harsh words; they were both cruel and unjust, and the magistrate soon regretted them, and did everything in his power to drive them from Lecoq's recollection. They met every day after this unfortunate incident; and every morning, when the young detective came to give an account of his investigations, they had a long conference together. For Lecoq still continued his efforts; still laboured on with an obstinacy intensified by constant sneers; still pursued his investigations with that cold and determined zeal which keeps one's faculties on the alert for years.

The magistrate, however, was utterly discouraged. "We must abandon this attempt," said he. "All the means of detection have been exhausted. I give it up. The prisoner will go to the Assizes, to be acquitted or condemned under the name of May. I will trouble myself no more about the matter."

He said this, but the anxiety and disappointment caused by defeat, sneering criticism and perplexity, as to the best course to be pursued, so affected his health that he became really ill—so ill that he had to take to his bed.

He had been confined to his room for a week or so, when one morning Lecoq called to inquire after him.

"You see, my good fellow," quoth M. Segmuller, despondently, "that this mysterious murderer is fatal to us magistrates. Ah! he is too much for us; he will preserve the secret of his identity."

"Possibly," replied Lecoq. "At all events, there is now but one way left to discover his secret: we must allow him to escape—and then track him to his lair."

This expedient, although at first sight a very startling one, was not of Lecoq's own invention, nor was it by any means novel. At all times, in cases of necessity, have the police closed their eyes and opened the prison doors for the release of suspected criminals. And not a few, dazzled

by liberty and ignorant of being watched, have foolishly betrayed themselves. All prisoners are not like the Marquis de Lavalette, protected by royal connivance; and one might enumerate many individuals who have been released, only to be re-arrested after confessing their guilt to police spies or auxiliaries who have won their confidence.

Naturally, however, it is but seldom, and only in special cases, and as a last resort, that such a plan is adopted. Moreover, the authorities only consent to it when they hope to derive some important advantage, such as the capture of a whole band of criminals. For instance, the police perhaps arrest one of a band. Now, despite his criminal propensities the captured culprit often has a certain sense of honour—we all know that there is honour among thieves—which prompts him to refuse all information concerning his accomplices. In such a case what is to be done? Is he to be sent to the Assizes by himself, tried and convicted, while his comrades escape scot free? No: it is best to set him at liberty. The prison doors are opened, and he is told that he is free. But each after step he takes in the streets outside is dogged by skilful detectives; and soon, at the very moment when he is boasting of his good luck and audacity to the comrades he has rejoined, the whole gang find themselves caught in the snare.

M. Segmuller knew all this, and much more, and yet, on hearing Lecoq's proposition, he made an angry gesture and exclaimed: "Are you mad?"

"I think not, sir"

"At all events your scheme is a most foolish one!"

"Why so, sir? You will recollect the famous murder of the Chaboiseaus. The police soon succeeded in capturing the guilty parties; but a robbery of a hundred and sixty thousand francs in bank-notes and coin had been committed at the same time, and this large sum of money couldn't be found. The murderers obstinately refused to say where they had concealed it; for, of course, it would prove a fortune for them, if they ever escaped the gallows. In the meanwhile, however, the children of the victims were ruined. Now, M. Patrigent, the magistrate who investigated the affair, was the first to convince the authorities that it would be best to set one of the murderers at

liberty. His advice was followed ; and three days later the culprit was surprised unearthing the money from among a bed of mushrooms. Now, I believe that our prisoner—”

“Enough !” interrupted M. Segmuller. “I wish to hear no more on the matter. I have, it seems to me, forbidden you to broach the subject.”

The young detective hung his head with a hypocritical air of submission. But all the while he watched the magistrate out of the corner of his eye and noted his agitation. “I can afford to be silent,” he thought : “he will return to the subject of his own accord.”

And in fact M. Segmuller did return to it only a moment afterwards. “Suppose this man were released from prison,” said he, “what would you do ?”

“What would I do, sir ! I would follow him like grim death : I would not once let him out of my sight ; I would be his shadow.”

“And do you suppose he wouldn’t discover this surveillance ?”

“I should take my precautions.”

“But he would recognize you at a single glance.”

“No, sir, he wouldn’t for I should disguise myself. A detective who can’t equal the most skilful actor in the matter of make-up is no better than an ordinary policeman. I have only practised at it for a twelvemonth, but I can easily make myself look old or young, dark or light, or assume the manner of a man of the world, or of some frightful ruffian of the *barrieres*.”

“I wasn’t aware that you possessed this talent, *Monsieur Lecoq*.”

“Oh ! I’m very far from the perfection I hope to arrive at ; though I may venture to say that in three days from now I could call on you and talk with you for half-an-hour without being recognized.”

M. Segmuller made no rejoinder ; and it was evident to Lecoq that the magistrate had offered this objection rather in the hope of its being overruled, than with the wish to see it prevail.

“I think, my poor fellow,” he at length observed, “that you are strangely deceived. We have both been equally anxious to penetrate the mystery that enshrouds this strange man. We have both admired his wonderful acute-

ness—for his sagacity *is* wonderful ; so marvellous, indeed, that it exceeds the limits of imagination. Do you believe that a man of his penetration would betray himself like an ordinary prisoner? He will understand at once, if he is set at liberty, that his freedom is only given him so that we may surprise his secret."

"I don't deceive, myself, sir. May will guess the truth of course. I'm quite aware of that."

"Very well. Then, what would be the use of attempting what you propose?"

"I have come to this conclusion," replied Lecoq, "May will find himself strangely embarrassed, even when he's set free. He won't have a sou in his pocket; we know he has no trade, so what will he do to earn a living? He may struggle along for a while; but he won't be willing to suffer long. Man must have food and shelter, and when he finds himself without a roof over his head, without even a crust of bread to break, he will remember that he is rich. Won't he then try to recover possession of his property? Yes, certainly he will. He will try to obtain money, endeavour to communicate with his friends, and I shall wait till that moment arrives. Months may elapse, before, seeing no signs of my surveillance, he may venture on some decisive step; and then I will spring forward with a warrant for his arrest in my hand."

"And what if he should leave Paris? What if he should go abroad?"

"Oh, I will follow him. One of my aunts has left me a little land in the provinces worth about twelve thousand francs. I will sell it, and spend the last sou, if necessary, so long as I only have my revenge. This man has outwitted me as if I were a child, and I must have my turn."

"And what if he should slip through your fingers?"

Lecoq laughed like a man that was sure of himself. "Let him try," he exclaimed; "I will answer for him with my life."

"Your idea is not a bad one," said M. Segmuller, eventually. "But you must understand that law and justice will take no part in such intrigues. All I can promise you is my tacit approval. Go, therefore, to the Prefecture; see your superiors—"

With a really despairing gesture, the young man interrupted M. Segmuller. "What good would it do for *me*

to make such a proposition?" he exclaimed. "They would not only refuse my request, but they would dismiss me on the spot, if my name is not already erased from the roll."

"What, dismissed, after conducting this case so well?"

"Ah, sir, unfortunately every one is not of that opinion. Tongues have been wagging busily during your illness. Somehow or other, my enemies have heard of the last scene we had with May; and impudently declare that it was *I*, who imagined all the romantic details of this affair, being eager for advancement. They pretend that the only reasons to doubt the prisoner's identity are those I have invented myself. To hear them talk at the Depot, one might suppose that I invented the scene in the Widow Chupin's cabin; imagined the accomplices; suborned the witnesses; manufactured the articles of conviction; wrote the first note in cipher as well as the second; duped Father Absinthe, and mystified the governor."

"The deuce!" exclaimed M. Segmuller; "in that case, what do they think of me?"

The wily detective's face assumed an expression of intense embarrassment.

"Ah! sir," he replied with a great show of reluctance, "they pretend that you have allowed yourself to be deceived by me, and that you haven't weighed at their proper worth the proofs I've furnished."

A fleeting flush mantled over M. Segmuller's forehead. "In a word," said he, "they think I'm your dupe—and a fool besides."

The recollection of certain sarcastic smiles he had often detected on the faces of colleagues and subordinates alike, the memory of numerous covert allusions to Caspar Hauser, and the Man with the Iron Mask—allusions which had stung him to the quick—induced him to hesitate no longer.

"Very well! I will aid you, Monsieur Lecoq," he exclaimed. "I should like you to triumph over your enemies. I will get up at once and accompany you to the Palais de Justice. I will see the public prosecutor myself; I will speak to him, and plead your case for you."

Lecoq's joy was intense. Never, no never, had he dared to hope for such assistance. Ah! after this he would willingly go through fire on M. Segmuller's behalf.

And yet, despite his inward exultation, he had sufficient control over his feelings, to preserve a sober face. This victory must be concealed under penalty of forfeiting the benefits that might accrue from it. Certainly, the young detective had said nothing that was untrue; but there are different ways of presenting the truth, and he had, perhaps, exaggerated a trifle in order to excite the magistrate's rancour, and win his needful assistance.

"I suppose," remarked M. Segmuller, who was now quite calm again—no outward sign of wounded vanity being perceptible—"I suppose you have decided what stratagem must be employed to lull the prisoner's suspicions if he is permitted to escape."

"I must confess, I haven't given it a thought," replied Lecoq. "Besides, what good would any such stratagem do? He knows too well that he is the object of suspicion, not to remain on the alert. Still, there is one precaution which I believe absolutely necessary, indispensable indeed, if we wish to be successful."

"What precaution do you mean?" inquired the magistrate.

"Well, sir, I think an order should be given to have May transferred to another prison. It doesn't in the least matter which; you can select the one you please."

"Why should we do that?"

"Because, during the few days preceding his release, it is absolutely necessary he should hold no communication with his friends outside, and that he should be unable to warn his accomplice."

"Then you think he's badly guarded where he is?" inquired M. Segmuller with seeming amazement.

"No, sir, I did not say that. I am satisfied that since the affair of the cipher note the governor's vigilance has been unimpeachable. However, news from outside certainly reaches the suspected murderer at the Depot; we have had material evidence—full proof of that—and besides—"

The young detective paused in evident embarrassment. He plainly had some idea in his head to which he feared to give expression.

"And besides?" repeated the magistrate.

"Ah, well, sir! I will be perfectly frank with you. I find that Gevrol enjoys too much liberty at the Depot; he

is perfectly at home there, he comes and goes as he likes, and no one ever thinks of asking what he is doing, where he is going, or what he wants. No pass is necessary for his admission, and he can influence the governor just as he likes. Now, to tell the truth, I distrust Gevrol."

"Oh! Monsieur Lecoq!"

"Yes, I know very well that it's a bold accusation, but a man is not master of his presentiments: so there it is, I distrust Gevrol. Did the prisoner know that I was watching him from the loft, and that I had discovered his secret correspondence, was he ignorant of it? To my mind he evidently knew everything, as the last scene we had with him proves."

"I must say that's my own opinion," interrupted M. Segmuller.

"But how could he have known it?" resumed Lecoq. "He could not have discovered it by himself. I endured tortures for a whole week in the hope of solving the problem. But all my trouble was wasted. Now the supposition of Gevrol's intervention would explain everything."

M. Segmuller had turned pale with eager. "Ah! if I could really believe that!" he exclaimed; "if I were sure of it! Have you any proofs?"

The young man shook his head. "No," said he, "I haven't; but even if my hands were full of proofs I should not dare to show them. I should ruin my future. Ah, if ever I succeed, I must expect many such acts of treachery. There is hatred and rivalry in every profession. And, mark this, sir—I don't doubt Gevrol's honesty. If a hundred thousand francs were counted out upon the table and offered to him, he wouldn't even try to release a prisoner. But he would rob justice of a dozen criminals in the mere hope of injuring me, jealous as he is, and fearing lest I might obtain advancement."

How many things these simple words explained. Did they not give the key to many and many an enigma which justice has failed to solve, simply on account of the jealousy and rivalry that animate the detective force? Thus thought M. Segmuller, but he had no time for further reflection.

"That will do," said he, "go into the drawing-room for a moment. I will dress and join you there. I will send for a cab: for we must make haste if I am to see the public prosecutor to-day."

Less than quarter of an hour afterwards M. Segmuller, who usually spent considerable time over his toilette, was dressed and ready to start. He and Lecoq were just getting into the cab that had been summoned when a footman in a stylish livery was seen approaching.

"Ah! Jean," exclaimed the magistrate, "How's your master?"

"Improving, sir," was the reply. "He sent me to ask how you were, and to inquire how that affair was progressing?"

"There has been no change since I last wrote to him. Give him my compliments, and tell him that I am out again."

The servant bowed. Lecoq took a seat beside the magistrate and the cab started off.

"That fellow is one of D'Escorval's servants," remarked M. Segmuller. "He's richer than I, and can well afford to keep a footman."

"D'Escorval's," ejaculated Lecoq, "the magistrate who—"

"Precisely. He sent his man to me two or three days ago, to ascertain what we were doing with our mysterious May."

"Then M. d'Escorval is interested in the case?"

"Prodigiously! I conclude it is because he opened the prosecution, and because the case rightfully belongs to him. Perhaps he regrets that it passed out of his hands, and thinks that he could have managed the investigation better himself. We would have done better with it if we could. I would give a good deal to see him in my place."

But this change would not have been at all to Lecoq's taste. "Ah," thought he, "such a fellow as D'Escorval would never have shown me such confidence as M. Segmuller." He had, indeed, good reason to congratulate himself: for that very day M. Segmuller, who was a man of his word, a man who never rested until he had carried his plan into execution, actually induced the authorities to allow May to be set at liberty; and the details of this measure only remained to be decided upon. As regards the proposed transfer of the suspected murderer to another prison, this was immediately carried into effect, and May was removed to Mazas where Lecoq had no fear of Gevrol's interference.

That same afternoon, moreover, the Widow Chupin received her conditional release. There was no difficulty as regards her son, Polyte. He had, in the meantime, been brought before the correctional court on a charge of theft; and, to his great astonishment, had heard himself sentenced to thirteen months' imprisonment. After this, M. Segmuller had nothing to do but to wait, and this was the easier as the advent of the Easter holidays gave him an opportunity to seek a little rest and recreation with his family in the provinces.

On the day he returned to Paris—the last of the recess, and by chance a Sunday—he was sitting alone in his library when his cook came to tell him that there was a man in the vestibule who had been sent from a neighbouring register-office to take the place of a servant he had recently dismissed. The new comer was ushered into the magistrate's presence and proved to be a man of forty or thereabouts, very red in the face and with carrotty hair and whiskers. He was, moreover, strongly inclined to corpulence, and was clad in clumsy, ill-fitting garments. In a complacent tone, and with a strong Norman accent, he informed the magistrate that during the past twenty years he had been in the employment of various literary men, as well as of a physician, and notary; that he was familiar with the duties that would be required of him at the Palais de Justice, and that he knew how to dust papers without disarranging them. In short, he produced such a favourable impression, that although M. Segmuller reserved twenty-four hours in which to make further inquiries, he drew a twenty franc piece from his pocket on the spot and tendered it to the Norman valet as the first instalment of his wages.

But instead of pocketing the proffered coin, the man, with a sudden change of voice and attitude, burst into a hearty laugh, exclaiming: "Do you think, sir, that May will recognize me?"

"Monsieur Lecoq!" cried the astonished magistrate.

"The same, sir; and I have come to tell you that if you are ready to release May, all my arrangements are now completed."

XX.

WHEN one of the investigating magistrates of the Tribunal of the Seine wishes to examine a person confined in one of the Paris prisons, he sends by his messenger to the governor of that particular jail, a so-called "order of extraction," a concise imperative formula, which reads as follows; "The keeper of — prison will give into the custody of the bearer of this order, the prisoner know as —, in order that he may be brought before us in our cabinet at the Palais de Justice." No more, no less, a signature, a seal, and everybody is bound to obey.

But from the moment of receiving this order until the prisoner is again incarcerated, the governor of the prison is relieved of all responsibility. Whatever may happen, his hands are clear. Minute precautions are taken, however, so that a prisoner may not escape during his journey from the prison to the Palais. He is carefully locked up in a compartment of one of the lugubrious vehicles that may be often seen waiting on the Quai de l'Horloge, or in the court-yard of the Sainte-Chapelle. This van conveys him to the Palais, and while he is awaiting examination, he is immured in one of the cells of the gloomy jail, familiarly known as "la Souriciere" or the mouse-trap. On entering and leaving the van the prisoner is surrounded by guards: and on the road, in addition to the mounted troopers who always accompany these vehicles, there are prison warders or linesmen of the Gard de Paris installed in the passage between the compartments of the van and seated on the box with the driver. Hence, the boldest criminals ordinarily realize the impossibility of escaping from this ambulatory prison.

Indeed, statistics record only thirty attempts at escape in a period of ten years. Of these thirty attempts, twenty-five were ridiculous failures; four were discovered before their authors had conceived any serious hope of success: and only one man actually succeeded in alighting from the vehicle, and even he had not taken fifty steps before he was re-captured.

Lecoq was well acquainted with all these facts, and in preparing everything for May's escape, his only fear was lest the murderer might decline to profit of the opportunity.

Hence, it was necessary to offer every possible inducement for flight. The plan the young detective had eventually decided on consisted in sending an order to Mazas for May to be despatched to the Palais de Justice. He could be placed in one of the prison vans, and at the moment of starting the door of his compartment would not be perfectly secured. When the van reached the Palais de Justice and discharged its load of criminals at the door of the "mouse trap" May would purposely be forgotten and left in the vehicle, while the latter waited on the Quai de l'Horloge, until the hour of returning to Mazas. It was scarcely possible that the prisoner would fail to embrace this apparently favourable opportunity to make his escape.

Everything was, therefore, prepared and arranged according to Lecoq's directions, on the Monday following the close of the Easter holidays; the requisite "order of extraction" being entrusted to an intelligent man with the most minute instructions.

Now, although the van in which May would journey was not to be expected at the Palais de Justice before noon, it so happened that at nine o'clock that same morning a queer-looking "loafer" having the aspect of an over-grown, over-aged "gamin de Paris" might have been seen hanging about the Prefecture de Police. He wore a tattered black woollen blouse, and a pair of wide, ill-fitting trousers, fastened about his waist by a leather strap. His boots betrayed a familiar acquaintance with the puddles of the barrières, and his cap was shabby and dirty though, on the other hand, his necktie, a pretentious silk scarf of flaming hue, was evidently quite fresh from some haberdasher's shop. No doubt it was a present from his sweetheart. This uncomely being had the unhealthy complexion, hollow eyes, slouching mien, and straggling beard common to his tribe. His yellow hair, cut closely at the back of the head, as if to save the trouble of brushing, was long in front and at the sides; being plastered down over his forehead and advancing above his ears in extravagant corkscrew ringlets.

What with his attire, his affected jaunty step, his alternate raising of either shoulder, and his way of holding his cigarette and of ejecting a stream of saliva from between his teeth, Polyte Chupin, had he been at liberty, would

undoubtedly have proffered a paw, and greeted this *barrière* beauty as a "pal."

It was the 14th of April; the weather was lovely, and, on the horizon, the youthful foliage of the chestnut trees in the Tuileries gardens stood out against a bright blue sky. The "ethereal mildness" of "gentle Spring" seemed to have a positive charm for the tattered "loafer" who lazily loitered in the sunlight, dividing his attention between the passers-by and some men who were hauling sand from the banks of the Seine. Occasionally, however, he crossed the roadway, and, strange to say, exchanged a few remarks with a neatly dressed, long-bearded, gentleman, who wore gold rimmed spectacles over his nose, and drab silk gloves on his hands. This individual exhibited all the outward characteristics of eminent respectability, and seemed to take a remarkable interest in the contents of an optician's shop window.

Every now and then a policeman or an agent of the detective corps passed by on his way to the Prefecture, and the elderly gentleman or the "loafer" would at times run after these officials to ask for some trifling information. The person addressed replied and passed on; and then the "loafer" and the gentleman would join each other and laughingly exclaim: "Good!—there's another who doesn't recognize us."

And in truth the pair had just cause for exultation, good reason to be proud, for of some twelve or fifteen comrades they accosted, not one recognized the two detectives, Lecoq and Father Absinthe. For the loafer was none other than our hero, and the gentleman of such eminent respectability his faithful lieutenant.

"Ah!" quoth the latter with admiration, "I am not surprised they don't recognize me, since I can't recognize myself. No one but you, Monsieur Lecoq, could have so transformed me."

Unfortunately, for Lecoq's vanity, the good fellow spoke at a moment when the time for idle conversation had passed. The prison van was just crossing the bridge at a brisk trot.

"Attention!" exclaimed the young detective, "there comes our friend! Quick!—to your post; remember my directions, and keep your eyes open!"

Near them, on the quay, was a large pile of timber

behind which Father Absinthe immediately concealed himself, whilst Lecoq, seizing a spade that was lying idle, hurried to a little distance and began digging in the sand. They did well to make haste. The van came onwards and turned the corner. It passed the two detectives, and with a noisy clang rolled under the heavy arch leading to "la Souriciere." May was inside, as Lecoq assured himself on recognizing the keeper sitting beside the driver.

The van remained in the court-yard for more than a quarter of an hour. When it re-appeared, the driver had left his perch and the quay opposite the Palais de Justice, threw a covering over his horses, lighted his pipe, and quietly walked away. The moment for action was now swiftly approaching.

For a few minutes the anxiety of the two watchers amounted to actual agony; nothing stirred—nothing moved. But at last the door of the van was opened with infinite caution, and a pale, frightened face became visible. It was the face of May. The prisoner cast a rapid glance around him. No one was in sight. Then as swiftly and as stealthily as a cat, he sprang to the ground, noiselessly closed the door of the vehicle, and walked quietly towards the bridge.

Lecoq breathed again. He had been asking himself if some trifling circumstance could have been forgotten or neglected, thus disarranging all his plans. He had been wondering if this strange man would refuse the dangerous liberty which had been offered him. But he had been anxious without cause. May had fled; not thoughtlessly, but with premeditation.

From the moment when he was left alone, apparently forgotten, in the insecurely locked compartment, until he opened the door and glanced around him, sufficient time had elapsed for a man of his intellect and discernment to analyze and calculate all the chances of so grave a step. Hence, if he had stepped into the snare laid for him, it must be with a full knowledge of the risks he had to run. He and Lecoq were alone together, free in the streets of Paris, armed with mutual distrust, equally obliged to resort to strategy, and forced to hide from each other. Lecoq, it is true, had an auxiliary—Father Absinthe. But who could say that May would not be aided by his redoubtable accomplice? Hence, it was a veritable duel, the result

of which depended entirely upon the courage, skill, and coolness of the antagonists.

All these thoughts flashed through the young detective's brain with the quickness of lightning. Throwing down his spade, and running towards a sergeant de ville, who was just coming out of the Palais de Justice, he gave him a letter which was ready in his pocket. "Take this to M. Segmuller at once; it is a matter of importance," said he.

The policeman attempted to question this "loafer" who was in correspondence with the magistrates; but Lecoq had already darted off on the prisoner's trail.

May had covered but a short distance. He was sauntering along with his hands in his pockets; his head high in the air, his manner composed and full of assurance. Had he reflected that it would be dangerous to run while so near the prison from which he had just escaped? Or was he of opinion that as an opportunity of flight had been willingly furnished him, there was no danger of immediate re-arrest? This was a point Lecoq could not decide. At all events, May showed no signs of quickening his pace even after crossing the bridge; and it was with the same tranquil manner that he next crossed the Quai aux Fleurs and turned into the Rue de la Cite.

Nothing in his bearing or appearance proclaimed him to be an escaped prisoner. Since his trunk—that famous trunk which he pretended to have left at the Hotel de Mariembourg—had been returned to him, he had been well supplied with clothing: and he never failed, when summoned before the magistrate, to array himself in his best apparel. The garments he wore that day were black cloth and their cut combined with his manner gave him the appearance of a working man of the better class, taking a holiday.

His tread, hitherto firm and decided, suddenly became uncertain when, after crossing the Seine, he reached the Rue St. Jacques. He walked more slowly, frequently hesitated and glanced continually at the shops on either side of the way.

"Evidently he is seeking something," thought Lecoq: "but what?"

It was not long before he ascertained. Seeing a second-hand clothes' shop close by, May entered in evident haste.

Lecoq at once stationed himself under a gateway on the opposite side of the street, and pretended to be busily engaged lighting a cigarette. The criminal being momentarily out of sight, Father Absinthe thought he could approach without danger.

"Ah, well," said he, "here's our man changing his fine clothes for coarser garments. He will ask for the difference in money; and they will give it him. You told me this morning: 'May without a sou'—that's the trump card in our game!"

"Nonsense! Before we begin to lament, let us wait and see what happens. It is not likely that shop keeper will give him any money. He won't buy clothing of the first passer-by."

Father Absinthe withdrew to a little distance. He distrusted these reasons, but not Lecoq who gave them.

In the meanwhile, in his secret soul, Lecoq was cursing himself. Another blunder, thought he, another weapon left in the hands of the enemy. How was it that he, who fancied himself so shrewd, had not foreseen this emergency? Calmness of mind returned however a moment afterwards when he saw May emerge from the shop, attired as when he entered it. Luck had for once been in the young detective's favour.

May actually staggered when he stepped out on the pavement. His bitter disappointment could be read in his countenance, which disclosed the anguish of a drowning man who sees the frail plank which was his only hope of salvation snatched from his grasp by the ruthless waves.

What could have taken place? This Lecoq must know without a moment's delay. He gave a peculiar whistle, to warn his companion that he momentarily abandoned the pursuit to him; and having received a similar signal in response, he entered the shop. The owner was still standing behind the counter. Lecoq wasted no time in parleying. He merely showed his card to acquaint the man with his profession, and curtly asked; "What did the fellow want who was just in here?"

The shopkeeper seemed embarrassed. "It's a long story," he stammered.

"Then tell it!" said Lecoq, surprised at the man's hesitation.

"Oh, it's very simple. About twelve days ago, a man

entered my shop with a bundle under his arm. He claimed to be a countryman of mine."

"Are you an Alsatian?"

"Yes, sir. Well, I went with this man to the wine-shop at the corner, where he ordered a bottle of good wine; and while we drank together, he asked me if I would consent to keep the package he had with him until one of his cousins came to claim it. To prevent any mistake, this cousin was to say certain words—a countersign, as it were. I refused, shortly and decidedly, for the very month before I had got into trouble and had been charged with receiving stolen goods, all by obliging a person in this way. Well, you never saw a man so vexed and so surprised. What made me all the more determined in my refusal was that he offered me a good round sum in payment for my trouble. This only increased suspicion, and I persisted in my refusal.

The shopkeeper paused to take breath; but Lecoq was on fire with impatience. "And what then?" he insisted.

"Well he paid for the wine, and went away. I had forgotten all about the matter, until that man came in here just now, and after asking me if I hadn't a package for him, which had been left by one of his cousins, began to say some peculiar words—the countersign, no doubt. When I replied that I had nothing at all, he turned as white as his shirt; and I thought he was going to faint. All my suspicions came back to me. So when he afterwards proposed that I should buy his clothes, I told him I couldn't think of it."

All this was plain enough to Lecoq. "And this cousin who was here a fortnight ago, what was he like?" asked he.

"He was a tall, rather corpulent man, with a ruddy complexion, and white whiskers. Ah! I should recognize him in an instant!"

"The accomplice!" exclaimed Lecoq.

"What did you say?"

"Nothing that would interest you. Thank you. I am in a hurry. You will see me again: good morning."

Lecoq had not remained five minutes in the shop: and yet, when he emerged, May and Father Absinthe were nowhere in sight. Still, the young detective was not at all uneasy on that score. In making arrangements with his

old colleague for this pursuit Lecoq had foreseen such a situation and it had been agreed that if one of them were obliged to remain behind, the other who was closely following May, should from time to time make chalk marks on the walls, shutters and facings of the shops, so as to indicate the route, and enable his companion to rejoin him. Hence, in order to know which way to go, Lecoq had only to glance at the buildings around him. The task was neither long nor difficult, for on the front of the third shop beyond that of the second-hand clothes-dealer, a superb dash of the crayon instructed him to turn into the Rue Saint-Jacques.

On he rushed in that direction, his mind busy at work with the incident that had just occurred. What a terrible warning that old clothes-dealer's declaration had been ! Ah ! that mysterious accomplice was a man of foresight. He had even done his utmost to ensure his comrade's salvation in the event of his being allowed to escape. What did the package the shop-keeper had spoken of contain ? Clothes no doubt. Everything necessary for a complete disguise ; money, papers, a forged passport most likely.

While these thoughts were rushing through Lecoq's mind, he had reached the Rue Soufflot, where he paused for an instant to learn his way from the walls. This was the work of a second. A long chalk-mark on a watch-maker's shop pointed to the Boulevard Saint-Michel, whither the young detective at once directed his steps. "The accomplice," said he to himself, resuming his meditation, "didn't succeed with that old clothes-dealer ; but he isn't a man to be disheartened by one rebuff. He has certainly taken other measures. How shall I divine what they are in order to defeat them ?"

The supposed murderer had crossed the Boulevard Saint-Michel, and had then taken to the Rue Monsieur-le-Prince, as Father Absinthe's dashes of the crayon proclaimed with many eloquent flourishes.

"One circumstance re-assures me," the young detective murmured, "May's going to this shop, and his consternation on finding that there was nothing for him there. The accomplice had informed him of his plans, but had *not* been able to inform him of their failure. Hence, from this hour, the prisoner is left to his own resources. The chain that bound him to his accomplice is broken ; there is

no longer an understanding between them. Everything depends now upon keeping them apart. Yes, everything lies in that ! ”

Ah ! how Lecoq rejoiced that he had succeeded in having May transferred to another prison ; for he was convinced that the accomplice had warned May of the attempt he was going to make with the old clothes-dealer on the very evening before May's removal to Mazas. Hence, it had not been possible to acquaint him with the failure of this scheme or the substitution of another.

Still following the chalk-marks, Lecoq now reached the Odeon theatre. Here were fresh signs, and what was more, Father Absinthe could be perceived under the colonnade, standing in front of one of the book-stalls, and apparently engrossed in the contemplation of a print.

Assuming the nonchalant manner of the loafer whose garb he wore, Lecoq took his stand beside his colleague. “Where is he ? ” asked the young detective.

“There,” replied his companion, with a slight movement of his head in the direction of the steps.

The fugitive was, indeed, seated on one of the steps at the side of the theatre, his elbows resting on his knees and his face hidden in his hands, as if he felt the necessity of concealing the expression of his face from the passers-by. Undoubtedly, at that moment, he gave himself up for lost. Alone, in the midst of Paris, without a penny, what was to become of him ? He knew beyond the shadow of a doubt, that he was being watched ; that his steps were being dogged, that the first attempt he made to inform his accomplice of his whereabouts would cost him his secret—the secret which he plainly held as more precious than life itself, and which, by immense sacrifices, he had so far been able to preserve.

Having for some short time contemplated in silence this unfortunate man whom after all he could but esteem and admire, Lecoq turned to his old companion. “What did he do on the way ? ” he asked.

“He went into the shops of five dealers in second-hand clothing without success. Then he addressed a man who was passing with a lot of old rubbish on his shoulder : but the man wouldn't even answer him.”

Lecoq nodded his head thoughtfully. “The moral of this is, that there's a vast difference between theory and

practice," he remarked. "Here's a fellow, who has made some most discerning men believe that he's only a poor devil, a low buffoon. Well, now he's free; and this so-called Bohemian doesn't even know how to go to work to sell the clothes on his back. The comedian who could play his part so well on the stage, has disappeared; while the man remains—the man who has always been rich, and knows nothing of the vicissitudes of life."

The young detective suddenly ceased moralising, for May had risen from his seat. Lecoq was only ten yards distant, and could see that his face was pallid. His attitude expressed profound dejection and one could read his indecision in his eyes. Perhaps he was wondering if it would not be best to return and place himself again in the hands of his jailers, since he was without the resources upon which he had depended.

After a little, however, he shook off the torpor that had for a time overpowered him; his eyes brightened, and, with a gesture of defiance, he left the steps, crossed the open square and walked down the Rue de l'Ancienne-Comedie. He strode onward now with the brisk, determined step of a man who has a definite aim in view.

"Who knows where he is going now?" murmured Father Absinthe, as he trotted along by Lecoq's side.

"I do," replied the young detective. "And the proof is, that I am going to leave you, and run on in advance, to prepare for his reception. I may be mistaken, however, and as we must be prepared for any emergency, leave me the chalk-marks as you go along. If our man doesn't come to the Hotel de Mariembourg, as I think he will, I shall come back here to start in pursuit of you again."

Just then an empty cab chanced to be passing, and Lecoq hastily got into it telling the driver to take him to the Northern Railway station by the shortest route and as quickly as possible. As time was precious, he handed the cabman his fare while on the road, and then began to search his pocketbook among the various documents confided to him by M. Segmuller, for a particular paper he would now require.

Scarcely had the cab stopped at the Place de Roubaix than the young detective alighted and ran toward the Hotel de Mariembourg where, as on the occasion of his first visit, he found Madame Milner standing on a chair

in front of her bird cage, obstinately trying to teach her starling German, while the bird with equal obstinacy repeated: "Camille! where is Camille?"

On perceiving the individual of questionable mien, who had presumed to cross her threshold, the pretty widow did not deign to change her position.

"What do you want?" she asked in a curt, sharp voice.

"I am the nephew of a messenger at the Palais de Justice," replied Lecoq with an awkward bow, in perfect keeping with his attire. "On going to see my uncle this morning, I found him laid up with rheumatism; and he asked me to bring you this paper in his stead. It is a summons for you to appear at once before the investigating magistrate."

This reply induced Madame Milner to abandon her perch. "Very well," she replied after glancing at the summons; "give me time to throw a shawl over my shoulder and I'll start."

Lecoq withdrew with another awkward bow; but he had not reached the street before a significant grimace betrayed his inward satisfaction. She had duped him once, and now he had repaid her. On looking round him he perceived a half built house at the corner of the Rue St. Quentin, and being momentarily in want of a hiding place he concluded that he had best conceal himself there. The pretty widow had only asked for sufficient time to slip on a shawl before starting; but then it so happened that she was rather particular as to her personal appearance—and such a plump attractive little body as herself, having an eye perhaps to renewed wedlock, could not possibly be expected to tie her bonnet strings in less than a quarter of an hour. Hence, Lecoq's sojourn behind the scaffolding of the half built house, proved rather longer than he had expected, and at the thought that May might arrive at any moment he fairly trembled with anxiety. How much was he in advance of the fugitive? Half-an-hour, perhaps! And he had accomplished only half his task.

At last, however, the coquettish landlady made her appearance as radiant as a spring morning. She probably wished to make up for the time she had spent over her toilet, for as she turned the corner she began to run. Lecoq waited till she was out of sight, and then bounding

from his place of concealment, he burst into the *Hotel de Mariembourg* like a bomb-shell.

Fritz, the Bavarian lad, must have been warned that the house was to be left in his sole charge for some hours ; for having comfortably installed himself in his mistress's own particular arm-chair, with his legs resting on another one, he had already commenced to fall asleep.

"Wake up !" shouted Lecoq : "wake up !"

At the sound of this voice, which rang like a trumpet blast, Fritz sprang to his feet frightened half out of his wits.

"You see that I am an agent of the Prefecture of Police," said the visitor, showing his card. "Now, if you wish to avoid all sorts of disagreeable things, the least of which will be a sojourn in prison, you must obey me."

The boy trembled in every limb. "Yes mein Herr—Monsieur, I mean—I will obey you," he stammered. "But what am I to do ?"

"Oh very little. A man is coming here in a moment you will know him by his black clothes, and his long beard. You must answer him word for word, as I tell you. And remember, if you make any mistake, you will suffer for it."

"You may rely upon me, sir," replied Fritz. "I have an excellent memory."

The prospect of imprisonment had terrified him into abject submission. He spoke the truth ; he would have been willing to say or do anything just then. Lecoq profited of this disposition ; and then, clearly and concisely gave the lad his instructions. "And now," added he, "I must see and hear you. Where can I hide myself ?"

Fritz pointed to a glass door. "In the dark room there, sir. By leaving the door ajar you can hear ; and you can see everything through the glass."

Without another word Lecoq darted into the room in question. Not a moment too soon, however, for the spring-bell of the outer door announced the arrival of a visitor. It was May. "I wish to speak to the landlady," he said.

"What landlady ?" replied the lad.

"The person who received me when I came here six weeks ago—"

"Oh, I understand," interrupted Fritz ; "it's Madame Milner you want to see ; but you have come too late ; she

sold the house about a month ago, and has gone back to Alsace."

May stamped his foot and uttered a terrible oath. "I have come to claim something from her," he insisted.

"Do you want me to call her successor?"

Concealed behind the glass door, Lecoq could not help admiring Fritz, who was uttering these glaring falsehoods with that air of perfect candour which gives the Germans such a vast advantage over the Latin races, who seem to be lying even when they are telling the truth.

"Her successor would order me off," exclaimed May. "I came to reclaim the money I paid for a room I never occupied."

"Such money is never refunded."

May uttered some incoherent threat, in which such words as "downright robbery" and "justice" could be distinguished, and then abruptly walked back into the street, slamming the door behind him.

"Well! did I answer properly?" asked Fritz triumphantly, as Lecoq emerged from his hiding place.

"Yes, perfectly," replied the detective. And then pushing aside the boy, who was standing in his way, he dashed after May.

A vague fear almost suffocated him. It had struck him that the fugitive had not been either surprised or deeply affected by the news he had heard. He had come to the hotel depending upon Madame Milner's assistance and the news of this woman's departure would naturally have alarmed him, for was she not the mysterious accomplice's confidential friend? Had May then guessed the trick that had been played upon him? And if so, how? Lecoq's good sense told him plainly, that the fugitive must have been put on his guard and, on rejoining Father Absinthe, he immediately exclaimed, "May spoke to some one on his way to the hotel."

"Why, how could you know that?" exclaimed the worthy man, greatly astonished.

"Ah! I was sure of it!"

"Who did ne speak to?"

"To a very pretty woman, upon my word!—fair and plump as a partridge!"

"Ah! fate is against us!" exclaimed Lecoq with an oath. "I run on in advance to Madame Milner's house, so that

May shan't see her. I invent an excuse to send her out of the hotel, and yet they meet each other."

Father Absinthe gave a despairing gesture. "Ah! if I had known!" he murmured; "but you did not tell me to prevent May from speaking to the passers-by."

"Never mind, my old friend," said Lecoq, consolingly; "it couldn't have been helped."

While this conversation was going on, the fugitive had reached the Faubourg Montmartre, and his pursuers were obliged to hasten forward and get closer to their man so that they might not lose him in the crowd.

"Now," resumed Lecoq when they had overtaken him, "give me the particulars. Where did they meet?"

"In the Rue-Saint-Quentin."

"Which saw the other first?"

"May."

"What did the woman say? Did you hear any cry of surprise?"

"I heard nothing, for I was quite fifty yards off; but by the woman's manner, I could see she was stupefied."

Ah! if Lecoq could have witnessed the scene, what valuable deductions he might have drawn from it. "Did they talk for a long time?" he asked.

"For less than a quarter of an hour."

"Do you know whether Madame Milner gave May money or not?"

"I can't say. They gesticulated like mad—so violently, indeed, that I thought they were quarreling."

"They knew they were being watched, and were endeavouring to divert suspicion."

"If they would only arrest this woman and question her," suggested Father Absinthe.

"What good would it do? Hasn't M. Segmuller examined and cross-examined her a dozen times without drawing anything from her! Ah! she's a cunning one. She would declare that May met her and insisted that she should refund the ten francs he paid her for his room. We must do our best, however. If the accomplice has not been warned already, he will soon be told; so we must try to keep the two men apart. What ruse they will employ, I can't divine. But I know that it will be nothing hackneyed."

Lecoq's presumptions made Father Absinthe nervous.

"The surest way, perhaps," ventured the latter, "would be to lock him up again!"

"No!" replied the young detective. "I want his secret and I'll have it. What will be said of us, if we two allow this man to escape us? He can't be visible and invisible by turns, like the devil. We'll see what he is going to do now that he's got some money and a plan—for he has both at the present moment. I would stake my right hand upon it."

At that same instant, as if May intended to convince Lecoq of the truth of his suspicion, he entered a tobacconist's shop, and emerged an instant afterwards, with a cigar in his mouth.

XXI.

So the landlady of the Hotel de Mariembourg had given May money. There could be no further doubt on that point after the purchase of this cigar. But had they agreed upon any plan? Had they had sufficient time to decide on the method that May was to employ with the view of baffling his pursuit?

It would seem so, since the fugitive's manner had now changed in more respects than one. If hitherto he had seemed to care little for the danger of pursuit and capture at present he was evidently uneasy and agitated. After walking so long in the full sunlight, with his head high in the air, he now slunk along in the shadow of the houses, hiding himself as much as possible.

"It is evident that his fears have increased in proportion with his hopes," said Lecoq to his companion. "He was quite unnerved when we saw him at the Odeon and the merest trifle would have decided him to surrender; now, however, he thinks he has a chance to escape with his secret."

The fugitive was following the boulevards, but suddenly he turned into a side street and made his way toward the Temple, where, soon afterwards, Father Absinthe and Lecoq found him conversing with one of those importunate dealers in cast off garments who consider every passer-by their lawful prey. The vendor and May were evidently debating a question of price; but the latter was plainly no skilful bargainer, for with a somewhat dis-

appointed air, he soon gave up the discussion and entered the shop.

"Ah, so now he has some coin he has determined on a costume," remarked Lecoq. "Isn't that always an escaped prisoner's first impulse?"

Soon afterward May emerged into the street. His appearance was decidedly changed; for he wore a pair of dark blue linen trousers, of the type French "navvies" habitually affect, and a loosely fitting coat of rough woollen material. A gay silk kerchief was knotted about his throat; and a black silk cap was set on one side of his head. Thus attired, he was scarcely more prepossessing in appearance than Lecoq, and one would have hesitated before deciding which of the two it would be preferable to meet at night on a deserted highway.

May seemed very well pleased with his transformation, and was evidently more at ease in his new attire. On leaving the shop, however, he glanced suspiciously around him, as if to ascertain which of the passers-by were watching his movements. He had not parted with his broadcloth suit, but was carrying it under his arm, wrapped up in a handkerchief. The only thing he had left behind him was his tall chimney-pot hat.

Lecoq would have liked to enter the shop, and make some inquiries; but he felt that it would be imprudent to do so, for May had settled his cap on his head with a gesture that left no doubt as to his intentions. A second later he turned into the Rue du Temple, and now the chase began in earnest; for the fugitive proved as swift and agile as a stag, and it was no small task to keep him well in sight. He had no doubt lived in England and Germany, since he spoke the language of these countries like a native; but one thing was certain—he knew Paris as thoroughly as the most expert Parisian.

This was shown by the way in which he dashed into the Rue des Gravelliers, and by the precision of his course through the many winding streets that lie between the Rue du Temple and the Rue Beaubourg. He seemed to know this quarter of the capital by heart; as well, indeed, as if he had spent half his life there. He knew all the wine-shops communicating with two streets—all the by-ways, passages, and tortuous alleys. Twice he almost escaped his pursuers; and once his salvation hung upon a thread.

If he had remained in an obscure corner, where he was completely hidden, only an instant longer, the two detectives would have passed him by and his safety would have been assured.

The pursuit presented immense difficulties. Night was coming on, and with it that light fog which almost invariably accompanies a spring sun-set. Soon the street-lamps glimmered luridly in the mist, and then it required a keen eyesight indeed to see even for a moderate distance. And to add to this drawback, the streets were now thronged with workmen returning home after their daily toil, and with housewives intent on purchasing provisions for the evening meal; while round about each dwelling there congregated its numerous denizens swarming like bees around a hive. May, moreover, took advantage of every opportunity to mislead the persons who might be following him. Groups collected around some cheap-jack's stall, street accidents, a block of vehicles—everything was utilized by him with such marvellous presence of mind that he often glided through the crowd without leaving any sign of his passage.

At last he left the neighbourhood of the Rue des Gravelliers and made for a broader street. Reaching the Boulevard de Sebastopol, he turned to the left, and took a fresh start. He darted on with marvellous rapidity with his elbows pressed close to his body—husbanding his breath, and timing his steps with the precision of a dancing master. Never pausing, and without once turning his head, he ever hurried on. And it was at the same regular but rapid pace that he covered the Boulevard de Sebastopol, crossed the Place du Chatelet, and proceeded to mount the Boulevard Saint-Michel.

Here he suddenly halted before a cab-stand. He spoke to one of the drivers opened the door of his vehicle and jumped in. The cab started off at a rapid pace. But May was not inside. He had merely passed through the vehicle getting out at the other door, and just as the driver was departing for an imaginary destination May slipped into an adjacent cab which left the stand at a gallop. Perhaps, after so many ruses, after such formidable efforts after this last stratagem—perhaps May believed that he was free.

He was mistaken. Behind the cab which bore him on-

ward, and whilst he leant back against the cushions to rest, a man was running; and this man was Lecoq. Poor Father Absinthe had fallen by the way. In front of the Palais de Justice he paused, exhausted and breathless, and Lecoq had little hope of seeing him again, since he he had all he could do to keep his man in sight, without stopping to make the chalk-marks agreed upon.

May had instructed his driver to take him to the Place d'Italie: requesting him, moreover, to stop exactly in the middle of the square. This was about a hundred paces from the police-station in which he had been temporarily confined with the Widow Chupin. When the vehicle halted he sprang to the ground, and cast a rapid glance around him, as if looking for some dreaded shadow. He could see nothing; however, for although surprised by the sudden stoppage Lecoq had yet had time to fling himself flat on his stomach under the body of the cab regardless of all danger of being crushed by the wheels. May was apparently re-assured. He paid the cabman and then retraced his course towards the Rue Mouffetard.

With a bound, Lecoq was on his feet again, and started after the fugitive as eagerly as a ravenous dog might follow a bone. He had reached the shadow cast by the large trees in the outer boulevards, when a faint whistle resounded in his ears. "Father Absinthe!" he exclaimed, in a tone of delighted surprise.

"The same," replied the old detective, "and quite rested, thanks to a passing carman who picked me up and brought me here——"

"Oh, enough!" interrupted Lecoq. "Let us keep our eyes open."

May was now walking quite leisurely. He stopped first before one and then before another of the numerous wine-shops and eating houses that abound in this neighbourhood. He was apparently looking for someone or something, which of the two Lecoq could not of course divine. However, after peering through the glass doors of three of these establishments and then turning away, the fugitive at last entered the fourth. The two detectives, who were enabled to obtain a good view of the shop inside, saw the supposed murderer cross the room and seat himself at a table, where a man of unusually stalwart-build, ruddy-faced and grey-whiskered, was already seated.

"The accomplice!" murmured Father Absinthe.

Was this really the redoubtable accomplice? Under other circumstances Lecoq would have hesitated to place dependence on a vague similarity in personal appearance; but here probabilities were so strongly in favour of Father Absinthe's assertion that the young detective at once admitted its truth. Was not this meeting the logical sequence of May and Madame Milner's chance interview a few hours before?

"May," thought Lecoq, "began by taking all the money Madame Miller had about her; and then instructed her to tell his accomplice to come and wait for him in some cheap restaurant near here. If he hesitated and looked inside the different establishments, it was only because he hadn't been able to specify any particular one. Now, if they don't throw aside the mask, it will be because May is not sure he has eluded pursuit, and because the accomplice fears that Madame Milner may have been followed."

The accomplice, if this new personage was really the accomplice, had resorted to a disguise not unlike that which May and Lecoq had both adopted. He wore a dirty blue blouse, and a hideous old slouch hat, which was well-nigh in tatters. He had, in fact, rather exaggerated his make-up, for his sinister physiognomy attracted especial attention even beside the depraved and ferocious faces of the other customers in the shop. For this low eating house was a regular den of thieves and cut-throats. Among those present, there were not four workmen really worthy of that name. The others occupied in eating and drinking there, were all more or less familiar with prison life. The least to be dreaded were the *barriere* loafers easily recognized by their glazed caps and their loosely-knotted neckerchiefs. The majority of the company appeared to consist of this class.

And yet May, that man who was so strongly suspected of belonging to the highest social sphere, seemed to be perfectly at home. He called for the regular "ordinary" and a "chopine" of wine, and then, after gulping down his soup, bolted great pieces of beef, pausing every now and then to wipe his mouth on the back of his sleeve. But was he conversing with his neighbour? This it was impossible to discern through the glass door, all obscured by smoke and steam.

"I must go in," said Lecoq, resolutely. "I must get a place near them, and listen."

"Don't think of such a thing," said Father Absinthe. "What if they recognized you!"

"They won't recognize me."

"If they do, they'll kill you."

Lecoq made a careless gesture.

"I certainly think that they wouldn't hesitate to rid themselves of me at any cost. But, nonsense! A detective who is afraid to risk his life is no better than a low spy. Why! you never saw even Gevrol flinch."

Perhaps Father Absinthe had wished to ascertain if his companion's courage was equal to his shrewdness and sagacity. If such were the case he was satisfied on this score now.

"You, my friend, will remain here to follow them if they leave hurriedly," resumed Lecoq, who in the meanwhile had already turned the handle of the door. Entering with a careless air and taking a seat at a table near that occupied by the fugitive and the man in the slouched hat, he called for a plate of meat and a chopine of wine in a guttural voice.

The fugitive and the ruffian opposite him *were* talking, but like strangers who had met by chance, and not at all after the fashion of friends who have met at a rendezvous. They spoke in the jargon of their pretended rank in life, not that puerile slang met with in romances descriptive of low life, but that obscene vulgar dialect which it is impossible to render, so changeable and diverse is the signification of its words.

"What wonderful actors!" thought Lecoq; "what perfection! what method! How I should be deceived if I were not absolutely certain!"

For the moment the man in the slouch hat was giving a detailed account of the different prisons in France. He described the governors of the principal houses of detention; explained the divergencies of discipline in different establishments; and recounted that the food at Poissy was ten times better than that at Fontevrault.

Lecoq, having finished his repast, ordered a small glass of brandy, and, leaning his back against the wall and closing his eyes, pretended to fall asleep. His ears were

wide open however, and he carefully listened to the conversation.

Soon May began talking in his turn ; and he narrated his story exactly as he had related it to the magistrate, from the murder up to his escape, without forgetting to mention the suspicions attached to his identity—suspicions which had afforded him great amusement, he said. He added that he would be perfectly happy if he had money enough to take him back to Germany ; but unfortunately he only had a few sous and didn't know where or how to procure any more. He had not even succeeded in selling some clothing which belonged to him, and which he had with him in a bundle.

At these words the man in the tattered felt hat declared that he had too good a heart to leave a comrade in such embarrassment. He knew, in the very same street, an obliging dealer in such articles, and he offered to take May to his place at once. May's only response was to rise, saying, "Let us start." And they did start, with Lecoq still at their heels.

They walked rapidly on until passing the Rue Fer-a-Moulin when they turned into a narrow dimly-lighted alley, and entered a dingy dwelling.

"Run and ask the concierge if there are not two doors by which any one can leave this house," said Lecoq, addressing Father Absinthe.

The latter instantly obeyed. He learnt, however, that the house had only one street door, and accordingly the two detectives waited. "We are discovered!" murmured Lecoq. "I am sure of it. May must have recognized me, or the boy at the Hotel de Mariembourg has described me to the accomplice."

Father Absinthe made no response, for just then the two men came out of the house. May was jingling some coins in his hand, and seemed to be in a very bad temper. "What infernal rascals these receivers are!" he grumbled.

However, although he had only received a small sum for his clothing, he probably felt that his companion's kindness deserved some reward ; for immediately afterwards he proposed they should take a drink together, and with that object in view they entered a wine-shop close by. They remained here for more than an hour, drinking

together ; and only left this establishment to enter one a hundred paces distant. Turned out by the landlord, who was anxious to shut up, the two friends now took refuge in the next one they found open. Here again they were soon turned out and then they hurried to another boozing-den—and yet again to a fifth. And so, after drinking innumerable bottles of wine, they contrived to reach the Place Saint-Michel, at about one o'clock in the morning. Here, however, they found nothing to drink ; for all the wine-shops were closed.

The two men then held a consultation together, and, after a short discussion, they walked arm-in-arm towards the Faubourg Saint-Germain, like a pair of friends. The liquor they had imbibed was seemingly producing its effect, for they often staggered in their walk, and talked not merely loudly but both at the same time. In spite of the danger, Lecoq advanced near enough to catch some fragments of their conversation ; and the words “ a good stroke,” and “ money enough to satisfy one,” reached his ears.

Father Absinthe's confidence wavered. “ All this will end badly,” he murmured.

“ Don't be alarmed,” replied his friend. “ I frankly confess that I don't understand the manœuvres of these wily confederates, but what does that matter after all ; now the two men are together, I feel sure of success—sure. If one runs away, the other will remain, and Gevrol shall soon see which is right, he or I.”

Meanwhile the two drunkards had slackened their pace. By the manner in which they examined the magnificent mansions of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, one might have suspected them of the very worst intentions. In the Rue de Varrennes, at only a few steps from the Rue de la Chaise, they suddenly paused before a wall of moderate height surrounding an immense garden. The man in the slouch hat now did the talking, and explained to May—as the detectives could tell by his gestures—that the mansion to which the garden belonged had its front entrance in the Rue de Grenelle.

“ Bah !” growled Lecoq, “ how much further will they carry this nonsense ? ”

They carried it farther than the young detective had ever imagined. May suddenly sprung on to his compan-

ion's shoulders, and raised himself to a level with the summit of the wall. An instant afterwards a heavy thud might have been heard. He had let himself drop into the garden. The man in the slouch hat remained in the street to watch.

The enigmatical fugitive had accomplished this strange, inconceivable design so swiftly that Lecoq had neither the time nor the desire to oppose him. His amazement at this unexpected misfortune was so great that for an instant he could neither think nor move. But he quickly regained his self-possession, and at once decided what was to be done. With a sure eye he measured the distance separating him from May's accomplice, and with three bounds he was upon him. The man in the slouched hat attempted to shout, but an iron hand stifled the cry in his throat. He tried to escape, and to beat off his assailant, but a vigorous kick stretched him on the ground as if he had been a child. Before he had time to think of further resistance he was bound, gagged, and carried, half-suffocated, to the corner of the Rue de la Chaise. No sound had been heard; not a word, not an ejaculation, not even a noise of scuffling—nothing. Any suspicious sound might have reached May, on the other side of the wall, and warned him of what was going on.

"How strange," murmured Father Absinthe, too much amazed to lend a helping hand to his younger colleague. "How strange! Who would have supposed—"

"Enough! enough!" interrupted Lecoq, in that harsh, imperious voice, which imminent peril always gives to energetic men. "Enough!—we will talk to-morrow. I must run away for a minute, and you will remain here. If May shows himself, capture him; don't allow him to escape."

"I understand; but what is to be done with the man who is lying there?"

"Leave him where he is. I have bound him securely, so there is nothing to fear. When the night-police pass, we will give him into charge—"

He paused and listened. A short way down the street, heavy, measured footsteps could be heard approaching.

"There they come," said Father Absinthe.

"Ah! I dared not hope it! I shall have a good chance now."

At the same moment, two sergeants de ville, whose at-

tention had been attracted by this group at the street corner, hastened towards them. In a few words, Lecoq explained the situation, and it was decided that one of the sergeants should take the accomplice to the station-house, while the other remained with Father Absinthe to cut off May's retreat.

"And now," said Lecoq, "I will run round to the Rue de Grenelle and give the alarm. To whose house does this garden belong?"

"What!" replied one of the sergeants in surprise, "don't you know the gardens of the Duke de Sairmeuse, the famous duke who is a millionaire ten times over, and who was formally the friend—"

"Ah yes, I know, I know!" said Lecoq.

"The thief," resumed the sergeant, "walked into a pretty trap when he got over that wall. There was a reception at the mansion this evening as there is every Monday and every one in the house is still up. The guests are only just leaving for there were five or six carriages still at the door as we passed by."

Lecoq darted off extremely troubled by what he had just heard. It now seemed to him, that if May had got into this garden, it was not for the purpose of committing a robbery, but in the hope of throwing his pursuers off the track, and making his escape by way of the Rue de Grenelle, which he hoped to do unnoticed, in the bustle and confusion attending the departure of the guests.

On reaching the Hotel de Sairmeuse, a princely dwelling the long facade of which was brilliantly illuminated, Lecoq found a last carriage just coming from the court-yard, while several footmen were extinguishing the lights, and an imposing "Suisse," dazzling to behold in his gorgeous livery, prepared to close the heavy double doors of the grand entrance.

The young detective advanced towards this important personage, "Is this the Hotel de Sairmeuse?" he inquired.

The Suisse suspended his work to survey the audacious vagabond who ventured to question him and then in a harsh voice replied—"I advise you to pass on. I want none of your jesting."

Lecoq had forgotten that he was clad as a *barriere loafer*. "Ah," he rejoined, "I'm not what I seem to be.

I'm an agent of the secret service ; by name Lecoq. Here is my card, and I came to tell you that an escaped criminal has just scaled the garden wall in the rear of the Hotel de Sairmeuse."

"A crim-in-al?"

The young detective thought a little exaggeration could do no harm, and might perhaps ensure him more ready aid. "Yes," he replied ; "and one of the most dangerous kind—a murderer who has the blood of three victims already on his hands. We have just arrested his accomplice, who helped him over the wall."

The flunkey's ruby nose paled perceptibly. "I will summon the servants," he faltered, and suiting the action to the word, he was raising his hand to the bell-chain, employed to announce the arrival of visitors, when Lecoq hastily stepped him.

"A word first!" said he. "Might not the fugitive have passed through the house and escaped by this door, without being seen? In that case he would be far away by this time."

"Impossible!"

"But why?"

"Excuse me, but I know what I am saying. First, the door opening into the garden is closed ; it is only open during grand receptions, not for our ordinary Monday drawing-rooms. Secondly, Monseigneur requires me to stand on the threshold of the street door when he is receiving. To-day he repeated this order, and you may be sure that I haven't disobeyed him."

"Since that's the case," said Lecoq, slightly re-assured, "we shall perhaps succeed in finding our man. Warn the servants, but without ringing the bell. The less noise we make, the greater will be our chance of success."

In a moment the fifty servants who peopled the ante-rooms, stables, and kitchens of the Hotel de Sairmeuse were gathered together. The great lanterns in the coach houses and stables were lighted, and the entire garden was illuminated as by enchantment.

"If May is concealed here," thought Lecoq, delighted to see so many auxiliaries, "it will be impossible for him to escape."

But it was in vain that the gardens were thoroughly explored over-and-over again ; no one could be found. The

sheds where the gardening tools were kept, the conservatories, the summer-houses, the two rustic pavilions at the foot of the garden, even the dog-kennels, were scrupulously visited, but all in vain. The trees, with the exception of some horse-chestnuts at the rear of the garden, were almost destitute of leaves, but they were not neglected on that account. An agile boy, armed with a lantern, climbed each tree, and explored even the topmost branches.

"The murderer must have left by the way he came," obstinately repeated the Suisse who had armed himself with a huge pistol, and who would not let go his hold on Lecoq, fearing an accident perhaps.

To convince the Suisse of his error it was necessary for the young detective to place himself in communication with Father Absinthe and the sergeant de ville on the other side of the wall. As Lecoq had expected, the latter both replied that they had not once taken their eyes off the wall, and that not even a mouse had crossed into the street.

The exploration had hitherto been conducted after a somewhat haphazard fashion, each of the servants obeying his own inspiration; but the necessity of a methodically conducted search was now recognized. Accordingly, Lecoq took such measures that not a corner, not a recess, could possibly escape scrutiny; and he was dividing the task between his willing assistants, when a new-comer appeared upon the scene. This was a grave, smooth-faced individual in the attire of a notary.

"Monsieur Otto, Monseigneur's first valet de chambre," the Suisse murmured in Lecoq's ear.

This important personage came on behalf of Monsieur le Duc (*he* did not say "Monseigneur") to inquire the meaning of all this uproar. When he had received an explanation, M. Otto condescended to compliment Lecoq on his efficiency, and to recommend that the house should be searched from garret to cellar. These precautions alone would allay the fears of Madame la Duchesse.

He then departed; and the search began again with renewed ardour. A mouse concealed in the gardens of the Hotel de Sairmeuse could not have escaped discovery, so minute were the investigations. Not a single object of any size was left undisturbed. The trees were examined leaf-by-leaf, one might almost say. Occasionally the discouraged

servants proposed to abandon the search ; but Lecoq urged them on. He ran from one to the other, entreating and threatening by turns, swearing that he asked only one more effort, and that this effort would assuredly be crowned with success. Vain promises ! The fugitive could not be found.

The evidence was now conclusive. To persist in searching the garden any longer would be worse than folly. Accordingly, the young detective decided to recall his auxiliaries. "That's enough," he said, in a despondent voice. "It is now certain that the criminal is no longer in the garden."

Was he cowering in some corner of the great house, white with fear, and trembling at the noise made by his pursuers ? One might reasonably suppose this to be the case ; and such was the opinion of the servants. Above all, such was the opinion of the Suisse who renewed with growing assurance his affirmations of a few moments before.

"I have not moved from the threshold of the house tonight," he said, "and I should certainly have seen any person who passed out."

"Let us go into the house, then," said Lecoq. "But first let me ask my companion, who is waiting for me in the street, to join me. It is unnecessary for him to remain any longer where he is."

When Father Absinthe had responded to the summons all the lower doors were carefully closed and guarded, and the search recommenced inside the house, one of the largest and most magnificent residences of the Faubourg Saint-Germain. But at this moment all the treasures of the universe could not have won a single glance or a second's attention from Lecoq. All his thoughts—were occupied with the fugitive. He passed through several superb drawing-rooms, along an unrivalled picture gallery, across a magnificent dining-room, with sideboards groaning beneath their load of massive plate, without paying the slightest attention to the marvels of art and upholstery that were offered to his view. He hurried on accompanied by the servants who were guiding and lighting him. He lifted heavy articles of furniture as easily as he would have lifted a feather ; he moved each chair and sofa from its place, he explored each cupboard and wardrobe, and drew back in turns all the wall-hangings, window-curtains, and *portieres*. A more complete search would have been impossible. 17

each of the rooms and passages that Lecoq entered not a nook was left unexplored, not a corner was forgotten. At length, after two hours continuous work, Lecoq returned to the first floor. Only five or six servants had accompanied him on his tour of inspection. The others had dropped off one by one, weary of this adventure, which had at first possessed the attractions of a pleasure party.

"You have seen everything, gentlemen," declared an old footman.

"Everything!" interrupted the Suisse, "everything! Certainly not. There are the private apartments of Monseigneur and those of Madame la Duchesse still to be explored."

"Alas!" murmured Lecoq, "What good would it be?"

But the Suisse had already gone to rap gently at one of the doors opening into the hall. His interest equalled that of the detectives. They had seen the murderer enter; he had not seen him go out; therefore the man was in the house and he wished him to be found.

The door at which he had knocked soon opened, and the grave, clean-shaven face of Otto, the duke's first valet de chambre, showed itself. "What the deuce do you want?" he asked in surly tones.

"To enter Monseigneur's room," replied the Suisse, "in order to see if the fugitive has not taken refuge there."

"Are you crazy?" exclaimed the head valet de chambre. "How could any one have entered here? Besides, I can't suffer Monsieur le Duc to be disturbed. He has been at work all night, and he is just going to take a bath before going to bed."

The Suisse seemed very vexed at this rebuff; and Lecoq was presenting his excuses, when another voice was heard exclaiming. "Let these worthy men do their duty, Otto."

"Ah! do you hear that!" exclaimed the Suisse triumphantly.

"Very well, since Monsieur le Duc permits it. Come in, I will light you through the apartments."

Lecoq entered, but it was only for form's sake that he walked through the different apartments; a library, an admirable study and a charming smoking-room. As he was passing through the bed-chamber, he had the honour of seeing the Duke de Sairmeuse through the half-open door of a small, white, marble bath-room.

"Ah, well!" cried the duke, affably, "is the fugitive still invisible?"

"Still invisible, monsieur," Lecoq respectfully replied.

The valet de chambre did not share his master's good humor. "I think, gentlemen," said he, "that you may spare yourselves the trouble of visiting the apartments of the duchess. It is a duty we have taken upon ourselves—the women and I—and we have looked even in the bureau drawers."

Upon the landing the old footman, who had not ventured to enter his master's apartments, was awaiting the detectives. He had doubtless received his orders, for he politely inquired if they desired anything, and if, after such a fatiguing night, they would not find some cold meat and a glass of wine acceptable. Father Absinthe's eyes sparkled. He probably thought that in this *quasi-royal* abode they must have delicious things to eat and drink—such viands, indeed, as he had never tasted in his life. But Lecoq civilly refused, and left the Hotel de Sairmeuse, reluctantly followed by his old companion.

He was eager to be alone. For several hours he had been making immense efforts to conceal his rage and despair. May escaped! vanished! evaporated! The thought drove him almost mad. What he had declared to be impossible had nevertheless occurred. In his confidence and pride, he had sworn to answer for the prisoner's head with his own life; and yet he had allowed him to slip between his fingers.

When he was once more in the street, he paused in front of Father Absinthe, and crossing his arms, inquired: "Well, my friend, what do you think of all this?"

The old-detective shook his head, and in serene unconsciousness of his want of tact, responded: "I think that Gevrol will chuckle with delight."

At this mention of his most cruel enemy, Lecoq bounded from the ground like a wounded bull. "Oh!" he exclaimed. "Gevrol has not won the battle yet. We have lost May: it is a great misfortune: but his accomplice remains in our hands. We hold the crafty man who has hitherto defeated all our plans, no matter how carefully arranged. He is certainly shrewd and devoted to his friend; but we will see if his devotion will withstand the prospect of hard labour in the penitentiary. And that is what awaits

him, if he is silent, and if he thus accepts the responsibility of aiding and abetting the fugitive's escape. Oh! I've no fears—M. Segmuller will know how to draw the truth out of him."

So speaking, Lecoq brandished his clenched fist with a threatening air and then, in calmer tones, he added: "But we must go to the station-house where the accomplice was removed. I wish to question him a little."

XXII.

IT was six o'clock, and the dawn was just breaking when Father Absinthe and his companion reached the station-house, where they found the superintendent seated at a small table, making out his report. He did not move when they entered, failing to recognize them under their disguises. But when they had mentioned their names, he rose with evident cordiality, and held out his hand.

"Upon my word!" said he, "I congratulate you on your capture last night."

Father Absinthe and Lecoq exchanged an anxious look. "What capture?" they both asked in a breath.

"Why, that individual you sent me last night so carefully bound."

"Well, what about him?"

The superintendent burst into a hearty laugh. "So you are ignorant of your good fortune," said he. "Ah! luck has favoured you, and you will receive a handsome reward."

"Pray tell us what we've captured?" asked Father Absinthe, impatiently.

"A scoundrel of the deepest dye, an escaped convict, who has been missing for three months. You must have a description of him in your pocket—Joseph Couturier, in short."

On hearing these words, Lecoq became so frightfully pale that Father Absinthe, fearing he was going to faint, raised his arms to prevent his falling. A chair stood close by, however, and on this Lecoq allowed himself to drop. "Joseph Couturier," he faltered, evidently unconscious of what he was saying. "Joseph Couturier! an escaped convict!"

The superintendent certainly did not understand Lecoq's

agitation, any better than he understood Father Absinthe's discomfited air.

"You have reason to be proud of your work ; your success will make a sensation this morning," he repeated. "You have captured a famous prize. I can see Gevrol's nose now when he hears the news. Only yesterday he was boasting that he alone was capable of securing this dangerous rascal."

After such an irreparable failure as that which had overtaken Lecoq, the unintended irony of these compliments was bitter in the extreme. The superintendent's words of praise fell on his ears like so many blows from a sledge hammer.

"You must be mistaken," he eventually remarked, rising from his seat and summoning all his energy to his assistance. "That man is not Couturier."

"Oh, I'm not mistaken ; you may be quite sure of that. He fully answers the description appended to the circular ordering his capture, and even the little finger of his left hand is lacking, as is mentioned."

"Ah ! that's a proof indeed !" groaned Father Absinthe.

"It is indeed. And I know another one more conclusive still. Couturier is an old acquaintance of mine. I have had him in custody before ; and he recognized *me* last night just as I recognized him."

After this further argument was impossible ; hence it it was in an entirely different tone that Lecoq remarked : "At least, my friend, you will allow me to address a few questions to your prisoner."

"Oh ! as many as you like. But first of all, let us bar the door and place two of my men before it. This Couturier has a fondness for the open air, and he wouldn't hesitate to dash out our brains if he only saw a chance of escape."

After taking these precautions, the man was removed from the cage in which he had been confined. He stepped forward with a smile on his face, having already recovered that nonchalant manner common to old offenders who, when in custody, seem to lose all feeling of anger against the police. They are not unlike these gamblers who, after losing their last half-penny, nevertheless willingly shake hands with their adversary.

Couturier at once recognized Lecoq. "Ah !" said he, "it was you who did that business last night. You can

boast of having a solid fist ! You fell upon me very unexpectedly ; and the back of my neck is still the worse for your clutch."

"Then, if I were to ask a favour of you, you wouldn't be disposed to grant it?"

"Oh, yes ! all the same. I have no more malice in my composition than a chicken ; and I rather like your face. What do you want of me ?"

"I should like to have some information about the man who accompanied you last night."

Couturier's face darkened. "I am really unable to give you any," he replied.

"Why ?"

"Because I don't know him. I never saw him before last night."

"It's hard to believe that. A fellow doesn't enlist the first-come, for an expedition like yours last evening. Before undertaking such a job with a man, one finds out something about him."

"I don't say I haven't been guilty of a stupid blunder," replied Couturier. "Indeed I could murder myself for it, but there was nothing about the man to make me suspect that he belonged to the secret-service. He spread a net for me, and I jumped into it. It was made for me, of course ; but it wasn't necessary for me to put my foot into it."

"You are mistaken, my man," said Lecoq. "The individual in question didn't belong to the police force. I pledge you my word of honour, he didn't."

For a moment Couturier surveyed Lecoq with a knowing air, as if he hoped to discover whether he were speaking the truth or attempting to deceive him. "I believe you," he said at last. "And to prove it I'll tell you how it happened. I was dining alone last evening in a restaurant in the Rue Mouffetard, when that man came in and took a seat beside me. Naturally we began to talk ; and I thought him a very good sort of a fellow. I forget how it began, but somehow or other he mentioned that he had some clothes he wanted to sell ; and being glad to oblige him, I took him to a friend, who bought them from him. It was doing him a good turn, wasn't it ? Well, he offered me something to drink, and I returned the compliment. We had a number of glasses together, and by midnight I

began to see double. He then began to propose a plan, which, he swore would make us both rich. It was to steal the plate from a superb mansion. There would be no risk for me ; he would take charge of the whole affair. I had only to help him over the wall, and keep watch. The proposal was tempting—was it not ? You would have thought so, if you had been in my place, and yet I hesitated. But the fellow insisted. He swore that he was acquainted with the habits of the house ; that Monday evening was a grand gala night there, and that on these occasions the servants didn't lock up the plate. After a little while I consented."

A fleeting flush tinged Lecoq's pale cheeks. "Are you sure he told you that the Duke de Sairmeuse received every Monday evening ?" he asked, eagerly.

"Certainly ; how else could I have known it ! He even mentioned the name you uttered just now, a name ending in 'euse.'"

A strange thought had just flitted through Lecoq's mind. "What if May and the Duke de Sairmeuse should be one and the same person ?" But the notion seemed so thoroughly absurd, so utterly inadmissible that he quickly dismissed it, despising himself even for having entertained it for a single instant. He cursed his inveterate inclination always to look at events from a romantic impossible side, instead of considering them as natural common-place incidents. After all there was nothing surprising in the fact that a man of the world, such as he supposed May to be, should know the day set aside by the Duke de Sairmeuse for the reception of his friends.

The young detective had nothing more to expect from Couturier. He thanked him, and after shaking hands with the superintendent, walked away, leaning on Father Absinthe's arm. For he really had need of support. His legs trembled, his head whirled, and he felt sick both in body and in mind. He had failed miserably, disgracefully. He had flattered himself that he possessed a genius for his calling, and yet he had been easily outwitted. To rid himself of pursuit, May had only had to invent a pretended accomplice, and this simple stratagem had sufficed to non-plus those who were on his trail.

Father Absinthe was rendered uneasy by his colleague's

evident dejection. "Where are we going?" he enquired; "to the Palais de Justice, or to the Prefecture de Police?"

Lecoq shuddered on hearing this question, which brought him face to face with the horrible reality of his situation. "To the Prefecture!" he responded. "Why should I go there? To expose myself to Gevrol's insults, perhaps! I haven't courage enough for that. Nor do I feel that I have strength to go to M. Segmuller and say: 'Forgive me: you have judged me too favourably. I am a fool!'"

"What are we to do?"

"Ah! I don't know. Perhaps I shall embark for America—perhaps I shall throw myself into the river."

He had walked about a hundred yards when suddenly he stopped short. "No!" he exclaimed, with a furious stamp of his foot. "No, this affair shan't end like this. I have sworn to have the solution of the enigma—and I will have it!" For a moment he reflected; then, in a calmer voice, he added: "There is one man who can save us, a man who will see what I haven't been able to discern, who will understand things that I couldn't. Let us go and ask his advice, my course will depend on his reply—come!"

After such a day and such a night, it might have been expected that these two men would have felt an irresistible desire to sleep and rest. But Lecoq was sustained by wounded vanity, intense disappointment, and yet unextinguished hope of revenge: while poor Father Absinthe was not unlike some luckless cab-horse, which, having forgotten there is such a thing as repose, is no longer conscious of fatigue, but travels on until he falls down dead. The old detective felt that his limbs were failing him; but Lecoq said: "It is necessary," and so he walked on.

They both went to Lecoq's lodgings, where they laid aside their disguises and made themselves trim. Then after breakfasting they hastily betook themselves to the Rue St. Lazare, where entering one of the most stylish houses in the street, Lecoq enquired of the concierge, "Is M. Tabaret at home?"

"Yes, but he's ill," was the reply.

"Very ill?" asked Lecoq anxiously.

"It is hard to tell," replied the man: "it is his old complaint—gout." And with an air of hypocritical commiseration, he added: "M. Tabaret is not wise to lead

the life he does. Women are very well in a way, but at his age——”

The two detectives exchanged a meaning glance, and as soon as they were out of hearing burst out laughing. Their hilarity had scarcely ceased when they reached the first floor, and rang the bell at the door of one of the apartments. The buxom-looking woman who appeared in answer to this summons, informed them that her master would receive them, although he was confined to his bed. “However, the doctor is with him now,” she added. “But perhaps the gentlemen would not mind waiting until he has gone?” The gentlemen replying in the affirmative, she then conducted them into a handsome library, and invited them to sit down.

The person whom Lecoq had come to consult was a man celebrated for wonderful shrewdness and penetration, well-nigh exceeding the bounds of possibility. For five-and-forty years he had held a petty post in one of the offices of the *Mont de Piété*, just managing to exist upon the meagre stipend he received. Suddenly enriched by the death of a relative, of whom he had scarcely ever heard, he immediately resigned his functions, and the very next day began to long for the same employment he had so often anathematized. In his endeavours to divert his mind, he began to collect old books, and heaped up mountains of tattered worm-eaten volumes in immense oak bookcases. But despite this pastime to many so attractive, he could not shake off his weariness. He grew thin and yellow, and his income of forty thousand francs, was literally killing him, when a sudden inspiration came to his relief. It came to him one evening after reading the memoirs of a celebrated detective, one of those men of subtle penetration, soft as silk, and supple as steel, whom justice sometimes sets upon the trial of crime.

“And I also am a detective!” he exclaimed.

This, however, he must prove. From that day forward he perused with feverish interest every book he could find that had any connection with the organisation of the police service and the investigation of crime. Reports and pamphlets, letters and memoirs, he eagerly turned from one to the other, in his desire to master his subject. Such learning as he might find in books, did not suffice, however, to perfect his education. Hence, whenever a crime came to his

knowledge he started out in quest of the particulars and worked up the case by himself.

Soon these platonic investigations did not suffice, and one evening, at dusk, he summoned all his resolution, and, going on foot to the Prefecture de Police, humbly begged employment from the officials there. He was not very favourably received, for applicants are numerous. But he pleaded his cause so adroitly that at last he was charged with some trifling commissions. He performed them admirably. The great difficulty was then overcome. Other matters were entrusted to him, and he soon displayed a wonderful aptitude for his chosen work.

The case of Madame B——, the rich banker's wife, made him virtually famous. Consulted at a moment when the police had abandoned all hope of solving the mystery, he proved by A plus B—by a mathematical deduction, so to speak—that the dear lady must have stolen her own property; and events soon proved that he had told the truth. After this success he was always called upon to advise in obscure and difficult cases.

It would be difficult to tell his exact *status* at the Prefecture. When a person is employed, salary or compensation of some kind is understood: but this strange man had never consented to receive a penny. What he did he did for his own pleasure—for the gratification of a passion which had become his very life. When the funds allowed him for expenses seemed insufficient, he at once opened his private purse; and the men who worked with him never went away without some substantial token of his liberality. Of course, such a man had many enemies. He did as much work—and far better work than any two inspectors of police; and he didn't receive a sou of salary. Hence, in calling him "spoil-trade," his rivals were not far from right.

Whenever anyone ventured to mention his name favourably in Gevrol's presence, the jealous inspector could scarcely control himself, and retorted by denouncing an unfortunate mistake which this remarkable man once made. Inclined to obstinacy, like all enthusiastic men, he had indeed once effected the conviction of an innocent prisoner—a poor little tailor, who was accused of killing his wife. This single error (a grievous one no doubt) in a career of some duration, had the effect of cooling his ardour perceptibly; and subsequently, he seldom visited the Prefec

ture. But yet he remained "the oracle," after the fashion of those great advocates who, tired of practice at the bar, still win great and glorious triumphs in their consulting rooms, lending to others the weapons they no longer care to wield themselves.

When the authorities were undecided what course to pursue in some great case, they invariably said: "Let us go and consult Tiraucclair." For this was the name by which he was most generally known: a sobriquet derived from a phrase, which was always on his lips. He was constantly saying: "Il faut que cela se tire au clair—That must be brought to light." Hence, the not altogether unappropriate appellation of "Pere Tiraucclair," or "Father Bring-to-Light."

Perhaps this sobriquet assisted him in keeping his occupation secret from his friends among the general public. At all events they never suspected them. His disturbed life when he was working up a case, the strange visitors he received, his frequent and prolonged absences from home, were all imputed to a very unseasonable inclination to gallantry. His concierge was deceived as well as his friends, and laughing at his supposed infatuation, disrespectfully called him an old libertine. It was only the officials of the detective force who knew that Tiraucclair and Tabaret were one and the same person.

Lecoq was trying to gain hope and courage by reflecting on the career of this eccentric man, when the buxom housekeeper re-entered the library and announced that the physician had left. At the same time she opened a door and exclaimed: "This is the room; you gentlemen can enter now."

XXIII.

On a large canopied bed, sweating and panting beneath the weight of numerous blankets, lay the two-faced oracle—Tiraucclair, of the Prefecture—Tabaret, of the Rue Saint Lazare. It was impossible to believe that the owner of such a face, in which a look of stupidity was mingled with one of perpetual astonishment, could possess superior talent, or even an average amount of intelligence. With his retreating forehead, and his immense ears, his odious turn-up nose, tiny eyes, and coarse, thick lips, M. Tabaret

seemed an excellent type of the ignorant, penny-wise, petty *rentier* class. Whenever he took his walks abroad, the juvenile street Arabs would impudently shout after him or try to mimic his favourite grimace. And yet his ungainliness did not seem to worry him in the least, while he appeared to take real pleasure in increasing his appearance of stupidity, solacing himself with the reflection that "he is not really a genius who seems to be one."

At the sight of the two detectives, whom he knew very well, his eyes sparkled with pleasure. "Good morning, Lecoq, my boy," said he, "Good-morning, my old Absinthe. So you think enough down there of poor Papa Tiraclair to come and see him?"

"We need your advice, Monsieur Tabaret."

"Ah, ah!"

"We have just been as completely outwitted as if we were babies in long clothes."

"What! was your man such a very cunning fellow?"

Lecoq heaved a sigh. "So cunning," he replied, "that, if I were superstitious, I should say he was the devil himself."

The sick man's face wore a comical expression of envy. "What! you have found a treasure like that," said he, "and you complain! Why, it is a magnificent opportunity—a chance to be proud of! You see, my boys, everything has degenerated in these days. The race of great criminals is dying out—those who've succeeded the old stock are like counterfeit coins. There's scarcely anything left outside a crowd of low offenders who are not worth the shoe leather expended in pursuing them. It is enough to disgust a detective, upon my word. No more trouble, emotion, anxiety, or excitement. When a crime is committed now-a-days, the criminal is in jail the next morning, you've only to take the omnibus, and go to the culprit's house and arrest him. He's always found, the more the pity. But what has your fellow been up to?"

"He has killed three men."

"Oh! oh! oh!" said old Tabaret, in three different tones, plainly implying that this criminal was evidently superior to others of his species. "And where did this happen?"

"In a wine-shop near the barriere."

"Oh, yes, I recollect; a man named May. The mur

ders were committed in the Widow Chupin's cabin. I saw the case mentioned in the *Gazette des Tribunaux*, and your comrade, Fanferlot l'Ecureuil, who comes to see me, told me you were strangely puzzled about the prisoner's identity. So you are charged with investigating the affair? So much the better. Tell me all about it, and I will assist you as well as I can."

Suddenly checking himself, and lowering his voice, Tiraucclair added: "But first of all, just do me the favour to get up. Now, wait a moment, and when I motion you, open that door there, on the left, very suddenly. Mariette, my housekeeper, who is curiosity incarnate is standing there listening. I hear her hair rubbing against the lock. Now!"

The young detective immediately obeyed, and Mariette, caught in the act, hastened away, pursued by her master's sarcasms. "You might have known that you couldn't succeed at that!" he shouted after her.

Although Lecoq and Father Absinthe were much nearer the door than old Tiraucclair, neither of them had heard the slightest sound; and they looked at each other in astonishment, wondering whether their host had been playing a little farce for their benefit, or whether his sense of hearing was really so acute as this incident would seem to indicate.

"Now," said Tabaret, settling himself more comfortably upon his pillows—"now I will listen to you, my boy. Mariette will not come back again."

On his way to Tabaret's, Lecoq had busied himself in preparing his story; and it was in the clearest possible manner that he related all the particulars, from the moment when Gevrol opened the door of the Poivriere, to the instant when May leaped over the garden wall in the rear of the Hotel de Sairmeuse.

While the young detective was telling his story, old Tabaret seemed completely transformed. His gout was entirely forgotten. According to the different phases of the recital, he either turned and twisted on his bed, uttering little cries of delight or disappointment, or else lay motionless, plunged in the same kind of ecstatic reverie which enthusiastic admirers of classical music yield themselves up to while listening to one of the great Beethoven's divine sonatas.

"If I had been there! If only I had been there!" he murmured regretfully every now and then through his set teeth, though when Lecoq's story was finished, enthusiasm seemed decidedly to have gained the upper hand. "It is beautiful! it is grand!" he exclaimed. "And with just that one phrase: 'It is the Prussians who are coming,' for a starting point! Lecoq, my boy, I must say that you have conducted this affair like an angel!"

"Don't you mean to say like a fool?" asked the discouraged detective.

"No, my friend, certainly not. You have rejoiced my old heart. I can die; I shall have a successor. Ah! that Gevrol who betrayed you—for he did betray you, there's no doubt about it—that obtuse, obstinate 'General' is not worthy to blacken your shoes!"

"You overpower me, Monsieur Tabaret!" interrupted Lecoq, as yet uncertain whether his host was poking fun at him or not. "But it is none the less true that May has disappeared, and I have lost my reputation, before I had begun to make it."

"Don't be in such a hurry to reject my compliments," replied old Tabaret, with a horrible grimace. "I say that you have conducted this investigation very well; but it could have been done much better, very much better. You have a talent for your work, that's evident; but you lack experience; you become elated by a trifling advantage, or discouraged by a mere nothing; you fail, and yet persist in holding fast to a fixed idea, as a moth flutters about a candle. Then, you are young. But never mind that, it's a fault you will outgrow only too soon. And now, to speak frankly, I must tell you that you have made a great many blunders."

Lecoq hung his head like a schoolboy receiving a reprimand from his teacher. After all was he not a scholar, and was not this old man his master?

"I will now enumerate your mistakes," continued old Tabaret, "and I will show you how, on at least three occasions, you allowed an opportunity for solving this mystery to escape you."

"But,—"

"Pooh! pooh! my boy, let me talk a little while now. What axiom did you start with? You said: 'Always dis

trust appearances ; believe precisely the contrary of what appears true, or even probable.' "

" Yes, that is exactly what I said to myself."

" And it was a very wise conclusion. With that idea in your lantern to light your path, you ought to have gone straight to the truth. But you are young, as I said before ; and the very first circumstance you find that seems at all probable, you quite forget the rule which, as you yourself admit, should have governed your conduct. As soon as you meet a fact that seems even *more* than probable, you swallow it as eagerly as a gudgeon swallows an angler's bait.

This comparison could but pique the young detective. " I don't think I've been so simple as that," protested he.

" Bah ! What did you think, then, when you heard that M. d'Escorval had broken his leg, in getting out of his carriage ? "

" Believe ! I believed what they told me, because—"

He paused, and Tiraclair burst into a hearty fit of laughter. " You believed it," he said, " because it was a very plausible story."

" What would you have believed had you been in my place ? "

" Exactly the opposite of what they told me. I might have been mistaken ; but it would be the logical conclusion of my first course of reasoning."

This conclusion was so bold that Lecoq was disconcerted. " What ! " he exclaimed ; " do you suppose that M. d'Escorval's fall was only a fiction ? that he didn't break his leg ? "

Old Tabaret's face suddenly assumed a serious expression. " I don't suppose it," he replied ; " I'm sure of it."

XXIV.

LECOQ's confidence in the oracle he was consulting was very great ; but even old Tiraclair might be mistaken, and what he had just said seemed such an enormity, so completely beyond the bounds of possibility, that the young man could not conceal a gesture of incredulous surprise.

" So, Monsieur Tabaret, you are ready to affirm that M.

d'Escorval is in quite as good health as Father Absinthe or myself; and that he has confined himself to his room for a couple of months to give a semblance of truth to a falsehood?"

"I would be willing to swear it."

"But what could possibly have been his object?"

Tabaret lifted his hands to heaven, as if imploring forgiveness for the young man's stupidity. "And it was in you," he exclaimed, "in you that I saw a successor, a disciple to whom I might transmit my method of induction; and now, you ask me such a question as that! Reflect a moment. Must I give you an example to assist you? Very well. Let it be so. Suppose yourself a magistrate. A crime is committed; you are charged with the duty of investigating it, and you visit the prisoner to question him. Very well. This prisoner has, hitherto, succeeded in concealing his identity—this was the case in the present instance, was it not? Very well. Now, what would you do, if, at the very first glance, you recognized under the prisoner's disguise your best friend, or your worst enemy? What would you do, I ask?"

"I should say to myself that a magistrate who is obliged to hesitate between his duty and his inclinations, is placed in a very trying position, and I should endeavor to avoid the responsibility."

"I understand that; but would you reveal this prisoner's identity—remember, he might be your friend or your enemy?"

The question was so delicate that Lecoq remained silent for a moment, reflecting before he replied.

The pause was interrupted by Father Absinthe. "I should reveal nothing whatever!" he exclaimed. "I should remain absolutely neutral. I should say to myself others are trying to discover this man's identity. Let them do so if they can; but let my conscience be clear."

This was the cry of honesty; not the counsel of a casuist.

"I also should be silent," Lecoq at last replied; "and it seems to me that, in holding my tongue, I should not fail in my duty as a magistrate."

On hearing these words, Tabaret rubbed his hands together, as he always did when he was about to present some overwhelming argument. "Such being the case,"

said he, "do me the favour to tell me what pretext you would invent in order to withdraw from the case without exciting suspicion?"

"I don't know; I can't say now. But if I were placed in such a position I should find some excuse—invent something——"

"And if you could find nothing better," interrupted Tabaret, "you would adopt M. d'Escorval's expedient; you would pretend you had broken a limb. Only, as you are a clever fellow, you would sacrifice your arm it would be less inconvenient than your leg; and you wouldn't be condemned to seclusion for several months."

"So, Monseieur Tabaret, you are convinced that M. d'Escorval knows who May really is."

Old Tiraclair turned so suddenly in his bed that his forgotten gout drew from him a terrible groan. "Can you doubt it?" he exclaimed. "Can you possibly doubt it? What proofs do you want then? What connection do you see between the magistrate's fall and the prisoner's attempt at suicide? I wasn't there, as you were; I only know the story as you have told it to me. I can't look at the facts with my own eyes, but according to your statements, which are I suppose correct, this is what I understand. When M. d'Escorval has completed his task at the Widow Chupin's house, he comes to the prison to examine the supposed murderer. The two men recognize each other. Had they been alone, mutual explanations might have ensued, and affairs taken quite a different turn. But they were not alone; a third party was present—M. d'Escorval's clerk. So they could say nothing. The magistrate asked a few common-place questions, in a troubled voice, and the prisoner, terribly agitated, replied as best he could. Now, after leaving the cell, M. d'Escorval no doubt said to himself: 'I can't investigate the offenses of a man I hate!' He was certainly terribly perplexed. When you tried to speak to him, as he was leaving the prison, he harshly told you to wait till the next day; and a quarter of an hour later he pretended to fall down and break his leg."

"Then you think that M. d'Escorval and May are enemies?" inquired Lecoq.

"Don't the facts prove that beyond a doubt?" retorted Tabaret. "If they had been friends, the magistrate might

have acted in the same manner; but then the prisoner wouldn't have attempted to strangle himself. But thanks to you; his life was saved; for he owes his life to you. During the night, confined in a straight-waistcoat, he was powerless to injure himself. Ah! how he must have suffered that night! What agony! So, in the morning, when he was conducted to the magistrate's room for examination, it was with a sort of frenzy that he dashed into the dreaded presence of his enemy. He expected to find M. d'Escorval there, ready to triumph over his misfortunes; and he intended to say: 'Yes, it's I. There is a fatality in it. I have killed three men, and I am in your power. But there is a mortal feud between us, and for that very reason you haven't the right to prolong my tortures! It would be infamous cowardice if you did so.' However, instead of M. d'Escorval, he sees M. Segmuller. Then what happens? He is surprised, and his eyes betray the astonishment he feels when he realizes the generosity of his enemy—an enemy from whom he had expected no indulgence. Then a smile comes to his lips—a smile of hope; for he thinks, since M. d'Escorval has not betrayed his secret, that he may be able to keep it, and emerge, perhaps, from this shadow of shame and crime with his name and honour still untarnished."

Old Tabaret paused, and then, with a sudden change of tone and an ironical gesture, he added: "And that—is my explanation."

Father Absinthe had risen, frantic with delight. "Cristi!" he exclaimed: "that's it! that's it!"

Lecoq's approbation was none the less evident although unspoken. He could appreciate this rapid and wonderful work of induction far better than his companion.

For a moment or two old Tabaret reclined upon his pillows enjoying the sweets of admiration; then he continued: "Do you wish for further proofs, my boy? Recollect the perseverance M. d'Escorval displayed in sending to M. Segmuller for information. I admit that a man may have a passion for his profession; but not to such an extent as that. You believed that his leg was broken. Then were you not surprised to find a magistrate, with a broken limb, suffering mortal anguish, taking such wonderful interest in a miserable murderer? I haven't any broken bones, I've only got the gout; but I know very

well that when I'm suffering, half the world might be judging the other half, and yet the idea of sending Mariette for information would never occur to me. Ah! a moment's reflection would have enabled you to understand the reason of his solicitude, and would probably have given you the key to the whole mystery."

Lecoq, who was such a brilliant casuist in the Widow Chupin's hovel, who was so full of confidence in himself, and so earnest in expounding his theories to simple Father Absinthe—Lecoq hung his head abashed and did not utter a word. But he felt neither anger nor impatience. He had come to ask advice, and was glad that it should be given him. He had made many mistakes, as he now saw only too plainly; and when they were pointed out to him he neither fumed nor fretted, nor tried to prove that he had been right when he had been wrong. This was certainly an excellent trait in his character.

Meanwhile, M. Tabaret had poured out a great glass of some cooling drink and drained it. He now resumed: "I need not remind you of the mistake you made in not compelling Toinon Chupin to tell you all she knew about this affair while she was in your power. 'A bird in the hand'—you know the proverb."

"Be assured, Monsieur Tabaret, that this mistake has cost me enough to make me realize the danger of allowing a well-disposed witness's zeal to cool down."

"We will say no more about that, then. But I must tell you that three or four times, at least, it has been in your power to clear up this mystery."

The oracle paused, awaiting some protestation from his disciple. None came however. "If he says this," thought the young detective, "it must indeed be so."

This discretion made a great impression on old Tabaret, and increased the esteem he had conceived for Lecoq. "The first time that you were lacking in discretion," said he, "was when you tried to discover the owner of the diamond earring found at the Poivriere."

"I made every effort to discover the last owner."

"You tried very hard, I don't deny it; but as for making every effort—that's quite another thing. For instance, when you heard that the Baroness de Watchau was dead, and that all her property had been sold, what did you do?"

"You know; I went immediately to the person who had charge of the sale."

"Very well! and afterwards?"

"I examined the catalogue; and as, among the jewels mentioned, I could find none that answered the description of these diamonds, I knew that the clue was quite lost."

"There is precisely where you are mistaken!" exclaimed old Tiraucclair, exultantly. "If such valuable jewels are not mentioned in the catalogue of the sale, the Baroness de Watchau could not have possessed them at the time of her death. And if she no longer possessed them she must have given them away or sold them. And who could she have sold them to? To one of her lady friends, very probably. For this reason, had I been in your place, I should have found out the names of her intimate friends; this would have been a very easy task; and then, I should have tried to win the favour of all the lady's-maids in the service of these friends. This would have only been a pastime for a good-looking young fellow like you. Then, I should have shown this earring to each maid in succession until I found one who said: 'That diamond belongs to my mistress,' or one who was seized with a nervous trembling."

"And to think that this idea did not once occur to me!" ejaculated Lecoq.

"Wait, wait, I am coming to the second mistake you made," retorted the oracle. "What did you do when you obtained possession of the trunk which May pretended was his? Why you played directly into this cunning adversary's hand. How could you fail to see that this trunk was only an accessory article; a bit of 'property' got ready in 'mounting' the 'comedy.' You should have known that it could only have been deposited with Madame Milner by the accomplice, and that all its contents must have been purchased for the occasion."

"I knew this, of course; but even under these circumstances, what could I do?"

"What could you do, my boy? Well, I am only a poor old man, but I should have interviewed every clothier in Paris; and at last some one would have exclaimed: 'Those articles! Why I sold them to an individual like this or

that—who purchased them for one of his friends whose measure he brought with him.’”

Angry with himself, Lecoq struck his clenched hand violently upon the table beside him. “*Sacrebleu!*” he exclaimed, “that method was infallible, and so simple too! Ah! I shall never forgive myself for my stupidity as long as I live!”

“Gently, gently!” interrupted old Tiraclair. “You are going too far, my dear boy. Stupidity is not the proper word at all; you should say carelessness, thoughtlessness. You are young—what else could one expect? What is far less inexcusable is the manner in which you conducted the chase, after the prisoner was allowed to escape.”

“Alas!” murmured the young man, now completely discouraged; “did I blunder in that?”

“Terribly, my son; and here is where I really blame you. What diabolical influence induced you to follow May, step by step, like a common policeman?”

This time Lecoq was stupefied. “Ought I to have allowed him to escape me?” he inquired.

“No; but if I had been by your side in the gallery of the Odeon, when you so clearly divined the prisoner’s intentions, I should have said to you: ‘This fellow, friend Lecoq, will hasten to Madame Milner’s house to inform her of his escape. Let us run after him.’ I shouldn’t have tried to prevent his seeing her, mind: But when he had left the Hotel de Mariembourg, I should have added: ‘Now, let him go where he chooses: but attach yourself to Madame Milner; don’t lose sight of her; cling to her as closely as her own shadow, for she will lead you to the accomplice—that is to say—to the solution of the mystery.’”

“That’s the truth; I see it now.”

“But instead of that, what did you do? You ran to the hotel, you terrified the boy! When a fisherman has cast his bait and the fish are swimming near, he doesn’t sound a gong to frighten them all away!”

Thus it was that old Tabaret reviewed the entire course of investigation and pursuit, remodeling it in accordance with his own method of induction. Lecoq had originally had a magnificent inspiration. In his first investigations

he had displayed remarkable talent; and yet he had not succeeded. Why! Simply because he had neglected the axiom with which he started: "Always distrust what seems probable!"

But the young man listened to the oracle's "summing up" with divided attention. A thousand projects were darting through his brain, and at length he could no longer restrain himself. "You have saved me from despair," he exclaimed, "I thought everything was lost; but I see that my blunders can be repaired. What I neglected to do, I can do now; there is still time. Haven't I the diamond earring, as well as various effects belonging to the prisoner, still in my possession. Madame Milner still owns the Hotel de Mariembourg, and I will watch her."

"And what for, my boy?"

"What for? Why, to find my fugitive, to be sure!"

Had the young detective been less engrossed with his idea, he would have detected a slight smile that curved Papa Tiraclair's thick lips.

"Ah, my son! is it possible that you don't suspect the real name of this pretended buffoon?" enquired the oracle somewhat despondently.

Lecoq trembled and averted his face. He did not wish Tabaret to see his eyes. "No," he replied, "I don't suspect——"

"You are uttering a falsehood!" interrupted the sick man. "You know as well as I do, that May resides in the Rue de Grenelle-Saint-Germain, and that he is known as the Duke de Sairmeuse.

On hearing these words, Father Absinthe indulged in a hearty laugh: "Ah! that's a good joke!" he exclaimed. "Ah, ha!"

Such was not Lecoq's opinion, however. "Well, yes, Monsieur Tabaret," said he, "the idea *did* occur to me; but I drove it away."

"And why, if you please?"

"Because—because——"

"Because you would not believe in the logical sequence of your premises; but I am consistent, and I say that it seems impossible the murderer arrested in the Widow Chupin's drinking den should be the Duke de Sairmeuse. Hence, the murderer arrested there, May, the pretended buffoon, *is* the Duke de Sairmeuse!"

XXV.

How this idea had entered old Tabaret's head, Lecoq could not understand. A vague suspicion had, it is true, flitted through his own mind; but it was in a moment of despair, when he was distracted at having lost May, and when certain of Couturier's remarks furnished the excuse for any ridiculous supposition. And yet now Father Tiraclair calmly proclaimed this suspicion—which Lecoq had not dared seriously to entertain, even for an instant—to be an undoubted fact.

"You look as if you had suddenly fallen from the clouds," exclaimed the oracle, noticing his visitor's amazement. "Do you suppose that I spoke at random like a parrot?"

"No, certainly not, but——"

"Hush! You are surprised because you know nothing of contemporary history. If you don't wish to remain all your life a common detective, like your friend Gevrol, you must read, and make yourself familiar with all the leading events of the century."

"I must confess that I don't see the connection."

M. Tabaret did not deign to reply. Turning to Father Absinthe, he requested the old detective, in the most affable tones, to go to the library and fetch two large volumes entitled: "General Biography of the Men of the Present Age," which he would find in the book-case on the right. Father Absinthe hastened to obey; and as soon as the books were brought, M. Tabaret began turning the pages with an eager hand, like a person seeking some word in a dictionary.

"Esbayron," he muttered, "Escars, Escayrac, Escher, Escodica—at last we have it—Escorval! Listen attentively, my boy, and you will be enlightened."

This injunction was entirely unnecessary. Never had the young detective's faculties been more keenly on the alert. It was in an emphatic voice that the sick man then read: "Escorval (Louis-Guillaume, baron d').—Diplomatist and politician, born at Montaignac, December 3rd, 1769, of an old family of lawyers. He was completing his studies in Paris at the outbreak of the Revolution and embraced the popular cause with all the ardour of youth. But, soon disapproving the excesses committed in the

name of Liberty, he sided with the Reactionists, advised, perhaps, by Roederer, who was one of his relatives. Commended to the favor of the First Consul by M. de Talleyrand, he began his diplomatic career with a mission to Switzerland; and during the existence of the first empire he was entrusted with many important negotiations. Devoted to the Emperor, he found himself gravely compromised at the advent of the Second Restoration. At the time of the celebrated rising at Montaignac, he was arrested on the double charge of high treason and conspiracy. He was tried by a military commission, and condemned to death. The sentence was not executed, however. He owed his life to the noble devotion and heroic energy of a priest, one of his friends, the Abbe Midon, cure of the little village of Sairmeuse. The baron d'Escorval had only one son, who embraced the judicial profession at a very early age."

Lecoq was intensely disappointed. "I understand," he remarked. "This is the biography of our magistrate's father. Only I don't see that it teaches us anything."

An ironical smile curved old Tiraucclair's lips. "It teaches us that M. d'Escorval's father was condemned to death," he replied. "That's something, I assure you. A little patience, and you will soon know everything."

Having found a new leaf, he recommenced to read: "Sairmeuse (Anne-Marie-Victor de Tingry, Duke de).—A French general and politician, born at the chateau de Sairmeuse, near Montaignac, in 1758. The Sairmeuse family is one of the oldest and most illustrious in France. It must not be confounded with the ducal family of Sermeuse, whose name is written with an 'e.' Leaving France at the beginning of the Revolution, Anne de Sairmeuse began by serving in the army of Conde. Some years later he offered his sword to Russia; and it is asserted by some of his biographers that he was fighting in the Russian ranks at the time of the disastrous retreat from Moscow. Returning to France with the Bourbons, he became notorious by the intensity of his ultra-royalist opinions. It is certain that he had the good fortune to regain possession of his immense family estates; and the rank and dignities which he had gained in foreign lands were confirmed. Appointed by the king to preside at the military commission charged with arresting and trying the conspirators of Montaignac his

zeal and severity resulted in the capture and conviction of all the parties implicated."

Lecoq sprang up with sparkling eyes. "I see it clearly now," he exclaimed. "The father of the present Duke de Sairmeuse tried to have the father of the present M. d'Escorval beheaded."

M. Tabaret was the picture of complacency. "You see the assistance history gives," said he. "But I have not finished, my boy; the present Duke de Sairmeuse also has his article which will be of interest to us. So listen: Sairmeuse (Anne-Marie-Martial)—Son of the preceding, was born in London towards the close of the last century; received his early education in England, and completed it at the Court of Austria, which he subsequently visited on several confidential missions. Heir to the opinions, prejudices, and animosities of his father, he placed at the service of his party a highly cultivated intellect, unusual penetration, and extraordinary abilities. A leader at a time when political passion was raging highest, he had the courage to assume the sole responsibility of the most unpopular measures. The hostility he encountered, however, eventually obliged him to retire from office, leaving behind him animosities likely to terminate only with his life."

The sick man closed the book, and with assumed modesty, he asked: "Ah, well! What do you think of my little method of induction?"

But Lecoq was too much engrossed with his own thoughts to reply to this question. "I think," he remarked, "that if the Duke de Sairmeuse had disappeared for two months—the period of May's imprisonment, all Paris would have known of it—and so——"

"You are dreaming," interrupted Tabaret. "Why with his wife and his valet de chambre for accomplices, the duke could absent himself for a year if he liked, and yet all his servants would believe him to be in the house."

"I admit that," said Lecoq, at last: "but unfortunately, there is one circumstance which completely upsets the theory we have built up so laboriously."

"And what is that if you please?"

"If the man who took part in the broil at the Poivriere had been the Duke de Sairmeuse, he would have disclosed [his name—he would have declared that, having

been attacked, he had only defended himself—and his name alone would have opened the prison-doors. Instead of that, what did the prisoner do? He attempted to kill himself. Would a grand seigneur, like the Duke de Sairmeuse, to whom life must be a perpetual enchantment, have thought of committing suicide?"

A mocking whistle from old Tabaret interrupted the speaker. "You seem to have forgotten the last sentence in his biography: 'M. Sairmeuse leaves behind him ill-will and hatred.' Do you know the price he might have been compelled to pay for his liberty! No—no more do I. To explain his presence at the Poivriere, and the presence of a woman, who was perhaps his wife, who knows what disgraceful secrets he would have been obliged to reveal? Between shame and suicide, he chose suicide. He wished to save his name and honour intact."

Old Tiraculair spoke with such vehemence that even Father Absinthe was deeply impressed, although, to tell the truth, he had understood but little of the conversation.

As for Lecoq, he rose very pale, his lips trembling a little. "You will excuse my hypocrisy, Monsieur Tabaret," he said in an agitated voice. "I only offered these last objections for form's sake. I had thought of what you now say, but I distrusted myself, and I wanted to hear you say it yourself." Then with an imperious gesture, he added: "Now, I know what I have to do."

Old Tabaret raised his hands toward heaven with every sign of intense dismay. "Unhappy man!" he exclaimed; "do you think of going to arrest the Duke de Sairmeuse! Poor Lecoq! Free, this man is almost omnipotent, and you, an infinitesimal agent of police, would be shattered as easily as glass. Take care, my boy, don't attack the duke. I wouldn't be responsible for the consequences. You might imperil your life."

The young detective shook his head. "Oh! I don't deceive myself," said he. "I know that the duke is far beyond my reach—at least for the present. But he will be in my power again, the day I learn his secret. I don't fear danger; but I know, that if I am to succeed, I must conceal myself, and so I will. Yes, I will remain in the shade until I can unveil this mystery; but then I shall reappear in my true character. And if May be really the Duke de Sairmeuse, I shall have my revenge."

PART II.

THE HONOR OF THE NAME.

I.

ON the first Sunday in the month of August, 1815, at ten o'clock precisely, the sacristan of the parish church of Sairmeuse gave, according to custom, three successive pulls at the bell—placed high in the tower above—to warn the faithful that the priest was about to ascend the steps of the altar to celebrate high mass. The church was already more than half full, and from every side came groups of peasants, hurrying towards the church-yard. The women were all in their bravest attire, with dainty 'kerchiefs crossed upon their breasts, broad-striped, brightly coloured skirts, reaching to their ankles, and large white caps set upon their heads. Being of an economical mind, although coquettish, they mostly came barefooted, carrying their shoes in their hands, and only putting them on as they were about to enter the house of worship.

But few of the men went into the church. They remained outside to talk, seating themselves in the porch, or standing about the yard, in the shade of the grand old elms. For such was the custom in the village of Sairmeuse. The two hours which the women consecrated to prayer the men employed in discussing the news, the success or failure of the crops; and, before the service came to a close, they could generally be found, glass in hand, in the long public room of the village hostelry.

For the farmers for a league around, Sunday mass at Sairmeuse was only an excuse for meeting together to

hold, as it were, a kind of weekly exchange. Since the re-establishment of religion all the cures who had been successively stationed at Sairmeuse had endeavoured to put an end to this scandalous habit of turning God's area into an exchange, but all their efforts had proved unavailing. The obstinate peasantry would only make one concession. At the moment of the elevation of the host, all voices outside the church were hushed, heads uncovered, and a few of the less sceptical farmers even bowed the knee, and made the sign of a cross. But this was the affair of an instant only, and then conversation anent crops, cattle, wine, wood, and so on was resumed with increased vivacity.

But on that particular Sunday in August the usual animation was wanting; and the comments exchanged among little knots of villagers gathered here and there among the tombstones under the trees were scarcely audible. Ordinarily there would have been no dearth of noisy discussions between the various buyers and sellers—discussions well nigh interminable, and punctuated at frequent intervals with some loud spoken popular oath, such as "By my faith in God!" or "May the devil burn me!" To-day, however, the farmers were not talking, they were whispering together. Each face was sad; lips were placed cautiously at each listener's ear; and anxiety could be read in every eye. Evidently, some great misfortune had occurred.

In point of fact, only a month had elapsed since Louis XVIII. had been, for the second time, installed at the Tuileries by the efforts of a triumphant coalition. The earth had scarcely had time to imbibe the blood that had flowed at Waterloo; twelve hundred thousand foreign soldiers desecrated the soil of France; and a Prussian general was Governor of Paris.

The peasantry of Sairmeuse trembled with indignation and fear. This king, brought back by the allies, was no less to be dreaded than the allies themselves. To these non-political country folks, the great name of Bourbon only signified a terrible burden of taxation and oppression. Above all, it signified ruin—for there were scarcely one among them who had not purchased from the government of the revolution or the Empire, some patch of the land confiscated after the downfall of Louis XVI.; and now it

was currently reported that all the estates would have to be surrendered to the former landowners, who had emigrated when the Bourbons were overthrown.

Hence, it was with feverish curiosity that most of the Sairmeuse peasants clustered round a young man who, only two days before, had returned from the army. With tears of rage in his eyes, he was recounting the shame and misery of the invasion. He described the pillage at Versailles, the exactions at Orleans, and the pitiless requisitions of the allied army.

"And these cursed foreigners to whom the traitors have delivered us, will remain here," he exclaimed, "as long as there's a sou and a bottle of wine left in France!" So speaking, he shook his clenched fist menacingly at a white flag that floated from the tower of the church.

His generous anger won the close attention of his audience, who were still listening to him with undiminished interest, when the sound of a horse's hoofs resounded on the stones of the one long street of Sairmeuse. A shudder passed through the crowd, and the same fear slackened the beating of every heart. Who could say but what this rider was not some English or Prussian officer, who had come perhaps to announce the arrival of his regiment, and to demand, with all a conqueror's harshness, money, food, and clothing for his men?

But the suspense was not of long duration. Instead of a uniform the rider wore a soiled blue blouse, and in lieu of a charger with military trappings, he bestrode a saddleless, bony, nervous little mare, covered with foam, which he was urging forward with repeated blows of an improvised whip.

"Ah! it's Father Chupin," murmured one of the peasants with a sigh of relief.

"The same," observed another. "He seems to be in a terrible hurry."

"The old rascal has probably stolen the horse he is riding," remarked a third.

This last remark revealed the reputation that the rider of the saddleless mare enjoyed among his neighbours. He was, in fact, one of those rascals who are the scourge and terror of rural districts. He pretended to be a day-labourer, but in reality he held all work in holy horror, and spent most of his time idling about his hovel. Indeed,

he and his wife and their two sons—terrible youths who, somehow, had escaped the conscription—lived entirely by theft. Everything they consumed was stolen; wheat, wine, fuel, fruits—all being the property of others, while poaching and fishing in closed time furnished them with ready money. Every one in the neighbourhood was aware of this; and yet when Father Chupin was pursued and captured, as occasionally happened, no one could ever be found to testify against him.

“He’s such a dangerous fellow,” the peasantry remarked. “If any one denounced him, why on leaving prison he would simply lie in ambush and send an ounce of lead into his enemy’s brains.”

While the farmers assembled in the churchyard were thus exchanging comments concerning him, the rider of the saddleless mare had drawn rein in front of the local hostelry—the inn of the Bœuf Couronne or Crowned Bull. Alighting from his steed and crossing the square he walked towards the church.

He was a tall man of fifty or thereabouts, and as gnarled and sinewy as the stem of some ancient vine. At the first glance he would not have been taken for a scoundrel, for his demeanour was humble and even gentle. The restlessness of his eyes and the expression of his thin lips betrayed however, a spirit of diabolical cunning and calculation. At any other moment this half despised, half dreaded individual would have been avoided; but curiosity and anxiety now led the crowd toward him.

“Ah, well, Father Chupin!” cried the peasants, as soon as he was within hearing, “where do you come from in such a tremendous haste?”

“From the city.” To the inhabitants of Sairmeuse and its environs “the city” meant the chief town of the arrondissement, Montaignac, a charming sub-prefecture of eight thousand souls, about four leagues distant. “And did you buy the horse you were riding just now at Montaignac?”

“I didn’t buy it: it was lent to me.”

Coming from such a rascal this was so strange an assertion that his listeners could not repress a smile. He did not seem, however, to notice their incredulity.

“It was lent me,” he continued, “in order that I might bring some great news here as quickly as possible.”

For a moment a vague fear struck the inquisitive farmers dumb. "Is the enemy in the city?" one of the more timid eventually inquired in an anxious tone.

"Yes, but not the enemy you mean. The new arrival is our old lord of the manor, his grace the Duke de Sairmeuse."

"What! why people said he was dead."

"They were mistaken."

"Have you seen him?"

"No, I have not seen him, but some one else has seen him for me, and has spoken to him. And this some one is M. Laugeron, the landlord of the Hotel de France at Montaignac. I was passing the house this morning, when he called me. 'Here old fellow,' said he, 'will you do me a favour?' Naturally I replied I would, whereupon he placed a coin in my hand and said: 'Well go round to the stable and tell them to saddle a horse for you, then gallop to Sairmeuse as fast as you can and tell my friend Lacheneur that the Duke de Sairmeuse arrived here last night in a post-chaise, with his son Monsieur Martial, and two servants.'" Father Chupin paused. "The news was important," said he. "And as there wasn't an ostler in the stable and I couldn't find a saddle I came here as quickly as I could on the beast's bare back."

The peasants were listening with pale cheeks and set teeth, and Father Chupin strove to preserve the subdued mien appropriate to a messenger of misfortune. But if one had observed him carefully, a swiftly repressed smile of irony might have been detected on his lips, and a gleam of malicious joy in his eyes. He was in fact, inwardly jubilant, for at that moment he was having his revenge for all the slights and all the scorn he had been forced to endure. And what a revenge it was! If his words seemed to fall slowly and reluctantly from his lips, it was only because he was trying to prolong the sufferings of his audience as much as possible.

However, a stalwart young peasant, with an intelligent face, who, perhaps, read the old rascal's secret heart, brusquely interrupted him. "What can we care for the presence of the Duke de Sairmeuse at Montaignac?" said he. "Let him remain at the Hotel de France as long as he chooses: we shan't go in search of him."

"No! we shan't go in search of him," echoed the other peasants approvingly.

The old rogue shook his head with affected commiseration. "The duke will not put you to that trouble," he replied; "he will be here in less than a couple of hours."

"How do you know that?"

"I know it through M. Laugeron, who, just as I was starting, said, 'Above all old man, explain to my friend Lacheneur that the duke has ordered horses to be ready to take him to Sairmeuse at eleven o'clock.'"

"With a common impulse all the peasants who had watches consulted them."

"And what does he want here?" asked the same young farmer who had spoken before.

"Excuse me but he didn't tell me," replied Father Chupin, "though one need not be very cunning to guess. He comes to revisit his former estates, and to take them from those who have purchased them, if possible. From you, Rousselet, he will claim the meadows on the Oiselle, which always yield two crops; from you Father Gauchais, the ground on which the Croix-Brulee stands: from you, Chalouineau, the vineyards on the Borderie——"

Chalouineau was the impetuous young fellow who had twice interrupted Father Chupin already. "Claim the Borderie!" he exclaimed, with even greater violence than before, "let him try—and we'll see. It was waste land when my father bought it—covered with briars; why a goat couldn't have found pasture there. We have cleared it of stones, we have scratched up the soil with our very nails, watered it with our sweat, and now this duke wants to take it from us! Ah! he shall have my last drop of blood first."

"I don't say but——"

"But what? Is it any fault of ours if the nobles fled to foreign lands? We haven't stolen their lands, have we? The government offered them for sale; we bought them, and paid for them; they are lawfully ours."

"That's true; but M. de Sairmeuse is the great friend of the king."

The young soldier whose voice had aroused the most noble sentiments only a moment before, was now no longer remembered. Invaded France, the threatening en-

emy, were alike forgotten. The all-powerful instinct of avarice had been suddenly aroused.

"In my opinion," resumed Chalouineau, "we had better consult the Baron d'Escorval."

"Yes, yes!" exclaimed the peasants; "let us go at once!"

They were starting, when a villager who sometimes read the papers, checked them with the remark. "Take care what you are about. Don't you know that since the return of the Bourbons M. d'Escorval is of no account whatever? Fouché has him on the proscription list, and he is under the surveillance of the police."

This objection dampened the general enthusiasm. "That's true," murmured some of the older men, "a visit to M. d'Escorval would, perhaps, do us more harm than good. And, besides, what advice could he give us?"

Chalouineau had forgotten all prudence. "What of that!" he exclaimed. "If M. d'Escorval has no advice to give us about this matter, he can, perhaps, teach us how to resist and to defend ourselves."

For some moments Father Chupin had been studying, with a placid countenance, the storm of anger he had aroused. In his secret heart he experienced an incendiary's satisfaction at the sight of the flames he had kindled. perhaps he already had a presentiment of the infamous part he would play a few months later. However, satisfied with his experiment, he now thought fit to assume the role of moderator.

"Wait a little. Don't cry before you are hurt," he exclaimed in an ironical tone. "Who told you that the Duke de Sairmeuse would trouble you? How much of his former domain do you all own between you? Almost nothing. A few fields and meadows, and a hill on the Borderie. All these together didn't yield him five thousand livres a year in the old days."

"Yes, that's true," replied Chalouineau; "and if the revenue you mention is now four times as much it is only because the land is in the hands of forty farmers who cultivate it themselves."

"Which is another reason why the duke is not likely to say a word; he won't wish to set the whole district in commotion. In my opinion he will only proceed against one person—against our late mayor—M. Lacheneur in short."

Ah ! the wily poacher knew only too well the egotism of his compatriots. He knew with what complacency and eagerness they would accept an expiatory victim whose sacrifice would be their salvation.

"That's a fact," remarked an old man ; "M. Lacheneur owns nearly all the Sairmeuse property."

"Say all, while you are about it," rejoined Father Chupin. "Where does M. Lacheneur live? Why in the beautiful Chateau de Sairmeuse, whose towers we can see there through the trees. He hunts in the forests which once belonged to the Duke de Sairmeuse ; he fishes in their lakes ; he drives the horses that once belonged to them, seated in the carriages on which one might still see their coat of arms, if it hadn't been painted out. Twenty years ago, Lacheneur was a poor devil like myself ; now he's a grand gentleman with a princely income. He wears the finest broad-cloth and top-boots just like the Baron d'Es-corval. Instead of working himself he makes others work for him, and when he passes by every one must bow to the earth. If you kill so much as a sparrow on his lands he will have you thrown into prison. Ah, he has been a lucky fellow. The emperor made him mayor. The Bourbons deprived him of his office ; but what does that matter to him ? He is still the real master here, just as the dukes were in other days. His son is pursuing his studies in Paris, with the intention of becoming a notary. As for his daughter, Mademoiselle Marie-Anne——"

"Not a word against her !" exclaimed Chalouineau ; "if she were mistress, there wouldn't be a poor man in the neighborhood. Ask your wife if that isn't the case, Father Chupin."

This was an affront which the rascal Chupin would never forget as long as he lived ; still for the moment he swallowed it without any show of outward resentment. "I don't say that Mademoiselle Marie-Anne is not generous," he replied with affected humility, "but after all her charitable work, she has plenty of money left for her fine dresses and other fancies. I think M. Lacheneur might be very well content to give the duke back half or even three-quarters of the property he acquired no one ever knew how. He would still have enough left to grind the poor under foot."

After appealing to selfishness, Father Chupin now ap-

pealed to envy. There could be no doubt of his success. But he had no time to pursue his advantage. Mass was over, and the worshipers were leaving the church. Soon there stood on the threshold of the porch the man he had alluded to—M. Lacheneur—mayor of Sairmeuse in the days of the vanquished emperor. A young girl of dazzling beauty leant upon his arm. Father Chupin walked straight towards him and brusquely delivered his message. M. Lacheneur staggered beneath the blow. He turned first so red, and then so frightfully pale, that those around him thought he was about to fall. But he quickly recovered his self-possession, and without a word to the messenger, walked rapidly away leading his daughter with him.

Some minutes later an old post-chaise, drawn by four horses, dashed through the village at a gallop, and paused before the cure's house. Then one might have witnessed a singular spectacle. Father Chupin had gathered his wife and sons together, and the four surrounded the carriage, shouting with all the power of their lungs:

“Long live the Duke de Sairmeuse!”

II.

A GENTLY inclined road, more than two miles in length shaded by a quadruple row of venerable elms leads from the village to the Chateau de Sairmeuse. Nothing could be more beautiful than this avenue, a fit approach to a palace; and the stranger who beheld it would at once understand the popular proverb of the district: “He does not know the real beauty of France, who has never seen Sairmeuse nor the Oiselle.” The Oiselle is a little river crossed by a wooden bridge on leaving the village, and the clear rapid waters of which give a delicious freshness to the valley. At every step as one ascends the avenue the view changes. It is as if an enchanting panorama were being slowly enrolled before one. On the right the saw-pits of Fereol and the wind-mills of La Reche may be perceived. On the left the tree-tops of the forest of Dolomieu tremble in the breeze. Those imposing ruins across the river are all that remain of the feudal castle of the house of Breulh. That red brick mansion, with granite trimmings, half concealed by a bend in the stream, belongs to the

Baron d'Escorval. And if the day is clear, one can easily distinguish the spires of Montaignac in the distance.

This was the road taken by M. Lacheneur after Chupin had delivered his message. But what did the late mayor of Sairmeuse care for the beauties of the landscape! Standing under the church porch he had received his death wound; and now, with a tottering step, he dragged himself along like some poor soldier, mortally wounded upon the field of battle, who searches for a ditch or quiet nook where to lie down and die. He seemed to have lost all thought of the surroundings—all consciousness of previous events. He pursued his way, lost in his reflections, and guided only by force of habit. Two or three times his daughter, who was walking by his side, tried to speak to him; but an "Ah! let me alone!" uttered in a harsh tone, was the only reply she obtained. Evidently M. Lacheneur had received a terrible blow; and undoubtedly, as often happens under such circumstances, the unfortunate man was reviewing all the different phases of his life.

At twenty he was only a poor ploughboy in the service of the Sairmeuse family. His ambition was modest then; and stretched beneath a tree at the hour of noonday rest he indulged in dreams as simple as his calling. "If I could but amass a hundred pistoles," he thought, "I would ask Father Barrois for the hand of his daughter Martha; and he wouldn't refuse me."

A hundred pistoles! A thousand francs!—an enormous sum for one who, during two years of toil and privation had only laid by eleven louis, placed carefully in a tiny box and hidden in the depth of his straw mattress. Still, he did not despair, for he had read in Martha's eyes that she would wait. And Mademoiselle Armande de Sairmeuse, a rich old maid, was his godmother; and he thought, if he attracted her adroitly, that he might, perhaps, interest her in his love affair.

Then suddenly the terrible storm of the Revolution burst over France. With the fall of the first thunderbolts, the Duke de Sairmeuse left France with the Count d'Artois. They took refuge in foreign lands much after the same fashion as a passer-by might seek shelter in a doorway from a summer shower, saying to himself: "This will not last long." The storm did last, however, and the following year Mademoiselle Armande, who had remained

at Sairmeuse, died. The chateau was then closed, the president of the district took possession of the keys in the name of the government, and the servants became scattered in various parts.

Lacheneur took up his residence in Montaignac. Young, daring, and personally attractive, blessed with an energetic face, and an intelligence far above his station, it was not long before he became well known in the political clubs. For three months indeed Lacheneur was the virtual dictator of Montaignac.

But this profession of public agitator is seldom lucrative; hence the surprise throughout the district was immense, when people learned that the former ploughboy had purchased the chateau, and almost all the land belonging to his former masters. It is true that the nation had sold this princely domain for scarcely a twentieth part of its real value. It had been valued at sixty-nine thousand francs. To sell it for so beggarly an amount was equivalent to giving it away. And yet, it was necessary to have this sum, and strange to say the apparently penniless Lacheneur possessed it, since he had poured a flood of beautiful louis d'or into the hands of the receiver of the district.

From that moment his popularity waned. The patriots who had applauded the ploughboy cursed the capitalist. He discreetly left his former friends to recover from their rage as best they could, and returned to Sairmeuse. There every one bowed low before Citoyen Lacheneur. Unlike most people, he did not forget his past hopes at the moment when they might be realized. He married Martha Barrois, and leaving the country to work out its own salvation without his assistance, he gave his time and attention to agriculture.

Any close observer in those days would have surmised that the man was bewildered by the sudden change in his situation. His manner was so troubled and anxious that, to see him, he would have been taken for a servant in constant fear of being detected in some indiscretion. At first he did not open the chateau, but installed himself and his young wife in the cottage formerly occupied by the head gamekeeper, near the entrance of the park. But, little by little, with the habit of possession came assurance. The Consulate had succeeded the Directory, the Empire suc-

ceeded the Consulate, and Citoyen Lacheneur became Monsieur Lacheneur. Appointed mayor two years later, he left the cottage and took possession of the chateau. The former ploughboy slept in the bed of the Dukes de Sairmeuse ; he ate off the massive plate bearing their escutcheon ; and he received his visitors in the same magnificent suite of rooms where the proud peers had received their friends in the years gone by.

To those who had known him in former days, M. Lacheneur had become unrecognizable. He had adapted himself to his lofty station. Blushing at his own ignorance, he had had the courage—wonderful in one of his age—to acquire the education which he lacked. Then all his undertakings were successful to such a degree that his good luck had become proverbial. It sufficed for him to take any part in an enterprise for it to turn out well. The blessings of wedded life, moreover, were not denied him, for his wife had given him two lovely children, a son and a daughter ; while on the other hand his property, managed with a shrewdness and sagacity the former owners had not possessed, yielded a princely income.

How many under similar circumstances would have lost their heads ! But Lacheneur retained all his habitual coolness. In spite of the luxury that surrounded him, his own habits continued simple and frugal. He never had an attendant for his own person. His large income was almost entirely consecrated to the improvement of the estate or to the purchase of more land. And yet he was not avaricious. In all that concerned his wife or children he did not count the cost. His son, Jean, had been educated in Paris, for he wished him to be fitted for any position. Unwilling to consent to a separation from his daughter, he had entrusted her to the care of a resident governess. Sometimes his friends accused him of an inordinate ambition for his children ; but at any such remarks he would sadly shake his head and reply, “ All I want is to ensure them a modest and comfortable future, though it is folly indeed to count upon the time to come. Thirty years ago, who could have foreseen that the Sairmeuse family would ever be deprived of their estates ? ”

With such opinions he should have been a good master ; and such he was, though no one ever thought better of him on that account. His former comrades could not

forgive him for his sudden elevation, and seldom spoke of him without wishing his ruin in ambiguous language.

Alas ! evil days were to come. Towards the close of the year 1812, he lost his wife : while the disasters of 1813 swept away a large portion of his personal fortune, invested in a manufacturing enterprise. At the advent of the first Restoration, he was obliged to conceal himself for a time ; and to cap the climax the conduct of his son, who was still in Paris, caused him serious disquietude. He already believed himself the most unfortunate of men, and now here was another misfortune threatening him—a misfortune so terrible that all the others were forgotten in the contemplation of it. Twenty years had elapsed since the day he had purchased Sairmeuse. Twenty years ! And yet it seemed to him only yesterday that, blushing and trembling, he had laid those piles of louis d'or on the desk of the district receiver. Had he dreamed it ? No he had not dreamed it. His whole life, with its struggles and miseries, its hopes and fears, its unexpected joys and blighted hopes passed in review before him.

Lost in these memories, he had quite forgotten the present situation, when a commonplace incident, more powerful than his daughter's voice, brought him back to the threatening reality. The park gate leading to the Chateau de Sairmeuse, to *his* chateau, was locked. He shook it violently in a fit of rage, and being unable to break the lock, found some relief in breaking the bell.

On hearing the noise, a gardener hastened to the spot.

"Why is this gate closed ?" demanded M. Lacheneur, with unwonted violence of manner. "By what right do you barricade my house when I, the master, am out of doors ?"

The gardener tried to make some excuse. "Hold your tongue !" interrupted his master. "I dismiss you ; you are no longer in my service."

Leaving the bewildered gardener to his astonishment, he walked on through the pleasure grounds—past the velvet lawns fringed with summer flowers and dense patches of shrubbery. In the vestibule, paved and panelled with mosaics of marble, three of his tenants sat awaiting him, for it was on Sunday that he always received those farmers who desired to confer with him. The three

even rose at his approach, and deferentially doffed their hats. But he did not give them time to utter a word.

"Who allowed you to enter here?" he said in a savage voice, "and what do you desire? They sent you to play the spy on me, did they? Well, get out now and at once!"

The three farmers were even more bewildered than the gardener had been, and exchanged many comments of dismay. But M. Lacheneur did not hear them. Throwing open a sculptured door he had dashed into the grand saloon followed by his frightened daughter.

Never had Marie-Anne seen her father in such a mood; and she fairly trembled, affected for the moment by the most terrible presentiments. She had heard it said that under the influence of some dire calamity men have sometimes suddenly lost their reason, and she was wondering if her father had become insane. Many might really have supposed that such was the case, for his eyes flashed, his lips twitched and convulsive shudders shook his entire frame. He made the circuit of the drawing-room as a wild beast makes the circuit of its cage, uttering harsh imprecations and making frenzied gestures. His actions were quite incomprehensible. Sometimes he seemed to be trying the thickness of the carpet with the toe of his boot, and sometimes he threw himself on to a chair or a sofa as if to test their softness. Occasionally he paused abruptly before one of the valuable pictures that covered the walls, or before some precious bronze; and one might have supposed him to be taking an inventory, and appraising all the marvels of art and upholstery which decorated this apartment, the most sumptuous in the chateau.

"And I must renounce all this!" he exclaimed at last. "No, never! never! never! I cannot! I will not!"

Now, Marie-Anne was in a measure enlightened. But still she did not exactly know what was passing in her father's mind. Anxious for information she left the low chair on which she had been sitting and went to his side. "Are you ill, father?" she asked, in her sweetest voice; "what is the matter? What do you fear? Why don't you confide in me—am I not your daughter? Don't you love me any longer?"

At the sound of this dear voice, M. Lacheneur trembled like a sleeper suddenly aroused from the terrors of night.

mare, and cast an indescribable glance upon his daughter. "Did you not hear what Chupin said to me?" he replied slowly. "The Duke de Sairmeuse is at Montaignac—he will soon be here; and we are dwelling in the chateau of his fathers, and his domain has become ours!"

Marie-Anne was well acquainted with this vexed question of the national lands, a question which agitated France for thirty years, for she had heard it discussed a thousand times. "Ah, well! dear father," said she, "what does that matter, even if we do hold the property? You have bought it and paid for it, haven't you? So it is rightfully and lawfully ours."

M. Lacheneur hesitated a moment before replying. He had a secret which suffocated him; and was in one of those crises in which a man, however strong, totters and seeks for any support however fragile. "You would be right, my daughter," he murmured with drooping head, "if the money I gave in exchange for Sairmeuse had really belonged to me."

At this strange avowal the young girl turned pale and recoiled a step. "What?" she faltered; "the gold wasn't yours, father? Who did it belong to then? where did it come from?"

The unhappy man had gone too far to retract. "I will tell you everything, my dear girl," he replied, "and you shall be my judge. You shall decide everything. When the Sairmeuse family fled from France, I had only my hands to depend upon, and as it was almost impossible to obtain work, I wondered if starvation were not near at hand. Such was my condition when some one came one evening to tell me that Mademoiselle Armande de Sairmeuse, my godmother, was dying, and wished to speak with me. I ran to the chateau. The messenger had told the truth. Mademoiselle Armande was sick unto death. I felt aware of this when I saw her lying on the bed, whiter than wax. Ah! if I were to live a hundred years, I should never forget the look that was on her face. It seemed to express a determination to hold death at bay until some task on which she had resolved had been performed. When I entered the room she seemed relieved. 'How long you were in coming!' she murmured. I was about to make some excuse, when she motioned me to pause, and ordered her nurses to leave the room. As

soon as we were alone, 'You are an honest boy,' said she, 'and I am about to give you a proof of my confidence. People believe me to be poor, but they are mistaken. While my relatives were gaily ruining themselves, I was saving the five hundred louis which the duke allowed me every year.' So saying she motioned me to come nearer, and kneel beside her bed. I obeyed, and then Mademoiselle Armande leant towards me, fixed her lips to my ear, and added: 'I have saved eighty thousand francs.' I felt a sudden giddiness, but my godmother didn't notice it. 'This amount,' she continued, 'is not a quarter of the former income from our family estates. But now, who knows one day it may be the only resource of the Sairmeuses. I am going to place it in your charge, Lacheneur. I confide it to your honour and devotion. The estates belonging to the emigrants are to be sold, I hear. If such an act of injustice is committed, you will probably be able to purchase our property for seventy thousand francs.. If the property is sold by the government, purchase it; but if the lands belonging to the emigrants are not sold, take seventy thousand francs to the duke, my nephew, who is with the Count d'Artois. The surplus, that is to say, the ten thousand francs remaining, I give to you—they are yours.' When saying this she seemed to recover her strength. She raised herself up in bed, and holding the crucifix attached to her rosary against my lips, she added, 'Swear by the image of our Saviour, that you will faithfully execute your dying godmother's last will.' I took the required oath, and an expression of satisfaction overspread her features."

M. Lacheneur paused. The recollection of this scene plainly produced a deep impression on his mind. "In continuation," he said, "Mademoiselle Armande, then told me she should die content. 'You will have a protector on high,' she said. 'But this is not all. In times like these, this gold will not be safe in your hands unless those about you are ignorant that you possess it. It is here in this cupboard at the head of my bed, in a small oak chest, which you must manage to remove without being seen. If you went out with it in your arms, people might wonder by-and-by what it contained. The best plan would be to fasten a sheet round it, and let it down gently from the window into the garden. You must then leave the house

as you entered it, and as soon as you are outside, you must take the box and carry it home. The night is very dark, and no one will see you, if you are careful. But make haste; my strength is nearly gone.' I did as Mademoiselle Armande suggested, and less than ten minutes afterwards I had lowered the box into the garden without the slightest noise. Closing the window, I exclaimed, 'I have done your bidding godmother.' 'God be praised,' she whispered, 'Sairmeuse is saved!' I heard a deep sigh, and turning round found that she was dead."

M. Lacheneur shuddered as he uttered these last words. His emotion was intense, and for a moment he could not speak. Eventually, in a hollow voice, he exclaimed: "I called for aid—it came. Mademoiselle Armande was loved by every one; there was great lamentation, and half-an-hour of indescribable confusion. I was able to withdraw, unnoticed, to run into the garden, and carry away the box. An hour later, it was concealed in the miserable hovel I inhabited, and the following year I purchased Sairmeuse."

The unfortunate man paused again, he had confessed everything, and now stood trembling in front of his daughter trying to read his sentence in her eyes.

"And can you hesitate?" she asked.

"Ah! you don't know—"

"I know that Sairmeuse must be given up."

This was also the counsel of his own conscience, that faint voice which speaks only in a whisper, but which all the tumult on earth cannot overpower. Still he hesitated. "No one saw me take away the chest," he faltered. "If any one suspected it, there is not a single proof against me. But no one does suspect it."

Marie-Anne rose, her eyes flashing with indignation. "Father!" she exclaimed, "Oh! father! If others know nothing about it, can *you* forget it?"

M. Lacheneur did not immediately reply. He seemed to be inwardly wrestling with himself. "Restitution," he at last exclaimed. "Yes, then I will make restitution. I restitute what I received. I will give the Duke the eighty thousand francs, with the interest on the amount ever since I have had it in my hands, and then we shall be quits!"

Marie-Anne shook her head. "Why resort to an un-

worthy subterfuge?" she asked in a gentle voice. "You know perfectly well that it was Sairmeuse itself that Mademoiselle Armande wished to intrust to the servant of her house. And it is Sairmeuse which must be returned."

The word "servant" was revolting to a man, who, at least while the empire lasted, had been a power in the land. "Ah! Marie, you are cruel," he replied with intense bitterness, "as cruel as a child who has never suffered—as cruel as one who, never having been tempted himself is without mercy for those who have yielded to temptation. You tell me that I was but a trustee, and so indeed I formerly considered myself. If your dear mother were still alive, she would tell you the anxiety and anguish I felt on becoming the master of riches which were not mine. I was afraid of myself. I felt like some gambler to whom the winnings of others have been confided. Your mother could tell you that I moved heaven and earth to find the Duke de Sairmuese. But he had left the Count d'Artois, and no one knew where he had gone or what had become of him. Ten wears passed before I could make up my mind to inhabit the chateau—yes, ten years—during which I had the furniture dusted each morning as if the master was to return that very evening. At last I ventured. I heard M. d'Escorval declare that the duke had been killed in battle. So I took up my abode here; and day after day as the domain of Sairmeuse grew more productive and extensive under my care, I felt myself more and more its rightful owner."

This fresh plea—this despairing appeal on behalf of a bad cause produced no impression on Marie-Anne's loyal heart. "Restitution must be made," she repeated.

Her father wrung his hands. "Without mercy!" he exclaimed; "she is without mercy. Unfortunate girl! doesn't she understand that it is for her sake I wish to remain where I am. I am old; familiar with toil and poverty; and my hands are still hard and horny. What do I need to keep me alive till the time comes to lay me in the grave-yard? A crust of bread and an onion in the morning, a bowl of soup at night, and a bundle of straw to sleep on. I could easily return to that. But you, unhappy child! and your brother, what will become of you both?"

"We must not discuss nor haggle with duty, father,"

replied Marie-Anne. "I think, however, that you are needlessly alarmed. I believe the duke is too noble-hearted ever to allow you to want after the immense service you have rendered him."

The former ploughboy of the house of Sairmeuse laughed a loud, bitter laugh. "You believe that!" said he. "Then you don't know the nobles who have been our masters for ages. My only reward will be some callous phrase, "You're a worthy fellow," or something of the kind, uttered just for form's sake; and you will see us—me at my plough, and you out at service. And if I venture to speak of the ten thousand francs that were given me, I shall be treated like an impostor or an impudent fool. I swear this shall not be!"

"Oh, father!"

"No! this shall not be. And I realize—as you can not realize—the disgrace of such a fall. You think you are beloved in Sairmeuse? You are mistaken. We have been too fortunate not to be the victims of hatred and jealousy. If I fall to-morrow, those who kissed your hands yesterday will be ready to tear you to pieces!"

Lacheneur's eyes glittered; he believed he had found a victorious argument. "And then," resumed he, "you, yourself, will realize the horror of the disgrace. It will cost you the deadly anguish of separating from the man your heart has chosen?"

At these words Marie-Anne's beautiful eyes filled with tears. "If what you say proves true, father," she murmured, in an altered voice, "I may, perhaps, die of sorrow; but I shall have to realize that my confidence and love were misplaced."

"And you still insist upon my returning Sairmeuse to its former owner?"

"Honour demands it, father."

M. Lacheneur struck the chair in which he was seated with a violent blow of his fist. "And if I continue obstinate," he exclaimed—"if I keep the property—what will you do then?"

"I shall say to myself, father, that honest poverty is better than stolen wealth. I shall leave the chateau, which belongs to the Duke de Sairmeuse, and seek a situation as a servant in the neighbourhood."

M. Lacheneur sank back in his chair sobbing. He

knew his daughter's nature well enough to rest assured that she would do what she said. However, he was conquered; Marie-Anne had won the battle, and he had decided to make the heroic sacrifice she asked for.

"I will relinquish Sairmeuse," he faltered, "come what may——"

He paused suddenly, for a visitor had just opened the door unheard, and was now entering the room. The new comer was a young man, twenty or thereabouts, of distinguished mien, but with a rather melancholy and gentle manner. On crossing the threshold his eyes met those of Marie-Anne, and a crimson flush mantled over both their faces.

"Sir," said this young fellow, "my father sends me to inform you that the Duke de Sairmeuse and his son have just arrived. They have asked the hospitality of our cure."

M. Lacheneur rose, unable to conceal his agitation. "You will thank the Baron d'Escorval for his attention, my dear Maurice," he replied. "I shall have the honor of seeing him to-day, after an important step which my daughter and I are about to take."

Young d'Escorval had seen at the first glance that his presence was inopportune, and accordingly he did not linger. But as he was taking leave, Marie-Anne found time and opportunity to say to him in a low voice: "I think I know your heart, Maurice; this evening I shall know it for certain."

III.

FEW of the inhabitants of Sairmeuse knew, except by name, the terrible duke whose arrival had thrown the whole village into commotion. Some of the oldest residents had a faint recollection of having seen him long ago, before '89 indeed, when he came to visit his aunt, Mademoiselle Armande, though under the monarchy his duties had seldom permitted him to leave the court. If he had given no signs of life during the empire, it was mainly because he had escaped the humiliations and suffering which so many of the emigrants endured in exile. Indeed unlike most of his fellows he had received a princely fortune in exchange for the wealth of which the Revolution had deprived him.

Taking refuge in London after the defeat of the army of

Conde, he had been so fortunate as to please the only daughter of one of the richest catholic peers in England, and he had married her. She possessed a dowry of two hundred and fifty thousand pounds sterling, more than six million francs. Still the marriage was not a happy one; for the chosen companion of the licentious Count d'Artois not unnaturally proved a very indifferent husband. Indeed the young duchess was contemplating a separation when she died, in giving birth to a little boy, who was baptized under the names of Anne-Marie-Martial.

The loss of his wife did not render the Duke de Sairmeuse inconsolable. He was free and richer than he had ever been. As soon therefore as etiquette permitted, he confided his son to the care of one of his wife's relations and began his roving life again. Rumour had told the truth. He had fought, and fought furiously, against France first in the Austrian and then in the Russian ranks. And he took no pains to conceal the fact, convinced that he had only performed his duty. He indeed considered that he had honestly and loyally gained the rank of general, granted him by the Emperor of all the Russias.

He had not returned to France during the first Restoration; but his absence had been involuntary. His father-in-law, had just died, and the duke was detained in London by business connected with his son's immense inheritance. Then followed the "Hundred Days," by which he was exasperated. But "the good cause," as he styled it, having triumphed anew, he had at length hastened back to France.

Lacheneur had correctly estimated the character of the former lord of Sairmeuse, when he resisted his daughter's entreaties. The former ploughboy had been compelled to conceal himself during the first Restoration, and he knew only too well, that the returned *émigrés* had learned nothing and forgotten nothing. The Duke de Sairmeuse was no exception to the rule. He thought, and nothing could be more sadly absurd, that a mere act of authority would suffice to suppress forever all the events of the Revolution and the Empire. When any of those who had seen Louis XVIII. at the helm in 1814, assured the duke that France had changed in many respects since 1789, he responded with a shrug of the shoulders: "Nonsense! As soon as we assert ourselves all these rascals

whose rebellion alarms you will quietly slink out of sight." And such was really his opinion.

On the road from Montaignac to Sairmeuse, his grace, comfortably ensconced in a corner of his travelling carriage, unfolded his theories for his son's benefit. "The king has been poorly advised," he said. "And indeed I am disposed to believe that he inclines too much to Jacobinism. If he would listen to my advice, he would use the twelve hundred thousand soldiers our friends have placed at his disposal, to bring his subjects to a proper sense of duty. Twelve hundred thousand bayonets have far more eloquence than all the clauses of a charter."

The duke continued his remarks in this strain until the vehicle approached Sairmeuse. Though but little given to sentiment, he was really affected by the sight of the district in which he had been born—where he had played as a child, and of which he had heard nothing since Made-moiselle Armande's death. Though change could be detected on every side, at least the outlines of the landscape remained the same, and the valley of the Oiselle was as bright and smiling as in days gone by.

"I recognize it!" exclaimed his grace with a momentary delight that made him forget politics. "I recognize it!"

Soon the changes became more striking. The vehicle had reached Sairmeuse, and rattled over the stones of the one long street. This street, in former years, had been unpaved, and had always been well nigh impassable in wet weather.

"Ah, ha!" murmured the duke, "this is an improvement!"

It was not long before he noticed others. The dilapidated, thatched hovels of the old regime had given place to pretty, comfortable white cottages, with green blinds to the windows and vines hanging gracefully over the doors. Soon the church came in view with the white flag of the Bourbons floating according to royal command on the summit of the belfry tower. In the open square facing the house of worship groups of peasants were still engaged in anxious converse.

"What do you think of all these peasants?" enquired the duke's son, the Marquis Martial de Sairmeuse. "Do

you think they look like people who are preparing a triumphal reception for their old masters?"

The duke shrugged his shoulders. He was not the man to renounce an illusion for such a trifle. "They don't know that I am in this carriage," he replied. "When they know——" At this very moment loud shouts of "Vive Monseigneur le Duc de Sairmeuse!" interrupted him.

"Do you hear that, marquis?" he exclaimed; and pleased by these cries that proved he was in the right, he leant from the carriage-window, waving his hand to the honest Chupin family, who were running after the vehicle with noisy shouts. The old rascal, his wife, and his sons, all possessed powerful voices; and it was scarcely strange that the duke should believe that the whole village was welcoming him. He was indeed convinced of it; and when the vehicle stopped before the house of the cure, M. de Sairmeuse was firmly persuaded that the popularity of the nobility was even greater then than ever.

Upon the threshold of the parsonage, stood Bibaine, the village priest's old housekeeper. She knew who these guests must be, for a cure's servant always knows everything that is going on. "The cure has not yet returned from church," she said, in reply to the duke's inquiry; "but if the gentlemen would like to wait, it will not be long before he comes, for the poor dear man has not yet lunched."

"Then let us go in," the duke said to his son; and guided by the housekeeper, they entered a small sitting-room which M. de Sairmeuse appraised in a single glance. The aspect of a house reveals the habits of its master. Here everything was poor and bare, though scrupulously clean. The walls were white-washed; eight or ten chairs were ranged around, and the spoons and forks on the clothless table were of common pewter. This abode either belonged to a man of saintly character or one of intense ambition.

"Will these gentlemen take any refreshment?" inquired Bibaine.

"Upon my word," replied Martial, "I must confess that the drive has whetted my appetite amazingly."

"Blessed Jesus!" exclaimed the old housekeeper, in evident despair. "You wish to lunch. What am I to do? I have nothing! That is to say—yes—I have an old hen

left in the coop. Give me time to ring its neck, to pick it and clean it——” She paused to listen; footsteps could be heard in the passage. “Ah!” she exclaimed, “here comes our cure!”

The village priest of Sairmeuse, the Abbe Midon as he was called was the son of a poor farmer in the environs of Montaignac, and owed his Latin and its tonsure to the privations of his family. Tall, angular, and solemn, he was as cold and impassive as a grave-stone.

It was by immense efforts of will, and at the cost of great physical and mental torture that he had made himself what he was. Some idea of the terrible restraint to which he had subjected himself could be formed by looking at his eyes, which occasionally flashed with all the fire of an impassioned soul. Was he old or young? The most subtle observer would have hesitated to answer this question on looking at his pallid emaciated face, cut in two by an immense nose—a real eagle’s beak—as thin as the edge of a razor. He wore a long black robe, patched and darned in numberless places, but without a single spot or stain. This garment hung about his tall attenuated body like the damaged sails around the mast of some disabled ship.

At the sight of two strangers occupying his sitting-room, the village priest manifested some slight surprise. The vehicle standing at the door had announced the presence of some unusual visitor; but neither he nor the sacristan had been notified, and he wondered who he had to deal with, and what was required of him. Mechanically he turned to Bibaine, but the old servant had taken flight.

The duke understood his host’s astonishment. “Upon my word, abbe,” he said, with the impertinent ease of a great nobleman, who makes himself at home everywhere, “we have taken your house by storm and hold the position, as you see. I am the Duke de Sairmeuse, and this is my son, the marquis.”

The priest bowed, but he did not seem very greatly impressed by his guest’s exalted rank. “It is a great honour for me,” he replied, in a more than reserved tone, “to receive a visit from the former master of this place.”

He emphasized this word “former,” in such a manner that it was impossible to doubt his sentiments and opinions. “Unfortunately,” he continued, “you will not find

here the comforts to which you are accustomed, and I fear——”

“Nonsense!” interrupted the duke. “An old soldier is not fastidious, and what suffices for you, Monsieur l’Abbe, will suffice for us. And rest assured that we shall amply repay you in one way or another for any inconvenience we may cause you.”

The priest’s eyes flashed. This want of tact, this disagreeable familiarity, this last insulting remark, kindled the anger of the man concealed beneath the priest.

“Besides,” added Martial gaily, “we have been vastly amused by your housekeeper’s anxieties, and already know that there is a chicken in the coop——”

“That is to say there was one, Monsieur le Marquis.”

The old housekeeper, who suddenly reappeared, explained her master’s reply. She seemed overwhelmed with despair. “Holy Virgin! what shall I do?” she clamoured. “The chicken has disappeared. Some one has certainly stolen it for the coop is securely closed!”

“Do not accuse your neighbors hastily,” interrupted the cure; “no one has stolen it. Bertrand was here this morning to ask alms for her sick daughter. I had no money, so I gave her the fowl that she might make some good broth for the poor girl.”

This explanation changed Bibaine’s consternation to fury. Planting herself in the centre of the room, one hand on her hip, and the other pointing at her master, she cried in a loud voice, “That is just the sort of a man he is; he hasn’t as much sense as a baby! Any miserable peasant who meets him can turn him round his little finger; and the bigger the falsehood the more readily the tears come to his eyes. And that’s the way they take the very shoes off his feet and the bread from his mouth. As for Bertrand’s daughter she’s no more ill than I am!”

“Enough,” said the priest sternly, “enough.” Then, knowing by experience that his voice would not check her flood of reproaches, he took her by the arm and led her out into the passage.

The Duke de Sairmeuse and his son exchanged a glance of consternation. Was this a comedy prepared for their benefit? Evidently not, since their arrival had been unexpected. But the priest whose character had been so plainly revealed by this domestic quarrel, was not a man

to their taste. At least, he was evidently not the man they had hoped to find—the auxiliary whose assistance was indispensable to the success of their plans. Still they did not exchange a word; but listened, waiting for what would follow.

They could hear a discussion in the passage. The master was speaking in a low tones, but with an unmistakable accent of command, and the servant uttered an astonished exclamation. No distinct word was, however, audible.

Soon the priest re-entered the sitting-room. “I hope, gentlemen,” he said, with a dignity calculated to check any attempt at sarcasm, “that you will excuse this ridiculous scene. The cure of Sairmeuse, thank God, is not so poor as his housekeeper pretends.”

Neither the duke nor Martial made any reply. Their earlier assurance was very sensibly diminished; and M. de Sairmeuse, deemed it advisable to change the subject. This he did, by relating the events which he had just witnessed in Paris; profiting of the occasion to pretend that his majesty, Louis XVIII., had been welcomed back with enthusiastic transports of affection.

Fortunately, the old housekeeper interrupted this recital. She entered the room, loaded with china, spoons, forks, and bottles, and behind her came a tall man in a white apron, with three or four covered dishes in his hands. It was an order to go and obtain this repast from the village inn that had drawn from Bibaine so many exclamations of wonder and dismay in the passage.

A moment later the cure and his guests took their places at the table. Had the dinner merely consisted of the much-lamented chicken, the rations would have been very “short.” Indeed the worthy woman was herself obliged to confess this, on seeing the terrible appetites evinced by M. de Sairmeuse and his son. “One would have sworn that they hadn’t eaten anything for a whole fortnight,” she told her friends the next day.

The Abbe Midon was apparently not hungry, though it was now two o’clock, and he had eaten nothing since the previous evening. The sudden arrival of the former masters of Sairmeuse filled his heart with gloomy forebodings; and to his mind their coming presaged the greatest misfortunes. So while he played with his knife and fork, pretend-

ing to eat, he was really occupied in watching his guests, and in studying them with all a priest's penetration, which, by the way, is generally far superior to that of a physician or a magistrate.

The Duke de Sairmeuse was fifty-seven, but looked considerably younger. The storms of his youth, the dissipation of his riper years, the great excesses of every kind in which he had indulged had failed to impair his iron constitution. Of herculean build, he was extremely proud of his strength, and of his hands, which were well formed, but large, firmly knit and powerful, such hands as rightfully belonged to a nobleman whose ancestors had dealt many a crushing blow with ponderous battle-axe and two-handed sword in the ancient days of chivalry. His face revealed his character. He possessed all the graces and all the vices of a courtier. He was at the same time witty and ignorant, sceptical as regards religion, and yet violently imbued with the authoritative prejudices of his class.

Though less robust than his father, Martial was quite as distinguished a looking cavalier. Young as he was, barely a man, he had already been the hero of many a love intrigue, and more than one beauty of renown at foreign courts had been smitten with the soft gleam of his large blue eyes, and the wavy locks of golden hair he inherited from his mother. To his father he owed energy, courage, and, it must also be added, perversity. But he was his superior in education and intellect. If he shared his father's prejudices, he had not adopted them without weighing them carefully. What the father might do in a moment of excitement, the son was capable of doing in cold blood.

It was thus that the abbe, with rare sagacity, read the character of his guests. So it was with sorrow, but without surprise, that he heard the duke advance, on the questions of the day, the impossible ideas that were shared by nearly all the returned *émigrés*. Knowing the condition of the country, and the state of the public opinion, the cure endeavoured to convince the obstinate nobleman of his mistake; but upon this subject the duke would not permit contradiction; and he was beginning to lose his temper, when Bibaine opportunely appeared at the parlour door.

"Monsieur le Duc," said she, "M. Lacheneur and his daughter are without and desire to speak to you."

This name of Lacheneur awakened no recollection in the duke's mind. First of all, he had never lived at Sairmeuse. And even if he had, what courtier of the *ancien regime* ever troubled himself about the individual names of his peasantry, whom he regarded with such profound indifference. When a nobleman addressed these people, he exclaimed : "Halloo ! hi there ! my worthy fellow !"

Hence it was with the air of a man who is making an effort of memory that the Duke de Sairmeuse repeated ; "Lacheneur—M. Lacheneur——"

But Martial, a closer observer than his father, had noticed that the priest's glance wavered at the mention of this name.

"Who is this person, abbe ?" lightly asked the duke.

"M. Lacheneur," replied the priest with evident hesitation, "is the present owner of the Chateau de Sairmeuse."

Martial, the precocious diplomat, could not repress a smile on hearing this reply, which he had foreseen. But the duke bounded from his chair. "Ah !" he exclaimed, "it's the rascal who had the impudence—Let him come in, old woman, let him come in."

Bibaine retired, and the priest's uneasiness increased. "Permit me, Monsieur le Duc," he hastily said, "to remark that M. Lacheneur exercises a great influence in this region—to offend him would be impolitic——"

"I understand—you advise me to be conciliatory. Such sentiments are those of a Jacobin. If his majesty listens to the advice of such as you, all these sales of confiscated estates will be ratified. Zounds ! our interests are the same. If the Revolution has deprived the nobility of their property, it has also impoverished the clergy."

"The possessions of a priest are not of this world," coldly retorted the cure.

M. de Sairmeuse was about to make some impertinent rejoinder, when M. Lacheneur appeared, followed by his daughter. The wretched man was ghastly pale, great drops of perspiration coursed down forehead, and his restless, haggard eyes revealed his distress of mind. Marie-Anne was as pale as her father, but her attitude and the light gleaming in her glance spoke of invincible energy and determination.

"Ah, well! friend," said the duke, "so you are the owner of Sairmeuse, it seems."

This was said with such a careless insolence of manner that the cure blushed that a man whom he considered his equal should be thus treated in his house. He rose and offered the visitors' chairs. "Will you take a seat, dear Lacheneur?" said he, with a politeness intended as a lesson for the duke; "and you, also, mademoiselle, do me the honour——"

But the father and the daughter both refused the proffered civility with a motion of the head.

"Monsieur le Duc," continued Lacheneur, "I am an old servant of your house——"

"Ah! indeed!"

"Mademoiselle Armande, your aunt, did my poor mother the honour of acting as my godmother——"

"Ah, yes," interrupted the duke, "I remember you now. Our family has shown great kindness to you and yours. And it was to prove your gratitude, probably, that you made haste to purchase our estate!"

The former ploughboy was of humble origin, but his heart and his character had developed with his fortunes; he understood his own worth. Much as he was disliked, and even detested, by his neighbours, every one respected him. And here was a man who treated him with undisguised scorn. Why? By what right? Indignant at the outrage, he made a movement as if to retire. No one, save his daughter, knew the truth; he had only to keep silent, and Sairmeuse remained his. Yes, he, had still the power to keep Sairmeuse, and he knew it, for he did not share the fears of the ignorant rustics. He was too well informed not to be able to distinguish between the hopes of the *emigres* and the reality of their situation.

He knew that to place the returning noblemen perforce in repossession of their ancestral estates would imperil even the existence of the monarchy, despite the presence of all the foreign bayonets. A beseeching word, uttered in a low tone by his daughter, induced him, however, to turn again to the duke. "If I purchased Sairmeuse," he answered, in a voice husky with emotion, "it was in obedience to the command of your dying aunt, and with the money she gave me for that purpose. If you see me

here, it is only because I come to restore to you the deposit confided to my keeping."

Any one not belonging to that class of spoiled fools who ordinarily surround a throne would have been deeply touched. But the duke thought this grand act of honesty and generosity the most simple and natural thing in the world.

"That's all very well, so far as the principal is concerned," said he. "But let us speak now of the interest. Sairmeuse, if I remember rightly, yielded an average income of one thousand louis per year. These revenues, well invested, should have amounted to a considerable amount. Where is it?"

This claim, thus advanced and at such a moment, was so outrageous, that Martial, disgusted, made a sign to his father which the latter did not see. But the cure hoping to recall the grasping nobleman to something like a sense of shame, exclaimed: "Monsieur le Duc! Oh, Monsieur le Duc!"

Lacheneur shrugged his shoulders with an air of resignation. "The income I have partly used for my own living expenses, and the education of my children; but most of it has been expended in improving the estate, which to-day yields an income twice as large as in former years."

"That is to say, for twenty years, M. Lacheneur has played the part of lord of the manor. A delightful comedy. You are rich now, I suppose."

"I possess nothing at all. But I hope you will allow me to take ten thousand francs, which your aunt gave me."

"Ah! she gave you ten thousand francs. And when?"

"On the same evening that she gave me the seventy thousands francs intended for the purchase of the estate."

"Perfect! What proof can you furnish that she gave you this sum?"

Lacheneur stood motionless and speechless. He tried to reply, but could not. If he opened his lips it would only be to pour a torrent of menace, insult, and invective.

Marie-Anne stepped quickly forward. "The proof, sir," said she, in a clear, ringing voice, "is the word of this man, who, of his own free will, comes to return to you—to give you a fortune."

As she sprang forward, her beautiful dark hair escaped from its confinement, her rich blood crimsoned her

cheeks, her dark eyes flashed brilliantly, and sorrow, anger, horror at the humiliation imposed upon her father, imparted a sublime expression to her face. She was so beautiful that Martial gazed at her with absolute wonder. "Lovely!" he murmured in English; "beautiful as an angel!"

These words, which she understood, abashed Marie-Anne. But she had said enough; her father felt that he was avenged. He drew from his pocket a roll of papers and threw them upon the table.

"Here are your titles," he said, addressing the duke in a tone full of implacable hatred. "Keep the legacy your aunt gave me, I wish nothing of yours. I shall never set foot in Sairmeuse again. Penniless I entered it, penniless I will leave it!"

He walked out of the room with head proudly erect, and when they were outside, he merely said to his daughter; "You see, I told you so!"

"You have done your duty," she replied; "it is those who haven't done theirs who are to be pitied!"

She had no opportunity to say any more, for Martial came running after them, anxious for another chance of seeing this girl whose beauty had made such an immediate impression upon his mind. "I hastened after you," he said addressing Marie-Anne, rather than M. Lacheneur, "to reassure you. All this will be arranged, Mademoiselle. Eyes so beautiful as yours should never know tears. I will be your advocate with my father—"

"Mademoiselle Lacheneur has no need of an advocate!" interrupted a harsh voice.

Martial turned, and saw the young man who that morning had gone to warn M. Lacheneur of the duke's arrival. Accosting him, he exclaimed, in an insolent voice, "I am the Marquis de Sairmeuse."

"And I," said the other quietly, "am Maurice d'Escorval."

They surveyed one another for a moment, each expecting, perhaps, an insult from the other. Instinctively, they felt they were to be enemies; and the glances they exchanged were full of animosity. Perhaps they had a presentiment that they were to be the champions of two different principles, as well as rivals in love.

Martial, remembering his father, yielded. "We shall meet again, M. d'Escorval," he said, as he retired.

At this threat, Maurice shrugged his shoulders, and replied, "You had better not desire it."

IV.

THE residence of the Baron d'Escorval, the brick structure with stone dressings, seen from the avenue leading to the Chateau de Sairmeuse, was small and unpretentious. Its chief attraction was a pretty lawn extending to the banks of the Oiselle in front, and a small but shady park in the rear. It was known as the Chateau d'Escorval, but such an appellation was a piece of the grossest flattery. Any petty manufacturer who has amassed a small fortune, would desire a larger, handsomer, and more imposing structure for his residence.

M. d'Escorval—and history will record the fact to his honour—was not a rich man. Although he had been entrusted with several of those missions from which generals and diplomats often return laden with millions, his worldly possessions only consisted of the little patrimony bequeathed him by his father; a property which yielded an income of from twenty to twenty-five thousand francs a year. His modest dwelling, situated about a mile from Sairmeuse, represented ten years' savings. He had built it in 1806 from a plan drawn by his own hand, and it was the dearest spot he had on earth. He always hastened to this retreat when work allowed him a little rest, though on this occasion he had not come to Escorval of his own free will, for he had been compelled to leave Paris by the prescription list of July 24—that fatal list which summoned the valiant Ney, the enthusiastic Labedoyere, and the virtuous Drouot before a court-martial.

Even in the seclusion of his country seat, M. d'Escorval's situation was not without danger, for he was one of those who, some days before the disaster of Waterloo, had strongly urged the emperor to order the execution of Fouche, the former minister of police. Now, Fouche knew of this advice; and to-day he was all powerful. Hence, M. d'Escorval's friends wrote to him from Paris to be very careful. But he put his trust in Providence,

and faced the future, threatening though it was, with the unalterable serenity of a pure conscience.

The baron was still young; he was not yet fifty, but anxiety, work, and long nights passed in struggling with the most arduous difficulties of the imperial policy had aged him before his time. He was tall, slightly inclined to *embonpoint*, and stooped a little. His calm eyes, serious mouth, broad, furrowed forehead, and austere manners at once inspired respect. "He must be stern and inflexible," said those who saw him for the first time. But they were mistaken. If, in the exercise of his official duties, he had always had the strength to resist any temptation to swerve from the right path; if, when duty was at stake, he was as rigid as iron, in private life he was as unassuming as a child, and kind and gentle even to the verge of weakness. To this nobility of character he owed his domestic happiness, that rare boon which after all is the one great treasure of life.

During the bloodiest epoch of the Reign of Terror, M. d'Escorval had saved from the guillotine a young girl, named Victorie-Laure d'Alleu, a distant cousin of the Rhetaus of Commarin, as beautiful as an angel, and only three years younger than himself. He loved her—and though she was an orphan, destitute of fortune, he married her, considering the treasure of her virgin heart of far greater value than the largest dowry. She was an honest woman as her husband was an honest man, in the strictest, most rigorous sense of the word. She was seldom seen at the Tuileries, where M. d'Escorval's worth made him eagerly welcomed. The splendours of the imperial court, outshining even the pomp of the grand Monarque, had no attractions for her. She reserved her grace, beauty, youth, and accomplishments for the adornment of her home. Her husband was everything for her. She lived in him and through him. She had not a thought which did not belong to him; and her happiest hours were those he could spare from his arduous labors to devote to her. And when in the evening, they sat beside the fire in their modest drawing-room, with their son Maurice playing on the rug at their feet, it seemed to them that they had nothing to wish for here below.

The overthrow of the empire surprised them in the heyday of happiness. Surprised them? Scarcely. For a

long time, M. d'Escorval had seen the prodigious edifice, raised by the genius whom he had made his idol, totter as if about to fall. Certainly, he was troubled by this fall when at last it came, but he was truly heart-broken at beholding all the treason and cowardice which followed it. He was disgusted and horrified at the rising of the sons of mammon, eager to gorge themselves with the spoil. Under these circumstances, exile from Paris seemed an actual blessing; and he remarked to the baroness that in the seclusion of the provinces they would soon be forgotten. In his innermost heart, however, he was not without misgivings—misgivings shared by his wife, who trembled for her husband's safety, although to spare him all alarm she strove to preserve a placid countenance.

On this first Sunday in August, M. and Madame d'Escorval had been unusually sad. A vague presentiment of approaching misfortune weighed heavily upon their hearts. At the moment when Lacheneur presented himself at the parsonage they were sitting on the terrace in front of their house, gazing anxiously at the roads leading from Escorval to the chateau, and to the village of Sairmeuse. Apprised that same morning of the duke's arrival by his friends at Montaignac, the baron had sent his son to warn M. Lacheneur. He had requested him to return as soon as possible; and yet the hours were rolling by, and Maurice had not returned.

"What if something has happened to him!" thought the anxious parents.

No, at that moment nothing had happened to him. Though a word from Mademoiselle Lacheneur had sufficed to make him forget his usual deference to his father's wishes. "This evening," she had said, "I shall certainly know your heart." What could this mean? Could she doubt him? Tortured by anxieties, he could not make up his mind to go home again without having had an explanation, and he loitered near the chateau hoping that Marie-Anne would reappear.

She did reappear at last, but leaning on her father's arm. Young d'Escorval followed them at a distance, and soon saw them enter the parsonage. What they wanted there he couldn't guess though he knew that the duke and his son were inside. The time that the Lacheneurs remained in the Abbe Midon's house seemed a century to Maurice,

who paced restlessly up and down the market place. At last, however, Marie-Anne and her father reappeared, and he was about to join them when he was prevented by the appearance of Martial, whose promises he overheard.

Maurice knew nothing of life; he was as innocent as a child, but he could not mistake the intentions that had dictated the step taken by the Marquis de Sairmeuse. At the thought that a libertine's caprice should for an instant rest on the pure and beautiful girl he loved with all the strength of his being—the girl he had sworn should be his wife—all his blood mounted madly to his brain. He felt a wild longing to chastise the marquis; but fortunately—unfortunately, perhaps—his hand was stayed by the recollection of a phrase he had heard his father repeat a thousand times: "Calmness and irony are the only weapons worthy of the strong." And at the remembrance of these words he acquired sufficient strength of will to appear calm, though in reality he was beside himself with passion.

"Ah! I will find you again," he repeated, however, through his set teeth as he watched his enemy move away. He then turned and discovered that Marie-Anne and her father had left him. He saw them standing about a hundred yards off, and although he was surprised at their indifference, he made haste to join them, and addressed himself to M. Lacheneur.

"We are just going to your father's house," was the only reply he received, and this in an almost ferocious tone.

A glance from Marie-Anne commanded silence. He obeyed, and walked a few steps behind them, his head bowed upon his breast, terribly anxious, and vainly seeking to explain to himself what had taken place. His manner betrayed such intense grief that his mother divined a misfortune as soon as she caught sight of him.

All the anguish which this courageous woman had hidden for a month, found utterance in a single cry. "Ah! here is misfortune!" said she: "we shall not escape it."

It was indeed misfortune. One could no longer doubt it on seeing M. Lacheneur enter the drawing-room. He walked with the heavy and uncertain step of a drunken

man ; his eyes were void of expression, his features were distorted and his lips trembled.

"What has happened?" eagerly asked the baron.

But whilom proprietor of Sairmeuse did not seem to hear him. "Ah! I warned her," he murmured, continuing a monologue he had begun before entering the room. "Yes, I told my daughter so."

Madame d'Escorval, after kissing Marie-Anne, drew the girl towards her. "What has happened? For heaven's sake tell me what has happened!" she exclaimed.

With a gesture of resignation, the girl motioned her to look at M. Lacheneur, and listen to him.

The latter seemed to wake up; he passed his hand across his forehead and wiped away the moisture from his eyes. "It is only this, M. le Baron," said he in a harsh, unnatural voice: "I rose this morning the richest land-owner in the district, and I shall lie down to-night poorer than the poorest beggar in Sairmeuse. I had everything; and now I have nothing, nothing but my two hands. They earned me my bread for twenty-five years; they will earn it for me now until the day of my death. I had a beautiful dream; it is over."

In the presence of this outburst of despair, M. d'Escorval turned pale. "You must exaggerate your misfortune," he faltered; "explain what has happened."

Unconscious of what he was doing, M. Lacheneur threw his hat upon a chair, and flinging back his long, gray hair, he said: "To you I will tell everything. I came here for that purpose. I know you. I know your heart. And have you not done me the honour to call me your friend?"

Then, without omitting a detail he related the scene which had just taken place at the parsonage. The baron listened with intense astonishment, almost doubting the evidence of his own senses; while Madame d'Escorval's indignant exclamations showed that she was utterly revolted by such injustice.

But there was one listener, whom Marie-Anne alone observed, who was most intensely moved by Lacheneur's narrative. This listener was Maurice. Leaning against the door, pale as death, he tried in vain to repress the tears of rage and grief which rushed to his eyes. To insult Lacheneur was to insult Marie-Anne—that is to say,

to injure, to outrage him in what he held dearest in the world. Had Martial now been within his reach he would certainly have paid dearly for the insults heaped on the father of the girl that Maurice loved. However, young d'Escorval swore that the chastisement he contemplated was only deferred—that it should surely come. And it was not mere angry boasting. This young man, so modest and gentle in manner, had albeit a heart that was inaccessible to fear. His beautiful, dark eyes, which usually had the trembling timidity of a girl's could meet an enemy's gaze without flinching.

When M. Lacheneur had repeated the last words he addressed to the Duke de Sairmeuse, M. d'Escorval offered him his hand. "I have told you already that I was your friend," he said, in a voice faltering with emotion; "but I must tell you to-day that I am proud of having such a friend as you."

Lacheneur trembled at the touch of the loyal hand which clasped his so warmly, and his face betrayed his inward satisfaction.

"If my father had not returned the estate," obstinately murmured Marie-Anne, "he would have been an unfaithful guardian—a thief. He has only done his duty."

M. d'Escorval turned to the young girl a little surprised. "You speak the truth, mademoiselle," he said, reproachfully; "but when you are as old as I am and have had my experience, you will know that the accomplishment of a duty is, under certain circumstances, an act of heroism of which only few persons are capable."

M. Lacheneur exclaimed warmly to his friend, "Ah! your words do me good. Now, I am glad of what I have done."

The baroness rose, too much a woman to know how to resist the generous dictates of her heart. "And I, also, Lacheneur," said she, "desire to press your hand. I wish to tell you that I esteem you as much as I despise those who have tried to humiliate you, when they should have fallen at your feet. They are heartless monsters, and I don't believe the like of them are to be found on earth."

"Alas!" sighed the baron, "the allies have brought back plenty of others who, like the Sairmeuses, think that the world was created exclusively for their benefit."

"And yet these people wish to be our masters," growled Lacheneur.

By some strange fatality no one chanced to hear this last remark. Had it been overheard, and had the speaker been questioned, he would probably have disclosed some of the projects just forming in his mind; and then many disastrous consequences might have been averted.

M. d'Escorval had now regained his usual coolness. "Now, my dear friend," he asked, "what course do you propose to pursue with these members of the Sairmeuse family!"

"They will hear nothing more from me—for some time at least."

"What! Shall you not claim the ten thousand francs they owe you?"

"I shall ask them for nothing."

"You will be compelled to do so. Since you have alluded to the legacy, your own honour requires that you should insist upon its payment by all legal means. There are still judges in France."

M. Lacheneur shook his head. "The judges will not grant me the justice I desire. I shall not apply to them."

"But——"

"No, no. I wish to have nothing more to do with these men. I shall not even go to the chateau to remove either my own clothes or my daughter's. If they send them to us—very well. If they like to keep them so much the better. The more shameful, infamous, and odious their conduct the better I shall be satisfied."

The baron made no reply; but his wife spoke, believing that she had a sure means of conquering this incomprehensible obstinacy. "I could understand your determination if you were alone in the world," said she, "but you have children."

"My son is eighteen, madame; he is in good health and has had an excellent education. He can make his own way in Paris if he chooses to remain there."

"But your daughter?"

"Marie-Anne will remain with me."

M. d'Escorval thought it his duty to interfere. "Take care, my dear friend, that your grief doesn't tamper with

your reason," said he. "Reflect! What will become of you—your daughter and yourself?"

Lacheneur smiled sadly. "Oh," he replied, "we are not as destitute as I said. I exaggerated our misfortune. We are still landowners. Last year an old cousin, whom I could never induce to come and live with us at Sairmeuse, died, and left everything she had to Marie-Anne; so we've still got a poor little cottage near La Reche, with a little garden and a few acres of barren land. In compliance with my daughter's entreaties, I repaired the cottage, and furnished it with a table, some chairs, and a couple of beds. It was then intended as a home for old Father Guvat and his wife. And in the midst of my wealth and luxury, I said to myself: 'How comfortable those two old people will be there.' Well, what I thought so comfortable for others, will be good enough for me now. I can raise vegetables, and Marie-Anne shall sell them."

Was he speaking seriously? Maurice must have supposed so, for he sprang forward. "This shall not be, Lacheneur!" he exclaimed.

"What!"

"No, this shall not be, for I love Marie-Anne, and I ask you to give her to me for my wife."

Maurice and Marie-Anne's affections for each other did not date from yesterday. As children they had played together in the parks of Sairmeuse and Escorval. They had shared many a butterfly hunt, and many a search for pebbles on the river banks; and oft times had they rolled in the hay while their mothers sauntered through the meadows bordering the Oiselle.

For their mothers were friends. Madame Lacheneur had been reared like most poor peasant girls; that is to say, on her marriage day she only succeeded with great difficulty in inscribing her name upon the register. But from her husband's example she learnt that prosperity, as well as noble lineage, entails numerous obligations; hence with rare courage, crowned with still rarer success, she undertook to acquire an education in keeping with her rank and fortune. And the baroness made no effort to resist the feelings of sympathy which led her towards this meritorious young woman, in whom it was easy to discern a mind of many natural gifts, and a nature which despite low birth was instinctively refined. When Madame Lacheneur died,

Madame d'Escorval mourned for her as she would have mourned for a favourite sister.

From that moment Maurice's attachment assumed a more serious character. Educated at a college in Paris, his masters sometimes complained of his want of application. "If your professors are not satisfied with you," said his mother, "you shall not go to Escorval for the holidays, and then you will not see your friend." Now this simple threat always sufficed to make the school-boy resume his studies with redoubled diligence. So each succeeding year strengthened as it were the love which preserved Maurice from the restlessness and errors of youth.

The two children were equally timid and artless, and equally infatuated with each other. Long walks in the twilight under their parents' eyes, a glance that revealed their delight at meeting, flowers exchanged between them and religiously preserved—such were their simple pleasures. That magical word love—so sweet to utter, and so sweet to hear—had never once dropped from their lips. Maurice's audacity had never gone beyond a furtive pressure of the hand.

The parents could not be ignorant of this mutual affection; and if they pretended to shut their eyes, it was only because it neither displeased them nor disturbed their plans. M. and Madame d'Escorval saw no objection to their son's marriage with a girl whose nobility of character they appreciated, and who was as beautiful as she was good. That she was the richest heiress in the province, was naturally no objection. So far as M. Lacheneur was concerned, he was delighted at the prospect of a marriage which would ally him, a former ploughboy, with an old and generally respected family. Hence although the subject had never been directly alluded to either by the baron or Lacheneur, there was withal a tacit agreement between the two families. Indeed the marriage was considered as a foregone conclusion.

And yet Maurice's impetuous unexpected declaration struck every one dumb. In spite of his agitation, the young man perceived the effect his words had produced, and frightened by his own boldness, he turned towards his father with a look of interrogation. The baron's face was grave, even sad; but his attitude expressed no displeasure.

This gave renewed courage to the anxious lover. "You will excuse me," he said, addressing Lacheneur, "for presenting my request in such a manner, and at such a time. But surely it is at the moment when misfortune overtakes one that true friends should declare themselves, and deem themselves fortunate if their devotion can obliterate the remembrance of such infamous treatment as that to which you have been subjected."

As he spoke, he was watching Marie-Anne. Blushing and embarrassed, she turned away her head, perhaps to conceal the tears which gushed forth from her eyes—tears of joy and gratitude. The love of the man she worshipped had come forth victorious from a test which many heiresses might in vain resort to. Now could she truly say that she knew Maurice's heart.

Maurice speedily continued: "I have not consulted my father, sir; but I know his affection for me and his esteem for you. When the happiness of my life is at stake he will not oppose me. He, who married my dear mother without a dowry, must understand my feelings."

With these words Maurice paused, awaiting the verdict.

"I approve your course, my son," said M. d'Escorval, "you have behaved like an honourable man. Certainly you are very young to become the head of a family; but, as you say, circumstances demand it."

Then turning to M. Lacheneur, he added: "My dear friend, on my son's behalf I ask you for your daughter's hand in marriage."

Maurice had not expected so little opposition. In his delight he was almost tempted to bless the hateful Duke de Sairmeuse, to whom he would owe his future happiness. He sprang towards his father, and seizing his hands, he raised them to his lips, faltering: "Thanks!—you are so good! I love you so! Oh, how happy I am!"

Unfortunately, the poor boy's joy was premature. A gleam of pride flashed in M. Lacheneur's eyes; but his face soon resumed its gloomy expression. "Believe me, M. le Baron," said he, "I am deeply touched by what you and your son have said—yes, deeply touched. You wish to make me forget my humiliation; but for this very reason, I should be the most contemptible of men if I did not refuse the great honour you desire to confer upon my daughter."

"What!" exclaimed the baron in utter astonishment; "you refuse?"

"I am compelled to do so."

Although momentarily thunderstruck, Maurice soon renewed the attack with an energy no one had ever suspected in his character. "Do you wish to ruin my life, to ruin *our* lives," he exclaimed; "for if I love Marie-Anne, she also loves me."

It was easy to see that he spoke the truth. The unhappy girl, crimson with happy blushes a moment earlier, had now turned as white as marble and glanced imploringly towards her father.

"It cannot be," repeated M. Lacheneur; "and the day will arrive when you will bless the decision I have come to."

Alarmed by her son's evident dismay, Madame d'Escorval interposed: "You must have reasons for this refusal," said she.

"None that I can disclose, madame. But as long as I can prevent it, my daughter shall never be your son's wife."

"Ah! it will kill my child!" exclaimed the baroness.

M. Lacheneur shook his head. "M. Maurice," said he, "is young; he will soon console himself—and forget."

"Never!" interrupted the unhappy lover—"never!"

"And your daughter?" inquired the baroness.

Ah! this was the weak spot in Lacheneur's armour: a mother's instinct had prompted the baroness's last words. The whilom lord of Sairmeuse hesitated for a moment, and it was not without a struggle that his will gained the mastery over his heart: "Marie-Anne," he replied slowly, "knows her duty too well not to obey me. When I have told her the motive that governs my conduct she will resign herself, and if she suffers she will know how to conceal her sufferings."

He suddenly paused. In the distance a report of musketry could be plainly heard. Each face grew paler: for circumstances imparted to these sounds an ominous significance to anxious hearts. Both M. d'Escorval and Lacheneur sprang out upon the terrace. But everything was silent again. Far as the horizon stretched, nothing unusual could be discerned. The limpidity of the azure

sky was unimpaired, and not the faintest cloudlet of smoke rose above the trees.

"It is the enemy," muttered M. Lacheneur in a tone which told how gladly he would have shouldered his gun and with five hundred others marched against the allies.

He paused. The reports were repeated with still greater violence, and for five minutes or so succeeded each other without cessation. It seemed even as if some pieces of artillery had been discharged.

M. d'Escorval listened with knitted brows. "This is very strange; but yet it is scarcely the fire of a regular engagement," he murmured.

To remain any longer in such a state of uncertainty was out of the question. "If you will allow me, father," ventured Maurice, "I will try and ascertain—"

"Go," replied the baron quietly; "but if there should be anything, which I doubt, don't expose yourself to useless danger, but return."

"Oh! be prudent!" nervously insisted Madame d'Escorval, who already saw her son exposed to peril.

"Be prudent!" also entreated Marie-Anne, who alone understood the attraction that danger might have for a lover in despair.

These cautions were unnecessary. As Maurice was rushing to the gate, his father stopped him.

"Wait," said he, "here comes some one who may, perhaps, be able to enlighten us."

A peasant was passing along the road leading from Sairmeuse. He was walking bareheaded and with hurried strides in the middle of the dusty highway, brandishing his stick as if soon to threaten some invisible enemy, and he came near enough for the party on the terrace to distinguish his features.

"Ah! it's Chanlouineau!" exclaimed M. Lacheneur.

"The owner of the vineyards on the Borderie?"

"The same! The best looking young farmer in the district, and the best in heart as well. Ah! he has good blood in his veins; we may well be proud of him."

"Ask him to stop," said M. d'Escorval.

"Ah! Chanlouineau!" shouted Lacheneur, leaning over the balustrade.

The young farmer raised his head.

"Come up here," resumed Lacheneur; "the baron wishes to speak with you."

Chanlouineau replied by a gesture of assent, and opening the garden gate soon crossed the lawn. He had a furious look in his face, and the state of his clothes showed plainly enough that he had been fighting. He had lost his collar and necktie, and the muscles of his neck were swollen as if by the pressure of some vigorous hand.

"What's going on?" eagerly asked Lacheneur. "Is there a battle?"

"Oh, there's no battle," replied the young farmer, with a nervous laugh. "The firing you hear is in honour of the Duke de Sairmeuse."

"What!"

"Oh, it's the truth. It's all the work of that scoundrel, Chupin. If ever he comes within reach of my arm again, he will never steal any more."

M. Lacheneur was confounded. "Tell us what has happened," he said, excitedly.

"Oh, it's simple enough. When the duke arrived at Sairmeuse, Chupin, with his two rascally boys, and that old hag, his wife, ran after the carriage like beggars after a diligence, crying, 'Vive Monseigneur le duc!' The duke was delighted, for he no doubt expected a volley of stones, so he gave each of the wretches a five franc piece. This money abetted Chupin's appetite, so he took it into his head to give the duke such a reception as was given the emperor. Having learnt from Bibaine, whose tongue is as long as a viper's, everything that had occurred at the parsonage between the duke and you, M. Lacheneur, he came and proclaimed the news on the market-place. When the fools heard it, all those who had purchased national lands got frightened. Chupin had counted on this, and soon he began telling the poor fools that they must burn powder under the duke's nose if they wished him to confirm their titles to their property."

"And did they believe him?"

"Implicitly. It didn't take them long to make their preparations. They went to the *mairie* and took the firemen's muskets, and the guns used for firing salutes on fete days; the mayor gave them powder, and then you heard the result. When I left Sairmeuse there was more than two hundred idiots in front of the parsonage shouting

'Vive Monseigneur! Vive le Duc de Sairmeuse!' at the top of their voices."

"The same pitiful farce that was played in Paris, only on a smaller scale," murmured the Baron d'Escorval. "Avarice and human cowardice are the same all the world over."

Meanwhile, Chanlouineau was proceeding with his narrative. "To make the fete complete, the devil must have warned all the nobility of the district, for they all hastened to the spot. They say that M. de Sairmeuse is the king's favourite, and that he can do just as he pleases. So you may imagine how they all greeted him! I'm only a poor peasant, but I'd never lie down in the dust before any man like these old nobles, who are so haughty with us, did before the duke. They even kissed his hands, and he allowed them to do so. He walked about the square with the Marquis de Courtornieu—"

"And his son?" interrupted Maurice.

"The Marquis Martial, eh? Oh, he was also strutting about with Mademoiselle Blanche de Courtornieu on his arm. Ah! I can't understand how people can call her pretty—a little bit of a thing, so blonde that one might almost take her hair for white. Ah, they did laugh those two and poke fun at the peasants into the bargain. Some of the villagers say they are going to be married. And even this evening there's to be a banquet at the Chateau de Courtornieu in the duke's honour."

"You've only forgotten one thing," said M. Lacheneur when Chanlouineau paused. "How is it your clothes are torn, it seems as if you'd been fighting."

The young farmer hesitated for a moment, and it was with evident reluctance that he replied: "I can tell you all the same. While Chupin was preaching, I preached as well, but not in the same strain. The scoundrel reported me. So, in crossing the square, the duke stopped before me and remarked: 'So you are an evil disposed person?' I said I wasn't, though I knew my rights. Then he took me by the coat and shook me, and told me he'd cure me and take possession of *his* vineyard again. The deuce! When I felt the old rascal's hand on me my blood boiled. I pinioned him. But six or seven men fell on me, and compelled me to let him go. But he had better make up his mind not to come prowling about my vineyard!"

The young farmer clenched his hands, and his eyes flashed ominously; he evidently had an intense thirst for vengeance. M. d'Escorval remained silent, fearing to aggravate this hatred, so imprudently kindled, and the explosion of which might have terrible results.

M. Lacheneur had risen from his chair. "I must go and take possession of my cottage," he remarked to Chanlouineau; "will you accompany me? I have a proposal to make to you."

M. and Madame d'Escorval endeavoured to detain him, but he would not allow himself to be persuaded, and a minute later, he, his daughter, and Chanlouineau had taken their departure. However, Maurice did not despair, for Marie-Anne had promised to meet him on the following day in the pine grove near La Reche.

Chanlouineau had correctly reported the reception which the villagers of Sairmeuse had given to the duke. The artful Chupin had found a sure means of kindling a semblance of enthusiasm among the callous, calculating peasants who were his neighbours.

He was a dangerous fellow this old poacher and farm-yard thief. Shrewd he always was; cautious and pathetic when necessary; bold as those who possess nothing can afford to be; in short, one of the most consummate scoundrels that ever breathed. The peasants feared him, and yet they had no conception of his real character. All the resources of his mind had hitherto been expended in evading the provisions of the rural code. To save himself from falling into the hands of the gendarmes, to steal a few sacks of wheat without detection, he had expended talents of intrigue which would have sufficed to make the fortune of twenty diplomats. Circumstances, as he always said, had been against him. Hence, he desperately caught at the first and only opportunity worthy of his genius that had ever presented itself.

Of course, the wily rustic told his fellow-villagers nothing of the true circumstances which had attended the restoration of Sairmeuse to its former owner. From him the peasants only learned the bare fact; and the news spread rapidly from group to group. "M. Lacheneur has given up Sairmeuse," said Chupin. "Chateau, forests, vineyards, fields,—he surrenders everything."

This was enough, and more than enough, to terrify every

landowner in the village. If Lacheneur, this man who was so powerful in their eyes, considered the danger so threatening that he deemed it necessary or advisable to make a complete surrender, what was to become of them—poor devils—without aid, without counsel, without defence? They were told that the government was about to betray their interests; that a decree was in process of preparation which would render their title-deeds worthless. They could see no hope of salvation, except through the duke's generosity—that generosity which Chupin painted with the glowing colours of a rainbow.

When a man is not strong enough to weather the gale, he must bow like the reed before it, and rise again after the storm has passed: to this conclusion the frightened peasantry came. Accordingly they bowed. And their apparent enthusiasm was all the more vociferous, on account of the rage and fear that filled their hearts. A close observer would have detected an under-current of anger and menace in their shouts; and in point of fact each villager murmured to himself: "What do we risk by crying, 'Vive le duc?' Nothing, absolutely nothing. If he's satisfied with that as a compensation for his lost property—all well and good! If he isn't satisfied, we shall have time by-and-bye to adopt other measures." Hence they all shouted themselves hoarse.

And while the duke was sipping his coffee in the cure's little sitting-room, he expressed his lively satisfaction at the scene outside. He, this great lord of times gone by; this unconquerable, incorrigible man of absurd prejudices and obstinate illusions accepted these acclamations as if they had been *bona-fide*. Without the least semblance of doubt he blandly mistook the counterfeit coin for genuine money. "How you have deceived me, to be sure," he said to the Abbe Midon. "How could you declare that your people were unfavourably disposed towards us?"

The Abbe Midon was silent. What could he reply? He could not understand this sudden revolution in public opinion—this abrupt change from gloom and discontent to excessive gaiety. Something must have transpired of which he was not aware. Somebody must have been at work among the peasantry.

It was not long before it became apparent who that somebody was. Emboldened by his success outside, Chu-

pin ventured to present himself at the parsonage. He entered the sitting-room, scraping and cringing, his back bent double, and an obsequious smile upon his lips. He came as an ambassador, he declared, with numerous protestations of respect, he came to implore "monseigneur" to show himself upon the market place.

"Ah, well—yes," exclaimed the duke, rising from his seat; "yes, I will yield to the wishes of these good people. Follow me, marquis!"

As the duke appeared on the threshold of the parsonage, a loud shout rent the air; a score of muskets blazed away, and the old salute guns belched forth smoke and fire. Never had Sairmeuse heard such a salvo of artillery, and the shock of the report shattered three windows at the inn of the Bœuf Couronne.

The Duke de Sairmeuse knew how to preserve an appearance of haughty indifference. Any display of emotion was in his opinion vulgar; but in reality he was perfectly delighted, so delighted that he desired to reward his well-comers. A glance over the deeds handed him by Lacheneur had shown him that Sairmeuse had been restored to him virtually intact. The portions of the immense domain which had been detached and sold separately were after all of little importance. Now, the duke already schooled in a measure by his son, thought it would be politic, and at the same time inexpensive, to abandon all claim to these few acres, now shared by forty or fifty peasants.

"My friends," he exclaimed in a loud voice, "I renounce, for myself and for my descendants, all claim to the lands belonging to my house which you have purchased. They are yours—I give them to you!"

By this absurd semblance of a gift, M. de Sairmeuse thought to add the finishing touch to his popularity. A great mistake! It simply assured the popularity of Chupin, the organizer of the farce. While the duke was promenading through the crowd with a proud and self-satisfied air, the peasants, despite their seemingly respectful attitude, were secretly laughing and jeering at him. And if they promptly took his part against Chanlouineau, it was only because his gift was still fresh in their minds; except for this his grace might have fared badly indeed.

The duke, however, had but little time to think of this encounter, which produced a vivid impression on his son.

One of his former companions in exile, the Marquis de Courtornieu, whom he had informed of his arrival, now appeared on the place, and hastened to welcome him. The marquis was accompanied by his daughter, Mademoiselle Blanche. Martial could not do otherwise than offer his arm to the daughter of his father's friend; and the young couple took a leisurely promenade under the shade of the lofty trees, while the duke renewed his acquaintance with all the nobility of the neighborhood.

There was not a single nobleman who did not hasten to press the duke de Sairmeuse's hand. First, he possessed, it was said, an estate in England valued at more than twenty millions of francs. Then, he was the king's favourite, and each member of the local aristocracy had some favour to ask for himself, his relatives, or friends. Poor king! If he had had twenty kingdoms of France to divide like a cake between all these cormorants, he would yet have failed to satisfy their voracious appetites.

That evening, after a grand banquet at the Chateau de Courtornieu, the duke slept at the Chateau de Sairmeuse, in the room which had been so lately occupied by Lacheneur. He was gay, chatty, and full of confidence in the future.

"I'm like Louis XVIII. in Bonaparte's bedroom," he said to his son in a jocular tone; then adding with a shade of sentiment, "Ah! it's good to be in one's own house again!"

But Martial only tendered a mechanical reply. His mind was occupied in thinking of two women, who had made a deep impression on his heart that day. He was thinking of two girls so utterly unlike—Blanche de Courtornieu and Marie-Anne Lacheneur.

ONLY those who, in the bright spring-time of life, have loved, and been loved in return, who have suddenly seen an impassable gulf open between them and their future happiness, can realise Maurice d'Escorval's disappointment. All the dreams of his life, all his future plans, were based upon his love for Marie-Anne. If this love failed him, the enchanted castle which hope had erected would crum-

ble and fall, burying him beneath its ruins. Without Marie-Anne he saw neither aim nor motive in existence. Still he did not suffer himself to be deluded by false hopes. Although at first his appointed meeting with Marie-Anne on the following day seemed salvation itself, on reflection he was forced to admit that this interview could bring no change, since everything depended upon the will of a third person, M. Lacheneur.

Maurice spent the remainder of Sunday in mournful silence. Dinner time came; and he took his seat at the table, but it was impossible for him to eat, and he soon requested his parent's permission to withdraw. M. d'Escorval and the baroness exchanged sorrowful glances, but did not offer any comment. They respected his grief; knowing that a sorrow such as his would only be aggravated by any attempt at consolation.

"Poor Maurice!" murmured Madame d'Escorval, as soon as her son had left the room. "Perhaps it will not be prudent for us to leave him entirely to the dictates of despair."

The baron shuddered. He divined only too well his wife's sad apprehensions. "We have nothing to fear," he replied quickly; "I heard Marie-Anne promise to meet Maurice to-morrow in the grove near La Reche."

The baroness, who in her anxiety had momentarily dreaded lest Maurice might commit suicide, now breathed more freely. Still she was a mother, and her husband's assurance did not completely satisfy her. She hastily went up stairs, softly opened the door of her son's room and looked in.

He was so engrossed in gloomy thought that he neither heard her nor even for an instant suspected the presence of the anxious mother who was fondly watching over him. He was sitting at the window, his elbows resting on the sill and his head between his hands. There was no moon, but the night was clear, and over and beyond the light fog which indicated the course of the Oiselle, rose the towers and turrets of the massive Chateau de Sairmeuse. More than once had Maurice sat silently gazing at this stately pile, which sheltered all that he held dearest and most precious in the world. From his windows Marie-Anne's casement could be perceived, and the throbbing of his heart would quicken whenever he saw it lighted up. "She is

there," he would think, "in her virgin chamber. She is praying on her bended knees, and she murmurs my name after her father's, imploring heaven's blessing upon us both."

But this evening Maurice was not waiting for a light to gleam through the panes of that dear window. Marie-Anne was no longer at Sairmeuse—she had been driven away. Where was she now? She, accustomed to all the luxury that wealth could procure, no longer had any home save a poor thatch-roofed hovel, the walls of which were not even white-washed, and whose only floor was the earth itself, dusty as the public highway in summer, and frozen or muddy in winter. She was reduced to the necessity of occupying herself the humble abode which, in her charitable heart, she had intended as an asylum for one of her pensioners. What was she doing now? Doubtless she was weeping; and at this thought poor Maurice felt heart-broken.

What was his surprise, a little after midnight, to see the chateau brilliantly illuminated. The duke and his son had repaired there after the banquet given by the Marquis de Courtornieu; and before going to bed, they made a tour of inspection through their ancestral abode. M. de Sairmeuse had not crossed its threshold for two-and-twenty years, and Martial had never seen it in his life. Maurice could see the lights leap from storey to storey, from casement to casement, until at last even Marie-Anne's windows were illuminated.

At this sight, the unhappy youth could not restrain a cry of rage. These men, these strangers, dared to enter this virgin bower which he, even in thought, scarcely ventured to picture. No doubt they trampled carelessly over the delicate carpet with their heavy boots, and Maurice trembled to think of the liberties which, in their insolent familiarity, they might perhaps venture to take. He fancied he could see them examining and handling the thousand petty trifles with which young girls love to surround themselves, impudently opening the drawers and perhaps inquisitively reading an unfinished letter lying on the writing-desk. Never until this night had Maurice supposed it possible to hate any one, as now he hated these two men.

At last, in despair, he threw himself on to his bed, and

passed the remainder of the night in thinking over what he should say to Marie-Anne on the morrow, and in seeking for some means to remove the difficulties obstructing his path to happiness. He rose at daybreak and spent the early morning wandering about the park, fearing and yet longing for the hour that would decide his fate. Madame d'Escorval was obliged to exert all her authority to make him take some food, for he had quite forgotten that he had spent twenty-four hours without eating. At last, when eleven o'clock struck, he left the house.

The lands of La Reche are situated across the Oiselle, and Maurice to reach his destination had to take a ferry a short distance from his home. As he approached the river-bank, he perceived six or seven peasants who were waiting to cross. They were talking in a loud voice, and did not notice young d'Escorval as he drew near them.

"It is certainly true," Maurice heard one of the men say. "I heard it from Chanlouineau himself only last evening. He was wild with delight. 'I invite you all to the wedding!' he cried. 'I am betrothed to M. Lacheneur's daughter; the affair's decided.'"

Maurice was well-nigh stunned by this astounding news, and he was actually unable to think or to move.

"Besides," he heard the same man say, "Chanlouineau's been in love with her for a long time. Every one knows that. Haven't you ever noticed his eyes when he met her—red-hot coals were nothing to them. But while her father was so rich, he didn't dare speak. However, now that the old man has met with this trouble, he has ventured to offer himself, and is accepted."

"An unfortunate thing for him," remarked one of the listeners.

"Why so?"

"If M. Lacheneur is ruined as they say——"

The others laughed heartily. "Ruined—M. Lacheneur!" they exclaimed in chorus. "How absurd! He's richer than all of us put together. Do you suppose he's been stupid enough not to put anything by during all these years? He hasn't put his money in ground, as he pretends, but somewhere else."

"What you are saying is untrue!" interrupted Maurice, indignantly. "M. Lacheneur left Sairmeuse as poor as he entered it."

On recognizing M. d'Escorval's son, the peasants became extremely cautious; and to all his questions they would only give vague unsatisfactory answers. A Sairmeuse rustic is usually so dreadfully afraid of compromising himself that he will never give a frank reply to a question if he has the slightest reason to suspect that his answer might displease his questioner. However, what Maurice had heard before sufficed to fill his heart with doubt. Directly he had crossed the Oiselle, he pushed on rapidly towards La Reche, murmuring as he went: "What! Marie-Anne marry Chanlouineau? No; that can not be. It is impossible!"

The spot termed La Reche—literally the Waste—where Marie-Anne had promised to meet Maurice, owed its name to the rebellious sterile nature of its soil. It seems to have been cursed by nature. Boulders strew the sandy surface, and vain indeed had been all the attempts at culture. It is only here and there among the broom that a few stunted oaks with straggling branches manage to exist. But at the edge of this barren tract rises a shady grove. Here the firs are straight and strong, with wild clematis and honey-suckle clinging to their stems and branches, for the winter floods have washed down from the high lands and left among the rocks sufficient soil to sustain them.

On reaching this grove, Maurice consulted his watch. It was just noon; he had feared he was late, but he was fully an hour in advance of the appointed time. He seated himself on a ledge of one of the high rocks scattered among the firs, whence he could survey the entire Reche, and waited.

The weather was sultry in the extreme. The rays of the scorching August sun fell on the sandy soil, and speedily withered the few weeds which had sprung up since the last rainfall. The stillness was profound. Not a sound broke the silence, not even the chirp of a bird, the buzzing of an insect, nor the faintest whisper of a breeze passing through the firs. All nature was apparently asleep—taking its siesta—and there was nothing to remind one of life, motion, or mankind. This repose of nature, which contrasted so vividly with the tumult raging in his own heart, soon exerted a beneficial effect on Maurice. These few moments of solitude afforded him an opportunity to regain his composure, and to collect his

thoughts scattered by the storm of passion, as leaves are scattered by the fierce November gale.

With sorrow comes experience, and that cruel knowledge of life which teaches one to guard one's self against one's hopes. It was not until he heard the conversation of the peasants standing near the ferry that Maurice fully realized the horror of Lacheneur's position. Suddenly precipitated from the social eminence he had attained, the whilom lord of Sairmeuse found, in the valley of humiliation into which he was cast, only hatred, distrust, and scorn. Both factions despised and derided him. Traitor, cried one; thief, cried the other. He no longer held any social status. He was the fallen man, the man who *had* been, and who was no more. Was not the excessive misery of such a position a sufficient explanation of the strangest and wildest resolutions?

This thought made Maurice tremble. Connecting the conversation of the peasants with the words spoken by Lacheneur to Chanlouineau on the preceding evening at Escorval, he came to the conclusion that this report of Marie-Anne's marriage to the young farmer was not so improbable as he had at first supposed. But why should M. Lacheneur give his daughter to an uncultured peasant? From mercenary motives? Certainly not, since he had just refused an alliance of which he had been justly proud even in his days of prosperity. Could it be in order to satisfy his wounded pride then? Perhaps so; possibly he did not wish it to be said that he owed anything to a son-in-law.

Maurice was exhausting all his ingenuity and penetration in endeavouring to solve this knotty point, when at last, along the foot-path crossing the waste, he perceived a figure approaching him. It was Marie-Anne. He rose to his feet, but fearing observation did not venture to leave the shelter of the grove. Marie-Anne must have felt a similar fear, for as she hurried on she cast anxious glances on every side. Maurice remarked, not without surprise, that she was bare-headed, and had neither shawl nor scarf about her shoulders.

As she reached the edge of the wood, he sprang towards her, and catching hold of her hand raised it to his lips. But this hand which she had so often yielded to him was

now gently withdrawn, and with so sad a gesture that he could not help feeling there was no hope.

"I came, Maurice," she began, "because I could not endure the thought of your anxiety. By doing so I have betrayed my father's confidence. He was obliged to leave home, and I hastened here; and yet I promised him, only two hours ago, that I would never see you again. You hear me—never!"

She spoke hurriedly, but Maurice was appalled by the firmness of her accent. Had he been less agitated, he would have seen what a terrible effort this semblance of calm cost the girl he loved. He would have detected the agony she was striving to conceal in the pallor of her cheeks, the twitching of her lips, and the redness of her eye-lids which, although recently bathed with fresh water, still betrayed the tears she had wept during the night.

"If I have come," she continued, "it is only to tell you that, for your own sake, as well as for mine, you must not retain the slightest shadow of hope. It is all over; we must separate for ever! It is only weak natures that revolt against a destiny which cannot be altered. Let us accept our fate uncomplainingly. I wished to see you once more, and to bid you be of good courage. Go away, Maurice—leave Escorval—forget me!"

"Forget you, Marie-Anne!" exclaimed the poor fellow, "forget you!" His eyes met hers, and in a husky voice he added: "Will you then forget me?"

"I am a woman, Maurice—"

But he interrupted her. "Ah! I did not expect this," he said, despondingly. "Poor fool that I was! I believed you would surely find a way to touch your father's heart."

She blushed slightly, and with evident hesitation, replied, "I threw myself at my father's feet, but he repulsed me."

Maurice was thunderstruck, but recovering himself: "It was because you did not know how to speak to him!" he exclaimed with passionate emphasis; "but I shall know how I will present such arguments that he will be forced to yield. Besides, what right has he to ruin my happiness with his caprices? I love you, you love me, and by the right of love, you are mine—mine rather than his! I will

make him understand this, you shall see. Where is he? Where can I find him?"

Already he was starting to go, he knew not where, when Marie-Anne caught him by the arm. "Remain here," she answered in a tone of authority surprising in one of her sex and youth, "remain! Ah, you have failed to understand me, Maurice. But you must know the truth. I am acquainted now with the reasons of my father's refusal; and though his decision should cost me my life, I approve it. Don't try to find my father. If he were moved by your prayers, and gave his consent, I should have the courage to refuse mine!"

Maurice was so beside himself that this reply did not enlighten him. Crazed with anger and despair, regardless even of how he spoke to the woman he loved so deeply, he exclaimed: "Is it for Chanlouineau, then, that you are reserving your consent? I've already heard that he goes about everywhere saying you will soon be his wife."

Marie-Anne could not conceal all resentment of these words; and yet there was more sorrow than anger in the glance she cast on Maurice. "Must I stoop so low as to defend myself from such an imputation?" she asked sadly. "Must I tell you that even if I suspect such an arrangement between my father and Chanlouineau, I have not been consulted? Must I tell you that there are some sacrifices which are beyond the strength of human nature? Understand this: I have found strength to renounce the man I love—I shall never be able to accept another in his place!"

Maurice hung his head, abashed by her earnest words, and dazzled by the sublime expression of her face. Reason returned to him; he realised the enormity of his suspicions, and was horrified with himself for having dared to give them utterance. "Oh! forgive me!" he faltered, "forgive me!"

What did the mysterious motive of all these events which had so rapidly succeeded each other, what did M. Lacheneur's secrets or Marie-Anne's reticence matter to him now? He was seeking some chance of salvation, and believed that he had found it. "We must fly!" he exclaimed; "fly at once without pausing to look back. Before night we shall have crossed the frontier." So say-

ing, he sprang towards her with outstretched arms as if to seize her and carry her off.

But she checked him by a single look. "Fly!" said she reproachfully; "fly!—and is it you, Maurice, who thus advises me? What! while my poor father is crushed with misfortune, am I to add despair and shame to his sorrows? His friends have deserted him; must I, his daughter, also abandon him? Ah! if I did that, I should be a vile, cowardly creature! If, when I believed my father to be the true owner of Sairmeuse, he had asked of me such a sacrifice as that I consented to last night, I might, perhaps, have resolved on doing what you say. I might have left Sairmeuse in broad day-light on my lover's arm, for it isn't the world I fear! But if one might fly from the chateau of a wealthy happy father, one *cannot* desert a despairing, penniless parent. Leave me, Maurice, where honour holds me. It will not be difficult for me, the daughter of generations of peasants, to become a peasant myself. Leave me! I cannot endure any more! Go! and remember that it is impossible to be utterly wretched if one's conscience is clean, and one's duty fulfilled!"

Maurice was about to reply, when a crackling of dry branches made him turn his head. Scarcely ten paces off, Martial de Sairmeuse was standing under the firs leaning on his gun.

VI.

THE Duke de Sairmeuse had indulged in but little sleep on the night of his return, or as he phrased it "of his restoration." Although he pretended to be inaccessible to the emotions which agitate the common herd, the scenes of the day had in point of fact greatly excited him; and, on lying down to rest, he could not help reviewing them, although he made it a rule of life never to reflect. While exposed to the scrutiny of the village peasants and of his own aristocratic acquaintances, he had felt that honour required him to appear cold and indifferent to everything that transpired, but as soon as he was alone in the privacy of his own bed-room, he gave free vent to his satisfaction.

This satisfaction amounted to perfect joy, almost *verg*

ing on delirium. He was now forced to admit to himself Lacheneur had rendered him an immense service in voluntarily restoring Sairmeuse. This man to whom he had displayed the blackest ingratitude, this man, honest to heroism, whom he had treated like an unfaithful servant, had just relieved him of an anxiety which had long poisoned his life. Indeed, Lacheneur had just placed the Duke de Sairmeuse beyond the reach of a very possible calamity which he had dreaded for some time back.

If his secret anxiety had been made known, it would have caused some little merriment. The less fortunate of the returning *émigrés* were in the habit of remarking that the Sairmeuses would never know want as they possessed property in England of a value of many million francs. Broadly speaking, the statement was true, only the property in question—property coming from Martial's mother and maternal grandfather—had not been left to the duke, but to Martial himself. It is true that the Duke de Sairmeuse enjoyed absolute control over this enormous fortune; he disposed of the capital and the immense revenues just as he pleased, although in reality everything belonged to his son—to his only son. The duke himself possessed nothing—a pitiful income of twelve hundred francs, or so, strictly speaking, not even the means of subsistence.

Martial, who was just coming of age, had certainly never uttered a word which might lead his father to suppose that he had any intention of removing the property from his control; still this word might some day or another be spoken, and at the thought of such a contingency the duke shuddered with horror. He saw himself reduced to a pension, a very handsome pension undoubtedly, but still a fixed, immutable, regular allowance, by which he would be obliged to regulate his expenditure. He would have to calculate that two ends might meet—he, who had been accustomed to inexhaustible coffers. "And this will necessarily happen sooner or later," he thought.

"If Martial should marry, if he should become ambitious, or meet with evil counsellors, then my reign will end."

Hence, the duke watched and studied his son much as a jealous woman studies and watches the lover she mistrusts. He thought he could read in his son's eyes many thoughts which Martial never had; he carefully noted

whether the Marquis was gay or sad, careless or pre-occupied, and according to the young man's mood, he became reassured or grew still more alarmed. Sometimes he imagined the worst. "If I should quarrel by-and-by with Martial," he thought, "he would take possession of his entire fortune, and I should be left absolutely without bread."

To a man like the Duke de Sairmeuse, who judged the sentiments of others by his own, these torturing apprehensions proved a terrible chastisement; and there were days when his personal poverty and impotence well-nigh drove him mad. "What am I?" he would say to himself in a fit of rage. "A mere plaything in the hands of a child. My son owns me. If I displease him, he will cast me aside. Yes, he will be able to dismiss *me* just as he would a lacquey. If I enjoy his fortune, it will be because he allows me to do so. I owe my very existence, as well as my luxuries, to his charity. But a moment's anger, even a whim, may deprive me of everything."

With such ideas in his brain, the duke could not love his son. Indeed, he hated him. He passionately envied him all the advantages he possessed—his youth, his millions, his physical good looks, and his talents, which were really of a superior order. We every day meet mothers who are jealous of their daughters, and in the same way there are fathers who are jealous of their sons. This was one of those cases. The duke, however, showed no outward sign of mental disquietude; and if Martial had possessed less penetration, he might have believed that his father adored him. However, if he *had* detected the duke's secret, he did not reveal his knowledge, nor did he abuse his power. Their manner towards each other was perfect. The duke was kind even to weakness; Martial full of deference. But their relations were not those of father and son. One was in constant fear of displeasing the other; the other a little too sure of his power. They lived on a footing of perfect equality, like two companions of the same age. From this trying situation, Lacheneur had now rescued the duke. On becoming once more the owner of Sairmeuse, an estate worth more than three million francs, his grace freed himself from his son's tyranny; and recovered all his liberty. What brilliant projects flitted through his brain that night! He beheld himself the richest land-

owner in the province; and in addition he was the king's chosen friend. To what then might he not aspire? Such a prospect enchanted him. He felt quite young again: he had shaken off the twenty years he had spent in exile. So, rising before nine o'clock, he went to Martial's room to rouse him.

On returning from dining with the Marquis de Courtonieu, the evening before, the duke had promenaded through the chateau; but this hasty inspection by candle-light had not satisfied his curiosity. He wished to visit everything in detail now that it was day. So, followed by his son, he explored one after another the numerous rooms of this princely abode; and at every step he took, the recollections of childhood crowded upon him. Lacheneur had such a wonderful respect for all the appointments of the chateau, that the duke found things as old as himself religiously preserved, and occupying the old familiar places from which they had never been removed.

"Decidedly, marquis," he exclaimed when his inspection was concluded, "this Lacheneur wasn't such a rascal as I supposed. I am disposed to forgive him a great deal, on account of the care he has taken of our house in our absence."

Martial seemed engrossed in thought. "I think, sir," he said, at last, "that we should show our gratitude to this man by paying him a large indemnity."

This last word excited the duke's anger. "An indemnity!" he exclaimed. "Are you mad, marquis? Think of the income he has received out of my estate. Have you forgotten the calculation made for us last evening by the Chevalier de la Livandiere?"

"The chevalier is a fool!" declared Martial, promptly. "He forgot that Lacheneur has trebled the value of Sairmeuse. I think our family honour requires us to give this man an indemnity of, at least, a hundred thousand francs. This would, moreover, be a good stroke of policy in the present state of public sentiment, and his majesty would, I am sure, be much pleased if we did so."

"Stroke of policy"—"public sentiment"—"his majesty." You might have obtained almost anything from M. de Sairmeuse by such words and arguments as these.

"Heavenly powers!" he exclaimed; "a hundred thou

sand francs ! how you talk ! It is all **very well** for you, with your fortune ! Still, if you really think so—”

“ Ah ! my dear sir, isn’t my fortune yours ? Yes, such is really my opinion. So much so, indeed, that, if you will permit it, I will see Lacheneur myself, and arrange the matter in such a way that his pride won’t be wounded. It would be worth our while to retain such devotion as his.”

The duke opened his eyes to their widest extent. “ Lacheneur’s pride ! ” he murmured. “ Worth while to retain his devotion ! Why do you talk in that strain ? What’s the reason of this extraordinary interest ? ”

He paused, enlightened by a sudden recollection. “ Ah, I understand ! ” he exclaimed ; “ I understand. He has a pretty daughter.” Martial smiled without replying.

“ Yes, as pretty as a rose,” continued the duke ; “ but a hundred thousand francs ; zounds ! That’s a round sum to pay for such a whim. But, if you insist upon it—”

After this the matter was settled and, two hours later, armed with the authorization he had solicited, Martial started on his mission. The first peasant he met told him the way to the cottage which M. Lacheneur now occupied. “ Follow the river,” said the man, “ and when you see a pine grove on your left, cross through it and follow the path over the waste.”

Martial was crossing through the grove when he heard the sound of voices. He approached, recognized Marie-Anne and Maurice d’Escorval, and obeying an angry impulse, paused.

During the decisive moments of life, when one’s entire future depends on a word or a gesture, twenty contradictory inspirations can traverse the mind in the time occupied by a flash of lightning.

On thus suddenly perceiving the young Marquis de Sairmeuse, Maurice d’Escorval’s first thought was—How long has he been here ? Has he been playing the spy ? Has he been listening to us ? What did he hear ? His first impulse was to spring upon his enemy, to strike him in the face, and compel him to engage in a hand-to-hand struggle. The thought of Marie-Anne checked him, however. He reflected upon the possible, even probable results of a quarrel arising under such circumstances. The combat which would ensue would cost this pure young

girl her reputation. Martial would talk about it; and country folks are pitiless. He could imagine Marie-Anne becoming the talk of the neighbourhood, and saw the finger of scorn pointed at her. Accordingly, he made a great effort and mastered his anger. These reflections occupied merely a few seconds, and then young d'Escorval politely touching his hat, advanced towards Martial and observed,

"You are a stranger, sir, and have no doubt lost your way?"

His words were ill-chosen, and defeated his prudent intentions. A curt "Mind your own business" would have been less wounding. He forgot that this word "stranger" was the most deadly insult that one could cast in the face of the former *emigres*, now returning in the rear of the allies.

However, the young marquis did not change his nonchalant attitude. He touched the peak of his hunting cap with one finger, and replied: "It's true I've lost my way."

Marie-Anne, despite her agitation, easily perceived that her presence alone restrained the hatred animating these young men. Their attitude, and the glance with which they measured each other, plainly spoke of hostile feelings. If one of them was ready to spring upon the other, the latter was on the alert, prepared to defend himself.

A short pause followed the marquis's last words. At length he spoke again. "A peasant's directions are not generally remarkable for their clearness," he said, lightly; "and for more than an hour I have been trying to find the house to which M. Lacheneur has retired."

"Ah!"

"I am sent to him by the Duke de Sairmeuse, my father."

Knowing what he did, Maurice supposed that these strangely rapacious individuals had some fresh claim to make. "I thought," said he, "that all relations between M. Lacheneur and M. de Sairmeuse were broken off yesterday evening at the abbe's house."

This was said in the most provoking tone, and yet Martial never so much as frowned. He had sworn that he would remain calm, and he had strength enough to keep his word. "If these relations have been broken off,"

he replied, "believe me, M. d'Escorval, it is no fault of ours."

"Then it is not as people say?"

"What people? Who?"

"The people here in the neighbourhood."

"Ah! And what do these people say?"

"The truth; that you have been guilty of an offence which a man of honour could never forgive nor forget."

The young marquis shook his head gravely. "Your condemnation is very hasty, sir," he said, coldly. "Permit me to hope that M. Lacheneur will be less severe than you are; and that his resentment, his just resentment, I confess, will vanish before a truthful explanation."

Martial profited by the effect he had produced to walk towards Marie-Anne, and, addressing himself exclusively to her, now seemed to completely ignore Maurice's presence. "For there has been a mistake—a misunderstanding, mademoiselle," he continued. "Do not doubt it. The Sairmeuses are not ingrates. How could any one have supposed that we would intentionally give offence to a devoted friend of our family, and that at a moment when he had rendered us such signal service! A true gentleman like my father, and a hero of probity like yours, cannot fail to esteem each other. I admit that yesterday M. de Sairmeuse did not appear to advantage; but the step he takes to-day proves his sincere regret."

Certainly this was not the cavalier tone which Martial had employed in speaking to Marie-Anne for the first time on the square in front of the church. He had removed his cap, his attitude was full of deference, and he spoke as respectfully as though he were addressing some haughty duchess, instead of the humble daughter of that "rascal" Lacheneur. Was this only a *roué's* manœuvre? Or had a true sense of this noble girl's sterling worth penetrated his heart? Perhaps it was both. At all events it would have been difficult for him to say how far the homage he thus paid was intentional, and how far involuntary.

"My father," he continued, "is an old man who has had cruel sufferings. Exile is hard to bear. But if sorrow and deception have embittered his character, they have not changed his heart. His apparent imperiousness conceals a kindness of heart which I have often seen degenerate into positive weakness. And—why should I not con-

fess it?—the Duke de Sairmeuse, with his white hair, still retains the illusions of a child. He refuses to believe that the world has progressed during the past twenty years. Moreover, people had deceived him by the most absurd fabrications. To speak plainly, even while we were in Montaignac, M. Lacheneur's enemies succeeded in prejudicing my father against him."

One might have sworn that Martial was speaking the truth; for his voice was so persuasive, and his glance, his gestures, and the expression on his face corresponded so fittingly with his words. Maurice, who felt certain that young de Sairmeuse was lying, impudently lying, was abashed by this scientific prevarication, so universally practiced in good society, but of which he was happily and utterly ignorant. However, if the marquis were lying, what did he want here, and what was the meaning of this farce?

"Need I tell you, mademoiselle," Martial resumed, "all that I suffered last evening in the little sitting-room in the parsonage? Never in my whole life can I recollect such a cruel moment! I understood, and I did honour to M. Lacheneur's heroism. Hearing of our arrival, he came without hesitation, without delay, to voluntarily surrender a princely fortune—and he was insulted. This excessive injustice horrified me. And if I did not openly protest against it—if I did not show my indignation—it was only because contradiction drives my father to the verge of frenzy. And what good would it have done for me to protest? Your filial love and piety had a far more powerful effect than any words of mine would have had. You were scarcely out of the house before the duke, already ashamed of his injustice, said to me; 'I have been wrong, but I am an old man: it is hard for me to decide to make the first advance; you, marquis, go and find M. Lacheneur, and obtain his forgiveness.'"

Marie-Anne redder than a peony, and terribly embarrassed, lowered her eyes. "I thank you, sir," she faltered, "in my father's name—"

"Oh! do not thank me," interrupted Martial earnestly; "it will be my duty, on the contrary, to give *you* thanks, if you can induce M. Lacheneur to accept the reparation which is due to him—and he will accept it, if you will only

condescend to plead our cause. Who could resist your sweet voice, your beautiful beseeching eyes?"

However inexperienced Maurice might be, he could no longer fail to comprehend Martial's intentions. This man whom he mortally hated already, dared to speak of love to Marie-Anne, and in his presence. In other words, the marquis, not content with having ignored and insulted him, presumed to take an insolent advantage of his supposed simplicity. The certainty of this outrage made his blood boil. He seized Martial by the arm, and threw him forcibly against a fir tree, several paces off. "This last is too much, Marquis de Sairmeuse!" he cried.

Maurice's attitude was so threatening, that Martial fully expected another attack. He had fallen on one knee; without rising he now raised his gun, as if to take aim. It was not from anything like cowardice that the Marquis de Sairmeuse felt an impulse to fire upon an unarmed foe; but the affront which he had received was in his opinion so dastardly that he would have shot Maurice like a dog, rather than feel the weight of his hand upon his arm again.

For some minutes previously, Marie-Anne had been expecting and hoping for Maurice's outburst of anger. She was even more inexperienced than her lover; but she was a woman, and could not fail to understand the meaning of the young marquis's manner. He was evidently "paying his court to her." And with what intentions, it was only too easy to divine. Her agitation, while the marquis spoke to her in an unceasingly tender voice, had changed at first to stupor, and then to indignation, as she realized his marvellous audacity. After that, how could she help blessing the act of violence which had curtailed a situation, so insulting for herself and so humiliating for Maurice? An ordinary woman would have thrown herself between two men anxious to kill each other; but Marie-Anne remained impassive. Was it not Maurice's duty to protect her when she was insulted? Who, then, if not he, should defend her from this young roue's insolent gallantry? She would have blushed, she who was energy personified, to love a weak and pusillanimous man.

But after all, intervention was quite unnecessary; for Maurice understood that the situation required him to be very cautious under penalty of giving the offending party

the advantage. He felt that Marie-Anne must not be regarded as the cause of the quarrel; and this thought at once produced a powerful reaction in his mind. He recovered, as if by magic, his usual coolness and the free exercise of his faculties.

"Yes," he resumed, in a bold voice, "this is hypocrisy enough. To dare to prate of reparation after the insults that you and yours have inflicted, is adding intentional humiliation to injury—and I will not permit it."

Martial had thrown aside his gun; he now rose, and with a phlegm he had learnt in England, complacently brushed his dusty knee. He was too discerning not to perceive that Maurice had purposely disguised the true cause of his passionate outburst; and though he would not have been displeased if young d'Escorval had confessed the truth, the matter was after all of little moment.

However, it was necessary to make some reply, and to preserve the superiority which he imagined he had hitherto maintained. "You will never know, sir," he said, glancing alternately at his gun and at Marie-Anne, "all that you owe to Mademoiselle Lacheneur. We shall meet again, I hope——"

"You have made that remark before," Maurice interrupted, tauntingly. "Nothing is easier than to find me. The first peasant you meet will point out the Baron d'Escorval's house."

"Very good, sir, I can't promise but that two of my friends will call upon you."

"Oh! whenever you please!"

"Certainly; but it would gratify me to know by what right you make yourself the judge of M. Lacheneur's honour, and take upon yourself to defend what has not been attacked. Who has given you this right?"

From Martial's sneering tone, Maurice felt certain the marquis had overheard at least a part of his conversation with Marie-Anne. "My right," he replied, "is that of friendship. If I tell you that your advances are unwelcome, it is because I know that M. Lacheneur will accept nothing from you. No, nothing, no matter how you may disguise the alms you offer merely to appease your own consciences. He will never forgive the affront which is his honour and your shame. Ah! you thought to degrade him, Messieurs de Sairmeuse! and you have raised him

far above your own mock grandeur. *He* receive anything from you! Go and learn that your millions can never give you a pleasure equal to the ineffable joy he will feel when he sees you roll by in your carriage, for he can say to himself: 'Those people owe everything to me!'"

Maurice spoke with such an intensity of feeling that Marie-Anne could not resist the impulse to press his hand; and this gesture was his revenge on Martial, who turned pale with passion.

"But I have still another right," continued Maurice. "My father yesterday had the honour of asking M. Lacheneur for his daughter's hand—"

"And I refused it!" cried a terrible voice.

The marquis, Marie-Anne, and Maurice turned with a movement of mingled alarm and surprise. M. Lacheneur was beside them, and just behind him stood Chanlouineau, surveying the group with threatening eyes.

"Yes, I refused it," resumed M. Lacheneur, "and I do not believe that my daughter will marry any one without my consent. What did you promise me this morning, Marie-Anne? And yet you grant a rendezvous to gallants in the grove? Go home at once!"

"But, father——"

"Go home!" he repeated angrily. "Go home, I command you."

Marie-Anne did not utter another word; but, with a look of resignation, turned to depart, though not without bestowing on Maurice a saddened gaze in which he read a last farewell.

As soon as she was some twenty paces off, M. Lacheneur, with folded arms confronted the baron's son. "As for you, M. D'Escorval," said he, "I hope that you'll no longer prowl round about my daughter——"

"I swear to you, sir——"

"Oh, no oaths, if you please. It is an evil action to try and turn a young girl from her duty, which is obedience. You have severed forever all connection between your family and mine."

Maurice tried to excuse himself; but M. Lacheneur interrupted him. "Enough! enough!" said he, "go back home."

And as the young fellow hesitated, he seized him by the collar and dragged him to the little foot-path, leading

through the grove. This was the work of scarcely ten seconds, and yet Lacheneur found time to whisper in Maurice's ear, in his former friendly tones: "Go, you young wretch! do you want to render all my precautions useless?"

He watched Maurice as the latter disappeared, bewildered by the scene he had witnessed, and stupefied by what he had just heard; and it was not until the late lord of Sairmeuse saw that young D'Escorval was out of hearing that he turned to Martial. "As I have had the honour of meeting you, M. le Marquis," said he, "I deem it my duty to inform you that Chupin and his sons are searching for you everywhere. It is at the request of the duke, your father, who is anxious for you to go at once to the Chateau de Courtoirieu." Then turning to Chanlouineau, he added: "We will now proceed on our way."

But Martial detained him with a gesture. "I am much surprised to hear that they are seeking me," said he. "My father knows very well where he sent me—I was going to your house, at his request."

"To my house?"

"Yes to your house, to express our sincere regret for the scene which took place at the parsonage yesterday evening." And then, without waiting for any rejoinder, Martial, with wonderful cleverness and felicity of expression, began to repeat to the father the story he had just related to the daughter. According to his version, the duke and himself were in despair. How could M. Lacheneur suppose them guilty of such black ingratitude? Why had he retired so precipitately? The Duke de Sairmeuse held at M. Lacheneur's disposal any amount which it might please him to mention—sixty, a hundred thousand francs, even more.

But M. Lacheneur did not appear to be dazzled in the least; and when Martial had concluded, he replied respectfully but coldly that he would consider the matter.

This coldness amazed Chanlouineau; who, when the marquis after many earnest protestations at last turned his face homewards, naively declared, "We have misjudged these people."

But M. Lacheneur shrugged his shoulders. "And so you are foolish enough to suppose that he offered all that money to me?"

"Zounds! I have ears."

"Ah well! my poor boy, you must not believe all they hear if you have. The truth is, these large sums were intended to win my daughter's favour. She has taken the marquis's fancy, and—he wishes to make her his mistress——"

Chanlouineau stopped short, with eyes flashing and hands clenched. "Good heavens!" he exclaimed, "prove that and I am yours, body and soul—to do anything you like!"

VII.

"AH, what a girl she is, this Marie-Anne Lacheneur. I've never met the like of her before—what beauty, grace, and dignity combined—" thus soliloquised Martial when after leaving the grove he turned in the direction of Sairmeuse. At the risk of losing his way he took what seemed to be the shortest course, cutting across the fields and leaping the ditches with the aid of his gun. He found a peculiar pleasure in picturing Marie-Anne as he had just seen her. Now blushing and growing pale with frightened modesty; and now raising her head with haughty pride and disdain. Who would have suspected that such girlish artlessness and such outward frigidity of manner concealed an energetic nature and an impassioned soul? What an expression of love lighted up her large black eyes when she glanced at young D'Escorval! Ah, to be looked at thus only for a moment, was felicity indeed. No wonder that Maurice D'Escorval was madly in love with her. Was not he—the marquis—in love with her himself? "Ah," exclaimed he, "Come what may she shall be mine."

Thus meditating, the Marquis de Sairmeuse turned to the strategic side of the question—to assist him in the study of which he was, despite his recent manhood, able to bring considerable experience. His *debut*, he was forced to admit, had been neither fortunate nor adroit. Compliments and offers of money had alike been rejected. If Marie-Anne had heard his covert insinuations with evident horror, M. Lacheneur had received with even more than coldness his repeated offers of actual wealth. Moreover, he remembered Chanlouineau's terrible eyes; and the way the sturdy rustic measured him. Had Marie-

Anne made but a sign, the young farmer would have crushed him like an egg-shell, without the least thought of his noble ancestors. Probably the stalwart young peasant was another of Marie-Anne's visitors, in which case there would be three rivals for her favour. However, the more difficult the undertaking seemed, the more Martial's passions were inflamed. He reflected that his blunders might after all be repaired ; for occasions of meeting would not be wanting, since he must have frequent interviews with M. Lacheneur in effecting a formal transfer of Sairmeuse. If he could only win the father over to his side. With the daughter his course was plain. Profiting by experience he must henceforth be as timid as he had hitherto been bold, and she would be hard to please if she were not flattered by such a triumph of her beauty. Young D'Escorval remained to be disposed of. True, the baron's son had been rudely dismissed by M. Lacheneur, and yet the latter's anger seemed rather far-fetched to be absolutely real. Was this incident merely a comedy, and if so who had Lacheneur wished to deceive—he—the marquis—or Chanlouineau ? And then, if there *had* been deception, what could have been its motive ? On the other hand it was impossible to call young D'Escorval to account for his insolence, for if even a pretext were found, Marie-Anne would never forgive the man who raised his hand against one who, for the time being, was apparently her favoured lover—so, hard as it was, Martial must yet swallow Maurice's affront in silence. Ah, he would have given a handsome sum to any one who would have devised a means of sending the baron's son away from the neighbourhood.

Revolving in his mind these ideas and plans, the precise consequences of which he could neither calculate nor foresee, Martial was walking up the avenue leading to the, Chateau de Sairmeuse when he heard hurried footsteps behind him. He turned and paused on seeing two men running after him and motioning him to stop. The younger was one of father Chupin's sons, and the other, the old rascal himself.

The quondam poacher had been enrolled among the servants charged with preparing Sairmeuse for the duke's reception ! and he was already doing everything in his power to make himself indispensable. "Ah, M. le Mar

quis," he cried, "we have been searching for you everywhere my son and I. It was M. le Duc——"

"Very well," said Martial dryly. "I am returning——"

But Chupin was not over sensitive ; and despite his curt reception, he ventured to follow the marquis, at a little distance behind it is true, but still sufficiently near to make himself heard. He also had his schemes, and it was not long before he began to repeat all the calumnies that had lately been spread about the neighbourhood in reference to Lacheneur. Why did he choose this subject in preference to any other ? Did he suspect the young marquis's passion for Marie-Anne ? Perhaps so ; at all events he described Lacheneur (he no longer styled him "Monsieur"), as a thorough rascal. The complete surrender of Sairmeuse, he said, was only a farce, for Marie-Anne's father must possess thousands, and hundreds of thousands of francs, since he was about to marry his daughter. Any suspicions the old scoundrel may have entertained, became certainties when he heard Martial eagerly ask : "What ! is Mademoiselle Lacheneur going to be married ?"

"Yes, sir."

"And who's the happy man ?"

"Why Chanlouineau, the fellow the peasants wanted to kill yesterday on the market-place because he was so disrespectful to the duke. He is an avaricious man ; and if Marie-Anne does not bring him a good round sum as a dowry, he will never marry her, no matter how beautiful she may be."

"Are you sure of what you say ?"

"Oh, it's quite true. My eldest son heard from Chanlouineau and from Lacheneur, that the wedding would take place within a month." And turning to his son, the old knave added : "Is it not true, boy ?"

"Yes," promptly replied the youth, although he had heard nothing of the kind.

Martial made no rejoinder. Perhaps he was ashamed at having allowed himself to listen to all this tittle tattle ; though on the other hand he could but feel grateful to Chupin for such important information. Lacheneur's conduct now appeared all the more mysterious. Why had he refused to give his daughter to Maurice d'Escorval ; why did he wish to marry her to a peasant ? His conduct

must be guided by some potent motive, which he—Martial—ignored.

Thus cogitating, the young marquis reached Sairmeuse, where a strange scene awaited him. On the broad gravel walk intervening between the peristyle of the chateau and the lawn, a huge pile of furniture, crockery, linen, and clothes might be perceived. Half a dozen lacqueys were running to and fro executing the orders of the Duke de Sairmeuse, who stood on the threshold of the building, and a passer-by would have supposed that the occupants of the chateau were moving. To Martial the scene was inexplicable. Approaching his father, and saluting him respectfully, he enquired what it meant.

The duke burst into a hearty laugh. "What, can't you guess?" he replied. "Why, it's very simple. When the lawful master returns home, he finds it delightful the first night to sleep under the usurper's counterpane, but afterwards it is not so pleasant. Everything here reminds me too forcibly of M. Lacheneur. It seems to me that I am in his house, and the thought is unendurable. So I have had them collect everything belonging to him and to his daughter—everything in fact which did not belong to the chateau in former years, and the servants will put all these goods and chattels into a cart and carry them to him."

The young marquis gave fervent thanks to heaven that he had arrived before it was too late. Had his father's project been executed, he might have bid farewell to all his hopes for ever. "You don't surely mean to do this, M. le Duc?" he said earnestly.

"And why not, pray? Who can prevent me from doing it?"

"No one, most assuredly. But you yourself will decide on reflection, that a man who has not conducted himself *too* badly, has at least a right to some consideration."

The duke seemed greatly astonished. "Consideration!" he exclaimed. "This rascal has a right to some consideration! You must be joking surely. What! I give him—that is to say—you give him a hundred thousand francs, and that doesn't satisfy him! He is entitled to consideration! You, who are after the daughter, may treat him to as much consideration as you like, but I shall do as I please!"

"You have a perfect right to do so, M. le Duc," replied Martial, "but I would respectfully observe, that

if I were in your place I should think twice before acting. Lacheneur has surrendered Sairmeuse; that is all very well; but how can you authenticate your claim to the property? Suppose you imprudently irritated him. What would you do if he changed his mind? What would become of your right to the estate?"

M. Sairmeuse turned livid. "Zounds!" he exclaimed. "I had not thought of that. Here, you fellows, take all these things indoors again, and quickly!" And as the lacqueys prepared to obey his orders, "Now," he remarked, "let us hasten to Courtornieu. They have already sent for us twice. It must be business of the utmost importance which demands our attention."

The Chateau de Courtornieu is, next to that of Sairmeuse, the most magnificent seignorial seat in the district of Montaignac. When the carriage conveying Martial and his father turned from the public highway into the long narrow rough by-road leading to this historic mansion, the jolting aroused the duke from a profound reverie into which he had fallen on leaving Sairmeuse.

The marquis thought that he had caused this unusual fit of abstraction. "It is the result of my adroit manœuvre," he said to himself, not without secret satisfaction. "Until the restitution of Sairmeuse is legalized, I can make my father do anything I wish; yes, anything. And if it is necessary, he will even invite Lacheneur and Marie-Anne to his table."

Martial was mistaken, however. The duke had already forgotten the matter, for his most vivid impressions were more fleeting than the briefest summer shower. After suddenly lowering the glass window in front of the carriage, and ordering the coachman to walk his horses up the road, he turned to his son and remarked, "Let us have a few minutes' chat. Are you really in love with that girl Lacheneur?"

Martial could not repress a start. "Oh! in love," said he, lightly, "that would perhaps be saying too much. Let me say she has taken my fancy, that will be sufficient."

The duke glanced at his son with a bantering air. "Really, you delight me!" he exclaimed. "I feared that this love affair might derange, at least for the mo-

ment, certain plans that I have formed—for I have formed certain plans for you.”

“The deuce!”

“Yes, I have my plans, and I will communicate them to you later in detail. I will content myself to-day by recommending you to study Mademoiselle Blanche de Courtornieu.”

Martial made no reply. This recommendation was indeed superfluous. If Mademoiselle Lacheneur had made him forget momentarily Mademoiselle de Courtornieu that morning, the remembrance of Marie-Anne was now effaced by the radiant image of Blanche.

“Before discussing the daughter,” resumed the duke, “let us speak of the father. He is one of my best friends; and I know him thoroughly. You have heard men reproach me for what they style my prejudices; haven’t you? Well, in comparison with the Marquis de Courtornieu, I am only a mere Jacobin.”

“Oh! father!”

“Really, such is the case. If I am behind the age in which I live, he belongs to the reign of Louis XIV. Only—for there is an only—the principles which I openly profess, he keeps locked up in his snuff-box—and trust him for not forgetting to open it at the proper moment. He has suffered cruelly for his opinions, in the sense of having so often been obliged to conceal them. He concealed them, first under the Consulate, when he returned from exile. He dissimulated them even more courageously under the Empire—for he played the part of a chamberlain to Bonaparte, this dear marquis. But, hush! don’t remind him of that proof of heroism; he has bitterly deplored it since the battle of Lutzen.”

This was the tone in which M. de Sairmeuse was accustomed to speak of his best friends. “The history of the marquis’s fortune,” he continued, “is the history of his marriages—I say marriages, because he has married a number of times, and always advantageously. Yes, in a period of fifteen years he has had the misfortune to lose three wives, each richer than the other. His daughter’s mother was his third and last wife, a Cisse Blossac—who died in 1809. He comforted himself after each bereavement by purchasing a quantity of lands or bonds. So that now he is as rich as you are, and his influence is

powerful and wide-spread. I forgot one detail, however. He believes, they tell me, in the growing power of the clergy, and has become very devout."

The duke checked himself, for the carriage had entered the marquis's grounds, and was now approaching the grand entrance of the Chateau de Courtornieu. As the wheels grated over the gravel, M. de Courtornieu himself appeared on the threshold of the mansion and hastily descended the steps to receive his guests in person. This was a flattering distinction, which he seldom lavished upon his visitors. The marquis was long rather than tall, and very solemn in deportment. His angular form was surmounted by a remarkably small head (a distinctive characteristic of his race), covered with thin glossy black hair, and lighted by cold, round black eyes. The pride that becomes a nobleman, and the humility that befits a christian, were continually at war with each other in his countenance. He pressed M. de Sairmeuse's hands with a great show of friendship, and overwhelmed them with compliments expressed in a thin nasal voice, which, coming from his elongated frame, was as astonishing as would be the sound of a flute issuing from the pipes of an orphicleide.

"At last you have come," he said, "we were waiting for you before beginning to deliberate on a very grave and delicate matter. We are thinking of addressing a petition to his majesty. The nobility, who have suffered so much during the Revolution, have a right to expect ample compensation. Our neighbours, to the number of sixteen, are now assembled in my cabinet, transformed for the time into a council chamber."

Martial shuddered at the thought of all the ridiculous and tiresome conversation he would probably be obliged to listen to; and his father's recommendation occurred to him. "Shall we not have the honour of paying our respects to Mademoiselle de Courtornieu!" he asked.

"My daughter must be in the drawing-room with our cousin," replied the marquis in an indifferent tone, "at least, if she is not in the garden."

This might be construed as, "Go, and look for her if you choose." At any rate so Martial understood the marquis; and accordingly when the hall was reached, he allowed his father and M. de Courtornieu to go upstairs

without him. At his request a servant opened the drawing-room door, but he found that apartment empty. He then turned into the garden, and after a fruitless search was retracing his steps towards the house, when, in the recesses of a shady bower, he espied the flowing folds of a white silk dress. Surmising that the wearer of this dainty toilet was Mademoiselle de Courtornieu, he advanced towards the bower, and his heart throbbed quicker when he perceived that he was right. Mademoiselle Blanche was seated on a garden bench beside an elderly lady to whom she was reading a letter in a low voice. She was evidently greatly pre-occupied, since she did not hear Martial's approach. Pausing at about a dozen paces from the bower the susceptible young marquis lingered blissfully contemplating the charming tableau presented to his gaze.

Blanche de Courtornieu was not absolutely beautiful; but she was as pretty, as piquante, and as dainty as heart could desire. Bewitching indeed were her large velvety blue eyes, her dimpled chin, and fresh pouting lips. She was a blonde—but one of those dazzling, radiant blondes found only in the countries of the sun—and her hair, drawn high upon the top of her head, escaped on all sides in a profusion of glittering ringlets which seemed almost to sparkle in the play of the light breeze. One might, perhaps, have wished her a trifle taller. But she had the winning charm of all delicately formed women; and her figure was deliciously symmetrical and admirably proportioned.

The old axiom that appearances are often deceitful could not, however, have been better exemplified than in the case of this apparently innocent artless girl. The candour sparkling in her eyes concealed a parched, hollow soul, worthy of an experienced woman of the world, or of some old courtier. Being the only daughter of a millionaire *grand-seigneur* she had been so petted by all who approached her, so bespattered with adulation that every good quality she might have possessed had been blighted in the bud by the poisonous breath of flattery. She was only nineteen; and still it was impossible for any one to have been more susceptible to the charms of wealth and ambition. She dreamed of a position at court as most girls dream of a lover. If she had deigned to notice

Martial—and she had remarked him—it was only because her father had told her that this young man might raise his wife to the highest sphere of power—a statement she had greeted with a “very well, we will see!” that would have changed an enamoured suitor’s love into disgust.

After Martial had loitered a few minutes in contemplation he made up his mind to advance, and Mademoiselle Blanche, on seeing him, sprang up with a pretty affectation of intense timidity. Bowing low before her, the young marquis exclaimed in a tone of profound deference: “M. de Courtornieu, mademoiselle, was so kind as to tell me where I might have the honour of finding you. I had not courage enough to brave those formidable discussions indoors; but——” He paused, and pointing to the letter the young girl held in her hand, he added, “But I fear that I am interrupting you.”

“Oh! not in the least, Monsieur le Marquis, although this letter which I have just been reading has, I confess, deeply interested me. It was written by a poor child in whom I have taken a great interest—whom I have sent for at times when I felt lonely—Marie-Anne Lacheneur.”

Accustomed from his infancy to the hypocrisy of drawing-rooms, the young marquis had taught his face not to betray his feelings. He could have laughed gaily with anguish at his heart; he could have preserved the sternest gravity when inwardly convulsed with merriment. And yet, the mention of Marie-Anne’s name coming from Mademoiselle de Courtornieu, caused his glance to waver. The thought that they knew each other flashed through his brain, and then with equal rapidity he recovered his self-possession. But Mademoiselle de Courtornieu had perceived his momentary agitation. “What can it mean?” she wondered, much disturbed. Still, it was with a perfect assumption of innocence that she continued: “In fact you must have seen her, this poor Marie-Anne, M. le Marquis, since her father was the guardian of Sairmeuse?”

“Yes, I have seen her, mademoiselle,” replied Martial, quietly.

“Is she not remarkably beautiful? Her beauty is of an unusual type, it quite takes one by surprise.”

A fool would have protested. The marquis was not guilty of such folly. “Yes, she is very beautiful,” said he.

Blanche de Courtornieu was slightly disconcerted by

this apparent frankness ; and it was with an air of hypocritical compassion that she murmured : " Poor girl ! What will become of her ? Here is her father reduced to digging the ground."

" Oh ! you exaggerate, mademoiselle ; my father will always preserve Lacheneur from anything of that kind."

" Of course—I might have known that—but where will he find a husband for Marie-Anne ?"

" One has been found already. I understand that she is to marry a farmer in the neighbourhood, who has some little property—a young fellow named Chantouineau."

Mademoiselle le Courtornieu with all her apparent artlessness was more cunning than the *marquis*. She had satisfied herself that she had just grounds for her suspicions ; and she experienced a certain anger on finding him so well informed in regard to everything that concerned Mademoiselle Lacheneur. " And do you fancy this is the husband she dreamed of ?" she enquired still in a tone of affected benevolence. " Ah, well ! God grant that she may be happy ; for we were very fond of her, very—were we not, Aunt Medea ?"

" Yes, very," replied Aunt Medea, who was the elderly lady seated on the bench beside the Courtornieu heiress. She was a poor relation whom M. de Courtornieu had installed at the chateau as his daughter's chaperone, and she earned her daily bread by playing the part of echo to the authoritative Blanche.

" It grieves me to see these friendly relations, which were so dear to me, broken off," resumed Mademoiselle de Courtornieu. " But listen to what Marie-Anne writes." So saying she produced Mademoiselle Lacheneur's letter and read as follows : " My dear Blanche—You know that the Duke de Sairmeuse has returned. The news fell upon us like a thunderbolt. My father and I had grown too accustomed to consider the deposit entrusted to our fidelity, as our own property, and now we have been punished for doing so. At least we have done our duty, and now everything is finished. She whom you have called your friend, will henceforth be only a poor peasant girl, as her mother was before her."

The most attentive observer would have supposed that Mademoiselle Blanche was experiencing the keenest emotion. One would have sworn that it was only by in-

tense effort that she succeeded in restraining her tears—that they were even trembling beneath the long lashes shading her eyes. In point of fact, however, she was trying to discover some indication of Martial's feelings. But now he was on his guard, and he listened to the perusal of the note with an imperturbable air. She continued:

"I should not be telling the truth if I said that I have not suffered on account of this sudden change. But I have courage left, and I shall learn how to submit. I shall, I hope, also have strength to forget, for I *must* forget! The remembrances of past happiness would make my present misery intolerable."

Mademoiselle de Courtornieu suddenly folded up the letter. "Can you understand such pride as that?" said she. "And they accuse us daughters of the nobility of being proud!"

Martial made no response. He felt that his trembling voice would betray him. Great as was the emotion he concealed, it would have been all the greater if he had been allowed to read the concluding lines:—

"One must live, my dear Blanche," added Marie-Anne, "and I feel no false shame in asking you to aid me. I sew very nicely, as you know, and I could earn my livelihood by embroidery if I knew more people. I will call to-day at Courtornieu to ask you to give me a list of ladies to whom I can present myself on your recommendation."

But Mademoiselle de Courtornieu had taken good care not to allude to this touching request. She had read the commencement of the letter to Martial as a test, and plainly perceived that if her new-born suspicions were correct, at all events the young marquis was resolved not to betray himself any further. Rising from the bench, she now accepted his arm to return to the house. She seemed to have forgotten her friend, and soon engaged in a gay flirtation. They were sauntering along toward the chateau, when the sound of voices engaged in animated debate reached their ears. The council convened in M. de Courtornieu's cabinet was angrily discussing the proposed address to the king.

Mademoiselle Blanche paused. "I am trespassing upon your kindness, M. le Marquis," she said. "I am boring

you with my silly chatter when you would undoubtedly prefer to be up stairs."

"Certainly not," replied Martial laughing. "What should I do there? Men of action only intervene when the orators have finished."

He spoke so energetically, in spite of his jesting tone, that Mademoiselle de Courtornieu was fascinated. She saw before her, she believed, a man who, as her father had said, would rise to the highest position in the political world. Unfortunately, her admiration was disturbed by a ring at the great bell which always announced visitors. She faltered, let go her hold on Martial's arm, and exclaimed in an earnest tone. "Ah, no matter. I wish very much to know what is going on up stairs. If I ask my father he will laugh at my curiosity, while you, if you are present at the conference, can tell me everything."

A wish thus expressed was a command. Martial bowed and withdrew. "She dismisses me," he said to himself as he mounted the staircase, "nothing could be more evident; and that without much ceremony. Why the deuce did she want to get rid of me?"

Why? Because that single peal of the bell announced a visitor to her; because she was expecting a visit from the former friend whose letter she had just been reading; and because she wished at any cost to prevent a meeting between Martial and Marie-Anne. She did not love the young marquis, and yet an agony of jealousy was torturing her. Such was the nature of Mademoiselle Blanche.

Her presentiments were realized. It was indeed Mademoiselle Lacheneur whom she found awaiting her in the drawing-room. Marie-Anne was paler than usual; but nothing in her manner betrayed the frightful anguish she had suffered during the past few days. In asking her former friend for a list of ladies to whom she could recommend her, she spoke as calmly and as quietly as in former days when she had oftentimes called at Courtornieu and invited Blanche to spend a day at Sairmeuse. Then the two girls embraced each other, their roles were reversed. It was Marie-Anne who had been crushed by misfortune; but it was Blanche who wept. However, while writing down the names of the persons in the neighbourhood with whom she was acquainted, Mademoiselle de Courtornieu did not neglect this favorable opportunity for verifying the

suspensions which Martial's momentary agitation had roused in her breast.

"It is inconceivable," she remarked to her friend, "that the Duke de Sairmeuse should allow you to be reduced to such an extremity."

Marie-Anne's nature was so loyal, that although the remark was levelled against a man, who had treated her father most cruelly, she at once resented its injustice. "The duke is not to blame," she replied gently, "he offered us a very considerable sum, this morning, through his son."

Mademoiselle Blanche started as if a viper had stung her. "So you have seen the Marquis, Marie-Anne?" she said.

"Yes."

"Has he been to your house?"

"He was going there, when he met me in the grove near La Reche." As Marie-Anne spoke the recollection of Martial's impertinent gallantry brought a blush to her cheeks.

Blanche, despite her precocious experience, misunderstood the cause of her friend's confusion. Still she was an adept at dissimulation, and she took leave of Marie-Anne with every outward sign of sincere affection. In reality, however, she was well nigh suffocating with rage. "What!" she thought, "they have met but once, and yet they are so strongly impressed with one another! Do they love each other already?"

VIII.

BLANCHE DE COURTORNIEU would probably have been extremely astonished if Martial had faithfully reported to her everything he heard in her father's cabinet. He was himself passably amazed by the opinions he heard expressed and the projects he heard enunciated. Above all, he was really disgusted with the ridiculous greed displayed by M. de Courtornieu's noble guests. Decorations, fortune, honors, power—they desired everything. They were satisfied that their sentimental devotion to the throne deserved the most munificent rewards; and it was only the most modest among them, who declared that he would

rest content with the epaulettes of lieutenant-general. Recrimination, rancour, and reproach were persistently indulged in, and the Marquis de Courtornieu, who acted as president of the council, soon grew exhausted with exclaiming: "Be calm, gentlemen, be calm! A little moderation, if you please!"

"All these men are mad," thought Martial, with difficulty restraining an intense desire to laugh; "They are insane enough to be placed in an asylum."

It so happened that he was not obliged to render a report of what transpired, for soon after his arrival in the cabinet the deliberations were fortunately interrupted by a summons to dinner, and when he rejoined Blanche, she had quite forgotten to question him about the doings of the council. In fact, what were these people's hopes and plans to her? These greedy nobles were all below her father in rank, and most of them were much less rich than he. Moreover, a matter of personal interest had engaged all her attention. She had been absorbed in thought, since Marie-Anne's departure—in thought of Martial, with whose mind and person she was decidedly pleased. He possessed all the qualifications an ambitious woman could desire in a husband—and she had decided that *she* would marry him. She would most likely not have arrived at this conclusion so quickly, had it not been for the feeling of jealousy, aroused in her mind by the belief that he was coveted by another woman, for the heart had nothing to do with her new-born desire, which was one of those counterfeit brain passions so often mistaken for real love. As for the outcome of her fancy, she never once thought that she might possibly reap defeat in lieu of victory: for over and over again had her flatterers told her that the man she chose must esteem himself fortunate above all others. She had seen her father besieged by so many suitors for her hand; and, besides, her mirror told her that she was as pretty—nay, far prettier than Marie-Anne; whilst she possessed other advantages which her rival could lay no claim to; birth, wit, and a genius for coquetry!

The result of Mademoiselle de Courtornieu's meditations was that during dinner she exercised all her powers of fascination upon the young marquis. She was so evidently desirous of pleasing him that several of the guests remarked it. Some were even shocked by her forwardness. But

Blanche de Courtornieu could do as she chose, as she herself was well aware. Was she not the richest heiress for miles and miles around? No slander can tarnish the brilliancy of such a fortune as she would one day possess.

Martial yielded unresistingly to the charm of his position. How could he suspect unworthy motives in a girl whose eyes had such an expression of virgin purity, and whose laugh bespoke the happy gaiety of innocent maidenhood. Involuntarily he compared the seemingly light-hearted Blanche with the grave and thoughtful Marie-Anne, and his imagination turned from one to the other, inflamed by the strangeness of the contrast. He occupied a seat beside Mademoiselle de Courtornieu at table, and they chatted gaily, amusing themselves at the expense of the other guests, who were again conversing upon political matters, and whose royalist enthusiasm waxed warmer and warmer as the repast proceeded. Champagne was served with the dessert; and the company drank to the allies by the force of whose victorious bayonets the king had managed to return to Paris; they drank to the English, to the Prussians, and to the Russians, whose horses were trampling the harvests of France under foot.

The name of D'Escorval heard above the clink of the glasses, suddenly roused Martial from his dream of enchantment. An old nobleman had just risen, and proposed that active measures should be taken to rid the neighbourhood of the Baron d'Escorval. "Such a man's presence dishonours our province," said he, "he is a frantic Jacobin, and Fouché has him on the list of suspected persons, a plain proof that he is a dangerous character. Even now he is under the surveillance of the police."

Had M. d'Escorval heard these remarks, and had he seen the savage glances which the listeners exchanged, he would certainly have felt anxious for his safety. Still, if the old nobleman's proposal met with approving looks, the various guests plainly hesitated about giving it their formal sanction. Martial's easy gaiety of a moment before had now quite vanished, and he was as pale as death. A terrible struggle was going on in his mind—a conflict between honour and desire. A few hours previously he had longed for a means to get rid of Maurice, and now the opportunity presented itself. It was impossible to imagine a better one. If the old nobleman's proposals were adopted,

the Baron d'Escorval and his family would be forced to leave France forever!

Martial noted the hesitation of the company, and felt that a word from him would probably decide the matter. What should he do—should he second the suggestion or oppose it? He did not reflect for long. The voice of honour imperatively commanded him to do his duty. Rising from his seat he declared that the suggestion was most impolitic. "M. d'Escorval," he said, "is one of those men whose spirit of honesty and justice has made them rightly popular. He fully deserves the general esteem in which he is held in the district. And by attacking him you would make many malcontents among those whose support it is our duty to obtain in the interests of the monarchy."

The young marquis's cold and haughty manner, his few but incisive words decided the question. "We had better leave the baron alone. It would be a great mistake to attack him," such were the comments exchanged on every side.

When Martial sat down again Blanche de Courtornieu leant towards him. "You have acted rightly," she murmured. "I see you know how to defend your friends." "M. d'Escorval is not my friend," replied Martial, in a voice which revealed the struggle through which he had passed. "The injustice of the proposal incensed me, that is all."

Mademoiselle de Courtornieu was not to be deceived by an explanation like this. Still, feigning to accept it, she quietly added: "Then your conduct is all the more admirable M. le Marquis."

Such was not the opinion of the Duke de Sairmeuse, however. On returning to the chateau some hours later, he reproached his son for his intervention. "Why the deuce did you meddle with the matter?" he inquired. "I should not have liked to take upon myself the odium of the proposition, but since it had been made—"

"I was anxious to prevent such an act of useless folly!"

"Useless folly! Zounds! marquis, you carry matters with a high hand. Do you think that cursed baron adores you? What would you say if you heard that he was conspiring against us?"

"I should answer with a shrug of the shoulders."

"You would ! Very well then, just do me the favour to question Chupin."

The Duke de Sairmeuse had only been a fortnight in France ; he had scarcely shaken the dust of exile from his feet, and already his imagination saw enemies on every side. He had slept but two nights in the chateau of his forefathers, and yet he accepted the venomous reports which Chupin poured into his ears as unhesitatingly as if they had been gospel truth. The suspicions which he tried to instil into Martial's mind were, however, cruelly unjust.

At the very moment when the duke accused M. d'Escorval of conspiring against the house of Sairmeuse, the baron was weeping at the bedside of his son, whose life he feared for. Maurice was indeed dangerously ill. Mental agony had overcome him and with his nervous organism the circumstance was not surprising. After leaving the grove near La Reche in obedience with M. Lacheneur's orders, he had mechanically returned home, a hundred conflicting thoughts battling in his mind. What did it all mean ? The marquis's insults, Lacheneur's feigned anger, Marie-Anne's obstinacy—all the incidents in which he had just taken part combined to crush him ; and so singular was his demeanour that the peasants who met him on the way felt convinced that some great calamity had befallen the D'Escorval family. When he reached home his mother experienced a terrible shock on perceiving the wild, haggard expression of his features. Still he had enough strength of mind left to try and reassure her. "It is all over," he exclaimed in a tremulous voice, "but don't be worried, mother ; for I have some courage left as you shall see."

He did, in fact, seat himself at the dinner-table with a resolute air. He ate even more than usual ; and his father noticed, without alluding to it, that he drank more wine than he was in the habit of doing. He was very pale, his eyes glittered, his manner and appearance were suggestive of the febrile agitation from which he was suffering, and he spoke in a husky tone, talking much and at times even jesting.

"Why won't he cry," thought Madame d'Escorval ; "then I shouldn't be so much alarmed, and I could try to comfort him."

This was Maurice's last effort. Directly dinner was over he went upstairs to his room, and when his mother, after repeatedly listening at the door, finally decided to enter and ascertain what he was about, she found him lying upon the bed, muttering incoherently. He did not appear to recognize or even to see her; and when she spoke to him, he did not seem to hear. His face was scarlet, and his lips were parched. She took hold of his hand and found that it was burning, and this although his body trembled, and his teeth chattered as if with cold.

No words could describe Madame d'Escorval's agony on making this discovery. For a moment she feared she was about to faint: but, summoning all her strength, she sprang to the staircase, and cried: "Help! help! My son is dying!"

With a bound, M. d'Escorval reached his son's room, and after a brief inspection, instructed a servant to saddle a horse and gallop to Montaignac for a doctor without delay. It is true that there was a medical man at Sairmeuse, but he was a disgrace to his profession. After serving for a short time as an army surgeon he had been dismissed for absolute incompetency. The peasants shunned him as they would have shunned the plague; and in cases of sickness they always sent for the village cure. M. d'Escorval now followed their example, in this respect well knowing that the physician from Montaignac could not possibly arrive long before morning.

The Abbe Midon had never frequented a medical school, but since he had been ordained to Sairmeuse the poor had so often asked for his advice that he had applied himself to the study of medicine, and, aided by experience, had acquired a knowledge of the healing art, well worthy of a faculty diploma. No matter at what hour of the day or night his parishioners chanced to beg his help, he was always ready—and the same answer invariably greeted their appeals: "Let us go at once." Thus, when the people of the neighborhood met him on the road with his little medicine bag slung over his shoulder, they doffed their hats respectfully and stood aside to let him pass. Those who did not respect the priest honoured the man.

When the abbe learnt that M. d'Escorval needed his advice he set out at once. The baron was his friend, and he was anxious to do everything in his power to save

young Maurice whom the frightened messenger described as almost dead. The priest was just in sight of Escorval when the baroness rushed out to meet him, and her manner was so suggestive of despair that the abbe feared she was about to announce some irreparable misfortune. But, no—she took his hand, and, without uttering a word, led him to her son's room. Maurice's condition was indeed critical, but it was not hopeless as the priest at once perceived; "We will get him out of this," he said with a smile that re-awakened hope.

And then, with the coolness of an old practitioner, he bled his patient freely, and ordered applications of ice to his head. In a moment, all the household was busy executing the cure's various orders. He took advantage of the opportunity thus offered to draw the baron aside, and inquire what had happened.

"A disappointment in love," replied M. d'Escorval, with a despairing gesture. "Yesterday afternoon M. Lacheneur refused to let his daughter marry Maurice, who, however, was to have seen Marie-Anne to-day. What passed between them I don't know, but you see what is the result."

At this moment the baroness re-entered the room and the abbe was unable to make any rejoinder. Maurice was now more excited than ever; and in his delirium he frequently muttered the names of Marie-Anne, Martial de Sairmeuse, and Chanlouineau. The hours slowly passed without bringing any change in his condition, and the vigil, shared by the distressed parents and their friend the priest, was an anxious one indeed. Dawn was just at hand, when the stillness out of doors was broken by the sound of a horse's hoofs approaching at a swift gallop along the neighbouring highway. A few minutes later, and the doctor from Montaignac entered the house.

"There is no motive for immediate alarm," he said, after carefully examining Maurice and conferring with the abbe. "Nothing more could be done at present. The fever must take its course, but I will return to-morrow."

He did return every day during the ensuing week, and not until his eighth visit did he proclaim Maurice to be out of danger. Then it was that the Baron d'Escorval sought information concerning the cause of this dangerous attack,

and learnt from his son what had transpired in the pine grove near La Reche.

"Are you sure," asked the baron, when Maurice had finished his narrative, "are you sure that you correctly understood Marie-Anne's reply? Did she really tell you that even if her father gave his consent to your marriage, she would refuse hers?"

"Those were her very words."

"And still she loves you?"

"I am sure of it."

"You were not mistaken in M. Lacheneur's tone when he said to you: 'Be off you young wretch! do you want to render all my precautions useless?'"

"No."

M. d'Escorval sat for a moment in silence. "This passes comprehension," he murmured at last. And then so low that his son could not hear him, he added: "I will see Lacheneur to-morrow: this mystery must be explained."

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PART II.

THE HONOUR OF THE NAME.

IX.

THE cottage where M. Lacheneur had taken refuge stood on a hill overlooking the river. It was a small and humble dwelling, though scarcely so miserable in its aspect and appointments as most of peasant abodes round about. It comprised a single storey divided into three rooms and roofed with thatch. In front was a tiny garden, where a vine straggling over the walls of the house, a few fruit-trees, and some withered vegetables just managed to exist. Small as was this garden patch, and limited as was its production, still Lacheneur's aunt, to whom the dwelling had formerly belonged, had only succeeded in conquering the natural sterility of the soil after long years of patient perseverance. Day after day, during a lengthy period, she had regularly spread in front of the cottage three or four basketfulls of arable soil brought from a couple of miles distant; and though she had been dead for more than a twelvemonth, one could still detect a narrow pathway across the waste, worn by her patient feet in the performance of this daily task.

This was the path which M. d'Escorval, faithful to his resolution, took the following day, in the hope of obtaining from Marie-Anne's father some explanation of his singular conduct. The baron was so engrossed in his own thoughts that he failed to realise the excessive heat as he climbed

the rough hillside in the full glare of the noonday sun. When he reached the summit, however, he paused to take breath ; and while wiping the perspiration from his brow, turned to look back on the valley whence he had come. It was the first time he had visited the spot, and he was surprised at the extent of the landscape offered to his view. From this point, the most elevated in the surrounding country, one can survey the course of the Oiselle for many miles ; and in the distance a glimpse may be obtained of the ancient citadel of Montaignac, perched on an almost inaccessible rock. A man in the baron's mood could, however, take but little interest in the picturesqueness of the scenery, though, when he turned his back to the valley and prepared to resume his walk, he was certainly struck by the aspect of Lacheneur's new abode. His imagination pictured the sufferings of this unfortunate man, who, only two days before, had relinquished the splendours of the Chateau du Sairmeuse to resume the peasant life of his early youth.

"Come in !" cried a female voice when M. d'Escorval rapped at the door of the cottage. He lifted the latch, and entered a small room with white-washed walls, having no other ceiling than the thatched roof, and no other flooring than the bare ground. A table with a wooden bench on either side stood in the middle of this humble chamber, in one corner of which was an old bedstead. On a stool near the narrow casement sat Marie-Anne, working at a piece of embroidery, and clad in a peasant-girl's usual garb.

At the sight of M. d'Escorval, she rose to her feet, and for a moment they remained standing in front of one another, she apparently calm, he visibly agitated. Lacheneur's daughter was paler than usual, she seemed even thinner, but there was a strange, touching charm about her person ; the consciousness of duty nobly fulfilled, of resignation calling for accomplishment, lending, as it were, a new radiance to her beauty.

Remembering his son, M. d'Escorval was surprised at Marie-Anne's tranquillity. "You don't inquire after Maurice," he said, with a touch of reproachfulness in his voice.

"I had news of him this morning, as I have had every day," quietly replied Marie-Anne. "I know that he is

getting better, and that he was able to take some food yesterday."

"You have not forgotten him, then?"

She trembled; a faint blush suffused her cheeks and forehead, but it was in a calm voice that she replied: "Maurice knows that it would be impossible for me to forget him, even if I wished to do so."

"And yet you told him that you approved your father's decision!"

"Yes, I told him so; and I shall have the courage to repeat it."

"But you have made Maurice most wretched and unhappy, my dear child; he almost died of grief."

She raised her head proudly, looked M. d'Escorval fully in the face and answered, "Do you think then that I haven't suffered myself?"

M. d'Escorval was abashed for a moment; but speedily recovering himself, he took hold of Marie-Anne's hand and, pressing it affectionately, exclaimed: "So Maurice loves you, and you love him; you are both suffering: he has nearly died of grief and still you reject him!"

"It must be so, sir."

"You say this, my dear child—you say this, and you undoubtedly believe it. But I, who have sought to discover the necessity of this immense sacrifice, have quite failed to find any plausible reason. Explain to me why it must be so, Marie-Anne. Have you no confidence in me? Am I not an old friend? It may be that your father in his despair has adopted extreme resolutions. Let me know them and we will conquer them together. Lacheneur knows how deeply I am attached to him. I will speak to him: he will listen to *me*."

"I can tell you nothing, sir."

"What! you remain inflexible when a father entreats you to assist him, when he says to you: 'Marie-Anne, you hold my son's happiness, life, and reason in your hands. Can you be so cruel——'"

"Ah! it is you who are cruel, sir," answered Marie-Anne with tears glittering in her eyes; "it is you who are without pity. Cannot you see what I suffer? No, I have nothing to tell you; there is nothing you can say to my father. Why try to unnerve me when I require all my courage to struggle against my despair? Maurice must

forget me ; he must never see me again. This is fate ; and he must not fight against it. It would be folly. Beseech him to leave the country, and if he refuses, you, who are his father, must command him to do so. And you too, in heaven's name fly from us. We shall bring misfortune upon you. Never return here ; our house is accursed. The fate that overshadows us may ruin you as well."

She spoke almost wildly, and her voice was so loud that it reached an adjoining room, the door of which suddenly opened, M. Lacheneur appearing upon the threshold. At the sight of M. d'Escorval the whilom lord of Sairmeuse could not restrain an oath ; but there was more sorrow and anxiety than anger in his manner, as he said : " What, you here, baron ? "

The consternation into which Marie-Anne's words had thrown M. d'Escorval was so intense that he could only just manage to stammer a reply. " You have abandoned us entirely ; I was anxious about you. Have you forgotten your old friendship ? I come to you——"

" Why did you not inform me of the honour that the baron had done me, Marie-Anne ? " said Lacheneur sternly.

She tried to speak, but could not ; and it was the baron who replied ; " Why, I have but just arrived, my dear friend."

M. Lacheneur looked suspiciously, first at his daughter and then at the baron. His brow was overcast as he was evidently wondering what M. d'Escorval and Marie-Anne had said to each other whilst they were alone. Still, however great his disguise may have been, he seemed to master it ; and it was with his old-time affability of manner that he invited M. d'Escorval to follow him into the adjoining room. " It is my reception room and study combined," he said smilingly.

This room, although much larger than the first, was, however, quite as scantily furnished, but piled up on the floor and table were a number of books and packages, which two men were busy sorting and arranging. One of these men was Chanlouineau, whom M. d'Escorval at once recognized, though he did not remember having ever seen the other one, a young fellow of twenty or thereabouts. With the latter's identity he was, however, soon made acquainted.

"This is my son, Jean," said Lacheneur. "He has changed since you last saw him ten years ago."

It was true. Fully ten years had elapsed since the baron last saw Lacheneur's son. How time flies! He had known Jean as a boy and he now found him a man. Young Lacheneur was just in his twenty-first year, but with his haggard features and precocious beard he looked somewhat older. He was tall and well built, and his face indicated more than average intelligence. Still he did not convey a favorable impression. His restless eyes betokened a prying curiosity of mind, and his smile betrayed an unusual degree of shrewdness, amounting almost to cunning. He made a deep bow when his father introduced him; but he was evidently out of temper.

"Having no longer the means to keep Jean in Paris," resumed M. Lacheneur, "I have made him return as you see. My ruin will, perhaps, prove a blessing to him. The air of great cities is not good for a peasant's son. Fools that we are, we send our children to Paris that they may learn to rise above their fathers. But they do nothing of the kind. They think only of degrading themselves."

"Father," interrupted the young man; "father, wait at least until we are alone!"

"M. d'Escorval is not a stranger," retorted M. Lacheneur, and then turning again to the baron, he continued; "I must have wearied you by telling you again and again; 'I am very pleased with my son. He has a commendable ambition; he is working faithfully and is bound to succeed.' Ah! I was a poor foolish father! The friend whom I commissioned to call on Jean and tell him to return here has enlightened me as to the truth. The model young man you see here only left the gaming-house to run to some public ball. He was in love with a wretched little ballet girl at some low theatre; and to please this creature, he also went on the stage with his face painted red and white."

"It's not a crime to appear on the stage," interrupted Jean with a flushed face.

"No; but it is a crime to deceive one's father and to affect virtues one doesn't possess! Have I ever refused you money? No; and yet you have got into debt on all sides. You owe at least twenty thousand francs!"

Jean hung his head ; he was evidently angry, but he feared his father.

"Twenty thousand francs !" repeated M. Lacheneur. "I had them a fortnight ago ; now I haven't a halfpenny. I can only hope to obtain this sum through the generosity of the Duke or the Marquis de Sairmeuse."

The baron uttered an exclamation of surprise. He only knew of the scene at the parsonage and believed that there would be no further connection between Lacheneur and the duke's family. Lacheneur perceived M. d'Escorval's amazement, and it was with every token of sincerity and good faith that he resumed : "What I say astonishes you. Ah ! I understand why. My anger at first led me to indulge in all sorts of absurd threats. But I am calm now, and realize my injustice. What could I expect the duke to do ? To make me a present of Sairmeuse ? He was a trifle brusque, I confess, but that is his way ; at heart he is the best of men."

"Have you seen him again ?"

"No ; but I have seen his son. I have even been with him to the chateau to select the articles which I desire to keep. Oh ! he refused me nothing. Everything was placed at my disposal—everything. I selected what I wanted, furniture, clothes, linen. Everything is to be brought here ; and I shall be quite a great man."

"Why not seek another house ? This——"

"This pleases me. Its situation suits me perfectly."

In fact, after all, thought M. d'Escorval, why should not the Sairmeuse's have regretted their odious conduct ? And if they had done so might not Lacheneur, in spite of indignation, agree to accept honourable conditions ?

"To say that the marquis has been kind is saying too little," continued Lacheneur. "He has shown us the most delicate attentions. For example, having noticed how much Marie-Anne regrets the loss of her flowers, he has promised to send her plants to stock our small garden, and they will be renewed every month."

Like all passionate men, M. Lacheneur overdid his part. This last remark was too much ; it awakened a terrible suspicion in M. d'Escorval's mind. "Good heavens !" he thought, "does this wretched man meditate some crime ?" He glanced at Chanlouineau, and his anxiety increased,

for on hearing Lacheneur speak of the marquis and Marie-Anne, the stalwart young farmer had turned livid.

"It is decided," resumed Lacheneur with an air of unbounded satisfaction, "that they will give me the ten thousand francs bequeathed to me by Mademoiselle Armande. Moreover, I am to fix upon such a sum as I consider a just recompense for my services. And that is not all: they have offered me the position of manager at Sairmeuse; and I was to be allowed to occupy the game-keeper's cottage, where I lived so long. But on reflection I refused this offer. After having enjoyed a fortune which did not belong to me during so many years, I am now anxious to amass a fortune of my own."

"Would it be indiscreet in me to inquire what you intend to do?"

"Not the least in the world. I am going to turn pedlar."

M. d'Escorval could not believe his ears. "Pedlar?" he repeated.

"Yes, M. le Baron. Look, there is my pack in that corner."

"But that's absurd," exclaimed M. d'Escorval. "People can scarcely earn their daily bread in this way!"

"You are wrong, sir. I have considered the subject carefully; the profits are thirty per cent. And besides, there will be three of us to sell the goods, for I shall confide one pack to my son, and another to Chanlouineau."

"What! Chanlouineau?"

"He has become my partner in the enterprise."

"And his farm—who will take care of that?"

"He will employ day labourers." And then, as if wishing to make M. d'Escorval understand that his visit had lasted quite long enough, Lacheneur began arranging such of the little packages as were intended for his own pack.

But the baron was not to be got rid of so easily, especially now that his suspicions had almost ripened into certainty. "I must speak with you alone," he said in a curt tone.

M. Lacheneur turned round. "I am very busy," he replied with evident reluctance of manner.

"I only ask for five minutes. But if you haven't the time to spare to-day, I can return to-morrow—the day after to-morrow—or any day when I can see you in private."

Lacheneur saw plainly that it would be impossible to escape this interview, so with a gesture of a man who resigns himself to a necessity, he bade his son and Chanlouineau withdraw.

They left the room, and as soon as the door had closed behind them, Lacheneur exclaimed : " I know very well, M. le Baron, the arguments you intend to advance ; and the reason of your coming. You come to ask me again for Marie-Anne. I know that my refusal has nearly killed Maurice. Believe me, I have suffered cruelly at the thought ; but my refusal is none the less irrevocable. There is no power in the world capable of changing my resolution. Don't ask my motives ; I cannot reveal them ; but rest assured that they are sufficiently weighty."

" Are we not your friends ? " asked M. d'Escorval.

" You—! " exclaimed Lacheneur with affectionate cordiality—" ah ! you know it well !—you are the best, the only friends I have here below. I should be the greatest wretch living if I did not retain the recollection of your kindness until my eyes close in death. Yes, you are my friends, yes, I am devoted to you—and it is for that very reason, that I answer your proposals with no, no, never ! "

There was no longer any room for doubt. M. d'Escorval seized Lacheneur's hands, and almost crushing them in his grasp, " Unfortunate man ! " he exclaimed, " what do you intend to do ? Of what terrible vengeance are you dreaming ! "

" I swear to you——"

" Oh ! do not swear. You cannot deceive a man of my age and of my experience. I divine your intentions—you hate the Sairmeuse family more mortally than ever."

" I——"

" Yes, you ; and if you pretend to forget the way they treated you, it is only that they may forget it. These people have offended you too cruelly not to fear you ; you understand this, and you are doing all in your power to reassure them. You accept their advances—you kneel before them—why ? Because they will be more completely in your power when you have lulled their suspicions to rest ; and then you can strike them more surely——"

He paused ; the door of the front room opened, and Marie-Anne appeared upon the threshold. " Father," said she, " Here is the Marquis de Sairmeuse."

The mention of this name at such a juncture was so ominously significant that M. d'Escorval could not restrain a gesture of surprise and fear. "He dares to come here!" he thought. "What, is he not afraid the very walls will fall and crush him?"

M. Lacheneur cast a withering glance at his daughter. He suspected her of a ruse which might force him to reveal his secret; and for a second his features were distorted by a fit of passionate rage. By an effort, however, he succeeded in regaining his composure. He sprang to the door, pushed Marie-Anne aside, and leaning out exclaimed: "Deign to excuse me, M. le Marquis, if I take the liberty of asking you to wait a moment; I am just finishing some business, and I will be with you in a few minutes."

Neither agitation nor anger could be detected in his voice; but rather, a respectful deference and a feeling of profound gratitude. Having spoken in this fashion he closed the door again and turned to M. d'Escorval. The baron, still standing with folded arms, had witnessed this scene with the air of a man who distrusts the evidence of his own senses; and yet he understood the meaning of the incident only too well. "So this young man comes here?" he said to Lacheneur.

"Almost every day—not at this hour usually, but a trifle later."

"And you receive him? you welcome him?"

"Certainly. How can I be insensible to the honour he confers upon me? Moreover, we have subjects of mutual interest to discuss. We are now occupied in legalising the restitution of Sairmeuse. I can also give him much useful information, and many hints regarding the management of the property."

"And do you expect to make me, your old friend, believe that a man of your superior intelligence is deceived by the excuses the marquis makes for these frequent visits? Look me in the eye, and then tell me, if you dare, that you believe these visits are addressed to you!"

Lacheneur's glance did not waver. "To whom else could they be addressed?" he inquired.

This obstinate serenity disappointed the baron's expectations. He could not have received a heavier blow. "Take care Lacheneur," he said sternly. "Think of the

situation in which you place your daughter, between Chanlouineau, who wishes to make her his wife, and M. de Sairmeuse, who hopes to make her—”

“Who hopes to make her his mistress—is that what you mean? Oh, say the word. But what does that matter? I am sure of Marie-Anne.”

M. d’Escorval shuddered. “In other words,” said he, in bitter indignation, “you make your daughter’s honour and reputation your stake in the game you are playing.”

This was too much. Lacheneur could restrain his furious passion no longer. “Well, yes!” he exclaimed, with a frightful oath; “yes, you have spoken the truth. Marie-Anne must be, and will be the instrument of my plans. A man in my situation is free from the considerations by which others are guided. Fortune, friends, life, honour—I have been forced to sacrifice everything. Perish my daughter’s virtue—perish my daughter herself—what do they signify if I can but succeed?”

Never had M. d’Escorval seen Lacheneur so excited. His eyes flashed, and as he spoke, shook his clenched fist wildly in the air, as though he were threatening some miserable enemy. “So you admit it,” exclaimed M. d’Escorval; “you admit that you propose revenging yourself on the Sairmeuse family, and that Chanlouineau is to be your accomplice?”

“I admit nothing,” Lacheneur replied. “Let me reassure you.” Then raising his hand as if to take an oath, he added in a solemn voice: “Before God, who hears my word, by all that I hold sacred in this world, by the memory of the wife I loved and whom I mourn to-day, I swear to you, that I am plotting nothing against the Sairmeuse family; that I have no thought of touching a hair of their heads. I use them only because they are absolutely indispensable to me. They will aid me without injuring themselves.”

For a moment the baron remained silent. He was evidently trying to reconcile Lacheneur’s conflicting utterances. “How can one believe this assurance after your previous avowal?” he evidently enquired.

“Oh, you may refuse to believe me if you choose,” rejoined Lacheneur, who had now regained all his self-possession. “But whether you believe me or not I must decline to speak any further on the subject. I have said

too much already. I know that your visit and your questions have been solely prompted by your friendship, and I cannot help feeling both proud and grateful. Still I can tell you no more. The events of the last few days demand that we should separate. Our paths in life lie far apart, and I can only say to you what I said yesterday to the Abbe-Midon. If you are my friend never come here again under any pretext whatever. Even if you hear I am dying, do not come, and should you meet me, turn aside, shun me as you would some deadly pestilence."

Lacheneur paused, as if expecting some further observation from the baron, but the latter remained silent, reflecting that the words he had just heard were substantially a repetition of what Marie-Anne had previously told him.

"There is still a wiser course you might pursue," resumed the ex-lord of Sairmeuse, after a brief interval. "Here in the district there is but little chance of your son's sorrow soon subsiding. Turn which way he will—alas, I know myself, that even the very trees and flowers will remind him of a happier time. So leave this neighborhood, take him with you, and go far away."

"Ah! how can I do that when Fouché has virtually imprisoned me here!"

"All the more reason why you should listen to my advice. You were one of the emperor's friends, hence you are regarded with suspicion. You are surrounded by spies, and your enemies are watching for an opportunity to ruin you. They would seize on the slightest pretext to throw you into prison—a letter, a word, an act capable of misconstruction. The frontier is not far off; so I repeat, go and wait in a foreign land for happier times.

"That I will never do," said M. d'Escorval proudly. His words and accent showing plainly enough how futile further discussion would be.

"Ah! you are like the Abbe Midon," sadly rejoined Lacheneur; "you won't believe me. Who knows how much your coming here this morning may cost you? It is said that no one can escape his destiny. But if some day the executioner lays his hand on your shoulder, remember that I warned you, and don't curse me for what may happen."

Lacheneur paused once more, and seeing that even this sinister prophecy produced no impression on the baron, he

pressed his hand as if to bid him an eternal farewell, and opened the door to admit the Marquis de Sairmeuse. Martial was, perhaps, annoyed at meeting M. d'Escorval; but he nevertheless bowed with studied politeness, and began a lively conversation with M. Lacheneur, telling him that the articles he had selected at the chateau were at that moment on their way.

M. d'Escorval could do no more. It was quite impossible for him to speak with Marie-Anne, over whom Chaulouineau and Jean were both jealously mounting guard. Accordingly, he reluctantly took his leave, and oppressed by cruel forebodings, slowly descended the hill which he had climbed an hour before so full of hope.

What should he say to Maurice? He was revolving this query in his mind and had just reached the little pine grove skirting the waste, when the sound of hurried footsteps behind induced him to look back. Perceiving to his great surprise that the young Marquis de Sairmeuse was approaching and motioning him to stop, the baron paused, wondering what Martial could possibly want of him.

The latter's features wore a most ingenuous air, as he hastily raised his hat and exclaimed: "I hope, sir, that you will excuse me for having followed you when you hear what I have to say. I do not belong to your party and our doctrines and preferences are very different. Still I have none of your enemies' passion and malice. For this reason I tell you that if I were in your place I would take a journey abroad. The frontier is but a few miles off; a good horse, a short gallop, and you have crossed it. A word to the wise is—salvation!"

Having thus spoken and without waiting for any reply, Martial abruptly turned and retraced his steps.

"One might suppose there was a conspiracy to drive me away!" murmured M. d'Escorval in his amazement. "But I have good reason to distrust this young man's disinterestedness. The young marquis was already far off. Had he been less pre-occupied, he would have perceived two figures in the grove—Mademoiselle Blanche de Courtornieu, followed by the inevitable Aunt Medea, had come to play the spy.

X.

THE Marquis de Courtornieu idolised his daughter. This was alike an incontestable and an uncontested fact. When people spoke to him concerning the young lady they invariably exclaimed : " You who adore your daughter—" And in a like manner whenever the marquis spoke of her himself, he always contrived to say : " I who adore Blanche." In point of fact, however, he would have given a good deal even a third of his fortune, to get rid of this smiling, seemingly artless girl, who, despite her apparent simplicity, had proved more than a match for him with all his diplomatic experience. Her fancies were legion, and however capricious they chanced to be it was useless to resist them. At one time he had hoped to ward his daughter off by inviting Aunt Medea to come and live at the chateau, but the weak-minded spinster had proved a most fragile barrier, and soon Blanche had returned to the charge more audacious and capricious than ever. Sometimes the marquis revolted, but nine times out of ten he paid dearly for his attempts at rebellion. When Blanche turned her cold, steel-like eyes upon him with a certain peculiar expression, his courage evaporated. Her weapon was irony ; and knowing his weak points she dealt her blows with wonderful precision.

Such being the position of affairs, it is easy to understand how devoutly M. de Courtornieu prayed and hoped that some eligible young aristocrat would ask for his daughter's hand, and thus free him from bondage. He had announced on every side that he intended to give her a dowry of a million francs, a declaration which had brought a host of eager suitors to Courtornieu. But, unfortunately, though many of these wooers would have suited the marquis well enough, not one had been so fortunate as to please the capricious Blanche. Her father presented a candidate ; she received him graciously, lavished all her charms upon him ; but as soon as his back was turned, she disappointed all her father's hopes by rejecting him. " He is too short, or too tall. His rank is not equal to ours. He is a fool—his nose is so ugly." Such were the reasons she would give for her refusal ; and from these summary decisions there was no appeal. Argu

ments and persuasion were alike useless. The condemned man had only to take himself off and be forgotten.

Still, as this inspection of would-be husbands amused the capricious Blanche, she encouraged her father in his efforts to find a suitor. Despite all his perseverance, however, to please her, the poor marquis was beginning to despair, when fate dropped the Duke de Sairmeuse and his son at his very door. At sight of Martial he had a presentiment that the *rara avis* he was seeking was found at last; and believing best to strike the iron while it was hot, he broached the subject to the duke on the morrow of their first meeting. M. de Courtornieu's overtures were favourably received, and the matter was soon decided. Indeed, having the desire to transform Sairmeuse into a principality, the duke could not fail to be delighted with an alliance with one of the oldest and wealthiest families in the neighbourhood. "Martial, my son," he said, "possesses in his own right, an income of at least six hundred thousand francs."

"I shall give my daughter a dowry of at least—yes, at least fifteen hundred thousand," replied M. de Courtornieu.

"His majesty is favourably disposed towards me," resumed his grace. "I can obtain any important diplomatic position for Martial."

"In case of trouble," was the retort, "I have many friends among the opposition."

The treaty was thus concluded; but M. de Courtornieu took good care not to speak of it to his daughter. If he told her how much he desired the match, she would be sure to oppose it. Non-intervention accordingly seemed advisable. The correctness of his policy was soon fully demonstrated. One morning Blanche entered her father's study and peremptorily declared, "Your capricious daughter has decided, papa, that she would like to become the Marchioness de Sairmeuse."

It cost M. de Courtornieu quite an effort to conceal his delight; but he feared that if Blanche discovered his satisfaction the game would be lost. Accordingly, he presented several objections, which were quickly disposed of; and, at last, he ventured to opine: "Then the marriage is half decided as one of the parties consents. It only remains to ascertain if—"

"The other will consent," retorted the vain heiress; who, it should be remarked, had for several days previously been assiduously engaged in the agreeable task of fascinating Martial and bringing him to her feet. With a skilful affectation of simplicity and frankness, she had allowed the young marquis to perceive that she enjoyed his society, and without being absolutely forward she had made him evident advances. Now, however, the time had come to beat a retreat—a manœuvre so successfully practised by coquettes, and which usually suffices to enslave even a hesitating suitor. Hitherto, Blanche had been gay, spirituelle, and coquettish; now she gradually grew quiet and reserved. The giddy school girl had given place to a shrinking maiden; and it was with rare perfection that she played her part in the divine comedy of "first love." Martial could not fail to be fascinated by the modest timidity and chaste fears of a virgin heart now awaking under his influence to a consciousness of the tender passion. Whenever he made his appearance Blanche blushed and remained silent. Directly he spoke she grew confused; and he could only occasionally catch a glimpse of her beautiful eyes behind the shelter of their long lashes. Who could have taught her this refinement of coquetry? Strange as it may seem, she had acquired her acquaintance with all the artifices of love during her convent education.

One thing she had not learnt, however, that clever as one may be, one is oftentimes duped by one's own imagination. Great actresses so enter into the spirit of their part that they frequently end by shedding real tears. This knowledge came to Blanche one evening when a bantering remark from the Duke de Sairmeuse apprised her of the fact that Martial was in the habit of going to Lacheneur's house every day. She had previously been annoyed at the young marquis's admiration of Marie-Anne, but now she experienced a feeling of real jealousy; and her sufferings were so intolerable that fearing she might reveal them she hurriedly left the drawing-room and hastened to her own room.

"Can it be that he does not love me?" she murmured. She shivered at the thought; and for the first time in her life this haughty heiress distrusted her own power. She reflected that Martial's position was so exalted that he could afford to despise rank; that he was so rich

that wealth had no attractions for him; and that she herself might not be so pretty and so charming as her flatterers had led her to suppose. Still Martial's conduct during the past week—and heaven knows with what fidelity her memory recalled each incident!—was well calculated to reassure her. He had not, it is true, formally declared himself; but it was evident that he was paying his addresses to her. His manner was that of the most respectful, but the most infatuated of lovers.

Her reflections were interrupted by the entrance of her maid, bringing a large bouquet of roses which Martial had just sent. She took the flowers, and while arranging them in a vase, bedewed them with the first sincere tears she had shed since she was a child.

She was so pale and sad, so unlike herself when she appeared the next morning at breakfast, that Aunt Medea felt alarmed. But Blanche had prepared an excuse, which she presented in such sweet tones that the old lady was as much amazed as if she had witnessed a miracle. M. de Courtornieu was no less astonished, and wondered what new freak it was that his daughter's doleful face betokened. He was still more alarmed when immediately after breakfast, Blanche asked to speak with him. She followed him into his study, and as soon as they were alone, before he had even had time to sit down she entreated him to tell her what had passed between the Duke de Sairmeuse and himself; she wished to know if Martial had been informed of the intended alliance, and what he had replied. Her voice was meek, her eyes tearful; and her manner indicated the most intense anxiety.

The marquis was delighted. "My wilful daughter has been playing with fire," he thought, stroking his chin caressingly; "and upon my word she has scorched herself." Then with a smile on his face he added aloud. "Yesterday, my child, the Duke de Sairmeuse formally asked for your hand on his son's behalf; and your consent is all that is lacking. So rest easy, my beautiful lovelorn damsel—you will be a duchess."

She hid her face in her hands to conceal her blushes. "You know my decision, father," she faltered in an almost inaudible voice; "we must make haste."

He started back thinking he had not heard her words aright. "Make haste!" he repeated.

"Yes, father. I have fears."

"What fears, in heaven's name?"

"I will tell you when everything is settled," she replied, at the same time making her escape from the room.

She did not doubt the reports which had reached her concerning Martial's frequent visits to Marie-Anne, still she wished to ascertain the truth for herself. Accordingly, on leaving her father, she told Aunt Medea to dress herself, and without vouchsafing a single word of explanation, took her with her to the Reche and stationed herself in the pine grove so as to command a view of M. Lacheneur's cottage.

It chanced to be the very day when M. d'Escorval called on Marie-Anne's father, in hopes of obtaining some definite explanation of his conduct. Blanche saw the baron climb the slope, and shortly afterwards Martial followed the same route. She had been rightly informed; there was no room for further doubt, and her first impulse was to return home. But on reflection she resolved to wait and ascertain how long the Marquis remained with this girl she hated. M. d'Escorval's visit was a brief one, and scarcely had he left the cottage than she saw Martial hasten out after him, and speak to him. She breathed again.

The marquis had only made a brief call, perhaps, on some matter of business, and no doubt, like M. d'Escorval, he was now going home again. Not at all, however, after a moment's conversation with the baron, Martial returned to the cottage.

"What are we doing here?" asked Aunt Medea.

"Let me alone! hold your tongue!" angrily replied Blanche, whose attention had just been attracted by a number of wheels, a tramp of horse's hoofs, a loud crackling of whips, and a brisk exchange of oaths, such as waggons in a difficulty usually resort to.

All this racket heralded the approach of the vehicles conveying M. Lacheneur's furniture and clothes. The noise must have reached the cottage on the slope, for Martial speedily appeared on the threshold, followed by Lacheneur, Jean, Chanlouineau, and Marie-Anne. Every one was soon busy unloading the waggons, and judging from the young marquis's gestures and manner, it seemed as if he were directing the operation. He was certainly

bestirring himself immensely. Hurrying to and fro, talking to everybody, and at times not even disdaining to lend a hand.

"He, a nobleman makes himself at home in that wretched hovel!" quoth Blanche to herself. "How horrible! Ah! I see only too well that this dangerous creature can do what she likes with him."

All this, however, was nothing compared with what was to come. A third cart drawn by a single horse, and laden with shrubs and pots of flowers soon halted in front of the cottage. At this sight Blanche was positively enraged. "Flowers!" she exclaimed, in a voice hoarse with passion. "He sends her flowers, as he does me—only he sends me a bouquet, while for her he pillages the gardens of Sairmeuse."

"What are you saying about flowers?" inquired the impoverished relative.

Blanche curtly rejoined that she had not made the slightest allusion to flowers. She was suffocating; and yet she obstinately refused to leave the grove, and go home as Aunt Medea repeatedly suggested. No; she must see the finish, and although a couple of hours were spent in unloading the furniture, still she lingered with her eyes fixed on the cottage and its surroundings. Some time after the empty waggons had gone off, Martial reappeared on the threshold, Marie-Anne was with him, and they remained talking in full view of the grove where Blanche and her chaperone were concealed. For a long while it seemed as if the young marquis could not promptly make up his mind to leave, and when he did so, it was with evident reluctance that he slowly walked away. Marie-Anne still standing on the door-step waved her hand after him with a friendly gesture of farewell.

The young marquis was scarcely out of sight when Blanche turned to her aunt and hurriedly exclaimed: "I must speak to that creature; come quick!" Had Marie-Anne been within speaking distance at that moment, she would certainly have learnt the cause of her former friend's anger and hatred. But fate willed it otherwise. Three hundred yards of rough ground intervened between the two; and in crossing this space Blanche had time enough to reflect.

She soon bitterly regretted having shown herself at all.

But Marie-Anne, who was still standing on the threshold of the cottage had seen her approaching, and it was consequently quite impossible to retreat. She accordingly utilized the few moments still at her disposal in recovering her self-control, and composing her features; and she had her sweetest smile on her lips when she greeted the girl who she had styled "that creature," only a few minutes previously. Still she was embarrassed, scarcely knowing what excuse to give for her visit, hence with the view of gaining time she pretended to be quite out of breath. "Ah! it is not very easy to reach you, dear Marie-Anne," she said at last; "you live on the top of a perfect mountain."

Mademoiselle Lacheneur did not reply. She was greatly surprised, and did not attempt to conceal the fact.

"Aunt Medea pretended to know the road," continued Blanche; "but she led me astray. Didn't you aunt?"

As usual the impecunious relative assented, and her niece resumed: "But at last we are here. I couldn't resign myself to hearing nothing about you, my dear, especially after all your misfortunes. What have you been doing? Did my recommendation procure you the work you wanted?"

Marie-Anne was deeply touched by the kindly interest which her former friend displayed in her welfare, and with perfect frankness, she confessed that all her efforts had been fruitless. It had even seemed to her that several ladies had taken pleasure in treating her unkindly.

Blanche was not listening, however. Close by stood the flowers brought from Sairmeuse; and there perfume rekindled her anger. "At all events," she interrupted, "you have something here which will almost make you forget the gardens of Sairmeuse. Who sent you those beautiful flowers?"

Marie-Anne turned crimson. For a moment she did not speak, but at last she stammered: "They are a mark of attention from the Marquis de Sairmeuse."

"So she confesses it!" thought Mademoiselle de Courtornieu, amazed at what she was pleased to consider an outrageous piece of impudence. But she succeeded in concealing her rage beneath a loud burst of laughter; and it was in a tone of raillery that she rejoined: "Take care,

my dear friend, I am going to call you to account. "You are accepting flowers from my *fiancee*."

"What, the Marquis de Sairmeuse!"

"Yes, he has asked for my hand; and my father has promised it to him. It is a secret as yet; but I see no danger in confiding in your friendship."

Blanche really believed that this information would crush her rival; but though she watched her closely, she failed to detect the slightest trace of emotion in her face. "What dissimulation!" thought the heiress, and then with affected gaiety, she resumed aloud: "And the country folks will see two weddings at about the same time, since you are going to be married as well, my dear."

"I married?"

"Yes, you—you little deceiver! Everybody knows that you are engaged to a young man in the neighbourhood, named—wait, I know—Chanlouineau."

Thus the report which annoyed Marie-Anne so much reached her from every side. "Everybody is for once mistaken," she replied energetically. "I shall never be that young man's wife."

"But why? People speak well of him personally, and he is very well off."

"Because," faltered Marie-Anne; "because——" Maurice d'Escorval's name trembled on her lips; but unfortunately she did not give it utterance. She was as it were abashed by a strange expression on Blanche's face. How often one's destiny depends on such an apparently trivial circumstance as this!

"What an impudent worthless creature!" thought Blanche; and then in cold sneering tones that unmistakably betrayed her hatred, she said: "You are wrong, believe me, to refuse such an offer. This young fellow Chanlouineau will at all events save you from the painful necessity of toiling with your own hands, and of going from door to door in quest of work which is refused you. "But no matter; *I*"—she laid great stress upon this word—"I will be more generous than your other old acquaintances. I have a great deal of embroidery to be done. I shall send it to you by my maid, and you two may settle the price together. It's late now, and we must go. Good-bye, my dear. Come, Aunt Medea."

So saying, the haughty heiress turned away, leaving

Marie-Anne petrified with surprise, sorrow, and indignation. Although less experienced than Blanche, she understood well enough that this strange visit concealed some mystery—but what? She stood motionless, gazing after her departing visitors, when she felt a hand laid gently on her shoulder. She trembled, and turning quickly found herself face to face with her father.

Lacheneur was intensely pale and agitated, and a sinister light glittered in his eyes. “I was there,” said he pointing to the door, “and I heard everything.”

“Father!”

“What! would you try to defend her after she came here to crush you with her insolent good fortune—after she overwhelmed you with her ironical pity and scorn! I tell you they are all like this—these girls, whose heads have been turned by flattery, and who believe that the blood in their veins is different to ours. But patience! The day of reckoning is near at hand!”

He paused. Those whom he threatened would have trembled had they seen him at that moment, so plain it was that he harboured in his mind some terrible design of retributive vengeance.

“And you, my darling, my poor Marie-Anne,” he continued, “you did not understand the insults she heaped upon you. You are wondering why she treated you with such disdain. Ah, well! I will tell you: she imagines that the Marquis de Sairmeuse is your lover.”

Marie-Anne turned as pale as her father, and quivered from head to foot. “Can it be possible?” she exclaimed. “Great God! what shame! what humiliation!”

“Why should it astonish you?” said Lacheneur, coldly. “Haven’t you expected this result ever since the day when, to ensure the success of my plans, you consented to receive the attentions of this marquis, whom you loathe as much as I despise?”

“But Maurice! Maurice will despise me! I can bear anything, yes, everything but that.”

Lacheneur made no reply. Marie-Anne’s despair was heart-rending; he felt that he could not bear to witness it, that it would shake his resolution, and accordingly he re-entered the house.

His penetration was not at fault, in surmising that Blanche’s visit would lead to something new, for biding

the time when she might fully revenge herself in a way worthy of her hatred, Mademoiselle de Courtornieu availed herself of a favourite weapon among the jealous—calumny, and two or three abominable stories which she concocted, and which she induced Aunt Medea to circulate in the neighbourhood virtually ruined Marie-Anne's reputation.

These scandalous reports even came to Martial's ears, but Blanche was greatly mistaken if she had imagined that they would induce him to cease his visits to Lacheneur's cottage. He went there more frequently than ever and stayed much longer than he had been in the habit of doing before. Dissatisfied with the progress of his courtship, and fearful that he was being duped, he even watched the house. And then one evening, when the young marquis was quite sure that Lacheneur, his son, and Chaulouineau were absent, it so happened that he perceived a man leave the cottage, descend the slope and hasten across the fields. He followed in pursuit, but the fugitive escaped him. He believed, however, that he had recognized Maurice d'Escorval.

XI.

WHEN Maurice narrated to his father the various incidents which had marked his interview with Marie-Anne in the pine grove near La Reche, M. d'Escorval was prudent enough to make no allusion to the hopes of final victory which he, himself, still entertained. "My poor Maurice," he thought, "is heart-broken, but resigned. It is better for him to remain without hope than to be exposed to the danger of another possible disappointment."

But passion is not always blind, and Maurice divined what the baron tried to conceal—and clung to this faint hope in his father's intervention, as tenaciously as a drowning man clings to the proverbial straw. If he refrained from speaking on the subject, it was only because he felt convinced that his parents would not tell him the truth. Still he watched all that went on in the house with that subtlety of penetration which fever so often imparts, and nothing that his father said or did escaped his vigilant eyes and ears. He heard the baron put on his boots, ask for his hat, and select a cane from among those placed in

the hall stand ; and a moment later he, moreover, heard the garden-gate grate upon its hinges. Plainly enough M. d'Escorval was going out. Weak as he was, Maurice succeeded in dragging himself to the window in time to ascertain the truth of his surmise. "If my father is going out," he thought, "it can only be to visit M. Lacheneur ; and if he is going to La Reche he has evidently not relinquished all hope."

With this thought in his mind Maurice sank into an arm-chair close at hand, intending to watch for his father's return ; by doing so, he might know his fate a few moments sooner. Three long hours elapsed before the baron returned, and by his dejected manner Maurice plainly saw that all hope was lost. Of this, he was sure, as sure as the criminal who reads the fatal verdict in the judge's solemn face. He required all his energy to regain his couch, and for a moment he felt that he should die. Soon, however, he grew ashamed of this weakness, which he judged unworthy of him, and prompted by a desire to know exactly what had happened he rang the bell, and told the servant who answered his summons that he wished to speak with his father. M. d'Escorval promptly made his appearance.

"Well !" exclaimed Maurice, as his father crossed the threshold of the room.

The baron felt that all denial would be useless. "Lacheneur is deaf to my remonstrances and entreaties," he replied, sadly. "There is no hope, my poor boy ; you must submit. I will not tell you that time will assuage the sorrow that now seems insupportable—for you wouldn't believe me if I did. But I do say to you be a man, and prove your courage. I will say even more : fight against all thought of Marie-Anne, as a traveller on the brink of a precipice fights against the thought of vertigo."

"Have you seen Marie-Anne, father ? Have you spoken to her ?"

"I found her even more inflexible than Lacheneur."

"They reject me, and yet no doubt they receive Chanolouineau."

"Chanolouineau is living there."

"Good heavens ! And Martial de Sairmeuse ?"

"He is their familiar guest. I saw him there."

Evidently enough each of these replies fell upon Maurice like a thunderbolt. But M. d'Escorval had armed him

self with the imperturbable courage of a surgeon, who only grasps his instrument more firmly when the patient groans and writhes beneath his touch. He felt that it was necessary to extinguish the last ray of hope in his son's heart.

"It is evident that M. Lacheneur has lost his reason!" exclaimed Maurice.

The baron shook his head despondently. "I thought so myself at first," he murmured.

"But what does he say in justification of his conduct? He must say something."

"Nothing: he refuses any explanation."

"And you, father, with all your knowledge of human nature, with all your wide experience, have not been able to fathom his intentions?"

"I have my suspicions," M. d'Escorval replied; "but only suspicions. It is possible that Lacheneur, listening to the voice of hatred, is dreaming of some terrible revenge. He may, perhaps, think of organizing some conspiracy against the emigres. Such a supposition would explain everything. Chanlouineau would be his aider and abettor; and he pretends to be reconciled to the Marquis de Sairmeuse in order to obtain information through him—"

The blood had returned to Maurice's pale cheeks. "Such a conspiracy," said he, "would not explain M. Lacheneur's obstinate rejection of my suit."

"Alas! yes, it would, my poor boy. It is through Marie-Anne that Lacheneur exerts such great influence over Chanlouineau and the marquis. If she became your wife to-day, they would desert him to-morrow. Then, too, it is precisely because he has such sincere regard for us, that he is determined to keep us out of a hazardous, even perilous enterprise. However, of course, this is merely a conjecture."

"Still, I see that it is necessary to submit," faltered Maurice. "I must resign myself; forget, I cannot."

He said this because he wished to reassure his father; though, in reality, he thought exactly the reverse. "If Lacheneur is organizing a conspiracy," he murmured to himself, "he must need assistance. Why should I not offer mine? If I aid him in his preparations, if I share his hopes and dangers, he cannot refuse me his daughter's hand. Whatever he may wish to undertake, I can surely be of greater assistance to him than Chanlouineau."

From that moment Maurice dwelt upon this thought; and the result was that he no longer pined and fretted, but did all he could to hasten his convalescence. This passed so rapidly that the Abbe Midon, who had taken the place of the physician from Montaignac, was positively astonished. Madame d'Escorval was delighted at her son's wonderful improvement in health and spirits, and declared that she would never have believed he could be so soon and so easily consoled. The baron did not try to diminish his wife's satisfaction, though he regarded this almost miraculous recovery with considerable distrust, having, indeed, a vague perception of the truth. Skilfully, however, as he questioned his son he could draw nothing from him; for Maurice had decided to keep whatever determinations he had formed a secret even from his parents. What good would it do to trouble them? and, besides, he feared remonstrance and opposition; which he was anxious to avoid although firmly resolved to carry out his plans, even if he were compelled to leave the paternal roof.

One day in the second week of September the abbe declared that Maurice might resume his ordinary life, and that, as the weather was pleasant it would be well for him to spend much of his time in the open air. In his delight, Maurice embraced the worthy priest, at the same time remarking that he had felt afraid the shooting season would pass by without his bagging a single bird. In reality he cared but little for a day on the cover; the partiality he feigned being prompted by the idea that "shooting" would furnish him with an excuse for frequent and protracted absences from home.

He had never felt happier than he did the morning when, with his gun over his shoulder, he crossed the Oiselle and started for M. Lacheneur's cottage at La Reche. He had just reached the little pine grove, and was about to pause, when he perceived Jean Lacheneur and Chanlouineau leave the house, each laden with a pedlar's pack. This circumstance delighted him, as he might now expect to find M. Lacheneur and Marie-Anne alone in the cottage.

He hastened up the slope and lifted the door latch without pausing to rap. Marie-Anne and her father were kneeling on the hearth in front of a blazing fire. On hearing

the door open, they turned ; and at the sight of Maurice, they both sprang to their feet. Lacheneur with a composed look on his face, and Marie-Anne blushing to the roots of her hair. "What brings you here?" they exclaimed in the same breath.

Under other circumstances, Maurice d'Escorval would have been dismayed by such an unengaging greeting, but now he scarcely noticed it.

"You have no business to return here against my wishes, and after what I said to you, M. d'Escorval," exclaimed Lacheneur, rudely.

Maurice smiled, he was perfectly cool, and not a detail of the scene before him had escaped his notice. If he had felt any doubts before, they were now dispelled. On the fire he saw a large cauldron of molten lead, while several bullet-moulds stood on the hearth, besides the andirons.

"If, sir, I venture to present myself at your house," said young d'Escorval in a grave, impressive voice, "it is because I know everything. I have discovered your revengeful projects. You are looking for men to aid you, are you not? Very well! look me in the face, in the eyes, and tell me if I am not one of those a leader is glad to enrol among his followers?"

Lacheneur seemed terribly agitated. "I don't know what you mean," he faltered, forgetting his feigned anger; "I have no such projects as you suppose."

"Would you assert this upon oath? If so, why are you casting those bullets? You are clumsy conspirators. You should lock your door; some one else might have opened it." And adding example to precept, he turned and pushed the bolt. "This is only an imprudence," he continued: "but to reject a willing volunteer would be a mistake for which your associates would have a right to call you to account. Pray understand that I have no desire to force myself into your confidence. Whatever your cause may be, I declare it mine; whatever you wish, I wish; I adopt your plans; your enemies are my enemies; command me and I will obey you. I only ask one favour, that of fighting, conquering, or dying by your side."

"Oh! father refuse him!" exclaimed Marie-Anne, "refuse him! It would be a crime to accept his offer."

"A crime! And why, if you please?" asked Maurice.

"Because our cause is not your cause; because its success is doubtful; because dangers surround us on every side."

Maurice interrupted her with a cry of scorn. "And you think to dissuade me," said he, "by warning one of the dangers which you a girl can yet afford to brave. You cannot think me a coward! If peril threatens you, all the more reason to accept my aid. Would you desert me if I were menaced, would you hide yourself, saying, 'Let him perish, so that I be saved!' Speak! would you do this?"

Marie-Anne averted her face and made no reply. She could not force herself to utter an untruth; and on the other hand she was unwilling to answer: "I would act as you are acting." She prudently waited for her father's decision.

"If I complied with your request, Maurice," said M. Lacheneur, "in less than three days you would curse me, and ruin us by some outburst of anger. Loving Marie-Anne as you do, you could not behold her equivocal position unmoved. Remember, she must neither discourage Chanlouineau nor the marquis. I know as well as you do that the part is a shameful one; and that it must result in the loss of a girl's most precious possession—her reputation; still, to ensure our success, it must be so."

Maurice did not wince. "So be it," he said calmly. "Marie-Anne's fate will be that of all women who have devoted themselves to the political cause of the man they love, be he father, brother, or lover. She will be slandered and insulted, and still what does it matter! Let her continue her task. I consent to it, for I shall never doubt her, and I shall know how to hold my peace. If we succeed, she shall be my wife, if we fail—" The gesture with which young d'Escorval concluded his sentence expressed more strongly than any verbal protestations that come what might he was ready and resigned.

Lacheneur seemed deeply moved. "At least give me time for reflection," said he.

"There is no necessity, sir, for further reflection."

"But you are only a child, Maurice; and your father is my friend."

"What of that?"

"Rash boy! don't you understand that by compromising

yourself you also compromise the Baron d'Escorval? You think you are only risking your own head, but you are also endangering your father's life—"

"Oh, there has been too much parleying already!" interrupted Maurice, "there have been too many remonstrances. Answer me in a word! Only understand this: if you refuse, I shall immediately return home and blow out my brains."

It was plain from the young man's manner that this was no idle threat. The strange fire gleaming in his eyes, and the impressive tone of his voice, convinced both his listeners that he really intended to effect his deadly purpose; and Marie-Anne, with a heart full of cruel apprehensions, clasped her hands and turned to her father with a pleading look.

"You are one of us, then," sternly exclaimed Lacheneur after a brief pause; "but do not forget that your threats alone induced me to consent; and whatever may happen to you or yours, remember that you would have it so."

These gloomy words, ominous as they were, produced, however, no impression upon Maurice, who, feverish with anxiety a moment before, was now well-nigh delirious with joy.

"At present," continued Lacheneur, "I must tell you my hopes, and acquaint you with the cause for which I am toiling—"

"What does that matter to me?" replied Maurice gaily; and springing towards Marie-Anne he seized her hand and raised it to his lips, crying, with the joyous laugh of youth: "Here is my cause—none other!"

Lacheneur turned aside. Perhaps he remembered that a sacrifice of his own obstinate pride would suffice to assure his daughter's and her lover's happiness.

Still if a feeling of remorse crept into his mind, he swiftly banished it, and with increased sternness of manner exclaimed: "It is necessary, however, that you should understand our agreement."

"Let me know your conditions, sir," said Maurice.

"First of all your visits here—after certain rumours that I have circulated—would arouse suspicion. You must only come here at night time, and then only at hours agreed upon in advance—never when you are not expected." Lacheneur paused, and then seeing that Maurice's attitude

implied unreserved consent, he added: "You must also find some way to cross the river without employing the ferryman, who is a dangerous fellow."

"We have an old skiff; I will persuade my father to have it repaired."

"Very well. Will you also promise me to avoid the Marquis de Sairmeuse?"

"I will."

"Wait a moment—we must be prepared for any emergency. Perhaps in spite of our precautions you may meet him here. M. de Sairmeuse is arrogance itself; and he hates you. You detest him, and you are very hasty. Swear to me that if he provokes you, you will ignore his insults."

"But I should be considered a coward."

"Probably; but will you swear?"

Maurice was hesitating when an imploring look from Marie-Anne decided him. "I swear it!" he said gravely.

"As far as Chanlouineau is concerned it would be better not to let him know of our agreement; but I will see to that point myself. Lacheneur paused once more and reflected for a moment whether he had left anything forgotten. "All that remains, Maurice," he soon resumed, "is to give you a last and very important piece of advice. Do you know my son?"

"Certainly; we were formerly the best of friends when we met during the holidays."

"Very well. When you know my secret—for I shall confide it to you without reserve—beware of Jean."

"What, sir?"

"Beware of Jean. I repeat it." And Lacheneur's face flushed as he added: "Ah! it is a painful avowal for a father; but I have no confidence in my own son. He knows no more of my plans than I told him on the day of his arrival. I deceive him, because I fear he might betray us. Perhaps it would be wise to send him away; but in that case, what would people say? Most assuredly they would say that I wanted to save my own blood, while I was ready to risk the lives of others. Still I may be mistaken; I may misjudge him." He sighed, and again added: "Beware!"

It will be understood from the foregoing that it was really Maurice d'Escorval whom the Marquis de Sairmeuse perceived leaving Lacheneur's cottage on the night he

played the spy. Martial was not positively certain of the fugitive's identity, but the very idea made his heart swell with anger. "What part am I playing here, then?" he exclaimed indignantly.

Passion had hitherto so completely blinded him that even if no pains had been taken to deceive him, he would probably have remained in blissful ignorance of the true condition of affairs. He fully believed in the sincerity of Lacheneur's formal courtesy and politeness and of Jean's studied respect; while Chanlouineau's almost servile obsequiousness did not surprise him in the least. And since Marie-Anne welcomed him cordially he had concluded that his suit was favourably progressing. Having himself forgotten the incidents which marked the return of his family to Sairmeuse, he concluded that every one else had ceased to remember them. Moreover, he was of opinion that he had acted with great generosity, and that he was fully entitled to the gratitude of the Lacheneurs; for Marie-Anne's father had received the legacy bequeathed him by Mademoiselle Armande, with an indemnity for his past services; and in addition he had selected whatever furniture he pleased among the appointments of the chateau. In goods and coin he had been presented with quite sixty thousand francs; and the hard fisted old duke, enraged at such prodigality, although it did not cost him a penny, had discontentedly growled, "He must be hard to please indeed if he is not satisfied with what we've done for him."

Such being the position of affairs, and having for so long supposed that he was the only visitor to the cottage on La Reche, Martial was perfectly incensed when he discovered that such was not the case. Was he, after all, merely a shameless girl's foolish dupe? So great was his anger, that for more than a week he did not go to Lacheneur's house. His father concluded that his ill humour was caused by some misunderstanding with Marie-Anne; and he took advantage of this opportunity to obtain his son's consent to a marriage with Blanche de Courtornieu. Goaded to the last extremity, tortured by doubt and fear, the young marquis eventually agreed to his father's proposals; and, naturally enough, the duke did not allow such a good resolution to grow cold. In less than forty-eight hours the engagement was made public; the mar-

riage contract was drawn up, and it was announced that the wedding would take place early in the spring. A grand banquet was given at Sairmeuse in honour of the betrothal—a banquet all the more brilliant since there were other victories to be celebrated, for the Duke de Sairmeuse had just received, with his brevet of lieutenant-general, a commission placing him in command of the military district of Montaignac; while the Marquis de Courtornieu had also been appointed provost-marshal of the same region.

Thus it was that Blanche triumphed, for, after this public betrothal, might she not consider that Martial was bound to her? For a fortnight, indeed, he scarcely left her side, finding in her society a charm which almost made him forget his love for Marie-Anne. But, unfortunately, the haughty heiress could not resist the temptation to make a slighting allusion to the lowliness of the marquis's former tastes; finding, moreover, an opportunity to inform him that she furnished Marie-Anne with work to aid her in earning a living. Martial forced himself to smile; but the disparaging remarks made by his betrothed concerning Marie-Anne aroused his sympathy and indignation; and the result was that the very next day he went to Lacheneur's house.

In the warmth of the greeting which there awaited him all his anger vanished, and all his suspicions were dispelled. He perceived that Marie-Anne's eyes beamed with joy on seeing him again, and could not help thinking he should win her yet. All the household were really delighted at his return; as the son of the commander of the military forces at Montaignac, and the prospective son-in-law of the provost-marshal, Martial was bound to prove a most valuable instrument. "Through him, we shall have an eye and an ear in the enemy's camp," said Lacheneur. "The Marquise de Sairmeuse will be our spy."

And such he soon became, for he speedily resumed his daily visits to the cottage. It was now December, and the roads were scarcely passable; but neither rain, snow, nor mud could keep Martial away. He generally made his appearance at ten o'clock in the morning, seated himself on a stool in the shadow of a tall fire-place, and then he and Marie-Anne began to talk by the hour. She always seemed greatly interested in what was going on at

Montagnac, and he told her everything he knew, whether it were of a military, political, or social character.

At times they remained alone. Lacheneur, Chanlouineau, and Jean were tramping about the country with their pedlar's packs. Business was indeed prospering so well that Lacheneur had even purchased a horse in order to extend the circuit of his rounds. But, although the usual occupants of the cottage might be away, it so happened that Martial's conversation was generally interrupted by visitors. It was indeed really surprising to see how many peasants called at the cottage to speak with M. Lacheneur. They called at all hours and in rapid succession, sometimes alone, and at others in little batches of two or three. And to each of these peasants Marie-Anne had something to say in private. Then she would offer them refreshments; and at times one might have imagined oneself in an ordinary village wine shop. But what can daunt a lover's courage? Martial endured the peasants and their carouses without a murmur. He laughed and jested with them, shook them by the hand, and at times he even drained a glass in their company.

He gave many other proofs of moral courage. He offered to assist M. Lacheneur in making up his accounts; and once—it happened about the middle of February—seeing Chanlouineau worrying over the composition of a letter, he actually volunteered to act as his amanuensis. "The letter is not for me, but for an uncle of mine who is about to marry his daughter," said the stalwart young farmer.

Martial took a seat at the table, and at Chanlouineau's dictation, but not without many erasures, indited the following epistle:

"My dear friend—We are at last agreed, and the marriage is decided on. We are now busy preparing for the wedding, which will take place on—We invite you to give us the pleasure of your company. We count upon you, and be assured that the more friends you bring with you the better we shall be pleased."

Had Martial seen the smile upon Chanlouineau's lips when he requested him to leave the date for the wedding a blank, he would certainly have suspected that he had been caught in a snare. But he did not see it, and, besides, he was in love.

"Ah! marquis," remarked his father one day, "Chupin tells me you are always at Lacheneur's. When will you recover from your foolish fancy for that little girl?"

Martial did not reply. He felt that he was at that "little girl's" mercy. Each glance she gave him made his heart throb wildly. He lingered by her side a willing captive; and if she had asked him to make her his wife he would certainly not have refused. But Marie-Anne had no such ambition. All her thoughts and wishes were for her father's success.

Maurice and Marie-Anne had become M. Lacheneur's most intrepid auxiliaries. They were looking forward to such a magnificent reward. Feverish, indeed, was the activity which Maurice displayed! All day long he hurried from hamlet to hamlet, and in the evening, as soon as dinner was over, he made his escape from the drawing-room, sprang into his boat, and hastened to La Reche.

M. d'Escorval could not fail to notice his son's long and frequent absences. He watched him, and soon discovered that some secret understanding existed between Maurice and Lacheneur. Recollecting his previous suspicion that Lacheneur was harbouring some seditious design he became greatly alarmed for his son's safety, and decided to go to La Reche and try once more to learn the truth. Previous repulses had diminished his confidence in his own persuasive powers, and being anxious for an auxiliary's assistance he asked the Abbe Midon to accompany him.

It was the 4th of March, and half-past four in the evening when M. d'Escorval and the cure started from Sairmeuse bound for the cottage at La Reche. They were both anxious as to the result of the step they were taking, and scarcely exchanged a dozen words as they walked towards the banks of the Oiselle. They had crossed the river and traversed the familiar pine grove, when on reaching the outskirts of the waste they witnessed a strange sight well calculated to increase their anxiety and alarm.

Night was swiftly approaching, but yet it was still sufficiently light to distinguish objects at a short distance, and on the summit of the slope they could perceive in front of Lacheneur's cottage a group of twenty persons who, judging by their frequent gesticulations, were engaged in animated conversation. Lacheneur himself was there, and

his manner plainly indicated that he was in a state of great excitement. Suddenly he waved his hand, the others clustered round him, and he began to speak. What was he saying? The baron and the priest were still too far off to distinguish his words, but when he ceased they were startled by a loud acclamation which literally rent the air. Suddenly the former lord of Sairmeuse struck a match, and setting fire to a bundle of straw lying before him he tossed it on to the roof of the cottage, shouting as he did so, "Yes, the die is cast! and this will prove to you that I shall not draw back!"

Five minutes later the house was in flames and in the distance the baron and his companion could perceive a ruddy glare illuminating the windows of the citadel at Montaignac, while on every hillside round about glowed the light of other incendiary fires. The whole district was answering Lacheneur's signal.

XII.

AH! ambition is a fine thing! The Duke de Sairmeuse and the Marquis de Courtornieu were considerably past middle-age; they had weathered many storms and vicissitudes; they possessed millions in hard cash, and owned the finest estates in the province. Under these circumstances it might have been supposed that their only desire was to end their days in peace and quietness. It would have been easy for them to lead a happy and useful life by seeking to promote the welfare of the district, and they might have gone down to their graves amid a chorus of benedictions and regrets.

But no. They longed to have a hand in managing the state vessel; they were not content with remaining simple passengers. The duke, appointed to the command of the military forces, and the marquis, invested with high judicial functions at Montaignac, were both obliged to leave their beautiful chateaux and install themselves in somewhat dingy quarters in the town. And yet they did not murmur at the change, for their vanity was satisfied. Louis XVIII. was on the throne; their prejudices were triumphant; and they felt supremely happy. It is true that sedition was already rife on every side, but had they not hundreds and thousands of allies at hand to assist them in suppressing

it? And when thoughtful politicians spoke of "discontent," the duke and his associates looked at them with the thorough contempt of the sceptic who does not believe in ghosts.

On the 4th of March, 1816, the duke was just sitting down to dinner at his house in Montaignac when he heard a loud noise in the hall. He rose to go and see what was the matter when the door was suddenly flung open and a man entered the room panting and breathless. This man was Chupin, once a poacher, but now enjoying the position of head gamekeeper on the Sairmeuse estates. It was evident, from his manner and appearance, that something very extraordinary had happened.

"What is the matter?" inquired the duke.

"They are coming!" cried Chupin; "they are already on the way!"

"Who are coming? who?"

Chupin made no verbal reply, but handed the duke a copy of the letter written by Martial under Chanlouineau's dictation. "My dear friend," so M. de Sairmeuse read. "We are at last agreed, and the marriage is decided on. We are now busy preparing for the wedding, which will take place on the fourth of March." The date was no longer blank: but still the duke had naturally failed to understand the purport of the missive. "Well, what of it?" he asked.

Chupin tore his hair. "They are on the way," he repeated. "The peasants—all the peasants of the district they intend to take possession of Montaignac, dethrone Louis XVIII., bring back the emperor, or at least, the emperor's son, and crown him as Napoleon II. Ah, the wretches! they have deceived me. I suspected this outbreak, but I did not think it was so near at hand."

This unexpected intelligence well-nigh stupefied the duke. "How many are there?" he asked.

"Ah! how do I know, your grace? Two thousand, perhaps—perhaps ten thousand."

"All the town's people are with us."

"No, your grace, no. The rebels have accomplices here. All the retired officers of the imperial army are waiting to assist them."

"Who are the leaders of the movement?"

"Lacheneur, the Abbe Midon, Chanlouineau, the Baron d'Escorval——"

"Enough!" cried the duke.

Now that the danger was certain, his coolness returned, and his herculean form, a trifle bowed by the weight of years, rose to its full height. He gave the bell-rope a violent pull; and directly his valet entered, he bade him bring his uniform and pistols at once. The servant was about to obey, when the duke added: "Wait! Let some one take a horse, and go and tell my son to come here without a moment's delay. Take one of the swiftest horses. The messenger ought to go to Sairmeuse and back in two hours." On hearing these words, Chupin pulled at the duke's coat tail to attract his attention.

"Well, what is it now?" asked M. de Sairmeuse impatiently.

The old poacher raised his finger to his lips, as if recommending silence, and as soon as the valet had left the room, he exclaimed: "It is useless to send for the marquis?"

"And why, you fool?"

"Because, because—excuse me—I——"

"Zounds! will you speak, or not?"

Chupin regretted that he had gone so far. "Because the marquis——"

"Well?"

"He is engaged in it."

The duke overturned the dinner-table with a terrible blow of his clenched fist. "You lie, you wretch!" he thundered with terrible oaths.

His anger was so threatening, that the old poacher sprang to the door and turned the knob, ready for flight. "May I lose my head if I do not speak the truth," he insisted. "Ah! Lacheneur's daughter is a regular sorceress. All the gallants of the neighbourhood are in the ranks; Chanlouineau, young D' Escorval, your son——"

M. de Sairmeuse was pouring forth a torrent of curses upon Marie-Anne when his valet re-entered the room. He suddenly checked himself, put on his uniform, and ordering Chupin to follow him, he hastened from the house. He was still hoping that Chupin had exaggerated the danger; but when he reached the Place d'Armes commanding an extensive view of the surrounding country, whatever illusions he may have retained immediately vanished. Signal lights gleamed on every side, and Montaignac seemed surrounded by a circle of flame.

"There are the signals," murmured Chupin. "The rebels will be here before two o'clock in the morning."

The duke made no reply, but hastened towards M. de Courtornieu's house. He was striding onward, when on turning a corner, he espied two men talking in a doorway; they also had perceived him, and at sight of his glittering epaulettes they both took flight. The duke instinctively started in pursuit, overtook one of the men, and seizing him by the collar, sternly asked: "Who are you? What is your name?"

"The man was silent, and his captor shook him so roughly that two pistols concealed under his over-coat, fell to the ground. "Ah, brigand!" exclaimed M. de Sairmeuse, "so you are one of the conspirators against the king!"

Then without another word, he dragged the man to the citadel, gave him in charge of the astonished soldiers, and again hastened after M. de Courtornieu. He expected to find the marquis terrified; but on the contrary he seemed perfectly delighted.

"At last," he said, "there comes an opportunity for us to display our devotion and our zeal—and without danger! We have good walls, strong gates, and three thousand soldiers at our command. These peasants are fools! But be grateful for their folly, my dear duke, and run and order out the Montaignac chasseurs——" He suddenly paused, and then with a gesture of annoyance, he resumed: "The deuce! I am expecting Blanche this evening. She was to leave Courtornieu after dinner. Heaven grant she may meet with no misfortune on the way!"

The Duke de Sairmeuse and the Marquis de Courtornieu had more time before them than they supposed. The rebels were advancing, but not so rapidly as Chupin had stated, for Lacheneur's plans had been disarranged by two unforeseen circumstances.

When standing beside his burning cottage, he had counted the signal fires that blazed out in answer to his own, and found their number corresponded with his expectations; he joyfully exclaimed: "See all our friends keep their word!" They are ready; and are now on their way to the meeting place. Let us start at once, for we must be there first!"

His horse was brought him, and one foot was already in

the stirrup when two men sprang from the neighbouring grove and darted towards him. One of them seized the horse by the bridle.

"The Abbe Midon!" exclaimed Lacheneur, in amazement; "M. d'Escorval!" And foreseeing, perhaps, what was to come, he added, in a tone of concentrated fury: "What do you two want with me?"

"We wish to prevent the accomplishment of an act of madness!" exclaimed M. d'Escorval. "Hatred has crazed you, Lacheneur!"

"You know nothing of my projects!"

"Do you think that I don't suspect them? You hope to capture Montaignac——"

"What does that matter to you?" interrupted Lacheneur, angrily.

But M. d'Escorval would not be silenced. He seized his former friend by the arm, and in a voice loud enough to be heard distinctly by every one present, he continued: "You foolish fellow! You have forgotten that Montaignac is a fortified city, surrounded by deep moats and high walls! You have forgotten that behind these fortifications there is a garrison commanded by a man whose energy and bravery are beyond all question—the Duke de Sairmeuse."

Lacheneur struggled to free himself from the baron's grasp. "Everything has been arranged," he replied, "and they are expecting us at Montaignac. You would be as sure of this as I am myself, if you had only seen the lights gleaming in the windows of the citadel. And look, you can see them yet. These lights tell me that two or three hundred of Napoleon's old officers will come and open the gates of the town as soon as we make our appearance."

"And after that! If you take Montaignac, what will you do then? Do you imagine the English will give you back your emperor? Isn't Napoleon II. an Austrian prisoner. Have you forgotten that the allied sovereigns have left a hundred and fifty thousand soldiers within a day's march of Paris?"

Sullen murmurs were heard among Lacheneur's followers.

"But all this is nothing," continued the baron. "The chief danger lies in the fact that there are generally as many traitors as dupes in an undertaking of this sort."

"Whom do you call dupes?"

"All those who mistake their illusions for realities, as you have done; all those who wishing something to happen, are convinced that it *will* happen—simply because they wish it so. And besides do you really suppose that neither the Duke de Sairmeuse nor the Marquis de Courtonnieu has been warned of your attempt?"

Lacheneur shrugged his shoulders. "Who could have warned them?" he asked complacently. But his tranquillity was feigned; as the glance he cast on Jean only too plainly proved. Frigid indeed was the tone in which he added: "It is probable that the duke and the marquis are at this very moment in the power of our friends."

The cure now attempted to second the baron's efforts. "You will not go, Lacheneur," he said. "You cannot remain deaf to the voice of reason. You are an honest man; think of the frightful responsibility you assume! Upon these frail hopes you are imperilling hundreds of brave lives? I tell you that you will not succeed; you will be betrayed; I am sure you will be betrayed!"

An expression of horrible agony contracted Lacheneur's features. It was evident to every one that he was deeply moved; and, perhaps, matters might have taken a very different course, had it not been for Chanlouineau's intervention. "We are wasting too much time in foolish prattle," he exclaimed, stepping forward and brandishing his gun.

Lacheneur started as if he had been struck by a whip. He rudely freed himself from his friend's grasp, and leaped into the saddle. "Forward!" he ordered.

But the baron and the priest did not yet despair; they sprang to the horse's head. "Lacheneur," cried the priest, "beware! The blood you are about to spill will fall on your own head, and on the heads of your children!"

Arrested by these prophetic words, the little band paused, and at the same moment a figure clad in the costume of a peasant issued from the ranks.

"Marie-Anne!" exclaimed the abbe and the baron in the same breath.

"Yes it is I," replied the young girl, doffing the large hat which had partially concealed her face; "I wish to share the dangers of those who are dear to me—share in

their victory or their defeat. Your advice comes too late, gentlemen. Do you see those lights on the horizon? They tell us that the people of the province are repairing to the cross-roads at the Croix d'Arcy, our general meeting place. Before two o'clock fifteen hundred men will be gathered there awaiting my father's commands. Would you have him leave these men, whom he has called from their peaceful firesides, without a leader? No, it is impossible!"

She evidently shared her lover's and her father's madness, even if she did not share all their hopes. "No, there must be no more hesitation, no more parleying," she continued. "Prudence now would be the height of folly. There is no more danger in a retreat than in an advance. Do not try to detain my father, gentlemen; each moment of delay may, perhaps, cost a man's life. And now, my friends, forward!"

A loud cheer answered her, and the little band descended the hill.

But M. d'Escorval could not allow his own son, whom he now perceived in the ranks, to depart in this fashion: "Maurice!" he cried.

The young fellow hesitated, but finally stepped forward.

"You will not follow these madmen, Maurice?" said the baron.

"I must follow them, father."

"I forbid it."

"Alas! father, I can't obey you. I have promised—I have sworn. I am second in command." If his voice had a mournful ring, plainly enough he was at all events determined.

"My son!" exclaimed M. d'Escorval; "unfortunate boy! Don't you know that you are marching to certain death?"

"Then all the more reason, father, why I shouldn't break my word."

"And your mother, Maurice, your mother whom you forget!"

A tear glistened in the young fellow's eye. "I am sure," he replied, "that my mother would rather weep for her dead son than keep him near her dishonoured, and branded as a coward and a traitor. Farewell! father."

M. d'Escorval appreciated the nobility of mind which

Maurice's conduct implied. He opened his arms, and pressed his son convulsively to his heart, feeling that it might be for the last time in life. "Farewell!" he faltered, "Farewell!"

A minute later Maurice had rejoined his comrades, now on the plain below, leaving the baron standing motionless and overwhelmed with sorrow.

Suddenly M. d'Escorval started from his reverie. "A single hope remains, abbe!" he cried.

"Alas!" murmured the priest.

"Oh—I am not mistaken. Marie-Anne just told us the place of rendezvous. By running to Escorval and harnessing the cabriolet, we might be able to reach the Croix d'Arcy before this party arrives there. Your voice, which touched Lacheneur, will touch the hearts of his accomplices. We will persuade these poor, misguided men to return home. Come, abbe; come quickly!"

They tarried no longer, but swiftly descended towards the ferry.

XIII.

THE clock in the church tower of Sairmeuse was just striking eight when Lacheneur and his little band of followers left La Reche. An hour later, Blanche de Courtornieu, after dining alone with Aunt Medea at the chateau, ordered the carriage to take her to Montaignac. Since her father's duties had compelled him to reside in the town they only met on Sundays, when it either happened that Blanche went to Montaignac, or the marquis paid a visit to his estate.

Now this was Thursday evening, and the servants were consequently somewhat surprised when they heard that their young mistress was going to "the town." Her journey was prompted, however, by somewhat singular circumstances.

Six days had elapsed since Martial's last visit to Courtornieu, six days of suspense and anguish for the jealous Blanche. What Aunt Medea had to endure during this interval, only poor dependents in rich families can understand. For the first three days Blanche succeeded in preserving a semblance of self-control; but on the fourth she could endure the suspense no longer, and in spite of

the breach of etiquette the step involved, she despatched a messenger to Sairmeuse to inquire if Martial were ill, or if he had been summoned away?

The messenger learnt that the young marquis was in very good health, and that he spent the entire day, from early morn to dewy eve, shooting in the neighbouring preserves; going to bed every evening as soon as dinner was over.

What a horrible insult this conduct implied for Blanche! However, it did not so much distress her as she felt certain that directly Martial heard of her enquiries he would hasten to her with a full apology. Her hope was vain; he did not come; nor even condescend to give a sign of life.

"Ah! no doubt he is with that wretch," said Blanche to Aunt Medea. "He is on his knees before that miserable Marie-Anne—his mistress." For she had finished by believing—as is not unfrequently the case—the very calumnies which she herself had invented.

Scarcely knowing how to act she at last decided to make her father her confidant; and accordingly wrote him a note to the effect that she was coming to Montaignac for his advice. In reality, she wished her father to compel Lacheneur to leave the country. This would be an easy matter for the marquis, since he was armed with discretionary judicial authority at an epoch when lukewarm devotion furnished an ample excuse for sending a man into exile.

Fully decided upon executing this plan, Mademoiselle Courtornieu grew calmer on leaving the chateau; and her hopes overflowed in incoherent phrases, which poor Aunt Medea listened to with all her accustomed resignation. "At last," exclaimed the revengeful Blanche, "I shall be rid of this shameless creature. We will see if he has the audacity to follow her. Ah, no; he cannot dare to do that!"

She was talking in this strain, or reflecting how she should lay the matter before her father, while the carriage which she and Aunt Medea occupied rolled over the highway and through the village of Sairmeuse.

There were lights in every house, the wine-shops seemed full of tipplers, and groups of people could be seen in every direction. All this animation was no doubt most unusual, but what did it matter to Mademoiselle de Courtornieu!

It was not until they were a mile or so from Sairmeuse that she was startled from her reverie.

"Listen, Aunt Medea," she suddenly exclaimed. "What is that noise?"

The poor dependent listened as she was bid, and both occupants of the carriage could distinguish a confused babel of shouts and singing, which grew nearer and more distinct as the vehicle rolled onward.

"Let us find out the meaning of all this hubbub," said Blanche. And lowering one of the carriage windows, she asked the coachman if he knew what the disturbance was about.

"I can see a great crowd of peasants on the hill," he replied; "they have torches and—"

"Blessed Jesus!" interrupted Aunt Medea in alarm.

"It must be a wedding," added the coachman, whipping up his horses.

It was not a wedding, however, but Lacheneur's little band, which had now swollen to five hundred men.

The Bonapartist ringleader should have been at the Croix d'Arcy two hours earlier. But he had shared the fate of most popular chieftains. He had given an impetus to the movement, and now it was beyond his control. The Baron d'Escorval had made him lose twenty minutes at La Reche, and he was delayed four times as long in Sairmeuse. When he reached that village, a little behind time, he found the peasants scattered through the wine-shops, drinking to the success of the enterprise; and it proved a long and difficult talk to wrest them from their merry-making. To crown everything, when the insurgents were finally induced to resume their line of march, they could not possibly be persuaded to extinguish the torches they had lighted. Prayers and threats were alike unavailing. They declared that they wished to see their way, and their leader had to submit to this foolish fancy. Poor deluded beings! They had not the slightest conception of the difficulties and the perils of the enterprise they had undertaken. They had set out to capture a fortified town, defended by a numerous garrison; just as if they had been bound on a pleasure-jaut. Gay, thoughtless, and animated with childlike confidence, they marched along, arm in arm, singing some patriotic refrain. Lacheneur, who was on horseback in the center of the band, suffered the most

intolerable anguish. Would not this delay ruin everything? What would the others, who were waiting at Croix d'Arcy, think of him! What were they doing at this very moment? Maurice, Chanlouineau, Jean, Marie-Anne, and some twenty old soldiers of the Empire who accompanied the party, understood and shared Lacheneur's despair. They knew the terrible danger they were incurring, and like their captain they constantly repeated: "Faster! Let us march faster!"

Vain was the exhortation! The peasantry openly declared that they preferred walking slowly. Soon, indeed they did not walk at all, but came to an abrupt halt. Still it was not hesitation that induced them to pause. The fact was that some of the band, chancing to look back, had perceived the lamps of Mademoiselle de Courtornieu's carriage gleaming in the darkness. The vehicle came rapidly onward, and soon overtook them. The peasants at once recognized the coachman's livery, and greeted the carriage with derisive shouts.

M. de Courtornieu's avarice had made him even more enemies than the Duke de Sairmeuse's pride, and all the peasants who thought they had more or less to complain of his extortions were delighted at this opportunity to frighten him; for as this was his carriage, no doubt he was inside. Hence, their disappointment was great indeed when, on opening the carriage-door, they perceived that the vehicle only contained Blanche and her elderly aunt. The latter shrieked with terror, but her niece, who was certainly a brave girl, haughtily asked: "Who are you? and what do you want?"

"You shall know to-morrow," replied Chanlouineau. "Until then, you are our prisoners."

"I see that you do not know who I am, boy."

"Excuse me. I do know who you are, and, for this very reason, I must request you to alight from your carriage. She must leave the carriage, must she not, M. d'Escorval?"

"I won't leave my carriage," retorted the infuriated heir-ess. "Tear me from it if you dare!"

They would certainly have dared to do so had it not been for Marie-Anne, who checked several peasants as they were springing towards the vehicle. "Let Made

moiselle de Courtornieu pass without hindrance," said she.

But this permission might produce such serious consequences that Chanlouineau found courage to resist. "That cannot be, Marie-Anne," said he. "She will warn her father. We must keep her as a hostage; her life may save the lives of our friends."

Blanche had not hitherto recognized her former friend, any more than she had suspected the intentions of the crowd. But Marie-Anne's name, coupled with that of D'Escorval enlightened her at once. She understood everything, and trembled with rage at the thought that she was at her rival's mercy. She immediately resolved to place herself under no obligation to Marie-Anne Lacheneur.

"Very well," said she, "we will alight."

But Marie-Anne checked her. "No," said she, "no! This is not proper company for a young girl."

"For an honest young girl, you should say," replied Blanche, with a sneer.

Chanlouineau was standing only a few feet off with his gun in his hand. If a man had spoken in this manner he would certainly have killed him on the spot.

"Mademoiselle will turn back," calmly rejoined Marie-Anne, disdaining to notice the insult which her former friend's words implied. "As she can reach Montaignac by the other road, two men will accompany her as far as Courtornieu."

The order was obeyed. The carriage turned and rolled away, though not before Blanche had found time to cry: "Beware, Marie-Anne! I will make you pay dearly for your insulting patronage!"

The hours were flying by. This incident had occupied ten minutes more—ten centuries—and the last trace of order had vanished. Lacheneur could have wept with rage. Suddenly calling Maurice and Chanlouineau to his side, he said: "I place you in command, do everything you can to hurry these idiots onward. I will ride as fast as possible to the Croix d'Arcy."

He started, but he was only a short distance in advance of his followers when he perceived two men running towards him at full speed. One was clad in the attire of the middle classes; the other wore the old uniform of captain in the emperor's guard.

"What has happened?" cried Lacheneur in alarm.

"Everything is discovered!"

"Good heavens!"

"Major Carini has been arrested."

"By whom? How?"

"Ah! there was a fatality about it! Just as we were perfecting our arrangements to seize the Duke de Sairmeuse, he himself surprised us. We fled, but the cursed noble pursued us, overtook Carini, caught him by the collar, and dragged him to the citadel."

Lacheneur was overwhelmed; the abbe's gloomy prophecy again resounded in his ears.

"So I warned my friends, and hastened to warn you," continued the officer. "The affair is an utter failure!"

He was only too correct; and Lacheneur knew it even better than he did. But, blinded by hatred and anger, he would not acknowledge that the disaster was irreparable. He affected a calmness which he was far from feeling. "You are easily discouraged, gentlemen," he said, bitterly. "There is, at least, one more chance."

"The deuce! Then you have resources of which we are ignorant?"

"Perhaps—that depends. You have just passed the Croix d'Arcy; did you tell any of those people what you have just told me?"

"Not a word."

"How many men are assembled there?"

"At least two thousand."

"And what is their mood?"

"They are all eagerness to begin the fight. They are cursing your slowness, and told me to entreat you to make haste."

"In that case our cause is not lost," said Lacheneur, with a determined gesture. "Wait here until the peasants come up, and impress upon them that you were sent to tell them to make haste. Bring them on as quickly as possible, and have confidence in me; I will be responsible for the success of the enterprise."

So speaking he put spurs to his horse and galloped away. In point of fact, he had deceived the men he had just spoken with. He had no other resources, nor even the slightest hope that the enterprise might now prove successful. He had told an abominable falsehood. But if

this edifice, which he had raised with such infinite care and labour was to totter and fall, he wished to be buried beneath its ruins. They would be defeated; he felt sure of it, but what did that matter? In the conflict he would seek death and find it.

Bitter discontent pervaded the crowd at the Croix d'Arcy, the murmurs of dissatisfaction having changed to curses after the messengers despatched to warn Lacheneur of the disaster at Montaignac had passed by. These peasants, nearly two thousand in number, were indignant not to find their leader waiting for them at the rendezvous. "Where is he?" they asked each other. "Who knows, perhaps he has turned tail at the last moment? Perhaps he is concealing himself while we are here risking our lives and our children's bread."

Soon the epithets of mischief-maker and traitor flew from lip to lip, increasing the anger that swelled in every heart. Some were of opinion that it would be best to disperse; while others wished to march against Montaignac without waiting any longer for Lacheneur. The point was being deliberated when a vehicle appeared in sight. It was the Baron d'Escorval's cabriolet. He and the abbe were in advance of Lacheneur, and trusted that they had arrived in time to prevent any further prosecution of the enterprise. But although only a few minutes previously several of the insurgents had wavered, the peacemakers found all their entreaties and warnings useless. Instead of arresting the movement, their intervention only precipitated it.

"We have gone too far to draw back," exclaimed one of the neighbouring farmers, who was the recognized leader in Lacheneur's absence. "If death is before us, it is also behind us. To attack and conquer—that is our only hope of salvation. Forward, then, at once. That is the only way of disconcerting our enemies. He who hesitates is a coward! So forward!"

"Yes, forward!" re-echoed the excited crowd. They unfurled the tricolour, the banner banished by the Bourbon kings, which reminded them of so much glory and such great misfortunes; the drums beat, and with loud shouts of, "Long live Napoleon the Second!" the whole column took up its line of march.

Pale, in disordered garb, and with voices husky with

emotion and fatigue, M. d'Escorval and the abbe followed in the wake of the rebels, imploring them to listen to reason. These two alone perceived the precipice towards which these misguided men were rushing, and they prayed to providence for an inspiration that might enable them to arrest this foolish enterprise while there was yet time. In fifty minutes the distance separating the Croix d'Arcy from Montaignac is covered. Soon the insurgents perceive the gate of the citadel, which was to have been opened for them by their friends within the town. It is eleven o'clock, and this gate is opened. Does not this circumstance prove that their friends are masters of the town, and that they are awaiting them in force? Hence, the column boldly advances, so certain of success that those who carry guns do not even take the trouble to load them.

M. d'Escorval and the abbe alone foresee the catastrophe. They entreat the leader of the expedition not to neglect the commonest precautions; they implore him to send some two men on in advance to reconnoitre; they themselves offer to go, on condition that the peasants will await their return before proceeding farther.

But their prayers are unheeded. The peasants pass the outer line of fortification in safety, and the head of the advancing column reaches the drawbridge. The enthusiasm now amounts to delirium; and who will be the first to enter is the only thought.

Alas! at that very moment they hear a pistol fired. It is a signal, for instantly, and on every side, resounds a terrible fusillade. Three or four peasant fall, mortally wounded. The remainder pause, terror stricken and thinking only of escape. Still the leader encourages his men, there are a few of Napoleon's old soldiers in the ranks; and a struggle begins, all the more frightful owing to the darkness!

But it is not the cry of "Forward!" that suddenly rends the air. The voice of a coward raises the cry of panic: "We are betrayed! Let him save himself who can!"

Then comes the end of all order. A wild fear seizes the throng; and these men fly madly, despairingly, scattered like withered leaves are scattered by the force of the tempest.

XIV.

At first Chupin's extraordinary revelations and the thought that Martial, the heir of his name and dukedom, should so degrade himself as to enter into a conspiracy with vulgar peasants, had well-nigh overcome the Duke de Sairmeuse. However, M. de Courtornieu's composure soon restored his *sang froid*. He hastened to the barracks, and in less than half-an-hour five hundred linesmen and three hundred Montaignac chasseurs were under arms. With those forces at his disposal it would have been easy enough to suppress the movement without the slightest bloodshed. It was only necessary to close the gates of the city, for it was not with clubs and fowling-pieces that these infatuated peasants could force an entrance into a fortified town.

Such moderation did not, however, suit a man of the duke's violent nature. Struggle and excitement were his elements, and ambition fanned his zeal. He ordered the gates of the citadel to be left open, and concealed numerous soldiers behind the parapets of the outer fortifications. He then stationed himself where he could command a view of the insurgents' approach, and deliberately choose his moment for giving the signal to fire. Still a strange thing happened. Out of four hundred shots fired into a dense mass of fifteen hundred men, only three hit their mark. More humane than their commander, nearly all the soldiers had fired into the air.

However, the duke had no time to investigate this strange occurrence now. He leaped into the saddle, and placing himself at the head of several hundred men, both cavalry and infantry, he started in pursuit of the fugitives. The peasants were, perhaps, some twenty minutes in advance. These simple minded fellows might easily have made their escape. They had only to disperse in twenty different directions; but unfortunately, this thought never once occurred to the majority of them. A few ran across the fields and then gained their homes in safety; while the others fled panic stricken, like a flock of frightened sheep before the pursuing soldiers. Fear lent them wings, for at each moment they could hear the shots fired at the laggards.

There was one man, however, who was still steady galloping in the direction of Montaignac; and this was Lache

neur. He had just reached the Croix d'Arcy when the firing began. He listened and waited. No discharge of musketry answered the first fusillade. What could be happening? Plainly there was no combat. Had the peasantry been butchered then? Lacheneur had a perception of the truth, and regretted that the bullets just discharged had not pierced his own heart. He put spurs to his horse and galloped past the cross-roads towards Montaignac. At last he perceived the fugitives approaching in the distance. He dashed forward to meet them, and mingling curses and insults together he vainly tried to stay their flight. "You cowards!" he vociferated, "you traitors! you fly and you are ten against one! Where are you going? To your own homes? Fools! you will only find the gendarmes there, waiting your coming to conduct you to the scaffold. Is it not better to die with your weapons in your hands? Come—right about. Follow me! We may still conquer. Re-enforcements are at hand; two thousand men are following me!"

He promised them two thousand men; had he promised them ten thousand, twenty thousand—an army and cannon, it would have made no difference. Not until they reached the wide open space of the cross-roads, where they had talked so confidently scarcely an hour before, did the more intelligent of the throng regain their senses, while the others fled in every direction.

About a hundred of the bravest and most determined of the conspirators gathered round Lacheneur. In the midst of the little crowd was the Abbe Midon with a gloomy and despondent countenance. He had been separated from the baron, of whose fate he was ignorant. Had M. d'Escorval been killed or taken prisoner? or was it possible that he had made his escape? The worthy priest dared not return home. He waited, hoping that his companion might rejoin him, and deemed himself fortunate in finding the baron's cabriolet still standing at a corner of the open space, formed by the four cross roads. He was still waiting when the remnant of the column confided to Maurice and Chanlouineau came up. Of the five hundred men that composed this troop on its departure from Sairmeuse, only fifteen remained, including the two retired officers, who had escaped from Montaignac, and brought Lacheneur intelligence that the conspiracy

was discovered. Marie-Anne was in the centre of this little party.

Her father and his friends were trying to decide what course should be pursued. Should each man go his own way? or should they unite, and by an obstinate resistance, give their comrades time to reach their homes?

Chanlouineau's voice put an end to the hesitation. "I have come to fight," he exclaimed, "and I shall sell my life dearly."

"We will make a stand then!" cried the others.

But Chanlouineau did not immediately follow them to the spot they considered best adapted for a prolonged defence; he called Maurice and drew him a little aside. "You must leave us at once M. d'Escorval," he said, in a rough voice.

"I—I came here, Chanlouineau, as you did, to do my duty."

"Your duty, sir, is to serve Marie-Anne. Go at once, and take her with you."

"I shall remain," said Maurice firmly.

He was going to join his comrades when Chanlouineau stopped him. "You have no right to sacrifice your life here," he said quickly. "It belongs to the woman who has given herself to you."

"Wretch! how dare you—"

Chanlouineau sadly shook his head. "What is the use of denying it?" said he. "It was so great a temptation that only an angel could have resisted it. It was not your fault, nor was it hers. Lacheneur was a bad father. There was a day when I wanted either to kill myself or to kill you, I didn't know which. Ah! you certainly were near death that day. You were scarcely five paces from the muzzle of my gun. It was God who stayed my hand by reminding me what her despair would be. But now that I have to die, and Lacheneur as well, some one must take care of Marie-Anne. Swear that you will marry her. You may be involved in some difficulty on account of this affair; but I have the means of saving you."

He was suddenly interrupted by a fusillade. The Duke de Sairmeuse's soldiers were approaching. "Good heavens!" exclaimed Chanlouineau, "and Marie-Anne."

They rushed in pursuit of her, and Maurice was the first to find her, standing in the centre of the open space

clinging to the neck of her father's horse. He took her in his arms, trying to drag her away. "Come!" said he, "come!"

But she refused. "Leave me, leave me!" she entreated.

"But all is lost!"

"Yes, I know that all is lost—even honour. Leave me here. I must remain; I must die, and thus hide my shame. It must, it shall be so!"

Just then Chanlouineau reached them. Had he divined the secret of her resistance? Perhaps so, but at all events without uttering a word, he lifted her in his strong arms as if she had been a child, and carried her to the cabriolet, beside which the Abbe Midon was standing. "Get in," he said, addressing the priest, "and quick—take Mademoiselle Lacheneur. Now, Maurice it's your turn!"

But the duke's soldiers were already masters of the field. They had perceived this little group and hastened forward. Brave Chanlouineau certainly was. He seized his gun, and brandishing it like a club managed to hold the enemy at bay, while Maurice sprang into the carriage caught the reins and started the horse off at a gallop. All the cowardice and all the heroism displayed on that terrible night will never be really known. Two minutes after the departure of the vehicle, Chanlouineau was still battling with the foe. He had at least a dozen men to deal with. Twenty shots had been fired, and yet he was unwounded, and his enemies almost believed him to be invulnerable.

"Surrender!" cried the soldiers, amazed by his bravery; "surrender!"

"Never! never!" he shrieked in reply, at the same time warding his assailants off with well-nigh superhuman strength and agility. The struggle might have lasted some time longer, had not one of the soldiers managed to crawl behind him, without being perceived. This linesman seized Chanlouineau by the legs, and although the latter struggled furiously, he was taken at such a disadvantage that further resistance was impossible. He fell to the ground with a loud cry of "Help! friends, help!"

But no one responded to this appeal. At the other end of the open space those upon whom he called had vir

tually yielded, after a desperate struggle. The main body of the duke's infantry was near at hand. The rebels could hear the drums beating the charge; and see the bayonets gleaming in the moonlight.

Lacheneur, who had remained on horseback amid his partisans, utterly ignoring the bullets that whistled round him, felt that his few remaining friends were about to be exterminated. At that supreme moment a vision of the past flitted before his mind's eye, with the rapidity of a flash of lightning. He read and judged his own heart. Hatred had led him to crime. He loathed himself for the humiliation which he had imposed upon his daughter, and cursed himself for the falsehoods with which he had deceived these brave men, for whose death he would be accountable to God. Enough blood had flowed; he must save those who remained. "Cease firing, my friends," he commanded; "retreat!"

They obeyed—he could see them scatter in every direction. He too could fly, for was he not mounted on a swift steed which would bear him beyond the reach of the enemy? But he had sworn that he would not survive defeat. Maddened with remorse, despair, sorrow, and impotent rage, he saw no refuge except in death. He had only to wait for it, for it was fast approaching; and yet he preferred to rush to meet it. Gathering up the reins, and applying the spurs he charged upon the enemy.

The shock was rude, the ranks opened, and there was a moment's confusion. Then Lacheneur's horse, wounded by a dozen bayonet thrusts, reared on its hind-legs, beat the air with its forehoofs, and, falling backwards, pinned its rider underneath. And the soldiers marched onward not suspecting that the rider was struggling to free himself.

It was half-past one in the morning—the open space where the cross roads met was virtually deserted. Nothing could be heard save the moans of a few wounded men, calling on their comrades for succour. Before thinking of attending to the wounded, M. de Sairmeuse had to occupy himself with his own personal interests and glory. Now that the insurrection had, so to say, been suppressed, it was necessary to exaggerate its magnitude as much as possible, in order that his grace's reward might be in proportion with the services he would be supposed to have

rendered. Some fifteen or twenty rebels had been captured ; but these were not sufficient to give the victory all the *eclat* which the duke desired. He must find more culprits to drag before the provost-marshal or before a military commission. He, therefore, divided his troops into several detachments, and sent them in every direction with orders to explore the villages, search the houses, and arrest all suspected persons. Having given this order and recommended implacable severity, he turned his horse and started at a brisk trot for Montaignac.

Like his friend, M. de Courtornieu, he would have blessed these honest, artless conspirators, had not a growing fear impaired his satisfaction. Was his son, the Marquis de Sairmeuse, really implicated in this conspiracy or not ? The duke could scarcely believe in Martial's connivance, and yet the recollection of Chupin's assertions troubled him. On the other hand, what could have become of Martial ? Had he been met by the servant sent to warn him ? Was he returning ? And, in that case, by which road ? Had he fallen into the hands of the peasants ? So many questions which could not with certainty be answered.

His grace's relief was intense when, on reaching his residence in Montaignac, after a conference with M. de Courtornieu, he learnt that Martial had returned home about a quarter of an hour before. The servant who brought him this news added that the marquis had gone to his own room directly he dismounted from his horse.

"All right," replied the duke. "I will go to him there." At the same time, however, despite his outward placidity of manner, he was secretly murmuring, "What abominable impertinence ! What ! I am on horseback at the head of my troops, my life imperilled, and my son goes quietly to bed without even assuring himself of my safety !"

He reached Martial's room, and finding the door closed and locked on the inside, rapped angrily against the panel.

"Who is there ?" inquired the young marquis.

"It is I," replied the duke ; "open the door."

Martial at once complied, and M. de Sairmeuse entered ; but the sight that met his gaze made him tremble. On

the table stood a basin full of blood, and Martial, with bare chest, was bathing a large wound near the right nipple.

"You have been fighting!" exclaimed the duke, in an agitated voice.

"Yes."

"Ah!—then you were, indeed—"

"I was where?—what?"

"Why, at the rendezvous of those miserable peasants who, in their folly, dared to dream of overthrowing the best of princes!"

"I think you must be jesting, sir," replied Martial, in a tone of deep surprise, which somewhat reassured his father, though it failed to dissipate his suspicions entirely.

"Then these vile rascals attacked you?" inquired M. de Sairmeuse.

"Not at all. I have been simply obliged to fight a duel."

"With whom? Name the scoundrel who has dared to insult you?"

A faint flush tinged Martial's cheek; but it was with his usual careless manner that he replied: "Upon my word, no; I shall not give his name. You would trouble him, perhaps; and I really owe the fellow a debt of gratitude. It happened upon the highway; he might have murdered me without ceremony had he only chosen, but he offered me open combat. Besides, he was wounded far more severely than I."

All M. de Sairmeuse's doubts had now returned. "And why, instead of summoning a physician, are you attempting to dress this wound yourself?"

"Because it is a mere trifle, and because I wish to keep it a secret."

The duke shook his head. "All this is scarcely plausible," he remarked; "especially after the statements made to me concerning your complicity in the revolt."

"Ah!" said the young marquis, "so your head spy has been at work again. However, I am certainly surprised that you can hesitate for a moment between your son's word and the stories told you by such a wretch."

"Don't speak ill of Chupin, marquis; he is a very useful man. Had it not been for him, we should have been taken unawares. It was through him that I learned of this vast conspiracy organized by Lacheneur—"

"What ! is it Lacheneur—"

"Who is at the head of the movement?—yes, *marquis*. Ah ! your usual discernment has failed you in this instance. What, you were a constant visitor at his house, and yet you suspected nothing ? And you contemplate a diplomatic career ! But this is not everything. Now you know what became of the money you so lavishly bestowed on these people. They used it to purchase guns, powder and ammunition."

The duke was satisfied that his earlier suspicions concerning his son's complicity were without foundation ; still he could not resist the temptation to taunt Martial anent his intimacy with the ex-steward of *Sairmeuse*. But, despite the bitterness of the situation, it proved a fruitless effort. Martial knew very well that he had been duped, but he did not think of resentment. "If Lacheneur has been captured," he murmured to himself, "if he were condemned to death, and if I could only save him, then *Marie-Anne* would have nothing to refuse me."

XV.

WHEN the Baron d'Escorval divined the reason of his son's frequent absences from home, he studiously avoided speaking on the matter to his wife ; and, indeed, he did not even warn her of his purpose when he went to ask the *Abbe Midon* to go with him to Lacheneur's. This was the first time that he had ever had a secret from the faithful partner of his life ; and his silence fully explains the intensity of Madame d'Escorval's astonishment when at dinner time Maurice was sometimes late ; but the baron, like all great workers, was punctuality itself. Hence his non-arrival could only be due to some extraordinary occurrence. Madame d'Escorval's surprise developed into uneasiness when she ascertained that her husband had started off in the *Abbe Midon's* company, that they had harnessed a horse to the cabriolet themselves, driving through the stable-yard into a lane leading to the public road, in lieu of passing through the court-yard in front of the house, as was the usual practice. This strange precaution must necessarily conceal some mystery.

Madame d'Escorval waited, oppressed by vague fore-

bodings. The servants shared her anxiety; for the baron's affability and kindness had greatly endeared him to all his dependants. Long hours passed by, but eventually, at about ten o'clock in the evening, a peasant returning from Sairmeuse passed by the chateau, and seeing the servants clustering in front of the garden gate he stopped short, and with the loquacity of a man who has just been sacrificing at the altar of Bacchus proceeded to relate the most incredible stories. He declared that all the peasantry for ten leagues around were under arms, and that the Baron d'Escorval was the leader of a revolt organized for the restoration of the Empire. He did not doubt the final success of the movement, boldly stating that Napoleon II., Marie-Louise, and all the marshals were concealed in Montaignac. Alas! it must be confessed that Lacheneur had not hesitated to utter the grossest falsehoods in his anxiety to gain followers to his cause. Madame d'Escorval, before whom this peasant was conducted, could not be deceived by these ridiculous stories, but she could and did believe that the baron was the prime mover in the insurrection. And this belief, which would have carried consternation to many women's hearts, absolutely reassured her. She had entire, unlimited faith in her husband. She believed him superior to all other men—infallible, in short. Hence, if he had organized a movement, that movement was right. If he had attempted it, it was because he expected to succeed; and if he looked for success, to her mind it was certain.

Impatient, however, to know the result, she despatched the gardener to Sairmeuse with orders to obtain information without awakening suspicion, if possible, and to hasten back as soon as he could learn anything of a positive nature. He returned shortly after midnight, pale, frightened, and in tears. The disaster had already become known, and had been described to him with any amount of exaggeration. He had been told that hundreds of men had been killed, and that a whole army was scouring the country, massacring the defenceless peasants and their families.

While he was telling his story, Madame d'Escorval felt as if she were going mad. She saw—yes, positively, saw her son and her husband, dead—or still worse, mortally wounded, stretched on the public highway—lying with

their arms crossed upon their breasts, livid, bloody, their eyes staring wildly—begging for water—a drop of water to assuage their burning thirst. “I will find them!” she exclaimed, in frenzied accents. “I will go to the battlefield and seek for them among the dead, until I find them. Light some torches, my friends, and come with me, for you will aid me, will you not? You loved them; they were so good! You would not leave their dead bodies unburied! Oh! the wretches! the wretches who have killed them!”

The servants were hastening to obey when the furious gallop of a horse and the rapid roll of carriage-wheels were heard. “Here they come!” exclaimed the gardener, “here they come!”

Madame d’Escorval, followed by the servants, rushed to the gate just in time to see a cabriolet enter the courtyard, and the panting horse, flecked with foam, miss his footing, and fall. The Abbe Midon and Maurice had already sprung to the ground and were removing an apparently lifeless body from the vehicle. Even Marie-Anne’s great energy had not been able to resist so many successive shocks. The last trial had overwhelmed her. Once in the carriage, all immediate danger having disappeared, the excitement which had sustained her fled. She became unconscious, and all efforts had hitherto failed to restore her. Madame d’Escorval, however, did not recognize Mademoiselle Lacheneur in her masculine attire. She only saw that the body Maurice and the priest were carrying was not her husband, and turning to her son exclaimed in a stifled voice. “And your father—your father where is he?”

Until that moment, Maurice and the cure had comforted themselves with the hope that M. d’Escorval would reach home before them. They were now cruelly undeceived. Maurice tottered, and almost dropped his precious burden. The abbe perceived his anguish and made a sign to two servants who gently lifted Marie-Anne, and bore her to the house. Then turning to Madame d’Escorval the cure exclaimed at hazard. “The baron will soon be here, madame, he fled first—”

“The baron d’Escorval could not have fled,” she interrupted. “A general does not desert when he is face to face with the enemy. If a panic seizes his soldiers, he

rushes to the front, and either leads them back to combat, or sacrifices his own life."

"Mother!" faltered Maurice; "mother!"

"Oh! do not try to deceive me. My husband was the organizer of this conspiracy—If his confederates have been beaten and dispersed they must have proved themselves cowards. Heaven have mercy upon me, my husband is dead!"

In spite of the abbe's quickness of perception, he could not understand these assertions on the part of the baroness; and feared that sorrow and terror had tampered with her mind. "Ah! madame," he exclaimed, "the baron had nothing to do with this movement: far from it—" He paused; they were standing in the court-yard, in the full glare of the torches lighted by the servants a moment previously. Any one passing along the public road could hear and see everything; and in the present situation such imprudence might have fatal results. "Come, Madame," accordingly resumed the priest, leading the baroness toward the house "and you Maurice, come as well!"

Madame d'Escorval and her son passively obeyed the summons. The former seemed crushed by unspeakable anguish, but on entering the drawing-room she instinctively glanced at the seemingly lifeless form extended on the sofa. This time she recognized Marie-Anne. "What, Mademoiselle Lacheneur!" she faltered, "here in this costume? dead?"

One might indeed believe that the poor girl was dead, to see her lying there rigid, cold, and as white as if the last drop of blood had been drained from her veins. Her beautiful face had the motionless pallor of marble; her half-open colourless lips disclosed her teeth, clenched convulsively, and a large dark blue circle surrounded her closed eyelids. Her long black hair, which she had rolled up closely, so as to slip it under her peasant's hat was now unwound, and fell confusedly over the sofa and her shoulders.

"There is no danger," declared the abbe, after he had examined her. "She has only fainted, and it will not be long before she regains consciousness." And then, rapidly but clearly, he gave the necessary directions to the servants, who were as astonished as their mistress.

"What a night!" murmured Madame d'Escorval, as

staring on the scene with dilated eyes she mechanically wiped her forehead, covered with cold perspiration.

"I must remind you, madame," said the priest sympathizingly, but firmly, "that reason and duty alike forbid your yielding to despair! Wife, where is your energy? Christian, what has become of your confidence in a just and protecting providence!"

"Oh! I have courage left," faltered the wretched woman. "I am brave!"

The abbe led her to a large arm-chair and compelled her to sit down. Then in a gentler tone, he resumed: "Besides, why should you despair, madame? Your son is with you in safety. Your husband has not compromised himself; he has done nothing more than I have done myself." And briefly, but with rare precision, the priest explained the part which he and the baron had played during this unfortunate evening.

Instead of reassuring the baroness, however, his recital seemed to increase her anxiety. "I understand you," she interrupted, "and I believe you. But I also know that all the people in the country round about are convinced that my husband commanded the rebels. They believe it, and they will say it."

"And what of that?"

"If he has been arrested, as you give me to understand may be the case, he will be summoned before a court-martial. Was he not one of the emperor's friends? That alone is a crime, as you know very well yourself. He will be convicted and sentenced to death."

"No, madame, no! Am I not here? I will go to the tribunal, and say: 'I have seen and know everything.'"

"But they will arrest you as well, for you are not a priest after their cruel hearts. They will throw you into prison, and you will meet him on the scaffold."

Maurice had been listening with a pale, haggard face. "Ah, I shall have been the cause of the death of my father," he exclaimed, as he heard these last words, and then despite all the abbe's attempts to silence him, he continued. "Yes, I shall have killed him. He was ignorant even of the existence of this conspiracy desired by Lacheneur; but I knew of it, and wished to succeed, because on it the success, the happiness of my life depended. And then—wretch that I was!—at times when I wished to gain

a waverer to our ranks, I mentioned the honoured name of D'Escorval. Ah! I was mad!—I was mad! And yet, even now, I have not the courage to curse my folly! Oh, mother, mother, if you knew——”

The young fellow paused, the sobs which convulsively rose in his throat, choking all further utterances. Just then a faint moan was heard. Marie-Anne was slowly regaining consciousness. She seemed intensely puzzled by the scene around her, and passed her hands before her wandering eyes as if to ascertain whether she were really awake or not. At one moment she opened her mouth as if to speak, but the Abbe Midon checked her with a hasty gesture. Maurice's confession, and his mother's remarks had fully enlightened the priest as to the danger threatening the D'Escorvals. How could it be averted? There was no time for reflection. He must decide, and act at once. Accordingly he darted to the door, and summoned the servants still clustering in the hall and on the staircase. “Listen to me attentively,” said he, in that quick imperious voice which unhesitatingly impresses the hearer with the certainty of approaching peril, “and remember that your master's life depends, perhaps, upon your discretion. We can rely upon you, can we not?”

Simultaneously the little group of dependents raised their hands, as if to call upon heaven to witness their fidelity.

“In less than an hour,” continued the priest, “the soldiers sent in pursuit of the fugitives will be here. Not a word must be said concerning what has happened this evening. Whoever questions you must be led to suppose that I went away with the baron, and returned alone. Not one of you must have seen Mademoiselle Lacheneur. We are going to conceal her. Remember, my friends that all is lost if the slightest suspicion of her presence here is roused. Should the soldiers question you, try and convince them that M. Maurice has not left the house this evening.” The priest paused for a moment, trying to think if he had forgotten any other precaution that human prudence could suggest; then he added again. “One word more; to see you standing about at this hour of the night will awaken suspicion at once. However, we must plead in justification the alarm we feel at the baron's prolonged absence. Besides, Madame d'Escorval is ill and that will furnish another excuse. She must go to bed at once, for by this

means she may escape all awkward questioning. As for you, Maurice, run and change your clothes; and above all, wash your hands, and sprinkle some scent over them.

Those who heard the abbe were so impressed with the imminence of the danger, that they were more than willing to obey his orders. As soon as Marie-Anne could be moved, she was carried to a tiny garret under the roof; while Madame d'Escorval retired to her own room, and the servants went back to the kitchen. Maurice and the abbe remained alone in the drawing-room. They were both cruelly oppressed by anxiety, and shared the opinion that the Baron d'Escorval had been made a prisoner. In that event, the abbe Midon felt that all he could usefully attempt, was to try and save Maurice from any charge of complicity. "And who knows," he muttered, "the son's freedom may save the father's life."

At that moment, his meditations were interrupted by a violent pull at the bell of the front gate. The gardener could be heard hastening to answer the summons, the gate grated on its hinges, and then the measured tread of soldiers resounded over the gravel. Half-a-minute later a loud voice commanded: "Halt!"

The priest looked at Maurice and saw that he was as pale as death. "Be calm," he entreated, "don't be alarmed. Don't lose your self-possession—and, above all, don't forget my instructions."

"Let them come," replied Maurice. "I am prepared."

Scarcely had he spoken than the drawing-room door was flung violently open, and a captain of grenadiers entered the apartment. He was a young fellow of five-and-twenty, tall, fair-haired, with blue eyes, and a little, carefully waxed moustache. No doubt on ordinary occasions this military dandy's features wore the coxcomb's usual look of self-complacency, but for the time being he had a really ferocious air. The soldiers by whom he was accompanied awaited his orders in the hall. After glancing suspiciously round the apartment, he asked in a harsh voice; "Who is the master of this house?"

"The Baron d'Escorval, my father, who is absent," replied Maurice.

"Where is he?"

The abbe, who had hitherto remained seated, now rose to his feet. "On hearing of the unfortunate outbreak of

this evening," he replied, "the baron and myself went after the peasants in the hope of inducing them to relinquish their foolish undertaking. They would not listen to us. In the confusion that ensued, I became separated from the baron; I returned here very anxious, and am now waiting for his return."

The captain twisted his moustache with a sneering air. "Not a bad invention!" said he. "Only I don't believe a word of it."

A threatening light gleamed in the priest's eyes, and his lips trembled for a moment. However, he prudently held his peace.

"Who are you?" rudely asked the officer.

"I am the cure of Sairmeuse."

"Honest men ought to be in bed at this hour. And you are racing about the country after rebellious peasants. Really, I don't know what prevents me from ordering your arrest."

What did prevent him was the priestly robe, all powerful under the Restoration. With Maurice, however, the swaggering swashbuckler was more at ease. "How many are there in this family of yours?" he asked.

"Three; my father, my mother—ill at this moment—and myself."

"And how many servants?"

"Seven—four men and three women."

"You haven't housed or concealed any one here this evening?"

"No one."

"It will be necessary to prove that," rejoined the captain; and turning towards the door he called, "Corporal Bavois, step here!"

This corporal proved to be one of the old soldiers who had followed the emperor all over Europe. Two tiny, but piercing grey eyes lighted his tanned, weather-beaten face, and an immense hooked nose surmounted a heavy, bristling moustache. "Bavois," commanded the officer, "take half a dozen men and search this house from top to bottom. You are an old fox, and if there be any hiding-place here, you will be sure to discover it. If you find any one concealed here, bring the person to me. Go, and make haste!"

The corporal saluted and turned on his heels; while the

captain walked towards Maurice: "And now," said he, "what have you been doing this evening?"

The young man hesitated for a moment: then, with well-feigned indifference, replied: "I have not put my head out of doors."

"Hum! that must be proved. Let me see your hands."

The soldier's tone was so offensive that Maurice felt the blood rise to his forehead. Fortunately a warning glance from the abbe made him restrain himself. He offered his hands for inspection, and the captain, after examining them carefully on either side, took the final precaution to smell them. "Ah!" quoth he, "these hands are too white and smell too sweet to have been dabbling with powder."

At the same time he was somewhat surprised that this young man should have so little courage as to remain by the fireside at home, while his father was leading the peasants on to battle. "Another thing," said he: "you must have some weapons here?"

"Yes, a few hunting rifles."

"Where are they?"

"In a small room on the ground floor."

"Take me there."

They conducted him to the room, and on finding that none of the guns had been used, at least for some days, he seemed considerably annoyed. But his disappointment reached a climax when Corporal Bavois returned and stated that he had searched everywhere, without finding anything of a suspicious character.

"Send for the servants," was the officer's next order; but all the dependents faithfully confined themselves to the story indicated by the abbe Midon, and the captain perceived that even if a mystery existed, as he suspected, he was not likely to fathom it. Swearing that all the inmates of the house should pay a heavy penalty if they were deceiving him, he again called Bavois and told him that he should resume the search himself. "You," he added, will remain here with two men, and I shall expect you to render a strict account of all you see and hear. If M. d'Escorval returns, bring him to me at once; do not allow him to escape. Keep your eyes open and good luck to you!"

He added a few words in a low voice, and then left the room as abruptly as he had entered it. Scarcely had the sound of his footsteps died away, than the corporal gave

vent to his disgust in a frightful oath. "*Hein!*" said he, to his men, "did you hear that cadet. Listen, watch, arrest, report. So he takes us for spies! Ah! if the Little Corporal only knew how his old soldiers were degraded!"

The two men responded with sullen growls.

"As for you," pursued the old trooper, addressing Maurice and the abbe, "I Bavois, corporal of the grenadiers, declare in my own name and in that of my comrades here, that you are as free as birds, and that we shall arrest no one. More than that, if we can aid you in any way, we are at your service. The little fool who commands us this evening thought we were fighting. Look at my gun—I have not fired a shot from it—and my comrades only fired blank cartridges." The statement might possibly be a sincere one, but was scarcely probable. "We have nothing to conceal," replied the cautious priest.

The old corporal gave a knowing wink. "Ah! you distrust me!" said he. "You are wrong, as I'll show you. It may be easy to gull that fool who has just left here, but it's not so easy to deceive Corporal Bavois. And if you had intended to do so, you shouldn't have left a gun in the courtyard, which was certainly never loaded for firing at swallows."

The cure and Maurice exchanged glances of consternation. Maurice now recollected, for the first time, that on alighting from the cabriolet on his return, he had hastily propped the loaded gun against the wall. The weapon had subsequently escaped the servants' notice.

"Secondly!" resumed Bavois, "there is some one concealed in the attic. I have excellent ears. Thirdly, I arranged matters so that no one should enter the sick lady's room."

Maurice needed no further proof. He held out his hand to the corporal, and, in a voice trembling with emotion, replied: "You are a noble fellow!"

A few moments later—the three grenadiers having retired to another room, where they were served with supper—Maurice, the abbe, and Madame d'Escorval were again deliberating concerning their future action, when Marie-Anne entered the apartment with a pale face, but firm step. "I must leave this house," she said, to the baroness, in a tone of quiet resolution. "Had I been conscious, I would never have accepted hospitality which is likely to

bring such misfortune on your family. Your acquaintance with me has cost you too much sorrow already. Don't you understand now, why I wished you to look on us as strangers? A presentiment told me that my family would prove fatal to yours!"

"Poor child!" exclaimed Madame d'Escorval; "where will you go?"

Marie-Anne raised her beautiful eyes to heaven. "I don't know, madame," she replied, "but duty commands me to go. I must learn what has become of my father and brother, and share their fate."

"What!" exclaimed Maurice, "still this thought of death. You, who no longer——" He paused; for a secret which was not his own had almost escaped his lips. But visited by a sudden inspiration, he threw himself at his mother's feet. "Oh, my mother! my dearest mother, do not allow her to go," he cried. "I may perish in my attempt to save my father. She will be your daughter then—she whom I have loved so dearly. She cannot leave us. You will encircle her with your tender and protecting love; and may be, after all these trials, happier times will come."

Touched by her son's despair, Madame d'Escorval turned to Marie-Anne, and with her winning words soon prevailed upon her to remain.

XVI.

THE baroness knew nothing of the secret which Marie-Anne had revealed at the Croix d'Arcy, when she proclaimed her desire to die by her father's side; but Maurice was scarcely uneasy on that score, for his faith in his mother was so great that he felt sure she would forgive them both when she learnt the truth. Not unfrequently does it happen, that of all women, chaste and loving wives and mothers are precisely the most indulgent towards those whom the voice of passion has led astray. Comforted by this reflection, which reassured him as to the future of the girl he loved, Maurice now turned all his thoughts towards his father.

The day was breaking, and he declared that he would disguise himself as best he could, and go to Montaignac at once. It was not without a feeling of anxiety that Mad-

ame d'Escorval heard him speak in this manner. She was trembling for her husband's life, and now her son must hurry into danger. Perhaps before the day was over neither husband nor son would be left to her. And yet she did not forbid his going; for she felt that he was only fulfilling a sacred duty. She would have loved him less had she supposed him capable of cowardly hesitation, and would have dried her tears, if necessary to bid him "go." Moreover, was not anything preferable to the agony of suspense which they had been enduring for hours?

Maurice had reached the drawing-room door when the abbe called him back. "You must certainly go to Montaignac," said he, "but it would be folly to disguise yourself. You would surely be recognized, and the saying: 'He who conceals himself is guilty,' would at once be applied to you. You must proceed openly, with head erect, and you must even exaggerate the assurance of innocence. Go straight to the Duke de Sairmeuse and the Marquis de Courtornieu. I will accompany you; we will go together in the carriage."

"Take this advice, Maurice," said Madame d'Escorval, seeing that her son seemed undecided, "the abbe knows what is best much better than we do."

The cure had not waited for the assent which Maurice gave to his mother's words, but had already gone to order the carriage to be got ready. On the other hand, Madame d'Escorval now left the room to write a few lines to a lady friend, whose husband had considerable influence in Montaignac; and Maurice and Marie-Anne were thus left alone. This was the first moment of freedom they had found since Marie-Anne's confession. "My darling," whispered Maurice, clasping the young girl to his heart, "I did not think it was possible to love more fondly than I loved you yesterday; but now—And you—you wish for death when another precious life depends on yours."

"I was terrified," faltered Marie-Anne. "I was terrified at the prospect of shame which I saw—which I still see before me; but now I am resigned. My frailty deserves punishment, and I must submit to the insults and disgrace awaiting me."

"Insults! Let any one dare insult you! But will you not now be my wife in the sight of men, as you are in the

sight of heaven? The failure of your father's scheme sets you free!"

"No, no, Maurice, I am not free! Ah! it is you who are pitiless! I see only too well that you curse me, that you curse the day when we met for the first time! Confess it!" And so speaking Marie-Anne lifted her streaming eyes to his. "As for me," she resumed, "I could not say so. Grievous my fault is, no doubt, I am disgraced and humiliated, but still——"

She could not finish; Maurice drew her to him, and their lips and their tears met in one long embrace. "You love me," he exclaimed, "you love me in spite of everything! We shall succeed. I will save your father, and mine—I will save your brother too."

He had no time to say more. The baron's berline, to which a couple of horses had been harnessed, that they might reach Montaignac with greater speed, was waiting in the courtyard; and the abbe's voice could be heard calling on Maurice to make haste, and Madame d'Escorval, moreover, now returned, carrying a letter which she handed to her son. One long, last embrace, and then leaving the two women to their tears and prayers, Maurice and the abbe sprang into the carriage, which was soon dashing along the high road towards Montaignac.

"If, by confessing your own guilt, you could save your father," said the Abbe Midon as they rolled through the village of Sairmeuse, "I should tell you to give yourself up, and confess the whole truth. Such would be your duty. But such a sacrifice would be not only useless, but dangerous. Your confessions of guilt would only implicate your father still more. You would be arrested, but they would not release him, and you would both be tried and convicted. Let us then allow—I will not say justice, for that would be blasphemy—but these blood-thirsty men, who call themselves judges, to pursue their course, and attribute all that you yourself have done to your father. When the trial comes on you will be able to prove his innocence, and to produce *alibis* of so unimpeachable a character, that they will be forced to acquit him. And I understand the people of our province well enough to feel sure that none of them will reveal our stratagem."

"And if we should not succeed in that way," asked Maurice, gloomily, "what could I do then?"

The question was so grave a one that the priest did not even try to answer it, and tortured with anxiety and cruel forebodings, he and Maurice remained silent during the rest of the journey. When they reached the town young d'Escorval realised the abbe's wisdom in preventing him from assuming a disguise; for, armed as they were with absolute power the Duke de Sairmeuse and the Marquis de Courtorvieu had closed all the gates of Montaignac but one, through which all those who desired to leave or enter the town were obliged to pass; two officers being moreover stationed beside it, to examine and question all comers and goers. Maurice noticed these officers' surprise when, on being asked who he was, he gave them the name of d'Escorval. "Ah! you know what has become of my father!" he exclaimed.

"The Baron d'Escorval is a prisoner," replied one of the officers.

Although Maurice had expected this reply, he turned pale with suppressed emotion. "Is he wounded?" he asked, eagerly.

"He hasn't a scratch," was the answer; "but please pass on." From the tone of this last remark, and the anxious looks the officers exchanged one might have supposed that they feared they might compromise themselves by conversing with the son of so great a criminal.

The carriage rolled under the archway, and had gone a couple of hundred yards or so along the Grande Rue when Maurice noticed a large poster affixed to one of the walls, and which an elderly man was busy perusing. Instinctively both the inmates of the vehicle felt that this notice must have some connection with the revolt; and they were not mistaken, for on springing to the ground they themselves read as follows: "We, commander of the Military Division of Montaignac, in virtue of the State of Siege, decree—Article I.—The inmates of the house in which the elder Lacheneur is found shall be handed over to a military commission for trial. Article II.—Whoever shall deliver up the body of the elder Lacheneur, dead or alive, will receive a reward of twenty thousand francs. *Signed: DUKE DE SAIRMEUSE.*"

"God be praised!" exclaimed Maurice when he had finished his perusal. "Then Marie-Anne's father has escaped! He had a good horse, and in two hours—"

A glance and a nudge from the abbe checked him ; and in turning he recognized that the man standing near them was none other than Father Chupin. The old scoundrel had also recognized them, for he took off his hat to the cure, and with an expression of intense covetousness remarked : "Twenty thousand francs ! What a sum ! A man could live comfortably all his life on the interest."

The abbe and Maurice shuddered as they re-entered the carriage. "Lacheneur is lost if that man discovers his whereabouts," murmured the priest.

"Fortunately he must have crossed the frontier before now," replied Maurice. "A hundred to one he is beyond reach."

"And if you should be mistaken. What, if wounded and faint from loss of blood, Lacheneur only had strength enough to drag himself to the nearest house and implore the hospitality of its inmates ?"

"Oh ! even in that case he is safe ; I know our peasants. There is not one who is capable of selling the life of a proscribed man."

This youthful enthusiasm elicited a sad smile from the priest. "You forget the dangers to be incurred by those who shelter him," he said. "Many a man who would not soil his hands with the price of blood might deliver up a fugitive from fear."

They were passing through the principal street, and were struck with the mournful aspect of the little city, usually so gay and full of bustle. The shops were closed ; and even the window shutters of the houses had not been opened. So lugubrious was the silence that one might have supposed there was a general mourning, and that each family had lost one or more of its members. The manner of the few persons passing along the footways testified to their deep anxiety. They hurried along, casting suspicious glances on every side ; and two or three who were acquaintances of the Baron d'Escorval averted their heads directly they saw his carriage, so as to avoid the necessity of bowing.

The terror prevailing in the town was explained when Maurice and the abbe reached the Hotel de France, where they proposed taking up their quarters ; and which establishment the former's father had always patronized whenever he visited Montagnac ; the landlord being Laugeron

—Lacheneur's friend, who had been so anxious to warn him of the Duke de Sairmeuse's return to France. On catching sight of his visitors, this worthy man hastened into the courtyard, cap in hand, to give them a fitting greeting. In such a situation politeness amounted to heroism; but it has always been supposed that Laugeron was in some way connected with the conspiracy. He at once invited Maurice and the abbe to take some refreshments, doing so in such a way as to make them understand that he was anxious to speak to them in private. Thanks to one of the Duke de Sairmeuse's valets who frequented the house, the landlord knew as much as the authorities; and, indeed, he knew even more, since he had also received information from several rebels who had escaped capture. He conducted Maurice and the abbe to a room looking on to the back of the house, where he knew they would be secure from observation, and then it was that they obtained their first positive information. In the first place, nothing had been heard either of Lacheneur or his son Jean, who had so far eluded all pursuit. Secondly, there were, at that moment, no fewer than two hundred prisoners in the citadel, including both the Baron d'Escorval and Chanlouineau. And finally, that very morning there had been at least sixty additional arrests in Montaignac. It was generally supposed that these arrests were due to traitorous denunciations, and all the inhabitants were trembling with fear. M. Laugeron knew the real cause, however, for it had been confided to him under pledge of secrecy by his customer, the duke's valet. "It certainly seems an incredible story, gentlemen," he remarked; "but yet it is quite true. Two officers, belonging to the Montaignac militia, were returning from the expedition this morning at daybreak, when on passing the Croix d'Arcy they perceived a man, wearing the uniform of the emperor's body guard, lying dead in a ditch. Not unnaturally they examined the body, and to their great astonishment they found a slip of paper between the man's clenched teeth. It proved to be a list of Montaignac conspirators, which this old soldier, finding himself mortally wounded, had endeavored to destroy; but the agonies of death had prevented him from swallowing it——."

The abbe and Maurice had no time to listen to the general news the landlord might have to impart. They

requested him to procure a messenger, who was at once despatched to Escorval, so that the baroness and Marie-Anne might be made acquainted with the information they had obtained concerning both the baron and Lacheneur. They then left the hotel and hastened to the house occupied by the Duke de Sairmeuse. There was a crowd at the door; a crowd of a hundred persons or so—men with anxious faces, women in tears—all of them begging for an audience. These were the friends and relatives of the unfortunate men who had been arrested. Two footmen, wearing gorgeous liveries, of haughty mien, stood in the doorway, their time being fully occupied in keeping back the struggling throng. Hoping that his priestly dress would win him a hearing, the Abbe Midon approached and gave his name. But he was repulsed like the others. "M. le Duc is busy, and can receive nobody," said one of the servants. "M. le Duc is preparing his report to his majesty." And in support of his assertion, he pointed to the horses, standing saddled in the courtyard, and waiting for the couriers who were to carry the despatches.

The priest sadly rejoined his companions. "We must wait!" said he. And yet, intentionally or not, the servants were deceiving these poor people; for, just then, the duke was in no wise troubling himself about his despatches. In point of fact, he happened to be engaged in a violent altercation with the Marquis de Courtornieu. Each of these noble personages was anxious to play the leading part—that which would meet with the highest reward at the hands of the supreme authorities at Paris. This quarrel had begun on some petty point, but soon they both lost their tempers and stinging words, bitter allusions, and even threats were rapidly exchanged. The marquis declared it necessary to inflict the most frightful—he said the most *salutary* punishment upon the offenders; while the duke, on the contrary, was inclined to be indulgent. The marquis opined that since Lacheneur, the prime mover, and his son, had both eluded pursuit, it was absolutely requisite that Marie-Anne should be arrested. M. de Sairmeuse, however, would not listen to the suggestion. To his mind it would be most impolitic to arrest this young girl. Such a course would render the authorities

odious, and would exasperate all the rebels who were still at large.

"These men must be put down with a strong hand!" urged M. de Courtornieu.

"I don't wish to exasperate the populace," replied the duke.

"Bah! what does public sentiment matter?"

"It matters a great deal when you cannot depend upon your soldiers. Do you know what happened last night? There was enough powder burned to win a battle, and yet there were only fifteen peasants wounded. Our men fired in the air. You forget that the Montaignac corps is for the most part composed of men who formerly fought under Bonaparte, and who are burning to turn their weapons against us."

Thus did the dispute continue, ostensibly for motives of public policy, though, in reality, both the duke and the marquis had a secret reason for their obstinacy. Blanche de Courtornieu had reached Montaignac that morning and had confided her anxiety and her sufferings to her father, with the result that she had made him swear to profit of this opportunity to rid her of Marie-Anne. On his side, the duke was convinced that Marie-Anne was his son's mistress, and wished, at any cost, to prevent her appearance at the tribunal. Finding that words had no influence whatever on his coadjutor, his grace at last finished the dispute by a skillful stratagem. "As we are of different opinions we can't possibly work together," quoth he; "we are one too many." And speaking in this fashion he glanced so meaningly at a pair of pistols that the noble marquis felt a disagreeable chilliness creep up his spine. He had never been noted for bravery, and did not in the least relish the idea of having a bullet lodged in his brains. Accordingly he waived his proposal, and eventually agreed to go to the citadel with the duke to inspect the prisoners.

The whole day passed by without M. de Sairmeuse consenting to give a single audience, and Maurice spent his time in watching the moving arms of the semaphore perched on the tall keep-tower. "What orders are travelling through space?" he said to the abbe. "Are these messages of life, or death?"

The messenger despatched from the *Hôtel de France*

had been instructed to make haste, and yet he did not reach Escorval until night-fall. Beset by a thousand fears, he had taken the longest but less frequented roads, and had made numerous circuits to avoid the people he had seen approaching in the distance. Scarcely had the baroness read the letter, written to her by Maurice, than turning to Marie-Anne, she exclaimed, "We must go to Montaignac at once!"

But this was easier said than done; for they only kept three horses at Escorval. The one which had been harnessed to the cabriolet the preceding night was lame—indeed, nearly dead: while the other two had been taken to Montaignac that morning by Maurice and the priest. What were the ladies to do? They appealed to some neighbours for assistance, but the latter, having heard of the baron's arrest, firmly refused to lend a horse, believing they should gravely compromise themselves if they in any way helped the wife of a man charged with such grievous offences as high treason and revolt. Madame d'Escorval and Marie-Anne were talking of making the journey on foot, when Corporal Bavois, still left on guard at the chateau, swore by the sacred name of thunder that this should not be. He hurried off with his two men, and, after a brief absence, returned leading an old plough-horse by the mane. He had, more or less forcibly, requisitioned this clumsy steed, which he harnessed to the cabriolet as best he could. This was not his only demonstration of good will. His duties at the chateau were over, now that M. d'Escorval had been arrested, and nothing remained for him but to rejoin his regiment. Accordingly he declared that he would not allow these ladies to travel unattended at night-time, along a road where they might be exposed to many disagreeable encounters, but should escort them to their journey's end with his two subordinates. "And it will go hard with soldier or civilian who ventures to molest them, will it not, comrades?" he exclaimed.

As usual, his companions assented with an oath; and as Madame d'Escorval and Marie-Anne journeyed onward, they could perceive the three men preceding or following the vehicle, or oftener walking beside it. Not until they reached the gates of Montaignac did the old soldier forsake his proteges, and then, not without bidding them a

respectful farewell, in his own name and that of his subordinates, adding that if they had need of his services, they had only to call upon Bavois, corporal of grenadiers in company No. I., stationed at the citadel.

The clocks were striking half-past ten when Madame d'Escorval and Marie-Anne alighted at the Hotel de France. They found Maurice in despair, and even the abbe disheartened, for since the morning events had progressed with fearful rapidity. The semaphore signals were now explained; orders had come from Paris; and there they could be read in black and white, affixed to the walls of the town. "Montaignac must be regarded as in a state of siege. The military authorities have been granted discretionary powers. A military commission will exercise jurisdiction in lieu of all other courts. Let peaceable citizens take courage; let the evil disposed tremble! As for the rabble, the sword of the law is about to strike!" Only six lines in all—but each word fraught with menace!

The abbe most regretted that trial before a military commission had been substituted for the customary court-martial. Indeed this upset all the plans he had devised in the hope of saving his friend. A court-martial is, of course, hasty and often unjust in its decisions; but still, it observes some of the forms of procedure practiced in judicial tribunals. It still retains some of the impartiality of legal justice, which asks to be enlightened before condemning. But the military commission now to be appointed would naturally neglect all legal forms; and the prisoners would be summarily condemned and punished after the fashion in which spies are treated in time of war.

"What!" exclaimed Maurice, "would they dare to condemn without investigating, without listening to testimony, without allowing the prisoners time to prepare their defence?" The abbe remained silent. The turn events had taken exceeded his worst apprehensions. Now, indeed, he believed that anything was possible.

Maurice had spoken of investigation. Investigation, if such it could be called, had indeed begun that very day, and was still continuing by the light of a jailor's lantern. That is to say, the Duke de Sairmeuse and the Marquis de Courtornieu were passing the prisoners in review. They now numbered three hundred, and the duke and his companion had decided to begin by summoning before the

commission thirty of the most dangerous conspirators. How were they to select them? By what method could they hope to discover the extent of each prisoner's guilt? It would have been difficult for them to explain the course they took. They simply went from one man to another, asking any question that entered their minds, and when the terrified captive had answered them they either said to the head jailor, "Keep this one until another time," or, "This one for to-morrow," their decision being guided by the impression the man's language and demeanour had created. By daylight, they had thirty names upon their list, at the head of which figured those of the Baron d'Escorval and Chanlouineau.

Although the unhappy party at the Hotel de France were not aware of this circumstance, they passed a sleepless, anxious night; and it was relief, indeed, when the daylight peered through the windows and the *reveille* could be heard beating at the citadel; for now at least they might renew their efforts. The abbe intimated his intention of going alone to the duke's house, declaring that he would find a way to force an entrance. He had just bathed his red and swollen eyes in fresh water, and was preparing to start, when a rap was heard at the door. Directly afterwards M. Laugeron, the landlord, entered the room. His face betokened some dreadful misfortune; and indeed he had just been made acquainted with the composition of the military commission. In defiance of all equity and justice, the presidency of this tribunal of vengeance had been offered to the Duke de Sairmeuse who had unblushingly accepted it—he who was at the same time both witness and executioner. Moreover, he was to be assisted by other officers hitherto placed under his immediate orders.

"And when does the commission enter upon its functions?" inquired the abbe.

"To-day," replied the host, hesitatingly; "this morning—in an hour—perhaps sooner!"

The priest understood well enough what M. Laugeron meant, but what he dared not say: "The commission is assembling, make haste." "Come!" said the abbe Midon turning to Maurice, "I wish to be present when your father is examined."

The baroness would have given anything to accompany the priest and her son; but this could not be; she under

stood it, and submitted. As Maurice and his companion stepped into the street they saw a soldier a short distance off who made a friendly gesture. Recognizing Corporal Bavois, they paused instinctively. But he now passing them by with an air of the utmost indifference, and apparently without observing them, hastily exclaimed: "I have seen Chanlouineau. Be of good cheer: he promises to save the baron!"

XVII.

WITHIN the limits of the citadel of Montaignac stands an old building known as the chapel. Originally consecrated to purposes of worship, this structure had, at the time of which we write, fallen into disuse. It was so damp that it could not even be utilized for storage purposes, and yet this was the place selected by the Duke de Sairmeuse and the Marquis de Courtornieu for the assembling of the military commission. When Maurice and the abbe entered this gloomy building they found that the proceedings had not yet commenced. The little trouble taken to transform the old chapel into a hall of justice impressed them sadly, for it testified beyond power of mistake to the precipitation of the judges, and revealed their determination to carry out the work of vengeance without either delay or mercy. Three large tables taken from a soldier's mess-room, and covered with horse blankets instead of baize, stood on a raised platform formerly occupied by the chief altar. Behind these tables were ranged a few rush-seated chairs, waiting the president's assessors, and in their midst glittered a richly-carved and gilt arm chair which his grace had had sent from his own house for his personal accommodation. In front of the tables three or four long wooden benches had been placed in readiness for the prisoners, while several strong ropes were stretched from one wall to the other, so as to divide the chapel into two parts and allow considerable room for the public. This last precaution had proved quite superfluous, for, contrary to expectation, there were not twenty persons in the building. Prominent among these were ten or twelve men of martial mien, but clad in civilian attire. Their scarred and weather-beaten features testified to many an arduous campaign fought in imperial times; and indeed they had all served

Napoleon—this one as a lieutenant, that other as a captain—but the Restoration had dismissed them with scanty pensions and given their well-earned commissions to cadets of the old nobility. Their pale faces and the sullen fire gleaming in their eyes showed plainly enough what they thought of the Duke de Sairmeuse's proceedings. In addition to these retired officers there were three men dressed in professional black who stood conversing in low tones near the chapel door; while in a corner one could perceive several peasant women with their aprons thrown over their faces; they were the mothers, wives, and daughters of some of the imprisoned rebels. Save for their constant sobs the silence would have been well-nigh undisturbed.

Nine o'clock had just struck when a rolling of drums shook the window panes; a loud voice was heard outside exclaiming, "Present arms!" and then the members of the commission entered, followed by the Marquis de Courtornieu and various civil functionaries. The Duke de Sairmeuse was in full uniform, his face rather more flushed, and his air a trifle more haughty than usual. "The sitting is open!" he announced, and adding in a rough voice, "Bring in the culprits."

They came in, one by one, to the number of thirty, and sat themselves down on the benches at the foot of the platform. Chanlouineau held his head proudly erect, and looked about him with an air of great composure. The Baron d'Escorval was calm and grave; but not more so than when, in days gone by, he had been called upon to express his opinion in the councils of the empire. Both of them perceived Maurice, who was so overcome that he had to lean upon the abbe for support. But while the baron greeted his son with a simple bend of the head, Chanlouineau made a gesture that clearly signified: "Have confidence in me—fear nothing." The attitude of the other prisoners indicated surprise rather than fear. Perhaps they were unconscious of the peril they had braved, and the extent of the danger that now threatened them.

When the prisoners had taken their places, a colonel who filled the office of commissary for the prosecution rose to his feet. His presentation of the case was violent but brief. He narrated a few leading facts, exalted the merits of the government of his majesty King Louis

XVIIIth, and concluded by demanding that sentence of death should be pronounced upon the culprits. When he had ceased speaking, the duke rudely bade the first prisoner on the nearest bench to stand up and give his name, age, and profession.

"Eugene Michel Chanlouineau," was the reply, "aged twenty nine, a farmer by occupation."

"An owner of national lands, probably?"

"The owner of lands which, having been paid for with good money and made fertile by my own labour, are rightfully mine."

The duke did not wish to waste time in useless discussion. "You took part in this rebellion?" he asked; and receiving an affirmative reply, pursued, "You are right in confessing, for witnesses will be introduced who will prove this fact conclusively."

Five grenadiers entered—the same that Chanlouineau held at bay while Maurice, the abbe, and Marie-Anne were getting into the cabriolet near the cross roads. They all of them declared upon oath that they recognized the prisoner; and one of them even went so far as to say he was a solid fellow of remarkable courage. During this evidence Chanlouineau's eyes betrayed an agony of anxiety. Would the soldiers allude to the circumstance of the cabriolet and Marie-Anne's escape? Perhaps they might have done so had not the Duke de Sairmeuse abruptly stated that as the prisoner confessed he had heard quite enough.

"What were your motives in fomenting this outbreak?" asked his grace, turning to Chanlouineau.

"We hoped to free ourselves from a government brought back by foreign bayonets; to free ourselves from the insolence of the nobility, and to retain the lands that are justly ours."

"Enough! You were one of the leaders of the revolt?"

"One of the leaders—yes."

"Who were the others?"

A faint smile flitted over the young farmer's lips as he replied: "The others were M. Lacheneur, his son Jean, and the Marquis de Sairmeuse."

The duke bounded from his carved arm-chair. "You wretch! you rascal! you vile scoundrel!" he exclaimed, catching up a heavy inkstand that stood on the table

before him. Every one supposed that he was about to hurl it at the prisoner's head.

But Chanlouineau stood perfectly unmoved in the midst of the assembly, which had been excited to the highest pitch by his startling declaration. "You questioned me," he resumed, "and I replied. You may gag me if my answers don't please you. If there were witnesses *for* me as there are against me, I could prove the truth of what I say. As it is, all the prisoners here will tell you that I am speaking the truth. Is it not so, you others?"

With the exception of the Baron d'Escorval, there was not one of the other prisoners who was capable of understanding the real bearing of these audacious allegations; nevertheless, they all nodded assent.

"The Marquis de Sairmeuse was so truly our leader," exclaimed the daring peasant, "that he was wounded by a sabre-thrust while fighting by my side."

The duke's face was as purple as if he had been struck with apoplexy; and his fury almost deprived him of the power of speech. "You lie, scoundrel! you lie!" he gasped.

"Send for the marquis," said Chanlouineau, quietly, "and see whether he's wounded or not."

A refusal on the duke's part was bound to arouse suspicion. But what could he do? Martial had concealed his wound on the previous day, and it was now impossible to confess that he had been wounded. Fortunately for his grace, one of the commissioners relieved him of his embarrassment. "I hope, sir," he said, "that you will not give this arrogant rebel the satisfaction he desires. The commission opposes his demand."

"Very naturally," retorted Chanlouineau. "To-morrow my head will be off, and you think nothing will then remain to prove what I say. But, fortunately, I have other proof—material and indestructible proof—which it is beyond your power to destroy, and which will speak when my body is six feet under ground."

"What is this proof?" asked another commissioner, on whom the duke looked askance.

The prisoner shook his head. "You shall have it," he said, "when you promise me my life in exchange for it. It is now in the hands of a trusty person, who knows its value. It will go to the king if necessary. We should

like to understand the part which the Marquis de Sairmeuse played in this affair—whether he was truly with us, or whether he was only an instigating agent.”

A tribunal regardless of the simplest rules of justice, or even of its own honour, would have instantly required the Marquis de Sairmeuse’s attendance. But the military commission considered such a course quite beneath its dignity. These men arrayed in glittering uniforms were not judges charged with the vindication of the law; but simply agents selected by the conquerors to strike the conquered in virtue of that savage saying, “Woe to the vanquished!” The president, the noble Duke de Sairmeuse, would not have consented to summon Martial on any consideration. Nor did his associate judges wish him to do so. Had Chanlouineau foreseen this result? Probably he had; and yet, why had he ventured on so hazardous a course? The tribunal, after a short deliberation, decided that it would not admit this “unjustifiable” denunciation which, while exciting the whole audience, had quite stupefied Maurice and the Abbe Midon.

The examination was continued, therefore, with increased bitterness. “Instead of designating imaginary leaders,” resumed the duke, “you would do well to name the real instigator of this revolt—not Lacheneur, but an individual seated at the other end of the bench, the elder D’Escorval—”

“Monsieur le Baron d’Escorval was entirely ignorant of the conspiracy, I swear it by all that I hold most sacred—”

“Hold your tongue!” interrupted the emissary for the prosecution. “Instead of trying the patience of the commission with such ridiculous stories, you should endeavour to merit its indulgence.”

Chanlouineau’s glance and gesture expressed such disdain that his interrupter was abashed. “I wish for no indulgence,” said the young farmer. “I have played my game and lost it; here is my head. But if you are not wild beasts you will take pity on the poor wretches who surround me. I see at least ten among them who were not our accomplices, and who certainly did not take up arms. Even the others did not know what they were doing.”

With these words he resumed his seat, proud, indifferent, and apparently oblivious of the murmur which ran through

the audience, the soldiers of the guard, and even to the platform, at the sound of his ringing voice. His appeal for clemency towards his fellow prisoners had reawakened the grief of the poor peasant women, whose sobs and moans now filled the hall. The retired officers had grown paler than before, and as they nervously pulled at their long moustaches they murmured among themselves, "That's a man, and no mistake!" Just then, moreover, the abbe leant towards Maurice and whispered in his ear: "Chanlouineau evidently has some plan. He intends to save your father, though I don't at all understand how."

The judges were conversing with considerable animation, although in an undertone. A difficulty had presented itself. The prisoners, ignorant of the charges which would be brought against them, and not expecting instant trial, had not thought of procuring defenders. And this circumstance, bitter mockery! caused great annoyance to this iniquitous tribunal, despite the complacency with which it was prepared to trample justice under foot. The commissioners had made up their minds, they had already determined on their verdict, and yet they wished to hear a voice raised in defence of those who were already doomed. It chanced that three lawyers, retained by the friends of a few prisoners, were in the hall. They were the three men whom Maurice had noticed conversing near the door when he entered the chapel. The duke was informed of their presence. He turned to them, and motioned them to approach; then, pointing to Chanlouineau, asked, "Will you undertake this culprit's defence?"

For a moment the lawyers hesitated. They were disgusted with these monstrous proceedings, and looked inquiringly at one another. "We are all disposed to undertake the prisoner's defence," at last replied the eldest of the three; "but we see him for the first time; we do not know what defence he can present. He must ask for a delay; it is indispensable, in order to confer with him."

"The court can grant you no delay," interrupted M. de Sairmeuse; "will you undertake his defence, yes or no?"

The advocate hesitated, not that he was afraid, for he was a brave man: but he was endeavouring to find some argument strong enough to turn these mock judges from the course on which they seemed bent. "I will speak on his behalf," said the advocate, at last, "but not without

first protesting with all my strength against these unheard of modes of trial."

"Oh! spare us your homilies, and be brief."

After Chanlouineau's examination, it was difficult to improvise any plea for him, and especially so on the spur of the moment. Still, in his indignation, the courageous advocate managed to present a score of arguments which would have made any other tribunal reflect. But all the while he was speaking the Duke de Sairmeuse fidgeted in his arm-chair with every sign of angry impatience. "Your speech was very long," he remarked, when the lawyer had finished, "terribly long. We shall never get through with this business if each prisoner takes up as much time!"

He turned to his colleagues and proposed that they should unite all the cases, in fact try all the culprits in a body, with the exception of the elder d'Escorval. "This will shorten our task," said he, "and there will then be but two judgments to be pronounced. This will not, of course, prevent each individual from defending himself."

The lawyers protested against such a course; for a general judgment such as the duke suggested would destroy all hope of saving any one of these unfortunate men. "How can we defend them," pleaded one advocate, "when we know nothing of their precise situations; why, we do not even know their names. We shall be obliged to designate them by the cut of their coats or by the colour of their hair."

They implored the tribunal to grant a week for preparation, four days, even twenty-four hours; but all their efforts were futile, for the president's proposition was adopted by his colleagues. Consequently, each prisoner was called to the table, according to the place which he occupied on the different benches. Each man gave his name, age, dwelling place, and profession, and received an order to return to his seat. Six or seven of the prisoners were actually granted time to say that they were absolutely ignorant of the conspiracy, and that they had been arrested while conversing quietly on the public highway. They begged to be allowed to furnish proof of the truth of their assertions, and they invoked the testimony of the soldiers who had arrested them. M. d'Escorval, whose case had been separated from the others, was not summoned to the table. He would be examined last of all.

"Now the counsel for the defence will be heard," said the duke; "but make haste; lose no time for it is already twelve o'clock."

Then began a shameful and revolting scene. The duke interrupted the lawyers every other moment, bidding them be silent, questioning them, or jeering at their arguments. "It seems incredible," said he, "that any one can think of defending such wretches!" Or again: "Silence! You should blush with shame for having constituted yourself the defender of such rascals!"

However, the advocates courageously persevered, even although they realized the utter futility of their efforts. But what could they do under such circumstances? The defence of these twenty-nine prisoners lasted only one hour and a half.

Before the last word was fairly uttered, the Duke de Sairmeuse gave a sigh of relief, and in a tone which betrayed his inward delight, exclaimed: "Prisoner d'Escorval, stand up."

Thus called upon, the baron rose to his feet, calm and dignified. Terrible as his sufferings must have been, there was no trace of them on his noble face. He had even repressed the smile of disdain which the duke's paltry spite in not giving him the title he had a right to almost brought to his lips. But Chanlouineau sprang up at the same time, trembling with indignation, and his face all aglow with anger.

"Remain seated," ordered the duke, "or you shall be removed from the court-room."

Despite this order the young farmer declared that he would speak: that he had some remarks to add to the plea made by the defending counsel. At a sign from the duke, two gendarmes approached him and placed their hands on his shoulders. He allowed them to force him back into his seat, though he could easily have crushed them with one blow of his brawny arm. An observer might have supposed that he was furious; but in reality he was delighted. He had attained the end he had in view. Whilst standing he had been able to glance at the Abbe Midon, and the latter had plainly read in his eyes: "Whatever happens, watch over Maurice; restrain him. Do not allow him to defeat my plans by any outburst."

This caution was not unnecessary, for Maurice was

terribly agitated ; his sight failed him, his head swam, he felt that he was suffocating, that he was losing his reason. 'Where is the self-control you promised me ?' murmured the priest.

But no one observed the young man's condition. The attention of the audience was elsewhere, and the silence was so perfect that one could distinctly hear the measured tread of the sentinels pacing to and fro in the courtyard outside. It was plain to every one that the decisive moment for which the tribunal had reserved all its attention and efforts had now arrived. The conviction and condemnation of the poor peasants were, after all, mere trifles ; otherwise, indeed, was the task of humbling a prominent statesman, who had been the emperor's faithful friend and counsellor. Seldom could circumstances offer so splendid an opportunity to satisfy the cravings of royalist prejudice and ambition ; and the Duke de Sairmeuse and his colleagues had fully determined not to allow it to slip by. If they had acted informally in the case of the obscure conspirators, they had carefully prepared their suit against the baron. Thanks to the activity of the Marquis de Courtornieu, the prosecution had found no fewer than seven charges against him, the least notable of which was alone punishable with death. "Which of you," asked the president, turning to the lawyers, "will consent to defend this great culprit ?"

"I !" exclaimed the three advocates all in one breath.

"Take care," said the duke, with a malicious smile ; "the task may prove a difficult one."

"Difficult, indeed !" It would have been better to have said dangerous, for the defender risked his career, his peace, his liberty, and very probably—his life.

"Our profession has its exigencies," nobly replied the oldest of the advocates. And then the two courageously took their places beside the baron, thus avenging the honour of their robe.

"Prisoner," resumed M. de Sairmeuse, "state your name and profession."

"Louis Guillaume, Baron d'Escorval, Commander of the order of the Legion of Honour, formerly Councillor of State under the Empire."

"So you avow these shameful services ? You confess——"

"Excuse me ; I am proud of having had the honour of serving my country, and of being useful to her in proportion to my abilities——"

"Ah ha ! very good indeed !" interrupted the duke with a furious gesture. "These gentlemen, my fellow commissioners, will appreciate those words of yours. No doubt it was in the hope of regaining your former position that you entered into this shameful conspiracy against a magnanimous prince."

"You know as well as I do myself, sir, that I have had no hand in this conspiracy."

"Why, you were arrested in the ranks of the conspirators with weapons in your hands !"

"I was unarmed, as you are well aware ; and if I was among the peasantry, it was only because I hoped to induce them to relinquish their senseless enterprise."

"You lie !"

The baron paled beneath the insult, but he made no response. There was, however, one man in the assemblage who could no longer endure such abominable injustice, and this was the Abbe Midon, who, only a moment before, had advised Maurice to remain calm. Abruptly leaving his place, he advanced to the foot of the platform.

"The Baron d'Escorval speaks the truth," he cried, in a ringing voice : "as each of the three hundred prisoners in the citadel will swear. Those who are here would say the same, even if they stood upon the guillotine ; and I, who accompanied him, who walked beside him, I, a priest, swear before the God who one day will judge us all, Monsieur de Sairmeuse, I swear we did everything that was humanly possible to do to arrest this movement !"

The duke listened with an ironical smile. "I was not deceived, then," he answered, "when I was told that this army of rebels had a chaplain ! Ah ! sir, you should sink to the earth with shame. What ! You, a priest, mingle with such scoundrels as these—with these enemies of our good king and of our holy religion ! Do not deny it ! Your haggard features, your swollen eyes, your disordered attire, plainly betray your guilt. Must I, a soldier, remind you of what is due to your sacred calling ? Hold your peace, sir, and depart !"

But the prisoner's advocates were on their feet. "We

demand," cried they, "we demand that this witness be heard. He must be heard! Military commissions are not above the laws that regulate ordinary tribunals."

"If I do not speak the truth," resumed the abbe, "I am a perjured witness—worse yet, an accomplice. It is your duty, in that case, to have me arrested."

The duke's face assumed a look of hypocritical compassion. "No, Monsieur le Cure," said he, "I shall not arrest you. I wish to avert the scandal which you are trying to cause. We will show your priestly garb the respect the wearer does not deserve. Again, and for the last time, retire, or I shall be obliged to employ force."

What would further resistance avail? Nothing. The abbe, with a face whiter than the plastered walls, and eyes filled with tears, returned to his place beside Maurice.

In the meanwhile, the advocates were protesting with increasing energy. But the duke, hammering on the table with both fists, at last succeeded in reducing them to silence. "Ah! you want evidence!" he exclaimed. "Very well then, you shall have it. Soldiers, bring in the first witness."

There was some little movement among the guards, and then Father Chupin made his appearance. He advanced with a deliberate step, but his restless, shrinking eyes showed plainly enough that he was ill at ease. And there was a very perceptible tremor in his voice when, with hand uplifted, he swore to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

"What do you know concerning the prisoner d'Escorval?" asked the duke.

"I know that he took part in the rising the other night."

"Are you sure of this?"

"I can furnish proofs."

"Submit them to the consideration of the commission."

The old scoundrel began to grow more confident. "First of all," he replied, "directly Lacheneur had given up your grace's family estates, much against his will, he hastened to M. d'Escorval's house, where he met Chaulouineau. It was then that they plotted this insurrection between them."

"I was Lacheneur's friend," observed the baron "and

it was perfectly natural that he should come to me for consolation after a great misfortune."

M. de Sairmeuse turned to his colleagues. "Do you hear that!" said he. "This D'Escorval calls the restitution of a deposit a great misfortune! Proceed, witness."

"In the second place," resumed Chupin, "M. d'Escorval was always prowling round about Lacheneur's house."

"That's false," interrupted the baron. "I never visited the house but once, and on that occasion I implored him to renounce—" He paused, understanding only when it was too late the terrible significance of these few words. However, having begun, he would not retract, but calmly added: "I implored him to renounce all idea of provoking an insurrection."

"Ah! then you knew of his infamous intentions?"

"I suspected them."

"At all events you must be perfectly well aware that the fact of not revealing this conspiracy made you an accomplice, which implies the guillotine."

The Baron d'Escorval had just signed his death-warrant. How strange is destiny! He was innocent, and yet he was the only one among all the prisoners, whom a regular tribunal could have legally condemned. Maurice and the abbe were overcome with grief; but Chanlouineau, who turned towards them, had still the same smile of confidence on his lips. How could he hope when all hope seemed absolutely lost?

The commissioners made no attempt to conceal their satisfaction, and M. de Sairmeuse, especially, evinced an indecent joy. "Ah, well! gentlemen, what do you say to that?" he remarked to the lawyers, in a sneering tone.

The counsel for the defence were unable to conceal their discouragement; though they still endeavoured to question the validity of their client's declaration. He had said that he *suspected* the conspiracy, not that he *knew* of it, which was a very different thing.

"Say at once that you wish for still more overwhelming testimony," interrupted the duke. "Very well! You shall have it. Continue your evidence, witness."

"The prisoner," continued Chupin, "was present at all the conferences held at Lacheneur's house; and having to cross the Oiselle each time, and fearing lest the ferryman

might speak about his frequent nocturnal journeys, he had an old boat repaired, which he had not used for years."

"Ah! that's a remarkable circumstance, prisoner; do you recollect having your boat repaired?"

"Yes; but not for the purpose this man mentions."

"For what purpose, then?"

The baron made no reply. Was it not in compliance with Maurice's request, that this boat had been put in order?

"And finally," continued Chupin, "when Lacheneur set fire to his house as a signal for the insurrection, the prisoner was with him."

"That," exclaimed the duke, "is conclusive evidence."

"Yes, I was at La Reche," interrupted the baron; "but as I have already told you, it was with the firm determination of preventing this outbreak."

M. de Sairmeuse laughed disdainfully. "Ah, gentlemen!" he said, addressing his fellow commissioners, "you see that the prisoner's courage does not equal his depravity. But I will confound him. What did you do, prisoner, when the insurgents left La Reche?"

"I returned home with all possible speed, took a horse and hastened to the Croix-d'Arcy."

"Then you knew that this was to be the general meeting place?"

"Lacheneur had just informed me of it."

"Even if I believed your story," retorted the duke, "I should have to remind you, that your duty was to have hastened to Montaignac and informed the authorities. But what you say is untrue. You did not leave Lacheneur, you accompanied him."

"No, sir, no!"

"And what if I could prove that you did so, beyond all question?"

"Impossible, since such was not the case."

By the malicious satisfaction that sparkled in M. de Sairmeuse's eyes, the Abbe Midon divined that he had some terrible weapon in reserve, and that he was about to overwhelm the Baron d'Escorval with false evidence, or fatal coincidence, which would place Maurice's father beyond all possibility of being saved. At a sign from the commissary for the prosecution the Marquis de Courtornieu now left his seat and advanced to the front of the platform. "I

must request you, Monsieur le Marquis," said the duke, "to be kind enough to read us the statement your daughter has prepared and signed."

This scene had evidently been prepared beforehand. M. de Courtornieu cleared his glasses, produced a paper which he slowly unfolded, and then amid a death-like silence, emphatically read as follows: "I, Blanche de Courtornieu, do declare upon oath that, on the evening of the fourth of March, between ten and eleven o'clock on the public road leading from Sairmeuse to Montaignac, I was assailed by a band of armed brigands. While they were deliberating as to whether they should take possession of my person and pillage my carriage, I overheard one of them say to another, speaking of me: 'She must get out, must she not, M. d'Escorval?' I believe that the brigand who uttered these words was a peasant named Chanlouineau, but I can not assert this, on oath."

At this moment a loud cry of anguish abruptly interrupted the marquis's perusal. The trial was too great for Maurice's reason, and if the Abbe Midon had not restrained him, he would have sprung forward, and exclaimed: "It was to me, not to my father that Chanlouineau addressed those words. I alone am guilty; my father is innocent!" But fortunately the abbe had sufficient presence of mind to hold the young fellow back, and place his hand before his mouth. One or two of the retired officers standing near, also tendered their help, and probably divining the truth, seized hold of Maurice, and despite all his attempts at resistance carried him from the room by main force. The whole incident scarcely occupied ten seconds.

"What is the cause of this disturbance!" asked the duke, looking angrily at the spectators, none of whom uttered a word. "At the least noise the hall shall be cleared," added his grace. "And you, prisoner, what have you to say in self-justification, after Mademoiselle de Courtornieu's crushing evidence?"

"Nothing," murmured the baron.

But to return to Maurice. Once outside the court-room, the Abbe Midon confided him to the care of three officers, who promised to go with him, to carry him by main force, if need be, to the Hotel de France, and keep him there. Relieved on this score, the priest re-entered the hall just in time to see the baron re-seat himself without replying to

M. de Sairmeuse's final sneer, that by bearing Mademoiselle Blanche's testimony unchallenged M. d'Escorval had virtually confessed his guilt. But then in truth, how could he have challenged it? How could he defend himself without betraying his son? Until this moment every one present had believed in the baron's innocence. Could it be that he was guilty? His silence seemed to imply that such was the case; and this alone was a sufficient triumph for the Duke de Sairmeuse and his friends. His grace now turned to the lawyers, and with an air of weariness and disdain, remarked. "At present you may speak, since it is absolutely necessary; but no long phrases, mind! we ought to have finished here an hour ago."

The eldest of the three advocates rose, trembling with indignation, and prepared to dare anything for the sake of giving free utterance to his thoughts, but before a word was spoken the baron hastily checked him. "Do not try to defend me," he said calmly; "it would be labour wasted. I have only one word to say to my judges. Let them remember what noble Marshal Moncey wrote to the king: 'The scaffold does not make friends.'"

But this reminder was not of a nature to soften the judges' hearts. For that very phrase the marshal had been deprived of his office, and condemned to three months' imprisonment. As the advocates made no further attempt to argue the case, the commission retired to deliberate. This gave M. d'Escorval an opportunity to speak with his defenders. He shook them warmly by the hand, and thanked them for their courage and devotion. Then drawing the eldest among them on one side, he quickly added, in a low voice: "I have a last favour to ask of you. When sentence of death has been pronounced upon me, go at once to my son. Say to him that his dying father commands him to live—he will understand you. Tell him that it is my last wish; that he live—live for his mother!"

He said no more; the judges were returning. Of the thirty prisoners, nine were declared not guilty, and released. The remaining twenty-one including both M. d'Escorval and Chanlouineau were then formally condemned to death. But Chanlouineau's lips still retained their enigmatical smile.

XVIII.

THE three military men to whose care the Abbe Midon had entrusted Maurice had considerable difficulty in getting him to the Hotel de France, for he made continual attempts to return to the court-room, having the fallacious idea that by telling the truth he might yet save his father. In point of fact, however, the only effect of his confession would have been to provide the Duke de Sairmeuse with another welcome victim. When he and his custodians at length entered the room where Madame d'Escorval and Marie-Anne were waiting in cruel suspense, the baroness eagerly asked whether the trial was over.

"Nothing is decided yet," replied one of the retired officers. "The cure will come here as soon as the verdict is given."

Then as the three military men had promised not to lose sight of Maurice, they sat themselves down in gloomy silence. Not the slightest stir could be heard in the hotel, which seemed indeed as if it were deserted. At last, a little before four o'clock, the abbe came in, followed by the lawyer, to whom the baron had confided his last wishes.

"My husband!" exclaimed Madame d'Escorval, springing wildly from her chair. The priest bowed his head. "Death!" she faltered, fully understanding the significance of this impressive gesture. "What? they have condemned him!" And overcome with the terrible blow, she sank back, with hanging arms. But this weakness did not last long. "We must save him!" she exclaimed, abruptly springing to her feet again, her eyes bright with some sudden resolution, "we must wrest him from the scaffold. Up, Maurice! up, Marie-Anne! No more lamentations. To work! You also, gentlemen, will assist me; and I can count on your help, Monsieur le Cure. I do not quite know how to begin, but something must be done. The murder of so good, so noble a man as he would be too great a crime. God will not permit it." She paused, with clasped hands, as if seeking for inspiration. "And the king," she resumed—"can the king consent to such a crime? No. A king can refuse mercy, but he cannot refuse justice. I will go to him. I will tell him everything.

Ah! why didn't this thought occur to me sooner? We must start for Paris without losing an instant. Maurice you must accompany me; and one of you gentlemen go at once and order post-horses." Then, thinking they would obey her, she hastened into the next room to make preparations for her journey.

"Poor woman!" whispered the lawyer to the abbe, "she does not know that the sentence of a military commission is executed in twenty-four hours, and that it requires four days to make the journey to Paris." He reflected a moment, and then added: "But, after all, to let her go would be an act of mercy. Did not Ney, on the morning of his execution, implore the king to order the removal of his wife who was sobbing and moaning in his cell?"

The abbe shook his head. "No," said he; "Madame d'Escorval would never forgive us if we prevented her from receiving her husband's last farewell."

At that very moment, the baroness re-entered the room, and the priest was trying to gather sufficient courage to tell her the cruel truth, when a loud knock was heard at the door. One of the retired officers went to open it, and our old friend Bavois, the corporal of grenadiers, entered, raising his right hand to his cap, as if he were in his captain's presence. "Is Mademoiselle Lacheneur here?" he asked.

Marie-Anne stepped forward. "I am she, sir," she replied; "what do you want with me?"

"I am ordered to conduct you to the citadel, mademoiselle."

"What?" exclaimed Maurice, in a tone of anger; "so they imprison women as well?"

The worthy corporal struck his forehead with his open hand. "I am an old fool!" he exclaimed, "and don't know how to express myself. I meant to say that I came to fetch mademoiselle at the request of one of the prisoners, a man named Chanlouineau, who wishes to speak with her."

"Impossible, my good fellow," said one of the officers; "they would not allow this lady to visit one of the prisoners without special permission——"

"Well, she has this permission," said the old soldier. And then persuaded he had nothing to fear from any one

present, he added, in lower tones : "This Chanlouineau told me that the cure would understand his reasons."

Had the brave peasant really found some means of salvation. The abbe almost began to believe that such was the case. "You must go with this worthy fellow, Marie-Anne," said he.

The poor girl shuddered at the thought of seeing Chanlouineau again, but the idea of refusing never once occurred to her. "Let me go," she said quietly.

But the corporal did not budge. Winking in a desperate fashion, as was his wont whenever he wished to attract attention, he exclaimed : "Wait a bit. I've something else to tell you. This Chanlouineau, who seems to be a shrewd fellow, told me to say that all was going well. May I be hung if I can see how ! Still such is his opinion. He also told me to tell you not to stir from this place, and not to attempt anything until mademoiselle comes back again, which will be in less than an hour. He swears that he will keep his promise, and only asks you to pledge your word that you will obey him——"

"We will wait for an hour," replied the abbe. "I can promise that——"

"Then that'll do," rejoined Bavois. "Salute company. And now, mademoiselle, on the double, quick march ! The poor devil over there must be on coals of fire."

That a condemned conspirator should be allowed to receive a visit from his leader's daughter—from the daughter of that Lacheneur who had succeeded in making his escape—was indeed surprising. But Chanlouineau had been ingenious enough to discover a means of procuring this special permission ; and with this aim in view, he had feigned the most abject terror on hearing the sentence of death passed upon him. He even contrived to weep in a bellowing fashion, and the guards could scarcely believe their eyes when they saw this robust young fellow, so insolent and defiant a few hours before, now utter, overcome, and even unable to walk back to his cell. They had to carry him there, and then his lamentations became still more boisterous, concluding with an urgent prayer that one of the guard should go to the Duke de Sairmeuse, or the Marquis de Courtornieu, and tell them he had revelations of the greatest importance to make.

That potent word "revelations" made M. de Courtor

nieu hasten to the prisoner's cell. He found Chanlouineau on his knees, his features distorted by what appeared to be an agony of fear. The crafty fellow dragged himself towards the marquis, took hold of his hands and kissed them, imploring mercy and forgiveness, and swearing that to save his own life, he was ready to do anything, yes, anything, even to deliver Lacheneur up to the authorities. Such a prospect had powerful attractions for the Marquis de Courtornieu. "Do you know, then, where this brigand is concealed?" he asked.

Chanlouineau admitted that he did not know, but declared that Marie-Anne, Lacheneur's daughter, was well acquainted with her father's hiding-place. She had, he said, perfect confidence in him, Chanlouineau; and if they would only send for her, and allow him ten minutes private conversation with her, he was positive he could ascertain where the leader of the insurrection was concealed. So the bargain was quickly concluded; and Chanlouineau's life was promised him in exchange for Lacheneur's. A soldier, who fortunately chanced to be Corporal Bavois, was then sent to summon Marie-Anne; and the young farmer awaited her coming with feelings of poignant anxiety. He loved her, remember, and the thought of seeing her once more—for the last time on earth—made his heart throb wildly with mingled passion and despair. At last, at the end of the corridor, he could hear footsteps approaching. The heavy bolts securing the entrance to his cell were drawn back, the door opened, and Marie-Anne appeared, accompanied by Corporal Bavois. "M. de Courtornieu promised me that we should be left alone!" exclaimed Chanlouineau.

"Yes, I know he did, and I am going," replied the old soldier. "But I have orders to return for mademoiselle in half-an-hour."

When the door closed behind the worthy corporal, Chanlouineau took hold of Marie-Anne's hand and drew her to the tiny grated window. "Thank you for coming," said he, "thank you. I can see you and speak to you once more. Now that my hours are numbered, I may reveal the secret of my soul and of my life. Now, I can venture to tell you how ardently I have loved you—how much I still love you."

Involuntarily Marie-Anne drew away her hand and

stepped back ; for this outburst of passion, at such a moment and in such a place, seemed at once unspeakably sad and shocking.

“Have I, then, offended you?” asked Chanlouineau, sadly. “Forgive me—for I am about to die! You cannot refuse to listen to the voice of one, who, to-morrow, will vanish from earth forever. I have loved you for a long time, Marie-Anne, for more than six years. Before I saw you, I only cared for my belongings, and to raise fine crops and gather money together seemed to me the greatest possible happiness here below. And when at first I did meet you—you were so high, and I so low, that in my wildest dreams I did not dare to aspire to you. I went to the church each Sunday only that I might worship you as peasant women worship the Virgin; I went home with my eyes and heart full of you—and that was all. But then came your father’s misfortunes, which brought us nearer to each other; and your father made me as insane, yes, as insane as himself. After the insults he received from the Duke de Sairmeuse, M. Lacheneur resolved to revenge himself upon all these arrogant nobles, and selected me for his accomplice. He had read my heart as easily as if it had been an open book; and when we left the baron’s house that Sunday evening we both have such good reason to remember, he said to me: ‘You love my daughter, my boy. Very well, assist me, and I promise you, that if we succeed, she shall be your wife. Only,’ he added, ‘I must warn you that you risk your life.’ But what was life in comparison with the hopes that dazzled me? From that night, I gave body, soul, and fortune to his cause. Others were influenced by hatred, or ambition; but I was actuated by neither of these motives. What did the quarrels of these great folks matter to me—a simple labourer? I knew that the greatest were powerless to give my crops a drop of rain in seasons of drought, or a ray of sunshine during long spells of rain. I took part in the conspiracy, it was because I loved you——”

It seemed to Marie-Anne that he was reproaching her for the deception she had been forced to practise, and for the cruel fate to which Lacheneur’s wild designs had brought him. “Ah, you are cruel,” she cried, “you are pitiless!”

But Chanlouineau scarcely heard her words. All the bitterness of the past was rising to his brain like fumes of alcohol; and he was scarcely conscious of what he said himself. "However, the day soon came," he continued, "when my foolish illusions were destroyed. You could not be mine since you belonged to another. I might have broken my compact! I thought of doing so, but I did not have the courage. To see you, to hear your voice, to spend my time under the same roof as you, was happiness enough. I longed to see you happy and honoured; I fought for the triumph of another, for him you had chosen——" A sob rose in his throat and choked his utterance; he buried his face in his hands to hide his tears, and, for a moment, seemed completely overcome. But he mastered his weakness after a brief interval, and in a firm voice, exclaimed: "We must not linger any longer over the past. Time flies, and the future is ominous."

As he spoke, he went to the door and applied first his eyes and then his ear to the grating, to see that there were no spies outside. But he could perceive no one, nor could he hear a sound. He came back to Marie-Anne's side, and tearing the sleeve of his jacket open with his teeth, he drew from the lining two letters, wrapped carefully in a piece of cloth. "Here," he said, in a low voice, "is a man's life!"

Marie-Anne knew nothing of Chanlouineau's promises and hopes, and she was moreover so distressed by what the young farmer had previously said that at first she did not understand his meaning. All she could do was to repeat mechanically, "This is a man's life!"

"Hush speak lower!" interrupted Chanlouineau. "Yes, one of these letters might, perhaps, save the life of a prisoner now under sentence of death."

"Unfortunate man! Why do you not make use of it and save yourself?"

The young farmer shook his head. "Would it ever be possible for you to love me?" he said. "No it wouldn't be possible; and so what wish can I have to live? At least I shall be able to forget everything when I am underground. Moreover, I have been justly condemned. I knew what I was doing when I left La Reche with my gun over my shoulder, and my sword by my side; I have no

right to complain. But these judges of ours have condemned an innocent man——”

“The Baron d’Escorval?”

“Yes—Maurice’s father!” His voice changed as he pronounced the name of his envied rival—envied, no doubt, and yet to assure this rival’s happiness and Marie-Anne’s he would have given ten lives had they been his to give. “I wish to save the baron,” he added, “and I can do so.”

“Oh! if what you said were true? But you undoubtedly deceive yourself.”

“I know what I am saying,” rejoined Chanlouineau: and still fearful lest some spy might be concealed outside; he now came close to Marie-Anne and in a low voice spoke rapidly as follows: “I never believed in the success of this conspiracy, and when I sought for a weapon of defence in case of failure, the Marquis de Sairmeuse furnished it. When it became necessary to send out a circular warning our accomplices of the date decided upon for the rising, I persuaded M. Martial to write a model. He suspected nothing. I told him it was for a wedding, and he did what I asked. This letter, which is now in my possession, is the rough draft of the circular we sent; and it is in the Marquis de Sairmeuse’s handwriting. It is impossible for him to deny it. There is an erasure in every line, and every one would look at the letter as the handiwork of a man seeking to convey his real meaning in ambiguous phrases.”

With these words Chanlouineau opened the envelope and showed her the famous letter he had dictated, in which the space for the date of the insurrection was left blank. “My dear friend, we are at last agreed, and the marriage is decided on, etc.”

The light that had sparkled in Marie-Anne’s eyes was suddenly bedimmed. “And you think that this letter can be of any use?” she inquired, with evident discouragement.

“I don’t *think* so!”

“But——”

With a gesture, he interrupted her. “We must not lose time in discussion—listen to me. Of itself, this letter might be unimportant, but I have arranged matters in such a way that it will produce a powerful effect. I declared

before the commission that the Marquis de Sairmeuse was one of the leaders of the movement. They laughed; and I read incredulity on all the judges' faces. But calumny is never without its effect. When the Duke de Sairmeuse is about to receive a reward for his services, there will be enemies in plenty to remember and repeat my words. He knew this so well that he was greatly agitated, even while his colleagues sneered at my accusation."

"It's a great crime to charge a man falsely," murmured Marie-Anne, with simple honesty. "No doubt," rejoined Chanlouineau, "but I wish to save the baron, and I cannot choose my means. As I knew that the marquis had been wounded, I declared that he was fighting against the troops by my side and asked that he should be summoned before the tribunal; swearing that I had in my possession unquestionable proofs of his complicity."

"Did you say that the Marquis de Sairmeuse had been wounded?" inquired Marie-Anne.

Chanlouineau's face wore a look of intense astonishment. "What!" he exclaimed, "don't you know——?" Then after an instant's reflection: "Fool that I am!" he resumed. "After all who could have told you what happened? However, you remember that while we were on our way to the Croix-d'Arcy, after your father had rode on in advance, Maurice placed himself at the head of one division, and you walked beside him, while your brother Jean and myself stayed behind to urge the laggards forward. We were performing our duty conscientiously enough, when suddenly we heard the gallop of a horse behind us. 'We must know who is coming,' said Jean to me. So we paused. The horse soon reached us; we caught the bridle and held him. Can you guess who the rider was? Why, Martial de Sairmeuse. It would be impossible to describe your brother's fury when he recognized the marquis. 'At last I find you, you wretched noble!' he exclaimed, 'and now we will settle our account! After reducing my father, who had just given you a fortune, to despair and penury, you tried to degrade my sister. I will have my revenge! Down, we must fight!'"

Marie-Anne could scarcely tell whether she was awake or dreaming. "What, my brother challenged the marquis!" she murmured, "Is it possible?"

"Brave as the marquis may be," pursued Chanlouineau,

"he did not seem inclined to accept the invitation. He stammered out something like this: 'You are mad—you are jesting—haven't we always been friends? What does all this mean?' Jean ground his teeth in rage. 'This means that we have endured your insulting familiarity long enough,' he replied, 'and if you don't dismount and fight me fairly, I will blow your brains out!' Your brother, as he spoke, manipulated his pistol in so threatening a manner that the marquis jumped off his horse and addressing me: 'You see, Chanlouineau,' he said, 'I must fight a duel or submit to murder. If Jean kills me there is no more to be said—but if I kill him, what is to be done?' I told him he would be free to go off unmolested on condition he gave me his word not to proceed to Montaignac before two o'clock. 'Then I accept the challenge,' said he, 'give me a weapon.' 'I gave him my sword, your brother drew his, and they took their places in the middle of the highway.'"

The young farmer paused to take breath, and then more slowly he resumed: "Marie-Anne, your father and I misjudged your brother. Poor Jean's appearance is terribly against him. His face indicates a treacherous, cowardly nature, his smile is cunning, and his eyes always shun yours. We distrusted him, but we should ask his forgiveness for having done so. A man who fights as I saw him fight, deserves all our confidence. For this combat in the road, and in the darkness, was terrible. They attacked each other furiously, and at last Jean fell."

"Ah! my brother is dead!" exclaimed Marie Anne.

"No," promptly replied Chanlouineau; "at least I have reason to hope not; and I know he has been well cared for. The duel had another witness, a man named Poignot, whom you must remember as he was one of your father's tenants. He took Jean away with him, and promised me that he would conceal him and care for him. As for the marquis, he showed me that he was wounded as well, and then he remounted his horse, saying: 'What could I do? He would have it so.'"

Marie-Anne now understood everything. "Give me the letter," she said to Chanlouineau, "I will go to the duke. I will find some way of reaching him, and then God will guide me in the right course to pursue."

The noble-hearted young farmer calmly handed her the

scrap of paper which might have been the means of his own salvation. "You must on no account allow the duke to suppose that you have the proof with which you threaten him about your person. He might be capable of any infamy under such circumstances. He will probably say, at first, that he can do nothing—that he sees no way to save the baron; but you must tell him that he must find a means, if he does not wish this letter sent to Paris, to one of his enemies——"

He paused, for the bolt outside was being withdrawn. A moment later Corporal Bavois reappeared. "The half-hour expired ten minutes ago," said the old soldier sadly, "and I must obey my orders."

"Coming," replied Chanlouineau; "we have finished." And then handing Marie-Anne the second letter he had taken from his sleeve, "This is for you," he added. "You will read it when I am no more. Pray, pray, do not cry so! Be brave! You will soon be Maurice's wife. And when you are happy, think sometimes of the poor peasant who loved you so."

Marie-Anne could not utter a word, but she raised her face to his. "Ah! I dare not ask it!" he exclaimed. And for the first and only time in life he clasped her in his arms, and pressed his lips to her pallid cheek. "Now, good-bye," he said once more. "Do not lose a moment. Good-bye, for ever!"

XIX.

THE prospect of capturing Lacheneur, the chief conspirator, had so excited the Marquis de Courtonnieu that he had not been able to tear himself away from the citadel to go home to dinner. Stationed near the entrance of the dark corridor leading to Chalouineau's cell, he watched Marie-Anne hasten away; but as he saw her go out into the twilight with a quick, alert step, he felt a sudden doubt concerning Chanlouineau's sincerity. "Can it be that this miserable peasant has deceived me?" thought he; and so strong was this new-born suspicion that he hastened after the young girl, determined to question her—to ascertain the truth—to arrest her even, if need be. But he no longer possessed the agility of youth, and when he reached the gateway the sentinel told him that

Mademoiselle Lacheneur had already left the citadel. He rushed out after her, looked about on every side, but could see no trace of the nimble fugitive. Accordingly, he was constrained to return again, inwardly furious with himself for his own credulity. "Still, I can visit Chanlouineau," thought he, "and to-morrow will be time enough to summon this creature and question her."

"This creature" was, even then, hastening up the long, ill-paved street leading to the Hotel de France. Regardless of the inquisitive glances of the passers-by, she ran on, thinking only of shortening the terrible suspense which her friends at the hotel must be enduring. "All is not lost!" she exclaimed, as she re-entered the room where they were assembled.

"My God, Thou hast heard my prayers!" murmured the baroness. Then, suddenly seized by a horrible dread, she added: "But do not try to deceive me. Are you not trying to comfort me with false hopes?"

"No! I am not deceiving you, madame. Chanlouineau has placed a weapon in my hands, which, I hope and believe, will place the Duke de Sairmeuse in our power. He is only omnipotent at Montaignac, and the only man who would oppose him, M. de Courtornieu, is his friend. I believe that M. d'Escorval can be saved."

"Speak!" cried Maurice; "what must we do?"

"Pray and wait, Maurice, I must act alone in this matter, but be assured that I will do everything that is humanly possible. It is my duty to do so, for am I not the cause of all your misfortune?"

Absorbed in the thought of the task before her, Marie-Anne had failed to remark a stranger who had arrived during her absence—an old white-haired peasant. The abbe now drew her attention to him. "Here is a courageous friend," said he, "who ever since morning, has been searching for you everywhere, in order to give you some news of your father."

Marie-Anne could scarcely falter her gratitude. "Oh, you need not thank me," said the old peasant. "I said to myself: 'The poor girl must be terribly anxious, and I ought to relieve her of her misery.' So I came to tell you that M. Lacheneur is safe and well, except for a wound in the leg, which causes him considerable suffering, but which will be healed in a few weeks. My son-in-law, who

was hunting yesterday in the mountains, met him near the frontier in company of two of his friends. By this time he must be in Piedmont, beyond the reach of the *gendarmes*."

"Let us hope now," said the abbe, "that we shall soon hear what has become of Jean."

"I know already," replied Marie-Anne, "that my brother has been badly wounded, but some kind friends are caring for him."

Maurice, the abbe, and the retired officers now surrounded the brave young girl. They wished to know what she was about to attempt, and to dissuade her from incurring useless danger. But she refused to reply to their pressing questions; and when they suggested accompanying her, or, at least, following her at a distance, she declared that she must go alone. "However, I shall be here again in a couple of hours," she said, "and then I shall be able to tell you if there is anything else to be done." With these words she hastened away.

To obtain an audience of the Duke de Sairmeuse was certainly a difficult matter, as Maurice and the abbe had ascertained on the previous day. Besieged by weeping and heart-broken families, his grace had shut himself up securely, fearing, perhaps, that he might be moved by their entreaties. Marie-Anne was aware of this, but she was not at all anxious, for by employing the same word that Chaulouineau had used—that same word "*revelation*"—she was certain to obtain a hearing. When she reached the Duke de Sairmeuse's mansion she found three or four lacqueys talking in front of the principal entrance.

"I am the daughter of M. Lacheneur," said she, speaking to one of them. "I must see the duke at once, on matters connected with the revolt."

"The duke is absent."

"I come to make a revelation."

The servant's manner suddenly changed. "In that case follow me, mademoiselle," said he.

She did follow him up the stairs and through two or three rooms. At last he opened a door and bade her enter; but, to her surprise, it was not the Duke de Sairmeuse who was in the room, but his son, Martial, who, was stretched upon a sofa, reading a paper by the light of a large candelabra. On perceiving Marie-Anne he sprang up,

pale and agitated. "You here!" he stammered; and then, swiftly mastering his emotion, he bethought himself of the possible motive of such a visit: "Lacheneur must have been arrested," he continued, "and wishing to save him from the military commission you have thought of me. Thank you for doing so, dear Marie-Anne, thank you for your confidence in me. I will not abuse it. Be reassured. We will save your father, I promise you—I swear it. We will find a means, for he must be saved. I will have it so!" As he spoke his voice betrayed the passionate joy that was surging in his heart.

"My father has not been arrested," said Marie-Anne, coldly.

"Then," said Martial, with some hesitation—"Then it is Jean who is a prisoner."

"My brother is in safety. If he survives his wounds he will evade all attempts at capture."

The pale face of the Marquis de Sairmeuse turned a deep crimson. Marie-Anne's manner showed him that she was acquainted with the duel. It would have been useless to try and deny it; still he endeavoured to excuse himself. "It was Jean who challenged me," he said; "I tried to avoid fighting, and I only defended my life in fair combat, and with equal weapons——"

Marie-Anne interrupted him. "I do not reproach you, Monsieur le Marquis," she said, quietly.

"Ah! Marie-Anne, I am more severe than you. Jean was right to challenge me. I deserved his anger. He knew my guilty thoughts, of which you were ignorant. Oh! Marie-Anne, if I wronged you in thought it was because I did not know you. Now I know that you, above all others, are pure and chaste——"

He tried to take her hands, but she instantly repulsed him, and broke into a fit of passionate sobbing. Of all the blows she had received this last was most terrible. What shame and humiliation? Now, indeed, her cup of sorrow was filled to overflowing. "Chaste and pure!" he had said. Oh, the bitter mockery of those words!

But Martial misunderstood the meaning of her grief. "Your indignation is just," he resumed, with growing eagerness. "But if I have injured you even in thought, I now offer you reparation. I have been a fool—a miserable fool—for I love you; I love, and can love you only. I

am the Marquis de Sairmeuse. I am wealthy. I entreat you, I implore you to be my wife."

Marie-Anne listened in utter bewilderment. But an hour before Chanlouineau in his cell cried aloud that he died for love of her, and now it was Martial, who avowed his willingness to sacrifice his ambition and his future for her sake. And the poor peasant condemned to death, and the son of the all-powerful Duke de Sairmeuse, had confessed their passion in almost the same words.

Martial paused, awaiting some reply—a word, a gesture. None came; and then with increased vehemence, "You are silent," he cried. "Do you question my sincerity? No, it is impossible! Then why this silence? Do you fear my father's opposition? You need not. I know how to gain his consent. Besides, what does his approbation matter to us? Have we any need of him? Am I not my own master? Am I not rich—immensely rich? I should be a miserable fool, a coward, if I hesitated between his stupid prejudices and the happiness of my life." He was evidently weighing all the possible objections, in order to answer and overrule them beforehand. "Is it on account of your family that you hesitate?" he continued. "Your father and brother are pursued, and France is closed against them. But we will leave France, and they shall come and live near you. Jean will no longer dislike me when you are my wife. We will all live in England or in Italy. Now I am grateful for the fortune that will enable me to make your life a continual enchantment. I love you—and in the happiness and tender love which shall be yours in the future, I will make you forget all the bitterness of the past!"

Marie-Anne knew the Marquis de Sairmeuse well enough to understand the intensity of the love revealed by these astounding proposals. And for that very reason she hesitated to tell him that he had triumphed over his pride in vain. She was anxiously wondering to what extremity his wounded vanity would carry him, and if a refusal might not transform him into a bitter foe.

"Why do you not answer?" asked Martial, with evident anxiety.

She felt that she must reply, that she must speak, say something; and yet it was with intense reluctance that she at last unclosed her lips. "I am only a poor girl, Monsieur

le Marquis," she murmured. "If I accepted your offer, you would regret it for ever."

"Never!"

"But you are no longer free. You have already plighted your troth. Mademoiselle Blanche de Courtornieu is your promised wife."

"Ah! say one word—only one—and this engagement which I detest shall be broken."

She was silent. It was evident that her mind was fully made up, and that she refused his offer.

"Do you hate me, then?" asked Martial, sadly.

If she had allowed herself to tell the whole truth, Marie-Anne would have answered "Yes;" for the Marquis de Sairmeuse did inspire her with almost insurmountable aversion. "I no more belong to myself than you belong to yourself," she faltered.

A gleam of hatred shone for a second in Martial's eyes. "Always Maurice!" said he.

"Always."

She expected an angry outburst, but he remained perfectly calm. "Then," said he, with a forced smile, "I must believe this and other evidence. I must believe that you forced me to play a ridiculous part. Until now I doubted it."

Marie-Anne bowed her head, blushing with shame to the roots of her hair; still she made no attempt at denial. "I was not my own mistress," she stammered; "my father commanded and threatened, and I—I obeyed him."

"That matters little," he interrupted; "a pure minded young girl should not have acted so." This was the only reproach he allowed himself to utter, and he even regretted it, perhaps because he did not wish her to know how deeply he was wounded, perhaps because—as he afterwards declared—he could not overcome his love for her. "Now," he resumed, "I understand your presence here. You come to ask mercy for M. d'Escorval."

"Not mercy, but justice. The baron is innocent."

Martial drew close to Marie-Anne, and lowering his voice: "If the father is innocent," he whispered, "then it is the son who is guilty."

She recoiled in terror. What! he knew the secret which the judges could not, or would not penetrate!

But seeing her anguish, he took pity on her. "An-

other reason," said he, "for attempting to save the baron! If his blood were shed upon the guillotine there would be an abyss between you and Maurice which neither of you could cross. So I will join my efforts to yours."

Blushing and embarrassed, Marie-Anne dared not thank him; for was she not about to requite his generosity by charging him with a complicity of which, as she well knew, he was innocent. Indeed, she would have by far preferred to find him angry and revengeful.

Just then a valet opened the door, and the Duke de Sairmeuse entered. "Upon my word!" he exclaimed, as he crossed the threshold, "I must confess that Chupin is an admirable hunter. Thanks to him—" He paused abruptly: he had not perceived Marie-Anne until now. "What! Lacheneur's daughter!" said he, with an air of intense surprise. "What does she want here?"

The decisive moment had come—the baron's life depended upon Marie-Anne's courage and address. Impressed by this weighty responsibility she at once recovered all her presence of mind. "I have a revelation to sell to you, sir," she said, with a resolute air.

The duke looked at her with mingled wonder and curiosity; then, laughing heartily, he threw himself on to the sofa, exclaiming: "Sell it, my pretty one—sell it! I can't speak of that until I am alone with you."

At a sign from his father, Martial left the room. "Now tell me what it is," said the duke.

She did not lose a moment. "You must have read the circular convening the conspirators," she began.

"Certainly; I have a dozen copies of it in my pocket."

"Who do you suppose wrote it?"

"Why, the elder d'Escorval, or your father."

"You are mistaken, sir; that letter was prepared by the Marquis de Sairmeuse, your son."

The duke sprang to his feet, his face purple with anger. "Zounds! girl! I advise you to bridle your tongue!" cried he.

"There is proof of what I assert; and the lady who sends me here," interrupted Marie-Anne, quite unabashed, "has the original of this circular in safe keeping. It is in the handwriting of Monsieur le Marquis, and I am obliged to tell you—"

She did not have time to complete her sentence, for the

duke sprang to the door, and, in a voice of thunder, called his son. As soon as Martial entered the room his grace turned to Marie-Anne, "Now, repeat," said he, "repeat before my son what you have just said to me."

Boldly, with head erect, and in a clear, firm voice, Marie-Anne repeated her charge. She expected an indignant denial, a stinging taunt, or, at least, an angry interruption from the marquis; but he listened with a nonchalant air, and she almost believed she could read in his eyes an encouragement to proceed, coupled with a promise of protection.

"Well! what do you say to that?" imperiously asked the duke, when Marie-Anne had finished.

"First of all," replied Martial, lightly, "I should like to see this famous circular."

The duke handed him a copy. "Here—read it," said he.

Martial glanced over the paper, laughed heartily, and exclaimed: "A clever trick."

"What do you say?"

"I say that this Chanlouineau is a sly rascal. Who the devil would have thought the fellow so cunning to see his honest face. Another lesson to teach one not to trust in appearances."

In all his life the Duke de Sairmeuse had never received so severe a shock. "So Chanlouineau was not lying, then," he ejaculated, in a choked, unnatural voice, "you *were* one of the instigators of this rebellion?"

Martial's brow bent as, in a tone of marked disdain, he slowly replied: "This is the fourth time that you have addressed that question to me, and for the fourth time I answer: 'No.' That should suffice for you. If the fancy had seized me to take part in this movement, I should frankly confess it. What possible reason could I have for concealing anything from you?"

"The facts!" interrupted the duke, in a frenzy of passion; "the facts!"

"Very well," rejoined Martial, in his usual indifferent tone; "the fact is that the original of this circular does exist, that it was written in my best hand on a very large sheet of very poor paper. I recollect that in trying to find appropriate expressions I erased and re-wrote sev-

eral words. Did I date this writing? I think I did, but I could not swear to it."

"How do you reconcile this with your denials?" exclaimed M. de Sairmeuse.

"I can do this easily. Did I not tell you just now that Chanlouineau had made a tool of me?"

The duke no longer knew what to believe; but what exasperated him more than everything else was his son's imperturbable coolness. "You had much better confess that you were led into this by your mistress," he retorted, pointing at Marie-Anne.

"Mademoiselle Lacheneur is not my mistress," replied Martial, in an almost threatening tone. "Though it only rests with her to become the Marchioness de Sairmeuse if she chooses to-morrow. But let us leave recriminations on one side, they cannot further the progress of our business."

It was with difficulty that the duke checked another insulting rejoinder. However, he had not quite lost all reason. Trembling with suppressed rage, he walked round the room several times, and at last paused in front of Marie-Anne, who had remained standing in the same place, as motionless as a statue. "Come, my good girl," said he, "give me the writing."

"It is not in my possession, sir."

"Where is it?"

"In the hands of a person who will only give it to you under certain conditions."

"Who is this person?"

"I am not at liberty to tell you."

There was both admiration and jealousy in the look that Martial fixed upon Marie-Anne. He was amazed by her coolness and presence of mind. Ah! indeed powerful must be the passion that imparted such a ringing clearness to her voice, such brilliancy to her eyes, and such precision to her words!

"And if I should not accept the—the conditions, what then?" asked M. de Sairmeuse.

"In that case the writing will be utilized."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean, sir, that early to-morrow morning a trusty messenger will start for Paris, with the view of submitting this document to certain persons who are not exactly

friends of yours. He will show it to M. Laine, for example—or to the Duke de Richelieu ; and he will, of course, explain to them its significance and value. Will this writing prove the Marquis de Sairmeuse's complicity ? Yes, or no ? Have you, or have you not, dared to condemn to death the unfortunate men who were only your son's tools ? ”

“ Ah, you little wretch, you hussy, you little viper ! ” interrupted the duke in a passionate rage. “ You want to drive me mad ! Yes, you know that I have enemies and rivals who would gladly give anything for this execrable letter. And if they obtain it they will demand an investigation, and then farewell to the rewards due to my services. It will be shouted from the housetops that Chanlouineau, in the presence of the tribunal, declared that you, marquis, were his leader and his accomplice. You will be obliged to submit to the scrutiny of physicians, who, finding a freshly-healed wound, will require you to state how and where you received it, and why you concealed it. And then, of course, I shall be accused ! It will be said I expedited matters in order to silence the voices raised against my son. Perhaps my enemies will even say that I secretly favoured the insurrection. I shall be vilified in the newspapers. And remember that it is you, you alone, marquis, who have ruined the fortunes of our house, our brilliant prospects, in this foolish fashion. You pretend to believe in nothing, to doubt everything—you are cold, sceptical, disdainful. But only let a pretty woman make her appearance on the scene, and you grow as wild as a school-boy, and you are ready to commit any act of folly. It is you that I am speaking to, marquis. Don't you hear me ? Speak ! what have you to say ? ”

Martial had listened to this tirade with unconcealed scorn, and without even attempting to interrupt it. But now he slowly replied, “ I think, sir, that if Mademoiselle Lacheneur *had* any doubts of the value of the document she possesses, she certainly can have them no longer.”

This answer fell upon the duke's wrath like a bucket of iced water. He instantly realised his folly ; and frightened by his own words, stood literally stupefied with astonishment.

Without deigning to speak any further to his father, the marquis turned to Marie-Anne. “ Will you be kind

enough to explain what is required in exchange for this letter?" he said.

"The life and liberty of M. d'Escorval."

The duke started as if he had received an electric shock. "Ah!" he exclaimed. "I knew they would ask for something that was impossible!" He sank back into an arm chair; and his despair now seemed as deep as his frenzy had been violent. He hid his face in his hands, evidently seeking for some expedient. "Why didn't you come to me before judgment was pronounced?" he murmured. "Then, I could of done anything—now, my hands are bound. The commission has spoken, and the sentence must be excuted—" He rose, and added in the tone of a man who is utterly resigned: "Decidedly, I should risk more in attempting to save the baron"—in his anxiety he gave M. d'Escorval his title—"a thousand times more than I have to fear from my enemies. So, mademoiselle"—he no longer said, "my good girl"—"you can utilize your document."

Having spoken, he was about to leave the room, when Martial detained him, "Think again before you decide," said the marquis. "Our situation is not without a precedent. Don't you remember that a few months ago the Count de Lavalette was condemned to death. Now the king wished to pardon him, but the ministers had contrary views. No doubt his majesty was the master; still what did he do? He effected to remain deaf to all the supplications made on the prisoner's behalf. The scaffold was even erected, and yet Lavalette was saved! And no one was compromised—yes, a jailer lost his position; but he is living on his pension now."

Marie-Anne caught eagerly at the idea which Martial had so cleverly presented. "Yes," she exclaimed, "the Count de Lavalette was favoured by royal connivance, and succeeded in making his escape."

The simplicity of the expedient, and the authority of the example, seemed to make a vivid impression on the duke. He remained silent for a moment, but Marie-Anne fancied she could detect an expression of relief steal over his face. "Such an attempt would be very hazardous," he murmured; "yet, with care, and if one were sure that it would remain a secret—"

"Oh! the secret will be religiously kept, sir," interrupted Marie-Anne.

With a glance Martial recommended her to remain silent; then turning to his father, he said: "We can always consider this expedient, and calculate the consequences—that won't bind us. When is this sentence to be carried into effect?"

"To-morrow," replied the duke. Terrible as this curt answer seemed, it did not alarm Marie-Anne. She had perceived by the duke's acute anxiety that she had good grounds for hope, and she was now aware that Martial would favour her designs.

"We have, then, only the night before us," resumed the marquis. "Fortunately, it is only half-past seven, and until ten o'clock my father can visit the citadel without exciting suspicion." He paused, and seemed embarrassed. The fact was, he had just realised the existence of a difficulty which might thwart all his plans. "Have we any intelligent men in the citadel?" he murmured. "A jailer or a soldier's assistance is indispensable." Turning to his father, he abruptly asked him: "Have you any man whom one can trust?"

"I have three or four spies—they can be bought—"

"No! the wretch who betrays his comrade for a few sous would betray you for a few louis. We must have an honest man who sympathizes with Baron d'Escorval's opinions—an old soldier who fought under Napoleon, if possible."

"I know the man you require!" exclaimed Marie-Anne with sudden inspiration, and noticing Martial's surprise. "Yes, a man at the citadel."

"Take care," observed the marquis. "Remember he will have a great deal to risk, for should this be discovered the accomplices must be sacrificed."

"The man I speak of is the one you need. I will be responsible for him. His name is Bavois, and he is a corporal in the first company of grenadiers."

"Bavois," repeated Martial, as if to fix the name in his memory; "Bavois. Very well, I will confer with him. My father will find some pretext for having him summoned here."

"It is easy to find a pretext," rejoined Marie-Anne.

"He was left on guard at Escorval after the searching party left the house."

"That's capital," said Martial, walking towards his father's chair. "I suppose," he continued, addressing the duke, "that the baron has been separated from the other prisoners."

"Yes, he is alone, in a large, comfortable room, on the second floor of the corner tower."

"The corner tower!" said Martial, "is that the very tall one, built on the edge of the cliff, where the rock rises almost perpendicularly?"

"Precisely," answered M. de Sairmenuse, whose promptness plainly implied that he was ready to risk a good deal to enable the prisoner to escape.

"What kind of a window is there in the baron's room?" inquired Martial.

"Oh, a tolerably large one, with a double row of iron bars, securely riveted into the stone walls. It overlooks the precipice."

"The deuce! The bars can easily be cut through, but that precipice is a serious difficulty, and yet, in one respect, it is an advantage, for no sentinels are stationed there, are they?"

"No, never. Between the walls and the citadel and the edge of the rock there is barely standing room. The soldiers don't venture there even in the day time."

"There is one more important question. What is the distance from M. d'Escorval's window to the ground?"

"I should say it is about forty feet from the base of the tower."

"Good! And from the base of the tower to the foot of the cliff—how far is that?"

"I really scarcely know. However, I should think fully sixty feet."

"Ah, that's terribly high; but fortunately the baron is still pretty vigorous."

"The duke was growing impatient. "Now," said he to his son, "will you be so kind as to explain your plan?"

"My plan is simplicity itself," replied Martial. "Sixty and forty are one hundred; so it is necessary to procure a hundred feet of strong rope. It will make a very large bundle; but no matter. I will twist it round me, wrap myself up in a large cloak, and accompany you to the

citadel. You will send for Corporal Bavois, leave me alone with him in a quiet place; and I will explain our wishes to him."

The Duke de Sairmeuse shrugged his shoulders. "And how will you procure a hundred feet of rope at this hour in Montaignac? Will you go about from shop to shop? You might as well trumpet your project all over France at once."

"I shall attempt nothing of the kind. What I can't do, the friends of the D'Escorval family will do." Then seeing that the duke was about to offer some fresh objections, Martial earnestly added: "Pray don't forget the danger that threatens us, nor the little time that is left us. I have made a blunder, let me repair it." And turning to Marie-Anne: "You may consider the baron saved," he pursued; "but it is necessary for me to confer with one of his friends. Return at once to the Hotel de France and tell the cure to meet me on the Place d'Armes, where I shall go at once and wait for him."

XX.

DIRECTLY the Baron d'Escorval was arrested, although he was unarmed and although he had taken no part in the insurrection, he fully realised the fact that he was a lost man. He knew how hateful he was to the royalist party, and having made up his mind that he would have to die, he turned all his attention to the danger threatening his son. The unfortunate blunder he made in contradicting Chupin's evidence was due to his preoccupation, and he did not breathe freely until he saw Maurice led from the hall by the Abbe Midon and the friendly officers; for he feared that his son would be unable to restrain himself, that he would declare his guilt all to no purpose since the commission in its blind state would never forgive the father, but rather satisfy its rancour by ordering the execution of the son as well. When Maurice was eventually got away, the baron became more composed, and with head erect, and steadfast eye, he listened to his sentence. In the confusion that ensued in removing the prisoners from the hall M. d'Escorval found himself beside Chanlouineau, who had begun his noisy lamen-

tations. "Courage, my boy," he said, indignant at such apparent cowardice.

"Ah! it is easy to talk," whined the young farmer, who seeing that he was momentarily unobserved, leant towards the baron, and whispered; "It is for you that I am working. Save all your strength for to-night."

Chanlouineau's words and his burning glance surprised M. d'Escorval, but he attributed both to fear. When the guards took him back to his cell, he threw himself on to his pallet, and became absorbed in that vision of the last hour, which is at once the hope and despair of those who are about to die. He knew the terrible laws that govern a military commission. The next day—in a few hours—at dawn, perhaps, he would be taken from his cell, and placed in front of a squad of soldiers, an officer would lift his sword, and then all would be over. All over! ay, but what would become of his wife and son? His agony on thinking of those he loved was terrible. He was alone; he wept. But suddenly he started up, ashamed of his weakness. He must not allow these thoughts to unnerve him. Had he not already determined to meet death without flinching? Resolved to shake off this fit of melancholy, he walked round and round his cell forcing his mind to occupy itself with material objects.

The room which had been allotted to him was very large. It had once communicated with an adjoining apartment, but the door had long since been walled up. The cement which held the stone together had crumbled away, leaving crevices through which one might look from one room into the other. M. d'Escorval mechanically applied his eye to one of these crevices. Perhaps he had a friend for a neighbour, some wretched man who was to share his fate. No. He could not see anyone. He called, first in a whisper, and then louder; but no voice replied. "If I could only tear down this thin partition," he thought. He trembled, then shrugged his shoulders. And if he did, what then? He would only find himself in another apartment similar to his own, and communicating like his with a corridor full of guards, whose monotonous tramp he could plainly hear as they passed to and fro. What folly to think of escape! He knew that every possible precaution must have been taken to guard against it. Yes, he knew this, and yet he could not refrain from examining his window. Two

rows of iron bars protected it. These were placed in such a way that it was impossible for him to protrude his head and see how far he was above the ground. The height, however, must be considerable, judging from the extent of the view. The sun was setting; and through the violet haze the baron could discern an undulating line of hills, the culminating point of which must be the waste land of La Reche. The dark mass of foliage that he saw on the right was probably the forest of Sairmeuse. On the left, he divined rather than saw, nestling between the hills, the valley of the Oiselle and Escorval. Escorval, that lovely retreat where he had known such happiness, where he had hoped to die in peace. And remembering past times, and thinking of his vanished dreams, his eyes once more filled with tears. But he quickly dried them as he heard some one draw back the bolts securing the door of his room.

Two soldiers entered, one of whom carried a torch, while the other had with him one of those long baskets divided into compartments which are used in carrying meals to officers on guard. These men were evidently deeply moved, and yet, obeying a sentiment of instinctive delicacy, they affected a semblance of gaiety. "Here is your dinner, sir," said one soldier, "it ought to be good, since it comes from the commander's kitchen."

M. d'Escorval smiled sadly. Some attentions have a sinister significance coming from your jailer. Still, when he seated himself before the little table prepared for him, he found that he was really hungry. He ate with a relish, and was soon chatting quite cheerfully with the soldiers. "Always hope for the best, sir," said one of these worthy fellows. "Who knows? Stranger things have happened!"

When the baron had finished his meal, he asked for pen, ink, and paper, which were almost immediately brought to him. He found himself again alone; but his conversation with the soldiers had been of service, for his weakness had passed away, his self-possession had returned, and he could not reflect. He was surprised that he had heard nothing from his wife or son. Had they been refused admittance to the prison? No, that could not be; he could not imagine his judges sufficiently cruel to prevent him from pressing his wife and son to his heart, in a last

embrace. Yet, how was it that neither the baroness nor Maurice had made an attempt to see him! Something must have prevented them from doing so. What could it be? He imagined the worst misfortunes. He saw his wife writhing in agony, perhaps dead. He pictured Maurice, wild with grief, on his knees at his mother's bedside. Still they might come yet, for on consulting his watch, he found that it was only seven o'clock. But alas, he waited in vain. No one came. At last, he took up his pen, and was about to write, when he heard a bustle in the corridor outside. The clink of spurs resounded over the flagstones, and he heard the sharp clink of a musket as the sentinel presented arms. Trembling in spite of himself, the baron sprang up. "They have come at last!" he exclaimed.

But he was mistaken; the footsteps died away in the distance, and he reflected that this must have been some round of inspection. At the same moment, however, two objects thrown through the little grated opening in the door of his cell, fell on to the floor in the middle of the room. M. d'Escorval caught them up. Somebody had thrown him two files. His first feeling was one of distrust. He knew that there were jailers who left no means untried to dishonour their prisoners before delivering them over to the executioner. Who had sent him these instruments of deliverance, a friend or an enemy? Chanlouineau's last words and the look that accompanied them recurred to his mind, perplexing him still more. He was standing with knitted brows, turning and re-turning the files in his hands, when he suddenly noticed on the floor a scrap of paper which at first had escaped his attention. He picked it up, unfolded it, and read: "Your friends are at work. Everything is prepared for your escape. Make haste and saw the bars of your window. Maurice and his mother embrace you. Hope, courage!" Beneath these few lines was the letter M.

But the baron did not need this initial to feel assured, for he had at once recognized the Abbe Midon's handwriting. "Ah! he is a true friend," he murmured. "And this explains why neither my wife nor son came to visit me; and yet I doubted their energy—and was complaining of their neglect!" Intense joy filled his heart, he raised the letter that promised him life and liberty to his lips, and enthusiastically exclaimed: "To work! to work!"

He had chosen the finest of the two files which were both well tempered, and was about to attack the bars, when he fancied he heard some one open the door of the next room. Some one had opened it, certainly, and had closed it again, but without locking it. The baron could hear this person moving cautiously about. What did it all mean? Were they incarcerating some fresh prisoner, or were they stationing a spy there? Holding his breath and listening with the greatest attention, the baron now heard a singular sound, the cause of which it was quite impossible to explain. He stealthily advanced to the door that had been walled up, knelt down and peered through one of the crevices in the masonry. The sight that met his eyes amazed him. A man was standing in a corner of the room, and the baron could see the lower part of his body by the light of a large lantern which he had deposited on the floor at his feet. He was turning quickly round and round, thus unwinding a long rope which had been twined round his body as thread is wound about a bobbin. M. d'Escorval rubbed his eyes as if to assure himself that he was not dreaming. Evidently this rope was intended for him. It was to be attached to the broken bars. But how had this man succeeded in gaining admission to this room? Who could it be that enjoyed such liberty in the prison? He was not a soldier—or, at least, he did not wear a uniform. Unfortunately, the highest crevice was so situated that the baron could not see the upper part of the man's body; and despite all his efforts, he failed to distinguish the features of this friend—he judged him to be such—whose boldness verged on folly. Unable to resist his intense curiosity, M. d'Escorval was on the point of rapping against the wall to question him, when the door of the room where this man stood was impetuously thrown open. Another man entered, but his lineaments also were beyond the baron's range of vision. However, his voice could be heard quite plainly, and M. d'Escorval was seized with despair when this new comer ejaculated in a tone of intense astonishment: "Good heavens! what are you about?"

"All is discovered!" thought the baron, growing sick at heart; while to his increased surprise the man he believed to be his friend calmly continued unwinding the rope, and quietly replied: "As you see, I am freeing

myself from this burden, which I find extremely uncomfortable. There are at least sixty yards of it, I should think—and what a bundle it makes! I feared they would discover it under my cloak.”

“And what are you going to do with all this rope?” inquired the newcomer.

“I am going to hand it to the Baron d’Escorval, to whom I have already given a file. He must make his escape to-night.”

The scene was so improbable that the baron could not believe his own ears. “I can’t be awake; I must be dreaming,” he thought.

But the new-comer uttered a terrible oath, and, in an almost threatening tone, exclaimed: “We will see about that! If you have gone mad, thank God I still possess my reason! I will not permit——”

“Excuse me!” interrupted the other, coldly, “you will permit it. This is merely the result of your own—credulity. The time to say, ‘I won’t permit it,’ was when Chanlouineau asked you to allow him to receive a visit from Mademoiselle Lacheneur. Do you know what that cunning fellow wanted? Simply to give Mademoiselle Lacheneur a letter of mine, so compromising in its nature, that if it ever reaches the hands of a certain person of my acquaintance, my father and I will be obliged to reside in London for the future. Then good-bye to all our projects of an alliance between our two families!” The new-comer heaved a mighty sigh, followed by a half angry, half sorrowful exclamation; but the man with the rope, without giving him any opportunity to reply, resumed: “You, yourself, marquis, would no doubt be compromised. Were you not a chamberlain during Bonaparte’s reign? Ah, marquis! how could a man of your experience, so subtle, penetrating, and acute, allow himself to be duped by a low, ignorant peasant?”

Now M. d’Escorval understood everything. He was not dreaming; it was the Marquis de Courtornieu and Martial de Sairmeuse who were talking on the other side of the wall. The former had been so crushed by Martial’s revelation that he made no effort to oppose him. “And this terrible letter?” he groaned.

“Marie-Anne Lacheneur gave it to the Abbe Midon, who came to me and said: ‘Either the baron will escape,

or this letter will be taken to the Duke de Richelieu.' I voted for the baron's escape, I assure you. The abbe procured all that was necessary; he met me at a rendez-vous I appointed in a quiet place; he coiled all this rope round my body, and here I am."

"Then you think that if the baron escapes they will give you back your letter?"

"Most assuredly I do."

"You deluded man! Why, as soon as the baron is safe, they will demand the life of another prisoner, with the same threats."

"By no means."

"You will see."

"I shall see nothing of the kind, for a very simple reason. I have the letter now in my pocket. The abbe gave it to me in exchange for my word of honour."

M. de Courtornieu uttered an ejaculation which showed that he considered the abbe to be an egregious fool. "What!" he exclaimed. "You hold the proof, and— But this is madness! Burn this wretched letter in your lantern, and let the baron go where his slumbers will be undisturbed."

Martial's silence betrayed something like stupefaction. "Ah! so that's what you would do?" he asked at last.

"Certainly—and without the slightest hesitation."

"Ah well! I can't say that I quite congratulate you."

The sneer was so apparent that M. de Courtornieu was sorely tempted to make an angry reply. But he was not a man to yield to his first impulse—this ex-Imperial chamberlain now a *grand prevot* under His Majesty King Louis XVIII. He reflected. Should he, on account of a sharp word, quarrel with Martial—with the only suitor who had ever pleased his daughter? A quarrel and he would be left without any prospect of a son-in-law! When would heaven send him such another? And how furious Blanche would be! He concluded to swallow the bitter pill; and it was in a tone of paternal indulgence that he remarked: "I see that you are very young, my dear Martial."

The baron was still kneeling beside the partition, holding his breath in an agony of suspense, and with his right ear against one of the crevices.

"You are only twenty, my dear Martial," pursued the Marquis de Courtornieu; "you are imbued with all the

enthusiasm and generosity of youth. Complete your undertaking; I shall not oppose you; but remember that all may be discovered—and then——”

“Have no fear, sir, on that score,” interrupted the young marquis; “I have taken every precaution. Did you see a single soldier in the corridor, just now? No. That is because my father, at my request, has just assembled all the officers and guards together under pretext of ordering exceptional precautions. He is talking to them now. This gave me an opportunity to come here unobserved. No one will see me when I go out. Who, then, will dare suspect me of having any hand in the baron’s escape?”

“If the baron escapes, justice will require to know who aided him.”

Martial laughed. “If justice seeks to know, she will find a culprit of my providing. Go, now; I have told you everything. I had but one person to fear—yourself. A trusty messenger requested you to join me here. You came; you know all, you have agreed to remain neutral. I am at ease, and the baron will be safe in Piedmont when the sun rises.” He picked up his lantern, and added, gaily: “But let us go—my father can’t harangue those soldiers forever.”

“But you have not told me——” insisted M. de Courtornieu.

“I will tell you everything, but not here. Come, come!”

They went out, locking the door behind them; and then the baron rose from his knees. All sorts of contradictory ideas, doubts, and conjectures filled his mind. What could this letter have contained? Why had not Chanlouineau used it to procure his own salvation? Who would have believed that Martial would be so faithful to a promise wrested from him by threats? But this was a time for action, not for reflection. The bars were heavy, and there were two rows of them. M. d’Escorval set to work. He had supposed that the task would be difficult, but, as he almost immediately discovered, it proved a thousand times more arduous than he had expected. It was the first time that he had ever worked with a file, and he did not know how to use it. His progress was despairingly slow. Nor was that all. Though he worked as cautiously as

possible, each movement of the instrument across the iron caused a harsh, grating sound which made him tremble. What if some one overheard this noise? And it seemed to him impossible for it to escape notice, since he could plainly distinguish the measured tread of the guards, who had resumed their watch in the corridor. So slight was the result of his labours, that at the end of twenty minutes he experienced a feeling of profound discouragement. At this rate, it would be impossible for him to sever the first bar before daybreak. What, then, was the use of spending his time in fruitless labour? Why mar the dignity of death by the disgrace of an unsuccessful effort to escape?

He was hesitating when footsteps approached his cell. At once he left the window and seated himself at the table. Almost directly afterwards the door opened and a soldier entered; an officer who did not cross the threshold remarking at the same moment: "You have your instructions, corporal, keep a close watch. If the prisoner needs anything, call."

M. d'Escorval's heart throbbed almost to bursting. What was coming now? Had M. de Courtornieu's advice carried the day, or had Martial sent some one to assist him? But the door was scarcely closed when the corporal whispered: "We must not be dawdling here."

M. d'Escorval sprang from his chair. This man was a friend. Here was help and life.

"I am Bavois," continued the corporal. "Some one said to me just now: 'One of the emperor's friends is in danger; are you willing to lend him a helping hand?' I replied, 'Present,' and here I am."

This certainly was a brave fellow. The baron held out his hand, and in a voice trembling with emotion: "Thanks," said he; "thanks. What, you don't even know me, and yet you expose yourself to the greatest danger for my sake."

Bavois shrugged his shoulders disdainfully. "Positively my old hide is no more precious than yours. If we don't succeed they will chop off our heads with the same ax. But we *shall* succeed. Now, let's stop talking and proceed to business."

As he spoke he drew from under his long overcoat a strong iron crowbar and a small vial of brandy, both of

which he laid upon the bed. He then took the candle and passed it five or six times before the window.

"What are you doing?" inquired the baron in suspense.

"I am signalling to your friends that everything is progressing favourably. They are down there waiting for us; and see they are now answering." The baron looked, and three times they both perceived a little flash of flame, such as is produced by burning a pinch of gunpowder.

"Now," said the corporal, "we are all right. Let us see what progress you have made with the bars."

"I have scarcely begun," murmured M. d'Escorval.

The corporal inspected the work. "You may indeed say that you have made no progress," said he; "but never mind, I was 'prenticed to a locksmith once, and I know how to handle a file." Then drawing the cork from the vial of brandy, he fastened it to the end of one of the files, and swathed the handle of the tool with a piece of damp linen. "That's what they call putting a *stop* on the instrument," he remarked, by way of explanation. Immediately afterwards he made an energetic attack on the bars, and it was at once evident that he had by no means exaggerated either his knowledge of the task, or the efficacy of his precautions for deadening the sound. The harsh grating which had so alarmed the baron was no longer heard, and Bavois, finding he had nothing more to dread from the keenest ears, now made preparations to shelter himself from observation. Suspicion would be at once aroused if the gratings in the door were covered over, so the corporal hit upon another expedient. Moving the little table to another part of the room, he stood the candle-stick on it in such a position that the window remained entirely in shadow. Then he ordered the baron to sit down, and handing him a paper, said: "Now read aloud, without pausing for a minute, until you see me stop work."

By this method they might reasonably hope to deceive the guards outside in the corridor; some of whom, indeed did come to the door and look in; but after a brief glance they walked away, and remarked to their companions: "We have just taken a look at the prisoner. He is very pale, and his eyes are glistening feverishly. He is reading aloud to divert his mind. Corporal Bavois is looking out of the window. It must be dull music for him."

They little suspected why the baron's eyes glistened in

this feverish fashion ; and had no idea that if he read aloud it was with the view of overpowering any suspicious sound which might result from Corporal Bavois' labour. The time passed on, and while the latter worked, M. d'Escorval continued reading. He had completed the perusal of the entire paper, and was about to begin it again, when the old soldier, leaving the window, motioned him to stop.

"Half the task is completed," he said in a whisper. "The lower bars are cut."

"Ah ! how can I ever repay you for your devotion !" murmured the baron.

"Hush ! not a word !" interrupted Bavois. "If I escape with you, I can never return here ; and I shan't know where to go, for the regiment, you see, is my only family. Ah, well ! if you give me a home with you I shall be very well content." Thereupon he swallowed some of the brandy, and set to work again with renewed ardour.

He had cut one of the bars of the second row, when he was interrupted by M. d'Escorval who, without pausing in his renewed perusal, was pulling him by the coat tails to attract attention. The corporal turned round at once. "What's up ?" said he.

"I heard a singular noise just now in the adjoining room where the ropes are."

Honest Bavois muttered a terrible oath. "Do they intend to betray us ?" he asked. "I risked my life, and they promised me fair play." He placed his ear against a crevice in the partition, and listened for a long while. Nothing, not the slightest sound could be detected. "It must have been some rat that you heard," he said at last. "Go on with your reading." And he turned to his work again.

This was the only interruption, and a little before four o'clock everything was ready. The bars were cut, and the ropes, which had been drawn through an opening in the wall, were coiled under the window. The decisive moment had come. Bavois took the counterpane from the bed, fastened it over the opening in the door, and filled up the keyhole. "Now," said he, in the same measured tone he would have used in instructing a recruit, "attention ! sir, and obey the word of command."

Then he calmly explained that the escape would consist of two distinct operations ; first, one would have to

gain the narrow platform at the base of the tower; next one must descend to the foot of the precipitous rock. The abbe, who understood this, had brought Martial two ropes; the one to be used in the descent of the precipice being considerably longer than the other. "I will fasten the shortest rope under your arms," said Bavois to the baron, "and I will let you down to the base of the tower. When you have reached it I will pass you the longer rope and the crowbar. Don't miss them. If we find ourselves without them on that narrow ledge of rock, we shall either be compelled to deliver ourselves up, or throw ourselves down the precipice. I shan't be long in joining you. Are you ready?"

In reply M. d'Escorval lifted his arms, the rope was fastened securely about him, and he crawled through the window.

From above the height seemed immense. Below, in the barren fields surrounding the citadel, eight persons were waiting, silent, anxious, breathless with suspense. They were Madame d'Escorval and Maurice, Marie-Anne, the Abbe Midon, and four retired officers. There was no moon, but the night was very clear, and they could see the tower plainly. Soon after four o'clock struck from the church steeples, they perceived a dark object glide slowly down the side of the tower—this was the baron. A short interval and then another form followed rapidly—this was Bavois. Half of the perilous journey was accomplished. The watchers below could see the two figures moving about on the narrow platform. The corporal and the baron were exerting all their strength to fix the crowbar securely in a crevice of the rock. Suddenly one of the figures stepped forward and glided gently down the side of the precipice. It could be none other than M. d'Escorval. Transported with happiness, his wife sprang forward with open arms to receive him. Alas! at that same moment a terrible cry rent the still night air.

M. d'Escorval was falling from a height of fifty feet; he was being hurled to the foot of the precipice. The rope had parted. Had it broken naturally? Maurice examined it; and then with a vow of vengeance exclaimed that they had been betrayed—that their enemy had arranged to deliver only a dead body into their hands—that the rope had

been foully tampered with, intentionally cut with a knife beforehand!

XXI.

FATHER CHUPIN, the false witness and the crafty spy, had refrained from sleeping and almost from drinking ever since that unfortunate morning when the Duke de Sairmeuse affixed to the walls of Montaignac the decree in which he promised twenty thousand francs to the person who delivered up Lacheneur, dead or alive. "Twenty thousand francs," muttered the old rascal gloomily; "twenty sacks with a hundred golden pistoles in each! Ah! if I could only discover this Lacheneur, even if he were dead and buried a hundred feet under ground, I should gain the reward."

He cared nothing for the shame which such a feat would entail. His sole thought was the reward—the blood-money. Unfortunately for his greed he had nothing whatever to guide him in his researches; no clue, however vague. All that was known in Montaignac was that Lacheneur's horse had been killed at the Croix-d'Arcy. But no one could say whether Lacheneur himself had been wounded, or whether he had escaped from the fray uninjured. Had he gained the frontier? or had he found an asylum in some friend's house. Chupin was thus hungering for the price of blood, when, on the day of the baron's trial, as he was returning from the citadel, after giving his evidence, he chanced to enter a wine-shop. He was indulging in a strong potation when he suddenly heard a peasant near him mention Lacheneur's name in a low voice. This peasant was an old man who sat at an adjoining table, emptying a bottle of wine in a friend's company, and he was telling the latter that he had come to Montaignac on purpose to give Mademoiselle Lacheneur some news of her father. He said that his son-in-law had met the chief conspirator in the mountains which separate the arrondissement of Montaignac from Savoy, and he even mentioned the exact place of meeting, which was near Saint Pavin-des-Grottes, a tiny village of only a few houses. Certainly the worthy fellow did not think he was committing a dangerous indiscretion, for in his opinion Lacheneur had already crossed

the frontier, and put himself out of danger. But in this surmise he was grievously mistaken.

The frontier bordering on Savoy was guarded by soldiers, who had received orders to prevent any of the conspirators passing into Italian territory. And even if Piedmont was gained it seemed likely that the Italian authorities would themselves arrest the fugitive rebels, and hand them over to their judges. Chupin was aware of all this, and resolved to act at once. He threw a coin on the counter, and without waiting for his change, rushed back to the citadel, and asked a sergeant at the gate for pen and paper. Writing was for him usually a most laborious task, but to-day it only took him a moment to pen these lines: "I know Lacheneur's retreat, and beg monseigneur to order some mounted soldiers to accompany me, so that we may capture him."
"CHUPIN."

This letter was given to one of the guards, with a request to take it to the Duke de Sairmeuse, who was then presiding over the military commission. Five minutes later the soldier returned with the same note, on the margin of which the duke had written an order, placing a lieutenant and eight men of the Montaignac chasseurs, who could be relied upon, at Chupin's disposal. The old spy also asked the loan of a horse for his own use, and this was granted him: and the party then started off at once in the direction of St. Pavin.

When, at the finish of the final stand made by the insurgents at the Croix-d'Arcy, Lacheneur's horse received a bayonet wound in the chest, and reared and fell, burying its rider underneath; the latter lost consciousness, and it was not till some hours later that, restored by the fresh morning air, he regained his senses and was able to look about him. All he perceived was a couple of dead bodies lying some little distance off. It was a terrible moment, and in his soul he cursed the fate which had left him still alive. Had he been armed, he would no doubt have put an end to the mental tortures he was suffering by suicide—but then he had no weapon. So he must resign himself to life. Perhaps, too, the voice of honour whispered that it was cowardice to strive to escape responsibility by self-inflicted death. At last, he endeavoured to draw himself from under his horse, which proved no easy task, as his

foot was still in the stirrup, and his limbs were so cramped that he could scarcely move them. Finally, however, he succeeded in freeing himself, and, on examination, discovered that he had only one wound, inflicted by a bayonet thrust, in the left leg. It caused him considerable pain, and he was trying to bandage it with his handkerchief, when he heard the sound of approaching footsteps. He had no time for reflection; but at once darted into the forest that lies to the left of the Croix-d'Arcy. The troops were returning to Montaignac after pursuing the rebels for more than three miles. There were some two hundred soldiers, who were bringing back a score of peasants as prisoners. Crouching behind an oak tree scarcely fifteen paces from the road, Lacheneur recognized several of the captives in the grey light of dawn. It was only by the merest chance that he escaped discovery; and he fully realized how difficult it would be for him to gain the frontier without falling into the hands of the many detachments of soldiery, who were doubtless scouring the country in every direction.

Still he did not despair. The mountains lay only two leagues away; and he firmly believed that he would be able to successfully elude his pursuers could he only gain the shelter of the hills. He began his journey courageously, but soon he was obliged to admit that he had greatly over estimated his strength, which was well nigh quite exhausted by the excessive labour and excitement of the past few days, coupled with the loss of blood occasioned by his wound. He tore up a stake in an adjacent vineyard, and using it as a staff, slowly dragged himself along, keeping in the shelter of the woods as much as possible, and creeping beside the hedges and in the ditches whenever he was obliged to cross an open space. Physical suffering and mental anguish, were soon supplemented by the agony of hunger. He had eaten nothing for thirty hours, and felt terribly weak from lack of nourishment. Soon the craving for food became so intolerable that he was willing to brave anything to appease it. At last he perceived the thatched roofs of a little hamlet. He was going forward, decided to enter the first house and ask for food; the outskirts of the village were reached, and a cottage stood within a few yards—when suddenly he heard the rolling of a drum. Surmising that a party of troops was near at hand, he instinctively hid himself behind

a wall. But the drum proved to be that of a public crier summoning the village folk together; and soon he could hear a clear, penetrating voice reciting the following words: "This is to give notice that the authorities of Montaignac promise a reward of twenty thousand francs to whosoever delivers up the man known as Lacheneur, dead or alive. Dead or alive! Understand, that if he be dead, the compensation will be the same; twenty thousand francs! to be paid in gold. God save the king."

Then came another roll of the drum. But with a bound, Lacheneur had already risen; and though he had believed himself utterly exhausted, he now found superhuman strength to fly. A price had been set upon his head; and the circumstance awakened in his breast the frenzy that renders a hunted beast so dangerous. In all the villages around him he fancied he could hear the rolling of drums, and the voices of criers proclaiming him an outlaw. Go where he would now, he was a tempting bait offered to treason and cupidity. Whom could he dare confide in? Whom could he ask for shelter? And even if he were dead, he would still be worth a fortune. Though he might die from lack of nourishment and exhaustion under a bush by the way side, yet his emaciated body would still be worth twenty thousand francs. And the man who found his corpse would not give it burial. He would place it on his cart and convey it to Montaignac, present it to the authorities and say: "Here is Lacheneur's body—give me the reward."

How long and by what paths he pursued his flight, he could not tell. But several hours afterwards, while he was wandering through the wooded hills of Charves, he espied two men, who sprang up and fled at his approach. In a terrible voice, he called after them: "Eh! you fellows! do you each want to earn a thousand pistoles? I am Lacheneur."

They paused when they recognized him, and Lacheneur saw that they were two of his former followers, both of them well-to-do farmers, whom it had been difficult to induce to join in the revolt. They happened to have with them some bread and a little brandy, and they gave both to the famished man. They sat down beside him on the grass, and while he was eating they related their misfortunes. Their connection with the conspiracy had been

discovered, and soldiers were hunting for them, but they hoped to reach Italy with the help of a guide who was waiting for them at an appointed place.

Lacheneur held out his hand. "Then I am saved," said he. "Weak and wounded as I am, I should have perished, all alone."

But the two farmers did not take the hand he offered. "We ought to leave you," said the younger man gloomily, "for you are the cause of our misfortunes. You deceived us, Monsieur Lacheneur."

The leader of the revolt dared not protest; the reproach was so well deserved. However, the other farmer gave his companion a peculiar glance and suggested that they might let Lacheneur accompany them all the same. So they walked on all three together, and that same evening, after nine hours journey through the mountains, they crossed the frontier. But, in the meanwhile, many and bitter had been the reproaches they had exchanged. On being closely questioned by his companions, Lacheneur, exhausted both in mind and body, finally admitted the insincerity of his promises, by means of which he had inflamed his followers' zeal. He acknowledged that he had spread the report that Marie-Louise and the young king of Rome were concealed in Montaignac, and that it was a gross falsehood. He confessed that he had given the signal for the revolt without any chance of success, and without any precise means of action, leaving everything to chance. In short he confessed that nothing was real except the hatred, the bitter hatred he felt against the Sairmeuse family. A dozen times, at least, during this terrible confession, the peasants who accompanied him were on the point of hurling him over the precipice by the banks of which they walked. "So it was to gratify his own spite," they thought, quivering with rage, "that he set every one fighting and killing each other—that he has ruined us and driven us into exile. We'll see if he is to escape unpunished."

After crossing the frontier the fugitives repaired to the first hostelry they could find, a lonely inn, a league or so from the little village of Saint-Jean-de-Coche, and kept by a man named Balstain. It was past midnight when they rapped, but, despite the lateness of the hour, they were admitted, and ordered supper. Lacheneur, weak from loss

of blood, and exhausted by his long tramp, went off to bed, however, without eating. He threw himself on to a pallet in an adjoining room and soon fell asleep. For the first time since meeting him, the two farmers now found an opportunity to talk in private. The same idea had occurred to both of them. They believed that by delivering Lacheneur up to the authorities, they might secure pardon for themselves. Neither of them would have consented to receive a single sou of the blood-money; but they did not consider there would be any disgrace in exchanging their own lives and liberty for Lacheneur's, especially as he had so deceived them. Eventually they decided to go to Saint-Jean-de-Coche directly supper was over, and inform the Piedmontese guards.

But they reckoned without their host. They had spoken loud enough to be overheard by Balstain, the inn-keeper, who, during the day, had been told of the magnificent reward promised for Lacheneur's capture. On learning that the exhausted man, now quietly sleeping under his roof, was the famous conspirator, he was seized with a sudden thirst for gold, and whispering a word to his wife he darted through the window of a back room to run and fetch the carabineers, as the Italian gendarmes are termed. He had been gone half-an-hour or so when the two peasants left the house; for they had drunk heavily with the view of mustering sufficient courage to carry their purpose into effect. They closed the door so violently on going out that Lacheneur woke up. He rose from his bed and came into the front room, where he found the innkeeper's wife alone. "Where are my friends?" he asked, anxiously. "And where is your husband?"

Moved by sympathy, the woman tried to falter some excuse, but finding none, she threw herself at his feet, exclaiming: "Fly, save yourself—you are betrayed!"

Lacheneur rushed back into his bedroom, trying to find a weapon with which to defend himself, or a mode of egress by which he could escape unperceived. He had thought they might abandon him, but betray him—no never! "Who has sold me?" he asked, in an agitated voice.

"Your friends—the two men who supped at that table."

"That's impossible!" he retorted: for he ignored his

comrades' designs and hopes ; and could not, would not believe them capable of betraying him for lucre.

"But," pleaded the innkeeper's wife, still on her knees before him, "they have just started for Saint-Jean-de-Coche, where they mean to denounce you. I heard them say that your life would purchase theirs. They certainly mean to fetch the carabineers ; and, alas, must I also say that my own husband has gone to betray you."

Lacheneur understood everything now ! And this supreme misfortune, after all the misery he had endured, quite prostrated him. Tears gushed from his eyes, and sinking on to a chair, he murmured : "Let them come ; I am ready for them. No, I will not stir from here ! My miserable life is not worth such a struggle."

But the landlady rose, and grasping at his clothing, shook and dragged him to the door—she would have carried him had she possessed sufficient strength. "You shall not be taken here ; it will bring misfortune on our house !"

Bewildered by this violent appeal, and urged on by the instinct of self-preservation, so powerful in every human heart, Lacheneur advanced to the threshold. The night was very dark, and chilly fog intensified the gloom.

See, madame," said he, in a gentle voice, "how can I find my way through these mountains, which I do not know, where there are no roads—where the foot-paths are scarcely traced."

But Balstain's wife would not argue ; pushing him forward and turning him as one does a blind man to set him on the right track. "Walk straight before you," said she, "always against the wind. God will protect you. Farewell !"

He turned to ask further directions, but she had re-entered the house and closed the door. Upheld by a feverish excitement, he walked on during long hours. Soon he lost his way, and wandered among the mountains, benumbed with cold, stumbling over the rocks, at times falling to the ground. It was a wonder that he was not precipitated over the brink of some precipice. He had lost all idea of his whereabouts, and the sun was already high in the heavens when at last he met some one of whom he could ask his way. This was a little shepherd boy, who was looking for some stray goats, but the lad,

frightened by the stranger's wild and haggard aspect, at first refused to approach. At last the offer of a piece of money induced him to come a little nearer. "You are just on the frontier line," said he. "Here is France; and there is Savoy."

"And which is the nearest village?"

"On the Savoy side, Saint-Jean-de-Coche; on the French side, Saint-Pavin."

So after all his terrible exertions, Lacheneur was not a league from the inn. Appalled by this discovery, he remained for a moment undecided which course to pursue. Still, after all what did it matter? Was he not doomed, and would not every road lead him to death? However, at last he remembered the carabineers, the innkeeper's wife had warned him against, and slowly crawled down the steep mountain-side leading back into France. He was near Saint-Pavin, when he espied a cottage standing alone and in front of it a young peasant-woman spinning in the sunshine. He dragged himself towards her, and in a weak voice begged her hospitality.

The woman rose, surprised and somewhat alarmed by the aspect of this stranger, whose face was ghastly pale, and whose clothes were torn and soiled with dust and blood. She looked at him more closely, and then perceived that his age, stature, and features correspond with the descriptions of Lacheneur, which had been distributed round about the frontier. "Why you are the conspirator they are hunting for, and for whom they promise a reward of twenty thousand francs," she said.

Lacheneur trembled. "Yes," he replied, after a moment's hesitation; "I am Lacheneur. Betray me if you will, but in charity's name give me a morsel of bread, and allow me to rest a little."

"We betray you, sir!" said she. "Ah! you don't know the Antoinettes! Come into our house, and lie down on the bed while I prepare some refreshment for you. When my husband comes home, we will see what can be done."

It was nearly sunset when the master of the house, a sturdy mountaineer, with a frank face, entered the cottage. On perceiving the stranger seated at his fireside he turned frightfully pale. "Unfortunate woman!" he murmured to his wife, "don't you know that anyone who

shelters this fugitive will be shot, and his house levelled to the ground?"

Lacheneur overheard these words; he rose with a shudder. He knew that a price had been set upon his head, but until now he had not realised the danger to which his presence exposed these worthy people. "I will go at once," said he, gently.

But the peasant laid his broad hand kindly on the outlaw's shoulder and forced him to resume his seat. "It was not to drive you away that I said that," he remarked. "You are at home, and you shall remain here until I can find some means of ensuring your safety."

The woman flung her arms round her husband's neck, and in a loving voice, exclaimed: "Ah! you are a noble man Antoine."

He smiled, tenderly kissed her, then, pointing to the open door: "Watch!" said he, and turning to Lacheneur: "It won't be easy to save you, for the promise of that big reward has set a number of evil-minded people on the alert. They know that you are in the neighbourhood, and a rascally innkeeper has crossed the frontier for the express purpose of betraying your whereabouts to the French gendarmes."

"Balstain?"

"Yes, Balstain; and he is hunting for you now. But that's not everything, as I passed through Saint-Pavin, coming back a little while ago I saw eight mounted soldiers, with a peasant guide who was also on horse-back. They declared that they knew you were concealed in the village, and were going to search each house in turn."

These soldiers were the Montaignac chasseurs, placed at Chupin's disposal by the Duke de Sairmeuse. The task was certainly not at all to their taste, but they were closely watched by the lieutenant in command, who hoped to receive some substantial reward if the expedition was crowned with success.

But to return to Lacheneur. "Wounded and exhausted as you are," continued Antoine, "you can't possibly make a long march for a fortnight hence, and till then you must conceal yourself. Fortunately, I know a safe retreat in the mountain, not far from here. I will take you there to night, with provisions enough to last you for a week."

Just then he was interrupted by a stifled cry from his wife. He turned, and saw her fall almost fainting against the door, her face white as her linen cap, her finger pointing to the path that led from Saint-Pavin to the cottage. "The soldiers—they are coming!" she gasped.

Quicker than thought, Lacheneur and the peasant sprang to the door to see for themselves. The young woman had spoken the truth; for here came the Montaig nac chasseurs, slowly climbing the steep foot-path. Chupin walked in advance, urging them on with voice, gesture, and example. An imprudent word from the little shepherd-boy, had decided the fugitive's fate; for on returning to Saint-Pavin, and hearing that the soldiers were searching for the chief conspirator, the lad had chanced to say: "I met a man just now on the mountain who asked me where he was; and I saw him go down the foot-path leading to Antoine's cottage." And in proof of his words, he proudly displayed the piece of silver which Lacheneur had given him.

"One more bold stroke and we have our man!" exclaimed Chupin. "Come, comrades!" And now the party were not more than two hundred feet from the house in which the outlaw had found an asylum.

Antoine and his wife looked at each other with anguish in their eyes. They saw that their visitor was lost.

"We must save him! we must save him!" cried the woman.

"Yes, we must save him!" repeated the husband gloomily. "They shall kill me before I betray a man in my own house."

"If he could hide in the stable behind the bundles of straw—"

"Oh, they would find him! These soldiers are worse than tigers, and the wretch who leads them on must have a bloodhound's scent." He turned quickly to Lacheneur. "Come, sir," said he, "let us leap from the back window and fly to the mountains. They will see us, but no matter! These horsemen are always clumsy runners. If you can't run, I'll carry you. They will probably fire at us, but miss their aim."

"And your wife?" asked Lacheneur.

The honest mountaineer shuddered; still he simply said: "She will join us."

Lacheneur grasped his protector's hand. "Ah! you are a noble people," he exclaimed, "and God will reward you for your kindness to a poor fugitive. But you have done too much already. I should be the basest of men if I exposed you to useless danger. I can bear this life no longer; I have no wish to escape." Then drawing the sobbing woman to him and kissing her on the forehead. "I have a daughter, young and beautiful like yourself," he added. "Poor Marie-Anne! And I pitilessly sacrificed her to my hatred! I must not complain; come what may, I have deserved my fate."

The sound of the approaching footsteps became more and more distinct. Lacheneur straightened himself up, and seemed to be gathering all his energy for the decisive moment. "Remain inside," he said imperiously, to Antoine and his wife. "I am going out; they must not arrest me in your house." And as he spoke, he crossed the threshold with a firm tread. The soldiers were but a few paces off. "Halt!" he exclaimed, in a loud ringing voice. "Are you not seeking for Lacheneur? I am he! I surrender myself."

His manner was so dignified, his tone so impressive, that the soldiers involuntarily paused. This man before them was doomed; they knew the fate awaiting him, and seemed as awed as if they had been in the presence of death itself. One there was among the search party, whom Lacheneur's ringing words had literally terrified, and this was Chupin. Remorse filled his cowardly heart, and pale and trembling, he sought to hide himself behind the soldiers.

But Lacheneur walked straight towards him. "So it is you who have sold my life, Chupin?" he said scornfully. "You have not forgotten, I perceive, how often my daughter filled your empty larder—so now you take your revenge."

The old scoundrel seemed crushed by these words. Now that he had done this foul deed, he knew what betrayal really was. "So be it," resumed Lacheneur. "You will receive the price of my blood; but it will not bring you good fortune—traitor!"

Chupin, however, indignant with his own weakness, was already making a vigorous effort to recover a semblance of self composure. "You have conspired against the king,"

he stammered. "I only did my duty in denouncing you." And turning to the soldiers, he added: "As for you, comrades, you may be sure the Duke de Sairmeuse will remember your services."

Lacheneur's hands were bound, and the party was about to descend the slope, when a man, roughly clad, bare-headed, covered with perspiration, and panting for breath, suddenly made his appearance. The twilight was falling, but Lacheneur recognized Balstain. "Ah! you have him!" exclaimed the innkeeper, pointing to the prisoner, as soon as he was within speaking distance. "The reward belongs to me—I denounced him first on the other side of the frontier, as the carabineers at Saint-Jean-de-Coche will testify. He would have been captured last night in my house if he hadn't managed to run away in my absence. I've been following the bandit for sixteen hours." He spoke with extraordinary vehemence, being full of fear lest he might lose his reward, and only reap disgrace and obliquy in recompense for his treason.

"If you have any right to the money, you must prove it before the proper authorities," said the officer in command.

"If I have any right!" interrupted Balstain; "who contests my right, then?" He looked threateningly around him, and casting his eyes on Chupin, "Is it you?" he asked. "Do you dare to assert that you discovered the brigand?"

"Yes, it was I who discovered his hiding place."

"You lie, you impostor!" vociferated the innkeeper; "you lie!" The soldiers did not budge. This scene repaid them for the disgust they had experienced during the afternoon. "But," continued Balstain, "what else could one expect from such a knave as Chupin? Every one knows that he's been obliged to fly from France over and over again on account of his crimes. Where did you take refuge when you crossed the frontier, Chupin? In my house, in Balstain's inn. You were fed and protected there. How many times haven't I saved you from the gendarmes and the galleys? More times than I can count. And to reward me you steal my property; you steal this man who was mine——"

"The fellow's insane!" ejaculated the terrified Chupin, "he's mad!"

"At least you will be reasonable," exclaimed the innkeeper, suddenly changing his tactics. "Let's see, Chupin, what you'll do for an old friend? Divide, won't you? No, you say no? How much will you give me, comrade? A third? Is that too much? A quarter, then——"

Chupin felt that the soldiers were enjoying his humiliation. They were indeed, sneering at him, and only an instant before they had, with instinctive loathing, avoided coming in contact with him. The old knave's blood was boiling, and pushing Balstain aside, he cried to the chasseurs:—"Come—are we going to spend the night here?"

On hearing these words, Balstain's eyes sparkled with revengeful fury, and suddenly drawing his knife from his pocket and making the sign of the cross in the air: "Saint-Jean-de-Coche," he exclaimed, in a ringing voice, "and you, Holy Virgin, hear my vow. May my soul burn in hell if I ever use a knife at meals until I have plunged the one I now hold, into the heart of the scoundrel who has defrauded me!" With these words he hurried away into the woods, and the soldiers took up their line of march.

But Chupin was no longer the same. His impudence had left him and he walked along with hanging head, his mind full of sinister presentiments. He felt sure that such an oath as Balstain's, and uttered by such a man, was equivalent to a death warrant, or at least to a speedy prospect of assassination. The thought tormented him so much indeed, that he would not allow the detachment to spend the night at Saint-Pavin, as had been agreed upon. He was impatient to leave the neighbourhood. So after supper he procured a cart; the prisoner was placed in it, securely bound, and the party started for Montaignac. The great bell was tolling two in the morning when Lacheneur was conducted into the citadel; and at that very moment M. d'Escorval and Corporal Bavois were making their final preparations for escape.

XXII.

ON being left alone in his cell after Marie-Anne's departure, Chanlouineau gave himself up to despair. He loved Marie-Anne most passionately, and the idea that he

would never see her again on earth proved heart-rending. Some little comfort he certainly derived from the thought that he had done his duty, that he had sacrificed his own life to secure her happiness, but then this result had only been obtained by simulating the most abject cowardice, which must disgrace him for ever in the eyes of his fellow prisoners, and the guards. Had he not offered to sell Lacheneur's life for his own moreover. True it was but a ruse, and yet those who knew nothing of his secret would always brand him as a traitor and a coward. To a man of his true valiant heart such a prospect was particularly distressing, and he was still brooding over the idea when the Marquis de Courtoineau entered his cell to ascertain the result of Marie-Anne's visit. "Well, my good fellow——" began the old nobleman, in his most condescending manner; but Chanlouineau did not allow him time to finish. "Leave," he cried, in a fit of rage. "Leave or——"

Without waiting to hear the end of the sentence the marquis made his escape, greatly surprised and not a little dismayed by this sudden change in the prisoner's manner. "What a dangerous bloodthirsty rascal!" he remarked to the guard. "It would, perhaps, be advisable to put him into a strait-jacket!"

But there was no necessity for that; for scarcely had the marquis left, than the young farmer threw himself on to his pallet, oppressed with feverish anxiety. Would Marie-Anne know how to make the best use of the weapon he had placed in her hands? He hoped so, for she would have the Abbe Midon's assistance, and besides he considered that the possession of this letter would frighten the Marquis de Sairmeuse into any concessions. In this last surmise Chanlouineau was entirely mistaken. The fear which Martial seemingly evinced during the interview with Marie-Anne and his father was all affected. He pretended to be alarmed, in order to frighten the duke, for he really wished to assist the girl he so passionately loved, and besides the idea of saving an enemy's life, of wresting him from the executioner on the very steps of the scaffold, was very pleasing to his mind which at times took a decidedly chivalrous turn. Poor Chanlouineau, however, was ignorant of all this, and consequently his anxiety was perfectly natural. Throughout the afternoon

he remained in anxious suspense, and when the night fell, stationed himself at the window of his cell gazing on to the plain below, and trusting that if the baron succeeded in escaping, some sign would warn him of the fact. Marie-Anne had visited him, she knew the cell he occupied and surely she would find some means of letting him know that his sacrifice had not been in vain. Shortly after two o'clock in the morning he was alarmed by a great bustle in the corridor outside. Doors were thrown open, and then slammed to; there was a loud rattle of keys; guards hurried to and fro, calling each other; the passage was lighted up, and then as Chanlouineau peered through the grating in the door of his cell he suddenly perceived Lacheneur as pale as a ghost walk by conducted by some soldiers. The young farmer almost doubted his eyesight; for he really believed his former leader had escaped. Another hour, and another hour passed by and yet did he prolong his anxious vigil. Not a sound, save the tramp of the guards in the corridor, and the faint echo of some distant challenge as sentinels were relieved outside. At last, however, there abruptly came a despairing cry. What was it? He listened; but it was not repeated. After all the occurrence was not so surprising. There were twenty men in that citadel under sentence of death, and the agony of that their last night, might well call forth a lamentation. At length the grey light of dawn stole through the window bars, the sun rose rapidly and Chanlouineau, hopeful for some sign, till then murmured in despair, that the letter must have been useless. Poor generous peasant! His heart would have leapt with joy if as he spoke those words he could only have cast a glance on the court-yard of the citadel.

An hour after the *reveille* had sounded, two country-women, carrying butter and eggs to market, presented themselves at the fortress gate, and declared that while passing through the fields below the cliff on which the citadel was built, they had perceived a rope dangling from the side of the rock. A rope! Then one of the condemned prisoners must have escaped. The guards hastened from cell to cell and soon discovered that the Baron d'Escorval's room was empty. And not merely had the baron fled, but he had taken with him the man who had been left to guard him—Corporal Bavois, of the

grenadiers. Everyone's amazement was intense, but their fright was still greater. There was not a single officer who did not tremble on thinking of his responsibility; not one who did not see his hopes of advancement forever blighted. What should be said to the formidable Duke de Sairmeuse and to the Marquis de Courtornieu, who in spite of his calm polished manners, was almost as much to be feared? It was necessary to warn them, however, and so a sergeant was despatched with the news. Soon they made their appearance, accompanied by Martial; and to look at all three it would have been said that they were boiling over with anger and indignation. The Duke de Sairmeuse's rage was especially conspicuous. He swore at everybody, accused everybody, and threatened everybody. He began by consigning all the keepers and guards to prison, and even talked of demanding the dismissal of all the officers. "As for that miserable Bavois," he exclaimed—"as for that cowardly deserter, he shall be shot as soon as we capture him, and we will capture him, you may depend upon it!"

The officials had hoped to appease the duke's wrath a little, by informing him of Lacheneur's arrest; but he knew of this already, for Chupin had ventured to wake him up in the middle of the night to tell him the great news. The baron's escape afforded his grace an opportunity to exalt Chupin's merits. "The man who discovered Lacheneur will know how to find this traitor D'Escorval," he remarked.

As for M. de Courtornieu, he took what he called "measures for restoring this great culprit to the hands of justice." That is to say, he despatched couriers in every direction, with orders to make close inquiries throughout the neighbourhood. His commands were brief, but to the point; they were to watch the frontier, to submit all travellers to a rigorous examination, to search the houses and sow the description of D'Escorval's appearance broadcast through the land. But first of all he issued instructions for the arrest of the Abbe Midon and Maurice d'Escorval.

Among the officers present there was an old lieutenant, who had felt deeply wounded by some of the imputations which the Duke de Sairmeuse had cast right and left in his affected wrath. This lieutenant heard the Marquis de Courtornieu give his orders, and then stepped forward with a gloomy air, remarking that these measures were doubtless

all very well, but at the same time it was urgent that an investigation should take place at once, so as to learn for certain how the baron had escaped and who were his accomplices if he had any. At the mention of this word "investigation," both the Duke de Sairmeuse and the Marquis de Courtornieu shuddered. They could not ignore the fact that their reputations were at stake, and that the merest trifle might disclose the truth. A neglected precaution, any insignificant detail, an imprudent word or gesture might ruin their ambitious hopes forever. They trembled to think that this officer might be a man of unusual shrewdness, who had suspected their simplicity, and was impatient to verify his presumptions. In point of fact, they were unnecessarily alarmed, for the old lieutenant had not the slightest suspicion of the truth. He had spoken on the impulse of the moment, merely to give vent to his displeasure. He was not even keen enough to remark a rapid glance which the duke and the marquis exchanged. Martial noticed this look, however, and with studied politeness, remarked: "Yes we must institute an investigation; that suggestion is as shrewd as it is opportune."

The old lieutenant turned away with a muttered oath. "That coxcomb is poking fun at me," he thought; "and he and his father and that prig the marquis deserve a box on the ears."

In reality, however, Martial was not poking fun at him. Bold as was his remark it was made advisedly. To silence all future suspicions it was absolutely necessary that an investigation should take place immediately. But then it would, by reason of their position and functions, naturally devolve on the duke and the marquis, who would know just how much to conceal, and how much to disclose. They began their task immediately, with a haste which could not fail to dispel all doubts, if indeed any existed in the minds of their subordinates.

Martial thought he knew the details of the escape as well as the fugitives themselves, for even if they had been the actors, he was at any rate the author of the drama played that night. However, he was soon obliged to admit that he was mistaken in his opinion; for the investigation revealed several incomprehensible particulars. It had been determined beforehand that the baron and the corporal would have to make two successive descents. Hence

the necessity of having two ropes. These ropes had been provided, and the prisoners must have used them. And yet only one rope could be found—the one which the peasant woman had perceived hanging from the rocky platform at the base of the citadel where it was made fast to an iron crowbar. From the window of the cell, to the platform, there was no rope, however. “This is most extraordinary!” murmured Martial, thoughtfully.

“Very strange!” approved M. de Courtornieu.

“How the devil could they have reached the base of the tower?”

“That is what I can’t understand.”

But Martial soon found other causes for surprise. On examining the rope that remained—the one which had been used in making the descent of the cliff—he discovered that it was not of a single piece. Two pieces had been knotted together. The longest piece had evidently been too short. How did this happen? Could the duke have made a mistake in the height of the cliff? or had the abbe measured the rope incorrectly? But Martial had also measured it with his eye, while it was wound round him, and it had then seemed to him that the rope was much longer, fully a third longer, than it now appeared.

“There must have been some accident,” he remarked to his father and the marquis; “what I can’t say.”

“Well, what does it matter?” replied M. de Courtornieu, “you have the compromising letter, haven’t you?”

But Martial’s mind was one of these that never rest, until they have solved the problem before them. Accordingly, he insisted on going to inspect the rocks at the foot of the precipice. Here they discovered several stains, formed of coagulated blood. “One of the fugitives must have fallen,” said Martial, quickly, “and been dangerously wounded!”

“Upon my word!” exclaimed the Duke de Sairmeuse, “if it is the Baron d’Escorval, who has broken his neck, I shall be delighted!”

Martial turned crimson, and look searchingly at his father. “I suppose, sir, that you do not mean one word of what you are saying,” he observed, coldly. “We pledged ourselves upon the honour of our name, to save the baron. If he has been killed it will be a great misfortune for us, a very great misfortune.”

When his son addressed him in this haughty freezing tone of his, the duke never knew how to reply. He was indignant, but his son's was the stronger nature.

"Nonsense!" exclaimed M. de Courtornieu; "if the rascal had merely been wounded we should have known it."

Such also was Chupin's opinion. He had been sent for by the duke, and had just made his appearance. But the old scoundrel, usually so loquacious and officious, now replied in the briefest fashion; and, strange to say, he did not offer his services. His habitual assurance and impudence, and his customary cunning smile, had quite forsaken him; and in lieu thereof his brow was overcast, and his manners strangely perturbed. So marked was the change that even the Duke de Sairmeuse observed it. "What misfortune have you had Master Chupin?" he asked.

"Why, while I was coming here," replied the old knave in a sullen tone, "a band of ragamuffins pelted me with mud and stones, and ran after me, shouting, 'Traitor! traitor!' as loud as they could." He clenched his fists, as he spoke, as if he were meditating vengeance; then suddenly he added: "The people of Montaignac are quite pleased this morning. They know that the baron has escaped, and they are rejoicing."

Alas! the joy which Chupin spoke of, was destined to be of short duration, for the execution of the conspirators sentenced on the preceding afternoon was to take place that very day. At noon the gate of the citadel was closed, and the drums rolled loudly as a preface to the coming tragedy. Consternation spread through the town. Doors were carefully secured, shutters closed, and window-blinds pulled down. The streets became deserted, and a death-like silence prevailed. At last, just as three o'clock was striking, the gate of the fortress was re-opened, and under the lofty archway came fourteen doomed men, each with a priest by his side. One and twenty had been condemned to death, but the Baron d'Escorval had eluded the executioner, and remorse or fear had tempered the Duke de Sairmeuse's thirst for blood. He and M. de Courtornieu had granted reprieves to six of the prisoners, and at that very moment a courier was starting for Paris with six petitions for pardon, signed by the military commission.

Chanlouineau was not among those for whom royal clemency was solicited. When he left his cell, without

knowing whether his plan for saving the Baron d'Escorval, had proved of any use or not, he counted and examined his thirteen comrades with keen anxiety. His eyes betrayed such an agony of anguish that the priest who accompanied him asked him in a whisper. "Who are you looking for, my son?"

"For the Baron d'Escorval."

"He escaped last night."

"Ah! now I shall die content!" exclaimed the heroic peasant. And he died as he had sworn he would—without even changing colour—calm and proud, the name of Marie-Anne upon his lips.

There was one woman, a fair young girl, who was not in the least degree affected by the tragic incidents attending the repression of the Montaignac revolt. This was Blanche de Courtornieu, who smiled as brightly as ever, and who, although her father exercised almost dictatorial power in conjunction with the Duke de Sairmeuse, did not raise as much as her little finger to save any one of the condemned prisoners from execution. These rebels had dared to stop her carriage on the public road, and this was an offence which she could neither forgive nor forget. She also knew that she had only owed her liberty to Marie-Anne's intercession, and to a woman of such jealous pride this knowledge was galling in the extreme. Hence, it was with bitter resentment that, on the morning following her arrival in Montaignac, she denounced to her father what she styled that Lacheneur girl's inconceivable arrogance, and the peasantry's frightful brutality. And when the Marquis de Courtornieu asked her if she would consent to give evidence against the Baron d'Escorval, she coldly replied that she considered it was her duty to do so. She was fully aware that her testimony would send the baron to the scaffold, and yet she did not hesitate a moment. True, she carefully concealed her personal spite, and declared she was only influenced by the interests of justice. Impartiality compels us to add, moreover, that she really believed the Baron d'Escorval to be a leader of the rebels. Chanoluineau had pronounced the name in her presence, and her error was all the more excusable as Maurice was usually known in the neighbourhood by his Christian name. Had the young farmer called to "Monsieur Maurice" for instructions, Blanche would have understood the situation,

but he had exclaimed, "M. d'Escorval," and hence her mistake.

After she had delivered to her father her written statement of what occurred on the highroad on the night of the revolt, the heiress assumed an attitude of seeming indifference, and when any of her friends chanced to speak of the rising, she alluded to the plebian conspirators in tones of proud disdain. In her heart, however, she blessed this timely outbreak, which had removed her rival from her path. "For now," thought she, "the marquis will return to me, and I will make him forget the bold creature who bewitched him!" In this she was somewhat mistaken. True, Martial returned and paid his court, but he no longer loved her. He had detected the calculating ambition she had sought to hide under a mask of seeming simplicity. He had realised how vain and selfish she was, and his former admiration was now well nigh transformed into repugnance; for he could but contrast her character with the noble nature of Marie-Anne, now lost to him for ever. It was mainly the knowledge that Lacheneur's daughter could never be his which prompted him to a seeming reconciliation with Blanche. He said to himself that the duke, his father, and the Marquis de Courtornieu had exchanged a solemn pledge; that he, too, had given his word, and that after all Blanche was his promised wife. Was it worth while to break off the engagement? Would he not be compelled to marry some day or another? His rank and name required him to do so, and such being the case what did it matter who he married, since the only woman he had ever truly loved—the only woman he ever could love—was never to be his? To a man of Martial's education it was no very difficult task to pay proper court to the jealous Blanche, to surround her with every attention, and to affect a love he did not really feel; and, indeed, so perfectly did he play his part, that Mademoiselle de Courtornieu might well flatter herself with the thought that she reigned supreme in his affections.

While Martial seemed wholly occupied with thoughts of his approaching marriage, he was really tortured with anxiety as to the fate which had overtaken the Baron d'Escorval and the other fugitives. The three members of the D'Escorval family, the abbe, Marie-Anne, Corporal Bavois, and four half-pay officers, had all disappeared, leaving no

trace behind them. This was very remarkable, as the search prescribed by MM. de Sairmeuse and Courtornieu had been conducted with feverish activity, greatly to the terror of its promoters. Still what could they do? They had imprudently excited the zeal of their subordinates, and now they were unable to allay it. Fortunately, however, all the efforts to discover the fugitives proved unsuccessful; and the only information that could be obtained came from a peasant, who declared that on the morning of the escape, just before day-break, he had met a party of a dozen persons, men and women, who seemed to be carrying a dead body. This circumstance, taken in connection with the broken rope and the stains of blood at the bottom of the cliff, made Martial tremble. He was also strongly impressed by another circumstance, which came to light when the soldiers on guard the night of the escape were questioned as to what transpired. "I was on guard in the corridor communicating with the prisoner's quarters in the tower," said one of these soldiers, "when at about half-past two o'clock, just after Lacheneur had been placed in his cell, I saw an officer approaching me. I challenged him; he gave me the countersign, and, naturally, I let him pass. He went down the passage, and entered the empty room next to M. d'Escorval's. He remained there about five minutes.

"Did you recognize this officer?" asked Martial eagerly.

"No," answered the soldier. "He wore a large cloak, the collar of which was turned up so high that it hid his face to the very eyes."

"Who could this mysterious officer have been?" thought Martial, racking his brains. "What was he doing in the room where I left the ropes?"

The Marquis de Courtornieu, present at the examination, seemed much disturbed. Turning to the witness he asked him angrily, "How could you be ignorant that there were so many sympathizers with this movement among the garrison? You might have known that this visitor, who concealed his face so carefully, was an accomplice warned by Bavois, who had come to see if he needed a helping hand."

This seemed a plausible explanation, but it did not satisfy Martial. "It is very strange," he thought, "that M d'Escorval has not even deigned to let me know he is in

safety. The service I rendered him deserves that acknowledgment, at least."

Such was the young marquis's anxiety, that despite his repugnance for Chupin the spy, he resolved to seek that archtraitor's assistance, with the view of discovering what had become of the fugitives. It was no longer easy, however, to secure the old rascal's services, for since he had received the price of Lacheneur's blood—these twenty thousand francs which had so fascinated him—he had deserted the Duke of Sairmeuse's house, and taken up his quarters in a small inn at the outskirts of the town; where he spent his days alone in a large room on the second floor. At night-time he barricaded the door, and drank, drank, drank; and till daybreak he might be heard cursing and singing, or struggling against imaginary enemies. Still he dared not disobey the summons which a soldier brought him to hasten to the Hotel de Sairmeuse at once.

"I wish to discover what has become of the Baron d'Escorval," said Martial when the old spy arrived.

Chupin trembled, and a fleeting colour dyed his cheeks. "The Montaignac police are at your disposal," he answered sulkily. "They, perhaps, can satisfy your curiosity, Monsieur le Marquis, but I don't belong to the police."

Was he in earnest, or was he merely simulating a refusal with the view of obtaining a high price for his services? Martial inclined to the latter opinion. "You shall have no reason to complain of my generosity," said he. "I will pay you well."

That word "pay" would have made Chupin's eyes gleam with delight a week before, but on hearing it now he at once flew into a furious passion. "So it was to tempt me again that you summoned me here!" he exclaimed. "You would do much better to leave me quietly at my inn."

"What do you mean, you fool?"

But Chupin did not even hear the interruption. "People told me," quoth he, with increasing fury, "that, by betraying Lacheneur, I should be doing my duty and serving the king. I betrayed him, and now I am treated as if I had committed the worst of crimes. Formerly, when I lived by stealing and poaching, folks despised me, perhaps; but they didn't shun me as they did the pestilence. They called me rascal, robber, and the like; but they would

drink with me all the same. To-day, I've twenty thousand francs in my pocket, and yet I'm treated as if I were a venomous beast. If I approach any one he draws back, and if I enter a room, those who are there hasten out of it." At the recollection of the insults heaped upon him since Lacheneur's capture, the old rascal's rage reached a climax. "Was what I did so abominable?" he pursued. "Then why did your father propose it? The shame should fall on him. He shouldn't have tempted a poor man with wealth like that. If, on the contrary, I did my duty, let them make laws to protect me."

Martial perceived the necessity of reassuring this troubled mind. "Chupin, my boy," said he, "I don't ask you to discover M. d'Escorval in order to denounce him; far from it—I only want you to ascertain if any one at Saint-Pavin, or at Saint-Jean-de-Coche, knows of his having crossed the frontier."

The mention of Saint-Jean-de-Coche made Chupin shudder. "Do you want me to be murdered?" he exclaimed, remembering Balstain's vow. "I must let you know that I value my life now that I'm rich." And seized with a sort of panic he fled precipitately.

Martial was stupefied with astonishment. "One might really suppose that the rascal was sorry for what he had done," thought he.

If that were really the case, Chupin was not the only person afflicted with qualms of conscience, for both M. de Courtornieu and the Duke de Sairmeuse were secretly blaming themselves for the exaggeration of their first reports, and the manner in which they had magnified the proportions of the rebellion. They accused each other of undue haste, of neglecting the proper forms of process, and had to admit in their hearts that the sentences were most unjust. They each tried to make the other responsible for the blood which had been spilt; and were certainly doing all that they could to obtain a pardon for the six prisoners who had been reprieved. But their efforts did not succeed; for one night a courier arrived at Montaignac, bearing the following laconic despatch: "The twenty-one convicted prisoners must all be executed." That is to say, the Duke de Richelieu, and M. Decazes, with their colleagues of the council of ministers, had decided that the petitions for clemency must be refused.

This despatch was a terrible blow for the Duke de Sairmeuse and M. de Courtornieu. They knew, better than any one else, how little these poor fellows were deserving of death. They knew it would soon be publicly proved that two of these six men had taken no part whatever in the conspiracy. What was to be done? Martial wished his father to resign his authority; but the duke had not the strength of mind to do so. Besides, M. de Courtornieu encouraged him to retain his functions, remarking, that no doubt all this was very unfortunate, but, since the wine was drawn, it was necessary to drink it; indeed, his grace could not now draw back without causing a terrible scandal.

Accordingly, the next day a dismal roll of drums was heard again, and the six doomed men, two of whom were known to be innocent, were led outside the walls of the citadel and shot, on the same spot where, only a week before, fourteen of their comrades had fallen.

The prime mover in the conspiracy had not, however, yet been tried. He had fallen into a state of gloomy despondency, which lasted during his whole term of imprisonment. He was terribly broken, both in body and mind. Once only did the blood mount to his pallid cheeks, and that was on the morning when the Duke de Sairmeuse entered the cell to examine him. "It was you who drove me to do what I did," exclaimed Lacheneur. "God sees us, and judges us both!"

Unhappy man! his faults had been great: his chastisement was terrible. He had sacrificed his children on the altar of his wounded pride; and did not even have the consolation of pressing them to his heart and of asking their forgiveness before he died. Alone in his cell, he could not turn his mind from his son and daughter; but such was the terrible situation in which he had placed himself that he dared not ask what had become of them. Through a compassionate keeper, however, he learned that nothing had been heard of Jean, and that it was supposed Marie-Anne had escaped to some foreign country with the D'Escorval family. When summoned before the court for trial, Lacheneur was calm and dignified in manner. He made no attempt at defence, but answered every question with perfect frankness. He took all the blame upon himself, and would not give the name of any one accomplice.

Condemned to be beheaded, he was executed on the following day, walking to the scaffold and mounting to the platform with a firm step. A few seconds later the blade of the guillotine fell with a loud whirr, and the rebellion of the fourth of March counted its twenty-first victim.

That same evening the townsfolk of Montaignac were busy talking of the magnificent rewards which were to be bestowed on the Duke de Sairmeuse and the Marquis de Courtornieu, for their services to the royal cause, and a report was flying abroad to the effect that Martial and Made-moiselle Blanche were now to be married with great pomp, and with as little delay as possible.

XXIII.

AFTER Lacheneur had been executed, the co-dictators, regretting, as we have already said, the precipitation with which they had sentenced many of the minor partisans of the revolt, sought to propitiate public opinion by treating the remaining prisoners with unexpected clemency. Out of a hundred peasants still confined in the citadel, only eighteen or twenty were tried, and the sentences pronounced upon them were light in the extreme; all the others were released. Major Carini, the leader of the military conspirators in Montaignac, had expected to lose his head, but to his own astonishment he was only sentenced to two years' imprisonment. This tardy indulgence did not, however, efface popular recollections of previous severity, and the townsfolk of Montaignac openly declared that if MM. de Sairmeuse and de Courtornieu were clement, it was only because they were afraid of the consequences that might await continued tyranny. So thus it came to pass that people execrated them for their past cruelty, and despised them for their subsequent cowardice. However, both the duke and the marquis were ignorant of the true current of public opinion, and hurried on with their preparations for their children's wedding. It was arranged that the ceremony should take place on the 17th of April, at the village church of Sairmeuse, and that a grand entertainment should be given to the guests in the duke's chateau, which was indeed transformed into a fairy palace for the occasion.

A new priest, who had taken the Abbe Midon's place, celebrated the nuptial mass, and then addressed the newly-wedded pair in congratulatory terms. "You will be, you *must* be happy!" he exclaimed in conclusion, fully believing for the moment that he spoke the words of prophecy. And who would not have believed as he did? Where could two young people be found more richly dowered with all the attributes of worldly happiness—youth, health, opulence, and rank. And yet although the new marchioness's eyes sparkled joyfully, the bridegroom seemed strangely preoccupied. Blanche was before him radiant with beauty, proud with success; but his mind, despite all efforts, wandered back to Marie-Anne—to the Marie-Anne he had lost, who had disappeared, whom he might never behold again. "Ah! if she had but loved him," thought Martial, "what happiness would have been his. But now he was bound for life to a woman whom he did not love."

At dinner, however, he succeeded in shaking off his sadness, thanks, perhaps, to the exhilarating influence of several glasses of champagne, and when the guests rose from table he had almost forgotten his forebodings. He was rising in his turn, when a servant approached him and whispered: "There is a young peasant in the hall who wishes to speak with Monsieur le Marquis. He would not give me his name."

"Wouldn't give his name?" ejaculated Martial. "Ah, well, on one's wedding-day one must grant an audience to everybody." And with a smile he descended the staircase. Beside the fragrant flowering plants with which the vestibule was lined, he found a young man with a pale face, whose eyes glittered with feverish brilliancy. On recognising him Martial could not restrain an exclamation of surprise. "Jean Lacheneur!" he exclaimed; "you imprudent fellow!"

Young Lacheneur stepped forward. "You thought you were rid of me," he said, bitterly. "But you see you were mistaken. However, you can order your people to arrest me if you choose."

Martial's brow lowered on hearing these insulting words. "What do you want?" he asked coldly.

"I am to give you this on behalf of Maurice d'Escorval," replied Jean, drawing a letter from his pocket.

With an eager hand, Martial broke the seal; but scarcely had he glanced at the contents than he turned as pale as death and staggered back, exclaiming, "Infamous!"

"What am I to say to Maurice," insisted Jean. "What do you intend to do?"

"Come—you shall see," replied the young marquis, seizing Jean by the arm and dragging him up the staircase. The expression of Martial's features had so changed during his brief absence that the wedding guests looked at him with astonishment when he re-entered the grand saloon holding an open letter in one hand, and leading with the other a young peasant whom no one recognised. "Where is my father?" he asked, in a husky voice; "where is the Marquis de Courtornieu?"

The duke and the marquis were with Blanche in a little drawing-room leading out of the main hall. Martial hastened there, followed by a crowd of wondering guests, who, foreseeing a stormy scene, were determined to witness it. He walked straight towards M. de Courtornieu, who was standing by the fire-place, and handing him the letter: "Read!" said he, in a threatening voice.

M. de Courtornieu mechanically obeyed the injunction; but suddenly he turned livid; the paper trembled in his hands: he averted his glance, and was obliged to lean against the mantelpiece for support. "I don't understand," he stammered: "no, I don't understand."

The duke and Blanche had both sprung forward. "What is the matter?" they both asked in one breath; "what has happened?"

Martial's reply was to tear the letter from the Marquis de Courtornieu's hands, and to turn to his father with these words: "Listen to this note I have just received."

Three hundred people were assembled in the room, or clustering round the doorway, but the silence was so perfect that Martial's voice reached the farthest extremity of the grand hall as he read: "Monsieur le Marquis—Upon the honour of your name, and in exchange for a dozen lines that threatened you with ruin, you promised us the Baron d'Escorval's life. You did, indeed, bring the ropes by which he was to make his escape, but they had been previously cut, and my father was precipitated on to the rocks below. You have forfeited your honour, sir. You have soiled your name with opprobrium, and while a drop of blood

remains in my veins, I will leave no means untried to punish you for your cowardice and treason. By killing me you would, it is true, escape the chastisement I am reserving for you. I challenge you to fight with me. Shall I wait for you to-morrow on La Reche? At what hour? With what weapons? If you are the vilest of men, you can appoint a meeting, and then send your gendarmes to arrest me. That would be an act worthy of you.

“MAURICE D’ESCORVAL.”

On hearing these words the Duke de Sairmeuse was seized with despair. He saw the secret of the baron’s flight made public, and his own political prospects ruined. “Hush!” he hurriedly exclaimed in a low voice; “hush, wretched fellow, you will ruin us!”

But Martial did not even seem to hear him. He finished his perusal, and then looking the Marquis de Courtornieu full in the face: “*Now*, what do you think?” he asked

“I am still unable to comprehend,” replied the old nobleman, coldly.

Martial raised his hand; and every one present believed that he was about to strike his father-in-law. “You don’t comprehend,” he exclaimed sarcastically. “Ah, well, if *you* don’t, *I* do. I know who that officer was who entered the room where I deposited the ropes—and I know what took him there.” He paused, crumpled the letter between his hands, and threw it in M. de Courtornieu’s face, with these last words: “Here, take your reward, you cowardly traitor!”

Overwhelmed by this denouement the marquis sank back into an armchair, and Martial, still holding Jean Lacheneur by the arm, was on the point of leaving the room, when his young wife, wild with despair, tried to detain him. “You shall not go!” she exclaimed, “you cannot! Where are you going? That young fellow with you is Jean Lacheneur. I recognize him. You want to join his sister—your mistress!”

Martial indignantly pushed his wife aside. “How dare you insult the noblest and purest of women,” he exclaimed. “Ah, well—yes—I am going to find Marie-Anne. Farewell!” And with these words he left the chateau.

XXIV.

THE ledge of rock on which the Baron d'Escorval and Corporal Bavois rested on descending from the tower was not more than a yard and a half across its widest part. It sloped down towards the edge of the precipice, and its surface was so rugged and uneven that it was considered very imprudent to stand there, even in the daytime. Thus it will be understood that the task of lowering a man from this ledge, at dead of night, was perilous in the extreme. Before allowing the baron to descend, Bavois took every possible precaution to save himself from being dragged over the verge of the precipice by his companion's weight. He fixed his crowbar firmly in a crevice of the rock, seated himself, braced his feet against the bar, threw his shoulders well back, and then feeling that his position was secure he bid the baron let himself down. The sudden parting of the rope hurled the corporal against the tower wall, and then he rebounded forward on his knees. For an instant he hung suspended over the abyss, his hands clutching at the empty air. A hasty movement, and he would have fallen. But he possessed a marvellous power of will, and had faced danger so often in his life that he was able to restrain himself. Prudently, but with determined energy, he screwed his feet and knees into the crevices of the rock, feeling with his hands for some point of support; then gradually sinking on to one side, he at last succeeded in dragging himself from the verge of the precipice.

The effort had been a terrible one, his limbs were quite cramped, and he was obliged to sit down and rest himself. He fully believed that the baron had been killed by his fall, but this catastrophe did not produce much effect upon the old soldier, who had seen so many comrades fall by his side on fields of battle. What did amaze him, however, was the breaking of the rope—a rope so thick that one would have supposed it capable of sustaining the weight of ten men like the baron. It was too dark to examine the fragment remaining in his possession, but on feeling it at the lower end with his finger, the corporal was surprised to find it quite smooth and even, not rough and ragged as is usual after a break. "It must have been cut—yes cut nearly through," exclaimed Bavois with an oath. And at

the same time a previous incident recurred to his mind. "This," thought he, "explains the noise which the poor baron heard in the next room! And I said to him: 'Nonsense! it is a rat!'"

With the view of verifying his conjectures, Bavois passed the cord round about the crowbar and pulled at it with all his strength. It parted in three places. The discovery appalled him. A part of the rope had fallen with the baron, and it was evident that the remaining fragments even if tied together would not be long enough to reach the base of the rock. What was to be done? How could he escape? If he could not descend the precipice he must remain on the ledge from which there was no other mode of escape. "It's all up, corporal," he murmured to himself. "At daybreak they will find the baron's cell empty. They will poke their heads out of the window, and see you here perched like a stone saint on his pedestal. Of course you'll be captured, tried, and condemned, and have to take your turn in the ditches. Ready! Aim! Fire! That'll be the end of your story."

He stopped short, for a vague idea had just entered his mind, which he felt might lead to salvation. It had come to him in touching the rope which he and the baron had used in their descent from the latter's cell to the rocky ledge, and which, firmly attached to the bars above hung down the side of the tower. "If you had that rope which hangs there, corporal," said he, you could tie it to these bits, and then the cord would be long enough to take you down the precipice. But how can one obtain it? If one goes back after it, one can't bring it down and come down again ones' self at the same time. He pondered for a moment and then began talking to himself again. "Attention, corporal," said he. "You are going to knot the five pieces of rope you've got here together, and you're going to fasten them to your waist; next you're going to climb up to that window, hand over hand. Not an easy matter! A staircase would be preferable. But no matter, you mustn't be finical, corporal. So you will climb up and find yourself in the cell again. What are you going to do there? A mere nothing. You will unfasten the cord secured to the window bars, you will tie it to this one and that will give you eighty feet of good strong rope. Then you will pass the rope about one of

the bars that remain intact, you will tie the two ends together, and then the rope will be doubled. Next you must let yourself down here again, and when you are here, you will only have to untie one of the knots, and the rope will be at your service. Do you understand, corporal?"

The corporal did understand so well that in less than twenty minutes he was back again upon the narrow shelf of rock, having successfully accomplished the dangerous feat which he had planned. Not without a terrible effort, however, not without torn and bleeding hands and knees. Still he had succeeded in obtaining the rope, and now he was certain that he could make his escape from his dangerous position. He was chuckling gleefully at the prospect when suddenly he bethought himself of M. d'Escorval whom he had forgotten first in his anxiety, and then in his joy. "Poor baron," murmured the corporal remorsefully. "I shall succeed in saving my miserable life, for which no one cares, but I was unable to save his. No doubt, by this time his friends have carried him away."

As he uttered these words he leant forward, and to his intense amazement perceived a faint light moving here and there in the depths below. What could have happened? Something extraordinary, that was evident; or else intelligent men like the baron's friends would never have displayed this light, which, if noticed from the citadel, would betray their presence and ruin them. However, the corporal's time was too precious to be wasted in idle conjectures. "Better go down on the double-quick," he said aloud, as if to spur on his courage. "Come, my friend, spit on your hands and be off!"

As he spoke the old soldier threw himself flat on his belly and crawled slowly backwards to the verge of the precipice. The spirit was strong, but the flesh shuddered. To march upon a battery had been a mere pastime for him in days of imperial glory; but to face an unknown peril, to suspend one's life upon a cord, was a very different matter. Great drops of perspiration, caused by the horror of his situation, stood out upon his brow when he felt that half his body had passed over the edge of the precipice, and that the slightest movement would now launch him into space. Still he did not hesitate, but

allowed himself to glide on, murmuring : " If there is a God who watches over honest people let Him open His eyes this instant ! "

Providence was watching ; and Bavois arrived at the end of his dangerous journey alive and safe. He fell like a mass of rock ; and groaned aloud when at last, after a swift flight through space, he sank heavily on to the rugged soil below. For a minute he lay stunned and dizzy on the ground. He was rising when he felt himself seized by either arm. " No foolishness," he cried quickly. " It is I, Bavois. "

But his captors did not loosen their hold. " How does it happen," asked one of them in a threatening tone, " that the Baron d'Escorval is precipitated half way down the cliff, and that you alight in safety a few moments later ? "

The old soldier was too shrewd not to understand the import of this insinuation ; and the indignation he felt, gave him sufficient strength to free himself with a violent jerk from his captor's hand. " A thousand thunderclaps ! " he cried, " so I pass for a traitor, do I ! No, it is impossible, well, just listen to me. " Then rapidly, but with great clearness, he recounted all the phases of his escape, his despair, his perilous situation, and the almost insurmountable obstacles which he had overcome. His tone was so sincere, the details he gave so circumstantial, that his questioners—two of the retired officers who had been waiting for the baron—at once held out their hands, sorry that they had wounded the feelings of a man so worthy of their respect and gratitude. " Forgive us, corporal," said one of them sadly. " Misery makes men suspicious and unjust, and we are very unhappy. "

" No offence," he growled. " If I had trusted poor M. d'Escorval, he would be alive now. "

" The baron still breathes," observed one of the officers.

This was such astounding news that for a moment Bavois was utterly confounded. " Ah ! I will give my right hand, if necessary, to save him ! " he exclaimed, at last.

" If it is possible to save him, he will be saved, my friend. That worthy priest whom you see there, is an excellent physician. He is examining M. d'Escorval's wounds at this moment. It was by his order that we procured and lighted that candle, which may bring our

enemies upon us at any moment ; but this is not a time for hesitation."

Bavois looked with all his eyes, but from where he was standing he could only distinguish a confused group of moving figures. On stepping forward, however, he perceived that Marie-Anne was holding a candle over the baron who lay stretched upon the ground, his head reclining on his wife's knees. His face was not disfigured ; but he was extremely pale, and his eyes were closed at intervals. He shuddered, and then the blood would trickle from his mouth. His clothing was hacked—literally hacked to pieces ; and it was easy to see that he had been frightfully mauled and wounded. Kneeling beside the unconscious man, the Abbe Midon was dexterously staunching the blood and applying bandages, torn from the linen of those present. Maurice and one of the officers were assisting him. "Ah ! if I had my hands on the scoundrel who cut the rope," cried the corporal, with passionate indignation ; "but patience. I shall have him yet."

"Do you know who it was ?"

"Only too well !" He said no more. The abbe had done all it was possible to do, and was now lifting the wounded man a little higher on Madame d'Escorval's knees. This change of position elicited a moan which betrayed the baron's intense sufferings. He opened his eyes and faltered a few words—the first he had uttered. "Firmin !" he murmured, "Firmin !" This was the name of his former secretary, a devoted helpmate who had been dead for several years. It was evident that the baron's mind was wandering. Still he had some vague idea of his terrible situation, for in a stifled, almost inaudible voice, he added : "Oh ! how I suffer ! Firmin, I will not fall into the hands of the Marquis de Courtornieu alive. I would rather kill myself."

This was all ; his eyes closed again, and his head fell back a dead weight. The officers clustering round believed that he had expired, and it was with poignant anxiety that they drew the abbe aside. "Is it all over ?" they asked. "Is there any hope ?"

The priest shook his head sadly, and pointing to heaven : "My hope is in God !" he said reverently.

The hour, the place, the catastrophe, the present danger.

the threatening future, all combined to impart solemnity to the priest's few words; and so profound was the impression that, for a moment, these men, familiar with death and peril, stood in awed silence. Maurice, who approached, followed by Corporal Bavois, brought them back to the exigencies of the situation. "Ought we not to make haste and carry my father away?" he asked. "Mustn't we be in Piedmont before evening?"

"Yes!" exclaimed one of the officers, "let us start at once."

But the priest did not move, and it was in a despondent voice that he remarked: "Any attempt to carry M. d'Escorval across the frontier in his present condition would cost him his life."

This seemed so inevitably a death-warrant for them all, that they shuddered. "My God! what shall we do?" faltered Maurice. "What course shall we adopt?"

No one replied. It was clear that they hoped for salvation through the priest alone. He was lost in thought, and it was some time before he spoke. "About an hour's walk from here," he said, at last, "beyond the Croix-d'Arcy, lives a peasant on whom I can rely. His name is Poignot; and he was formerly in M. Lacheneur's employ. With the assistance of his three sons, he now tills quite a large farm. We must procure a litter and carry M. d'Escorval to this honest peasant's house."

"What," interrupted one of the officers, "you want us to procure a litter at this hour of the night, and in this neighbourhood?"

"It must be done."

"But won't it awake suspicion?"

"Most assuredly."

"The Montaignac police will follow us."

"I am certain of it."

"The baron will be recaptured?"

"No." The abbe spoke in the tone of a man who, having assumed all the responsibility, feels that he has a right to be obeyed. "When the baron had been conveyed to Poignot's house," he continued, "one of you gentlemen will take the wounded man's place on the litter; the others will carry him, and the party will remain together until you have reached Piedmontese territory. Then you must

separate and pretend to conceal yourselves, but do it in such a way that you are seen everywhere.

The priest's simple plan was readily understood. The royalist emissaries must be thrown off the track; and at the very moment when it seemed to them that the baron was in the mountains, he would be safe in Poignot's house.

"One word more," added the cure. "The party which will accompany the pretended baron must look as much like the people one would expect to find with him, as possible. So Mademoiselle Lacheneur will go with you, and Maurice also. Again, people know that I would not leave the baron; and as my priestly robe would attract attention, one of you must assume it. God will forgive the deception on account of its worthy motive."

It was now necessary to procure the litter; and the officers were trying to decide where they should go to obtain it, when Corporal Bavois interrupted them. "Give yourselves no uneasiness," he remarked; "I know an inn not far from here where I can procure one."

He started off on the run, and a few minutes later returned with a small litter, a thin mattress, and a coverlid. He had thought of everything. The baron was lifted carefully from the ground and placed on the mattress—a long and difficult operation which, in spite of extreme caution, provoked many terrible groans from the wounded man. When everything was ready, each officer took an end of the litter, and the little procession, headed by the abbe, started on its way. They were obliged to proceed slowly as the least jolting increased the baron's sufferings. Still they made some progress, and by daybreak they were about half way to Poignot's house. They then chanced to meet some peasants going to their daily toil. The latter paused to look at them, and when the group had passed by stood gazing curiously after these strange folks who were apparently carrying a dead body. However, these meetings did not at all seem to worry the Abbe Midon. At all events, he made no attempt to avoid them. At last they came in sight of Poignot's cottage. There was a little grove not far from the house, and here the party halted, the priest bidding his companions conceal themselves while he went forward to reconnoitre and confer with the man upon whose decision the safety of the whole party depended.

As the priest approached the house, a short, slim peasant with grey hair and a sunburnt face emerged from the stable. This was Father Poignot himself. "What! is this you, Monsieur le Cure!" he exclaimed, delightedly. "Heavens! how pleased my wife will be. We have a great favour to ask of you——" And then, without giving the abbe an opportunity to open his lips, the farmer began to relate his perplexities. The night of the revolt he had given shelter to a poor fellow who had received an ugly swordthrust. Neither his wife nor himself knew how to dress the wound, and he did not dare to send for a doctor. "And this wounded man," he added, "is Jean Lacheneur, my old employer's son."

This recital made the priest feel very anxious. This peasant had already given an asylum to one wounded conspirator, but would he consent to receive another? He could not say, but his voice trembled as he presented his petition. The farmer turned very pale and shook his head gravely more than once, while the priest was speaking. When the abbe had finished, he coldly asked: "Do you know, sir, that I incur a great risk by converting my house into a hospital for these rebels?" The abbe dared not answer. "They told me," continued Father Poignot, "that I was a coward, because I would not join in the revolt. Such was not my opinion. Now, however, I choose to shelter these wounded men. In my opinion, it requires quite as much courage to do that as to go and fight."

"Ah! you are a brave fellow!" cried the abbe.

"Never mind about that, but bring M. d'Escorval here. There is no one but my wife and boys, and they won't betray him!"

The offer was at once accepted, and half-an-hour later the baron was lying in a small loft, where Jean Lacheneur was already installed. From the window, the Abbe Midon and Madame d'Escorval watched the little party, organized for the purpose of deceiving the Duke de Sairmeuse's spies, as it moved rapidly away. Corporal Bavois, with his head bound up with blood-stained linen, had taken the baron's place on the litter carried by the retired officers. These latter only knew the baron by name and reputation. But then he was the friend of their former ruler—the friend of that great captain whom they had made their idol, and they rejoiced with all their hearts

when they saw him reposing under Father Poignot's roof in comparative security. After this, there was the ask of misleading the government emissaries, and they took various skilful precautions, not knowing that they were quite unnecessary. Public sentiment had declared itself in an unmistakable manner, and the police did not ascertain a single detail of the escape. They did not even hear of the little party that travelled nearly three leagues in the full light of day, bearing a wounded man upon a litter. Among the two thousand peasants who believed that this wounded man was the Baron d'Escorval, there was not one who turned informer, or made an indiscreet remark.

The fugitives were ignorant of this willing connivance, and on approaching the frontier, which they had heard was strictly guarded, they became extremely cautious. They waited until nightfall before presenting themselves at a lonely inn, where they hoped to procure a guide to lead them through the mountain passes. Sad news awaited them there, for the inn-keeper informed them of the executions that had taken place that day at Montaignac, giving the particulars as he had heard them from an eye witness. Fortunately, or unfortunately, he knew nothing of M. d'Escorval's flight or of M. Lacheneur's arrest. But he was well acquainted with Chanlouineau, and was quite inconsolable concerning the death of that "handsome young fellow, the best farmer in the country."

Finding this man's views so favourable, the officers, who had left the litter a short distance from the inn, decided to confide in him, at least in some degree. "We are carrying one of our wounded comrades," they said. "Can you guide us across the frontier to-night?"

The inn-keeper replied that he would do so willingly, that he could promise to take them safely past the military posts; but that he could not think of starting before the moon rose. At midnight the fugitives were on their way; and at daybreak they set foot on the territory of Piedmont. They had dismissed their guide some time before. They now proceeded to break the litter in pieces; and handful by handful cast the wool of the mattress to the wind.

"Our task is accomplished," said one of the officers to Maurice. "We will now return to France. May God protect you! Farewell!"

It was with tears in his eyes that Maurice parted from these brave fellows who had proved so instrumental in saving his father's life. Now he was the sole protector of Marie-Anne, who, pale and overcome with fatigue and emotion trembled on his arm. But no—for Corporal Bavois still lingered by his side. "And you, my friend," he asked, sadly, "what are you going to do?"

"Follow you," replied the old soldier. "I have a right to a home with you; that was agreed between your father and myself! so don't hurry, for the young lady does not seem well, and I can see a village only a short distance off."

XXV

ESSENTIALLY a woman in grace and beauty, as well as in devotion and tenderness, Marie-Anne, as we have shown, was moreover capable of truly virile bravery. Her energy and coolness during those trying days had been the admiration and astonishment of all around her. But human endurance has its limits, and after excessive efforts there invariably comes a moment when the shrinking flesh fails the firmest will. Thus, when Marie-Anne tried to resume her journey she found that her strength was exhausted; her swollen feet and limbs scarcely supported her, her head whirled, and she shivered feverishly. Maurice and the old soldier were both obliged to support her, almost to carry her; but fortunately they were not far from a village, as was evident from an old church tower just discernible through the morning mist. Soon, however, they distinguished several cottages, and with the prospect of speedy rest before them they were hastening forward, when suddenly Bavois stopped short, "A thousand thunderclaps!" he exclaimed; "why, I'm in uniform! It would excite suspicion at once if I went into the village dressed like this; before we had a chance to sit down, the Piedmontese gendarmes would arrest us." He reflected for a moment, twirling his moustache furiously; then, in a tone that would have made a passer-by tremble, he remarked, "All things are fair in love and war. The next person who passes——"

"But I have money with me," interrupted Maurice, un-

buckling a belt filled with gold, which he had put on under his clothing on the night of the revolt.

"Eh! then we are fortunate!" cried Bavois. "Give me some, and I will soon find a shop where I can purchase a change of clothing."

He started; and it was not long before he re-appeared clad in peasant's garb, his thin weazened countenance well-nigh hidden by a large broad-brimmed slouching hat. "Now, steady, forward, march!" he said to Maurice and Marie-Anne, who scarcely recognized him in this disguise.

What they had taken to be a mere village proved to be almost a small town, called Saliente, as they almost immediately afterwards ascertained from a sign-post. The fourth house they met with was a hostelry, the Traveller's Rest. They went in, and at once asked the hostess to take the young lady to a room, and to assist her in undressing. While these instructions were being complied with, Maurice and the corporal proceeded to the dining-room, and ordered something to eat. Refreshments were served at once, but the glances cast upon the new arrivals were by no means friendly. They were evidently regarded with suspicion. A tall man, who was apparently the landlord, hovered round them, and at last embraced a favourable opportunity to ask their names. "My name is Dubois," replied Maurice, without the slightest hesitation. "I am travelling on business, and this man with me is a farmer of mine."

The landlord seemed somewhat reassured by this reply. "And what is your business?" he enquired.

"I have come into this land of inquisitive people to buy mules," laughed Maurice, striking his belt of money.

On hearing the jingle of the coin the landlord deferentially raised his cap. Breeding mules was the chief industry of the district. This would-be purchaser was very young, but he had a well-filled purse, and that was enough. "You will excuse me," resumed the landlord, in quite a different tone. "You see, we are obliged to be very careful. There has been some trouble at Montaignac."

The imminence of the peril and the responsibility devolving upon him, gave Maurice unusual assurance; and it was in the most careless, off-hand manner possible that he concocted quite a plausible story to explain his early arrival on foot with his wife, who had been taken poorly on the

way. He congratulated himself upon his address, but the old corporal was far from satisfied. "We are too near the frontier to bivouac here," he grumbled. "As soon as the young lady is on her feet again we must hurry on."

He believed, and Maurice hoped, that twenty-four hours, rest would set Marie-Anne right again. But they were both mistaken. She could not move, but remained in a state of torpor from which it was impossible to rouse her. When she was spoken to she made no reply, and it seemed very doubtful whether she could even hear and understand. Fortunately the landlord's mother proved to be a good, kind-hearted old woman, who would not leave the so-called Madame Dubois's bed-side, but nursed her with the greatest care during three long days, while Marie-Anne remained in this strange and alarming condition. When at last she spoke, Maurice could at first scarcely understand the import of her words. "Poor girl!" she sighed; "poor, wretched girl!" In point of fact she was alluding to herself. By a phenomenon which often manifests itself after a crisis in which reason has been temporarily imperilled, it seemed to her that it was some one else who had been the victim of all these misfortunes, the recollection of which gradually returned to her like the memory of a painful dream. What strange and terrible events had taken place since that August Sunday when, on leaving church with her father, she first heard of the Duke de Sairmeuse's return to France. And that was only nine months ago. What a difference between the past—when she lived happy and envied in that beautiful Chateau de Sairmeuse, of which she believed herself the mistress—and the present, when she found herself lying in the comfortless room of a miserable country inn, attended by an old woman whom she did not know, and with no other protectors than her proscribed lover, and an old soldier—a deserter, whose life was in constant peril. Hope, fortune, and future happiness, had all been wrecked, and she had not even saved her honour. But was she alone responsible? Who was it that had forced her to play that odious part with Maurice, Martial, and Chanlouineau? As this last name darted through her mind, she recalled with startling clearness all the incidents of her last meeting with the young farmer. She saw him at her feet in that dingy cell of the citadel at Montagnac; she felt his

first and only kiss upon her cheek, and remembered that he had given her a second letter, saying as he did so: "You will read this when I am dead."

She might read it now, for he had already cruelly expiated his share in her father's enterprise. But then what had become of it? She had not given it a thought till now; but at present, raising herself up in bed, she exclaimed in an eager, imperious voice: "My dress, give me my dress."

The old nurse obeyed her, and Marie-Anne could not restrain an exclamation of delight when, on examining the pocket, she found the letter there. She opened it and read it slowly, then, sinking back on her pillows, she burst into tears. Maurice hastily approached her. "What is the matter?" he inquired anxiously. Her only reply was to hand him the missive.

Chanlouineau, it should be remembered, was only a poor peasant. Scarcely possessing the rudiments of education, as his letter (written on common paper and closed with a huge wafer, specially purchased from a grocer in Sairmeuse) evinced plainly enough. The heavy, laboured, distorted characters, had evidently been traced by a man who was more at home when guiding a plough than a pen. There was but one straight line, and every third word, at least, was mis-spelt. And yet the thoughts expressed were noble and generous, well worthy of the true heart that had beat in the young farmer's breast. "Marie-Anne,"—So the letter began. "The outbreak is at hand, and whether it succeeds or fails, at all events, I shall die. I decided that on the day when I learned that you could marry no other man than Maurice d'Escorval. The conspiracy cannot succeed; and I understand your father well enough to know that he will not survive defeat. And if Maurice and your brother should both be killed, what would become of you? Oh, my God, would you not be reduced to beggary? The thought has haunted me continually. I have reflected, and this is my last will: I give and bequeath to you all my property, everything that I possess: My house, the Borderie, with its gardens and vineyards, the woodland and pastures of Berarde, and five lots of lands at Valrollier. An inventory of this property, and of the other possessions I leave to you is deposited with the notary at Sairmeuse. You can accept this bequest without fear; for I have no

relatives, and am at liberty to dispose of my belongings as I please. If you do not wish to remain in France, the property can be sold for at least forty thousand francs. But it would, it seems to me, be better for you to remain in your own province. The house on the *Borderie* is comfortable and convenient, for I have had it thoroughly repaired. Upstairs you will find a room that has been fitted up by the best upholsterer in *Montagnac*. I intended it for you. Under the hearth-stone in this same room I have deposited a box containing three hundred and twenty-seven louis d'or and one hundred and forty-six livres. If you refuse this gift, it will be because you scorn me even after I am dead. Accept it, if not for your own sake, for the sake of—I dare not finish, but you will understand my meaning only too well. If Maurice is not killed, and I shall try my best to stand between him and danger, he will marry you. Then, perhaps, you will be obliged to ask his consent in order to accept my gift. I hope that he will not refuse his permission. One is not jealous of the dead! Besides, he knows well enough that you scarcely ever vouchsafed a glance to the poor peasant who loved you so much. Do not be offended at anything I have said, I am in such agony that I cannot weigh my words. Farewell, Marie-Anne. Farewell for ever.

CHANLOUINEAU."

Maurice read this letter carefully, at times pausing with suppressed emotion. After finishing its perusal he remained silent for a moment, and then in a husky voice exclaimed: "You cannot refuse; it would be wrong." Then, fearing lest he might betray his feelings, he hastily left the room. Chanlouineau's words had evidently made a deep impression on his mind. This noble peasant had saved their lives at the *Croix d'Arcy*, he had wrested the Baron d'Escorval from the hands of the executioner, and he had never allowed either a complaint or a reproach to escape his lips. His abnegation had been sublime; and yet, as if what he had done in life were not sufficient, he sought to protect the woman he loved, even after he was dead. When Maurice recalled all that he and Marie-Anne owed to Chanlouineau, he could not help reproaching himself with inferiority and unworthiness. But, good heavens! what if this same comparison should arise in Marie-Anne's mind as well? How could he compete with

the memory of such nobility of soul and such self-sacrifice? Ay, Chanlouineau was mistaken; one may, perhaps, be jealous of the dead! However, Maurice took good care to conceal his anxiety, and when he returned to Marie-Anne's room his face was calm and even cheerful.

Although, as we have seen, Marie-Anne had recovered the full possession of her mental faculties, her strength had not yet returned. She was almost unable to sit up; and Maurice had to relinquish all thought of leaving Saliente for the present. The so-called Madame Dubois' persistent weakness began to astonish the old nurse, and her faith in herbs, gathered by moonlight, was considerably shaken. Fortunately, however, Bavois had succeeded in finding a medical man in the neighbourhood—a physician of great ability, who, after being at one time attached to Prince Eugene Beauharnais' vice-regal court at Milan had, for political reasons, been forced to take refuge in this secluded spot. The corporal's discovery was a happy one, for in these days the smaller towns and villages of Italy rarely possessed any other doctors than some ignorant barber, who invariably treated all complaints with a lancet and a stock of leeches. Bavois' physician was at once summoned, and he promptly made his appearance. He was a man of uncertain age, with a furrowed brow and a keen and piercing glance. After visiting the sick-room, he drew Maurice aside. "Is this young lady really your wife, Monsieur—Dubois?" he asked, hesitating so strangely over this name, Dubois, that Maurice's face crimsoned to the roots of his hair.

"I do not understand your question," he retorted, angrily.

"I beg your pardon, of course, but you seem very young for a married man, and your hands are too soft for a farmer's. And when I spoke to this young lady about her husband, she turned scarlet. The man who accompanies you, moreover, has terrible moustaches for a farmer, and besides, you must remember that there have been troubles across the frontier at Montaignac."

From crimson Maurice had turned white. He felt that he was discovered—that he was in this man's power. What should he do? What was the use of denial? At times it is only prudent to confess, and extreme confidence often meets with sympathy and protection. He

weighed these considerations in his mind, and then in an anxious voice replied : " You are not mistaken, monsieur. My friend and myself are both fugitives, undoubtedly condemned to death in France by this time." And then, without giving the doctor an opportunity to respond, he briefly narrated the terrible events that had recently happened at Sairmeuse. He neither concealed his own name nor Marie-Anne's, and when his recital was completed, the physician, whom his confidence had plainly touched, warmly shook his hand.

" It is just as I supposed," said the medical man. " Believe me, Monsieur Dubois, you must not tarry here. What I have discovered others will discover as well. And, above everything, don't warn the hotel-keeper of your departure. He has not been deceived by your explanation. Self-interest alone has kept his mouth shut. He has seen your money, and so long as you spend it at his house he will hold his tongue ; but if he discovers that you are going away, he will probably betray you."

" Ah ! sir, but how is it possible for us to leave this place ? "

" In two days the young lady will be on her feet again," interrupted the physician. " And take my advice. At the next village, stop and give your name to Mademoiselle Lacheneur."

" Ah ! sir," exclaimed Maurice, " have you considered the advice you offer me ? How can I, a proscribed man—a man condemned to death perhaps—how can I obtain, how can I display the proofs of identity necessary for marriage."

" Excuse me," observed the physician shaking his head, " but you are no longer in France, Monsieur d'Escorval, you are in Piedmont."

" Another difficulty ! "

" No, because in this country, people marry, or at least they can marry, without all the formalities that cause you so much anxiety."

" Is it possible ? " exclaimed Maurice.

" Yes, if you can find a consenting priest, when he has inscribed your name on his parish register and given you a certificate, you will be so undoubtedly married, Mademoiselle Lacheneur and yourself, that the court of Rome would never grant you a divorce."

"That may be," said Maurice hesitatingly, "but how could I find a priest——"

The physician was silent, and it might have been supposed he was blaming himself for meddling with matters that did not concern him. Suddenly, however, he abruptly said: "Listen to me attentively, Monsieur d'Escorval. I am about to take my leave, but before I go, I shall find occasion to recommend your wife to take as much exercise as possible—I will do this in the landlord's presence. Consequently, on the day after to-morrow, Wednesday, you must hire mules, and you, Mademoiselle Lacheneur and your old friend, the soldier, must start from the hotel as if you were going on a pleasure excursion. You will push on to Vigano, three leagues from here, where I live. Then I will take you to a priest, one of my friends; and upon my recommendation, he will perform the marriage ceremony. Now, reflect, shall I expect you on Wednesday?"

"Oh, yes, yes. How can I ever thank you sufficiently?"

"By not thanking me at all. See, here is the innkeeper; you are M. Dubois, again."

Maurice was intoxicated with joy. He understood the irregularity of such a marriage, but he knew it would reassure Marie-Anne's troubled conscience. Poor girl! she was suffering an agony of remorse. It was that which was killing her. However, he did not speak to her on the matter, fearing lest something might occur to interfere with the project. But the old physician had not spoken lightly, and everything took place as he had promised. The priest at Vigano blessed the marriage of Maurice d'Escorval and Marie-Anne Lacheneur, and after inscribing their names upon the church register, he gave them a certificate, which the physician and Corporal Bavois signed as witnesses. That same evening the mules were sent back to Saliente, and the fugitives resumed their journey. The Abbe Midon had advised them to reach Turin as quickly as possible. "It is a large city," he had said, when bidding them good-bye near Father Poignot's house, "you will be lost in the crowd. I have several friends there, whose names and addresses are on this paper. Go to them, for through them I will try to send you news of M. d'Escorval."

So it was towards Turin that Maurice, Marie-Anne, and

Corporal Bavois directed their steps. Their progress was slow, however, for they were obliged to avoid the more frequented roads, and renounce all ordinary modes of transport. Still the fatigue of travel, instead of exhausting Marie-Anne, seemed to revive her, and when five or six days had elapsed the colour came back to her cheeks, and her strength had fully returned. "Fate seems to have abandoned the pursuit," said Maurice one day. "Who knows but what the future may have many compensations in store for us!"

But he was mistaken. Fate far from forgetting them had merely granted them a short respite. One April morning the fugitives stopped to breakfast at an inn in the outskirts of a large town. Maurice had finished eating, and was just leaving the table to settle with the landlady, when Marie-Anne uttered a loud shriek and fell back on her chair. She held in her hand a French newspaper about a fortnight old, which she had found lying on the sideboard where some traveller had probably left it. Maurice seized the print rapidly, and read as follows, "Lacheneur, the leader of the revolt in Montaignac, was executed yesterday. The miserable mischief-maker exhibited on the scaffold the audacity for which he had always been famous."

"My father has been put to death!" cried Marie-Anne, "and I—his daughter—was not there to receive his last farewell!" She rose, and in an imperious voice: "I will go no farther," she said; "we must turn back now without losing an instant. I wish to return to France."

To return to France was to expose themselves to frightful peril. What good would it do? Was not the misfortune irreparable? So Corporal Bavois suggested, very timidly it is true, for the old soldier trembled at the thought that they might suspect him of being afraid. But Maurice would not listen. He shuddered. He did not know what had transpired since their flight, but it seemed to him that the Baron d'Escorval must have been discovered and re-arrested at the same time that Lacheneur was captured. Accordingly they at once procured a vehicle to convey them to the frontier. One important question, however, remained to be decided. Should Maurice and Marie-Anne make their marriage public? She wished to do so, but Maurice with tears in his eyes entreated her to

conceal it. "Our marriage certificate will not silence those who are disposed against us," said he. "Let us keep our secret for the present. No doubt we shall only remain in France for a few days." Unfortunately, Marie-Anne yielded. "Since you wish it," said she, "I will obey you. No one shall know of it."

It was the evening of the seventeenth of April, the same day that Martial was married to Blanche, when the fugitives at last reached Father Poignot's house. Maurice and Corporal Bavois were disguised as peasants and the old soldier had made a sacrifice that drew tears from his eyes; he had shaved off his moustaches.

XXVI.

WHEN the Abbe Midon and Martial de Sairmeuse held their conference, to decide upon the arrangements for the Baron de Escorval's escape, a difficulty presented itself which threatened to break off the negotiations. "Return my letter," said Martial, "and I will save the baron."

"Save the baron," replied the abbe, "and your letter shall be returned."

The idea that any one should suppose him to be influenced by danger when in reality he was only yielding to Marie-Anne's tears, angered Martial beyond endurance. "These are my last words, sir," he retorted, emphatically. "Give me the letter now, and I swear to you, by the honour of my name, that I will do everything that is possible for any human being to do to save the baron. If you distrust my word, good-evening."

The situation was desperate, the danger imminent, the time limited, and Martial's tone betrayed an inflexible determination. The abbe could not hesitate. He drew the letter from his pocket and handing it to Martial: "Here it is, sir," he said, solemnly, "remember that you have pledged the honour of your name."

"I will remember it, Monsieur le Cure. Go and obtain the ropes."

Thus the abbe's sorrow and amazement were intense, when, after the baron's terrible fall, Maurice declared that the cord had been cut beforehand. And yet the priest could not make up his mind that Martial was guilty of

such execrable duplicity, which is rarely found in men under twenty-five years of age. However, no one suspected the abbe's secret thoughts. It was with perfect composure that he dressed the baron's wounds and made arrangements for the flight, though not until he saw M. d'Escorval installed in Poignot's house did he breathe freely. The fact that the baron had been able to endure the journey, proved that he retained a power of vitality for which the priest had scarcely dared to hope. Some way must now be discovered to procure the surgical instruments and pharmaceutical remedies which the wounded man's condition would necessitate. But where and how could they be procured. The police kept a close watch over all the medical men and druggists in Montaignac, in hopes of discovering the wounded conspirators through one or the other medium. However, the cure had for ten years acted as physician and surgeon for the poor of his parish, and he possessed an almost complete set of surgical instruments, and a well-filled medicine chest. Accordingly at nightfall he put on a long blue blouse, concealed his features under a large slouch hat, and wended his way towards Sairmeuse. There was not a single light in the parsonage; Bibiane, the old housekeeper, having gone out to gossip with some of the neighbours. The priest effected an entrance into the house, by forcing the lock of the garden door; he speedily found the things he wanted and was able to retire without having been perceived. That night the abbe hazarded a cruel but indispensable operation. His heart trembled, but although he had never before attempted so difficult a task, the hand that held the knife was firm. "It is not upon my weak powers that I rely," he murmured, "I have placed my trust in One who is on High."

His faith was rewarded. Three days later the wounded man, after a comfortable night, seemed to regain consciousness. His first glance was for his devoted wife, who was sitting by the bedside; his first word was for his son. "Maurice?" he asked.

"Is in safety," replied the abbe. "He must be on the road to Turin."

M. d'Escorval's lips moved as if he were murmuring a prayer; then, in a feeble voice: "We owe you a debt of

gratitude which we can never pay," he murmured, "for I think I shall pull through."

He did "pull through," but not without terrible suffering, and not without severe relapses that made those around him tremble with anxiety. Jean Lacheneur was more fortunate, for he was on his legs by the end of the week.

On the evening of the seventeenth of April the abbe was seated in the loft reading a newspaper to the baron when suddenly the door was quietly opened, and one of the Poignet boys looked into the room. He did not speak, however, but merely gave the cure a glance, and then quickly withdrew.

The priest finished the paragraph he was perusing, laid down the paper, and went out on to the landing. "What's the matter?" he inquired.

"Ah!" answered the young fellow, "M. Maurice, Mademoiselle Lacheneur, and the old corporal have just arrived; they want to come upstairs."

Three bounds and the abbe reached the ground floor. "You imprudent children!" he exclaimed, addressing the three travellers, "what has induced you to return here?" Then turning to Maurice: "Isn't it enough that your father has nearly died for you and through you? Are you so anxious for his recapture, that you return here to set our enemies on his track? Be off at once!"

Utterly abashed, it was as much as Maurice could do to falter his excuses; uncertainty, he said, had seemed worse to him than death; he had heard of M. Lacheneur's execution; he had started off at once without reflection and only asked to see his father and embrace his mother before leaving again.

The priest was inflexible. "The slightest emotion might kill your father," he declared; "and I should cause your mother the greatest anxiety if I told her of your return, and the dangers to which you have foolishly exposed yourself. Come, go at once, and cross the frontier again this very night."

The scene had been witnessed by Jean Lacheneur, who now approached. "The time has come for me to take *my* leave," said he, "I shall go with Maurice. But I scarcely think that the highway's the right place for my sister. You would cap all your kindness, Monsieur le Cure, if you

would only persuade Father Poignot to let her remain here, and if you would watch over her yourself."

The abbe deliberated for a moment, and then hurriedly replied: "So be it; but go at once; your name is not on the proscribed list. You will not be pursued."

Suddenly separated from his wife in this fashion, Maurice wished to confer with her, to give her some parting advice; but the abbe did not allow him an opportunity to do so. "Go, go at once," he insisted. "Farewell!"

The priest's intentions were excellent, no doubt, but in point of fact he was too hasty. At the very moment when Maurice stood sorely in need of wise and temperate counsel he was handed over to Jean Lacheneur's pernicious influence. Scarcely were they outside the house, than the latter remarked: "We have to thank the Sairmeuses and the Marquis de Courtornieu for all this. I don't even know where they have thrown my father's corpse. I, his son, was even debarred from embracing him before he was traitorously murdered." He spoke in a harsh, bitter voice, laughing the while in a strange discordant fashion. "And yet," he continued, "if we climbed that hill we should be able to see the Chateau de Sairmeuse brightly illuminated. They are celebrating the marriage of Martial de Sairmeuse and Blanche de Courtornieu. We are friendless outcasts, succourless and shelterless, but they are feasting and making merry."

Less than this would have sufficed to rekindle Maurice's wrath. Yes, these Sairmeuses and these Courtornieus had killed the elder Lacheneur, and they had betrayed the Baron d'Escorval, and delivered him up—a mangled corpse—to his suffering relatives. "It would be a rightful vengeance to disturb their merrymaking now, and in the midst of hundreds of assembled guests denounce their cruelty and perfidy." "I will start at once," exclaimed Maurice, "I will challenge Martial in the presence of the revellers."

But Jean interrupted him. "No, don't do that! The cowards would arrest you. Write to the young marquis, and I will take your letter."

Corporal Bavois, who heard the conversation, did not make the slightest attempt to oppose this foolish enterprise. Indeed, he thought the undertaking quite natural, under the circumstances, and esteemed his young friends

all the more for their rashness. They all three entered the first wine shop they came across, and Maurice wrote the challenge which was confided to Jean Lacheneur.

The only object which Jean had in view was to disturb the bridal ball at the Chateau de Sairmeuse. He merely hoped to provoke a scandal which would disgrace Martial and his relatives in the eyes of all their friends; for he did not for one moment imagine that the young marquis would accept Maurice's challenge. While waiting for Martial in the hall of the chateau, he sought to compose a fitting attitude, striving to steel himself against the sneering scorn with which he expected the young nobleman would receive him. Martial's kindly greeting was so unlooked for that Jean was at first quite disconcerted, and he did not recover his assurance until he perceived how cruelly Maurice's insulting letter made the marquis suffer. When the latter seized him by the arm and led him upstairs, he offered no resistance; and as they crossed the brightly-lighted drawing-rooms and passed through the throng of astonished guests, his surprise was so intense that he forgot both his heavy shoes and peasant's blouse. Breathless with anxiety, he wondered what was coming. Then standing on the threshold of the little saloon leading out of the grand hall he heard Martial read Maurice d'Escorval's letter aloud, and finally saw him frantic with passion, throw the missive in his father-in-law's face. It might have been supposed that these incidents did not in the least affect Jean Lacheneur, who stood by cold and unmoved, with compressed lips and downcast eyes. However, appearances were deceitful, for in reality his heart throbbed with exultation; and if he lowered his eyes, it was only to conceal the joy that sparkled in them. He had not hoped for so prompt and so terrible a revenge.

Nor was this all. After brutally pushing Blanche, his newly-wedded wife, aside when she attempted to detain him, Martial again seized Jean Lacheneur's arm. "Now," said he, "follow me!"

Jean still obeyed him without uttering a word. They again crossed the grand hall, and on passing out into an ante-room, Martial took a candle burning on a side table, and opened a little door leading to a private stair-case "Where are you taking me?" inquired Jean.

Martial, in his haste, was already a third of the way up the flight. "Are you afraid?" he asked, turning round.

The other shrugged his shoulders. "If you put it in that way, let us go on," he coldly replied.

They entered the room which Martial had occupied since taking possession of the chateau. It was the same room that had once belonged to Jean Lacheneur; and nothing in it had been changed. The whilom steward's son recognized the brightly-flowered curtains, the figures on the carpet, and even an old arm-chair ensconced wherein he had read many a novel in secret. Martial hastened to a small writing-desk, and drew therefrom a folded paper which he slipped into his pocket. "Now," said he, "let us be off. We must avoid another scene. My father and my wife will be looking for me. I will explain everything when we are outside."

They hastily descended the staircase, passed through the gardens, and soon reached the long avenue. Then Jean Lacheneur suddenly paused. "After all," said he, "it was scarcely necessary for me to wait so long for a simple yes or no. Have you decided? What answer am I to give Maurice d'Escorval?"

"None at all! You will take me to him. I must see him and speak with him in order to justify myself. Let us proceed!"

But Jean did not move. "What you ask is impossible!" he replied.

"Why so?"

"Because Maurice is pursued. If he is captured, he will be tried and undoubtedly condemned to death. He is now in a safe retreat, and I have no right to disclose it." In point of fact, Maurice's safe retreat, for the time being, was only a neighbouring wood, where, in the corporal's company, he was waiting for Jean's return. But the latter could not resist the temptation to make this insinuating remark, which by reason of its covert character, was far more insulting than if he had simply said: "We fear informers!"

Strange as it may appear, and proud and violent as was Martial's nature, he did not resent the insult. "So you distrust me!" he merely said. Jean Lacheneur was silent—another insult. "And yet," insisted Martial, "after

what you've just seen and heard you can't possibly suspect me of having cut the ropes I carried to the baron."

"No! I'm convinced that *you* didn't do it."

"You saw how I punished the man who had dared to compromise my honour. And this man is the father of the girl I married to-day."

"Oh, I saw and heard everything, but as for taking you to Maurice, I must still reply: 'Impossible.'"

No doubt the younger Lacheneur's severity was unjust; however, Martial did not rebel against it. He merely drew from his pocket the paper which he had taken from his desk a few minutes previously, and handed it to Jean. "You doubt my word," he said grimly. "I shall not forget to punish those whose fault it is. However, here is a proof of my sincerity which I expect you to give to Maurice, and which must convince even you."

"What proof is it?"

"Why, the very letter in exchange for which we facilitated the baron's escape. A presentiment I can't explain prevented me from burning it, and now I'm very glad I didn't. Take it, and do what you choose with it."

Any one but Jean Lacheneur would have appreciated the young marquis's candour, and have been touched by the confidence he displayed. But Jean's hatred was implacable, and the more humble his enemy showed himself, the more determined he was to carry out the project of vengeance maturing in his brain. His only reply to Martial's last remark was a promise to give the letter to Maurice.

"It should be a bond of alliance, it seems to me," said Martial, gently.

"A bond of alliance!" rejoined Jean with a threatening gesture. "You are too fast, Monsieur le Marquis! Have you forgotten all the blood that flows between us? You didn't cut the ropes; but who condemned the Baron d'Escorval to death? Wasn't it your father, the Duke de Sairmeuse? An alliance! why, you must have forgotten that you and yours sent my father to the scaffold! How have you rewarded the man whose honesty gave you back a fortune? By murdering him and ruining his daughter's reputation."

"I offered my name and fortune to your sister."

"I would have killed her with my own hand had she ac-

cepted your offer. Take that as a proof that I don't forget; and if any great disgrace ever tarnishes the proud name of Sairmeuse, think of Jean Lacheneur. My hand will be in it." He was so frantic with passion that he forgot his usual caution. However, after a great effort he recovered his self-possession, and added in calmer tones "If you are so desirous of seeing Maurice, be at La Reche to-morrow at noon. He will be there." With these words he turned abruptly aside, sprang over the fence skirting the avenue, and vanished into the darkness.

"Jean," cried Martial, in almost supplicating tones; "Jean, come back—listen to me!" There was no reply. The young marquis stood bewildered in the middle of the road; and little short of a miracle prevented his being run over by a horseman galloping in the direction of Montaignac. The latter's shouts to get out of the way awakened him from his dream, and as the cold night breeze fanned his forehead he was able to collect his thoughts and judge his conduct. Ah, there was no denying it. He, the professed sceptic, a man who, despite his youth, boasted of his indifference and insensibility, had forgotten all self-control. He had acted generously, no doubt, but after all he had created a terrible scandal, all to no purpose. When Blanche, his wife, had accused Marie-Anne of being the cause of his frenzy, she had not been entirely wrong. For though Martial might regard all other opinions with disdain, the thought that Marie-Anne despised him, and considered him a traitor and a coward, had, in truth, made him perfectly frantic. It was for her sake, that on the impulse of the moment he had resorted to such a startling justification. And if he had begged Jean to lead him to Maurice d'Escorval, it was because he hoped to find Marie-Anne not far off, and to say to her, "Appearances were against me, but I am innocent; and have proved it by unmasking the real culprit." It was to Marie-Anne that he wished Chanlouineau's circular to be given, thinking that she, at least, would be surprised at his generosity. And yet all his expectations had been disappointed. "It will be the devil to arrange!" he thought; "but nonsense! it will be forgotten in a month. The best way is to face those gossips at once: I will return immediately." He said: "I will return," in the most deliberate manner; but his courage grew weaker at each successive step he took in the direc-

tion of the chateau. The guests must have already left, and Martial concluded that he would probably find himself alone with his young wife, his father and the Marquis de Courtornieu, whose reproaches, tears, and threats he would be obliged to encounter. "No," muttered he. "After all, let them have a night to calm themselves. I will not appear until to-morrow."

But where should he sleep? He was in evening dress and bare-headed, and the night was chilly. On reflection he recollected his father's house at Montaignac. "I shall find a bed there," he thought, "servants, a fire, and a change of clothing—and to-morrow, a horse to come back again." The walk was a long one, no doubt; however, in his present mood, this circumstance did not displease him. The servant who came to open the door when he knocked, was at first speechless with astonishment. "You, Monsieur le Marquis!" he exclaimed at last.

"Yes, it's I. Light a good fire in the drawing-room, and bring me a change of clothes." The valet obeyed, and soon Martial found himself alone, stretched on a sofa in front of the blazing logs. "It would be a good thing to sleep and forget my troubles," he thought; and accordingly he tried to do so, but it was almost dawn when at last he fell into a feverish slumber.

He woke up again at nine o'clock, gave the necessary instructions for breakfast, and was eating with a good appetite, when suddenly he remembered his rendezvous with Maurice. He ordered a horse and set out at once, reaching La Reche at half-past eleven o'clock. The others had not yet arrived; so he fastened his horse by the bridle to a tree near by, and leisurely climbed to the summit of the hill. It was here that Lacheneur's cottage had formerly stood, and the four walls still remained standing, blackened by fire. Martial was gazing at the ruins, not without a feeling of emotion, when he heard the branches crackle in the adjacent cover. He turned, and perceived that Maurice, Jean, and Corporal Bavois were approaching. The old soldier carried under his arm, in a piece of green serge, a couple of swords which Jean Lacheneur had borrowed from a retired officer at Montaignac during the night. "We are sorry to have kept you waiting," began Maurice, "but you will observe

that is not yet noon. Since we scarcely expected to see you——”

“I was too anxious to justify myself not to be here early,” interrupted Martial.

Maurice shrugged his shoulders disdainfully. “This is not a question of self-justification, but one of fighting,” he abruptly replied.

Insulting as were the words and the gesture that accompanied them, Martial never so much as winced. “Grief has made you unjust,” said he, gently, “or M. Lacheneur has not told you everything.”

“Yes, Jean has told me everything.”

“Well, then?”

Martial’s coolness drove Maurice frantic. “Well,” he replied, with extreme violence, “my hatred is unabated even if my scorn is diminished. I have waited for this occasion ever since the day we met on the square at Sairmeuse in Mademoiselle Lacheneur’s presence. You said to me then, ‘We shall meet again.’ And now here we stand face to face. What insults must I heap upon you to decide you to fight?”

With a threatening gesture Martial seized one of the swords which Bavois offered him, and assumed an attitude of defence. “You will have it so,” said he in a husky voice. “The thought of Marie-Anne can no longer save you.”

But the blades had scarcely crossed before a cry from Jean arrested the combat. “The soldiers!” he exclaimed; “we are betrayed.” A dozen gendarmes were indeed approaching at full speed.

“Ah! I spoke the truth!” exclaimed Maurice. “The coward came, but the guards accompanied him.” He bounded back, and breaking his sword over his knee, hurled the fragments in Martial’s face. “Here, miserable wretch!” he cried.

“Wretch!” repeated Jean and Corporal Bavois, “traitor! coward!” And then they fled, leaving Martial literally thunderstruck.

He struggled hard to regain his composure. The soldiers were swiftly approaching; he ran to meet them, and addressing the officer in command, imperiously enquired, “Do you know who I am?”

"Yes," replied the brigadier, respectfully, "you are the Duke de Sairmeuse's son."

"Very well! I forbid you to follow those men."

The brigadier hesitated at first; then, in a decided tone he replied: "I can't obey you, sir. I have my orders." And turning to his men, he added, "Forward!"

He was about to set the example, when Martial seized him by the arm: "At least you will not refuse to tell me who sent you here?"

"Who sent us? The colonel, of course, in obedience to orders from the grand provost, M. d'Courtornieu. He sent the order last night. We have been hidden near here ever since daybreak. But thunder! let go your hold, I must be off."

He galloped away, and Martial, staggering like a drunken man, descended the slope, and remounted his horse. But instead of repairing to the Chateau of Sairmeuse, he returned to Montaignac, and passed the remainder of the afternoon in the solitude of his own room. That evening he sent two letters to Sairmeuse—one to his father, and the other to his wife.

XXVII.

MARTIAL certainly imagined that he had created a terrible scandal on the evening of his marriage; but he had no conception of the reality. Had a thunderbolt burst in these gilded halls, the guests at Sairmeuse could not have been more amazed and horrified than they were by the scene presented to their view. The whole assembly shuddered when Martial, in his wrath, flung the crumpled letter full in the Marquis de Courtornieu's face. And when the latter sank back into an arm-chair, several young ladies of extreme sensibility actually fainted away. The young marquis had departed, taking Jean Lacheneur with him, and yet the guests stood as motionless as statues, pale, mute, and stupefied. It was Blanche who broke the spell. While the Marquis de Courtornieu was panting for breath—while the Duke de Sairmeuse stood trembling and speechless with suppressed anger—the young marchioness made an heroic attempt to save the situation. With her hand still aching from Martial's brutal clasp, her heart swelling with rage and hatred, and her face whiter

than her bridal veil, she yet had sufficient strength to restrain her tears and force her lips to smile. "Really this is placing too much importance on a trifling misunderstanding which will be explained to-morrow," she said, almost gaily, to those nearest her. And stepping into the middle of the hall she made a sign to the musicians to play a country-dance.

But scarcely had the first note sounded, than, as if by unanimous consent, the whole company hastened towards the door. It might have been supposed that the chateau was on fire, for the guests did not withdraw, they actually fled. An hour previously, the Marquis de Courtornieu and the Duke de Sairmeuse had been overwhelmed with the most obsequious homage and adulation. But now there was not one in all the assembly daring enough to take them openly by the hand. Just when they both believed themselves all-powerful they were rudely precipitated from their lordly eminence. Indeed disgrace, and perhaps punishment, were to be their portion. Heroic to the last, however, the abandoned bride endeavoured to stay the tide of retreating guests. Standing near the door, and with her most bewitching smile upon her lips, Blanche spared neither flattering words nor entreaties in her efforts to retain the deserters. The attempt was vain; and, in point of fact, many were not sorry of this opportunity to repay the young Marchioness de Sairmeuse for all her past disdain and criticism. Soon, of all the guests, there only remained one old gentleman who, on account of his gout, had deemed it prudent not to mingle with the crowd. He bowed as he passed before Blanche, and could not even restrain a blush, for he rightly considered that this swift flight was a cruel insult for the abandoned bride. Still, what could he do alone? Under the circumstances, his presence would prove irksome, and so he departed like the others.

Blanche was now alone, and there was no longer any necessity for constraint. There were no more curious witnesses to enjoy her sufferings and comment upon them. With a furious gesture she tore her bridal veil and wreath of orange flowers from her head, and trampled them under foot. "Extinguish the lights everywhere!" she cried to a servant passing by, stamping her foot angrily, and speaking as imperiously as if she had been in her father's house,

and not at Sairmeuse. The lacquey obeyed her, and then, with flashing eyes and dishevelled hair, she hastened to the little drawing-room at the end of the hall. Several servants stood round the marquis, who was lying back in his chair with a swollen, purple face, as if he had been stricken with apoplexy.

"All the blood in his body has flown to his head," remarked the duke, with a shrug of his shoulders. His grace was furious. He scarcely knew whom he was most angry with—with Martial or the Marquis de Courtornieu. The former, by his public confession, had certainly imperilled, if not ruined, their political future. But, on the other hand, the Marquis de Courtornieu had cast on the Sairmeuses the odium of an act of treason revolting to any honourable heart. The duke was watching the clustering servants with a contracted brow when his daughter-in-law entered the room. She paused before him, and angrily exclaimed: "Why did you remain here while I was left alone to endure such humiliation. Ah! if I had been a man! All our guests have fled, monsieur—all of them!"

M. de Sairmeuse sprang up. "Ah, well! what if they have. Let them go to the devil!" Among all the invited ones who had just left his house, there was not one whom his grace really regretted—not one whom he regarded as an equal. In giving a marriage feast for his son, he had invited all the petty nobility and gentry of the neighbourhood. They had come—very well! They had fled—*bon voyage!* If the duke cared at all for their desertion, it was only because it presaged with terrible eloquence the disgrace that was to come. Still he tried to deceive himself. "They will come back again, madame," said he; "you will see them return, humble and repentant! But where can Martial be?"

Blanche's eyes flashed, but she made no reply.

"Did he go away with the son of that rascal, Lache-neur?"

"I believe so."

"It won't be long before he returns——"

"Who can say?"

M. de Sairmeuse struck the mantlepice with his clenched fist. "My God!" he exclaimed, "this is an overwhelming misfortune." The young wife believed that he was anxious and angry on her account. But she was mis-

taken : for his grace was only thinking of his disappointed ambition. Whatever he might pretend, the duke secretly admitted his son's intellectual superiority and genius for intrigue, and he was now extremely anxious to consult him. "He has wrought this evil," he murmured : "it is for him to repair it ! And he is capable of doing so if he chooses." Then, aloud, he resumed : "Martial must be found—he must be found——"

With an angry gesture Blanche interrupted him. "You must look for Marie-Anne Lacheneur if you wish to find my husband," said she.

The duke was of the same opinion, but he dared not admit it. "Anger leads you astray, marchioness," said he.

"I know what I say," was the curt response.

"No, believe me, Martial will soon make his appearance. If he went away, he will soon return. The servants shall go for him at once, or I will go for him myself——"

The duke left the room with a muttered oath, and Blanche approached her father, who still seemed to be unconscious. She seized his arm and shook it roughly, peremptorily exclaiming, "Father, father !" This voice, which had so often made the Marquis de Courtornieu tremble, proved more efficacious than eau de Cologne. "I wish to speak with you," added Blanche : "do you hear me ?"

The marquis dared not disobey ; he slowly opened his eyes and raised himself from his recumbent position. "Ah ! how I suffer !" he groaned, "how I suffer !"

His daughter glanced at him scornfully, and then in a tone of bitter irony remarked : "Do you think that I'm in paradise ?"

"Speak," sighed the marquis. "What do you wish to say ?"

The bride turned haughtily to the servants and imperiously ordered them to leave the room. When they had done so and she had locked the door : "Let us speak of Martial," she began.

At the sound of his son-in-law's name the marquis bounded from his chair with clenched fists. "Ah, the wretch !" he exclaimed.

"Martial is my husband, father."

"And you! after what he has done—you dare to defend him?"

"I don't defend him; but I don't wish him to be murdered." At that moment the news of Martial's death would have given the Marquis de Courtornieu infinite satisfaction. "You heard, father," continued Blanche, "that young D'Escorval appointed a meeting for to-morrow, at mid-day, at La Reche. I know Martial; he has been insulted, and will go there. Will he encounter a loyal adversary? No. He will find a band of assassins. You alone can prevent him from being murdered."

"I—and how?"

"By sending some soldiers to La Reche, with orders to conceal themselves in the grove—with orders to arrest these murderers at the proper moment."

The marquis gravely shook his head. "If I do that," said he, "Martial is quite capable——"

"Of anything!—yes, I know it. But what does it matter to you, since I am willing to assume the responsibility?"

M. de Courtornieu looked at his daughter inquisitively, and if she had been less excited as she insisted on the necessity of sending instructions to Montaignac at once, she would have discerned a gleam of malice in his eye. The marquis was thinking that this would afford him an ample revenge, since he could easily bring dishonour on Martial, who had shown so little regard for the honour of others. "Very well; then, since you will have it so, it shall be done," he said, with feigned reluctance.

His daughter hastily procured ink and pens, and then with trembling hands he prepared a series of minute instructions for the commander at Montaignac. Blanche herself gave the letter to a servant, with directions to start at once; and it was not until she had seen him set off at a gallop that she went to her own apartment, that luxurious bridal chamber which Martial had so sumptuously adorned. But now its splendour only aggravated the misery of the deserted wife, for that she was deserted she did not for a moment doubt. She felt sure that her husband would not return, and had no faith whatever in the promises of the Duke de Sairmeuse, who at that moment was searching through the neighbourhood with a party of servants. Where could the truant be? With Marie-Anne most assuredly—and at the thought a wild desire to wreak vengeance

ance on her rival took possession of Blanche's heart. She did not sleep that night, she did not even undress, but when morning came she exchanged her snowy bridal robe for a black dress, and wandered through the grounds like a restless spirit. Most of the day, however, she spent shut up in her room, refusing to allow either the duke or her father to enter.

At about eight o'clock in the evening tidings came from Martial. A servant brought two letters; one sent by the young marquis to his father, and the other to his wife. For a moment Blanche hesitated to open the one addressed to her. It would determine her destiny, and she felt afraid. At last, however, she broke the seal and read: "Madame—Between you and me all is ended; reconciliation is impossible. From this moment you are free. I esteem you enough to hope that you will respect the name of Sairmeuse, from which I cannot relieve you. You will agree with me, I am sure, in thinking a quiet separation preferable to the scandal of legal proceedings. My lawyer will pay you an allowance befitting the wife of a man whose income amounts to five hundred thousand francs. MARTIAL DE SAIRMEUSE."

Blanche staggered beneath the terrible blow. She was indeed deserted—and deserted, as she supposed, for another. "Ah!" she exclaimed, "that creature! that creature! I will kill her!"

While Blanche was measuring the extent of her misfortune his grace the Duke de Sairmeuse raved and swore. After a fruitless search for his son he returned to the chateau, and began a continuous tramp to and fro in the great hall. Oh the morrow he scarcely ate, and was well nigh sinking from weariness when his son's letter was handed him. It was very brief. Martial did not vouchsafe any explanation; he did not even mention the conjugal separation he had determined on, but merely wrote: "I cannot return to Sairmeuse, and yet it is of the utmost importance that I should see you. You will, I trust, approve the resolution I have taken when I explain the reasons that have guided me in adopting it. Come to Montaignac, then, the sooner the better. I am waiting for you."

Had he listened to the prompting of his own impatience, his grace would have started at once. But he could not abandon the Marquis de Courtornieu and his son's wife

in this abrupt fashion. He must at least see them, speak to them, and warn them of his intended departure. He attempted to do this in vain. Blanche had shut herself up in her own apartments, and remained deaf to all entreaties for admittance. Her father had been put to bed, and the physician who had been summoned to attend him, declared that the marquis was wellnigh at death's door. The duke was therefore obliged to resign himself to the prospect of another night of suspense, which was almost intolerable to such a nature as his. "However," thought he, "to-morrow, after breakfast, I will find some pretext to escape, without telling them I am going to see Martial."

He was spared this trouble, for on the following morning at about nine o'clock, while he was dressing, a servant came to inform him that M. de Courtonieu and his daughter were waiting to speak with him in the drawing-room. Much surprised, he hastened downstairs. As he entered the room, the marquis, who was seated in an arm-chair, rose to his feet leaning for support on Aunt Medea's shoulder; while Blanche, who was as pale as if every drop of blood had been drawn from her veins—stepped swiftly forward: "We are going, Monsieur le Duc," she said, coldly, "and we wish to bid you farewell."

"What! you are going? Will you not——"

The young bride interrupted him with a mournful gesture, and drew Martial's letter from her bosom. "Will you do me the favour to peruse this?" she said, handing the missive to his grace.

The duke glanced over the short epistle, and his astonishment was so intense that he could not even find an oath. "Incomprehensible!" he faltered; "incomprehensible!"

"Incomprehensible, indeed," repeated the young wife sadly, but without bitterness. "I was married yesterday; to-day I am deserted. It would have been more generous to have reflected the evening before and not the next day. Tell Martial, however, that I forgive him for having destroyed my life, for having made me the most unhappy of women. I also forgive him for the supreme insult of speaking to me of his fortune. I trust he may be happy. Farewell, Monsieur le Duc, we shall never meet again. Farewell!"

With these words she took her father's arm, and they

were about to retire, when M. de Sairmeuse hastily threw himself between them and the door. "You shall not go away like this!" he exclaimed. "I will not suffer it. Wait at least until I have seen Martial. Perhaps he is not so guilty as you suppose——"

"Enough!" interrupted the marquis; "enough! This is one of those outrages which can never be repaired. May your conscience forgive you, as I myself forgive you. Farewell!"

This was said with such a conventional air of benevolence, and with such entire harmony of intonation and gesture that M. de Sairmeuse was perfectly bewildered. With a dazed air he watched the marquis and his daughter depart, and they had been gone some moments before he recovered himself sufficiently to exclaim: "The old hypocrite! does he believe me to be his dupe?" His dupe! M. de Sairmeuse was so far from being his dupe, that his next thought was: "What's going to follow this farce? If he says he forgives us, that means that he has some crushing blow in store for us." This idea soon ripening into conviction made his grace feel apprehensive, for he did not quite see how he would cope successfully with the perfidious marquis. "But Martial is a match for him!" he at last exclaimed. "Yes I must see Martial at once."

So great was his anxiety that he lent a helping hand in harnessing the horses he had ordered, and when the vehicle was ready, he announced his determination to drive himself. As he urged the horses furiously onward, he tried to reflect, but the most contradictory ideas were seething in his brain and he lost all power of looking at the situation calmly. He burst into Martial's room like a bombshell. "I certainly think you must have gone mad, marquis," he exclaimed. "That is the only valid excuse you can offer."

But Martial, who had been expecting the visit, had fully prepared himself for some such remark. "Never, on the contrary, have I felt more calm and composed in mind," he replied, "than I am now. Allow me to ask you one question. Was it you who sent the gendarmes to the meeting which Maurice d'Escorval appointed?"

"Marquis!"

"Very well! Then it was another act of infamy to be scored against the Marquis de Courtornieu."

The duke made no reply. In spite of all his faults and

vices, this haughty nobleman retained those characteristics of the old French aristocracy—fidelity to his word and undoubted valour. He thought it perfectly natural, even necessary, that Martial should fight with Maurice; and he considered it a contemptible proceeding to send armed soldiers to seize an honest and confiding opponent.

"This is the second time," resumed Martial, "that this scoundrel has tried to dishonour our name; and if I am to convince people of the truth of this assertion, I must break off all connection with him and his daughter. I have done so, and I don't regret it, for I only married her out of deference to your wishes, and because it seemed necessary for me to marry, and because all women, excepting one, who can never be mine, are alike to me."

Such utterances were scarcely calculated to re-assure the duke. "This sentiment is very noble, no doubt," said he; "but it has none the less ruined the political prospects of our house."

An almost imperceptible smile curved Martial's lips. "I believe, on the contrary, I have saved them," replied he. "It is useless for us to attempt to deceive ourselves; this affair of the insurrection has been abominable, and you ought to bless the opportunity this quarrel gives you to free yourself from all responsibility in it. You must go to Paris at once, and see the Duke de Richelieu—nay, the king himself, and with a little address, you can throw all the odium on the Marquis de Courtornieu, and retain for yourself only the prestige of the valuable services you have rendered."

The duke's face brightened. "Zounds, marquis!" he exclaimed; "that is a good idea! In the future I shall be infinitely less afraid of Courtornieu."

Martial remained thoughtful. "It is not the Marquis de Courtornieu that I fear," he murmured, "but his daughter—my wife."

XXVIII.

IN the country, news flies from mouth to mouth with inconceivable rapidity, and, strange as it may seem, the scene at the Chateau de Sairmeuse was known of at Father Poignot's farm-house that same night. After Maurice, Jean Lacheneur, and Bavois left the farm, promising

to recross the frontier as quickly as possible the Abbe, Midon decided not to acquaint M. d'Escorval either with his son's return, or Marie-Anne's presence in the house. The baron's condition was so critical that the merest trifle might turn the scale. At about ten o'clock he fell asleep, and the abbe and Madame d'Escorval then went downstairs to talk with Marie-Anne. They were sitting together when Poignot's eldest son came home in a state of great excitement. He had gone out after supper with some of his acquaintances to admire the splendours of the Sairmeuse *fete*, and he now came rushing back to relate the strange events of the evening to his father's guests. "It is inconceivable!" murmured the abbe when the lad had finished his narrative. The worthy ecclesiastic fully understood that these strange events would probably render their situation more perilous than ever. "I cannot understand," added he, "how Maurice could commit such an act of folly after what I had just said to him. The baron has no worse enemy than his own son."

In the course of the following day the inmates of the farm heard of the meeting at La Reche; a peasant who had witnessed the preliminaries of the duel from a distance being able to give them the fullest details. He had seen the two adversaries take their places, and had then perceived the soldiers hasten to the spot. After a brief parley with the young Marquis de Sairmeuse, they had started off in pursuit of Maurice, Jean, and Bavois, fortunately, however, without overtaking them; for this peasant had met the same troopers again five hours later, when they were harassed and furious; the officer in command declaring that their failure was due to Martial, who had detained them. That same day, moreover, Father Poignot informed the abbe that the Duke de Sairmeuse and the Marquis de Courtornieu were at variance. Their quarrel was the talk of the district. The marquis had returned home with his daughter, and the duke had gone to Montaignac. The abbe's anxiety on receiving this intelligence was so intense that, strive as he might, he could not conceal it from the Baron d'Escorval. "You have heard some bad news, my friend," said the latter.

"Nothing, absolutely nothing."

"Some new danger threatens us."

"None, none at all."

But the priest's protestations did not convince the wounded man. "Oh, don't deny it!" he exclaimed. "On the night before last, when you came into my room after I woke up, you were paler than death, and my wife had certainly been crying. What does all this mean?" As a rule, when the cure did not wish to reply to his patient's questions, it sufficed to tell him that conversation and excitement would retard his recovery; but this time the baron was not so docile. "It will be very easy for you to restore my peace of mind," he continued. "Confess now, you are afraid they may discover my retreat. This fear is torturing me also. Very well, swear to me that you will not let them take me alive, and then my mind will be at rest."

"I can't take such an oath as that," said the cure, turning pale.

"And why not?" insisted M. d'Escorval. "If I am recaptured, what will happen? They will nurse me, and then, as soon as I can stand on my feet, they will shoot me down again. Would it be a crime to save me from such suffering? You are my best friend; swear you will render me this supreme service. Would you have me curse you for saving my life?"

The abbe offered no verbal reply; but his eye, voluntarily or involuntarily, turned with a peculiar expression to the medicine chest standing upon the table near by. Did he wish to be understood as saying: "I will do nothing myself, but you will find a poison there?"

At all events M. d'Escorval understood him so; and it was in a tone of gratitude that he murmured: "Thanks!" He breathed more freely now that he felt he was master of his life, and from that hour his condition, so long desperate, began steadily to improve.

Day after day passed by, and yet the abbe's gloomy apprehensions were not realised. Instead of fomenting reprisals, the scandal at the Chateau de Sairmeuse, and the imprudent temerity of which Maurice and Jean Lacheneur had been guilty, seemed actually to have frightened the authorities into increased indulgence; and it might have been reasonably supposed that they quite had forgotten, and wished every one else to forget, all about Lacheneur's conspiracy, and the slaughter which had followed it. The inmates of the farm soon learnt that Mau-

rice and his friend the corporal had succeeded in reaching Piedmont; though nothing was heard of Jean Lacheneur, who had probably remained in France. However, his safety was scarcely to be feared for, as he was not upon the proscribed list. Later on it was rumoured that the Marquis de Courtornieu was ill, and that Blanche his daughter did not leave his bedside; and then just afterwards Father Poignot returning from an excursion to Montagnac, reported that the Duke de Sairmeuse had lately passed a week in Paris, and that he was now on his way home with one more decoration—a convincing proof that he was still in the enjoyment of royal favour. What was of more importance was, that his grace had succeeded in obtaining an order for the release of all the conspirators still detained in prison. It was impossible to doubt this news which the Montagnac papers formally chronicled on the following day. The abbe attributed this sudden and happy change of prospects to the quarrel between the duke and the Marquis de Courtornieu, and such indeed was the universal opinion in the neighbourhood. Even the retired officers remarked: "The duke is decidedly better than he was supposed to be; if he was so severe, it is only because he was influenced by his colleague the odious provost marshal."

Marie-Anne alone suspected the truth. A secret presentiment told her that it was Martial de Sairmeuse who was working all these changes, by utilizing his ascendancy over his father's mind. "And it is for your sake," whispered an inward voice, "that Martial is working in this fashion. He cares nothing for the obscure peasant prisoners, whose names he does not even know! If he protects them, it is only that he may have a right to protect you, and those whom you love!" With these thoughts in her mind she could but feel her aversion for Martial diminish. Was not his conduct truly noble? She had to confess it was, and yet the thought of this ardent passion which she had inspired never once quickened the throbbing of Marie-Anne's heart. Alas! it seemed as if nothing were capable of touching her heart now. She was but the ghost of her former self. She would sit for whole days motionless in her chair, her eyes fixed upon vacancy, her lips contracted as if by a spasm, while great tears rolled silently down her cheeks. The Abbe Midon, who was very anxious on her

account, often tried to question her. "You are suffering, my child," he said kindly one afternoon. "What is the matter?"

"Nothing, Monsieur le Cure. I am not ill."

"Won't you confide in me? Am I not your friend? What do you fear?"

She shook her head sadly and replied: "I have nothing to confide." She said this, and yet she was dying of sorrow and anguish. Faithful to the promise she had made to Maurice, she had never spoken of her condition, or of the marriage solemnized in the little church at Vigano. And she saw with inexpressible terror the moment, when she could no longer keep her secret, slowly approaching. Her agony was frightful; but what could she do! Fly! but where could she go? And by going, would she not lose all chance of hearing from Maurice, which was the only hope that sustained her in this trying hour? Still she had almost determined on flight when circumstances—providentially, it seemed to her—came to her aid.

Money was needed at the farm. The fugitives were unable to obtain any without betraying their whereabouts, and Father Poignot's little store was almost exhausted. The Abbe Midon was wondering what they could do, when Marie-Anne told him of the will which Chanlouineau had made in her favour, and of the money concealed under the hearth-stone in the room on the first floor. "I might go to the Borderie one night," she suggested, "enter the house, which is unoccupied, obtain the money and bring it here. I have a right to do so, haven't I?"

"You might be seen," replied the priest, "and who knows—perhaps arrested. If you were questioned, what plausible explanation could you give?"

"What shall I do, then?"

"Act openly; you yourself are not compromised. You must appear at Sairmeuse to-morrow as if you had just returned from Piedmont; go at once to the notary, take possession of your property, and install yourself at the Borderie."

Marie-Anne shuddered. "What, live in Chanlouineau's house," she faltered. "Live there alone?"

"Heaven will protect you, my dear child. I can only see an advantage in your living at the Borderie. It will be easy to communicate with you; and with ordinary precau-

tions there can be no danger. Before you start we will decide on a meeting place, and two or three times a week you can join Father Poignot there. And in the course of two or three months you can be still more useful to us. When people have grown accustomed to your living at the Borderie, we will take the baron there. Such an arrangement would hasten his convalescence; for in the narrow loft, where we are obliged to conceal him now, he is really suffering for want of light and air."

Accordingly it was decided that Father Poignot should accompany Marie-Anne to the frontier that very night; and that she should take the diligence running between Piedmont and Montaignac, *via* Sairmeuse. Before she started, the Abbe Midon gave her minute instructions as to the story she should tell of her sojourn in foreign lands. The peasantry, possibly even the authorities, would question her, and all her answers must tend to prove that the Baron d'Escorval was concealed near Turin.

The plan was carried out as projected; and at eight o'clock on the following morning, the people of Sairmeuse were greatly astonished to see Marie-Anne alight from the passing diligence. "M. Lacheneur's daughter has come back again!" they exclaimed. The words flew from lip to lip with marvellous rapidity, and soon all the villagers stood at their doors and windows watching the poor girl as she paid the driver, and entered the local hostelry, followed by a lad carrying a small trunk. Urban curiosity has some sense of shame, and seeks to hide itself when prying into other people's affairs, but country folks are openly and outrageously inquisitive. Thus when Marie-Anne emerged from the inn, she found quite a crowd of sightseers awaiting her with gaping mouths and staring eyes. And fully a score of chattering gossips thought fit to escort her to the notary's door. This notary was a man of importance, and he welcomed Marie-Anne with all the deference due to the heiress of a house and farm worth from forty to fifty thousand francs. However, being jealous of his renown for perspicuity, he gave her clearly to understand that, as a man of experience, he fully divined that love alone had influenced Chanlouineau in drawing up this last will and testament. He was no doubt anxious to obtain some information concerning the young farmer's passion, and Marie

Anne's composure and reticence disappointed him immensely.

"You forget what brings me here," she said; "you don't tell me what I have to do!"

The notary, thus interrupted, made no further attempts at divination. "Plague on it!" he thought, "she is in a hurry to get possession of her property—the avaricious creature!" Then he added aloud, "The business can be finished at once, for the magistrate is at liberty to-day, and can go with us to break the seals this afternoon."

So, before evening, all the legal requirements complied with, and Marie-Anne was formally installed at the *Borderie*. She was alone in Chanlouineau's house, and as the darkness gathered round her, a great terror seized hold of her heart. She fancied that the doors were about to open, that this man who had loved her so much would suddenly appear before her, and that she should hear his voice again as she heard it for the last time in his grim prison cell. She struggled hard against these foolish fears, and at last lighting a lamp she ventured to wander through this house—now her's—but wherein everything spoke so forcibly of its former owner. She slowly examined the different rooms on the ground floor, noting the recent repairs and improvements, and at last climbed the stairs to the room above which Chanlouineau had designed to be the altar of his love. Strange as it may seem, it was really luxuriously upholstered—far more so than Chanlouineau's letter had led her to suppose. The young farmer, who for years had breakfasted off a crust and an onion, had lavished a small fortune on this apartment, which he meant to be his idol's sanctuary.

"How he loved me!" murmured Marie-Anne, moved by that emotion, the bare thought of which had awakened Maurice's jealousy. But she had neither the time nor the right to yield to her feelings. At that very moment Father Poignot was no doubt waiting for her at the appointed meeting place. Accordingly, she swiftly raised the hearthstone, and found the money which Chanlouineau had mentioned. She handed the larger part of it to Poignot, who in his turn gave it to the abbe on reaching home.

The days that followed were peaceful ones for Marie-Anne, and this tranquillity, after so many trials, seemed to her almost happiness. Faithful to the priest's instructions,

she lived alone ; but, by frequent visits to Sairmeuse, she accustomed people to her presence. Yes, she would have been almost happy if she could only have had some news of Maurice. What had become of him ! Why did he give no sign of life ? She would have given anything in exchange for one word of love and counsel from him. Soon the time approached when she would require a confidant ; and yet there was no one in whom she dared confide. In her dire need she at last remembered the old physician at Vigano, who had been one of the witnesses at her marriage. She had no time to reflect whether he would be willing or not ; but wrote to him immediately, entrusting her letter to a youth in the neighbourhood. "The gentleman says you may rely upon him," said the lad on his return. And that very evening Marie-Anne was roused by a rap at her door. It was the kind-hearted old man, who had hastened to her relief. He remained at the Borderie nearly a fortnight, and when he left one morning before daybreak, he took away with him under his cloak an infant—a little boy—whom he had sworn to cherish as his own child.

XXIX.

It had cost Blanche an almost superhuman effort to leave Sairmeuse without treating the duke to a display of violence, such as would have fairly astonished even that irascible nobleman. She was tortured with inward rage at the very moment, when, with an assumption of melancholy dignity, she murmured the words of forgiveness we have previously recorded. But vanity, after all, was more powerful than resentment. She thought of the gladiators who fall in the arena with a smile on their lips, and resolved that no one should see her weep, that no one should hear her threaten or complain. Indeed, on her return to the Chateau de Courtornieu her behaviour was truly worthy of a stoic philosopher. Her face was pale, but not a muscle of her features moved as the servants glanced at her inquisitively. "I am to be called mademoiselle as formerly," she said imperiously. "Any of you forgetting this order will be at once dismissed."

One maid did forget the injunction that very day, addressing her young mistress as "madame," and the poor

girl was instantly dismissed, in spite of her tears and protestations. All the servants were indignant. "Does she hope to make us forget that she's married, and that her husband has deserted her?" they queried.

Ah! that was what she wished to forget herself. She wished to annihilate all recollection of the day that had seen her successively maiden, wife, and widow. For was she not really a widow? A widow, not by her husband's death, it is true; but, thanks to the machinations of an odious rival, an infamous, perfidious creature, lost to all sense of shame. And yet, though she had been disdained, abandoned, and repulsed, she was no longer free. She belonged to this man whose name she bore like a badge of servitude—to this man who hated her, who had fled from her. She was not yet twenty; still her youth, her hopes, her dreams were ended. Society condemned her to seclusion, while Martial was free to rove wheresoever he listed. It was now that she realised the disadvantages of isolation. She had not been without friends in her school-girl days; but after leaving the convent she had estranged them by her haughtiness, on finding them not as high in rank, or as wealthy as herself. So she was now reduced to the irritating consolations of Aunt Medea, a very worthy person, no doubt, but whose tears flowed as freely for the loss of a cat as for the death of a relative. However, Blanche firmly persevered in her determination to conceal her grief and despair in the deepest recesses of her heart. She drove about the country, wore her prettiest dresses, and forced herself to assume a gay and indifferent air. But on going to church at Sairmeuse on the following Sunday, she realised the futility of her efforts. Her fellow worshippers did not look at her haughtily, or even inquisitively, but they turned aside to smile, and she overheard remarks concerning "the maiden widow," which pierced her very soul. So she was an object of mockery and ridicule. "Oh! I will have my revenge!" she muttered to herself.

She had indeed already thought of vengeance; and had found her father quite willing to assist her. For the first time the father and the daughter shared the same views. "The Duke de Sairmeuse shall learn what it costs to favour a prisoner's escape, and to insult a man like me," said the Marquis bitterly. "Fortune, favour, position—he shall lose everything, and I will not rest content till I

see him ruined and dishonoured at my feet. And mind me, that day shall surely come !”

Unfortunately, however, for M. de Courtornieu's projects, he was extremely ill for three days after the scene at Sairmeuse ; and then he wasted three days more in composing a report, which was intended to crush his former ally. This delay ruined him, for it gave Martial time to perfect his plans, and to despatch the Duke de Sairmeuse to Paris with full instructions. And what did the duke say to the king, who gave him such a gracious reception ? He undoubtedly pronounced the first reports to be false, reduced the rising at Montaignac to its proper proportions, represented Lacheneur as a fool, and his followers as inoffensive idiots. It was said, moreover, that he led his majesty to suppose that the Marquis de Courtornieu might have provoked the outbreak by undue severity. He had served under Napoleon, and had possibly thought it necessary to make a display of his zeal, so that his past apostasy might be forgotten. As far as the duke himself was concerned, he deeply deplored the mistakes into which he had been led by his ambitious colleague, on whom he cast most of the responsibility of so much bloodshed. To be brief, the result of the duke's journey was, that when the Marquis de Courtornieu's report reached Paris, it was answered by a decree depriving him of his office as provost-marshal of the province.

This unexpected blow quite crushed the old intriguer. What ! he had been duped in this fashion, he so shrewd, so adroit, so subtle minded and quick witted ; he who had successfully battled with so many storms ; who, unlike most of his fellow patricians, had been enriched, not impoverished, by the Revolution, and who had served with the same obsequious countenance each master who was willing to accept his services. “ It must be that old imbecile, the Duke de Sairmeuse, who has manœuvred so skilfully,” he groaned. “ But who advised him ? I can't imagine who it could have been.”

Who it was Blanche knew only too well. Like Marie-Anne, she recognized Martial's hand in all this business. “ Ah ! I was not deceived in him,” she thought ; “ he is the great diplomatist I believed him to be. To think that at his age he has outwitted my father, an old politician of such experience and acknowledged skill ! And he does

all this to please Marie-Anne," she continued, frantic with rage. "It is the first step towards obtaining pardon for that vile creature's friends. She has unbounded influence over him, and so long as she lives there is no hope for me. But, patience, my time will come."

She had not yet decided what form the revenge she contemplated should take ; but she already had her eye on a man whom she believed would be willing to do anything for money. And, strange as it may seem, this man was none other than our old acquaintance, Father Chupin. Burdened with remorse, despised and jeered at ; stoned whenever he ventured in the streets, and horror-stricken whenever he thought of Balstain's vow, Chupin had left Montaignac, and sought an asylum at the Chateau de Sairmeuse. In his ignorance, he fancied that the great nobleman who had incited him to discover Lacheneur owed him, over and above the promised reward, all needful aid and protection. But the duke's servants shunned the so-called traitor. He was not even allowed a seat at the kitchen table, nor a straw pallet in the stables. The cook threw him a bone, as he would have thrown it to a dog ; and he slept just where he could. However, he bore all these hardships uncomplainingly, deeming himself fortunate in being able to purchase comparative safety, even at such a price. But when the duke returned from Paris with a policy of forgetfulness and conciliation in his pocket, his grace could no longer tolerate in his establishment the presence of a man who was the object of universal execration. He accordingly gave instructions for Chupin to be dismissed. The latter resisted, however, swearing that he would not leave Sairmeuse unless he were forcibly expelled, or unless he received the order from the lips of the duke himself. This obstinate resistance was reported to the duke, and made him hesitate ; but a word from Martial concerning the necessities of the situation eventually decided him. He sent for Chupin and told him that he must not visit Sairmeuse again under any pretext whatever, softening the harshness of expulsion, however, by the offer of a small sum of money. But Chupin, sullenly refusing the proffered coins, gathered his belongings together, and departed, shaking his clenched fist at the chateau, and vowing vengeance on the Sairmeuse family. He then went to his old home, where his wife

and his two boys still lived. He seldom left this filthy den, and then only to satisfy his poaching proclivities. On these occasions, instead of stealthily firing at a squirrel or a partridge from some safe post of concealment, as he had done in former times, he walked boldly into the Sairmeuse or the Courtornieu forests, shot his game, and brought it home openly, displaying it in an almost defiant manner. He spent the rest of his time in a state of semi-intoxication, for he drank constantly, and more and more immoderately. When he had taken more than usual, his wife and his sons usually attempted to obtain money from him, and if persuasion failed they often resorted to blows. For he had never so much as shown them the blood-money paid to him for betraying Lacheneur; and though he had squandered a small sum at Montaignac, no one knew what he had done with the great bulk of the 20,000 francs in gold paid to him by the Duke de Sairmeuse. His sons believed he had buried it somewhere; but they tried in vain to wrest his secret from him. All the people in the neighbourhood were aware of this state of affairs, and one day when the head gardener at Courtornieu was telling the story to two of his assistants, Blanche, seated on a bench near by, chanced to overhear him.

"Ah, he's an old scoundrel!" said the gardener indignantly. "And he ought to be at the galleys, instead of at large among respectable people."

At that same moment the voice of hatred was whispering to Blanche, "That's the man to serve your purpose." But how an opportunity was to be found to confer with him? she wondered, being too prudent to think of hazarding a visit to his house. However, she remembered that he occasionally went shooting in the Courtornieu woods, and that it might be possible for her to meet him there. "It will only require," thought she, "a little perseverance and a few long walks." But, in point of fact, it cost poor Aunt Medea, the inevitable chaperone, two long weeks of almost constant perambulation. "Another freak!" groaned the impoverished relative, overcome with fatigue; "my niece is certainly crazy!"

However, at last, one lovely afternoon in May, Blanche came across the object of her quest. She chanced to be standing in a sequestered nook nigh the mere, situated in the depths of the forest of Courtornieu, when she perceived

Chupin, tramping sullenly along with his gun in his hand, and glancing suspiciously on either side. Not that he feared either game-keeper or judicial proceedings, but go wherever he would, still and ever he fancied he could see Balstain the Piedmontese innkeeper, walking in his shadow and brandishing the terrible knife, which, by St. Jean-de-Coche, he had consecrated to his vengeance. Seeing Blanche in turn, the old rascal would have fled into the cover, but before he could do so she had called to him: "Eh, Father Chupin!"

He hesitated for a moment, then paused, dropped his gun, and waited.

Aunt Medea was pale with fright. "Blessed Jesus!" she murmured, pressing her niece's arm; "what are you calling that terrible man for?"

"I want to speak to him."

"What Blanche, do you dare——"

"I must!"

"No, I can't allow it. I must not——"

"There, that's enough!" said Blanche, with one of those imperious glances that deprive a dependent of all strength and courage; "quite enough." Then, in gentler tones: "I *must* talk with this man," she added. "And you, Aunt Medea, must remain some little distance off. Keep a close watch on every side, and if you see any one approaching, call me at once."

Aunt Medea, submissive as was her wont, immediately obeyed; and Blanche walked straight towards the old poacher. "Well, my good Father Chupin, and what sort of sport have you had to-day?" she began, directly she was a few steps from him.

"What do you want with me?" growled Chupin; "for you do want something, or you wouldn't trouble yourself about a man like me."

The old ruffian's manner was so surly and aggressive that Blanche needed all her strength of mind to carry out her purpose. "Yes, it is true that I have a favour to ask you," she replied, in a resolute tone.

"Ah, ha! I supposed so."

"A mere trifle which will cost you no trouble, and for which you shall be well paid." She said this so carelessly that an ordinary person would have supposed she was

really asking for some unimportant service ; but cleverly as she played her part, Chupin was not deceived.

"No one asks trifling services of a man like me," he said coarsely. "Since I served the good cause, at the peril of my life, people seem to suppose they've a right to come to me with money in their hands whenever they want any dirty work done. It's true that I was well paid for that other job ; but I would like to melt all the gold and pour it down the throats of those who gave it to me. Ah ! I know now what it costs the poor to listen to the words of the great ! Go your way ; and if you have any wickedness in your head, do it yourself !"

He shouldered his gun and was moving off, when Blanche coldly observed : "It was because I knew of your wrongs that I stopped you ; I thought you would be glad to serve me, because I hate the Sairmeuses like you do."

These words excited the old poacher's interest, and he paused. "I know very well that you hate the Sairmeuses now—but—"

"But what ?"

"Why, in less than a month you will be reconciled. And then that old wretch, Chupin—"

"We shall never be reconciled."

"Hum !" growled the wily rascal, after deliberating awhile. And if I did assist you, what compensation will you give me ?"

"I will give you whatever you wish for—money, land, a house—"

"Many thanks. I want something quite different."

"What do you want then ? Tell me."

Chupin reflected for a moment, and then replied : "This is what I want. I have a good many enemies, and I don't even feel safe in my own house. My sons abuse me when I've been drinking, and my wife is quite capable of poisoning my wine. I tremble for my life and for my money. I can't endure such an existence much longer. Promise me an asylum at the Chateau de Courtornieu and I'm yours. I shall be safe in your house. But let it be understood I won't be ill-treated by the servants like I was at Sairmeuse."

"Oh, I can promise you all that."

"Swear it then by your hope of heaven."

"I swear it."

There was such evident sincerity in her accent that Chupin felt re-assured. He leant towards her, and in a low voice, remarked: "Now tell me your business." His small grey eyes glittered in a threatening fashion; his thin lips were drawn tightly over his sharp teeth; he evidently expected some proposition of murder, and was ready to accomplish it.

His attitude evinced his feelings so plainly that Blanche shuddered. "Really, what I want of you is almost nothing," she replied. "I only want you to watch the Marquis de Sairmeuse."

"Your husband?"

"Yes; my husband. I want to know what he does, where he goes, and what persons he sees, I want to know how he spends all his time."

"What! now is that really all you want me to do?" asked Chupin eagerly.

"For the present, yes. My plans are not yet decided; but circumstances will guide me."

"You can rely upon me," replied Chupin at once; "but I must have a little time."

"Yes, I understand that. To-day is Saturday; can you give me a first report on Thursday?"

"In five days? Yes, probably."

"In that case, meet me here on Thursday, at the same hour."

The conversation might have continued a few moments longer, but at this very moment Aunt Medea was heard exclaiming. "Some one is coming!"

"Quick! we must not be seen together. Conceal yourself," ejaculated Blanche, and while the old poacher disappeared with one bound into the forest, she hastily re-joined her chaperone. A few paces off she could perceive one of her father's servants approaching.

"Ah! mademoiselle," exclaimed the lacquey, "we have been looking for you everywhere during the last three hours. Your father M. le Marquis—good heavens! what a misfortune! A physician has been sent for."

"Whatever has happened? Is my father dead?"

"No, mademoiselle, no; but—how can I tell you. When the marquis went out this morning his actions were very strange, and—and—when he returned—" As he

spoke the servant tapped his forehead with his forefinger. "You understand me, mademoiselle—when he came home his reason seemed to—to have left him!"

Without waiting for the servant to finish, or for her terrified aunt to follow her, Blanche darted off in the direction of the chateau. "How is the marquis?" she inquired of the first servant she met.

"He is in bed, and is quieter than he was," answered the maid.

But Blanche had already reached her father's room. He was sitting up in bed, under the supervision of his valet and a footman. His face was livid, and a white foam had gathered on his lips. Still, he recognized his daughter. "Here you are," said he. "I was waiting for you."

She paused on the threshold, and though she was neither tender-hearted nor impressionable, the sight seemed to appal her: "My father!" she faltered. "Good heavens! what has happened?"

"Ah, ha!" exclaimed the marquis, with a discordant laugh. "I met him! what, you doubt me? I tell you that I saw the wretch. I know him well; haven't I seen his cursed face before my eyes for more than a month—for it never leaves me. I saw him. It was in the forest near the Sanguille rocks. You know the place; it is always dark there, on account of the trees. I was slowly walking home thinking of him, when suddenly he sprang up before me, holding out his arms as if to bar my passage. 'Come,' said he, 'you must join me.' He was armed with a gun; he fired—"

The marquis paused, and Blanche summoned up sufficient courage to approach him. For more than a minute she looked at him attentively, with a cold magnetic glance, such as often exercises great influence over those who have lost their reason, then shaking him roughly by the arm, she exclaimed: "Control yourself, father. You are the victim of an hallucination. It is impossible that you can have seen the man you speak of."

Blanche knew only too well who was the man that M. de Courtornieu alluded to; but she dared not, could not, utter his name.

However, the marquis had resumed his scarcely coherent narrative. "Was I dreaming?" he continued. "No, it

was Lacheneur, Lacheneur and none other who stood in front of me. I am sure of it, and the proof is that he reminded me of a circumstance which occurred in my youth, and which was known only to him and me. It happened during the Reign of Terror. He was all-powerful in Montaignac; and I was accused of being in correspondence with the *émigrés*. My property had been confiscated; and I was every moment expecting to feel the executioner's hand on my shoulder, when Lacheneur took me to his house. He concealed me; furnished me with a passport; saved my money, and saved my life as well; and yet—and yet I sentenced him to death. That's the reason why I've seen him again. I must join him; he told me so—I'm a dying man!" With these words the marquis fell back on his pillows, pulled the bed clothes over his face, and lied there so rigid and motionless that one might readily have supposed the counterpane covered some inanimate corpse.

Mute with horror, the servants exchanged frightened glances. Such baseness and ingratitude amazed them. They could not understand why, under such circumstances, the marquis had not pardoned Lacheneur. Blanche alone retained her presence of mind. Turning to her father's valet, she said: "Hasn't some one tried to injure my father?"

"I beg your pardon, mademoiselle, some one most certainly has: a little more and Monsieur le Marquis would have been killed."

"How do you know that?"

"In undressing the marquis I noticed that he had received a wound in the head. I also examined his hat, and I found three holes in it, which could only have been made by bullets."

"Then some one must have tried to murder my father," murmured Blanche, "and this attack of delirium has been brought on by fright. How can we find out who the would-be murderer was?"

The valet shook his head. "I suspect that old poacher, who is always prowling about here, a man named—Chupin."

"No, it couldn't have been him."

"Ah! I am almost sure of it. There's no one else in the neighbourhood capable of such an evil deed."

Blanche could not give her reasons for declaring Chupin

innocent. Nothing in the world would have induced her to admit that she had met him, talked with him for more than half-an-hour, and only just parted from him. So she remained silent.

Soon afterwards the medical man arrived. He removed the coverlet from M. de Courtornieu's face, being almost compelled to use force in doing so—examined the patient with evident anxiety, and then ordered mustard plasters, applications of ice to the head, leeches, and a potion, for which a servant was to gallop to Montaignac at once. Immediately afterwards all was bustle and confusion in the house. When the physician left the sickroom, Blanche followed him. "Well, doctor?" she said, with a questioning look.

The physician hesitated, but at last he replied; "People sometimes recover from such attacks."

It really mattered little to Blanche whether her father recovered or died, but she felt that an opportunity to recover her lost influence was now afforded her. If she was to fight successfully against Martial's desertion, she must improvise a very different reputation to that which she at present enjoyed. Now, if she could only appear to the world in the character of a patient victim, and devoted daughter, public opinion, which, as she had recently discovered, was after all worth having, might yet turn in her favour. Such an occasion offering itself must not be neglected. Accordingly, she lavished the most touching and delicate attentions on her suffering father. It was impossible to induce her to leave his bedside for a moment, and it was only with great difficulty that she would be persuaded to sleep for a couple of hours, in an arm-chair in the sick-room. But while she was playing this self-imposed role of sister of charity with a talent worthy of a healthier mind, her chief thoughts were for Chupin. What was he doing at Montaignac? Was he watching Martial as he had promised? How slowly the time passed! Would that Thursday which had been appointed for their meeting never come?

It came at last, and momentarily entrusting her father to Aunt Medea's care, Blanche made her escape. The old poacher was waiting for her at the appointed place near the lake. "Well, what have you got to tell me?" asked Blanche.

"Next to nothing, I'm sorry to say."

"What! haven't you been watching the marquis?"

"Your husband? Excuse me, I have followed him like his own shadow. But I'm afraid the news I have of him won't interest you very much. Since the duke left for Paris, your husband has charge of everything. Ah! you wouldn't recognize him! He's always busy now. He's up at cock-crow; and goes to bed with the chickens. He writes letters all the morning. In the afternoon he receives every one who calls upon him. The retired officers are hand and glove with him. He has re-instated five or six of them, and has granted pensions to two others. He seldom goes out, and never in the evening."

He paused, and for a moment Blanche remained silent. A question rose to her lips, and yet she scarcely dared to propound it. She blushed with shame, and it was only after a supreme effort that she managed to articulate, "But he must surely have a mistress?"

Chupin burst into a noisy laugh. "Well, we have come to it at last," he said, with an air of audacious familiarity that made Blanche positively shudder. "You mean that scoundrel Lacheneur's daughter, don't you? that stuck-up minx Marie-Anne?"

"Blanche felt that denial was useless. "Yes," she answered; "I do mean Marie-Anne."

"Ah, well! she's neither been seen nor heard of. She must have fled with her other lover, Maurice d'Escorval."

"You are mistaken."

"Oh, not at all! Of all the Lacheneurs, the only one remaining about here is Jean the son, who leads a vagabond life, poaching much as I do. He's always in the woods, day and night, with his gun slung over his shoulder. I caught sight of him once. He's quite frightful to look at, a perfect skeleton, with eyes that glitter like live coals. If he ever meets me and sees me, my account will be settled then and there."

Blanche turned pale. Plainly enough it was Jean Lacheneur who had fired at her father. However, concealing her agitation, she replied, "I, myself, feel sure that Marie-Anne is in the neighbourhood, concealed at Montaignac, probably. I must know. Try and find out where she is by Monday, when I will meet you here again."

"All right, I'll try," answered Chupin, and he did in

deed try ; exerting all his energy and cunning, but in vain. He was fettered by the precautions which he took to shield himself against Balstain and Jean Lacheneur ; while, on the other hand, he had to prosecute his search personally, as no one in the neighbourhood would have consented to give him the least information. " Still no news ! " he said to Blanche at each succeeding interview. But she would not admit the possibility of Marie-Anne having fled with Maurice. Jealousy will not yield even to evidence. She had declared that Marie-Anne had taken her husband from her, that Martial and Marie-Anne loved each other, and it must be so, all proofs to the contrary notwithstanding. At last, one morning, she found her spy jubilant. " Good news ! " he cried, as soon as he perceived her ; " we have caught the minx at last."

XXX.

THIS was three days after Marie-Anne's arrival at the Borderie, which event was the general topic of conversation throughout the neighbourhood ; Chanlouineau's will especially forming the subject of countless comments. The old folks looked grave, and repeated to one another, " Ah, well, here's M. Lacheneur's daughter with an income of more than two thousand francs, without counting the house." While the unattractive maidens who had not been fortunate enough to secure husbands muttered in their turn, " An honest girl would have had no such luck as that ! "

When Chupin brought this great news to Blanche she trembled with anger, and clenched her soft white hands, exclaiming : " What audacity ! What impudence ! "

The old poacher seemed to be of the same opinion. " If each of her lovers gives her as much she will be richer than a queen," quothed he maliciously. " She will be able to buy up Sairmeuse, and Courtornieu as well if she chooses."

" And this is the woman who has estranged Martial from me ! " ejaculated Blanche. " He abandons me for a filthy drab like that ! " She was so incensed that she entirely forgot Chupin's presence, making no attempt to restrain herself, or to hide the secret of her sufferings. " Are you sure that what you tell me is true ? " she asked.

" As sure as you stand there."

"Who told you all this?"

"No one—I have eyes. That is, I overheard two villagers talking about Mademoiselle Lacheneur's return; so then I went to the Borderie to see for myself, and I found all the shutters open. Marie-Anne was leaning out of a window. She doesn't even wear mourning, the heartless hussy!" Chupin spoke the truth, but then the only dress the poor girl possessed was the one that Madame d'Escorval had lent her on the night of the insurrection, when it became necessary for her to doff her masculine attire.

The old poacher was about to increase Blanche's irritation by some further malicious remarks, when she checked him with the enquiry—"Whereabouts is the Borderie?"

"Oh, about a league and a half from here, opposite the water mills on the Oiselle, and not far from the river bank."

"Ah, yes! I remember now. Were you ever in the house?"

"Oh, scores and scores of times while Chanlouineau was living."

"Then you can describe it to me?"

"I should think I could. It stands in an open space a little distance from the road. There's a small garden in front, and an orchard behind. They are both hedged in. In the rear of the orchard, on the right, are the vineyards; while on the left there's a small grove planted round about a spring." Chupin paused suddenly in his description, and with a knowing wink, inquired: "But what use do you mean to make of all this information?"

"That's no matter of yours. But tell me, what is the house like inside?"

"There are three large square rooms on the ground floor, besides the kitchen and pantry. I can't say what there is upstairs, as I've never been there."

"And what are the rooms you've seen furnished like?"

"Why, like those in any peasant's house, to be sure." Chupin, it should be observed, knew nothing of the luxurious apartment which Chanlouineau had intended for Marie Anne. Indeed, the only stranger who was aware of its existence was the leading upholsterer of Montaignac, for the young farmer had never confided his secret to any one in the neighbourhood, and the furniture had been brought to the Borderie one night in the stealthiest fashion.

"How many doors are there to the house?" enquired Blanche.

"Three: one opening into the garden, one into the orchard, and another communicating with the stables. The staircase is in the middle room."

"And is Marie-Anne quite alone at the Borderie?"

"Quite alone at present; but I expect her brigand of a brother will join her before long."

After this reply, Blanche fell into so deep and prolonged a reverie that Chupin at last became impatient. He ventured to touch her on the arm, and, in a wily voice, enquired, "Well, what shall we decide?"

Blanche drew back shuddering. "My mind is not yet made up," she stammered. "I must reflect—I will see." And then noting the old poacher's discontented face, she added, "I will do nothing lightly. Don't lose sight of the marquis. If he goes to the Borderie, and he will go there, I must be informed of it. If he writes, and he will write, try to procure one of his letters. I must see you every other day. Don't rest! Try to deserve the good place I am reserving for you at Courtornieu. Now go!"

The old rascal trudged off without attempting a rejoinder, but his manner plainly showed that he was intensely disappointed. "It serves me deucedly well right," he growled. "I oughtn't to have listened to such a silly, affected woman. She fills the air with her ravings, wants to kill everybody, burn and destroy everything. She only asks for an opportunity. Well, the occasion presents itself, and then of course her heart fails her. She draws back, and gets afraid!"

In these remarks, Chupin did Blanche great injustice. If, as he had noted, she had shrunk back shuddering when he urged her to decide, it was not because her will wavered, but rather because her flesh instinctively revolted against the deed she had in her mind. The old spy's unwelcome touch, his perfidious voice and threatening glance, may also in a minor degree have prompted this movement of repulsion. At all events, Blanche's reflections were by no means calculated to appease her rancour. Whatever Chupin and the Sairmeuse villagers might say to the contrary, she regarded the story which Marie-Anne, in obedience to the Abbe Midon's instructions, had told of her travels in Piedmont as a ridiculous fable, and nothing more. In her

opinion, Marie-Anne had simply emerged from some retreat where Martial had previously deemed it prudent to conceal her. But why this sudden re-appearance? Vindictive Blanche was ready to swear that it was out of mere bravado, and intended only as an insult to herself. "Ah, I *will* have my revenge," she thought. "I would tear my heart out if it were capable of cowardly weakness under such provocation!"

The voice of conscience was unheard, unheeded, in this tumult of passion. Her sufferings, and Jean Lacheneur's attempt upon her father's life, seemed to justify the most terrible reprisals. She had plenty of time now to brood over her wrongs, and to concoct schemes of vengeance; for her father no longer required her care. He had passed from the frenzied ravings of delirium to the stupor of idiocy. And yet the physician had confidently declared his patient to be cured. Cured! The body was cured, perhaps, but reason had utterly fled. All traces of intelligence had left the marquis's once mobile face, so ready in former times to assume the precise expression which his hypocrisy and duplicity required. His eyes, which had gleamed with cunning, wore a dull, vacant stare, and his under lip hung low, as is customary with idiots. Worst of all, no hope of any improvement was to be entertained. A single passion—indulgence at table—had taken the place of all those which in former times had swayed the life of this ambitious man. The marquis, in previous years most temperate in his habits, now ate and drank with disgusting voracity, and was rapidly becoming extremely corpulent. Between his meals he would wander about the Chateau and its surrounding in a listless fashion, scarcely knowing what he did. His memory had gone, and he had lost all sense of dignity, all knowledge of good and evil. Even the instinct of self-preservation, the last which dies within us, had departed, and he had to be watched like a child. Often, as he roamed about the grounds, his daughter would gaze at him from her window with a strange terror in her heart. But after all, this warning of providence only increased her desire for revenge. "Who would not prefer death to such a misfortune?" she murmured. "Ah! Jean Lacheneur's revenge is far more terrible than if his bullet had pierced my father's heart. It is a similar revenge that I must have, and I will have it!"

She saw Chupin every two or three days ; sometimes going alone to the meeting-place, and at others in Aunt Medea's company. The old poacher came punctually enough although he was beginning to tire of his task. "I am risking a great deal," he growled. "I fancied that Jean Lacheneur would go and live at the Borderie with his sister. Then, I should have been safe. But no; the brigand continues to prowl about with his gun under his arm: and sleeps in the woods at night time. What game is he after? Why, Father Chupin, of course. On the other hand, I know that my rascally innkeeper over there has abandoned his inn and disappeared. Where is he? Hidden behind one of these trees, perhaps, in settling what part of my body he shall plunge his knife into." What irritated the old poacher most of all was, that after two months watching he had come to the conclusion that whatever might have been Martial's connection with Marie-Anne in former times, everything was now all over between them.

But Blanche would not admit this. "Own that they are more cunning than you are, Father Chupin, but don't tell me they don't see each other," she observed one day.

"Cunning—and how?" was the retort. "Since I have been watching the marquis, he hasn't once passed outside the fortifications of Montaignac, while, on the other hand, the postman at Sairmeuse, whom my wife cleverly questioned, declares that he hasn't taken a single letter to the Borderie."

After this, if it had not been for the hope of a safe and pleasant retreat at Courtornieu, Chupin would have abandoned his task altogether; as it was, he relaxed his surveillance considerably; coming to the rendezvous with Blanche, chiefly because he had fallen into the habit of claiming some money for his expenses, on each occasion. And when Blanche asked him for an account of everything that Martial had done since their previous meeting, he generally told her anything that came into his head. However, one day, early in September, she interrupted him as he began the same old story, and, looking him steadfastly in the eyes, exclaimed: "Either you are betraying me, Father Chupin, or else you are a fool. Yesterday Martial and Marie-Anne spent a quarter of an hour together at the Croix d'Arcy."

XXXI.

AFTER the old physician of Vigano had left the Borderie with his precious burden, Marie-Anne fell into a state of bitter despondency. Many in her situation would perhaps have experienced a feeling of relief, for had she not succeeded in concealing the outcome of her frailty, which none, save perhaps the Abbe Midon, so much as suspected? Hence, her despondency may at first sight seem to have been uncalled for. But then, let it be remembered that the sublime instinct of maternity had been awakened in her breast; and when she saw the physician leave her, carrying away her child she felt as if her soul and body were being rent asunder. When might she hope to set her eyes again on this poor babe who was doubly dear to her by reason of the very sorrow and anguish he had cost her? Ah, if it had not been for her promise to Maurice, she would have braved public opinion and kept her infant son at the Borderie. Had she not braved calumny already? She had been accused of having three lovers. Chamlouineau, Martial, and Maurice. The comments of the villagers had not affected her; but she had been tortured, and was still tortured by the thought that these people didn't know the truth. Maurice was her husband, and yet she dare not proclaim the fact; she was "Mademoiselle Lacheneur" to all around—a maiden—a living lie. Surely such a situation accounted only too completely for her despondency and distress. And when she thought of her brother she positively shuddered with dismal apprehensions.

Having learnt that Jean was roving about the country she sent for him; but it was not without considerable persuasion that he consented to come and see her at the Borderie. A glance at his appearance sufficed to explain all Chupin's terror. The young fellow's clothes were in tatters, and the expression of his weather-stained, unshaven, unkempt face was ferocious in the extreme. When he entered the cottage, Marie-Anne recoiled with fear. She did not recognize him until he spoke. "It is I, sister," he said gloomily.

"What, you—my poor Jean! you!"

He surveyed himself from head to foot, and with a

sneering laugh retorted, "Well, really, I shouldn't like to meet myself at dusk in the forest."

Marie-Anne fancied she could detect a threat behind this ironical remark, and her apprehensions were painful in the extreme. "What a life you must be leading, my poor brother!" she said after a brief pause. "Why didn't you come here sooner? Now, I have you here, I shall not let you go. You will not desert me. I need protection and love so much. You will remain with me?"

"That's impossible, Marie-Anne."

"And why?"

Jean averted his glance; his face coloured, and it was with evident hesitation that he replied—"Because I've a right to dispose of my own life, but not of yours. We can't be anything to each other any longer. I deny you to-day, so that you may be able to deny me to-morrow. Yes, although you are now the only person on earth I love. I must and do renounce you. Your worst enemies haven't slandered you more foully than I have done, for before numerous witnesses I have openly declared that I would never set my foot inside a house given you by Chanlouineau."

"What, you said that—you, Jean—you, my brother?"

"Yes, I said it, and with a purpose; for it must be supposed that there is a deadly feud between us, so that neither you nor Maurice d'Escorval may be accused of complicity in any deed of mine."

Marie-Anne gazed at her brother wonderingly. "He is mad!" she murmured, and then with a burst of energy, she added, "What do you mean to do? Tell me; I must know."

"Nothing! leave me to myself."

"Jean!"

"Leave me to myself," he repeated roughly.

Marie-Anne felt that her apprehensions were correct. "Take care, take care," she said entreatingly. "Do not tamper with such matters. God's justice will punish those who have wronged us."

But nothing could move Jean Lacheneur, or divert him from his purpose. With a hoarse, discordant laugh, he clapped his hand on his gun and retorted, "That's my justice!"

Marie-Anne almost tottered as she heard these words. She discerned in her brother's mind the same fixed, fatal idea which had lured her father on to destruction—the idea for which he had sacrificed everything—family, friends, fortune, and even his daughter's honour, the idea which had caused so much bloodshed, which had cost the lives of so many innocent men, and had finally led him to the scaffold himself. “Jean,” she murmured, “remember our father.”

The young fellow's face turned livid; and instinctively he clenched his fists. But the words he uttered were the more impressive as his voice was calm and low. “It is just because I do remember my father that I am determined justice shall be done. Ah! these wretched nobles wouldn't display such audacity if all sons had my will and determination. A scoundrel like the Duke de Sairmeuse would hesitate before he attacked an honest man if he were only obliged to say to himself: ‘If I wrong this man, and even should I kill him, I cannot escape retributive justice, for his children will surely call me to account. Their vengeance will fall on me and mine; they will pursue us by day and night, at all hours and in all seasons. We must ever fear their hatred for they will be implacable and merciless. I shall never leave my house without fear of a bullet; never lift food to my lips without dread of poison. And until I and mine have succumbed, these avengers will prowl round about our home threatening us at every moment with death, dishonour, ruin, infamy, and misery!’” The young fellow paused, laughed nervously, and then, in a still slower voice, he added: “That is what the Sairmeuses and the Courtornieus have to expect from me.” It was impossible to mistake the import of these words. Jean Lacheneur's threats were not the wild ravings of anger. His was a cold, deep-set premeditated desire for vengeance which would last as long as he lived—and he took good care that his sister should understand him, for between his teeth he added: “Undoubtedly these people are very high, and I am very low; but when a tiny insect pierces the root of a giant oak, that tree is doomed.”

Marie-Anne realized that all her entreaties would fail to turn her brother from his purpose, and yet she could not allow him to leave, without making one more effort.

It was with clasped hands and in a supplicating voice that she begged him to renounce his projects, but he still remained obdurate, and when changing her tactics she asked him to remain with her, at least that evening and share her frugal supper, adding in trembling tones that it might be the last time they would see each other for long years, he again repeated, "You ask me an impossibility!" And yet he was visibly moved, and if his voice was stern, a tear trembled in his eye. She was clinging to him imploringly, when, yielding for one moment to the impulse of nature, he took her in his arms and pressed her to his heart. "Poor sister—poor Marie-Anne," he said, "you will never know what it costs me to refuse your supplications. But I cannot yield to them. I have been most imprudent in coming here at all. You don't realize the danger to which you may be exposed if folks suspect that there is any connection between us. I trust that you and Maurice may lead a calm and happy life. It would be a crime for me to mix you up with my wild schemes. Think of me sometimes, but don't try to see me, or even to find out what has become of me. A man like me struggles, triumphs, or perishes alone." He kissed Marie-Anne passionately, and freed himself from her detaining hands. "Farewell!" he cried; "when you see me again, our father will be avenged!"

Then with one bound he reached the door. She sprang out after him, meaning to call him back, but he had already disappeared. "It is all over," murmured the wretched girl; "my brother is lost. Nothing will restrain him now." And a vague, inexplicable, dread invaded her heart. She felt as if she were being slowly but surely drawn into a whirlpool of passion, rancour, vengeance, and crime, and a voice whispered that she would be crushed.

Some days had elapsed after this incident, when one evening, while she was preparing her supper, she heard a rustling sound outside. She turned and looked: some one had slipped a letter under the front door. Without a moments hesitation, she raised the latch and courageously sprang out on to the threshold. No one could be seen. The gloom was well nigh impenetrable, and when she listened not a sound broke the stillness. With a trembling hand she picked up the letter, walked towards the lamp burning on her supper table, and looked at the address,

"From the Marquis de Sairmeuse!" she exclaimed, in amazement, as she recognized Martial's hand-writing. So he had written to her! He had dared to write to her! Her first impulse was to burn the letter; and she was already holding it over the stove, when she suddenly thought of her friends concealed at Father Poignot's farm. "For their sake," she thought, "I must read it, and see if they are threatened with danger."

Then hastily opening the missive, she found that it was as follows: "My dear Marie-Anne—Perhaps you have suspected who it is that has given an entirely new and certainly surprising turn to events. Perhaps you have also understood the motives that guided him. In that case I am amply repaid for my efforts, for you can no longer refuse me your esteem. But my work of reparation is not yet perfect. I have prepared everything for a revision of the judgment that condemned the Baron d'Escorval to death, or for having him pardoned. You must know where the baron is concealed. Acquaint him with my plans and ascertain whether he prefers a revision of judgment, or a simple pardon. If he wishes for a new trial, I will give him a letter of licence from the king. I await your reply before acting. MARTIAL DE SAIRMEUSE."

Marie-Anne's head whirled. This was the second time that Martial had astonished her by the chivalrous spirit of his love. How noble the two men who had loved her and whom she had rejected, had proved themselves to be. One of them Chanlouineau, after dying for her sake, had sought to protect her from beyond the grave. The other, Martial de Sairmeuse had sacrificed the connections and prejudices of his caste, and hazarded with noble recklessness the political fortunes of his house, so as to insure as far as possible her own happiness and that of those she loved. And yet the man whom she had chosen, the father of her child, Maurice d'Escorval, had not given as much as a sign of life since he left her five months before. But suddenly and without reason, Marie-Anne passed from profound admiration to deep distrust. "What if Martial's offer were only a trap?" This was the suspicion that darted through her mind. "Ah!" she thought, "the Marquis de Sairmeuse would be a hero if he were sincere!" And she did not wish him to be a hero.

The result of her suspicions was that she hesitated five

day, before repairing to the meeting place where Father Poignot usually awaited her. When she did go, in lieu of the worthy farmer she found the Abbe Midon, who had been greatly alarmed by her prolonged absence. It was night time, but Marie-Anne, fortunately, knew Martial's letter by heart. The abbe made her repeat it twice, the second time very slowly, and when she had concluded, he remarked: "This young man no doubt has the prejudices of his rank and his education; but his heart is noble and generous." And when Marie-Anne disclosed her suspicions: "You are wrong, my child," he added, "the marquis is certainly sincere, and it would be unwise not to take advantage of his generosity. Such, at least, is my opinion. Entrust this letter to me. I will consult the baron, and tomorrow you shall know our decision."

Four and twenty hours later the abbe and Marie-Anne met again at the same spot. "M. d'Escorval," said the priest, "agrees with me that we must trust ourselves to the Marquis de Sairmeuse. Only the baron, being innocent, cannot, will not, accept a pardon. He demands a revision of the iniquitous judgment which condemned him—in one word, a new trial."

Marie-Anne had foreseen this determination, and yet she could not help exclaiming: "What! M. d'Escorval means to give himself up to his enemies! To risk his life on the chance of acquittal?" The priest nodded assent, and then knowing that it was quite useless to attempt arguing the point Marie-Anne submissively remarked: "In this case, I must ask you for a rough draft of the letter I ought to write to the marquis."

For a moment the priest did not reply. He evidently had some misgivings. At last, summoning all his courage, he answered. "It would be better not to write."

"But——"

"It is not that I distrust the marquis, not by any means, but a letter is dangerous; it doesn't always reach the person it's addressed to. You must see M. de Sairmeuse."

Marie-Anne recoiled. "Never! never!" she exclaimed.

The abbe did not seem surprised. "I understand your repugnance, my child," he said, gently; "your reputation has suffered greatly through the marquis's attentions. But duty calls, and this is not the time to hesitate. You know that the baron is innocent, and you know, alas, that your

father's mad enterprise has ruined him. You must, at least, make this atoning sacrifice." He then explained to her everything she would have to say, and did not leave her until she had promised to see the marquis in person.

It must not be supposed that Marie-Anne's aversion to this interview was due to the reason which the abbe assigned. Her reputation ! Alas, she knew that it was lost for ever. A fortnight before the prospect of such a meeting would have in no wise disquieted her. Then, though she no longer hated Martial, she thought of him with indifference, whereas now——Perhaps, in choosing the Croix d'Arcy for the rendezvous, she hoped that this spot with its cruel memories would restore aversion to her heart. As she walked along towards the meeting place, she said to herself that no doubt Martial would wound her feelings by his usual tone of careless gallantry. But in this she was mistaken. The young marquis was greatly agitated, but he did not utter a word unconnected with the purport of the meeting. It was only when the conference was over, and he had consented to all the conditions suggested by the abbe, that he sadly remarked : "We are friends, are we not ?"

And in an almost inaudible voice she answered, "Yes."

And that was all. He remounted his horse, which had been held by a servant, and galloped off in the direction of Montaignac. Breathless, with cheeks on fire, Marie-Anne watched him as bending low in the saddle he urged his horse onward over the dusty highway, until at last a bend and some projecting trees finally hid him from view. Then, all of a sudden, she became as it were conscious of her thoughts. "Ah, wretched woman that I am," she exclaimed, "is it possible I could ever love any other man than Maurice, my husband, the father of my child ?"

Her voice was still trembling with emotion when she related the particulars of the interview to the abbe. But he did not perceive her trouble, his thoughts being busy with the baron's interests. "I felt sure," said he, "that Martial would agree to our conditions. I was, indeed, so certain that I even made every arrangement for the baron to leave the farm. He will leave it to-morrow night and wait at your house till we receive the letters of licence from the king. The heat and bad ventilation of Poignot's loft are certainly retarding his recovery. One of Poignot's boys will

bring our baggage to-morrow evening, and at eleven o'clock or so we will place M. d'Escorval in a vehicle and all sup together at the Borderie."

"Heaven comes to my aid!" murmured Marie-Anne as she walked home, reflecting that now she would no longer be alone. With Madame d'Escorval at her side to talk to her of Maurice, and the cheerful presence of her other friends, she would soon be able to chase away those thoughts of Martial, now haunting her.

When she awoke the next morning she was in better spirits than she had been for months, and once, while putting her little house in order, she was surprised to find herself singing at her work. Just as eight o'clock in the evening was striking she heard a peculiar whistle. This was a signal from the younger Poignot, who soon appeared laden with an arm-chair for the sick man, the abbe's medicine chest, and a bag of books. They were all placed in the room upstairs—the room which Chanlouineau had decorated at such cost, and which Marie-Anne now intended for the baron. Young Poignot told her that he had several other things to bring, and nearly an hour afterwards, fancying that he might be overloaded, she ventured out to meet him. The night was very dark, and as she hastened on, Marie-Anne failed to notice two figures stooping behind a clump of lilac bushes in her little garden.

XXXII.

CHUPIN was at first quite crestfallen when Blanche told him of Martial's meeting with Marie-Anne at the Croix d'Arcy. He was detected with a falsehood on his lips, and feared that the discovery of his duplicity would for ever wreck his prospects. He must say good-bye to a safe and pleasant retreat at Courtornieu, and good-bye also to frequent gifts which had enabled him to spare his hoarded treasure, and even to increase it. However, his discomfiture only lasted for a moment. It seemed best to put a bold face on the matter, and accordingly raising his head, he remarked with an affection of frankness, "I may be stupid no doubt, but I wouldn't deceive a child. I scarcely fancy your information can be correct. Some one must have told you falsely."

Blanche shrugged her shoulders. "I obtained my information from two persons, who were ignorant of the interest it possessed for me."

"As truly as the sun is in the heavens I swear——"

"Don't swear; simply confess that you have been very negligent."

Blanche spoke so authoritatively that Chupin considered it best to change his tactics. With an air of abject humility, he admitted that he had relaxed his surveillance on the previous day; he had been very busy in the morning; then one of his boys had injured his foot; and finally, he had met some friends who persuaded him to go with them to a wine-shop, where he had taken more than usual, so that——. He told his story in a whining tone, frequently interrupting himself to affirm his repentance and cover himself with reproaches. "Old drunkard!" he said, "this will teach you not to neglect your duties."

But far from reassuring Blanche, his protestations only made her more suspicious. "All this is very good, Father Chupin," she said, dryly, "but what are you going to do now to repair your negligence?"

"What do I intend to do?" he exclaimed, feigning the most violent anger. "Oh! you shall see. I will prove that no one can deceive me with impunity. There is a small grove near the Borderie, and I shall station myself there; and may the devil seize me if a cat enters that house without my knowing it."

Blanche drew her purse from her pocket, and handed three louis to Chupin, saying as she did so, "Take these, and be more careful in future. Another blunder of the kind, and I shall have to obtain some other person's assistance."

The old poacher went away whistling contentedly. He felt quite reassured. In this, however, he was wrong, for Blanche's generosity was only intended to prevent him fancying that she doubted his veracity. In point of fact, she did doubt it. She believed his promises to be on a par with his past conduct, which, as events had shown, had at the very best been negligent in the extreme. This miserable wretch made it his business to betray others—so why shouldn't he have betrayed her as well? What confidence could she place in his reports. She certainly paid him, but the person who paid him more would un

questionably have the preference. Still, she must know the truth, the whole truth, and how was she to ascertain it? There was but one method—a certain, though a very disagreeable one—she must play the spy herself.

With this idea in her head, she waited impatiently for evening to arrive, and then, directly dinner was over, she summoned Aunt Medea, and requested her company as she was going out for a walk. The impoverished chaperone made a feeble protest concerning the lateness of the hour. But Blanche speedily silenced her, and bade her get ready at once, adding that she did not wish any one in the chateau to know that they had gone out. Aunt Medea had no other resource than to obey, and in the twinkling of an eye she was ready. The marquis had just been put to bed, the servants were at dinner, and Blanche and her companion reached a little gate leading from the grounds into the open fields without being observed. “Good heavens! Where are we going?” groaned the astonished chaperone.

“What does that matter to you? Come along!” replied Blanche, who, as it may have been guessed, was going to the Borderie. She could have followed the banks of the Oiselle, but she preferred to cut across the fields, thinking she would be less likely to meet any one. The night was very dark, and the hedges and ditches often impeded their progress. On two occasions Blanche lost her way, while Aunt Medea stumbled again and again over the rough ground, bruising herself against the stones. She groaned; she almost wept; but her terrible niece was pitiless. “Come along!” she cried, “or else I shall leave you to find your way as best you can.” And so the poor dependent struggled on.

At last, after more than an hour’s tramp, Blanche ventured to breathe. She recognized Chanlouineau’s house, a short distance off, and soon afterwards she paused in the little grove of which Chupin had spoken. Aunt Medea now timidly inquired if they were at their journey’s end—a question which Blanche answered affirmatively. “But be quiet,” she added, “and remain where you are. I wish to look about a little.”

“What! you are leaving me alone?” ejaculated the frightened chaperone. “Blanche, I entreat you! What

are you going to do? Good heavens! you frighten me. You do indeed, Blanche!"

But her niece had gone. She was exploring the grove, looking for Chupin, whom she did not find. This convinced her that the old poacher was deceiving her, and she angrily asked herself if Martial and Marie-Anne were not in the house hard by at that very hour, laughing at her credulity. She then rejoined Aunt Medea, whom she found half dead with fright, and they both advanced to the edge of the copse, where they could view the front of the house. A flickering, ruddy light illuminated two windows on the upper floor. There was evidently a fire in the room upstairs. "That's right," murmured Blanche, bitterly; "Martial is such a chilly personage." She was about to approach the house, when a peculiar whistle made her pause. She looked about her, and, through the darkness, she managed to distinguish a man walking towards the Borderie, and carrying a weighty burden. Almost immediately afterwards, a woman, certainly Marie-Anne, opened the door of the house, and the stranger was admitted. Ten minutes later he re-appeared, this time without his burden, and walked briskly away. Blanche was wondering what all this meant, but for the time being she did not venture to approach, and nearly an hour elapsed before she decided to try and satisfy her curiosity by peering through the windows. Accompanied by Aunt Medea, she had just reached the little garden, when the door of the cottage opened so suddenly that Blanche and her relative had scarcely time to conceal themselves behind a clump of lilac-bushes. At the same moment, Marie-Anne crossed the threshold, and walked down the narrow garden path, gained the road, and disappeared. "Wait for me here," said Blanche to her aunt, in a strained, unnatural voice, "and whatever happens, whatever you hear, if you wish to finish your days at Courtonnieu, not a word! Don't stir from this spot; I will come back again." Then pressing the frightened spinster's arm she left her alone and went into the cottage.

Marie-Anne, on going out, had left a candle burning on the table in the front room. Blanche seized it and boldly began an exploration of the dwelling. Owing to Chupin's description, she was tolerably familiar with the arrangements on the ground floor, and yet the aspect of the rooms

surprised her. They were roughly floored with tiles, and the walls were poorly whitewashed. A massive linen press, a couple of heavy tables, and a few clumsy chairs, constituted the only furniture in the front apartment, while from the beams above hung numerous bags of grain and bunches of dried herbs. Marie-Anne evidently slept in the back room, which contained an old-fashioned country bedstead very high and broad, and the tall fluted posts of which were draped with green serge curtains, sliding on iron rings. Fastened to the wall at the head of the bed was a receptacle for holy water. Blanche dipped her finger in the bowl, and found it full to the brim. Then beside the window on a wooden shelf she espied a jug and basin of common earthenware. "It must be confessed that my husband doesn't provide his idol with a very sumptuous abode," she muttered with a sneer. And for a moment, indeed, she was almost on the point of asking herself if jealousy had not led her astray. Remembering Martial's fastidious tastes, she failed to reconcile them with these meager surroundings. The presence of the holy water, moreover, seemed incompatible with her suspicions. But the latter revived again when she entered the kitchen. A savoury soup was bubbling in a pot over the fire, and fragrant stews were simmering in two or three saucepans. Such preparations could not be made for Marie-Anne alone. Who then were they for? At this moment Blanche remembered the ruddy glow which she had noticed through the windows on the floor above. Hastily leaving the kitchen she climbed the stairs and opened a door she found in front of her. A cry of mingled anger and surprise escaped her lips. She stood on the threshold of the room which Chanlouineau in the boldness of his passion had designed to be the sanctuary of his love. Here every thing was beautiful and luxurious: "Ah, so after all it's true," exclaimed Blanche in a paroxysm of jealousy. "And I was fancying that everything was too meager and too poor. Down stairs everything is so arranged that visitors may not suspect the truth! Ah, now I recognise Martial's astonishing talent for dissimulation, he is so infatuated with this creature that he is even anxious to shield her reputation. He keeps his visits secret and hides himself up here. Yes, here it is that they laugh at me the deluded forsaken wife whose marriage was but a mockery!"

She had wished to know the truth, and now she felt she knew it. Certainty was less cruel than everlasting suspicion, and she even took a bitter delight in examining the appointments of the apartment, which to her mind proved how deeply Martial must be infatuated. She felt the heavy curtains of brocaded silken stuff with trembling hands; she tested the thickness of the rich carpet with her feet; the embroidered coverlid on the palissandre bedstead, the mirrors, the hundred knickknacks on the tables and the mantleshef—all in turn met with her attentive scrutiny. Everything indicated that some one was expected—the bright fire—the cosy arm-chair beside it, the slippers on the rug. And who would Marie-Anne expect but Martial? No doubt the man whom Blanche had seen arriving had come to announce the marquis's approach, and Marie-Anne had gone to meet him.

Curiously enough, on the hearth stood a bowl of soup, still warm, and which Marie-Anne had evidently been about to drink when she heard the messenger's signal. Blanche was still wondering how she could profit of her discoveries, when she espied a chest of polished oak standing open on a table near a glass door leading into an adjoining dressing room. She walked towards it and perceived that it contained a number of tiny vials and boxes. It was indeed the Abbe Midon's medicine chest, which Marie-Anne had placed here in readiness, should it be needed when the baron arrived, weak from his nocturnal journey. Blanche was examining the contents when suddenly she noticed two bottles of blue glass, on which "poison" was inscribed. "Poison!"—the word seemed to fascinate her, and by a diabolical inspiration she associated these vials with the bowl of soup standing on the hearth. "And why not?" she muttered. "I could escape afterwards." Another thought made her pause, however. Martial would no doubt return with Marie-Anne, and perhaps he would drink this broth. She hesitated for a moment, and then took one of the vials in her hand, murmuring as she did so, "God will decide; it is better he should die than belong to another." She had hitherto acted like one bewildered, but this act, simple in its performance, but terrible in its import, seemed to restore all her presence of mind. "What poison is it," thought she, "ought I to administer a large or a small dose?" With some little diffi-

culty she opened the bottle and poured a small portion of its contents into the palm of her hand. The poison was a fine, white powder, glistening like pulverized glass. "Can it really be sugar?" thought Blanche; and with the view of making sure she moistened a finger tip, and gathered on it a few atoms of the powder, which she applied to her tongue. Its taste was not unlike that of an apple. She wiped her tongue with her handkerchief, and then without hesitation or remorse, without even turning pale, she poured the entire contents of the bottle into the bowl. Her self-possession was so perfect that she even stirred the broth, so that the powder might more rapidly dissolve. She next tasted it, and found that it had a slightly bitter flavour—not sufficiently perceptible, however, to awaken distrust. All that now remained was to escape, and she was already walking towards the door when, to her horror, she heard some one coming up the stairs. What should she do? where could she conceal herself? She now felt so sure that she would be detected that she almost decided to throw the contents of the bowl into the fire, and then face the intruders. But no—a chance remained—the dressing-room! She darted into it, without daring, however, to close the door, for the least click of the lock might betray her.

Immediately afterwards Marie-Anne entered the apartment, followed by a peasant carrying a large bundle. "Ah! here is my candle!" she exclaimed, as she crossed the threshold. "Joy must be making me lose my wits! I could have sworn that I left it on the table downstairs."

Blanche shuddered. She had not thought of this circumstance before.

"Where shall I put these clothes?" asked the peasant.

"Lay them down here. I will arrange them by and by," replied Marie-Anne.

The youth dropped his heavy burden with a sigh of relief. "That's the last," he exclaimed. "Now our gentleman can come."

"At what o'clock will he start?" inquired Marie-Anne.

"At eleven. It will be nearly midnight when he gets here."

Marie-Anne glanced at the magnificent timepiece on the

mantelshelf. "I have still three hours before me," said she; "more time than I need. Supper is ready, I am going to set the table here by the fire. Tell him to bring a good appetite with him."

"I won't forget, mademoiselle; thank you for having come to meet me. The load wasn't so very heavy, but it was awkward to handle."

"Won't you take a glass of wine?"

"No, thanks. I must make haste back, Mademoiselle Lacheneur."

"Good night, Poignot."

Blanche had never heard this name of Poignot before; it had no meaning for her. Ah, if she had heard M. d'Escorval or the abbe mentioned, she might perhaps have doubted the truth; her resolution might have wavered and—who knows? But unfortunately, young Poignot, in referring to the baron, had spoken of him as "our gentleman," while Marie-Anne said, "he." And to Blanche's mind they both of them referred to Martial. Yes, unquestionably it must be the Marquis de Sairmeuse, who would arrive at midnight. She was sure of it. It was he who had sent this messenger with a parcel of clothes—a proceeding which could only mean that he was going to establish himself at the Borderie. Perhaps he would cast aside all secrecy and live there openly, regardless of his rank, his dignity, and duties; forgetful even of his prejudices as well. These conjectures could only fire Blanche's jealous fury. Why should she hesitate or tremble after that? The only thing she had to fear now was that Marie-Anne might enter the dressing-room and find her there. She had but little anxiety concerning Aunt Medea, who, it is true, was still in the garden; but after the orders she had received the poor dependent would remain as still as a stone behind the lilac bushes, and, if needs be, during the whole night. On the other hand, Marie-Anne would remain alone in the house during another two hours and a half, and Blanche reflected that this would give her ample time to watch the effects of the poison on her hated rival. When the crime was discovered she would be far away. No one knew she was not at Courtornieu; no one had seen her leave the chateau; Aunt Medea would be as silent as the grave. And, besides, who would dare to accuse the Marchioness de Sairmeuse, *nee* Blanche de Courtornieu,

of murder? One thing that worried Blanche was that Marie-Anne seemed to pay no attention to the broth. She had, in fact, forgotten it. She had opened the bundle of clothes, and was now busily arranging them in a wardrobe near the bed. Who talks of presentiments! She was as gay and vivacious as in her happiest days; and while she folded the clothes hummed an air that Maurice had often sung. She felt that her troubles were nearly over, for her friends would soon be round her, and a brighter time seemed near at hand. When she had put all the clothes away, she shut the wardrobe and drew a small table up before the fire. It was not till then that she noticed the bowl standing on the hearth. "How stupid I am!" she said, with a laugh; and taking the bowl in her hands, she raised it to her lips.

Blanche heard Marie-Anne's exclamation plainly enough; she saw what she was doing; and yet she never felt the slightest remorse. However, Marie-Anne drank but one mouthful, and then, in evident disgust, she set the bowl down. A horrible dread made the watcher's heart stand still, and she wondered whether her victim had detected any peculiar taste in the soup. No, she had not; but, owing to the fire having fallen low, it had grown nearly cold, and a slight coating of grease floated on its surface. Taking a spoon Marie-Anne skimmed the broth carefully, and stirred it up. Then, being thirsty, she drank the liquid almost at one draught laid the bowl on the mantelpiece, and resumed her work.

The crime was perpetrated. The future no longer depended on Blanche de Courtornieu's will. Come what would, she was a murderess. But though she was conscious of her crime, the excess of her jealous hatred prevented her from realizing its enormity. She said to herself that she had only accomplished an act of justice, that in reality her vengeance was scarcely cruel enough for the wrongs she had suffered, and that nothing could indeed fully atone for the tortures inflicted on her. But in a few moments grievous misgivings took possession of her mind. Her knowledge of the effects of poison was extremely limited. She had expected to see Marie-Anne fall dead before her, as if stricken down by a thunderbolt. But no, several minutes passed, and Marie-Anne continued her preparations for supper as if nothing had occurred. She spread a

white cloth over the table, smoothed it with her hands, and placed a cruet-stand and salt-cellar on it. Blanche's heart was beating so violently that she could scarcely realise why its throbbings were not heard in the adjoining room. Her assurance had been great, but now the fear of punishment which usually precedes remorse crept over her mind; and the idea that her victim might enter the dressing-room made her turn pale with fear. At last she saw Marie-Anne take the light and go down-stairs. Blanche was left alone, and the thought of escaping again occurred to her; but how could she possibly leave the house without being seen? Must she wait there, hidden in that nook for ever? "That couldn't have been poison. It doesn't act," she muttered in a rage.

Alas! it did act as she herself perceived when Marie-Anne re-entered the room. The latter had changed frightfully during the brief interval she had spent on the ground floor. Her face was livid and mottled with purple spots, her distended eyes glittered with a strange brilliancy, and she let a pile of plates she carried fall on the table with a crash.

"The poison! it begins to act at last!" thought Blanche.

Marie-Anne stood on the hearth-rug, gazing wildly round her, as if seeking for the cause of her incomprehensible sufferings. She passed and repassed her hand across her forehead, which was bathed in cold sweat; she gasped for breath, and then suddenly overcome with nausea, she staggered, pressed her hands convulsively to her breast, and sank into the arm-chair, crying: "Oh, God! how I suffer!"

Kneeling by the door of the dressing-room which was only partly closed, Blanche eagerly watched the workings of the poison she had administered. She was so near her victim that she could distinguish the throbbing of her temples, and sometimes she fancied she could feel on her own cheek her rival's breath, scorching her like flame. An utter prostration followed Marie-Anne's paroxysm of agony; and if it had not been for the convulsive working of her mouth and laboured breathing, it might have been supposed that she was dead. But soon the nausea returned, and she was seized with vomiting. Each effort seemed to contract her body; and gradually a ghastly tint crept over her face, the spots on her cheeks became of a

deeper tint, her eyes seemed as if they were about to burst from their sockets, and great drops of perspiration rolled down her cheeks. Her sufferings must have been intolerable. She moaned feebly at times, and at intervals gave vent to truly heart-rending shrieks. Then she faltered fragmentary sentences; she begged piteously for water, or entreated heaven to shorten her tortures. "Ah, it is horrible! I suffer too much! My God! grant me death!" She invoked all the friends she had ever known, calling for aid in a despairing voice. She called on Madame d'Escorval, the abbe, Maurice, her brother, Chaulouineau, and Martial!

Martial!—that name more than sufficed to chase all pity from Blanche's heart. "Go on! call your lover, call!" she said to herself, bitterly. "He will come too late." And as Marie-Anne repeated the name, in a tone of agonized entreaty: "Suffer!" continued Blanche, "suffer, you deserve it! You imparted to Martial the courage to forsake me, his wife, like a drunken lacquey would abandon the lowest of degraded creatures! Die, and my husband will return to me repentant." No, she had no pity. She felt a difficulty in breathing, but that merely resulted from the instinctive horror which the sufferings of others inspire—a purely physical impression, which is adorned with the fine name of sensibility, but which is, in reality, the grossest selfishness.

And yet, Marie-Anne was sinking perceptibly. She had fallen on to the floor, during one of her attacks of sickness, and now she even seemed unable to moan; her eyes closed, and after a spasm which brought a bloody foam to her lips, her head sank back, and she lay motionless on the hearth-rug.

"It is over," murmured Blanche, rising to her feet. To her surprise her own limbs trembled so acutely, that she could scarcely stand. Her will was still firm and implacable; but her flesh failed her. She had never even imagined a scene like that she had just witnessed. She knew that poison caused death; but she had not suspected the agony of such a death. She no longer thought of increasing her victim's sufferings by upbraiding her. Her only desire now was to leave the house, the very floor of which seemed to scorch her feet. A strange, inexplicable sensation was creeping over her: it was not yet frigid, but

rather the stupor that follows the perpetration of a terrible crime. Still, she compelled herself to wait a few moments longer; then seeing that Marie-Anne still remained motionless, with closed eyes, she ventured to open the door softly, and enter the room in which her victim was lying. But she had not taken three steps forward before Marie-Anne, as if she had been galvanized by an electric battery, suddenly rose and extended her arms to bar her enemy's passage. This movement was so unexpected and so appalling that Blanche recoiled. "The Marchioness de Sairmeuse," faltered Marie-Anne. "You, Blanche—here!" And finding an explanation of her sufferings in the presence of this young woman, who once had been her friend, but who was now her bitterest enemy, she exclaimed: "It is you who have murdered me!"

Blanche de Courtoineu's nature was one of those that break, but never bend. Since she had been detected, nothing in the world would induce her to deny her guilt. She advanced boldly, and in a firm voice replied: "Yes, I have taken my revenge. Do you think I didn't suffer that evening when you sent your brother to take my newly-wedded husband away, so that I have never since gazed upon his face?"

"Your husband! I sent my brother to take him away! I do not understand you."

"Do you dare deny, then, that you are not Martial's mistress!"

"The Marquis de Sairmeuse's mistress! why I saw him yesterday for the first time since the Baron d'Escorval's escape." The effort which Marie-Anne had made to rise and speak had exhausted her strength. She fell back in the arm-chair.

But Blanche was pitiless. "You only saw Martial then," she said. "Pray, tell me, who gave you this costly furniture, these silk hangings, all the luxury that surrounds you?"

"Chanlouineau."

Blanche shrugged her shoulders. "So be it," she said, with an ironical smile. "But you are not waiting for Chanlouineau this evening? Have you warmed these slippers and laid this table for Chanlouineau? Was it Chanlouineau who sent his clothes by a peasant named Poignot? You see that I know everything?" She paused

for some reply ; but her victim was silent. "Who are you waiting for ?" insisted Blanche. "Answer me !"

"I cannot !"

"Ah, of course not, because you know that it is your lover who is coming, you wretched woman—my husband, Martial !"

Marie-Anne was considering the situation as well as her intolerable sufferings and troubled mind would permit. Could she name the persons she was expecting ? Would not any mention of the Baron d'Escorval to Blanche ruin and betray him ? They were hoping for a letter of licence for a revision of judgment, but he was none the less under sentence of death, and liable to be executed in twenty-four hours.

"So you refuse to tell me whom you expect here—at midnight," repeated the marchioness.

"I refuse," gasped Marie-Anne ; but at the same time she was seized with a sudden impulse. Although the slightest movement caused her intolerable agony, she tore her dress open, and drew a folded paper from her bosom. "I am not the Marquis de Sairmeuse's mistress," she said, in an almost inaudible voice. "I am Maurice d'Escorval's wife. Here is the proof—read."

Blanche had scarcely glanced at the paper than she turned as pale as her victim. Her sight failed her ; there was a strange ringing in her ears, and a cold sweat started from every pore in her skin. This paper was the marriage certificate of Maurice d'Escorval and Marie-Anne Lacheneur, drawn up by the cure of Vigano, witnessed by the old physician and Bavois, and sealed with the parish seal. The proof was indisputable. She had committed a useless crime ; she had murdered an innocent woman. The first good impulse of her life made her heart beat more quickly. She did not stop to consider ; she forgot the danger to which she exposed herself, and in a ringing voice she cried ; "Help ! help !"

Eleven o'clock was just striking in the country ; every one was naturally abed, and, moreover, the nearest farmhouse was half a league away. Blanche's shout was apparently lost in the stillness of the night. In the garden below Aunt Medea perhaps heard it ; but she would have allowed herself to be cut to pieces rather than stir from her place. And yet there was one other who heard that

cry of distress. Had Blanche and her victim been less overwhelmed with despair, they would have heard a noise on the stairs, which at that very moment were creaking under the tread of a man, who was cautiously climbing them. But he was not a saviour, for he did not answer the appeal. However, even if there had been help at hand, it would now have come too late.

Marie-Anne felt that there was no longer any hope for her, and that it was the chill of death which was creeping towards her heart. She felt that her life was fast ebbing away. So, when Blanche turned as if to rush out in search of assistance, she detained her with a gesture, and gently called her by her name. The murderess paused. "Do not summon any one," murmured Marie-Anne; "It would do no good. Let me at least die in peace. It will not be long now."

"Hush! do not speak so. You must not—you shall not die! If you should die—great God! what would my life be afterwards!"

Marie-Anne made no reply. The poison was rapidly completing its work. The sufferer's breath literally whistled as it forced its way through her inflamed throat. When she moved her tongue, it scorched her palate as if it had been a piece of hot iron; her lips were parched and swollen; and her hands, inert and paralysed, would no longer obey her will.

But the horror of the situation restored Blanche's calmness. "All is not yet lost," she exclaimed. "It was in that great box there on the table that I found the white powder I poured into the bowl. You must know what it is; you must know the antidote."

Marie-Anne sadly shook her head. "Nothing can save me now," she murmured, in an almost inaudible voice; "but I don't complain. Who knows the misery from which death may preserve me? I don't crave life; I have suffered so much during the past year; I have endured such humiliation; I have wept so much! A curse was on me!" She was suddenly endowed with that clearness of mental vision so often granted to the dying. She saw how she had wrought her own undoing by consenting to play the perfidious part her father had assigned her, and how she herself had paved the way for the slander, crimes, and misfortunes of which she had been the victim.

Her voice grew fainter and fainter. Worn out with suffering, a sensation of drowsiness stole over her. She was falling asleep in the arms of death. But suddenly such a terrible thought found its way into her failing mind that she gasped with agony, "My child!" And then, regaining, by a superhuman effort as much will, energy, and strength, as the poison would allow her, she straitened herself in the arm-chair, and though her features were contracted by mortal anguish, yet with an energy of which no one would have supposed her capable, she exclaimed, "Blanche, listen to me. It is the secret of my life which I am going to reveal to you; no one suspects it. I have a son by Maurice. Alas! many months have elapsed since my husband disappeared. If he is dead, what will become of my child? Blanche, you, who have killed me, swear to me that you will be a mother to my child!"

Blanche was utterly overcome. "I swear!" she sobbed; "I swear!"

"On that condition, but on that condition alone, I pardon you. But take care! Do not forget your oath! Blanche, heaven sometimes allows the dead to avenge themselves. You have sworn, remember. My spirit will allow you no rest if you do not fulfil your vow!"

"I will remember," sobbed Blanche; "I will remember. But the child——"

"Ah! I was afraid—cowardly creature that I was! I dreaded the shame—then Maurice insisted—I sent my child away—your jealousy and my death are the punishment of my weakness. Poor child! abandoned to strangers! Wretched woman that I am! Ah! this suffering is too horrible. Blanche, remember——"

"She spoke again, but her words were indistinct, inaudible. Blanche frantically seized the dying woman's arm, and endeavoured to arouse her. "To whom have you confided your child?" she repeated; "to whom? Marie-Anne—a word more—a single word—a name, Marie-Anne!"

The unfortunate woman's lips moved, but the death-rattle already sounded in her throat; a terrible convulsion shook her frame; she slid down from the chair, and fell full length upon the floor. Marie-Anne was dead—dead, and she had not disclosed the name of the old physician at Vigano to whom she had entrusted her child. She was

dead, and the terrified murderess stood in the middle of the room as rigid and motionless as a statue. It seemed to her that madness—a madness like that which had stricken her father—was working in her brain. She forgot everything; she forgot that some one was expected at midnight; that time was flying, and that she would surely be discovered if she did not fly. But the man who had entered the house when she cried for help was watching over her. As soon as he saw that Marie-Anne had breathed her last, he pushed against the door, and thrust his leering face into the room.

“Chupin!” faltered Blanche.

“In the flesh,” he responded. “This was a grand chance for you. Ah, ha! The business riled your stomach a little; but nonsense! that will soon pass off. But we must not dawdle here: some one may come in. Let us make haste.”

Mechanically the murderess stepped forward, but Marie-Anne’s dead body lay between her and the door, barring the passage. To leave the room it was necessary to step over her victim’s lifeless form. She had not courage to do so, and recoiled with a shudder. But Chupin was troubled by no such scruples. He sprang across the body, lifted Blanche as if she had been a child, and carried her out of the house. He was intoxicated with joy. He need have no fears for the future now; for Blanche was bound to him by the strongest of chains—complicity in crime. He saw himself on the threshold of a life of constant revelry. All remorse anent Lacheneur’s betrayal had departed. He would be sumptuously fed, lodged, and clothed; and, above all, effectually protected by an army of servants.

While these agreeable thoughts were darting through his mind, the cool night air was reviving the terror-stricken Marchioness de Sairmeuse. She intimated that she should prefer to walk, and accordingly Chupin deposited her on her feet some twenty paces from the house. Aunt Medea was already with them after the fashion of a dog left at the door by its master while the latter goes into a house. She had instinctively followed her niece, when she perceived the old poacher carrying her out of the cottage.

“We must not stop to talk,” said Chupin. “Come, I will lead the way.” And taking Blanche by the arm, he

hastened towards the grove. "Ah! so Marie-Anne had a child," he remarked, as they hurried on. "She pretended to be such a saint! But where the deuce has she placed it?"

"I shall find it," replied Blanche.

"Hum! that is easier said than done," quoth the old poacher, thoughtfully.

Scarcely had he spoken than a shrill laugh resounded in the darkness. In the twinkling of an eye Chupin had released his hold on Blanche's arm, and assumed an attitude of defence. The precaution was fruitless; for at the same moment a man concealed among the trees bounded upon him from behind, and, plunging a knife four times into his writhing body, exclaimed, "Holy Virgin! now is my vow fulfilled! I shall no longer have to eat with my fingers!"

"Balstain! the innkeeper!" groaned the wounded man, sinking to the ground.

Blanche seemed rooted to the spot with horror; but Aunt Medea for once in her life had some energy in her fear. "Come!" she shrieked, dragging her niece away "Come—he is dead!"

Not quite, for the old traitor had sufficient strength remaining to crawl home and knock at the door. His wife and youngest boy were sleeping soundly, and it was his eldest son, who had just returned home, who opened the door. Seeing his father prostrate on the ground, the young man thought he was intoxicated, and tried to lift him and carry him into the house, but the old poacher begged him to desist. "Don't touch me," said he. "It is all over with me! but listen: Lacheneur's daughter has just been poisoned by Madame Blanche. It was to tell you this that I dragged myself here. This knowledge is worth a fortune. my boy, if you are not a fool!" And then he died without being able to tell his family where he had concealed the price of Lacheneur's blood.

XXXIII.

It will be recollected that of all those who witnessed the Baron d'Escoval's terrible fall over the precipice below the citadel of Montagnac, the Abbe Midon was the only one

who did not despair. He set about his task with more than courage, with a reverent faith in the protection of providence, remembering Ambroise Pare's sublime phrase—"I dress the wound—God heals it." That he was right to hope was conclusively shown by the fact that after six months sojourn in Father Poignot's house, the baron was able to sit up and even to limp about with the aid of crutches. On reaching this stage of recovery, however, when it was essential he should take some little exercise, he was seriously inconvenienced by the diminutive proportions of Poignot's loft, so that he welcomed with intense delight the prospect of taking up his abode at the Borderie with Marie-Anne; and when indeed the abbe fixed the day for moving, he grew as impatient for it to arrive, as a schoolboy is for the holidays. "I am suffocating here," he said to his wife, "literally suffocating. The time passes so slowly. When will the happy day come!"

It came at last. The morning was spent in packing up such things as they had managed to procure, during their stay at the farm; and soon after nightfall Poignot's elder son began carrying them away. "Everything is at the Borderie," said the honest fellow, on returning from his last trip, "and Mademoiselle Lacheneur bids the baron bring a good appetite."

"I shall have one, never fear!" responded M. d'Escorval gaily. "We shall all have one."

Father Poignot himself was busy harnessing his best horse to the cart which was to convey the baron to his new home. The worthy man felt sad as he thought that these guests, for whose sake he had incurred such danger, were now going to leave him. He felt he should acutely miss them, that the house would seem gloomy and deserted after they had left. He would allow no one else to arrange the mattress intended for M. d'Escorval comfortably in the cart; and when he had done this to his satisfaction, he murmured, with a sigh, "It's time to start!" and turned to climb the narrow staircase leading to the loft.

M. d'Escorval with a patient's natural egotism had not thought of the parting. But when he saw the honest farmer, coming to bid him good-bye, with signs of deep emotion on his face, he forgot all the comforts that awaited him at the Borderie, in the remembrance of the royal and

courageous hospitality he had received in the house he was about to leave. The tears sprang to his eyes. "You have rendered me a service which nothing can repay, Father Poignot," he said, with intense feeling. "You have saved my life."

"Oh! we won't talk of that, baron. In my place, you would have done the same—neither more nor less."

"I shall not attempt to express my thanks, but I hope to live long enough to show my gratitude."

The staircase was so narrow that they had considerable difficulty in carrying the baron down; but finally they had him stretched comfortably on his mattress in the cart; a few handfuls of straw being scattered over his limbs so as to hide him from the gaze of any inquisitive passers-by. The latter was scarcely to be expected it is true, for it was now fully eleven o'clock at night. Parting greetings were exchanged, and then the cart which young Poignot drove with the utmost caution started slowly on its way.

On foot, some twenty paces in the rear came Madame d'Escorval, leaning on the abbe's arm. It was very dark, but even if they had been in the full sunshine, the former cure of Sairmeuse might have encountered any of his old parishioners without the least danger of detection. He had allowed his hair and beard to grow; his tonsure had entirely disappeared, and his sedentary life had caused him to become much stouter. He was clad like all the well-to-do peasants of the neighbourhood, his face being partially hidden by a large slouch hat. He had not felt so much at ease for months past. Obstacles which had originally seemed to him insurmountable, had now vanished, and in the near future he saw the baron's innocence proclaimed by an impartial tribunal, while he himself was reinstalled in the parsonage of Sairmeuse. If it had not been for his recollection of Maurice he would have had nothing to trouble his mind. Why had young d'Escorval given no sign of life? It seemed impossible for him to have met with any misfortune without hearing of it, for there was brave old Corporal Bavois who would have risked anything to come and warn them, if Maurice had been in danger. The abbe was so absorbed in these reflections, that he did not notice Madame d'Escorval was leaning more heavily on his arm and gradually slackening her pace. "I am ashamed to confess it," she said at last, "but I can go no farther. It

is so long since I was out of doors, that I have almost forgotten how to walk."

"Fortunately we are almost there," replied the priest; and indeed a moment afterwards young Poignot drew up at the corner of the foot-path leading to the Borderie. Telling the baron that the journey was ended he gave a low whistle, like that which had warned Marie-Anne of his arrival a few hours before. No one appeared or replied, so he whistled again, in a louder key, and then a third time with all his might—still there was no response. Madame d'Escorval and the abbe had now overtaken the cart, "It's very strange that Marie-Anne doesn't hear me," remarked young Poignot, turning to them. "We can't take the baron to the house until we have seen her. She knows that very well. Shall I run up and warn her?"

"She's asleep, perhaps," replied the abbe; "stay with your horse, my boy, and I'll go and wake her."

He certainly did not feel the least uneasiness. All was calm and still outside, and a bright light shone through the windows of the upper floor. Still, when he perceived the open door, a vague presentiment of evil stirred his heart. "What can this mean?" he thought. There was no light in the lower rooms, and he had to feel for the staircase with his hands. At last he found it and went up. Another open door was in front of him; he stepped forward and reached the threshold. Then, so suddenly that he almost fell backward—he paused horror-stricken at the sight before him. Poor Marie-Anne was lying on the floor. Her eyes, which were wide open, were covered with a white film; her tongue was hanging black and swollen from her mouth. "Dead!" faltered the priest; "dead!" But this could not be. The abbe conquered his weakness, and approaching the poor girl, he took her by the hand. It was icy cold; and her arm was as rigid as iron. "Poisoned!" he murmured: "poisoned with arsenic." He rose to his feet, and was casting a bewildered glance around the room, when his eyes fell on his medicine chest, standing open on a side-table. He rushed towards it, took out a vial, uncorked it, and turned it over on the palm of his hand—it was empty. "I was not mistaken!" he exclaimed.

But he had no time to lose in conjectures. The first thing to be done was to induce the baron to return to the

farm-house without telling him of the terrible misfortune which had occurred. It would not be very difficult to find a pretext. Summoning all his courage the priest hastened back to the waggon, and with well-affected calmness told M. d'Escorval that it would be impossible for him to take up his abode at the Borderie at present, that several suspicious-looking characters had been seen prowling about, and that they must be more prudent than ever now, so as not to render Martial's intervention useless. At last, but not without considerable reluctance, the baron yielded. "As you desire it, cure," he sighed, "I must obey. Come, Poignot, my boy, drive me back to your father's house."

Madame d'Escorval took a seat in her cart beside her husband. The priest stood watching them as they drove off, and it was not until the sound of the wheels had died away in the distance that he ventured to return to the Borderie. He was climbing the stairs again when he heard a faint moan in the room where Marie-Anne was lying. The sound sent all his blood wildly rushing to his heart, and with one bound he had reached the upper floor. Beside the corpse a young man was kneeling, weeping bitterly. The expression of his face, his attitude, his sobs betrayed the wildest despair. He was so lost in grief that he did not observe the abbe's entrance. Who was this mourner who had found his way to the house of death? At last, however, though he did not recognize him, the priest divined who he must be. "Jean!" he cried, "Jean Lacheneur!" The young fellow sprang to his feet with a pale face and threatening look. "Who are you?" he asked vehemently. "What are you doing here? What do you want with me?"

The former cure of Sairmeuse was so effectually disguised by his peasant dress and long beard, that he had to name himself. "You, Monsieur abbe," exclaimed Jean. "It is God who has sent you here! Marie-Anne cannot be dead! You, who have saved so many others, will save her." But as the priest sadly pointed to heaven, the young fellow paused, and his face became most ghastly looking than before. He understood now that there was no hope. "Ah!" he murmured in a desponding tone, "fate shows us no mercy. I have been watching over Marie-Anne, from a distance; and this evening I was coming to warn her to be cautious, for I knew she was in great danger

An hour ago, while I was eating my supper in a wineshop at Sairmeuse, Grollet's son came in. 'Is that you, Jean?' said he. 'I just saw Chupin hiding near your sister's house; when he observed me he slunk away.' When I heard that, I hastened here like a crazy man. I ran, but when fate is against you, what can you do? I arrived too late!"

The abbe reflected for a moment. "Then you suppose it was Chupin?" he asked.

"I don't suppose; I feel certain that it was he—the miserable traitor!—who committed this foul deed."

"Still, what motive could he have had?"

With a discordant laugh that almost seemed a yell, Jean answered: "Oh, you may be certain that the daughter's blood will yield him a richer reward than did the father's. Chupin has been the instrument; but it was not he who conceived the crime. You will have to seek higher for the culprit, much higher, in the finest chateau of the country, in the midst of an army of retainers at Sairmeuse."

"Wretched man, what do you mean?"

"What I say." And he coldly added: "Martial de Sairmeuse is the assassin."

The priest recoiled. "You are mad!" he said severely.

But Jean gravely shook his head. "If I seem so to you, sir," he replied, "it is only because you are ignorant of Martial's wild passion for Marie-Anne. He wanted to make her his mistress. She had the audacity to refuse the honour; and that was a crime for which she must be punished. When the Marquis de Sairmeuse became convinced that Lacheneur's daughter would never be his, he poisoned her that she might not belong to any one else." All efforts to convince Jean of the folly of his accusations would at that moment have been vain. No proofs would have convinced him. He would have closed his eyes to all evidence.

"To-morrow, when he is more calm, I will reason with him," thought the abbe; and then he added aloud: "We can't allow the poor girl's body to remain here on the floor. Help me, and we will place it on the bed."

Jean trembled from head to foot, and his hesitation was perceptible; but at last, after a severe struggle, he complied. No one had ever yet slept on this bed which

Chanlouineau had destined for Marie-Anne, saying to himself that it should be for her, or for no one. And Marie-Anne it was who rested there the first—sleeping the sleep of death. When the sad task was accomplished, Jean threw himself into the same arm-chair in which Marie-Anne had breathed her last, and with his face buried in his hands, and his elbows resting on his knees, he sat there as silent and motionless as the statues of sorrow placed above the last resting places of the dead.

In the meanwhile, the abbe knelt by the bed-side, and began reciting the prayers for the departed, entreating God to grant peace and happiness in heaven to her who had suffered so much on earth. But he prayed only with his lips, for in spite of all his efforts, his mind would persist in wandering. He was striving to solve the mystery that enshrouded Marie-Anne's death. Had she been murdered? Was it possible that she had committed suicide? The latter idea occurred to him without his having any great faith in it; but, on the other hand, how could her death possibly be the result of crime? He had carefully examined the room, and had discovered nothing that betrayed a stranger's visit. All he could prove was that his vial of arsenic was empty, and that Marie-Anne had been poisoned by absorbing it in the broth a few drops of which were left in the bowl standing on the mantelpiece. "When morning comes," thought the abbe, "I will look outside."

Accordingly, at daybreak he went into the garden, and made a careful examination of the premises. At first he saw nothing that gave him the least clue, and he was about to abandon his investigations, when on entering the little grove, he espied a large dark stain on the grass a few paces off. He went nearer—it was blood! In a state of great excitement, he summoned Jean to inform him of the discovery.

"Some one has been murdered here," said young Lacheneur; "and only last night, for the blood has scarcely had time to dry."

"The victim must have lost a great deal of blood," remarked the priest; "it might be possible to discover who he was by following these stains."

"Yes, I will try," replied Jean with alacrity. "Go into the house, sir; I will soon be back again."

A child might have followed the trail of the wounded man, for the blood stains left along his line of route were so frequent and distinct. These tell-tale marks led to Chupin's hovel, the door of which was closed. Jean rapped, however, without the slightest hesitation, and when the old poacher's eldest son opened the door, he perceived a very singular spectacle. The dead body had been thrown on to the ground, in a corner of the hut, the bedstead was overturned and broken, all the straw had been torn from the mattress, and the dead man's wife and sons armed with spades and pick-axes were wildly overturning the beaten soil that formed the hovel's only floor. They were seeking for the hidden treasure, for the 20,000 francs in gold, paid for Lacheneur's betrayal! "What do you want?" asked the widow, roughly.

"I want to see Father Chupin."

"Can't you see that he's been murdered," replied one of the sons. And brandishing his pick close to Jean's head, he added: "And you're the murderer, perhaps. But that's for justice to determine. Now, decamp; if you don't want me to do for you."

Jean could scarcely restrain himself from punishing young Chupin for his threat, but under the circumstances a conflict was scarcely permissible. Accordingly, he turned without another word hastened back to the Borderie. Chupin's death upset all his plans, and greatly irritated him. "I swore that the wretch who betrayed my father should perish by my hand," he murmured; "and now I am deprived of my vengeance. Some one has cheated me out of it. Who could it be? Can Martial have assassinated Chupin after he murdered Marie-Anne? The best way to assure one's self of an accomplice's silence is certainly to kill him."

Jean had reached the Borderie, and was on the point of going up-stairs, when he fancied he heard some one talking in the back room. "That's strange," he said to himself. "Who can it be?" And yielding to the impulse of curiosity, he tapped against the communicating door.

The abbe instantly made his appearance, hurriedly closing the door behind him. He was very pale and agitated.

"Who's there?" inquired Jean, eagerly.

"Why, Maurice d'Escorval and Corporal Bavois."

"My God!"

"And it's a miracle that Maurice has not been up stairs."

"But whence does he come from? Why have we had no news of him?"

"I don't know. He has only been here five minutes. Poor boy! after I told him his father was safe, his first words were: 'And Marie-Anne!' He loves her more devotedly than ever. He comes home with his heart full of her, confident and hopeful; and I tremble—I fear to tell him the truth."

"Yes, it's really too terrible!"

"Now I have warned you; be prudent—and come in." They entered the room together; and both Maurice and the old soldier greeted Jean warmly. They had not seen one another since the duel at La Reche, interrupted by the arrival of the soldiers; and when they separated that day they scarcely expected to meet again.

Now Maurice, however, was in the best of spirits, and it was with a smile on his face that he remarked: "I am glad you've come. There's nothing to fear now." Then turning to the abbe, he remarked: "But I just promised to let you know the reason of my long silence. Three days after we crossed the frontier—Corporal Bavois and I—we reached Turin. We were tired out. We went to a small inn, and they gave us a room with two beds. While we were undressing, the corporal said to me: 'I am quite capable of sleeping two whole days without waking,' while I promised myself at least a good twelve hours' rest; but we reckoned without our host, as you'll see. It was scarcely daybreak when we were suddenly woke up. There were a dozen men in our room, one or two of them in some official costume. They spoke to us in Italian, and ordered us to dress ourselves. They were so numerous that resistance was useless, so we obeyed; and an hour after we were both in prison, confined in the same cell. You may well imagine what our thoughts were. The corporal remarked to me, in that cool way of his: 'It will require four days to obtain our extradition, and three days to take us back to Montaignac—that's seven, then there'll be one day more to try us, so we've in all just eight days to live.' Bavois said that at least a hundred times during the first five or six days of our

confinement, but five months passed by, and every night we went to bed expecting they'd come for us on the following morning. But they didn't come. We were kindly treated. They did not take away my money; and they willingly sold us various little luxuries. We were allowed two hours of exercise every day in the courtyard, and the keepers even lent us several books to read. In short, I shouldn't have had any particular cause for complaint, if I had only been allowed to receive or to forward letters, or if I had been able to communicate with my father or Marie-Anne. But we were in the secret cells, and were not allowed to have any intercourse with the other prisoners. At length our detention seemed so strange and became so insupportable that we resolved to obtain some explanation of it at any cost. We changed our tactics. We had hitherto been quiet and submissive: but now we became as violent and unmanageable as possible. The whole prison resounded with our cries and protestations; we were continually sending for the superintendent, and claiming the intervention of the French ambassador. These proceedings at last had the desired effect. One fine afternoon the governor of the jail released us, not without expressing his regret at being deprived of the society of such amiable and charming guests. Our first act, as you may suppose, was to hasten to the ambassador. We didn't see that dignitary, but his secretary received us. He knit his brows when I told my story, and became excessively grave. I remember each word of his reply. 'Sir,' said he, 'I can assure you most positively that any proceedings instituted against you in France have had nothing whatever to do with your detention here.' And I expressed my astonishment frankly. 'One moment,' he added, 'I will give you my opinion. One of your enemies—I leave you to discover which—must exert a powerful influence in Turin. You were in his way, perhaps, and he had you imprisoned by the Piedmontese police.'

Jean Lacheneur struck the table beside him with his clenched fist. "Ah! the secretary was right!" he exclaimed. "Maurice, it was Martial de Sairmeuse who caused your arrest——"

"Or the Marquis de Courtornieu," interrupted the abbe, with a warning glance at Jean,

In a moment Maurice's eyes gleamed brilliantly, then, shrugging his shoulders carelessly, he said, "Never mind; I don't wish to trouble myself any more about the past. My father is well again—that is the main thing. We can easily find some way of getting him safely across the frontier. And then Marie-Anne and I—we will tend him so devotedly that he will soon forget it was my rashness that almost cost him his life. He is so good, so indulgent for the faults of others. We will go and reside in Italy or Switzerland, and you shall accompany us, Monsieur the Abbe, and you as well, Jean. As for you, corporal, it's already decided that you belong to our family."

While Maurice spoke in this fashion, so hopefully, so confidently, Jean and the abbe, realising the bitter truth, sought to avert their faces; but they could not conceal their agitation from young D'Escorval's searching glance. "What is the matter?" he asked, with evident surprise.

They trembled, hung their heads, but did not say a word. Maurice's astonishment changed to a vague, inexpressible fear. He enumerated all the misfortunes which could possibly have befallen him.

"What has happened?" he asked in a husky voice. "My father is safe is he not? You said that my mother would want nothing more, if I were only by her side again. Is it Marie-Anne then——" He hesitated.

"Courage, Maurice," murmured the abbe. "Courage!"

The young fellow tottered as if he were about to fall. He had turned intensely pale. "Marie-Anne is dead!" he exclaimed.

Jean and the abbe were silent.

"Dead!" repeated Maurice; "and no secret voice warned me! Dead! When?"

"She died only last night," replied Jean.

Maurice rose. "Last night?" said he. "In that case, then, she is still here. Where?—upstairs?" And without waiting for a reply, he darted toward the staircase so quickly that neither Jean nor the abbe had time to intercept him. With three bounds he reached the room above; he walked straight to the bed, and with a firm hand turned back the sheet that hid his loved one's face. But at the same moment he recoiled with a heart-broken cry. What! was this the beautiful, the radiant Marie-Anne—she whom he had loved so fervently! He did not recognize her.

He could not recognize these distorted features—that swollen, discoloured face—these eyes, now almost hidden by the purple swelling round them. When Jean and the priest entered the room they found him standing with his head thrown back, his eyes dilated with terror, his right arm rigidly extended toward the corpse. “Maurice,” said the priest, gently, “be calm. Courage!”

The young fellow turned with an expression of complete bewilderment upon his features. “Yes,” he faltered; “that is what I need—courage!” He staggered as he spoke, and they were obliged to support him to an arm-chair.

“Be a man,” continued the priest. “Where is your energy? To live is to suffer.”

He listened, but did not seem to understand. “Live!” he murmured; “why should I live since she is dead?”

His eyes gleamed so strangely that the abbe was alarmed. “If he does not weep, he will most certainly lose his reason!” thought the priest. Then in a commanding voice he added aloud, “You have no right to despair; you owe a sacred duty to your child.”

The same remembrance which had given Marie-Anne strength to hold even death itself at bay for a moment, saved Maurice from the dangerous trance into which he was sinking. He shuddered as if he had received an electric shock, and springing from his chair, “That is true,” he cried. “Take me to my child!”

“Not just now, Maurice; wait a little.”

“Where is it? Tell me where it is.”

“I cannot; I do not know.”

An expression of unspeakable anguish stole over Maurice’s face, and in a broken voice he said: “What! you don’t know? Did she not confide in you?”

“No. I suspected her secret. I, alone——”

“You, alone! Then the child is perhaps dead. Even if it is living, who can tell where it is?”

“We shall no doubt find a clue.”

“You are right,” faltered Maurice. “When Marie-Anne knew that her life was in danger, she could not have forgotten her little one. Those who cared for her in her last moments must have received some message for me. I must see those who watched over her. Who were they?” The priest averted his face. “I asked you who was with

her when she died," repeated Maurice, in a sort of frenzy. And, as the abbe remained silent, a terrible light dawned on the young fellow's mind. He understood the cause of Marie-Anne's distorted features now. "She perished the victim of a crime!" he exclaimed. "Some monster killed her. If she died such a death, our child is lost for ever! And it was I who recommended, who commanded the greatest precautions! Ah! we are all of us cursed!" He sank back in his chair, overwhelmed with sorrow and remorse, and with big tears rolling slowly down his cheeks.

"He is saved!" thought the abbe, whose heart bled at the sight of such intense sorrow.

Jean Lacheneur stood by the priest's side with gloom upon his face. Suddenly he drew the Abbe Midon towards one of the windows: "What is this about a child?" he enquired, harshly.

The priest's face flushed. "You have heard," he answered, laconically.

"Am I to understand that Marie-Anne was Maurice's mistress, and that she had a child by him? Is that the case? I won't, I can't believe it! She whom I revered as a saint! What! you would have me believe that her eyes lied—her eyes so chaste, so pure? And he—Maurice—he whom I loved as a brother! So his friendship was only a cloak which he assumed so as to rob us of our honour!" Jean hissed these words through his set teeth in such low tones that Maurice, absorbed in his agony of grief, did not overhear him. "But how did she conceal her shame?" he continued. "No one suspected it—absolutely no one. And what has she done with her child? Did the thought of disgrace frighten her? Did she follow the example of so many ruined and forsaken women? Did she murder her own child? Ah, if it be alive I will find it, and in any case Maurice shall be punished for his perfidy as he deserves." He paused; the window was open, and the sound of galloping horses could be plainly heard approaching along the adjacent highway. Both Jean and the abbe leant forward and looked out. Two horsemen were riding toward the Borderie—the first some ten yards in advance of the other. The former halted at the corner of the garden path, threw his reins to his follower—a groom—and then strode on foot toward the house. On recognizing this visitor, Jean bounded from

the window with a yell. He clutched Maurice by the shoulders, and, shaking him violently, exclaimed, "Up! here comes Martial, Marie-Anne's murderer! Up! he is coming! He is at our mercy!"

Maurice sprang to his feet, infuriated; but the abbe darted to the door and intercepted both young fellows as they were about to leave the room. "Not a word! not a threat!" he said, imperiously. "I forbid it. At least respect the presence of death!" He spoke with such authority, and his glance was so commanding, that both Jean and Maurice involuntarily paused. Before the priest had time to add another word, Martial was there. He did not cross the threshold. One look and he realised the situation. He turned very pale, but not a word escaped his lips. Wonderful as was his usual power of self-control he could not articulate a syllable; and it was only by pointing to the bed on which Marie-Anne's lifeless form was reposing that he asked for an explanation.

"She was infamously poisoned last evening," sadly replied the abbe.

Then Maurice, forgetting the priest's demands, stepped forward. "She was alone and defenseless," he said vehemently. "I have only been at liberty during the last two days. But I know the name of the man who had me arrested at Turin, and thrown into prison. They told me the coward's name! Yes, it was you, you infamous wretch! Ah! you dare not deny it; you confess your guilt, you scoundrel!"

Once again the abbe interposed; he threw himself between the rivals, fearing lest they should come to blows. But the Marquis de Sairmeuse had already resumed his usual haughty and indifferent manner. He took a bulky envelope from his pocket, and threw it on the table. "This," said he coldly, "is what I was bringing to Made-moiselle Lacheneur. It contains, first of all, royal letters of licence from his majesty for the Baron d'Escorval, who is now at liberty to return to his old home. He is, in fact, free and saved, for he is granted a new trial, and there can be no doubt of his acquittal. In the same envelope you will also find a decree of noncomplicity rendered in favour of the Abbe Midon, and an order from the bishop of the diocese, reinstating him as cure of Sairmeuse; and, finally, Corporal Bavois' discharge from the service, drawn

up in proper form, with the needful memorandum securing his right to a pension."

He paused, and as his hearers stood motionless with wonder, he turned and approached Marie-Anne's bedside. Then, with his hand raised to heaven over the lifeless form of her whom he had loved, and in a voice that would have made the murderess tremble in her innermost soul; he solemnly exclaimed: "I swear to you, Marie-Anne, that I will avenge you!" For a few seconds he stood motionless, then suddenly he stooped, pressed a kiss on the dead girl's brow, and left the room.

"And you think that man can be guilty!" exclaimed the abbe. "You see, Jean, that you are mad!"

"And this last insult to my dead sister is an honour, I suppose," said Jean, with a furious gesture.

"And the wretch binds my hands by saving my father!" exclaimed Maurice.

From his place by the window, the abbe saw Martial vault into the saddle. But the marquis did not take the road to Montaignac. It was towards the Chateau de Courtornieu that he now hastened.

XXXIV.

BLANCHE'S reason had sustained a frightful shock, when Chupin was obliged to lift and carry her out of Marie-Anne's room. But she well-nigh lost consciousness altogether when she saw the old poacher struck down by her side. However, as will be remembered, Aunt Medea, at least, had some energy in her fright. She seized her bewildered niece's arm, and by dint of dragging and pushing had her back at the chateau in much less time than it had taken them to reach the Borderie. It was half-past one in the morning when they reached the little garden-gate, by which they had left the grounds. No one in the chateau had noticed their long absence. This was due to several different circumstances. First of all, to the precautions which Blanche herself had taken in giving orders, before going out, that no one should come to her room, on any pretext whatever, unless she rang. Then it also chanced to be the birthday of the marquis's valet de chambre, and the servants had dined more sumptuously than usual.

They had toasts and songs over their dessert; and at the finish of the repast, they amused themselves with an improvised ball. They were still dancing when Blanche and her aunt returned. None of the doors had yet been secured for the night, and the pair succeeded in reaching Blanche's room without being observed. When the door had been securely closed, and there was no longer any fear of listeners, Aunt Medea attacked her niece.

"Now, will you explain what happened at the Borderie; and what you were doing there?" she inquired, in a tone of unusual authority.

Blanche shuddered. "Why do you wish to know?" she asked.

"Because I suffered agony during the hours I was waiting for you in the garden. What was the meaning of those dreadful cries I heard? Why did you call for help? I heard a death-rattle that made my hair stand on end with terror. Why did Chupin have to bring you out in his arms?" She paused for a moment, and then finding that Blanche did not reply. "You don't answer me!" she exclaimed.

The young marchioness was longing to annihilate her dependent relative, who might ruin her by a thoughtless word, and whom she would ever have beside her—a living memento of her crime. However, what should she say? Would it be better to reveal the truth, horrible as it was, or to invent some plausible explanation? If she confessed everything she would place herself at Aunt Medea's mercy. But, on the other hand, if she deceived her aunt, it was more than probable that the latter would betray her by some involuntary remark when she heard of the crime committed at the Borderie? Hence, under the circumstances, the wisest plan, perhaps, would be to speak out frankly, to teach her relative her lesson, and try and imbue her with some firmness. Having come to this conclusion, Blanche disdained all concealment. "Ah, well!" she said, "I was jealous of Marie-Anne. I thought she was Martial's mistress. I was half-crazed, and I poisoned her."

She expected a despairing cry, or even a fainting fit, but, to her surprise, Aunt Medea merely shed a few tears—such as she often wept for any trifle—and exclaimed: "How terrible. What if it should be discovered?" In point of fact, stupid as the neglected spinster might be, she

had guessed the truth before she questioned her niece. And not merely was she prepared for some such answer, but the tyranny she had endured for years had well-nigh destroyed all the real moral sensibility she had ever possessed.

On noting her aunt's comparative composure, Blanche breathed more freely. She never imagined that her impoverished relative was already meditating some sort of revenge for all the slights heaped on her in past years; but felt quite convinced that she could count on Aunt Medea's absolute silence and submission. With this idea in her head she began to relate all the circumstances of the frightful drama enacted at the Borderie. In so doing she yielded to a desire stronger than her own will: to the wild longing that often seizes the most hardened criminal, and forces—irresistibly impels him to talk of his crimes, even when he distrusts his confidant. But when she came to speak of the proofs which had convinced her of her lamentable mistake, she suddenly paused in dismay.

What had she done with the marriage certificate signed by the cure of Vigano, and which she remembered holding in her hands? She sprang up, and felt in the pocket of her dress. Ah, she had it safe. It was there. Without again unfolding it she threw into a drawer, and turned the key.

Aunt Medea wished to retire to her own room, but Blanche entreated her to remain. She was unwilling to be left alone—she dared not—she was afraid. And as if she desired to silence the inward voice tormenting her, she talked on with extreme volubility, repeating again and again that she was ready to do anything in expiation of her crime, and vowing that she would overcome all impossibilities in her quest for Marie-Anne's child. The task was both a difficult and dangerous one, for an open search for the child would be equivalent to a confession of guilt. Hence, she must act secretly, and with great caution. "But I shall succeed," she said. "I will spare no expense." And remembering her vow, and her dying victim's threats, she added: "I must succeed. I swore to do so, and I was forgiven under those conditions."

In the meanwhile, Aunt Medea sat listening in astonishment. It was incomprehensible to her, that her niece, with her dreadful crime still fresh in her mind, could coolly

reason, deliberate, and make plans for the future. "What an iron will!" thought the dependent relative; but in her bewilderment she quite overlooked one or two circumstances that would have enlightened any ordinary observer.

Blanche was seated on her bed with her hair unbound; her eyes were glistening with delirium, and her incoherent words and excited gestures betrayed the frightful anxiety that was torturing her. And she talked and talked, now narrating, and now questioning Aunt Medea, and forcing her to reply, only that she might escape from her own thoughts. Morning had already dawned, and the servants could be heard bustling about the chateau, while Blanche, oblivious of everything around her, was still explaining how, in less than a year, she could hope to restore Marie-Anne's child to Maurice d'Escorval. She paused abruptly in the middle of a sentence. Instinct had suddenly warned her of the danger she incurred in making the slightest change in her habits. Accordingly, she sent Aunt Medea away, then, at the usual hour, rang for her maid. It was nearly eleven o'clock, and she was just completing her toilette, when the ring of the outer bell announced a visitor. Almost immediately her maid, who had just previously left her, returned, evidently in a state of great excitement.

"What is the matter?" inquired Blanche, eagerly. "Who has come?"

"Ah, madame—that is, mademoiselle, if you only knew——"

"Will you speak?"

"The Marquis de Sairmeuse is downstairs in the blue drawing-room; and he begs mademoiselle to grant him a few minutes' conversation."

Had a thunderbolt riven the earth at her feet, the murderess could not have been more terrified. Her first thought was that everything had been discovered; for what else could have brought Martial there? She almost decided to send word that she was not at home, or that she was extremely ill; when reason told her that she was perhaps alarming herself needlessly, and that in any case the worst was preferable to suspense. "Tell the marquis that I will be with him in a moment," she at last replied.

She desired a few minutes solitude to compose her features, to regain her self-possession, if possible, and conquer

the nervous trembling that made her shake like a leaf. But in the midst of her uneasiness a sudden inspiration brought a malicious smile to her lip. "Ah!" she thought, "my agitation will seem perfectly natural. It may even be of service." And yet as she descended the grand staircase, she could not help saying to herself: "Martial's presence here is incomprehensible."

It was certainly very extraordinary; and he himself had not come to Courtornieu without considerable hesitation. But it was the only means he had of procuring several important documents which were indispensable in the revision of M. d'Escorval's case. These documents, after the baron's condemnation, had been left in the Marquis de Courtornieu's hands. Now that the latter had gone out of his mind, it was impossible to ask him for them; and Martial was obliged to apply to his wife for permission to search for them among her father's papers. He had said to himself that morning: "I will carry the baron's letters of licence to Marie-Anne, and then I will push on to Courtornieu."

He arrived at the Borderie gay and confident, his heart full of hope; and found that Marie-Anne was dead. The discovery had been a terrible blow for Martial; and his conscience told him that he was not free from blame; that he had, at least, facilitated the perpetration of the crime. For it was indeed he who, by an abuse of influence, had caused Maurice's arrest at Turin. But though he was capable of the basest perfidy when his love was at stake, he was incapable of virulent animosity. Marie-Anne was dead; he had it in his power to revoke the benefits he had conferred, but the thought of doing so never once occurred to him. And when Jean and Maurice upbraided him, his only revenge was to overwhelm them by his magnanimity. When he left the Borderie, pale as a ghost, his lips still cold from the kiss still printed on the dead girl's brow, he said to himself: "For her sake, I will go to Courtornieu. In memory of her, the baron must be saved."

By the expression of the servants' faces as he leapt from the saddle in the courtyard of the chateau and asked to see Madame Blanche, he was again reminded of the sensation which this unexpected visit would necessarily cause. However, he cared little for it. He was passing

through a crisis in which the mind can conceive no further misfortune, and becomes indifferent to everything. Still he trembled slightly when they ushered him into the blue drawing-room. He remembered the room well, for it was here that Blanche had been wont to receive him in days gone by, when his fancy was wavering between her and Marie-Anne. How many pleasant hours they had passed together here ! He seemed to see Blanche again, as she was then, radiant with youth, gay and smiling. Her manner was affected, perhaps, but still it had seemed charming at the time.

At this very moment, Blanche entered the room. She looked so sad and careworn that her husband scarcely knew her. His heart was touched by the look of patient sorrow seemingly stamped upon her features. "How much you must have suffered, Blanche," he murmured, scarcely knowing what he said.

It cost her an effort to repress her secret joy. She at once realised that he knew nothing of her crime ; and noting his emotion, she perceived the profit she might derive from it. "I can never cease to regret having displeased you," she replied, in a sad humble voice. "I shall never be consoled."

She had touched the vulnerable spot in every man's heart. For there is no man so sceptical, so cold, or so heartless but his vanity is not flattered with the thought that a woman is dying for his sake. There is no man who is not moved by such a flattering idea ; and who is not ready and willing to give, at least, a tender pity in exchange for such devotion.

"Is it possible that you could forgive me ?" stammered Martial. The wily enchantress averted her face as if to prevent him from reading in her eyes a weakness of which she felt ashamed. This simple gesture was the most eloquent of answers. But Martial said no more on this subject. He asked for permission to inspect M. de Courtornieu's papers with the view of finding the documents he required for M. d'Escorval's case, and Blanche readily complied with his request. He then turned to take his leave, and fearing perhaps the consequences of too formal a promise he merely added : "Since you don't forbid it, Blanche, I will return—to-morrow—another day." However, as he rode back to Montaignac, his thoughts were busy. "She really loves

me," he mused ; " that pallor, that weariness could not be feigned. Poor girl ! she is my wife, after all. The reasons that influenced me in my quarrel with her father exist no longer, for the Marquis de Courtoirieu may be considered as dead."

All the inhabitants of Sairmeuse were congregated on the market-place when Martial rode through the village. They have just heard of the murder at the Borderie, and the abbe was now closeted with the magistrate, relating as far as he could the circumstances of the crime. After a prolonged enquiry, it was eventually reported that a man known as Chupin, a notoriously bad character, had entered the house of Marie-Anne Lacheneur, and taken advantage of her absence to mingle poison with her food ; and the said Chupin had been himself assassinated soon after his crime, by a certain Balstain, whose whereabouts were unknown.

However, this affair soon interested the district far less than the constant visits which Martial was paying to Madame Blanche. Shortly afterwards it was rumoured that the Marquis and the Marchioness de Sairmeuse were reconciled ; and indeed a few weeks later, they left for Paris with an intention of residing there permanently. A day or two after their departure, the eldest of the Chupins also announced his determination of taking up his abode in the same great city. Some of his friends endeavoured to dissuade him, assuring him that he would certainly die of starvation ; but with singular assurance, he replied : " On the contrary, I have an idea that I shan't want for anything so long as I live there."

XXXV.

TIME gradually heals all wounds ; and its effacing fingers spare but few traces of events ; which in their season may have absorbed the attention of many thousand minds. What remained to attest the reality of that fierce whirlwind of passion which had swept over the peaceful valley of the Oiselle ? Only a charred ruin on La Reche, and a grave in the cemetery, on which was inscribed : " Marie-Anne Lacheneur, died at the age of twenty. Pray for her ! " Recent as were the events of which that ruin

and that grave stone seemed as it were the prologue and the epilogue, they were already relegated to the legendary past. The peasantry of Sairmeuse had other things to think about—the harvest, the weather, their sheep and cattle, and it was only a few old men, the politicians of the village, who at times turned their attention from agricultural incidents to remember the rising of Montaignac. Sometimes, during the long winter evenings, when they were gathered together at the local hostelry of the Boeuf Couronne, they would lay down their greasy cards and gravely discuss the events of the past year. And they never failed to remark that almost all the actors in that bloody drama at Montaignac had in common parlance, “come to a bad end.” The victors and the vanquished seemed to encounter the same fate. Lacheneur had been beheaded; Chanlouineau, shot; Marie-Anne, poisoned, and Chupin, the traitor, the Duke de Sairmeuse’s spy, stabbed to death. It was true that the Marquis de Courtonnieu lived, or rather survived, but death would have seemed a mercy in comparison with such a total annihilation of intelligence. He had fallen below the level of a brute beast, which at least is endowed with instinct. Since his daughter’s departure he had been ostensibly cared for by two servants, who did not allow him to give them much trouble, for whenever they wished to go out they complacently confined him, not in his room, but in the back cellar, so as to prevent his shrieks and ravings from being heard outside. If some folks supposed for awhile that the Sairmeuses would escape the fate of the others, they were grievously mistaken, for it was not long before the curse fell upon them as well.

One fine December morning, the Duke left the chateau to take part in a wolf-hunt in the neighbourhood. At nightfall, his horse returned, panting, covered with foam, and riderless. What had become of his master? A search was instituted at once, and all night long a score of men, carrying torches, wandered through the woods, shouting and calling at the top of their voices. Five days went by, and the search for the missing man was almost abandoned, when a shepherd lad, pale with fear, came to the chateau to tell the steward that he had discovered the Duke de Sairmeuse’s body—lying all bloody and mangled at the foot of a precipice. It seemed strange that so ex-

cellent a rider should have met with such a fate ; and there might have been some doubt as to its being an accident, had it not been for the explanation given by several of his grace's grooms. "The duke was riding an exceedingly vicious beast," these men remarked. "She was always taking fright and shying at everything."

A few days after this occurrence Jean Lacheneur left the neighbourhood. This singular fellow's conduct had caused considerable comment. When Marie-Anne died, although he was her natural heir, he at first refused to have anything to do with her property. "I don't want to take anything that came to her through Chanlouineau," he said to every one right and left, thus slandering his sister's memory, as he had slandered her when alive. Then, after a short absence from the district, and without any apparent reason, he suddenly changed his mind. He not only accepted the property, but made all possible haste to obtain possession of it. He excused his past conduct as best he could ; but if he was to be believed, instead of acting in his own interest, he was merely carrying his sister's wishes into effect, for he over and over again declared that whatever price her property might fetch not a sou of its value would go into his own pockets. This much is certain, as soon as he obtained legal possession of the estate, he sold it, troubling himself but little as to the price he received, provided the purchasers paid cash. However, he reserved the sumptuous furniture of the room on the upper floor of the Borderie and burnt it—from the bed-stead to the curtains and the carpet—one evening in the little garden in front of the house. This singular act became the talk of the neighbourhood, and the villagers universally opined that Jean had lost his head. Those who hesitated to agree with this opinion, expressed it a short time afterwards, when it became known that Jean Lacheneur had engaged himself with a company of strolling players who stopped at Montaignac for a few days. The young fellow had both good advice and kind friends. M. d'Escorval and the abbe had exerted all their eloquence to induce him to return to Paris, and complete his studies ; but in vain.

The priest and the baron no longer had to conceal themselves. Thanks to Martial de Sairmeuse they were now installed, the former at the parsonage and the latter at

Escorval, as in days gone by. Acquitted at his new trial, re-installed in possession of his property, reminded of his frightful fall only by a slight limp, the baron would have deemed himself a fortunate man had it not been for his great anxiety on his son's account. Poor Maurice ! The nails that secured Marie-Anne's coffin ere it was lowered into the sod seemed to have pierced his heart ; and his very life now seemed dependent on the hope of finding his child. Relying already on the Abbe Midon's protection and assistance, he had confessed everything to his father, and had even confided his secret to Corporal Bavois, who was now an honoured guest at Escorval ; and all three had promised him their best assistance. But the task was a difficult one and such chances of success as might have existed were greatly diminished by Maurice's determination that Marie-Anne's name should not be mentioned in prosecuting the search. In this he acted very differently to Jean. The latter slandered his murdered sister right and left, while Maurice sedulously sought to prevent her memory being tarnished.

The Abbe Midon did not seek to turn Maurice from his idea. "We shall succeed all the same," he said kindly, "with time and patience any mystery can be solved." He divided the department into a certain number of districts ; and one of the little band went day by day from house to house questioning the inmates, in the most cautious manner, for fear of arousing suspicion ; for a peasant becomes intractable if his suspicions are but once aroused. However, weeks went by, and still the quest was fruitless. Maurice was losing all hope. "My child must have died on coming into the world," he said, again and again.

But the abbe re-assured him. "I am morally certain that such was not the case," he replied. "By Marie-Anne's absence I can tell pretty nearly the date of her child's birth. I saw her after her recovery ; she was comparatively gay and smiling. Draw your own conclusions."

"And yet there isn't a nook or corner for miles round which we haven't explored."

"True ; but we must extend the circle of our investigations."

The priest was now only striving to gain time, which as he knew full well is the sovereign balm for sorrow, His

confidence had been very great at first, but it had sensibly diminished since he had questioned an old woman, who had the reputation of being one of the greatest gossips of the community. On being skilfully catechised by the abbe, this worthy dame replied that she knew nothing of such a child, but that there must be one in the neighbourhood, as this was the third time she had been questioned on the subject. Intense as was his surprise, the abbe succeeded in concealing it. He set the old gossip talking, and after two hours' conversation, he arrived at the conclusion that two persons in addition to Maurice were searching for Marie-Anne's child. Who these persons were and what their aim was, were points which the abbe failed to elucidate. "Ah" thought he, "after all, rascals have their use on earth. If we only had a man like Chupin to set on the trail!"

The old poacher was dead, however, and his eldest son—the one who knew Blanche's secret—was in Paris. Only the widow and the second son remained at Sairmeuse. They had not, as yet, succeeded in discovering the twenty thousand francs, but the fever for gold was still burning in their veins, and they persisted in their search. From morn till night the mother and son toiled on, until the earth round their hut had been fully explored to the depth of six feet. However, a peasant passed by one day and made a remark which suddenly caused them to abandon their search. "Really, my boy," he said, addressing young Chupin, "I didn't think you were such a fool as to persist in bird's nesting after the chick was hatched and had flown. Your brother in Paris can no doubt tell you where the treasure was concealed."

"Holy Virgin! you're right!" cried the younger Chupin. "Wait till I get money enough to take me to Paris, and we'll see."

XXXVI.

MARTIAL DE SAIRMEUSE's unexpected visit to the Chateau de Courtornieu had alarmed Aunt Medea even more than it had alarmed Blanche. In five minutes, more ideas passed through the dependent relative's mind than during

the last five years. In fancy she already saw the gendarmes at the chateau; her niece arrested, confined in the Montaignac prison, and brought before the Assize Court. She might herself remain quiet if that were all there was to fear! But suppose she were compromised, suspected of complicity as well, dragged before the judges, and even accused of being the only culprit! At this thought her anxiety reached a climax, and finding the suspense intolerable, she ventured downstairs. She stole on tiptoe into the great ball room, and applying her ear to the keyhole of the door leading into the blue salon, she listened attentively to Blanche and Martial's conversation. What she heard convinced her that her fears were groundless. She drew a long breath, as if a mighty burden had been lifted from her breast. But a new idea, which was to grow, flourish, and bear fruit, had just taken root in her mind. When Martial left the room, she at once opened the door by which she had been standing, and entered the blue reception room, thus admitting as it were that she had been a listener. Twenty-four hours earlier she would not even have dreamed of committing such an audacious act. "Well," she exclaimed, "Blanche, we were frightened for nothing."

Blanche did not reply. The young marchioness was weighing in her mind the probable consequences of all these events which had succeeded each other with such marvellous rapidity. "Perhaps the hour of my revenge is nigh," she murmured, as if communing with herself.

"What do you say?" inquired Aunt Medea, with evident curiosity.

"I say, aunt, that in less than a month I shall be the Marchioness de Sairmeuse in reality as well as in name. My husband will return to me, and then—oh! then."

"God grant it!" said Aunt Medea, hypocritically. In her secret heart she had but scant faith in this prediction, and cared very little whether it was realized or not. However, in that low tone which accomplices habitually employ, she ventured to add: "If what you say proves true, it will only be another proof that your jealousy led you astray; and that—that what you did at the Borderie was a perfectly unnecessary act."

Such had indeed been Blanche's opinion; but now she shook her head, and gloomily replied: "You are wrong;

what took place at the Borderie has brought my husband back to me again. I understand everything now. It is true that Marie-Anne was not his mistress; but he loved her. He loved her, and her repulses only increased his passion. It was for her sake that he abandoned me; and while she lived he would never have thought of me. His emotion on seeing me was the remnant of an emotion which she had awakened. His tenderness was only the expression of his grief. Whatever happens, I shall only have her leavings—the leavings of what she disdained!” The young marchioness spoke bitterly, her eyes flashed, and she stamped her foot as she added: “So I shan’t regret what I have done! no, never—never!” As she spoke she felt herself again brave and determined.

But horrible fears assailed her when the enquiry into the circumstances of the murder commenced. Officials had been sent from Montaignac to investigate the affair. They examined a host of witnesses, and there was even some talk of sending to Paris for one of those detectives skilled in unravelling all the mysteries of crime. This prospect quite terrified Aunt Medea; and her fear was so apparent that it caused Blanche great anxiety. “You will end by betraying us,” she remarked, one evening.

“Ah! I can’t control my fears.”

“If that is the case, don’t leave your room.”

“It would be more prudent, certainly.”

“You can say you are not well; your meals shall be served you upstairs.”

Aunt Medea’s face brightened. In her heart, she was delighted. It had long been her dream and ambition to have her meals served in her own room, in bed in the morning and on a little table by the fire in the evening; but as yet she had never been able to realise this fancy. On two or three occasions, feeling slightly indisposed, she had asked to have her breakfast brought to her room, but her request had each time been harshly refused. “If Aunt Medea is hungry, she will come downstairs, and take her place at the table as usual,” had been Blanche’s imperious reply.

It was hard, indeed, to be treated in this way in a chateau where there were always a dozen servants idling about. But now, in obedience to the young marchioness’s formal orders, the head cook himself came up every morn-

ing into Aunt Medea's room, to receive her instructions; and she was at perfect liberty to dictate each day's bill of fare, and to order the particular dishes she preferred. This change in the dependent relative's situation awakened many strange thoughts in her mind, and stifled such regret as she had felt for the crime at Borderie. Still both she and her niece followed the enquiry which had been set on foot with a keen interest. They obtained all the latest information concerning the investigation through the butler of the chateau, who seemed much interested in the case, and who had won the goodwill of the Montaignac police agents, by making them familiar with the contents of his wine cellar. It was from this major-domo that Blanche and her aunt learned that all suspicions pointed to the deceased Chupin, who had been seen prowling round about the Borderie on the very night the crime was committed. This testimony was given by the same young peasant who had warned Jean Lacheneur of the old poacher's doings. As regards the motive of the crime, fully a score of persons had heard Chupin declare that he should never enjoy any piece of mind as long as a single Lacheneur was left on earth. So thus it happened that the very incidents which might have ruined Blanche, saved her; and she really came to consider the old poacher's death as a providential occurrence, for she at least had no reason to suspect that he had revealed her secret before expiring. When the butler told her that the magistrate and the police agents had returned to Montaignac, she could scarcely conceal her joy; and drawing a long breath of relief, she turned towards Aunt Medea with the remark: "Ah, now there's nothing more to be feared."

She had, indeed, escaped the justice of man; but the justice of God remained. A few weeks previously the thought of divine retribution would perhaps have made Blanche smile, for she then considered the punishment of providence as an imaginary evil, invented to hold timorous minds in check. On the morning that followed her crime, and after her long random talk with Aunt Medea, she almost shrugged her shoulders at the thought of Marie-Anne's dying threats. She remembered her promise; and yet, despite all she had said, she did not intend to fulfil it. After careful consideration, she had come to the conclusion that in trying to find the missing child she would ex-

pose herself to terrible risks; and on the other hand, she felt certain that the child's father would discover it. So she dismissed the matter from her mind, and chiefly busied herself with what Martial had said during his visit, and the prospect that presented itself of a reconciliation.

But she was destined to realize the power of her victim's threats that same night. Worn out with fatigue, she retired to her room at an early hour, and jumped into bed, exclaiming; "I must sleep!" But sleep had fled. Her crime was over in her thoughts; and rose before her in all its horror and atrocity. She knew that she was lying on her bed, at Courtornieu; and yet it seemed as if she were still in Chanlouineau's house, first pouring out the poison, and then watching its effects, while concealed in the dressing-room. She was struggling against the idea; exerting all her strength of will to drive away these terrible memories, when she imagined she heard the key turn in the lock. Raising her head from the pillow with a start, she fancied she could perceive the door open noiselessly, and then Marie-Anne glided into the room like a phantom. She seated herself in an arm-chair near the bed, and while the tears rolled down her cheeks, she looked sadly, yet threateningly around her. The murderess hid her face under the counterpane. She shivered with terror, and a cold sweat escaped from every pore in her skin. For this seemed no mere apparition, but the frightful reality itself. Blanche did not submit to these tortures without resisting. Making a vigorous effort, she tried to reason with herself aloud, as if the sound of her voice would re-assure her. "I am dreaming!" she said. "The dead don't return to life? To think that I'm childish enough to be frightened at phantoms which only exist in my own imagination."

She said this, but the vision did not fade. When she shut her eyes the phantom still faced her—even through her closed eyelids, and through the coverlids drawn up over her face. Say what she would, she did not succeed in sleeping till daybreak. And, worst of all, night after night, the same vision haunted her, reviving the terror which she forgot during the day-time in the broad sunlight. For she would regain her courage and become sceptical again as soon as the morning broke. "How foolish it is to be afraid of something that does not exist!" she would remark, railing at herself. "To-night I will

conquer this absurd weakness." But when evening came all her resolution vanished, and scarcely had she retired to her room than the same fears seized hold of her, and the same phantom rose before her eyes. She fancied that her nocturnal agonies would cease when the investigation anent the murder was over—that she would forget both her crime and promise; but the enquiry finished, and yet the same vision haunted her, and she did not forget. Darwin has remarked that it is when their safety is assured that great criminals really feel remorse, and Blanche might have vouched for the truth of this assertion, made by the deepest thinker and closest observer of the age.

And yet her sufferings, atrocious as they were, did not induce her for one moment to abandon the plan she had formed on the occasion of Martial's visit. She played her part so well that, moved with pity, if not with love, he returned to see her frequently, and at last, one day, besought her to allow him to remain. But even this triumph did not restore her peace of mind. For between her and her husband rose the dreadful vision of Marie-Anne's distorted features. She knew only too well that Martial had no love to give her, and that she would never have the slightest influence over him. And to crown her already intolerable sufferings came an incident which filled her with dismay. Alluding one evening to Marie-Anne's death, Martial forgot himself, and spoke of his oath of vengeance. He deeply regretted that Chupin was dead, he said, for he should have experienced an intense delight in making the wretch who murdered her die a lingering death in the midst of the most frightful tortures. As he spoke his voice vibrated with still powerful passion, and Blanche, in terror asked herself what would be her fate if her husband ever discovered that she was the culprit—and he might discover it. Now it was that she began to regret she had not kept her promise; and she resolved to commence the search for Marie-Anne's child. But to do this effectually it was essential she should be in a large city—in Paris, for instance—where she could procure discreet and skilful agents. Thus it was necessary to persuade Martial to remove to the capital. But with the Duke de Sairmeuse's assistance she did not find this a very difficult task; and one morning, with a radiant face, she informed Aunt

Medea that she and her husband would leave Courtornieu at the end of the coming week.

In the midst of her anxiety, Blanche had failed to notice that Aunt Medea was no longer the same. The change in the dependent relative's tone and manner had, it is true, been a gradual one; it had not struck the servants, but it was none the less positive and real, and now it showed itself continually. For instance, the ofttime tyrannized-over chaperone no longer trembled when any one spoke to her, as formerly had been her wont, and there was occasionally a decided ring of independence in her voice. If visitors were present, she had been used to remain modestly in the background, but now she drew her chair forward, and unhesitatingly took part in the conversation. At table, she gave free expression to her preferences and dislikes; and on two or three occasions she had ventured to differ from her niece in opinion, and had even been so bold as to question the propriety of some of her orders. One day, moreover, when Blanche was going out, she asked Aunt Medea to accompany her; but the latter declared she had a cold, and remained at home. And, on the following Sunday, although Blanche did not wish to attend vespers, Aunt Medea declared her intentions of going; and as it rained she requested the coachman to harness the horses to the carriage, which was done. All these little incidents could have been nothing separately, but taken together they plainly showed that the once humble chaperone's character had changed. When her niece announced that she and Martial were about to leave the neighbourhood, Aunt Medea was greatly surprised, for the project had never been discussed in her presence. "What! you are going away," she repeated; "you are leaving Courtornieu?"

"And without regret."

"And where are you going to, pray?"

"To Paris. We shall reside there permanently; that's decided. The capital's the proper place for my husband, and, with his name, fortune, talents and the king's favour, he will secure a high position there. He will re-purchase the Hotel de Sairmeuse, and furnish it magnificently, so that we shall have a princely establishment."

Aunt Medea's expression plainly indicated that she was suffering all the torments of envy. "And what is to become of me?" she asked, in plaintive tones.

"You—aunt! You will remain here; you will be mistress of the chateau. A trustworthy person must remain to watch over my poor father. You will be happy and contented here, I hope."

But no; Aunt Medea did not seem satisfied. "I shall never have courage to stay all alone in this great chateau," she whined.

"You foolish woman! won't you have the servants, the gardeners, and the concierge to protect you?"

"That makes no difference. I am afraid of insane people. When the marquis began to rave and howl this evening, I felt as if I should go mad myself."

Blanche shrugged her shoulders. "What *do* you wish, then?" she asked, sarcastically.

"I thought—I wondered—if you wouldn't take me with you."

"To Paris! You are crazy, I do believe. What would you do there?"

"Blanche, I entreat you, I beseech you, to do so!"

"Impossible, aunt, impossible!"

Aunt Medea seemed to be in despair. "And what if I told you that I can't remain here—that I dare not—that I should die!"

Blanche flushed with impatience. "You weary me beyond endurance," she said, roughly. And with a gesture that increased the harshness of her words, she added: "If Courtornieu displeases you so much, there is nothing to prevent you from seeking a home more to your taste. You are free and of age."

Aunt Medea turned very pale, and bit her lips. "That is to say," she said at last, "that you allow me to take my choice between dying of fear at Courtornieu and ending my days in a hospital. Thanks, my niece, thanks. That is like you. I expected nothing less from you. Thanks!" She raised her head, and her once humble eyes gleamed in a threatening fashion. "Very well! this decides me," she continued. "I entreated you, and you brutally refused my request, so now I command you and I say: 'I will go!' Yes, I intend to go with you to Paris—and I shall go. Ah! so it surprises you to hear poor, meek, much-abused Aunt Medea speak like this; but I've endured a great deal in silence for a long time, and now I rebel. My life in this house has been like life in hell. It is true you've

given me shelter—fed and lodged me; but you've taken my entire life in exchange. What servant ever endured what I've had to endure? Have you ever treated one of your maids as you have treated me—your own flesh and blood? And I have had no wages; on the contrary, I was expected to be grateful since I lived by your tolerance. Ah, you have made me pay dearly for the crime of being poor. How you have insulted me—humiliated me—trampled me under foot!"

The rebellious chaperone paused again. The bitter rancour which had been accumulating in her heart for years fairly choked her: but after a moment, she resumed in a tone of irony: "You ask me what *I* should do in Paris? I should enjoy myself, like you. You will go to court, to the play—into society, won't you? Very well, I will accompany you. I will attend these fetes. I will have handsome toilettes too. I have rarely seen myself in anything but shabby black woollen dresses. Have you ever thought of giving me the pleasure of possessing a handsome dress? Twice a-year, perhaps, you have given me a black silk, recommending me to take good care of it. But it was not for my sake that you went to this expense. It was for your own sake, and in order that your poor relation should do honour to your generosity. You dressed me in it, like you put your lacqueys in livery, through vanity. And I endured all this; I made myself insignificant and humble; and when I was buffeted on one cheek, I offered the other. For after all I must live—I must have food. And you, Blanche, how often haven't you said to me so that I might do your bidding, 'You must obey me, if you wish to remain at Courtornieu!' And I obeyed you—I was forced to obey, as I didn't know where else to go. Ah! you have abused my poverty in every way; but now my turn has come!"

Blanche was so amazed that she could scarcely articulate a syllable, and it was in a scarcely audible voice that at last she faltered: "I don't understand you, aunt, I don't understand you."

The poor dependent shrugged her shoulders, as her niece had done a few moments before. "In that case," said she, slowly, "I may as well tell you that since you have made me your accomplice against my will, we must share everything in common. I share the danger; so I

will share the pleasure. Suppose everything should be discovered? Do you ever think of that? Yes, I've no doubt you do, and that's why you are seeking diversion. Very well! I desire diversion also, so I shall go to Paris with you."

With a desperate effort, Blanche managed to regain some degree of self-possession. "And if I still said no?" she coldly queried.

"But you won't say no."

"And why not, if you please?"

"Because—"

"Will you go to the authorities and denounce me?"

Aunt Medea shook her head. "I am not such a fool," she retorted. "I should only compromise myself. No. I shouldn't do that; but I might, perhaps, tell your husband what happened at the *Borderie*."

Blanche shuddered. No other threat could have had such influence over her. "You shall accompany us, aunt," said she: "I promise it." And then in a gentle voice, she added: "But it's quite unnecessary to threaten me. You have been cruel, aunt, and at the same time unjust. If you have been unhappy in our house, you have only yourself to blame. Why haven't you ever said anything? I attributed your complaisance to your affection for me. How was I to know that a woman so quiet and modest as yourself longed for fine dresses. Confess that it was impossible. Had I known—But rest easy, aunt, I will atone for my neglect." And as Aunt Medea, having obtained all she desired, stammered an excuse. "Nonsense!" rejoined Blanche; "let us forget this foolish quarrel. You forgive me, don't you?" And the two ladies embraced each other with the greatest effusion, like two friends, united after a misunderstanding.

Neither of them, however, was in the least degree deceived by this mock reconciliation. "It will be best for me to keep on the alert," thought the dependent relative. "God only knows with what joy my dear niece would send me to join Marie-Anne."

Perhaps a similar thought flitted through Blanche's mind. "I'm bound to this dangerous, perfidious creature for ever now," she reflected. "I'm no longer my own mistress; I belong to her. When she commands me, I must obey, no matter what may be her fancy—and she has

forty years' humiliation and servitude to avenge." The prospect of such a life made the young marchioness tremble; and she racked her brain to discover some way of freeing herself from such intolerable thralldom. Would it be possible to induce Aunt Medea to live independently in her own house, served by her own servants? Might she succeed in persuading this silly old woman, who still longed for finery, to marry? A handsome marriage portion will always attract a husband. However, in either case, Blanche would require money—a large sum of money, which no one must be in a position to claim an account of. With this idea she took possession of over two hundred and fifty thousand francs, in bank notes and coin, belonging to her father, and put away in one of his private drawers. This sum represented the Marquis de Courtornieu's savings during the past three years. No one knew he had laid it aside, except his daughter; and now that he had lost his reason, Blanche could take it for her own use, without the slightest danger. "With this," thought she, "I can enrich Aunt Medea whenever I please without having recourse to Martial."

After these incidents there was a constant exchange of delicate attentions and fulsome affection between the two ladies. It was "my dearest little aunt," and "my dearly beloved niece," from morning until night; and the gossips of the neighbourhood, who had often commented on the haughty disdain with which Blanche treated her relative, would have found abundant food for comment had they known that during the journey to Paris, Aunt Medea was protected from the possibility of cold by a mantle lined with costly fur, exactly like the marchionesses's own, and that instead of travelling in the cumbersome berline with the servants, she had a seat in the postchaise with the Marquis de Sairmeuse and his wife.

Before their departure Martial had noticed the great change which had come over Aunt Medea and the many attentions which his wife lavished on her, and one day when he was alone with Blanche, he exclaimed in a tone of good-natured raillery: "What's the meaning of all this attachment? We shall finish by encasing this precious aunt in cotton, shan't we?"

Blanche trembled, and flushed. "I love good Aunt Medea so much!" said she. "I never can forget all the

affection and devotion she lavished on me when I was so unhappy."

It was such a plausible explanation that Martial took no further notice of the matter; and, indeed, just then his mind was fully occupied. The agent he had despatched to Paris in advance, to purchase the Hotel de Sairmeuse, if it were possible, had written asking the marquis to hasten his journey, as there was some difficulty about concluding the bargain. "Plague take the fellow!" angrily said Martial, on receiving this news. "He is quite stupid enough to let this opportunity, which we've been waiting for during the last ten years, slip through his fingers. I shan't find any pleasure in Paris, if I can't own our old residence."

He has so impatient to reach the capital that, on the second day of their journey, he declared that if he were alone he would travel all night. "Do so now," said Blanche, graciously; "I don't feel the least tired, and a night of travel does not frighten me." So they journeyed on without stopping, and the next morning at about nine o'clock they alighted at the Hotel Meurice.

Martial scarcely took time to eat his breakfast. "I must go and see my agent at once," he said, as he hurried off. "I will soon be back." Two hours afterwards he reappeared with a radiant face. "My agent was a simpleton," he exclaimed. "He was afraid to write me word that a man, on whom the conclusion of the sale depends, requires a bonus of fifty thousand francs. He shall have it and welcome." Then, in a tone of gallantry, habitual to him whenever he addressed his wife, he added: "It only remains for me to sign the papers, but I won't do so unless the house suits you. If you are not too tired, I would like you to visit it at once. Time presses, and we have many competitors."

This visit was, of course, one of pure form; but Blanche would have been hard to please if she had not been satisfied with this mansion, then one of the most magnificent in Paris, with a monumental entrance facing the Rue de Grenelle St. Germain and large umbrageous gardens, extending to the Rue de Varennes. Unfortunately, this superb dwelling had not been occupied for several years, and required considerable repair. "It will take at least six months to restore everything," said Martial, "perhaps

more ; though in three months, possibly, a portion of it might be arranged very comfortably."

"It would be living in one's own house, at least," observed Blanche, divining her husband's wishes.

"Ah ! then you agree with me ! In that case, you may rest assured that I will expedite matters as swiftly as possible."

In spite, or rather by reason of his immense fortune, the Marquis de Sairmeuse knew that one is never so well, nor so quickly served, as when one serves one's self, and so he resolved to take the matter into his own hands. He conferred with the architect, interviewed the contractors, and hurried on the workmen. As soon as he was up in the morning he started out without waiting for breakfast, and seldom returned before dinner. Although Blanche was compelled to pass most of her time in doors, on account of the bad weather, she was not inclined to complain. Her journey, the unaccustomed sights and sounds of Paris, the novelty of life in a hotel, all combined to divert her thoughts from herself. She forgot her fears, a sort of haze enveloped the terrible scene at the Borderie, and the clamours of conscience was sinking into faint whispers. Indeed, the past seemed fading away, and she was beginning to entertain hopes of a new and better life, when one day a servant knocked at the door, and said : "There is a man downstairs who wishes to speak with madame."

XXXVII.

BLANCHE was reclining on a sofa listening to a new book which Aunt Medea was reading aloud, and she did not even raise her head as the servant delivered his message. "A man ?" she said, carelessly ; "what man ?" She was expecting no one ; it must be one of the assistants or overseers employed by Martial.

"I can't inform madame who he is," replied the servant. "He is quite young ; he is dressed like a peasant, and is, perhaps, seeking a place."

"It is probably the marquis he wishes to see."

"Madame will excuse me, but he particularly said that he wished to speak with her."

"Ask his name and business, then. Go on, aunt," she

added : " we have been interrupted in the most interesting part."

But Aunt Medea had not time to finish the page before the servant returned. " The man says madame will understand his business when she hears his name."

" And his name ? "

" Chupin."

It seemed as if a bomb-shell had burst into the room. Aunt Medea dropped her book with a shriek, and sank back, half fainting in her chair. Blanche sprang up with a face as colourless as her white cashmere morning dress, her eyes dazed, and her lips trembling. " Chupin," she repeated, as if she almost hoped the servant would tell her she had not understood him correctly ; " Chupin ! " Then angrily, she added : " Tell this man I won't see him, I won't see him, do you hear ? " But before the servant had time to bow and retire, the young marchioness changed her mind. " One moment," said she ; " on reflection I think I will see him. Bring him up."

The servant then withdrew, and the two ladies looked at each other in silent consternation. " It must be one of Chupin's sons," faltered Blanche at last.

" No doubt ; but what does he desire."

" Money, probably."

Aunt Medea raised her eyes to heaven. " God grant that he knows nothing of your meetings with his father ! " said she.

" You are not going to despair in advance, are you, aunt ? We shall know everything in a few minutes. Pray remain calm. Turn your back to us ; look out of the window into the street and don't let him see your face."

Blanche was not deceived. This unexpected visitor was indeed Chupin's eldest son ; the one to whom the dying poacher had confided his secret. Since his arrival in Paris, the young fellow had been running in every direction, inquiring everywhere and of everybody for the Marquis de Sairmeuse's address. At last he obtained it ; and he lost no time in presenting himself at the Hotel Meurice. He was now awaiting the result of his application at the entrance down-stairs where he stood whistling, with his hands in his pockets, when the servant returned, and bade him follow. Chupin obeyed ; but the servant, who was on fire with curiosity, loitered by the way in hope of obtaining

from this country youth some explanation of the surprise, not to say fright with which Madame de Sairmeuse had greeted the mention of his name. "I don't say it to flatter you, my boy," he remarked, "but your name produced a great effect on madame." The prudent peasant carefully concealed the joy he felt on receiving this information. "How does she happen to know you?" continued the servant. "Are you both from the same place?"

"I am her foster-brother."

The servant did not believe this reply for a moment, and as they had now reached the marchioness's apartment, he opened the door and ushered Chupin into the room. The latter had prepared a little story beforehand, but he was so dazzled by the magnificence around him that for a moment he stood motionless with staring eyes and gaping mouth. His wonder was increased by a large mirror opposite the door, in which he could survey himself from head to foot, and by the beautiful flowers on the carpet, which he feared to crush with his heavy shoes.

After a moment, Blanche decided to break the silence. "What do you want of me," she asked.

In a rambling fashion young Chupin then explained that he had been obliged to leave Sairmeuse on account of the numerous enemies he had there, that he had been unable to find his father's hidden treasure, and that he was consequently without resources.

"That'll do," interrupted Blanche, and then in far from a friendly manner, she remarked: "I don't at all understand why you should apply to me. You and all the rest of your family have anything but an enviable reputation at Sairmeuse; still, as you are from that part of the country, I am willing to aid you a little on condition you don't apply to me again."

Chupin listened to this homily with a half cringing, half impudent air; but when Blanche had finished he raised his head, and proudly said: "I don't ask for alms."

"What do you ask for, then?"

"My dues."

Blanche's heart sank, and yet she had courage enough to glance disdainfully at Chupin, and reply: "What! do I owe you anything?"

"You don't owe me anything personally, madame; but you owe a heavy debt to my deceased father. Whose ser-

vice did he perish in? Poor old man! he loved you devotedly. His last words were about you. 'A terrible thing has just happened at the Borderie, my boy,' said he. 'The young marchioness hated Marie-Anne, and she has poisoned her. If it hadn't been for me she would have been lost. I am about to die, so let the whole blame rest on me; for it won't hurt me when I'm under the sod, and it will save the young lady. And by-and-by she will reward you; so that as long as you keep the secret you will want for nothing.' Great as was young Chupin's impudence he paused abruptly, amazed by the air of perfect composure with which Blanche listened to him. In face of such wonderful dissimulation he almost doubted the truth of his father's story.

The marchioness's self possession was indeed surprising. She felt that if she once yielded she would always be at this wretch's mercy, as she already was at Aunt Medea's. "In other words," said she, calmly, "you accuse me of having murdered Mademoiselle Lacheneur; and you threaten to denounce me if I don't yield to your demands." Chupin nodded his head in acquiescence. "Very well!" added Blanche; "since that's the case you may go."

It seemed, indeed, that by audacity she might win this dangerous game on which her future peace depended. Chupin, greatly abashed, was standing before her undecided what course to pursue, when Aunt Medea, who was listening by the window, turned in affright, exclaiming, "Blanche! your husband—Martial! He is coming!"

The game was lost. Blanche fancied her husband entering and finding Chupin there, conversing with him, and so discovering everything! Her brain whirled; she yielded. Hastily thrusting her purse into Chupin's hand, she dragged him through an inner door to the servants' staircase. "Take this," she said, in a hoarse whisper. "I will see you again. And not a word—not a word to my husband, remember!"

She had been wise to yield in time. When she returned to the drawing-room, she found Martial there. He was gazing on the ground, and held an open letter in his hand. But he raised his head when his wife entered the room, and she could detect signs of great emotion in his features. "What has happened?" she faltered.

Martial did not remark her troubled manner. "My father is dead, Blanche," he replied.

"The Duke de Sairmeuse! Good heavens! how did it happen?"

"He was thrown from his horse in the forest near the Sanguille rocks."

"Ah! it was there where my poor father was nearly murdered."

"Yes, the very place."

There was a moment's silence. Martial's affection for his father had not been very deep, and he was well aware that the duke had but little love for him. Hence he was astonished at the bitter grief he felt on hearing of his death. "From this letter, which was forwarded by a messenger from Sairmeuse," he continued, "I gather that everybody believes it to have been an accident; but I—I——"

"Well?"

"I believe he was murdered."

An exclamation of horror escaped Aunt Medea, and Blanche turned pale. "Murder!" she whispered.

"Yes, Blanche; and I could name the murderer. Oh! I am not deceived. My father's murderer is the same man who tried to kill the Marquis de Courtonieu——"

"Jean Lacheneur!"

Martial gravely bowed his head. It was his only reply.

"And will you not denounce him? Will you not demand justice?"

Martial's face grew gloomy. "What good would it do?" he replied. "I have no material proofs to furnish, and justice requires unimpeachable evidence." Then, as if communing with his own thoughts, rather than addressing his wife, he added, despondingly, "The Duke de Sairmeuse and the Marquis de Courtonieu have reaped what they sowed. The blood of murdered innocence always calls for vengeance. Sooner or later, the guilty must expiate their crimes."

Blanche shuddered. Each word found an echo in her own soul. Had her husband intended his words for her, he would scarcely have expressed himself differently. "Martial," said she, trying to arouse him from his gloomy reverie; "Martial!"

But he did not seem to hear her, and it was in the same

tone that he continued ; " These Lacheneurs were happy and honoured before our arrival at Sairmeuse. Their conduct was above all praise ; their probity amounted to heroism. We might have made them our faithful and devoted friends. It was our duty, as well as in our interests, to have done so. But we did not understand it ; we humiliated, ruined, exasperated them. It was a fault for which we must atone. Who knows but what in Jean Lacheneur's place I should have done exactly what he has done ? " He was again silent for a moment ; then, with one of those sudden inspirations that sometimes enable one almost to read the future, he resumed : " I know Jean Lacheneur. I can fathom his hatred, and I know that he lives only in the hope of vengeance. It is true that we are very high and he is very low, but that matters little. We have everything to fear. Our millions form a rampart around us, but he will know how to open a breach. And no precautions will save us. At the very moment when we feel ourselves secure, he will be ready to strike. What he will attempt, I don't know ; but his will be a terrible revenge. Remember my words, Blanche, if ruin ever overtakes our house, it will be Jean Lacheneur's work."

Aunt Medea and her niece were too horror-stricken to articulate a word, and for five minutes no sound broke the stillness save Martial's monotonous tread, as he paced up and down the room. At last he paused before his wife. " I have just ordered post-horses," he said. " You will excuse me for leaving you here alone. I must go to Sairmeuse at once, but I shall not be absent more than a week."

He left Paris a few hours later, and Blanche became a prey to the most intolerable anxiety. She suffered more than she had done during the days that immediately followed her crime. It was not against phantoms that she had to shield herself now ; Chupin existed, and his voice, even if it were not as terrible as the voice of conscience, might make itself heard at any moment. If she had known where to find him, she would have gone to him, and endeavoured, by the payment of a large sum of money, to persuade him to leave France. But he had left the hotel without giving her his address. Then again Martial's gloomy apprehensions combined to increase her fears, and the mere thought of Jean Lacheneur made her shrink with ter-

ror. She could not rid herself of the idea that Jean suspected her guilt, and was watching her, waiting for revenge. Her wish to find Marie-Anne's child now became stronger than ever; it seemed to her that the abandoned infant might be a protection to her some day. However, where could she find an agent in whom she could confide? At last she remembered that she had heard her father speak of a detective named Chefteux as an exceedingly shrewd fellow, capable of anything, even of honesty if he were well paid. This man was really a perfect scoundrel, one of Fouché's vilest instruments, who had served and betrayed all parties, and who, at last, after the most barefaced perjury, had been dismissed from the police force. He had then established a private enquiry office, and after some little search Blanche ascertained that he lived in the Place Dauphine. One morning, taking advantage of her husband's absence, she donned her simplest dress, and, accompanied by Aunt Medea, repaired to Chefteux's residence. He proved to be a middle-aged man of medium height and inoffensive mien, and he cleverly affected an air of good humour. He ushered his client into a neatly furnished drawing-room, and Blanche at once told him that she was a married woman; that she lived with her husband in the Rue St. Denis; and that one of her sisters who had lately died had been led astray by a man who had disappeared. A child was living, however, whom she was very anxious to find. In short, she narrated an elaborate story which she had prepared in advance, and which, after all, sounded very plausible. Chefteux, however, did not believe a word of it; for as soon as it was finished he tapped Blanche familiarly on the shoulder, and remarked: "In short, my dear, we had our little escapades before our marriage."

Blanche shrank back as if some venomous reptile had touched her. To be treated in this fashion! she—a Courtornieu, now Duchess de Sairmeuse! "I think you are labouring under a wrong impression," she haughtily replied.

He made haste to apologize; but while listening to the further details he asked for, he could not help remarking to himself; "What eyes! what a voice!—they can't belong to a denizen of the Rue Saint-Denis!" His suspicions were confirmed by the reward of twenty thousand francs, which Blanche imprudently promised him in case of suc

cess, and by the five hundred francs which she paid in advance. "And where shall I have the honour of writing to you, madame?" he inquired.

"Nowhere," replied Blanche. "I shall be passing by here from time to time; and I will call."

When the two women left the house, Chefteux followed them. "For once," thought he, "I believe that fortune smiles on me." To discover his new client's name and rank was but child's play for Fouche's former pupil; and indeed his task was all the easier since they had no suspicion whatever of his designs.

Blanche, who had heard his powers of discernment so highly praised, was confident of success, and all the way back to the hotel she was congratulating herself on the step she had taken. "In less than a month," she said to Aunt Medea, "we shall have the child; and it will be a protection to us."

But the following week she realised the extent of her imprudence. On visiting Chefteux again, she was received with such marks of respect that she at once saw she was known. Still, she would have made another attempt to deceive the detective, but he checked her. "First of all," he said, with a good-humoured smile, "I ascertain the identity of the persons who honour me with their confidence. It is a proof of my ability, which I give gratis. But madame need have no fears. I am discreet by nature and by profession. Many ladies of the highest rank are in the position of Madame Duchesse."

So Chefteux still believed that the Duchess de Sairmeuse was searching for her own child. She did not try to convince him to the contrary, for it was better he should believe this than suspect the truth.

Blanche's position was now truly pitiable. She found herself entangled in a net, and each movement, far from freeing her, tightened the meshes round her. Three persons were acquainted with the secret which threatened her life and honour; and under these circumstances, how could she hope to prevent it from becoming more widely known? She was, moreover, at the mercy of three unscrupulous masters; and at a word, a gesture, or a look from them, her haughty spirit must bow in meek subservience. And her time, moreover, was no longer at her own disposal; for Martial had returned, and they had taken up their abode

at the Hotel de Sairmeuse, where the young duchess was compelled to live under the scrutiny of fifty servants, more or less interested in watching her, in criticising her acts, and discovering her thoughts. Aunt Medea, it is true, was of great assistance. Blanche purchased a new dress for her whenever she bought one for herself, took her about with her on all occasions, and the dependent relative expressed her satisfaction in the most enthusiastic terms, declaring her willingness to do anything for her benefactress. Nor did Chefteux give Blanche much more annoyance. Every three months he presented a memorandum of investigation expenses, which usually amounted to some ten thousand francs ; and so long as she paid him it was plain he would be silent. He had given her to understand, however, that he should expect an annuity of twenty-four thousand francs ; and once, when Blanche remarked that he must abandon the search if nothing had been discovered at the end of two years. "Never," replied he ; "I shall continue the search as long as I live."

In addition to these two there was Chupin, who proved a constant terror. Blanche had been compelled to give him twenty thousand francs, to begin with. He declared that his younger brother had come to Paris in pursuit of him, accusing him of having stolen their father's hoard, and demanding his share with his knife in his hand. There had been a battle, and it was with his head bound up in blood-stained linen, that Chupin made his appearance before Blanche. "Give me the sum that the old man buried," said he, "and I will allow my brother to think I stole it. It is not very pleasant to be regarded as a thief, when one's an honest man, but I will bear it for your sake. If you refuse, however, I shall be compelled to tell him where I've obtained my money, and how." Naturally enough Blanche complied with this demand, for how could she do otherwise ?

If her tormentor possessed all his father's vices, depravity, and cold-blooded perversity, he had certainly not inherited the parental intelligence or tact. Instead of taking the precautions which his interests required, he seemed to find a brutal pleasure in compromising the duchess. He was a constant visitor at the Hotel de Sairmeuse. He called at all hours, morning, noon, and night, without in the least troubling himself about Martial. And the ser

vants were amazed to see their haughty mistress unhesitatingly leave everything to receive this suspicious-looking character, who smelt so strongly of tobacco and alcohol. One evening, while a grand entertainment was progressing at the Hotel de Sairmeuse, he made his appearance, half drunk, and imperiously ordered the servants to go and tell Madame Blanche that he was there, waiting for her. She hastened to him in her magnificent evening dress, her face white with rage and shame beneath her tiara of diamonds. And when, in her exasperation, she refused to give the wretch what he demanded: "So that's to say I'm to starve while you are revelling here!" he exclaimed. "I am not such a fool. Give me some money at once, or I will tell everything I know on the spot!" What could she do? She was obliged to yield, as she had always done before. And yet he grew more and more insatiable every day. Money filtered through his fingers as fast as water filters through a sieve. But he did not think of raising his vices to the height of the fortune which he squandered. He did not even provide himself with decent clothing, and from his appearance he might have been supposed to be a penniless beggar. One night he was arrested for fomenting a row in a low drinking den, and the police, surprised at finding so much gold in such a beggarly-looking rascal's possession, accused him of being a thief. But he mentioned the name of the Duchess de Sairmeuse, and on the following morning—Martial fortunately was in Vienna at the time—an inspector of police presented himself at the mansion in the Rue de Grenelle, and Blanche had to undergo the humiliation of confessing that she had given a large sum of money to this man, whose family she had known, and who, she added, had once rendered her an important service.

Sometimes her pertinacious tormentor changed his tactics. For instance, he declared that he disliked coming to the Hotel de Sairmeuse, as the servants treated him as if he were a mendicant; so whenever he required money he would write. And effectively, every week or so, there came a letter bidding Blanche bring such a sum, to such a place, and at such an hour. And the proud duchess was always punctual at the rendezvous. Soon afterwards the rascal met, heaven knows where! a certain Aspasia Clapard, to whom he took a violent fancy, and al-

though she was much older than himself, he wished to marry her. It was Blanche who paid for the wedding feast. Then Chupin again announced his desire of establishing himself in business, having resolved, he said, to live by his own exertions. So he purchased a wine merchant's stock, which the duchess paid for, and which he drank in no time. Next, his wife gave birth to a child, and Madame de Sairmeuse must pay for the baptism as she had paid for the wedding, only too happy that Chupin did not require her to stand as god-mother to little Polyte, which idea he had at first entertained. On two occasions Blanche accompanied her husband to Vienna and to London, where he went on important diplomatic missions. She remained abroad during three years, and during all that time she received at least one letter every week from Chupin. Ah ! many a time she envied her victim's lot ! What was Marie-Anne's death compared with the life she led ! Her sufferings were measured by years, Marie-Anne's by minutes ; and she said to herself, again and again, that the tortures of poison could not be so intolerable as was her agony.

XXXVIII.

It may be asked how it was that Martial had failed to discover or to suspect this singular state of affairs ; but a moment's reflection will explain his ignorance. The head of a family, whether he dwells in an attic or in a palace, is always the last to know what is going on in his own home. He does not even suspect circumstances, with which every one else is fully acquainted ; and, in Martial's case, the life he led was scarcely likely to lead him to the truth ; for after all, he and his wife were virtually strangers to one another. His manner towards her was perfect, full of deference and chivalrous courtesy ; but they had nothing in common except a name and certain interests. Each lived his own life. They met only at dinner, or at the entertainments they gave—which were considered the most brilliant of Parisian society. The duchess had her own apartments, her private servants, carriages, horses, and table. At five-and-twenty, Martial, the last descendant of the great house of Sairmeuse—a man on whom destiny had apparently lavished every blessing—who was

young, who possessed unbounded wealth, and a brilliant intellect, found himself literally overburdened with *ennui*. Marie-Anne's death had destroyed all his hopes of happiness; and realizing the emptiness of his life, he sought to fill the void with bustle and excitement. He threw himself headlong into politics, striving to find some relief from his despondency in the pleasures of power and satisfied ambition.

It is only just to say that Blanche had remained superior to circumstances; and that she had played the part of a happy, contented woman with consummate skill. Her frightful sufferings and anxiety never marred the haughty serenity of her features. She soon won a place as one of the queens of Parisian society; and plunged into dissipation with a sort of frenzy. Was she endeavouring to divert her mind? Did she hope to overpower thought by excessive fatigue? To Aunt Medea alone did Blanche reveal her secret heart. "I am like a culprit who has been bound to the scaffold, and abandoned there by the executioner to live, as it were, till the axe falls of its own accord." And the axe might fall at any moment. A word, a trifle, an unlucky chance—she dared not say "a decree of providence," and Martial would know everything. Such, in all its unspeakable horror, was the position of the beautiful and envied Duchess de Sairmeuse. "She must be perfectly happy," said the world; but she felt herself sliding down the precipice to the awful depths below. Like a shipwrecked mariner clinging to a floating spar, she scanned the horizon with a despairing eye, and could only see the threatening clouds that betokened the coming tempest. Once it happened that six weeks went by without any news coming from Chupin. A month and a half! What had become of him? To Madame Blanche this silence was as ominous as the calm that precedes the storm. A line in a newspaper solved the mystery, however. Chupin was in prison. After drinking more heavily than usual one evening, he had quarrelled with his brother, and killed him by a blow on the head with an iron bar. Lacheneur's blood was being visited on his betrayer's children. Chupin was tried, condemned to twenty year's hard labour, and sent to Brest. But this sentence afforded the duchess no relief. The culprit had written to her from his Paris prison; and he found the means to write to her

from Brest. He confided his letters to comrades, whose terms of imprisonment had expired, and who came to the Hotel de Sairmeuse demanding an interview with the duchess. And she received them. They told her all the miseries they had endured "out there ;" and usually ended by requesting some slight assistance.

One morning, a man whose desperate manner quite frightened her, brought the duchess this laconic note. "I am tired of starving here; I wish to make my escape. Come to Brest; you can visit the prison, and we will decide on some plan. If you refuse to do this, I shall apply to the duke, who will obtain my pardon in exchange for what I will tell him." Blanche was dumb with horror. It was impossible, she thought, to sink lower than this.

"Well!" said the returned convict, harshly. "What answer shall I take to my comrade?"

"I will go—tell him I will go!" she said, driven to desperation. And in fact she made the journey, and visited the prison, but without finding Chupin. There had been a revolt the previous week, the troops had fired on the prisoners, and Chupin had been killed. Still the duchess dared not rejoice, for she feared that her tormentor had told his wife the secret of his power.

Indeed the widow—the Aspasie Clapard already mentioned, promptly made her appearance at the house in the Rue de Grenelle; but her manner was humble and supplicating. She had often heard her dear dead husband say that madame was his benefactress, and now she came to beg a little aid to enable her to open a small wine-shop. Her son Polyte—ah! such a good son! just eighteen years old, and such a help to his poor mother—had found a little house in a good situation for business, and if they only had three or four hundred francs—Blanche cut the story short by handing her supplicant a five hundred franc note. "Either that woman's humility is a mask," thought the duchess, "or her husband has told her nothing."

Five days later Polyte Chupin presented himself. They needed three hundred francs more before they could commence business, he said, and he came on behalf of his mother to entreat the kind lady to advance them that amount. But being determined to discover exactly how she was situated, with regard to the widow, the duchess curtly refused, and the young fellow went off without a

word. Evidently the mother and son were ignorant of the facts. Chupin's secret had died with him.

This happened early in January. Towards the close of February, Aunt Medea contracted inflammation of the lungs on leaving a fancy ball, which she attended in an absurd costume, in spite of all the attempts which her niece made to dissuade her. Her passion for dress killed her. Her illness lasted only three days; but her sufferings, physical and mental, were terrible. Constrained by fear of death to examine her own conscience, she saw plainly enough that profiting by her niece's crime had been as culpable as if she had actually aided her in committing it. Aunt Medea had been very devout in former years, and now her superstitious fears were reawakened and intensified. Her faith returned, followed by a train of terrors. "I am lost, I am lost!" she cried, tossing to and fro on her bed; writhing and shrieking as if she already saw hell opening to engulf her. She called on the Holy Virgin and all the saints to protect her. She entreated heaven to grant her time for repentance and expiation; and she even begged to see a priest, swearing she would make a full confession.

Paler than the dying woman, but still implacable, Blanche watched over her, aided by one of her maids in whom she had most confidence. "If this lasts long, I shall be ruined," she thought. "I shall be obliged to call for assistance, and she will betray me."

But it did not last long. The patient's delirium was followed by such utter prostration that it seemed as if each moment would be her last. But towards midnight she revived a little, and in a voice of intense feeling, she faltered, "You have had no pity on me, Blanche. You have deprived me of all hope in the life to come. Heaven will punish you. You will die like a dog yourself, and alone without a word of Christian counsel or encouragement. I curse you!" And she expired, just as the clock was striking two.

The time when Blanche would have given almost anything to know that Aunt Medea was under the ground had long since passed away. Now the poor old woman's death deeply affected her. She had lost an accomplice who had often consoled her, and she had gained nothing in return. Every one who was intimately acquainted with

the Duchesse de Sairmeuse noticed her dejection, and was astonished by it. "Is it not strange," remarked her friends, "that the duchess—such a very superior woman—should grieve so much for that absurd relative of hers." But Blanche's dejection was due in great measure to the sinister prophecies faltered by her dying aunt, to whom for self-protection she had denied the last consolations of religion. And as her mind reviewed the past she shuddered as the Sairmeuse peasants had done, when thinking of the fatality which pursued those who had shed, or helped to shed so much innocent blood. What misfortunes had overtaken them all—from Chupin's sons to her father, the Marquis de Courtornieu, in whose mind not one spark of reason had gleamed for ten long years before his death. The Baron and the Baroness d'Escorval, and old Corporal Bavois had departed this life within a month of each other the previous year, mourned by every one, so that of all the people of diverse condition who had been connected with the troubles of Montaignac, Blanche knew of only four who were still alive. Maurice d'Escorval, who having studied the law was now an investigating magistrate attached to the tribunal of the Seine; the Abbe Midon, who had come to Paris with Maurice, and Martial and herself.

There was another person at the recollection of whom she trembled, and whose name she dared not utter. This was Jean Lacheneur, Marie-Anne's brother. He had disappeared, and so completely that it might have been fancied he was dead, but an inward voice, more powerful than reason, told Blanche that this enemy was still alive, watching for his hour of vengeance. More troubled by her presentiments now, than she had been by Chupin's persecutions in days gone by, Madame de Sairmeuse decided to apply to Chefteux in order to ascertain, if possible, what she had to expect. Fouche's former agent had not wavered in his devotion to the duchess. Every three months he presented his bill, which was paid without discussion; and to ease his conscience, he sent one of his men two or three times a year to prowl round Sairmeuse for awhile. Animated by the hope of a magnificent reward, the spy promised his client, and—what was more to the purpose—promised himself, that he would discover this dreaded enemy. He started in quest of him, and had already begun to col-

fect proofs of Jean's existence, when his investigations abruptly came to a close. One morning a man's body, literally hacked to pieces, was found in an old well not far from Sairmeuse. It was Chefteux who had been murdered by some one who remained unknown. When Blanche read this news in a local journal she felt as a culprit might feel on hearing his death-warrant read. "The end is near," she murmured. "Lacheneur is coming."

The duchess was not mistaken. Jean had told the truth when he declared that he was not disposing of his sister's estate for his own benefit. In his opinion, Marie-Anne's fortune must be consecrated to one sacred purpose; and he would not divert the slightest portion of it to his personal requirements. He was absolutely penniless when the manager of a travelling theatrical company sojourning at Montaignac engaged him for a consideration of forty-five francs a month. From that day he lived the precarious life of a strolling player. He was poorly paid, and often reduced to abject poverty by lack of engagements, or the impecuniosity of managers. His hatred had lost none of its virulence; but to wreak the vengeance he wished to wreak, he must have time and money at his disposal. But how could he accumulate money when he was often too poor even to appease his hunger. Still he did not renounce his hopes. His was a rancour which was only intensified by years. He was biding his time while he watched from the depths of his misery the brilliant fortunes of the house of Sairmeuse. He had waited sixteen years, when one of his friends procured him an engagement in Russia. The engagement was nothing; but during his stay at St. Petersburg the poor comedian was fortunate enough to obtain an interest in a theatrical enterprise, from which he realized a clear profit of a hundred thousand francs in less than six years. "Now," said he, "I can give up this life, for I have money enough to begin the struggle." And six weeks later he arrived at his native village.

Before carrying any of his designs into execution, he went to Sairmeuse to visit Marie-Anne's grave, the sight of which he felt would fan his smouldering animosity, and give him all the determination he needed as the cold stern avenger of crime. This was his only motive in going, but, on the very evening of his arrival, he learnt

through a garrulous old peasant woman that ever since his departure—that is to say, for a period of twenty years—two parties had been making persistent inquiries for a child which had been placed somewhere in the neighbourhood. Jean knew that it was Marie-Anne's child they were seeking, and why they had not succeeded in finding it. But why were there two persons prosecuting these investigations? One was Maurice d'Escorval, of course, but who was the other? This information induced Jean to prolong his stay at Sairmeuse, where he tarried a whole month. By the expiration of that time he had traced the inquiries, which he could not at first comprehend, to one of Chefteux's agents. Through the latter, he reached Fouché's former spy himself; and finally succeeded in discovering that the second search had been instituted by no less a person than the Duchess de Sairmeuse. This discovery bewildered him. How could Blanche have known that Marie-Anne had given birth to a child; and, knowing it, what possible interest could she have had in finding this abandoned babe, now grown to manhood. These two questions puzzled Jean considerably, and he could give them no satisfactory answer. "Chupin's son could tell me perhaps," he thought, "but to obtain information from that quarter, I must pretend to be reconciled to the sons of the wretch who betrayed my father."

However, the traitor's children had been dead for several years, and after a long search, Jean only found the Widow Chupin, *nee* Aspasia Clapard, and her son Polyte. They were keeping a drinking-den not far from the Rue des Chateau-des-Rentiers; and their establishment, known as the Poivrière, enjoyed anything but an enviable reputation. Lacheneur cautiously questioned the widow and her son. He asked them if they knew of the crime at the Borderie—if they had heard that grandfather Chupin had committed murder and had been assassinated in his turn—if they had ever been told of an abandoned child, and of searches prosecuted to find it. But neither of these two had ever been at Sairmeuse in their lives, and when Lacheneur mentioned his name in hopes it might recall some recollection, they declared they had never heard it before. Jean was about to take his departure, despondently enough, when Mother Chupin, probably in the hope of pocketing a few pence, began to deplore her present misery, which

was, she declared, all the harder to bear as she had wanted for nothing during her poor husband's lifetime, for he had always obtained as much money as he wanted from a lady of high degree, called the Duchess de Sairmeuse.

Lacheneur uttered such a frightful oath that the old woman and her son started back in astonishment. He saw at once the close connection between Blanche's search for the child and her generosity to Chupin. "It was she who poisoned Marie-Anne," he said to himself. "It must have been through my sister herself that she became aware of the child's existence. She loaded the younger Chupin with favours because he knew the crime she had committed—that crime in which his father had been only an accomplice."

He remembered Martial's oath at the murdered girl's bedside, and his heart overflowed with savage exultation. For he could already see his two enemies, the last of the Sairmeuses and the last of the Courtornieus consummating his work of vengeance themselves. However, after all, this was mere conjecture: he must at any price ascertain whether his suppositions were correct. Drawing from his pocket several pieces of gold, and, throwing them on the table, he said: "I am rich; if you will obey me and keep my secret, your fortune is made."

A shrill cry of delight from mother and son outweighed any protestations of obedience. The Widow Chupin knew how to write, and Lacheneur then dictated this letter to her: "Madame la Duchesse—I shall expect you at my establishment to-morrow between twelve and four o'clock. It is on business connected with the Borderie. If at five o'clock I have not seen you, I shall carry to the post a letter for the duke."

"And if she comes, what am I to say to her?" asked the astonished widow.

"Nothing; you will merely ask her for money."

"If she comes, it is as I have guessed," he reflected.

She came. Hidden in the loft of the Poivriere, Jean, through an opening in the floor, saw the duchess hand Mother Chupin a bank note. "Now, she is in my power!" he thought exultantly. "And I will drag her through sloughs of degradation before I deliver her up to her husband's vengeance!"

XXXIX.

A FEW lines of the article consecrated to Martial in the "General Biography of Men of the Time," fittingly epitomize the history of his public life. "Martial de Sairmeuse," says the writer, "placed at the service of his party a highly cultivated intellect, unusual penetration, and extraordinary abilities. A leader at the time when political passion was raging highest, he had the courage to assume the sole responsibility of the most unpopular measures. But the hostility he encountered, the danger in which he placed the throne, compelled him to retire from office, leaving behind him animosities which will only be extinguished with his life." In thus summing up Martial's public career, his biographer omits to say that if the Duke de Sairmeuse was wrong in his policy—and that depends entirely on the point of view from which his conduct is regarded—he was doubly wrong, since he was not possessed of that ardent conviction verging on fanaticism which makes men, fools, heroes, and martyrs. He was not even truly ambitious. When those associated with him witnessed his passionate struggles and unceasing activity, they thought him actuated by an insatiable thirst for power. But, in reality, he cared little or nothing for it. He considered its burdens heavy; its compensations slight. His pride was too lofty to feel any satisfaction in applause; and flattery disgusted him. Often, during some brilliant fete, his acquaintances and subordinates, finding him thoughtful and pre-occupied, respectfully refrained from disturbing him. "His mind is occupied with momentous questions," they fancied. "Who can tell what important decisions may result from his reverie." But in this surmise they were mistaken. And, indeed, at the very moment when royal favour filled his rivals' hearts with envy, when occupying the highest position a subject can aspire to, and it seemed he could have nothing left to wish for in this world, Martial was saying to himself, "What an empty life! What weariness and vexation of spirit! To live for others—what a mockery!"

He looked at his wife, radiant in her beauty, worshipped like a queen, and sighed. He thought of her who was dead—Marie-Anne—the only woman he had ever loved. She was never absent from his mind, and after all these

years he saw her yet, stretched cold, rigid, lifeless, on the canopied bedstead, in that luxurious room at the Borderie. Time, far from effacing from his heart the image of the fair girl whose beauty unwittingly had wrought such woe—had only intensified youthful impressions, endowing the lost idol with almost superhuman grace of person and character. Ah! if fate had but given him Marie-Anne for his wife! Thus said Martial, again and again, picturing the happiness which when would have been his. They would have remained at Sairmeuse. They would have had children playing round them! And he would not be condemned to this continual warfare—to this hollow, unsatisfying restless life. The truly happy are not those who parade their dignities and opulence before the eyes of the multitude. They rather hide themselves from the curious gaze, and they are right; for here on earth happiness is almost a crime. So thought Martial; and he, the envied statesman, often said to himself, with a feeling of vexation: "To love, and to be loved—that is everything! All else is vanity."

He had really tried to love his wife; he had done his best to resuscitate the feeling of admiration with which she had inspired him at their first meeting; but he had not succeeded. It seemed as if there was between them a wall of ice which nothing could melt, and which only grew and expanded as time went on. "Why is it?" he wondered, again and again. "It is incomprehensible. There are days when I could swear she loves me. Her character, formerly so irritable, is entirely changed; she is gentleness itself." But still he could not conquer his aversion; it was stronger than his own will.

These unavailing regrets, the disappointment and sorrow that preyed upon his mind undoubtedly aggravated the bitterness and severity of Martial's policy. At least he knew how to fall nobly. He passed, even without a change of countenance, from all but omnipotence to a position so compromising that his very life was endangered. On perceiving his ante-chambers, formerly thronged with flatterers and place-hunters, now empty and deserted, he laughed—naturally, sincerely, without the least affectation. "The ship is sinking," said he; "the rats have deserted it." He did not even turn pale when the mob gathered outside his house, hurling stones at his windows,

and hooting and cursing the fallen statesman ; and when Otto, his faithful valet de chambre, entreated him to assume a disguise, and make his escape through the gardens, he quietly replied, "By no means ! I am simply odious ; I don't wish to become ridiculous !" They could not even dissuade him from going to a window and looking down on the rabble in the street below. A singular idea had just occurred to him. "If Jean Lacheneur is still alive," he thought, "how much he would enjoy this ! And if he is alive, no doubt he is there in the foremost rank, urging no the crowd." And he wished to see. But Jean Lacheneur was in Russia at that epoch.

The excitement eventually subsided ; and the Hotel de Sairmeuse was not seriously threatened. However, Martial realized that it would be better for him to go away for awhile, and allow people to forget him. He did not ask the duchess to accompany him. "The fault has been mine entirely," he said to her, "and it would be most unjust to make you suffer for it by condemning you to exile. Remain here ; I think it will be much better for you to remain." She did not offer to go with him, although she longed to do so, but then she dared not leave Paris. She knew that she must remain in order to secure her persecutor's silence. On the two occasions when she had left Paris before, everything was near being discovered, and yet then she had had Aunt Medea to take her place. Martial went away, accompanied only by his servant, Otto. In intelligence, this man was decidedly superior to his position ; he was indeed decently off, and he had a hundred reasons—one, by the way, was a very pretty one—for desiring to remain in Paris ; but his master was in trouble, and so he did not hesitate. During four years the Duke de Sairmeuse wandered through Europe, always chafing beneath the burden of a life no longer animated by interest or sustained by hope. He remained for a time in London, then he went to Vienna, and afterwards to Venice. One day he was seized by an irresistible desire to see Paris again, and he returned. It was not a very prudent step, perhaps, for his bitterest enemies—personal enemies, whom he had mortally offended and persecuted—were in power ; but still he did not hesitate. Besides, how could they injure him, since he had no favours to ask, no cravings of ambition to satisfy ?

The exile which had weighed so heavily on him, the loneliness he had endured had softened his nature and inclined his heart to tenderness: and he returned firmly resolved to overcome his aversion to his wife, and seek a reconciliation. "Old age is coming," he thought. "If I have not the love of youth by my fireside, I may at least have a friend." Blanche was astonished by his manner towards her when he returned. She almost believed she had found again the Martial of the old days at Courtonieu, but the realisation of the dream, so fondly cherished and so long deferred, now proved only another torture added to all the others. Still, Martial was striving to carry his plan into execution, when one day the following brief note came to him through the post: "Monsieur le Duc—If I were in your place, I would watch my wife."

It was only an anonymous letter, and yet on perusing it Martial's blood mounted to his forehead. "Can she have a lover?" he thought. Then reflecting on his own conduct towards his wife since their marriage, he said to himself: "And if she has, what right have I to complain? Did I not tacitly give her back her liberty?" However, he was greatly troubled; and yet he did not once think of playing the spy.

A few mornings afterwards, at about eleven o'clock, he was returning from a ride on horseback, and was not thirty paces from the Hotel de Sairmeuse when he suddenly perceived a lady hurriedly emerge from the house. She was very plainly dressed—entirely in black—but her whole appearance recalled that of the duchess in a striking fashion. "That's certainly my wife," thought Martial, "but why is she dressed in that fashion?" Then, yielding to a sudden impulse, he walked his horse up the Rue de Grenelle behind the woman in black. Blanche it was. She was tripping swiftly over the pavement, keeping her face shrouded by a thick veil and she never once turned her head. On reaching the Rue Taranne, she spoke hurriedly to a cab-driver on the stand, and then sprung into his vehicle. The Jehu was already on his box and he at once gave his bony horse such a vigorous cut of the whip that it was evident he had just been promised a princely gratuity. The cab had already turned into the Rue du Dragon, and Martial, ashamed of what he had already done and irresolute as to what he should do now was still tarrying at the

corner of the Rue des Saints-Peres, where he had originally stopped his horse. Scarcely daring to entertain the suspicions that flitted across his mind, he tried to deceive himself. "After all," he muttered, "it is of no use advancing. The cab's a long way off by now, and I couldn't overtake it." Still he mechanically gave his horse the rein and when he reached the Croix Rouge he espied Blanche's vehicle among a crowd of others. He recognized it by its green body and wheels striped with white. This decided him. The cab-driver had just managed to extricate himself from the block which traffic so frequently causes hereabouts, and whipping up his horse once more turned literally at a gallop up the Rue du Vieux Colombier—leading into the Place St. Sulpice. Thence he took the shortest cut to gain the outer boulevards.

Martial's thoughts were busy as he trotted along a hundred yards or so behind the vehicle. "She's in a terrible hurry," he said to himself. "But this is scarcely the quarter for a lover's rendezvous." The cab had indeed now reached the squalid region extending beyond the Place d'Italie. It turned into the Rue du Chateau-des-Rentiers and soon drew up before a tract of waste ground. The Duchess de Sairmeuse then hastily alighted, and, without stopping to look to the right or to the left, hurried across the open space. Martial had prudently paused in the rear. Not far from him he espied a man sitting on a block of stone and apparently immersed in the task of colouring a clay-pipe. "Will you hold my horse a moment?" inquired Martial.

"Certainly," answered the man, rising to his feet. He wore a workman's blouse and a long beard, and his aspect altogether was scarcely prepossessing. Had Martial been less pre-occupied, his suspicions might have been aroused by the malicious smile that curved the fellow's lips; and had he scrutinized him closely, he would perhaps have recognized him. For the seeming vagrant was Jean Lacheneur. Since forwarding that anonymous letter to the Duke de Sairmeuse, he had compelled the Duchess to multiply her visits to the Widow Chupin's den, and on each occasion he had watched for her arrival. "So, if her husband decides to follow her I shall know it," he thought. It was indispensable for the success of his plans that Blanche should be watched by her husband. For from

among a thousand schemes of revenge, Jean had chosen the most frightful his fevered brain could conceive. He longed to see the haughty Duchess de Sairmeuse subjected to the vilest ignominy, and Martial in the hands of the lowest of the low. He pictured a bloody struggle in this miserable den; the sudden arrival of the police, summoned by himself, and the indiscriminate arrest of all the parties present. He gloated over the thought of a trial in which the crime committed at the Borderie would be brought to light; he saw the duke and the duchess in prison, and the great names of Sairmeuse and Courtornieu shrouded in eternal disgrace. And he believed that nothing was wanting to ensure the success of his plans. He had two miserable wretches who were capable of any crime at his disposal; and an unfortunate youth named Gustave, whom poverty and cowardice had made his willing slave, was intended to play the part of Marie-Anne's son. These three accomplices had no suspicions of Lacheneur's real intentions, while, as for the Widow Chupin and her son, if they suspected some infamous plot all they really knew in regard to it was the duchess's name. Moreover, Jean held Polyte and his mother completely under his control by the wealth he had promised them if they served them faithfully. If Martial decided to follow his wife into the Poivriere the first time he watched her, Jean had, moreover, so arranged matters that the duke would at first suppose that Blanche had been led there by charity. "But he will not go in," thought the seeming vagrant, as, holding Martial's horse some little distance off, he looked in the direction of the hovel. "Monsieur le Duc is too cunning for that."

And Martial did not go in. Though he was horrified when he saw his wife enter so vile a den, as if she were at home there, he said to himself that he should learn nothing by following her. He, therefore, contented himself by making a thorough examination of the hovel from outside, and then remounting his horse and throwing Lacheneur a silver coin he started back home at a gallop. He was completely mystified: he did not know what to think, what to imagine, what to believe. But, at the same time, he was fully resolved to fathom the mystery; and as soon as he returned home he sent Otto out in search of information. He could confide everything to this devoted servant

from whom he had no secrets. At four o'clock in the afternoon, the faithful valet de chambre returned with an expression of consternation on his face. "What is it?" asked Martial, divining some great misfortune.

"Ah, sir, the mistress of that wretched den is the widow of Chupin's son—"

Martial's face turned ghastly pale. He knew life well enough to understand that since the duchess had been compelled to submit to these peoples' power, they must be masters of some secret which she was anxious at any price to keep unrevealed. But what secret could it be? The years which had furrowed Martial's brow, had not cooled the ardour of his blood. He was, as he had always been, a man of impulse, and so, without pausing he rushed to his wife's apartments.

"Madame has just gone downstairs to receive the Countess de Mussidan and the Marchioness d'Arlange," said the maid whom he met on the landing.

"Very well; I will wait for her here. You may retire."

So saying, Martial entered Blanche's dressing-room. It was in disorder for, after returning from the Poivriere, the duchess was still engaged at her toilette when visitors were announced. The wardrobe-doors stood open, two or three chairs were encumbered with wearing apparel, and Blanche's watch, her purse, and several bunches of keys were lying on the dressing-table and the mantel-piece. Martial did not sit down. His self-possession was returning. "I will commit no act of folly," he thought, "if I question her, I shall learn nothing. I must be silent and watchful."

He was about to retire, when, on glancing round the room, he noticed a large casket, inlaid with silver, which had belonged to his wife ever since she was a girl, and which accompanied her everywhere. "That, no doubt, contains the solution of the mystery," he said to himself. This was one of those moments when a man obeys the dictates of passion without pausing to reflect. Seeing the keys on the mantelpiece, he seized them, and endeavoured to find one that would fit the lock of the casket. The fourth key opened it. It was full of papers. With feverish haste, Martial examined their contents. He had thrown aside several unimportant letters, when he came to a bill that read as follows: "Search made for Madame

de Sairmeuse's child. Expenses for the third quarter of the year 18—" Martial's brain reeled. A child! His wife had a child! But he read on: "For the services of two agents at Sairmeuse,—. For expenses attending my own journey,—. Divers gratuities,—. Etc., etc." The total amounted to six thousand francs; and it was receipted "*Chefteux*." With a sort of cold rage, Martial continued his examination of the casket's contents, and found a miserably-written note, which said; "Two thousand francs this evening, or I will tell the duke the history of the affair at the *Borderie*." Then there were several more of *Chefteux*'s bills; next, a letter from Aunt Medea, in which she spoke of prison and remorse; and, finally, at the bottom of the casket, he found the marriage certificate of Marie-Anne Lacheneur and Maurice d'Escorval, drawn up by the cure of Vigano and signed by the old physician and Corporal Bavois.

The truth was as clear as daylight. Stunned, frozen with horror, Martial scarcely had strength enough to place the letters in the casket again, and restore it to its place. Then he tottered back to his own room, clinging to the walls for support. "It was she who murdered Marie-Anne," he murmured. He was confounded, terror-stricken, by the perfidy of this woman who was his wife—by her criminal audacity, cool calculation and assurance, and her marvellous powers of dissimulation.

Still he swore he would discover everything, either through the duchess or through the Widow Chupin; and he ordered Otto to procure him a costume such as was generally worn by the frequenters of the *Poivriere*. He did not know how soon he might have need of it. This happened early in February, and from that moment Blanche did not take a single step without being watched. Not a letter reached her that her husband had not previously read. And she had not the slightest suspicion of the constant supervision to which she was subjected. Martial did not leave his room; he pretended to be ill. He felt he could not meet his wife and remain silent. He remembered the oath of vengeance which he had sworn over Marie-Anne's lifeless form only too well. However, the watch which Otto kept over the duchess, and the perusal of the letters addressed to her, did not yield any fresh information, and for this reason: Polyte Chupin had been

arrested on a charge of theft, and this accident caused a delay in the execution of Lacheneur's plans.

But at last the latter prepared everything for Shrove Sunday, the 20th of February. On the previous day, in accordance with her instructions, the Widow Chupin wrote to the duchess that she must come to the Poivriere on Sunday night at eleven o'clock. On that same evening, Jean was to meet his accomplices at a ball at the Rainbow—a wine-shop bearing a very unenviable reputation—and give them their final instructions. These accomplices were to open the scene; he was only to appear at the *denouement*. "All is well arranged; the mechanism will work of its own accord," he said to himself. But, as is already known, the "mechanism," as he styled it, failed to act.

On receiving the Widow Chupin's summons, Blanche revolted for a moment. The lateness of the hour, the distance, the isolation of the appointed meeting place, frightened her. Still, she was obliged to submit, and on Sunday evening she furtively left the house, accompanied by Camille, the same maid who had been present when Aunt Medea died. The duchess and Camille were attired like women of the lowest order, and felt no fear of being recognized. And yet a man was watching who quickly followed them. This was Martial. He had perused the note appointing this rendezvous even before his wife, and had disguised himself in the costume Otto had procured for him—that of a labourer about the quays. Then, in hope of making himself absolutely unrecognizable, he had soiled and matted his hair and beard; his hands were grimed with dirt; and he really seemed to belong to the class of which he wore the attire. Otto had begged to be allowed to accompany his master; but the duke refused, remarking that his revolver would prove quite sufficient protection. He knew Otto well enough, however, to feel certain he would disobey him.

Ten o'clock was striking when Blanche and Camille left the house, and it did not take them five minutes to reach the Rue Taranne. There was only one cab on the stand, which they at once hired. This circumstance drew from Martial an oath worthy of his costume. But he reflected that, since he knew where to find his wife, a slight delay in obtaining a vehicle would not matter. He soon found one, and, thanks to a gratuity of ten francs, the driver

started off to the Rue du Chateau-des-Rentiers as fast as his horse could go. However, the duke had scarcely alighted before he heard the rumbling of another vehicle which pulled up abruptly a little distance behind. "Otto is evidently following me," he thought. And he then started across the open space in the direction of the Poivriere. The prevailing silence and absence of life were rendered still more oppressive by a chill fog which heralded an approaching thaw. Martial stumbled and slipped at almost every step he took over the rough, snow-covered ground; but at last through the mist he distinguished a building in the distance. This was the Poivriere. The light burning inside, filtered through the heart-shaped apertures cut in the upper part of the shutters, and it almost seemed as if a pair of lurid eyes were striving to peer through the fog.

Could it really be possible that the Duchess de Sairmeuse was there! Martial cautiously approached the window, and clinging to the hinges of the shutters, raised himself up so that he could glance through one of the apertures. Yes, there was no mistake. His wife and Camille were seated at a table before a large punch-bowl, in the company of two ragged, leering scoundrels, and a soldier of youthful appearance. In the centre of the room stood the Widow Chupin, with a small glass in her hand. She was talking with great volubility, and punctuating her sentences with occasional sips of brandy. The impression this scene produced on Martial was so acute that his hold relaxed and he dropped to the ground. A ray of pity stole into his soul, for he vaguely realized the frightful suffering which had been the murderess's chastisement. But he wished for another glance, and so once more he lifted himself up to the opening and looked in. The old woman had disappeared; the young soldier had risen from the table, and was talking and gesticulating earnestly. Blanche and Camille were listening to him with the closest attention. The two men who were sitting face to face, with their elbows on the table, were looking at each other; and Martial saw them exchange a significant glance. He was not wrong. The scoundrels were plotting "a rich haul." Blanche, who had dressed herself with much care, and to render her disguise perfect had encased her feet in large coarse shoes, that were

causing her well nigh intolerable agony—Blanche had neglected to remove her superb diamond ear-rings. She had forgotten them, but Lacheneur's accomplices had noticed them, and were now glancing at them with eyes that glittered more brilliantly than the diamonds themselves. While awaiting Lacheneur's coming, these wretches as had been agreed upon, were playing the part which he had imposed upon them. For this, and their assistance afterwards, they were to receive a certain sum of money. But they were thinking that this sum did not represent a quarter of the value of these jewels, and their looks only too plainly said : "What if we could secure them and go off before Lacheneur comes !" The temptation was too strong to be resisted. One of the scoundrels suddenly rose, and, seizing the duchess by the back of the neck, forced her head down on the table. The diamonds would have been at once torn from her ears if it had not been for Camille, who bravely came to her mistress's assistance. Martial could endure no more. He sprang to the door of the hovel, opened it, and entered, bolting it behind him.

"Martial !" "Monsieur le Duc !" cried Blanche and Camille in the same breath, for, despite his disguise, they had both recognised him. Their exclamations turned the momentary stupor of their assailants into fury ; and both ruffians precipitated themselves on Martial, determined to kill him. But, springing on one side, the duke avoided them. He had his revolver in his hand ; he fired twice, and both the scoundrels fell. However, he was not yet safe, for the young soldier rushed forward and attempted to disarm him. Then began a furious struggle, in the midst of which Martial did not leave off crying, in a panting voice, "Fly ! Blanche, fly ! Otto is not far off. The name—save the honour of the name !"

The two women obeyed him, making their escape through the back door, which opened into the garden ; and they had scarcely done so, before a violent knocking was heard at the front entry. The police were coming ! This increased Martial's frenzy ; and in a supreme effort to free himself from his assailant, he hurled him backwards so violently, that, striking his head against a corner of the table, the young soldier fell on to the floor, and lay there to all appearance dead. In the meanwhile,

the Widow Chupin, who had hastened from the room above on hearing the uproar, was shrieking on the staircase, while at the front door a voice was crying: "Open in the name of the law!" Martial might have fled; but if he fled, the duchess might be captured, for he would certainly be pursued. He saw the peril at a glance, and determined to remain. Shaking the Widow Chupin by the arm, he said to her, in an imperious voice: "If you know how to hold your tongue you shall have a hundred thousand francs." Then, drawing a table before the door opening into the back room, he intrenched himself behind it as behind a rampart, and awaited the enemy's approach.

The next moment the door was forced open, and a squad of police agents, headed by Inspector Gevrol, entered the room. "Surrender!" cried the inspector.

Martial did not move; his revolver was turned towards the intruders. "If I can parley with them and hold them in check only two minutes, all may yet be saved," he thought. He obtained the required delay; then throwing his weapon to the ground, he was about to bound through the back door, when a police agent, who had gone round to the rear of the house, seized him about the body, and threw him to the floor. From this side he expected only assistance, hence he exclaimed: "Lost! It is the Prussians who are coming!"

In the twinkling of an eye he was bound; and two hours later he was an inmate of the station-house at the Place d'Italie. He had played his part so perfectly, that he had deceived even Gevrol. His assailants were dead, and he could rely upon the Widow Chupin. But he knew that the trap had been set for him by Jean Lacheneur; and he read a whole volume of suspicion in the eyes of the young officer who had cut off his retreat, and who was called Lecoq by his companions.

XL.

THE Duke de Sairmeuse was one of those men who remain superior to circumstances. He was possessed of vast experience, and great natural shrewdness. His mind

was quick to act, and fertile in resources. But when he found himself immured in the damp and loathsome station-house at the Place d'Italie, after the terrible scene we have just recalled, he felt inclined to relinquish all hope. He knew that justice does not trust to appearances, and that when an investigating magistrate finds himself in presence of a mystery, he does not rest until he has fathomed it. He knew only too well, moreover, that if his identity was established, the authorities would endeavour to discover the reason that had led him to the Poivriere; now he could scarcely doubt but what this reason would soon be discovered, and, in that case, the crime at the Borderie, and the duchess's guilt, would undoubtedly be made public. This meant the Assize Court for the woman who bore his name—imprisonment, perhaps execution, at all events, a frightful scandal, dishonour, eternal disgrace! And the power he had wielded in former days was a positive disadvantage to him now, when his past position was filled by his political adversaries. Among them were two personal enemies, whose vanity he once had wounded, and who had never forgiven him. They would certainly not neglect the present opportunity for revenge. At the thought of such an ineffaceable stain on the great name of Sairmeuse, which was his pride and glory, reason almost forsook him. "My God, inspire me," he murmured. "How shall I save the honour of the name?"

He saw but one chance of salvation—death. They now believed him to be one of the miserable loafers who haunt the suburbs of Paris; if he were dead they would not trouble themselves about his identity. "It is the only way!" he thought, and he was indeed endeavouring to find some means of committing suicide, when suddenly he heard a bustle outside his cell. A few moments afterwards the door was opened and a man was thrust in—a man who staggered a few steps, fell heavily on to the floor, and then began to snore. The new arrival was apparently only some vulgar drunkard.

A minute or so elapsed, and then a vague, strange hope touched Martial's heart—no, he must be mistaken—and yet—yes, certainly this drunkard was Otto—Otto in disguise, and almost unrecognizable! It was a bold ruse and no time must be lost in profiting by it. Martial stretched himself on a bench, as if to sleep, and in such a way that

his head was close to Otto's. "The duchess is out of danger," murmured the faithful servant.

"For to-day, perhaps. But to-morrow, through me everything will be discovered."

"Have you told them who you are?"

"No; all the police agents but one took me for a vagabond."

"You must continue to personate that character."

"What good will it do? Jean Lacheneur will betray me." But Martial, though he little knew it, had no need to fear Lacheneur for the present, at least. A few hours previously, on his way in the dark from the Rainbow to the Poivriere, Jean had fallen to the bottom of a stone quarry, and fractured his skull. The labourers, on returning to their work early in the morning, found him lying there senseless; and that very moment they were carrying him to the hospital.

Although Otto also was ignorant of this circumstances, he did not seem discouraged. "There will be some way of getting rid of Lacheneur," said he, "if you will only sustain your present character. An escape is an easy matter when a man has millions at his command."

"They will ask me who I am, where I've come from, and how I've lived."

"You speak English and German, don't you; tell them that you have just returned from foreign parts; that you were a foundling, and that you have always lived a roving life."

"How can I prove that?"

Otto drew a little nearer his master, and said, impressively: "We must agree on our plans, for success depends on a perfect understanding between us. I have a sweetheart in Paris—and no one knows of our connection. She is as sharp as steel. Her name is Milner, and she keeps the Hotel de Mariembourg, in the Rue Saint-Quentin. You can say that you arrived here from Leipsic on Sunday; that you went to that hotel, that you left your trunk there, and that it has a card nailed to the top with your name—say May, foreign artist."

"Capital!" said Martial, approvingly. And then, with extraordinary quickness and precision, they agreed, point by point, on their plan of defense. When everything had been arranged, Otto pretended to awake from the heavy

sleep of intoxication; he clamoured to be released, and the keeper finally opened the door and set him at liberty. Before leaving the station-house, however, he succeeded in throwing a note to the Widow Chupin, who was imprisoned in the opposite cell. So, when Lecoq, after his skilful investigations at the Poivriere, rushed to the Place d'Italie, panting with hope and ambition, he found himself outwitted by these men, who were inferior to him in penetration, but whose tact was superior to his own.

Martial's plans being fully formed, he intended to carry them out with absolute perfection of detail, and, after his removal to the Depot, he was preparing himself for the investigating magistrate's visit, when Maurice d'Escorval entered his cell. They recognized each other. They were both terribly agitated, and the examination was an examination only in name. After Maurice's departure Martial attempted to destroy himself; for he had no faith in his former enemy's generosity. But when he found M. Segmuller occupying Maurice's place the next morning, he really believed that he was saved.

Then began that struggle between the magistrate and Lecoq on one side, and the prisoner on the other—a struggle in which neither conquered. Martial knew that Lecoq was the only person he had to fear, still he bore him no ill-will. Faithful to his nature, which compelled him to be just even to his enemies, he could not help admiring the astonishing penetration and perseverance of this young police agent, who, undismayed by the obstacles surrounding him, struggled on, unassisted, to reach the truth. But Lecoq was always outwitted by Otto, the mysterious accomplice, who seemed to know his every movement in advance. At the Morgue, at the Hotel de Mariembourg, with Toinon, the wife of Polyte Chupin, as well as with Polyte himself Lecoq was always just a little too late. He detected the secret correspondence between the prisoner and his accomplice, and he was even ingenious enough to discover the key to it, but this served no purpose. A man, who had seen a rival, or rather a future master in Lecoq—in short, Gevrol—had betrayed him. If his efforts to arrive at the truth through the jeweller and the Marchioness d'Arange had failed, it was only because Blanche had not purchased the diamond ear-rings she wore at the Poivriere at any shop, but from one of her friends, the Baroness

Watchau. And finally, if no one in Paris had missed the Duke de Sairmeuse, it was because—thanks to an understanding between the duchess, Otto, and Camille—no other inmates of the Hotel de Sairmeuse suspected his absence. All the servants supposed that the duke was confined to his room by illness. His breakfast and dinner were taken up to his private apartments every day; and soups and tisanes were prepared ostensibly for his benefit.

So the weeks went by, and Martial was expecting to be summoned before the Assize Court and condemned under the name of May, when he was afforded an opportunity to escape. Too shrewd not to discern the trap that had been set for him, it was only after horrible hesitation that he decided to alight from the prison-van, determined to run the risk, and commending himself for protection to his lucky star. And he decided wisely, for that same night he leaped over his own garden wall, leaving an escaped convict, Joseph Couturier by name, whom he had picked up in a low eating-house, as a hostage in Lecoq's hands. Warned by Madame Milner, thanks to a blunder which Lecoq committed, Otto was waiting for his master. In the twinkling of an eye Martial's beard fell under the razor; he plunged into the bath which was already prepared, and his clothes were burned. And he it was who, during the search a few minutes later, had the hardihood to call out: "Otto, by all means allow these men to do their duty." But he did not breathe freely until the police-agents had departed. "At last," he exclaimed, "honour is saved! We have outwitted Lecoq!"

He had just left his bath, and assumed a dressing-gown, when Otto handed him a letter from the duchess. He hastily opened the envelope and read: "You are safe. You know everything. I am dying. Farewell. I loved you."

With two bounds he reached his wife's apartments. The outer door was locked: he burst it open; but he came to late. Blanche was dead—poisoned, like Marie-Anne; but she had procured a drug having an instantaneous effect, and extended on her couch, clad in her wonted apparel, her hands folded over her breast, she seemed only asleep. A tear glistened in Martial's eye. "Poor, unhappy woman!" he murmured; "may God forgive you

as I forgive you—you whose crime has been so frightfully expiated here below !”

EPILOGUE.

SAFE, in his own princely mansion, and surrounded by an army of retainers, the Duke de Sairmeuse had triumphantly exclaimed : “ We have outwitted Lecoq ! ”

In this he was right ; for the young detective was certainly nonplussed for the time being ; but when his grace fancied himself for ever beyond this wily, keen-witted, aspiring agent’s reach, he was most decidedly wrong. Lecoq was not the man to sit down with folded hands and brood over the humiliation of defeat. Before he went to old Tabaret, he was beginning to recover from his despondency ; and when he left that experienced detective’s presence, he had regained his courage, energy, and command over his faculties. “ Well, my worthy friend,” he remarked to Father Absinthe, who was trotting along by his side, “ you heard what the great Monsieur Tabaret said, didn’t you ? So you see I was right.”

But his companion evinced no enthusiasm. “ Yes, you were right,” he responded, in woe-begone tones.

“ Do you think we are ruined by two or three mistakes ? Nonsense ! I will soon turn to-day’s defeat into a glorious victory.”

“ Ah ! you might do so perhaps, if—they don’t dismiss us from the force.”

This doleful remark recalled Lecoq to a sense of his present position. He and Absinthe had allowed a prisoner to slip through their fingers. That was vexatious, it is true ; but, on the other hand, they had captured a most notorious criminal—Joseph Couturier. Surely there was some comfort in that. Still, of course, they both might be dismissed—and yet Lecoq could have borne the prospect, dismal as it was, if it had not been for the thought that dismissal would for ever prevent him from following up the Poivriere affair. What would his superiors say when he told them that May and the Duke de Sairmeuse were one and the same person. They would, no doubt, shrug their shoulders and turn up their noses. “ Still, M. Segmuller will believe me,” he thought. “ But will he dare to take

any action in the matter without patent evidence before him?"

This was very unlikely, as Lecoq fully realized, and for a moment he asked himself if he and his fellows could not make a descent on the Hotel de Sairmeuse, and, on some pretext or other, compel the duke to show himself. It would then be easy to identify him as the prisoner May. However, after a little thought he dismissed the idea. "It would be a stupid expedient!" he exclaimed. "Two such men as the duke and his accomplice are not likely to be caught napping. They are prepared for such a visit, and we should only have our labour for our pains."

He made these reflections in a low tone of voice; and Father Absinthe's curiosity was aroused. "Excuse me," said the old veteran, "I don't quite understand you."

"I say that we must find some tangible proof before asking permission to proceed further—" Lecoq paused with knitted brows. An idea had occurred to him. He fancied he could prove complicity between at least one of the witnesses summoned to give evidence, and some member of the duke's household. He was indeed thinking of Madame Milner, the landlady of the Hotel de Mariembourg, and of his first meeting with her. He saw her again, in his mind's eye, standing on a chair, her face on a level with a cage, covered with a large piece of black silk, while she persistently repeated three or four German words to a starling, who with equal persistency retorted: "Camille! Where is Camille?" "One thing is certain," exclaimed Lecoq aloud, "if Madame Milner—who is a German, and who speaks French with the strongest possible German accent—had reared this bird, it would either have spoken in German or else in French, and in the latter case with the same accent as its mistress. So it can't have been in her possession long; but then who can have given it to her?"

Father Absinthe was beginning to grow impatient. "In sober earnest, what are you talking about?" he asked, petulantly.

"I say that if there is any one at the Hotel de Sairmeuse named Camille, I have the proof I wish for. Come, Papa Absinthe, let us hurry on." And without another word of explanation, he dragged his companion rapidly towards the Seine.

When they reached the Rue de Grenelle, Lecoq perceived a commissionaire leaning against the door of a wine-shop. He walked straight towards him. "Come, my good fellow," said he. "I want you to go to the Hotel de Sairmeuse and ask for Camille. Tell her that her uncle is waiting for her here."

"But, sir——"

"What, you haven't gone yet?"

The messenger started off, and the two police agents entered the wine-shop, Father Absinthe scarcely having time to swallow a glass of brandy before the envoy returned. "I was unable to see Mademoiselle Camille," said he. "The house is closed from top to bottom. The duchess died very suddenly this morning."

"Ah! the wretch!" exclaimed the young police agent. Then controlling himself, he mentally added: "He must have killed his wife on returning home, but his fate is sealed. Now, I shall be allowed to continue my investigations."

In less than twenty minutes they arrived at the Palais de Justice. M. Segmuller did not seem to be immoderately surprised by Lecoq's revelations, though he listened with evident doubt to the young police agent's ingenious deductions; it was the circumstance of the starling which at last decided him. "Perhaps you are right, my dear Lecoq," he said, "and to tell the truth, I quite agree with you. But I can take no further action in the matter until you can furnish proof so convincing in its nature that the Duke de Sairmeuse will be unable to think of denying it."

"Ah! sir, my superiors won't allow me——"

"On the contrary," interrupted the magistrate, "they will allow you the fullest liberty after I have spoken to them." Such action on M. Segmuller's part, required no little courage; for in official circles there had been considerable merriment over the magistrate's mysterious man with the iron mask, disguised as a mountebank; and the former by his persistent support of the young detective's theories, had almost become an object of ridicule.

"And when will you speak to them?" timidly inquired Lecoq.

"At once."

The magistrate had already turned towards the door

when the young police agent stopped him. "I have one more favour to ask you, sir," he said, entreatingly. "You are so kind, you are the first person who has given me any encouragement—who has had any faith in me."

"Speak, my good fellow."

"Ah! sir, will you give me a message for M. d'Escorval? Any insignificant message—inform him of the prisoner's escape. I will take it myself, and then—Oh! fear nothing, sir; I will be very prudent."

"Very well!" replied the magistrate, "I will write him a note."

When he finally left the office, Lecoq was fully authorized to proceed with his investigations, and he carried in his pocket M. Segmuller's letter to M. d'Escorval. His satisfaction was so intense that he did not deign to notice the sneers bestowed upon him as he passed along the corridors; but on the threshold downstairs he encountered Gevrol the general, who was evidently watching for him. "Ah ha!" laughed the inspector, as Lecoq passed out, "here's one of those simpletons who fish for whales and don't even catch a gudgeon."

For an instant Lecoq felt angry. He turned round abruptly and looked Gevrol full in the face. "At all events," retorted he in the tone of a man *who* knows what he's saying. "That's better than assisting prisoners to carry on a surreptitious correspondence with people outside."

In his surprise, Gevrol almost lost countenance, and his blush was equivalent to a confession. But Lecoq did not add another word. What did it matter to him now if Gevrol had betrayed him! Was he not about to win a glorious revenge!

He spent the remainder of the day in preparing his plan of action, and in thinking what he should say when he took M. Segmuller's note to Maurice d'Escorval. The next morning at about eleven o'clock he presented himself at the latter's house. M. d'Escorval is in his study with a young man," replied the servant to the young detective's inquiry, "but, as he gave me no orders to the contrary, you may go in."

Lecoq entered, but found the study unoccupied. From the adjoining room, however, only separated from the study by velvet hangings, came a sound of stifled exclamations,

of sobs mingled with kisses. Not knowing whether to remain or to retire, the young police-agent stood for a moment undecided; when suddenly he perceived an open letter lying on the carpet. Impelled by an impulse stronger than his will, Lecoq picked the letter up, and his eyes meeting the signature, he started back in surprise. He could not now refrain from reading this missive which ran as follows :

“The bearer of this letter is Marie-Anne’s son—your son, Maurice. I have given him all the proofs necessary to establish his identity. It was to his education that I consecrated poor Marie-Anne’s inheritance. Those to whose care I confided him have made a noble man of him. If I restore him to you, it is only because the life I lead is not a fitting life for him. Yesterday, the miserable woman who murdered my sister died from poison administered by her own hand. Poor Marie-Anne! she would have been far more terribly avenged had not an accident which happened to me saved the Duke and the Duchess de Sairmeuse from the snare into which I had drawn them.

“JEAN LACHENEUR.”

Lecoq stood as if petrified. Now he understood the terrible drama enacted in the Widow Chupin’s cabin. “I must go to Sairmeuse at once,” he said to himself; “there I can discover everything.” He left the room without seeing M. d’Escorval, and even successfully resisted the temptation to take Lacheneur’s letter with him.

Exactly a month had transpired since Blanche’s death. His grace the Duke de Sairmeuse was reclining on a divan in his library, reading one of his favourite authors, when Otto his valet de chambre came in to inform him that a messenger was below, charged with delivering into his grace’s own hands a letter from M. d’Escorval.

Martial sprang to his feet. “It is impossible,” he exclaimed; and then he quickly added: “Let the messenger come up.”

A tall man, with florid complexion, and red hair and beard, timidly handed the duke a letter. Martial instantly broke the seal, and read :

“I saved you, monsieur, by not recognizing the prisoner,

May. In your turn assist me. By noon on the day after to-morrow, I must have two hundred and sixty thousand francs. I have sufficient confidence in your honour to apply to you.

“MAURICE D’ESCORVAL.”

For a moment Martial stood bewildered, then springing to a table he began writing, without noticing that the messenger was looking over his shoulder: “Monsieur—Not the day after to-morrow, but this evening, what you ask will be at your service. My fortune and my life are at your disposal. It is but a slight return for the generosity shown by you in withdrawing, when, under the rags of May, you recognized your former enemy, but now your devoted friend.

“MARTIAL DE SAIRMEUSE.”

The duke folded this letter with a feverish hand, and giving it to the messenger with a louis, he said: “Here is the answer, make haste!”

But the messenger did not stir. He slipped the letter into his pocket, and then hastily cast his red beard and wig on the floor.

“Lecoq!” exclaimed Martial, paler than death.

“Lecoq, yes, sir,” replied the young detective. “I was obliged to take my revenge; my future depended on it, and so I ventured to imitate M. d’Escorval’s writing.” And as Martial offered no remark: “I must also say to Monsieur le Duc,” he continued, “that if your grace will transmit a confession of your presence at the Poivriere in your own hand-writing to the investigating magistrate I can and will at the same time furnish proofs of your grace’s innocence—that you were dragged into a snare, and that you only acted in self-defense.”

Martial looked up in fair astonishment, but to show that he was acquainted with everything, Lecoq slowly added: “As madame is dead, there will be nothing said concerning what took place at the Borderie.”

A week later a private report setting forth that there were no grounds to proceed against the Duke de Sairmeuse was forwarded by M. Segmuller to the public prosecutor.

Appointed to the position of inspector, which he coveted.

Lecoq had the good taste, or perhaps, the shrewdness, to wear his honours modestly. But on the day of his promotion, he ordered a seal, on which was engraved the exultant rooster, his chosen armorial design, with a motto to which he ever remained faithful: "*Semper Vigilans.*"

FINIS.

THE WIDOW LEROUGE

CHAPTER I.

ON Thursday, the 6th of March, 1862, two days after Shrove Tuesday, five women of the village of Jonchère presented themselves at the bureau of police at Bougival.

They stated that for two days past no one had seen the Widow Lerouge,—one of their neighbors, who lived by herself in an isolated cottage. The house was shut up. Several persons had knocked without receiving an answer. The window-shutters as well as the door were closed; and it was impossible to obtain even a glimpse of the interior.

This state of affairs alarmed them. Apprehensive of a crime, or at the least an accident, they demanded the interference of justice to satisfy their doubts by forcing the door and entering the house.

Bougival is a quiet maritime village, its inhabitants principally boatmen, who ply upon the river. Trifling offences are sometimes heard of in its neighborhood, but crimes are rare.

The commissary of police at first refused to listen to the women, but their importunities fatigued him into compliance. He called into requisition the services of a

locksmith, the brigadier of gendarmes, and two of his men; and, thus accompanied, he followed the neighbor of the Widow Lerouge.

Whatever celebrity it possesses, La Jonchère owes to the projectors of the railway, which has now passed close to it for several years, with more enterprise than profit. It is a hamlet of small importance, seated upon the side of the hill which overlooks the Seine between Malmaison and Bougival. It is about twenty minutes' walk from the main road; which, passing by Rueil and Port Marly, goes from Paris to St. Germain. A steep and rugged road, or rather by-path, not easily travelled, turning off at right angles from the main road, leads to it.

The little troupe, headed by the gendarmes, followed the highway bordering the river, until it reached this cross-road, into which it turned, and after stumbling over its rugged inequalities for about a hundred yards halted before the dwelling of the Widow Lerouge.

It was a house, or rather cottage, of modest, but comfortable appearance, and must have been built by some Parisian shopkeeper in love with the beauties of Nature; for all the trees had been carefully cut down. More deep than wide, it consisted of two apartments on the ground floor with a loft above. Around it extended a much-neglected garden, enclosed by a wall of dry stones about three feet high, much dilapidated,—broken and crumbling in many places, and affording but slight protection against trespassers. To this garden a light wooden gate, turning on hinges clumsily constructed of iron wire, gave access.

"This is the house," said the women.

The commissary turned. During his short walk, the number of his followers had been rapidly increasing,

and now included all the idle persons in the village. He saw before him about forty peasants of both sexes, nearly wild with curiosity.

"Let no one enter the garden," said he; and, to ensure obedience, he placed the two gendarmes on sentry before the entrance, and advanced towards the house, accompanied by the brigadier and the locksmith.

After calling several times, he knocked loudly with his cane, at the door first, and then successively at each of the window-shutters. After each blow, he placed his ear against the wood and listened. Hearing nothing, he turned to the locksmith.

"Open!" said he.

The workman unstrapped his basket, and produced his implements. He had already introduced a skeleton key into the lock, when a loud exclamation was heard from the crowd outside the gate.

"The key!" they cried. "Here is the key!"

An urchin of some dozen years, playing with his companions, had perceived in a ditch by the roadside an enormous key, which he had picked up and carried to the cottage in triumph.

"Give it to me gamin," said the brigadier. "We shall see."

The key was tried. It was, in fact, the key of the house.

The commissary and the locksmith exchanged glances full of sinister misgivings. "This looks bad," muttered the brigadier. They entered the house; while the crowd, restrained with difficulty by the gendarmes, stamped with impatience, or clambered on the garden wall, stretching their necks eagerly, to see or hear something of what was passing within the cottage.

Those who anticipated the discovery of crime, were

unhappily not deceived. Of this the commissary was satisfied upon the threshold. Every thing in the first room pointed with a sad eloquence to the presence of a malefactor. The furniture—a bureau and two large trunks—were forced and broken open. In the inner room, the disorder was even greater. It seemed as though some furious hand had taken a fiendish pleasure in creating frightful disorder.

In the inner room, near the chimney, was found extended upon the hearth the dead body of the Widow Lerouge. She was lying with her face in the ashes. One side of the face and a portion of the hair were burnt; it appeared a miracle that the fire had not caught her clothing.

“Wretches!” exclaimed the brigadier. “Could they not have robbed, without assassinating the poor woman?”

“But where has she been wounded?” inquired the commissary. “I do not see any blood.”

“Hold! here between the shoulders,” replied the brigadier; “two fierce blows, by my faith. I’ll wager my stripes she had no time to cry out.”

He stooped over the corpse and touched it.

“She is cold,” he continued, “and completely rigid. It is at least thirty-six hours since she received her death-wound.”

The commissary began writing at the table his summary official report.

“We are not here to speculate, but to discover the criminal,” said he. “Let information be at once conveyed to the justice of peace, and the mayor at Bougival, and send this letter without delay to the Palace de Justice in Paris. In less than two hours a judge of inquiry

can be here. In the meanwhile I will proceed to a provisional inquest."

"Shall I carry the letter?" asked the brigadier.

"No, send one of your men; you will be useful to me here in keeping away intruders, and finding the witnesses I shall require. It is advisable to leave everything in this chamber as we have found it. I shall install myself in the other."

A gendarme departed at a run towards the station at Rueil; and the commissary commenced his investigations in regular form, as prescribed by law.

"Who was this Widow Lerouge? Where did she come from? How was she employed? Upon what means did she live? What were her habits, her manners, her companionships? Was she known to have enemies? Was she a miser? Did she pass for being rich?"

All this it was important to the commissary to ascertain.

But, although the witnesses were numerous enough, they possessed but little information. The depositions of the neighbors, successively interrogated, were empty, incoherent, and incomplete. No one knew any thing of the victim. She was a stranger in the country. Many presented themselves as witnesses, moreover, who came forward less to afford information than to seek the gratification of their curiosity. A gardener who had been an acquaintance of the deceased, and a young girl who supplied her with milk, were the only persons capable of giving any precise evidence; and that was insignificant enough.

In a word, after three hours of laborious investigation, after having undergone the infliction of all the gossip of the country, after receiving evidence the most

contradictory, and listened to commentaries the most ridiculous the following is all that appeared any way near certainty to the bewildered commissary.

Twelve years before, at the beginning of 1850, the woman Lerouge had made her appearance at Bougival, with a large wagon piled with furniture, linen, and her personal effects. She had stopped at an inn, declared her intention of settling in the neighborhood, and immediately went in quest of a house. Finding this one unoccupied, and liking it, she had taken it, without trying to beat down the terms; paid in advance three hundred and twenty francs for the first six months, but refused to sign a lease.

The house taken, she installed herself the same day, and expended about a hundred francs on repairs.

She was a woman about fifty-four or fifty-five years of age, well preserved, active, and in the enjoyment of excellent health. No one knew her reasons for taking up her abode in a country where she was an absolute stranger. She was supposed to have come from Normandy, having been at times seen to wear the high white muslin head-dress of that country. This night bonnet, as the neighbors called it, did not prevent her from wearing very coquettish costumes during the day; indeed, she wore ordinarily very handsome dresses, very showy ribbons on her bonnets, and covered herself with as many jewels as a gipsy. Without doubt she had lived near the sea, for sailors and seafaring topics recurred incessantly in her conversation.

Her husband she said was dead, having been lost at sea; but, as she never entered into particulars on this subject, the impression was that she disliked speaking of him.

On one particular occasion she had remarked in

presence of the milkmaid and three other persons, "No woman was ever more miserable than I during my married life." And at another, "All new, all fine! A new broom sweeps clean. My sea-monster of a husband loved me for only a year!"

The Widow Lerouge passed for rich, or at the least for being very well off; and she was not a miser. She had given a woman at Malmaison sixty francs to pay her rent, and at another time advanced two hundred francs to a fisherman of Port Marly. She was fond of good living, spent a good deal of money on her table, and bought wine in large quantities. She took pleasure in treating her acquaintances, and her dinners were excellent. If complimented on her easy circumstances, she made no very strong denial. She had frequently been heard to say, "I have neither lands nor houses: but I have every thing I want; and, if I wished for any thing more, I could have it."

Beyond this, the slightest allusion to her past life, her country, or her family had never escaped her, although she was talkative, and at times very boastful. She was supposed, however, to have seen the world, and to know a great deal. She never went out in the evenings, but barricaded herself in her cottage as in a fortress. It was well known that she got tipsy regularly after dinner and went to bed very soon afterwards. Rarely had strangers been seen to visit her,—two or three times a lady and a young man, and upon one occasion two gentlemen,—one old and decorated, the other young and of a distinguished appearance; these latter came in a magnificent carriage.

In conclusion, the deceased was held in little esteem by her neighbors. Her conversation was often singular, and odious in the mouth of a woman of her age. She

had been heard to give a young girl the most detestable counsels. A pork butcher, embarrassed in his business, tempted by her supposed wealth, had at one time paid her his addresses. She declined his advances, declaring that to be married once was enough for her. At several times two men had been seen in her house, the first of whom was young and looked like a laborer who worked upon the railway; the other was a big man, rather elderly, with huge brown whiskers and dressed in a blouse, who appeared very fierce and even dangerous. These men were suspected to be her lovers.

Having interrogated all his witnesses, the commissary proceeded to write out their depositions. As he finished the last page, the judge of inquiry arrived upon the scene, attended by the chief of the detective police, and one of his agents.

M. Daburon was a man thirty-eight years of age, well made, and of very prepossessing appearance; sympathetic notwithstanding his coldness; wearing upon his handsome countenance a calm and sweet expression, although tinged with sadness. This settled melancholy had remained with him ever since his recovery, two years before, from a dreadful malady, which had well nigh proved fatal.

Judge of inquiry since 1859, he had rapidly acquired the most brilliant reputation. Laborious, patient, and acute, he knew with singular skill how to disentangle the skein of the most complicated affair, and from the midst of a thousand threads lay hold of the right one. None better than he could solve those terrible problems where the sign x —in algebra, the unknown quantity—represents the criminal. Armed with an irresistible logic, he deduced the unknown from the known, and excelled in collecting and uniting in a bundle of over-

whelming proof facts to others unimportant and circumstances in appearance the most insignificant.

Although possessed of qualifications for his office so numerous and valuable, he was tremblingly distrustful of his own abilities, and exercised his terrible functions with diffidence and hesitation. He wanted audacity to risk those *coups de theatre*, so often resorted to by his contemporaries in the pursuit of truth.

Thus it was repugnant to his feelings to deceive even an accused person, or lay snares for him; in fact the mere idea of the possibility of a judicial error terrified him. They said of him in the courts, "He is a trembler." What he sought was not presumption or conviction, but the most absolute certainty. No rest for him until the day when the accused was forced to bow before the evidence; so much so that he had been jestingly reproached with seeking not to discover criminals but innocents.

The chief of detective police was none other than the celebrated Gevrol, who has so often figured in our previous works. He was really an able man, but wanting in perseverance, and liable to be blinded by an incredible obstinacy. If he lost a clew, he could not bring himself to acknowledge it, still less to retrace his steps. His audacity and coolness, however, rendered it difficult to disconcert him; and being at once courageous, and possessed of immense personal strength, he never hesitated to confront the most daring of malefactors.

But his specialty, his triumph, his glory, was his memory of faces, so prodigious as to exceed belief. Did he see a face for five minutes, it was enough. Its possessor was catalogued, and, no matter how long the interval, recognized on reappearance. The impossibilities of place, the unlikelihood of circumstances, the most in-

credible disguises, could not lead him astray. What he remembered, he said, was the peculiarities of the shape, size, color, and expression of the eyes, at which alone he looked, without noticing any other features.

This faculty was severely tested before he had been a week at Poissy, by the following experiment. Three prisoners were draped in coverings completely disguising their figures. Over their faces were veils, allowing nothing of the features to be seen except the eyes; and in this state they were shown to Gevrol.

Without the slightest hesitation he recognized the prisoners and named them.

Had chance alone assisted him?

The aid-de-camp who attended Gevrol was an old offender, reconciled to the law,—a jolly fellow, cunning, quick; and useful in his way, but secretly jealous of his chief, whose abilities he held in light estimation. He was named Lecoq.

The commissary, by this time heartily tired of his responsibilities, welcomed the judge of inquiry and his agents as liberators. He related rapidly the facts collected in his official report.

"You have proceeded well, monsieur," said the judge. "All is stated clearly; yet there is one fact you have omitted to ascertain."

"What is that, monsieur?" inquired the commissary.

"On what day was the Widow Lerouge last seen, and at what hour?"

"I am coming to that, monsieur. She was seen and spoken to on the evening of Shrove Tuesday, at twenty minutes after five. She was then returning from Bougival with a pannier of provisions."

"You are sure of the hour?" inquired Gevrol.

"Perfectly, and for this reason: two witnesses, the woman Tellier and a cooper who lives hard by, alighted from the omnibus which leaves Marly every hour, when they perceived the widow in the cross-road, and hastened to overtake her. They conversed with her until they separated at the door of her own house."

"And what had she in her pannier?" demanded the judge of inquiry.

The witnesses were ignorant. They knew only that she carried two bottles of wine sealed, and another of brandy. She complained to them of headache, and said, "While you are going to enjoy yourselves, according to custom on Shrove Tuesday, I am going to bed."

"So, so!" exclaimed the chief of police. "I know where it is necessary to search!"

"You think so?" inquired M. Daburon.

"Parbleu! it is clear enough. We want to find the large brown man, the gallant in the blouse. The brandy and the wine were intended for his entertainment. The widow expected him to supper. He came, sure enough, the amiable gallant!"

"Oh!" cried the brigadier, evidently scandalized, "she was very old, and terribly ugly!"

Gevrol regarded the honest gendarme with an expression of contemptuous pity.

"Know, brigadier," said he, "that a woman who has money is always young and pretty, if she desires to be thought so!"

"Perhaps there is something in that," replied the judge. "It did not occur to me. I am more impressed by the remark of this unfortunate woman, 'If I wished for any thing more, I could have it.'"

"That also attracted my attention," acquiesced the commissary.

Gevrol did not take the trouble to listen. He held to his own opinion, and began to inspect minutely every nook and corner of the room. Suddenly he turned towards the commissary.

"Now that I think of it," cried he, "was it not on Tuesday that the weather changed? It had been dry for a fortnight, and on that evening it rained. At what hour did the rain commence here?"

"At half-past nine," answered the brigadier. "I went out from supper to make my circuit of the dancing halls, when I was overtaken by a heavy shower opposite to the Rue Pecheurs. In less than ten minutes there was half an inch of water on the pavement."

"Very well," said Gevrol. "Then if the man came after half-past nine his shoes must have been muddy. If dry, he arrived sooner. This ought to have been ascertained before the floor was disturbed. Were there any imprints of footsteps, M. le commissary?"

"I must confess we never thought of looking for them."

"Ah!" exclaimed the chief of police, in a tone of irritation, "that is vexatious!"

"Wait," replied the commissary, "there is yet time to see if there are any,—not in this room, but in the other. We have there deranged absolutely nothing. My footsteps and those of the brigadier may be easily distinguished. Let us see."

As the commissary opened the door of the second chamber, Gevrol stopped him.

"I demand permission, M. the judge," said he, "to examine the apartment before any one else is permitted to enter."

"Certainly," acquiesced Daburon.

Gevrol passed into the room, the others remaining

on the threshold. He took in at a glance the scene of the crime.

Every thing, as the commissary had stated, seemed to have been overturned by some furious madman.

In the middle of the chamber stood a table laid for one person, and covered with a fine linen table cloth, white as snow. Upon this was placed a magnificent wine-glass of the rarest manufacture, a very handsome knife, and a plate of the finest porcelain. There was an opened bottle of wine, hardly touched, and another of brandy, from which about five or six *petits verres* had been taken.

At the right, along the wall, stood two handsome cupboards of walnut, with ornamental locks and hinges of brass, one each side of the window; both were empty, and the contents scattered on all sides. There were clothing, linen, and other effects unfolded, tossed about, or smashed to pieces.

At the back, near the chimney, a small closet in the wall for holding the plate was torn open. At the other side of the chimney, an old secretary with a marble top had been smashed into fragments, and rummaged to its inmost recesses. The desk, wrenched away, hung by a single hinge. The drawers were pulled out and emptied upon the floor.

At the left of the room the bed had been completely disarranged and overturned, the bed-ticking cut, and the straw with which it was filled thrown out.

"Not the slightest imprint," murmured Gevrol, disappointed. "He must have arrived before half-past nine. You can all come in now."

He walked right to the corpse of the widow, near which he knelt.

"It cannot be said," grumbled he, "that the work

is not properly done! the assassin was no apprentice!"

Then looking right and left,—

"Oh! oh!" continued he, "the poor devil was busy with her cooking when he struck her; see her pan of ham and eggs upon the hearth. The brute hadn't patience to wait for his dinner. He struck the blow fast; therefore he can't invoke the gaiety of dessert in his defence!"

"It is evident," said the commissary, "that robbery was the motive of this crime."

"It is probable," answered Gevrol in a sharp tone; "and that accounts for the absence of silver on the table."

"Hold! Some pieces of gold in this drawer!" exclaimed Lecoq, who had been searching on his own account,— "about three hundred and twenty francs!"

"What!" cried Gevrol, a little disconcerted.

But he recovered from his embarrassment quickly, and continued,—

"He must have forgotten them; that often happens. I have more than once known an assassin, having accomplished the murder, so utterly bewildered as to depart without remembering the plunder, for which he had committed the crime. Our man became excited perhaps, or perhaps may have been interrupted. Some one may have knocked at the door. What makes me more willing to think so is, that the scamp did not leave the candle burning. You see he took the trouble to extinguish it."

"Bast!" said Lecoq. "That proves nothing. He is probably an economical and careful man."

The investigations of the two agents were continued all through the house; but their most minute researches

resulted in discovering absolutely nothing ; not one piece of evidence to convict ; not the most feeble indication which might serve as a point of departure. Even the dead woman's papers, if she possessed any, had disappeared. Not a letter, not a scrap of paper even, to be met with.

From time to time Gevrol stopped to swear or grumble.

" Oh ! it is a clever piece of work ! See what care the scoundrel takes of number one ! He is a clever hand ! "

" What conclusion do you come to, monsieur ? " at length demanded the judge of inquiry.

" It is a drawn game, M. the judge," replied Gevrol. " We are baffled for the present. The miscreant has taken his measures with great precaution ; but, before night, I shall have a dozen men in pursuit. He shall not escape us long. He has carried off some table silver and some jewels. He is lost ! "

" With all that," remarked M. Daburon, " we are no further advanced than we were this morning. "

" Sapristi ! " growled Gevrol. " A man can do only what he can ! "

" Confound it ! " said Lecoq in a low tone, perfectly audible, however, " why is not Père Tiraclair here ? "

" What could he do more than we have done ? " retorted Gevrol, directing a furious glance at his subordinate.

Lecoq stooped his head and was silent, inwardly delighted at having wounded his chief.

" Who and what is this Père Tiraclair ? " demanded the judge. " It seems to me that I have heard the name, but can't think where. "

" He is an extraordinary man ! " exclaimed Lecoq.

" He was formerly a pawnbroker's clerk," added

Gevrol; "but he is now a rich old fellow. His real name is Tabaret; and he has taken to the business of police, as others do to painting or music, for amusement."

"And to augment his revenues?" asked the commissary.

"He?" replied Lecoq. "No danger of that. He works so much for the glory of success that he often spends money from his own pocket. It is great amusement for him though! In the service we have nicknamed him 'Tirauclair,' because of a phrase he is in the habit of repeating. Ah! he is smart, the old weasel! It was he who in the case of the banker's wife, you remember, discovered the truth, that the lady was herself the robber."

"True!" retorted Gevrol; "and it was he who had poor Derème beheaded for killing his wife; and all the while the poor man was innocent."

"We lose our time, monsieurs," interrupted the judge of inquiry. And, addressing himself to Lecoq, he said,—

"Go and find Père Tabaret. I have a great desire to speak to him, and shall be glad to see him at work here."

Lecoq started at a run. Gevrol was seriously humiliated.

"You have the right to demand the services of whom you please," said he in a tone of suppressed passion; "but I might—"

"Do not annoy yourself, M. Gevrol. I have great confidence in your ability. But to-day we happen to differ in opinion. You hold absolutely to your brown man in the blouse, and I am convinced he is not the criminal at all!"

"I believe that I am right," replied the chief, "and

I hope to prove it; but I shall find the scoundrel, be he whom he may!"

"I ask nothing better," said M. Daburon.

"Only if you will permit me to give—what shall I say without failing in respect?—a piece of advice?"

"Speak!"

"I would advise you to distrust Père Tabaret."

"Truly? And for what reason?"

"The old fellow is too passionate; he owes his success in the police to nothing more or less than his invention. And, as he is vainer than a peacock, he is apt to overdo matters in order to make a sensation. When in the presence of a crime like this of to-day, for example, he pretends to be able to explain every thing on the instant. And he will in fact invent a history that will be *en rapport* exactly with the situation. He will pretend, unassisted, to reconstruct all the scenes of an assassination, as a savant who from a single bone reconstructs an antediluvian animal. Sometimes, as in the case of the banker's wife, he divines correctly; but at other times he is far out of the way, as in the case of the tailor, the unfortunate Derème."

"I thank you for your advice," said M. Daburon, "and will endeavor to profit by it. Now, M. le commissary," continued he, "it is most important to ascertain, if possible, from what part of the country came the Widow Lerouge."

The procession of witnesses marshalled by the brigadier commenced to pass before the judge of inquiry.

But nothing new was elicited. It was evident that the Widow Lerouge had been during her lifetime a singularly discreet woman; for, although talkative, nothing in any way connected with her antecedents remained in the memory of the gossips of Jonchère.

All the people interrogated tried obstinately to impart to the judge their own convictions and personal conjectures. Public opinion sided with Gevrol. With one voice, the assembly denounced the big brown man of the grey blouse. He must surely be the culprit. Every one remembered his ferocious aspect, and how, struck by his suspicious appearance, they had wisely avoided him. He had one evening menaced a woman, and another day beaten a child. They could point out neither the child nor the woman; but no matter: these brutal acts were notoriously public.

M. Daburon began to despair of gaining the least enlightenment, when some one brought a grocer of Bougival, at whose shop the victim used to purchase her provisions, and a child thirteen years old, who knew, it was said, something positive.

The grocer first made her appearance.

She had heard the Widow Lerouge speak of having a son yet living.

"Are you quite sure of this?" demanded the judge.

"As of my existence," answered the grocer. "One evening,—yes, it was evening,—she was, saving your presence, a little tipsy,—she remained in my store more than an hour."

"And she said,—"

"I think I see her now," continued the grocer; "she was leaning against the counter near the scales. She was jesting with a fisherman of Marly, Father Husson, who can tell you the same; and she called him a fresh water sailor. 'My husband,' said she, 'would sometimes remain a couple of years on a voyage, and used to bring me back cocoanuts. I have a boy who is also a sailor, like his dead father,—a sailor in the navy.'"

"Did she mention her son's name?"

"Not that evening; but another evening, when she was, if I must say it, drunk, she told us that her son was called Jacques, and she had not seen him for a very long time."

"Did she speak ill of her husband?"

"Never! she only said he was jealous and brutal, and used to beat her unmercifully; but he was a good man at bottom, and made her life miserable. He had a weak head, and forged ideas out of nothing. In fact, he was a very stupid brute, but a very good, kind man."

"Did her son ever come to see her while she lived here?"

"She never told me of it."

"Did she spend much money with you?"

"As it might happen. About sixty francs a month; sometimes more, when she bought some old brandy. She was good pay, poor woman!"

The grocer, knowing no more, was dismissed.

The child, who was now brought forward, belonged to parents in easy circumstances. Tall and strong for his age, he had bright intelligent eyes, and features expressive of watchfulness and cunning. The presence of the judge did not intimidate him.

"Let us hear, my boy," said the judge, "what you know."

"Monsieur, a few days ago,—Sunday last,—I saw a man at Madame Lerouge's garden-gate."

"At what time of the day?"

"In the morning. I was going to church, to serve the second mass."

"Well," continued the judge, "and this was a big brown man, dressed in a blouse?"

"No, monsieur: he was short, very fat, and old."

"You are sure you are not mistaken?"

"Certain, monsieur," replied the urchin, "I saw him close, face to face; I spoke to him."

"Tell me, then, what occurred?"

"Well, monsieur, I was passing, when I saw this fat man at the gate. He appeared very much vexed,—oh! vexed awfully! His face was red, or rather purple, as far as the middle of his head, which I could see very well; for it was bare, and had very little hair on it."

"And did he speak to you first?"

"Yes, monsieur, he saw me, and called out, 'Halloa! little fellow!' I went up to him; and he asked me if I had got a good pair of legs? I answered, yes. Then he took me by the ear, but without hurting me, and said, 'Since that is so, if you will run an errand for me, I will give you ten sous. Run as far as the Seine; and, when you reach the quay, you will see a large sloop moored. Go on board, and ask to see the captain, Gervaise: he will be there. Tell him that he can slip his cable,—that I am ready.' Then he put ten sous in my hand; and I went."

"If all the witnesses were like this bright little fellow," murmured the commissary, "what a pleasure it would be!"

"Now," said the judge, "tell us how you executed your commission?"

"I went to the sloop, monsieur, and found the man, and I told him; and that's all."

Gevrol, who had listened with the most lively attention, leaned over towards the ear of M. Daburon.

"M. le judge," said he in a low voice, "will you permit me to ask the boy a few questions?"

"Certainly, M. Gevrol."

"Tell us, my little friend," asked Gevrol, "if you saw this man again, would you know him?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Then there was something remarkable about him?"

"Yes, I should think so! his face was like a brick-bat!"

"And is that all?"

"Well, yes, monsieur."

"Can you remember how he was dressed? had he a blouse?"

"No: it was a vest. Under the arms it had large pockets; and from one of them peeped out the half of a blue spotted pocket handkerchief."

"How were his pantaloons?"

"I do not remember them."

"And his under vest?"

"Let me see," answered the child. "I don't think he wore an undervest. And yet,—but no, I remember he did not wear one: he had a long cravat, fastened near his neck by a large ring."

"Ah!" said Gevrol with an air of satisfaction, "you are a bright boy; and I wager that, if you try hard to remember, you can find more particulars than those you have given us."

The boy dropped his head, and remained silent. From the knitting of his young brows, it was plain he was making a violent effort of memory. "Yes," cried he suddenly, "I remember another thing."

"What?"

"The man wore very large rings in his ears."

"Bravo!" cried Gevrol, "here is an identification complete. I shall find this gentleman with the ear-rings again. M. the judge may prepare a warrant for his arrest."

"I believe, indeed, the testimony of this child is of the highest importance," replied M. Daburon; and he turned to the boy.

"Can you tell us, my little friend, with what this sloop was loaded?" demanded M. Daburon.

"No, monsieur, I couldn't see, because it was decked."

"Which way was she going, up the river or down?"

"Neither, monsieur; she was moored."

"Now think well," said Gevrol. "The judge asks you which way the bow of the sloop was turned,—towards Paris or towards Marly?"

"The two ends of a sloop are alike to me."

The chief of police made a gesture of disappointment.

"At least," said he, addressing the child again, "you noticed the name of the sloop? You can read I suppose; you must surely have seen the name of the vessel you went aboard of?"

"No, I didn't see any name," said the little boy.

"If this sloop was moored a few steps from the quay," remarked M. Daburon, "it was probably noticed by the inhabitants of Bougival."

"That is true," approved the commissary.

"Besides," said Gevrol, "the sailors must have come ashore. I shall find out all about it at the wine shop. But this Capt. Gervaise, my little friend, what was he like?"

"Like all the sailors hereabouts, monsieur."

The child was preparing to depart, when the judge recalled him.

"Before you depart, my child, tell me, have you spoken to any one of this meeting before to-day?"

"I told all to mamma, when I got back from church, and gave her the ten sous."

"And you have told us all the truth?" continued the judge. "You know that it is a grave matter to attempt to impose on justice, she always discovers the truth; and it is my duty to warn you that she inflicts the most terrible punishment upon liars."

The little fellow blushed, and dropped his eyes.

"I see," pursued Daburon, "that you have concealed something from us. Don't you know that the police are not to be trifled with?"

"Pardon, monsieur," cried the boy, bursting into tears,—“pardon. Don't punish me, and I will never do so again.”

"Tell us, then, how you have deceived us?"

"It was not ten sous, monsieur, that the man gave me, it was twenty sous. I only gave half to mamma; and I kept the rest to buy marbles with."

"My little friend," interrupted the judge, "for this time I forgive you. But let it be a lesson for the remainder of your life. Remember it is vain to hide the truth; it always comes to light!"

CHAPTER II.

THE two last depositions awakened in Daburon's mind some slight gleams of hope. In the midst of darkness, the humblest rush-light acquires brilliancy.

"I will go at once to Bougival, if you approve," suggested Gevrol.

"Perhaps it would be as well to wait a little," answered Daburon. "This man was seen on Sunday morning: we might inquire into the Widow Lerouge's movements on that day."

Three neighbors were called. They all declared that the widow had kept her bed all Sunday. To one woman who had visited her, hearing that she was sick, she said, "Ah! I have had this day a terrible adventure." Nobody at the time attached any importance to these words.

"The man with the rings in his ears becomes more and more important," said the judge, when the women had retired. "To find him again is indispensable: this you will take care of, M. Gevrol."

"Before eight days, I shall have him," replied the chief of police, "if I have to search every vessel on the Seine, from its source to the ocean. I know the name of the captain,—Gervaise. The bureau of navigation may tell me the rest."

He was interrupted by Lecoq, who rushed into the house breathless.

"Here is Père Tabaret," said he. "I met him setting out. What a man! He wouldn't wait for the train, but paid I don't know how much for a carriage; and we drove here in fifty minutes!"

Almost immediately an old man appeared at the door, whose aspect bore little resemblance to the ideal portraits of the secret agent of police.

His round face wore an expression of perpetual astonishment, mingled with uneasiness, which would have made the fortunes of a dozen comic actors of the "Palais Royale." Scrupulously shaved, he presented a very short chin, large and good natured lips, and a nose disagreeably elevated, like the broad end of a Saxe horn. His eyes, of a dull grey, were small, bordered by rings of scarlet, and absolutely void of expression; yet they fatigued the observer by their insupportable restlessness. Thin hairs brushed flat upon his head, light as

the fur of a rabbit, barely concealed his long ears, which were large, wide, and spreading away from the skull.

He was comfortably dressed, neat as a new franc piece, displaying linen of dazzling whiteness, and wearing silk gloves and leather gaiters. A long and massive chain of gold, of a deplorable taste, was twisted thrice round his neck, and fell in cascades to his vest-pocket.

Père Tabaret, surnamed Tiraclair, standing at the threshold, bowed almost to the ground, bending his old back into an arch, and in the humblest of voices demanded,—

“The judge of inquiry has deigned to send for me.”

“Yes,” replied Daburon, adding under his breath; “and, if you are a man of any ability, there is at least nothing to indicate it in your appearance.”

“I am here,” continued the old fellow, “completely at the service of justice.”

“I wish to know,” replied the judge, “whether you cannot, with more success than has attended our efforts, discover some indication that may serve to put us upon the track of the author of this atrocious crime. I will explain the—”

“Oh, I know enough of it!” interrupted Père Tabaret. “Lecoq has told me as much as I desire to to know.”

“Nevertheless,” commenced the commissary, “if you will permit me, I prefer to proceed without receiving any information, in order to be more fully master of my own impression. If you know another’s opinion, it can’t help influencing your judgment. I will, if you please, at once commence my researches, with Lecoq’s assistance.”

As the old fellow spoke, his little grey eyes dilated, and became brilliant as carbuncles. His face reflected an

internal satisfaction ; even his wrinkles seemed to laugh. His figure became erect, his step almost elastic, as he darted rather than walked into the second chamber.

He remained there about half an hour ; then came out running, then re-entered and came out again ; again re-entered, and again reappeared almost immediately. The judge could not help comparing him to a pointer on the scent ; restless and active, he ran hither and thither, carrying his nose in the air, as if to discover some subtle odor left by the assassin. All the while he talked loudly and with much gesticulation, apostrophizing himself, scolding himself, uttering little cries of triumph or self-encouragement. He did not allow Lecoq to have a moment's rest. He wanted this or that or the other thing. He demanded paper and a pencil. Then he wanted a spade ; and finally he cried out for plaster of Paris and a bottle of oil. With these he left the cottage.

When more than an hour had elapsed, the judge of inquiry began to lose patience, and asked what had become of the amateur detective.

"He is on the road," replied the brigadier, "lying flat in the mud. He has mixed the plaster in a plate. He says he is nearly finished, and that he is coming back presently."

Tabaret entered almost instantly, joyous, triumphant, looking at least twenty years younger. Lecoq followed him, carrying with the utmost precaution a large pannier.

"I have it !" said he to the judge, "completely. It is as plain as noonday. Lecoq, my lad, put the pannier on the table."

Gevrol at this moment returned from his expedition equally delighted.

"I am on the track of the man with the rings in his

ears," said he; "the sloop went down the river. I have obtained an exact description of Capt. Gervaise."

"What have you done, M. Tabaret?" said the judge of inquiry.

The old fellow carefully emptied upon the table the contents of the pannier,—a huge lump of potter's clay, several large sheets of paper, and three or four small morsels of plaster yet damp. Standing behind this table, he presented a grotesque resemblance to a mountebank conjurer, who in the public squares makes puddings in hats, swallows swords, and eats fire. His dress was in a singular state; he was mud to the chin.

"In the first place," said he, at last, in a tone of affected modesty, "robbery has had nothing to do with the crime that occupies our attention."

"On the contrary,"—muttered Gevrol.

"I shall prove it," continued Père Tabaret, "by the evidence. By-and-by I shall offer my humble opinion as to the real motive.

"In the second place, the assassin arrived here before half-past nine; that is to say, before the rain fell. No more than M. Gevrol have I been able to discover traces of muddy footsteps; but under the table, on the spot where his feet rested, I find dust. We are thus assured of the hour. The widow did not expect her visitor. She had commenced undressing, and was about to wind up her cuckoo clock when he knocked."

"These are absolute details!" cried the commissary.

"But easily established," replied the amateur. "Examine this cuckoo clock; it is one of those which run fourteen or fifteen hours at most. Now it is more than probable, it is certain, that the widow wound it up every evening before going to bed.

"How, then, should the clock have stopped at nine?

She must have touched it at that hour. At the moment she was drawing the chain, the assassin knocked. In proof, I show this chair below the clock, and on the seat a very plain mark of a foot. Now look at the dress of the victim. The waist of her gown is taken off. In order to open the door more quickly, she did not wait to put it on again, but hastily threw an old shawl over her shoulders."

"Sapristi!" exclaimed the brigadier, evidently filled with admiration.

"The widow," continued the old fellow, "knew the person who knocked. Her haste to open the door gives rise to this conjecture; what follows proves it. The assassin then gained admission without difficulty. He was a young man, a little above the middle height, elegantly dressed. He wore on that evening a high hat. He carried an umbrella, and smoked a trabucos with a cigar-holder."

"Ridiculous!" cried Gevrol. "This is too strong."

"Too strong for you perhaps," retorted Père Tabaret. "At all events, it is the truth. If you have not been minute in your examinations, there is no reason why I shouldn't be. I search, and I find. Too strong, say you? Well, deign to glance at these morsels of damp plaster. They represent the heels of the boots worn by the assassin, of which I found a most perfect impression near the ditch, where the key was picked up. On these sheets of paper, I have marked in outline the imprint of the foot which I cannot take up, because it is in the gravel.

"Look! heel high, instep pronounced, sole small and narrow,—an elegant boot, belonging to a foot well cared for evidently. Look for this impression all along the

road ; and you will find it twice repeated. Then you will find it five times repeated in the garden ; and these foot-prints prove, by the way, that the stranger knocked not at the door, but at the window-shutter, beneath which shone a gleam of light. Near the entrance of the garden, the man made a leap to avoid a square flower-bed ; the point of the foot, more deeply imprinted than usual, shows it. He leaped more than two yards with ease, proving that he is active, and therefore young."

Père Tabaret spoke now in a low voice, but clear and penetrating ; and his eye glanced from one to the other of his auditors, watching the impression he was making.

"Does the hat astonish you, Gevrol ?" pursued Père Tabaret. "Just look at this circle traced in the dust on the marble of the secretary. That was where he placed his hat : so we arrive at the shape and size of the crown ; and the height is, at least, presumable. Now the assassin put his hands on the top shelf of the cupboard, to get at its contents. If he had been a very tall man, he could have seen them without touching the shelf ; and, if a very short man, he would have stood upon a chair ; consequently he must have been a little above the middle height. You seem troubled about the umbrella and the cigar-holder ; but they are very simple. This lump of earth preserves an admirable impression, not only of the point, but even of the little wooden shield which holds the silk. Then as for the cigar, here is the end of a Trabucos that I found in the ashes. Is it bitten ? No. Has it been moistened with saliva ? No. Then he who smoked it used a cigar-holder."

Lecoq was unable to conceal his enthusiastic admiration, and noiselessly rubbed his hands. The commissary

appeared stupefied, while the judge was delighted. Gevrol's face, on the contrary, was sensibly elongated. As for the brigadier, he was overwhelmed.

"Now," continued the old fellow, "follow me closely. We have traced the young man into the house. How he explained his presence at this hour, I do not know; this much is certain, he told the widow he had not dined. The honest woman was delighted to hear it, and at once set to work to prepare a meal. This meal was not for herself; for in the cupboard I find the remains of her dinner. She had dined on fish: The autopsy will confirm the truth of this conjecture. You can see the rest for yourself. There is but one glass on the table, and one knife. Who was this young man? Evidently the widow looked upon him as a man of rank superior to her own; for, in the small plate-closet is a table-cloth suitable enough for her, but not at all good enough for him. For her guest, she brought out one of white linen, and much handsomer. For him she sets this magnificent glass—a present, no doubt—and this knife with the ivory handle."

"That is all true," murmured the judge,—“very true.”

"Now, then, we have got the young man seated. He began by drinking a glass of wine, while the widow was putting her pan on the fire. Then, his heart failing him, he called for brandy, and swallowed about five *petits verres*. After an internal struggle of ten minutes (the time it must have taken to cook the ham and eggs to the point they have reached), the young man arose and approached the widow, who was leaning forward over her cooking. He stabbed her twice in the back; but she was not killed instantly. She half arose, seizing the assassin by the hands; while he drew back, lifting her rudely,

and then hurling her down in the position in which you see her.

"This short struggle is indicated by the posture of the body; for, wounded in the back, it is on her back she ought naturally to have fallen. The weapon used was sharp and pointed, and, unless I am deceived, was the end of a foil, broken off and sharpened. By wiping the weapon upon his victim's skirt, the assassin leaves us this indication. He was not, however, hurt in the struggle, though the victim must have clung with a death-grip to his hands; but, as he has not left his gray gloves,"—

"Gloves! Why, this is romance," exclaimed Gevrol.

"Have you examined the dead woman's finger-nails, M. Gevrol? No. Well, do so, and then tell me whether I am deceived.

"The woman, now dead, we come to the object of her assassination. What did this well-dressed young gentleman want? Money? valuables? No! no! a hundred times, no! What he wanted, what he sought, and what he found, were papers, documents, letters, which he knew to be in the possession of this unfortunate woman. To find them, he has overturned every thing, upset the cupboards, unfolded the linen, broken open the secretary, of which he could not find the key, and even emptied the mattress of the bed.

"At last he found them; and then what did he do? Burned them, of course; not in the chimney, but in the little stove in the front chamber. His end accomplished, what does he then? He flies, carrying with him all that he finds valuable, to mislead pursuit, and baffle detection, by indicating a robbery. Having bundled them together, he wrapped these valuables in the napkin which was to have served him at dinner; and, blowing out the

candle, he fled, locking the door, and afterwards throwing the key into the ditch.

"That is my idea of the case, M. the judge."

"M. Tabaret," said the judge, "your investigation is admirable; and I am persuaded your inferences are correct."

"Ah!" cried Lecoq, "is he not colossal? Papa Tiraclair?"

"Pyramidal!" cried Gevrol ironically. "I fear, however, your well-dressed young man must have been much embarrassed in carrying a bundle at once so inconvenient and so remarkable."

"He did not carry it a hundred leagues," responded Père Tabaret. "You may well believe, that, to reach the railway station, he would not risk taking the omnibus. No, he returned on foot by the shortest way, to the edge of the water. Now, on arriving at the Seine, it will not be too strong, I hope, to suppose his first care was to throw into it this tell-tale bundle."

"Do you believe so, Papa Tiraclair?" demanded Gevrol.

"I will wager on it; and the best evidence of my belief is, that I have sent three men, under the surveillance of a gendarme to drag the Seine at the nearest spot. If they succeed in finding the bundle, I have promised them a recompense."

"From your own pocket, old enthusiast?"

"Yes, M. Gevrol, from my own pocket."

"If they find this bundle, however,—" murmured the judge.

He was interrupted by the entrance of a gendarme.

"Here," said he,— "here is a soiled table-napkin, filled with plate, silver, and jewels, which these men

have found; they claim the hundred francs' reward, promised them."

Père Tabaret took from his pocket-book a bank bill, which he handed to the gendarme.

"Now," demanded he, ignoring M. Gevrol with a superb disdain, "what thinks M. the judge of inquiry?"

"That, thanks to your penetration, we shall come to the point,—

He did not finish. The doctor summoned to make the post mortem examination appeared.

That unpleasant task accomplished, it only confirmed the assertions and conjectures of Père Tabaret. The doctor explained as he had the position of the body. In his opinion, there had been a brief but fierce struggle. He pointed out a bluish circle, hardly perceptible, round the neck of the victim produced apparently by the powerful grasp of the murderer; then he declared the Widow Lerouge had dined three hours before being struck.

Nothing now remained except to collect the fragments of evidence received, which might at a later period confound the culprit.

Père Tabaret examined with extreme care the dead woman's fingers; and, using infinite precaution, he even extracted from beneath the nails several small particles of gray kid. The largest of these fragments was not above two millimetres in length; but their color was easily distinguishable. He put aside also the part of the dress upon which the assassin had wiped the weapon. These, with the bundle recovered from the Seine, and the cast of the footprints taken by the old fellow, were all the traces the murderer had left behind him.

It was nothing ; but this nothing was enormous in the eyes of M. Daburon : and he had strong hopes of discovering the culprit. The greatest obstacle to success in the unravelling of mysterious crime is in mistaking the motive. If the researches take at the first step a false direction, they are diverted further and further from the truth, in proportion to the length they are followed. Thanks to Père Tabaret, the judge felt confident that he was in the right path.

Night had come on. The judge had nothing more to do at Jonchère ; but Gevrol, who still clung to his own opinion of the guilt of the man with the rings in his ears, declared he would remain at Bougival. He determined to employ the evening in visiting the different wine shops, and finding if possible new witnesses.

At the moment of departure, after the commissary and the entire party had received their congée from M. Daburon, the latter asked Père Tabaret to accompany him.

"I was about to solicit that honor," replied the old fellow. They set out together ; and naturally the crime which had been discovered, and with which they were mutually preoccupied, formed the subject of their conversation.

"Can we, or can we not, ascertain the antecedents of this woman?" repeated Père Tabaret. "All depends upon that, after all!"

"We shall ascertain them, if the grocer has told the truth," replied M. Daburon. "If the Widow Lerouge has had a husband a sailor, and there is now a son of hers named Jacques in the navy, the minister of marine can furnish information that will lead to its discovery. I will write to the minister this very night."

They arrived at the station at Rueil, and took their places in the train. They were so fortunate as to secure a compartment to themselves.

But Père Tabaret was not disposed for conversation. He reflected, he sought, he combined; and in his face might easily be read the working of his thoughts. The judge felt singularly attracted by this eccentric old man, whose very original taste had led him to devote his services to the bureau of secret police in the Rue Jerusalem.

"M. Tabaret," demanded he brusquely, "have you been long associated with the police?"

"Nine years, M. the judge,—more than nine years; and permit me to confess I am a little surprised that you have never before heard of me."

"I certainly know you by reputation," answered M. Daburon; "and it was in consequence of hearing of your talent that the excellent idea of asking your assistance occurred to me. But what was the occasion of your adopting this employment?"

"Chagrin, M. the judge, isolation, ennui. Ah! I have not always been happy!"

"I hear, though, that you are rich."

The old fellow heaved a deep sigh, as he recalled what seemed to him the cruelest deception. "I am well off, monsieur," replied he; "but I have not always been. Until I was forty-five years old, my life was a series of absurd and useless privations. I had a father who ruined my youth, wasted my manhood, and made me the most pitiable of human creatures."

There are men who can never divest themselves of their professional habits. M. Daburon was at all times and seasons a little of a judge of inquiry.

"How, M. Tabaret," said he, "your father the author of your misfortunes?"

"Alas, yes, monsieur! I have forgiven him long since; but once I cursed him. In the first transports of my resentment, I heaped upon his memory all the injuries that can be inspired by the most violent hatred. Even now, when I think,—but I will confide to you my history M. Daburon.

"When I was five and twenty years of age, I was earning two thousand francs a year, as clerk in a pawnbroker's. One morning my father entered my apartment, and announced to me abruptly that he was ruined, and wanted food and shelter. He appeared in despair, and declared he had done with life. I loved my father. Naturally, I strove to reassure him. I boasted of my situation, and explained to him at some length, that, while I earned the means of living, he should want for nothing; and, to commence, I insisted that henceforth we should live together. No sooner said than done; and during twenty years, the best twenty years of my life, I was encumbered with the old—"

"How? you repent of your filial conduct, M. Tabaret?"

"Yes, I do repent of it; that is to say, I wish the old wretch had received his deserts; for then he would have been poisoned by the bread which I gave him."

Daburon was unable to repress a gesture of surprise, which did not escape the old fellow's notice.

"Hear, before you condemn me," said he. "There I was at twenty-five, imposing upon myself the severest privations for sake of my father,—no more friends, no more flirtations, nothing. In the evenings, to augment our scanty revenues, I worked at copying law papers for a notary. I denied myself even the luxury

of a cigar. Notwithstanding, the old skinflint complained without ceasing. He regretted his lost fortune. He wanted pocket-money. He wanted this, he wanted that. My utmost exertions failed to satisfy him. Ah, heaven alone knows what I have suffered! I was not born to live alone to old age, like a dog. I longed for the pleasures of a home and a family. My dream of happiness was marriage,—an adored wife, by whom I might be loved a little, innocent little ones gambolling about my knees; but pshaw! when such thoughts entered my heart and forced a tear or two from my eyes, I rebelled against myself. I said: ‘My lad, when you earn but three thousand francs a year, and have an old and cherished father to support, it is your duty to stifle such desires, and remain a bachelor.’ In the mean time, I fell in love. Hold, do not laugh at me. I was but thirty years of age then; and, old and ugly as I am now, I was a good looking fellow at that time. She,—she was called Hortense. I could not marry her and continue to provide for him. Who can tell what became of her? I lost sight of her. She waited long; but, alas! she was pretty and poor. When my father died, and left me free, I was an old man. The miserable, miserly old,—”

“M. Tabaret!” interrupted the judge,—“M. Tabaret!”

“Yes, yes, monsieur, I have forgiven him long ago, I am a good Christian; but you will understand my anger when I tell you, the day of his death, looking in his secretary in the hope of finding enough to bury the old hypocrite, I found a memorandum of twenty thousand francs of rent!”

“He was rich, then?”

“Yes, very rich; for that was not all: he owned near Orleans a property leased for six thousand francs a

year. He owned besides, the house I now live in, where we lived together; and I fool, sot, imbecile, stupid animal that I was, used to pay the rent every three months to the concierge!"

"Cruel fortune!" M. Daburon could not help saying.

"Was it not, monsieur? I was robbing myself of my own money! To crown the absurdity, he left a testament, wherein he declared he had no other aim in view, in thus acting, than my advantage. He wished, he said, to habituate me to habits of good order and economy, and keep me from the commission of follies. And so, monsieur, I was at forty-five a rich man, who for twenty years could not accuse himself of having expended uselessly a single sou. In short, he had speculated on my good heart to rob me of my life's happiness. Bah! it is enough to disgust the human race with filial piety."

M. Tabaret's anger, albeit very real, was so highly ludicrous in its effect upon his features and gesture that the judge had much difficulty to restrain his laughter, although touched with pity at the recital.

"After all," said he, "this fortune ought to give you pleasure."

"No, monsieur, it came too late. Of what avail to have the bread when one has no longer the teeth?"

"The best part of life was gone, the age of happiness had passed. I resigned my situation at the pawnbroker's, to make way for some other poor devil, and became a gentleman at large. At the end of a month, I was ennuied to death; and, to replace the interest in life I despaired of gaining, I resolved to give myself a passion, a hobby, a mania. I became a collector of books. You think perhaps, monsieur, that to take an

interest in books a man must have studied, must be learned?"

"No, monsieur; but he must have money. I am acquainted with an illustrious bibliomaniac who actually cannot read his own name."

"It is very possible, monsieur: but I could read; and I read all the books I bought, and mine is an unique collection. It consists of all the works I could find far or near, that related aught concerning the police. Memoirs, reports, discourses, letters,—all were delightful to me; and I devoured them as Don Quixote did the books of chivalry.

"Reading these adventures so exciting and so real, I became little by little attracted towards this mysterious power which from the obscurity of the Rue Jerusalem watches over and protects society from fraud and violence,—that unseen hand that lifts the most impervious veil; that invisible eye that sees through every plot; that unknown intelligence that divines even the secrets of men's hearts, knows to a grain weight the worth of women's reputation and the price of men's integrity; that universal confidant who keeps in her secret record the most terrible as well as the most shameful confessions!

"In reading the memoirs of celebrated police agents (more attractive matter to me than the fables of our best authors) I became inspired by an enthusiastic admiration for those men, so untiring in pursuit, so fertile in expedient, who follow crime to his stronghold as relentlessly as the savages of Cooper pursue their enemies in the depths of the American forest. The desire seized me to become a wheel of this admirable machine,—a small assistance in the punishment of crime and the triumph of innocence. I have made the essay; and I

am proud to say, monsieur, I find I have not mistaken my vocation."

"Then this employment pleases you?"

"I owe to it, monsieur, my liveliest enjoyments. Adieu ennui! Since I have abandoned the pursuit of old worm-eaten books for this to which I am equal, I am happy. I shrug the shoulder when I see a foolish fellow pay twenty-five francs for the right of hunting a hare. What a prize! Give me the hunting of a man! *That* calls the faculties into play, and the victory is not inglorious! The game in my sport is worth the hunter. He has against him intelligence, force, and cunning. The arms are nearly equal. Ah! if people knew the excitement of these parties of hide and seek which are played between the criminal and the detective, everybody would be wanting employment at the bureau of secret police. The misfortune is, that the art is being lost because fine crimes are rare. The race of strong criminals, fearless and ingenious, has given place to a mob of vulgar pickers and stealers, hardly worth hunting after,—blunderers as well as cowards, who sign their names to their misdeeds, and even leave you their *cartes de visite*. There is no merit in catching them: their work examined, nothing remains but their arrest."

"It seems to me," said M. Daburon, smiling, "that cur assassin is not such a bungler."

"This case, monsieur, is an exception; and I shall have the greater delight in tracing him: and I will trace him, though I should compromise myself in the pursuit. For I ought to confess, M. le judge," added he with a ludicrous embarrassment, "that I do not boast to my friends of my exploits, but conceal them as carefully as possible. They would join hands with me less warmly did they know that Tiraucclair and Tabaret are one."

Insensibly the crime became again the subject of conversation. It was agreed, that, in the morning, Père Tabaret should instal himself at Bougival. He could by hard work examine all the peasants in the country in eight days. On his side the judge promised to keep him advised of the least evidence that transpired, and recall him, if by any accident he should procure the papers of the Widow Lerouge.

"To you, M. Tabaret," said the judge in conclusion, "I shall be always visible. If you have any thing to speak of, do not hesitate to come at night as well as during the day. I rarely go abroad; and you will always find me at home, Rue Jacob. When not in my office at the Palais de Justice, I shall leave orders for your admittance whenever you present yourself."

The train entered the depot at this moment. M. Daburon having called a hackney coach, offered a place to Père Tabaret. The old fellow declined.

"It is not worth while," replied he; "for I live, as I have had the honor to tell you, Rue St. Lazare, two steps from this."

"Till to-morrow, then!" said M. Daburon.

"Till to-morrow," replied Père Tabaret; and he added, "We shall find him!"

CHAPTER III.

PERE TABARET'S dwelling was in truth, as he said, not four minutes' walk from the railway terminus of St. Lazare. He was the owner of the property,—a fine house, carefully kept, and which must have yielded a fine revenue, although the rents on the quarter were not extravagant.

The house being much too large for the old fellow, he occupied only the ground floor,— a suite of handsome apartments, well arranged and comfortably furnished, of which the principal ornament was his collection of books. He lived very simply from taste as well as habit, served by an old domestic to whom on great occasions the portress lent a helping hand.

Nothing in the house gave the slightest indication of the avocations of its proprietor. Besides, even the humblest agent of police would be expected to possess a degree of acuteness for which no one gave M. Tabaret credit. Indeed, they mistook for incipient idiocy his continual absence of mind.

It is true that all who knew him remarked the singularity of his habits. His constant expeditions had given to his proceedings an appearance at once eccentric and mysterious. Never was young libertine more irregular in his habits than this old man. He came or failed to come to his meals, ate it mattered not what or at what hour. He went out at every hour of the day and night, often slept abroad, and even disappeared for entire weeks at a time. Then he received the strangest visitors,—odd looking men of suspicious appearance, and fellows of ill-favored and sinister aspect.

This irregular way of life had robbed the old fellow of some consideration. Many believed they saw in him a shameless libertine, who dispensed his revenues in disreputable places of amusement. They exclaimed, "Is it not a shame, a man of that age?"

He was aware of these reports, and laughed at them. This did not, however, prevent many of his acquaintances from seeking his society and paying court to him. When invited to dinner, he almost invariably refused.

He saw but little of his tenants, with one exception,

where he cultivated the greatest intimacy, so great indeed that he was almost as much at home in his neighbor's apartments as his own. This exception was made in favor of a widow lady, who had for more than fifteen years occupied the third floor. She was called Madame Gerdy, and lived with her son Noel, whom she worshipped.

Noel Gerdy was a man thirty-three years of age, and older in appearance, tall and well-made, with a noble and intelligent face, large black eyes, and black hair which curled naturally. An advocate, he passed for having great talent, and greater industry, and had already gained a certain amount of notoriety. An obstinate worker, cold and meditative, devoted to his profession, he affected, with some ostentation, perhaps, a great rigidity of principle, and austerity of manners.

In Madame Gerdy's family, Père Tabaret almost believed himself included. He looked upon himself as a parent, and upon Noel as a son. In spite of her fifty years, he had often thought of asking the hand of this charming widow, and was restrained less by the fear of a refusal than its consequences. To propose and be rejected would sever the existing relations, so pleasurable to him. However, he had in his will, which was deposited with his notary, constituted this young advocate his sole legatee; with the sole condition of paying an annual prize of two thousand francs to the police agent who during the year had drawn to light the most obscure and mysterious crime.

Short as was the distance to his house, Père Tabaret was a good quarter of an hour in reaching it. On leaving the judge his thoughts reverted to the scene of the murder; and, so blinded was the old fellow to external objects, that the passers by were obliged to push him

aside in order to pursue their way: thus his progress was a slow one.

He repeated to himself for the fiftieth time the words of the Widow Lerouge, as reported by the milk-maid, "If I wished for anything more, I could have it."

"All is in that," murmured he. "The Widow Lerouge possessed some important secret, which persons rich and powerful had the strongest motives for concealing. This secret was her fortune; by means of this she made her powerful friends sing to her tune. She has either threatened or wearied them, and they have silenced her forever! But of what nature was this secret, and how did she become possessed of it? Might she not in her youth have been a servant in some great family, where she has seen, heard, or surprised something. What? Evidently there is a woman at the bottom. May she not have assisted her mistress in some intrigue? What more probable? And in that case the affair becomes complicated. Not only must the woman be found, but the lover; for it is the lover who has moved in this affair. It must be, or I am deceived, a noble personage. A man of inferior rank would have paid the assassin. This man has not hung back; he himself has struck, avoiding the mistake of an accomplice. He is a courageous man, full of audacity and coolness; for the crime has been admirably executed.

"The gallant left nothing behind of a nature to compromise him seriously; but for me, Gevrol would have seen in the assassination the work of a robber, and overlooked the real motive for the crime! No," continued the good man, "it must be the issue of an amour. Time will show."

Père Tabaret mounted the steps in front of his house. The portress, seated in her *loge*, and chatting with her

husband, saw him through the window by the light of the lamp which hung over the door.

"Hold," said the porter, "here is the proprietor returned."

"So it seems," returned the portress. "His princess does not want him this evening. He looks troubled about something."

"It is positively indecent," said the porter, "for a man of his years to act in the manner he does. Oh! he's got softening of the brain. One of these fine mornings he will find his way to the insane asylum in a straight waistcoat."

"Look at him now!" interrupted the portress—"look at him now, in the open street!"

The old fellow had stopped at the extremity of the porch. He had taken off his hat, and, while talking to himself, gesticulated violently.

"No," said he to himself, "I have not yet laid hold of the clew; but I am near it. I burn; but I am not at the fire yet."

Admitted by the portress, he passed on to the door of his apartments, of which he rang the bell, forgetting that he had his pass-key in his pocket. His housekeeper came and opened it.

"Hey day, monsieur. Is it you, and at this hour?"

"Hey day, madame. And what of that?" demanded the old fellow.

"Do you know," said the servant, "that it is half-past eight o'clock? I thought you were not coming back this evening. Have you dined?"

"No, not yet."

"Fortunately I have kept your dinner warm. You can sit down to table."

Père Tabaret seated himself, and was helped to soup;

but, mounting his hobby-horse again, he forgot to eat, and remained arrested by an idea, his spoon in the air,

"He is certainly touched in the head," thought Mannette. "Look at that stupid air. Who would act in such a manner that was in his senses?"

She struck him on the shoulder, bawling in his ear, as if he were deaf,—

"You do not eat. Are you not hungry?"

"Yes, yes," answered he, trying mechanically to escape the voice that sounded in his ears, "I am very hungry; for since morning I have been obliged"—

He interrupted himself, remaining with his mouth open, his eyes fixed on vacancy.

"You have been obliged—?" repeated Mannette.

"Thunder!" cried he, raising his clenched hands towards the ceiling,— "thunder of heaven! I have it now."

His movement was so violent and sudden that the housekeeper was alarmed, and retired to the further end of the room, near the door.

"Yes," continued he, "it is certain there is a child!"

Mannette approached quickly.

"An infant?" she asked in astonishment.

"Ah, so," cried he in a furious tone. "What are you doing there? Has your hardihood come to this that you pick up the words which escape me? Do me the favor to retire to your kitchen, and stay there until I call you."

"He is going crazy!" thought Mannette, as she disappeared very quickly.

Père Tabaret returned to the table. The soup was completely cold; but he swallowed it in large spoonfuls, without remarking it.

"Stupid!" said he to himself. "Why did I not think

of it before? Poor humanity! I am growing old; and my toils are less sharp than they used to be. But it is clear as the day: the circumstances all point to that conclusion."

He rapped with his spoon upon the table: the servant reappeared.

"The roast," demanded he, "and leave me to myself."

"Yes," continued he, furiously carving a leg of Prèsalè mutton,—“yes, there was an infant; and here is the history. The Widow Lerouge, when a young woman, is in the service of a great lady, immensely rich. Her husband, a sailor, probably had departed on a long voyage. The lady had a lover—found herself *enciente*. She confided in the Widow Lerouge, and, with her assistance, accomplished a clandestine *accouchement*."

He called again.

"Mannette, the dessert, and get out!"

Certainly such a master was unworthy of so excellent a cook as Mannette. He would have been puzzled to say what he had eaten for dinner, or even what he was eating at this moment; it was a preserve of pears.

"But what," murmured he, "has become of the child? Has it been destroyed? No; for the Widow Lerouge, an accomplice in an infanticide, would be no longer formidable. The child has been preserved, and confided to the care of our widow, by whom it has been reared. They have been able to take the infant away from her, but not the proofs of its birth and its existence. Here is the opening. The father is the man of the fine carriage; the mother is the lady who came with the handsome young man. Ha! ha! I can well believe the dear old dame wanted for nothing. She had a secret worth a farm in Brie. But the old lady

was extravagant; her expenses and her demands have increased year by year. Poor humanity! She has leaned upon the staff too heavily, and broken it. She has threatened. They have been frightened, and said, 'Let there be an end of this!' But who has charged himself with the commission? The papa? No: he is too old. By jupiter! the son,— the child himself! He would save his mother, the brave boy! He has slain the witness and burnt the proofs!"

Mannette all this time, her ear to the keyhole, listened with all her soul; from time to time she gleaned a word, an oath, the noise of a blow upon the table; but that was all.

"For certain," thought she, "his women are running in his head."

Her curiosity overcame her prudence. Hearing no more, she ventured to open the door a little way. The old fellow caught her in the very act.

"Monsieur wants his coffee?" stammered she timidly.

"Yes, you may bring it to me," he answered.

He attempted to swallow his coffee at a gulp, but scalded himself so severely that the pain brought him suddenly from speculation to reality.

"Thunder!" grumbled he; "but it is hot! Devil take the case! it has set me beside myself. They are right in the office, when they say I take too strong an interest in the investigations. Who but I should have, by the sole exercise of observation and reason, established the whole history of the assassination? Certainly not Gevrol, poor man! He must, if he has any professional feeling, be deeply humiliated. Shall I seek M. Daburon? No, not yet. I must sift to the bottom all the particulars and arrange my ideas systematically be-

fore meeting him again. Upon the other hand, if I sit here alone, this history will keep me in a fever of speculation. My faith! I will call upon Madame Gerdy: she has been ailing for some days. I will have a chat with Noel, and that will brighten me up a little."

He got up from the table, and took his hat and cane.

"Monsieur is going out?" demanded Mannette.

"Yes."

"Monsieur will not return until late?"

"Possibly."

"But monsieur will return?"

"I do not know."

One minute later Père Tabaret rang at his friend Madame Gerdy's apartments.

Madame Gerdy lived in respectable style. She possessed a competence; and her son's business, already large, had made it a fortune. She had few acquaintances, and, with the exception of one or two friends, occasionally invited to dinner, received no visitors. During the fifteen years that Père Tabaret came familiarly to the house, he had encountered only the curate of the parish, an old professor, and Madame Gerdy's brother, a colonel retired from service.

When these three visitors called upon the same evening, an event somewhat rare, they played at "Boston," or made a party at piquet. Noel, however, seldom remained in the salon, but shut himself up after dinner in his study, and immersed himself in his law papers. He was supposed to work far into the night. Often in winter his lamp was not extinguished before dawn.

Mother and son absolutely lived for one another, as all who knew them took pleasure in repeating.

They loved and honored Noel for the care he bestowed upon his mother,—for his more than filial de-

votion,—for the sacrifices which all supposed he made in living at his age like an old man.

The neighbors were in the habit of contrasting the conduct of this exemplary young man with that of Père Tabaret, the incorrigible old rake, the gallant in the peruke.

As for Madame Gerdy, she saw nothing but her son in all the world. Her love had actually taken the form of worship. In Noel, she believed she saw united all the physical and moral perfections. To her he seemed of a superior order to the rest of humanity. If he spoke, she listened and was silent: his word was a command, his advice a decree of Providence. To care for her son, study his tastes, anticipate his wishes, was the sole aim of her life. Noel was her existence.

She was a mother.

“Is Madame Gerdy visible?” demanded Père Tabaret of the young girl who opened the door; and, without waiting for an answer, he walked into the room like a man assured that his presence cannot be inopportune, and ought to be agreeable.

A single lamp gave light to the salon, which was not in its accustomed order. The marble-top table, usually in the middle of the room, was rolled into a corner. Madame Gerdy’s large arm-chair was near the window: a newspaper, all crumpled, lay before it on the carpet.

The old amateur took in the whole at a glance.

“Has any accident occurred?” demanded he of the young girl.

“Do not speak to me, monsieur: we have had such a fright! oh, what a fright!”

“What was it? speak quickly!”

“You know that madame has been ailing for more

than a month. She has eaten I may say almost nothing; this morning, even, she said to me"—

"Well, well! but this evening?"

"After dinner madame came into the salon as usual. She sat down and took up one of M. Noel's newspapers. Scarcely had she begun to read, when she uttered a great cry,—oh, a terrible cry, monsieur! We ran into the salon, and found madame where she had fallen upon the carpet as if dead. M. Noel raised her in his arms, and carried her into her chamber. I wanted to fetch a doctor; but he said there was no need: he knew what was the matter with her."

"And how is she now?"

"She has come to her senses; that is to say; I suppose so; for M. Noel made me leave the room. All that I do know is, that she kept talking all the time, and talking very loudly too; for I heard her say,—Ah, monsieur, but it is all so very strange!"

"What is strange?"

"What I heard Madame Gerdy say to M. Noel.

"Ah ha! my belle!" sneered Père Tabaret; "so you listen at key-holes, do you?"

"No, monsieur! no indeed, I swear to you; but madame cried out like one lost. She said,"—

"My girl," said Père Tabaret, "one never hears any thing good through key-holes. Mannette can tell you as much."

The poor girl, thoroughly confused, sought to excuse herself.

"Enough, enough!" said the good man. "Return to your work: you need not disturb M. Noel; I can wait for him very well here.

And, satisfied with the reproof he had administered,

he picked up the newspaper, and installed himself in the chimney-corner, placing the lamp so as to read with ease.

A minute had scarcely elapsed when he in his turn bounded in his chair, and uttered a cry of instinctive terror and surprise.

These were the first words that met his eye.

"A horrible crime has plunged in grief and consternation the little village of La Jonchère. A poor widow, named Lerouge, who enjoyed the general esteem and love of the community, has been assassinated in her own house. The officers of the law made the usual preliminary investigations; and, from the information we have been able to gather, we believe justice is already on the track of the authors of this dastardly crime."

"Thunder!" cried Père Tabaret to himself, "can it be that Madame Gerdy?"—

The idea was but a gleam of lightning, dismissed as soon as formed; he fell back into the arm-chair, and, raising his shoulders, murmured,—

"This affair of Jonchère is driving me out of my senses! I can think of nothing but this infernal Widow Lerouge. I see her now in every thing."

In the mean while, an uncontrollable curiosity made him peruse the entire newspaper. He found nothing, with the exception of these lines, to justify or explain even the slightest emotion.

"It is an extremely singular coincidence, at the same time," thought the incorrigible police agent. Then, remarking that the newspaper was slightly torn at the lower part, and crushed, as if by a convulsive grasp, he repeated,—

"It is strange!"

At this moment the door of Madame Gerdy's room opened, and Noel appeared on the threshold.

Without doubt the accident to his mother had greatly excited him; for he was very pale and his countenance, ordinarily so calm, wore an expression of profound sorrow. He appeared surprised to see Père Tabaret.

"Ah, my dear Noel!" cried the old fellow. "Calm my inquietude. How is your mother?"

"Madame Gerdy is as well as can be expected."

"Madame Gerdy!" repeated the old fellow with an air of astonishment; but he continued, "It is plain you have been seriously alarmed."

"In truth," replied the advocate, seating himself, "I have experienced a rude shock."

Noel was making visibly the greatest efforts to appear calm, to listen to the old fellow, and to answer him. Père Tabaret, as much disquieted on his side, perceived nothing.

"At least, my dear boy," said he, "tell me how this happened?"

The young man hesitated a moment, as if consulting with himself. No doubt he was unprepared for this point blank question, and knew not what answer to make; at last he replied,—

"Madame Gerdy has suffered a severe shock in learning from a paragraph in this newspaper that a woman in whom she takes a strong interest has been assassinated."

"Ah!" cried Père Tabaret.

The old fellow was in a fever of embarrassment. He wanted to question Noel, but was restrained by the fear of revealing the secret of his association with the police. Indeed he had almost betrayed himself by the eagerness with which he exclaimed,—

"What! your mother knew the Widow Lerouge?"

By an effort he restrained himself, and with difficulty dissembled his satisfaction; for he was delighted to find himself so unexpectedly on the trace of the antecedents of the victim of La Jonchère.

"She was," continued Noel, "the slave of Madame Gerdy, devoted to her body and soul! She would have thrown herself in the fire at a sign from her hand."

"Then you, my dear friend, you knew this honest woman?"

"I have not seen her for a long time," replied Noel; "but I knew her well; I ought even to say I loved her tenderly. She was my nurse."

"She, this woman?" stammered Père Tabaret.

This time he was thunderstruck. The Widow Lerouge Noel's nurse? He was playing with fortune. Providence had evidently chosen him for its instrument, and was leading him by the hand. He was about to obtain all the information, in one half-hour, which he had almost despaired of ever procuring. He remained seated before Noel stunned and speechless. At length he remembered, that, unless he would compromise himself, he must break the silence.

"It is a great misfortune," murmured he.

"For Madame Gerdy, I know nothing of that; but, for me, it is an overwhelming misfortune! I am struck to the heart by the blow which has slain this poor woman. Her death, M. Tabaret, has annihilated my dreams of the future, and overthrown my most cherished hopes. I have to perform a solemn duty,—to avenge myself for cruel outrages. Her death breaks the weapon in my hands, and reduces me to despair, to impotence. Alas! I am indeed unfortunate."

"You unfortunate?" cried Père Tabaret, singularly

affected by the sadness of his dear Noel. "In heaven's name, what has happened to you?"

"I suffer," murmured the advocate, "not only from injustice that can never be repaired, but from dread of calumny that cannot be repudiated. I am defenceless. I shall be accused of inventing falsehood, of being an ambitious intriguer, having no regard for truth, no scruples of conscience."

Père Tabaret was puzzled. What connection could possibly exist between Noel's honor and the assassination at Jonchère? His brain was in a whirl. A thousand troubled and confused ideas jostled one another in inextricable confusion.

"Come, come, Noel," said he, "collect yourself. Calumny threatens you? Nonsense! Have you not friends? Am I not here? Have confidence in me. It will be strange, indeed, if between us two—"

The advocate started to his feet, inflamed by a sudden resolution.

"Yes," interrupted he, "you shall know the secret that is stifling me. The rôle I have imposed upon myself irritates and confounds me. I have need of a friend to console, a counsellor to advise me; for one is a bad judge of his own cause: and this crime has plunged me into an abyss of hesitation."

"You know," replied Père Tabaret, "that I regard you as a son. Command me, my dear Noel, as if I were indeed your father."

"Know then," commenced the advocate,—“but no, not here: what I have to say must not be overheard. Let us go into my study.”

CHAPTER IV.

WHEN Noel and Père Tabaret were seated face to face in the small apartment devoted to Noel's business, and the door had been carefully locked, the old fellow began to feel uneasy.

"If your mother should require any thing," said he.

"If Madame Gerdy rings," replied the young man, "the servant will attend to her wants."

This indifference, this coldness, confounded Père Tabaret, accustomed as he was to the interchange of affection between mother and son.

"For heaven's sake, Noel," said he, "calm yourself. Do not allow yourself to be overcome by a feeling of irritation. You have, I see, some little pique against your mother, which will be forgotten to-morrow. Don't speak of her in this icy tone; but tell me what you mean by calling her Madame Gerdy?"

"What I mean?" replied the advocate in a hollow tone,— "what I mean?"

He quitted his arm-chair, took several strides across the floor of the little chamber, returned to his place near the old fellow, and said,—

"Because, M. Tabaret, Madame Gerdy is not my mother!"

This sentence fell like a blow of a heavy club on the head of the amateur: he was paralyzed.

"Oh!" said he, in the tone one assumes when rejecting an absurd proposition, "do you dream of what you say, Noel? Is it credible? Is it probable?"

"It is improbable," replied Noel with peculiar emphasis: "it is incredible, if you will; but it is true. For thirty-three years, ever since my birth, this woman has

played a most marvellous and unworthy comedy, to enoble and enrich her son,—for she has a son,—and to despoil, to plunder me!”

“My friend,”—continued Père Tabaret, who in the background of the picture presented by this singular revelation saw again the phantom of the murdered Widow Lerouge.

But Noel heard not, and seemed hardly in a state to hear. The young man, usually so cold, so self-contained, could not control his anger. At the sound of his own voice, he became animated, as a good horse might at the jingling of his harness.

“Was ever man,” continued he, “more cruelly deceived, more miserably duped, than I have been,—I who have so loved this woman? How I have sought for evidences of affection to lavish on her, who was sacrificing me to her own selfish ambition for her son! How she has laughed at me! Her infamy dates from the moment when for the first time she took me on her knees; and, until these few days past, she has sustained without faltering her execrable rôle: her love for me, hypocrisy! her devotion falsehood! her caresses lies. And how I have worshipped her! Ah! why can I not recall the innocent kisses of my childhood, the devotion of my youth, the sacrifices of my manhood, given in exchange for her Judas’ kisses? And for what was all this heroism of deception, this caution, this duplicity? To betray me, more securely to despoil me; to rob me; to give to her illegitimate offspring all that lawfully appertained to me,—a noble name, a princely inheritance!”

“We are burning!” thought Père Tabaret, who was fast relapsing into the *collaborateur* of M. Gevrol; then aloud he said,—

“This is terribly serious, my dear Noel. To credit

what you have said, we must believe Madame Gerdy possessed of an amount of audacity and ability rarely united in one individual. She must have been assisted, advised, compelled perhaps. Who have been her accomplices? She could never have accomplished this herself; her husband perhaps himself?"

"Her husband!" interrupted Noel, with a bitter laugh. "Ah! you have believed her a widow. Pshaw! She never had a husband. Père Gerdy never had an existence. I am illegitimate, my dear Tabaret, thrice base born,—Noel, son of a *femme couverte*, and an unknown father!"

"Ah!" cried the old fellow; "this then is the occasion of your marriage with Mademoiselle Levernois being delayed these four years?"

"Yes, my friend, that was the cause. And what misfortunes might have been averted by this marriage with a young girl whom I love! Had I wedded her before making this abominable discovery, I should not have wasted all my affection on her that I have called my mother. When she told me I was not the son of this imaginary individual, this M. Gerdy, she wept, she accused herself, she seemed ready to die of grief and shame; and I, poor fool! dry her tears, excuse her to her own eyes, console her with my caresses! No, she had no husband: such women have no husbands. She was the Count de Commarin's mistress; and, on the day when he quitted her, he threw to her three hundred thousand francs, the price of her degradation!"

Noel would have continued to pour forth these furious denunciations; but his volubility was arrested by the old fellow. He felt he was coming to a history in all points similar to that which he had imagined; and his

impatience to gratify his vanity, in discovering how nearly he had divined the facts, made him almost forget to express any sympathy for his friend's misfortunes.

"My dear boy," said he, "let us not digress. You ask me for advice; and I am perhaps the best adviser you could have chosen. Come, then, to the point. How have you learned this? Have you proofs of what you state? where are they?"

The decided tone of the old fellow would no doubt have awakened Noel's attention at any other time; but he was off his guard: he had not leisure to stop or to reflect. He answered promptly,—

"I have known the truth for three weeks. I made the discovery by chance. I have important moral proofs; but they are mere presumptive evidence. A word from the Widow Lerouge, one single word, would have rendered them decisive. This word, she cannot pronounce, since they have killed her; but she has said it to me. Of what avail? Now, Madame Gerdy will deny all. I know her; with her head on the block, she will deny it. My father doubtless will turn against me. I am myself morally convinced. I *was* strong in evidence; but this crime renders vain my certainty, utterly destroys my proofs!"

"Explain it all to me," replied Père Tabaret after a pause,—“all you understand. We, the old, are sometimes able to give good advice; and I am willing to advise you.”

"Three weeks ago," commenced Noel, "searching for some old documents, I opened Madame Gerdy's secretary. Accidentally I overturned a drawer: some papers tumbled out, amongst which were a packet of

letters, which fell right into my hand. A mechanical impulse, which I cannot explain, prompted me to untie the string, and read one of the letters."

"You did wrong," remarked Père Tabaret.

"Be it so. I read. At the end of ten lines, I was convinced that this correspondence was my father's, whose name, Madame Gerdy, in spite of my prayers, had always hidden from me. You can understand my emotion. I carried off the packet, shut myself up in this room, and devoured the letters from beginning to end."

"And you have been cruelly punished, my poor boy!"

"It is true; but who in my position could have resisted? These letters have given me pain; but they afford the proof of what I have told you."

"And you have preserved the letters?"

"I have them here; and, that you may understand the case in which I have requested your advice, I am going to read them to you."

The advocate opened one of the drawers of his bureau, pressed an imperceptible spring, and a hidden receptacle appeared in the back of the upper tablette, from which he drew out a bundle of letters.

"You understand, my friend," said he, "that I shall spare you all insignificant details, which, however, have their own weight. I am only going to take up the important facts, which treat directly of the affair."

Père Tabaret nestled in his arm-chair, burning with the fever of curiosity, his face expressing the most ardent attention.

After a selection, which he was some time in making, the advocate opened a letter, and commenced his reading in a voice which trembled, in spite of his efforts to render it calm.

“ ‘MY VALERIE, WELL BELOVED,—’

“Valerie,” said he, “you understand is Madame Gerdy.”

“I know, I know. Do not interrupt yourself.”

Noel continued.

“ ‘My Valerie, well beloved.

“ ‘This is a happy day. This morning I received your welcome letter. I have covered it with kisses. I have read it a hundred times ; and now it has gone to join the others here upon my heart. This letter fills me with transport. You were not deceived. Heaven has blessed our loves ; and we shall have a son.

“ ‘I shall have a son, the living image of my adored Valerie ! Oh ! why are we parted at a time like this ? Why have I not the wings of a bird, that I might fly to thee, beloved of my soul and mingle our tears of joy and thankfulness ? Ah ! never as at this moment have I cursed the fatal union imposed upon me by an inexorable family, whose cruelty my prayers and tears could not soften. I cannot restrain myself from hating this woman who bears in spite of me my name, innocent victim though she is of the barbarity of our parents. And, to fill up the measure of sorrow, she is also soon to make me a father. What words can paint my sorrow when I compare the fortunes of these two children ?

“ ‘One, son of the object of my tenderest love, shall have neither father, family, nor name, since an inexorable law forbids me to legitimize him. While the other, the son of my detested spouse, by the sole fact of his birth shall be rich, honored, noble, surrounded by devotion and homage, with a great position in the world. I cannot endure the thought of this terrible injustice ! Who can imagine a way to repair it ? I cannot tell now ; but be sure I shall find a way. It is to him, the most desired, most cherished, most beloved, that the best fortune should come ; and come to him it shall : I swear it.’ ”

"From whence is that letter dated?" demanded Père Tabaret.

"See," replied Noel.

He handed the letter to the old fellow, who read,—

"Venice, December, 1828."

"You perceive," said the advocate, "all the importance of this first letter: it is a brief statement of the facts. My father, married in spite of himself, adores his mistress and detests his wife. Nor are his feelings towards the infants at all concealed. In fact, we can plainly perceive, peeping forth, the germ of the idea which afterwards he matured and carried into execution, in defiance of all law human or divine!"

He was gradually falling into his professional manner, as if pleading the cause before the tribunals. Père Tabaret again interrupted him.

"There is no explanation necessary; the letter is explicit enough. I am not an adept in such matters as a grand juror; but I understand admirably so far."

"I pass several letters," continued Noel, "and I come to this one of Jan. 23, 1829. It is very long, and filled with matters altogether foreign to the subject which now interests us. However, I find therein two passages, which attest the slow but steady and determinate growth of the idea suggested in the first letter.

"The destinies, more powerful than my will, chain me here; but my soul is ever near to thee, my adored Valerie! Without ceasing, my thoughts rest upon the unspeakable happiness in store for us."

"I skip," said Noel, "several pages of passionate rhapsody, to stop at these lines at the end.

"My aversion to the countess increases daily. Unfortunate woman! I hate and at the same time pity her. She seems to divine the occasion of my sadness, my

coldness. By her timid submission and unalterable sweetness, she seems to seek pardon for her share in our unhappy union. Sacrificed creature! She also may have given her heart to another, before being fettered to a husband who can never look upon her with a husband's love. Your good heart will pardon me this pity.'

"That countess was my mother," cried the advocate in a trembling voice. "And he demands pardon for the pity she inspires! Poor lady!"

He covered his eyes with his hand, as if forcing back his tears, and added in a low tone,—

"She is dead!"

In spite of his impatience, Père Tabaret dared not utter a word. He resented keenly the profound sorrow of his youthful and respected friend. After a silence, which almost maddened the old fellow, Noel raised his head, and returned to the letters.

"All the letters which follow," said he, "carry traces of the preoccupation of my father's mind on the subject of his illegitimate son. I lay them, however, aside, and take up this written from Rome, March 5, 1829."

"My son,—our son, my most constant, my only care,—how to secure for him the position in the future of which I dream? The nobles of former days had not these vulgar obstacles to their wishes to contend with. In old time, a word from the king would have ennobled my son, and given him a place in the world. To-day, the king who governs with difficulty his disaffected subjects, can do less than nothing. Nobility has lost its rights, and the lords of France are as powerless to transgress the laws as the meanest of their vassals.'

"Lower down I find,—

"My heart loves to picture to itself the form and features of our son. He will have the soul, the mind,

the beauty, all the fascinations of his mother. He will inherit from his father the pride, the valor, the sentiments of his noble and ancient race. What will be the other? I tremble to think of it.'

"The monster! that is I!" cried the advocate with intense rage. "'Whilst the other—' but let us leave this part of the subject, these preliminaries to an outrageous action. I only desire by these to show the aberration of my father's reason under the influence of his passion. We shall soon be at the end."

Père Tabaret was astonished at the strength of this passion, long since burnt out, of which Noel was raking up the dead ashes. Perhaps he felt all the more keenly the force of those passionate expressions of devotion, because they reminded him of his own lost youth. He understood how irresistible must have been the force of such a love; and he trembled to speculate as to the result.

"Here," said Noel, "is another; not one of those interminable epistles from which I have read you fragments, but a simple billet. It is dated from Venice at the beginning of May; it is short and decisive.

"'DEAR VALERIE,—

"'Thy response is more favorable than I dared to hope for. The project I have conceived is now practicable. I begin to feel the approach of calmness and security. Your son shall bear my name. I shall not be obliged to separate myself from him. He shall be reared near me, in my house, under my eyes, on my knees, in my arms. Shall I have strength to bear this excess of happiness?

"'I set out to-morrow for Naples, from whence I shall write to you at length; although, whatever may happen, though I should sacrifice the important interests confided to me, I shall be in Paris at the solemn

hour. My presence will double your courage; my love shall diminish thy sufferings.' ”

“ Pardon me for interrupting you, Noel,” said Père Tabaret, “ do you know what grave affairs detained your father abroad? ”

“ My father, my old friend,” replied the advocate, “ was, in spite of his youth, one of the friends, one of the confidants, of Charles X. ; and he had been charged by him with a secret mission to Italy. My father is the Count Rheteau de Commarin.”

“ Whew ! ” exclaimed the old fellow ; and between his teeth, the better to engrave the name upon his memory, he repeated several times, “ Rheteau de Commarin.”

Noel held his peace. Having controlled his resentment, he seemed buried in reflection, as if seeking the means of executing his unalterable determination to repair the wrong he had sustained.

“ In the middle of the month of May,” continued he, “ my father writes again, this time from Naples. Does it not appear incredible that a man of prudence, sense, a dignified diplomatist, a gentleman, should dare, even in the eagerness of insensate passion, to confide to paper this most monstrous project? Listen !

“ ‘ MY ADORED,—

“ ‘ Germain, my faithful *valet de chambre*, will hand you this letter. I have despatched him to Normandy, charged with a commission of the most delicate nature. He is one of those servitors who may be trusted implicitly.

“ ‘ The time has come when you must learn the nature of my project touching our son. In three weeks, at the latest I shall be in Paris.

“ ‘ Here is what I have resolved.

“ ‘ The two infants will be entrusted to two nurses

of Normandy, where my estates are situated. One of these women, selected and instructed by Germain, will be in our interests; to her charge, my Valerie, our child is to be confided. These two women shall leave Paris the same day, Germain accompanying her who has the son of the countess.

“An accident, arranged in advance, will compel these two women to pass one night on the road. Another chance, brought about by Germain, will force them to sleep in the same inn,—in the same chamber!

“During the night, the nurse entrusted with your child will change the infants in their cradles.

“I have foreseen and arranged every thing, even as I now explain it to you. Every precaution has been taken to prevent our secret from escaping. Germain is charged to procure, while in Paris, a cradle and clothing for your infant precisely similar to that of the countess's. Assist him with your advice.

“Your maternal heart, sweet Valerie, may bleed at thought of being deprived of your infant. Console yourself for the loss of his innocent caresses, by dreaming of the station secured to him by your sacrifice. What excess of maternal tenderness can serve him as powerfully as this separation? As to the other, I know your tenderness of heart. You will love him for his father's sake; and the affection you bestow on him will prove your devotion to me. And he will have nothing to complain of. Knowing nothing, he shall have nothing to regret; and all that money and influence can secure, in his position, he shall have.

“Do not argue with me that this attempt is criminal. No, my well beloved, no. The success of our plan depends upon so many coincidences, independent of our will, that should they unite, we may assure ourselves the hand of Providence favors our design. If success crowns our wishes, it will be because heaven has decreed it.

“I have hope!”

“Just what I thought,” murmured Père Tabaret.

“And the wretched man,” cried Noel, “dares to in-

voke the aid of Providence! He would make heaven his accomplice!"

"But your mother," demanded the old fellow,—
"pardon, I would say Madame Gerdy,—how did she receive this proposition?"

"She would appear to have rejected it, at first, for here are twenty pages of eloquent persuasion from the count, urging her to agree to it. Oh, this woman!"

"My son," said Père Tabaret, softly, "let us not be unjust. Why direct all your resentment against Madame Gerdy? To me, the count seems far more deserving of your anger."

"True," interrupted Noel, with a certain degree of violence,—
"true, the count is culpable. He is the author of an infamous conspiracy; yet I am not inspired by a sense of hatred against him. He has committed a crime, but has passion to excuse it. Moreover, he has not deceived me every hour of my life, by enacting a lie, as this miserable woman has, for thirty years. And, more than all, his punishment has been so cruel, that I can even now pardon the injury he has done me, and weep for the suffering it has entailed."

"Ah! he has been punished?" interrogated the old fellow.

"Yes, fearfully; how you shall learn. But allow me to continue. Towards the end of May, or more probably, during the first days of June, the count must have arrived in Paris; for the correspondence ceases. It would seem, that, after his meeting with Madame Gerdy, the final arrangements of the conspiracy were delayed by some obstacle. Here is a billet, relieving all uncertainty on the subject. On the day it was written, the count was on service at the Tuileries, and unable to leave his post. He has written it even in the king's cabi-

net, on the king's paper ; see the royal arms ! The bargain has been concluded ; the woman who has consented to become the instrument of his project, is in Paris, of which he acquaints his mistress.

“ ‘ DEAR VALERIE,—

“ ‘ Germain announces to me the arrival of your son's nurse,—your son, *our* son. She will present herself at your house during the day. She is to be depended upon. A magnificent recompense is the price of her discretion. She has been given to understand that you are ignorant of the proposed exchange of children ; therefore say nothing to her that may undeceive her on that point. I wish to charge myself with the sole responsibility of the deed. It is the most prudent course. This woman is of Normandy. She was born on our lands and in some sort in our house. Her husband is an honest mariner. Her name is Claudine Lerouge.

“ ‘ Be of good courage, my love ! I am exacting from you the greatest sacrifice that can be made by woman ; and I appreciate the devotion that foregoes a mother's happiness for thy lover's sake. There is no longer a doubt that heaven is protecting us. All smiles. Hereafter everything depends upon our address, our prudence. I feel that we shall succeed ! ’ ”

On one point, at least Père Tabaret was sufficiently enlightened. The researches into the past life of the Widow Lerouge were anticipated. He could not restrain an exclamation, “ At last ! ” of satisfaction, which fortunately escaped Noel.

“ This note,” said the advocate, “ closes the Count de Commarin's correspondence.”

“ What ! ” exclaimed the old fellow, “ you are in possession of nothing more ? ”

“ I have yet ten lines, written many years later, which certainly have some weight, but after all offer only moral proof.”

"What a misfortune!" murmured Père Tabaret. Noel replaced on his bureau the letters which were in his hand, and turning towards his old friend, looked at him steadily.

"Suppose," he said slowly, and emphasizing every syllable,—“suppose that all my sources of information end here. Admit, for a moment, that I know nothing more than you do now. What is your advice?”

Père Tabaret paused some minutes before answering; he was weighing the probabilities resulting from the count's letters.

"For my own part," said he at length, "I believe on my soul you are not the son of Madame Gerdy."

"And you believe rightly!" answered the advocate forcibly. "You think, do you not, that, after reading these letters, I ought to have seen and questioned Claudine? You will say this poor woman who nursed me must have loved me; that she must have suffered some remorse for her part in the horrible injustice of which I was the victim? Well, I have seen her. I have questioned her; and she has confessed all. She was only too glad to do so. The thought of her complicity tormented her. It was a weight of guilt too heavy for her age to bear; and she told me all. The count's scheme, simply and yet ingeniously conceived, succeeded without any effort; and I, poor helpless infant! when but three days old was thus betrayed, despoiled, and disinherited by my unnatural father and his unworthy mistress. Poor Claudine! remorse was dragging her to the grave; and she promised me, with eagerness, her testimony on the day I should reclaim my rights."

"And she has gone, carrying her secret with her," murmured the old fellow in a tone of regret.

"I have yet," said Noel, "one hope. Claudine had

in her possession several letters, written subsequently, —some by the Count, some by Madame Gerdy,—letters at once imprudent and explicit. They can be, without question, recovered; and their evidence will be decisive. I have had them in my hands: I have read them. Claudine would have given them to me; but, fool that I was, I did not take them."

The little hope that existed in that quarter no one knew better than Père Tabaret. To gain possession of those very letters, the crime at Jonchère had been committed. The assassin had found and burned them, with the other papers, in the little stove. The old amateur was master of the situation.

"Knowing your affairs, my dear boy, almost as thoroughly as my own," said the old fellow after another pause, "I am surprised the count should have forgotten the promises he made in his letters to Madame Gerdy, of promoting your fortune."

"He seems never to have remembered them, my old friend."

"That," cried the old fellow indignantly, "is even more infamous than all the rest!"

"Do not accuse my father," answered Noel gravely; "his *liaison* with Madame Gerdy ceased long ago. I have a faint recollection of a distinguished looking man who came to see me at school. I am now persuaded it was the count. But the rupture came."

"Naturally," said Père Tabaret. "A fine gentleman!"

"Suspend your judgment," interrupted the advocate. "M. de Commarin had good reason; his mistress deceived him. He discovered her perfidy, and cast her off with just indignation. The ten lines of which I have spoken were written then."

Noel searched a considerable time among the papers scattered upon the table, and at length selected a letter more faded and creased than the others. Judging from its appearance of having been often folded and unfolded, it had been read over and over many times; the writing was almost effaced in many places.

"In this," said he in a bitter tone, "Madame Gerdy is no longer 'adored Valerie.'"

" 'A cruel friend has, like a true friend, opened my eyes. I doubted him, believing in you: but you have been watched; and to-day, unhappily, I can doubt no more. You, Valerie,—you to whom I have given more than my life,—you have deceived me, and have been deceiving me long. Unhappy man that I am, I can no longer be certain that I am the father of your child.' "

"But this letter is a proof," cried Père Tabaret,—"a proof that cannot be overcome. Of what importance to the count would be a doubt of his paternity, had he not sacrificed his legitimate to his natural son? Yes, you have said truly, my dear Noel, his chastisement has been severe."

"Madame Gerdy," continued Noel, "attempted to justify herself. She wrote to the count; but he returned her letters unopened. She tried to see him, but in vain: he would not grant her an interview. She knew that all was over when the count's steward brought her a legal settlement of fifteen thousand francs a year. Her son had taken my place; and his mother had ruined me!"

A light knock at the door of the study interrupted their conversation.

"Who is there?" demanded Noel without stirring.

"Monsieur," answered the servant from outside the door, "madame wishes to speak to you."

The advocate appeared to hesitate.

"Go, my son," advised Père Tabaret; "do not be merciless."

Noel arose with visible reluctance, and passed into Madame Gerdy's sleeping apartment.

"Poor boy!" thought Père Tabaret when left alone. "What a fatal discovery! and how he must feel it. Noble young man! Brave, honest heart! In his innocent simplicity, he sees not from whence the blow has fallen. By good fortune, I am not so blind. I can see for him; and, when he despairs of justice, I am confident of obtaining it. Thanks to his information, I can see it all now. An infant's intelligence might now divine whose hand struck the blow that silenced the important witness. How singular that he should assist the discovery of this crime without knowing it! How shall I proceed? Ah! if I could have one of those letters for four and twenty hours. He probably has counted them. I dare not ask for one; I would be compelled to acknowledge my connection with the police. Better run the risk, and take one, no matter which, that I may verify the writing."

Père Tabaret had hardly thrust one of the letters into the depths of one of his capacious pockets, when the advocate returned.

He was one of those men of strongly formed character whose self-control never deserts them. He was long accustomed to dissimulation, that indispensable armor of the ambitious.

Nothing in his manner betrayed what had taken place between Madame Gerdy and himself. He was absolutely as calm as, when seated in his arm-chair, he listened to the interminable nothings of his clients.

"Well," demanded Père Tabaret, "how is she now?"

"Worse," answered Noel: "she is delirious. She just now assailed me with the most injurious accusations, upbraiding me as the vilest of mankind. I am persuaded she is out of her senses."

"Or losing them," murmured Père Tabaret; "and I think you ought to call in a physician."

"I am going in search of one," answered Noel.

The advocate resumed his seat before his bureau, and re-arranged, according to their dates, the scattered letters. He seemed to have forgotten that he was wanting advice from his old friend; nor did he appear desirous of renewing the conversation. This was the farthest in the world from Père Tabaret's intention.

"The more I ponder over your history, my dear Noel," commenced he, "the more I am bewildered. I do not know what resolution I should adopt, were I in your situation."

"Yes, my old friend," answered the advocate, "it is a situation that might well perplex more profound experiences than yours."

The amateur repressed with difficulty the smile, which for an instant appeared upon his lips.

"I confess it humbly," said he, taking pleasure in assuming an air of innocence. "But have you done any thing yet? Your first move should have been to demand an explanation of Madame Gerdy."

Noel made a startled movement, which was unnoticed by Père Tabaret, pre-occupied as he was in trying to give the turn he desired to the conversation.

"It was by that," answered Noel, "I began."

"Well, what did she say?"

"What could she say? Was she not overwhelmed by the discovery?"

"What! did she not attempt to exculpate herself?"

"Oh, yes," sneered Noel, "she attempted; she is accustomed to attempt the impossible, of course. She pretended to explain the correspondence. She told me, I know not how many absurd falsehoods."

The advocate finished gathering up his letters, without seeming to perceive the abstraction, tied them carefully, and replaced them in the secret drawer.

"Yes," continued he, rising and shutting up his bureau, as if trying by the movement to calm his anger,—"yes, she attempted to make me believe the exchange had never taken place,—no easy matter, considering the proofs I hold. This is the occasion of her sickness. The idea that her son, whom she adores, should be obliged to restore to me the name and fortune of which he robbed me broke her heart. She could see me suffer the most cruel privations; but she could not bear the thought of her son's displacement. Rather than I should hurt a hair of his head, she would consign me to the bottomless pit."

"She has probably acquainted the count with your discovery," said Père Tabaret, pursuing his idea.

"Hardly; for the count has been absent from Paris more than a month, and is not expected to return until the end of the week."

"How do you know that?"

"I called at the house, as I wished to see and speak with him."

"You?"

"Yes. Do you think I shall not reclaim my own? Do you imagine that I am the man to be robbed, spoiled, and betrayed with impunity? No, I have rights; and I shall make them good. What consideration withholds me from lifting up my voice and proclaiming my

wrongs? I shall claim my rights. Do you think that surprising?"

"No, certainly, my friend; then you have visited M. de Commarin's house?"

"Oh! I did not adopt this resolution immediately," continued Noel. "My discovery made me at first almost lose my senses. A thousand opposing sentiments agitated me. At one moment, my fury blinded me; the next, my courage deserted me. I would, and I would not. I was undecided, uncertain, wild. The eclat that must be occasioned by the publicity of such an affair terrified me. I longed to recover,—I *will* recover my name; but I would at the same time preserve that noble name from stain. I would, if possible, find a means of conciliating all parties concerned, without publicity and without scandal."

"You decided?"

"Yes, after a struggle of fifteen days,—fifteen days of torture, of anguish! Ah! what I suffered in that time! I neglected my business, being unable to fix my mind upon any kind of work. During the day, I tried by incessant action to fatigue my body, that at night I might find forgetfulness in sleep. Vain hope: since I found those ill-omened letters, I have not slept an hour."

From time to time, Père Tabaret silently consulted his watch.

"M. Daburon will be asleep," thought he.

"One morning," continued Noel, "after a night of rage, I determined to end all uncertainty. I was in that desperate state of mind, in which the gambler, after successive losses, throws upon the board his last remaining coin. I called a carriage, and, with a beating heart, gave the order. 'To the Hotel de Commarin, Faubourg St. Germain.'"

The old amateur allowed a sigh of impatience to escape him.

“It is one of the most magnificent houses in Paris,” continued Noel,—“a princely dwelling, worthy the representation of an illustrious family,—almost a palace. Right and left of the vast courtyard are the stables, where twenty horses of price are standing in reserve for common use. At the back rises the grand façade of the main building, majestic and severe, with its sculptured pediment, its noble portico, and its double flight of marble steps. Behind the house extends a large garden, or rather a park, shaded by the oldest trees, perhaps, in Paris.”

This enthusiastic description sorely tested Père Tabaret’s patience; but he did not venture to interrupt Noel by a question. An indiscreet word might betray him, and reveal his relation with the bureau of investigation.

“Standing before the dwelling of my ancestors,” continued Noel, “you cannot comprehend the excess of my emotion. Here, said I, is the house in which I was born. This is the home in which I should have been reared; and, above all, this is the spot where I should reign to-day, whereon I stand an outcast and a stranger, devoured by the sad and bitter memories, of which banished men have died. I compared my brother’s brilliant destinies with my sad and laborious career; and my indignation well nigh overmastered reason. The mad impulse stirred me to force the doors, to rush into the grand salon, and drive out the intruder,—the son of Madame Gerdy,—who has taken the place of the son of the Countess de Commarin! Out, usurper, out of this. I am the master here. The propriety of legal means at once recurred to my distracted mind however, and restrained me. Once more I stood before the habi-

tation of my fathers. How I love its old sculptures, its grand old trees, its shaded walks, worn by the feet of my poor mother! I love all, even to the proud escutcheon, frowning above the principal doorway, flinging its defiance to the theories of this age of levellers."

This last phrase conflicted so directly with the code of opinions habitual to Noel, that Père Tabaret was obliged to turn aside, to conceal his amusement.

"Poor humanity!" thought he; "he is already the grand seigneur."

"On presenting myself," continued the advocate, "I demanded to see the Count de Commarin. A Swiss porter, in grand livery, answered, the count was traveling, but that the viscount was at home. This ran counter to my designs; but I was embarked; so I insisted on speaking to the son in default of the father. The Swiss porter stared at me with astonishment. He had evidently seen me alight from a hired carriage, and so deliberated for some moments as to whether I was not too insignificant a person to have the honor of being admitted to visit the viscount."

"But tell me, have you seen him?" asked Père Tabaret, unable to restrain his impatience.

"Of course, immediately," replied the advocate in a tone of bitter raillery. "Could the examination, think you, result otherwise than in my favor? No. My white cravat and black costume produced their natural effect. The Swiss porter entrusted me to the guidance of a chasseur with a plumed hat, who, leading me across the court to a superb vestibule, transferred me to the care of a lackey; who, in company with five or six others, was lolling upon a bench. This fine gentleman led me up a spacious staircase, wide enough for a carriage to ascend, and preceded me along an extensive

picture gallery, guided me across a vast apartment, of which the furniture was shrouded in sombre coverings, and finally delivered me into the hands of the *valet de chambre* of Albert de Commarin; that is to say, the man who bears my name."

"I understand, I understand."

"I had passed an inspection; now I had to undergo an examination. M. Albert's valet desired to be informed who I was, whence I came, and what I wanted, what was my profession, and all the rest. I answered simply, that I was unknown to the viscount; but it was absolutely necessary I should converse with him for five minutes upon an affair of the most urgent nature. I waited more than a quarter of an hour, when he reappeared. His master had graciously deigned to receive me."

It was easy to perceive that his reception rankled in the advocate's breast. He could not forgive Albert his lackeys and his *valet de chambre*. He forgot the words of the illustrious duke, who said, "I pay my valets for being insolent, to save myself the trouble." Père Tabaret was a little surprised at his young friend's bitterness, in speaking of these trivial details.

"Can it be true," thought he, "that the arrogance of lackeys is the secret of the people's hatred of the aristocracy?"

"I was ushered into a small salon," continued Noel, "simply furnished, the only ornaments of which were weapons. These, ranged against the walls, were of all times and countries. Never have I seen in so small a space so many muskets, arquebusses, pistols, swords, sabres, and foils: one might have imagined himself in the arsenal of a *maitre de armes*."

The weapon used by the Widow Lerouge's assassin naturally recurred to the old fellow's memory.

"The viscount," continued Noel, speaking slowly, "was half lying on the divan when I entered. He was dressed in a jacket and pantaloons of velvet, and had around his neck an immense scarf of white silk. I do not cherish resentment against this young man. He has never to his knowledge injured me. He had no share in his parent's crime. I am therefore able to speak of him with justice. He is handsome, has a noble air, and carries gracefully the name which does not belong to him. He is about my height, of the same brown complexion, and would resemble me, perhaps, if he did not wear a beard. Yet he appears at least five years younger; but this is readily explained, he has neither worked nor suffered. He is one of the fortunate ones of the earth, who traverse life's road on such soft cushions that they are never injured by the jolting of the carriage. On seeing me, he arose and saluted me graciously."

"You must have been dreadfully excited."

"Less than I am at this moment: remember, I was fifteen days preparing for this interview; and fifteen days of mental torture exhausts one's emotions. I answered the question I saw upon his lips. 'Monsieur,' said I, 'you do not know me; but that is of little consequence. I come to you, charged with a very grave, a very sad mission, which not only interests you, but touches the honor of the name you bear.' Without doubt he did not believe me; for, in a tone of the coolest impertinence, he asked me 'Shall you be long?' I answered as coolly, 'Yes.'"

"Pray," said Père Tabaret, becoming very attentive,

"do not omit a single detail; it may be very important, you understand."

"The viscount," continued Noel, "appeared much disquieted. At length he said courteously, 'My time is hardly at my own disposal this morning. I am at this hour engaged to call upon my fiancée, Mademoiselle d'Arlanges. Can we not postpone this conversation?'"

"Good! another woman," said the old fellow to himself.

"I answered the viscount, that an explanation would admit of no delay; and, as I saw him prepare to dismiss me, I drew from my pocket the count's correspondence, and presented to him one of the letters. On recognizing his father's handwriting, he became more tractable, declared himself at my service, and demanded permission to write a word of apology to the lady by whom he was expected. Having written the note hastily, he handed it to his valet, and ordered him to send it to Mademoiselle d'Arlanges immediately; then, opening the door of the adjoining apartment, his library, he requested me to enter."

"One word," interrupted the old fellow; "was he troubled on seeing the letters?"

"Not the least in the world. After closing the door, he handed me a chair, and, seating himself, said, 'Now, monsieur, explain yourself.' I was fully prepared for the situation, and decided to strike a *grand coup*.

"'Monsieur,' said I, 'my mission is painful. The facts I am about to reveal to you are incredible. I beseech you, do not interrupt me, and do not answer me until you have read the letters I am about to show you.' He regarded me with an air of extreme surprise, and answered, 'Speak! I can hear all.' I stood up. 'Monsieur,' said I, 'I must inform you that you are

not the legitimate son of M. de Commarin, as this correspondence will prove to you. The legitimate son exists; and he it is who sends me.' I kept my eyes on his while speaking; and I saw there a passing gleam of fury: for a moment I expected he was about to spring at my throat. He spoke quickly. 'The letters,' said he in a short tone. I handed them to him."

"How," cried Père Tabaret, "these letters—the true ones? How imprudent!"

"And why?"

"If he had—I don't know; but—" the old fellow hesitated. The advocate leaned his powerful hand upon the old man's shoulder.

"I was there," said he in a hollow tone; "and I promise you the letters were in no danger."

Noel's features assumed such a sudden expression of ferocity that the old fellow was terrified, and recoiled instinctively.

"He would have killed him," thought he.

The advocate resumed.

"That which I have done for you this evening, my friend, I did for the viscount. I obviated, at least for the moment the necessity of reading all of these hundred and fifty-six letters, by directing his attention to those marked with a cross, and to the passages of most especial importance, indicated with a red pencil."

"It was an abridgement of his penance," said Père Tabaret.

"He was seated," continued Noel, "before a little table, too fragile even to lean upon. I was resting against the mantelpiece. I followed his slightest movements; and I scanned his features closely. Never in my life have I seen so sad a spectacle. I shall never forget it, were I to live a thousand years. In less than five min-

utes his face changed to a degree that his own valet would not have recognized him. He held his handkerchief in his hand, with which from time to time mechanically he wiped his lips; and, as he read, the lips became as white as the handkerchief. Large drops of sweat stood upon his forehead; and his eyes became dull and clouded, as if a film had covered them: but not an exclamation, not a sign, not a groan, escaped him, not even a gesture. At one moment, I felt such pity for him that I was almost on the point of snatching the letters from his hands, throwing them into the fire, and taking him in my arms, crying, 'No, you are my brother! Forget all; let us remain each one in his place! Let us love one another.'"

Père Tabaret took Noel's hand, and pressed it.

"Ah!" cried he, "I recognize my generous boy."

"If I have not done this, my friend, it is because I said to myself, 'These letters burned, would he recognize me as his brother?'"

"Ay!" sighed Père Tabaret, "it is true."

"In about half an hour, he had finished reading: he arose, and facing me directly, said, 'You are right, monsieur. If these letters are really written by my father, as I believe them to be, they distinctly prove that I am not the son of the Countess de Commarin.' I did not answer. 'Meanwhile,' continued he, 'these are only presumptions. Are you possessed of other proofs?' I expected, of course, a great many other objections. 'Germain,' said I, 'can speak.' He told me that Germain had been dead for several years. Then I spoke of the nurse, the Widow Lerouge. I explained how easily she could be found and questioned, adding that she lived at la Jonchère."

"And what said he, Noel, to this?" demanded Père Tabaret anxiously.

"He preserved a moment's silence, and appeared to reflect. All on a sudden he struck his forehead, and said, 'I remember; I know her. I have accompanied my father to her house three times, and have seen him give her considerable sums of money.'"

"I remarked to him that this was yet another proof. He made no answer, but went out as if to look for something in the adjoining room. He returned after some minutes,—

"'Monsieur, said he, can I meet the legitimate son of the count, my father?' I answered, 'You see him before you, monsieur!' He bowed his head, and murmured, 'I knew it was he.' He took my hand, and added, 'Brother, I bear you no grudge for the step you have taken. All I ask of you is, to wait eight or ten days, when my father will return. I will explain every thing to him; and I promise you that justice shall be done. I, on my side, lose everything,—name, position, fortune, and, worse than all, I shall probably lose my plighted bride, Mademoiselle d'Arlanges, who is dearer to me than life itself. In exchange, it is true I shall find a mother. I will labor to console her for your loss, monsieur, and win her love by tenderness and devotion.'"

"Did he really say that?"

"Almost word for word."

"Hypocrite!" growled the old fellow between his teeth.

"What did you say?" asked Noel.

"I say that he is a fine young man; and I shall be delighted to make his acquaintance."

"I did not show him the letter referring to the rupture," added Noel; "so that he is ignorant of Madame Gerdy's misconduct. I voluntarily deprived myself of this proof, rather than give him further pain."

"And now?"

"What am I to do? I am waiting the count's return. I shall act more freely after hearing what he has to say. To-morrow I shall demand permission from the tribunals to examine the papers belonging to Claudine. If I find the letters, I am saved; if not,—but, as I have told you, I have taken no step since I knew of this assassination. Now, what is your advice?"

"The briefest counsel demands long reflection," replied the old fellow, who was in haste to depart. "Alas! my poor boy, what a fate yours has been!"

"Terrible! and, in addition to all this distraction, I have pecuniary embarrassments."

"How! you who spend nothing?"

"I have advanced large sums on mortgages. I might make use of Madame Gerdy's fortune, which I have hitherto used as my own; but no, I could not bring myself to it."

"You certainly ought not; but hold! I am glad you spoke of money: you can render me a service."

"Very willingly; in what way?"

"I have in my secretary twelve or fifteen thousand francs, which trouble me exceedingly, you can easily understand why. I am an old man, weak and defenceless. If any one knew I had this money—"

"You are certainly imprudent in running such a risk," acknowledged the advocate.

"Then," said the old fellow, "to-morrow I will give them to you to take care of."

But remembering he was about to put himself at M.

Daburon's disposal, and that perhaps he might not be free on the morrow, he said,—

"But no, I will not wait until to-morrow. This infernal money shall not remain another night in my keeping."

He darted out, and presently reappeared, holding in his hand fifteen bank bills of a thousand francs each.

"If that is not sufficient for the present," said he, handing them to Noel, "you can have more."

"I will give you a receipt," said the advocate.

"Time enough to-morrow."

"And if I die to-night?"

"Then," said the old fellow to himself, thinking of his will, "some one else will have to be my heir. Good-night!" said he aloud: "you have asked my advice; I shall require the night for reflection. At present my brain is whirling; I must go out into the air. If I go to bed now, I shall have a horrible nightmare. Good-night, my boy; patience and courage. Who knows whether at this very hour Providence is not working for you?"

He went out; and Noel, leaving his door open, listened to the sound of his footsteps as he descended the stairs. Almost immediately the cry of, "Open, if you please," and the banging of the door apprised him that Père Tabaret was in the street.

He waited a few minutes and refilled his lamp, then took a small packet from one of his bureau drawers, slipped into his pockets the bank bills given him by his old friend, and quitted his study, of which he locked the door. On the landing of the staircase he paused. He listened so intently that even Madame Gerdy's moans were audible to him. Hearing nothing else, he descended on tiptoe. A minute later he was in the street.

CHAPTER V.

COMMUNICATING with Madame Gerdy's apartments was a room on the ground floor, formerly a coach house, but used by her as a lumber room. Here were heaped together all the old rubbish of the household,—utensils past service, articles become useless or cumbrous. Here were also stored the provision of wood and coal for winter fuel.

This old coach house had a small door opening on the street, which had been nailed up many years ago; but Noel had secretly repaired this door, provided it with a lock, of which he kept the key, and by its means was enabled to enter or leave the house at any hour, without the porter's knowledge.

By this door the advocate went out, using the utmost caution in opening and closing it.

When in the street, he remained a moment stationary, as if hesitating which way to go. Then, turning his steps towards the railway depot of St. Lazare, he hailed a passing cab.

"Rue Faubourg Montmarte, at the corner of the Rue Provence, and make haste," said Noel, entering the vehicle.

At the spot named, the advocate alighted, and dismissed his coachman. Waiting until he had departed, Noel turned into the Rue Provence, and, after walking a few steps, rang the door-bell of one of the handsomest houses in the street.

The door was immediately opened.

When Noel passed before the *loge*, the porter made him a bow, at once respectful and patronizing,—one of

those salutations which Parisian porters reserve for patrons of open hands and well-filled purses.

Arrived at the second floor, the advocate paused, drew a key from his pocket, and entered as if at home.

At the sound of the key in the lock, a young and pretty waiting woman, with a bold pair of eyes, ran towards him.

"Ah, monsieur!" cried she.

This exclamation escaped her just loud enough to be audible at the extremity of the apartment, and serve as a signal, if needed. It was as if she cried, "Take care!" Noel did not seem to remark it.

"Madame is there?" asked he.

"Yes, monsieur, and very angry, too, I can tell you. This morning she wanted me to go in search of you. A little while ago, she spoke of going herself. I have had much difficulty, monsieur, in not disobeying your orders."

"Very well," said the advocate.

"Madame is in the smoking room," continued the soubrette. "I am making her a cup of tea. Will monsieur have one?"

"Yes," replied Noel, "light me, Charlotte."

They passed through successively a magnificent dining room, a splendid *salon doré* in the style of Louis the XIV., and entered the smoking room.

This was a rather large apartment, of which the ceiling was remarkably elevated. On entering it, the visitor might easily imagine himself three thousand miles from Paris, in the house of some opulent mandarin of the celestial empire of China. Furniture, carpets, hangings, pictures,—all had evidently been imported direct from Hongkong or Shanghai.

A rick silk tapestry, representing highly colored fig-

ures, clothed the walls and hung before the doors. All the empire of the sun and moon there defiled before the spectator. Corpulent mandarins, disported themselves in vermilion landscapes, or, surrounded by lanterns, lay stupefied with opium, sleeping under their parasols. Young girls, with almond shaped eyes elevated at the outer corners, stumbled upon their diminutive feet, swathed in bandalettes.

The carpet of a tissue, the secret of which is unknown in Europe, was strewn with fruits and flowers, whose perfect resemblance to natural objects might have deceived a bee. On the silken canopy, which hid the ceiling, some great artist of Pekin had painted fantastic birds, opening on a ground of azure their wings of purple and of gold.

Slender rods of lacquer, encrusted with mother of pearl, held the draperies in place, and marked the angles of the apartment.

Two fantastic chests occupied one side of the room. Furniture of capricious and incoherent forms, tables with porcelain tops, and chiffoniers of precious woods encumbered every recess or angle.

Then there were ornamental nic-nacs, purchased in the bazars of Lien Tsi, le Tahan, from Sou-Tcheou, the artistic city,—a thousand curiosities impossible and expensive, from the ivory chop stick, which take the place of our forks, to the tea-cups of porcelain, thinner than soap bubbles,—miracles of the reign of Kien Loung.

A divan, very large and very low, piled up with cushions covered with tapestry similar to the hangings, ran along the back of the room. There was no window ; but instead a large looking-glass, reaching from floor to ceiling, was let into the wall. in front of which was a double door of glass with movable panes. The space

between this glass door and the mirror was filled with plants and rare exotics; which, being reflected in the mirror, presented the optical illusion of a conservatory.

The absent fireplace and chimney was replaced by registers adroitly concealed, which maintained a temperature in the apartment that seemed to make the flowers blow upon the silk, truly harmonizing with the furnishing of this luxurious abode.

When Noel entered, a young woman was lying on the divan, smoking a cigarette. In spite of the tropical heat, she was enveloped in great shawls of magnificent cashmere.

She was petite, and united in her small figure all the physical beauties in such perfection as only small women can. Women who are above the medium height are either essays, or errors of nature. If handsome, they invariably present some defect; like the work of a sculptor, whose faults, unnoticed when presented in a statuette, become glaring when exhibited in a colossal figure.

She was small; but her neck, her shoulders, and her arms had the most exquisite contours. Her hands, small and plump, even to the retroussé finger tips and rosy nails, were of marvellous beauty, and seemed preciously cared for. Her feet, encased in silken stockings almost as thin as a cobweb, were a marvel; not that they recalled the fabled foot which Cinderella thrust into the glassy slipper; but that other foot,—more real, more palpable, though less celebrated,—of which the fair owner (the wife of a well-known banker) used to present the model to her admirers in bronze or in marble.

Her face was not beautiful, nor even pretty: but her features were such as one never forgets; for, at the first

glance, they startled the beholder like a flash of lightning. Her forehead was a little high, and her mouth unmistakably large, notwithstanding the provoking freshness of her lips. Her eyebrows seemed to have been drawn with Chinese ink; but, unhappily the pencil had been used too heavily; and they gave her an unpleasant expression when she frowned. In revenge for these defects, her smooth complexion had a rich golden pallor; and her black and velvety eyes possessed enormous magnetic power. Her teeth were sound and of a pearly brilliancy and whiteness; and her hair, of prodigious opulence, was black and waving, and glossy as a raven's wing.

On perceiving Noel, as he drew aside the silken curtain which served as a door, she half-rose and leaned upon her elbow.

"So you have come at last?" said she in a tone of vexation: "we ought to be very happy!"

The advocate was almost suffocated by the oppressive temperature of the room.

"How warm it is!" said he; "it is enough to stifle one!"

"Do you find it warm?" replied the young woman. "Well, that shows the extent of my suffering! I am shivering: but it's your fault; you know that waiting is insupportable to me. It acts upon my nerves; and I have waited for you since yesterday."

"It has been impossible for me to come," said Noel,—
"impossible!"

"You know perfectly well," continued the lady, "that to-day was my settling day; and I have had quite a number of bills to pay. The upholsterer came. Not a sou to give him. The coachmaker sent his bill. No money: call again! then this old swindler who holds my

note for three thousand francs,—he has been here, making a frightful row! All this is agreeable, is it not?”

Noel bowed his head like a truant school-boy, undergoing the pedagogue's rebuke.

“It is but one day behind,” murmured he.

“One day behind!” retorted the young woman; “and is that nothing? A man who respects himself may permit his own note to be protested, if he will; but that of his mistress, never!”

“For what do you take me?” continued she, working herself into a passion. “Do you forget that I receive no consideration from you except money? Very well, since I am to have nothing else, I will have that at all events; and the day it is not forthcoming, I bid you good-by.”

“My dear Juliette!—” began the advocate, gently.

“Oh, yes! that's all very fine; but I have heard it all before,” interrupted she. “Your dear Juliette! your adored Juliette! and, as long as you are face to face with Juliette, she is an angel, if she would allow you to make a fool of her: but, no sooner have you turned your back upon Juliette, than she is given to the winds; and you never take the trouble even to remember that there is such a person as Juliette!”

“How unjust you are!” replied Noel. “As if you are not well assured that I am always thinking of you. Have I not proved it to you a thousand times? Hold! I am going to prove it to you again this instant.”

So saying, he produced the small packet he had taken from his bureau, and, opening it, showed her a handsome velvet casket.

“See!” said he, exultingly, “the bracelet you wished for so much, eight days ago, at M. Beaugrau's.”

Madame Juliette, without rising, held out her hand to take the jewel case, and, opening it with the utmost

nonchalance, glanced at the magnificent bauble; then, closing the casket, she threw it carelessly upon a little table near her, saying, —

“It looked much prettier in the shop window.”

“I am unfortunate, this evening,” said the advocate, apparently much mortified at the reception of his costly present.

“Unfortunate, my friend? Indeed, how so?”

“I see plainly the bracelet does not please you.”

“Oh, yes! it is very pretty; at all events, it will complete the two dozen.”

At this Noel almost lost patience: but he controlled himself; and, as she was silent, he went on,—

“You exhibit little sign of gratification.”

“Oh! indeed!” cried the lady. “I am not grateful enough! I am not sufficiently profuse in my acknowledgments, to please my generous benefactor? You bring me a present, and expect instant payment. I am to fill the house with cries of joy, and throw myself upon my knees before your feet, calling you a great and magnificent seigneur!”

Noel was unable this time to restrain a gesture of impatience; which Juliette perceived plainly enough, to her great delight.

“Is that sufficient?” continued she. “Or must I call Charlotte to admire this superb monument of your generosity? Shall I run down stairs to exhibit it to the porter? shall I go into the kitchen and dazzle the eyes of my cook, and ask her if I ought not to be happy in the possession of a lover so unboundedly munificent?”

The advocate raised his shoulders like a philosopher, unable to answer the jests of a child.

“A truce to these cutting witticisms,” said he. “If

you have any complaint against me, better to say so simply and seriously."

"So be it," said Juliette, quickly, changing her manner. "Let us be serious. And, being so, let me tell you it would have been better to have forgotten the bracelet, and remembered the eight thousand francs of which I have such pressing need."

"I could not come."

"You might send; there are messengers at the street-corners."

"If I have neither brought nor sent them, my dear Juliette, it was because I did not have the amount. I have trouble enough in getting a promise of it to-morrow. If I have the sum this evening, I owe it to a chance upon which I could not have counted an hour ago; and I have brought it to you to-night, at the risk of compromising myself."

"Poor man!" said Juliette, in a tone of pity; then incredulously, "do you dare to tell me you have had difficulty in finding ten thousand francs,—you?"

"Yes," replied Noel, calmly, "I!"

The young woman looked at her lover, and burst into a fit of laughter.

"You are superb in the rôle of poor young man!" said Juliette scornfully.

"It is not a rôle," said Noel stolidly.

"What do you say?" exclaimed she; "but I see what we are coming to. This amiable confession is the preface. To-morrow you will be very much embarrassed; and the day after to-morrow you will be ruined! Avarice is the name of the complaint that afflicts you, my friend. Do you not feel a pang of remorse for all the money you have lavished upon me?"

"Selfish woman!" murmured Noel, angrily.

"Truly," continued the lady, "I pity you, unfortunate lover! Shall I get up a subscription for you? In your place, I should issue an appeal to the benevolent."

Noel lost his temper, in spite of his resolution.

"You think it a laughing matter?" asked he bitterly. "Well, understand me, Juliette; I am at the end of my expedients. I have exhausted my resources! I am ruined!"

The eyes of the young woman brightened. She regarded her lover tenderly.

"Oh, if 'twas only true!" said she. "If I could only believe you!"

The advocate was wounded to the heart.

"She believes me," thought he; "and she is glad: she detests me."

He was deceived. Madame Juliette never loved him so well as at that moment. The idea that he had loved her to the extent of ruining himself for her, without even a reproach for her extravagance, almost transported her with joy. It was but for a moment, however. She became immediately incredulous. The expression of her eyes changed quickly.

"What a fool you must think me, to come with your romantic stories of ruin, and expect me to believe them! No, no, my friend; such men as you do not ruin themselves. It is your vain young coxcombs and your drivelling old dotards who ruin themselves for their mistresses. You are a very gay young spark; but you never lose your senses. You are very grave and prudent, and, above all, very strong."

"Not with you," murmured Noel.

"Pshaw! then leave me alone. You know well what you are about. Instead of a heart, you have a calculating

machine. You have taken a fancy to me, and appraised me. You have said to yourself, 'I can afford to pay this passion so much;' and you hold yourself to your word. It is an investment, like any other, in which one receives a certain amount of interest agreed upon. You are capable of all the folly and extravagance in the world that does not go beyond your limit of four thousand francs a month! If it runs twenty sous over the amount fixed, you take up your heart and your hat, and carry them somewhere else."

"It is true," answered Noel, coolly. "I know how to count; and that accomplishment is very useful to me now, since it enables me to know how and where I have spent my fortune."

"Do you really know?" sneered Juliette.

"And I can tell you," continued he. "At first, you were not exacting; but the appetite came with eating. You wished for luxury; you had it; splendid furniture; I gave it: extravagant toilettes, a house in the Rue Provence, with a marble staircase in front, a carriage, a pair of English horses: I responded, I denied you nothing. You had every thing you desired. I speak not of a thousand fantasies. I include neither this Chinese cabinet nor the two dozen bracelets. The total is four hundred thousand francs!"

"Are you sure?"

"As one can be who has had that amount, and has it no longer."

"Four hundred thousand francs, just? Are there no centimes?"

"No."

"There, my dear friend, I will present you with the bills duly receipted; and you will be satisfied."

The entrance of the waiting woman with the tea-tray interrupted this amorous duet, of which Noel had experienced more than one repetition.

Madame Juliette Chaffour was a Parisienne. She was born about 1839, in the highest apartment of a house in the Faubourg Montmartre. Her mother was a beauty of some note in her day. Her father was unknown. Her infancy was a long alternation of beatings and caresses, equally furious; and she was fed on sugar plums, sour wine, and damaged fruit: so that her stomach was as depraved as her intelligence. At twelve years old, she was meagre as a nail, and green as a June apple; and, as for her mental training, a strict moralist would have considered her a precocious little wretch, totally destitute of principle.

As she gave no promise of beauty, she was placed in a store, to study the art and mystery of selling ribbons and laces; when a wealthy and highly respectable gentleman,—an old friend of her mamma's many years ago,—accorded her his protection. This prudent old gentleman was a connoisseur, and detected the promise of charms, where others saw only indications of ugliness. He sent his protégé to a school, to receive a varnish of education. Here she learned to read and write very badly, to play the piano tolerably, and to waltz to such perfection that she turned the head of a foreign ambassador, whom her old protector brought to see her at one of his visits.

When the old gentleman came to take her from the seminary, he found she had been taken away already, by a young artist, who offered her half of every thing he possessed; that is to say, nothing. At the end of three months, she quitted the studio of her artistic admirer,

with her entire wardrobe tied up in a cotton pocket handkerchief.

During the four years which followed, she led a precarious existence,—sometimes with little else to live upon but Hope, which never wholly abandons a young girl who knows she has good eyes. By turns she sunk to the bottom, and again rose to the surface of the stream down which she was being carried. But she was reckless and imprudent. Twice had fortune in fresh gloves come knocking at her door; and she had not the sense to seize him by the skirt of his paletot.

With the assistance of a captain of a coasting vessel, she managed to get an appearance at a small theatre, and acquitted herself adroitly enough in the trifling rôles entrusted to her; when Noel, by the merest accident, encountered her. He loved her; and she became his mistress.

The advocate did not displease her at first. She admired him for his polite manners, his distinguished air, his learning, his knowledge of the world, his contempt for all that was unworthy, and, above all, for his unalterable patience, which nothing could tire. Soon, however, she began to discover qualities to her less admirable. He was not amusing. He never made her laugh. He absolutely refused to accompany her to any of the numerous places of amusement where gaiety puts on her holiday garb and laughter reigns supreme. For absolute lack of employment, she began to squander money; and, in proportion to the gratification of her extravagant desires and the sacrifices made by her lover, her aversion to him increased.

She rendered him the most miserable of men, and treated him like a very dog; and this not from natural

badness of disposition, but from a firm belief in the precept,—the only one ever taught her by her mamma,—that a woman is beloved in proportion to the trouble she causes and the mischief she does.

Juliette was not wicked; and she believed she had much to complain of. The dream of her life was to be loved in a way which she felt, but could scarcely have explained. She had never been to her lover more than a plaything. She understood this; and, as she was naturally proud, the idea enraged her. She dreamed of a lover who would be devoted enough to make a real sacrifice for her,—who would descend to her level, instead of attempting to raise her to his. She despaired of meeting such a man.

Noel's extravagance, instead of melting her heart, hardened it. She believed he was very rich, and actually resented his liberality as the insolence of wealth; for, strange to say, in spite of her extravagance, she cared little for money. Noel would have been an immense gainer by an outspoken frankness that would have shown her clearly his situation. He lost her love by the delicacy of his dissimulation, that left her ignorant of the sacrifices he was making for her.

Noel adored Juliette. Until the fatal day he saw her, he had been a sage, a model of prudence and integrity. This, his first and only passion, burned him up; and, from the disaster, he saved only appearances. The four walls remained standing; but the interior of the edifice was destroyed. Even heroes have their vulnerable parts. Achilles was wounded in the heel. The most artfully constructed armor has a joint somewhere. By Juliette, Noel was assailable; and her entrance made way for every thing. For her, in four years, this model young man, this advocate of the immaculate reputation, this

austere moralist, had wasted not only his own fortune, but Madame Gerdy's also.

He loved Juliette madly, without reflection, without measure, with his eyes shut. Near her, he forgot all prudence, and became reckless of consequences. In her boudoir, he dropped his mask of habitual dissimulation, and his vices displayed themselves at ease, as his limbs in a bath.

He felt himself so powerless against her that he never essayed to struggle. She possessed him. Once or twice he had attempted to firmly oppose her caprices; but she had made him pliable as the osier. Under the dark glances of this girl, his strongest resolutions melted more quickly than snow beneath the April sun. She tortured him; but she had also the power to repay him for all,—by a word, a smile, a single tear, or a caress.

Away from the enchantress, reason returned at intervals; and, in his lucid moments, he said to himself, "She does not love me. She is amusing herself with my folly, and laughing at my infatuation." But her love had taken such deep root in his heart that he could not pluck it forth. He made himself a monster of jealousy, to torture him still more, and was constantly occupied in arguments within himself respecting her fidelity. But he never had the courage to declare his suspicions. "I should either have to leave her," thought he, "or accept every thing in the future." At the idea of a separation from her, he trembled, and felt his passion strong enough to compel him to submit to the lowest indignity. He preferred even his desolating doubts to a still more dreadful certainty.

The presence of the maid who took a considerable time in arranging the tea-table gave Noel an opportunity to recover himself. He looked at Juliette; and his anger

took flight. Already he began to fear he had been a little cruel to her.

When Charlotte retired, he came and took a seat on the divan beside his mistress, and attempted to put his arms round her.

"Come," said he in a caressing tone, "you have been angry enough for this evening. If I have done wrong, you have punished me sufficiently. Make peace, and embrace me." She repulsed him angrily, and said in a dry tone,—

"Let me alone! How many times must I repeat, that I am suffering from nervousness this evening."

"Suffer, my love? what ails you? shall I bring the doctor?"

"There is no need. I know the nature of my malady. It is called ennui; and the doctor cannot cure me."

Noël rose with a discouraged air, and took his place at the other side of the tea-table, facing her. His resignation bespoke how habituated he had become to these rebuffs. Juliette snubbed him; but he returned always, like the poor dog who lies in wait for the instant when his caresses may not be inopportune.

"You have told me very often, during the last few months, that you feel ennui. What have I done to you?"

"Nothing."

"Well, why then"—?

"My life is nothing more than a long imprisonment," answered the young woman with flashing eyes. "Do you think it very amusing to be shut up here all alone until you come in, like a mute at a funeral? Look at yourself,—sad, disagreeable, restless, suspicious, devoured by a prying jealousy!"

"Your reception of me, my dear Juliette, this evening," ventured Noel, "was enough to extinguish gaiety and freeze good humor; and, as for my jealousy, one fears where one loves."

"Thank you, monsieur. I am the occasion of your sad looks and grave speeches! Go, then, and find another woman expressly formed to suit your ideas, and, if you cannot find her, have one made to order; and, when you get her, then shut her up in a cave, and show her to yourself once a day, after dinner, with the dessert, when the champagne is on the table. That's your idea of happiness, is it?"

"I should have done better not to have come," murmured the advocate.

"Indeed! That I might remain alone here, without any thing to occupy me except a cigarette and a stupid book, that I go to sleep over? Do you call this an existence, even, never to budge out of the house?"

"It is the life of all the honest women that I know," replied the advocate, dryly.

"Then I cannot compliment them on their enjoyment. They merit all the respect they gain by being honest women, if they have no more amusement than that. Happily for me, however, I am not an honest woman; although I might as well be, housed up more closely than the wife of a Turk, with your sorrowful face for my only distraction."

"You housed up? You live in a prison, you?"

"Yes, I!" continued Juliette, with eager opposition. "Let us see. Have you ever brought one of your friends here? No. Monsieur hides me. When have you offered me your arm for a promenade? Never. Monsieur's dignity would be sullied, if he were seen in my company. I

have a carriage. Have you entered it three times? Perhaps; but then you pulled up the blinds! I ride out alone. I promenade alone."

"Always the same refrain," interrupted Noel, his anger beginning to rise, "without ceasing these discontented complainings, as if you had yet to learn the reason why this state of things exists."

"I am not ignorant," pursued the young girl, "that you blush for me. I know, at the same time, men who carry higher crests than yours who willingly show themselves by the side of their mistresses. Monsieur trembles for the fine name of Gerdy that I am tarnishing; whilst the sons of the greatest families in France are not afraid to proclaim their preferences to all the world."

This home-thrust enraged Noel, to the great delight of Madame Chaffour.

"Enough of these recriminations!" cried he, rising. "If I hide our relations, it is because I am constrained to do so. Of what do you complain? You have unrestrained liberty; and you use it, too, and so largely that your actions altogether escape me. You accuse me of creating a vacuum around you. I bring no friends to visit you. Am I to blame for the circumstances of my position? My friends have been accustomed to see me in a home whose aspect speaks of modest competence, not unrestrained extravagance. Can I bring them here, to be astonished by your luxury, by this suite of apartments,—a monument of my folly? Would they not inquire of me, from whom have I taken the money that maintains this mad profusion?"

"I may have a preference: granted; but I have no right to throw away a fortune which is not my own. The day it becomes known that my folly enables you to pursue your career of extravagance, my future pros-

pects are destroyed. What client would confide his interests to an imbecile who permitted himself to be ruined by the woman whose toilettes are the talk of Paris? I am not a noble. I have neither an historical name to tarnish nor an immense fortune to lose. I am Noel Gerdy, advocate. My reputation is all that I possess. It is a false reputation, you will say. Be it so. Such as it is, it is necessary to me; and I will endeavor to keep it."

Juliette knew Noel by heart. She saw that she had gone far enough.

"My friend," said she, tenderly, "I do not wish to pain you. You must be indulgent. I am horribly nervous this evening."

This simple change of tone delighted the advocate, and sufficed almost to calm his anger.

"You drive me mad with your injustice," said he. "While I exhaust my imagination to find what can be agreeable to you, you are perpetually attacking my gravity; and forty-eight hours have not elapsed since we were plunged in all the extravagance of the carnival. To please you, I kept the fête of Shrove Tuesday like a student. I took you to the theatre; I put on a domino, and accompanied you to the ball at the opera, and even invited two of my friends to sup with us."

"It was very gay indeed," answered the young girl, making a wry face.

"So it seemed to me."

"Did it, indeed? Then you are not difficult to please. We went to the Vaudeville, it is true, but separately, as we always do,—I alone above, you below. At the ball, you looked the very picture of misery; and, at the supper-table, your friends were as melancholy as a pair of owls. I obeyed your orders, by affecting hardly to know you; and, by the way, although you drank like a sponge,

I could not see that you became a whit more cheerful, even when you were drunk."

"A proof," interrupted Noel, "that we ought not to force our tastes. Let us talk of something else."

He took a few steps in the room, and looked at his watch.

"An hour gone already," said he. "My love, I must leave you."

"How, already?"

"Yes, to my great regret: my mother is dangerously sick."

He displayed, and counted on the table, the bankbills given him by Père Tabaret.

"My petite Juliette," said he, "here are not eight thousand francs, but ten thousand. You will not see me again for some days."

"You are going to leave Paris, then?"

"No; but my entire time will be absorbed by an affair of immense importance. If I succeed in my undertaking, mignonne, our future happiness is assured; and you will soon see how well I love you!"

"Oh, my dear Noel, tell me what it is."

"I cannot, now."

"Tell me, I beseech you," pleaded the young girl, hanging round his neck, raising herself upon the points of her toes to approach her lips to his. The advocate embraced her; and his resolution seemed to waver.

"No," said he, at length, "I am serious, I cannot. Of what use to awaken in you hopes that may never be realized? Now, my cherished, hear me well. Whatever may happen, understand, you must under no pretext whatever again come near my house, as you had once the imprudence to do. Do not even write to me. By disobeying, you may do me an irreparable injury. If any

accident occurs, send for me by this old extortioner, Clergeot. I ought to have a visit from him to-morrow, or the day after; he holds notes of mine."

Juliette recoiled, menacing Noel with a mutinous gesture.

"You will not tell me any thing?" insisted she.

"Not this evening; but shortly I will tell you every thing," replied the advocate embarrassed by the piercing glances of her dark eyes.

"Always some mystery!" cried Juliette, piqued at the want of success attending her blandishments.

"This will be the last, I swear to you!"

"Noel, my good man," said the young girl in a serious tone, "you are hiding something from me: I know it; I read it in your face. For several days,—how I cannot precisely explain,—you have been completely changed."

"I swear to you, Juliette—"

"No, swear nothing; I should not believe you. Only remember, no attempt at deceiving me, I forewarn you. I am a woman to revenge myself."

The advocate evidently was ill at ease.

"The affair in question," stammered he, "can as well fail as succeed."

"Enough!" interrupted Juliette; "your will shall be obeyed. I promise that. All right, monsieur. Good-night. I am going to bed."

The door was not shut upon Noel when Charlotte was installed on the divan, near her mistress. Had the advocate been listening at the door, he would have heard Madame Juliette say,—

"What a scene! No, Charlotte, I can endure him no longer. I am afraid of him. He is capable of killing me! I can see it in his glance."

The soubrette vainly tried to defend Noel; but her mistress did not listen. She murmured,—

“Why does he absent himself? and what is he plotting? Some mischief, I am sure. An absence of eight days! It is suspicious. Can he by any chance be going to be married? Ah! if I knew it. You weary me to death, my good Noel, with your gravity and your jealousy; and I am determined to break with you one of these fine mornings; but I cannot permit you to quit me first. I cannot allow you to get married, and dismiss me. No, no, my mysterious friend, I must have some information about your business of immense importance.”

But Noel did not listen at the door. He left the house in haste, descended the Rue Provence as quickly as possible, gained the Rue St. Lazare, and entered as he had departed,—by the secret door. He had hardly reached his study, when the nurse knocked at the door.

“Monsieur,” said the woman, “in the name of heaven, answer me!”

He opened the door, and said with impatience, “What is it now?”

“Monsieur,” stammered the servant in tears, “this is the third time I have called, and you have not answered. Come, I implore you. I am afraid madame is dying!”

He followed the nurse to Madame Gerdy’s chamber. He must have found her terribly changed; for he could not restrain a movement of terror.

The sick woman struggled painfully beneath her coverings. Her face was of a livid paleness, as though there was not a drop of blood in her veins; and her eyes, which glittered with a sombre fire, seemed covered with a film. Her hair, loose and disordered, falling over her cheeks and upon her shoulders, contributed to her wild appearance. She uttered from time to time a groan

hardly audible, or murmured unintelligible words. At times, a fiercer pang than common forced from her a cry of anguish. She did not recognize Noel.

"You see, monsieur," said the nurse.

"Yes. Who would have believed her malady could advance so rapidly? Quick, run to Dr. Hervé! he will come immediately, when you tell him it is for me."

And he seated himself in the arm-chair, facing the sick woman.

Doctor Hervé was one of Noel's friends,—an old school-fellow, his companion of the Quartier Latin, in his student days. The doctor's history differed in nothing from that of most young men, who, without fortune, friends, or influence, enter upon the practice of the most difficult, the most hazardous of professions in Paris.

A man of remarkable courage and self-reliance, conscious of possessing superior talent, Hervé determined neither to exile himself in a country village, nor place himself under the control of some unprincipled dealer in drugs, as many of his companions were reduced to the necessity of doing, to gain a bare subsistence. "I will remain in Paris," said he to himself; "I will there become celebrated. I shall be surgeon-in-chief of the hospital, and wear the cross of the legion of honor."

To enter upon this path of thorns, leading to an arch of triumph, the future academician ran himself twenty thousand francs in debt to furnish a small office. Here, armed with a patience which nothing could fatigue, an iron resolution that nothing could subdue, he struggled and waited. Only those who have experienced it can understand what sufferings are endured by the poor, proud man, who waits in a black coat, freshly shaven, with smiling lips, while he is starving of hunger. The refinements of civilization have inaugurated punish-

ments compared to which the torture practised on his victim by the savage Indian is mercy.

The unknown physician must begin by attending the sick beds of the poor who cannot pay him, becoming known to the mass of human beings who take advantage of the needs of their fellow-men. He is called in by a citizen of the better class, to save the expense of employing a more thriving practitioner. The sick man is profuse in promises, while he is in danger; but, when cured, he recovers the use of his faculties and forgets the doctor's fee.

After seven years of heroic perseverance, Hervé obtained at last a circle of patients who paid his fees. During this time, he had lived and paid the exorbitant interest of his debt; but he had succeeded at last. Three or four pamphlets and a prize won without much intrigue, attracted public attention to him. He became the great, the famous physician of Paris.

But he is no longer the brave young enthusiast, full of the faith and hope that attended him in his visits to the poor, whose lives he saved without other payment than their prayers. He comes now to the rich man's sick bed, stronger and more self-reliant than ever, it is true, but neither hoping for nor rejoicing in success. He had used up those feelings in the days when he had not wherewith to pay for his dinner. For his great fortune in the time to come, he had paid too dearly in the past; and now to attain success is to take a revenge. At thirty-five, he is blasé, filled with disgust at the deceptions of the world and believing in nothing. Under the appearance of universal benevolence, he conceals universal scorn. His finesse, sharpened by the grindstone of adversity, has become mischievous. And, while he sees through all disguises worn by others, he hides his pene-

tration carefully under a mask of cheerful good-nature and jovial lightness.

But he was good, he was devout, and he loved his friends.

He arrived, hardly dressed, so great had been his haste. His first word on entering was,—

“What is the matter with him?”

Noel pressed his hand in silence, and pointed to the bed.

In less than a minute, the doctor completed his examination of the sick woman, and returned to his friend.

“What has happened to her?” demanded he shortly.

“It is necessary I should know.”

The advocate started at this question.

“Know what?” stammered he.

“All,” answered Hervé. “This is a case of encephalite. I cannot be mistaken in the symptoms. It is an uncommon malady, and generally fatal. Even when the life of the patient is saved, the functions of the brain usually remain arrested. Who can have occasioned this? There is no local injury to the brain or its bony covering. The mischief has been caused by some violent emotion of the soul,—a shock, the intelligence of some catastrophe!”

Noel interrupted his friend by a gesture, and drew him into the embrasure of the window.

“Yes, my friend,” said he in a low tone, “Madame Gerdy has experienced great mental suffering. She has been tortured by remorse for crime, and apprehension of discovery. Listen, Hervé. I will confide to your honor and our friendship a secret. Madame Gerdy is not my mother. She has despoiled me, to enrich her son with my fortune and my name. Three weeks have elapsed since my discovery of this unworthy fraud. This

discovery was the shock you have suspected. Since then, she has been dying minute by minute."

The advocate expected some exclamations of astonishment, some questions regarding the particulars of this singular history, from his friend; but the doctor received the explanation without remark, as a simple statement, indispensable to his understanding the case.

"Three weeks," murmured he; "that explains every thing. Has she appeared to suffer much during the time?"

"She complained of violent pains in the head, dimness of sight, and a noise as of the surging of water in her ears; but do not conceal any thing from me, Hervé; is there serious danger?"

"So serious, my friend, that I am undertaking a hopeless task in attempting a cure."

"Ah! good heaven!"

"You asked for the truth, my friend; and I have had the courage to answer, because you tell me this poor woman is not your mother. Nothing short of a miracle can save her; but this miracle we may prepare for. And now to work."

CHAPTER VI.

ELEVEN o'clock was striking at the Terminus of St. Lazare, when Père Tabaret left his house, stunned and bewildered by the flood of information so unexpectedly poured upon him. Having been obliged to restrain himself while in Noel's presence, his sudden release to the freedom of speech and deportment was delightful. On gaining the street, he reeled like a drunkard when he first breathes the open air, after leaving the

heated atmosphere of the wine shop, so intense was the effect of the sudden revelations, just made by his friend Noel.

Notwithstanding his haste to arrive at M. Daburon's, he did not take a carriage. He felt the necessity of walking. He was one of those to whose brain exercise brings clearness. As he went along, his ideas clashed and shifted themselves, as grains of wheat when shaken in a basket. Without hastening his pace, he gained the Rue Chaussée d'Antin, crossed the boulevard with its resplendent cafés, and turned into the Rue Richelieu.

He walked along, unconscious of external objects, tripping and stumbling over the inequalities of the sidewalk, or slipping on the greasy pavement. If he followed the proper road, it was a purely mechanical impulse that guided him. His mind was following through the darkness the mysterious thread of which he had seized the almost imperceptible end at Jonchère.

Persons laboring under strong emotion frequently, without knowing it, utter their thoughts aloud, little thinking into what indiscreet ears their revelations or disjointed phrases may fall. At every step, we meet in Paris people babbling to themselves, and unconsciously confiding to the four winds of heaven their dearest secrets, like cracked vases that allow their contents to steal away. Often the passers by take these eccentric monologists for madmen. Often the idle or curious follow, and amuse themselves by receiving these strange confidences. It was an indiscretion of this kind which told the ruin of Riscara the rich banker. Lambreth, the assassin of the Rue Venise, betrayed himself in a similar manner.

"What a vein!" said Père Tabaret. "What an incredible piece of good fortune! Gevrol has well said,

that, after all, the cleverest agent of the police is chance. Who would have imagined such a history? I was not, however, very far from the reality. I smelt out an infant at the bottom of the mystery! But who would have dreamed of such a thing as the substitution?—an old sensational effect, used up long ago in plays and novels. This is a striking example of the danger of following preconceived ideas in police investigation. We are frightened at unlikelihood; and, as in this case, the greatest unlikelihood proves often to be the truth. We retreat before the absurd; and the absurd turns out to be the very thing we should examine. Every thing is possible.

“I would not take a thousand crowns for the experiences of this evening. I shall kill two birds with one stone. I deliver up the criminal; and I give Noel a hearty clap on the shoulder to recover his title and his fortune. For once I shall not be sorry to see a boy raised to fortune from the school of adversity. But, pshaw! he will be like all the rest. Prosperity will turn his head. Already he begins to prate of his ancestors. Poor humanity!” he burst into a fit of laughter. “It is my friend Madame Gerdy who has astonished me most of all,—a woman to whom I would have given absolution before waiting to hear confess; and then to think that I was on the point of asking her hand in marriage! What a narrow escape! B-r-r-r!”

At this thought, the old fellow shivered. He saw himself married, and all on a sudden discovering the antecedents of Madame Tabaret, becoming mixed up with a scandalous prosecution, compromised, and rendered ridiculous.

“When I think,” he went on laughing, as his thoughts took another direction,—“when I think of

my worthy Gevrol running after the man with the earrings in his ears! Ha, ha! Travel, my boy, travel! Voyages inform youth. How vexed he will be when he hears of this! He will wish me dead. I must jest with him a little, just a little. I cannot help it. If he wishes to do me any injury, M. Daburon must protect me. Talking of Daburon. Am I not going to take a thorn out of his foot. I can see him from this spot opening his eyes like saucers, when I say to him, 'I have the rascal!' This investigation will bring him honor, when all the credit is due to me. He will, at the least, receive the cross of honor. So much the better. He will come to me again, this judge. If he is asleep, I am going to give him an agreeable awaking. How he will overpower me with questions! How he will want to know the end, before I can relate the beginning!"

Père Tabaret, who was now crossing the bridge of St. Perè's, stopped suddenly. "Hold!" said he, "the details? I have not got them. I know the story only in the gross."

He continued his walk, and resumed,—“They are right at the office; I am too hasty. I am too fond of romancing, as Gevrol says. When I was with Noel I ought to have cross-examined him, until I extracted from him all those little points of evidence which now I can only guess at; but I was carried away. I drank in his words. I would willingly have had him tell the story in one sentence. But, after all, it is but natural. When one is in pursuit of a stag, he does not stop to shoot a blackbird. Besides, by insisting on minute particulars, I might have awakened suspicions in Noel's mind, and led him to discover that I am working up the case for the Rue Jerusalem. To be sure, I do not blush for my connection with the police; I am even vain of

it; but I love to think that no one suspects it,—to see how stupid people are in not knowing the police who protect and guard them. And now for the interview; for here we are at the end of our journey.”

M. Daburon had gone to bed, but had given orders to his servant; so that Père Tabaret had but to give his name, to be conducted to the magistrate’s sleeping-room.

At sight of his amateur agent, the judge addressed him quickly,—

“There is something extraordinary! What have you discovered? have you got a clew?”

“Better than that,” answered the old fellow, smiling at ease.

“Speak quickly!”

“I have got the culprit!”

Père Tabaret ought to have been satisfied; he certainly produced an effect. The judge bounded from his bed.

“Already?” said he. “Is it possible?”

“I have the honor to repeat to M. the judge of inquiry that I know the author of the crime of Jonchère.”

“And I,” said the judge,—“I proclaim you the most able of police agents past or future. I shall certainly never hereafter undertake an investigation without your assistance.”

“You are too kind, monsieur. I have had little or nothing to do in the matter. The discovery is due to chance alone.”

“You are modest, M. Tabaret. Chance assists only wise men. She disdains to aid the stupid; but I beg you will be seated and talk.”

Then with a lucidity and precision of which few would have believed him capable, the old fellow repeated to the judge all of Noel’s story. He repeated from

memory the extracts from the letters, almost without changing a word.

"These letters," added he, "I have seen; and I have even carried off one, in order to verify the writing. Here it is."

"Yes," murmured the magistrate,—“yes, M. Tabaret, you have discovered the criminal. The evidence is palpable, even to the blind. Heaven has willed this. Crime engenders crime. The misdeeds of the father have made the son an assassin.”

"I have not given you the names, monsieur," said Père Tabaret. "I wished first to hear your opinion of the evidence."

"Oh! you can name them," interrupted the judge with a certain degree of animation. "If ever so high in position, they shall not escape the law. A French magistrate never hesitates."

"I know it, monsieur; but we are going high this time. The father who has sacrificed his legitimate to his natural son is the Count Rheteau de Commarin; and the assassin of the Widow Lerouge is the natural son, Albert Vicomte de Commarin!"

Père Tabaret, like an accomplished artist, had uttered these words with a deliberate emphasis, expecting confidently to produce a great impression. His attempt overshot itself. M. Daburon was struck with stupor. He remained motionless, his eyes dilated with astonishment. Mechanically he repeated it, like a strange word, the sense of which he was trying to understand.

"Albert de Commarin! Albert de Commarin!"

"Yes," insisted Père Tabaret, "the noble viscount. He is the last man in the world to be suspected, I know."

But he perceived the alteration of the judge's face; and, a little frightened, he approached the bed.

"Are you unwell?" he asked.

"No," answered Daburon, without knowing what he said. "I am very well; but the surprise, the emotion,"—

"I understand that," said the old fellow.

"I wish you would leave me for a few minutes; but do not depart. We must converse at some length on this business. Will you step into my study? There ought to be a fire still burning there. I will rejoin you in an instant."

Then Daburon rose lightly from the bed, put on a dressing-gown, and seated himself, or rather fell, into an arm-chair. His face, to which the exercise of his austere functions had given the immobility of marble, reflected the most cruel agitation; while his eyes betrayed the inward agony of his soul.

The name of Commarin, suddenly pronounced, awakened in him the most sorrowful recollections, and tore open a wound but badly healed. This name recalled to him an event which had rudely extinguished his youth and broken his life. Involuntarily, he carried his thoughts back to this epoch, and compelled himself to taste again all its bitterness.

An hour ago, it had seemed to him far removed, and already hidden in the mists of the past. One word had sufficed to recall it, clear and distinct. It seemed to him now that this event with which he connected the name of Albert de Commarin dated from yesterday, instead of which two years had elapsed.

Pierre Marie Daburon belonged to one of the oldest families of Poitou. Three or four of his ancestors had filled successively the most considerable offices in the province. Why, then, had they not bequeathed a title and their arms to their descendants?

The magistrate's worthy father inhabited an ugly modern castle; but it was surrounded by about eight hundred thousand francs' worth of the best land in France. His mother was a Cottevise-Luxe, from whom he inherited the blood of the highest nobility of Poitou, one of the most exclusive families in France, as every one knows.

When he was appointed a judge of inquiry in Paris, his parentage opened for him without delay five or six aristocratic salons; and he was not slow to extend his circle of acquaintance.

He possessed, however, few of the qualifications for social success. He was cold and grave even to sadness, reserved and timid to excess. His mind wanted brilliancy and lightness; he lacked the facility of repartee, and the amiable art of conversing without a subject,—which is almost a necessity in mixed companies. He could neither relate a *bon mot* nor pay a compliment. Like most men who feel deeply, he was unable to translate his impressions immediately. Reflection was necessary to him; and he fell back upon himself.

To compensate for these defects he possessed other qualities more solid,—nobility of sentiment, strength of character, and integrity of purpose. Those who knew him quickly learned to esteem his sound judgment, his keen sense of honor, and to discover under his cold exterior a warm heart, an excessive sensibility, and a delicacy almost feminine. In a word, although he might be eclipsed by the wits and triflers of a crowded salon, he charmed all hearts in a smaller circle, where he felt warmed by the purer atmosphere of sympathy.

He accustomed himself to go abroad a great deal. He reasoned, wisely perhaps, that a magistrate can make better use of his time than by remaining shut up in

his study, in company with books of law. He thought a man, to be a judge, ought to know something of mankind; and, with that belief, he entered upon the study of the subject. An attentive and discreet observer, he examined around him the play of human interests and passions, exercised himself in disentangling and manœuvring at need the strings of the puppets he saw moving about him. Piece by piece, so to say, he labored to comprehend the working of the complicated machine called society, of which he was charged to overlook the movements, regulate the springs, and preserve the healthful action.

All on a sudden, towards the commencement of the winter of 1860 and 1861, Daburon disappeared. His friends sought for him; he was nowhere to be found. What had become of him? Inquiry resulted in the discovery that he passed nearly all his evenings at Madame d' Arlanges' house. The surprise was as great as it was natural.

This dear marquise was, or rather is,—for she is still in the land of the living,—a person rather out of date and rococo in the dowagers of the Princess de Southenay's circle. She is surely the most singular link between the eighteenth century and our own. How, and by what marvelous process she has been preserved such as we see her, from so remote an age to the present, is a more puzzling question than we can explain. Listening to her, you would swear that she was yesterday at one of the queen's soirées, whose passion for cards was the annoyance of Louis XIV., at whose parties the great ladies cheated openly in emulation of each other.

Manners, language, habits, even costume she preserved them all; and, as time had touched them, not to

beauty but to disfigure, the effect was not the most pleasing. A glimpse of her head-dress is more than a long article of review of the court of Louis XIV.; an hour's conversation, more than a volume of the "Confessions of Madame de Maintenon."

She was born in a little German principality, where her parents had taken refuge from their wild and rebellious people. She had been nursed, when a child, on the knees of old Emigrès, in a salon very old and very much gilded, resembling a cabinet of curiosities. Her mind was awakened amid the hum of antediluvian conversations, her imagination aroused by arguments a little less profitable than those of an assembly of dunces, convoked to decide the merits of a Greek hexameter. Here she imbibed a fund of ideas, which, applied to the forms of society to-day, are grotesque, as would be those of an individual shut up for twenty years in an Assyrian museum.

The empire, the restoration, the monarchy of July, the second republic, the second empire, have passed beneath her windows; but she has not taken the pains to open them. All that has taken place since '89 she ignores, or at most looks upon as a dream, a nightmare, and expects an awakening. She has seen every thing; but she has seen it through spectacles of her own making, which present objects not as they are, but as she wishes them to be.

At the age of sixty-eight, she was straight as an arrow, and had never known a day's sickness. She ate her four meals a day with the appetite of a grape-gatherer, and drank when she was thirsty. She was so vivacious and active that she never rested save when sleeping, or when seated at her favorite game of piquet. She professed an undisguised contempt for the silly wo-

men of our century, who dine on the wing of a partridge, and talk you to death with philosophical disquisitions. Positive and over-bearing in all things, her word was prompt and easily understood. Her language was never rendered obscure by unnecessary delicacy. She never shrank from using the most appropriate words to express her meaning. If she offended some refined ears, so much the worse,—for their owners. What she most detested was hypocrisy.

She believed in God; but she believed also a little in Voltaire. In fact, her devotion was, to say the least, problematical. However, she was on good terms with the curate of her parish, and was very particular about the arrangement of her dinner on the days she honored him with an invitation to her table. She considered him a subaltern, very useful to her salvation, and deserving of the honor of opening for her the gate of paradise.

She was shunned like the plague. Everybody dreaded her high voice, her terrible indiscretion, and the frankness of speech she seemed to affect, in order to claim the right of saying the most unpleasant things before your face. Of all her family, there remained only her granddaughter, whose father had died very young.

Of a fortune originally large, she had been able to preserve but a small remnant, on which she supported her small household in genteel, or rather aristocratic poverty. She was, however, proprietor of the pretty little house in which she lived near the Invalides, situated between a rather narrow court and a very extensive and beautiful garden.

So circumstanced, she considered herself the most unfortunate of God's creatures, and passed the greater part of her time crying *miserère*! From time to time,

she declared she expected to be reduced to absolute beggary, and to die in a hospital.

A friend of M. Daburon's presented him one evening to the Marquise d'Arlanges, having dragged him to her house in a mirthful mood, saying, "Come with me, and I will show you a phenomenon,—a ghost of the past in flesh and bone."

The marquise received the magistrate graciously enough; and her eccentricities amused him. On his second visit, she amused him still more; for which reason, he came a third time. But she amused him no longer; henceforth, every faculty of his soul was absorbed in studying the charms of the young and tender rose who was blooming into loveliness, in this to him henceforth enchanted dwelling.

Madame d'Arlanges conceived a violent friendship for him, and became eloquent in his praise.

"A most charming young man," she declared, "delicate and sensible! What a pity he was not born—" (Her ladyship meant born of noble parentage, but used the phrase as ignoring the fact of the unfortunates who are not noble having been born at all;) "although it is plainly to be seen he ought to be. His family, by the father's side, were people of considerable importance; and his mother was a Cottevise, who made a mesalliance. I approve of the young man, and shall advance him in the world by my countenance."

The strongest proof of the favorable impression he had made upon the marquise was, that she condescended to pronounce his name like the rest of the world. She preserved this affectation of forgetfulness of the names of people who were not "born," and who in consequence have no right to names. She was so confirmed in this habit, that, if by accident she pronounced the name of

one of those people correctly, she repeated it immediately in some ridiculous manner.

At his first visit, the judge was amused to hear his name changed every time she addressed him in the most unaccountable way. Successively she made it Taburon, Dabiron, Maliron, Laridon; but in less than three months, she called him Daburon as distinctly as if he had been a duke of something, and seigneur of somewhere.

On occasions, she amused herself, endeavoring to prove to the worthy magistrate that he must be noble, or at least ought to be. She would have been happy, if she had succeeded in making him wrap himself up in a title, and put a coat of arms upon his visiting cards.

"How is it possible," said she, "that your ancestors, eminent, wealthy, and influential, never thought of purchasing a title for their descendants? What a pity they have not left you some presentable coat of arms!"

"My ancestors were proud," responded M. Daburon. "They preferred being foremost among their fellow-citizens to becoming newly-created nobles."

Upon which the marquise explained, and proved to a demonstration, that between the most influential and wealthy untitled citizen and the smallest scion of nobility, there was an abyss that all the money in the world could not fill up.

They who were surprised at the frequency of the magistrate's visits to this celebrated "relic of the past" had no idea that the real attraction was not the marquise but her granddaughter, Claire, whose presence converted the old-fashioned house into a bower of enchantment.

Mademoiselle Claire d'Arlanges had already seen seventeen summers. She was very gracious and sweet in

manner, and ravishing in her natural innocence and fearlessness of harm. She had blonde, ash-colored hair, very fine and thick, which she wore over a large roll above her forehead, and which fell in large masses upon her neck, in the most artless fashion imaginable. Her figure, though graceful, was rather slender; but her face recalled the celestial pictures of Guido. Her blue eyes, shaded by long lashes of a hue darker than her hair, had above all an adorable expression.

A certain air of antiquity, caught from association with her grandmother, added yet another charm to the young girl's manners. She had more sense, however, than her relative; and, as her education was not neglected, she had imbibed ideas of the world in which she lived sufficiently exact to preserve her from imitating her grandmother's absurdities. This education, these practical ideas, Claire owed to her governess, upon whose shoulders the marquise had thrown the sole responsibility of cultivating her mind.

This governess, Mademoiselle Schmidt, chosen at hazard, taken "with eyes shut," happened by the most fortunate chance to be both well informed and possessed of principle. She was, what is often met with on the other side of the Rhine, a woman at once romantic and practical, of the tenderest sensibility and the severest virtue. This good woman, while she carried her pupil into the land of sentimental phantasy and poetical imaginings, gave her at the same time the most practical instruction in matters relating to actual life; and, while she deprived Claire of all the peculiarities of thought and manner that rendered her grandmother so ridiculous, she preserved in her mind all the respect that was due to her position and the relations between them.

This was the young girl who attracted M. Daburon to

Madame d'Arlanges' salon where he sat evening after evening, listening, without hearing, to her rigmaroles, her interminable anecdotes of the emigration; while he gazed upon Claire, as a fanatic upon his idol. Often, in his ecstasy, he forgot where he was for the moment, absolutely became oblivious of the old lady's presence; although her shrill voice was piercing the tympanum of his ear, as a needle goes through cloth. Suddenly recalled to consciousness, he answered her at cross-purposes, committing the most singular blunders, which he labored afterwards to explain. But this did not much impede the conversation. Madame d'Arlanges did not perceive her courtier's absence of mind; and her questions were of such a length, and succeeded each other so rapidly, that the answers were of little consequence. Having a listener, she was satisfied, provided that from time to time he gave signs of life.

When obliged to sit down to piquet, he cursed below his breath the game and its detestable inventor. He paid no attention to his cards. He made mistakes every moment, dealt without seeing, and forgot to cut. The old dame was annoyed by these continual distractions; but she did not scruple to profit by them. She watched the deal, rectified all mistakes; while she counted audaciously points she never made, and pocketed his money without remorse.

As Daburon's timidity was extreme, and Claire was unsociable to excess, they never spoke to each other. During the entire winter, the judge did not address ten times a direct word to the young girl; and, on these rare occasions, he had learned by heart mechanically the phrase he proposed to repeat to her, well knowing that, without this precaution, he would be obliged to remain silent.

But at least he saw her, he breathed the same air with her, he heard her voice, whose pure and harmonious vibrations thrilled his very soul.

By constantly watching her eyes, he learned to understand all their expressions. He believed he could read in them all her thoughts, and through them look into her soul as into an open window.

"She is pleased to-day," said he to himself; and then he was happy. At other times, he thought, "She has met with some annoyance to-day;" and immediately he became sad.

The idea of asking for her hand many times presented itself to his imagination; but he never dared to entertain it. Knowing, as he did, the marquise's prejudices, her devotion to titles, her dread of mesalliance, he was convinced she would reject his suit; and he did not dare to risk the dissolution of his present happiness upon so slender a hope of success. Poor man! he had reached the altitude of love where it feeds upon its own misery.

"Once repulsed," he thought, "the house is shut against me; and then farewell to happiness: this life is finished for me."

Upon the other hand, the very rational thought occurred to him that some other might see Mademoiselle d'Arlanges; seeing, love her, and in consequence, demand and perhaps obtain her.

In either case, hazarding a proposal, or hesitating still, he must certainly lose her in the end. By the commencement of spring, his mind was made up.

One fine afternoon, in the month of April, he bent his steps towards the Hotel d'Arlanges, having truly need of more bravery than if he were a soldier about to face a battery. He, like the soldier, whispered to himself "Victory or death!" The marquise, who had gone out

shortly after breakfast, had just returned in a terrible rage, and was uttering screams like an eagle.

This was what had taken place. She had had some work done by a neighboring painter some eight or ten months before; and the workman presented himself a hundred times to receive payment, without avail. Tired of this proceeding, he had summoned the high and mighty Marquise d'Arlanges before the courts.

This summons had exasperated the marquise; but she kept the matter to herself, having decided, in her wisdom, to call upon the judge of the court himself, and request him to reprimand the insolent painter who had dared to plague her for a paltry sum of money. The result of this fine project may be guessed. The judge had been compelled to eject her forcibly from his office; hence her fury.

M. Daburon found her in the rose-colored boudoir in half dishabille, and complete disorder of head-dress, red as a peony, surrounded by the debris of glass and china which had fallen under her hands in the first moments of her passion. To complete her annoyance, Claire and her governess were gone out. An excited and terrified *femme de chambre* was inundating the old lady with water, in the hope of calming her nerves.

She received Daburon as a messenger direct from Providence. In a little more than half an hour, she told her story, interlarded with interjections and imprecations.

"Do you comprehend this judge?" cried she. "This must be some frantic Jacobin,—some son of the furies, who washed their hands in the blood of their king. Oh! my friend, I read stupor and indignation on your visage. He has listened to the complaint of this buffoon, to whom I had given the means of living, by employing

him. And when I waited upon him in his office, and addressed to him, as I owed it to myself to do, some severe remonstrances, he actually turned me out of the room! me! turned me out!"

At this painful recollection, she made a fierce gesture with her arms. In her sudden movement, she struck a superb flacon, which the *femme de chambre* was holding. The blow dashed it to pieces against the wall of the boudoir.

"Stupid, awkward fool!" she cried, turning her anger upon the frightened girl.

Daburon, stunned at first, now endeavored to calm her exasperation. She did not allow him to pronounce three words.

"Happily you are here," she continued! "I have told you all. I count upon you! you will exercise your influence, your powerful friends, your credit, to have this pitiful painter and this miscreant of a judge flung into some deep ditch, to teach them the respect due to a woman of my rank."

The magistrate did not permit himself even to smile at this imperative demand. He had heard many speeches as absurd issue from her lips without daring to perceive their absurdity. Was she not Claire's grandmother? for that he loved and venerated her. He blessed her for her granddaughter, as an admirer of nature blesses heaven for the wild flower that delights him with its perfume.

The fury of the old lady was terrible; nor was it of short duration. It was able, like the anger of Achilles, to last through ten chapters. At the end of an hour, however, she was, or appeared to be pacified. They replaced her head-dress, repaired the disorder of her toilette, and picked up the fragments of broken china. Van-

quished by her own violence, the reaction was immediate and complete. She fell back helpless and exhausted in the arm-chair.

This magnificent result was due to the magistrate. To accomplish it, he had to use all his ability, to exercise the most angelic patience, the greatest tact. His triumph was the more meritorious, because he came unprepared for this adventure, which interfered with his intended proposal. He had arrived filled with something like a resolve to speak of his wishes; and this untoward event declared against him: but he had a good heart to oppose to misfortune.

Arming himself with his professional eloquence, he talked the old lady into calmness. He was not so foolish as to contradict her. On the contrary, he caressed her hobby. He was humorous and pathetic by turns. He attacked the authors of the revolution, cursed its errors, deplored its crimes, and reviewed its disastrous results. From the infamous Marat, by an adroit allusion he attacked the infamous judge who had offended her. He abused the scandalous conduct of the magistrate in good set terms, and was awfully severe upon the dishonest scamp of a painter. He declared that they deserved the lowest dungeon in the Bastille; but the conclusion to which he arrived was, that the severest blow she could administer to the man's impertinence and the judge's incapacity would be to pay the bill, and compel them to give her a receipt in full for all demands.

The disconnected syllable "pay" brought Madame d'Arlanges to her feet in the fiercest attitude.

"Pay!" she screamed. "In order that these scoundrels may persist in their obduracy? encourage them by a culpable weakness? Never! And, moreover, to pay, it is necessary to have money; and I have none!"

"Why," said the judge, "it amounts to but eighty-seven francs!"

"And is that nothing?" asked the marquise: "you talk very easily, M. Daburon. It is easy to see that you have money: your ancestors were people of no rank: and the revolution passed a hundred feet above their heads. Who can tell whether they may not have been the gainers by it? It has taken all from the d'Arlanges. What will they do to me, if I do not pay?"

"Well, madame le marquise, many things,—ruin you, in short: you will receive a notification from the courts. If that is not attended to, your furniture will be seized."

"Alas!" cried the old lady, "the revolution is not over yet. We have not passed through all its horrors! How fortunate you are, M. Daburon, in being of the people! I see plainly that I must pay this man; and it is frightfully sad for me, who have nothing, and am forced to make such sacrifices for sake of my grand-child!"

The word "sacrifices" surprised the magistrate so strongly that involuntarily he repeated it half-aloud, "Sacrifices?"

"Certainly!" replied Madame d'Arlanges. "Without her, would I have to live as I am doing, refusing myself every thing to make both ends meet? Was it not for her sake I placed all that I possessed in the funds, and lost it? But I do not consider myself. I know, thank heaven, the duties of a mother; and I guard all mine well for my little Claire."

To this extraordinary devotion, M. Daburon had no reply to make.

"Ah! this dear child torments me terribly," continued the marquise. "I confess, M. Daburon, it makes me giddy when I think of her establishment."

The judge reddened with pleasure. The occasion had come at a gallop. She was turning to leave the room, when he detained her.

"It seems to me," stammered he, "that to establish Mademoiselle Claire ought to be easy."

"Unfortunately, it is any thing but easy. She is pretty enough, although unpolished; but, now-a-days, beauty goes for nothing. Men are so mercenary they think only of money. I do not know of one who has the manhood to take a d'Arlanges with her bright eyes for a dowry."

"I believe that you exaggerate," said the judge timidly.

"By no means. Besides, when I find a son-in-law, he will cause me a thousand troubles. Of this, I am assured by my lawyer. I can be compelled, it seems, to render an account of Claire's patrimony. As if I ever kept accounts! It is shameful. Ah! if Claire had any sense of filial duty, she would quietly take the veil in some convent. I would use every effort to pay the necessary dowry; but she has no affection for me."

Daburon felt that the time to speak had arrived. He collected his courage, as a good horseman pulls his horse together the moment he faces the leap, and in a voice which he tried to render firm, commenced,—

"Madame, I know, I believe, just the person for Mademoiselle Claire,—an honest man, who loves her, and who will do every thing in the world to make her happy."

"That," said Madame d'Arlanges, "is always understood."

"The man of whom I speak," continued the judge, "is still young, and is rich. He will be only too happy to receive Mademoiselle Claire without dowry. Not

only will he decline an examination of your accounts of guardianship, but he will supply you with means to free your own property of all incumbrance."

"Peste!" exclaimed the old dame; "you are not a bad friend, M. Daburon!"

"If you prefer to place your fortune in an annuity, your son-in-law will make good whatever deficiency remains."

"Ah! I am suffocating. If you have known such a man, why have you not already presented him?"

"I did not dare, madame: I was afraid."

"Quick! tell me who is this admirable son-in-law,—this white blackbird? where does he nestle?"

The judge felt a strange fluttering of the heart: he was going to stake his happiness on a word. At length, he stammered,—

"It is I, madame!"

His voice, his look, his suppliant gesture, were ridiculous in the eyes of the old lady; and she laughed till the tears came. He, frightened at his own audacity, stunned at having vanquished his timidity, was on the point of falling at her feet. At last, raising her shoulders, she cried,—

"My dear Daburon, you are too ridiculous! In good truth, you will make me die of laughing."

But suddenly, in the very height of her merriment she stopped, and assumed her most dignified air.

"Are you perfectly serious in all you have told me, M. Daburon?"

"I have stated the truth," murmured the judge.

"You are very rich, then?"

"I have, madame, in right of my mother, about twenty thousand livres a year. One of my uncles died about a year ago, leaving me a hundred thousand

crowns. My father is worth not less than a million. Were I to ask him for the half to-morrow, he would give it to me. He would give me all his fortune, if it were necessary to my happiness, and be but too well contented, should I relieve him of its administration."

Madame d'Arlanges made a sign to him to be silent; and, for five good minutes at least, she remained plunged in reflection, her forehead resting in her hands. At length she raised her head.

"Hear me," said she. "Had you been so hardy as to make this proposal to Claire's father, he would have called his servants to show you the door; but I am old and desolate. I am poor. My grandchild's prospects disquiet me; and that is my excuse for not acting in like manner. I cannot, however, consent to speak to Claire of this horrible mesalliance. This much I can promise you; and it is much, I will not be against you. Take your own measures. Pay your addresses to Mademoiselle d'Arlanges. Let her decide. If she says 'yes,' I shall not say 'no.'"

Daburon transported with happiness, would have embraced the old lady, if he dared. He never dreamed of the facility with which this fierce soul had been brought to yield. He was delirious.

"Wait!" said the old lady; "your cause is not yet gained. Your mother, it is true, was a Cottevise; and I must excuse her for marrying so wretchedly: but your father is *Sieur Daburon*. This name, my dear friend, is simply ridiculous. Do you think it will be possible to wrap up in Daburon a young girl who for eighteen years has been called d'Arlanges?"

This objection did not seem to trouble the judge.

"After all," continued the old lady, "your father has gained a Cottevise: you may win a d'Arlanges; and, on

the strength of an alliance with the daughter of a house whose nobility has descended from sire to son for so many generations, the Daburons may end by being ennobled. Who knows? One last advice: you believe Claire to be just as she looks,—timid, sweet, obedient. Undeceive yourself, my friend. With her saintly air and delicate touch, she is hardy, fierce, and obstinate as the marquis her father was, who resembled a mule of Auvergne. You see, I forewarn you. Our conditions are agreed to, are they not? Let us say no more on the subject. I wish you every success."

This scene was so present to his mind as he sat there at midnight in his own house in his arm-chair, after so long a lapse of time that he still seemed to hear the old lady's voice; and this word "success" sounded in his ear.

He departed in triumph from the Hotel d'Arlanges, which he had entered with a heart swelling with anxiety.

He walked with his head high, his chest dilated, breathing the air with full respirations.

He was so happy! The sky appeared to him more blue, the sun more brilliant.

The grave magistrate felt a mad desire to stop the passers by, to press them in his arms, to cry to them,—

"Do you not know, the marquise consents?"

He walked; and the earth seemed to him to bound beneath his steps. He felt too small to contain his happiness, too light to remain on earth. He was going to fly away toward the stars.

What a castle in Spain did he build upon this little word of the marquise! He tendered his resignation. He built on the banks of the Loire, not far from Tours, an enchanting little villa. He saw it smiling, with its

façade to the rising sun, seated in the midst of flowers, and shaded with great trees. He furnished this dwelling as if for the reception of the queen of the fairies. He wished to provide a casket worthy the pearl he was going to possess, for he had not a dread of shipwreck, to obscure the horizon made radiant by his hopes, not a voice at the bottom of his heart raised itself to cry, "Beware!"

From this time, his visits to the marquise became more frequent. He might be said to live at her house.

While he preserved his respectful and reserved demeanor towards Claire, he strove assiduously to be something in her life. He strove to conquer his timidity, to speak to this well beloved of his soul,—to converse with her, to interest her.

He went in quest of novelty, to amuse her. He read all the new books, and brought to her all that were fit for her to read.

Little by little he succeeded, thanks to the most delicate persistence, in taming his wood pigeon. He began to perceive that her fear of him had almost disappeared, that she no longer received him with the cold and haughty air which so long had kept him at a distance. He felt that insensibly he was advancing in her confidence. She still blushed when she spoke to him; but she no longer hesitated to address the first word. She even ventured at times to ask him a question. She had heard a play spoken of, and wished to know the subject. M. Daburon quickly ran to see it, and committed a complete account of it to writing, which he addressed to her by mail. At times she entrusted him with trifling commissions, the execution of which he would not have exchanged for a Russian embassy.

Once he ventured to send her a magnificent bouquet.

She accepted it with an air of suppressed disquietude, and begged him not to repeat the offering.

The tears came to his eyes; and he left her presence wounded,—the unhappiest of men.

But, three days after, she raised him from this despair, by begging him to look for certain flowers, then very much in fashion, she wanted for her little garden. He sent enough to fill the house from the garret to the cellar.

“She loves me,” he whispered to himself.

These little events, so great, had not interrupted the parties at piquet; only the young girl now appeared interested in the game, nearly always taking part with the judge against the marquise. She did not understand the game very well; but, when the old gambler cheated too openly, she would perceive it, and say laughing,—

“She is robbing you, M. Daburon,—she is robbing you!”

He would willingly be robbed of his entire fortune, to hear that sweet voice raised for him.

It was summer.

Often in the evening she accepted his arm; and, while the marquise remained in the porch, seated in her arm-chair, they walked around the garden, treading lightly upon the paths spread with gravel, sifted so fine that the trailing of her light robe effaced the traces of their footsteps. She chatted gaily with him, as with a beloved brother; while he was obliged to do violence to his feelings, to refrain from imprinting a kiss upon the little blonde head, from which the light breeze lifted the curls and scattered them like fleecy clouds. At such moments, he seemed to tread a triumphant path, strewn with flowers, and saw at the end happiness.

He attempted to speak of his hopes to the marquise.

"You know what we have agreed upon," she would say. "Not a word. Already does the voice of conscience reproach me with my fault in lending my countenance to this abomination. To think that I may one day have a granddaughter who calls herself Daburon! I must petition the king, my friend, to change this name."

If, instead of intoxicating himself with dreams of happiness, this acute observer had studied the character of his idol, the effect might have been to put him upon his guard.

In the mean while, he remarked singular alterations in her humor. On certain days she was gay and careless as a child. Then, for a week, she would remain sombre and dejected. Seeing her in this state the day following a ball, to which her grandmother had taken her, he dared to ask her the reason of her sadness.

"Oh! that," answered she, heaving a deep sigh, "is my secret,—a secret of which even my grandmother knows nothing."

Daburon looked at her. He thought he saw a tear between her long eyelashes.

"One day," continued she, "I may confide in you: it will be necessary, perhaps."

The judge was blind and deaf.

"I also," answered he, "have a secret, which I wish to confide to you in return."

When retiring after midnight, he said to himself, "To-morrow I will confess every thing to her."

There passed a little more than fifty days, during which he kept repeating to himself,—

"To-morrow!"

One evening in the month of August,—the heat all

day had been overpowering,—a breeze had risen. The leaves rustled: there were signs of a storm in the atmosphere.

They were seated together at the bottom of the garden, under the arbor, adorned with flowers which Claire had planted; and, through the branches, they perceived the fluttering head-dress of the marquise, who was taking her accustomed walk after supper.

They had remained a long time without speaking, enjoying the perfume of the flowers, the calm beauty of the evening. Daburon had ventured to take the young girl's hand.

It was the first time; and the touch of her slender fingers thrilled through every fibre of his frame, and drove the blood surging to his brain.

"Mademoiselle," stammered he, "Claire."

She stopped him, by turning upon him her beautiful eyes, filled with astonishment.

"Pardon me," continued he,—"pardon me. I have addressed your grandmother, before venturing to speak to you. Do you not understand me, Claire? A word from your lips decides my future happiness or misery. Claire, mademoiselle, I love you!"

While the magistrate was speaking, the young girl looked at him as though doubtful of the evidence of her senses; but at the words, "I love you!" pronounced with the trembling accents of passion, she disengaged her hand rudely, and uttered a stifled cry.

"You," murmured she,—"is this really true?"

M. Daburon at this, the most critical moment of his life, was powerless to utter a word. The presentiment of an immense misfortune oppressed his heart. What divined he, when he saw Claire burst into a flood of tears.

She hid her face between her hands, and repeated,—
“I am very unhappy, very unhappy!”

“You unhappy?” cried the magistrate. “And through me, Claire? You are cruel! In heaven’s name, what have I done? What is the matter? Speak! Any thing rather than this anxiety, which is killing me!”

He knelt before her on the gravelled walk, and made an attempt to again take her hand. She repulsed him with an imploring gesture.

“Let me weep,” said she; “you are going to hate me. I feel it. Who knows, to despise me, perhaps? And yet I swear before heaven that I was ignorant of what you have just said to me, that I had not even a suspicion of it!”

Daburon remained upon his knees, awaiting his doom.

“Yes,” continued Claire, “you will think you have been the victim of a detestable coquetry. I see it now! I comprehend every thing! Is it possible, that, without a profound love, a man cannot be all that you have been to me? Alas! I was deceived. I gave myself up to the great happiness of having a friend! Am I not alone in the world, as if lost in a desert? Mad and imprudent, I devoted myself to you without reflection, as to the most indulgent of fathers.”

These words revealed to the unfortunate judge a complete understanding of his error. As a hammer of steel it smashed into a thousand fragments the fragile edifice of his hopes. He raised himself slowly; and, in a tone of involuntary reproach, he repeated,—

“Your father!”

The young girl felt how deeply she had wounded him; but she knew not the intense depth of his love.

“Yes,” she repeated, “a father! Seeing you so grave and austere, become for me so good, so indulgent,

I thanked heaven for sending me a protector to replace the father I have lost."

Daburon could not restrain a sob; his heart was breaking.

"One word," continued Claire,—“one single word, would have enlightened me. That word, until to-night, you have never pronounced. And with what comfort I have leaned upon you, as an infant upon its mother; with what inward joy I have said to myself, ‘I am sure of one friend,—one heart into which runs the overflow of mine.’ Ah! why was not my confidence greater? Why have I withheld my secret from you? I would have avoided this fearful calamity. I ought to have long since told what I must tell you now. I belong not to myself, but to another, to whom I have freely and with happiness given my life.”

To hover in the clouds, and suddenly be cast rudely to the earth. The sufferings of the judge are not to be described.

“Better had I had the courage to speak long since,” answered he; “yet, no: I owe to silence six months of delicious illusions,—six months of enchanting dreams. This shall be my share of life’s happiness.”

The last beams of closing day permitted the magistrate again to see Mademoiselle d’Arlanges. Her beautiful face was blanched to a deathlike whiteness, and was immovable in its expression as marble. Large tears rolled silently down her cheeks. Daburon seemed to contemplate the frightful spectacle of a weeping statue.

“You love another,” said he at length,—“another? and your grandmother is ignorant? Claire, you cannot have chosen a man unworthy of your love? How is it your grandmother does not receive him?”

“There are certain obstacles,” murmured Claire,—

"obstacles which perhaps we may never be able to remove; but a girl like me can love but once. She marries him she loves, or she remains with heaven!"

"Certain obstacles," said Daburon in a hollow voice. "You love a man: he knows it; and he meets with obstacles?"

"I am poor," answered Mademoiselle d'Arlanges; "and his family is immensely rich. His father is cruel, inexorable."

"His father," cried the magistrate, with a bitterness he did not dream of hiding,—“his father, his family; and that withholds him? You are poor: he is rich; and that stops him, and he knows you love him? Ah! why am I not in his place; and why have not I against me the entire universe? What sacrifice could compare with love like mine? Nay, would it be a sacrifice? What to others might appear so, to me would be simply joy. Suffer, struggle, wait, so long as hope remains; that is to love."

"It is thus I love," said Claire with simplicity.

This answer crushed the judge. He understood that for him there was no hope; but he felt a terrible enjoyment in plumbing the depth of his misfortune.

"But," insisted he, "how have you known him, spoken to him? Where? When? Madame d'Arlanges receives no one."

"I will tell you every thing," answered she in a decided tone. "It is a long time since I have known him. It was at the house of one of my grandmother's friends, who was a cousin of his,—old Mademoiselle Goello,—that I saw him for the first time. There we first met; there we meet each other now."

"Ah!" cried Daburon to himself, "I remember now. A few days before your visit to Mademoiselle

Goello, you are gayer than usual ; and, when you return, you are often sad."

"That is because I see how much he is pained by the obstacles he cannot overcome."

"His family is, then, so illustrious," said he, "that it disdains alliance with yours?"

"You shall know every thing, without question, monsieur," answered Mademoiselle d'Arlanges. "His name is Albert de Commarin."

The marquise, at this moment, thinking she had walked enough, prepared to regain her rose-colored boudoir. She approached the arbor.

"Incorruptible magistrate!" said she, in her great voice, "the table is set for piquet."

Mechanically the magistrate arose, stammering, "I am coming."

Claire held his arm.

"I have not asked you to be secret, monsieur," said she.

"O mademoiselle!" said the judge, wounded by this appearance of doubt.

"I know," said Claire, "that I can count upon you; but, come what will, my tranquillity is lost."

Daburon regarded her with an air of surprise; his eye questioned her.

"It is certain," said she, answering the look, "that what I, a young and inexperienced girl, have failed to see, has not been unnoticed by my grandmother. That she has continued to receive you is a tacit encouragement of your addresses; which I consider, permit me to say, as very honorable to me."

"I have already mentioned, Mademoiselle, that the marquise has deigned to authorize my hopes."

And briefly he related his interview with Madame

d'Arlanges, having the delicacy to omit absolutely the question of money, which had so strongly influenced the old lady.

"I see very plainly what effect this will have on my peace," said she sadly, "when she learns that I have not received your homage."

"You do not know me, mademoiselle," said he. "I have nothing to say to the marquise. I will retire; and all will be concluded."

"Oh! you are good and generous, I know!"

"I will go away," pursued Daburon; "and soon you will have forgotten even the name of the unfortunate whose life is broken."

"You do not mean what you say?" asked the young girl quickly.

"Well, no. I will flatter myself with a hope, that, later, my remembrance will not be without pleasure to you. Sometimes you will say 'He loved me,' and think of me as a friend,—your most devoted friend."

Claire, in her turn, took with emotion his hands within her own.

"Yes," said she; "you must remain my friend. Let us forget what has happened,—what you have said to-night,—and remain to me, as in the past, the best, the most indulgent of brothers."

The darkness had come, and she could not see him; but she knew he was weeping, for he was slow to answer.

"Is it possible," murmured he at length, "that you can ask that? Do you, who talk to me of forgetting, feel the power to forget? Do you not know that I love you a thousand times more than you love—"

He stopped, unable to pronounce the name of Com-

marin; and then, with an effort, he added, "and I shall love you always."

He had left the arbor, and was now on the steps of the porch.

"And now, mademoiselle, adieu! You will see me again rarely. I shall only return often enough to avoid the appearance of a rupture."

His voice trembled, so that with difficulty he made it distinct.

"Whatever may come in the future," added he, "remember that there is one in the world who belongs to you absolutely. If ever you have need of a friend's devotion, come to me, come to your friend. Let me go. It is over. I have courage, Claire. Mademoiselle, for the last time, adieu!"

She was little less dismayed than he was. Instinctively she advanced her head; and M. Daburon touched lightly with his cold lips, for the first and last time, the forehead of her he loved so well.

They mounted the steps, she leaning on his arm, and entered the rose-colored boudoir where the marquise was seated, impatiently shuffling the cards, while awaiting her victim.

"Now, then, incorruptible judge," cried she.

But Daburon felt sick at heart. He could not have held the cards. He stammered some absurd excuses, spoke of pressing affairs, of duties to be attended to, of unexpected news, and went out, clinging to the walls.

His departure made the old cardplayer indignant. She turned to her granddaughter, who was endeavoring to hide her confusion behind the wax candles of the card-table, and demanded,—

"What has happened to M. Daburon this evening?"

"I do not know, madame," stammered Claire.

"It appears to me," continued the marquise, "that the little judge permits himself to take singular liberties. He must be reminded of his proper place, or he will finish by believing himself our equal."

Claire essayed to justify the magistrate.

"He has been complaining all the evening, grand-mamma; may he not be sick?"

"What if he should be?" exclaimed the old lady. "Is it not his duty to exercise some self-denial, in return for the honor of our company? I think I have already related to you the story of your granduncle, the Duke de St. Hurluge, who, having attended the king's hunting party, on their return from the **chase** lost with the best grace in the world two hundred and twenty pistoles. All the assembly remarked his gaiety and his good humor. The following day it was learned, that, during the chase, he had fallen from his horse and had sat at his majesty's card-table with a broken rib, rather than mar the enjoyment of the company by a complaint. Nobody made any outcry, so perfectly natural did an act of ordinary politeness appear in those days. This little judge, if he is sick, should have given proof of his breeding by saying nothing about it, and remaining for my piquet. But he is as well as I am. Who can tell what games he has gone to play elsewhere?"

CHAPTER VII.

DABURON did not return home on leaving the Hotel d'Arlanges. All the night he wandered at random, he knew not whither, seeking a little coolness for his burning head, a little calm for his overloaded and bursting heart.

"Fool that I was," said he to himself. "Thousand times fool to have hoped, to have believed, that she would ever love me. Insensible! how could I have dreamed of possessing so much grace, nobleness, and beauty! How charming she was this evening, when her face was wet with tears. Could any thing be more angelic? What a sublime expression her eyes had in speaking of him! How she must love him! And I? She loves me as a father. She told me so,—as a father. And could it be otherwise? Is it not justice? Ought she to see a lover in this magistrate, sombre and severe, always as sad as his black costume? Was it not a crime to dream of uniting that virginal simplicity to my detestable worldly science? For her, the future is yet the land of smiling chimeras; and long since experience has dissipated all my illusions. She is as young as Innocence: I am as old as Vice."

The unfortunate magistrate made himself veritably a horror. He understood Claire, and he excused her. He even wished he could himself suffer the sadness he had brought upon her. He reproached himself with having cast a shadow upon her life. He could not forgive himself for having spoken of his love. Ought he not to have foreseen what had happened,—that she would refuse him, that he would thus deprive himself of the happiness of seeing her, of hearing her, of silently adoring her?

"A young and romantic girl," pursued the judge, "must have a lover she can dream of,—whom she can caress in imagination, as an ideal, pleasing herself by seeing in him every great and brilliant quality, imagining him full of nobleness, of bravery, of heroism. What would she see, if, in my absence, she dreamed of me? Her imagination would present me dressed in a funeral

robe, in the depth of a gloomy dungeon, engaged with some foul criminal. Is it not my trade to descend into all the moral sinks, to stir up the foulness of crime? Am I not compelled to wash in secrecy and shadow the foul linen of society? Ah! it is a fatal profession. Am I punished thus, because, like the priest, the judge should condemn himself to solitude and celibacy? Both know all: they hear all, their costumes are nearly the same; but, while the priest in the fold of his black robe carries consolation, the judge carries terror. One is mercy, the other chastisement. Such are the images awakened; while the other,—the other—”

The wretched man continued his headlong course along the deserted quays.

He went with his head bare, his eyes haggard. To breathe more freely he had torn off his cravat and thrown it to the winds.

Sometimes, unconsciously, he crossed the path of a solitary wayfarer, who would pause, touched with pity, and turn to watch the retreating figure of the unfortunate wretch he thought deprived of reason.

In a by-road, near Grenelle, some officers stopped, and tried to question him. He mechanically tendered them his card. They read it, and permitted him to pass, convinced that he was drunk.

Anger,—a furious anger, began to replace his first feeling of resignation. In his heart arose a hate, stronger and more violent than even his love for Claire.

This other, this preferred, this noble viscount, who could not overcome these paltry obstacles, oh, that he had him there, under his knee!

At this moment, this noble and proud man, this magistrate, so severe and grave, felt an irresistible longing for vengeance. He began to understand the hate that

armed itself with the poniard, and lay in ambush in dark corners; which struck in the darkness, whether in the face or in the back, it mattered little, but which struck, which killed,—whose vengeance blood alone could satisfy.

At this very hour, he was charged with the conduct of an inquiry into the case of an unfortunate young girl, accused of having stabbed one of her wretched companions.

She was jealous of this woman, who had tried to take her lover from her. He was a soldier, very fat and very ugly.

Daburon felt himself seized with pity for this miserable creature, whom he had commenced to examine the day previous.

She was very ugly,—truly repulsive; but the expression of her eyes, when speaking of her soldier, returned to the memory of the judge.

“She loved him veritably,” thought he. “If each one of her jurors could suffer what I am suffering now, she would be acquitted. But how many men have had in their lives a passion? Perhaps not one in twenty.”

He resolved to recommend this girl to the indulgence of the tribunal, and extenuate as much as he could the punishment of her crime.

He had himself resolved upon the commission of a crime.

He was resolved to kill Albert de Commarin.

During the rest of the night, he did but confirm himself in this resolution, demonstrating by a thousand mad reasons, which he found solid and inscrutable, the necessity for another legitimacy of this vengeance.

At seven o'clock in the morning, he found himself in an alley of the Bois de Boulogne, not far from the lake.

He gained the Maillot gate, called a carriage, and was driven to his house.

The delirium of the night continued, but without suffering. He was conscious of no fatigue,—calm and cool apparently, but under the empire of an hallucination,—in a state approaching somnambulism.

He reflected and reasoned, but without reason.

He dressed himself with care, as was his custom formerly when visiting the Marquise d'Arlanges, and went out.

He first called at an armorers, and bought a small revolver, which he caused to be carefully loaded under his own eyes, and put into his pocket. He threw himself in the way of persons he supposed capable of informing him to what club the viscount belonged. No one perceived the strange situation of his mind, so natural were his manners and conversation.

It was not until the afternoon he found a young friend, a member of Albert de Commarin's club, who offered to conduct him thither and present him.

Daburon accepted warmly, and accompanied his friend.

While passing along he grasped with frenzy the handle of the revolver, which he kept concealed, thinking only of the murder he determined to commit, and the means of insuring the accuracy of his aim.

"This will make," thought he, "a terrible scandal; above all, if I do not succeed: Well, if I fail, I shall go mad. They will arrest me,—throw me into prison. I shall be placed upon trial at the court of assize, my name dishonored! Bast! what does that import to me? I am not loved by Claire. What to me is all the rest. My father without doubt will die of grief; but *I must be revenged.*"

Arrived at the club, his friend pointed out to him a very distinguished looking young man, of a brown complexion, with a haughty air, or what appeared so to him, who, seated at a table, was reading a review. It was the viscount.

Daburon marched upon him without drawing his revolver. Arrived within two paces, his heart failed him: he turned suddenly and fled, leaving his friend astonished at a scene, to him utterly inexplicable.

Albert de Commarin will be as near death but once again.

When he reached the street, Daburon felt the ground flying beneath his feet,—every thing turning around him. He tried, but was unable to cry out: he struck at the air with his hands, reeled an instant, and then fell helpless on the pavement.

The passers by ran and assisted the police to raise him. In one of his pockets they found his address, and carried him to his house. When he recovered his senses, he lay upon his bed, at the foot of which he perceived his father.

“What has taken place?” he asked. With much caution they told him, that for six weeks he had wavered between life and death. The doctors had declared his life saved; and, now that reason was restored, all would go well.

Five minutes’ conversation exhausted him. He shut his eyes, and tried to collect his ideas; but they whirled hither and thither wildly, as autumn leaves in the wind. The past seemed shrouded in a dark mist; yet, in the midst of all the darkness and confusion, the memory of his scene with Mademoiselle d’Arlanges stood out before his mental vision clear and luminous. All his actions up to the moment when he embraced Claire were

marked, as in a picture strongly drawn. He trembled; and his hair was in a moment damp with perspiration.

He had failed to become an assassin.

The proof that he was restored to full possession of his faculties was, that a question of criminal law crossed his brain.

"The crime committed," said he to himself, "should I have been condemned? Yes. Was I responsible? No. Would an action committed in a state of mental alienation be a crime? Was I mad? Or was I in a peculiar state of mind which always precedes an illegal attempt? Who can answer? Why have not all judges passed through an incomprehensible crisis such as mine? Who would believe me, were I to recount my experience?"

Some days later, he was sufficiently recovered to tell his father all. The old gentleman shrugged his shoulders, and assured him it was but a reminiscence of his delirium.

The good old man was moved at the story of his son's luckless wooing, without seeing therein an irreparable misfortune. He advised him to think of something else, placed at his disposal his entire fortune, and recommended him to marry a stout Poitevine heiress, very pretty and good humored, who would make him an excellent wife. Then, as his farm was suffering by his absence, he returned to his province. Two months later, the judge of inquiry had resumed his ordinary avocations. But it was hard work. He went through his duties like a body without a soul. He felt that his heart was broken.

Once he ventured to pay a visit to his old friend, the marquise. On seeing him, she uttered a cry of terror.

She took him for a spectre, so much was he changed in appearance.

As she dreaded dismal figures, she shut herself from him in the future.

Claire was sick for a week after seeing him. "How he loved me!" thought she. "He has almost died for me! Does Albert love me as much?"

She did not dare to answer herself. She felt a desire to console him, to speak to him, attempt something; but he came no more.

Daburon was not, however, a man to be overthrown without a struggle. He tried, as his father advised him, to distract his thoughts. He sought for pleasure, and found disgust, but not forgetfulness. Often he went so far as the threshold of dissipation; always the pure figure of Claire, dressed in white garments, barred the doors against him.

Then he took refuge in work, as in a sanctuary; condemned himself to the most incessant labor, forbade himself to think of Claire, as the consumptive forbids himself to recollect his malady.

His asperity in his labor, his feverish activity, was worth the reputation of an ambitious man; but he took no real interest in any thing.

At length, though he found not rest, this engrossing occupation exempted him from the sorrow which commonly follows a great catastrophe. The convalescence of oblivion commenced.

These were the events, recalled to Daburon by Père Tabaret, in pronouncing the name of Commarin. He believed them buried under the ashes of time; and behold they came up, as those characters traced in sympathetic ink appear when held before a fire, on paper apparently blank. In an instant they unrolled them-

selves before his memory, with the instantaneousness of a dream, annihilating time and space.

During some minutes, he assisted at the representation of his own life. At once actor and spectator, he was there seated in his arm-chair; and he appeared to himself as in a theatre. He acted, and he judged himself.

His first thought, it must be confessed, was one of hate, followed by a detestable sentiment of satisfaction. Chance had delivered to him this man preferred by Claire,—this man no longer a haughty gentleman, illustrious by his fortune and his ancestors, but an illegitimate offspring of a *femme couverte*. To guard a stolen name, he had committed a most cowardly assassination. And he the judge, was to experience the infinite gratification of striking his enemy with the sword of justice.

But this was only a passing thought. The conscience of the man revolted against it, and made its powerful voice heard above the whispers of selfishness.

“Is any thing,” it cried, “more monstrous than the association of these two ideas,—hatred and justice? A judge. Can he, without despising himself more than the vile beings he condemns, remind himself that a criminal whose fate is in his hands has been his enemy? A judge of inquiry. Has he a right to sit in judgment on a man against whom he harbors in his heart one drop of gall?”

Daburon repeated to himself many times during the year, on commencing an inquiry,—

“And I also,—I almost stained myself with dreadful murder!”

And now observe what he was about to do,—to arrest, interrogate, and hand over to the court of assize the man he had once the firm determination to kill.

All the world, it is true, ignores the crime of thought and intention ; but could he himself forget it? Was not this, of all others, a case to except against, to give his resignation? Ought he not to withdraw, and wash his hands of bloodshed, leaving to another the care of avenging society?

"No," said he, "it would be a cowardice unworthy of me."

A project of mad generosity came to him. "If I save him," murmured he, "if for sake of Claire I leave him his honor and his life,—but how can I save him?—I shall be obliged to suppress Père Tabaret's testimony, and impose upon him the complicity of silence. It will be necessary to make him voluntarily take a false road, and run with Gevrol after a chimerical murderer. Is this practicable? On the other hand, to spare Albert is to defame Noel; it is to assure impunity to the most odious of crimes. In fine, it is to sacrifice human justice to human feeling."

The magistrate suffered.

How to choose a path in the midst of so many perplexities! Dragged each way by different interests, he wavered, undecided, between determinations the most opposite, his mind oscillating from one extreme to the other.

What to do? His reason after this new and unforeseen shock vainly sought to regain its equilibrium.

"Retreat?" said he to himself. "Where, then, is my courage? Ought I not rather to remain the representative of the law, incapable of emotion, insensible to prejudice? Am I so feeble that, in assuming my rôle, I am unable to divest myself of my personality? Can I not, for the present, make abstraction of the past? My duty is to pursue this inquiry. Claire herself would order

me to act thus. Would she desire to wed a man soiled by suspicion of a crime? Never. For Claire's sake, then, I will go on; that, if innocent, he may be restored to her, and, if guilty, she may be delivered from all further contact with a man so unworthy of her pure affection."

This was very strong reasoning; but, at the bottom of his heart, a thousand disquietudes darted their thorns. He wanted something more to reassure him.

"Do I still hate this young man?" he continued. "No, certainly. If Claire has preferred him to me, it is to Claire and not him I owe my suffering. My fury was no more than a passing fit of delirium. I will prove it, by letting him find in me as much of counsellor as judge. If he is not guilty, he will dispose of all this formidable array of evidence, placed by Père Tabaret in the hands of justice, by establishing counter-proofs of his innocence. Yes, I am able to be his judge. Heaven, who reads the thoughts of all hearts, sees that I love Claire enough to wish with all my heart the innocence of her lover."

At this moment, M. Daburon, remembered vaguely the lapse of time.

It was nearly three o'clock in the morning.

"Goodness!" cried he, "and Père Tabaret is waiting for me. 'I shall find him asleep.'"

But Père Tabaret was not asleep. He had felt the passage of time no more than the judge.

Ten minutes had sufficed him to take an inventory of the contents of Daburon's study; which was large, and of a severe magnificence, altogether in accordance with the position and large fortune of the magistrate. Armed with a lamp, he approached six very handsome pictures, which broke the monotony of the wainscoting,

and admired them. He examined curiously some rare bronzes, placed upon the chimney-piece, and a console. He gave the bookcase the glance of a connoisseur.

After which, taking an evening paper from the table, he approached the hearth, and plunged into a vast arm-chair.

He had not read the third part of the leading article, —which, like all the leading articles of the time, interested itself exclusively with the Roman question,—when, letting the paper drop from his hands he became absorbed in meditation. The fixed idea, stronger than his will, and more interesting to him than politics, carried him to Jonchère, where lay the murdered Widow Lerouge. Like the child who builds up and throws down again and again his house of cards, he re-arranged and scattered alternately his series of inductions and evidence.

Certainly there was nothing doubtful or questionable in the evidence. From A to Z, he knew all. He knew what his own impressions had been, on hearing Noel's revelations; and Daburon, he saw, shared his opinions. What difficulty remained?

There is between the judge of inquiry and the accused a supreme tribunal,—an admirable institution, a powerful moderator,—the jury.

The jury, thank heaven! does not content itself with a moral conviction. The strongest probabilities cannot draw from them an affirmative verdict.

Placed upon a neutral ground, between the prosecution and the defence, it demands material and tangible proofs. Where the magistrate would condemn twenty times for one, in all security of conscience, the jury acquit for lack of satisfying evidence.

The deplorable execution of Lesurques has certainly

assured impunity to many criminals ; but, it is necessary to say it justifies hesitation in receiving circumstantial evidence in capital crimes.

In short, save where a criminal is taken in the very act, or confesses his guilt, it is not certain that the minister of justice can secure a conviction. Sometimes the judge of inquiry is as anxious as the accused himself. Nearly all crimes are in some particular point mysterious, perhaps impenetrable to justice and the police ; and the duty of the advocate is, to discover this weak point, and thereon establish his client's defence. By pointing out this doubt to the jury, he insinuates in their minds a distrust of the entire evidence ; and frequently the detection of a distorted induction, cleverly exposed, can change the face of a prosecution, and make a strong case appear to the jury a weak one. This uncertainty explains the character of passion which is so often perceptible in criminal trials.

And, in proportion to the march of civilization, juries in important trials will become more timid and hesitating. The weight of responsibility oppresses the man of conscientious scruple. Already numbers recoil from the idea of capital punishment ; and, whenever a jury can find a peg to hang a doubt on, they will wash their hands of the responsibility of condemnation. We have seen numbers of persons signing appeals for mercy to a condemned malefactor, condemned for what crime ? Parricide ! Every juror, from the moment he is sworn, weighs infinitely less the evidence he has come to listen to than the risk he runs of incurring the pangs of remorse. Rather than risk the condemnation of one innocent man, he will allow twenty scoundrels to go unpunished.

The accusation must, then, come before the jury,

armed at all points, with both hands full of proofs. A task often tedious to the judge of inquiry, and bristling with difficulties, is the arrangement and condensation of this evidence, particularly when the accused is a miscreant of strength and coolness, certain of having left no traces of his guilt. Then, from the depths of his dungeon he defies the assault of justice, and laughs at the judge of inquiry. It is a terrible struggle, enough to make one tremble at the responsibility of the magistrate, when he remembers, that, after all, this man imprisoned, without consolation or advice, may be innocent. How hard is it, then, for the judge to resist his moral convictions!

Even when presumptive evidence points clearly to the criminal, and common sense recognizes him, Justice is at times compelled to acknowledge her defeat, for lack of what the jury consider sufficient proof of guilt.

Thus, unhappily, many crimes escape punishment. An old advocate-general one day confessed that he knew as many as three assassins, living rich, happy, and respected, who, unless from some improbable accidents, would end by dying in their beds, surrounded by their families, being followed to the grave with lamentations, and praised for their virtues in their epitaphs.

At the idea that a murderer should escape the penalty of his crime, steal himself away from the very court of assize, Père Tabaret's blood fairly boiled in his veins, as at the recollection of a cruel personal injury.

Such a monstrous event, in his opinion, could only proceed from the incapacity of the magistrates charged with the prosecution, the maladdress of the police, or the stupidity of the judge of inquiry.

"It is not I," he muttered with the satisfied vanity of success, "who ever let my prey escape. No crime can

be committed, of which the author cannot be found unless he happens to be a madman; in which event, his escape is reasonable. I would pass my life in pursuit of a criminal, before avowing myself vanquished, as this Gevrol has done so many times."

This time again, Père Tabaret, assisted by chance, had succeeded, he repeated to himself; but what proofs of innocence would the defence present to this accursed jury,—this jury, so difficult to convince, so formal and so cowardly. Who could imagine what means might not be found by a strong man, perfectly on his guard, covered by his position, and without doubt by cunning precautions? What trap had he prepared? To what new and infallible stratagem had he had recourse?

The amateur detective exhausted himself in subtle but impracticable combinations, always stopped by this fatal jury, so obnoxious to the chevaliers of the Rue Jerusalem.

He was so deeply absorbed in his thoughts that he did not hear the door open, and continued his reflections unconscious of the judge's presence.

Daburon's voice aroused him from his reverie.

"You will excuse me, M. Tabaret, for having left you so long alone."

The old fellow rose and made a respectful salutation at an angle of forty-five degrees.

"By my faith, monsieur," replied he, "I have not had the leisure to perceive my solitude."

Daburon crossed the room, and seated himself, facing his agent before a small table encumbered with papers and documents relating to the crime. He appeared very much fatigued.

"I have reflected a good deal," he commenced, "on all this affair—"

"And I," interrupted Père Tabaret, "was just asking myself, monsieur, what was likely to be the attitude assumed by the viscount at the moment of his arrest. Nothing is more important, according to my theory, than his manner of conducting himself then. Will he attempt to intimidate the agents? Will he threaten them with expulsion from the house? These are generally the tactics of titled criminals. My opinion, however, is, that he will remain perfectly cool. This conclusion is logical. It is the character of the perpetrator of the crime to treat the ministers of justice with a superb assurance. He will declare himself the victim of a misunderstanding, and insist upon an immediate interview with the judge of inquiry. Once that is accorded to him, he will finish by explaining every thing very quickly."

The old fellow spoke of matters of speculation in such a tone of assurance that Daburon was unable to repress a smile.

"We have not got as far as that yet," said he.

"But we shall, in some hours," replied Tabaret quickly. "I presume you will order the criminal's arrest at daybreak."

The judge trembled, as the patient who sees the surgeon on entering deposit his case of instruments upon the table.

The moment for action had come. He felt now what a distance lies between a mental decision and the physical action resulting therefrom.

"You are prompt, M. Tabaret," said he; "you recognize no obstacles."

"None, having ascertained the criminal. Who else can have committed this assassination? Who but he had an interest in silencing the Widow Lerouge, in suppressing her testimony, in destroying her papers?"

Poor Noel! who is as dull as honesty, has been forestalled by this wretch, who stops at nothing. Noel has instituted proceedings to recover his title and estates. Should the guilt of the assassin fail to be established, he will remain de Cammarin more than ever; and my young advocate will be Noel Gerdy to the grave."

"Yes, but—"

The amateur fixed upon the judge a look of astonishment.

"You see, then, some difficulties, monsieur?" he demanded.

"Without doubt!" replied Daburon. "This is a matter demanding the utmost circumspection. In cases like the present, we must not strike until the blow is sure; and we have but presumptions. We must not deceive ourselves. Justice, unhappily, cannot repair her errors. Her hand once placed upon a man, even if unjustly, leaves an imprint of dishonor that can never be effaced. She may perceive her error, and proclaim it aloud; but in vain. Public opinion,—absurd, idiotic opinion,—pardons not the man guilty of the crime of being suspected."

It was with a sinking heart the old fellow heard these remarks. He would not be the man to be withheld by such mean considerations.

"Our suspicions are well grounded," continued the judge. "But, should they lead us into error, our precipitation would be a terrible misfortune for this young man, to say nothing of the effect it would have in abridging the authority and dignity of Justice, of weakening the respect which constitutes her power. Such a mistake would call for discussion, provoke examination, and awaken distrust, at an epoch in our history when

all minds are but too much disposed to defy the constituted authorities."

He leaned upon the table, and appeared to reflect profoundly.

"No chance," thought Père Tabaret. "I have to do with a trembler. When he should act, he makes speeches; instead of signing mandates, he propounds theories. He is stunned by my discovery, and is not equal to the situation. Instead of being delighted by my appearance with the news of our success, he would have given a louis, I dare say, to have been left to slumber undisturbed in thick ignorance. Ah! he would very willingly have the little fishes in his net; but the big ones frighten him: the big fish are dangerous; and he lets them swim away."

"Perhaps," said Daburon in a loud tone, "it will suffice to issue a mandate of inquiry, and another of requisition for the appearance of the accused."

"Then all is lost!" cried Père Tabaret.

"And why, if you please?"

"Monsieur, we are opposed by a criminal of marked ability. The crime has been executed with the most subtle premeditation. A most providential accident alone, almost a miracle, has placed us upon the track of discovery. If we give him time to breathe, he will escape."

The only answer was an inclination of the head; which Daburon might have intended for a sign of assent.

"It is evident," continued the old fellow, "that our adversary has foreseen every thing, absolutely every thing, except the possibility of suspicion attaching to one in his high position. Oh! his precautions are all

taken. If you are satisfied with demanding his appearance, he is saved. He will enter your cabinet of inquiry as tranquilly as your clerk, as unconcerned as if he came to arrange the preliminaries of a duel. He will present you with a magnificent *alibi*, an *alibi* that cannot be gainsaid. He will show you that he passed the evening and the night of Tuesday with personages of the highest rank. He has dined with the Count de Machin, gamed with the Marquis of so and so, and supped with the Duke of what's his name. The Baroness of this and the Viscountess of that have not lost sight of him for a minute. In short, his little machine will be so cleverly constructed, so nicely arranged, all its little wheels will play so well, that there will be nothing left for you but to open the door and usher him out with the most humble apologies. The only means of securing conviction is to surprise the miscreant by a rapidity against which it is impossible he can be on guard. Fall upon him like a thunderclap, arrest him as he awakes, drag him hither while yet pale with astonishment, and interrogate at once."

Père Tabaret stopped short, frightened at the idea that he had been wanting in respect; but Daburon showed no sign of being offended.

"Proceed," said he, in a tone of encouragement, "proceed."

"Then," continued the old fellow, "I am a judge of inquiry. I cause my man to be arrested; and, twenty minutes later, he is standing before me. I do not amuse myself by putting questions to him, more or less subtle. No, I go right to the mark. I overwhelm him at once by the weight of my certainty, prove to him so clearly that I know every thing, that he must surrender, seeing no chance of escape. I should say to him, 'My good

man, you bring me an *alibi*; it is very well: but we are acquainted with this system of defence. It will not do with me. Of course I understand you have been elsewhere at the hour of the crime; an hundred persons have never lost sight of you: It is all admitted. In the mean time, here is what you have done. At twenty minutes after eight, you slipped away adroitly; at thirty-five minutes past eight, you took the train at Rue St. Lazare; at nine o'clock, you descended at the station at Rueil, and took the road to Jonchère; at a quarter past nine, you knocked at the window-shutter of the Widow Lerouge's cottage. You were admitted. You asked for something to eat, and, above all, something to drink. At twenty minutes past nine, you planted the end of a foil, well-sharpened, between her shoulders. You killed her! You then overturned every thing in the house, and burned certain papers of importance; after which, you tied in a napkin all the valuables you could find, and carried them off, to lead the police to believe the murder was the work of a robber. You locked the door, and threw away the key.

“ ‘ Arrived at the Seine you threw the bundle into the water, and then regained the railway station on foot; and, at eleven o'clock, you re-appeared in the company, where your absence was unnoticed. Your game was well played; but you omitted to provide against two adversaries, an agent of police, not easily deceived, named Tiraucclair, and another still more capable, named chance.

“ ‘ Between the two, they have made you lose the game. Moreover, you were wrong to wear fine boots, and to keep on your pearl gray gloves, besides embarrassing yourself with a silk hat and an umbrella. Now confess your guilt, and save the trouble of a trial; and I will

give you permission to smoke in your dungeon some of those trabucos you are so fond of, and which you smoke always with an amber mouthpiece.' ”

During this speech, delivered with extraordinary volubility, Père Tabaret had gained a couple of inches in height, so great was his enthusiasm. He looked at the magistrate, as if requesting a smile of approval.

“ Yes,” continued he, after taking breath, “ I would say this, and nothing else ; and, unless this man is a hundred times stronger than I suppose him to be, unless he is made of bronze, of marble, or of steel, he would fall at my feet and avow his guilt.”

“ And then if he were of bronze,” said Daburon, “ and did not fall at your feet, what would you do next ? ”

The question evidently embarrassed the old fellow.

“ Pshaw ! ” stammered he ; “ I don't know ; I should see. I would search. But he would confess.”

After a prolonged silence, Daburon took a pen, and wrote in haste,—

“ I surrender,” said he. “ M. Albert de Commarin shall be arrested. It is decided ; but the formalities and inquiries will occupy some time, which I wish to use by first interrogating the Count de Commarin, the young man's father, and this young advocate, your friend M. Noel Gerdy, also, in examination of the letters of which you speak ; they are indispensable to me.”

At the name of Gerdy, Père Tabaret's face assumed a most comical expression of uneasiness.

“ Confound it,” cried he, “ the very thing I have most dreaded.”

“ What ? ” demanded Daburon.

“ The necessity for the examination of those letters. Noel will discover my interference. He will despise me : he will fly from me, when he knows that Tabaret and

Tirauclair sleep in the same nightcap. Before eight days, my oldest friends will refuse to take my hand, as if it were not an honor to serve justice. I shall be obliged to change my residence, and assume a false name."

He almost wept, so great was his annoyance. Daburon was touched.

"Reassure yourself, my dear Tabaret," said he. "I will manage that your adopted son, your Benjamin, shall know nothing. I shall lead him to believe I have reached him by means of the widow's papers."

The old fellow seized the judge's hand in a transport of gratitude, and carried it to his lips.

"Oh! thanks, monsieur, a thousand thanks! I beg to be permitted to witness the arrest; and I shall be glad to assist at the examination."

"I expected you would ask it, M. Tabaret," answered the judge.

The lamps paled in the gray dawn of the morning; the rumbling of vehicles was heard in the distance: Paris was awaking.

"I have no time to lose," continued Daburon, "if I would have all my measures well taken. I must at once see the procurer imperial, awake him, if necessary. I will go from his house directly to the palace of justice. I shall be in my cabinet before eight o'clock; and I desire, M. Tabaret, you will there await my orders."

The magistrate's servant appeared.

"A note, monsieur," said he, "brought by a gendarme from Bougival. He waits an answer."

"Very well," replied Daburon. "Ask the man to have some refreshment; at least offer him a glass of wine."

He opened the envelope.

"Ah!" he cried, "a letter from Gevrol;" and he read,—

" ' TO THE JUDGE OF INQUIRY,—

" ' I have the honor to inform you, that I am on the track of the man of the ear-rings. I heard of him at a wine shop, which he entered on Sunday morning, before going to the Widow Lerouge's cottage. He drank, and paid for two litres of wine; then, suddenly striking his forehead, he cried, "Old stupid! to forget that tomorrow is the boat's fête day!" and demanded another litre of wine. I consulted the almanac; it was the fête of St. Martin, which I therefore take to be the name of the boat. I have also learned that she was laden with grain. I write to the prefecture at the same time as I write to you, that inquiries may be made at Paris and Rouen. He must be found at one of these places.

" ' I am in waiting, monsieur, etc.' "

"Poor Gevrol!" cried Père Tabaret, bursting with laughter. "He sharpens his sabre, and the battle is over. Are you not going to put a stop to his researches, monsieur?"

"No; certainly not," answered Daburon; "to neglect the slightest clew might lead to error. Who can tell what light we may receive from this old mariner with the rings in his ears?"

CHAPTER VIII.

ON the same day that the crime of Jonchère was discovered, and precisely at the hour when Père Tabaret made his memorable examination in the victim's chamber, the Viscount Albert de Commarin entered a carriage, and proceeded to the Gate du Nord, to meet his father.

The young man was very pale, his features pinched, his eyes dull, his lips blanched, his whole appearance denoting either overwhelming fatigue or unusual sorrow.

All the servants had observed, that, during the past five days, their young master was not in his ordinary condition: he spoke with effort, ate almost nothing, and forbade the admission of visitors.

His valet remarked that this singular alteration dated from the visit, on Sunday morning, of a certain M. Noel Gerdy, advocate, who had been closeted with him for three hours in the library.

The viscount, gay as a lark until the arrival of this person, had, from the moment of his departure, the appearance of a man at the point of death, or filled with remorse for the commission of a terrible crime.

At the moment of setting forth to meet his father, the viscount appeared to suffer so acutely that Lubin, his valet, entreated him not to expose himself to the cold; it would be more prudent to retire to his room, and call in the doctor.

But the Count de Commarin, his son knew, was exacting on the score of filial duty, and would overlook the worst of youthful indiscretions sooner than what he termed a want of reverence. He had announced his intended arrival by telegraph, twenty-four hours in advance; therefore the house was expected to be in perfect readiness to receive him: and the absence of Albert at the railway station would have been resented as a flagrant omission of duty.

The viscount had been but five minutes in the waiting room, when the bell announced the arrival of the train. Soon the doors leading to the platform were opened, and the depot became filled with travellers.

The throng beginning to thin a little, the count appeared, followed by a servant, who carried a travelling pelisse lined with expensive fur.

The Count de Commarin looked a good ten years less than his age. His beard and hair, yet abundant, were scarcely grey. He was tall and muscular, held himself upright, and carried his head high,—all this without any of the ungracious British manner, so much affected by our young men of the present day. His appearance was noble, his movements easy. His hands were strong and handsome,—the hands of a man whose ancestors have been for centuries familiar with swordhilts. His regular features presented a study to the physiognomist, all expressing easy, careless good nature, even to the handsome, smiling mouth; except his eyes, in whose clear depths flashed the fiercest, most arrogant pride. This contrast revealed the secret of his character. Imbued quite as deeply with aristocratic prejudice as the Marquise d'Arlanges, he had progressed with his century, or at least appeared to have done so. As fully as the marquise, he held in contempt all who were not noble; but his disdain expressed itself in different fashion. The marquise proclaimed her contempt loudly and coarsely; the count dissimulated, beneath an excess of politeness humiliating to its object, a feeling of disgust equally excessive. The marquise willingly admitted her tradespeople to familiar conversation. The count, one day when his architect let fall his umbrella, picked it up and returned it to him. The marquise had lived with her eyes bandaged, her ears closed; the count had kept eyes and ears open and had seen and heard a good deal. She was stupid, and without the protection of common sense. He was witty and sensible, and possessed enlarged views of life and politics. She dreamed of the

return of the absurd traditions of a former age, and the restoration of effete monarchies, imagining that the years could be turned back like the hands of a clock. He hoped for things within the power of events to bring forth. For example, he was sincerely persuaded the nobles of France would yet recover slowly and silently, but surely, all their lost power, with its prestige and influence.

But, in the end, they belonged to the same order. They were both aristocrats. The count was a flattered portrait of his class; the marquise its caricature.

It should be added that M. de Commarin knew how to divest himself of his crushing urbanity in the company of his equals. There he recovered his true character,—haughty, self-sufficient, and intractable, enduring contradiction pretty much as a wild horse the application of the spur.

In his own house, he was a despot.

Perceiving his father, Albert advanced, and embraced him with an air equally noble and ceremonious, and, in less than a minute, had expressed in well-chosen phrase all the news that had transpired during his absence, and the compliments of the journey.

Then only M. de Commarin perceived the so visible alteration in his son's face.

"You are not well, viscount?" asked he.

"Oh, yes, monsieur!" answered Albert, dryly.

The count gave an "Ah!" accompanied by a certain movement of the head—a habitual trick with him, expressing perfect incredulity; then, turning to his servant, he gave him some orders briefly.

"Now," resumed he, "let us go quickly to the house. I am in haste to feel at home; and I am hungry, having

had nothing to-day but some detestable bouillon, at I know not what way station."

M. de Commarin arrived in Paris in very ill-humor: his journey into Austria had not brought the results he hoped for.

To crown his dissatisfaction, he had rested, on his homeward way, at the house of an old friend, with whom he had so violent a discussion that they parted without shaking hands.

The count was hardly seated in his carriage, which started at a gallop, before he entered upon the subject of this disagreement.

"I have quarrelled with the Duke de Sairmeuse," said he.

"That seems to me to happen whenever you meet," answered Albert, without intending any raillery.

"True," said the count; "but this is serious. I passed four days at his country-seat, in a state of inconceivable exasperation. He has been guilty of an act which lowers him in my estimation beyond recovery! Sairmeuse has sold his estate of Gondresy,—one of the finest in the north of France. He cut down the timber, and put up to auction the old chateau,—a princely dwelling, now to be converted into a sugar refinery; all this for the purpose, as he says, of raising money to meet some legal obligations,—debts or settlements, or something of that kind!"

"And was that the cause of your rupture?" inquired Albert, without much surprise.

"Certainly it was?" Do you not think it a sufficient one?"

"But, monsieur, you know the duke has a large family, and is far from rich."

"What matters that? A noble of France who sells

his land commits an unworthy act. He is guilty of treason against his order!"

"O monsieur!" said Albert, deprecatingly.

"I said treason!" continued the count. "I maintain the position. Remember well, viscount, the power has been, and always will be, on the side of wealth,—the strongest right with those who hold the soil. The men of '93 well understood this principle, and acted upon it. By impoverishing the nobility, they destroyed their prestige more effectually than by abolishing their titles. A prince dismounted, and without retinue,—that is, without means to retain them,—is a ridiculous figure! The minister of July, who said to the people, 'Make yourselves rich,' was not a fool. He gave them the magic formula for power. But they have not the sense to understand it. They want to go too fast. They launch into speculations, and become rich, it is true; but in what? Stocks, bonds, paper,—rags, in short. It is smoke they are locking in their coffers. They prefer to invest in merchandise, which pays eight or ten per cent, to investing in vines or corn which will return but three. The peasant is not so foolish. From the moment he owns a piece of ground the size of a handkerchief, he wants to make it as large as a tablecloth. He is slow as the oxen he ploughs with, but as patient, as tenacious, and as obstinate. He goes directly to his object, pressing firmly against the yoke; and nothing can stop or turn him aside. He knows that stocks may rise or fall, fortunes be won or lost on 'change; but the land always remains,—the real standard of wealth. To become landholders, the peasant starves himself, wears sabots in winter; and the imbeciles who laugh at him will be astonished by and by when *he* makes his '93, and the peasant becomes a baron in power if not in name."

"I do not understand the application," said the viscount.

"You do not understand? Why, what the peasant is doing is what the nobles ought to have done! Ruined, their duty was to reconstruct their fortunes. Commerce is interdicted to us; be it so: agriculture remains. Instead of grumbling uselessly during the half-century, instead of running themselves into debt, in the ridiculous attempt to support an appearance of grandeur, they ought to have retreated to their provinces, shut themselves up in their chateaux; there worked, economized, denied themselves, as the peasant is doing, purchased the land piece by piece. Had they taken this course, they would to-day possess France. Their wealth would be enormous; for the value of land rises year after year. I have, without effort, doubled my fortune in thirty years. Blauville, which cost my father a hundred crowns in 1817, is worth to-day more than a million: so that, when I hear the nobles complain, I shrug the shoulder. Who but they are to blame? They impoverish themselves from year to year. They sell their land to the peasants. Soon they will be reduced to beggary, and their escutcheons. What consoles me is, that the peasant, having become the proprietor of our domains, will then be all-powerful, and will yoke to his chariot wheels these traders in scrip and stocks, whom he hates as much as I execrate them myself."

The carriage at this moment stopped in the court of the Hotel Commarin, after having described that perfect circle, the glory of coachmen who preserve the old traditions.

The count alighted from the carriage, leaning upon his son's arm, and ascended the steps of the grand entrance.

In the immense vestibule, nearly all the servants, dressed in rich liveries, stood in a line.

The count gave them a glance, in passing, as an officer might his soldiers on parade, and proceeded to his apartments upon the second floor, above the reception rooms.

Never was there a better regulated household than that of the Hotel de Commarin,—a considerable establishment, too; for the count's fortune enabled him to sustain a retinue greater than that of a German prince. He possessed in a high degree the art, more rare than is generally supposed, of commanding an army of servants.

According to Riviral, a man's manner of giving an order to a lackey establishes his rank better than a hundred genealogies on parchment.

The number of his domestics gave the count neither inconvenience nor embarrassment. They were necessary to him. Although he was exacting, never permitting the expression, "I did not understand," he was rarely heard to administer a reproof.

So perfect was the organization of this household, that its functions were performed like those of a machine,—without noise, variation, or effort.

Thus, when the count returned from his journey, the sleeping hotel was awakened as if by the spell of an enchanter. Each servant was at his post; and the occupations, interrupted during the past six weeks, resumed without confusion. As the count was known to have passed the day on the road, the dinner was served in advance of the usual hour. All the establishment, even to the lowest scullion, represented the spirit of the first article of the rules of the house, "Servants are not to execute orders, but anticipate them."

M. de Commarin had hardly removed the traces of his journey, and changed his dress, when his Maitre d'Hotel announced,—

“M. le Count is served.”

He descended at once; and father and son met upon the threshold of the dining-room.

This was a large apartment, very high in the ceiling, as were all the rooms of the first floor, and was at once magnificent and simple in its furniture and appointments.

One only of its four sideboards would have encumbered a dining-room of the Rue Maléscherhes.

A collector of curiosities would have found much to occupy his attention on those four sideboards, loaded as they were with antique gold and silver plate, rare enamels, marvellous china, and porcelain that might make a king of Saxony turn green with jealousy.

The table service, resplendent in silver and cut glass, which occupied the middle of the room, was in keeping with this luxury.

The count was not only a great eater, but was vain of his enormous appetite,—the possession of which would have been to a poor devil an awful calamity. He was fond of recalling the names of great men, noted for their capacity of stomach. Charles the fifth devoured mountains of viands. Louis XIV. swallowed at each repast as much as six ordinary men. He argued, pleasantly, that we may judge of men's qualities by their digestive capacities. He compared them to lamps, whose power of giving light is in proportion to the oil they consume.

The first half hour of dinner passed in silence. M. de Commarin ate conscientiously, either not perceiving or not caring to notice that his son ate nothing, but merely

sat at the table as if to countenance him. But with the dessert the old nobleman's ill-humor and volubility returned, apparently increased by the Burgundy, which he drank unsparingly.

He was partial, moreover, to after dinner argument, professing a theory that spirited discussion is a perfect digestive. A letter which had been delivered to him on his arrival, and which he had found time to glance over, gave him at once a subject and a point of departure.

"I arrived here at one o'clock," said he; "and I have already received a homily from Broisfresnay."

"He writes often," observed Albert.

"Too much; he consumes himself in ink. More ridiculous projects, vain hopes, veritable childishness! and he mentions at least a dozen names of men high in power as associates. By my word of honor, men seem to have lost their senses! They talk of lifting the world, only they want the lever and the point on which to rest it. It makes me die with laughter!"

For ten minutes the count continued to discharge a volley of epigrams and sarcasms against his best friends, without seeming to see that a great many of the foibles he ridiculed were his own as much as theirs.

"If," continued he more seriously,— "if they showed any confidence in themselves, they might be entitled to respect; but they have not even the virtue of courage. They count upon others to do for them what they ought to do for themselves. They are in continual quest of some one better mounted, who will consent to take them on his crupper. In short, their proceedings are a series of confessions of helplessness, of premature declarations of failure."

Coffee was served; and the count made a sign.

The servants left the room.

"No," said the count, "I see but one hope for the French aristocracy, but one plank of salvation, one good little law, establishing the right of primogeniture."

"You will never obtain it, monsieur."

"You would oppose such a measure, viscount."

Albert knew by experience what dangerous ground his father was approaching, and was silent.

"Let us put it, then, that I dream of the impossible!" resumed the count. "Let the nobles do their duty. When the younger sons and daughters of great houses devote themselves to establish their families, by giving up the entire patrimony to its first-born for five generations, contenting themselves each one with a hundred louis a year, then only can great fortunes be reconstructed, and families, instead of being divided by a variety of interests, become united by a common aspiration,—have a political influence, a position in the State."

"Unfortunately," objected the viscount, "the time is not favorable to such devotedness."

"I know it, monsieur," replied the count quickly; "and in my own house I have proved it. I have conjured you to renounce the espousal of the granddaughter of this old fool, the Marquise d' Arlanges. To what purpose?"

"My father—" Albert was beginning.

"It is well," interrupted the count. "You will take your own course; but remember my prediction: you will give the mortal blow to our house; you will be one of the largest proprietors in France, but have half a dozen children; and they will be hardly rich. Live to be an old man, and you will see your grandchildren in poverty!"

"You put all at the worst, father."

“Without doubt: it is the only means of pointing out the danger, and averting the evil. You talk of your life’s happiness. A truly noble man thinks of his name and family before all, even his life’s happiness. Mademoiselle d’ Arlanges is very pretty, and very attractive; but she has not a sou. It is your duty to marry an heirless.”

“Whom I shall not love?”

“The same old song. Pshaw! the lady I wish you to marry will bring you four millions in her apron,—a larger dowry than the kings of to-day can give their daughters.”

The discussion upon this subject would have been interminable, had Albert taken an active share in it; but his mind was leagues away: and he answered from time to time only, and then in monosyllables. This absence of opposition was more irritating to the count than the most obstinate contradiction. He directed his utmost efforts to pique his son, that was his next tactique.

Meanwhile, he was vainly prodigal of words, and unsparing in provoking and unpleasant allusions. At length, from being irritated, he became furious; and, on receiving a laconic response, he burst forth,—

“Parbleu! the son of my Maitre d’ Hotel argues no worse than you. What blood have you in your veins? You are more like a son of the people than a scion of the de Commarins!”

There are certain conditions of mind in which the least conversation jars upon the nerves. During the last half hour, Albert had suffered an intolerable punishment. The patience with which he had armed himself at last escaped him.

“Well, monsieur,” he answered, “if I resemble a son of the people, there are perhaps good reasons for it.”

The glance accompanying the speech was so expressive that the count experienced a sudden shock. All the animation departed from his manner; and, in a hesitating voice, he demanded,—

“What do you say, viscount?”

Albert no sooner uttered the sentence than he regretted his precipitation; but he had gone too far to retreat.

“Monsieur,” he said with a peculiar calmness, “I have to confer with you on important matters. My honor, yours, the honor of our house, are involved. I intended postponing the conversation till to-morrow, not desiring to trouble you on the evening of your return; but you have introduced the topic, and we must proceed.”

The count listened with ill-concealed anxiety. He divined the misfortune that had occurred, and was terrified at himself for having divined it.

“Believe me, monsieur,” continued Albert, “whatever may have been your acts, my voice will never be raised to reproach you. Your constant goodness—”

M. de Commarin held up his hand.

“A truce to preambles; the facts without phrases,” said he, sternly.

Albert was slow to answer: he hesitated where to commence.

“Monsieur,” said he at length, “during your absence, I have read all your correspondence with Madame Gerdy,—*all!*” emphasizing the last word, already so significant.

The count started up, as if stung by a serpent, with such violence that his chair rolled back several paces.

“Not a word!” cried he in a terrible voice. “I forbid you to speak.”

He was ashamed of his violence, evidently ; for he replaced his chair with an affectation of calmness.

“ Who will hereafter refuse to believe in presentiments ? ” he resumed in a tone which he strove to render light and rallying. “ An hour ago, on seeing your pale face at the railway station, I felt that you had learned something,—much or little,—of this history. I was sure of it.”

With one accord, father and son avoided letting their eyes meet, lest they might encounter glances too eloquent to bear at so painful a moment.

“ You said, monsieur,” said the count, “ honor demands this conference ; it is important, then, to avoid delay. Will you follow me to my room ? ”

He rang the bell. A valet appeared.

“ Neither M. the viscount nor I am at home to any one, no matter whom. We are not to be interrupted.”

CHAPTER IX.

THIS revelation irritated, much more than surprised the Count de Commarin.

Indeed, for twenty years, he had been expecting to see the truth brought to light. He knew that there could be no secret so carefully guarded that it might not by some chance escape ; and his had been known to four people, three of whom were still living.

He had not forgotten that he had been imprudent enough to trust this secret to paper, knowing all the while that it ought never to have been written.

How could he, a prudent diplomat, a statesman, used to precaution, have put it in writing ? How, after writing, could he have allowed this fatal correspondence to

remain in existence? Why had he not destroyed, at whatever cost, these overwhelming proofs, which sooner or later, would be brought against him? Such imprudence could only have been caused by an absurd passion, blind, insensible, improvident even to madness.

It is characteristic of love to have such belief in its continuance that it is scarcely satisfied with the prospect of eternity. Absorbed completely in the present, it takes no thought for the future.

Besides, what man ever dreams of putting himself on his guard against the woman he loves? The enamored Samson is ever ready to submit his hair to the scissors of his Delilah.

So long as he was Valerie's lover, the count never thought of asking the return of his letters from his beloved accomplice. If the idea had occurred to him, he would have repelled it as an insult to the character of his angel.

What reason could he have had to suspect her discretion? None. He would have been much more likely to have supposed her interested in removing every trace, even the slightest, of the occurrences which had taken place. Was it not her son who had received the benefits of the deed,—who had usurped another's name and fortune?

When, eight years after, thinking himself deceived, the count had broken off the connection which had given him so much happiness, he thought of obtaining possession of this unhappy correspondence. But he knew no way. A thousand reasons precluded his moving in the matter.

The principal one of these reasons was, that he had resolved never again to meet this woman once so dearly loved. He did not feel sufficiently sure either of his

anger or of his firmness. Could he, without yielding, resist the tearful pleading of those eyes, which had so long held complete sway over his soul?

To look again upon this mistress of his youth would, he feared, result in his forgiving her; and he had been too cruelly wounded in his pride and in his affection to admit the idea of a reconciliation.

On the other hand, to obtain the letters through a third party was entirely out of the question. He abstained, then, from all action, postponing it indefinitely.

"I will go to her," said he; "but not until I have so torn her from my heart that she will have become indifferent to me. I will not gratify her with the sight of my grief."

So months and years passed on; and finally he began to say and believe that it was too late.

The truth was, that there were memories which it would have been imprudent to awake. By an unjust mistrust, he might provoke her to using the letters.

Can you better force a well-armed person to use his arms than by demanding their surrender? After so long a silence, to ask for the letters would be nearly the same as declaring war. Besides, were they still in existence? who could tell? what more likely than that Madame Gerdy had destroyed them, understanding that their existence was dangerous and that their destruction alone could render her son's usurpation safe?

M. de Commarin was not blind; but, finding himself in an inextricable difficulty, he thought the wisest course was to trust to chance; and so he left open for his old age this door to a guest who was always entering,—Unhappiness.

And for now more than twenty years, he had never passed a day without cursing his inexcusable folly.

Never had he been able to forget that above his head hung a danger more terrible than the sword of Damocles, suspended by a thread, which the slightest accident might break.

To-day this thread had broken.

Often, when considering the possibility of such a catastrophe, he had asked himself how he should avert it?

He had formed and rejected many plans; he had deluded himself, like all men of imagination, who, with a wealth of chimerical projects, find themselves at last surprised while unprepared.

Albert stood respectfully, while his father sat in his great armorial chair, just beneath the large chart, where the genealogical tree of the illustrious family of Rheteau de Commarin spread its luxuriant branches.

The old gentleman permitted no one to see the cruel apprehensions which oppressed him. He seemed neither irritated nor dejected; but his eyes expressed a haughtiness more than usually disdainful,—a self-reliance full of contempt, rendering him imperturbable.

“Now, viscount,” he began in a firm voice, “explain yourself. I need say nothing to you of the pain of a father, obliged to blush before his son; you feel, and pity. Let us spare each other, and try to be calm. Tell me, how did you obtain your knowledge of this correspondence?”

Albert had had time to recover himself, and prepare for the present struggle, as he had waited four days for this interview with mortal impatience.

The difficulty he experienced in speaking the first words had given place to a dignified and proud demeanor. He expressed himself clearly and forcibly,

without losing himself in those details which in grave matters only retard progress.

“Monsieur,” he replied, “on Monday morning a young man appeared here, stating that he had business with me of the utmost importance and secrecy. I received him. He then revealed to me that I, alas! am only your natural son, substituted, through your affection, for the legitimate child borne to you by Madame de Commarin.”

“And you did not kick this man out of doors?” exclaimed the count.

“No, monsieur. I should have answered him very sharply, of course; but, presenting me with a package of letters, he begged me to read them before replying.”

“Ah!” cried M. de Commarin, “you did not throw them in the fire,—there was a fire, I suppose? You held them in your hands; and they still exist. I would have done very differently!”

“Monsieur!” said Albert, reproachfully.

And recalling the position Noel had occupied before the mantel, and the manner in which he stood, he added,—

“Even if the thought had occurred to me, it was impracticable. Besides, at the first glance, I recognized your handwriting. I then took the letters, and read them.”

“And then?”

“And then, monsieur, I returned the correspondence to the young man, and asked for a delay of eight days; not to think over it myself,—there was no need of that,—but because I judged an interview with you indispensable. Now, therefore, I beseech you, tell me whether this substitution ever took place.”

"Certainly it did," replied the count violently,—"certainly. You know that it did; for you have read what I wrote to Madame Gerdy, your mother."

Albert had foreseen, had expected this reply; but it crushed him.

This was one of those misfortunes, so great, that you have to keep repeating it to yourself before you can actually realize it. This flinching lasted but an instant, however.

"Pardon me, monsieur," he replied. "I believed it; but I had not a formal assurance of it. All the letters that I read spoke distinctly of your purpose, detailing your plan minutely; but not one pointed to, or in any way confirmed, the execution of the project."

The count gazed at his son with a look of intense surprise. He recollected distinctly all the letters; and he could remember, that, in writing to Valerie, he had over and over rejoiced at their success, thanking her for having acted in accordance with his wishes.

"You did not finish, then, viscount," he said, "you did not read all?"

"Every line, monsieur, and with an attention that you may well understand. The last letter shown me simply announced to Madame Gerdy the arrival of Claudine Lerouge, the nurse who was charged with accomplishing the exchange. I know nothing beyond that."

"These proofs amount to nothing," muttered the count. "A man may form a plan, cherish it for a long time, and at the last moment abandon it; it often happens so."

He reproached himself for having answered so hastily. Albert had had only serious suspicions: he had changed them to certainty. What a mistake!

"There can be no possible doubt," he said to himself; "Valerie has destroyed the most conclusive letters, those which appeared to her the most dangerous, those I wrote after the exchange. But why has she preserved these others, compromising enough in themselves? and why, after having preserved them, has she let them out of her possession?"

"Perhaps she is dead!" said M. de Commarin aloud.

And at this thought of Valerie dead, without his having again seen her, he started painfully. His heart, after more than twenty years of voluntary separation, still suffered, so deeply rooted was this first love of his youth. He had cursed her; at this moment, he would have pardoned her. She had deceived him, it is true; but did he not owe to her the only years of happiness he had ever known? Had she not formed all the poetry of his youth. Had he experienced, since leaving her, one single hour of happiness? In his present frame of mind, his heart retained only happy memories, like a vase which, once filled with the precious perfumes, retains the odor even after it is itself destroyed.

"Poor girl!" he murmured.

He sighed deeply. Three or four times his eyelids twinkled, as if a tear had nearly fallen. Albert watched him with anxious curiosity. This was the first time since the viscount had grown to man's estate that he had surprised in his father's countenance other emotion than ambition or pride, conquered or triumphant. But M. de Commarin's was not the character to yield long to sentiment.

"You have not told me, viscount," he said, "who sent you this unhappy message?"

"He came in person, monsieur, not wishing, he told me, to bring a third party into the sad affair. The young

man was no other than he whose place I have occupied, —your legitimate son, Noel Gerdy himself.”

“Yes,” said the count in a low tone, “Noel; that is his name: I remember.” And then, with evident hesitation, he added, “did he speak to you of his—of your mother?”

“Scarcely, monsieur. He told me that he had been brought up in ignorance of the secret which he had accidentally discovered, and which he revealed to me.”

M. de Commarin made no reply. There was nothing more for him to learn. He was reflecting. The decisive moment had come; and he saw but one way to escape.

“Come Viscount,” he said, in a tone so affectionate that Albert was astonished, “do not stand; sit down here by me, and let us discuss this matter. Let us unite our efforts to shun, if possible, this great misfortune. Confide in me, as a son should in his father. Have you thought of what is to be done? have you formed any determination?”

“It seems to me, monsieur, that hesitation is impossible.”

“In what way?”

“My duty, father, to me is very plain. Before your legitimate son, I ought to give way without a murmur, if not without regret. Let him come. I am ready to yield to him every thing that I have so long, without a suspicion of the truth, kept from him,—a father’s love, his fortune and his name.”

The old gentleman, at this most praiseworthy reply, could scarcely preserve the calmness he had recommended to his son in the earlier part of the interview. His face grew purple; and he struck the table with his fist more furiously than he had ever done in his life. He, usually so guarded, so decorous on all occasions, ut-

tered a volley of oaths that would not have done discredit to an old cavalry officer.

"And I tell you, sir, that this, your dream of life, shall never take place. No; that it sha'n't. I promise you, whatever happens, understand, that things must remain as they are; because it is my wish. You are Viscount de Commarin; and Viscount de Commarin you shall remain, in spite of yourself. You shall retain the title to your death, or at least to mine; for never, while I live, shall your absurd idea be carried out."

"But, monsieur," began Albert, timidly.

"You are very fond of interrupting me while I am speaking, monsieur," exclaimed the count. "Do I not know all your objections beforehand? You are going to tell me that it is a revolting injustice, a wicked robbery. I confess it, and grieve over it more than you possibly can. Do you think that I now for the first time repent of my youthful folly? For twenty years, monsieur, I have lamented my true son; for twenty years have I cursed the wickedness of which he is the victim. And yet I taught myself to keep silence, to hide the sorrow and the remorse which has covered my pillow with thorns. In a single instant, your senseless yielding would render my long-suffering of no avail. No, I will never permit it!"

The count read a reply on his son's lips; he stopped him with a withering glance.

"Do you think," he continued, "that I have never wept over the thought of my legitimate son passing his life struggling for a competence? Do you think that I have never felt a burning desire to repair the wrong done him? There have been times, monsieur, when I would have given half of my fortune simply to embrace that child of a wife too tardily appreciated. The fear

of casting a shadow of suspicion upon your birth prevented me. I have sacrificed myself to the great name I bear. I received it from my ancestors without a stain. May you hand it down to your children equally spotless! Your first purpose is a worthy one,—noble, chivalrous, but you must forget it. Think of the scandal, if our secret should be disclosed to the public gaze. Can you not foresee the joy of that herd of parvenues who surround us? I shudder at the thought of the odium, the ridicule which will attach to our name. Too many families already have stains upon their escutcheons; I hope ours will never be among the number.”

M. de Commarin had stopped several minutes, without Albert’s daring to reply, so much had he been accustomed since infancy to respect the least wish of the terrible old gentleman.

“There is no possible way out of it,” continued the count. “Shall I to-morrow discard you, and present this Noel as my son, saying, ‘Excuse me, but there has been a slight mistake in identity: I didn’t know my own son?’ And then the tribunals will get hold of it. Now, if our name were Benoit, Durand, or Bernard, it would make no difference; but, when one is called a Commarin, even but for a single day, he must retain it through life. Justice is not the same in every case; because all have not the same duties. In our position, errors are irreparable. Take courage, then, and show yourself worthy of the name you bear. The storm is upon you; raise your head to meet it.”

Albert’s impassibility contributed not a little to increase M. de Commarin’s irritation. Firm in an unchangeable resolution, the viscount listened like one fulfilling a duty; and his face reflected no emotion. The count saw that he was not shaken.

"What have you to reply?" he asked.

"It seems to me, monsieur, that you do not understand all the dangers to which I am exposed. It is difficult to master the revolts of conscience."

"Indeed!" interrupted the count contemptuously; "your conscience revolts, does it? It has chosen its time badly. Your scruples come too late. So long as you saw, in succeeding me, an illustrious title and a dozen or so of millions, it smiled on you. To-day the name appears to you laden with a heavy fault,—a crime, if you will; and your conscience revolts. Renounce this folly. Children, monsieur, are accountable to their fathers; and they should obey them. Willing or unwilling, you must be my accomplice; willing or unwilling, you must bear the burden, as I have borne it. And, however much you suffer, be assured it can never approach what I have endured for so many years."

"Ah, monsieur!" cried Albert, "is it then I, the dispossessor, who has made this trouble? is it not, on the contrary, the dispossessed? It is not I who have moved in the matter; it is Noel Gerdy."

"Noel!" repeated the count.

"Your legitimate son, yes, monsieur. You act as if the issue of this unhappy affair depended solely upon my will. Do you, then, imagine that Noel Gerdy will be so easily disposed of, so easily silenced? And, if he should raise his voice, do you hope to accomplish much through the considerations you have just mentioned?"

"I have no doubt of it."

"Then you are wrong, monsieur, permit me to tell you. Suppose for a moment that this young man has ever had a soul sufficiently noble to relinquish his claim

upon your rank and your fortune. Is there not now the accumulated rancor of years to urge him to oppose us? He cannot help feeling a fierce resentment for the horrible injustice of which he has been the victim. He must passionately long for vengeance, or rather reparation."

"He has no proofs."

"He has your letters, monsieur."

"They are not decisive, you have told me."

"That is true, monsieur; and yet they convinced me, who am interested in not being convinced. Besides if he needs witnesses, he will find them."

"Who? You, probably."

"Yourself, monsieur. The day when he wishes it, you will betray us. Suppose you were summoned before the tribunals, and that there, under oath, you should be required to speak the truth, what answer would you make?"

M. de Commarin's face darkened at this very natural supposition. He hesitated,—he whose honor was usually so great.

"I would save the name of my ancestors," he said at last.

Albert shook his head doubtfully.

"At the price of a lie, my father," he said. "I never will believe that. But let us suppose even that. He will then call upon Madame Gerdy."

"Oh, I will answer for her!" cried the count; "her interests are the same as ours. If necessary, I will see her. Yes," he added with an effort, "I will go to her house: I will speak to her; and I will guarantee that she does not betray us."

"And Claudine," continued the young man; "will she be silent, too?"

"For money, yes; and I will give her whatever she asks."

"And you would trust, father, to a paid silence, as if one could ever be sure of a purchased conscience? What is sold to you may be sold to another. A certain sum may close her mouth; a much larger will open it."

"I will risk it."

"You forget, father, that Claudine Lerouge was Noel Gerdy's nurse, that she takes an interest in his happiness, that she loves him. How do you know that he has not already secured her aid? She lives at Bougival. I have been there, I remember, with you. Without doubt, he sees her often. Perhaps it was she who put him on the track of this correspondence. He spoke to me of her, as though he was sure of her testimony. He almost proposed my going to her for information."

"Alas!" cried the count, "why is not Claudine dead instead of my faithful Germain?"

"You see, monsieur," concluded Albert, "Claudine Lerouge alone stands in the way of your project."

"Ah, no!" cried the count; "I will find some expedient."

The obstinate old gentleman was not willing to give in to this argument, whose very clearness blinded him. The pride of his blood paralyzed in him his usual practical good sense, and obscured his remarkable clear headedness. To acknowledge himself conquered by necessity humiliated him, seemed to him disgraceful, unworthy of him. He did not remember to have met during his long career an invincible resistance or an absolute impediment.

He was a little like those Hercules, who, having never experienced a limit to their strength, believe that they could overcome mountains if they desired.

He had also the misfortune of all men of imagination, who fall in love with their projects, and who try to make them succeed on all occasions, as if wishing hard was all that was necessary to change their dreams into realities.

Albert this time broke the silence, whose length threatened to be prolonged.

"I see, monsieur," he said, "that you fear, above all things, the publicity of this sad history; the possible scandal renders you desperate. But, unless we yield, the uproar will be terrible. If a writ issued against us to-morrow, in four days our trial will be the talk of all Europe. The newspapers will print the facts, accompanied by heaven knows what comments of their own. Our name, however the trial results, will appear in all the papers of the world. This might be borne, if we were sure of succeeding; but we might fail, my father,—we might fail. Then think of the noise, think of the dishonor branded upon us in public opinion."

"I think," said the count, "that you can have neither respect nor affection for me, when you speak in that way."

"It is my duty, monsieur, to point out to you the evils I see threatening, and which there is yet time to shun. Noel Gerdy is your legitimate son; recognize him, acknowledge his just pretensions, receive him. We can make the change very quickly. It is easy to account for it, through a mistake of the nurse,—Claudine Lerouge, for instance. All the parties being in accord, there can be no trouble made: What is to prevent the new Viscount de Commarin from quitting Paris, and being lost to sight? He might travel in Europe four or five years; by the end of that time all would be forgotten. No one will remember me more."

M. de Commarin was not listening: he was deep in thought.

"But instead of contesting, viscount," he cried, "we might compromise. We may be able to purchase these letters. What does this young fellow want? A position and a fortune? I will give him both. I will make him as rich as he can ask. I will give him a million; if need be, two, three,—half of all I possess. With money, you see, much money—"

"Spare him, monsieur; he is your son."

"Curse it! and I wish him to the devil for it! I will show him that he had better compromise. I will prove to him the bad policy of the earthen pot beating against the iron kettle; and, if he is not a fool, he will understand it."

The count rubbed his hands while speaking. He was delighted with this brilliant plan of negotiation. It could not fail to result favorably. A crowd of arguments occurred to his mind for proving his case. He would buy back again his lost quiet.

But Albert did not seem to share his father's hopes.

"You will perhaps think it unkind in me, monsieur," said he sadly, "to dispel this last illusion of yours; but it must be. Do not delude yourself with the idea of an amicable arrangement: the awakening will only be the more painful. I have seen this Gerdy, my father; and he is not one, I assure you, to be intimidated. If ever there was an energetic will in the world, his is one. He is truly your son; and his expression, like yours, shows an iron resolution, to be broken but never bent. I can still hear his voice trembling with resentment, while he spoke to me. I can still see the dark fire of his eyes. No: he will never compromise. He will have all or nothing; and I cannot say that he is wrong. If we re-

sist, he will attack us without the slightest consideration. Strong in his rights, he will cling to us with stubborn animosity. He will drag us from court to court; he will not stop short of utter defeat or complete triumph."

Accustomed to absolute, almost unresisting obedience from his son, the old gentleman was astounded at this unexpected obstinacy.

"What is your purpose, then?" he asked.

"It is this, monsieur. I should utterly despise myself, if I did not spare your old age this greatest of calamities. Your name does not belong to me; I will take my own. I am your natural son. I will yield to your legitimate child. Permit me to withdraw with at least the honor of having freely done my duty. Do not force me to await arrest by the tribunal, which would drive me out in disgrace."

"What!" cried the count stunned, "you will abandon me? You refuse to sustain me, you turn against me, recognize the rights of this man, in spite of my wishes?"

Albert bowed. He was much moved, but still remained firm.

"My resolution is irrevocably taken," he replied. "I can never consent to despoil your son."

"Cruel, ungrateful boy!" cried M. de Commarin.

His wrath was such, that, when he found he could do nothing by abuse, he passed at once to jeering.

"But no," he continued, "you are great, you are noble, you are generous; you are acting after the most approved pattern of chivalry, viscount,—I should say, my very dear Monsieur Gerdy,—after the fashion in Plutarch's time! So you renounce my name, my fortune, and you leave me. You will shake the dust from

your shoes upon my threshold; and you will go out into the world. I see only one difficulty in your way. How do you expect to live, my stoic philosopher? Have you an estate at your fingers' ends, like Jean Jacques' Emile? Or, my worthy Monsieur Gerdy, have you learned economy from the four thousand francs a month I allow you for waxing your moustache? Perhaps you will gamble at the Bourse! Then you will uphold my name with a vengeance,—my name, that seems to you so very burdensome to wear. Is dirt, then, so great an attraction for you that you must jump from the carriage so eagerly? Say, rather, that the company of my friends embarrasses you, and that you are anxious to go where you will be among your own equals."

"I am very wretched, monsieur," replied Albert to this avalanche of insults, "and you would crush me!"

"You wretched! Well, whose fault is it? But let us get back to my question; how and on what will you live?"

"I am not so romantic as you are pleased to suggest, monsieur. I must confess that, for the future, I have counted upon your goodness. You are so rich, that five hundred thousand francs would not materially affect your fortune; and, on the income of that sum, I could live quietly, if not happily."

"And if I should refuse you this money?"

"I know you well enough, monsieur, to feel sure that you will not refuse it. You are too just to wish that I should expiate alone the wrongs that were not of my making. Left to myself, I should have, at my present age, achieved a position. It is too late for me to make one now; but I can at least try."

"Superb!" broke in the count; "this is superb! I never heard of such a hero of romance. What a char-

acter. It has all the purity of Rome, all the firmness of Sparta. It is as grand as any thing in antiquity. But tell me, what do you expect from all this astonishing disinterestedness?"

"Nothing, monsieur."

The count shrugged his shoulders, looking sarcastically at his son.

"The compensation is very slight. And you expect to make me believe it? No, monsieur, mankind is not in the habit of doing such fine actions for its own satisfaction. You have some reason for acting so grandly, which I fail to catch."

"None but what I have already told you."

"Then you intend to renounce every thing; you will even abandon your proposed union with Mademoiselle Claire d'Arlanges? You forget that for two years I have in vain begged you to give this marriage up."

"No, monsieur. I have seen Claire. I have explained my unhappy position to her. Whatever happens, she has sworn to be my wife."

"And do you think that Madame d'Arlanges will give her granddaughter to plain Monsieur Gerdy?"

"I hope so, monsieur. The marquise is sufficiently infected with nobility to prefer the natural child of a gentleman to the son of some honest tradesman; but if she refuses,—ah! well, we will await her death, though without desiring it."

Albert's uniformly calm tone enraged the count.

"Can this be my son?" he cried. "Never! What blood have you in your veins, monsieur? Perhaps your worthy mother might tell us, provided she ever knew herself."

"Monsieur," broke in Albert, fiercely, "think well before you speak. She is my mother, and that is suf-

ficient. I am her son, not her judge. No one in my presence shall speak disrespectfully of her: I will not permit it, monsieur; and I will suffer it least of all from you."

The count used truly heroic efforts to keep his anger within bounds; but he was beside himself at Albert's position. What, he rebelled, he dared to brave him to his face, he threatened him! The old man jumped from his chair, and moved toward his son as if he would strike him.

"Leave the room!" he cried, in a voice choking with rage,—“leave the room instantly! Retire to your apartments, and take care not to leave them without my orders. To-morrow I will give you my decision."

Albert bowed respectfully, but without lowering his eyes, and walked slowly to the door. He had already opened it, when M. de Commarin experienced one of those revulsions of feeling, so frequent in violent natures.

"Albert," said he, "come back and listen to me."

The young man turned, much affected by this change of tone.

"Do not go," continued the count, "until I have asked your pardon. You are worthy of being the heir of a great house, monsieur. I may be irritated by you; but I can never lose my esteem for you. You are a noble man, Albert. Give me your hand."

This was a happy moment for both, and such a one as they had scarcely ever experienced in their lives, restrained as they had been by cold etiquette. The count felt proud of his son, and recognized in him himself at that age. As for Albert, the real meaning of the scene then occurring impressed him: it had until now escaped

him. For a long time their hands remained clasped, without either being able to utter a word.

At last, M. de Commarin resumed his seat beneath the genealogical chart.

"I must ask you to leave me, Albert," he said frankly. "I must be alone, to reflect upon, to try and accustom myself to this terrible blow."

And, as the young man closed the door, he added, as if giving vent to his inmost thoughts,—

"If he deserts me, in whom I have placed all my hope, what will become of me? O my God! And what can the other ever be to me?"

Albert's features, when he left the count's study, bore traces of the violent emotions he had felt during the interview. The servants whom he met noticed it the more, as they had heard something of the quarrel.

"Well," said an old footman who had been in the family thirty years, "the count has had another unhappy scene with his son. The old fellow has been in a dreadful passion."

"I got wind of it at dinner," spoke up a *valet de chambre*: "the count restrained himself enough not to burst out before me; but he rolled his eyes fiercely."

"What can be the matter?"

"Pshaw! that's more than they know themselves. Why, Denis, before whom they always speak freely, says that they often wrangle for hours together, like dogs, about things which he can never see through."

"Ah," cried out a young fellow, who was being trained to service, "if I were in the viscount's place, I'd settle the old gent pretty effectually!"

"Joseph, my friend," said the footman pointedly, "you are a fool. You might give your father his walking ticket very properly, because you never expect five

sous from him; and you have already learned how to earn your living without doing any work at all. But the viscount, pray tell me what he is good for, what he knows how to do? Put him in the centre of Paris, with only his fine hands for capital, and you will see."

"Yes, but he has his mother's property in Normandy," replied Joseph.

"I can't for the life of me," said the *valet de chambre*, "see what the count finds to complain of; for his son is a perfect model, and I shouldn't be sorry to have one like him. There was a very different pair, when I was in the Marquis de Courtivois's service. He was one who made it a point never to be in good humor. His eldest son, who is a friend of the viscount's, and who comes here occasionally, is a pit without a bottom, as far as money is concerned. He will fritter away a thousand-franc note quicker than Joseph can smoke a pipe."

"But the marquis is not rich," said a little old man, who himself had perhaps the enormous wages of fifteen francs; "he can't have more than sixty thousand francs' income at the most."

"That's why he gets angry. Every day there is some new story about his son. He had an apartment in the house; he went in and out when he pleased; he passed his nights in gaming and drinking; he cut up so with the actresses that the police had to interfere. Besides all this, I have many a time had to help him up to his room, and put him to bed, when the waiters from the restaurants brought him home in a carriage, so drunk that he could scarcely say a word."

"Ha!" exclaimed Joseph enthusiastically, "this fellow's service must be mighty profitable."

"That was according to circumstances. When he won at play, he was lavish with his money; but he al-

ways lost : and, when he was drunk, he had a quick temper, and didn't spare the blows. I must do him the justice to say, though, that his cigars were splendid. But he was a ruffian ; while the viscount here is a true child of wisdom. He is severe upon our faults, it is true ; but he is never harsh nor brutal to his servants. Then he is uniformly generous ; which in the long run pays us best. I must say that he is better than the majority, and that the count is very unreasonable."

Such was the judgment of the servants. That of society was perhaps less favorable.

The Viscount de Commarin was not one of those who possess the rather questionable and at times unenviable accomplishment of pleasing every one. He was wise enough to distrust those astonishing personages who are always praising everybody. In looking about us, we often see men of success and reputation, who are simply dolts, without any merit except their perfect insignificance. That stupid propriety which offends no one, that uniform politeness which shocks no one's vanity, have peculiarly the gift of pleasing and of succeeding.

One cannot meet certain persons without saying, " I know that face ; I have seen it somewhere, before ; " because it has no individuality, but simply resembles faces seen in a common crowd. It is precisely so with the minds of certain other people. When they speak, you know exactly what they are going to say : you have heard the same thing so many times already from them, you know all their ideas by heart. These people are welcomed everywhere ; because they have nothing peculiar about them ; and peculiarity, especially in the upper classes, is always irritating and offensive : they detest all innovations.

Albert was peculiar; consequently much discussed, and very differently estimated. He was charged with sins of the most opposite character, with faults so contradictory that they were their own defence. Some accused him, for instance, of entertaining ideas entirely too liberal for one of his rank; and, at the same time, others complained of his excessive arrogance. He was charged with treating with insulting levity the most serious questions, and was then blamed for his affectation of gravity. People knew him scarcely well enough to love him, while they were jealous of him and feared him.

He wore a bored look in all fashionable reunions, which was considered very bad taste. Forced by his relations, by his father, to go into society a great deal, he was bored, and committed the unpardonable sin of letting it be seen. Perhaps he had been disgusted by the constant court made to him, by the rather coarse attentions which were never spared the noble heir of one of the richest families in France. Having all the necessary qualities for shining, he despised them. Dreadful sin! he did not abuse his advantages; and no one ever heard of his getting into a scrape.

He had had once, it was said, a very decided liking for Madame Prosny, perhaps the naughtiest, certainly the most mischievous woman in Paris; but that was all. Mothers who had daughters to dispose of upheld him; but, for the last two years, they had turned against him, when his love for Mademoiselle d'Arlanges became well known.

At the club they rallied him on his prudence. He had had, like others, his run of follies; but he had soon got disgusted with what it is the fashion to call pleasure. The noble profession of *bon vivant* appeared to him very tame and tiresome. He did not enjoy passing

his nights at cards; nor did he appreciate the society of those frail sisters, who in Paris give notoriety to their lovers. He affirmed that a gentleman was not necessarily an object of ridicule because he would not expose himself in the theatre with these women. Finally, none of his friends could ever inoculate him with a passion for the turf.

As doing nothing wearied him, he attempted, like the parvenu, to give some meaning to life by work. He purposed, after a while, to take part in public affairs; and, as he had often been struck with the gross ignorance of many men in power, he wished to avoid their example. He busied himself with politics; and this was the cause of all his quarrels with his father. The one word of "liberal" was enough to throw the count into convulsions; and he suspected his son of liberalism, ever since reading an article by the viscount, published in the "*Revue des Deux Mondes*."

His ideas, however, did not prevent his fully sustaining his rank. He spent most nobly on the world the revenue which placed his father and himself a little above it. His establishment, distinct from the count's, was arranged as that of a wealthy young gentleman's ought to be. His liveries left nothing to be desired; and his horses and equipages were celebrated. Letters of invitation were eagerly sought for to the grand hunting parties, which he formed every year towards the end of October at Commarin,—an admirable piece of property, covered with immense woods.

Albert's love for Claire—a deep, well-considered love—had contributed not a little to keep him from the habits and life of the pleasant and elegant idleness indulged in by his friends. A noble attachment is always a great safeguard. In contending against it, M. de Commarin

had only succeeded in increasing its intensity and insuring its continuance. This passion, so annoying to the count, was the source of the most vivid, the most powerful emotions in the viscount. Ennui was banished from his existence.

All his thoughts took the same direction; all his actions had but one aim. Could he look to the right or the left, when, at the end of his journey, he perceived the reward so ardently desired? He resolved that he would never have any wife but Claire; his father absolutely refused his consent. The effort to change this refusal had long been the business of his life. Finally, after three years of perseverance, he had triumphed; the count had given his consent. And now, just as he was reaping the happiness of success, Noel had arrived, implacable as fate, with his cursed letters.

On leaving M. de Commarin, and while slowly mounting the stairway which led to his apartment, Albert's thoughts reverted to Claire. What was she doing at this moment? Thinking of him, without a doubt. She knew that the crisis would come this very evening, or to-morrow at the latest. She must be praying.

Albert felt broken down. His suffering was intense. He felt dizzy; his head seemed ready to burst. He rang and ordered some tea.

"Monsieur does wrong in not sending for the doctor," said Lubin, his *valet de chambre*. "I ought to disobey you, and send for him myself."

"It would be useless," replied Albert sadly; "he could do nothing for my illness."

As the valet was leaving the room, he added,—

"Say nothing about my suffering to any one, Lubin: it is nothing at all. If I am really ill, I will ring."

At this moment, to see any one, to hear a voice, to

have to reply, seemed insupportable. He longed to be left entirely to himself.

After the painful emotions arising from his explanations with the count, he could not sleep. He opened one of the library windows, and leaned against the casement. It was a beautiful night: and there was a lovely moon. Seen at this hour, by the mild, tremulous evening light, the gardens seemed twice their usual size. The motionless tops of the great trees stretched away like an immense plain, hiding the neighboring houses. The clumps in the flower garden, set off by the green shrubbery, appeared like great black figures; while in the carefully sanded walks sparkled particles of shell, little pieces of glass, and the polished pebbles. At the right, in the still lighted servants' quarters, could be heard the servants passing to and fro; and the step of a groom sounded on the pavement in the court. The horses stamped in the stable; and the rattling of their halter chains against the bars of the manger could be distinguished. In the carriage-house they were unharnessing the vehicle, always kept ready throughout the evening, in case the count should wish to go out.

Albert had there under his eyes a complete picture of his magnificence. He sighed deeply.

"Must I, then lose all this?" he murmured. "I can scarcely, even for myself, abandon so many splendors without regret; and thinking of Claire makes it harder. Have I not dreamed of a life of exceptional happiness for her, almost impossible to realize without wealth?"

Midnight sounded from St. Clotilde, whose twin arrows he could perceive by leaning slightly forward.

He shivered; it was growing cold.

He closed his window, and sat down near the fire, which he stirred up. In the hope of obtaining a respite from his thoughts he took up the evening paper, in which was an account of the assassination at Jonchère; but he found it impossible to read. The lines danced before his eyes. Then he thought of writing to Claire. He sat down at his desk, and wrote, "My dearly loved Claire." He could go no further; his distracted brain could not furnish him with a single sentence.

At last, at break of day, weariness overpowered him, sleep surprised him, on a sofa, where he had thrown himself,—a heavy sleep peopled with phantoms.

At half-past nine in the morning, he was awakened with a start, by the noise of his door being opened with a crash.

A servant entered, frightened, so breathless, having come up the stairway four steps at a time, that he could scarcely speak.

"Monsieur," said he, "viscount, quick, fly, hide yourself, save yourself: they are here, they—"

A commissary of police in uniform appeared at the library door. He was followed by a number of men, among whom could be seen, keeping as much out of sight as possible, Père Tabaret.

The commissary approached Albert.

"You are," he asked, "Guy Louis Marie Albert de Rheteau de Commarin?"

"Yes, monsieur."

The commissary raised his hand, while pronouncing the usual formula.

"Monsieur de Commarin, in the name of the law I arrest you."

"Me, monsieur? me?"

Albert, aroused suddenly from his painful dreams, seemed hardly to comprehend what was taking place. He seemed to ask himself,—

“Am I really awake? Is not this some hideous nightmare?”

He threw a stupid look, much to the astonishment of the commissary of police, upon the men, and upon Père Tabaret, who acted very much as though he was the one arrested.

“Here is the warrant,” added the commissary, unfolding the paper.

Mechanically Albert glanced over it.

“Claudine assassinated!” he cried.

Then very low, but distinct enough to be heard by the commissary, by one of the officers, and by Père Tabaret, he added,—

“I am lost!”

While the commissary was making the formal inquiries, which immediately follow all arrests, the officers spread through the apartment, and proceeded to a searching examination of them: they had received orders to obey Père Tabaret; and the old fellow guided them in their researches, made them ransack drawers and closets, and move the furniture. They seized quite a number of articles belonging to the viscount,—papers, manuscripts, and a very voluminous correspondence; but it was with especial delight that Père Tabaret put his hands on certain articles, which were carefully described in order in the official report.

I. In the first room,—a waiting-room, hung with all sorts of weapons,—behind a sofa, a broken foil. This foil had a peculiar handle, and was unlike those commonly sold. It bore the count’s coronet, with the initials A. C. It had been broken at about the middle;

and the end could not be found. When asked, the viscount declared that he could give no account as to what had become of the missing end.

2. In the dressing-room, pantaloons of black cloth still wet, bearing stains of mud or dirt. All one side was covered with greenish moss, as if the wearer had climbed over a wall. In front, there were numerous rents; and near the knee was one ten centimetres long. The aforesaid pantaloons had not been hung up in the wardrobe, but appeared to have been hidden between two large trunks of clothing.

3. In the pocket of the above-described pantaloons were found a pair of pearl-gray gloves. The palm of the right hand glove showed a large greenish stain, produced by grass or moss. The end of the fingers had been worn by rubbing. Upon the back of both gloves, scratches were noticed, evidently made by finger-nails.

4. Two pairs of boots, one of which, well cleaned, were still damp; an umbrella recently wetted, the end of which was still covered with white mud.

5. In a large room, called "the library," a box of cigars of the trabucos brand, and upon the mantel a number of cigar-holders in amber and meerschaum.

The last article noted down, Père Tabaret approached the commissary of police.

"I have every thing I could desire," he whispered.

"And I have finished, too," replied the commissary. "This chap here don't seem to know exactly how to act. Do you see? He gave in on the first attack. I suppose you will call it lack of experience."

"Before the day is over," replied the amateur detective in a whisper, "he won't be quite so crest-fallen. But now, suddenly awakened, you know— Always arrest them early in the morning; take them in bed before they are awake."

"I have spoken with two or three of the servants. They tell some singular stories."

"Very well: we shall see. But I must hurry and find the judge of inquiry, who will be impatient."

Albert began to revive a little from the stupor into which he had been plunged on the entrance of the commissary of police.

"Monsieur," he asked, "will you permit me to say a few words in your presence to the Count de Commarin? I am a victim of some mistake, which will be quickly remedied."

"It's always a mistake," muttered Père Tabaret.

"What you ask is impossible," replied the commissary. "I have special orders of the strictest sort. You cannot henceforth communicate with a living soul. A carriage is in waiting below. Will you descend?"

In crossing the vestibule, Albert noticed great agitation among the servants. They all seemed to have lost their senses. Denis gave orders in a sharp, imperative tone. Then he thought he heard that the Count de Commarin had been struck with apoplexy. After that, he remembered nothing.

They almost carried him to the carriage; which drove off as fast as the two little horses could go. A more rapid vehicle bore away Père Tabaret.

CHAPTER X.

THE visitor who risks himself in the labyrinth of galleries and stairways in the palais de justice, and mounts to the third story in the left wing, will find himself in a long, low-studded gallery, badly lighted by narrow windows, and pierced at short intervals by little doors, like a hall at the ministry or at a lodging-house.

It is a place difficult to view calmly, the imagination makes it appear so dark and dismal.

It needs a Dante to compose an inscription to place above the doors which lead from it. From morning to night, the flagstones resound under the heavy tread of the gendarmes, who accompany the prisoners. You can scarcely recall any thing but sad figures there. There are the parents or friends of the accused, the witnesses, the detectives. In this gallery, far from the sight of men, the judicial curriculum is gone through with.

Each one of the little doors, which has its number painted over it in black, opens into the office of a judge of inquiry. All the rooms are just alike: if you see one, you have seen them all. They have nothing terrible nor sad in themselves; and yet it is difficult to enter one of them without a shudder. They are cold. The walls all seem moist with the tears which have been shed there. You shudder, at thinking of the avowals wrested from criminals, of the confessions broken with sobs murmured there.

In the office of the judge of inquiry, Justice clothes herself in none of that apparel which she afterwards dons in order to strike fear into the masses. She is still simple, and almost disposed to kindness. She says to the prisoner,—

“I have strong reasons for thinking you guilty; but prove to me your innocence, and I will release you.”

On entering one of these rooms, a stranger would imagine that he got into a cheap shop by mistake. The furniture is of the most primitive sort, as is the case in all places where important matters are transacted. Of what consequence are surroundings to the judge hunt-

ing down the author of a crime, or to the accused who is defending his life?

A desk full of documents for the judge, a table for the clerk, an arm-chair, and one or two chairs besides comprise the entire furniture of the antechamber of the court of assize. The walls are hung with green paper; the curtains are green, and the floors are carpeted in the same color. Monsieur Daburon's office bore the number fifteen.

At nine o'clock in the morning, he had arrived, and was waiting. His course resolved upon, he lost not an instant, understanding as well as Père Tabaret the necessity of rapid action. So he had already had an interview with the imperial solicitor, and had consulted the officers of the police judiciary.

Besides the warrant issued against Albert, he had despatched summons of immediate appearance, before him, to the Count de Commarin, Madame Gerdy, Noel and some of Albert's servants.

He thought it essential to examine all these before calling in the prisoner.

Under his orders, ten detectives were sent into the country; and he himself sat in his office, like a general of an army, who sends off his aides-de-camp to begin the battle, and who hopes for victory through his combinations.

Often, at this same hour, he had sat in this same office, under conditions almost identical. A crime had been committed: he believed he had discovered the criminal; he had given orders for his arrest. Was not that his duty? But he had never experienced this anxiety of mind which disturbed him now. Many a time had he issued warrants of arrest, without having nearly half the proofs which shone out so clearly in the present case.

He kept repeating this to himself; and yet he could not quiet this dreadful anxiety, which would not give him a moment's rest.

He wondered why his people were so long in making their appearance. He walked up and down the room, counting the minutes, drawing out his watch three times within the quarter of an hour, to compare it with the clock. Hearing a step in the gallery, nearly deserted at that hour, he involuntarily moved near the door, stopped and listened.

Some one knocked. It was his clerk, late this morning.

There was nothing particular in this man; he was long rather than large, and very slim. His gait was precise, his gestures methodical; his face was as impassive as if it had been cut out of a piece of yellow wood.

He was thirty-four years of age, and since thirty had taken minutes of examination for four judges of inquiry in succession. It is said that he could hear, without moving a muscle, the most utter absurdities.

An ingenious writer has thus defined a clerk, "A pen for the judge of inquiry; a personage who is dumb but speaks, who is blind but writes, who is deaf but hears." This man answered the definition. His name was Constant.

He bowed to the judge, and excused himself for his tardiness. He had been busy with his book-keeping, which he did every morning; and he had got so interested in it that his wife had had to remind him of the way time was passing.

"You are still in good time," said Daburon; "but we shall have plenty of work: so you had better get your papers ready."

Five minutes later, the usher introduced Noel Gerdy.

He entered with an easy manner, like an advocate who had considerable practice in the palais, and who knew its ways. He in no way resembled, this morning, the friend of Père Tabaret; still less could he have been recognized as the lover of Madame Juliette. He was entirely another being, or rather he had resumed his customary rôle.

It was now the official who appeared,—one who recognized his confreres, esteemed his friends, was beloved in the circle of his acquaintance.

From his firm step, his placid face, one would never imagine that, after an evening of emotion and excitement, after a stolen visit to his mistress, he had passed the night by the pillows of a dying woman, and that woman his mother, or at least the one who had filled his mother's place.

What a contrast between him and the judge!

The judge had not slept either; and you could see lack of rest in his feebleness, in his anxious look, in the dark circles about his eyes. The front of his shirt was all rumpled; not even his cuffs were fresh. Occupied with the course of events, the soul had forgotten the body. Noel's well-shaved chin, on the contrary, rested upon an irreproachably white cravat; his collar had not a wrinkle; his hair and his whiskers were most carefully brushed. He bowed to Daburon, and held out his summons.

"You summoned me, monsieur," he said; "and I am at your orders."

The judge of inquiry had met the young advocate several times in the lobbies of the palais; and he recognized him at sight. He remembered having heard this

Gerdy spoken of as a man of talent and promise, whose reputation was fast rising. He therefore welcomed him as a fellow-workman, and invited him to be seated.

The preliminaries common in the examinations of all witnesses ended; the name, surname, age, place of business, and so on registered, the judge, who had followed his clerk with his eyes while he was writing, turned to Noel.

"Do you know, Monsieur Gerdy," he began, "the business on account of which you are troubled with appearing before me?"

"Yes, monsieur, the assassination of the poor old woman at Jonchère."

"Precisely," replied Daburon.

Then, calling to mind his promise to Père Tabaret, he added,—

"If Justice has summoned you so promptly, it is because we have found your name often mentioned in the papers of the Widow Lerouge."

"I am not surprised at that," replied the advocate: "we have been much interested in this good woman, who was my nurse; and I know that Madame Gerdy wrote to her quite often."

"Very well; you can then give me some information about her."

"It will be, I fear, monsieur, very incomplete. I know very little about this poor Mother Lerouge. I was taken from her at a very early age; and since I have been a man, I have thought little about her, except to send her occasionally a little aid."

"You have never visited her?"

"Oh, yes! I have gone there many times; but I remained only a few moments each time. Madame Gerdy,

who has often seen her, and to whom she entrusted all her affairs, could enlighten you much better than I, however."

"I expect," said the judge, "to see Madame Gerdy here; she must have received a summons."

"She has, monsieur; but it will be impossible for her to appear; she is ill."

"Seriously?"

"So seriously that you will be obliged, I think, to give up all expectations from her testimony. She is attacked with a disease which, in the words of my friend, Dr. Hervé, never pardons. It is something like inflammation of the brain,—encephalite, if I am not mistaken. It may be that her life will be saved; but she will never recover her reason. If she does not die, she will be insane."

Daburon appeared much troubled.

"This is very vexatious," he muttered. "And you think, my dear sir, that it will be impossible to obtain any thing from her?"

"It is useless even to hope for it. She has completely lost her reason. She was, when I left her, in such a state of utter prostration that I fear she cannot live through the day."

"And when was she attacked by this illness?"

"Yesterday evening."

"Suddenly?"

"Yes, monsieur, apparently, at least; though I myself think she has been suffering from it for the last three weeks at least. But yesterday, on rising from dinner, after having eaten but little, she took up a newspaper; and, by a most unhappy chance, her eyes fell exactly upon the lines which told of this crime. All at

once she uttered a loud cry, fell back in her chair, and thence slipped to the floor, murmuring, 'Oh, the unhappy man, the unhappy man!'"

"The unhappy woman, you mean."

"No, monsieur. I spoke advisedly. Evidently the exclamation did not refer to my poor nurse."

Upon this reply, so important and yet made in the most unconscious tone, Daburon raised his eyes to the witness. The advocate lowered his head.

"And then?" asked the judge, after a moment's silence, during which he had taken a few notes.

"Those words, monsieur, were the last spoken by Madame Gerdy. Assisted by our servant, I carried her to her bed. The doctor was called; and, since then, she has not recovered consciousness. The doctor—"

"It is well," interrupted Daburon, "Let us leave that for the present. Do you know, monsieur, any one who might have been at enmity with the Widow Lerouge?"

"No, monsieur."

"She had no enemies? Well, now tell me, does there exist to your knowledge any one having any interest whatever in the death of this poor woman?"

The judge of inquiry, in putting this question, kept his eyes fixed on Noel's not allowing him to turn or lower his head.

The advocate started, and seemed deeply moved. He was disconcerted; he hesitated, as if a struggle was going on within him.

Finally, in a voice which was by no means firm, he replied,—

"No, no one."

"Is that really true?" demanded the judge looking

at him more sternly. "You know no one whom this crime benefits, or whom it might benefit,—absolutely no one?"

"I know only one thing, monsieur," replied Noel; "and that is, that, as far as I am concerned, it has caused me an irreparable injury."

"At last," thought Daburon, "we have got at the letters; and I have not betrayed poor Père Tabaret. It would be too bad to cause the least trouble to that zealous and invaluable man."

"An injury to you, my dear sir?" he replied; "you will, I hope, explain yourself."

The embarrassment, of which Noel had already given some signs, appeared now much more marked.

"I am aware, monsieur," he replied, "that I owe justice not merely the truth, but the whole truth; but there are circumstances involved so delicate that the conscience of a man of honor sees danger to itself. Then it is very hard to be obliged to unveil these sad secrets, whose revelations may sometime—"

Daburon interrupted with a gesture. Noel's sad tone impressed him. Knowing, beforehand, what he was about to hear, he was pained for the young advocate. He turned to his clerk.

"Constant!" said he in a peculiar tone.

This tone was evidently a signal; for the long clerk arose methodically, put his pen behind his ear, and went out in his measured tread.

Noel appeared sensible of this delicacy. His face expressed the strongest gratitude: his look returned thanks.

"I am so much obliged to you, monsieur," he said with suppressed warmth, "for your generous kindness.

What I have to say is very painful; but, before you now, it will be scarcely an effort to speak."

"Fear nothing," replied the judge; "I will only retain in your deposition my dear sir, what seems to me absolutely indispensable."

"I feel scarcely master of myself, monsieur," began Noel; "so pray pardon my emotion. If any words escape me that seem charged with bitterness, excuse them; it will be involuntarily. Up to the past few days, I always believed that I was the offspring of illicit love. My history is short. I have been honorably ambitious. I have worked hard. He who has no name must make one, you know. I have passed a quiet life, retired and austere, as people must, who, starting at the foot of the ladder, wish to reach the top. I worshipped her whom I believed to be my mother; and I felt convinced that she loved me in return. The stain of my birth had some humiliations attached to it; but I despised them. Comparing my lot with that of so many others, I felt that I had more than common advantages. One day, Providence placed in my hands all the letters which my father, the Count de Commarin, had written to Madame Gerdy at the time of their liaison. On reading these letters, I was convinced that I was not what I had hitherto believed myself to be,—that Madame Gerdy was not my mother!"

And, without giving Daburon time to reply, he laid before him the facts which, twelve hours before, he had recounted to Père Tabaret.

It was the same story, with the same circumstances, the same abundance of precise and conclusive details; but the tone was entirely changed. Before the old detective, the young advocate had been emphatic and

violent; but now, in the office of the judge of inquiry, he had restrained and sobered his violent emotions.

One might imagine that he adapted his manner to his auditor, wishing to produce the same effect on both, and using that method which would best accomplish his purpose.

To Père Tabaret, an ordinary mind, he used the exaggeration of anger; to Daburon, of superior intelligence, he used the exaggeration of restraint.

While his mind rebelled against his unjust lot, he nevertheless seemed to bow, armed with resignation, before a blind fatality.

With genuine eloquence and rare happiness of expression, he drew his situation on the day following the discovery,—his grief, his perplexity, his doubts.

To support this moral certainty, there needed some positive testimony. Could he hope for this from the count or from Madame Gerdy, both interested in concealing the truth? No. But he had counted upon that of his nurse,—the poor old woman who loved him, and who, near the close of her life, would be glad to free her conscience from this heavy load. She was dead now; and the letters became mere waste papers in his hands.

Then he passed to his explanation with Madame Gerdy; and he gave the judge even fuller details than he had given his old neighbor.

She had, he said, at first utterly denied the substitution; but he gave it to be understood that, plied with questions, overcome by the evidence, in a moment of despair she had confessed all, declaring at the same time that she would retract and deny this confession, being resolved at all hazards that her son should preserve his position.

From this scene, in the advocate's judgment, the first attacks of the sickness, to which she had finally succumbed, might be dated.

Noel then described his interview with the Viscount de Commarin.

In his narrative, there slipped in a few inaccuracies, but so slight that it would be difficult to charge him with them. Besides, there was nothing in them at all unfavorable to Albert.

He insisted, on the contrary, upon the excellent impression which he had received of that young man.

Albert had received the revelation with a certain defiance, it is true, but with a noble firmness at the same time, and like a brave heart, was ready to bow before the justification of right.

In fact, he drew an almost enthusiastic portrait of this rival, who had not been spoiled by prosperity, who had left him without a look of hatred, towards whom he felt himself drawn, and who after all was his brother.

Daburon had listened to Noel with the most unremitting attention, without a word, a movement, a frown, betraying his feelings. When he had ended,—

"How, monsieur," observed the judge, "could you have told me that, in your opinion, no one was interested in the death of the Widow Lerouge?"

The advocate made no reply.

"It seems to me that the Viscount de Commarin's position has by it become almost impregnable. Madame Gerdy is insane; the count will deny all; your letters prove nothing. It is evident that the crime is of the greatest service to this young man, and that it was committed at a singularly favorable moment."

"O monsieur!" cried Noel, protesting with all his energy, "this insinuation is dreadful."

The judge watched the advocate's face narrowly. Was he speaking frankly, or was he but playing the generous rôle? Could it really be that he had never had any suspicion of this? Noel did not flinch under the gaze, but almost immediately continued,—

“What reason could Albert have for trembling, fearing for his position? I did not utter one word of threat, even indirectly. I did not present myself raging, like a robbed man, who demands that every thing which had been taken from him should be restored on the spot. I merely presented the facts to Albert, saying, ‘Here, what do you think we ought to do? Be the judge.’”

“And he asked you for time?”

“Yes. I had just suggested his accompanying me to the Widow Lerouge, whose testimony might dispel all doubts; he did not seem to understand me. But he was well acquainted with her, having often visited her with the count, who supplied her, I have since learned, liberally with money.”

“Does not this generosity appear to you very singular?”

“No.”

“Can you explain why the viscount did not appear disposed to accompany you?”

“Certainly. He said that he wished, before all, to have an explanation with his father, who was then absent, but who would return within a few days.”

The truth, as all the world knows, and delights in proclaiming, has an accent which no one can mistake. Daburon had not the slightest doubt of his witness's good faith. Noel continued with an ingenuous candor, like an honest heart, which suspicion has never touched with its bat's wing.

“The idea of treating at once with my father pleased

me exceedingly. I consider it so much better to wash all one's dirty linen at home, that I have never desired any thing but an amicable arrangement. With my hands full of proofs, I should still recoil from a public trial."

"Would you not have brought an action?"

"Never, monsieur, at any price. Could I," he added, proudly, "on assuming my rightful name, begin by dishonoring it?"

For once, Daburon could not conceal his sincere admiration.

"A most praiseworthy feeling, monsieur," he said.

"I think," replied Noel, "it is but natural. If the worse came to the worst, I had determined to leave my title with Albert. Certainly the name of Commarin is an illustrious one; but I hope that, within ten years, mine will be equally so. I would have simply demanded a large pecuniary compensation. I possess nothing; and I have often been hampered in my career by this miserable question of money. That which Madame Gerdy owed to the generosity of my father was almost entirely spent. My education had absorbed a great part of it; and it was long before my profession covered my expenses. Madame Gerdy and I lived very quietly; but, unfortunately, though simple in her tastes, she lacked economy and system: and no one can imagine how great our expenses have been. But I have nothing to reproach myself with, whatever happens. From the commencement, I have kept my anger well under control; and even now I bear no ill-will. On learning of the death of my nurse, though, I cast all my hopes into the sea."

"You are wrong, my dear sir," said the judge. "I advise you to still hope. Perhaps, before the end is

reached, you will yet enter into possession of your rights. Justice, I will not conceal from you, thinks she has found the assassin of the Widow Lerouge. At this moment, the Viscount Albert is doubtless under arrest."

"What!" exclaimed Noel with a sort of stupor; "can it be true? I was, then, not mistaken, monsieur, in the meaning of your words. I dreaded to understand them."

"You have not mistaken me, monsieur," said Daburon. "I thank you for your sincere, straightforward explanations; they have eased my task materially. To-morrow,—for to-day my time is all taken up,—we will regularly take your deposition, at this same hour, if convenient to you. There is nothing more, I believe, except to ask you for the letters in your possession, and which are indispensable to me."

"Within an hour, monsieur, you shall have them," replied Noel.

And he retired, after having warmly expressed his gratitude to the judge of inquiry.

Less preoccupied, the advocate perceived at the end of the gallery Père Tabaret, who had just arrived, eager and happy, like a bearer of good news as he was.

His carriage had scarcely stopped before the gate of the palais de justice before he was in the court, and rushing towards the porch. To see him jumping more nimbly than a fifth rate lawyer's clerk up the steep flight of stairs leading to the judge's office, you would never believe that he had been years on the shady side of fifty. Even he doubted the fact. He did not remember having passed the dark line: he had never felt so fresh, so agile, in such spirits; he had springs of steel in his limbs.

He crossed the gallery in two jumps, and burst like a cannon shot into the judge's apartment, hustling against the methodical clerk in the rudest of ways, without even asking his pardon.

"Caught!" he cried, while yet on the threshold, "caught, nipped, squeezed, strung, trapped, locked! We have got our man."

Père Tabaret, more "Tirauclair" than ever, gesticulated with such comical vehemence and such remarkable contortions that even the long clerk smiled; for which, however, he took himself severely to task, on going to bed that night.

But Daburon, still under the influence of Noel's deposition, was shocked at this apparently unseasonable joy; although he felt the safer for it. He looked severely at Père Tabaret, saying,—

"Hush, monsieur; be decent; compose yourself."

At any other time, the old fellow would have been frightened at having deserved such a reprimand. Now it made no impression on him.

"I can't be quiet," he replied; "and I am proud of it. Never has any thing like it been seen. All that I predicted has been found. Broken foil, pearl gray gloves slightly frayed, cigar-holder; nothing is wanting. You shall have them, monsieur, and many more like them. I have a little system of my own, which appears by no means a bad one. Just see the triumph of my method of induction, which Gevrol ridiculed so. I'd give a hundred francs if he were only here now. But no: my Gevrol wants to nab the man with the earrings; he is capable of doing just that. He is a fine fellow, this Gevrol, a famous fellow! How much do you give him a year for his skill?"

"Come, my dear Tabaret," said the judge, as soon

as he could get a word in, "be serious, if you can, and let us proceed regularly."

"Pshaw!" replied the old fellow, "what good will it do? It is a clear case now. When they bring our man before you, show him simply the particles taken from the fingers of the victim side by side with his torn gloves; and you will overwhelm him. I wager that he will confess all, *hic et nunc*,—yes, I wager my head against his: although that's pretty risky; for he will get off yet! These milksops on the jury are just capable of according him extenuating circumstances. I'd give him extenuating circumstances. Ah! these snails destroy justice! Why, if all the world were of my mind, the punishment of these rascals wouldn't take such a time! The moment they were captured, that moment they should be strung up. That's my opinion."

Daburon resigned himself to this shower of words. When the old fellow's excitement had cooled down a little, he simply began questioning him. He was even then in great trouble to obtain the exact details of the arrest,—details which might confirm the official report of the commissary of police.

The judge appeared much surprised at hearing that Albert, at sight of the warrant, had exclaimed, "I am lost!"

"That," muttered he, "is a terrible proof against him."

"Certainly," replied Père Tabaret. "In his ordinary state, he would never have allowed these words to escape him; which in fact destroy him. It was because we arrested him when he was scarcely awake. He hadn't been in bed, but was lying in a troubled sleep, upon a sofa, when we arrived. I took good care

to send a frightened servant in in advance, and then to follow closely upon him myself; because he was thus demoralized. All my calculations were made. But, never fear, he will find a plausible excuse for this fatal exclamation. By the way, I should add that we found on the floor, near by, last evening's 'Gazette de France' all crumpled, which contained the report of the assassination. This is the first time that a piece of news in the papers ever helped to nab a criminal."

"Yes," murmured the judge, deep in thought,— "yes, you are a valuable man, Tabaret." Then, louder, he added, "I am thoroughly convinced; for Noel Gerdy has just this moment left me."

"You have seen Noel," cried the old fellow.

On the instant all his proud self-satisfaction disappeared. A cloud of anxiety, like a veil, spread over his face, and eclipsed his joy.

"Noel here," he repeated; then timidly added, "and does he know?"

"Nothing," replied Daburon. "I had no need of bringing you in. Besides, had I not promised absolute secrecy?"

"Ah, that's all right," cried Père Tabaret. "And what do you think of Noel?"

"His is, I am sure, a noble, worthy heart," said the magistrate,— "a nature both strong and tender. The sentiments which I heard him express here, and the genuineness of which it is impossible to doubt, manifested an elevation of soul, unhappily, very rare. Seldom in my life have I met with a man who so won my sympathy from the first. I can well understand one's pride in being among his friends."

"Just what I said; he has precisely the same effect upon every one. I love him as though he were my

own child; and, whatever happens, he is to inherit my entire fortune; yes, I intend leaving him every thing. My will is made, and in the hands of Baron, my notary. There is a legacy, too, for Madame Gerdy; but I am going to scratch that out at once."

"Madame Gerdy, Tabaret, will soon be beyond all need of worldly goods."

"How, what do you mean? Has the count—"

"She is dying, and will hardly last through the day; Monsieur Gerdy told me so himself."

"Ah! heavens!" cried the old fellow, "what do you tell me? dying? Noel will go distracted; but no: since she is not his mother, how can it affect him? Dying? I was so fond of her before this discovery. Poor humanity! It seems as though all the accomplices in that great sin are passing away at the same time; for I forgot to tell you, that, just as I was leaving the Hotel de Commarin, I heard a servant telling another that the count at the news of his son's arrest had fallen in a fit of apoplexy."

"That will be the worst of misfortunes for young Gerdy."

"For Noel?"

"I had counted upon M. de Commarin's testimony to recover for him all that he so well deserves. The count dead, the Widow Lerouge dead, Madame Gerdy dying, or in any event insane, who then can tell us whether the plan detailed in these letters was ever carried into execution?"

"True," murmured Père Tabaret; "it is true! And I did not see it. What fatality! For I am not deceived; I am certain that—"

He did not finish. Daburon's office door opened; and the Count de Commarin himself appeared in the flesh,

as stately as one of those old portraits which you might imagine frozen in their gilded frames.

The old gentleman signed with his hand; and the two servants who had helped him up as far as the gallery, sustaining him on either side, retired.

CHAPTER XI.

It was the Count de Commarin, or rather his shadow. His head, usually carried so high, fell upon his breast; his figure was bent; his eyes had no longer their accustomed fire; his fair hands trembled. The extreme disorder of his dress rendered more striking still the change which had come over him. In one night, he had grown twenty years older.

These robust old men resemble great trees whose inner wood has crumbled away, and whose only life is in the bark without.

They are apparently unshaken, they seem to set time at defiance; yet one blast of wind casts them to the earth. This man, yesterday so proud of never having bent to a storm, was now completely prostrated. The pride of his name had constituted his entire strength; that humbled, he seemed utterly overwhelmed. In him every thing gave way at once; all his supports failed him at the same time. His cold, lifeless gaze revealed the dull stupor of his thoughts. He presented such an image of utter despair that the judge of inquiry shuddered at the sight. Tabaret looked frightened, and even the clerk seemed moved.

“Constant,” said Monsieur Daburon quickly, “go with Monsieur Tabaret, and see if there’s any news at the prefecture.”

The clerk left the room, followed by the old man, who went away regretfully. The count had not noticed their presence; he paid no attention to their departure.

Daburon offered him a seat, which he accepted with a sad smile. "I feel so weak," said he, "you must excuse my sitting."

Apologies to an inferior magistrate! What an advance in civilization, when the nobility consider themselves subject to the law, and bow to its decrees! It was far different when the Duchess of Bouillon mocked at parliament, when the haughty nobles that infested the reign of Louis XIV. treated with the greatest indignity the counsellor of the *chambre d'ardente*. All the world respects justice nowadays; and an innocent man need fear but little, even when defended only by a simple, conscientious judge of inquiry.

"You are perhaps too unwell, count," said the judge, "to give me the explanations I had hoped for."

"I am better, thank you," replied Monsieur de Commarin, "than I have been since the terrible blow has fallen upon me. When I heard of the crime of which my son is accused, and of his arrest, I was stunned. I believed myself strong; I find myself a poor, weak old man. My servants thought me dead. Would that I were. The strength of my constitution, my physician tells me, was all that saved me; but I know that heaven has kept me alive, that I may drink to the bitter dregs this cup of humiliation."

He stopped for a moment, choked by a flow of blood that rose to his mouth.

The judge of inquiry remained near the table, not daring to move.

After a few moments' rest, the count found relief, and proceeded.

“Unhappy man that I am! did I not expect it? Every thing comes to light sooner or later. I am punished for my great sin,—pride. I thought myself out of reach of the thunderbolt; and I have been the means of drawing down the storm upon my house. Albert an assassin! A Viscount de Commarin arraigned before a court of assize! Ah, monsieur, punish me, too; for I alone and long ago, laid the foundation of this crime. A race bearing for fifteen centuries a spotless name closes with me in infamy.”

Daburon considered the conduct of the Count de Commarin unpardonable, and had determined not to spare him.

He had expected to meet a proud, haughty noble, almost unmanageable; and he had resolved to humble his arrogance.

Perhaps the harsh treatment he had received of old from the Marquise d’Arlanges had given him, unconsciously, a slight grudge against aristocracy.

He had vaguely thought of certain rather severe remarks, which were to overcome the old gentleman, and bring him to his senses.

But, when he found in his presence a real penitent, his indignation changed to profound pity; and he asked himself how he could assuage his grief.

“Write, monsieur,” continued the count, with an exultation of which he would not have been capable ten minutes before,—“write my avowal withholding nothing. I have no longer need of mercy nor of tenderness. What have I to fear now? Is not my disgrace public? Must not I, Count Rheteau de Commarin, appear before the tribunal, to proclaim the infamy of our house? Ah! all is lost now, even honor itself. Write, monsieur; my wish is, that all the world shall know that I am the most

to blame. But they shall also know that already the punishment has been terrible, and that there is no new need of this last and mortal trial."

The count interrupted himself, to concentrate and arrange his memory.

He continued, then, with a firmer voice, adapting his tone to what he had to say,—

"When I was of Albert's age, monsieur, my parents made me marry, in spite of my protestations, the noblest and purest of young girls. I made her the most unhappy of women. I could not love her. I cherished a most passionate love for a mistress, who had trusted herself to me, and whom I had loved for many years. I found her rich in beauty, purity, and soul. Her name was Valerie. My heart is dead and cold in me, monsieur; but, ah! when I pronounce that name, it calls me again to life. In spite of my marriage, I could not induce myself to part from her; nor did she wish it. The idea of a disgraceful separation was revolting to her; for she loved me then. Our relations continued.

"My wife and my mistress became mothers at nearly the same time. This coincidence suggested to me the sad idea of sacrificing my legitimate son to his less fortunate brother. I communicated this project to Valerie. To my surprise, she refused it with horror. Already the maternal instinct had awakened in her; she would not be separated from her child. I have preserved, as a memento of my folly, the letters which she wrote to me at this time. I have re-read them only this night. Ah! how could I have refused both her arguments and her prayers? It was because I was mad. She had the same presentiment of evil which weighs me down to-day. But I came to Paris. I had absolute control over her. I threatened to leave her, never to see her again. She

yielded; and my valet and Claudine Lerouge were charged with this wicked substitution. It is therefore, the son of my mistress who wears the title of Viscount de Commarin, and who was arrested but an hour since."

Daburon had not hoped for a declaration so clear, and above all so prompt. He secretly rejoiced for the young advocate, whose sentiments had so won upon him.

"So, count," said he, "you acknowledge that Noel Gerdy was the issue of your legitimate marriage, and that he alone is entitled to bear your name?"

"Yes, monsieur. Alas! I was then more delighted at the success of my project than I should have been over the most brilliant victory. I was so intoxicated with the joy of having my Valerie's child there, near me, that I forgot every thing. I had transferred to him a part of my love for his mother; or, rather, I loved him still better, if that be possible. The thought that he would bear my name, that he would inherit all my wealth, to the detriment of the other, transported me with delight. The other, I hated; I could not even look upon him. I do not recollect having embraced him twice even.

"It was on this point alone that Valerie, who was very good, reproached me severely.

"One thing alone interfered with my happiness. The Countess de Commarin adored him whom she believed to be her son, and always wished to have him on her knees. I cannot express what I suffered at seeing my wife cover with kisses and caresses the child of my mistress.

"But I kept him from her as much as I could; and she, poor girl! not understanding what was passing within me, imagined that I was doing every thing to keep her son from loving her. She died, monsieur, with this idea, which poisoned her last days. She died of sor-

row ; but saintlike, without a complaint, without a murmur, pardon upon her lips and in her heart."

Much pressed for time, Daburon, however, did not dare to interrupt the count, and ask him briefly for the immediate facts of the case. He knew that fever alone gave him this energy, to which a moment after might succeed the most complete prostration. He feared, if he stopped him for an instant, that he would not have strength enough to begin again.

"I had not," continued the count, "a tear for her. What had she been in my life? A cause of sorrow and remorse. But the justice of God, in advance of man's, took a terrible revenge. One day, I was warned that Valerie had deceived me, and had broken with me for a long time. I could not believe it at first; it seemed to me impossible, absurd. I would have sooner doubted myself than her. I had taken her from a garret, where she had worked sixteen hours to earn thirty sous: she owed every thing to me. Every thing had gone so smoothly in the past that her falseness was in some way repugnant to my reason. I could not induce myself to feel jealous. However, I inquired into the matter; I watched her; I even descended to setting a spy upon her. I had been told the truth. This unhappy girl had a lover, and had had him for more than ten years. He was a cavalry officer. He came to her house with every precaution. Usually he departed about midnight: but sometimes he came to pass the night, and in that case left in the early morning. Being stationed near Paris, he obtained leaves to visit it; and, during these leaves, he remained shut up in her house without going out at all. One evening, my spies brought me word that he was there. I hastened to the house. My presence did not embarrass her. She received me as usual, throwing

her arms about my neck. I thought that my spies had deceived me; and I was going to tell her all, when I saw upon the piano a buckskin glove, such as is worn by soldiers. Not wishing a scene, and not knowing to what excess my anger might carry me, I took my departure without a word. I have never seen her since. She wrote to me. I did not open her letters. She attempted to force her way into my presence, but in vain: my servants had orders that they dared not break."

Could this be the Count de Commarin, celebrated for his haughty coldness, for his reserve, so full of disdain, who spoke thus, who opened his whole life without restrictions, without reserve? And to whom? To a stranger.

He was in one of those desperate states, allied to madness, when all reflection leaves us, when we must have some outlet to a too powerful emotion.

What mattered this secret to him, so courageously carried for so many years?

He disburdened himself of it, like the miserable man, who, weighed down by a too heavy burden, casts it to the earth without caring where it falls, nor how it tempts the cupidity of the passers by.

"Nothing," continued he,—“no, nothing, can approach to what I then endured. My very heart-strings were bound up in that woman. She was like a part of myself. In separating myself from her, it seemed to me that I was tearing away a part of my own flesh. I cannot tell what furious passions her memory stirred within me. I scorned her and longed for her with equal vehemence. I hated her, and I loved her. And, to this day, I have retained her detestable image. Nothing can make me forget her. I have never consoled myself for her loss. And that is not all; terrible doubts about

Albert occurred to me. Was I really his father? Can you understand what my punishment was, when I said to myself, 'I have perhaps sacrificed my own child to that of an utter stranger.' This thought made me hate the youth. To my great love, there succeeded an unconquerable repulsion. How often, in those times, I struggled against an insane desire to murder him! Since then, I have learned to subdue my aversion; but I have never completely mastered it. Albert, monsieur, has been the best of sons. Nevertheless, there has always been an icy barrier between us, which he could never explain. Often I have been upon the point of presenting myself before the tribunals, of avowing all, of reclaiming my legitimate heir; but regard for my rank has prevented me. I recoiled before the scandal. I feared the ridicule or disgrace that would attach itself to my name; and yet I have not been able to save it from infamy."

The voice of the old gentleman was silent, after these words. With a desolate movement, he buried his face in both hands. Two great tears, almost immediately dry, rolled silently down his wrinkled cheeks.

In the mean time, the door of the study opened half way, and the head of the long clerk appeared.

Daburon signed to him to enter, and then addressing Monsieur de Commarin, said, in a voice that compassion made the more gentle,—

"Monsieur, in the eyes of heaven, as in the eyes of society, you have committed a great sin; and the results, you see, are the most disastrous. This sin it is your duty to repair as much as lies in your power."

"Such is my intention, monsieur, and, shall I say, my dearest wish."

"You doubtless understand me," continued Daburon.

"Yes, monsieur," replied the old man,—“yes, I understand you.”

“It will doubtless be a consolation for you,” added the judge, “to learn that Noel Gerdy is worthy in all respects of the high position that you are going to restore to him. You will certainly acknowledge that his character is of the greater worth, from his having raised himself by his own exertions. He is a man of great talent, better and worthier than any one I know. You will have a son worthy of his ancestors. And no one of your family will regret, monsieur, that the Viscount Albert is not a Commarin.”

“No,” replied the count quickly, “a Commarin would have died by this time; and blood washes all away.”

This remark of the old gentleman set the judge of inquiry to think profoundly.

“Are you then sure,” said he, “of the viscount’s guilt?”

M. de Commarin gave the judge a look of surprise.

“I only arrived in Paris yesterday evening,” he replied; “and I am entirely ignorant of all that has occurred. I only know that they would not proceed on trifles against a man of Albert’s rank. If you have arrested him, it is quite evident that you have something more than suspicion against him,—that you possess positive proofs.”

Daburon bit his lips, and, for a moment, could not conceal a feeling of displeasure. He had neglected his usual prudence, had moved too quickly. He had believed the count’s mind entirely overthrown; and now he had aroused his defiance. All the skill in the world could not repair such an unfortunate mistake.

As the result of an examination, from which much had been expected, all his plans might be overturned.

A witness on his guard is a witness no longer to be depended upon; he trembles for fear of compromising himself, measures the weight of the questions, and hesitates as to his answers.

On the other hand, justice, in the form of a magistrate, is disposed to doubt every thing, to imagine every thing, and to suspect all the world.

How far was the count a stranger to the crime at Jonchère? Evidently, several days before it, although doubting Albert's paternity, he had made great efforts to retain his son in his place. His story showed that he thought his honor concerned in his retention.

Was he not a man to suppress, by every means, an inconvenient witness? Thus reasoned Monsieur Daburon.

And yet he could not clearly see how the Count de Comarin's interests and his restless uncertainty were concerned in the matter. His whole life opposed it.

"Monsieur," he began again more sternly, "when were you informed of the discovery of your secret?"

"Last evening, by Albert himself. He spoke to me of this sad story, and of a deed which I now seek in vain to explain, unless—"

The count stopped short, as if his reason had been struck by the improbability of the supposition which he had formed.

"Unless?—" inquired the magistrate quickly.

"Monsieur," said the count, without replying directly, "Albert will be a hero, if he be not the criminal."

"Ah!" said the magistrate quickly, "have you, then, reason to think him innocent?"

Daburon's spite was so plainly visible in the tone of his words that Monsieur de Commarin could and ought to have seen the appearance of a wicked intention. He

started, evidently offended, and righted himself by saying,—

“I am no more a witness now to discharge than I was a moment ago to condemn. I desire only to make justice clear, in accordance with my duty.”

“Confound it,” said Daburon to himself, “here I have offended him again! Is this the way to do things, making mistake after mistake?”

“The facts are these,” said the count. “Yesterday, after having spoken to me of these cursed letters, Albert began to set a trap to discover the truth,—for he still had doubts, Noel Gerdy not having obtained the complete correspondence. An animated discussion arose between us. He declared his resolution to give way to Noel. I, on the other hand, was resolved to compromise, cost what it might. Albert dared to oppose me. All my efforts to convert him to my views were in vain. Vainly I tried to touch those cords in his breast which I had supposed the most sensitive. He firmly repeated his intention to retire in spite of me, declaring himself satisfied, if I would consent to allow him a modest competence. I again attempted to shake him, by showing him that his marriage, so ardently looked forward to for two years, would be broken off by this blow. He replied that he felt sure of the constancy of his *fiancée*, Mademoiselle d’Arlanges.”

This name fell like a thunderbolt upon the ears of the judge of inquiry. He fell back in his chair.

Feeling that he was turning crimson, he took, at a venture, from his table a large bundle of papers, and, to hide his emotion, raised it to his face, as if he was trying to decipher an illegible word.

He began to understand the difficult duty with which he was charged. He seemed troubled like a child, hav-

ing neither his usual calmness nor foresight. He felt that he might commit the most serious blunder. Why had he undertaken this inquiry? Could he keep himself a free arbiter? Did he think his will would be impartial?

Gladly would he have turned over to another the further examination of the count; but could he? His conscience told him that this would be another blunder. He renewed, then, the painful examination.

"Monsieur," said he, "the sentiments expressed by the viscount are very fine, without doubt; but did he not speak to you of the Widow Lerouge?"

"Yes," replied the count, who appeared suddenly to brighten, as by the remembrance of some unnoticed circumstances,—“yes, certainly.”

"He might have shown you that the testimony of this woman would render a struggle with M. Gerdy impossible."

"Precisely, monsieur; and, aside from the question of duty, it was upon that that he based his refusal to follow my wishes."

"It will be necessary, count, for you to repeat to me very exactly all that passed between the viscount and yourself. Appeal, then, I beseech you, to your memory, and strive to repeat his words as nearly as possible."

Monsieur de Commarin obeyed without much difficulty. For a moment, a salutary reaction had worked upon him. His blood, excited by the persistence of the examination, renewed its accustomed course. His brain redeemed itself.

The scene of last evening was admirably presented to his memory, even to the most minute details. The sound of Albert's words were again in his ears; he saw again his expressive gestures.

As his story advanced, brilliant with clearness and precision, Daburon's conviction was confirmed.

The judge turned against Albert precisely what had the day before won the count's admiration.

"What wonderful acting!" thought he. "Tabaret is decidedly possessed of second sight. To his inconceivable boldness, this young man joins an infernal cleverness. The genius of crime itself inspires him. It is a miracle that we have been able to unmask him. How well every thing was foreseen and arranged! How marvellously this scene with his father was brought about, in order to bring doubt in case of discovery! There is not a sentence which lacks a purpose, which does not tend to ward off suspicion. What refinement of execution! What over-anxious care for details! Nothing failed him, not even the great devotion of his *fiancée*. Had he really informed Claire? Probably I might be sure of this; but I should have to return to her, to again speak to her. Poor child! to love such a man! But he will now appear before her in his true colors. This discussion, too, with the count was his plank of safety. It committed him to nothing, and gained time. He would of course raise objections, since they would only end by binding himself the more firmly in his father's heart. He could thus make a merit of his compliance, and would ask a reward for his helplessness. And, when Noel should return to the charge, he would find against him the count, who would boldly deny every thing, politely refuse him; and he would, of course, be driven out as an impostor and forger."

It was a strange coincidence, but yet easily explained, that M. de Commarin, while telling his story, arrived precisely at the same ideas with the judge, at conclusions almost identical.

In fact, why this persistence on the subject of Claudine? He remembered plainly, that, in his anger, he had said to his son, "Mankind is not in the habit of doing such fine actions for its own satisfaction." This great disinterestedness now explained itself.

"I thank you, monsieur," said Daburon: "I will say nothing positive; but Justice has weighty reasons to believe that, in the scene which you have just reported to me, the Viscount Albert played a part previously arranged."

"And well arranged," murmured the count; "for he deceived me, me!"

He was interrupted by the entrance of Noel, who carried a shagreen portfolio, ornamented with black figures, under his arm.

The advocate bowed to the old gentleman, who in his turn arose and retired politely to the end of the room.

"Monsieur," said Noel, in an undertone to the judge, "you will find all the letters in this portfolio. I must ask permission to leave you at once, as Madame Gerdy's condition grows hourly more alarming."

Noel had raised his voice a little, in pronouncing these last words; and the count heard them. He started, and needed great effort to restrain the question which leaped from his heart into his mouth.

"You must give me a moment, my dear fellow," said the judge.

Daburon then quitted his chair, and, taking the advocate by the hand, led him to the count.

"Monsieur de Commarin," said he, "I have the honor of presenting to you M. Noel Gerdy."

M. de Commarin was probably expecting some scene of this kind; for not a muscle of his face moved; he remained perfectly calm. Noel, on his side, was like a

man who had received a blow on the head ; he staggered, and was obliged to seek support from the back of a chair.

Then these two, father and son, stood face to face, apparently deep in thought, in reality examining one another with dark distrust, each striving to gather something of the other's thought.

Daburon had hoped much from this *coup de theatre*, which he had planned since the count's arrival. He had expected to bring about, by this abrupt presentation, an intensely pathetic scene, which would not give his clients time for reflection. The count would open his arms: Noel would throw himself into them; and this reconciliation would only await the sanction of the tribunals, to be complete.

The coldness of one, the embarrassment of the other, disconcerted his plans. He believed a more pressing intervention necessary.

"Count," said he reproachfully, "remember that Monsieur Gerdy is your legitimate son."

M. de Commarin made no reply; to judge from his lack of emotion, he had not heard.

Then Noel, summoning all his courage, ventured to speak first,—

"Monsieur," he stammered, "I only wish—"

"You may call me your father," interrupted the old man, in a tone which certainly had nothing of emotion or tenderness in it. Then addressing the judge,—

"Can I be of any further use?" he asked.

"Only to hear your deposition read," replied Daburon, "and to sign it, if you find it taken down correctly. You may proceed, Constant," he added.

The long clerk made a half turn in his chair, and commenced. He had a peculiar way of sputtering over

what he had scrawled. He read very quickly, all at one dash, without paying attention to periods, commas, questions, or replies, as long as his breath lasted. When he could go on no longer, he took a breath, and went on as before. Unconsciously, he reminded you of those divers, who now and then raise their heads above water, obtain a supply of air, and disappear again. Noel was the only one to listen attentively to the reading, which was to unpractised ears unintelligible. It apprised him of things which it was important for him to know. At last Constant pronounced the formula, *en foi de quoi*, etc., which end all official reports in France.

He handed the pen to the count, who signed without hesitation. The old gentleman then turned towards Noel.

"I am not very strong," he said; "you must, therefore, my son," (this word was emphasized) "help your father to his carriage."

The young advocate advanced eagerly. His face brightened, while he passed the count's arm through his own.

When they were gone, Daburon could not resist an impulse of curiosity. He hastened to the door, which he opened; and, keeping his body in the background, that he might not himself be seen, he extended his head, examining the gallery with a glance.

The count and Noel had not yet reached the end. They were going slowly. The count seemed to drag heavily and painfully along; the advocate took short steps, bending lightly on the side towards the count; and all his movements were marked with the greatest solicitude. The judge retained his position until they were lost to view by a turn in the gallery. Then he went back to his place, heaving a deep sigh.

"At least," said he, "I have helped to make one happy person. The day will not be utterly wasted."

But he had no time to give way to such thoughts, the hours flew by so quickly. He had to examine Albert as soon as possible; and he had still to receive the deposition of many of the servants of the Count de Commarin's house, and to receive the report of the commissary of police charged with the arrest.

The above-named domestics, who had waited their turn a long while, were without delay brought in, one after the other.

They had but little information to give; but there were as many new charges as there were witnesses. It was easy to see that all believed their master guilty.

Albert's conduct since the beginning of this fatal week, his least words, his most insignificant movements, were reported, commented upon, and explained.

The man who lives in the midst of thirty servants is like an insect in a glass box under the magnifying glass of a naturalist. No one of his acts escape attention; scarcely can he have a secret; and, if they cannot divine what it is, they at least know he has one. From morning until night, he is the point of observation for thirty pairs of eyes, interested in studying the slightest change in his face.

The judge had, therefore, an abundance of frivolous details; which at the time they occurred meant nothing, but the most trifling of which seemed all at once to the count to become a matter of life and death.

By combining these depositions, reconciling them, and putting them in order, Daburon could follow his prisoner hour by hour to his going out on Sunday morning.

On that Sunday morning, the viscount had given or-

ders that all visitors should be informed that he had gone into the country. From that moment, the whole household perceived that something had gone wrong, and annoyed him.

He did not leave his study on that day, but had had his dinner brought to him. He ate very little,—only some soup, and a bit of fish with white wines. While eating, he had said to Monsieur Contois, the butler, “Remind the cook to spice this sauce a little more, in future,” and then added in a low tone, “Ah? to what purpose?” In the evening he dismissed the servants from all duties, saying, “Go, and amuse yourselves.” He expressly warned them not to enter his room until he rang.

On Monday, he did not rise until noon, although usually an early riser. He complained of a violent headache, and of weakness. He took, however, a cup of tea. He ordered out his coupé but almost immediately countermanded the order. His *valet de chambre*, Lubin, heard him say, “It is too late to hesitate;” and a few moments after, “I must finish it.” Shortly afterwards, he began writing.

Lubin had been instructed to carry a letter to Mademoiselle Claire d’Arlanges, with orders to deliver it to herself or to Mademoiselle Smith, the governess only. A second letter, with two checks of a thousand francs, were intrusted to Joseph, to be carried to the club. Joseph, no longer remembered the person to whom it was addressed: but it was not a titled name.

That evening, Albert took only a little soup, and remained shut up in his room. He was up early on Tuesday. He walked up and down the house, like a soul in pain, or like one who awaited with impatience something which had not arrived. Upon his going into the gar-

den, the gardener asked his advice concerning a lawn. He replied, "You may consult the count upon his return."

He breakfasted precisely as on the day before. About one o'clock, he went down to the stables, and, with an air of sadness, he caressed his favorite mare, Norma. Stroking her neck, he said, "Poor creature! poor old girl!"

At three o'clock, a messenger arrived with a letter. The viscount took it, and opened it hastily. He was then opposite the flower garden. Two footmen heard him distinctly say, "She cannot resist." He entered the house, and burned the letter in the large fire-place in the entry.

As he was sitting down to dinner, at six o'clock, two of his friends, Monsieur de Courtivois and the Marquis of Chouze, insisted upon seeing him, in spite of all orders. They would not be refused. These gentlemen were anxious to carry him away to a party of pleasure; but he refused, saying that he had a very important appointment.

At dinner, he ate a little more than on the former days. He asked the butler also for a bottle of Chateau Lafitte, which he drank entirely. While taking his coffee, he smoked a cigar in the dining-room, contrary to the rules of the house. At half-past seven, according to Joseph and the two footmen, or at eight according to the porter and Lubin, the viscount went out on foot, taking with him an umbrella. He returned at two o'clock in the morning, and dismissed at once his *valet de chambre*, whose duty it was to remain up for him.

Wednesday, on entering the viscount's room, the *valet de chambre* was struck with the condition in which he found his master's clothing. It was wet, and stained

with mud; the pants were torn. He hazarded a remark upon them. Albert replied, in a furious manner, "Throw the old things in a corner, ready to be given away."

He appeared to be much better that day. He breakfasted with a good appetite; and the butler perceived that he was in excellent spirits. He passed the afternoon in the library, and burned a pile of papers.

Thursday, he seemed again to suffer much. He seemed to regret not being able to see the count. That evening, after his interview with his father, he went to his room in a pitiable condition. Lubin wanted to go for the doctor: he would not allow it, saying, at the same time, there was nothing the matter with him.

Such was the substance of twenty large pages, which the long clerk had written without once turning his head to look at the witnesses who passed by in their fine livery.

This testimony Daburon managed to obtain inside of two hours. Being well aware of the importance of their testimony, all these servants were very voluble. The difficulty was, to stop them when they were once started. And yet, from all they said, it appeared that Albert was a very good master,—easily served, kind and polite to his servants. Wonderful to relate! there were found only three among them all who did not appear perfectly delighted at the misfortune which had befallen the family. Two were seriously distressed. Lubin, although he had been an object of especial kindness, was not one of these last.

The turn of the commissary of police had now come. In a few words, he gave an account of the arrest, already described by Père Tabaret. He did not forget to mark the one word "Lost," which had escaped Albert;

to his mind, it was a confession. He then delivered all the articles seized in the Viscount de Commarin's room.

The judge of inquiry examined carefully all these articles, and compared them closely with the scraps of evidence gathered at Jonchère. He appeared now, more than ever, satisfied with his course.

He personally placed all the material proofs upon the table, and, to hide them, threw over them three or four of those large sheets of paper, which are used by shirt-makers for covers.

The day was far advanced; and Daburon had no more than sufficient time to examine the prisoner before night. Why should he hesitate now? He had in his hands more proofs than would suffice to summon ten men before the court of assize, and send them from thence to Roquette. He was fighting with arms so immeasurably superior, that, unless through some error of his own, Albert would scarcely dream of defending himself; and yet, at this moment of so much solemnity to himself, he seemed to falter. Was his will enfeebled? Would he abandon his resolution?

He now, for the first time, remembered that he had tasted nothing since morning; and he sent hastily for a bottle of wine, and some biscuits. It was not strength, however, that the judge needed; it was courage. All the time that he was drinking, his thoughts would keep repeating this strange sentence, "I am going to appear before the Viscount de Commarin." At any other moment, he would have laughed at this flight of his thoughts; but, at this moment, he seemed to see the will of Providence.

"So be it," said he; "this is my punishment."

And immediately he gave the necessary orders for the Viscount Albert to be brought before him.

CHAPTER XII.

THERE was little difference in Albert's state of mind at home and in the seclusion of the prison.

Snatched away from those painful dreams by the rude voice of the commissary, saying, "In the name of the law I arrest you," his spirit, completely overcome, was a long time in recovering its equilibrium. Every thing that followed his arrest appeared to float indistinctly in a thick mist, like the fairy scenes at the theatre behind a quadruple gauze curtain.

To their questions he replied, without hearing himself speak. Two agents took his arms, and helped him down the stairs from the house. He could not have walked down alone. His limbs, which bent beneath him, could not have borne him. One thing alone he heard, a servant saying that the count had been struck with apoplexy; but even that he soon forgot.

They raised him into the coach, which stood in the court, at the foot of the steps, rather ashamed of finding itself in such a place; and they placed him upon the back seat. Two agents took their seats in front of him; while a third mounted the box by the side of the driver. During the drive, he did not at all realize his situation. He lay in the dirty, greasy carriage motionless. His body, which followed every jolt of the carriage, wofully in need of springs, rolled from one side to the other; and his head fell to and fro on his shoulders, as if the muscles of his neck were broken. He thought of the Widow Lerouge. He recalled her as she was when he went with his father to Jonchère. It was in the spring; and the May-flowers sweetened the way. The old wo-

man, in a white head-dress, stood at her garden gate: she spoke with a suppliant air. The count listened to her with a stern glance; then, taking some money from his pocket-book, he gave it to her.

On reaching the jail, they got out of the carriage as they had entered it.

During the formalities of the jail-book, in the dark, offensive record office, replying mechanically to every thing, he gave himself up with delight to recollections of Claire. He went back to the time of their first love, when he doubted whether he should ever have the happiness of being loved by her in return, and to Madame Goello's house, where they had first exchanged their vows.

This old lady had a certain celebrated lover's retreat, upon the left bank of the Seine, of the most peculiar description. Upon all the furniture, and even upon the mantel, were placed a dozen or fifteen stuffed dogs, of various kinds, which together or successively had helped to cheer the old maid's lonely hours. She loved to relate the stories of these pets, whose affections had never failed her. They were, too, such grotesque, horrible things. One especially, outrageously stuffed, seemed ready to burst. How many times he had laughed at it with Claire until the tears came!

They began searching him then. This crowning humiliation, when rough hands passed all over his body, brought him somewhat to himself, and roused his anger. But it was soon finished; and they took him through the dark corridors, whose pavements were filthy and slippery. They opened a door, and pushed him into a sort of little cell. He heard behind him the sound of clashing bolts, and creaking locks.

He was a prisoner, and, in accordance with special

orders, in solitary confinement. Immediately he felt a marked sensation of comfort. He was alone.

No more stifled whispers, harsh voices, dreadful questions, filled his ears. A profound silence, giving the idea of nothingness, formed about him. It seemed to him that he had never before escaped from society; and he rejoiced at it. He would have felt relieved, had this even been a tomb. His body, as well as his mind, was weighed down with weariness. He was going to sit down, when he perceived a mean couch, at the right, in front of the grated window, which let in the little light there was. This bed gave him as much pleasure as a plank would a drowning man. He threw himself upon it, and stretched himself with delight; but he felt chilled. He found a coarse woolen coverlid, and, wrapping it about him, was soon sound asleep.

In the corridor, two agents of the safety police, one still young, the other already gray, applied alternately their eyes and ears to the peep-hole in the door.

"What a fellow he is!" murmured the younger officer. "If a man has no more nerve than that, he ought to be pretty honest. He will be wild the morning of his execution, eh, Balan?"

"That depends,"—replied the other. "We must wait and see. Lecoq told me that he was a terrible rascal."

"Ah! see how the fellow arranges his bed, and lies down. Can he be going to sleep? That's good! It's the first time I ever saw such a thing."

"It's because, comrade, that you have only had dealings with the smaller rogues. All great rascals—and I have had to do with more than one—are of this sort. At the moment of arrest, good-night every one; their heart fails them: but they recover themselves next day."

"Upon my word, if he hasn't gone to sleep! What a joke!"

"I tell you, my friend," added the old man, pointedly, "that nothing is more natural. I am sure that, since the blow was struck, this young fellow has hardly lived: his body has been all on fire. Now he knows that his secret is out; and that quiets him."

"Ha, ha! you are joking: you say that that quiets him?"

"Certainly. There is no greater punishment, remember, than anxiety; any thing is preferable. If you have only got ten thousand livres income, I will show you a way to prove this. Go to Hamburg and risk your entire fortune on one chance at *rouge et noir*. Tell me, afterwards, what your feelings were while the ball was rolling. It is, observe, as though they were tearing your brain with pincers, as if they were pouring molten lead into your bones, instead of marrow. This dread of detection is so strong, that, when every thing is lost, they are content; they feel relieved; they breathe again; they say to themselves, 'Ah, it is finished at last.' They are ruined, demolished, overthrown; but it is ended."

"Truly, Balan, one would think that you yourself had had just such an experience."

"Alas!" sighed the officer, "it is to my love for the queen of spades, my unhappy love, that you owe the honor of looking through this peep-hole in my company. But this fellow has two hours for his nap; do not lose sight of him: I am going to smoke a cigarette in the court."

Albert slept four hours. On awaking, his head seemed clearer than it had been any time since his interview with Noel. It was a terrible moment for him,

when, for the first time, he looked his situation calmly in the face.

"By this time," said he, "he has taken measures to prevent his being ousted."

He longed to see some one,—to speak, to have questions asked, to explain. He felt a desire to cry out.

"But what good would it do," he said to himself, "even if they came?"

He looked for his watch, to see what time it was, and found that they had taken it away. This moved him deeply: they were treating him like the most abandoned of villains. He felt in his pockets: they had all been carefully emptied. He thought now of his appearance; and, throwing himself upon the couch, he repaired as much as possible the disorder of his toilet. He put his clothes in order, and dusted them; he straightened his collar, and re-tied his cravat. Turning, then, a little water on his handkerchief, he passed it over his face, rubbing his eyes, the lids of which were smarting. Then he endeavored to smooth his beard and hair. He had no idea that four lynx eyes were fixed upon him all the time.

"Good!" murmured the young officer: "see how our cock raises his crest and smooths his feathers!"

"I tell you," put in Balan, "he is simply benumbed. Hush! he is speaking, I believe."

But they neither surprised one of those disordered gestures nor one of those incoherent speeches, which almost always escape from the feeble when excited by fears, or from the independent who believe their secrets secure. One word alone, "honor," reached the ears of the two spies.

"These rascals of rank," grumbled Balan, "always

have this word in their mouths. That which they most fear is the opinion of some dozen friends, and several thousand strangers, who read the 'Journal des Tribunaux.' They care nothing about their own heads."

When the gendarmes came to conduct Albert to the examination, they found him seated on the side of his bed, his feet pressed against the iron bar, his elbows on his knees, and his head buried in his hands. He rose, as they entered, and took a few steps towards them; but his throat was so dry that he was scarcely able to speak. He asked for a few moments' rest; and, turning towards the little table, he filled and drank two large glasses of water in succession.

"I am ready," he then said.

And, with a firm step, he followed the gendarmes along the passage which led to the court.

Daburon was now in anguish. He walked furiously up and down his office, awaiting his prisoner. Again, and for the twentieth time since morning, he regretted his having engaged in the business.

"Curse on this absurd point of honor, which I have obeyed," he exclaimed. "I have attempted to reassure myself by the aid of sophisms. I have done wrong in not withdrawing. Nothing in the world can change my feelings against the young man. I hate him. I am his judge; and it is no less true, that I have longed to assassinate him. I once aimed at him with my revolver. Why did I not pull the trigger? Do I know why? What power held my finger, when an almost insensible pressure would have sufficed to strike the blow? I cannot say. Why is not he the judge, and I the assassin? If the intention was as punishable as the deed, my neck would suffer. And is it under such conditions that I dare examine him?"

Passing before the door, he heard the heavy step of the gendarmes in the gallery.

"It is he," he said aloud; and then hastily took a seat behind the table, bending into the shade of the portfolio, as though striving to hide himself. If the long clerk had had eyes, he would have noticed the singular spectacle of a judge, more anxious than the prisoner. But he was blind to it; and, at this moment, he saw only an error of fifteen centimes, which had slipped into his accounts, and which he was unable to rectify.

Albert entered the judge's office erect. His features bore traces of great fatigue and of long wakefulness. He was very pale; but his eyes were clear and sparkling.

The usual questions which open such examinations gave Daburon time to recover himself. Fortunately he had found time in the morning to prepare a plan, which he had now simply to follow.

"You are not ignorant, monsieur," he commenced in a tone of perfect politeness, "that you have no right to the name you bear?"

"I know, monsieur," replied Albert, "that I am the natural son of Monsieur de Commarin. I know further that my father would be unable to recognize me, if he wished; since I was born during his marriage."

"What were your feelings upon learning this?"

"I should speak falsely, monsieur, if I said I did not feel very bitterly. When one is in the high position I occupied, the fall is terrible. However, I have never for a moment thought of contesting Noel Gerdy's rights. I have always purposed, and still purpose, to yield. I have so informed M. de Commarin."

Daburon listened to this reply; and it only strengthened his suspicions. Did it not enter into the line of defence which the prisoner had marked out for himself?

It was his duty now to seek some way of breaking up this defence, in which the prisoner meant to shut himself up as in a shell.

"You could only oppose," continued the judge, "a plea of *non recevoir* to Monsieur Gerdy. You had, indeed, on your side, the count, and your mother; but Gerdy had, on his side, testimony which it would have been necessary to suppress,—that of the Widow Lerouge."

"I have never denied it, monsieur."

"Now," continued the judge, seeking to hide the look which he fastened upon Albert, "Justice supposes that, to do away with the only existing proofs, you have assassinated the Widow Lerouge!"

This terrible accusation, terribly emphasized, caused no change in Albert's features. He kept the same firm bearing, without braggadocio. Not a wrinkle appeared on his face.

"Before God," he answered, "and by all that is most sacred on earth, I swear to you, monsieur, that I am innocent! I have been to this moment a close prisoner, without communication with the outer world, reduced consequently to the most absolute helplessness. It is through your probity that I hope to demonstrate my innocence."

"What an actor!" thought the judge. "Can crime give such force?"

He ran over the papers, reading certain passages of the preceding depositions, turning down the corners of certain pages which contained important information. Then suddenly he continued,—

"When you were arrested, you cried out, 'I am lost;' what did you mean by that?"

"Monsieur," replied Albert, "I remember having ut-

tered those words. When I knew of what crime they accused me, I was overwhelmed with consternation. My spirit was, as it were, illuminated by a glimpse of futurity. In less than a moment, I perceived all the horrors of my situation. I saw the weight of the accusation, its probability, and the difficulties I should have in defending myself. A voice cried out to me, 'Who, then, is most interested in Claudine's death?' And the knowledge of my imminent peril forced from me the exclamation you speak of."

His explanation was more than plausible, was possible, and even probable. It had the advantage, too, of anticipating the axiom,—

Search out the one whom the crime will benefit! Tabaret had spoken truly, when he said that they had not taken an unskilful prisoner.

Daburon admired Albert's presence of mind, and the resources of his perverse imagination.

"You do, indeed," continued the judge, "appear to have had the most serious interest in this death. You see we are very sure that robbery was not the object of the crime. The things thrown into the Seine have been recovered. We know, also, that all the papers were burnt. Could they compromise any one but yourself? If you know of any one, speak."

"What can I answer, monsieur? Nothing."

"Have you gone often to this woman's house?"

"Three or four times, with my father."

"One of your coachmen pretends to have driven you there at least ten times."

"The man is mistaken. But what matters the number of visits?"

"Do you recollect the arrangement of the rooms? Can you describe them?"

"Perfectly, monsieur: there were two. Claudine slept in the back room."

"It is understood that you were not unknown to the Widow Lerouge. If you had knocked some evening at her door, do you think she would have opened it for you?"

"Certainly, monsieur, and eagerly."

"You have been unwell these last few days?"

"Very unwell; yes, monsieur, my body bent under the weight of a burden too great for my strength. I have not, however, lost my courage."

"Why did you forbid your *valet de chambre*, Lubin, to call the doctor?"

"Ah, monsieur, how could the doctor reach my disease? All his science could not make me the legitimate son of the Count de Commarin."

"Singular remarks made by you were overheard. You seemed to be no longer interested in any thing about the house. You destroyed papers and letters."

"I had decided to leave the house, monsieur. My resolution explains all that."

To the judge's questions, Albert replied promptly, without the least embarrassment, and in a confident tone. His voice, of a sympathetic calibre, did not tremble. It concealed no emotion; it retained its pure and vibrating sound.

Daburon believed it wise to suspend the examination. With an adversary of this strength, he was evidently pursuing a false course. To proceed in detail was folly; they neither intimidated him nor made him break through his reserve.

"Monsieur," said the judge abruptly, "tell me exactly, I beseech you, how you passed your time last Tuesday evening, from six o'clock until midnight?"

For the first time, Albert seemed disconcerted. His eyes, which had, up to this time, been fixed upon the judge, wandered.

"During Tuesday evening," he stammered, repeating the phrase to gain time.

"I have hit it," thought the judge, starting with joy, and then added aloud, "yes, from six o'clock until midnight."

"I am afraid, monsieur," answered Albert, "it will be difficult for me to satisfy you. I haven't a very good memory."

"Oh, don't tell me that!" interrupted the judge. "If I had asked what you were doing three months ago, on a certain evening, and at a certain hour, I could account for your hesitation; but this is about Tuesday, and it is now Friday. Moreover, this day, so close, was the last of the carnival; it was Shrove Tuesday. That circumstance ought to help your memory."

"That evening, I was walking," murmured Albert.

"Now," continued the judge, "where did you dine?"

"At home, as usual."

"No, not as usual. At the end of your meal, you asked for a bottle of Bourdeaux, which you emptied. You doubtless had need of some extra excitement for your subsequent plans."

"I had no plans," replied the prisoner with a very evident uneasiness.

"You deceive yourself. Two friends came to seek you. You replied to them, before sitting down to dinner, that you had a very important engagement."

"That was only a polite way of getting rid of them."

"Why?"

"Can you not understand, monsieur? I was resigned, but not comforted. I was learning to get accustomed

to the terrible blow. Does not one seek solitude in the great crises of one's life?"

"The prosecution supposes that you wished to be left alone, that you might go to Jonchère. During the day, you said, 'She cannot resist me.' Of whom were you speaking?"

"Of some one to whom I had written the evening before, and who had replied to me. I spoke the words, with her letter still in my hands."

"This letter was, then, from a woman?"

"Yes."

"What have you done with it?"

"I burned it."

"This precaution would seem to imply that you considered it as compromising."

"Not at all, monsieur; it treated entirely of private matters."

Daburon was sure that this letter came from Mademoiselle d'Arlanges. Should he nevertheless ask it, and compel himself to again pronounce this name of Claire, so terrible to him? He ventured to do so, hiding his face behind a paper, so that the prisoner did not detect his emotion.

"From whom did this letter come?" he asked.

"From one whom I cannot name."

"Monsieur," said the judge, addressing him severely, "I will not conceal from you that your position is very dangerous. Do not aggravate it by this culpable reticence. You are here to tell every thing, monsieur."

"My affairs alone, not those of others."

Albert gave this last answer in a dry tone. He was giddy, flurried, exasperated, by the prying and irritating mode of the examination, which gave him no time to breathe. The judge's questions fell upon him more

thickly than the blows of the blacksmith's hammer upon the red hot iron which he is anxious to form before it cools.

The apparent rebellion of his prisoner troubled Daburon seriously. He was further extremely surprised to find the discernment of the old detective at fault; just as though Tabaret were infallible. Tabaret had predicted an unexceptionable *alibi*; and this *alibi* was not forthcoming. Why? Had this subtle villain something better than that? What *ruse* had he at the bottom of his bag? Doubtless he kept in reserve some unforeseen stroke, perhaps irresistible.

"Gently," thought the judge. "I have not got him yet." Then he quickly said aloud,—

"Go on. After dinner, what did you do?"

"I went out for a walk."

"Not immediately. The bottle drank, you smoked in the dining room, which was so unusual as to be noticed. What kind of cigars do you usually smoke?"

"Trabucos."

"Do you not use a cigar-holder, to keep your lips from contact with the tobacco?"

"Yes, monsieur," replied Albert, much surprised at this series of questions.

"What time did you go out?"

"About eight o'clock."

"Did you carry an umbrella?"

"Yes."

"Where did you go?"

"I walked about the streets."

"Alone, without an object, all the evening?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Now trace out your wanderings for me exactly."

"Ah, monsieur, that is very difficult for me! I went

out simply to walk, to obtain exercise, to drive away the torpor which had depressed me for three days. I don't know whether you can picture to yourself my exact condition. I had lost my head. I moved about at hazard along the quays. I wandered through the streets,—”

“All that is very improbable,” interrupted the judge. Daburon, however, knew that it was possible. Had not he himself one night in a race of folly traversed all Paris? What reply could he have made, if some one had asked him next morning where he had gone, except that he had not paid attention, and did not know? But he had forgotten this; and his anguish, too, had much less reason for it than Albert's.

The inquiry commenced, he had caught the fever of investigation. He renewed his desire for the struggle, his passion for his calling.

He became again a judge of inquiry, like the fencing master, who, practicing with his dearest friend, elated by the clash of weapons, becomes excited, forgets himself, and kills him.

“So,” continued Daburon, “you met absolutely no one who could affirm that he saw you? You did not speak to a living soul? You went in nowhere,—not even into a café or a theatre?”

“No, monsieur.”

“Well, monsieur, it is a great misfortune for you,—a very great misfortune; for I must inform you, that it was precisely during this Tuesday evening, between eight o'clock and midnight, that the Widow Lerouge was assassinated. Justice can point to the exact hour. Again, monsieur, in your interests, I entreat you to reflect,—to make a strong appeal to your memory.”

This pointing out of the exact day and hour of the murder stunned Albert. He carried his hand to his

forehead with a despairing gesture. But he replied in a calm voice,—

“I am very unfortunate, monsieur; but I have no explanation to make.”

Daburon's surprise was profound. What, not an *alibi*? Nothing? This could be no snare nor system of defence. Was, then, this man as strong as he had imagined? Doubtless; but he had been taken unaware,—caught unprovided. He had never imagined that it was possible for the accusation to fall upon him; it could only do so by a miracle.

The judge raised slowly, and one by one, the large pieces of paper that covered the convicting articles seized in Albert's room.

“We will pass on,” he continued, “to the examination of the charges which weigh against you. Will you please come nearer? Do you recognize these articles as belonging to yourself?”

“Yes, monsieur, they are all mine.”

“Well, take this foil. Who broke it?”

“I, monsieur, in fencing with M. Courtivois, who can bear witness to it.”

“That will be inquired into. Where is the broken end?”

“I do not know. Upon that point, you must ask my *valet de chambre*, Lubin.”

“Exactly. He declares that he has hunted for it, and cannot find it. I must tell you that the victim received the fatal blow with the end of a foil, broken and sharpened. This piece of stuff, on which the assassin wiped his weapon, proves it.”

“I beseech you, monsieur, to order a most minute search for this. It is impossible that the other half of the foil is not to be found.”

"Orders have been given to that effect. See here, traced out on this paper the exact imprint of the murderer's foot. I have applied it to the sole of one of your boots; it, at once, you perceive, adapts itself with the utmost precision. This piece of plaster has been poured into the hollow left by your heel: you observe that it is, in all respects, your own heel. I perceive, too, the mark of a peg, which is also here."

Albert followed with marked anxiety the judge's every movement. It was plain that he was struggling against a growing terror. Was he attacked by that panic which stupefies criminals when they are on the point of being convicted? To all remarks of the magistrate, he replied in a dull voice,—

"It is true,—perfectly true."

"Wait," continued Daburon; "listen further, before crying out. The criminal had an umbrella. The end of this umbrella sank in the mud; the round of wood-work, which ends the cloth, was found moulded in the hollow. Here is this clod of mud, raised with the utmost care; and here is your umbrella. Compare the rounds. Are they alike, or not?"

"These things, monsieur," attempted Albert, "are wonderful coincidences."

"Well, that remains to be proved; look at the end of this cigar, found at the scene of the crime, and tell of what brand it is, and how it was smoked."

"It is a trabuco, and was smoked with a cigar-holder."

"Like these, eh?" persisted the judge, showing the cigars and holders of amber and meerschaum, taken from the library mantel.

"Ah!" murmured Albert, "it is a fatality,—a wonderful coincidence."

"Patience; that is nothing, as yet. The assassin of the Widow Lerouge wore gloves. The victim, in the convulsions of agony, seized the murderer's hands; and these fragments of skin remained in her nails. These were preserved, and are here. They are of pearl gray, are they not? Now, here are the gloves which you wore on Tuesday. They are gray, and they are frayed. Compare these particles with your own gloves. Do they not correspond? Are they not of the same color, the same skin?"

He could neither deny it, equivocate, nor find subterfuges. The evidence was there before his eyes. The brutal deed shone forth. While appearing to occupy himself solely with the objects lying upon his table, Daburon never lost sight of his prisoner. Albert was terrified. A cold perspiration bathed his face, and glided drop by drop down his cheeks. His hands trembled so much that they were of no use to him. With a choking voice he repeated,—

"It is horrible, horrible!"

"Finally," pursued the inexorable judge, "here are the pantaloons you wore on the evening of the murder. It is plain that they have been wet; and, besides the mud, there are traces of dirt. Observe, too, they are torn on the knees. We will admit, for the sake of argument, that you might not remember where you went on that evening; but who could believe that you do not know where you tore your pantaloons and frayed your gloves?"

What courage could resist such assaults? Albert's firmness and energy were at an end. His brain whirled. He fell heavily into a chair, exclaiming,—

"I shall go mad!"

"You see," insisted the judge, whose gaze had be-

come unbearably fixed upon him,—“you see that the Widow Lerouge could only have been stabbed by you.”

I see,” protested Albert, “that I am a victim of one of those terrible fatalities which makes men doubt the evidence of their reason. I am innocent.”

“Then tell me where you passed Tuesday evening.”

“Ah, monsieur!” cried the prisoner, “I must,—” But, restraining himself, he added in a dull voice, “I have made the only answer that I can make.”

Daburon arose, having now reached his final grand stroke.

“It is, then, my duty,” said he, with a shade of irony, “to supply your failure of memory. I am going to recount to you what you did. On Tuesday evening, at eight o’clock, after having received from wine a dreadful energy, you left your home. At thirty-five minutes past eight, you took the cars at St. Lazare station. At nine o’clock, you got out at Rueil station.”

And, adopting without shame, the ideas of Père Tabaret, the judge of inquiry repeated nearly word for word the tirade improvised the night before by his amateur agent of police.

He had every reason, while speaking, to admire the penetration of the old detective. In all his life, his eloquence had never produced so striking an effect. Every sentence, every word, carried weight. The assurance of the prisoner, already shaken, fell piece by piece, just as the walls of a town give way when riddled with balls.

Albert was, as the judge perceived, like a man, who, rolling to the bottom of a precipice, sees all the points which might retard his fall fail him, and who feels a new and more painful bruise at each projecture, against which his body strikes.

“And now,” concluded the judge of inquiry, “listen

to good advice: do not persist in this mode of denying, impossible to sustain. Change your mind. Justice, be assured, is ignorant of nothing which it is important to know. Believe me; seek the indulgence of the courts: confess your guilt."

Daburon did not believe that his prisoner would again refuse. He pictured him overwhelmed, confounded, throwing himself at his feet, asking for mercy. But he was deceived.

However great appeared Albert's prostration, he found in one last effort of his will sufficient strength to recover himself and again protest,—

"You are right, monsieur," he said in a sad, but firm voice; "every thing seems to prove the criminal. In your place, I should have spoken as you have done; and yet I swear to you that I am innocent."

"Upon my word,"—began the judge.

"I am innocent," interrupted Albert; "and I repeat it, without the least hope of changing in any way your conviction. Yes, every thing speaks against me,—every thing, even my own bearing before you. It is true, my courage has been shaken by these incredible, miraculous, overwhelming coincidences. I am overcome, because I feel the impossibility of establishing my innocence. But I do not despair. My honor and my life are in the hands of God. At the same time that I appear to you lost,—for I do not deceive myself, monsieur,—I do not despair of a complete justification. I await it confidently."

"What have you to say?" interrupted the judge.

"Nothing but what I have already said, monsieur."

"So you persist in denying your guilt?"

"I am innocent."

"But this is folly—"

"I am innocent."

"Very well," said Daburon; "that is enough for to-day. You shall hear the reading of the official report, and will then be taken back to your prison. I exhort you to reflect. Night will perhaps bring on a better feeling; if you wish at any time to speak to me, send word and I will come to you. I will give orders to that effect. You may read now, Constant."

When Albert departed with the gendarmes, the judge muttered in a low tone, "There's an obstinate fellow for you." He certainly had not a shadow of doubt. To him, Albert was as surely the murderer as if he heard him confess it. Even if he should persist in his purpose of denial to the end of the investigation, it would be impossible, that, with the proofs already in existence, a verdict of "Not guilty" should be rendered. It was a hundred to one, that to all the questions the jury would reply in the affirmative.

However, left to himself, Daburon did not experience that intense satisfaction, mixed with vanity, which is ordinarily felt after one has successfully conducted an examination, when he has succeeded in getting his prisoner into Albert's state. Something disturbed him and shocked him. At the bottom of his heart, he felt ill at ease. He had triumphed; but his victory gave him only uneasiness, pain, and vexation. A reflection so simple that he could hardly understand why it had not occurred to him before increased his discontent, and made him angry with himself.

"Something told me," he muttered, "that I was wrong to undertake this business. I am punished for not having obeyed this inner voice. I must excuse myself from going on with it. This Viscount de Commarin has been arrested, imprisoned, examined, overpowered: he will certainly be convicted, and probably

condemned. Had I been a stranger to the trial, I could have appeared in Claire's presence. Her grief would have been great. As her friend, I could have soothed her, mingled my tears with hers, calmed her regrets. With time, she might have been consoled,—perhaps have forgotten him. She might, perhaps, then have rewarded me; who knows? While now, whatever may happen, I shall be an object of terror to her; she will never be able to endure the sight of me. I shall always in her eyes be the assassin of her lover. I have with my own hands formed between her and myself an abyss which centuries can never fill, by my own great fault."

The unhappy judge heaped the bitterest reproaches upon himself. He was in despair. He had never so hated Albert,—this wretched man, who, stained with a crime, stood in the way of his happiness. Then how he cursed Père Tabaret! Alone, he should not have decided so quickly. He would have thought over it, matured his decision, and certainly recollected the inconveniences, which now occurred to him. This man, like a badly trained bloodhound, urged on and carried away by his stupid passion, had become confused.

It was precisely this unfavorable moment that Tabaret chose for making his appearance before the judge. He had been informed of the termination of the inquiry; and he arrived, impatient to know what had passed, swelling with curiosity, his nose in air, distended with the sweet hope of hearing of the fulfilment of his predictions.

"What answer did he make?" he asked almost before he had opened the door.

"He is evidently the criminal," replied the judge, with a harshness very different from his usual manner.

Père Tabaret, who had expected to receive praises

by the basketful, was surprised at this tone! It was, therefore, with great hesitancy that he offered his further services.

"I have come," he said modestly, "to know if any investigations are necessary to demolish the *alibi* offered by the prisoner."

"He gave no *alibi*," replied the magistrate dryly.

"How," cried the old detective, "no *alibi*? Pshaw! I ask pardon: he has of course then confessed every thing."

"No," said the judge impatiently, "he has confessed nothing. He acknowledges that the proofs are decisive: he cannot give an account of how he spent his time; but he protests his innocence."

In the centre of the office, Tabaret, his mouth wide open, his eyes starting wildly, stood in the most grotesque attitude his astonishment could effect. He was literally thunderstruck.

In spite of his anger, Daburon could not help smiling; and even Constant gave a grin, which on his lips was equivalent to a paroxysm of laughter.

"Not an *alibi*, nothing?" murmured the old fellow. "No explanations? The idea! It is inconceivable. Not an *alibi*? We must be mistaken: he is certainly not the criminal. It cannot be at all!"

The judge of inquiry felt that the old amateur must have been waiting the result of the examination at the wine shop around the corner, or else that he had gone mad.

"Unfortunately," said he, "we are not mistaken. It is too clearly shown that Monsieur de Commarin is the murderer. But, if you like, ask Constant for his report of the examination, and run it over while I put these papers in order."

"Very well," said the old fellow with feverish anxiety.

He sat down in Constant's chair, and, leaning his elbows on the table, burying his hands in his hair, in less than no time read through the report. When he had finished, he arose wild, pale, his face distorted.

"Monsieur," said he to the judge in a strange voice, "I have been the involuntary cause of a terrible mistake. This man is innocent."

"Come, come," said Daburon without stopping his preparations for departure, "you are losing your head, my dear Tabaret. How, after all that you have read there, can—?"

"Yes, monsieur, yes; it is because I have read this that I entreat you to pause, or we shall add one more to the sad list of judicial errors. Read this examination over carefully; there is not a reply which does not declare this unfortunate man innocent,—not one word which does not throw out a ray of light. And he is still in prison, still in solitary confinement?"

"He is; and there he will remain, if you please," broke in the judge. "It becomes you well to speak in this manner, after the way you talked last night, while I hesitated so much."

"But, monsieur," cried the old detective, "I say now, precisely the same. Ah, wretched Tabaret! all is lost; and they will not understand you. Pardon me, monsieur, if I lack the respect due to your office; but you have not grasped my method. It is, however, very simple. Given a crime, with all the circumstances and details, I construct, piece by piece, a plan of accusation, which I do not warrant until it is entire and perfect. If a man is found to whom this plan applies exactly in every particular, the author of the crime is found; otherwise, we have laid hands upon an innocent person. It is

not sufficient that such and such particulars seem to point to him; it must be all or nothing. This is infallible. Now, in this case, how have I reached the criminal? By proceeding by inference from the known to the unknown. I have examined his work; and I have formed an idea of the worker. Reason and logic lead us to what? To a villain, determined, courageous, and prudent, versed in the business. And do you think that such a man would neglect a precaution that would not be omitted by the commonest tyro? It is inconceivable. What! This man is so skilful as to leave such feeble traces that they escaped Gevrol's practiced eye; and you think he would risk discovery by leaving an entire night unaccounted for? It's impossible! I am as sure of my system as of a well-proved rule of arithmetic. The Jonchère assassin had an *alibi*. Albert has offered none; then he is innocent."

Daburon looked at the old detective pityingly,—much as he would look at a remarkable monomaniac. When he had finished,—

"My worthy Monsieur Tabaret," he said to him, "you are entirely in the wrong. You err through an excess of subtlety. You allow too freely to others the wonderful sagacity with which you yourself are endowed. Our man has failed in prudence, simply because he believed his rank would place him above suspicion."

"No, monsieur,—no, a thousand times no. My criminal,—the true one,—he whom we have yet to find, would dread every thing. Besides, does Albert defend himself? No. He is overwhelmed; because he perceives the coincidences so fatal that they appear to condemn him, without a chance of escape. Did he try to excuse himself? No. He simply replied, 'It is terrible.' And then this reticence that I cannot explain."

"I can explain it very easily; and I am as confident as though he had confessed every thing. I have more than sufficient proofs for that."

"Ah, monsieur, those proofs! There are always enough of those against an arrested man. They have existed against every innocent man who was ever condemned. Proofs! Why, I had them in quantities against Kaiser, the poor little tailor, who—"

"Well," interrupted the judge, hastily, "if he is not the one most interested in the crime, who is? His father, the Count de Commarin?"

"No: the true assassin is a young man."

Daburon had arranged his papers, and finished his preparations. He took up his hat, and, as he was going out, replied,—

"Adieu! Come and see me by-and-by, Tabaret, when you have got rid of these fancies. To-morrow we will talk the whole matter over again. I am rather tired to-night." Then he added, addressing his clerk, "Constant, bring me word, in the court of records, in case the prisoner Commarin wishes to speak to me."

He had reached the door; but Tabaret barred his exit.

"Monsieur," said the old man, "in the name of heaven listen to me! He is innocent, I swear to you. Help me, then, to find the real criminal. Monsieur, think of your remorse in case you take this false step."

But the magistrate did not wish to hear more. He pushed Père Tabaret quickly aside, and hastened into the gallery.

The old man now turned to Constant. He wished to convince, persuade, prove to him. Lost trouble: the tall clerk hastened to fold up his baggage, thinking of his soup, which was growing cold.

Having closed the study door, Père Tabaret, wretched in spirit, was alone in the dark gallery. The noise of the courts was hushed: all was silent as the tomb. The old detective desperately grasped his hair with both hands.

“Ah!” said he, “Albert is innocent; and it is I who have betrayed him. I, like a madman, have infused into the obstinate spirit of this judge a conviction that I can no longer control. He is innocent, and is yet enduring the most horrible anguish. If he should commit suicide! There have been instances of wretched men, who in despair at being falsely accused have killed themselves in their prison. Poor boy! But I will not abandon him. I have ruined him: I will save him! I must, I will find the criminal; and he shall pay dearly for my mistake,—the scoundrel!”

CHAPTER XIII.

AFTER seeing the Count de Commarin safely in his carriage at the entrance of the palais de justice, Noel Gerdy seemed inclined to leave him.

Resting one hand against the half-opened carriage-door, he bowed respectfully, and said,—

“When shall I have the honor of paying my respects to you, monsieur?”

“Come with me now,” said the old man.

The advocate, still leaning forward, muttered some excuses. He had, he said, important business: he must positively return to his rooms at once.

“Come,” repeated the count, in a tone which admitted of no reply.

Noel obeyed.

"You have found your father," said M. de Commarin in a low tone; "but I must warn you, that you at the same time lose your independence."

The carriage started; and now, for the first time, the count noticed that Noel had very modestly taken his seat opposite him. This modest bearing pleased him much.

"Sit here, by my side, monsieur," he said; "are you not my son?"

The advocate, without replying, took his seat by the side of the old man, but as far from him as possible.

He had received a terrible shock in Daburon's presence; for he retained none of his usual boldness, none of that sang-froid by which he was accustomed to conceal his feelings. Fortunately, the ride gave him time to breathe, and to recover himself a little.

On the way from the palais de justice to their home, not a word passed between the father and son.

When the carriage stopped before the flight of stairs, and the count got out with Noel's assistance, there was great commotion among the servants.

There were, it is true, few of them present, nearly all having been summoned to the palais; but the count and the advocate had scarcely disappeared, when, as if by enchantment, they were all assembled in the entry. They came from the garden, the stables, the cellar, and the kitchen. Nearly all bore marks of their calling. One young groom ran about with his wooden shoes filled with straw, shuffling on the marble floor like a mangy dog on the Gobelin tapestry. One of these fellows recognized Noel from his visit of the previous Sunday; and that was enough to set fire to all these lovers of gossip, thirsting for scandal.

Since morning, moreover, the unusual events at the Commarin house had started a great uproar in society. A thousand stories were circulated, talked over, corrected, and added to by the ill-natured and malicious,—some abominably absurd, others simply idiotic. Twenty people, very noble and still more proud, had not been too proud to send their most intelligent servants to pay a little visit among the count's servants, for the sole purpose of learning something positive. As it was, nobody knew any thing; and yet everybody was fully informed.

Let any one explain who can this very common phenomenon: a crime is committed; justice arrives, wrapping itself in mystery; the police are still ignorant of almost every thing; and yet details of the most minute character are circulated about the streets.

"Ah," said a cook, "that great dark fellow with the whiskers is the count's true son!"

"You are right," said one of the servants who had accompanied M. de Commarin; "as for the other, he is no more his son than Jean here; who, by the way, will be kicked out of doors, if he is caught in here with his dirty working-shoes on."

"Likely story," exclaimed Jean smiling a little at the danger which threatened him.

"He has been expected all the time," said the cook.

"Why, how is that?"

"Well, you see, one day, long ago, when the countess who is now dead was out walking with her little son, who was about six months old, the child was stolen by gypsies. The poor lady was full of grief; but, above all, feared her husband, who was not kind to her. What was to be done? She purchased a brat from an old woman, who happened to be passing; and, never having

noticed his child, the count has never known the difference since."

"But the assassination?"

"That's very simple. When the woman saw her brat in such a nice berth, she bled him finely, and has kept up a system of blackmailing all along. So he resolved to put an end to it, and came to a final settling with her."

"And this brown fellow,—what about him?"

The orator would have gone on, without doubt, giving the most satisfactory explanations of every thing if he had not been interrupted by the entrance of Lubin, who came from the palais in company with young Joseph. His success, so brilliant up to this time, was cut short, just as that of an inferior singer when the star comes on the stage. The entire assembly turned towards Albert's *valet de chambre*, all eyes questioning him. He knew at once that he was a man of importance; but he did not abuse his advantages, and make his little world languish too long.

"What a rascal!" he cried out. "What a villainous fellow is this Albert!"

He purposely did away with "monsieur" and "viscount," and met with general approval for so doing.

"But," he added, "I always had my doubts. The fellow didn't please me by half. Just see to what we are exposed every day in our profession. It is dreadfully disagreeable. The judge concealed nothing from me. 'Lubin,' said he, 'it was very wrong for a man like you to serve such a scoundrel.' For you must know, that, besides an old woman of about eighty, he also assassinated a young girl of twelve. The little child, the judge told me, was chopped into bits."

"Ah!" put in Joseph; "he must have been a brute. How they will give it to him for such a deed, even

though he is rich; for they always punish poor men, who do it simply to gain a living!"

"Pshaw!" said Lubin in a knowing tone; "you will see him come out of it as pure as snow. These rich men can do any thing."

"But," said the cook, "I'd give willingly a month's wages to be a mouse, and to listen to what the proud count and the tall brown fellow are talking about. If I could only get a little peep through the key-hole."

This proposition did not meet with much favor. The servants knew by experience that, on important occasions, spying was worse than useless.

M. de Commarin knew all about servants from infancy.

His study was, therefore, a shelter to all imprudence. The sharpest ear placed at the keyhole could understand nothing of what was going on within, even when the count was in a passion, and his voice loudest. One alone, Denis, *monsieur le premier*, as they called him, had the opportunity of gathering information; but he was well paid for being discreet: and he was discretion itself.

At this time, Monsieur de Commarin was sitting in the same chair which he had beaten with such a furious hand while listening to Albert.

From the moment he touched the step of his carriage, the old gentleman recovered his haughtiness. He became even more arrogant in his manner, as if he felt the mortification of his attitude before the judge, and wished himself dead for what he now considered an unpardonable weakness.

He wondered how he could have yielded to a momentary impulse,—how his grief could have so basely betrayed him.

At the remembrance of the avowals wrested from him in his wildness, he blushed, and called himself the worst of names.

Like Albert, the night before, Noel, having recovered himself fully, held himself erect, cold as marble, respectful, but no longer humble.

The father and son exchanged glances which had nothing of sympathy nor of friendliness.

They examined one another; they measured each other, much as two adversaries feel their way with their eyes before encountering with their weapons.

"Monsieur," finally said the count in a hard tone, "henceforth this house is yours. From this moment, you are the Viscount de Commarin; you re-enter into the fulness of the rights of which you have been deprived. Wait. Listen, before you thank me. I wish, in the beginning, to relieve you from all misunderstanding. Had I been master of the situation, I should never have recognized you: Albert should have remained in the position in which I placed him."

"I understand you, monsieur," replied Noel. "I don't think that I could ever bring myself to do an act like that by which you deprived me of my birthright; but I declare that, if I had the misfortune to have done it, I should have thereafter acted as you have. Your rank was too conspicuous to permit a voluntary acknowledgment. It was a thousand times better to suffer an injustice to continue in secret than to expose your name to the comments of the malicious."

This answer surprised the count, and very agreeably. But he would not let his satisfaction be seen; and it was with a still harder tone that he continued,—

"I have no claim, monsieur, upon your affection; I do not ask for it; but I insist at all times upon the ut-

most deference. It is traditional in our house, that the son shall never interrupt his father when he is speaking; that you have just been guilty of. Children are not to judge their parents; that also you have just done. When I was forty years of age, my father was in his second childhood; but I do not remember having raised my voice once above his. This much, said by way of caution, I continue. I have undergone considerable expense in providing Albert with an establishment distinct from my own,—with servants, horses, and carriages; and I have allowed the unhappy boy four thousand francs a month. I have decided, in order to put a stop to all foolish gossip, and to make your position the easier, that you ought to hold a more important place in the house, this for my own sake. Further, I will increase your monthly allowance to six thousand francs; which I trust you will spend as nobly as possible, giving the least possible chance for ridicule. I cannot too strongly exhort you to the utmost caution. Keep close watch over yourself. Weigh your words well. Reason about your slightest actions. You will be the point of observation for thousands of impertinent idlers who compose our world; your blunders will be their delight. Do you fence?"

"Moderately well."

"So. Do you ride?"

"No; but in six months I will be a good horseman, or break my neck."

"It is fashionable to be a horseman, not to break one's neck. Let us proceed. You will, of course, not occupy Albert's apartments. They will be closely locked, as soon as they are free from the police. Thank heaven! the house is large. You will occupy the other wing; and there will be a separate entrance to your apart-

ments, by a separate staircase. Servants, horses, carriages, furniture, such as becomes a viscount, will be at your service, cost what it may, within forty-eight hours. On the day of your taking possession, you must look as though you had been installed for years. There will be great scandal; but that cannot be avoided. A prudent father might send you away for a few months to the Austrian court or to the Russian; but, in this instance, such prudence would be absurd. Much better a dreadful outcry, which ends quickly, than low murmurs which last forever. Dare public opinion; and, in eight days, it will have exhausted its comments, and the story will have become old. So, to work! This evening, the laborers shall be here; and, in the first place, I must present you to my servants."

To put this purpose into execution, the count moved to touch the bell-rope. Noel stopped him.

Since the commencement of this interview, the advocate had wandered in the regions of the thousand and one nights, the wonderful lamp in his hand. The fairy reality cast into the shade his wildest dreams. He was dazzled at the words of the count, and had need of all his reason to struggle against the giddiness which came over him, at realizing his great good fortune. Touched by a magic wand, he seemed to awake to a thousand novel and unknown sensations. He rolled in purple and bathed in gold.

But he knew how to appear unmoved. His face had contracted the habit of guarding the secret of the most violent inner excitement. While all his passions vibrated within him, he listened apparently with a sad and almost indifferent coldness."

"Permit me," he said to the count, "without overstepping the bounds of the utmost respect, to say a few

words. I am touched more than I can express by your goodness; and yet, I beseech you, to delay its manifestation. The proposition I am about to suggest may perhaps appear to you worthy of consideration. It seems to me that the situation demands the greatest delicacy. It is well to despise public opinion, but not to defy it. I am certain to be judged with the utmost severity. If I instal myself so suddenly in your house, what will they not say? I shall have the appearance of a conqueror, who thinks little, in attaining his purpose, of passing over the bodies of the conquered. They will reproach me with occupying the bed still warm from Albert's body. They will rail bitterly at my haste in taking possession. They will certainly compare me to Albert; and the comparison will be to my disadvantage, because I seem to triumph at a time when a great disaster has fallen upon our house."

The count listened without marked disapproval, struck perhaps by the justice of his reasons.

Noel imagined that his hardness was much more feigned than real; and this idea encouraged him.

"I beseech you then, monsieur," he continued, "to permit me for the present in no way to change my mode of living. By not showing myself, I leave all malicious remarks to waste themselves in air,—I let public opinion the better familiarize itself with the idea of a coming change. There is a great deal in not taking the world by surprise. By waiting, I shall not have the air of an intruder on presenting myself. Absent, I shall have the advantages which the unknown always possess,—I shall draw to myself the good opinion of all those who have envied Albert, I shall obtain as defenders all those servants who would to-morrow assail me, if my elevation came suddenly upon them. Besides, by this

delay, I should accustom myself to my abrupt change of fortune. I ought not to bring into your world, which is now mine, the manners of a parvenu. My name ought not to incommode me, like an ill-made coat. And, by thus acting, it will be possible for me to rectify, at home and without noise, the mistakes of my early education."

"Perhaps it would be the wisest," murmured the count.

This assent, so easily obtained, surprised Noel. He got the idea that the count had only wished to prove him, to test him. In any case, whether he had triumphed by his eloquence, or whether he had simply shunned a trap, he had triumphed. His boldness increased; he determined to make himself master in every way.

"I must add, monsieur," he continued, "that I have certain changes to bring about in myself. Before entering upon duties in my new life, I ought to finish those in my old. I have friends and clients. This event has surprised me, just as I was beginning to reap the reward of ten years of hard work and perseverance. I had yet only sown; I was on the point of gathering in my harvest. My name was already rising. I had obtained some little influence. I confess, without shame, that I have heretofore professed ideas and opinions that would not be suited to this house; and it would be impossible to-day or to-morrow for —"

"Ah!" interrupted the count in a bantering tone, "you were a liberal. It is a fashionable disease. Albert was a great liberal."

"My ideas, monsieur," said Noel eagerly, "were those of every intelligent man who wishes to rise. Besides, have not all parties one and the same aim—

power? They merely take different means of reaching it. I will not enlarge upon this subject. Be assured, monsieur, that I will respect my name, and think and act as a man of my rank should."

"I trust so," said M. de Commarin; "and I hope that you will never make me regret Albert."

"At least, monsieur, it will not be my fault. But since you have mentioned the name of that unfortunate young man, let us speak of him."

The count cast a look of defiance upon Noel.

"What can now be done for Albert?" he asked.

"What, monsieur!" cried Noel with ardor, "would you abandon him, when he has not a friend left in the world? He is still your son, monsieur; he is my brother. For thirty years he has borne the name of Commarin. All the members of a family are one. Innocent, or guilty, he has a right to count upon us; and we owe him our assistance."

This was another of those sentiments which the count recognized as Albert's; and this second one again touched him.

"What do you then hope for, monsieur?" he asked.

"To save him, if he is innocent; and I love to believe that he is. I am an advocate, monsieur; and I wish to defend him. I have been told that I have considerable talent; in such a cause, I must have. Yes, however strong the charges against him may be, I will overthrow them. I will dispel all doubts. The truth shall burst forth through my voice. I will find new accents to imbue the judges with my conviction. I will save him; and this shall be my last cause."

"And if he should confess," said the count, "if he should confess?"

"Then monsieur," replied Noel with a dark look, "I

will render him the last service, which in such a misfortune I should ask of a brother,—the means of avoiding judgment.”

“That is well said, monsieur,” said the count,—“very well, my son.”

And he extended his hand to Noel, who pressed it, bowing with a respectful acknowledgment.

The advocate breathed again. At last he had found the way to the heart of this haughty noble; he had conquered, he had pleased him.

“Let us return to ourselves,” continued the count. “I yield to the reasons which you have suggested. But do not consider this a precedent. I never retire from a plan once undertaken, unless it is proved to me to be bad, and contrary to my interests. But at least nothing need prevent your remaining here to-day, and dining with me. We will, in the first place, see where you can lodge until you formally take possession of the apartments which are to be prepared for you.”

Noel ventured to interrupt the old gentleman again.

“Monsieur,” said he, “when you bade me follow you here, I obeyed you, as was my duty. Now another and a sacred duty calls me away. Madame Gerdy is at this moment expiring. Ought I to leave the death-bed of her who filled my mother’s place?”

“Valerie!” murmured the count.

He leaned upon the arm of his chair, his face buried in his hands; in one moment the whole past rose up before him.

“She has done me great harm,” he murmured, as if answering his thoughts. “She has ruined my whole life; but ought I to be implacable? She is dying from the accusation which is hanging over our son, Albert. It was I who was the cause of it all. Doubtless, in this

last hour, a word from me would be a great consolation to her. I will accompany you, monsieur."

Noel started at this unexpected proposition.

"O monsieur!" said he hastily, "spare yourself, pray, a heart-rending sight. Your going would be useless, Madame Gerdy probably yet exists; but her mind is dead. Her brain was unable to resist so violent a shock. The unfortunate woman would neither recognize nor understand you."

"Go then alone," sighed the count,—"go, my son."

The words "my son," pronounced with a marked emphasis, sounded like a note of victory in Noel's ears, which only his studied reserve concealed.

He bowed to take his leave. The old gentleman signed him to stay.

"In any event," he said, "a place at table will be set for you here. I dine at precisely half-past six. I shall be glad to see you."

He rang. *Monsieur le premier* appeared. "Denis," said he, "none of the orders I have given will affect this gentleman. You will tell this to all the servants. This gentleman is at home here."

The advocate took his leave; and the count felt great comfort in being once more alone.

Since morning, events had followed one another with such bewildering rapidity that his thoughts could scarcely keep pace with them. At last, he was able to reflect.

"There, then," said he to himself, "is my legitimate son. I am sure of his birth, at any rate. Truly it would be with a bad grace, were I to deny him. I find him an exact picture of myself at thirty. He is a fine fellow, this Noel, very fine. His features are decidedly in his favor. He is intelligent and acute. He knows how to

be humble without lowering himself, firm without arrogance. His new and unexpected fortune does not make him giddy. I augur well of a man who knows how to bear himself in prosperity. He thinks well. He will carry his title proudly. And yet I feel no sympathy with him; it seems to me that I shall regret my poor Albert. I never knew how to appreciate him. Unhappy boy! To commit a dreadful crime! He must have lost his reason. I do not like the sight of this one: he is too clever. They say that he is perfect. He expresses, at least, the noblest and most appropriate sentiments. He is kind and brave, magnanimous, generous, heroic. He is without malice, and is ready to sacrifice himself to repay me for what I have done for him. He forgives Madame Gerdy; he loves Albert. That makes me distrust him. But all young men nowadays are so. Ah! we live in a happy age. Our children are born free from all human mistakes. They have none of the vices, passions, nor prejudices of their fathers; and these precocious philosophers, models of sagacity and virtue, are incapable of committing the least folly. Alas! Albert, too, was perfect; and he has assassinated Claudine! That might imply,—but what matters it?" he added, half aloud. "I wish I had gone to see Valerie!"

And although the advocate had been gone at least ten good minutes, M. de Commarin, not realizing how time had passed, hastened to the window, in the hope of seeing Noel in the yard, and hailing him.

But Noel had already gone. On leaving the house, he had taken a cab as far as the Rue Bourgoyne, and from thence to the Rue St. Lazare.

Arrived at his own door, he threw rather than gave five francs to the driver, and ran rapidly up to the fourth story.

"Who has called upon me?" he asked of the maid.

"No one, monsieur."

He seemed relieved from a great anxiety, and spoke again in a calmer tone.

"And the doctor?"

"He came this morning," replied the maid, "while you were away; and he did not seem at all confident. He has returned every hour, and is now here."

"Very well. I am going in to speak to him. If any one calls, show them into my study, and call me."

While entering Madame Gerdy's chamber, Noel wondered how he could discover whether any one had been in during his absence.

The sick woman, her eyes fixed, her face convulsed, lay extended upon her back.

She seemed dead, save for sudden starts, which at intervals shook her and disturbed the bedclothes.

Above her head was placed a little vessel, filled with ice water, which fell drop by drop upon her face and upon her forehead, covered with large bluish spots.

The table and mantel were laden with little pots, ornamented with strings of roses, vials for medicines, and half-emptied glasses.

At the foot of the bed, a piece of linen stained with blood showed that they had been using leeches.

Near the fireplace, where burned a large fire, a nun of the order of St. Vincent de Paul was crouching, watching a kettle boil.

She was a woman still young, her face whiter than her skirt. Her features were immovably placid, her look mournful, betraying the renunciation of the flesh, and the abdication of all independence of thought.

Her dress of gray hung from her in large ungraceful folds. At her every motion, her large bead-roll of dyed

box-wood, weighed down by a cross and copper medals, was shaken, and dragged on the ground with a noise like a chain.

Upon a chair opposite the bed Dr' Hervé sat, following apparently with close attention the sister's preparations. He raised himself eagerly, as Noel entered.

"At last you are here," he said, giving his friend a strong grasp of the hand.

"I was detained at the palais," said the advocate, as if he felt the necessity of explaining his absence; "and I have been, as you may well imagine, dreadfully anxious."

He bent down to the doctor's ear, and, with his voice trembling with anxiety, asked,—

"Well?"

The doctor shook his head with an air of deep discouragement.

"She is much worse," he replied; "since morning, bad symptoms have succeeded each other with frightful rapidity."

He checked himself. The advocate seized his arm, and pinched it. Madame Gerdy had stirred a little, and let a feeble groan escape her.

"She understood you," murmured Noel.

"I wish it were so," said the doctor; "it would be most encouraging. But you are mistaken. However, go to her."

He approached Madame Gerdy, and taking her pulse, examined it carefully; then, with the end of his finger, he lightly raised the eyelid.

The eye appeared dull, glassy, lifeless.

"Come, judge for yourself; take her hand, speak to her."

Noel, trembling all over, obeyed his friend. He ad-

vanced, and, leaning on the bed so that his mouth almost touched her ear, he murmured,—

“Mother, it is I,—Noel,—your own Noel. Speak to me, make some sign, if you know me, mother.”

It was in vain; she retained her frightful immobility. Not a sign of intelligence crossed her features.

“You see,” said the doctor, “I told you the truth.”

“Poor woman!” sighed Noel, “does she suffer?”

“Not now.”

The nun now rose; and she too came near the bed.

“Doctor,” said she, “it is all ready.”

“Then call the maid, sister, to help us. We are going to apply a mustard poultice.”

The servant hastened in. In the arms of the two women, Madame Gerdy was like a corpse, whose last toilet they were making. She was rigid as though she were dead. She must have suffered much and long, poor woman! for it was pitiable to see how thin she was. The nun herself was affected, although she had become habituated to the sight of suffering. How many sick people had breathed their last in her arms during the fifteen years that she had gone from pillow to pillow!

Noel, during this time, had retired into the recess of the window, and pressed his burning brow against the panes.

Of what was he thinking, while she was dying a few paces from him,—she who had given him so many proofs of maternal tenderness and devotion? Did he regret her? Did he not think rather of the grand and magnificent existence which was awaiting him on the other side of the river, at the Faubourg St. Germain? He turned abruptly about, upon hearing the voice of his friend.

“It is done,” said the doctor; “we have only now

to wait the effect of the mustard. If she feels it, it will be a good sign; if it has no effect, we will try cupping."

"And if she never stirs?"

The doctor answered only with a shrug of the shoulders, which showed his feeling of absolute powerlessness.

"I understand your silence, Hervé," murmured Noel. "Alas! you fear that to-night she is lost."

"Scientifically, yes; but I do not yet despair. It was hardly a year ago that the grandfather of one of our comrades was saved in an almost identical case; and I have seen worse cases than this,—where suppuration had commenced."

"It breaks my heart to see her in that state. Must she die without recovering her reason for one moment? Will she not recognize me, speak one word to me?"

"Who knows? This disease, my poor friend! baffles all foresight. Each moment, the aspect may change, according as the inflammation affects such or such a part of the encephalic mass. She is now in a state of utter insensibility, of the destruction of all her intellectual faculties, of drowsiness, of paralysis; to-morrow, she may be taken with convulsions, accompanied with a lightness of the brain, a fierce delirium."

"And will she speak then?"

"Without doubt; but that will not change either the nature or the gravity of the disease."

"And will she recover her reason?"

"Perhaps," answered the doctor, looking fixedly at his friend; "but why do you ask that?"

"Ah, my dear Hervé, one word from Madame Gerdy, —only one, would be of such use to me!"

"In your affairs, eh? Well, I can tell you nothing, can promise you nothing. You have chances in your

favor, and chances against you; only do not be far away. If her intelligence returns, it will be only by flashes; try and profit by them. But I must go," added the doctor: "I have still three visits to make."

Noel followed his friend. When he reached the staircase,—

"You will return?" he asked.

"This evening, at nine. There is no need of me at present. All depends upon the watcher. But I have chosen a pearl. I know her well."

"It was you, then, who brought this nun?"

"Yes, with your permission. Are you displeased?"

"Not the least in the world. Only, I confess—"

"What? you make a face. Perhaps you object to having your mother nursed by a daughter of St. Vincent?"

"My dear Hervé, you—"

"Well, I agree with you entirely. They are adroit, insinuating, dangerous, I know. If I had an old uncle, whose heir I expected to be, I shouldn't bring one of these into my house. These good daughters are sometimes charged with strange commissions. But what is there to fear now? Let them speak their foolish words. Money aside, these good sisters are the best nurses in the world. I hope you will have one on your death-bed. But good-by; I am in a hurry."

So, regardless of his professional dignity, the doctor jumped down the stairs; while Noel, thoughtful, his face charged with anxiety, went back into Madame Gerdy's room.

Upon the threshold of the sick-room, the nun awaited the advocate's return.

"Monsieur," said she, "monsieur."

"You want something of me, sister?"

"Monsieur, the maid bade me come to you for money ; she has no more, and had to get credit at the apothecary's."

"Excuse me, sister," interrupted Noel in no very eager tone,—“excuse me for not having anticipated your request ; but you see I am a little confused.”

And, taking out a hundred franc note, he laid it on the mantel.

"Thanks, monsieur," said the sister ; "I will keep account of all expenses. We always do this," she added ; "it is more convenient for the family,—one is so troubled at seeing one we love sick. You have perhaps not thought of giving this poor lady the sweet aid of our beloved religion ? In your place, monsieur, I should send without delay for a priest,—"

"Why, sister, you see the condition she is in ! She is the same as dead ; you saw that she did not heed my voice."

"That is of little consequence, monsieur," replied the sister : "you ought always to do your duty. She did not reply to you ; but are you sure that she would not reply to a priest ? Ah, you do not understand all the power of the last rites ! I have seen even the dying revive their intelligence and strength to make confession, and to receive the sacred body of our Lord Jesus Christ. I have often heard families say, that they did not wish to frighten their sick friend,—that the sight of the minister of our Lord would inspire a terror that would hasten the final end. It is a grievous error. The priest does not terrify ; he reassures the soul, at the beginning of its long journey. He speaks in the name of the God of mercy, who comes to save, not to destroy. I could cite to you many cases of dying people who have been cured simply by contact with the sacred balm."

The good sister spoke in a tone mournful as her look. Her heart was evidently not in the words she pronounced. Without doubt, she had learned them when she first entered the convent. Then they expressed something she really felt,—she spoke her own thoughts; but, since then, she had repeated the words over and over again to the friends of every sick person, until they lost all meaning. It was thereafter only a succession of hackneyed words, which she spoke much as she did the Latin words in her rosary. It became simply a part of her duties as nurse, like the preparation of draughts, and the making of poultices.

Noel did not listen to her; his thoughts were far away.

“Your dear mother,” continued the sister, “this good lady that you love so much, ought to have the aid of her religion. Do you wish to endanger her soul? If she could speak in the midst of these cruel sufferings—”

The advocate was on the point of replying, when the servant announced that a gentleman, who would not give his name, wished to speak with him on business.

“I will come,” he said quickly.

“What do you decide, monsieur?” persisted the nun.

“I leave you free, sister, to do as you may judge best.”

The worthy woman began to recite her lesson of thanks but uselessly. Noel had disappeared with a displeased look; and almost immediately she heard his voice in the next room, saying,—

“Ah, Clergeot, I had almost given up seeing you!”

The visitor, who awaited the advocate, was a person well known in the Rue St. Lazare, from Rue Provence to the quarters of Notre Dame de Lorette, and all along the outer boulevards, from the embankment of Martyrs to the cross-roads at Clichy.

Clergeot was no more a usurer than the father of M. Jourdain was a merchant. Only having more money than he could very well use, he lent it to his friends; and, in return for this kindness, he consented to receive interest, which varied from twenty to thirty per cent.

The excellent man positively enjoyed the practice; and his honesty was generally appreciated. He was never known to arrest a debtor; he preferred to follow him without relaxation or intermission for ten years, and drag from him bit by bit what was due him.

He lived near the top of the Rue Victoire. He had no shop; and yet he sold everything salable, and some other things, too, that the law scarcely considers merchandise,—any thing to be useful or neighborly. He often asserted that he was not rich. It was possibly true. He was odd, very covetous, and fearfully bold. Light in purse when it suited him, he would not lend a hundred sous, even with the Ferriere's guarantee, to those who did not please him; but he would risk his all on the smallest chance at cards.

His preferred customers consisted of young girls, actresses, artists, and those venturesome fellows who enter upon a profession worth only what they can earn, such as advocates and doctors.

He lent to women upon their present beauty, to men upon their future talent. Slight pledges! His sagacity, it should be said, however, enjoyed a great reputation. It was rarely deceived. A girl of the town, furnished by Clergeot, had a great start in the world. For an actress to be in Clergeot's debt was a recommendation preferable to the warmest criticism.

Madame Juliette had procured this useful and honorable alliance for her lover.

Noel, who knew well how sensitive this worthy man

was to kind attentions, and how pleased by politeness, began by offering him a seat, and asking after his health. Clergeot gave details. His teeth were still good; but his sight was beginning to fail. His leg was growing soft, and his ear hard. The chapter of grievances ended, "you know," he said, "why I have come. Your notes fall due to-day; and I am in devilish need of money. I have one of ten, one of seven, and a third of five thousand francs: total, twenty-two thousand francs."

"Ah, Clergeot," replied Noel, "not a bad joke, this!"

"Joke?" said the usurer; "I am not joking at all."

"I hope you are. Why, it's just eight days to-day since I wrote to tell you that I could not be ready, and asking for a renewal!"

"I remember perfectly receiving your letter."

"What do you say to it, then?"

"By my not answering the note, I supposed that you would understand that I could not comply with your request. I trust that you will exert yourself to find the amount for me."

Noel let a gesture of impatience escape him.

"I cannot do it," he said; "so take your own course. I haven't a sou."

"The devil! Do you know that I have renewed these notes four times already?"

"I know that the interest has been fully and promptly paid, and at a rate which need not make you regret the investment."

Clergeot never liked to talk about the interest he received.

He pretended that it was humiliating.

"I do not complain; I only say that you take things too easily with me. If I had put your signature in circulation, it would be paid the moment it came due."

"Not at all."

"Yes, your pride would not bear trifling; and you would have found means to shun a suit. But you say, 'Father Clergeot is a good fellow: he is trustworthy.' But I am so only when it can do me no harm. Now, to-day, I am in great need of funds,—in — great — need," he added, emphasizing each word.

The old fellow's decided tone seemed to disturb the advocate.

"Must I repeat it?" he said; "I am completely drained — com — plete — ly!"

"Indeed?" said the usurer; "well, I am sorry for you; but I shall have to put the papers in the sheriff's hands."

"To what end? Let us play our cards out, Monsieur Clergeot. You expect to increase the sheriff's revenue. Is it not so? After you have been to all the expense, you may perhaps recover a centime. You will get judgment against me. Well, what then? Do you think of attaching? This is not my house; the lease is in Madame Gerdy's name."

"I know all that. Besides, the sale of every thing here would not cover the amount."

"Then you count upon dragging me to Clichy! Bad speculation, I warn you: you will not only lose what I owe you, but much more beside."

"Good!" cried the honest pawnbroker. "How you abuse me! You call that being frank. Pshaw! if you supposed me capable of half the malicious things you have said, my money would be there in your drawer, ready for me."

"A mistake! I should not know where to get it, unless by asking Madame Gerdy,—a thing I would never do."

A sarcastic and most irritating little laugh, peculiar to Père Clergeot interrupted Noel.

"There would be simply the trouble of asking," said the usurer: "mamma's purse has long been empty; and if the dear creature should die now, — they tell me she is very ill, — I would not give two hundred louis for the inheritance."

The advocate flushed: his eyes glittered; but he dissembled, and protested with some spirit.

"We know what we know," continued Clergeot quietly. "Before a man risks his all, he takes pains to inquire into his chances. Mamma's last money was poured out in October last. Ah! the Rue Provence is an expensive place! I have made an estimate, which is at home. Juliette is a charming woman, to be sure: she has not her equal, I am convinced; but she is expensive, devilish expensive."

Noel was enraged at hearing his Juliette thus spoken of by this honorable personage. But what reply could he make? Besides, none of us are perfect; and Clergeot's fault was in not properly appreciating women, which doubtless arose from the business transactions he had had with them. He was charming in his business with the fair sex, complimenting and flattering them; but the greatest injuries would be less revolting than this impertinent familiarity.

"You have gone too fast," he continued, without deigning to notice his customer's look; "and I have told you so before. But, pshaw! you are wild over the girl. You cannot refuse her any thing. Fool! When a pretty girl wants any thing, you should let her teaze for it a long time; it gives her something to occupy her mind, and keeps her from thinking of a quantity of other follies. Four real strong wishes, well managed, ought

to last a year. You don't know how to look after your own interests. I know that her glance would strike terror into a stone saint; and she knows her business well. Why, there are not ten girls in Paris who live in such style! And do you think she will love you any the more? Not a bit of it. When she has ruined you, she'll leave you in the lurch."

Noel accepted the eloquence of his prudent banker something as a man without an umbrella accepts a shower.

"What is the object of all this?" he asked.

"Simply that I will not renew your notes. You understand? At the moment they fall due, you must hand me the twenty-two thousand francs in question. You need not frown: you will find means to do it, to prevent my attaching your goods,—not here, for that would be absurd, but at your little girl's house; who would scarcely be pleased, and who won't hesitate to show her displeasure."

"But it is her own house; and you have no right—"

"What of that? She is the cause of all this trouble. I could well wait; but she is wasting your money. Believe me, you had best parry the blow. I wish to be paid now. I won't give you any further delay; because, for three months, you have been living on your last resources. It won't do. You are in one of those conditions that must be continued at any price. You would burn the wood from your dying mother's bed to warm this creature's feet. What has become of the ten thousand francs that you left with her the other evening? Who knows what you will attempt, to procure money? The idea of striving to ward it off fifteen days, three days, perhaps but a single day more! Open your eyes. I know the game well. If you do not leave Juliette, you will be ruined.

Listen to a little good advice, gratis. You must leave her, sooner or later, mustn't you? Do it to-day, then."

As you see, our worthy Clergeot never minced the truth to his customers, when they were not in the right path. If they were displeased, so much the worse for them: his conscience was at rest; it was not his affair, who never did a foolish thing in his life.

Noel could bear it no longer; and his ill-humor burst forth.

"Enough," he cried decidedly. "Do as you please, Monsieur Clergeot, but have done with your advice. I prefer the sheriff's plain prose. If I have committed imprudences, I can repair them, doubtless, much to your surprise. Yes, Monsieur Clergeot, I can find the twenty-two thousand francs; I can have a hundred thousand to-morrow morning, if I see fit. It will cost me the mere trouble of asking; but I do not see fit. My expenses, however displeasing to you, must remain secret as heretofore. I do not wish that my embarrassment should be even suspected. I will not relinquish, for your sake, the aim that I have pursued, the very day it is in my grasp."

"He resists," thought the usurer; "he is less deeply involved than I had imagined."

"So," continued the advocate, "take your paper to the sheriff. In eight days, I shall be summoned before the court of commerce; and I shall ask for twenty-five days' delay, which the judges always grant to an embarrassed debtor. Twenty-five and eight, all the world over, make just thirty-three days. That is precisely the respite I need. Let us resume; accept from me a bill of exchange for twenty-four thousand francs in six weeks, or go at once for the sheriff."

"And in six weeks," replied the usurer, "you will

be in precisely the same condition you are to-day. And forty-five days more of Juliette will — ”

“ Monsieur Clergeot,” answered Noel, “ long before that time, my position will be completely changed. But I have finished,” he added rising; “ and my time is valuable,”

“ One moment, you impatient fellow,” interrupted the good-natured banker, “ you said twenty-four thousand francs in forty-five days? ”

“ Yes. That is about sixty-five per cent,— pretty fair interest.”

“ I never cavil about interest,” said Clergeot; “ but—”

He looked sharply at Noel, rubbing his chin violently, a movement which in him indicated intense brain work.

“ Only,” he continued, “ I should like to know upon what you are counting.”

“ That I cannot tell you. You will know it ere long, in common with all the world.”

“ I have it,” cried Clergeot,—“ I have it; you are going to marry. You have found an heiress; your little Juliette told me something of that sort this morning. Ah! you are going to marry. Is she pretty? But what matters it? She has a full purse, eh? You wouldn’t take her without that. Then you will keep house? ”

“ I did not say so.”

“ That’s right. Be discreet. But I can take a hint. One word more. Be careful; your little girl has a suspicion of the truth. You are right; it wouldn’t do to be seeking money now. The slightest mis-step would be sufficient to put your father-in-law upon the track of your financial position; and you would lose the girl. Marry, and settle down. But conceal it from Juliette; or I would not give a hundred sous for your wedding.

So it is settled. Prepare a bill of exchange for twenty-four thousand francs, and I will bring your notes to you on Monday."

"You haven't them with you, then?"

"No. And, to be frank with you, I confess that, knowing well I should get nothing from you, I left them with others,—with the sheriff. However, you may rest easy; you have my word."

Clergeot made an appearance of retiring; but, just as he was going out, he turned sharply around.

"I forgot," said he; "while you are about it, you can make the bill for twenty-six thousand francs. Your little girl ordered some dresses, which I shall deliver to-morrow: they may as well be paid in the same way."

The advocate began to remonstrate. He would certainly not refuse to pay, only he thought he ought to be consulted in the purchase. He didn't like this way of disposing of his money.

"What a fellow!" said the usurer, shrugging his shoulders; "do you want to make the girl unhappy? You must keep her in good humor; think how she might affect the marriage. And you know that, if you need any advances for the wedding, you have but to guarantee me. Speak to your notary, and every thing shall be arranged. But I must go. On Monday, then?"

Noel watched, to make sure that the usurer had actually gone. When he saw that he was not lingering on the staircase, "Fool!" he cried, "miserable thieving old skinflint! He is on the wrong track,—the track, however, that he himself chose to pursue. It would be a fine thing, if this should get to the count's ears. Miserable usurer! I feared for awhile that I should have to tell him all."

While inveighing thus against his banker, the advocate looked at his watch.

"Half-past five already," he said.

His indecision was great. Should he dine with his father? Could he leave Madame Gerdy? He longed to dine at the Commarin house; yet, on the other hand, to leave a dying woman!

"Decidedly," he said, "I can't go."

He sat down at his desk, and with all haste wrote a letter of apology to his father. Madame Gerdy, he wrote, might breathe her last at any moment: he must remain within call.

After he had bade the servant give the note to a messenger, to carry it to the count, a sudden thought occurred to him.

"Does madame's brother," he asked, "know that she is dangerously ill?"

"I do not know, monsieur," replied the girl; "at any rate, it was not my fault."

"What, did you not think to inform him, in my absence? Run to his house quickly. Have him sought for, if he is not at home; bring him here."

More tranquil after that, he went in to sit in the sick room. The lamp was lighted; and the sister moved back and forth, putting every thing in place, dusting and arranging. She wore an air of satisfaction, that did not escape Noel.

"Have we any gleam of hope, sister?" he asked.

"Perhaps," replied the nun. "The priest has been here, monsieur: your dear mother did not notice his presence; but he is coming back. That is not all. Since the priest was here, the mustard has taken admirably. The skin is quite reddened. I am sure she feels."

"God grant it, sister!"

“Oh, I have already been praying! But it is important not to leave her alone a minute. I have arranged all with the maid. When the doctor comes, I shall lie down, and she will watch until one in the morning. I will then rise and —”

“You may both go and rest yourselves, sister,” interrupted Noel. “I shall not be able to sleep: so I will watch all night.”

CHAPTER XIV.

TABARET did not consider himself defeated, because he had been repulsed by the judge of inquiry, when irritated by a long day's examination. You may call it a fault or an accomplishment; but the old man was more obstinate than a mule. To the excess of despair to which he succumbed in the gallery, there soon succeeded that firm resolution which upheld him in danger. The feeling of duty took possession of him. Was that a time to yield to discouraging idleness, when the life of a fellow-man hung on each moment? Inaction would be unpardonable. He had plunged an innocent man into the abyss; and he must draw him out,—he alone, if no one would lend their aid. Père Tabaret, as well as the judge, gave way to weariness. On reaching the open air, he perceived that he, too, had need of rest. The emotions of the day had prevented him from feeling hungry; and, since morning, he had taken nothing but one glass of water. He entered a restaurant on the boulevard, and ordered supper.

While he ate, not only his courage, but his confidence came insensibly back to him. It was with him, as with the rest of the world: he who does not know how often

the course of his ideas may change, from the beginning to the end of a repast, should be very modest. A philosopher has plainly demonstrated that heroism is but an affair of the stomach.

The old fellow looked at the situation in a much less sombre light. Was there not plenty of time before him? What could not such a man as he do in a month? Was his usual penetration to fail him now? Certainly not. His great regret was, his inability to let Albert know that some one was working for him.

He was entirely another man, upon leaving the table; and it was with a cheerful step that he walked towards the Rue St. Lazare. Nine o'clock sounded, as the porter opened the door for him. He jumped up stairs four steps at a time, to receive news of his old friend, of her whom he used formerly to call the excellent, the worthy Madame Gerdy.

Noel opened the door to him,—Noel, who had doubtless been thinking of the past; for he looked as sad as though the dying woman was really his mother.

In consequence of this unexpected circumstance, Père Tabaret for a few moments could not help thinking of certain difficulties which he should experience.

He knew very well, that, finding himself with the advocate, he would be unavoidably led to speak of the Lerouge affair; and how could he do this, knowing, as he did, the particulars much better than his young friend himself, without exposing himself to betrayal? But a single imprudent word would reveal the part he was playing in this sad drama. Now it was from his dear Noel, the future Viscount de Commarin, above all others, that he wished entirely to conceal his connection with the police.

But, on the other hand, he thirsted to know what had

passed between the advocate and the count. The single point possessed an interest that aroused his curiosity. At last, as he could not restrain its gratification, he resolved to keep close watch upon his language and remain constantly on his guard.

The advocate took the old man into Madame Gerdy's room. Her condition, since afternoon, had changed a little; it was impossible to say whether for good or bad. One thing was evident, her depression was less profound. Her eyes still remained fixed; but certain quiverings of the lids were evident. She moved on her pillow, and moaned feebly.

"What does the doctor say?" asked Père Tabaret, in that low whisper one unconsciously takes in a sick room.

"He is just gone," replied Noel; "before long all will be over."

The old man advanced on tip-toe, and looked at the dying woman with evident emotion.

"Poor woman!" he murmured; "the good God is merciful in taking her. She perhaps suffers; but what is this pain, compared to what she would feel if she knew that her son, her true son, was in prison, accused of murder?"

"That is what I keep repeating to myself," said Noel, "to console me for this sight; for I always loved her, my old friend: for me, she is still my mother. You have heard me upbraid her, have you not? I have twice treated her very harshly. I thought I hated her; but here, at the moment of losing her, I forget every wrong she has done me, only to remember her tenderness. Yes, much better death for her! And yet I cannot think, no, I cannot think her son guilty."

"What! is it possible, you, too?"

Père Tabaret put so much warmth and vivacity into this exclamation, that Noel looked at him with a sort of wonder. He felt the color rising in his cheeks, and he hastened to explain himself. "I said, 'you, too,'" he continued, "because that I, thanks perhaps to my inexperience, am persuaded of the innocence of this young man. I cannot in the least imagine a man of that rank meditating and accomplishing so cowardly a crime. I have spoken with many persons on this matter which has made so much noise; and everybody is of my opinion. He has public opinion in his favor; that is already something."

Seated near the bed, sufficiently far from the lamp to be in the shadow, the nun hastily knitted stockings destined for the poor. It was a purely mechanical work; during which she usually prayed. But, since the entrance of Père Tabaret, she forgot, in listening, her everlasting prayer. What did this conversation mean? Who could this woman be? And this young man who was not her son, and who yet called her mother, and at the same time spoke of a veritable son accused of being an assassin? Before this she had overheard mysterious remarks between Noel and the doctor. Into what singular house had she fallen? She was a little afraid; and her conscience was sorely troubled. Was she not sinning? She resolved to tell all to the priest, when he returned.

"No," said Noel,—“no, Tabaret; Albert has not public opinion with him. We are sharper than that in France, you must know. When a poor devil is arrested, entirely innocent, perhaps, of the crime charged against him, we usually throw stones at him. We keep all our pity for him, who, without doubt the criminal, comes before the court of assizes. As long as justice hesitates, we side with the prosecution against the

prisoner. The moment she announces that the man is a criminal, all our sympathies are in favor of acquitting him. That's public opinion. You understand, however, that that affects me but little. I despise it to such an extent, that if, as I dare still hope, Albert is not released, I will be his defender. Yes, I have told my father as much, the Count de Commarin. I will be his advocate; I will save him."

Gladly would the old man have thrown himself on Noel's neck. He longed to say to him, "We two will save him." But he restrained himself. Would not the advocate misunderstand him, if he confessed? He resolved, however, to reveal all if it became necessary, and if Albert's interests took a more dangerous turn. For the present, he contented himself with strongly approving his young friend.

"Bravo! my child," said he; "you have a noble heart. I feared to see you spoiled by wealth and rank. Pardon me; you remain, I see, what you have always been in your humble position. But, tell me, have you, then, seen your father, the count?"

Now, for the first time, Noel seemed to notice the eyes of the sister; which, lighted by eager curiosity, glittered in the shadow like carbuncles. By a look, he pointed her out to the old man, and said,—

"I have seen him; and every thing is arranged to my satisfaction. I will tell you all, in detail, by-and-by, when we are more by ourselves. By this bedside, I almost blush at my happiness."

Tabaret was obliged to content himself with this reply and this promise. Seeing that he should learn nothing this evening, he spoke of going to bed, declaring himself wearied out, as the result of certain things he had had to do during the day. Noel did not urge

his remaining. He himself was waiting, he said, for Madame Gerdy's brother, who had been sent for several times without finding him in. He would be much embarrassed, he added, in this brother's presence; he did not yet know what conduct he ought to pursue. Should he tell him all? But that would only increase his grief. On the other hand, silence obliged him to play a difficult part. The old man advised him to keep silent, to put off all explanation until later.

"What a fine fellow is this Noel!" murmured Père Tabaret, on gaining his apartments as gently as possible.

He had been absent from home twenty-four hours; and he had to go through a formidable scene with his household. Mannette was in a particularly bad humor: so she declared decidedly, and once for all, that she would get a new place, if her master did not change his conduct.

She had remained awake all night, in a terrible fright, listening to the least sound on the stairway, expecting to see her master brought home on a litter, assassinated. Then there had been great commotion in the house. M. Gerdy had gone out a short time after monsieur, and had returned two hours later. After he had come in, there had been constant inquiries for the doctor. Such goings on would be the death of her, without forgetting her temperament, which could not endure these constant worries. But Mannette forgot that the worry was not on her master's account nor on Noel's but for a little affair of her own,—one of those handsome guards of Paris having promised to marry her, but for whom she had waited in vain,—the rascal!

She burst forth in reproaches, while she was laying

the table for her master, too frank, she declared, to keep any thing on her mind, and keep her mouth closed, when she felt so much interest in monsieur, in his health and reputation. Monsieur made no reply, not being in the mood for argument. He bent his head to the squall, turning his back to the storm. But, when Mannette had finished her preparations, he shoved her out of the room without ceremony, and double locked the door.

He busied himself in forming a new line of battle, and in deciding upon prompt and active measures. Rapidly he analyzed the situation. Had he been deceived in his investigations? No. Had his calculations of probabilities been erroneous? No. He had started with a positive fact, the murder. He had discovered the particulars; his inferences were correct, and must inevitably point at a criminal such as he had indicated: and this criminal could not be Monsieur Daburon's prisoner. His confidence in a judicial axiom had led him astray, when he pointed out Albert.

"See," thought he, "where their standard opinions and absurd axioms, all cut and dried, lead us, when they are foolishly followed, like the landmarks on a road! Left free to my own inspirations, I formed this case very profoundly. I did not trust to chance. The formula, 'Seek out the one whom the crime benefits' may be as often absurd as true. The heirs of a man assassinated are in reality all benefited by a murder; while the assassin receives at most the watch or purse of the victim. Three persons were interested in the death of the Widow Lerouge,—Albert, Madame Gerdy, and the Count de Commarin. It is plain to see that Albert is not the criminal. It is not Madame Gerdy, who has been killed by the unexpected announcement

of the crime. There remains, then, the count. Can it be he? He certainly did not do it himself. He hired some wretch,—a wretch of good position, if you please, wearing well-varnished boots of a good make, and smoking trabucos with an amber mouth-piece. These villains of good position ordinarily lack nerve. They cheat, they forge; but they don't assassinate. But here the count would simply exchange a rabbit for a hare. He would merely substitute one accomplice for another still more dangerous. That would be idiotic; and the count is an intelligent man. He is, therefore, out of the question. I shall have to start off on another tack.

"Another thing, the Widow Lerouge, who so dexterously exchanged the children while nursing them, would be very likely to undertake a number of dangerous commissions. Who can prove that she has not made it, before now, the interest of some one else to get her out of the way? There is a mystery here. I am impatient; but I have not yet unraveled it. One thing is sure though, she was not assassinated to prevent Noel from recovering his rights. She must have been suppressed for some analogous reason, by a bold, experienced scoundrel, who wore the clothing I fixed upon Albert. It is, then, this scent I must follow. And, above all, I must have the past history of this obliging widow: and I will have it, too; for the investigations ordered at her birthplace will be in court to-morrow."

Returning now to Albert, Père Tabaret weighed the charges which were brought against the young man, and reckoned the chances which he still had.

"From the look of things," he murmured, "I see only luck and myself; that is to say, absolutely nothing in his favor at present. As to the charges, they are

countless. However, it is no use going over them. It is I who amassed them; and I know what they are worth! At once every thing and nothing. What do signs prove, however striking they may be, in this case, where one ought to disbelieve even the witness of his own senses? Albert is a victim of the most remarkable coincidences: but one word might explain them. I have seen many just such cases. It was even worse in the affair of my little tailor. At five o'clock, he bought a knife, which he showed to ten of his friends, saying, this is for my wife, who is an idle jade, and who plays me false with my servants. In the evening, the neighbor heard a terrible quarrel between the couple,—cries, threats, stamping, blows; then suddenly all was quiet. The next day, the tailor had disappeared from his house; and they discovered the woman dead, with the very same knife buried to the hilt between her shoulders. Ah, well! it turned out it was not the husband who had planted it there; it was a jealous lover. After that, what is to be believed? Albert, it is true, will not give an account of how he passed the evening. That does not affect me. The question for me is not to prove where he was but that he was not at Jonchère. Perhaps, after all, Gevrol was on the right track. I hope so, from the bottom of my heart. Yes; God grant that he may be successful. My vanity and my mad presumption will deserve the slight punishment of his triumph over me. What would I not give to establish this man's innocence? Half of my fortune would be but a small sacrifice. If I should be foiled; if, after having caused the evil, I should find myself powerless to undo it!"

Père Tabaret went to bed, shuddering at this last thought. He fell asleep, and had a terrible nightmare.

Lost in that vulgar crowd, which, on the days when society revenges itself, presses about the Place de la Roquette and watches the last convulsions of one condemned to death, he attended Albert's execution. He saw the unhappy boy, his hands bound behind his back, his collar turned down, ascend, supported by a priest, the steep flight of stairs leading to the scaffold. He saw him upright upon the fatal platform, throwing his pious gaze upon the dismayed assembly. Soon the eyes of the condemned man met his own; and, breaking his cords, he pointed him, Tabaret, out in the crowd saying, in a loud voice, "There is my assassin." Then, a great clamor arose to curse him. He wished to escape; but his feet were nailed to the ground. He tried to close his eyes; he could not. A force unknown and irresistible compelled him to look. Then Albert again cried out, "I am innocent; the guilty one is—" He pronounced some name: the crowd repeated the name; and he alone did not understand it. Finally the head of the condemned man fell.

The old man gave a loud cry, and awoke in a cold perspiration. It took him some time to convince himself that nothing was real of this which he had felt and seen and that he was actually in his own house, in his own bed: it was only a dream! But dreams sometimes are, they say, warnings from heaven. His imagination was in that excited condition that he made unheard of efforts to recall the name of the criminal pronounced by Albert. Not succeeding, he got up and lighted his candle. The darkness made him afraid. The night peoples itself with phantoms. It was no longer with him a question of sleep. Beset with these anxieties, he accused himself most severely, and

harshly reproached the occupation he had until now so delighted in. Poor humanity!

He was mad to fix the day when it first came into his head to seek employment in the Rue Benjamin Frère—noble hobby, truly, for a man of his age, a good quiet citizen of Paris, rich and esteemed by all! And to think that he had been proud of his exploits, that he had boasted of his cunning, that he had plumed himself on his keenness of scent, that he had been flattered by that ridiculous soubriquet “Tiraclair.” Old fool! What had he gained from the business of bloodhound? All sorts of annoyance, the contempt of the world, without counting the danger of contributing to the conviction of an innocent man. Why had he not taken warning by the case of the little tailor?

Recalling the few satisfactions of the past, and comparing them with the present anguish, he resolved that he would have no more to do with it. Albert once saved, he would seek some amusement less dangerous, and more generally appreciated. He would break the connection of which he was ashamed, and the police and justice might go on without him.

At last the day, which he had awaited with feverish impatience, dawned. To pass the time, he dressed himself slowly, with much care, trying to occupy his mind with little details, until an hour had passed; during which he had looked twenty times at the clock, to see if it had not stopped. In spite of all this delay, it was not eight o'clock when he caused himself to be announced at the judge's door, praying him to excuse, on account of the importance of his business, a visit too early not to be unwelcome.

Excuses were superfluous. They did not disturb

Monsieur Daburon at eight in the morning. Already he was at work. He received, with his usual kindness, the old amateur detective, and even joked with him a little on his absurdity of the night before. Who would have thought his nerves so sensitive? Doubtless the night had brought deliberation. Had he recovered his old good sense? or had he put his hand on the true criminal?

This trifling tone in a magistrate, who was accused of being grave even to a fault, troubled the old man. Did not this quizzing hide a determination to neglect all that he could say? He believed it did; and it was without the least deception that he commenced his pleading.

He put the case more calmly this time, but with all the energy of a well-digested conviction. He addressed himself to the heart, he spoke to the reason; but, although doubt is essentially contagious, he neither succeeded in convincing the judge, nor shaking his opinion. His strongest arguments were of no more avail against Daburon's absolute conviction than bullets of crumbs of bread against a breastplate. And, at his failure, he was in no way surprised.

Père Tabaret had on his side only a subtle theory, words; Daburon possessed palpable testimony, facts. And such was this cause, that all the reasons brought forward by the old man to justify Albert simply reacted upon him, and confirmed his guilt.

A repulse at the judge's hands had entered too much into Tabaret's calculations for him to appear troubled or discouraged. He declared that, for the present, he would insist no more: he had full confidence in the wisdom and impartiality of the judge of inquiry. It sufficed him to have put him on his guard against the

influences which he himself had unfortunately used in working up the case.

He was going, he added, to busy himself with hunting up "new signs." They were only at the beginning of the inquiry; and they were yet ignorant of very many things, even of the past life of the Widow Lerouge. New facts may come to light. Who knows what testimony the man with the rings in his ears, who was now being pursued by Gevrol, may give. All enraged within, and longing to injure in some way the "idiot magistrate," as he called the judge, Père Tabaret forced himself to be humble and polite. He wished, he said, to keep track of the examination, and to be informed of the result of future investigations. He finally ended by asking permission to communicate with Albert. He thought his services deserved this slight favor. He wished an interview of only ten minutes without witnesses.

Daburon refused this request. He declared, that, for the present, the prisoner must continue to remain strictly in solitary confinement.

As a sort of consolation, he added that, in three or four days, he might perhaps be able to change this decision, provided the motives which caused it no longer existed.

"Your refusal is cruel, monsieur," said Père Tabaret; "but I understand it, and obey."

That was his only complaint; and he withdrew almost immediately, fearing that he could no longer master his irritation.

He felt, that, besides the great happiness of saving an innocent man, compromised by his imprudence, he should experience an unspeakable delight in avenging himself upon the stubbornness of the judge.

"Three or four days," he muttered, "that is to say, three or four years for the unfortunate prisoner. He speaks quite at his ease, this kind magistrate. But Albert ought to know the truth now."

Yes, Daburon only asked three or four days to wring a confession from Albert, or at least to make him change his system of defence.

The difficulty of the prosecution was in not being able to produce any witness who had seen the prisoner on the evening of Shrove Tuesday.

One deposition alone to that effect would have so great weight, that Daburon, upon Tabaret's departure, turned all his efforts in that direction.

He had great hope yet. It was now only Saturday. The day of the murder was remarkable enough to fix people's memories; and there had not been time yet to set on foot a proper investigation.

Five of the most experienced spies in the secret service were sent to Bougival, supplied with photographs of Albert. They were to scour the entire country between Reuil and Jonchère, to hunt, inquire into, and examine,—to obtain the most precise and the most minute information. The photographs would greatly aid their efforts. They had orders to show them everywhere and to everybody, and even to leave a dozen in the place, being furnished with a sufficient number to do so. It was impossible, that, on an evening when so many people were about, no one had observed the original of the picture either at the station at Reuil or upon one of the roads which led to Jonchère,—the highway, or the road by the water's edge.

These arrangements made, the judge of inquiry proceeded to the palais de justice, and sent for his prisoner.

He had already in the morning received a report, in-

forming him hour by hour of the deeds, gestures, and utterances of the prisoner, carefully watched. Nothing in him, the report said, declared the criminal. He appeared sad, but not despairing. He had not cried out, nor threatened, nor cursed at justice, nor even spoke of the fatal deed. After having eaten lightly, he went to the window of his cell, and had there remained standing for more than an hour. Then he laid down, and had quietly gone to sleep.

"What an iron constitution!" thought Daburon, when the prisoner entered his office.

Albert was no longer the despairing man, who the night before, dizzy with the multiplicity of charges, overcome by the rapidity of the blows, had writhed beneath the gaze of the judge of inquiry, and appeared ready to faint. Innocent or guilty, his course had been taken; his face left no doubt of that. His eyes expressed that resolution, careless of a sacrifice freely made, and a certain haughtiness which might be taken for disdain, but which expressed the noble feeling of an injured man. In him was seen a man self-reliant, who might be shaken but never overcome by misfortune.

At this countenance, the judge knew that he must change his mode of attack. He recognized one of those natures, which attacked, was only provoked to resistance, and, threatened, was only rendered obstinate. Renouncing his efforts to frighten, he attempted to soften him. It was a hackneyed trick, but one always successful, like certain pathetic scenes at theatres. The criminal who has girt up his energy to sustain the shock of intimidation, finds himself without defence against the wheedling of kindness, the greater in proportion to its lack of sincerity. Now tenderness would

cause Daburon's triumph. What an avowal he knew would burst forth in tears! No one knew so well as he how to touch the cords which vibrate still even in the most abandoned heart,—honor, love, family.

To Albert, he became kind and friendly, full of the liveliest compassion. Unfortunate man! how much he had had to suffer,—he whose whole life had been like one long enchantment. How every thing had fallen about him in ruins, at a single blow! Who could have foreseen all this in the time when he was the one hope of a wealthy and illustrious house! Calling up the past, the judge pictured to him the most touching reminiscences of his early youth, and stirred up the ashes of all his extinct affections. Using and abusing all that he knew of the life of the prisoner, he martyred himself by the most mournful allusions to Claire. How could he persist in bearing alone his great misfortune? Had he no one in the world who would deem it happiness to share his sufferings? Why this morose silence? Should he not rather hasten to rescue her whose very life depended upon his? What was necessary to that end? But a single word. Then he would be, if not free, at least returned to the world. His prison would become an habitable abode, no longer solitary; his friends would visit him: he might receive whomever he saw fit.

It was no longer a judge who spoke; it was a father, who still keeps in his heart indulgence for his son.

Daburon went on. He would for a moment imagine himself in Albert's position. What would be his condition after the terrible discovery? He would scarcely dare question himself. He would dwell upon the murder of the Widow Lerouge; he would explain it to himself; he would almost excuse it. (Another trap.) It

was certainly an enormous crime, but not one revolting to conscience or to reason. It was one of those crimes which society might, if not forget, at least forgive up to a certain point, because the motive was not a disgraceful one. What tribunal would fail to find extenuating circumstances for a moment of frenzy so excusable? For was not the first the greatest criminal, the Count de Commarin? Was it not his folly that prepared the way for this terrible denouement? His son had been the victim of a fatality, and was in the highest degree to be pitied.

Upon this text, Daburon spoke for a long time, seeking those things most suitable in his opinion to soften the hardened heart of the assassin. And he arrived always at the same conclusion,—the wisdom of confessing. But he wasted his eloquence precisely as Tabaret had wasted his. Albert appeared in no way affected. His replies were of the shortest. He began and ended as at first, in protesting his innocence.

One test, which had often given the desired result, now remained to be tried.

On this same day, Saturday, Albert was confronted with the corpse of the Widow Lerouge. He appeared impressed by the sad sight, but no more than any one would be, if forced to look at the victim of an assassination four days after the crime. One of the bystanders, exclaiming,—

“Ah, if she could but speak!” he replied, “That would be great good fortune for me.”

Since morning, Daburon had not obtained the least advantage. He had to acknowledge the failure of his plot; and here this last triumph had grounded. The unmoved calmness of the prisoner filled to overflowing the exasperation of this man so sure of his facts. His

spite was evident to all, when, dropping suddenly his wheedling, he harshly gave the orders to re-conduct the prisoner to his cell.

"I will compel him to confess," he ground between his teeth.

Perhaps he regretted those gentle instruments of investigation of the middle ages, which compelled the prisoner to say whatever they wanted him to. Never, thought he, did any one ever meet a prisoner like this. What could he reasonably hope for from this system of persistent denial? This obstinacy, absurd in the presence of absolute proofs, drove the judge into a rage. Albert, confessing his guilt, would have found him disposed to pity; denying it, he opposed himself to an implacable enemy.

It was the very falseness of the situation which misled and blinded this magistrate, naturally so kind and generous. Having previously wished Albert innocent, he now absolutely longed to prove him guilty, and that for a hundred reasons which he was unable to analyse. He remembered, too, his having had the Viscount de Commarin for a rival, and his having nearly assassinated him. Had he not repented even with remorse his having signed the warrant of arrest, and accepted the duty of investigation? Tabaret's incomprehensible change troubled him, too.

All these feelings, combined, inspired Daburon with a feverish hatred, urging him on in the path which he had chosen. In future, it would be less the proofs of Albert's guilt which he sought for than the justification of his own conduct to himself as judge. The investigation rankled, as if it were a personal matter.

In fact, were the prisoner innocent, he would become inexcusable in his own eyes; and, in proportion as he

reproached himself the more severely, and as the feelings of his own wrongs grew, he was the more disposed to try every thing to conquer this ancient rival, even to abusing his own power. The logic of events urged him on. It seemed as though his honor itself were at stake; and he displayed a passionate activity, such as had never been seen before in any investigation.

All Sunday, Daburon passed in listening to the reports of his agents at Bougival.

They had spared no trouble, they stated; but they could report no new developments.

They had heard many speak of a woman, who had pretended, they said, to have seen the assassin leaving the Widow Lerouge's house; but no one had been able to point this woman out to them, or even to give them her name.

But they all thought it their duty to inform the judge that another inquiry was going on at the same time with theirs. It was under the charge of Père Tabaret, who personally scoured the country in all directions in a cabriolet drawn by a very swift horse. He must have acted with great promptness; for, everywhere that they presented themselves, he had anticipated them. He appeared to have under his orders a dozen men, four of whom at least certainly belonged to the Rue Jerusalem. All the agents had met him; and he had spoken to all of them. To one, he had said,—

“What the devil are you showing this photograph for? In less than no time you will pick up a witness, who, to gain three francs, will describe some one more like the picture than the picture itself.”

He had met another agent on the road, and had laughed at him.

“You are a simple fellow,” he cried out to him, “to

hunt for a hiding man in the highway; look a little aside, and you may find him."

Finally he had accosted two who were together in a café at Bougival, and had taken them aside.

"I have him," he said to them. "He is a smart fellow; he passed by Chatois. Three people have seen him,—two railway employés, and a third person whose testimony will be decisive; for she spoke to him. He was smoking."

Daburon was so angry at this with Père Tabaret, that, on the instant he started for Bougival, firmly resolved to bring this too zealous man back to Paris and to give him some occupation more in the interests of justice. This trip was useless. Tabaret, cabriolet, swift horse, and the twelve men had all disappeared, or at least were not to be found.

On returning home, much fatigued and very angry, the judge of inquiry found the following despatch from the chief of the detective force; it was brief, and to the point,—

"ROUEN, Sunday.

"The man is found. This evening we start for Paris. The most valuable testimony. GEVROL."

CHAPTER XV.

MONDAY morning, at nine o'clock, Daburon was preparing to start for the palais de justice, where he expected to find Gevrol and his man, and perhaps Père Tabaret.

His preparations were nearly made, when his servant announced that a young lady, accompanied by another more elderly, asked to speak with him.

She declined giving her name, saying, however, that she would not refuse it, if that was absolutely necessary in order to be received.

"Let her enter," said the judge.

He thought it might be a relation of some one of the prisoners, with whose business he had been employed before the Jonchère crime occurred. He determined to make short work of her, if she were troublesome.

He was standing before his mantel, hunting for an address in a plate filled with visiting cards. At the sound of the opening of the door, at the rustling of a silk dress gliding by the window, he did not take the trouble to move, did not deign even to turn his head. He contented himself with merely casting a careless glance into the mirror.

But he immediately started with a movement of dismay, as if he had seen a ghost. In his confusion, he dropped the card-plate, which fell noisily to the hearth, and broke into a thousand pieces.

"Claire," he stammered, "Claire!"

And, as if he feared equally either his being deceived by an illusion or the actually seeing her whose name he pronounced, he turned slowly.

It was truly Mademoiselle d'Arlanges.

This young girl, usually so proud and reserved, had had courage to come to his house alone, or almost alone; for her governess, whom she had left in the ante-chamber, counted as no one. She was obeying some powerful emotion; since it made her forget her habitual timidity.

Never, even in the time when a sight of her was his greatest happiness, had she appeared more fascinating. Her beauty, ordinarily veiled by a sweet sadness, beamed forth, and dazzled him. Her features had an

animation which he had never seen in them before. In her eyes, rendered more brilliant by recent tears, even now hardly wiped away, shone the noblest resolution. One could see that she was conscious of having a great duty to perform, and that she would accomplish it, if not with pleasure, at least with that simplicity which in her was heroism.

She advanced calm and dignified, and held out her hand to the magistrate in that English style that some ladies can imitate so gracefully.

"We have always been friends, have we not?" she said with a sad smile.

The magistrate did not dare take the ungloved hand she held out to him. It was as much as he dared to touch the end of her fingers, as if he feared too great an emotion.

"Yes," he replied indistinctly, "I have been always devoted to you."

Mademoiselle d'Arlanges sat down in the easy chair, where, two nights previously Père Tabaret had planned Albert's arrest.

"Do you know why I have come?" asked the young girl.

With a nod, he replied in the affirmative.

He divined her object only too easily; and he was asking himself, in fact, whether he ought to resist prayers from such a mouth. What could she ask that he would have the heart to refuse? Ah, if he had foreseen this!

"I only knew of this dreadful story yesterday," pursued Claire; "they considered it wise to hide it from me; and, but for my devoted Schmidt, I should yet be ignorant of it all. What a night have I passed! I was at first terrified; but, when they told me that all de-

pended upon you, my fears were dispelled. It is for my sake, is it not? that you have taken charge of this trial? Oh, you are a noble man! How can I ever express my thanks!"

What humiliation for the honest magistrate were these heartfelt thanks! Yes, he had at first thought of Mademoiselle d'Arlanges: but since— He bowed his head, to avoid that beautiful sight of Claire, so pure, so daring.

"Do not thank me, mademoiselle," he stammered; "I have not the claim that you think upon your gratitude."

Claire had already noticed the magistrate's agitation. The trembling of his voice attracted her attention; but she did not suspect the cause. She thought that her presence recalled sad memories, that he doubtless still loved her, and that he was suffering for her. This idea saddened her, and filled her with self-reproach.

"And yet, monsieur," she continued, "I thank you all the same. I should never have dared go to another judge, to speak to an entire stranger! For what value would he attach to my words, not knowing me? While you, you, so generous, will reassure me, will tell me by what unhappy mistake he has been arrested and put in prison."

"Alas!" sighed the magistrate so low that Claire scarcely heard or understood the terrible meaning of the exclamation.

"With you," she continued, "I do not fear. You are my friend, you have told me; you will not refuse my prayers. Give him his liberty quickly. I do not know exactly of what he is accused; but I swear to you that he is innocent."

Claire spoke in the positive manner of one who saw

no obstacle in the way to the very simple and natural desire which she had expressed. A formal assurance given by her ought to be amply sufficient; in a word, Daburon was to repair every thing. The judge was silent. He admired this saint-like ignorance of every thing, this artless and frank confidence which doubted nothing. She had commenced by wounding him inadvertently, it is true; but he quite forgot that.

He was really honest, good as the best, as is proved from the fact, that, at the moment of unveiling the fatal truth, he shuddered. He hesitated to pronounce the words whose breath, like a whirlwind, would overturn the fragile edifice of this young girl's happiness. Humiliated, despised, he was going to have his revenge; but it brought him no satisfaction.

"And if I should tell you, mademoiselle," he commenced, "that Albert is not innocent—"

She half-raised herself with a protesting gesture. He continued,—

"If I should tell you he is guilty?"

"O monsieur!" interrupted Claire, "you cannot think it."

"I do think it, mademoiselle," continued the magistrate in a sad voice; "and I must add that I am morally certain of it."

Claire looked at the magistrate with profound amazement. Can this really be he who is speaking to her? Did she hear him aright? Did she understand? She was really in doubt. Had he answered seriously? Was he not abusing her by an unworthy, cruel jest? She asked herself this with a sort of wildness; for every thing appeared possible, probable, rather than that which he had spoken.

Not daring to raise his eyes he continued in a tone, expressive of the sincerest pity,—

“I suffer cruelly for you at this moment, mademoiselle; but I have the sad courage to tell you the truth, and you must summon yours to hear it. Much better that you should know all from the mouth of a friend. Summon, then, all your fortitude; strengthen your noble soul against a most dreadful misfortune. No, there is no mistake. Justice has not been deceived. The Viscount de Commarin is accused of an assassination; and it is absolutely—absolutely, understand me—proved that he committed it.”

Like a doctor, who pours out drop by drop a dangerous medicine, Daburon pronounced slowly, word by word this last sentence. He watched carefully the result, ready to cease, if the shock was too great. He did not suppose that this young girl, timid to excess, with a sensitiveness almost a disease, would be able to hear without flinching such a revelation. He expected a burst of despair, tears, distressing cries. She might perhaps faint away; and he stood ready to call in the good Schmidt.

He was deceived. Claire drew herself up full of energy and valor. The flame of indignation flushed her cheeks, and dried her tears.

“It is false,” she cried; “and those who say it are liars. He cannot be; no he cannot be an assassin. If he were here, and should himself say, ‘It is true,’ I should refuse to believe it: I should still cry out, ‘It is false.’”

“He has not yet confessed it,” continued the judge; “but he will confess it: and, if not, there are more proofs than are needed to convict him. The charges

against him are as impossible to deny as is the sun which shines upon us."

"Ah! well," interrupted Mademoiselle d'Arlanges, in a voice which thrilled his soul, "I assert, I repeat, that justice is deceived. Yes," she persisted, stopping a gesture of denial from the judge,—“yes, he is innocent. I am sure of it; and I will proclaim it, even were the whole world to join with you in accusing him. Do you not see that I understand him better than he can understand himself? that my faith in him is absolute, as that which I have in God? that I would doubt myself before doubting him?"

The judge of inquiry attempted timidly to make an objection. Claire interrupted him,—

"You force me, then, monsieur," said she, "in order to overcome you, to forget that I am a young girl, and that I am not talking to my mother but to a man. For his sake, I can bear it! It is four years, monsieur, since we first loved, and told each other of it. Since that time, I have not kept from him one of my thoughts: he has not hid from me one of his. For four years, we have never had a secret between us: he lived in me, as I lived in him. I alone can say how worthy he is to be loved; I alone know all that grandeur of soul, nobility of thought, generosity of sentiment, from which you have so easily made an assassin. And I have seen him, oh! so unhappy, while all the world envied his lot. He was like me, alone in the world; his father never loved him. Sustained one by the other, we have passed many a sad day; and it is at the very moment our trial was ending that he has become a criminal. Why? tell me why?"

"Neither the name nor fortune of the Count de Commarin would descend to him, mademoiselle; and

the knowledge of it came upon him with a sudden shock. One old woman alone was able to prove this. To protect his position, he killed her."

"What infamous," cried the young girl, "what shameful, wicked calumny! I know, monsieur, this story of falling greatness; he himself told me of it. It is true that for three days this misfortune unmanned him; but, if he was dismayed, it was on my account more than his own. He was distressed at thinking that perhaps I should be grieved, when he confessed to me that he could no longer give me all that his love dreamed of. I grieved? Ah! what to me is this great name, this immense wealth? I owe to them all the unhappiness of my life. Was it, then, for their sake that I loved him? It was thus that I replied to him; and he, so sad, immediately recovered his gayety. He thanked me, saying, 'You love me; the rest is of no consequence.' I chided him, then, for having doubted me; and, after that, would he thus cowardly assassinate an old woman? You dare not repeat it."

Mademoiselle d'Arlanges ceased, a smile of victory on her lips. That smile meant, "At last I have attained my end: you are conquered; what can you reply to all that I have said?"

The judge of inquiry did not long leave this smiling illusion to the unhappy child. He did not perceive the cruelty, the shock of his persistence. Always the one idea. In persuading Claire, he would justify his own conduct to himself.

"You do not know, mademoiselle," he continued, "what giddiness may overthrow the reason of an honest man. It is only at the time a thing escapes us that we feel the greatness of the loss. God keep me from doubting all that which you have said! but picture to yourself

the immensity of the blow which has fallen upon M. de Commarin. Think of the despair to which he was driven on leaving you, and the extremities to which it might lead him! He might have had a moment of wildness, and have done the deed without perceiving its enormity. In this way the crime may be explained."

Mademoiselle d'Arlanges' face grew deathly pale, and betrayed the utmost terror. The judge saw that at last doubt began to affect her noble and pure thoughts.

"He might, then, have been mad," she murmured.

"Possibly," replied the judge; "but the circumstances of the crime denote a well-laid plan. Believe me, then, mademoiselle, and do not be too confident. Wait, prayerfully, the issue of this unhappy trial. Listen to my voice; it is that of a friend. You used to have in me the confidence a daughter gives to her father, you have often told me; do not, then, refuse my advice. Keep silence; wait. Hide your real grief; you may hereafter regret having exposed it. Young, inexperienced, without a mother, alas! you have sadly misplaced your affections."

"No, monsieur, no," stammered Claire. "Ah!" she added, "you speak like the rest of the world,—the prudent, egotistical world, which I despise and hate."

"Poor child!" continued Daburon, pitiless, even in his compassion, "unhappy girl! this is your first deception! Nothing can be imagined more terrible. Few women would know how to bear it. But you are young; you are brave; your life will not be ruined. Hereafter you will feel horrified at this crime. There is no wound, I know by experience, which time does not heal."

Claire tried to grasp what the judge was saying; but she heard only confused sounds; the meaning entirely escaped her.

"I do not understand, monsieur," she broke in. "What advice, then, would you give me?"

"The only one that reason dictates, and that my affection for you can suggest, mademoiselle. I speak to you like a tender and devoted brother. I say to you, 'Courage, Claire: give yourself up to the saddest, greatest sacrifice which honor can ask of a young girl. Weep, yes, weep for your deceived love; but renounce it. Pray heaven to send you forgetfulness. He, whom you have loved is no longer worthy of you.'"

The judge stopped a little frightened. Mademoiselle d'Arlanges had become livid.

But, although the body failed, the soul still remained firm.

"You said a moment since," she murmured, "that he might have committed this crime in a moment of distraction, in a fit of madness?"

"Yes, it is possible."

"Then, monsieur, not knowing what he did, he is no criminal."

The judge of inquiry forgot a certain troublesome question which he had put to himself one morning in bed after his sickness.

"Neither justice nor society, mademoiselle," he replied, "can take that into account. To God alone, who sees into the depths of our hearts, it belongs to judge, to decide upon these questions which human justice must pass by. In our sight, M. de Commarin is a criminal. There may be certain extenuating circumstances to soften the punishment; but the moral stain is the same. Even if he were acquitted,—and I hope he may be, but without hope,—he will always wear the dishonor, the stain of blood cowardly shed. Then give him up."

Mademoiselle d'Arlanges stopped the judge with a look which flashed the most vivid resentment.

"Then," she cried, "you counsel me to abandon him in his misfortune. All the world deserts him; and your prudence advises me to act with the world. Men may act thus, they tell me, when one of their friends is ruined; but women never. Look about you; however humiliated, however wretched, however fallen, you always find the wife near, to sustain and console. When the last friend has boldly taken to flight, when the last relation has abandoned you, the wife remains."

The judge regretted his having been carried away a little too far. Claire's excitement frightened him. He tried in vain to stop her.

"I may be timid," she continued with increasing energy; "but I am no coward. I have chosen Albert voluntarily from all. Whatever happens to him, I will never desert him. No: I will never say, 'I do not know this man.' He would have given me half of his prosperity, and of his glory. I will share, whether he expects it or not, half of his shame and misfortune. Between two, the burden will be less weighty. Strike! I will cling so closely to him that no blow can touch him without hurting me, too. You counsel me to forget him. Teach me, then, how. I forget him? Could I, if I wished? But I do not wish it. I love him. It is no more in my power to cease loving him than it is to arrest, by the sole effort of my will, the beating of my heart. He is a prisoner, accused of an assassination. So be it. I love him. He is a criminal. What of that? I love him. You condemn, you dishonor him. Condemned, dishonored, I still love him. You will send him to prison. I will follow him; and in the prison, under the convict's dress I will love him still.

Let him fall to the bottom of the abyss. I will fall with him. My life is his, at his disposal. No, nothing shall separate us, nothing but death! And, if he must mount the scaffold, I shall die, I know well, with the blow which fells him."

Daburon had buried his face in his hands. He would not for worlds have Claire perceive the emotion with which he was affected.

"How she loves him!" he thought, "how she loves him!"

His spirit was sunk in the darkest thoughts. All the stings of jealousy were rending him.

What would not be his delight, if he were the object of so irresistible a passion as this which shone before him! What would he not give in return! He had, too, a young and ardent soul, a burning thirst for love. But who would be thus troubled for him? He was esteemed, respected, perhaps feared, but not loved; and he never would be. Was he, then, unworthy of it? Why do so many men pass through life destitute of love, while others, the vilest beings sometimes, seem to possess a mysterious power, which charms, seduces, carries away, which inspires in the object of their affection a blind, impetuous longing to sacrifice herself for them. Have women, then, no reason nor discernment?

Mademoiselle d'Arlanges' silence brought the judge back to himself. He raised his eyes to her. Overcome by the violence of her enthusiasm, she fell back in her chair, and breathed with such difficulty that Daburon feared that she was going to faint. He moved his hand quickly to the bell upon his desk, to summon aid; but Claire was quicker still, and stopped him.

"What would you do?" she asked.

"You seemed suffering so," he stammered, "that I—"

"It is nothing, monsieur," replied she. "I may seem weak; but it is nothing. I am very strong, believe me, very strong. It is true that I suffer, as I never believed that one could suffer. It is cruel for a young girl to have to do violence to all her feelings. You ought to be satisfied, monsieur. I have torn aside all veils; and you have read even the inmost recesses of my heart. But I do not regret it; it was for his sake. That which I do regret is my having lowered myself so far as to defend him; but he will forgive me that one doubt. Your persistence startled me so. A man like him does not need defence; his innocence must be proved; and, God helping me, I will prove it."

As Claire was half-rising to depart, Daburon detained her by a gesture. In his blindness, he thought he would be doing wrong to leave this poor young girl in the slightest way deceived. Having done so much at the beginning, he persuaded himself that his duty bade him go on to the end. He said to himself, in all good faith that thus he should save Claire herself, and spare her in the future from bitter regrets. The surgeon who has commenced a painful operation does not leave it half-finished because the patient struggles, suffers, and cries out.

"It is painful, mademoiselle,—" he began.

Claire would not let him finish.

"Enough, monsieur," said she; "all that you can say will be of no avail. I respect your unhappy conviction. I ask, in return, the same regard for mine. If you were truly my friend, I should ask you to aid me in the task of saving him, to which I shall devote myself; but you, doubtless, are not willing."

Claire seemed to be continually irritating the unhappy magistrate. With her woman's instinct, she had arrived at the same result as Père Tabaret with his logic. Women neither analyse nor reason: they feel and think. Instead of discussing, they affirm; and here, perhaps, arises their superiority. As for Claire, Daburon did not feel that she was his enemy; and yet she treated him like one.

The judge of inquiry resented strongly this injury. Annoyed by his scruples of conscience on one side, and by his convictions on the other, tossed about between duty and feelings, embarrassed by the harness of his profession, he was incapable of simple reflection. For three days, he had acted like a stubborn child. Why this obstinacy, which would not admit the possibility of Albert's innocence? Investigations in all cases have the same aim. But he, usually favorable to a prisoner, would not admit for a moment that there might be a mistake in this case.

"If you knew the proofs which I have in my hand, mademoiselle," he said in a cold tone, which expressed his determination not to give way to anger, "if I should show them to you, you would have no longer a doubt."

"Speak, monsieur," cried Claire imperiously.

"You wish it, mademoiselle? Very well; I will give you in detail all the charges made by justice. I will explain every thing; you shall know all. But no; why should I harass you with all the proofs? There is one which alone is decisive. The murder was committed on the evening of Shrove Tuesday; and the prisoner cannot give an account of what he did on that evening. He went out, however, and returned home about two o'clock in the morning, his clothes soiled and torn, his gloves frayed."

"Oh! enough, monsieur enough!" broke in Claire, whose eyes beamed once more with happiness. "You say it was on Shrove Tuesday evening?"

"Yes, mademoiselle."

"Ah! I was sure," she cried triumphantly. "I told you truly that he could not be the criminal."

She raised her hands; and, from the movement of her lips, it was evident that she was praying.

The expression of the most perfect trust, represented by some of the Italian painters, illuminated her beautiful face; while she gave thanks to God in a burst of thankfulness.

The magistrate was so disconcerted, that he forgot to admire her. He awaited an explanation.

"Well?" he asked impatiently.

"Monsieur," replied Claire, "if that is your strongest proof, it exists no longer. Albert passed the entire evening you speak of with me."

"With you?" stammered the judge.

"Yes, with me, at my house."

Daburon was stunned. Was he dreaming? His arms fell.

"What!" he exclaimed, "the viscount was at your house? And your grandmother, your governess, your servants, did they all see him and speak to him?"

"No, monsieur; he came and went away in secret. He wished no one to see him; he desired to be alone with me."

"Ah!" said the judge with a sigh of relief.

The sigh was significant. It meant, "It's all clear, —only too evident. She is determined to save him, at the risk even of compromising her reputation. Poor girl! The idea must have just occurred to her."

This "Ah!" was interpreted very differently by

Mademoiselle d'Arlanges. She thought that Daburon was astonished at her consenting to receive Albert.

"Your surprise is an insult, monsieur," said she.

"Mademoiselle!"

"A daughter of my family, monsieur, may receive her *fiancé*, without danger of any thing occurring for which she should blush."

She said this, and at the same time was red with shame, grief, and anger. She began to hate Daburon.

"I had no such insulting thought as you imagine, mademoiselle," said the magistrate. "I was only wondering why Monsieur de Commarin went secretly to your house, when his approaching marriage gives him the right to present himself openly, at all hours. I wondered still further, how, on such a visit, he could get his clothes in the condition in which we found them."

"That is to say, monsieur," replied Claire bitterly, "that you doubt my word."

"The circumstances are such, mademoiselle,—"

"You accuse me, then, of falsehood, monsieur? Why, were we criminals, we should not descend to justifying ourselves; we should never pray nor ask for pardon."

The haughty, contemptuous tone of Mademoiselle d'Arlanges could only anger the judge. How harshly she treated him! And simply because he would not consent to be her dupe.

"Above all, mademoiselle," he answered severely, "I am a magistrate; and I have a duty to perform. A crime has been committed. Every thing tells me that Albert de Commarin is the guilty man. I arrest him; I examine him; and I find against him overwhelming proofs. You come and tell me that they are false; that

is not enough. As long as you addressed me as a friend, you have found me kind and gentle. Now it is the judge to whom you speak: and it is the judge who replies, 'Prove it.'"

"My word, monsieur,—"

"Prove it!"

Mademoiselle d'Arlanges arose slowly, throwing upon the judge a look filled with astonishment and suspicion.

"Shall you, then, be glad, monsieur," she asked, "to find Albert guilty? Will it give you pleasure to convict him? Do you hate this prisoner, whose fate is in your hands? They told me the truth, then. Can you talk of impartiality? Do not certain memories weigh heavily in the scale? Are you sure that you are not armed with the law, revenging yourself upon a rival?"

"This is too much," murmured the judge,— "this is too much."

"Do you know the unusual, the dangerous position we are in at this moment? One day, I remember, you declared your love for me. It appeared to me sincere and honest; it touched me. I was obliged to refuse you, because I loved another; and I pitied you. Now that other is accused of assassination; and you are his judge, and I between you stand praying for him. In accepting the duty of investigation, you seemed to declare in his favor; and yet they say you are against him."

Claire's every word fell upon Daburon's heart like a blow on his face.

Was it really she who was speaking? Whence came this sudden boldness, which made her recall all those words which found an echo in his heart?

"Mademoiselle," said he, "your grief carries you beyond yourself. From you alone could I pardon what you have just said. Your ignorance of this matter makes you unjust. If you think that Albert's fate depends upon my pleasure, you deceive yourself. To convince me is nothing; it is necessary to convince others. That I should believe you is all very natural; but what weight will others attach to your testimony, when you come before them with a story, true,—most true, I am confident,—but highly improbable."

Tears came into Claire's eyes.

"If I have unjustly offended you, monsieur," she said, "pardon me: my unhappiness makes me forget myself."

"You cannot offend me, mademoiselle," replied the magistrate. "I have already told you that I am devoted to your service."

"Then, monsieur, help me to prove the truth of what I have said. I will tell you every thing."

Daburon was fully convinced that Claire was seeking to deceive him; but her boldness astonished him.

He wondered what fable she was concocting."

"Monsieur, began Claire, "you know what obstacles have stood in the way of my marriage with Albert. The Count de Commarin did not wish me for a daughter-in-law, because I was poor, because I possessed nothing. It took Albert five years to triumph over his father's objections. Twice the count yielded; twice he recalled the consent which he said had been extorted from him. At last, about a month ago, he gave his consent of his own accord. But these hesitations, delays, refusals, had deeply hurt my grandmamma. You know her sensitive character; and in this case, I must confess she was right. After the wedding day had been fixed, the mar-

quise declared that we should not be compromised and laughed at for any apparent haste in contracting so advantageous a marriage, as we had never before been accused of ambition. She decided, therefore, that, until the publication of the banns, Albert should only be admitted into the house every other day, for two hours in the afternoon, and that in her presence. We could not move her from this determination. Such was the state of affairs, when, on Sunday morning, a note came to me from Albert. He told me that pressing business would prevent his coming, although that was his regular day. What could have happened to keep him away? I feared some evil. The next day I waited, impatient, distracted, until his valet brought a note for me to Schmidt. In that letter, monsieur, Albert entreated me to grant him a secret interview. It was necessary, he wrote, that he should have a long conversation with me alone, and at once. Our whole future, he added, depended upon this interview. He left me to choose the day and hour, urging me to confide in no one. I did not hesitate. I sent him word to meet me on Tuesday evening, at the little garden gate, which opened into an unoccupied street. To notify me of his presence, he was to knock just as nine o'clock sounded from the tower of Les Invalides. I knew that my grandmother had invited a number of her friends for that evening; and I thought that, by pretending a headache, I might retire early, and so be free. I knew, also, that Madame d'Arlanges would keep Schmidt with her."

"Excuse me, mademoiselle," interrupted Daburon, "what day did you write to Albert?"

"Tuesday."

"Can you fix the hour?"

"I must have sent the letter between two and three o'clock."

"Thanks, mademoiselle. Go on, I beseech you."

"All my anticipations," continued Claire, "were realized. I escaped in the evening; and I descended to the garden a little before the appointed time. I had procured a key to the little gate; and I tried to open it. Unfortunately, I could not make it turn, the lock was so rusty. I exerted all my strength in vain. I was in despair, when nine o'clock sounded. At the third stroke, Albert knocked. I told him of the accident; and I threw him the key, that he might try and unlock the door. He tried in vain. I then begged him to postpone our interview until the next day. He replied that it was impossible, that what he had to say admitted of no delay; that, during the three days that he had hesitated about confiding in me, he had suffered martyrdom, and that he could endure it no longer. We were speaking, you understand, through the gate. At last, he declared that he would climb over the wall. I begged him not to do it, fearing an accident. It was very high, you see; and the top was set with pieces of broken glass, and the acacia branches stretched above like a hedge. But he laughed at my fears, and said that, unless I made a vigorous resistance, he was going to scale the wall. I dared not say any thing; and he risked it. Fortunately, he was very active, and got over without injury. He had come, monsieur, to tell me of the misfortune which had befallen him. We were now seated upon the little bank, you know, opposite the grove; then, when the rain fell, we took refuge in the summer house. It was after midnight when Albert left me, quiet and happy. He went back in the same man-

ner, only with less danger ; because I forced him to use the gardener's ladder, which I laid beside the wall when he was on the other side."

This account, given in the simplest, most natural manner, puzzled Daburon. What was he to think?

"Mademoiselle," he asked, "had the rain commenced when Albert climbed over the wall?"

"No, monsieur ; the first drops fell when we were on the bank. I recollect it very well, because he opened his umbrella ; and I thought of Paul and Virginia."

"Allow me one moment, mademoiselle," said the judge.

He sat down at his desk, and rapidly wrote two letters. In the first, he gave orders for Albert's presence in his office in the palais de justice.

In the second he ordered a detective to go immediately to the Faubourg St. Germain to the d'Arlanges house and examine the wall at the bottom of the garden, and notice any marks of its having been scaled, if any such existed. He explained that the wall had been climbed twice, before and after the rain ; consequently the marks of the going and the coming would be different from each other.

He enjoined upon this agent to proceed with the utmost caution, and to discover a plausible pretext which would explain his investigations.

Having finished writing, the judge rang for his servant, who appeared.

"Here," said he, "are two letters, which you will take to my clerk, Constant. Tell him to read them, and to have the orders they contain executed at once,—at once, you understand. Run, take a carriage, any thing, but go quickly ! Ah ! one word. If Constant is not in

my office, have him sought for: he will not be a great way off, as he is waiting for me. Go quick!"

Daburon then turned to Claire.

"Have you kept the letter, mademoiselle, in which Albert asked for this interview?"

"Yes, monsieur, I ought to have it with me."

She arose, felt in her pocket, and drew out a much rumpled piece of paper.

"Here it is!"

The judge of inquiry took it. A suspicion crossed him. This compromising letter was quite conveniently in Claire's pocket; and yet young girls do not usually thus expose requests for interviews. At a glance, he ran over the ten lines of the note.

"No date," he muttered, "no stamp,—nothing at all."

Claire did not hear him; she was racking her brain to find proofs of the interview.

"Monsieur," said she suddenly, "it often happens, that, when we wish to be, and believe ourselves alone, we are nevertheless observed. Summon, I beseech you, all of my grandmamma's servants, and inquire if any of them saw Albert that night."

"Inquire of your servants! Are you not dreaming, mademoiselle?"

"What, monsieur? You fear that I shall be compromised. What of that, if he is only freed?"

Daburon could not help admiring her.

What sublime devotion in this young girl, whether she spoke the truth or not! He could understand her violence of an hour ago, now that he knew her character so well.

"That is not all," she added; "the key to the little

gate which I threw to Albert: He did not return it to me; he must have forgotten it. If they find it in his possession, that will well prove that he was in the garden."

"I will give the orders, mademoiselle."

"There is still another means," continued Claire; "while I am here, send to examine the wall."

She seemed to think of every thing.

"That is already done, mademoiselle," replied Daburon. "I will not hide from you, that one of the letters which I have just sent off ordered an examination of your grandmother's house,—a very quiet examination, though, be assured."

Claire rose joyfully, and for the second time held out her hand to the judge.

"Oh, thanks!" said she, "a thousand thanks! Now I am sure that you are with me. But I have still another idea: Albert ought to have the note I wrote on Tuesday."

"No, mademoiselle, he has burned it."

Claire's eyes drooped; she drew back.

She imagined a touch of irony in the judge's reply. There was none, however. The magistrate remembered the letter thrown into the fire by Albert on Tuesday afternoon. It could be none other than this of Claire's. It was to her, then, that the words, "She cannot resist me," applied. He understood, now, the action and the remark.

"Do you know, mademoiselle," he pursued, "that M. de Commarin has led justice astray, and has exposed me to a most deplorable error, when it would have been so easy to have told me all this?"

"It seems to me, monsieur, that an honest man could not confess that he had obtained an interview with a

lady, until he had obtained full permission from her own lips. He ought to risk his life sooner than the honor of her who has trusted in him; but be assured Albert had confidence in me."

He had nothing to reply to this; for the sentiments expressed by Mademoiselle d'Arlanges gave a meaning to some of Albert's replies in the examination.

"This is not all yet, mademoiselle," continued the judge; "all that you have told me here, you must repeat in my office, at the palais de justice. My clerk must take down your testimony; and you must sign it. This proceeding will be painful; but it is a necessary formality."

"Ah, monsieur, I will do it with pleasure. What can I refuse, when I know that he is in prison? I am determined to do every thing. If I am needed at the court of assize, I will go,—yes, I will be present; and, above all and before all, I will speak the truth. Doubtless," she added sadly, "I shall be much exposed: I shall be looked upon as a heroine of romance; but what matters public opinion, the blame or approval of the world, since I am sure of his love?"

She arose, readjusting her cloak and the strings of her hat.

"Must I," she asked, "await the return of those who are examining the wall?"

"It is not at all necessary, mademoiselle."

"Then," she continued in a sweet voice, "I can only beseech you" (she clasped her hands), "conjure you" (her eyes implored), "to let Albert out of prison."

"He shall be liberated as soon as possible; I give you my word."

"Oh, to-day, dear Monsieur Daburon, to-day, I beg of you,—now, this moment! Since he is innocent, be

kind, since you are our friend. Do you wish me to go down on my knees?"

The judge had only time to extend his arms, and prevent her.

He was choking with emotion, unhappy man!

Ah! how much he envied the prisoner's lot!

"That which you ask of me is impossible, mademoiselle," said he tenderly, "impracticable, upon my honor. Ah! if it depended upon me alone, I should not be able, even were he guilty, to see you weep, and to resist."

Mademoiselle d'Arlanges, so firm up to this time, could no longer restrain her sobs.

"Unhappy man!" she cried, "he is suffering; he is in prison. I am free; and yet I can do nothing for him. Great heaven! inspire me with accents to touch the heart of men! At their feet I will cast myself for pardon."

She suddenly stopped, surprised at having uttered such a word.

"Pardon!" she repeated fiercely; "he has no need of pardon. Why am I only a woman? Can I not find one man who will aid me? Yes," she said after a moment's reflection, "there is one man who owes himself to Albert; since he it was who put him in this position,—the Count de Commarin. He is his father, and has yet abandoned him. Ah, well! I will remind him that he has a son still."

The magistrate arose to see her to the door; but she had already disappeared, taking with her the good Schmidt.

Daburon, more dead than alive, sank back in his chair. His eyes filled with tears.

"What a noble woman she is!" he murmured. "Ah!

I made no vulgar choice. I had divined and understood all these good qualities."

He had never loved her so much; and he felt that he should never be consoled for not having won her love in return. But, in the midst of his meditations, a sudden thought passed like a flash across his brain.

Had Claire spoken the truth? Had she not been playing a rôle, assumed to deceive him? No, surely no!

But she might have been deceived,—might have been the dupe of some skilful trick.

Père Tabaret's prediction was now realized.

Tabaret had said, "Look out for an unobjectionable *alibi*."

How could he show the falsity of this one, planned in advance, affirmed by Claire, who was herself deceived?

How could he foil a plan, so well laid that the prisoner was able without danger to await certain results, with his hands bound, and without himself moving in the matter?

And yet, if Claire's story were true, and Albert innocent.

The judge struggled in the midst of inextricable difficulties, without a plan, without an idea.

He arose.

"Oh!" he said in a loud voice, as though encouraging himself, "at the palais, all will be unravelled."

CHAPTER XVI.

DABURON had been surprised at Claire's visit.

M. de Commarin was still more so, when his *valet de chambre* whispered to him that Mademoiselle d'Aranges asked a moment's conversation with him.

Daburon had let a handsome card-plate fall; M. de Commarin, who was at breakfast, let his knife fall.

Like the judge he exclaimed,—

“ Claire! ”

He hesitated to receive her, fearing a painful and disagreeable scene.

She had had, he knew, very slight affection for him, who had for so long repulsed her with such obstinacy. What could she want with him? To inquire about Albert, of course. And what could he reply?

She would probably have some nervous attack or other; and her system, as well as his, would be disturbed.

However, he thought of the great grief she must have experienced; and he pitied her.

He reflected, that it would be cruel, as well as unworthy his character, to keep himself from her who was to have been his daughter,—the Viscountess de Commarin.

He sent a message, asking her to wait one instant in the little salon on the ground floor.

He did not keep her long, his appetite having been destroyed by the announcement of her presence. He was prepared for any thing disagreeable.

When he entered, Claire bowed to him with one of those graceful, yet highly dignified bends, which distinguished the Marquise d'Arlanges.

“ Monsieur,” she began —

“ You come, do you not, my poor child, to obtain news of the unhappy boy? ” asked M. de Commarin.

He had interrupted Claire, wishing to go straight to the point, in order to get it the more quickly over.

“ No, monsieur,” replied the young girl; “ I come, on the contrary, to bring you news. Albert is innocent.”

The count looked at her most attentively, persuaded that grief had affected her reason; but her madness in this instance was very quiet.

"I have never doubted it," continued Claire; "but now I have the most positive proofs."

"Do you feel sure of what you have advanced?" inquired the count, whose eyes betrayed his doubt.

Mademoiselle d'Arlanges understood his thoughts; her interview with Daburon had given her experience.

"I advance nothing which is not of the utmost accuracy," she replied, "and easily proved. I have just come from the judge of inquiry, Monsieur Daburon, who is one of my grandmamma's friends; and, after what I have told him, he is persuaded that Albert is innocent."

"He told you that, Claire!" exclaimed the count. "My child, are you sure, are you not deceiving yourself?"

"No, monsieur. I told him something, of which the world is ignorant, and of which Albert, who is a gentleman, could not speak; I told him that Albert passed with me, in my grandmamma's garden, all that evening when the crime was committed. He had asked an interview of me—"

"But your word will not be sufficient."

"There are proofs of it which Justice has by this time."

"Heavens! Is it really possible?" cried the count, who was beside himself.

"Ah, monsieur!" said Mademoiselle d'Arlanges bitterly, "you are like the judge; you thought it impossible. You are his father, and suspected him. You could not have known him, then. You abandoned him,

without trying to defend him. Ah, I never doubted him!"

We can easily be induced to believe true what we are anxiously longing for. M. de Commarin was not difficult to convince. Without reasons, without discussion, he put faith in Claire's assertions. He shared her convictions, without asking whether they were wise or prudent.

Yes, he had been overcome by the positiveness of the judge: he had acknowledged the improbability of his son's innocence; and he had bowed his head. One word from this young girl restored him. Albert innocent? This thought descended upon his heart like dew from heaven.

Claire appeared to him a messenger bringing sunshine and hope.

During the last three days, he had discovered how great his affection for Albert was. He had loved him tenderly; for he had never been able to discard him, in spite of his frightful suspicions about his paternity.

For three days, the remembrance of the crime imputed to the unhappy boy, the thought of the punishment which awaited him, had nearly killed him; and now he was innocent!

No more shame, no more scandal, no more stains upon the escutcheon; the name of Commarin would no longer resound before the tribunals.

"But now, mademoiselle," demanded the count, "are they going to release him?"

"Alas! monsieur, I demanded that they should at once place him at liberty. It is just, is it not? since he is not guilty? But the judge only replied that it was not possible; that he was not the master; that

Albert's fate depended on many others. It was then that I resolved to come to you for aid."

"Is there any thing in my power?"

"I at least hope so. I am only a poor girl, very ignorant; and I know no one in the world. I do not know what can be done in behalf of a man unjustly detained in prison. There ought, however, to be some means for obtaining justice for him. Will you not try what can be done, monsieur, you, who are his father?"

"Yes," replied M. de Commarin quickly,—“yes, and without a moment's loss."

Since Albert's arrest, the count had been plunged in a dull stupor. In his profound grief, seeing about him only ruin and disaster, he had done nothing to shake off this mental paralysis. Ordinarily very active, he sat all day now without moving. He congratulated himself that his condition prevented his feeling the immensity of his misfortune. Claire's voice sounded in his ear like the resurrection trumpet. The frightful darkness was dispelled; he saw a glimmering in the horizon; he recovered the energy of his youth.

"Let us go," he said.

But suddenly the radiance in his face changed to sadness, mixed with anger.

"But yet," he said, "where? At what door shall we knock with any hope of success? In the olden times, I should seek the king; but to-day the emperor will not interfere with the law. He will tell me to await the decision of the tribunals, that he can do nothing. Wait. And Albert is counting the minutes in mortal agony! We shall certainly obtain justice; but to do it promptly is an art taught in schools that I have not frequented."

"Let us try, at least, monsieur," persisted Claire. "Let us seek out judges, generals, ministers. Only lead me to them. I will speak; and you shall see if we do not succeed."

The count took Claire's little hands between his own, and held them a moment pressing them with paternal tenderness.

"Brave girl!" he cried; "you are a noble, courageous woman, Claire. Good blood never fails. I should not have known you. Yes, you shall be my daughter; and you shall be happy together,—Albert and you. But we mustn't rush about everywhere, like wild geese. We need some one to point out whom we should address,—some guide, advocate, notary. Ah!" he cried, "I have it,—Noel."

Claire raised her eyes to the count's in surprise.

"He is my son," replied M. de Commarin, evidently embarrassed,—“my other son, Albert's brother,—the best and worthiest of men,” he added, repeating quite appropriately a phrase already used by Daburon. “He is an advocate; he knows all about the palais; he will guide us.”

Noel's name, thus thrown into the midst of this conversation so full of hope, oppressed Claire's heart.

The count perceived her affright.

"Don't feel anxious, dear child," he said. "Noel is good; and I will tell you more, loves Albert. Do not shake your head so; Noel told me himself, on this very spot, that he did not believe Albert guilty. He declared that he intended doing every thing to dispel the fatal mistake, and that he would be his advocate."

These assertions did not seem to reassure the young girl. She said to herself, "What has this Noel accomplished for Albert?" She could think of nothing.

"I will send for him," said M. de Commarin; "he is now with Albert's mother, who brought him up, and who is now on her death-bed."

"Albert's mother?"

"Yes, my child. Albert will explain to you what may perhaps seem to you an enigma. Now time presses. But I think—"

He stopped suddenly. He thought, that, instead of sending for Noel at Madame Gerdy's, he might go there himself. He should thus see Valerie! and he had longed to see her again so much!

It was one of those actions which the heart urges, but which we do not dare risk; because a thousand subtle reasons and interests are against it.

We wish, we desire, we long for it; and yet we struggle, combat, resist. But, if an opportunity occurs, we are only too happy to seize it; then we have, at least, one excuse to silence our conscience.

In thus yielding every thing to the impulse of our feelings, we can say, "It was not I who wished it; it was fate."

"It will be better, perhaps," observed the count, "to go to Noel."

"Let us start then, monsieur."

"I hardly know, my child," said the old gentleman hesitating, "whether I may, whether I ought, to take you with me. Propriety—"

"Ah, monsieur, why talk of propriety?" replied Claire, impetuously. "With you, and for his sake, I can go anywhere. Is it not indispensable that I should give the circumstances? Only send word to my grand-mamma by Schmidt, who will come back here and await my return. I am ready, monsieur."

"Well," said the count.

Then, ringing so violently that he broke the bell cord, he cried, "My carriage!"

In descending the stairway, he insisted upon Claire's taking his arm. The gallant and elegant politeness of the Count d'Artois reappeared.

"You have taken off twenty years from my age," he said; "it is fit that I should do homage for the youth you have given me."

When Claire had entered the carriage, "Rue St. Lazare," he said to the footman, "quick!"

Whenever the count said, on entering his carriage, "quick," the foot-passengers had to get out of the way. But the coachman was a skilful driver; and they arrived without accident.

Aided by the directions of the porter, the count and the young girl went towards Madame Gerdy's apartment. The count mounted slowly, holding tightly to the railing, stopping at each landing to breathe. He was, then, to see her again. This emotion pressed his heart like a vise.

"Noel Gerdy?" he asked of the maid.

The advocate had just that moment gone out. She did not know where he had gone; but he had said he should not be out more than half an hour.

"We will wait for him, then," said the count.

He advanced; and the maid drew back to let them pass. Noel had, in so many words, forbidden her to admit any visitors; but the Count de Commarin was one of those whose appearance makes servants forget all their orders.

Three persons were in the room when the maid introduced the Count and Mademoiselle d'Arlanges.

There was the parish priest, the doctor, and a tall

man, an officer of the legion of honor, whose carriage and figure indicated the veteran.

They were conversing near the mantel; and the arrival of strangers appeared to astonish them.

In bowing, in response to M. de Commarin's and Claire's salute, they seemed to inquire their business; but the hesitation was brief: the soldier offered Mademoiselle d'Arlanges a chair.

The count saw that his presence was inopportune; and he felt called upon to introduce himself, and explain his visit.

"You will excuse me, messieurs," said he, "if I am inconsiderate. I need not tell you, that, in asking permission to await Noel, I have the most pressing need of seeing him. I am the Count de Commarin."

At this name, the old soldier left the chair whose back he still held, and assumed all the haughtiness of his profession. An angry light flashed in his eyes; and he made a threatening gesture. His lips moved, as if he were about to speak; but he restrained himself, and retired, his head bowed, to the window.

Neither the count nor the others remarked these various movements; but they did not escape Claire.

While Mademoiselle d'Arlanges sat down, confused, the count, also much embarrassed at his position, approached the priest, and in a low voice asked,—

"What is, I beseech you, Monsieur l'Abbe, Madame Gerdy's condition?"

The doctor, who had a sharp ear, heard the question, and approached quickly.

It was very pleasant to speak to a personage as celebrated as the Count de Commarin, and to become acquainted with him.

"I fear, monsieur," he said, "that she cannot live another day."

The count pressed his hand against his forehead, as though he had felt a sudden pain. He hesitated to inquire further.

After a moment of chilling silence, he resolved to go on.

"Does she recognize her friends?" he murmured.

"No, monsieur. Since last evening, however, there has been a great change. She was very uneasy all last night: she had moments of fierce delirium. About an hour ago, we thought she was recovering her senses; and we sent for the priest."

"Very useless, though," put in the priest; "it is a sad misfortune. Her reason is quite gone, poor woman! I have known her ten years. I have seen her nearly every week; and I never knew a more excellent woman."

"She must suffer dreadfully," said the doctor.

Almost on the instant, and as if to bear out the doctor's words, they heard stifled cries from the next room, the door of which was open.

"Did you hear?" exclaimed the count, trembling from head to foot.

Claire understood nothing of this strange scene. Dark presentiments oppressed her; she felt as though she were enveloped by an atmosphere of evil. She grew frightened, and drew near the count.

"Is she really there?" asked M. de Commarin.

"Yes, monsieur," harshly answered the old soldier who had come near, "she is."

At another time, the count would have noticed the soldier's tone, and have resented it. Now, he did not even raise his eyes. He remained insensible to every

thing. Was she not there, two steps from him? His thoughts were in the past; it seemed to him but yesterday that he had quitted her for the last time.

"I should much like to see her," he said timidly.

"That is impossible," replied the old soldier.

"Why?" stammered the count.

"At least, Monsieur de Commarin," replied the soldier, "let her die in peace."

The count started, as if he had been struck. His eyes encountered those of the veteran's; they fell like a criminal's before his judge.

"Nothing need prevent monsieur's entering Madame Gerdy's room," put in the doctor, who purposely saw nothing of all this. "She would probably not notice his presence; and if—"

"Oh, she would perceive nothing!" said the priest. "I have just spoken to her, taken her hand: she is still insensible."

The old soldier reflected deeply.

"Enter," said he at last to the count; "perhaps it is God's will."

The count tottered, so that the doctor sprang forward to assist him. He gently pushed him away.

The doctor and the priest entered with him; Claire and the old soldier remained at the threshold of the door, opposite the bed.

The count took three or four steps, and was obliged to stop. He wished, but could not go further.

Could this dying woman really be Valerie?

He had to tax his memory severely: nothing in those withered features, nothing in that troubled face, recalled the beautiful, the adored Valerie of his youth. He did not even know her.

But she knew him, or rather divined, felt his pres-

ence. Moved by a supernatural force, she raised herself, exposing her shoulders and emaciated arms. With a violent gesture, she pushed away the ice from her forehead, throwing back her still plentiful hair, bathed with perspiration, which fell upon the pillow.

"Guy!" she cried. "Guy!"

The count trembled all over.

He stood more immovable than those unhappy people, who, according to popular belief, when struck by lightning remain standing, but crumble into dust if touched.

He did not perceive that which immediately struck all others present,— the transformation in the sick woman. Her contracted features relaxed: a celestial joy spread over her face; and her eyes, hollowed by disease, assumed an expression of infinite tenderness.

"Guy," said she in a voice heart-breaking by its sweetness, "you have come at last! How long, O my God! I have waited for you! You cannot think what I have suffered in your absence. I was dying of grief, without one hope of seeing you again. They have kept you from me. Who, who was it? Your relations still? Cruel, cruel! Did you not tell them that no one could love you here below as I did? No; that was not it. I, I forget. I,—were you not angry when you left me? Your friends wished to separate us; they said that I drew you away from her. Who have I injured that I should have so many enemies? They envied my happiness; and we were so happy! But you did not believe the wicked calumny: you scorned it; for are you not here?"

The nun, who had risen on seeing so many enter the sick room, now opened her eyes with astonishment.

"I betray you?" continued the dying woman, apparently wild at the thought. "Was I not yours, your own, heart and soul? To me you were every thing; and there was nothing I could expect or hope from another which you had not already given me. Was I not yours, body and soul, from the first? I never hesitated to give myself entirely to you; I felt that I was born for you. Guy, can you forget that? I was working for a lace-maker, and was barely earning a living. You told me that you were a poor student; and I felt that you were depriving yourself for my sake. You wished to fit up our little cottage at St. Michael. It was lovely, with its fresh paper all covered with flowers, which we ourselves hung. How delightful it was! From the window, there was a view of the great trees at the Tuileries; and, by a little imagination, we could see the setting sun through the arches of the bridge. Oh, those happy times! The first time that we walked out into the country together, one Sunday, you brought me a more beautiful dress than I had ever dreamed of, and boots so tiny that it was a shame to walk in them. But you had deceived me; you were not a poor student. One day, in taking my work home, I met you in an elegant carriage, behind which rode tall footmen in a livery covered with gold. I could not believe my eyes. That evening you told me the truth, that you were a noble of great wealth. O my darling! why did you tell me?"

Had she her reason, or was this delirium which was speaking.

Great tears rolled down the wrinkled face of the Count de Commarin; and the doctor and priest wondered at this sad spectacle of an old man weeping like a child.

Last evening only, the count had thought his heart dead; and now this voice, sinking into his heart, was sufficient to recall the fresh, powerful feelings of his youth. How many years had passed away since!

"Then," continued Madame Gerdy, "we left St. Michael. You wished it; and I obeyed, in spite of my apprehensions. You told me, that, to please you, I must resemble the great ladies. You provided teachers for me; for I had been so ignorant that I scarcely knew how to sign my name. Do you remember the queer spelling in my first letter? Ah Guy, if you had only been really a poor student! When I knew that you were so rich, I lost my simplicity, my thoughtlessness, my gayety. I feared that you would think me covetous,—that you would imagine that your fortune influenced my love. Men, who, like you, have millions, must be very unhappy. They must be always doubting and full of suspicions; they can never be sure whether it is themselves or their gold which is loved: and this makes them defiant, jealous, cruel. Oh, my dearest! why did we leave our little cottage? There we were happy. Why did you not leave me always where you had found me? Did you not know that the sight of happiness irritates mankind? If we had been wise, we should have hid our happiness like a crime. You thought to raise me; you only sunk me lower. You were proud of our love; you published it abroad. Vainly I asked you in mercy to leave me in obscurity, and unknown. Soon the whole town knew that I was your mistress. It was reported, in your own circles, that you were ruining yourself for me. How I blushed at the flaunting luxury you thrust upon me! You were satisfied, because my beauty became celebrated; I wept because my shame became so, too. They talked

about me, as about women who make their lovers commit the greatest follies. Was not my name in the papers? And it was through the same papers that I learned of your approaching marriage. Unhappy woman! I should have fled from you; but I had not the courage. I resigned myself, without an effort, to the most humiliating, the most shameful of lots. You were married; and I continued your mistress. Oh, what anguish I suffered during that terrible evening! I was alone in my own house, in that room so associated with you; and you were marrying another. I said to myself, 'At this moment, a pure, noble young girl is giving herself to him.' I said again, 'What oaths is that mouth, which has so often pressed my lips, now taking?' Often since that dreadful misfortune, I have asked the good God what crime I had committed that I should be so terribly punished? This was the crime. I continued your mistress, and your wife died. I had only seen her once, and then scarcely for a moment; but she looked at you; and I knew that she loved as only I could. And, Guy, it was our love that killed her!"

She stopped exhausted: but none of the bystanders moved. They listened breathlessly, and waited with feverish emotion for her to resume.

Mademoiselle d'Arlanges had not strength to remain standing; she fell upon her knees, and pressed her handkerchief to her mouth to keep back her sobs. Was not this Albert's mother?

The worthy sister was alone unmoved; she had seen, she said to herself, many such deliriums before. She understood absolutely nothing of the scene.

"These people are very foolish," she thought, "to pay so much attention to the ramblings of insanity."

She thought she had more sense than the others. Approaching the bed she began to cover the sick woman.

"Come, madame," said she, "cover yourself, or you will catch cold."

"Sister!" remonstrated the doctor and the priest at the same moment.

"Jupiter Ammon!" cried the soldier, "let her speak."

"Who," continued the sick woman, unconscious of all that was passing about her,—“who can tell what I have endured? Oh, the wretches! They set spies upon me; they discovered that an officer came frequently to see me. That officer was my brother, my dear Louis. When he was eighteen years old, getting no work, he enlisted, saying to mother, that there would now be one mouth less in the family. He was a good soldier; and the officers always liked him. He joined his regiment: he taught himself; and he gradually rose in rank. He was promoted to lieutenant, captain, and finally became major. Louis always loved me; but I seldom saw him. He was a non-commissioned officer when he first knew that I had a lover; and he was so enraged that I feared he would never forgive me. But he did forgive me, saying that my constancy in my wrong was its only excuse. Ah, my friend, he was more jealous of your honor than you yourself! He came to see me in secret, because I had placed him in the unhappy position of blushing for his sister. My name never passed his lips. Could a brave soldier confess that his sister was the mistress of a count? That it might not be known, I took the utmost precautions, but alas! only to make you doubt me. When Louis knew what was said, he wished, in his blind rage, to challenge you; and then I was obliged to prove to him

that he had no right to defend me. What misery! Ah, I have paid dearly for my years of stolen happiness! But you are here; and all is forgotten; for you do believe me, do you not, Guy? I will call Louis. He will come: he will tell you that I do not lie; and you cannot doubt his, a soldier's word."

"Yes, on my honor," spoke the old soldier, "what my sister says is the truth."

The dying woman did not hear him; she continued in a voice panting with weariness,—

"How your presence revives me! I feel that I am growing stronger. I have been sick. I do not deserve to be happy to-day; but embrace me!"

She held out her hands, and raised her lips as if to kiss him.

"But it is on one condition, Guy, that you will leave me my child. Oh! I beg you, I entreat you not to take him from me; leave him to me. What is a mother without her son? You are anxious to give him an illustrious name, an immense fortune. No. You tell me that this sacrifice will be for his good. No. My child is mine; I will protect him. The world has no honors, no riches, which can replace a mother's care beside the cradle. You wish by the exchange, to give me another's child. Never! What, shall that woman embrace my boy? No, no. Take away this strange child from me; it fills me with horror. I want my own Noel! Ah, do not insist, do not threaten me with your anger! Don't leave me. I yield, and then I will die. Guy, give up this fatal purpose; the thought alone is crime. Cannot my prayers, my tears, can nothing move you? Ah, well, God will punish us in our old age. All will be discovered. The day will come when these children will demand a fearful reckoning. Guy, I

foresee the future; I see my son coming to me, justly angered. What does he say? Great heaven! Oh, those letters, those letters, sweet memories of our love! My son, he threatens me! He strikes me! Ah, help! A son strike his mother! Tell no one of it: don't let it ever be known. God, what torture! He knows well that I am his mother. He pretends not to believe me. This is too much! Guy, pardon, oh, my dearest! I had not power to resist, nor the courage to obey you."

At this moment the door leading to the stairway opened, and Noel appeared, pale as usual, but calm and composed.

The dying woman saw him; and it affected her like an electric shock.

A terrible trembling shook her whole body; her eyes grew inordinately large; her hair seemed to stand on end. She raised herself on her elbows, pointed at Noel and in a loud voice exclaimed,—

"Assassin!"

Convulsively she fell back on the bed. They hastened forward: she was dead.

A deep silence prevailed.

Such is the majesty of death, and the terror which accompanies it, that, before it, even the strongest and most skeptical bow their heads.

For an instant, passions and interests are forgotten. Involuntarily we are drawn together, when some mutual friend breathes his last in our presence.

All the bystanders were deeply moved by this painful scene, this last confession, wrested from a delirious and unhappy woman.

But the last word uttered by Madame Gerdy, "Assassin!" surprised no one.

All, with the exception of the nun, knew of the unhappy accusation which had been made against Albert.

To him they applied the malediction of the unfortunate mother.

Noel appeared to totter. Kneeling near the bedside of her who had been as a mother to him, he took one of her hands, and pressed it close to his lips.

"Dead!" he groaned; "she is dead!"

By his side, the nun and the priest knelt, and repeated in a low voice the prayers for the dead.

They implored God to shed his peace and mercy on this departed soul.

They begged for a little happiness in heaven for her who had suffered so much on this earth.

Falling into a chair, his head back, the Count de Commarin was more overwhelmed, more livid, than this dead woman, his old love, once so beautiful.

Claire and the doctor pressed toward him.

They undid his cravat, and opened the collar of his shirt, or he would have suffocated.

With the help of the old soldier, whose red, tearful eye told of suppressed grief, they moved the count's chair to the half-opened window for a little air. Three days before, this scene would have killed him.

But the heart grows hardened by misfortune, as hands by labor.

"Tears would relieve him," whispered the doctor to Claire.

M. de Commarin gradually recovered, and, with clearness of thought, returned the intensity of suffering.

The prostration was followed by great struggles in his mind. Nature seemed striving to sustain the mis-

fortune. We never feel the entire shock at once; it is only afterwards that we realize the extent and profundity of any misfortune.

The count's gaze was fixed upon the bed where lay Valerie's body. There, then, was all that remained of her. The soul—that soul, so devoted, so tender—had flown.

What would he not give if God would but return that unfortunate woman for a day, for only an hour of life and reason? With what transports of repentance would he cast himself at her feet, to implore pardon, to tell her how much horror he had for his past conduct. How he had misunderstood the inexhaustible love of that angel! Upon a suspicion, without deigning to inquire, without hearing her, he had crushed her with his cold contempt: Why had he not investigated the matter? He would have spared himself twenty years of doubt as to Albert's birth. Instead of an isolated existence, he would have had a happy, joyous life.

Then he recalled the death of the countess. She also had loved, even to her death.

He had not understood them; he had killed them both.

The hour of expiation had come; and he could not say "Lord, the punishment is too great."

And yet, what punishment, what wretchedness, during the last five days!

"Yes," he stammered, "she predicted it. Why did I not listen to her?"

Madame Gerdy's brother pitied the old man, so severely tried. He held out his hand.

"Monsieur de Commarin," he said, in a grave, sad voice, "my sister pardoned you long ago, even if she

ever had an ill feeling against you. It is my turn to-day; I forgive you sincerely."

"Thanks, monsieur," murmured the count,—
"thanks!" and then added "dead!"

"Yes," said Claire, "she breathed her last in the idea that her son was guilty. And you did not undeceive her."

"At least her son," cried the count, "should be free to render her his last duties; yes, he must be. Noel!"

The advocate had drawn near his father, and had heard all.

"I have promised, father," he replied, "to save him."

For the first time, Mademoiselle d'Arlanges was face to face with Noel. Their eyes met; and she could not restrain a movement of repugnance, which the advocate perceived.

"Albert is already saved," she said bitterly: "What we ask is, that prompt justice shall be done him; that he shall be immediately set at liberty. The judge now knows the truth."

"The truth?" exclaimed the advocate.

"Yes; Albert passed at my house, with me, the evening the crime was committed."

Noel looked at her surprised: so singular a confession from such a mouth, without explanation, might well surprise him.

She drew herself up haughtily.

"I am Mademoiselle Claire d'Arlanges, monsieur," she said.

M. de Commarin now quickly ran over all the incidents reported by Claire.

When he had finished,—

"Monsieur," replied Noel, "you see my position; leave this until to-morrow."

"To-morrow!" interrupted the count indignantly, "you said, I believe, to-morrow! Honor demands, monsieur that we act to-day, this moment. You can do honor to this poor woman much better by delivering her son than by praying for her."

Noel bowed low.

"To hear your wish, monsieur, is to obey it," he said. "I go. This evening, at your house, I will have the honor of giving you an account of my proceedings. Perhaps I shall be able to bring Albert with me."

He spoke, and, embracing the dead woman for the last time, went out.

Soon the count and Mademoiselle d'Arlanges followed.

The old soldier went to the mayor's, to make his declaration of the death, and to fulfil the necessary formalities.

The nun alone remained, awaiting the priest, which the curé had promised to send to watch the corpse.

The daughter of St. Vincent felt neither fear nor embarrassment; she had been so many times in just such scenes.

Her prayers said, she arose, and went about the room, putting every thing in the proper order after a death.

She removed all traces of the sickness, hid the vials and little cups, burnt some sugar upon the fire shovel, and on a table covered with a white cloth at the head of the bed, placed some lighted candles, a crucifix with holy water, and a branch of palm.

CHAPTER XVII.

TROUBLED and distressed by the revelations of Mademoiselle d'Arlanges, Daburon was ascending the stairway that led to the gallery of the judges of inquiry, when he was met by Père Tabaret. The sight pleased him; and so he called out,—

“Monsieur Tabaret!”

But the old fellow, who showed every sign of the most intense agitation, was scarcely disposed to stop, or to lose a single minute.

“You must excuse me,” he said, saluting him, “but I am expected at home.”

“I hope, however—”

“Oh, he is innocent,” interrupted Père Tabaret. “I have already some proofs; and before three days— But you are going to see Gevrol’s man with the rings in his ears. He is very acute, is this Gevrol; I have misjudged him.”

And without listening to another word he hurried on, jumping down three steps at a time, at the risk of breaking his neck.

Daburon, disappointed, also hastened on.

In the gallery, before his office door, on a bench of rough wood, sat Albert under the charge of a garde de Paris.

“You will be summoned immediately,” said the judge to the prisoner, on opening the door.

In the office, Constant was talking with a little man of a sorry appearance, who might be taken, from his dress, for an inhabitant of the Batignoles, even without the enormous false pin which shone in his cravat, and which betrayed the detective.

"You received my letters?" asked Daburon of his clerk. "Monsieur, your orders have been executed: the prisoner is without; and here is Martin, who has this moment arrived from Les Invalides."

"That is very well," said the magistrate in a satisfied tone. And turning towards the detective,—

"Well, Martin," he asked, "what have you found?"

"Monsieur, some one has climbed over the wall."

"Lately?"

"Five or six days ago."

"You are sure of this?"

"As sure as I am that I see Constant at this moment mending his pen."

"The marks are plain?"

"As plain as the nose on my face, if I may so express myself. The thief—it was done by a thief, I imagine—" continued Martin, who was a great talker,— "the thief entered before the rain, and returned after it, as you had conjectured. This circumstance is easy to establish, if you examine the marks of the ascent and the descent on the wall on the side towards the street. These marks are holes, made by the end of the boot. The first are clean; the others, muddy. The scamp—he was a nimble fellow—entered by the aid of his wrists and legs; but, in going out, he enjoyed the luxury of a ladder, which he threw down as soon as he was over. It is very evident where it was placed below, by means of the holes made by the fellow's weight; above, by the displaced mortar."

"Is that all?" asked the judge.

"Not yet, monsieur. Three of the pieces of bottle which covered the top of the wall have been torn away. Many of the acacia branches, which extend out over the wall, have been bent and broken. From a thorn of

one of these branches, I took this little piece of pearl gray kid, which appears to me to have come from a glove."

The judge took the piece with eagerness.

It was really a small fragment of a gray glove.

"You took care, I hope Martin, not to attract attention at the house where you made this investigation?"

"Certainly, monsieur. I examined the exterior, at my leisure. After that, disguising myself at a wine merchant's around the corner, I called at the Marquise d'Arlanges' house, giving myself out to be the servant of a neighboring duchess, who was in despair at having lost a favorite, and if I may so speak, an eloquent parouquet. They very kindly gave me permission to look in the garden; and, as I spoke as disrespectfully as possible of my pretended mistress, they took me for an unmistakable servant."

"You are an adroit and prompt fellow, Martin," interrupted the judge. "I am well satisfied with you; and I will report you favorably at headquarters."

He rang; while the detective, delighted at the praises he had received, moved backwards to the door, bowing the while.

Albert was then brought in.

"Have you decided, monsieur," asked the judge of inquiry without preamble, "to give an account of how you spent Tuesday evening?"

"I have already given it, monsieur."

"No, monsieur, you have not; and I regret to say that you have told me a falsehood."

Albert, at this apparent insult, turned red; and his eyes flashed.

"I know all that you did on that evening," continued

the judge; "because Justice, as I have already said, is ignorant of nothing that it is important for it to know."

He sought Albert's eye, met it, and said slowly,—

"I have seen Mademoiselle Claire d'Arlanges.

At that name, the prisoner's features, restrained by a firm resolve not to betray himself, relaxed.

The immense sensation of delight which he must have felt can easily be imagined. He was like a man who escapes by a miracle from an imminent danger which he had despaired of avoiding.

But he made no reply.

"Mademoiselle d'Arlanges," continued the judge, "has told me where you were on Tuesday evening."

Albert still hesitated.

"I am not setting a trap for you," added the judge. "I give you my word of honor. She has told me all, you understand?"

This time Albert decided to speak.

His explanations corresponded almost exactly with Claire's, —not one detail more. Henceforth, doubt was impossible.

Mademoiselle d'Arlanges' reliability had not been shaken. Either Albert was innocent, or she was his accomplice.

Could she knowingly be the accomplice of this dreadful crime? No; she could not even be suspected of it.

But now where to find the assassin?

For, in the sight of Justice, when a crime is once discovered, there must be a criminal.

"You see, monsieur," said the judge severely to Albert, "you did deceive me. You risked your life, monsieur, and what is still more serious, you exposed me, you exposed Justice, to a most deplorable mistake. Why did you not tell me the truth?"

"Monsieur," replied Albert, "Mademoiselle d'Aranges, in according me a meeting, trusted in my honor."

"And you would have died rather than speak of this interview?" interrupted Daburon with a touch of irony. "That is very fine, monsieur, worthy of the days of chivalry!"

"I am not the hero that you suppose, monsieur," replied the prisoner simply. "If I said that I did not count on Claire, I should be telling a falsehood; I was only waiting for her. I knew that, on learning of my arrest, she would brave every thing to save me. But they might have hid it from her; that was my only fear. In that case, however they might have construed my silence, I think I should not have spoken her name."

There was no appearance of bravado. What Albert said, he thought and felt. Daburon repented his irony.

"Monsieur," he said kindly, "you must return to your prison. I cannot release you yet; but you will be no longer in solitary confinement. You will be treated with every attention due a prisoner whose innocence is at least probable."

Albert bowed, and thanked him. He was then removed by the garde.

"We are now ready for Gevrol," said the judge to his clerk.

The chief of detectives was absent: they had inquired for him at the prefecture; but his witness, the man with the rings in his ears, was without, in the gallery.

They told him to enter.

He was one of those short, thickset men, powerful as oaks, of an iron frame, who look as though they could carry almost any weight on their broad shoulders.

His white hair and beard made his red skin, burnt, scorched, tanned by the inclemencies of the weather, by the storms of the sea and the sun of the tropics, appear the more hard favored and ugly.

He had large hands, blackened, hard, callous, with the thumbs so broad and knotted that they must have had the pressure of a vise.

Large rings, in the form of an anchor hung from his ears. He wore the costume of a well-to-do Norman fisher, when he is dressed for a visit to the city, or for a journey.

The sheriff was obliged to force him into the office.

The wolf from the coast was frightened and abashed.

He advanced, balancing himself first on one leg, then on the other, with that irregular walk of the sailor, who, missing the rolling and tossing of the ocean, is surprised to find beneath his feet any thing so immovable as *terra firma*.

To give himself confidence, he fumbled over his soft felt hat, adorned with little lead saints, after the fashion of king Louis XI. of illustrious memory, and adorned still more with a round *gances de laine*, made by some young country girl, in the primitive style of four or five pins placed in a bit of cork.

Daburon examined him, and saw his worth at a glance.

There was no doubt but what this was the red-faced man described by one of the witnesses from Jonchère.

It was impossible also to doubt the honesty of the man. His face breathed open-heartedness and goodness.

"Your name?" demanded the judge of inquiry.

"Marie Pierre Lerouge."

"You are, then, some relation of Claudine Lerouge?"

"Her husband, monsieur."

What, the husband of the victim, alive, and the police ignorant of even his existence!

That was Daburon's first thought.

What, then, does this wonderful progress in invention accomplish?

To-day, precisely as twenty years ago, when Justice is in doubt, it requires the same inordinate loss of time and money to obtain the slightest information.

On Friday, they had written to inquire about Claudine's past life; it was now Monday, and no reply had arrived.

And yet photography was in existence, and the electric telegraph. They had at their service a thousand means, formerly unknown; and they made no use of them.

"All the world," said the judge, "believed her a widow. She herself pretended to be one."

"Yes; it was an arrangement between ourselves. I told her that I would have nothing more to do with her."

"Indeed? Well, you know, I suppose, that she is dead,—that she was the victim of a dreadful crime?"

"The officer who brought me here told me of it, monsieur," replied the sailor, his face darkening. "She was a wretch!" he added in a deep tone.

"How? You, her husband, revile her?"

"I have good reason to, monsieur. Ah, my dead father, who foresaw it all at the time, warned me! I laughed, when he said, 'Take care, or she will dishonor you.' He was right. For her sake, I have been hunted

down by the police, just like some skulking thief. Everywhere that they have inquired after me with a description, people will say, 'Ah, ha, he has committed some crime!' And here I am before a court of justice! Ah monsieur, what a disgrace! The Lerouges have been honest people, from father to son, since the world began. Inquire through the country. They will tell you, 'Lerouge's word is as good as another man's writing.' Yes, she was a wicked woman; and I have often told her that she would come to a bad end."

"You told her that?"

"More than a hundred times, monsieur."

"Why? Come, my friend, be assured; your honor is not at stake here: no one doubts you. When did you warn her so wisely?"

"Ah, a long time ago, monsieur," replied the sailor; "the first time was more than thirty years back. She had ambition in her very blood; she wished to mix herself in the intrigues of the great. It was that that ruined her. She said that you got money for preserving their secrets; and I said that you got disgrace along with it. To put up your hands to hide the villainies of the rich, and to expect happiness from it, is like making your bed of thorns, in the hope of sleeping well. But she had got it into her head; and it couldn't be got out."

"You were her husband," objected Daburon; "you had the right to command her obedience."

The sailor struck his head, and heaved a deep sigh.

"Alas, monsieur! it was I who did the obeying."

To proceed by short inquiries with a witness, when you have no idea of the information he brings, is but to lose time in attempting to gain it. When you think you are approaching the important fact, you may be just avoiding it. It is much better to give the witness the

rein, and to listen, putting him on the track only when he gets too far away. It is the surest and easiest method. This was the course Daburon pursued, all the time cursing Gevrol's absence, as he by a single word could have cut off a good half of the examination, whose importance, by the way, the judge did not even suspect.

"In what intrigues did your wife mingle?" asked the magistrate. "Go on, my friend, tell me exactly; here, you know, we must have not only the truth, but the whole truth."

Lerouge placed his hat on a chair. Then he began alternately to twirl his fingers, and snap them, and to scratch his head violently. It was his way of arranging his ideas.

"I must tell you," he began, "that it is thirty-five years since I fell in love with Claudine, at St. Jean. She was a bright, neat, fascinating girl, with a voice sweeter than honey. She was the most beautiful girl in the country, straight as a mast, supple as a willow, as fine and strong as a ship of the line. Her eyes sparkled like old cider. She had black hair, white teeth, and her breath was sweeter than the sea-breeze. The difficulty was, that she hadn't a sou, while our family were in easy circumstances. Her mother, who had been a widow for some thirty-six years, was not, saving your presence, much respected; and my father was the honestest man alive. When I spoke to the old fellow of marrying Claudine, he swore fiercely; and eight days after, he sent me to Porto on a schooner belonging to one of our neighbors, pretending that it was for change of air. I came back, at the end of six months, thinner than a marling spike, but more in love than ever. Recollections of Claudine scorched me like a fire. I was fool

enough to give up eating and drinking. I felt that she loved me a little in return, seeing that I was a stout young fellow, and more than one girl had set her cap for me. Then my father, seeing that he could do nothing, that I was wasting away without saying 'boo!' and was in a fair way to join my mother in the cemetery, decided to let me complete my folly. So one evening, after we had returned from fishing, and I got up from supper without tasting it, he said to me, 'Marry the hag, and stop this sort of thing.' I remember it distinctly; because, at hearing the old fellow call my love such a name, I flew into a passion, and almost wanted to kill him. Ah, one never gains any thing by marrying in opposition to one's parents!"

The brave sailor wandered in the midst of his recollections. He was very far from his story.

The judge of inquiry attempted to bring him back into the right path.

"Let us come to our business," he said.

"I am going to, monsieur; but it is necessary to begin at the beginning. I married. That evening, after the ceremony, and when the relatives and invited guests had departed, I went to join my wife, when I perceived my father all alone in one corner weeping. The sight touched my heart; and I had a foreboding of evil; but it quickly passed away. It is so delightful, those first six months with a dearly loved wife! You seem to be surrounded by mists, that change the very stones into palaces and temples so completely that novices are taken in. For two years, in spite of a few little quarrels, every thing went on nicely. Claudine managed me like a charm. Ah, she was cunning! She seized, bound, carried me to market and sold me, while I was totally unconscious. Her great fault was her extravagance. All

that I earned,—and my business was very prosperous,—she put on her back. Every week there was some new ornament, dresses, jewels, bonnets, the devil's baubles, which merchants invent for the perdition of the female sex. The neighbors chattered; but I thought it was all right. At the baptism of our son, who was called Jacques after my father, to please her, I spent, regardless of my usual economy, more than three hundred pistoles,—the very sum with which I had intended buying a meadow that lay in the midst of our property."

Daburon was boiling over with impatience; but what could he do?

"Go on, go on," he said every time Lerouge made the slightest appearance of stopping.

"I was well enough pleased," continued the sailor, "until one morning I saw one of the Count de Commarin's servants entering our house, their chateau being only a quarter of a mile from our house on the other side of the town. There was something peculiar about this Germain, that I didn't like at all. Then it was said that he had been mixed up in that affair of poor Thomassine, a young girl of our family who attended on the countess, and who one day suddenly disappeared. I asked my wife what the fellow wanted; she replied that he had come to engage her services as wet nurse. I couldn't understand it; for our means were sufficient to allow Claudine to keep all her milk for our own child. But she gave me the very best of reasons. She wanted to earn a little money, being ashamed of doing nothing, while I was killing myself with work. She wanted to save, to economize; so that before long I might not be obliged to go to sea any more. She was to get such a good price, that, in a very little while, we could save enough to replace the three hundred pistoles,

and buy the meadow after all. That confounded meadow decided me."

"Did she not tell you of the commission with which she was charged?"

This question astonished Lerouge. He thought that it was said very properly that justice sees and knows every thing.

"Not then," he answered; "but you shall see. Eight days after, the postman brought a letter, asking her to come to Paris to get the child. It arrived in the evening. 'Very well,' said she, 'I will start to-morrow by the diligence.' I didn't say a word then; but next morning, when she was about to take her seat in the diligence, I declared that I was going with her. She didn't seem at all angry. On the contrary, she seemed pleased; at which of course I was delighted. At Paris, she was to get the little one at Madame Gerdy's, who lived on the Boulevard. We arranged that she was to go alone, while I waited for her at our inn. After she had gone, I grew jealous. I went out in about an hour, and prowled about Madame Gerdy's house, making inquiries of the servants and of the passers by, until I discovered that she was the mistress of the Count de Commarin. Of course I was in a passion; and, if I had been master, my wife should have gone back without the little scamp. A nice sort of thing to be mixed up in, to be sure, I thought."

The judge of inquiry moved uneasily in his chair. "Will this man never end?" he muttered.

"Yes, you are perfectly right," he said; "but never mind your thoughts. Go on, go on!"

"Claudine, monsieur, was more obstinate than a mule. After three days of violent discussion, and by

the wicked snares of kissing and embracing, she tore from me a reluctant consent. Then she told me that we were not to return home by diligence. The lady, who feared the fatigue of the journey for her child, had arranged that we should carry him back by short stages in her carriage, and drawn by her horses. That was keeping up grand style. I was ass enough to be delighted, because it gave me a chance to see the country at my leisure. We were installed with the children, mine and the other, in an elegant carriage, drawn by magnificent animals, driven by a coachman in livery. My wife was mad with joy, and chinked the gold in my face. I was angry, as an honest husband should be, who sees money in the family which he didn't earn. At seeing my countenance, Claudine, hoping to pacify me, resolved to tell me the whole truth. 'See here,' she said to me,—

Lerouge stopped, and, changing his tone said,—

"You understand that it is my wife who is speaking?"

"Yes, yes. Go on."

"She said to me, shaking her purse, 'See here, my man, we shall never want again; and here's the reason: the count, who has a legitimate child of the same age as this, wishes that this youngster shall bear his name instead of the other; and this can only be accomplished through me. On the road, we are to meet at an inn, where we are to lodge, Germain and the nurse to whom they have entrusted the legitimate child: we are to be put in the same chamber; and, during the night, I am to exchange the little ones, as they are very much alike, one for the other. The count is to give eight thousand francs for it, and an annuity of a thousand francs.'"

"And you," cried the judge, "you, who call yourself an honest man permitted such a villainy, when one word would have been sufficient to prevent it?"

"Excuse me, monsieur," remonstrated Lerouge; "if you would only let me finish."

"Well, go on."

"I could say nothing, then, I was so choked with rage. I was dismayed. But she burst out laughing,—she was always afraid of me when I asserted myself,—and said, 'What a fool you are! Listen, before you sour like a dish of milk. The count is the only one who wants this change made; and he is the one that's to pay for it. His mistress, this little one's mother, doesn't want it at all; but she seems to consent, so as not to quarrel with her lover, and because she has got a plan of her own. She took me aside, during my visit in her room; and, after having made me swear secrecy on a crucifix, she told me this plan. She said that she couldn't bear the idea of separating herself from her babe forever, and of bringing up another's child; so she said, that, if I would agree not to change the children, keeping mum about it to the count, she would give me ten thousand francs down, and guarantee me an annuity equal to what the count was to give me. She declared, also, that she could easily find out whether I kept my word, as she had made a mark of recognition on her little one. She didn't show me the mark; and I have examined him carefully, but can't find it. Do you understand now? I am simply to take care of this little fellow here. I am to tell the count that I have made the exchange. We fill our pockets from both sides; and our little Jacques will be a rich man. What do you think of your wife now? Has she more clev-

erness than you, eh?' That, monsieur, is word for word what Claudine said to me."

The rough sailor drew from his pocket a large blue-checked handkerchief, and blew his nose so violently that the windows shook. It was his way of weeping.

Daburon was confounded.

Since the beginning of this wretched affair, he had encountered astonishment after astonishment. Scarcely had he got his ideas in order on any point, when something new arose which utterly routed them again.

He felt confused. What was this new and grave information? What did it mean?

He longed to investigate it instantly; but he saw that Lerouge was getting on with difficulty, laboriously disentangling his memories, guided by a well-stretched thread, which the least interruption would break.

"What Claudine proposed to me," continued the sailor, "was villainous; and I was an honest man. But she kneaded me to her will as easily as a baker kneads a patè. She overcame my heart; she made me see that white as snow which was really as black as ink. How I loved her! She proved to me that we were wronging no one, and that we were making little Jacques's fortune and I was silenced. At evening, we arrived at some village, and the coachman, stopping the carriage before an inn, told us we were to lodge there. We entered, and who do you think we saw? That scamp, Germain, with a nurse, carrying a child so exactly like the one we had that I was startled. They had journeyed there, like ourselves, in one of the count's carriages. A suspicion came over me. How could I be sure that Claudine had not invented the second story to pacify me? She was certainly capable of it. I was

enraged. I would consent to the one wickedness, but not to the other. I resolved not to lose sight of our little chap, swearing that they shouldn't cheat me: so I kept him all the evening on my knees; and, to make it the surer, I tied my handkerchief about his waist. Ah! their plan was well laid. After supper they spoke of turning in; and then it was found that there were only two rooms and two beds to spare in the house. It seemed as though it was built expressly for our scheme. The innkeeper said that the two nurses might sleep in one room and Germain and myself in the other. You understand, monsieur? Add to this, that during the entire evening I had surprised looks of intelligence passing between my wife and that rascally servant, and you can imagine how furious I was. It was conscience that spoke; and I was trying to silence it. I knew very well that I was doing wrong; and I almost wished myself dead. Why is it these scamps can almost twist an honest man's spirit around like a weather-cock with every breath of their rascality?"

Daburon's only reply was a blow of his fist, almost powerful enough to break his desk.

Lerouge at that proceeded more quickly.

"As for me, I stopped the business, pretending to be too jealous to leave my wife a minute. Every thing turned out as I wished. The other nurse went into the room first. Claudine and I followed soon afterwards. My wife laid down in her clothes by the side of the other nurse and child. I installed myself in a chair near the bed, determined to keep one eye open, and to mount close watch. I put out the candle, in order to let the women sleep; as for me, I could scarcely think. My ideas drove away sleep; and I thought of my father, and what he would say, if he ever knew

what I was doing. Towards midnight, I heard Claudine moving. I held my breath. She arose. Was she going to change the children? At one moment, I thought not; the next, I felt sure she was. I was beside myself; and seizing her by the arm, I commenced to beat her roughly, letting loose all that I had on my heart. I spoke in a loud voice, as on a ship in a high wind. I swore like a fiend. I raised a frightful disturbance. The other nurse cried out, as if she were having her throat cut. At this uproar, Germain rushed in with a lighted candle. The sight of him finished me. Not knowing what I was doing, I drew from my pocket a Spanish knife, which I always carried, and, seizing the cursed baby, I ran the blade across his arm, crying, 'This fellow at least can't be changed without my knowing it; he is marked for life!'

Lerouge could go on no further.

Great drops of sweat stood upon his forehead, and flowing down his cheeks, lodged in the deep wrinkles of his face.

He panted; and the stern glance from the judge oppressed him, harassed him, urging him on, just as the whip urges on the negro overcome with fatigue.

"The wound on the little fellow," he continued, "was terrible. It bled dreadfully; and he might have died: but I didn't stop at that. I was troubled about the future, about what might happen afterwards; so I determined to write out all that had occurred, and to have all sign it. This was done: we all four signed. Germain didn't dare resist; for I spoke with knife in hand. He wrote his name first, begging me only to say nothing about it to the count, swearing that, for his part, he would never breathe a word of it, and pledging the other nurse to a like secrecy."

"And have you kept this paper?" asked Daburon.

"Yes, monsieur: and as the officer, to whom I confessed all, advised me to bring it with me, I went to the place where I always kept it; and I have it here."

"Give it to me."

Lerouge took from the pocket of his roundabout an old parchment pocket-book, fastened with a leather strap and drew out a paper yellowed by age and careful hiding.

"Here it is," said he. "The paper hasn't been opened since that cursed night."

As the judge unfolded it, ashes fell out, which had been used to keep the writing, when wet, from blotting.

It was really a brief description of the scene, described by the old sailor. The four signatures were all there.

"What has become of the witnesses who signed this paper?" muttered the judge, speaking to himself.

Lerouge thought the question was put to him.

"Germain is dead," he replied; "I have been told that he was killed in some broil or other. Claudine has been assassinated; but the other nurse still lives. She told the affair to her husband, I know; for he hinted as much to me. Her name is Brossette; and she lives in the village of Commarin itself."

"Is there any thing else?" asked the judge, after having taken down the name and address of this woman.

"The next day, monsieur, Claudine tried to pacify me, and to extort a promise of silence. The child was hardly sick at all; but he retained an enormous scar on his arm."

"Was Madame Gerdy kept in ignorance of what had passed?"

"I do not think so, monsieur; but I am not sure."

"How? not sure?"

"Yes, monsieur. You see my ignorance came of what happened afterwards."

"What did happen?"

The sailor hesitated.

"That, monsieur, concerns only me and—"

"My friend," interrupted the judge, "you are an honest man, I believe; in fact, I am sure. But once in your life, influenced by a wicked woman, you did wrong,—you became an accomplice in a very great crime. Repair that error, by speaking truly now. All that is said here, and which is not directly connected with the crime, remains secret; even I will forget it immediately. Fear nothing; and, if you experience some humiliation, remember it is your punishment for the past."

"Alas, monsieur," answered the sailor, "I have been already punished; it is a long time since my trouble began. Money, wickedly acquired, brings no good. On arriving home, I bought the wretched meadow for much more than it was worth; and, the day I walked over it, feeling that it was actually mine, closed my happiness. Claudine was a coquette; but she had vices still worse. When she realized how much money we had, these vices burst forth, just as a fire smouldering at the bottom of the hold, bursts forth when you open the hatches. Instead of the slight eater she had been, her appetite got to be enormous enough, saving your presence, to strike you with horror. There was feasting in our house without end. When I would go to sea, she would en-

tain the worst scoundrels in the country; and there was nothing too good or too expensive for them. She took to drinking, too; so that she was half her time far from sober. One night when she thought me at Rouen, I unexpectedly returned. I entered, and found her with the head bailiff of the town. I might have killed him, like the vermin that he was: it was my right; but I had pity on him. I took him by the neck and pitched him out the window, without opening it. It didn't kill him, more's the pity! Then I fell upon my wife, and beat her until she couldn't stir."

Lerouge spoke in a harsh voice, now and then thrusting his restless hands into his eyes.

"I pardoned her," he continued; "and the man who beats his wife and then pardons her is lost. In the future, she only takes better precautions,—becomes more of a hypocrite. In the mean while, Madame Gerdy had taken back her child; and Claudine had nothing more to restrain her. Protected and counselled by her mother, whom she had taken to live with us and who took care of our Jacques, she managed to deceive me for more than a year. I thought she had recovered her better senses; but not at all: she lived a terrible life. My house became the resort of all the good-for-nothing rogues in the country, for whom my wife brought out bottles of wine and brandy; and, while I was away at sea, they got drunk promiscuously. When money failed, she wrote to the count or his mistress; and the orgies continued. Occasionally I had doubts which disturbed me; and then without reason, for a simple yes or no, I would beat her until she was even more thirsty, and after that pardon like a coward, like an imbecile. It was a hard life. I don't know which gave me the most pleasure, embracing her or beating her.

Everybody in the village despised me, and turned their backs on me; they believed me an accomplice or a willing dupe. I heard, afterwards, that they believed I shared the profits of my wife's conduct; while in reality there were no profits. At all events, they wondered where all the money came from that was spent in my house. To distinguish me from a cousin of mine, also named Lerouge, they tacked on an infamous word to my name. What disgrace! And I knew nothing of all the scandal,—no, nothing. Would that I had never married! Fortunately, though, my father was dead."

Daburon pitied him sincerely.

"Rest yourself, my friend," he said; "wait an instant."

"No," replied the sailor, "I would rather get through with it quickly. One man, the priest, had the charity to tell me of it. Never had such a thing happened to a Lerouge! Without losing a moment, I sought a lawyer, and asked him how an honest man ought to act who had had the misfortune to marry such a woman. He said that nothing could be done. To go to law was simply to publish one's own dishonor; while a separation would accomplish nothing. When once a man has given his name to a woman, he told me, he could no longer take it back: he had shared it with her for the rest of her life; she had the right to keep it. She may sully it, cover it with mire, drag it from wine-shop to wine-shop; and the husband can do nothing. That being the case, my course was soon taken. That same day I sold the meadow and sent the price of it to Claudine, wishing to keep nothing of the price of shame. I then drew up a paper, authorizing her to use our property, but not allowing her either to sell or mortgage it. Then I wrote a letter to her, in which I told

her that she need never expect to speak with me again ; that I was nothing more to her, and that she might look upon herself as a widow : and that night I went away with my son."

" And what became of your wife after your departure? "

" I cannot say, monsieur ; I only know that she quitted the country a year after I did."

" You have never seen her since? "

" Never."

" But you were at her house three days before this crime was committed."

" That is true, monsieur ; but that was absolutely necessary. I had been at much trouble to find her : no one knew what had become of her. Fortunately my notary was able to procure Madame Gerdy's address. He wrote to her ; and that is how I knew that Claudine was living at Jonchère. I had just come from Rouen. Capt. Gervaise, who is a friend of mine, offered to bring me to Paris on his boat ; and I accepted. Ah, monsieur, what a shock I experienced when I entered her house ! My wife did not know me ! By constantly telling the world that I was dead, she had without a doubt ended by believing it herself. When I told my name, she fell back. The wretched woman had not changed in the least ; she had by her side a glass and a bottle of brandy—"

" All this doesn't explain why you were seeking your wife."

" It was on Jacques's account, monsieur, that I went. The little boy has grown to be a man ; and he is anxious to marry. For that, his mother's consent is necessary ; and I was taking to Claudine a paper, which the notary had drawn up, and which she signed. Here it is now."

Daburon took the paper, and appeared to read it attentively. After a moment he asked,—

“Have you tried to think who could have assassinated your wife?”

Lerouge made no reply.

“Have you had suspicions of any one?” persisted the judge.

“Well, monsieur,” replied the sailor, “what can I say? It might be that Claudine had wearied out these people from whom she drew money, like water from a well; or perhaps, getting drunk some day, she blabbed too freely.”

The testimony being as full as possible, Daburon discharged Lerouge, at the same time advising him to wait for Gevrol, who would take him to a hotel, where he might wait, at the disposal of justice, until further orders.

“All your expenses will be repaid you,” added the judge.

Lerouge had scarcely turned on his heel, when an event grave, extraordinary, unheard of, unprecedented, took place in the office of the judge of inquiry.

Constant, the serious, impassive, immovable, deaf and dumb Constant, arose and spoke.

He broke a silence of fifteen years. He forgot himself so far as to offer an opinion.

He said,—

“This, monsieur, is a most extraordinary affair.”

Very extraordinary, truly, thought Daburon, putting to rout all predictions, all preconceived opinions.

Why had he, the judge, moved with such deplorable haste? Why, before risking any thing, had he not waited to possess all the elements of this weighty matter, to hold all the threads of this complicated plot?

Justice is accused of slowness; but it is this very slowness that constitutes its strength and surety, its almost infallibility.

One cannot know, on the instant, what course the testimony will take.

There is no knowing what facts investigations apparently useless may reveal.

The dramas of the court of assize lose much by not observing the unities.

When the labyrinth of the various passions and motives seems inextricable, an unknown personage presents himself, coming from, no one knows where; and it is he who brings on the denouement.

Daburon, usually the most prudent of men, had considered as simple one of the most complex of cases. He had acted in a mysterious crime, which demanded the utmost caution, as carelessly as though it were a case of simple misdemeanor. Why? Because his memory had not left free his deliberation, his judgment, his discernment. He had feared equally appearing weak and appearing revengeful. Thinking himself sure of his facts, he had been carried away by his animosity. And yet how often had he deceived himself with the idea of duty! But then, when you are at all doubtful about your duty, you are always on a false track.

The singular part of it all was, that the faults of the judge of inquiry sprang from his very honesty. He had been led astray by a too great refinement of conscience. The scruples which troubled him had filled his mind with phantoms, had pushed him even to a passionate animosity.

Calmer now, he examined the matter more soundly. As a whole, thank heaven! there was nothing done

which could not be repaired. He accused himself, however, none the less hardly. Chance alone had stopped him. On the instant, he resolved that this examination should be his last. His profession henceforth could inspire him only with an unconquerable loathing. Then his interview with Claire had opened all the old wounds in his heart; and they bled more dreadfully than ever. He felt, in despair, that his life was broken, ruined. A man may feel so, when all women are as nothing to him except one, whom he may never hope to possess.

Too religious to think of suicide, he asked himself with anguish what would become of him when he should throw aside his judge's robes.

Then he turned again to the business in hand. In any case, innocent or guilty, Albert was really the Viscount de Commarin, the count's legitimate son. But was he guilty? Plainly not.

"I think," he cried out suddenly, "I had better speak to the Count de Commarin. Constant, send to his house and bring him here at once; if he is not at home, have him sought for."

Daburon felt that an unpleasant duty was before him. He should have to say to the old gentleman, "Monsieur, I was mistaken about your legitimate son; you have still the right one with you." What a position, not only painful, but bordering on the ridiculous! As a compensation, though, he could tell him that Albert was innocent.

To Noel he must also tell the truth, must hurl him to earth, after having raised him among the clouds. What a blow it would be! But, without a doubt, the count would make him some compensation; at least, he ought to.

"Now," muttered the judge, "who can be the criminal?"

A dark suspicion flashed across his brain, which immediately after appeared to him utterly absurd. He rejected it, then thought of it again. He turned and returned it, examined it in all its various aspects. He was almost decided, when M. de Commarin entered.

Daburon's messenger had arrived just as he was alighting from his carriage, on returning with Claire from Madame Gerdy's.

CHAPTER XVIII.

PERE TABARET had spoken; but he had also acted.

Abandoned by the judge of inquiry to his own resources, he went to work without losing a moment's time and without taking a moment's rest.

The story of the cabriolet, drawn by a swift horse, was exact in every particular.

Lavish with his money, the old fellow had gathered together a dozen detectives on leave, or out of work; and at the head of these worthy assistants, seconded by his friend Lecoq, he had gone to Bougival.

He had actually searched the country house by house, with the obstinacy and the patience of a maniac hunting for a needle in a hay-stack.

His efforts were not absolutely wasted.

After three days' investigation, he felt comparatively sure of this; the assassin had not left the cars at Rueil, as all the people of Bougival, Jonchère, and Marly do, but had gone on as far as Chatou.

Tabaret thought he recognized him in a man, de-

scribed to him by the employés at that station as still young, of brown complexion, with a pair of black whiskers, laden with a great coat and an umbrella.

This traveller, who arrived by the train which left Paris for St. Germain at thirty-five minutes past eight in the evening, had appeared very depressed.

On quitting the station, he had started off at a rapid pace on the road which led to Bougival. Upon the way, two men from Marly and a woman from Malmaison had noticed him, and wondered at his long strides. He smoked all the way.

On crossing the bridge which joins the two banks of the Seine at Bougival, he had been again noticed.

It is usual to pay a toll on crossing this bridge; and the supposed assassin had apparently forgotten this circumstance.

He had passed without paying, keeping up his rapid pace, pressing his elbows to his side, husbanding his breath; and the gate-keeper was obliged to rush after him for his pay.

He appeared much provoked at this circumstance, threw down a ten sous' piece, and went on, without waiting for the forty-five centimes due him as change.

Nor was that all.

The station agent at Rueil remembered that, two minutes before the quarter past ten train passed, a traveller arrived agitated, and so out of breath that he could scarcely ask for a ticket—a second class ticket—for Paris.

The appearance of this man corresponded exactly to the description given of him by his employés, at Chatou, and by the gate-keeper at the bridge.

Finally the old man got on the track of an individual who had occupied the same compartment with him.

He proved to be a baker of Asnieres; and he had written to him, asking an interview.

Such was Père Tabaret's balance sheet, when on Monday morning he presented himself at the palais de justice, in order to hear if there had been any information received as to the Widow Lerouge's past life.

He found that none had arrived; but in the gallery he met Gevrol and his man.

The chief of detectives was triumphant, and showed it, too. On seeing Tabaret, he called out,—

"Ah well, my illustrious bird's-nest hunter, what news? Have you found any more mare's nests, since the other day? Ah, you old rogue, you are aiming for my place!"

The old man was sadly changed.

The consciousness of his mistake made him humble and meek. These pleasantries, which a few days before would have made him angry, now did not touch him. Instead of replying, he bowed his head in such a penitent manner that Gevrol was astonished.

"Jeer at me, my good Gevrol," he replied, "mock me without pity: you are right; I deserve it all."

"Ah," said the chief, "you have performed some new masterpiece, my ardent old fellow!"

Père Tabaret shook his head sadly.

"I have delivered up an innocent man," he said; "and justice will not give him back to me."

Gevrol was delighted, and rubbed his hands until he almost wore away the skin.

"This is fine," he sang out, "this is capital. To bring criminals to justice is of no account at all; but to free the innocent, Jove! that is the last touch of art. Papa Tiraucclair, you are a wonder; and I bow before you."

At the same time, he lifted his hat ironically.

"Don't crush me," replied the old fellow. "As you know, in spite of my grey hairs, I am young in the profession. Because chance has served me three or four times I had become foolishly proud. I learned too late that I was not all that I had thought myself. I was but an apprentice, and success had turned my head; while you, Gevrol, you were always my master. In the place of laughing pray help me, aid me with your counsels and your experience. Alone, I can do nothing as well as if I had your assistance."

Gevrol was elated in the highest degree.

Tabaret's submission, which he really thought a great deal of at heart, tickled his pretensions as a detective immensely.

He was softened.

"I suppose," he said patronizingly, "you refer to the Jonchère matter."

"Alas! yes, dear Gevrol, I wished to go on without you; but I have been dished."

Tabaret's old cunning kept his countenance as penitent as that of a sacristan, surprised while cooking meat on Friday; but at heart he was laughing and rejoicing all the while.

"Conceited simpleton!" he thought, "I will flatter you so that you will end by doing just what I want you to."

Gevrol rubbed his nose, put out his lower lip, and said, "Ah,—hem!"

He pretended to hesitate; but it was only because he enjoyed prolonging the old amateur's discomfiture.

"Come," said he at last, "cheer up, Papa Tiraclair. I am a good fellow at heart; and I'll give you a lift. It is kind in me, isn't it? But, to-day, I am entirely too

busy. I am expected below now. Come to me to-morrow morning, and we'll talk it over. But before we part I'll give you a light to find your way with. Do you know who this witness is that I have brought?"

"No; but tell me, my good Gevrol."

"Well, that fellow on the bench there, who is waiting for Monsieur Daburon, is the husband of the victim of the Jonchère tragedy!"

"It is impossible," said Père Tabaret stunned. Then, after reflecting, he added, "you are joking with me."

"No, upon my word. Go ask him his name; he will tell you that he is called Pierre Lerouge."

"She wasn't a widow then?"

"It appears not," replied Gevrol sarcastically, "since there is her happy spouse."

"Whew!" muttered the old fellow. "And does he bring any information?"

In a few sentences, the chief explained to his amateur colleague the story that Lerouge was about to give to the judge of inquiry.

"What do you say to that?" he demanded at the end.

"What do I say to that?" stammered Père Tabaret, whose countenance indicated intense astonishment, "what do I say to that? I don't say any thing. But I think,—no, I don't think at all!"

"A tile has fallen, eh, what?" said Gevrol beaming.

"Say rather a blow of a club," replied Tabaret.

But suddenly he recovered himself, giving his forehead a hard blow with his fist.

"And my baker!" he cried, "to-morrow, then, Gevrol."

"He is crazed," thought the chief of detectives.

The old fellow was sane enough; but he had entirely

forgotten the Asnieres baker, whom he had appointed to meet at his house. He might find him there still.

On the stairway he met Daburon; but he hardly deigned to reply to him.

He was soon out, and trotting like a lean cat along the quays.

"There; we'll fix it all right," he said to himself. "Noel may feel bad; but he shan't suffer. Pshaw! if he likes, I'll adopt him. Tabaret doesn't sound so well as Commarin, but it's at least a name. No matter. Gevrol's story affects in no way Albert's situation nor my convictions. He is the legitimate son; so much the better for him. That doesn't in any way prove his innocence, though, unless I am mistaken. He evidently knows nothing of these surprising circumstances, any more than his father. He must believe, as well as the count, in the substitution having taken place. Madame Gerdy, too, must have been ignorant of these facts; they must have invented some story to explain the scar. But then she must have known that Noel was really her son; for she had placed a mark of recognition upon him, which she of course examined when he was returned to her. Then, when Noel discovered the count's letters, she must have hastened to explain to him—"

Père Tabaret stopped as suddenly as if his path were obstructed by a dangerous reptile.

He was terrified at the conclusion he had reached.

"Noel, then, must be the assassin of the Widow Lerouge, that he might prevent her confessing that the substitution never took place; and he burnt the letters and papers which proved it!"

But he pushed away with horror this supposition, as every honest man drives away a detestable thought which by accident gets into his mind.

"What an old fool I am!" he exclaimed, resuming his walk; "this is the result of the dreadful profession I used to glory in following. Suspect Noel, my boy, my sole heir, the personification of virtue and honor,—Noel, whom ten years of constant intercourse have taught me to esteem and admire to such a degree that I would speak for him as I would for myself? Men of his class must have terrible passions to push them to shedding blood: and I have never known Noel to have but two passions, his mother, and his profession. And I dare even to breathe a suspicion against this noble character! I ought to be whipped. Old fool! isn't the lesson you have already received sufficiently terrible? Will you never be more cautious?"

Thus he reasoned, forcing himself to repel these disquieting thoughts, and restraining his habits of investigation; but in his heart a tormenting voice constantly whispered, "Could it be Noel?"

Père Tabaret arrived at the Rue St. Lazare. Before his door stood an elegant blue coupé, drawn by a magnificent horse. Mechanically he stopped.

"A handsome animal!" he said; "my lodgers must be receiving some fine callers."

They were apparently receiving very bad ones, too; for, at that moment, he saw Clergeot coming out, honest Clergeot, whose presence in a house betrayed ruin just as surely as the presence of undertakers indicate death.

The old detective, who knew everybody, was well acquainted with the honest banker. He had even had business with him once, examining his books.

He stopped him.

"Halloa! you old crocodile," said he; "you have business, then, in my house?"

"So it seems," replied Clergeot dryly, not liking to be treated with such familiarity.

"Hold on!" shouted Père Tabaret.

And, urged by the very natural curiosity of a proprietor very careful about the kind of lodgers he takes, he added,—

"Who the devil are you ruining now?"

"I never ruin any one," replied Clergeot, with an air of offended dignity. "Have you ever had reason to complain of me in our affairs? I think not. Ask the young advocate up there, who does business with me, if you like; he will tell you whether he has reason to regret knowing me."

Tabaret was painfully impressed.

What, Noel, the prudent Noel, one of Clergeot's customers! What could that mean? Perhaps there was no harm in it; but he remembered the fifteen thousand francs of Thursday.

"Yes," said he, wishing to get a little more information, "I know that young Gerdy spends a pretty round sum."

Clergeot was always sensitive, and never left his profession undefended when attacked.

"It isn't he personally," he objected, "who makes the money dance; it's that charming little girl of his. Ah, she's a great one; she'd eat the devil, hoofs, horns, and all!"

What, a mistress,—a creature whom Clergeot himself, fond of the little girls, considered expensive! This revelation, at this time, pierced the old man to the heart. But he dissembled. A gesture, a look, might awaken the usurer's defiance, and close his mouth.

"That's well known," he replied, in as careless a tone

as he could muster; "youth must have something to amuse itself with. But what do you suppose that this little girl costs him a year?"

"Oh, I don't know! He is wrong in not limiting her. According to my calculation, she must have, during the four years that he has had her, cost him in the neighborhood of five hundred thousand francs."

Four years? Five hundred thousand francs!

These words, these figures, burst like a bombshell on Tabaret's brain.

A half million!

In that case, Noel must be utterly ruined. But then—

"It is a great deal," said he, succeeding by desperate efforts in hiding his sufferings; "it is enormous; but then, Gerdy has resources."

"He?" interrupted the usurer, shrugging his shoulders. "Not a bit of it," he added, snapping his fingers; "he is utterly ruined. But, if he owes you money, never fear. He is a sly dog: he is going to get married. I have just renewed his notes for twenty-six thousand francs, on that understanding. *Au revoir*, Monsieur Tabaret."

The usurer hurried away, leaving the poor old fellow standing still as a stone in the street.

He experienced something of that terrible grief which breaks a father's heart, when he begins to realize that his dearly-loved son is perhaps the worst of scoundrels.

And, moreover, such was his confidence in Noel that he struggled with his reason to again resist the suspicion which tormented him. Might not this usurer be slandering the advocate?

People who demand more than ten per cent. are capa-

ble of any thing. Evidently he had exaggerated the extent of Noel's follies.

And, even if it were true, have not many men done just such insane things for women, without ceasing to be honest?

He was about entering his door.

A whirlwind of silk, lace, and velvet barred the passage.

A bright young brunette was coming out.

She jumped as lightly as a bird into the blue coupé.

Père Tabaret was a gallant man, and the young girl was most charming; but he never even glanced at her.

He entered; and beneath the arch he found his porter standing, cap in hand, looking tenderly with his one eye at a twenty franc piece.

"Ah, monsieur," said the man, "such a fine lady, so ladylike! If you had only been here five minutes sooner."

"What lady? why?"

"This fine lady, who just went out, monsieur, she came to inquire about Monsieur Gerdy. She gave me twenty francs for answering her questions. It seems that monsieur is going to be married; and she was evidently much excited at it. Superb creature! I know now why he is out every night."

"Monsieur Gerdy?"

"Yes, monsieur; but I have never spoken to you of it, because he seemed to hide it. He never asked me to open for him: no, he wasn't such a fool. He slipped out by the little back gate. I said to myself, 'He don't want to disturb me: it is very thoughtful on his part; and he seems to enjoy it so.'"

The porter spoke with his eye constantly fixed on the gold piece.

When he raised his head to examine the countenance of his master, Tabaret had disappeared.

"There is another fine fellow!" said the porter to himself. "A hundred sous, that master runs after the superb creature. Run ahead; go it, old graybeard." The porter was right. Père Tabaret did run after the lady in the blue coupé.

He thought, "She will tell me all;" and instantly he was in the street.

He reached it just in time to see the blue coupé turn the corner of the Rue St. Lazare.

"Heavens!" he muttered, "I shall lose sight of her, just when the truth is in my grasp."

He was in one of those states of nervous excitement which call forth prodigies.

He ran to the end of the Rue St. Lazare as rapidly as if he had been a young man of twenty.

Joy! Five steps from him he saw the blue coupé in the Rue Havre, stopped in the midst of a blockade of carriages.

"I have her," he murmured.

He looked all through the neighborhood of the Ouest, that street where unemployed carriages are almost invariably roving; not a carriage!

Gladly would he have cried, like Richard the III.,—

"My kingdom for a hackney coach."

The blue coupé got out of the entanglement, and started off rapidly towards the Rue Tronchet. The old fellow followed after.

He kept his ground. The coupé gained but little upon him.

While he was running in the middle of the road, keeping an eye out for a carriage, he kept saying,—

"Follow on, old fellow, follow on. If you haven't a head, you must use your legs. Why didn't you remember to get this woman's address from Clergeot? You must be sharper than that, my old friend, sharper than that!

"If you want to be a detective, you must be fit for the profession; and every detective ought to have the shanks of a deer."

He thought only of catching up with the blue coupé and of nothing else. But he was losing ground,—plainly losing ground.

He was only half way down the Rue Tronchet, and he broke down: he felt that his limbs could not carry him a hundred steps farther; and the cursed coupé had reached the Madeleine.

Hurrah! a covered hack, going in the same direction with himself, passed by.

He made a sign more despairing than a drowning man's. The sign was seen. He gathered together his last strength, and with a bound jumped up into the vehicle without the aid of the step.

"There," he gasped, "that blue coupé; twenty francs."

"All right," replied the coachman, nodding.

And he covered his ill-conditioned horse with vigorous blows, muttering,—

"A jealous husband following his wife; that's evident. Hi, you rascal!"

As for Père Tabaret, he was a long time in recovering himself, his strength was so completely exhausted.

For nearly a minute, he could not catch his breath. They were soon upon the boulevards. He stood up in the carriage, supporting himself by the driver's seat.

"I don't see the coupé any longer," he said.

"Oh, I see it plainly! But it is drawn by a splendid horse!"

"Yours ought to be a better one. I said twenty francs; I'll make it forty."

The driver whipped up un pityingly, and growled,—

"There is no use talking, I must catch her. For twenty francs, I would have let her escape; for I love the girls, and always help them if I can. But, gracious! Two louis! I wonder how a man who is as ugly as that can be jealous."

Père Tabaret tried every way to occupy his mind with less important matters.

He tried not to reflect, wishing first to see this woman, speak with her, and carefully question her.

He was sure that by one word she would destroy or save her lover.

"What, destroy Noel? Ah, well, yes."

This idea of Noel as the assassin harassed, tormented, pestered his brain, like the moth which coming over and over again, wounds itself at last against the glass, or burns in the flame.

As they passed Chausée d'Antin, the blue coupé was scarcely thirty paces in advance. The driver of the hack turned, and said,—

"The coupé has stopped."

"Then stop also. Don't lose sight of it; but be ready to start again at the same time it does."

Père Tabaret leaned as far as he could out of the hack.

The young girl got out, crossed the pavement, and entered a shop where cashmere and laces were sold.

"There," thought Père Tabaret, "is where the thousand franc notes go! Half a million in four years!"

What can these creatures do with the money so lavishly poured upon them? Do they eat it? On the altar of what caprices do they squander their fortunes? They are the devil's own love potions, given to these idiots to drink, making them ruin themselves for them. They must possess some peculiar art of preparing and spicing pleasure; since, once they get hold of a man, he sacrifices every thing before leaving them."

The hack moved on once more, but soon stopped again.

The coupé made a new pause, this time before a curiosity shop.

"The woman wants to buy out all Paris!" said the old fellow to himself in a passion. "Yes, if Noel committed the crime, it was she who pushed him on. These are my fifteen thousand francs that she is frittering away now. How long will they last her? It must have been for money, then, that Noel murdered this Lerouge woman. He must be the lowest, most infamous of men! What a monster of dissimulation and hypocrisy! And to think that he would be my heir, if I should die here in my rage! Yes, it is written in so many words, 'I leave to my son Noel Gerdy!' If this boy is guilty, there isn't a punishment sufficiently great for him. I wonder if this woman is never going home!"

"This woman" was in no hurry. The day was charming, her toilette irresistible; and she intended showing herself off. She visited three or four more stores, and at last stopped at a confectioner's, where she remained for more than quarter of an hour.

The old fellow, driven to destruction, jumped and stamped in his hack.

It was torture thus to be kept from the key to a ter-

rible enigma by the caprice of a worthless hussy! He was dying to follow her, take her by the arm, and cry out to her,—

“Home, wretched creature, home at once! What are you doing here? Don’t you know that at this moment your lover, he whom you have ruined, is suspected of an assassination? Home, then, that I may question you, that I may learn from you whether he is innocent or guilty; for you can tell me, without a doubt, and I have prepared a fine trap to catch you with. Home, for this anxiety is killing me!”

She returned to her carriage.

It moved on, passed up the Faubourg Montmartre, turned into the Rue Provence, deposited its fair freight at her own door, and drove away.

“She lives here,” said Père Tabaret, with a sigh of relief.

He got off the hack, gave the driver his two louis, bade him wait, and followed the young girl’s footsteps.

“The old fellow is patient,” thought the driver; “but the little brunette is a sly one.”

The old detective opened the door of the porter’s lodge.

“What is the name of the lady who has just entered?” he demanded.

The porter did not seem disposed to reply.

“Her name!” insisted the old man.

The tone was so short, so imperative, that the old porter was upset.

“Madame Juliette Chaffour,” he replied.

“On what floor?”

“The second,—the door opposite you.”

A moment after, the old man was waiting in Madame

Juliette's parlors. Madame was dressing, the chambermaid informed him, and would be down instantly.

Père Tabaret was astonished at the luxury of this parlor. There was nothing flaring, or coarse, or in bad taste. The old fellow who knew a good deal about such things, saw that every thing was of the costliest. The ornaments on the mantel alone must have cost, at the lowest estimation, twenty thousand francs.

"Clergeot," he said, "didn't exaggerate a bit."

Juliette's entrance disturbed his reflections.

She had taken off her dress, and had hastily thrown about her a black dressing-gown, trimmed with cherry satin. Her beautiful hair, slightly disordered after her drive, fell in cascades upon her neck, and was fastened behind her delicate ears. She dazzled Père Tabaret; and yet he perfectly understood such follies.

"You wished to speak with me?" she inquired, bending graciously.

"Madame," replied Père Tabaret, "I am a friend of Noel Gerdy's, I may say his best friend, and"—

"Pray sit down, monsieur," interrupted the lady.

She placed herself on a sofa, just showing the tips of her little feet encased in slippers matching the dress; while the old man sat down in a chair.

"I come, madame," he began, "on very serious business. Your presence at Monsieur Gerdy's house—"

"Ah," cried Juliette to herself, "he knows of my visit already; he must be a detective."

"My dear child—" began Tabaret, paternally.

"Oh! I know, monsieur, what your errand is. Noel has sent you to scold me. He is anxious to prevent my coming to his house. Well, I don't want to go; but it's annoying to have a puzzle for a lover,—a man whom

nobody knows anything about, a riddle in a black coat and white cravat, a sad and mysterious being—”

“ You have been imprudent.”

“ Why? Because he is going to get married? He has told you all about it, then? ”

“ Suppose that that was not true.”

“ Oh, but it is! He told that old shark Clergeot so, who told me. Any way, he must be plotting something in that head of his; for the last month he has been so fickle; he has changed so that I hardly recognize him.”

Père Tabaret was especially anxious to know whether Noel had prepared an *alibi* for the Tuesday of the crime. That for him was the grand question. If he had, he was certainly guilty; if not, he might still be innocent. Madame Juliette, he had no doubt, could make that point perfectly clear.

Consequently he had come with his lesson all prepared, his little trap all set.

The young lady's outburst disconcerted him a little; but he continued, trusting to the chances in conversation,—

“ Will you prevent Noel's marriage, then? ”

“ His marriage! ” cried Juliette, bursting out into a laugh; “ ah, the poor boy! If he meets no worse obstacle than myself, his path will be smooth. Let him marry, this dear Noel, the sooner the better, and let me hear no more of him.”

“ You don't love him, then? ” asked the old fellow, surprised at this amiable frankness.

“ Listen, monsieur. I did love him intensely; but that's all over now. For four years, I have passed an intolerable existence,—I, who am so fond of pleasure. If Noel doesn't leave me, I shall have to leave him. I

am tired of having a lover who blushes for me and despises me."

"If he despises you, my dear, he scarcely shows it here," replied Père Tabaret, casting a significant glance about the room.

"You mean," said the girl, raising herself, "that he spends a great deal for me. It is true. He pretends that he has ruined himself for me; it's very possible. But what's that to me? I am not a hard-hearted woman; and I would much prefer less money and more love. My follies have been inspired by anger and ennui. Monsieur Gerdy treats me like a mercenary woman; and so I act like one. We are quits."

"You know well that he worships you."

"He? I tell you he is ashamed of me. He hides me like a secret crime. You are the first of his friends to whom I have ever spoken. Ask him if he has ever ridden out with me? It would seem as though my very touch was dishonor. Why, no longer ago than last Tuesday, we went to the theatre! He hired an entire box; but do you think that he sat in it with me? Not at all. He slipped away; and I saw no more of him the whole evening."

"How? Were you obliged to return home alone?"

"No. At the end of the play, nearly midnight, he deigned to reappear. Then we went to the opera ball, where we took supper. Ah, that was charming! But, at the ball, he didn't dare to let down his hood, or to take off his mask. At supper, I had to treat him like a perfect stranger, for fear of his friends."

This, then, was the *alibi* prepared in case of trouble.

Less wrapped up in her own passion, Juliette would have noticed Père Tabaret's looks, and would certainly have checked herself.

He was perfectly livid, and trembled like a leaf

"Well," he said, making a superhuman effort to articulate his words, "the supper, I suppose, was none the less gay for that."

"Gay!" repeated the girl, shrugging her shoulders; "you would scarcely have known him. If you ever ask him to dinner, take good care how you allow him to drink. He made as merry over his wine as a drunken sailor. At the second bottle, he was as light headed as a cork; so much so, that he lost every thing he had,—his coat, purse, umbrella, cigar-case—"

Père Tabaret hadn't strength enough to listen longer; he jumped to his feet like a furious madman.

"Miserable wretch!" he cried to himself, "infamous scoundrel! It is he; but I have him."

And he rushed out, leaving Juliette so terrified that she called her maid.

"Child," said she, "I have made some dreadful blunder; have let some secret out. I know I have done wrong; I feel it. That old fellow was no friend of Noel's he came to circumvent me, to lead me by the nose; and he has done it. Without a doubt I have spoken against Noel. What could I have said? I have thought carefully; but I can remember nothing: he must be warned though. I will write him a line, while you get a messenger."

Getting again into the hack, Père Tabaret hurried towards the prefecture of police. Noel an assassin! His hate was now without bounds, as formerly had been his trusting love. He had been cruelly played with, unworthily duped by the vilest, most criminal of men. He thirsted for vengeance; he tried to think of some punishment which was not too small for the crime.

"For he has not only assassinated Claudine," thought

he, "but he has so arranged the whole thing as to have an innocent man accused and condemned. And who knows that he did not kill his poor mother?"

He regretted the abolition of torture, the refined cruelty of the middle ages, quartering, the stake, the wheel.

The guillotine was too quick; the condemned man had scarcely time to feel the cold steel cutting through his muscles; there is nothing but a single twitch of the neck. In trying to soften the pain of death, it had been made nowadays almost a pleasure.

The certainty of confronting Noel, of delivering him up to justice, of taking vengeance upon him, alone kept Tabaret up.

"It is clear," he muttered, "that the wretch forgot those things at the railway, in his haste to rejoin his mistress. Have they yet been called for? If he has had the prudence to go boldly, and get them under a false name, I can see no further proofs against him. The testimony of this Madame Chaffour won't be on my side. The hussy, seeing her lover in danger, will deny what she has just told me: she will assert that Noel quitted her after ten o'clock. But he can't have dared to go to the railway again."

About the middle of the Rue Richelieu, Père Tabaret was taken with a sudden faintness.

"I am going to have an attack, I fear," thought he. "If I die, Noel will escape me, and will still be my heir. A man ought always to keep his will constantly with him, to destroy it, if he wishes."

Twenty paces on, he saw a doctor's sign: he stopped the hack, and rushed into the house.

He was so excited, so beside himself, his eyes had such an expression of wildness, that the doctor was al-

most afraid of this remarkable patient, who cried to him hoarsely,—

“Bleed me!”

The doctor ventured an objection; but already the old fellow had taken off his coat, and drawn up one of his shirt-sleeves.

“Bleed me!” he repeated. “Do you want me to die?”

The doctor finally obeyed; and Père Tabaret came out quieted and relieved.

An hour later, armed with the necessary power, and accompanied by a policeman, he proceeded to the department of lost articles at the railway, to make the necessary search.

His investigations resulted as he had expected.

He found that, on the evening of Shrove Tuesday, there had been found in one of the second class compartments of train forty-five a great coat and an umbrella.

They showed him the articles; and he recognized them as Noel’s.

In one of the pockets of the great coat, he found a pair of pearl gray gloves, torn and soiled, as well as a return ticket from Chatou, which had not been used.

In hurrying on, in pursuit of the truth, Père Tabaret knew only too well what this meant.

His conviction, unwillingly formed when Clergeot disclosed to him Noel’s follies, had been since strengthened by a thousand circumstances. At Juliette’s house he became positively sure; and yet, at this last moment, when doubt became absolutely impossible, in seeing the evidence cleared up, he was depressed.

“On,” he cried at last. “Now to arrest him.”

And, without losing an instant, he hastened to the palais de justice, where he hoped to find the judge of inquiry.

Notwithstanding the lateness of the hour, Daburon had not yet left his office.

He was conversing with the Count de Commarin, giving him the facts revealed by Pierre Lerouge, whom the count had believed dead many years since.

Père Tabaret entered like a whirlwind, too distracted to notice the presence of a stranger.

"Monsieur," he cried, stuttering with rage, "we have got the real assassin! It is he, my adopted son, my heir, Noel!"

"Noel!" repeated Daburon, rising. And then, in a lower tone, he added, "I had suspected it."

"A warrant is necessary at once," continued the old detective. "If we lose a minute, he will slip through our fingers. He will know that he is discovered, if his mistress has time to warn him of my visit. Hasten, monsieur, hasten!"

Daburon opened his lips to ask an explanation; but the old detective continued,—

"That is not yet all. An innocent man, Albert, is still in prison."

"He will not be so an hour longer," replied the magistrate; "a moment before your arrival, I had made arrangements to have him released. But about this other—"

Neither Père Tabaret nor Daburon had noticed the disappearance of the Count de Commarin.

At Noel's name he had gained the door quietly, and rushed into the gallery.

CHAPTER XIX.

NOEL had promised to use every effort,—to attempt even the impossible,—to obtain Albert's release.

He in fact did interview some members of the bar, but managed to be repulsed everywhere.

At four o'clock, he called at the Count de Commarin's house, to inform the count of the slight success he had met.

"The count has gone out," said Denis; "but if you will take the trouble to wait—"

"I will wait," answered Noel.

"Then," replied the valet, "will you please follow me? I have the count's orders to take you into his study."

This trust gave Noel an idea of his new power. He was at home. Henceforth, in this magnificent house, he was to be master,—the heir! His eye, which ran over the entire room, was caught by a genealogical table, hanging above the mantel. He went up to it, and read it.

It was a page, and one of the most illustrious, taken from the golden book of French nobility. Every name which has a place in our history was there. The Commarins had mingled their blood with all the great houses, two of them had even married daughters of the reigning family. A warm glow of pride filled the advocate's heart; his pulse beat quicker: he raised his head haughtily, as he muttered.—

"Viscount de Commarin!"

The door opened. He turned, and saw the count entering.

At once Noel bowed respectfully. He was petrified

by the look of hatred, anger, contempt, on his father's face.

A shiver ran through his veins. His teeth chattered; he saw that he was lost.

"Wretch!" cried the count.

And, dreading his own violence, the old gentleman threw his cane into a corner.

He was unwilling to strike his son; he considered him unworthy of being struck by his hands.

After he had entered, there was a moment of mortal silence which seemed to them both a century.

Both at the same time were filled with bitter thoughts, which would require a volume to transcribe.

Noel took courage, and spoke first.

"Monsieur," he began.

"Silence!" exclaimed the count hoarsely; "keep silent. It may be—heaven forgive me!—that you are my son! Alas, I cannot doubt it now! Wretch! you knew well that you were Madame Gerdy's son. Infamous creature! you have not only committed this murder, but you have caused an innocent man to be charged with your crime. Parricide! you have also killed your mother."

The advocate attempted to stammer forth a protest.

"You killed her," continued the count with increased energy, "if not by poison, at least by your crimes. I understand all now; she was not delirious this morning. But you knew well what she would say. You were listening; and, if you dared to enter at the moment when one word would have destroyed you, it was because you calculated the effect of your presence. It was to you that she spoke that last word, 'Assassin!'"

Little by little, Noel had retired to the end of the room; and he stood leaning against the wall, his head

thrown back, his hair on end, his eye haggard. A convulsive shudder seized him. His face betrayed a terror most horrible to see,—the terror of a discovered criminal.

“I know all, you see,” continued the count; “and I am not alone in that knowledge. At this moment, a warrant of arrest is issued against you.”

A cry of rage, like a hollow rattle, burst from the advocate. His lips, which were hanging through terror, now grew firm. Overwhelmed in the very midst of his triumph, he struggled against his fright. He recovered himself with a look of defiance.

M. de Commarin, without seeming to pay any attention to Noel, approached a desk, and opened a drawer.

“My duty,” said he, “would be to leave you to the hangman who awaits you; but I remember that I have the misfortune to be your father. Sit down; write and sign a confession of your crime. You will then find fire-arms in that drawer. May heaven forgive you!”

The old gentleman moved towards the door. Noel stopped him; and drawing at the same time a revolver from his pocket,—

“Your fire-arms are needless, monsieur,” he said: “my precautions, you see, are taken; they will never take me alive. But—”

“But?” repeated the count harshly.

“I must tell you, monsieur,” continued the advocate coldly, “that I do not see fit to kill myself,—at least, at present.”

“Ah!” cried M. de Commarin in disgust, “you are a coward!”

“No, monsieur, not a coward; but I will not give in until I am sure that every opening is closed against me,—that I cannot save myself.”

"Miserable wretch!" said the count, threatening; "then I must do it."

He moved towards the drawer; but Noel closed it with a slam.

"Listen to me, monsieur," said the advocate in that hoarse, quick tone, which imminent danger gives a man; "do not waste in vain words the few moments' respite left me. I have committed a crime, it is true, and I do not attempt to justify it; but who laid the foundation of it, if not yourself? Now, you do me the favor of offering me a pistol. Thanks. I must decline it. This generosity is not through any regard for me: you only wish to avoid the scandal of my trial, and the disgrace which cannot fail to reflect upon your name."

The count was about to reply.

"Give me leave," interrupted Noel imperiously. "I decline killing myself; I wish to save my life, if possible. Supply me with the means of escape; and I promise you that I will die before I am captured. I say, supply me with means; for I have not twenty francs to my name. My last bank note was burnt the day when—you understand me. There isn't enough in my mother's house to give her a decent burial. Then, some money."

"Never!"

"Then I will deliver myself up; and you will see the effect upon the name you hold so dear!"

The count, mad with rage, jumped to his desk for a pistol. Noel placed himself before him.

"Oh, do not struggle!" said he coldly; "I am the strongest."

M. de Commarin recoiled.

By thus speaking of the trial, of scandal, disgrace, the advocate had made an impression upon him.

For a moment hesitating between love for his name

and his burning desire to see this wretch punished, the old gentleman stood undecided.

Finally his feeling for his position triumphed.

"Let us end this," he said in a voice trembling and filled with the utmost contempt; "let us end this disgraceful scene. What do you ask?"

"I have told you, money,—all that you have here. But decide quickly."

On Saturday the count had drawn from his bankers the sum he had set aside for fitting up the rooms of him whom he thought his legitimate child.

"I have eighty thousand francs here," he replied.

"That's very little," said the advocate; "but give them to me. I had counted upon five hundred thousand francs from you. If I succeed in escaping my pursuers, you must hold at my disposal the balance, four hundred and twenty thousand francs. Will you pledge yourself to give them to me at the first demand? I will find some means of sending for them, without risk to myself. At that price, you need never fear seeing me again."

For his only reply, the count opened a little iron chest imbedded in the wall, and drew out a roll of bank notes, which he threw at Noel's feet.

A gleam of anger flashed in the advocate's eyes, as he took one step towards his father.

"Oh, do not push me too far!" he said threateningly; "people who, like me, having nothing to lose, are dangerous. I may free myself, and—"

He bent down, however, and picked up the notes.

"Will you give me your word," he continued, "to let me have the rest?"

"Yes."

"Then I am going. Do not fear. I will be faithful to our compact: they shall not take me alive. Adieu!

my father: you are the true criminal; but you will escape punishment. Ah, heaven is not just! I curse you."

When, an hour later, the servants entered the count's study, they found him stretched on the floor, his face against the carpet, with scarcely a sign of life.

But Noël left the house, and staggered up the Rue Université.

It seemed to him that the pavement reeled beneath his feet, and that every thing about him was turning.

But, at the same time, strange to relate, he felt an incredible relief, almost delight.

Honest Balan's theory was correct.

It was ended. All was over; he was ruined. No more anguish now, no more useless fright and foolish terrors, no more dissembling, struggling. Henceforth there was nothing more to fear. His horrible rôle played to the bitter end, he could lay aside his mask and breathe freely.

An irresistible weariness succeeding to the highly-wrought passion which had sustained him before the count destroyed his impudent arrogance. All the springs of his organization, stretched for a week beyond their limits, now relaxed and gave way. The fever which for the last eight days had kept him up failed him now; and, with the weariness, he felt an imperative need of rest. He experienced a great void, an utter indifference for every thing.

His insensibility bore a striking resemblance to that felt by people afflicted with sea-sickness; who care for nothing, whom no sensations are capable of moving, who have neither strength nor courage to think, and who could not be aroused from their lethargy by the presence of any great danger, not even of death itself.

They might have arrested him then; and he would never have thought of resisting, nor of defending himself: he could not have taken a step to hide, to fly, to save himself in any way.

For a moment he had serious thoughts of giving himself up as a prisoner, in order to secure peace, to gain quiet, to free himself from this anxiety about his safety.

But he struggled against this dull stupor. The reaction came, shaking off this weakness of mind and body.

The consciousness of his position, of his danger, came to him. He foresaw, with horror, the scaffold, as one sees the abyss by the flashes of lightning:

"I must save my life," he thought; "but how?"

That mortal terror which deprives the assassin of even ordinary common sense seized him.

He looked eagerly about him, and thought he noticed three or four passers by look at him curiously. His terror increased.

He began running in the direction of the Latin quarter without purpose, without aim, running for the sake of running, to escape himself,—like Crime, as represented by the painter, fleeing under the lashes of the furies.

He very soon stopped however, seeing that this extraordinary procedure attracted attention.

It seemed that every one was on the point of denouncing him as the murderer: he thought he read contempt and horror upon every face, suspicion in every eye.

He walked along, instinctively repeating to himself,—
"I must follow some plan!"

But, in this horrible excitement, he was incapable of seeing any thing, of thinking, planning, determining, deciding.

When he first thought of the crime, he had said to himself, "I may be discovered." And, with this in sight, he had perfected a plan which should put him beyond all fear of pursuit. He would do this and that; he would have recourse to this ruse, he would take that precaution. Useless forethought. Nothing of this plan seemed feasible now. They were seeking for him; and he could think of no place in the whole world where he would feel perfectly safe.

He was near the Odeon, when a thought quicker than a flash of lightning lit up the darkness of his brain.

He thought that they were doubtless already in pursuit of him; his description would be given everywhere; his white cravat and well-dressed whiskers would betray him as surely as though he carried a placard.

Seeing a barber's shop, he went to the door; but, while turning the knob, he grew frightened.

They would think it singular that he wanted his beard shaved; and if they should question him.

He passed on.

He saw another barber's shop; and the same doubts prevented his entering.

Gradually night came on; and, with the darkness, Noel seemed to recover his confidence and boldness.

After this great shipwreck in port, hope arose again to the surface. Why could he not save himself?

There had been many just such cases. He would go to a foreign country, change his name, begin life over again, become a new man entirely. He had the money; and that was the principal thing.

And, besides, when these eighty thousand francs were spent, he had the certainty of receiving, on his first request, five or six times as much more.

He was already thinking of the disguise he should

assume, and the frontier to which he should go, when a recollection of Juliette crossed his heart like a hot iron.

Was he going to escape without her, go away with the certainty of never seeing her again?

Should he fly, pursued by all the police in the world, tracked like a deer, and she remain peaceably in Paris? Impossible. For whom had he committed this crime? For her. Who reaped the benefits of it? She. Was it not just, then, that she should bear her share of the punishment?

"She does not love me," thought the advocate with bitterness; "she never loved me. She would be delighted to be forever free from me. She will not regret me, now that I can be of no more use to her. An empty coffer is an unserviceable piece of furniture. Juliette is prudent; she has managed to save a pretty little fortune. Grown rich at my expense, she will take some new lover. She will forget me: she will live happily; while I— And I was going away without her."

The voice of prudence cried out to him, "Wretched man! to drag a woman with you, and such a woman, is but to draw attention upon you, to render flight impossible, to give yourself up out of mere wantonness."

"What of that?" replied passion. "We will be saved, or we will perish together. If she does not love me, I love her. She is a necessity to me. She must come, or—"

But how to see Juliette, to speak with her, to persuade her.

To go to her house would expose him too much. The police were doubtless there already.

"No," thought Noel; "no one knows that she is my mistress. They won't find it out for two or three days; and, besides, it would be more dangerous still to write."

He took a carriage from the stand not far from the square L'Observatoire, and in a low tone told the driver the fatal number of the house in the Rue Provence.

Stretched on the cushions of the carriage, lulled by its monotonous rattle, Noel gave no thought to the future; he did not even think over what he should say to Juliette. No. Involuntarily he passed in review the events which had brought on and hastened the catastrophe, like a man who, near his death, reviews the tragedy or comedy of his life.

He thought over the past month, day by day.

Ruined, without expedients, without resources, he had determined at all hazards to procure money, to still keep Madame Juliette; when one day chance made him master of the correspondence of the Count de Commarin,—not only the letters read to Père Tabaret, and shown to Albert, but also those, which, written by the count when he believed the substitution accomplished, plainly established the fact.

The reading of these gave him an hour of mad delight.

He believed himself the legitimate son; but soon his mother undeceived him, told him the truth, proved it to him by many letters from the Widow Lerouge, called Claudine to witness it, and demonstrated it by the scar he bore.

But a drowning man never chooses what branch he will draw himself out by. He takes the first that comes. Noel resolved to make use of these letters.

He attempted to use his ascendancy over his mother, to induce her to leave the count in his ignorance, so that he might thus blackmail him. But Madame Gerdy repulsed this proposition with horror.

Then the advocate made a confession of all his follies,

laid bare his financial condition, showed himself in his true light, sunk in debt; and he begged his mother to have recourse to M. de Commarin.

This also she refused; and prayers and threats availed nothing against her resolution. For five days, there was a great struggle between mother and son, in which the advocate was finally conquered.

It was then that idea of murdering Claudine occurred to him.

The unhappy woman had been no more frank with Madame Gerdy than with others; and Noel thought her a widow. Her testimony suppressed, therefore, who else stood in his way?

Madame Gerdy, and perhaps the count.

He feared them but little.

If Madame Gerdy spoke, he could always reply, "You have stolen my name for your son: and you will do any thing in the world to preserve it for him." But how to do away with Claudine without danger?

After long reflection the advocate thought of a diabolical stratagem.

He would burn all the count's letters establishing the substitution, and preserve only those rendering it probable.

These last he would show to Albert, feeling sure, that, if Justice ever inquired into the matter, it would naturally suspect him who appeared to have so much interest in Claudine's death.

Not that he really thought of attaching the crime upon Albert; it was simply a precaution. He counted upon so arranging matters that the police would lose their trouble, in the pursuit of an imaginary criminal.

Nor did he think of ousting the Viscount de Commarin, and putting himself in his place.

His plan was simply, the crime once committed, he would wait; things would take their own course. He would negotiate, he would compromise, at the price of a fortune.

He felt sure of his mother's silence, provided she never suspected him of the assassination.

His plans laid, he decided to strike the fatal blow on Shrove Tuesday.

To neglect no precaution, he would that evening himself take Juliette to the theatre, and afterwards to the opera ball. He would thus secure, in case things went wrong, an unanswerable *alibi*.

The loss of his great coat troubled him for a moment; but, upon reflection, he reassured himself, saying,—

“Pshaw! who will ever know?”

Every thing had resulted in accordance with his calculations. He thought that now it was but a matter of patience.

But, when Madame Gerdy read the story of the murder, the unhappy woman divined her son's work; and, in the first transports of her grief, she declared that she would denounce him.

He was terrified. A mad fear of his mother possessed him. One word from her might destroy him. Putting a bold face on it, however, he took the chances, staking his all.

To put the police on Albert's track was to guarantee his own safety, to insure to himself, in case of success, the name and fortune of the Count de Commarin.

Circumstances, as well as his own terror, had increased his boldness and his acuteness.

Père Tabaret's visit occurred just then.

Noel knew of his connection with the police, and knew

that the old fellow would make a most valuable confidant.

So long as Madame Gerdy lived, Noel trembled. The fever was untrustworthy, and might betray him. But, when she had breathed her last, he believed himself safe. He thought it all over; he could see no obstacle in his way; he had triumphed.

And now all was discovered, just as he was about to reap the benefits. But how? by whom? What fatality had unearthed a secret which he had believed buried with Madame Gerdy?

But what boots it, when one is at the bottom of an abyss, to know what stone had given way, to ask by what descent he had fallen?

The hack stopped in the Rue Provence.

Noel leaned out of the door, searching the neighborhood, throwing a glance into the depths of the porter's lodge.

Seeing no one, he paid his fare through the front window, before getting out of the carriage, and, crossing the pavement with a bound, he leaped up the stairway.

Charlotte, at sight of him, gave a shout of joy.

"You are here!" she cried. "Ah, madame has been expecting you with the greatest impatience! She is very anxious."

Juliette expecting him! Juliette anxious!

The advocate did not stop to ask questions. On reaching this spot, he seemed suddenly to recover his coolness. He could understand his imprudence; he knew the exact value of every instant.

"If any one rings," said he to Charlotte, "don't let them in. No matter what they do or say, don't let them in."

On hearing Noel's voice, Juliette ran out to meet him.

He pushed her gruffly into the salon, and followed, closing the door.

There for the first time she saw his face.

He was so changed; his look was so haggard that she could not keep from crying out,—

“What is the matter?”

Noel made no reply; he advanced towards and took her hand.

“Juliette,” he demanded in a hollow voice, fastening his flashing eyes upon her,—“Juliette, be sincere; do you love me?”

She instinctively felt that something dreadful had occurred: she seemed to breathe an atmosphere of evil; but she, as usual, affected indifference.

“You ill-natured fellow,” she replied, pouting her lips most provokingly, “do you deserve—”

“Oh, enough!” broke in Noel, stamping his feet fiercely. “Answer me,” he continued, bruising her pretty hands in his grasp, “yes, or no,—do you love me?”

A hundred times had she played with her lover’s anger, delighting to excite him into a fury, to enjoy the pleasure of appeasing him with a word; but she had never seen him like this before.

She had wronged him greatly; and she dared not complain of this his first harshness.

“Yes, I love you,” she stammered, “do you not know it?”

“Why?” replied the advocate, releasing her hands; “why? Because, if you love me you must prove it; if you love me, you must follow me at once,—abandon every thing. Come, fly with me. Time presses—”

The young girl was terrified.

“Great heavens! what has happened?”

"Nothing, except that I have loved you too much, Juliette. When I found I had no more money for your luxury, your caprices, I became wild. To procure money, I,—I committed a crime,—a crime; do you understand? They are pursuing me now. I must fly: will you follow me?"

Juliette's eyes grew wide with astonishment; but she doubted Noel.

"A crime? You?" she began.

"Yes, me! Would you know the truth? I have committed murder, an assassination. But it was all for you."

The advocate felt that Juliette would certainly recoil from him in horror. He expected that terror which a murderer inspires. He was resigned to it in advance. He thought that she would fly from him; perhaps there would be a scene. She might, who knows, have hysterics; might cry out, call for succor, for help, for aid. He was wrong.

With a bound, Juliette flew to him, throwing herself upon him, her arms about his neck, and embraced him as she had never embraced him before.

"Yes, I do love you!" she cried. "Yes, you have committed a crime for my sake, because you loved me. You have a heart. I never really knew you before!"

It had cost him dear to inspire this passion in Madame Juliette; but Noel never thought of that.

He experienced a moment of intense delight: nothing appeared hopeless to him now.

But he had the presence of mind to free himself from her embrace

"Let us go," he said; "the one great danger is, that I do not know from whence the attack comes. How they have discovered the truth is still a mystery to me."

Juliette remembered her alarming visitor of the afternoon; she understood it all.

"Oh, what a wretched woman I am!" she cried, wringing her hands in despair; "it is I who have betrayed you. It occurred on Tuesday, did it not?"

"Yes, Tuesday."

"Ah, then I have told all, without a doubt, to your friend, the old man I supposed you had sent, Tabaret!"

"Has Tabaret been here?"

"Yes; just a little while ago."

"Come, then," cried Noel, "quickly; it's a miracle that he hasn't been back."

He took her arm, to hurry her away; but she nimbly released herself.

"Wait," said she. "I have some money, some jewels. I will take them."

"It is useless. Leave every thing behind. I have a fortune, Juliette; let us fly!"

She had already opened her jewel box, and was throwing every thing of value that she possessed pell mell into a little travelling bag.

"Ah, you are ruining me," cried Noel, "you are ruining me!"

He spoke thus; but his heart was overflowing with joy.

"What sublime devotion! She loves me truly," he said to himself; "for me, she renounces this happy life without hesitation; for me, she sacrifices all!"

Juliette had finished her preparations, and was quietly tying on her bonnet, when the door-bell rang.

"They are here!" cried Noel, becoming, if possible, even more livid.

They stood as immovable as two statues; great drops

of perspiration on their foreheads, their eyes dilated, listening breathlessly.

A second ring was heard, then a third.

Charlotte appeared, walking on tip-toe.

"There are a great many at the door," she whispered; "I heard them talking together."

Growing tired of ringing, they began pounding. A voice reached the salon; they distinguished but the one word, "law."

"No hope!" murmured Noel.

"Don't despair," cried Juliette; "the servant's stairway!"

"They will scarcely leave that unguarded."

Then Juliette became depressed, terrified.

She was surprised by heavy steps on the stairway, made by some one endeavoring to walk softly.

"There must be some escape!" she cried fiercely.

"Yes," replied Noel, "one way. I have given my word. They will pick the lock. Bolt all the doors, and make them break them down: it will gain time for me."

Juliette and Charlotte sprang forward to do this, Noel, leaning against the mantel, took out his revolver, and placed it against his breast.

But Juliette, who had returned, perceiving the movement, threw herself headlong upon her lover, to prevent his purpose, but so violently that the pistol was discharged. The shot took effect, the ball passing through Noel's stomach. He gave a terrible cry.

Juliette had made his death a terrible punishment; she had only prolonged his agony.

He staggered, but did not fall, supporting himself by the mantel, while the blood flowed copiously.

Juliette clung to him, trying to wrest the pistol from him.

"You shall not kill yourself," she cried, "you shall not. You are mine; I love you. Let them come. What can they do to you? If they imprison you, you can escape. I will aid you: we will bribe the jailors. Come. We will live so happily, no matter where, far off in America where no one knows us!"

The outside door had yielded; they were now at work at the door of the ante-chamber.

"Hush!" murmured Noel; "they must not take me alive!"

And, with one last effort, triumphing over his dreadful agony, he released himself, and pushed Juliette away, who fell back on a near sofa.

Then, seizing the revolver, he applied it anew to the place where he felt his heart beating pulled the trigger, and rolled to the floor.

It was full time; for the police at that moment burst open the door.

The first thought of the detectives was, that Noel, before shooting himself, had shot his mistress.

They knew of cases where people had romantically desired to quit this world together; and had they not heard two shots? But Juliette was already on her feet again.

"A doctor," she cried, "a doctor! He cannot be dead!"

One man ran out; while the others, under the direction of Père Tabaret, carried the advocate's body, and laid it on Madame Juliette's bed.

"He cannot live!" murmured the old man, whose anger left him at the sight. "I loved him as though he were my child; his name is still on my will!"

Père Tabaret stopped. Noel uttered a groan, and opened his eyes.

"You see that he will live!" cried Juliette.

The advocate shook his head feebly, and, for a moment, he tossed himself painfully on the bed, passing his right hand first under his coat, and then under his pillow.

He turned himself half-way towards the wall, and then back again.

Upon a sign, easily understood, they placed another pillow beneath his head.

Then, in a broken, stifled voice, he spoke a few words.

"I am the assassin," he said. "Write, I will sign it; it will free Albert. I owe him that at least."

While they were writing, he drew Juliette to him.

"My fortune is beneath the pillow," he whispered. "I give it all to you."

A flow of blood burst from his mouth; and they thought he was dying.

But he still had strength enough to sign the confession, and to launch a joke at Père Tabaret.

"Ah, ha, old fellow!" he said, "so you are a detective, eh? It must be great fun to trap one's friends! Ah, I have had a fine game; but, with three women in the play, you are always sure to lose."

He fell back in agony; and, when the doctor arrived, he could only announce the death of Maitre Noel Gerdy, advocate.

CHAPTER XX.

SOME months later, one evening, at old Mademoiselle Goello's, the Marquise d'Arlanges, looking ten years younger than when we saw her last, was giving her dowager friends an account of the wedding of her granddaughter Claire, who had married the Viscount Albert de Commarin.

"The marriage," said she, "took place on our estate in Normandy, without any flourish of trumpets. My son-in-law wished it; but I disapproved heartily. The noise about the mistake of which he had been the victim would have given eclat to the wedding. That was my opinion; and I made no effort to conceal it. Pshaw! the boy is as stubborn as his father, which is saying a good deal: he persisted in his course; and my shameless grandchild, obedient to her future husband, took her stand against me. And yet I defy any one to find to-day a single individual with courage enough to confess that he ever for an instant doubted Albert's innocence. I have left the young people in all the happiness of the honeymoon, billing and cooing like a pair of turtle-doves. It must be confessed that they have paid dearly for their happiness. May they be happy, and may they have lots of children! for they will find no difficulty in providing for them. For, do you know, for the first time in his life, and probably for the last, the count has behaved like an angel! He has settled all his fortune on his son absolutely. He intends living alone at one of his country-seats. I don't think the old man is quite himself. I am not sure that he has entirely recovered his head since that attack; but my grandchild is nicely settled. I know what it has cost me, and how economical I shall have to be; but I despise parents who hesitate at any pecuniary sacrifice, when the happiness of their children is at stake."

The marquise forgot, however, to state that, eight days before the wedding, Albert had freed her from a very embarrassing situation, and had discharged a very considerable amount of her debts.

Since then, she had borrowed from him only nine thousand francs; but she intended confessing to him

some day how much she was annoyed by an upholsterer, by her dressmaker, by three linen drapers, and by five or six other tradesmen.

Ah, well, she was a worthy woman; she never said any evil about her son-in-law!

Taking refuge in Poitou, after sending in his resignation, Daburon sought rest and forgetfulness. His friends, however, do not despair of some time inducing him to marry.

Madame Juliette was entirely consoled. The eighty thousand francs hidden by Noel under the pillows were not taken from her. She had much more beside, as it was not long before the sale of her magnificently furnished apartments was announced.

Père Tabaret was alone indelibly impressed. After having believed in the infallibility of justice, he now saw no errors so great as judicial ones.

The old amateur detective doubted the existence of crime, and believed that the evidence of one's senses proved nothing. He circulated a petition for the abolition of capital punishment, and organized a society for aiding the poor and innocent accused.

THE END.

THE MYSTERY OF ORCIVAL

I

On Thursday, the 9th of July, 186-, Jean Bertaud and his son, well known at Orcival as living by poaching and marauding, rose at three o'clock in the morning, just at daybreak, to go fishing.

Taking their tackle, they descended the charming pathway, shaded by acacias, which you see from the station at Evry, and which leads from the burg of Orcival to the Seine.

They made their way to their boat, moored as usual some fifty yards above the wire bridge, across a field adjoining Valfeuillu, the imposing estate of the Count de Trémoré.

Having reached the river-bank, they laid down their tackle, and Jean jumped into the boat to bail out the water in the bottom.

While he was skilfully using the scoop, he perceived that one of the oar-pins of the old craft, worn by the oar, was on the point of breaking.

"Philippe," cried he, to his son, who was occupied in unravelling a net, "bring me a bit of wood to make a new oar-pin."

"All right," answered Philippe.

There was no tree in the field. The young man bent his steps toward the park of Valfeuillu, a few rods dis-

tant; and, neglectful of Article 391 of the Penal Code jumped across the wide ditch which surrounds M. de Trémoré's domain. He thought he would cut off a branch of one of the old willows, which at this place touch the water with their drooping branches.

He had scarcely drawn his knife from his pocket, while looking about him with the poacher's unquiet glance, when he uttered a low cry, "Father! Here! Father!"

"What's the matter?" responded the old marauder, without pausing from his work.

"Father, come here!" continued Philippe. "In Heaven's name, come here, quick!"

Jean knew by the tone of his son's voice that something unusual had happened. He threw down his scoop, and, anxiety quickening him, in three leaps was in the park. He also stood still, horror-struck, before the spectacle which had terrified Philippe.

On the bank of the river, among the stumps and flags, was stretched a woman's body. Her long, dishevelled locks lay among the water-shrubs; her dress—of gray silk—was soiled with mire and blood. All the upper part of the body lay in shallow water, and her face had sunk in the mud.

"A murder!" muttered Philippe, whose voice trembled.

"That's certain," responded Jean, in an indifferent tone. "But who can this woman be? Really one would say, the countess."

"We'll see," said the young man. He stepped toward the body; his father caught him by the arm.

"What would you do, fool?" said he. "You ought never to touch the body of a murdered person without legal authority."

"You think so?"

"Certainly. There are penalties for it."

"Then, come along and let's inform the Mayor."

"Why? as if people hereabouts were not against us enough already! Who knows that they would not accuse *us*——"

"But, father——"

"If we go and inform Monsieur Courtois, he will ask us how and why we came to be in Monsieur de Trémorrel's park to find this out. What is it to you, that the countess has been killed? They'll find her body without you. Come, let's go away."

But Philippe did not budge. Hanging his head, his chin resting upon his palm, he reflected.

"We must make this known," said he, firmly. "We are not savages; we will tell Monsieur Courtois that in passing along by the park in our boat, we perceived the body."

Old Jean resisted at first; then, seeing that his son would, if need be, go without him, yielded.

They re-crossed the ditch, and leaving their fishing-tackle in the field, directed their steps hastily toward the mayor's house.

Orcival, situated a mile or more from Corbeil, on the right bank of the Seine, is one of the most charming villages in the environs of Paris, despite the infernal etymology of its name. The gay and thoughtless Parisian, who, on Sunday, wanders about the fields, more destructive than the rook, has not yet discovered this smiling country. The distressing odor of the frying from coffee-gardens does not there stifle the perfume of the honeysuckles. The refrains of bargemen, the brazen voices of boat-horns, have never awakened echoes there. Lazily situated on the gentle slopes of

a bank washed by the Seine, the houses of Orcival are white, and there are delicious shades, and a bell-tower which is the pride of the place. On all sides vast pleasure domains, kept up at great cost, surround it. From the upper part, the weathercocks of twenty châteaux may be seen. On the right is the forest of Mauprévoir, and the pretty country-house of the Countess de la Brèche; opposite, on the other side of the river, is Mousseaux and Petit-Bourg, the ancient domain of Aguado, now the property of a famous coach-maker; on the left, those beautiful copses belong to the Count de Trémoré, that large park is d'Etiolles, and in the distance beyond is Corbiel; that vast building, whose roofs are higher than the oaks, is the Darblay mill.

The mayor of Orcival occupies a handsome, pleasant mansion, at the upper end of the village. Formerly a manufacturer of dry goods, M. Courtois entered business without a penny, and after thirty years of absorbing toil, he retired with four round millions of francs.

Then he proposed to live tranquilly with his wife and children, passing the winter at Paris and the summer at his country-house.

But all of a sudden he was observed to be disturbed and agitated. Ambition stirred his heart. He took vigorous measures to be forced to accept the mayoralty of Orcival. And he accepted it, quite in self-defence, as he will himself tell you. This office was at once his happiness and his despair; apparent despair, interior and real happiness.

It quite befits him, with clouded brow, to rail at the cares of power; he appears yet better when, his waist encircled with the gold-laced scarf, he goes in triumph at the head of the municipal body.

Everybody was sound asleep at the mayor's when the two Bertauds rapped the heavy knocker of the door. After a moment, a servant, half asleep, appeared at one of the ground-floor windows.

"What's the matter, you rascals?" asked he, growling.

Jean did not think it best to revenge an insult which his reputation in the village too well justified.

"We want to speak to Monsieur the Mayor," he answered. "There is terrible need of it. Go call him, Monsieur Baptiste; he won't blame you."

"I'd like to see anybody blame me," snapped out Baptiste.

It took ten minutes of talking and explaining to persuade the servant. Finally, the Bertauds were admitted to a little man, fat and red, very much annoyed at being dragged from his bed so early. It was M. Courtois.

They had decided that Philippe should speak.

"Monsieur Mayor," he said, "we have come to announce to you a great misfortune. A crime has been committed at Monsieur de Trémoré's."

M. Courtois was a friend of the count's; he became whiter than his shirt at this sudden news.

"My God!" stammered he, unable to control his emotion, "what do you say—a crime!"

"Yes; we have just discovered a body; and as sure as you are here, I believe it to be that of the countess."

The worthy man raised his arms heavenward, with a wandering air.

"But where, when?"

"Just now, at the foot of the park, as we were going to take up our nets."

"It is horrible!" exclaimed the good M. Courtois;

"what a calamity! So worthy a lady! But it is not possible—you must be mistaken; I should have been informed——"

"We saw it distinctly, Monsieur Mayor."

"Such a crime in my village! Well, you have done wisely to come here. I will dress at once, and will hasten off—no, wait." He reflected a moment, then called:

"Baptiste!"

The valet was not far off. With ear and eye alternately pressed against the key-hole, he heard and looked with all his might. At the sound of his master's voice he had only to stretch out his hand and open the door.

"Monsieur called me?"

"Run to the justice of the peace," said the mayor. "There is not a moment to lose. A crime has been committed—perhaps a murder—you must go quickly. And you," addressing the poachers, "await me here while I slip on my coat."

The justice of the peace at Orcival, M. Plantat—"Papa Plantat," as he was called—was formerly an attorney at Melun. At fifty, Mr. Plantat, whose career had been one of unbroken prosperity, lost in the same month, his wife, whom he adored, and his two sons, charming youths, one eighteen, the other twenty-two years old. These successive losses crushed a man whom thirty years of happiness left without defence against misfortune. For a long time his reason was despaired of. Even the sight of a client, coming to trouble his grief, to recount stupid tales of self-interest, exasperated him. It was not surprising that he sold out his professional effects and good-will at half price. He wished to establish himself at his ease in his grief,

with the certainty of not being disturbed in its indulgence.

But the intensity of his mourning diminished, and the ills of idleness came. The justiceship of the peace at Orcival was vacant, and M. Plantat applied for and obtained it. Once installed in this office, he suffered less from ennui. This man, who saw his life drawing to an end, undertook to interest himself in the thousand diverse cases which came before him. He applied to these all the forces of a superior intelligence, the resources of a mind admirably fitted to separate the false from the true among the lies he was forced to hear. He persisted, besides, in living alone, despite the urging of M. Courtois; pretending that society fatigued him, and that an unhappy man is a bore in company.

Misfortune, which modifies characters, for good or bad, had made him, apparently, a great egotist. He declared that he was only interested in the affairs of life as a critic tired of its active scenes. He loved to make a parade of his profound indifference for everything, swearing that a rain of fire descending upon Paris, would not even make him turn his head. To move him seemed impossible. "What's that to me?" was his invariable exclamation.

Such was the man who, a quarter of an hour after Baptiste's departure, entered the mayor's house.

M. Plantat was tall, thin, and nervous. His physiognomy was not striking. His hair was short, his restless eyes seemed always to be seeking something, his very long nose was narrow and sharp. After his affliction, his mouth, formerly well shaped, became deformed; his lower lip had sunk, and gave him a deceptive look of simplicity.

"They tell me," said he, at the threshold, "that Madame de Trémorrel has been murdered."

"These men here, at least, pretend so," answered the mayor, who had just reappeared.

M. Courtois was no longer the same man. He had had time to make his toilet a little. His face attempted to express a haughty coldness. He had been reproaching himself for having been wanting in dignity, in showing his grief before the Bertauds. "Nothing ought to agitate a man in my position," said he to himself. And, being terribly agitated, he forced himself to be calm, cold, and impassible.

M. Plantat was so naturally.

"This is a very sad event," said he, in a tone which he forced himself to make perfectly disinterested; "but after all, how does it concern us? We must, however, hurry and ascertain whether it is true. I have sent for the brigadier, and he will join us."

"Let us go," said M. Courtois; "I have my scarf in my pocket."

They hastened off. Philippe and his father went first, the young man eager and impatient, the old one sombre and thoughtful. The mayor, at each step, made some exclamation.

"I can't understand it," muttered he; "a murder in my commune! a commune where, in the memory of men, no crime has been committed!"

And he directed a suspicious glance toward the two Bertauds. The road which led toward the château of M. de Trémorrel was an unpleasant one, shut in by walls a dozen feet high. On one side is the park of the Marchioness de Lanascot; on the other the spacious garden of Saint Jouan. The going and coming had taken time; it was nearly eight o'clock when the

mayor, the justice, and their guides stopped before the gate of M. de Trémorel.

The mayor rang. The bell was very large; only a small gravelled court of five or six yards separated the gate from the house; nevertheless no one appeared.

The mayor rang more vigorously, then with all his strength; but in vain.

Before the gate of Mme. de Lanascot's château, nearly opposite, a groom was standing, occupied in cleaning and polishing a bridle-bit.

"It's of no use to ring, gentlemen," said this man; "there's nobody in the château."

"How! nobody?" asked the mayor, surprised.

"I mean," said the groom, "that there is no one there but the master and mistress. The servants all went away last evening by the 8.40 train to Paris, to the wedding of the old cook, Madame Denis. They ought to return this morning by the first train. I was invited myself——"

"Great God!" interrupted M. Courtois, "then the count and countess remained alone last night?"

"Entirely alone, Monsieur Mayor."

"It is horrible!"

M. Plantat seemed to grow impatient during this dialogue. "Come," said he, "we cannot stay forever at the gate. The gendarmes do not come; let us send for the locksmith." Philippe was about to hasten off, when, at the end of the road, singing and laughing were heard. Five persons, three women and two men, soon appeared.

"Ah, there are the people of the château," cried the groom, whom this morning visit seemed to annoy, "they ought to have a key."

The domestics, seeing the group about the gate, be-

came silent and hastened their steps. One of them began to run ahead of the others; it was the count's valet de chambre.

"These gentlemen perhaps wish to speak to Monsieur the Count?" asked he, having bowed to M. Plantat.

"We have rung five times, as hard as we could," said the mayor.

"It is surprising," said the valet de chambre, "the count sleeps very lightly. Perhaps he has gone out."

"Horror!" cried Philippe. "Both of them have been murdered!" These words shocked the servants, whose gayety announced a reasonable number of healths drunk to the happiness of the newly wedded pair. M. Courtois seemed to be studying the attitude of old Bertaud.

"A murder!" muttered the valet de chambre. "It was for money then; it must have been known——"

"What?" asked the mayor.

"Monsieur the Count received a very large sum yesterday morning."

"Large! yes," added a chambermaid. "He had a large package of bank-bills. Madame even said to Monsieur that she should not shut her eyes the whole night, with this immense sum in the house."

There was a silence; each one looked at the others with a frightened air. M. Courtois reflected.

"At what hour did you leave the château last evening?" asked he of the servants.

"At eight o'clock; we had dinner early."

"You went away all together?"

"Yes, sir."

"You did not leave each other?"

"Not a minute."

"And you returned all together?"

The servants exchanged a significant look.

"All," responded a chambermaid—"that is to say, no. One left us on reaching the Lyons station at Paris; it was Guespin."

"Ah!"

"Yes, sir; he went away, saying that he would re-join us at Wepler's, in the Batignolles, where the wedding took place." The mayor nudged the justice with his elbow, as if to attract his attention, and continued to question the chambermaid.

"And this Guespin, as you call him—did you see him again?"

"No, sir. I asked several times during the evening in vain, what had become of him; his absence seemed to me suspicious." Evidently the chambermaid tried to show superior perspicacity. A little more, and she would have talked of presentiments.

"Has this Guespin been long in the house?"

"Since spring."

"What were his duties?"

"He was sent from Paris by the house of the 'Skilful Gardener,' to take care of the rare flowers in Madame's conservatory."

"And did he know of this money?"

The domestics again exchanged significant glances.

"Yes," they answered in chorus, "we had talked a great deal about it among ourselves."

The chambermaid added: "He even said to me, 'To think that Monsieur the Count has enough money in his cabinet to make all our fortunes.'"

"What kind of a man is this?"

This question absolutely extinguished the talkativeness of the servants. No one dared to speak, perceiv-

ing that the least word might serve as the basis of a terrible accusation. But the groom of the house opposite; who burned to mix himself up in the affair, had none of these scruples. "Guespin," answered he, "is a good fellow. Lord, what jolly things he knows! He knows everything you can imagine. It appears he has been rich in times past, and if he wished— But dame! he loves to have his work all finished, and go off on spree. He's a crack billiard-player, I can tell you."

Papa Plantat, while listening in an apparently absent-minded way to these depositions, or rather these scandals, carefully examined the wall and the gate. He now turned, and interrupting the groom:

"Enough of this," said he, to the great scandal of M. Courtois. "Before pursuing this interrogatory, let us ascertain the crime, if crime there is; for it is not proved. Let whoever has the key, open the gate."

The valet de chambre had the key; he opened the gate, and all entered the little court. The gendarmes had just arrived. The mayor told the brigadier to follow him, and placed two men at the gate, ordering them not to permit anyone to enter or go out, unless by his orders. Then the valet de chambre opened the door of the house.

II

If there had been no crime, at least something extraordinary had taken place at the château; the impassible justice might have been convinced of it, as soon as he had stepped into the vestibule. The glass door leading to the garden was wide open, and three of the panes were shattered into a thousand pieces. The carpeting of waxed canvas between the doors had been torn up,

and on the white marble slabs large drops of blood were visible. At the foot of the staircase was a stain larger than the rest, and upon the lowest step a splash hideous to behold.

Unfitted for such spectacles, or for the mission he had now to perform, M. Courtois became faint. Luckily, he borrowed from the idea of his official importance, an energy foreign to his character. The more difficult the preliminary examination of this affair seemed, the more determined he was to carry it on with dignity.

"Conduct us to the place where you saw the body," said he to Bertaud. But Papa Plantat intervened.

"It would be wiser, I think," he objected, "and more methodical, to begin by going through the house."

"Perhaps—yes—true, that's my own view," said the mayor, grasping at the other's counsel, as a drowning man clings to a plank. And he made all retire excepting the brigadier and the valet de chambre, the latter remaining to serve as guide. "Gendarmes," cried he to the men guarding the gate, "see to it that no one goes out; prevent anybody from entering the house, and above all, let no one go into the garden."

Then they ascended the staircase. Drops of blood were sprinkled all along the stairs. There was also blood on the baluster, and M. Courtois perceived, with horror, that his hands were stained.

When they had reached the first landing-stage, the mayor said to the valet de chambre:

"Tell me, my friend, did your master and mistress occupy the same chamber?"

"Yes, sir."

"And where is their chamber?"

"There, sir."

As he spoke, the valet de chambre staggered back, terrified, and pointed to a door, the upper panel of which betrayed the imprint of a bloody hand. Drops of perspiration overspread the poor mayor's forehead; he too was terrified, and could hardly keep on his feet. Alas, authority brings with it terrible obligations! The brigadier, an old soldier of the Crimea, visibly moved, hesitated.

M. Plantat alone, as tranquil as if he were in his garden, retained his coolness, and looked around upon the others.

"We must decide," said he.

He entered the room; the rest followed.

There was nothing unusual in the apartment; it was a boudoir hung in blue satin, furnished with a couch and four arm-chairs, covered also with blue satin. One of the chairs was overturned.

They passed on to the bed-chamber.

A frightful disorder appeared in this room. There was not an article of furniture, not an ornament, which did not betray that a terrible, enraged and merciless struggle had taken place between the assassins and their victims. In the middle of the chamber a small table was overturned, and all about it were scattered lumps of sugar, vermilion cups, and pieces of porcelain.

"Ah!" said the valet de chambre, "Monsieur and Madame were taking tea when the wretches came in!"

The mantel ornaments had been thrown upon the floor; the clock, in falling, had stopped at twenty minutes past three. Near the clock were the lamps; the globes were in pieces, the oil had been spilled.

The canopy of the bed had been torn down, and

covered the bed. Someone must have clutched desperately at the draperies. All the furniture was overturned. The coverings of the chairs had been hacked by strokes of a knife, and in places the stuffing protruded. The secretary had been broken open; the writing-slide, dislocated, hung by its hinges; the drawers were open and empty, and everywhere, blood—blood upon the carpet, the furniture, the curtains—above all, upon the bed-curtains.

“Poor wretches!” stammered the mayor. “They were murdered here.”

Everyone for a moment was appalled. But meanwhile, the justice of the peace devoted himself to a minute scrutiny, taking notes upon his tablets, and looking into every corner. When he had finished:

“Come,” said he, “let us go into the other rooms.”

Everywhere there was the same disorder. A band of furious maniacs, or criminals seized with a frenzy, had certainly passed the night in the house.

The count’s library, especially, had been turned topsy-turvy. The assassins had not taken the trouble to force the locks; they had gone to work with a hatchet. Surely they were confident of not being overheard; for they must have struck tremendous blows to make the massive oaken bureau fly in pieces.

Neither parlor nor smoking-room had been respected. Couches, chairs, canopies, were cut and torn as if they had been lunged at with swords. Two spare chambers for guests were all in confusion.

They then ascended to the second story.

There, in the first room which they penetrated, they found, beside a trunk which had been assaulted, but which was not yet opened, a hatchet for splitting wood,

which the valet de chambre recognized as belonging to the house.

"Do you understand now?" said the mayor to M. Plantat. "The assassins were in force, that's clear. The murder accomplished, they scattered through the château, seeking everywhere the money they knew they would find here. One of them was engaged in breaking open this trunk, when the others, below, found the money; they called him; he hastened down, and thinking all further search useless, he left the hatchet here."

"I see it," said the brigadier, "just as if I had been here."

The ground-floor, which they next visited, had been respected. Only, after the crime had been committed, and the money secured, the murderers had felt the necessity of refreshing themselves. They found the remains of their supper in the dining-room. They had eaten up all the cold meats left in the cupboard. On the table, beside eight empty bottles of wine and liqueurs, were ranged five glasses.

"There were five of them," said the mayor.

By force of will, M. Courtois had recovered his self-possession.

"Before going to view the bodies," said he, "I will send word to the procureur of Corbeil. In an hour, we will have a judge of instruction, who will finish our painful task."

A gendarme was instructed to harness the count's buggy, and to hasten to the procureur. Then the mayor and the justice, followed by the brigadier, the valet de chambre, and the two Bertauds, took their way toward the river.

The park of Valfeuillu was very wide from right to

left. From the house to the Seine it was almost two hundred steps. Before the house was a grassy lawn, interspersed with flower-beds. Two paths led across the lawn to the river-bank.

But the murderers had not followed the paths. Making a short cut, they had gone straight across the lawn. Their traces were perfectly visible. The grass was trampled and stamped down as if a heavy load had been dragged over it. In the midst of the lawn they perceived something red; M. Plantat went and picked it up. It was a slipper, which the valet de chambre recognized as the count's. Farther on, they found a white silk handkerchief, which the valet declared he had often seen around the count's neck. This handkerchief was stained with blood.

At last they arrived at the river-bank, under the willows from which Philippe had intended to cut off a branch; there they saw the body. The sand at this place was much indented by feet seeking a firm support. Everything indicated that here had been the supreme struggle.

M. Courtois understood all the importance of these traces.

"Let no one advance," said he, and, followed by the justice of the peace, he approached the corpse. Although the face could not be distinguished, both recognized the countess. Both had seen her in this gray robe, adorned with blue trimmings.

Now, how came she there?

The mayor thought that having succeeded in escaping from the hands of the murderers, she had fled wildly. They had pursued her, had caught up with her there, and she had fallen to rise no more. This version explained the traces of the struggle. It must

have been the count's body that they had dragged across the lawn.

M. Courtois talked excitedly, trying to impose his ideas on the justice. But M. Plantat hardly listened; you might have thought him a hundred leagues from Valfeuillu; he only responded by monosyllables—yes, no, perhaps. And the worthy mayor gave himself great pains; he went and came, measured steps, minutely scrutinized the ground.

There was not at this place more than a foot of water. A mud-bank, upon which grew some clumps of flags and some water-lilies, descended by a gentle decline from the bank to the middle of the river. The water was very clear, and there was no current; the slippery and slimy mire could be distinctly seen.

M. Courtois had gone thus far in his investigations, when he was struck by a sudden idea.

"Bertaud," said he, "come here."

The old poacher obeyed.

"You say that you saw the body from your boat?"

"Yes, Monsieur Mayor."

"Where is your boat?"

"There, hauled up to that field."

"Well, lead us to it."

It was clear to all that this order had a great effect upon the man. He trembled and turned pale under his rough skin, tanned as it was by sun and storm. He was even seen to cast a menacing look toward his son.

"Let us go," said he at last.

They were returning to the house when the valet proposed to pass over the ditch. "That will be the quickest way," said he, "I will go for a ladder which we will put across."

He went off, and quickly reappeared with his improvised foot-bridge. But at the moment he was adjusting it, the mayor cried out to him:

“Stop!”

The imprints left by the Bertauds on both sides of the ditch had just caught his eye.

“What is this?” said he; “evidently someone has crossed here, and not long ago; for the traces of the steps are quite fresh.”

After an examination of some minutes he ordered that the ladder should be placed farther off. When they had reached the boat, he said to Jean, “Is this the boat with which you went to take up your nets this morning?”

“Yes.”

“Then,” resumed M. Courtois, “what implements did you use? your cast net is perfectly dry; this boat-hook and these oars have not been wet for twenty-four hours.”

The distress of the father and son became more and more evident.

“Do you persist in what you say, Bertaud?” said the mayor.

“Certainly.”

“And you, Philippe?”

“Monsieur,” stammered the young man, “we have told the truth.”

“Really!” said M. Courtois, in an ironical tone. “Then you will explain to the proper authorities how it was that you could see anything from a boat which you had not entered. It will be proved to you, also, that the body is in a position where it is impossible to see it from the middle of the river. Then you will still have to tell what these foot-prints on the grass are,

which go from your boat to the place where the ditch has been crossed several times and by several persons."

The two Bertauds hung their heads.

"Brigadier," ordered the mayor, "arrest these two men in the name of the law, and prevent all communication between them."

Philippe seemed to be ill. As for old Jean, he contented himself with shrugging his shoulders and saying to his son:

"Well, you would have it so, wouldn't you?"

While the brigadier led the two poachers away, and shut them up separately, and under the guard of his men, the justice and the mayor returned to the park. "With all this," muttered M. Courtois, "no traces of the countess."

They proceeded to take up the body of the countess.

The mayor sent for two planks, which, with a thousand precautions, they placed on the ground, being able thus to move the countess without effacing the imprints necessary for the legal examination. Alas! it was indeed she who had been the beautiful, the charming Countess de Trémoré! Here were her smiling face, her lovely, speaking eyes, her fine, sensitive mouth.

There remained nothing of her former self. The face was unrecognizable, so soiled and wounded was it. Her clothes were in tatters. Surely a furious frenzy had moved the monsters who had slain the poor lady! She had received more than twenty knife-wounds, and must have been struck with a stick, or rather with a hammer; she had been dragged by her feet and by her hair!

In her left hand she grasped a strip of common cloth, torn, doubtless, from the clothes of one of the assassins.

The mayor, in viewing the spectacle, felt his legs fail him, and supported himself on the arm of the impassible Plantat.

"Let us carry her to the house," said the justice, "and then we will search for the count."

The valet and brigadier (who had now returned) called on the domestics for assistance. The women rushed into the garden. There was then a terrible concert of cries, lamentations, and imprecations.

"The wretches! So noble a mistress! So good a lady!"

M. and Mme. de Trémoré, one could see, were adored by their people.

The countess had just been laid upon the billiard-table, on the ground-floor, when the judge of instruction and a physician were announced.

"At last!" sighed the worthy mayor; and in a lower tone he added, "the finest medals have their reverse."

For the first time in his life, he seriously cursed his ambition, and regretted being the most important personage in Orcival.

III

The judge of instruction of the tribunal at Corbeil, was M. Antoine Domini, a remarkable man, since called to higher functions. He was forty years of age, of a prepossessing person, and endowed with a very expressive, but too grave physiognomy. In him seemed typified the somewhat stiff solemnity of the magistracy. Penetrated with the dignity of his office, he sacrificed his life to it, rejecting the most simple distractions, and the most innocent pleasures.

He lived alone, seldom showing himself abroad;

rarely received his friends, not wishing, as he said, that the weaknesses of the man should derogate from the sacred character of the judge. This latter reason had deterred him from marrying, though he felt the need of a domestic sphere.

Always and everywhere he was the magistrate—that is, the representative, even to fanaticism, of what he thought the most august institution on the earth. Naturally gay, he would double-lock himself in when he wished to laugh. He was witty; but if a bright sally escaped him, you may be sure he repented of it. Body and soul he gave to his vocation; and no one could bring more conscientiousness to the discharge of what he thought to be his duty. He was also inflexible. It was monstrous, in his eyes, to discuss an article of the code. The law spoke; it was enough; he shut his eyes, covered his ears, and obeyed.

From the day when a legal investigation commenced, he did not sleep, and he employed every means to discover the truth. Yet he was not regarded as a good judge of instruction; to contend by tricks with a prisoner was repugnant to him; to lay a snare for a rogue he thought debasing; in short, he was obstinate—obstinate to foolishness, sometimes to absurdity, even to denying the existence of the sun at mid-day.

The mayor and Papa Plantat hastened to meet M. Domini. He bowed to them gravely, as if he had not known them, and presenting to them a man of some sixty years who accompanied him:

“Messieurs,” said he, “this is Doctor Gendron.”

Papa Plantat shook hands with the doctor; the mayor smiled graciously at him, for Dr. Gendron was well-known in those parts; he was even celebrated, despite the nearness of Paris. Loving his art and ex-

ercising it with a passionate energy, he yet owed his renown less to his science than his manners. People said: "He is an original;" they admired his affectation of independence, of scepticism, and rudeness. He made his visits from five to nine in the morning—all the worse for those for whom these hours were inconvenient. After nine o'clock the doctor was not to be had. The doctor was working for himself, the doctor was in his laboratory, the doctor was inspecting his cellar. It was rumored that he sought for secrets of practical chemistry, to augment still more his twenty thousand livres of income. And he did not deny it; for in truth he was engaged on poisons, and was perfecting an invention by which could be discovered traces of all the alkaloids which up to that time had escaped analysis. If his friends reproached him, even jokingly, on sending away sick people in the afternoon, he grew red with rage.

"Parbleu!" he answered, "I find you superb! I am a doctor four hours in the day. I am paid by hardly a quarter of my patients—that's three hours I give daily to humanity, which I despise. Let each of you do as much, and we shall see."

The mayor conducted the new-comers into the drawing-room, where he installed himself to write down the results of his examination.

"What a misfortune for my town, this crime!" said he to M. Domini. "What shame! Orcival has lost its reputation."

"I know nothing of the affair," returned the judge. "The gendarme who went for me knew little about it."

M. Courtois recounted at length what his investigation had discovered, not forgetting the minutest detail, dwelling especially on the excellent precautions which

he had had the sagacity to take. He told how the conduct of the Bertauds had at first awakened his suspicions; how he had detected them, at least in a point-blank lie; how, finally, he had determined to arrest them. He spoke standing, his head thrown back, with wordy emphasis. The pleasure of speaking partially rewarded him for his recent distress.

"And now," he concluded, "I have just ordered the most exact search, so that doubtless we shall find the count's body. Five men, detailed by me, and all the people of the house, are searching the park. If their efforts are not crowned with success, I have here some fishermen who will drag the river."

M. Domini held his tongue, only nodding his head from time to time, as a sign of approbation. He was studying, weighing the details told him, building up in his mind a plan of proceeding.

"You have acted wisely," said he, at last. "The misfortune is a great one, but I agree with you that we are on the track of the criminals. These poachers, or the gardener who has disappeared, have something, perhaps, to do with this abominable crime."

Already, for some minutes, M. Plantat had rather awkwardly concealed some signs of impatience.

"The misfortune is," said he, "that if Guespin is guilty, he will not be such a fool as to show himself here."

"Oh, we'll find him," returned M. Domini. "Before leaving Corbeil, I sent a despatch to the prefecture of police at Paris, to ask for a police agent, who will doubtless be here shortly."

"While waiting," proposed the mayor, "perhaps you would like to see the scene of the crime?"

M. Domini made a motion as if to rise; then sat down again.

"In fact, no," said he; "we will see nothing till the agent arrives. But I must have some information concerning the Count and Countess de Trémoré."

The worthy mayor again triumphed.

"Oh, I can give it to you," answered he quickly, "better than anybody. Ever since their advent here, I may say, I have been one of their best friends. Ah, sir, what charming people! excellent, and affable, and devoted——"

And at the remembrance of all his friends' good qualities, M. Courtois choked in his utterance.

"The Count de Trémoré," he resumed, "was a man of thirty-four years, handsome, witty to the tips of his nails. He had sometimes, however, periods of melancholy, during which he did not wish to see anybody; but he was ordinarily so affable, so polite, so obliging; he knew so well how to be noble without haughtiness, that everybody here esteemed and loved him."

"And the countess?" asked the judge of instruction.

"An angel, Monsieur, an angel on earth! Poor lady! You will soon see her remains, and surely you would not guess that she has been the queen of the country, by reason of her beauty."

"Were they rich?"

"Yes; they must have had, together, more than a hundred thousand francs income—oh, yes, much more; for within five or six months the count, who had not the bucolic tastes of poor Sauvresy, sold some lands to buy consols."

"Have they been married long?"

M. Courtois scratched his head; it was his appeal to memory.

"Faith," he answered, "it was in September of last year; just six months ago. I married them myself. Poor Sauvresy had been dead a year."

The judge of instruction looked up from his notes with a surprised air.

"Who is this Sauvresy," he inquired, "of whom you speak?"

Papa Plantat, who was furiously biting his nails in a corner, apparently a stranger to what was passing, rose abruptly.

"Monsieur Sauvresy," said he, "was the first husband of Madame de Trémorrel. My friend Courtois has omitted this fact."

"Oh!" said the mayor, in a wounded tone, "it seems to me that under present circumstances——"

"Pardon me," interrupted the judge. "It is a detail such as may well become valuable, though apparently foreign to the case, and at the first view, insignificant."

"Hum!" grunted Papa Plantat. "Insignificant—foreign to it!"

His tone was so singular, his air so strange, that M. Domini was struck by it.

"Do you share," he asked, "the opinion of the mayor regarding the Trémorels?"

Plantat shrugged his shoulders.

"I haven't any opinions," he answered: "I live alone—see nobody; don't disturb myself about anything. But——"

"It seems to me," said M. Courtois, "that nobody should be better acquainted with people who were my friends than I myself."

"Then, you are telling the story clumsily," said M. Plantat, dryly.

The judge of instruction pressed him to explain him-

self. So M. Plantat, without more ado, to the great scandal of the mayor, who was thus put into the background, proceeded to dilate upon the main features of the count's and countess's biography.

"The Countess de Trémoré, *née* Bertha Lechaillu, was the daughter of a poor village school-master. At eighteen, her beauty was famous for three leagues around, but as she only had for dowry her great blue eyes and blond ringlets, but few serious lovers presented themselves. Already Bertha, by advice of her family, had resigned herself to take a place as a governess—a sad position for so beautiful a maid—when the heir of one of the richest domains in the neighborhood happened to see her, and fell in love with her.

"Clement Sauvresy was just thirty; he had no longer any family, and possessed nearly a hundred thousand livres income from lands absolutely free of incumbrance. Clearly, he had the best right in the world to choose a wife to his taste. He did not hesitate. He asked for Bertha's hand, won it, and, a month after, wedded her at mid-day, to the great scandal of the neighboring aristocracy, who went about saying: 'What folly! what good is there in being rich, if it is not to double one's fortune by a good marriage!'

"Nearly a month before the marriage, Sauvresy set the laborers to work at Valfeuillu, and in no long time had spent, in repairs and furniture, a trifle of thirty thousand crowns. The newly married pair chose this beautiful spot in which to spend their honeymoon. They were so well-contented there that they established themselves permanently at Valfeuillu, to the great satisfaction of the neighborhood.

"Bertha was one of those persons, it seemed, who are born especially to marry millionnaires. Without awk-

wardness or embarrassment, she passed easily from the humble school-room, where she had assisted her father, to the splendid drawing-room of Valfeuillu. And when she did the honors of her château to all the neighboring aristocracy, it seemed as though she had never done anything else. She knew how to remain simple, approachable, modest, all the while that she took the tone of the highest society. She was beloved."

"But it appears to me," interrupted the mayor, "that I said the same thing, and it was really not worth while——"

A gesture from M. Domini closed his mouth, and M. Plantat continued:

"Sauvresy was also liked, for he was one of those golden hearts which know not how to suspect evil. He was one of those men with a robust faith, with obstinate illusions, whom doubts never disturb. He was one of those who thoroughly confide in the sincerity of their friends, in the love of their mistresses. This new domestic household ought to be happy; it was so. Bertha adored her husband—that frank man, who, before speaking to her a word of love, offered her his hand. Sauvresy professed for his wife a worship which few thought foolish. They lived in great style at Valfeuillu. They received a great deal. When autumn came all the numerous spare chambers were filled. The turn-outs were magnificent.

"Sauvresy had been married two years, when one evening he brought from Paris one of his old and intimate friends, a college comrade of whom he had often spoken, Count Hector de Trémoré. The count intended to remain but a short time at Valfeuillu; but weeks passed and then months, and he still remained. It was not surprising. Hector had passed a very

stormy youth, full of debauchery, of clubs, of gambling, and of amours. He had thrown to the winds of his caprices an immense fortune; the relatively calm life of Valfeuillu was a relief. At first people said to him, 'You will soon have enough of the country.' He smiled, but said nothing. It was then thought, and rightly, perhaps, that having become poor, he cared little to display his ruin before those who had obscured his splendor. He absented himself rarely, and then only to go to Corbeil, almost always on foot. There he frequented the Belle Image hotel, the best in the town, and met, as if by chance, a young lady from Paris. They spent the afternoon together, and separated when the last train left."

"Peste!" growled the mayor, "for a man who lives alone, who sees nobody, who would not for the world have anything to do with other people's business, it seems to me our dear Monsieur Plantat is pretty well informed."

Evidently M. Courtois was jealous. How was it that he, the first personage in the place, had been absolutely ignorant of these meetings? His ill-humor was increasing, when Dr. Gendron answered:

"Pah! all Corbeil prated about that at the time."

M. Plantat made a movement with his lips as if to say, "I know other things besides." He went on, however, with his story.

"The visit of Count Hector made no change in the habits at the château. Monsieur and Madame Sauvresy had a brother; that was all. Sauvresy at this time made several journeys to Paris, where, as everybody knew, he was engaged in arranging his friend's affairs.

"This charming existence lasted a year. Happiness

seemed to be fixed forever beneath the delightful shades of Valfeuille. But alas! one evening on returning from the hunt, Sauvresy became so ill that he was forced to take to his bed. A doctor was called; inflammation of the chest had set in. Sauvresy was young, vigorous as an oak; his state did not at first cause anxiety. A fortnight afterward, in fact, he was up and about. But he was imprudent and had a relapse. He again nearly recovered; a week afterward there was another relapse, and this time so serious, that a fatal end of his illness was foreseen. During this long sickness, the love of Bertha and the affection of Trémoré for Sauvresy were tenderly shown. Never was an invalid tended with such solicitude—surrounded with so many proofs of the purest devotion. His wife and his friend were always at his couch, night and day. He had hours of suffering, but never a second of weariness. He repeated to all who went to see him, that he had come to bless his illness. He said to himself, ‘If I had not fallen ill, I should never have known how much I was beloved.’ ”

“He said the same thing to me,” interrupted the mayor, “more than a hundred times. He also said so to Madame Courtois, to Laurence, my eldest daughter——”

“Naturally,” continued M. Plantat. “But Sauvresy’s distemper was one against which the science of the most skilful physicians and the most constant care contend in vain.

“He said that he did not suffer much, but he faded perceptibly, and was no more than the shadow of his former self. At last, one night, toward two or three o’clock, he died in the arms of his wife and his friend. Up to the last moment, he had preserved the full force

of his faculties. Less than an hour before expiring, he wished everyone to be awakened, and that all the servants of the castle should be summoned. When they were all gathered about the bedside, he took his wife's hand, placed it in that of the Count de Trémorrel, and made them swear to marry each other when he was no more. Bertha and Hector began to protest, but he insisted in such a manner as to compel assent, praying and adjuring them, and declaring that their refusal would embitter his last moments. This idea of the marriage between his widow and his friend seems, besides, to have singularly possessed his thoughts toward the close of his life. In the preamble of his will, dictated the night before his death, to M. Bury, notary of Orcival, he says formally that their union is his dearest wish, certain as he is of their happiness, and knowing well that his memory will be piously kept."

"Had Monsieur and Madame Sauvresy no children?" asked the judge of instruction.

"No," answered the mayor.

M. Plantat continued:

"The grief of the count and the young widow was intense. M. de Trémorrel, especially, seemed absolutely desperate, and acted like a madman. The countess shut herself up, forbidding even those whom she loved best from entering her chamber—even Madame Courtois. When the count and Madame Bertha reappeared, they were scarcely to be recognized, so much had both changed. Monsieur Hector seemed to have grown twenty years older. Would they keep the oath made at the death-bed of Sauvresy, of which everyone was apprised? This was asked with all the more curiosity, because their profound sorrow for a man who well merited it, was admired."

The judge of instruction stopped M. Plantat with a motion of his hand.

"Do you know," asked he, "whether the rendez-vous at the Hôtel Belle Image had ceased?"

"I suppose so, sir; I think so."

"I am almost sure of it," said Dr. Gendron. "I have often heard it said—they know everything at Corbeil—that there was a heated explanation between M. de Trémoré and the pretty Parisian lady. After this quarrel, they were no longer seen at the Belle Image."

The old justice of the peace smiled.

"Melun is not at the end of the world," said he, "and there are hotels at Melun. With a good horse, one is soon at Fontainebleau, at Versailles, even at Paris. Madame de Trémoré might have been jealous; her husband had some first-rate trotters in his stables."

Did M. Plantat give an absolutely disinterested opinion, or did he make an insinuation? The judge of instruction looked at him attentively, to reassure himself, but his visage expressed nothing but a profound serenity. He told the story as he would any other, no matter what.

"Please go on, Monsieur," resumed M. Domini.

"Alas!" said M. Plantat, "nothing here below is eternal, not even grief. I know it better than anybody. Soon, to the tears of the first days, to violent despair, there succeeded, in the count and Madame Bertha, a reasonable sadness, then a soft melancholy. And in one year after Sauvresy's death Monsieur de Trémoré espoused his widow."

During this long narrative the mayor had several

times exhibited marks of impatience. At the end, being able to hold in no longer, he exclaimed:

"There, those are surely exact details; but I question whether they have advanced us a step in this grave matter which occupies us all—to find the murderers of the count and countess."

M. Plantat, at these words, bent on the judge of instruction his clear and deep look, as if to search his conscience to the bottom.

"These details were indispensable," returned M. Domini, "and they are very clear. Those rendezvous at the hotel struck me; one knows not to what extremities jealousy might lead a woman——"

He stopped abruptly, seeking, no doubt, some connection between the pretty Parisian and the murderers; then resumed:

"Now that I know the Trémorels as if I had lived with them intimately, let us proceed to the actual facts."

The brilliant eye of M. Plantat immediately grew dim; he opened his lips as if to speak; but kept his peace. The doctor alone, who had not ceased to study the old justice of the peace, remarked the sudden change of his features.

"It only remains," said M. Domini, "to know how the new couple lived."

M. Courtois thought it due to his dignity to anticipate M. Plantat.

"You ask how the new couple lived," said he hastily; "they lived in perfect concord; nobody knows better about it than I, who was most intimate with them. The memory of poor Sauvresy was a bond of happiness between them; if they liked me so well, it was because I often talked of him. Never a cloud, never a

cross word. Hector—I called him so, familiarly, this poor, dear count—gave his wife the tender attentions of a lover; those delicate cares, which I fear most married people soon dispense with.”

“And the countess?” asked M. Plantat, in a tone too marked not to be ironical.

“Bertha?” replied the worthy mayor—“she permitted me to call her thus, paternally—I have cited her many and many a time as an example and model, to Madame Courtois. She was worthy of Hector and of Sauvresy, the two most worthy men I have ever met!”

Then, perceiving that his enthusiasm somewhat surprised his hearers, he added, more softly:

“I have my reasons for expressing myself thus; and I do not hesitate to do so before men whose profession and character will justify my discretion. Sauvresy, when living, did me a great service—when I was forced to take the mayoralty. As for Hector, I knew well that he had departed from the dissipations of his youth, and thought I discerned that he was not indifferent to my eldest daughter, Laurence; and I dreamed of a marriage all the more proper, as, if the Count Hector had a great name, I would give to my daughter a dowry large enough to gild any escutcheon. Only events modified my projects.”

The mayor would have gone on singing the praises of the Trémorels, and his own family, if the judge of instruction had not interposed.

“Here I am fixed,” he commenced, “now, it seems to me——”

He was interrupted by a loud noise in the vestibule. It seemed like a struggle, and cries and shouts reached the drawing-room. Everybody rose.

"I know what it is," said the mayor, "only too well. They have just found the body of the Count de Trémoré."

IV

The mayor was mistaken. The drawing-room door opened suddenly, and a man of slender form, who was struggling furiously, and with an energy which would not have been suspected, appeared, held on one side by a gendarme, and on the other by a domestic.

The struggle had already lasted long, and his clothes were in great disorder. His new coat was torn, his cravat floated in strips, the button of his collar had been wrenched off, and his open shirt left his breast bare. In the vestibule and court were heard the frantic cries of the servants and the curious crowd—of whom there were more than a hundred, whom the news of the crime had collected about the gate, and who burned to hear, and above all to see.

This enraged crowd cried:

"It is he! Death to the assassin! It is Guespin! See him!"

And the wretch, inspired by an immense fright, continued to struggle.

"Help!" shouted he hoarsely. "Leave me alone. I am innocent!"

He had posted himself against the drawing-room door, and they could not force him forward.

"Push him," ordered the mayor, "push him."

It was easier to command than to execute. Terror lent to Guespin enormous force. But it occurred to the doctor to open the second wing of the door; the support failed the wretch, and he fell, or rather rolled

at the foot of the table at which the judge of instruction was seated. He was straightway on his feet again, and his eyes sought a chance to escape. Seeing none—for the windows and doors were crowded with the lookers-on—he fell into a chair. The fellow appeared the image of terror, wrought up to paroxysm. On his livid face, black and blue, were visible the marks of the blows he had received in the struggle; his white lips trembled, and he moved his jaws as if he sought a little saliva for his burning tongue; his staring eyes were bloodshot, and expressed the wildest distress; his body was bent with convulsive spasms. So terrible was this spectacle, that the mayor thought it might be an example of great moral force. He turned toward the crowd, and pointing to Guespin, said in a tragic tone:

“See what crime is!”

The others exchanged surprised looks.

“If he is guilty,” muttered M. Plantat, “why on earth has he returned?”

It was with difficulty that the crowd was kept back; the brigadier was forced to call in the aid of his men. Then he returned and placed himself beside Guespin, thinking it not prudent to leave him alone with unarmed men.

But the man was little to be feared. The reaction came; his over-excited energy became exhausted, his strained muscles flaccid, and his prostration resembled the agony of brain fever. Meanwhile the brigadier recounted what had happened.

“Some of the servants of the château and the neighboring houses were chatting near the gate, about the crime, and the disappearance of Guespin last night, when all of a sudden, someone perceived him at a dis-

tance, staggering, and singing boisterously, as if he were drunk."

"Was he really drunk?" asked M. Domini.

"Very," returned the brigadier.

"Then we owe it to the wine that we have caught him, and thus all will be explained."

"On perceiving this wretch," pursued the gendarme, who seemed not to have the shadow of a doubt of Guespin's guilt, "François, the count's valet de chambre, and Baptiste, the mayor's servant, who were there, hastened to meet him, and seized him. He was so tipsy that he thought they were fooling with him. When he saw my men, he was undeceived. Just then one of the women cried out, 'Brigand, it was you who have this night assassinated the count and the countess!' He immediately became paler than death, and remained motionless and dumb. Then he began to struggle so violently that he nearly escaped. Ah! he's strong, the rogue, although he does not look like it."

"And he said nothing?" said Plantat.

"Not a word; his teeth were so tightly shut with rage that I'm sure he couldn't say 'bread.' But we've got him. I've searched him, and this is what I have found in his pockets: a handkerchief, a pruning-knife, two small keys, a scrap of paper covered with figures, and an address of the establishment of 'Vulcan's Forges.' But that's not all——"

The brigadier took a step, and eyed his auditors mysteriously; he was preparing his effect.

"That's not all. While they were bringing him along in the court-yard, he tried to get rid of his wallet. Happily I had my eyes open, and saw the dodge. I picked up the wallet, which he had thrown among the flowers near the door; here it is. In it are a one-

hundred-franc note, three napoleons, and seven francs in change. Yesterday the rascal hadn't a sou——"

"How do you know that?" asked M. Domini.

"Dame! Monsieur Judge, he borrowed of the valet François (who told me of it) twenty-five francs, pretending that it was to pay his share of the wedding expenses."

"Tell François to come here," said the judge of instruction. "Now, sir," he continued, when the valet presented himself, "do you know whether Guespin had any money yesterday?"

"He had so little, Monsieur," answered François promptly, "that he asked me to lend him twenty-five francs during the day, saying that otherwise he could not go to the wedding, not having enough even to pay his railway fare."

"But he might have some savings—a hundred-franc note, for instance, which he didn't like to change."

François shook his head with an incredulous smile.

"Guespin isn't the man to have savings," said he. "Women and cards exhaust all his wages. No longer ago than last week, the keeper of the Café du Commerce came here and made a row on account of what he owed him, and threatened to go to the count about it."

Perceiving the effect of what he said, the valet, as if to correct himself, hastened to add:

"I have no ill-will toward Guespin; before to-day I've always considered him a clever fellow, though he was too much of a practical joker; he was, perhaps, a little proud, considering his bringing up——"

"You may go," said the judge, cutting the disquisition of M. François short; the valet retired.

During this colloquy, Guespin had little by little

come to himself. The judge of instruction, Plantat, and the mayor narrowly watched the play of his countenance, which he had not the coolness to compose, while the doctor held his pulse and counted its beating.

"Remorse, and fear of punishment," muttered the mayor.

"Innocence, and the impossibility of proving it," responded Plantat in a low tone.

M. Domini heard both these exclamations, but did not appear to take notice of them. His opinion was not formed, and he did not wish that anyone should be able to foretell, by any word of his, what it would be.

"Are you better, my friend?" asked Dr. Gendron, of Guespin.

The poor fellow made an affirmative sign. Then, having looked around with the anxious glance of a man who calculates a precipice over which he has fallen, he passed his hand across his eyes and stammered:

"Something to drink!"

A glass of water was brought, and he drank it at a draught, with an expression of intense satisfaction. Then he got upon his feet.

"Are you now in a fit state to answer me?" asked the judge.

Guespin staggered a little, then drew himself up. He continued erect before the judge, supporting himself against a table. The nervous trembling of his hands diminished, the blood returned to his cheeks, and as he listened, he arranged the disorder of his clothes.

"You know the events of this night, don't you?" commenced the judge; "the Count and Countess de

Trémoré have been murdered. You went away yesterday with all the servants of the château; you left them at the Lyons station about nine o'clock; you have just returned, alone. Where have you passed the night?"

Guespin hung his head and remained silent.

"That is not all," continued M. Domini; "yesterday you had no money, the fact is well known; one of your fellow-servants has just proved it. To-day, one hundred and sixty-seven francs are found in your wallet. Where did you get this money?"

The unhappy creature's lip moved as if he wished to answer; a sudden thought seemed to check him, for he did not speak.

"More yet. What is this card of a hardware establishment that has been found in your pocket?"

Guespin made a sign of desperation, and stammered:

"I am innocent."

"I have not as yet accused you," said the judge of instruction, quickly. "You knew, perhaps, that the count received a considerable sum yesterday?"

A bitter smile parted Guespin's lips as he answered:

"I know well enough that everything is against me."

There was a profound silence. The doctor, the mayor, and Plantat, seized with a keen curiosity, dared not move. Perhaps nothing in the world is more thrilling than one of these merciless duels between justice and a man suspected of a crime. The questions may seem insignificant, the answers irrelevant; both questions and answers envelop terrible, hidden meanings. The smallest gesture, the most rapid movement of physiognomy may acquire deep significance, a fugitive light in the eye betray an advantage gained:

an imperceptible change in the voice may be confession.

The coolness of M. Domini was disheartening.

"Let us see," said he after a pause: "where did you pass the night? How did you get this money? And what does this address mean?"

"Eh!" cried Guespin, with the rage of powerlessness, "I should tell you what you would not believe."

The judge was about to ask another question, but Guespin cut him short.

"No; you wouldn't believe me," he repeated, his eyes glistening with anger. "Do men like you believe men like me? I have a past, you know, of antecedents, as you would say. The past! They throw that in my face, as if the future depended on the past. Well, yes; it's true, I'm a debauchee, a gambler, a drunkard, an idler, but what of it? It's true I have been before the police court, and condemned for night poaching—what does that prove? I have wasted my life, but whom have I wronged if not myself? My past! Have I not sufficiently expiated it?"

Guespin was self-possessed, and finding in himself sensations which awoke a sort of eloquence, he expressed himself with a savage energy well calculated to strike his hearers.

"I have not always served others," he continued; "my father was in easy circumstances—almost rich. He had large gardens, near Saumur, and he passed for one of the best gardeners of that region. I was educated, and when sixteen years old, began to study law. Four years later they thought me a talented youth. Unhappily for me, my father died. He left me a landed property worth a hundred thousand francs: I sold it out for sixty thousand and went to Paris. I was a fool

then. I had the fever of pleasure-seeking, a thirst for all sorts of pastimes, perfect health, plenty of money. I found Paris a narrow limit for my vices; it seemed to me that the objects of my desires were wanting. I thought my sixty thousand francs would last forever."

Guespin paused; a thousand memories of those times rushed into his thoughts and he muttered: "Those were good times."

"My sixty thousand francs," he resumed, "held out eight years. Then I hadn't a sou, yet I longed to continue my way of living. You understand, don't you? About this time, the police, one night, arrested me. I was 'detained' six months. You will find the records of the affair at the prefecture. Do you know what it will tell you? It will tell you that on leaving prison I fell into that shameful and abominable misery which exists in Paris. It will tell you that I have lived among the worst and lowest outcasts of Paris—and it is the truth."

The worthy mayor was filled with consternation.

"Good Heaven!" thought he, "what an audacious and cynical rascal! and to think that one is liable at any time to admit such servants into his house!"

The judge held his tongue. He knew that Guespin was in such a state that, under the irresistible impulse of passion, he might betray his innermost thoughts.

"But there is one thing," continued the suspected man, "that the record will not tell you; that, disgusted with this abject life, I was tempted to suicide. It will not tell you anything of my desperate attempts, my repentance, my relapses. At last, I was able in part to reform. I got work; and after being in four situations, engaged myself here. I found myself well off. I always spent my month's wages in advance, it's true—

but what would you have? And ask if anyone has ever had to complain of me."

It is well known that among the most intelligent criminals, those who have had a certain degree of education, and enjoyed some good fortune, are the most redoubtable. According to this, Guespin was decidedly dangerous. So thought those who heard him. Meanwhile, exhausted by his excitement, he paused and wiped his face, covered with perspiration.

M. Domini had not lost sight of his plan of attack.

"All that is very well," said he, "we will return to your confession at the proper time and place. But just now the question is, how you spent your night, and where you got this money."

This persistency seemed to exasperate Guespin.

"Eh!" cried he, "how do you want me to answer? The truth? You wouldn't credit it. As well keep silent. It is a fatality."

"I warn you for your own sake," resumed the judge, "that if you persist in refusing to answer, the charges which weigh upon you are such that I will have you arrested as suspected of this murder."

This menace seemed to have a remarkable effect on Guespin. Great tears filled his eyes, up to that time dry and flashing, and silently rolled down his cheeks. His energy was exhausted; he fell on his knees, crying:

"Mercy! I beg you, Monsieur, not to arrest me; I swear I am innocent, I swear it!"

"Speak, then."

"You wish it," said Guespin, rising. Then he suddenly changed his tone. "No, I will not speak, I cannot! One man alone could save me; it is the count; and he is dead. I am innocent; yet if the guilty are

not found, I am lost. Everything is against me. I know it too well. Now, do with me as you please ; I will not say another word."

Guespin's determination, confirmed by his look, did not surprise the judge.

"You will reflect," said he, quietly, "only, when you have reflected, I shall not have the same confidence in what you say as I should have now. Possibly," and the judge spoke slowly and with emphasis, "you have only had an indirect part in this crime ; if so——"

"Neither indirect nor direct," interrupted Guespin ; and he added, violently, "what misery ! To be innocent, and not able to defend myself."

"Since it is so," resumed M. Domini, "you should not object to be placed before Mme. de Trémoré's body?"

The accused did not seem affected by this menace. He was conducted into the hall whither they had fetched the countess. There, he examined the body with a cold and calm eye. He said, simply :

"She is happier than I ; she is dead, she suffers no longer ; and I, who am not guilty, am accused of her death."

M. Domini made one more effort.

"Come, Guespin ; if in any way you know of this crime, I conjure you, tell me. If you know the murderers, name them. Try to merit some indulgence for your frankness and repentance."

Guespin made a gesture as if resigned to persecution. "By all that is most sacred," he answered, "I am innocent. Yet I see clearly that if the murderer is not found, I am lost."

Little by little M. Domini's conviction was formed and confirmed. An inquest of this sort is not so diffi-

cult as may be imagined. The difficulty is to seize at the beginning, in the entangled skein, the main thread, which must lead to the truth through all the mazes, the ruses, silence, falsehoods of the guilty. M. Domini was certain that he held this precious thread. Having one of the assassins, he knew well that he would secure the others. Our prisons, where good soup is eaten, and good beds are provided, have tongues, as well as the dungeons of the mediæval ages.

The judge ordered the brigadier to arrest Guespin, and told him not to lose sight of him. He then sent for old Bertaud. This worthy personage was not one of the people who worry themselves. He had had so many affairs with the men of law, that one inquisition the more disturbed him little.

"This man has a bad reputation in my commune," whispered the mayor to M. Domini.

Bertaud heard it, however, and smiled.

Questioned by the judge of instruction, he recounted very clearly and exactly what had happened in the morning, his resistance, and his son's determination. He explained the reason for the falsehood they told; and here again the chapter of antecedents came up.

"Look here; I'm better than my reputation, after all," said he. "There are many folks who can't say as much. You see many things when you go about at night—enough."

He was urged to explain his allusions, but in vain.

When he was asked where and how he had passed the night, he answered, that having left the cabaret at ten o'clock, he went to put down some traps in Mau-prévoir wood; and had gone home and to bed about one o'clock.

"By the bye," added he, "there ought to be some game in those traps by this time."

"Can you bring a witness to prove that you went home at one?" asked the mayor, who bethought him of the count's clock, stopped at twenty minutes past three.

"Don't know, I'm sure," carelessly responded the poacher, "it's quite likely that my son didn't wake up when I went to bed."

He added, seeing the judge reflect:

"I suspect that you are going to imprison me until the murderers are discovered. If it was winter, I wouldn't complain much; a fellow is well off in prison then, for it's warm there. But just at the time for hunting, it's provoking. It will be a good lesson for that Philippe; it'll teach him what it costs to render a service to gentlefolks."

"Enough!" interrupted M. Domini, sternly. "Do you know Guespin?"

This name suddenly subdued the careless insolence of the marauder; his little gray eyes experienced a singular restlessness.

"Certainly," he answered in an embarrassed tone, "we have often made a party at cards, you understand, while sipping our 'gloria.' " *

The man's inquietude struck the four who heard him. Plantat, especially, betrayed profound surprise. The old vagabond was too shrewd not to perceive the effect which he produced.

"Faith, so much the worse!" cried he: "I'll tell you everything. Every man for himself, isn't it? If Guespin has done the deed, it will not blacken him any more, nor make him any the worse off. I know him,

* Coffee and brandy.

simply because he used to sell me the grapes and strawberries from the count's conservatories; I *suppose* he stole them; we divided the money, and I left."

Plantat could not refrain from an exclamation of satisfaction, as if to say, "Good luck! I knew it well enough!"

When he said he would be sent to prison, Bertaud was not wrong. The judge ordered his arrest.

It was now Philippe's turn.

The poor fellow was in a pitiable state; he was crying bitterly.

"To accuse me of such a crime, *me!*" he kept repeating.

On being questioned he told the pure and simple truth, excusing himself, however, for having dared to penetrate into the park. When he was asked at what hour his father reached home, he said he knew nothing about it; he had gone to bed about nine, and had not awoke until morning. He knew Guespin, from having seen him at his father's several times. He knew that the old man had some transactions with the gardener, but he was ignorant as to what they were. He had never spoken four times to Guespin. The judge ordered Philippe to be set at liberty, not that he was wholly convinced of his innocence, but because if the crime had been committed by several persons, it was well to have one of them free; he could be watched, and he would betray the whereabouts of the rest.

Meanwhile the count's body was nowhere to be found. The park had been rigidly searched, but in vain. The mayor suggested that he had been thrown into the river, which was also M. Domini's opinion; and some fishermen were sent to drag the Seine, com-

mencing their search a little above the place where the countess was found.

It was then nearly three o'clock. M. Plantat remarked that probably no one had eaten anything during the day. Would it not be wise to take something, he suggested, if the investigations were to be pursued till night? This appeal to the trivial necessities of our frail humanity highly displeased the worthy mayor; but the rest readily assented to the suggestion, and M. Courtois, though not in the least hungry, followed the general example. Around the table which was yet wet with the wine spilt by the assassins, the judge, M. Plantat, the mayor, and the doctor sat down, and partook of an improvised collation.

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The staircase had been put under guard, but the vestibule had remained free. People were heard coming and going, tramping and coughing; then rising above this continuous noise, the oaths of the gendarmes trying to keep back the crowd. From time to time, a scared face passed by the dining-room door, which was ajar. These were curious folks who, more daring than the rest, wished to see the "men of justice" eating, and tried to hear a word or two, to report them, and so become important in the eyes of the others. But the "men of justice"—as they said at Orcival—took care to say nothing of moment while the doors were open, and while a servant was passing to and fro. Greatly moved by this frightful crime, disturbed by the mystery which surrounded it, they hid their impressions. Each, on his part, studied the

probability of his suspicions, and kept his opinion to himself.

M. Domini, as he ate, put his notes in order, numbering the leaves, marking certain peculiarly significant answers of the suspected persons with a cross. He was, perhaps, the least tormented of the four companions at this funereal repast. The crime did not seem to him one of those which keep judges of instruction sleepless through the night; he saw clearly the motive of it; and he had Bertaud and Guespin, two of the assassins, or at least accomplices, secure.

M. Plantat and Dr. Gendron, seated next each other, were talking of the illness which carried off Sauvresy. M. Courtois listened to the hubbub without.

The news of the double murder was soon noised about the neighborhood, and the crowd increased every minute. It filled the court, and became bolder and bolder; the gendarmes were overwhelmed. Then or never was the time for the mayor to show his authority. "I am going to make these people listen to reason," said he, "and make them retire." And at once, wiping his mouth, he threw his tumbled napkin on the table, and went out.

It was time. The brigadier's injunctions were no longer heeded. Some curious people, more eager than the rest, had flanked the position and were forcing an entrance through the gate leading to the garden. The mayor's presence did not perhaps intimidate the crowd much, but it redoubled the energy of the gendarmes; the vestibule was cleared, amid murmurings against the arm of the law.

What a chance for a speech! M. Courtois was not wanting to the occasion. He believed that his eloquence, endowed with the virtues of a cold shower-

bath, would calm this unwonted effervescence of his constituency. He stepped forward upon the steps, his left hand resting in the opening of his vest, gesturing with his right in the proud and impassible attitude which the sculptor lends to great orators. It was thus that he posed before his council when, finding unexpected opposition, he undertook to impose his will upon them, and recall the recalcitrant members to their duty.

His speech, in fragments, penetrated to the dining-room. According as he turned to the right or to the left, his voice was clear and distinct, or was lost in space. He said:

"Fellow-citizens, an atrocious crime, unheard of before in our commune, has shocked our peaceable and honest neighborhood. I understand and excuse your feverish emotion, your natural indignation. As well as you, my friends, more than you—I cherished and esteemed the noble Count de Trémoré, and his virtuous wife. We mourn them together——"

"I assure you," said Dr. Gendron to M. Plantat, "that the symptoms you describe are not uncommon after pleurisy. From the acute state, the inflammation passes to the chronic state, and becomes complicated with pneumonia."

"But nothing," pursued the mayor, "can justify a curiosity, which by its importunate attempts to be satisfied, embarrasses the investigation, and is, at all events, a punishable interference with the cause of justice. Why this unwonted gathering? Why these rumors and noises? These premature conjectures?"

"There were several consultations," said M. Plantat, "which did not have favorable results. Sauvresy suffered altogether strange and unaccountable tort-

ures. He complained of troubles so unwonted, so absurd, if you'll excuse the word, that he discouraged all the conjectures of the most experienced physicians."

"Was it not R——, of Paris, who attended him?"

"Exactly. He came daily, and often remained overnight. Many times I have seen him ascending the principal street of the village, with troubled countenance, as he went to give his prescription to the apothecary."

"Be wise enough," cried M. Courtois, "to moderate your just anger; be calm; be dignified."

"Surely," continued Dr. Dendron, "your apothecary is an intelligent man; but you have at Orcival a fellow who quite outdoes him, a fellow who knows how to make money; one Robelot——"

"Robelot, the bone-setter?"

"That's the man. I suspect him of giving consultations, and prescribing *sub rosa*. He is very clever. In fact I educated him. Five or six years ago, he was my laboratory boy, and even now I employ him when I have a delicate operation on hand——"

The doctor stopped, struck by the alteration in the impassible Plantat's features.

"What is the matter, my friend?" he asked. "Are you ill?"

The judge left his notes, to look at him.

"Why," said he, "Monsieur Plantat is very pale——"

But M. Plantat speedily resumed his habitual expression.

"'Tis nothing," he answered, "really nothing. With my abominable stomach, as soon as I change my hour of eating——"

Having reached his peroration, M. Courtois raised his voice.

"Return," said he, "to your peaceable homes, your quiet avocations. Rest assured the law protects you. Already justice has begun its work; two of the criminals are in its power, and we are on the track of their accomplices."

"Of all the servants of the château," remarked M. Plantat, "there remains not one who knew Sauvresy. The domestics have one by one been replaced."

"No doubt," answered the doctor, "the sight of the old servants would be disagreeable to Monsieur de Trémoré."

He was interrupted by the mayor, who re-entered, his eyes glowing, his face animated, wiping his forehead.

"I have let the people know," said he, "the indecency of their curiosity. They have all gone away. They were anxious to get at Philippe Bertaud, the brigadier says; public opinion has a sharp scent."

Hearing the door open, he turned, and found himself face to face with a man whose features were scarcely visible, so profoundly did he bow, his hat pressed against his breast.

"What do you wish?" sternly asked M. Courtois. "By what right have you come in here? Who are you?"

The man drew himself up.

"I am Monsieur Lecoq," he replied, with a gracious smile. "Monsieur Lecoq of the detective force, sent by the prefect of police in reply to a telegram, for this affair."

This declaration clearly surprised all present, even the judge of instruction.

In France, each profession has its special externals, as it were, insignia, which betray it at first view. Each profession has its conventional type, and when public opinion has adopted a type, it does not admit it possible that the type should be departed from. What is a doctor? A grave man, all in black, with a white cravat. A gentleman with a capacious stomach, adorned with heavy gold seals, can only be a banker. Everybody knows that the artist is a merry liver, with a peaked hat, a velvet vest, and enormous ruffles. By virtue of this rule, the detective of the prefecture ought to have an eye full of mystery, something suspicious about him, a negligence of dress, and imitation jewelry. The most obtuse shopkeeper is sure that he can scent a detective at twenty paces; a big man with mustaches, and a shining felt hat, his throat imprisoned by a collar of hair, dressed in a black, threadbare surtout, carefully buttoned up on account of the entire absence of linen. Such is the type. But, according to this, M. Lecoq, as he entered the dining-room at Valfeuillu, had by no means the air of a detective. True, M. Lecoq can assume whatever air he pleases. His friends declare that he has a physiognomy peculiar to himself, which he resumes when he enters his own house, and which he retains by his own fireside, with his slippers on; but the fact is not well proved. What is certain, is that his mobile face lends itself to strange metamorphoses; that he moulds his features according to his will, as the sculptor moulds clay for modelling. He changes everything, even his look.

“So,” said the judge of instruction, “the prefect has sent you to me, in case certain investigations become necessary.”

“Yes, Monsieur, quite at your service.”

M. Lecoq had on this day assumed a handsome wig of lank hair, of that vague color called Paris blonde, parted on the side by a line pretentiously fanciful; whiskers of the same color puffed out with bad pomade, encircled a pallid face. His big eyes seemed congealed within their red border, an open smile rested on his thick lips, which, in parting, discovered a range of long yellow teeth. His face, otherwise, expressed nothing in particular. It was a nearly equal mixture of timidity, self-sufficiency, and contentment. It was quite impossible to concede the least intelligence to the possessor of such a phiz. One involuntarily looked for a goitre. The retail haberdashers, who, having cheated for thirty years in their threads and needles, retire with large incomes, should have such heads as this. His apparel was as dull as his person. His coat resembled all coats, his trousers all trousers. A hair chain, the same color as his whiskers, was attached to a large silver watch, which bulged out his left waistcoat pocket. While speaking, he fumbled with a confection-box made of transparent horn, full of little square lozenges, and adorned by a portrait of a very homely, well-dressed woman—"the defunct," no doubt. As the conversation proceeded, according as he was satisfied or disturbed, M. Lecoq munched a lozenge, or directed glances toward the portrait which were quite a poem in themselves.

Having examined the man a long time, the judge of instruction shrugged his shoulders. "Well," said M. Domini, finally, "now that you are here, we will explain to you what has occurred."

"Oh, that's quite useless," responded Lecoq, with a satisfied air, "perfectly useless, sir."

"Nevertheless, it is necessary that you should know——"

"What? that which monsieur the judge knows?" interrupted the detective, "for that I already know. Let us agree there has been a murder, with theft as its motive; and start from that point. The countess's body has been found—not so that of the count. What else? Bertaud, an acknowledged rogue, is arrested; he merits a little punishment, doubtless. Guespin came back drunk; ah, there are sad charges against this Guespin! His past is deplorable; it is not known where he passed the night, he refuses to answer, he brings no alibi—this is indeed grave!"

M. Plantat gazed at the detective with visible pleasure.

"Who has told you about these things?" asked M. Domini.

"Well—everybody has told me a little."

"But where?"

"Here: I've already been here two hours, and even heard the mayor's speech."

And, satisfied with the effect he had produced, M. Lecoq munched a lozenge.

"You were not aware, then," resumed the judge, "that I was waiting for you?"

"Pardon me," said the detective; "I hope you will be kind enough to hear me. You see, it is indispensable to study the ground; one must look about, establish his batteries. I am anxious to catch the general rumor—public opinion, as they say, so as to distrust it."

"All this," answered M. Domini, severely, "does not justify your delay."

M. Lecoq glanced tenderly at the portrait.

“Monsieur the judge,” said he, “has only to inquire at the prefecture, and he will learn that I know my profession. The great thing requisite, in order to make an effective search, is to remain unknown. The police are not popular. Now, if they knew who I was, and why I was here, I might go out, but nobody would tell me anything; I might ask questions—they’d serve me a hundred lies; they would distrust me, and hold their tongues.”

“Quite true—quite true,” murmured Plantat, coming to the support of the detective.

M. Lecoq went on:

“So that when I was told that I was going into the country, I put on my country face and clothes. I arrive here and everybody, on seeing me, says to himself, ‘Here’s a curious bumpkin, but not a bad fellow.’ Then I slip about, listen, talk, make the rest talk! I ask this question and that, and am answered frankly; I inform myself, gather hints, no one troubles himself about me. These Orcival folks are positively charming; why, I’ve already made several friends, and am invited to dine this very evening.”

M. Domini did not like the police, and scarcely concealed it. He rather submitted to their co-operation than accepted it, solely because he could not do without them. While listening to M. Lecoq, he could not but approve of what he said; yet he looked at him with an eye by no means friendly.

“Since you know so much about the matter,” observed he, dryly, “we will proceed to examine the scene of the crime.”

“I am quite at Monsieur the judge’s orders,” returned the detective, laconically. As everyone was

getting up, he took the opportunity to offer M. Plantat his lozenge-box.

"Monsieur perhaps uses them?"

Plantat, unwilling to decline, appropriated a lozenge, and the detective's face became again serene. Public sympathy was necessary to him, as it is to all great comedians.

VI

M. Lecoq was the first to reach the staircase, and the spots of blood at once caught his eye.

"Oh," cried he, at each spot he saw, "oh, oh, the wretches!"

M. Courtois was much moved to find so much sensibility in a detective. The latter, as he continued to ascend, went on:

"The wretches! They don't often leave traces like this everywhere—or at least they wipe them out."

On gaining the first landing, and the door of the boudoir which led into the chamber, he stopped, eagerly scanning, before he entered, the position of the rooms.

Then he entered the boudoir, saying:

"Come; I don't see my way clear yet."

"But it seems to me," remarked the judge, "that we have already important materials to aid your task. It is clear that Guespin, if he is not an accomplice, at least knew something about the crime."

M. Lecoq had recourse to the portrait in the lozenge-box. It was more than a glance, it was a confidence. He evidently said something to the dear defunct, which he dared not say aloud.

"I see that Guespin is seriously compromised," re-

sumed he. "Why didn't he want to tell where he passed the night? But, then, public opinion is against him, and I naturally distrust *that*."

The detective stood alone in the middle of the room, the rest, at his request, remained at the threshold, and looking keenly about him, searched for some explanation of the frightful disorder of the apartment.

"Fools!" cried he, in an irritated tone, "double brutes! Because they murder people so as to rob them, is no reason why they should break everything in the house. Sharp folks don't smash up furniture; they carry pretty picklocks, which work well and make no noise. Idiots! one would say——"

He stopped with his mouth wide open.

"Eh! Not so bungling, after all, perhaps."

The witnesses of this scene remained motionless at the door, following, with an interest mingled with surprise, the detective's movements.

Kneeling down, he passed his flat palm over the thick carpet, among the broken porcelain.

"It's damp; very damp. The tea was not all drunk, it seems, when the cups were broken."

"Some tea might have remained in the teapot," suggested Plantat.

"I know it," answered M. Lecoq, "just what I was going to say. So that this dampness cannot tell us the exact moment when the crime was committed."

"But the clock does, and very exactly," interrupted the mayor.

"The mayor," said M. Domini, "in his notes, well explains that the movements of the clock stopped when it fell."

"But see here," said M. Plantat, "it was the odd hour marked by that clock that struck me. The hands

point to twenty minutes past three; yet we know that the countess was fully dressed, when she was struck. Was she up taking tea at three in the morning? It's hardly probable."

"I, too, was struck with that circumstance," returned M. Lecoq, "and that's why I said, 'not so stupid!' Well, let's see."

He lifted the clock with great care, and replaced it on the mantel, being cautious to set it exactly upright. The hands continued to point to twenty minutes past three.

"Twenty past three!" muttered he, while slipping a little wedge under the stand. "People don't take tea at *that* hour. Still less common is it that people are murdered at daylight."

He opened the clock-case with some difficulty, and pushed the longer hand to the figure of half-past three.

The clock struck eleven!

"Good," cried M. Lecoq, triumphantly. "That is the truth!" and drawing the lozenge-box from his pocket, he excitedly crushed a lozenge between his teeth.

The simplicity of this discovery surprised the spectators; the idea of trying the clock in this way had occurred to no one. M. Courtois, especially, was bewildered.

"There's a fellow," whispered he to the doctor, "who knows what he's about."

"*Ergo*," resumed M. Lecoq (who knew Latin), "we have here, not brutes, as I thought at first, but rascals who looked beyond the end of their knife. They intended to put us off the scent, by deceiving us as to the hour."

"I don't see their object very clearly," said M. Courtois, timidly.

"Yet it is easy to see it," answered M. Domini. "Was it not for their interest to make it appear that the crime was committed after the last train for Paris had left? Guespin, leaving his companions at the Lyons station at nine, might have reached here at ten, murdered the count and countess, seized the money which he knew to be in the count's possession, and returned to Paris by the last train."

"These conjectures are very shrewd," interposed M. Plantat; "but how is it that Guespin did not rejoin his comrades in the Batignolles? For in that way, to a certain degree, he might have provided a kind of alibi."

Dr. Gendron had been sitting on the only unbroken chair in the chamber, reflecting on Plantat's sudden embarrassment, when he had spoken of Robe-lot the bone-setter. The remarks of the judge drew him from his revery; he got up, and said:

"There is another point; putting forward the time was perhaps useful to Guespin, but it would greatly damage Bertaud, his accomplice."

"But," answered M. Domini, "it might be that Bertaud was not consulted. As to Guespin, he had no doubt good reasons for not returning to the wedding. His restlessness, after such a deed, would possibly have betrayed him."

M. Lecoq had not thought fit to speak as yet. Like a doctor at a sick bedside, he wanted to be sure of his diagnosis. He had returned to the mantel, and again pushed forward the hands of the clock. It sounded, successively, half-past eleven, then twelve, then half-past twelve, then one.

As he moved the hands, he kept muttering:

"Apprentices—chance brigands! You are malicious, parbleu, but you don't think of everything. You give a push to the hands, but don't remember to put the striking in harmony with them. Then comes along a detective, an old rat who knows things, and the dodge is discovered."

M. Domini and Plantat held their tongues. M. Lecoq walked up to them.

"Monsieur the Judge," said he, "is perhaps now convinced that the deed was done at half-past ten."

"Unless," interrupted M. Plantat, "the machinery of the clock has been out of order."

"That often happens," added M. Courtois. "The clock in my drawing-room is in such a state that I never know the time of day."

M. Lecoq reflected.

"It is possible," said he, "that Monsieur Plantat is right. The probability is in favor of my theory; but probability, in such an affair, is not sufficient; we must have certainty. There happily remains a mode of testing the matter—the bed; I'll wager it is rumpled up." Then addressing the mayor, "I shall need a servant to lend me a hand."

"I'll help you," said Plantat, "that will be a quicker way."

They lifted the top of the bed and set it on the floor, at the same time raising the curtains.

"Hum!" cried M. Lecoq, "was I right?"

"True," said M. Domini, surprised, "the bed is rumpled."

"Yes; and yet no one has lain in it."

"But—" objected M. Courtois.

"I am sure of what I say," interrupted the detective.

"The sheets, it is true, have been thrown back, per-

haps someone has rolled about in the bed ; the pillows have been tumbled, the quilts and curtains ruffled, but this bed has not the appearance of having been slept in. It is, perhaps, more difficult to rumple up a bed than to put it in order again. To make it up, the coverings must be taken off, and the mattresses turned. To disarrange it, one must actually lie down in it, and warm it with the body. A bed is one of those terrible witnesses which never misguide, and against which no counter testimony can be given. Nobody has gone to bed in this——”

“The countess,” remarked Plantat, “was dressed ; but the count might have gone to bed first.”

“No,” answered M. Lecoq, “I’ll prove to the contrary. The proof is easy, indeed, and a child of ten, having heard it, wouldn’t think of being deceived by this intentional disorder of the bedclothes.”

M. Lecoq’s auditors drew up to him. He put the coverings back upon the middle of the bed, and went on :

“Both of the pillows are much rumpled, are they not ? But look under the bolster—it is all smooth, and you find none of those wrinkles which are made by the weight of the head and the moving about of the arms. That’s not all ; look at the bed from the middle to the foot. The sheets being laid carefully, the upper and under lie close together everywhere. Slip your hand underneath—there—you see there is a resistance to your hand which would not occur if the legs had been stretched in that place. Now Monsieur de Trémoré was tall enough to extend the full length of the bed.”

This demonstration was so clear, its proof so palpable, that it could not be gainsaid.

“This is nothing,” continued M. Lecoq. “Let us

examine the second mattress. When a person purposely disarranges a bed, he does not think of the second mattress."

He lifted up the upper mattress, and observed that the covering of the under one was perfectly even.

"H'm, the second mattress," muttered M. Lecoq, as if some memory crossed his mind.

"It appears to be proved," observed the judge, "that Monsieur de Trémoré had not gone to bed."

"Besides," added the doctor, "if he had been murdered in his bed, his clothes would be lying here somewhere."

"Without considering," suggested M. Lecoq, "that some blood must have been found on the sheets. Decidedly, these criminals were not shrewd."

"What seems to me surprising," M. Plantat observed to the judge, "is that anybody would succeed in killing, except in his sleep, a young man so vigorous as Count Hector."

"And in a house full of weapons," added Dr. Gendron; "for the count's cabinet is full of guns, swords and hunting knives; it's a perfect arsenal."

"Alas!" sighed M. Courtois, "we know of worse catastrophies. There is not a week that the papers don't——"

He stopped, chagrined, for nobody was listening to him. Plantat claimed the general attention, and continued:

"The confusion in the house seems to you surprising; well now, I'm surprised that it is not worse than it is. I am, so to speak, an old man; I haven't the energy of a young man of thirty-five; yet it seems to me that if assassins should get into my house, when I was there, and up, it would go hard with them. I don't

know what I would do ; probably I should be killed ; but surely I would give the alarm. I would defend myself, and cry out, and open the windows, and set the house afire."

"Let us add," insisted the doctor, "that it is not easy to surprise a man who is awake. There is always an unexpected noise which puts one on his guard. Perhaps it is a creaking door, or a cracking stair. However cautious the murderer, he does not surprise his victim."

"They may have used fire-arms," struck in the worthy mayor, "that has been done. You are quietly sitting in your chamber ; it is summer, and your windows are open ; you are chatting with your wife, and sipping a cup of tea ; outside, the assassins are supplied with a short ladder ; one ascends to a level with the window, sights you at his ease, presses the trigger, the bullet speeds——"

"And," continued the doctor, "the whole neighborhood, aroused by it, hastens to the spot."

"Permit me, pardon, permit me," said M. Courtois, testily, "that would be so in a populous town. Here, in the midst of a vast park, no. Think, doctor, of the isolation of this house. The nearest neighbor is a long way off, and between there are many large trees, intercepting the sound. Let us test it by experience. I will fire a pistol in this room, and I'll wager that you will not hear the echo in the road."

"In the daytime, perhaps, but not in the night."

"Well," said M. Domini, who had been reflecting while M. Courtois was talking, "if against all hope, Guespin does not decide to speak to-night, or to-morrow, the count's body will afford us a key to the mystery."

During this discussion, M. Lecoq had continued his investigations, lifting the furniture, studying the fractures, examining the smallest pieces, as if they might betray the truth. Now and then, he took out an instrument-case, from which he produced a shank, which he introduced and turned in the locks. He found several keys on the carpet, and on a rack, a towel, which he carefully put one side, as if he deemed it important. He came and went from the bedroom to the count's cabinet, without losing a word that was said ; noting in his memory, not so much the phrases uttered, as the diverse accents and intonations with which they were spoken. In an inquest such as that of the crime of Orcival, when several officials find themselves face to face, they hold a certain reserve toward each other. They know each other to have nearly equal experience, to be shrewd, clear-headed, equally interested in discovering the truth, not disposed to confide in appearances, difficult to surprise. Each one, likely enough, gives a different interpretation to the facts revealed ; each may have a different theory of the deed ; but a superficial observer would not note these differences. Each, while dissimulating his real thoughts, tries to penetrate those of his neighbor, and if they are opposed to his own, to convert him to his opinion. The great importance of a single word justifies this caution. Men who hold the liberty and lives of others in their hands, a scratch of whose pen condemns to death, are apt to feel heavily the burden of their responsibility. It is an ineffable solace, to feel that this burden is shared by others. This is why no one dares take the initiative, or express himself openly ; but each awaits other opinions, to adopt or oppose them. They exchange fewer affirmations than sug-

gestions. They proceed by insinuation; then they utter commonplaces, ridiculous suppositions, asides, provocative, as it were, of other explanations.

In this instance, the judge of instruction and Plantat were far from being of the same opinion; they knew it before speaking a word. But M. Domini, whose opinion rested on material and palpable facts, which appeared to him indisputable, was not disposed to provoke contradiction. Plantat, on the contrary, whose system seemed to rest on *impressions*, on a series of logical deductions, would not clearly express himself, without a positive and pressing invitation. His last speech, impressively uttered, had not been replied to; he judged that he had advanced far enough to sound the detective.

“Well, Monsieur Lecoq,” asked he, “have you found any new traces?”

M. Lecoq was at that moment curiously examining a large portrait of the Count Hector, which hung opposite the bed. Hearing M. Plantat’s question, he turned.

“I have found nothing decisive,” answered he, “and I have found nothing to refute my conjectures. But——”

He did not finish; perhaps he too, recoiled before his share of the responsibility.

“What?” insisted M. Domini, sternly.

“I was going to say,” resumed M. Lecoq, “that I am not yet satisfied. I have my lantern and a candle in it; I only need a match——”

“Please preserve your decorum,” interrupted the judge severely.

“Very well, then,” continued M. Lecoq, in a tone too humble to be serious, “I still hesitate. If the doc-

tor, now, would kindly proceed to examine the countess's body, he would do me a great service."

"I was just going to ask the same favor, Doctor," said M. Domini.

The doctor answering, "Willingly," directed his steps toward the door.

M. Lecoq caught him by the arm.

"If you please," said he, in a tone totally unlike that he had used up to this time, "I would like to call your attention to the wounds on the head, made by a blunt instrument, which I suppose to be a hammer. I have studied these wounds, and though I am no doctor, they seem to me suspicious."

"And to me," M. Plantat quickly added. "It seemed to me, that in the places struck, there was no emission of blood in the cutaneous vessels."

"The nature of these wounds," continued M. Lecoq, "will be a valuable indication, which will fix my opinion." And, as he felt keenly the brusque manner of the judge, he added:

"It is you, Doctor, who hold the match."

M. Gendron was about to leave the room, when Baptiste, the mayor's servant—the man who wouldn't be scolded—appeared. He bowed and said:

"I have come for Monsieur the Mayor."

"For me? why?" asked M. Courtois. "What's the matter? They don't give me a minute's rest! Answer that I am busy."

"It's on account of madame," resumed the placid Baptiste; "she isn't at all well." The excellent mayor grew slightly pale.

"My wife!" cried he, alarmed. "What do you mean? Explain yourself."

"The postman arrived just now," returned Baptiste

with a most tranquil air, "and I carried the letters to madame, who was in the drawing-room. Hardly had I turned on my heels when I heard a shriek, and the noise of someone falling to the floor." Baptiste spoke slowly, taking artful pains to prolong his master's anguish.

"Speak! go on!" cried the mayor, exasperated. "Speak, won't you?"

"I naturally opened the drawing-room door again. What did I see? madame, at full length on the floor. I called for help; the chambermaid, cook, and others came hastening up, and we carried madame to her bed. Justine said that it was a letter from Mademoiselle Laurence which overcame my mistress——"

At each word Baptiste hesitated, reflected; his eyes, giving the lie to his solemn face, betrayed the great satisfaction he felt in relating his master's misfortunes.

His master was full of consternation. As it is with all of us, when we know not exactly what ill is about to befall us, he dared not ask any questions. He stood still, crushed; lamenting, instead of hastening home. M. Plantat profited by the pause to question the servant, with a look which Baptiste dared not disobey.

"What, a letter from Mademoiselle Laurence? Isn't she here, then?"

"No, sir: she went away a week ago, to pass a month with one of her aunts."

"And how is madame?"

"Better, sir; only she cries piteously."

The unfortunate mayor had now somewhat recovered his presence of mind. He seized Baptiste by the arm.

"Come along," cried he, "come along!"

They hastened off.

"Poor man!" said the judge of instruction. "Perhaps his daughter is dead."

M. Plantat shook his head.

"If it were only that!" muttered he. He added, turning to M. Domini:

"Do you recall the allusions of Bertaud, Monsieur?"

VII

The judge of instruction, the doctor, and M. Plantat exchanged a significant look. What misfortune had befallen M. Courtois, this worthy, and despite his faults, excellent person? Decidedly, this was an ill-omened day!

"If we are to speak of Bertaud's allusions," said M. Lecoq, "I have heard two very curious stories, though I have been here but a few hours. It seems that this Mademoiselle Laurence——"

M. Plantat abruptly interrupted the detective.

"Calumnies! odious calumnies! The lower classes, to annoy the rich, do not hesitate to say all sorts of things against them. Don't you know it? Is it not always so? The gentry, above all, those of a provincial town, live in glass houses. The lynx eyes of envy watch them steadily night and day, spy on them, surprise what they regard as their most secret actions to arm themselves against them. The bourgeois goes on, proud and content; his business prospers; he possesses the esteem and friendship of his own class; all this while, he is vilified by the lower classes, his name dragged in the dust, soiled by suppositions the most mischievous. Envy, Monsieur, respects nothing, no one."

"If Laurence has been slandered," observed Dr. Gendron, smiling, "she has a good advocate to defend her."

The old justice of the peace (the man of bronze, as M. Courtois called him) blushed slightly, a little embarrassed.

"There are causes," said he, quietly, "which defend themselves. Mademoiselle Courtois is one of those young girls who has a right to all respect. But there are evils which no laws can cure, and which revolt me. Think of it, *monsieurs*, our reputations, the honor of our wives and daughters, are at the mercy of the first petty rascal who has imagination enough to invent a slander. It is not believed, perhaps; but it is repeated, and spreads. What can be done? How can we know what is secretly said against us; will we ever know it?"

"Eh!" replied the doctor, "what matters it? There is only one voice, to my mind, worth listening to—that of conscience. As to what is called 'public opinion,' as it is the aggregate opinion of thousands of fools and rogues, I only despise it."

This discussion might have been prolonged, if the judge of instruction had not pulled out his watch, and made an impatient gesture.

"While we are talking, time is flying," said he. "We must hasten to the work that still remains."

It was then agreed that while the doctor proceeded to his autopsy, the judge should draw up his report of the case. M. Plantat was charged with watching Le-coq's investigations.

As soon as the detective found himself alone with M. Plantat:

"Well," he said, drawing a long breath, as if relieved of a heavy burden, "now we can get on."

Plantat smiled; the detective munched a lozenge, and added:

"It was very annoying to find the investigation already going on when I reached here. Those who were here before me have had time to get up a theory, and if I don't adopt it at once, there is the deuce to pay!"

M. Domini's voice was heard in the entry, calling out to his clerk.

"Now there's the judge of instruction," continued Lecoq, "who thinks this a very simple affair; while I, Lecoq, the equal at least of Gévrol, the favorite pupil of Papa Tabaret—I do not see it at all clearly yet."

He stopped, and after apparently going over in his mind the result of his discoveries, went on: "No; I'm off the track, and have almost lost my way. I see something underneath all this—but what? what?"

M. Plantat's face remained placid, but his eyes shone.

"Perhaps you are right," said he, carelessly; "perhaps there is something underneath." The detective looked at him; he didn't stir. His face seemed the most undisturbed in the world. There was a long silence, by which M. Lecoq profited to confide to the portrait of the defunct the reflections which burdened his brain.

"See here, my dear darling," said he, "this worthy person seems a shrewd old customer, and I must watch his actions and gestures carefully. He does not argue with the judge; he's got an idea that he doesn't dare to tell, and we must find it out. At the very first he guessed me out, despite these pretty blond locks. As long as he thought he could, by misleading me, make

me follow M. Domini's tack, he followed and aided me, showing me the way. Now that he sees me on the scent, he crosses his arms and retires. He wants to leave me the honor of the discovery. Why? He lives here—perhaps he is afraid of making enemies. No. He isn't a man to fear much of anything. What then? He shrinks from his own thoughts. He has found something so amazing, that he dares not explain himself."

A sudden reflection changed the course of M. Lecoq's confidences.

"A thousand imps!" thought he. "Suppose I'm wrong! Suppose this old fellow is not shrewd at all! Suppose he hasn't discovered anything, and only obeys the inspirations of chance! I've seen stranger things. I've known so many of these folks whose eyes seem so very mysterious, and announce such wonders; after all, I found nothing, and was cheated. But I intend to sound this old fellow well."

And, assuming his most idiotic manner, he said aloud:

"On reflection, Monsieur, little remains to be done. Two of the principals are in custody, and when they make up their minds to talk—they'll do it, sooner or later, if the judge is determined they shall—we shall know all."

A bucket of ice-water falling on M. Plantat's head could not have surprised him more, or more disagreeably, than this speech.

"What!" stammered he, with an air of frank amazement, "do you, a man of experience, who——"

Delighted with the success of his ruse, Lecoq could not keep his countenance, and Plantat, who perceived that he had been caught in the snare, laughed heartily.

Not a word, however, was exchanged between these two men, both subtle in the science of life, and equally cunning in its mysteries. They quite understood each other.

"My worthy old buck," said the detective to himself, "you've got something in your sack; only it's so big, so monstrous, that you won't exhibit it, not for a cannon-ball. You wish your hand forced, do you? Ve-ry well!"

"He's sly," thought M. Plantat. "He knows that I've got an idea; he's trying to get at it—and I believe he will."

M. Lecoq had restored his lozenge-box to his pocket, as he always did when he went seriously to work. His amour-propre was enlisted; he played a part—and he was a rare comedian.

"Now," cried he, "let's to horse. According to the mayor's account, the instrument with which all these things were broken has been found."

"In the room in the second story," answered M. Plantat, "overlooking the garden, we found a hatchet on the floor, near a piece of furniture which had been assailed, but not broken open; I forbade anyone to touch it."

"And you did well. Is it a heavy hatchet?"

"It weighs about two pounds."

"Good. Let's see it."

They ascended to the room in question, and M. Lecoq, forgetting his part of a haberdasher, and regardless of his clothes, went down flat on his stomach, alternately scrutinizing the hatchet—which was a heavy, terrible weapon—and the slippery and well-waxed oaken floor.

"I suppose," observed M. Plantat, "that the assas-

sins brought this hatchet up here and assailed this cupboard, for the sole purpose of putting us off our scent, and to complicate the mystery. This weapon, you see, was by no means necessary for breaking open the cupboard, which I could smash with my fist. They gave one blow—only one—and quietly put the hatchet down.”

The detective got up and brushed himself.

“I think you are mistaken,” said he. “This hatchet wasn’t put on the floor gently; it was thrown with a violence betraying either great terror or great anger. Look here; do you see these three marks, near each other, on the floor? When the assassin threw the hatchet, it first fell on the edge—hence this sharp cut; then it fell over on one side; and the flat, or hammer end left this mark here, under my finger. Therefore, it was thrown with such violence that it turned over itself and that its edge a second time cut in the floor, where you see it now.”

“True,” answered M. Plantat. The detective’s conjectures doubtless refuted his own theory, for he added, with a perplexed air:

“I don’t understand anything about it.”

M. Lecoq went on:

“Were the windows open this morning as they are now?”

“Yes.”

“Ah! The wretches heard some noise or other in the garden, and they went and looked out. What did they see? I can’t tell. But I do know that what they saw terrified them, that they threw down the hatchet furiously, and made off. Look at the position of these cuts—they are slanting of course—and you will see that the hatchet was thrown by a man who was stand-

ing, not by the cupboard, but close by the open window."

Plantat in his turn knelt down, and looked long and carefully. The detective was right. He got up confused, and after meditating a moment, said:

"This perplexes me a little; however——"

He stopped, motionless, in a revery, with one of his hands on his forehead.

"All might yet be explained," he muttered, mentally searching for a solution of the mystery, "and in that case the time indicated by the clock would be true."

M. Lecoq did not think of questioning his companion. He knew that he would not answer, for pride's sake.

"This matter of the hatchet puzzles me, too," said he. "I thought that these assassins had worked leisurely; but that can't be so. I see they were surprised and interrupted."

Plantat was all ears.

"True," pursued M. Lecoq, slowly, "we ought to divide these indications into two classes. There are the traces left on purpose to mislead us—the jumbled-up bed, for instance; then there are the real traces, undesigned, as are these hatchet cuts. But here I hesitate. Is the trace of the hatchet true or false, good or bad? I thought myself sure of the character of these assassins: but now——"

He paused; the wrinkles on his face, the contraction of his mouth, betrayed his mental effort.

"But now?" asked M. Plantat.

M. Lecoq, at this question, seemed like a man just roused from sleep.

"I beg your pardon," said he. "I forgot myself.

I've a bad habit of reflecting aloud. That's why I almost always insist on working alone. My uncertainty, hesitation, the vacillation of my suspicions, lose me the credit of being an astute detective—of being an agent for whom there's no such thing as a mystery."

Worthy M. Plantat gave the detective an indulgent smile.

"I don't usually open my mouth," pursued M. Le-coq, "until my mind is satisfied; then I speak in a peremptory tone, and say—this is thus, or this is so. But to-day I am acting without too much restraint, in the company of a man who knows that a problem such as this seems to me to be, is not solved at the first attempt. So I permit my gropings to be seen without shame. You cannot always reach the truth at a bound, but by a series of diverse calculations, by deductions and inductions. Well, just now my logic is at fault."

"How so?"

"Oh, it's very simple. I thought I understood the rascals, and knew them by heart; and yet I have only recognized imaginary adversaries. Are they fools, or are they mighty sly? That's what I ask myself. The tricks played with the bed and clock had, I supposed, given me the measure and extent of their intelligence and invention. Making deductions from the known to the unknown, I arrived, by a series of very simple consequences, at the point of foreseeing all that they could have imagined, to throw us off the scent. My point of departure admitted, I had only, in order to reach the truth, to take the contrary of that which appearances indicated. I said to myself:

"A hatchet has been found in the second story;

therefore the assassins carried it there, and designedly forgot it.

"They left five glasses on the dining-room table; therefore they were more or less than five, but they were not five.

"There were the remains of a supper on the table; therefore they neither drank nor ate.

"The countess's body was on the river-bank; therefore it was placed there deliberately. A piece of cloth was found in the victim's hand; therefore it was put there by the murderers themselves.

"Madame de Trémoré's body is disfigured by many dagger-strokes, and horribly mutilated; therefore she was killed by a single blow——"

"Bravo, yes, bravo," cried M. Plantat, visibly charmed.

"Eh! no, not bravo yet," returned M. Lecoq. "For here my thread is broken; I have reached a gap. If my deductions were sound, this hatchet would have been very carefully placed on the floor."

"Once more, bravo," added the other, "for this does not at all affect our general theory. It is clear, nay certain, that the assassins intended to act as you say. An unlooked-for event interrupted them."

"Perhaps; perhaps that's true. But I see something else——"

"What?"

"Nothing—at least, for the moment. Before all, I must see the dining-room and the garden."

They descended at once, and Plantat pointed out the glasses and bottles, which he had put one side. The detective took the glasses, one after another, held them level with his eye, toward the light, and scrutinized the moist places left on them.

"No one has drank from these glasses," said he, firmly.

"What, from neither one of them?"

The detective fixed a penetrating look upon his companion, and in a measured tone, said:

"From neither one."

M. Plantat only answered by a movement of the lips, as if to say, "You are going too far."

The other smiled, opened the door, and called:

"François!"

The valet hastened to obey the call. His face was suffused with tears; he actually bewailed the loss of his master.

"Hear what I've got to say, my lad," said M. Lecoq, with true detective-like familiarity. "And be sure and answer me exactly, frankly, and briefly."

"I will, sir."

"Was it customary here at the château, to bring up the wine before it was wanted?"

"No, sir; before each meal, I myself went down to the cellar for it."

"Then no full bottles were ever kept in the dining-room?"

"Never."

"But some of the wine might sometimes remain in draught?"

"No; the count permitted me to carry the dessert wine to the servants' table."

"And where were the empty bottles put?"

"I put them in this corner cupboard, and when they amounted to a certain number, I carried them down cellar."

"When did you last do so?"

"Oh"—François reflected—"at least five or six days ago."

"Good. Now, what liqueurs did the count drink?"

"The count scarcely ever drank liqueurs. If, by chance, he took a notion to have a small glass of eau-de-vie, he got it from the liqueur closet, there, over the stove."

"There were no decanters of rum or cognac in any of the cupboards?"

"No."

"Thanks; you may retire."

As François was going out, M. Lecoq called him back.

"While we are about it, look in the bottom of the closet, and see if you find the right number of empty bottles."

The valet obeyed, and looked into the closet.

"There isn't one there."

"Just so," returned M. Lecoq. "This time, show us your heels for good."

As soon as François had shut the door, M. Lecoq turned to Plantat and asked:

"What do you think now?"

"You were perfectly right."

The detective then smelt successively each glass and bottle.

"Good again! Another proof in aid of my guess."

"What more?"

"It was not wine that was at the bottom of these glasses. Among all the empty bottles put away in the bottom of that closet, there was one—here it is—which had contained *vinegar*; and it was from this bottle that they turned what they thought to be wine into the glasses."

Seizing a glass, he put it to M. Plantat's nose, adding:

"See for yourself."

There was no disputing it; the vinegar was good, its odor of the strongest; the villains, in their haste, had left behind them an incontestable proof of their intention to mislead the officers of justice. While they were capable of shrewd inventions, they did not have the art to perform them well. All their oversights could, however, be accounted for by their sudden haste, caused by the occurrence of an unlooked-for incident. "The floors of a house where a crime has just been committed," said a famous detective, "burn the feet." M. Lecoq seemed exasperated, like a true artist, before the gross, pretentious, and ridiculous work of some green and bungling scholar.

"These are a parcel of vulgar ruffians, truly! able ones, certainly; but they don't know their trade yet, the wretches."

M. Lecoq, indignant, ate three or four lozenges at a mouthful.

"Come, now," said Plantat, in a paternally severe tone. "Don't let's get angry. The people have failed in address, no doubt; but reflect that they could not, in their calculations, take account of the craft of a man like you."

M. Lecoq, who had the vanity which all actors possess, was flattered by the compliment, and but poorly dissimulated an expression of pleasure.

"We must be indulgent; come now," pursued Plantat. "Besides," he paused a moment to give more weight to what he was going to say, "besides, you haven't seen everything yet."

No one could tell when M. Lecoq was playing a

comedy. He did not always know, himself. This great artist, devoted to his art, practised the feigning of all the emotions of the human soul, just as he accustomed himself to wearing all sorts of costumes. He was very indignant against the assassins, and gesticulated about in great excitement; but he never ceased to watch Plantat slyly, and the last words of the latter made him prick up his ears.

“Let’s see the rest, then,” said he.

As he followed his worthy comrade to the garden, he renewed his confidences to the dear defunct.

“Confound this old bundle of mystery! We can’t take this obstinate fellow by surprise, that’s clear. He’ll give us the word of the riddle when we have guessed it; not before. He is as strong as we, my darling; he only needs a little practice. But look you—if he has found something which has escaped us, he must have previous information, that we don’t know of.”

Nothing had been disturbed in the garden.

“See here, Monsieur Lecoq,” said the old justice of the peace, as he followed a winding pathway which led to the river. “It was here that one of the count’s slippers was found; below there, a little to the right of these geraniums, his silk handkerchief was picked up.”

They reached the river-bank, and lifted, with great care, the planks which had been placed there to preserve the foot-prints.

“We suppose,” said M. Plantat, “that the countess, in her flight, succeeded in getting to this spot; and that here they caught up with her and gave her a finishing blow.”

Was this really Plantat’s opinion, or did he only report the morning’s theory? M. Lecoq could not tell.

"According to my calculations," he said, "the countess could not have fled, but was brought here already dead, or logic is not logic. However, let us examine this spot carefully."

He knelt down and studied the sand on the path, the stagnant water, and the reeds and water-plants. Then going along a little distance, he threw a stone, approaching again to see the effect produced on the mud. He next returned to the house, and came back again under the willows, crossing the lawn, where were still clearly visible traces of a heavy burden having been dragged over it. Without the least respect for his pantaloons, he crossed the lawn on all-fours, scrutinizing the smallest blades of grass, pulling away the thick tufts to see the earth better, and minutely observing the direction of the broken stems. This done, he said:

"My conclusions are confirmed. The countess was carried across here."

"Are you sure of it?" asked Plantat.

There was no mistaking the old man's hesitation this time; he was clearly undecided, and leaned on the other's judgment for guidance.

"There can be no error, possibly."

The detective smiled, as he added:

"Only, as two heads are better than one, I will ask you to listen to me, and then, you will tell me what you think."

M. Lecoq had, in searching about, picked up a little flexible stick, and while he talked, he used it to point out this and that object, like the lecturer at the panorama.

"No," said he, "Madame de Trémoré did not fly from her murderers. Had she been struck down here, she would have fallen violently; her weight, therefore,

would have made the water spirt to some distance, as well as the mud; and we should certainly have found some splashes."

"But don't you think that, since morning, the sun——"

"The sun would have absorbed the water; but the stain of dry mud would have remained. I have found nothing of the sort anywhere. You might object, that the water and mud would have spirted right and left; but just look at the tufts of these flags, lilies, and stems of cane—you find a light dust on every one. Do you find the least trace of a drop of water? No. There was then no splash, therefore no violent fall; therefore the countess was not killed here; therefore her body was brought here, and carefully deposited where you found it."

M. Plantat did not seem to be quite convinced yet.

"But there are the traces of a struggle in the sand," said he.

His companion made a gesture of protest.

"Monsieur deigns to have his joke; those marks would not deceive a school-boy."

"It appears to me, however——"

"There can be no mistake, Monsieur Plantat. Certain it is that the sand has been disturbed and thrown about. But all these trails that lay bare the earth which was covered by the sand, were made by the same foot. Perhaps you don't believe it. They were made, too, with the end of the foot; that you may see for yourself."

"Yes, I perceive it."

"Very well, then; when there has been a struggle on ground like this, there are always two distinct kinds of traces—those of the assailant and those of the vic-

tim. The assailant, throwing himself forward, necessarily supports himself on his toes, and imprints the fore part of his feet on the earth. The victim, on the contrary, falling back, and trying to avoid the assault, props himself on his heels, and therefore buries the *heels* in the soil. If the adversaries are equally strong, the number of imprints of the toes and the heels will be nearly equal, according to the chances of the struggle. But what do we find here?"

M. Plantat interrupted:

"Enough; the most incredulous would now be convinced." After thinking a moment, he added:

"No, there is no longer any possible doubt of it."

M. Lecoq thought that his argument deserved a reward, and treated himself to two lozenges at a mouthful.

"I haven't done yet," he resumed. "Granted, that the countess could not have been murdered here; let's add that she was not carried hither, but dragged along. There are only two ways of dragging a body; by the shoulders, and in this case the feet, scraping along the earth, leave two parallel trails; or by the legs—in which case the head, lying on the earth, leaves a single furrow, and that a wide one."

Plantat nodded assent.

"When I examined the lawn," pursued M. Lecoq, "I found the parallel trails of the feet, but yet the grass was crushed over a rather wide space. How was that? Because it was the body, not of a man, but of a woman, which was dragged across the lawn—of a woman full-dressed, with heavy petticoats; that, in short, of the countess, and not of the count."

M. Lecoq paused, in expectation of a question, or a remark.

But the old justice of the peace did not seem to be listening, and appeared to be plunged in the deepest meditation. Night was falling; a light fog hung like smoke over the Seine.

"We must go in," said M. Plantat, abruptly, "and see how the doctor has got on with his autopsy."

They slowly approached the house. The judge of instruction awaited them on the steps. He appeared to have a satisfied air.

"I am going to leave you in charge," said he to M. Plantat, "for if I am to see the procureur, I must go at once. When you sent for him this morning, he was absent."

M. Plantat bowed.

"I shall be much obliged if you will watch this affair to the end. The doctor will have finished in a few minutes, he says, and will report to-morrow morning. I count on your co-operation to put seals wherever they are necessary, and to select the guard over the château. I shall send an architect to draw up an exact plan of the house and garden. Well, sir," asked M. Domini, turning to the detective, "have you made any fresh discoveries?"

"I have found some important facts; but I cannot speak decisively till I have seen everything by daylight. If you will permit me, I will postpone making my report till to-morrow afternoon. I think I may say, however, that complicated as this affair is——"

M. Domini did not let him finish.

"I see nothing complicated in the affair at all; everything strikes me as very simple."

"But," objected M. Lecoq, "I thought——"

"I sincerely regret," continued the judge, "that you were so hastily called, when there was really no seri-

ous reason for it. The evidences against the arrested men are very conclusive."

Plantat and Lecoq exchanged a long look, betraying their great surprise.

"What!" exclaimed the former, "have you discovered any new indications?"

"More than indications, I believe," responded M. Domini. "Old Bertaud, whom I have again questioned, begins to be uneasy. He has quite lost his arrogant manner. I succeeded in making him contradict himself several times, and he finished by confessing that he saw the assassins."

"The assassins!" exclaimed M. Plantat. "Did he say assassins?"

"He saw at least one of them. He persists in declaring that he did not recognize him. That's where we are. But prison walls have salutary terrors. Tomorrow after a sleepless night, the fellow will be more explicit, if I mistake not."

"But Guespin," anxiously asked the old man, "have you questioned him?"

"Oh, as for him, everything is clear."

"Has he confessed?" asked M. Lecoq, stupefied.

The judge half turned toward the detective, as if he were displeased that M. Lecoq should dare to question him.

"Guespin has *not* confessed," he answered, "but his case is none the better for that. Our searchers have returned. They haven't yet found the count's body, and I think it has been carried down by the current. But they found at the end of the park, the count's other slipper, among the roses; and under the bridge, in the middle of the river, they discovered a thick vest which still bears the marks of blood."

“And that vest is Guespin’s?”

“Exactly so. It was recognized by all the domestics, and Guespin himself did not hesitate to admit that it belonged to him. But that is not all——”

M. Domini stopped as if to take breath, but really to keep Plantat in suspense. As they differed in their theories, he thought Plantat betrayed a stupid opposition to him; and he was not sorry to have a chance for a little triumph.

“That is not all,” he went on; “this vest had, in the right pocket, a large rent, and a piece of it had been torn off. Do you know what became of that piece of Guespin’s vest?”

“Ah,” muttered M. Plantat, “it was that which we found in the countess’s hand.”

“You are right, Monsieur. And what think you of this proof, pray, of the prisoner’s guilt?”

M. Plantat seemed amazed; his arms fell at his side. As for M. Lecoq, who, in presence of the judge, had resumed his haberdasher manner, he was so much surprised that he nearly strangled himself with a lozenge.

“A thousand devils!” exclaimed he. “That’s tough, that is!” He smiled sillily, and added in a low tone, meant only for Plantat’s ear:

“Mighty tough! Though quite foreseen in our calculations. The countess held a piece of cloth tightly in her hand; therefore it was put there, *intentionally*, by the murderers.”

M. Domini did not hear this remark. He shook hands with M. Plantat and made an appointment to meet him on the morrow, at the court-house. Then he went away with his clerk.

Guespin and old Bertaud, handcuffed, had a few

minutes before been led off to the prison of Corbeil, under the guard of the Orcival gendarmes.

VIII

Dr. Gendron had just finished his sad task in the billiard-room. He had taken off his long coat, and pulled up his shirt-sleeves above his elbows. His instruments lay on a table near him; he had covered the body with a long white sheet. Night had come, and a large lamp, with a crystal globe, lighted up the gloomy scene. The doctor, leaning over a water-basin, was washing his hands, when the old justice of the peace and the detective entered.

"Ah, it's you, Plantat," said the doctor in a suppressed tone; "where is Monsieur Domini?"

"Gone."

The doctor did not take the trouble to repress a vexed motion.

"I must speak with him, though," said he, "it's absolutely necessary—and the sooner the better; for perhaps I am wrong—I may be mistaken——"

M. Lecoq and M. Plantat approached him, having carefully closed the door. The doctor was paler than the corpse which lay under the sheet. His usually calm features betrayed great distress. This change could not have been caused by the task in which he had been engaged. Of course it was a painful one; but M. Gendron was one of those experienced practitioners who have felt the pulse of every human misery, and whose disgust had become torpid by the most hideous spectacles. He must have discovered something extraordinary.

"I am going to ask you what you asked me a while ago," said M. Plantat. "Are you ill or suffering?"

M. Gendron shook his head sorrowfully, and answered, slowly and emphatically:

"I will answer you, as you did me; 'tis nothing, I am already better."

Then these two, equally profound, turned away their heads, as if fearing to exchange their ideas; they doubted lest their looks should betray them.

M. Lecoq advanced and spoke.

"I believe I know the cause of the doctor's emotion. He has just discovered that Madame de Trémorcel was killed by a single blow, and that the assassins afterward set themselves to disfiguring the body, when it was nearly cold."

The doctor's eyes fastened on the detective, with a stupefied expression.

"How could you divine that?" he asked.

"Oh, I didn't guess it alone; I ought to share the honor of the theory which has enabled us to foresee this fact, with Monsieur Plantat."

"Oh," cried the doctor, striking his forehead, "now, I recollect your advice; in my worry, I must say, I had quite forgotten it. Well," he added, "your foresight is confirmed. Perhaps not so much time as you suppose elapsed between the first blow and the rest; but I am convinced that the countess had ceased to live nearly three hours, when the last blows were struck."

M. Gendron went to the billiard-table, and slowly raised the sheet, discovering the head and part of the bust.

"Let us inform ourselves, Plantat," he said.

The old justice of the peace took the lamp, and passed to the other side of the table. His hand trem-

bled so that the globe tingled. The vacillating light cast gloomy shadows upon the walls. The countess's face had been carefully bathed, the blood and mud effaced. The marks of the blows were thus more visible, but they still found upon that livid countenance, the traces of its beauty. M. Lecoq stood at the head of the table, leaning over to see more clearly.

"The countess," said Dr. Gendron, "received eighteen blows from a dagger. Of these, but one is mortal; it is this one, the direction of which is nearly vertical—a little below the shoulder, you see." He pointed out the wound, sustaining the body in his left arm. The eyes had preserved a frightful expression. It seemed as if the half-open mouth were about to cry "Help! Help!"

Plantat, the man with a heart of stone, turned away his head, and the doctor, having mastered his first emotion, continued in a professionally apathetic tone:

"The blade must have been an inch wide, and eight inches long. All the other wounds—those on the arms, breast, and shoulders, are comparatively slight. They must have been inflicted at least two hours after that which caused death."

"Good," said M. Lecoq.

"Observe that I am not positive," returned the doctor quickly. "I merely state a probability. The phenomena on which I base my own conviction are too fugitive, too capricious in their nature, to enable me to be absolutely certain."

This seemed to disturb M. Lecoq.

"But, from the moment when——"

"What I can affirm," interrupted Dr. Gendron, "what I would affirm under oath, is, that all the wounds on the head, excepting one, were inflicted after

death. No doubt of that whatever—none whatever. Here, above the eye, is the blow given while the countess was alive.”

“It seems to me, Doctor,” observed M. Lecoq, “that we may conclude from the proved fact that the countess, after death, was struck by a flat implement, that she had also ceased to live when she was mutilated by the knife.”

M. Gendron reflected a moment.

“It is possible that you are right; as for me, I am persuaded of it. Still the conclusions in my report will not be yours. The physician consulted by the law, should only pronounce upon patent, demonstrated facts. If he has a doubt, even the slightest, he should hold his tongue. I will say more; if there is any uncertainty, my opinion is that the accused, and not the prosecution, should have the benefit of it.”

This was certainly not the detective’s opinion, but he was cautious not to say so. He had followed Dr. Gendron with anxious attention, and the contraction of his face showed the travail of his mind.

“It seems to me now possible,” said he, “to determine how and where the countess was struck.”

The doctor had covered the body, and Plantat had replaced the lamp on the little table. Both asked M. Lecoq to explain himself.

“Very well,” resumed the detective. “The direction of the wound proves to me that the countess was in her chamber taking tea, seated, her body inclined a little forward, when she was murdered. The assassin came up behind her with his arm raised; he chose his position coolly, and struck her with terrific force. The violence of the blow was such that the victim fell forward, and in the fall, her forehead struck the end of the

table; she thus gave herself the only fatal blow which we have discovered on the head."

M. Gendron looked from one to the other of his companions, who exchanged significant glances. Perhaps he suspected the game they were playing.

"The crime must evidently have been committed as you say," said he.

There was another embarrassing silence. M. Lecoq's obstinate muteness annoyed Plantat, who finally asked him:

"Have you seen all you want to see?"

"All for to-day; I shall need daylight for what remains. I am confident, indeed, that with the exception of one detail that worries me, I have the key to the mystery."

"We must be here, then, early to-morrow morning."

"I will be here at any hour you will name."

"Your search finished, we will go together to Monsieur Domini, at Corbeil."

"I am quite at your orders."

There was another pause.

M. Plantat perceived that M. Lecoq guessed his thoughts, and did not understand the detective's capriciousness; a little while before, he had been very loquacious, but now held his tongue. M. Lecoq, on the other hand, was delighted to puzzle the old man a little, and formed the intention to astonish him the next morning, by giving him a report which should faithfully reflect all his ideas. Meanwhile he had taken out his lozenge-box, and was intrusting a hundred secrets to the portrait.

"Well," said the doctor, "there remains nothing more to be done, except to retire."

"I was just going to ask permission to do so," said M. Lecoq. "I have been fasting ever since morning."

M. Plantat now took a bold step.

"Shall you return to Paris to-night, Monsieur Lecoq?" asked he, abruptly.

"No; I came prepared to remain over-night; I've brought my night-gown, which I left, before coming up here, at the little roadside inn below. I shall sup and sleep there."

"You will be poorly off at the Faithful Grenadier," said the old justice of the peace. "You will do better to come and dine with me."

"You are really too good, Monsieur——"

"Besides, we have a good deal to say, and so you must remain the night with me; we will get your night-clothes as we pass along."

M. Lecoq bowed, flattered and grateful for the invitation.

"And I shall carry you off, too, Doctor," continued M. Plantat, "whether you will or not. Now, don't say no. If you insist on going to Corbeil to-night, we will carry you over after supper."

The operation of fixing the seals was speedily concluded; narrow strips of parchment, held by large waxen seals, were affixed to all the doors, as well as to the bureau in which the articles gathered for the purposes of the investigation had been deposited.

IX

Despite the haste they made, it was nearly ten o'clock when M. Plantat and his guests quitted the château of Valfeuillu. Instead of taking the high road, they cut across a pathway which ran along be-

side Mme. de Lanascal's park, and led diagonally to the wire bridge; this was the shortest way to the inn where M. Lecoq had left his slight baggage. As they went along, M. Plantat grew anxious about his good friend, M. Courtois.

"What misfortune can have happened to him?" said he to Dr. Gendron.

"Thanks to the stupidity of that rascal of a servant, we learned nothing at all. This letter from Mademoiselle Laurence has caused the trouble, somehow."

They had now reached the Faithful Grenadier.

A big red-faced fellow was smoking a long pipe at the door, his back against the house. He was talking with a railway employee. It was the landlord.

"Well, Monsieur Plantat," he cried, "what a horrible affair this is! Come in, come in; there are several folks in the hall who saw the assassins. What a villain old Bertaud is! And that Guespin; ah, I would willingly trudge to Corbeil to see them put up the scaffold!"

"A little charity, Master Lenfant; you forget that both these men were among your best customers."

Master Lenfant was confused by this reply; but his native impudence soon regained the mastery.

"Fine customers, parbleu!" he answered, "this thief of a Guespin has got thirty francs of mine which I'll never see again."

"Who knows?" said Plantat, ironically. "Besides, you are going to make more than that to-night, there's so much company at the Orcival festival."

During this brief conversation, M. Lecoq entered the inn for his night-gown. His office being no longer a secret, he was not now welcomed as when he was taken for a simple retired haberdasher. Mme. Lenfant, a lady

who had no need of her husband's aid to show penniless sots the door, scarcely deigned to answer him. When he asked how much he owed, she responded, with a contemptuous gesture, "Nothing." When he returned to the door, his night-gown in hand, M. Plantat said:

"Let's hurry, for I want to get news of our poor mayor."

The three hastened their steps, and the old justice of the peace, oppressed with sad presentiments, and trying to combat them, continued:

"If anything had happened at the mayor's, I should certainly have been informed of it by this time. Perhaps Laurence has written that she is ill, or a little indisposed. Madame Courtois, who is the best woman in the world, gets excited about nothing; she probably wanted to send her husband for Laurence at once. You'll see that it's some false alarm."

No; some catastrophe had happened. A number of the village women were standing before the mayor's gate. Baptiste, in the midst of the group, was ranting and gesticulating. But at M. Plantat's approach, the women fled like a troop of frightened gulls. The old man's unexpected appearance annoyed the placid Baptiste not a little, for he was interrupted, by the sudden departure of his audience, in the midst of a superb oratorical flight. As he had a great fear of M. Plantat, however, he dissimulated his chagrin with his habitual smile.

"Ah, sir," cried he, when M. Plantat was three steps off, "ah, what an affair! I was going for you——"

"Does your master wish me?"

"More than you can think. He ran so fast from Valfeuillu here, that I could scarcely keep up with him.

He's not usually fast, you know; but you ought to have seen him this time, fat as he is!"

M. Plantat stamped impatiently.

"Well, we got here at last," resumed the man, "and monsieur rushed into the drawing-room, where he found madame sobbing like a Magdalene. He was so out of breath he could scarcely speak. His eyes stuck out of his head, and he stuttered like this—'What's—the—matter? What's the—matter?' Madame, who couldn't speak either, held out mademoiselle's letter, which she had in her hand."

The three auditors were on coals of fire; the rogue perceived it, and spoke more and more slowly.

"Then monsieur took the letter, went to the window, and at a glance read it through. He cried out hoarsely, thus: 'Oh!' then he went to beating the air with his hands, like a swimming dog; then he walked up and down and fell, pouf! like a bag, his face on the floor. That was all."

"Is he dead?" cried all three in the same breath.

"Oh, no; you shall see," responded Baptiste, with a placid smile.

M. Lecoq was a patient man, but not so patient as you might think. Irritated by the manner of Baptiste's recital, he put down his bundle, seized the man's arm with his right hand, while with the left he whisked a light flexible cane, and said:

"Look here, fellow, I want you to hurry up, you know."

That was all he said; the servant was terribly afraid of this little blond man, with a strange voice, and a fist harder than a vice. He went on very rapidly this time, his eye fixed on M. Lecoq's rattan.

"Monsieur had an attack of vertigo. All the house

was in confusion ; everybody except I, lost their heads ; it occurred to me to go for a doctor, and I started off for one—for Doctor Gendron, whom I knew to be at the château, or the doctor near by, or the apothecary—it mattered not who. By good luck, at the street corner, I came upon Robelot, the bone-setter—‘ Come, follow me,’ said I. He did so ; sent away those who were tending monsieur, and bled him in both arms. Shortly after, he breathed, then he opened his eyes, and then he spoke. Now he is quite restored, and is lying on one of the drawing-room lounges, crying with all his might. He told me he wanted to see Monsieur Plantat, and I——”

“ And—Mademoiselle Laurence ? ” asked M. Plantat, with a trembling voice. Baptiste assumed a tragic pose.

“ Ah, gentlemen,” said he, “ don’t ask me about her—’tis heartrending ! ”

The doctor and M. Plantat heard no more, but hurried in ; M. Lecoq followed, having confided his night-gown to Baptiste, with, “ Carry that to M. Plantat’s—quick ! ”

Misfortune, when it enters a house, seems to leave its fatal imprint on the very threshold. Perhaps it is not really so, but it is the feeling which those who are summoned to it experience. As the physician and the justice of the peace traversed the court-yard, this house, usually so gay and hospitable, presented a mournful aspect. Lights were seen coming and going in the upper story. Mlle. Lucile, the mayor’s youngest daughter, had had a nervous attack, and was being tended. A young girl, who served as Laurence’s maid, was seated in the vestibule, on the lower stair, weeping bitterly. Several domestics were there also.

frightened, motionless, not knowing what to do in all this fright. The drawing-room door was wide open; the room was dimly lighted by two candles; Mme. Courtois lay rather than sat in a large arm-chair near the fireplace. Her husband was reclining on a lounge near the windows at the rear of the apartment. They had taken off his coat and had torn away his shirt-sleeves and flannel vest, when he was to be bled. There were strips of cotton wrapped about his naked arms. A small man, habited like a well-to-do Parisian artisan, stood near the door, with an embarrassed expression of countenance. It was Robelot, who had remained, lest any new exigency for his services should arise.

The entrance of his friend startled M. Courtois from the sad stupor into which he had been plunged. He got up and staggered into the arms of the worthy Plantat, saying, in a broken voice:

“Ah, my friend, I am most miserable—most wretched!”

The poor mayor was so changed as scarcely to be recognizable. He was no longer the happy man of the world, with smiling face, firm look, the pride of which betrayed plainly his self-importance and prosperity. In a few hours he had grown twenty years older. He was broken, overwhelmed; his thoughts wandered in a sea of bitterness. He could only repeat, vacantly, again and again:

“Wretched! most wretched!”

M. Plantat was the right sort of a friend for such a time. He led M. Courtois back to the sofa and sat down beside him, and taking his hand in his own, forced him to calm his grief. He recalled to him that

his wife, the companion of his life, remained to him, to mourn the dear departed with him. Had he not another daughter to cherish? But the poor man was in no state to listen to all this.

"Ah, my friend," said he shuddering, "you do not know all! If she had died here, in the midst of us, comforted by our tender care, my despair would be great; but nothing compared with that which now tortures me. If you only knew——"

M. Plantat rose, as if terrified by what he was about to hear.

"But who can tell," pursued the wretched man, "where or how she died? Oh, my Laurence, was there no one to hear your last agony and save you? What has become of you, so young and happy?"

He rose, shaking with anguish and cried:

"Let us go, Plantat, and look for her at the Morgue." Then he fell back again, muttering the lugubrious word, "the Morgue."

The witnesses of this scene remained mute, motionless, rigid, holding their breath. The stifled sobs and groans of Mme. Courtois and the little maid alone broke the silence.

"You know that I am your friend—your best friend," said M. Plantat, softly; "confide in me—tell me all."

"Well," commenced M. Courtois, "know"—but his tears choked his utterance, and he could not go on. Holding out a crumpled letter, wet with tears, he stammered:

"Here, read—it is her last letter."

M. Plantat approached the table, and, not without difficulty, read:

“DEARLY BELOVED PARENTS—

“Forgive, forgive, I beseech you, your unhappy daughter, the distress she is about to cause you. Alas! I have been very guilty, but the punishment is terrible! In a day of wandering, I forgot all—the example and advice of my dear, sainted mother, my most sacred duty, and your tenderness. I could not, no, I *could* not resist him who wept before me in swearing for me an eternal love—and who has abandoned me. Now, all is over; I am lost, lost. I cannot long conceal my dreadful sin. Oh, dear parents, do not curse me. I am your daughter—I cannot bear to face contempt, I will not survive my dishonor.

“When this letter reaches you, I shall have ceased to live; I shall have quitted my aunt’s, and shall have gone far away, where no one will find me. There I shall end my misery and despair. Adieu, then, oh, beloved parents, adieu! I would that I could, for the last time, beg your forgiveness on my knees. My dear mother, my good father, have pity on a poor wanderer; pardon me, forgive me. Never let my sister Lucile know. Once more, adieu—I have courage—honor commands! For you is the last prayer and supreme thought of your poor

LAURENCE.”

Great tears rolled silently down the old man’s cheeks as he deciphered this sad letter. A cold, mute, terrible anger shrivelled the muscles of his face. When he had finished, he said, in a hoarse voice:

“Wretch!”

M. Courtois heard this exclamation.

“Ah, yes, wretch indeed,” he cried, “this vile villain who has crept in in the dark, and stolen my dearest treasure, my darling child! Alas, she knew nothing of

life. He whispered into her ear those fond words which make the hearts of all young girls throb; she had faith in him; and now he abandons her. Oh, if I knew who he was—if I knew——”

He suddenly interrupted himself. A ray of intelligence had just illumined the abyss of despair into which he had fallen.

“No,” said he, “a young girl is not thus abandoned, when she has a dowry of a million, unless for some good reason. Love passes away; avarice remains. The infamous wretch was not free—he was married. He could only be the Count de Trémoré. It is he who has killed my child.”

The profound silence which succeeded proved to him that his conjecture was shared by those around him.

“I was blind, blind!” cried he. “For I received him at my house, and called him my friend. Oh, have I not a right to a terrible vengeance?”

But the crime at Valfeuilu occurred to him; and it was with a tone of deep disappointment that he resumed:

“And not to be able to revenge myself! I could not, then, kill him with my own hands, see him suffer for hours, hear him beg for mercy! He is dead. He has fallen under the blows of assassins, less vile than himself.”

The doctor and M. Plantat strove to comfort the unhappy man; but he went on, excited more and more by the sound of his own voice.

“Oh, Laurence, my beloved, why did you not confide in me? You feared my anger, as if a father would ever cease to love his child. Lost, degraded, fallen to the ranks of the vilest, I would still love thee. Were you not my own? Alas! you knew not a father’s

heart. A father does not pardon; he forgets. You might still have been happy, my lost love."

He wept; a thousand memories of the time when Laurence was a child and played about his knees recurred to his mind; it seemed as though it were but yesterday.

"Oh, my daughter, was it that you feared the world—the wicked, hypocritical world? But we should have gone away. I should have left Orcival, resigned my office. We should have settled down far away, in the remotest corner of France, in Germany, in Italy. With money all is possible. All? No! I have millions, and yet my daughter has killed herself."

He concealed his face in his hands; his sobs choked him.

"And not to know what has become of her!" he continued. "Is it not frightful? What death did she choose? You remember, Doctor, and you, Plantat, her beautiful curls about her pure forehead, her great, trembling eyes, her long curved lashes? Her smile—do you know, it was the sun's ray of my life. I so loved her voice, and her mouth so fresh, which gave me such warm, loving kisses. Dead! Lost! And not to know what has become of her sweet form—perhaps abandoned in the mire of some river. Do you recall the countess's body this morning? It will kill me! Oh, my child—that I might see her one hour—one minute—that I might give her cold lips one last kiss!"

M. Lecoq strove in vain to prevent a warm tear which ran from his eyes, from falling. M. Lecoq was a stoic on principle, and by profession. But the desolate words of the poor father overcame him. Forgetting that his emotion would be seen, he came out from

the shadow where he had stood, and spoke to M. Courtois :

"I, Monsieur Lecoq, of the detectives, give you my honor that I will find Mademoiselle Laurence's body."

The poor mayor grasped desperately at this promise, as a drowning man to a straw.

"Oh, yes, we will find her, won't we? You will help me. They say that to the police nothing is impossible—that they see and know everything. We will see what has become of my child."

He went toward M. Lecoq, and taking him by the hand :

"Thank you," added he, "you are a good man. I received you ill a while ago, and judged you with foolish pride: forgive me. We will succeed—you will see, we will aid each other, we will put all the police on the scent, we will search through France, money will do it—I have it—I have millions—take them——"

His energies were exhausted: he staggered and fell heavily on the lounge.

"He must not remain here long," muttered the doctor in Plantat's ear, "he must get to bed. A brain fever, after such excitement, would not surprise me."

The old justice of the peace at once approached Mme. Courtois, who still reclined in the arm-chair, apparently having seen or heard nothing of what had passed, and oblivious in her grief.

"Madame!" said he, "Madame!"

She shuddered and rose, with a wandering air.

"It is my fault," said she, "my miserable fault! A mother should read her daughter's heart as in a book. I did not suspect Laurence's secret; I am a most unhappy mother."

The doctor also came to her.

"Madame," said he, in an imperious tone, "your husband must be persuaded to go to bed at once. His condition is very serious, and a little sleep is absolutely necessary. I will have a potion prepared——"

"Oh, my God!" cried the poor lady, wringing her hands, in the fear of a new misfortune, as bitter as the first; which, however, restored her to her presence of mind. She called the servants, who assisted the mayor to regain his chamber. Mme. Courtois also retired, followed by the doctor. Three persons only remained in the drawing-room—Plantat, Lecoq, and Robelot, who still stood near the door.

"Poor Laurence!" murmured Plantat. "Poor girl!"

"It seems to me that her father is most to be pitied," remarked M. Lecoq. "Such a blow, at his age, may be more than he can bear. Even should he recover, his life is broken."

"I had a sort of presentiment," said the other, "that this misfortune would come. I had guessed Laurence's secret, but I guessed it too late."

"And you did not try——"

"What? In a delicate case like this, when the honor of a family depends on a word, one must be circumspect. What could I do? Put Courtois on his guard? Clearly not. He would have refused to believe me. He is one of those men who will listen to nothing, and whom the brutal fact alone can undeceive."

"You might have dealt with the Count de Trémoré."

"The count would have denied all. He would have asked what right I had to interfere in his affairs."

"But the girl?"

M. Plantat sighed heavily.

"Though I detest mixing up with what does not concern me, I did try one day to talk with her. With infinite precaution and delicacy, and without letting her see that I knew all, I tried to show her the abyss near which she was drawing."

"And what did she reply?"

"Nothing. She laughed and joked, as women who have a secret which they wish to conceal, do. Besides, I could not get a quarter of an hour alone with her, and it was necessary to act, I knew—for I was her best friend—before committing this imprudence of speaking to her. Not a day passed that she did not come to my garden and cull my rarest flowers—and I would not, look you, give one of my flowers to the Pope himself. She had instituted me her florist in ordinary. For her sake I collected my briars of the Cape——"

He was talking on so wide of his subject that M. Lecoq could not repress a roguish smile. The old man was about to proceed when he heard a noise in the hall, and looking up he observed Robelot for the first time. His face at once betrayed his great annoyance.

"*You* were there, were you?" he said.

The bone-setter smiled obsequiously.

"Yes, Monsieur, quite at your service."

"You have been listening, eh?"

"Oh, as to that, I was waiting to see if Madame Courtois had any commands for me."

A sudden reflection occurred to M. Plantat; the expression of his eye changed. He winked at M. Lecoq to call his attention, and addressing the bone-setter in a milder tone, said: "Come here, Master Robelot."

M. Lecoq had read the man at a glance. Robelot

was a small, insignificant-looking man, but really of herculean strength. His hair, cut short behind, fell over his large, intelligent forehead. His eyes shone with the fire of covetousness, and expressed, when he forgot to guard them, a cynical boldness. A sly smile was always playing about his thin lips, beneath which there was no beard. A little way off, with his slight figure and his beardless face, he looked like a Paris gamin—one of those little wretches who are the essence of all corruption, whose imagination is more soiled than the gutters where they search for lost pennies.

Robelot advanced several steps, smiling and bowing.

"Perhaps," said he, "Monsieur has, by chance, need of me?"

"None whatever, Master Robelot, I only wish to congratulate you on happening in so apropos, to bleed Monsieur Courtois. Your lancet has, doubtless, saved his life."

"It's quite possible."

"Monsieur Courtois is generous—he will amply recompense this great service."

"Oh, I shall ask him nothing. Thank God, I want nobody's help. If I am paid my due, I am content."

"I know that well enough; you are prosperous—you ought to be satisfied."

M. Plantat's tone was friendly, almost paternal. He was deeply interested, evidently, in Robelot's prosperity.

"Satisfied!" resumed the bone-setter. "Not so much as you might think. Life is very dear for poor people."

"But, haven't you just purchased an estate near d'Evry?"

"Yes."

"And a nice place, too, though a trifle damp. Happily you have stone to fill it in with, on the land that you bought of the widow Frapesle."

Robelot had never seen the old justice of the peace so talkative, so familiar; he seemed a little surprised.

"Three wretched pieces of land!" said he.

"Not so bad as you talk about. Then you've also bought something in the way of mines, at auction, haven't you?"

"Just a bunch of nothing at all."

"True, but it pays well. It isn't so bad, you see, to be a doctor without a diploma."

Robelot had been several times prosecuted for illegal practicing; so he thought he ought to protest against this.

"If I cure people," said he, "I'm not paid for it."

"Then your trade in herbs isn't what has enriched you."

The conversation was becoming a cross-examination. The bone-setter was beginning to be restless.

"Oh, I make something out of the herbs," he answered.

"And as you are thrifty, you buy land."

"I've also got some cattle and horses, which bring in something. I raise horses, cows, and sheep."

"Also without diploma?"

Robelot waxed disdainful.

"A piece of parchment does not make science. I don't fear the men of the schools. I study animals in the fields and the stable, without bragging. I haven't my equal for raising them, nor for knowing their diseases."

M. Plantat's tone became more and more winning.

"I know that you are a bright fellow, full of experience. Doctor Gendron, with whom you served, was praising your cleverness a moment ago."

The bone-setter shuddered, not so imperceptibly as to escape Plantat, who continued: "Yes, the good doctor said he never had so intelligent an assistant. 'Robelot,' said he, 'has such an aptitude for chemistry, and so much taste for it besides, that he understands as well as I many of the most delicate operations.'"

"Parbleu! I did my best, for I was well paid, and I was always fond of learning."

"And you were an apt scholar at Doctor Gendron's, Master Robelot; he makes some very curious studies. His work and experience on poisons are above all remarkable."

Robelot's uneasiness became apparent; his look wavered.

"Yes," returned he, "I have seen some strange experiments."

"Well, you see, you may think yourself lucky—for the doctor is going to have a splendid chance to study this sort of thing, and he will undoubtedly want you to assist him."

But Robelot was too shrewd not to have already guessed that this cross-examination had a purpose. What was M. Plantat after? he asked himself, not without a vague terror. And, going over in his mind the questions which had been asked, and the answers he had given, and to what these questions led, he trembled. He thought to escape further questioning by saying:

"I am always at my old master's orders when he needs me."

"He'll need you, be assured," said M. Plantat, who

added, in a careless tone, which his rapid glance at Robelot belied, "The interest attaching to this case will be intense, and the task difficult. Monsieur Sauvresy's body is to be disinterred."

Robelot was certainly prepared for something strange, and he was armed with all his audacity. But the name of Sauvresy fell upon his head like the stroke of a club, and he stammered, in a choked voice:

"Sauvresy!"

M. Plantat had already turned his head, and continued in an indifferent tone:

"Yes, Sauvresy is to be exhumed. It is suspected that his death was not wholly a natural one. You see, justice always has its suspicions."

Robelot leaned against the wall so as not to fall. M. Plantat proceeded:

"So Doctor Gendron has been applied to. He has, as you know, found reactive drugs which betray the presence of an alkaloid, whatever it may be, in the substances submitted to him for analysis. He has spoken to me of a certain sensitive paper——"

Appealing to all his energy, Robelot forced himself to stand up and resume a calm countenance.

"I know Doctor Gendron's process," said he, "but I don't see who could be capable of the suspicions of which you speak."

"I think there are more than suspicions," resumed M. Plantat. "Madame de Trémoré, you know, has been murdered: her papers have, of course, been examined; letters have been found, with very damaging revelations, receipts, and so on."

Robelot, apparently, was once more self-possessed; he forced himself to answer:

"Bast! let us hope that justice is in the wrong."

Then, such was this man's self-control, despite a nervous trembling which shook his whole body as the wind does the leaves, that he added, constraining his thin lips to form a smile:

"Madame Courtois does not come down; I am waited for at home, and will drop in again to-morrow. Good-evening, gentlemen."

He walked away, and soon the sand in the court was heard creaking with his steps. As he went, he staggered like a drunken man.

M. Lecoq went up to M. Plantat, and taking off his hat:

"I surrender," said he, "and bow to you; you are great, like my master, the great Tabaret."

The detective's amour-propre was clearly aroused; his professional zeal was inspired; he found himself before a great crime—one of those crimes which triple the sale of the *Gazette of the Courts*. Doubtless many of its details escaped him: he was ignorant of the starting-point; but he saw the way clearing before him. He had surprised Plantat's theory, and had followed the train of his thought step by step; thus he discovered the complications of the crime which seemed so simple to M. Domini. His subtle mind had connected together all the circumstances which had been disclosed to him during the day, and now he sincerely admired the old justice of the peace. As he gazed at his beloved portrait, he thought, "Between the two of us—this old fox and I—we will unravel the whole web." He would not, however, show himself to be inferior to his companion.

"Monsieur," said he, "while you were questioning this rogue, who will be very useful to us, I did not

lose any time. I've been looking about, under the furniture and so on, and have found this slip of paper."

"Let's see."

"It is the envelope of the young lady's letter. Do you know where her aunt, whom she was visiting, lives?"

"At Fontainebleau, I believe."

"Ah; well, this envelope is stamped 'Paris,' Saint-Lazare branch post-office. I know this stamp proves nothing——"

"It is, of course, an indication."

"That is not all; I have read the letter itself—it was here on the table."

M. Plantat frowned involuntarily.

"It was, perhaps, a liberty," resumed M. Lecoq, "but the end justifies the means. Well, you have read this letter; but have you studied it, examined the handwriting, weighed the words, remarked the context of the sentences?"

"Ah," cried Plantat, "I was not mistaken then—you had the same idea strike you that occurred to me!"

And, in the energy of his excitement he seized the detective's hands and pressed them as if he were an old friend. They were about to resume talking when a step was heard on the staircase; and presently Dr. Gendron appeared.

"Courtois is better," said he, "he is in a doze, and will recover."

"We have nothing more, then, to keep us here," returned M. Plantat. "Let's be off. Monsieur Lecoq must be half dead with hunger."

As they went away, M. Lecoq slipped Laurence's letter, with the envelope, into his pocket.

X

M. Plantat's house was small and narrow; a philosopher's house. Three large rooms on the ground-floor, four chambers in the first story, an attic under the roof for the servants, composed all its apartments. Everywhere the carelessness of a man who has withdrawn from the world into himself, for years, ceasing to have the least interest in the objects which surround him, was apparent. The furniture was shabby, though it had been elegant; the mouldings had come off, the clocks had ceased to keep time, the chairs showed the stuffing of their cushions, the curtains, in places, were faded by the sun. The library alone betrayed a daily care and attention.

Long rows of books in calf and gilt were ranged on the carved oaken shelves, a movable table near the fireplace contained M. Plantat's favorite books, the discreet friends of his solitude. A spacious conservatory, fitted with every accessory and convenience, was his only luxury. In it flourished one hundred and thirty-seven varieties of briars.

Two servants, the widow Petit, cook and housekeeper, and Louis, gardener, inhabited the house. If they did not make it a noisy one, it was because Plantat, who talked little, detested also to hear others talk. Silence was there a despotic law. It was very hard for Mme. Petit, especially at first. She was very talkative, so talkative that when she found no one to chat with, she went to confession; to confess was to chat. She came near leaving the place twenty times; but the thought of an assured pension restrained her. Gradually she became accustomed to govern her

tongue, and to this cloistral silence. But she revenged herself outside for the privations of the household, and regained among the neighbors the time lost at home.

She was very much wrought up on the day of the murder. At eleven o'clock, after going out for news, she had prepared monsieur's dinner; but he did not appear. She waited one, two hours, five hours, keeping her water boiling for the eggs; no monsieur. She wanted to send Louis to look for him, but Louis being a poor talker and not curious, asked her to go herself. The house was besieged by the female neighbors, who, thinking that Mme. Petit ought to be well posted, came for news; no news to give.

Toward five o'clock, giving up all thought of breakfast, she began to prepare for dinner. But when the village bell struck eight o'clock, monsieur had not made his appearance. At nine, the good woman was beside herself, and began to scold Louis, who had just come in from watering the garden, and, seated at the kitchen table, was soberly eating a plate of soup.

The bell rung.

"Ah, there's monsieur, at last."

No, it was not monsieur, but a little boy, whom M. Plantat had sent from Valfeuillu to apprise Mme. Petit that he would soon return, bringing with him two guests who would dine and sleep at the house. The worthy woman nearly fainted. It was the first time that M. Plantat had invited anyone to dinner for five years. There was some mystery at the bottom of it—so thought Mme. Petit, and her anger doubled with her curiosity.

"To order a dinner at this hour," she grumbled. "Has he got common-sense, then?" But reflecting that time pressed, she continued:

"Go along, Louis; this is not the moment for two feet to stay in one shoe. Hurry up, and wring three chickens' heads; see if there ain't some ripe grapes in the conservatory; bring on some preserves; fetch up some wine from the cellar!" The dinner was well advanced when the bell rung again. This time Baptiste appeared, in exceeding bad humor, bearing M. Lecoq's night-gown.

"See here," said he to the cook, "what the person, who is with your master, gave me to bring here."

"What person?"

"How do I know? He's a spy sent down from Paris about this Valfeuillu affair; not much good, probably—ill-bred—a brute—and a wretch."

"But he's not alone with monsieur?"

"No; Doctor Gendron is with them."

Mme. Petit burned to get some news out of Baptiste; but Baptiste also burned to get back and know what was taking place at his master's—so off he went, without having left any news behind.

An hour or more passed, and Mme. Petit had just angrily declared to Louis that she was going to throw the dinner out the window, when her master at last appeared, followed by his guests. They had not exchanged a word after they left the mayor's. Aside from the fatigues of the evening, they wished to reflect, and to resume their self-command. Mme. Petit found it useless to question their faces—they told her nothing. But she did not agree with Baptiste about M. Lecoq: she thought him good-humored, and rather silly. Though the party was less silent at the dinner-table, all avoided, as if by tacit consent, any allusion to the events of the day. No one would ever have thought that they had just been witnesses of, almost

actors in, the Valfeuillu drama, they were so calm, and talked so glibly of indifferent things. From time to time, indeed, a question remained unanswered, or a reply came tardily; but nothing of the sensations and thoughts, which were concealed beneath the uttered commonplaces, appeared on the surface.

Louis passed to and fro behind the diners, his white cloth on his arm, carving and passing the wine. Mme. Petit brought in the dishes, and came in thrice as often as was necessary, her ears wide open, leaving the door ajar as often as she dared. Poor woman! she had prepared an excellent dinner, and nobody paid any attention to it.

M. Lecoq was fond of tit-bits; yet, when Louis placed on the table a dish of superb grapes—quite out of season—his mouth did not so much as expand into a smile. Dr. Gendron would have been puzzled to say what he had eaten. The dinner was nearly over, when M. Plantat began to be annoyed by the constraint which the presence of the servants put upon the party. He called to the cook:

“You will give us our coffee in the library, and may then retire, as well as Louis.”

“But these gentlemen do not know their rooms,” insisted Mme. Petit, whose eavesdropping projects were checked by this order. “They will, perhaps, need something.”

“I will show them their rooms,” said M. Plantat, dryly. “And if they need anything, I shall be here.”

They went into the library. M. Plantat brought out a box of cigars and passed them round:

“It will be healthful to smoke a little before retiring.”

M. Lecoq lit an aromatic weed, and remarked:

"You two may go to bed if you like; I am condemned, I see, to a sleepless night. But before I go to writing, I wish to ask you a few things, Monsieur Plantat."

M. Plantat bowed in token of assent.

"We must resume our conversation," continued the detective, "and compare our inferences. All our lights are not too much to throw a little daylight upon this affair, which is one of the darkest I have ever met with. The situation is dangerous, and time presses. On our acuteness depends the fate of several innocent persons, upon whom rest very serious charges. We have a theory: but Monsieur Domini also has one, and his, let us confess, is based upon material facts, while ours rests upon very disputable sensations and logic."

"We have more than sensations," responded M. Plantat.

"I agree with you," said the doctor, "but we must prove it."

"And I *will* prove it, parbleu," cried M. Lecoq, eagerly. "The affair is complicated and difficult—so much the better. Eh! If it were simple, I would go back to Paris *instantanément*, and to-morrow I would send you one of my men. I leave easy riddles to infants. What I want is the inexplicable enigmas, so as to unravel it; a struggle, to show my strength; obstacles, to conquer them."

M. Plantat and the doctor looked steadily at the speaker. He was as if transfigured. It was the same yellow-haired and whiskered man, in a long overcoat: yet the voice, the physiognomy, the very features, had changed. His eyes shone with the fire of his enthusiasm, his voice was metallic and vibrating, his imperi-

ous gesture affirmed the audacity and energy of his resolution.

“If you think, my friends,” pursued he, “that they don’t manufacture detectives like me at so much a year, you are right. When I was twenty years old, I took service with an astronomer, as his calculator, after a long course of study. He gave me my breakfasts and seventy francs a month; by means of which I dressed well, and covered I know not how many square feet with figures daily.”

M. Lecoq puffed vigorously at his cigar a moment, casting a curious glance at M. Plantat. Then he resumed:

“Well, you may imagine that I wasn’t the happiest of men. I forgot to mention that I had two little vices: I loved the women, and I loved play. All are not perfect. My salary seemed too small, and while I added up my columns of figures, I was looking about for a way to make a rapid fortune. There is, indeed, but one means; to appropriate somebody else’s money, shrewdly enough not to be found out. I thought about it day and night. My mind was fertile in expedients, and I formed a hundred projects, each more practicable than the others. I should frighten you if I were to tell you half of what I imagined in those days. If many thieves of my calibre existed, you’d have to blot the word ‘property’ out of the dictionary. Precautions, as well as safes, would be useless. Happily for men of property, criminals are idiots.”

“What is he coming to?” thought the doctor.

“One day, I became afraid of my own thoughts. I had just been inventing a little arrangement by which a man could rob any banker whatever of 200,000 francs without any more danger or difficulty than I raise this

cup. So I said to myself, 'Well, my boy, if this goes on a little longer, a moment will come when, from the idea, you will naturally proceed to the practice.' Having, however, been born an honest lad—a mere chance—and being determined to use the talents which nature had given me, eight days afterward I bid my astronomer good-morning, and went to the prefecture. My fear of being a burglar drove me into the police.'

"And you are satisfied with the exchange?" asked Dr. Gendron.

"I' faith, Doctor, my first regret is yet to come. I am happy, because I am free to exercise my peculiar faculties with usefulness to my race. Existence has an enormous attraction for me, because I have still a passion which overrides all others—curiosity."

The detective smiled, and continued:

"There are people who have a mania for the theatre. It is like my own mania. Only, I can't understand how people can take pleasure in the wretched display of fictions, which are to real life what a tallow dip is to the sun. It seems to me monstrous that people can be interested in sentiments which, though well represented, are fictitious. What! can you laugh at the witticisms of a comedian, whom you know to be the struggling father of a family? Can you pity the sad fate of the poor actress who poisons herself, when you know that on going out you will meet her on the boulevards? It's pitiable!"

"Let's shut up the theatres," suggested Dr. Gendron.

"I am more difficult to please than the public," returned M. Lecoq. "I must have veritable comedies, or real dramas. My theatre is—society. My actors laugh honestly, or weep with genuine tears. A crime

is committed—that is the prologue; I reach the scene, the first act begins. I seize at a glance the minutest shades of the scenery. Then I try to penetrate the motives, I group the characters, I link the episodes to the central fact, I bind in a bundle all the circumstances. The action soon reaches the crisis, the thread of my inductions conducts me to the guilty person; I divine him, arrest him, deliver him up. Then comes the great scene; the accused struggles, tries tricks, splits straws; but the judge, armed with the arms I have forged for him, overwhelms the wretch; he does not confess, but he is confounded. And how many secondary personages, accomplices, friends, enemies, witnesses are grouped about the principal criminal! Some are terrible, frightful, gloomy—others grotesque. And you know not what the ludicrous in the horrible is. My last scene is the court of assize. The prosecutor speaks, but it is I who furnished his ideas; his phrases are embroideries set around the canvass of my report. The president submits his questions to the jury; what emotion! The fate of my drama is being decided. The jury, perhaps, answers, ‘Not guilty;’ very well, my piece was bad, I am hissed. If ‘Guilty,’ on the contrary, the piece was good, I am applauded, and victorious. The next day I can go and see my hero, and slapping him on the shoulder, say to him, ‘You have lost, old fellow, I am too much for you!’”

Was M. Lecoq in earnest now, or was he playing a part? What was the object of this autobiography? Without appearing to notice the surprise of his companions, he lit a fresh cigar; then, whether designedly or not, instead of replacing the lamp with which he lit it on the table, he put it on one corner of the mantel.

Thus M. Plantat's face was in full view, while that of M. Lecoq remained in shadow.

"I ought to confess," he continued, "without false modesty, that I have rarely been hissed. Like every man I have my Achilles heel. I have conquered the demon of play, but I have not triumphed over my passion for woman."

He sighed heavily, with the resigned gesture of a man who has chosen his path. "It's this way. There is a woman, before whom I am but an idiot. Yes, I the detective, the terror of thieves and murderers, who have divulged the combinations of all the sharpers of all the nations, who for ten years have swum amid vice and crime; who wash the dirty linen of all the corruptions, who have measured the depths of human infamy; I who know all, who have seen and heard all; I, Lecoq, am before her, more simple and credulous than an infant. She deceives me—I see it—and she proves that I have seen wrongly. She lies—I know it, I prove it to her—and I believe her. It is because this is one of those passions," he added, in a low, mournful tone, "that age, far from extinguishing, only fans, and to which the consciousness of shame and powerlessness adds fire. One loves, and the certainty that he cannot be loved in return is one of those griefs which you must have felt to know its depth. In a moment of reason, one sees and judges himself; he says, no, it's impossible, she is almost a child, I almost an old man. He says this—but always, in the heart, more potent than reason, than will, than experience, a ray of hope remains, and he says to himself, 'who knows—perhaps!' He awaits, what—a miracle? There are none, nowadays. No matter, he hopes on."

M. Lecoq stopped, as if his emotion prevented his

going on. M. Plantat had continued to smoke mechanically, puffing the smoke out at regular intervals; but his face seemed troubled, his glance was unsteady, his hands trembled. He got up, took the lamp from the mantel and replaced it on the table, and sat down again. The significance of this scene at last struck Dr. Gendron.

In short, M. Lecoq, without departing widely from the truth, had just attempted one of the most daring experiments of his repertoire, and he judged it useless to go further. He knew now what he wished to know. After a moment's silence, he shuddered as though awaking from a dream, and pulling out his watch, said:

"Par le Dieu! How I chat on, while time flies!"

"And Guespin is in prison," remarked the doctor.

"We will have him out," answered the detective, "if, indeed, he is innocent; for this time I have mastered the mystery, my romance, if you wish, and without any gap. There is, however, one fact of the utmost importance, that I by myself cannot explain."

"What?" asked M. Plantat.

"Is it possible that Monsieur de Trémoré had a very great interest in finding something—a deed, a letter, a paper of some sort—something of a small size, secreted in his own house?"

"Yes—that is possible," returned the justice of the peace.

"But I must know for certain."

M. Plantat reflected a moment.

"Well then," he went on, "I am sure, perfectly sure, that if Madame de Trémoré had died suddenly, the count would have ransacked the house to find a certain

paper, which he knew to be in his wife's possession, and which I myself have had in my hands."

"Then," said M. Lecoq, "there's the drama complete. On reaching Valfeuilu, I, like you, was struck with the frightful disorder of the rooms. Like you, I thought at first that this disorder was the result of design. I was wrong; a more careful scrutiny has convinced me of it. The assassin, it is true, threw everything into disorder, broke the furniture, hacked the chairs in order to make us think that some furious villains had been there. But amid these acts of premeditated violence I have followed up the involuntary traces of an exact, minute, and I may say patient search. Everything seemed turned topsy-turvy by chance; articles were broken open with the hatchet, which might have been opened with the hands; drawers had been forced which were not shut, and the keys of which were in the locks. Was this folly? No. For really no corner or crevice where a letter might be hid has been neglected. The table and bureau-drawers had been thrown here and there, but the narrow spaces between the drawers had been examined—I saw proofs of it, for I found the imprints of fingers on the dust which lay in these spaces. The books had been thrown pell-mell upon the floor, but every one of them had been handled, and some of them with such violence that the bindings were torn off. We found the mantelshelves in their places, but every one had been lifted up. The chairs were not hacked with a sword, for the mere purpose of ripping the cloth—the seats were thus examined. My conviction of the certainty that there had been a most desperate search, at first roused my suspicions. I said to myself, 'The villains have

been looking for the money which was concealed; therefore they did not belong to the household.' ”

“ But,” observed the doctor, “ they might belong to the house, and yet not know the money was hidden; for Guespin——”

“ Permit me,” interrupted M. Lecoq, “ I will explain myself. On the other hand, I found indications that the assassin must have been closely connected with Madame de Trémorrel—her lover, or her husband. These were the ideas that then struck me.”

“ And now? ”

“ Now,” responded the detective, “ with the certainty that something besides booty might have been the object of the search, I am not far from thinking that the guilty man is he whose body is being searched for—the Count Hector de Trémorrel.”

M. Plantat and Dr. Gendron had divined the name; but neither had as yet dared to utter his suspicions. They awaited this name of Trémorrel; and yet, pronounced as it was in the middle of the night, in this great sombre room, by this at least strange personage, it made them shudder with an indescribable fright.

“ Observe,” resumed M. Lecoq, “ what I say; I believe it to be so. In my eyes, the count's guilt is only as yet extremely probable. Let us see if we three can reach the certainty of it. You see, gentlemen, the inquest of a crime is nothing more nor less than the solution of a problem. Given the crime, proved, patent, you commence by seeking out all the circumstances, whether serious or superficial; the details and the particulars. When these have been carefully gathered, you classify them, and put them in their order and date. You thus know the victim, the crime, and the circumstances; it remains to find the third term of the problem, that is, *x*, the unknown quantity—the guilty

party. The task is a difficult one, but not so difficult as is imagined. The object is to find a man whose guilt explains all the circumstances, all the details found—all, understand me. Find such a man, and it is probable—and in nine cases out of ten, the probability becomes a reality—that you hold the perpetrator of the crime.”

So clear had been M. Lecoq’s exposition, so logical his argument, that his hearers could not repress an admiring exclamation :

“Very good! Very good!”

“Let us then examine together if the assumed guilt of the Count de Trémorél explains all the circumstances of the crime at Valfeuillu.”

He was about to continue when Dr. Gendron, who sat near the window, rose abruptly.

“There is someone in the garden,” said he.

All approached the window. The weather was glorious, the night very clear, and a large open space lay before the library window; they looked out, but saw no one.

“You are mistaken, Doctor,” said Plantat, resuming his arm-chair.

M. Lecoq continued :

“Now let us suppose that, under the influence of certain events that we will examine presently, Monsieur de Trémorél had made up his mind to get rid of his wife. The crime once resolved upon, it was clear that the count must have reflected, and sought out the means of committing it with impunity; he must have weighed the circumstances, and estimated the perils of his act. Let us admit, also, that the events which led him to this extremity were such that he feared to be disturbed, and that he also feared that a search would be

made for certain things, even should his wife die a natural death."

"That is true," said M. Plantat, nodding his head.

"Monsieur de Trémoré, then, determined to kill his wife, brutally, with a knife, with the idea of so arranging everything, as to make it believed that he too had been assassinated; and he also decided to endeavor to thrust suspicion on an innocent person, or at least, an accomplice infinitely less guilty than he.

"He made up his mind in advance, in adopting this course, to disappear, fly, conceal himself, change his personality; to suppress, in short, Count Hector de Trémoré, and make for himself, under another name, a new position and identity. These hypotheses, easily admitted, suffice to explain the whole series of otherwise inconsistent circumstances. They explain to us in the first place, how it was that on the very night of the murder, there was a large fortune in ready money at Valfeuilu; and this seems to me decisive. Why, when a man receives sums like this, which he proposes to keep by him, he conceals the fact as carefully as possible. Monsieur de Trémoré had not this common prudence. He shows his bundles of bank-notes freely, handles them, parades them; the servants see them, almost touch them. He wants everybody to know and repeat that there is a large sum in the house, easy to take, carry off, and conceal. And what time of all times, does he choose for this display? Exactly the moment when he knows, and everyone in the neighborhood knows, that he is going to pass the night at the château, alone with Madame de Trémoré.

"For he is aware that all his servants are invited, on the evening of July 8th to the wedding of the former cook. So well aware of it is he, that he defrays the

wedding expenses, and himself names the day. You will perhaps say that it was by chance that this money was sent to Valfeuillu on the very night of the crime. At the worst that might be admitted. But believe me, there was no chance about it, and I will prove it. We will go to-morrow to the count's banker, and will inquire whether the count did not ask him, by letter or verbally, to send him these funds precisely on July 8th. Well, if he says yes, if he shows us such a letter, or if he declares that the money was called for in person, you will confess, no doubt, that I have more than a probability in favor of my theory."

Both his hearers bowed in token of assent.

"So far, then, there is no objection."

"Not the least," said M. Plantat.

"My conjectures have also the advantage of shedding light on Guespin's position. Honestly, his appearance is against him, and justifies his arrest. Was he an accomplice or entirely innocent? We certainly cannot yet decide. But it is a fact that he has fallen into an admirably well-laid trap. The count, in selecting him for his victim, took all care that every doubt possible should weigh upon him. I would wager that Monsieur de Trémorrel, who knew this fellow's history, thought that his antecedents would add probability to the suspicions against him, and would weigh with a terrible weight in the scales of justice. Perhaps, too, he said to himself that Guespin would be sure to prove his innocence in the end, and he only wished to gain time to elude the first search. It is impossible that we can be deceived. We know that the countess died of the first blow, as if thunderstruck. She did not struggle; therefore she could not have torn a piece of cloth off the assassin's vest. If you admit Guespin's

guilt, you admit that he was idiot enough to put a piece of his vest in his victim's hand; you admit that he was such a fool as to go and throw this torn and bloody vest into the Seine, from a bridge, in a place where he might know search would be made—and all this, without taking the common precaution of attaching it to a stone to carry it to the bottom. That would be absurd.

"To me, then, this piece of cloth, this smeared vest, indicate at once Guespin's innocence and the count's guilt."

"But," objected Dr. Gendron, "if Guespin is innocent, why don't he talk? Why don't he prove an alibi? How was it he had his purse full of money?"

"Observe," resumed the detective, "that I don't say he is innocent; we are still among the probabilities. Can't you suppose that the count, perfidious enough to set a trap for his servant, was shrewd enough to deprive him of every means of proving an alibi?"

"But you yourself deny the count's shrewdness."

"I beg your pardon; please hear me. The count's plan was excellent, and shows a superior kind of perversity; the execution alone was defective. This is because the plan was conceived and perfected in safety, while when the crime had been committed, the murderer, distressed, frightened at his danger, lost his coolness and only half executed his project. But there are other suppositions. It might be asked whether, while Madame de Trémoré was being murdered, Guespin might not have been committing some other crime elsewhere."

This conjecture seemed so improbable to the doctor that he could not avoid objecting to it. "Oh!" muttered he.

"Don't forget," replied Lecoq, "that the field of conjectures has no bounds. Imagine whatever complication of events you may, I am ready to maintain that such a complication has occurred or will present itself. Lieuben, a German lunatic, bet that he would succeed in turning up a pack of cards in the order stated in the written agreement. He turned and turned ten hours per day for twenty years. He had repeated the operation 4,246,028 times, when he succeeded."

M. Lecoq was about to proceed with another illustration, when M. Plantat interrupted him by a gesture.

"I admit your hypotheses; I think they are more than probable—they are true."

M. Lecoq, as he spoke, paced up and down between the window and the book-shelves, stopping at emphatic words, like a general who dictates to his aids the plan of the morrow's battle. To his auditors, he seemed a new man, with serious features, an eye bright with intelligence, his sentences clear and concise—the Lecoq, in short, which the magistrates who have employed his talents, would recognize.

"Now," he resumed, "hear me. It is ten o'clock at night. No noise without, the road deserted, the village lights extinguished, the château servants away at Paris. The count and countess are alone at Val-feuillu.

"They have gone to their bedroom.

"The countess has seated herself at the table where tea has been served. The count, as he talks with her, paces up and down the chamber.

"Madame de Trémorrel has no ill presentiment; her husband, the past few days, has been more amiable, more attentive than ever. She mistrusts nothing, and

so the count can approach her from behind, without her thinking of turning her head.

"When she hears him coming up softly, she imagines that he is going to surprise her with a kiss. He, meanwhile, armed with a long dagger, stands beside his wife. He knows where to strike that the wound may be mortal. He chooses the place at a glance; takes aim; strikes a terrible blow—so terrible that the handle of the dagger imprints itself on both sides of the wound. The countess falls without a sound, bruising her forehead on the edge of the table, which is overturned. Is not the position of the terrible wound below the left shoulder thus explained—a wound almost vertical, its direction being from right to left?"

The doctor made a motion of assent.

"And who, besides a woman's lover or her husband is admitted to her chamber, or can approach her when she is seated without her turning round?"

"That's clear," muttered M. Plantat.

"The countess is now dead," pursued M. Lecoq. "The assassin's first emotion is one of triumph. He is at last rid of her who was his wife, whom he hated enough to murder her, and to change his happy, splendid, envied existence for a frightful life, henceforth without country, friend, or refuge, proscribed by all nations, tracked by all the police, punishable by the laws of all the world! His second thought is of this letter or paper, this object of small size which he knows to be in his wife's keeping, which he has demanded a hundred times, which she would not give up to him, and which he must have."

"Add," interrupted M. Plantat, "that this paper was one of the motives of the crime."

"The count thinks he knows where it is. He im-

agines that he can put his hand on it at once. He is mistaken. He looks into all the drawers and bureaux used by his wife—and finds nothing. He searches every corner, he lifts up the shelves, overturns everything in the chamber—nothing. An idea strikes him. Is this letter under the mantel-shelf? By a turn of the arm he lifts it—down the clock tumbles and stops. It is not yet half-past ten.”

“Yes,” murmured the doctor, “the clock betrays that.”

“The count finds nothing under the mantel-shelf except the dust, which has retained traces of his fingers. Then he begins to be anxious. Where can this paper be, for which he has risked his life? He grows angry. How search the locked drawers? The keys are on the carpet—I found them among the *débris* of the tea service—but he does not see them. He must have some implement with which to break open everything. He goes downstairs for a hatchet. The drunkenness of blood and vengeance is dissipated on the staircase; his terrors begin. All the dark corners are peopled, now, with those spectres which form the cortege of assassins; he is frightened, and hurries on. He soon goes up again, armed with a large hatchet—that found on the second story—and makes the pieces of wood fly about him. He goes about like a maniac, rips up the furniture at hazard; but he pursues a desperate search, the traces of which I have followed, among the *débris*. Nothing, always nothing! Everything in the room is topsy-turvy; he goes into his cabinet and continues the destruction; the hatchet rises and falls without rest. He breaks his own bureau, since he may find something concealed there of which he is ignorant. This bureau belonged to the first husband

—to Sauvresy. He takes out all the books in the library, one by one, shakes them furiously, and throws them about the floor. The infernal paper is undiscoverable. His distress is now too great for him to pursue the search with the least method. His wandering reason no longer guides him. He staggers, without calculation, from one thing to another, fumbling a dozen times in the same drawer, while he completely forgets others just by him. Then he thinks that this paper may have been hid in the stuffing of a chair. He seizes a sword, and to be certain, he slashes up the drawing-room chairs and sofas and those in the other rooms.”

M. Lecoq’s voice, accent, gestures, gave a vivid character to his recital. The hearer might imagine that he saw the crime committed, and was present at the terrible scenes which he described. His companions held their breath, unwilling by a movement to distract his attention.

“At this moment,” pursued he, “the count’s rage and terror were at their height. He had said to himself, when he planned the murder, that he would kill his wife, get possession of the letter, execute his plan quickly, and fly. And now all his projects were baffled! How much time was being lost, when each minute diminished the chances of escape! Then the probability of a thousand dangers which had not occurred to him, entered his mind. What if some friend should suddenly arrive, expecting his hospitality, as had occurred twenty times? What if a passer-by on the road should notice a light flying from room to room? Might not one of the servants return? When he is in the drawing-room, he thinks he hears someone ring at the gate; such is his terror, that he lets his candle fall—for I have found the marks of it on the

carpet. He hears strange noises, such as never before assailed his ears; he thinks he hears walking in the next room; the floor creaks. Is his wife really dead; will she not suddenly rise up, run to the window, and scream for help? Beset by these terrors, he returns to the bedroom, seizes his dagger, and again strikes the poor countess. But his hand is so unsteady that the wounds are light. You have observed, doctor, that all these wounds take the same direction. They form right angles with the body, proving that the victim was lying down when they were inflicted. Then, in the excess of his frenzy, he strikes the body with his feet, and his heels form the contusions discovered by the autopsy."

M. Lecoq paused to take breath. He not only narrated the drama, he acted it, adding gesture to word; and each of his phrases made a scene, explained a fact, and dissipated a doubt. Like all true artists who wrap themselves up in the character they represent, the detective really felt something of the sensations which he interpreted, and his expressive face was terrible in its contortions.

"That," he resumed, "is the first act of the drama. An irresistible prostration succeeds the count's furious passion. The various circumstances which I am describing to you are to be noticed in nearly all great crimes. The assassin is always seized, after the murder, with a horrible and singular hatred against his victim, and he often mutilates the body. Then comes the period of a prostration so great, of torpor so irresistible, that murderers have been known literally to go to sleep in the blood, that they have been surprised sleeping, and that it was with great difficulty that they were awakened. The count, when he has frightfully

disfigured the poor lady, falls into an arm-chair; indeed, the cloth of one of the chairs has retained some wrinkles, which shows that someone had sat in it. What are then the count's thoughts? He reflects on the long hours which have elapsed, upon the few hours which remain to him. He reflects that he has found nothing; that he will hardly have time, before day, to execute his plans for turning suspicion from him, and assure his safety, by creating an impression that he, too, has been murdered. And he must fly at once—fly, without that accursed paper. He summons up his energies, rises, and do you know what he does? He seizes a pair of scissors and cuts off his long, carefully cultivated beard."

"Ah!" interrupted M. Plantat, "that's why you examined the portrait so closely."

M. Lecoq was too intent on following the thread of his deductions to note the interruption.

"This is one of those vulgar details," pursued he, "whose very insignificance makes them terrible, when they are attended by certain circumstances. Now imagine the Count de Trémoré, pale, covered with his wife's blood, shaving himself before his glass, rubbing the soap over his face, in that room all topsy-turvy, while three steps off lies the still warm and palpitating body! It was an act of terrible courage, believe me, to look at himself in the glass after a murder—one of which few criminals are capable. The count's hands, however, trembled so violently that he could scarcely hold his razor, and his face must have been cut several times."

"What!" said Dr. Gendron, "do you imagine that the count spared the time to shave?"

"I am positively sure of it, pos-i-tive-ly. A towel

on which I have found one of those marks which a razor leaves when it is wiped—and one only—has put me on the track of this fact. I looked about, and found a box of razors, one of which had recently been used, for it was still moist; and I have carefully preserved both the towel and the box. And if these proofs are not enough, I will send to Paris for two of my men, who will find, somewhere in the house or the garden, both the count's beard and the cloth with which he wiped his razor. As to the fact which surprises you, Doctor, it seems to me very natural; more, it is the necessary result of the plan he adopted. Monsieur de Trémoré has always worn his full beard: he cuts it off, and his appearance is so entirely altered, that if he met anyone in his flight, he would not be recognized."

The doctor was apparently convinced, for he cried:

"It's clear—it's evident."

"Once thus disguised, the count hastens to carry out the rest of his plan, to arrange everything to throw the law off the scent, and to make it appear that he, as well as his wife, has been murdered. He hunts up Guespin's vest, tears it out at the pocket, and puts a piece of it in the countess's hand. Then taking the body in his arms, crosswise, he goes downstairs. The wounds bleed frightfully—hence the numerous stains discovered all along his path. Reaching the foot of the staircase he is obliged to put the countess down, in order to open the garden-door. This explains the large stain in the vestibule. The count, having opened the door, returns for the body and carries it in his arms as far as the edge of the lawn; there he stops carrying it, and drags it by the shoulders, walking backward, trying thus to create the impression that his own body has been dragged across there and thrown into the

Seine. But the wretch forgot two things which betray him to us. He did not reflect that the countess's skirts, in being dragged along the grass, pressing it down and breaking it for a considerable space, spoiled his trick. Nor did he think that her elegant and well-curved feet, encased in small high-heeled boots, would mould themselves in the damp earth of the lawn, and thus leave against him a proof clearer than the day."

M. Plantat rose abruptly.

"Ah," said he, "you said nothing of this before."

"Nor of several other things, either. But I was before ignorant of some facts which I now know; and as I had reason to suppose that you were better informed than I, I was not sorry to avenge myself for a caution which seemed to me mysterious."

"Well, you are avenged," remarked the doctor, smiling.

"On the other side of the lawn," continued M. Le-coq, "the count again took up the countess's body. But forgetting the effect of water when it spirts, or—who knows?—disliking to soil himself, instead of throwing her violently in the river, he put her down softly, with great precaution. That's not all. He wished it to appear that there had been a terrible struggle. What does he do? Stirs up the sand with the end of his foot. And he thinks that will deceive the police!"

"Yes, yes," muttered Plantat, "exactly so—I saw it."

"Having got rid of the body, the count returns to the house. Time presses, but he is still anxious to find the paper. He hastens to take the last measures to assure his safety. He smears his slippers and handkerchief with blood. He throws his handkêrchiêf and

one of his slippers on the sward, and the other slipper into the river. His haste explains the incomplete execution of his manœuvres. He hurries—and commits blunder after blunder. He does not reflect that his valet will explain about the empty bottles which he puts on the table. He thinks he is turning wine into the five glasses—it is vinegar, which will prove that no one has drunk out of them. He ascends, puts forward the hands of the clock, but forgets to put the hands and the striking bell in harmony. He rumples up the bed, but he does it awkwardly—and it is impossible to reconcile these three facts, the bed crumpled, the clock showing twenty minutes past three, and the countess dressed as if it were mid-day. He adds as much as he can to the disorder of the room. He smears a sheet with blood; also the bed-curtains and furniture. Then he marks the door with the imprint of a bloody hand, too distinct and precise not to be done designedly. Is there so far a circumstance or detail of the crime, which does not explain the count's guilt?"

"There's the hatchet," answered M. Plantat, "found on the second story, the position of which seemed so strange to you."

"I am coming to that. There is one point in this mysterious affair, which, thanks to you, is now clear. We know that Madame de Trémoré, known to her husband, possessed and concealed a paper or a letter, which he wanted, and which she obstinately refused to give up in spite of all his entreaties. You have told us that the anxiety—perhaps the necessity—to have this paper, was a powerful motive of the crime. We will not be rash then in supposing that the importance of this paper was immense—entirely beyond an ordi-

nary affair. It must have been, somehow, very damaging to one or the other. To whom? To both, or only the count? Here I am reduced to conjectures. It is certain that it was a menace—capable of being executed at any moment—suspended over the head of him or them concerned by it. Madame de Trémoré surely regarded this paper either as a security, or as a terrible arm which put her husband at her mercy. It was surely to deliver himself from this perpetual menace that the count killed his wife.”

The logic was so clear, the last words brought the evidence out so lucidly and forcibly, that his hearers were struck with admiration. They both cried:

“Very good!”

“Now,” resumed M. Lecoq, “from the various elements which have served to form our conviction, we must conclude that the contents of this letter, if it can be found, will clear away our last doubts, will explain the crime, and will render the assassin’s precautions wholly useless. The count, therefore, must do everything in the world, must attempt the impossible, not to leave this danger behind him. His preparations for flight ended, Hector, in spite of his deadly peril, of the speeding time, of the coming day, instead of flying recommences with more desperation than ever his useless search. Again he goes through all the furniture, the books, the papers—in vain. Then he determines to search the second story, and armed with his hatchet, goes up to it. He has already attacked a bureau, when he hears a cry in the garden. He runs to the window—what does he see? Philippe and old Bertaud are standing on the river-bank under the willows, near the corpse. Can you imagine his immense terror? Now, there’s not a second to lose—he has already delayed

too long. The danger is near, terrible. Daylight has come, the crime is discovered, they are coming, he sees himself lost beyond hope. He must fly, fly at once, at the peril of being seen, met, arrested. He throws the hatchet down violently—it cuts the floor. He rushes down, slips the bank-notes in his pocket, seizes Guespin's torn and smeared vest, which he will throw into the river from the bridge, and saves himself by the garden. Forgetting all caution, confused, beside himself, covered with blood, he runs, clears the ditch, and it is he whom old Bertaud sees making for the forest of Mauprévior, where he intends to arrange the disorder of his clothes. For the moment he is safe. But he leaves behind him this letter, which is, believe me, a formidable witness, which will enlighten justice and will betray his guilt and the perfidy of his projects. For he has not found it, but we will find it; it is necessary for us to have it to defeat Monsieur Domini, and to change our doubts into certainty."

XI

A long silence followed the detective's discourse. Perhaps his hearers were casting about for objections. At last Dr. Gendron spoke:

"I don't see Guespin's part in all this."

"Nor I, very clearly," answered M. Lecoq. "And here I ought to confess to you not only the strength, but the weakness also, of the theory I have adopted. By this method, which consists of reconstructing the crime before discovering the criminal, I can be neither right nor wrong by halves. Either all my inferences are correct, or not one of them is. It's all, or nothing. If I am right, Guespin has not been mixed up with

this crime, at least directly; for there isn't a single circumstance which suggests outside aid. If, on the other hand, I am wrong——"

M. Lecoq paused. He seemed to have heard some unexpected noise in the garden.

"But I am not wrong. I have still another charge against the count, of which I haven't spoken, but which seems to be conclusive."

"Oh," cried the doctor, "what now?"

"Two certainties are better than one, and I always doubt. When I was left alone a moment with François, the valet, I asked him if he knew exactly the number of the count's shoes; he said yes, and took me to a closet where the shoes are kept. A pair of boots, with green Russia leather tops, which François was sure the count had put on the previous morning, was missing. I looked for them carefully everywhere, but could not find them. Again, the blue cravat with white stripes which the count wore on the 8th, had also disappeared."

"There," cried M. Plantat, "that is indisputable proof that your supposition about the slippers and handkerchief was right."

"I think that the facts are sufficiently established to enable us to go forward. Let's now consider the events which must have decided——"

M. Lecoq again stopped, and seemed to be listening. All of a sudden, without a word he jumped on the window-sill and from thence into the garden, with the bound of a cat which pounces on a mouse. The noise of a fall, a stifled cry, an oath, were heard, and then a stamping as if a struggle were going on. The doctor and M. Plantat hastened to the window. Day was breaking, the trees shivered in the fresh wind of the

early morning, objects were vaguely visible without distinct forms across the white mist which hangs, on summer nights, over the valley of the Seine. In the middle of the lawn, at rapid intervals, they heard the blunt noise of a clinched fist striking a living body, and saw two men, or rather two phantoms, furiously swinging their arms. Presently the two shapes formed but one, then they separated, again to unite; one of the two fell, rose at once, and fell again.

"Don't disturb yourselves," cried M. Lecoq's voice. "I've got the rogue."

The shadow of the detective, which was upright, bent over, and the conflict was recommenced. The shadow stretched on the ground defended itself with the dangerous strength of despair; his body formed a large brown spot in the middle of the lawn, and his legs, kicking furiously, convulsively stretched and contracted. Then there was a moment when the lookers-on could not make out which was the detective. They rose again and struggled; suddenly a cry of pain escaped, with a ferocious oath.

"Ah, wretch!"

And almost immediately a loud shout rent the air, and the detective's mocking tones were heard:

"There he is! I've persuaded him to pay his respects to us—light me up a little."

The doctor and his host hastened to the lamp; their zeal caused a delay, and at the moment that the doctor raised the lamp, the door was rudely pushed open.

"I beg to present to you," said M. Lecoq, "Master Robelot, bone-setter of Orcival, herborist by prudence, and poisoner by vocation."

The stupefaction of the others was such that neither could speak.

It was really the bone-setter, working his jaws nervously. His adversary had thrown him down by the famous knee-stroke which is the last resort of the worst prowlers about the Parisian barriers. But it was not so much Robelot's presence which surprised M. Plantat and his friend. Their stupor was caused by the detective's appearance; who, with his wrist of steel—as rigid as handcuffs—held the doctor's ex-assistant, and pushed him forward. The voice was certainly Lecoq's; there was his costume, his big-knotted cravat, his yellow-haired watch-chain—still it was no longer Lecoq. He was blond, with highly cultivated whiskers, when he jumped out the window; he returned, brown, with a smooth face. The man who had jumped out was a middle-aged person, with an expressive face which was in turn idiotic and intelligent; the man who returned by the door was a fine young fellow of thirty-five, with a beaming eye and a sensitive lip; a splendid head of curly black hair, brought out vividly the pallor of his complexion, and the firm outline of his head and face. A wound appeared on his neck, just below the chin.

“Monsieur Lecoq!” cried M. Plantat, recovering his voice.

“Himself,” answered the detective, “and this time the true Lecoq.” Turning to Robelot, he slapped him on the shoulder and added:

“Go on, you.”

Robelot fell upon a sofa, but the detective continued to hold him fast.

“Yes,” he continued, “this rascal has robbed me of my blond locks. Thanks to him and in spite of myself, you see me as I am, with the head the Creator gave me, and which is really my own.” He gave a

careless gesture, half angry, half good-humored. "I am the true Lecoq; and to tell the truth, only three persons besides yourselves really know him—two trusted friends, and one who is infinitely less so—she of whom I spoke a while ago."

The eyes of the other two met as if to question each other, and M. Lecoq continued:

"What can a fellow do? All is not rose color in my trade. We run such dangers, in protecting society, as should entitle us to the esteem, if not the affection of our fellow-men. Why, I am condemned to death, at this moment, by seven of the most dangerous criminals in France. I have caught them, you see, and they have sworn—they are men of their word, too—that I should only die by their hands. Where are these wretches? Four at Cayenne, one at Brest; I've had news of them. But the other two? I've lost their track. Who knows whether one of them hasn't followed me here, and whether to-morrow, at the turning of some obscure road, I shall not get six inches of cold steel in my stomach?"

He smiled sadly.

"And no reward," pursued he, "for the perils which we brave. If I should fall to-morrow, they would take up my body, carry it to my house, and that would be the end." The detective's tone had become bitter, the irritation of his voice betrayed his rancor. "My precautions happily are taken. While I am performing my duties, I suspect everything, and when I am on my guard I fear no one. But there are days when one is tired of being on his guard, and would like to be able to turn a street corner without looking for a dagger. On such days I again become myself; I take off my false beard, throw down my mask, and my real self

emerges from the hundred disguises which I assume in turn. I have been a detective fifteen years, and no one at the prefecture knows either my true face or the color of my hair."

Master Robelot, ill at ease on his lounge, attempted to move.

"Ah, look out!" cried M. Lecoq, suddenly changing his tone. "Now get up here, and tell us what you were about in the garden?"

"But you are wounded!" exclaimed Plantat, observing stains of blood on M. Lecoq's shirt.

"Oh, that's nothing—only a scratch that this fellow gave me with a big cutlass he had."

M. Plantat insisted on examining the wound, and was not satisfied until the doctor declared it to be a very slight one.

"Come, Master Robelot," said the old man, "what were you doing here?"

The bone-setter did not reply.

"Take care," insisted M. Plantat, "your silence will confirm us in the idea that you came with the worst designs."

But it was in vain that M. Plantat wasted his persuasive eloquence. Robelot shut himself up in a ferocious and dogged silence. M. Gendron, hoping, not without reason, that he might have some influence over his former assistant, spoke:

"Answer us; what did you come for?"

Robelot made an effort; it was painful, with his broken jaw, to speak.

"I came to rob; I confess it."

"To rob—what?"

"I don't know."

"But you didn't scale a wall and risk the jail without a definite object?"

"Well, then, I wanted——"

He stopped.

"What? Go on."

"To get some rare flowers in the conservatory."

"With your cutlass, hey?" said M. Lecoq.

Robelot gave him a terrible look; the detective continued:

"You needn't look at me that way—you don't scare me. And don't talk like a fool, either. If you think we are duller than you, you are mistaken—I warn you of it."

"I wanted the flower-pots," stammered the man.

"Oh, come now," cried M. Lecoq, shrugging his shoulders, "don't repeat such nonsense. You, a man that buys large estates for cash, steal flower-pots! Tell that to somebody else. You've been turned over to-night, my boy, like an old glove. You've let out in spite of yourself a secret that tormented you furiously, and you came here to get it back again. You thought that perhaps Monsieur Plantat had not told it to anybody, and you wanted to prevent him from speaking again forever."

Robelot made a sign of protesting.

"Shut up now," said M. Lecoq. "And your cutlass?"

While this conversation was going on, M. Plantat reflected.

"Perhaps," he murmured, "I've spoken too soon."

"Why so?" asked M. Lecoq. "I wanted a palpable proof for Monsieur Domini; we'll give him this rascal, and if he isn't satisfied, he's difficult to please."

"But what shall we do with him?"

"Shut him up somewhere in the house; if necessary, I'll tie him up."

"Here's a dark closet."

"Is it secure?"

"There are thick walls on three sides of it, and the fourth is closed with a double door; no openings, no windows, nothing."

"Just the place."

M. Plantat opened the closet, a black-looking hole, damp, narrow, and full of old books and papers.

"There," said M. Lecoq to his prisoner, "in here you'll be like a little king," and he pushed him into the closet. Robelot did not resist, but he asked for some water and a light. They gave him a bottle of water and a glass.

"As for a light," said M. Lecoq, "you may dispense with it. You'll be playing us some dirty trick."

M. Plantat, having shut the closet-door, took the detective's hand.

"Monsieur," said he, earnestly, "you have probably just saved my life at the peril of your own; I will not thank you. The day will come, I trust, when I may——"

The detective interrupted him with a gesture.

"You know how I constantly expose myself," said he, "once more or less does not matter much. Besides, it does not always serve a man to save his life." He was pensive a moment, then added: "You will thank me after awhile, when I have gained other titles to your gratitude."

M. Gendron also cordially shook the detective's hand, saying:

"Permit me to express my admiration of you. I had no idea what the resources of such a man as you

were. You got here this morning without information, without details, and by the mere scrutiny of the scene of the crime, by the sole force of reasoning, have found the criminal: more, you have proved to us that the criminal could be no other than he whom you have named."

M. Lecoq bowed modestly. These praises evidently pleased him greatly.

"Still," he answered, "I am not yet quite satisfied. The guilt of the Count de Trémoré is of course abundantly clear to me. But what motives urged him? How was he led to this terrible impulse to kill his wife, and make it appear that he, too, had been murdered?"

"Might we not conclude," remarked the doctor, "that, disgusted with Madame de Trémoré, he has got rid of her to rejoin another woman, adored by him to madness?"

M. Lecoq shook his head.

"People don't kill their wives for the sole reason that they are tired of them and love others. They quit their wives, live with the new loves—that's all. That happens every day, and neither the law nor public opinion condemns such people with great severity."

"But it was the wife who had the fortune."

"That wasn't the case here. I have been posting myself up. M. de Trémoré had a hundred thousand crowns, the remains of a colossal fortune saved by his friend Sauvresy; and his wife by the marriage contract made over a half million to him. A man can live in ease anywhere on eight hundred thousand francs. Besides, the count was master of all the funds of the estate. He could sell, buy, realize, borrow, deposit, and draw funds at will."

The doctor had nothing to reply. M. Lecoq went

on, speaking with a certain hesitation, while his eyes interrogated M. Plantat.

"We must find the reasons of this murder, and the motives of the assassin's terrible resolution—in the past. Some crime so indissolubly linked the count and countess, that only the death of one of them could free the other. I suspected this crime the first thing this morning, and have seen it all the way through; and the man that we have just shut up in there—Robe-lot—who wanted to murder Monsieur Plantat, was either the agent or the accomplice of this crime."

The doctor had not been present at the various episodes which, during the day at Valfeuillu and in the evening at the mayor's, had established a tacit understanding between Plantat and Lecoq. He needed all the shrewdness he possessed to fill up the gaps and understand the hidden meanings of the conversation to which he had been listening for two hours. M. Lecoq's last words shed a ray of light upon it all, and the doctor cried, "Sauvresy!"

"Yes—Sauvresy," answered M. Lecoq. "And the paper which the murderer hunted for so eagerly, for which he neglected his safety and risked his life, must contain the certain proof of the crime."

M. Plantat, despite the most significant looks and the direct provocation to make an explanation, was silent. He seemed a hundred leagues off in his thoughts, and his eyes, wandering in space, seemed to follow forgotten episodes in the mists of the past. M. Lecoq, after a brief pause, decided to strike a bold blow.

"What a past that must have been," exclaimed he, "which could drive a young, rich, happy man like Hector de Trémoré to plan in cool blood such a crime, to resign himself to disappear after it, to cease to exist,

as it were to lose all at once his personality, his position, his honor and his name! What a past must be that which drives a young girl of twenty to suicide!"

M. Plantat started up, pale, more moved than he had yet appeared.

"Ah," cried he, in an altered voice, "you don't believe what you say! Laurence never knew about it, never!"

The doctor, who was narrowly watching the detective, thought he saw a faint smile light up his mobile features. The old justice of the peace went on, now calmly and with dignity, in a somewhat haughty tone:

"You didn't need tricks or subterfuge, Monsieur Lecoq, to induce me to tell what I know. I have evinced enough esteem and confidence in you to deprive you of the right to arm yourself against me with the sad secret which you have surprised."

M. Lecoq, despite his cool-headedness, was disconcerted.

"Yes," pursued M. Plantat, "your astonishing genius for penetrating dramas like this has led you to the truth. But you do not know all, and even now I would hold my tongue, had not the reasons which compelled me to be silent ceased to exist."

He opened a secret drawer in an old oaken desk near the fireplace and took out a large paper package, which he laid on the table.

"For four years," he resumed, "I have followed, day by day—I might say, hour by hour—the various phases of the dreadful drama which ended in blood last night at Valfeuillu. At first, the curiosity of an old retired attorney prompted me. Later, I hoped to save the life and honor of one very dear to me. Why did I say nothing of my discoveries? That, my friends,

is the secret of my conscience—it does not reproach me. Besides, I shut my eyes to the evidence even up to yesterday; I needed the brutal testimony of this deed!”

Day had come. The frightened blackbirds flew whistling by. The pavement resounded with the wooden shoes of the workmen going fieldward. No noise troubled the sad stillness of the library, unless it were the rustling of the leaves which M. Plantat was turning over, or now and then a groan from Robelot.

“Before commencing,” said the old man, “I ought to consider your weariness; we have been up twenty-four hours——”

But the others protested that they did not need repose. The fever of curiosity had chased away their exhaustion. They were at last to know the key of the mystery.

“Very well,” said their host, “listen to me.”

XII

The Count Hector de Trémoré, at twenty-six, was the model and ideal of the polished man of the world, proper to our age; a man useless alike to himself and to others, harmful even, seeming to have been placed on earth expressly to play at the expense of all. Young, noble, elegant, rich by millions, endowed with vigorous health, this last descendant of a great family squandered most foolishly and ignobly both his youth and his patrimony. He acquired by excesses of all kinds a wide and unenviable celebrity. People talked of his stables, his carriages, his servants, his furniture, his dogs, his favorite loves. His cast-off horses still took prizes, and a jade distinguished by his notice was eager-

ly sought by the young bloods of the town. Do not think, however, that he was naturally vicious; he had a warm heart, and even generous emotions at twenty. Six years of unhealthy pleasures had spoiled him to the marrow. Foolishly vain, he was ready to do anything to maintain his notoriety. He had the bold and determined egotism of one who has never had to think of anyone but himself, and has never suffered. Intoxicated by the flatteries of the so-called friends who drew his money from him, he admired himself, mistaking his brutal cynicism for wit, and his lofty disdain of all morality and his idiotic scepticism, for character. He was also feeble; he had caprices, but never a will; feeble as a child, a woman, a girl. His biography was to be found in the petty journals of the day, which retailed his sayings—or what he might have said; his least actions and gestures were reported.

One night when he was supping at the Café de Paris, he threw all the plates out the window. It cost him twenty thousand francs. Bravo! One morning gossiping Paris learned with stupefaction that he had eloped to Italy with the wife of X——, the banker, a lady nineteen years married. He fought a duel, and killed his man. The week after, he was wounded in another. He was a hero! On one occasion he went to Baden, where he broke the bank. Another time, after playing sixty hours, he managed to lose one hundred and twenty thousand francs—won by a Russian prince.

He was one of those men whom success intoxicates, who long for applause, but who care not for what they are applauded. Count Hector was more than ravished by the noise he made in the world. It seemed to him the acme of honor and glory to have his name or ini-

tials constantly in the columns of the *Parisian World*. He did not betray this, however, but said, with charming modesty, after each new adventure :

“ When will they stop talking about me? ”

On great occasions, he borrowed from Louis XIV. the epigram :

“ After me the deluge.”

The deluge came in his lifetime.

One April morning, his valet, a villainous fellow, drilled and dressed up by the count—woke him at nine o'clock with this speech :

“ Monsieur, a bailiff is downstairs in the ante-chamber, and has come to seize your furniture.”

Hector turned on his pillow, yawned, stretched, and replied :

“ Well, tell him to begin operations with the stables and carriage-house ; and then come up and dress me.”

He did not seem disturbed, and the servant retired amazed at his master's coolness. The count had at least sense enough to know the state of his finances ; and he had foreseen, nay, expected the bailiff's visit. Three years before, when he had been laid up for six weeks in consequence of a fall from his horse, he had measured the depth of the gulf toward which he was hastening. Then, he might yet have saved himself. But he must have changed his whole course of life, reformed his household, learned that twenty-one franc pieces made a napoleon. Fie, never ! After mature reflection he had said to himself that he would go on to the end. When the last hour came, he would fly to the other end of France, erase his name from his linen, and blow his brains out in some forest.

This hour had now come.

By contracting debts, signing bills, renewing obliga-

tions, paying interests and compound interests, giving commissions by always borrowing, and never paying, Hector had consumed the princely heritage—nearly four millions in lands—which he had received at his father's death. The winter just past had cost him fifty thousand crowns. He had tried eight days before to borrow a hundred thousand francs, and had failed. He had been refused, not because his property was not as much as he owed, but because it was known that property sold by a bankrupt does not bring its value.

Thus it was that when the valet came in and said, "The bailiff is here," he seemed like a spectre commanding suicide.

Hector took the announcement coolly and said, as he got up:

"Well, here's an end of it."

He was very calm, though a little confused. A little confusion is excusable when a man passes from wealth to beggary. He thought he would make his last toilet with especial care. Parbleu! The French nobility goes into battle in court costume! He was ready in less than an hour. He put on his bejewelled watch-chain; then he put a pair of little pistols, of the finest quality, in his overcoat pocket; then he sent the valet away, and opening his desk, he counted up what funds he had left. Ten thousand and some hundreds of francs remained. He might with this sum take a journey, prolong his life two or three months; but he repelled with disdain the thought of a miserable subterfuge, of a reprieve in disguise. He imagined that with this money he might make a great show of generosity, which would be talked of in the world; it would be chivalrous to breakfast with his inamorata and make her a present of this money at dessert. During the

meal he would be full of nervous gayety, of cynical humor, and then he would announce his intention to kill himself. The girl would not fail to narrate the scene everywhere; she would repeat his last conversation, his last will and gift; all the cafés would buzz with it at night; the papers would be full of it.

This idea strangely excited him, and comforted him at once. He was going out, when his eyes fell upon the mass of papers in his desk. Perhaps there was something there which might dim the positiveness of his resolution. He emptied all the drawers without looking or choosing, and put all the papers in the fire. He looked with pride upon this conflagration; there were bills, love letters, business letters, bonds, patents of nobility, deeds of property. Was it not his brilliant past which flickered and consumed in the fireplace?

The bailiff occurred to him, and he hastily descended. He was the most polite of bailiffs, a man of taste and wit, a friend of artists, himself a poet at times. He had already seized eight horses in the stables with all their harness and trappings, and five carriages with their equipage, in the carriage-house.

"I'm going on slowly, Count," said he, bowing. "Perhaps you wish to arrest the execution. The sum is large, to be sure, but a man in your position——"

"Believe that you are here because it suits me," interrupted Hector, proudly, "this house doesn't suit me; I shall never enter it again. So, as you are master, go on."

And wheeling round on his heel he went off.

The astonished bailiff proceeded with his work. He went from room to room, admiring and seizing. He seized cups gained at the races, collections of pipes and

arms, and the library, containing many sporting-books, superbly bound.

Meanwhile the Count de Trémoré, who was resolved more than ever on suicide, ascending the boulevards came to his inamorata's house, which was near the Madeleine. He had introduced her some six months before into the *demi-monde* as Jenny Fancy. Her real name was Pélagie Taponnet, and although the count did not know it, she was his valet's sister. She was pretty and lively, with delicate hands and a tiny foot, superb chestnut hair, white teeth, and great impertinent black eyes, which were languishing, caressing, or provoking, at will. She had passed suddenly from the most abject poverty to a state of extravagant luxury. This brilliant change did not astonish her as much as you might think. Forty-eight hours after her removal to her new apartments, she had established order among the servants; she made them obey a glance or a gesture; and she made her dress-makers and milliners submit with good grace to her orders. Jenny soon began to languish, in her fine rooms, for new excitement; her gorgeous toilets no longer amused her. A woman's happiness is not complete unless seasoned by the jealousy of rivals. Jenny's rivals lived in the Faubourg du Temple, near the barrier; they could not envy her splendor, for they did not know her, and she was strictly forbidden to associate with and so dazzle them. As for Trémoré, Jenny submitted to him from necessity. He seemed to her the most tiresome of men. She thought his friends the dreariest of beings. Perhaps she perceived beneath their ironically polite manner, a contempt for her, and understood of how little consequence she was to these rich people, these high livers, gamblers, men of the

world. Her pleasures comprised an evening with someone of her own class, card-playing, at which she won, and a midnight supper. The rest of the time she suffered ennui. She was wearied to death. A hundred times she was on the point of discarding Trémoré, abandoning all this luxury, money, servants, and resuming her old life. Many a time she packed up; her vanity always checked her at the last moment.

Hector de Trémoré rang at her door at eleven on the morning in question. She did not expect him so early, and she was evidently surprised when he told her he had come to breakfast, and asked her to hasten the cook, as he was in a great hurry.

She had never, she thought, seen him so amiable, so gay. All through breakfast he sparkled, as he promised himself he would, with spirit and fun. At last, while they were sipping their coffee, Hector spoke:

“All this, my dear, is only a preface, intended to prepare you for a piece of news which will surprise you. I am a ruined man.”

She looked at him with amazement, not seeming to comprehend him.

“I said—ruined,” said he, laughing bitterly, “as ruined as man can be.”

“Oh, you are making fun of me, joking——”

“I never spoke so seriously in my life. It seems strange to you, doesn’t it? Yet it’s sober truth.”

Jenny’s large eyes continued to interrogate him.

“Why,” he continued, with lofty carelessness, “life, you know, is like a bunch of grapes, which one either eats gradually, piece by piece, or squeezes into a glass to be tossed off at a gulp. I’ve chosen the latter way. My grape was four million francs; they are drunk up to the dregs. I don’t regret them, I’ve had a jolly life

for my money. But now I can flatter myself that I am as much of a beggar as any beggar in France. Everything at my house is in the bailiff's hands—I am without a domicile, without a penny.”

He spoke with increasing animation as the multitude of diverse thoughts passed each other tumultuously in his brain. And he was not playing a part. He was speaking in all good faith.

“But—then—” stammered Jenny.

“What? Are you free? Just so——”

She hardly knew whether to rejoice or mourn.

“Yes,” he continued, “I give you back your liberty.”

Jenny made a gesture which Hector misunderstood.

“Oh! be quiet,” he added quickly, “I sha’n’t leave you thus; I would not desert you in a state of need. This furniture is yours, and I have provided for you besides. Here in my pocket are five hundred napoleons; it is my all; I have brought it to give to you.”

He passed the money over to her on a plate, laughingly, imitating the restaurant waiters. She pushed it back with a shudder.

“Oh, well,” said he, “that’s a good sign, my dear; very good, very good. I’ve always thought and said that you were a good girl—in fact, too good; you needed correcting.”

She did, indeed, have a good heart; for instead of taking Hector’s bank-notes and turning him out of doors, she tried to comfort and console him. Since he had confessed to her that he was penniless, she ceased to hate him, and even commenced to love him. Hector, homeless, was no longer the dreaded man who paid to be master, the millionaire who, by a caprice, had raised her from the gutter. He was no longer the ex-

ecrated tyrant. Ruined, he descended from his pedestal, he became a man like others, to be preferred to others, as a handsome and gallant youth. Then Jenny mistook the last artifice of a discarded vanity for a generous impulse of the heart, and was deeply touched by this splendid last gift.

"You are not as poor as you say," she said, "for you still have so large a sum."

"But, dear child, I have several times given as much for diamonds which you envied."

She reflected a moment, then as if an idea had struck her, exclaimed:

"That's true enough; but I can spend, oh, a great deal less, and yet be just as happy. Once, before I knew you, when I was young (she was now nineteen), ten thousand francs seemed to me to be one of those fabulous sums which were talked about, but which few men ever saw in one pile, and fewer still held in their hands."

She tried to slip the money into the count's pocket; but he prevented it.

"Come, take it back, keep it——"

"What shall I do with it?"

"I don't know, but wouldn't this money bring in more? Couldn't you speculate on the Bourse, bet at the races, play at Baden, or something? I've heard of people that are now rich as kings, who commenced with nothing, and hadn't your talents either. Why don't you do as they did?"

She spoke excitedly, as a woman does who is anxious to persuade. He looked at her, astonished to find her so sensitive, so disinterested.

"You will, won't you?" she insisted, "now, won't you?"

"You are a good girl," said he, charmed with her, "but you must take this money. I give it to you, don't be worried about anything."

"But you—have you still any money? What have you?"

"I have yet——"

He stopped, searched his pockets, and counted the money in his purse.

"Faith, here's three hundred and forty francs—more than I need. I must give some napoleons to your servants before I go."

"And what for Heaven's sake will become of you?"

He sat back in his chair, negligently stroked his handsome beard, and said:

"I am going to blow my brains out."

"Oh!"

Hector thought that she doubted what he said. He took his pistols out of his pockets, showed them to her, and went on:

"You see these toys? Well, when I leave you, I shall go somewhere—no matter where—put the muzzle to my temple, thus, press the trigger—and all will be over!"

She gazed at him, her eyes dilated with terror, pale, breathing hard and fast. But at the same time, she admired him. She marvelled at so much courage, at this calm, this careless railing tone. What superb disdain of life! To exhaust his fortune and then kill himself, without a cry, a tear, or a regret, seemed to her an act of heroism unheard of, unexampled. It seemed to her that a new, unknown, beautiful, radiant man stood before her. She loved him as she had never loved before!

"No!" she cried, "no! It shall not be!"

And rising suddenly, she rushed to him and seized him by the arm.

"You will not kill yourself, will you? Promise me, swear it to me. It isn't possible, you would not! I love you—I couldn't bear you before. Oh, I did not know you, but now—come, we will be happy. You, who have lived with millions don't know how much ten thousand francs are—but I know. We can live a long time on that, and very well, too. Then, if we are obliged to sell the useless things—the horses, carriages, my diamonds, my green cashmere, we can have three or four times that sum. Thirty thousand francs—it's a fortune! Think how many happy days——"

The Count de Trémoré shook his head, smilingly. He was ravished; his vanity was flattered by the heat of the passion which beamed from the poor girl's eyes. How he was beloved! How he would be regretted! What a hero the world was about to lose!

"For we will not stay here," Jenny went on, "we will go and conceal ourselves far from Paris, in a little cottage. Why, on the other side of Belleville you can get a place surrounded by gardens for a thousand francs a year. How well off we should be there! You would never leave me, for I should be jealous—oh, so jealous! We wouldn't have any servants, and you should see that I know how to keep house."

Hector said nothing.

"While the money lasts," continued Jenny, "we'll laugh away the days. When it's all gone, if you are still decided, you will kill yourself—that is, we will kill ourselves together. But not with a pistol—No! We'll light a pan of charcoal, sleep in one another's arms, and that will be the end. They say one doesn't suffer that way at all."

This idea drew Hector from his torpor, and awoke in him a recollection which ruffled all his vanity.

Three or four days before, he had read in a paper the account of the suicide of a cook, who, in a fit of love and despair, had bravely suffocated himself in his garret. Before dying he had written a most touching letter to his faithless love. The idea of killing himself like a cook made him shudder. He saw the possibility of the horrible comparison. How ridiculous! And the Count de Trémoré had a wholesome fear of ridicule. To suffocate himself, at Belleville, with a grisette, how dreadful! He almost rudely pushed Jenny's arms away, and repulsed her.

"Enough of that sort of thing," said he, in his careless tone. "What you say, child, is all very pretty, but utterly absurd. A man of my name dies, and doesn't choke." And taking the bank-notes from his pocket, where Jenny had slipped them, he threw them on the table.

"Now, good-by."

He would have gone, but Jenny, red and with glistening eyes, barred the door with her body.

"You shall not go!" she cried, "I won't have you; you are mine—for I love you; if you take one step, I will scream."

The count shrugged his shoulders.

"But we must end all this!"

"You sha'n't go!"

"Well, then, I'll blow my brains out here." And taking out one of his pistols, he held it to his forehead, adding, "If you call out and don't let me pass, I shall fire." He meant the threat for earnest.

But Jenny did not call out; she could not; she uttered a deep groan and fainted.

"At last!" muttered Hector, replacing the pistol in his pocket.

He went out, not taking time to lift her from the floor where she had fallen, and shut the door. Then he called the servants into the vestibule, gave them ten napoleons to divide among them, and hastened away.

XIII

The Count de Trémoré, having reached the street, ascended the boulevard. All of a sudden he bethought him of his friends. The story of the execution must have already spread.

"No; not that way," he muttered.

This was because, on the boulevard, he would certainly meet some of his very dear cronies, and he desired to escape their condolence and offers of service. He pictured to himself their sorry visages, concealing a hidden and delicious satisfaction. He had wounded so many vanities that he must look for terrible revenges. The friends of an insolently prosperous man are rejoiced in his downfall.

Hector crossed the street, went along the Rue Duphot, and reached the quays. Where was he going? He did not know, and did not even ask himself. He walked at random, enjoying the physical content which follows a good meal, happy to find himself still in the land of the living, in the soft April sunlight.

The weather was superb, and all Paris was out of doors. There was a holiday air about the town. The flower-women at the corners of the bridges had their baskets full of odorous violets. The count bought a bouquet near the Pont Neuf and stuck it in his button-hole, and without waiting for his change, passed on.

He reached the large square at the end of the Bourdon boulevard, which is always full of jugglers and curiosity shows; here the noise, the music, drew him from his torpor, and brought his thoughts back to his present situation.

"I must leave Paris," thought he.

He crossed toward the Orleans station at a quicker pace. He entered the waiting-room, and asked what time the train left for Etampes. Why did he choose Etampes? A train had just gone, and there would not be another one for two hours. He was much annoyed at this, and as he could not wait there two hours, he wended his way, to kill time, toward the Jardin des Plantes. He had not been there for ten or twelve years—not since, when at school, his teachers had brought him there to look at the animals. Nothing had changed. There were the groves and parterres, the lawns and lanes, the beasts and birds, as before. The principal avenue was nearly deserted. He took a seat opposite the mineralogical museum. He reflected on his position. He glanced back through the departed years, and did not find one day among those many days which had left him one of those gracious memories which delight and console. Millions had slipped through his prodigal hands, and he could not recall a single useful expenditure, a really generous one, amounting to twenty francs. He, who had had so many friends, searched his memory in vain for the name of a single friend whom he regretted to part from. The past seemed to him like a faithful mirror; he was surprised, startled at the folly of the pleasures, the inane delights, which had been the end and aim of his existence. For what had he lived? For others.

"Ah, what a fool I was!" he muttered, "what a fool!"

After living for others, he was going to kill himself for others. His heart became softened. Who would think of him, eight days hence? Not one living being. Yes—Jenny, perhaps. Yet, no. She would be consoled with a new lover in less than a week.

The bell for closing the garden rang. Night had come, and a thick and damp mist had covered the city. The count, chilled to the bones, left his seat.

"To the station again," muttered he.

It was a horrible idea to him now—this of shooting himself in the silence and obscurity of the forest. He pictured to himself his disfigured body, bleeding, lying on the edge of some ditch. Beggars or robbers would despoil him. And then? The police would come and take up this unknown body, and doubtless would carry it, to be identified, to the Morgue.

"Never!" cried he, at this thought, "no, never!"

How die, then? He reflected, and it struck him that he would kill himself in some second-class hotel on the left bank of the Seine.

"Yes, that's it," said he to himself.

Leaving the garden with the last of the visitors, he wended his way toward the Latin Quarter. The carelessness which he had assumed in the morning gave way to a sad resignation. He was suffering; his head was heavy, and he was cold.

"If I shouldn't die to-night," he thought, "I shall have a terrible cold in the morning."

This mental sally did not make him smile, but it gave him the consciousness of being firm and determined. He went into the Rue Dauphine and looked about for a hotel. Then it occurred to him that it was not yet

seven o'clock, and it might arouse suspicions if he asked for a room at that early hour. He reflected that he still had over one hundred francs, and resolved to dine. It should be his last meal. He went into a restaurant and ordered it. But he in vain tried to throw off the anxious sadness which filled him. He drank, and consumed three bottles of wine without changing the current of his thoughts.

The waiters were surprised to see him scarcely touch the dishes set before him, and growing more gloomy after each potation. His dinner cost ninety francs; he threw his last hundred-franc note on the table, and went out. As it was not yet late, he went into another restaurant where some students were drinking, and sat down at a table in the farther corner of the room. He ordered coffee and rapidly drank three or four cups. He wished to excite himself, to screw up his courage to do what he had resolved upon; but he could not; the drink seemed only to make him more and more irresolute.

A waiter, seeing him alone at the table, offered him a newspaper. He took it mechanically, opened it, and read:

"Just as we are going to press, we learn that a well-known person has disappeared, after announcing his intention to commit suicide. The statements made to us are so strange, that we defer details till to-morrow, not having time to send for fuller information now."

These lines startled Hector. They were his death sentence, not to be recalled, signed by the tyrant whose obsequious courtier he had always been—public opinion.

"They will never cease talking about me," he mut-

tered angrily. Then he added, firmly, "Come, I must make an end of this."

He soon reached the Hôtel Luxembourg. He rapped at the door, and was speedily conducted to the best room in the house. He ordered a fire to be lighted. He also asked for sugar and water, and writing materials. At this moment he was as firm as in the morning.

"I must not hesitate," he muttered, "nor recoil from my fate."

He sat down at the table near the fireplace, and wrote in a firm hand a declaration which he destined for the police.

"No one must be accused of my death," he commenced; and he went on by asking that the hotel-keeper should be indemnified.

The hour by the clock was five minutes before eleven; he placed his pistols on the mantel.

"I will shoot myself at midnight," thought he. "I have yet an hour to live."

The count threw himself in an arm-chair and buried his face in his hands. Why did he not kill himself at once? Why impose on himself this hour of waiting, of anguish and torture? He could not have told. He began again to think over the events of his life, reflecting on the headlong rapidity of the occurrences which had brought him to that wretched room. How time had passed! It seemed but yesterday that he first began to borrow. It does little good, however, to a man who has fallen to the bottom of the abyss, to know the causes why he fell.

The large hand of the clock had passed the half hour after eleven.

He thought of the newspaper item which he had just

read. Who furnished the information? Doubtless it was Jenny. She had come to her senses, tearfully hastened after him. When she failed to find him on the boulevard, she had probably gone to his house, then to his club, then to some of his friends. So that to-night, at this very moment, the world was discussing him.

"Have you heard the news?"

"Ah, yes, poor Trémoré! What a romance! A good fellow, only——"

He thought he heard this "only" greeted with laughter and innuendoes. Time passed on. The ringing vibration of the clock was at hand; the hour had come.

The count got up, seized his pistols, and placed himself near the bed, so as not to fall on the floor.

The first stroke of twelve; he did not fire.

Hector was a man of courage; his reputation for bravery was high. He had fought at least ten duels, and his cool bearing on the ground had always been admiringly remarked. One day he had killed a man, and that night he slept very soundly.

But he did not fire.

There are two kinds of courage. One, false courage, is that meant for the public eye, which needs the excitement of the struggle, the stimulus of rage, and the applause of lookers-on. The other, true courage, despises public opinion, obeys conscience, not passion; success does not sway it, it does its work noiselessly.

Two minutes after twelve—Hector still held the pistol against his forehead.

"Am I going to be afraid?" he asked himself.

He was afraid, but would not confess it to himself.

He put his pistols back on the table and returned to his seat near the fire. All his limbs were trembling.

"It's nervousness," he muttered. "It'll pass off."

He gave himself till one o'clock. He tried to convince himself of the necessity of committing suicide. If he did not, what would become of him? How would he live? Must he make up his mind to work? Besides, could he appear in the world, when all Paris knew of his intention? This thought goaded him to fury; he had a sudden courage, and grasped his pistols. But the sensation which the touch of the cold steel gave him, caused him to drop his arm and draw away shuddering.

"I cannot," repeated he, in his anguish. "I cannot!"

The idea of the physical pain of shooting himself filled him with horror. Why had he not a gentler death? Poison, or perhaps charcoal—like the little cook? He did not fear the ludicrousness of this now; all that he feared was, that the courage to kill himself would fail him.

He went on extending his time of grace from half-hour to half-hour. It was a horrible night, full of the agony of the last night of the criminal condemned to the scaffold. He wept with grief and rage and wrung his hands and prayed. Toward daylight he fell exhausted into an uneasy slumber, in his arm-chair. He was awakened by three or four heavy raps on the door, which he hastily opened. It was the waiter, who had come to take his order for breakfast, and who started back with amazement on seeing Hector, so disordered was his clothing and so livid the pallor of his features.

"I want nothing," said the count. "I'm going down."

He had just enough money left to pay his bill, and six sous for the waiter. He quitted the hotel where he had suffered so much, without end or aim in view. He was more resolved than ever to die, only he yearned for several days of respite to nerve himself for the deed. But how could he live during these days? He had not so much as a centime left. An idea struck him—the pawnbrokers!

He knew that at the Monte-de-Piété* a certain amount would be advanced to him on his jewelry. But where find a branch office? He dared not ask, but hunted for one at hazard. He now held his head up, walked with a firmer step; he was seeking something, and had a purpose to accomplish. He at last saw the sign of the Monte-de-Piété on a house in the Rue Condé, and entered. The hall was small, damp, filthy, and full of people. But if the place was gloomy, the borrowers seemed to take their misfortunes good-humoredly. They were mostly students and women, talking gayly as they waited for their turns. The Count de Trémoré advanced with his watch, chain, and a brilliant diamond that he had taken from his finger. He was seized with the timidity of misery, and did not know how to open his business. A young woman pitied his embarrassment.

“See,” said she, “put your articles on this counter, before that window with green curtains.”

A moment after he heard a voice which seemed to proceed from the next room:

“Twelve hundred francs for the watch and ring.”

This large amount produced such a sensation as to arrest all the conversation. All eyes were turned tow-

* The public pawnbroker establishment of Paris, which has branch bureaux through the city.

ard the millionaire who was going to pocket such a fortune. The millionaire made no response.

The same woman who had spoken before nudged his arm.

"That's for you," said she. "Answer whether you will take it or not."

"I'll take it," cried Hector.

He was filled with a joy which made him forget the night's torture. Twelve hundred francs! How many days it would last! Had he not heard there were clerks who hardly got that in a year?

Hector waited a long time, when one of the clerks, who was writing at a desk, called out:

"Whose are the twelve hundred francs?"

The count stepped forward.

"Mine," said he.

"Your name?"

Hector hesitated. He would never give his name aloud in such a place as this. He gave the first name that occurred to him.

"Durand."

"Where are your papers?"

"What papers?"

"A passport, a receipt for lodgings, a license to hunt——"

"I haven't any."

"Go for them, or bring two well-known witnesses."

"But——"

"There is no but. The next——"

Hector was provoked by the clerk's abrupt manner.

"Well, then," said he, "give me back the jewelry."

The clerk looked at him jeeringly.

"Can't be done. No goods that are registered, can be returned without proof of rightful possession." So

saying, he went on with his work. "One French shawl, thirty-five francs, whose is it?"

Hector meanwhile went out of the establishment. He had never suffered so much, had never imagined that one could suffer so much. After this ray of hope, so abruptly put out, the clouds lowered over him thicker and more hopelessly. He was worse off than the shipwrecked sailor; the pawnbroker had taken his last resources. All the romance with which he had invested the idea of his suicide now vanished, leaving bare the stern and ignoble reality. He must kill himself, not like the gay gamester who voluntarily leaves upon the roulette table the remains of his fortune, but like the Greek, who surprised and hunted, knows that every door will be shut upon him. His death would not be voluntary; he could neither hesitate nor choose the fatal hour; he must kill himself because he had not the means of living one day longer.

And life never before seemed to him so sweet a thing as now. He never felt so keenly the exuberance of his youth and strength. He suddenly discovered all about him a crowd of pleasures each more enviable than the others, which he had never tasted. He who flattered himself that he had squeezed life to press out its pleasures, had not really lived. He had had all that is to be bought or sold, nothing of what is given or achieved. He already not only regretted giving the ten thousand francs to Jenny, but the two hundred francs to the servants—nay the six sous given to the waiter at the restaurant, even the money he had spent on the bunch of violets. The bouquet still hung in his buttonhole, faded and shrivelled. What good did it do him? While the sous which he had paid for it—!

He did not think of his wasted millions, but could not drive away the thought of that wasted franc!

True, he might, if he chose, find plenty of money still, and easily. He had only to return quietly to his house, to discharge the bailiffs, and to resume the possession of his remaining effects. But he would thus confront the world, and confess his terrors to have overcome him at the last moment; he would have to suffer glances more cruel than the pistol-ball. The world must not be deceived; when a man announces that he is going to kill himself—he must kill himself.

So Hector was going to die because he had said he would, because the newspapers had announced the fact. He confessed this to himself as he went along, and bitterly reproached himself.

He remembered a pretty spot in Viroflay forest, where he had once fought a duel; he would commit the deed there. He hastened toward it. The weather was fine, and he met many groups of young people going into the country for a good 'time. Workmen were drinking and clinking their glasses under the trees along the river-bank. All seemed happy and contented, and their gayety seemed to insult Hector's wretchedness. He left the main road at the Sèvres bridge, and descending the embankment reached the borders of the Seine. Kneeling down, he took up some water in the palm of his hand, and drank—an invincible lassitude crept over him. He sat, or rather fell, upon the sward. The fever of despair came, and death now seemed to him a refuge, which he could almost welcome with joy. Some feet above him the windows of a Sèvres restaurant opened toward the river. He could be seen from them, as well as from

the bridge; but he did not mind this, nor anything else.

"As well here as elsewhere," he said to himself.

He had just drawn his pistol out, when he heard someone call:

"Hector! Hector!"

He jumped up at a bound, concealed the pistol, and looked about. A man was running down the embankment toward him with outstretched arms. This was a man of his own age, rather stout, but well shaped, with a fine open face and large black eyes in which one read frankness and good-nature; one of those men who are sympathetic at first sight, whom one loves on a week's acquaintance.

Hector recognized him. It was his oldest friend, a college mate; they had once been very intimate, but the count not finding the other fast enough for him, had little by little dropped his intimacy, and had now lost sight of him for two years.

"Sauvresy!" he exclaimed, stupefied.

"Yes," said the young man, hot, and out of breath, "I've been watching you the last two minutes; what were you doing here?"

"Why—nothing."

"How! What they told me at your house this morning was true, then! I went there."

"What did they say?"

"That nobody knew what had become of you, and that you declared to Jenny when you left her the night before that you were going to blow your brains out. The papers have already announced your death, with details."

This news seemed to have a great effect on the count.

"You see, then," he answered tragically, "that I must kill myself!"

"Why? In order to save the papers from the inconvenience of correcting their error?"

"People will say that I shrunk——"

"Oh, 'pon my word now! According to you, a man must make a fool of himself because it has been reported that he would do it. Absurd, old fellow. What do you want to kill yourself for?"

Hector reflected; he almost saw the possibility of living.

"I am ruined," answered he, sadly.

"And it's for this that—stop, my friend, let me tell you, you are an ass! Ruined! It's a misfortune, but when a man is of your age he rebuilds his fortune. Besides, you aren't as ruined as you say, because I've got an income of a hundred thousand francs."

"A hundred thousand francs——"

"Well, my fortune is in land, which brings in about four per cent."

Trémoré knew that his friend was rich, but not that he was as rich as this. He answered with a tinge of envy in his tone:

"Well, I had more than that; but I had no breakfast this morning."

"And you did not tell me! But true, you are in a pitiable state; come along, quick!"

And he led him toward the restaurant.

Trémoré reluctantly followed this friend, who had just saved his life. He was conscious of having been surprised in a distressingly ridiculous situation. If a man who is resolved to blow his brains out is accosted, he presses the trigger, he doesn't conceal his pistol. There was one alone, among all his friends, who loved

him enough not to see the ludicrousness of his position; one alone generous enough not to torture him with raillery; it was Sauvresy.

But once seated before a well-filled table, Hector could not preserve his rigidity. He felt the joyous expansion of spirit which follows assured safety after terrible peril. He was himself, young again, once more strong. He told Sauvresy everything; his vain boasting, his terror at the last moment, his agony at the hotel, his fury, remorse, and anguish at the pawnbroker's.

"Ah!" said he. "You have saved me! You are my friend, my only friend, my brother."

They talked for more than two hours.

"Come," said Sauvresy at last, "let us arrange our plans. You want to disappear awhile; I see that. But to-night you must write four lines to the papers. To-morrow I propose to take your affairs in hand, that's a thing I know how to do. I don't know exactly how you stand; but I will agree to save something from the wreck. We've got money, you see; your creditors will be easy with us."

"But where shall I go?" asked Hector, whom the mere idea of isolation terrified.

"What? You'll come home with me, parbleu, to Valfeuillu. Don't you know that I am married? Ah, my friend, a happier man than I does not exist! I've married—for love—the loveliest and best of women. You will be a brother to us. But come, my carriage is right here near the door."

XIV

M. Plantat stopped. His companions had not suffered a gesture or a word to interrupt him. M. Lecoq, as he listened, reflected. He asked himself where M. Plantat could have got all these minute details. Who had written Trémourel's terrible biography? As he glanced at the papers from which Plantat read, he saw that they were not all in the same handwriting.

The old justice of the peace pursued the story:

Bertha Lechaillu, though by an un hoped-for piece of good fortune she had become Madame Sauvresy, did not love her husband. She was the daughter of a poor country school-master, whose highest ambition had been to be an assistant teacher in a Versailles school; yet she was not now satisfied. Absolute queen of one of the finest domains in the land, surrounded by every luxury, spending as she pleased, beloved, adored, she was not content. Her life, so well regulated, so constantly smooth, without annoyances and disturbance, seemed to her insipid. There were always the same monotonous pleasures, always recurring each in its season. There were parties and receptions, horse rides, hunts, drives—and it was always thus! Alas, this was not the life she had dreamed of; she was born for more exciting pleasures. She yearned for unknown emotions and sensations, the unforeseen, abrupt transitions, passions, adventures. She had not liked Sauvresy from the first day she saw him, and her secret aversion to him increased in proportion as her influence over him grew more certain. She thought him common, vulgar, ridiculous. She thought the simplicity of his manners, silliness. She looked at him, and

saw nothing in him to admire. She did not listen to him when he spoke, having already decided in her wisdom that he could say nothing that was not tedious or commonplace. She was angry that he had not been a wild young man, the terror of his family.

He had, however, done as other young men do. He had gone to Paris and tried the sort of life which his friend Trémoré led. He had enough of it in six months, and hastily returned to Valfeuilu, to rest after such laborious pleasures. The experience cost him a hundred thousand francs, but he said he did not regret purchasing it at this price.

Bertha was wearied with the constancy and adoration of her husband. She had only to express a desire to be at once obeyed, and this blind submission to all her wishes appeared to her servile in a man. A man is born, she thought, to command, and not to obey; to be master, and not slave. She would have preferred a husband who would come in in the middle of the night, still warm from his orgy, having lost at play, and who would strike her if she upbraided him. A tyrant, but a man. Some months after her marriage she suddenly took it into her head to have absurd freaks and extravagant caprices. She wished to prove him, and see how far his constant complacence would go. She thought she would tire him out. It was intolerable to feel absolutely sure of her husband, to know that she so filled his heart that he had room for no other, to have nothing to fear, not even the caprice of an hour. Perhaps there was yet more than this in Bertha's aversion. She knew herself, and confessed to herself that had Sauvresy wished, she would have been his without being his wife. She was so lonely at her father's, so wretched in her poverty, that she would have fled from

her home, even for this. And she despised her husband because he had not despised her enough!

People were always telling her that she was the happiest of women. Happy! And there were days when she wept when she thought that she was married. Happy! There were times when she longed to fly, to seek adventure and pleasure, all that she yearned for, what she had not had and never would have. The fear of poverty—which she knew well—restrained her. This fear was caused in part by a wise precaution which her father, recently dead, had taken. Sauvresy wished to insert in the marriage-contract a settlement of five hundred thousand francs on his affianced. The worthy Lechaillu had opposed this generous act.

“My daughter,” he said, “brings you nothing. Settle forty thousand francs on her if you will, not a sou more; otherwise there shall be no marriage.”

As Sauvresy insisted, the old man added:

“I hope that she will be a good and worthy wife; if so, your fortune will be hers. But if she is not, forty thousand francs will be none too little for her. Of course, if you are afraid that you will die first, you can make a will.”

Sauvresy was forced to yield. Perhaps the worthy school-master knew his daughter; if so he was the only one. Never did so consummate a hypocrisy minister to so profound a perversity, and a depravity so inconceivable in a young and seemingly innocent girl. If, at the bottom of her heart, she thought herself the most wretched of women, there was nothing of it apparent—it was a well-kept secret. She knew how to show to her husband, in place of the love she did not feel, the appearance of a passion at once burning and

modest, betraying furtive glances and a flush as of pleasure, when he entered the room.

All the world said:

“Bertha is foolishly fond of her husband.”

Sauvresy was sure of it, and he was the first to say, not caring to conceal his joy:

“My wife adores me.”

Such were man and wife at Valfeuillu when Sauvresy found Trémorrel on the banks of the Seine with a pistol in his hand. Sauvresy missed his dinner that evening for the first time since his marriage, though he had promised to be prompt, and the meal was kept waiting for him. Bertha might have been anxious about this delay; she was only indignant at what she called inconsiderateness. She was asking herself how she should punish her husband, when, at ten o'clock at night, the drawing-room door was abruptly thrown open, and Sauvresy stood smiling upon the threshold.

“Bertha,” said he, “I’ve brought you an apparition.”

She scarcely deigned to raise her head. Sauvresy continued:

“An apparition whom you know, of whom I have often spoken to you, whom you will like because I love him, and because he is my oldest comrade, my best friend.”

And standing aside, he gently pushed Hector into the room.

“Madame Sauvresy, permit me to present to you Monsieur the Count de Trémorrel.”

Bertha rose suddenly, blushing, confused, agitated by an indefinable emotion, as if she saw in reality an apparition. For the first time in her life she was

abashed, and did not dare to raise her large, clear blue eyes.

"Monsieur," she stammered, "you are welcome."

She knew Trémorél's name well. Sauvresy had often mentioned it, and she had seen it often in the papers, and had heard it in the drawing-rooms of all her friends. He who bore it seemed to her, after what she had heard, a great personage. He was, according to his reputation, a hero of another age, a social Don Quixote, a terribly fast man of the world. He was one of those men whose lives astonish common people, whom the well-to-do citizen thinks faithless and lawless, whose extravagant passions overleap the narrow bounds of social prejudice; a man who tyrannizes over others, whom all fear, who fights on the slightest provocation, who scatters gold with a prodigal hand, whose iron health resists the most terrible excesses. She had often in her miserable reveries tried to imagine what kind of man this Count de Trémorél was. She awarded him with such qualities as she desired for her fancied hero, with whom she could fly from her husband in search of new adventures. And now, of a sudden, he appeared before her.

"Give Hector your hand, dear," said Sauvresy.

She held out her hand, which Trémorél lightly pressed, and his touch seemed to give her an electric shock.

Sauvresy threw himself into an arm-chair.

"You see, Bertha," said he, "our friend Hector is exhausted with the life he has been leading. He has been advised to rest, and has come to seek it here, with us."

"But, dear," responded Bertha, "aren't you afraid that the count will be bored a little here?"

"Why?"

"Valfeuillu is very quiet, and we are but dull country folks."

Bertha talked for the sake of talking, to break a silence which embarrassed her, to make Trémorrel speak, and hear his voice. As she talked she observed him, and studied the impression she made on him. Her radiant beauty usually struck those who saw her for the first time with open admiration. He remained impassible. She recognized the worn-out rake of title, the fast man who has tried, experienced, exhausted all things, in his coldness and superb indifference. And because he did not admire her she admired him the more.

"What a difference," thought she, "between him and that vulgar Sauvresy, who is surprised at everything, whose face shows all that he thinks, whose eye betrays what he is going to say before he opens his mouth."

Bertha was mistaken. Hector was not as cold and indifferent as she imagined. He was simply wearied, utterly exhausted. He could scarcely sit up after the terrible excitements of the last twenty-four hours. He soon asked permission to retire. Sauvresy, when left alone with his wife, told her all that happened, and the events which resulted in Trémorrel's coming to Valfeuillu; but like a true friend omitted everything that would cast ridicule upon his old comrade.

"He's a big child," said he, "a foolish fellow, whose brain is weak; but we'll take care of him and cure him."

Bertha never listened to her husband so attentively before. She seemed to agree with him, but she really admired Trémorrel. Like Jenny, she was struck with

the heroism which could squander a fortune and then commit suicide.

"Ah!" sighed she, "Sauvresy would not have done it!"

No, Sauvresy was quite a different man from the Count de Trémoré. The next day he declared his intention to adjust his friend's affairs. Hector had slept well, having spent the night on an excellent bed, undisturbed by pressing anxieties; and he appeared in the morning sleek and well-dressed, the disorder and desperation of the previous evening having quite disappeared. He had a nature not deeply impressible by events; twenty-four hours consoled him for the worst catastrophes, and he soon forgot the severest lessons of life. If Sauvresy had bid him begone, he would not have known where to go; yet he had already resumed the haughty carelessness of the millionaire, accustomed to bend men and circumstances to his will. He was once more calm and cold, coolly joking, as if years had passed since that night at the hotel, and as if all the disasters to his fortune had been repaired. Bertha was amazed at this tranquillity after such great reverses, and thought this childish recklessness force of character.

"Now," said Sauvresy, "as I've become your man of business, give me my instructions, and some valuable hints. What is, or was, the amount of your fortune?"

"I haven't the least idea."

Sauvresy provided himself with a pencil and a large sheet of paper, ready to set down the figures. He seemed a little surprised.

"All right," said he, "we'll put x down as the unknown quantity of the assets; now for the liabilities.

Hector made a superbly disdainful gesture.

"Don't know, I'm sure, what they are."

"What, can't you give a rough guess?"

"Oh, perhaps. For instance, I owe between five and six hundred thousand francs to Clair & Co., five hundred thousand to Dervoy; about as much to Dubois, of Orleans——"

"Well?"

"I can't remember any more."

"But you must have a memorandum of your loans somewhere?"

"No."

"You have at least kept your bonds, bills, and the sums of your various debts?"

"None of them. I burnt up all my papers yesterday."

Sauvresy jumped up from his chair in astonishment; such a method of doing business seemed to him monstrous; he could not suppose that Hector was lying. Yet he was lying, and this affectation of ignorance was a conceit of the aristocratic man of the world. It was very noble, very distingué, to ruin one's self without knowing how!

"But, my dear fellow," cried Sauvresy, "how can we clear up your affairs?"

"Oh, don't clear them up at all; do as I do—let the creditors act as they please, they will know how to settle it all, rest assured; let them sell out my property."

"Never! Then you would be ruined, indeed!"

"Well, it's only a little more or a little less."

"What splendid disinterestedness!" thought Bertha; "what coolness, what admirable contempt of money, what noble disdain of the petty details which

annoy common people! Was Sauvresy capable of all this?"

She could not at least accuse him of avarice, since for her he was as prodigal as a thief; he had never refused her anything; he anticipated her most extravagant fancies. Still he had a strong appetite for gain, and despite his large fortune, he retained the hereditary respect for money. When he had business with one of his farmers, he would rise very early, mount his horse, though it were mid-winter, and go several leagues in the snow to get a hundred crowns. He would have ruined himself for her if she had willed it, this she was convinced of; but he would have ruined himself economically, in an orderly way.

Sauvresy reflected.

"You are right," said he to Hector, "your creditors ought to know your exact position. Who knows that they are not acting in concert? Their simultaneous refusal to lend you a hundred thousand makes me suspect it. I will go and see them."

"Clair & Co., from whom I received my first loans, ought to be the best informed."

"Well, I will see Clair & Co. But look here, do you know what you would do if you were reasonable?"

"What?"

"You would go to Paris with me, and both of us——"

Hector turned very pale, and his eyes shone.

"Never!" he interrupted, violently, "never!"

His "dear friends" still terrified him. What! Reappear on the theatre of his glory, now that he was fallen, ruined, ridiculous by his unsuccessful suicide? Sauvresy had held out his arms to him. Sauvresy was a noble fellow, and loved Hector sufficiently not to per-

ceive the falseness of his position, and not to judge him a coward because he shrank from suicide. But the others!—

“Don’t talk to me about Paris,” said he in a calmer tone. “I shall never set my foot in it again.”

“All right—so much the better; stay with us; I sha’n’t complain of it, nor my wife either. Some fine day we’ll find you a pretty heiress in the neighborhood. But,” added Sauvresy, consulting his watch, “I must go if I don’t want to lose the train.”

“I’ll go to the station with you,” said Trémorel.

This was not solely from a friendly impulse. He wanted to ask Sauvresy to look after the articles left at the pawnbroker’s in the Rue de Condé, and to call on Jenny. Bertha, from her window, followed with her eyes the two friends, who, with arms interlocked, ascended the road toward Orcival. “What a difference,” thought she, “between these two men! My husband said he wished to be his friend’s steward; truly he has the air of a steward. What a noble gait the count has, what youthful ease, what real distinction! And yet I’m sure that my husband despises him, because he has ruined himself by dissipation. He affected—I saw it—an air of protection. Poor youth! But everything about the count betrays an innate or acquired superiority; even his name, Hector—how it sounds!” And she repeated “Hector” several times, as if it pleased her, adding, contemptuously, “My husband’s name is Clement!”

M. de Trémorel returned alone from the station, as gayly as a convalescent taking his first airing. As soon as Bertha saw him she left the window. She wished to remain alone, to reflect upon this event which had happened so suddenly, to analyze her sensations,

listen to her presentiments, study her impressions and decide, if possible, upon her line of conduct. She only reappeared when the tea was set for her husband, who returned at eleven in the evening. Sauvresy was faint from hunger, thirst, and fatigue, but his face glowed with satisfaction.

"Victory!" exclaimed he, as he ate his soup. "We'll snatch you from the hands of the Philistines yet. Parbleu! The finest feathers of your plumage will remain, after all, and you will be able to save enough for a good cosey nest."

Bertha glanced at her husband.

"How is that?" said she.

"It's very simple. At the very first, I guessed the game of our friend's creditors. They reckoned on getting a sale of his effects; would have bought them in a lump dirt cheap, as it always happens, and then sold them in detail, dividing the profits of the operation."

"And can you prevent that?" asked Trémorrel, incredulously.

"Certainly. Ah, I've completely checkmated these gentlemen. I've succeeded by chance—I had the good luck to get them all together this evening. I said to them, you'll let us sell this property as we please, voluntarily, or I'll outbid you all, and spoil your cards. They looked at me in amazement. My notary, who was with me, remarked that I was Monsieur Sauvresy, worth two millions. Our gentlemen opened their eyes very wide, and consented to grant my request."

Hector, notwithstanding what he had said, knew enough about his affairs to see that this action would save him a fortune—a small one, as compared with what he had possessed, yet a fortune.

The certainty of this delighted him, and moved by

a momentary and sincere gratitude, he grasped both of Sauvresy's hands in his.

"Ah, my friend," cried he, "you give me my honor, after saving my life! How can I ever repay you?"

"By committing no imprudences or foolishnesses, except reasonable ones. Such as this," added Sauvresy, leaning toward Bertha and embracing her.

"And there is nothing more to fear?"

"Nothing! Why I could have borrowed the two millions in an hour, and they knew it. But that's not all. The search for you is suspended. I went to your house, took the responsibility of sending away all your servants except your valet and a groom. If you agree, we'll send the horses to be sold to-morrow, and they'll fetch a good price; your own saddle-horse shall be brought here."

These details annoyed Bertha. She thought her husband exaggerated his services, carrying them even to servility.

"Really," thought she, "he was born to be a steward."

"Do you know what else I did?" pursued Sauvresy. "Thinking that perhaps you were in want of a wardrobe, I had three or four trunks filled with your clothes, sent them out by rail, and one of the servants has just gone after them."

Hector, too, began to find Sauvresy's services excessive, and thought he treated him too much like a child who could foresee nothing. The idea of having it said before a woman that he was in want of clothes irritated him. He forgot that he had found it a very simple thing in the morning to ask his friend for some linen.

Just then a noise was heard in the vestibule. Doubt-

less the trunks had come. Bertha went out to give the necessary orders.

"Quick!" cried Sauvresy. "Now that we are alone, here are your trinkets. I had some trouble in getting them. They are suspicious at the pawnbroker's. I think they began to suspect that I was one of a band of thieves."

"You didn't mention my name, did you?"

"That would have been useless. My notary was with me, fortunately. One never knows how useful one's notary may be. Don't you think society is unjust toward notaries?"

Trémoré thought his friend talked very lightly about a serious matter, and this flippancy vexed him.

"To finish up, I paid a visit to Miss Jenny. She has been abed since last evening, and her chambermaid told me she had not ceased sobbing bitterly ever since your departure."

"Had she seen no one?"

"Nobody at all. She really thought you dead, and when I told her you were here with me, alive and well, I thought she would go mad for joy. Do you know, Hector, she's really pretty."

"Yes—not bad."

"And a very good little body, I imagine. She told me some very touching things. I would wager, my friend, that she don't care so much for your money as she does for yourself."

Hector smiled superciliously.

"In short, she was anxious to follow me, to see and speak to you. I had to swear with terrible oaths that she should see you to-morrow, before she would let me go; not at Paris, as you said you would never go there, but at Corbeil."

“ Ah, as for that——”

“ She will be at the station to-morrow at twelve. We will go down together, and I will take the train for Paris. You can get into the Corbeil train, and breakfast with Miss Jenny at the hotel of the Belle Image.”

Hector began to offer an objection. Sauvresy stopped him with a gesture.

“ Not a word,” said he. “ Here is my wife.”

XV

On going to bed, that night, the count was less enchanted than ever with the devotion of his friend Sauvresy. There is not a diamond on which a spot cannot be found with a microscope.

“ Here he is,” thought he, “ abusing his privileges as the savior of my life. Can’t a man do you a service, without continually making you feel it? It seems as though because he prevented me from blowing my brains out, I had somehow become something that belongs to him! He came very near upbraiding me for Jenny’s extravagance. Where will he stop?”

The next day at breakfast he feigned indisposition so as not to eat, and suggested to Sauvresy that he would lose the train.

Bertha, as on the evening before, crouched at the window to see them go away. Her troubles during the past eight-and-forty hours had been so great that she hardly recognized herself. She scarcely dared to reflect or to descend to the depths of her heart. What mysterious power did this man possess, to so violently affect her life? She wished that he would go, never to return, while at the same time she avowed to herself that in going he would carry with him all her thoughts.

She struggled under the charm, not knowing whether she ought to rejoice or grieve at the inexpressible emotions which agitated her, being irritated to submit to an influence stronger than her own will.

She decided that to-day she would go down to the drawing-room. He would not fail—were it only for politeness—to go in there; and then, she thought, by seeing him nearer, talking with him, knowing him better, his influence over her would vanish. Doubtless he would return, and so she watched for him, ready to go down as soon as she saw him approaching. She waited with feverish shudderings, anxiously believing that this first *tête-à-tête* in her husband's absence would be decisive. Time passed; it was more than two hours since he had gone out with Sauvresy, and he had not reappeared. Where could he be?

At this moment, Hector was awaiting Jenny at the Corbeil station. The train arrived, and Jenny soon appeared. Her grief, joy, emotion had not made her forget her toilet, and never had she been so rollickingly elegant and pretty. She wore a green dress with a train, a velvet mantle, and the jauntiest little hat in the world. As soon as she saw Hector standing near the door, she uttered a cry, pushed the people aside, and rushed into his arms, laughing and crying at the same time. She spoke quite loud, with wild gestures, so that everyone could hear what she said.

"You didn't kill yourself, after all," said she. "Oh, how I have suffered; but what happiness I feel to-day!"

Trémoré struggled with her as he could, trying to calm her enthusiastic exclamations, softly repelling her, charmed and irritated at once, and exasperated at all these eyes rudely fixed on him. For none of the

passengers had gone out. They were all there, staring and gazing. Hector and Jenny were surrounded by a circle of curious folks.

"Come along," said Hector, his patience exhausted.

He drew her out of the door, hoping to escape this prying curiosity; but he did not succeed. They were persistently followed. Some of the Corbeil people who were on the top of the omnibus begged the conductor to walk his horses, that this singular couple might not be lost to view, and the horses did not get into a trot until they had disappeared in the hotel.

Sauvresy's foresight in recommending the place of meeting had thus been disconcerted by Jenny's sensational arrival. Questions were asked; the hostess was adroitly interrogated, and it was soon known that this person, who waited for eccentric young ladies at the Corbeil station, was an intimate friend of the owner of Valfeuillu. Neither Hector nor Jenny doubted that they formed the general topic of conversation. They breakfasted gayly in the best room at the Belle Image, during which Trémoré recounted a very pretty story about his restoration to life, in which he played a part, the heroism of which was well calculated to redouble the little lady's admiration. Then Jenny in her turn unfolded her plans for the future, which were, to do her justice, most reasonable. She had resolved more than ever to remain faithful to Hector now that he was ruined, to give up her elegant rooms, sell her furniture, and undertake some honest trade. She had found one of her old friends, who was now an accomplished dress-maker, and who was anxious to obtain a partner who had some money, while she herself furnished the experience. They would purchase an establishment in the Breda quarter, and between them could scarcely fail

to prosper. Jenny talked with a pretty, knowing, business-like air, which made Hector laugh. These projects seemed very comic to him; yet he was touched by this unselfishness on the part of a young and pretty woman, who was willing to work in order to please him.

But, unhappily, they were forced to part. Jenny had gone to Corbeil intending to stay a week; but the count told her this was absolutely impossible. She cried bitterly at first, then got angry, and finally consoled herself with a plan to return on the following Tuesday.

"Good-by," said she, embracing Hector, "think of me." She smilingly added, "I ought to be jealous; for they say your friend's wife is perhaps the handsomest woman in France. Is it true?"

"Upon my word, I don't know. I've forgotten to look at her."

Hector told the truth. Although he did not betray it, he was still under the surprise of his chagrin at the failure of his attempt at suicide. He felt the dizziness which follows great moral crises as well as a heavy blow on the head, and which distracts the attention from exterior things. But Jenny's words, "the handsomest woman in France," attracted his notice, and he could, that very evening, repair his forgetfulness. When he returned to Valfeuilu, his friend had not returned; Mme. Sauvresy was alone reading, in the brilliantly lighted drawing-room. Hector seated himself opposite her, a little aside, and was thus able to observe her at his ease, while engaging her in conversation. His first impression was an unfavorable one. He found her beauty too sculptural and polished. He sought for imperfections, and finding none, was almost

terrified by this lovely, motionless face, these clear, cold eyes. Little by little, however, he accustomed himself to pass the greater part of the afternoon with Bertha, while Sauvresy was away arranging his affairs—selling, negotiating, using his time in cutting down interests and discussing with agents and attorneys. He soon perceived that she listened to him with pleasure, and he judged from this that she was a decidedly superior woman, much better than her husband. He had no wit, but possessed an inexhaustible fund of anecdotes and adventures. He had seen so many things and known so many people that he was as interesting as a chronicle. He had a sort of frothy fervor, not wanting in brilliancy, and a polite cynicism which, at first, surprised one. Had Bertha been unimpassioned, she might have judged him at his value; but she had lost her power of insight. She heard him, plunged in a foolish ecstasy, as one hears a traveller who has returned from far and dangerous countries, who has visited peoples of whose language the hearer is ignorant, and lived in the midst of manners and customs incomprehensible to ourselves.

Days, weeks, months passed on, and the Count de Trémoré did not find life at Valfeuillu as dull as he had thought. He insensibly slipped along the gentle slope of material well-being, which leads directly to brutishness. A physical and moral torpor had succeeded the fever of the first days, free from disagreeable sensations, though wanting in excitement. He ate and drank much, and slept twelve round hours. The rest of the time, when he did not talk with Bertha, he wandered in the park, lounged in a rocking-chair, or took a jaunt in the saddle. He even went fishing under the willows at the foot of the garden; and grew

fat. His best days were those which he spent at Corbeil with Jenny. He found in her something of his past, and she always quarrelled with him, which woke him up. Besides, she brought him the gossip of Paris and the small talk of the boulevards. She came regularly every week, and her love for Hector, far from diminishing, seemed to grow with each interview. The poor girl's affairs were in a troubled condition. She had bought her establishment at too high a price, and her partner at the end of the first month decamped, carrying off three thousand francs. She knew nothing about the trade which she had undertaken, and she was robbed without mercy on all sides. She said nothing of these troubles to Hector, but she intended to ask him to come to her assistance. It was the least that he could do.

At first, the visitors to Valfeuilu were somewhat astonished at the constant presence there of a young man of leisure; but they got accustomed to him. Hector assumed a melancholy expression of countenance, such as a man ought to have who had undergone unheard-of misfortunes, and whose life had failed of its promise. He appeared inoffensive; people said:

“The count has a charming simplicity.”

But sometimes, when alone, he had sudden and terrible relapses. “This life cannot last,” thought he; and he was overcome with childish rage when he contrasted the past with the present. How could he shake off this dull existence, and rid himself of these stiffly good people who surrounded him, these friends of Sauvresy? Where should he take refuge? He was not tempted to return to Paris; what could he do there? His house had been sold to an old leather merchant; and he had no money except that which he borrowed

of Sauvresy. Yet Sauvresy, to Hector's mind, was a most uncomfortable, wearisome, implacable friend; he did not understand half-way measures in desperate situations.

"Your boat is foundering," he said to Hector; "let us begin by throwing all that is superfluous into the sea. Let us keep nothing of the past; that is dead; we will bury it, and nothing shall recall it. When your situation is relieved, we will see."

The settlement of Hector's affairs was very laborious. Creditors sprung up at every step, on every side, and the list of them seemed never to be finished. Some had even come from foreign lands. Several of them had been already paid, but their receipts could not be found, and they were clamorous. Others, whose demands had been refused as exorbitant, threatened to go to law, hoping to frighten Sauvresy into paying. Sauvresy wearied his friend by his incessant activity. Every two or three days he went to Paris, and he attended the sales of the property in Burgundy and Orleans. The count at last detested and hated him; Sauvresy's happy, cheerful air annoyed him; jealousy stung him. One thought—that a wretched one—consoled him a little. "Sauvresy's happiness," said he to himself, "is owing to his imbecility. He thinks his wife dead in love with him, whereas she can't bear him."

Bertha had, indeed, permitted Hector to perceive her aversion to her husband. She no longer studied the emotions of her heart; she loved Trémoré, and confessed it to herself. In her eyes he realized the ideal of her dreams. At the same time she was exasperated to see in him no signs of love for her. Her beauty was

not, then, irresistible, as she had often been told. He was gallant and courteous to her—nothing more.

“If he loved me,” thought she, “he would tell me so, for he is bold with women and fears no one.”

Then she began to hate the girl, her rival, whom Hector went to meet at Corbeil every week. She wished to see her, to know her. Who could she be? Was she handsome? Hector had been very reticent about Jenny. He evaded all questions about her, not sorry to let Bertha’s imagination work on his mysterious visits.

The day at last came when she could no longer resist the intensity of her curiosity. She put on the simplest of her toilets, in black, threw a thick veil over her head, and hastened to the Corbeil station at the hour that she thought the unknown girl would present herself there. She took a seat on a bench in the rear of the waiting-room. She had not long to wait. She soon perceived the count and a young girl coming along the avenue, which she could see from where she sat. They were arm in arm, and seemed to be in a very happy mood. They passed within a few steps of her, and as they walked very slowly, she was able to scrutinize Jenny at her ease. She saw that she was pretty, but that was all. Having seen that which she wished, and become satisfied that Jenny was not to be feared (which showed her inexperience) Bertha directed her steps homeward. But she chose her time of departure awkwardly; for as she was passing along behind the cabs, which concealed her, Hector came out of the station. They crossed each other’s paths at the gate, and their eyes met. Did he recognize her? His face expressed great surprise, yet he did not bow to her. “Yes, he recognized me,”

thought Bertha, as she returned home by the river-road; and surprised, almost terrified by her boldness, she asked herself whether she ought to rejoice or mourn over this meeting. What would be its result? Hector cautiously followed her at a little distance. He was greatly astonished. His vanity, always on the watch, had already apprised him of what was passing in Bertha's heart, but, though modesty was no fault of his, he was far from guessing that she was so much enamoured of him as to take such a step.

"She loves me!" he repeated to himself, as he went along. "She loves me!"

He did not yet know what to do. Should he fly? Should he still appear the same in his conduct toward her, pretending not to have seen her? He ought to fly that very evening, without hesitation, without turning his head; to fly as if the house were about to tumble about his head. This was his first thought. It was quickly stifled under the explosion of the base passions which fermented in him. Ah, Sauvresy had saved him when he was dying! Sauvresy, after saving him, had welcomed him, opened to him his heart, purse, house; at this very moment he was making untiring efforts to restore his fortunes. Men like Trémorrel can only receive such services as outrages. Had not his sojourn at Valfeuillu been a continual suffering? Was not his self-conceit tortured from morning till night? He might count the days by their humiliations. What! Must he always submit to—if he was not grateful for—the superiority of a man whom he had always been wont to treat as his inferior?

"Besides," thought he, judging his friend by himself, "he only acts thus from pride and ostentation. What am I at his house, but a living witness of his

generosity and devotion? He seems to live for me—it's Trémoré here and Trémoré! there! He triumphs over my misfortunes, and makes his conduct a glory and title to the public admiration."

He could not forgive his friend for being so rich, so happy, so highly respected, for having known how to regulate his life, while he had exhausted his own fortune at thirty. And should he not seize so good an opportunity to avenge himself for the favors which overwhelmed him?

"Have I run after his wife?" said he to himself, trying to impose silence on his conscience. "She comes to me of her own will, herself, without the least temptation from me. I should be a fool if I repelled her."

Conceit has irresistible arguments. Hector, when he entered the house, had made up his mind. He did not fly. Yet he had the excuse neither of passion nor of temptation; he did not love her, and his infamy was deliberate, coldly premeditated. Between her and him a chain more solid than mutual attraction was riveted; their common hatred of Sauvresy. They owed too much to him. His hand had held both from degradation.

The first hours of their mutual understanding were spent in angry words, rather than the cooings of love. They perceived too clearly the disgrace of their conduct not to try to reassure each other against their remorse. They tried to prove to each other that Sauvresy was ridiculous and odious; as if they were absolved by his deficiencies, if deficiencies he had. If indeed trustfulness is foolishness, Sauvresy was indeed a fool, because he could be deceived under his own eyes, in his own house, because he had perfect faith in his wife and his friend. He suspected nothing, and

every day he rejoiced that he had been able to keep Trémorel by him. He often repeated to his wife:

“I am too happy.”

Bertha employed all her art to encourage these joyous illusions. She who had before been so capricious, so nervous, wilful, became little by little submissive to the degree of an angelic softness. The future of her love depended on her husband, and she spared no pains to prevent the slightest suspicion from ruffling his calm confidence. Such was their prudence that no one in the house suspected their state. And yet Bertha was not happy. Her love did not yield her the joys she had expected. She hoped to be transported to the clouds, and she remained on the earth, hampered by all the miserable ties of a life of lies and deceit.

Perhaps she perceived that she was Hector's revenge on her husband, and that he only loved in her the dishonored wife of an envied friend. And to crown all, she was jealous. For several months she tried to persuade Trémorel to break with Jenny. He always had the same reply, which, though it might be prudent, was irritating.

“Jenny is our security—you must think of that.”

The fact was, however, that he was trying to devise some means of getting rid of Jenny. It was a difficult matter. The poor girl, having fallen into comparative poverty, became more and more tenacious of Hector's affection. She often gave him trouble by telling him that he was no longer the same, that he was changed; she was sad, and wept, and had red eyes.

One evening, in a fit of anger, she menaced him with a singular threat.

“You love another,” she said. “I know it, for I have proofs of it. Take care! If you ever leave me,

my anger will fall on her head, and I will not have any mercy on her."

The count foolishly attached no importance to these words; they only hastened the separation.

"She is getting very troublesome," thought he. "If some day I shouldn't go when she was expecting me, she might come up to Valfeuillu, and make a wretched scandal."

He armed himself with all his courage, which was assisted by Bertha's tears and entreaties, and started for Corbeil resolved to break off with Jenny. He took every precaution in declaring his intentions, giving the best reasons for his decision that he could think of.

"We must be careful, you know, Jenny," said he, "and cease to meet for a while. I am ruined, you know, and the only thing that can save me is marriage."

Hector had prepared himself for an explosion of fury, piercing cries, hysterics, fainting-fits. To his great surprise, Jenny did not answer a word. She became as white as her collar, her ruddy lips blanched, her eyes stared.

"So," said she, with her teeth tightly shut to contain herself, "so you are going to get married?"

"Alas, I must," he answered with a hypocritical sigh. "You know that lately I have only been able to get money for you by borrowing from my friend; his purse will not be at my service forever."

Jenny took Hector by the hand, and led him to the window. There, looking intently at him, as if her gaze could frighten the truth out of him, she said, slowly:

"It is really true, is it, that you are going to leave me to get married?"

Hector disengaged one of his hands, and placed it on his heart.

"I swear it on my honor," said he.

"I ought to believe you, then."

Jenny returned to the middle of the room. Standing erect before the mirror, she put on her hat, quietly disposing its ribbons as if nothing had occurred. When she was ready to go, she went up to Trémoré.

"For the last time," said she, in a tone which she forced to be firm, and which belied her tearful, glistening eyes. "For the last time, Hector, are we really to part?"

"We must."

Jenny made a gesture which Trémoré did not see; her face had a malicious expression; her lips parted to utter some sarcastic response; but she recovered herself almost immediately.

"I am going, Hector," said she, after a moment's reflection. "If you are really leaving me to get married, you shall never hear of me again."

"Why, Jenny, I hope I shall still remain your friend."

"Well, only if you abandon me for another reason, remember what I tell you; you will be a dead man, and she, a lost woman."

She opened the door; he tried to take her hand; she repulsed him.

"Adieu!"

Hector ran to the window to assure himself of her departure. She was ascending the avenue leading to the station.

"Well, that's over," thought he, with a sigh of relief. "Jenny was a good girl."

XVI

The count told half a truth when he spoke to Jenny of his marriage. Sauvresy and he had discussed the subject, and if the matter was not as ripe as he had represented, there was at least some prospect of such an event. Sauvresy had proposed it in his anxiety to complete his work of restoring Hector to fortune and society.

One evening, about a month before the events just narrated, he had led Hector into the library, saying:

"Give me your ear for a quarter of an hour, and don't answer me hastily. What I am going to propose to you deserves serious reflection."

"Well, I can be serious when it is necessary."

"Let's begin with your debts. Their payment is not yet completed, but enough has been done to enable us to foresee the end. It is certain that you will have, after all debts are paid, from three to four hundred thousand francs."

Hector had never, in his wildest hopes, expected such success.

"Why, I'm going to be rich," exclaimed he joyously.

"No, not rich, but quite above want. There is, too, a mode in which you can regain your lost position."

"A mode? what?"

Sauvresy paused a moment, and looked steadily at his friend.

"You must marry," said he at last.

This seemed to surprise Hector, but not disagreeably.

"I, marry? It's easier to give that advice than to follow it."

"Pardon me—you ought to know that I do not speak rashly. What would you say to a young girl of good family, pretty, well brought up, so charming that, excepting my own wife, I know of no one more attractive, and who would bring with her a dowry of a million?"

"Ah, my friend, I should say that I adore her! And do you know such an angel?"

"Yes, and you too, for the angel is Mademoiselle Laurence Courtois."

Hector's radiant face overclouded at this name, and he made a discouraged gesture.

"Never," said he. "That stiff and obstinate old merchant, Monsieur Courtois, would never consent to give his daughter to a man who has been fool enough to waste his fortune."

Sauvresy shrugged his shoulders.

"Now, there's what it is to have eyes, and not see. Know that this Courtois, whom you think so obstinate, is really the most romantic of men, and an ambitious old fellow to boot. It would seem to him a grand good speculation to give his daughter to the Count Hector de Trémorrel, cousin of the Duke of Samblemeuse, the relative of the Commarins, even though you hadn't a sou. What wouldn't he give to have the delicious pleasure of saying, Monsieur the Count, my son-in-law; or my daughter, Madame the Countess Hector! And you aren't ruined, you know, you are going to have an income of twenty thousand francs, and perhaps enough more to raise your capital to a million."

Hector was silent. He had thought his life ended, and now, all of a sudden, a splendid perspective unrolled itself before him. He might then rid himself of

the patronizing protection of his friend; he would be free, rich, would have a better wife, as he thought, than Bertha; his house would outshine Sauvresy's. The thought of Bertha crossed his mind, and it occurred to him that he might thus escape a lover who although beautiful and loving, was proud and bold, and whose domineering temper began to be burdensome to him.

"I may say," said he, seriously to his friend, "that I have always thought Monsieur Courtois an excellent and honorable man, and Mademoiselle Laurence seems to me so accomplished a young lady, that a man might be happy in marrying her even without a dowry."

"So much the better, my dear Hector, so much the better. But you know, the first thing is to engage Laurence's affections; her father adores her, and would not, I am sure, give her to a man whom she herself had not chosen."

"Don't disturb yourself," answered Hector, with a gesture of triumph, "she will love me."

The next day he took occasion to encounter M. Courtois, who invited him to dinner. The count employed all his practised seductions on Laurence, which were so brilliant and able that they were well fitted to surprise and dazzle a young girl. It was not long before the count was the hero of the mayor's household. Nothing formal had been said, nor any direct allusion or overture made; yet M. Courtois was sure that Hector would some day ask his daughter's hand, and that he should freely answer, "yes;" while he thought it certain that Laurence would not say "no."

Bertha suspected nothing; she was now very much worried about Jenny, and saw nothing else. Sau-

vresy, after spending an evening with the count at the mayor's, during which Hector had not once quitted the whist-table, decided to speak to his wife of the proposed marriage, which he thought would give her an agreeable surprise. At his first words, she grew pale. Her emotion was so great that, seeing she would betray herself, she hastily retired to her boudoir. Sauvresy, quietly seated in one of the bedroom arm-chairs, continued to expatiate on the advantages of such a marriage—raising his voice, so that Bertha might hear him in the neighboring room.

“Do you know,” said he, “that our friend has an income of sixty thousand crowns? We'll find an estate for him near by, and then we shall see him and his wife every day. They will be very pleasant society for us in the autumn months. Hector is a fine fellow, and you've often told me how charming Laurence is.”

Bertha did not reply. This unexpected blow was so terrible that she could not think clearly, and her brain whirled.

“You don't say anything,” pursued Sauvresy. “Don't you approve of my project? I thought you'd be enchanted with it.”

She saw that if she were silent any longer, her husband would go in and find her sunk upon a chair, and would guess all. She made an effort and said, in a strangled voice, without attaching any sense to her words:

“Yes, yes; it is a capital idea.”

“How you say that! Do you see any objections?”

She was trying to find some objection, but could not.

“I have a little fear of Laurence's future,” said she at last.

“Bah! Why?”

“I only say what I’ve heard you say. You told me that Monsieur Trémoré has been a libertine, a gambler, a prodigal——”

“All the more reason for trusting him. His past follies guarantee his future prudence. He has received a lesson which he will not forget. Besides, he will love his wife.”

“How do you know?”

“Barbleu, he loves her already.”

“Who told you so?”

“Himself.”

And Sauvresy began to laugh about Hector’s passion, which he said was becoming quite pastoral.

“Would you believe,” said he, laughing, “that he thinks our worthy Courtois a man of wit? Ah, what spectacles these lovers look through! He spends two or three hours every day with the mayor. What do you suppose he does there?”

Bertha, by great effort, succeeded in dissembling her grief; she reappeared with a smiling face. She went and came, apparently calm, though suffering the bitterest anguish a woman can endure. And she could not run to Hector, and ask him if it were true!

For Sauvresy must be deceiving her. Why? She knew not. No matter. She felt her hatred of him increasing to disgust; for she excused and pardoned her lover, and she blamed her husband alone. Whose idea was this marriage? His. Who had awakened Hector’s hopes, and encouraged them? He, always he. While he had been harmless, she had been able to pardon him for having married her; she had compelled herself to bear him, to feign a love quite foreign to her heart. But now he became hateful; should she submit

to his interference in a matter which was life or death to her?

She did not close her eyes all night ; she had one of those horrible nights in which crimes are conceived. She did not find herself alone with Hector until after breakfast the next day, in the billiard-hall.

“ Is it true ? ” she asked.

The expression of her face was so menacing that he quailed before it. He stammered :

“ True—what ? ”

“ Your marriage.”

He was silent at first, asking himself whether he should tell the truth or equivocate. At last, irritated by Bertha’s imperious tone, he replied :

“ Yes.”

She was thunderstruck at this response. Till then, she had a glimmer of hope. She thought that he would at least try to reassure her, to deceive her. There are times when a falsehood is the highest homage. But no—he avowed it. She was speechless ; words failed her.

Trémorel began to tell her the motives which prompted his conduct. He could not live forever at Valfeuillu. What could he, with his habits and tastes, do with a few thousand crowns a year ? He was thirty ; he must, now or never, think of the future. M. Courtois would give his daughter a million, and at his death there would be a great deal more. Should he let this chance slip ? He cared little for Laurence, it was the dowry he wanted. He took no pains to conceal his meanness ; he rather gloried in it, speaking of the marriage as simply a bargain, in which he gave his name and title in exchange for riches. Bertha stopped him with a look full of contempt.

"Spare yourself," said she. "You love Laurence."

He would have protested; he really disliked her.

"Enough," resumed Bertha. "Another woman would have reproached you; I simply tell you that this marriage shall not be; I do not wish it. Believe me, give it up frankly, don't force me to act."

She retired, shutting the door violently; Hector was furious.

"How she treats me!" said he to himself. "Just as a queen would speak to a serf. Ah, she don't want me to marry Laurence!" His coolness returned, and with it serious reflections. If he insisted on marrying, would not Bertha carry out her threats? Evidently; for he knew well that she was one of those women who shrink from nothing, whom no consideration could arrest. He guessed what she would do, from what she had said in a quarrel with him about Jenny. She had told him, "I will confess everything to Sauvresy, and we will be the more bound together by shame than by all the ceremonies of the church."

This was surely the mode she would adopt to break a marriage which was so hateful to her; and Trémoré trembled at the idea of Sauvresy knowing all.

"What would he do," thought he, "if Bertha told him? He would kill me off-hand—that's what I would do in his place. Suppose he didn't; I should have to fight a duel with him, and if I killed him, quit the country. Whatever would happen, my marriage is irrevocably broken, and Bertha seems to be on my hands for all time."

He saw no possible way out of the horrible situation in which he had put himself.

"I must wait," thought he.

And he waited, going secretly to the mayor's, for he really loved Laurence. He waited, devoured by anx-

iety, struggling between Sauvresy's urgency and Bertha's threats. How he detested this woman who held him, whose will weighed so heavily on him! Nothing could curb her ferocious obstinacy. She had one fixed idea. He had thought to conciliate her by dismissing Jenny. It was a mistake. When he said to her:

"Bertha, I shall never see Jenny again."

She answered, ironically:

"Mademoiselle Courtois will be very grateful to you!"

That evening, while Sauvresy was crossing the courtyard, he saw a beggar at the gate, making signs to him.

"What do you want, my good man?"

The beggar looked around to see that no one was listening.

"I have brought you a note," said he, rapidly, and in a low tone. "I was told to give it only to you, and to ask you to read it when you are alone."

He mysteriously slipped a note, carefully sealed, into Sauvresy's hand.

"It comes from a pretty girl," added he, winking.

Sauvresy, turning his back to the house, opened it and read:

"SIR—You will do a great favor to a poor and unhappy girl, if you will come to-morrow to the Belle Image, at Corbeil, where you will be awaited all day.

"Your humble servant,

"JENNY F——."

There was also a postscript.

"Please, sir, don't say a word of this to the Count de Trémoré."

"Ah ha," thought Sauvresy, "there's some trouble about Hector, that's bad for the marriage."

"I was told, sir," said the beggar, "there would be an answer."

"Say that I will come," answered Sauvresy, throwing him a franc piece.

XVII

The next day was cold and damp. A fog, so thick that one could not discern objects ten steps off, hung over the earth. Sauvresy, after breakfast, took his gun and whistled to his dogs.

"I'm going to take a turn in Mauprévoir wood," said he.

"A queer idea," remarked Hector, "for you wont see the end of your gun-barrel in the woods."

"No matter, if I see some pheasants."

This was only a pretext, for Sauvresy, on leaving Valfeuillu, took the direct road to Corbeil, and half an hour later, faithful to his promise, he entered the Belle Image tavern.

Jenny was waiting for him in the large room which had always been reserved for her since she became a regular customer of the house. Her eyes were red with recent tears; she was very pale, and her marble color showed that she had not slept. Her breakfast lay untouched on the table near the fireplace, where a bright fire was burning. When Sauvresy came in, she rose to meet him, and took him by the hand with a friendly motion.

"Thank you for coming," said she. "Ah, you are very good."

Jenny was only a girl, and Sauvresy detested girls;

but her grief was so sincere and seemed so deep, that he was touched.

"You are suffering, Madame?" asked he.

"Oh, yes, very much."

Her tears choked her, and she concealed her face in her handkerchief.

"I guessed right," thought Sauvresy. "Hector has deserted her. Now I must smooth the wound, and yet make future meetings between them impossible."

He took the weeping Jenny's hand, and softly pulled away the handkerchief.

"Have courage," said he.

She lifted her tearful eyes to him, and said:

"You know, then?"

"I know nothing, for, as you asked me, I have said nothing to Trémoré; but I can imagine what the trouble is."

"He will not see me any more," murmured Jenny. "He has deserted me."

Sauvresy summoned up all his eloquence. The moment to be persuasive and paternal had come. He drew a chair up to Jenny's, and sat down.

"Come, my child," pursued he, "be resigned. People are not always young, you know. A time comes when the voice of reason must be heard. Hector does not desert you, but he sees the necessity of assuring his future, and placing his life on a domestic foundation; he feels the need of a home."

Jenny stopped crying. Nature took the upper hand, and her tears were dried by the fire of anger which took possession of her. She rose, overturning her chair, and walked restlessly up and down the room.

"Do you believe that?" said she. "Do you believe that Hector troubles himself about his future? I see

you don't know his character. He dream of a home, or a family? He never has and never will think of anything but himself. If he had any heart, would he have gone to live with you as he has? He had two arms to gain his bread and mine. I was ashamed to ask money of him, knowing that what he gave me came from you."

"But he is my friend, my dear child."

"Would you do as he has done?"

Sauvresy did not know what to say; he was embarrassed by the logic of this daughter of the people, judging her lover rudely, but justly.

"Ah, I know him, I do," continued Jenny, growing more excited as her mind reverted to the past. "He has only deceived me once—the morning he came and told me he was going to kill himself. I was stupid enough to think him dead, and to cry about it. He, kill himself? Why, he's too much of a coward to hurt himself! Yes, I love him, but I don't esteem him. That's our fate, you see, only to love the men we despise."

Jenny talked loud, gesticulating, and every now and then thumping the table with her fist so that the bottles and glasses jingled. Sauvresy was somewhat fearful lest the hotel people should hear her; they knew him, and had seen him come in. He began to be sorry that he had come, and tried to calm the girl.

"But Hector is not deserting you," repeated he. "He will assure you a good position."

"Humph! I should laugh at such a thing! Have I any need of *him*? As long as I have ten fingers and good eyes, I shall not be at the mercy of any man. He made me change my name, and wanted to accustom me to luxury! And now there is neither a Miss Jenny,

nor riches, but there is a Pélagie, who proposes to get her fifty sous a day, without much trouble."

"No," said Sauvresy, "you will not need——"

"What? To work? But I like work; I am not a do-nothing. I will go back to my old life. I used to breakfast on a sou's worth of biscuit and a sou's worth of potatoes, and was well and happy. On Sundays, I dined at the Turk for thirty sous. I laughed more then in one afternoon, than in all the years I have known Trémoré."

She no longer cried, nor was she angry; she was laughing. She was thinking of her old breakfasts, and her feasts at the Turk.

Sauvresy was stupefied. He had no idea of this Parisian nature, detestable and excellent, emotional to excess, nervous, full of transitions, which laughs and cries, caresses and strikes in the same minute, which a passing idea whirls a hundred leagues from the present moment.

"So," said Jenny, more calmly, "I snap my fingers at Hector"—she had just said exactly the contrary, and had forgotten it—"I don't care for him, but I will not let him leave me in this way. It sha'n't be said that he left me for another. I won't have it."

Jenny was one of those women who do not reason, but who feel; with whom it is folly to argue, for their fixed idea is impregnable to the most victorious arguments. Sauvresy asked himself why she had asked him to come, and said to himself that the part he had intended to play would be a difficult one. But he was patient.

"I see, my child," he commenced, "that you haven't understood or even heard me. I told you that Hector was intending to marry."

"He!" answered Jenny, with an ironical gesture.

"He get married."

She reflected a moment, and added:

"If it were true, though——"

"I tell you it is so."

"No," cried Jenny, "no, that can't be possible. He loves another, I am sure of it, for I have proofs."

Sauvresy smiled; this irritated her.

"What does this letter mean," cried she warmly, "which I found in his pocket, six months ago? It isn't signed to be sure, but it must have come from a woman."

"A letter?"

"Yes, one that destroys all doubts. Perhaps you ask, why I did not speak to him about it? Ah, you see, I did not dare. I loved him. I was afraid if I said anything, and it was true he loved another, I should lose him. And so I resigned myself to humiliation, I concealed myself to weep, for I said to myself, he will come back to me. Poor fool!"

"Well, but what will you do?"

"Me? I don't know—anything. I didn't say anything about the letter, but I kept it; it is my weapon—I will make use of it. When I want to, I shall find out who she is, and then——"

"You will compel Trémoré, who is kindly disposed toward you, to use violence."

"He? What can he do to me? Why, I will follow him like his shadow—I will cry out everywhere the name of this other. Will he have me put in St. Lazare prison? I will invent the most dreadful calumnies against him. They will not believe me at first; later, part of it will be believed. I have nothing to fear—I have no parents, no friends, nobody on earth who cares

for me. That's what it is to raise girls from the gutter. I have fallen so low that I defy him to push me lower. So, if you are his friend, sir, advise him to come back to me."

Sauvresy was really alarmed; he saw clearly how real and earnest Jenny's menaces were. There are persecutions against which the law is powerless. But he dissimulated his alarm under the blindest air he could assume.

"Hear me, my child," said he. "If I give you my word of honor to tell you the truth, you'll believe me, won't you?"

She hesitated a moment, and said:

"Yes, you are honorable; I will believe you."

"Then, I swear to you that Trémoréel hopes to marry a young girl who is immensely rich, whose dowry will secure his future."

"He tells you so; he wants you to believe it."

"Why should he? Since he came to Valfeuilu, he could have had no other affair than this with you. He lives in my house, as if he were my brother, between my wife and myself, and I could tell you how he spends his time every hour of every day as well as what I do myself."

Jenny opened her mouth to reply, but a sudden reflection froze the words on her lips. She remained silent and blushed violently, looking at Sauvresy with an indefinable expression. He did not observe this, being inspired by a restless though aimless curiosity. This proof, which Jenny talked about, worried him.

"Suppose," said he, "you should show me this letter."

She seemed to feel at these words an electric shock.

"To you?" she said, shuddering. "Never!"

If, when one is sleeping, the thunder rolls and the storm bursts, it often happens that the sleep is not troubled ; then suddenly, at a certain moment, the imperceptible flutter of a passing insect's wing awakens one.

Jenny's shudder was like such a fluttering to Sauvresy. The sinister light of doubt struck on his soul. Now his confidence, his happiness, his repose, were gone forever. He rose with a flashing eye and trembling lips.

"Give me the letter," said he, in an imperious tone.

Jenny recoiled with terror. She tried to conceal her agitation, to smile, to turn the matter into a joke.

"Not to-day," said she. "Another time ; you are too curious."

But Sauvresy's anger was terrible ; he became as purple as if he had had a stroke of apoplexy, and he repeated, in a choking voice :

"The letter, I demand the letter."

"Impossible," said Jenny. "Because," she added, struck with an idea, "I haven't got it here."

"Where is it ?"

"At my room, in Paris."

"Come, then, let us go there."

She saw that she was caught ; and she could find no more excuses, quick-witted as she was. She might, however, easily have followed Sauvresy, put his suspicions to sleep with her gayety, and when once in the Paris streets, might have eluded him and fled. But she did not think of that. It occurred to her that she might have time to reach the door, open it, and rush downstairs. She started to do so. Sauvresy caught her at a bound, shut the door, and said, in a low, hoarse voice :

"Wretched girl! Do you wish me to strike you?"

He pushed her into a chair, returned to the door, double locked it, and put the keys in his pocket.

"Now," said he, returning to the girl, "the letter."

Jenny had never been so terrified in her life. This man's rage made her tremble; she saw that he was beside himself, that she was completely at his mercy; yet she still resisted him.

"You have hurt me very much," said she, crying, "but I have done you no harm."

He grasped her hands in his, and bending over her, repeated:

"For the last time, the letter; give it to me, or I will take it by force."

It would have been folly to resist longer.

"Leave me alone," said she. "You shall have it."

He released her, remaining, however, close by her side, while she searched in all her pockets. Her hair had been loosened in the struggle, her collar was torn, she was tired, her teeth chattered, but her eyes shone with a bold resolution.

"Wait—here it is—no. It's odd—I am sure I've got it though—I had it a minute ago——"

And, suddenly, with a rapid gesture, she put the letter, rolled into a ball, into her mouth, and tried to swallow it. But Sauvresy as quickly grasped her by the throat, and she was forced to disgorge it.

He had the letter at last. His hands trembled so that he could scarcely open it.

It was, indeed, Bertha's writing.

Sauvresy tottered with a horrible sensation of dizziness; he could not see clearly; there was a red cloud before his eyes; his legs gave way under him, he staggered, and his hands stretched out for a support.

Jenny, somewhat recovered, hastened to give him help; but her touch made him shudder, and he repulsed her. What had happened he could not tell. Ah, he wished to read this letter and could not. He went to the table, turned out and drank two large glasses of water one after another. The cold draught restored him, his blood resumed its natural course, and he could see. The note was short, and this was what he read:

“Don’t go to-morrow to Petit-Bourg; or rather, return before breakfast. He has just told me that he must go to Melun, and that he should return late. A whole day!”

“He”—that was himself. This other lover of Hector’s was Bertha, his wife. For a moment he saw nothing but that; all thought was crushed within him. His temples beat furiously, he heard a dreadful buzzing in his ears, it seemed to him as if the earth were about to swallow him up. He fell into a chair; from purple he became ashy white. Great tears trickled down his cheeks.

Jenny understood the miserable meanness of her conduct when she saw this great grief, this silent despair, this man with a broken heart. Was she not the cause of all? She had guessed who the writer of the note was. She thought when she asked Sauvresy to come to her, that she could tell him all, and thus avenge herself at once upon Hector and her rival. Then, on seeing this man refusing to comprehend her hints, she had been full of pity for him. She had said to herself that he would be the one who would be most cruelly punished; and then she had recoiled—but too late—and he had snatched the secret from her.

She approached Sauvresy and tried to take his hands; he still repulsed her.

"Let me alone," said he.

"Pardon me, sir—I am a wretch, I am horrified at myself."

He rose suddenly; he was gradually coming to himself.

"What do you want?"

"That letter—I guessed——"

He burst into a loud, bitter, discordant laugh, and replied:

"God forgive me! Why, my dear, did you dare to suspect my wife?"

While Jenny was muttering confused excuses, he drew out his pocket-book and took from it all the money it contained—some seven or eight hundred francs—which he put on the table.

"Take this, from Hector," said he, "he will not permit you to suffer for anything; but, believe me, you had best let him get married."

Then he mechanically took up his gun, opened the door, and went out. His dogs leaped upon him to caress him; he kicked them off. Where was he going? What was he going to do?

XVIII

A small, fine, chilly rain had succeeded the morning fog; but Sauvresy did not perceive it. He went across the fields with his head bare, wandering at hazard, without aim or discretion. He talked aloud as he went, stopping ever and anon, then resuming his course. The peasants who met him—they all knew him—turned to look at him after having saluted him, asking themselves whether the master of Valfeuillu had not gone mad. Unhappily he was not mad. Over-

whelmed by an unheard-of, unlooked-for catastrophe, his brain had been for a moment paralyzed. But one by one he collected his scattered ideas and acquired the faculty of thinking and of suffering. Each one of his reflections increased his mortal anguish. Yes, Bertha and Hector had deceived, had dishonored him. She, beloved to idolatry; he, his best and oldest friend, a wretch that he had snatched from misery, who owed him everything. And it was in his house, under his own roof, that this infamy had taken place. They had taken advantage of his noble trust, had made a dupe of him. The frightful discovery not only embittered the future, but also the past. He longed to blot out of his life these years passed with Bertha, with whom, but the night before, he had recalled these "happiest years of his life." The memory of his former happiness filled his soul with disgust. But how had this been done? When? How was it he had seen nothing of it? And now things came into his mind which should have warned him had he not been blind. He recalled certain looks of Bertha, certain tones of voice, which were an avowal. At times, he tried to doubt. There are misfortunes so great that to be believed there must be more than evidence.

"It is not possible!" muttered he.

Seating himself upon a prostrate tree in the midst of Mauprévoir forest, he studied the fatal letter for the tenth time within four hours.

"It proves all," said he, "and it proves nothing."

And he read once more.

"Do not go to-morrow to Petit-Bourg——"

Well, had he not again and again, in his idiotic confidence, said to Hector:

"I shall be away to-morrow, stay here and keep Bertha company."

This sentence, then, had no positive signification. But why add:

"Or rather, return before breakfast."

This was what betrayed fear, that is, the fault. To go away and return again anon, was to be cautious, to avoid suspicion. Then, why "he," instead of, "Clement?" This word was striking. "He"—that is, the dear one, or else, the master that one hates. There is no medium—'tis the husband, or the lover. "He," is never an indifferent person. A husband is lost when his wife, in speaking of him, says, "He."

But when had Bertha written these few lines? Doubtless some evening after they had retired to their room. He had said to her, "I'm going to-morrow to Melun," and then she had hastily scratched off this note and given it, in a book, to Hector.

Alas! the edifice of his happiness, which had seemed to him strong enough to defy every tempest of life, had crumbled, and he stood there lost in the midst of its débris. No more happiness, joys, hopes—nothing! All his plans for the future rested on Bertha; her name was mingled in his every dream, she was at once the future and the dream. He had so loved her that she had become something of himself, that he could not imagine himself without her. Bertha lost to him, he saw no direction in life to take, he had no further reason for living. He perceived this so vividly that the idea of suicide came to him. He had his gun, powder and balls; his death would be attributed to a hunting accident, and all would be over.

Oh, but the guilty ones!

They would doubtless go on in their infamous

comedy—would seem to mourn for him, while really their hearts would bound with joy. No more husband, no more hypocrisies or terrors. His will giving his fortune to Bertha, they would be rich. They would sell everything, and would depart rejoicing to some distant clime. As to his memory, poor man, it would amuse them to think of him as the cheated and despised husband.

“Never!” cried he, drunk with fury, “never! I must kill myself, but first, I must avenge my dishonor!”

But he tried in vain to imagine a punishment cruel or terrible enough. What chastisement could expiate the horrible tortures which he endured? He said to himself that, in order to assure his vengeance, he must wait—and he swore that he would wait. He would feign the same stolid confidence, and resigned himself to see and hear everything.

“My hypocrisy will equal theirs,” thought he.

Indeed a cautious duplicity was necessary. Bertha was most cunning, and at the first suspicion would fly with her lover. Hector had already—thanks to him—several hundred thousand francs. The idea that they might escape his vengeance gave him energy and a clear head.

It was only then that he thought of the flight of time, the rain falling in torrents, and the state of his clothes.

“Bah!” thought he, “I will make up some story to account for myself.”

He was only a league from Valfeuilu, but he was an hour and a half reaching home. He was broken, exhausted; he felt chilled to the marrow of his bones. But when he entered the gate, he had succeeded in assuming his usual expression, and the gayety which so well

hinted his perfect trustfulness. He had been waited for, but in spite of his resolutions, he could not sit at table between this man and woman, his two most cruel enemies. He said that he had taken cold, and would go to bed. Bertha insisted in vain that he should take at least a bowl of broth, and a glass of claret.

"Really," said he, "I don't feel well."

When he had retired, Bertha said:

"Did you notice, Hector?"

"What?"

"Something unusual has happened to him."

"Very likely, after being all day in the rain."

"No. His eye had a look I never saw before."

"He seemed to be very cheerful, as he always is."

"Hector, my husband suspects!"

"He? Ah, my poor good friend has too much confidence in us to think of being jealous."

"You deceive yourself, Hector; he did not embrace me when he came in, and it is the first time since our marriage."

Thus, at the very first, he had made a blunder. He knew it well; but it was beyond his power to embrace Bertha at that moment; and he was suffering more than he thought he should. When his wife and his friend ascended to his room, after dinner, they found him shivering under the sheets, red, his forehead burning, his throat dry, and his eyes shining with an unusual brilliancy. A fever soon came on, attended by delirium. A doctor was called, who at first said he would not answer for him. The next day he was worse. From this time both Hector and Bertha conceived for him the most tender devotion. Did they think they should thus in some sort expiate their crime? It is doubtful. More likely they tried to impose on the peo-

ple about them; everyone was anxious for Sauvresy. They never deserted him for a moment, passing the night by turns near his bed. And it was painful to watch over him; a furious delirium never left him. Several times force had to be used to keep him on the bed; he tried to throw himself out of the window. The third day he had a strange fancy; he did not wish to stay in his chamber. He kept crying out:

“Carry me away from here, carry me away from here.”

The doctor advised that he should be humored; so a bed was made up for him in a little room on the ground-floor, overlooking the garden. His wanderings did not betray anything of his suspicions; perhaps the firm will was able even to control the delirium. The fever finally yielded on the ninth day. His breathing became calmer, and he slept. When he awoke, reason had returned. That was a frightful moment. He had, so to speak, to take up the burden of his misery. At first he thought it the memory of a horrid night-mare; but no. He had not dreamed. He recalled the Belle Image, Jenny, the forest, the letter. What had become of the letter? Then, having the vague impression of a serious illness, he asked himself if he had said anything to betray the source of his misery. This anxiety prevented his making the slightest movement, and he opened his eyes softly and cautiously. It was eleven at night, and all the servants had gone to bed. Hector and Bertha alone were keeping watch; he was reading a paper, she was crocheting. Sauvresy saw by their placid countenances that he had betrayed nothing. He moved slightly; Bertha at once arose and came to him.

“How are you, dear Clement?” asked she, kissing him fondly on the forehead.

"I am no longer in pain."

"You see the result of being careless."

"How many days have I been sick?"

"Eight days."

"Why was I brought here?"

"Because you wished it."

Trémoré had approached the bedside.

"You refused to stay upstairs," said he, "you were ungovernable till we had you brought here."

"Ah!"

"But don't tire yourself," resumed Hector. "Go to sleep again, and you will be well by to-morrow. And good-night, for I am going to bed now, and shall return and wake your wife at four o'clock."

He went out, and Bertha, having given Sauvresy something to drink, returned to her seat.

"What a friend Trémoré is," murmured she.

Sauvresy did not answer this terribly ironical exclamation. He shut his eyes, pretended to sleep, and thought of the letter. What had he done with it? He remembered that he had carefully folded it and put it in the right-hand pocket of his vest. He must have this letter. It would balk his vengeance, should it fall into his wife's hands; and this might happen at any moment. It was a miracle that his valet had not put it on the mantel, as he was accustomed to do with the things which he found in his master's pockets. He was reflecting on some means of getting it, of the possibility of going up to his bedroom, where his vest ought to be, when Bertha got up softly. She came to the bed and whispered gently:

"Clement, Clement!"

He did not open his eyes, and she, persuaded that

he was sleeping, though very lightly, stole out of the room, holding her breath as she went

"Oh, the wretch!" muttered Sauvresy, "she is going to *him*!"

At the same time the necessity of recovering the letter occurred to him more vividly than ever.

"I can get to my room," thought he, "without being seen, by the garden and back-stairs. She thinks I'm asleep; I shall get back and abed before she returns."

Then, without asking himself whether he were not too feeble, or what danger there might be in exposing himself to the cold, he got up, threw a gown around him, put on his slippers and went toward the door.

"If anyone sees me, I will feign delirium," said he to himself.

The vestibule lamp was out and he found some difficulty in opening the door; finally, he descended into the garden. It was intensely cold, and snow had fallen. The wind shook the limbs of the trees crusted with ice. The front of the house was sombre. One window only was lighted—that of Trémoré's room; that was lighted brilliantly, by a lamp and a great blazing fire. The shadow of a man—of Hector—rested on the muslin curtains; the shape was distinct. He was near the window, and his forehead was pressed against the panes. Sauvresy instinctively stopped to look at his friend, who was so at home in his house, and who, in exchange for the most brotherly hospitality, had brought dishonor, despair and death.

Hector made a sudden movement, and turned around as if he was surprised by an unwonted noise. What was it? Sauvresy only knew too well. Another shadow appeared on the curtain—that of Bertha. And he had forced himself to doubt till now! Now proofs

had come without his seeking. What had brought her to that room, at that hour? She seemed to be talking excitedly. He thought he could hear that full, sonorous voice, now as clear as metal, now soft and caressing, which had made all the chords of passion vibrate in him. He once more saw those beautiful eyes which had reigned so despotically over his heart, and whose expressions he knew so well. But what was she doing? Doubtless she had gone to ask Hector something, which he refused her, and she was pleading with him; Sauvresy saw that she was supplicating, by her motions; he knew the gesture well. She lifted her clasped hands as high as her forehead, bent her head, half shut her eyes. What languor had been in her voice when she used to say:

“Say, dear Clement, you will, will you not?”

And now she was using the same blandishments on another. Sauvresy was obliged to support himself against a tree. Hector was evidently refusing what she wished; then she shook her finger menacingly, and tossed her head angrily, as if she were saying:

“You won’t? You shall see, then.”

And then she returned to her supplications.

“Ah,” thought Sauvresy. “*he* can resist her prayers; *I* never had such courage. He can preserve his coolness, his will, when she looks at him; I never said no to her; rather, I never waited for her to ask anything of me; I have passed my life in watching her lightest fancies, to gratify them. Perhaps that is what has ruined me!”

Hector was obstinate, and Bertha was roused little by little; she must be angry. She recoiled, holding out her arms, her head thrown back; she was threatening him. At last he was conquered; he nodded, “Yes.”

Then she flung herself upon him, and the two shadows were confounded in a long embrace.

Sauvresy could not repress an agonized cry, which was lost amid the noises of the night. He had asked for certainty; here it was. The truth, indisputable, evident, was clear to him. He had to seek for nothing more, now, except for the means to punish surely and terribly. Bertha and Hector were talking amicably. Sauvresy saw that she was about to go downstairs, and that he could not now go for the letter. He went in hurriedly, forgetting, in his fear of being discovered, to lock the garden door. He did not perceive that he had been standing with naked feet in the snow, till he had returned to his bedroom again; he saw some flakes on his slippers, and they were damp; quickly he threw them under the bed, and jumped in between the clothes, and pretended to be asleep.

It was time, for Bertha soon came in. She went to the bed, and thinking that he had not woken up, returned to her embroidery by the fire. Trémoré also soon reappeared; he had forgotten to take his paper, and had come back for it. He seemed uneasy.

"Have you been out to-night, Madame?" asked he, in a low voice.

"No."

"Have all the servants gone to bed?"

"I suppose so; but why **do you** ask?"

"Since I have been upstairs, somebody has gone out into the garden, and come back again."

Bertha looked at him with a troubled glance.

"Are you sure of what you say?"

"Certainly. Snow is falling, and whoever went out brought some back on his shoes. This has melted in the vestibule——"

Mme. Sauvresy seized the lamp, and interrupting Hector, said:

"Come."

Trémorrel was right. Here and there on the vestibule pavement were little puddles.

"Perhaps this water has been here some time," suggested Bertha.

"No. It was not there an hour ago, I could swear. Besides, see, here is a little snow that has not melted yet."

"It must have been one of the servants."

Hector went to the door and examined it.

"I do not think so," said he. "A servant would have shut the bolts; here they are, drawn back. Yet I myself shut the door to-night, and distinctly recollect fastening the bolts."

"It's very strange!"

"And all the more so, look you, because the traces of the water do not go much beyond the drawing-room door."

They remained silent, and exchanged anxious looks. The same terrible thought occurred to them both.

"If it were he?"

But why should he have gone into the garden? It could not have been to spy on them.

They did not think of the window.

"It couldn't have been Clement," said Bertha, at last. "He was asleep when I went back, and he is in a calm and deep slumber now."

Sauvresy, stretched upon his bed, heard what his enemies were saying. He cursed his imprudence.

"Suppose," thought he, "they should think of looking at my gown and slippers!"

Happily this simple idea did not occur to them; after

reassuring each other as well as they were able, they separated; but each heart carried an anxious doubt. Sauvresy on that night had a terrible crisis in his illness. Delirium, succeeding this ray of reason, renewed its possession of his brain. The next morning Dr. R—— pronounced him in more danger than ever; and sent a despatch to Paris, saying that he would be detained at Valfeuilu three or four days. The distemper redoubled in violence; very contradictory symptoms appeared. Each day brought some new phase of it, which confounded the foresight of the doctors. Every time that Sauvresy had a moment of reason, the scene at the window recurred to him, and drove him to madness again.

On that terrible night when he had gone out into the snow, he had not been mistaken; Bertha was really begging something of Hector. This was it:

M. Courtois, the mayor, had invited Hector to accompany himself and his family on an excursion to Fontainebleau on the following day. Hector had cordially accepted the invitation. Bertha could not bear the idea of his spending the day in Laurence's company, and begged him not to go. She told him there were plenty of excuses to relieve him from his promise; for instance, he might urge that it would not be seemly for him to go when his friend lay dangerously ill. At first he positively refused to grant her prayer, but by her supplications and menaces she persuaded him, and she did not go downstairs until he had sworn that he would write to M. Courtois that very evening declining the invitation. He kept his word, but he was disgusted by her tyrannical behavior. He was tired of forever sacrificing his wishes and his liberty, so that he could plan nothing, say or promise nothing without

consulting this jealous woman, who would scarcely let him wander out of her sight. The chain became heavier and heavier to bear, and he began to see that sooner or later it must be wrenched apart. He had never loved either Bertha or Jenny, or anyone, probably; but he now loved the mayor's daughter. Her dowry of a million had at first dazzled him, but little by little he had been subdued by Laurence's charms of mind and person. He, the dissipated rake, was seduced by such grave and naïve innocence, such frankness and beauty; he would have married Laurence had she been poor—as Sauvresy married Bertha. But he feared Bertha too much to brave her suddenly, and so he waited. The next day after the quarrel about Fontaine-bleau, he declared that he was indisposed, attributed it to the want of exercise, and took to the saddle for several hours every day afterward. But he did not go far; only to the mayor's. Bertha at first did not perceive anything suspicious in Trémorel's rides; it reassured her to see him go off on his horse. After some days, however, she thought she saw in him a certain feeling of satisfaction concealed under the semblance of fatigue. She began to have doubts, and these increased every time he went out; all sorts of conjectures worried her while he was away. Where did he go? Probably to see Laurence, whom she feared and detested. The suspicion soon became a certainty with her. One evening Hector appeared, carrying in his button-hole a flower which Laurence herself had put there, and which he had forgotten to take out. Bertha took it gently, examined it, smelt it, and, compelling herself to smile:

“Why,” said she, “what a pretty flower!”

"So I thought," answered Hector, carelessly, "though I don't know what it is called."

"Would it be bold to ask who gave it to you?"

"Not at all. It's a present from our good Plantat."

All Orcival knew that M. Plantat, a monomaniac on flowers, never gave them away to anyone except Mlle. Laurence. Hector's evasion was an unhappy one, and Bertha was not deceived.

"You promised me, Hector," said she, "not to see Laurence any more, and to give up this marriage."

He tried to reply.

"Let me speak," she continued, "and explain yourself afterward. You have broken your word—you are deceiving my confidence! But I tell you, you shall not marry her!" Then, without awaiting his reply, she overwhelmed him with reproaches. Why had he come here at all? She was happy in her home before she knew him. She did not love Sauvresy, it was true; but she esteemed him, and he was good to her. Ignorant of the happiness of true love, she did not desire it. But he had come, and she could not resist his fascination. And now, after having engaged her affection, he was going to desert her, to marry another! Trémoré listened to her, perfectly amazed at her audacity. What! She dared to pretend that it was *he* who had abused her innocence, when, on the contrary, he had sometimes been astonished at her persistency! Such was the depth of her corruption, as it seemed to him, that he wondered whether he were her first or her twentieth lover. And she had so led him on, and had so forcibly made him feel the intensity of her will, that he had been fain still to submit to this despotism. But he had now determined to resist on the first opportunity; and he resisted.

"Well, yes," said he, frankly, "I did deceive you; I have no fortune—this marriage will give me one; I shall get married." He went on to say that he loved Laurence less than ever, but that he coveted her money more and more every day. "To prove this," he pursued, "if you will find me to-morrow a girl who has twelve hundred thousand francs instead of a million, I will marry her in preference to Mademoiselle Courtois."

She had never suspected he had so much courage. She had so long moulded him like soft wax, and this unexpected conduct disconcerted her. She was indignant, but at the same time she felt that unhealthy satisfaction that some women feel, when they meet a master who subdues them; and she admired Trémoré more than ever before. This time, he had taken a tone which conquered her; she despised him enough to think him quite capable of marrying for money. When he had done, she said:

"It's really so, then; you only care for the million of dowry?"

"I've sworn it to you a hundred times."

"Truly now, don't you love Laurence?"

"I have never loved her, and never shall."

He thought that he would thus secure his peace until the wedding-day; once married, he cared not what would happen. What cared he for Sauvresy? Life is only a succession of broken friendships. What is a friend, after all? One who can and ought to serve you. Ability consists in breaking with people, when they cease to be useful to you.

Bertha reflected.

"Hear me, Hector," said she at last. "I cannot calmly resign myself to the sacrifice which you demand.

Let me have but a few days, to accustom myself to this dreadful blow. You owe me as much—let Clement get well, first.”

He did not expect to see her so gentle and subdued; who would have looked for such concessions, so easily obtained? The idea of a snare did not occur to him. In his delight he betrayed how he rejoiced in his liberty, which ought to have undeceived Bertha; but she did not perceive it. He grasped her hand, and cried:

“Ah, you are very good—you really love me.”

XIX

The Count de Trémoré did not anticipate that the respite which Bertha begged would last long. Sauvresy had seemed better during the last week. He got up every day, and commenced to go about the house; he even received numerous visits from the neighbors; without apparent fatigue. But alas, the master of Valfeuille was only the shadow of himself. His friends would never have recognized in that emaciated form and white face, and burning, haggard eye, the robust young man with red lips and beaming visage whom they remembered. He had suffered so! He did not wish to die before avenging himself on the wretches who had filched his happiness and his life. But what punishment should he inflict? This fixed idea burning in his brain, gave his look a fiery eagerness. Ordinarily, there are three modes in which a betrayed husband may avenge himself. He has the right, and it is almost a duty—to deliver the guilty ones up to the law, which is on his side. He may adroitly watch them, surprise them and kill them. There is a law which does

not absolve, but excuses him, in this. Lastly, he may affect a stolid indifference, laugh the first and loudest at his misfortune, drive his wife from his roof, and leave her to starve. But what poor, wretched methods of vengeance. Give up his wife to the law? Would not that be to offer his name, honor, and life to public ridicule? To put himself at the mercy of a lawyer, who would drag him through the mire. They do not defend the erring wife, they attack her husband. And what satisfaction would he get? Bertha and Trémoré would be condemned to a year's imprisonment, perhaps eighteen months, possibly two years. It seemed to him simpler to kill them. He might go in, fire a revolver at them, and they would not have time to comprehend it, for their agony would be but for a moment; and then? Then, he must become a prisoner, submit to a trial, invoke the judge's mercy, and risk conviction. As to turning his wife out of doors, that was to hand her over quietly to Hector. He imagined them leaving Valfeuillu, hand in hand, happy and smiling, and laughing in his face. At this thought he had a fit of cold rage; his self-esteem adding the sharpest pains to the wounds in his heart. None of these vulgar methods could satisfy him. He longed for some revenge unheard-of, strange, monstrous, as his tortures were. Then he thought of all the horrible tales he had read, seeking one to his purpose; he had a right to be particular, and he was determined to wait until he was satisfied. There was only one thing that could balk his progress—Jenny's letter. What had become of it? Had he lost it in the woods? He had looked for it everywhere, and could not find it.

He accustomed himself, however, to feign, finding a sort of fierce pleasure in the constraint. He learned

to assume a countenance which completely hid his thoughts. He submitted to his wife's caresses without an apparent shudder; and shook Hector by the hand as heartily as ever. In the evening, when they were gathered about the drawing-room table, he was the gayest of the three. He built a hundred air-castles, pictured a hundred pleasure-parties, when he was able to go abroad again. Hector rejoiced at his returning health.

"Clement is getting on finely," said he to Bertha, one evening.

She understood only too well what he meant.

"Always thinking of Laurence?"

"Did you not permit me to hope?"

"I asked you to wait, Hector, and you have done well not to be in a hurry. I know a young girl who would bring you, not one, but three millions as dowry."

This was a painful surprise. He really had no thoughts for anyone but Laurence, and now a new obstacle presented itself.

"And who is that?"

She leaned over, and whispered tremblingly in his ear:

"I am Clement's sole heiress; perhaps he'll die; I might be a widow to-morrow."

Hector was petrified.

"But Sauvresy, thank God! is getting well fast."

Bertha fixed her large, clear eyes upon him, and with frightful calmness said:

"What do you know about it?"

Trémoré d' dared not ask what these strange words meant. He was one of those men who shun explanations, and who, rather than put themselves on their guard in time, permit themselves to be drawn on by

circumstances ; soft and feeble beings, who deliberately bandage their eyes so as not to see the danger which threatens them, and who prefer the sloth of doubt, and acts of uncertainty to a definite and open position, which they have not the courage to face.

Besides, Hector experienced a childish satisfaction in seeing Bertha's distress, though he feared and detested her. He conceived a great opinion of his own value and merit, when he saw the persistency and desperation with which she insisted on keeping her hold on him.

"Poor woman!" thought he. "In her grief at losing me, and seeing me another's, she has begun to wish for her husband's death!"

Such was the torpor of his moral sense that he did not see the vileness of Bertha's and his own thoughts.

Meanwhile Sauvresy's state was not reassuring for Hector's hopes and plans. On the very day when he had this conversation with Bertha, her husband was forced to take to his bed again. This relapse took place after he had drank a glass of quinine and water, which he had been accustomed to take just before supper ; only, this time, the symptoms changed entirely, as if one malady had yielded to another of a very different kind. He complained of a pricking in his skin, of vertigo, of convulsive twitches which contracted and twisted his limbs, especially his arms. He cried out with excruciating neuralgic pains in the face. He was seized with a violent, persistent, tenacious craving for pepper, which nothing could assuage. He was sleepless, and morphine in large doses failed to bring him slumber ; while he felt an intense chill within him, as if the body's temperature were gradually diminishing. Delirium had completely disappeared, and the sick man

retained perfectly the clearness of his mind. Sauvresy bore up wonderfully under his pains, and seemed to take a new interest in the business of his estates. He was constantly in consultation with bailiffs and agents, and shut himself up for days together with notaries and attorneys. Then, saying that he must have distractions, he received all his friends, and when no one called, he sent for some acquaintance to come and chat with him in order to forget his illness. He gave no hint of what he was doing and thinking, and Bertha was devoured by anxiety. She often watched for her husband's agent, when, after a conference of several hours, he came out of his room; and making herself as sweet and fascinating as possible, she used all her cunning to find out something which would enlighten her as to what he was about. But no one could, or at least would, satisfy her curiosity; all gave evasive replies, as if Sauvresy had cautioned them, or as if there were nothing to tell.

No complaints were heard from Sauvresy. He talked constantly of Bertha and Hector; he wished all the world to know their devotion to him; he called them his "guardian angels," and blessed Heaven that had given him such a wife and such a friend. Sauvresy's illness now became so serious that Trémoré began to despair; he became alarmed; what position would his friend's death leave him in? Bertha, having become a widow, would be implacable. He resolved to find out her inmost thoughts at the first opportunity; she anticipated him, and saved him the trouble of broaching the subject. One afternoon, when they were alone, M. Plantat being in attendance at the sick man's bedside, Bertha commenced.

"I want some advice, Hector, and you alone can give it to me. How can I find out whether Clement,

within the past day or two, has not changed his will in regard to me?"

"His will?"

"Yes, I've already told you that by a will of which I myself have a copy, Sauvresy has left me his whole fortune. I fear that he may perhaps revoke it."

"What an idea!"

"Ah, I have reasons for my apprehensions. What are all these agents and attorneys doing at Valfeuillu? A stroke of this man's pen may ruin me. Don't you see that he can deprive me of his millions, and reduce me to my dowry of fifty thousand francs?"

"But he will not do it; he loves you——"

"Are you sure of it? I've told you, there are three millions; I must have this fortune—not for myself, but for you; I want it, I *must* have it! But how can I find out—how? how?"

Hector was very indignant. It was to this end, then, that his delays had conducted him! She thought that she had a right now to dispose of him in spite of himself, and, as it were, to purchase him. And he could not, dared not, say anything!

"We must be patient," said he, "and wait——"

"Wait—for what? Till he's dead?"

"Don't speak so."

"Why not?" Bertha went up to him, and in a low voice, muttered:

"He has only a week to live; and see here——"

She drew a little vial from her pocket, and held it up to him.

"That is what convinces me that I am not mistaken."

Hector became livid, and could not stifle a cry of horror. He comprehended all now—he saw how it was that Bertha had been so easily subdued, why she had

refrained from speaking of Laurence, her strange words, her calm confidence.

"Poison!" stammered he, confounded.

"Yes, poison."

"You have not used it?"

She fixed a hard, stern look upon him—the look which had subdued his will, against which he had struggled in vain—and in a calm voice, emphasizing each word, answered:

"I have used it."

The count was, indeed, a dangerous man, unscrupulous, not recoiling from any wickedness when his passions were to be indulged, capable of everything; but this horrible crime awoke in him all that remained of honest energy.

"Well," he cried, in disgust, "you will not use it again!"

He hastened toward the door, shuddering; she stopped him.

"Reflect before you act," said she, coldly. "I will betray the fact of your relations with me; who will then believe that you are not my accomplice?"

He saw the force of this terrible menace, coming from Bertha.

"Come," said she, ironically, "speak—betray me if you choose. Whatever happens, for happiness or misery, we shall no longer be separated; our destinies will be the same."

Hector fell heavily into a chair, more overwhelmed than if he had been struck with a hammer. He held his bursting forehead between his hands; he saw himself shut up in an infernal circle, without outlet.

"I am lost!" he stammered, without knowing what he said, "I am lost!"

He was to be pitied ; his face was terribly haggard, great drops of perspiration stood at the roots of his hair, his eyes wandered as if he were insane. Bertha shook him rudely by the arm, for his cowardice exasperated her.

"You are afraid," she said. "You are trembling! Lost? You would not say so, if you loved me as I do you. Will you be lost because I am to be your wife, because we shall be free to love in the face of all the world? Lost! Then you have no idea of what I have endured? You don't know, then, that I am tired of suffering, fearing, feigning."

"Such a crime!"

She burst out with a laugh that made him shudder.

"You ought to have said so," said she, with a look full of contempt, "the day you won me from Sauvresy—the day that you stole the wife of this friend who saved your life. Do you think that was a less horrid crime? You knew as well as I did how much my husband loved me, and that he would have preferred to die, rather than lose me thus."

"But he knows nothing, suspects nothing of it."

"You are mistaken ; Sauvresy knows all."

"Impossible!"

"All, I tell you—and he has known all since that day when he came home so late from hunting. Don't you remember that I noticed his strange look, and said to you that my husband suspected something? You shrugged your shoulders. Do you forget the steps in the vestibule, the night I went to your room? He had been spying on us. Well, do you want a more certain proof? Look at this letter, which I found, crumpled up and wet, in one of his vest pockets."

She showed him the letter which Sauvresy had forcibly taken from Jenny, and he recognized it well.

"It is a fatality," said he, overwhelmed. "But we can separate and break off with each other. Bertha, I can go away."

"It's too late. Believe me, Hector, we are to-day defending our lives. Ah, you don't know Clement! You don't know what the fury of a man like him can be, when he sees that his confidence has been outrageously abused, and his trust vilely betrayed. If he has said nothing to me, and has not let us see any traces of his implacable anger, it is because he is meditating some frightful vengeance."

This was only too probable, and Hector saw it clearly.

"What shall we do?" he asked, in a hoarse voice; he was almost speechless.

"Find out what change he has made in his will."

"But how?"

"I don't know yet. I came to ask your advice, and I find you more cowardly than a woman. Let me act, then; don't do anything yourself; I will do all."

He essayed an objection.

"Enough," said she. "He must not ruin us after all—I will see—I will think."

Someone below called her. She went down, leaving Hector overcome with despair.

That evening, during which Bertha seemed happy and smiling, his face finally betrayed so distinctly the traces of his anguish, that Sauvresy tenderly asked him, if he were not ill?

"You exhaust yourself tending on me, my good Hector," said he. "How can I ever repay your devotion?"

Trémorrel had not the strength to reply.

“And that man knows all,” thought he. “What courage! What fate can he be reserving for us?”

The scene which was passing before Hector's eyes made his flesh creep. Every time that Bertha gave her husband his medicine, she took a hair-pin from her tresses, and plunged it into the little vial which she had shown him, taking up thus some small, white grains, which she dissolved in the potions prescribed by the doctor.

It might be supposed that Trémorél, enslaved by his horrid position, and harassed by increasing terror, would renounce forever his proposed marriage with Laurence. Not so. He clung to that project more desperately than ever. Bertha's threats, the great obstacles now intervening, his anguish, crime, only augmented the violence of his love for her, and fed the flame of his ambition to secure her as his wife. A small and flickering ray of hope which lighted the darkness of his despair, consoled and revived him, and made the present more easy to bear. He said to himself that Bertha could not be thinking of marrying him the day after her husband's death. Months, a whole year must pass, and thus he would gain time; then some day he would declare his will. What would she have to say? Would she divulge the crime, and try to hold him as her accomplice? Who would believe her? How could she prove that he, who loved and had married another woman, had any interest in Sauvresy's death? People don't kill their friends for the mere pleasure of it. Would she provoke the law to exhume her husband? She was now in a position, thought he, wherein she could, or would not exercise her reason. Later on, she would reflect, and then she would be arrested by

the probability of those dangers, the certainty of which did not now terrify her.

He did not wish that she should ever be his wife at any price. He would have detested her had she possessed millions; he hated her now that she was poor, ruined, reduced to her own narrow means. And that she was so, there was no doubt, Sauvresy indeed knew all. He was content to wait; he knew that Laurence loved him enough to wait for him one, or three years, if necessary. He already had such absolute power over her, that she did not try to combat the thoughts of him, which gently forced themselves on her, penetrated to her soul, and filled her mind and heart. Hector said to himself that in the interest of his designs, perhaps it was well that Bertha was acting as she did. He forced himself to stifle his conscience in trying to prove that he was not guilty. Who thought of this crime? Bertha. Who was executing it? She alone. He could only be reproached with moral complicity in it, a complicity involuntary, forced upon him, imposed somehow by the care for his own life. Sometimes, however, a bitter remorse seized him. He could have understood a sudden, violent, rapid murder; could have explained to himself a knife-stroke; but this slow death, given drop by drop, horribly sweetened by tenderness, veiled under kisses, appeared to him unspeakably hideous. He was mortally afraid of Bertha, as of a reptile, and when she embraced him he shuddered from head to foot.

She was so calm, so engaging, so natural; her voice had the same soft and caressing tones, that he could not forget it. She plunged her hair-pin into the fatal vial without ceasing her conversation, and he did not surprise her in any shrinking or shuddering, nor even a trembling of the eyelids. She must have been made

of brass. Yet he thought that she was not cautious enough, and that she put herself in danger of discovery; and he told her of these fears, and how she made him tremble every moment.

"Have confidence in me," she answered. "I want to succeed—I am prudent."

"But you may be suspected."

"By whom?"

"Eh! How do I know? Everyone—the servants, the doctor."

"No danger. And suppose they did suspect?"

"They would make examinations, Bertha; they would make a minute scrutiny."

She gave a smile of the most perfect security.

"They might examine and experiment as much as they pleased, they would find nothing. Do you think I am such a fool as to use arsenic?"

"For Heaven's sake, hush!"

"I have procured one of those poisons which are as yet unknown, and which defy all analysis; one of which many doctors—and learned ones, too—could not even tell the symptoms!"

"But where did you get this—this——"

He dared not say, "poison."

"Who gave you *that*?" resumed he.

"What matters it? I have taken care that he who gave it to me should run the same danger as myself, and he knows it. There's nothing to fear from that quarter. I've paid him enough to smother all his regrets."

An objection came to his lips; he wanted to say, "It's too slow;" but he had not the courage, though she read his thought in his eyes.

"It is slow, because that suits me," said she. "Be-

fore all, I must know about the will—and that I am trying to find out.”

She occupied herself constantly about this will, and during the long hours that she passed at Sauvresy's bedside, she gradually, with the greatest craft and delicacy, led her husband's mind in the direction of his last testament, with such success that he himself mentioned the subject which so absorbed Bertha.

He said that he did not comprehend why people did not always have their worldly affairs in order, and their wishes fully written down, in case of accident. What difference did it make whether one were ill or well? At these words Bertha attempted to stop him. Such ideas, she said, pained her too much. She even shed real tears, which fell down her cheeks and made her more beautiful and irresistible than before; real tears which moistened her handkerchief.

“ You dear silly creature,” said Sauvresy, “ do you think that makes one die? ”

“ No; but I do not wish it.”

“ But, dear, have we been any the less happy because, on the day after our marriage, I made a will bequeathing you all my fortune? And, stop; you have a copy of it, haven't you? If you were kind, you would go and fetch it for me.”

She became very red, then very pale. Why did he ask for this copy? Did he want to tear it up? A sudden thought reassured her; people do not tear up a document which can be cancelled by a scratch of the pen on another sheet of paper. Still, she hesitated a moment.

“ I don't know where it can be.”

“ But I do. It is in the left-hand drawer of the glass cupboard; come, please me by getting it.”

While she was gone, Sauvresy said to Hector :

“ Poor girl ! Poor dear Bertha ! If I died, she never would survive me ! ”

Trémoré thought of nothing to reply ; his anxiety was intense and visible.

“ And this man,” thought he, “ suspects something ! No ; it is not possible.”

Bertha returned.

“ I have found it,” said she.

“ Give it to me.”

He took the copy of his will, and read it with evident satisfaction, nodding his head at certain passages in which he referred to his love for his wife. When he had finished reading, he said :

“ Now give me a pen and some ink.”

Hector and Bertha reminded him that it would fatigue him to write ; but he insisted. The two guilty ones, seated at the foot of the bed and out of Sauvresy’s sight, exchanged looks of alarm. What was he going to write ? But he speedily finished it.

“ Take this,” said he to Trémoré, “ and read aloud what I have just added.”

Hector complied with his friend’s request, with trembling voice :

“ This day, being sound in mind, though much suffering, I declare that I do not wish to change a line of this will. Never have I loved my wife more—never have I so much desired to leave her the heiress of all I possess, should I die before her.

“ CLEMENT SAUVRESY.”

Mistress of herself as Bertha was, she succeeded in concealing the unspeakable satisfaction with which she

was filled. All her wishes were accomplished, and yet she was able to veil her delight under an apparent sadness.

"Of what good is this?" said she, with a sigh.

She said this, but half an hour afterward, when she was alone with Hector, she gave herself up to the extravagance of her delight.

"Nothing more to fear," exclaimed she. "Nothing! Now we shall have liberty, fortune, love, pleasure, life! Why, Hector, we shall have at least three millions; you see, I've got this will myself, and I shall keep it. No more agents or notaries shall be admitted into this house henceforth. Now I must hasten!"

The count certainly felt a satisfaction in knowing her to be rich, for he could much more easily get rid of a millionaire widow than of a poor penniless woman. Sauvresy's conduct thus calmed many sharp anxieties. Her restless gayety, however, her confident security, seemed monstrous to Hector. He would have wished for more solemnity in the execution of the crime; he thought that he ought at least to calm Bertha's delirium.

"You will think more than once of Sauvresy," said he, in a graver tone.

She answered with a "prrr," and added vivaciously:

"Of him? when and why? Oh, his memory will not weigh on me very heavily. I trust that we shall be able to live still at Valfeuillu, for the place pleases me; but we must also have a house at Paris—or we will buy yours back again. What happiness, Hector!"

The mere prospect of this anticipated felicity so shocked Hector, that his better self for the moment got the mastery; he essayed to move Bertha.

"For the last time," said he, "I implore you to renounce this terrible, dangerous project. You see

that you were mistaken—that Sauvresy suspects nothing, but loves you as well as ever.”

The expression of Bertha’s face suddenly changed; she sat quite still, in a pensive revery.

“Don’t let’s talk any more of that,” said she, at last. “Perhaps I was mistaken. Perhaps he only had doubts—perhaps, although he has discovered something, he hopes to win me back by his goodness. But you see——”

She stopped. Doubtless she did not wish to alarm him.

He was already much alarmed. The next day he went off to Melun without a word, being unable to bear the sight of this agony, and fearing to betray himself. But he left his address, and when she sent word that Sauvresy was always crying out for him, he hastily returned. Her letter was most imprudent and absurd, and made his hair stand on end. He had intended, on his arrival, to reproach her; but it was she who upbraided him.

“Why this flight?”

“I could not stay here—I suffered, trembled, felt as if I were dying.”

“What a coward you are!”

He would have replied, but she put her finger on his mouth, and pointed with her other hand to the door of the next room.

“Sh! Three doctors have been in consultation there for the past hour, and I haven’t been able to hear a word of what they said. Who knows what they are about? I shall not be easy till they go away.”

Bertha’s fears were not without foundation. When Sauvresy had his last relapse, and complained of a severe neuralgia in the face and an irresistible craving for

pepper, Dr. R—— had uttered a significant exclamation. It was nothing, perhaps—yet Bertha had heard it, and she thought she surprised a sudden suspicion on the doctor's part; and this now disturbed her, for she thought that it might be the subject of the consultation. The suspicion, however, if there had ever been any, quickly vanished. The symptoms entirely changed twelve hours later, and the next day the sick man felt pains quite the opposite of those which had previously distressed him. This very inconstancy of the distemper served to puzzle the doctor's conclusions. Sauvresy, in these latter days, had scarcely suffered at all, he said, and had slept well at night; but he had, at times, strange and often distressing sensations. He was evidently failing hourly; he was dying—everyone perceived it. And now Dr. R—— asked for a consultation, the result of which had not been reached when Trémoré returned.

The drawing-room door at last swung open, and the calm faces of the physicians reassured the poisoner. Their conclusions were that the case was hopeless; everything had been tried and exhausted; no human resources had been neglected; the only hope was in Sauvresy's strong constitution.

Bertha, colder than marble, motionless, her eyes full of tears, seemed so full of grief on hearing this cruel decision, that all the doctors were touched.

"Is there no hope then? Oh, my God!" cried she, in agonizing tones.

Dr. R—— hardly dared to attempt to comfort her; he answered her questions evasively.

"We must never despair," said he, "when the invalid is of Sauvresy's age and constitution; nature often works miracles when least expected."

The doctor, however, lost no time in taking Hector apart and begging him to prepare the poor, devoted, loving young lady for the terrible blow about to ensue.

"For you see," added he, "I don't think Monsieur Sauvresy can live more than two days!"

Bertha, with her ear at the keyhole, had heard the doctor's prediction; and when Hector returned from conducting the physician to the door, he found her radiant. She rushed into his arms.

"Now," cried she, "the future truly belongs to us. Only one black point obscured our horizon, and it has cleared away. It is for me to realize Doctor R——'s prediction." They dined together, as usual, in the dining-room, while one of the chambermaids remained beside the sick-bed. Bertha was full of spirits which she could scarcely control. The certainty of success and safety, the assurance of reaching the end, made her imprudently gay. She spoke aloud, even in the presence of the servants, of her approaching liberty. During the evening she was more reckless than ever. If any of the servants should have a suspicion, or a shadow of one, she might be discovered and lost. Hector constantly nudged her under the table and frowned at her, to keep her quiet; he felt his blood run cold at her conduct; all in vain. There are times when the armor of hypocrisy becomes so burdensome that one is forced, cost what it may, to throw it off if only for an instant.

While Hector was smoking his cigar, Bertha was more freely pursuing her dream. She was thinking that she could spend the period of her mourning at Val-feuillu, and Hector, for the sake of appearances, would hire a pretty little house somewhere in the suburbs. The worst of it all was that she would be forced to seem to mourn for Sauvresy, as she had pretended to

love him during his lifetime. But at last a day would come when, without scandal, she might throw off her mourning clothes, and then they would get married. Where? At Paris or Orcival?

Hector's thoughts ran in the same channel. He, too, wished to see his friend under the ground to end his own terrors, and to submit to Bertha's terrible yoke.

XX

Time passed. Hector and Bertha repaired to Sauvresy's room; he was asleep. They noiselessly took chairs beside the fire, as usual, and the maid retired. In order that the sick man might not be disturbed by the light of the lamp, curtains had been hung so that, when lying down, he could not see the fireplace and mantel. In order to see these, he must have raised himself on his pillow and leaned forward on his right arm. But now he was asleep, breathing painfully, feverish, and shuddering convulsively. Bertha and Hector did not speak; the solemn and sinister silence was only broken by the ticking of the clock, or by the leaves of the book which Hector was reading. Ten o'clock struck; soon after Sauvresy moved, turned over, and awoke. Bertha was at his side in an instant; she saw that his eyes were open.

"Do you feel a little better, dear Clement?" she asked.

"Neither better nor worse."

"Do you want anything?"

"I am thirsty."

Hector, who had raised his eyes when his friend spoke, suddenly resumed his reading.

Bertha, standing by the mantel, began to prepare with great care Dr. R.—'s last prescription; when it was ready, she took out the fatal little vial as usual, and thrust one of her hair-pins into it.

She had not time to draw it out before she felt a light touch upon her shoulder. A shudder shook her from head to foot; she suddenly turned and uttered a loud scream, a cry of terror and horror.

“Oh!”

The hand which had touched her was her husband's.

While she was busied with the poison at the mantel, Sauvresy had softly raised himself; more softly still, he had pulled the curtain aside, and had stretched out his arm and touched her. His eyes glittered with hate and anger.

Bertha's cry was answered by another dull cry, or rather groan; Trémorél had seen and comprehended all; he was overwhelmed.

“All is discovered!” Their eyes spoke these three words to each other. They saw them everywhere, written in letters of fire. There was a moment of stupor, of silence so profound that Hector heard his temples beat. Sauvresy had got back under the bed-clothes again. He laughed loudly, wildly, just as a skeleton might have laughed whose jaws and teeth rattled together.

But Bertha was not one of those persons who are overcome by a single blow, terrible as it might be. She trembled like a leaf; her legs staggered; but her mind was already at work seeking a subterfuge. What had Sauvresy seen—anything? What did he know? For even had he seen the vial, this might be explained. It could only have been by simple chance that he had touched her at the moment when she was using the

poison. All these thoughts flashed across her mind in a moment, as rapid as lightning shooting between the clouds. And then she dared to approach the bed, and, with a frightfully constrained smile, to say:

"How you frightened me then!"

He looked at her a moment, which seemed to her an age—and simply replied:

"I understand it."

There was no longer any uncertainty. Bertha saw only too well in her husband's eyes that he knew something. But what—how much? She nerved herself to go on:

"Are you still suffering?"

"No."

"Then why did you get up?"

He raised himself upon his pillow, and with a sudden strength, he continued:

"I got up to tell you that I have had enough of these tortures, that I have reached the limits of human energy, that I cannot endure one day longer the agony of seeing myself put to death slowly, drop by drop, by the hands of my wife and my best friend!"

He stopped. Hector and Bertha were thunderstruck.

"I wanted to tell you also, that I have had enough of your cruel caution, and that I suffer. Ah, don't you see that I suffer horribly? Hurry, cut short my agony! Kill me, and kill me at a blow—poisoners!"

At the last word, the Count de Trémoré sprang up as if he had moved by a spring, his eyes haggard, his arms stretched out. Sauvresy, seeing this, quickly slipped his hand under the pillow, pulled out a revolver, and pointed the barrel at Hector, crying out:

"Don't advance a step!"

He thought that Trémoré, seeing that they were

discovered, was going to rush upon him and strangle him; but he was mistaken. It seemed to Hector as though he were losing his mind. He fell down as heavily as if he were a log. Bertha was more self-possessed; she tried to resist the torpor of terror which she felt coming on.

"You are worse, my Clement," said she. "This is that dreadful fever which frightens me so. Delirium——"

"Have I really been delirious?" interrupted he, with a surprised air.

"Alas, yes, dear, that is what haunts you, and fills your poor sick head with horrid visions."

He looked at her curiously. He was really stupefied by this boldness, which constantly grew more bold.

"What! you think that we, who are so dear to you, your friends, I, your——"

Her husband's implacable look forced her to stop, and the words expired on her lips.

"Enough of these lies, Bertha," resumed Sauvresy, "they are useless. No, I have not been dreaming, nor have I been delirious. The poison is only too real, and I could tell you what it is without your taking it out of your pocket."

She recoiled as if she had seen her husband's hand stretched out to snatch the blue vial.

"I guessed it and recognized it at the very first; for you have chosen one of those poisons which, it is true, leave scarcely any trace of themselves, but the symptoms of which are not deceptive. Do you remember the day when I complained of a morbid taste for pepper? The next day I was certain of it, and I was not the only one. Doctor R——, too, had a suspicion."

Bertha tried to stammer something; her husband interrupted her.

“People ought to try their poisons,” pursued he, in an ironical tone, “before they use them. Didn’t you understand yours, or what its effects were? Why, your poison gives intolerable neuralgia, sleeplessness, and you saw me without surprise, sleeping soundly all night long! I complained of a devouring fire within me, while your poison freezes the blood and the entrails, and yet you are not astonished. You see all the symptoms change and disappear, and that does not enlighten you. You are fools, then. Now see what I had to do to divert Doctor R——’s suspicions. I hid the real pains which your poison caused, and complained of imaginary, ridiculous ones. I described sensations just the opposite of those which I felt. You were lost, then—and I saved you.”

Bertha’s malignant energy staggered beneath so many successive blows. She wondered whether she were not going mad; had she heard aright? Was it really true that her husband had perceived that he was being poisoned, and yet said nothing; nay, that he had even deceived the doctor? Why? What was his purpose?

Sauvresy paused several minutes, and then went on:

“I have held my tongue and so saved you, because the sacrifice of my life had already been made. Yes, I had been fatally wounded in the heart on the day that I learned that you were faithless to me.”

He spoke of his death without apparent emotion; but at the words, “You were faithless to me,” his voice faltered and trembled.

“I would not, could not believe it at first. I doubted the evidence of my senses, rather than doubt you. But

I was forced to believe at last. I was no longer anything in my house but a laughing-stock. But I was in your way. You and your lover needed more room and liberty. You were tired of constraint and hypocrisy. Then it was that, believing that my death would make you free and rich, you brought in poison to rid yourselves of me."

Bertha had at least the heroism of crime. All was discovered; well, she threw down the mask. She tried to defend her accomplice, who lay unconscious in a chair.

"It is I that have done it all," cried she. "He is innocent."

Sauvresy turned pale with rage.

"Ah, really," said he, "my friend Hector is innocent! It wasn't he, then, who, to pay me up—not for his life, for he was too cowardly to kill himself; but for his honor, which he owes to me—took my wife from me? Wretch! I hold out my hand to him when he is drowning, I welcome him like a brother, and in return, he desolates my hearth! . . . And you knew what you were doing, my friend Hector—for I told you a hundred times that my wife was my all here below, my present and my future, my dream and happiness and hope and very life! You knew that for me to lose her was to die. But if you had loved her—no, it was not that you loved her; you hated me. Envy devoured you, and you could not tell me to my face, "You are too happy." Then, like a coward, you dishonored me in the dark. Bertha was only the instrument of your rancor; and she weighs upon you to-day—you despise and fear her. My friend, Hector, you have been in this house the vile lackey who thinks to avenge his base-

ness by spitting upon the meats which he puts on his master's table!"

The count only responded by a shudder. The dying man's terrible words fell more cruelly on his conscience than blows upon his cheek.

"See, Bertha," continued Sauvresy, "that's the man whom you have preferred to me, and for whom you have betrayed me. You never loved me—I see it now—your heart was never mine. And I—I loved you so! From the day I first saw you, you were my only thought; as if your heart had beaten in place of mine. Everything about you was dear and precious to me; I adored your whims, caprices, even your faults. There was nothing I would not do for a smile from you, so that you would say to me, Thank you, between two kisses. You don't know that for years after our marriage it was my delight to wake up first so as to gaze upon you as you lay asleep, to admire and touch your lovely hair, lying dishevelled across the pillow. Bertha!"

He softened at the remembrance of these past joys, which would not come again. He forgot their presence, the infamous treachery, the poison; that he was about to die, murdered by this beloved wife; and his eyes filled with tears, his voice choked.

Bertha, more motionless and pallid than marble, listened to him breathlessly.

"It is true, then," continued the sick man, "that these lovely eyes conceal a soul of filth! Ah, who would not have been deceived, as I was? Bertha, what did you dream of when you were sleeping in my arms? Trémoré came, and you thought you saw in him the ideal of your dreams. You admired the precocious wrinkles which betrayed an exhausted life, like the fatal

seal which marks the fallen archangel's forehead. Your love, without thought of mine, rushed toward him, though he did not think of you. You went to evil as if it were your nature. And yet I thought you more immaculate than the Alpine snows. You did not even have a struggle with yourself; you betrayed no confusion which would reveal your first fault to me. You brought me your forehead soiled with *his* kisses without blushing."

Weariness overcame his energies; his voice became little by little feebler and less distinct.

"You had your happiness in your hands, Bertha, and you carelessly destroyed it, as the child breaks the toy of whose value he is ignorant. What did you expect from this wretch for whom you had the frightful courage to kill me, with a kiss upon your lips, slowly, hour by hour? You thought you loved him, but disgust ought to have come at last. Look at him, and judge between us. See which is the man—I, extended on this bed where I shall soon die, or he shivering there in a corner. You have the energy of crime, but he has only the baseness of it. Ah, if my name was Hector de Trémoré, and a man had spoken as I have just done, that man should live no longer, even if he had ten revolvers like this I am holding to defend himself with!"

Hector, thus taunted, tried to get up and reply; but his legs would not support him, and his throat only gave hoarse, unintelligible sounds. Bertha, as she looked at the two men, recognized her error with rage and indignation. Her husband, at this moment, seemed to her sublime; his eyes gleamed, his face was radiant; while the other—the other! She felt sick with disgust when she but glanced toward him.

Thus all these deceptive chimeras after which she

had run, love, passion, poetry, were already hers; she had held them in her hands and she had not been able to perceive it. But what was Sauvresy's purpose?

He continued, painfully:

"This then, is our situation; you have killed me, you are going to be free, yet you hate and despise each other——"

He stopped, and seemed to be suffocating; he tried to raise himself on his pillow and to sit up in bed, but found himself too feeble.

"Bertha," said he, "help me get up."

She leaned over the bed, and taking her husband in her arms, succeeded in placing him as he wished. He appeared more at ease in his new position, and took two or three long breaths.

"Now," he said, "I should like something to drink. The doctor lets me take a little old wine, if I have a fancy for it; give me some."

She hastened to bring him a glass of wine, which he emptied and handed back to her.

"There wasn't any poison in it, was there?" he asked.

This ghastly question and the smile which accompanied it, melted Bertha's callousness; remorse had already taken possession of her, as her disgust of Trémorel increased.

"Poison?" she cried, eagerly, "never!"

"You must give me some, though, presently, so as to help me to die."

"You die, Clement? No; I want you to live, so that I may redeem the past. I am a wretch, and have committed a hideous crime—but you are good. You will live; I don't ask to be your wife, but only your servant. I will love you, humiliate myself, serve you on my

knees, so that some day, after ten, twenty years of expiation, you will forgive me ! ”

Hector in his mortal terror and anguish, was scarcely able to distinguish what was taking place. But he saw a dim ray of hope in Bertha's gestures and accent, and especially in her last words ; he thought that perhaps it was all going to end and be forgotten, and that Sauvresy would pardon them. Half-rising, he stammered :

“ Yes, forgive us, forgive us ! ”

Sauvresy's eyes glittered, and his angry voice vibrated as if it came from a throat of metal.

“ Forgive ! ” cried he, “ pardon ! Did you have pity on me during all this year that you have been playing with my happiness, during this fortnight that you have been mixing poison in all my potions ? Pardon ? What, are you fools ? Why do you think I held my tongue, when I discovered your infamy, and let myself be poisoned, and threw the doctors off the scent ? Do you really hope that I did this to prepare a scene of heartrending farewells, and to give you my benediction at the end ? Ah, know me better ! ”

Bertha was sobbing ; she tried to take her husband's hand, but he rudely repulsed her.

“ Enough of these falsehoods,” said he. “ Enough of these perfidies. I hate you ! You don't seem to perceive that hate is all that is still living in me.”

Sauvresy's expression was at this moment ferocious.

“ It is almost two months since I learned the truth ; it broke me up, soul and body. Ah, it cost me a good deal to keep quiet—it almost killed me. But one thought sustained me ; I longed to avenge myself. My mind was always bent on that ; I searched for a punishment as great as this crime ; I found none, could find none. Then you resolved to poison me. Mark this—

that the very day when I guessed about the poison I had a thrill of joy, for I had discovered my vengeance ! ”

A constantly increasing terror possessed Bertha, and now stupefied her, as well as Trémoré.

“ Why do you wish for my death ? To be free and marry each other ? Very well ; I wish that also. The Count de Trémoré will be Madame Sauvresy’s second husband.”

“ Never ! ” cried Bertha. “ No, never ! ”

“ Never ! ” echoed Hector.

“ It shall be so, nevertheless, because I wish it. Oh, my precautions have been well taken, and you can’t escape me. Now hear me. When I became certain that I was being poisoned, I began to write a minute history of all three of us ; I did more—I have kept a journal day by day and hour by hour, narrating all the particulars of my illness ; then I kept some of the poison which you gave me——”

Bertha made a gesture of denial. Sauvresy proceeded :

“ Certainly, I kept it, and I will tell you how. Every time that Bertha gave me a suspicious potion, I kept a portion of it in my mouth, and carefully ejected it into a bottle which I kept hid under the bolster. Ah, you ask how I could have done all this without your suspecting it, or without being seen by any of the servants. Know that hate is stronger than love, be sure that I have left nothing to chance, nor have I forgotten anything.”

Hector and Bertha looked at Sauvresy with a dull, fixed gaze. They forced themselves to understand him, but could scarcely do so.

“ Let’s finish,” resumed the dying man, “ my strength is waning. This very morning, the bottle con-

taining the poison I have preserved, our biographies, and the narrative of my poisoning, have been put in the hands of a trustworthy and devoted person, whom, even if you knew him, you could not corrupt. He does not know the contents of what has been confided to him. The day that you get married this friend will give them all up to you. If, however, you are not married in a year from to-day, he has instructions to put these papers and this bottle into the hands of the officers of the law."

A double cry of horror and anguish told Sauvresy that he had well chosen his vengeance.

"And reflect," added he, "that this package once delivered up to justice, means the galleys, if not the scaffold for both of you."

Sauvresy had overtasked his strength. He fell panting upon the bed, his mouth open, his eyes filmy, and his features so distorted that he seemed to be on the point of death. But neither Bertha nor Trémoré thought of trying to relieve him. They remained opposite each other with dilated eyes, stupefied, as if their thoughts were bent upon the torments of that future which the implacable vengeance of the man whom they had outraged imposed upon them. They were indissolubly united, confounded in a common destiny; nothing could separate them but death. A chain stronger and harder than that of the galley-slave bound them together; a chain of infamies and crimes, of which the first link was a kiss, and the last a murder by poison. Now Sauvresy might die; his vengeance was on their heads, casting a cloud upon their sun. Free in appearance, they would go through life crushed by the burden of the past, more slaves than the blacks in the American rice-fields. Separated by mutual hate and

contempt, they saw themselves riveted together by the common terror of punishment, condemned to an eternal embrace.

Bertha at this moment admired her husband. Now that he was so feeble that he breathed as painfully as an infant, she looked upon him as something superhuman. She had had no idea of such constancy and courage allied with so much dissimulation and genius. How cunningly he had found them out! How well he had known how to avenge himself! To be the master, he had only to will it. In a certain way she rejoiced in the strange atrocity of this scene; she felt something like a bitter pride in being one of the actors in it. At the same time she was transported with rage and sorrow in thinking that she had had this man in her power, that he had been at her feet. She almost loved him. Of all men, it was he whom she would have chosen were she mistress of her destinies; and he was going to escape her.

Trémoré, while these strange ideas crowded upon Bertha's mind, began to come to himself. The certainty that Laurence was now forever lost for him occurred to him, and his despair was without bounds. The silence continued a full quarter of an hour. Sauvresy at last subdued the spasm which had exhausted him, and spoke.

"I have not said all yet," he commenced.

His voice was as feeble as a murmur, and yet it seemed terrible to his hearers.

"You shall see whether I have reckoned and foreseen well. Perhaps, when I was dead, the idea of flying and going abroad would strike you. I shall not permit that. You must stay at Orcival—at Valfeuilu. A friend—not he with the package—is charged, without

knowing the reason for it, with the task of watching you. Mark well what I say—if either of you should disappear for eight days, on the ninth, the man who has the package would receive a letter which would cause him to resort at once to the police.”

Yes, he had foreseen all, and Trémorel, who had already thought of flight, was overwhelmed.

“I have so arranged, besides, that the idea of flight shall not tempt you too much. It is true I have left all my fortune to Bertha, but I only give her the use of it; the property itself will not be hers until the day after your marriage.”

Bertha made a gesture of repugnance which her husband misinterpreted.

“You are thinking of the copy of my will which is in your possession. It is a useless one, and I only added to it some valueless words because I wanted to put your suspicions to sleep. My true will is in the notary’s hands, and bears a date two days later. I can read you the rough draft of it.”

He took a sheet of paper from a portfolio which was concealed, like the revolver, under the bolster, and read:

“Being stricken with a fatal malady, I here set down freely, and in the fulness of my faculties, my last wishes:

“My dearest wish is that my well-beloved widow, Bertha, should espouse, as soon as the delay enjoined by law has expired, my dear friend, the Count Hector de Trémorel. Having appreciated the grandeur of soul and nobleness of sentiment which belong to my wife and friend, I know that they are worthy of each other, and that each will be happy in the other. I die the more peacefully, as I leave my Bertha to a protector whose——”

It was impossible for Bertha to hear more.

"For pity's sake," cried she, "enough."

"Enough? Well, let it be so," responded Sauvresy. "I have read this paper to you to show you that while I have arranged everything to insure the execution of my will; I have also done all that can preserve to you the world's respect. Yes, I wish that you should be esteemed and honored, for it is you alone upon whom I rely for my vengeance. I have knit around you a network which you can never burst asunder. You triumph; my tombstone shall be, as you hoped, the altar of your nuptials, or else—the galleys."

Trémoré's pride at last revolted against so many humiliations, so many whip-strokes lashing his face.

"You have only forgotten one thing, Sauvresy; that a man can die."

"Pardon me," replied the sick man, coldly. "I have foreseen that also, and was just going to tell you so. Should one of you die suddenly before the marriage, the police will be called in."

"You misunderstood me; I meant that a man can kill himself."

"You kill yourself? Humph! Jenny, who disdains you almost as much as I do, has told me about your threats to kill yourself. You! See here; here is my revolver; shoot yourself, and I will forgive my wife!"

Hector made a gesture of anger, but did not take the pistol.

"You see," said Sauvresy, "I knew it well. You are afraid." Turning to Bertha, he added, "This is your lover."

Extraordinary situations like this are so unwonted and strange that the actors in them almost always remain composed and natural, as if stupefied. Bertha,

Hector, and Sauvresy accepted, without taking note of it, the strange position in which they found themselves; and they talked naturally, as if of matters of every-day life, and not of terrible events. But the hours flew, and Sauvresy perceived his life to be ebbing from him.

"There only remains one more act to play," said he. "Hector, go and call the servants, have those who have gone to bed aroused, I want to see them before dying."

Trémorel hesitated.

"Come, go along; or shall I ring, or fire a pistol to bring them here?"

Hector went out; Bertha remained alone with her husband—alone! She had a hope that perhaps she might succeed in making him change his purpose, and that she might obtain his forgiveness. She knelt beside the bed. Never had she been so beautiful, so seductive, so irresistible. The keen emotions of the evening had brought her whole soul into her face, and her lovely eyes supplicated, her breast heaved, her mouth was held out as if for a kiss, and her new-born passion for Sauvresy burst out into delirium.

"Clement," she stammered, in a voice full of tenderness, "my husband, Clement!"

He directed toward her a glance of hatred.

"What do you wish?"

She did not know how to begin—she hesitated, trembled and sobbed.

"Hector would not kill himself," said she, "but I——"

"Well, what do you wish to say? Speak!"

"It was I, a wretch, who have killed you. I will not survive you."

An inexpressible anguish distorted Sauvresy's features. She killed herself! If so, his vengeance was vain;

his own death would then appear only ridiculous and absurd. And he knew that Bertha would not be wanting in courage at the critical moment.

She waited, while he reflected.

"You are free," said he, at last, "this would merely be a sacrifice to Hector. If you died, he would marry Laurence Courtois, and in a year would forget even our name."

Bertha sprang to her feet; she pictured Hector to herself married and happy. A triumphant smile, like a sun's ray, brightened Sauvresy's pale face. He had touched the right chord. He might sleep in peace as to his vengeance. Bertha would live. He knew how hateful to each other were these enemies whom he left linked together.

The servants came in one by one; nearly all of them had been long in Sauvresy's service, and they loved him as a good master. They wept and groaned to see him lying there so pale and haggard, with the stamp of death already on his forehead. Sauvresy spoke to them in a feeble voice, which was occasionally interrupted by distressing hiccoughs. He thanked them, he said, for their attachment and fidelity, and wished to apprise them that he had left each of them a goodly sum in his will. Then turning to Bertha and Hector, he resumed:

"You have witnessed, my people, the care and solicitude with which my bedside has been surrounded by this incomparable friend and my adored Bertha. You have seen their devotion. Alas, I know how keen their sorrow will be! But if they wish to soothe my last moments and give me a happy death, they will assent to the prayer which I earnestly make to them, and will swear to espouse each other after I am gone. Oh, my

beloved friends, this seems cruel to you now ; but you know not how all human pain is dulled in me. You are young, life has yet much happiness in store for you. I conjure you yield to a dying man's entreaties ! ”

They approached the bed, and Sauvresy put Bertha's hand into Hector's.

“ Do you swear to obey me ? ” asked he.

They shuddered to hold each other's hands, and seemed near fainting ; but they answered, and were heard to murmur :

“ We swear it.”

The servants retired, grieved at this distressing scene, and Bertha muttered :

“ Oh, 'tis infamous, 'tis horrible ! ”

“ Infamous—yes,” returned Sauvresy, “ but not more so than your caresses, Bertha, or than your hand-pressures, Hector ; not more horrible than your plans, than your hopes——”

His voice sank into a rattle. Soon the agony commenced. Horrible convulsions distorted his limbs ; twice or thrice he cried out :

“ I am cold ; I am cold ! ”

His body was indeed stiff, and nothing could warm it.

Despair filled the house, for a death so sudden was not looked for. The domestics came and went, whispering to each other, “ He is going, poor monsieur ; poor madame ! ”

Soon the convulsions ceased. He lay extended on his back, breathing so feebly that twice they thought his breath had ceased forever. At last, a little before ten o'clock, his cheeks suddenly colored and he shuddered. He rose up in bed, his eye staring, his arm stretched out toward the window, and he cried :

"There—behind the curtain—I see them—I see them!"

A last convulsion stretched him again on his pillow. Clement Sauvresy was dead!

XXI

The old justice of the peace ceased reading his voluminous record. His hearers, the detective and the doctor remained silent under the influence of this distressing narrative. M. Plantat had read it impressively, throwing himself into the recital as if he had been personally an actor in the scenes described.

M. Lecoq was the first to recover himself.

"A strange man, Sauvresy," said he.

It was Sauvresy's extraordinary idea of vengeance which struck him in the story. He admired his "good playing" in a drama in which he knew he was going to yield up his life.

"I don't know many people," pursued the detective, "capable of so fearful a firmness. To let himself be poisoned so slowly and gently by his wife! Brrr! It makes a man shiver all over!"

"He knew how to avenge himself," muttered the doctor.

"Yes," answered M. Plantat, "yes, Doctor; he knew how to avenge himself, and more terribly than he supposed, or than you can imagine."

The detective rose from his seat. He had remained motionless, glued to his chair for more than three hours, and his legs were benumbed.

"For my part," said he, "I can very well conceive what an infernal existence the murderers began to suffer the day after their victim's death. You have

depicted them, Monsieur Plantat, with the hand of a master. I know them as well after your description as if I had studied them face to face for ten years."

He spoke deliberately, and watched for the effect of what he said in M. Plantat's countenance.

"Where on earth did this old fellow get all these details?" he asked himself. "Did he write this narrative, and if not, who did? How was it, if he had all this information, that he has said nothing?"

M. Plantat appeared to be unconscious of the detective's searching look.

"I know that Sauvresy's body was not cold," said he, "before his murderers began to threaten each other with death."

"Unhappily for them," observed Dr. Gendron, "Sauvresy had foreseen the probability of his widow's using up the rest of the vial of poison."

"Ah, he was shrewd," said M. Lecoq, in a tone of conviction, "very shrewd."

"Bertha could not pardon Hector," continued M. Plantat, "for refusing to take the revolver and blow his brains out; Sauvresy, you see, had foreseen that. Bertha thought that if her lover were dead, her husband would have forgotten all; and it is impossible to tell whether she was mistaken or not."

"And nobody knew anything of this horrible struggle that was going on in the house?"

"No one ever suspected anything."

"It's marvellous!"

"Say, Monsieur Lecoq, that is scarcely credible. Never was dissimulation so crafty, and above all, so wonderfully sustained. If you should question the first person you met in Orcival, he would tell you, as our worthy Courtois this morning told Monsieur Dom-

ini, that the count and countess were a model pair and adored each other. Why I, who knew—or suspected, I should say—what had passed, was deceived myself.”

Promptly as M. Plantat had corrected himself, his slip of the tongue did not escape M. Lecoq.

“Was it really a slip, or not?” he asked himself.

“These wretches have been terribly punished,” pursued M. Plantat, “and it is impossible to pity them; all would have gone rightly if Sauvresy, intoxicated by his hatred, had not committed a blunder which was almost a crime.”

“A crime!” exclaimed the doctor.

M. Lecoq smiled and muttered in a low tone:

“Laurence.”

But low as he had spoken, M. Plantat heard him.

“Yes, Monsieur Lecoq,” said he severely. “Yes, Laurence. Sauvresy did a detestable thing when he thought of making this poor girl the accomplice, or I should say, the instrument of his wrath. He piteously threw her between these two wretches, without asking himself whether she would be broken. It was by using Laurence’s name that he persuaded Bertha not to kill herself. Yet he knew of Trémorrel’s passion for her, he knew her love for him, and he knew that his friend was capable of anything. He, who had so well foreseen all that could serve his vengeance, did not deign to foresee that Laurence might be dishonored; and yet he left her disarmed before this most cowardly and infamous of men!”

The detective reflected.

“There is one thing,” said he, “that I can’t explain. Why was it that these two, who execrated each other, and whom the implacable will of their victim chained together despite themselves, did not separate or one

accord the day after their marriage, when they had fulfilled the condition which had established their crime?"

The old justice of the peace shook his head.

"I see," he answered, "that I have not yet made you understand Bertha's resolute character. Hector would have been delighted with a separation; his wife could not consent to it. Ah, Sauvresy knew her well! She saw her life ruined, a horrible remorse lacerated her; she must have a victim upon whom to expiate her errors and crimes; this victim was Hector. Ravenous for her prey, she would not let him go for anything in the world."

"I' faith," observed Dr. Gendron, "your Trémoré was a chicken-hearted wretch. What had he to fear when Sauvresy's manuscript was once destroyed?"

"Who told you it had been destroyed?" interrupted M. Plantat.

M. Lecoq at this stopped promenading up and down the room, and sat down opposite M. Plantat.

"The whole case lies there," said he, "whether these proofs have or have not been destroyed."

M. Plantat did not choose to answer directly.

"Do you know," asked he, "to whom Sauvresy confided them for keeping?"

"Ah," cried the detective, as if a sudden idea had enlightened him, "it was you."

He added to himself, "Now, my good man, I begin to see where all your information comes from."

"Yes, it was I," resumed M. Plantat. "On the day of the marriage of Madame Sauvresy and Count Hector, in conformity with the last wishes of my dying friend, I went to Valfeuillu and asked to see Monsieur and Madame de Trémoré. Although they were full of company, they received me at once in the little room

on the ground-floor where Sauvresy was murdered. They were both very pale and terribly troubled. They evidently guessed the purpose of my visit, for they lost no time in admitting me to an interview. After saluting them I addressed myself to Bertha, being enjoined to do so by the written instructions I had received; this was another instance of Sauvresy's foresight. 'Madame,' said I, 'I was charged by your late husband to hand to you, on the day of your second marriage, this package, which he confided to my care.' She took the package, in which the bottle and the manuscript were enclosed, with a smiling, even joyous air, thanked me warmly, and went out. The count's expression instantly changed; he appeared very restless and agitated; he seemed to be on coals. I saw well enough that he burned to rush after his wife, but dared not. I was going to retire; but he stopped me. 'Pardon me,' said he, abruptly, 'you will permit me, will you not? I will return immediately,' with which he ran out. When I saw him and his wife a few minutes afterward, they were both very red; their eyes had a strange expression and their voices trembled, as they accompanied me to the door. They had certainly been having a violent altercation."

"The rest may be conjectured," interrupted M. Lecoq. "She had gone to secrete the manuscript in some safe place; and when her new husband asked her to give it up to him, she replied, 'Look for it.'"

"Sauvresy had enjoined on me to give it only into her hands."

"Oh, he knew how to work his revenge. He had it given to his wife so that she might hold a terrible arm against Trémoré, all ready to crush him. If he revolted, she always had this instrument of torture at

hand. Ah, the man was a miserable wretch, and **she** must have made him suffer terribly."

"Yes," said Dr. Gendron, "up to the very day he killed her."

The detective had resumed his promenade up and down the library.

"The question as to the poison," said he, "remains. It is a simple one to resolve, because we've got the man who sold it to her in that closet."

"Besides," returned the doctor, "I can tell something about the poison. This rascal of a Robelot stole it from my laboratory, and I know only too well what it is, even if the symptoms, so well described by our friend Plantat, had not indicated its name to me. I was at work upon aconite when Sauvresy died; and he was poisoned with aconitine."

"Ah, with aconitine," said M. Lecoq, surprised. "It's the first time that I ever met with that poison. Is it a new thing?"

"Not exactly. Medea is said to have extracted her deadliest poisons from aconite, and it was employed in Rome and Greece in criminal executions."

"And I did not know of it! But I have very little time to study. Besides, this poison of Medea's was perhaps lost, as was that of the Borgias; so many of these things are!"

"No, it was not lost, be assured. But we only know of it nowadays by Mathiole's experiments on felons sentenced to death, in the sixteenth century; by Hers, who isolated the active principle, the alkaloid, in 1833, and lastly by certain experiments made by Bouchardat, who pretends——"

Unfortunately, when Dr. Gendron was set agoing on poisons, it was difficult to stop him; but M. Lecoq, on

the other hand, never lost sight of the end he had in view.

"Pardon me for interrupting you, Doctor," said he. "But would traces of aconitine be found in a body which had been two years buried? For Monsieur Domini is going to order the exhumation of Sauvresy."

"The tests of aconitine are not sufficiently well known to permit of the isolation of it in a body. Bouchardat tried ioduret of potassium, but his experiment was not successful."

"The deuce!" said M. Lecoq. "That's annoying." The doctor smiled benignly.

"Reassure yourself," said he. "No such process was in existence—so I invented one."

"Ah," cried Plantat. "Your sensitive paper!"

"Precisely."

"And could you find aconitine in Sauvresy's body?"

"Undoubtedly."

M. Lecoq was radiant, as if he were now certain of fulfilling what had seemed to him a very difficult task.

"Very well," said he. "Our inquest seems to be complete. The history of the victims imparted to us by Monsieur Plantat gives us the key to all the events which have followed the unhappy Sauvresy's death. Thus, the hatred of this pair, who were in appearance so united, is explained; and it is also clear why Hector has ruined a charming young girl with a splendid dowry, instead of making her his wife. There is nothing surprising in Trémorél's casting aside his name and personality to reappear under another guise; he killed his wife because he was constrained to do so by the logic of events. He could not fly while she was alive, and yet he could not continue to live at Val-leuillu. And above all, the paper for which he searched

with such desperation, when every moment was an affair of life and death to him, was none other than Sauvresy's manuscript, his condemnation and the proof of his first crime."

M. Lecoq talked eagerly, as if he had a personal animosity against the Count de Trémorrel; such was his nature; and he always avowed laughingly that he could not help having a grudge against the criminals whom he pursued. There was an account to settle between him and them; hence the ardor of his pursuit. Perhaps it was a simple matter of instinct with him, like that which impels the hunting hound on the track of his game.

"It is clear enough now," he went on, "that it was Mademoiselle Courtois who put an end to his hesitation and eternal delay. His passion for her, irritated by obstacles, goaded him to delirium. On learning her condition, he lost his head and forgot all prudence and reason. He was wearied, too, of a punishment which began anew each morning; he saw himself lost, and his wife sacrificing herself for the malignant pleasure of sacrificing him. Terrified, he took the resolution to commit this murder."

Many of the circumstances which had established M. Lecoq's conviction had escaped Dr. Gendron.

"What!" cried he, stupefied. "Do you believe in Mademoiselle Laurence's complicity?"

The detective earnestly protested by a gesture.

"No, Doctor, certainly not; heaven forbid that I should have such an idea. Mademoiselle Courtois was and is still ignorant of this crime. But she knew that Trémorrel would abandon his wife for her. This flight had been discussed, planned, and agreed upon between

them; they made an appointment to meet at a certain place, on a certain day."

"But this letter," said the doctor.

M. Plantat could scarcely conceal his emotion when Laurence was being talked about.

"This letter," cried he, "which has plunged her family into the deepest grief, and which will perhaps kill poor Courtois, is only one more scene of the infamous drama which the count has planned."

"Oh," said the doctor, "is it possible?"

"I am firmly of Monsieur Plantat's opinion," said the detective. "Last evening we had the same suspicion at the same moment at the mayor's. I read and re-read her letter, and could have sworn that it did not emanate from herself. The count gave her a rough draft from which she copied it. We mustn't deceive ourselves; this letter was meditated, pondered on, and composed at leisure. Those were not the expressions of an unhappy young girl of twenty who was going to kill herself to escape dishonor."

"Perhaps you are right," remarked the doctor visibly moved. "But how can you imagine that Trémoré succeeded in persuading her to do this wretched act?"

"How? See here, Doctor, I am not much experienced in such things, having seldom had occasion to study the characters of well-brought-up young girls; yet it seems to me very simple. Mademoiselle Courtois saw the time coming when her disgrace would be public, and so prepared for it, and was even ready to die if necessary."

M. Plantat shuddered; a conversation which he had had with Laurence occurred to him. She had asked him, he remembered, about certain poisonous plants

which he was cultivating, and had been anxious to know how the poisonous juices could be extracted from them.

"Yes," said he, "she has thought of dying."

"Well," resumed the detective, "the count took her in one of the moods when these sad thoughts haunted the poor girl, and was easily able to complete his work of ruin. She undoubtedly told him that she preferred death to shame, and he proved to her that, being in the condition in which she was, she had no right to kill herself. He said that he was very unhappy; and that not being free, he could not repair his fault; but he offered to sacrifice his life for her. What should she do to save both of them? Abandon her parents, make them believe that she had committed suicide, while he, on his side, would desert his house and his wife. Doubtless she resisted for awhile; but she finally consented to everything; she fled, and copied and posted the infamous letter dictated by her lover."

The doctor was convinced.

"Yes," he muttered, "those are doubtless the means he employed."

"But what an idiot he was," resumed M. Lecoq, "not to perceive that the strange coincidence between his disappearance and Laurence's suicide would be remarked! He said to himself, 'Probably people will think that I, as well as my wife, have been murdered; and the law, having its victim in Guespin, will not look for any other.'"

M. Plantat made a gesture of impotent rage.

"Ah," cried he, "and we know not where the wretch has hid himself and Laurence."

The detective took him by the arm and pressed it.

"Reassure yourself," said he, coolly. "We'll find

him, or my name's not Lecoq ; and to be honest, I must say that our task does not seem to me a difficult one."

Several timid knocks at the door interrupted the speaker. It was late, and the household was already awake and about. Mme. Petit in her anxiety and curiosity had put her ear to the key-hole at least ten times, but in vain.

"What can they be up to in there?" said she to Louis. "Here they've been shut up these twelve hours without eating or drinking. At all events I'll get breakfast."

It was not Mme. Petit, however, who dared to knock on the door, but Louis, the gardener, who came to tell his master of the ravages which had been made in his flower-pots and shrubs. At the same time he brought in certain singular articles which he had picked up on the sward, and which M. Lecoq recognized at once.

"Heavens!" cried he, "I forgot myself. Here I go on quietly talking with my face exposed, as if it was not broad daylight ; and people might come in at any moment!" And turning to Louis, who was very much surprised to see this dark young man whom he had certainly not admitted the night before, he added :

"Give me those little toilet articles, my good fellow ; they belong to me."

Then, by a turn of his hand, he readjusted his physiognomy of last night, while the master of the house went out to give some orders, which M. Lecoq did so deftly, that when M. Plantat returned, he could scarcely believe his eyes.

They sat down to breakfast and ate their meal as silently as they had done the dinner of the evening before, losing no time about it. They appreciated the value of the passing moments ; M. Domini was waiting

for them at Corbeil, and was doubtless getting impatient at their delay.

Louis had just placed a sumptuous dish of fruit upon the table, when it occurred to M. Lecoq that Robelot was still shut up in the closet.

"Probably the rascal needs something," said he.

M. Plantat wished to send his servant to him; but M. Lecoq objected.

"He's a dangerous rogue," said he. "I'll go myself."

He went out, but almost instantly his voice was heard:

"Messieurs! Messieurs, see here!"

The doctor and M. Plantat hastened into the library.

Across the threshold of the closet was stretched the body of the bone-setter. He had killed himself.

XXII

Robelot must have had rare presence of mind and courage to kill himself in that obscure closet, without making enough noise to arouse the attention of those in the library. He had wound a string tightly around his neck, and had used a piece of pencil as a twister, and so had strangled himself. He did not, however, betray the hideous look which the popular belief attributes to those who have died by strangulation. His face was pale, his eyes and mouth half open, and he had the appearance of one who has gradually and without much pain lost his consciousness by congestion of the brain.

"Perhaps he is not quite dead yet," said the doctor.

He quickly pulled out his case of instruments and knelt beside the motionless body.

This incident seemed to annoy M. Lecoq very much ; just as everything was, as he said, " running on wheels," his principal witness, whom he had caught at the peril of his life, had escaped him. M. Plantat, on the contrary, seemed tolerably well satisfied, as if the death of Robelot furthered projects which he was secretly nourishing, and fulfilled his secret hopes. Besides, it little mattered if the object was to oppose M. Domini's theories and induce him to change his opinion. This corpse had more eloquence in it than the most explicit of confessions.

The doctor, seeing the uselessness of his pains, got up.

" It's all over," said he. " The asphyxia was accomplished in a very few moments."

The bone-setter's body was carefully laid on the floor in the library.

" There is nothing more to be done," said M. Plantat, " but to carry him home ; we will follow on so as to seal up his effects, which perhaps contain important papers. Run to the mairie," he added, turning to his servant, " and get a litter and two stout men."

Dr. Gendron's presence being no longer necessary, he promised M. Plantat to rejoin him at Robelot's, and started off to inquire after M. Courtois's condition.

Louis lost no time, and soon reappeared followed not by two, but ten men. The body was placed on a litter and carried away. Robelot occupied a little house of three rooms, where he lived by himself ; one of the rooms served as a shop, and was full of plants, dried herbs, grain, and other articles appertaining to his vocation as an herbist. He slept in the back room, which was better furnished than most country rooms. His body was placed upon the bed. Among the men who

had brought it was the "drummer of the town," who was at the same time the grave-digger. This man, expert in everything pertaining to funerals, gave all the necessary instructions on the present occasion, himself taking part in the lugubrious task.

Meanwhile M. Plantat examined the furniture, the keys of which had been taken from the deceased's pocket. The value of the property found in the possession of this man, who had, two years before, lived from day to day on what he could pick up, were an overwhelming proof against him in addition to the others already discovered. But M. Plantat looked in vain for any new indications of which he was ignorant. He found deeds of the Morin property and of the Frapesle and Peyron lands; there were also two bonds, for one hundred and fifty and eight hundred and twenty francs, signed by two Orcival citizens in Robelot's favor. M. Plantat could scarcely conceal his disappointment.

"Nothing of importance," whispered he in M. Lecoq's ear. "How do you explain that?"

"Perfectly," responded the detective. "He was a sly rogue, this Robelot, and he was cunning enough to conceal his sudden fortune and patient enough to appear to be years accumulating it. You only find in his secretary effects which he thought he could avow without danger. How much is there in all?"

Plantat rapidly added up the different sums, and said:

"About fourteen thousand five hundred francs."

"Madame Sauvresy gave him more than that," said the detective, positively. "If he had no more than this, he would not have been such a fool as to put it all into land. He must have a hoard of money concealed somewhere."

"Of course he must. But where?"

“ Ah, let me look.”

He began to rummage about, peering into everything in the room, moving the furniture, sounding the floor with his heels, and rapping on the wall here and there. Finally he came to the fireplace, before which he stopped.

“ This is July,” said he. “ And yet there are cinders here in the fireplace.”

“ People sometimes neglect to clean them out in the spring.”

“ True ; but are not these very clean and distinct ? I don’t find any of the light dust and soot on them which ought to be there after they have lain several months.”

He went into the second room whither he had sent the men after they had completed their task, and said :

“ I wish one of you would get me a pickaxe.”

All the men rushed out ; M. Lecoq returned to his companion.

“ Surely,” muttered he, as if apart, “ these cinders have been disturbed recently, and if they have been——”

He knelt down, and pushing the cinders away, laid bare the stones of the fireplace. Then taking a thin piece of wood, he easily inserted it into the cracks between the stones.

“ See here, Monsieur Plantat,” said he. “ There is no cement between these stones, and they are movable ; the treasure must be here.”

When the pickaxe was brought, he gave a single blow with it ; the stones gaped apart, and betrayed a wide and deep hole between them.

“ Ah,” cried he, with a triumphant air, “ I knew it well enough.”

The hole was full of rouleaux of twenty-franc pieces ;

on counting them, M. Lecoq found that there were nineteen thousand five hundred francs.

The old justice's face betrayed an expression of profound grief.

"That," thought he, "is the price of my poor Sauvresy's life."

M. Lecoq found a small piece of paper, covered with figures, deposited with the gold; it seemed to be Robelot's accounts. He had put on the left hand the sum of forty thousand francs; on the right hand, various sums were inscribed, the total of which was twenty-one thousand five hundred francs. It was only too clear; Mme. Sauvresy had paid Robelot forty thousand francs for the bottle of poison. There was nothing more to learn at his house. They locked the money up in the secretary, and affixed seals everywhere, leaving two men on guard.

But M. Lecoq was not quite satisfied yet. What was the manuscript which Plantat had read? At first he had thought that it was simply a copy of the papers confided to him by Sauvresy; but it could not be that; Sauvresy couldn't have thus described the last agonizing scenes of his life. This mystery mightily worried the detective and dampened the joy he felt at having solved the crime at Valfeuille. He made one more attempt to surprise Plantat into satisfying his curiosity. Taking him by the coat-lapel, he drew him into the embrasure of a window, and with his most innocent air, said:

"I beg your pardon, are we going back to your house?"

"Why should we? You know the doctor is going to meet us here."

"I think we may need the papers you read to us, to convince Monsieur Domini."

M. Plantat smiled sadly, and looking steadily at him, replied:

"You are very sly, Monsieur Lecoq; but I too am sly enough to keep the last key of the mystery of which you hold all the others."

"Believe me—" stammered M. Lecoq.

"I believe," interrupted his companion, "that you would like very well to know the source of my information. Your memory is too good for you to forget that when I began last evening I told you that this narrative was for your ear alone, and that I had only one object in disclosing it—to aid our search. Why should you wish the judge of instruction to see these notes, which are purely personal, and have no legal or authentic character?"

He reflected a few moments, and added:

"I have too much confidence in you, Monsieur Lecoq, and esteem you too much, not to have every trust that you will not divulge these strict confidences. What you will say will be of as much weight as anything I might divulge—especially now that you have Robelot's body to back your assertions, as well as the money found in his possession. If Monsieur Domini still hesitates to believe you, you know that the doctor promises to find the poison which killed Sauvresy——"

M. Plantat stopped and hesitated.

"In short," he resumed, "I think you will be able to keep silence as to what you have heard from me."

M. Lecoq took him by the hand, and pressing it significantly, said:

"Count on me, Monsieur."

At this moment Dr. Gendron appeared at the door.

"Courtois is better," said he. "He weeps like a child; but he will come out of it."

"Heaven be praised!" cried the old justice of the peace. "Now, since you've come, let us hurry off to Corbeil; Monsieur Domini, who is waiting for us this morning, must be mad with impatience."

XXIII

M. Plantat, in speaking of M. Domini's impatience, did not exaggerate the truth. That personage was furious; he could not comprehend the reason of the prolonged absence of his three fellow-workers of the previous evening. He had installed himself early in the morning in his cabinet, at the court-house, enveloped in his judicial robe; and he counted the minutes as they passed. His reflections during the night, far from shaking, had only confirmed his opinion. As he receded from the period of the crime, he found it very simple and natural—indeed, the easiest thing in the world to account for. He was annoyed that the rest did not share his convictions, and he awaited their report in a state of irritation which his clerk only too well perceived. He had eaten his breakfast in his cabinet, so as to be sure and be beforehand with M. Lecoq. It was a useless precaution; for the hours passed on and no one arrived.

To kill time, he sent for Guespin and Bertaud and questioned them anew, but learned nothing more than he had extracted from them the night before. One of the prisoners swore by all things sacred that he knew nothing except what he had already told; the other preserved an obstinate and ferocious silence, confining

himself to the remark: "I know that I am lost; do with me what you please."

M. Domini was just going to send a mounted gendarme to Orcival to find out the cause of the delay, when those whom he awaited were announced. He quickly gave the order to admit them, and so keen was his curiosity, despite what he called his dignity, that he got up and went forward to meet them.

"How late you are!" said he.

"And yet we haven't lost a minute," replied M. Plantat. "We haven't even been in bed."

"There is news, then? Has the count's body been found?"

"There is much news, Monsieur," said M. Lecoq. "But the count's body has not been found, and I dare even say that it will not be found—for the very simple fact that he has not been killed. The reason is that he was not one of the victims, as at first supposed, but the assassin."

At this distinct declaration on M. Lecoq's part, the judge started in his seat.

"Why, this is folly!" cried he.

M. Lecoq never smiled in a magistrate's presence.

"I do not think so," said he, coolly. "I am persuaded that if Monsieur Domini will grant me his attention for half an hour I will have the honor of persuading him to share my opinion."

M. Domini's slight shrug of the shoulders did not escape the detective, but he calmly continued:

"More; I am sure that Monsieur Domini will not permit me to leave his cabinet without a warrant to arrest Count Hector de Trémorrel, whom at present he thinks to be dead."

"Possibly," said M. Domini. "Proceed."

M. Lecoq then rapidly detailed the facts gathered by himself and M. Plantat from the beginning of the inquest. He narrated them not as if he had guessed or been told of them, but in their order of time and in such a manner that each new incident which he mentioned followed naturally from the preceding one. He had completely resumed his character of a retired haberdasher, with a little piping voice, and such obsequious expressions as, "I have the honor," and "If Monsieur the Judge will deign to permit me;" he resorted to the candy-box with the portrait, and, as the night before at Valfeuilu, chewed a lozenge when he came to the more striking points. M. Domini's surprise increased every minute as he proceeded; while at times, exclamations of astonishment passed his lips: "Is it possible?" "That is hard to believe!"

M. Lecoq finished his recital; he tranquilly munched a lozenge, and added:

"What does Monsieur the Judge of Instruction think now?"

M. Domini was fain to confess that he was almost satisfied. A man, however, never permits an opinion deliberately and carefully formed to be refuted by one whom he looks on as an inferior, without a secret chagrin. But in this case the evidence was too abundant, and too positive to be resisted.

"I am convinced," said he, "that a crime was committed on Monsieur Sauvresy with the dearly paid assistance of this Robelot. To-morrow I shall give instructions to Doctor Gendron to proceed at once to an exhumation and autopsy of the late master of Valfeuilu."

"And you may be sure that I shall find the poison," chimed in the doctor.

"Very well," resumed M. Domini. "But does it necessarily follow that because Monsieur Trémoré poisoned his friend to marry his widow, he yesterday killed his wife and then fled? I don't think so."

"Pardon me," objected Lecoq, gently. "It seems to me that Mademoiselle Courtois's supposed suicide proves at least something."

"That needs clearing up. This coincidence can only be a matter of pure chance."

"But I am sure that Monsieur Trémoré shaved himself—of that we have proof; then, we did not find the boots which, according to the valet, he put on the morning of the murder."

"Softly, softly," interrupted the judge. "I don't pretend that you are absolutely wrong; it must be as you say; only I give you my objections. Let us admit that Trémoré killed his wife, that he fled and is alive. Does that clear Guespin, and show that he took no part in the murder?"

This was evidently the flaw in Lecoq's case; but being convinced of Hector's guilt, he had given little heed to the poor gardener, thinking that his innocence would appear of itself when the real criminal was arrested. He was about to reply, when footsteps and voices were heard in the corridor.

"Stop," said M. Domini. "Doubtless we shall now hear something important about Guespin."

"Are you expecting some new witness?" asked M. Plantat.

"No; I expect one of the Corbeil police to whom I have given an important mission."

"Regarding Guespin?"

"Yes. Very early this morning a young working-woman of the town, whom Guespin has been courting,

brought me an excellent photograph of him. I gave this portrait to the agent with instructions to go to the Vulcan's Forges and ascertain if Guespin had been seen there, and whether he bought anything there night before last."

M. Lecoq was inclined to be jealous ; the judge's proceeding ruffled him, and he could not conceal an expressive grimace.

"I am truly grieved," said he, dryly, "that Monsieur the Judge has so little confidence in me that he thinks it necessary to give me assistance."

This sensitiveness aroused M. Domini, who replied :

"Eh ! my dear man, you can't be everywhere at once. I think you very shrewd, but you were not here, and I was in a hurry."

"A false step is often irreparable."

"Make yourself easy ; I've sent an intelligent man."

At this moment the door opened, and the policeman referred to by the judge appeared on the threshold. He was a muscular man about forty years old, with a military pose, a heavy mustache, and thick brows, meeting over the nose. He had a sly rather than a shrewd expression, so that his appearance alone seemed to awake all sorts of suspicions and put one instinctively on his guard.

"Good news !" said he in a big voice. "I didn't make the journey to Paris for the King of Prussia ; we are right on the track of this rogue of a Guespin."

M. Domini encouraged him with an approving gesture.

"See here, Goulard," said he, "let us go on in order if we can. You went then, according to my instructions, to the Vulcan's Forges?"

"At once, Monsieur."

"Precisely. Had they seen the prisoner there?"

"Yes; on the evening of Wednesday, July 8th."

"At what hour?"

"About ten o'clock, a few minutes before they shut up; so that he was remarked, and the more distinctly observed."

The judge moved his lips as if to make an objection, but was stopped by a gesture from M. Lecoq.

"And who recognized the photograph?"

"Three of the clerks. Guespin's manner first attracted their attention. It was strange, so they said, and they thought he was drunk, or at least tipsy. Then their recollection was fixed by his talking very fast, saying that he was going to patronize them a great deal, and that if they would make a reduction in their prices he would procure for them the custom of an establishment whose confidence he possessed, the Gentil Jardinier, which bought a great many gardening tools."

M. Domini interrupted the examination to consult some papers which lay before him on his desk. It was, he found, the Gentil Jardinier which had procured Guespin his place in Trémoré's household. The judge remarked this aloud, and added:

"The question of identity seems to be settled. Guespin was undoubtedly at the Vulcan's Forges on Wednesday night."

"So much the better for him," M. Lecoq could not help muttering.

The judge heard him, but though the remark seemed singular to him he did not notice it, and went on questioning the agent.

"Well, did they tell you what Guespin went there to obtain?"

"The clerks recollected it perfectly. He first bought a hammer, a cold chisel, and a file."

"I knew it," exclaimed the judge. "And then?"

"Then——"

Here the man, ambitious to make a sensation among his hearers, rolled his eyes tragically, and in a dramatic tone, added:

"Then he bought a dirk knife!"

The judge felt that he was triumphing over M. Lecoq.

"Well," said he to the detective in his most ironical tone, "what do you think of your friend now? What do you say to this honest and worthy young man, who, on the very night of the crime, leaves a wedding where he would have had a good time, to go and buy a hammer, a chisel, and a dirk—everything, in short, used in the murder and the mutilation of the body?"

Dr. Gendron seemed a little disconcerted at this, but a sly smile overspread M. Plantat's face. As for M. Lecoq, he had the air of one who is shocked by objections which he knows he ought to annihilate by a word, and yet who is fain to be resigned to waste time in useless talk, which he might put to great profit.

"I think, Monsieur," said he, very humbly, "that the murderers at Valfeuilu did not use either a hammer or a chisel, or a file, and that they brought no instrument at all from outside—since they used a hammer."

"And didn't they have a dirk besides?" asked the judge in a bantering tone, confident that he was on the right path.

"That is another question, I confess; but it is a difficult one to answer."

He began to lose patience. He turned toward the Corbeil policeman, and abruptly asked him:

“Is this all you know?”

The big man with the thick eyebrows superciliously eyed this little Parisian who dared to question him thus. He hesitated so long that M. Lecoq, more rudely than before, repeated his question.

“Yes, that’s all,” said Goulard at last, “and I think it’s sufficient; the judge thinks so too; and he is the only person who gives me orders, and whose approbation I wish for.”

M. Lecoq shrugged his shoulders, and proceeded:

“Let’s see; did you ask what was the shape of the dirk bought by Guespin? Was it long or short, wide or narrow?”

“Faith, no. What was the use?”

“Simply, my brave fellow, to compare this weapon with the victim’s wounds, and to see whether its handle corresponds to that which left a distinct and visible imprint between the victim’s shoulders.”

“I forgot it; but it is easily remedied.”

“An oversight may, of course, be pardoned; but you can at least tell us in what sort of money Guespin paid for his purchases?”

The poor man seemed so embarrassed, humiliated, and vexed, that the judge hastened to his assistance.

“The money is of little consequence, it seems to me,” said he.

“I beg you to excuse me if I don’t agree with you,” returned M. Lecoq. “This matter may be a very grave one. What is the most serious evidence against Guespin? The money found in his pocket. Let us suppose for a moment that night before last, at ten o’clock, he changed a one-thousand-franc note in Paris. Could the obtaining of that note have been the motive of the crime at Valfeuillu? No, for up to that hour the crime

had not been committed. Where could it have come from? That is no concern of mine, at present. But if my theory is correct, justice will be forced to agree that the several hundred francs found in Guespin's possession can and must be the change for the note."

"That is only a theory," urged M. Domini in an irritated tone.

"That is true; but one which may turn out a certainty. It remains for me to ask this man how Guespin carried away the articles which he bought? Did he simply slip them into his pocket, or did he have them done up in a bundle, and if so, how?"

The detective spoke in a sharp, hard, freezing tone, with a bitter raillery in it, frightening his Corbeil colleague out of his assurance.

"I don't know," stammered the latter. "They didn't tell me—I thought——"

M. Lecoq raised his hands as if to call the heavens to witness: in his heart, he was charmed with this fine occasion to revenge himself for M. Domini's disdain. He could not, dared not say anything to the judge; but he had the right to banter the agent and visit his wrath upon him.

"Ah so, my lad," said he, "what did you go to Paris for? To show Guespin's picture and detail the crime to the people at Vulcan's Forges? They ought to be very grateful to you; but Madame Petit, Monsieur Plantat's housekeeper, would have done as much."

At this stroke the man began to get angry; he frowned, and in his bluffest tone, began:

"Look here now, you——"

"Ta, ta, ta," interrupted M. Lecoq. "Let me alone, and know who is talking to you. I am Monsieur Lecoq."

The effect of the famous detective's name on his antagonist was magical. He naturally laid down his arms and surrendered, straightway becoming respectful and obsequious. It almost flattered him to be roughly handled by such a celebrity. He muttered, in an abashed and admiring tone :

"What, is it possible? You, Monsieur Lecoq!"

"Yes, it is I, young man; but console yourself; I bear no grudge against you. You don't know your trade, but you have done me a service and you have brought us a convincing proof of Guespin's innocence."

M. Domini looked on at this scene with secret chagrin. His recruit went over to the enemy, yielding without a struggle to a confessed superiority. M. Lecoq's presumption, in speaking of a prisoner's innocence whose guilt seemed to the judge indisputable, exasperated him.

"And what is this tremendous proof, if you please?" asked he.

"It is simple and striking," answered M. Lecoq, putting on his most frivolous air as his conclusions narrowed the field of probabilities.

"You doubtless recollect that when we were at Valfeuillu we found the hands of the clock in the bedroom stopped at twenty minutes past three. Distrusting foul play, I put the striking apparatus in motion—do you recall it? What happened? The clock struck eleven. That convinced us that the crime was committed before that hour. But don't you see that if Guespin was at the Vulcan's Forges at ten he could not have got back to Valfeuillu before midnight? Therefore it was not he who did the deed."

The detective, as he came to this conclusion, pulled out the inevitable box and helped himself to a lozenge,

at the same time bestowing upon the judge a smile which said:

“Get out of that, if you can.”

The judge's whole theory tumbled to pieces if M. Lecoq's deductions were right; but he could not admit that he had been so much deceived; he could not renounce an opinion formed by deliberate reflection.

“I don't pretend that Guespin is the only criminal,” said he. “He could only have been an accomplice; and that he was.”

“An accomplice? No, Judge, he was a victim. Ah, Trémoré is a great rascal! Don't you see now why he put forward the hands? At first I didn't perceive the object of advancing the time five hours; now it is clear. In order to implicate Guespin the crime must appear to have been committed after midnight, and——”

He suddenly checked himself and stopped with open mouth and fixed eyes as a new idea crossed his mind. The judge, who was bending over his papers trying to find something to sustain his position, did not perceive this.

“But then,” said the latter, “how do you explain Guespin's refusal to speak and to give an account of where he spent the night?”

M. Lecoq had now recovered from his emotion, and Dr. Gendron and M. Plantat, who were watching him with the deepest attention, saw a triumphant light in his eyes. Doubtless he had just found a solution of the problem which had been put to him.

“I understand,” replied he, “and can explain Guespin's obstinate silence. I should be perfectly amazed if he decided to speak just now.”

M. Domini misconstrued the meaning of this; he thought he saw in it a covert intention to banter him.

"He has had a night to reflect upon it," he answered. "Is not twelve hours enough to mature a system of defence?"

The detective shook his head doubtfully.

"It is certain that he does not need it," said he. "Our prisoner doesn't trouble himself about a system of defence, that I'll swear to."

"He keeps quiet, because he hasn't been able to get up a plausible story."

"No, no; believe me, he isn't trying to get up one. In my opinion, Guespin is a victim; that is, I suspect Trémoré of having set an infamous trap for him, into which he has fallen, and in which he sees himself so completely caught that he thinks it useless to struggle. The poor wretch is convinced that the more he resists the more surely he will tighten the web that is woven around him."

"I think so, too," said M. Plantat.

"The true criminal, Count Hector," resumed the detective, "lost his presence of mind at the last moment, and thus lost all the advantages which his previous caution had gained. Don't let us forget that he is an able man, perfidious enough to mature the most infamous stratagems, and unscrupulous enough to execute them. He knows that justice must have its victims, one for every crime; he does not forget that the police, as long as it has not the criminal, is always on the search with eye and ear open; and he has thrown us Guespin as a huntsman, closely pressed, throws his glove to the bear that is close upon him. Perhaps he thought that the innocent man would not be in danger of his life; at all events he hoped to gain time by this ruse; while the bear is smelling and turning over the glove, the huntsman gains ground, escapes and reaches

his place of refuge ; that was what Trémorel proposed to do."

The Corbeil policeman was now undoubtedly Lecoq's most enthusiastic listener. Goulard literally drank in his chief's words. He had never heard any of his colleagues express themselves with such fervor and authority ; he had had no idea of such eloquence, and he stood erect, as if some of the admiration which he saw in all the faces were reflected back on him. He grew in his own esteem as he thought that he was a soldier in an army commanded by such generals. He had no longer any opinion excepting that of his superior. It was not so easy to persuade, subjugate, and convince the judge.

"But," objected the latter, "you saw Guespin's countenance?"

"Ah, what matters the countenance—what does that prove? Don't we know if you and I were arrested to-morrow on a terrible charge, what our bearing would be?"

M. Domini gave a significant start ; this hypothesis scarcely pleased him.

"And yet you and I are familiar with the machinery of justice. When I arrested Lanscot, the poor servant in the Rue Marignan, his first words were: 'Come on, my account is good.' The morning that Papa Tabaret and I took the Viscount de Commarin as he was getting out of bed, on the accusation of having murdered the widow Lerouge, he cried: 'I am lost.' Yet neither of them were guilty ; but both of them, the viscount and the valet, equal before the terror of a possible mistake of justice, and running over in their thoughts the charges which would be brought against them, had a moment of overwhelming discouragement."

"But such discouragement does not last two days," said M. Domini.

M. Lecoq did not answer this; he went on, growing more animated as he proceeded.

"You and I have seen enough prisoners to know how deceitful appearances are, and how little they are to be trusted. It would be foolish to base a theory upon a prisoner's bearing. He who talked about 'the cry of innocence' was an idiot, just as the man was who prated about the 'pale stupor' of guilt. Neither crime nor virtue have, unhappily, any especial countenance. The Simon girl, who was accused of having killed her father, absolutely refused to answer any questions for twenty-two days; on the twenty-third, the murderer was caught. As to the Sylvain affair——"

M. Domini rapped lightly on his desk to check the detective. As a man, the judge held too obstinately to his opinions; as a magistrate he was equally obstinate, but was at the same time ready to make any sacrifice of his self-esteem if the voice of duty prompted it. M. Lecoq's arguments had not shaken his convictions, but they imposed on him the duty of informing himself at once, and to either conquer the detective or avow himself conquered.

"You seem to be pleading," said he to M. Lecoq. "There is no need of that here. We are not counsel and judge; the same honorable intentions animate us both. Each, in his sphere, is searching after the truth. You think you see it shining where I only discern clouds; and you may be mistaken as well as I."

Then by an act of heroism, he condescended to add: "What do you think I ought to do?"

The judge was at least rewarded for the effort he made by approving glances from M. Plantat and the

doctor. But M. Lecoq did not hasten to respond; he had many weighty reasons to advance; that, he saw, was not what was necessary. He ought to present the facts, there and at once, and produce one of those proofs which can be touched with the finger. How should he do it? His active mind searched eagerly for such a proof.

"Well?" insisted M. Domini.

"Ah," cried the detective. "Why can't I ask Guespin two or three questions?"

The judge frowned; the suggestion seemed to him rather presumptuous. It is formally laid down that the questioning of the accused should be done in secret, and by the judge alone, aided by his clerk. On the other hand it is decided, that after he has once been interrogated he may be confronted with witnesses. There are, besides, exceptions in favor of the members of the police force. M. Domini reflected whether there were any precedents to apply to the case.

"I don't know," he answered at last, "to what point the law permits me to consent to what you ask. However, as I am convinced the interests of truth outweigh all rules, I shall take it on myself to let you question Guespin."

He rang; a bailiff appeared.

"Has Guespin been carried back to prison?"

"Not yet, Monsieur."

"So much the better; have him brought in here."

M. Lecoq was beside himself with joy; he had not hoped to achieve such a victory over one so determined as M. Domini.

"He will speak now," said he, so full of confidence that his eyes shone, and he forgot the portrait of the dear defunct, "for I have three means of unloosening

his tongue, one of which is sure to succeed. But before he comes I should like to know one thing. Do you know whether Trémorel saw Jenny after Sauvresy's death?"

"Jenny?" asked M. Plantat, a little surprised.

"Yes."

"Certainly he did."

"Several times?"

"Pretty often. After the scene at the Belle Image the poor girl plunged into terrible dissipation. Whether she was smitten with remorse, or understood that it was her conduct which had killed Sauvresy, or suspected the crime, I don't know. She began, however, to drink furiously, falling lower and lower every week——"

"And the count really consented to see her again?"

"He was forced to do so; she tormented him, and he was afraid of her. When she had spent all her money she sent to him for more, and he gave it. Once he refused; and that very evening she went to him the worse for wine, and he had the greatest difficulty in the world to send her away again. In short, she knew what his relations with Madame Sauvresy had been, and she threatened him; it was a regular black-mailing operation. He told me all about the trouble she gave him, and added that he would not be able to get rid of her without shutting her up, which he could not bring himself to do."

"How long ago was their last interview?"

"Why," answered the doctor, "not three weeks ago, when I had a consultation at Melun, I saw the count and this demoiselle at a hotel window; when he saw me he suddenly drew back."

"Then," said the detective, "there is no longer any doubt——"

He stopped. Guespin came in between two gendarmes.

The unhappy gardener had aged twenty years in twenty-four hours. His eyes were haggard, his dry lips were bordered with foam.

"Let us see," said the judge. "Have you changed your mind about speaking?"

The prisoner did not answer.

"Have you decided to tell us about yourself?"

Guespin's rage made him tremble from head to foot, and his eyes became fiery.

"Speak!" said he hoarsely. "Why should I?"

He added with the gesture of a desperate man who abandons himself, renounces all struggling and all hope:

"What have I done to you, my God, that you torture me this way? What do you want me to say? That I did this crime—is that what you want? Well, then—yes—it was I. Now you are satisfied. Now cut my head off, and do it quick—for I don't want to suffer any longer."

A mournful silence welcomed Guespin's declaration. What, he confessed it!

M. Domini had at least the good taste not to exult; he kept still, and yet this avowal surprised him beyond all expression.

M. Lecoq alone, although surprised, was not absolutely put out of countenance. He approached Guespin and tapping him on the shoulder, said in a paternal tone:

"Come, comrade, what you are telling us is absurd. Do you think the judge has any secret grudge against

you? No, eh? Do you suppose I am interested to have you guillotined? Not at all. A crime has been committed, and we are trying to find the assassin. If you are innocent, help us to find the man who isn't. What were you doing from Wednesday evening till Thursday morning?"

But Guespin persisted in his ferocious and stupid obstinacy.

"I've said what I have to say," said he.

M. Lecoq changed his tone to one of severity, stepping back to watch the effect he was about to produce upon Guespin.

"You haven't any right to hold your tongue. And even if you do, you fool, the police know everything. Your master sent you on an errand, didn't he, on Wednesday night; what did he give you? A one-thousand-franc note?"

The prisoner looked at M. Lecoq in speechless amazement.

"No," he stammered. "It was a five-hundred-franc note."

The detective, like all great artists in a critical scene, was really moved. His surprising genius for investigation had just inspired him with a bold stroke, which, if it succeeded, would assure him the victory.

"Now," said he, "tell me the woman's name."

"I don't know."

"You are only a fool then. She is short, isn't she, quite pretty, brown and pale, with very large eyes?"

"You know her, then?" said Guespin, in a voice trembling with emotion.

"Yes, comrade, and if you want to know her name, to put in your prayers, she is called—Jenny."

Men who are really able in some specialty, whatever

it may be, never uselessly abuse their superiority; their satisfaction at seeing it recognized is sufficient reward. M. Lecoq softly enjoyed his triumph, while his hearers wondered at his perspicacity. A rapid chain of reasoning had shown him not only Trémorel's thoughts, but also the means he had employed to accomplish his purpose.

Guespin's astonishment soon changed to anger. He asked himself how this man could have been informed of things which he had every reason to believe were secret. Lecoq continued:

"Since I have told you the woman's name, tell me now, how and why the count gave you a five-hundred-franc note."

"It was just as I was going out. The count had no change, and did not want to send me to Orcival for it. I was to bring back the rest."

"And why didn't you rejoin your companions at the wedding in the Batignolles?"

No answer.

"What was the errand which you were to do for the count?"

Guespin hesitated. His eyes wandered from one to another of those present, and he seemed to discover an ironical expression on all the faces. It occurred to him that they were making sport of him, and had set a snare into which he had fallen. A great despair took possession of him.

"Ah," cried he, addressing M. Lecoq, "you have deceived me. You have been lying so as to find out the truth. I have been such a fool as to answer you, and you are going to turn it all against me."

"What? Are you going to talk nonsense again?"

"No, but I see just how it is, and you won't catch me again! Now I'd rather die than say a word."

The detective tried to reassure him; but he added:

"Besides, I'm as sly as you; I've told you nothing but lies."

This sudden whim surprised no one. Some prisoners intrench themselves behind a system of defence, and nothing can divert them from it; others vary with each new question, denying what they have just affirmed, and constantly inventing some new absurdity which anon they reject again. M. Lecoq tried in vain to draw Guespin from his silence; M. Domini made the same attempt, and also failed; to all questions he only answered, "I don't know."

At last the detective waxed impatient.

"See here," said he to Guespin, "I took you for a young man of sense, and you are only an ass. Do you imagine that we don't know anything? Listen: On the night of Madame Denis's wedding, you were getting ready to go off with your comrades, and had just borrowed twenty francs from the valet, when the count called you. He made you promise absolute secrecy (a promise which to do you justice, you kept); he told you to leave the other servants at the station and go to Vulcan's Forges, where you were to buy for him a hammer, a file, a chisel, and a dirk; these you were to carry to a certain woman. Then he gave you this famous five-hundred-franc note, telling you to bring him back the change when you returned next day. Isn't that so?"

An affirmative response glistened in the prisoner's eyes; still, he answered, "I don't recollect it."

"Now," pursued M. Lecoq, "I'm going to tell you what happened afterwards. You drank something and

got tipsy, and in short spent a part of the change of the note. That explains your fright when you were seized yesterday morning, before anybody said a word to you. You thought you were being arrested for spending that money. Then, when you learned that the count had been murdered during the night, recollecting that on the evening before you had bought all kinds of instruments of theft and murder, and that you didn't know either the address or the name of the woman to whom you gave up the package, convinced that if you explained the source of the money found in your pocket, you would not be believed—then, instead of thinking of the means to prove your innocence, you became afraid, and thought you would save yourself by holding your tongue.”

The prisoner's countenance visibly changed; his nerves relaxed; his tight lips fell apart; his mind opened itself to hope. But he still resisted.

“Do with me as you like,” said he.

“Eh! What should we do with such a fool as you?” cried M. Lecoq angrily. “I begin to think you are a rascal too. A decent fellow would see that we wanted to get him out of a scrape, and he'd tell us the truth. You are prolonging your imprisonment by your own will. You'd better learn that the greatest shrewdness consists in telling the truth. A last time, will you answer?”

Guespin shook his head; no.

“Go back to prison, then, since it pleases you,” concluded the detective. He looked at the judge for his approval, and added:

“Gendarmes, remove the prisoner.”

The judge's last doubt was dissipated like the mist before the sun. He was, to tell the truth, a little un-

easy at having treated the detective so rudely; and he tried to repair it as much as he could.

"You are an able man, Monsieur Lecoq," said he. "Without speaking of your clearsightedness, which is so prompt as to seem almost like second sight, your examination just now was a master-piece of its kind. Receive my congratulations, to say nothing of the reward which I propose to recommend in your favor to your chiefs."

The detective at these compliments cast down his eyes with the abashed air of a virgin. He looked tenderly at the dear defunct's portrait, and doubtless said to it:

"At last, darling, we have defeated him—this austere judge who so heartily detests the force of which we are the brightest ornament, makes his apologies; he recognizes and applauds our services."

He answered aloud:

"I can only accept half of your eulogies, Monsieur; permit me to offer the other half to my friend Monsieur Plantat."

M. Plantat tried to protest.

"Oh," said he, "only for some bits of information! You would have ferreted out the truth without me all the same."

The judge arose and graciously, but not without effort, extended his hand to M. Lecoq, who respectfully pressed it.

"You have spared me," said the judge, "a great remorse. Guespin's innocence would surely sooner or later have been recognized; but the idea of having imprisoned an innocent man and harassed him with my interrogatories, would have disturbed my sleep and tormented my conscience for a long time."

"God knows this poor Guespin is not an interesting youth," returned the detective. "I should be disposed to press him hard were I not certain that he's half a fool."

M. Domini gave a start.

"I shall discharge him this very day," said he, "this very hour."

"It will be an act of charity," said M. Lecoq; "but confound his obstinacy; it was so easy for him to simplify my task. I might be able, by the aid of chance, to collect the principal facts—the errand, and a woman being mixed up in the affair; but as I'm no magician, I couldn't guess all the details. How is Jenny mixed up in this affair? Is she an accomplice, or has she only been made to play an ignorant part in it? Where did she meet Guespin and whither did she lead him? It is clear that she made the poor fellow tipsy so as to prevent his going to the Batignolles. Trémoré must have told her some false story—but what?"

"I don't think Trémoré troubled his head about so small a matter," said M. Plantat. "He gave Guespin and Jenny some task, without explaining it at all."

M. Lecoq reflected a moment.

"Perhaps you are right. But Jenny must have had special orders to prevent Guespin from putting in an alibi."

"But," said M. Domini, "Jenny will explain it all to us."

"That is what I rely on; and I hope that within forty-eight hours I shall have found her and brought her safely to Corbeil."

He rose at these words, took his cane and hat, and turning to the judge, said:

"Before retiring——"

"Yes, I know," interrupted M. Domini, "you want a warrant to arrest Hector de Trémorel."

"I do, as you are now of my opinion that he is still alive."

"I am sure of it."

M. Domini opened his portfolio and wrote off a warrant as follows:

"By the law:

"We, judge of instruction of the first tribunal, etc., considering articles 91 and 94 of the code of criminal instruction, command and ordain to all the agents of the police to arrest, in conformity with the law, one Hector de Trémorel, etc."

When he had finished, he said:

"Here it is, and may you succeed in speedily finding this great criminal."

"Oh, *he'll* find him," cried the Corbeil policeman.

"I hope so, at least. As to how I shall go to work, I don't know yet. I will arrange my plan of battle to-night."

The detective then took leave of M. Domini and retired, followed by M. Plantat. The doctor remained with the judge to make arrangements for Sauvresy's exhumation.

M. Lecoq was just leaving the court-house when he felt himself pulled by the arm. He turned and found that it was Goulard who came to beg his favor and to ask him to take him along, persuaded that after having served under so great a captain he must inevitably become a famous man himself. M. Lecoq had some difficulty in getting rid of him; but he at length found himself alone in the street with the old justice of the peace.

"It is late," said the latter. "Would it be agreeable

to you to partake of another modest dinner with me, and accept my cordial hospitality?"

"I am chagrined to be obliged to refuse you," replied M. Lecoq. "But I ought to be in Paris this evening."

"But I—in fact, I—was very anxious to talk to you—about——"

"About Mademoiselle Laurence?"

"Yes; I have a plan, and if you would help me——"

M. Lecoq affectionately pressed his friend's hand.

"I have only known you a few hours," said he, "and yet I am as devoted to you as I would be to an old friend. All that is humanly possible for me to do to serve you, I shall certainly do."

"But where shall I see you? They expect me to-day at Orcival."

"Very well; to-morrow morning at nine, at my rooms, No — Rue Montmartre."

"A thousand thanks; I shall be there."

When they had reached the Belle Image they separated.

XXIV

Nine o'clock had just struck in the belfry of the church of St. Eustache, when M. Plantat reached Rue Montmartre, and entered the house bearing the number which M. Lecoq had given him.

"Monsieur Lecoq?" said he to an old woman who was engaged in getting breakfast for three large cats which were mewling around her. The woman scanned him with a surprised and suspicious air. M. Plantat, when he was dressed up, had much more the appearance of a fine old gentleman than of a country attorney; and though the detective received many visits from all

sorts of people, it was rarely that the denizens of the Faubourg Saint Germaine rung his bell.

"Monsieur Lecoq's apartments," answered the old woman, "are on the third story, the door facing the stairs."

The justice of the peace slowly ascended the narrow, ill-lighted staircase, which in its dark corners was almost dangerous. He was thinking of the strange step he was about to take. An idea had occurred to him, but he did not know whether it were practicable, and at all events he needed the aid and advice of the detective. He was forced to disclose his most secret thoughts, as it were, to confess himself; and his heart beat fast. The door opposite the staircase on the third story was not like other doors; it was of plain oak, thick, without mouldings, and fastened with iron bars. It would have looked like a prison door had not its sombreness been lightened by a heavily colored engraving of a cock crowing, with the legend "Always Vigilant." Had the detective put his coat of arms up there? Was it not more likely that one of his men had done it? After examining the door more than a minute, and hesitating like a youth before his beloved's gate, he rang the bell. A creaking of locks responded, and through the narrow bars of the peephole he saw the hairy face of an old crone.

"What do you want?" said the woman, in a deep, bass voice.

"Monsieur Lecoq."

"What do you want of him?"

"He made an appointment with me for this morning."

"Your name and business?"

"Monsieur Plantat, justice of the peace at Orcival."

"All right. Wait."

The peephole was closed and the old man waited.

"Peste!" growled he. "Everybody can't get in here, it seems." Hardly had this reflection passed through his mind when the door opened with a noise as of chains and locks. He entered, and the old crone, after leading him through a dining-room whose sole furniture was a table and six chairs, introduced him to a large room, half toilet-room and half working-room, lighted by two windows looking on the court, and guarded by strong, close bars.

"If you will take the trouble to sit," said the servant, "Monsieur Lecoq will soon be here; he is giving orders to one of his men."

But M. Plantat did not take a seat; he preferred to examine the curious apartment in which he found himself. The whole of one side of the wall was taken up with a long rack, where hung the strangest and most incongruous suits of clothes. There were costumes belonging to all grades of society; and on some wooden pegs above, wigs of all colors were hanging; while boots and shoes of various styles were ranged on the floor. A toilet-table, covered with powders, essences, and paints, stood between the fireplace and the window. On the other side of the room was a bookcase full of scientific works, especially of physic and chemistry. The most singular piece of furniture in the apartment, however, was a large ball, shaped like a lozenge, in black velvet, suspended beside the looking-glass. A quantity of pins were stuck in this ball, so as to form the letters composing these two names: HECTOR—JENNY.

These names glittering on the black background attracted the old man's attention at once. This must

have been M. Lecoq's reminder. The ball was meant to recall to him perpetually the people of whom he was in pursuit. Many names, doubtless, had in turn glittered on that velvet, for it was much frayed and perforated. An unfinished letter lay open upon the bureau; M. Plantat leaned over to read it; but he took his trouble for nothing, for it was written in cipher.

He had no sooner finished his inspection of the room than the noise of a door opening made him turn round. He saw before him a man of his own age, of respectable mien, and polite manners, a little bald, with gold spectacles and a light-colored flannel dressing-gown.

M. Plantat bowed, saying:

"I am waiting here for Monsieur Lecoq——"

The man in gold spectacles burst out laughing, and clapped his hands with glee.

"What, dear sir," said he, "don't you know me? Look at me well—it is I—Monsieur Lecoq!" And to convince him, he took off his spectacles. Those might, indeed, be Lecoq's eyes, and that his voice; M. Plantat was confounded.

"I never should have recognized you," said he.

"It's true, I have changed a little—but what would you have? It's my trade."

And pushing a chair toward his visitor, he pursued:

"I have to beg a thousand pardons for the formalities you've had to endure to get in here; it's a dire necessity, but one I can't help. I have told you of the dangers to which I am exposed; they pursue me to my very door. Why, last week a railway porter brought a package here addressed to me. Janouille—that's my old woman—suspected nothing, though she has a sharp nose, and told him to come in. He held out the package, I went up to take it, when pif! paf! off went two

pistol-shots. The package was a revolver wrapped up in oilcloth, and the porter was a convict escaped from Cayenne, caught by me last year. Ah, I put him through for this though!"

He told this adventure carelessly, as if it were the most natural thing in the world.

"But let's not starve ourselves to death," he continued, ringing the bell. The old hag appeared, and he ordered her to bring on breakfast forthwith, and above all, some good wine.

"You are observing my Janouille," remarked he, seeing that M. Plantat looked curiously at the servant. "She's a pearl, my dear friend, who watches over me as if I were her child, and would go through the fire for me. I had a good deal of trouble the other day to prevent her strangling the false railway porter. I picked her out of three or four thousand convicts. She had been convicted of infanticide and arson. I would bet a hundred to one that, during the three years that she has been in my service, she has not even thought of robbing me of so much as a centime."

But M. Plantat only listened to him with one ear; he was trying to find an excuse for cutting Janouille's story short, and to lead the conversation to the events of the day before.

"I have, perhaps, incommoded you a little this morning, Monsieur Lecoq?"

"Me? then you did not see my motto—'always vigilant?' Why, I've been out ten times this morning, besides marking out work for three of my men. Ah, we have little time to ourselves, I can tell you. I went to the Vulcan's Forges to see what news I could get of that poor devil of a Guespin."

"And what did you hear?"

"That I had guessed right. He changed a five-hundred-franc note there last Wednesday evening at a quarter before ten."

"That is to say, he is saved?"

"Well, you may say so. He will be, as soon as we have found Miss Jenny."

The old justice of the peace could not avoid showing his uneasiness.

"That will, perhaps, be long and difficult?"

"Bast! Why so? She is on my black ball there—we shall have her, accidents excepted, before night."

"You really think so?"

"I should say I was sure, to anybody but you. Reflect that this girl has been connected with the Count de Trémoré, a man of the world, a prince of the mode. When a girl falls to the gutter, after having, as they say, dazzled all Paris for six months with her luxury, she does not disappear entirely, like a stone in the mud. When she has lost all her friends there are still her creditors, who follow and watch her, awaiting the day when fortune will smile on her once more. She doesn't trouble herself about them, she thinks they've forgotten her; a mistake! I know a milliner whose head is a perfect dictionary of the fashionable world; she has often done me a good turn. We will go and see her if you say so, after breakfast, and in two hours she will give us Jenny's address. Ah, if I were only as sure of pinching Trémoré!"

M. Plantat gave a sigh of relief. The conversation at last took the turn he wished.

"You are thinking of him, then?" asked he.

"Am I?" shouted M. Lecoq, who started from his seat at the question. "Now just look at my black ball there. I haven't thought of anybody else, mark you,

since yesterday ; I haven't had a wink of sleep all night for thinking of him. I must have him, and I will ! ”

“ I don't doubt it ; but when ? ”

“ Ah, there it is ! Perhaps to-morrow, perhaps in a month ; it depends on the correctness of my calculations and the exactness of my plan.”

“ What, is your plan made ? ”

“ And decided on.”

M. Plantat became attention itself.

“ I start from the principle that it is impossible for a man, accompanied by a woman, to hide from the police. In this case, the woman is young, pretty, and in a noticeable condition ; three impossibilities more. Admit this, and we'll study Hector's character. He isn't a man of superior shrewdness, for we have found out all his dodges. He isn't a fool, because his dodges deceived people who are by no means fools. He is then a medium sort of a man, and his education, reading, relations, and daily conversation have procured him a number of acquaintances whom he will try to use. Now for his mind. We know the weakness of his character ; soft, feeble, vacillating, only acting in the last extremity. We have seen him shrinking from decisive steps, trying always to delay matters. He is given to being deceived by illusions, and to taking his desires for accomplished events. In short, he is a coward. And what is his situation ? He has killed his wife, he hopes he has created a belief in his own death, he has eloped with a young girl, and he has got nearly or quite a million of francs in his pocket. Now, this position admitted, as well as the man's character and mind, can we by an effort of thought, reasoning from his known actions, discover what he has done in such and such a case ? I think so, and I hope I shall prove it to you.”

M. Lecoq rose and promenaded, as his habit was, up and down the room. "Now let's see," he continued, "how I ought to proceed in order to discover the probable conduct of a man whose antecedents, traits, and mind are known to me. To begin with, I throw off my own individuality and try to assume his. I substitute his will for my own. I cease to be a detective and become this man, whatever he is. In this case, for instance, I know very well what I should do if I were Trémorél. I should take such measures as would throw all the detectives in the universe off the scent. But I must forget Monsieur Lecoq in order to become Hector de Trémorél. How would a man reason who was base enough to rob his friend of his wife, and then see her poison her husband before his very eyes? We already know that Trémorél hesitated a good while before deciding to commit this crime. The logic of events, which fools call fatality, urged him on. It is certain that he looked upon the murder in every point of view, studied its results, and tried to find means to escape from justice. All his acts were determined on long beforehand, and neither immediate necessity nor unforeseen circumstances disturbed his mind. The moment he had decided on the crime, he said to himself: 'Grant that Bertha has been murdered; thanks to my precautions, they think that I have been killed too; Laurence, with whom I elope, writes a letter in which she announces her suicide; I have money, what must I do?' The problem, it seems to me, is fairly put in this way."

"Perfectly so," approved M. Plantat.

"Naturally, Trémorél would choose from among all the methods of flight of which he had ever heard, or which he could imagine, that which seemed to him the

surest and most prompt. Did he meditate leaving the country? That is more than probable. Only, as he was not quite out of his senses, he saw that it was most difficult, in a foreign country, to put justice off the track. If a man flies from France to escape punishment, he acts absurdly. Fancy a man and woman wandering about a country of whose language they are ignorant; they attract attention at once, are observed, talked about, followed. They do not make a purchase which is not remarked; they cannot make any movement without exciting curiosity. The further they go the greater their danger. If they choose to cross the ocean and go to free America, they must go aboard a vessel; and the moment they do that they may be considered as good as lost. You might bet twenty to one they would find, on landing on the other side, a detective on the pier armed with a warrant to arrest them. I would engage to find a Frenchman in eight days, even in London, unless he spoke pure enough English to pass for a citizen of the United Kingdom. Such were Trémoré's reflections. He recollected a thousand futile attempts, a hundred surprising adventures, narrated by the papers; and it is certain that he gave up the idea of going abroad."

"It's clear," cried M. Plantat, "perfectly plain and precise. We must look for the fugitives in France."

"Yes," replied M. Lecoq. "Now let's find out where and how people can hide themselves in France. Would it be in the provinces? Evidently not. In Bordeaux, one of our largest cities, people stare at a man who is not a Bordelais. The shopkeepers on the quays say to their neighbors: 'Eh! do you know that man?' There are two cities, however, where a man may pass unnoticed—Marseilles and Lyons; but both of these

are distant, and to reach them a long journey must be risked—and nothing is so dangerous as the railway since the telegraph was established. One can fly quickly, it's true; but on entering a railway carriage a man shuts himself in, and until he gets out of it he remains under the thumb of the police. Trémoré knows all this as well as we do. We will put all the large towns, including Lyons and Marseilles, out of the question."

"In short, it's impossible to hide in the provinces."

"Excuse me—there is one means; that is, simply to buy a modest little place at a distance from towns and railways, and to go and reside on it under a false name. But this excellent project is quite above Trémoré's capacity, and requires preparatory steps which he could not risk, watched as he was by his wife. The field of investigation is thus much narrowed. Putting aside foreign parts, the provinces, the cities, the country, Paris remains. It is in Paris that we must look for Trémoré."

M. Lecoq spoke with the certainty and positiveness of a mathematical professor; the old justice of the peace listened, as do the professor's scholars. But he was already accustomed to the detective's surprising clearness, and was no longer astonished. During the four-and-twenty hours that he had been witnessing M. Lecoq's calculations and gropings, he had seized the process and almost appropriated it to himself. He found this method of reasoning very simple, and could now explain to himself certain exploits of the police which had hitherto seemed to him miraculous. But M. Lecoq's "narrow field" of observation appeared still immense.

"Paris is a large place," observed the old justice.

M. Lecoq smiled loftily.

"Perhaps so; but it is mine. All Paris is under the eye of the police, just as an ant is under that of the naturalist with his microscope. How is it, you may ask, that Paris still holds so many professional rogues? Ah, that is because we are hampered by legal forms. The law compels us to use only polite weapons against those to whom all weapons are serviceable. The courts tie our hands. The rogues are clever, but be sure that our cleverness is much greater than theirs."

"But," interrupted M. Plantat, "Trémoré is now outside the law; we have the warrant."

"What matters it? Does the warrant give me the right to search any house in which I may have reason to suppose he is hiding himself? No. If I should go to the house of one of Hector's old friends he would kick me out of doors. You must know that in France the police have to contend not only with the rogues, but also with the honest people."

M. Lecoq always waxed warm on this subject; he felt a strong resentment against the injustice practised on his profession. Fortunately, at the moment when he was most excited, the black ball suddenly caught his eye.

"The devil!" exclaimed he, "I was forgetting Hector."

M. Plantat, though listening patiently to his companion's indignant utterances, could not help thinking of the murderer.

"You said that we must look for Trémoré in Paris," he remarked.

"And I said truly," responded M. Lecoq in a calmer tone. "I have come to the conclusion that here, perhaps within two streets of us, perhaps in the next house,

the fugitives are hid. But let's go on with our calculation of probabilities. Hector knows Paris too well to hope to conceal himself even for a week in a hotel or lodging-house; he knows these are too sharply watched by the police. He had plenty of time before him, and so arranged to hire apartments in some convenient house."

"He came to Paris three or four times some weeks ago."

"Then there's no longer any doubt about it. He hired some apartments under a false name, paid in advance, and to-day he is comfortably ensconced in his new residence."

M. Plantat seemed to feel extremely distressed at this.

"I know it only too well, Monsieur Lecoq," said he, sadly. "You must be right. But is not the wretch thus securely hidden from us? Must we wait till some accident reveals him to us? Can you search one by one all the houses in Paris?"

The detective's nose wriggled under his gold spectacles, and the justice of the peace, who observed it, and took it for a good sign, felt all his hopes reviving in him.

"I've cudgelled my brain in vain—" he began.

"Pardon me," interrupted M. Lecoq. "Having hired apartments, Trémoré naturally set about furnishing them."

"Evidently."

"Of course he would furnish them sumptuously, both because he is fond of luxury and has plenty of money, and because he couldn't carry a young girl from a luxurious home to a garret. I'd wager that they have as fine a drawing-room as that at Valfeuillu."

"Alas! How can that help us?"

"Peste! It helps us much, my dear friend, as you shall see. Hector, as he wished for a good deal of expensive furniture, did not have recourse to a broker; nor had he time to go to the Faubourg St. Antoine. Therefore, he simply went to an upholsterer."

"Some fashionable upholsterer——"

"No, he would have risked being recognized. It is clear that he assumed a false name, the same in which he had hired his rooms. He chose some shrewd and humble upholsterer, ordered his goods, made sure that they would be delivered on a certain day, and paid for them."

M. Plantat could not repress a joyful exclamation; he began to see M. Lecoq's drift.

"This merchant," pursued the latter, "must have retained his rich customer in his memory, this customer who did not beat him down, and paid cash. If he saw him again, he would recognize him."

"What an idea!" cried M. Plantat, delighted. "Let's get photographs and portraits of Trémoré as quick as we can—let's send a man to Orcival for them."

M. Lecoq smiled shrewdly and proceeded:

"Keep yourself easy; I have done what was necessary. I slipped three of the count's cartes-de-visite in my pocket yesterday during the inquest. This morning I took down, out of the directory, the names of all the upholsterers in Paris, and made three lists of them. At this moment three of my men, each with a list and a photograph, are going from upholsterer to upholsterer showing them the picture and asking them if they recognize it as the portrait of one of their customers. If one of them answers 'yes,' we've got our man."

“And we will get him!” cried the old man, pale with emotion.

“Not yet; don’t shout victory too soon. It is possible that Hector was prudent enough not to go to the upholsterer’s himself. In this case we are beaten in that direction. But no, he was not so sly as that——”

M. Lecoq checked himself. Janouille, for the third time, opened the door, and said, in a deep bass voice:

“Breakfast is ready.”

Janouille was a remarkable cook; M. Plantat had ample experience of the fact when he began upon her dishes. But he was not hungry, and could not force himself to eat; he could not think of anything but a plan which he had to propose to his host, and he had that oppressive feeling which is experienced when one is about to do something which has been decided on with hesitation and regret. The detective, who, like all men of great activity, was a great eater, vainly essayed to entertain his guest, and filled his glass with the choicest Château Margaux; the old man sat silent and sad, and only responded by monosyllables. He tried to speak out and to struggle against the hesitation he felt. He did not think, when he came, that he should have this reluctance; he had said to himself that he would go in and explain himself. Did he fear to be ridiculed? No. His passion was above the fear of sarcasm or irony. And what did he risk? Nothing. Had not M. Lecoq already divined the secret thoughts he dared not impart to him, and read his heart from the first? He was reflecting thus when the door-bell rang. Janouille went to the door, and speedily returned with the announcement that Goulard begged to speak with M. Lecoq, and asked if she should admit him.

"Certainly."

The chains clanked and the locks scraped, and presently Goulard made his appearance. He had donned his best clothes, with spotless linen, and a very high collar. He was respectful, and stood as stiffly as a well-drilled grenadier before his sergeant.

"What the deuce brought you here?" said M. Lecoq, sternly. "And who dared to give you my address?"

"Monsieur," said Goulard, visibly intimidated by his reception, "please excuse me; I was sent by Doctor Gendron with this letter for Monsieur Plantat."

"Oh," cried M. Plantat, "I asked the doctor, last evening, to let me know the result of the autopsy, and not knowing where I should put up, took the liberty of giving your address."

M. Lecoq took the letter and handed it to his guest.

"Read it, read it," said the latter. "There is nothing in it to conceal."

"All right; but come into the other room. Janouille, give this man some breakfast. Make yourself at home, Goulard, and empty a bottle to my health."

When the door of the other room was closed, M. Lecoq broke the seal of the letter, and read:

"MY DEAR PLANTAT:

"You asked me for a word, so I scratch off a line or two which I shall send to our sorcerer's——"

"Oh, ho," cried M. Lecoq. "Monsieur Gendron is too good, too flattering, really!"

No matter, the compliment touched his heart. He resumed the letter:

"At three this morning we exhumed poor Sauvresy's body. I certainly deplore the frightful circum-

stances of this worthy man's death as much as anyone; but on the other hand, I cannot help rejoicing at this excellent opportunity to test the efficacy of my sensitive paper——"

"Confound these men of science," cried the indignant Plantat. "They are all alike!"

"Why so? I can very well comprehend the doctor's involuntary sensations. Am I not ravished when I encounter a fine crime?"

And without waiting for his guest's reply, he continued reading the letter:

"The experiments promised to be all the more conclusive as aconitine is one of those drugs which conceal themselves most obstinately from analysis. I proceed thus: After heating the suspected substances in twice their weight of alcohol, I drop the liquid gently into a vase with edges a little elevated, at the bottom of which is a piece of paper on which I have placed my tests. If my paper retains its color, there is no poison; if it changes, the poison is there. In this case my paper was of a light yellow color, and if we were not mistaken, it ought either to become covered with brown spots, or completely brown. I explained this experiment beforehand to the judge of instruction and the experts who were assisting me. Ah, my friend, what a success I had! When the first drops of alcohol fell, the paper at once became a dark brown; your suspicions are thus proved to be quite correct. The substances which I submitted to the test were liberally saturated with aconitine. I never obtained more decisive results in my laboratory. I expect that my conclusions will be disputed in court; but I have means of verifying them, so that I shall surely confound all the chemists who oppose me. I think, my dear friend,

that you will not be indifferent to the satisfaction I feel——”

M. Plantat lost patience.

“This is unheard-of!” cried he. “Incredible! Would you say, now, that this poison which he found in Sauvresy’s body was stolen from his own laboratory? Why, that body is nothing more to him than ‘suspected matter!’ And he already imagines himself discussing the merits of his sensitive paper in court!”

“He has reason to look for antagonists in court.”

“And meanwhile he makes his experiments, and analyzes with the coolest blood in the world; he continues his abominable cooking, boiling and filtering, and preparing his arguments——!”

M. Lecoq did not share in his friend’s indignation; he was not sorry at the prospect of a bitter struggle in court, and he imagined a great scientific duel, like that between Orfila and Raspail, the provincial and Parisian chemists.

“If Trémorrel has the face to deny his part in Sauvresy’s murder,” said he, “we shall have a superb trial of it.”

This word “trial” put an end to M. Plantat’s long hesitation.

“We mustn’t have any trial,” cried he.

The old man’s violence, from one who was usually so calm and self-possessed, seemed to amaze M. Lecoq.

“Ah ha,” thought he, “I’m going to know all.” He added aloud:

“What, no trial?”

M. Plantat had turned whiter than a sheet; he was trembling, and his voice was hoarse, as if broken by sobs.

“I would give my fortune,” resumed he, “to avoid

a trial—every centime of it, though it doesn't amount to much. But how can we secure this wretch Trémoré from a conviction? What subterfuge shall we invent? You alone, my friend, can advise me in the frightful extremity to which you see me reduced, and aid me to accomplish what I wish. If there is any way in the world, you will find it and save me——”

“But, my——”

“Pardon—hear me, and you will comprehend me. I am going to be frank with you, as I would be with myself; and you will see the reason of my hesitation, my silence, in short, of all my conduct since the discovery of the crime.”

“I am listening.”

“It's a sad history, Lecoq. I had reached an age at which a man's career is, as they say, finished, when I suddenly lost my wife and my two sons, my whole joy, my whole hope in this world. I found myself alone in life, more lost than the shipwrecked man in the midst of the sea, without a plank to sustain me. I was a soulless body, when chance brought me to settle down at Orcival. There I saw Laurence; she was just fifteen, and never lived there a creature who united in herself so much intelligence, grace, innocence, and beauty. Courtois became my friend, and soon Laurence was like a daughter to me. I doubtless loved her then, but I did not confess it to myself, for I did not read my heart clearly. She was so young, and I had gray hairs! I persuaded myself that my love for her was like that of a father, and it was as a father that she cherished me. Ah, I passed many a delicious hour listening to her gentle prattle and her innocent confidences; I was happy when I saw her skipping about in my garden, picking the roses I had reared for her, and laying waste

my parterres; and I said to myself that existence is a precious gift from God. My dream then was to follow her through life. I fancied her wedded to some good man who made her happy, while I remained the friend of the wife, after having been the confidant of the maiden. I took good care of my fortune, which is considerable, because I thought of her children, and wished to hoard up treasures for them. Poor, poor Laurence!"

M. Lecoq fidgeted in his chair, rubbed his face with his handkerchief, and seemed ill at ease. He was really much more touched than he wished to appear.

"One day," pursued the old man, "my friend Courtois spoke to me of her marriage with Trémoré; then I measured the depth of my love. I felt terrible agonies which it is impossible to describe; it was like a long-smothered fire which suddenly breaks forth and devours everything. To be old, and to love a child! I thought I was going crazy; I tried to reason, to upbraid myself, but it was of no avail. What can reason or irony do against passion? I kept silent and suffered. To crown all, Laurence selected me as her confidant—what torture! She came to me to talk of Hector; she admired in him all that seemed to her superior to other men, so that none could be compared with him. She was enchanted with his bold horseback riding, and thought everything he said sublime."

"Did you know what a wretch Trémoré was?"

"Alas, I did not yet know it. What was this man who lived at Valfeuillu to me? But from the day that I learned that he was going to deprive me of my most precious treasure, I began to study him. I should have been somewhat consoled if I had found him worthy of her; so I dogged him, as you, Monsieur Lecoq, cling to

the criminal whom you are pursuing. I went often to Paris to learn what I could of his past life; I became a detective, and went about questioning everybody who had known him, and the more I heard of him the more I despised him. It was thus that I found out his interviews with Jenny and his relations with Bertha."

"Why didn't you divulge them?"

"Honor commanded silence. Had I a right to dishonor my friend and ruin his happiness and life, because of this ridiculous, hopeless love? I kept my own counsel after speaking to Courtois about Jenny, at which he only laughed. When I hinted something against Hector to Laurence, she almost ceased coming to see me."

"Ah! I shouldn't have had either your patience or your generosity."

"Because you are not as old as I, Monsieur Lecoq. Oh, I cruelly hated this Trémoré! I said to myself, when I saw three women of such different characters smitten with him, 'what is there in him to be so loved?' "

"Yes," answered M. Lecoq, responding to a secret thought, "women often err; they don't judge men as we do."

"Many a time," resumed the justice of the peace, "I thought of provoking him to fight with me, that I might kill him; but then Laurence would not have looked at me any more. However, I should perhaps have spoken at last, had not Sauvresy fallen ill and died. I knew that he had made his wife and Trémoré swear to marry each other; I knew that a terrible reason forced them to keep their oath; and I thought Laurence saved. Alas, on the contrary she was lost! One evening, as I was passing the mayor's house, I saw a

man getting over the wall into the garden ; it was Trémorel. I recognized him perfectly. I was beside myself with rage, and swore that I would wait and murder him. I did wait, but he did not come out that night."

M. Plantat hid his face in his hands ; his heart bled at the recollection of that night of anguish, the whole of which he had passed in waiting for a man in order to kill him. M. Lecoq trembled with indignation.

"This Trémorel," cried he, "is the most abominable of scoundrels. There is no excuse for his infamies and crimes. And yet you want to save him from trial, the galleys, the scaffold which await him."

The old man paused a moment before replying. Of the thoughts which now crowded tumultuously in his mind, he did not know which to utter first. Words seemed powerless to betray his sensations ; he wanted to express all that he felt in a single sentence.

"What matters Trémorel to me?" said he at last. "Do you think I care about him? I don't care whether he lives or dies, whether he succeeds in flying or ends his life some morning in the Place Roquette."

"Then why have you such a horror of a trial?"

"Because——"

"Are you a friend to his family, and anxious to preserve the great name which he has covered with mud and devoted to infamy?"

"No, but I am anxious for Laurence, my friend ; the thought of *her* never leaves me."

"But she is not his accomplice ; she is totally ignorant—there's no doubt of it—that he has killed his wife."

"Yes," resumed M. Plantat, "Laurence is innocent ; she is only the victim of an odious villain. It is

none the less true, though, that she would be more cruelly punished than he. If Trémorel is brought before the court, she will have to appear too, as a witness, if not as a prisoner. And who knows that her truth will not be suspected? She will be asked whether she really had no knowledge of the project to murder Bertha, and whether she did not encourage it. Bertha was her rival; it were natural to suppose that she hated her. If I were the judge I should not hesitate to include Laurence in the indictment."

"With our aid she will prove victoriously that she was ignorant of all, and has been outrageously deceived."

"May be; but will she be any the less dishonored and forever lost? Must she not, in that case, appear in public, answer the judge's questions, and narrate the story of her shame and misfortunes? Must not she say where, when, and how she fell, and repeat the villain's words to her? Can you imagine that of her own free will she compelled herself to announce her suicide at the risk of killing her parents with grief? No. Then she must explain what menaces forced her to do this, which surely was not her own idea. And worse than all, she will be compelled to confess her love for Trémorel."

"No," answered the detective. "Let us not exaggerate anything. You know as well as I do that justice is most considerate with the innocent victims of affairs of this sort."

"Consideration? Eh! Could justice protect her, even if it would, from the publicity in which trials are conducted? You might touch the magistrates' hearts; but there are fifty journalists who, since this crime, have been cutting their pens and getting their paper

ready. Do you think that, to please us, they would suppress the scandalous proceedings which I am anxious to avoid, and which the noble name of the murderer would make a great sensation? Does not this case unite every feature which gives success to judicial dramas? Oh, there's nothing wanting, neither unworthy passion, nor poison, nor vengeance, nor murder. Laurence represents in it the romantic and sentimental element; she—my darling girl—will become a heroine of the assizes; it is she who will attract the readers of the *Police Gazette*; the reporters will tell when she blushes and when she weeps; they will rival each other in describing her toilet and bearing. Then there will be the photographers besieging her, and if she refuses to sit, portraits of some hussy of the street will be sold as hers. She will yearn to hide herself—but where? Can a few locks and bars shelter her from eager curiosity? She will become famous. What shame and misery! If she is to be saved, Monsieur Lecoq, her name must not be spoken. I ask of you, is it possible? Answer me.”

The old man was very violent, yet his speech was simple, devoid of the pompous phrases of passion. Anger lit up his eyes with a strange fire; he seemed young again—he loved, and defended his beloved.

M. Lecoq was silent; his companion insisted.

“Answer me.”

“Who knows?”

“Why seek to mislead me? Haven't I as well as you had experience in these things? If Trémoré is brought to trial, all is over with Laurence. And I love her! Yes, I dare to confess it to you, and let you see the depth of my grief, I love her now as I have never loved her. She is dishonored, an object of contempt,

perhaps still adores this wretch—what matters it? I love her a thousand times more than before her fall, for then I loved her without hope, while now——”

He stopped, shocked at what he was going to say. His eyes fell before M. Lecoq's steady gaze, and he blushed for this shameful yet human hope that he had betrayed.

“You know all, now,” resumed he, in a calmer tone; “consent to aid me, won't you? Ah, if you only would, I should not think I had repaid you were I to give you half my fortune—and I am rich——”

M. Lecoq stopped him with a haughty gesture.

“Enough, Monsieur Plantat,” said he, in a bitter tone, “I can do a service to a person whom I esteem, love and pity with all my soul; but I cannot *sell* such a service.”

“Believe that I did not wish——”

“Yes, yes, you wished to pay me. Oh, don't excuse yourself, don't deny it. There are professions, I know, in which manhood and integrity seem to count for nothing. Why offer me money? What reason have you for judging me so mean as to sell my favors? You are like the rest, who can't fancy what a man in my position is. If I wanted to be rich—richer than you—I could be so in a fortnight. Don't you see that I hold in my hands the honor and lives of fifty people? Do you think I tell all I know? I have here,” added he, tapping his forehead, “twenty secrets that I could sell to-morrow, if I would, for a plump hundred thousand apiece.”

He was indignant, but beneath his anger a certain sad resignation might be perceived. He had often to reject such offers.

“If you go and resist this prejudice established for

ages, and say that a detective is honest and cannot be otherwise, that he is tenfold more honest than any merchant or notary, because he has tenfold the temptations, without the benefits of his honesty; if you say this, they'll laugh in your face. I could get together to-morrow, with impunity, without any risk, at least a million. Who would mistrust it? I have a conscience, it's true; but a little consideration for these things would not be unpleasant. When it would be so easy for me to divulge what I know of those who have been obliged to trust me, or things which I have surprised, there is perhaps a merit in holding my tongue. And still, the first man who should come along to-morrow—a defaulting banker, a ruined merchant, a notary who has gambled on 'change—would feel himself compromised by walking up the boulevard with me! A policeman—fie! But old Tabaret used to say to me, that the contempt of such people was only one form of fear.”

M. Plantat was dismayed. How could he, a man of delicacy, prudence and finesse, have committed such an awkward mistake? He had just cruelly wounded this man, who was so well disposed toward him, and he had everything to fear from his resentment.

“Far be it from me, dear friend,” he commenced, “to intend the offence you imagine. You have misunderstood an insignificant phrase, which I let escape carelessly, and had no meaning at all.”

M. Lecoq grew calmer.

“Perhaps so. You will forgive my being so susceptible, as I am more exposed to insults than most people. Let's leave the subject, which is a painful one, and return to Trémoré.”

M. Plantat was just thinking whether he should dare to broach his projects again, and he was singularly

touched by M. Lecoq's delicately resuming the subject of them.

"I have only to await your decision," said the justice of the peace.

"I will not conceal from you," resumed M. Lecoq, "that you are asking a very difficult thing, and one which is contrary to my duty, which commands me to search for Trémorél, to arrest him, and deliver him up to justice. You ask me to protect him from the law——"

"In the name of an innocent creature whom you will thereby save."

"Once in my life I sacrificed my duty. I could not resist the tears of a poor old mother, who clung to my knees and implored pardon for her son. To-day I am going to exceed my right, and to risk an attempt for which my conscience will perhaps reproach me. I yield to your entreaty."

"Oh, my dear Lecoq, how grateful I am!" cried M. Plantat, transported with joy.

But the detective remained grave, almost sad, and reflected.

"Don't let us encourage a hope which may be disappointed," he resumed. "I have but one means of keeping a criminal like Trémorél out of the courts; will it succeed?"

"Yes, yes. If you wish it, it will!"

M. Lecoq could not help smiling at the old man's faith.

"I am certainly a clever detective," said he. "But I am only a man after all, and I can't answer for the actions of another man. All depends upon Hector. If it were another criminal, I should say I was sure. I am doubtful about him, I frankly confess. We ought,

above all, to count upon the firmness of Mademoiselle Courtois; can we, think you?"

"She is firmness itself."

"Then there's hope. But can we really suppress this affair? What will happen when Sauvresy's narrative is found? It must be concealed somewhere in Val-feuillu, and Trémorel, at least, did not find it."

"It will not be found," said M. Plantat, quickly.

"You think so?"

"I am sure of it."

M. Lecoq gazed intently at his companion, and simply said:

"Ah!"

But this is what he thought: "At last I am going to find out where the manuscript which we heard read the other night, and which is in two handwritings, came from."

After a moment's hesitation, M. Plantat went on:

"I have put my life in your hands, Monsieur Lecoq; I can, of course, confide my honor to you. I know you. I know that, happen what may——"

"I shall keep my mouth shut, on my honor."

"Very well. The day that I caught Trémorel at the mayor's, I wished to verify the suspicions I had, and so I broke the seal of Sauvresy's package of papers."

"And you did not use them?"

"I was dismayed at my abuse of confidence. Besides, had I the right to deprive poor Sauvresy, who was dying in order to avenge himself, of his vengeance?"

"But you gave the papers to Madame de Trémorel?"

"True; but Bertha had a vague presentiment of the fate that was in store for her. About a fortnight before

her death she came and confided to me her husband's manuscript, which she had taken care to complete. I broke the seals and read it, to see if he had died a violent death."

"Why, then, didn't you tell me? Why did you let me hunt, hesitate, grope about——"

"I love Laurence, Monsieur Lecoq, and to deliver up Trémorel was to open an abyss between her and me."

The detective bowed. "The deuce," thought he, "the old justice is shrewd—as shrewd as I am. Well, I like him, and I'm going to give him a surprise."

M. Plantat yearned to question his host and to know what the sole means of which he spoke were, which might be successful in preventing a trial and saving Laurence, but he did not dare to do so.

The detective bent over his desk lost in thought. He held a pencil in his hand and mechanically drew fantastic figures on a large sheet of white paper which lay before him. He suddenly came out of his revery. He had just solved a last difficulty; his plan was now entire and complete. He glanced at the clock.

"Two o'clock," cried he, "and I have an appointment between three and four with Madame Charman about Jenny."

"I am at your disposal," returned his guest.

"All right. When Jenny is disposed of we must look after Trémorel; so let's take our measures to finish it up to-day."

"What! do you hope to do everything to-day——"

"Certainly. Rapidity is above all necessary in our profession. It often takes a month to regain an hour lost. We've a chance now of catching Hector by surprise; to-morrow it will be too late. Either we shall

have him within four-and-twenty hours or we must change our batteries. Each of my three men has a carriage and a good horse; they may be able to finish with the upholsterers within an hour from now. If I calculate aright, we shall have the address in an hour, or at most in two hours, and then we will act."

Lecoq, as he spoke, took a sheet of paper surmounted by his arms out of his portfolio, and rapidly wrote several lines.

"See here," said he, "what I've written to one of my lieutenants."

"MONSIEUR JOB—

"Get together six or eight of our men at once and take them to the wine merchant's at the corner of the Rue des Martyrs and the Rue Lamartine; await my orders there."

"Why there and not here?"

"Because we must avoid needless excursions. At the place I have designated we are only two steps from Madame Charman's and near Trémoré's retreat; for the wretch has hired his rooms in the quarter of Notre Dame de Lorette."

M. Plantat gave an exclamation of surprise.

"What makes you think that?"

The detective smiled, as if the question seemed foolish to him.

"Don't you recollect that the envelope of the letter addressed by Mademoiselle Courtois to her family to announce her suicide bore the Paris postmark, and that of the branch office of Rue St. Lazare? Now listen to this: On leaving her aunt's house, Laurence must have gone directly to Trémoré's apartments, the address of

which he had given her, and where he had promised to meet her on Thursday morning. She wrote the letter, then, in his apartments. Can we admit that she had the presence of mind to post the letter in another quarter than that in which she was? It is at least probable that she was ignorant of the terrible reasons which Trémorcel had to fear a search and pursuit. Had Hector foresight enough to suggest this trick to her? No, for if he wasn't a fool he would have told her to post the letter somewhere outside of Paris. It is therefore scarcely possible that it was posted anywhere else than at the nearest branch office."

These suppositions were so simple that M. Plantat wondered he had not thought of them before. But men do not see clearly in affairs in which they are deeply interested; passion dims the eyes, as heat in a room dims a pair of spectacles. He had lost, with his coolness, a part of his clearightedness. His anxiety was very great; for he thought M. Lecoq had a singular mode of keeping his promise.

"It seems to me," he could not help remarking, "that if you wish to keep Hector from trial, the men you have summoned together will be more embarrassing than useful."

M. Lecoq thought that his guest's tone and look betrayed a certain doubt, and was irritated by it.

"Do you distrust me, Monsieur Plantat?"

The old man tried to protest.

"Believe me——"

"You have my word," resumed M. Lecoq, "and if you knew me better you would know that I always keep it when I have given it. I have told you that I would do my best to save Mademoiselle Laurence; but remember that I have promised you my assistance, not absolute

success. Let me, then, take such measures as I think best."

So saying, he rang for Janouille.

"Here's a letter," said he when she appeared, "which must be sent to Job at once."

"I will carry it."

"By no means. You will be pleased to remain here and wait for the men that I sent out this morning. As they come in, send them to the wine merchant's at the corner of the Rue des Martyrs; you know it—opposite the church. They'll find a numerous company there."

As he gave his orders, he took off his gown, assumed a long black coat, and carefully adjusted his wig.

"Will Monsieur be back this evening?" asked Janouille.

"I don't know."

"And if anybody comes from over yonder?"

"Over yonder" with a detective, always means "the house"—otherwise the prefecture of police.

"Say that I am out on the Corbeil affair."

M. Lecoq was soon ready. He had the air, physiognomy, and manners of a highly respectable chief clerk of fifty. Gold spectacles, an umbrella, everything about him exhaled an odor of the ledger.

"Now," said he to M. Plantat. "Let's hurry away."

Goulard, who had made a hearty breakfast, was waiting for his hero in the dining-room.

"Ah ha, old fellow," said M. Lecoq. "So you've had a few words with my wine. How do you find it?"

"Delicious, my chief; perfect—that is to say, a true nectar."

"It's cheered you up, I hope."

"Oh, yes, my chief."

"Then you may follow us a few steps and mount

guard at the door of the house where you see us go in. I shall probably have to confide a pretty little girl to your care whom you will carry to Monsieur Domini. And open your eyes ; for she's a sly creature, and very apt to inveigle you on the way and slip through your fingers."

They went out, and Janouille stoutly barricaded herself behind them.

XXV

Whosoever needs a loan of money, or a complete suit of clothes in the top of the fashion, a pair of ladies' boots, or an Indian cashmere, a porcelain table service or a good picture ; whosoever desires diamonds, curtains, laces, a house in the country, or a provision of wood for winter fires—may procure all these, and many other things besides, at Mme. Charman's.

Mme. Charman lives at 136, Rue Notre Dame de Lorette, on the first story above the ground-floor. Her customers must give madame some guarantee of their credit ; a woman, if she be young and pretty, may be accommodated at madame's at the reasonable rate of two hundred per cent. interest. Madame has, at these rates, considerable custom, and yet has not made a large fortune. She must necessarily risk a great deal, and bears heavy losses as well as receives large profits. Then she is, as she is pleased to say, too honest ; and true enough, she is honest—she would rather sell her dress off her back than let her signature go to protest.

Madame is a blonde, slight, gentle, and not wanting in a certain distinction of manner ; she invariably wears, whether it be summer or winter, a black silk dress. They say she has a husband, but no one has ever seen

him, which does not prevent his reputation for good conduct from being above suspicion. However, honorable as may be Mme. Charman's profession, she has more than once had business with M. Lecoq; she has need of him, and fears him as she does fire. She, therefore, welcomed the detective and his companion—whom she took for one of his colleagues—somewhat as the supernumerary of a theatre would greet his manager if the latter chanced to pay him a visit in his humble lodgings.

She was expecting them. When they rang, she advanced to meet them in the ante-chamber, and greeted M. Lecoq graciously and smilingly. She conducted them into her drawing-room, invited them to sit in her best arm-chairs, and pressed some refreshments upon them.

"I see, dear Madame," began M. Lecoq, "that you have received my little note."

"Yes, Monsieur Lecoq, early this morning; I was not up."

"Very good. And have you been so kind as to do the service I asked?"

"How can you ask me, when you know that I would go through the fire for you? I set about it at once, getting up expressly for the purpose."

"Then you've got the address of Pélagie Taponnet, called Jenny?"

"Yes, I have," returned Mme. Charman, with an obsequious bow. "If I were the kind of woman to magnify my services, I would tell you what trouble it cost me to find this address, and how I ran all over Paris and spent ten francs in cab hire."

"Well, let's come to the point."

"The truth is, I had the pleasure of seeing Miss Jenny day before yesterday."

"You are joking!"

"Not the least in the world. And let me tell you that she is a very courageous and honest girl."

"Really!"

"She is, indeed. Why, she has owed me four hundred and eighty francs for two years. I hardly thought the debt worth much, as you may imagine. But Jenny came to me day before yesterday all out of breath and told me that she had inherited some money, and had brought me what she owed me. And she was not joking, either; for her purse was full of bank notes, and she paid me the whole of my bill. She's a good girl!" added Mme. Charman, as if profoundly convinced of the truth of her encomium.

M. Lecoq exchanged a significant glance with the old justice; the same idea struck them both at the same moment. These bank-notes could only be the payment for some important service rendered by Jenny to Trémorel. M. Lecoq, however, wished for more precise information.

"What was Jenny's condition before this windfall?" asked he.

"Ah, Monsieur Lecoq, she was in a dreadful condition. Since the count deserted her she has been constantly falling lower and lower. She sold all she had piece by piece. At last, she mixed with the worst kind of people, drank absinthe, they say, and had nothing to put to her back. When she got any money she spent it on a parcel of hussies instead of buying clothes."

"And where is she living?"

"Right by, in a house in the Rue Vintimille."

"If that is so," replied M. Lecoq, severely, "I am astonished that she is not here."

"It's not my fault, dear Monsieur Lecoq; I know where the nest is, but not where the bird is. She was away this morning when I sent for her."

"The deuce! But then—it's very annoying; I must hunt her up at once."

"You needn't disturb yourself. Jenny ought to return before four o'clock, and one of my girls is waiting for her with orders to bring her here as soon as she comes in, without even letting her go up to her room."

"We'll wait for her then."

M. Lecoq and his friend waited about a quarter of an hour, when Mme. Charman suddenly got up.

"I hear my girl's step on the stairs," said she.

"Listen to me," answered M. Lecoq, "if it is she, manage to make Jenny think that it was you who sent for her; we will seem to have come in by the merest chance."

Mme. Charman responded by a gesture of assent. She was going towards the door when the detective detained her by the arm.

"One word more. When you see me fairly engaged in conversation with her, please be so good as to go and overlook your work-people in the shops. What I have to say will not interest you in the least."

"I understand."

"But no trickery, you know. I know where the closet of your bedroom is, well enough to be sure that everything that is said here may be overheard in it."

Mme. Charman's emissary opened the door; there was a loud rustling of silks along the corridor; and Jenny appeared in all her glory. She was no longer the fresh and pretty minx whom Hector had known—

the provoking large-eyed Parisian demoiselle, with haughty head and petulant grace. A single year had withered her, as a too hot summer does the roses, and had destroyed her fragile beauty beyond recall. She was not twenty, and still it was hard to discern that she had been charming, and was yet young. For she had grown old like vice; her worn features and hollow cheeks betrayed the dissipations of her life; her eyes had lost their long, languishing lids; her mouth had a pitiful expression of stupefaction; and absinthe had broken the clear tone of her voice. She was richly dressed in a new robe, with a great deal of lace and a jaunty hat; yet she had a wretched expression; she was all besmeared with rouge and paint.

When she came in she seemed very angry.

"What an idea!" she cried, without taking the trouble to bow to anyone; "what sense is there in sending for me to come here in this way, almost by force, and by a very impudent young woman?"

Mme. Charman hastened to meet her old customer, embraced her in spite of herself, and pressed her to her heart.

"Why, don't be so angry, dear—I thought you would be delighted and overwhelm me with thanks."

"I? What for?"

"Because, my dear girl, I had a surprise in store for you. Ah, I'm not ungrateful; you came here yesterday and settled your account with me, and to-day I mean to reward you for it. Come, cheer up; you're going to have a splendid chance, because just at this moment I happen to have a piece of exquisite velvet——"

"A pretty thing to bring me here for!"

"All silk, my dear, at thirty francs the yard. Ha, 'tis wonderfully cheap, the best——"

"Eh! What care I for your 'chance?' Velvet in July—are you making fun of me?"

"Let me show it to you, now."

"Never! I am expected to dinner at Asnières, and so——"

She was about to go away despite Mme. Charman's attempts to detain her, when M. Lecoq thought it was time to interfere.

"Why, am I mistaken?" cried he, as if amazed; "is it really Miss Jenny whom I have the honor of seeing?"

She scanned him with a half-angry, half-surprised air, and said:

"Yes, it's I; what of it?"

"What! Are you so forgetful? Don't you recognize me?"

"No, not at all."

"Yet I was one of your admirers once, my dear, and used to breakfast with you when you lived near the Madeleine; in the count's time, you know."

He took off his spectacles as if to wipe them, but really to launch a furious look at Mme. Charman, who, not daring to resist, beat a hasty retreat.

"I knew Trémorrel well in other days," resumed the detective. "And—by the bye, have you heard any news of him lately?"

"I saw him about a week ago."

"Stop, though—haven't you heard of that horrible affair?"

"No. What was it?"

"Really, now, haven't you heard? Don't you read the papers? It was a dreadful thing, and has been the talk of all Paris for the past forty-eight hours."

"Tell me about it, quick!"

"You know that he married the widow of one of his

friends. He was thought to be very happy at home; not at all; he has murdered his wife with a knife."

Jenny grew pale under her paint.

"Is it possible?" stammered she. She seemed much affected, but not very greatly surprised, which M. Lecoq did not fail to remark.

"It is so possible," he resumed, "that he is at this moment in prison, will soon be tried, and without a doubt will be convicted."

M. Plantat narrowly observed Jenny; he looked for an explosion of despair, screams, tears, at least a light nervous attack; he was mistaken.

Jenny now detested Trémoré. Sometimes she felt the weight of her degradation, and she accused Hector of her present ignominy. She heartily hated him, though she smiled when she saw him, got as much money out of him as she could, and cursed him behind his back. Instead of bursting into tears, she therefore laughed aloud.

"Well done for Trémoré," said she. "Why did he leave me? Good for her too."

"Why so?"

"What did she deceive her husband for? It was she who took Hector from me—she, a rich, married woman! But I've always said Hector was a poor wretch."

"Frankly, that's my notion too. When a man acts as Trémoré has toward you, he's a villain."

"It's so, isn't it?"

"Parbleu! But I'm not surprised at his conduct. For his wife's murder is the least of his crimes; why, he tried to put it off upon somebody else!"

"That doesn't surprise me."

"He accused a poor devil as innocent as you or I,

who might have been condemned to death if he hadn't been able to tell where he was on Wednesday night."

M. Lecoq said this lightly, with intended deliberation, so as to watch the impression he produced on Jenny.

"Do you know who the man was?" asked she in a tremulous voice.

"The papers said it was a poor lad who was his gardener."

"A little man, wasn't he, thin, very dark, with black hair?"

"Just so."

"And whose name was—wait now—was—Guespin."

"Ah ha, you know him then?"

Jenny hesitated. She was trembling very much, and evidently regretted that she had gone so far.

"Bah!" said she at last. "I don't see why I shouldn't tell what I know. I'm an honest girl, if Trémoré is a rogue; and I don't want them to condemn a poor wretch who is innocent."

"You know something about it, then?"

"Well, I know nearly all about it—that's honest, ain't it? About a week ago Hector wrote to me to meet him at Melun; I went, found him, and we breakfasted together. Then he told me that he was very much annoyed about his cook's marriage; for one of his servants was deeply in love with her, and might go and raise a rumpus at the wedding."

"Ah, he spoke to you about the wedding, then?"

"Wait a minute. Hector seemed very much embarrassed, not knowing how to avoid the disturbance he feared. Then I advised him to send the servant off out of the way on the wedding-day. He thought a moment,

and said that my advice was good. He added that he had found a means of doing this; on the evening of the marriage he would send the man on an errand for me, telling him that the affair was to be concealed from the countess. I was to dress up as a chambermaid, and wait for the man at the café in the Place du Chatelet, between half-past nine and ten that evening; I was to sit at the table nearest the entrance on the right, with a bouquet in my hand, so that he should recognize me. He would come in and give me a package; then I was to ask him to take something, and so get him tipsy if possible, and then walk about Paris with him till morning."

Jenny expressed herself with difficulty, hesitating, choosing her words, and trying to remember exactly what Trémoré said.

"And you," interrupted M. Lecoq, "did you believe all this story about a jealous servant?"

"Not quite; but I fancied that he had some intrigue on foot, and I wasn't sorry to help him deceive a woman whom I detested, and who had wronged me."

"So you did as he told you?"

"Exactly, from beginning to end; everything happened just as Hector had foreseen. The man came along at just ten o'clock, took me for a maid, and gave me the package. I naturally offered him a glass of beer; he took it and proposed another, which I also accepted. He is a very nice fellow, this gardener, and I passed a very pleasant evening with him. He knew lots of queer things, and——"

"Never mind that. What did you do then?"

"After the beer we had some wine, then some beer again, then some punch, then some more wine—the gardener had his pockets full of money. He was very

tipsy by eleven and invited me to go and have a dance with him at the Batignolles. I refused, and asked him to escort me back to my mistress at the upper end of the Champs Elysées. We went out of the café and walked up the Rue de Rivoli, stopping every now and then for more wine and beer. By two o'clock the fellow was so far gone that he fell like a lump on a bench near the Arc de Triomphe, where he went to sleep; and there I left him."

"Well, where did you go?"

"Home."

"What has become of the package?"

"Oh, I intended to throw it into the Seine, as Hector wished, but I forgot it; you see, I had drunk almost as much as the gardener—so I carried it back home with me, and it is in my room now."

"Have you opened it?"

"Well—what do you think?"

"What did it contain?"

"A hammer, two other tools and a large knife."

Guespin's innocence was now evident, and the detective's foresight was realized.

"Guespin's all right," said M. Plantat. "But we must know——"

M. Lecoq interrupted him; he knew now all he wished. Jenny could tell him nothing more, so he suddenly changed his tone from a wheedling one to abrupt severity.

"My fine young woman," said he, "you have saved an innocent man, but you must repeat what you have just said to the judge of instruction at Corbeil. And as you might lose yourself on the way, I'll give you a guide."

He went to the window and opened it; perceiving Goulard on the sidewalk, he cried out to him:

"Goulard, come up here."

He turned to the astonished Jenny, who was so frightened that she dared not either question him or get angry, and said:

"Tell me how much Trémolre paid you for the service you rendered him."

"Ten thousand francs; but it is my due, I swear to you; for he promised it to me long ago, and owed it to me."

"Very good; it can't be taken away from you." He added, pointing out Goulard who entered just then: "Go with this man to your room, take the package which Guespin brought you, and set out at once for Corbeil. Above all, no tricks, Miss—or beware of me!"

Mme. Charman came in just in time to see Jenny leave the room with Goulard.

"Lord, what's the matter?" she asked M. Lecoq.

"Nothing, my dear Madame, nothing that concerns you in the least. And so, thank you and good-evening; we are in a great hurry."

XXVI

When M. Lecoq was in a hurry he walked fast. He almost ran down the Rue Notre Dame de Lorette, so that Plantat had great difficulty in keeping up with him; and as he went along he pursued his train of reflection, half aloud, so that his companion caught here and there a snatch of it.

"All goes well," he muttered, "and we shall succeed. It's seldom that a campaign which commences

so well ends badly. If Job is at the wine merchant's, and if one of my men has succeeded in his search, the crime of Valfeuillu is solved, and in a week people will have forgotten it."

He stopped short on reaching the foot of the street opposite the church.

"I must ask you to pardon me," said he to the old justice, "for hurrying you on so and making you one of my trade; but your assistance might have been very useful at Madame Charman's, and will be indispensable when we get fairly on Trémorel's track."

They went across the square and into the wine shop at the corner of the Rue des Martyrs. Its keeper was standing behind his counter turning wine out of a large jug into some litres, and did not seem much astonished at seeing his new visitors. M. Lecoq was quite at home (as he was everywhere), and spoke to the man with an air of easy familiarity.

"Aren't there six or eight men waiting for somebody here?" he asked.

"Yes, they came about an hour ago."

"Are they in the big back room?"

"Just so, Monsieur," responded the wine merchant, obsequiously.

He didn't exactly know who was talking to him, but he suspected him to be some superior officer from the prefecture; and he was not surprised to see that this distinguished personage knew the ins and outs of his house. He opened the door of the room referred to without hesitation. Ten men in various guises were drinking there and playing cards. On M. Lecoq's entrance with M. Plantat, they respectfully got up and took off their hats.

"Good for you, Job," said M. Lecoq to him who

seemed to be their chief, "you are prompt, and it pleases me. Your ten men will be quite enough, for I shall have the three besides whom I sent out this morning."

M. Job bowed, happy at having pleased a master who was not very prodigal in his praises.

"I want you to wait here a while longer," resumed M. Lecoq, "for my orders will depend on a report which I am expecting." He turned to the men whom he had sent out among the upholsterers:

"Which of you was successful?"

"I, Monsieur," replied a big white-faced fellow, with insignificant mustaches.

"What, you again, Palot? really, my lad, you are lucky. Step into this side room—first, though, order a bottle of wine, and ask the proprietor to see to it that we are not disturbed."

These orders were soon executed, and M. Plantat being duly ensconced with them in the little room, the detective turned the key.

"Speak up now," said he to Palot, "and be brief."

"I showed the photograph to at least a dozen upholsterers without any result; but at last a merchant in the Faubourg St. Germain, named Rech, recognized it."

"Tell me just what he said, if you can."

"He told me that it was the portrait of one of his customers. A month ago this customer came to him to buy a complete set of furniture—drawing-room, dining-room, bed-room, and the rest—for a little house which he had just rented. He did not beat him down at all, and only made one condition to the purchase, and that was, that everything should be ready and in place,

and the curtains and carpets put in, within three weeks from that time; that is a week ago last Monday."

"And what was the sum-total of the purchase?"

"Eighteen thousand francs, half paid down in advance, and half on the day of delivery."

"And who carried the last half of the money to the upholsterer?"

"A servant."

"What name did this customer give?"

"He called himself Monsieur James Wilson; but Monsieur Rech said he did not seem like an Englishman."

"Where does he live?"

"The furniture was carried to a small house, No. 34 Rue St. Lazare, near the Havre station."

M. Lecoq's face, which had up to that moment worn an anxious expression, beamed with joy. He felt the natural pride of a captain who has succeeded in his plans for the enemy's destruction. He tapped the old justice of the peace familiarly on the shoulder, and pronounced a single word:

"Nipped!"

Palot shook his head.

"It isn't certain," said he.

"Why?"

"You may imagine, Monsieur Lecoq, that when I got the address, having some time on my hands, I went to reconnoitre the house."

"Well?"

"The tenant's name is really Wilson, but it's not the man of the photograph, I'm certain."

M. Plantat gave a groan of disappointment, but M. Lecoq was not so easily discouraged.

"How did you find out?"

"I pumped one of the servants."

"Confound you!" cried M. Plantat. "Perhaps you roused suspicions."

"Oh, no," answered M. Lecoq. "I'll answer for him. Palot is a pupil of mine. Explain yourself, Palot."

"Recognizing the house—an elegant affair it is, too—I said to myself: 'I' faith, here's the cage; let's see if the bird is in it.' I luckily happened to have a napoleon in my pocket; and I slipped it without hesitation into the drain which led from the house to the street-gutter."

"Then you rang?"

"Exactly. The porter—there is a porter—opened the door, and with my most vexed air I told him how, in pulling out my handkerchief, I had dropped a twenty-franc piece in the drain, and begged him to lend me something to try to get it out. He lent me a poker and took another himself, and we got the money out with no difficulty; I began to jump about as if I were delighted, and begged him to let me treat him to a glass of wine."

"Not bad."

"Oh, Monsieur Lecoq, it is one of your tricks, you know. My porter accepted my invitation, and we soon got to be the best friends in the world over some wine in a shop just across the street from the house. We were having a jolly talk together when, all of a sudden, I leaned over as if I had just espied something on the floor, and picked up—the photograph, which I had dropped and soiled a little with my foot. 'What,' cried I, 'a portrait?' My new friend took it, looked at it, and didn't seem to recognize it. Then, to be certain, I said, 'He's a very good-looking fellow, ain't he now?'

Your master must be some such a man.' But he said no, that the photograph was of a man who was bearded, while his master was as clean-faced as an abbé. 'Besides,' he added, 'my master is an American; he gives us our orders in French, but Madame and he always talk English together.'"

M. Lecoq's eye glistened as Palot proceeded.

"Trémoré speaks English, doesn't he?" asked he of M. Plantat.

"Quite well; and Laurence too."

"If that is so, we are on the right track, for we know that Trémoré shaved his beard off on the night of the murder. We can go on——"

Palot meanwhile seemed a little uneasy at not receiving the praise he expected.

"My lad," said M. Lecoq, turning to him, "I think you have done admirably, and a good reward shall prove it to you. Being ignorant of what we know, your conclusions were perfectly right. But let's go to the house at once; have you got a plan of the ground-floor?"

"Yes, and also of the first floor above. The porter was not dumb, and so he gave me a good deal of information about his master and mistress, though he has only been there two days. The lady is dreadfully melancholy, and cries all the time."

"We know it; the plan——"

"Below, there is a large and high paved arch for the carriages to pass through; on the other side is a good-sized courtyard, at the end of which are the stable and carriage-house. The porter's lodge is on the left of the arch; on the right a glass door opens on a staircase with six steps, which conducts to a vestibule into which the drawing-room, dining-room, and two other little

rooms open. The chambers are on the first floor, a study, a——”

“Enough,” M. Lecoq said, “my plan is made.”

And rising abruptly, he opened the door, and followed by M. Plantat and Palot, went into the large room. All the men rose at his approach as before.

“Monsieur Job,” said the detective, “listen attentively to what I have to say. As soon as I am gone, pay up what you owe here, and then, as I must have you all within reach, go and install yourselves in the first wine-shop on the right as you go up the Rue d’Amsterdam. Take your dinner there, for you will have time—but soberly, you understand.”

He took two napoleons out of his pocket and placed them on the table, adding:

“That’s for the dinner.”

M. Lecoq and the old justice went into the street, followed closely by Palot. The detective was anxious above all to see for himself the house inhabited by Trémoré. He saw at a glance that the interior must be as Palot had described.

“That’s it, undoubtedly,” said he to M. Plantat; “we’ve got the game in our hands. Our chances at this moment are ninety to ten.”

“What are you going to do?” asked the justice, whose emotion increased as the decisive moment approached.

“Nothing, just yet. I must wait for night before I act. As it is two hours yet before dark, let’s imitate my men; I know a restaurant just by here where you can dine capitally; we’ll patronize it.”

And without awaiting a reply, he led M. Plantat to a restaurant in the Passage du Havre. But at the mo-

ment he was about to open the door, he stopped and made a signal. Palot immediately appeared.

"I give you two hours to get yourself up so that the porter won't recognize you, and to have some dinner. You are an upholsterer's apprentice. Now clear out; I shall wait for you here."

M. Lecoq was right when he said that a capital dinner was to be had in the Passage du Havre; unfortunately M. Plantat was not in a state to appreciate it. As in the morning, he found it difficult to swallow anything, he was so anxious and depressed. He longed to know the detective's plans; but M. Lecoq remained impenetrable, answering all inquiries with:

"Let me act, and trust me."

M. Plantat's confidence was indeed very great; but the more he reflected, the more perilous and difficult seemed the attempt to save Trémoré from a trial. The most poignant doubts troubled and tortured his mind. His own life was at stake; for he had sworn to himself that he would not survive the ruin of Laurence in being forced to confess in full court her dishonor and her love for Hector.

M. Lecoq tried hard to make his companion eat something, to take at least some soup and a glass of old Bordeaux; but he soon saw the uselessness of his efforts and went on with his dinner as if he were alone. He was very thoughtful, but any uncertainty of the result of his plans never entered his head. He drank much and often, and soon emptied his bottle of Léoville. Night having now come on, the waiters began to light the chandeliers, and the two friends found themselves almost alone.

"Isn't it time to begin?" asked the old justice, timidly.

"We have still nearly an hour," replied M. Lecoq, consulting his watch; "but I shall make my preparations now."

He called a waiter, and ordered a cup of coffee and writing materials.

"You see," said he, while they were waiting to be served, "we must try to get at Laurence without Trémorel's knowing it. We must have a ten minutes' talk with her alone, and in the house. That is a condition absolutely necessary to our success."

M. Plantat had evidently been expecting some immediate and decisive action, for M. Lecoq's remark filled him with alarm.

"If that's so," said he mournfully, "it's all over with our project."

"How so?"

"Because Trémorel will not leave Laurence by herself for a moment."

"Then I'll try to entice him out."

"And you, you who are usually so clear-sighted, really think that he will let himself be taken in by a trick! You don't consider his situation at this moment. He must be a prey to boundless terrors. We know that Sauvresy's declaration will not be found, but he does not; he thinks that perhaps it has been found, that suspicions have been aroused, and that he is already being searched for and pursued by the police."

"I've considered all that," responded M. Lecoq with a triumphant smile, "and many other things besides. Well, it isn't easy to decoy Trémorel out of the house. I've been cudgelling my brain about it a good deal, and have found a way at last. The idea occurred to me just as we were coming in here. The Count de Trémorel, in an hour from now, will be in the Faubourg St. Ger-

main. It's true it will cost me a forgery, but you will forgive me under the circumstances. Besides, he who seeks the end must use the means."

He took up a pen, and as he smoked his cigar, rapidly wrote the following:

"MONSIEUR WILSON:

"Four of the thousand-franc notes which you paid me are counterfeits; I have just found it out by sending them to my banker's. If you are not here to explain the matter before ten o'clock, I shall be obliged to put in a complaint this evening before the procureur.

"RECH."

"Now," said M. Lecoq, passing the letter to his companion. "Do you comprehend?"

The old justice read it at a glance and could not repress a joyful exclamation, which caused the waiters to turn around and stare at him.

"Yes," said he, "this letter will catch him; it'll frighten him out of all his other terrors. He will say to himself that he might have slipped some counterfeit notes among those paid to the upholsterer, that a complaint against him will provoke an inquiry, and that he will have to prove that he is really Monsieur Wilson or he is lost."

"So you think he'll come out?"

"I'm sure of it, unless he has become a fool."

"I tell you we shall succeed then, for this is the only serious obstacle——"

He suddenly interrupted himself. The restaurant door opened ajar, and a man passed his head in and withdrew it immediately.

"That's my man," said M. Lecoq, calling the waiter

to pay for the dinner, "he is waiting for us in the passage; let us go."

A young man dressed like a journeyman upholsterer was standing in the passage looking in at the shop-windows. He had long brown locks, and his mustache and eyebrows were coal-black. M. Plantat certainly did not recognize him as Palot, but M. Lecoq did, and even seemed dissatisfied with his get-up.

"Bad," growled he, "pitiable. Do you think it is enough, in order to disguise yourself, to change the color of your beard? Look in that glass, and tell me if the expression of your face is not just what it was before? Aren't your eye and smile the same? Then your cap is too much on one side, it is not natural; and your hand is put in your pocket awkwardly."

"I'll try to do better another time, Monsieur Lecoq," Palot modestly replied.

"I hope so; but I guess your porter won't recognize you to-night, and that is all we want."

"And now what must I do?"

"I'll give you your orders; and be very careful not to blunder. First, hire a carriage, with a good horse; then go to the wine-shop for one of our men, who will accompany you to Monsieur Wilson's house. When you get there ring, enter alone and give the porter this letter, saying that it is of the utmost importance. This done, put yourself with your companion in ambuscade before the house. If Monsieur Wilson goes out—and he will go out or I am not Lecoq—send your comrade to me at once. As for you, you will follow Monsieur Wilson and not lose sight of him. He will take a carriage, and you will follow him with yours, getting up on the hackman's seat and keeping a lookout from there. Have your eyes open, for he is a rascal who may feel

inclined to jump out of his cab and leave you in pursuit of an empty vehicle."

"Yes, and the moment I am informed——"

"Silence, please, when I am speaking. He will probably go to the upholsterer's in the Rue des Saints-Pères, but I may be mistaken. He may order himself to be carried to one of the railway stations, and may take the first train which leaves. In this case, you must get into the same railway carriage that he does, and follow him everywhere he goes; and be sure and send me a despatch as soon as you can."

"Very well, Monsieur Lecoq; only if I have to take a train——"

"What, haven't you any money?"

"Well—no, my chief."

"Then take this five-hundred-franc note; that's more than is necessary to make the tour of the world. Do you comprehend everything?"

"I beg your pardon—what shall I do if Monsieur Wilson simply returns to his house?"

"In that case I will finish with him. If he returns, you will come back with him, and the moment his cab stops before the house give two loud whistles, you know. Then wait for me in the street, taking care to retain your cab, which you will lend to Monsieur Plantat if he needs it."

"All right," said Palot, who hastened off without more ado.

M. Plantat and the detective, left alone, began to walk up and down the gallery; both were grave and silent, as men are at a decisive moment; there is no chatting about a gaming-table. M. Lecoq suddenly started; he had just seen his agent at the end of the

gallery. His impatience was so great that he ran toward him, saying:

"Well?"

"Monsieur, the game has flown, and Palot after him!"

"On foot or in a cab?"

"In a cab."

"Enough. Return to your comrades, and tell them to hold themselves ready."

Everything was going as Lecoq wished, and he grasped the old justice's hand, when he was struck by the alteration in his features.

"What, are you ill?" asked he, anxiously.

"No, but I am fifty-five years old, Monsieur Lecoq, and at that age there are emotions which kill one. Look, I am trembling at the moment when I see my wishes being realized, and I feel as if a disappointment would be the death of me. I'm afraid, yes, I'm afraid. Ah, why can't I dispense with following you?"

"But your presence is indispensable; without your help I can do nothing."

"What could I do?"

"Save Laurence, Monsieur Plantat."

This name restored a part of his courage.

"If that is so—" said he. He began to walk firmly toward the street, but M. Lecoq stopped him.

"Not yet," said the detective, "not yet; the battle now depends on the precision of our movements. A single fault miserably upsets all my combinations, and then I shall be forced to arrest and deliver up the criminal. We must have a ten minutes' interview with Mademoiselle Laurence, but not much more, and it is absolutely necessary that this interview should be suddenly interrupted by Trémorrel's return. Let's make

our calculations. It will take the rascal half an hour to go to the Rue des Saints-Pères, where he will find nobody; as long to get back; let us throw in fifteen minutes as a margin; in all, an hour and a quarter. There are forty minutes left us."

M. Plantat did not reply, but his companion said that he could not stay so long on his feet after the fatigues of the day, agitated as he was, and having eaten nothing since the evening before. He led him into a neighboring café, and forced him to eat a biscuit and drink a glass of wine. Then seeing that conversation would be annoying to the unhappy old man, he took up an evening paper and soon seemed to be absorbed in the latest news from Germany. The old justice, his head leaning on the back of his chair and his eyes wandering over the ceiling, passed in mental review the events of the past four years. It seemed to him but yesterday that Laurence, still a child, ran up his garden-path and picked his roses and honeysuckles. How pretty she was, and how divine were her great eyes! Then, as it seemed, between dusk and dawn, as a rose blooms on a June night, the pretty child had become a sweet and radiant young girl. She was timid and reserved with all but him—was he not her old friend, the confidant of all her little griefs and her innocent hopes? How frank and pure she was then; what a heavenly ignorance of evil!

Nine o'clock struck; M. Lecoq laid down his paper.

"Let us go," said he.

M. Plantat followed him with a firmer step, and they soon reached M. Wilson's house, accompanied by Job and his men.

"You men," said M. Lecoq, "wait till I call before you go in; I will leave the door ajar."

He rang ; the door swung open ; and M. Plantat and the detective went in under the arch. The porter was on the threshold of his lodge.

"Monsieur Wilson?" asked M. Lecoq.

"He is out."

"I will speak to Madame, then."

"She is also out."

"Very well. Only, as I must positively speak with Madame Wilson, I'm going upstairs."

The porter seemed about to resist him by force ; but, as Lecoq now called in his men, he thought better of it and kept quiet.

M. Lecoq posted six of his men in the court, in such a position that they could be easily seen from the windows on the first floor, and instructed the others to place themselves on the opposite sidewalk, telling them to look ostentatiously at the house. These measures taken, he returned to the porter.

"Attend to me, my man. When your master, who has gone out, comes in again, beware that you don't tell him that we are upstairs ; a single word would get you into terribly hot water——"

"I am blind," he answered, "and deaf."

"How many servants are there in the house?"

"Three ; but they have all gone out."

The detective then took M. Plantat by the arm, and holding him firmly :

"You see, my dear friend," said he, "the game is ours. Come along—and in Laurence's name, have courage!"

XXVII

All M. Lecoq's anticipations were realized. Laurence was not dead, and her letter to her parents was an odious trick. It was really she who lived in the house as Mme. Wilson. How had the lovely young girl, so much beloved by the old justice, come to such a dreadful extremity? The logic of life, alas, fatally enchains all our determinations to each other. Often an indifferent action, little wrongful in itself, is the beginning of an atrocious crime. Each of our new resolutions depends upon those which have preceded it, and is their logical sequence just as the sum-total is the product of the added figures. Woe to him who, being seized with a dizziness at the brink of the abyss, does not fly as fast as possible, without turning his head; for soon, yielding to an irresistible attraction, he approaches, braves the danger, slips, and is lost. Whatever thereafter he does or attempts he will roll down the faster, until he reaches the very bottom of the gulf.

Trémorrel had by no means the implacable character of an assassin; he was only feeble and cowardly; yet he had committed abominable crimes. All his guilt came from the first feeling of envy with which he regarded Sauvresy, and which he had not taken the pains to subdue. Laurence, when, on the day that she became enamoured of Trémorrel, she permitted him to press her hand, and kept it from her mother, was lost. The hand-pressure led to the pretence of suicide in order to fly with her lover. It might also lead to infanticide.

Poor Laurence, when she was left alone by Hector's departure to the Faubourg St. Germain, on receiving M.

Lecoq's letter, began to reflect upon the events of the past year. How unlooked-for and rapidly succeeding they had been! It seemed to her that she had been whirled along in a tempest, without a second to think or act freely. She asked herself if she were not a prey to some hideous nightmare, and if she should not presently awake in her pretty maidenly chamber at Orcival. Was it really she who was there in a strange house, dead to everyone, leaving behind a withered memory, reduced to live under a false name, without family or friends henceforth, or anyone in the world to help her feebleness, at the mercy of a fugitive like herself, who was free to break to-morrow the bonds of caprice which to-day bound him to her? Was it she, too, who was about to become a mother, and found herself suffering from the excessive misery of blushing for that maternity which is the pride of pure young wives? A thousand memories of her past life flocked through her brain and cruelly revived her despair. Her heart sank as she thought of her old friendships, of her mother, her sister, the pride of her innocence, and the pure joys of the home fireside.

As she half reclined on a divan in Hector's library, she wept freely. She bewailed her life, broken at twenty, her lost youth, her vanished, once radiant hopes, the world's esteem, and her own self-respect, which she should never recover.

Of a sudden the door was abruptly opened.

Laurence thought it was Hector returned, and she hastily rose, passing her handkerchief across her face to try to conceal her tears.

A man whom she did not know stood upon the threshold, respectfully bowing. She was afraid, for Trémoré had said to her many times within the past

two days, "We are pursued; let us hide well;" and though it seemed to her that she had nothing to fear, she trembled without knowing why.

"Who are you?" she asked, haughtily, "and who has admitted you here? What do you want?"

M. Lecoq left nothing to chance or inspiration; he foresaw everything, and regulated affairs in real life as he would the scenes in a theatre. He expected this very natural indignation and these questions, and was prepared for them. The only reply he made was to step one side, thus revealing M. Plantat behind him.

Laurence was so much overcome on recognizing her old friend, that, in spite of her resolution, she came near falling.

"You!" she stammered; "you!"

The old justice was, if possible, more agitated than Laurence. Was that really his Laurence there before him? Grief had done its work so well that she seemed old.

"Why did you seek for me?" she resumed. "Why add another grief to my life? Ah, I told Hector that the letter he dictated to me would not be believed. There are misfortunes for which death is the only refuge."

M. Plantat was about to reply, but Lecoq was determined to take the lead in the interview.

"It is not you, Madame, that we seek," said he, "but Monsieur de Trémourel."

"Hector! And why, if you please? Is he not free?"

M. Lecoq hesitated before shocking the poor girl, who had been but too credulous in trusting to a scoundrel's oaths of fidelity. But he thought that the cruel truth is less harrowing than the suspense of intimations.

"Monsieur de Trémorrel," he answered, "has committed a great crime."

"He! You lie, sir."

The detective sorrowfully shook his head.

"Unhappily I have told you the truth. Monsieur de Trémorrel murdered his wife on Wednesday night. I am a detective and I have a warrant to arrest him."

He thought this terrible charge would overwhelm Laurence; he was mistaken. She was thunderstruck, but she stood firm. The crime horrified her, but it did not seem to her entirely improbable, knowing as she did the hatred with which Hector was inspired by Bertha.

"Well, perhaps he did," cried she, sublime in her energy and despair; "I am his accomplice, then—arrest me."

This cry, which seemed to proceed from the most senseless passion, amazed the old justice, but did not surprise M. Lecoq.

"No, Madame," he resumed, "you are not this man's accomplice. Besides, the murder of his wife is the least of his crimes. Do you know why he did not marry you? Because in concert with Bertha, he poisoned Monsieur Sauvresy, who saved his life and was his best friend. We have the proof of it."

This was more than poor Laurence could bear; she staggered and fell upon a sofa. But she did not doubt the truth of what M. Lecoq said. This terrible revelation tore away the veil which, till then, had hidden the past from her. The poisoning of Sauvresy explained all Hector's conduct, his position, his fears, his promises, his lies, his hate, his recklessness, his marriage, his flight. Still she tried not to defend him, but to share the odium of his crimes.

"I knew it," she stammered, in a voice broken by sobs, "I knew it all."

The old justice was in despair.

"How you love him, poor child!" murmured he.

This mournful exclamation restored to Laurence all her energy; she made an effort and rose, her eyes glittering with indignation:

"I love him!" cried she. "I! Ah, I can explain my conduct to you, my old friend, for you are worthy of hearing it. Yes, I *did* love him, it is true—loved him to the forgetfulness of duty, to self-abandonment. But one day he showed himself to me as he was; I judged him, and my love did not survive my contempt. I was ignorant of Sauvresy's horrible death. Hector confessed to me that his life and honor were in Bertha's hands—and that she loved him. I left him free to abandon me, to marry, thus sacrificing more than my life to what I thought was his happiness; yet I was not deceived. When I fled with him I once more sacrificed myself, when I saw that it was impossible to conceal my shame. I wanted to die. I lived, and wrote an infamous letter to my mother, and yielded to Hector's prayers, because he pleaded with me in the name of my—of our child!"

M. Lecoq, impatient at the loss of time, tried to say something; but Laurence would not listen to him.

"But what matter?" she continued. "I loved him, followed him, and am his. Constancy at all hazards is the only excuse for a fault like mine. I will do my duty. I cannot be innocent when Hector has committed a crime; I desire to suffer half the punishment."

She spoke with such remarkable animation that the detective despaired of calming her, when two whistles in the street struck his ear. Trémoré was returning

and there was not a moment to be lost. He suddenly seized Laurence by the arm.

"You will tell all this to the judges, Madame," said he, sternly. "My orders are only for M. de Trémorrel. Here is the warrant to arrest him."

He took out the warrant and laid it upon the table. Laurence, by the force of her will, had become almost calm.

"You will let me speak five minutes with the Count de Trémorrel, will you not?" she asked.

M. Lecoq was delighted; he had looked for this request, and expected it.

"Five minutes? Yes," he replied. "But abandon all hope, Madame, of saving the prisoner; the house is watched; if you look in the court and in the street you will see my men in ambuscade. Besides, I am going to stay here in the next room."

The count was heard ascending the stairs.

"There's Hector!" cried Laurence, "quick, quick! conceal yourselves!"

She added, as they were retiring, in a low tone, but not so low as to prevent the detective from hearing her:

"Be sure, we will not try to escape."

She let the door-curtain drop; it was time. Hector entered. He was paler than death, and his eyes had a fearful, wandering expression.

"We are lost!" said he, "they are pursuing us. See, this letter which I received just now is not from the man whose signature it professes to bear; he told me so himself. Come, let us go, let us leave this house——"

Laurence overwhelmed him with a look full of hate and contempt, and said:

"It is too late."

Her countenance and voice were so strange that Trémorel, despite his distress, was struck by it, and asked:

“What is the matter?”

“Everything is known; it is known that you killed your wife.”

“It’s false!”

She shrugged her shoulders.

“Well, then, it is true,” he added, “for I loved you so——”

“Really! And it was for love of me that you poisoned Sauvresy?”

He saw that he was discovered, that he had been caught in a trap, that they had come, in his absence, and told Laurence all. He did not attempt to deny anything.

“What shall I do?” cried he, “what shall I do?”

Laurence drew him to her, and muttered in a shuddering voice:

“Save the name of Trémorel; there are pistols here.”

He recoiled, as if he had seen death itself.

“No,” said he. “I can yet fly and conceal myself; I will go alone, and you can rejoin me afterward.”

“I have already told you that it is too late. The police have surrounded the house. And—you know—it is the galleys, or—the scaffold!”

“I can get away by the courtyard.”

“It is guarded; look.”

He ran to the window, saw M. Lecoq’s men, and returned half mad and hideous with terror.

“I can at least try,” said he, “by disguising myself——”

"Fool! A detective is in there, and it was he who left that warrant to arrest you on the table."

He saw that he was lost beyond hope.

"Must I die, then?" he muttered.

"Yes, you must; but before you die write a confession of your crimes, for the innocent may be suspected——"

He sat down mechanically, took the pen which Laurence held out to him, and wrote:

"Being about to appear before God, I declare that I alone, and without accomplices, poisoned Sauvresy and murdered the Countess de Trémorrel, my wife."

When he had signed and dated this, Laurence opened a bureau drawer; Hector seized one of the brace of pistols which were lying in it, and she took the other. But Trémorrel, as before at the hotel, and then in the dying Sauvresy's chamber, felt his heart fail him as he placed the pistol against his forehead. He was livid, his teeth chattered, and he trembled so violently that he let the pistol drop.

"Laurence, my love," he stammered, "what will—become of you?"

"Me! I have sworn that I will follow you always and everywhere. Do you understand?"

"Ah, 'tis horrible!" said he. "It was not I who poisoned Sauvresy—it was she—there are proofs of it; perhaps, with a good advocate——"

M. Lecoq did not lose a word or a gesture of this tragical scene. Either purposely or by accident, he pushed the door-curtain, which made a slight noise.

Laurence thought the door was being opened, that the detective was returning, and that Hector would fall alive into their hands.

"Miserable coward!" she cried, pointing her pistol at him, "shoot, or else——"

He hesitated; there was another rustle at the door; she fired.

Trémoré fell dead.

Laurence, with a rapid movement, took up the other pistol, and was turning it against herself, when M. Lecoq sprung upon her and tore the weapon from her grasp.

"Unhappy girl!" cried he, "what would you do?"

"Die. Can I live now?"

"Yes, you can live," responded M. Lecoq. "And more, you ought to live."

"I am a lost woman——"

"No, you are a poor child lured away by a wretch. You say you are very guilty; perhaps so; live to repent of it. Great sorrows like yours have their missions in this world, one of devotion and charity. Live, and the good you do will attach you once more to life. You have yielded to the deceitful promises of a villain; remember, when you are rich, that there are poor innocent girls forced to lead a life of miserable shame for a morsel of bread. Go to these unhappy creatures, rescue them from debauchery, and their honor will be yours."

M. Lecoq narrowly watched Laurence as he spoke, and perceived that he had touched her. Still, her eyes were dry, and were lit up with a strange light.

"Besides, your life is not your own—you know."

"Ah," she returned, "I must die now, even for my child, if I would not die of shame when he asks for his father——"

"You will reply, Madame, by showing him an honest man and an old friend, who is ready to give him his name—Monsieur Plantat."

The old justice was broken with grief; yet he had the strength to say:

"Laurence, my beloved child, I beg you accept me——"

These simple words, pronounced with infinite gentleness and sweetness, at last melted the unhappy young girl, and determined her. She burst into tears.

She was saved.

M. Lecoq hastened to throw a shawl which he saw on a chair about her shoulders, and passed her arm through M. Plantat's, saying to the latter:

"Go, lead her away; my men have orders to let you pass, and Palot will lend you his carriage."

"But where shall we go?"

"To Orcival; Monsieur Courtois has been informed by a letter from me that his daughter is living, and he is expecting her. Come, lose no time."

M. Lecoq, when he was left alone, listened to the departure of the carriage which took M. Plantat and Laurence away; then he returned to Trémoré's body.

"There," said he to himself, "lies a wretch whom I have killed instead of arresting and delivering him up to justice. Have I done my duty? No; but my conscience will not reproach me, because I have acted rightly."

And running to the staircase, he called his men.

XXVIII

The day after Trémoré's death, old Bertaud and Guespin were set at liberty, and received, the former four thousand francs to buy a boat and new tackle, and the latter ten thousand francs, with a promise of a like sum at the end of the year, if he would go and live in his

own province. Fifteen days later, to the great surprise of the Orcival gossips, who had never learned the details of these events, M. Plantat wedded Mlle. Laurence Courtois; and the groom and bride departed that very evening for Italy, where it was announced they would linger at least a year.

As for Papa Courtois, he has offered his beautiful domain at Orcival for sale; he proposes to settle in the middle of France, and is on the lookout for a commune in need of a good mayor.

M. Lecoq, like everybody else, would, doubtless, have forgotten the Valfeuillu affair, had it not been that a notary called on him personally the other morning with a very gracious letter from Laurence, and an enormous sheet of stamped paper. This was no other than a title deed to M. Plantat's pretty estate at Orcival, "with furniture, stable, carriage-house, garden, and other dependencies and appurtenances thereunto belonging," and some neighboring acres of pleasant fields.

"Prodigious!" cried M. Lecoq. "I didn't help ingrates, after all! I *am* willing to become a landed proprietor, just for the rarity of the thing."

FILE No. 113.

I.

IN the Paris journals of February 28, 186—, there appeared the following intelligence :—

“A daring robbery, committed during the night at one of our principal bankers’, M. André Fauvel, has created great excitement this morning in the neighborhood of the Rue de Provence. The thieves, who were as skilful as they were daring, succeeded in effecting an entrance to the bank, in forcing the lock of a safe that has heretofore been considered impregnable, and in possessing themselves of bank-notes, of the value of three hundred and fifty thousand francs. The police, immediately informed of the robbery, displayed their accustomed zeal, and their efforts have been crowned with success. Already, it is said, P. B., a clerk in the bank, has been arrested, and there is every reason to hope that his accomplices will be speedily overtaken by the hand of justice.”

For four days this robbery was the talk of Paris. Then public attention was engrossed by later and equally interesting events; an acrobat broke his leg at the circus; an actress made her *début* at a minor theatre; and news of the 28th was soon forgotten.

But for once the newspapers were—perhaps designedly—wrong, or at least inaccurate in their information. The sum of three hundred and fifty thousand francs had certainly been stolen from M. André Fauvel’s bank, but not in the manner described. A clerk had also been arrested on suspicion, but no conclusive proof had been forthcoming against him. This robbery of unusual importance remained, if not inexplicable, at least unexplained.

The following are the facts of the case as related with scrupulous exactitude in the official police report.

II.

THE banking-house of M. André Fauvel, No. 87 Rue de Provence, is a noted establishment, and, owing to its large staff of clerks, presents very much the appearance of a government department. On the ground-floor are the offices, with windows opening on the street, protected by iron bars sufficiently strong and close together to discourage all attempts at effecting an entrance. A large glass door opens into a spacious vestibule, where three or four messengers are always in waiting. On the right are the rooms to which the public is admitted, and from which a narrow passage-way leads to the head cashier's office. The offices of the corresponding clerks, the ledger-keeper and general accounts are on the left. At the farther end is a small glazed court with which seven or eight small wickets communicate. These are kept closed, except only on particular days when a considerable number of payments have to be made, and then they are indispensable. M. Fauvel's private office is on the first floor over the general offices, and leads into his handsome private apartments. This office communicates directly with the bank by means of a dark, narrow staircase, which opens into the room occupied by the head cashier. This latter room is completely proof against all burglarious attacks, no matter how ingeniously planned; indeed it could almost withstand a regular siege, sheeted as it is like a monitor. The doors, and the partition in which the wicket is where payments are made, are covered with thick iron plates; and a heavy grating protects the fireplace. Fastened in the wall by enormous iron clamps is a safe, a formidable and fantastic piece of furniture, calculated to fill with envy the poor devil who carries his fortune easily enough in a pocket-book. This safe, considered the masterpiece of the well-known house of Becquet, is six feet in height and four and a half in width, and is made entirely of wrought iron, with triple sides, and divided into isolated compartments in case of fire.

The safe is opened by a curious little key, which is, however, the least important part of the mechanism. Five movable steel buttons, upon which are engraved all the letters of the alphabet, constitute the real power of the

ingenious lock. To open the safe it is requisite, before inserting the key, to replace the letters on the buttons in the same order in which they were when the door was locked. In M. Fauvel's bank, as elsewhere, it was always closed with a word that was changed from time to time. This word was known only to the head of the bank and the chief cashier, each of whom had a key to the safe. In such a stronghold, a person might deposit more diamonds than the Duke of Brunswick possessed, and sleep well assured, as he would be, of their safety. But one danger seemed to threaten—that of forgetting the secret word which was the "Open, sesame" of the iron barrier.

About half-past nine o'clock on the morning of the 28th of February, the bank clerks were all busy at their various desks, when a middle-aged man of dark complexion and military air, clad in deep mourning, appeared in the office adjoining that of the head cashier, and expressed a desire to see him.

He was told that the cashier had not arrived, and his attention was called to a placard in the entry, which stated that the cashier's office opened at ten o'clock.

This reply seemed to disconcert the new-comer. "I expected," he said, in a tone of cool impertinence, "to find some one here ready to attend to my business. I explained the matter to M. Fauvel yesterday. I am Count Louis de Clameran, owner of iron-works at Oloron, and have come to receive three hundred thousand francs deposited in this bank by my late brother, whose heir I am. It is surprising that no instructions have been given about it."

Neither the title of the noble manufacturer nor his remarks appeared to have the slightest effect upon the clerks. "The head cashier has not yet arrived," they repeated, "and we can do nothing for you."

"Then conduct me to M. Fauvel."

There was a moment's hesitancy; then a clerk, named Cavaillon, who was writing by the window, said: "The chief is always out at this hour."

"I will call again, then," replied M. de Clameran. And he walked out, as he had entered, without saying "Good-morning," or even raising his hat.

"Not over polite, that customer," said little Cavaillon; "but he is unlucky, for here comes Prosper."

Prosper Bertomy, head cashier of Fauvel's banking-

house, was a tall, handsome man, of about thirty, with fair hair and large dark-blue eyes, fastidiously neat in appearance, and dressed in the height of fashion. He would have been very prepossessing but for a cold, reserved English-like manner, and a certain air of self-sufficiency, which spoiled his naturally bright and open countenance.

"Ah, here you are!" cried Cavaillon. "Some one has just been inquiring for you."

"Who? An ironmaster, was it not?"

"Precisely."

"Well, he will come again. Knowing that I should be late this morning, I made all my arrangements yesterday." Prosper had unlocked his office-door, and, as he finished speaking, entered, and closed it behind him.

"Good!" exclaimed one of the clerks; "there is a man who never lets anything disturb him. The chief has quarrelled with him twenty times for always coming late, and his remonstrances have no more effect upon him than a breath of wind."

"And quite right too; he knows he can get anything he wants out of the chief."

"Besides, how could he come any sooner? A man who sits up all night, and leads a fast life, doesn't feel inclined for work early in the morning. Did you notice how pale he looked when he came in?"

"He must have been playing heavily again. Couturier says he lost fifteen hundred francs at a sitting last week."

"His work is none the worse done for all that," interrupted Cavaillon. "If you were in his place—"

He stopped short. The door of the cashier's office suddenly opened, and the cashier appeared before them with tottering step, and a wild, haggard look on his ashy pale face. "Robbed!" he gasped out; "I have been robbed!"

Prosper's horrified expression, his hollow voice and trembling limbs, so alarmed the clerks that they jumped off their stools and ran towards him. He almost dropped into their arms; he was sick and faint, and sank into a chair. His companions surrounded him, and begged him to explain himself. "Robbed?" they said; "where, how, by whom?"

Gradually, Prosper recovered himself. "All the money that was in the safe," he said, "has been stolen."

"All?"

"Yes, all; three rolls, each containing one hundred notes of a thousand francs, and one roll of fifty thousand. The four rolls were wrapped in a sheet of paper and tied together."

With the rapidity of lightning, the news of the robbery spread throughout the banking-house, and the room was soon filled with curious inquirers.

"Tell us, Prosper," said young Cavaillon, "has the safe been broken open?"

"No; it is just as I left it."

"Well, then, how could—"

"All I know is that yesterday I placed three hundred and fifty thousand francs in the safe, and this morning they are gone."

A deep silence ensued, which was at length broken by an old clerk, who did not seem to share the general affright. "Don't distress yourself, M. Bertomy," he said; "no doubt the chief has disposed of the money."

The unhappy cashier started up with a look of relief; he eagerly caught at the suggestion. "Yes!" he exclaimed, "it must be as you say; the chief must have taken it." But, after thinking a few minutes, he remarked in a tone of deep depression: "No, that is impossible. During the five years I have had charge of the safe, M. Fauvel has never opened it excepting in my presence. Whenever he has needed money, he has either waited until I came, or has sent for me, rather than take it in my absence."

"Well," said Cavaillon, "before despairing, let us ascertain the truth."

But a messenger had already informed M. Fauvel of the robbery, and as Cavaillon was about to go in search of him, he entered the office.

M. André Fauvel appeared to be a man of fifty, inclined to corpulency, of medium height, with iron-gray hair; and, like all hard workers, he had a slight stoop. Nevertheless did he by a single action belie the kindly expression of his face. He had a frank air, a lively, intelligent eye, and full, red lips. Born in the neighborhood of Aix, he betrayed, when animated, a slight Provencal accent that gave a peculiar flavor to his genial humor. The news of the robbery had extremely agitated him, for his usually florid face was now quite pale. "What is this I hear? what

has happened?" he said to the clerks, who respectfully stood aside when he entered the office.

The sound of M. Fauvel's voice inspired the cashier with the factitious energy called forth by a great crisis. The dreaded and decisive moment had come; he arose, and advanced towards his chief. "Sir," he said, "having, as you know, a payment to make this morning, I yesterday drew from the Bank of France three hundred and fifty thousand francs."

"Why yesterday?" interrupted the banker. "I think I have a hundred times desired you to wait until the day payment has to be made."

"I know it, sir, and I did wrong to disobey you. But the mischief is done. Yesterday evening I locked the money up: it has disappeared, and yet the safe has not been broken open."

"You must be mad!" exclaimed M. Fauvel; "you are dreaming!"

These few words crushed all hope; but the horror of the situation imparted to Prosper, not the coolness of a steadied resolution, but that sort of stupid, stolid indifference which often results from unexpected catastrophes. It was with apparent calmness that he replied, "I am not mad; neither, unfortunately, am I dreaming: I am simply telling the truth."

This tranquillity at such a moment appeared to exasperate M. Fauvel. He seized Prosper by the arm, and shook him roughly. "Speak!" he exclaimed; "speak! who can have opened the safe?"

"I cannot say."

"No one but you and I know the secret word. No one but you and I possess keys."

This was a formal accusation; at least, all the auditors present so understood it. Yet Prosper's strange calmness never left him for an instant. He quietly released himself from M. Fauvel's grasp, and slowly said: "In other words, sir, it is only I who could have taken this money—"

"Miserable man," exclaimed M. Fauvel.

Prosper drew himself up to his full height, and, looking M. Fauvel full in the face, added: "Or you!"

The banker made a threatening gesture; and there is no knowing what would have happened if he had not been interrupted by loud and angry voices in the hall. A man

insisted upon entering despite the protestations of the messengers, and succeeded in forcing his way in. It was M. de Clameran.

The clerks stood looking on, bewildered and inert. The silence was profound and solemn. It was easy to perceive that some terrible issue was being anxiously weighed by all these men.

"The ironmaster did not appear to observe anything unusual. He advanced, and without lifting his hat said, in his former impertinent tone, "It is after ten o'clock, gentlemen."

No one answered; and M. de Clameran was about to continue, when turning round, he for the first time saw the banker, and walking up to him exclaimed, "Well, sir, I congratulate myself upon finding you in at last. I have been here once before this morning, and found the cashier's office not opened, the cashier not arrived, and you absent."

"You are mistaken, sir, I was in my office."

"At any rate, I was told you were out; that gentleman there assured me of the fact." And the ironmaster pointed out Cavaillon. "However, that is of little importance," he went on to say. "I return, and this time not only the cashier's office is closed, but I am refused admittance to the banking-house, and find myself compelled to force my way in. Be so good as to tell me whether I can have my money."

M. Fauvel's pale face turned red with anger as he listened to this harangue; yet he controlled himself. "I should be obliged to you, sir," he said in a low voice, "for a short delay."

"I thought you told me—"

"Yes, yesterday. But this morning—this very instant—I find I have been robbed of three hundred and fifty thousand francs."

M. de Clameran bowed ironically, and asked: "Shall I have to wait long?"

"Long enough for me to send to the Bank of France."

Then, turning his back on the iron-founder, M. Fauvel said to his cashier: "Write a check and send to the Bank at once to draw out all the available money. Let the messenger take a cab." Prosper remained motion-

less. "Do you hear me?" inquired the banker in an angry voice.

The cashier started; he seemed as if awakening from a dream. "It is useless to send," he said in a slow, measured tone: "this gentleman requires three hundred thousand francs, and there is less than one hundred thousand at the bank."

M. de Clameran appeared to expect this answer, for he muttered: "Of course." Although he only pronounced these words, his voice, his manner, his countenance clearly said: "This comedy is well acted; but nevertheless it is a comedy, and I don't intend to be duped by it."

Alas! After Prosper's answer, and the ironmaster's coarsely expressed opinion, the clerks knew not what to think. The fact was, that Paris had just been startled by several financial crashes. The thirst for speculation had caused the oldest and staunchest houses to totter. Men of the most unimpeachable honor had to sacrifice their pride, and go from door to door imploring aid. Credit, that rare bird of security and peace, rested with none, but stood, with upraised wings, ready to fly off at the first suggestion of suspicion.

This idea of a comedy arranged beforehand between the banker and his cashier might therefore readily occur to the minds of people who, if not suspicious, were at least aware of all the expedients resorted to by speculators in order to gain time, which with them often meant salvation.

M. Fauvel had had too much knowledge of mankind not to instantly divine the impression produced by Prosper's answer; he read the most mortifying doubt on the faces around him. "Oh! don't be alarmed, sir," said he to M. de Clameran, "this house has other resources. Be kind enough to await my return."

He left the office, went up to his private room, and in a few minutes returned, holding in his hand a letter and a bundle of securities. "Here, quick, Couturier!" he said to one of his clerks, "take my carriage, which is waiting at the door, and go with this gentleman to M. de Rothschild. Hand the latter this letter and these securities; in exchange, you will receive three hundred thousand francs, which give to M. de Clameran."

The ironmaster was visibly disappointed; he seemed

desirous of apologizing for his rudeness. "I assure you," said he to M. Fauvel, "that I had no intention of giving offence. Our relations, for some years, have been such that I hope—"

"Enough, sir," interrupted the banker, "I desire no apologies. In business, friendship counts for nothing. I owe you money : I am not ready to pay : you are pressing : you have a perfect right to demand what is your own. Accompany my messenger : he will pay you your money." Then he turned to his clerks, who stood curiously gazing on, and said : "As for you, gentlemen, be good enough to resume your places at your desks."

In an instant the office was cleared of every one excepting the clerks who habitually occupied it ; and they resumed their seats at their desks with their noses almost touching the paper before them, as if they were too engrossed in their work to think of anything else.

Still excited by the events which had rapidly succeeded each other, M. André Fauvel walked up and down the room with quick, nervous steps, occasionally uttering some half-stifled exclamation. Prosper had remained leaning against the partition, with pale face and fixed eyes, looking as if he had lost the faculty of thinking or of acting. Presently the banker, after a long silence, stopped short before him ; he had determined upon the line of conduct he would pursue. "We must have an explanation," he said. "Go into your office."

The cashier mechanically obeyed ; and his chief followed him, taking the precaution to close the door after them. The room bore no evidences of a successful burglary. Everything was in perfect order ; not even a paper was disturbed. The safe was open, and on the top shelf lay several rouleaus of gold, overlooked or disdained by the thieves.

M. Fauvel, without troubling himself to examine anything, took a seat, and ordered his cashier to do the same. He had quite recovered his equanimity, and his countenance wore its usual kind expression. "Now that we are alone, Prosper," he said, "have you nothing to tell me ?"

The cashier started, as if surprised at the question. "Nothing, sir, that I have not already told you," he replied.

"What! nothing? Do you persist in maintaining an attitude so absurd and ridiculous that no one can possibly give you credence? It is sheer folly? Confide in me: it is your only chance of salvation. I am your employer, it is true; but I am before and above all your friend—your best and truest friend. I cannot forget that in this very room, fifteen years ago, you were intrusted to me by your father; and ever since that day I have had cause to congratulate myself on possessing so faithful and efficient a clerk. Yes, it is fifteen years since you came to me. I was then just commencing the foundation of my fortune. You have seen it gradually grow, step by step, from almost nothing to its present magnitude. As my wealth increased, I endeavored to better your condition; you, who, although so young, are the oldest of my clerks. At each augmentation of my fortune I increased your salary."

Never had the cashier heard M. Fauvel express himself in so feeling and paternal a manner. Prosper was silent with astonishment.

"Answer," pursued M. Fauvel, "have I not always been like a father to you? From the first day, my house has been open to you; you were treated as a member of my family; my niece Madeleine and my sons looked upon you as a brother. But you grew weary of this peaceful life. One day, a year ago, you suddenly began to shun us; and since then—"

The memories of the past thus called up by the banker seemed too much for the unhappy cashier; he buried his face in his hands, and wept bitterly.

"A man can confide everything to his father," resumed M. Fauvel, also deeply affected. "Fear nothing. A father not only pardons, he forgets. Do I not know the temptations that beset a young man in a city like Paris? There are some inordinate desires before which the firmest principles will give way, and which so pervert our moral sense as to render us incapable of judging between right and wrong. Speak, Prosper, speak!"

"What do you wish me to say?"

"The truth. When an honorable man yields, in an hour of weakness, to temptation, his first step towards atonement is confession. Say to me, Yes, I have been

tempted, dazzled : the sight of these piles of gold turned my brain. I am young : I have passions."

"I!" murmured Prosper, "I!"

"Poor boy," said the banker sadly; "do you think I am ignorant of the life you have been leading since you left my roof a year ago? Can you not understand that all your fellow-clerks are jealous of you? that they do not forgive you for earning twelve thousand francs a year? Never have you committed a piece of folly without my being immediately informed of it by an anonymous letter. I could tell you the exact number of nights you have spent at the gaming-table, and the money you have squandered. Oh, envy has keen eyes and a quick ear! I have great contempt for these cowardly denunciations, but was forced, not only to heed them, but to make inquiries myself. It is only proper that I should know what sort of a life is led by the man to whom I intrust my fortune and my honor."

Prosper seemed about to protest against this last speech.

"Yes, my honor," insisted M. Fauvel, in a voice that a sense of humiliation made unsteady; "yes, my credit, which might have been compromised to-day by this M. de Clameran. Do you know how much I shall lose by paying him this money? And suppose I had not had the securities which I have sacrificed? you did not know I possessed them."

The banker paused, as if hoping for a confession, which, however, did not come.

"Come, Prosper, have courage, be frank! I will go up stairs. You will look again in the safe; I am sure that in your agitation you did not search it thoroughly. This evening I will return, and I am confident that, during the day, you will have found, if not the three hundred and fifty thousand francs, at least the greater portion of the amount; and to-morrow neither you nor I will remember anything about this false alarm."

M. Fauvel had risen, and was about to leave the room when Prosper arose, and seized him by the arm. "Your generosity is useless, sir," he said bitterly; "having taken nothing, I can restore nothing. I have made a scrupulous search; the bank-notes have been stolen."

"But by whom, poor fool? by whom?"

"By all that is sacred, I swear that it was not by me."

The banker's face turned crimson. "Miserable wretch!" cried he, "do you mean to say that I took the money?"

Prosper bowed his head, and did not answer.

"Ah! it is thus, then," said M. Fauvel, unable to contain himself any longer, "you dare— Then between you and me, M. Prosper Bertomy, justice shall decide. God is my witness that I have done all I could to save you. You will have yourself to thank for what follows. I have sent for the commissary of police; he must be waiting in my room. Shall I call him down?"

Prosper, with the fearful resignation of a man who entirely abandons himself, replied in a stifled voice: "Do as you will."

The banker was near the door, which he opened, and, after giving the cashier a last searching look, called to an office-boy: "Anselme, bid the commissary of police to step down."

III.

If there is one man in the world whom no event should move or surprise, always on his guard against deceptive appearances, capable of admitting everything and explaining everything, it certainly is a Parisian commissary of police.

While the judge, from his lofty seat, applies the Code to the facts submitted to him, the commissary of police observes and watches all the odious circumstances the law cannot reach. He is, in spite of himself, the confidant of disgraceful details, domestic crimes, and tolerated vices.

If, when he entered upon his office, he had any illusions, before the end of a year they would all be dissipated. If he does not absolutely despise the human race, it is because often, side by side with abominations indulged in with impunity, he discovers sublime generosityes which remain unrewarded. He sees impudent villains filching the public respect; and he consoles himself by thinking of the modest, obscure heroes whom he has also encountered.

So often have his forecasts been deceived, that he has reached a state of complete scepticism. He believes in nothing, neither in evil nor in absolute good; not more in virtue than in vice. His experience has forced him to

come to the drear conclusion, that not men, but events, are worth considering.

The commissary sent for by M. Fauvel soon made his appearance. It was with a calm air, if not one of perfect indifference, that he entered the office. He was followed by a short man dressed in a full suit of black, which was slightly relieved by a ruffled collar.

The banker, scarcely bowing, said to the commissary "Doubtless, sir, you have been apprised of the painful circumstance which compels me to have recourse to your assistance?"

"It is about a robbery, I believe."

"Yes; an infamous and mysterious robbery committed in this office, from the safe you see open there, of which my cashier" (he pointed to Prosper) "alone possesses the key and the word."

This declaration seemed to arouse the unfortunate cashier from his dull stupor. "Excuse me, sir," he said to the commissary in a low tone. "My chief also has the word and the key."

"Of course, that is understood."

The commissary at once drew his own conclusions. Evidently these two men accused each other. From their own statements, one or the other was guilty. One was the head of an important bank; the other was simply the cashier. One was the chief; the other the clerk. But the commissary of police was too well skilled in concealing his impressions to betray his thoughts by any visible sign. Not a muscle of his face moved. Yet he became more grave, and alternately watched the cashier and M. Fauvel, as if trying to draw some satisfactory conclusion from their behavior.

Prosper was very pale and dejected. He had dropped into a seat, and his arms hung inert on either side of the chair. The banker, on the contrary, remained standing with flashing eyes and crimson face, expressing himself with extraordinary vehemence. "The importance of the theft is immense," continued he; "there is missing a fortune, three hundred and fifty thousand francs! This robbery might have had the most disastrous consequences. In times like these, the want of this sum might compromise the credit of the wealthiest banking-house in Paris."

"I believe so, if bills were falling due."

"Well, sir, I have this very day a heavy payment to make."

"Ah, really!" There was no mistaking the commissary's tone; a suspicion, the first, had evidently entered his mind.

The banker understood it; he started, and added quickly: "I met my engagements, but at the cost of a disagreeable sacrifice. I ought to add further, that if my orders had been obeyed, the three hundred and fifty thousand francs would not have been here."

"How is that?"

"I desire never to have large sums of money in my house over night. My cashier had positive orders invariably to wait until the last moment before drawing money from the Bank of France. I forbade him, above all, to leave large sums of money in the safe over night."

"You hear this?" said the commissary to Prosper.

"Yes, sir," replied the cashier, "M. Fauvel's statement is quite correct."

After this explanation, the suspicions of the commissary, instead of being strengthened, were dissipated. "Well," he said, "a robbery has been perpetrated, but by whom? Did the robber enter from without?"

The banker hesitated a moment. "I think not," he said at last.

"And I am certain he did not," said Prosper.

The commissary expected and was prepared for these answers; but it did not suit his purpose to follow them up immediately. "However," said he, "we must make ourselves sure of it." Turning towards his companion,— "M. Fanferlot," he said, "go and see if you can discover any traces that may have escaped the attention of these gentlemen."

M. Fanferlot, nicknamed "the squirrel," was indebted to his prodigious agility for his title, of which he was not a little proud. Slim and insignificant in appearance, in spite of his iron muscles, he might be taken for the under clerk of a bailiff as he walked along buttoned up to the chin in his thin black overcoat. He had one of those faces that impress one disagreeably—an odiously turned-up nose, thin lips, and little restless black eyes.

Fanferlot, who had been in the detective force for five years, burned to distinguish himself. He was ambitious.

Alas ! he was unsuccessful, lacking opportunity—or genius. Already, before the commissary spoke to him, he had ferreted everywhere ; studied the doors, sounded the partitions, examined the wicket, and stirred up the ashes in the grate. “ I cannot imagine,” said he, “ how a stranger could have effected an entrance here.” He walked round the office. “ Is this door closed at night ? ” he inquired.

“ It is always locked.”

“ And who keeps the key ? ”

“ The watchman,” said Prosper, “ to whom I always gave it in charge before leaving the bank.”

“ And who,” said M. Fauvel, “ sleeps in the outer room on a folding-bedstead, which he unfolds at night, and folds up in the morning.”

“ Is he here now ? ” inquired the commissary.

“ Yes,” replied the banker, and he opened the door, and called : “ Anselme ! ”

This man was the favorite servant of M. Fauvel, and had lived with him for ten years. He knew that he would not be suspected ; but the idea of being connected in any way with a robbery was too much for him, and he entered the room trembling like a leaf.

“ Did you sleep in the next room last night ? ” asked the commissary.

“ Yes, sir, as usual.”

“ At what hour did you go to bed ? ”

“ About half-past ten ; I had spent the evening at a café near by, with master’s valet.”

“ Did you hear no noise during the night ? ”

“ Not a sound ; and still I sleep so lightly, that if M. Fauvel comes down to the cashier’s office when I am asleep, I am instantly aroused by the sound of his footsteps.”

“ M. Fauvel often comes to the cashier’s office at night, does he ? ”

“ No sir ; very seldom.”

“ Did he come last night ? ”

“ No sir, I am very certain he did not ; for I was kept awake nearly all night by the strong coffee I had drunk with the valet.”

“ That will do ; you can retire,” said the commissary.

When Anselme had left the room, Fanferlot resumed

his search. He opened the door of the private staircase. "Where do these stairs lead to?" he asked.

"To my private office," replied M. Fauvel.

"Is not that the room whither I was conducted when I first arrived?" inquired the commissary.

"The same."

"I should like to see it," said Fanferlot, "and examine the entrance to it."

"Nothing is easier," said M. Fauvel eagerly; "follow me, gentlemen. And you too, Prosper."

M. Fauvel's private office consisted of two rooms, the waiting-room, sumptuously furnished and elaborately decorated, and the inner one where he transacted business. The furniture in this room was composed of a large office-table, several leather-covered chairs, and on either side of the fireplace a secretary and a bookshelf.

These two rooms had only three doors; one opened on the private staircase, another into the banker's bedroom, and the third on to the landing. It was through this latter door that the banker's clients and visitors were admitted.

M. Fanferlot examined the room at a glance. He seemed puzzled, like a man who had flattered himself with the hope of discovering some clew and had found nothing. "Let us see the other side," he said. He passed into the waiting-room, followed by the banker and the commissary of police.

Prosper remained behind. Despite the confused state of his mind, he could not but notice that the situation was for him momentarily becoming more serious. He had demanded and accepted the contest with his chief; the struggle had commenced, and now it no longer depended upon his own will to arrest the consequences of his action. They were about to engage in a bitter conflict, utilizing all weapons, until one of the two should succumb, the loss of honor being the price of defeat.

In the eyes of justice who would be the innocent man? Alas! the unfortunate cashier saw only too clearly that the chances were terribly unequal, and he was overwhelmed with the sense of his own inferiority. Never had he thought that his chief would carry out his threats; for in a contest of this nature, M. Fauvel would have as much at stake as his cashier, and more to lose.

Prosper was sitting near the fireplace, absorbed in the most gloomy forebodings, when the banker's bedroom-door suddenly opened, and a lovely girl appeared upon the threshold. She was tall and slender; a loose morning robe, confined at the waist by a simple black ribbon, betrayed to advantage the graceful elegance of her figure. Her dark eyes were large and soft; her complexion had the creamy pallor of a white camellia; and her beautiful black hair, carelessly held together by a tortoiseshell comb, fell in a profusion of soft curls upon her finely shaped neck. She was Madeleine, M. Fauvel's niece, of whom he had spoken not long before. Seeing Prosper in the room, where probably she had expected to find her uncle alone, she could not refrain from an exclamation of surprise: "Ah!"

Prosper started up as if he had received an electric shock. His eyes, a moment before so dull and heavy, now sparkled with joy, as if he had caught a glimpse of an angel of hope. "Madeleine!" he cried, "Madeleine!"

The young girl was blushing crimson. She seemed about to hastily retreat, and stepped back; but, Prosper having advanced towards her, she was overcome by a sentiment stronger than her will, and extended her hand, which he took and pressed with great respect. They stood thus face to face, but with averted looks, as if they dared not let their eyes meet for fear of betraying their feelings; having much to say, and not knowing how to begin, they stood silent. Finally Madeleine murmured in a scarcely audible voice: "You, Prosper—you!"

These words broke the spell. The cashier dropped the white hand which he held, and answered bitterly: "Yes, I am Prosper, the companion of your childhood—suspected, accused of the most disgraceful theft; Prosper, whom your uncle has just delivered up to justice, and who, before the day has gone by, will be arrested and thrown into prison."

Madeleine, with a terrified gesture, cried in a tone of anguish: "Good heavens! Prosper, what are you saying?"

"What! mademoiselle, do you not know what has happened? Have not your aunt and cousins told you?"

"They have told me nothing. I have scarcely seen my cousins this morning; and my aunt is so ill that I felt

uneasy, and came to tell my uncle. But for heaven's sake, speak: tell me the cause of your distress."

Prosper hesitated. Perhaps it occurred to him to open his heart to Madeleine, of revealing to her his most secret thoughts. A remembrance of the past checked his confidence. He sadly shook his head, and replied: "Thanks, mademoiselle, for this proof of interest, the last, doubtless, that I shall ever receive from you; but allow me, by being silent, to spare you distress, and myself the mortification of blushing before you."

Madeleine interrupted him imperiously: "I insist upon knowing," she said.

"Alas! mademoiselle," answered Prosper, "you will only too soon learn my misfortune and disgrace; then, yes then, you will applaud yourself for what you have done."

She became more urgent; instead of commanding she entreated; but Prosper was inflexible. "Your uncle is in the adjoining room, with the commissary of police and a detective," said he. "They will soon return. I entreat you to retire that they may not find you here." As he spoke he gently pushed her through the door, and closed it upon her.

It was time, for the next moment the commissary and M. Fauvel entered. They had visited the main entrance and the waiting-room, and had heard nothing of what had passed. But Fanferlot had heard for them. This excellent bloodhound had not lost sight of the cashier. He said to himself, "Now that my young gentleman believes himself to be alone, his face will betray him. I shall detect a smile or a gesture that will enlighten me."

Leaving M. Fauvel and the commissary to pursue their investigations, he posted himself to watch. He saw the door open, and Madeleine appear upon the threshold; he lost not a single word or gesture of the rapid scene which had passed. It mattered little that every word of this scene was an enigma. M. Fanferlot was skilful enough to complete the sentences he did not understand. As yet he only had a suspicion; but a mere suspicion is better than nothing; it is a point to start from. So ready was he in building a plan upon the slightest incident, that he thought he saw in the past of these people, who were utter strangers to him, glimpses of a domestic drama. If the commissary of police is a sceptic, the detective has faith,

he believes in evil. "I understand the case now," said he to himself. "This man loves the young lady, who is really very pretty; and, as he is handsome, I suppose his love is reciprocated. This love affair vexes the banker, who, not knowing how to get rid of the importunate lover by fair means has to resort to foul, and plans this imaginary robbery, which is very ingenious."

Thus, to M. Fanferlot's mind, the banker had simply robbed himself, and the innocent cashier was the victim of a vile machination. But this conviction was at present of little service to Prosper. Fanferlot, the ambitious man, who had determined to obtain renown in his profession, decided to keep his conjectures to himself. "I will let the others go their way, and I'll go mine," he said. "When, by dint of close watching and patient investigation, I shall have collected proof sufficient to insure certain conviction, I will unmask the scoundrel."

He was radiant. He had at last found the crime, so long looked for, which would make him celebrated. Nothing was wanting, neither the odious circumstances, nor the mystery, nor even the romantic and sentimental element represented by Prosper and Madeleine. Success seemed difficult, almost impossible; but Fanferlot, "the squirrel," had great confidence in his own genius for investigation.

Meanwhile, the search up stairs was completed, and every one had returned to Prosper's office. The commissary, who had seemed so calm when he first came, now looked grave and perplexed. The moment for taking a decisive part had come, yet it was evident that he hesitated. "You see, gentlemen," he began, "our search has only confirmed our first opinion." M. Fauvel and Prosper bowed assentingly.

"And what do you think, M. Fanferlot?" continued the commissary. Fanferlot did not answer. Occupied in studying the lock of the safe, he manifested signs of a lively surprise. Evidently he had just made an important discovery. M. Fauvel, Prosper, and the commissary rose, and surrounded him.

"Have you discovered any trace?" asked the banker eagerly.

Fanferlot turned round with a vexed air. He reproached himself for not having concealed his impres

sions. "Oh!" said he carelessly, "I have discovered nothing of importance."

"But we should like to know," said Prosper.

"I have merely convinced myself that this safe has been recently opened or shut, I know not which, with some violence and haste."

"How so?" asked the commissary, becoming attentive.

"Look, sir, at this scratch near the lock."

The commissary stooped down, and carefully examined the safe; he saw a slight scratch several inches long that had removed the outer coat of varnish. "I see the scratch," said he, "but what does it prove?"

"Oh, nothing at all!" said Fanferlot. "I just now told you it was of no importance."

Fanferlot said this, but it was not his real opinion. This scratch, undeniably fresh, had for him a signification that escaped the others. He said to himself: "This confirms my suspicions. If the cashier had stolen millions, there was no occasion for his being in a hurry; whereas the banker creeping down in the dead of the night with furtive footsteps, for fear of awakening the man in the outer room, in order to rifle his own safe, had every reason to tremble, to hurry, to hastily withdraw the key, which, slipping out of the lock, scratched off the varnish."

Resolved to unravel alone the tangled thread of this mystery, the detective determined to keep his conjectures to himself; for the same reason he was silent as to the interview which he had witnessed between Madeleine and Prosper. He hastened to withdraw attention from the scratch upon the lock. "To conclude," he said, addressing the commissary, "I am convinced that no one outside of the bank could have obtained access to this room. The safe, moreover, is intact. No suspicious pressure has been used on the movable buttons. I can assert that the lock has not been tampered with by burglars' tools or false keys. Those who opened the safe knew the word, and possessed the key."

This formal affirmation of a man whom he knew to be skilful ended the hesitation of the commissary. "That being the case," he replied, "I must request a few moments conversation with M. Fauvel."

"I am at your service," said the banker.

Prosper foresaw the result of this conversation. He

quietly placed his hat on the table to show that he had no intention of attempting to escape, and passed into the adjoining office. Fanferlot also went out, but not before the commissary had made him a sign, and received one in return. This sign signified, "You are responsible for this man."

The detective needed no hint to make him keep a strict watch. His suspicions were too vague, his desire for success was too ardent, for him to lose sight of Prosper an instant. Closely following the cashier, he seated himself in a dark corner of the office, and, pretending to be sleepy, he fixed himself in a comfortable position for taking a nap, gaped until his jawbone seemed about to be dislocated, then closed his eyes and kept perfectly quiet.

Prosper took a seat at the desk of an absent clerk. The others were burning to know the result of the investigation; their eyes shone with curiosity, but they dared not ask a question. Unable to restrain himself any longer, little Cavaillon, Prosper's defender, ventured to say: "Well, who stole the money?"

Prosper shrugged his shoulders. "Nobody knows," he replied.

Was this conscious innocence or hardened recklessness? The clerks observed with bewildered surprise that Prosper had resumed his usual manner—that sort of icy haughtiness that kept people at a distance, and made him so unpopular in the bank. Save the death-like pallor of his face, and the dark circles around his swollen eyes, he bore no traces of the pitiable agitation he had exhibited not long before. Never would a stranger entering the office have supposed that this young man, idly lounging in a chair and toying with a pencil, was resting under an accusation of robbery, and was about to be arrested. He soon stopped playing with the pencil, and drew towards him a sheet of paper upon which he hastily wrote a few lines.

"Ah, ha!" thought Fanferlot, the squirrel, whose hearing and sight were wonderfully good in spite of his profound sleep; "eh! eh! he makes his little confidential communication on paper, I see; now we will discover something positive."

His note written, Prosper folded it carefully into the smallest possible size, and after furtively glancing towards

the detective, who remained motionless in his corner, threw it across the desk to little Cavaillon with this one word—"Gipsy !"

All this was so quickly and cleverly done that Fanferlot was confounded, and began to feel a little uneasy. "The devil take him !" said he to himself ; "for a suffering innocent this young dandy has more pluck and nerve than many of my oldest customers. This, however, shows the result of education !"

Yes, innocent or guilty, Prosper must have been endowed with great self-control and power of dissimulation to affect this presence of mind at a time when his honor, his future happiness, all that he held dear in life, were at stake. And he was not more than thirty years old.

Either from natural deference, or from the hope of gaining some ray of light by a private conversation, the commissary determined to speak to the banker before acting decisively. "There is not a shadow of doubt," said he, as soon as they were alone ; "this young man has robbed you. It would be a gross neglect of duty if I did not secure his person. The law will decide whether he shall be released, or sent to prison."

This declaration seemed to distress the banker. He sank into a chair, and murmured : "Poor Prosper !" Seeing the astonished look of his listener, he added : "Until to-day, I have always had the most implicit faith in my cashier's honesty, and would have unhesitatingly confided my fortune to his keeping. Almost on my knees have I besought and implored him to confess that in a moment of desperation he had taken the money, promising him pardon and forgetfulness ; but I could not move him. I loved him ; and even now, in spite of the trouble and humiliation that he is heaping upon me, I cannot bring myself to feel harshly towards him."

The commissary looked as if he did not understand. "What do you mean by humiliation ?" he asked.

"What !" said M. Fauvel excitedly, "is not justice the same for all ? Because I am the head of a bank, and he only a clerk, does it follow that my word is more to be relied upon than his ? Why could I not have robbed myself ? Such things have been done. They will ask me for facts ; and I shall be compelled to expose the exact

situation of my house, explain my affairs, disclose the secret and method of my operations."

"It is possible that you will be called upon for some explanation ; but your well-known integrity—"

"Alas! He was honest too. His integrity has never been doubted. Who would have been suspected this morning if I had not been able to instantly produce a hundred thousand crowns? Who would be suspected if I could not prove that my assets exceed my liabilities by more than three millions?"

To a strictly honorable man, the thought, the possibility of suspicion tarnishing his fair name, is cruel suffering. The banker suffered, and the commissary of police saw it, and felt for him. "Be calm, sir," said he ; "before the end of a week, justice will have collected sufficient proof to establish the guilt of this unfortunate man, whom we may now recall."

Prosper entered with Fanferlot—whom they had much trouble to awaken—and with the most stolid indifference listened to the announcement of his arrest. In response he calmly said : "I swear that I am guiltless."

M. Fauvel, much more disturbed and excited than his cashier, made a last attempt. "It is not too late yet, poor boy," he said : "for heaven's sake reflect—"

Prosper did not appear to hear him. He drew from his pocket a small key, which he laid on the table, and said : "Here, sir, is the key of your safe. I hope for my sake that you will some day be convinced of my innocence ; and I hope for your sake that the conviction will not come too late." Then as every one was silent, he resumed : "Before leaving I hand over to you the books, papers, and accounts necessary for my successor. I must at the same time inform you that, without speaking of the stolen three hundred and fifty thousand francs, I leave a deficit in cash."

A deficit ! This ominous word from the lips of the cashier fell like a bombshell upon the ears of Prosper's hearers. His declaration was interpreted in divers ways. "A deficit !" thought the commissary ; "how, after this, can his guilt be doubted? Before stealing the whole contents of the safe, he has kept his hand in by occasional small thefts." "A deficit !" said the detective to himself, "now, no doubt, the very innocence of this poor wretch

gives his conduct an appearance of great depravity ; were he guilty, he would have replaced the first money by a portion of the second."

The grave importance of Prosper's statement was considerably lessened by the explanation he proceeded to make : " There is a deficit of three thousand five hundred francs on my cash account, which has been disposed of in the following manner : two thousand taken by myself in advance on my salary ; fifteen hundred advanced to several of my fellow clerks. This is the last day of the month : to-morrow the salaries will be paid, consequently—"

The commissary interrupted him—" Were you authorized to draw money whenever you wished for yourself or the clerks ? "

" No ; but I knew that M. Fauvel would not have refused me permission to oblige my friends in the bank. What I did is done everywhere ; I have simply followed my predecessor's example." The banker made a sign of assent. " As regards that spent by myself," continued the cashier, " I had a sort of right to it, all of my savings being deposited in this bank ; about fifteen thousand francs."

" That is true," said M. Fauvel, " M. Bertomy has at least that amount on deposit."

This last question settled, the commissary's errand was at an end, and his report might now be made. He announced his intention of leaving, and ordered the cashier to prepare to follow him.

Usually, the moment—when stern reality stares us in the face, when our individuality is lost, and we feel that we are being deprived of our liberty—is terrible. At the fatal command, " Follow me," which brings before our eyes the yawning prison gates, the most hardened sinner feels his courage fail, and abjectly begs for mercy. But Prosper lost none of that studied stoicism which the commissary of police secretly pronounced consummate impudence. Slowly, with as much careless ease as if going to lunch with a friend, he smoothed his hair, drew on his overcoat and gloves, and said politely : " I am ready, sir, to accompany you."

The commissary folded up his note-book, and bowing to M. Fauvel, said to Prosper, " Come with me ! "

They left the room, and with a distressed face, and eyes

filled with tears that he could not restrain, the banker stood watching their retreating forms.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed: "gladly would I give twice that sum to regain my old confidence in poor Prosper, and be able to keep him with me!"

The quick-eared Fanferlot overheard these words, and prompt to suspicion, and ever disposed to impute to others the deep astuteness peculiar to himself, was convinced they had been uttered for his benefit. He had remained behind the others, under pretext of looking for an imaginary umbrella, and, as he reluctantly departed, said he would call in again to see if it had been found.

It was Fanferlot's task to escort Prosper to prison; but, as they were about starting, he asked the commissary to leave him at liberty to pursue another course, a request which his superior granted. Fanferlot had resolved to obtain possession of Prosper's note, which he knew to be in Cavaillon's pocket. To obtain this written proof, which must be an important one, appeared the easiest thing in the world. He had simply to arrest Cavaillon, frighten him, demand the letter, and, if necessary, take it by force. But to what would this lead? To nothing but an incomplete and doubtful result.

Fanferlot was convinced that the note was intended, not for the young clerk, but for a third person. If exasperated, Cavaillon might refuse to divulge who this person was, who after all might not bear the name "Gipsy" pronounced by the cashier. And, even if he did answer his questions, would he not lie? After mature reflection, Fanferlot decided that it would be superfluous to ask for a secret when it could be surprised. To quietly follow Cavaillon, and keep close watch on him until he caught him in the very act of handing over the letter, was but play for the detective. This method of proceeding, moreover, was much more in keeping with the character of Fanferlot, who, being naturally soft and stealthy, deemed it due to his profession to avoid all disturbance or anything resembling violence.

Fanferlot's plan was settled when he reached the vestibule. He began talking with an office-boy, and, after a few apparently idle questions, discovered that Fauvel's bank had no outlet on the Rue de la Victoire, and that consequently all the clerks were obliged to pass in and out through the main entrance in the Rue de Provence. From

this moment the task he had undertaken no longer presented a shadow of difficulty. He rapidly crossed the street, and took up his position under a gateway. His post of observation was admirably chosen; not only could he see every one who entered and came out of the bank, but he also commanded a view of all the windows, and by standing on tiptoe could look through the grating and see Cavaillon bending over his desk.

Fanferlot waited a long time, but did not get impatient, for he had often remained on watch entire days and nights at a time, with much less important objects in view than the present one. Besides, his mind was busily occupied in estimating the value of his discoveries, weighing his chances, and, like Perrette with her pot of milk, building the foundation of his fortune upon present success. Finally, about one o'clock, he saw Cavaillon rise from his desk, change his coat, and take down his hat. "Very good!" he exclaimed, "my man is coming out; I must keep my eyes open."

The next moment Cavaillon appeared at the door of the bank; but before stepping on the pavement he looked up and down the street in an undecided manner.

"Can he suspect anything?" thought Fanferlot.

No, the young clerk suspected nothing; only having a commission to execute, and fearing his absence would be observed, he was debating with himself which would be the shortest road for him to take. He soon decided, entered the Faubourg Montmartre, and walked up the Rue Notre Dame de Lorette so rapidly, utterly regardless of the grumbling passers-by whom he elbowed out of his way, that Fanferlot found it difficult to keep him in sight. Reaching the Rue Chaptal, Cavaillon suddenly stopped, and entered the house numbered 39. He had scarcely taken three steps in the narrow hall when he felt a touch on his shoulder, and turning abruptly found himself face to face with Fanferlot. He recognized him at once, and turning very pale he shrank back, and looked around for means of escape. But the detective, anticipating the attempt, barred the way. Cavaillon saw that he was fairly caught. "What do you want with me?" he asked in a voice tremulous with fright.

Fanferlot was distinguished among his colleagues for his exquisite suavity and unequalled urbanity. Even

with his prisoners he was the perfection of courtesy, and never was known to handcuff a man without first apologizing for being compelled to do so. "You will be kind enough, my dear sir," he said, "to excuse the great liberty I take; but I really am under the necessity of asking you for a little information."

"Information! From me, sir?"

"From you, my dear sir; from M. Eugène Cavaillon."

"But I do not know you."

"Oh, yes, you must remember seeing me this morning. It is only about a trifling matter, and you will overwhelm me with obligations if you will do me the honor to accept my arm, and step outside for a moment." What could Cavaillon do? He took Fanferlot's arm, and went out with him.

The Rue Chaptal is not one of those noisy thoroughfares where foot-passengers are in perpetual danger of being run over by numberless vehicles dashing to and fro; there are but two or three shops, and from the corner of the Rue Fontaine, occupied by an apothecary, to the entrance of the Rue Léonie, extends a high, gloomy wall, broken here and there by some small windows which light the carpenters' shops behind. It is one of those streets where you can talk at your ease, without having to step from the sidewalk every moment. So Fanferlot and Cavaillon were in no danger of being disturbed by passers-by.

"What I wished to say, my dear sir," began the detective, "is that M. Prosper Bertomy threw you a note this morning."

Cavaillon vaguely foresaw that he was to be questioned about this note and instantly put himself on his guard. "You are mistaken," he said, blushing to his ears.

"Excuse me for presuming to contradict you, but I am quite certain of what I say."

"I assure you that Prosper never gave me anything."

"Pray, sir, do not persist in a denial; you will compel me to prove that four clerks saw him throw you a note written in pencil and closely folded."

Cavaillon saw the folly of further contradicting a man so well informed; so he changed his tactics, and said: "It is true Prosper gave me a note this morning; but as

it was intended for me alone, after reading it, I tore it up, and threw the pieces in the fire."

This might be the truth. Fanferlot feared so ; but how could he assure himself of the fact ? He remembered that the most palpable tricks often succeed the best, and, trusting to his star, he said at hazard : " Permit me to observe that this statement is not correct ; the note was entrusted to you to give to Gipsy."

A despairing gesture from Cavaillon apprised the detective that he was not mistaken ; he breathed again. " I swear to you, sir—" began the young man.

" Do not swear," interrupted Fanferlot : " all the oaths in the world would be useless. You not only preserved the note, but you came to this house for the purpose of giving it to Gipsy, and it is in your pocket now."

" No, sir, no !"

Fanferlot paid no attention to this denial, but continued in his gentlest tone : " And I am sure you will be kind enough to give it to me ; believe me, nothing but the most absolute necessity—"

" Never !" exclaimed Cavaillon ; and, believing the moment favorable, he suddenly attempted to jerk his arm from under Fanferlot's and escape. But his efforts were vain ; the detective's strength was equal to his suavity.

" Don't hurt yourself, young man," he said, " but take my advice, and quietly give up the letter."

" I have not got it."

" Very well ; see, you reduce me to painful extremities. If you persist in being so obstinate, I shall call two policemen, who will take you by each arm, and escort you to the commissary of police ; and, once there, I shall be under the painful necessity of searching your pockets, whether you will or not."

Cavaillon was devoted to Prosper, and willing to make any sacrifice in his behalf ; but he clearly saw that it was worse than useless to struggle any longer, as he would have no time to destroy the note. To deliver it under force was no betrayal ; but he cursed his powerlessness, and almost wept with rage. " I am in your power," he said, and then suddenly drew from his pocket-book the unlucky note, and gave it to the detective.

Fanferlot trembled with pleasure as he unfolded the paper ; yet, faithful to his habits of fastidious politeness,

before reading it, he bowed to Cavaillon and said : " You will permit me, will you not, sir ? " Then he read as follows :—

" DEAR NINA—If you love me, follow my instructions instantly, without a moment's hesitation, without asking any questions. On the receipt of this note, take everything you have in the house, *absolutely everything*, and establish yourself in furnished rooms at the other end of Paris. Do not appear in public, but conceal yourself as much as possible. My life may depend on your obedience. I am accused of an outrageous robbery, and am about to be arrested. Take with you five hundred francs, which you will find in the secretary. Leave your address with Cavaillon, who will explain what I have not time to tell. Be hopeful, whatever happens. Good-by!—PROSPER."

Had Cavaillon been less bewildered, he would have seen blank disappointment depicted upon the detective's face after the perusal of the note. Fanferlot had cherished the hope that he was about to possess a very important document which would clearly prove the guilt or innocence of Prosper ; whereas he had only seized a love-letter written by a man who was evidently more anxious about the welfare of the woman he loved than about his own. Vainly did he puzzle over the letter, hoping to discover some hidden meaning : twist the words as he would, they proved nothing for or against the writer. The two words "*absolutely everything*" were underscored, it is true ; but they could be interpreted in so many ways. The detective, however, determined not to drop the matter here. " This Madame Nina Gipsy is doubtless a friend of M. Prosper Bertomy ? "

" She is his *particular* friend."

" Ah, I understand ; and she lives here at No. 39 ? "

" You know it well enough, as you saw me go in there "

" I suspected it to be the house, but now tell me whether the apartments she occupies are rented in her name."

" No. Prosper rents them."

" Exactly ; and on which floor, if you please ? "

" On the first."

During this colloquy, Fanferlot had folded up the note, and slipped it into his pocket. " A thousand thanks,"

said he, "for the information; and, in return, I will relieve you of the trouble of executing your commission."

"Sir!"

"Yes; with your permission, I will myself take this note to Madame Nina Gipsy."

Cavaillon began to remonstrate, but Fanferlot cut him short by saying, "I will also venture to give you a piece of advice. Return quietly to your business and have nothing more to do with this affair."

"But Prosper is a good friend of mine, and has saved me from ruin more than once."

"Only the more reason for your keeping quiet. You cannot be of the slightest assistance to him, and I can tell you that you may be of great injury. As you are known to be his devoted friend, of course your absence at this time will be remarked upon. Any steps that you take in this matter will receive the worst interpretation."

"Prosper is innocent, I am sure."

Fanferlot was of the same opinion, but he had no idea of betraying his private thoughts; and yet for the success of his investigations it was necessary to impress the importance of prudence and discretion upon the young man. He would have told him to keep silent concerning what had passed between them, but he dared not.

"What you say may be true," he said. "I hope it is for the sake of M. Bertomy, and on your own account too; for, if he is guilty, you will certainly be very much annoyed, and perhaps suspected of complicity, as you are well known to be intimate with him."

Cavaillon was overcome.

"Now, you had better take my advice, and return to the bank, and—Good morning, sir."

The poor fellow obeyed. Slowly and with swelling heart he returned to the Rue Notre Dame de Lorette. He asked himself how he could serve Prosper, warn Madame Gipsy, and above all, have his revenge upon this odious detective, who had just made him suffer such humiliation. He had no sooner turned the corner of the street than Fanferlot entered No. 39, mentioned the name of Prosper Bertomy to the concierge, went up stairs, and knocked at the first door he came to. It was opened by a youthful footman, dressed in the most fanciful livery.

"Is Madame Gipsy at home?" inquired Fanferlot.

The servant hesitated ; seeing this, Fanferlot showed his note and said : " M. Prosper told me to hand this note to madame and wait for an answer."

" Walk in, and I will let madame know you are here."

The name of Prosper produced its effect. Fanferlot was ushered into a little room furnished in blue and gold silk damask. Heavy curtains darkened the windows, and hung in front of the doors. The floor was covered with a blue velvet pile carpet.

" Our cashier was certainly well lodged," murmured the detective. But he had no time to pursue his inventory. One of the curtains was pushed aside, and Madame Nina Gipsy stood before him. She was quite young, small, and graceful, with a brown or rather gold-colored quad-room complexion, and the hands and feet of a child. Long curling silk lashes softened the piercing brilliancy of her large black eyes ; her lips were full, and her teeth were very white. She had not yet made her toilet, but wore a velvet dressing-gown, which did not conceal the lace ruffles beneath. But she had already been under the hands of a hairdresser. Her hair was curled and frizzed high on her forehead, and confined by narrow bands of red velvet ; her back hair was rolled in an immense coil, and held by a beautiful gold comb. She was ravishing. Her beauty was so startling that the dazzled detective was speechless with admiration.

" Well," he said to himself, as he remembered the noble, severe beauty of Madeleine, whom he had seen a few hours previous, " Our young gentleman certainly has good taste—very good taste—two perfect beauties !"

While he thus reflected, perfectly bewildered, and wondering how he could begin the conversation, Madame Gipsy eyed him with the most disdainful surprise : she was waiting for this shabby little man in a threadbare coat and greasy hat to explain his presence in her dainty drawing-room. She had many creditors, and was recalling them, and wondering which one had dared send this man to wipe his dusty boots on her velvet-pile carpets. After scrutinizing him from head to foot with undisguised contempt, she said haughtily, " What is it that you want ?"

Any one but Fanferlot would have been offended at her insolent manner ; but he only noticed it to gain some

notion of the young woman's disposition. "She is bad-tempered," he thought, "and is uneducated."

While he was speculating upon her merits, Madame Nina impatiently stamped her little foot and waited for an answer; finally she said: "Why don't you speak? What do you want here?"

"I am charged, my dear madame," he answered in his blandest tone, "by M. Bertomy, to give you this note."

"From Prosper! You know him then?"

"I have that honor, madame; indeed, I may be so bold as to claim him as a friend."

"What, sir! *You* a friend of Prosper!" exclaimed Madame Gipsy in a scornful tone, as if her pride were wounded."

Fanferlot did not condescend to notice this offensive exclamation. He was ambitious, and contempt failed to irritate him. "I said a friend of his, madame, and there are few people who would have the courage to claim friendship for him now."

Madame Gipsy was struck by the words and manner of Fanferlot. "I never could guess riddles," she said tartly; "will you be kind enough to explain what you mean?"

The detective slowly drew Prosper's note from his pocket, and, with a bow, presented it to Madame Gipsy. "Read madame," he said.

She certainly anticipated no misfortune; although her sight was excellent, she stopped to fasten a tiny gold eyeglass on her nose, then carelessly opened the note. At a glance she read its contents. She turned very pale, then very red; she trembled as if with a nervous chill; her limbs seemed to give way, and she tottered so that Fanferlot, thinking she was about to fall, extended his arms to catch her.

Useless precaution! Madame Gipsy was one of those women whose inert listlessness conceals indomitable energy; fragile-looking creatures whose powers of endurance and resistance are unlimited; cat-like in their soft grace and delicacy, especially cat-like in their nerves and muscles of steel. The dizziness caused by the shock she had received quickly passed off. She tottered, but did not fall, and stood up looking stronger than ever; seizing the wrist of the detective she held it as if her delicate little

hand were a vice, and cried out: "Explain yourself! what does all this mean? Do you know anything about the contents of this note?"

Although Fanferlot showed plenty of courage in daily contending with the most dangerous rascals, he was almost terrified by the action of Madame Gipsy. "Alas!" was all he murmured.

"Prosper is to be arrested, accused of being a thief?"

"Yes, madame, he is accused of taking three hundred and fifty thousand francs from the bank-safe."

"It is false, infamous, absurd!" she cried. She had dropped Fanferlot's hand; and her fury, like that of a spoiled child, found vent in violent actions. She tore her web-like handkerchief, and the magnificent lace on her gown, to shreds. "Prosper steal!" she cried; "what a stupid idea! Why should he steal? Is he not rich?"

"M. Bertomy is not rich, madame; he has nothing but his salary."

This answer seemed to confound Madame Gipsy. "But," she insisted, "I have always seen him with plenty of money; not rich—then—" She dared not finish; but her eye met Fanferlot's, and they understood each other.

Madame Nina's look meant: "He committed this robbery in order to gratify my extravagant whims." Fanferlot's glance signified: "Very likely, madame."

A few moment's reflection restored Nina's original assurance. Doubt fled after hovering for an instant over her agitated mind. "No!" she cried. "I regret to say that Prosper would never have stolen a single sou for me. One can understand a man robbing a bank to obtain the means of bestowing pleasure and luxury upon the woman he loves; but Prosper does not love me; he never has loved me."

"Oh, my dear lady!" protested the gallant and insinuating Fanferlot, "you surely cannot mean what you say."

Her beautiful eyes filled with tears, as she sadly shook her head and replied: "I mean exactly what I say. It is only too true. He is ready to gratify my every wish, you may say; what does that prove? Nothing. I am too well convinced that he does not love me. I know what love is. Once I was beloved by an affectionate, true-hearted man; and my own sufferings of the last year make

me know how miserable I must have made him by my cold return. Alas! we must suffer ourselves before we can feel for others. No, I am nothing to Prosper; he would not care if—”

“But then, madame, why—”

“Ah, yes,” interrupted Nina, “why? You will be very wise if you can answer me. For a year have I vainly sought an answer to this question, so sad to me. I, a woman, cannot answer it; and I defy you to do so. You cannot discover the thoughts of a man who is so thoroughly master of himself that he never permits a single idea that is passing through his mind to be detected upon his countenance. I have watched him as only a woman can watch the man upon whom her fate depends, but it has always been in vain. He is kind and indulgent; but he does not betray himself, never will commit himself. Ignorant people call him weak, yielding: I tell you that fair-haired man is a rod of iron painted like a reed!”

Carried away by the violence of her feelings, Madame Nina betrayed her inmost thoughts. She was without distrust, never suspecting that the stranger listening to her was other than a friend of Prosper. As for Fanferlot, he congratulated himself upon his success. No one but a woman could have drawn him so excellent a portrait; in a moment of excitement she had given him the most valuable information; he now knew the nature of the man with whom he had to deal, which, in an investigation like that he was pursuing, is the principal point. “You know that M. Bertomy gambles,” he ventured to say, “and gambling is apt to lead a man—”

Madame Gipsy shrugged her shoulders, and interrupted him. “Yes, he plays,” she said, “but he is not a gambler. I have seen him lose and gain large sums without betraying the slightest agitation. He plays as he drinks, as he sups, as he dissipates—without passion, without enthusiasm, without pleasure. Sometimes he frightens me; he seems to drag about a body without a soul. Ah, I am not happy! Never have I been able to overcome his indifference, an indifference so great, so reckless, that I often think it must be despair; nothing will convince me that he has not some terrible secret, some great misfortune weighing upon his mind, and making life a burden.”

“Then he has never spoken to you of his past?”

"Why should he tell me? Did you not hear me? I tell you he does not love me!"

Madame Nina was overcome by thoughts of the past, and tears silently coursed down her cheeks. But her despair was only momentary. She started up, and, her eyes sparkling with generous resolution, she exclaimed: "But I love him, and I will save him! I will see his chief, the miserable wretch who dares to accuse him. I will haunt the judges, and I will prove that he is innocent. Come, sir, let us start, and I promise you that before sunset he shall be free, or I shall be in prison with him."

Madame Gipsy's project was certainly laudable, and prompted by the noblest sentiments; but unfortunately it was impracticable. Moreover, it would be going counter to the plans of the detective. Although he had resolved to reserve to himself all the difficulties as well as the benefits of this inquiry, Fanferlot saw clearly that he could not conceal the existence of Madame Nina from the investigating magistrate. She would necessarily be brought into the case, and be sought after. But he did not wish her to take any steps of her own accord. He proposed to let her appear when and how he judged proper, so that he might gain for himself the merit of having discovered her.

Fanferlot's first step was to try to calm the young woman's excitement. He thought it easy to prove to her that the slightest interference in favor of Prosper would be a piece of folly. "What will you gain by acting thus, my dear madame?" he asked. "Nothing. I can assure you that you have not the least chance of success. Remember that you will seriously compromise yourself. Who knows if you will not be suspected as M. Bertomy's accomplice?"

But this alarming perspective, which had frightened Ca vaillon into foolishly giving up a letter which he might so easily have retained, only stimulated Gipsy's enthusiasm. Man calculates, while woman follows the inspirations of her heart. Our most devoted friend, if a man, hesitates and draws back; if a woman, rushes undauntedly forward, regardless of the danger. "What matters the risk?" she exclaimed. "I don't believe any danger exists; but, if it does, so much the better: it will be all the more to my credit. I am sure Prosper is innocent; but, if he shou'd

be guilty, I wish to share the punishment which awaits him."

Madame Gipsy's persistence was becoming alarming. She hastily drew around her a cashmere shawl, put on her bonnet, and, although still wearing her dressing-gown and slippers, declared that she was ready to walk from one end of Paris to the other, in search of this or the other magis-
trate.

"Come, sir," she said, with feverish impatience. "Are you not coming with me?"

Fanferlot was perplexed. Happily he had always several strings to his bow. Personal considerations having no hold upon this impulsive nature, he resolved to appeal to her interest in Prosper.

"I am at your command, my dear lady," he said; "let us go if you desire it; only permit me, while there is yet time, to say that we are very probably about to do great injury to M. Bertomy."

"In what way, if you please?"

"Because we are taking a step that he expressly forbade in his letter; we are surprising him—giving him no warning."

Nina scornfully tossed her head, and replied: "There are some people who must be saved without warning, and against their will. I know Prosper; he is just the man to let himself be murdered without a struggle, without speaking a word—to give himself up through sheer recklessness and despair."

"Excuse me, madame," interrupted the detective: "M. Bertomy has by no means the appearance of a man who has abandoned himself to despair. On the contrary, I think he has already prepared his plan of defence. By showing yourself, when he advises you to remain in concealment, you will very likely render his most careful precautions useless."

Madame Gipsy was silently weighing the value of Fanferlot's objections. Finally she said: "I cannot remain here inactive, without attempting to contribute in some way to his safety. Can you not understand that this floor burns my feet?"

Evidently, if she was not absolutely convinced, her resolution was shaken. Fanferlot saw that he was gaining ground, and this certainty, putting him more at ease, gave

weight to his persuasive eloquence. "You have it in your power, madame," he said, "to render a great service to the man you love."

"In what way, sir? tell me in what way."

"Obey him, my child," said Fanferlot, in a paternal tone.

Madame Gipsy evidently expected very different advice. "Obey," she murmured, "obey!"

"It is your duty," said Fanferlot with grave dignity; "it is your sacred duty."

She still hesitated; and he took from the table Prosper's note, which she had laid there, and continued: "What! M. Bertomy at the most trying moment, when he is about to be arrested, stops to point out your line of conduct; and you would render vain this wise precaution! What does he say to you? Let us read over this note, which is like the testament of his liberty. He says, 'If you love me, I entreat you, obey.' And you hesitate to obey. Then you do not love him. Can you not understand, unhappy child, that M. Bertomy has his reasons, terrible, imperious reasons, for your remaining in obscurity for the present?"

Fanferlot understood these reasons the moment he put his foot in the sumptuous apartment of the Rue Chaptal; and, if he did not expose them now, it was because he kept them as a good general keeps his reserve, for the purpose of deciding the victory. Madame Gipsy was intelligent enough to divine these reasons.

"Reasons for my hiding!" thought she. "Prosper wishes, then, to keep everyone in ignorance of our intimacy."

She remained thoughtful for a moment; then a ray of light seemed to cross her mind, and she exclaimed: "Oh, I understand now! Fool that I was for not seeing it before! My presence here, where I have been for a year, would be an overwhelming charge against him. An inventory of my possessions would be taken—of my dresses, my laces, my jewels—and my luxury would be brought against him as a crime. He would be asked where he obtained the money requisite to lavish all these elegancies on me."

The detective bowed, and said: "That is perfectly true, madame."

"Then I must fly at once! Who knows that the police are not already warned, and may appear at any moment?"

"Oh," said Fanferlot with easy assurance, "you have plenty of time ; the police are not so very prompt."

"No matter !"

And, leaving the detective alone in the parlor, Madame Nina hastily ran into her bedroom, and calling her maid, her cook, and her little footman, ordered them to empty her drawers and wardrobe of their contents, and assisted them to stuff her best clothing and jewels into her trunks. Suddenly she rushed back to Fanferlot, and said : " Everything will be ready for me to start in a few minutes ; but where am I to go ? "

" Did not M. Bertomy say, my dear lady, to the other end of Paris ? To a hotel, or furnished apartments. "

" But I don't know where to find any. "

Fanferlot seemed to be reflecting ; but he had great difficulty in concealing his delight at a sudden idea that flashed upon him ; his little black eyes fairly danced with joy. " I know a hotel, " he said at last, " but it might not suit you. It is not elegantly furnished like this apartment. "

" Should I be comfortable there ? "

" Upon my recommendation you would be treated like a queen, and, above all, you would be kept concealed. "

" Where is it ? "

" On the other side of the river, on the Quai Saint Michel. It is called the Grand Archangel, and is kept by Madame Alexandre. "

Madame Nina was never long making up her mind. " Here are pen and paper, " said she, " write your recommendation. "

Fanferlot rapidly wrote, and handed her the letter, saying, " With these three lines, madame, you can make Madame Alexandre do anything you wish. "

" Very good. Now, how am I to let Cavaillon know my address ? It was he who should have brought me Prosper's letter. "

" He was unable to come, madame, " interrupted the detective ; " but I will give him your address. "

Madame Gipsy was about to send for a carriage, but Fanferlot said he was in a hurry and would procure her one. He seemed to be in luck that day ; for a cab was passing the door, and he hailed it. " Wait here, " he said to the driver, after telling him that he was a detective.

"for a little brunette who is coming down with some trunks. If she tells you to drive her to the Quai Saint Michel, crack your whip; if she gives you any other address, get down from your box and arrange your harness. I will keep in sight."

He stepped across the street, and stood in the door of a wine-shop. He had not long to wait. In a few minutes the loud cracking of a whip apprised him that Madame Nina had started for the Hôtel of the Grand Archangel. "Aha," said he gayly, "I hold *her* at any rate."

IV.

AT the same hour that Madame Nina Gipsy was seeking refuge at the Grand Archangel, so highly recommended by Fanferlot, Prosper Bertomy was being consigned to the depot of the Préfecture of Police. From the moment he had resumed his habitual composure, he never once faltered. Vainly did the people around him watch for a suspicious expression, or any sign of his giving way under the embarrassment of his situation. His face was stolid as marble, and one would have supposed him insensible to the horrors of his condition, had not his heavy breathing, and the beads of perspiration standing on his brow, betrayed the intense agony he was suffering.

At the police station, where Prosper had to wait for two hours while the commissary went to receive orders from higher authorities, he entered into conversation with the two police agents who had charge of him. At twelve o'clock he said he was hungry, and sent to a restaurant near by for his lunch, which he ate with a good appetite, and also drank nearly a bottle of wine. While he was thus occupied, several clerks from the Préfecture, who have to transact business daily with the commissaries of police, eyed him curiously. They all formed the same opinion, and admiringly said to each other: "Well, he is certainly made of strong stuff, that fellow!" And again: "The young gentleman doesn't seem to care much. He has evidently something in reserve."

When he was told that a cab was waiting for him at the door, he at once rose; but, before going out, requested permission to light a cigar, which was granted him. A

flower-girl stood just by the door, and he stopped and bought a bunch of violets of her. The girl, seeing that he was arrested, said, by way of thanks : "Good luck to you, my poor gentleman !"

Prosper appeared touched by this mark of interest, and replied : "Thanks, my good girl, but 'tis a long time since luck has been in my way."

It was magnificent weather, a bright spring morning. As the cab went along the Rue Montmartre, Prosper kept his head out of the window, smilingly complaining at the same time at being imprisoned on such a lovely day, when everything outside was so sunny and pleasant. "It is singular," he said : "I never felt so great a desire to take a walk."

One of the police agents, a large, jovial, red-faced man, received this remark with a hearty burst of laughter, and said : "I understand."

While Prosper was going through the formalities of the commitment, he replied with haughty brevity to the indispensable questions that were put to him. But after being ordered to empty his pockets on the table, they began to search him, his eyes flashed with indignation, and a single tear coursed down his flushed cheek. In an instant he had recovered his stony calmness, and stood up motionless, with his arms raised in the air so that the rough creatures about him could more conveniently ransack him from head to foot, to assure themselves that he had no suspicious object concealed under his clothes.

The search would have, perhaps, been carried to the most ignominious lengths, but for the intervention of a middle-aged man of rather distinguished appearance, who wore a white cravat and gold spectacles, and was sitting at his ease by the fire. He started with surprise, and seemed much agitated, when he saw Prosper brought in by the officers ; he stepped forward, as if about to speak to him, then suddenly changed his mind, and sat down again.

In spite of his own troubles, Prosper could not help perceiving that this man kept his eyes fixed upon him. Did he know him ? Vainly did he try to recollect having met him before. This individual, treated with all the deference due to a chief, was no less a personage than M. Lecoq, a celebrated member of the detective police.

When the men who were searching Prosper were about to take off his boots, under the idea that a knife might be concealed in them, M. Lecoq waved them aside with an air of authority, and said: "You have done enough."

He was obeyed. All the formalities being ended, the unfortunate cashier was taken to a narrow cell; the heavily-barred door was swung to and locked upon him; he breathed freely; at last he was alone. Yes, he believed himself to be alone. He was ignorant that a prison is made of glass, that the prisoner is like a miserable insect under the microscope of an entomologist. He knew not that the walls have listening ears and watchful eyes. He felt so certain of being alone that he at once gave vent to his suppressed feelings, and, dropping his mask of impassibility, burst into a flood of tears. His long-restrained anger now flashed out like a smouldering fire. In a paroxysm of rage he uttered imprecations and curses. He dashed himself against the prison-walls like a wild beast in a cage.

Prosper Bertomy was not the man he appeared to be. This haughty, correct gentleman had ardent passions and a fiery temperament. One day, when he was about twenty-four years of age, he had become suddenly fired by ambition. While all of his desires were repressed—imprisoned in his low estate, like an athlete in a straight-waistcoat, seeing around him all those rich people with whom money served the purpose of the wand in the fairy-tale, he envied them their lot.

He studied the beginnings of these financial princes, and found that at the starting-point they possessed far less than himself. How, then, had they succeeded? By the force of energy, industry, and assurance. He determined to imitate and excel them.

From that day, with a force of will much less rare than we think, he imposed silence upon his instincts. He reformed not his character, but the outside of his character; and his efforts were not without success. Those who knew him had faith in his character; and his capabilities and ambition inspired the prophecy that he would be successful in attaining eminence and wealth.

And the end of all was this—to be imprisoned for robbery; that is ruined!

For he did not attempt to deceive himself. He knew

that, guilty or innocent, a man once suspected is as ineffably branded as the shoulder of a galley-slave. Therefore, what was the use of struggling? What benefit was a triumph which could not wash out the stain?

When the prison attendant brought him his supper, he found him lying on his mattress, with his face buried in the pillow, weeping bitterly. Ah, he was not hungry now! Now that he was alone, he fed upon his own bitter thoughts. He sank from a state of frenzy into one of stupefying despair, and vainly did he endeavor to clear his confused mind, and account for the dark cloud gathering about him; no loop-hole for escape could he discover.

The night was long and terrible, and for the first time he had nothing to count the hours by, as they slowly dragged on, but the measured tread of the patrol who came to relieve the sentinels. He was now thoroughly wretched.

At dawn he dropped into a sleep, a heavy, oppressive sleep, which was more wearisome than refreshing; from which he was startled by the rough voice of the jailer.

"Come, sir!" said he, "it is time for you to appear before the investigating magistrate."

Prosper jumped up at once, and, without stopping to set right his disordered toilet, said: "I am ready, lead the way."

The jailer remarked as they walked along: "You are very fortunate in having your case brought before a very worthy man." He was right.

Endowed with remarkable penetration, firm, unbiased, equally free from false pity and excessive severity, M. Patrigent possessed in an eminent degree all the qualities necessary for the delicate and arduous office of investigating magistrate. Perhaps he was wanting in the feverish activity which is sometimes necessary for coming to a quick and just decision; but he possessed unwearying patience, which nothing could discourage. He would cheerfully devote years to the examination of a case; he was even now engaged in an affair of Belgian bank-notes, of which he did not collect all the threads, and solve the mystery, until after four years investigation. Thus it was always to him that they brought the endless proceedings, the half-finished inquiries, and the incomplete processes.

This was the man before whom Prosper was being con-

ducted, and he was certainly taken by a difficult road. He was escorted along a corridor, through a room full of police agents, down a narrow flight of steps, across a kind of vault, and then up a steep staircase which seemed to have no end. Finally, he reached a long narrow gallery, on which opened numerous doors, bearing different numbers. The custodian of the unhappy cashier stopped before one of these doors, and said: "Here we are, and here your fate will be decided."

At this remark, uttered in a tone of deep commiseration, Prosper could not refrain from shuddering. It was only too true, that on the other side of the door was a man who would interrogate him, and according to his answers would either release him from custody or commit him for trial. Summoning all his courage, he turned to the door-handle, and was about to enter, when the jailer stopped him. "Don't be in such haste," he said; "you must sit down here and wait till your turn comes; then you will be called." The wretched man obeyed, and his keeper took a seat beside him.

Nothing is more doleful and terrible than having to wait in this gloomy gallery of the investigating magistrates. Occupying the entire length of the wall is a wooden bench blackened by constant use. This bench has for the last ten years been daily occupied by the murderers, thieves, and suspicious characters of the department of the Seine. Sooner or later, as filth rushes to a sewer, does crime reach this dreadful gallery with one door opening on the galleys, the other on the scaffold. This place was bitterly though vulgarly denominated by a certain magistrate as the great public wash-house of all the foul linen in Paris. When Prosper reached the gallery it was full of people. The bench was almost entirely occupied. Close beside him, so as to touch his shoulder, sat a man with a sinister countenance, dressed in rags.

Before each door, giving access to the offices of the investigating magistrates, stood groups of witnesses conversing in an undertone. Gendarmes were constantly arriving and departing with prisoners. Sometimes, above the noise of their heavy tramping along the flagstones, a woman's stifled sob might be heard, when, looking around, you would see some poor mother or wife with her face buried in her handkerchief, weeping bitterly. At short intervals

a door would open and shut, when an officer would call out a name or number.

The stifling atmosphere, and the sight of so much misery made Prosper feel ill and faint; he felt as if another five minutes' stay among these wretched creatures would make him deathly sick, when a little old man dressed in black, wearing a steel chain, the insignia of his office, cried out: "Prosper Bertomy!"

The unhappy man rose, and, without knowing how, found himself in the room of the investigating magistrate. For a moment he was blinded. He had come out of a dark passage; and the room in which he now found himself had a window directly opposite the door, so that a flood of light streamed suddenly upon him. This room, like all the others in the gallery, was of very ordinary appearance, and small and dingy. The wall was covered with a cheap dark paper, and on the floor was a hideous brown carpet, very much worn. Opposite the door was a large writing-table strewn with bundles of papers, furnishing the antecedents of those persons who were subjected to examinations, and behind was seated the magistrate, immediately facing those who entered, so that his countenance remained in the shade, while that of the prisoner or witness whom he questioned was in a glare of light.

Before a little table, on the right, sat a clerk, the indispensable auxiliary of the magistrate, engaged in writing.

But Prosper observed none of these details: his whole attention was concentrated upon the arbiter of his fate, and as he closely examined his face he was convinced that the jailer was right in styling him an honorable man. M. Patrigent's homely face, with its irregular outline and short red whiskers, lit up by a pair of bright, intelligent eyes, and a kindly expression, was calculated to impress one favorably at first sight. "Take a chair," he said to Prosper.

This little attention was gratefully welcomed by the prisoner, for he had expected to be treated with harsh contempt. He looked upon it as a good sign, and his mind felt a slight relief. M. Patrigent turned towards the clerk, and said: "We will begin now, Sigault; pay attention."

Looking at Prosper, he then asked him his name.

"Auguste Prosper Bertomy," replied the cashier.

"How old are you?"

"I shall be thirty on the fifth of next May."

"What is your profession?"

"I am—that is, I was—chief cashier in M. André Fauvel's bank."

The magistrate stopped to consult a little memorandum book lying on his desk. Prosper, who followed closely his every movement, began to be hopeful, saying to himself that never would a man seemingly so unprejudiced be cruel enough to send him to prison again. After finding what he looked for, M. Patrigent resumed the examination. "Where do you live?" he asked.

"At No. 39, Rue Chaptal, for the last four years. Before that time I lived at No. 7, Boulevard des Batignolles."

"Where were you born?"

"At Beaucaire, in the department of Le Gard."

"Are your parents living?"

"My mother died two years ago; my father is still living."

"Does he reside in Paris?"

"No, sir; he lives at Beaucaire with my sister, who married one of the engineers of the Southern canal." It was in broken accents that Prosper answered these last questions. Though there are moments in the life of a man when home memories encourage and console him, there are also moments when he would be thankful to be without a single tie, when he bitterly regrets that he is not alone in the world.

M. Patrigent observed the prisoner's emotion when he spoke of his parents. "What is your father's calling?" he continued.

"He was formerly a superintendent of roads and bridges; then he was employed on the Southern canal like my brother-in-law; now he has retired on a pension."

There was a moment's silence. The magistrate had turned his chair round, so that, although his head was apparently averted, he had a good view of the workings of Prosper's countenance. "Well," he said abruptly, "you are accused of having robbed M. Fauvel of three hundred and fifty thousand francs."

During the last twenty-four hours the wretched young man had had time to familiarize himself with the terrible idea of this accusation; and yet, uttered as it was now in this formal brief tone, it seemed to strike him with a hor-

ror which rendered him incapable of opening his lips. "What have you to answer?" asked the investigating magistrate.

"That I am innocent, sir; I swear that I am innocent!"

"I hope you are," said M. Patrigent, "and you may count upon me to assist you, to the extent of my ability, in proving your innocence. You must have some facts to allege in your defence, some proofs you can furnish me with."

"Ah, sir, what can I say when I am myself unable to understand this dreadful business? I can only refer you to my past life."

The magistrate interrupted him: "Let us be specific; the robbery was committed under circumstances that prevent suspicion from falling upon any one but M. Fauvel and yourself. Do you suspect any one else?"

"No, sir."

"You declare yourself to be innocent, therefore the guilty party must be M. Fauvel." Prosper remained silent. "Have you," persisted the magistrate, "any cause for believing that M. Fauvel robbed himself?" The prisoner preserved a rigid silence.

"I see," said the magistrate, "that you need time for reflection. Listen to the reading of your examination, and after signing it you will return to prison."

The unhappy man was overcome. The last ray of hope was gone. He heard nothing of what Sigault read, and he signed the paper without looking at it. He tottered as he left the magistrate's room, so that the agent who had him in charge was forced to support him. "I fear your case looks bad," said the man, "but don't be disheartened; keep up your courage."

Courage! Prosper had not a spark of it when he returned to his cell; but his heart was filled with anger and resentment. He had determined that he would defend himself before the magistrate, that he would prove his innocence; and he had not had time to do so. He reproached himself bitterly for having trusted to the magistrate's benevolent face. "What a farce," he angrily exclaimed, "to call that an examination!"

It was not really an examination that Prosper had been subjected to, but a mere formality. In summoning him, M. Patrigent obeyed Article 93 of the Criminal Code, which

says, "Every suspected person under arrest must be examined within twenty-four hours." But it is not in twenty-four hours, especially in a case like this, with no evidence or material proof, that a magistrate can collect the materials for an examination. To triumph over the obstinate defence of a prisoner who shuts himself up in absolute denial as though in a fortress, valid proofs are needed. These weapons M. Patrigent was busily preparing.

If Prosper had remained a little longer in the gallery, he would have seen the same official who had called him come from the magistrate's room, and cry out, No. 3. The witness who was awaiting his turn, and answered the call for No. 3, was M. Fauvel.

The banker was no longer the same man. Yesterday he was kind and affable in his manner; now, as he entered the magistrate's room, he seemed irritated against his cashier. Reflection, which usually brings calmness and a desire to pardon, had in his case led to anger and a thirst for vengeance. The inevitable questions which commence every examination had scarcely been addressed to him before his impetuous temper gained the mastery, and he burst forth in invectives against Prosper.

M. Patrigent was obliged to impose silence upon the banker, reminding him of what was due to himself, no matter what wrongs he had suffered at the hands of his clerk. Although he had very slightly examined Prosper, the magistrate was now scrupulously attentive and particular in having every question answered. Prosper's examination had been a mere formality, the verifying of a positive fact. M. Patrigent now occupied himself in ferreting out all the attendant circumstances and the most trifling particulars, in order to group them together, and arrive at a just conclusion.

"Let us proceed with regularity," said the magistrate to M. Fauvel, "and pray confine yourself to answering my questions. Did you ever suspect your cashier of being dishonest?"

"Certainly not. Yet there were reasons which should have made me hesitate to trust him."

"What reasons?"

"M. Bertomy gambled. I have known of his spending whole nights at the card-table, and losing large sums of money. He was intimate with an unprincipled set. Once

he was mixed up with one of my customers, M. de Clameran, in a scandalous gambling affair at the house of some disreputable woman, and which ended in an investigation at the police court."

For some minutes the banker continued to revile Prosper. "You must confess, sir," interrupted the magistrate, "that you were very imprudent, if not culpable, to have entrusted the contents of your safe to such a man."

"Ah, sir, Prosper was not always thus. Until the past year he was a perfect model for men of his age. He frequented my house as one of my family; he spent all of his evenings with us, and was the bosom friend of my eldest son Lucien. One day he suddenly left us, and never came to the house again. Yet I had every reason to believe him to be attached to my niece Madeleine."

M. Patrigent had an odd way of contracting his brows when he thought he had discovered some new proof. He now did this, and said: "Might not this admiration for the young lady have been the cause of M. Bertomy's estrangement?"

"How so?" asked the banker with surprise. "I was willing to bestow Madeleine's hand upon him, and to be frank, was astonishing that he did not ask for her in marriage. My niece would be a good match for any man, and he should have considered himself fortunate in obtaining her. She is very handsome, and her dowry will be half a million."

"Then you can discover no motive for your cashier's conduct?"

"It is impossible for me to account for it. I have, however, always supposed that Prosper was led astray by a young man whom he met at my house about that time, M. Raoul de Lagors."

"Ah! and who is this young man?"

"A relative of my wife's; a very attractive, intelligent young man, somewhat wild, but rich enough to pay for his follies."

The magistrate wrote the name Lagors at the bottom of an already long list on his memoranda. "Now," he said, "let us come to the point. You are sure that the theft was not committed by any one of your household?"

"Quite sure, sir."

"You always kept your key?"

"I generally carried it about on my person ; and whenever I left it at home, I placed it in the drawer of the secretary in my bedroom."

"Where was it on the evening of the robbery ?"

"In my secretary."

'But then—'

"Excuse me for interrupting you," said M. Fauvel, "and permit me to tell you that, to a safe like mine, the key is of no importance. To open it, one must know the word upon which the five movable buttons turn. With the word one can even open it without the key ; but without the word—"

"And you never told this word to any one ?"

"To no one, sir, and sometimes I should have been puzzled to know myself with what word the safe had been closed. Prosper would change it when he chose, and then inform me of the change, but I often forgot it."

"Had you forgotten it on the day of the theft ?"

"No ; the word had been changed the day before ; and its peculiarity struck me."

"What was it ?"

"Gipsy—g, i, p, s, y," said the banker, spelling the name.

M. Patrigent wrote down this name. "One more question, sir," said he, "were you at home the evening before the robbery ?"

"No ; I dined and spent the evening with a friend ; when I returned home, about one o'clock, my wife had retired, and I went to bed immediately."

"And you were not aware of the amount of money in the safe ?"

"Absolutely. In conformity with my positive orders, I could only suppose that a small sum had been left there over night ; I stated this fact to the commissary in M. Bertomy's presence, and he acknowledged it to be the case."

"It is perfectly correct, sir : the commissary's report proves it." M. Patrigent was for a time silent. To him everything depended upon this one fact, that the banker was unaware of the three hundred and fifty thousand francs being in the safe, and Prosper had disobeyed orders by placing them there over night ; hence the conclusion was very easily drawn.

Seeing that his examination was over, the banker thought he would relieve his mind of what was weighing upon it. "I believe myself above suspicion, sir," he began, "and yet I can never rest easy until Bertomy's guilt has been clearly proved. Calumny prefers attacking a successful man, and I may be calumniated: three hundred and fifty thousand francs is a fortune capable of tempting even a rich man. I should be obliged if you would have the condition of my affairs strictly examined. This examination will prove that I could have had no interest in robbing my own safe. The prosperous condition—"

"That is sufficient, sir."

M. Patrigent was already well informed of the high standing of the banker, and knew almost as much of his affairs as M. Fauvel himself. He asked him to sign his testimony, and then escorted him to the door of his office, a rare favor on his part.

When M. Fauvel had left the room, Sigault indulged in a remark. "This seems to be a very cloudy case," he said; "if the cashier is shrewd and firm, it will be difficult to convict him."

"Perhaps it will," said the magistrate; "but let us hear what the other witnesses have to say."

The person who answered to the call for No. 4 was Lucien, M. Fauvel's eldest son. He was a tall, handsome young man of twenty-two. To the magistrate's questions he replied that he was very fond of Prosper, was once very intimate with him, and had always regarded him as a strictly honorable man, incapable of doing anything unbecoming a gentleman. He declared that he could not imagine what fatal circumstances could have induced Prosper to commit a theft. He knew that he played cards, but not to the extent that was reported. He had never known him to indulge in expenses beyond his means. In regard to his cousin Madeleine, he replied: "I always thought that Prosper was in love with Madeleine, and, until yesterday, I was certain he would marry her, knowing that my father would not oppose their union. I have always attributed the discontinuance of Prosper's visits to a quarrel with my cousin, but supposed they would ultimately become reconciled."

This information threw more light upon Prosper's past life, than that furnished by M. Fauvel, but did not ap-

parently disclose any evidence which could be used in the present state of affairs. Lucien signed his deposition, and withdrew.

Cavaillon's turn for examination came next. The poor fellow was in a pitiable state of mind when he appeared before the magistrate. Having confided to a friend his adventure with the detective, as a great secret, and being jeered at for his cowardice in giving up the note, he felt great remorse, and passed the night in reproaching himself for having ruined Prosper. He endeavored to repair, as well as he could, what he called his treason. He did not exactly accuse M. Fauvel, but he courageously declared that he was the cashier's friend, and that he was as certain of his innocence as he was of his own. Unfortunately, besides having no proofs to strengthen his assertions, the latter were deprived of most of their value by his violent professions of friendship for the accused.

After Cavaillon, six or eight clerks of Fauvel's bank successively defiled in the magistrate's room; but their depositions were nearly all insignificant. One of them, however, stated a fact which the magistrate carefully noted. He said he knew that Prosper had speculated on the Bourse through the medium of M. Raoul de Lagors, and had gained immense sums. Five o'clock struck before the list of witnesses summoned for the day was exhausted. But M. Patrigent's task was not yet finished. He rang for his attendant, who instantly appeared, when he said to him: "Go at once and bring Fanferlot."

It was some time before the detective answered the summons. Having met a colleague in the gallery, he thought it his duty to treat him; and the official had to fetch him from the wine-shop at the corner.

"How is it that you keep people waiting?" said the magistrate, when the detective entered bowing and scraping. Fanferlot bowed more profoundly still. Despite his smiling face, he was very uneasy. To unravel the Bertomy case alone, it was requisite to play a double game that might be discovered at any moment. In serving at the same time the cause of justice and his own ambition, he ran great risks, the least of which was the losing of his place.

"I have had a great deal to do," he said, to excuse himself, "and have not wasted any time." And he began

to give a detailed account of his movements. He was embarrassed, for he spoke with all sorts of restrictions, picking out what was to be said, and avoiding what was to be left unsaid. Thus he gave the history of Cavaillon's letter, which he handed to the magistrate; but he did not breathe a word of Madeleine. On the other hand, he furnished minute biographical details of Prosper and Madame Gipsy, which he had collected from various quarters during the day.

As the detective progressed, M. Patrigent's conviction was strengthened. "This young man is evidently guilty," he murmured. Fanferlot did not reply; his opinion was different, but he was delighted that the magistrate was on the wrong track, thinking that his own glorification would thereby be the greater when he discovered the real culprit. True, this grand discovery was as far off as it had ever been.

After hearing all he had to say, the magistrate dismissed Fanferlot, telling him to return the next day. "Above all," he said, as Fanferlot left the room, "do not lose sight of the woman Gipsy; she must know where the money is, and can put us on the right scent."

Fanferlot smiled cunningly. "You may rest easy about that, sir," replied he; "the lady is in good hands."

Left to himself, although the evening was far advanced, M. Patrigent continued to busy himself with the case, and to arrange for the rest of the depositions being taken. The affair had obtained complete possession of his mind; it was, at the same time, puzzling and attractive. It seemed to be surrounded by a cloud of mystery, which he determined to penetrate and dispel.

The next morning he was in his room much earlier than usual. On this day he examined Madame Gipsy, recalled Cavaillon, and sent again for M. Fauvel. For several days he displayed the same activity. Of all the witnesses summoned, only two failed to appear. One was the messenger sent by Prosper to bring the money from the Bank of France, and who was ill from a fall. The other was M. Raoul de Lagors. But their absence did not prevent the memoranda relating to Prosper's case from daily increasing; and on the ensuing Monday, five days after the robbery, M. Patrigent thought he held in his hands enough moral proof to crush the accused.

V.

WHILE his whole past was the object of the most minute investigations, Prosper was in prison, in solitary confinement. The two first days had not appeared very long to him. He had requested, and been supplied with some sheets of paper, numbered, for they had to be accounted for; and he wrote, with a sort of fury, plans of defence and a narrative of justification.

The third day he began to feel uneasy at not seeing any one except the condemned prisoners employed to serve those undergoing solitary confinement, and the jailer who brought him his food. "Am I not to be examined again?" he would ask.

"Your turn is coming," the jailer invariably answered.

Time passed; and the wretched man, tortured by the sufferings of solitary confinement which quickly breaks the spirit, sank into the depths of despair. "Am I to stay here forever?" he moaned.

No, he was not forgotten; for on the Monday morning, at one o'clock, an hour when the jailer never came, he heard the heavy bolt of his cell pushed back. He ran towards the door. But the sight of a gray-headed man standing there rooted him to the spot. "Father," he gasped, "father!"

"Your father, yes!"

Prosper's astonishment at seeing his father was instantly succeeded by a feeling of great joy. A father is the one friend upon whom we can always rely. In the hour of need, when all else fails, we remember him upon whose knees we sat when children, and who soothed our sorrows; and even though he may be unable to assist us, his mere presence serves to comfort and strengthen us.

Without reflecting, Prosper, impelled by tender feeling, was about to throw himself into his father's arms, but M. Bertomy harshly repulsed him. "Do not approach me!" he exclaimed. He then advanced into the cell, and closed the door. The father and son were alone together—Prosper heart-broken, crushed; M. Bertomy angry, almost threatening.

Cast off by this last friend, by his father, the miserable young man seemed to be stupefied with pain and disap-

pointment. "You, too!" he bitterly cried. "You—you believe me guilty? O father!"

"Spare yourself this shameful comedy," interrupted M. Bertomy: "I know all."

"But I am innocent, father; I swear it by the sacred memory of my mother."

"Unhappy wretch!" cried M. Bertomy, "do not blaspheme!" He seemed overcome by tender thoughts of the past, and in a weak, broken voice, added: "Your mother is dead, Prosper, and little did I think that the day would come when I could thank God for having taken her from me. Your crime would have killed her, would have broken her heart!"

After a painful silence, Prosper said: "You overwhelm me, father, and at the moment when I need all my courage; when I am the victim of a hideous plot."

"Victim!" cried M. Bertomy, "victim! Dare you utter your insinuations against the honorable man who has taken care of you, loaded you with benefits, and had insured you a brilliant future! It is enough for you to have robbed him; do not calumniate him."

"For pity's sake, father, let me explain!"

"I suppose you would deny your benefactor's kindness. Yet you were at one time so sure of his affection, that you wrote me to hold myself in readiness to come to Paris and ask M. Fauvel for the hand of his niece. Was that, then, a lie?"

"No," said Prosper in a choked voice, "no."

"That was a year ago; you then loved Mademoiselle Madeleine; at least you told me so."

"Father, I love her now, more than ever; I have never ceased to love her."

M. Bertomy made a gesture of contemptuous pity. "Indeed!" he cried. "And the thought of the pure, innocent girl whom you loved did not prevent your entering upon a path of sin. You loved her! How dared you, then, without blushing, approach her presence after associating with the shameless creatures with whom you were so intimate?"

"For heaven's sake, let me explain by what fatality Madeleine"—

"Enough, sir, enough. I told you that I know every thing. I saw M. Fauvel yesterday; this morning I saw

the magistrate, and 'tis to his kindness that I am indebted for this interview. Do you know what mortification I suffered before being allowed to see you? I was searched and made to empty all my pockets. They suspected I was conveying some weapon to you!"

Prosper ceased to justify himself, but in a helpless, dejected way, dropped down upon a seat.

"I have seen your apartments, and at once recognized the proofs of your crime. I saw silk curtains hanging before all the windows and doors and the walls covered with pictures. In my father's house the walls were white-washed; and there was but one arm-chair in the whole place, and that was my mother's. Our luxury was our honesty. You are the first member of our family who has possessed Aubusson carpets; though, to be sure, you are the first thief of our blood." At this last insult Prosper's face flushed crimson, but he remained silent and immovable.

"But luxury is necessary now," continued M. Bertomy, becoming more excited and angry as he went on; "luxury must be had at any price. You must have the insolent opulence and display of an upstart, without the upstart's wealth. You must support worthless women who wear satin slippers lined with swan's down, like those I saw in your rooms, and keep servants in livery—and to do this you steal! Bankers will no longer dare trust the keys of their safes with any one, for every day honest families are disgraced by the discovery of some new piece of villany."

M. Bertomy suddenly stopped. He saw for the first time that his son was not in a condition to hear his reproaches. "But I will say no more," he added. "I came here not to reproach you, but to save, if possible, the honor of our name, to prevent it from being published in the papers among the names of thieves and murderers. Stand up and listen to me!" At his father's imperious tone, Prosper arose. So many successive blows had reduced him to a state of torpor.

"First of all," began M. Bertomy, "how much have you remaining of the stolen three hundred and fifty thousand francs?"

"Once more, father," replied the unfortunate man in a tone of hopeless resignation, "once more I swear I am innocent."

"So I supposed you would say. Then our family will have to repair the injury you have done M. Fauvel."

"What do you mean?"

"The day your brother-in-law heard of your crime he brought me your sister's dowry—seventy thousand francs. I succeeded in collecting a hundred and forty thousand francs more. This makes two hundred and ten thousand francs which I have brought with me to give to M. Fauvel."

This threat aroused Prosper from his torpor. "You shall do nothing of the kind!" he cried with unrestrained indignation.

"I will do so before the sun goes down this day. M. Fauvel will grant me time to pay the rest. My pension is fifteen hundred francs. I can live upon five hundred; I am strong enough to go to work again; and your brother-in-law—" M. Bertomy stopped short, frightened at the expression of his son's face. His features were contracted with such furious rage that he was scarcely recognizable, and his eyes glared like a maniac's.

"You dare not disgrace me thus!" cried Prosper; "you have no right to do it. You are free to disbelieve me yourself, but you have no right to take a step which would be a confession of guilt, and ruin me forever. Who and what convinces you of my guilt? When cold justice hesitates, you, my father, hesitate not, but, more pitiless than the law, condemn me unheard!"

"I will do my duty."

"Which means that I stand on the edge of a precipice, and you push me over! Do you call that your duty? What! between strangers who accuse me, and myself who swear that I am innocent, you do not hesitate? Why? Is it because I am your son? Our honor is at stake, it is true; but that is only the more reason why you should stand by me, and assist me to defend myself."

Prosper's earnest, truthful manner was enough to unsettle the firmest convictions, and make doubt penetrate the most stubborn mind. "Yet," said M. Bertomy in a hesitating tone, "everything seems to accuse you."

"Ah, father, you do not know that I was suddenly banished from Madeleine's presence; that I was compelled to avoid her. I became desperate, and tried to forget my sorrow in dissipation. I sought oblivion, and found shame and disgust. Oh, Madeleine, Madeleine!" He was over-

come with emotion ; but in a few minutes he resumed with renewed violence in his voice and manner : " Everything *is* against me ; but no matter. I will clear myself or perish. Human justice is liable to error ; although innocent, I may be convicted ; so be it. I will undergo my penalty ; but people are not kept galley-slaves forever."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, father, that I am now another man. My life, henceforth, has an object—vengeance ! I am the victim of a vile plot. As long as I have a drop of blood in my veins, I will seek its author. And I will certainly find him ; and then bitterly shall he expiate all of my cruel suffering. The blow has come from Fauvel's, and I will seek the villain there."

"Take care : your anger makes you say things that you will repent hereafter."

"Yes, I see, you are going to descant upon the probity of M. André Fauvel. You will tell me that all the virtues have taken refuge in the bosom of this patriarchal family. What do you know about it ? Would this be the first instance in which the most shameful secrets are concealed beneath the fairest appearances ? Why did Madeleine suddenly forbid me to think of her ? Why has she exiled me, when she suffers as much from our separation as I myself, when she still loves me ? For she does love me. I am sure of it. I have proofs of it."

The jailer here came to say that the time allotted to M. Bertomy had expired, and that he must leave the cell. A thousand conflicting emotions seemed to rend the old man's heart. Suppose Prosper were telling the truth : how great would be his own remorse, if he had added to the frightful weight of sorrow and trouble his son already had to bear ! And who could prove that he was not sincere in what he said ?

The voice of this son, of whom he had ever been proud, had aroused all his paternal affection which he had so violently repressed. Ah, were he guilty, and guilty of a worse crime, still he was his son, his only son ! His countenance lost its severity, and his eyes filled with tears. He wished to leave as he had entered, stern and angry, but he had not the cruel courage. His heart was breaking. He opened his arms, and pressed Prosper to his

breast. "Oh, my son!" he murmured, "God grant you have spoken the truth!"

Prosper was triumphant: he had almost convinced his father of his innocence. But he had no time to rejoice over this victory. The cell door again opened, and the jailer's gruff voice called out. "It is time for you to appear before the investigating magistrate."

Prosper instantly obeyed the summons. His step was no longer unsteady, as a few days previous: a complete change had come over him. He walked firmly, with his head erect, and the fire of resolution in his eye. He knew the way now, and he proceeded a little ahead of the officer who escorted him. As he was passing through the room full of police-agents, he encountered the individual with the gold spectacles, who had watched him so intently the day he was searched. "Courage, M. Prosper Bertomy," he said; "if you are innocent, there are those who will help you."

Prosper started with surprise, and was about to reply, when the man disappeared. "Who is that gentleman?" he asked of the officer who was escorting him.

"Is it possible that you don't know him?" replied the man with surprise. "Why, it is M. Lecoq of the detective service."

"You say his name is Lecoq?"

"You might as well say 'Monsieur Lecoq,'" said the offended official; "it would not burn your mouth. M. Lecoq is a man who knows everything that he wants to know, without its ever being told to him. If your case had been in his hands instead of in those of that smooth-tongued, imbecile Fanferlot, it would have been settled long ago. Nobody is allowed to waste time when he is in command. But he seems to be a friend of yours."

"I never saw him until the first day I came here."

"You can't swear to that, because no one can boast of knowing the real face of M. Lecoq. It is one thing to-day, and another to-morrow; sometimes he is a dark man, sometimes a fair one, sometimes quite young, and then an octogenarian. Why, at times he even deceives me. I begin to talk to a stranger—bah! it turns out to be M. Lecoq! Anybody on the face of the earth might be he. If I were told that you were he, I should say, 'Very likely it is so.' Ah! he can convert himself into any form he pleases.

He is a wonderful man !” The speaker would have continued forever his praises of M. Lecoq, had not the sight of the magistrate’s room put an end to them.

This time, Prosper was not kept waiting on the wooden bench ; on the contrary, the magistrate was waiting for him. M. Patrigent, who was a profound observer of human-nature, had contrived the interview between M. Bertomy and his son. He was certain that between the father, a man of such stubborn honor, and the son, accused of theft, an affecting scene would take place, and this scene would completely unman Prosper, and induce him to confess. He determined to send for him as soon as the interview was over, while his nerves were vibrating with terrible emotions : he would then tell the truth, to relieve his troubled, despairing mind.

The magistrate’s surprise therefore was great to see the cashier’s bearing ; resolute without obstinacy, firm and assured without defiance. “ Well,” he said to him, “ have you reflected ? ”

“ Not being guilty, sir, I had nothing to reflect upon.”

“ Ah, I see the prison has not been a good counsellor ; you forget that sincerity and repentance are the first things necessary to obtain the indulgence of the law.”

“ I crave no indulgence, sir.”

M. Patrigent looked vexed, and said : “ What would you say if I told you what had become of the three hundred and fifty thousand francs ? ”

Prosper shook his head sadly. “ If it were known, sir, I should not be here, but at liberty.”

This device had often been used by the magistrate, and had generally succeeded ; but, with a man so thoroughly master of himself as Prosper then was, there was small chance of success on this occasion. It had been used at a venture, and had failed. Then you persist in accusing M. Fauvel ? ” remarked M. Patrigent.

“ Him, or some one else.”

“ Excuse me : no one else, since he alone knew the word. Had he any interest in robbing himself ? ”

“ I can think of none.”

“ Well, now I will tell you what interest you had in robbing him.”

M. Patrigent spoke as a man who was convinced of the facts he was about to state ; but his assurance was all as

sumed. He had relied upon crushing at a blow, a despairing, wretched man, and was nonplussed by seeing him appear so determined upon resistance. "Will you be good enough to tell me," he said in a vexed tone, "how much you have spent during the last year?"

Prosper did not find it necessary to stop to reflect and calculate. "Yes, sir," he answered, unhesitatingly. "Circumstances made it necessary for me to preserve the greatest order in my wild career; I spent about fifty thousand francs."

"Where did you obtain them?"

"In the first place, twelve thousand francs were left to me by my mother. I received from M. Fauvel fourteen thousand francs for my salary, and share of the profits. By speculating on the Bourse I gained eight thousand francs. The rest I borrowed, and intend repaying out of the fifteen thousand francs which I have deposited in M. Fauvel's bank." The account was clear, exact, and could be easily proved; it must be a true one.

"Who lent you the money?" inquired M. Patrigent.

"M. Raoul de Lagors." This witness had left Paris the day of the robbery, and could not be found; so for the time being, M. Patrigent was compelled to rely upon Prosper's word.

"Well," he said, "I will not press this point. Tell me why, in spite of M. Fauvel's formal order, you drew the money from the Bank of France the night before, instead of waiting till the morning of the payment?"

"Because M. de Clameran had informed me that it would be convenient, necessary even, for him to have his money early in the morning. He will testify to that fact, if you summon him; and I knew that I should reach my office late."

"Then M. de Clameran is a friend of yours?"

"By no means. I have always had an aversion to him, which there was nothing whatever to justify; he is, however, the intimate friend of M. de Lagors."

While Sigault was writing down these answers, M. Patrigent was racking his brain to imagine what could have occurred between M. Bertomy and his son, to cause this transformation in Prosper. "One thing more," said the magistrate: "how did you spend your evening the night of the crime?"

"When I left my office, at five o'clock, I took the St. Germain train, and went to Vésinet to M. de Lagors's country house, to return him fifteen hundred francs which he had asked for; and, not finding him at home, I left the money with his servant."

"Did the latter tell you that M. de Lagors was going away?"

"No, sir. I did not know that he had left Paris."

"Where did you go when you left Vésinet?"

"I returned to Paris, and dined at a restaurant with a friend."

"And then?" Prosper hesitated.

"You are silent," said M. Patrigent. "I will therefore tell you how you employed your time. You returned to your rooms in the Rue Chaptal, dressed yourself, and went to a party given by one of those women who style themselves dramatic artists, and who are a disgrace to the stage; who receive salaries of a hundred crowns a year, and yet keep their carriages. You went to Mademoiselle Wilson's."

"You are right, sir."

"There is heavy playing at Wilson's?"

"Sometimes."

"You are in the habit of visiting places of this sort. Were you not connected in some way with a scandalous affair which took place at the house of a woman named Crescenzi?"

"I was summoned to give evidence, having been witness of a theft."

"Gambling generally leads to stealing. And did you not play baccarat at Wilson's, and lose eighteen hundred francs?"

"Excuse me, sir, only eleven hundred."

"Very well. In the morning you paid a bill that fell due of a thousand francs."

"Yes, sir."

"Moreover, there remained in your desk five hundred francs, and you had four hundred in your purse when you were arrested. So that altogether, in twenty-four hours, four thousand five hundred francs—"

Prosper was not discountenanced, but amazed. Not being aware of the powerful means of investigation which the law has at its command, he wondered how the magis-

trate could have obtained such accurate information in so short a time. "Your statement is correct, sir," he finally said.

"Where did all this money come from? The evening before you had so little that you were obliged to defer the payment of a small account."

"The day to which you allude, I sold some bonds I had, through an agent, which realized about three thousand francs. In addition I took from the safe two thousand francs in advance of my salary. I have nothing to conceal."

Prosper had given clear answers to all questions put to him, and M. Patrigent thought he would now attack him from a new point. "You say you have no wish to conceal any of your actions; then why this note stealthily thrown to one of your companions?" Here he held up the mysterious note.

This time the blow struck. Prosper's eyes dropped before the inquiring look of the magistrate. "I thought," he stammered, "I wished—"

"You wished to hide your mistress?"

"Well, yes, sir, I did. I knew that a man in my condition, accused of a robbery, has every fault, every weakness he has ever indulged in, charged against him as a great crime."

"Which means that you knew that the presence of a woman at your apartments would tell very much against you, and that justice would not excuse this scandalous defiance of public morality. A man who respects himself so little as to live with a worthless woman, does not elevate her to his standard, but descends to her base level."

"Sir!"

"I suppose you know who the woman is, whom you permit to bear the honest name borne by your mother?"

"Madam Gipsy was a governess when I first knew her. She was born at Oporto, and came to France with a Portuguese family."

"Her name is not Gipsy: she has never been a governess, and she is not a Portuguese."

Prosper began to protest against this statement; but M. Patrigent shrugged his shoulders, and after looking over a lot of papers on his desk, said: "Ah, here it is; listen: **Palmyre Chocareille**, born at Paris in 1840, daughter of

James Chocareille, undertaker's assistant, and of Caroline Piedlent, his wife."

Prosper looked vexed and impatient; he was not aware that the magistrate was reading him this report in order to convince him that nothing can escape the police. "Palmyre Chocareille," continued M. Patrigent, "was apprenticed at twelve years of age to a shoemaker, and remained with him until she was sixteen. Traces of her for one year are lost. At the age of seventeen she was hired as a servant by a grocer in the Rue St. Denis, named Dombas, and remained with him three months. She entered during this same year, 1857, eight different situations. In 1858 she entered the service of a dealer in fans in the Passage Choiseul."

As he read, the magistrate watched Prosper's face to observe the effect of these revelations. "Towards the close of 1858," continued he, "she was employed as a servant by Madame Nunès, and accompanied her to Lisbon. How long she remained in Lisbon, and what she did while she remained there is not reported. But in 1861 she returned to Paris, and was sentenced to three months' imprisonment for assault and battery. Ah, she returned from Portugal with the name of Nina Gipsy."

"But, I assure you, sir," Prosper began.

"Yes, I understand: this history is less romantic, doubtless, than the one related to you; but then it has the merit of being true. We lose sight of Palmyre Chocareille, called Gipsy, upon her release from prison; but we meet her again six months later, she having made the acquaintance of a commercial traveller named Caldas, who became infatuated with her beauty, and furnished some rooms for her near the Bastile. She assumed his name for some time, then she deserted him to devote herself to you. Did you ever hear of this Caldas?"

"Never, sir."

"This foolish man so deeply loved this creature that her desertion drove him almost insane through grief. He was very resolute, and publicly swore that he would kill his rival if he ever found him. The current report afterwards was, that he committed suicide. He certainly sold the furniture of the house occupied by the woman Chocareille, and suddenly disappeared. All the efforts made to discover him proved fruitless."

The magistrate paused a moment as if to give Prosper time for reflection, and then slowly said: "And this is the woman whom you made your companion, the woman for whom you robbed the bank!"

Once more M. Patrigent was on the wrong track, owing to Fanferlot's incomplete information. He had hoped that Prosper would betray himself by uttering some passionate retort when thus wounded to the quick; but the latter remained impassible. Of all that the magistrate had said to him his mind dwelt upon only one word—"Caldas," the name of the poor commercial traveller who had killed himself.

"At any rate," insisted M. Patrigent, "you will confess that this girl has caused your ruin."

"I cannot confess that, sir, for it is not true."

"Yet she is the cause of your extravagance. Listen,"—the magistrate here drew a bill from the file of papers—"During December you paid her dressmaker, Van Klopen, for two out-door costumes, nine hundred francs; one evening dress, seven hundred francs; one domino, trimmed with lace, four hundred francs."

"I spent that money of my own free will; but, nevertheless, I was not in the least attached to her."

M. Patrigent shrugged his shoulders. "You cannot deny the evidence," said he. "I suppose you will also say that it was not for this girl's sake you ceased spending your evenings at M. Fauvel's?"

"I assure you that she was not the cause of my ceasing to visit M. Fauvel's family."

"Then why did you suddenly break off your attentions to a young lady whom you confidently expected to marry, and whose hand you had written to your father to ask for you?"

"I had reasons which I cannot reveal," answered Prosper with emotion.

The magistrate breathed freely; at last he had discovered a vulnerable point in the prisoner's armor. "Did Mademoiselle Madeleine banish you from her presence?" Prosper was silent, and seemed agitated. "Speak," said M. Patrigent; "I must tell you that this is one of the most important circumstances in your case."

"Whatever the cost may be, on this subject I am compelled to keep silence."

"Beware of what you do; justice will not be satisfied with scruples of conscience." M. Patrigent waited for an answer. None came.

"You persist in your obstinacy, do you?" continued he. "Well, we will go on to the next question. You have, during the last year, spent fifty thousand francs. Your resources are at an end, and your credit is exhausted; to continue your mode of life was impossible. What did you intend to do?"

"I had no settled plan. I thought it might last as long as it would, and then I—"

"And then you would abstract money from the safe; was it not so?"

"Ah, sir, if I were guilty I should not be here! I should never have been such a fool as to return to the bank; I should have fled."

M. Patrigent could not restrain a smile of satisfaction, and exclaimed: "Exactly the argument I expected you to use. You showed your shrewdness precisely by staying to face the storm, instead of flying the country. Several recent cases have taught dishonest cashiers that flight abroad is dangerous. Railways travel fast, but telegrams travel faster. A French thief can be arrested in London within forty-eight hours after his description has been telegraphed. Even America is no longer a refuge. You remained, prudently and wisely, saying to yourself, 'I will manage to avoid suspicion; and, even if I am found out, I shall be free again after three or five years' seclusion, with a large fortune to enjoy.' Many people would sacrifice five years of their lives for three hundred and fifty thousand francs."

"But, sir, had I calculated in the manner you describe, I should not have been content with three hundred and fifty thousand francs—I should have waited for an opportunity to steal a million. I often had that sum in my charge."

"Oh! it is not always convenient to wait."

Prosper was buried in deep thought for some minutes. "Sir," he finally said, "there is one detail I forgot to mention before, and it may be of importance."

"Explain, if you please."

"The messenger whom I sent to the Bank of France for the money must have seen me tie up the bundles of

notes and put them away in the safe. At any rate, he knows that I left my office before he did."

"Very well; the man shall be examined. Now you can return to your cell; and once more I advise you to consider the consequences of your persistent denial." M. Patrigent thus abruptly dismissed Prosper because he wished to act immediately upon this last piece of information.

"Sigault," said he, as soon as Prosper had left the room, "is not this messenger the man who was excused from being examined from his having sent a doctor's certificate declaring him too ill to appear?"

"It is, sir."

"Where does he live?"

"Fanferlot says he was so ill that he was taken to the hospital—the Dubois Hospital."

"Very good. I am going to examine him to-day, this very hour. Take your pen and paper, and send for a cab."

It was some distance from the Palais de Justice to the Dubois Hospital; but the cabman, urged by the promise of a handsome present for himself, made his sorry jades fly as if they were blood horses.

Would the messenger be able to answer any questions? That was the point. The physician in charge of the hospital said that, although the man suffered severely from a broken knee, his mind was perfectly clear. "That being the case," said the magistrate, "I wish to examine him, and desire that no one be admitted while he makes his deposition."

"Oh! you will not be intruded upon; his room contains four beds, but with the exception of his own they are just now all unoccupied."

When the messenger saw the magistrate enter, followed by a tall thin young man with a portfolio under his arm, he at once knew what they had come for. "Ah," he said, "you have come to see me about M. Bertomy's affair?"

"Precisely."

M. Patrigent remained standing by the sick-bed while Sigault arranged his papers on a little table. In answer to the usual questions, the messenger stated that he was named Antonin Poche, was forty years old, born at Cadaujac in the Gironde, and was unmarried.

"Now," said the magistrate, "are you well enough to answer clearly any questions I may put to you?"

"Yes, certainly, sir."

"Did you, on the 27th of February, go to the Bank of France for the three hundred and fifty thousand francs that were stolen?"

"Yes, sir."

"At what hour did you return with the money?"

"It must have been five o'clock when I got back."

"Do you remember what M. Bertomy did when you handed him the notes? Now, do not be in a hurry; think before you answer the question."

"Let me see: first he counted the notes, and made them up into four packages; then he put them in the safe, which he afterwards locked, and then—it seems to me—yes, I am not mistaken, he went out!"

He uttered these last words with so much energy, that, forgetting his knee he half started up in bed, giving vent at the same time to a cry of pain.

"Are you sure of what you say?" asked the magistrate.

M. Patrigent's solemn tone seemed to frighten Antonin. "Sure?" he exclaimed with marked hesitation; "I would bet my head on it, yet I am not more sure than that!"

It was impossible to get him to be more precise in his answers. He had been frightened. He already imagined himself compromised, and for a trifle would have retracted everything. But the effect was none the less produced, and when they retired M. Patrigent said to Sigault: "This is a very important piece of evidence."

VI.

THE hotel of the Grand Archangel, Madame Gipsy's asylum, was the most elegant one on the Quai St Michel. At this hotel a person who pays her fortnight's board in advance is treated with marked consideration.

Madame Alexandre, who had been a handsome woman, was now stout, laced till she could scarcely breathe, always over-dressed, and fond of wearing a number of flashy gold chains around her fat neck. She had bright eyes and white teeth; but, alas, a red nose. Of all her weaknesses—and heaven knows she had indulged in every variety—

only one remained ; she loved a good dinner, washed down with plenty of good wine. But she loved her husband ; and, about the time M. Patrigent was leaving the hospital, she began to feel worried because her " little man " had not returned to dinner. She was about to sit down without him, when the waiter cried out : " Here is master." And Fanferlot appeared in person. }

Three years before, Fanferlot had kept a little private inquiry office ; Madame Alexandre dealt without a license in perfumery and toilet articles, and, finding it necessary to have some of her doubtful customers watched, engaged Fanferlot's services ; this was the origin of their acquaintance.

If they went through the marriage ceremony for the good of the mayoralty and the church, it was because they imagined it would, like a baptism, wash out the sins of the past. Upon this momentous day, Fanferlot gave up his private inquiry office, and entered the police, where he had already been occasionally employed, and Madame Alexandre retired from business.

Uniting their savings, they hired and furnished the Grand Archangel, which they were now carrying on prosperously, esteemed by their neighbors, who were ignorant of Fanferlot's connection with the police force.

" Why, how late you are, my little man ! " exclaimed Madame Alexandre as she dropped her knife and fork, and rushed forward to embrace her husband.

Fanferlot received her caresses with an air of abstraction. " My back is broken," he said. " I have been the whole day playing billiards with Evariste, M. Fauvel's valet, and allowed him to win as often as he wished—a man who does not know what pool is ! I became acquainted with him yesterday, and now I am his best friend. If I wish to enter M. Fauvel's service in Antonin's place, I can rely upon Evariste's good word."

" What, you be an office messenger ? you ? "

" Of course I would. How else am I to get an opportunity of studying my characters, if I am not on the spot to continually watch them ? "

" Then the valet gave you no information ? "

" None that I could make use of, and yet I turned him inside out like a glove. This banker is a remarkable man ; you don't often meet with one of his sort nowadays

Evariste says he has not a single vice, not even a little defect by which his valet could gain ten sous. He neither smokes, drinks, nor plays; in fact, he is a saint. He is worth millions, and lives as respectably and quietly as a grocer. He is devoted to his wife, adores his children, is very hospitable, but seldom goes into society.*

"Then his wife is young?"

"No, she must be about fifty."

Madam Alexandre reflected a minute, then asked: "Did you inquire about the other members of the family?"

"Certainly. The younger son is in the army. The elder son, Lucien, lives with his parents, and is altogether as proper as a young lady. He is so good, indeed, that he is perfectly stupid."

"And what about the niece?"

"Evariste could tell me nothing about her."

Madam Alexandre shrugged her fat shoulders. "If you have discovered nothing," she said, "it is because there is nothing to be discovered. Still, do you know what I would do, if I were you?"

"Tell me."

"I would consult M. Lecoq."

Fanferlot jumped up as if he had been shot. "Now, that's pretty advice!" he exclaimed. "Do you want me to lose my place? M. Lecoq does not suspect that I have anything to do with the case, excepting to obey his orders."

"Nobody told you to let him know you were investigating it on your own account. You can consult him with an air of indifference, as if you were not at all interested; and, after you have got his opinion, you can take advantage of it."

The detective weighed his wife's words, and then said: "Perhaps you are right; yet M. Lecoq is so deucedly shrewd, that he might see through me."

"Shrewd!" echoed Madam Alexandre; "shrewd! All of you at the Préfecture say that so often, that he has gained his reputation by it. You are just as sharp as he is."

"Well, we will see. I will think the matter over; but, in the mean time, what does the girl say?" The "girl" was Madame Nina Gipsy.

In taking up her abode at the Grand Archangel, Mad-

ame Nina thought she was following good advice ; and, as Fanferlot had never appeared in her presence since, she was still under the impression that she had obeyed a friend of Prosper's. When she received her summons from M. Patrigent, she admired the wonderful skill of the police in discovering her hiding place ; for she had established herself at the hotel under a false, or rather her true name, Palmyre Chocareille. Artfully questioned by her inquisitive landlady, she had, without any mistrust, confided her history to her. Thus Fanferlot was able to impress the magistrate with the idea of his being a skilful detective, when he pretended to have discovered all this information from a variety of sources.

"She is still up stairs," replied Madame Alexandre. "She suspects nothing ; but to keep her in the house becomes every day more difficult. I don't know what the magistrate told her, but she came home quite beside herself with anger. She wanted to go and make a fuss at M. Fauvel's. Then she wrote a letter, which she told Jean to post for her ; but I kept it to show you."

"What !" interrupted Fanferlot, "you have a letter, and did not tell me before ? Perhaps it contains the clue to the mystery. Give it to me, quick."

Obedying her husband, Madame Alexandre opened a little cupboard and took out a letter, which she handed to him. "Here, take it," she said, "and be satisfied."

Considering that she used to be a chamber-maid, Palmyre Chocareille, since become Madame Gipsy, wrote well. Her letter bore the following address, written in a free, flowing hand :

"M. L. DE CLAMERAN,

Forge-Master, Hôtel du Louvre.

"To be handed to M. Raoul de Lagorç.

"(Immediate.)"

"Oh, ho !" said Fanferlot, accompanying his exclamation with a little whistle, as was his habit when he thought he had made a grand discovery. "Oh, ho !"

"Are you going to open it ?" inquired Madame Alexandre.

"A little bit," said Fanferlot, as he dexterously opened the envelope.

Madame Alexandre leaned over her husband's shoulder, and they both read the following :

"MONSIEUR RAOUL—Prosper is in prison, accused of a robbery which he never committed. I wrote to you three days ago."

"What!" interrupted Fanferlot, "this silly girl wrote, and I never saw the letter?"

"But, little man, she must have posted it herself, the day she went to the Palais de Justice."

"Very likely," said Fanferlot, propitiated. He continued reading :

"I wrote to you three days ago, and have no reply. Who will help Prosper if his best friends desert him? If you don't answer this letter, I shall consider myself released from a certain promise, and without scruple will tell Prosper of the conversation I overheard between you and M. de Clameran. But I can count on you, can I not? I shall expect you at the Grand Archangel, on the Quai St. Michel, the day after to-morrow, between twelve and four.
—NINA GIPSY."

The letter read, Fanferlot at once proceeded to copy it.

"Well!" said Madame Alexandre, "what do you think?"

Fanferlot was delicately refastening the letter when the door of the hotel office was abruptly opened, and the waiter twice whispered : "Pst ! Pst !"

Fanferlot rapidly disappeared into a dark closet. He had barely time to close the door before Madame Gipsy entered the room. The poor girl was sadly changed. She was pale and hollow-cheeked, and her eyes were red with weeping.

On seeing her, Madame Alexandre could not conceal her surprise. "Why, my child, you are not going out?" said she.

"I am obliged to do so, madame; and I have come to ask you to tell any one that may call during my absence to wait until I return."

"But where in the world are you going at this hour, unwell as you are?"

For a moment Madame Gipsy hesitated. "Oh," she said, "you are so kind that I am tempted to **confide in**

you ; read this note which a messenger just now brought to me."

"What !" cried Madame Alexandre perfectly aghast ; "a messenger enter my house, and go up to your room !"

"Is there anything surprising in that ?"

"No, oh, no ! nothing surprising." And in a tone loud enough to be heard in the closet, Madame Alexandre read the note :

"A friend of Prosper's who can neither receive you, nor present himself at your hotel, is very anxious to speak to you. Be in the omnibus office opposite the tower of Saint Jacques, to-night at nine precisely, and the writer will be there, and tell you what he has to say.

"I have appointed this public place for the rendezvous so as to relieve your mind of all fear."

"And you are going to this rendezvous ?"

"Certainly, madame."

"But it is imprudent, foolish : it is a snare to entrap you."

"It makes no difference," interrupted Nina. "I am so unfortunate already that I have nothing more to dread. Any change would be a relief." And, without waiting to hear anything more, she went off. The door had scarcely closed upon her before Fanferlot bounced from the closet.

The mild detective was white with rage, and swore violently. "What is the meaning of this ?" he cried. "Am I to stand by and have people walking all over the Grand Archangel as if it were a public street ?" Madame Alexandre stood trembling, and dared not speak. "Was ever such impudence heard of before !" he continued. "A messenger comes into my house, and goes up stairs without being seen by anybody ! I will look into this. And the idea of you, Madame Alexandre, you, a sensible woman, being idiotic enough to try and persuade that little viper not to keep the appointment !"

"But, my dear—"

"Had you not sense enough to know that I would follow her, and discover what she is attempting to conceal ? Come, make haste and help me, so that she won't recognize me."

In a few minutes Fanferlot was completely disguised by a thick beard, a wig, and a linen blouse, and looked for all the world like one of those disreputable working men

who go about seeking for employment, and, at the same time, hoping they may not find any.

"Have you your life preserver?" asked the solicitous Madame Alexandre.

"Yes, yes; make haste and have that letter to M. de Clameran posted, and keep on the look out." And without listening to his wife, who called after him: "Good luck," Fanferlot darted into the street.

Madame Gipsy had some minutes start of him; but he ran up the street he knew she must have taken, and overtook her on the Pont-au-Change. She was walking with the uncertain manner of a person who, impatient to be at a rendezvous, has started too soon, and is obliged to occupy the intervening time. First she would walk slowly, then quicken her steps, and proceed very rapidly. She strolled up and down the Place du Châtelet several times, read the theatre-bills, and finally seated herself on a bench. One minute before a quarter to nine, she entered the omnibus-office, and sat down.

A moment afterwards Fanferlot entered; but, as he feared that Madame Gipsy might recognize him in spite of his beard, he took a seat at the opposite end of the room, in a dark corner. "Singular place for a conversation," he thought, as he watched the young woman. "Who in the world can have made this appointment in an omnibus office? Judging from her evident curiosity and uneasiness, I could swear she has not the faintest idea for whom she is waiting."

Meanwhile, the office was rapidly filling with people. Every minute an official would shout out the destination of an omnibus which had just arrived, and the passengers would rush in to obtain tickets, hoping to be able to proceed by it.

As each new-comer entered, Nina would tremble, and Fanferlot would say, "This must be him!" Finally, as the Hotel-de-Ville clock was striking nine, a man entered, and, without going to the ticket-desk, walked directly up to Nina, bowed, and took a seat beside her. He was of medium-size, rather stout, with a crimson face, and fiery-red whiskers. His dress was that of a well-to-do merchant, and there was nothing in his manner or appearance to excite attention.

Fanferlot watched him eagerly. "Well, my friend," he

said to himself, "in future I shall recognize you, no matter where we meet ; and this very evening I will find out who you are." Despite his intent listening, Fanferlot could not hear a word spoken by either the stranger or Nina. All he could do was to judge what the subject of their conversation might be by their gestures.

When the stout man bowed and spoke to her, Madame Gipsy looked so surprised that it was evident she had never seen him before. When he sat down by her, and said a few words, she started up with a frightened air, as if seeking to escape. A single word and look made her resume her seat. Then, as the stout man went on talking, Nina's attitude betrayed a certain apprehension. She evidently refused to do something required of her ; then suddenly she seemed to consent, when a good reason was given for her doing so. At one moment she appeared ready to weep, and the next her pretty face was illumined by a bright smile. Finally, she shook hands with her companion, as if she were confirming a promise.

"What can all this mean ?" said Fanferlot to himself, as he sat in his dark corner, biting his nails. "What an idiot I am to have stationed myself so far off !" He was thinking how he could manage to approach nearer without arousing their suspicions, when the stout man rose, offered his arm to Madame Gipsy, who accepted it without hesitation, and they walked together towards the door.

They were so engrossed with each other, that Fanferlot thought he could, without risk, follow them closely ; and it was well he did, for the crowd was dense outside, and he would soon have lost sight of them. Reaching the door, he saw the stout man and Nina cross the pavement, hail a cab, and enter it.

"Very good," muttered Fanferlot, "I've got them now. There is no need to hurry."

While the driver was gathering up his reins, Fanferlot prepared himself ; and, when the cab started, he set off at a brisk trot, determined upon following it to the end of the earth.

The cab proceeded along the Boulevard Sébastopol. It went pretty fast ; but it was not for nothing that Fanferlot had been dubbed the Squirrel. With his elbows glued to his sides, and economizing his wind, he ran on. By the time he had reached the Boulevard St. Denis, he

began to get winded, and stiff from the pain in his side. The cabman abruptly turned into the Rue Faubourg St. Martin.

But Fanferlot, who, at eight years of age, had played about the streets of Paris, was not to be baffled; he was a man of resources. He seized hold of the springs of the cab, raised himself up by the strength of his wrists, and hung on, with his legs resting on the axle-tree of the hind wheels. He was not particularly comfortable, but then, he no longer ran the risk of being distanced. "Now," he chuckled, behind his false beard, "you may drive as fast as you please, cabby."

The man whipped up his horses, and drove furiously along the hilly street of the Faubourg St. Martin. Finally the cab stopped in front of a wine-shop, and the driver jumped down from his seat, and went in.

The detective also left his uncomfortable post, and crouching in a doorway waited for Nina and her companion to alight, with the intention of following closely upon their heels. Five minutes passed, and still there were no signs of them. "What can they be doing all this time?" grumbled the detective. With great precautions he approached the cab, and peeped in. Oh, cruel deception! it was empty!

Fanferlot felt as if some one had thrown a bucket of ice-water over him; he remained rooted to the spot with his mouth open, the picture of blank bewilderment. He soon recovered his wits sufficiently to burst forth into a volley of oaths, loud enough to rattle all the window-panes in the neighborhood. "Tricked!" he cried, "fooled! Ah! but won't I make them pay for this!"

In a moment his quick mind had run over the gamut of possibilities, probable and improbable. "Evidently," he muttered, "this fellow and Nina entered by one door, and got out by the other; the trick is simple enough. If they resorted to it, 'tis because they feared being followed. If they feared being followed, they have uneasy consciences, therefore—" He suddenly interrupted his monologue as the idea struck him that he had better endeavor to find out something from the driver.

Unfortunately, the driver was in a very surly mood, and not only refused to answer, but shook his whip in so threatening a manner that Fanferlot deemed it prudent to beat

a retreat. "Oh, hang it," he muttered, "perhaps the driver is mixed up in the affair also!"

But what could he do now at this time of night? He could not imagine. He walked dejectedly back to the quay, and it was half-past eleven when he reached his own door. "Has the little fool returned?" he inquired of Madame Alexandre, the instant she let him in.

"No; but here are two large bundles which have come for her."

Fanferlot hastily opened them. They contained three cotton dresses, some heavy shoes, and some linen caps. "Well," said the detective in a vexed tone, "now she is going to disguise herself. Upon my word, I am getting puzzled! What can she be up to?"

When Fanferlot was sulkily walking down the Faubourg St. Martin, he had fully made up his mind that he would not tell his wife of his discomfiture. But once at home, confronted with a new fact of a nature to negative all his conjectures, his vanity disappeared. He confessed everything—his hopes so nearly realized, his strange mischance, and his suspicions. They talked the matter over and finally decided that they would not go to bed until Madame Gipsy, from whom Madame Alexandre was determined to obtain an explanation of what had happened, returned. At one o'clock the worthy couple were about giving over all hope of her re-appearance, when they heard the bell ring.

Fanferlot instantly slipped into the closet, and Madame Alexandre remained in the office to receive Nina. "Here you are at last, my dear child!" she cried. "Oh, I have been so uneasy, so afraid lest some misfortune had happened!"

"Thanks for your kind interest, madame. Has a bundle been sent here for me?"

Poor Nina's appearance had strikingly changed; she was still sad, but no longer dejected as she had been. To her prostration of the last few days, had succeeded a firm and generous resolution, which was betrayed in her sparkling eyes and resolute step.

"Yes, two bundles came for you; here they are. I suppose you saw M. Bertomy's friend?"

"Yes, madame, and his advice has so changed my plans, that, I regret to say, I must leave you to-morrow."

"Going away to-morrow! then something must have happened."

"Oh! nothing that would interest you, madame."

After lighting her candle at the gas-burner, Madame Gipsy said: "Good-night" in a very significant way, and left the room.

"And what do you think of that, Madame Alexandre?" asked Fanferlot, as he emerged from his hiding-place.

"It is incredible! This girl writes to M. de Lagors to meet her here, and then does not wait for him."

"She evidently mistrusts us; she knows who I am."

"Then this friend of the cashier must have told her."

"Nobody knows who told her. I begin to think that I have to do with some very knowing thieves. They guess I am on their track, and are trying to escape me. I should not be at all surprised if this little rogue has the money herself, and intends to run off with it to-morrow."

"That is not my opinion; but listen to me, you had better take my advice, and consult M. Lecoq."

Fanferlot meditated awhile, then exclaimed: "Very well; I will see him, just for your satisfaction; because I know that if I have not discovered anything, neither will he. But if he takes upon himself to be domineering, it won't do; for only let him show his insolence to me, and I will let him know his place!"

Notwithstanding this brave speech, the detective passed an uneasy night, and at six o'clock the next morning he was up—it was necessary to rise very early if one wished to catch M. Lecoq at home—and refreshed by a cup of strong coffee, he directed his steps towards the dwelling of the famous detective.

Fanferlot the Squirrel was certainly not afraid of his chief, as he called him, for he started off with his nose in the air, and his hat cocked on one side. But by the time he reached the Rue Montmartre, where M. Lecoq lived, his courage had vanished; he pulled his hat over his eyes, and hung his head, as if looking for relief among the paving-stones. He slowly ascended the stairs, pausing several times, and looking around as if he would like to fly. Finally he reached the third floor, and stood before a door decorated with the arms of the famous detective—a cock, the symbol of vigilance—and his heart failed him so that he had scarcely the courage to ring the bell.

The door was opened by Janouille, M. Lecoq's old servant, who had very much the manner and appearance of a grenadier. She was as faithful to her master as a watchdog, and always stood ready to attack any one who did not treat him with the august respect which she considered his due. "Well, M. Fanferlot," she said, "you come at a right time for once in your life. The chief is waiting to see you."

Upon this announcement, Fanferlot was seized with a violent desire to retreat. By what chance could Lecoq be waiting for him? While he thus hesitated, Janouille seized him by the arm, and pulled him in, saying: "Do you want to take root there? Come along, the master is busy at work in his study."

Seated at a desk in the middle of a large room, half library and half theatrical dressing-room, furnished in a curious style, was the same individual with gold spectacles, who had said to Prosper at the Préfecture, "Have courage." This was M. Lecoq in his official character.

Fanferlot on his entrance advanced respectfully, bowing till his back-bone was a perfect curve. M. Lecoq laid down his pen, and looking sharply at him, said: "Ah, so here you are, young man. Well, it seems that you haven't made much progress in Bertomy's case."

"What," murmured Fanferlot, "you know—"

"I know that you have muddled everything until you can't see your way out; so that you are ready to give in."

"But, M. Lecoq, it was not I—"

M. Lecoq rose, and walked up and down the room; suddenly he confronted Fanferlot, and said in a tone of scornful irony: "What would you think, Master Squirrel, of a man who abuses the confidence of those who employ him, who reveals just enough to lead the prosecution on the wrong scent, who sacrifices to his own foolish vanity the cause of justice and the liberty of an unfortunate prisoner?"

Fanferlot started back with a scared look. "I should say," he stammered, "I should say—"

"You would say this man ought to be punished, and dismissed from his employment; and you are right. The less a profession is honored, the more honorable should those be who belong to it. And yet you have been false to yours. Ah! Master Squirrel, we are ambitious, and we

try to make the police service forward our own views! We let justice go astray, and we go on a different tack. One must be a more cunning blood-hound than you are, my friend, to be able to hunt without a huntsman. You are too self-reliant by half."

"But, my chief, I swear—"

"Silence! Do you pretend to say that you did your duty, and told all you knew to the investigating magistrate? Whilst others were giving information against the cashier, you were getting up evidence against the banker. You watch his movements: you became intimate with his valet."

Was M. Lecoq really angry, or pretending to be so? Fanferlot, who knew him well, was puzzled as to whether all this indignation was real.

"Still, if you were only skilful," continued M. Lecoq, "it would be another matter; but no: you wish to be master, and you are not even fit to be a journeyman."

"You are right, my chief," said Fanferlot piteously, for he saw that it was useless for him to deny anything. "But how could I go about an affair like this, where there was not even a trace, a sign of any kind to start from?"

M. Lecoq shrugged his shoulders. "You are an ass!" exclaimed he. "Why, don't you know that on the very day you were sent for with the commissary to verify the fact of the robbery, you held—I do not say certainly, but very probably held—in your great stupid hands the means of knowing which key had been used when the money was stolen?"

"How is that?"

"You want to know do you? I will tell you. Do you remember the scratch you discovered on the safe? You were so struck by it, that you could not refrain from calling out directly you saw it. You carefully examined it, and were convinced that it was a fresh scratch, only a few hours old. You thought, and rightly too, that this scratch was made at the time of the theft. Now, with what was it made? Evidently with a key. That being the case, you should have asked for the keys both of the banker and the cashier. One of them would have probably had some particles of the hard green paint sticking to it."

Fanferlot listened with open mouth to this explanation.

At the last words, he violently slapped his forehead with his hand and cried out: "Idiot! idiot!"

"You have correctly named yourself," said M. Lecoq. "Idiot! This proof stares you right in the face, and you don't see it! This scratch is the only clue there is to follow, and you must like a fool neglect it. If I find the guilty party, it will be by means of this scratch; and I am determined that I will find him."

At a distance the Squirrel very bravely abuses and defies M. Lecoq; but, in his presence, he yields to the influence which this extraordinary man exercises upon all who approach him. This exact information, these minute details just given him, so upset his mind that he could not imagine where and how M. Lecoq had obtained them. Finally he humbly said: "You have then been occupying yourself with this case, my chief?"

"Probably I have; but I am not infallible, and may have overlooked some important evidence. Take a seat, and tell me all you know."

M. Lecoq was not the man to be hood-winked, so Fanferlot told the exact truth, a rare thing for him to do. However, as he reached the end of his statement, a feeling of mortified vanity prevented his telling how he had been fooled by Nina and the stout man. Unfortunately for poor Fanferlot, M. Lecoq was always fully informed on every subject in which he interested himself. "It seems to me, Master Squirrel," said he, "that you have forgotten something. How far did you follow the empty cab?"

Fanferlot blushed, and hung his head like a guilty school-boy. "Oh, my chief!" he cried, "and you know all about that too! How could you have—" But a sudden idea flashed across his mind, he stopped short, bounded off his chair, and exclaimed: "Oh! I know now: you were the stout gentleman with the red whiskers."

His amazement gave so singular an expression to his face that M. Lecoq could not restrain a smile. "Then it was you!" continued the bewildered detective; "you were the stout gentleman at whom I stared, so as to impress his appearance upon my mind, and I never recognized you! You would make a superb actor, my chief, if you would go on the stage; but I was disguised too—very well disguised."

"Very poorly disguised: it is only just to you that I should let you know what a failure it was, Fanferlot. Do you think that a huge beard and a blouse are a sufficient transformation? The eye is the thing to be changed—the eye! The art lies in being able to change the eye. That is the secret." This theory of disguise explained why the lynx-eyed Lecoq never appeared at the Préfecture of Police without his gold spectacles.

"Then, my chief," said Fanferlot, clinging to his idea, "you have been more successful than Madame Alexandre; you have made the little girl confess? You know why she leaves the Grand Archangel, why she does not wait for M. de Lagors, and why she has bought herself some cotton dresses?"

"She is following my advice."

"That being the case," said the detective dejectedly, "there is nothing left for me to do, but to acknowledge myself an ass."

"No, Squirrel," said M. Lecoq kindly, "you are not an ass. You merely did wrong in undertaking a task beyond your capacity. Have you progressed one step since you started in this affair? No. That shows that, although you are incomparable as a lieutenant, you do not possess the qualities of a general. I am going to present you with an aphorism: remember it, and let it be your guide in the future: *A man can shine in the second rank, who would be totally eclipsed in the first.*"

Never had Fanferlot seen his chief so talkative and good-natured. Finding his deceit discovered, he had expected to be overwhelmed with a storm of anger; whereas he had escaped with a little shower that had cooled his brain. Lecoq's anger disappeared like one of those heavy clouds which threaten in the horizon for a moment, and then are suddenly swept away by a gust of wind.

But this unexpected affability made Fanferlot feel uneasy. He was afraid that something might be concealed beneath it. "Do you know who the thief is, my chief?" he inquired.

"I know no more than you do, Fanferlot; and you seem to have made up your mind, whereas I am still undecided. You declare the cashier to be innocent, and the banker guilty. I don't know whether you are right or wrong. I follow after you, and have got no further than the prelim-

inaries of my investigation. I am certain of but one thing, and that is, the scratch on the safe-door. That scratch is my starting-point."

As he spoke, M. Lecoq took from his desk an immense sheet of paper which he unrolled. On this paper was photographed the door of M. Fauvel's safe. Every detail was rendered perfectly. There were the five movable buttons with the engraved letters, and the narrow, projecting brass lock. The scratch was indicated with great exactness.

"Now," said M. Lecoq, "here is our scratch. It runs from top to bottom, starting diagonally, from the keyhole, and proceeding from left to right; that is to say it terminates on the side next to the private staircase leading to the banker's apartments. Although very deep at the keyhole, it ends in a scarcely perceptible mark."

"Yes, my chief, I see all that."

"Naturally you thought that this scratch was made by the person who took the money. Let us see if you were right. I have here a little iron box, painted green like M. Fauvel's safe; here it is. Take a key, and try to scratch it."

"The deuce take it!" said Fanferlot after several attempts, "this paint is awfully hard to move!"

"Very hard, my friend, and yet that on the safe is harder still, and more solid. So you see the scratch you discovered could not have been made by the trembling hand of a thief letting the key slip."

"Sapristi!" exclaimed Fanferlot amazed; "I never should have thought of that. It certainly required great force to make the deep scratch on the safe."

"Yes, but how was that force applied? I have been racking my brain for three days, and it was only yesterday that I came to a conclusion. Let us examine if my conjectures present enough chances of probability to establish a starting-point."

M. Lecoq put the photograph aside, and, walking to the door communicating with his bedroom, took the key from the lock, and, holding it in his hands, said: "Come here, Fanferlot, and stand by my side, there; very well. Now suppose that I want to open this door, and that you don't wish me to open it; when you see me about to insert the key, what would be your first impulse?"

"To put my hands on your arm, and draw it towards me so as to prevent your introducing the key."

"Precisely so. Now let us try it; go on." Fanferlot obeyed; and the key held by M. Lecoq, pulled aside from the lock, slipped along the door, and traced upon it, from above to below a diagonal scratch, the exact reproduction of the one in the photograph.

"Oh, oh, oh!" exclaimed Fanferlot in three different tones of admiration, as he stood gazing in a reverie at the door.

"Do you begin to understand?" asked M. Lecoq.

"Understand, my chief? Why, a child could understand it now. Ah, what a man you are! I see the scene as if I had been there. Two persons were present at the robbery; one wished to take the money, the other wished to prevent its being taken. That is clear, that is certain."

Accustomed to triumphs of this sort, M. Lecoq was much amused at Fanferlot's enthusiasm. "There you go off, half-primed again," he said good-humoredly; "you regard as certain proof a circumstance which may be accidental, and at the most only probable."

"No, my chief; no! a man like you could not be mistaken; doubt is no longer possible."

"That being the case, what deductions would you draw from our discovery?"

"In the first place, it proves that I am correct in thinking the cashier innocent."

"How so?"

"Because, being at perfect liberty to open the safe whenever he wished to do so, it is not likely that he would have had a witness present when he intended to commit the theft."

"Well reasoned, Fanferlot. But on this supposition the banker would be equally innocent; reflect a little."

Fanferlot reflected, and all his confidence vanished. "You are right," he said in a despairing tone. "What can be done now?"

"Look for the third rogue, or rather the real rogue, the one who opened the safe, and stole the notes, and who is still at large, while others are suspected."

"Impossible, my chief, impossible! Don't you know that M. Fauvel and his cashier had keys, and they only? And they always kept these keys in their possession."

"On the evening of the robbery the banker left his key in his escritoire."

"Yes ; but the key alone was not sufficient to open the safe ; it was necessary that the word also should be known."

M. Lecoq shrugged his shoulders impatiently. "What was the word ?" he asked.

"Gipsy."

"Which is the name of the cashier's mistress. Now keep your eyes open. The day you find a man sufficiently intimate with Prosper to be aware of all the circumstances connected with this name, and who is at the same time on such a footing with the Fauvel family as would give him the privilege of entering M. Fauvel's chamber, then, and not until then, will you discover the guilty party. On that day the problem will be solved."

Self-sufficient and vain, like all famous men, M. Lecoq had never had a pupil, and never wished to have one. He worked alone, because he hated assistants, wishing to share neither the pleasures of success nor the pain of defeat. Thus Fanferlot, who knew his chief's character, was astonished to hear him giving advice, who heretofore had only given orders. He was so puzzled, that in spite of his preoccupation he could not help betraying his surprise. "My chief," he ventured to say, "you seem to take a great interest in this affair, you have so deeply studied it."

M. Lecoq started nervously, and replied, frowning: "You are too curious Master Squirrel ; be careful that you do not go too far. Do you understand ?"

Fanferlot began to apologize.

"That will do," interrupted M. Lecoq. "If I choose to lend you a helping hand, it is because it suits my fancy to do so. It pleases me to be the head, and to let you be the hand. Unassisted, with your preconceived ideas, you never would have found the culprit ; if we two together don't find him, my name is not Lecoq."

"We shall certainly succeed, as you interest yourself in the case."

"Yes, I am interested in it, and during the last four days I have discovered many important facts. But listen to me. I have reasons for not appearing in this affair. No matter what happens, I forbid you mentioning my name. If we succeed, all the success must be attributed

you. And, above all, don't try to find out what I choose to keep from you. Be satisfied with what explanations I give you. Now, be careful."

These conditions seemed to suit Fanferlot perfectly. "I will obey your instructions and be discreet," he replied.

"I shall rely upon you," continued M. Lecoq. "Now, to begin, you must carry this photograph to the investigating magistrate. I know M. Patrigent is much perplexed about the case. Explain to him as if it were your own discovery, what I have just shown you; repeat for his benefit the experiment we have performed, and I am convinced that this evidence will determine him to release the cashier. Prosper must be at liberty before I can commence my operations."

"Of course, my chief; but must I let him know that I suspect any one besides the banker or cashier?"

"Certainly. The authorities must not be kept in ignorance of your intention of following up this affair. M. Patrigent will tell you to watch Prosper; you will reply that you will not lose sight of him. I myself will answer for his being in safe keeping."

"Suppose he asks me about Nina Gipsy?"

M. Lecoq hesitated for a moment. "Tell him," he finally said, "that you persuaded her, in the interest of Prosper, to live in a house where she can watch some one whom you suspect."

Fanferlot rolled up the photograph and joyously seized hold of his hat, intending to depart, when M. Lecoq checked him by waving his hand, and said: "I have not finished yet. Do you know how to drive a carriage and manage horses?"

"How can you ask such a question as this, my chief, of a man who used to be a rider in the Bouthor Circus?"

"Very good. As soon as the magistrate dismisses you, return home immediately, obtain for yourself a wig and the complete dress of a valet; and, when you are ready, take this letter to the agency for servants at the corner of the Passage Delorme."

"But, my chief—"

"There must be no but, my friend; the agent will send you to M. de Clameran, who is wanting a valet, his man having left him yesterday."

"Excuse me, if I venture to suggest that I think you are

laboring under a wrong impression. This De Clameran is not the cashier's friend."

"Why do you always interrupt me?" said M. Lecoq imperiously. "Do what I tell you, and don't disturb your mind about the rest. I know that De Clameran is not a friend of Prosper's; but he is the friend and protector of Raoul de Lagors. Why so? Whence the intimacy of these two men of such different ages? That is what I must find out. I must also find out who this ironmaster is who spends all his time in Paris, and never goes to look after his forges. An individual, who takes it into his head to live at the Hotel du Louvre, in the midst of a constantly changing crowd, is a fellow difficult to watch. Through you I will keep an eye upon him. He has a carriage, which you will have to drive; and you will soon be able to give me an account of his manner of life, and of the sort of people with whom he associates."

"You shall be obeyed, my chief."

"Another thing. M. de Clameran is irritable and suspicious. You will be presented to him under the name of Joseph Dubois. He will ask for certificates of your good character. Here are three, which state that you have lived with the Marquis de Sairmeuse and the Count de Commarin, and that you have just left the Baron de Wortschen, who went to Germany the other day. Now keep your eyes open; be careful of your get-up and manners. Be polite, but not excessively so. And, above all things, don't be too honest: it might arouse suspicion."

"I understand, my chief. Where shall I report to you?"

"I will see you daily. Until I tell you differently, don't put foot in this house; you might be followed. If any thing important should happen, send a telegram to your wife, and she will inform me. Go, and be prudent."

The door closed on Fanferlot as M. Lecoq passed into his bedroom. In the twinkling of an eye the latter divested himself of the appearance of chief detective. He took off his stiff cravat and gold spectacles and removed the close wig from his thick black hair. The official Lecoq had disappeared, leaving in his place the genuine Lecoq whom nobody knew—a good-looking young man, with a bold, determined manner, and brilliant, piercing eyes. But he only remained himself for an instant. Seated before a

dressings-table covered with more cosmetics, paints, perfumes, false hair, and other shams, than are to be found on the toilet-tables of our modern belles, he began to undo the work of nature and to make himself a new face. He worked slowly, handling his brushes with great care. But in an hour he had accomplished one of his daily masterpieces. When he had finished, he was no longer Lecoq: he was the stout gentleman with red whiskers, whom Fanferlot had failed to recognize.

"Well," he said, casting a last look in the mirror, "I have forgotten nothing: I have left nothing to chance. All my plans are fixed; and I shall make some progress to-day, provided the Squirrel does not waste time."

But Fanferlot was too happy to waste even a minute. He did not run, he flew, towards the Palais de Justice. At last he was able to convince some one that he, Fanferlot, was a man of wonderful perspicacity. As to acknowledging that he was about to obtain a triumph with the ideas of another man, he never thought of such a thing. It is generally in perfect good faith that the jackdaw struts about in the peacock's feathers.

Fanferlot's hopes were not deceived. If the magistrate was not absolutely convinced, he admired the ingenuity and shrewdness of the whole proceeding. "This decides me," he said, as he dismissed Fanferlot. "I will draw up a favorable report to-day; and it is highly probable that the accused will be released to-morrow." He began at once to write out one of those terrible decisions of "Not proven," which restores liberty, but not honor, to the accused man; which says that he is not guilty, but does not say that he is innocent:

"Whereas sufficient proofs are wanting against the accused, Prosper Bertomy, in pursuance of Article 128 of the Criminal Code, we hereby declare that no grounds at present exist for prosecuting the aforesaid prisoner; and we order that he be released from the prison where he is confined, and set at liberty by the jailer," &c.

"Well," said he to the clerk, "here we have another of those crimes which justice cannot clear up. The mystery remains to be solved. There is another file to be stowed away among the police records." And with his own hand he wrote on the cover of the bundle of papers relating to Prosper's case, its number of rotation: *File No. 113.*

VII.

PROSPER had been languishing in his cell for nine days, when one Thursday morning the jailer came to apprise him of the magistrate's decision. He was conducted before the officer who had searched him when he was arrested; and his watch, penknife, and several small articles of jewellery, were restored to him; then he was told to sign a large sheet of paper, which he did.

He was next led across a dark passage, and almost pushed through a door, which was abruptly shut upon him. He found himself on the quay: he was alone; he was free.

Free! Justice had confessed her inability to convict him of the crime of which he was accused. Free! He could walk about, he could breathe the fresh air; but every door would be closed against him. Only acquittal after due trial would restore him to his former position among men. A decision of "Not proven" had left him exposed to continual suspicion.

The torments inflicted by public opinion are more fearful than those endured in a prison cell. At the moment of his restoration to liberty, Prosper suffered so cruelly from the horror of his situation, that he could not repress a cry of rage and despair. "I am innocent! God knows I am innocent!" he cried out. But of what use was his anger? Two strangers, who were passing, stopped to look at him, and said pityingly: "The poor fellow is crazy."

The Seine was at his feet. A thought of suicide crossed his mind. "No," he said, "no! I have not even the right to kill myself. No: I will not die until I have proved my innocence!"

Often, day and night, had Prosper repeated these words, as he walked his cell. With a heart filled with a bitter, determined thirst for vengeance, which gives a man the force and patience to destroy or wear out all obstacles in his way, he would say: "Oh! why am I not at liberty? I am helpless, caged up; but let me once be free!" Now he was free; and for the first time he saw the difficulties of the task before him. For each crime, justice requires a criminal: he could not establish his own innocence with

out producing the guilty individual, how was he to find the thief and hand him over to the law ?

Despondent, but not discouraged, Prosper turned in the direction of his apartments. He was beset by a thousand anxieties. What had taken place during the nine days that he had been cut off from all intercourse with his friends ? No news of them had reached him. He had heard no more of what was going on in the outside world, than if his secret cell had been a tomb. He walked slowly along the streets, with his eyes cast down, dreading to meet some familiar face. He, who had always been so haughty, would now be pointed at with the finger of scorn. He would be greeted with cold looks and averted faces. Men would refuse to shake hands with him. Still, if he could count on only one true friend ! Yes, only one. But what friend would believe him when his father, who should have been the last to suspect him, had refused to believe him ?

In the midst of his sufferings, when he felt almost overwhelmed by the sense of his wretched, lonely condition, Prosper thought of Nina Gipsy. He had never loved the poor girl : indeed, at times he almost hated her ; but now he felt a longing to see her, because he knew that she loved him, and that nothing would make her think him guilty ; because, too, woman remains true and firm in her belief, and is always faithful in the hour of adversity, although she sometimes fails in prosperity.

On reaching his house in the Rue Chaptal, Prosper hesitated at the moment he was about to cross the threshold. He suffered from the timidity which an honest man always feels when he knows he is regarded with suspicion. He dreaded meeting any one whom he knew ; still he could not remain in the street, so he entered. When the concierge saw him, he uttered an exclamation of glad surprise, and said : " Ah, here you are at last, sir. I told every one you would come out as white as snow ; and, when I read in the papers that you were arrested for robbery, I said, " My third-floor lodger a thief ! Never would I believe such a thing, never ! "

The congratulations of this ignorant man were sincere, and came from pure kindness of heart ; but they impressed Prosper painfully and he cut them short by abruptly ex-

claiming: "Madame of course has left; can you tell me where she has gone?"

"Dear me, no, I cannot. The day of your arrest, she sent for a cab and left with her trunks, and no one has seen or heard of her since."

This was another blow to the unhappy cashier. "And where are my servants?"

"Gone, sir. Your father paid them their wages, and discharged them."

"I suppose, then, you have my key?"

"No, sir; when your father left here this morning at eight o'clock, he told me that a friend of his would take charge of your rooms until you returned. Of course you know who he is—a stout gentleman with red whiskers."

Prosper was astounded. What could be the meaning of one of his father's friends occupying his rooms? He did not, however, betray his surprise, but quietly said: "Yes, I know who it is."

He quickly ran up the stairs, and knocked at his door, which was at once opened by his father's friend. He had been accurately described by the concierge. A stout man, with a red face, full lips, sharp eyes, and of rather coarse manners, stood bowing to Prosper, who had never seen him before. "Delighted to make your acquaintance, sir," said he.

He seemed to be perfectly at home. On the table lay a book, which he had taken from the bookcase; and he appeared ready to do the honors of the place.

"I must say, sir," began Prosper.

"That you are surprised to find me here? So I suppose. Your father intended introducing me to you; but he was compelled to return to Beaucaire this morning; and let me add that he departed thoroughly convinced, as I myself am, that you never took a sou from M. Fauvel."

At this unexpected good news, Prosper's face lit up with pleasure.

"Here is a letter from your father, which I hope will serve as an introduction between us."

Prosper opened the letter; and as he read his eyes grew brighter, and a slight color returned to his pale face. When he had finished he held out his hand to the stout gentleman, and said: "My father tells me, sir, that you

are his best friend ; he advises me to have absolute confidence in you, and to follow your advice."

"Exactly. This morning your father said to me : 'Verduret'—that is my name—'Verduret, my son is in great trouble, and must be helped out of it.' I replied : 'I am both ready and willing,' and here I am to assist you. Now the ice is broken, is it not ? Then let us go to work at once. What do you intend doing ?"

This question revived Prosper's slumbering rage. His eyes flashed. "What do I intend doing ?" said he angrily ; "What should I do but seek the villain who has ruined me ?"

"So I supposed ; but have you any means of success ?"

"None ; yet I shall succeed, because, when a man devotes his whole life to the accomplishment of an object, he is certain to achieve it."

"Well said, M. Prosper ; and, to be frank, I fully expected that this would be your purpose. I have therefore already begun to think and act for you. I have a plan. In the first place, you will sell this furniture, and disappear from the neighborhood."

"Disappear !" cried Prosper indignantly ; "disappear ! Why, sir ! do you not see that such a step would be a confession of guilt, would authorize the world to say that I am hiding so as to enjoy undisturbed the stolen 350,000 francs ?"

"Well, what then ?" said the man with the red whiskers ; "did you not say just now that the sacrifice of your life is made ? The expert swimmer thrown into the river, after being robbed, is careful not to rise to the surface immediately : on the contrary, he plunges beneath, and remains there as long as his breath holds out. He comes up again at a great distance off, and lands out of sight ; then, when he is supposed to be dead, he suddenly reappears and has his revenge. You have a enemy ? Some petty imprudence will betray him. But, while he sees you standing by on the watch, he will be on his guard."

It was with a sort of amazed submission that Prosper listened to this man, who, though a friend of his father, was an utter stranger to himself. He submitted unconsciously to the ascendancy of a nature so much more energetic and forcible than his own. In his helpless condition

he was grateful for friendly assistance, and said : " I will follow your advice, sir."

" I was sure you would, my dear fellow. Let us reflect upon the course you ought to pursue. And remember that you will need every franc of the proceeds of the sale. Have you any ready money ? no, but you must have some. Knowing that you would need this at once, I have already spoken to an upholsterer ; and he will give you twelve thousand francs for everything, minus the pictures."

The cashier could not refrain from shrugging his shoulders, which M. Verduret observed. " Well," said he, " it is rather hard, I admit, but it is a necessity. Now listen : you are the invalid, and I am the doctor charged to cure you ; if I cut to the quick, you will have to endure it. It is the only way to save you."

" Cut away then," answered Prosper.

" Well, we will make haste, for time presses. You have a friend, M. de Lagors ?"

" Raoul ? Yes, he is an intimate friend of mine."

" Now tell me, who is this fellow ?"

The term " fellow " seemed to offend Prosper. " M. de Lagors," he said haughtily, " is M. Fauvel's nephew ; he is a wealthy young man, handsome, intelligent, cultivated, and the best friend I have."

" Hum !" said M. Verduret, " I shall be delighted to make the acquaintance of one adorned by so many charming qualities. I must let you know that I wrote him a note in your name asking him to come here, and he sent word that he would come."

" What ! do you suppose—"

" Oh, I suppose nothing ! Only I must see this young man. Also I have arranged and will submit to you a little plan of conversation—" A ring at the outer door interrupted M. Verduret. " The deuce !" exclaimed he ; " adieu to my plan ; here he is ! Where can I hide so as to both hear and see ?"

" There, in my bedroom ; leave the door open and the curtain down."

A second ring was heard. " Now remember, Prosper," said M. Verduret in a warning tone, " not one word to this man about your plans, or about me. Pretend to be discouraged, helpless, and undecided what to do," And he

disappeared behind the curtain, as Prosper ran to open the door.

Prosper's portrait of M. de Lagors was no exaggerated one. Such an open and handsome countenance, and manly figure, could belong only to a noble character. Although Raoul said that he was twenty-four, he appeared to be not more than twenty. He had a fine figure, well knit and supple; an abundance of light chestnut-colored hair, curled over his intelligent-looking forehead, and his large blue eyes, which beamed with candor. His first impulse was to throw himself into Prosper's arms. "My poor, dear friend!" he said, "my poor Prosper!"

But beneath these affectionate demonstrations there was a certain constraint, which, if it escaped the perception of the cashier, was noticed by M. Verduret. "Your letter, my dear Prosper," said Raoul, "made me almost ill, I was so frightened by it. I asked myself if you could have lost your mind. Then I put aside everything, to hasten to your assistance; and here I am."

Prosper did not seem to hear him; his thoughts were occupied with the letter which he had not written. What were its contents? Who was this stranger whose assistance he had accepted?

"You must not feel discouraged," continued M. de Lagors; "you are young enough to commence life anew. Your friends are still left to you. I have come to say to you: 'Rely upon me; I am rich, half of my fortune is at your disposal.'"

This generous offer, made at a moment like this with such frank simplicity, deeply touched Prosper. "Thanks, Raoul," he said with emotion, "thank you! But unfortunately all the money in the world would be of no use now."

"Why so? What, then, are you going to do? Do you propose to remain in Paris?"

"I know not, Raoul. I have formed no plans yet. My mind is too confused for me to think."

"I will tell you what to do," resumed Raoul quickly; "you must start afresh; until this mysterious robbery is explained you must keep away from Paris. Excuse my frankness, but it will never do for you to remain here."

"And suppose it never should be explained?"

"Only the more reason for your remaining in oblivion. I have been talking about you to De Clameran. 'If I

were in Prosper's place,' he said, 'I would turn everything into money, and embark for America; there I would make a fortune, and return to crush with my millions those who have suspected me.'"

This advice offended Prosper's pride, but he interposed no kind of objection. He was recalling to mind what his unknown visitor had said to him. "I will think it over," he finally observed. "I will see. I should like to know what M. Fauvel says."

"My uncle? I suppose you know that I have declined the offer he made me to enter his banking-house, and we have almost quarrelled. I have not set foot in his house for over a month; but I hear of him occasionally."

"Through whom?"

"Through your friend Cavaillon. My uncle, they say, is more distressed by this affair than you are. He does not attend to his business, and seems as though he had just recovered from some serious illness."

"And Madame Fauvel, and—" Prosper hesitated—"and Mademoiselle Madeleine, how are they?"

"Oh," said Raoul lightly, "my aunt is as pious as ever; she has mass said for the benefit of the sinner. As to my handsome, icy cousin, she cannot bring herself down to common matters, because she is entirely absorbed in preparing for the fancy ball to be given the day after tomorrow by MM. Jandidier. She has discovered, so one of her friends told me, a wonderful dressmaker, a stranger who has suddenly appeared from no one knows where, and who is making for her a costume of one of Catherine de Médicis' maids of honor. I hear it is to be a marvel of beauty."

Excessive suffering brings with it a kind of dull insensibility and stupor; but this last remark of M. de Lagors' touched Prosper to the quick, and he murmured faintly: "Madeleine! O Madeleine!"

M. de Lagors, pretending not to have heard him, rose from his chair, and said: "I must leave you now, my dear Prosper; on Saturday I shall see these ladies at the ball, and bring you news of them. Now, take courage, and remember that, whatever happens, you have a friend in me."

Raoul shook Prosper by the hand and departed, leaving the latter standing immovable and overcome by disappointment. He was aroused from his gloomy reverie by hear-

ing the red-whiskered man say in a bantering tone, "So this is one of your friends?"

"Yes," said Prosper with bitterness. "Yet you heard him offer me half of his fortune?"

M. Verduret shrugged his shoulders with an air of compassion. "That was very stingy on his part," said he; "why did he not offer the whole? Offers cost nothing; although I have no doubt that this sweet youth would cheerfully give ten thousand francs to put the ocean between you and him."

"What reason, sir, would he have for doing this?"

"Who knows? Perhaps for the same reason that he told you he had not set foot in his uncle's house for a month."

"But that is the truth, I am sure of it."

"Naturally," said M. Verduret with a provoking smile. "But," continued he with a serious air, "we have devoted enough time to this Adonis, whose measure I have taken. Now, be good enough to change your dress, and we will go and call on M. Fauvel."

This proposal aroused Prosper's anger. "Never!" he exclaimed excitedly; "no, never will I voluntarily set eyes on that wretch!"

This resistance did not surprise M. Verduret. "I can understand your feelings towards him," said he; "but at the same time I hope you will change your mind. For the same reason that I wished to see M. de Lagors, I desire to see M. Fauvel; it is necessary, you understand. Are you so very weak that you cannot constrain yourself for five minutes? I shall introduce myself as one of your relatives, and you need not open your lips."

"If it is positively necessary," said Prosper, "if—"

"It is necessary; so come on. You must have confidence, and put on a brave face. Hurry and make yourself trim; it is getting late, and I am hungry. We will lunch on our way there."

Prosper had hardly passed into his bedroom when the bell rang again. M. Verduret opened the door. It was the concierge, who handed him a bulky letter, and said: "This letter was left this morning for M. Bertomy; I was so flustered when he came that I forgot to hand it to him. It is a very odd-looking letter; is it not, sir?"

It was indeed a most peculiar missive. The address

was not written, but formed of printed letters, carefully cut from a book, and pasted on the envelope.

"Oh, ho! what is this!" cried M. Verduret; then turning towards the man he said: "Wait a moment." He went into the next room, and closed the door behind him. There he found Prosper, anxious to know what was going on. "Here is a letter for you," observed M. Verduret.

Prosper at once tore open the envelope. Some bank notes dropped out; he counted them; there were ten. The cashier turned very red. "What does this mean?" he asked.

"We will read the letter and find out," replied Verduret.

The letter, like the address, was composed of printed words cut out and pasted on a sheet of paper. It was short but explicit:—

"My dear Prosper,—A friend, who knows the horror of your situation, sends you this succor. There is one heart, be assured, that shares your sufferings. Go away—leave France. You are young; the future is before you. Go, and may this money bring you happiness!"

As M. Verduret read the note, Prosper's rage increased. He was angry and perplexed, for he could not explain the rapidly succeeding events which were so calculated to mystify his already confused brain. "Everybody wishes me to go away," he cried; "there is evidently a conspiracy against me."

M. Verduret smiled with satisfaction. "At last you begin to open your eyes, you begin to understand. Yes, there are people who hate you because of the wrong they have done you; there are people to whom your presence in Paris is a constant danger, and who will not feel safe till they are rid of you."

"But who are these people? Tell me, who dares send this money?"

"If I knew, my dear Prosper, my task would be at an end, for then I should know who committed the robbery. But we will continue our researches. I have finally procured evidence which will sooner or later become convincing proof. I have heretofore only made deductions more or less probable; I now possess knowledge which proves that I was not mistaken. I walked in darkness: now I have a light to guide me."

As Prosper listened to M. Verduret's reassuring words, he felt hope rising in his breast.

"Now," said M. Verduret, "we must take advantage of this evidence, gained by the imprudence of our enemies, without delay. We will begin with the concierge."

He opened the door, and called out: "I say, my good man, step here a moment."

The concierge entered, looking very much surprised at the authority exercised over his lodger by this stranger.

"Who gave you this letter?" asked M. Verduret.

"A messenger, who said he was paid for bringing it."

"Do you know him?"

"I know him well; he is the commissionaire whose post is at the corner of the Rue Pigalle."

"Go and bring him here."

After the concierge had gone, M. Verduret drew his diary from his pocket and compared a page of it with the notes which he had spread over the table. "These notes were not sent by the thief," he said, after an attentive examination of them.

"Do you think so?"

"I am confident of it; that is, unless he is endowed with extraordinary penetration and forethought. One thing is certain: these ten thousand francs are not part of the three hundred and fifty thousand which were stolen from the safe."

"Yet," said Prosper, who could not account for this certainty on the part of his protector, "yet—"

"There is no yet about it: I have the numbers of all the stolen notes."

"What! When even I did not know them myself?"

"But the Bank did, fortunately. When we undertake an affair we must anticipate everything, and forget nothing. It is a poor excuse for a man to say, 'I did not think of it,' when he commits some oversight. I thought of the Bank."

If in the beginning Prosper had felt some repugnance about confiding in his father's friend, the feeling had now disappeared. He understood that alone, scarcely master of himself, governed only by the inspirations of inexperience he would never have had the patient perspicacity of this singular man.

Verduret continued, talking to himself, as if he had

absolutely forgotten Prosper's presence ; "Then, as this missive did not come from the thief, it can only come from the other person, who was near the safe at the time of the robbery, but could not prevent it, and now feels remorse. The probability of two persons assisting at the robbery, a probability suggested by the scratch, is now converted into a certainty. *Ergo*, I was right."

Prosper listening attentively tried hard to comprehend this monologue, which he dared not interrupt.

"Let us seek," the stout man went on to say, "this second person, whose conscience pricks him, and yet who dares not reveal anything." Here he read the letter over several times, scanning the sentences, and weighing every word. "Evidently this letter was composed by a woman," he finally said. "Never would a man doing another man a service, and sending him money, use the word 'succor.' A man would have said, loan, money, or some other equivalent, but succor, never. No one but a woman, ignorant of masculine susceptibilities, would have naturally made use of this word to express the idea it represents. As to the sentence, 'There is one heart' and so on, it could only have been written by a woman."

"You are mistaken, sir, I think," said Prosper ; "no woman is mixed up in this affair."

M. Verduret paid no attention to this interruption ; perhaps he did not hear it, perhaps he did not care to argue the matter. "Now, let us see if we can discover whence the printed words were taken to compose this letter."

He went to the window, and began to study the pasted words with all the scrupulous attention which an antiquary would devote to an old, half-effaced manuscript. "Small type," he said, "very slender and clear ; the paper is thin and glossy. Consequently, these words have not been cut from a newspaper, magazine, or even a novel. Yet I have seen type like this—I recognize it, I am sure Didot often uses it, so does Mame of Tours."

He suddenly stopped, his mouth open, and his eyes fixed, appealing as though anxiously to his memory. Suddenly he struck his forehead exultingly. "Now I have it !" he cried ; "now I have it ! Why did I not see it at once ? These words have all been cut from a prayer-book. We will look, at least, and then we shall be certain."

He moistened one of the words pasted on the paper

with his tongue, and when it was sufficiently softened, he detached it with a pin. On the other side of this word was the Latin word, *Deus*.

"Ah, ah!" he exclaimed with a little laugh of satisfaction, "I knew it. Old Tabaret would be pleased to see this. But what has become of the mutilated prayer-book? Can it have been burned? No, because a heavy-bound book is not easily burned. It has been thrown aside in some corner."

He was here interrupted by the concierge, who returned with the commissionaire from the Rue Pigalle.

"Ah, here you are," said M. Verduret, encouragingly. Then he showed him the envelope of the letter, and asked "Do you remember bringing this letter here this morning?"

"Perfectly, sir. I took particular notice of the direction; we don't often see anything like it."

"Who told you to bring it?—a gentleman, or a lady?"

"Neither, sir; it was a commissionaire."

This reply made the concierge laugh very much, but not a muscle of M. Verduret's face moved.

"A commissionaire? Well, do you know this colleague of yours?"

"I never saw him before."

"What was he like?"

"He was neither tall nor short; he wore a green velvet jacket, and his badge."

"Your description is so vague that it would suit every commissionaire in the city; but did your colleague tell you who sent the letter?"

"No, sir. He simply put ten sous in my hand, and said: 'Here, carry this to No. 39 Rue Chaptal; a cabman on the boulevard handed it to me.' Ten sous! I warrant you he made more than that by it."

This answer seemed to disconcert M. Verduret. The taking of so many precautions to send this letter disturbed him and upset all his plans.

"Do you think you would recognize the commissionaire again?" he asked.

"Yes, sir, if I saw him."

"How much do you gain a day as a commissionaire?"

"I can't exactly tell; but mine is a good corner, and I am busy going errands nearly all day. I suppose I make from eight to ten francs."

"Very well : I will give you ten francs a day if you will walk about the streets, and look for the commissionaire who gave you this letter. Every evening, at eight o'clock, come to the Grand Archangel, on the Quai Saint Michel, to give me a report of your search and receive your pay. Ask for M. Verduret. If you find the man I will give you fifty francs. Do you agree?"

"I should rather think I do."

"Then don't lose a minute. Start off!"

Although ignorant of M. Verduret's plans, Prosper began to comprehend the sense of his investigations. His fate depended upon their success, and yet he almost forgot this fact in his admiration of this singular man; for his energy, his bantering coolness when he wished to discover anything, the certainty of his deductions, the fertility of his expedients, and the rapidity of his movements, were astonishing.

"Do you still think, sir," said Prosper when the man had left the room, "you see a woman's hand in this affair?"

"More than ever; and a pious woman too, who has at least two prayer-books, since she could cut up one to write to you."

"And you hope to find the mutilated book?"

"I do, thanks to the opportunity I have of making an immediate search; which I will set about at once."

Saying this, he sat down, and rapidly scratched off a few lines on a slip of paper, which he folded up, and put in his waistcoat pocket. "Are you ready to go to M. Fauvel's?" he then asked. "Yes? Come on, then; we have certainly earned our lunch to-day."

VIII.

WHEN Raoul de Lagors spoke of M. Fauvel's extraordinary dejection, he had been guilty of no exaggeration. Since the fatal day when, upon his denunciation, his cashier had been arrested, the banker, this active, energetic man of business, had been a prey to the most gloomy melancholy, and ceased to take any interest in the affairs of his banking-house.

He, who had always been so devoted to his family, never came near them except at meals, when as soon as

he had swallowed a few mouthfuls, he would hastily leave the room. Shut up in his study, he would deny himself to visitors. His anxious countenance, his indifference to everybody and everything, his constant reveries and fits of abstraction, betrayed the presence of some fixed idea or of some hidden sorrow.

The day of Prosper's release, about three o'clock, M. Fauvel was, as usual, seated in his study, with his elbows resting on the table, and his face buried in his hands, when his valet abruptly entered, and with a frightened look said :

"M. Bertomy, the former cashier, is here sir, with one of his relatives ; he says he must see you."

At these words the banker jumped up as if he had been shot at. "Prosper !" he cried in a voice choked by anger, "what ! does he dare—" Then remembering that he ought to control himself before his servant, he waited a few moments, and said, in a tone of forced calmness : "Ask the gentlemen to walk in."

If M. Verduret had counted upon witnessing a strange and affecting scene, he was not disappointed. Nothing could be more terrible than the attitude of these two men as they stood confronting each other. The banker's face was almost purple with suppressed anger, and he looked as if he were about to be seized with a fit of apoplexy. Prosper was pale and motionless as a corpse. Silent and immovable, they stood glaring at each other with mortal hatred.

M. Verduret watched these two enemies with the indifference and coolness of a philosopher, who, in the most violent outbursts of human passion, merely see subjects for meditation and study. Finally, the silence becoming more and more threatening, he decided to break it by speaking to the banker :

"I suppose you know, sir," said he, "that my young relative has just been released from prison."

"Yes," replied M. Fauvel making an effort to control himself, "yes, for want of sufficient proof."

"Exactly so, sir ; and this want of proof, as stated in the decision of 'Not proven,' ruins the prospects of my relative, and compels him to leave here at once for America."

On hearing this statement, M. Fauvel's features re

laxed as if he had been relieved of some fearful agony. "Ah, he is going away," he kept repeating, "he is going abroad." There was no mistaking the insulting intonation of the words, "going away!"

M. Verduret took no notice of M. Fauvel's manner. "It appears to me," he continued in an easy tone, "that Prosper's determination is a wise one. I merely wished him, before leaving Paris, to come and pay his respects to his former chief."

The banker smiled bitterly. "M. Bertomy might have spared us both this painful meeting. I have nothing to say to him, and of course he can have nothing to tell me."

This was a formal dismissal; and M. Verduret, understanding it thus, bowed to M. Fauvel and left the room, accompanied by Prosper, who had not opened his lips.

They had reached the street before Prosper recovered the use of his tongue. "I hope you are satisfied, sir," said he in a gloomy tone. "You exacted this painful step, and I could but acquiesce. Have I gained anything by adding this humiliation to the others which I have had to suffer?"

"You have not, but I have," replied M. Verduret. "I could find no way of gaining access to M. Fauvel, save through you; and now I have found out what I wanted to know. I am convinced that M. Fauvel had nothing to do with the robbery."

"But you know, sir, innocence can be feigned," objected Prosper.

"Certainly, but not to this extent. And this is not all. I wished to find out if M. Fauvel would be accessible to certain suspicions. I can now confidently reply, 'yes.'"

Prosper and his companion had stopped to talk more at their ease, near the corner of Rue Lafitte, in the middle of a large space which had lately been cleared by pulling down an old house. M. Verduret seemed to be anxious, and was constantly looking around as if he expected some one. He soon uttered an exclamation of satisfaction. At the other end of the vacant space he saw Cavaillon, who was bareheaded and running.

The latter was so excited that he did not even stop to shake hands with Prosper, but darted up to M. Verduret, and said: "They have gone, sir!"

"How long since?"

"They went about a quarter of an hour ago."

"The deuce they did! Then we have not an instant to lose."

He handed Cavaillon the note he had written some hours before at Prosper's house.

"Here, pass this on, and then return at once to your desk; you might be missed. It was very imprudent of you to come out without your hat."

Cavaillon ran off as quickly as he had come. Prosper was astounded. "What!" he exclaimed. "You know Cavaillon?"

"So it seems," answered M. Verduret with a smile. "But we have no time to talk; come on, we must hurry!"

"Where are we going now?"

"You will soon know; let us walk fast!" And he set the example by striding rapidly towards the Rue Lafayette. As they went along he continued talking more to himself than to Prosper.

"Ah," said he, "it is not by putting both feet in one shoe that one wins a race. The trace once found, we should never rest an instant. When the savage discovers the footprints of an enemy, he follows it persistently, knowing that falling rain or a gust of wind may efface the footprints at any moment. It is the same with us; the most trifling incident may destroy the traces we are following up."

M. Verduret suddenly stopped before a door bearing the number 81. "We are going in here," he said to Prosper; "come along."

They went up stairs, and stopped on the second floor before a door over which was inscribed, "Modes and Confections." A handsome bell rope was hanging against the wall, but M. Verduret did not touch it. He tapped with the ends of his fingers in a peculiar way, and the door instantly opened, as if some one had been watching for his signal on the other side.

A neatly dressed woman of about forty received Verduret and Prosper, and quietly ushered them into a small dining-room with several doors opening into it. This woman bowed respectfully to M. Verduret, as if he were some superior being. He scarcely noticed her salutation, but questioned her with a look, which asked: "Well?"

She nodded affirmatively: "Yes."

"In there?" asked M. Verduret in a low tone, pointing to one of the doors.

"No," replied the woman in the same tone; "there, in the little parlor."

M. Verduret opened the door of the room indicated, and pushed Prosper forward, whispering as he did so, "Go in, and keep your presence of mind."

But this injunction was useless. The instant he cast his eyes round the room into which he had so unceremoniously been pushed without any warning, Prosper exclaimed in a startled voice: "Madeleine!"

It was indeed M. Fauvel's niece, looking more beautiful than ever. Hers was that calm, dignified beauty which imposes admiration and respect. Standing in the middle of the room, near a table covered with silks and satins, she was arranging a skirt of red velvet embroidered in gold; probably the dress she was to wear as maid of honor to Catherine de Médicis. At sight of Prosper, all the blood rushed to her face, and her beautiful eyes half closed, as if she were about to faint; she clung to the table to prevent herself from falling.

Prosper well knew that Madeleine was not one of those cold-hearted women whom nothing could disturb, and who feel sensations, but never a true sentiment. Of a tender, dreamy nature, she betrayed in the minute details of her life the most exquisite delicacy. But she was also proud, and incapable in any way of violating her conscience. When duty spoke, she obeyed.

She recovered from her momentary weakness, and the soft expression of her eyes changed to one of haughty resentment. In an offended tones he said: "What has emboldened you, sir, to be watching my movements?" "Who gave you permission to follow me—to enter this house?"

Prosper was certainly innocent. He longed with a word to explain what had just happened, but he was powerless to do so, and could only remain silent.

"You promised me upon your honor, sir," continued Madeleine, "that you would never again seek my presence. Is this the way you keep your word?"

"I did promise, mademoiselle, but—" He stopped.

"Oh, speak!"

"So many things have happened since that terrible day

that I think I am excusable in forgetting for one hour an oath torn from me in a moment of blind weakness. It is to chance, at least to another will than my own, that I am indebted for the happiness of once more finding myself near you. Alas! the instant I saw you my heart bounded with joy. I did not think—no, I could not think—that you would prove more pitiless than strangers have been, that you would cast me off when I am so miserable and heartbroken.”

Had not Prosper been so agitated he could have read in Madeleine’s eyes—those beautiful eyes which had so long been the arbiters of his destiny—the signs of a great inward struggle.

It was, however, in a firm voice that she replied: “You know me well enough, Prosper, to be sure that no blow can strike you without reaching me at the same time. You suffer, I suffer with you: I pity you as a sister would pity a beloved brother.”

“A sister!” said Prosper bitterly. “Yes, that was the word you used the day you banished me from your presence. A sister! Then why during three years did you delude me with vain hopes? Was I a brother to you the day we went to Notre Dame de Fourvières—that day when, at the foot of the altar, we swore to love each other forever and ever, and you fastened around my neck a holy relic and said, ‘Wear this always for my sake; never part from it, and it will bring you good fortune?’”

Madeleine attempted to interrupt him by a supplicating gesture; but he did not heed it, and continued with increased bitterness—“One month after that happy day—a year ago—you gave me back my promise, told me to consider myself free from any engagement, and never to come near you again. If I could have discovered in what way I had offended you—but no, you refused to explain. You drove me away, and to obey you I let every one suppose that I had left you of my own accord. You told me that an invincible obstacle had arisen between us, and I believed you, fool that I was! The obstacle was your own heart, Madeleine. I have always worn the relic; but it has not brought me happiness or good fortune.”

Pale and motionless as a statue, Madeleine listened with bowed head and weeping eyes to these passionate reproaches.

"I told you to forget me," she murmured.

"Forget!" exclaimed Prosper excitedly, "forget! Can I forget? Is it in my power to stop, by an effort of will, the circulation of my blood? Ah! you have never loved! To forget, as to stop the beatings of the heart, there is but one means—death!"

This word, uttered with the fixed determination of a desperate, reckless man, caused Madeleine to shudder.

"Miserable man!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, miserable man, and a thousand times more miserable than you can imagine! You can never understand the tortures I have suffered, when for a year past I have awoke every morning, and said to myself, 'It is all over, she has ceased to love me!' This great sorrow stares me in the face day and night in spite of all my efforts to dispel it. And you speak of forgetting! I sought it in poisoned cups, but found it not. I tried to extinguish this memory of the past, which burns within me like a devouring flame, but in vain. When my body succumbed, my pitiless thoughts still survived. Do you wonder then, that I should seek that rest which can only be obtained by suicide?"

"I forbid you to utter that word."

"You forget, Madeleine, that you have no right to forbid me now you love me no more."

With an imperious gesture, Madeleine interrupted him as if she wished to speak, and perhaps to explain all, to exculpate herself. But a sudden thought arrested her; she clasped her hands despairingly, and cried: "My God! this suffering is beyond endurance!"

Prosper seemed to misconstrue her words. "Your pity comes too late," he said. "There is no happiness in store for one like myself, who has had a glimpse of divine felicity, has had the cup of bliss held to his lips, and then dashed to the ground. There is nothing left to attach me to life. You have destroyed my holiest belief. I come forth from prison disgraced by my enemies; what is to become of me? Vainly do I question the future; for me there is no hope of happiness. I look around me to see nothing but abandonment, ignominy, and despair!"

"Prosper, my brother, my friend, if you only knew—"

"I know but one thing, Madeleine, which is, that you

no longer love me, and that I love you more madly than ever. O Madeleine, God only knows how I love you !”

He was silent. He hoped for an answer. None came. But suddenly the silence was broken by a stifled sob. It was Madeleine's maid, who, seated in a corner, was weeping bitterly. Madeleine had forgotten her presence.

Prosper on entering the room was so amazed on finding himself in the presence of Madeleine, that he noticed nothing else. With a feeling of surprise, he turned and looked at the weeping woman. He was not mistaken ; this neatly dressed waiting-maid was Nina Gipsy.

Prosper was so startled that he became perfectly dumb. He stood there with ashy lips, and a chilly sensation creeping through his veins. He was terrified at the position in which he found himself. He was there, between the two women who had ruled his fate ; between Madeleine, the proud heiress who spurned his love, and Nina Gipsy, the poor girl whose devotion to him he had so disdainfully rejected. And she had heard all ! Poor Nina had heard the passionate avowal of her lover, had heard him swear that he could never love any woman but Madeleine, that if his love were not reciprocated he would kill himself, as he had nothing else to live for.

Prosper could judge of her sufferings by his own. For she was wounded not only in the present, but in the past. What must be her humiliation and anger on hearing the miserable part which he, in his disappointed love, had imposed upon her ? He was astonished that Nina—violence itself—remained silently weeping, instead of rising and bitterly denouncing him.

Meanwhile Madeleine had succeeded in recovering her usual calmness. Slowly and almost unconsciously she had put on her bonnet and mantle, which were lying on the sofa. Then she approached Prosper, and said : “ Why did you come here ? We both have need of all the courage we can command. You are unhappy, Prosper : I am more than unhappy, I am most wretched. You have a right to complain : I have not the right to shed a tear. While my heart is slowly breaking, I must wear a smiling face. You can seek consolation in the bosom of a friend : I can have no confidante but God.”

Prosper tried to murmur a reply, but his pale lips refused to articulate ; he was stifling. “ I wish to tell

you," continued Madeleine, "that I have forgotten nothing. But oh! let not this knowledge give you any hope: the future is blank for us; but if you love me you will live. You will not, I know, add to my already heavy burden of sorrow the agony of mourning your death. For my sake, live; live the life of a good man, and perhaps the day will come when I can justify myself in your eyes. And now, O my brother, O my only friend, adieu! adieu!" She pressed a kiss upon his brow, and rushed from the room, followed by Nina Gipsy!

Prosper was alone. He seemed to be awaking from a troubled dream. He tried to think over what had just happened, and asked himself if he were losing his mind, or whether he had really spoken to Madeleine and seen Nina? He was obliged to attribute all this to the mysterious power of the strange man whom he had seen for the first time that very morning. How did this individual gain this wonderful power of controlling events to suit his own purposes? He seemed to anticipate everything, to know everything. He was acquainted with Cavaillon, he knew all Madeleine's movements; he had made even Nina become humble and submissive.

While thinking over this, Prosper had reached such a degree of exasperation, that when M. Verduret entered the little parlor, he strode towards him white with rage, and in a threatening voice, exclaimed:

"Who are you?"

The stout man did not manifest any surprise at this burst of anger, but quietly answered: "A friend of your father's; did you not know it?"

"That, sir, is no answer; I have been surprised into being influenced by a stranger, but now—"

"Do you want my biography—what I have been, what I am, and what I may be? What difference does it make to you? I told you that I would save you; the main point is that I am saving you."

"Still I have the right to ask by what means you are saving me."

"What good will it do you to know what my plans are?"

"In order to decide whether I will accept or reject them."

"But suppose I guarantee success?"

"That is not sufficient. I do not choose to be any

longer deprived of my own free will—to be exposed, without warning, to trials like those I have undergone to-day. A man of my age must know what he is doing.”

“A man of your age, Prosper, when he is blind, takes a guide, and does not undertake to point out the way to his leader.”

The half-bantering, half-commiserating tone of M. Verduret was not calculated to calm Prosper’s irritation.

“That being the case, sir,” he exclaimed, “I will thank you for your past services, and decline them for the future, as I have no need of them. If I attempted to defend my honor and my life, it was because I hoped that Madeleine would be restored to me. I have been convinced to-day that all is at an end between us; I retire from the struggle, and care not what becomes of me now.”

Prosper was so decided, that M. Verduret seemed alarmed. “You must be mad,” he firmly said.

“No, unfortunately I am not. Madeleine has ceased to love me, and of what importance is anything else?”

His heartbroken tone aroused M. Verduret’s sympathy, and he said in a kind, soothing voice—“Then you suspect nothing? You did not fathom the meaning of what she said?”

“You were listening?” cried Prosper fiercely.

“I certainly was.”

“Sir!”

“Yes. It was a presumptuous thing to do, perhaps; but the end justified the means in this instance. I am glad I did listen, because it enables me to say to you: Take courage, Prosper; Mademoiselle Madeleine loves you—she has never ceased to love you.”

Like a dying man who eagerly listens to deceitful promises of recovery, although he feels himself sinking into the grave, Prosper felt his sad heart cheered by M. Verduret’s assertion. “Oh,” he murmured, suddenly calmed, “if I only could hope!”

“Rely upon me, I am not mistaken. Ah, I could see the torture endured by this generous girl, while she struggled between her love and what she believed to be her duty. Were you not convinced of her love when she bade you farewell?”

“She loves me, she is free, and yet she shuns me.”

"No, she is not free! In breaking off her engagement with you, she was governed by some powerful, irrepressible event. She is sacrificing herself—for whom? We shall soon know; and the secret of her self-sacrifice will reveal to us the secret of the plot against you."

As M. Verduret spoke, Prosper felt his resolutions of revolt slowly melting away, and their place occupied by confidence and hope. "If what you say were only true!" he mournfully said.

"Foolish young man! Why do you persist in obstinately shutting your eyes to the proof I place before you? Can you not see that Mademoiselle Madeleine knows who the thief is? Yes, you need not look so shocked; she knows the thief, but no human power can tear it from her. She sacrifices you, but then she almost has the right, since she first sacrificed herself."

Prosper was almost convinced; and it nearly broke his heart to leave the little apartment where he had seen Madeleine. "Alas!" he said, pressing M. Verduret's hand, "you must think me a ridiculous fool! but you don't know how I suffer."

The man with the red whiskers sadly shook his head, and his voice sounded very unsteady, as he replied in a low tone: "What you suffer, I have suffered. Like you, I loved, not a pure, noble girl, yet a girl fair to look upon. For three years I was at her feet, a slave to her every whim, when, one day, she suddenly deserted me who adored her, to throw herself into the arms of a man who despised her. Then, like you, I wished to die. Neither threats nor entreaties could induce her to return to me. Passion never reasons, and she loved my rival."

"And did you know who this rival was?"

"Yes, I knew."

"And you did not seek revenge?"

"No," replied M. Verduret. And with a singular expression he added: "For fate charged itself with my vengeance."

For a minute Prosper was silent; then he said: "I have finally decided. My honor is a sacred trust for which I must account to my family. I am ready to follow you to the end of the world; dispose of me as you judge proper."

That same day Prosper, faithful to his promise, sold

his furniture, and wrote to his friends announcing his intended departure for San Francisco. In the evening he and M. Verduret installed themselves at the hotel of the Grand Archangel.

Madame Alexandre gave Prosper her prettiest room, but it was very ugly compared with the coquettish little drawing-room in the Rue Chaptal. His state of mind did not permit him, however, to notice the difference between his former and present quarters. He lay on an old sofa, meditating upon the events of the day, and feeling a bitter satisfaction in his isolated condition. About eleven o'clock he thought he would open the window, and let the cool air fan his burning brow; as he did so, a piece of paper was blown from among the folds of the window-curtain and lay at his feet on the floor.

Prosper mechanically picked it up, and looked at it. It was covered with writing, the handwriting of Nina Gipsy; he could not be mistaken about that. It was the fragment of a torn letter; and if the half sentences did not convey any clear meaning, they were sufficient to lead the mind into all sorts of conjectures.

The fragment read as follows:—

"of M. Raoul, I have been very im . . . plotted against him, of whom never warn Prosper, and then best friend, he hand of Mademoiselle Ma . . ."

Prosper never closed his eyes all that night.

IX.

Not far from the Palais Royal, in the Rue St. Honoré, is the sign of "La Bonne Foi," a small establishment, half café and half fruiterer's shop, much frequented by the work-people of the neighborhood.

It was in this modest café that Prosper, the day after his release, awaited M. Verduret, who had promised to meet him at four o'clock. Just as the clock struck the hour, M. Verduret, who was punctuality itself, appeared. He was more red-faced and self-satisfied, if possible, than on the day before. As soon as the waiter, of whom he ordered a glass of beer, had left them, M. Verduret said to Prosper: "Well, are all our commissions executed?"

"Yes, every one."

"Have you seen the costumier?"

"I gave him your letter, and everything you ordered will be sent to the Grand Archangel to-morrow."

"Very good; you have not lost time, neither have I. I have a lot of news for you."

The "Bonne Foi" is almost deserted at four o'clock. The hour for coffee is passed, and the hour for absinthe has not yet come. M. Verduret and Prosper could therefore talk at their ease without fear of being overheard by listening neighbors. The former drew forth his precious diary which, like the enchanted book in the fairy-tale, had an answer for every question. "While awaiting our emissaries whom I appointed to meet me here," said he, "let us devote a little time to M. de Lagors."

At this name Prosper did not protest, as he had done the previous day. Like those imperceptible insects which, having once penetrated the root of a tree devour it in a single night, suspicion, when it invades our minds, soon develops itself and destroys our firmest beliefs. De Lagors's visit and the fragment of Gipsy's letter had filled Prosper with suspicions which had grown stronger and more settled as time went on.

"Do you know, my dear friend," asked M. Verduret, "what part of France this devoted friend of yours comes from?"

"He was born at St. Remy, which is also Madame Fauvel's native town."

"Are you certain of that?"

"Oh, perfectly! He has not only often told me so, but I have heard him tell M. Fauvel; and he would talk to Madame Fauvel by the hour about his mother, who was cousin to Madame Fauvel, and dearly beloved by her."

"Then you think there is no possible doubt or error about this part of his story?"

"None in the least."

"Well, things are assuming a queer appearance," said M. Verduret. And he began to whistle between his teeth; which, with him, was a sign of intense inward satisfaction.

"What do you refer to?" inquired Prosper.

"To what I have just discovered—to what I have all

along expected. Good people!" he exclaimed, imitating the manner of a showman at a fair, "it is a lovely town, St. Remy, with six thousand inhabitants, charming boulevards on the site of the old fortifications, handsome town hall, numerous fountains, large charcoal market, silk factories, famous hospital, and so on."

Prosper was on thorns. "Please be so good," said he, "as to explain what you—"

"It also contains," continued M. Verduret, "a Roman triumphal arch, which is of unparalleled beauty, and a Greek mausoleum; but no De Lagors. St. Remy is the native town of Nostradamus, but not of your friend."

"Yet I have had proofs."

"Naturally. But proofs can be fabricated; relatives can be improvised. Your evidence is open to suspicion. My information is undeniable, perfectly authenticated. While you were pining in prison, I was preparing my batteries, and collecting ammunition to open fire. I wrote to St. Remy, and received answers to my questions."

"Will you not let me know what they were?"

"Have patience," said M. Verduret as he turned over the leaves of his diary. "Ah, here is number one. Bow to it respectfully, 'tis official." He then read:

"DE LAGORS.—Very old family, originally from Mailane, settled at St. Remy about a century ago—"

"I told you so," cried Prosper.

"Pray allow me to finish," said M. Verduret.

"The last of the De Lagors (Jules-René-Henri), bearing without clear authority the title of count, married in 1829 Mademoiselle Rosalie-Clarisse Fontanet, of Tarascon; died December 1848 leaving two daughters, but no male issue. The town registers make no mention of any person in the district bearing the name of De Lagors.'"

"Now what do you think of this information?" asked the stout man with a triumphant smile.

Prosper was astounded. "But why, then, does M. Fauvel treat Raoul as his nephew?" he asked.

"Ah, you mean—as his wife's nephew! Let us examine note number two: it is not official, but it throws a valuable light upon your friend's income of twenty thousand francs.

"Jules René-Henri de Lagors, last of his name, died at St. Remy on the 29th of December, 1848, in a state

verging on poverty. He at one time was possessed of a moderate fortune, but invested it in a nursery for silkworms, and lost it all.

“He had no son, but left two daughters, one of whom is a teacher at Aix, and the other married to a small tradesman at Orgon. His widow, who lives at Montagnette, is supported entirely by one of her relatives, the wife of a rich banker in Paris. No person of the name of De Lagors lives in the district of Arles.”

“That is all,” said M. Verduret; “do you think it enough?”

“Really, sir, I don’t know whether I am awake or dreaming.”

“You will be awake after awhile. Now, I wish to mention one thing. Some people may assert that the widow of De Lagors had a child born after her husband’s death. This objection is destroyed by the age of your friend. Raoul is twenty-four, and M. de Lagors has not been dead twenty years.”

“But,” observed Prosper, thoughtfully, “who then can Raoul be?”

“I don’t know. The fact is, I am more perplexed to find out who he is than to know who he is not. There is one man who could give us all the information we seek, but he will take good care to keep his mouth shut.”

“You mean M. de Clameran?”

“Him, and no one else.”

“I have always felt the most inexplicable aversion towards him. Ah, if we could only get an account of his life!”

“I have been furnished with a few notes concerning the De Clameran family by your father, who knew them well; they are brief, but I expect more.”

“What did my father tell you?”

“Nothing favorable, you may be sure. I will read you the synopsis of his information:

“Louis de Clameran was born at the Château de Clameran, near Tarascon. He had an elder brother named Gaston, who, in consequence of an affray in which he had the misfortune to kill a man and badly wound another, was compelled to fly the country in 1842. Gaston was an honest, noble youth, universally beloved.

Louis, on the contrary, was a wicked, despicable fellow, detested by all who knew him.

"Upon the death of his father, Louis came to Paris, and in less than two years had squandered not only his own patrimony, but also the share of his exiled brother. Ruined and harassed by debt, Louis entered the army, but behaved so disgracefully that he was constantly being punished. After leaving the army we lose sight of him; all that is known is, that he went to England, and thence to a German gambling resort, where he became notorious for his scandalous conduct.

"In 1865 we find him again in Paris. He was in great poverty, and his associates were among the most depraved classes. But he suddenly heard of the return of his brother Gaston to France. Gaston had made a fortune in Mexico; but being still a young man, and accustomed to a very active life, he purchased near Olcoron an iron foundry, intending to spend the remainder of his life in working it. Six months ago he died in the arms of his brother Louis. His death provided our De Clameran with an immense fortune, and the title of marquis."

"Then," said Prosper, "from all this I judge that M. de Clameran was very poor when I met him for the first time at M. Fauvel's?"

"Evidently."

"And shortly afterwards De Lagors arrived from the country?"

"Precisely."

"And about a month after his appearance, Madeleine suddenly dismissed me?"

"Good," exclaimed M. Verduret, "I am glad you are beginning to understand the state of affairs." He was here interrupted by the entrance of a stranger. The new-comer was a dandified-looking coachman, with elegant black whiskers, shining boots with light tops, a yellow cap, and a red and black striped waistcoat. After cautiously looking round the room, he walked straight up to the table where M. Verduret sat.

"What is the news, Master Joseph Dubois?" asked the stout man eagerly.

"Ah, my chief, don't ask me!" answered the man. "Things are getting warm, very warm."

Prosper concentrated all his attention upon this superb

servant. He thought he recognized his face. He had certainly somewhere seen that retreating forehead and those little restless black eyes, but where and when he could not remember. Meanwhile Master Joseph had taken a seat at a table adjoining the one occupied by M. Verduret and Prosper; and, having called for some absinthe, was preparing it by holding the water aloft and slowly dropping it into the glass.

"What have you to tell me?" inquired M. Verduret.

"In the first place, my chief, I must say that the position of valet and coachman to M. de Clameran is by no means a bed of roses."

"Go on; come to the point. You can complain to-morrow."

"Very good. Yesterday my master walked out at two o'clock. I, of course, followed him. Do you know where he went? The thing was as good as a farce. He went to the Grand Archangel to see Madame Nina Gipsy."

"Well, make haste. They told him she was gone. What then?"

"What then? Ah! he was not at all pleased, I can tell you. He hurried back to the hotel where the other, M. de Lagors, awaited him. He swore like a trooper, and M. Raoul asked him what had happened to put him in such a bad humor. 'Nothing,' replied my master, 'except that the little devil has run off, and no one knows where she is; she has slipped through our fingers.' Then they both appeared to be vexed and uneasy. De Lagors asked if she knew anything serious. 'She knows nothing but what I told you,' replied De Clameran; 'but this nothing, falling into the ear of a man with any suspicions, will be more than enough to work on.'"

M. Verduret smiled like a man who had his reasons for appreciating at their just value De Clameran's fears. "Well, your master is not without sense after all," said he; "don't you think he showed it by saying that?"

"Yes, my chief. Then De Lagors exclaimed: 'If it is as serious as that, we must get rid of the little beggar!' But my master shrugged his shoulders, and laughing loudly said: 'You talk like an idiot; when one is annoyed by a woman of this sort, one must take measures to get rid of her administratively.' This idea seemed to amuse them both very much."

"I can understand their being entertained by it," said M. Verduret ; "it is an excellent idea ; but the misfortune is, it is too late to carry it out. The nothing which made De Clameran uneasy has already fallen into a knowing ear."

With breathless curiosity, Prosper listened to this report, every word of which seemed to throw light upon past events. Now, he thought, he understood the fragment of Gipsy's letter. He saw that this Raoul, in whom he had confided so deeply, was nothing better than a scoundrel. A thousand little circumstances, unnoticed at the time, now recurred to his mind, and made him wonder how he could have remained blind so long.

Master Joseph Dubois continued his report,—

"Yesterday, after dinner, my master decked himself out like a bridegroom. I shaved him, curled his hair, and perfumed him with especial care, after which I drove him to the Rue de Province to call on Madam Fauvel."

"What!" exclaimed Prosper, "after the insulting language he used the day of the robbery, did he dare to visit the house?"

"Yes, my young gentleman ; he not only dared this, but he also stayed there until nearly midnight, to my great discomfort ; for I got thoroughly drenched while waiting for him."

"How did he look when he came out?" asked M. Verduret.

"Well, he certainly looked less pleased than when he went in. After putting up my carriage, and rubbing down my horse, I went to see if he wanted anything ; I found the door locked, and he abused me without stint through the keyhole."

And to assist the digestion of this insult, Master Joseph here gulped down a mouthful of absinthe.

"Is that all?" questioned M. Verduret.

"All that occurred yesterday, my chief ; but this morning my master rose late, still in a horribly bad humor. At noon Raoul arrived, also in a rage. They at once began to dispute, and there was such a row ! Why, the most abandoned thieves would have blushed at their foul language. At one time my master seized the other by the throat and shook him like a reed. But Raoul was too quick for him, and saved himself from strangulation by

drawing out a sharp-pointed knife, the sight of which made my master drop him in a hurry, I can tell you."

"But what was it that they said?"

"Ah, there is the rub, my chief," replied Joseph in a piteous tone; "the scamps spoke English, so I could not understand them. But I am sure they were disputing about money."

"How do you know that?"

"Because in view of the Exhibition I learned the word money in every language, and it constantly recurred in their conversation."

M. Verduret sat with knit brows, talking in an undertone to himself; and Prosper, who was watching him, wondered if he was trying to divine the subject of the dispute by the mere force of reflection.

"When they had done fighting," continued Joseph, "the rascals began to talk in French again; but they only spoke of a fancy ball which is to be given by some banker. When Raoul was leaving, my master said, 'Since this thing is inevitable, and must take place to-day, you had better remain at home, at Vésinet, this evening.' Raoul replied, 'Of course.'"

Evening was approaching, and the café was gradually filling with customers, who were altogether calling for either absinthe or bitters. The waiters, mounting on stools, lit the gas-burners placed round the room. "It is time to go," said M. Verduret to Joseph, "your master may want you; besides, here is some one come for me. I will see you to-morrow."

The new-comer was no other than Cavaillon, more troubled and frightened than ever. He looked uneasily around, as if he expected a posse of policemen to make their appearance, and carry him off to prison. He did not sit down at M. Verduret's table, but stealthily gave his hand to Prosper, and, after assuring himself that no one was observing them, handed M. Verduret a parcel, saying: "She found this in a cupboard."

It was a handsomely bound prayer-book. M. Verduret rapidly turned over the leaves, and soon found the pages from which the words pasted on Prosper's letter had been cut. "I had moral proofs," he said, handing the book to Prosper, "but here is material proof sufficient in itself to save you,"

When Prosper looked at the book, he turned as pale as a ghost. He recognized it instantly. He had given it to Madeleine in exchange for the relic. He opened it, and on the fly-leaf Madeleine had written, "Souvenir of Notre Dame de Fourvières, 17th January, 1866." "This book belongs to Madeleine," he cried.

M. Verduret did not reply, but walked towards a young man dressed like a wine cooper, who had just entered the café. Glancing at a note which this person handed to him, he hastened back to the table, and said in an agitated voice: "I think we have got them now!"

Throwing a five-franc piece on the table, and without saying a word to Cavaillon, M. Verduret seized Prosper's arm, and hurried from the room. "What a fatality!" he said, as he hastened along the street: "we may perhaps miss them. We shall certainly reach the St. Lazare station too late for the St. Germain train."

"For heaven's sake, where are you going?" asked Prosper.

"Never mind, we can talk after we start. Hurry!"

On arriving at the Place du Palais Royal, M. Verduret stopped in front of one of the cabs stationed there, and examined the horses at a glance. "How much will you want for driving us to Vésinet?" he asked of the driver.

"I don't know the road very well," replied the cabman.

The name of Vésinet was enough for Prosper. "I will point out the road," he quickly said.

"Well," said the driver, "at this time of night, in such dreadful weather, it ought to be—twenty-five francs—"

"And to drive very fast?"

"Bless my soul! Why, I leave that to your honor's generosity; but if you put it at thirty-five francs—"

"You shall have a hundred," interrupted M. Verduret, "if you overtake a vehicle which has half an hour's start of us."

"By Jingo!" cried the delighted driver; "jump in quick: we are losing time!" And whipping up his lean horses, he galloped them down the Rue de Valois at a fearful speed.

X.

ON quitting the little station of Vésinet, we come upon two roads. One, to the left, macadamized and kept in perfect repair, leads to the village, and along it glimpses are here and there obtained of the new church through the openings between the trees. The other road, newly laid out and scarcely levelled, leads through the woods. Along the latter, which before the lapse of five years will be a busy street, are a few houses, tasteless in design, rising here and there out of the foliage: rural retreats of Paris tradesmen, occupied only during the summer.

It was at the junction of these two roads that Prosper stopped the cab. The driver had gained his hundred francs. The horses were completely worn out, but they had accomplished all that was expected of them; M. Verduret could distinguish the lamps of another cab, about fifty yards ahead of him.

M. Verduret jumped out, and handing the driver a hundred-franc note, said: "Here is what I promised you. Go to the first tavern on the right-hand side of the road as you enter the village. If we do not meet you there in an hour, you will be at liberty to return to Paris."

The driver was overwhelming in his thanks; but neither Prosper nor his friend heard them. They had already started along the new road. The weather, which had been inclement when they set out, was now fearful. The rain fell in torrents, and a furious wind howled dismally through the woods. The intense darkness was rendered more dreary by the occasional glimmer of the lamps of the distant railway station, and which seemed about to be extinguished by every fresh gust of wind.

M. Verduret and Prosper had been running along the muddy road for about five minutes, when suddenly the latter stopped and said: "This is Raoul's house."

Before the iron gate of an isolated house was the cab which M. Verduret had followed. In spite of the pouring rain, the driver, wrapped in a thick cloak, and leaning back on his seat, was already fast asleep, while waiting for the person whom he had brought to the house a few minutes ago.

M. Verduret pulled his cloak, and said, in a low voice : "Wake up, my good man."

The driver started, and mechanically gathering up his reins, yawned out : "I am ready ; jump in !" But when, by the light of his lamps, he caught sight of two men in this lonely spot, he concluded they meant to rob him, and perhaps to take his life. "I am engaged !" he cried out, as he shook his whip ; "I am waiting here for some one."

"I know that, you fool," replied M. Verduret, "and only wish to ask you a question, which you can gain five francs by answering. Did you not bring a middle-aged lady here ?"

This question, with the promise of five francs, far from re-assuring the cabman, only increased his alarm. "I have already told you I am waiting for some one," he said ; "and if you don't go away and leave me alone, I will call out for help."

M. Verduret drew back quickly. "Come away," he whispered to Prosper, "the fool will do as he says ; and the alarm once given, farewell to our projects. We must find some other entrance than by the gate."

They then went along the wall surrounding the garden, in search of a place where it was possible to scale it. This was difficult to discover, the wall being twelve feet high, and the night very dark. Fortunately, M. Verduret was very agile ; and, having decided upon the spot to be scaled, he drew back a few paces, and making a sudden spring, seized hold of one of the projecting stones on the top ; then drawing himself up by the aid of his hands and feet, soon found himself astride the wall.

It was now Prosper's turn to climb up ; but, though much younger than his companion, he had not his agility and strength, and would never have succeeded if M. Verduret had not pulled him up and then helped him down on the other side.

Once in the garden, M. Verduret looked about him to study the situation. The house occupied by M. de Lagors stood in the middle of a large garden. It was narrow, two stories high, and had attics. In only one window, on the second story, was there any light.

"As you have often been here," said M. Verduret, "you must know all about the arrangement of the house : what room is that where we see the light ?"

"That is Raoul's bed-chamber."

"Very good. What rooms are on the ground floor?"

"The kitchen, pantry, billiard-room, and dining-room."

"And on the floor above?"

"Two drawing-rooms, separated by folding doors and a study."

"Where do the servants sleep?"

"Raoul has none at present. He is waited on by a man and his wife, who live at Vésinet; they come in the morning, and leave after dinner."

M. Verduret rubbed his hands gleefully. "That suits our plans exactly," he said; "it will be strange if we do not hear what Raoul has to say to this person who has come from Paris at this time of night to see him. Let us go in."

Prosper seemed averse to this, and said: "That would be a serious thing for us to do."

"Bless my soul! what else did we come here for?" exclaimed M. Verduret. "Did you think ours was a pleasure trip, merely to enjoy this lovely weather?" continued he in a bantering tone.

"But we might be discovered."

"Suppose we are? If the least noise betrays our presence, you have only to advance boldly as a friend come to visit a friend, and who, finding the door open, walked in."

But unfortunately the heavy oak door was locked. M. Verduret shook it in vain. "How foolish!" he said with vexation, "I ought to have brought my instruments with me. A common lock which could be opened with a nail, and I have not even a piece of wire!" Seeing it useless to attempt the door, he tried successively every window on the ground floor. Alas! each shutter was securely fastened on the inside.

M. Verduret was provoked. He prowled round the house like a fox round a hen-roost, seeking an entrance, but finding none. Despairingly he came back to the spot in front of the house, whence he had the best view of the lighted window. "If I could only look in," he said. "To think that in there," and he pointed to the window, "is the solution of the mystery; and we are cut off from it by thirty feet or so of wall!"

Prosper was more surprised than ever at his companion's

strange behavior. The latter seemed perfectly at home in this garden, and ran about it without any precaution. One would have supposed him accustomed to such expeditions, especially when he spoke of picking the lock of an occupied house, as coolly as though he were talking of opening a snuff-box. He was utterly indifferent to the rain and sleet driven in his face by the gusts of wind as he splashed about in the mud trying to find some means of entrance. "I must get a peep into that window," he said, "and I will certainly do so, cost what it may!"

Prosper seemed to suddenly remember something. "There is a ladder here," he remarked in an undertone.

"Why did you not tell me that before? Where is it?"

"At the end of the garden, under the trees."

They ran to the spot, and in a few minutes the ladder was standing against the house. But to their annoyance they found it five feet too short. Five long feet of wall between the top of the ladder and the lighted window was a discouraging sight to Prosper, who exclaimed: "We cannot reach it."

"We *can* reach it," cried M. Verduret triumphantly. And quickly seizing the ladder, he cautiously raised it, and rested the bottom round on his shoulders, holding, at the same time, the two uprights firmly and steadily with his hands. The obstacle was overcome. "Now mount," he said to his companion.

Prosper did not hesitate. Enthusiasm at seeing difficulties so skilfully conquered, and the hope of triumph, gave him a strength and agility which he had never imagined he possessed. He climbed up gently till he reached the lower rounds, then quickly mounted the ladder, which swayed and trembled beneath his weight.

But he had scarcely looked in at the lighted window when he uttered a cry, which was drowned in the roaring tempest, and sliding part way down the ladder, he dropped like a log on the wet grass, exclaiming: "The villain! the villain!"

With wonderful promptitude and vigor M. Verduret laid the ladder on the ground, and ran toward Prosper, fearing he was dangerously injured. "Are you hurt? What did you see?" he asked.

But Prosper had already risen. Although he had had a violent fall, he felt nothing; he was in that state when

mind governs matter so absolutely that the body is insensible to pain. "I saw," he answered in a hoarse voice, "I saw Madeleine—do you understand, Madeleine—in that room, alone with Raoul."

M. Verduret was confounded. Was it possible that he, the infallible expert, had been mistaken in his deductions?

He well knew that M. de Lagors's visitor was a woman; but his own conjectures, and the note which Madame Gipsy had sent to him at the café, had caused him to believe that this woman was Madame Fauvel.

"You must be mistaken," he said to Prosper.

"No, sir, no. Never could I mistake another for Madeleine. Ah! you who heard what she said to me yesterday, tell me: was I to have expected such infamous treason as this? You said to me then: 'She loves you, she loves you!' What do you think now? speak!"

M. Verduret did not answer. He had been completely bewildered by his mistake, and was now racking his brain to discover the cause of it, which was soon discerned by his penetrating mind.

"This is the secret discovered by Nina," continued Prosper. "Madeleine, this pure and noble Madeleine, whom I believed to be as immaculate as an angel, is the mistress of this thief, who has even stolen the name he bears. And I, trusting fool that I was, made this scoundrel my best friend. I confided to him all my hopes and fears; and he was her lover! Of course they amused themselves by ridiculing my silly devotion and blind confidence!"

He stopped, overcome by his violent emotions. Wounded vanity is the worst of miseries. The certainty of having been so shamefully deceived and betrayed made Prosper almost insane with rage. "This is the last humiliation I shall submit to," he fiercely cried. "It shall not be said that I was coward enough to let an insult like this go unpunished."

He started towards the house; but M. Verduret seized his arm, and said: "What are you going to do?"

"To have my revenge! I will break down the door; what do I care for the noise and scandal, now that I have nothing to lose? I shall not attempt to creep into the house like a thief, but as a master—as one who has a

right to enter ; as a man who, having received a deadly insult, comes to demand satisfaction."

"You will do nothing of the sort, Prosper."

"Who will prevent me ?"

"I will !"

"You ? do not hope that you will be able to deter me. I will appear before them, put them to the blush, kill them both, and then put an end to my own wretched existence. That is what I intend to do, and nothing shall hinder me !"

If M. Verduret had not held Prosper with a vice-like grip, he would have escaped, and attempted to carry out his threat. "If you make any noise, Prosper, or raise an alarm, all your hopes are ruined," said M. Verduret.

"I have no hopes now."

"Raoul, put on his guard, will escape us, and you will remain dishonored forever."

"What is that to me ?"

"It is everything to me. I have sworn to prove your innocence. A man of your age can easily find a wife, but can never restore lustre to a tarnished name. Let nothing interfere with the establishing of your innocence.

Genuine passion is uninfluenced by surrounding circumstances. M. Verduret and Prosper stood foot-deep in mud, wet to the skin, with the rain pouring down on their heads, and yet still continued their dispute. "I will be avenged," repeated Prosper, with the persistency of a fixed idea ; "I will be avenged."

"Well, avenge yourself then like a man, and not like a child !" said M. Verduret angrily.

"Sir !"

"Yes, I repeat it, like a child. What will you do after you get into the house ? Have you any arms ? No. You rush upon Raoul, and a struggle ensues ; and while you two are fighting, Madeleine jumps in the cab and drives off. What then ? Which is the stronger, you or Raoul ?"

Overcome by the sense of how powerless he was, Prosper remained silent.

"And of what use would arms be ?" continued M. Verduret. "It would be the height of folly to shoot a man whom you can send to the galleys."

"What then shall I do ?"

"Wait. Vengeance is a delicious fruit, which must be allowed to ripen in order that it may be fully enjoyed."

Prosper was unsettled in his resolution ; M. Verduret, seeing this, advanced his last and strongest argument. "How do we know," he said, "that Mademoiselle Madeleine is here on her own account ? Did we not come to the conclusion that she was sacrificing herself for the benefit of some one else ? That superior will which compelled her to banish you may have constrained this step to-night."

Whatever coincides with our secret wishes is always eagerly welcomed, and this apparently improbable supposition struck Prosper as being possibly correct.

"That might be the case," he murmured, "who knows ?"

"I would soon know," said M. Verduret, "if I could only see them together in that room."

"Will you promise me, sir, to tell me the truth, exactly what you yourself think, no matter how painful it may be for me ?"

"I swear it, upon my word of honor."

At these words Prosper, with a strength which a few minutes before he would not have believed himself possessed of, raised the ladder, placed the last round on his shoulders, and said to M. Verduret : "Mount !"

M. Verduret rapidly ascended the ladder, scarcely shaking it, and soon had his head on a level with the window. Prosper had seen but too well. There was Madeleine, at this hour of the night, alone with Raoul de Lagors in his bed-chamber !

M. Verduret noticed that she still wore her bonnet and mantle. She was standing in the middle of the room, talking with great animation. Her look and gestures betrayed indignant scorn. There was an expression of ill-disguised loathing upon her beautiful face. Raoul was seated in a low chair by the fire, stirring up the embers with a pair of tongs. Every now and then he would shrug his shoulders, like a man resigned to everything he heard, and had no answer to make beyond, "I cannot help it. I can do nothing for you."

M. Verduret would willingly have given the handsome ring on his finger to be able to hear what was being said ; but the roaring wind completely drowned the voices of the speakers, and he dared not place his ear close to the window for fear of being perceived. "They are evidently

quarrelling," he thought; "but it is certainly not a lovers' quarrel."

Madeleine continued talking; and it was by closely watching Raoul's face, clearly revealed by the lamp on the chimney-piece, that M. Verduret hoped to discover the meaning of the scene before him. Now and again De La-gors would start and tremble in spite of his pretended indifference; or else he would strike at the fire with the tongs, as if giving vent to his rage at some reproach uttered by Madeleine. Finally, Madeleine changed her threats into entreaties, and, clasping her hands, almost fell on her knees. Raoul turned away his head, and refused to answer save in monosyllables.

Several times she was about to leave the room, but each time returned, as if asking a favor, and unable to make up her mind to quit the house till she had obtained it. At last she seemed to have uttered something decisive; for Raoul quickly rose and took from a desk near the fireplace a bundle of papers, which he handed to her.

"Well," thought M. Verduret, "this looks bad. Can it be a compromising correspondence which the young lady wants to secure!"

Madeleine took the papers, but was apparently still dissatisfied. She seemed to entreat Raoul to give her something else, but he refused; and she then threw the papers on the table. These papers puzzled M. Verduret very much, as he gazed at them through the window. "I am not blind," he said, "and I certainly am not mistaken; those red, green, and gray papers, are evidently pawn tickets!"

Madeleine turned over the papers as if looking for some particular ones. She selected three, which she put in her pocket, disdainfully pushing the others aside. She was now evidently preparing to take her departure, and said a few words to Raoul, who took up the lamp as if to escort her down stairs.

There was nothing more for M. Verduret to see. He carefully descended the ladder, muttering to himself: "Pawn tickets! What infamous mystery lies at the bottom of all this?" The first thing to be done was to hide the ladder. Raoul might take it into his head to look round the garden, when he came to the door with Madeleine, and if he did so the ladder could scarcely fail to at-

tract his attention. M. Verduret and Prosper hastily laid it on the ground, regardless of the shrubs which they destroyed in doing so, and then concealed themselves among the trees, whence they could watch at once the front door and the outer gate.

Madeleine and Raoul appeared in the doorway. Raoul placed the lamp on the floor, and offered his hand to the girl; but she refused it with haughty contempt, which somewhat soothed Prosper's lacerated heart. This scornful behavior did not, however, seem to surprise or hurt Raoul, who simply answered by an ironical gesture which implied, "As you please!" He followed Madeleine to the gate, which he opened and closed after her; then he hurried back to the house, while the cab drove rapidly away.

"Now," said Prosper, "you must tell me what you think. You promised to let me know the truth no matter how bitter it might be. Speak; I can bear it, be it what it may!"

"You will have only joy to bear, my friend. Within a month you will bitterly regret your suspicions of to-night. You will blush to think that you ever imagined Mademoiselle Madeleine to have been the mistress of a man like De Lagors."

"But, sir, appearances—"

"It is precisely against appearances that we must be on our guard. Always distrust them. A suspicion, false or just, is necessarily based on something. But we must not stay here forever; and as Raoul has fastened the gate, we shall have to climb over the wall."

"But there is the ladder."

"Let it stay where it is; as we cannot efface our footprints, he will think thieves have been trying to get into the house." They scaled the wall, and had not walked fifty steps when they heard the noise of a gate being unlocked. They stood aside and waited; a man soon passed by on his way to the station.

"That is Raoul," said M. Verduret, "and Joseph will report to us that he has been to tell De Clameran what has just taken place. If they are only kind enough to speak French!" M. Verduret walked along quietly for some time, trying to connect the broken chain of his deductions. "Why the deuce," he abruptly asked, "did this

Raoul, who is devoted to gay society, come to choose a lonely country house like this to live in ? ”

“ I suppose it was because M. Fauvel’s villa is only fifteen minutes’ ride from here, on the banks of the Seine.”

“ That accounts for his staying here in the summer ; but in winter ? ”

“ Oh, in winter he has a room at the Hotel du Louvre, and all the year round keeps up an apartment in Paris.”

This did not enlighten M. Verduret much ; he hurried his pace. “ I hope our driver has not gone,” said he. “ We cannot take the train which is about to start, as Raoul would see us at the station.”

Although it was more than an hour since M. Verduret and Prosper left the cab, where the road turned off, they found it waiting for them in front of the tavern.

The driver being unable to resist the desire to change his bank note, had ordered supper, and finding the wine very good, he was in no hurry to leave.

While delighted at the idea of having a fare back to Paris, he could not refrain from remarking on M. Verduret and Prosper’s altered appearance. “ Well, you are in a strange state ! ” he exclaimed.

Prosper replied that they had been to see a friend, and losing their way, had fallen into a quagmire ; as if there were such things in Vésinet wood.

“ So, that’s the way you got covered with mud, is it ! ” exclaimed the driver, who, though apparently contented with this explanation, strongly suspected that his two customers had been engaged in some nefarious transaction. This opinion seemed to be entertained by the people present, for they looked at Prosper’s muddy clothes and then at each other in a knowing way.

But M. Verduret put an end to all further comment by saying : “ Come on ! ”

“ All right, your honor : get in while I settle my bill ; I will be with you in a minute.”

The drive back was silent and seemed interminably long. Prosper at first tried to draw his strange companion into conversation, but as he received nothing but monosyllables in reply, he held his peace for the rest of the journey. He was again beginning to feel irritated at the absolute empire exercised over him by this man. Physical dis-

comfort was added to his other troubles. He was stiff and numb; every bone in him ached with the cold. Although mental endurance may be unlimited, bodily strength must in the end give way. A violent effort is always followed by reaction.

Lying back in a corner of the cab, with his feet upon the front seat, M. Verduret seemed to be enjoying a nap; yet he was never more wide awake. He was in a perplexed state of mind. This expedition which he had been confident would solve all his doubts, had only added mystery to mystery. His chain of evidence, which he thought so strongly linked, was completely broken. For him the facts remained the same, but circumstances had changed. He could not imagine what common motive, what moral or material complicity, what influences, existed to cause the four actors in his drama, Madame Fauvel, Madeleine, Raoul, and De Clameran, to have apparently the same object in view. He was seeking, in his fertile mind, that encyclopædia of craft and subtlety, for some combination which would throw light on the problem before him.

Midnight struck as they reached the Grand Archangel, and for the first time M. Verduret remembered that he had not dined. Fortunately Madame Alexandre was still up, and in the twinkling of an eye had improvised a tempting supper. It was more than attention, more than respect, that she showed her guest. Prosper observed that she gazed admiringly at M. Verduret all the while that he was eating.

"You will not see me during the day-time, to-morrow," said M. Verduret to Prosper, when he had risen to leave the room; "but I will be here about this time at night. Perhaps I shall discover what I am seeking at Jandidiers' ball."

Prosper was almost dumb with astonishment. What! would M. Verduret venture to appear at a fancy dress ball given by the wealthiest and most fashionable bankers in Paris? This accounted for his sending to the costumier. "Then you are invited to this ball?" he presently asked.

The expressive eyes of M. Verduret sparkled with amusement. "Not yet," he said; "but I shall be."

Oh, the inconsistency of the human mind! Prosper was tormented by the most serious reflections. He looked

sadly round his chamber, and as he thought of M. Verduret's projected pleasure at the ball, exclaimed: "Ah, how fortunate he is! To-morrow he will see Madeleine more lovely than ever."

XI.

ABOUT the middle of the Rue St. Lazare are the almost regal residences of the brothers Jandidier, two celebrated financiers, who, if deprived of the prestige of immense wealth, would still be looked up to as remarkable men. Why cannot the same be said of all men?

These two mansions, which were regarded as marvels of magnificence at the time they were built, are entirely distinct from each other, but so planned as to form a single building when this is desired. When the brothers Jandidier give grand parties, they have the movable partitions taken away, and thus obtain the most superb suite of drawing-rooms in Paris. Princely magnificence, lavish hospitality, and an elegant, graceful manner of receiving their guests, make the entertainments given by the brothers eagerly sought after by the fashionable circles of the capital. On the Saturday, the Rue St. Lazare was blocked up by a file of carriages, whose fair occupants impatiently awaited their turn to alight. Dancing commenced at ten o'clock. The ball was a fancy dress one, and the majority of the costumes were superb; many were in the best taste, and some were quite original. Among the latter was that of a merry-andrew. Everything about the wearer was in perfect keeping: the insolent eye, coarse lips, inflamed cheek-bones, and a beard so red that it seemed to emit fire in the reflection of the dazzling lights.

He carried in his left hand a canvas banner, upon which were six or eight coarsely painted pictures, like those seen at country fairs. In his right he waved a little switch, with which he would every now and then strike his banner, after the fashion of a showman seeking to attract the attention of the crowd. A compact group gathered round him in the expectation of hearing some witty speeches; but he remained silent, near the door.

About half-past ten he quitted his post. M. and Madame Fauvel, followed by their niece Madeleine, had just

entered. During the last ten days, the affair of the Rue de Provence had been the general topic of conversation; and friends and enemies were alike glad to seize this opportunity of approaching the banker to tender their sympathy, or to offer equivocal condolence, which of all things is the most exasperating and insulting.

Belonging to the class of men of a serious turn, M. Fauvel had not assumed a fancy costume, but had merely thrown over his shoulders a short silk cloak. On his arm leaned Madame Fauvel, *née* Valentine de La Verberie, bowing and gracefully greeting her numerous friends.

She had once been remarkably beautiful; and to-night, in the artificial light her very becoming dress seemed to have restored all her youthful freshness and comeliness. No one would have supposed her to be forty-eight years old. She wore a robe of embroidered satin and black velvet, of the later years of Louis the Fourteenth's reign, magnificent and severe, without the adornment of a single jewel. She looked superb and grand in her court dress and her powdered hair, as became a La Verberie, so some ill-natured people remarked, who had made the mistake of marrying a man of money.

Madeleine, too, on her part was the object of universal admiration, so dazzlingly beautiful and queen-like did she appear in her costume of maid of honor, which seemed to have been especially invented to set forth her beautiful figure. Her loveliness expanded in the perfumed atmosphere and dazzling light of the ball-room. Never had her hair looked so brilliant a black, her complexion so exquisite, or her large eyes so sparkling. Having greeted their hosts, Madeleine took her aunt's arm, while M. Fauvel wandered about in search of the card-tables, the usual refuge of bored men, who find themselves enticed into a ball-room.

Dancing was now at its height. Two orchestras, led by Strauss and one of his lieutenants, filled the saloons with intoxicating sounds. The motley crowd whirled in the waltz, presenting a curious confusion of velvets, satins, laces, and diamonds. Almost every head and bosom sparkled with jewels; the palest cheeks became rosy; heavy eyes now shone like stars; and the glistening shoulders of fair women were like drifted snow in an April sun.

Forgotten by the crowd, the merry-andrew had taken refuge in the embrasure of a window, and seemed to be meditating upon the gay scene before him; at the same time, he kept his eyes upon a couple not far distant. It was Madeleine, leaning on the arm of a gorgeously attired doge, that attracted his gaze, and the doge was the Marquis de Clameran, who appeared radiant, rejuvenated, and whose attentions to his partner had an air of triumph. At an interval in the quadrille, he leaned over her and whispered compliments of unbounded admiration; and she seemed to listen, if not with pleasure, at least without repugnance. She now and then smiled, and coquettishly shrugged her shoulders.

"Evidently," muttered the merry-andrew, "this noble scoundrel is paying court to the banker's niece; so I was right yesterday. But how can Mademoiselle Madeleine resign herself so graciously to his insipid flattery? Fortunately, Prosper is not here now."

He was interrupted by an elderly man wrapped in a Venetian mantle, who said to him: "You remember, M. Verduret—" this name was uttered half seriously, half bantering—"what you promised me?"

The merry-andrew bowed with great respect, but not the slightest shade of humility. "I remember," he replied.

"But do not be imprudent, I beg you."

"Monsieur the Count need not be uneasy; he has my promise."

"Very good. I know its value." The count walked off; but during this short colloquy the quadrille had ended, and M. de Clameran and Madeleine were lost to sight.

"I shall find them near Madame Fauvel," thought the merry-andrew. And he at once started in search of the banker's wife.

Incommoded by the stifling heat of the room, Madame Fauvel had sought a little fresh air in the grand picture-gallery, which, thanks to the talisman called gold, was now transformed into a fairy-like garden, filled with orange-trees, japonicas, oleanders, and white lilacs, the delicate bunches of which hung in graceful clusters. The merry-andrew saw her seated near the door of the card-room. Upon her right was Madeleine, and on her left stood Raoul de Lagors, dressed in a costume of the time of Henri III.

"I must confess," muttered the merry-andrew, from his

post of observation, "that the young scamp is a handsome-looking fellow.

Madeleine appeared very sad. She had plucked a camellia from a plant near by, and was mechanically pulling it to pieces as she sat with her eyes cast down. Raoul and Madame Fauvel were engaged in earnest conversation. Their faces seemed composed, but the gestures of the one and the trembling of the other betrayed that a serious discussion was taking place between them. In the card-room sat the doge, M. de Clameran, so placed as to have a full view of Madame Fauvel and Madeleine, although he was himself concealed by an angle of the apartment.

"It is the continuation of yesterday's scene," thought the merry-andrew. "If I could only get behind those camellias, I might hear what they are saying." He pushed his way through the crowd, but just as he had reached the desired spot, Madeleine rose, and taking the arm of a jewelled Persian, walked away. At the same moment Raoul went into the card-room, and whispered a few words to De Clameran.

"There they go," muttered the merry-andrew. "The pair of scoundrels certainly hold these poor women in their power; and it is in vain that they struggle to free themselves. What can be the secret of their influence?"

Suddenly a great commotion was caused in the picture-gallery, by the announcement of a wonderful minuet to be danced in the grand saloon; then by the arrival of the Countess de Commarin as Aurora; and finally, by the presence of the Princess Korasoff, with her superb suite of emeralds, reported to be the finest in the world. In an instant the gallery became almost deserted. Only a few forlorn-looking people remained; mostly sulky husbands, whose wives were dancing with partners they were jealous of, and some melancholy youths, looking awkward and unhappy in their gay fancy dresses. The merry-andrew thought the opportunity favorable for carrying out his designs. He abruptly left his corner, brandishing his banner, and tapping upon it with his switch, hammering affectedly all the time, as though about to speak. Having crossed the gallery, he placed himself between the chair occupied by Madame Fauvel and the door. As soon as the people left in the gallery had collected in a circle round him, he

struck a comical attitude, and in a tone of great buffoonery proceeded to address them as follows :

"Ladies and gentlemen, this morning I obtained a license from the authorities of this city. And for what? Why, gentlemen, for the purpose of exhibiting to you a spectacle which has already excited the admiration of the four quarters of the globe, and of several other academies. Inside this booth, ladies, is about to commence the representation of a most unheard-of drama, acted for the first time at Peking, and translated by our most famous authors. Gentlemen, you can take your seats at once; the lamps are lighted, and the actors are dressing."

Here he stopped speaking, and imitated to perfection the screeching sounds which mountebanks educe from their musical instruments. "Now, ladies and gentlemen," he resumed, "you will wish to know what I am doing here, if the piece is to be performed inside the booth. The fact is, gentlemen, that I intend to give you a foretaste of the agitations, sensations, emotions, palpitations, and other entertainments which you may enjoy for the small sum of ten sous. You see this superb picture? Well, it represents the eight most thrilling scenes in the drama. Ah, you begin to shudder already; and yet this is nothing compared to the play itself. This splendid picture gives you no more idea of the actual performance than a drop of water gives an idea of the sea, or a spark of fire of the sun. My picture, gentlemen, is merely a foretaste of what takes place inside, like the odors which emanate from the kitchen of a restaurant."

"Do you know the fellow?" asked an enormous Turk of a melancholy Punch.

"No, but he imitates a trumpet splendidly."

"Oh, very well indeed! But what is he driving at?"

He was endeavoring to attract the attention of Madame Fauvel, who, since Raoul and Madeleine had left her, had abandoned herself to a mournful reverie. He succeeded in his object. His shrill voice brought the banker's wife back to a sense of reality; she started and looked quickly about her, as if suddenly awakened; then she turned towards the merry-andrew.

He, however, continued: "Now, ladies, we are in China. The first of the eight pictures on my canvas, here, in the left hand corner,"—here he touched the top daub,—"*rep*

resents the celebrated Mandarin Li-Fô, in the bosom of his family. The pretty young lady leaning over him is his wife; and the children playing on the carpet are the bonds of love between this happy pair. Do you not inhale the odor of contentment and happiness emanating from this admirable picture, gentlemen? Madame Li-Fô is the most virtuous of women, adoring her husband and idolizing her children. Being virtuous she is happy, for as the wise Confucius says, 'The ways of virtue are more pleasant than the ways of vice.'"

Madame Fauvel had quitted her seat, and taken another nearer to the speaker.

"Do you see anything on the banner like what he has been describing?" asked the melancholy Punch of his neighbor.

"No, nothing. Do you?"

The fact is, that the daubs of paint on the canvas represented nothing in particular, so that the merry-andrew could pretend they were anything he pleased.

"Picture No. 2!" he cried, after a flourish of music "This old lady, seated before a mirror tearing out her hair,—especially the gray ones,—you have seen before; do you recognize her? No, you do not. Well, she is the fair mandarine of the first picture. I see the tears in your eyes, ladies and gentlemen. Ah, you have cause to weep; for she is no longer virtuous, and her happiness has departed with her virtue. Alas, it is a sad tale! One fatal day she met in a street of Peking, a young ruffian, fiendish, but beautiful as an angel, and she loves him—the wretched woman loves him!"

The last words were uttered in the most tragic tone as he raised his clasped hands to heaven. During this tirade he had turned slightly round, so that he now found himself facing the banker's wife, whose countenance he closely watched while he was speaking.

"You are surprised, gentlemen," he continued; "I am not. The great Bilboquet, my master, has proved to us that the heart never grows old, and that the most vigorous wall-flowers flourish on the oldest ruins. This unhappy woman is nearly fifty years old—fifty years old, and in love with a youth! Hence this heart-rending scene which should serve as a warning to us all."

"Really!" grumbled a cook dressed in white satin, who

had passed the evening distributing bills of fare, which no one read, "I thought he would be more amusing."

"But," continued the merry-andrew, "you must go inside the booth to witness the effects of the mandarine's folly. At times a ray of reason penetrates her diseased brain, and then the sight of her anguish would soften a heart of stone. Enter, and for the small sum of ten sous you shall hear sobs such as the Odeon theatre never echoed in its halcyon days. The unhappy woman has waked up to the absurdity and inanity of her blind passion; she confesses to herself that she is madly pursuing a phantom. She knows but too well that he, in the vigor and beauty of youth, cannot love a faded old woman like herself, who vainly endeavors to retain the last traces of her once entrancing beauty. She feels that the sweet words he once whispered in her charmed ear were deceitful falsehoods. She knows that the day is near when she will be left alone, with nothing save his mantle in her hand."

As the merry-andrew addressed this voluble harangue to the crowd around him, he narrowly watched the countenance of the banker's wife. But nothing he had said seemed to affect her. She leaned back in her arm-chair perfectly calm, with the accustomed brightness in her eyes and an occasional smile upon her lips.

"Good heavens!" muttered the merry-andrew uneasily, "can I be on the wrong tack?" Preoccupied, however, as he was, he observed an addition to his circle of listeners in the person of M. de Clameran. "The third picture," said he, after imitating a roll of drums, "depicts the old mandarine after she has dismissed that most annoying of guests—remorse—from her bosom. She promises herself that interest will supply the place of love in chaining the too seductive youth to her side. It is with this object that she invests him with false honors and dignity, and introduces him to the chief mandarins of the capital of the Celestial Empire; then, since so handsome a youth must cut a fine figure in society, and as a fine figure cannot be cut without money, the lady sacrifices all she possesses for his sake. Necklaces, rings, bracelets, diamonds, and pearls, are all surrendered. The monster carries all these jewels to the pawnbrokers in the Tien-Tsi Street, and then has the cruelty to refuse her the tickets, by means of which she might redeem her treasures."

The merry-andrew thought that he had at last hit the mark. Madame Fauvel began to betray signs of agitation. Once she made an attempt to rise from her seat and to retire, but it seemed as if her strength failed her, and she sank back, forced to listen to the end.

"Finally, ladies and gentlemen," continued the merry-andrew, "the richly filled jewel-cases became empty. The day arrived when the mandarine had nothing more to give. It was then that the young scoundrel conceived the project of carrying off the jasper button belonging to the mandarin Li-Fô—a splendid jewel of incalculable value, which, being the badge of his dignity, was kept in a granite stronghold, and guarded by three soldiers night and day. Ah! the mandarine resisted for a long time! She knew the innocent soldiers would be accused and crucified, as is the custom in Peking, and this thought restrained her. But her lover besought her so tenderly, that she finally yielded to his entreaties; and—the jasper button was stolen. The fourth picture represents the guilty couple stealthily creeping down the private staircase: see their frightened looks—see—"

The merry-andrew abruptly stopped. Three or four of his auditors rushed to the assistance of Madame Fauvel, who seemed about to faint; and at the same moment he felt his arm roughly seized by some one behind him. He turned round and found himself face to face with M. de Clameran and Raoul de Lagors, both of whom were pale with anger.

"What do you require, gentlemen?" he asked politely.

"To speak with you," they answered in a breath.

"I am at your service." And he followed them to the end of the picture-gallery, near a window opening on to a balcony. Here they were unobserved except by the man in the Venetian cloak, whom the merry-andrew has so respectfully addressed as "Monsieur the Count." The minuet having ended, the musicians were resting, and the crowd began rapidly to fill the gallery. Madame Fauvel's sudden faintness had passed off unnoticed save by a few, who attributed it to the heat of the room. M. Fauvel had been sent for; but when he came hurrying in, and found his wife composedly talking to Madeleine, his alarm was dissipated, and he returned to the card-tables.

Not having as much control over his temper as Raoul

M. de Clameran angrily remarked to the merry-andrew: "In the first place, sir, I should like to know who I am speaking to."

The merry-andrew, determined to answer as if he thought the question were a jest, replied in the bantering tone of a buffoon: "You want my passport, do you, my lord doge? I left it in the hands of the city authorities; it contains my name, age, profession, domicile, and every detail."

With an angry gesture, M. de Clameran interrupted him. "You have just committed a most vile action!"

"I, my lord doge?"

"Yes, you! What is the meaning of the abominable story you have been relating?"

"Abominable! You may say so, if you like; but I, who composed it, entertain a different opinion."

"Enough, sir; you might at least have the courage to acknowledge that your allusions conveyed a vile insinuation against Madame Fauvel."

The merry-andrew stood with his head thrown back, and mouth wide open, as if astounded at what he heard. But any one who knew him would have detected his bright black eyes sparkling with malicious satisfaction.

"Bless my heart!" he cried, as if speaking to himself. "This is the strangest thing I ever heard of! How can my drama of the Mandarin Li-Fô, have any reference to Madame Fauvel, whom I don't know from Adam or Eve? I can't think how the resemblance—unless—but no, that is impossible."

"Do you pretend," said M. de Clameran, "to be ignorant of M. Fauvel's misfortune?"

The merry-andrew looked very innocent, and asked: "A misfortune?"

"I mean the robbery of which M. Fauvel is the victim. It is in every one's mouth, and you must have heard of it."

"Ah, yes, yes; I remember. His cashier has run off with three hundred and fifty thousand francs. Gracious me! It is a thing that almost happens daily. But, as to discovering any connection between this robbery and my story, that is quite another matter."

M. de Clameran did not hasten to reply. A nudge from De Lagors had calmed him as if by enchantment. He looked suspiciously at the mountebank, and seemed to

regret having uttered the significant words forced from him by angry excitement. "Very well," he finally said in his usual haughty tone; "I must have been mistaken. I accept your explanation."

But the merry-andrew, hitherto so humble and foolish-looking, seemed to take offence at the last word, and assuming a defiant attitude, exclaimed: "I have not given, nor had I to give, any explanation."

"Sir!" began De Clameran.

"Allow me to finish, if you please. If, unintentionally, I have offended the wife of a man whom I highly esteem, it is, I fancy, his business to seek redress, and not yours. Perhaps you will tell me he is too old to demand satisfaction, very likely; but he has sons, and I have just seen one of them here. You ask who I am; in return I ask you who are you—you who undertake to act as Madame Fauvel's champion? Are you her relative, friend, or ally? What right have you to insult her by pretending to discover an allusion to her in a story invented for amusement?"

There was nothing to be said in reply to this. M. de Clameran sought a means of evading a complete answer. "I am a friend of M. Fauvel's," he said, "and this title gives me the right to be as jealous of his reputation as if it were my own. If you do not think this a sufficient reason for my interference, I must inform you that his family will shortly be mine."

"Ah!"

"Next week, sir, my marriage with Mademoiselle Madeleine will be publicly announced."

This news was so unexpected, so strange, that for a moment the merry-andrew was fairly astounded. But he soon recovered himself, and bowing with deference, said, with covert irony: "Permit me to offer you my congratulations, sir. Besides being the belle of to-night's ball, Mademoiselle Madeleine is worth, I hear, half a million."

Raoul de Lagors had anxiously been watching the people near them, to see if they overheard this conversation. "We have had enough of this gossip," he said, in a disdainful tone; "I will only say one thing to you, my fine fellow, and that is, your tongue is too long."

"Perhaps it is, my pretty youth, perhaps it is; but my arm is still longer."

De Clameran here interrupted them by exclaiming

"It is impossible to have an explanation with a man who conceals his identity under the guise of a fool."

"You are at liberty, my lord doge, to ask the master of the house who I am—if you dare."

"You are," cried Clameran, "you are—" A warning look from Raoul checked the noble iron-founder from using an epithet which might have led to an affray, or at least a scandalous scene.

The merry-andrew stood by with a sardonic smile, and, after a moment's silence, stared M. de Clameran steadily in the face, and in measured tones said: "I was the best friend, sir, that your dead brother Gaston ever had. I was his adviser, and the confidant of his last hopes."

These words came like a clap of thunder on De Clameran, who turned deadly pale, and started back with his hands stretched out before him, as if shrinking from a phantom. He tried to answer, to protest, to say something, but terror froze the words upon his tongue.

"Come, let us go," said De Lagors, who had remained perfectly self-possessed. And he dragged De Clameran away, half supporting him, for he staggered like a drunken man, and clung to every object he passed, to prevent himself from falling.

"Oh, oh, oh!" exclaimed the merry-andrew, in three different tones. He was almost as much astonished as the forge-master, and remained rooted to the spot, watching the latter as he slowly left the room. It was with no decided object in view that the merry-andrew had ventured to use the last mysteriously threatening words, but he had been inspired to do so by his wonderful instinct, which with him was like the scent of a bloodhound. "What can this mean?" he murmured. "Why was he so frightened? What terrible memory have I awakened in his base soul? I need not boast of my penetration, or the subtlety of my plans. There is a great master, who, without any effort, in an instant destroys all our chimeras; he is called 'Chance.'"

His mind had wandered far from the present scene, when he was brought back to his situation by some one touching him on the shoulder. It was the man in the Venetian cloak. "Are you satisfied, M. Verduret?" he inquired.

"Yes and no, Monsieur the Count. No, because I have

not completely achieved the object I had in view when I asked you to obtain an invitation for me here to-night; yes, because these two rascals behaved in a manner which dispels all doubt."

"And yet you complain—"

"I do not complain, sir; on the contrary, I bless chance, or rather Providence, which has just revealed to me the existence of a secret that I did not before even suspect."

Five or six people approached the count, and he went off with them after giving M. Verduret a friendly nod. The latter instantly threw aside his banner, and started in pursuit of Madame Fauvel. He found her sitting on a sofa, in the ball-room, engaged in an animated conversation with Madeleine. "Of course they are talking over the scene; but what has become of De Lagors and De Clameran?" thought he. He soon caught sight of them wandering among the groups scattered about the room, and eagerly asking questions. "I will bet my head," he muttered, "these honorable gentlemen are trying to find out who I am. Ask away, my friends, ask away!"

They soon gave over their inquiries, but were so pre-occupied, and anxious to be alone in order to reflect and deliberate, that, without waiting for the supper, they took leave of Madame Fauvel and her niece, saying they were going home. The merry-andrew saw them enter the cloak-room to fetch their cloaks: and in a few minutes they left the house. "I have nothing more to do here," he murmured; "I may as well go too."

Completely covering his dress with an ample overcoat, he started for home, thinking the cold frosty air would cool his confused brain. He lit a cigar and, walking up the Rue St. Lazare, crossed the Rue Notre Dame de Lorette, and struck into the Faubourg Montmartre. A man suddenly darted out from some place of concealment, and rushed upon him with a dagger. Fortunately the merry-andrew had a cat-like instinct, which enabled him to protect himself against immediate danger, and detect any harm which threatened. He saw, or rather divined, the man crouching in the dark shadow of a house, and had the presence of mind to step back and spread out his arms before him, and so ward off the would-be assassin. This movement certainly saved his life; for he received in the

arm a furious stab, which would have instantly killed him had it penetrated his breast. Anger, more than pain, made him exclaim: "Ah, you villain!" And recoiling a few feet, he put himself on the defensive. The precaution, however, was useless; for seeing his blow miss the mark, the assassin did not return to the attack, but made rapidly off.

"That was certainly De Lagors," thought the merry-andrew, "and De Clameran must be somewhere near. While I walked round one side of the church, they must have gone the other and lain in wait for me."

His wound began to pain him very much, and he stood under a gas-lamp to examine it. It did not appear to be dangerous, although the arm was cut through to the bone. He tore his handkerchief into four bands, and tied his arm up with them with the dexterity of a surgeon. "I must be on the track of some great crime," said he, "since these fellows are resolved upon murder. When such cunning rogues are only in danger of the police court, they do not gratuitously risk the chance of being tried for murder." He thought that by enduring a great deal of pain he might still use his arm, so he started in pursuit of his enemy, taking care to keep in the middle of the road, and to avoid all dark corners. Although he saw no one, he was convinced that he was being followed. He was not mistaken. When he reached the Boulevard Montmartre, he crossed the street, and, as he did so, distinguished two shadows which he recognized. They also crossed the street a little higher up.

"I have to deal with desperate men," he muttered. "They do not even take the pains to conceal their pursuit of me. They seem to be accustomed to this kind of adventure, and the carriage trick which fooled Fanferlot would never succeed with them. Besides, my light hat is a perfect beacon to lead them on in the night." He continued his way up the boulevard, and, without turning his head, felt sure that his enemies were not more than thirty paces behind him. "I must get rid of them somehow," he said to himself. "I can neither return home nor to the Grand Archangel with these devils at my heels. They are following me now to find out where I live, and who I am. If they discover the merry-andrew is M. Verduret, and that M. Verduret is M. Lecoq, my plans will be ruined. They

will escape abroad with the money, and I shall be left to console myself with a wounded arm. A pleasant ending to all my exertions !”

The idea of Raoul and De Clameran escaping him so exasperated him that for an instant he thought of having them arrested at once. This was easy enough, for he only had to rush upon them, shout for help, and they would all three be arrested, conducted to the police-station and brought before the commissary. The police often resort to this ingenious and simple means to arrest a criminal whom they may meet by chance, and whom they cannot seize without a warrant. The merry-andrew had sufficient proof to sustain him in the arrest of De Lagors. He could produce the letter and the mutilated prayer-book, he could reveal the existence of the pawnbroker's tickets in the house at Vésinet, he could show his wounded arm. He could, if necessary, force Raoul to confess how and why he had assumed the name of De Lagors, and what his motive was in passing himself off as a relative of M. Fauvel. On the other hand, in acting thus hastily, he would be, perhaps, insuring the safety of the principal plotter, De Clameran. What absolute proofs had he against him? Not one. He had strong suspicions, but no real grounds for making any criminal charge. On reflection, the detective decided that he would act alone, as he had thus far done, and that alone and unaided he would discover the truth of his suspicions.

Having arrived at this decision, the first step to be taken was to put his pursuers on the wrong scent. He walked rapidly along the Boulevard Sébastopol, and, reaching the square of the Arts et Métiers, he abruptly stopped, and asked some insignificant questions of two policemen, who were standing talking together. This manœuvre had the result he expected; Raoul and De Clameran stood perfectly still about twenty steps off, not daring to advance. While talking with the constables, the merry-andrew pulled the bell of the door before which they were standing, and the sound that ensued apprised him that the door was open. He bowed, and entered the house.

A minute later the constables had passed on, and De Lagors and De Clameran in their turn rang the bell. When the door was opened, they roused up the concierge and asked who it was that had just gone in disguised as a merry-

andrew. They were told that he had seen no such person, and that none of the lodgers had gone out in fancy costume that night. "However," added the man, "I am not perfectly sure, for this house has another door which opens on the Rue St. Denis."

"We are tricked," interrupted De Lagors, "and will never know who this merry-andrew is."

"Unless we learn it too soon for our own advantage," said De Clameran musingly.

While the pair were lamenting their failure in discovering the merry-andrew's identity, Verduret hurried along and reached the Grand Archangel as the clock struck three. Prosper, who was watching from his window, saw him in the distance, and ran down to open the door for him. "What have you learned?" he asked: "what did you find out? Did you see Madeleine? Were Raoul and De Clameran at the ball?"

But M. Verduret was not in the habit of discussing private affairs where he might be overheard. "First of all, let us go into your room," said he, "and then get me some water to wash this cut, which burns like fire."

"Heavens! Are you wounded?"

"Yes, it is a little souvenir of your friend Raoul. Ah, I will soon teach him the danger of scratching my skin!" Prosper was surprised at the look of merciless rage on his friend's face, as he calmly washed and dressed his arm. "Now, Prosper, we will talk as much as you please," resumed M. Verduret. "Our enemies are on the alert, and we must crush them instantly. I have made a mistake. I have been on the wrong track; it is an accident liable to happen to any man, no matter how intelligent he may be. I took the effect for the cause. The day I was convinced that culpable relations existed between Raoul and Madame Fauvel, I thought I held the end of the thread that would lead us to the truth. I ought to have been more mistrustful; this solution was too simple, too natural."

"Do you suppose Madame Fauvel to be innocent?"

"Certainly not; but her guilt is not such as I first supposed. I imagined that, infatuated with a seductive young adventurer, Madame Fauvel had bestowed upon him the name of one of her relatives, and then introduced him to her husband as her nephew. This was an adroit stratagem to gain him admission to the house. She began by giving

him all the money she could dispose of ; then she let him have her jewels to pawn ; and at length having nothing more to give, she allowed him to steal the money from her husband's safe. That is what I first thought."

"And in this way everything was explained?"

"No, this did not explain everything, as I well knew at the time, and should, consequently, have studied my characters more thoroughly. How is De Clameran's ascendancy to be accounted for, if my first idea was the correct one?"

"De Clameran is De Lagors's accomplice, of course."

"Ah, there is the mistake! I for a long time believed De Lagors to be the person principally concerned, whereas, in fact, he is nothing. Yesterday, in a dispute between them, the forge-master said to him, 'And, above all, my young friend, I would advise you not to resist me, for if you do I will crush you to atoms.' That explains all. The elegant De Lagors is not Madame Fauvel's lover, but De Clameran's tool. Besides, did our first suppositions account for Madeleine's resigned obedience? It is De Clameran, and not De Lagors, whom she obeys."

Prosper began to remonstrate. M. Verduret shrugged his shoulders. To convince him he had only to tell him that three hours ago De Clameran had announced his approaching marriage with Madeleine ; but he refrained from doing so. "De Clameran," he continued, "De Clameran alone has Madame Fauvel in his power. Now, the question is, what is the secret of this terrible influence he has gained over her? I have positive proof that they have not met since their early youth until fifteen months ago ; and, as Madame Fauvel's reputation has always been above the reach of slander, we must seek in the past for the cause of her resigned obedience to his will."

"We shall never discover it," said Prosper mournfully.

"We shall know it as soon as we have learnt the history of De Clameran's past life. Ah, to-night he turned as white as a sheet when I mentioned his brother Gaston's name. And then I remembered that Gaston died suddenly, while his brother Louis was on a visit to him."

"Do you think he was murdered?"

"I think the men who tried to assassinate me would do

anything. The robbery, my friend, has now become a secondary affair. It is easily explained, and, if that were all that had to be accounted for, I would say to you ; ' My task is done, let us go and ask the investigating magistrate for a warrant of arrest.' "

Prosper started up with sparkling eyes, and exclaimed :
" What, you know then—is it possible ? "

" Yes, I know who gave the key, and I know who told the secret word."

" The key may have been M. Fauvel's. But the word—"

" The word, unlucky man, you gave yourself. You have forgotten, I suppose. But, fortunately, Nina remembered. You know that a couple of days before the robbery, you took De Lagors and two other friends to sup with Madame Gipsy ? Nina was sad, and reproached you for not being more devoted to her."

" Yes, I remember that."

" But do you remember what you replied to her ? "

" No, I do not," said Prosper, after thinking a moment.

" Well, I will tell you ; you said : ' Nina, you are unjust in reproaching me with not thinking constantly of you, for at this very moment it is your dear name that guards my employer's safe.' "

The truth suddenly burst upon Prosper like a thunder-clap. He wrung his hands despairingly and exclaimed :
" Yes, O yes ! I remember now."

" Then you can easily understand the rest. One of the scoundrels went to Madame Fauvel, and compelled her to give up her husband's key ; then, at a venture, he placed the movable buttons on the name of Gipsy, opened the safe, and took from it the three hundred and fifty thousand francs. And Madame Fauvel must have been terribly frightened before she yielded. The day after the robbery the poor woman was near dying ; and it was she who at the greatest risk sent you the ten thousand francs."

" But who was the thief, Raoul or De Clameran ? What enables them to thus tyrannize over Madame Fauvel ? And how does Madeleine come to be mixed up in this disgraceful affair ? "

" These questions, my dear Prosper, I cannot yet an-

swer; therefore I postpone going to see the magistrate. I must ask you to wait ten days; and, if in that time I cannot discover the solution of this mystery, I will return, and we will go together to M. Patrigent."

"Are you then going away?"

"In an hour I shall be on the road to Beaucaire. It was from that neighborhood that De Clameran came, as well as Madame Fauvel, who was a Mademoiselle de La Verberie before her marriage."

"Yes, I have heard of both families."

"I must go there to study them. Neither Raoul nor De Clameran can escape during my absence. The police will not lose sight of them. But you, Prosper, must be prudent. Promise me to remain a prisoner here whilst I am away."

All that M. Verduret asked, Prosper willingly promised. But he could not let him depart thus. "Will you not tell me, sir," he asked, "who you are, and your reasons for coming to my assistance?"

M. Verduret smiled sadly, and replied: "I will tell you in the presence of Nina, on the day before your marriage with Madeleine takes place."

Once left to his own reflections, Prosper began to appreciate the powerful assistance rendered him by his friend. Recalling the field of investigation gone over by his mysterious acquaintance, he was amazed at its extent. How many facts had been discovered in a week, and with what precision, too, although he had stated he was on the wrong track! Verduret had grouped his evidence, and reached a result which Prosper felt he never could have hoped to have attained by his own exertions. He was conscious that he possessed neither M. Verduret's penetration nor his subtlety, still less the art of exacting obedience, of creating friends at every step, and of making men and circumstances conduce to the attainment of a common result. He soon began to regret the absence of this friend, who had risen up in the hour of adversity. He missed the sometimes rough but always kindly voice, which had encouraged and consoled him. He felt wofully lost and helpless, not daring to act or think for himself, more timid than a child when deserted by its nurse. He had at least the good sense to follow the recommendations of his mentor. He remained shut up at the Grand Arch-

angel, not even showing himself at the windows. Twice he had news of M. Verduret. The first time he received a letter in which this friend said he had seen his father, and had had a long talk with him. Afterwards, Dubois, M. De Clameran's valet, came to tell him that his "chief" reported everything as progressing finely. On the ninth day of his voluntary seclusion, Prosper began to feel restless, and at ten o'clock at night wished to go for a walk, thinking the fresh air would relieve the headache which had kept him awake the previous night. Madame Alexandre, who seemed to have some knowledge of M. Verduret's affairs, begged Prosper to remain at home.

"What do I risk by taking a walk at this hour, in a quiet part of the city?" he asked. "I can certainly stroll as far as the Jardin des Plantes without the chance of meeting any one."

Unfortunately he did not strictly follow this programme; for, having reached the Orleans railway station, he went into a café near by, and called for a glass of beer. As he sat drinking it, he glanced at a daily paper, "*Le Soleil*," and under the heading of "Rumors of the Day," read the following paragraph: "We understand that the niece of one of our most prominent bankers, M. André Fauvel, will be shortly married to the Marquis Louis de Clameran, a Provençal nobleman." This news, coming upon him so unexpectedly, proved to Prosper the justness of M. Verduret's calculations. Alas! why did not this certainty inspire him with absolute faith? Why did it not give him the courage to wait, the strength of mind to refrain from acting on his own responsibility. Frenzied by distress of mind, he already saw Madeleine indissolubly united to this villain, and, thinking that M. Verduret would perhaps arrive too late to be of use, determined at all risks to throw an obstacle in the way of the marriage. He called for pen and paper, and, forgetting that no situation can excuse the mean cowardice of an anonymous letter, wrote in a disguised hand the following lines to M. Fauvel:

"DEAR SIR,—You consigned your cashier to prison; you acted rightly, since you were convinced of his dishonesty and faithlessness. But, even if he stole three hundred and fifty thousand francs from your safe, does it follow that he also stole Madam Fauvel's diamonds, and took

them to the pawnbroker's where they now are? Warned as you are, were I you, I would not be the subject of public scandal, but I would watch my wife, and would soon discover that one should ever be distrustful of handsome cousins. Moreover, before signing Mademoiselle Madeleine's marriage contract, I would call at the Préfecture of Police, and obtain some information concerning the noble Marquis de Clameran.—A FRIEND."

Prosper hastened off to post his letter. Fearing that it would not reach M. Fauvel in time, he walked to one of the head offices in the Rue Cardinal Lemoine, and put it into the letter-box. Until this moment he had not doubted the propriety of his action. But now, when too late, when he heard the sound of his letter falling into the box, a thousand scruples filled his mind. Was it not wrong to act thus hurriedly? Would not this letter interfere with all M. Verduret's plans? Upon reaching the hotel, his doubts were changed into bitter regrets. Joseph Dubois was waiting for him; he had received a telegram from his chief saying that his business was finished, and that he would return the next evening at nine o'clock. Prosper was wretched. He would have given all he had to recover the anonymous letter. And he had cause for regret. For at that very hour M. Verduret was taking his seat in the train at Tarascon, and meditating upon the most advantageous plan to be adopted in pursuance of his discoveries. For he had discovered everything.

Adding to what he already knew the story of an old servant of Mademoiselle de La Verberie, the affidavit of an old footman who had always lived in the De Clameran family, and the depositions of the married couple in the service of De Lagors at his Vésinet country-house, the latter having been sent to him by Dubois (Fanferlot), with a good deal of information obtained from the Préfecture of Police, he had worked up a complete case, and could now act upon a chain of evidence without a missing link. As he had predicted, he had been compelled to search into the distant past for the first causes of the crime of which Prosper had been the victim. The following is the drama, as written out by him for the benefit of the examining magistrate with the certainty that it contained sufficient grounds for preferring an indictment.

XII.

ABOUT six miles from Tarascon, on the left bank of the Rhone, not far from Messrs. Audibert's wonderful gardens, stood the château of Clameran, a weather-stained, neglected, but massive structure. Here lived, in 1841, the old Marquis de Clameran and his two sons, Gaston and Louis. The marquis was an eccentric old man. He belonged to the race of nobles, now almost extinct, whose watches stopped in 1789, and who keep the time of a past century. More attached to his illusions than to his life, the old marquis insisted upon considering all the stirring events which had happened since the first revolution as a series of deplorable practical jokes. Emigrating in the suite of the Count d'Artois, he did not return to France until 1815, with the allies. He should have been thankful to heaven for the recovery of a portion of his immense family estates; a comparatively small portion, it is true, but still sufficient to support him honorably. He said, however, that he did not think the few paltry acres worth thanking heaven for. At first he tried every means to obtain an appointment at court; but, finding all his efforts fail, he resolved to retire to his château, which he did, after cursing and pitying his king, whom he worshipped, and whom, at the bottom of his heart, he regarded as a thorough Jacobin.

The Marquis de Clameran soon became accustomed to the free and indolent life of a country nobleman. Possessing about fifteen thousand francs a year, he spent twenty-five or thirty thousand, borrowing even on his estates, on the pretence that a genuine Restoration would soon take place, and that he would then regain possession of all his properties. Following his example, his younger son, Louis, lived extravagantly, and was always in pursuit of adventure, or idling away his time in drinking and gambling. The elder son, Gaston, anxious to participate in the stirring events of the time, studied hard, and read certain papers, and pamphlets surreptitiously received, the mere titles of which were regarded by his father as blasphemous. Altogether the old marquis was the happiest of mortals, eating and drinking well, hunting a good deal, tolerated by the peasants, and execrated by the neighbor

ing townspeople, whom he treated with contempt and railery. Time never hung heavy on his hands, excepting in the summer, when the valley of the Rhone was intensely hot ; but even then he had infallible means of amusement ever fresh, though always the same. It was to speak ill of his neighbor the Countess de La Verberie.

The Countess de La Verberie, the marquis's special aversion, was a tall, wiry woman, angular in character, as well as in appearance, cold and arrogant towards her equals, and domineering over her inferiors. Like her noble neighbor, she had emigrated with her husband, who was afterwards killed at Lutzen, but, unfortunately for his memory, not in the French ranks. In 1815, the countess also came back to France. But while the Marquis de Clameran returned to comparative ease, she could obtain nothing from royal munificence, but the small estate and château of La Verberie, and a pension of two thousand five hundred francs. The countess had but one child—a lovely girl of eighteen, named Valentine ; fair, slender, and graceful, with large, soft eyes, beautiful enough to make the stone saints of the village church thrill in their niches, when she knelt piously at their feet. The renown of her great beauty, carried along on the rapid waters of the Rhone, had spread far and wide. Often the boatmen and the robust drivers urging their powerful horses along the tow-path, would stop to gaze with admiration upon Valentine, seated under some grand old trees on the bank of the river, absorbed in a book. At a distance, in her white dress and flowing tresses, she seemed to these honest people a mysterious spirit from another world, and they regarded it as a good omen when they caught a glimpse of her. All along between Arles and Valence she was spoken of as the “ lovely fairy ” of La Verberie.

If M. de Clameran detested the countess, Madame de La Verberie execrated the marquis. If he nicknamed her “ the witch,” she retaliated by calling him “ the old gander.” And yet they ought to have agreed, for at heart they cherished the same opinions, though viewing them in different ways. The marquis considered himself a philosopher, scoffed at everything, and had an excellent digestion. The countess nursed her old grievances, and grew sallow and thin from rage and envy. Still, they might have spent many pleasant evenings together, for, after all,

they were neighbors. From Clameran could be seen Valentine's greyhound running about the park of La Verberie; from La Verberie glimpses were had of the lights in the dining-room windows of Clameran. And, regularly as these lights were discerned every evening, the countess would say in a spiteful tone: "Ah, now their orgies are about to commence!" The two châteaux were only separated by the fast-flowing Rhone, which at this spot was rather narrow. But between the two families existed a hatred deeper and more difficult to avert than even the river's course. What was the cause of this hatred? The countess, no less than the marquis, would have found it difficult to tell. It was related that under the reign of Henri IV., or Louis XIII., a La Verberie had seduced a fair daughter of the De Clamerans. The misdeed in question led to a duel; swords flashed in the sunlight, and blood stained the fresh green grass. This groundwork of facts had been highly embellished by fiction; handed down from generation to generation, it became a long tragic history of perfidy, murder, and rapine, precluding any intercourse between the two families.

The usual result followed, as it always does in real life, and often in romances, which, however exaggerated they may be, generally preserve a reflection of the truth which inspires them. Gaston met Valentine at an entertainment; and fell in love with her at first sight. Valentine saw Gaston, and from that moment his image filled her heart. But so many obstacles separated them! For more than a year they both religiously guarded their secret, buried like a treasure in the inmost recesses of their hearts. This year of charming, dangerous reveries decided their fate. To the sweetness of their first impressions a more tender sentiment succeeded; then came love, each of them endowing the other with superhuman qualities and ideal perfections. Deep, sincere passion expands only in solitude; in the impure air of a city it fades and dies, like the hardy plants of the south, which lose their color and perfume when transplanted into our hot-houses. Gaston and Valentine had only seen each other once, but seeing was to love; and, as the time passed, their love grew stronger, until at last the fatality which had presided over their first meeting brought them once more together. They chanced to be visiting at the same time the old

Duchess d'Arlange, who had recently returned to the neighborhood to dispose of her remaining property. They spoke to each other, and like old friends, surprised to find that they entertained the same thoughts and echoed the same memories. Again they were separated for months. But ere long, as if by accident, both chanced to be regularly on the banks of the Rhone, at a certain hour, when they would sit and gaze across the river at each other. Finally, one mild May evening, when Madame de La Verberie had gone to Beaucaire, Gaston ventured into the park, and presented himself before Valentine. She was neither surprised nor indignant. Genuine innocence displays none of the startled modesty assumed by its conventional counterfeit. It never occurred to Valentine to bid Gaston to leave her. She leaned upon his arm, and strolled up and down the grand old avenue of oaks with him. They did not say they loved each other, they felt it; but they did say with tears in their eyes that their love was hopeless. They well knew that the inveterate family feud could never be overcome, and that the attempt would be mere folly. They swore never, never to forget each other, and mournfully resolved never to meet again, excepting just once more!

Alas! Valentine was not without excuse. Possessed of a timid, loving heart, her expansive affection had always been repressed and chilled by a harsh mother. Never had there been one of those long private talks between the Countess de La Verberie and Valentine which enable a good mother to read her daughter's heart like an open book. Madame de La Verberie concerned herself only with her daughter's beauty. She was wont to think: "Next winter I will borrow enough to take the child to Paris, and I am much mistaken if her handsome looks do not win her a rich husband and release me from this wretched state of poverty." She considered this loving her daughter! The second meeting of the lovers was not the last. Gaston dared not trust a boatman, so that he had to walk a league in order to cross the bridge. He thought it would be shorter work to swim the river; but he could not swim well, and to cross the Rhone where it ran so rapidly was a rash proceeding even for the most skilful swimmer.

However, he practised privately, and to such good pur-

pose that one evening Valentine was startled by seeing him rise out of the water at her feet. She made him promise never to attempt this exploit again. Still he repeated the feat and the promise the next and every successive evening. As Valentine was always imagining he was being drowned in the furious current, they agreed upon a signal to relieve her anxiety. At the moment of starting, Gaston would place a light in his window at Clameran, and in a quarter of an hour he would be at his idol's feet.

What were the projects and hopes of the lovers? Alas! they had no projects, and they hoped for nothing. Blindly, thoughtlessly, almost fearlessly, they abandoned themselves to the dangerous happiness of a daily meeting. Regardless of the storm that threatened to burst over their heads, they revelled in their present happiness. Is it not like this with every sincere passion? Love subsists upon itself and in itself; and the very things which ought to extinguish it, absence and obstacles, only cause it to burn more fiercely. It is exclusive and troubled neither with the past or the future; it sees and cares for nothing beyond its present enjoyment. Moreover, Valentine and Gaston believed every one ignorant of their secret. They had always been so exceedingly cautious! they had kept such a strict watch! They flattered themselves that their conduct had been a masterpiece of dissimulation and prudence. Valentine had fixed upon a time for their meetings when she was certain her mother would not miss her. Gaston had never confided his secret to any one, not even to his brother Louis. They never mentioned each other's name. They denied themselves a last sweet word, a final kiss, when they felt these would be attended with danger. Poor blind lovers! As if anything could be concealed from the idle curiosity of country gossips; from the slanderous spirits ever on the look-out for some new bit of scandal, on which they improve and eagerly spread far and near. They believed their secret well kept, whereas it had long since been a matter of public notoriety; the story of their love, the particulars of their meetings, were topics of conversation throughout the neighborhood. Sometimes at dusk they would see a boat gliding through the water, close to the shore, and would say to each other, "It is a belated fisherman returning home."

They were mistaken. On board the boat were spies, who, delighted at having discovered them, hastened to report, with a number of false details, the result of their shameful expedition.

One dreary November evening, Gaston was awakened to the true state of affairs. The Rhone was so swollen by heavy rains that an inundation was daily expected. To attempt to swim across this impetuous torrent, would be tempting Providence. Gaston therefore went to Tarascon, intending to cross the bridge there, and to walk along the bank to the usual place of meeting at La Verberie, where Valentine expected him at eleven o'clock. Whenever Gaston went to Tarascon, he dined with a relative living there; but on this occasion a strange fatality led him to accompany a friend to the Hotel of the Three Emperors. After dinner, instead of going to the Café Simon, their usual resort, they went to the little café facing the open space where the fairs are held. They found the small apartment crowded with young men of the town. Gaston and his friend called for a bottle of beer, and commenced a game at billiards. After they had been playing for a short time, Gaston's attention was attracted by peals of forced laughter from a party at the other end of the room. From this moment, with his attention taken up by this continued laughter, of which he believed himself the object, he knocked the balls about recklessly. His conduct surprised his friend, who remarked to him: "Why, what is the matter? You are missing the simplest strokes."

"It is nothing."

The game continued a little while longer, when Gaston suddenly turned as white as a sheet, and, throwing down his cue, strode towards the table which was occupied by five young men, playing dominoes and drinking mulled wine. He addressed the elder of the group, a handsome man of twenty-six, with large bright eyes, and a fierce black mustache, named Jules Lazet. "Repeat, if you dare," he said, in a voice trembling with passion, "the remark you just now made!"

"Who would prevent me?" asked Lazet calmly. "I said, and I repeat, that a nobleman's daughter is no better than a workman's daughter; that virtue does not necessarily accompany a title."

"You mentioned a particular name!"

Lazet rose from his chair as if he knew his answer would exasperate Gaston, and that from words they would come to blows. "I did," he said, with an insolent smile. "I mentioned the name of the pretty little fairy of La Verberie."

At this all the young men, and even a couple of commercial travellers who were dining at the café, rose and surrounded the two disputants. The provoking looks, the murmurs, the shouts, which were directed towards Gaston as he walked up to Lazet, convinced him that he was surrounded by enemies. The wickedness and the evil tongue of the old marquis were bearing their fruit. Rancor ferments quickly and fiercely in the hearts and heads of the people of Provence. But Gaston de Clameran was not a man to withdraw, even if his foes were a hundred, instead of fifteen or twenty.

"No one but a coward," he said, in a clear, ringing voice, which the pervading silence rendered almost startling; "no one but a contemptible coward would be base enough to calumniate a young girl who has neither father nor brother to defend her honor."

"If she has no father or brother," sneered Lazet, "she has her lovers, and that suffices."

The insulting words, "her lovers," enraged Gaston beyond control; he struck Lazet violently in the face. Every one in the café simultaneously uttered a cry of alarm. Lazet's violence of character, his herculean strength and undaunted courage, were well known. He sprang over the table that separated him from Gaston, and seized him by the throat. Then arose a scene of excitement and confusion. De Clameran's friend, attempting to assist him, was knocked down with billiard-cues, and kicked under a table. Equally strong and agile, Gaston and Lazet struggled for some minutes without either gaining an advantage. Lazet, as loyal as he was courageous, would not accept assistance from his friends. He continually called out: "Keep away; let me fight it out alone!"

But the others were too excited to remain inactive spectators of the scene. "A blanket, quick!" cried one of them; "a blanket to toss the marquis!"

Five or six young men now rushed upon Gaston, and separated him from Lazet. Some tried to throw him down, others to trip him up. He defended himself with the en-

ergy of despair, exhibiting in his furious struggles a strength of which no one would have thought him capable. He struck right and left as he showered fierce epithets upon his adversaries who were twelve against one. He was endeavoring to get round the billiard-table so as to be near the door, and had almost succeeded, when an exultant cry arose: "Here is the blanket!"

"Put him in the blanket—the little fairy's lover!"

Gaston heard these cries. He saw himself overcome, and suffering an ignoble outrage at the hands of these enraged men. By a dexterous movement he extricated himself from the grasp of the three who were holding him, and felled a fourth to the ground. His arms were free; but all his enemies returned to the charge. Then he seemed to lose his head, and seizing a knife which lay on the table where the commercial travellers had been dining, he plunged it twice into the breast of the first man who rushed upon him. This unfortunate man was Jules Lazet. He dropped to the ground. There was a second of silent horror. Then four or five of the young men rushed forward to raise Lazet. The landlady ran about wringing her hands, and screaming with fright. Some of the younger assailants rushed into the streets shouting: "Murder! Murder!" But all the others turned upon Gaston with cries of vengeance. He felt that he was lost. His enemies seized the first objects they could lay their hands upon and he received several wounds. He jumped upon the billiard-table, and making a rapid spring, dashed at the large window of the café. He was fearfully cut by the broken glass and splinters, but he passed through.

Gaston was outside, but he was not yet saved. Astonished and disconcerted at his desperate feat, his assailants for a moment were stupefied; but recovering their presence of mind, they started in pursuit of him. The weather was bad, the ground wet and muddy, and heavy black clouds were rolling westward; but the night was not dark. Gaston ran on from tree to tree, making frequent turnings, every moment on the point of being surrounded and seized, and asking himself what course he should take. Finally he determined, if possible, to reach Clameran. With incredible rapidity he darted diagonally across the open space, in the direction of the embankment which protects the valley of Tarascon from inundations. Unfortunately,

upon reaching this embankment, planted with magnificent trees, which make it one of the most charming promenades of Provence, Gaston forgot that the entrance was partially closed by three posts, such as are always placed before walks intended for foot-passengers only, and rushed against one of them with such violence that he was thrown back and badly bruised. He quickly sprang up; but his pursuers were upon him. This time he could expect no mercy. The infuriated men at his heels yelled that fearful cry, which in the evil days of lawless bloodshed had often echoed in that valley: "To the Rhone with him! To the Rhone with the marquis!"

His reason had abandoned him; he no longer knew what he did. His forehead was cut, and the blood trickled from the wound into his eyes, and blinded him. He must escape, or die in the attempt. He had tightly clasped the bloody knife with which he had stabbed Lazet. He struck his nearest foe; the man fell to the ground with a heavy groan. This blow gained him a moment's respite, which gave him time to pass between the posts, and rush along the embankment. Two men remained kneeling over their wounded companion, and five others resumed the pursuit. But Gaston ran fast, for the horror of his situation tripled his energy; excitement deadened the pain of his wounds; with elbows kept tight to his sides, and holding his breath, he went along at such a speed that he soon distanced his pursuers; the sound of their footsteps became gradually more indistinct, and finally ceased. Gaston ran on for another mile, across fields and through hedges; fences and ditches were leaped without effort, and only when he knew he was safe from capture he sank down at the foot of a tree to rest. This terrible scene had taken place with inconceivable rapidity. Only forty minutes had elapsed since Gaston and his friend entered the café. But during this short time how much had happened! These forty minutes had given him more cause for sorrow and remorse than the whole of his previous life put together. Entering this café with head erect and a happy heart, enjoying present existence, and looking forward to a yet better future, he left it ruined; for he was a murderer! He had killed a man, and still convulsively held the murderous instrument; he cast it from him with horror. He tried to account for the dreadful circumstances which had just

taken place; as if it were of any importance to a man lying at the bottom of an abyss to know which stone had slipped, and precipitated him from the summit. Still, if he alone had been lost! But Valentine was dragged down with him; her reputation was gone. And it was his want of self-command which had cast to the winds this honor, confided to his keeping, and which he held far dearer than his own.

But he could not remain here bewailing his misfortune. The authorities must soon be on his track. They would certainly go to the château of Clameran to seek him; and before leaving home, perhaps forever, he wished to say good-by to his father, and once more press Valentine to his heart. He started to walk, but with great pain, for the reaction had come, and his nerves and muscles, so violently strained, had now began to relax; the intense heat caused by his struggling and fast running was replaced by a cold perspiration, aching limbs, and chattering teeth. His hip and shoulder pained him almost beyond endurance. The cut on his forehead had almost stopped bleeding, but the coagulated blood round his eyes nearly blinded him. After a painful walk he reached home at ten o'clock. The old valet who admitted him started back terrified.

"Good heavens, sir! what is the matter?"

"Silence!" said Gaston in the brief, compressed tone always inspired by imminent danger; "silence! Where is my father?"

"The marquis is in his room with M. Louis. He has had a sudden attack of the gout, and cannot put his foot to the ground; but you, sir—"

Gaston did not stop to listen further. He hurried to his father's room. The old marquis, who was playing backgammon with Louis, dropped his dice-box with a cry of horror, when he looked up and saw his eldest son standing before him covered with blood. "What is the matter? what have you been doing, Gaston?" he exclaimed.

"I have come to embrace you for the last time, father, and to ask for assistance to escape abroad."

"You wish to fly?"

"I must, father, and instantly; I am pursued, the gendarmes may be here at any moment. I have killed two men."

The marquis was so shocked that he forgot the gout, and

attempted to rise ; a violent twinge made him drop back into his chair.

"Where? When?" he gasped.

"At Tarascon, in a café, an hour ago ; fifteen men attacked me, and I seized a knife to defend myself."

"The old tricks of '93," said the marquis. "Did they insult you, Gaston?"

"They insulted in my presence the name of a noble young girl."

"And you punished the rascals? By heaven! you did well. Who ever heard of a nobleman allowing insolent puppies to speak disrespectfully of a lady of quality in his presence? But who was the lady you defended?"

"Mademoiselle Valentine de La Verberie."

"What!" cried the marquis, "what! the daughter of that old witch! Those accursed La Verberies have always brought misfortune upon us." He certainly abominated the countess ; but his respect for her noble blood was greater than his resentment towards her individuality, and he added ; "Nevertheless, Gaston, you did your duty."

Meanwhile, the curiosity of Jean, the marquis's old valet, made him venture to open the door, and ask : "Did Monsieur the Marquis ring?"

"No, you rascal," answered M. de Clameran, "you know very well I did not. But now you are here, be useful. Quickly bring some clothes for M. Gaston, some clean linen, and some warm water : everything necessary to dress his wounds."

These orders were promptly executed, and Gaston found he was not so badly hurt as he had thought. With the exception of a deep stab in his left shoulder, his wounds were not serious. After receiving all the attentions which his condition required, Gaston felt like a new man, ready to brave any peril. His eyes sparkled with redoubled energy. The marquis made a sign to the servants to leave the room. "Do you still think you ought to leave France?" he asked Gaston.

"Yes, father."

"My brother ought not to hesitate," interposed Louis ; "he will be arrested here, thrown into prison, villified in court, and—who knows?"

"We all know well enough that he will be convicted," grumbled the old marquis. "These are the benefits of

the immortal revolution, as it is called. Ah, in my young days we three would have taken our swords, jumped on our horses, and, dashing into Tarascon, would soon have— But to-day we have to run away.”

“There is no time to lose,” observed Louis.

“True,” said the marquis, “but to fly, to go abroad, one must have money; and I have none by me to give to him.”

“Father!”

“No, I have none. Ah, what a prodigal old fool I have been! Have I even a hundred louis?”

Then he told Louis to open the secretary. The drawer in which the money was kept contained only nine hundred and twenty francs in gold.

“Nine hundred and twenty francs,” cried the marquis; “it is not enough. The eldest son of our house cannot fly the country with this paltry sum.”

He sat lost in reflection. Suddenly his brow cleared, and he told Louis to open a secret drawer in the secretary, and bring him a small casket. Then the marquis took from his neck a black ribbon, to which was attached the key of the casket. His sons observed with what deep emotion he unlocked it, and slowly took out a necklace, a cross, several rings, and various other jewels. His countenance assumed a solemn expression. “Gaston, my dear son,” he said, “at a time like this your life may depend upon bought assistance; money is power.”

“I am young, father, and have courage.”

“Listen to me. These jewels belonged to your sainted mother, a noble woman, who is now in heaven watching over us. They have never left me. During my days of misery and want, when I was compelled to earn a livelihood by teaching music in London, I piously treasured them. I never thought of selling them; and to pawn them, in the hour of direst need, would have seemed to me a sacrilege. But now, take them, my son, and sell them; they will fetch twenty thousand francs.”

“No, my father, no, I cannot take them!”

“You must, Gaston. If your mother were on earth, she would tell you to take them, as I do now. I command you to take and use them. The safety, the honor, of the heir of the house of De Clameran must not be imperilled for want of a little gold.”

With tearful eyes, Gaston sank on his knees, and, carrying his father's hand to his lips, murmured: "Thanks, father, thanks! In my heedless, ungrateful presumption I have hitherto misjudged you. I did not know your noble character. Forgive me. I accept, yes, I accept these jewels worn by my dear mother; but I take them as a sacred deposit, confided to my honor, and for which I will some day account to you."

In their emotion, the marquis and Gaston forgot the threatened danger. But Louis was not touched by the affecting scene. "Time presses," he said: "you had better hasten."

"He is right," cried the marquis; "go, Gaston, go, my son; and heaven protect the heir of the De Clamerans!"

Gaston slowly got up, and said with an embarrassed air: "Before leaving you, father, I must fulfil a sacred duty. I have not told you everything. I love Valentine, the young girl whose honor I defended this evening."

"Oh!" cried the marquis, thunderstruck, "oh, oh!"

"And I entreat you, father, to ask Madame de La Verberie for her daughter's hand. Valentine will gladly join me abroad, and share my exile."

Gaston stopped, frightened at the effect of his words. The old marquis had become crimson, or rather purple, as if struck by apoplexy.

"Preposterous!" he gasped. "Impossible! Perfect folly!"

"I love her, father, and have promised her never to marry another."

"Then you will remain a bachelor."

"I shall marry her!" cried Gaston excitedly. "I shall marry her because I have sworn I would, and I will not be so base as to desert her."

"Nonsense!"

"I tell you Mademoiselle de La Verberie must and shall be my wife. It is too late for me to draw back. Even if I no longer loved her, I would still marry her, because she has given herself to me; because, can't you understand, what was said at the café to-night was true: Valentine is my mistress."

Gaston's confession, forced from him by circumstances, produced a very different impression from that which he had expected. The enraged marquis instantly became

cool, and his mind seemed relieved of an immense weight. A wicked joy sparkled in his eyes, as he replied : " Ah, ha ! she yielded to your entreaties, did she ? Heavens ! I am delighted. I congratulate you, Gaston ; they say she is charming, the little wench."

" Sir ! " interrupted Gaston indignantly ; " I have told you that I love her, and have promised to marry her. You seem to forget."

" Ta, ta, ta ! " cried the marquis, " your scruples are absurd. You know full well that one of her ancestors led one of our girls astray. Now we are quits ! And so she is your mistress—"

" I swear by my mother's memory that Valentine shall be my wife ! "

" Do you dare assume that tone towards me ? " cried the exasperated marquis. " Never, understand me clearly, never will I give my consent. You know how dear to me is the honor of our house. Well, I would rather see you tried for murder, and even condemned, than married to this hussey ! "

This last word was too much for Gaston. " Then your wish shall be gratified, sir. I will remain here, and be arrested. I care not what becomes of me ! What is life to me without the hope of Valentine ? Take back these jewels ; they are useless now."

A terrible scene would have ensued between the father and son had they not been interrupted by a domestic who rushed into the room, and excitedly exclaimed : " The gendarmes ! here are the gendarmes ! "

At this news the old marquis started up, and seemed to forget his gout, which had yielded to more violent emotions. " Gendarmes ! " he cried, " in my house, at Claméran ! They shall pay dear for their insolence ! You will help me, will you not, my men ? "

" Yes, yes," answered the servants. " Down with the gendarmes ! down with them ! "

Fortunately, Louis, during all this excitement, preserved his presence of mind. " To resist would be folly," he said. " Even if we repulsed the gendarmes to-night, they would return to-morrow with re-enforcements."

" Louis is right," said the marquis bitterly. " Might is right, as they said in '93. The gendarmes are all powerful. Do they not even have the impertinence to come up

to me while I am out shooting, and ask to see my license ? —I, a De Clameran, show a license !”

“Where are they ?” asked Louis of the servants.

“At the outer gate,” answered La Verduze, one of the grooms. “Do you not hear the noise they are making with their sabres, sir ?”

“Then Gaston must escape by the garden door.”

“It is guarded, sir,” said La Verduze in despair, “and the little gate in the park also. There seems to be a regiment of them. They are even stationed along the park walls.”

This was only too true. The rumor of Lazet’s death had spread like wild-fire throughout the town of Tarascon, and everybody was in a state of excitement. Not only the mounted gendarmes, but a platoon of hussars from the garrison, had been sent in pursuit of the murderer. And at least twenty young men of the town guided them.

“Then,” said the marquis, “we are surrounded ?”

“Not a single chance of escape,” groaned Jean.

“We shall see about that !” cried the marquis. “Ah, we are not the strongest, but we can be the most artful. Attention ! Louis, my son, you and La Verduze go down to the stables, and mount the fastest horses ; then as quietly as possible station yourselves, you, Louis, at the park gate, and you, La Verduze, at the outer gate. You others, go and post yourselves at either of the gates. Upon the signal I shall give by firing off a pistol, let both gates be instantly opened. Louis and La Verduze must spur on their horses, and do all they can to pass through the gendarmes, who are sure to follow in pursuit.”

“I will make them run,” said La Verduze.

“Listen. During this time, Gaston, aided by Jean, will scale the park wall, and hasten along the river-bank to the cabin of Pilorel, the fisherman. He is an old sailor, and devoted to our house. He will take Gaston in his boat ; and, when they are once on the Rhone, there is nothing to be feared save heaven. Now go, all of you : do as I have said.”

Left alone with his son, the old marquis slipped the jewels into a silk purse, and stretching out his arms towards Gaston said, in broken accents : “Come here, my son, and let me bless you.” Gaston hesitated. “Come,” insisted the old man, “I must embrace you for the last time.”

I may never see you again. Save yourself, save your name, Gaston, and then—you know how I love you. Take back these jewels—”

For an instant father and son clung to each other, overpowered by emotion. But the continued noise at the gate now reached their ears. “We must part!” said M. de Clameran. And, taking a pair of small pistols, he handed them to his son, and added with averted eyes: “You must not be captured alive, Gaston!”

Unfortunately Gaston did not immediately hasten to the park wall. He yearned more than ever to see Valentine, and he perceived a possibility of being able to bid her farewell. He could persuade Pilorel to stop the boat when they reached the park of La Verberie. He therefore employed the few minutes respite that destiny had allowed him in going to his room and placing in the window the signal that would tell Valentine he was coming; and even waited for an answering light.

“Come, M. Gaston,” entreated old Jean, who could not understand this strange conduct. “For heaven’s sake make haste! your life is at stake!”

At last he came running down the stairs, and had just reached the hall when a pistol-shot, the signal given by the marquis, resounded through the house. The swinging open of the large gate, the rattling of the sabres of the gendarmes, the furious galloping of many horses, and a chorus of loud shouts and angry oaths, were next heard. Leaning against the window of his room, his brow covered with perspiration, the Marquis de Clameran breathlessly awaited the issue of this expedient, upon which depended the life of his eldest son. His measures were excellent. As he had planned, Louis and La Verduze managed to dash out through the gates, one to the right, the other to the left, each one pursued by a crowd of mounted men. Their horses flew like arrows, and kept far ahead of the pursuers. Gaston was as good as saved, when fate, but was it only fate, interfered? Suddenly Louis’s horse stumbled, and fell to the ground with his rider under him. Immediately surrounded by the gendarmes, M. de Clameran’s second son was easily recognized.

“He is not the murderer!” cried one of the young men of the town. “Let us hurry back, they are trying to deceive us!”

They returned just in time to see, by the uncertain light of the moon peeping from behind a cloud, Gaston climbing the wall.

"There is our man!" exclaimed a corporal. "Keep your eyes open, and gallop after him!"

They spurred their horses, and hastened to the spot where Gaston had jumped from the wall. On a piece of ground at all wooded, or even if it be only hilly, an agile man on foot, if he preserves his presence of mind, can escape a number of horsemen. Now the ground on this side of the park was extremely favorable to Gaston. He found himself in an immense madder-field, and it is well known that this valuable root, having to remain in the ground three years, the furrows are necessarily ploughed very deep. Horses cannot gallop over its uneven surface; indeed, they can scarcely stand steadily upon it. This circumstance brought the gendarmes to a dead halt. Four hussars ventured in the field, but their efforts were useless. Jumping from furrow to furrow, Gaston soon left his pursuers far behind, and reached a vast plantation covered with undergrowth. As his chances of escape increased, the excitement grew more intense. The horsemen urged each other on, and called out every time they saw Gaston run from one clump of trees to another. Being familiar with the country, young De Clameran did not despair. He knew that after the plantation came a field of thistles, and that the two were separated by a wide, deep ditch. He resolved to jump into this ditch, run along the bottom, and climb out at the further end, while the others were still looking for him among the trees. But he had forgotten the rising of the river. Upon reaching the ditch, he found it full of water. Discouraged but not disconcerted, he was about to jump across, when three horsemen appeared on the opposite side. They were gendarmes who had ridden round the madder-field and the plantation, knowing they would easily make up for lost time on the level ground of the field of thistles. At the sight of these three men, Gaston stood perplexed. He would certainly be captured if he attempted to run through the field, at the end of which he could see the cabin of Pilorel, the fisherman. To retrace his steps would be to surrender to the hussars. At a little distance on his right was a small wood, but he was separated from it by a road upon which

he heard the sound of horses' hoofs. He would certainly be caught there also. On his left was the surging, foaming river. What was to be done? He felt the circle of which he was the centre fast narrowing around him. Must he, then, fall back upon the pistols, and there, in the midst of the country, hunted by gendarmes like a wild beast, blow his brains out? What a death for a De Clameran! No! He would seize the one chance of salvation left him; a forlorn, desperate, perilous chance, but still a chance—the river. Holding a pistol in either hand, he ran to the edge of a little promontory, projecting a few yards into the Rhone. This cape of refuge was formed by the giant trunk of a fallen tree, which swayed and cracked fearfully under Gaston's weight, as he stood on the further end, and looked back upon his pursuers; there were fifteen of them, some on the right, some on the left, all uttering cries of joy.

"Do you surrender?" called out the corporal of gendarmes.

Gaston did not answer; he was weighing his chances. He was above the park of La Verberie: would he be able to swim there, granting that he was not swept away and drowned the instant he plunged into the angry torrent before him? He pictured Valentine, at that very moment, watching, waiting, and praying for him on the other shore.

"For the second time do you surrender?" cried the corporal.

The unfortunate man did not hear; he was deafened by the waters which were roaring and rushing past him. He was at that supreme moment, with his foot upon the threshold of another world, when a man sees his past life rise before him, and judges himself. Although death stared him in the face, Gaston calmly considered which would be the best spot to take his plunge, and commended his soul to God.

"He will stand there until we go after him," said a gendarme; "so we may as well do so at once."

But Gaston had finished his prayer. He flung his pistols in the direction of the gendarmes: he was ready. He made the sign of the cross, and then, with outstretched arms, plunged into the Rhone. The violence of his spring loosened the few remaining roots of the old tree; it swayed for a moment, turned over, and then rapidly drifted

away. The spectators uttered a cry of horror and pity rather than of anger. "That is the end of him," muttered one of the gendarmes; "he is done for; a man can't fight against the Rhone; his body will be washed ashore at Arles to-morrow."

The hussars seemed really grieved at the tragic fate of this brave, handsome, young man, whom a moment before they had pursued so tenaciously. They admired his spirited resistance, his courage, and especially his resignation, for, being armed, he might have sold his life dearly. True French soldiers, their sympathies were now all upon the side of the vanquished, and every man of them would have done all in his power to assist in saving the drowning man, and aiding his escape.

"An ugly piece of work!" grumbled the old sergeant who had command of the hussars.

"Bah!" exclaimed the philosophic corporal, "the Rhone is no worse then the assize-court. Right about my men. The thing that troubles me is the idea of that poor old man who is waiting to hear his son's fate. I would not be the one to tell him what has happened. March!"

XIII.

VALENTINE knew, that fatal evening, that Gaston would have to walk to Tarascon, to cross the Rhone by the suspension bridge which connects Tarascon with Beaucaire, and did not expect to see him until eleven o'clock, the time which they had agreed upon the previous evening. But, happening to look up at the windows of Clameran, long before the appointed hour, she saw lights hurrying to and fro in the different rooms in a most unusual manner. A presentiment of impending misfortune chilled her blood, and almost stopped the beatings of her heart. A secret and imperious voice within her breast told her that something terrible and extraordinary was going on at the château of Clameran. What was it? She could not imagine; but she knew, she felt, that some dreadful misfortune had happened. With her eyes fastened upon the dark mass looming in the distance she watched the going and coming of the lights, as if their movements would give her a clue to what was taking place within those walls. She even opened

her window and listened, as though any tell-tale sound could reach her at such a distance. Alas! she heard nothing but the roar of the angry river. Her anxiety grew more intolerable every moment, when suddenly the well-known, beloved signal appeared in Gaston's window, informing her that her lover was about to swim across the Rhone. She could scarcely believe her eyes, and it was not till the signal had been repeated three times that she answered it. Then, more dead than alive, she hastened with trembling limbs through the park to the river bank. Never had she seen the Rhone so furious. Since Gaston was risking his life in order to see her, she could no longer doubt that something fearful had occurred at Clameran. She fell on her knees, and with clasped hands, and her wild eyes fixed upon the dark waters, besought the pitiless stream to yield up her dear Gaston. Every dark object which she could distinguish floating in the middle of the torrent assumed the shape of a human form. At one time she thought she heard, above the roaring of the water, the terrible, agonized cry of a drowning man. She watched and prayed, but her lover came not.

While the gendarmes and hussars slowly and silently returned to the château of Clameran, Gaston experienced one of those miracles which would seem incredible were they not confirmed by the most convincing proof. When he first plunged into the river, he rolled over five or six times, and was then drawn towards the bottom. In a swollen river the current is not the same at different depths, being much stronger in some places than in others; hence the great danger. Gaston knew it, and guarded against it. Instead of wasting his strength in vain struggles, he held his breath, and let himself go with the flood. It was not till he had been carried some considerable distance that he made a sudden spring which brought him to the surface. Rapidly drifting by him was the old tree. For some seconds he was entangled in a mass of rubbish; an eddy set him free. He did not dream of making for the opposite shore. He determined to land wheresoever he could. With great presence of mind he exerted all his strength and dexterity so as to slowly and carefully take an oblique course, knowing well, however, that there was no hope for him if the current took him crosswise. This fearful current is, moreover, as capricious as it is terrible; which ac

counts for the strange effects of inundations. According to the meanderings of the river, it sometimes rushes to the right, and sometimes to the left, sparing one shore and ravaging the other. Gaston who was familiar with every bend of the river, knew that there was an abrupt turning just below Clameran, and relied upon the eddy formed thereby, to sweep him in the direction of La Verberie. His expectations were not deceived. An oblique current suddenly swept him towards the right bank, and, if he had not been on his guard, would have sunk him. But the eddy did not reach as far as Gaston supposed, and he was still some distance from the shore, when, with the rapidity of lightning, he was swept past the park of La Verberie. As he floated by, he caught a glimpse of a white shadow among the trees: Valentine was waiting for him. It was not till he had been carried a considerable distance that, finding himself nearer the bank, he attempted to land. Feeling a foothold, he twice raised himself, and was each time thrown down by the force of the current. He escaped being swept away by seizing some willow branches, and, clinging to them, climbed up the steep bank. He was safe at last. Without waiting to take breath, he darted off at once in the direction of the park. It was time he arrived. Overcome by the intensity of her emotions, Valentine had fainted, and lay apparently lifeless on the ground. Gaston's kisses aroused her.

"You!" she cried in a tone that revealed all the love she felt for him. "Is it indeed you? Then God heard my prayers, and had pity upon us."

"No, Valentine," he murmured, "God has had no pity."

The sad tones of Gaston's voice convinced her that her presentiment of evil was well-founded. "What new misfortune strikes us now?" she exclaimed. "Why have you thus risked your life—a life far dearer to me than my own? What has happened?"

"This is what has happened, Valentine: our secret is a secret no longer; our love is the jest of the country."

She shrank back, and, burying her face in her hands, moaned piteously.

"This," continued Gaston, forgetting everything but his present misery; "this is the result of the blind enmity of our families. Our noble and pure love, which ought to

be a glory in the eyes of God and man, has to be concealed, as though it were some evil deed."

"All is known, all is discovered!" murmured Valentine.

In the midst of the angry elements, Gaston had preserved his self-possession; but the heart-broken tones of his beloved Valentine overcame him. "And I was unable," he cried, "to crush the villains who dared to utter your adored name. Ah, why did I only kill two of the scoundrels!"

"You have killed some one, Gaston!"

Valentine's tone of horror restored to Gaston a ray of reason. "Yes," he replied, trying to overcome his emotion; "I have killed two men. It was for that reason I swam across the Rhone. I had to save the honor of my name. Only a short time ago all the gendarmes of the place were pursuing me. I have escaped them, and now I am flying the country."

Valentine struggled to preserve her composure under such unexpected blows. "Where do you hope to fly to?" she asked.

"I know not. Indeed, God only knows where I am to go, and what will become of me. I must assume a false name and a disguise, and try to reach some foreign land which offers a refuge to murderers." Gaston stopped. He expected an answer to this speech. None came, and he resumed with extraordinary vehemence: "And before disappearing, Valentine, I wished to see you, because now, when I am abandoned by every one else, I have relied upon you, and had faith in your love. A tie unites us, my darling, stronger than all other earthly bonds—the tie of love. Before God you are my wife; I am yours and you are mine, for life! Would you let me fly alone, Valentine? To the pain and toil of exile, to the bitter regrets of a ruined life, could you add the torture of separation?"

"Gaston, I implore you—"

"Ah, I knew it," he interrupted, mistaking the sense of her exclamation; "I knew you would not let me go alone. I knew your sympathetic heart would long to share the burden of my miseries. This moment effaces the wretched suffering I have endured. Let us fly! Having our happiness to defend, I fear nothing; I can brave and conquer all. Come, my Valentine, we will escape, or die together! This is the long-dreamed-of-happiness!"

The glorious future of love and liberty opens before us !”

He had worked himself into a state of delirious excitement. He seized Valentine round the waist, and tried to carry her off. But as his exaltation increased, she managed to regain her composure. Gently, and yet with a firmness he had not suspected her capable of, she withdrew herself from his embrace, and said sadly, but resolutely: “What you wish, Gaston, is impossible.”

This cold, inexplicable resistance seemed to confound her lover. “Impossible?” he stammered.

“You know me well enough, Gaston, to be convinced that sharing the greatest hardships with you would to me be the height of happiness. But above the pleading of your voice to which I fain would yield, above the voice of my own heart which urges me to follow you, there is another voice—a powerful, imperious one—which bids me stay: the voice of duty.”

“What! Would you think of remaining here after the horrible affair of to-night, after the scandal that will be spread abroad to-morrow!”

“What do you mean? That I am lost, dishonored? Am I any more so to-day than I was yesterday? Do you think that the jeers and scoffing of the world could make me suffer more than the pangs of my guilty conscience? I have long since passed judgment upon myself, Gaston; and, although the sound of your voice and the touch of your hand made me forget all save the bliss of love, no sooner had you gone than I wept tears of shame and remorse.”

Gaston listened motionless, astounded. He seemed to see a new Valentine standing before him, an entirely different woman from the one whose tender soul he thought he knew so well. “And your mother?” he murmured.

“It is my duty to her that keeps me here. Do you wish me to prove an unnatural daughter, and desert her now that she is poor, lonely, and friendless, with no one but me to cling to? Could I abandon her to follow my lover?”

“But our enemies will inform her of everything, Valentine; she will know all.”

“No matter. The dictates of conscience must be obeyed. Ah, why can I not, even at the price of my life, spare her the agony of learning that her only daughter, her Valentine, has disgraced her name? She may be hard, cruel,

pitiless towards me; but have I not deserved it? Oh, my only friend, we have been basking in a dream too beautiful to last! I have long dreaded this awful awakening. Like two weak, credulous fools, we imagined that happiness could exist beyond the pale of duty. Sooner or later stolen joys must be dearly paid for. We must bow our heads, and drink the cup to the dregs."

This cold reasoning, this sad resignation, was more than Gaston's fiery nature could bear. "Do not talk like that!" he cried. "Can you not feel that the bare idea of your suffering this humiliation drives me mad?"

"Alas! I must expect greater humiliation yet."

"What do you mean, Valentine?"

"Know then, Gaston—" But she stopped short, hesitated, and then added: "Nothing! I know not what I say."

Had Gaston been less excited, he would have suspected some new misfortune beneath Valentine's reticence; but his mind was too full of his one idea. "All hope is not lost," he resumed. "My father is kind hearted, and was touched by my love and despair. I am sure that my letters, together with the intercession of my brother Louis, will induce him to ask Madame de La Verberie for your hand."

This notion seemed to terrify Valentine. "Heaven forbid!" she exclaimed, "that the marquis should take this rash step!"

"Why, Valentine?"

"Because my mother would reject his offer; because, I must confess it now, she has sworn I shall marry none but a rich man; and your father is not rich."

"Good heavens!" cried Gaston with disgust, "and it is to such a mother that you sacrifice me?"

"She is my mother; that is sufficient. I have not the right to judge her. My duty is to remain with her, and remain I shall."

Valentine's manner showed such determined resolution, that Gaston saw that further prayers would be in vain.

"Alas!" he cried, as he wrung his hands with despair, "you do not love me; you have never loved me!"

"Gaston, Gaston! you do not think what you say!"

"If you loved me," he cried "you could never, at this moment of separation, have the cruel courage to reason

and calculate so coldly. Ah, far different is my love for you. Without you the world is void ; to lose you is to die. So let the Rhone take back this life, so miraculously saved ; for it is now a burden to me ! ”

And he would have rushed towards the river, determined to die, had Valentine not held him back. “ Is this the way to show your love for me ? ” she asked.

Gaston was absolutely discouraged. “ What is the use of living ? ” he murmured dejectedly. “ What is left to me now ? ”

“ God is left to us, Gaston ; and in His hands lies our future.”

As a shipwrecked man seizes a rotten plank in his desperation, so Gaston eagerly caught at the word “ *future*,” as a beacon in the gloomy darkness surrounding him. “ Your command shall be obeyed,” he cried with sudden enthusiasm. “ Away with weakness ! Yes, I will live, and struggle, and triumph. Madame de La Verberie wants gold ; well, in three years I shall either be rich, or dead.” With clasped hands Valentine thanked heaven for this determination, which was more than she had dared hope for. “ But,” continued Gaston, “ before going away I wish to intrust a sacred deposit to your keeping.” And drawing the jewels from his pocket and handing them to Valentine, he added : “ These jewels belonged to my poor mother ; you, alone, are worthy of wearing them. In my thoughts I intended them for you.” And as she refused to accept them, “ Take them,” he insisted, “ as a pledge of my return. If I do not come back within three years, you will know that I am dead, and then you must keep them as a souvenir of him who loved you so fondly.” She burst into tears, and took the jewels. “ And now,” resumed Gaston, “ I have a last request to make. Everybody believes me dead, but I cannot let my poor old father remain under this impression. Swear to me that you will go yourself to-morrow morning, and tell him that I am still alive.”

“ I will tell him,” she replied.

Gaston felt that he must now tear himself away before his courage failed him. He enveloped Valentine in a last fond embrace, and started up. “ What is your plan of escape ? ” she asked.

“ I shall go to Marseilles, and take refuge in a friend’s

house until I can procure a passage on board some foreign-bound vessel."

"You must have assistance ; I will secure you a guide in whom I have unbounded confidence ; old Menoul who lives near us. He owns the boat which he plies on the Rhone."

The lovers passed through the little park gate, of which Gaston had the key, and soon reached the boatman's cabin. He was dozing in his easy-chair by the fireside. When Valentine stood before him with Gaston, the old man jumped up, and kept rubbing his eyes, thinking it must be a dream. "M. Menoul," said Valentine, "M. Gaston is compelled to hide himself ; he wants to reach the sea, so that he can embark secretly. Can you take him in your boat as far as the mouth of the Rhone ?"

"It is impossible," said the old man shaking his head, "I dare not venture on the river in its present state."

"But, M. Menoul, you would be rendering an immense service to me ; would you not venture for my sake ?"

"For your sake ? certainly I would, Mademoiselle Valentine ; I am ready to start." He looked at Gaston, and, seeing his clothes wet and covered with mud, said to him : "Allow me to offer you some clothes of a son of mine who is dead, sir ; they will, at least, serve as a disguise : come this way."

In a few minutes old Menoul returned with Gaston, whom no one would have recognized in his sailor dress. Valentine went with them to the place where the boat was moored. While the old man was unfastening it, the disconsolate lovers tearfully embraced each other for the last time. "In three years," cried Gaston, "in three years !"

"Adieu, mademoiselle," interrupted the old boatman ; "and you, sir, hold fast, and keep steady." Then with a vigorous shove of the boat-hook he sent the boat into the middle of the stream.

Three days later, thanks to the assistance of old Menoul, Gaston was concealed on board the American three-master, "Tom Jones," Captain Warth, which was to start the next day for Valparaiso.

XIV.

COLD and white like a marble statue, Valentine stood on the river-bank, watching the frail bark which was carrying her lover away. It flew along the Rhone like a bird in a tempest, and after a few seconds only appeared as a black speck in the midst of a heavy fog which hung over the water. Now that Gaston was gone, Valentine had no motive for concealing her despair; she wrung her hands and sobbed as if her heart would break. All her forced calmness, her bravery and hopefulness, were gone. She felt crushed and lost, as if something had been torn from her; as if that swiftly disappearing bark had carried off the better part of herself. For while Gaston treasured in the bottom of his heart a ray of hope, she felt there was nothing to look forward to but shame and sorrow. The horrible facts which stared her in the face convinced her that happiness in this life was over; the future was worse than blank. She wept and shuddered at the prospect. She slowly retraced her footsteps through the little gate which had so often admitted Gaston; and, as she closed it behind her, she fancied she was placing an impassable barrier between herself and happiness. Before going to her room, Valentine was careful to walk round the château, and examine the windows of her mother's chamber. They were brilliantly lighted, as usual at that hour, for Madame de La Verberie passed a part of the night in reading, and did not rise till late in the morning. Enjoying the comforts of life, which are not expensive in the country, the selfish countess disturbed herself very little about her daughter. Having no fear for her in their isolation, she left her at perfect liberty; and, day and night, Valentine might go and come, and take long walks, without her mother making a remark.

But on this night Valentine feared being seen. She would be called upon to explain the torn, muddy condition of her dress, and what answer could she give? Fortunately she was able to reach her own room without meeting any one. She longed for solitude in order to collect her thoughts, and to pray for strength to withstand the angry storm about to burst over her head. Seated before

her little work-table, she took the purse of jewels from her pocket and mechanically examined them. It would be a sweet, sad comfort to wear the simplest of the rings, she thought ; but could she ? her mother would ask her where it came from. And she would have to deceive her again. She kissed the purse, in memory of Gaston, and then concealed the sacred deposit at the bottom of a drawer. She then remembered that she would have to go to Clameran, to inform the old marquis of the miraculous preservation of his son's life. Blinded by his passion, Gaston did not think, when he requested this service, of the obstacles and dangers to be braved in its performance. But Valentine saw them only too clearly ; yet it did not occur to her for an instant to break her promise, or delay to go. At sunrise she dressed herself. When the bell was ringing for early mass, she thought it a good time to start on her errand. The servants were all up, and one of them named Mihonne, who always waited on Valentine, was scrubbing the hall.

"If my mother asks for me," said Valentine to the girl, "tell her I have gone to early mass."

As she often went to church at this hour, there was nothing to be feared so far ; Mihonne said nothing. But Valentine knew that she would have a difficulty in returning in time for breakfast, for she would have to walk a league before reaching the bridge, and it was another league thence to Clameran ; that is four leagues there and back. She set forth at a rapid pace. The consciousness of performing an extraordinary action, and the feverish anxiety of incurred peril, increased her haste. She forgot fatigue, and that she had worn herself out with weeping all night. In spite of her efforts, however, it was past eight o'clock when she reached the long avenue leading to the main entrance of the château of Clameran. She had only proceeded a few steps along it, when she saw old Jean, the marquis's valet, coming down the path. She stopped and waited for him, and he hastened his steps at sight of her. He looked very much excited, and his eyes were swollen with weeping. To Valentine's surprise, he did not take off his cap to her, but accosted her most rudely.

"Are you going to the château, mademoiselle ?"

"Yes."

"If you are going after M. Gaston," continued the serv-

ant with an insolent sneer, "you are taking useless trouble. M. Gaston is dead, mademoiselle; he sacrificed himself for a mistress he had."

Valentine turned white at this insult, but took no notice of it. Jean, who expected to see her overcome by the dreadful news, was bewildered and indignant at her composure. "I am going to the château," she resumed quietly, "to speak to the marquis."

Jean stifled a sob, and said: "Then it is not worth while to go any further."

"Why?"

"Because the Marquis de Clameran died at five o'clock this morning."

Valentine leaned against a tree to prevent herself from falling. "Dead!" she gasped.

"Yes," said Jean fiercely, "yes, dead!" A faithful servant of the old regime, Jean shared all the passions, weaknesses, friendships, and enmities of his master. He had a horror of the La Verberies. And now he saw in Valentine the woman who had caused the death of the marquis whom he had served for forty years, and of Gaston whom he worshipped. "I will tell you how he died," continued the bitter old man. "Yesterday evening, when the news reached the marquis that his eldest son was dead, he who was hardy as an oak dropped down as if struck by lightning. I was there. He beat the air wildly with his hands, and fell without uttering one word. We put him to bed, and M. Louis galloped into Tarascon for a doctor. But the blow had struck too deeply. When Dr. Raget arrived he said there was no hope. At daybreak, the marquis recovered consciousness enough to ask for M. Louis, with whom he remained alone for some minutes. His last words were: 'Father and son on the same day, there will be rejoicing at La Verberie.'"

Valentine might have soothed the faithful servant's sorrow by telling him that Gaston still lived; but she feared it would be indiscreet, and so, unfortunately, she merely said: "Then, I must see M. Louis."

These words seemed to anger Jean the more. "You!" he exclaimed. "You would dare to take such a step, Mademoiselle de La Verberie? What! would you presume to appear before him after what has happened? I wil' never allow it! And you had best, moreover, take my

advice, and return home at once. I will not answer for the tongues of the servants here, when they see you." And, without waiting for an answer, he hurried away.

What could Valentine do? Humiliated and miserable, she could only wearily drag her aching limbs back the way she had so rapidly come, but a short time before. On the road, she met many country people coming from the town, where they had heard of the events of the previous night; and at every step the poor girl was greeted with insulting looks and mocking bows. When she reached La Verberie, she found Mihonne watching for her.

"Ah, mademoiselle," said the girl, "make haste. Madame had a visitor this morning, and ever since she left has been calling out for you. Hurry; but take care what you do, for she is in a violent passion."

Much has been said in favor of the patriarchal manners of our ancestors. Their manners may have been patriarchal years and years ago; but our grandames, very differently to our women now-a-days, had sharp wits, ready hands, and quick tongues, and were never afraid of letting their actions suit their words which were not always choice. Madame de La Verberie had preserved the manners of the good old times, when grand ladies swore like troopers. When Valentine appeared, she was overwhelmed with coarse epithets and violent abuse. The countess had been informed of everything, with many gross additions added by public scandal. An old dowager, her most intimate friend, had hurried over early in the morning to offer her this most poisoned dish of gossip, seasoned with her own pretended condolences. In this sad affair, Madame de La Verberie mourned less over her daughter's loss of reputation than over the ruin of her own projects—projects of arranging a grand marriage for Valentine, and of herself living in luxury the rest of her days. A young girl so compromised would not find it easy to get a husband. It would now be absolutely necessary to keep her two years longer in the country before introducing her into Parisian society. The world must have time to forget this shameful affair.

"You worthless wretch!" cried the countess, red with fury; "is it thus you respect the noble traditions of our family? Up to now it has never been considered necessary to watch the La Verberies; they could take care of

their honor : but it was reserved for you to take advantage of your liberty to lower yourself to the level of those harlots who are the disgrace of their sex !” .

With a sinking heart, Valentine had foreseen this tirade. She felt that it was only a fitting punishment for her guilty love. Knowing that her mother's indignation was just, she meekly hung her head like a repentant culprit at the bar of justice. But this silence only exasperated the angry countess the more. “Why do you not answer me ?” she screamed with a threatening gesture.

“What can I say, mother ?”

“Say, miserable girl ? Say that they lied when they accused a La Verberie of disgracing her name ! Speak, defend yourself !” Valentine mournfully shook her head, but said nothing. “It is true, then !” shrieked the countess, beside herself with rage ; “what they said is true ?”

“Forgive me, mother,” moaned the poor girl ; “forgive me.”

“What ! Forgive you ! I have not then been deceived. Forgive you ! Do you own it then, you hussy ! Good heavens ! what blood have you in your veins ? Do you not know that some faults should be persistently denied, no matter how glaring the evidence against them ? And you are my daughter ! Can you not understand that an ignominious confession like this should never be forced from a woman by any human power ? But no, you have lovers, and unblushingly avow it. Glory in it, it would be something new !”

“Alas ! you are pitiless, mother !”

“Did you have any pity for me, my dutiful daughter ? Did it never occur to you that your disgrace might kill me ? Ah ! many a time, I dare say, you and your lover have laughed at my blind confidence. For I had confidence in you as in myself. I believed you to be as chaste and pure as when I watched you lying in your cradle. And it has come to this : drunken men make a jest of your name in the wine shops, then fight about you, and kill each other. I intrusted to you the honor of our name, and what have you done with it ? You have given it to the first comer !” This was too much for Valentine. The words, “first comer,” wounded her pride more than all the other abuse heaped upon her. She tried to protest against this unmerited insult. “Ah, I have made a mistake,

Your lover is not the first comer," said the countess. "With the number you had to choose from, you must fix on the heir of our enemies of a hundred years, Gaston de Clameran. A coward, who publicly boasted of your favors; a wretch, who tried to avenge himself for the heroism of our ancestors by ruining you and me—an old woman and a child!"

"No, mother, that is false. He loved me, and, had he dared hope for your consent—"

"He would have married you? Ah! never. I would rather see you fall lower than you are, even to the gutter, than know you to be the wife of such a man!" Thus the countess expressed her hatred very much in the same terms as the old marquis had used to his son. "Besides," she added, with a ferocity which only a woman is capable of, "besides, your lover is drowned, and the old marquis is dead, so I have been told. God is just; we are avenged."

Old Jean's words, "There will be rejoicing at La Verberie," rung in Valentine's ears as she saw the countess's eyes sparkle with malignant joy. This was the crowning blow for the unfortunate young girl. For half an hour she had been exerting all her strength to bear up against her mother's cruel violence; but her physical endurance was not equal to the task. She turned, if possible, paler, and with half-closed eyes extended her arms as though to find some support, and fell, striking her head against a side table. It was with dry eyes that the countess beheld her daughter stretched at her feet. Her vanity was deeply wounded, but no other emotion disturbed her. Her's was a heart so full of anger and hatred that there was no room for any noble sentiment. Seeing, however, that Valentine remained unconscious, she rang the bell; and the affrighted maid-servants, who were trembling in the passage at the loud and angry tones of the voice they all dreaded, came running in.

"Carry mademoiselle to her room," she ordered; "lock her in, and bring me the key."

The countess intended keeping Valentine a close prisoner for a long time. She well knew the mischievous, gossiping propensities of country people, who, from mere idleness, indulge in limitless scandal. A poor fallen girl must either leave the place, or drink to the very dregs the chalice of premeditated humiliation and brutal irony.

Each one delights in casting a stone at her. But the countess's plans were destined to be baffled. The servants came to tell her that Valentine had recovered consciousness, but seemed to be very ill. She replied that it was all pretence ; whereupon Mihonne insisted upon her going up and judging for herself. She unwillingly went to her daughter's room, and perceived that something serious was the matter. However, she betrayed no apprehension, but sent to Tarascon for Dr. Raget, who was the oracle of the neighborhood ; it was he who had been called in to see the Marquis de Clameran. Dr. Raget was one of those men who leave a blessed memory, which lives long after their departure from this world. Intelligent and noble-hearted, he devoted himself to his art ; wealthy, he never demanded to be paid for his services. At all hours of the night and day, his gray horse and old cabriolet might be seen along the roads, with a hamper of wine and soup under the seat for his poorer patients. He was a little, bald-headed man of fifty, with a quick, bright eye, and pleasant face. The servant fortunately found him at home, and brought him back with him. On beholding Valentine, the doctor's face assumed a most serious expression. Endowed with profound perspicacity, quickened by practice, he studied the young girl and her mother alternately ; and the penetrating gaze which he fixed on the old countess so disconcerted her that she felt her wrinkled face turning very red.

"This child is very ill," he said, at length. And as Madame de La Verberie made no reply, he added : "I desire to remain alone with her for a few minutes."

The countess dared not resist the authority of a man of Dr. Raget's character and reputation, and retired to the next room, apparently calm, but in reality disturbed by the most gloomy forebodings. At the end of half an hour—it seemed a century—the doctor entered the room where she was waiting. He, who had witnessed so much suffering and misery, appeared deeply affected.

"Well ?" asked the countess.

"You are a mother, madame," he answered sadly—"that is to say your heart is full of indulgence and pardon. Summon all your courage. Mademoiselle Valentine will soon become a mother."

"The worthless creature ! I feared as much."

The doctor was shocked at the dreadful expression of the countess's eye. He laid his hand on her arm, and giving her a penetrating look, beneath which she instantly quailed, he added; "And the child must live."

The doctor's suspicions were correct. A dreadful idea had flashed across Madame de La Verberie's mind—the idea of destroying this child which would be a living proof of Valentine's sin. Feeling that her evil intention was divined, the proud, stern woman's eyes fell beneath the doctor's obstinate gaze. "I do not understand you, Dr. Raget," she murmured.

"But I know what I mean, madame; and I simply wished to tell you that a crime does not obliterate a fault."

"Doctor!"

"I merely say what I think, madame. If I was mistaken in my impression, so much the better for you. At present, your daughter's condition is serious, but not dangerous. Excitement and distress of mind have unstrung her nerves, and she is now in a high fever, which I hope soon to allay."

The countess saw that the old doctor's suspicions were not dispelled; so she thought she would try maternal anxiety, and said: "At least, doctor, you can assure me that the dear child's life is not in danger?"

"No, madame," answered Dr. Raget, with cutting irony, "your maternal tenderness need not be alarmed. All the poor child needs is rest of mind, which you alone can give her. A few kind words from you will do her more good than all my prescriptions. But remember, madame, that the least shock of nervous excitement will produce the most fatal consequences."

"I must confess," said the countess, hypocritically, "that I was unable to control my anger upon first hearing that my darling child had fallen a victim to a vile seducer."

"But now that the first shock is over, madame, being a mother and a Christian, you will do your duty. My duty is to save your daughter and her child, and I will do so. I will call to-morrow."

Madame de La Verberie had no idea of letting the doctor go off in this way. She motioned him to stay, and, without reflecting that she was betraying herself, exclaimed: "Do you pretend to say, sir, that you will pre

vent my taking every means to conceal the terrible misfortune that has fallen upon me? Do you wish our shame to be made public—to make us the laughing-stock of the neighborhood?”

The doctor remained a moment without answering; the condition of affairs was serious. “No, madame,” he at length replied; “I cannot prevent your leaving La Verberie—that would be overstepping my duty; but I must hold you to account for the child. You are at liberty to go where you please; but you must give me proof of the child’s being alive, or at least that no attempt was made against its life.”

After uttering these threatening words he left the house, and it was in good time, for the countess was choking with suppressed rage. “Insolent upstart!” she cried, “to presume to dictate to a woman of my rank! Ah, if I were not completely at his mercy!” But she was in his power, and she knew well enough that she must forever bid adieu to all her ambitious plans. No more hopes of luxury, of a millionaire-son-in-law, of splendid carriages, rich dresses, and charming card parties, where she could gamble to her heart’s content. She would have to die as she had lived, poor, neglected, condemned to a life of privation, all the harder to bear as she would no longer have a brighter future to look forward to. And it was Valentine who brought this misery upon her. This reflection aroused all her inherent bitterness, and she felt for her daughter one of those implacable hatreds which, instead of becoming appeased, are strengthened by time. She wished she could see her lying dead before her, and the accursed infant as well. But she remembered the doctor’s threatening look, and dared not attempt anything. She even forced herself to go and say a few forgiving words to Valentine, and then left her to the care of the faithful Mihonne.

Poor Valentine! She had suffered so much that she had lost all power of action. She was, however, getting better. She felt that dull, heavy sensation, almost free from pain, which always follows violent mental or physical suffering. When she was able to reflect, she thought to herself: “Well, it is over; my mother knows everything. I have no longer her anger to fear, and must trust to time for her forgiveness.” This was the secret which Valentine had been unwilling to reveal to Gaston, because she felt

certain that he would refuse to leave her if he knew it. But she wished him to escape ; and duty at the same time bade her remain. Even now she did not regret having done so.

The only thought which distressed her was Gaston's danger. Had he succeeded in embarking ? How could she find out ? For two days the doctor had allowed her to get up ; but she could not possibly walk as far as old Menoul's cabin. Happily, the devoted old boatman was intelligent enough to anticipate her wishes. Hearing that the young lady at the château was very ill, he set about devising some means of informing her of her friend's safety. He went to La Verberie several times on pretended errands, and finally succeeded in seeing Valentine. They were not alone, so he could not speak to her ; but he made her understand by a significant look that Gaston was out of danger. This knowledge contributed more towards Valentine's recovery than all the medicines administered by the doctor, who, after visiting her daily for six weeks, at length pronounced his patient sufficiently strong to bear the fatigues of a journey. The countess had waited with the greatest impatience for this decision. In order to prevent any delay, she had already realized half of her capital at a loss, and said to herself that the sum thus raised, some twenty-five thousand francs, would suffice for all contingent expenses. For a fortnight she had been calling on all her friends, saying that as soon as her daughter had recovered her health she meant to take her to England to visit a rich old relation, who had expressed a wish to see her.

Valentine looked forward to this journey with terror, and shuddered when her mother said to her, on the evening that the doctor gave her permission to set out : " We shall start the day after to-morrow." Only one day left ! And Valentine had been unable to let Louis de Clameran know that his brother was still living. In this extremity she was obliged to confide in Mihonne, and sent her with a letter to Louis. But the faithful servant had a useless walk. The château of Clameran was deserted ; all the servants had been dismissed, and M. Louis, whom they now called the marquis, had gone away.

At last they started. Madame de La Verberie, feeling that she could trust Mihonne, decided to take her with

them, after making her swear eternal secrecy. It was in a little village near London that the countess, under the assumed name of Mrs. Wilson, took up her abode with her daughter and maid-servant. She selected England, because she had lived there a long time, and was well acquainted with the manners and habits of the people, and spoke their language as well as she did her own. She had kept up an acquaintance with some of the English nobility, and often dined and went to the theatre with her friends in London. On these occasions she always took the humiliating precaution of locking Valentine in her room. It was in their sad, solitary house, one night in the month of May, that the son of Valentine de La Verberie was born. He was taken to the parish priest, and christened Valentin Raoul Wilson. The countess had prepared everything, and for five hundred pounds had engaged an honest farmer's wife to bring the child up as her own, and, when old enough, have him taught a trade. Little Raoul was handed over to her a few hours after his birth. The good woman thought him the child of an English lady, and there seemed no probability that he would ever discover the secret of his birth. Restored to consciousness, Valentine asked for her child. She yearned to clasp it to her bosom; but the cruel countess was pitiless. "Your child!" she cried, "I do not know what you mean; you must be dreaming; you are mad!" And as Valentine persisted, she replied: "Your child is safe, and will want for nothing; let that suffice. You must forget what has happened, as you would forget a painful dream. The past must be wiped out forever. You know me well enough to understand that I mean to be obeyed."

The moment had come when Valentine ought in some degree to have resisted the countess's continually increasing tyranny. She had the idea, but not the courage to do so. If, on one side, she saw the dangers of almost culpable resignation—for she, too, was a mother!—on the other she felt crushed by the consciousness of her guilt. She yielded; and surrendered herself forever into the hands of a mother whose conduct she refrained from questioning, to escape the necessity of condemning it. So much suffering, so many regrets and internal struggles, for a long time delayed her recovery, but towards the end of June, the countess took her back to La Verberie. This time

the mischief-makers and gossips were not so sharp as usual. The countess went about, complaining of the bad success of her trip to England, and was able to assure herself that no one suspected her real reason for the journey. Only one man, Dr. Raget, knew the truth ; and, although Madame de La Verberie hated him from the bottom of her heart, she did him the justice to feel sure that he would not prove indiscreet.

Her first visit was paid to him. When he entered the room, she abruptly threw on the table the official documents which she had procured especially for this purpose. "These will prove to you, sir, that the child is living, and well cared for at a cost that I can ill afford."

"These are perfectly correct, madame," he replied, after an attentive examination of the papers, "and, if your conscience does not reproach you, of course I have nothing to say."

"My conscience reproaches me with nothing, sir."

The old doctor shook his head, and gazing searchingly into her eyes, retorted : "Can you say that you have not been harsh, even to cruelty ?"

She turned away her head, and, assuming her grand air, answered : "I have acted as a woman of my rank should act ; and I am surprised to find in you an advocate of misconduct."

"Ah, madame," said the doctor, "it is your place to show kindness to the poor girl. What indulgence do you expect from strangers towards your unhappy daughter, when you, her mother, are so pitiless ?"

Such plain-spoken truths were more than the countess cared to hear, and she rose to leave. "Is that all that you have to say to me, Dr. Raget ?" she asked haughtily.

"Yes, madame ; I have done. My only object was to spare you eternal remorse."

The good doctor was mistaken in his idea of Madame de La Verberie's character. She was utterly incapable of feeling remorse ; but she suffered cruelly when her selfish vanity was wounded, or her comfort disturbed. She resumed her old mode of living, but, having disposed of a part of her income, found it difficult to make both ends meet. This furnished her with an inexhaustible text for complaint ; and at every meal she reproached Valentine most unmercifully. She seemed to forget her own com

mand, that the past should be buried in oblivion, and constantly recurred to it for food for her anger ; a day seldom passed, without her saying to Valentine : "Your conduct has ruined us."

One day her daughter could not refrain from replying : "I suppose you would have forgiven me, had it enriched us." But these revolts on Valentine's part were rare, although her life was a series of tortures inflicted with most refined cruelty. Even the memory of Gaston had become a suffering. Perhaps, discovering the uselessness of her sacrifice, of her courage, and her devotion to what she had considered her duty, she regretted not having followed him. What had become of him ? Why had he not contrived to send her a letter, a word to let her know that he was still alive ? Perhaps he was dead. Perhaps he had forgotten her. He had sworn to return a rich man before three years had passed. Would he ever return ? There was a risk in his returning under any circumstances. His disappearance had not put an end to the terrible affair at Tarascon. He was supposed to be dead ; but, as there was no positive proof of his death, and his body could not be found, justice was compelled to listen to the clamor of public opinion. The case was brought before the assize court ; and Gaston de Clameran was contumaciously sentenced to several years' imprisonment. As to Louis de Clameran, no one knew positively what had become of him. Some people said he was leading a life of reckless extravagance at Paris. Informed of these facts by her faithful Mihonne, Valentine became more hopeless than ever. Vainly did she question the dreary future ; no ray appeared upon the dark horizon of her life. All her energy was gone ; and she finally reached that state of passive resignation peculiar to people who are constantly oppressed.

In this miserable way, four years passed since the fatal evening when Gaston had escaped in old Menoul's boat. Madame de La Verberie had spent these four years most unprofitably. Seeing that she could not live upon her income, and having too much false pride to sell her land, which was so badly managed that it did not even bring her in two per cent, she resigned herself to borrowing and spent her capital with her income. As in such matters, it is only the first step that costs, the countess soon made

rapid strides, saying to herself, like the late Marquis de Clameran : "After me, the deluge !" She no longer thought of anything but taking her ease. She had frequent "at homes," and paid many visits to the neighboring towns of Nimes and Avignon ; she sent to Paris for the most elegant toilets, and indulged her taste for good living. She allowed herself all the luxury that she had hoped to obtain by the acquisition of a rich son-in-law. Great sorrows require consolation ! The first year after she returned from London, she did not hesitate to treat herself to a horse ; it was rather old, to be sure, but, when harnessed to a second-hand carriage bought on credit at Beaucaire, made quite a good appearance. She would quiet her conscience, which occasionally reproached her for this constant extravagance, by saying : "I am so unhappy !" The unhappiness was that this seeming luxury cost her dear, very dear. After having sold the rest of her bonds, the countess first mortgaged the estate of La Verberie, and then the château itself. And in less than four years she owed more than forty thousand francs, and was unable even to pay the interest of her debt.

She was racking her mind to discover some means of escape from her difficulties, when chance came to her rescue. For some time a young engineer, employed in surveys along the Rhone, had made the village close to La Verberie the centre of his operations. Being handsome, agreeable, and of polished manners, he had been warmly welcomed by the neighboring society, and the countess frequently met him at the houses of her friends where she went to play cards of an evening. This young engineer was named André Fauvel. The first time he met Valentine he was struck by her beauty, and after once looking into her large, melancholy eyes, his admiration deepened into love, though he had not even spoken to her. He was well off ; a splendid career was open to him ; he was free ; and he swore that Valentine should be his. It was to an old friend of Madame de La Verberie, as noble as a Montmorency and as poor as Job, that he first confided his matrimonial plans. With the precision of a graduate of the polytechnic school, he enumerated all his qualifications for being a model son-in-law. For a long time the old lady listened to him without interruption ; but, when he had finished, she did not hesitate to tell him that his

pretensions were most presumptuous. What! he, a man of no pedigree, a Fauvel, a common surveyor, to aspire to the hand of a La Verberie! After having enumerated all the superior advantages of that superior order of beings, the nobility, she condescended to take a common-sense view of the case, and said: "However, you may succeed. The poor countess owes money in every direction; scarcely a day passes without the bailiffs calling upon her; so that, you understand, if a rich suitor appeared, and agreed to her terms respecting the settlements,—well, well, there is no knowing what might happen."

André Fauvel was young; the old lady's insinuations seemed to him odious. On reflection, however, when he had studied the character of the nobility of the neighborhood, who were rich in nothing but prejudices, he clearly saw that pecuniary considerations alone would be strong enough to induce the proud Countess de La Verberie to grant him her daughter's hand. This certainty ended his hesitations, and he turned his whole attention to devising a plan for presenting his claim. He did not find this an easy thing to accomplish. To go in quest of a wife with her purchase-money in his hand, was repugnant to his feelings, and contrary to his ideas of delicacy. But he knew no one who could undertake the matter for him, and his love was strong enough to make him swallow his repugnance. The occasion so anxiously awaited, to explain his intentions, soon presented itself.

One day as he entered a hotel at Beaucaire to dine, he saw Madame de La Verberie about to seat herself at the table. He blushed deeply, and asked permission to sit beside her, which was granted him with a most encouraging smile. Did the countess suspect the love of the young engineer? Had she been warned by her friend? Perhaps so. At any rate, without giving André time to gradually approach the subject weighing on his mind, she began to complain of the hard times, the scarcity of money, and the grasping meanness of the tradespeople. The truth is, she had come to Beaucaire to borrow money, and had found every cash-box closed against her; and her lawyer had advised her to sell her land for what it would bring. Anger joined to that secret instinct of the situation of affairs which is the sixth sense of a woman, loosened her tongue, and made her more communicative to this compara-

tive stranger, than she had ever been to her bosom friends. She explained to him the horror of her situation, her present needs, her anxiety for the future, and above all, her great distress at not being able to marry off her beloved daughter. André listened to these complaints with becoming commiseration, but in reality he was delighted. Without giving her time to finish her tale, he began to state what he called his view of the matter. He said that, although he sympathized deeply with the countess, he could not account for her uneasiness about her daughter. What? Could she be disturbed at having no dowry for her? Why, the rank and beauty of Mademoiselle Valentine were a fortune in themselves, of which any man might be proud. He knew more than one man who would esteem himself only too happy if Mademoiselle Valentine would accept his name, and confer upon him the sweet duty of relieving her mother from all anxiety and care. Finally, he did not think the situation of the countess's affairs nearly so desperate as she imagined. How much money would be necessary to pay off the mortgages upon La Verberie? About forty thousand francs, perhaps? Indeed! That was but a mere trifle. Besides, this sum would not be a gift from the son-in-law, but only a loan, because the estate would be his in the end, and greatly increased in value. A man, too, worthy of Valentine's love could never let his wife's mother want for the comforts and luxuries due to a lady of her age, rank, and misfortunes. He would be only too glad to offer her a sufficient income, not only to provide comfort, but even luxury.

As André spoke in a tone too earnest to be assumed, it seemed to the countess that a celestial dew was dropping upon her pecuniary wounds. Her countenance was radiant with joy, her fierce little eyes beamed with the most encouraging tenderness, her thin lips were wreathed in the most friendly smiles. One thought alone disturbed the young engineer. "Does she understand me? Does she think I'm serious?" he wondered. She certainly did, as her subsequent remarks proved. "Alas!" she sighed, "forty thousand francs will not save La Verberie; the principal and interest of the debt amount to at least sixty thousand."

"Oh, either forty or sixty thousand is nothing worth speaking of."

—Then my son-in-law, the phoenix we are supposing, would he have the forethought to provide for my requirements?"

"I should fancy he would be delighted to add four thousand francs to the income you derive from your estate."

The countess did not reply at once, she was calculating. "Four thousand francs is not much," she said after a pause. "Everything is so dear in this part of the country! But with six thousand francs—yes, six thousand francs would make me happy!"

The young man thought that her demands were becoming excessive, but with the generosity of an ardent lover, he replied: "The son-in-law of whom we are speaking would not be very devoted to Mademoiselle Valentine, if the paltry sum of two thousand francs caused him to hesitate."

"You promise too much!" murmured the countess. A sudden objection, however, occurred to her. "But this imaginary son-in-law," she remarked, "must be possessed of the means to fulfil his promises. I have my daughter's happiness too much at heart to give her to a man who did not produce—what do you call them?—securities, guarantees."

"Decidedly," thought Fauvel with mortification, "we are making a bargain." Then he added aloud: "Of course, your son-in-law would bind himself in the marriage contract to—"

"Never!—sir, never! Think of the impropriety of the thing! What would the world say?"

"Excuse me, it would be stated that it was the interest of a sum received from you."

"Ah! yes that might do very well."

The countess insisted upon seeing André home in her carriage. During the drive, no definite plan was agreed upon between them; but they understood each other so well, that, when the countess set the young engineer down at his own door, she invited him to dinner the next day, and held out her skinny hand, which André kissed with devotion as he thought of Valentine's pretty eyes. When Madame de La Verberie returned home, the servants were dumb with astonishment at her good humor; they had not seen her in this happy frame of mind for years. And her

day's work was of a nature to elevate her spirits: she had been most unexpectedly raised from a very difficult position to affluence. She, who boasted of such proud sentiments, never perceived the shame of the transaction nor the infamy of her conduct. "An annuity of six thousand francs," said she to herself, "and a thousand crowns from the estate, that makes nine thousand francs a year! My daughter will live in Paris after she is married, and I can go and see my dear children without expense." At this price she would have sold not only one but three daughters, if she had possessed them. But suddenly her blood ran cold at a sudden thought which crossed her mind: "Would Valentine consent?"

Her anxiety to set her mind at rest sent her straightway to her daughter's room. She found Valentine reading by the light of a flickering candle. "My daughter," she said abruptly, "a young man of whom I approve has demanded your hand in marriage, and I have promised it to him."

At this startling announcement, Valentine started up—"Impossible!" she murmured, "impossible!"

"And why, if you please?"

"Did you tell him, mother, what I am? Did you own—"

"Your past folly? No, thank heavens! and I hope you will have the good sense to keep silent on the subject."

Although Valentine's spirit was completely crushed by her mother's tyranny, her sense of honor revolted at the idea. "You certainly would not wish me to marry an honest man, mother, without confessing to him everything connected with the past? I could never practise a deception so base."

The countess felt very much like flying into a passion; but she knew that threats would be of no avail in this instance, where resistance would be a matter of conscience with her daughter. Instead of commanding, she entreated. "Poor child," she said, "my poor dear Valentine, if you only knew the dreadful state of our affairs you would not talk in this way. Your folly commenced our ruin; to-day it is complete. Do you know that our creditors threaten to turn us out of La Verberie? Then what will become of us, my poor child? Must I in my old age go begging from door to door? We are utterly lost, and this marriage is our only hope of salvation."

These tearful entreaties were followed by plausible arguments. The dear countess made use of strange and subtle theories. What she formerly regarded as a monstrous crime, she now spoke of as a peccadillo. According to her, girls in Valentine's position were to be met with every day. She could understand, she said, her daughter's scruples if there were any danger of the past being brought to light; but she had taken such precautions, that there was no fear of that. Would it make her love her husband any the less? No. Would he be less happy? No. Then that being so, why hesitate? Shocked, bewildered, Valentine asked herself if this was really her mother, the haughty woman who had always been such a worshipper of honor and duty, who now contradicted every word she had uttered during her life! Valentine could not understand the sudden change. But she would have understood it, had she known to what base deeds a mind blinded by selfishness and vanity can lend itself. The countess's subtle arguments and shameful sophistry neither moved nor convinced her; but she had not the courage to resist the tearful entreaties of that mother, who ended by falling on her knees, and with clasped hands imploring her child to save her. Violently agitated, distracted by a thousand conflicting emotions, daring neither to refuse nor to promise, fearing the consequences of a decision thus forced from her, the unhappy girl begged her mother to grant her a few hours to reflect.

Madame de La Verberie dared not refuse this request, and acquiesced.

"I will leave you my daughter," she said, "and I trust your heart will tell you how to decide between a useless confession, and your mother's salvation." With these words she left the room, indignant but hopeful.

And she had grounds for hope. Placed between two obligations equally sacred, equally binding, but diametrically opposed, Valentine's troubled mind could no longer clearly discern the path of duty. Could she reduce her mother to want and misery? Could she basely deceive the confidence and love of an honorable man? However she decided, her future life would be one of suffering and remorse. Alas! why had she not a wise and kind adviser to point out the right course to pursue, and assist her in struggling against evil influences? Why had she not that gentle,

discreet friend who had helped her in her first misfortunes, old Dr. Raget? Formerly, the memory of Gaston had been her guiding star; but now this far-off memory was nothing but a sort of vanishing dream. In romance we meet with heroines of life-long constancy; real life produces few such miracles. For a long time, Valentine's mind had been filled with the image of Gaston. As the hero of her dreams, she dwelt fondly on his memory; but the mists of time had gradually dimmed the brilliancy of her idol, which was now no more than a cold relic at the bottom of her heart. When she arose the next morning, pale and weak from a sleepless, tearful night, she was almost resolved to confess everything; but when the evening came, and she found herself in the company of André Fauvel, and in the presence of her mother's alternately threatening and supplicating glances, her courage failed her. She would say to herself: "I will tell him." But later on she added: "I will wait till to-morrow." The countess saw all these struggles, but was not made uneasy by them. She knew by experience, that when a painful duty is put off it is never performed. There was, perhaps, some excuse for Valentine in the horror of her situation. Perhaps, unknown to herself, she felt a faint hope arise within her. Any marriage, even an unhappy one, offered the prospect of a change, of a new life, a relief from the insupportable suffering she was then enduring. Sometimes, in her ignorance of human life, she imagined that time and close intimacy would make it almost easy for her to confess her terrible fault, and that André would pardon her and marry her all the same, since he loved her so much. That he sincerely loved her, she knew full well. It was not the impetuous passion of Gaston, with its excitements and terrors, but a calm, steady, and perhaps more lasting affection, obtaining a sort of blissful rest in its legitimacy and constancy.

Thus Valentine gradually became accustomed to André's presence, and was surprised into feeling very happy at the constant delicate attentions and affectionate looks that he lavished upon her. She did not feel any love for him yet; but a separation would have distressed her deeply. During the courtship, the countess's conduct was a masterpiece. She suddenly ceased arguing and importuning, and with tearful resignation said she would not attempt

to influence her daughter's decision ; but she went about sighing and groaning as if she were on the eve of starving to death. She also made arrangements for being tormented by the bailiffs. Distress-warrants and legal notices poured in at La Verberie, and she would show Valentine all these documents, saying, "God grant we may not be driven from the home of our ancestors before your marriage, my darling !" Knowing that her presence was sufficient to freeze any confession on her daughter's lips, she never left her alone with André. "Once married," she thought, "they can settle the matter to please themselves." She was as impatient as André, and hastened the preparations for the wedding. She gave Valentine no opportunity for reflection. She kept her constantly busy, either in driving to town to purchase some article of dress, or in paying visits.

At last the eve of the wedding-day found the countess hopeful, though oppressed with anxiety, like the gambler playing for a high stake. On this evening, for the first time, Valentine found herself alone with the man who was to become her husband. It was twilight, and she was sitting in the drawing-room, miserable and trembling, anxious to unburden her mind, when André entered. Seeing that she was agitated, he pressed her hand, and gently begged her to tell him the cause of her sorrow. "Am I not your best friend," he said, "and ought I not to be the confidant of your troubles, if you have any? Why these tears, my darling?"

At this moment she was on the point of confessing everything. But suddenly she perceived the scandal that would result, the pain she would cause André, and her mother's anger ; she saw her own future life ruined—she exclaimed, like all young girls when the eventful moment draws near : "I am afraid." Imagining that she was merely disturbed by some vague fears, he tried to console and reassure her ; but he was surprised to find that his affectionate words only seemed to increase her distress. But already Madame de La Verberie came to interrupt them : they were wanted to sign the marriage contract. André Fauvel was left in ignorance.

On the morrow, a lovely spring day, André Fauvel and Valentine de La Verberie were married at the village church. Early in the morning, the château was filled with

the bride's friends, who came, according to custom, to assist at her wedding toilet. Valentine forced herself to appear calm, even smiling; but her face was whiter than her veil—her heart was torn by remorse. She felt as though the sad truth were written upon her brow, and that her white dress was but a bitter irony, a galling humiliation. She shuddered when her most intimate friend placed the wreath of orange-blossom upon her head. It seemed to her that this emblem of purity would burn her. It did not do so, but one of the wire stems of the flowers badly covered, scratched her forehead which bled a great deal, and a drop of blood fell upon her dress. What an evil omen! Valentine almost fainted. But presages are deceitful, as it proved with Valentine; for a year after her marriage she was, according to report, the happiest of wives. Happy! yes, she would have been completely so could she only have forgotten the past. André adored her. He had gone into business, and everything succeeded with him. But he wished to be immensely rich, not for himself, but for the wife he loved, whom he longed to surround with every luxury. Thinking her the most lovely, he wished to see her the most adorned.

Eighteen months after her marriage, Madame Fauvel had a son. But, alas! neither this child, nor a second son, born a year after, could make her forget the other one—the poor, forsaken babe who, for a sum of money, a stranger had consented to receive. Loving her children passionately, and bringing them up like the sons of princes, she would murmur to herself, “Who knows if the abandoned one has even bread to eat?” If she had only known where he was; if she had only dared inquire!—but she was afraid. Sometimes, too, she would be uneasy about Gaston's jewels, constantly fearing that their hiding-place would be discovered. Other times she would say to herself: “I may as well be tranquil; misfortune has forgotten me.” Poor deluded woman! Misfortune is a visitor who sometimes delays his visits, but always comes in the end.

XV.

LOUIS DE CLAMERAN, the second son of the marquis, was one of those self-controlled men, who beneath a cool, careless manner, conceal a fiery temperament, and ungovernable passions. All sorts of extravagant ideas had begun to ferment in his disordered brain, long before the occurrence which decided the destiny of the De Clameran family. Apparently occupied in the pursuit of pleasure, this precocious hypocrite longed for a larger field in which to indulge his evil inclinations, secretly cursing the stern necessity which chained him down to this dreary country life, and the old château, which to him was more gloomy than a prison, and as lifeless as the grave. This existence, dragged out in the country and the small neighboring towns, was too monotonous for his restless nature. The paternal authority, though gently exercised, exasperated his rebellious temper. He thirsted for independence, riches, excitement, pleasure, and the unknown. Louis did not love his father, and he hated his brother Gaston. The old marquis, in his culpable thoughtlessness, had kindled this burning envy in the heart of his second son. A strict observer of traditional rights, he had always declared that the eldest son of a noble house should inherit all the family possessions, and that he intended to leave Gaston his entire fortune. This flagrant injustice and favoritism inspired Louis with envious hatred for his brother. Gaston always said that he would never consent to profit by this paternal partiality, but would share equally with his brother. Judging others by himself, Louis placed no faith in this assertion, which he called an ostentatious affectation of generosity. Although this hatred was unsuspected by the marquis and Gaston, it was betrayed by acts significant enough to attract the attention of the servants. They were so fully aware of Louis's sentiments towards his brother, that, when the latter was prevented from escaping because of the stumbling horse, they refused to believe it an accident, and muttered under their breath the word: "Fratricide!" A deplorable scene took place between Louis and Jean, who was allowed, on account of his fifty years' faithful service, to take liberties which he sometimes abused by making rough speeches to his superiors.

"It is a great pity," said the old servant, "that a skilful rider like yourself should have fallen at the very moment when your brother's safety depended upon your good horsemanship. La Verdure did not fall."

At this broad insinuation, Louis turned pale, and threateningly exclaimed: "You insolent scoundrel, what do you mean?"

"You know well enough what I mean, sir," the old man replied significantly.

"I do not know! Explain yourself."

The servant only answered by a meaning look, which so incensed Louis, that he rushed towards him with upraised whip, and would have beaten him unmercifully, had not the other servants interfered, and dragged Jean from the spot. This altercation occurred while Gaston was in the madder-field trying to escape his pursuers. After awhile, the gendarmes and hussars returned, with slow tread and sad faces, and announced that Gaston de Clameran had plunged into the Rhone, and was most certainly drowned. This melancholy news was received with groans and tears by every one save Louis, who remained calm and unmoved—not a single muscle of his face quivered; but his eyes sparkled with triumph. A secret voice cried within him: "Now you are assured of the family possessions, and a marquis's coronet." He was no longer the poverty-stricken younger son, but the sole heir of the De Clamerans.

The corporal of the gendarmes had said: "I would not be the one to tell the poor old man that his son is drowned."

Louis felt none of the tender-hearted scruples of the brave old soldier. He instantly went to his father's sick-room, and said, in a firm voice: "Between disgrace and death, my brother has chosen: he is dead."

Like a sturdy oak stricken by lightning, the marquis tottered and fell when these fatal words sounded in his ears. The doctor soon arrived, but, alas! only to say that science was of no avail. Towards daybreak, Louis, without a tear, received his father's last sigh. Louis was now the master. All the unjust precautions taken by the marquis to elude the law, and insure beyond dispute the possession of his entire fortune to his eldest son, turned against him. By means of a fraudulent deed of trust

drawn by his dishonest lawyer, M. de Clameran had disposed everything so that, on the day of his death, every farthing he owned would be Gaston's. It was Louis who benefited by this precaution. He came into possession without even being called upon for the certificate of his brother's death. He was now Marquis de Clameran; he was free, he was comparatively rich. He who had never had twenty-five crowns in his pocket at a time, now found himself the possessor of close upon two hundred thousand francs. This sudden and most unexpected fortune so completely turned his head, that he forgot his skilful dissimulation. His demeanor at the funeral of the marquis attracted general notice. He followed the coffin, with his head bowed down and his face buried in a handkerchief, but his looks belied him, his face was beaming, and one could trace a smile beneath the grimaces of his feigned grief. The day after the funeral, Louis sold off everything that could be disposed of—horses, carriages, and family plate. The next day he discharged all the old servants, who had hoped to end their days beneath the hospitable roof of Clameran. Several, with tears in their eyes, took him aside, and entreated him to let them stay, even without wages. He roughly ordered them to begone. He sent for his father's lawyer, and gave him a power of attorney to sell the estate, and received in return the sum of twenty thousand francs as the first payment in advance. At the end of the week, he locked up the château, with a vow never to enter it again, and left the keys with Jean, who, owning a little house near Clameran, would continue to live in the neighborhood.

Poor Jean! little did he think that, in preventing Valentine from seeing Louis, he had ruined the prospects of his beloved Gaston. On receiving the keys, he asked but one question: "Shall we not search for your brother's body, sir?" he inquired in broken-hearted tones. "And, if it is found, what is to be done with it?"

"I shall leave instructions with my lawyer," answered Louis. And he hurried away from Clameran as if the ground burnt his feet. He went to Tarascon, where he had already forwarded his luggage, and took the stage-coach which travelled between Marseilles and Paris, the railroad not then being finished.

At last he was off. The lumbering vehicle rattled

along, drawn by six horses ; and the deep gullies made by the wheels seemed so many abysses between the past and the future. Lying back in his corner, Louis de Clameran enjoyed in anticipation the pleasures of which he was about to partake. At the end of the journey, Paris appeared before him—radiant, brilliantly dazzling as the sun. For he was going to Paris, the promised land, the city of wonders, where every Aladdin finds a lamp. There, all ambitions are crowned, all dreams are realized, all passions, all desires, good and evil, are satisfied. There the fast-fleeting days are followed by nights of ever-varied pleasure and excitement. In twenty theatres tragedy weeps, or comedy laughs ; whilst at the opera, the most beautiful women in the world, sparkling with diamonds, are ready to die with ecstasy at the sound of divine music ; everywhere noise, excitement, luxury, and pleasure. What a dream ! The heart of Louis de Clameran was overflowing with desire ; and it seemed to him that the horses crawled along like tortoises. He gave neither a thought nor a regret to the past. What mattered it to him how his father and brother had died ? All his mind was devoted to penetrating the mysterious future that awaited him. Was not every chance in his favor ? He was young, rich, handsome, and a marquis ; he had a constitution of iron ; he carried twenty thousand francs in his pocket, and would soon have ten times as many more. He, who had always been poor, regarded this sum as an inexhaustible treasure ; and at nightfall, when he jumped from the coach on to the muddy pavement of the brilliantly-lighted Paris street, he seemed to be taking possession of the great city, and felt as though he could buy everything in it. His illusions were those common to all young men who, never having been thrown upon their own resources, suddenly come into possession of a patrimony. It is this ignorance of the real value of money that squanders fortunes, and fritters away the gold so laboriously saved in the frugal provinces. Imbued with his own importance, accustomed to the deference of the country people, the young marquis came to Paris with the expectation of being a lion, on account of his name and fortune. He was mortified to discover his error. To his great surprise, he learnt that he possessed nothing which constituted a position in this immense city. He found

that in the midst of the busy, indifferent crowd, he was as much lost and unnoticed as a drop of water in a torrent.

But this not very flattering reality could not discourage a man who was determined to gratify his passions at all costs. His ancestral name gained him but one privilege, disastrous for his future; it opened to him the doors of the aristocratic Faubourg St. Germain. There he became acquainted with men of his own age and rank, whose annual incomes almost equalled his entire fortune. Nearly all of them confessed that they only kept up their extravagant style of living by dint of skilful economy behind the scenes, and by regulating their vices and follies as judiciously as a hosier would arrange his Sunday holidays. This information astonished Louis, but did not open his eyes. He endeavored to imitate the dashing style of these economically wasteful young men, without attempting to conform to their prudential rules. He learned how to spend, but not how to reckon as they did. He was Marquis de Clameran, and having given himself a reputation of great wealth, he was well received: if he made no friends, he had at least many acquaintances. At the club where he was proposed and elected shortly after his arrival, he found several obliging persons who took pleasure in initiating him into the secrets of fashionable life, and correcting any little provincialisms betrayed in his manners and conversation. He profited well and quickly by their lessons. At the end of three months he was fairly launched; his reputation as a skilful gambler was fully established; and he had nobly and gloriously compromised himself with one of the fast women of the day. He had rented handsome apartments in the vicinity of the Madeleine, with a coach-house and stabling for three horses. Although he only furnished this bachelor's establishment with what was absolutely necessary, he found that necessities were very costly; so that the day he took possession of his apartments, and tried to make up his accounts, he made the startling discovery that his short apprenticeship in Paris had cost him fifty thousand francs, one-fourth of his fortune. And yet he remained, when compared to his brilliant friends, in a state of inferiority which was mortifying to his vanity, like a worthy countryman who strains every nerve to make his nag keep up with thoroughbreds. Fifty thousand francs! For a moment Louis had a slight

inclination to retire from the contest. But then, what a come down! Besides, his vices bloomed and flourished in these charming surroundings. He had heretofore considered himself wonderfully fast, and now a host of new corruptions were revealed to him. Then the sight of suddenly acquired fortunes, and the many examples of the successful results of hazardous ventures, inflamed his mind. He thought that in this great, rich city, he certainly could succeed in securing a share of the loaves and fishes. But how? He had no idea, and he did not seek to find one. He simply persuaded himself that, like many others, he would have his lucky day. This is another of those errors which it is time to destroy. Fortune is not to be wasted upon idle fools. In this furious race of self-interest it requires great skill to bestride that capricious mare called opportunity, and ride her to the goal. But Louis did not devote so much thought to the matter. As stupid as the man who expected to win the prize at the lottery without having purchased a ticket, he said to himself, "Pshaw! opportunity—chance—a rich marriage will set me right again!" The rich bride failed to appear, but the turn of the last bank-note arrived. To a pressing demand for money, his notary replied by a refusal. "You have nothing left to sell, sir," he wrote, "with the exception of the château. It is no doubt very valuable; but it is difficult, if not impossible, to find a purchaser for so large a building situated as it is now. I will use every effort to secure a purchaser; and, believe me, sir, &c." Louis was thunderstruck at this final catastrophe, as much surprised as if he had not foreseen it. What was he to do? Ruined, with nothing to hope for, he imitated those poor fools who each year rise up, shine for a moment, and then suddenly disappear. But Louis could not give up the life of ease and pleasure which he had been leading for the past three years. Fate had decreed that, after leaving his fortune on the battle-field, he should also leave his honor. He first of all lived on the reputation of his dissipated fortune—on the credit that remains to the man who has spent much in a short space of time. This resource was soon exhausted. The day came when his creditors seized all they could lay their hands upon—the last remains of his opulence, his carriages, horses, and costly furniture. He retired to a very quiet hotel, but he

could not keep away from the wealthy set whom he had considered his friends. He now lived upon them as he had lived upon his tradesmen. Borrowing from one louis up to twenty-five, from anybody who would lend to him, and never attempting to repay them. Constantly betting, no one ever saw him pay a wager. He piloted all the novices who fell into his hands, and utilized, in the most shameful services, an experience which had cost him two hundred thousand francs: he was half a courtier, and half an adventurer. His acquaintances did not cut him, but made him cruelly expiate the favor of being tolerated. No one had the least regard for his feelings, or hesitated to say before him what was thought of his conduct; therefore, whenever alone in his little den, he would give way to fits of violent rage. He could endure all these humiliations, but could not help feeling them. Envy and covetousness had long since stifled every sentiment of honor and self-respect in him. For a few years of opulence, he felt ready to commit even a crime.

He did not commit a crime, however, but he became mixed up in a disgraceful affair of swindling and extortion. The Count de Commarin, an old friend of his family, came to his assistance, hushed up the matter, and furnished him with money to take him to England. And what were his means of livelihood in London? The detectives of the most corrupt capital in the world could alone tell us. Descending to the lowest stages of vice, the Marquis de Clameran finally found his level in a society composed of fallen women and of sharpers, whose chances and shameful profits he shared. Compelled to quit London, he travelled about Europe, with no other capital than his audacity, his deep depravity, and his skill at cards. Finally, in 1865, having met a run of good luck at Homburg, he returned to Paris, where he imagined himself entirely forgotten. Eighteen years had passed since he left France. The first step which he took on his return, before even settling himself in Paris, was to make a visit to his old home. Not that he had any relative or even friend in that part of the country, from whom he could expect any assistance; but he remembered the old château which his notary had been unable to sell. He thought that perhaps by this time a purchaser had appeared, and he determined to go himself and ascertain the point; he thought, too,

that once in the neighborhood, he would always be able to get something for his property, which had cost more than a hundred thousand francs to build.

Three days later, on a beautiful October evening, he reached Tarascon, and there learned that he was still the owner of the château. Early the next morning, he set out on foot to visit the paternal-home at Clameran, which he had not seen for twenty-five years. Everything was so changed, that he scarcely recognized the locality where he was born, and where he passed his youth ; yet the impression was so strong, that this man, tried by such varied, strange adventures, for a moment felt like turning back. He only continued his road because a secret, hopeful voice cried to him, "Onward, onward!"—as if, at the end of the journey, was to be found a new life and the long-wished-for good fortune. As Louis advanced, however, the changes appeared less striking ; he began to recognize the ground. Soon, through the trees, he distinguished the village steeple, then the village itself, built upon the gentle slope of a hill, crowned by a wood of olive-trees. He recognized the first houses he came to ; the farrier's shed, with its roof covered with vine ; the old parsonage, and farther on the village inn, where he and Gaston used to play billiards on its primitive table. In spite of what he styled his scorn of vulgar prejudices, a thrill of strange emotion oppressed his heart. He could not overcome a feeling of sadness as scenes of the past rose up before him. How many events had occurred since he last walked along this path, and received a friendly bow and smile from every villager ! Then, life appeared to him like a fairy-scene in which his every wish was gratified. And now, he returned, dishonored, worn out, disgusted with the realities of life, having tasted the bitter dregs of the cup of shame, stigmatized, poverty-stricken, and friendless, with nothing to lose and nothing to look forward to. The few villagers whom he met turned and stood gazing after this dust-covered stranger, and wondered who he could be.

Upon reaching Jean's house, he found the door open ; he walked into the immense kitchen, with its monumental fire-place, and rapped on the table. "Coming !" answered a voice from another room.

The next moment a man of about forty years appeared

in the doorway, and seemed much surprised at finding a stranger in his kitchen.

"What do you desire, sir?" he inquired.

"Does not Jean, the Marquis de Clameran's old valet, live here?"

"My father died five years ago, sir," replied the man in a sad tone.

This news affected Louis painfully, as if he had expected the old man to restore him some of his lost youth. He sighed, and said, "I am the Marquis de Clameran."

The man, at these words, uttered an exclamation of joy. He seized Louis's hand, and pressing it with respectful affection, cried: "You are the marquis! Alas! why is not my poor father alive to see you?—he would be so happy! His last words were about his dear masters, and many a time did he sigh and mourn at not receiving any news of you. He is beneath the sod now, resting after a well-spent life; but I, Joseph, his son, am here to take his place, and devote my life to your service. What an honor it is to have you in my house! Ah! my wife will be so happy to see you; she has all her life heard of the De Clamerans." Here he ran into the garden, and called, "'Toinette! I say, 'Toinette!—Come here quickly!"

This cordial welcome delighted Louis. So many years had gone by since he had been treated with an expression of kindness, or felt the pressure of a friendly hand. In a few moments a handsome, dark-eyed young woman entered the room, and stood blushing with confusion at sight of the stranger.

"This is my wife, sir," said Joseph, leading her towards Louis; "but I have not given her time to put on her finery. This is Monsieur the Marquis, Antoinette."

The young wife bowed, and having nothing to say, gracefully uplifted her brow, upon which the marquis pressed a kiss.

"You will see the children in a few minutes, Monsieur the Marquis," said Joseph; "I have sent to the school for them."

The worthy couple overwhelmed the marquis with attentions. After so long a walk he must be hungry, they said: he must take a glass of wine now, and lunch would soon be ready; they would be so proud and happy if Monsieur the Marquis would partake of a country lunch,

And Joseph went to the cellar after the wine, while 'Toinette ran to catch her fattest pullet. In a short time, Louis sat down to a table laden with the best of everything, waited upon by Joseph and his wife, who watched him with tender interest. The children came running in from school, smeared with the juice of berries. After Louis had embraced them, they stood in a corner and gazed at him with eyes wide open. The important news had spread, and a number of villagers and countrymen appeared at the open door to speak to the Marquis de Clameran.

"I am such a one, Monsieur the Marquis; don't you remember me? Ah! I recognized you at once. The late marquis was very good to me," said an old man. Another asked, "Don't you remember the time when you lent me your gun to go shooting?"

Louis welcomed with secret delight all these protestations and proofs of devotion, which had not chilled with time. The kindly voices of these honest people recalled many pleasant moments of the past, and made him feel once more the fresh sensations of his youth. No echoes of his stormy life, no suspicions of his shameful career had, then, reached this humble village on the banks of the Rhone. He, the adventurer, the bully, the base accomplice of London swindlers, delighted in these marks of respect and veneration bestowed upon him, as the representative of the house of De Clameran; it seemed to make him once more feel a little self-respect. Ah! had he possessed only a quarter of his squandered inheritance, how happy he would have been to peacefully end his days in his native village! But this rest after so many vain excitements, this haven after so many storms and shipwrecks, was denied him. He was penniless. How could he live here when he had nothing to live upon? This knowledge of his pressing need gave him courage to ask Joseph for the keys of the château, that he might go and examine it.

"You won't need any key, except the one to the iron gate, Monsieur the Marquis," replied Joseph.

It was but too true. Time had done its work, and the lordly château of Clameran was nothing but a ruin. The rain and sun had rotted the doors and shutters so that they were crumbling and dilapidated. Here and there were traces of the friendly hands of Jean and his son, who had tried to retard the total ruin of the old château; but

what use were their efforts? Within, the desolation was still greater. All of the furniture which Louis had not dared to sell stood in the position he left it, but in what a state! All the tapestry hangings and coverings were moth-eaten and in tatters; nothing seemed left but the dust-covered woodwork of the chairs and sofas. Louis was almost afraid to enter the grand, gloomy rooms, where every footfall echoed lugubriously. He almost expected to see the angry old marquis start up from some dark corner, and heap curses on his head for having dishonored the name. Perhaps his terror had another cause, perhaps he recalled that stumble so fatal to Gaston. His nerves could not bear it, and he hurried out into the open air and sunshine. After awhile, he recovered sufficiently to remember the object of his visit.

"Poor Jean was foolish not to make use of the furniture left in the château. It is now destroyed without having been of use to any one."

"My father would not have dared to touch anything without permission, Monsieur the Marquis."

"And he was wrong. As for the château, it is fast approaching the condition of the furniture. My fortune, I regret to say, does not permit me to repair it; I am, therefore, resolved to sell it whilst the walls are still standing."

Joseph received this information very much as a proposal to commit a sacrilege; but he was not bold of speech, like his father, so he dared not express what he thought.

"Would there be much difficulty in selling these ruins?" continued Louis.

"That depends upon the price you ask, Monsieur the Marquis. I know a man of the neighborhood who would purchase the lot if he could get it cheap."

"Who is he?"

"A person named Fougereux, who lives on the other side of the Rhone, at Montagnette. He came from Beaucaire, and twelve years ago married a servant-maid of the late Countess de La Verberie. Perhaps Monsieur the Marquis remembers her,—a plump, bright-eyed brunette, named Mihonne."

Louis did not remember Mihonne. "When can we see this Fougereux?" he inquired.

"At any time, by crossing the Rhone on the ferry."

"Well, let us go now. I am in a hurry."

An entire generation had passed away since Louis had left his old home. It was no longer the old republican sailor, Pilorel, who kept the ferry, but his son. But he also had a respect for tradition; and when he learnt the name of the stranger who accompanied Joseph, he hastily got his boat ready, and was soon in the middle of the river with his two passengers. Whilst young Pilorel rowed with all his might, Joseph did his best to warn the marquis against the wily Fougereux.

"He is a cunning fox," said he. "I have had a bad opinion of him ever since his marriage, which was a shameful affair altogether. Mihonne was over fifty years of age, and he was not twenty-five when he married her; so you will understand it was the money, and not the wife, that he wanted. She, poor fool, believed that the young scamp really loved her, and gave herself and her money up to him."

"And he has made good use of it," interrupted Pilorel.

"That is true. Fougereux is not the man to let the money lie idle. He is now very rich; but he ought, at least, to be thankful to Mihonne for his prosperity. One can easily understand his not feeling any love for her, when she looks like his grandmother; but that he should deprive her of everything and beat her cruelly is shameful."

"He would like to know her six feet under ground," said the ferryman.

"And he will see her there before long. She has been half dead, the poor old woman, ever since Fougereux brought home a worthless jade, whose servant she has become."

They had reached the opposite shore; Joseph and the marquis asked young Pilorel to await their return, and then took the road to Montagnette. They soon arrived at a well-cultivated farm, and Joseph, having inquired for the master, a farm boy said that "M. Fougereux" was out in the fields, but he would send for him. He soon appeared. He was a very little man, with a red beard, and restless sunken eyes. Although M. Fougereux professed to despise the nobility and the clergy, the hope of driving a good bargain made him servilely obsequious. He hastened to usher Louis into "his parlor," with many

bows and endless repetitions of "Monsieur the Marquis." Upon entering the room, he roughly ordered an old woman, who was crouching over some dying embers, to make haste and bring some wine for Monsieur the Marquis de Clameran. At this name, the old woman started as if she had received an electric shock. She opened her mouth to say something, but a look from her tyrant froze the words upon her lips. With a wild air, she hobbled out to obey his orders, and in a few minutes returned with a bottle of wine and three glasses. Then she resumed her seat by the fire, and kept her eyes fastened upon the marquis. Could this really be the plump and merry Mihonne, who had been the confidante of the little fairy of La Verberie? Valentine herself would never have recognized this poor, shrivelled, emaciated old woman. Only those who have lived in the country know what time and worry can do to a woman.

The bargain, meanwhile, was being discussed between Joseph and Fougereux. The dealer offered a ridiculously small sum for the château, saying that he would only buy it to pull down, and then sell the materials. Joseph enumerated the beams, joists, ashlar, iron-work, and the ground. As for Mihonne, the sight of the marquis was an event in her existence. If the faithful servant had hitherto never breathed a word of the secrets confided to her probity, they had seemed to her none the less heavy to bear. After marrying, and being so harshly treated that she daily prayed for death to come to her relief, she began to blame everybody but herself for her misfortunes. Excessively superstitious, she traced back the origin of her misfortunes to the day when she took the oath on the holy gospel during mass. Having no child, after having ardently longed for one, she was persuaded that God had stricken her with barrenness for having assisted in the abandonment of an innocent, helpless babe. She often thought that, by revealing everything, she might appease the wrath of Heaven, and once more bring happiness to her home. Nothing but her love for Valentine gave her strength to resist this constant temptation. But to-day the sight of Louis decided her. She thought there could be no danger in confiding in Gaston's brother. The bargain was at length struck. It was agreed that Fougereux should give five thousand two hundred and eighty francs in cash

for the château, and land attached; and Joseph was to have the remains of the furniture. The marquis and the dealer shook hands as they uttered the final word, "Agreed!" and Fougereux at once went himself to get a bottle of extra good wine with which to seal the bargain.

The occasion was favorable to Mihonne. She walked quickly over to where the Marquis sat, and said, in a nervous whisper, "Monsieur the Marquis, I must speak with you alone."

"With me, my good woman?"

"With you. It is a secret of life and death. This evening, at dusk, meet me under the walnut-trees over there, and I will tell you everything."

Hearing her husband's footsteps, she hastened back to her seat. Fougereux gayly filled the glasses, and drank De Clameran's health.

As they returned to the boat, Louis debated within himself whether he should keep this singular appointment. "Joseph, what the deuce can that old witch want with me?" he asked.

"Who can tell? She used to be in the service of a lady who was M. Gaston's mistress, so my father used to say. If I were in your place, sir, I would go. You can dine at my place, and after dinner Pilorel will row you over."

Curiosity decided Louis; and about seven o'clock he arrived under the walnut-trees, where old Mihonne had already been waiting a long time.

"Ah! here you are at last, my dear good sir," she said, in a tone of joy. "I was beginning to despair."

"Yes, here I am, my good woman; what have you to tell me?"

"Ah! many things, Monsieur the Marquis. But first, tell me have you heard from your brother."

Louis almost regretted having come, supposing that the old woman was wandering.

"You know well enough that my poor brother was drowned in the Rhone."

"Good heavens!" cried Mihonne, "are you ignorant, then, of his escape? Yes, he did what will never be done again; he swam across the swollen Rhone. The next day Mademoiselle Valentine went to Clameran to tell the news; but Jean prevented her seeing you. Afterwards I took a letter for you, but you had left."

These revelations, after twenty years, confounded Louis. "Are you sure you are not mistaking your dreams for real events, my good woman?" he asked gently.

"No," replied Mihonne, mournfully shaking her head. "If old Menoul were alive, he would tell you how he took charge of M. Gaston until he embarked at Marseilles. But that is nothing compared to the rest. M. Gaston has a son."

"My brother, a son! Really, you are out of your mind."

"Alas! no, unfortunately for my happiness in this world and in the world to come. He had a son, and Mademoiselle Valentine was the mother. I received the poor babe in my arms and carried it to a woman abroad, who was paid to take charge of it."

Then Mihonne told everything—the countess's anger, the journey to London, and the desertion of little Raoul. With the accurate memory natural to people unable to read and write, she related the most minute particulars—the names of the village and the farmer's wife, the child's christian and surname, and the exact date of everything which had occurred. Then she told of Valentine's suffering after her fault, of the impending ruin of the countess, and, finally, of the poor girl's marriage with a gentleman from Paris, who was so rich that he did not know the extent of his fortune, a banker named Fauvel. A piercing and prolonged cry here interrupted the old woman. "Heavens!" she exclaimed in a frightened voice, "that is my husband calling me," and she hurried back to the farmhouse as fast as her trembling limbs could carry her.

For several minutes after her departure, Louis stood rooted to the spot. Her recital had filled his wicked mind with an idea so infamous, so detestable, that even his vile nature shrank for a moment from its enormity. He knew the rich banker by reputation, and was calculating the advantages he might gain by the strange information of which he was now possessed. It was a secret which, if skilfully managed, would bring him in a handsome income. The few faint scruples he felt were silenced by the prospect of an old age spent in poverty. "But first of all," he thought, "I must ascertain the truth of the old woman's story; then I will decide upon a plan." This was why, two days later, having received the 5,280 francs from Fougereux, Louis de Clameran set out for London,

XVI.

DURING the twenty years of her married life, Valentine had experienced but one real sorrow; and this was one which, in the course of nature, must happen sooner or later. In 1859 her mother died from inflammation of the lungs, during one of her frequent journeys to Paris. The countess preserved her faculties to the last, and with her dying breath said to her daughter: "Ah, well! was I not right in prevailing upon you to bury the past? Your silence has made my old age peaceful and happy, for which I now thank you, and it assures you a quiet future."

Madame Fauvel constantly said that, since the loss of her mother, she had never had cause to shed a tear. And what more could she wish for? As years rolled on, André's love remained the same as it had been during the first days of their union. To the love that had not diminished was added that sweet intimacy which results from long conformity of ideas and unbounded confidence. Everything prospered with this happy couple. André was far more wealthy than he had ever hoped to be, even in his wildest visions; more so even than he or Valentine desired. Their two sons, Lucian and Abel, were beautiful as their mother, noble-hearted and intelligent young men, whose honorable characters and graceful bearing were the glory of their family. Nothing was wanting to insure Valentine's felicity. When her husband and her sons were absent, her solitude was cheered by the companionship of an accomplished young girl whom she loved as her own daughter, and who in return filled the place of a devoted child. Madeleine was M. Fauvel's niece, who, when an infant, had lost both parents, poor but very worthy people. Valentine adopted the babe, perhaps in memory of the poor little creature who had been abandoned to strangers. It seemed to her that God would bless her for this good action, and that Madeleine would be the guardian angel of the house. The day of the little orphan's arrival, M. Fauvel invested for her ten thousand francs, which he presented to Madeleine as her dowry. The banker amused himself by increasing these ten thousand francs in the most marvellous ways. He, who

never ventured upon a rash speculation with his own money, always invested his niece's in the most hazardous schemes, and was always so successful that, at the end of fifteen years, the ten thousand francs had become half a million. People were right when they said that the Fauvel family were to be envied. Time had dulled Valentine's remorse and anxiety. In the genial atmosphere of a happy home, she had almost found forgetfulness and a peaceful conscience. She had suffered so much at being compelled to deceive André, that she hoped she was now at quits with fate. She began to look forward to the future, and her youth seemed but buried in an impenetrable mist, the memory of a painful dream.

Yes, she believed herself saved, when, one rainy day in November, during an absence of her husband's, who had gone into the provinces on business, one of the servants brought her a letter, which had been left by a stranger, who refused to give his name. Without the faintest presentiment of evil, she carelessly broke the seal, and read :

“MADAME,—Would it be relying too much upon the memories of the past to hope for half an hour of your time ? To-morrow, between two and three, I will do myself the honor of calling upon you.—MARQUIS DE CLAMERAN.”

Fortunately, Madame Fauvel was alone. Trembling like a leaf, she read the letter over and over again, as if to convince herself that she was not the victim of a horrible hallucination. Half a dozen times, with a sort of terror, she whispered that name once so dear—Clamcran ! spelling it aloud as if it were a strange name which she could not pronounce. And the eight letters forming the name seemed to shine like the lightning which precedes the thunderbolt. Ah ! she had hoped and believed that the fatal past was atoned for, and buried in oblivion ; and now it suddenly stood before her, pitiless and threatening. Poor woman ! as if all human will could prevent what was fated to be ! It was in this hour of security, when she imagined herself pardoned, that the storm was to burst upon the fragile edifice of her happiness, and destroy her every hope. A long time passed before she could collect her scattered thoughts sufficiently to reflect upon a course of action. Then she began to think she was foolish to be so

frightened. This letter was written by Gaston, of course, therefore she need feel no apprehension. Gaston had returned to France, and wished to see her. She could understand this desire, and she knew too well this man, upon whom she had lavished her young affection, to attribute any bad motives to his visit. He would come; and finding her the wife of another, the mother of a family, they would exchange thoughts of the past, perhaps a few regrets; she would restore the jewels which she had faithfully kept for him, and—that would be all. But one distressing doubt beset her agitated mind. Should she conceal from Gaston the birth of his son? To confess was to expose herself to many dangers. It was placing herself at the mercy of a man—a loyal, honorable man, to be sure—confiding to him not only her own honor and happiness, but the honor of her husband and her sons. Still, silence would be a crime. After abandoning her child, and depriving him of a mother's care and affection, she would rob him of his father's name and fortune.

She was still undecided, when the servant announced dinner. But she had not the courage to meet the glances of her sons. She sent word that she was not well, and would not be down to dinner. For the first time in her life she rejoiced at her husband's absence. Madeleine came hurrying into her aunt's room to see what was the matter; but Valentine dismissed her, saying she would try to sleep off her indisposition. She wished to be alone in her trouble, and her mind tried to imagine what the morrow would bring forth. This dreaded morrow soon came. She counted the hours until two o'clock; then she counted the minutes. At half-past two the servant announced: "Monsieur the Marquis de Clameran."

Madame Fauvel had promised herself to be calm, even cold. During a long, sleepless night, she had mentally arranged beforehand every detail of this painful meeting. She had even decided upon what she should say. She would reply this, and ask that. But, at the dreaded moment, her strength gave way; a frightful emotion fixed her to her seat; she could neither speak nor think. He, however, bowed respectfully, and remained waiting in the middle of the room. He appeared about fifty years of age, with iron-gray hair and mustache, and a cold, severe cast of countenance; his expression was one of haughty sever-

ity as he stood there in his full suit of black. The agitated woman tried to discover in his face some traces of the man whom she had so madly loved, who had pressed her to his heart—the father of her son; and she was surprised to find in the person before her no resemblance to the youth whose memory had haunted her life—no, nothing. At length, as he continued to remain motionless, she faintly murmured: “Gaston!”

But he, shaking his head, replied: “I am not Gaston, madame; my brother succumbed to the misery and suffering of exile. I am Louis de Clameran.”

What! it was not Gaston, then, who had written to her—it was not Gaston who stood before her? She trembled with terror; her head whirled, and her eyes grew dim. It was not he! And her voice alone, when she called him “Gaston,” betrayed her. What, then, could this man want—this brother in whom Gaston had never cared to confide? A thousand probabilities, each one more terrible than the other, flashed across her brain. Yet she succeeded in overcoming her weakness, so that Louis scarcely perceived it. The fearful strangeness of her situation, the very imminence of her peril, inspired her mind with extraordinary lucidness.

Pointing to a chair, she said to Louis with affected indifference: “Will you be kind enough, then, sir, to explain the object of this most unexpected visit?”

The marquis, seeming not to notice this sudden change of manner, took a seat without removing his eyes from Madame Fauvel’s face. “First of all, madame,” he began, “I must ask if we can be overheard by any one?”

“Why this question? You can have nothing to say to me that my husband and children should not hear.”

Louis shrugged his shoulders, and said: “Be good enough to answer me, madame; not for my sake, but for your own.”

“Speak, then, sir, you will not be heard.”

In spite of this assurance, the marquis drew his chair close to the sofa where Madame Fauvel sat, so as to speak in a very low tone, as if almost afraid to hear his own voice. “As I told you, madame,” he resumed, “Gaston is dead; and it was I who closed his eyes, and received his last wishes. Do you understand?”

The poor woman understood only too well, but was

racking her brain to discover what could be the purpose of this fatal visit. Perhaps it was only to claim Gaston's jewels.

"It is unnecessary to recall," continued Louis, "the painful circumstances which blasted my brother's life. However happy your own lot has been, you cannot entirely have forgotten that friend of your youth who, unhesitatingly, sacrificed himself in defence of your honor."

Not a muscle of Madame Fauvel's face moved; she appeared to be trying to recall the circumstances to which Louis alluded.

"Have you forgotten, madame?" he asked with bitterness. "Then I must try and explain myself more clearly. A long, long time ago you loved my unfortunate brother."

"Sir!"

"Ah, it is useless to deny it, madame. I told you that Gaston confided everything to me—*everything*," he added significantly.

But Madame Fauvel was not frightened by this information. This "everything" could not be of any importance, for Gaston had gone abroad in total ignorance of her secret. She rose, and said with an apparent assurance she was far from feeling: "You forget, sir, that you are speaking to a woman who is now advanced in life, who is married, and who is the mother of a family. If your brother loved me, it was his affair, and not yours. If, young and ignorant, I was led into imprudence, it is not your place to remind me of it. He would not have done so. This past which you evoke I buried in oblivion twenty years ago."

"Then you have forgotten all that happened?"

"Absolutely all."

"Even your child, madame?"

This question, accompanied by one of those looks which penetrate the innermost recesses of the soul, fell upon Madame Fauvel like a thunder-bolt. She dropped tremblingly into her seat, murmuring: "He knows! How did he discover it?" Had her own happiness alone been at stake, she would have instantly thrown herself upon De Clameran's mercy. But she had her family to defend, and the consciousness of this gave her strength to resist him. "Do you wish to insult me, sir?" she asked.

"It is true, then, you have forgotten Valentin-Raoul?"

She saw that this man did indeed know all. How? It

little mattered. He certainly knew ; but she determined to deny everything, even in the face of the most positive proofs, if he should produce them. For an instant she had an idea of ordering the Marquis De Clameran to leave the house ; but prudence stayed her. She thought it best to find out what he was driving at. "Well," she asked, with a forced laugh, "what is it you want?"

"Listen, madame. Two years ago the vicissitudes of exile took my brother to London. There, at the house of a friend, he met a young man bearing the name of Raoul. Gaston was so struck by the youth's appearance and intelligence, that he inquired who he was, and discovered that beyond a doubt this boy was his son, and your son, madame."

"This is quite a romance you are relating."

"Yes, madame, a romance, the denouement of which is in your hands. The countess, your mother, certainly used every precaution to conceal your secret ; but the best-laid plans always have some weak point. After your departure, one of your mother's London friends came to the village where you had been staying. This lady pronounced your real name before the farmer's wife who was bringing up the child. Thus, everything was revealed. My brother wished for proofs, he procured the most positive, the most unobjectionable."

He stopped and closely watched Madame Fauvel's face to see the effect of his words. To his astonishment she betrayed not the slightest agitation or alarm ; she was smiling.

"Well, what next?" she asked carelessly.

"Then, madame, Gaston acknowledged the child. But the De Clamerans are poor ; my brother died in a lodging-house ; and I have only an annuity of twelve hundred francs to live upon. What is to become of Raoul, alone without relations or friends to assist him? This anxiety embittered my brother's last moments."

"Really, sir—"

"I will conclude," interrupted Louis. "It was then that Gaston opened his heart to me. He told me to seek you. 'Valentine,' said he, 'Valentine will remember ; she will not allow our son to want for everything, even bread ; she is wealthy, very wealthy ; I die in peace.'"

Madame Fauvel rose from her seat, evidently with the

intention of dismissing her visitor. "You must confess, sir," she said, "that I have shown great patience."

This imperturbable assurance amazed Louis so much that he did not reply.

"I do not deny," she continued, "that I at one time possessed the confidence of M. Gaston de Clameran. I will prove it to you by restoring to you your mother's jewels, with which he entrusted me at the time of his departure." While speaking she took from beneath the sofa-cushion the bag of jewels, and handed it to Louis. "Here they are, sir," she added; "permit me to express my surprise that your brother never asked me for them."

Had he been less master of himself, Louis would have shown how great was his surprise. "I was told," he said sharply, "not to mention this matter."

Madame Fauvel, without making any reply, laid her hand on the bell-rope. "You will allow me, sir," she said, "to end this interview, which was only granted for the purpose of placing in your hands these precious jewels."

Thus dismissed, M. de Clameran was obliged to take his leave without attaining his object. "As you will, madame," he said; "I leave you; but before doing so I must tell you the rest of my brother's dying injunctions: 'If Valentine disregards the past, and refuses to provide for our son, I enjoin it upon you to compel her to do her duty.' Meditate upon these words, madame, for what I have sworn to do, upon my honor, shall be done!"

At last Madame Fauvel was alone. She could give vent to her despair. Exhausted by her efforts at self-restraint during De Clameran's presence, she felt weary and crushed in body and spirit. She had scarcely strength to drag herself up to her bed-chamber, and to lock the door. Now there was no room for doubt; her fears had become realities. She could fathom the abyss into which she was about to be hurled, and knew that in her fall she would drag her family with her. God alone, in this hour of danger, could help her, could save her from destruction. She prayed. "O God," she cried, "punish me, for I am very guilty, and I will evermore adore Thy chastising hand. Punish me, for I have been a bad daughter, an unworthy mother, and a perfidious wife. Smite me, O God, and only me! In Thy just anger spare the innocent; have pity on my husband and my children!" What were her

twenty years of happiness compared to this hour of misery? A bitter remorse; nothing more. Ah, why did she listen to her mother? Why did she hold her tongue? Hope had fled forever. This man who had left her presence with a threat upon his lips would return; she knew it well. What answer could she give him? To-day she had succeeded in subduing her heart and conscience; would she again have the strength to master her feelings? She well knew that her calmness and courage were entirely due to De Clameran's unskilfulness. Why did he not use entreaties instead of threats! When Louis spoke of Raoul, she could scarcely conceal her emotion; her maternal heart yearned towards the innocent child who was expiating his mother's faults. A chill of horror passed over her at the idea of his enduring the pangs of hunger. Her child wanting bread, when she, his mother, was rolling in wealth! Ah, why could she not lay all her possessions at his feet? With what delight would she undergo the greatest privations for his sake! If she could but send him enough money to support him comfortably! But no; she could not take this step without compromising herself and her family. Prudence forbade her acceptance of Louis de Clameran's intervention. To confide in him, was placing herself, and all she held dear, at his mercy, and this inspired her with instinctive terror. Then she began to ask herself if he had really spoken the truth. In thinking over Louis's story, it seemed improbable and disconnected. If Gaston had been living in Paris, in the poverty described by his brother, why had he not demanded of the married woman the deposit entrusted to the maiden? Why, when anxious about their child's future, had he not come to her, since he believed her to be so rich that, on his deathbed, it was she he relied upon. A thousand vague apprehensions beset her mind; she felt suspicion and distrust of every one and everything. She was aware that a decisive step would bind her forever, and then, what would not be exacted of her? For a moment she thought of throwing herself at her husband's feet and confessing all. Unfortunately, she thrust aside this means of salvation. She pictured to herself the mortification and sorrow that her noble-hearted husband would suffer upon discovering, after a lapse of twenty years, how shamefully he had been deceived. Having been deceived from

the very first, would he not believe that it had been so ever since? Would he believe in her fidelity as a wife, when he discovered her perfidy as a young girl? She understood André well enough to know that he would say nothing, and would use every means to conceal the scandal. But his domestic happiness would be gone forever. He would forsake his home; his sons would shun her presence, and every family bond would be severed. She thought of ending her doubts by suicide; but her death would not silence her implacable enemy, who, not able to disgrace her while alive would dishonor her memory.

Fortunately, the banker was still absent; and, during the two days succeeding Louis's visit, Madame Fauvel was able to keep her room under pretence of illness. But Madeleine, with her feminine instinct, saw that her aunt was troubled by something worse than the nervous attack for which the physician was prescribing all sorts of remedies. She noticed, too, that this sudden illness seemed to have been caused by the visit of a stern-looking stranger, who had been closeted for a long time with her aunt. Madeleine felt so sure that something was wrong, that, on the second day, seeing Madame Fauvel more anxious still, she ventured to say: "What makes you so sad, dear aunt? Tell me, shall I ask our good priest to come and see you?" With a sharpness foreign to her nature, which was gentleness itself, Madame Fauvel refused to listen to her niece's suggestion. What Louis calculated upon happened. After long reflection, not seeing any issue to her deplorable situation, Madame Fauvel little by little determined to yield. By consenting to all, she had a chance of saving everything. She well knew that to act thus was to prepare a life of torture for herself; but she alone would be the victim, and, at any rate, she would be gaining time. In the mean time, M. Fauvel had returned home, and Valentine resumed her accustomed ways. But she was no longer the happy mother and devoted wife, whose smiling presence was wont to fill the house with sunshine and comfort. She was beset by the most frightful anxieties. Hearing nothing of De Clameran, she expected to see him appear, so to say, at any moment; trembling at every ring of the bell, turning pale whenever the door opened, and not daring to leave the house, for fear he should come during her absence. The condemned man, who, each

morning on awaking, asks himself, "Is it for to-day?" does not suffer more dreadful agony. De Clameran did not come; he wrote, or rather, as he was too prudent to furnish arms which could be used against himself, he had a note written, which Madame Fauvel alone might understand, in which he said that, being ill, he begged she would excuse his being obliged to make an appointment with her for the next day at the Hotel du Louvre. The letter was almost a relief to Madame Fauvel. Anything was preferable to suspense. She was ready to consent to everything. She burned the letter, and said to herself: "I will go."

The next day towards the appointed time, she dressed herself in the plainest of her black dresses, in the bonnet which concealed her face the most, placed a thick veil in her pocket, and started forth. It was not until she found herself a considerable distance from her home that she ventured to hail a cab, which soon set her down at the Hotel du Louvre. Here her uneasiness increased. Her circle of acquaintances being large, she was in terror of being recognized. What would her friends think, if they saw her at the Hotel du Louvre dressed as she was? Any one would naturally suspect an intrigue, a rendezvous; and her character would be ruined forever. This was the first time since her marriage that she had had occasion for mystery; and, in her inexperience, her efforts to escape notice were in every way calculated to attract attention. The concierge said that the Marquis de Clameran's room was on the third floor. She hurried up the stairs, glad to escape the scrutinizing glances which she imagined were fixed upon her; but, in spite of the minute directions given by the concierge, she lost her way in the immense hotel, and for a long time wandered about the interminable corridors. Finally, she found a door bearing the number sought,—317. She stood leaning against the wall with her hand pressed to her throbbing heart, which seemed ready to burst. Now, at the moment of risking this decisive step, she felt paralyzed with fright. The sight of a stranger traversing the corridor ended her hesitations. With a trembling hand she knocked at the door.

"Come in," said a voice.

She entered. But it was not the Marquis de Clameran who stood in the middle of the room, it was quite a young man, almost a youth, who looked at her with a singular ex-

pression. "Madame Fauvel thought that she had mistaken the room. "Excuse me, sir," she said, blushing deeply: "I thought that this was the Marquis de Clameran's room."

"It is his room, madame," replied the young man; then seeing she was silent, and about to leave, he added: "I presume I have the honor of addressing Madame Fauvel?"

She nodded affirmatively, shuddering at the sound of her own name, and frightened at this proof of De Clameran's betrayal of her secret to a stranger. With visible anxiety she awaited an explanation.

"Fear nothing, madame," resumed the young man: "you are as safe here as if you were in your own drawing-room. M. de Clameran desired me to make his excuses; you will not see him."

"But, sir, from an urgent letter sent by him yesterday, I was led to suppose—I inferred—"

"When he wrote to you, madame, he had projects in view which he has since renounced forever."

Madame Fauvel was too surprised, too agitated to think clearly. Beyond the present she could see nothing. "Do you mean," she asked with distrust, "that he has changed his intentions?"

The young man's face was expressive of sad compassion, as if he shared the unhappy woman's sufferings. "The marquis has renounced," he said in a melancholy tone, "what he wrongly considered a sacred duty. Believe me, he hesitated a long time before he could decide to apply to you on a subject painful to you both. You repelled him, you were obliged to refuse to hear him. He knew not what imperious reasons dictated your conduct. Blinded by unjust anger, he swore to obtain by threats what you refused to give voluntarily. Resolved to attack your domestic happiness, he had collected overwhelming proofs against you. Pardon him: an oath given to his dying brother bound him." He took from the mantelpiece a bundle of papers through which he glanced as he continued speaking: "These proofs that cannot be denied, I now hold in my hand. This is the certificate of the Rev. Mr. Sedley; this the declaration of Mrs. Dobbin, the farmer's wife; and these others are the statements of the physician and of several persons who were acquainted with Madame

de La Verberie during her stay near London. Not a single link is missing. I had great difficulty in getting these papers away from M. de Clameran. Perhaps he had a suspicion of my intentions. This, madame, is what I intended doing with these proofs."

With a rapid motion he threw the bundle of papers into the fire, where they blazed up, and, in a moment, nothing remained of them but a little heap of ashes. "All is now destroyed, madame," he resumed, his eyes sparkling with the most generous resolutions. "The past, if you desire it, is as completely annihilated as those papers. If any one, hereafter, dares accuse you of having had a son before your marriage, treat him as a vile calumniator. There are no longer any proofs; you are free."

Madame Fauvel began to understand the sense of this scene—the truth dawned upon her bewildered mind. This noble youth, who protected her from De Clameran's anger, who restored her peace of mind and the exercise of her own free will, by destroying all proofs of her past, who in fact saved her, was, must be, the child whom she had abandoned—Valentin-Raoul. At this moment she forgot everything. Maternal tenderness, so long restrained, now welled up and overflowed as, in a scarcely audible voice, she murmured: "Raoul!"

At this name, uttered in so thrilling a tone, the young man staggered, as if overcome by an un hoped-for happiness. "Yes, Raoul," he cried; "Raoul, who would rather die a thousand times than cause his mother the slightest pain; Raoul, who would shed his life's blood to spare her one tear."

She made no attempt to struggle nor resist; all her body trembled as she recognized her first-born. She opened her arms, and Raoul sprang into them, saying, in a choked voice: "Mother! my dear mother! Bless you for this first kiss!"

Alas! this was the sad truth. This dear son she had never seen before. He had been taken from her, despite her prayers and tears, without a mother's embrace; and this kiss she had just given him was indeed the first. But joy so great, following upon so much anguish, was more than the excited mother could bear; she sank back in her chair almost fainting, and, with a sort of meditative rapture, gazed in an eager way upon her long-lost son, who was now

kneeling at her feet. With her hand she stroked his soft curls; she admired his white forehead, pure as a young girl's, and his large, trembling eyes; and she hungered after his red lips.

"O mother!" he said; "words cannot describe my feelings when I heard that my uncle had dared to threaten you. He threaten you! Ah! when my father told him to apply to you, he was no longer in his right mind. I have known you for a long, long time. Often have my father and I hovered around your happy home to catch a glimpse of you through the window. When you passed by in your carriage, he would say to me: 'There is your mother, Raoul!' To look upon you was our greatest joy. When we knew you were going to a ball, we would wait near the door to see you enter, beautiful and adorned. How often, in the depth of winter, have I raced with your fast horses, to admire you till the last moment!"

Tears—the sweetest tears she had ever shed—coursed down Madame Fauvel's cheeks, as she listened to the musical tones of Raoul's voice. This voice was so like Gaston's, that it recalled to her the fresh and adorable sensations of her youth. She seemed to live over again those early stolen meetings—to feel once more the beatings of her virgin heart. It seemed as though nothing had happened since Gaston folded her in his fond embrace. André, her two sons, Madeleine—all were forgotten in this new-found affection.

Raoul went on to say: "Only yesterday I learnt that my uncle had been to demand for me a few crumbs of your wealth. Why did he take such a step? I am poor, it is true—very poor; but I am too familiar with poverty to be frightened of it. I have a clear brain and willing hands—they will earn me a living. You are very rich, I have been told. What is that to me? Keep all your fortune, my darling mother; but give me a corner in your heart. Let me love you. Promise me that this first kiss shall not be the last. No one will ever know; be not afraid. I shall be able to hide my happiness."

And Madame Fauvel had dreaded this son! Ah! how bitterly did she now reproach herself for not having sooner flown to meet him. She questioned him regarding the past; she wished to know how he had lived—what he had been doing. He replied that he had nothing to conceal;

his existence had been that of every poor man's child. The farmer's wife who had brought him up had always treated him with affection. She had even given him an education superior to his condition in life, and rather beyond her means, because she thought him so handsome and intelligent. When about sixteen years of age, she procured him a situation in a banking-house; and he was commencing to earn his own living, when one day a stranger came to him, and said: "I am your father," and took him away with him. Since then nothing was wanting to his happiness, save a mother's tenderness. He had suffered but one great sorrow, and that was the day when Gaston de Clameran—his father—had died in his arms. "But now," he said, "all is forgotten. Have I been unhappy? I no longer know, since I see you—since I love you."

Madame Fauvel was oblivious of the lapse of time, but fortunately Raoul was on the watch. "Why, it is seven o'clock!" he suddenly exclaimed. This exclamation brought Madame Fauvel abruptly back to the reality. Seven o'clock! What would her family think of this long absence?

"Shall I see you again, mother?" asked Raoul, as they were about to separate.

"O yes!" she replied, fondly; "yes, often, every day, to-morrow."

But now, for the first time since her marriage, Madame Fauvel perceived that she was not mistress of her actions. Never before had she had occasion to wish for uncontrolled liberty. She left her heart and soul behind her in the room of the Hotel du Louvre, where she had just found her son. She was compelled to leave him, to undergo the intolerable agony of composing her face to conceal this great happiness, which had changed her whole life and being. Having some difficulty in procuring a cab, it was more than half-past seven when she reached the Rue de Provence, where she found the family waiting dinner for her. She thought her husband silly, and even vulgar, when he joked her upon being late. So strange are the sudden effects of a new passion, that she regarded almost with contempt this unbounded confidence he reposed in her. And she, ordinarily so timorous, replied to his jest with imperturbable calmness, almost without an effort. So intox-

icating had been her sensations while with Raoul, that in her joy she was incapable of desiring anything else—of dreaming of aught save the renewal of those delightful emotions. No longer was she a devoted wife—an incomparable mother. She scarcely thought of her two sons. They had always been happy and beloved. They had a father—they were rich; whilst the other, the other! oh, how much reparation was owing to him! In her blindness, she almost regarded her family as responsible for Raoul's sufferings. Her folly was complete. No remorse for the past, no apprehensions for the future, disturbed her conscience. To her the future was to-morrow; eternity—the sixteen hours which separated her from another interview. To her, Gaston's death seemed to absolve the past as well as the present. But she regretted she was married. Free, she could have consecrated herself exclusively to Raoul. She was rich, but how gladly would she have sacrificed her affluence to enjoy poverty with him! Neither her husband nor sons would ever suspect the thoughts which absorbed her mind; but she dreaded her niece. She imagined that Madeleine looked at her strangely on her return home. Did she suspect something? For several days she had asked embarrassing questions. She must beware of her.

This uneasiness changed the affection which Madame Fauvel had hitherto felt for her adopted daughter into positive dislike. She, so kind and loving, regretted having placed over herself a vigilant spy from whom nothing escaped. She pondered what means she could take to avoid the penetrating watchfulness of a girl who was accustomed to read in her face every thought that crossed her mind. With unspeakable satisfaction she thought of a way which she imagined would please all parties. During the last two years the banker's cashier and protégé, Prosper Bertomy, had been devoted in his attentions to Madeleine. Madame Fauvel decided to do all in her power to hasten matters, so that, Madeleine once married and out of the house, there would be no one to criticize her own movements. That very evening, with a duplicity of which she would have been incapable a few days before, she began to question Madeleine about her sentiments towards Prosper.

"Ah, ah, mademoiselle," she said gayly, "is it thus you

permit yourself to choose a husband without my permission."

"But, aunt! I thought you—"

"Yes, I know; you thought I had suspected the true state of affairs? That is precisely what I had done." Then, in a serious tone, she added: "Therefore, nothing remains but to obtain the consent of Master Prosper. Do you think he will grant it?"

"He! aunt. Ah! if he only dared—"

"Ah, indeed! you seem to know all about it, *mademoiselle*."

Madeleine, blushing and confused, hung her head, and said nothing. Madame Fauvel drew her towards her, and continued in her most affectionate voice: "My dear child, do not be distressed. Is it possible that you, usually so sharp, supposed us to be in ignorance of your secret? Did you think that Prosper would have been so warmly welcomed by your uncle and myself, had we not approved of him in every respect?"

Madeleine threw her arms round her aunt's neck, and murmured: "Oh, thank you, my dear aunt, thank you; you are kind, you love me!"

Madame Fauvel said to herself: "I will make André speak to Prosper, and before two months are over the marriage can take place."

Unfortunately, Madame Fauvel was so engrossed by her new passion, which did not leave her a moment for reflection, that she put off this project. Spending a portion of each day at the Hotel du Louvre with Raoul, she did not cease devoting her thoughts to insuring him an independent fortune and a good position. She had not yet ventured to speak to him on the subject. She imagined that she had discovered in him all his father's noble pride and sensitiveness. She anxiously wondered if he would ever accept the least assistance from her. The Marquis de Clameran quieted her doubts on this point. She had frequently met him since the day on which he had so frightened her, and to her first aversion had succeeded a secret sympathy. She felt kindly towards him for the affection he lavished on her son. If Raoul, with the heedlessness of youth, mocked at the future, Louis, the man of the world, seemed very anxious about his nephew's welfare. So that,

one day, after a few general observations, he approached this serious question.

"The pleasant life my nephew leads is all very well," he commenced, "but would it not be prudent for him to seek some employment? He has no fortune."

"Ah, my dear uncle, do let me enjoy my present happiness. What is the use of any change? What do I want?"

"You want for nothing at present, Raoul; but when your resources are exhausted, and mine too—which will be in a short time—what will become of you?"

"Oh! I will enter the army. All the De Clamerans are born soldiers; and if a war breaks out—"

Madame Fauvel laid her hand upon his lips, and said in a reproachful tone: "Cruel boy! become a soldier? Would you, then, deprive me of the joy of seeing you?"

"No, mother dear; no."

"You see," insisted Louis, "that you must listen to us."

"I am quite willing; but some other time. I will work and earn no end of money."

"How, poor foolish boy? What can you do?"

"Oh! never mind. I don't know now; but set your mind at rest, I will find a way."

Finding it impossible to make this self-sufficient youth listen to reason, Louis and Madame Fauvel, after discussing the matter fully, decided that assistance must be forced upon him. It was difficult, however, to choose a profession; and De Clameran thought it prudent to wait awhile, and study the bent of the young man's mind. In the mean while, it was decided that Madame Fauvel should place funds at the marquis's disposal for Raoul's support. Regarding Gaston's brother in the light of a father to her child, Madame Fauvel soon found him indispensable. She continually wanted to see him, either to consult him concerning some new idea which occurred to her, or to impress upon him some good advice to be given. Thus she was well pleased when one day he requested the honor of being allowed to call upon her at her own house. Nothing was easier than to introduce the Marquis de Clameran to her husband as an old friend of her family; and, after once being admitted, he could soon become an intimate acquaintance. Madame Fauvel soon had reason to congratulate herself upon this arrangement. Unable to continue to go to Raoul every day, and not daring, if she

wrote to him, to receive his replies, she obtained news of him through Louis.

For about a month things went on smoothly, when one day the marquis confessed that Raoul was giving him a great deal of trouble. His hesitating, embarrassed manner frightened Madame Fauvel. She thought something had happened, and that he was trying to break the bad news gently.

"What is the matter?" she asked.

"I am sorry to say," replied De Clameran, "that this young man has inherited all the pride and passions of his ancestors. He is one of those natures who stop at nothing, who find incitement in opposition; and I can think of no way of checking him in his mad career."

"Merciful heaven! what has he been doing?"

"Nothing particularly censurable; nothing irreparable, certainly; but I am afraid of the future. He is still unaware of the liberal allowance which you have placed in my hands for his benefit; he thinks that I support him, and yet he throws away money as if he were the son of a millionaire."

Like all mothers, Madame Fauvel attempted to excuse her son. "Perhaps you are a little severe," she said. "Poor child, he has suffered so much! He has undergone so many privations during his childhood, that this sudden happiness and wealth has turned his head; he seizes on pleasure as a starving man seizes on a piece of bread. Is it so surprising? Ah, only have patience, and he will soon return to the path of duty; he has a good heart."

"He has suffered so much!" was Madame Fauvel's constant excuse for Raoul. This was her invariable reply to M. de Clameran's complaints of his nephew's conduct. And, having once commenced, he was now constant in his accusations against Raoul.

"Nothing restrains his extravagance and dissipation," Louis would say in a mournful voice; "the instant a piece of folly enters his head, it is carried out, no matter at what cost."

But Madame Fauvel saw no reason why her son should be thus harshly judged. "We must remember," she replied in an aggrieved tone, "that from infancy he has been left to his own unguided impulses. The unfortunate boy never had a mother to tend and council him. You

must remember, too, that in his childhood he never knew a father's guidance."

"There is some excuse for him, to be sure ; but nevertheless he must change his present course. Could you not speak seriously to him, madame ? You have more influence over him than I."

She promised, but did not keep her promise. She had so little time to devote to Raoul, that it seemed cruel to spend it in reprimands. Sometimes she would hurry from home for the purpose of following the marquis's advice ; but, the instant she saw Raoul, her courage failed, a pleading look from his soft, dark eyes silenced the rebuke upon her lips, the sound of his voice banished every anxious thought from her mind. But De Clameran was not a man to lose sight of the main object ; he would have no compromise with duty. His brother had bequeathed to him, as a precious trust, his son Raoul ; he regarded himself, he said, as his guardian, and would be held responsible in another world for his welfare. He entreated Madame Fauvel to use her influence, when he found himself powerless in trying to check the heedless youth in his downward career. She ought, for the sake of her child, to see more of him, in fact, every day.

"Alas," the poor woman replied, "that would be my heart's desire. But how can I do it ? Have I the right to ruin myself ? I have other children, for whom I must be careful of my reputation."

This answer appeared to astonish De Clameran. A fortnight before, Madame Fauvel would not have alluded to her other sons. "I will think the matter over," said Louis, "and perhaps when I see you next I shall be able to submit to you a plan which will reconcile everything."

The reflections of a man of so much experience could not be fruitless. He had a relieved, satisfied look, when he called to see Madame Fauvel in the following week. "I think I have solved the problem," he said.

"What problem ?"

"The means of saving Raoul."

He explained himself by saying that as Madame Fauvel could not, without arousing her husband's suspicions, visit Raoul daily, she must receive him at her own house. This proposition shocked Madame Fauvel ; for though she had been imprudent, even culpable, she was the soul of

honor, and naturally shrank from the idea of introducing Raoul into the midst of her family, and seeing him welcomed by her husband, and perhaps become the friend of his sons. Her instinctive sense of justice made her declare that she would never consent to such an infamous step.

"Yes," said the marquis thoughtfully; "but then it is the only chance of saving your child."

But this time, at least, she resisted, and with an indignation and an energy capable of shaking a will less strong than the Marquis de Clameran's. "No," she repeated, "no; I can never consent."

Unhappy woman! little did she know of the pitfalls which stand ever ready to swallow up wanderers from the straight path. Before a week had passed she listened to this project, which at first had filled her with horror, with a willing ear, and even began to devise means for its speedy execution. Yes, after a cruel struggle, she finally yielded to the pressure of De Clameran's politely uttered threats and Raoul's wheedling entreaties.

"But how?" she asked, "upon what pretext can I receive Raoul?"

"It would be the easiest thing in the world," replied De Clameran, "to introduce him as an ordinary acquaintance, as I, myself, have the honor of being. But Raoul must be more than that."

After torturing Madame Fauvel for a long time, and almost driving her out of her mind, he finally revealed his scheme. "We have in our hands," he said, "the solution of the problem. It is an inspiration."

Madame Fauvel eagerly scanned his face as she listened with the pitiable resignation of a martyr.

"Have you not a cousin, a widow lady, who had two daughters, living at St. Remy?" continued Louis.

"Yes, Madame de Lagors."

"Precisely so. What fortune has she?"

"She is poor, sir, very poor."

"And, but for the assistance you render her secretly, she would be thrown upon the charity of the world."

Madame Fauvel was bewildered at finding the marquis so well informed of her private affairs. "How could you have discovered this?" she asked.

"Oh, I know all about this affair, and many others be-

sides. I know, for instance, that your husband knows none of your relatives, and that he is scarcely aware of the existence of your cousin De Lagors. Do you begin to comprehend my plan?"

She understood it slightly, and was asking herself how she could resist it.

"This," continued Louis, "is what I have planned. To-morrow or next day, you will receive a letter from your cousin at St. Remy, telling you that she has sent her son to Paris, and begging you to watch over him. Naturally you show this letter to your husband; and a few days afterwards he warmly welcomes your nephew, Raoul de Lagors, a handsome, rich, attractive young man, who will do everything he can to please him, and who will succeed."

"Never, sir," replied Madame Fauvel, "my cousin is a pious, honorable woman, and nothing would induce her to countenance so shameful a transaction."

The marquis smiled scornfully, and asked: "Who told you that I intended to confide in her?"

"But you would be obliged to do so!"

"You are very simple, madame. The letter which you will receive, and show to your husband, will be dictated by me, and posted at St. Remy by a friend of mine. If I spoke of the obligations under which you have placed your cousin, it was merely to show you that, in case of accident, her own interest would make her serve you. Do you see any other obstacle to this plan, madame?"

Madame Fauvel's eyes flashed with indignation. "Is my will of no account?" she exclaimed. "You seem to have made your arrangements without consulting me at all."

"Excuse me," said the marquis with ironical politeness; "I am sure that you will take the same view of the matter as myself."

"But it is a crime, sir, that you propose—an abominable crime!"

This speech seemed to arouse all the bad passions slumbering in De Clameran's bosom; and his pale face had a fiendish expression as he fiercely replied: "I think we do not quite understand each other. Before you begin to talk about crime, think over your past life. You were not so timid and scrupulous when you gave yourself up to

your lover. It is true that you did not hesitate to refuse to share his exile, when for your sake he had just jeopardized his life by killing two men. You felt no scruples at abandoning your child in London; although rolling in wealth, you never even inquired if this poor waif had bread to eat. You felt no scruples about marrying M. Fauvel. Did you tell your confiding husband of the lines of shame concealed beneath your wreath of orange-blossom? No! All these crimes you indulged in; and, when in Gaston's name I demand reparation, you indignantly refuse! It is too late! You ruined the father; but you shall save the son, or I swear you shall no longer cheat the world of its esteem."

"I will obey you, sir," murmured the trembling, frightened woman.

The following week Raoul, now Raoul de Lagors, was seated at the banker's dinner-table, between Madame Fauvel and Madeleine.

XVII.

It was not without the most acute suffering and self-condemnation that Madame Fauvel submitted to the will of the relentless Marquis de Clameran. She had used every argument and entreaty to soften him; but he merely looked upon her with a triumphant, sneering smile, when she knelt at his feet, and implored him to be merciful. Neither tears nor prayers moved his depraved soul. Disappointed, and almost desperate, she sought the intercession of her son. Raoul was in a state of furious indignation at the sight of his mother's distress, and hastened to demand an apology from De Clameran. But he had reckoned without his host. He soon returned with downcast eyes, and moodily angry at his own powerlessness, declaring that safety demanded a complete surrender to the tyrant. Now only did the wretched woman fully fathom the abyss into which she was being dragged, and clearly see the labyrinth of crime of which she was becoming the victim. And all this suffering was the consequence of a fault, an interview granted to Gaston. Ever since that fatal day she had been vainly struggling against the implacable logic of events. Her life had been spent in trying to overcome the

past, and now it had risen to crush her. The hardest thing of all to do, the act that most wrung her heart, was showing to her husband the forged letter from St. Remy, and saying that she expected soon to see her nephew, a quite young man, and very rich ! But words cannot paint the torture she endured on the evening she introduced Raoul to her family. It was with a smile on his lips that the banker welcomed this nephew, of whom he had never heard before. "It is natural," said he, as he held out his hand, "when one is young and rich, to prefer Paris to St. Remy." Raoul did his utmost to deserve this cordial reception. If his early education had been neglected, and he lacked those delicate refinements of manner and conversation which home influence imparts, his superior tact concealed these defects. He possessed the happy faculty of reading characters, and adapting his conversation to the minds of his listeners. Before a week had gone by, he was a favorite with M. Fauvel, intimate with Abel and Lucien, and inseparable from Prosper Bertomy, the cashier, who then spent all his evenings with the banker's family. Charmed at the favorable impression made by Raoul Madame Fauvel recovered comparative ease of mind, and at times almost congratulated herself upon having obeyed the marquis, and began once more to hope. Alas ! she rejoiced too soon.

Raoul's intimacy with his cousins threw him among a set of rich young men, and as a consequence, instead of reforming, he daily grew more dissipated and reckless. Gambling, racing, expensive suppers, made money slip through his fingers like grains of sand. This proud young man, whose sensitive delicacy not long since made him refuse to accept aught save affection from his mother, now never approached her without demanding large sums of money. At first she gave with pleasure, without stopping to count the cash. But she soon perceived that her generosity, if she did not keep it within bounds, would be her ruin. This rich woman, whose magnificent diamonds, elegant toilets, and superb equipages were the admiration and envy of Paris, knew misery in its bitterest form : that of not being able to gratify the desires of a beloved being. Her husband had never thought of giving her a fixed sum for expenses. The day after their wedding he gave her a key to his secretary, and ever since, she had been in the

habit of freely taking the money necessary for keeping up the establishment, and for her own personal requirements. But the fact of her having always been so modest in her personal expenses, that her husband used to jest her on the subject, and of her having managed the household expenditure in a most judicious manner, she was not able to suddenly dispose of large sums, without giving rise to embarrassing questions. M. Fauvel, the most generous of millionaires, would have delighted to see his wife indulge in any extravagance, no matter how foolish; but he would naturally expect to see traces of the money spent, something to show for it. The banker might suddenly discover that much more than the usual amount of money was used in the house; and, if he should ask the cause of this astonishing outlay, what answer could she give?

In three months, Raoul had squandered a little fortune. In the first place, he was obliged to have bachelor's apartments, prettily furnished. He was in want of everything, just like a shipwrecked sailor. He asked for a horse and brougham, how could she refuse him? Then every day there was some fresh whim to be satisfied.

When she would gently remonstrate, Raoul's beautiful eyes would fill with tears, and in a sad, humble tone he would say: "Alas! I am a child, a poor fool, I ask too much. I forget that I am only the son of poor Valentine, and not of the rich banker's wife!"

This touching repentance wrung her heart. The poor boy had suffered so much that it was her duty to console him, and she would finish by excusing him. She soon discovered that he was jealous and envious of his two brothers—for, after all, they were his brothers—Abel and Lucien.

"You never refuse them anything," he would say; "they were fortunate enough to enter life by the golden gate. Their every wish is gratified; they enjoy wealth, position, home affection, and have a splendid future awaiting them."

"But what is lacking to your happiness, unhappy child?" Madame Fauvel would ask in despair.

"What do I want? apparently nothing, in reality everything. Do I possess anything legitimately? What right have I to your affection, to the comforts and luxuries you heap upon me, to the name I bear? Have I not, so to say, stolen even my life?"

When Raoul talked in this strain, she was ready to do anything, so that he should not be envious of her two other sons. As spring approached, she told him she wished him to spend the summer in the country, near her villa at St. Germain. She expected he would offer some objection. But not at all. The proposal seemed to please him, and a few days after he told her he had rented a little house at Vésinet, and intended having his furniture moved into it.

"Then, just think, dear mother, what a happy summer we will spend together!" he said with beaming eyes.

She was delighted for many reasons, one of which was that the prodigal's expenses would probably diminish. Anxiety as to the exhausted state of her finances made her bold enough to chide him at the dinner-table one day for having lost two thousand francs at the races the day before.

"You are severe, my dear," said M. Fauvel with the carelessness of a rich man. "Mamma De Lagors will pay; mammas were created for the special purpose of paying." And, not observing the effect these words had upon his wife, he turned to Raoul, and added: "Don't worry yourself, my boy; when you want money, come to me, and I will lend you some."

What could Madame Fauvel say? Had she not followed De Clameran's orders, and announced that Raoul was very rich? Why had she been made to tell this unnecessary lie? She all at once perceived the snare which had been laid for her: but now she was caught, and it was too late to struggle. The banker's offer was soon accepted. That same week Raoul went to his uncle, and boldly borrowed ten thousand francs. When Madame Fauvel heard of this piece of audacity, she wrung her hands in despair.

"What can he want with so much money?" she moaned to herself.

For some time De Clameran had kept away from Madame Fauvel's house. She decided to write and ask him to call. She hoped that this energetic, determined man, who was so fully awake to his duties as a guardian, would make Raoul listen to reason. When De Clameran heard what had taken place, his surprise and anger were unbounded. A violent altercation ensued between him and Raoul. But Madame Fauvel's suspicions were aroused: she watched them, and it seemed to her—could it be possible—that their anger was feigned; that, although they

abused and even threatened each other in the bitterest language, their eyes were smiling. She dared not breathe her doubts; but, like a subtle poison which disorganizes everything with which it comes in contact, this new suspicion filled her thoughts, and added to her already intolerable sufferings. Yet she never once thought of blaming Raoul, for she still loved him madly. She accused the marquis of taking advantage of the youthful weaknesses and inexperience of his nephew. She knew that she would have to suffer insolence and extortion from this man who had her completely in his power; but she could not penetrate his motive for acting as he did. He soon acquainted her with it.

One day, after complaining more bitterly than usual of Raoul, and proving to Madame Fauvel that it was impossible for this state of affairs to continue much longer, the marquis declared that he saw but one way of preventing a catastrophe. This was, that he (De Clameran) should marry Madeleine. Madame Fauvel had long ago been prepared for anything his cupidity could attempt. But if she had given up all hope of happiness for herself, if she consented to the sacrifice of her own peace of mind, it was because she thus hoped to insure the security of those dear to her. This unexpected declaration shocked her. "Do you suppose for an instant, sir," she indignantly exclaimed, "that I will consent to any such disgraceful project?"

With a nod, the marquis answered: "Yes."

"What sort of a woman do you think I am, sir? Alas! I was very guilty once, but the punishment now exceeds the fault. And does it become you to be constantly reproaching me with my long-past imprudence? So long as I alone had to suffer, you found me weak and timid; but, now that you attack those I love, I rebel."

"Would it then, madame, be such a very great misfortune for Mademoiselle Madeleine to become the Marchioness de Clameran?"

"My niece, sir, chose, of her own free will, a husband whom she will shortly marry. She loves M. Prosper Bertomy."

The marquis disdainfully shrugged his shoulders. "A school-girl-love affair," said he; "she will forget all about it when you wish her to do so."

"I will never wish it."

"Excuse me," he replied, in the low, suppressed tone of a man trying to control himself; "let us not waste time in these idle discussions. Hitherto you have always commenced by protesting against my proposed plans, and in the end acknowledged the good sense and justness of my arguments. This time, also, you will oblige me by yielding."

"Never," said Madame Fauvel; "never!"

De Clameran paid no attention to this interruption, but went on: "If I insist upon this marriage, it is because it will re-establish your affairs, as well as ours. Of course you see that the allowance you give your son is insufficient for his extravagant style of living. The time approaches when you will have nothing more to give him, and you will no longer be able to conceal from your husband your constant encroachments on the housekeeping money. When that day comes, what is to be done?"

Madame Fauvel shuddered. The dreaded day, of which the marquis spoke, could not be far off.

"Then," he continued, "you will render justice to my wise forethought, and to my good intentions. Mademoiselle Madeleine is rich; her dowry will enable me to supply the deficit, and save you."

"I would rather be ruined than be saved by such means."

"But I will not permit you to ruin us all. Remember, madame, that we are associated in a common cause—Raoul's future welfare."

"Cease your importunities," she said, looking him steadily in the face. "I have made up my mind irrevocably."

"To what?"

"To do everything and anything to escape your shameful persecution. Oh! you need not smile. I shall, if necessary, throw myself at M. Fauvel's feet, and confess everything. He loves me, and, knowing how I have suffered, will forgive me."

"Do you think so?" asked De Clameran, derisively.

"You mean to say that he will be pitiless, and banish me from his roof! So be it; it will only be what I deserve. There is no torture that I cannot bear, after what I have suffered through you."

This inconceivable resistance so upset all the marquis's plans that he lost all constraint, and, dropping the mask

of politeness, appeared in his true character. "Indeed!" he said, in a fierce brutal tone; "so you have decided to confess to your husband! A famous idea! What a pity you did not think of it before! Confessing everything the first day I called on you, you might have been forgiven. Your husband might have pardoned a youthful fault, atoned for by twenty years of irreproachable conduct; for none can deny that you have been a faithful wife and a good mother. But picture the indignation of your trusting husband, when you tell him that this pretended nephew—whom you impose upon his family circle, who sits at his table, who borrows his money—is your illegitimate son! M. Fauvel is, no doubt, an excellent, kind-hearted man; but I scarcely think he will pardon a deception of this nature, which betrays such depravity, duplicity, and audacity."

All that the angry marquis said was horribly true; yet, Madame Fauvel listened unflinchingly.

"Upon my word," he went on, "you must be very much infatuated with this M. Bertomy! Between the honor of your husband's name, and pleasing this love-sick cashier, you refuse to hesitate. Well, I suppose it will console you when M. Fauvel separates from you, and Abel and Lucien avert their faces at your approach, and blush at being your sons—it will be very sweet to be able to say: 'I have made Prosper happy!'"

"Happen what may, I shall do what is right," said Madame Fauvel.

"You shall do what I tell you!" cried De Clameran, threateningly. "Do you suppose that I will allow your sentimentality to blast all my hopes? Your niece's fortune is indispensable to us, and, more than that, I love the fair Madeleine."

The blow once struck, the marquis judged it prudent to await the result. With cool politeness, he added: "I will leave you now, madame, to think the matter over. Believe me, consent to this sacrifice—it will be the last required of you. Think of the honor of your family, and not of your niece's love affairs. I will call in three days for your answer."

"You will come uselessly, sir. I shall tell my husband everything, as soon as he returns."

If Madame Fauvel had not been so agitated herself

she would have detected an expression of alarm upon De Clameran's face. But this uneasiness was only momentary. With a shrug, which meant, "Just as you please," he said: "I think you have sense enough to keep your secret."

He bowed ceremoniously, and left the room, but slammed the door after him with a violence that betrayed the constraint he had imposed upon himself. De Clameran had cause for fear. Madame Fauvel's determination was not feigned. "Yes," she cried, with the enthusiasm of a noble resolution; "yes, I will tell André everything."

She believed herself to be alone, but turned round suddenly at the sound of footsteps, and found herself face to face with Madeleine, who was pale as a statue, and whose eyes were full of tears. "You must obey this man, aunt," she quietly said.

Adjoining the drawing-room were two little card-rooms, shut off only by heavy silk curtains. Madeleine, unknown to her aunt, was sitting in one of the little rooms when the marquis arrived, and had overheard the conversation.

"Good heavens!" cried Madame Fauvel with terror; "do you know—"

"I know everything, aunt."

"And you wish me to sacrifice you to this fiend?"

"I implore you to let me save you."

"You must certainly hate M. de Clameran."

"I hate him, aunt, and despise him. He will always be for me the basest of men; nevertheless I will marry him."

Madame Fauvel was overcome by the magnitude of this devotion. "And what is to become of Prosper, my poor child—Prosper, whom you love?"

Madeleine stifled a sob, and replied in a firm voice: "To-morrow I will break off my engagement with M. Bertomy."

"I will never permit such a wrong," cried Madame Fauvel. "I will not add to my sins by suffering an innocent girl to bear their penalty."

The noble girl sadly shook her head, and replied: "Neither will I suffer dishonor to fall upon this house, which is my home, while I have power to prevent it. Am I not indebted to you for more than life? What would I now be had you not taken pity on me? A factory girl in my native town. You warmly welcomed the poor orphan, and

became a mother to her. Is it not to your husband that I owe the fortune which excites this villain's cupidity? Are not Abel and Lucien brothers to me? And now, when the happiness of us all is at stake, do you suppose I would hesitate? No. I will become the wife of De Clameran."

Then began a struggle of self-sacrifice between Madame Fauvel and her niece, as to which should be the victim; and all the more sublime, because each offered her life to the other, not from any sudden impulse, but deliberately and willingly. But Madeleine was bound to triumph, fired as she was by that holy enthusiasm of sacrifice which makes martyrs.

"I am responsible to none but myself," said she, well knowing this to be the most vulnerable point she could attack; "whilst you, dear aunt, are accountable to your husband and children. Think of my uncle's pain and sorrow if he should ever learn the truth! It would kill him."

The generous girl was right. After having sacrificed her husband to her mother, Madame Fauvel was about to immolate her husband and children for Raoul. As a general thing, a first fault draws many others in its train. As an impalpable snowflake may be the beginning of an avalanche, so an imprudence is often the prelude to a great crime. To false situations there is but one safe issue—truth.

Madame Fauvel's resistance grew weaker and weaker. "But," she faintly argued, "I cannot accept your sacrifice. What sort of a life will you lead with this man?"

"We can hope for the best," replied Madeleine, with a cheerfulness she was far from feeling; "he loves me, he says; perhaps he will be kind to me."

"Ah, if I only knew where to obtain money! It is money that the grasping man wants; money alone will satisfy him."

"Does he not want it for Raoul? Has not Raoul, by his extravagant follies, dug an abyss which must be bridged over by money? If I could only believe M. de Clameran!"

Madame Fauvel looked at her niece with bewildered curiosity. What! this inexperienced girl had weighed the matter in its different lights before deciding upon a surrender; whereas, she, a wife and a mother, had blindly

yielded to the inspirations of her heart! "What do you mean?" she asked.

"I mean this, aunt, that I do not believe that De Clameran has any thought of his nephew's welfare. Once in possession of my fortune, he may leave you and Raoul to your fates. And there is another dreadful suspicion that tortures my mind."

"A suspicion?"

"Yes, and I would reveal it to you, if I dared; if I did not fear that you—"

"Speak!" insisted Madame Fauvel. "Alas! misfortune has given me strength. I can fear nothing worse than what has already happened. I am ready to hear anything."

Madeleine hesitated; she wished to enlighten her credulous aunt, and yet feared to distress her. "I would like to be certain," she said, "that some secret understanding between M. de Clameran and Raoul does not exist, that they are not acting a part agreed upon between them beforehand."

Love is blind and deaf. Madame Fauvel no longer remembered the laughing eyes of the two men, upon the occasion of the pretended quarrel in her presence. She could not, she would not, believe in such hypocrisy. "It is impossible," she said: "the marquis is really indignant and distressed at his nephew's mode of life, and he certainly would never give him any bad advice. As to Raoul, he is vain, trifling, and extravagant; but he has a good heart. Prosperity has turned his head, but he loves me. Ah, if you could see and hear him, when I reproach him for his faults, your suspicions would fly to the winds. When he tearfully promises to be more prudent, he means to keep his word. If he breaks his promises, it is because perfidious friends lead him astray."

Mothers always blame their children's friends. The friend is the guilty one. Madeleine had not the heart to undeceive her aunt. "God grant that what you say may be true," she said; "if so, my marriage will not be useless. We will write to M. de Clameran to-night."

"Why to-night, Madeleine? We need not hurry so. Let us wait a little; something might happen to save us."

These words—this confidence in chance, in a mere nothing—revealed Madame Fauvel's true character, and so

counted for her troubles. Timid, hesitating, easily swayed, she never could come to a firm decision, form a resolution, and abide by it, in spite of all arguments brought to bear against it. In the hour of peril she would always shut her eyes, and trust to chance for a relief which never came. Quite different was Madeleine's character. Beneath her gentle timidity, lay a strong, self-reliant will. Once decided upon a sacrifice, it was to be carried out to the letter; she shut out all deceitful illusions, and walked straight forward without one look back.

"We had better end the matter at once, dear aunt," she said, in a gentle but firm tone. "Believe me, the reality of misfortune is not as painful as its apprehension. You cannot bear the shocks of sorrow, and delusive hopes of happiness, much longer. Do you know what anxiety of mind has done to you? Have you looked in your mirror during the last four months?" She led her aunt up to a looking-glass, and said: "Look at yourself." Madame Fauvel was, indeed, a mere shadow of her former self. She had reached the perfidious age when a woman's beauty, like a full-blown rose fades in a day. Four months of trouble had made her an old woman. Sorrow had stamped its fatal seal upon her brow. Her fair, soft skin was wrinkled, her hair was streaked with silver. "Do you not agree with me," continued Madeleine, pityingly, "that peace of mind is necessary to you? Do you not see that you are a wreck of your former self? Is it not a miracle that M. Fauvel has not noticed this sad change in you?" Madame Fauvel, who flattered herself that she had displayed wonderful dissimulation, shook her head. "Alas! my poor aunt! did I not discover that you had a secret?"

"You, Madeleine?"

"Yes! only I thought—Oh! pardon an unjust suspicion, but I was wicked enough to suppose—" She stopped, too distressed to finish her sentence; then, making a painful effort, she added: "I was afraid that perhaps you loved another man better than my uncle."

Madame Fauvel sobbed aloud. Madeleine's suspicion might be entertained by others. "My reputation is gone," she moaned.

"No, dear aunt, no," exclaimed the young girl, "do

not be alarmed. Have courage : we two can fight now ; we will defend ourselves, we will save ourselves."

The Marquis de Clameran was agreeably surprised that evening by receiving a letter from Madame Fauvel, saying that she consented to everything, but must have a little time to carry out the plan. Madeleine, she said, could not break off her engagement with M. Bertomy in a day. M. Fauvel would make objections, for he had an affection for Prosper, and had tacitly approved of the match. It would be wiser to leave to time the smoothing away of certain obstacles which a sudden attack might render insurmountable. A line from Madeleine, at the bottom of her letter, assured him of her consent.

Poor girl ! she did not spare herself. The next day she took Prosper aside, and forced from him the fatal promise to shun her in the future, and to take upon himself the responsibility of breaking their engagement. He implored Madeleine to at least explain the reason of this banishment, which destroyed all his hopes of happiness. She simply replied that her peace of mind and honor depended upon his obedience. He left her sick at heart. As he went out of the house, the marquis entered. Yes, he had the audacity to come in person, to tell Madame Fauvel that, now he had the promise of herself and Madeleine, he would consent to wait awhile. He himself saw the necessity of patience, knowing that he was not liked by the banker. Having the aunt and niece in his power, he was certain of success. He said to himself that the moment would come when a deficit impossible to be replaced would force them to hasten the wedding. And Raoul did all he could to bring matters to a crisis. Madame Fauvel went sooner than usual to her country-seat, and Raoul at once moved into his house at Vésinet. But living in the country did not lessen his expenses. Gradually he laid aside all hypocrisy, and now only came to see his mother when he wanted money ; and his demands were frequent and more exorbitant each time. As for the marquis, he prudently absented himself, awaiting the propitious moment. And it was quite by chance that three weeks later, meeting the banker at a friend's, he was invited to dinner the next day.

Twenty people were seated at the table ; and as the desert was being served, the banker suddenly turned to

De Clameran and said : " I have a question to ask you, marquis. Have you any relatives bearing your name ? "

" None that I know of, sir."

" I am surprised. About a week ago, I became acquainted with another Marquis de Clameran."

Although so hardened by crime, impudent enough to deny anything, De Clameran was taken aback and turned pale. " Oh, indeed ! That is strange. A De Clameran may exist ; but I cannot understand the title of marquis."

M. Fauvel was not sorry to have the opportunity of annoying a guest whose aristocratic pretensions had often piqued him. " Marquis or not," he replied, " the De Clameran in question seems to be able to do honor to the title."

" Is he rich ? "

" I have reason to suppose that he is very wealthy. I have been authorized to collect for him four hundred thousand francs."

De Clameran had a wonderful faculty of self-control ; he had so schooled himself that his face never betrayed what was passing in his mind. But this news was so startling, so strange, so pregnant of danger, that his usual assurance deserted him. He detected a peculiar look of irony in the banker's eye. The only persons who noticed this sudden change in the marquis's manner were Madeleine and her aunt. They saw him turn pale, and exchange a meaning look with Raoul.

" Then I suppose this new marquis is a merchant," said De Clameran, after a moment's pause.

" You ask too much. All that I know is, that four hundred thousand francs are to be deposited to his account by some ship-owners of Havre, after the sale of the cargo of a Brazilian ship."

" Then he comes from Brazil ? "

" I do not know, but I can, if you like, give you his Christian name."

" I would be obliged."

M. Fauvel rose from the table, and brought from the next room a memorandum-book, and began to read over the names written in it.

" Wait a moment," he said : " let me see—the 22d, no, it was later than that. Ah, here it is : De Clameran, Gaston. His name is Gaston,"

But this time Louis betrayed no emotion or alarm ; he had had sufficient time to recover his self-possession, and nothing could now throw him off his guard. "Gaston?" he queried carelessly. "I know who he is now. He must be the son of my father's sister, whose husband lived at Havana. I suppose, upon his return to France, he must have taken his mother's name, which is more sonorous than his father's, that being, if I recollect aright, Moiroi or Boiroi."

The banker laid down his memorandum-book, and, resuming his seat, said: "Boiroi or De Clameran, I hope to have the pleasure of inviting you to dine with him before long. Of the four hundred thousand francs which I was ordered to collect for him, he only wishes to draw one hundred, and tells me to keep the rest on current account. I judge from this, that he intends coming to Paris."

"I shall be delighted to make his acquaintance."

De Clameran broached another topic, and seemed to have entirely forgotten the news told him by the banker. Although apparently engrossed in the conversation at the table, he closely watched Madame Fauvel and her niece. He saw that they were unable to conceal their agitation, and stealthily exchanged significant looks. Evidently the same terrible idea had crossed their minds. Madeline seemed more nervous and startled than her aunt. When M. Fauvel uttered Gaston's name, she saw Raoul begin to draw back his chair and glance in a frightened manner towards the window, like a detected thief looking for means of escape. Raoul, less experienced than his uncle, was thoroughly discountenanced. He, the original talker, the lion of a dinner-party, never at a loss for some witty speech, was now perfectly dumb ; he sat anxiously watching Louis. At last the dinner ended, and as the guests passed into the drawing-rooms, De Clameran and Raoul managed to remain last in the dining-room. When they were alone, they no longer attempted to conceal their anxiety.

"It is he!" said Raoul.

"I have no doubt of it."

"Then all is lost ; we had better make our escape."

But a bold adventurer like De Clameran had no idea of giving up the ship till forced to do so. "Who knows what may happen?" he asked thoughtfully. "There is hope yet. Why did not that muddle-headed banker tell

us where this De Clameran is to be found?" Here he uttered a joyful exclamation. He saw M. Fauvel's memorandum-book lying on the side-board. "Watch!" he said to Raoul.

Seizing the note-book, he hurriedly turned over the leaves, and, in an undertone, read: "Gaston, Marquis de Clameran, Oloron, Lower Pyrenees."

"Well, does finding out his address assist us?" inquired Raoul eagerly.

"It may save us: that is all. Let us return to the drawing-room; our absence might be observed. Exert yourself to appear unconcerned and gay. You almost betrayed us once by your agitation."

"The two women suspect something."

"Well, suppose they do?"

"It is not safe for us here."

"Were you any better in London? Don't be so easily frightened. I am going to plant my batteries."

They joined the other guests. But, if their conversation had not been overheard, their movements had been watched. Madeleine had come on tip-toe, and, looking through the half-open door, had seen De Clameran consulting her uncle's note-book. But what benefit would she derive from this proof of the marquis's anxiety? She no longer doubted the villany of the man to whom she had promised her hand. As he had said to Raoul, neither Madeleine nor her aunt could escape him. Two hours later, De Clameran was on the road to Vésinet with Raoul, explaining to him his plans.

"It is he, and no mistake," he said. "But we are too easily alarmed, my fine nephew."

"Nonsense! the banker is expecting him; he may be among us to-morrow."

"Don't be an idiot!" interrupted De Clameran. "Does he know that Fauvel is Valentine's husband? That is what we must find out. If he knows that little fact, we must take to our heels; if he is ignorant of it, our case is not desperate."

"How can we find out?"

"By simply going and asking him."

"That is a brilliant idea," said Raoul, admiringly; "but dangerous."

"It is not as dangerous as not doing it. And, as to run-

ning away at the first suspicion of alarm, it would be downright imbecility."

"And who will go and see him?"

"I will!"

"Oh, oh, oh!" exclaimed Raoul in three different tones. De Clameran's audacity confounded him. "But what am I to do?" he inquired.

"You will oblige me by remaining here. At the least sign of danger, I will send you a telegram, and then you must make off."

As they parted at Raoul's door, De Clameran said: "It is then understood you will remain here. But mind, so long as my absence lasts, become once more the best of sons. Set yourself against me, calumniate me if you can. But no nonsense. No demands for money. So now, good-by! To-morrow night I shall be at Oloron and shall have seen this De Clameran."

XVIII.

AFTER leaving Valentine de La Verberie, Gaston underwent great peril and difficulty in effecting his escape. But for the experienced and faithful Menoul, he never would have succeeded in embarking. Having left his mother's jewels with Valentine, his sole fortune consisted of not quite a thousand francs; and it is not with a paltry sum like that that a fugitive who has just killed two men can pay for his passage on board a ship. But Menoul was a man of experience. While Gaston remained concealed in a farm house at Camargue, Menoul went to Marseilles, and the same evening learnt that a three-masted American vessel was in the roadstead, whose commander, Captain Warth, a not over-scrupulous person, would be glad to welcome on board an able-bodied man who would be of assistance to him at sea, and would not trouble himself about his antecedents. After visiting the vessel and taking a glass of rum with the captain, old Menoul returned to Gaston.

"If it was a question of myself, sir," he said, "I should avail myself of the opportunity, but you—"

"What suits you, suits me," interrupted Gaston.

"You see, the fact is, you will be obliged to work very

hard. You will only be a common sailor, you know ! And I must confess that the ship's company is not the most moral one I ever saw. The captain, too, seems a regular swaggering bully."

"I have no choice," said Gaston. "I will go on board at once."

Old Menoul's suspicions were correct. Before Gaston had been on board the "Tom Jones" forty-eight hours, he saw that chance had cast him among a collection of the most depraved bandits and cut-throats. The crew, recruited seemingly anywhere, contained specimens of the rascals of almost every country. But Gaston's mind was undisturbed as to the character of the people with whom his lot was cast for several months. It was only his body that the vessel was carrying to another land. His heart and soul rested in the shady park of La Verberie, beside his beloved Valentine. And what would become of her now, poor child, when he was no longer there to love, console, and defend her? Happily, he had no time for sad reflections. His every moment was occupied in learning the rough apprenticeship of a sailor's life. All his energies were spent in bearing up under the heavy burden of labor allotted to him. This was his salvation. Physical suffering calmed and deadened his mental agony. The few hours relaxation granted him were spent in sleep. At rare intervals, when the weather was calm, and he was relieved from his constant occupation of trimming the sails, he would anxiously question the future. He had sworn that he would return before the end of three years, rich enough to satisfy the exactions of Madame de La Verberie. Would he be able to keep this boastful promise? Though desire has wings, reality crawls upon the ground. Judging from the conversation of his companions, he was not now on the road to the fortune he so much desired. The "Tom Jones" was sailing for Valparaiso, but certainly went in a roundabout way to reach her destination. The real fact was, that Captain Warth proposed visiting the Gulf of Guinea. A friend of his, a black prince, he said, with a loud laugh, was waiting for him at Badagri, to exchange a cargo of "*ebony*" for some pipes of rum, and a hundred flint-lock muskets which were on board. Gaston soon saw that he was serving his apprenticeship on one of the numerous slavers equipped yearly by the free and philanthropic

Americans. Although this discovery filled Gaston with indignation and shame, he was prudent enough to conceal his impressions. His remonstrances, no matter how eloquent, would have made no change in Captain Warth's opinions regarding a traffic which brought him in more than cent. per cent., in spite of the French and English cruisers, the damages, sometimes entire loss of cargoes, and many other risks. The crew had a certain respect for Gaston when the story of his having killed two men, as related by Menoul to the captain, transpired. To have given vent to his feelings would have incurred the enmity of the whole of his shipmates, without bettering his own situation. He therefore kept quiet, but swore mentally, that he would desert on the first opportunity. This opportunity, like everything impatiently longed for, came not. By the end of three months Captain Warth found Gaston indispensable. Seeing him so intelligent he took a fancy to him, he liked to have him at his own table, he listened to his conversation with pleasure, and was glad of his company in a game of cards. The mate of the ship dying, Gaston was chosen to replace him. In this capacity he made two successive voyages to Guinea, bringing back a thousand blacks, whom he superintended during a trip of fifteen hundred leagues, and finally landed clandestinely on the coast of Brazil. When Gaston had been about three years on board, the "Tom Jones" put into Rio Janeiro. He now had an opportunity of leaving the captain, who was after all a worthy man, and never would have engaged in the diabolical traffic of human beings, but for his little daughter's sake, his little Mary, an angel, whose dowry he wished to make a magnificent one. Gaston had saved twelve thousand francs out of his share of the profits, when he landed in Brazil. As a proof that the slave trade was repugnant to his nature he left the slaver the moment he possessed a little capital with which to enter some honest business. But he was no longer the high-minded, pure-hearted Gaston, who had been so beloved by the little fairy of La Verberie. It is useless to deny that evil examples are pernicious to morals. The most upright characters are unconsciously influenced by bad surroundings. As the exposure to rain, sun, and sea-air first darkened and then hardened his skin, so did wicked associates first shock and then destroy the refinement and purity of Gaston's mind,

His heart had become as hard and coarse as his sailor hands. He still remembered Valentine, and sighed for her presence; but though she was still the most beloved, she was no longer the one woman in the world to him. However, the three years, after which he had pledged himself to return, had passed; perhaps Valentine was expecting him. Before deciding on any definite project, he wrote to an intimate friend at Beaucaire to learn what had happened during his long absence. He also wrote to his father, to whom he had already sent several letters, whenever he had an opportunity of doing so. At the end of a year, he received his friend's reply. It told him that his father was dead, that his brother had left France, that Valentine was married, and, finally, that he, Gaston, had been sentenced to several years' imprisonment for manslaughter. Henceforth he was alone in the world, with no country, disgraced by a public sentence. Valentine was married, and he had no further object in life! He would hereafter have faith in no one, since she, Valentine, had cast him off and forgotten him, had lacked the courage to keep her promise and wait for him. In his despair, he almost regretted the "Tom Jones." Yes, he sighed for the wicked slaver crew, his life of excitement and peril, the dangers and triumphs of those bold corsairs who die on sacks of dollars or strung up to the yard-arm.

But Gaston was not a man to be long cast down. "I will earn money, then," he cried with rage, "since money is the only thing in this world which never deceives!" And he set to work with a greedy activity, which increased every day. He tried all the many speculations open to adventurers. Alternately he traded in furs, worked a mine, and cultivated lands. Five times he went to bed rich, and waked up ruined; five times, with the patience of the beaver, whose hut is swept away by the current, he recommenced the building of his fortune. Finally, after long, weary years of toil and struggle, he was worth about a million in gold, besides immense tracts of land. He had often said that he would never leave Brazil, that he wanted to end his days in Rio. He had forgotten that love for his native land never dies in a Frenchman's breast. Now that he was rich, he wished to die in France. He made inquiries, and found that the law of limitations would permit him to return without being disturbed by

the authorities. He realized what he could of his property, and, leaving the rest in charge of an agent, he embarked for France. Twenty-three years and four months had elapsed since he fled from home, when, on a bright day in January, 1866, he stood upon the quays at Bordeaux. He had departed a young man, with his heart brimful of hope ; he returned gray-haired, and believing in nothing. His health, too, on his arrival, began to suffer from the sudden change of climate. Rheumatism confined him to his bed for several months. As soon as he could sit up, the physicians sent him to some baths, where they said he would regain his health. When cured, he felt that inactivity would kill him. Charmed with the beauty of the Pyrenees, and the lovely valley of Aspe, he resolved to take up his abode there. An iron-foundry was for sale near Oloron, on the banks of the Gave ; he bought it with the intention of utilizing the immense quantity of wood, which for want of means of transport was wasting in the mountains.

He had been settled some weeks in his new home, when one evening his servant brought him the card of a stranger who desired to see him. He read the name on the card : *Louis de Clameran*. Many years had passed since Gaston had experienced such violent agitation. His blood rushed to his head, and he trembled like a leaf. The old home affections which he thought dead now sprung up anew in his heart. A thousand confused memories rushed through his mind. Words rose to his lips, but he was unable to utter them. " My brother ! " he at length gasped, " my brother ! " Hurriedly passing by the frightened servant, he ran down stairs. In the hall a man, Louis de Clameran, stood waiting. Gaston threw his arms round his neck and held him in a close embrace for some minutes, and then drew him into a room. Seated close beside Louis, and tightly clasping his two hands, Gaston gazed on his face as a fond mother would gaze at her son just returned from the battle-field.

" And is this really Louis ? " he cried. " My dearly loved brother ? Why, I should have recognized you among a thousand ; the expression of your face has not in the least changed, your smile is the same as it used to be."

Louis did indeed smile, just as he perhaps smiled on that fatal night when his horse stumbled, and prevented Gaston's escape. He smiled now as if he was perfectly happy ;

he seemed overjoyed. He had exerted all the courage he possessed to venture upon this meeting. Nothing but the most terrible necessity would have induced him to present himself thus. His teeth chattered and he trembled in every limb when he rang Gaston's bell, and handed the servant his card, saying, "Take this to your master." The few moments that elapsed before Gaston's appearance seemed to him centuries. He said to himself, "Perhaps it is not he. And if it is, does he know? Does he suspect anything?" He was so anxious that, when he saw Gaston rushing down stairs, he felt like fleeing from the house. Not knowing the nature of Gaston's feelings towards him, he stood perfectly motionless. But one glance at his brother's face convinced him that he was the same affectionate, credulous, trusting Gaston of old; and, now that he was almost certain that his brother harbored no suspicions, he recovered himself and smiled.

"After all," continued Gaston, "I am not alone in the world; I shall have some one to love, some one to care for me." Then, as if suddenly struck by a thought, he asked, "Are you married, Louis?"

"No."

"That is a pity, a great pity. It would so have added to my happiness to see you the husband of a good, affectionate woman, the father of bright, lovely children! It would have been a comfort to have a happy family about me. I should have looked upon them all as my own. To live alone, without a loving wife to share one's joys and sorrows, is not living at all. Oh, the sadness of having only one's self to care for! But what am I saying? I have you, Louis, and is not that enough? I have a brother, a friend with whom I can talk aloud, as I have for so long talked to myself."

"Yes, Gaston, yes, a good friend!"

"Of course! for are you not my brother? So you are not married! Then we will keep house together. We will live like two old bachelors, as we are, and be as happy as kings; we will amuse each other, we will thoroughly enjoy ourselves. What a capital idea! You make me feel young again, barely twenty. I feel as active and strong as I did the night I swam across the swollen Rhone. And that was long, long ago; and since, I have struggled, I have suffered, I have cruelly aged and changed."

"You!" interrupted Louis; "why, you have not aged as much as I have."

"You are jesting."

"I assure you."

"Would you have recognized me?"

"Instantly. You are very little changed."

And Louis was right. He himself had a worn-out, used-up appearance rather than an aged one; while Gaston, in spite of his gray hair and weather-beaten face, was a robust man, in his prime. It was a relief to turn from Louis's restless eyes and crafty smiles to Gaston's frank, honest face.

"But," said Gaston, "how did you know that I was living? What kind fairy guided you to my house?"

Louis was prepared for this question. During his eighteen hours' ride in the train he had had time to arrange all his answers. "We must thank Providence for this happy meeting," he replied. "Three days ago, a friend of mine returned from some baths, and mentioned that he had heard that a Marquis de Ciameran was near there, in the Pyrenees. You can imagine my surprise. I instantly supposed that some impostor had assumed our name. I took the next train, and finally found my way here."

"Then you did not expect to see me?"

"My dear brother, how could I hope for that? I thought that you were drowned twenty-three years ago."

"Drowned! Mademoiselle de La Verberie certainly told you of my escape. She promised that she would go herself, the next day, and tell my father of my safety."

Louis assumed a distressed look, as if he hesitated to tell the sad truth, and murmured in a regretful tone: "Alas! she never told us."

Gaston's eyes flashed with indignation. He thought that perhaps Valentine had been glad to get rid of him. "She did not tell you?" he exclaimed. "Did she have the cruelty to let you mourn my death? to let my old father die of a broken heart? Ah! she must have been very fearful of the world's opinion. She sacrificed me, then, for the sake of her reputation."

"But why did you not write to us?" asked Louis.

"I did write as soon as I had an opportunity; and La-fourcade wrote back, saying that my father was dead, and that you had left the neighborhood."

"I left Clameran because I believed you to be dead."

Gaston rose, and walked up and down the room as if to shake off a feeling of sadness; then he said cheerfully: "Well, it's of no use mourning over the past. All the memories in the world, good or bad, are not worth one slender hope for the future; and thank heaven, we have a bright future before us."

Louis was silent. His footing was not sure enough to risk any questions.

"But here I have been talking incessantly for an hour," said Gaston, "and I dare say that you have not dined."

"No, I have not, I own."

"Why did you not say so before? I forgot that I had not dined myself. I will not let you starve, the first day of your arrival. Ah! I have some splendid old Cape wine."

He pulled the bell, and ordered the servant to hasten dinner; and within half-an-hour the two brothers were seated at a sumptuous repast. Gaston kept up an uninterrupted stream of questions. He wished to know all that had happened during his absence.

"What about Clameran?" he abruptly asked.

Louis hesitated a moment. Should he tell the truth, or not? "I have sold Clameran," he finally said.

"The château too?"

"Yes."

"You acted as you thought best," said Gaston, sadly; "but it seems to me that, if I had been in your place, I should have kept the old homestead. Our ancestors lived there for many generations, and our father died there." Then seeing Louis appeared sad and distressed, he quickly added: "However, it is just as well; it is in the heart that memory dwells, and not in a pile of old stones. I myself had not the courage to return to Provence. I could not trust myself to go to Clameran, where I would have to gaze on the park of La Verberie. Alas, the only happy moments of my life were spent there!"

Louis's countenance immediately cleared. The certainty that Gaston had not been to Provence relieved his mind of an immense weight. The next day he telegraphed to Raoul; "Wisdom and prudence. Follow my directions. All goes well. Be sanguine."

All was going well; and yet Louis, in spite of his skillfully plied questions, had obtained none of the informa-

tion which he had come to seek. Gaston was communicative on every subject except the one in which Louis was most interested. Was this silence premeditated, or simply unconscious? Louis, like all villains, was ever ready to attribute to others the bad motives by which he himself would be influenced. Anything was better than this uncertainty; he determined to ask his brother what he intended doing. They had just sat down to lunch, and he thought the moment an opportune one.

"Do you know, my dear Gaston," he began by saying; "that thus far we have spoken of everything except serious matters?"

"Why do you look so solemn, Louis! What are the grave subjects you allude to?"

"Well, there is this: believing you to be dead, I inherited all our father left."

"Is that what you call a serious matter?" asked Gaston with an amused smile.

"Certainly. I owe you an account of your share; you have a right to half."

"I have," interrupted Gaston, "a right to ask you never to allude to the subject again. What you have is yours by limitation."

"No, I cannot accept it."

"But you must. Our father wished to have only one of us to inherit his property; we will be carrying out his wishes by not dividing it." Seeing that Louis's face still remained clouded, Gaston added: "Come now, you must be very rich, or think me very poor, to insist thus."

Louis started at this remark. What could he say so as not to commit himself?

"I am neither rich nor poor," he finally observed.

"I am delighted to hear it," exclaimed his brother. "I wish you were as poor as Job, so that I might share what I have with you."

Luncheon over, Gaston rose and said: "Come, I want to show you my—that is, our property."

Louis uneasily followed. It seemed to him that Gaston obstinately shunned anything like an explanation. Could all this brotherly affection be assumed to blind him as to his real plans? Louis's fears were again aroused, and he almost regretted his hasty telegram. But his calm, smiling face betrayed none of the anxious thoughts which

filled his mind. He was called upon to examine everything. First he was taken over the house and then the servants' quarters, the stables, kennels, and the vast, beautifully laid-out garden. Across a pretty meadow was the iron-foundry in full operation. Gaston, with all the enthusiasm of a new proprietor, explained everything, down to the smallest file and hammer. He detailed all his projects; how he intended substituting wood for coal, and how, besides having plenty to work the forge, he could make immense profits by felling the forest trees, which had hitherto been considered impracticable. Louis approved of everything; but only answered in monosyllables, "Ah, indeed! excellent idea! quite a success!" His mind was tortured by a new pain; he was paying no attention to Gaston's remarks, but enviously comparing all this wealth and prosperity with his own poverty. He found Gaston rich, respected, and happy, enjoying the price of his own industry; whilst he— Never had he so cruelly felt the misery of his condition, which was of his own making. After a lapse of twenty-three years, all the envy and hate he had felt towards Gaston, when they were boys together, revived.

"What do you think of my purchase?" asked Gaston, when the inspection was over.

"I think you possess, my dear brother, a most charming property, situated in the loveliest spot in the world. It is enough to excite the envy of any poor Parisian."

"Do you really think so?"

"Certainly."

"Then, my dear Louis," said Gaston joyfully, "this property is yours, as well as mine. You like it, then live here always. Do you really care for your foggy Paris? Do you not prefer this beautiful Béara sky? The scanty and paltry luxury of Paris is not equal to the good and plentiful living you will find here. You are a bachelor, therefore you have no ties. Remain, we shall want for nothing. And, to employ our time, there is the foundry. Does my plan suit you?"

Louis was silent. A year ago, this proposal would have been eagerly welcomed. How gladly he would have seized this offer of a comfortable, luxurious home, after having been buffeted about the world so long! How delightful it would have been to turn over a new leaf, and become

an honest man ! But he saw, with disappointment and rage, that he would now be compelled to decline it. No, he was no longer free. He could not leave Paris. He had become entangled in one of those hazardous plots which are lost if neglected, and the loss of which generally leads the projector into penal servitude. Alone, he could easily remain where he was ; but he was trammelled with an accomplice.

" You do not answer me," said Gaston, with surprise ; " are there any obstacles to my plans ? "

" None."

" What is the matter, then ? "

" The matter is, my dear brother, that the salary of an appointment which I hold in Paris is all that I have to support me."

" Is that your only objection ? Yet, you just now wanted to pay me back half of the family inheritance ! Louis, that is unkind ; you are not acting as a brother should."

Louis hung his head. Gaston was unconsciously telling the truth. " I should be a burden to you, Gaston."

" A burden ! Why Louis, you must be mad ! Did I not tell you I was very rich ? Do you suppose that you have seen all I possess ? This house and the iron-works do not constitute a fourth of my fortune. Do you think that I would have risked my twenty years' savings in an experiment of this sort ? I have invested, in state securities, an income of twenty-four thousand francs. And that is not all ; it seems that I shall be able to sell my grants in Brazil ; I am lucky ! My agent has already forwarded me four hundred thousand francs."

Louis trembled with pleasure. He was, at last, to know the extent of the danger menacing him. " What agent ? " he asked, with assumed indifference.

" Why, my old partner at Rio, of course. The money is now at my Paris banker's, quite at my disposal."

" Some friend of yours ? "

" Well, no. He was recommended to me by my banker at Pau, as a very rich, prudent, and reliable man. His name is—let me see—André Fauvel, and he lives in the Rue de Provence."

Master of himself as he was, and prepared for what he was about to hear, Louis turned pale and red by turns.

"Do you know this banker?" asked Gaston, who, full of his own thoughts, did not notice his brother's condition.

"Only by reputation."

"Then, we can shortly make his acquaintance together; for I think of accompanying you to Paris, when you return there to wind up your affairs, before establishing yourself here."

At this unexpected announcement of a step which would prove his utter ruin, Louis managed to maintain his self-possession. It seemed to him that his brother was looking him through and through. "You are going to Paris?" he uttered.

"Certainly I am. What is there extraordinary in that?"

"Oh! nothing."

"I hate Paris, although I have never been there; but I am called there by interest, by sacred duties," he hesitatingly said. "The truth is, I understand that Mademoiselle de La Verberie lives in Paris, and I wish to see her again."

"Ah!"

Gaston was silent and thoughtful for some moments, and then resumed, nervously, "I can tell you, Louis, why I wish to see her. When I went away, I left our mother's jewels in her keeping."

"And you intend, after a lapse of twenty-three years, to claim these jewels?"

"Yes—or rather no; that is only a vain excuse for seeing her, with which I try to satisfy myself. I must see her, because—because—I loved her; that is the truth."

"But how will you find her?"

"Oh! that is easy enough. Any one almost can tell me her husband's name, and then I will go to see her. I will write to-morrow, to Beaucaire, for the information."

Louis made no reply. Men of his character, when brought face to face with imminent danger, always weigh their words, and say as little as possible, for fear of committing themselves by some indiscreet remark. Above all things, Louis was careful to avoid raising any objections to his brother's proposed trip to Paris. To oppose a man's wishes has generally the effect of fixing them more firmly in his mind. Each argument is like striking a nail with a hammer. Knowing this, Louis changed the conversation,

and nothing more during the day was said of Valentine or Paris. At night, alone in his room, he brought his cunning mind to bear upon the difficulties of his situation, and wondered by what means he could extricate himself. At first sight, it seemed hopeless. During the twenty years Louis had been at war with society, trusted by none, living upon his wits and the credulity of foolish men, he had, many a time, found himself in a desperate position. He had been caught at the gaming-table with his hands full of marked cards; he had been tracked all over Europe by the police, and obliged to fly from city to city under an assumed name; he had sold to cowards his skilful handling of the sword and pistol; he had been thrown into a prison, and had miraculously made his escape. He had braved everything, and feared nothing. He had often conceived and carried out the most criminal plans, without the slightest hesitation or remorse. And now, here he sat, utterly bewildered—unable to think clearly; his usual impudence and ready cunning seemed to have deserted him. Thus driven into a corner, he saw no means of escape, and was almost tempted to give in, and retire from the struggle. He asked himself if it would not be wiser to borrow a large sum from Gaston, and fly the country. Vainly did he think over the wicked experience of the past; none of his former successful stratagems could be resorted to in the present case. Fatally, inevitably, he was about to be caught in a trap laid by himself. The future was fraught with ruin and disgrace. He had to fear the wrath of M. Fauvel, his wife, and niece. Gaston would have speedy vengeance the moment he discovered the truth; and Raoul, his accomplice, would certainly turn against him in the hour of misfortune, and become his most implacable enemy. Was there no possible way of preventing a meeting between Valentine and Gaston? No, none that he could think of. And their meeting would be his destruction.

Lost in reflection, he paid no attention to the flight of time. Daybreak found him sitting at the window, exposing to the morning breeze his burning brow, which seemed on the point of bursting. "It is useless for me to think," he muttered. "There is nothing to be done but gain time, and wait for an opportunity." The fall of the horse at Clameran was, no doubt, what Louis called "an oppor-

tunity." He closed the window, threw himself upon the bed, and so accustomed was he to danger, that he soon slept. At the breakfast-table, his calm, smiling face bore no traces of a wakeful, anxious night. He was in a gayer, more talkative, and affectionate mood than usual, and said he would like to ride about the country. Before leaving the table, he had planned several excursions in the neighborhood. The truth is, he hoped to keep Gaston so amused and occupied, that he would forget all about going to Paris in search of Valentine. He thought that, with time, and skilfully put objections, he could dissuade his brother from seeking out his former love. He relied upon being able to convince him that this absolutely unnecessary interview would be painful to both, embarrassing to him, and dangerous to her. As to the jewels, if Gaston persisted in claiming them, Louis could safely offer to go and get them for him, as he well knew where they were. But his hopes and plans were soon scattered to the winds.

"You know," said Gaston, one morning, "I have written."

Louis knew well enough to what he alluded, but pretended to be very much surprised, and said, "Written? To whom? Where? What for?"

"To Beaucaire, to ask Lafourcade the name of Valentine's husband."

"You are, then, still thinking of her?"

"Always."

"You have not given up your idea of going to see her?"

"Not in the least."

"Alas! brother, you forget that she whom you once loved is now the wife of another, and possibly the mother of a family. How do you know that she will consent to see you? Why run the risk of destroying her domestic happiness, and planting seeds of remorse in your own bosom?"

"I know I am a fool, but my folly is dear to me."

The quiet determination of Gaston's tone convinced Louis that all remonstrances would be unavailing. Yet, he remained the same in his manner and behavior, apparently engrossed in pleasure parties; but, in reality, his only thought was of the letters delivered at the house. He always managed to be near the door when the post

man came. When he and Gaston were out together at the time of the postman's visit, he would hurry into the house first, so as to look over the letters delivered in their absence. His watchfulness was at last rewarded. The following Sunday, among the letters handed to him by the postman, was one bearing the postmark of Beaucaire. He quickly slipped it into his pocket ; and, although he was on the point of mounting his horse to ride with Gaston, he found a pretext for running up to his room, so as to gratify his impatient desire to read the letter. He tore it open, and, seeing "Lafourcade" signed at the bottom of three closely written pages, hastily devoured the contents. After reading a detailed account of events entirely uninteresting to him, Louis came to the following passage relating to Valentine :—" Mademoiselle de La Verberie's husband is an eminent banker, named André Fauvel. I have not the honor of his acquaintance, but I intend going to see him shortly. I am anxious to submit to him a project that I have conceived for the benefit of this part of the country. If he approves of it, I shall ask him to invest in it, as his name will be of great assistance to the scheme. I suppose you have no objections to my mentioning your name as a reference." Louis trembled like a man who had just had a narrow escape from death. He well knew that he would have to fly, if Gaston received this letter. But though the danger was warded off for the while, it might return and destroy him at any moment. Gaston would wait a week or so for an answer, then he would write again ; Lafourcade would instantly reply to express surprise that his first letter had not been received ; all this correspondence would occupy, at the most, not more than twelve days. And then, Lafourcade's visit to Paris was another source of danger, for the instant he mentioned the name of De Clameran to the banker, everything would be discovered.

But Gaston was getting tired of waiting. "Are you coming?" he cried.

"I am coming now," replied Louis.

Hastily thrusting Lafourcade's letter into a secret compartment of his trunk, Louis ran down to his brother. He had made up his mind to borrow a large sum from Gaston, and go off to America ; and Raoul might get out of the scrape as best he could. The only thing which he regretted was the sudden failure of the most skilful combi

nation he had ever conceived ; but he was not a man to fight against destiny, so he determined to make the best of the emergency, and hope for better fortune in his next scheme. The following day, about dusk, while walking along the pretty road leading from the foundry to Oloron, he commenced the prologue of a little story, which was to conclude by asking Gaston to lend him two hundred thousand francs. As they went slowly along, arm in arm, about half a mile from the foundry they met a young laborer, who bowed as he passed them. Louis started back so violently that his brother asked him in surprise what was the matter.

"Nothing, except I struck my foot against a stone, and it hurt me."

Gaston might have known, by the tremulous tones of Louis's voice, that this was a lie. Louis de Clameran had reason to tremble, for in the workman he recognized Raoul de Lagors. Instinctive fear paralyzed and overwhelmed him. His volubility was gone ; and he silently walked along by his brother's side, like an automaton, totally incapable of thinking or acting for himself. He seemed to listen—he did listen ; but the words fell upon his ear unmeaningly ; he could not understand what Gaston was saying, and mechanically answered "yes" or "no," like one in a dream. Whilst necessity—absolute necessity—kept him at Gaston's side, his thoughts were all with the young man who had just passed by. What had brought Raoul to Oloron ? What plot was he hatching ? Why was he disguised as a laborer ? Why had he not answered the many letters which Louis had written him from Oloron ? He had ascribed this silence to Raoul's carelessness, but now he saw it was premeditated. Something disastrous must have happened at Paris ; and Raoul, afraid to commit himself by writing, had come himself to bring the bad news. Had he come to say that the game was up, and they must fly ? But, after all, he might have been mistaken. Perhaps it was some workman bearing a strong resemblance to Raoul. If he could only run after the stranger, and speak to him ! His anxiety increased, minute by minute, and at length became intolerable. Fortunately, Gaston was rather tired that evening, and returned home much earlier than usual. He went to his own room at once. At last, Louis was free ! He lit a cigar, and

telling the servant not to sit up for him, went out. He expected that Raoul, if it was Raoul, would be prowling near the house, waiting for him. He was not mistaken. He had hardly proceeded thirty yards, when a man suddenly sprang from behind a tree, and stood before him. The night was clear, and Louis at once recognized Raoul.

"What is the matter?" he impatiently demanded; "what has happened?"

"Nothing."

"What! Do you mean to say that nothing has gone wrong in Paris?"

"Nothing whatever. I will add, too, that, but for your inordinate greed of gain, everything would be going on swimmingly."

"Then why have you come here?" cried Louis, fiercely. "Who gave you permission to desert your post, at the risk of ruining us both?"

"That is my business," said Raoul, coolly.

Louis seized the young man's wrist, and almost crushed them in his vice-like grasp. "Explain this strange conduct of yours," he exclaimed, in a tone of suppressed rage.

Without apparent effort, Raoul released his hands from their imprisonment, and jeeringly said: "Gently, my friend! I don't like being roughly treated, and I have other means of answering you." At the same time, he drew a revolver from his pocket.

"You must and shall explain yourself," insisted Louis; "if you don't—"

"Well, if I don't? Now, you might just as well spare yourself the trouble of trying to frighten me. I intend to answer your questions when I choose; but it certainly won't be here, in the middle of the road, with the bright moonlight showing us off to advantage. How do you know people are not watching us this very minute? Come this way."

They strode through the fields, regardless of the plants, which they trampled under foot in order to take a short cut.

"Now," began Raoul, when they were at a safe distance from the road, "now, my dear uncle, I will tell you what brings me here. I have received and carefully read your letters, and read them more than once. You wished to be prudent, and the consequence was that your letters were

unintelligible. Only one thing did I understand clearly: we are in danger."

"Only the more reason for your watchfulness and obedience."

"Very well put. Only, before braving danger, my venerable and beloved uncle, I want to know its extent. I am not a man to retreat in the hour of peril, but I want to know exactly how much risk I am running."

"Did I not tell you to keep quiet?"

"But to do this would imply that I have perfect confidence in you, my dear uncle," said Raoul, sneeringly.

"And why should you not? What reasons for distrust have you, after all that I have done for you? Who went to London, and rescued you from a state of privation and ignominy? I did. Who gave you a name and position when you had neither? I did. And who is working even now to maintain your present life of ease, and insure you a splendid future? I am."

"Superb, magnificent, inimitable!" said Raoul with mocking admiration. "But, while on the subject, why don't you prove that you have sacrificed yourself for my sake? You did not need me as a tool for carrying out plans for your own benefit; did you? oh no, not at all! Dear, kind, generous, disinterested uncle! You ought to have the Montyon prize; I must recommend you for it."

De Clameran was so enraged that he feared to trust himself to speak.

"Now, my good uncle," continued Raoul more seriously, "we had better end this child's play, and come to a clear understanding. I followed you here, because I thoroughly understand your character, and have just as much confidence in you as you deserve, and not a particle more. If it were for your advantage to ruin me, you would not hesitate one instant. If danger threatened us, you would fly alone, and leave your dutiful nephew to make his escape the best way he could. Oh! don't look shocked, and pretend to deny it; your conduct is perfectly natural, and in your place I would act the same way. Only remember this, that I am not a man to be trifled with. Now let us cease these unnecessary recriminations, and come to the point: what has been happening here?"

Louis saw that his accomplice was too shrewd to be deceived, and that the safest course was to trust all to him,

and to pretend that he had intended doing so all along. Without any show of anger, he briefly and clearly related all that had occurred at his brother's. He told the truth about everything except the amount of his brother's fortune, the importance of which he lessened as much as possible.

"Well," said Raoul, when the report was ended, "we are in a nice fix. And you expect to get out of it, do you?"

"Yes, if you don't betray me."

"I wish you to understand, marquis, that I have never betrayed any one yet. What steps will you take to get free of this entanglement?"

"I don't know yet; but something will turn up. Oh, don't be alarmed; I'll find some means of escape: so you can return home with your mind set at rest. You run no risk in Paris, and I will stay here to watch Gaston."

Raoul reflected for some moments, and then said: "Are you sure I am out of danger in Paris?"

"What are you afraid of? We have Madame Fauvel so completely in our power that she would not dare speak a word against us, even if she knew the whole truth, which no one but you and I know: she would not not open her lips, but be only too glad to hush up matters so as to escape punishment for her fault from her deceived husband and a censuring world."

"That is so. I know we have a secure hold on her," said Raoul. "It is not of her I am afraid."

"Of whom, then?"

"An enemy of your own making, my respected uncle, a most implacable enemy—Madeleine."

"Fiddlesticks!" replied De Clameran disdainfully.

"It is all very well for you to treat her with contempt," said Raoul gravely; "but I can tell you, you are much mistaken in your estimate of her character. I have studied her lately, and see that she has devoted herself to save her aunt; but she has not given in. She has promised to marry you, she has discarded Prosper, who is broken-hearted, it is true; but she has not given up hope. You imagine her to be weak and yielding, easily frightened? It's a great mistake: she is self-reliant and fearless. More than that, she is in love, my good uncle; and a woman will defend her love as a tigress defends her young. There is the danger."

"She is worth five hundred thousand francs."

"So she is; and at five per cent. we would each have an income of twelve thousand five hundred francs. But, for all that, you had better take my advice, and give up Madeleine."

"Never, I swear by heaven!" exclaimed De Clameran. "Rich or poor, she shall be mine! I first wanted her for her money, but now I want *her*—I love her for herself, Raoul!"

Raoul seemed to be amazed at this declaration of his uncle. He raised his hands, and started back with astonishment. "Is it possible," he said, "that you are in love with Madeleine?—you!"

"Yes," replied Louis in a tone of suspicion. "Is there anything so very extraordinary in it?"

"Oh, no; certainly not! only this sentimental state you are in explains your strange behavior. So, you love Madeleine! Then, my venerable uncle, we may as well surrender at once."

"Why so?"

"Because you know the axiom, 'When the heart is interested, the head is lost.' Generals in love always lose their battles. The day is not far off when your infatuation for Madeleine will make you sell us both for a smile. And, mark my words, she is shrewd, and watching us as only an enemy can watch."

With a forced laugh De Clameran interrupted his nephew.

"Just see how you fire up for nothing," he said. "You must dislike the charming Madeleine then very much."

"She will prove to be our ruin; that is all."

"You might as well be frank, and say you are in love with her yourself."

"I am only in love with her money," retorted Raoul with an angry frown.

"Then what are you complaining of? I shall give you half her fortune. You will have the money without being troubled with the wife; the profit without the burden."

"I am not over fifty years old," said Raoul conceitedly.

"Enough of this," interrupted Louis, angrily. "The day I relieved your pressing wants, and brought you to Paris, it was agreed that I should be the master."

"Yes ; but you forget that my liberty, perhaps my life, is at stake. You may hold the cards, but I must have the right of advising you."

It was midnight before the accomplices separated. "It won't do to stand idle," said Louis. "I agree with you that something must be done at once ; but I can't decide what it shall be on the spur of the moment. Meet me here at this hour, to-morrow night, and I will have some plan ready for you."

"Very good. I will be here."

"And remember, don't be imprudent !"

"My costume ought to convince you that I am not anxious to be recognized by any one. I left such an ingenious alibi, that I defy anybody to prove that I have been absent from the house at Vésinet. I even took the precaution of travelling here third-class. Well, good-night ; I am going to the inn."

Raoul went off after these words, apparently unconscious of having aroused suspicion in the breast of his accomplice. During his adventurous life, De Clameran had transacted "business" with too many scamps not to know the precise amount of confidence to place in a man like Raoul. The old adage, "Honor among thieves," seldom holds good after the "stroke." There is always a quarrel over the division of the spoils. The distrustful De Clameran foresaw already a thousand reasons for fear and disputes. "Why," he pondered, "did Raoul assume this disguise ? Why this alibi at Paris ? Can he be laying a trap for me ? It is true that I have a hold upon him ; but then I am completely at his mercy. Those accursed letters which I have written to him, while here, are so many proofs against me. Can he be thinking of cutting loose from me, and making off with all the profits of our enterprise ?"

Louis never once during the night closed his eyes ; but by daybreak he had fully made up his mind how to act, and with feverish impatience waited for night. His anxiety made him so restless, that the unobserving Gaston finally noticed it, and asked him what the matter was ; if he was ill, or troubled about anything. At last evening came, and Louis was able to join Raoul, whom he found lying on the grass smoking in the field where they had talked on the preceding evening.

"Well," he carelessly asked, as Louis approached, "have you decided upon anything?"

"Yes, I have two projects, either of which is, I think, sure of success."

"I am listening."

Louis was silent for a minute, as if arranging his thoughts so as to present them as clearly and briefly as possible. "My first plan," he began, "depends upon your approval. What would you say, if I proposed to you to give up the affair altogether?"

"What!"

"Would you consent to disappear, leave France, and return to London, if I paid you a good round sum?"

"What do you call a good round sum?"

"I could give you a hundred and fifty thousand francs."

"My respected uncle," said Raoul, with a contemptuous shrug, "I am distressed to see how little you know me! You try to deceive me, to outwit me, which is ungenerous and foolish on your part—ungenerous, because it fails to carry out your agreement; foolish, because, as you ought to know by now, my power equals yours."

"I don't understand you."

"I am sorry for it. I understand myself, and that is sufficient. Oh, I know you, my dear uncle! I have watched you with careful eyes, which are not to be deceived; I see through you clearly. If you offer me one hundred and fifty thousand francs, it is because you intend to walk off with a million for yourself."

"You are talking like a fool," said De Clameran, with virtuous indignation.

"Not at all; I only judge the future by the past. Of all the large sums extorted from Madame Fauvel, often against my wishes, I have scarcely received a tenth part."

"But you know we have a reserve fund."

"All very good; but you have the keeping of it, my good uncle. If our little plot were to be discovered to-morrow, you would walk off with the money-box, and leave your devoted nephew to be sent to prison."

"Ungrateful fellow!" muttered Louis, as if distressed at these undeserved reproaches.

"Bravo!" cried Raoul; "you said it splendidly. But we have not time for this nonsense. I will end the matter by proving how you have been trying to deceive me."

"I would like to hear you do so, if you can."

"Very good. In the first place, you told me that your brother only possessed a modest competency. Now, I learn that Gaston has an income of at least sixty thousand francs; it is useless for you to deny it. And how much is this property worth? A hundred thousand crowns. He has four hundred thousand francs deposited in M. Fauvel's bank. Total, seven hundred thousand francs. And besides all this, the broker in Oloron has instructions to buy up a large amount of government stock for him. I have not wasted my day, as you see."

Raoul's information was too concise and exact for Louis to deny it.

"You might have sense, enough," Raoul went on, "to know how to manage your forces if you undertake to be a commander. We had a splendid game in our hands; and you, who held the cards, have made a perfect muddle of it."

"I think—"

"That the game is lost? That is my opinion too, and all through you."

"I could not control events."

"Yes, you could, if you had been shrewd. Fools sit down and wait for an opportunity; sensible men make one. What did we agree upon in London? We were to implore my good mother to assist us a little, and if she complied with our wishes, we were to be flattering and affectionate in our devotion to her; but, at the risk of killing the golden goose, you have made me torment the poor woman, until she is almost crazy."

"It was prudent to hasten matters."

"You think so, do you? Was it also to hasten matters that you took it into your head to marry Madeleine? That made it necessary to let her into the secret; and, ever since, she has advised and set her aunt against us. I would not be surprised if she makes her confess everything to M. Fauvel, or even inform against us at the Préfecture of Police."

"I love Madeleine!"

"You told me that before. And suppose you do love her. You led me into this piece of business without having studied its various bearings—without knowing what you were about. No one but an idiot, my beloved uncle, would go and put his foot into a trap, and then say, 'If I

had only known about it !' You should have made it your business to know everything. You came to me, and said, 'Your father is dead.' But not at all, he is living : and, after what we have done, I dare not appear before him. He would have left me a million, and now I shall not get a sou. He will find his Valentine, and then good-by."

"Enough !" angrily interrupted Louis. "If I have made a mistake, I know how to redeem it. I can save everything yet."

"You can ? How so ?"

"That is my secret," said Louis, gloomily.

Louis and Raoul were silent for a minute ; and this silence between them, in this lonely spot, at dead of night, was so horribly significant, that both of them shuddered. An abominable thought had flashed across their evil minds, and, without a word or look they understood each other.

Louis broke the ominous silence by abruptly saying : "Then you refuse to disappear if I pay you a hundred and fifty thousand francs ? Think it over before deciding : it is not too late yet."

"I have fully thought it over. I know you will not attempt to deceive me any more. Between certain ease, and the probability of an immense fortune, I choose the latter at all risks. I will share your success or your failure ; we will swim or sink together."

"And you will follow my instructions ?"

"Blindly."

Raoul must have been very certain of Louis's intentions, for he did not ask him a single question. Perhaps he dared not. Perhaps he preferred doubt to shocking certainty, as if he could thus escape the remorse attendant upon criminal complicity.

"In the first place," said Louis, "you must at once return to Paris."

"I will be there in forty-eight hours."

"You must be constantly at Madame Fauvel's and keep me informed of everything that takes place in the family."

"I understand."

Louis laid his hand on Raoul's shoulder, as if to impress upon his mind what he was about to say. "You have a sure means of being restored to your mother's confidence and affection, by blaming me for everything that has happened to distress her. Abuse me constantly. The more

odious you render me in her eyes and those of Madeleine, the better you will serve me. Nothing would please me more than to be denied admittance to the house when I return to Paris. You must say that you have quarrelled with me, and that if I still come to see you, it is because you cannot prevent it. That is the scheme: you can develop it."

Raoul listened to these strange instructions with astonishment. "What!" he cried; "you adore Madeleine, and take this means of winning her good graces? An odd way of carrying on a courtship, I must confess! I will be shot if I can comprehend."

"There is no necessity for your comprehending."

"All right," said Raoul, submissively. "If you say so."

Then Louis reflected that no one could properly execute a commission without having at least, an idea of its nature. "Did you ever hear," he asked Raoul, "of the man who burned down his lady-love's house so as to have the bliss of carrying her out in his arms?"

"Yes; what of it?"

"At the proper time, I will charge you to set fire morally to Madame Fauvel's house; and I will rush in, and save her and her niece. Now, in the eyes of those women, my conduct will appear more magnanimous and noble in proportion to the contempt and abuse they have heaped upon me. I gain nothing by patient devotion; I have everything to hope from a sudden change of tactics. A well-managed stroke will transform a demon into an angel."

"Very well; a good idea!" said Raoul, approvingly, when his uncle had finished.

"Then you understand what is to be done?"

"Yes; but you will write to me?"

"Of course; and if anything should happen at Paris—"

"I will telegraph to you."

"And never lose sight of my rival, the cashier."

"Prosper? Not much danger of our being troubled by him, poor boy! He is just now my most devoted friend. Trouble has driven him into a path of life which will soon prove his destruction. Every now and then I pity him from the bottom of my soul."

"Pity him as much as you like."

The two men shook hands and separated, apparently the

best friends in the world ; in reality, the bitterest enemies. Raoul would not forgive Louis for having attempted to appropriate all the booty and leave him in the lurch, when it was he who had risked the greatest dangers. Louis, on his part, was alarmed at the attitude taken by Raoul. Thus far he had found him tractable, and even blindly obedient ; and now he had suddenly become rebellious and threatening. Instead of ordering Raoul, he was forced to consult and bargain with him. What could be more wounding to his vanity and self-conceit than the reproaches, well founded though they were, to which he had been obliged to listen from a mere youth ? As he walked back to his brother's house, thinking over what had just occurred, Louis swore that sooner or later he would be revenged, and that as soon as he could, he would take means of getting rid of Raoul forever. But for the present he was so afraid of his young accomplice that, according to his promise, he wrote to him the next day, and every succeeding day, full particulars of everything that happened. Seeing how important it was to restore his shaken confidence, Louis entered into the most minute details of his plans. The situation remained the same : the dark cloud hung threateningly near, but grew no larger.

Gaston seemed to have forgotten that he had written to Beaucaire, and never mentioned Valentine's name once. Like all men accustomed to a busy life, Gaston was miserable except when occupied, and spent his whole time in the foundry, which seemed to absorb him entirely. It was losing money when he purchased it ; but he determined to work it until it should be equally beneficial to himself and the neighborhood. He engaged the services of an intelligent engineer, and, thanks to untiring energy and new improvements in machinery, his receipts soon more than equalled his expenses

"Now that we are doing so well," said Gaston joyously, "we shall certainly make twenty-five thousand francs next year."

Next year ! Alas, poor Gaston ! Five days after Raoul's departure, one Saturday afternoon, Gaston was suddenly taken ill. He had a sort of vertigo, and was so dizzy that he was forced to lie down.

"I know what is the matter," he said. "I have often been ill in this way at Rio. A couple of hours' sleep will

cure me. I will lie down, and you can send some one to awaken me when dinner is ready, Louis."

But when the servant came to announce dinner, he found Gaston much worse. He had a violent headache, a choking sensation in his throat, and dimness of vision. But his worst symptom was dysphonia; he would try to articulate one word, and find himself using another. His jaw-bones became so stiff, that it was with the greatest difficulty that he opened his mouth. Louis came up to his brother's room, and urged him to send for the physician. "No," said Gaston, "I won't have any doctor to make me ill with all sorts of medicines. I know what is the matter with me, and my indisposition will be cured by a simple remedy which I have always used." At the same time he ordered Manuel, his old Spanish servant, who had lived with him for ten years, to prepare him some lemonade.

The next day Gaston appeared to be much better. He ate his breakfast, and was about to take a walk, when the pains of the previous day suddenly returned in a more violent form. Without consulting his brother, Louis sent to Oloron for Dr. C——, whose wonderful cures had won him a wide reputation. The doctor declared that there was no danger, and merely prescribed a dose of valerian, and a blister with some grains of morphine sprinkled on it. But in the middle of the night, all the symptoms suddenly changed for the worse. The pain in the head was succeeded by a fearful oppression, and the sick man suffered torture in trying to get his breath. Daybreak found him still tossing restlessly from pillow to pillow. When Dr. C—— came early in the morning, he appeared very much surprised at this change for the worse. He inquired if they had not used too much morphine. Manuel said that he had put the blister on his master, and the doctor's directions had been accurately followed. The doctor, after having examined Gaston, and found his breathing heavy and irregular, prescribed leeches and a heavy dose of sulphate of quinine; he then retired, saying he would return the next day. As soon as the doctor had gone, Gaston sent for a friend of his, a lawyer, to come to him as soon as possible.

"For Heaven's sake! what do you want with a lawyer?" inquired Louis.

"I want his advice, brother. It is useless to try and deceive ourselves; I know I am extremely ill. Only timid

fools are superstitious about making their wills. I would rather have the lawyer at once, and then my mind will be at rest."

Gaston did not think he was about to die ; but, knowing the uncertainty of life, determined to be prepared for the worst. He had too often imperilled his life, and been face to face with death, to feel any fear now. He had made his will while ill at Bordeaux ; but now that he had found Louis, he wished to leave him all his property, and sent for his business man to advise as to the best means of disposing of his wealth for his benefit. The lawyer was a shrewd, wiry little man, very popular, and perfectly familiar with all the intricacies of the law. Nothing delighted him more than to succeed in eluding some stringent article of the Code ; and he often sacrificed large fees for the sake of outwitting his opponent, and controverting the justness of a decision. Once aware of his client's wishes and intentions, he had but one idea, and that was to carry them out as inexpensively as possible, by skilfully evading the heavy costs to be paid by the inheritor of the estate. He explained to Gaston that he could, by an act of partnership, associate Louis in his business enterprises, by signing an acknowledgment that half of the money invested in these various concerns belonged to and had been advanced by his brother ; so that in the event of Gaston's death, Louis would only have to pay taxes on half the fortune. Gaston eagerly took advantage of this fiction ; not that he thought of the money saved by the transaction if he died, but this would be a favorable opportunity for sharing his riches with Louis without wounding his delicate sensibility. A deed of partnership between Gaston and Louis de Clameran, for the working of a cast-iron mill, was drawn up ; this deed acknowledged Louis to have invested five hundred thousand francs as his share of the capital.

When Louis was called in to sign the paper, he violently opposed his brother's project. "Why do you distress me by making these preparations for death, merely because you are suffering from a slight indisposition ? Do you think that I would consent to accept your wealth during your lifetime ? If you die, I am your heir ; if you live, I enjoy your property as if it were my own. What more can you wish ?"

Vain remonstrances. Gaston was not a man to be persuaded from accomplishing a purpose upon which he had fully set his heart. When, after mature deliberation, he made a resolution, he always carried it out in spite of all opposition. After a long and heroic resistance, which showed great nobleness of character and rare disinterestedness, Louis, urged by the physician, finally yielded, and signed his name to the papers drawn up by the lawyer. It was done. Now he was legally Gaston's partner, and possessor of half his fortune. No court of law could deprive him of what had been deeded with all the legal formalities, even if his brother should change his mind and try to get back his property. The strangest sensations now filled Louis's breast. He was in a state of delirious excitement, often felt by persons suddenly raised from poverty to affluence. Whether Gaston lived or died, Louis was the lawful possessor of an income of twenty-five thousand francs, without counting the eventual profits of the iron-works. At no time in his life had he hoped for or dreamed of such wealth. His wildest wishes were surpassed. What more could he want? Alas! he wanted the power of enjoying these riches in peace: they had come too late. This fortune, fallen from the skies, should have filled his heart with joy, whereas it only made him melancholy and angry. This unlooked-for happiness seemed to have been sent by cruel fate as a punishment for his past sins. Although his conscience told him that he deserved this misery, he blamed Gaston entirely for his present torture. Yes, he held Gaston responsible for the horrible situation in which he found himself. His letters to Raoul for several days expressed all the fluctuations of his mind, and revealed glimpses of coming evil.

"I have twenty-five thousand francs a year," he wrote to him, a few hours after signing the deed of partnership; "and I possess in my own right five hundred thousand francs. One-fourth of this sum would have made me the happiest of men a year ago; now it is of no use to me. All the gold on earth could not remove one of the difficulties of our situation. Yes, you were right. I have been imprudent; but I pay dear for my precipitation. Rich or poor, I have cause to tremble as long as there is any risk of a meeting between Gaston and Valentine. How can they be kept apart? Will my brother renounce his plan

of discovering the whereabouts of this woman whom he so loved?"

No ; Gaston would never be turned from his search for his first love, as he proved by calling for her in the most beseeching tones when he was suffering his worst paroxysms of pain. He grew no better. In spite of the most careful nursing his symptoms changed, but showed no improvement. Each attack was more violent than the preceding one. Towards the end of the week, however, the pains left his head, and he felt well enough to get up and partake of a slight nourishment. But poor Gaston was a mere shadow of his former self. In one week he had aged ten years. His strong constitution was broken. He, who ten days ago was boasting of his vigorous health, was now weak and bent like an old man. He could hardly drag himself along, and shivered in the warm sun as if he were bloodless. Leaning on Louis's arm, he slowly walked down to look at the forge, and, seating himself before a furnace at full blast, he declared that he felt very much better, that this intense heat revived him. His pains were all gone, and he could breathe without difficulty.

His spirits rose, and he turned to the workmen gathered around, and said cheerfully : " I was not blest with a good constitution for nothing, my friends, and I shall soon be well again."

When the neighbors called to see him, and insisted that this illness was entirely owing to change of climate, Gaston replied that he supposed they were right, and that he ought to return to Rio as soon as he was well enough to travel. What hope this answer roused in Louis's breast ! " Yes," he eagerly said, " I will go with you. A trip to Brazil would be charming ! "

But the next day Gaston had changed his mind. He told Louis that he felt almost well, and was determined not to leave France. He proposed going to Paris to consult the best physicians, and then he would see Valentine. As his illness increased, he became more surprised and troubled at not hearing from Beaucaire. He wrote again in the most pressing terms, and asked for a reply by return of post. This letter was never received by Lafourcade. That night, Gaston's sufferings returned with renewed violence, and for the first time Dr. C—— was uneasy. A

fatal termination seemed possible. Gaston's pain left him in a measure, but he was growing weaker every moment. His heart beat slower, and his feet were as cold as ice. On the fourteenth day of his illness, after lying in a stupor for several hours, he revived sufficiently to ask for a priest, saying that he would follow the example of his ancestors, and die like a Christian. The priest left him after half an hour's interview, and all the workmen were summoned to receive their master's farewell. Gaston spoke a few kind words to them all, saying that he had provided for them in his will. After they had gone, he made Louis promise to carry on the iron-works, embraced him for the last time, and sank back on his pillow in a dying state. As the bell tolled for noon he quietly breathed his last. Now Louis was in reality Marquis de Clameran, and a millionaire besides. Two weeks later, having made arrangements with the engineer in charge of the iron-works to attend to everything during his absence, he took his seat in the train for Paris. He had sent the following significant telegram to Raoul the night previous: "I arrive to-morrow."

XIX.

FAITHFUL to the programme laid down by his accomplice, while Louis watched at Oloron, Raoul remained in Paris with the purpose of recovering Madame Fauvel's confidence and affection, and of lulling any suspicions which might have arisen in her breast. The task was difficult, but not impossible. Madame Fauvel had been distressed by Raoul's wild extravagance, but had never ceased to love him. Whatever faults he had committed, whatever future follies he might indulge in, he would always remain her best loved child, her first-born, the living image of her noble, handsome Gaston, the lover of her youth. She adored her two sons, Lucien and Abel; but she could not overcome an indulgent weakness for the unfortunate child, torn from her arms the day of his birth, abandoned to the mercies of hired strangers, and for twenty years deprived of home influences and a mother's love. She blamed herself for Raoul's misconduct, and accepted the responsibility of it, saying to herself "It is my

fault." Knowing these to be her sentiments, Raoul did not hesitate to take advantage of them. Never were more irresistible fascinations employed for the accomplishment of a wicked object. Beneath an air of innocent frankness, this precocious scoundrel concealed wonderful astuteness and penetration. He could at will adorn himself with the confiding artlessness of youth, so that angels might have yielded to the soft look of his large dark eyes. There were few women living who could have resisted the thrilling tones of his sympathetic voice. During the month of Louis's absence, Madame Fauvel was in a state of comparative happiness. Never had this mother and wife—this pure, innocent woman, in spite of her first and only fault—enjoyed such tranquillity. She felt as one under the influence of enchantment, while revelling in the sunshine of filial love, which almost bore the character of a lover's passion; for Raoul's devotion was ardent and constant, his manner so tender and winning, that any one would have taken him for Madame Fauvel's suitor. As she was still at her country house, and M. Fauvel went to town every morning, she had the whole of her time to devote to Raoul. When she had spent the morning with him at his house in Vésinet, she would often bring him home to dine and spend the evening with her. All his past faults were forgiven, or rather the whole blame of them was laid upon De Clameran; for, now that he was absent, had not Raoul once more become her noble, generous, and affectionate son? Raoul enjoyed the life he was leading, and took such an interest in the part that he was playing, that his acting was perfect. He possessed the faculty which makes cheats successful—faith in his own impostures. Sometimes he would stop to think whether he was telling the truth, or acting a shameful comedy. His success was wonderful. Even Madeleine, the prudent, distrustful Madeleine, without being able to shake off her prejudice against the young adventurer, confessed that perhaps she had been influenced by appearances, and had judged unjustly. Raoul never asked for money now. He seemed to live on nothing.

Affairs were in this happy state when Louis arrived from Oloron. Although now immensely rich, he resolved to make no change in his style of living, but returned to his apartments at the Hotel du Louvre. His only outlay

was the purchase of a handsome carriage; and this was driven by Manuel, who consented to enter his service, although Gaston had left him a sufficient sum to support him comfortably. Louis's dream, the height of his ambition, was to be ranked among the great manufacturers of France. He was prouder of being called "iron-founder" than of his marquise. During his adventurous life, he had met with so many titled gamblers and cut-throats, that he no longer believed in the prestige of nobility. It was impossible to distinguish the counterfeit from the genuine. He thought what was so easily imitated was not worth the having. Dearly bought experience had taught him that our unromantic century attaches no value to armorial bearings, unless their possessor is rich enough to display them upon a splendid coach. One can be a marquis without a marquise, but it is impossible to be forge-master without owning a forge. Louis now thirsted for the homage of the world. All the badly digested humiliations of the past weighed upon him. He had suffered so much contempt and scorn from his fellow-men, that he burned to avenge himself. After a disgraceful youth, he longed to live a respected and honored old age. His past career disturbed him little. He was sufficiently acquainted with the world to know that the sound of his carriage wheels would silence the jeers of those who knew his former life. These thoughts fermented in Louis's brain as he journeyed from Pau to Paris. He troubled his mind not in the least about Raoul, determining to use him as a tool so long as he needed his services, and then pay him a large sum if he would consent to leave him. All these plans and thoughts were afterwards found noted down in the diary which he had in his pocket at the time of the journey.

The first interview between the accomplices took place at the Hotel du Louvre. Raoul, having a practical turn of mind, said he thought that they ought both to be contented with the result already obtained, and that it would be folly to try and secure anything more. "What more do we want?" he asked his uncle. "We now possess over a million; let us divide it and keep quiet. We had better be satisfied with our good luck, and not tempt Providence."

But this moderation did not suit Louis. "I am rich," he replied, "but I desire more than wealth. I am deter

mined to marry Madeleine : I swear she shall be my wife ! In the first place, I madly love her ; and then, as the nephew of the most eminent banker in Paris, I at once gain high position and public consideration."

"I tell you, uncle, your courtship will involve you in great risks."

"I don't care if it does. I choose to run them. My intention is to share my fortune with you ; but I will not do so till the day after my wedding. Madeleine's dowry will be your share."

Raoul was silent. De Clameran held the money, and was therefore master of the situation. "You don't seem to anticipate any difficulty in carrying out your wishes," he resumed, discontentedly ; "how are you to account for your suddenly acquired fortune ? M. Fauvel knows that a De Clameran lived at Oloron, and had money in his bank. You told him that you never heard of this person bearing your name, and then, at the end of a month, you come and say you have inherited his fortune."

"You are an innocent youth, nephew ; your ingenuousness is amusing."

"Explain yourself."

"Certainly. The banker, his wife, and Madeleine must be informed that the De Clameran of Oloron was a natural son of my father, consequently my brother, born at Hamburg, and recognized during the emigration. Of course, he wished to leave his fortune to his own family. This is the story which you must tell Madame Fauvel tomorrow."

"That is a bold step to take."

"How so ?"

"Inquiries might be made."

"Who would make them ? The banker would not trouble himself to do so. What difference is it to him whether I had a brother or not ? My title as heir is legally authenticated ; and all he has to do is to pay the money he holds, and there his business ends."

"I am not afraid of his giving trouble."

"Do you think that Madame Fauvel and her niece will ask any questions ? Why should they ? They have no grounds for suspicion. Besides, they cannot take a step without compromising themselves. If they knew all our secrets, I would not have the least fear of their making

revelations. They have sense enough to know that they had best keep quiet."

Not finding any other objections to make, Raoul said: "Very well, then, I will obey you; but I am not to call upon Madame Fauvel for any more money, am I?"

"And why not, pray?"

"Because, my uncle, you are rich now."

"Suppose I am rich," replied Louis triumphantly; "what does that matter? Have we not pretended to have quarrelled, and have you not abused me sufficiently to justify you in refusing my assistance? Ah! I foresaw everything, and when I explain my present plan, you will say with me, 'Success is certain.'" Louis de Clameran's scheme was very simple, and therefore, unfortunately, presented the strongest chances of success. "We will go back, and look at our balance-sheet. As heretofore, my brilliant nephew, you seem to have misunderstood my management of this affair, I will now explain it to you."

"I am listening."

"In the first place, I presented myself to Madame Fauvel, and said, not 'Your money or your life,' but 'Your money or your reputation!' It was a rude blow to strike, but effective. As I expected, she was frightened, and regarded me with the greatest aversion."

"Aversion is a mild term, uncle."

"I know that. Then I brought you upon the scene, and, without flattering you in the least, I must say that your opening act was a perfect success. I was concealed behind the curtain, and saw your first interview; it was sublime! She saw you, and loved you; you spoke a few words, and won her heart."

"And but for you—"

"Let me finish. This was the first act of our comedy. Let us pass to the second. Your extravagant follies—your grandfather would have said your dissoluteness—soon changed our respective situations. Madame Fauvel, without ceasing to worship you—you resemble Gaston *so* closely—was frightened of you. She was so frightened that she was forced to come to me for assistance."

"Poor woman!"

"I acted my part very well, as you must confess. I was grave, cold, indignant, and represented the distressed uncle to perfection. I spoke of the old probity of the De

Clamerans, and bemoaned that the family honor should be dragged in the dust by a degenerate descendant. For a short time I triumphed at your expense. Madame Fauvel forgot her former prejudice against me, and soon showed that she esteemed and liked me."

"That was a long time ago."

Louis paid no attention to this ironical interruption. "Now we come to the third act," he went on to say, "the time when Madame Fauvel, having Madeleine for an adviser, nearly judged us at our true value. Oh! you need not flatter yourself that she did not fear and despise us both. If she did not hate you, Raoul, it was because a mother's heart always forgives a sinful child. A mother can despise and worship her son at the same time."

"She has proved it to me in so many touching ways, that I—yes, even I, hardened as I am—was moved, and felt remorse."

"No doubt. I have felt some pangs myself. Where did I leave off? Oh, yes! Madame Fauvel was frightened, and Madeleine, bent on sacrificing herself, had discarded Prosper, and consented to marry me, when Gaston's existence was suddenly revealed to us. And what has happened since? You have succeeded in convincing Madame Fauvel that you are purer than an angel, and that I am blacker than hell. She is blinded by your noble qualities, and she and Madeleine regard me as your evil genius, whose pernicious influence led you astray."

"You are right, my venerated uncle; that is precisely the position you occupy."

"Very good. Now we come to the fifth act, and our comedy needs entire change of scenery. We must veer around."

"Change our tactics?"

"You think it difficult, I suppose? Nothing easier. Listen attentively, for the future depends upon your skillfulness."

Raoul leaned back in his chair with folded arms, as if prepared for anything, and said: "I am ready."

"The first thing for you to do," said Louis, "is to go to Madame Fauvel to-morrow, and tell her the story about my natural brother. She will not believe you, but that makes no difference. The important thing is for you to appear convinced of the truth of what you tell her."

“Consider me convinced.”

“Five days hence, I will call on M. Fauvel, and confirm the notification sent him by my notary at Oloron, that the money deposited in the bank now belongs to me. I will repeat, for his benefit, the story of the natural brother, and ask him to keep the money for me, as I have no occasion for it at present. You, who are so distrustful, my good nephew, may regard this deposit as a guarantee of my sincerity.”

“We will talk of that another time. Go on.”

“Then I will go to Madame Fauvel, and say, ‘Being very poor, my dear madame, necessity compelled me to claim your assistance in the support of my brother’s son, who is also yours. This youth is worthless and extravagant.’”

“Thanks, my good uncle.”

“He has poisoned your life when he should have added to your happiness; he is a constant anxiety and sorrow to your maternal heart. I have come to offer my regrets for your past trouble, and to assure you that you will have no annoyance in the future. I am now rich, and henceforth take the whole responsibility of Raoul upon myself.”

“Is that what you call a scheme?”

“Wait, you will soon see whether it is. After listening to this speech, Madame Fauvel will feel inclined to throw herself in my arms, by way of expressing her gratitude and joy. She will refrain, however, on account of her niece. She will ask me to relinquish my claim on Madeleine’s hand, now that I am rich. I will roundly tell her, ‘No.’ I will make this an opportunity for an edifying display of magnanimity and disinterestedness. I will say, ‘Madame you have accused me of cupidity. I am now able to prove your injustice. I have been infatuated, as every man must be, by the beauty, grace, and intelligence of Made-moiselle Madeleine; and—I love her. If she were penniless, my devotion would only be the more ardent. She has been promised to me, and I must insist upon this one article of our agreement. This must be the price of my silence. And, to prove that I am not influenced by her fortune, I give you my sacred promise that the day after the wedding I will send Raoul sufficient to secure him an income of twenty-five thousand francs per annum.’”

Louis expressed himself with such convincing candor, that Raoul, an artist in knavery, was charmed and astonished. "Beautifully done," he cried, clapping his hands with glee. "That last sentence may create a chasm between Madame Fauvel and her niece. The promise of a fortune for me will most likely bring my mother over to our side."

"I hope so," said Louis with pretended modesty. "And I have strong reasons for hoping so, as I shall be able to furnish the good lady with excellent arguments for excusing herself in her own eyes. You know when some one proposes some little—what shall we call it?—transaction to an honest person, it must be accompanied by justifications sufficient to quiet all qualms of conscience. I shall prove to Madame Fauvel and her niece that Prosper has shamefully deceived them. I shall prove to them that he is cramped by debts, dissipated, and a reckless gambler, openly associating with a woman of no character."

"And very pretty, besides, by Jove! You must not neglect to expatiate upon the beauty and fascinations of the adorable Gipsy; that will be your strongest point."

"Don't be alarmed; I shall be more eloquent than a popular divine. Then I will explain to Madame Fauvel that if she really loves her niece, she will persuade her to marry, not an insignificant cashier, but a man of position, a great manufacturer, a marquis, and, more than this, one rich enough to establish you in the world."

Raoul was dazzled by this brilliant prospect. "If you don't decide her, you will at least make her waver," he said.

"Oh! I don't expect a sudden change. I only intend planting the germ in her mind; thanks to you, it will develop, flourish, and bear fruit."

"Thanks to me?"

"Allow me to finish. After making my speeches I shall disappear from the scene, and your rôle will commence. Of course your mother will repeat the conversation to you, and then we can judge of the effect produced. But remember, you must scorn to receive any assistance from me. You must swear that you will brave all privations, want, famine even, rather than accept anything from a base man whom you hate and despise; a man who— But you

know ~~exactly~~ what you are to say. I can rely upon you for good acting."

"No one can surpass me when I am interested in my part. In pathetic rôles I am always a success, when I have had time to prepare myself."

"I know you are. But this disinterestedness need not prevent you from resuming your dissipations. You must gamble, bet, and lose more money than you ever did before. You must increase your demands, and say that you must have money at all costs. You need not account to me for any money you can extort from her. All you get is your own to spend as you please."

"You don't say so! If you mean that—"

"You will expedite matters, I'll be bound."

"I can promise you, no time shall be wasted."

"Now listen to what you are to do, Raoul. Before the end of three months, you must have exhausted the resources of these two women. You must force from them every franc they can raise, so that they will be wholly unable to procure money to supply your increasing demands. In three months, I must find them penniless, absolutely ruined, without even a jewel left."

Raoul was startled at the passionate, vindictive tone of Louis's voice as he uttered these last words. "You must hate these women, if you are so determined to make them miserable," he said.

"I hate them?" cried Louis. "Can't you see that I madly love Madeleine, love her as only a man of my age can love? Is not her image ever in my mind? Does not the very thought of her fire my heart, and her name burn my lips when I pronounce it?"

"Your great devotion does not prevent you planning the destruction of her present happiness."

"Necessity compels me to do so. Nothing but the most cruel deceptions and the bitterest suffering would ever induce her to become my wife. The day on which you have led Madame Fauvel and her niece to the extreme edge of the precipice, pointed out its dark depths, and convinced them that they are irretrievably lost, I shall appear, and rescue them. Why, it will be the crowning scene of our drama. I will play my part with such grandeur, such lofty magnanimity, that Madeleine will be touched. When she finds that it is her sweet self, and not her money, that I

want, she will soften, and no longer despise me. No true woman can be indifferent to a grand passion. I don't pretend to say that she will love, but she will give herself to me without repugnance ; that is all I ask for."

Raoul was shocked at the cold-blooded perversity of his uncle ; but De Clameran showed his immense superiority in wickedness, and the apprentice admired the master. " You would certainly succeed, uncle," he said, " were it not for the cashier. Between you and Madeleine, Prosper will always stand ; if not in person, certainly in memory."

Louis smiled scornfully, and, throwing away his cigar which had gone out, said : " I don't mind Prosper, or attach any more importance to him than to that cigar."

" But she loves him."

" So much the worse for him. Six months hence, ~~she~~ will despise him ; he is already morally ruined, and at the proper time I will make an end of him socially. Do you know whither the road of dissipation leads, my good nephew ? Prosper supports Gipsy, who is extravagant ; he gambles, keeps fast horses, and gives suppers. Sooner or later he will have a night of bad luck ; the losses at bacarat must be paid within twenty-four hours, he will wish to pay, and he—has charge of the banker's safe."

Raoul protested against this insinuation.

" It is useless to tell me that he is honest. I daresay he is. I was honest myself until I learned to gamble. A scamp would have married Madeleine long ago, and sent us flying, bag and baggage. You say she loves him ? No one but a coward would be defrauded of the woman he loved and who loved him. Ah, if I had once felt Madeleine's hand tremble in mine, if her rosy lips had once pressed a kiss upon my brow, the whole world could not take her from me. Woe to him who dares stand in my path ! As it is, Prosper annoys me, and I intend to suppress him. With your aid I will so cover him with disgrace and infamy, that Madeleine will drive every thought of him from her mind."

Louis's tone of rage and vengeance startled Raoul, and made him regard the affair in a worse light than ever. " You have given me a shameful, dastardly rôle to play," he said after a long pause.

" My honorable nephew has scruples, I suppose," sneered De Clameran.

"Not exactly scruples ; yet I confess—"

"That you want to retreat? Rather too late to sing that tune, my friend. You wish to enjoy ever luxury, have your pockets filled with gold, cut a fine figure in high society, and remain virtuous. You should have been born with a golden spoon in your mouth then. Fool! have you ever seen men like us draw millions from the pure fount of virtue. We must fish in muddy waters, and cleanse ourselves afterwards."

"I have never been rich enough to be honest," said Raoul humbly ; "but I must say it goes hard with me to torture two defenceless, frightened women, and ruin the character of a poor devil who regards me as his best friend. It is a low business !"

This resistance exasperated Louis to the last degree. "You are the most absurd, ridiculous fool I ever met," he cried. "An opportunity occurs for us to make an immense fortune. All we have to do is to stretch out our hands and take it ; when you must needs prove refractory, like a whimpering baby. Nobody but an ass would refuse to drink when he is thirsty, because he sees a little mud at the bottom of the bucket. I suppose you prefer theft on a small scale. And where will your system lead you? To the poor-house or the police-station. You prefer living from hand to mouth, supported by Madame Fauvel, having small sums doled out to you to pay your little gambling debts."

"I am neither ambitious nor cruel."

"And suppose Madame Fauvel dies to-morrow ; what will become of you? Will you go cringing up to the widower, and implore him to continue your allowance?"

"Enough said," cried Raoul, angrily interrupting his uncle. "I never had any idea of retreating. I made these objections to show you what infamous work you expect of me, and, at the same time, prove to you that without my assistance you can do nothing."

"I never pretended otherwise."

"Then, my noble uncle, we might as well settle what my share is to be. Oh! it is not worth while for you to indulge in idle protestations. What will you give me in case of success? and what if we fail?"

"I told you before. I will give you twenty-five thou-

sand francs a year, and all you can secure between now and my wedding-day."

"This arrangement suits me very well; but where are your securities?"

This question was discussed a long time, without being satisfactorily settled by the accomplices, who had every reason to distrust each other.

"What are you afraid of?" asked De Clameran.

"Everything," replied Raoul. "Where am I to obtain justice, if you deceive me? From this pretty little poniard? No, thank you. I would be made to pay as dear for your hide, as for that of an honest man."

Finally, after a long debate and much recrimination, the matter was arranged, and they shook hands before separating. Alas! Madame Fauvel and her niece soon felt the evil effects of the understanding between the villains. Everything happened as Louis had arranged. Once more, when Madame Fauvel had begun to breathe freely, and to hope that her troubles were over, Raoul's conduct suddenly changed; he became more extravagant and dissipated than ever. Formerly, Madame Fauvel would have said, "I wonder what he does with all the money I give him?" Now, she saw where it went. Raoul was reckless in his wickedness; he was intimate with actresses, openly lavishing money and jewellery upon them; he drove about with four horses, and bet heavily on every race. Never had he been so exacting and exorbitant in his demands for money; Madame Fauvel had the greatest difficulty in supplying his wants. He no longer made excuses and apologies for spending so much; instead of coaxingly entreating, he demanded money as a right, threatening to betray Madame Fauvel to her husband if she refused him. At this rate, all that she and Madeleine possessed soon disappeared. In one month, all their money had been squandered. Then they were compelled to resort to the most shameful expedients in the household expenses. They economized in every possible way, making purchases on credit, and making tradesman wait; then they changed figures in the bills, and even invented accounts of things never bought. These imaginary costly whims increased so rapidly, that M. Fauvel one day said, with a smile, "You are becoming very coquettish, my dears." Poor women! For months

they had bought nothing, but had lived upon the remains of their former splendor, having all their old dresses altered to keep up appearances in society. More clear-sighted than her aunt, Madeleine saw plainly that the day would soon come when everything would be discovered. Although she knew that the sacrifices of the present would avail nothing in the future, she was silent. A high-minded delicacy made her conceal her apprehensions beneath an assumed calmness. The fact of her sacrificing herself made her refrain from uttering anything like a complaint or censure. "As soon as Raoul sees we have nothing more to give," she would say to her aunt, "he will come to his senses, and stop all this extravagance." The day came, however, when Madame Fauvel and Madeleine found it impossible to give another franc. The previous evening, there had been a dinner-party, and they, with difficulty, scraped together enough money to defray the expenses. Raoul appeared, and said that he was in the greatest need of money, being forced to pay a debt of two thousand francs at once. In vain they implored him to wait a few days, until they could, with propriety, ask M. Fauvel for money.

"But I have no way of getting it for you," said Madame Fauvel, desperately; "you have taken everything from me. I have nothing left but my diamonds: do you want them? If they can be of use, take them."

Hardened as the young villain was, he blushed at these words. He felt pity for this unfortunate woman, who had always been so kind and indulgent to him—who had so often lavished upon him her maternal caresses. He felt for the noble girl, who was the innocent victim of a vile plot. But he was bound by his promise; he knew that a powerful hand would save these women at the brink of the precipice. More than this, he saw an immense fortune at the end of his road of crime, and quieted his conscience by saying that he would redeem his present cruelty by honest kindness in the future. Stifling his better impulses, he said harshly to Madame Fauvel: "Give me the jewels; I will take them to the pawnbroker's." She handed him a box containing a set of diamonds. It was a present from her husband the day he became worth a million. And so pressing was the want of these women who were surrounded by princely luxury, with their ten servants,

beautiful horses, and jewels which were the admiration of Paris, that they implored him to bring them some of the money which he would procure on the diamonds. He promised, and kept his word. But they had revealed a new source—a mine to be worked; he took advantage of it. One by one all Madame Fauvel's jewels followed the way of the diamonds; and, when hers were all gone, those belonging to Madeleine were given up. Madame Fauvel had no defence against the scoundrels who were torturing her, save prayers and tears; these availed her little. Sometimes, though, she betrayed such heart-broken suffering when Raoul begged her for money which she had no means of obtaining, that he would hurry away disgusted at his own brutal conduct, and say to De Clameran, "You must end this dirty business; I cannot stand it any longer. Let us steal with both hands as much as you like; but as to killing by agony and fright, these two poor miserable women, whom I am really fond of, I am not going to do it."

De Clameran showed no surprise at these remonstrances. "It is not pleasant, I know," he replied; "but necessity knows no law. Have a little more perseverance and patience; we have almost got to the end."

The end was nearer than De Clameran supposed. Towards the latter part of November, Madame Fauvel saw that it was impossible to postpone the catastrophe any longer, and as a last effort determined to apply to the marquis for assistance. She had not seen him since his return from Oloron, except once, when he came to announce his accession to wealth. At that time, persuaded that he was Raoul's evil genius, she had received him very coldly, and did not invite him to repeat his visit. She hesitated before speaking to her niece of the step she intended taking, because she feared violent opposition. To her great surprise Madeleine warmly approved of it. Trouble had made her keen-sighted and suspicious. Reflecting on past events, comparing and weighing every act and speech of Raoul, she was now convinced that he was De Clameran's tool. She thought that Raoul was too shrewd to be acting in this shameful way, ruinously to his own interests, if there were not some secret motive at the bottom of it all. She saw that this persecution was more feigned than real. So thoroughly was she convinced of

this, that, had it only concerned herself alone, she would have firmly resisted the oppression, confident that the threatened exposure would never take place. Recalling, with a shudder, certain looks of De Clameran, she guessed the truth, that the object of all this underhand work was to force her to become his wife. Determined on making the sacrifice, in spite of her repugnance towards the man, she wished to have the deed done at once; anything was preferable to the intolerable existence which Raoul made her lead. She felt that her courage might fail if she waited and suffered much longer.

"The sooner you see M. de Clameran the better for us, aunt," she said, after talking the project over.

The next day Madame Fauvel called on the marquis at the Hotel du Louvre, having sent him a note announcing her intended visit. He received her with cold, studied politeness, like a man who had been misunderstood and had been unjustly wounded. After listening to her report of Raoul's scandalous behavior, he became very indignant, and swore that he would soon make him repent of his heartlessness. But, when Madame Fauvel told him that Raoul applied to her because he would take nothing from his uncle, De Clameran seemed confounded.

"The worthless rascal!" he exclaimed, "the idea of his audacity. Why, during the last four months, I have given him more than twenty thousand francs, which I would not have done except to prevent him from applying to you, as he constantly threatened to do."

Seeing an expression of doubt upon Madame Fauvel's face, Louis arose and took from a desk some receipts signed by Raoul, which he showed her. The total amount was twenty-three thousand five hundred francs. Madame Fauvel was shocked and amazed.

"He has obtained about forty thousand francs from me," she faintly said, "so that altogether he has spent at least sixty thousand francs in four months."

"I can't imagine what he does with it," said De Clameran, "unless he spends it on actresses."

"Good heavens! what can those creatures do with all the money lavished on them?"

"That is a thing one never knows."

He appeared to pity Madame Fauvel sincerely; he promised that he would at once see Raoul, and make him

alter his behavior. Finally, after many protestations of friendship, he wound up by placing his fortune at her disposal. Although Madame Fauvel refused his offer, she appreciated the kindness of it, and on returning home said to Madeleine, "Perhaps we have mistaken his character ; he may be a good man after all." Madeleine sadly shook her head. She had anticipated just what happened. De Clameran's magnanimity and generosity confirmed her presentiments.

Raoul called on his uncle, and found him radiant. "Everything is going on swimmingly, my smart nephew," said the marquis ; "your receipts act like a charm. Ah, you are a partner worth having. I congratulate you upon your success. Forty thousand francs in four months !"

"Yes," said Raoul carelessly. "I got about that much from her and the pawnbrokers."

"Hang it ! Then you must have a nice little sum laid by ; for the young lady, I presume, is a myth."

"That is my business, uncle. Remember our agreement. I can tell you this much ; Madame Fauvel and Madeleine have turned everything they can into money ; they have nothing left, and I have had enough of my rôle."

"Your rôle is ended. I forbid you to hereafter ask for a single centime."

"What are you about to do ? What has happened ?"

"The mine is loaded, nephew, and I am only awaiting an opportunity to set fire to it."

Louis de Clameran relied upon making his rival, Prosper Bertomy, furnish him with this ardently desired opportunity. He loved Madeleine too passionately to feel aught save the bitterest hate towards the man whom she had freely chosen, and who still possessed her heart. De Clameran knew that he could marry her at once if he chose ; but in what way ? By holding a sword of terror over her head, and forcing her to be his. He became frenzied at the idea of possessing her person, while her heart and soul would always be with Prosper. Thus he swore that, before marrying, he would so cover Prosper with shame and ignominy that no honest person would speak to him. He had at first thought of killing him, but he preferred to disgrace him. He imagined that there would be no difficulty in ruining the unfortunate young man, He soon found

himself mistaken. Though Prosper led a life of reckless dissipation, he preserved order in his disorder. If in a state of miserable entanglement, and obliged to resort to **all** sorts of make-shifts to escape his creditors, his caution prevented the world from knowing it. Vainly did Raoul, with his pockets full of gold, tempt him to play high; every effort to hasten his ruin failed. When he played he did not seem to care whether he lost or won; nothing aroused him from his cold indifference. His mistress, Nina Gipsy, was extravagant, but her devotion to Prosper restrained her from going beyond certain limits. Raoul's great intimacy with Prosper enabled him to fully understand the state of his mind; that he was trying to drown his disappointment in excitement, but had not given up **all** hope.

"You need not hope to beguile Prosper into committing any serious piece of folly," said Raoul to his uncle; "his head is as cool as an usurer's. What object he has in view I know not. Perhaps when he has spent his last coin he will blow his brains out; he certainly never will descend to any dishonorable act; he will never have recourse to the money in the banker's safe."

"We must urge him on," replied De Clameran; "lead him into more extravagances; make Gipsy call on him for costly finery, lend him plenty of money."

Raoul shook his head, as if convinced that his efforts would be in vain. "You don't know Prosper, uncle: we can't galvanize a dead man. Madeleine killed him the day she discarded him. He takes no interest in anything on the face of the earth."

"We can wait."

They did wait; and, to the great surprise of Madame Fauvel, Raoul once more became an affectionate and dutiful son, as he had been during De Clameran's absence. From reckless extravagance he changed to great economy. Under pretext of saving money, he remained at Vésinet, although it was very uncomfortable and disagreeable there in the winter. He wished, he said, to expiate his sins in solitude. The truth was, that, by remaining in the country, he insured his liberty, and escaped his mother's visits. It was about this time that Madame Fauvel, charmed with the improvement in Raoul, asked her husband to give him some employment in the bank. M. Fauvel was delighted

to please his wife, and at once offered Raoul the place of corresponding clerk, with a salary of five hundred francs a month. The appointment pleased Raoul; but, in obedience to De Clameran's command, he refused it, saying, he had no taste for banking. This refusal so provoked the banker, that he rather bitterly reproached Raoul, and told him not to expect him to do anything to assist him in future. Raoul seized this pretext for ostensibly ceasing his visits. When he wanted to see his mother, he would come in the afternoon or evening, when he knew that M. Fauvel would be from home; and he only came often enough to keep himself informed of what was going on in the household. This sudden lull after so many storms appeared ominous to Madeleine. She was more certain than ever that the plot was now ripe, and would suddenly burst upon them, without warning. She did not impart her presentiment to her aunt, but prepared herself for the worst.

"What can they be doing?" Madame Fauvel would say; "can they have decided not to persecute us any more?"

"Yes, what can they be doing?" Madeleine would murmur.

Louis and Raoul gave no signs of life, because, like expert hunters, they were silently hiding, and watching for a favorable opportunity of pouncing upon their victims. Never losing sight of Prosper for a day, Raoul had exhausted every effort of his fertile mind to compromise his honor—to ensnare him into some inextricable entanglement. But, as he had foreseen, the cashier's indifference offered little hope of success. De Clameran began to grow impatient at this delay, and had fully determined to bring matters to a crisis himself, when one night, about three o'clock, he was aroused by Raoul. He knew that some event of great importance must have happened, to make his nephew come to him at that hour of the night.

"What is the matter?" he anxiously inquired.

"Perhaps nothing; perhaps everything. I have just left Prosper."

"Well?"

"I had him, Madame Gipsy, and three other friends to dine with me. After dinner, I made up a game of baccarat,

but Prosper took no interest in it, although he was quite tipsy."

"You must be drunk yourself, to come here waking me up in the middle of the night, to hear this idle gabble," said Louis, angrily.

"Now, wait until you hear the rest."

"Zounds! speak then!"

"After the game was over, we went to supper; Prosper became quite intoxicated, and betrayed the word with which he closes the money-safe."

At these words, De Clameran uttered a cry of triumph. "What was the word?"

"His mistress's name."

"Gipsy! Yes, that would be five letters." Louis was so excited that he jumped out of bed, slipped on his dressing-gown, and began to stride up and down the room. "Now we have got him!" he said, with vindictive satisfaction. "There's no chance of escape for him now! Ah! the virtuous cashier won't touch the money confided to him; so we must touch it for him. His disgrace will be just as great no matter who opens the safe. We have the word; you know where the key is kept."

"Yes; when M. Fauvel goes out he always leaves the key in a drawer of his secretary, in his bedroom."

"Very good. You will go and get this key from Madame Fauvel. If she does not give it up willingly, use force; then, when having got the key, you will open the safe, and take out every franc it contains. Ah! Master Bertomy, you shall pay dear for being loved by the woman I love!"

For five minutes, De Clameran indulged in such a tirade of abuse against Prosper, mingled with rhapsodies of love for Madeleine, that Raoul thought him almost out of his mind, and tried to calm him. "Before crying victory," he said, "you had better consider the drawbacks and difficulties. Prosper might change the word to-morrow."

"Yes, he might; but it is not probable he will. He will forget what he said while drunk; besides, we will be quiet."

"That is not all. M. Fauvel has given orders that no large sum shall be kept in the safe over night; before closing time, everything is sent to the Bank of France."

"A large sum will be kept there the night I choose."

"You think so?"

"I think this : I have a hundred thousand crowns deposited with M. Fauvel ; and if I desire the money to be paid over to me early some morning, directly the bank is opened, of course the money will be kept in the safe the previous night."

"A splendid idea !" cried Raoul, admiringly.

It was a good idea ; and the plotters spent several hours in studying its strong and weak points. Raoul feared that he would never be able to overcome Madame Fauvel's resistance ; and, even if she yielded the key, would she not go directly and confess everything to her husband, rather than sacrifice an innocent man ? But Louis felt no uneasiness on this score. "One sacrifice necessitates another," he said : "she has made too many to draw back at the last one. She sacrificed her adopted daughter ; therefore she will sacrifice a young man, who is, after all, a comparative stranger to her."

"But Madeleine will never believe any harm of Prosper ; therefore—"

"You talk like an idiot, my verdant nephew !"

Before the conversation had ended, the plan seemed feasible. The scoundrels made all their arrangements, and fixed the day for committing the crime. They selected the evening of the 27th of February, because Raoul knew that M. Fauvel would be dining out, and Madeleine was invited to a party on that evening. Unless something unforeseen should occur, Raoul knew that he would find Madame Fauvel alone at half-past eight o'clock."

"I will ask M. Fauvel this very day," said De Clameran, "to have my money ready for Tuesday."

"That is a very short notice, uncle," objected Raoul. "You know there are certain forms to be gone through, and he can claim a longer time wherein to pay it over."

"That is true, but our banker is proud of always being prepared to pay any amount of money, no matter how large ; and if I say I am pressed, and would like to be accommodated on Tuesday, he will make a point of having it ready for me. Then, you must ask Prosper, as a personal favor to you, to have the money on hand at the opening of the bank."

Raoul once more examined the situation, to discover if there was not the grain of sand which so often becomes a mountain at the last moment. "Prosper and Gipsy are to

be with me at Vésinet this evening," he said; "but I can not ask him anything until I know the banker's answer. As soon as you have arranged matters with him, send me word by Manuel."

"I can't send Manuel, for an excellent reason—he has left me; but I can send another messenger."

What Louis said was true; Manuel was gone. He had insisted on keeping Gaston's old servant in his service, because he thought it imprudent to leave him at Oloron, where his gossiping might cause trouble. He soon became annoyed by Manuel's loyalty, and determined to rid himself of him; so he just gave him the idea of ending his days in peace in his own country. So, the evening before, Manuel had started for Arenys-de-Mar, a little port of Catalonia, his native place; and Louis was seeking another servant. After breakfasting together, Louis and Raoul separated. De Clameran was so elated by the prospect of success that he lost sight of the great crime intervening. Raoul was calm, but resolute. The shameful deed he was about to commit would give him riches, and release him from a hateful servitude. His one thought was liberty, as Louis's was Madeleine. Everything seemed to progress finely. The banker did not ask for the delay he was entitled to, but promised to pay the money on the day named. Prosper said he would have it ready early in the morning. The certainty of success made Louis almost wild with joy. He counted the hours and the minutes.

"When this affair is ended," he said to Raoul, "I will reform, and be a model of virtue. No one will dare hint that I have ever indulged in any sins—great or small."

But Raoul became more and more sad as the time approached. Reflection gradually showed him the blackness of the contemplated crime. Raoul was bold and determined in the pursuit of his own gratifications and wickedness; he could smile in the face of his best friend, while cheating him of his last napoleon at cards; and he could sleep well after stabbing his enemy to the heart; but he was young. He was young in sin. Vice had not yet penetrated to his marrow-bones—corruption had not yet crowded into his soul enough to uproot and destroy every generous sentiment. It had not been so very long since he had cherished a few holy beliefs. The good intentions of his boyhood were not quite obliterated from his sometimes

reproachful memory. Possessing the daring courage natural to youth, he depised the cowardly part forced upon him ; this dark plot—this slow agony of two helpless women, filled him with horror and disgust. His heart revolted at the idea of acting the part of Judas towards his mother, to betray her between two kisses. Disgusted by Louis's cool villany, he longed for some great peril to be braved, so as to excuse himself in his own eyes. But no ; he well knew that he ran no risk, not even that of being arrested and sent to prison. For he was certain that, if M. Fauvel discovered everything, he would do his utmost to hush up every fact connected with the disgraceful story. Although he was careful not to breathe it to De Clameran, he felt a sincere affection for Madame Fauvel, and was touched by the indulgent fondness which she so unchangingly lavished upon him. He had been happy at Vésinet ; while his accomplice, or rather his master, was at Oloron. He would have been glad to lead an honest life, and could not see the sense of committing a crime when there was no necessity for it. He hated De Clameran, who abused his power for the sake of gratifying a selfish passion ; and he longed for an opportunity of thwarting his plots, if it could be done without also ruining himself. His resolution, which had been so firm in the beginning, was growing weaker and weaker as the hours rolled on ; as the crisis approached, his horror of the deed increased. And yet Louis never left him, but continually painted for him a dazzling future, position, wealth, and freedom. He prepared, and forced his accomplice to rehearse, the scene which was to be enacted at Madame Fauvel's, with as much coolness and precision as if it were to be performed at a public theatre. Louis said that no piece could be well acted unless the actor was interested, and imbued with the spirit of his rôle. But the more urgently Louis pressed upon him the advantages to be derived from success—the oftener he sounded in his ears the magic words “ five hundred thousand francs,” the more loudly did Raoul's conscience cry out against the sinful deed. On the Monday evening, about six o'clock, Raoul felt so depressed and miserable that he asked himself whether, even if he wished it, he would be able to obey.

“ Are you afraid ? ” asked De Clameran, who had anxiously watched these inward struggles.

"Yes," replied Raoul, "yes ; I have not your ferocious will, and I am afraid !"

"What, you, my pupil, my friend ! It is not possible. Come, a little energy, one more stroke of our oars and we are in port. You are only nervous ; come to dinner, and a bottle of Burgundy will soon set you right."

They were walking along the boulevards. De Clameran insisted upon their entering a restaurant, and having dinner in a private room. Vainly did he strive, however, to chase the gloom from his companion's pale face. Raoul sat listening, with a sullen frown, to his friend's jest about "swallowing the bitter pill gracefully." Urged by Louis, he drank two bottles of wine, in hopes that intoxication would inspire him with courage to do the deed. But the drunkenness he sought came not ; the wine proved false ; at the bottom of the last bottle he found nothing but anger and disgust. The clock struck eight.

"The time has come," said Louis firmly.

Raoul turned livid ; his teeth chattered, and his limbs trembled so that he was unable to stand on his feet. "Oh, I cannot do it !" he cried in an agony of terror and rage.

De Clameran's eyes flashed angrily at the prospect of all his plans being ruined at the last moment. But he dared not give way to his anger, for fear of exasperating Raoul, whom he knew to be anxious for an excuse to quarrel ; so he violently pulled the bell-rope. A waiter appeared. "A bottle of port," he said, "and a bottle of rum."

When the waiter returned with the bottles, Louis filled a large glass with the two liquors mixed, and handed it to Raoul. "Drink this !" he said.

Raoul emptied the glass at a draught, and a faint color returned to his pale cheek. He arose, and striking the table with his fist, cried fiercely, "Come along !"

But before he had walked thirty yards, the fictitious energy inspired by drink deserted him. He clung to De Clameran's arm, and was almost dragged along, trembling like a criminal on his way to the scaffold.

"If I can once get him in the house," thought Louis, who had studied Raoul and understood him ; "once inside, his rôle will sustain him and carry him through, and all will be well. The cowardly baby ! I would like to wring his neck !"

As they walked along he said : "Now, don't forget our

arrangements, and be careful how you enter the house ; everything depends upon that. Have you the pistol in your pocket ? ”

“ Yes, yes ! Let me alone ! ”

It was well that De Clameran accompanied Raoul ; for, when he got in sight of the door his courage gave way, and he longed to retreat. “ A poor, helpless woman ! ” he groaned, “ and an honest man who pressed my hand in friendship yesterday, to be cowardly ruined, betrayed by me ! Ah, it is too base, too cowardly ! ”

“ Come,” said De Clameran in a tone of contempt, “ I thought you had more nerve. When a fellow has no more pluck than that, he should remain honest ! ”

Raoul overcame his weakness, and, silencing the clamors of his conscience, hurried to the house and pulled the bell. “ Is Madame Fauvel at home ? ” he inquired of the servant who opened the door.

“ Madame is alone in the little drawing-room,” was the reply.

And Raoul went up stairs.

XX.

DE CLAMERAN’S injunction to Raoul was : “ Be very cautious how you enter the room ; your appearance must tell everything, and thus avoid impossible explanations.”

The recommendation was useless. The instant that Raoul entered the room, the sight of his pale, haggard face and wild eyes made Madame Fauvel exclaim : “ Raoul ! What misfortune has happened to you ? ”

The sound of her tender, affectionate voice acted like an electric shock upon the young bandit. He shook like a leaf. But at the same time his mind seemed to change. Louis was not mistaken in his estimate of his companion’s character. Raoul was on the stage, his part was to be played ; his assurance returned to him ; his cheating, lying nature assumed the ascendant. “ This misfortune is the last I shall ever suffer, mother ! ”

Madame Fauvel rushed towards him, and, seizing his hand, gazed searchingly into his eyes, as if to read his very soul. “ What is the matter ? Raoul, my dear son, do tell me what troubles you.”

He gently pushed her from him. "The matter is, my mother," he said, in a voice of heart-broken despair, "that I am unworthy of you, unworthy of my noble father!"

She shook her head as though to protest.

"Alas!" he said, "I know and judge myself. No one can reproach me for my infamous conduct more bitterly than does my own conscience. I am not naturally wicked, but only a miserable fool. At times I am like an insane man, and am not responsible for my actions. Ah, my dear mother, I would not be what I am, if you had watched over my childhood. But brought up among strangers, with no guide but my own evil passions, nothing to restrain me, no one to advise me, no one to love me, owning nothing, not even my stolen name, I am cursed with vanity and unbounded ambition. Poor, with no one to assist me but you, I have the tastes and vices of a millionaire's son. Alas! when I found you, the evil was done. Your affection, your maternal love, the only true happiness of my life, could not save me. I, who had suffered so much, endured so many privations, even the pangs of hunger, became spoiled by this new life of luxury and pleasure which you opened before me. I rushed headlong into extravagance, as a drunkard long deprived of drink seizes and drains to the dregs the first bottle in his reach."

Madame Fauvel listened, silent and terrified, to these words of despair and remorse, which Raoul uttered with remarkable vehemence. She dared not interrupt him, but felt certain some dreadful piece of news was coming. Raoul continued in a sad, hopeless tone: "Yes; I have been a weak fool. Happiness was within my reach, and I had not the sense to stretch forth my hand and grasp it. I rejected a delicious reality to eagerly pursue a vain phantom. I, who ought to have spent my life at your feet, and daily striven to express my gratitude for your lavish kindness, have made you unhappy, destroyed your peace of mind, and, instead of being a blessing, I have been a curse ever since the first fatal day you welcomed me to your kind heart. Ah, unfeeling brute that I was, to squander upon creatures whom I despised, a fortune, of which each gold piece must have cost you a tear! Too late, too late! I find that with you was happiness."

He stopped, as if overcome by the consciousness of his evil deeds, and seemed about to burst into tears.

"It is never too late to repent, my son," murmured Madame Fauvel in comforting tones.

"Ah, if I only could!" cried Raoul; "but no, it is too late! Besides, can I tell how long my good resolutions will last? This is not the first time that I have condemned myself pitilessly. Stinging remorse for each new fault made me swear to lead a better life, to sin no more. What was the result of these periodical repentances? At the first temptation I forgot my remorse and good resolutions. I am weak and mean-spirited, and you are not firm enough to govern my vacillating nature. While my intentions are good, my actions are villanous. The disproportion between my extravagant desires, and the means of gratifying them, is too great for me to endure any longer. Who knows to what fearful lengths my unfortunate disposition may lead me? However, I shall know how to do myself justice!" he finally said with a reckless laugh.

Madame Fauvel was too cruelly agitated to follow Raoul's skilful transitions. "Speak!" she cried, "explain yourself; am I not your mother? Tell me the truth; I am ready to hear the worst."

He appeared to hesitate, as if afraid to crush his mother's heart by the terrible blow he was about to inflict. Then in a voice of gloomy despair he replied: "I am ruined!"

"Ruined!"

"Yes, ruined; and I have nothing more to expect or hope for. I am dishonored, and all through my own fault; no one is to blame but myself."

"Raoul!"

"It is the sad truth, my poor mother; but fear nothing. I shall not trail in the dust the name which you bestowed upon me. I will at least have the courage not to survive my dishonor. Come, mother, don't pity me, or distress yourself; I am one of those miserable beings fated to find no peace save in the arms of death. I came into the world with misfortune stamped upon my brow. Was not my birth a shame and disgrace to you? Did not the memory of my existence haunt you day and night, filling your soul with remorse? And now, when I am restored to you after many years' separation, do I not prove to be a bitter curse instead of a blessing?"

"Ungrateful boy! Have I ever reproached you?"

"Never! Your poor Raoul will die blessing you, and with your beloved name upon his lips."

"Die? You die, my son?"

"It must be, my dear mother; honor compels it. I am condemned by judges from whose decision no appeal can be taken—my conscience and my will."

An hour ago, Madame Fauvel would have sworn that Raoul had made her suffer all the torments that a woman could endure; but now she felt that all her former troubles were nothing compared with her present agony. "What, then, have you been doing, Raoul?" she gasped.

"Money was entrusted to me; I gambled, and lost it."

"Was it a very large sum?"

"No; but more than you can replace. My poor mother, have I not taken everything from you? Have you not given me your last jewel?"

"But M. de Clameran is rich. He placed his fortune at my disposal. I will order the carriage, and go to him."

"But M. de Clameran is away, and the money must be paid this evening, or I am lost. Alas! I have thought it all over and, although it is hard to die so young, still fate wills it so." He pulled the pistol from his pocket, and, with a forced smile, added: "This will settle everything."

Madame Fauvel was too upset and frightened to reflect upon the horror of Raoul's behavior: and that these wild threats were a last expedient. Forgetful of the past, careless of the future, her every thought concentrated upon the present, she comprehended but one fact: that her son was about to commit suicide, and that she was powerless to prevent the fearful deed. "Oh, wait a little while, my son!" she cried. "André will soon return home, and I will ask him to give me—How much did you lose?"

"Thirty thousand francs."

"You shall have them to-morrow."

"But I must have the money to-night."

Madame Fauvel wrung her hands in despair. "Oh! why did you not come to me sooner, my son? Why did you not have confidence enough in me to come at once for help? This evening there is no one in the cashier's office to open the safe, otherwise—"

"The safe!" cried Raoul, "but you know where the key is kept?"

"Yes, it is in the next room."

"Well!" he exclaimed, with a bold look that caused Madame Fauvel to lower her eyes, and keep silent. "Give me the key, mother," he said in a tone of entreaty.

"O Raoul, Raoul!"

"It is my life I am asking of you."

These words decided her; she snatched up a candle, rushed into her bedroom, opened the secretary, and took out M. Fauvel's key. But, when about to hand it to Raoul, her reason returned to her. "No," she stammered, "no, it is impossible."

He did not insist, and seemed about to leave the room. "True," said he; "then, mother, a last kiss."

"What could you do with the key, Raoul?" asked Madame Fauvel, stopping him. "You do not know the secret word."

"No; but I can try to open it."

"You know that money is never kept in the safe over night."

"Nevertheless, I can make the attempt. If I open the safe and find money in it, it will be a miracle, showing that Heaven has pitied my misfortunes."

"And, if you are not successful, will you promise me to wait until to-morrow?"

"I swear it, by my father's memory."

"Then take the key, and follow me."

Pale and trembling, Raoul and Madame Fauvel passed through the banker's study, and down the narrow staircase leading to the offices and cashier's room below. Raoul walked in front, holding the light, and the key of the safe. Madame Fauvel was convinced that it would be utterly impossible to open the safe, as the key was useless without the secret word, and of course Raoul could not know what that was. Even granting that some chance had revealed the secret to him, he would find but little in the safe, since everything was deposited in the Bank of France. The only anxiety she felt was, how Raoul would bear the disappointment, how she could calm his despair. She thought that she would gain time by letting Raoul make the attempt; and then, when he found he could not open the safe, he would keep his promise, and wait until the next day. "When he sees there is no chance of success," she thought, "he will wait as he promised; and then to-morrow—to-morrow—"

What she would do on the morrow she knew not, she did not even ask herself. But in extreme situations the least delay inspires hope, as if a short respite meant sure salvation. The condemned man, at the last moment, begs for a reprieve of a day, an hour, a few seconds. Raoul was about to kill himself; his mother prayed to God to grant her one night; as if in this short space of time some unexpected relief would come to end her misery. They reached Prosper's office, and Raoul placed the lamp on a high stool so that it lighted the whole room. He had then recovered all his coolness, or rather that mechanical precision of movement, almost independent of will, which men accustomed to peril always find ready in time of need. Rapidly, with the dexterity of experience, he slipped the buttons on the five letters composing the name of G, i, p, s, y. His features during this short operation, expressed the most intense anxiety. He was fearful that the awful energy he had shown might after all be of no use; perhaps the safe would remain closed, perhaps the money would not be there. Prosper might have changed the word, or neglected to have the money in the safe. Madame Fauvel saw these visible apprehensions with alarm. She read in his eyes that wild hope of a man who, passionately desiring an object, ends by persuading himself that his own will suffices to overcome all obstacles. Having often been present when Prosper was preparing to leave his office, Raoul had fifty times seen him move the buttons, and lock the safe, just before the bank closed. Indeed, having a practical turn of mind, and an eye to the future, he had even turned the key in the lock on more than one occasion. He inserted the key softly, and turned it round once, pushed it farther in, and turned it a second time; then thrust it right in with a jerk, and turned it again. His heart beat so loudly that Madame Fauvel could hear its throbs. The word had not been changed; the safe opened. Raoul and his mother simultaneously uttered a cry—she of terror, he of triumph.

"Shut it again!" exclaimed Madame Fauvel, frightened at the incomprehensible result of Raoul's attempt; "leave it alone, come away."

And, half frenzied, she clung to his arm, and pulled him away so abruptly, that the key was dragged from the lock, and, slipping along the glossy varnish of the safe-door,

made a deep, long scratch. But at a glance the young man had perceived three rolls of bank notes on an upper shelf. He snatched them up with his left hand, and slipped them inside his vest. Exhausted by the effort she had made, Madame Fauvel dropped his arm, and, almost fainting with emotion, leant against the back of a chair.

"Have mercy, Raoul!" she moaned. "I implore you to put back that money, and I solemnly swear I will give you twice as much to-morrow. O my son, have pity upon your unhappy mother!"

He paid no attention to these words of entreaty, but carefully examined the scratch on the safe. This trace of the robbery was very visible, and alarmed him.

"At least you will not take all," said Madame Fauvel; "just keep enough to save yourself, and put back the rest."

"What good would that do? What I take will be missed just the same."

"Oh, no! not at all. I can account to André; I will tell him I had a pressing need for some money, and opened the safe to get it."

In the mean time Raoul had carefully closed the safe. "Come, mother, let us go back to the sitting-room. A servant might go there to look for you, and be astonished at our absence."

Raoul's cruel indifference and cold calculations at such a moment filled Madame Fauvel with indignation. She thought that she had still some influence over her son—that her prayers and tears would have some effect upon his hard heart. "Let them be astonished," she cried; "let them come here and find us. Then there will be an end to all this. André will drive me from his house like a worthless creature, but I will not sacrifice the innocent. Prosper will be accused of this to-morrow. De Clameran has taken from him the woman he loved, and now you would deprive him of his honor! I will not allow it."

She spoke so loud and angrily that Raoul was alarmed. He knew that one of the office-men passed the night in a room close by, and although it was still early in the evening he might already be in bed, and listening to them. "Come up stairs," he said, seizing Madame Fauvel's arm.

But she clung to a table, and refused to move a step.

"I have been cowardly enough to sacrifice Madeleine," she said, "but I will not ruin Prosper."

Raoul had an argument in reserve which he knew would make Madame Fauvel submit to his will. "Now, really," he said, with a cynical laugh, "do you pretend that you do not know Prosper and I arranged this little affair together, and that he is waiting to share the booty?"

"It is impossible!"

"What! Do you suppose, then, that chance alone told me the word, and placed the money in the safe?"

"Prosper is honest."

"Of course he is, and so am I too. The only thing is, that we both need money."

"You lie."

"No, dear mother. Madeleine dismissed Prosper, and the poor fellow has to console himself for her cruelty, and this sort of consolation is expensive."

He took up the lamp, and gently but firmly led Madame Fauvel towards the staircase. She mechanically suffered him to do so, more bewildered by what she had just heard, than she was at the opening of the safe-door. "What!" she gasped; "can Prosper be a thief?" She began to think herself the victim of a terrible nightmare, and that, when she awoke, her mind would be relieved of this intolerable torture. She helplessly clung to Raoul's arm as he assisted her up the little narrow staircase.

"You must put the key back in the secretary," said Raoul, as soon as they were in the bedroom again.

But she did not seem to hear him; so he went and put it in the place from which he had seen her take it. He then led, or rather carried, Madame Fauvel, into the little sitting-room, and placed her in an easy-chair. The set expressionless look of the wretched woman's eyes, and her dazed manner, frightened Raoul, who thought that she was going out of her mind.

"Come, cheer up, my dear mother," he said, in coaxing tones, as he rubbed her icy cold hands; "you have just saved my life, and have at the same time rendered an immense service to Prosper. Don't be alarmed; every thing will come out right in the end. Prosper will be accused—perhaps arrested; he expects that, and is prepared for it; he will deny his culpability; and, as there is no proof against him, he will soon be set at liberty."

But these falsehoods were wasted on Madame Fauvel, who was incapable of understanding anything said to her. "Raoul," she moaned, "Raoul, my son, you have killed me."

Her gentle voice, kind even its despairing accents, touched the very bottom of Raoul's perverted heart, and once more his soul was so wrung by remorse, that he felt inclined to put back the stolen money. The thought of De Clameran restrained him. Finding that Madame Fauvel still sat motionless and death-like in her chair, and fearing that M. Fauvel or Madeleine might enter at any moment, and demand an explanation, he hastily pressed a kiss upon his mother's brow, and hurried from the house. At the restaurant, in the room where they had dined, De Clameran, tortured by anxiety, awaited his accomplice. He wondered if, at the last moment, when he was not near to sustain him, Raoul would prove a coward and retreat. The merest accident, too, is sufficient to upset the most skilful combinations. When Raoul returned he jumped to his feet, ghastly pale, and with difficulty gasped out: "Well?"

"It is done, uncle, thanks to you; and I am now the greatest villain on the face of the earth." He unbuttoned his vest, and, pulling out the four bundles of bank-notes, angrily dashed them upon the table, adding, in a tone of hate and contempt: "Now I hope you are satisfied. This is the price of the happiness, honor, and perhaps the life, of three persons."

De Clameran paid no attention to these angry words. With feverish eagerness he seized the notes, and held them in his hand as if to convince himself of the reality of success. "Now Madeleine is mine," he cried, excitedly.

Raoul said nothing. This exhibition of joy, after the scene in which he had just been an actor, disgusted and humiliated him. Louis misinterpreted his silence, and asked, gayly: "Did you have much difficulty?"

"I forbid you ever to allude to this evening's work," cried Raoul, fiercely. "Do you hear me? I wish to forget it."

De Clameran shrugged his shoulders at this outburst of anger, and said, in a bantering tone: "Just as you please, my handsome nephew; forget it if you like. I rather think, though, you will not refuse to accept these three hundred

and fifty thousand francs, as a slight memento. Take them—they are yours.”

This generosity seemed neither to surprise nor satisfy Raoul. “According to our agreement,” he said, sullenly, “I was to have much more than this.”

“Of course ; this is only on account.”

“And when am I to have the rest, if you please ? ”

“The day I marry Madeleine, and not before, my boy. You are too valuable an assistant to lose at present ; and you know that, though I don’t distrust you, I am not altogether sure of your sincere affection for me.”

Raoul reflected that to commit a crime, and not profit by it, would be the height of absurdity. He had returned with the intention of breaking off all connection with De Clameran ; but he now determined that he would not abandon his accomplice until there was nothing more to get out of him. “Very well,” he said, “I accept this on account ; but remember, I will never do another piece of work like this of to-night.”

De Clameran burst into a loud laugh, and replied : “That is sensible ; now that you are rich, you can afford to be honest. Set your conscience at rest, for I promise you I will require nothing more of you save a few trifling services. You can retire behind the scenes now, while I appear upon the stage.”

XXI.

FOR more than an hour after Raoul’s departure, Madame Fauvel remained in a state of torpor bordering upon unconsciousness. Gradually, however, she recovered her senses sufficiently to comprehend the horrors of her present situation ; and, with the faculty of thought, that of suffering returned. The dreadful scene in which she had taken part was still before her affrighted vision ; all the attending circumstances, unnoticed at the time, now struck her forcibly. She saw that she had been the dupe of a shameful conspiracy ; that Raoul had tortured her with cold-blooded cruelty, had taken advantage of her tenderness, and played with her sufferings. But had Prosper anything to do with the robbery ? This Madame Fauvel had no way of finding out. Ah, Raoul knew how the blow would

strike when he accused his friend. He knew that she would end by believing in the cashier's complicity. Knowing that Madeleine's lover was leading a life of extravagance and dissipation, she thought it very likely he had, from sheer desperation, resorted to this bold step to pay his debts ; her blind affection, moreover, made her anxious to attribute the first idea of crime to any one, rather than to her son. She had heard that Prosper was supporting one of those worthless creatures whose extravagance impoverishes men, and whose evil influence perverts their natures. When a young man is thus degraded, will he stop at any sin or crime? Alas ! Madame Fauvel knew, from her own sad experience, to what depths even one fault can lead. Although she believed Prosper guilty, she did not blame him, but considered herself responsible for his sins. Was she not the cause that he no longer frequented the home he had begun to look upon as his own? Had she not destroyed his hopes of happiness, and driven him to a life of dissipation, wherein perhaps he sought forgetfulness? She was undecided whether to confide in Madeleine, or bury the secret in her own breast. Fatally inspired, she decided to keep silent.

When the young girl returned home at eleven o'clock, Madame Fauvel not only was silent as to what had occurred, but even succeeded in so concealing all traces of her agitation, that she escaped any questions from her niece. Her calmness never left her when M. Fauvel and Lucien returned, although she was in terror lest her husband should go down to the cashier's room to examine the books. It was not his habit to open the safe at night, but he sometimes did so. As fate would have it, the banker, as soon as he entered the room, began to speak of Prosper, saying how distressing it was that so interesting a young man should be thus throwing himself away, and wondering what could have happened to make him suddenly cease his visits at the house, and resort to bad company. If M. Fauvel had looked at the faces of his wife and niece while he harshly blamed the cashier, he would have been puzzled at their strange expressions. All night long, Madame Fauvel suffered the most intolerable agony.

"In six hours," she would say to herself, "in three

hours, in one hour, all will be discovered ; and then what will happen ? ”

When daybreak came, she heard the servants moving about the house. Then the offices were opened, and the noise made by the arriving clerks reached her. She attempted to get up, but felt so ill and weak that she sank back upon her pillow ; and lying there, trembling like a leaf, bathed in cold perspiration, she awaited the discovery of the robbery. She was leaning over the side of the bed, straining her ear to catch the least sound, when Madeleine, who had shortly before left her, rushed back into the room. The poor girl's white face and wild eyes told Madame Fauvel that the crime was discovered.

“ Do you know what has happened aunt ? ” cried Madeleine, in a shrill, horrified tone. “ Prosper is accused of robbery, and the commissary of police has come to take him to prison ! ”

A groan was Madame Fauvel's only answer.

“ Raoul or the marquis is at the bottom of this,” continued Madeleine, excitedly.

“ How can they be concerned in it ? ”

“ I can't tell yet ; but I only know that Prosper is innocent. I have just seen him, spoken to him. He would never have looked me in the face had he been guilty.”

Madame Fauvel opened her lips to confess all : fear kept her silent.

“ What can these wretches want ? ” asked Madeleine, “ what new sacrifice do they demand ? Dishonor Prosper ! They had far better have killed him—I would have said nothing.”

M. Fauvel's entrance into the room interrupted Madeleine. The banker was so enraged that he could scarcely speak. “ The worthless scoundrel ! ” he cried : “ to think of his daring to accuse me ! to insinuate that I robbed my own safe ! And that Marquis de Clameran, who seems to doubt my integrity.” Then, without noticing the effect of his words upon the two women, he proceeded to relate all that had occurred. “ I was afraid of something of this sort last night,” he said in conclusion ; “ this is the result of leading such a life as his has been lately.”

Throughout the day Madeleine's devotion to her aunt was severely tried. The generous girl saw disgrace heaped upon the man she loved. She had perfect faith in his in-

nocence ; she felt sure she knew who had laid the trap to ruin him, and yet she did not say a word in his defence. Fearing that Madeleine would suspect her of complicity in the theft, if she remained in bed and betrayed so much agitation, Madame Fauvel rose and dressed for breakfast. It was a dreary meal. No one tasted a morsel. The servants moved about on tiptoe, as silently as if a death had occurred in the family.

About two o'clock a servant came to M. Fauvel's study, and said that the Marquis de Clameran desired to see him. "What !" cried the banker, "does he dare—" Then, after a moment's reflection, he added : "Ask him to walk up."

The very name of De Clameran sufficed to arouse all M. Fauvel's slumbering wrath. The victim of a robbery, finding his safe empty at the moment that he was called upon to make a heavy payment, he had been constrained to curb his anger and resentment ; but now he determined to have his revenge upon his insolent visitor. But the marquis declined to come up stairs. The messenger returned with the answer that the gentleman had a particular reason for seeing M. Fauvel in the office below, where the clerks were.

"What does this fresh impertinence mean ?" cried the banker, as he angrily jumped up and hastened down stairs.

M. de Clameran was standing the middle of the office adjoining the cashier's room ; M. Fauvel walked up to him, and roughly said : "What do you want now, sir ? You have been paid your money, and I have your receipt."

To the surprise of all the clerks, and the banker himself, the marquis seemed not in the least offended at this rude greeting, but answered in a deferential though not at all humble manner : "You are hard upon me, sir, but I deserve it, and that is why I am here. A gentleman always acknowledges when he is in the wrong : in this instance I am the offender ; and I flatter myself that my past will permit me to say so without being accused of cowardice or lack of self-respect. If I desired to see you here instead of in your study, it was because, having been rude to you in the presence of your clerks, I wished them to be witnesses of my apology for the same."

De Clameran's speech was so different from his usual overbearing, haughty conduct, that the surprised banker

could only stammer : " I must say that I was hurt by your doubts, your insinuations—"

" This morning," continued the marquis, " I was irritated, and thoughtlessly gave way to my temper. Although I am gray-headed, my disposition is as excitable as that of a fiery young man of twenty. My words, believe me, did not represent my real thoughts, and I regret them deeply."

M. Fauvel being himself a kind-hearted though quick-tempered man, could understand De Clameran's feelings ; and, knowing that his own high reputation for scrupulous honesty could not be affected by any hasty language, he at once calmed down before so frank an apology. Holding out his hand to De Clameran, he said : " Let us forget what happened, sir."

They conversed in a friendly manner for some minutes ; and De Clameran, after explaining why he had such pressing need of the money at that particular hour of the morning, turned to leave, saying that he would do himself the honor of calling upon Madame Fauvel. " That is, if a visit just now would not be considered intrusive," he said with a shade of hesitation. " Perhaps after the trouble of this morning, she does not wish to be disturbed."

" Oh, no !" said the banker ; " I think a visit would cheer her up. I am obliged to go out on account of this unfortunate affair."

Madame Fauvel was in the same room where Raoul had threatened to kill himself the night before ; she looked very ill as she lay on a sofa, with Madeleine seated beside her.

When M. de Clameran was announced, they both started up as if a phantom had appeared before them. Although Louis had been gay and smiling when he parted from M. Fauvel down stairs, he now wore a melancholy aspect, as he gravely bowed, and refused to seat himself in the chair which Madame Fauvel motioned him to take.

" You will excuse me, ladies," he began, " for intruding upon your affliction ; but I have a duty to fulfil."

The two women were silent ; they seemed to be waiting for him to explain. He therefore added in an undertone : " I know all."

By an imploring gesture, Madame Fauvel tried to stop him. She saw that he was about to reveal her secret to Madeleine. But Louis would not see this gesture ; he

turned his whole attention to Madeleine, who haughtily said : "Explain yourself, sir."

"Only an hour ago," he replied, "I discovered that Raoul last night forced from his mother the key of the safe, and stole three hundred and fifty thousand francs."

Madeleine crimsoned with shame and indignation ; she leaned over the sofa, and seizing her aunt by the wrists shook her violently. "Is it true ?" she asked in a hollow voice ; "is it true ?"

"Alas ! alas !" groaned Madame Fauvel utterly crushed.

"You have allowed Prosper to be accused," cried the young girl ; "you have suffered him to be arrested and disgraced for life."

"Forgive me," murmured her aunt. "Raoul was about to kill himself ; I was so frightened ! Then you know—Prosper was to share the money with him."

"Oh !" exclaimed Madeleine indignantly ; "you were told that, and you believed it !"

De Clameran interrupted them. "Unfortunately," said he in a sad tone, "what your aunt says of M. Bertomy is the truth."

"Your proofs, sir, where are your proofs ?"

"Raoul's confession !"

"Raoul is a scoundrel !"

"That is only too true ; but how did he find out the word, if M. Bertomy did not reveal it ? And who left the money in the safe but M. Bertomy ?"

These arguments had no effect upon Madeleine. "And now tell me," she said scornfully, "what became of the money ?"

There was no mistaking the significance of these words ; they meant : "You are the instigator of the robbery, and of course the receiver as well."

This harsh accusation from a girl whom he so passionately loved, when, grasping bandit as he was, he risked for her sake all the money gained by his crimes, so cruelly hurt De Clameran that he turned livid. But he had prepared and studied his part too well, to be at all discouraged. "A day will come, mademoiselle," he said, "when you will deeply regret having treated me so cruelly. I understand your insinuation ; oh ! you need not attempt to deny it—"

"I have no idea of denying anything, sir."

"Madeleine!" remonstrated Madame Fauvel, who trembled at the rising anger of the man who held her fate in his hands, "Madeleine, have mercy!"

"Mademoiselle is pitiless," said De Clameran sadly; "she cruelly punishes an honorable man whose only fault is having obeyed his brother's dying injunctions. And I am here now because I believe in the joint responsibility of all the members of a family." Here he slowly drew from his pocket several bundles of bank-notes, and laid them on the mantle-piece. "Raoul stole three hundred and fifty thousand francs," he said: "I return the same amount. It is more than half my fortune. Willingly would I give the rest to insure this being his last crime."

Too inexperienced to penetrate De Clameran's bold, and yet simple plan, Madeleine was dumb with astonishment; all her calculations were upset.

Madame Fauvel, on the contrary, accepted this restitution as salvation sent from heaven. "Oh, thanks, sir, thanks!" she cried, gratefully clasping De Clameran's hand in hers; "you are goodness itself!"

Louis's eyes lit up with pleasure. But he rejoiced too soon. A minute's reflection brought back all of Madeleine's distrust. She thought this generosity unnatural in a man whom she considered incapable of a noble sentiment, and at once concluded that it must conceal some snare beneath, "What are we to do with this money?" she demanded.

"Restore it to M. Fauvel, mademoiselle."

"We restore it, sir, and how? Restoring the money is denouncing Raoul, and ruining my aunt. Take back your money, sir."

De Clameran was too shrewd to insist; he took up the money and seemed about to leave.

"I comprehend your refusal, mademoiselle, and must find another way of accomplishing my wish. But, before retiring, let me say that your injustice pains me deeply. After the promise you made to me, I had reason to hope for a kinder welcome."

"I will keep my promise, sir, but not until you have furnished security."

"Security! What security? Pray explain yourself."

"Something to protect my aunt against Raoul after my marriage. What is my dowry to a man who squanders

a hundred thousand francs in four months? We are making a bargain; I give you my hand in exchange for my aunt's life and honor, and of course you must give me some security for the performance of your promise."

"Oh! I will give you ample securities," exclaimed De Clameran, "such as will quiet all your suspicious doubts of my good faith. Alas! you will not believe in my devotion; what shall I do to convince you of its sincerity? Shall I try to save M. Bertomy?"

"Thanks for the offer, sir," replied Madeleine disdainfully; "if Prosper is guilty, let him be punished by the law; if he is innocent, God will protect him."

Madeleine and her aunt rose from their seats to signify that the interview was over. De Clameran bowed, and left the room. "What pride! What determination! The idea of her demanding security of me!" he said to himself as he slowly walked away. "But the proud girl shall be humbled yet. She is so beautiful! and, if I did not so madly love her—Well! so much the worse for Raoul!"

Never had De Clameran been so incensed. Madeleine's quiet determination and forethought, which he had not anticipated, had upset his well-laid plan. He was disconcerted, and at a loss how to proceed. He knew that it would be useless to attempt deceiving a girl of Madeleine's character a second time; he saw that though she had not penetrated his motives, she was on the defence, and prepared for any new surprise. Moreover, she would prevent Madame Fauvel from being frightened and forced into submission any longer. At the very moment when Louis thought he had won easily, he met with an adversary. The whole thing would have to be gone over again. Although Madeleine had resigned herself to sacrifice, it was evident that she had no idea of doing so blindly, and would not hazard her aunt's and her own happiness upon the uncertainty of eventual promises. How could he furnish the securities she demanded? What measures could he take to prevent Raoul from importuning his mother in the future. Once De Clameran married, and Raoul become rich, there would be no further reason for disquieting Madame Fauvel. But how prove this to Madeleine? The knowledge of all the circumstances of this shameful and criminal intrigue would have re-assured her upon this point; but then it would never do to inform

her of these details, especially before the marriage. What securities then could he give? But De Clameran was not one of those hesitating men who take weeks to consider a difficulty. When he could not untie a knot, he would cut it. Raoul was a stumbling-block to his wishes, and he swore to rid himself of his troublesome accomplice somehow or other. It was not, however, an easy matter to dispose of so cunning a knave as Raoul. But this consideration could not stop De Clameran. He was incited by one of those passions which age renders terrible. The more certain he was of Madeleine's contempt and dislike, the more determined he was to marry her. But he had sense enough to see that he might ruin his prospects by undue haste, and that the safest course would be to await the result of the accusation against Prosper before moving further in the matter.

He waited in anxious expectation of a summons from Madame Fauvel. But he was again mistaken. On calmly thinking over the two accomplices' last acts, Madeleine came to the conclusion that they would remain quiet for awhile; she knew resistance could have no worse results than would cowardly submission, and therefore assumed the entire responsibility of managing the affair so as to keep at bay both Raoul and De Clameran. She knew that Madame Fauvel would be anxious to accept any terms of peace, but determined to use all her influence to prevent her doing this, and to force upon her the necessity of maintaining a firmer and more dignified attitude. This accounted for the silence of the two women, who were quietly waiting for their adversaries to renew hostilities. They even succeeded in concealing their anxiety beneath assumed indifference; never asking any questions about the robbery, or those who were in any way connected with it. M. Fauvel brought them an account of Prosper's examination, the many charges brought against him, his obstinate denial of having stolen the money; and finally, how, after great perplexity and close study of the case by the investigating magistrate, the cashier had been discharged for want of sufficient proof against him. Since De Clameran's offer to replace the money, Madame Fauvel had not doubted Prosper's guilt. She said nothing, but inwardly accused him of having seduced her son from the path of virtue, and enticed him into crime—that son

whom she could never cease to love. Madeleine, on the contrary, had perfect faith in Prosper's innocence. She was so sure of it, that, learning that he was about to be set at liberty, she ventured to ask her uncle, under pretext of some charitable object, to give her ten thousand francs, which she sent to the unfortunate victim of circumstantial evidence who, from all that she had heard, was probably in great need of assistance. In the letter—cut from her prayer-book to avoid detection by writing—accompanying the money, she advised Prosper to leave France, because she knew that it would be impossible for a man of his proud nature to remain on the scene of his disgrace. Besides, Madeleine, at that time, feeling that she would be obliged sooner or later to marry De Clameran, was anxious to have the man she loved, far, far away from her. And yet, on the day that this anonymous present was sent, in opposition to the wishes of Madame Fauvel, the two poor women were fearfully entangled in pecuniary difficulties. The tradesmen, whose money had been squandered by Raoul, refused to give credit any longer, and insisted upon their bills being paid at once; saying they could not understand how a man of M. Fauvel's wealth and position could keep them waiting for such insignificant amounts. One was owed two thousand, another one thousand, and a third only five hundred francs. The butcher, the grocer, and the wine-merchant, would call together, and Madame Fauvel had the greatest difficulty in prevailing upon them to accept something on account. Some of them threatened to apply to the banker. Madame Fauvel's indebtedness amounted to almost fifteen thousand francs. Madeleine and her aunt had declined all invitations during the winter, to avoid spending money on dress. But at last they were obliged to appear in public. M. Fauvel's most intimate friends, the Messrs. Jandidier, were about to give a splendid ball, and, as fate would have it, a fancy ball, which would require the purchasing of costumes. Where was the money to come from? They had been owing a large bill to their dress-maker for over a year. Would she consent to furnish them with any more dresses on credit? Madeleine's new maid, Palmyre Chocareille, extricated them from this difficulty. This girl who seemed to have suffered all the minor ills of life—which, after all, were the hardest to

bear—seemed to have divined her mistress's anxiety. At any rate, she voluntarily informed Madeleine that a friend of hers, a first class dressmaker, had just set up for herself, and would be glad to furnish materials and make the dresses on credit, for the sake of obtaining the patronage of Madame Fauvel and her niece, which would at once bring her plenty of fashionable customers. But this was not all. Neither of them could go to the ball without jewellery; and every jewel they owned had been taken by Raoul, and pawned, and he had the tickets. After thinking the matter over, Madeleine decided to ask Raoul to devote some of the stolen money to redeeming the jewels he had forced from his mother. She informed her aunt of her plan, saying: "Make an appointment with Raoul: he will not dare to refuse you; and I will go in your stead." And, two days after, the courageous girl took a cab, and, regardless of the inclement weather, went to Vésinet. She had no idea, then, that M. Verduret and Prosper were following close behind her, and that they witnessed her interview from the top of a ladder. Her bold step, however, was fruitless. Raoul swore that he had shared with Prosper; that his own half was spent, and that he was quite without money. He even refused to give up the pawn-tickets; and Madeleine had to insist most energetically before she could induce him to give up four or five trifling articles that were absolutely indispensable. De Clameran had ordered him to refuse, because he hoped that in their distress they would apply to him for help. Raoul had obeyed, but only after a violent altercation witnessed by De Clameran's new valet, Joseph Dubois. The accomplices were at that time on very bad terms together. The marquis was seeking a safe means of getting rid of Raoul; and the young scamp had a sort of presentiment of his uncle's friendly intentions. Nothing but the certainty of impending danger could reconcile them; and this was revealed to them at the Jandidier ball. Who was the mysterious mountebank that had indulged in such transparent allusions to Madame Fauvel's private troubles, and then said with threatening significance to Louis: "I was your brother Gaston's friend!"

Who he was, where he came from, they could not imagine; but they clearly saw that he was a dangerous enemy, and forthwith attempted to assassinate him upon his

leaving the ball. Having followed him and then having lost him, they became alarmed: "We cannot be too guarded in our conduct," whispered De Clameran; "we shall know only too soon who he is."

Once more Raoul tried to induce him to give up his project of marrying Madelaine. "Never!" he exclaimed: "I will marry her, or perish!"

They thought that, now they were warned, the danger of their being caught was lessened. But they did not know the sort of man who was on their track.

XXII.

SUCH are the facts that, with an almost incredible talent for investigation, had been collected and prepared by M. Verduret, the stout man with the jovial face who had taken Prosper under his protection. Reaching Paris at nine o'clock at night, not by the Lyons train as he had announced, but by the Orleans one, M. Verduret had hastened to the Hotel of the Grand Archangel, where he had found the cashier impatiently expecting him.

"You are about to hear something extraordinary," he had said to Prosper, "and you will see how far back one has to seek into the past, for the primary causes of a crime. All things are linked together and dependent upon each other in this world of ours. If Gaston de Clameran had not entered a little café at Tarascon to play a game of billiards twenty years ago, your safe would not have been robbed three weeks back. Valentine de La Verberie is punished in 1866 for the murders committed for her sake in 1840. Nothing is ever lost or forgotten. Listen."

And he forthwith related all that he had discovered, referring, as he went along to his notes and the voluminous manuscript which he had prepared. During the entire week, M. Verduret had not perhaps taken in all twenty-four hours' rest, but he bore no great traces of fatigue. His iron muscles braved any amount of labor, and his elastic nature was too well tempered to give way beneath such pressure. While any other man would have sunk exhausted in a chair, he stood up and described, with the enthusiasm and captivating animation peculiar to him, the minutest details and intricacies of the plot that he had de-

voted his whole energy to unravelling ; personating, so to say, every character he brought upon the scene, so that his listener was bewildered and dazzled by his brilliant acting. As Prosper listened to this narrative of events happening twenty years back, the secret conversations as minutely related as if overheard the moment they took place, it sounded to him more like a romance than a plain statement of facts. All these ingenious explanations might be logical, but what foundation did they possess ? Might they not be the dream of an excited imagination ?

M. Verduret did not finish his report until four o'clock in the morning ; then he exclaimed triumphantly : " And now they are on their guard ; they are wary rascals too ; but I can laugh at their efforts, for I have them safe. Before a week is over, Prosper, your innocence will be recognized by every one. I promised your father this."

" Is it possible ? " murmured Prosper in a dazed way ; " is it possible ? "

" What ? "

" All this you have just told me."

M. Verduret bounded like a man little accustomed to have the accuracy of his information doubted. " Is it possible, indeed ? " he cried ; " but it is truth itself, truth founded on fact and exposed in all its impressiveness ! "

" But how can such rascalities take place in Paris, in our very midst, without—"

" Ah ! " interrupted the stout man, " you are young, my friend ! Crimes worse than this happen, and you know nothing of them. You think the horrors of the assize-court are the only ones. Pooh ! You only read in the ' Gazette des Tribunaux ' of the bloody melodramas of life, where the actors, low-born villains, are as cowardly as the knife, or as stupid as the poison they use. It is at the family fireside, often under shelter of the law itself, that the real tragedies of life are acted ; in these days traitors wear gloves, scoundrels cloak themselves in public esteem, and their victims die broken-hearted, but smiling to the last. What I have just related to you is almost an every-day occurrence ; and yet you profess astonishment."

" I can't help wondering how you discovered all this tissue of crime."

" Ah, that is the point ! " said M. Verduret, with a self-satisfied smile. " When I undertake a task, I devote my

whole attention to it. Now, make a note of this: When a man of ordinary intelligence concentrates his thoughts and energies upon the attainment of an object, he is almost always certain to ultimately obtain success. Besides that, I have my own means of working up a case."

"Still I don't see what grounds you had to go upon."

"To be sure, one needs some light to guide one in a dark affair like this. But the fire in De Clameran's eye at the mention of Gaston's name ignited my lantern. From that moment I walked straight to the solution of the mystery, as to a beacon."

Prosper's eager, questioning looks showed that he would like to know the secret of his protector's wonderful penetration, and at the same time be more thoroughly convinced that what he had heard was all true—that his innocence would be clearly proved.

"Now confess," cried M. Verduret, "you would give something to know how I discovered the truth"

"I certainly would, for to me it seems marvellous!"

M. Verduret enjoyed Prosper's bewilderment. To be sure, he was neither a good judge nor a distinguished amateur; but sincere admiration is always flattering, no matter whence it comes. "Well," he replied, "I will explain my system. There is nothing marvellous about it as you will soon see. We worked together to find the solution of the problem, so you know my reason for suspecting De Clameran as the prime mover in the robbery. As soon as I had arrived at this conclusion my task was easy. You want to know what I did? I placed trustworthy people to watch the parties in whom I was most interested. Joseph Dubois took charge of De Clameran, and Nina Gipsy never lost sight of Madame Fauvel and her niece."

"I know, and I cannot comprehend how Nina ever consented to this service."

"That is my secret," replied M. Verduret. "Having the assistance of good eyes and quick ears on the spot, I went to Beaucaire to inquire into the past, so as to link it with what I was sure to learn of the present. The next day I was at Clameran; and the first step I took was to find the son of Jean, the old valet. An honest fellow he is, too; open and simple as nature herself; and he at once guessed that I wanted to purchase some madder."

"Madder?" said Prosper with a puzzled look.

"Of course I wanted to buy his madder. I did not appear to him as I do to you now. He had madder for sale, that was evident; so we began to bargain about the price. The debate lasted almost all day, during which time we drank a dozen bottles of wine. About supper-time, Jean, the younger, was as drunk as a barrel, and I had purchased nine hundred francs' worth of madder which your father will sell for me." Prosper looked so astonished that M. Verduret laughed heartily. "I risked nine hundred francs," he continued, "but thread by thread I gathered the whole history of the De Clamerans, Gaston's love affair, his flight, and the stumbling of the horse ridden by Louis. I found also that about a year ago Louis returned and sold the château to a man named Fougereux, whose wife, Mihonne, had a secret interview with Louis the day of the purchase. I went to see Mihonne. Poor woman! her rascally husband has pounded nearly all the sense out of her; she is almost idiotic. I convinced her that I came from some De Clameran or other, and she at once related to me everything she knew." The apparent simplicity of this mode of investigation confounded Prosper. "From that time," continued M. Verduret, "the skein began to disentangle; I held the principal thread. I now set about finding out what had become of Gaston. Lafourcade, who is a friend of your father, informed me that he had bought an iron foundry at Oloron, had settled there, and died soon after."

"You are certainly indefatigable!" said Prosper.

"No, but I always strike when the iron is hot. At Oloron, I met Manuel, who had gone there to make a little visit before returning to Spain. From him I obtained a complete history of Gaston's life, and all the particulars of his death. Manuel also told me of Louis's visit; and an inn-keeper described a young workman who was there at the same time, whom I at once recognized as Raoul."

"But how did you know of all the conversations between the villains?" asked Prosper.

"You evidently think I have been drawing upon my imagination. You will soon think the contrary. While I was at work at Oloron, my assistants here did not sit with their hands in their pockets. Mutually distrustful, De Clameran and Raoul preserved all the letters they received from each other. Joseph Dubois copied most of them,

and had the more important ones photographed, and forwarded the copies to me. Nina spent her time listening at all the doors, and sent me a faithful report of everything she heard. Finally, I have at the Fauvels' another means of investigation, which I will reveal to you later."

"I understand it now," murmured Prosper.

"And what have you been doing during my absence, my young friend?" asked M. Verduret.

At this question Prosper turned crimson. But he knew that it would never do to keep silent about his imprudent step. "Alas!" he stammered, "I read in a newspaper that De Clameran was about to marry Madeleine; and I acted like a fool."

"What did you do?" inquired M. Verduret anxiously.

"I sent M. Fauvel an anonymous letter, in which I insinuated that his wife was in love with Raoul—"

M. Verduret here brought his clenched fist down upon the little table near which he sat, and broke it. "Wretched man!" he cried, "you have probably ruined everything." A great change came over him. His usually jovial face assumed a menacing expression. He rose from his seat, and strode up and down the room, oblivious of the lodgers on the floor below. "But you must be a baby," added he to the dismayed Prosper, "an idiot, or, worse than that, a fool."

"Sir!"

"Here you are drowning; a brave man springs into the water after you, and just as he is on the point of saving you, you cling to his feet to prevent him swimming! What did I tell you to do?"

"To keep quiet, and not go out."

"Well!"

The consciousness of having done a foolish thing made Prosper as frightened as a schoolboy, accused by his teacher of playing truant. "It was night, sir," he said, "and, having a violent headache, I took a walk along the quays. I thought there would be no harm in my entering a café; I took up a paper and read the dreadful announcement."

"Was it not settled that you should have perfect confidence in me?"

"You were not here, sir, this announcement had quite

upset me; you were far away, and might have been surprised by an unexpected—”

“Nothing is unexpected except to a fool!” declared M. Verduret peremptorily. “To write an anonymous letter? Do you know to what you expose me? You are the cause of my perhaps breaking a sacred promise made to one of the few persons whom I highly esteem among my fellow beings. I shall be looked upon as a cheat a dastard, I, who—” He stopped abruptly, as if afraid of saying too much, and it was only after some minutes that, having become calm again, he resumed: “It is no use crying over what is done. We must try and get out of the mess somehow. When and where did you post this letter?”

“Last night, in the Rue du Cardinal Lemoine. It hardly reached the bottom of the box before I regretted having written it.”

“Your regrets should have come sooner. What time was it?”

“About ten o’clock.”

“Then your sweet little letter must have reached M. Fauvel this morning with his other correspondence; probably he was alone in his study when he opened and read it.”

“It is not probable, it is certain.”

“Can you recall the exact words of your letter? Stop and think, for it is very important that I should know.”

“Oh, it is unnecessary for me to reflect. I remember the letter as if I had just written it.” And he repeated almost verbatim what he had written.

M. Verduret listened most attentively with a perplexed frown upon his face. “That is a formidable anonymous letter,” he murmured, “to come from a person who does not deal in such things. It insinuates everything without specifying a single thing; it is vague, jeering, and treacherous. Repeat it to me.” Prosper obeyed, and his second version did not vary from the first in a single word. “Nothing could be more alarming than that allusion to the cashier,” said the stout man, repeating the words after Prosper. “The question, ‘Is it also he who has stolen Madame Fauvel’s diamonds?’ is simply horrible! What could be more exasperating than the sarcastic advice, ‘In your place, I would not have any public scandal, but would

watch my wife?' The effect of your letter must have been terrible," he added thoughtfully, as he stood with folded arms in front of Prosper. "M. Fauvel is quick-tempered, is he not?"

"He has a very violent temper."

"Then the mischief is perhaps not irreparable."

"What! do you suppose—"

"I think that an impulsive man is afraid of himself, and seldom carries out his first intentions. That is our only chance. If, upon the receipt of your bomb-shell, M. Fauvel, unable to restrain himself, rushed into his wife's room, exclaiming, 'Where are your diamonds?' our plans are done for. I know Madame Fauvel, she will confess all."

"Why would this be so disastrous?"

"Because, the moment Madame Fauvel opens her lips to her husband, our birds will take flight."

Prosper had never thought of this eventuality.

"Then, again," continued M. Verduret, "it would deeply distress another person."

"Any one whom I know?"

"Yes, my friend, and very well too. I should certainly be vexed to the last degree, if these two rascals escape without my being thoroughly informed about them."

"It seems to me that you know sufficient."

M. Verduret shrugged his shoulders, and asked: "Did you not perceive any gaps in my narrative?"

"Not one."

"That is because you don't know how to listen. In the first place, did Louis de Clameran poison his brother or not?"

"Yes; I am sure of it, from what you tell me."

"There you are! You are much more certain, young man, than I am. Your opinion is mine; but what decisive proof have we? None. I skilfully questioned Dr. C. He has not the shadow of a suspicion; and Dr. C. is no quack; he is a learned and observing man of high standing. What poisons produce the effects described? I know of none; and yet I have studied all sorts of poisons, from the digitalis used by La Pommeraye to Madame Sauvresy's aconite."

"The death took place so opportunely—"

"That anybody would suspect foul play. That is true;

but chance is sometimes a wonderful accomplice in crime. In the second place, I know nothing of Raoul's antecedents."

"Is information on that point necessary?"

"Indispensable, my friend; but we will soon know something. I have sent one of my men—excuse me, I mean one of my friends—who is very expert, M. Pâlot; and he writes that he is on the track. I am interested in the history of this sentimental, sceptical young rascal. I have an idea that, had he not known De Clameran, he might have been a brave, honest sort of youth."

Prosper was no longer listening. M. Verduret's words had inspired him with confidence. Already he saw the guilty men arraigned before the bar of justice; and enjoyed, in anticipation, this assize-court drama, where he would be publicly righted, after having been so openly dishonored. More than that, he now understood Madeleine, her strange conduct at the dressmaker's was explained, and he knew that she had never ceased to love him. This certainty of future happiness restored all the self-possession that had deserted him the day he found the safe robbed. For the first time he was astonished at the peculiarity of his situation. Prosper had at first only been surprised at the protection of M. Verduret and the extent of his investigations; now he asked himself, what could have been his friend's motives for acting thus? In a word, what price did he expect for this sacrifice of time and labor? His anxiety was so great on this point that he suddenly exclaimed: "You have no longer the right, sir, to preserve your incognito with me. When you have saved the honor and life of a man, you should at least let him know whom he has to thank."

"Oh!" said M. Verduret smilingly; "you are not out of the mess yet. You are not married either; so you must, for a few days longer, have patience and faith." The clock struck six. "Good heavens!" he added. "Can it be six o'clock? I did hope to have a good night's rest, but this is no time for sleeping." He went on to the landing, and leaning over the balusters, called: "Madame Alexandre! I say, Madame Alexandre!"

The hostess of the Grand Archangel, the portly wife of Fanferlot, the squirrel, had evidently not been to bed. This fact struck Prosper. She appeared, obsequious,

smiling, and eager to please. "What do you require, gentlemen?" she inquired.

"You can send me your—Joseph Dubois, and also Palmyre, as soon as possible. Have them sent for at once, and let me know when they arrive. I will take a little rest in the mean time."

As soon as Madame Alexandre left the room, the stout man unceremoniously threw himself on the bed. "You have no objection, I suppose," he said to Prosper. In five minutes he was fast asleep; and Prosper, more perplexed than ever, seated himself in an easy-chair and wondered who this strange man could be. About nine o'clock some one tapped timidly at the door. Slight as the noise was, it aroused M. Verduret, who sprang up, and called out: "Who is there?" But Prosper had already opened the door. Joseph Dubois, the Marquis de Clameran's valet, entered. M. Verduret's assistant was breathless from running; and his little eyes were more restless than ever.

"Well, master, I am glad to see you once more," he cried. "Now you can tell me what to do; I have been perfectly lost during your absence, and have felt like a puppet with a broken string."

"What! you allow yourself to be disconcerted like that?"

"Bless me! I think I had cause for alarm when I could not find you anywhere. Yesterday afternoon I sent you three telegrams, to the addresses you gave me, at Lyons, Beaucaire, and Oloron, and received no answer. I was almost going crazy when your message reached me just now."

"Things are getting warm, then."

"Warm! They are burning! The place is too hot to hold me any longer."

Whilst speaking, M. Verduret occupied himself in repairing his toilet, which had become disarranged during his sleep. When he had finished, he threw himself in an easy-chair, and said to Joseph Dubois, who remained respectfully standing, cap in hand, like a soldier awaiting orders: "Explain yourself, my lad, and quickly, if you please; no long phrases."

"It is just this, sir. I don't know what your plans are, or what means you have of carrying them out; but you

must wind up this affair and strike your final blow very quickly."

"That is your opinion, Master Joseph!"

"Yes, master, because if you wait any longer, good-by to our covey; you will only find an empty cage, and the birds flown. You smile? Yes, I know you are clever, and can accomplish anything; but they are cunning blades, and as slippery as eels. They know, too, that they are watched.

"The devil they do!" cried M. Verduret. "Some one must have blundered."

"Oh! nobody has done anything wrong," replied Joseph. "You know that they suspected something long ago. They gave you a proof of it, the night of the fancy-dress ball; I mean that ugly cut on your arm. Ever since they have always slept with one eye open. They were feeling easier, however, when all of a sudden, yesterday, they began to smell a rat!"

"Was that why you sent me those telegrams?"

"Of course. Now listen: yesterday morning when my master got up, about ten o'clock, he took it into his head to arrange the papers in his desk; which, by the way, has a disgusting lock which has given me a deal of trouble. Meanwhile, I pretended to be making up the fire, so as to remain in the room to watch him. That man has a Yankee's eye! At the first glance he saw, or rather divined, that his papers had been meddled with; he turned as white as a sheet, and swore an oath, such an oath!"

"Never mind the oath; go on."

"Well, how he discovered his letters had been touched I can't imagine. You know how careful I am. I had put everything back in its place just as I found it. To make sure he was not mistaken, the marquis picks up each paper, one at a time, turns it over, and smells it. I was just longing to offer him a microscope, when all of a sudden he sprang up, and kicking his chair to the other end of the room, flew at me in a fury. 'Somebody has been at my papers,' he shrieked; 'this letter has been photographed!' B-r-r-r! I am not a coward, but I can tell you that my heart stood perfectly still; I saw myself dead, cut into mince-meat; and I even said to myself, 'Fanfer—excuse me—Dubois, my friend, you are done for.' And I thought of Madame Alexandre."

M. Verduret was buried in thought, and paid no attention to the worthy Joseph's analysis of his personal sensations. "What happened next?" he asked after a few minutes.

"Why, I was needlessly frightened after all. The rascal did not dare to touch me. To be sure, I had taken the precaution to get out of his reach; we talked with a large table between us. While wondering what could have enabled him to discover the secret, I defended myself with virtuous indignation. I said: 'It cannot be; Monsieur the Marquis is mistaken. Who would dare touch his papers?' Bah! Instead of listening to me, he flourished an open letter, saying: 'This letter has been photographed! here is proof of it!' and he pointed to a little yellow spot on the paper, shrieking out: 'Look! Smell! It is—' I forget the name he called it, but some acid used by photographers."

"I know, I know," said M. Verduret; "go on; what next?"

"Then we had a scene; such a scene! He ended by seizing me by the coat collar, and shaking me like a plum-tree, to make me tell him who I am, who I know, and where I came from. As if I know, myself! I was obliged to account for every minute of my time since I had been in his service. He was born to be an investigating magistrate. Then he sent for the hotel waiter, who attends to his rooms, and questioned him closely, but in English, so that I could not understand. After awhile he cooled down, and when the waiter was gone, presented me with twenty francs, saying: 'I am sorry I was so hasty with you; you are too stupid to have been guilty of the offence.'"

"He said that, did he?"

"He used those very words to my face, master."

"And you think he meant what he said?"

"Certainly I do."

The stout man smiled, and whistled in a way that showed that he had a different opinion. "If you think that," he said, "De Clameran was right. You are not up to much."

It was easy to see that Joseph Dubois was anxious to give his grounds for his opinion, but dared not. "I suppose I *am* stupid, if you think so," he replied humbly.

"Well, after he had done blustering about the letters, the marquis dressed and went out. He would not take his carriage, but hired a cab at the hotel door. I thought he would perhaps disappear forever; but I was mistaken. About five o'clock he returned as gay as a lark. During his absence, I telegraphed to you."

"What! did you not follow him?"

"No; but one of our friends did, and this friend gave me a report of the dandy's movements. First he went to a broker's, then to a bank and a discount office. It is evident he is a man of capital. I expect he intends to go on a little trip somewhere."

"Is that all he did?"

"That is all; yes. But I must tell you that the rascals tried to get Mademoiselle Palmyre shut up, 'administratively,' you understand. Fortunately, you had anticipated something of the kind, and given orders so as to prevent it. But for you she would now be in prison." Joseph left off speaking, and looked up at the ceiling by way of trying to remember whether he had not something more to say. Finding nothing, he added: "That is all. I rather think M. Patrigent will rub his hands with delight when I take him my report. He has no idea of the facts collected to swell the size of his File No. 113."

There was a long silence. Joseph was right in supposing that the crisis had come. M. Verduret was arranging his plan of battle while waiting for the report of Nina—now Palmyre—upon which depended his point of attack.

But Joseph Dubois was restless and uneasy. "What am I to do now, master?" he asked.

"Return to the hotel; probably your master has noticed your absence; but he will say nothing about it, so continue—"

Here an exclamation from Prosper, who was standing near the window, interrupted M. Verduret. "What is the matter?" he inquired.

"De Clameran is there!" replied Prosper.

M. Verduret and Joseph ran to the window. "Where is he?" they asked.

"There, at the corner of the bridge, behind the orange-woman's stall."

Prosper was right. It was the noble Marquis de Clameran, who, hid behind the stall, was watching for his

servant to come out of the Grand Archangel. At first the quick-sighted Verduret had some doubts whether it was the marquis, who, being skilled in these hazardous expeditions, managed to conceal himself almost entirely. But a moment came, when, elbowed by the pressing crowd, he was obliged to get off the pavement in full view of the window.

"Now you see I was right!" cried the cashier.

"Well," murmured Joseph, convinced, "I am amazed!"

M. Verduret seemed not in the least surprised, but quietly said: "The hunter is now being hunted. Well, Joseph, my boy, do you still think that your noble master was duped by your pretended injured innocence?"

"You stated the contrary, sir," replied Joseph in a humble tone; "and a statement from you is more convincing than all the proofs in the world."

"This pretended outburst of rage was premeditated on the part of your noble master. Knowing that he is being tracked, he naturally wishes to discover who his adversaries are. You can imagine how uncomfortable he must be whilst in this uncertainty. Perhaps he thinks his pursuers are some of his old accomplices, who, being hungry, want a piece of his cake. He will remain there until you go out; then he will come in to inquire who you are."

"But I can leave without his seeing me."

"Yes, I know. You will climb the little wall separating the hotel from the wine-merchant's yard, and keep along the stationer's area, until you reach the Rue de la Huchette."

Poor Joseph looked as if he had just received a bucket of ice-water upon his head. "Exactly the way I was going," he gasped out. "I heard that you knew all the houses in Paris, and it certainly must be so."

The stout man made no reply to Joseph's admiring remarks. He was wondering what advantage he could reap from De Clameran's behavior. As to the cashier, he listened wonderingly, watching these strangers, who without any apparent reason, seemed determined to win the difficult game in which his honor, his happiness, and his life, were the stake.

"I have another idea," said Joseph after deep thought.

"What is it?"

"I can walk quietly out of the front door, and with my

hands in my pockets stroll slowly back to the *Hôtel du Louvre*."

"And then?"

"Well! then, De Clameran will come in and question Madame Alexandre, whom you can instruct beforehand; and she is smart enough to put any joker off the track."

"Bad plan!" pronounced M. Verduret decidedly; "a scamp so compromised as De Clameran is not easily taken in; it will be impossible to reassure him." His mind was made up; for in a brief tone of authority, which admitted of no contradiction, he added: "I have a better plan. Has De Clameran, since he found out that his papers had been touched, seen De Lagors?"

"No, sir."

"Perhaps he has written to him?"

"I'll bet you my head he has not. Having your orders to watch his correspondence, I invented a little system which informs me every time he touches a pen; during the last twenty-four hours the pens have not been touched."

"De Clameran went out yesterday afternoon."

"But the man who followed him says he wrote nothing on the way."

"Then we have time yet!" cried Verduret. "Be quick! I give you fifteen minutes to make yourself another head; you know the sort; I will watch the rascal until you are ready."

"The delighted Joseph disappeared in a twinkling, and Prosper and M. Verduret remained at the window observing De Clameran, who, according to the movements of the crowd, kept disappearing and reappearing, but was evidently determined not to quit his post until he had obtained the information he sought.

"Why do you devote yourself exclusively to the marquis?" asked Prosper.

"Because, my friend," replied M. Verduret, "because—that is my business, and not yours."

Joseph Dubois had been granted a quarter of an hour in which to metamorphose himself; before ten minutes had elapsed he re-appeared. The dandified coachman with whiskers, red vest, and foppish manners, was replaced by a sinister-looking individual, whose very appearance was enough to scare any rogue. His black cravat

twisted round a paper collar, and ornamented by an imitation diamond pin ; his black frock-coat buttoned up to the chin ; his greasy hat and shiny boots and heavy cane—revealed the myrmidon of the Rue de Jérusalem, as plainly as the uniform denotes the soldier. Joseph Dubois had vanished, and from his livery, phoenix-like and triumphant, rose the radiant Fanferlot, surnamed the Squirrel. When he entered the room, Prosper uttered a cry of surprise, almost of terror. He recognized the man who had assisted the commissary of police in his investigation at the bank on the day of the robbery.

M. Verduret examined his follower with a satisfied look, and said : “Not bad ! There is enough of the police-court air about you to alarm even an honest man. You understand me perfectly.”

Fanferlot was transported with delight at this compliment. “What must I do now, chief ?” he inquired.

“Nothing difficult for a smart man : but remember, upon the precision of our movements depends the success of my plan. Before occupying myself with De Lagors, I wish to dispose of De Clameran. Now that the rascals are separated, we must prevent their coming together again.”

“I understand,” said Fanferlot, winking his eye ; “I am to create a diversion.”

“Exactly. Go out by the Rue de la Huchette, and hasten to the Pont St. Michel ; loaf along the river-bank, and finally place yourself on some of the steps of the quay, so that De Clameran may perceive he is being watched. If he fails to see you, do something to attract his attention.”

“I know ! I will throw a stone in the water,” said Fanferlot, rubbing his hands with delight at his own brilliant idea.

“As soon as De Clameran has seen you,” continued M. Verduret, “he will be alarmed, and instantly decamp. You must follow him, and he, knowing that the police are after him, will do everything to escape you. You must keep both your eyes open for he is a cunning rascal.”

“I was not born yesterday.”

“So much the better. You can convince him of that. Well, knowing you are at his heels, he will not dare to return to the Hotel du Louvre, for fear of finding some

troublesome visitors awaiting him. Now it is very important that he should not return to the hotel."

"But suppose he does?" said Fanferlot.

M. Verduret thought for a minute, and then replied: "It is not at all likely; but if he should, you must wait until he comes out again, and continue to follow him. But he won't enter the hotel; very likely he will take the train; but in that event don't lose sight of him, no matter if you have to follow him to Siberia. Have you money with you?"

"I will get some from Madame Alexandre."

"Very good. Ah! one word more. If the rascal does take the train, send me a line here. If he beats about the bush until night time, be on your guard, especially in lonely places; he is capable of anything."

"If necessary, may I fire?"

"Don't be rash; but, if he attacks you, of course defend yourself. Come, 'tis time you were gone."

"Dubois-Fanferlot went out. M. Verduret and Prosper resumed their post of observation. "Why all this secrecy?" inquired Prosper. "De Clameran is guilty of ten times worse crimes than I was ever accused of, and yet my disgrace was made as public as possible."

"Don't you understand," replied the stout man, "that I wish to separate Raoul's cause from that of the marquis? But, hush! Look!" De Clameran had left his place near the orange-woman's stand, and approached the parapet of the bridge, where he seemed to be trying to make out some unexpected object. "Ah!" murmured M. Verduret; "he has just discovered our man." De Clameran's uneasiness was quite apparent; he walked forward a few steps, as if intending to cross the bridge; then, suddenly turning round, walked rapidly away in the direction of the Rue St. Jacques. "He is caught!" cried M. Verduret with delight.

At that moment the door opened, and Madame Nina Gipsy, *alias* Palmyre Chocareille, entered. Poor Nina! Each day since she entered Madeleine's service seemed to have aged her a year. Tears had dimmed the brilliancy of her beautiful black eyes; her rosy cheeks were pale and hollow, and her merry smile was quite gone. Poor Gipsy, once so gay and spirited, now crushed beneath the burden of her sorrows, was the picture of misery. Pros-

per thought that, wild with joy at seeing him, and proud of having so nobly devoted herself to his interests, Nina would throw her arms around his neck, and hold him in a tight embrace. He was mistaken ; and though entirely devoted to Madeleine since he knew the reason of her harshness to him, his deception affected him deeply. Nina scarcely seemed to know him. She saluted him timidly, almost like a stranger. She stood looking at M. Verduret with a mixture of fear and devotion, like a poor dog that has been cruelly treated by its master.

He, however, was kind and gentle in his manner towards her. "Well, my dear," he asked encouragingly, "what news do you bring me?"

"Something is going on at the house, sir, and I have been trying to get here to tell you ; at last, Mademoiselle Madeleine made an excuse for sending me out."

"You must thank her for her confidence in me. I suppose she carried out the plan we decided upon?"

"Yes, sir."

"She receives the Marquis de Clameran's visits?"

"Since the marriage has been decided upon, he comes every day, and mademoiselle receives him with kindness. He seems to be delighted."

These answers filled Prosper with anger and alarm. The poor fellow, not comprehending M. Verduret's intricate moves, felt as if he were being tossed about from pillar to post, and made the tool and laughing-stock of everybody. "What!" he cried; "this worthless Marquis de Clameran, an assassin, and a thief, allowed to visit at M. Fauvel's and pay his addresses to Madeleine? Where are the promises which you made me, sir? Have you merely been amusing yourself by raising my hopes, to dash them—"

"Enough!" interrupted M. Verduret harshly; "you are really too good a young man to understand anything, my friend. If you are incapable of helping yourself, at least have sense enough to refrain from stupidly importuning those who are working for you. Do you not think you have already done sufficient mischief?" Having administered this rebuke, he turned to Nina, and said in softer tones: "Go on, my child; what have you discovered?"

"Nothing positive, sir; but enough to make me nervous, and fearful of impending danger. I am not certain, but

suspect from appearances, that some dreadful catastrophe is about to happen. It may only be a presentiment. I cannot get any information from Madame Fauvel; she moves about like a ghost, never opening her lips. She seems to be afraid of her niece, and to be trying to conceal something from her."

"What about M. Fauvel?"

"I was just about to tell you, sir. Some fearful misfortune has happened to him, you may depend upon it. He wanders about as if he had lost his mind. Something certainly occurred yesterday; his voice even is changed. He is so harsh and irritable that mademoiselle and M. Lucien were wondering what could be the matter with him. He seems to be on the eve of giving way to a burst of anger; and there is a wild, strange look about his eyes, especially when he looks at madame. Yesterday evening, when M. de Clameran was announced, he jumped up, and hurried out of the room, saying that he had some work to do in his study."

A triumphant exclamation from M. Verduret interrupted Nina. He was radiant. "Ah!" he said to Prosper, forgetting his bad humor of a few minutes before; "ah! what did I tell you?"

"He has evidently—"

"Been afraid to give way to his first impulse; of course he has. He is now seeking for proofs of your assertions. He must have then by this time. Did the ladies go out yesterday?"

"Yes, a part of the day."

"What became of M. Fauvel?"

"The ladies took me with them; we left M. Fauvel at home."

"There is no longer a doubt, now!" cried the stout man; "he looked for proofs, and found them too! Your letter told him exactly where to go. Ah, Prosper, that unfortunate letter gives more trouble than everything else together."

These words seemed to throw a sudden light on Nina's mind. "I understand it now!" she exclaimed. "M. Fauvel knows everything."

"That is, he thinks he knows everything; and what he has been led to believe, is worse than the true state of affairs."

"That accounts for the order which M. Cavaillon overheard him give to his valet, Evariste."

"What order?"

"He told Evariste to bring every letter that came to the house, no matter to whom addressed, into his study, and hand it to him; saying that, if this order was disobeyed, he should be instantly discharged."

"At what time was this order given?" asked M. Verduret.

"Yesterday afternoon."

"That is what I was afraid of," cried M. Verduret. "He has clearly made up his mind what course to pursue, and is keeping quiet so as to make his vengeance more sure. The question is, Have we still time to counteract his projects? Have we time to convince him that the anonymous letter was incorrect in some of its assertions?"

He tried to hit upon some plan for repairing the damage done by Prosper's foolish letter. "Thank you for your information, my dear child," he said after a long silence. "I will decide at once what steps to take, for it will never do to sit quietly and let things go on in this way. Return home without delay, and be careful of everything you say and do; for M. Fauvel suspects you of being in the plot. Send me word of anything that happens, no matter how insignificant it may be."

Nina, thus dismissed, did not move, but asked timidly: "What about Caldas, sir?"

This was the third time during the last fortnight that Prosper had heard this name, Caldas. The first time, it had been whispered in his ear by a respectable-looking, middle-aged man, who promised him his protection on one of the days he was at the Préfecture. The second time, the investigating magistrate had mentioned it in connection with Nina's history. Prosper thought over all the men he had ever been connected with, but could recall none named Caldas.

The impassible M. Verduret started and trembled at the sound of this name, but, quickly recovering himself, said: "I promised to find him for you, and I will keep my promise. Now you must go; good-by."

It was twelve o'clock, and M. Verduret suddenly remembered that he was hungry. He called Madame Alexandre, and the all-powerful hostess of the Grand Archan-

gel soon placed a tempting breakfast before Prosper and his protector. But the dainty meal failed to smooth M. Verduret's perplexed brow. To the eager questions and complimentary remarks of Madame Alexandre, he merely answered: "Hush, hush! let me alone; keep quiet."

For the first time since he had known the stout man, Prosper saw him betray anxiety and hesitation. He remained silent as long as he could, and then uneasily said: "I am afraid I have embarrassed you very much, sir."

"Yes, you have dreadfully embarrassed me," replied M. Verduret. "What on earth to do now, I don't know! Shall I hasten matters, or keep quiet and wait for the next move? And I am bound by a sacred promise. Come, I must go and consult the investigating magistrate. He can perhaps assist me. You had better come too."

XXIII.

As M. Verduret had anticipated, Prosper's anonymous letter had a terrible effect upon M. Fauvel. It was morning. M. Fauvel had just entered his study to attend to his correspondence. After opening a dozen letters on business, his eyes fell on the fatal missive. Something about the handwriting struck him as peculiar. It was evidently disguised, and although, owing to the fact of his being a millionaire, he was in the habit of receiving anonymous communications, sometimes abusive, but generally begging for money, this particular letter filled him with a presentiment of evil. With absolute certainty that he was about to read of some calamity, he broke the seal, and unfolding the coarse writing-paper of the café, commenced to read. What he read was a terrible blow to a man whose life hitherto had been an unbroken chain of prosperity, who could recall the past without one bitter regret, without remembering any sorrow deep enough to bring forth a tear. What! his wife deceive him! And among all men, to choose one vile enough to rob her of her jewels, and force her to be his accomplice in the ruin of an innocent young man! For did not the letter before him assert this to be the fact, and tell him how to convince himself of its truth? M. Fauvel was as bewildered as if he had been knocked on the head with a club. It was

impossible for his scattered ideas to take in the enormity of what these dreadful words intimated. He seemed to be mentally and physically paralyzed, as he sat there staring blankly at the letter. But in a few minutes his reason returned.

"What infamous cowardice!" he cried; "it is abominable!" And he angrily crumpled up the letter and threw it into the empty fireplace, adding: "I will forget having read it. I will not soil my mind by letting it dwell upon such turpitude!"

He said this, and he thought it; but, for all that, he could not open the rest of his letters. That penetrating, clinging, all-corroding worm, suspicion, had taken possession of his soul; and he leaned over his desk, with his face buried in his hands, vainly endeavoring to recover his habitual calmness of mind. "Supposing, though, that the letter stated the truth!" At the thought, his dejection of the first few minutes gave way to the most violent rage. "Ah!" he exclaimed in his wrath, "if I only knew the scoundrel who dared to write this; if I only had him here!" Thinking that the handwriting might throw some light on the mystery, he picked the fatal letter out of the fireplace. Carefully smoothing it out he laid it on his desk, and studied the up strokes, the down strokes, and the capitals of every word. "It must be from one of my clerks," he thought, "who is angry with me for having refused to raise his salary; or for some other reason." Clinging to this idea, he thought over all the young men in his bank; but not one could he believe capable of resorting to so base a vengeance. Then he wondered where the letter had been posted, thinking this might throw some light on the mystery. He looked at the envelope, and read on the post-mark, "Rue du Cardinal Lemoine." This fact told him nothing. Once more he read the letter through, spelling over each word, and analyzing every sentence it contained. It is the custom to treat anonymous letters with silent contempt, as the malicious lies of cowards who dare not say to a man's face what they secretly commit to paper. Yet what innumerable catastrophes can be traced to no other origin. One throws the letters in the fire, but, although the paper is destroyed by the flames, doubts remain, and, like a subtle poison, penetrate the inmost recesses of the mind, weaken its holiest

beliefs, and destroy its faith. The wife suspected, no matter how unjustly, is no longer the wife in whom her husband trusted as he would trust himself. Suspicion, no matter whence the source, has irrevocably tarnished the brightness of his idol. Unable to struggle any longer against these conflicting doubts, M. Fauvel determined to resolve them by showing the letter to his wife ; but a shocking thought, more torturing than a red-hot iron burning his flesh, made him sink back in his chair in despair. "Suppose it be true !" he muttered to himself ; "suppose I have been miserably duped ! By confiding in my wife, I shall put her on her guard, and lose all chance of discovering the truth."

Thus were realized all M. Verduret's presumptions. He had said, "If M. Fauvel does not yield to his first impulse, if he stops to reflect, we have time to repair the harm done." And after long and painful meditation, the banker had finally decided to wait and watch his wife. It was a hard struggle for a man of his frank, upright nature, to play the part of a domestic spy, and jealous husband. Accustomed to give way to sudden bursts of anger, but quickly mastering them, he would find it difficult to preserve his self-restraint, to maintain silence until his proofs were overwhelming. There was one simple means of ascertaining the truth. The letter stated that his wife's diamonds had been pawned. If it lied in this instance, he would treat it with the scorn it deserved. But if, on the other hand, it should prove to be true ! At this moment, the servant announced that lunch was served, and M. Fauvel looked in the glass before leaving his study, to see if face betrayed the emotion he felt. He was shocked at the sight of his haggard features. "Shall I be able to control my feelings ?" he asked himself. At table he did his utmost to look unconcerned, he talked incessantly, related several stories, hoping thus to distract the attention of the others. But, all the time he was talking, he was casting over in his mind various expedients for getting his wife out of the house long enough for him to search her room. At last he asked Madame Fauvel if she were going out at all that day.

"Yes," she replied, "the weather is dreadful, but Madeleine and I have some pressing matters to see after."

"At what time do you think of starting ?"

“Immediately after lunch.”

He drew a long breath as if relieved of a great weight. In a short time he would be able to learn the truth. His uncertainty was so torturing to the unhappy man that to it he preferred anything, even the most dreadful reality. Lunch over, he lighted a cigar, but did not remain in the dining-room to smoke it, as was his habit. He went into his study, pretending he had some pressing work to attend to. He took the precaution to send Lucien out so as to be quite alone. After the lapse of half an hour, he heard the carriage drive away with his wife and niece. Hurrying into Madame Fauvel's room, he opened her jewel drawer. Several of the cases he knew she possessed were missing, those that remained—there were ten or twelve of them—were empty. The anonymous letter had told the truth. “Oh, it cannot be!” he gasped in broken tones. “It is not possible!” He wildly pulled open other drawers in the hope of finding the jewels. Perhaps his wife kept them elsewhere. She might have sent some of them to be reset, and others to be mended. But he found nothing! He then recollected the Jandidier ball, and that he, full of pride, had said to his wife: “Why don't you wear your diamonds?” She had smilingly replied: “Oh! what is the use? Everybody knows them so well; I shall be more noticed if I don't wear them; and besides, they wouldn't suit my costume.” Yes, she had made this answer without blushing, without showing the slightest sign of agitation. What barefaced impudence! What base hypocrisy concealed beneath an innocent, confiding manner! And she had been thus deceiving him for twenty years! But suddenly a gleam of hope penetrated his confused mind—slight, barely possible; still a straw to cling to—“Perhaps Valentine has put her diamonds in Madeleine's room.” Without stopping to consider the indelicacy of what he was about to do, he hurried into the young girl's room, and pulled open one drawer after another. He did not find his wife's—not Madame Fauvel's diamonds—but he discovered seven or eight jewel cases belonging to Madeleine, and all empty. Great heavens! Was this gentle girl, whom he had treated as a daughter, an accomplice in this deed of shame? This last blow was too much for the miserable man. He sank almost lifeless into a chair, and wringing his hands, groaned over the

wreck of his happiness. Was this the happy future to which he had looked forward? Was the fabric of his honor, well-being and domestic bliss, to be dashed to the earth and forever lost in a day? Seemingly nothing was changed in his existence; he was not materially injured; the objects around him remained the same; and yet what a commotion had taken place, a commotion more unheard of, more surprising than the changing to night into day. What! Valentine, the pure young girl whom he had so loved and married in spite of her poverty; Valentine, the tender, loving wife, who had become dearer and dearer to him as years rolled on; could she have been deceiving him? She, the mother of his sons! His sons? Bitter thought! Were they his sons? If she could deceive him now when she was silver-haired had she not deceived him when she was young? Not only did he suffer in the present, but the uncertainty of the past tortured his soul.

M. Fauvel did not long remain in this dejected state. Anger and a thirst for vengeance gave him fresh strength, and he determined to sell his past happiness dearly. He well knew that the fact of the diamonds being missing was not sufficient ground upon which to base an accusation. But he had plenty of means of procuring other proofs. He began by calling his valet, and ordering him to bring to him every letter that should come to the house. He then telegraphed to a notary at St. Remy, for minute and authentic information about the De Lagors family, and especially about Raoul. Finally, following the advice of the anonymous letter, he went to the Préfecture of Police, hoping to obtain De Clameran's biography. But the police, fortunately for many people, are as discreetly silent as the grave. They guard their secrets as a miser his treasure. Nothing but an order from the Public Prosecutor could reveal the secrets of those terrible green boxes which are kept in an apartment by themselves, guarded like a banker's strong-room. M. Fauvel was politely asked what motives urged him to inquire into the past life of a French citizen; and, as he declined to state his reasons, he was told he had better apply to the above-mentioned functionary. This advice he could not follow. He had sworn that the secret of his wrongs should be confined to the three persons interested. He chose to avenge his own injuries, to be alone the judge and executioner. He re-

turned home more enraged than ever ; there he found a telegram answering the one which he had sent to St. Remy. It was as follows : "The De Lagors are very poor, and there has never been any member of the family named Raoul. Madame De Lagors has no son, only two daughters." This information was the final blow. The banker thought, when he discovered his wife's infamy, that she had sinned as deeply as woman could sin ; but he now saw that she had practised a deception more shocking than the crime itself.

"Wretched creature !" he cried with anguish ; "in order to see her lover constantly, she dared present him to me under the name of a nephew who never existed. She had the shameless courage to introduce him beneath my roof, and seat him at my fireside, between myself and my sons ; and I, confiding fool that I was, welcomed the villain, and lent him money."

Nothing could equal the pain of wounded pride and mortification which he suffered at the thought that Raoul and Madame Fauvel had amused themselves with his good-natured credulity. Nothing but death could wipe out an injury of this nature. But the very bitterness of his resentment enabled him to restrain himself until the time for punishment came. With grim satisfaction he promised himself that his acting would be as successful as theirs. That day he succeeded in concealing his agitation, and kept up a flow of talk during the whole time the dinner lasted. But at about nine o'clock, when De Clameran called, he hastened from the house, for fear that he would be unable to control his indignation, and did not return home until late in the night. The next day he reaped the fruit of his prudence. Among the letters which his valet brought him at noon, was one bearing the post-mark of Vésinet. He carefully opened the envelope, and read, "DEAR AUNT,—It is imperatively necessary for me to see you to-day ; so I expect you. I will explain why I am prevented from calling at your house. RAOUL."

"I have them now !" cried M. Fauvel, trembling with satisfaction at the near prospect of vengeance. Eager to lose no time, he opened a drawer, took out a revolver, and examined the hammer to see if it worked easily. He certainly imagined himself alone, but a vigilant eye was watching his movements. Nina immediately upon her return from

the Grand Archangel, stationed herself at the key-hole of the study-door, and saw all that occurred. M. Fauvel laid the weapon on the mantle-piece, and nervously resealed the letter, which he then took to the place where the letters were usually left, not wishing his wife to know that Raoul's letter had passed through his hands. He was only absent a few minutes, but inspired by the imminence of the danger, Nina darted into the study, and rapidly extracted the cartridges from the revolver. "By this means," she murmured, "the immediate peril is averted, and M. Verduret will now perhaps have time to act. I must send Cavaillon to tell him what is happening."

She hurried down stairs, and sent the clerk with a message, telling him to leave it with Madame Alexandre, if M. Verduret had left the hotel. An hour later, Madame Fauvel ordered her carriage, and went out. M. Fauvel jumped into a hackney-coach, and followed her.

"God grant that M. Verduret may be in time!" said Nina to herself, "otherwise Madame Fauvel and Raoul are lost."

XXIV

THE day that the Marquis de Clameran perceived that Raoul de Lagors was the only obstacle between him and Madeleine, he swore that the obstacle should be removed. He at once took steps for the accomplishment of his purpose. As Raoul was walking home at Vésinet about midnight, he was assailed at a lonely spot not far from the station by three men, who, determined, so they said, to see the time by his watch, fell upon him suddenly, and but for Raoul's wonderful strength and agility, would have left him dead on the spot. As it was, he soon, by his skilfully plied blows, for he was a proficient in fencing, and had learnt boxing in England, made his enemies take to their heels. He quietly continued his walk home, fully determined in future, to be well armed when he went out at night. He never for an instant suspected his accomplice of having instigated the assault. But two days afterwards, while sitting in a café he frequented, a burly, vulgar-looking man, a stranger to him, tried to draw him into a quarrel about nothing, and finally threw a card in his face, saying

he was ready to grant him satisfaction when and where he pleased. Raoul rushed towards the man to chastise him on the spot ; but his friends held him back.

“Very well, then,” said he ; “be at home to-morrow morning, sir, and I will send two of my friends to you.” As soon as the stranger had left, Raoul recovered from his excitement, and began to wonder what could have been the motive for this evidently premeditated insult. Picking up the card of the bully, he read :

W. H. B. JACOBSON.

Formerly Garibaldian volunteer.

Ex-staff-officer of the armies of the South.

(Italy, America).

30, Rue Leonie.

“Oh ! oh !” thought Raoul, “this glorious soldier may very possibly have won his laurels in a fencing school !”

Still the insult had been offered in the presence of others : and, no matter who the offender was, it must be noticed. Raoul requested two of his friends to call upon M. Jacobson early the next morning, and make arrangements for the duel. It was settled that they should render him an account of their mission at the Hotel du Louvre, where he arranged to sleep. Everything being arranged, Raoul went out to find out something about M. Jacobson. He was an expert at the business, but he had considerable trouble. The information he obtained was not very promising. M. Jacobson, who lived in a very suspicious-looking little hotel, frequented chiefly by women of loose character, was described to him as an eccentric gentleman, whose means of livelihood was a problem difficult to solve. He reigned despotically at an ordinary near by, went out a great deal, came home very late, and seemed to have no capital to live upon, save his military titles, his talent for entertaining, and a notable quantity of various expedients.

“That being his character,” thought Raoul, “I cannot see what object he can have in picking a quarrel with me. What good will it do him to run a sword through my body ? Not the slightest ; and, moreover, his pugnacious conduct is apt to attract the attention of the police, who, from what I hear, are the last people this warrior would like to have

after him. Therefore, for acting as he has done, he must have some reasons which I am unable to discern."

The result of his meditations was, that Raoul, upon his return to the Hotel du Louvre, did not mention a word of his adventure to De Clameran, whom he still found up. At half-past eight his seconds arrived. M. Jacobson had agreed to fight, and had chosen the sword; but it must be that very hour, in the Bois de Vincennes. Raoul felt very uneasy, nevertheless he boldly said: "I accept the gentleman's conditions." They went to the place decided upon, and after an interchange of a few thrusts Raoul was slightly wounded in the right shoulder. The "Ex-staff-officer of the armies of the South" wished to continue the combat; but Raoul's seconds—brave young men—declared that honor was satisfied, and that they had no intention of subjecting their friend's life to unnecessary hazards. The ex-officer was forced to submit, and unwillingly retired from the field. Raoul went home delighted at having escaped with nothing more serious than a little loss of blood, and resolved to keep clear of all so-called Garibaldians in the future. In fact, a night's reflection had convinced him that De Clameran was the instigator of the two attempts on his life. Madame Fauvel having told him what conditions Madeleine placed on her consent to marry, Raoul instantly saw how necessary his removal would be, now that he was an impediment in the way of De Clameran's success. He recalled a thousand insignificant events of the last few days, and, on skilfully questioning the marquis, had his suspicions changed into certainty. This conviction that the man whom he had so materially assisted in his criminal plans, had hired assassins to make away with him, made him mad with rage. This treason seemed, to him, monstrous. He was as yet not sufficiently experienced in ruffianism to know that one villain always sacrifices another to advance his own projects; he was credulous enough to believe in the old adage, of "honor amongst thieves." His rage was naturally mingled with fright, well knowing that his life hung by a thread, when it was threatened by a daring scoundrel like De Clameran. He had twice miraculously escaped; a third attempt would more than likely prove fatal. Knowing his accomplice's nature, Raoul saw himself surrounded by snares; he saw death before him in every form; he was equally afraid of

going out, and of remaining at home. He only ventured with the most suspicious caution into the most public places; he feared poison as much as the assassin's knife, and imagined that every dish placed before him tasted of strychnine. This life of torture was intolerable, so with a desire for revenge as much as with a view of securing his personal safety, he determined to anticipate a struggle which he felt must terminate in the death of either De Clameran or himself. "Better kill the devil," said he, "than be killed by him." In his days of poverty, Raoul had often risked his liberty to obtain a few guineas, and would not have hesitated to make short work of a person like De Clameran. But with money prudence had come. He wished to enjoy his four hundred thousand francs without being compromised by committing a murder which might be discovered; he therefore began to devise some other means of getting rid of his dreaded accomplice. In the mean time, he thought it would be a good thing to thwart De Clameran's marriage with Madeleine. He was sure that he would thus strike him to the heart, and this was at least a satisfaction. Raoul was persuaded that, by openly siding with Madeleine and her aunt, he could save them from De Clameran's clutches. Having fully resolved upon this course, he wrote a note to Madame Fauvel asking for an interview. The poor woman hastened to Vésinet convinced that some new misfortune was in store for her. Her alarm was groundless. She found Raoul more tender and affectionate than he had ever been. He saw the necessity of re-assuring her, and winning his old place in her forgiving heart, before making his disclosures. He succeeded. The poor lady had a smiling and happy look as she sat in an arm-chair, with Raoul kneeling beside her. "I have distressed you too long, my dear mother," he said in his softest tones; "but I repent sincerely: now listen to me."

He had not time to say more; the door was violently thrown open, and Raoul, springing to his feet, was confronted by M. Fauvel. The banker had a revolver in his hand, and was ghastly pale. It was evident that he was making superhuman efforts to remain calm, like a judge whose duty it is to justly punish crime.

"Ah," he exclaimed with a horrible laugh, "you look surprised. You did not expect me? You thought that

my imbecile credulity assured you an eternal impunity!"

Raoul had the courage to place himself before Madame Fauvel, and to stand prepared to receive the expected bullet.

"I assure you, uncle," he began.

"Enough!" interrupted the banker with an angry gesture, "let me hear no more infamous falsehoods! End this odious comedy, of which I am no longer the dupe."

"I swear to you—"

"Spare yourself the trouble of denying anything. Do you not see that I know all. I know who pawned my wife's diamonds. I know who committed the robbery for which an innocent man was arrested and imprisoned!"

Madame Fauvel, white with terror, fell upon her knees. At last it had come—the dreadful day had come. Vainly had she added falsehood to falsehood; vainly had she sacrificed herself and others: all was discovered. She saw that she was lost, and wringing her hands, with her face bathed in tears, she moaned: "Pardon, André! I beg you, forgive me!"

At these heart-broken tones, the banker shook like a leaf. This voice brought before him the twenty years of happiness which he had owed to this woman, who had always been the mistress of his heart, whose slightest wish had been his law, and who, by a smile or a frown, could make him the happiest or the most miserable of men. Could this wretched woman crouching at his feet be his beloved Valentine, the pure, innocent girl whom he had found secluded in the château of La Verberie? Could this be the cherished wife whom he had worshipped for so many years? In the memory of his lost happiness never to return, he seemed to forget the present, and was almost melted to forgiveness.

"Unhappy woman," he murmured, "unhappy woman! What had I done that you should thus deceive me? Ah, my only fault was loving you too deeply, and letting you see it. One wearies of everything in this world, even happiness. Did pure domestic joys pall upon you, and weary you, driving you to seek the excitement of sinful passion? Were you so tired of the atmosphere of respect and affection which surrounded you, that you must needs risk your honor and mine by braving public opinion?"

Oh, into what an abyss you have fallen, Valentine! If you were wearied by my constant devotion, had the thought of your children no power to restrain your evil passions?"

M. Fauvel spoke slowly, with painful effort, as if each word choked him. Raoul, who listened with attention, saw that if the banker knew some things, he certainly did not know all. He saw that erroneous information had misled the unhappy man, and that he was a victim of false appearances. He determined to convince him of the mistake under which he was laboring.

"Sir," he began, "will you consent to listen—"

But the sound of Raoul's voice was sufficient to break the charm. "Silence!" cried the banker with an angry oath; "silence!"

For some moments nothing was heard but the sobs of Madame Fauvel.

"I came here," continued the banker, "with the intention of surprising and killing you both. I have surprised you, but—my courage, yes my courage fails me—I cannot kill an unarmed man."

Raoul once more tried to speak.

"Let me finish!" interrupted M. Fauvel. "Your life is in my hands; the law excuses the vengeance of an outraged husband, but I refuse to take advantage of it. I see on your mantle-piece a revolver similar to mine; take it, and defend yourself."

"Never!"

"Defend yourself!" cried the banker raising his weapon. "if you do not—"

Seeing the barrel of M. Fauvel's revolver close to his breast, Raoul in self-defence seized his own and prepared to fire.

"Stand in that corner of the room, and I will stand in this," continued the banker; "and when the clock strikes, which will be in a few seconds, we will both fire together."

They took the places designated, and stood perfectly still. But the horror of the scene was too much for Madame Fauvel to witness it any longer without interposing. She understood but one thing: her son and her husband were about to kill each other before her eyes. Fright and horror gave her strength to rise and rush between the two men.

"For God's sake, have mercy, André!" she cried, turn-

ing to her husband and wringing her hands with anguish, "let me tell you everything; don't kill him."

M. Fauvel mistook this burst of maternal love, for the pleadings of an adulterous wife defending her lover. He roughly seized his wife by the arm, and thrust her aside: "Get out of the way!" he cried.

But she would not be repulsed; rushing up to Raoul, she threw her arms around him, and said to her husband: "Kill me, and me alone; for I alone am guilty."

At these words M. Fauvel's rage knew no bounds, he deliberately took aim at the guilty pair, and fired. As neither Raoul nor Madame Fauvel fell, the banker fired a second time; then a third. He was preparing for a fourth shot, when a man rushed into the room, snatched the revolver from the banker's hand, and, throwing him on the sofa ran towards Madame Fauvel. This man was M. Verduret, who had been warned by Cavaillon, but who did not know that Nina had withdrawn the charges from M. Fauvel's weapon.

"Thank Heaven!" he exclaimed, "she is unhurt."

But the banker had already regained his feet. "Leave me alone," he cried struggling to get free, "I will have vengeance!"

M. Verduret seized his wrists in a vice-like grasp, and in a solemn tone, so as to give more weight to his words, he said: "Thank God you are saved from committing a terrible crime; the anonymous letter deceived you."

M. Fauvel never once thought of asking this stranger who he was and where he came from. He heard and understood but one fact: the anonymous letter had lied. "But my wife confesses her guilt," he stammered.

"Yes," replied M. Verduret, "but not of the crime you imagine. Do you know who that man is, that you wish to kill?"

"Her lover!"

"No: her son!"

The presence of this well-informed stranger, seemed to confound Raoul and to frighten him more than M. Fauvel's threats had done. Yet he had sufficient presence of mind to say: "It is the truth!"

The banker looked wildly from Raoul to M. Verduret; then, fastening his haggard eyes on his wife exclaimed: "What you tell me is not possible! Give me proofs!"

"You shall have proofs," replied M. Verduret, "but first listen."

And rapidly, with his wonderful talent for exposition, he related the principal events of the drama he had discovered. The true state of the case was terribly distressing to M. Fauvel, but nothing compared with what he had suspected. His throbbing, yearning heart told him that he still loved his wife. Why should he punish a fault committed so very long ago, and atoned for by twenty years of devotion and suffering? For some moments after M. Verduret had finished his explanation, M. Fauvel remained silent. So many strange events had happened, following each other in such quick succession, and culminating in the shocking scene which had just taken place, that M. Fauvel seemed to be too bewildered to think clearly. If his heart counselled pardon and forgetfulness, wounded pride and self-respect demanded vengeance. If Raoul, the baleful witness, the living proof of a far-off sin, were not in existence, M. Fauvel would not have hesitated. Gaston de Clameran was dead; he would have held out his arms to his wife, saying: "Come to my heart! your sacrifices for my honor shall be your absolution; let the sad past be forgotten." But the sight of Raoul froze the words upon his lips.

"So this is your son," said he to his wife, "this man, who has plundered you and robbed me!"

Madame Fauvel was unable to utter a word in reply to these reproachful words.

"Oh!" said M. Verduret, "madame will tell you that this young man is the son of Gaston de Clameran; she has never doubted it. But, the truth is—"

"What!"

"That, in order to swindle her more easily, he has perpetrated a gross imposture."

During the last few minutes Raoul had been quietly creeping towards the door hoping to escape while no one was thinking of him. But M. Verduret, who anticipated his intention, was watching him out of the corner of his eye, and stopped him just as he was about leaving the room. "Not so fast, my pretty youth," he said, dragging him into the middle of the apartment; "it is not polite to leave us so unceremoniously. Let us have a little explanation before parting!"

M. Verduret's jeering words and mocking manner were a revelation for Raoul. "The merry-andrew!" he gasped starting back with an affrighted look.

"The same my friend," said the stout man. "Ah, now that you recognize me, I confess that the merry-andrew and myself are one and the same; here is proof of it." And turning up his sleeve he showed his bare arm. "I think that this recent wound will convince you of my identity," he continued. "I imagine you know the villain that gave me this little decoration, that night I was walking along the Rue Bourdaloue. That being the case, you know, I have a slight claim upon you, and shall expect you to relate to us your little story." But Raoul was so terrified that he could not utter a word. "Your modesty prevents your speaking," said M. Verduret. "Bravo! modesty belongs to talent, and for one of your age you certainly have displayed a talent for knavery."

M. Fauvel listened without understanding a word of what was said. "Into what abyss of shame have we fallen!" he groaned.

"Re-assure yourself, sir," replied M. Verduret in a serious tone. "After what I have been constrained to tell you, what remains to be said is a mere trifle. This is the end of the story. On leaving Mihonne, who had given him a full account of the misfortunes of Made-moiselle Valentine de La Verberie, De Clameran hastened to London. He had no difficulty in finding the farmer's wife to whom the old countess had intrusted Gaston's son. But here an unexpected disappointment greeted him. He learned that the child, who was registered on the parish books as Raoul-Valentin Wilson, had died of the croup when eighteen months old."

Raoul tried to protest. "Did any one dare say that?" he commenced.

"It was not only stated, but proved, my pretty youth," replied M. Verduret. "You don't suppose I am a man to trust to mere gossip; do you?" He drew from his pocket several stamped documents, and laid them on the table. "These are the declarations of the nurse, her husband, and four witnesses. Here is an extract from the registry of births; this is a certificate of registry of death; and all these are authenticated at the French Embassy. Now are you satisfied, young man?"

"What next?" inquired M. Fauvel.

"De Clameran," replied M. Verduret, "finding that the child was dead, supposed that he could, in spite of this disappointment, obtain money from Madame Fauvel; he was mistaken. His first attempt failed. Having an inventive turn of mind, he determined that the child should come to life again. Among his large circle of rascally acquaintance, he selected the young fellow who stands before you."

Madame Fauvel was in a pitiable state. And yet she began to feel a ray of hope; her acute anxiety had so long tortured her, that the truth was a relief. "Can this be possible?" she murmured, "can it be?"

"What!" cried the banker: "can an infamous plot like this be planned in the present day?"

"All this is false!" said Raoul boldly.

M. Verduret turned to Raoul, and, bowing with ironical respect, said: "You desire proofs, sir, do you? You shall certainly have convincing ones. I have just left a friend of mine, M. Pâlot, who brought me valuable information from London. Now, my young gentleman, I will tell you the little story he told me, and then you can give your opinion of it. In 1847 Lord Murray, a wealthy and generous nobleman, had a jockey named Spencer, of whom he was very fond. At the Epsom races this jockey was thrown from his horse, and killed. Lord Murray grieved over the loss of his favorite, and having no children of his own, declared his intention of adopting Spencer's son, who was then but four years old. Thus James Spencer was brought up in affluence, as heir to the immense wealth of the noble lord. He was a handsome, intelligent boy, and gave satisfaction to his protector until he was sixteen years of age, when he became intimate with a worthless set of people, and went to the bad. Lord Murray, who was very indulgent, pardoned many grave faults; but one fine morning he discovered that his adopted son had been imitating his signature upon some checks. He indignantly dismissed him from his house, and told him never to show his face there again. James Spencer had been living in London about four years, managing to support himself by gambling and swindling, when he met De Clameran, who offered him twenty-five thousand francs

to play a part in a little comedy which he had himself arranged."

"You are a detective!" interrupted Raoul, not caring to hear any more.

The stout man smiled blandly.

"At present," he replied, "I am merely Prosper Bertomy's friend. It depends entirely upon yourself, as to which character I shall hereafter appear in."

"What do you require me to do?"

"Where are the three hundred and fifty thousand francs which you have stolen?"

The young rascal hesitated a moment and then said: "The money is here."

"Very good. This frankness will be of service to you. I know that the money is in this room, and also that it is at the bottom of that cupboard. Do you intend to refund it?"

Raoul saw that his game was lost. He tremblingly went to the cupboard, and pulled out several rolls of bank-notes, and an enormous package of pawnbroker's tickets.

"Very well done," said M. Verduret, as he carefully examined the money and papers: "this is the most sensible step you ever took."

Raoul relied on this moment, when everybody's attention would be absorbed by the money, to make his escape. He crept towards the door, gently opened it, slipped out, and locked it, for the key was on the outside.

"He has escaped!" cried M. Fauvel.

"Of course," replied M. Verduret, without even looking up: "I thought he would have sense enough to do that."

"But is he to go unpunished?"

"My dear sir, would you have this affair become a public scandal? Do you wish your wife's name to be brought into a case of this nature at the police court?"

"Oh! sir."

"Then the best thing you can do, is to let the rascal go. Here are receipts for all the articles which he has pawned, so that we should consider ourselves fortunate. He has kept fifty thousand francs, but that is all the better for you. That sum will enable him to leave France, and we shall never see him again."

Like every one else, M. Fauvel yielded to M. Verduret's ascendancy. Gradually he had awakened to the true

state of affairs ; prospective happiness no longer seemed impossible, and he felt that he was indebted to the man before him for more than life. With earnest gratitude he seized M. Verduret's hand as if to carry it to his lips, and said in broken tones : " Oh, sir ! how can I ever find words to express how deeply I appreciate your kindness ? How can I ever repay the great service you have rendered me ? "

M. Verduret reflected a moment, and then replied : " If you consider yourself under any obligations to me, sir, I have a favor to ask of you. "

" A favor ! you ! ask of me ! Speak, sir, you have but to name it. My fortune and my life are at your disposal. "

" I will not hesitate, then, to explain myself. I am Prosper's friend. You can restore him to his former honorable position. You can do so much for him, sir ! he loves Mademoiselle Madeleine— "

" Madeleine shall be his wife, sir, " interrupted the banker : " I give you my word. And I will so publicly exonerate him, that not a shadow of suspicion will ever rest upon his name. "

The stout man quietly took up his hat and cane, as if he had been paying an ordinary call. " You will excuse my importuning you, " said he, " but Madame Fauvel— "

" André " murmured the wretched woman, " André ! "

The banker hesitated a moment, then, following the impulse of his heart, ran to his wife, and, clasping her in his arms, said tenderly : ' No, I will not be foolish enough to struggle against my heart. I do not pardon, Valentine : I forget ; I forget all ! "

M. Verduret had nothing more to do at Vésinet. Without taking leave of the banker, he quietly left the room, and, jumping into his cab, ordered the driver to return to Paris, and drive to the Hotel du Louvre as rapidly as possible. His mind was filled with anxiety. He knew that Raoul would give him no more trouble ; the young rogue was probably far off by that time. But De Clameran should not escape unpunished ; and how this punishment could be brought about without compromising Madame Fauvel was the problem to be solved. M. Verduret thought over various expedients, but not one could be applied to the present circumstances. After long thought he decided that an accusation of poisoning must be made at

Oloron. He would go there and work upon "public opinion," so that, to satisfy the townspeople, the authorities would order a post-mortem examination of Gaston's body. But this mode of proceeding required time; and De Clameran would certainly escape before long. He was bemoaning his inability to come to a satisfactory decision, when the cab stopped in front of the Hotel du Louvre. It was almost dark. A crowd of people was collected round about the entrance, eagerly discussing some exciting event which seemed to have just taken place.

"What has happened?" asked M. Verduret of one of the crowd.

"The strangest thing you have ever heard of," replied the man; "yes, I saw it with my own eyes. He first appeared at that seventh-story window; he was only half-dressed. Some men tried to seize him; but, bah! with the agility of a squirrel, he jumped out upon the roof, shrieking, 'Murder! murder!' The recklessness of his conduct led me to suppose—" The gossip stopped short in his narrative, very much surprised and vexed; his questioner had vanished.

"If it should be De Clameran!" thought M. Verduret; "if terror has deranged that brain, so capable of working out great crimes!"

While thus talking to himself, he elbowed his way into the court-yard of the hotel. At the foot of the principal staircase he found M. Fanferlot and three peculiar looking individuals waiting together.

"Well!" cried M. Verduret, "what is the matter?"

With laudable precision, the four men stood at attention. "The chief!" said they.

"Come!" said the stout man with an oath. "What has happened?"

"This is what has happened, sir," said Fanferlot dejectedly. "I am doomed to ill luck. You see how it is; this is the only chance I ever had of working out a beautiful case, and puff! my criminal goes and sells me."

"Then it is De Clameran who—"

"Of course it is. When the rascal saw me this morning, he scampered off like a hare. You should have seen him run, I thought he would never stop this side of Ivry; but not at all. On reaching the Boulevard des Ecoles, a sudden idea seemed to strike him, and he made a bee-line

for his hotel ; I suppose, to secure his pile of money. Directly he gets here, what does he see ? these three friends of mine. The sight of these gentlemen had the effect of a sunstroke upon him ; he went raving mad on the spot."

"Where is he now ?"

"At the Préfecture, I suppose. Some policemen handcuffed him, and drove off with him in a cab."

"Come with me."

M. Verduret and Fanferlot found De Clameran in one of the private cells reserved for dangerous prisoners. He had on a strait-waistcoat, and was struggling violently against three men, who were striving to hold him, while a physician tried to force him to swallow a potion.

"Help !" he shrieked, "help, for God's sake ! Do you not see my brother coming after me ? Look ! he wants to poison me !"

M. Verduret took the physician aside, and asked him a few questions.

"The wretched man is in a hopeless state," replied the doctor ; "this species of insanity is incurable. He thinks some one is trying to poison him, and nothing will persuade him to eat or drink anything ; he will die of starvation, after having suffered all the tortures of poison."

M. Verduret shuddered as he left the Préfecture. "Madame Fauvel is saved," he murmured, "since God has himself punished De Clameran !"

"That doesn't help me in the least," grumbled Fanferlot. "The idea of all my trouble and labor ending in this way !"

"True," replied M. Verduret, "the File No. 113 will never leave its portfolio. But console yourself ; before the end of the month I will give you a letter to a friend of mine, and what you have lost in fame you will gain in gold."

* * * * *

XXV.

ONE morning some days later, M. Lecoq—the official Lecoq, who resembles the head of a department—was walking up and down his private office, looking at the clock at

every moment. At last, a bell rang, and the faithful Janouille ushered in Madame Nina and Prosper Bertomy.

"Ah," said M. Lecoq, "you are punctual, my fond lovers ; that is well."

"We are not lovers, sir," replied Madame Gipsy. "Only M. Verduret's express orders have brought us together here to meet him."

"Very well," said the celebrated detective ; "then be good enough to wait a few minutes : I will tell him you are here."

During the quarter of an hour that Nina and Prosper remained alone together, they did not exchange a word. Finally a door opened, and M. Verduret appeared.

Nina and Prosper eagerly started towards him ; but he checked them by one of those looks which no one ever dared resist. "You have come," he said severely, "to hear the secret of my conduct. I have promised, and will keep my word, however painful it may be to my feelings. Listen, then. My best friend is a loyal, honest fellow, named Caldas. Eighteen months ago this friend was the happiest of men. Infatuated by a woman, he lived for her alone, and, fool that he was, imagined that as she owed all to him, she loved him."

"Yes !" cried Nina, "yes, she loved him !"

"So be it. She loved him so much, that one fine night she went off with another man. In his first moments of despair, Caldas wished to kill himself. Then he reflected that it would be wiser to live, and avenge himself."

"But then—" faltered Prosper.

"Then Caldas avenged himself in his own way. He made the woman who deceived him recognize his immense superiority over his rival. Weak, timid, and without intelligence, the latter was disgraced and falling into the abyss, when Caldas's powerful hand saved him. For you have understood, have you not ? The woman is Nina ; the seducer is yourself ; and Caldas is—"

With a quick, dexterous movement, he threw off his wig and whiskers, and stood before them the real, intelligent and proud Lecoq.

"Caldas !" cried Nina.

"No, not Caldas, nor Verduret either, but Lecoq, the detective !"

There was a moment of astonished silence, then M.

Lecoq turned to Prosper and said : "It is not to me alone that you owe your salvation. A noble girl in confiding in me rendered my task easy. I mean Mademoiselle Madeleine ; I promised her that M. Fauvel should never know anything. Your letter made it impossible for me to keep my promise. That is all."

He turned to leave the room, but Nina stopped him. "Caldas," she murmured, "I implore you to have pity on me ! I am *so* miserable ! Ah, if you only knew ! Be forgiving to one who has always loved you, Caldas ! Listen—"

* * * * *

Prosper departed from M. Lecoq's office alone.

On the 15th of last month was celebrated, at the church of Notre Dame de Lorette, the marriage of M. Prosper Bertomy and Mademoiselle Madeleine Fauvel.

The banking-house is still in the Rue de Provence ; but as M. Fauvel has determined to retire from business, and live in the country, the name of the firm has been changed, and is now : "Prosper Bertomy & Co."

THE END.

CAUGHT IN THE NET

CHAPTER I.

PUTTING ON THE SCREW.

THE cold on the 8th of February, 186—, was more intense than the Parisians had experienced during the whole of the severe winter which had preceded it, for at twelve o'clock on that day Chevalier's thermometer, so well known by the denizens of Paris, registered three degrees below zero. The sky was overcast and full of threatening signs of snow, while the moisture on the pavement and roads had frozen hard, rendering traffic of all kinds exceedingly hazardous. The whole great city wore an air of dreariness and desolation, for even when a thin crust of ice covers the waters of the Seine, the mind involuntarily turns to those who have neither food, shelter, nor fuel.

This bitterly cold day actually made the landlady of the Hôtel de Perou, though she was a hard, grasping woman from Auvergne, give a thought to the condition of her lodgers, and one quite different from her usual idea of obtaining the maximum of rent for the minimum of accommodation.

"The cold," remarked she to her husband, who was busily engaged in replenishing the stove with fuel, "is enough to frighten the wits out of a Polar bear. In

this kind of weather I always feel very anxious, for it was during a winter like this that one of our lodgers hung himself, a trick which cost us fifty francs, in good, honest money, besides giving us a bad name in the neighborhood. The fact is, one never knows what lodgers are capable of doing. You should go up to the top floor, and see how they are getting on there."

"Pooh, pooh!" replied her husband, M. Loupins; "they will do well enough."

"Is that really your opinion?"

"I know that I am right. Daddy Tantine went out as soon as it was light, and a short time afterward Paul Violaine came down. There is no one upstairs now but little Rose, and I expect that she has been wise enough to stick to her bed."

"Ah!" answered the landlady rather spitefully. "I have made up my mind regarding that young lady some time ago; she is a sight too pretty for this house, and so I tell you."

The Hôtel de Perou stands in the Rue de la Hachette, not twenty steps from the Place de Petit Pont; and no more cruelly sarcastic title could ever have been conferred on a building. The extreme shabbiness of the exterior of the house, the narrow, muddy street in which it stood, the dingy windows covered with mud, and repaired with every variety of patch,—all seemed to cry out to the passers by: "This is the chosen abode of misery and destitution."

The observer might have fancied it a robbers' den, but he would have been wrong; for the inhabitants were fairly honest. The Hôtel de Perou was one of those refuges, growing scarcer and more scarce every day, where unhappy men and women, who had been worsted in the battle of life, could find a shelter in

return for the change remaining from the last five-franc piece. They treat it as the shipwrecked mariner uses the rock upon which he climbs from the whirl of the angry waters, and breathes a deep sigh of relief as he collects his forces for a fresh effort. However wretched existence may be, a protracted sojourn in such a shelter as the Hôtel de Perou would be out of the question. The chambers in every floor of the house are divided into small slips by partitions, covered with canvas and paper, and pleasantly termed rooms by M. Loupins. The partitions were in a terrible condition, rickety and unstable, and the paper with which they were covered torn and hanging down in tatters; but the state of the attics was even more deplorable, the ceilings of which were so low that the occupants had to stoop continually, while the dormer windows admitted but a small amount of light. A bedstead, with a straw mattress, a rickety table, and two broken chairs, formed the sole furniture of these rooms. Miserable as these dormitories were, the landlady asked and obtained twenty-two francs for them by the month, as there was a fireplace in each, which she always pointed out to intending tenants.

The young woman whom M. Loupins alluded to by the name of Rose was seated in one of these dreary dens on this bitter winter's day. Rose was an exquisitely beautiful girl about eighteen years of age. She was very fair; her long lashes partially concealed a pair of steely blue eyes, and to a certain extent relieved their hard expression. Her ripe, red lips, which seemed formed for love and kisses, permitted a glimpse of a row of pearly teeth. Her bright waving hair grew low down upon her forehead, and such of it as had escaped from the bondage of a cheap comb, with which it was

fastened, hung in wild luxuriance over her exquisitely shaped neck and shoulders. She had thrown over her ragged print gown the patched coverlet of the bed, and, crouched upon the tattered hearthrug before the hearth, upon which a few sticks smouldered, giving out hardly a particle of heat, she was telling her fortune with a dirty pack of cards, endeavoring to console herself for the privations of the day by the promise of future prosperity. She had spread those arbiters of her destiny in a half circle before her, and divided them into threes, each of which had a peculiar meaning, and her breast rose and fell as she turned them up and read upon their faces good fortune or ill-luck. Absorbed in this task, she paid but little attention to the icy chillness of the atmosphere, which made her fingers stiff, and dyed her white hands purple.

"One, two, three," she murmured in a low voice. "A fair man, that's sure to be Paul. One, two, three, money to the house. One, two, three, troubles and vexations. One, two, three, the nine of spades; ah, dear! more hardships and misery,—always that wretched card turning up with its sad story!"

Rose seemed utterly downcast at the sight of the little pieces of painted cardboard, as though she had received certain intelligence of a coming misfortune. She soon, however, recovered herself, and was again shuffling the pack,—cut it, taking care to do so with her left hand, spread them out before her, and again commenced counting: one, two, three. This time the cards appeared to be more propitious, and held out promises of success for the future.

"I am loved," read she, as she gazed anxiously upon them,—"very much loved! Here is rejoicing, and a letter from a dark man! See, here he is,—the knave

of clubs. Always the same," she continued; "I cannot strive against fate."

Then, rising to her feet, she drew from a crack in the wall, which formed a safe hiding-place for her secrets, a soiled and crumpled letter, and, unfolding it, she read for perhaps the hundredth time these words:—

"MADEMOISELLE,—

"To see you is to love you. I give you my word of honor that this is true. The wretched hovel where your charms are hidden is no fit abode for you. A home, worthy in every way to receive you, is at your service—Rue de Douai. It has been taken in your name, as I am straightforward in these matters. Think of my proposal, and make what inquiries you like concerning me. I have not yet attained my majority, but shall do so in five months and three days, when I shall inherit my mother's fortune. My father is wealthy, but old and infirm. From four to six in the afternoon of the next few days I will be in a carriage at the corner of the Place de Petit Pont.

GASTON DE GANDELU."

The cynical insolence of the letter, together with its entire want of form, was a perfect example of the style affected by those loiterers about town, known to the Parisians as "mashers;" and yet Rose did not appear at all disgusted by the reception of such an unworthily worded proposal, but, on the contrary, rather pleased by its contents. "If I only dared," mused she, with a sigh,—“ah, if I only dared!” For a time she sat deeply immersed in thought, with her face buried in her hands, until she was aroused from her meditations by the sound of an active and youthful step upon the creaking stairs. "He has come back," she gasped; and with the agile movement of a cat she again concealed the letter in its hiding-place, and she had scarcely

done so, when Paul Violaine entered the miserable room. He was a young man of twenty-three, of slender figure, but admirably proportioned. His face was a perfect oval, and his complexion of just that slight olive tint which betrays the native of the south of France. A slight, silky moustache concealed his upper lip, and gave his features that air of manliness in which they would have otherwise been deficient. His curly chestnut hair fell gracefully over a brow upon which an expression of pride was visible, and enhanced the peculiar, restless glance of his large dark eyes. His physical beauty, which was fully equal to that of Rose, was increased by an aristocratic air, popularly believed to be only found in the scions of noble families. The landlady, in her moments of good humor, used to assert her belief that her lodger was a disguised prince; but if this were the case, he was certainly one that had been overtaken by poverty. His dress, to which the closest attention had been paid, revealed the state of destitution in which he was,—not the destitution which openly asks for alms, but the hidden poverty which shuns communication and blushes at a single glance of pity. In this almost Arctic winter he wore clothes rendered thin by the constant friction of the clothes brush, over which was a light overcoat about as thick as the web of a spider. His shoes were well blacked, but their condition told the piteous tale of long walks in search of employment, or of that good luck which seems to evade its pursuer.

Paul was holding a roll of manuscript in his hand, and as he entered the room he threw it on the bed with a despairing gesture. “A failure again!” exclaimed he, in accents of the utmost depression. “Nothing else but failures!”

The young woman rose hastily to her feet; she appeared to have forgotten the cards completely; the smile of satisfaction faded from her face and her features, and an expression of utter weariness took its place.

"What! no success?" she cried, affecting a surprise which was evidently assumed. "No success, after all your promises when you left me this morning?"

"This morning, Rose, a ray of hope had penetrated my heart; but I have been deceived, or rather I deceived myself, and I took my ardent desires for so many promises which were certain to be fulfilled. The people that I have been to have not even the kindness to say 'No' plain and flat; they listen to all you have to say, and as soon as your back is turned they forget your existence. The coin that passes around in this infernal town is indeed nothing but idle words, and that is all that poverty-stricken talent can expect."

A silence of some duration ensued, and Paul was too much absorbed in his own thoughts to notice the look of contempt with which Rose was regarding him. His helpless resignation to adverse circumstances appeared to have turned her to stone.

"A nice position we are in!" said she at last. "What do you think will become of us?"

"Alas! I do not know."

"Nor I. Yesterday Madame Loupins came to me and asked for the eleven francs we owe here; and told me plainly that if within three days we did not settle our account, she would turn us out; and I know enough of her to be sure that she will keep her word. The detestable old hag would do anything for the pleasure of seeing me on the streets."

"Alone and friendless in the world," muttered Paul,

paying but little attention to the young girl's words, "without a creature or a relative to care for you, or to lend you a helping hand."

"We have not a copper in the world," continued Rose with cruel persistency; "I have sold everything that I had, to preserve the rags that I am wearing. Not a scrap of wood remains, and we have not tasted food since yesterday morning."

To these words, which were uttered in a tone of the most bitter reproach, the young man made no reply, but clasped his icily cold hands against his forehead, as though in utter despair.

"Yes, that is a true picture of our position," resumed Rose coldly, her accents growing more and more contemptuous. "And I tell you that something must be done at once, some means discovered, I care not what, to relieve us from our present miserable state."

Paul tore off his overcoat, and held it toward her.

"Take it, and pawn it," exclaimed he; but the girl made no move.

"Is that all that you have to propose?" asked she, in the same glacial tone.

"They will lend you three francs upon it, and with that we can get bread and fuel."

"And after that is gone?"

"After that—oh, we will think of our next step, and shall have time to hit upon some plan. Time, a little time, is all that I require, Rose, to break asunder the bonds which seem to fetter me. Some day success must crown my efforts; and with success, Rose, dear, will come affluence, but in the meantime we must learn to wait."

"And where are the means to enable us to wait?"

"No matter; they will come. Only do what I tell you, and who can say what to-morrow——"

Paul was still too much absorbed in his own thoughts to notice the expression upon the young girl's face; for had he done so, he would at once have perceived that she was not in the humor to permit the matter to be shelved in this manner.

"To-morrow!" she broke in sarcastically. "To-morrow,—always the same pitiful cry. For months past we seem to have lived upon the word. Look you here, Paul, you are no longer a child, and ought to be able to look things straight in the face. What can I get on that threadbare coat of yours? Perhaps three francs at the outside. How many days will that last us? We will say three. And then, what then? Besides, can you not understand that your dress is too shabby for you to make an impression on the people you go to see? Well-dressed applicants only have attention, and to obtain money, you must appear not to need it; and, pray, what will people think of you if you have no overcoat? Without one you will look ridiculous, and can hardly venture into the streets."

"Hush!" cried Paul, "for pity's sake, hush! for your words only prove to me more plainly that you are like the rest of the world, and that want of success is a pernicious crime in your eyes. You once had confidence in me, and then you spoke in a very different strain."

"Once indeed! but then I did not know——"

"No, Rose, it was not what you were then ignorant of; but it was that in those days you loved me."

"Great heavens! I ask you, have I left one stone unturned? Have I not gone from publisher to pub-

lisher to sell those songs of my own composing—those songs that you sing so well? I have endeavored to get pupils. What fresh efforts can I try? What would *you* do, were you in my place? Tell me, I beg you.”

And as Paul spoke, he grew more and more excited, while Rose still maintained her manner of exasperating coolness.

“I know not,” she replied, after a brief pause; “but if I was a man, I do not think that I would permit the woman, for whom I pretended that I had the most sincere affection, to be in want of the actual necessities of life. I would strain every effort to obtain them.”

“I have no trade; I am no mechanic,” broke in Paul passionately.

“Then I would learn one. Pray how much does a man earn who climbs the ladder with a bricklayer’s hod upon his shoulders? It may be hard work, I allow, but surely the business is not difficult to learn. You have, or say you have, great musical talents. I say nothing about them; but had I any vocal powers and if there was not a morsel to eat in the house, I would go and sing in the taverns or even in the public streets, and would earn money, and care little for the means by which I made it.”

“When you say those things, you seem to forget that I am an honest man.”

“One would really suppose that I had suggested some questionable act to you. Your reply, Paul, plainly proves to me that you are one of those who, for want of determination, fall, helpless, by the wayside in the journey of life. They flaunt their rags and tatters in the eyes of the world, and with saddened hearts and empty stomachs utter the boast,* ‘I am an honest man.’

Do you think that, in order to be rich, you must perforce be a rogue? This is simple imbecility."

She uttered this tirade in clear and vibrant accents, and her eyes gleamed with the fire of savage resolution. Her nature was one of those cruel and energetic ones, which lead a woman to hurl a man from the brink of the abyss to which she has conducted him, and to forget him before he has ever reached the bottom.

This torrent of sarcasm brought out Paul's real nature. His face flushed, and rage began to gain the mastery over him. "Can you not work?" he asked. "Why do you not do something instead of talking so much?"

"That is not at all the same kind of thing," answered she coolly. "I was not made for work."

Paul made a threatening gesture. "You wretch!" exclaimed he.

"You are wrong," she replied. "I am not a wretch; I am simply hungry."

There seemed every prospect of an angry scene, when a slight sound attracted the attention of the disputants, and, turning round, they saw an old man standing upon the threshold of their open door. He was tall, but stooped a good deal. He had high, thick brows, and a red nose; a long, thick, grizzly beard covered the rest of his countenance. He wore a pair of spectacles with colored glasses, which, to a great extent, concealed the expression of his face. His whole attire indicated extreme poverty. He wore a greasy coat, much frayed and torn at the pockets, and which had carried away with it marks of all the walls against which it had been rubbed when he had indulged a little too freely in the cheerful glass. He seemed to belong to that class who consider it a work of supererogation

to disrobe before going to bed, and who just turn in on such spot as the fancy of the moment may dictate. Paul and Rose both recognized the old man from having continually met him when ascending or descending the staircase, and knew that he rented the back attic, and was called Daddy Tantaine. In an instant the idea flashed across Paul's mind that the dilapidated state of the partition permitted every word spoken in one attic to be overheard in the other, and this did not tend to soothe his exasperated feelings.

"What do you want here, sir?" asked he angrily. "And, pray, who gave you permission to enter my room without leave?"

The old man did not seem at all put out by the threatening language of his questioner. "I should be telling a fib," answered he calmly, "if I were to tell you that, being in my own room and hearing you quarrelling, I did not hear every word of what you have been saying."

"Sir!"

"Stop a bit, and don't be in such a hurry, my young friend. You seem disposed to quarrel, and, on my faith, I am not surprised; for when there is no corn in the manger, the best tempered horse will bite and kick."

He uttered these words in the most soothing accents, and appeared utterly unconscious of having committed any breach of etiquette in entering the room.

"Well, sir," said Paul, a flush of shame passing across his face, "you see now how poverty can drag a man down. Are you satisfied?"

"Come, come, my young friend," answered Daddy Tantaine, "you should not get angry; and if I did step in without any notice, it was because, as a neighbor,

I find I might venture on such a liberty; for when I heard how embarrassed you were, I said to myself, 'Tantaine, perhaps you can help this pretty pair out of the scrape they have got into.'"

The promise of assistance from a person who had not certainly the outward appearance of a capitalist seemed so ludicrous to Rose that she could not restrain a smile, for she fancied that if their old neighbor was to present them with half his fortune, it might possibly amount to twenty centimes or thereabouts.

Paul had formed a somewhat similar idea, but he was a little touched by this act of friendliness on the part of a man who doubtless knew that money lent under similar circumstances was but seldom returned.

"Ah, sir!" said he, and this time he spoke in softer accents, "what can you possibly do for us?"

"Who can say?"

"You can see how hard we are pushed. We are in want of almost everything. Have we not reached the *acme* of misery?"

The old man raised his hand to heaven, as if to seek for aid from above.

"You have indeed come to a terrible pass," murmured he; "but all is not yet lost. The pearl which lies in the depths of the ocean is not lost for ever; for may not some skillful diver bring it to the surface? A fisherman may not be able to do much with it, but he knows something of its value, and hands it over to the dealer in precious stones."

He intensified his speech by a little significant laugh, the meaning of which was lost upon the two young people who, though their evil instincts led them to be greedy and covetous, were yet unskilled in the world's ways.

"I should," remarked Paul, "be a fool if I did not accept the offer of your kind assistance."

"There, then, that is right; and now the first thing to do is to have a really good feed. You must get in some wood too, for it is frightfully cold. My old bones are half frozen; and afterward we will talk of a fresh rig out for you both."

"Yes," remarked Rose with a faint sigh; "but to do all that, we want a lot of money."

"Well, how do you know that I can't find it?"

Daddy Tantaine unbuttoned his great coat with grave deliberation, and drew from an inner pocket a small scrap of paper which had been fastened to the lining by a pin. This he unfolded with the greatest care and laid upon the table.

"A banknote for five hundred francs!" exclaimed Rose, with extreme surprise. Paul did not utter a word. Had he seen the woodwork of the chair upon which he was leaning burst into flower and leaf, he could not have looked more surprised. Who could have expected to find such a sum concealed beneath the old man's tatters, and how could he have obtained so much money? The idea that some robbery had been committed at once occurred to both the young people, and they exchanged a meaning glance, which, however, did not escape the observation of their visitor.

"Pooh, pooh!" said he, without appearing in the slightest degree annoyed. "You must not give way to evil thoughts or suspicions. It is a fact that banknotes for five hundred francs don't often grow out of a ragged pocket like mine. But I got this fellow honestly,—that I can guarantee."

Rose paid no attention to his words; indeed, she took no interest in them. The note was there, and that was

enough for her. She took it up and smoothed it out as though the crisp paper communicated a pleasant sensation to her fingers.

"I must tell you," resumed Daddy Tantine, "that I am employed by a sheriff's officer, and that, in addition, I do a little bill collecting for various persons. By these means I have often comparatively large sums in my possession, and I can lend you five hundred francs for a short time without any inconvenience to myself."

Paul's necessities and conscience were fighting a hard battle, and he remained silent, as a person generally does before arriving at a momentous decision.

At length he broke the silence. "No," said he, "your offer is one that I cannot accept, for I feel——"

"This is no time, my dear Paul, to talk of feelings," interrupted Rose; "besides, can you not see that our refusal to accept the loan annoys this worthy gentleman?"

"The young lady is quite right," returned Daddy Tantine. "Come, let us say that the matter is settled. Go out and get in something to eat, sharp, for it has struck four some time ago."

At these words, Rose started, and a scarlet flush spread over her cheek. "Four o'clock," repeated she, thinking of her letter; but after a moment's reflection she stepped up to the cracked mirror, and, arranging her tattered skirts, took up the banknote and left the room.

"She is a rare beauty," remarked Daddy Tantine with the air of one who was an authority in such matters, "and as clever as they make them. Ah! if she had only some one to give her a hint, she might rise to any height."

Paul's ideas were in such a wild state of confusion, that he could make no reply; and, now that he was no longer held in thrall by Rose's presence, he began to be terrified at what had taken place, for he imagined that he caught a sinister expression in the old man's face which made him very suspicious of the wisdom of the course he had been persuaded to pursue. Was there ever such an unheard-of event as an old man of such a poverty-stricken appearance showering bank-notes upon the heads of perfect strangers? There was certainly something mysterious in the affair, and Paul made up his mind that he would do his utmost to avoid being compromised.

"I have thought the matter over," said he resolutely; "and it is impossible for me to accept the loan of a sum which it would be difficult for me to repay."

"My dear young friend, that is not the way to talk. If you do not have a good opinion of yourself, all the world will judge you according to your own estimation. Your inexperience has, up to this time, been the sole cause of your failure. Poverty soon changes a boy into a man as straw ripens fruit; but the first thing you must do is to put all confidence in me. You can repay the five hundred francs at your convenience, but I must have six per cent. for my money and your note of hand."

"But really——," began Paul.

"I am looking at the matter in a purely business light, so we can drop sentiment."

Paul had so little experience in the ways of the world, that the mere fact of giving his acceptance for the money borrowed put him at once at his ease, though he knew well that his name was not a very valuable addition to the slip of paper.

Daddy Tantine, after a short search through his pockets, discovered a bill stamp, and, placing it on the table, said, "Write as I shall dictate:—

'On the 8th of June, 188—, I promise to pay to M. Tantine or order the sum of five hundred francs for value received, such sum to bear interest at the rate of six per cent. per annum.

'Frs. 500.

'PAUL VIOLAINE.'"

The young man had just completed his signature when Rose made her appearance, bearing a plentiful stock of provisions in her arms. Her eyes had a strange radiance in them, which Paul, however, did not notice, as he was engaged in watching the old man, who, after carefully inspecting the document, secured it in one of the pockets of his ragged coat.

"You will, of course, understand, sir," remarked Paul, "that there is not much chance of my being able to save sufficient to meet this bill in four months, so that the date is a mere form."

A smile of benevolence passed over Daddy Tantine's features. "And suppose," said he, "that I, the lender, was to put the borrower in a position to repay the advance before a month had passed?"

"Ah! but that is not possible."

"I do not say, my young friend, that I could do this myself; but I have a good friend whose hand reaches a long way. If I had only listened to his advice when I was younger, you would not have caught me to-day in the Hôtel de Perou. Shall I introduce you to him?"

"Am I a perfect fool, to throw away such a chance?"

"Good! I shall see him this evening, and will mention your name to him. Call on him at noon to-

morrow, and if he takes a fancy to you,—decides to push you, your future is assured, and you will have no doubts as to getting on.”

He took out a card from his pocket and handed it to Paul, adding, “The name of my friend is Mascarin.”

Meanwhile Rose, with a true Parisian’s handiness, had contrived to restore order from chaos, and had arranged the table, with its one or two pieces of broken crockery, with scraps of brown paper instead of plates. A fresh supply of wood crackled bravely on the hearth, and two candles, one of which was placed in a chipped bottle, and the other in a tarnished candlestick belonging to the porter of the hotel. In the eyes of both the young people the spectacle was a truly delightful one, and Paul’s heart swelled with triumph. The business had been satisfactorily concluded, and all his misgivings were at an end.

“Come, let us gather round the festive board,” said he joyously. “This is breakfast and dinner in one. Rose, be seated; and you, my dear friend, will surely share with us the repast we owe to you?”

With many protestations of regret, however, Daddy Tantaine pleaded an important engagement at the other end of Paris. “And,” added he, “it is absolutely necessary that I should see Mascarin this evening, for I must try my best to make him look on you with a favorable eye.”

Rose was very glad when the old man took his departure, for his ugliness, the shabbiness of his dress, and his general aspect of dirt, drove away all the feelings of gratitude she ought to have evinced, and inspired in her loathing and repugnance; and she fancied that his eyes, though veiled by his colored glasses, could detect the minutest secrets of her heart; but still this

did not prevent her putting on a sweet smile and entreating him to remain.

But Daddy Taintaine was resolute; and after impressing upon Paul the necessity of punctuality, he went away, repeating, as he passed through the door, "May good appetite be present at your little feast, my dears."

As soon, however, as the door was closed he bent down and listened. The young people were as merry as larks, and their laughter filled the bare attic of the Hôtel de Perou. Why should not Paul have been in good spirits? He had in his pocket the address of the man who was to make his fortune, and on the chimney-piece was the balance of the banknote, which seemed to him an inexhaustible sum. Rose, too, was delighted, and could not refrain from jeering at their benefactor, whom she stigmatized as "an old idiot."

"Laugh while you can, my dears!" muttered Daddy Taintaine; "for this may be the last time you will do so."

With these words he crept down the dark staircase, which was only lighted up on Sundays, owing to the high price of gas, and, peeping through the glass door of the porter's lodge, saw Madame Loupins engaged in cooking; and, with the timid knock of a man who has learned his lesson in poverty's grammar, he entered.

"Here is my rent, madame," said he, placing on the table ten francs and twenty centimes. Then, as the woman was scribbling a receipt, he launched into a statement of his own affairs, and told her that he had come into a little property which would enable him to live in comfort during his few remaining years on earth; and—evidently fearing that his well-known pov-

erty might cause Madame Loupins to discredit his assertions—drew out his pocketbook and exhibited several banknotes. This exhibition of wealth so surprised the landlady, that when the old man left she insisted on lighting him to the door. He turned eastward as soon as he had left the house, and, glancing at the names of the shops, entered a grocer's establishment at the corner of the Rue de Petit Pont. This grocer, thanks to a certain cheap wine, manufactured for him by a chemist at Berçy, had achieved a certain notoriety in that quarter. He was very stout and pompous, a widower, and a sergeant in the National Guard. His name was Melusin. In all poor districts five o'clock is a busy hour for the shopkeepers, for the workmen are returning from their labors, and their wives are busy in their preparations for their evening meal. M. Melusin was so busily engaged, giving orders and seeing that they were executed, that he did not even notice the entrance of Daddy Tantine; but had he done so, he would not have put himself out for so poorly dressed a customer. But the old man had left behind him in the Hôtel de Perou every sign of humility and servility, and, making his way to the least crowded portion of the shop, he called out in imperative accents, "M. Melusin!"

Very much surprised, the grocer ceased his avocation and hastened to obey the summons. "How the deuce does the man know me?" muttered he, forgetting that his name was over the door in gilt letters fully six inches long.

"Sir," said Daddy Tantine, without giving the grocer time to speak, "did not a young woman come here about half an hour ago and change a note for five hundred francs?"

"Most certainly," answered M. Melusin; "but how did you know that? Ah, I have it!" he added, striking his forehead; "there has been a robbery, and you are in pursuit of the criminal. I must confess that the girl looked so poor, that I guessed there was something wrong. I saw her fingers tremble."

"Pardon me," returned Daddy Tantaine. "I have said nothing about a robbery. I only wished to ask you if you would know the girl again?"

"Perfectly—a really splendid girl, with hair that you do not see every day. I have reason to believe that she lives in the Rue Hachette. The police are not very popular with the shopkeeping class; but the latter, desirous of keeping down crime, generally afford plenty of information, and in the interests of virtue will even risk losing customers, who go off in a huff at not being attended to while they are talking to the officers of justice. Shall I," continued the grocer, "send one of the errand boys to the nearest police station?"

"No, thank you," replied Daddy Tantaine. "I should prefer your keeping the matter quiet until I communicate with you once more."

"Yes, yes, I see; a false step just now would put them on their guard."

"Just so. Now, will you let me have the number of the note, if you still have it? I wish you also to make a note of the date as well as the number."

"Yes, yes, I see," returned the grocer. "You may require my books as corroborative evidence; that is often the way. Excuse me; I will be back directly."

All that Daddy Tantaine had desired was executed with the greatest rapidity, and he and the grocer parted on the best terms, and the tradesman watched his visitor's departure, perfectly satisfied that he had been

assisting a police officer who had deemed it fit to assume a disguise. Daddy Tantaine cared little what he thought, and, gaining the Place de Petit Pont, stopped and gazed around as if he was waiting for some one. Twice he walked round it in vain; but in his third circuit he came to a halt with an exclamation of satisfaction, for he had seen the person of whom he had been in search, who was a detestable looking youth of about eighteen years of age, though so thin and stunted that he hardly appeared to be fifteen.

The lad was leaning against the wall of the Quay St. Michel, openly asking alms, but keeping a sharp lookout for the police. At the first glance it was easy to detect in him the hideous outgrowth of the great city, the regular young rough of Paris, who, at eight years of age, smokes the butt ends of cigars picked up at the tavern doors and gets tipsy on coarse spirits. He had a thin crop of sandy hair, his complexion was dull and colorless, and a sneer curled the corners of his mouth, which had a thick, hanging underlip, and his eyes had an expression in them of revolting cynicism. His dress was tattered and dirty, and he had rolled up the sleeve of his right arm, exhibiting a deformed limb, sufficiently repulsive to excite the pity of the passers by. He was repeating a monotonous whine, in which the words "poor workman, arm destroyed by machinery, aged mother to support," occurred continually.

Daddy Tantaine walked straight up to the youth, and with a sound cuff sent his hat flying.

The lad turned sharply round, evidently in a terrible rage; but, recognizing his assailant, shrank back, and muttered to himself, "Landed!" In an instant he restored his arm to its originally healthy condition, and,

picking up his cap, replaced it on his head, and humbly waited for fresh orders.

"Is this the way you execute your errands?" asked Daddy Tantaine, snarling.

"What errands? I have heard of none!"

"Never you mind that. Did not M. Mascarin, on my recommendation, put you in a way of earning your livelihood? and did you not promise to give up begging?"

"Beg pardon, guv'nor, I meant to be on the square, but I didn't like to waste time while I was a-waiting. I don't like a-being idle and I have copped seven browns."

"Toto Chupin," said the old man, with great severity, "you will certainly come to a bad end. But come, give your report. What have you seen?"

During this conversation they were walking slowly along the quay, and had passed the Hôtel Dieu.

"Well, guv'nor," replied the young rogue, "I just saw what you said I should. At four sharp, a carriage drove into the Place, and pulled up bang opposite the wigfaker's. Dash me, if it weren't a swell turnout!—horse, coachman, and all, in real slap-up style. It waited so long that I thought it had taken root there."

"Come, get on! Was there any one inside?"

"I should think there was! I twigged him at once, by the description you gave me. I never see a cove togged out as he was,—tall hat, light sit-down-upons, and a short coat—wasn't it cut short! but in really bang-up style. To be certain, I went right up to him, for it was getting dark, and had a good look at him. He had got out of the trap, and was marching up and down the pavement, with an unlighted cigar stuck in his mouth. I took a match, and said, 'Have a light,

my noble swell?' and hanged if he didn't give me ten centimes! My! ain't he ugly!—short, shrivelled up, and knock-kneed, with a glass in his eye, and altogether precious like a monkey."

Daddy Tantine began to grow impatient with all this rigmarole. "Come, tell me what took place," said he angrily.

"Precious little. The young swell didn't seem to care about dirtying his trotter-cases; he kept slashing about with his cane, and staring at all the gals. What an ass that masher is! Wouldn't I have liked to have punched his head! If you ever want to hide him, daddy, please think of yours truly. He wouldn't stand up to me for five minutes."

"Go on, my lad; go on."

"Well, we had waited half an hour, when all at once a woman came sharp round the corner, and stops before the masher. Wasn't she a fine gal! and hadn't she a pair of sparklers! but she had awfully seedy togs on. But they spoke in whispers."

"So you did not hear what they said?"

"Do you take me for a flat? The gal said, 'Do you understand?—to-morrow.' Then the swell chap, says he, 'Do you promise?' and the gal, she answers back, 'Yes, at noon.' Then they parted. She went off to the Rue Hachette, and the masher tumbled into his wheelbox. The jarvey cracked his whip, and off they went in a brace of shakes. Now hand over them five francs."

Daddy Tantine did not seem surprised at this request, and he gave over the money to the young loafer, with the words, "When I promise, I pay down on the nail; but remember, Toto Chupin, you'll come to grief one day. Good-night. Our ways lie in different directions."

The old man, however, lingered until he had seen the lad go off toward the Jardin des Plantes, and then, turning round, went back by the way he had come. "I have not lost my day," murmured he. "All the improbabilities have turned out certainties, and matters are going straight. Won't Flavia be awfully pleased?"

CHAPTER II.

A REGISTRY OFFICE.

THE establishment of the influential friend of Daddy Tantaine was situated in the Rue Montorgeuil, not far from the Passage de la Reine Hortense. M. B. Mascarin has a registry office for the engagement of both male and female servants. Two boards fastened upon each side of the door announce the hours of opening and closing, and give a list of those whose names are on the books; they further inform the public that the establishment was founded in 1844, and is still in the same hands. It was the long existence of M. Mascarin in a business which is usually very short-lived that had obtained for him a great amount of confidence, not only in the quarter in which he resided, but throughout the whole of Paris. Employers say that he sends them the best of servants, and the domestics in their turn assert that he only despatches them to good places. But M. Mascarin has still further claims on the public esteem; for it was he who, in 1845, founded and carried out a project which had for its aim and end the securing of a shelter for servants out of place. The better to carry out this, Mascarin took a partner, and gave him the charge of a furnished

house close to the office. Worthy as these projects were, Mascarin contrived to draw considerable profit from them, and was the owner of the house before which, in the noon of the day following the events we have described, Paul Violaine might have been seen standing. The five hundred francs of old Tantaine, or at any rate a portion of them, had been well spent, and his clothes did credit to his own taste and the skill of his tailor. Indeed, in his fine feathers he looked so handsome, that many women turned to gaze after him. He however took but little notice of this, for he was too full of anxiety, having grave doubts as to the power of the man whom Tantaine had asserted could, if he liked, make his fortune. "A registry office!" muttered he scornfully. "Is he going to propose a berth of a hundred francs a month to me?" He was much agitated at the thoughts of the impending interview, and, before entering the house, gazed upon its exterior with great interest. The house much resembled its neighbors. The entrances to the Registry Office and the Servants' Home were in a courtyard, at the arched entrance to which stood a vendor of roast chestnuts.

"There is no use in remaining here," said Paul. Summoning, therefore, all his resolution, he crossed the courtyard, and, ascending a flight of stairs, paused before a door upon which "OFFICE" was written. "Come in!" responded at once to his knock. He pushed open the door, and entered a room, which closely resembled all other similar offices. There were seats all round the room, polished by frequent use. At the end was a sort of compartment shut in by a green baize curtain, jestingly termed "the Confessional" by the frequenters of the office. Between the

windows was a tin plate, with the words, "All fees to be paid in advance," in large letters upon it. In one corner a gentleman was seated at a writing table, who, as he made entries in a ledger, was talking to a woman who stood beside him.

"M. Mascarin?" asked Paul hesitatingly.

"What do you want with him?" asked the man, without looking up from his work. "Do you wish to enter your name? We have now vacancies for three bookkeepers, a cashier, a confidential clerk—six other good situations. Can you give good references?"

These words seemed to be uttered by rote.

"I beg your pardon," returned Paul; "but I should like to see M. Mascarin. One of his friends sent me here."

This statement evidently impressed the official, and he replied almost politely, "M. Mascarin is much occupied at present, sir; but he will soon be disengaged. Pray be seated."

Paul sat down on a bench, and examined the man who had just spoken with some curiosity. M. Mascarin's partner was a tall and athletic man, evidently enjoying the best of health, and wearing a large moustache elaborately waxed and pointed. His whole appearance betokened the old soldier. He had, so he asserted, served in the cavalry, and it was there that he had acquired the *soubriquet* by which he was known—Beaumarchef, his original name being David. He was about forty-five, but was still considered a very good-looking fellow. The entries that he was making in the ledger did not prevent him from keeping up a conversation with the woman standing by him. The woman, who seemed to be a cross between a cook and a market-woman, might be described as a thoroughly

jovial soul. She seasoned her conversation with pinches of snuff, and spoke with a strong Alsatian brogue.

"Now, look here," said Beaumarchef; "do you really mean to say that you want a place?"

"I do that."

"You said that six months ago. We got you a splendid one, and three days afterward you chucked up the whole concern."

"And why shouldn't I? There was no need to work then; but now it is another pair of shoes, for I have spent nearly all I had saved."

Beaumarchef laid down his pen, and eyed her curiously for a second or two; then he said,—

"You've been making a fool of yourself somehow, I expect."

She half turned away her head, and began to complain of the hardness of the terms and of the meanness of the mistresses, who, instead of allowing their cooks to do the marketing, did it themselves, and so cheated their servants out of their commissions.

Beaumarchef nodded, just as he had done half an hour before to a lady who had complained bitterly of the misconduct of her servants. He was compelled by his position to sympathize with both sides.

The woman had now finished her tirade, and drawing the amount of the fee from a well-filled purse, placed it on the table, saying,—

"Please, M. Beaumarchef, register my name as Caroline Scheumal, and get me a real good place. It must be a cook, you understand, and I want to do the marketing without the missus dodging around."

"Well, I'll do my best."

"Try and find me a wealthy widower, or a young woman married to a very old fellow. Now, do look

round; I'll drop in again to-morrow;" and with a farewell pinch of snuff, she left the office.

Paul listened to this conversation with feelings of anger and humiliation, and in his heart cursed old Tantaine for having introduced him into such company. He was seeking for some plausible excuse for withdrawal, when the door at the end of the room was thrown open, and two men came in, talking as they did so. The one was young and well dressed, with an easy, swaggering manner, which ignorant people mistake for good breeding. He had a many-colored rosette at his buttonhole, showing that he was the knight of more than one foreign order. The other was an elderly man, with an unmistakable legal air about him. He was dressed in a quilted dressing-gown, fur-lined shoes, and had on his head an embroidered cap, most likely the work of the hands of some one dear to him. He wore a white cravat, and his sight compelled him to use colored glasses.

"Then, my dear sir," said the younger man, "I may venture to entertain hopes?"

"Remember, Marquis," returned the other, "that if I were acting alone, what you require would be at once at your disposal. Unfortunately, I have others to consult."

"I place myself entirely in your hands," replied the Marquis.

The appearance of the fashionably dressed young man reconciled Paul to the place in which he was.

"A Marquis!" he murmured; "and the other swell-looking fellow must be M. Mascarin."

Paul was about to step forward, when Beaumarchef respectfully accosted the last comer,—

"Who do you think, sir," said he, "I have just seen?"

"Tell me quickly," was the impatient reply.

"Caroline Schimmel; you know who I mean."

"What! the woman who was in the service of the Duchess of Champdoce?"

"Exactly so."

M. Mascarin uttered an exclamation of delight.

"Where is she living now?"

Beaumarchef was utterly overwhelmed by this simple question. For the first time in his life he had omitted to take a client's address. This omission made Mascarin so angry that he forgot all his good manners, and broke out with an oath that would have shamed a London cabman,—

"How could you be such an infernal fool? We have been hunting for this woman for five months. You knew this as well as I did, and yet, when chance brings her to you, you let her slip through your fingers and vanish again."

"She'll be back again, sir; never fear. She won't fling away the money that she has paid for fees."

"And what do you think that she cares for ten sous or ten francs? She'll be back when she thinks she will; but a woman who drinks and is off her head nearly all the year round——"

Inspired by a sudden thought, Beaumarchef made a clutch at his hat.

"She has only just gone," said he; "I can easily overtake her."

But Mascarin arrested his progress.

"You are not a good bloodhound. Take Toto Chupin with you; he is outside with his chestnuts, and is as fly as they make them. If you catch her up, don't say a word, but follow her up, and see where she goes. I want to know her whole daily life. Remember that

no item, however unimportant it may seem, is not of consequence."

Beaumarchef disappeared in an instant, and Mascarin continued to grumble.

"What a fool!" he murmured. "If I could only do everything myself. I worried my life out for months, trying to find the clue to the mystery which this woman holds, and now she has again escaped me."

Paul, who saw that his presence was not remarked, coughed to draw attention to it. In an instant Mascarin turned quickly round.

"Excuse me," said Paul; but the set smile had already resumed its place upon Mascarin's countenance.

"You are," remarked he, civilly, "Paul Violaine, are you not?"

The young man bowed in assent.

"Forgive my absence for an instant. I will be back directly," said Mascarin.

He passed through the door, and in another instant Paul heard his name called.

Compared to the outer chamber, Mascarin's office was quite a luxurious apartment, for the windows were bright, the paper on the walls fresh, and the floor carpeted. But few of the visitors to the office could boast of having been admitted into this sanctum; for generally business was conducted at Beaumarchef's table in the outer room. Paul, however, who was unacquainted with the prevailing rule, was not aware of the distinction with which he had been received. Mascarin, on his visitor's entrance, was comfortably seated in an armchair before the fire, with his elbow on his desk—and what a spectacle did that desk present! It was a perfect world in itself, and indicated that its

proprietor was a man of many trades. It was piled with books and documents, while a great deal of the space was occupied by square pieces of cardboard, upon each of which was a name in large letters, while underneath was writing in very minute characters.

With a benevolent gesture, Mascarin pointed to an armchair, and in encouraging tones said, "And now let us talk."

It was plain to Paul that Mascarin was not acting, but that the kind and patriarchal expression upon his face was natural to it, and the young man felt that he could safely intrust his whole future to him.

"I have heard," commenced Mascarin, "that your means of livelihood are very precarious, or rather that you have none, and are ready to take the first one that offers you a means of subsistence. That, at least, is what I hear from my poor friend Tantaine."

"He has explained my case exactly."

"Good; only before proceeding to the future, let us speak of the past."

Paul gave a start, which Mascarin noticed, for he added,—

"You will excuse the freedom I am taking; but it is absolutely necessary that I should know to what I am binding myself. Tantaine tells me that you are a charming young man, strictly honest, and well educated; and now that I have had the pleasure of meeting you, I am sure that he is right; but I can only deal with proofs, and must be quite certain before I act on your behalf with third parties."

"I have nothing to conceal, sir, and am ready to answer any questions," responded Paul.

A slight smile, which Paul did not detect, played round the corners of Mascarin's mouth, and, with a

gesture, with which all who knew him were familiar, he pushed back his glasses on his nose.

"I thank you," answered he; "it is not so easy as you may suppose to hide anything from me." He took one of the packets of pasteboard slips from his desk, and shuffling them like a pack of cards, continued, "Your name is Marie Paul Violaine. You were born at Poitiers, in the Rue des Vignes, on the 5th of January, 1843, and are therefore in your twenty-fourth year."

"That is quite correct, sir."

"You are an illegitimate child?"

The first question had surprised Paul; the second absolutely astounded him.

"Quite true, sir," replied he, not attempting to hide his surprise; "but I had no idea that M. Tantine was so well informed; the partition which divided our rooms must have been thinner than I thought."

Mascarin took no notice of this remark, but continued to shuffle and examine his pieces of cardboard. Had Paul caught a clear glimpse of these, he would have seen his initials in the corner of each.

"Your mother," went on Mascarin, "kept, for the last fifteen years of her life, a little haberdasher's shop."

"Just so."

"But a business of that description in a town like Poitiers, does not bring in very remunerative results, and luckily she received for your support and education a sum of one thousand francs per year."

This time Paul started from his seat, for he was sure that Tantine could not have learned this secret at the Hôtel de Perou.

"Merciful powers, sir!" cried he; "who could have told you a thing that has never passed my lips since

my arrival in Paris, and of which even Rose is entirely ignorant?"

Mascarin raised his shoulders.

"You can easily comprehend," remarked he, "that a man in my line of business has to learn many things. If I did not take the greatest precautions, I should be deceived daily, and so lead others into error."

Paul had not been more than an hour in the office, but the directions given to Beaumarchef had already taught him how many of these events were arranged.

"Though I may be curious," went on Mascarin, "I am the symbol of discretion; so answer me frankly: How did your mother receive this annuity?"

"Through a Parisian solicitor."

"Do you know him?"

"Not at all," answered Paul, who had begun to grow uneasy under this questioning, for a kind of vague apprehension was aroused in his mind, and he could not see the utility of any of these interrogations. There was, however, nothing in Mascarin's manner to justify the misgivings of the young man, for he appeared to ask all these questions in quite a matter-of-course way, as if they were purely affairs of business.

After a protracted silence, Mascarin resumed,—

"I am half inclined to believe that the solicitor sent the money on his own account."

"No, sir," answered Paul. "I am sure you are mistaken."

"Why are you so certain?"

"Because my mother, who was the incarnation of truth, often assured me that my father died before my birth. Poor mother! I loved and respected her too much to question her on these matters. One day, however, impelled by an unworthy feeling of curiosity, I

dared to ask her the name of our protector. She burst into tears, and then I felt how mean and cruel I had been. I never learned his name but I know that he was not my father."

Mascarin affected not to notice the emotion of his young client.

"Did the allowance cease at your mother's death?" continued he.

"No; it was stopped when I came of age. My mother told me that this would be the case; but it seems only yesterday that she spoke to me of it. It was on my birthday, and she had prepared a little treat for my supper; for in spite of the affliction my birth had caused her, she loved me fondly. Poor mother! 'Paul,' said she, 'at your birth a genuine friend promised to help me to bring up and educate you, and he kept his word. But you are now twenty-one, and must expect nothing more from him. My son, you are a man now, and I have only you to look to. Work and earn an honest livelihood——'"

Paul could proceed no farther, for his emotions choked him.

"My mother died suddenly some ten months after this conversation—without time to communicate anything to me, and I was left perfectly alone in the world; and were I to die to-morrow, there would not be a soul to follow me to my grave."

Mascarin put on a sympathetic look.

"Not quite so bad as that, my young friend; I trust that you have one now."

Mascarin rose from his seat, and for a few minutes paced up and down the room, and then halted, with his arms folded, before the young man.

"You have heard me," said he, "and I will not put

any further questions which it will but pain you to reply to, for I only wished to take your measure, and to judge of your truth from your replies. You will ask why? Ah, that is a question I cannot answer to-day, but you shall know later on. Be assured, however, that I know everything about you, but I cannot tell you by what means. Say it has all happened by chance. Chance has broad shoulders, and can bear a great deal."

This ambiguous speech caused a thrill of terror to pass through Paul, which was plainly visible on his expressive features.

"Are you alarmed?" asked Mascarin, readjusting his spectacles.

"I am much surprised, sir," stammered Paul.

"Come, come! what can a man in your circumstances have to fear? There is no use in racking your brain; you will find out all you want quickly enough, and had best make up your mind to place yourself in my hands without reserve, for my sole desire is to be of service to you."

These words were uttered in the most benevolent manner; and as he resumed his seat, he added,—

"Now let us talk of yourself. Your mother, whom you justly say was a thoroughly good woman, pinched herself in order to keep you at college at Poitiers. You entered a solicitor's office at eighteen, I think?"

"Yes, sir."

"But your mother's desire was to see you established at Loudon or Cevray. Perhaps she hoped that her wealthy friend would aid you still further. Unluckily, however, you had no inclination for the law."

Paul smiled, but Mascarin went on with some little severity.

"I repeat, unfortunately; and I think that by this

time you have gone through enough to be of my opinion. What did you do instead of studying law? You did—what? You wasted your time over music, and composed songs, and, I know, an opera, and thought yourself a perfect genius.”

Paul had listened up to this time with patience, but at this sarcasm he endeavored to protest; but it was in vain, for Mascarin went on pitilessly,—

“One day you abandoned the study of the law, and told your mother that until you had made your name as a musical composer you would give lessons on the piano; but you could obtain no pupils, and—well, just look in the glass yourself, and say if you think that your age and appearance would justify parents in intrusting their daughters to your tuition?”

Mascarin stopped for a moment and consulted his notes afresh.

“Your departure from Poitiers,” he went on, “was your last act of folly. The very day after your mother’s death you collected together all her scanty savings, and took the train to Paris.”

“Then, sir, I had hoped——”

“What, to arrive at fortune by the road of talent? Foolish boy! Every year a thousand poor wretches have been thus intoxicated by their provincial celebrity, and have started for Paris, buoyed up by similar hopes. Do you know the end of them? At the end of ten years—I give them no longer—nine out of ten die of starvation and disappointment, and the other joins the criminal army.”

Paul had often repeated this to himself, and could, therefore, make no reply.

“But,” went on Mascarin, “you did not leave Poi-

tiers alone; you carried off with you a young girl named Rose Pigoreau."

"Pray, let me explain."

"It would be useless. The fact speaks for itself. In six months your little store had disappeared; then came poverty and starvation, and at last, in the Hôtel de Perou, your thoughts turned to suicide, and you were only saved by my old friend Tontaine."

Paul felt his temper rising, for these plain truths were hard to bear; but fear lest he should lose his protector kept him silent.

"I admit everything, sir," said he calmly. "I was a fool, and almost mad, but experience has taught me a bitter lesson. I am here to-day, and this fact should tell you that I have given up all my vain hallucinations."

"Will you give up Rose Pigoreau?"

As this abrupt question was put to him, Paul turned pale with anger.

"I love Rose," answered he coldly; "she believes in me, and has shared my troubles with courage, and one day she shall be my wife."

Raising his velvet cap from his head, Mascarin bowed with an ironical air, saying, "Is that so? Then I beg a thousand pardons. It is urgent that you should have immediate employment. Pray, what can you do? Not much of anything, I fancy;—like most college bred boys, you can do a little of everything, and nothing well. Had I a son, and an enormous income, I would have him taught a trade."

Paul bit his lips; but he knew the portrait was a true one.

"And now," continued Mascarin, "I have come to your aid, and what do you say to a situation with a salary of twelve thousand francs?"

This sum was so much greater than Paul had dared to hope, that he believed Mascarin was amusing himself at his expense.

"It is not kind of you to laugh at me, under the present circumstances," remarked he.

Mascarin was not laughing at him; but it was fully half an hour before he could prove this to Paul.

"You would like more proof of what I say," said he, after a long conversation. "Very well, then; shall I advance your first month's salary?" And as he spoke, he took a thousand-franc note from his desk, and offered it to Paul. The young man rejected the note; but the force of the argument struck him; and he asked if he was capable of carrying out the duties which such a salary doubtless demanded.

"Were I not certain of your abilities, I should not offer it to you," replied Mascarin. "I am in a hurry now, or I would explain the whole affair; but I must defer doing so until to-morrow, when please come at the same hour as you did to-day."

Even in his state of surprise and stupefaction, Paul felt that this was a signal for him to depart.

"A moment more," said Mascarin. "You understand that you can no longer remain at the Hôtel de Perou? Try and find a room in this neighborhood; and when you have done so, leave the address at the office. Good-bye, my young friend, until to-morrow, and learn to bear good fortune."

For a few minutes Mascarin stood at the door of the office watching Paul, who departed almost staggering beneath the burden of so many conflicting emotions; and when he saw him disappear round the corner, he ran to a glazed door which led to his bed

chamber, and in a loud whisper called, "Come in, Hortebise. He has gone."

A man obeyed the summons at once, and hurriedly drew up a chair to the fire. "My feet are almost frozen," exclaimed he; "I should not know it if any one was to chop them off. Your room, my dear Baptiste, is a perfect refrigerator. Another time, please, have a fire lighted in it."

This speech, however, did not disturb Mascarin's line of thought. "Did you hear all?" asked he.

"I saw and heard all that you did."

"And what do you think of the lad?"

"I think that Daddy Tantine is a man of observation and powerful will, and that he will mould this child between his fingers like wax."

CHAPTER III.

THE OPINION OF DR. HORTEBISE.

DR. HORTEBISE, who had addressed Mascarin so familiarly by his Christian name of Baptiste, was about fifty-six years of age, but he carried his years so well, that he always passed for forty-nine. He had a heavy pair of red, sensual-looking lips, his hair was untinted by gray, and his eyes still lustrous. A man who moved in the best society, eloquent in manner, a brilliant conversationalist, and vivid in his perceptions, he concealed under the veil of good-humored sarcasm the utmost cynicism of mind. He was very popular and much sought after. He had but few faults, but quite a catalogue of appalling vices. Under this Epicurean

exterior lurked, it was reported, the man of talent and the celebrated physician. He was not a hard-working man, simply because he achieved the same results without toil or labor. He had recently taken to homœopathy, and started a medical journal, which he named *The Globule*, which died at its fifth number. His conversion made all society laugh, and he joined in the ridicule, thus showing the sincerity of his views, for he was never able to take the round of life seriously. To-day, however, Mascarin, well as he knew his friend, seemed piqued at his air of levity.

"When I asked you to come here to-day," said he, "and when I begged you to conceal yourself in my bedroom——"

"Where I was half frozen," broke in Hortebise.

"It was," went on Mascarin, "because I desired your advice. We have started on a serious undertaking,—an undertaking full of peril both to you and to myself."

"Pooh! I have perfect confidence in you,—whatever you do is done well, and you are not the man to fling away your trump cards."

"True; but I may lose the game, after all, and then——"

The doctor merely shook a large gold locket that depended from his watch chain.

This movement seemed to annoy Mascarin a great deal. "Why do you flash that trinket at me?" asked he. "We have known each other for five and twenty years,—what do you mean to imply? Do you mean that the locket contains the likeness of some one that you intend to make use of later on? I think that you might render such a step unnecessary by giving me your present advice and attention."

Hortebise threw himself back in his chair with an expression of resignation. "If you want advice," remarked he, "why not apply to our worthy friend Catenac?—he knows something of business, as he is a lawyer."

The name of Catenac seemed to irritate Mascarin so much, that, calm and self-contained as he usually was, he pulled off his cap and dashed it on his desk.

"Are you speaking seriously?" said he angrily.

"Why should I not be in earnest?"

Mascarin removed his glasses, as though without them he could the more easily peer into the depths of the soul of the man before him.

"Because," replied he slowly, "both you and I distrust Catenac. When did you see him last?"

"More than three months ago."

"True, and I allow that he seems to be acting fairly toward his old associates; but you will admit that, in keeping away thus, his conduct is without excuse, for he has made his fortune; and though he pretends to be poor, he is certainly a man of wealth."

"Do you really think so?"

"Were he here, I would force him to acknowledge that he is worth a million, at least."

"A million!" exclaimed the doctor, with sudden animation.

"Yes, certainly. You and I, Hortebise, have indulged our every whim, and have spent gold like water, while our friend garnered his harvest and stored it away. But poor Catenac has no expensive tastes, nor does he care for women or the pleasures of the table. While we indulged in every pleasure, he lent out his money at usurious interest. But, stop,—how much do you spend per annum?"

"That is a hard question to answer; but, say, forty thousand francs."

"More, a great deal more; but calculate what a capital sum that would amount to during the twenty years we have done business together."

The doctor was not clever at figures; he made several vain attempts to solve the problem, and at last gave it up in despair. "Forty and forty," muttered he, tapping the tips of his fingers, are eighty, then forty——"

"Call it eight hundred thousand francs," broke in Mascarin. "Say I drew the same amount as you did. We have spent ours, and Catenac has saved his, and grown rich; hence my distrust. Our interests are no longer identical. He certainly comes here every month, but it is only to claim his share; he consents to take his share of the profits, but shirks the risks. It is fully ten years since he brought in any business. I don't trust him at all. He always declines to join in any scheme that we propose, and sees danger in everything."

"He would not betray us, however."

Mascarin took a few moments for reflection. "I think," said he, "that Catenac is afraid of us. He knows that the ruin of me would entail the destruction of the other two. This is our only safeguard; but if he dare not injure us openly, he is quite capable of working against us in secret. Do you remember what he said the last time he was here? That we ought to close our business and retire. How should *we* live? for he is rich and we are poor. What on earth are you doing, Hortebise?" he added, for the physician, who had the reputation of being worth an enormous amount, had taken out his purse, and was going over the contents.

"I have exactly three hundred and twenty-seven francs!" answered he with a laugh. "What is the state of your finances?"

Mascarin made a grimace. "I am not so well off as you; and besides," he continued in a low voice, as though speaking to himself, "I have certain ties which you do not possess."

For the first time during this interview a cloud spread over the doctor's countenance.

"Great heavens!" said he, "and I was depending on you for three thousand francs, which I require urgently."

Mascarin smiled slyly at the doctor's uneasiness. "Don't worry," he answered. "You can have that; there ought to be some six or eight thousand francs in the safe. But that is all, and that is the last of our common capital,—this after twenty years of toil, danger, and anxiety, and we have not twenty years before us to make a fresh fortune in."

"Yes," continued Mascarin, "we are getting old, and therefore have the greater reason for making one grand stroke to assure our fortune. Were I to fall ill to-morrow, all would go to smash."

"Quite true," returned the doctor, with a slight shudder.

"We must, and that is certain, venture on a bold stroke. I have said this for years, and woven a web of gigantic proportions. Do you now know why at this last moment I appeal to you, and not to Catenac for assistance? If only one out of the two operations that I have fully explained to you succeeds, our fortune is made."

"I follow you exactly."

"The question now is whether the chance of success

is sufficiently great to warrant our going on with these undertakings. Think it over, and let me have your opinion."

An acute observer could easily have seen that the doctor was a man of resource, and a thoroughly competent adviser, for the reason that his coolness never deserted him. Compelled to choose between the use of the contents of his locket, or the continuance of a life of luxurious ease, the smile vanished from the doctor's face, and he began to reflect profoundly. Leaning back in his chair, with his feet resting on the fender, he carefully studied every combination in the undertaking, as a general inspects the position taken up by the enemy, when a battle is impending, upon which the fate of an empire may hinge. That this analysis took a favorable turn, was evident, for Mascarin soon saw a smile appear upon the doctor's lips. "We must make the attack at once," said he; "but make no mistake; the projects you propose are most dangerous, and a single error upon our side would entail destruction; but we must take some risk. The odds are against us, but still we may win. Under these circumstances, and as necessity cheers us on, I say, *Forward!*" As he said this, he rose to his feet, and extending his hand toward his friend, exclaimed, "I am entirely at your disposal."

Mascarin seemed relieved by the doctor's decision, for he was in that frame of mind when, however self-reliant a man may be, he has a disinclination to be left alone, and the aid of a stout ally is of the utmost service.

"Have you considered every point carefully?" asked he. "You know that we can only act at present upon one of these undertakings, and that is the one of which the Marquis de Croisenois——"

"I know that."

"With reference to the affair of the Duke de Champdoce, I have still to gather together certain things necessary for the ultimate success of the scheme. There is a mystery in the lives of the Duke and Duchess,—of this there is no doubt,—but what is this secret? I would lay my life that I have hit upon the correct solution; but I want no suspicions, no probabilities; I want absolute certainties. And now," continued he, "this brings us back to the first question. What do you think of Paul Violaine?"

Hortebise walked up and down the room two or three times, and finally stopped opposite to his friend. "I think," said he, "that the lad has many of the qualities we want, and we might find it hard to discover one better suited for our purpose. Besides, he is a bastard, knows nothing of his father, and therefore leaves a wide field for conjecture; for every natural son has the right to consider himself, if he likes, the offspring of a monarch. He has no family or any one to look after him, which assures us that whatever may happen, there is no one to call us to account. He is not overwise, but has a certain amount of talent, and any quantity of ridiculous self-conceit. He is wonderfully handsome, which will make matters easier, but—"

"Ah, there is a 'but' then?"

"More than one," answered the doctor, "for there are three for certain. First, there is Rose Pigoreau, whose beauty has so captivated our old friend Tantine,—she certainly appears to be a danger in the future."

"Be easy," returned Mascarin; "we will quickly remove this young woman from our road."

"Good; but do not be too confident," answered

Hortebise, in his usual tone. - "The danger from her is not the one you think, and which you are trying to avoid. You think Paul loves her. You are wrong. He would drop her to-morrow, so that he could please his self-indulgence. But the woman who thinks that she hates her lover often deceives herself; and Rose is simply tired of poverty. Give her a little amount of comfort, good living, and luxury, and you will see her give them all up to come back to Paul. Yes, I tell you, she will harass and annoy him, as women of her class who have nothing to love always do. She will even go to Flavia to claim him."

"She had better not," retorted Mascarin, in threatening accents.

"Why, how could you prevent it? She has known Paul from his infancy. She knew his mother; she was perhaps brought up by her, perhaps even lived in the same street. Look out, I say, for danger from that quarter."

"You may be right, and I will take my precautions."

It was sufficient for Mascarin to be assured of a danger to find means of warding it off.

"My second 'but,'" continued Hortebise, "is the idea of the mysterious protector of whom the young man spoke. His mother, he says, has reason to know that his father is dead, and I believe in the truth of the statement. In this case, what has become of the person who paid Madame Violaine her allowance?"

"You are right, quite right; these are the crevices in our armor; but I keep my eyes open, and nothing escapes me."

The doctor was growing rather weary, but he still went on courageously. "My third 'but'" said he, "is perhaps the strongest. We must see the young fel-

low at once. It may be to-morrow, without even having prepared him or taught him his part. Suppose we found that he was honest! Imagine—if he returned a firm negative to all your dazzling offers!”

Mascarin rose to his feet in his turn. “I do not think that there is any chance of that,” said he.

“Why not, pray?”

“Because when Tantine brought him to me, he had studied him carefully. He is as weak as a woman, and as vain as a journalist. Besides, he is ashamed at being poor. No; I can mould him like wax into any shape I like. He will be just what we wish.”

“Are you sure,” asked Hortebise, “that Flavia will have nothing to say in this matter?”

“I had rather, with your permission, say nothing on that head,” returned Mascarin. He broke off his speech and listened eagerly. “There is some one listening,” said he. “Hark!”

The sound was repeated, and the doctor was about to seek refuge in the inner room, when Mascarin laid a detaining hand upon his arm.

“Stay,” observed he, “it is only Beaumarchef;” and as he spoke, he struck a gilded bell that stood on his desk. In another instant Beaumarchef appeared, and with an air in which familiarity was mingled with respect, he saluted in military fashion.

“Ah,” said the doctor pleasantly, “do you take your nips of brandy regularly?”

“Only occasionally, sir,” stammered the man.

“Too often, too often, my good fellow. Do you think that your nose and eyelids are not real telltales?”

“But I assure you, sir——”

“Do you not remember I told you that you had asthmatic symptoms? Why, the movement of your

pectoral muscles shows that your lungs are affected."

"But I have been running, sir."

Mascarin broke in upon this conversation, which he considered frivolous. "If he is out of breath," remarked he, "it is because he has been endeavoring to repair a great act of carelessness that he has committed. Well, Beaumarchef, how did you get on?"

"All right, sir," returned he, with a look of triumph. "Good!"

"What are you talking about?" asked the doctor.

Mascarin gave his friend a meaning glance, and then, in a careless manner, replied, "Caroline Schimmel, a former servant of the Champdoce family, also patronizes our office. How did you find her, Beaumarchef?"

"Well, an idea occurred to me."

"Pooh! do you have ideas at your time of life?"

Beaumarchef put on an air of importance. "My idea was this," he went on: "as I left the office with Toto Chupin, I said to myself, the woman would certainly drop in at some pub. before she reached the boulevard."

"A sound argument," remarked the doctor.

"Therefore Toto and I took a squint into every one we passed, and before we got to the Rue Carreau we saw her in one, sure enough."

"And Toto is after her now?"

"Yes, sir; he said he would follow her like her shadow, and will bring in a report every day."

"I am very pleased with you, Beaumarchef," said Mascarin, rubbing his hands joyously.

Beaumarchef seemed highly flattered, but continued,—

"This is not all."

"What else is there to tell?"

"I met La Candéle on his way from the Place de Petit Pont, and he has just seen that young girl—you know whom I mean—driving off in a two-horse Victoria. He followed it, of course. She has been placed in a gorgeous apartment in the Rue Douai; and from what the porter says, she must be a rare beauty; and La Candéle raved about her, and says that she has the most magnificent eyes in the world."

"Ah," remarked Hortebise, "then Tantine was right in his description of her."

"Of course he was," answered Mascarin with a slight frown, "and this proves the justice of the objection you made a little time back. A girl possessed of such dazzling beauty may even influence the fool who has carried her off to become dangerous."

Beaumarchef touched his master's arm kindly. "If you wish to get rid of the masher," said he, "I can show you a way;" and throwing himself into the position of a fencer, he made a lunge with his right arm, exclaiming, "One, two!"

"A Prussian quarrel," remarked Mascarin. "No; a duel would do us no good. We should still have the girl on our hands, and violent measures are always to be avoided." He took off his glasses, wiped them, and looking at the doctor intently, said, "Suppose we take an epidemic as our ally. If the girl had the small-pox, she would lose her beauty."

Cynical and hardened as the doctor was, he drew back in horror at this proposal. "Under certain circumstances," remarked he, "science might aid us; but Rose, even without her beauty, would be just as dangerous as she is now. It is *her* affection for Paul that we have to check, and not *his* for her; and the uglier a woman is, the more she clings to her lover."

"All this is worthy of consideration," returned Mascarin; "meanwhile we must take steps to guard ourselves from the impending danger. Have you finished that report on Gandelu, Beaumarchef? What is his position?"

"Head over ears in debt, sir, but not harassed by his creditors because of his future prospects."

"Surely among these creditors there are some that we could influence?" said Mascarin. "Find this out, and report to me this evening; and farewell for the present."

When again alone, the two confederates remained silent for some time. The decisive moment had arrived. As yet they were not compromised; but if they intended to carry out their plans, they must no longer remain inactive; and both of these men had sufficient experience to know that they must look at the position boldly, and make up their minds at once. The pleasant smile upon the doctor's face faded away, and his fingers played nervously with his locket. Mascarin was the first to break the silence.

"Let us no longer hesitate," said he; "let us shut our eyes to the danger and advance steadily. You heard the promises made by the Marquis de Croisenois. He will do as we wish, but under certain conditions. Mademoiselle de Mussidan must be his bride."

"That will be impossible."

"Not so, if we desire it: and the proof of this is, that before two o'clock the engagement between Mademoiselle Sabine and the Baron de Breulh-Faverlay will be broken off."

The doctor heaved a deep sigh. "I can understand Catenac's scruples. Ah! if, like him, I had a million!"

During this brief conversation Mascarin had gone

into his sleeping room and was busily engaged in changing his dress.

"If you are ready," remarked the doctor, "we will make a start."

In reply, Mascarin opened the door leading into the office. "Get a cab, Beaumarchef," said he.

CHAPTER IV.

A TRUSTWORTHY SERVANT.

IN the city of Paris it is impossible to find a more fashionable quarter than the one which is bounded on the one side by the Rue Faubourg Saint Honoré and on the other by the Seine, and commences at the Place de la Concorde and ends at the Avenue de l'Impératrice. In this favored spot millionaires seem to bloom like the rhododendron in the sunny south. There are the magnificent palaces which they have erected for their accommodation, where the turf is ever verdant, and where the flowers bloom perennially; but the most gorgeous of all these mansions was the Hôtel de Mussidan, the last *chef d'œuvre* of Sevoir, that skilful architect who died just as the world was beginning to recognize his talents. With a spacious courtyard in front and a magnificent garden in the rear, the Hôtel de Mussidan is as elegant as it is commodious. The exterior was extremely plain, and not disfigured by florid ornamentation. White marble steps, with a light and elegant railing at the sides, lead to the wide doors which open into the hall. The busy hum of the servants at work at an early hour in the yard tells that

an ample establishment is kept up. There can be seen luxurious carriages, for occasions of ceremony, and the park phaeton, and the simple brougham which the Countess uses when she goes out shopping; and that carefully groomed thoroughbred is Mirette, the favorite riding horse of Mademoiselle Sabine. Mascarin and his confederate descended from their cab a little distance at the corner of the Avenue Matignon. Mascarin, in his dark suit, with his spotless white cravat and glittering spectacles, looked like some highly respectable functionary of State. Hortebise wore his usual smile, though his cheek was pale.

"Now," remarked Mascarin, "let me see,—on what footing do you stand with the Mussidans? Do they look upon you as a friend?"

"No, no; a poor doctor, whose ancestors were not among the Crusaders, could not be the intimate friend of such haughty nobles as the Mussidans."

"But the Countess knows you, and will not refuse to receive you, nor have you turned out as soon as you begin to speak; for, taking shelter behind some rogue without a name, you can shelter your own reputation. I will see the Count."

"Take care of him," said Hortebise thoughtfully. "He has a reputation for being a man of ungovernable temper, and, at the first word from you that he objects to, would throw you out of the window as soon as look at you."

Mascarin shrugged his shoulders. "I can bring him to reason," answered he.

The two confederates walked a little past the Hôtel de Mussidan, and the doctor explained the interior arrangements of the house.

"I," continued Mascarin, "will insist upon the

Count's breaking off his daughter's engagement with M. de Breulh-Faverlay, but shall not say a word about the Marquis de Croisenois, while you will take the opportunity of putting his pretensions before the Countess, and will not say a word of M. de Breulh-Faverlay."

"I have learned my lesson, and shall not forget it."

"You see, doctor, the beauty of the whole affair is, that the Countess will wonder how her husband will take her interference, while he will be at a loss how to break the news to his wife. How surprised they will be when they find that they have both the same end in view!"

There was something so droll in the whole affair, that the doctor burst into a loud laugh.

"We go by such different roads," said he, "that they will never suspect that we are working together. Faith! my dear Baptiste, you are much more clever than I thought."

"Don't praise me until you see that I am successful."

Mascarin stopped opposite to a *café* in the Faubourg Saint Honoré.

"Wait here for me, doctor," said he, "while I make a little call. If all is right, I will come for you again; then I will see the Count, and twenty minutes later do you go to the house and ask for the Countess."

The clock struck four as the worthy confederates parted, and Mascarin continued his way along the Faubourg Saint Honoré, and again stopped before a public house, which he entered, the master of which, Father Canon, was so well known in the neighborhood that he had not thought it worth while to have his name painted over the door. He did not profess to serve his best wine to casual customers, but for regu-

lar frequenters of his house, chiefly the servants of noble families, he kept a better brand of wine. Mascarin's respectable appearance inclined the landlord to step forward. Among Frenchmen, who are always full of gayety, a serious exterior is ever an excellent passport.

"What can I do for you, sir?" asked he with great politeness.

"Can I see Florestan?"

"In Count de Mussidan's service, I believe?"

"Just so; I have an appointment with him here."

"He is downstairs in the band-room," replied the landlord. "I will send for him."

"Don't trouble; I will go down," and, without waiting for permission, Mascarin descended some steps that apparently led to a cellar.

"It appears to me," murmured Father Canon, "that I have seen this cove's face before."

Mascarin pushed open a door at the bottom of the flight of stairs, and a strange and appalling noise issued from within (but this neither surprised nor alarmed him), and entered a vaulted room arranged like a *café*, with seats and tables, filled with customers. In the centre, two men, in their shirt sleeves, with crimson faces, were performing upon horns; while an old man, with leather gaiters, buttoning to the knee, and a broad leather belt, was whistling the air the hornplayers were executing. As Mascarin politely took off his hat, the performers ceased, and the old man discontinued his whistling, while a well-built young fellow, with pumps and stockings, and wearing a fashionable mustache, exclaimed,—

"Aha, it is that good old Mascarin. I was expecting you; will you drink?"

Without waiting for further invitation Mascarin helped himself from a bottle that stood near.

"Did Father Canon tell you that I was here?" asked the young man, who was the Florestan Mascarin had been inquiring for. "You see," continued he, "that the police will not permit us to practise the horn; so, you observe, Father Canon has arranged this underground studio, from whence no sound reaches the upper world."

The hornplayers had now resumed their lessons, and Florestan was compelled to place both hands to the side of his mouth, in order to render himself audible, and to shout with all his might.

"That old fellow there is a huntsman in the service of the Duke de Champdoce, and is the finest hornplayer going. I have only had twenty lessons from him, and am getting on wonderfully."

"Ah!" exclaimed Mascarin, "when I have more time I must hear your performance; but to-day I am in a hurry, and want to say a few words to you in private."

"Certainly, but suppose we go upstairs and ask for a private room."

The rooms he referred to were not very luxuriously furnished, but were admirably suited for confidential communications; and had the walls been able to speak, they could have told many a strange tale.

Florestan and Mascarin seated themselves in one of these before a small table, upon which Father Canon placed a bottle of wine and two glasses.

"I asked you to meet me here, Florestan," began Mascarin, "because you can do me a little favor."

"Anything that is in my power I will do," said the young man.

"First, a few words regarding yourself. How do you get on with Count de Mussidan?"

Mascarin had adopted an air of familiarity which he knew would please his companion.

"I don't care about the place," replied Florestan, "and I am going to ask Beaumarchef to look out another one for me."

"I am surprised at that; all your predecessors said that the Count was a perfect gentleman——"

"Just try him yourself," broke in the valet. "In the first place he is as fickle as the wind, and awfully suspicious. He never leaves anything about,—no letters, no cigars, and no money. He spends half his time in locking things up, and goes to bed with his keys under his pillow."

"I allow that such suspicion on his part is most unpleasant."

"It is indeed, and besides he is awfully violent. He gets in a rage about nothing, and half a dozen times in the day he looks ready to murder you. On my word, I am really frightened at him."

This account, coupled with what he had heard from Hortebise seemed to render Mascarin very thoughtful.

"Is he always like this, or only at intervals?"

"He is always a beast, but he is worse after drink or losing at cards. He is never home until after four in the morning."

"And what does his wife say?"

This query made Florestan laugh.

"Madame does not bother herself about her lord and master, I can assure you. Sometimes they don't meet for weeks. All she wants is plenty of money. And ain't we just dunned!"

"But the Mussidans are wealthy?"

"Tremendously so, but at times there is not the value of a franc in the house. Then Madame is like a tigress, and would send to borrow from all her friends."

"But she must feel much humiliated?"

"Not a bit; when she wants a heavy amount, she sends off to the Duke de Champdoce, and he always parts; but she doesn't mince matters with him."

"It would seem as if you had known the contents of your mistress's letters?" remarked Mascarin with a smile.

"Of course I have; I like to know what is in the letters I carry about. She only says, 'My good friend, I want so much,' and back comes the money without a word. Of course it is easy to see that there has been something between them."

"Yes, evidently."

"And when master and missus do meet they only have rows, and such rows! When the working man has had a drop too much, he beats his wife, she screams, then they kiss and make it up; but the Mussidans say things to each other in cold blood that neither can ever forgive."

From the air with which Mascarin listened to these details, it almost seemed as if he had been aware of them before.

"Then," said he, "Mademoiselle Sabine is the only nice one in the house?"

"Yes, she is always gentle and considerate."

"Then you think that M. de Breulh-Faverlay will be a happy man?"

"Oh yes; but perhaps this marriage will——" but here Florestan interrupted himself and assumed an air of extreme caution. After looking carefully round,

he lowered his voice, and continued, "Mademoiselle Sabine has been left so much to herself that she acts just as she thinks fit."

"Do you mean," asked Mascarin, "that the young lady has a lover?"

"Just so."

"But that must be wrong; and let me tell you that you ought not to repeat such a story."

The man grew quite excited.

"Story," repeated he; "I know what I know. If I spoke of a lover, it is because I have seen him with my own eyes, not once, but twice."

From the manner in which Mascarin received this intelligence, Florestan saw that he was interested in the highest degree.

"I'll tell you all about it," continued he. "The first time was when she went to mass; it came on to rain suddenly, and Modeste, her maid, begged me to go for an umbrella. As soon as I came back I went in and saw Mademoiselle Sabine standing by the receptacle for holy water, talking to a young fellow. Of course I dodged behind a pillar, and kept a watch on the pair——"

"But you don't found all your story on this?"

"I think you would, had you seen the way they looked into each other's eyes."

"What was he like?"

"Very good looking, about my height, with an aristocratic air."

"How about the second time?"

"Ah, that is a longer story. I went one day with Mademoiselle when she was going to see a friend in the Rue Marbœuf. She waited at a corner of the street, and beckoned me to her. 'Florestan,' said she,

‘I forgot to post this letter; go and do so; I will wait here for you.’”

“Of course you read it?”

“No. I thought there was something wrong. She wants to get rid of you, so, instead of posting it, I slunk behind a tree and waited. I had hardly done so, when the young fellow I had seen at the chapel came round the corner; but I scarcely knew him. He was dressed just like a working man, in a blouse all over plaster. They talked for about ten minutes, and Mademoiselle Sabine gave him what looked like a photograph.”

By this time the bottle was empty, and Florestan was about to call for another, when Mascarin checked him, saying,—

“Not to-day; it is growing late, and I must tell you what I want you to do for me. Is the Count at home now?”

“Of course he is; he has not left his room for two days, owing to having slipped going downstairs.”

“Well, my lad, I must see your master; and if I sent up my card, the odds are he would not see me, so I rely upon you to show me up without announcing me.”

Florestan remained silent for a few minutes.

“It is no easy job,” he muttered, “for the Count does not like unexpected visitors, and the Countess is with him just now. However, as I am not going to stay, I’ll chance it.”

Mascarin rose from his seat.

“We must not be seen together,” said he; “I’ll settle the score; do you go on, and I will follow in five minutes. Remember we don’t know each other.”

"I am fly; and mind you look out a good place for me."

Mascarin paid the bill, and then looked into the *café* to inform the doctor of his movements, and a few minutes later, Florestan in his most sonorous voice, threw open the door of his master's room and announced,—

"M. Mascarin."

CHAPTER V.

A FORGOTTEN CRIME.

BAPTISTE MASCARIN had been in so many strange situations, from which he had extricated himself with safety and credit, that he had the fullest self-confidence, but as he ascended the wide staircase of the Hôtel de Mussidan, he felt his heart beat quicker in anticipation of the struggle that was before him. It was twilight out of doors, but all within was a blaze of light. The library into which he was ushered was a vast apartment, furnished in severe taste. At the sound of the unaristocratic name of Mascarin, which seemed as much out of place as a drunkard's oath in the chamber of sleeping innocence, M. de Mussidan raised his head in sudden surprise. The Count was seated at the other end of the room, reading by the light of four candles placed in a magnificently wrought candelabra. He threw down his paper, and raising his glasses, gazed with astonishment at Mascarin, who, with his hat in his hand and his heart in his mouth, slowly crossed the room, muttering a few unintelligible apologies. He could make nothing, however, of his visitor, and said, "Whom do you wish to see, sir?"

"The Count de Mussidan," stuttered Mascarin; "and I hope that you will forgive this intrusion."

The Count cut his excuse short with a haughty wave of his hand. "Wait," said he imperiously. He then with evident pain rose from his seat, and crossing the room, rang the bell violently, and then reseated himself. Mascarin, who still remained in the centre of the room, inwardly wondered if after all he was to be turned out of the house. In another second the door opened, and the figure of the faithful Florestan appeared.

"Florestan," said the Count angrily, "this is the first time that you have permitted any one to enter this room without my permission; if this occurs again, you leave my service."

"I assure your lordship," began the man.

"Enough! I have spoken; you know what to expect."

During this brief colloquy, Mascarin studied the Count with the deepest attention.

The Count Octave de Mussidan in no way resembled the man sketched by Florestan. Since the time of Montaigne, a servant's portrait of his employer should always be distrusted. The Count looked fully sixty, though he was but fifty years of age; he was undersized, and he looked shrunk and shrivelled; he was nearly bald, and his long whiskers were perfectly white. The cares of life had imprinted deep furrows on his brow, and told too plainly the story of a man who, having drained the chalice of life to the bottom, was now ready to shiver the goblet. As Florestan left the room the Count turned to Mascarin, and in the same glacial tone observed, "And now, sir, explain this intrusion."

Mascarin had often been rebuffed, but never so cruelly as this. His vanity was sorely wounded, for he was vain, as all are who think that they possess some hidden influence, and he felt his temper giving way.

"Pompous idiot!" thought he; "we will see how he looks in a short time;" but his face did not betray this, and his manner remained cringing and obsequious. "You have heard my name, my lord, and I am a general business agent."

The Count was deceived by the honest accents which long practice had taught Mascarin to use, and he had neither a suspicion nor a presentiment.

"Ah!" said he majestically, "a business agent, are you? I presume you come on behalf of one of my creditors. Well, sir, as I have before told these people, your errand is a futile one. Why do they worry me when I unhesitatingly pay the extravagant interest they are pleased to demand? They know that they are all knaves. They are aware that I am rich, for I have inherited a great fortune, which is certainly without encumbrance; for though I could raise a million to-morrow upon my estates in Poitiers, I have up to this time not chosen to do so."

Mascarin had at length so recovered his self-command that he listened to this speech without a word, hoping to gain some information from it.

"You may tell this," continued the Count, "to those by whom you are employed."

"Excuse me, my lord——"

"But what?"

"I cannot allow——"

"I have nothing more to say; all will be settled as I promised, when I pay my daughter's dowry. You

are aware that she will shortly be united to M. de Breulh-Faverlay."

There was no mistaking the order to go, contained in these words, but Mascarin did not offer to do so, but readjusting his spectacles, remarked in a perfectly calm voice,—

"It is this marriage that has brought me here."

The Count thought that his ears had deceived him. "What are you saying?" said he.

"I say," repeated the agent, "that I am sent to you in connection with this same marriage."

Neither the doctor nor Florestan had exaggerated the violence of the Count's temper. Upon hearing his daughter's name and marriage mentioned by this man, his face grew crimson and his eyes gleamed with a lurid fire.

"Get out of this!" cried he, angrily.

But this was an order that Mascarin had no intention of obeying.

"I assure you that what I have to say is of the utmost importance," said he.

This speech put the finishing touch to the Count's fury.

"You won't go, won't you?" said he; and in spite of the pain that at the moment evidently oppressed him, he stepped to the bell, but was arrested by Mascarin, uttering in a warning voice the words,—

"Take care; if you ring that bell, you will regret it to the last day of your life."

This was too much for the Count's patience, and letting go the bell rope, he snatched up a walking cane that was leaning against the chimneypiece, and made a rush toward his visitor. But Mascarin did not move or lift his hand in self-defence, contenting himself with saying calmly,—

"No violence, Count; remember Montlouis."

At this name the Count grew livid, and dropping the cane from his nerveless hand staggered back a pace or two. Had a spectre suddenly stood up before him with threatening hand, he could not have been more horrified.

"Montlouis!" he murmured; "Montlouis!"

But now Mascarin, thoroughly assured of the value of his weapon, had resumed all his humbleness of demeanor.

"Believe me, my lord," said he, "that I only mention this name on account of the immediate danger that threatens you."

The Count hardly seemed to pay attention to his visitor's words.

"It was not I," continued Mascarin, "who devised the project of bringing against you an act which was perhaps a mere accident. I am only a plenipotentiary from persons I despise, to you, for whom I entertain the very highest respect."

By this time the Count had somewhat recovered himself.

"I really do not understand you," said he, in a tone he vainly endeavored to render calm. "My sudden emotion is only too easily explained. I had a sad misfortune. I accidentally shot my secretary, and the poor young man bore the name you just now mentioned; but the court acquitted me of all blame in the matter."

The smile upon Mascarin's face was so full of sarcasm that the Count broke off.

"Those who sent me here," remarked the agent, slowly, "are well acquainted with the evidence produced in court; but unfortunately, they know the real

facts, which certain honorable gentlemen had sense to conceal at any risk."

Again the Count started, but Mascarin went on implacably,—

"But reassure yourself, your friend did not betray you voluntarily. Providence, in her inscrutable decrees——"

The Count shuddered.

"In short, sir, in short——"

Up to this time Mascarin had remained standing, but now that he saw that his position was fully established, he drew up a chair and sat down. The Count grew more livid at this insolent act, but made no comment, and this entirely removed any doubts from the agent's mind.

"The event to which I have alluded had two eye-witnesses, the Baron de Clinchain, and a servant, named Ludovic Trofin, now in the employ of the Count du Commarin."

"I did not know what had become of Trofin."

"Perhaps not, but my people do. When he swore to keep the matter secret, he was unmarried, but a few years later, having entered the bonds of matrimony, he told all to his young wife. This woman turned out badly; she had several lovers, and through one of them the matter came to my employer's ears."

"And it was on the word of a lackey, and the gossip of a dissolute woman, that they have dared to accuse me."

No word of direct accusation had passed, and yet the Count sought to defend himself.

Mascarin saw all this, and smiled inwardly, as he replied, "We have other evidence than that of Ludovic."

"But," said the Count, who was sure of the fidelity of his friend, "you do not, I suppose, pretend that the Baron de Clinchain has deceived me?"

The state of mental anxiety and perturbation into which this man of the world had been thrown must have been very intense for him not to have perceived that every word he uttered put a fresh weapon in his adversary's hands.

"He has not denounced you by word of mouth," replied the agent. "He has done far more; he has written his testimony."

"It is a lie," exclaimed the Count.

Mascarin was not disturbed by this insult.

"The Baron has written," repeated he, "though he never thought that any eye save his own would read what he had penned. As you are aware, the Baron de Clinchain is a most methodical man, and punctilious to a degree."

"I allow that; continue."

"Consequently you will not be surprised to learn that from his earliest years he has kept a diary, and each day he puts down in the most minute manner everything that has occurred, even to the different conditions of his bodily health."

The Count knew of his friend's foible, and remembered that when they were young many a practical joke had been played upon his friend on this account, and now he began to perceive the dangerous ground upon which he stood.

"On learning the facts of the case from Ludovic's wife's lover," continued Mascarin, "my employers decided that if the tale was a true one, some mention of it would be found in the Baron's diary; and thanks to the ingenuity and skill of certain parties, they have

had in their possession for twenty-four hours the volume for the year 1842."

"Scoundrels!" muttered the Count.

"They find not one only, but three distinct statements relating to the affair in question."

The Count started again to his feet with so menacing a look, that the worthy Mascarin pushed back his chair in anticipation of an immediate assault.

"Proofs!" gasped the Count. "Give me proofs."

"Everything has been provided for, and the three leaves by which you are so deeply compromised have been cut from the book."

"Where are these pages?"

Mascarin at once put on an air of injured innocence.

"I have not seen them, but the leaves have been photographed, and a print has been entrusted to me, in order to enable you to recognize the writing."

As he spoke he produced three specimens of the photographic art, wonderfully clear and full of fidelity. The Count examined them with the utmost attention, and then in a voice which trembled with emotion, he said, "True enough, it is his handwriting."

Not a line upon Mascarin's face indicated the delight with which he received this admission.

"Before continuing the subject," he observed placidly, "I consider it necessary for you to understand the position taken up by the Baron de Clinchain. Do you wish, my lord, to read these extracts, or shall I do so for you?"

"Read," answered the Count, adding in a lower voice, "I cannot see to do so."

Mascarin drew his chair nearer to the lights on the table. "I perceive," said he, "that the first entry was made on the evening after the—well, the accident.

This is it: 'October 26, 1842. Early this morning went out shooting with Octave de Mussidan. We were accompanied by Ludovic, a groom, and by a young man named Montlouis, whom Octave intends one day to make his steward. It was a splendid day, and by twelve o'clock I had killed a leash of hares. Octave was in excellent spirits, and by one o'clock we were in a thick cover not far from Bevron. I and Ludovic were a few yards in front of the others, when angry voices behind attracted our attention. Octave and Montlouis were arguing violently, and all at once the Count struck his future steward a violent blow. In another moment Montlouis came up to me. "What is the matter?" cried I. Instead of replying to my question, the unhappy young man turned back to his master, uttering a series of threats. Octave had evidently been reproaching him for some low intrigue he had been engaged in, and was reflecting upon the character of the woman. "At any rate," cried Montlouis, "she is quite as virtuous as Madame de Mussidan was before her marriage."

"As Octave heard these words, he raised the loaded gun he held in his hand and fired. Montlouis fell to the ground, bathed in blood. We all ran up to him, but he was quite dead, for the charge of shot had penetrated his heart. I was almost beside myself, but Octave's despair was terrible to witness. Tearing his hair, he knelt beside the dead man. Ludovic, however, maintained his calmness. "We must say that it was an accident," observed he quickly. "Thinking that Montlouis was not near, my master fired into cover."

"This was agreed to, and we carefully arranged what we should say. It was I who went before the

magistrate and made a deposition, which was unhesitatingly received. But, oh, what a fearful day! My pulse is at eighty, and I feel I shall not sleep all night. Octave is half mad, and Heaven knows what will become of him.' ”

The Count, from the depths of his armchair, listened without apparent emotion to this terrible revelation. He was quite crushed, and was searching for some means to exorcise the green spectre of the past, which had so suddenly confronted him. Mascarin never took his eyes off him. All at once the Count roused himself from his prostration, as a man awakes from a hideous dream. “This is sheer folly,” cried he.

“It is folly,” answered Mascarin, “that would carry much weight with it.”

“And suppose I were to show you,” returned the Count, “that all these entries are the offspring of a diseased mind?”

Mascarin shook his head with an air of affected grief. “There is no use, my lord, in indulging in vain hopes. We,” he continued, wishing to associate himself with the Count, “we might of course admit that the Baron de Clinchain had made this entry in his diary in a moment of temporary insanity, were it not for the painful fact that there are others. Let me read them.”

“Go on ; I am all attention.”

“We find the following, three days later : ‘ Oct. 29th, 1842. I am most uneasy about my health. I feel shooting pains in all my joints. The derangement of my system arises entirely from this business of Octave’s. I had to run the gauntlet of a second court, and the judge’s eyes seemed to look me through and through. I also saw with much alarm that my second

statement differs somewhat from the first one, so I have now learned it by heart. Ludovic is a sharp fellow, and quite self-possessed. I would like to have him in my household. I keep myself shut up in my house for fear of meeting friends who want to hear all the details of the accident. I believe I may say that I have repeated the story more than a couple of dozen times.' Now, my lord," added Mascarin, "what do you say to this?"

"Continue the reading of the extracts."

"The third allusion, though it is short, is still very important: 'November 3rd, 1842. Thank Heaven! all is over. I have just returned from the court. Octave has been acquitted. Ludovic has behaved wonderfully. He explained the reason of the misadventure in a way that was really surprising in an uneducated man, and there was not an atom of suspicion among judge, jury, or spectators. I have changed my mind; I would not have a fellow like Ludovic in my service; he is much too sharp. When I had been duly sworn, I gave my evidence. Though I was much agitated, I went through it all right; but when I got home I felt very ill, and discovered that my pulse was down to fifty. Ah, me! what terrible misfortunes are wrought by a momentary burst of anger. I now write this sentence in my diary: "*Never give way to first impulses.*"' These words," continued Mascarin, "were inscribed on every one of the pages following,—at least so those who examined the entries informed me."

Mascarin persisted in representing himself as the agent of others, but still the Count made no allusion to the persons in the background.

After a few moments the Count rose and limped up and down, as though he hoped by this means to col-

lect his ideas, or perhaps in order to prevent his visitor from scanning his face too closely.

"Have you done?" asked he, all at once.

"Yes, my lord."

"Have you thought what an impartial judge would say?"

"I think I have."

"He would say," broke in the Count, "that no sane man would have written such things down, for there are certain secrets which we do not whisper even to ourselves, and it is hardly likely that any man would make such compromising entries in a diary which might be lost or stolen, and which would certainly be read by his heir. Do you think that a man of high position would record his perjury, which is a crime that would send him to penal servitude?"

Mascarin gazed upon the Count with an air of pity.

"You are not going the right way, my lord, to get out of your trouble. No lawyer would adopt your theory. If the remaining volumes of M. de Clinchain's diaries were produced in court, I imagine that other equally startling entries would be found in them."

The Count now appeared to have arrived at some decision, and to continue the conversation simply for the purpose of gaining time.

"Well," said he, "I will give up this idea; but how do I know that these documents are not forgeries? Nowadays, handwritings are easily facsimilied, when even bankers find it hard to distinguish between their own notes and counterfeit ones."

"That can be settled by seeing if certain leaves are missing from the Baron's diary."

"That does not prove much."

"Pardon me, it proves a great deal. This new line

of argument, I assure you, will avail you as little as the other. I am perfectly aware that the Baron de Clinchain will utter whatever words you may place in his mouth. Let us suppose that the leaves which have been torn out should fit into the book exactly. Would not that be a strong point?"

The Count smiled ironically, as though he had a crushing reply in reserve.

"And so this is your opinion, is it?" said he.

"It is indeed."

"Then all I have to do is to plead guilty. I did kill Montlouis, just as Clinchain describes, but——" and as he spoke he took a heavy volume from a shelf, and opening it at a certain place laid it before Mascarin, remarking,—“this is the criminal code; read. ‘All proceedings in criminal law shall be cancelled after a lapse of ten years.’”

The Count de Mussidan evidently thought that he had crushed his adversary by this shattering blow; but it was not so, for instead of exhibiting any surprise, Mascarin's smile was as bland as ever.

"I, too, know a little of the law," said he. "The very first day this matter was brought to me, I turned to this page and read what you have just shown me to my employers."

"And what did they say?"

"That they knew all this, but that you would be glad to compromise the affair, even at the expense of half your fortune."

The agent's manner was so confident that the Count felt they had discovered some means of turning this crime of his early days to advantage; but he was still sufficiently master of himself to show no emotion.

"No," replied he, "it is not such an easy matter as

you think to get hold of half my fortune. I fancy that your friends' demands will assume a more modest tone, the more so when I repeat that these morsels of paper, stolen from my friend's diary, are absolutely worthless."

"Do you think so?"

"Certainly, for the law on this matter speaks plainly enough."

Mascarin readjusted his glasses, a sure indication that he was going to make an important reply.

"You are quite right, my lord," said he, slowly. "There is no intention of taking you before any court, for there is no penalty now for a crime committed twenty-three years ago; but the miserable wretches whom I blush to act for have arranged a plan which will be disagreeable in the highest degree both for you and the Baron."

"Pray tell me what this clever plan is."

"Most certainly. I came here to-day for this very purpose. Let us first conclude that you have rejected the request with which I approached you."

"Do you call this style of thing a request?"

"What is the use of quarrelling over words. Well, to-morrow, my clients—though I am ashamed to speak of them as such—will send to a well known morning paper a tale, with the title, 'Story of a Day's Shooting.' Of course only initials will be used for the names, but no doubt will exist as to the identity of the actors in the tragedy."

"You forget that in actions for libel proofs are not admitted."

Mascarin shrugged his shoulders.

"My employers forget nothing," remarked he; "and it is upon this very point that they have based their plans. For this reason they introduce into the matter

a fifth party, of course an accomplice, whose name is introduced into the story in the paper. Upon the day of its appearance, this man lodges a complaint against the journal, and insists on proving in a court of justice, that he did not form one of the shooting-party."

"Well, what happens then?"

"Then, my lord, this man insists that the journal should give a retraction of the injurious statement and summons as witnesses both yourself and the Baron de Clinchain, and as a conclusion, Ludovic; and as he claims damages, he employs a lawyer, who is one of the confederates and behind the scenes. The lawyer will speak something to this effect: 'That the Count de Mussidan is clearly a murderer; that the Baron de Clinchain is a perjurer, as proved by his own handwriting; Ludovic has been tampered with, but my client, an honorable man, must not be classed with these, etc., etc.' Have I made myself understood?"

Indeed, he had, and with such cold and merciless logic that it seemed hopeless to expect to escape from the net that had been spread.

As these thoughts passed through the Count's brain, he saw at a glance the whole terrible notoriety that the case would cause, and society gloating over the details. Yet such was the obstinacy of his disposition, and so impatient was he of control, that the more desperate his position seemed, the fiercer was his resistance. He knew the world well, and he also knew that the cut-throats who demanded his money with threats had every reason to dread the lynx eye of the law. If he refused to listen to them, as his heart urged him, perhaps they would not dare to carry out their threats. Had he alone been concerned in the matter, he would have resisted to the last, and fought it out to the last

drop or his blood, and as a preliminary, would have beaten the sneering rogue before him to a jelly; but how dared he expose his friend Clinchain, who had already braved so much for him? As he paced up and down the library, these and many other thoughts swept across his brain, and he was undecided whether to submit to these extortions or throw the agent out of the window. His excited demeanor and the occasional interjections that burst from his lips showed Mascarin that the account of him was not exaggerated, and that when led by passion he would as soon shoot a fellow-creature as a rabbit. And yet, though he knew not whether he should make his exit by the door or the window, he sat twirling his fingers with the most unconcerned air imaginable. At last the Count gave ear to prudence. He stopped in front of the agent, and, taking no pains to hide his contempt, said,—

“Come, let us make an end of this. How much do you want for these papers?”

“Oh, my lord!” exclaimed Mascarin; “surely you do not think that I could be guilty——?”

M. de Mussidan shrugged his shoulders. “Pray, do not take me for a fool,” said he, “but name your sum.”

Mascarin seemed a little embarrassed, and hesitated. “We don’t want money,” answered he at length.

“Not money!” replied the Count.

“We want something that is of no importance to you, but of the utmost value to those who despatched me here. I am commissioned to inform you that my clients desire that you should break off the engagement between your daughter and M. de Breulh-Faverlay, and that the missing paper will be handed to you on the completion of her marriage with any one else whom you may deem worthy of such an honor.”

This demand, which was utterly unexpected, so astonished the Count that he could only exclaim, "Why, this is absolute madness!"

"No; it is plain, good sense, and a *bona fide* offer."

An idea suddenly flashed across the Count's mind. "Is it your intention," asked he, "to furnish me with a son-in-law too?"

"I am sure, my lord," answered Mascarin, looking the picture of disinterested honesty, "that, even to save yourself, you would never sacrifice your daughter."

"But——"

"You are entirely mistaken; it is M. de Breulh-Faverlay whom my clients wish to strike at, for they have taken an oath that he shall never wed a lady with a million for her dowry."

So surprised was the Count, that the whole aspect of the interview seemed to have changed, and he now combated his own objections instead of those of his unwelcome visitor. "M. de Breulh-Faverlay has my promise," remarked he; "but of course it is easy to find a pretext. The Countess, however, is in favor of the match, and the chief opposition to any change will come from her."

Mascarin did not think it wise to make any reply, and the Count continued, "My daughter also may not view this rupture with satisfaction."

Thanks to the information he had received from Florestan, Mascarin knew how much importance to attach to this. "Mademoiselle, at her age and with her tastes, is not likely to have her heart seriously engaged." For fully a quarter of an hour the Count still hesitated. He knew that he was entirely at the mercy of those miscreants, and his pride revolted at the idea of submission; but at length he yielded.

"I agree," said he. "My daughter shall not marry M. de Breulh-Faverlay."

Even in his hour of triumph, Mascarin's face did not change. He bowed profoundly, and left the room; but as he descended the stairs, he rubbed his hands, exclaiming, "If the doctor has made as good a job of it as I have, success is certain."

CHAPTER VI.

A MEDICAL ADVISER.

DOCTOR HORTEBISE did not find it necessary to resort to any of those expedients which Mascarin had found it advisable to use in order to reach Madame de Mussidan. As soon as he presented himself—that is, after a brief interval of five minutes—he was introduced into the presence of the Countess. He rather wondered at this, for Madame de Mussidan was one of those restless spirits that are seldom found at home, but are to be met with at exhibitions, on race-courses, at the *salons*, restaurants, shops, or theatres; or at the studio of some famous artist; or at the rooms of some musical professor who had discovered a new tenor; anywhere and everywhere, in fact, except at home. Hers was one of those restless natures constantly craving for excitement; and husband, home, and child were mere secondary objects in her eyes. She had many avocations; she was a patroness of half a dozen charitable institutions, but the chief thing that she did was to spend money. Gold seemed to melt in her grasp like so much snow, and she never knew what became of

the sums she lavished so profusely. Husband and wife had long been almost totally estranged, and led almost separate existences. Dr. Hortebise was well aware of this, in common with others who moved in society. Upon the appearance of the doctor, the Countess dropped the book she had been perusing, and gave vent to an exclamation of delight. "Ah, doctor, this is really very kind of you;" and at the same time signed to the servant to place a chair for the visitor.

The Countess was tall and slender, and at forty-five had the figure of a girl. She had an abundance of fair hair, the color of which concealed the silver threads which plentifully interspersed it. A subtle perfume hung about her, and her pale blue eyes were full of pride and cold disdain.

"You know how to time your visits so well, doctor!" said she. "I am thoroughly bored, and am utterly weary of books, for it always seems to me, when I read, that I had perused the same thing before somewhere or other. You have arrived at so opportune a moment, that you appear to be a favorite of timely chance."

The doctor was indeed a favorite of chance; but the name of chance was Baptiste Mascarin.

"I see so few visitors," continued Madame de Musidan, "that hardly any one comes to see me. I must really set aside one day in the week for my at home; for when I do happen to stay at home, I feel fearfully dull and lonely. For two mortal hours I have been in this room. I have been nursing the Count."

The doctor knew better than this; but he smiled pleasantly, and said, "Perfectly so," exactly at the right moment.

"Yes," continued the Countess, "my husband

slipped on the stairs, and hurt himself very much. Our doctor says it is nothing; but then I put little faith in what doctors say."

"I know that by experience, madame," replied Hortebise.

"Present company of course always excepted; but, do you know, I once really believed in you; but your sudden conversion to homeopathy quite frightened me."

The doctor smiled. "It is as safe a mode of practice as any other."

"Do you really think so?"

"I am perfectly sure of it."

"Well, now that you *are* here, I am half inclined to ask your advice."

"I trust that you are not suffering."

"No, thank heaven; I have never any cause to complain of my health; but I am very anxious about Sabine's state."

Her affectation of maternal solicitude was a charming pendant to her display of conjugal affection, and again the doctor's expression of assent came in in the right place.

"Yes, for a month, doctor, I have hardly seen Sabine, I have been so much engaged; but yesterday I met her, and was quite shocked at the change in her appearance."

"Did you ask her what ailed her?"

"Of course, and she said, 'Nothing,' adding that she was perfectly well."

"Perhaps something had vexed her?"

"She,—why, don't you know that every one likes her, and that she is one of the happiest girls in Paris; but I want you to see her in spite of that." She rang

the bell as she spoke, and as soon as the footman made his appearance, said, "Lubin, ask Mademoiselle to have the goodness to step downstairs."

"Mademoiselle has gone out, madame."

"Indeed! how long ago?"

"About three o'clock, madame."

"Who went with her?"

"Her maid, Modeste."

"Did Mademoiselle say where she was going to?"

"No, madame."

"Very well, you can go."

Even the imperturbable doctor was rather surprised at a girl of eighteen being permitted so much freedom.

"It is most annoying," said the Countess. "However, let us hope that the trifling indisposition, regarding which I wished to consult you, will not prevent her marriage."

Here was the opening that Hortebise desired.

"Is Mademoiselle going to be married?" asked he with an air of respectful curiosity.

"Hush!" replied Madame de Mussidan, placing her finger on her lips; "this is a profound secret, and there is nothing definitely arranged; but you, as a doctor, are a perfect father confessor, and I feel that I can trust you. Let me whisper to you that it is quite possible that Sabine will be Madame de Breulh-Faverlay before the close of the year."

Hortebise had not Mascarin's courage; indeed, he was frequently terrified at his confederate's projects; but having once given in his adherence, he was to be relied on, and did not hesitate for a moment. "I confess, madame, that I heard that mentioned before;" returned he cautiously.

"And, pray, who was your informant?"

"Oh, I have had it from many sources; and let me say at once that it was this marriage, and no mere chance, that brought me here to-day."

Madame de Mussidan liked the doctor and his pleasant and witty conversation very much, and was always charmed to see him; but it was intolerable that he should venture to interfere in her daughter's marriage. "Really, sir, you confer a great honor upon the Count and myself," answered she haughtily.

Her severe manner, however, did not cause the doctor to lose his temper. He had come to say certain things in a certain manner. He had learned his part, and nothing that the Countess could say would prevent his playing it.

"I assure you, madame," returned he, "that when I accepted the mission with which I am charged, I only did so from my feelings of respect to you and yours."

"You are really very kind," answered the Countess superciliously.

"And I am sure, madame, that after you have heard what I have to say, you will have even more reason to agree with me." His manner as he said this was so peculiar, that the Countess started as though she had received a galvanic shock. "For more than twenty-five years," pursued the doctor, "I have been the constant depositary of strange family secrets, and some of them have been very terrible ones. I have often found myself in a very delicate position, but never in such an embarrassing one as I am now."

"You alarm me," said the Countess, dropping her impatient manner.

"If, madame, what I have come to relate to you are the mere ravings of a lunatic, I will offer my most sincere apologies; but if, on the contrary, his state-

ments are true—and he has irrefragable proofs in his possession,—then, madame——”

“What then, doctor?”

“Then, madame, I can only say, make every use of me, for I will willingly place my life at your disposal.”

The Countess uttered a laugh as artificial as the tears of long-expectant heirs. “Really,” said she, “your solemn air and tones almost kill me with laughter.”

“She laughs too heartily, and at the wrong time. Mascarin is right,” thought the doctor. “I trust, madame,” continued he, “that I too may laugh at my own imaginary fears; but whatever may be the result, permit me to remind you that a little time back you said that a doctor was a father confessor: for, like a priest, the physician only hears secrets in order to forget them. He is also more fitted to console and advise, for, as his profession brings him into contact with the frailties and passions of the world, he can comprehend and excuse.”

“And you must not forget, doctor, that like the priest also, he preaches very long sermons.”

As she uttered this sarcasm, there was a jesting look upon her features, but it elicited no smile from Hortebise, who, as he proceeded, grew more grave.

“I may be foolish,” he said; “but I had better be that than reopen some old wound.”

“Do not be afraid, doctor; speak out.”

“Then, I will begin by asking if you have any remembrance of a young man in your own sphere of society, who, at the time of your marriage, was well known in every Parisian *salon*. I speak of the Marquis de Croisenois.”

The Countess leaned back in her chair, and con-

tracted her brow, and pursed up her lips, as though vainly endeavoring to remember the name.

"The Marquis de Croisenois?" repeated she. "It seems as if——no——wait a moment. No; I cannot say that I can call any such person to mind."

The doctor felt that he must give the spur to this rebellious memory.

"Yes, Croisenois," he repeated. "His Christian name was George, and he had a brother Henry, whom you certainly must know, for this winter I saw him at the Duchess de Laumeuse's, dancing with your daughter."

"You are right; I remember the name now."

Her manner was indifferent and careless as she said this.

"Then perhaps you also recollect that some twenty-three years ago, George de Croisenois vanished suddenly. This disappearance caused a terrible commotion at the time, and was one of the chief topics of society."

"Ah! indeed?" mused the Countess.

"He was last seen at the Café de Paris, where he dined with some friends. About nine he got up to leave. One of his friends proposed to go with him, but he begged him not to do so, saying, 'Perhaps I shall see you later on at the opera, but do not count on me.' The general impression was that he was going to some love tryst."

"His friends thought that, I suppose."

"Yes, for he was attired with more care than usual, though he was always one of the best dressed men in Paris. He went out alone, and was never seen again."

"Never again," repeated the Countess, a slight shade passing across her brow.

"Never again," echoed the unmoved doctor. "At first his friends merely thought his absence strange; but at the end of a week they grew anxious."

"You go very much into details."

"I heard them all at the time, madame, and they were only brought back to my memory this morning. All are to be found in the records of a minute search that the authorities caused to be made into the affair. The friends of De Croisenois had commenced the search; but when they found their efforts useless, they called in the aid of the police. The first idea was suicide: George might have gone into some lonely spot and blown out his brains. There was no reason for this; he had ample means, and always appeared contented and happy. Then it was believed that a murder had been committed, and fresh inquiries were instituted, but nothing could be discovered—nothing."

The Countess affected to stifle a yawn, and repeated like an echo, "Nothing."

"Three months later, when the police had given up the matter in despair, one of George de Croisenois' friends received a letter from him."

"He was not dead then, after all?"

Dr. Hortebise made a mental note of the tone and manner of the Countess, to consider over at his leisure.

"Who can say?" returned he. "The envelope bore the Cairo post-mark. In it George declared that, bored with Parisian life, he was going to start on an exploring expedition to Central Africa, and that no one need be anxious about him. People thought this letter highly suspicious. A man does not start upon such an expedition as this without money; and it was conclusively proved that on the day of De Croisenois' disappearance he had not more than a thousand francs about him,

half of which was in Spanish doubloons, won at whist before dinner. The letter was therefore regarded as a trick to turn the police off the scent; but the best experts asserted that the handwriting was George's own. Two detectives were at once despatched to Cairo, but neither there nor anywhere on the road were any traces of the missing man discovered."

As the doctor spoke, he kept his eyes riveted on the Countess, but her face was impassable.

"Is that all?" asked she.

Dr. Hortebise paused a few moments before he replied, and then answered slowly,—

"A man came to me yesterday, and asserts that you can tell me what has become of George de Croisenois."

A man could not have displayed the nerve evinced by this frail and tender woman, for however callous he may be, some feature will betray the torture he is enduring; but a woman can often turn a smiling face upon the person who is racking her very soul. At the mere name of Montlouis the Count had staggered, as though crushed down by a blow from a sledge hammer; but at this accusation of Hortebise the Countess burst into a peal of laughter, apparently perfectly frank and natural, which utterly prevented her from replying.

"My dear doctor," said she at length, as soon as she could manage to speak, "your tale is highly sensational and amusing, but I really think that you ought to consult a *clairvoyant*, and not a matter-of-fact person like me, about the fate of George de Croisenois."

But the doctor, who was ready with his retort, and, not at all disconcerted by the cachinations of the Countess, heaved a deep sigh, as though a great load had been removed from his heart, and, with an air of

extreme delight, exclaimed, "Thank Heaven! then I was deceived."

He uttered these words with an affectation of such sincerity that the Countess fell into the trap.

"Come," said she, with a winning smile, "tell me who it is that says I know so much."

"Pooh! pooh!" returned Hortebise. "What good would that do? He has made a fool of me, and caused me to risk losing your good opinion. Is not that enough? To-morrow, when he comes to my house, my servants will refuse to admit him; but if I were to do as my inclinations lead me, I should hand him over to the police."

"That would never do," returned the Countess, "for that would change a mere nothing into a matter of importance. Tell me the name of your mysterious informer. Do I know him?"

"It is impossible that you could do so, madame, for he is far below you in the social grade. You would learn nothing from his name. He is a man I once helped, and is called Daddy Tantaine."

"A mere nickname, of course."

"He is miserably poor, a cynic, philosopher, but as sharp as a needle; and this last fact causes me great uneasiness, for at first I thought that he had been sent to me by some one far above him in position, but——"

"But, doctor," interposed the Countess, "you spoke to me of proofs, of threats, of certain mysterious persons."

"I simply repeated Daddy Tantaine's words. The old idiot said to me, 'Madame de Mussidan knows all about the fate of the Marquis, and this is clearly proved by letters that she has received from him, as well as from the Duke de Champdoce.'"

This time the arrow went home. She grew deadly pale, and started to her feet with her eyes dilated with horror.

"My letters!" exclaimed she hoarsely.

Hortebise appeared utterly overwhelmed by this display of consternation, of which he was the innocent cause.

"Your letters, madame," replied he with evident hesitation, "this double-dyed scoundrel declares he has in his possession."

With a cry like that of a wounded lioness, the Countess, taking no notice of the doctor's presence, rushed from the room. Her rapid footfall could be heard on the stairs, and the rustle of her silken skirts against the banisters. As soon as he was left alone, the doctor rose from his seat with a cynical smile upon his face.

"You may search," mused he, "but you will find that the birds have flown." He walked up to one of the windows, and drummed on the glass with his fingers. "People say," remarked he, "that Mascarin never makes a mistake. One cannot help admiring his diabolical sagacity and unfailing logic. From the most trivial event he forges a long chain of evidence, as the botanist is able, as he picks up a withered leaf, to describe in detail the tree it came from. A pity, almost, that he did not turn his talents to some nobler end; but no; he is now upstairs putting the Count on the rack, while I am inflicting tortures on the Countess. What a shameful business we are carrying on! There are moments when I think that I have paid dearly for my life of luxury, for I know well," he added, half consciously fingering his locket, "that some day we shall meet some one stronger than ourselves, and then the inevitable will ensue."

The reappearance of the Countess broke the chain of his thoughts. Her hair was disturbed, her eyes had a wild look in them, and everything about her betrayed the state of agitation she was in.

"Robbed! robbed!" cried she, as she entered the room. Her excitement was so extreme that she spoke aloud, forgetting that the door was open, and that the lackey in the ante-room could hear all she said. Luckily Hortebise did not lose his presence of mind, and, with the ease of a leading actor repairing the error of a subordinate, he closed the door.

"What have you lost?" asked he.

"My letters; they are all gone."

She staggered on to a couch, and in broken accents went on. "And yet these letters were in an iron casket closed by a secret spring; that casket was in a drawer, the key of which never leaves me."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Hortebise in affected tones, "then Tantine spoke the truth."

"He did," answered the Countess hoarsely. "Yes," she continued, "I am the bondsman to people whose names I do not even know, who can control my every movement and action."

She hid her face in her hands as though her pride sought to conceal her despair.

"Are these letters, then, so terribly compromising?" asked the doctor.

"I am utterly lost," cried she. "In my younger days I had no experience; I only thought of vengeance, and lately the weapons I forged myself have been turned against me. I dug a pitfall for my adversaries and have fallen into it myself."

Hortebise did not attempt to stay the torrent of her words, for the Countess was in one of those moods of

utter despair when the inner feelings of the soul are made manifest, as during a violent tempest the weeds of ocean are hurled up to the surface of the troubled waters.

"I would sooner be lying in my grave a thousand times," wailed she, "than see these letters in my husband's hands. Poor Octave! have I not caused him sufficient annoyance already without this crowning sorrow? Well, Dr. Hortebise, I am menaced with the production of these letters, and they will be handed to my husband unless I agree to certain terms. What are they? Of course money is required; tell me to what amount."

The doctor shook his head.

"Not money?" cried the Countess; "what, then, do they require? Speak, and do not torture me more."

Sometimes Hortebise confessed to Mascarin that, putting his interests on one side, he pitied his victims; but he showed no sign of this feeling, and went on,—

"The value of what they require, madame, is best estimated by yourself."

"Tell me what it is; I can bear anything now."

"These compromising letters will be placed in your hands upon the day on which your daughter marries Henry de Croisenois, the brother of George."

Madame de Mussidan's astonishment was so great that she stood as though petrified into a statue.

"I am commissioned to inform you, madame, that every delay necessary for altering any arrangements that may exist will be accorded you; but, remember, if your daughter marries any one else than Henry de Croisenois, the letters will be at once placed in your husband's hands."

As he spoke the doctor watched her narrowly. The Countess crossed the room, faint and dizzy, and rested her head on the mantelpiece.

“And that is all?” asked she. “What you ask me to do is utterly impossible: and perhaps it is for the best, for I shall have no long agony of suspense to endure. Go, doctor, and tell the villain who holds my letters that he can take them to the Count at once.”

The Countess spoke in such a decided tone that Hortebise was a little puzzled.

“Can it be true,” she continued, “that scoundrels exist in our country who are viler than the most cowardly murderers,—men who trade in the shameful secrets that they have learned, and batten upon the money they earn by their odious trade? I heard of such creatures before, but declined to believe it; for I said to myself that such an idea only existed in the unhealthy imaginations of novel writers. It seems, however, that I was in error; but do not let these villains rejoice too soon; they will reap but a scanty harvest. There is one asylum left for me where they cannot molest me.”

“Ah, madame!” exclaimed the doctor in imploring accents; but she paid no attention to his remonstrances, and went on with increasing violence,—

“Do the miserable wretches think that I fear death? For years I have prayed for it as a final mercy from the heaven I have so deeply offended. I long for the quiet of the sepulchre. You are surprised at hearing one like me speak in this way,—one who has all her life been admired and flattered,—I, Diana de Laurebourg, Countess de Mussidan. Even in the hours of my greatest triumphs my soul shuddered at the thought of the grim spectre hidden away in the past; and I

wished that death would come and relieve my sufferings. My eccentricities have often surprised my friends, who asked if sometimes I were not a little mad. Mad? Yes, I am mad! They do not know that I seek oblivion in excitement, and that I dare not be alone. But I have learned by this time that I must stifle the voice of conscience."

She spoke like a woman utterly bereft of hope, who had resolved on the final sacrifice. Her clear voice rang through the room, and Hortebise turned pale as he heard the footsteps of the servants pacing to and fro outside the door, as they made preparations for dinner.

"All my life has been one continual struggle," resumed she,—“a struggle which has cost me sore; but now all is over, and to-night, for the first time for many years, Diana de Mussidan will sleep a calm and untroubled sleep.”

The excitement of the Countess had risen to so high a pitch that the doctor asked himself how he could allay a tempest which he had not foreseen; for her loud tones would certainly alarm the servants, who would hasten to acquaint the Count, who was himself stretched upon the rack; then the entire plot would be laid bare, and all would be lost.

Madame de Mussidan was about to rush from the room, when the doctor, perceiving that he must act decisively, seized her by both wrists, and, almost by force, caused her to resume her seat.

"In Heaven's name, madame," he whispered, "for your daughter's sake, listen to me. Do not throw up all; am not I here ready to do your bidding, whatever it may be? Rely upon me,—rely upon the knowledge of a man of the world, and of one who still possesses

some portion of what is called heart. Cannot we form an alliance to ward off this attack?"

The doctor continued in this strain, endeavoring to reassure the Countess as much as he had previously endeavored to terrify her, and soon had the satisfaction of seeing his efforts crowned with success; for Madame de Mussidan listened to his flow of language, hardly comprehending its import, but feeling calmer as he went on; and in a quarter of an hour he had persuaded her to look the situation boldly in the face. Then Hortebise breathed more freely, and, wiping the perspiration from his brow, felt that he had gained the victory.

"It is a nefarious plot," said the Countess.

"So it is, madame; but the facts remain. Only tell me one thing, have you any special objection to M. de Croisenois paying his addresses to your daughter?"

"Certainly not."

"He comes from a good family, is well educated, handsome, popular, and only thirty-four. If you remember, George was his senior by fifteen years. Why, then, is not the marriage a suitable one? Certainly, he has led rather a fast life; but what young man is immaculate? They say that he is deeply in debt; but then your daughter has enough for both. Besides, his brother left behind him a considerable fortune, not far short of two millions, I believe; and to this, of course, Henry will eventually succeed."

Madame de Mussidan was too overwhelmed by what she had already gone through to offer any further exposition of her feelings on the subject.

"All this is very well," answered she; "but the Count has decided that Sabine is to become the wife of

M. de Breulh-Faverlay, and I have no voice in the matter."

"But if you exerted your influence?"

The Countess shook her head. "Once on a time," said she sadly, "I reigned supreme over Octave's heart; I was the leading spirit of his existence. Then he loved me; but I was insensible to the depths of his affection, and wore out a love that would have lasted as long as life itself. Yes, in my folly I slew it, and now——" She paused for a moment as if to collect her ideas, and then added more slowly: "and now our lives are separate ones. I do not complain; it is all my own fault; he is just and generous."

"But surely you can make the effort?"

"But suppose Sabine loves M. de Breulh-Faverlay?"

"But, madame, a mother can always influence her daughter."

The Countess seized the doctor's hand, and grasped it so tightly that he could hardly bear the pain.

"I must," said she in a hoarse whisper, "divulge to you the whole extent of my unhappiness. I am estranged from my husband, and my daughter dislikes and despises me. Some people think that life can be divided into two portions, one consecrated to pleasure and excitement, and the other to domestic peace and happiness; but the idea is a false one. As youth has been, so will be age, either a reward or an expiation."

Dr. Hortebise did not care to follow this train of argument—for the Count might enter at any moment, or a servant might come in to announce dinner—and only sought to soothe the excited feelings of Madame de Mussidan, and to prove to her that she was frightened by shadows, and that in reality she was not

estranged from her husband, nor did her daughter dislike her; and finally a ray of hope illuminated the saddened heart of the unfortunate lady.

"Ah, doctor!" said she, "it is only misfortune that teaches us to know our true friends."

The Countess, like her husband, had now laid down her arms; she had made a longer fight of it, but in both cases the result had been the same. She promised that she would commence operations the next day, and do her utmost to break off the present engagement.

Dr. Hortebise was well satisfied with his morning's work, and promised the unhappy lady that he would do his best to keep that scoundrel, Tantaine, quiet, and would bring her news of what was passing from day to day.

Hortebise then took his leave, quite worn out with the severe conflict he had waged during his two hours' interview with the Countess. In spite of the extreme cold, the air outside seemed to refresh him considerably, and he inhaled it with the happy feeling that he had performed his duty in a manner worthy of all praise. He walked up the Rue de Faubourg Saint Honoré, and again entered the *café* where he and his worthy confederate had agreed to meet. Mascarin was there, an untasted cutlet before him, and his face hidden by a newspaper which his anxiety would not permit him to peruse. His suspense was terrible. Had Hortebise failed? had he encountered one of those unforeseen obstacles which, like a minute grain of sand, utterly hinders the working of a piece of delicate machinery?

"Well, what news?" said he eagerly, as soon as he caught sight of the doctor.

“Success, perfect success!” said Hortebise gayly. “But,” added he, as he sank exhausted upon a seat, “the battle has been a hard one.”

CHAPTER VII.

IN THE STUDIO.

STAGGERING like a drunken man, Paul Violaine descended the stairs when his interview with Mascarin had been concluded. The sudden and unexpected good fortune which had fallen so opportunely at his feet had for the moment absolutely stunned him. He was now removed from a position which had caused him to gaze with longing upon the still waters of the Seine, to one of comparative affluence. “Mascarin,” said he to himself, “has offered me an appointment bringing in twelve thousand francs per annum, and proposed to give me the first month’s salary in advance.”

Certainly it was enough to bewilder any man, and Paul was utterly dazed. He went over all the events that had occurred during the day—the sudden appearance of old Tantaine, with his loan of five hundred francs, and the strange man who knew the whole history of his life, and who, without making any conditions, had offered him a valuable situation. Paul was in no particular hurry to get back to the Hôtel de Perou, for he said to himself that Rose could wait. A feeling of restlessness had seized upon him. He wanted to squander money, and to have the sympathy of some companions,—but where should he go, for he had no friends? Searching the records of his memory, he remembered that, when poverty had first overtaken him, he had borrowed twenty francs from a young fellow

of his own age, named André. Some gold coins still jingled in his pocket, and he could have a thousand francs for the asking. Would it not add to his importance if he were to go and pay this debt? Unluckily his creditor lived a long distance off in the Rue de la Tour d'Auvergne. He, however, hailed a passing cab, and was driven to André's address. This young man was only a casual acquaintance, whom Paul had picked up one day in a small wine-shop to which he used to take Rose when he first arrived in Paris. André, with whose other name Paul was unacquainted, was an artist, and, in addition, was an ornamental sculptor, and executed those wonderful decorations on the outside of houses in which builders delight. The trade is not a pleasant one, for it necessitates working at dizzy heights, on scaffolds that vibrate with every footstep, and exposes you to the heat of summer and the frosts of winter. The business, however, is well paid, and André got a good price for his stone figures and wreaths. But all the money he earned went in the study of the painter's art, which was the secret desire of his soul. He had taken a studio, and twice his pictures had been exhibited at the *Salon*, and orders began to come in. Many of his brother artists predicted a glorious future for him. When the cab stopped, Paul threw the fare to the driver, and asked the clean-looking portress, who was polishing the brasswork on the door, if M. André was at home.

"He is, sir," replied the old woman, adding, with much volubility, "and you are likely to find him in, for he has so much work; but he is such a good and quiet young man, and so regular in his habits! I don't believe he owes a penny in the world; and as for drink, why he is a perfect Anchorite. Then he has very few

acquaintances,—one young lady, whose face for a month past I have tried to see, but failed, because she wears a veil, comes to see him, accompanied by her maid.”

“Good heavens, woman!” cried Paul impatiently, “will you tell me where to find M. André?”

“Fourth floor, first door to the right,” answered the portress, angry at being interrupted; and as Paul ran up the stairs, she muttered, “A young chap with no manners, taking the words out of a body’s mouth like that! Next time he comes, I’ll serve him out somehow.”

Paul found the door, with a card with the word “André” marked upon it nailed up, and rapped on the panel. He heard the sound of a piece of furniture being moved, and the jingle of rings being passed along a rod; then a clear, youthful voice answered, “Come in!”

Paul entered, and found himself in a large, airy room, lighted by a skylight, and exquisitely clean and orderly. Sketches and drawings were suspended on the walls; there was a handsome carpet from Tunis, and a comfortable lounge; a mirror in a carved frame, which would have gladdened the heart of a connoisseur, stood upon the mantelpiece. An easel with a picture upon it, covered with a green baize curtain, stood in one corner. The young painter was in the centre of his studio, brush and palette in hand. He was a dark, handsome young man, well built and proportioned, with close-cut hair, and a curling beard flowing down over his chest. His face was full of expression, and the energy and vigor imprinted upon it formed a marked contrast to the appearance of Mascarin’s *protégé*. Paul noticed that he did not wear the usual painter’s blouse,

but was carefully dressed in the prevailing fashion. As soon as he recognized Paul, André came forward with extended hand. "Ah," said he, "I am pleased to see you, for I often wondered what had become of you."

Paul was offended at this familiar greeting. "I have had many worries and disappointments," said he.

"And Rose," said André, "how is she—as pretty as ever, I suppose?"

"Yes, yes," answered Paul negligently; "but you must forgive me for having vanished so suddenly. I have come to repay your loan, with many thanks."

"Pshaw!" returned the painter, "I never thought of the matter again; pray, do not inconvenience yourself."

Again Paul felt annoyed, for he fancied that under the cloak of assumed generosity the painter meant to humiliate him; and the opportunity of airing his newly-found grandeur occurred to him.

"It was a convenience to me, certainly," said he, "but I am all right now, having a salary of twelve thousand francs."

He thought that the artist would be dazzled, and that the mention of this sum would draw from him some exclamations of surprise and envy. André, however, made no reply, and Paul was obliged to wind up with the lame conclusion, "And at my age that is not so bad."

"I should call it superb. Should I be indiscreet in asking what you are doing?"

The question was a most natural one, but Paul could not reply to it, as he was entirely ignorant as to what his employment was to be, and he felt as angry as if the painter had wantonly insulted him.

"I work for it," said he, drawing himself up with

such a strange expression of voice and feature that André could not fail to notice it.

"I work too," remarked he; "I am never idle."

"But I have to work very hard," returned Paul, "for I have not, like you, a friend or protector to interest himself in me."

Paul, who had not a particle of gratitude in his disposition, had entirely forgotten Mascarin.

The artist was much amused by this speech. "And where do you think that a foundling, as I am, would find a protector?"

Paul opened his eyes. "What," said he, "are you one of those?"

"I am; I make no secret of it, hoping that there is no occasion for me to feel shame, though there may be for grief. All my friends know this; and I am surprised that you are not aware that I am simply a foundling from the Hôpital de Vendôme. Up to twelve years of age I was perfectly happy, and the masters praised me for the knack I had of acquiring knowledge. I used to work in the garden by day, and in the evening I wasted reams of paper; for I had made up my mind to be an artist. But nothing goes easily in this world, and one day the lady superintendent conceived the idea of apprenticing me to a tanner."

Paul, who had taken a seat on the divan in order to listen, here commenced making a cigarette; but André stopped him. "Excuse me; but will you oblige me by not smoking?"

Paul tossed the cigarette aside, though he was a little surprised, as the painter was an inveterate smoker. "All right," said he, "but continue your story."

"I will; it is a long one. I hated the tanner's business from the very beginning. Almost the first day

an awkward workman scalded me so severely that the traces still remain." As he spoke he rolled up his shirt sleeve, and exhibited a scar that covered nearly all one side of his arm. "Horried at such a commencement, I entreated the lady superintendent, a hideous old woman in spectacles, to apprentice me to some other trade, but she sternly refused. She had made up her mind that I should be a tanner."

"That was nasty of her," remarked Paul.

"It was, indeed; but from that day I made up my mind, and I determined to run away as soon as I could get a little money together. I therefore stuck steadily to the business, and by the end of the year, by means of the strictest economy, I found myself master of thirty francs. This, I thought, would do, and, with a bundle containing a change of linen, I started on foot for Paris. I was only thirteen, but I had been gifted by Providence with plenty of that strong will called by many obstinacy. I had made up my mind to be a painter."

"And you kept your vow?"

"But with the greatest difficulty. Ah! I can close my eyes and see the place where I slept the first night I came to Paris. I was so exhausted that I did not awake for twelve hours. I ordered a good breakfast; and finding funds at a very low ebb, I started in search of work."

Paul smiled. He, too, remembered *his* first day in Paris. He was twenty-two years of age, and had forty francs in his pocket.

"I wanted to make money—for I felt I needed it—to enable me to pursue my studies. A stout man was seated near me at breakfast, and to him I addressed myself.

“‘Look here,’ said I, ‘I am thirteen, and much stronger than I look. I can read and write. Tell me how I can earn a living.’

“He looked steadily at me, and in a rough voice answered, ‘Go to the market to-morrow morning, and try if one of the master masons, who are on the look-out for hands, will employ you.’”

“And you went?”

“I did; and was eagerly watching the head masons, when I perceived my stout friend coming toward me.

“‘I like the looks of you, my lad,’ he said; ‘I am an ornamental sculptor. Do you care to learn my trade?’

“When I heard this proposal, it seemed as if Paradise was opening before me, and I agreed with enthusiasm.”

“And how about your painting?”

“That came later on. I worked hard at it in all my hours of leisure. I attended the evening schools, and worked steadily at my art and other branches of education. It was a very long time before I ventured to indulge in a glass of beer. ‘No, no, André,’ I would say to myself, ‘beer costs six sous; lay the money by.’ Finally, when I was earning from eighty to a hundred francs a week, I was able to give more time to the brush.”

The recital of this life of toil and self-denial, so different from his own selfish and idle career, was inexpressibly mortifying to Paul; but he felt that he was called upon to say something.

“When one has talents like yours,” said he, “success follows as a matter of course.”

He rose to his feet, and affected to examine the sketches on the walls, though his attention was attracted to the covered picture on the easel. He remembered

what the garrulous old portress had said about the veiled lady who sometimes visited the painter, and that there had been some delay in admitting him when he first knocked. Then he considered, for whom had the painter dressed himself with such care? and why had he requested him not to smoke? From all these facts Paul came to the conclusion that André was expecting the lady's visit, and that the veiled picture was her portrait. He therefore determined to see it; and with this end in view, he walked round the studio, admiring all the paintings on the walls, manœuvring in such a manner as to imperceptibly draw nearer to the easel.

"And this," said he, suddenly extending his hand toward the cover, "is, I presume, the gem of your studio?"

But André was by no means dull, and had divined Paul's intention, and grasped the young man's outstretched hand just as it touched the curtain.

"If I veil this picture," said he, "it is because I do not wish it to be seen."

"Excuse me," answered Paul, trying to pass over the matter as a jest, though in reality he was boiling over with rage at the manner and tone of the painter, and considered his caution utterly ridiculous.

"At any rate," said he to himself, "I will lengthen out my visit, and have a glimpse of the original instead of her picture;" and, with this amiable resolution, he sat down by the artist's table, and commenced an apparently interminable story, resolved not to attend to any hints his friend might throw out, who was glancing at the clock with the utmost anxiety, comparing it every now and then with his watch.

As Paul talked on, he saw close to him on the table

the photograph of a young lady, and, taking advantage of the artist's preoccupation, looked at it.

"Pretty, very pretty!" remarked he.

At these words the painter flushed crimson, and snatching away the photograph with some little degree of violence, thrust it between the leaves of a book.

André was so evidently in a passion, that Paul rose to his feet, and for a second or two the men looked into each other's eyes as two adversaries do when about to engage in a mortal duel. They knew but little of each other, and the same chance which had brought them together might separate them again at any moment, but each felt that the other exercised some influence over his life.

André was the first to recover himself.

"You must excuse me; but I was wrong to leave so precious an article about."

Paul bowed with the air of a man who accepts an apology which he considers his due; and André went on,—

"I very rarely receive any one except my friends; but to-day I have broken through my rule."

Paul interrupted him with a magniloquent wave of the hand.

"Believe me, sir," said he, in a voice which he endeavored to render cutting and sarcastic, "had it not been for the imperative duty I before alluded to, I should not have intruded."

And with these words he left the room, slamming the door behind him.

"The deuce take the impudent fool!" muttered André. "I was strongly tempted to pitch him out of the window."

Paul was in a furious rage for having visited the

studio with the kindly desire of humiliating the painter. He could not but feel that the tables had been turned upon himself.

"He shall not have it all his own way," muttered he; "for I will see the lady," and not reflecting on the meanness of his conduct, he crossed the street, and took up a position from which he could obtain a good view of the house where André resided. It was snowing; but Paul disregarded the inclemency of the weather in his eagerness to act the spy.

He had waited for fully half an hour, when a cab drove up. Two women alighted from it. The one was eminently aristocratic in appearance, while the other looked like a respectable servant. Paul drew closer; and, in spite of a thick veil, recognized the features he had seen in the photograph.

"Ah!" said he, "after all, Rose is more to my taste, and I will get back to her. We will pay up Loupins, and get out of his horrible den."

CHAPTER VIII.

MADemoiselle DE MUSSIDAN.

PAUL had not been the only watcher; for at the sound of the carriage wheels the ancient portress took up her position in the doorway, with her eyes fixed on the face of the young lady. When the two women had ascended the stairs, a sudden inspiration seized her, and she went out and spoke to the cabman.

"Nasty night," remarked she; "I don't envy you in such weather as this."

"You may well say that," replied the driver; "my feet are like lumps of ice."

"Have you come far?"

"Rather; I picked them up in the Champs Elysées, near the Avenue de Matignon."

"That is a distance."

"Yes; and only five sous for drink money. Hang your respectable women!"

"Oh! they are respectable, are they?"

"I'll answer for that. The other lot are far more open-handed. I know both of them."

And with these words and a knowing wink, he touched up his horse and drove away; and the portress, only half satisfied, went back to her lodge.

"Why that is the quarter where all the swells live," murmured she. "I'll tip the maid next time, and she'll let out everything."

After Paul's departure, André could not remain quiet; for it appeared to him as if each second was a century. He had thrown open the door of his studio, and ran to the head of the stairs at every sound.

At last their footsteps really sounded on the steps. The sweetest music in the world is the rustle of the beloved one's dress. Leaning over the banisters, he gazed fondly down. Soon she appeared, and in a short time had gained the open door of the studio.

"You see, André," said she, extending her hand, "you see that I am true to my time."

Pale, and trembling with emotion, André pressed the little hand to his lips.

"Ah! Mademoiselle Sabine, how kind you are! Thanks, a thousand thanks."

Yes, it was indeed Sabine, the scion of the lordly house of Mussidan, who had come to visit the poor

foundling of the Hôtel de Vendôme in his studio, and who thus risked all that was most precious to her in the world, her honor and her reputation. Yes, regardless of the conventionalities among which she had been reared, dared to cross that social abyss which separates the Avenue de Matignon from the Rue de la Tour d'Auvergne. Cold reason finds no excuse for such a step, but the heart can easily solve this seeming riddle. Sabine and André had been lovers for more than two years. Their first acquaintance had commenced at the Château de Mussidan. At the end of the summer of 1865, André, whose constant application to work had told upon his health, determined to take a change, when his master, Jean Lanier, called him, and said,—

“If you wish for a change, and at the same time to earn three or four hundred francs, now is your time. An architect has written to me, asking me for a skilled stone carver, to do some work in the country at a magnificent mansion in the midst of the most superb scenery. Would you care about undertaking this?”

The proposal was a most acceptable one to André, and in a week's time he was on his way to his work with a prospect of living for a month in pure country air. Upon his arrival at the Château, he made a thorough examination of the work with which he had been entrusted. He saw that he could finish it with perfect ease, for it was only to restore the carved work on a balcony, which would not take more than a fortnight. He did not, however, press on the work, for the beautiful scenery enchanted him.

He made many exquisite sketches, and his health began to return to him. But there was another reason why he was in no haste to complete his task, one which

he hardly ventured even to confess to himself: he had caught a glimpse of a young girl in the park of the Château who had caused a new feeling to spring up in his heart. It was Sabine de Mussidan. The Count, as the season came on, had gone to Germany, the Countess had flitted away to Luzon, and the daughter was sent to the dull old country mansion in charge of her old aunt. It was the old, old story; two young hearts loving with all the truth and energy of their natures. They had exchanged a few words on their first meeting, and on the next Sabine went on to the balcony and watched the rapid play of André's chisel with childish delight. For a long time they conversed, and Sabine was surprised at the education and refinement of the young workman. Utterly fresh, and without experience, Sabine could not understand her new sensations. André held, one night, a long converse with himself, and was at last obliged to confess that he loved her fondly. He ran the extent of his folly and madness, and recognized the barrier of birth and wealth that stood between them, and was overwhelmed with consternation.

The Château de Mussidan stands in a very lonely spot, and one of the roads leading to it passes through a dense forest, and therefore it had been arranged that André was to take his meals in the house. After a time Sabine began to feel that this isolation was a needless humiliation.

"Why can't M. André take his meals with us?" asked she of her aunt. "He is certainly more gentlemanlike than many of those who visit us, and I think that his conversation would entertain you."

The old lady was easily persuaded to adopt this suggestion, though at first it seemed an odd kind of

thing to admit a mere working man to her table; but she was so bored with the loneliness of the place that she hailed with delight anything that would break its monotony. André at once accepted the proposal, and the old lady would hardly believe her eyes when her guest entered the room with the dress and manners of a highbred gentleman. "It is hardly to be believed," said she, as she was preparing to go to bed, "that a mere carver of stone should be so like a gentleman. It seems to me that all distinctions of social rank have vanished. It is time for me to die, or we are rapidly approaching a state of anarchy."

In spite of her prejudices, however, André contrived to win the old lady's heart, and won a complete victory by painting her portrait in full gala costume. From that moment he was treated as one of the family, and, having no fear of a rebuff, was witty and sprightly in his manner. Once he told the old lady the true story of his life. Sabine was deeply interested, and marvelled at his energy and endurance, which had won for him a place on the ladder that leads to future eminence. She saw in him the realization of all her girlish dreams, and finally confessed to herself that she loved him. Both her father and mother had their own pleasures and pursuits, and Sabine was as much alone in the world as André.

The days now fled rapidly by. Buried in this secluded country house, they were as free as the breeze that played through the trees of the forest, for the old lady rarely disturbed them. After the morning meal, she would beg André to read the newspaper to her, and fell into a doze before he had been five minutes at the task. Then the young people would slip quietly away, as merry as truants from school. They wandered

beneath the shade of the giant oaks, or climbed the rocks that stood by the river bank. Sometimes, seated in a dilapidated boat, they would drift down the stream with its flower-bedecked banks. The water was often almost covered with rushes and water lilies. Two months of enchantment thus fled past, two months of the intoxications of love, though the mention of the tender passion never rose to their lips from their hearts, where it was deeply imbedded. André had cast all reflections regarding the perils of the future to the winds, and only thanked heaven for the happiness that he was experiencing.

"Am I not too happy?" he would say to himself. "I fear this cannot last." And he was right. Anxious to justify his remaining at Mussidan after his task was completed, André determined to add to what he had already done a masterpiece of modern art, by carving a garland of fruit and flowers over the old balcony, and every morning he rose with the sun to proceed with his task.

One morning the valet came to him, saying that the old lady was desirous of seeing him, and begged him to lose no time, as the business was urgent. A presentiment of evil came like a chilly blast upon the young man's heart. He felt that his brief dream of happiness was at an end, and he followed the valet as a criminal follows his executioner to the scaffold.

As he opened the door in which Sabine's aunt was awaiting him, the old man whispered,—

"Have a care, sir, have a care. Madame is in a terrible state; I have not seen her like this since her husband died."

The old lady was in a terrible state of excitement, and in spite of rheumatic pains was walking up and

down the room, gesticulating wildly, and striking her crutch-handled stick on the floor.

"And so," cried she in that haughty tone adopted by women of aristocratic lineage when addressing a supposed inferior, "you have, I hear, had the impudence to make love to my niece?"

André's pale face grew crimson as he stammered out,—

"Madame——"

"Gracious powers, fellow!" cried the angry woman, "do you dare to deny this when your very face betrays you? Do you know that you are an insolent rogue even to venture to look on Sabine de Mussidan? How dare you! Perhaps you thought that if you compromised her, we should be forced to submit to this ignoble alliance."

"On my honor, madame, I assure you——"

"On your honor! To hear you speak, one would suppose that you were a gentleman. If my poor husband were alive, he would break every bone in your body; but I am satisfied with ordering you out of the house. Pack up your tools, and be off at once."

André stood as though petrified into stone. He took no notice of her imperious manner, but only realized the fact that he should never see Sabine again, and, turning deadly pale, staggered to a chair. The old lady was so surprised at the manner in which André received her communication, that for a time she too was bewildered, and could not utter a word.

"I am unfortunately of a violent temper," said she, speaking in more gentle accents, "and perhaps I have spoken too severely, for I am much to blame in this matter, as the priest of Berron said when he came to inform me of what was going on. I am so old that

I forgot what happens when young people are thrown together, and I was the only one who did not know what was going on when you were affording subject of gossip for the whole countryside; my niece——”

But here André started to his feet with a threatening look upon his face.

“I could strangle them all,” cried he.

“That is right,” returned the old lady, secretly pleased at his vigor and energy, “but you cannot silence every idle tongue. Fortunately, matters have not gone too far. Go away, and forget my niece.”

She might as well have told the young man to go away and die.

“Madame!” cried he in accents of despair, “pray listen to me. I am young, and full of hope and courage.”

The old lady was so touched by his evident sorrow, that the tears rolled down her wrinkled cheeks.

“What is the good of saying this to me?” asked she. “Sabine is not my daughter. All that I can do is never to say a word to her father and mother. Great heavens, if Mussidan should ever learn what has occurred! There, do go away. You have upset me so that I do not believe I shall eat a mouthful for the next two days.”

André staggered out of the room. It seemed to him as if the flooring heaved and rolled beneath his feet. He could see nothing, but he felt some one take him by the hand. It was Sabine, pallid and cold as a marble statue.

“I have heard everything, André,” murmured she.

“Yes,” stammered he. “All is over, and I am dismissed.”

“Where are you going to?”

"Heaven only knows, and when once I leave this place I care not."

"Do not be desperate," urged Sabine, laying her hand upon his arm.

His fixed glance terrified her as he muttered,—

"I cannot help it; I am driven to despair."

Never had Sabine appeared so lovely; her eyes gleamed with some generous impulse, and her face glowed.

"Suppose," said she, "I could give you a ray of future hope, what would you do then?"

"What would I *not* do then? All that a man could. I would fight my way through all opposition. Give me the hardest task, and I will fulfil it. If money is wanted, I will gain it; if a name, I will win it."

"There is one thing that you have forgotten, and that is patience."

"And that, Mademoiselle, I possess also. Do you not understand that with one word of hope from you I can live on?"

Sabine raised her head heavenwards. "Work!" she exclaimed. "Work and hope, for I swear that I will never wed other than you."

Here the voice of the old lady interrupted the lovers.

"Still lingering here!" she cried, in a voice like a trumpet call. André fled away with hope in his heart, and felt that he had now something to live for. No one knew exactly what happened after his departure. No doubt Sabine brought round her aunt to her way of thinking, for at her death, which happened two months afterward, she left the whole of her immense fortune directly to her niece, giving her the income while she remained single, and the capital on her marriage, whether with or without the consent of her par-

ents. Madame de Mussidan declared that the old lady had gone crazy, but both André and Sabine knew what she had intended, and sincerely mourned for the excellent woman, whose last act had been to smooth away the difficulties from their path. André worked harder than ever, and Sabine encouraged him by fresh promises. Sabine was even more free in Paris than at Mussidan, and her attached maid, Modeste, would have committed almost any crime to promote the happiness of her beloved mistress. The lovers now corresponded regularly, and Sabine, accompanied by Modeste, frequently visited the artist's studio, and never was a saint treated with greater respect and adoration than was Sabine by André.

CHAPTER IX.

ROSE'S PROMOTION.

As soon as André had released her hand, Sabine took off her hat, and, handing it to Modeste, remarked,—

“How am I looking to-day, André?”

The young painter hastened to reassure her on this point, and she continued in joyous tones,—

“No, I do not want compliments; I want to know if I look the right thing for sitting for my portrait.”

Sabine was very beautiful, but hers was a different style of beauty from that of Rose, whose ripe, sensuous charms were fitted to captivate the admiration of the voluptuary, while Sabine was of the most refined and ethereal character. Rose fettered the body with earthly trammels, while Sabine drew the soul heaven-

ward. Her beauty was not of the kind that dazzles, for the air of proud reserve which she threw over it, in some slight measure obscured its brilliancy.

She might have passed unnoticed, like the work of a great master's brush hanging neglected over the altar of a village church; but when the eye had once fathomed that hidden beauty, it never ceased to gaze on it with admiration. She had a broad forehead, covered with a wealth of chestnut hair, soft, lustrous eyes, and an exquisitely chiselled mouth.

"Alas!" said André, "when I gaze upon you, I have to confess how impossible it is to do you justice. Before you came I had fancied that the portrait was completed, but now I see that I have only made a failure."

As he spoke, he drew aside the curtain, and the young girl's portrait was revealed. It was by no means a work of extraordinary merit. The artist was only twenty-four years of age, and had been compelled to interrupt his studies to toil for his daily bread, but it was full of originality and genius. Sabine gazed at it for a few moments in silence, and then murmured the words,—

"It is lovely!"

But André was too discouraged to notice her praise.

"It is like," remarked he, "but a photograph also has that merit. I have only got your features, but not your expression; it is an utter failure. Shall I try again?"

Sabine stopped him with a gesture of denial.

"You shall not try again," said she decidedly.

"And why not?" asked he in astonishment.

"Because this visit will be my last, André."

"The last?" stammered the painter. "In what way

have I so offended you, that you should inflict so terrible a punishment on me?"

"I do not wish to punish you. You asked for my portrait, and I yielded to your request; but let us talk reasonably. Do you not know that I am risking my reputation by coming here day after day?"

André made no reply, for this unexpected blow had almost stunned him.

"Besides," continued Mademoiselle de Mussidan, "what is to be done with the portrait? It must be hidden away, as if it were something we were ashamed of. Remember, on your success hangs our marriage."

"I do not forget that."

"Hasten then to gain all honor and distinction, for the world must agree with me in saying that my choice has been a wise one."

"I will do so."

"I fully believe you, dear André, and remember what I said to you a year ago. Achieve a name, then go to my father and ask for my hand. If he refuses, if my supplications do not move him, I will quit his roof forever."

"You are right," answered André. "I should indeed be a fool if I sacrificed a future happy life for a few hours of present enjoyment, and I will implicitly——"

"And now," said Sabine, "that we have agreed on this point, let us discuss our mutual interests, of which it seems that we have been a little negligent up till now."

André at once began to tell her of all that had befallen him since they had last met, his defeats and successes.

"I am in an awkward plight," said he. "Yesterday, that well known collector, Prince Crescenzi, came to

my studio. One of my pictures took his fancy, and he ordered another from me, for which he would pay six thousand francs."

"That was quite a stroke of luck."

"Just so, but unfortunately he wants it directly. Then Jean Lamou, who has more in his hand than he can manage, has offered me the decoration of a palatial edifice that he is building for a great speculator, M. Gandelu. I am to engage all the workmen, and shall receive some seven or eight hundred francs a month."

"But how does this trouble you?"

"I will tell you. I have twice seen M. Gandelu, and he wants me to begin work at once; but I cannot accept both, and must choose between them."

Sabine reflected.

"I should execute the Prince's commission," said she.

"So should I, only——"

The girl easily found the cause of his hesitation.

"Will you never forget that I am wealthy?" replied she.

"The one would bring in the most money," he returned, "and the other most credit."

"Then accept the offer of M. Gandelu."

The old cuckoo-clock in the corner struck five.

"Before we part, dear André," resumed she, "I must tell you of a fresh trouble which threatens us; there is a project for marrying me to M. de Breulh-Faverlay."

"What, that very wealthy gentleman?"

"Just so."

"Well, if I oppose my father's wishes, an explanation must ensue, and this just now I do not desire. I therefore intend to speak openly to M. de Breulh-Faverlay, who is an honorable, straightforward man; and

when I tell him the real state of the case, he will withdraw his pretensions."

"But," replied André, "should he do so, another will come forward."

"That is very possible, and in his turn the successor will be dismissed."

"Ah!" murmured the unhappy man, "how terrible will be your life,—a scene of daily strife with your father and mother."

After a tender farewell, Sabine and Modeste left. André had wished to be permitted to go out and procure a vehicle, but this the young girl negatived, and took her leave, saying,—

"I shall see M. de Breulh-Faverlay to-morrow."

For a moment after he was left alone André felt very sad, but a happy thought flashed across his brain.

"Sabine," said he, "went away on foot, and I may follow her without injury to her reputation."

In another moment he was in the street, and caught a glimpse of Sabine and her maid under a lamp at the next corner. He crossed to the other side of the way and followed them cautiously.

"Perhaps," murmured he, "the time is not far distant when I shall have the right to be with her in her walks, and feel her arm pressed against mine."

By this time Sabine and her companion had reached the Rue Blanche, and hailing a cab, were rapidly driven away. André gazed after it, and as soon as it was out of sight, decided to return to his work. As he passed a brilliantly lighted shop, a fresh young voice saluted him.

"M. André, M. André."

He looked up in extreme surprise, and saw a young woman, dressed in the most extravagant style, standing

by the door of a brougham, which glittered with fresh paint and varnish. In vain he tried to think who she could be, but at length his memory served him.

"Mademoiselle Rose," said he, "or I am much mistaken."

A shrill, squeaky voice replied, "Madame Zora Chantemille, if you please."

André turned sharply round and found himself face to face with a young man who had completed an order he was giving to the coachman.

"Ah, is that you?" said he.

"Yes, Chantemille is the name of the estate that I intend to settle on madame."

The painter examined the personage who had just addressed him with much curiosity. He was dressed in the height or rather the burlesque of fashion, wore an eyeglass, and an enormous locket on his chain. The face which surmounted all this grandeur was almost that of a monkey, and Toto Chupin had not exaggerated its ugliness when he likened it to that animal.

"Pooh," cried Rose, "what matters a name? All you have to do is to ask this gentleman, who is an old friend of mine, to dinner." And without waiting for a reply, she took André by the hand and led him into a brilliantly lighted hall. "You must dine with us," she exclaimed; "I will take no denial. Come, let me introduce you, M. André, M. Gaston de Gandelu. There, that is all settled."

The man bowed.

"André, André," repeated Gandelu; "why, the name is familiar to me,—and so is the face. Have I not met you at my father's house? Come in; we intend to have a jovial evening."

"I really cannot," pleaded André. "I have an engagement."

"Throw it over then; we intend to keep you, now that we have got you."

André hesitated for a moment, but he felt dispirited, and that he required rousing. "After all," thought he, "why should I refuse? If this young man's friends are like himself, the evening will be an amusing one."

"Come up," cried Rose, placing her foot upon the stairs. André was about to follow her, but was held back by Gandelu, whose face was radiant with delight.

"Was there ever such a girl?" whispered he; "but there, don't jump at conclusions. I have only had her in hand for a short time, but I am a real dab at starting a woman grandly, and it would be hard to find my equal in Paris, you may bet."

"That can be seen at a glance," answered André, concealing a smile.

"Well, look here, I began at once. Zora is a quaint name, is it not? It was my invention. She isn't a right down swell to-day, but I have ordered six dresses for her from Van Klopen; such swell gets up! You know Van Klopen, don't you, the best man-milliner in Paris. Such taste! such ideas! you never saw the like."

Rose had by this time reached her drawing-room. "André," said she, impatiently, "are you never coming up?"

"Quick, quick," said Gandelu, "let us go at once; if she gets into a temper she is sure to have a nervous attack, so let us hurry up."

Rose did all she could to dazzle André, and as a commencement exhibited to him her domestics, a cook and a maid; then he was shown every article of furniture, and not one was spared him. He was forced to admire

the drawing-room suite covered with old gold silk, trimmed with blue, and to test the thickness of the curtains. Bearing aloft a large candelabra, and covering himself with wax, Gandelu led the way, telling them the price of everything like an energetic tradesman.

"That clock," said he, "cost me a hundred louis, and dirt cheap at the price. How funny that you should have known my father! Has he not a wonderful intellect? That flower stand was three hundred francs, absolutely given away. Take care of the governor, he is as sharp as a needle. He wanted me to have a profession, but no, thank you. Yes, that occasional table was a bargain at twenty louis. Six months ago I thought that the old man would have dropped off, but now the doctors say——" He stopped suddenly, for a loud noise was heard in the vestibule. "Here come the fellows I invited," cried he, and placing the candelabra on the table, he hurried from the room.

André was delighted at so grand an opportunity of studying the *genus* masher. Rose felt flattered by the admiration her fine rooms evidently caused.

"You see," cried she, "I have left Paul; he bothered me awfully, and ended by half starving me."

"Why, you are joking; he came here to-day, and said he was earning twelve thousand francs a year."

"Twelve thousand humbugs. A fellow that will take five hundred francs from an old scarecrow he never met before is——"

Rose broke off abruptly, for at that moment young Gandelu brought in his friends, and introduced them; they were all of the same type as their host, and André was about to study them more intently, when a white-waistcoated waiter threw open the door, exclaiming pompously, "Madame, the dinner is on the table."

CHAPTER X.

“YOU ARE A THIEF.”

WHEN Mascarin was asked what was the best way to achieve certain results, his invariable reply was, “Keep moving, keep moving.” He had one great advantage over other men, he put in practice the doctrines he preached, and at seven o’clock the morning after his interview with the Count de Mussidan he was hard at work in his room. A thick fog hung over the city, even penetrating into the office, which had begun to fill with clients. This crowd had but little interest for the head of the establishment, as it consisted chiefly of waiters from small eating houses, and cooks who knew little or nothing of what was going on in the houses where they were in service. Finding this to be the case, Mascarin handed them all over to Beaumarchef, and only occasionally nodded to the serviteur of some great family, who chanced to stroll in.

He was busily engaged in arranging those pieces of cardboard which had so puzzled Paul in his first visit, and was so much occupied with his task, that all he could do was to mutter broken exclamations: “What a stupendous undertaking! but I have to work single-handed, and hold in my hands all these threads, which for twenty years, with the patience of a spider, I have been weaving into a web. No one, seeing me here, would believe this. People who pass me by in the street say, ‘That is Mascarin, who keeps a servants’ registry office;’ that is the way in which they look upon me. Let them laugh if they like; they little know

the mighty power I wield in secret. No one suspects me, no, not one. I may seem too sanguine, it is true," he continued, still glancing over his papers, "or the net may break and some of the fishes slip out. That idiot, Mussidan, asked me if I was acquainted with the Penal Code. I should think I was, for no one has studied them more deeply than I have, and there is a clause in volume 3, chapter 2, which is always before me. Penal servitude for a term of years; and if I am convicted under Article 306, then it means a life sentence." He shuddered, but soon a smile of triumph shone over his face as he resumed, "Ah, but to send a man like Mascarin for change of air to Toulon, he must be caught, and that is not such an easy task. The day he scents danger he disappears, and leaves no trace behind him. I fear that I cannot look for too much from my companions, Catenac and Hortebise; I have up to now kept them back. Croisenois would never betray me, and as for Beaumarchef, La Candèle, Toto Chupin, and a few other poor devils, they would be a fine haul for the police. They couldn't split, simply because they know nothing." Mascarin chuckled, and then adjusting his spectacles with his favorite gesture, said, "I shall go on in the course I have commenced, straight as the flight of an arrow. I ought to make four millions through Croisenois. Paul shall marry Flavia, that is all arranged, and Flavia will make a grand duchess with her magnificent income."

He had by this time arranged his pasteboard squares, then he took a small notebook, alphabetically arranged, from a drawer, wrote a name or two in it, and then closing it said with a deadly smile, "There, my friends, you are all registered, though you little suspect it. You are all rich, and think that you are free, but you

are wrong, for there is one man who owns you, soul and body, and that man is Baptiste Mascarin; and at his bidding, high as you hold your heads now, you will crawl to his feet in humble abasement." His musings were interrupted by a knock at the door. He struck the bell on his writing table, and the last sound of it had hardly died away, when Beaumarchef stood on the threshold.

"You desired me, sir," said he, with the utmost deference, "to complete my report regarding young M. Gandelu, and it so happens that the cook whom he has taken into his service in the new establishment he has started is on our list. She has just come to pay us eleven francs that she owed us, and is waiting outside. Is not this lucky?"

Mascarin made a little grimace. "You are an idiot, Beaumarchef," said he, "to be pleased at so trivial a matter. I have often told you that there is no such thing as luck or chance, and that all comes to those who work methodically."

Beaumarchef listened to his master's wisdom in silent surprise.

"And pray, who is this woman?" asked Mascarin.

"You will know her when you see her, sir. She is registered under class D, that is, for employment in rather fast establishments."

"Go and fetch her," observed Mascarin, and as the man left the room, he muttered, "Experience has taught me that it is madness to neglect the smallest precaution."

In another moment the woman appeared, and Mascarin at once addressed her with that air of friendly courtesy which made him so popular among such

women. "Well, my good girl," said he, "and so you have got the sort of place you wanted, eh?"

"I hope so, sir, but you see I have only been with Madame Zora de Chantemille since yesterday."

"Ah, Zora de Chantemille, that is a fine name, indeed."

"It is only a fancy name, and she had an awful row over it with master. She wanted to be called Raphaëla, but he stood out for Zora."

"Zora is a very pretty name," observed Mascarin solemnly.

"Yes, sir, just what the maid and I told her. She is a splendid woman, and doesn't she just squander the shiners? Thirty thousand francs have gone since yesterday."

"I can hardly credit it."

"Not cash, you understand, but tick. M. de Gandelu has not a sou of his own in the world, so a waiter at Potier's told me, and he knew what was what; but the governor is rolling in money. Yesterday they had a house-warming—the dinner, with wine, cost over a thousand francs."

Not seeing how to utilize any of this gossip, Mascarin made a gesture of dismissal, when the woman exclaimed,—

"Stop, sir, I have something to tell you."

"Well," said Mascarin, throwing himself back in his chair with an air of affected impatience, "let us have it."

"We had eight gents to dinner, all howling swells, but my master was the biggest masher of the lot. Madame was the only woman at table. Well, by ten o'clock, they had all had their whack of drink, and then they told the porter to keep the courtyard clear.

What do you think they did then? Why, they threw plates, glasses, knives, forks, and dishes bang out of the window. That is a regular swell fashion, so the waiter at Potier's told me, and was introduced into Paris by a Russian."

Mascarin closed his eyes and answered languidly, "Go on."

"Well, sir, there was one gent who was a blot on the whole affair. He was tall, shabbily dressed, and with no manners at all. He seemed all the time to be sneering at the rest. But didn't Madame make up to him just. She kept heaping up his plate and filling his glass. When the others got to cards, he sat down by my mistress, and began to talk."

"Could you hear what they said?"

"I should think so. I was in the bedroom, and they were near the door."

"Dear me," remarked Mascarin, appearing much shocked, "surely that was not right?"

"I don't care a rap whether it was right or not. I like to hear all about the people whom I engage with. They were talking about a M. Paul, who had been Madame's friend before, and whom the gentleman also knew. Madame said that this Paul was no great shakes, and that he had stolen twelve thousand francs."

Mascarin pricked up his ears, feeling that his patience was about to meet with its reward.

"Can you tell me the gentleman's name, to whom Madame said all this?" asked he.

"Not I. The others called him 'The painter.'"

This explanation did not satisfy Mascarin.

"Look here, my good girl," said he, "try and find out the fellow's name. I think he is an artist who owes me money."

"All right! Rely on me; and now I must be off, for I have breakfast to get ready, but I'll call again to-morrow;" and with a curtsy she left the room.

Mascarin struck his hand heavily on the table.

"Hortebise has a wonderful nose for sniffing out danger," said he. "This Rose and the young fool who is ruining himself for her must both be suppressed."

Beaumarchef again made a motion of executing a thrust with the rapier.

"Pooh, pooh!" answered his master; "don't be childish. I can do better than that. Rose calls herself nineteen, but she is more, she is of age, while Gandelu is still a minor. If old Gandelu had any pluck, he would put Article 354 in motion."

"Eh, sir?" said Beaumarchef, much mystified.

"Look here. Before twenty-four hours have elapsed I must know everything as to the habits and disposition of Gandelu senior. I want to know on what terms he is with his son."

"Good. I will set La Candèle to work."

"And as the young fellow will doubtless need money, contrive to let him know of our friend Verminet, the chairman of the Mutual Loan Society."

"But that is M. Tontaine's business."

Mascarin paid no heed to this, so occupied was he by his own thoughts.

"This young artist seems to have more brains than the rest of the set, but woe to him if he crosses my path. Go back to the outer office, Beaumarchef, I hear some clients coming in."

The man, however, did not obey.

"Pardon me, sir," said he, "but La Candèle, who is outside, will see to them. I have my report to make."

"Very good. Sit down and go on."

Enchanted at this mark of condescension, Beaumarchef went on. "Yesterday there was nothing of importance, but this morning Toto Chupin came."

"He had not lost Caroline Schimmel, I trust?"

"No, sir; he had even got into conversation with her."

"That is good. He is a cunning little devil; a pity that he is not a trifle more honest."

"He is sure," continued Beaumarchef, "that the woman drinks, for she is always talking of persons following her about who menace her, and she is so afraid of being murdered that she never ventures out alone. She lives with a respectable workingman and his wife, and pays well for her board, for she seems to have plenty of money."

"That is a nuisance," remarked Mascarin, evidently much annoyed. "Where does she live?"

"At Montmartre, beyond the Château Rouge."

"Good. Tantine will inquire and see if Toto has made no mistake, and does not let the woman slip through his fingers."

"He won't do that, for he told me that he was on the right road to find out who she was, and where she got her money from. But I ought to warn you against the young scamp, for I have found out that he robs us and sells our goods far below their value."

"What do you mean?"

"I have long had my suspicions, and yesterday I wormed it all out from a disreputable looking fellow, who came here to ask for his friend Chupin."

Men accustomed to danger are ever prompt in their decisions. "Very well," returned Mascarin, "if this

is the case, Master Chupin shall have a taste of prison fare."

Beaumarchef withdrew, but almost immediately reappeared.

"Sir," said he, "a servant from M. de Croisenois is here with a note."

"Send the man in," said Mascarin.

The domestic was irreproachably dressed, and looked what he was, the servant of a nobleman.

He had something the appearance of an Englishman, with a high collar, reaching almost to his ears. His face was clean shaved, and of a ruddy hue. His coat was evidently the work of a London tailor, and his appearance was as stiff as though carved out of wood. Indeed, he looked like a very perfect piece of mechanism.

"My master," said he, "desired me to give this note into your own hands."

Under cover of breaking the seal, Mascarin viewed this model servant attentively. He was a stranger to him, for he had never supplied Croisenois with a domestic.

"It seems, my good fellow," said he, "that your master was up earlier than usual this morning?"

The man frowned a little at this familiar address, and then slowly replied,—

"When I took service with the Marquis, he agreed to give me fifteen louis over my wages for the privilege of calling me 'a good fellow,' but I permit no one to do so gratis. I think that my master is still asleep," continued the man solemnly. "He wrote the note on his return from the club."

"Is there any reply?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good; then wait a little."

And Mascarin, opening the note, read the following:

"MY DEAR FRIEND,—

"Baccarat has served me an ugly turn, and in addition to all my ready cash I have given an I.O.U. for three thousand francs. To save my credit I must have this by twelve to-morrow."

"His credit," said Mascarin. "His credit! That is a fine joke indeed." The servant stood up stiffly erect, as one seeming to take no notice, and the agent continued reading the letter.

"Am I wrong in looking to you for this trifle? I do not think so. Indeed, I have an idea that you will send me a hundred and fifty louis over and above, so that I may not be left without a coin in my pocket. How goes the great affair? I await your decision on the brink of a precipice.

"Yours devotedly,

"HENRY DE CROISENOIS."

"And so," growled Mascarin, "he has flung away five thousand francs, and asks me to find it for him in my coffers. Ah, you fools, if I did not want the grand name that you have inherited from your ancestors, a name that you daily bespatter and soil, you might whistle for your five thousand francs."

However, as Croisenois was absolutely necessary to him, Mascarin slowly took from his safe five notes of a thousand francs each, and handed them to the man.

"Do you want a receipt?" asked the man.

"No; this letter is sufficient, but wait a bit;" and Mascarin, with an eye to the future, drew a twenty franc piece from his pocket, and placing it on the table, said in his most honeyed accents,—

"There, my friend, is something for yourself."

"No, sir," returned the man; "I always ask wages enough to prevent the necessity of accepting presents." And with this dignified reply he bowed with the stiff air of a Quaker, and walked rigidly out of the room.

The agent was absolutely thunderstruck. In all his thirty years' experience he had never come across anything like this.

"I can hardly believe my senses," muttered he; "where on earth did the Marquis pick this fellow up? Can it be that he is sharper than I fancied?"

Suddenly a new and terrifying idea flashed across his mind. "Can it be," said he, "that the fellow is not a real servant, after all? I have so many enemies that one day they may strive to crush me, and however skilfully I may play my cards, some one may hold a better hand." This idea alarmed him greatly, for he was in a position in which he had everything to fear; for when a great work is approaching completion, the anxiety of the promoter becomes stronger and stronger. "No, no," he continued; "I am getting too full of suspicions;" and with these words he endeavored to put aside the vague terrors which were creeping into his soul.

Suddenly Beaumarchef, evidently much excited, appeared upon the threshold.

"What, you here again!" cried Mascarin, angrily; "am I to have no peace to-day?"

"Sir, the young man is here."

"What young man? Paul Violaine?"

"Yes, sir."

"Why, I told him not to come until twelve; something must have gone wrong." He broke off his speech, for at the half-open door stood Paul. He was very

pale, and his eyes had the expression of some hunted creature. His attire was in disorder and betokened a night spent in aimless wanderings to and fro.

"Ah, sir!" said he, as he caught sight of Mascarin.

"Leave us, Beaumarchef," said the latter, with an imperious wave of his hand; "and now, my dear boy, what is it?"

Paul sank into a chair.

"My life is ended," said he; "I am lost, dishonored for ever."

Mascarin put on a face of the most utter bewilderment, though he well knew the cause of Paul's utter prostration; but it was with the air of a ready sympathizer that he drew his chair nearer to that of Paul, and said,—

"Come, tell me all about it; what can possibly have happened to affect you thus?"

In deeply tragic tones, Paul replied,—

"Rose has deserted me."

Mascarin raised his hands to heaven.

"And is this the reason that you say you are dishonored? Do you not see that the future is full of promise?"

"I loved Rose," returned Paul, and his voice was so full of pathos that Mascarin could hardly repress a smile. "But this is not all," continued the unhappy boy, making a vain effort to restrain his tears; "I am accused of theft."

"Impossible!" exclaimed Mascarin.

"Yes, sir; and you who know everything are the only person in the world who can save me. You were so kind to me yesterday that I ventured to come here before the time appointed, in order to entreat your help."

"But what do you think I can do?"

"Everything, sir; but let me tell you the whole hideous complication."

Mascarin's face assumed an air of the deepest interest, as he answered, "Go on."

"After our interview," began Paul, "I went back to the Hôtel de Perou, and on the mantelpiece in my garret found this note from Rose."

He held it out as he spoke, but Mascarin made no effort to take it.

"In it," resumed Paul, "Rose tells me she no longer loves me, and begs me not to seek to see her again; and also that, wearied out with poverty, she has accepted the offer of unlimited supplies of money, a carriage, and diamonds."

"Are you surprised at this?" asked Mascarin, with a sneer.

"How could I anticipate such an infidelity, when only the evening before she swore by all she held most sacred that she loved me only? Why did she lie to me? Did she write to make the blow fall heavier? When I ascended the staircase, I was picturing to myself her joy when I told her of your kind promises to me. For more than an hour I remained in my garret, overwhelmed with the terrible thought that I should never see her again."

Mascarin watched Paul attentively, and came to the conclusion that his words were too fine for his grief to be sincere.

"But what about the accusation of theft?"

"I am coming to that," returned the young man. "I then determined to obey your injunctions and leave the Hôtel de Perou, with which I was more than ever disgusted. I went downstairs to settle with Madame

Loupins, when ah! hideous disgrace! As I handed her the two weeks' rent, she asked me with a contemptuous sneer, where I had stolen the money from?"

Mascarin secretly chuckled over the success of his plans thus announced by Paul.

"What did you say?" asked he.

"Nothing, sir; I was too horror-stricken; the man Loupins came up, and both he and his wife scowled at me threateningly. After a short pause, they asserted that they were perfectly sure that Rose and I had robbed M. Tantine."

"But did you not deny this monstrous charge?"

"I was utterly bewildered, for I saw that every circumstance was against me. The evening before, Rose, in reply to Madame Loupin's importunities, had told her that she had no money, and did not know where to get any. But, as you perceive, on the very next day I appeared in a suit of new clothes, and was prepared to pay my debts, while Rose had left the house some hours before. Does not all this form a chain of strange coincidences? Rose changed the five hundred franc note that Tantine had lent me at the shop of a grocer, named Melusin, and this suspicious fool was the first to raise a cry against us, and dared to assert that a detective had been ordered to watch us."

Mascarin knew all this story better than Paul, but here he interrupted his young friend.

"I do not understand you," said he, "nor whether your grief arises from indignation or remorse. Has there been a robbery?"

"How can I tell? I have never seen M. Tantine from that day. There is a rumor that he has been plundered and important papers taken from him, and that he has consequently been arrested."

"Why did you not explain the facts?"

"It would have been of no use. It would clearly prove that Tantaine was no friend of mine, not even an acquaintance, and they would have laughed me to scorn had I declared that the evening before he came into my room and made me a present of five hundred francs."

"I think that I can solve the riddle," remarked Mascarin. "I know the old fellow so well."

Paul listened with breathless eagerness.

"Tantaine," resumed Mascarin, "is the best and kindest fellow in the world, but he is not quite right in the upper story. He was a wealthy man once, but his liberality was his ruin. He is as poor as a church-mouse now, but he is as anxious as ever to be charitable. Unfortunately in the place I procured for him he had a certain amount of petty cash at his disposal, and moved to pity at the sight of your sufferings, he gave you the money that really belonged to others. Then he sent in his accounts, and the deficiency was discovered. He lost his head, and declared that he had been robbed. You lived in the next room; you were known to be in abject poverty on the one day and in ample funds on the next; hence these suspicions."

All was too clear to Paul, and a cold shiver ran through his frame as he saw himself arrested, tried, and condemned.

"But," stammered he, "M. Tantaine holds my note of hand, which is a proof that I acted honestly."

"My poor boy, do you think that if he hoped to save himself at your expense he would produce it?"

"Luckily, sir, you know the real state of the case." Mascarin shook his head.

"Would my story be credited?" asked he. "Justice

is not infallible, and I must confess that appearances are against you."

Paul was crushed down beneath this weight of argument. "There is no resource for me then but death," murmured he, "for I will not live a dishonored man."

The conduct of Paul was precisely what Mascarin had expected, and he felt that the moment had arrived to strike a final blow.

"You must not give way to despair, my boy," said he.

But Paul made no reply; he had lost the power of hearing. Mascarin, however, had no time to lose, and taking him by the arm, shook him roughly. "Rouse yourself. A man in your position must help himself, and bring forward proofs of his innocence."

"There is no use in fighting," replied Paul. "Have you not just shown me that it is hopeless to endeavor to prove my innocence?"

Mascarin grew impatient at this unnecessary exhibition of cowardice, but he concealed his feelings as best he could.

"No, no," answered he; "I only wished to show you the worst side of the affair."

"There is only one side."

"Not so, for it is only a supposition that Tantaine had made away with money entrusted to him, and we are not certain of it. And we only surmise that he has been arrested, and thrown the blame on you. Before giving up the game, would it not be best to be satisfied on these points?"

Paul felt a little reassured.

"I say nothing," continued Mascarin, "of the influence I exercise over Tantaine, and which may enable me to compel him to confess the truth."

Weak natures like Paul's are raised in a moment from the lowest depths of depression to the highest pitch of exultation, and he already considered that he was saved.

"Shall I ever be able to prove my gratitude to you?" said he impulsively.

Mascarin's face assumed a paternal expression.

"Perhaps you may," answered he; "and as a commencement you must entirely forget the past. Daylight dispels the hideous visions of the night. I offer you a fresh lease of life; will you become a new man?"

Paul heaved a deep sigh. "Rose," he murmured; "I cannot forget her."

Mascarin frowned. "What," said he, "do you still let your thoughts dwell on that woman? There are people who cringe to the hand that strikes them, and the more they are duped and deceived, the more they love. If you are made of this kind of stuff, we shall never get on. Go and find your faithless mistress, and beg her to come back and share your poverty, and see what she will say."

These sarcasms roused Paul. "I will be even with her some day," muttered he.

"Forget her; that is the easiest thing for you to do."

Even now Paul seemed to hesitate. "What," said his patron reproachfully, "have you no pride?"

"I have, sir."

"You have not, or you would never wish to hamper yourself with a woman like Rose. You should keep your hands free, if you want to fight your way through the battle of life."

"I will follow your advice, sir," said Paul hurriedly.

"Very soon you will thank Rose deeply for having

left you. You will climb high, I can tell you, if you will work as I bid you."

"Then," stammered Paul, "this situation at twelve thousand francs a year——"

"There never has been such a situation."

A ghastly pallor overspread Paul's countenance, as he saw himself again reduced to beggary.

"But, sir," he murmured, "will you not permit me to hope——"

"For twelve thousand francs! Be at ease, you shall have that and much more. I am getting old. I have no ties in the world—you shall be my adopted son."

A cloud settled on Paul's brow, for the idea that his life was to be passed in this office was most displeasing to him. Mascarin divined his inmost thoughts with perfect ease. "And the young fool does not know where to go for a crust of bread," thought he. "Ah, if there were no Flavia, no Champdoce;" then, speaking aloud, he resumed, "don't fancy, my dear boy, that I wish to condemn you to the treadmill that I am compelled to pass my life in. I have other views for you, far more worthy of your merits. I have taken a great liking to you, and I will do all I can to further your ambitious views. I was thinking a great deal of you, and in my head I raised the scaffolding of your future greatness. 'He is poor,' said I, 'and at his age, and with his tastes, this is a cruel thing. Why, pray, should I not find a wife for him among those heiresses who have a million or two to give the man they marry? When I talk like this, it is because I know of an heiress, and my friend, Dr. Hortebise, shall introduce her to you. She is nearly, if not quite, as pretty as Rose, and has the advantage of her in being well-born, well-educated, and wealthy. She has

influential relatives, and if her husband should happen to be a poet, or a composer, she could assist him in becoming famous."

A flush came over Paul's face. This seemed like the realization of some of his former dreams.

"With regard to your birth," continued Mascarin, "I have devised a wonderful plan. Before '93, you know, every bastard was treated as a gentleman, as he might have been the son of some high and mighty personage. Who can say that your father may not have been of the noblest blood of France, and that he has not lands and wealth? He may even now be looking for you, in order to acknowledge you and make you his heir. Would you like to be a duke?"

"Ah, sir," stammered the young man.

Mascarin burst into a fit of laughter. "Up to now," said he, "we are only in the region of suppositions."

"Well, sir, what do you wish me to do?" asked Paul, after a short pause.

Mascarin put on a serious face. "I want absolute obedience from you," said he; "a blind and undeviating obedience, one that makes no objections and asks no questions."

"I will obey you, sir; but, oh! do not desert me."

Without making any reply, Mascarin rang for Beaumarchef, and as soon as the latter appeared, said, "I am going to Van Klopen's, and shall leave you in charge here." Then, turning to Paul, he added, "I always mean what I say; we will go and breakfast at a neighboring restaurant. I want to have a talk with you, and afterward—afterward, my boy, I will show you the girl I intend to be your wife. I am curious to know how you like her looks."

CHAPTER XI.

THE MAN-MILLINER.

GASTON DE GANDELU was much surprised at finding that André should be ignorant of the existence of Van Klopen, the best-known man in Paris. To assure oneself of this, it was only necessary to glance at his circulars, which were ornamented with the representations of medals won at all sorts of exhibitions in different quarters of the world, together with various decorations received from foreign potentates. One had been presented to him by the Queen of Spain, while he had a diploma appointing him the supplier to the Court of the Czar. The great Van Klopen was not an Alsatian, as was generally supposed, but a stout, handsome Dutchman, who, in the year 1850, had been a tailor in his small native town, and manufactured in cloth, purchased on credit, the long waistcoats and miraculous coats worn by the wealthy citizens of Rotterdam. Van Klopen, however, was not successful in his business, and was compelled to close his shop and abscond from his creditors. He took refuge in Paris, where he seemed likely to die of hunger. One day over a magnificent establishment in the Rue de Grammont appeared a signboard with the name of Van Klopen, dressmaker, and in the thousands of handbills distributed with the utmost profusion, he called himself the "Regenerator of Fashion." This was an idea that would have never originated in the brain of the phlegmatic Dutchman, and whence came the funds to carry on the business? On this point he was dis-

creetly silent. The enterprise was at first far from a success, for during nearly a month Paris almost split its sides laughing at the absurd pretensions of the self-dubbed "Regenerator of Fashion." Van Klopen bent before the storm he had aroused, and in due time his advertisements brought him two customers, who were the first to blow the trumpet of his fame. One was the Duchess de Suirmeuse, a very great lady indeed, and renowned for her eccentricities and extravagant manner, while the other was an example of another class, being no less than the celebrated Jennie Fancy, who was at that time under the protection of the Count de Tremouselle; and for these two Van Klopen invented such dresses as had never been seen before. From this moment his success was certain; indeed, it was stupendous, and Paris resounded with his praises. Now he has achieved a world-wide reputation, and has nothing to fear from the attacks of his rivals. He would not execute orders for every one, saying that he must pick and choose his customers, and he did so, excising the names of such as he did not think would add to his reputation. Rank and wealth disputed the honor of being his customers. The haughtiest dames did not shrink from entrusting to him secrets of form and figure, which they even hid from their husbands. They endured without shrinking the touch of his coarse hands as he measured them. He was the rage, and his showrooms were a species of neutral ground, where women of all circles of society met and examined each other. The Duchess of — did not shrink from being in the same room with the celebrated woman for whom the Baron de — had blown out the few brains he possessed. Perhaps the Duchess thought that by employing the same costumier, she might also gain some

of the venal beauteous attractions. Mademoiselle D——, of the Gymnase Theatre, who was well known to earn just one thousand francs per annum, took a delight in astonishing the haughty ladies of fashion by the reckless extravagance of her orders. Van Klopen, who was a born diplomatist, distributed his favors between his different customers; consequently he was termed the most charming and angelic of men. Many a time had he heard the most aristocratic lips let fall the words, "I shall die, Van Klopen, if my dress is not ready." On the evenings of the most aristocratic balls a long line of carriages blocked up the road in front of his establishment, and the finest women in Paris crowded the showrooms for a word of approval from him.

He gave credit to approved customers, and also, it was whispered, lent money to them. But woe to the woman who permitted herself to be entrapped in the snare of credit that he laid for her; for the woman who owed him a bill was practically lost, never knowing to what depths she might be degraded to obtain the money to settle her account. It was not surprising that such sudden prosperity should have turned Van Klopen's head. He was stout and ruddy, impudent, vain, and cynical. His admirers said that he was witty.

It was to this man's establishment that Mascarin conducted Paul after a sumptuous breakfast at Philipe's.

It is necessary to give a slight description of Van Klopen's establishment. Carpets of the most expensive description covered the stairs to his door on the first floor, at which stood the liveried menials resplendent in gold lace and scarlet. As soon as Mascarin made his appearance, one of these gorgeous creatures hast-

ened to him and said, "M. Van Klopen is just now engaged with the Princess Korasoff, but as soon as he hears of your arrival he will manage to get rid of her. Will you wait for him in his private room?"

But Mascarin answered,—

"We are in no hurry, and may as well wait in the public room with the other customers. Are there many of them?"

"There are about a dozen ladies, sir."

"Good; I am sure that they will amuse me."

And, without wasting any more words, Mascarin opened a door which led into a magnificent drawing-room, decorated in very florid style. The paper on the walls almost disappeared beneath a variety of water-color sketches, representing ladies in every possible style of costume. Each picture had an explanatory note beneath it, such as "Costume of Mde. de C—— for a dinner at the Russian Ambassador's," "Ball costume of the Marchioness de V—— for a ball at the Hôtel de Ville," etc.

Paul, who was a little nervous at finding himself among such splendor, hesitated in the doorway; but Mascarin seized his young friend by the arm, and, as he drew him to a settee, whispered in his ear,—

"Keep your eyes about you; the heiress is here."

The ladies were at first a little surprised at this invasion of the room by the male element, but Paul's extreme beauty soon attracted their attention. The hum of conversation ceased, and Paul's embarrassment increased as he found a battery of twelve pairs of eyes directed full upon him.

Mascarin, however, was quite at his ease, and upon his entrance had made a graceful though rather old-

fashioned bow to the fair inmates of the room. His coolness was partly due to the contempt he felt for the human race in general, and also to his colored glasses, which hid the expression of his countenance. When he saw that Paul still kept his eyes on the ground, he tapped him gently on the arm.

"Is this the first time you ever saw well-dressed women? Surely you are not afraid of them. Look to the right," continued Mascarin, "and you will see the heiress."

A young girl, not more than eighteen, was seated near one of the windows. She was not perhaps so beautiful as Mascarin had described, but her face was a very striking one nevertheless. She was slight and good-looking, with the clear complexion of a brunette. Her features were not perhaps very regular, but her glossy black hair was a beauty in itself. She had a pair of dark, melting eyes, and her wide, high forehead showed that she was gifted with great intelligence. There was an air of restrained voluptuousness about her, and she seemed the very embodiment of passion.

Paul felt insensibly attracted toward her. Their eyes met, and both started at the same moment. Paul was fascinated in an instant, and the girl's emotion was so evident that she turned aside her head to conceal it.

The babel had now commenced again, and general attention was being paid to a lady who was enthusiastically describing the last new costume which had made its appearance in the Bois de Boulogne.

"It was simply miraculous," said she; "a real triumph of Van Klopen's art. The ladies of a certain class are furious, and Henry de Croisenois tells me

that Jennie Fancy absolutely shed tears of rage. Imagine three green skirts of different shades, each draped——”

Mascarin, however, only paid attention to Paul and the young girl, and a sarcastic smile curled his lips.

“What do you think of her?” asked he.

“She is adorable!” answered Paul, enthusiastically.

“And immensely wealthy.”

“I should fall at her feet if she had not a sou.”

Mascarin gave a little cough, and adjusted his glasses.

“Should you, my lad?” said he to himself; “whether your admiration is for the girl or her money, you are in my grip.”

Then he added, aloud,—

“Would you not like to know her name?”

“Tell me, I entreat you.”

“Flavia.”

Paul was in the seventh heaven, and now boldly turned his eyes on the girl, forgetting that owing to the numerous mirrors, she could see his every movement.

The door was at this moment opened quietly, and Van Klopen appeared on the threshold. He was about forty-four, and too stout for his height. His red, pimply face had an expression upon it of extreme insolence, and his accent was thoroughly Dutch. He was dressed in a ruby velvet dressing-gown, with a cravat with lace ends. A huge cluster-diamond ring blazed on his coarse, red hand.

“Who is the next one?” asked he, rudely.

The lady who had been talking so volubly rose to her feet, but the tailor cut her short, for, catching sight of Mascarin, he crossed the room, and greeted him with the utmost cordiality.

"What!" said he; "is it you that I have been keeping waiting? Pray pardon me. Pray go into my private room; and this gentleman is with you? Do me the favor, sir, to come with us."

He was about to follow his guests, when one of the ladies started forward.

"One word with you, sir, for goodness sake!" cried she.

Van Klopen turned sharply upon her.

"What is the matter?" asked he.

"My bill for three thousand francs falls due to-morrow."

"Very likely."

"But I can't meet it."

"That is not my affair."

"I have come to beg you will renew it for two months, or say one month, on whatever terms you like."

"In two months," answered the man brutally, "you will be no more able to pay than you are to-day. If you can't pay it, it will be noted."

"Merciful powers! then my husband will learn all."

"Just so; that will be what I want; for he will then have to pay me."

The wretched woman grew deadly pale.

"My husband will pay you," said she; "but I shall be lost."

"That is not my lookout. I have partners whose interests I have to consult."

"Do not say that, sir! He has paid my debts once, and if he should be angry and take my children from me—Dear M. Van Klopen, be merciful!"

She wrung her hands, and the tears coursed down her cheeks; but the tailor was perfectly unmoved.

"When a woman has a family of children, one ought to have in a needlewoman by the hour."

She did not desist from her efforts to soften him, and, seizing his hand, strove to carry it to her lips.

"Ah! I shall never dare to go home," wailed she; "never have the courage to tell my husband."

"If you are afraid of your own husband, go to some one else's," said he roughly; and tearing himself from her, he followed Mascarin and Paul.

"Did you hear that?" asked he, as soon as he had closed the door of his room with an angry slam. "These things occasionally occur, and are not particularly pleasant."

Paul looked on in disgust. If he had possessed three thousand francs, he would have given them to this unhappy woman, whose sobs he could still hear in the passage.

"It is most painful," remarked he.

"My dear sir," said the tailor, "you attach too much importance to these hysterical outbursts. If you were in my place, you would soon have to put their right value on them. As I said before, I have to look after my own and my partners' interests. These dear creatures care for nothing but dress; father, husband, and children are as nothing in comparison. You cannot imagine what a woman will do in order to get a new dress, in which to outshine her rival. They only talk of their families when they are called on to pay up."

Paul still continued to plead for some money for the poor lady, and the discussion was getting so warm that Mascarin felt bound to interfere.

"Perhaps," said he, "you have been a little hard."

"Pooh," returned the tailor; "I know my customer;

and to-morrow my account will be settled, and I know very well where the money will come from. Then she will give me another order, and we shall have the whole comedy over again. I know what I am about." And taking Mascarin into the window, he made some confidential communication, at which they both laughed heartily.

Paul, not wishing to appear to listen, examined the consulting-room, as Van Klopen termed it. He saw a great number of large scissors, yard measures, and patterns of material, and heaps of fashion plates.

By this time the two men had finished their conversation.

"I had," said Mascarin, as they returned to the fireplace, "I had meant to glance through the books; but you have so many customers waiting, that I had better defer doing so."

"Is that all that hinders you?" returned Van Klopen, carelessly. "Wait a moment."

He left the room, and in another moment his voice was heard.

"I am sorry, ladies, very sorry, on my word; but I am busy with my silk mercer. I shall not be very long."

"We will wait," returned the ladies in chorus.

"That is the way," remarked Van Klopen, as he returned to the consulting-room. "Be civil to women, and they turn their backs on you; try and keep them off, and they run after you. If I was to put up 'no admittance' over my door, the street would be blocked up with women. Business has never been better," continued the tailor, producing a huge ledger. "Within the last ten days we have had in orders amounting to eighty-seven thousand francs."

"Good!" answered Mascarin; "but let us have a look at the column headed 'Doubtful.'"

"Here you are," returned the arbiter of fashion, as he turned over the leaves. "Mademoiselle Virginie Cluhe has ordered five theatrical costumes, two dinner, and three morning dresses."

"That is a heavy order."

"I wanted for that reason to consult you. She doesn't owe us much—perhaps a thousand francs or so."

"That is too much, for I hear that her friend has come to grief. Do not decline the order, but avoid taking fresh ones."

Van Klopen made a few mysterious signs in the margin of his ledger.

"On the 6th of this month the Countess de Mussidan gave us an order—a perfectly plain dress for her daughter. Her account is a very heavy one, and the Count has warned us that he will not pay it."

"Never mind that. Go on with the order, but press for payment."

"On the 7th a new customer came—Mademoiselle Flavia, the daughter of Martin Rigal, the banker."

When Paul heard this name, he could not repress a start, of which, however, Mascarin affected to take no notice.

"My good friend," said he, turning to Van Klopen, "I confide this young lady to you; give her your whole stock if she asks for it."

By the look of surprise which appeared upon the tailor's face, Paul could see that Mascarin was not prodigal of such recommendations.

"You shall be obeyed," said Van Klopen, with a bow.

"On the 8th a young gentleman of the name of Gaston de Gandelu was introduced by Lupeaux, the jeweller. His father is, I hear, very wealthy, and he will come into money on attaining his majority, which is near at hand. He brought with him a lady," continued the tailor, "and said her name was Zora de Chantemille, a tremendously pretty girl."

"That young man is always in my way," said Mascarin. "I would give something to get him out of Paris."

Van Klopen reflected for a moment. "I don't think that would be difficult," remarked he; "that young fellow is capable of any act of folly for that fair girl."

"I think so too."

"Then the matter is easy. I will open an account with him; then, after a little, I will affect doubts as to his solvency, and ask for a bill; and we shall then place our young friend in the hands of the Mutual Loan Society, and M. Verminet will easily persuade him to write his name across the bottom of a piece of stamped paper. He will bring it to me; I will accept it, and then we shall have him hard and fast."

"I should have proposed another course."

"I see no other way, however." He suddenly stopped, for a loud noise was heard in the ante-room, and the sound of voices in loud contention.

"I should like to know," said Van Klopen, rising to his feet, "who the impudent scoundrel is, who comes here kicking up a row. I expect that it is some fool of a husband."

"Go and see what it is," suggested Mascarin.

"No! I! My servants are paid to spare me such annoyances."

Presently the noise ceased.

“And now,” resumed Mascarin, “let us return to our own affairs. Under the circumstances, your proposal appears to be a good one. How about writing in another name? A little forgery would make our hands stronger.” He rose, and taking the tailor into the window recess, again whispered to him.

During this conversation Paul’s cheek had grown paler and paler, for, occupied as he was, he could not fail to comprehend something of what was going on. During the breakfast Mascarin had partially disclosed many strange secrets, and since then he had been even more enlightened. It was but too evident to him that his protector was engaged in some dark and insidious plot, and Paul felt that he was standing over a mine which might explode at any moment. He now began to fancy that there was some mysterious link between the woman Schimmel, who was so carefully watched, and the Marquis de Croisenois, so haughty, and yet on such intimate terms with the proprietor of the registry office. Then there was the Countess de Mussidan, Flavia, the rich heiress, and Gaston de Gandelu, who was to be led into a crime the result of which would be penal servitude,—all jumbled and mixed up together in one strange phantasmagoria. Was he, Paul, to be a mere tool in such hands? Toward what a precipice was he being impelled! Mascarin and Van Klopen were not friends, as he had at first supposed, but confederates in villainy. Too late did he begin to see collusion between Mascarin and Tontaine, which had resulted in his being accused of theft during his absence. But the web had been woven too securely, and should he struggle to break through it, he might find himself exposed to even more terrible dangers. He felt horrified at his position, but with this there was

mingled no horror of the criminality of his associates, for the skilful hand of Mascarin had unwound and mastered all the bad materials of his nature. He was dazzled at the glorious future held out before him, and said to himself that a man like Mascarin, unfettered by law, either human or Divine, would be most likely to achieve his ends. "I should be in no danger," mused he to himself, "if I yield myself up to the impetuous stream which is already carrying me along, for Mascarin is practised swimmer enough to keep both my head and his own above water."

Little did Paul think that every fleeting expression in his countenance was caught up and treasured by the wily Mascarin; and it was intentionally that he had permitted Paul to listen to this compromising conversation. He had decided that very morning, that if Paul was to be a useful tool, he must be at once set face to face with the grim realities of the position.

"Now," said he, "for the really serious reason for my visit. How do we stand now with regard to the Viscountess Bois Arden?"

Van Klopen gave his shoulders a shrug as he answered, "She is all right. I have just sent her several most expensive costumes."

"How much does she owe you?"

"Say twenty-five thousand francs. She has owed us more than that before."

"Really," remarked Mascarin, "that woman has been grossly libelled; she is vain, frivolous, and fond of admiration, but nothing more. For a whole fortnight I have been prying into her life, but I can't hit upon anything in it to give us a pull over her. The debt may help us, however. Does her husband know that she has an account with us?"

"Of course he does not; he is most liberal to her, and if he inquired——"

"Then we are all right; we will send in the bill to him."

"But, my good sir," urged Van Klopen, "it was only last week that she paid us a heavy sum on account."

"The more reason to press her, for she must be hard up."

Van Klopen would have argued further, but an imperious sign from Mascarin reduced him to silence.

"Listen to me," said Mascarin, "and please do not interrupt me. Are you known to the domestics at the house of the Viscountess?"

"Not at all."

"Well, then, at three o'clock sharp, the day after to-morrow, call on her. Her footman will say that Madame has a visitor with her."

"I will say I will wait."

"Not at all. You must almost force your way in, and you will find the Viscountess talking to the Marquis de Croisenois. You know him, I suppose?"

"By sight—nothing more."

"That is sufficient. Take no notice of him; but at once present your bill, and violently insist upon immediate payment."

"What can you be thinking of? She will have me kicked out of doors."

"Quite likely; but you must threaten to take the bill to her husband. She will command you to leave the house, but you will sit down doggedly and declare that you will not move until you get the money."

"But that is most unbusinesslike behavior."

"I quite agree with you; but the Marquis de Croise-

nois will interfere; he will throw a pocketbook in your face, exclaiming, 'There is your money, you impudent scoundrel!'"

"Then I am to slink away?"

"Yes; but before doing so, you will give a receipt in this form—'Received from the Marquis de Croisenois, the sum of so many francs, in settlement of the account of the Viscountess Bois Arden.'"

"If I could only understand the game," muttered the puzzled Van Klopen.

"There is no necessity for that now; only act up to your instructions."

"I will obey, but remember that we shall not only lose her custom, but that of all her acquaintance."

Again the same angry sounds were heard in the corridor.

"It is scandalous," cried a voice. "I have been waiting an hour; my sword and armor. What, ho, lackeys; hither, I say. Van Klopen is engaged, is he? Hie to him and say I must see him at once."

The two accomplices exchanged looks, as though they recognized the shrill, squeaky voice.

"That is our man," whispered Mascarin, as the door was violently flung open, and Gaston de Gandelu burst in. He was dressed even more extravagantly than usual, and his face was inflamed with rage.

"Here am I," cried he; "and an awful rage I am in. Why, I have been waiting twenty minutes. I don't care a curse for your rules and regulations."

The tailor was furious at this intrusion; but as Mascarin was present, and he felt that he must respect his orders, he by a great effort controlled himself.

"Had I known, sir," said he sulkily, "that you were here——"

These few words mollified the gorgeous youth, who at once broke in.

"I accept your apologies," cried he; "the lackeys remove our arms, the joust is over. My horses have been standing all this time, and may have taken cold. Of course you have seen my horses. Splendid animals, are they not? Zora is in the other room. Quick, fetch her here."

With these words he rushed into the passage and shouted out, "Zora, Mademoiselle de Chantemille, my dear one, come hither."

The renowned tailor was exquisitely uncomfortable at so terrible a scene in his establishment. He cast an appealing glance at Mascarin, but the face of the agent seemed carved in marble. As to Paul, he was quite prepared to accept this young gentleman as a perfect type of the glass of fashion and the mould of form, and could not forbear pitying him in his heart. He went across the room to Mascarin.

"Is there no way," whispered he, "of saving this poor young fellow?"

Mascarin smiled one of those livid smiles which chilled the hearts of those who knew him thoroughly.

"In fifteen minutes," said he, "I will put the same question to you, leaving you to reply to it. Hush, this is the first real test that you have been subjected to; if you are not strong enough to go through it, then we had better say farewell. Be firm, for a thunderbolt is about to fall!"

The manner in which these apparently trivial words were spoken startled Paul, who, by a strong effort,

recovered his self-possession ; but, prepared as he was, it was with the utmost difficulty that he stifled the expression of rage and surprise that rose to his lips at the sight of the woman who entered the room. The Madame de Chantemille, the Zora of the youthful Gandelu, was there, attired in what to his eyes seemed a most dazzling costume. Rose seemed a little timid as Gandelu almost dragged her into the room.

"How silly you are!" said he. "What is there to be frightened at? He is only in a rage with his flunkies for having kept us waiting."

Zora sank negligently into an easy chair, and the gorgeously attired youth addressed the all-powerful Van Klopen.

"Well, have you invented a costume that will be worthy of Madame's charms?"

For a few moments Van Klopen appeared to be buried in profound meditation.

"Ah," said he, raising his hand with a grandiloquent gesture, "I have it; I can see it all in my mind's eye."

"What a man!" murmured Gaston in deep admiration.

"Listen," resumed the tailor, his eye flashing with the fire of genius. "First, a walking costume with a polonaise and a cape *à la pensionnaire*; bodice, sleeves, and underskirt of a brilliant chestnut——"

He might have continued in this strain for a long time, and Zora would not have heard a word, for she had caught sight of Paul, and in spite of all her audacity, she nearly fainted. She was so ill at ease, that young Gandelu at last perceived it; but not knowing the effect that the appearance of Paul would necessarily cause, and being also rather dull of comprehension he could not understand the reason for it.

"Hold hard, Van Klopen, hold hard! the joy has been too much for her, and I will lay you ten to one that she is going into hysterics."

Mascarin saw that Paul's temper might blaze forth at any moment, and so hastened to put an end to a scene which was as absurd as it was dangerous.

"Well, Van Klopen, I will say farewell," said he. "Good morning, madame; good morning, sir;" and taking Paul by the arm, he led him away by a private exit which did not necessitate their passing through the great reception-room.

It was time for him to do so, and not until they were in the street did the wily Mascarin breathe freely.

"Well, what do you say, now?" asked he.

Paul's vanity had been so deeply wounded, and the effort that he had made to restrain himself so powerful, that he could only reply by a gasp.

"He felt it more than I thought he would," said Mascarin to himself. "The fresh air will revive him."

Paul's legs bent under him, and he staggered so that Mascarin led him into a little *café* hard by, and ordered a glass of cognac, and in a short time Paul was himself once again.

"You are better now," observed Mascarin; and then, believing it would be best to finish his work, he added, "A quarter of an hour ago I promised that I would ask you to settle what our intentions were to be regarding M. de Gandelu."

"That is enough," broke in Paul, violently.

Mascarin put on his most benevolent smile.

"You see," remarked he, "how circumstances change ideas. Now you are getting quite reasonable."

"Yes, I am reasonable enough now; that is, that I

mean to be wealthy. You have no need to urge me on any more. I am willing to do whatever you desire, for I will never again endure degradation like that I have gone through to-day."

"You have let temper get the better of you," returned Mascarin, with a shrug of his shoulders.

"My anger may pass over, but my determination will remain as strong as ever."

"Do not decide without thinking the matter well over," answered the agent. "To-day you are your own master; but if you give yourself up to me, you must resign your dearly loved liberty."

"I am prepared for all."

Victory had inclined to the side of Mascarin, and he was proportionally jubilant.

"Good," said he. "Then Dr. Hortebise shall introduce you to Martin Rigal, the father of Mademoiselle Flavia, and one week after your marriage I will give you a duke's coronet to put on the panels of your carriage."

CHAPTER XII.

A STARTLING REVELATION.

WHEN Sabine de Mussidan told her lover that she would appeal to the generosity of M. de Breulh-Faverlay, she had not calculated on the necessity she would have for endurance, but had rather listened to the dictates of her heart; and this fact came the more strongly before her, when, in the solitude of her own chamber, she inquired of herself how she was to carry out her

promise. It seemed to her very terrible to have to lay bare the secrets of her soul to any one, but the more so to M. de Breulh-Faverlay, who had asked for her hand in marriage. She uttered no word on her way home, where she arrived just in time to take her place at the dinner table, and never was a more dismal company assembled for the evening meal. Her own miseries occupied Sabine, and her father and mother were suffering from their interviews with Mascarin and Dr. Hortebise. What did the liveried servants, who waited at table with such an affectation of interest, care for the sorrows of their master or mistress? They were well lodged and well fed, and nothing save their wages did they care for. By nine o'clock Sabine was in her own room trying to grow accustomed to the thoughts of an interview with M. de Breulh-Faverlay. She hardly closed her eyes all night, and felt worn out and dispirited by musing; but she never thought of evading the promise she had made to André, or of putting it off for a time. She had vowed to lose no time, and her lover was eagerly awaiting a letter from her, telling him of the result. In the perplexity in which she found herself, she could not confide in either father or mother, for she felt that a cloud hung over both their lives, though she knew not what it was. When she left the convent where she had been educated, and returned home, she felt that she was in the way, and that the day of her marriage would be one of liberation to her parents from their cares and responsibilities. All this preyed terribly upon her mind, and might have driven a less pure-minded girl to desperate measures. It seemed to her that it would be less painful to fly from her father's house than to have this interview with M. de Breulh-Faverlay. Luckily

for her, frail as she looked, she possessed an indomitable will, and this carried her through most of her difficulties.

For André's sake, as well as her own, she did not wish to violate any of the unwritten canons of society, but she longed for the hour to come when she could acknowledge her love openly to the world. At one moment she thought of writing a letter, but dismissed the thought as the height of folly. As the time passed Sabine began to reproach herself for her cowardice. All at once she heard the clang of the opening of the main gates. Peeping from her window, she saw a carriage drive up, and, to her inexpressible delight, M. de Breulh-Faverlay alighted from it.

"Heaven has heard my prayer, and sent him to me," murmured she.

"What do you intend to do, Mademoiselle?" asked the devoted Modeste; "will you speak to him now?"

"Yes, I will. My mother is still in her dressing-room, and no one will venture to disturb my father in the library. If I meet M. de Breulh-Faverlay in the hall and take him into the drawing-room, I shall have time for a quarter of an hour's talk, and that will be sufficient."

Calling up all her courage, she left her room on her errand. Had André seen the man selected by the Count de Mussidan for his daughter's husband, he might well have been proud of her preference for him. M. de Breulh-Faverlay was one of the best known men in Paris, and fortune had showered all her blessings on his head. He was not forty, of an extremely aristocratic appearance, highly educated, and witty; and, in addition, one of the largest landholders in the country.

He had always refused to enter public life. "For," he would say to those who spoke to him on the matter, "I have enough to spend my money on without making myself ridiculous." He was a perfect type of what a French gentleman should be—courteous, of unblemished reputation, and full of chivalrous devotion and generosity. He was, it is said, a great favorite with the fair sex; but, if report spoke truly, his discretion was as great as his success. He had not always been wealthy, and there was a mysterious romance in his life. When he was only twenty, he had sailed for South America, where he remained twelve years, and returned no richer than he was before; but shortly afterward his aged uncle, the Marquis de Faverlay, died, bequeathing his immense fortune to his nephew on the condition that he should add the name of Faverlay to that of De Breulh. De Breulh was passionately fond of horses; but he was really a lover of them, and not a mere turfite, and this was all that the world knew of the man who held in his hands the fates of Sabine de Mussidan and André. As soon as he caught sight of Sabine he made a profound inclination.

The girl came straight up to him.

"Sir," said she, in a voice broken by conflicting emotions, "may I request the pleasure of a short private conversation with you?"

"Mademoiselle," answered De Breulh, concealing his surprise beneath another bow, "I am at your disposal."

One of the footmen, at a word from Sabine, threw open the door of the drawing-room in which the Countess had thrown down her arms in her duel with Dr. Hortebise. Sabine did not ask her visitor to be seated, but, leaning her elbow on the marble mantel-

piece, she said, after a silence equally trying to both,—

“This strange conduct on my part, sir, will show you, more than any explanation, my sincerity, and the perfect confidence with which you have inspired me.”

She paused, but De Breulh made no reply, for he was perfectly mystified.

“You are,” she continued, “my parents’ intimate friend, and must have seen the discomforts of our domestic hearth, and that though both my father and mother are living, I am as desolate as the veriest orphan.”

Fearing that M. de Breulh might not understand her reason for speaking thus, she threw a shade of haughtiness into her manner as she resumed,—

“My reason, sir, for seeing you to-day is, to ask,—nay, to entreat you, to release me from my engagement to you, and to take the whole responsibility of the rupture on yourself.”

Man of the world as he was, M. de Breulh could not conceal his surprise, in which a certain amount of wounded self-love was mingled.

“Mademoiselle!” commenced he—

Sabine interrupted him.

“I am asking a great favor, and your granting it will spare me many hours of grief and sadness, and,” she added, as a faint smile flickered across her pallid features, “I am aware that I am asking but a trifling sacrifice on your part. You know scarcely anything of me, and therefore you can only feel indifference toward me.”

“You are mistaken,” replied the young man gravely; “and you do not judge me rightly. I am not a mere boy, and always consider a step before I take it; and

if I asked for your hand, it was because I had learned to appreciate the greatness both of your heart and intellect; and I believe that if you would condescend to accept me, we could be very happy together."

The girl seemed about to speak, but De Breulh continued,—

"It seems, however, that I have in some way displeased you,—I do not know how; but, believe me, it will be a source of sorrow to me for the rest of my life."

De Breulh's sincerity was so evident, that Mademoiselle de Mussidan was deeply affected.

"You have not displeased me in any way," answered she softly, "and are far too good for me. To have become your wife would have made me a proud and happy woman."

Here she stopped, almost choked by her tears, but M. de Breulh wished to fathom this mystery.

"Why then this resolve?" asked he.

"Because," replied Sabine faintly, as she hid her face,—“because I have given all my love to another.”

The young man uttered an exclamation so full of angry surprise, that Sabine turned upon him at once.

"Yes, sir," answered she, "to another; one utterly unknown to my parents, yet one who is inexpressibly dear to me. This ought not to irritate you, for I gave him my love long before I met you. Besides, you have every advantage over him. He is at the foot, while you are at the summit, of the social ladder. You are of aristocratic lineage,—he is one of the people. You have a noble name,—he does not even know his own. Your wealth is enormous,—while he works hard for his daily bread. He has all the fire of genius, but the cruel cares of life drag and fetter him to the earth.

He carries on a workman's trade to supply funds to study his beloved art."

Incautiously, Sabine had chosen the very means to wound this noble gentleman most cruelly, for her whole beauty blazed out as, inflamed by her passion, she spoke so eloquently of André and drew such a parallel between the two young men.

"Now, sir," said she, "do you comprehend me? I know the terrible social abyss which divides me from the man I love, and the future may hold in store some terrible punishment for my fidelity to him, but no one shall ever hear a word of complaint from my lips, for——" she hesitated, and then uttered these simple words—"for I love him."

M. de Breulh listened with an outwardly impassible face, but the venomous tooth of jealousy was gnawing at his heart. He had not told Sabine the entire truth, for he had studied her for a long time, and his love had grown firm and strong. Without an unkind thought the girl had shattered the edifice which he had built up with such care and pain. He would have given his name, rank, and title to have been in this unknown lover's place, who, though he worked for his bread, and had no grand ancestral name, was yet so fondly loved. Many a man in his position would have shrugged his shoulders and coldly sneered at the words, "I love him," but he did not, for his nature was sufficiently noble to sympathize with hers. He admired her courage and frankness, which, disdaining all subterfuges, went straight and unhesitatingly to the point she desired to reach. She might be imprudent and reckless, but in his eyes these seemed hardly to be faults, for it is seldom that convent-bred young ladies err in this way.

"But this man," said he, after a long pause,—“how do you manage ever to see him?”

"I meet him out walking," replied she, "and I sometimes go to his studio."

"To his studio?"

"Yes, I have sat to him several times for my portrait; but I have never done anything that I need blush to own. You know all now, sir," continued Sabine; "and it has been very hard for a young girl like me to say all this to you. It is a thing that ought to be confided to my mother."

Only those who have heard a woman that they are ardently attached to say, "I do not love you," can picture M. de Breulh's frame of mind. Had any one else than Sabine made this communication he would not have withdrawn, but would have contested the prize with his more fortunate rival. But now that Mademoiselle de Mussidan had, as it were, thrown herself upon his mercy, he could not bring himself to take advantage of her confidence.

"It shall be as you desire," said he, with a faint tinge of bitterness in his tone. "To-night I will write to your father, and withdraw my demand for your hand. It is the first time that I have ever gone back from my word; and I am sure that your father will be highly indignant."

Sabine's strength and firmness had now entirely deserted her. "From the depth of my soul, sir," said she, "I thank you; for by this act of generosity I shall avoid a contest that I dreaded."

"Unfortunately," broke in De Breulh, "you do not see how useless to you will be the sacrifice that you exact from me. Listen! you have not appeared much in society; and when you did, it was in the character

of my betrothed; as soon as I withdraw hosts of aspirants for your hand will spring up."

Sabine heaved a deep sigh, for André had foreseen the same result.

"Then," continued De Breulh, "your situation will become even a more trying one; for if your noble qualities are not enough to excite admiration in the bosoms of the other sex, your immense wealth will arouse the cupidity of the fortune-hunters."

When De Breulh referred to fortune-hunters, was this a side blow at André? With this thought rushing through her brain, she gazed upon him eagerly, but read no meaning in his eyes.

"Yes," answered she dreamily, "it is true that I am very wealthy."

"And what will be your reply to the next suitor, and to the one after that?" asked De Breulh.

"I know not; but I shall find some loophole of escape when the time comes; for if I act in obedience to the dictates of my heart and conscience, I cannot do wrong, for Heaven will come to my aid."

This phrase sounded like a dismissal; but De Breulh, man of the world as he was, did not accept it.

"May I permit myself to offer you a word of advice?"

"Do so, sir."

"Very well, then; why not permit matters to remain as they now are? So long as our rupture is not public property, so long will you be left in peace. It would be the simplest thing in the world to postpone all decisive steps for a twelvemonth, and I would withdraw as soon as you notified me that it was time."

Sabine put every confidence in this proposal, believing that everything was in good faith. "But," said

she, "such a subterfuge would be unworthy of us all."

M. de Breulh did not urge this point; a feeling of deep sympathy had succeeded to his wounded pride; and, with all the chivalrous instinct of his race, he determined to do his best to assist these lovers.

"Might I be permitted," asked he, "now that you have placed so much confidence in me, to make the acquaintance of the man whom you have honored with your love?"

Sabine colored deeply. "I have no reason to conceal anything from you: his name is André, he is a painter, and lives in the Rue de la Tour d'Auvergne."

De Breulh made a mental note of the name, and continued,—

"Do not think that I ask this question from mere idle curiosity; my only desire is to aid you. I should be glad to be a something in your life. I have influential friends and connections——"

Sabine was deeply wounded. Did this man propose patronizing André, and thus place his position and wealth in contrast with that of the obscure painter? In his eagerness De Breulh had made a false move.

"I thank you," answered she coldly; "but André is very proud, and any offer of assistance would wound him deeply. Forgive my scruples, which are perhaps exaggerated and absurd. All he has of his own are his self-respect and his natural pride."

As she spoke, Sabine rang the bell, to show her visitor that the conversation was at an end.

"Have you informed my mother of M. de Breulh-Faverlay's arrival?" asked she, as the footman appeared at the door.

"I have not, mademoiselle; for both the Count and

Countess gave the strictest order that they were not to be disturbed on any pretext whatsoever."

"Why did you not tell me that before?" demanded M. de Breulh; and, without waiting for any explanation, he bowed gravely to Sabine, and quitted the room, after apologizing for his involuntary intrusion, and by his manner permitted all the domestics to see that he was much put out.

"Ah!" sighed Sabine, "that man is worthy of some good and true woman's affection."

As she was about to leave the room, she heard some one insisting upon seeing the Count de Mussidan. Not being desirous of meeting strangers, she remained where she was. The servant persisted in saying that his master could receive no one.

"What do I care for your orders?" cried the visitor; "your master would never refuse to see his friend the Baron de Clinchain;" and, thrusting the lackey on one side, he entered the drawing-room; and his agitation was so great that he hardly noticed the presence of the young girl.

M. de Clinchain was a thoroughly commonplace looking personage in face, figure, and dress, neither tall nor short, handsome nor ill-looking. The only noticeable point in his attire was that he wore a coral hand on his watch chain; for the Baron was a firm believer in the evil eye. When a young man, he was most methodical in his habits; and, as he grew older, this became an absolute mania with him. When he was twenty, he recorded in his diary the pulsations of his heart, and at forty he added remarks regarding his digestion and general health.

"What a fearful blow!" murmured he; "and to fall at such a moment when I had indulged in a more

heartly dinner than usual. I shall feel it for the next six months, even if it does not kill me outright."

Just then M. de Mussidan entered the room, and the excited man ran up to him, exclaiming,—

"For Heaven's sake, Octave, save us both, by cancelling your daughter's engagement with M. de——"

The Count laid his hand upon his friend's lips.

"Are you mad?" said he; "my daughter is here."

In obedience to a warning gesture, Sabine left the room; but she had heard enough to fill her heart with agitation and terror. What engagement was to be cancelled, and how could such a rupture affect her father or his friend? That there was some mystery, was proved by the question with which the Count had prevented his friend from saying any more. She was sure that it was the name of M. de Breulh-Faverlay with which the Baron was about to close his sentence, and felt that the destiny of her life was to be decided in the conversation about to take place between her father and his visitor. It was deep anxiety that she felt, not mere curiosity; and while these thoughts passed through her brain, she remembered that she could hear all from the card-room, the doorway of which was only separated from the drawing-room by a curtain. With a soft, gliding step she gained her hiding-place and listened intently. The Baron was still pouring out his lamentations.

"What a fearful day this has been!" groaned the unhappy man. "I ate much too heavy a breakfast, I have been terribly excited, and came here a great deal too fast. A fit of passion caused by a servant's insolence, joy at seeing you, then a sudden interruption to what I was going to say, are a great deal more than sufficient to cause a serious illness at my age."

But the Count, who was usually most considerate of his friend's foibles, was not in a humor to listen to him.

"Come, let us talk sense," said he sharply; "tell me what has occurred."

"Occurred!" groaned De Clinchain; "oh, nothing, except that the whole truth is known regarding what took place in the little wood so many years back. I had an anonymous letter this morning, threatening me with all sorts of terrible consequences if I do not hinder you from marrying your daughter to De Breulh. The rogues say that they can prove everything."

"Have you the letter with you?"

De Clinchain drew the missive from his pocket. It was to the full as threatening as he had said; but M. de Mussidan knew all its contents beforehand.

"Have you examined your diary, and are the three leaves really missing?"

"They are."

"How were they stolen? Are you sure of your servants?"

"Certainly; my valet has been sixteen years in my service. You know Lorin? The volumes of my diary are always locked up in the *escritoire*, the key of which never leaves me. And none of the other servants ever enter my room."

"Some one must have done so, however."

Clinchain struck his forehead, as though an idea had suddenly flashed across his brain.

"I can partly guess," said he. "Some time ago Lorin went for a holiday, and got drunk with some fellows he picked up in the train. Drink brought on fighting, and he was so knocked about that he was laid

up for some weeks. He had a severe knife wound in the shoulder, and was much bruised."

"Who took his place?"

"A young fellow that my groom got at a servants' registry office."

M. de Mussidan felt that he was on the right track, for he remembered that the man who had called on him had had the audacity to leave a card, on which was marked:

"B. MASCARIN,
Servants' Registry Office,
Rue Montorgueil."

"Do you know where this place is?" asked he.

"Certainly; in the Rue du Dauphin nearly opposite to my house."

The Count swore a deep oath. "The rogues are very wily; but, my dear fellow if you are ready, we will defy the storm together."

De Clinchain felt a cold tremor pass through his whole frame at this proposal.

"Not I," said he; "do not try and persuade me. If you have come to this decision, let me know at once, and I will go home and finish it all with a pistol bullet."

He was just the sort of nervous, timorous man to do exactly as he said, and would sooner have killed himself than endure all kinds of annoyance, which might impair his digestion.

"Very well," answered his friend, with sullen resignation, "then I will give in."

De Clinchain heaved a deep sigh of relief, for he, not knowing what had passed before, had expected to

have had a much more difficult task in persuading his friend.

"You are acting like a reasonable man for once in your life," said he.

"You think so, because I give ear to your timorous advice. A thousand curses on that idiotic habit of yours of putting on paper not only your own secrets, but those of others."

But at this remark Clinchain mounted his hobby.

"Do not talk like that," said he. "Had you not committed the act, it would not have appeared in my diary."

Chilled to the very bone, and quivering like an aspen leaf, Sabine had listened to every word. The reality was even more dreadful than she had dreamed of. There was a hidden sorrow, a crime in her father's past life.

Again the Count spoke. "There is no use in re-creation. We cannot wipe out the past, and must, therefore, submit. I promise you, on my honor, that this day I will write to De Breulh, and tell him that this marriage must be given up."

These words threw the balm of peace and safety into De Clinchain's soul, but the excess of joy was too much for him, and murmuring, "Too much breakfast, and the shock of too violent an emotion," he sank back, fainting, on a couch.

The Count de Mussidan was terrified; he pulled the bell furiously, and the domestics rushed in, followed by the Countess. Restoratives were applied, and in ten minutes the Baron opened one eye, and raised himself on his elbow.

"I am better now," said he, with a faint smile. "It is weakness and dizziness. I know what I ought to

take—two spoonfuls of *eau des carmes* in a glass of sugar and water, with perfect repose of both mind and body. Fortunately, my carriage is here. Pray, be prudent, Mussidan.” And, leaning upon the arm of one of the lackeys, he staggered feebly out, leaving the Count and Countess alone, and Sabine still listening from her post of espial in the card-room.

CHAPTER XIII.

HUSBAND AND WIFE.

EVER since Mascarin’s visit, the Count de Mussidan had been in a deplorable state of mind. Forgetting the injury to his foot, he passed the night pacing up and down the library, cudgelling his brains for some means of breaking the meshes of the net in which he was entangled. He knew the necessity for immediate action, for he felt sure that this demand would only be the forerunner of numerous others of a similar character. He thought over and dismissed many schemes. Sometimes he had almost decided to go to the police authorities and make a clean breast; then the idea of placing the affair in the hands of a private detective occurred to him; but the more he deliberated, the more he realized the strength of the cord that bound him, and the scandal which exposure would cause. This long course of thought had in some measure softened the bitterness of his wrath, and he was able to receive his old friend M. de Clinchain with some degree of calmness. He was not at all surprised at the receipt of the anonymous letter,—indeed, he had expected that a blow

would be struck in that direction. Still immersed in thought, M. de Mussidan hardly took heed of his wife's presence, and he still paced the room, uttering a string of broken phrases. This excited the attention of the Countess, for her own threatened position caused her to be on the alert.

"What is annoying you, Octave?" asked she. "Surely, not M. de Clinchain's attack of indigestion?"

For many years the Count had been accustomed to that taunting and sarcastic voice, but this feeble joke at such a moment was more than he could endure.

"Don't address me in that manner," said he angrily.

"What is the matter—are you not well?"

"Madame!"

"Will you have the kindness to tell me what has taken place?"

The color suffused the Count's face, and his rage burst forth the more furiously from his having had to suppress it, so long; and coming to a halt before the chair in which the Countess was lounging, his eyes blazing with hate and anger, he exclaimed,—

"All I wish to tell you is, that De Breulh-Faverlay shall not marry our daughter."

Madame de Mussidan was secretly delighted at this reply, for it showed her that half the task required of her by Dr. Hortebise had been accomplished without her interference; but in order to act cautiously, she began at once to object, for a woman's way is always at first to oppose what she most desires.

"You are laughing at me, Count!" said she. "Where can we hope to find so good a match again?"

"You need not be afraid," returned the Count, with a sneer; "you shall have another son-in-law."

These words sent a pang through the heart of the Countess. Was it an allusion to the past? or had the phrase dropped from her husband's lips accidentally? or had he any suspicion of the influence that had been brought to bear upon her? She, however, had plenty of courage, and would rather meet misfortune face to face than await its coming in dread.

"Of what other son-in-law are you speaking?" asked she negligently. "Has any other suitor presented himself? May I ask his name? Do you intend to settle my child's future without consulting me?"

"I do, madame."

A contemptuous smile crossed the face of the Countess, which goaded the Count to fury.

"Am I not the master here?" exclaimed he in accents of intense rage. "Am I not driven to the exercise of my power by the menaces of a pack of villains who have wormed out the hidden secrets which have overshadowed my life from my youth upward? They can, if they desire, drag my name through the mire of infamy."

Madame de Mussidan bounded to her feet, asking herself whether her husband's intellect had not given way.

"You commit a crime!" gasped she.

"I, madame, I, myself! Does that surprise you? Have you never had any suspicion? Perhaps you have not forgotten a fatal accident which took place out shooting, and darkened the earlier years of our married life? Well, the thing was not an accident, but a deliberate murder committed by me. Yes, I murdered him, and this fact is known, and can be proved."

The Countess grew deadly pale, and extended her

hand, as though to guard herself from some coming danger.

"You are horrified, are you?" continued the Count, with a sneer. "Perhaps I inspire you with horror; but do not fear; the blood is no longer on my hands, but it is here, and is choking me." And as he spoke he pressed his fingers upon his heart. "For twenty-three years I have endured this hideous recollection, and even now when I wake in the night I am bathed in cold sweat, for I fancy I can hear the last gasps of the unhappy man."

"This is horrible, too horrible!" murmured Madame de Mussidan faintly.

"Ah, but you do not know why I killed him,—it was because the dead man had dared to tell me that the wife that I adored with all the passion of my soul was unfaithful to me."

Words of eager denial rose to the lips of the Countess; but her husband went on coldly, "And it was all true, for I heard all later on.

"Poor Montlouis! *he* was really loved. There was a little shop-girl, who toiled hard for daily bread, but she was a thousand times more honorable than the haughty woman of noble race that I had just married."

"Have mercy, Octave."

"Yes, and she fell a victim to her love for Montlouis. Had he lived, he would have made her his wife. After his death, she could no longer conceal her fault. In small towns the people are without mercy; and when she left the hospital with her baby at her breast, the women pelted her with mud. But for me," continued the Count, "she would have died of hunger. Poor girl! I did not allow her much, but with it she managed to give her son a decent education. He has now

grown up, and whatever happens, his future is safe."

Had M. de Mussidan and his wife been less deeply engaged in this hideous recital, they would have heard the stifled sobs that came from the adjoining room.

The Count felt a certain kind of savage pleasure in venting the rage, that had for years been suppressed, upon the shrinking woman before him. "Would it not be a cruel injustice, madame, to draw a comparison between you and this unhappy girl? Have you always been deaf to the whisperings of conscience? and have you never thought of the future punishment which most certainly awaits you? for you have failed in the duties of daughter, wife, and mother."

Generally the Countess cared little for her husband's reproaches, well deserved as they might be, but to-day she quailed before him.

"With your entrance into my life," continued the Count, "came shame and misfortune. When people saw you so gay and careless under the oak-trees of your ancestral home, who could have suspected that your heart contained a dark secret? When my only wish was to win you for my wife, how did I know that you were weaving a hideous conspiracy against me? Even when so young, you were a monster of dissimulation and hypocrisy. Guilt never overshadowed your brow, nor did falsehood dim the frankness of your eyes. On the day of our marriage I mentally reproached myself for my unworthiness. Wretched fool that I was, I was happy beyond all power of expression, when you, madame, completed the measure of your guilt by adding infidelity to it."

"It is false," murmured the Countess. "You have been deceived."

M. de Mussidan laughed a grim and terrible laugh.

"Not so," answered he; "I have every proof. This seems strange to you, does it? You have always looked upon me as one of those foolish husbands that may be duped without suspicion on their parts. You thought that you had placed a veil over my eyes, but I could see through it when you little suspected that I could do so. Why did I not tell you this before? Because I had not ceased to love you, and this fatal love was stronger than all honor, pride, and even self-respect." He poured out this tirade with inconceivable rapidity, and the Countess listened to it in awe-struck silence. "I kept silence," continued the Count, "because I knew that on the day I uttered the truth you would be entirely lost to me. I might have killed you; I had every right to do so, but I could not live apart from you. You will never know how near the shadow of death has been to you. When I have kissed you, I have fancied that your lips were soiled with the kisses of others, and I could hardly keep my hands from clutching your ivory neck until life was extinct, and failed utterly to decide whether I loved you or hated you the most."

"Have mercy, Octave! have mercy!" pleaded the unhappy woman.

"You are surprised, I can see," answered he, with a dark smile; "yet I could give you further food for wonder if I pleased, but I have said enough now."

A tremor passed over the frame of the Countess. Was her husband acquainted with the existence of the letters? All hinged upon this. He could not have read them, or he would have spoken in very different terms, had he known the mystery contained in them.

"Let me speak," began she.

"Not a word," replied her husband.

"On my honor——"

"All is ended; but I must not forget to tell you of one of my youthful follies. You may laugh at it, but that signifies nothing. I actually believed that I could gain your affection. I said to myself that one day you would be moved by my deep passion for you. I was a fool. As if love or affection could ever penetrate the icy barriers that guarded your heart."

"You have no pity," wailed she.

He gazed upon her with eyes in which the pent-up anger of twenty years blazed and consumed slowly. "And you, what are you? I drained to the bottom the poisoned cup held out to a deceived husband by an unfaithful wife. Each day widened the breach between us, until at last we sank into this miserable existence which is wearing out my life. I kept no watch on you; I was not made for a jailer. What I wanted was your soul and heart. To imprison the body was easy, but your soul would still have been free to wander in imagination to the meeting-place where your lover expected you. I know not how I had the courage to remain by your side. It was not to save an honor that had already gone, but merely to keep up appearances; for as long as we were nominally together the tongue of scandal was forced to remain silent."

Again the unhappy woman attempted to protest her innocence, and again the Count paid no heed to her. "I wished too," resumed he, "to save some portion of our property, for your insatiable extravagance swallowed up all like a bottomless abyss. At last your trades-people, believing me to be ruined, refused you credit, and this saved me. I had my daughter to think of, and have gathered together a rich dowry for her,

and yet——” he hesitated, and ceased speaking for a moment.

“And yet,” repeated Madame de Mussidan.

“I have never kissed her,” he burst forth with a fresh and terrible explosion of wrath, “without feeling a hideous doubt as to whether she was really my child.”

This was more than the Countess could endure.

“Enough,” she cried, “enough! I have been guilty, Octave; but not so guilty as you imagine.”

“Why do you venture to defend yourself?”

“Because it is my duty to guard Sabine.”

“You should have thought of this earlier,” answered the Count with a sneer. “You should have moulded her mind—have taught her what was noble and good, and have perused the unsullied pages of the book of her young heart.”

In the deepest agitation the Countess answered,—

“Ah, Octave, why did you not speak of this sooner, if you knew all; but I will now tell you everything.”

By an inconceivable error of judgment the Count corrected her speech. “Spare us both,” said he. “If I have broken through the silence that I have maintained for many a year, it is because I know that no word you could utter would touch my heart.”

Feeling that all hope had fled, Madame de Mussidan fell backward upon the couch, while Sabine, unable to listen to any more terrible revelations, had crept into her own chamber. The Count was about to leave the drawing-room, when a servant entered, bearing a letter on a silver salver. De Mussidan tore it open; it was from M. de Breulh-Faverlay, asking to be released from his engagement to Sabine de Mussidan. This last stroke was almost too much for the Count’s nerves, for in this act he saw the hand of the man who had

come to him with such deadly threats, and terror filled his soul as he thought of the far-stretching arm of him whose bondsman he found himself to be; but before he could collect his thoughts, his daughter's maid went into the room crying with all her might, "Help, help; my poor mistress is dying!"

CHAPTER XIV.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

VAN KLOPEN, the man-milliner, knew Paris and its people thoroughly like all tradesmen who are in the habit of giving large credit. He knew all about the business of his customers, and never forgot an item of information when he received one. Thus, when Mascarin spoke to him about the father of the lovely Flavia, whose charms had set the susceptible heart of Paul Violaine in a blaze, the arbiter of fashion had replied,—

"Martin Rigal; yes, I know him; he is a banker." And a banker, indeed, Martin Rigal was, dwelling in a magnificent house in the Rue Montmartre. The bank was on the ground floor, while his private rooms were in the story above. Though he did not do business in a very large way, yet he was a most respectable man, and his connection was chiefly with the smaller tradespeople, who seem to live a strange kind of hand-to-mouth existence, and who might be happy were it not for the constant reappearance of that grim phantom—bills to be met. Nearly all these persons were in the banker's hands entirely. Martin Rigal used his power despotically and permitted no arguments, and speedily

quelled rebellion on the part of any new customer who ventured to object to his arbitrary rules. In the morning the banker was never to be seen, being engaged in his private office, and not a clerk would venture to knock at his door. Even had one done so, no reply would have been returned; for the experiment had been tried, and it was believed that nothing short of an alarm of fire would have brought him out.

The banker was a big man, quite bald, his face was clean shaved, and his little gray eyes twinkled incessantly. His manner was charmingly courteous, and he said the most cruel things in the most honied accents, and invariably escorted to the door the man whom he would sell up the next day. In his dress he affected a fashionable style, much used by the modern school of Shylocks. When not in business, he was a pleasant, and, as some say, a witty companion. He was not looked on as an ascetic, and did not despise those little pleasures which enable us to sustain life's tortuous journey. He liked a good dinner, and had always a smile ready for a young and attractive face. He was a widower, and all his love was concentrated on his daughter. He did not keep a very extravagant establishment, but the report in the neighborhood was that Mademoiselle Flavia, the daughter of the eminent banker, would one day come into millions. The banker always did his business on foot, for the sake of his health, as he said; but Flavia had a sweet little Victoria, drawn by two thoroughbred horses, to drive in the Bois de Boulogne, under the protection of an old woman, half companion and half servant, who was driven half mad by her charge's caprices. As yet her father has never denied her anything. He worked harder than all his clerks put together, for, after having

spent the morning in his counting house over his papers, he received all business clients.

On the day after Flavia and Paul Violaine had met at Van Klopen's, M. Martin Rigal was, at about half-past five, closeted with one of his female clients. She was young, very pretty, and dressed with simple elegance, but the expression of her face was profoundly melancholy. Her eyes were overflowing with tears, which she made vain efforts to restrain.

"If you refuse to renew our bill, sir, we are ruined," said she. "I could meet it in January. I have sold all my trinkets, and we are existing on credit."

"Poor little thing!" interrupted the banker.

Her hopes grew under these words of pity.

"And yet," continued she, "business has never been so brisk. New customers are constantly coming in, and though our profits are small, the returns are rapid."

As Martin Rigal heard her exposition of the state of affairs, he nodded gravely.

"That is all very well," said he at last, "but this does not make the security you offer me of any more value. I have more confidence in you."

"But remember, sir, that we have thirty thousand francs' worth of stock."

"That is not what I was alluding to," and the banker accompanied these words with so meaning a look, that the poor woman blushed scarlet and almost lost her nerve. "Your stock," said he, "is of no more value in my eyes than the bill you offer me. Suppose, for instance, you were to become bankrupt, the landlord might come down upon everything, for he has great power."

He broke off abruptly, for Flavia's maid, as a privileged person, entered the room without knocking.

"Sir," said she, "my mistress wishes to see you at once."

The banker got up directly. "I am coming," said he; then, taking the hand of his client, he led her to the door, repeating: "Do not worry yourself; all the difficulties shall be got through. Come again, and we will talk them over;" and before she could thank him he was half way to his daughter's apartment. Flavia had summoned her father to show him a new costume which had just been sent home by Van Klopen, and which pleased her greatly. Flavia's costume was a masterpiece of fashionable bad taste, which makes women look all alike and destroys all appearance of individuality. It was a mass of frills, furbelows, fringes, and flutings of rare hue and form, making a series of wonderful contrasts. Standing in the middle of the room, with every available candle alight, for the day was fading away, she was so dainty and pretty that even the *bizarre* dress of Van Klopen's was unable to spoil her appearance. As she turned round, she caught sight of her father in a mirror, panting with the haste he had made in running upstairs.

"What a time you have been!" said she pettishly.

"I was with a client," returned he apologetically.

"You ought to have got rid of him at once. But never mind that; look at me and tell me plainly what you think of me."

She had no need to put the question, for the most intense admiration beamed in his face.

"Exquisite, delicious, heavenly!" answered he.

Flavia, accustomed as she was to her father's compliments, was highly delighted. "Then you think that he will like me?" asked she.

She alluded to Paul Violaine, and the banker heaved a deep sigh as he replied,—

“Is it possible that any human being exists that you cannot please?”

“Ah!” mused she, “if it were any one but he, I should have no doubts or misgivings.”

Martin Rigal took a seat near the fire, and, drawing his daughter to him, pressed a fond kiss upon her brow, while she with the grace and activity of a cat, nestled upon his knee. “Suppose, after all, that he should not like me,” murmured she; “I should die of grief.”

The banker turned away his face to hide the gloom that overspread it. “Do you love him, then, even now?” asked he.

She paused for a moment, and he added, “More than you do me?”

Flavia pressed her father’s hand between both her palms and answered with a musical laugh, “How silly you are, papa! Why, of course I love you. Are you not my father? I love you too because you are kind and do all I wish, and because you are always telling me that you love me. Because you are like the cupids in the fairy stories—dear old people who give their children all their heart’s desire; I love you for my carriage, my horses, and my lovely dresses; for my purse filled with gold, for my beautiful jewelry, and for all the lovely presents you make me.”

Every word she spoke betrayed the utter selfishness of her soul, and yet her father listened with a fixed smile of delight on his face.

“And why do you love him?” asked he.

“Because—because,” stammered the girl, “first, because he is himself; and then,—well, I can’t say, but I *do* love him.”

Her accents betrayed such depth of passion that the father uttered a groan of anguish.

Flavia caught the expression of his features, and burst into a fit of laughter.

"I really believe that you are jealous," said she, as if she were speaking to a spoiled child. "That is very naughty of you; you ought to be ashamed of yourself. I tell you that the first time I set eyes upon him at Van Klopen's, I felt a thrill of love pierce through my heart, such love as I never felt for a human being before. Since then, I have known no rest. I cannot sleep, and instead of blood, liquid fire seems to come through my veins."

Martin Rigal raised his eyes to the ceiling in mute surprise at this outburst of feeling.

"You do not understand me," went on Flavia. "You are the best of fathers, but, after all, you are but a man. Had I a mother, she would comprehend me better."

"What could your mother have done for you more than I? Have I neglected anything for your happiness?" asked the banker, with a sigh.

"Perhaps nothing; for there are times when I hardly understand my own feelings."

In gloomy silence the banker listened to the narrative of his daughter's state of mind; then he said,—

"All shall be as you desire, and the man you love shall be your husband."

The girl was almost beside herself with joy, and, throwing her arms around his neck, pressed kiss upon kiss on his cheeks and forehead.

"Darling," said she, "I love you for this more than for anything that you have given me in my life."

The banker sighed again; and Flavia, shaking her

pretty little fist at him, exclaimed, "What is the meaning of that sigh, sir? Do you by any chance regret your promise? But never mind that. How do you mean to bring him here without causing any suspicion?"

A benevolent smile passed over her father's face, as he answered,—

"That, my pet, is my secret."

"Very well, keep it; I do not care what means you use, as long as I see him soon, very soon,—to-night perhaps, in an hour, or even in a few minutes. You say Dr. Hortebise will bring him here; he will sit at our table. I can look at him without trouble, I shall hear his voice——"

"Silly little puss!" broke in the banker; "or, rather, I should say, unhappy child."

"Silly, perhaps; but why should you say unhappy?"

"You love him too fondly, and he will take advantage of your feeling for him."

"Never; I do not believe it," answered the girl.

"I hope to heaven, darling, that my fears may never be realized. But he is not the sort of husband that I intended for you; he is a composer."

"And is that anything against him!" exclaimed Flavia in angry tones; "one would think from your sneers that this was a crime. Not only is he a composer, but he is a genius. I can read that in his face. He may be poor, but I am rich enough for both, and he will owe all to me; so much the better, for then he will not be compelled to give lessons for his livelihood, and he will have leisure to compose an opera more beautiful than any that Gounod has ever written, and I shall share all his glory. Why, perhaps, he may even sing his own songs to me alone."

Her father noticed her state of feverish excitement and gazed upon her sadly. Flavia's mother had been removed from this world at the early age of twenty-four by that insidious malady, consumption, which defies modern medical science, and in a brief space changes a beautiful girl into a livid corpse, and the father viewed her excited manner, flushed cheeks, and sparkling eyes with tears and dismay.

"By heavens!" cried he, bursting into a sudden fit of passion; "if ever he ill treats you, he is a dead man."

The girl was startled at the sudden ferocity of his manner.

"What have I done to make you angry?" asked she; "and why do you have such evil thoughts of him?"

"I tremble for you, in whom my whole soul is wrapped up," answered the banker. "This man has robbed me of my child's heart, and you will be happier with him than you are with your poor old father. I tremble because of your inexperience and his weakness, which may prove a source of trouble to you."

"If he is weak, all the better; my will can guide him."

"You are wrong," replied her father, "as many other women have been before you. You believe that weak and vacillating dispositions are easily controlled, but I tell you that this is an error. Only determined characters can be influenced, and it is on substantial foundations that we find support."

Flavia made no reply, and her father drew her closer to him.

"Listen to me, my child," said he. "You will never have a better friend than I am. You know that I would shed every drop of blood in my veins for you."

He is coming, so search your heart to discover if this is not some mere passing fancy."

"Father!" cried she.

"Remember that your happiness is in your own hands now, so be careful and conceal your feelings, and do not let him discover how deep your love is for him. Men's minds are so formed that while they blame a woman for duplicity, they complain far more if she acts openly and allows her feelings to be seen——"

He paused, for the door-bell rang. Flavia's heart gave a bound of intense joy.

"He has come!" gasped she, and, with a strong effort to retain her composure, she added, "I will obey you, my dear father; I will not come here again until I have entirely regained my composure. Do not fear, and I will show you that your daughter can act a part as well as any other woman."

She fled from the room as the door opened, but it was not Paul who made his appearance, but some other guests—a stout manufacturer and his wife, the latter gorgeously dressed, but with scarcely a word to say for herself. For this evening the banker had issued invitations to twenty of his friends, and among this number Paul would scarcely be noticed. He in due time made his appearance with Dr. Hortebise, who had volunteered to introduce him into good society. Paul felt ill at ease; he had just come from the hands of a fashionable tailor, who, thanks to Mascarin's influence, had in forty-eight hours prepared an evening suit of such superior cut that the young man hardly knew himself in it. Paul had suffered a good deal from conflicting emotions after the visit to Van Klopen's, and more than once regretted the adhesion that he had given to

Mascarin's scheme; but a visit the next day from Hortebise, and the knowledge that the fashionable physician was one of the confederates, had reconciled him to the position he had promised to assume.

He was moreover struck with Flavia's charms, and dazzled with the accounts of her vast prospective fortune. To him, Hortebise, gay, rich, and careless, seemed the incarnation of happiness, and contributed greatly to stifle the voice of Paul's conscience. He would, however, perhaps have hesitated had he known what the locket contained that dangled so ostentatiously from the doctor's chain.

Before they reached the banker's door, driven in the doctor's elegant brougham, a similar one to which Paul mentally declared he would have, as soon as circumstances would permit, the young man's mentor spoke.

"Let me say a few words to you. You have before you a chance which is seldom afforded to any young man, whatever his rank and social standing. Mind that you profit by it."

"You may be sure I will," said Paul, with a smile of self-complacency.

"Good, dear boy; but let me fortify your courage with a little of my experience. Do you know what an heiress really is?"

"Well, really——"

"Permit me to continue. An heiress and more so if she is an only child, is generally a very disagreeable person, headstrong, capricious, and puffed up with her own importance. She is utterly spoiled by the flattery to which she has been accustomed from her earliest years, and thinks that all the world is made to bend before her."

"Ah!" answered Paul, a little discomfited. "I hope

it is not Mademoiselle Flavia's portrait that you have been sketching?"

"Not exactly," answered the doctor, with a laugh. "But I must warn you that even she has certain whims and fancies. For instance, I am quite sure that she would give a suitor every encouragement, and then repulse him without rhyme or reason."

Paul, who up to this time had only seen the bright side of affairs, was a good deal disconcerted.

"But why should you introduce me to her then?"

"In order that you may win her. Have you not everything to insure success? She will most likely receive you with the utmost cordiality; but beware of being too sanguine. Even if she makes desperate love to you, I say, take care; it may be only a trap; for, between ourselves, a girl who has a million stitched to her petticoats is to be excused if she endeavors to find out whether the suitor is after her or her money."

Just then the brougham stopped, and Dr. Hortebise and his young friend entered the house in the Rue Montmartre, where they were cordially greeted by the banker.

Paul glanced round, but there were no signs of Flavia, nor did she make her appearance until five minutes before the dinner hour, when the guests flocked round her. She had subdued all her emotions, and not a quiver of the eyelids disclosed the excitement under which she was laboring. Her eye rested on Paul, and he bowed ceremoniously. The banker was delighted, for he had not believed much in her self-command. But Flavia had taken his advice to heart, and when seated at table abstained from casting a glance in Paul's direction. When dinner was over and many of the guests had sat down to whist, Flavia ventured to approach

Paul, and in a low voice, which shook a little in spite of her efforts, said,—

“Will you not play me one of your own compositions, M. Violaine?”

Paul was but a medium performer, but Flavia seemed in the seventh heaven, while her father and Dr. Hortebise, who had taken their seats not far away, watched the young couple with much anxiety.

“How she adores him!” whispered the banker. “And yet I cannot judge of the effect that she has produced upon him.

“Surely Mascarin will worm it all out of him to-morrow,” returned the doctor. “To-morrow the poor fellow will have his hands full, for there is to be a general meeting, when we shall hear all about Catenac’s ideas, and I shall be glad to know what Croisenois’s conduct will be when he knows what he is wanted for.”

It was growing late, and the guests began to drop off. Dr. Hortebise signalled to Paul, and they left the house together. According to the promise to her father, Flavia had acted her part so well, that Paul did not know whether he had made an impression or not.

CHAPTER XV.

MASTER CHUPIN.

BEAUMARCHEF, when Mascarin called a general meeting of his associates, was in the habit of assuming his very best attire; for as he was often called into the inner office to answer questions, he was much impressed with the importance of the occasion. This time, however, the subordinate, although he had received due

notice of the meeting, was still in his every-day dress. This discomposed him a good deal, though he kept muttering to himself that he meant no disrespect by it. Early in the morning he had been compelled to make up the accounts of two cooks, who, having obtained situations, were leaving the servants' lodging-house. When this matter was completed, he had hoped for half an hour's leisure. As he was crossing the courtyard, however, he fell in with Toto Chupin bringing in his daily report, which Beaumarchef thought would be what it usually was—a mere matter of form. He was, however, much mistaken; for though outwardly Toto was the same, yet his ideas had taken an entirely new direction; and when Beaumarchef urged him to look sharp, the request was received with a great deal of sullenness.

"I ain't lost no time," said he, "and have fished up a thing or two fresh; but before saying a word——"

He stopped, and seemed a little confused

"Well, go on."

"I want a fresh arrangement."

Beaumarchef was staggered.

"Arrangement!" he echoed.

"Of course you can lump it if yer don't like it," said the boy. "Do you think as how I'm going to work like a horse, and not get a wink of sleep, just for a 'thank ye, Chupin?' No fear. I'm worth a sight more nor that."

Beaumarchef flew into a rage.

"Then you are not worth a pinch of salt," said he.

"All right, my cove."

"And you are an ungrateful young villain to talk like this after all the kindness your master has shown you."

Chupin gave a sarcastic laugh.

"Goodness!" cried he. "To hear you go on, one would think that the boss had ruined himself for my sake."

"He took you out of the streets, and has given you a room ever since."

"A room, do you say? I call it a dog kennel."

"You have your breakfast and dinner every day regularly."

"I know that, and half a bottle of wine at each meal, which has so much water in it that it cannot even stain the tablecloth."

"You are an ungrateful young hound," exclaimed Beaumarchef, "and forget that, in addition to this, he has set you up in business as a hot chestnut seller."

"Good old business! I am allowed to stand all day under the gateway, roasted on one side, and frozen on the other, and gain, perhaps twenty sous."

"You know that in summer he has promised to set you up in the fried potato line."

"Thank ye for nothing; I don't like the smell of grease."

"What is it you want, then?"

"Nothing. I feel that I ought to be a gentleman at large."

Beaumarchef cast a furious glance at the shameless youth, and told him that he would report everything to his master. The boy, however, did not seem to care a pin.

"I intends to see Master Mascarin myself presently," remarked Chupin.

"You are an idiot."

"Why so? Do you think I didn't live better before

I had anything to do with this blooming old cove? I never worked then. I used to sing in front of the pubs, and easily made my three francs a day. My pal and I soon check 'em though, and then off we went to the theatre. Sometimes we'd make tracks for Ivry, and take our doss in a deserted factory, into which the crushers never put their noses. In the winter we used to go to the glass houses and sleep in the warm ashes. All these were good times, while now——"

"Well, what have you to grumble at now? Don't I hand you a five-franc piece every day that you are at work?"

"But that ain't good enough. Come, don't get shirty; all I asks for is a rise of salary. Only say either Yes or No; and if you say No, why, I sends in my resignation."

Beaumarchef would have given a five-franc piece out of his own pocket for Mascarin to have heard the boy's impertinence.

"You are a young rascal!" said he, "and keep the worst of company. There is no use in denying it, for a hang-dog fellow, calling himself Polyte, has been here asking after you."

"My company ain't any business of yours."

"Well, I give you warning, you will come to grief."

"How?" returned Toto Chupin sulkily. "How can I come to grief? If old Mascarin interferes, I'll shut up his mouth pretty sharp. I wish you and your master wouldn't poke their noses into my affairs. I'm sick of you both. Don't you think I'm up to you? When you make me follow some one for a week at a time, it isn't to do 'em a kindness, I reckon. If things turn out badly, I've only to go before a beak and speak

up; I should get off easily enough then; and if I do so, you will be sorry for not having given me more than my five francs a day."

Beaumarchef was an old soldier and a bold man, but he was easily upset, for the lad's insolence made him believe that he was uttering words that had been put in his mouth by some wily adviser; and not knowing how to act, the ex-soldier thought it best to adopt a more conciliating demeanor.

"How much do you want?" asked he.

"Well, seven francs to start with."

"The deuce you do! Seven francs a day is a sum. Well, I'll give it you myself to-day and will speak about you to the master."

"You won't get me to loosen my tongue for that amount to-day; you may bet your boots on that," answered the lad insolently. "I wants one hundred francs down on the nail."

"One hundred francs," echoed Beaumarchef, scandalized at such a demand.

"Yes, my cove, that and no less."

"And what will you give in return? No, no, my lad; your demand is a preposterous one; besides, you wouldn't know how to spend such a sum."

"Don't you flurry yourself about that; but of one thing you may be sure, I sha'n't spend my wages as you do—in wax for your mustache."

Beaumarchef could not endure an insult to his mustache, and Chupin was about to receive the kick he had so richly earned, when Daddy Tantine suddenly made his appearance, looking exactly as he did when he visited Paul in his garret.

"Tut, tut; never quarrel with the door open."

Beaumarchef thanked Providence for sending this

sudden reinforcement to his aid, and began in a tone of indignation,—

“Toto Chupin——”

“Stop! I have heard every word,” broke in Tantaine.

On hearing this, Toto felt that he had better make himself scarce; for though he hardly knew Mascarin, and utterly despised Beaumarchef, he trembled before the oily Tantaine, for in him he recognized a being who would stand no nonsense. He therefore began in an apologetic tone,—

“Just let me speak, sir; I only wanted——”

“Money, of course, and very natural too. Come, Beaumarchef, hand this worthy lad the hundred francs that he has so politely asked for.”

Beaumarchef was utterly stupefied, and was about to make some objection when he was struck by a signal which Toto did not perceive, and, drawing out his pocketbook, extracted a note which he offered to the lad. Toto glanced at the note, then at the faces of the two men, but was evidently afraid to take the money.

“Take the money,” said Tantaine. “If your information is not worth the money, I will have it back from you; come into the office, where we shall not be disturbed.”

Tantaine took a chair, and glancing at Toto, who stood before him twirling his cap leisurely, said,—

“I heard you.”

The lad had by this time recovered his customary audacity.

“Five days ago,” he began, “I was put on to Caroline Schimmel; I have found out all about her by this time. She is as regular as clockwork in her duties at

least. She wakes at ten and takes her absinthe. Then she goes to a little restaurant she knows, and has her breakfast and a game at cards with any one that will play with her. At six in the evening she goes to the Grand Turk, a restaurant and dancing-shop in the Rue des Poissonnières. Ain't it a swell ken just! You can eat, drink, dance, or sing, just as you like; but you must have decent togs on, or they won't let you in."

"Wouldn't they let you through then?"

Toto pointed significantly to his rags as he replied,—

"This rig out wouldn't pass muster, but I have a scheme in hand."

Tantaine took down the address of the dancing-saloon, and then, addressing Toto with the utmost severity,—

"Do you think," said he, "that this report is worth a hundred francs?"

Toto made a quaint grimace.

"Do you think," asked he, "that Caroline can lead the life she does without money? No fear. Well, I have found out where the coin comes from."

The dim light in the office enabled Tantaine to hide the pleasure he felt on hearing these words.

"Ah," answered he carelessly, as if it was a matter of but little moment, "and so you have found out all that, have you?"

"Yes, and a heap besides. Just you listen. After her breakfast, my sweet Carry began to play cards with some chaps who had been grubbing at the next table. 'Regular right down card sharpers and macemen,' said I to myself, as I watched the way in which they faked the pasteboards. 'They'll get everything out of you, old gal.' I was in the right, for in less than an hour she had to go up to the counter and leave one of her rings

as security for the breakfast. He said he knew her, and would give her credit. 'You are a trump,' said she. 'I'll just trot off to my own crib and get the money.'"

"Did she go home?"

"Not she; she went to a real swell house in a bang up part of Paris, the Rue de Varennes. She knocked at the door, and in she went, while I lounged about outside."

"Do you know who lives there?"

"Of course I do. The grocer round the corner told me that it was inhabited by the Duke — what was his blessed name? Oh, the Duke —"

"Was it the Duke de Champdoce?"

"That is the right one, a chap they say as has his cellars chock full of gold and silver."

"You are rather slow, my lad," said Tantaine, with his assumed air of indifference. "Get on a bit, do."

Toto was much put out; for he had expected that his intelligence would have created an immense sensation.

"Give a cove time to breathe in. Well, in half an hour out comes my Carry as lively as a flea. She got into a passing cab and away she went. Fortunately I can run a bit, and reached the Palais Royal in time to see Caroline change two notes of two hundred francs each at the money-changers."

"How did you find out that?"

"By looking at 'em. The paper was yellow."

Tantaine smiled kindly. "You know a banknote then?"

"Yes, but I have precious few chances of handling them. Once I went into a money-changer's shop and

asked them just to let me feel one, and they said, 'Get out sharp.' "

"Is that all?" demanded Tantaine.

"No; I have kept the best bit for a finish. I want to tell you that there are others on the lookout after Caroline."

Toto had no reason this time to grumble at the effect he had produced, for the old man gave such a jump that his hat fell off.

"What are you saying?" said he.

"Simply that for the last three days a big chap with a harp on his back has been keeping her in view. I twigged him at once, and he too saw her go into the swell crib that you say belongs to that Duke."

Tantaine pondered a little.

"A street musician," muttered he. "I must find out all about this. Now, Toto, listen to me; chuck Caroline over, and stick to the fellow with the harp; be off with you, for you have earned your money well."

As Chupin went off, the old man shook his head.

"Too sharp by a good bit," said he; "he won't have a long lease of life."

Beaumarchef was about to ask Tantaine to remain in the office while he went off to put on his best clothes, but the old man stopped this request by saying,—

"As M. Mascarin does not like to be disturbed, I will just go in without knocking. When the other gentlemen arrive, show them in; for look you here, my good friend, the pear is so ripe that if it is not plucked, it will fall to the ground."

CHAPTER XVI.

A TURN OF THE SCREW.

DR. HORTEBISE was the first to arrive. It was a terrible thing for him to get up so early; but for Mascarin's sake he consented even to this inconvenience. When he passed through the office, the room was full of clients; but this did not prevent the doctor from noticing the negligence of Beaumarchef's costume.

"Aha!" remarked the doctor, "on the drunk again, I am afraid."

"M. Mascarin is within," answered the badgered clerk, endeavoring to put on an air of dignity; "and M. Tantine is with him."

A brilliant idea flashed across the doctor's mind, but it was with great gravity that he said,—

"I shall be charmed to meet that most worthy old gentleman."

When, however, he entered the inner sanctum, he found Mascarin alone, occupied in sorting the eternal pieces of pasteboard.

"Well, what news?" asked he.

"There are none that I know of."

"What, have you not seen Paul?"

"No."

"Will he be here?"

"Certainly."

Mascarin was often laconic, but he seldom gave such short answers as this.

"What is the matter?" asked the doctor. "Your greeting is quite funereal. Are you not well?"

"I am merely preoccupied, and that is excusable on the eve of the battle we are about to fight," returned Mascarin.

He only, however, told a portion of the truth; for there was more in the background, which he did not wish to confide to his friend. Toto Chupin's revolt had disquieted him. Let there be but a single flaw in the axletree, and one day it will snap in twain; and Mascarin wanted to eliminate this flaw.

"Pooh!" remarked the doctor, playing with his locket, "we shall succeed. What have we to fear, after all,—opposition on Paul's part?"

"Paul may resent a little," answered Mascarin disdainfully; "but I have decided that he shall be present at our meeting of to-day. It will be a stormy one, so be prepared. We might give him his medicine in minims, but I prefer the whole dose at once."

"The deuce you do! Suppose he should be frightened, and make off with our secret."

"He won't make off," replied Mascarin in a tone which froze his listener's blood. "He can't escape from us any more than the cockchafer can from the string that a child has fastened to it. Do you not understand weak natures like his? He is the glove, I the strong hand beneath it."

The doctor did not argue this point, but merely murmured,—

"Let us hope that it is so."

"Should we have any opposition, resumed Mascarin, "it will come from Catenac. I may be able to force him into co-operation with us, but his heart will not be in the enterprise."

"Do you propose to bring Catenac into this affair?" asked Hortebise in great surprise.

"Assuredly."

"Why have you changed your plan?"

"Simply because I have recognized the fact that, if we dispensed with his services, we should be entirely at the mercy of a shrewd man of business, because——"

He broke off, listened for a moment, and then said,—
Hush! I can hear his footstep."

A dry cough was heard outside, and in another moment Catenac entered the room.

Nature, or profound dissimulation, had gifted Catenac with an exterior which made every one, when first introduced to him, exclaim, "This is an honest and trustworthy man." Catenac always looked his clients boldly in the face. His voice was pleasant, and had a certain ring of joviality in it, and his manner was one of those easy ones which always insure popularity. He was looked upon as a shrewd lawyer; but yet he did not shine in court. He must therefore, to make those thirty thousand francs a year which he was credited with doing, have some special line of business. He assayed rather risky matters, which might bring both parties into the clutches of the criminal law, or, at any rate, leave them with a taint upon both their names. A sensational lawsuit is begun, and the public eagerly await the result; suddenly the whole thing collapses, for Catenac has acted as mediator. He has even settled the disputes of murderers quarrelling over their booty. But he has even gone farther than this. More than once he has said of himself, "I have passed through the vilest masses of corruption." In his office in the Rue Jacob he has heard whispered conferences which were enough to bring down the roof above his head. Of course this was the most lucrative

business that passed into Catenac's hands. The client conceals nothing from his attorney, and he belongs to him as absolutely as the sick man belongs to his physician or the penitent to his confessor.

"Well, my dear Baptiste," said he, "here I am; you summoned me, and I am obedient to the call."

"Sit down," replied Mascarin gravely.

"Thanks, my friend, many thanks, a thousand thanks; but I am much hurried; indeed I have not a moment to spare. I have matters on my hands of life and death."

"But for all that," remarked Hortebise, "you can sit down for a moment. Baptiste has something to say to you which is as important as any of your matters can be."

With a frank and genial smile Catenac obeyed; but in his heart were anger and an abject feeling of alarm.

"What is it that is so important?" asked he.

Mascarin had risen and locked the door. When he had resumed his seat he said,—

"The facts are very simple. Hortebise and I have decided to put our great plan into execution, which we have as yet only discussed generally with you. We have the Marquis de Croisenois with us."

"My dear sir," broke in the lawyer.

"Wait a little; we must have your assistance, and——"

Catenac rose from his seat. "That is enough," said he. "You have made a very great mistake if it is on this matter that you have sent for me; I told you this before."

He was turning away, and, looking for his hat, proposed to beat a retreat; but Dr. Hortebise stood between him and the door, gazing upon him with no

friendly expression of countenance. Catenac was not a man to be easily alarmed, but the doctor's appearance was so threatening, and the smile upon Mascarin's lips was of so deadly a character, that he stood still, positively frightened into immobility.

"What do you mean?" stammered he; "what is it you say now?"

"First," replied the doctor, speaking slowly and distinctly,—“first, we wish that you should listen to us when we speak to you.”

"I am listening."

"Then sit down again, and hear what Baptiste has to say."

The command Catenac had over his countenance was so great that it was impossible to see to what conclusion he had arrived from the words and manner of his confederates.

"Then let Baptiste explain himself," said he.

"Before entering into matters completely," said he coolly, "I first want to ask our dear friend and associate if he is prepared to act with us?"

"Why should there be any doubt on that point?" asked the lawyer. "Do all my repeated assurances count as nothing?"

"We do not want promises now; what we do want is good faith and real co-operation."

"Can it be that you——"

"I ought to inform you," continued Mascarin, unheeding the interruption, "that we have every prospect of success; and, if we carry the matter through, we shall certainly have a million apiece."

Hortebise had not the calm patience of his confederate, and exclaimed,—

"You understand it well enough. Say Yes or No."

Catenac was in the agonies of indecision, and for fully a minute made no reply.

"No, then!" he broke out in a manner which betrayed his intense agitation. "After due consideration, and having carefully weighed the chances for and against, I answer you decidedly, No."

Mascarin and Hortebise evidently expected this reply, and exchanged glances.

"Permit me to explain," said Catenac, "what you consider as a cowardly withdrawal upon my part——"

"Call it treachery."

"I will not quibble about words. I wish to be perfectly straightforward with you."

"I am glad to hear it," sneered the doctor, "though that is not your usual form."

"And yet I do not think that I have ever concealed my real opinion from you. It is fully ten years ago since I spoke to you of the necessity of breaking up this association. Can you recall what I said? I said only our extreme need and griping poverty justified our acts. They are now inexcusable."

"You talked very freely of your scruples," observed Mascarin.

"You remember my words then?"

"Yes, and I remember too that those inner scruples never hindered you from drawing your share of the profits."

"That is to say," burst in the doctor, "you repudiated the work, but shared the booty. You wished to play the game without staking anything."

Catenac was in no way disconcerted at this trenchant argument.

"Quite true," said he, "I always received my share; but I have done quite as much as you in putting the

agency in its present prosperous condition. Does it not work smoothly like a perfect piece of mechanism? Have we not succeeded in nearly all our schemes? The income comes in monthly with extreme regularity, and I, according to my rights, have received one-third. If you desire to throw up this perilous means of livelihood, say so, and I will not oppose it."

"You are really too good," sneered the doctor, with a look of menace in his glance.

"Nor," continued Catenac, "will I oppose you if you prefer to let matters stand as they are; but if you start on fresh enterprises, and embark on the tempestuous sea of danger, then I put down my foot and very boldly 'halt.' I will not take another step with you. I can see by the looks of both of you that you think me a fool and a coward. Heaven grant that the future may not show you only too plainly that I have been in the right. Think over this. For twenty years fortune has favored us, but, believe me, it is never wise to tempt her too far, for it is well known that at some time or other she always turns."

"Your imagery is really charming," remarked Hortebise sarcastically.

"Good, I have nothing else to say but to repeat my warning: *reflect*. Grand as your hopes and expectations may be, they are as nothing to the perils that you will encounter."

This cold flood of eloquence was more than the doctor could bear.

"It is all very well for you," exclaimed he, "to reason like this, for you are a rich man."

"I have enough to live on, I allow; for in addition to the income derived from my profession, I have saved two hundred thousand francs; and if you can

be induced to renounce your projects, I will divide this sum with you. You have only to think."

Mascarin, who had taken no part in the dispute, now judged it time to interfere.

"And so," said he, turning to Catenac, "you have only two hundred thousand francs?"

"That or thereabouts."

"And you offer to divide this sum with us. Really we ought to be deeply grateful to you, but——."

Mascarin paused for a moment; then settling his spectacles more firmly, he went on,—

"But even if you were to give us what you propose, you would still have eleven hundred francs remaining!"

Catenac burst into a pleasant laugh. "You are jesting," said he.

"I can prove the correctness of my assertion;" and as he spoke, Mascarin unlocked a drawer, and taking a small notebook from it, turned over the pages, and leaving it open at a certain place, handed it to the lawyer.

"There," said he, "that is made up to December last, and shows precisely how you stand financially. Twice, then, you have increased your funds. These deposits you will find in an addenda at the end of the book."

Catenac started to his feet; all his calmness had now disappeared.

"Yes," he said, "I have just the sum you name; and I, for that very reason, refuse to have anything further to do with your schemes. I have an income of sixty thousand francs; that is to say, sixty thousand good reasons for receiving no further risks. You envy me my good fortune, but did we not all start penniless?"

I have taken care of my money, while you have squandered yours. Hortebise has lost his patients, while I have increased the number of my clients; and now you want me to tread the dangerous road again. Not I; go your way, and leave me to go home."

Again he took up his hat, but a wave of the hand from Mascarin detained him.

"Suppose," said he coldly, "that I told you that your assistance was necessary to me."

"I should say so much the worse for you."

"But suppose I insist?"

"And how can you insist? We are both in the same boat, and sink or swim together."

"Are you certain of that?"

"So certain that I repeat from this day I wash my hands of you."

"I am afraid you are in error."

"How so?"

"Because for twelve months past, I have given food and shelter to a girl of the name of Clarisse. Do you by any chance know her?"

At the mention of this name, the lawyer started, as a man starts who, walking peacefully along, suddenly sees a deadly serpent coiled across his path.

"Clarisse," stammered he, "how did you know of her? who told you?"

But the sarcastic sneer upon the lips of his two confederates wounded his pride so deeply, that in an instant he recovered his self-possession.

"I am getting foolish," said he, "to ask these men how they learned my secret. Do they not always work by infamous and underhand means?"

"You see I know all," remarked Mascarin, "for I foresaw the day would come when you would wish to

sever our connection, and even give us up to justice, if you could do so with safety to yourself. I therefore took my precautions. One thing, however, I was not prepared for, and that was, that a man of your intelligence should have played so paltry a game, and even twelve months back thought of betraying us. It is almost incredible. Do you ever read the *Gazette des Tribunaux*? I saw in its pages yesterday a story nearly similar to your own. Shall I tell it to you? A lawyer who concealed his vices beneath the mantle of joviality and candor, brought up from the country a pretty, innocent girl to act as servant in his house. This lawyer occupied his leisure time in leading the poor child astray, and the moment at last came when the consequences of her weakness were too apparent. The lawyer was half beside himself at the approaching scandal. What would the neighbors say? Well, to cut the story short, the infant was suppressed,—you understand, suppressed, and the mother turned into the street.”

“Baptiste, have mercy!”

“It was a most imprudent act, for such things always leak out somehow. You have a gardener at your house at Champigny, and suppose the idea seized upon this worthy man to dig up the ground round the wall at the end of the garden.”

“That is enough,” said Catenac, piteously. “I give in.”

Mascarin adjusted his spectacles, as he always did in important moments.

“You give in, do you? Not a bit. Even now you are endeavoring to find a means of parrying my home thrusts.”

“But I declare to you——”

"Do not be alarmed; dig as deeply as he might, your gardener would discover nothing."

The lawyer uttered a stifled exclamation of rage as he perceived the pit into which he had fallen.

"He would find nothing," resumed Mascarin, "and yet the story is all true. Last January, on a bitterly cold night, you dug a hole, and in it deposited the body of a new-born infant wrapped in a shawl. And what shawl? Why the very one that you purchased at the *Bon Marché*, when you were making yourself agreeable to Clarisse. The shopman who sold it to you has identified it, and is ready to give evidence when called upon. You may look for that shawl, Catenac, but you will not find it."

"Have you got that shawl?" asked Catenac hoarsely.

"Am I a fool?" asked Mascarin contemptuously. "Tantaine has it; but *I* know where the body is, and will keep the information to myself. Do not be alarmed; act fairly, and you are safe; but make one treacherous move, and you will read in the next day's papers a paragraph something to this effect: 'Yesterday some workmen, engaged in excavations near so-and-so, discovered the body of a new-born infant. Every effort is being made to discover the author of the crime.' You know me, and that I work promptly. To the shawl I have added a handkerchief and a few other articles belonging to Clarisse, which will render it an easy matter to fix the guilt on you."

Catenac was absolutely stunned, and had lost all power of defending himself. The few incoherent words that he uttered showed his state of utter despair.

"You have killed me," gasped he, "just as the prize, that I have been looking for for twenty years, was in my grasp."

"Work does a man no harm," remarked the doctor sententiously.

There was, however, little time to lose; the Marquis de Croisenois and Paul might be expected to arrive at any moment, and Mascarin hastened to restore a certain amount of calmness to his prostrate antagonist.

"You make as much noise as if we were going to hand you over to the executioner on the spot. Do you think that we are such a pair of fools as to risk all these hazards without some almost certain chance of success? Hortebise was as much startled as yourself when I first spoke to him of this affair, but I explained everything fully to him, and now he is quite enthusiastic in the matter. Of course you can lay aside all fear, and, as a man of the world, will bear no malice against those who have simply played a better game than yourself."

"Go on," said Catenac, forcing a smile. "I am listening."

Mascarin made a short pause.

"What we want of you," answered he, "will not compromise you in the slightest degree. I wish you to draw up a document, the particulars of which I will give you presently, and you will outwardly have no connection with the matter."

"Very good."

"But there is more yet. The Duke of Champdoce has placed a difficult task in your hands. You are engaged in a secret on his behalf."

"You know that also?"

"I know everything that may be made subservient to our ends. I also know that instead of coming direct to me you went to the very man that we have every

reason to dread, that fellow Perpignan, who is nearly as sharp as we are."

"Go on," returned Catenac impatiently. "What do you expect from me on this point?"

"Not much; you must only come to me first, and report any discovery you may have made, and never give any information to the Duke without first consulting us."

"I agree."

The contending parties seemed to have arrived at an amicable termination, and Dr. Hortebise smiled complacently.

"Now," said he, "shall we not confess, after all, that there was no use in making such a fuss?"

"I allow that I was in the wrong," answered Catenac meekly; and, extending his hands to his two associates with an oily smile, he said: "Let us forget and forgive."

Was he to be trusted? Mascarin and the doctor exchanged glances of suspicion. A moment afterward a knock came to the door, and Paul entered, making a timid bow to his two patrons.

"My dear boy," said Mascarin, "let me present you to one of my oldest and best friends." Then, turning to Catenac, he added: "I wish to ask you to help and assist my young friend here. Paul Violaine is a good fellow, who has neither father nor mother, and whom we are trying to help on in his journey through life."

The lawyer started as he caught the strange, meaning smile which accompanied these words.

"Great heavens!" said he, "why did you not speak sooner?"

Catenac at once divined Mascarin's project, and understood the allusion to the Duke de Champdoce.

CHAPTER XVII.

SOME SCRAPS OF PAPER.

THE Marquis de Croisenois was never punctual. He had received a note asking him to call on Mascarin at eleven o'clock, and twelve had struck some time before he made his appearance. Faultlessly gloved, his glass firmly fixed in his eye, and a light walking cane in his hand, and with that air of half-veiled insolence that is sometimes affected by certain persons who wish the world to believe that they are of great importance, the Marquis de Croisenois entered the room.

At the age of twenty-five Henry de Croisenois affected the airs and manners of a lad of twenty, and so found many who looked upon his escapades with lenient eyes, ascribing them to the follies of youth. Under this youthful mask, however he concealed a most astute and cunning intellect, and had more than once got the better of the women with whom he had had dealings. His fortune was terribly involved, because he had insisted on living at the same rate as men who had ten times his income. Forming one of the recklessly extravagant band of which the Duke de Sau-meine was the head, Croisenois, too, kept his race-horses, which was certainly the quickest way to wreck the most princely fortune. The Marquis had found out this, and was utterly involved, when Mascarin extended a helping hand to him, to which he clung with all the energy of a drowning man.

Whatever Henry de Croisenois' anxieties may have been on the day in question, he did not allow a symp-

tom of them to appear, and on his entrance negligently drawled, "I have kept you waiting, I fear; but really my time is not my own. I am quite at your service now, and will wait until these gentlemen have finished their business with you." And as he concluded, he again placed the cigar which he had removed while saying these words, to his lips.

His manner was very insolent, and yet the amiable Mascarin did not seem offended, although he loathed the scent of tobacco.

"We had begun to despair of seeing you, Marquis," answered he politely. "I say so, because these gentlemen are here to meet you. Permit me to introduce to you, Dr. Hortebise, M. Catenac of the Parisian bar, and our secretary," pointing as he spoke, to Paul.

As soon as Croisenois had taken his seat, Mascarin went straight to the point, as a bullet to the target. "I do not intend," began he, "to leave you in doubt for a moment. Beatings about the bush would be absurd among persons like ourselves."

At finding himself thus classed with the other persons present, the Marquis gave a little start, and then drawled out, "You flatter me, really."

"I may tell you, Marquis," resumed Mascarin, "that your marriage has been definitely arranged by myself and my associates. All you have to do is to get the young lady's consent, for that of the Count and Countess has already been secured."

"There will be no difficulty in that," lisped the Marquis. "I will promise her the best horsed carriage in the Bois, a box at the opera, unlimited credit at Van Klopen's, and perfect freedom. There will be no difficulty, I assure you. Of course, however, I must

be presented by some one who holds a good position in society."

"Would the Viscountess de Bois Arden suit you?"

"No one better; she is a relation of the Count de Mussidan."

"Good; then when you wish, Madame de Bois Arden will introduce you as a suitor for the young lady's hand, and praise you up to the skies."

The Marquis looked very jubilant at hearing this. "All right," cried he; "then that decides the matter."

Paul wondered whether he was awake or dreaming. He too had been promised a rich wife, and here was another man who was being provided for in the same manner. "These people," muttered he, "seem to keep a matrimonial agency as well as a servants' registry office!"

"All that is left, then," said the Marquis, "is to arrange the—shall I call it the commission?"

"I was about to come to that," returned Mascarin.

"Well, I will give you a fourth of the dowry, and on the day of my marriage will hand you a cheque for that amount."

Paul now imagined that he saw how matters worked. "If I marry Flavia," thought he, "I shall have to share her dowry with these highly respectable gentlemen."

The offer made by the Marquis did not, however, seem to please Mascarin. "That is not what we want," said he.

"No,—well, must I give you more? Say how much."

Mascarin shook his head.

"Well then, I will give you a third; it is not worth while to give you more."

"No, no; I would not take half, nor even the whole of the dowry. You may keep that as well as what you owe us."

"Well, but tell me what you *do* want."

"I will do so," answered Mascarin, adjusting his spectacles carefully; "but before doing so, I feel that I must give you a short account of the rise and progress of this association."

At this statement Hortebise and Catenac sprang to their feet in surprise and terror. "Are you mad?" said they at length, with one voice.

Mascarin shrugged his shoulders.

"Not yet," answered he gently, "and I beg that you will permit me to go on."

"But surely we have some voice in the matter," faltered Catenac.

"That is enough," exclaimed Mascarin angrily. "Am not I the head of this association? Do you think," he continued in tones of deep sarcasm, "that we cannot speak openly before the Marquis?"

Hortebise and the lawyer resignedly resumed their seats. Croisenois thought that a word from him might reassure them.

"Among honest men——" began he.

"We are not honest men," interrupted Mascarin. "Sir," added he in a severe tone, "nor are you either."

This plain speaking brought a bright flush to the face of the Marquis, who had half a mind to be angry, but policy restrained him, and he affected to look on the matter as a joke. "Your joke is a little personal," said he.

But Mascarin took no heed of his remark. "Listen to me," said he, "for we have no time to waste, and

do you," he added, turning to Paul, "pay the greatest attention."

A moment of perfect silence ensued, broken only by the hum of voices in the outer office.

"Marquis," said Mascarin, whose whole face blazed with a gleam of conscious power, "twenty-five years ago I and my associates were young and in a very different position. We were honest then, and all the illusions of youth were in full force; we had faith and hope. We all then tenanted a wretched garret in the Rue de la Harpe, and loved each other like brothers."

"That was long, long ago," murmured Hortebise.

"Yes," rejoined Mascarin; "and yet the effluxion of times does not hinder me from seeing things as they then were, and my heart aches as I compare the hopes of those days with the realities of the present. Then, Marquis, we were poor, miserably poor, and yet we all had vague hopes of future greatness."

Croisenois endeavored to conceal a sneer; the story was not a very interesting one.

"As I said before, each one of us anticipated a brilliant career. Catenac had gained a prize by his 'Treatise on the Transfer of Real Estate,' and Hortebise had written a pamphlet regarding which the great Orfila had testified approval. Nor was I without my successes. Hortebise had unluckily quarrelled with his family. Catenac's relatives were poor, and I, well, I had no family. I stood alone. We were literally starving, and I was the only one earning money. I prepared pupils for the military colleges, but as I only earned thirty-five sous a day by cramming a dull boy's brain with algebra and geometry, that was not enough to feed us all. Well, to cut a long story short, the day came when we had not a coin among us. I forgot to

tell you that I was devotedly attached to a young girl who was dying of consumption, and who had neither food nor fuel. What could I do? I knew not. Half mad, I rushed from the house, asking myself if I had better plead for charity or take the money I required by force from the first passer-by. I wandered along the quays, half inclined to confide my sorrow to the Seine, when suddenly I remembered it was a holiday at the Polytechnic School, and that if I went to the *Café Semblon* or the Palais Royal, I should most likely meet with some of my old pupils, who could perhaps lend me a few sous. Five francs perhaps, Marquis,—that is a very small sum, but in that day it meant the life of my dear Marie and of my two friends. Have you ever been hungry, M. de Croisenois?"

De Croisenois started; he had never suffered from hunger, but how could he tell what the future might bring? for his resources were so nearly exhausted, that even to-morrow he might be compelled to discard his fictitious splendor and sink into the abyss of poverty.

"When I reached the *Café Semblon*," continued Mascarin, "I could not see a single pupil, and the waiter to whom I addressed my inquiries looked at me with the utmost contempt, for my clothes were in tatters; but at length he condescended to inform me that the young gentlemen had been and gone, but that they would return. I said that I would wait for them. The man asked me if I would take anything, and when I replied in the negative, contemptuously pointed to a chair in a distant corner, where I patiently took my seat. I had sat for some time, when suddenly a young man entered the *café*, whose face, were I to live for a century, I shall never forget. He was perfectly livid, his features rigid, and his eyes wild and full of anguish.

He was evidently in intense agony of mind or body. Evidently, however, it was not poverty that was oppressing him, for as he cast himself upon a sofa, all the waiters rushed forward to receive his orders. In a voice that was almost unintelligible, he asked for a bottle of brandy, and pen, ink, and paper. In some mysterious manner, the sight of this suffering brought balm to my aching heart. The order of the young man was soon executed, and pouring out a tumbler of brandy, he took a deep draught. The effect was instantaneous, he turned crimson, and for a moment almost fell back insensible. I still kept my eyes on him, for a voice within me kept crying out that there was some mysterious link connecting this man and myself, and that his life was in some manner interwoven with mine, and that the influence he would exercise over me would be for evil. So strongly did this idea become rooted, that I should have left the *café*, had not my curiosity been so great. In the meantime the stranger had recovered himself, and seizing a pen, scrawled a few lines on a sheet of paper. Evidently he was not satisfied with his composition, for after reading it over, he lit a match and burnt the paper. He drank more brandy, and wrote a second letter, which, too, proved a failure, for he tore it to fragments, which he thrust into his waistcoat pocket. Again he commenced, using greater care. It was plain that he had forgotten where he was, for he gesticulated, uttered a broken sentence or two and evidently believed that he was in his own house. His last letter seemed to satisfy him, and he recopied it with care. He closed and directed it; then, tearing the original into pieces, he flung it under the table; then calling the waiter, he said, 'Here are twenty francs; take this letter to the address on the

envelope. Bring the answer to my house; here is my card.' The man ran out of the room, and the nobleman, only waiting to pay his bill, followed almost immediately. The morsels of white paper beneath the table had a strange fascination for me; I longed to gather them up, to put them together, and to learn the secret of the strange drama that had been acted before me. But, as I have told you, then I was honest and virtuous, and the meanness of such an act revolted all my instincts; and I should have overcome this temptation, had it not been for one of those trifling incidents which too often form the turning-point of a life. A draught from a suddenly opened door caught one of these morsels of paper, and wafted it to my feet. I stooped and picked it up, and read on it the ominous words, 'blow out my brains!' I had not been mistaken, then, and was face to face with some coming tragedy. Having once yielded, I made no further efforts at self-control. The waiters were running about; no one paid any attention to me; and creeping to the place that the unknown had occupied, I obtained possession of two more scraps of paper. Upon one I read, 'shame and horror!' upon the other, 'one hundred thousand francs by to-night.' The meaning of these few words were as clear as daylight to me; but for all that, I managed to collect every atom of the torn paper, and piecing them together, read this:—

“‘CHARLES,—

‘I must have one hundred thousand francs to-night, and you are the only one to whom I can apply. The shame and horror of my position are too much for me. Can you send it me in two hours? As you act, so I regulate my conduct. I am either saved, or I blow out my brains.’

* * * * *

“You are probably surprised, Marquis, at the accuracy of my memory, and even now I can see this scrawl as distinctly as if it were before me. At the end of this scrawl was a signature, one of the best known commercial names, which, in common with other financial houses, was struggling against a panic on the Bourse. My discovery disturbed me very much. I forgot all my miseries, and thought only of his. Were not our positions entirely similar? But by degrees a hideous temptation began to creep into my heart, and, as the minutes passed by, assume more vivid color and more tangible reality. Why should I not profit by this stolen secret? I went to the desk and asked for some wafers and a Directory. Then, returning, I fastened the torn fragments upon a clean sheet of paper, discovered the address of the writer, and then left the *café*. The house was situated in the Rue Chaussée d’Autin. For fully half an hour I paced up and down before his magnificent dwelling-place. Was he alive? Had the reply of Charles been in the affirmative? I decided at last to venture, and rang the bell. A liveried domestic appeared at my summons, and said that his master did not receive visitors at that hour; besides, he was at dinner. I was exasperated at the man’s insolence, and replied hotly, ‘If you want to save your master from a terrible misfortune, go and tell him that a man has brought him the rough draft of the letter he wrote a little time back at the *Café Semblon*.’ The man obeyed me without a word, no doubt impressed by the earnestness of my manner. My message must have caused intense consternation, for in a moment the footman reappeared, and, in an obsequious manner, said, ‘Follow at once, sir; my master is waiting for you.’ He led me into a large room, magnifi-

cently furnished as a library, and in the centre of this room stood the man of the *Café Semblon*. His face was deadly pale, and his eyes blazed with fury. I was so agitated that I could hardly speak.

“‘You have picked up the scraps of paper I threw away?’ exclaimed he.

“I nodded, and showed him the fragments fastened on to the sheet of note-paper.

“‘How much do you want for that?’ asked he. ‘I will give you a thousand francs.’

“I declare to you, gentlemen, that up to this time I had no intention of making money by the secret. My intention in going had been simply to say, ‘I bring you this paper, of which some one else might have taken an undue advantage. I have done you a service; lend me a hundred francs.’ This is what I meant to say, but his behavior irritated me, and I answered,—

“‘No, I want two thousand francs.’

“He opened a drawer, drew out a bundle of bank-notes, and threw them in my face.

“‘Pay yourself, you villain!’ said he.

“I can, I fear, never make you understand what I felt at this undeserved insult. I was not myself, and Heaven knows that I was not responsible for any crime that I might have committed in the frenzy of the moment, and I was nearly doing so. That man will, perhaps, never see death so near him, save at his last hour. On his writing table lay one of those Catalan daggers, which he evidently used as a paper-cutter. I snatched it up, and was about to strike, when the recollection of Marie dying of cold and starvation occurred to me. I dashed the knife to the ground, and rushed from the house in a state bordering on insanity. I went into

that house an honest man, and left it a degraded scoundrel. But I must finish. When I reached the street, the two banknotes which I had taken from the packet seemed to burn me like coals of fire. I hastened to a money-changer, and got coin for them. I think, from my demeanor, he must have thought that I was insane. With my plunder weighing me down, I regained our wretched garret in the Rue de la Harpe. Catenac and Hortebise were waiting for me with the utmost anxiety. You remember that day, my friends. Marquis, my story is especially intended for you. As soon as I entered the room, my friends ran up to me, delighted at seeing me return in safety, but I thrust them aside.

“‘Let me alone!’ cried I; ‘I am no longer fit to take an honest man’s hand; but we have money, money!’ And I threw the bags upon the table. One of them burst, and a flood of silver coins rolled to every part of the room.

“Marie started from her chair with upraised hands. ‘Money!’ she repeated, ‘money! we shall have food, and I won’t die.’

“My friends, Marquis, were not as they are now, and they started back in horror, fearing that I had committed some crime.

“‘No,’ said I, ‘I have committed no crime, not one, at least, that will bring me within the reach of the strong arm of the law. This money is the price of our honor, but no one will know that fact but ourselves.’

“Marquis, there was no sleeping in the garret all that night; but when daylight peered through the broken windows, it beamed on a table covered with empty bottles, and round it were seated three men, who, hav-

ing cast aside all honorable scruples, had sworn that they would arrive at wealth and prosperity by any means, no matter how foul and treacherous they might be. That is all."

CHAPTER XVIII.

AN INFAMOUS TRADE.

MASCARIN, who was anxious to make as deep an impression as possible upon Croisenois and Paul, broke off his story abruptly, and paced up and down the room. Had his intention been to startle his audience, he had most certainly succeeded. Paul was breathless with interest, and Croisenois broke down in attempting to make one of his usual trivial remarks. He was not particularly intelligent, except as regarded his self-interests, and though, of course, he knew that there must be some connection between his interests and the recital that Mascarin had just made, he could not for the life of him make out what it was. Mascarin seemed utterly careless of the effect that he had produced. But the next time that his walk brought him to his desk he stopped, and, adjusting his glasses, said, "I trust, Marquis, that you will forgive this long preliminary address, which would really make a good sensational novel; but we have now arrived at the really practical part of the business." As he said these words, he took up an imposing attitude, with his elbow resting on the mantelpiece.

"On the night of which I have spoken, I and my friends released ourselves from all the bonds of virtue

and honor, and freed ourselves from all the fetters of duty to our fellow-men. The plan emanated from my brain complete in all its details in the will I made twenty years ago to my friends. Marquis, as the summer goes on, you know that the ripest and reddest cherries are the fullest flavored, just so, in the noblest and wealthiest of families in Paris there is not one that has not some terrible and ghostly secret which is sedulously concealed. Now, suppose that one man should gain possession of all of them, would he not be sole and absolute master? Would he not be more powerful than a despot on his throne? Would he not be able to sway society in any manner he might think fit? Well, I said to myself, I will be that man!"

Ever since the Marquis had been in relation with Mascarin, he had shrewdly suspected that his business was not conducted on really fair principles.

"What you mention," said he, "is nothing but an elaborate and extended system of blackmail."

Mascarin bowed low, with an ironical smile on his face. "Just so, Marquis, just so; you have hit on the very name. The word is modern, but the operation doubtless dates from the earliest ages. The day upon which one man began to trade upon the guilty secret of another was the date of the institution of this line of business. If antiquity makes a thing respectable, then blackmailing is worthy of great respect."

"But, sir," said the Marquis, with a flush upon his face, "but, sir——"

"Pshaw!" broke in Mascarin, "does a mere word frighten you? Who has not done some of it in his time? Why, look at yourself. Do you not recollect this winter that you detected a young man cheating at cards? You said nothing to him at the time, but you

found out that he was rich, and, calling upon him the next day, borrowed ten thousand francs. When do you intend to repay that loan?"

Croisenois sank back in his chair, overcome with surprise at this display of knowledge on Mascarin's part. "This is too terrible," muttered he, but Mascarin went on,—

"I know, at least, two thousand persons in Paris who only exist by the exercise of this profession; for I have studied them all, from the convict who screws money out of his former companions, in penal servitude, to the titled villain, who, having discovered the frailty of some unhappy woman, forces her to give him her daughter as his wife. I know a mere messenger in the Rue Douai, who in five years amassed a comfortable fortune. Can you guess how? When he was intrusted with a letter, he invariably opened it, and made himself master of the contents, and if there was a compromising word in it, he pounced down upon either the writer or the person to whom it was addressed. I also know of one large limited company which pays an annual income to a scoundrel with half a dozen foreign orders, who has found out that they have broken their statutes of association, and holds proofs of their having done so. But the police are on the alert, and our courts deal very severely with blackmailers."

Mascarin went on: "The English, however, are our masters, for in London a compromising servant is as easily negotiable as a sound bill of exchange. There is in the city a respectable jeweller, who will advance money on any compromising letter with a good name at the foot. His shop is a regular pawnshop of infamy. In the States it has been elevated to the dig-

nity of a profession, and the citizen at New York dreads the blackmailers more than the police, if he is meditating some dishonorable action. Our first operations did not bring in any quick returns, and the harvest promised to be a late one; but you have come upon us just as we are about to reap our harvest. The professions of Hortebise and Catenac—the one a doctor and the other a lawyer—facilitated our operations greatly. One administered to the diseases of the body, and the other to that of the purse, and, of course, thus they became the possessors of many secrets. As for me, the head and chief, it would not do to remain an idle looker-on. Our funds had dwindled down a good deal, and, after mature consideration, I decided to hire this house, and open a Servants' Registry Office. Such an occupation would not attract any attention, and in the end it turned out a perfect success, as my friends can testify."

Catenac and Hortebise both nodded assent.

"By the system which I have adopted," resumed Mascarin, "the wealthy and respectable man is as strictly watched in his own house as is the condemned wretch in his cell; for no act of his escapes the eyes of the servants whom we have placed around him. He can hardly even conceal his thoughts from us. Even the very secret that he has murmured to his wife with closed doors reaches our ears."

The Marquis gave a supercilious smile.

"You must have had some inkling of this," observed Mascarin, "for you have never taken a servant from our establishment; but for all that, I am as well posted up in your affairs as yourself. You have even now about you a valet of whom you know nothing."

"Morel was recommended to me by one of my most intimate friends—Sir Richard Wakefield."

"But for all that I have my suspicions of him; but we will talk of this later, and we will now return to the subject upon which we have met. As I told you, I conceal the immense power I had attained through our agency, and use it as occasion presents itself, and after twenty years' patient labor, I am about to reap a stupendous harvest. The police pay enormous sums to their secret agents, while I, without opening my purse, have an army of devoted adherents. I see perhaps fifty servants of both sexes daily; calculate what this will amount to in a year."

There was an air of complacency about the man as he explained the working of his system, and a ring of triumph in his voice.

"You must not think that all my agents are in my secrets, for the greater part of them are quite unaware of what they are doing, and in this lies my strength. Each of them brings me a slender thread, which I twine into the mighty cord by which I hold my slaves. These unsuspecting agents remind me of those strange Brazilian birds, whose presence is a sure sign that water is to be found near at hand. When one of them utters a note, I dig, and I find. And now, Marquis, do you understand the aim and end of our association?"

"It has," remarked Hortebise quietly, "brought us in some years two hundred and fifty thousand francs apiece."

If M. de Croisenois disliked prosy tales, he by no means underrated the eloquence of figures. He knew quite enough of Paris to understand that if Mascarin threw his net regularly, he would infallibly catch many fish. With this conviction firmly implanted in his mind,

he did not require much urging to look with favor on the scheme, and, putting on a gracious smile, he now asked, "And what must I do to deserve admission into this association?"

Paul had listened in wonder and terror, but by degrees all feelings of disgust at the criminality of these men faded away before the power that they unquestionably possessed.

"If," resumed Mascarin, "we have up to this met with no serious obstacles, it is because, though apparently acting rashly, we are in reality most prudent and cautious. We have managed our slaves well, and have not driven any one to desperation. But we are beginning to weary of our profession; we are getting old, and we have need of repose. We intend, therefore, to retire, but before that we wish to have all matters securely settled. I have an immense mass of documentary evidence, but it is not always easy to realize the value they represent, and I wait upon your assistance to enable me to do so."

Croisenois' face fell. Was he to take compromising letters round to his acquaintances and boldly say, "Your purse or your honor?" He had no objection to share the profits of this ignoble trade, but he objected strongly to showing his connection with it openly. "No, no," cried he hastily, "you must not depend upon me."

He seemed so much in earnest that Hortebise and Catenac exchanged glances of dismay.

"Let us have no nonsense," returned Mascarin sternly, "and wait a little before you display so much fierceness. I told you that my documentary evidence was of a peculiar kind. We very often find among our fish married people who cannot deal with their per-

sonal property. A husband, for instance, will say, 'I can't take ten thousand francs without my wife knowing of it.' Women say, 'Why, I get all my money through my husband,' and both are telling the truth. They kneel at my feet and entreat me to have mercy, saying, 'Find me some excuse for using a portion of my funds and you shall have more than you ask.' For a long time I have sought for this means, and at last I have found it in the Limited Company, which you, Marquis, will float next month."

"Really!" returned the Marquis. "I do not see——"

"I beg your pardon; you see it all clearly. A husband who cannot, without fear of disturbing his domestic peace, put in five thousand francs, can put in ten thousand if he tells his wife, 'It is an investment;' and many a wife who has not any money of her own will persuade her husband to bring in the money we require by the proposal to take shares. Now, what do you say to the idea?"

"I think that it is an excellent one, but what part am I to play in it?"

"In taking the part of Chairman of the Company. I could not do so, being merely the proprietor of a Servants' Registry Office. Hortebise, as a doctor, and more than all a homœopath, would inspire no confidence, and Catenac's legal profession prevents him appearing in the matter openly. He will act as our legal adviser."

"But really I do not see anything about me that would induce people to invest," remarked De Croise-nois.

"You are too modest; you have your name and rank, which, however we may look upon them, have a great effect upon the general public. There are many

Companies who pay directors of rank and creditable connection very largely. Before starting this enterprise you can settle all your debts, and the world will then conclude that you are possessed of great wealth, while, at the same time, the news of your approaching marriage with Mademoiselle de Mussidan will be the general talk of society. What better position could you be in?"

"But I have the reputation of being a reckless spend-thrift."

"All the better. The day the prospectus comes out with your name at the head of it, there will be a universal burst of laughter. Men will say, 'Do you see what Croisenois is at now? What on earth possessed him to go into Company work?' But as this proceeding on your part will have paid your debts and given you Mademoiselle Sabine's dowry, I think that the laugh will be on your side."

The prospect dazzled De Croisenois.

"And suppose I accept," asked he, "what will be the end of the farce?"

"Very simple. When all the shares are taken up, you will close the office and let the Company look after itself."

Croisenois started to his feet angrily. "Why," cried he, "you intend to make a catspaw of me! Such a proceeding would send me to penal servitude."

"What an ungrateful man he is!" said Mascarin, appealing to his audience, "when I am doing all I can to prevent his going there."

"Sir!"

But Catenac now felt it time to interfere. "You do not understand," remarked he, addressing Croisenois. "You will start a Company for the development of

some native product, let us say Pyrenean marble, for instance, issue a prospectus, and the shares will be at once taken up by Mascarin's clients."

"Well, what happens then?"

"Why, out of the funds thus obtained we will take care when the crash comes to reimburse any outsiders who may have taken shares in the concern, telling them that the thing has been a failure, and that we are ruined; while Mascarin will take care to obtain from all his clients a discharge in full, so the Company will quietly collapse."

"But," objected the Marquis, "all the shareholders will know that I am a rogue."

"Naturally."

"They would hold me in utter contempt."

"Perhaps so, but they would never venture to let you see it. I never thought that you would make objections; and whose character, however deep, will bear investigation?"

"Are you sure that you hold your people securely?" asked he; "and that none of them will turn surly?"

Mascarin was waiting for this question, and taking from his desk the pieces of cardboard which he took so much pains to arrange, he replied, "I have here the names of three hundred and fifty people who will each invest ten thousand francs in the Company. Listen to me, and judge for yourself."

He put all three pieces of cardboard together, and then drawing out one he read,—

"'N——, civil engineer. Five letters written by him to the gentleman who procured his appointment for him: worth fifteen thousand francs.'"

"'P——, merchant. Absolute proof that his last bankruptcy was a fraudulent one, and that he kept back

from his creditors two hundred thousand francs. Good for twenty thousand francs.'

"'Madame V——. A photograph taken in very light and airy costume. Poor, but can pay three thousand francs.'

"'M. H——. Three letters from her mother, proving that the daughter had compromised herself before marriage. Letter from a monthly nurse appended. Can be made to pay ten thousand francs.'

"'L——. A song both impious and obscene. Good for two thousand francs.'

"'S——, head clerk in a Limited Company; proof of a false account. Can be made to pay fifteen thousand francs.'

"'X——, a portion of his correspondence with L—— in 1848. Three thousand francs.'

"'Madame M. de M——. A true history of her adventure with M. J——.'"

This sample was quite sufficient to satisfy M. de Croisenois. "Enough," cried he, "I yield. I bow before your gigantic power, which utterly surpasses that of the police. Give me your orders."

Before this Mascarin had conquered Hortebise and Paul Violaine, and now he had the Marquis at his feet. Many times during this conversation the Marquis had more than once endeavored to make up his mind to withdraw entirely from the business, but he had been unable to resist the strange fascination of that mysterious person who had been laying bare his scheme with such extraordinary audacity. The few vestiges of honesty that were still left in his corrupted soul revolted at the thought of the shameful compact into which he was about to enter, but the dazzling prospect held out before his eyes silenced his scruples, and he felt a cer-

tain pride in being the associate of men who possessed such seemingly illimitable power. Mascarin saw that there was no longer any necessity for the extreme firmness with which he had before spoken, and it was with the most studied courtesy that he replied: "I have no orders to give you, Marquis, our interests are identical, and we must all have a voice in the deliberations as to the best means of carrying them out."

This change from *hauteur* to suavity gratified Croise-nois' pride immensely.

"Now," continued Mascarin, "let us speak of your own circumstances. You wrote to me recently that you had nothing, and I am aware that you have no expectations for the future."

"Excuse me, but there is the fortune of my poor brother George, who disappeared so mysteriously."

"Let me assure you," answered Mascarin, "that we had better be perfectly frank with each other."

"And am I not so?" answered the Marquis.

"Why, in talking of this imaginary fortune?"

"It is not imaginary; it is real, and a very large one, too, about twelve or fourteen hundred thousand francs, and I can obtain it, for, by Articles 127 and 129 of the Code Napoleon——"

He interrupted himself, as he saw an expression of hardly-restrained laughter upon the features of Dr. Hortebise.

"Do not talk nonsense," answered Mascarin. "You could at first have filed an affidavit regarding your brother's disappearance, and applied to the Court to appoint you trustee, but this is now exactly what you wish to avoid."

"Why not, pray? Do you think——"

"Pooh, pooh, but you have raised so much money

on this inheritance that there is nothing of it left hardly, certainly not sufficient to pay your debts. It is the bait you used to allure your tradespeople into giving you credit."

At finding himself so easily fathomed, Croisenois burst into a peal of laughter. Mascarin had by this time thrown himself into an armchair, as though utterly worn out by fatigue.

"There is no necessity, Marquis," said he, "to detain you here longer. We shall meet again shortly, and settle matters. Meanwhile Catenac will draw up the prospectus and Articles of Association of the proposed Company, and post you up in the financial slang of which you must occasionally make use."

The Marquis and the lawyer at once rose and took their leave. As soon as the door had closed behind them, Mascarin seemed to recover his energy.

"Well, Paul," said he, "what do you think of all this?"

Like all men with weak and ductile natures, Paul, after being almost prostrated by the first discovery of his master's villainy, had now succeeded in smothering the dictates of his conscience, and adopted a cynical tone quite worthy of his companions.

"I see," said he, "that you have need of me. Well, I am not a Marquis, but you will find me quite as trustworthy and obedient."

Paul's reply did not seem to surprise Mascarin, but it is doubtful whether he was pleased by it, for his countenance showed traces of a struggle between extreme satisfaction and intense annoyance, while the doctor was surprised at the cool audacity of the young man whose mind he had undertaken to form.

Paul was a little disturbed by the long and continued

silence of his patron, and at last he ventured to say timidly,—

“Well, sir, I am anxious to know under what conditions I am to be shown the way to make my fortune and marry Mademoiselle Flavia Rigal, whom I love.”

Mascarin gave a diabolical smile.

“Whose dowry you love,” he observed. “Let us speak plainly.”

“Pardon me, sir, I said just what I meant.”

The doctor, who had not Mascarin’s reasons for gravity, now burst into a jovial laugh.

“And that pretty Rose,” said he, “what of her?”

“Rose is a creature of the past,” answered Paul. “I can now see what an idiot I was, and I have entirely effaced her from my memory, and I am half inclined to deplore that Mademoiselle Rigal is an heiress, the more so if it is to form a barrier between us.”

This declaration seemed to make Mascarin more easy.

“Reassure yourself, my boy,” said he, “we will remove that barrier; but I will not conceal from you that the part you have to play is much more difficult than that assigned to the Marquis de Croisenois; but if it is harder and more perilous, the reward will be proportionately greater.”

“With your aid and advice I feel capable of doing everything necessary,” returned Paul.

“You will need great self-confidence, the utmost self-possession, and as a commencement you must utterly destroy your present identity.”

“That I will do with the utmost willingness.”

“You must become another person entirely; you must adopt his name, his gait, his behavior, his virtues, and even his failings. You must forget all that you

have either said or done. You must always think that you are in reality the person you represent yourself to be, for this is the only way in which you can lead others into a similar belief. Your task will be a heavy one."

"Ah, sir," cried the young man, enthusiastically, "can you doubt me?"

"The glorious beam of success that shines ahead of you will take your attention from the difficulties and dangers of the road that you are treading."

The genial Dr. Hortebise rubbed his hands.

"You are right," cried he, "quite right."

"When you have done this," resumed Mascarin, "we shall not hesitate to acquaint you with the secret of the lofty destiny that awaits you. Do you understand me fully?"

Here the speaker was interrupted by the entrance of Beaumarchef, who had signified his desire to come in by three distinct raps upon the door. He was now gorgeous to look upon, for having taken advantage of a spare half hour, he had donned his best clothes.

"What is it?" demanded Mascarin.

"Here are two letters, sir."

"Thank you; hand them to me, and leave us."

As soon as they were once more alone, Mascarin examined the letters.

"Ah," cried he, "one from Van Klopen, and the other from the Hôtel de Mussidan. Let us first see what our friend the man-milliner has to say.

"DEAR SIR,—

"You may be at ease. Our mutual friend Verminet has executed your orders most adroitly. At his instigation Gaston de Gandelu has forged the banker Martin Rigal's signature on five different bills. I hold them,

and awaiting your further orders regarding them, and also with respect to Madame de Bois Arden,

"I remain your obedient servant,

"VAN KLOPEN."

Tossing it on the table, Mascarin opened the other letter, which he also read aloud.

"SIR,—

"I have to report to you the breaking off of the marriage between Mademoiselle Sabine and M. de Breulh-Faverlay. Mademoiselle is very ill, and I heard the medical man say that she might not survive the next twenty-four hours.

"FLORESTAN."

Mascarin was so filled with rage on learning this piece of news, which seemed likely to interfere with his plans, that he struck his hand down heavily on the table.

"Damnation!" cried he. "If this little fool should die now, all our work will have to be recommenced."

He thrust aside his chair, and paced hurriedly up and down the room.

"Florestan is right," said he; "this illness of the girl comes on at the date of the rupture of the engagement. There is some secret that we must learn, for we dare not work in the dark."

"Shall I go to the Hôtel de Mussidan?" asked Hortebise.

"Not a bad idea. Your carriage is waiting, is it not? You can go in your capacity as a medical man."

The doctor was preparing to go, when Mascarin arrested his progress.

"No," said he, "I have changed my mind. We must neither of us be seen near the place. I expect that one of our mines has exploded; that the Count and

Countess have exchanged confidences, and that between the two the daughter has been struck down."

"How shall we find this out?"

"I will see Florestan and try and find out."

In an instant he vanished into his inner room, and as he changed his dress, continued to converse with the doctor.

"This blow would be comparatively trifling, if I had not so much on hand, but I have Paul to look after. The Champdoce affair must be pressed on, for Catenac, the traitor, has put the Duke and Perpignan into communication. I must see Perpignan and discover how much has been told him, and how much he has guessed. I will also see Caroline Schimmel, and extract something from her. I wish to heaven that there were thirty-six hours in the day instead of only twenty-four."

By this time he had completed his change of costume and called the doctor into his room.

"I am off, now," whispered he; "do not lose sight of Paul for a single instant, for we are not sufficiently sure of him to let him go about alone with our secret in his possession. Take him to dine at Martin Rigal's, and then make some excuse for keeping him all night at your rooms. See me to-morrow."

And he went out so hurriedly that he did not hear the cheery voice of the doctor calling after him,—

"Good luck; I wish you all good luck."

CHAPTER XIX.

A FRIENDLY RIVAL.

ON leaving the Hôtel de Mussidan, M. de Breulh-Faverlay dismissed his carriage, for he felt as a man often does after experiencing some violent emotion, the absolute necessity for exercise, and to be alone with his thoughts, and by so doing recover his self-possession. His friends would have been surprised if they had seen him pacing hurriedly along the Champs Elysées. The usual calm of his manner had vanished, and the generally calm expression of his features was entirely absent. As he walked, he talked to himself, and gesticulated.

“And this is what we call being a man of the world. We think ourselves true philosophers, and a look from a pair of beautiful, pleading eyes scatters all our theories to the winds.”

He had loved Sabine upon the day on which he had asked for her hand, but not so fondly as upon this day when he had learned that she could no longer be his wife, for, from the moment he had made this discovery, she seemed to him more gifted and fascinating than ever. No one could have believed that he, the idol of society, the petted darling of the women, and the successful rival of the men, could have been refused by the young girl to whom he had offered his hand.

“Yes,” murmured he with a sigh, “she is just the companion for life that I longed for. Where could I find so intelligent an intellect and so pure a mind, united with such radiant beauty, so different from the

women of society, who live but for dress and gossip. Has Sabine anything in common with those giddy girls who look upon life as a perpetual valse, and who take a husband as they do a partner, because they cannot dance without one? How her face lighted up as she spoke of him, and how thoroughly she puts faith in him! The end of it all is that I shall die a bachelor. In my old age I will take to the pleasures of the table, for an excellent authority declares that a man can enjoy his four meals a day with comfort. Well, that is something to look forward to certainly, and it will not impair my digestion if my heirs and expectants come and squabble round my armchair. Ah," he added, with a deep sigh, "my life has been a failure."

M. de Breulh-Faverlay was a very different type of man to that which both his friends and his enemies popularly supposed him to be. Upon the death of his uncle, he had plunged into the frivolous vortex of Parisian dissipation, but of this he had soon wearied.

All that he had cared for was to see the doings of his racehorse chronicled in the sporting journals, and occasionally to expend a few thousand francs in presents of jewelry to some fashionable actress. But he had secretly longed for some more honorable manner of fulfilling his duties in life, and he had determined that before his marriage he would sell his stud and break with his old associates entirely; and now this wished-for marriage would never take place.

When he entered his club, the traces of his agitation were so visible upon his face, that some of the card-players stopped their game to inquire if Chambertin, the favorite for the Chantilly cup, had broken down.

"No, no," replied he, as he hurriedly made his way

to the writing-room, "Chambertin is as sound as a bell."

"What the deuce has happened to De Breulh?" asked one of the members.

"Goodness gracious!" remarked the man to whom the question was addressed, "he seems in a hurry to write a letter."

The gentleman was right. M. de Breulh was writing a withdrawal from his demand for Sabine's hand to M. de Mussidan, and he found the task by no means an easy one, for on reading it over he found that there was a valid strain of bitterness throughout it, which would surely attract attention and perhaps cause embarrassing questions to be put to him.

"No," murmured he, "this letter is quite unworthy of me." And tearing it up, he began another, in which he strung together several conventional excuses, alleging the difficulty of breaking off his former habits and of an awkward entanglement which he had been unable to break with, as he had anticipated. When this little masterpiece of diplomacy was completed, he rang the bell, and, handing it to one of the club servants, told him to take it to the Count de Mussidans' house. When this unpleasant duty was over, M. de Breulh had hoped to experience some feeling of relief, but in this he was mistaken. He tried cards, but rose from the table in a quarter of an hour; he ordered dinner, but appetite was wanting; he went to the opera, but there he did nothing but yawn, and the music grated on his nerves. At length he returned home. The day had seemed interminable, and he could not sleep, for Sabine's face was ever before him. Who could this man be whom she so fondly loved and preferred before all others? He respected her too much not to feel

assured that her choice was a worthy one, but his experience had taught him that when so many men of the world fell into strange entanglements, a poor girl without knowledge of the dangers around her might easily be entrapped. "If he is worthy of her," thought he, "I will do my best to aid her; but if not, I will open her eyes."

At four o'clock in the morning he was still seated musing before the expiring embers of his fire; he had made up his mind to see André—there was no difficulty in this, for a man of taste and wealth can find a ready excuse for visiting the studio of a struggling artist. He had no fixed plan as to what he would say or do, he left that all to chance, and with this decision he went to bed, and by two in the afternoon he drove straight to the Rue de la Tour d'Auvergne.

André's discreet portress was as usual leaning on her broom in the gallery as M. de Breulh's magnificent equipage drew up.

"Gracious me!" exclaimed the worthy woman, dazzled by the gorgeousness of the whole turnout; "he can't be coming here, he must have mistaken the house."

But her amazement reached its height when M. de Breulh, on alighting, asked for André.

"Fourth story, first door to the right," answered the woman; "but I will show you the way."

"Don't trouble yourself;" and with these words M. de Breulh ascended the staircase that led to the painter's studio and knocked at the door. As he did so, he heard a quick, light step upon the stairs, and a young and very dark man, dressed in a weaver's blouse and carrying a tin pail which he had evidently just filled with water from the cistern, came up.

"Are you M. André?" asked De Breulh.

"That is my name, sir."

"I wish to say a few words to you."

"Pray come in," replied the young artist, opening the door of his studio and ushering his visitor in. André's voice and expression had made a favorable impression upon his visitor; but he was, in spite of his having thrown aside nearly all foolish prejudices, a little startled at his costume. He did not, however, allow his surprise to be visible.

"I ought to apologize for receiving you like this," remarked André quickly, "but a poor man must wait upon himself." As he spoke, he threw off his blouse and set down the pail in a corner of the room.

"I rather should offer my excuse for my intrusion," returned M. de Breulh. "I came here by the advice of one of my friends;" he stopped for an instant, endeavoring to think of a name.

"By Prince Crescensi, perhaps," suggested André.

"Yes, yes," continued M. de Breulh, eagerly snatching at the rope the artist held out to him. "The Prince sings your praises everywhere, and speaks of your talents with the utmost enthusiasm. I am, on his recommendation, desirous of commissioning you to paint a picture for me, and I can assure you that in my gallery it will have no need to be ashamed of its companions."

André bowed, coloring deeply at the compliment.

"I am obliged to you," said he, "and I trust that you will not be disappointed in taking the Prince's opinion of my talent."

"Why should I be so?"

"Because, for the last four months I have been so busy that I have really nothing to show you."

"That is of no importance. I have every confidence in you."

"Then," returned André, "all that we have to do is to choose a subject."

André's manner had by this time so captivated De Breulh that he muttered to himself, "I really ought to hate this fellow, but on my word I like him better than any one I have met for a long time."

André had by this time placed a large portfolio on the table. "Here," said he, "are some twenty or thirty sketches; if any of them took your fancy, you could make your choice."

"Let me see them," returned De Breulh politely, for having made an estimate of the young man's character, he now wished to see what his artistic talents were like. With this object in view he examined all the sketches in the portfolio minutely, and then turned to those on the walls. André said nothing, but he somehow felt that this visit would prove the turning-point of his misfortunes. But for all that the young man's heart was very sad, for it was two days since Sabine had left him, promising to write to him the next morning regarding M. de Breulh-Faverlay, but as yet he had received no communication, and he was on the tenterhooks of expectation, not because he had any doubt of Sabine, but for the reason that he had no means of obtaining any information of what went on in the interior of the Hôtel de Mussidan. M. de Breulh had now finished his survey, and had come to the conclusion that though many of André's productions were crude and lacking in finish, yet that he had the true artistic metal in him. He extended his hand to the young man and said forcibly, "I am no longer influenced by the opinion of a friend. I have seen

and judged for myself, and am more desirous than ever of possessing one of your pictures. I have made my choice of a subject, and now let us discuss the details."

As he spoke he handed a little sketch to André. It was a view of everyday life, which the painter had entitled, "Outside the Barrier." Two men with torn garments and wine-flushed faces were struggling in tipsy combat, while on the right hand side of the picture lay a woman, bleeding profusely from a cut on the forehead, and two of her terrified companions were bending over her, endeavoring to restore her to consciousness. In the background were some flying figures, who were hastening up to separate the combatants. The sketch was one of real life, denuded of any sham element of romance, and this was the one that M. de Breulh had chosen. The two men discussed the size of the picture, and not a single detail was omitted.

"I am sure that you will do all that is right," remarked De Breulh. "Let your own inspiration guide you, and all will be well." In reality he was dying to get away, for he felt in what a false position he was, and with a violent effort he approached the money part of the matter.

"Monsieur," said André, "it is impossible to fix a price; when completed, a picture may only be worth the canvas that it is painted on, or else beyond all price. Let us wait."

"Well," broke in M. de Breulh, "what do you say to ten thousand francs?"

"Too much," returned André with a deprecatory wave of his hand; "far too much. If I succeed in it, as I hope to do, I will ask six thousand francs for it."

"Agreed!" answered De Breulh, taking from his pocket an elegant note-case with his crest and monogram upon it and extracting from it three thousand francs. "I will, as is usual, deposit half the price in advance."

André blushed scarlet. "You are joking," said he.

"Not at all," answered De Breulh quietly; "I have my own way of doing business, from which I never deviate."

In spite of this answer André's pride was hurt.

"But," remarked he, "this picture will not be ready for perhaps six or seven months. I have entered into a contract with a wealthy builder, named Candéle, to execute the outside decorations of his house."

"Never mind that," answered M. de Breulh; "take as long as you like."

Of course, after this, André could offer no further opposition; he therefore took the money without another word.

"And now," said De Breulh, as he paused for a moment at the open doorway, "let me wish you my good luck, and if you will come and breakfast with me one day, I think that I can show you some pictures which you will really appreciate." And handing his card to the artist, he went downstairs.

At first André did not glance at the card, but when he did so, the letters seemed to sear his eyeballs like a red-hot iron. For a moment he could hardly breathe, and then a feeling of intense anger took possession of him, for he felt that he had been trifled with and deceived.

Hardly knowing what he was doing, he rushed out on the landing, and, leaning over the banister, called out loudly, "Sir, stop a moment!"

De Breulh, who had by this time reached the bottom of the staircase, turned round.

"Come back, if you please," said André.

After a moment's hesitation, De Breulh obeyed; and when he was again in the studio, André addressed him in a voice that quivered with indignation.

"Take back these notes, sir; I will not accept them."

"What do you mean?"

"Only that I have thought the matter over, and that I will not accept your commission."

"And why this sudden change?"

"You know perfectly well, M. de Breulh-Faverlay."

The gentleman at once saw that Sabine had mentioned his name to the young artist, and with a slight lacking of generous feeling said,—

"Let me hear your reasons, sir."

"Because, because——" stammered the young man.

"Because is no answer."

André's confusion became greater. He would not tell the whole truth, for he would have died sooner than bring Sabine's name into the discussion; and he could only see one way out of his difficulty.

"Suppose I say that I do not like your manner or appearance," returned he disdainfully.

"Is it your wish to insult me, M. André?"

"As you choose to take it."

M. de Breulh was not gifted with an immense stock of patience. He turned livid, and made a step forward; but his generous impulses restrained him, and it was in a voice broken by agitation that he said,—

"Accept my apologies, M. André; I fear that I have played a part unworthy both of you and of myself. I ought to have given you my name at once. I know everything."

"I do not comprehend you," answered André in a glacial voice.

"Why doubt, then, if you do not understand? However, I have given you cause to do so. But, let me reassure you, Mademoiselle Sabine has spoken to me with the utmost frankness; and, if you still distrust me, let me tell you that this veiled picture is her portrait. I will say more," continued De Breulh gravely, as the artist still kept silent; "yesterday, at Mademoiselle de Mussidan's request, I withdrew from my position as a suitor for her hand."

André had been already touched by De Breulh's frank and open manner, and these last words entirely conquered him.

"I can never thank you enough," began he.

But De Breulh interrupted him.

"A man should not be thanked for performing his duty. I should lie to you if I said that I am not painfully surprised at her communication; but tell me, had you been in my place, would you not have acted in the same manner?"

"I think that I should."

"And now we are friends, are we not?" and again De Breulh held out his hand, which André clasped with enthusiasm.

"Yes, yes," faltered he.

"And now," continued De Breulh, with a forced smile, "let us say no more about the picture, which was, after all, merely a pretext. As I came here I said to myself, 'If the man to whom Mademoiselle de Mussidan has given her heart is worthy of her, I will do all I can to advance his suit with her family!' I came here to see what you were like; and now I say to you, do me a great honor, and permit me to place

myself, my fortune, and the influence of my friends, at your disposal."

The offer was made in perfect good faith, but André shook his head.

"I shall never forget your kindness in making this offer, but——"; he paused for a moment, and then went on: "I will be as open as you have been, and will tell you the whole truth. You may think me foolish; but remember, though I am poor, I have still my self-respect to maintain. I love Sabine, and would give my life for her. Do not be offended at what I am about to say. I would, however, sooner give up her hand than be indebted for it to you."

"But this is mere madness."

"No, sir, it is the purest wisdom; for were I to accede to your wishes, I should feel deeply humiliated by the thought of your self-denial; for I should be madly jealous of the part you were playing. You are of high birth and princely fortune, while I am utterly friendless and unknown; all that I am deficient in you possess."

"But I have been poor myself," interposed De Breulh, "and perhaps endured even greater miseries than ever you have done. Do you know what I was doing at your age? I was slowly starving to death at Sonora, and had to take the humblest position in a cattle ranch. Do you think that those days taught me nothing?"

"You will be able to judge me all the more clearly then," returned André. "If I raise myself up to Sabine's level, as she begged me to, then I shall feel that I am your equal; but if I accept your aid, I am your dependent; and I will obey her wishes or perish in the effort."

Up to this moment the passion which stirred André's inmost soul had breathed in every word he uttered; but, checking himself by a mighty effort, he resumed in a tone of greater calmness,—

“But I ought to remember how much we already owe you, and I hope that you will allow me to call myself your friend?”

M. de Breulh's noble nature enabled him to understand André's scruples; his feelings, however, would not for the instant enable him to speak. He slowly put the notes back in their receptacle, and then said in a low voice,—

“Your conduct is that of an honorable man; and remember this, at all times and seasons you may rely upon De Breulh-Faverlay. Farewell!”

As soon as he was alone, André threw himself into an armchair, and mused over this unexpected interview, which had proved a source of such solace to his feelings. All that he now longed for was a letter from Sabine. At this moment the portress entered with a letter. André was so occupied with his thoughts that he hardly noticed this act of condescension on the part of the worthy woman.

“A letter!” exclaimed he; and, tearing it open, he glanced at the signature. But Sabine's name was not there; it was signed Modeste. What could Sabine's maid have to say to him? He felt that some great misfortune was impending, and, trembling with excitement, he read the letter.

“SIR,—

“I write to tell you that my mistress has succeeded in the matter she spoke of to you; but I am sorry to say that I have bad news to give you, for she is seriously ill.”

"Ill!" exclaimed André, crushing up the letter in his hands, and dashing it upon the floor. "Ill! ill!" he repeated, not heeding the presence of the portress; "why, she may be dead;" and, snatching up his hat, he dashed downstairs into the street.

As soon as the portress was left alone, she picked up the letter, smoothed it out, and read it.

"And so," murmured she, "the little lady's name was Sabine—a pretty name; and she is ill, is she? I expect that the old gent who called this morning, and asked so many questions about M. André, would give a good deal for this note; but no, that would not be fair."

CHAPTER XX.

A COUNCIL OF WAR.

MAD with his terrible forebodings, André hurried through the streets in the direction of the Hôtel de Mussidan, caring little for the attention that his excited looks and gestures caused. He had no fixed plan as to what to do when he arrived there, and it was only on reaching the Rue de Matignon that he recovered sufficient coolness to deliberate and reflect.

He had arrived at the desired spot; how should he set to work to obtain the information that he required? The evening was a dark one, and the gas-lamps showed a feeble light through the dull February fog. There were no signs of life in the Rue de Matignon, and the silence was only broken by the continuous surge of carriage wheels in the Faubourg Saint Honoré. This

gloom, and the inclemency of the weather, added to the young painter's depression. He saw his utter helplessness, and felt that he could not move a step without compromising the woman he so madly adored. He walked to the gate of the house, hoping to gain some information even from the exterior aspect of the house; for it seemed to him that if Sabine were dying, the very stones in the street would utter sounds of woe and lamentation; but the fog had closely enveloped the house, and he could hardly see which of the windows were lighted. His reasoning faculties told him that there was no use in waiting, but an inner voice warned him to stay. Would Modeste, who had written to him, divine, by some means that he was there, in an agony of suspense, and come out to give him information and solace? All at once a thought darted across his mind, vivid as a flash of lightning.

"M. de Breulh will help me," cried he; "for though I cannot go to the house, he will have no difficulty in doing so."

By good luck, he had M. de Breulh's card in his pocket, and hurried off to his address. M. de Breulh had a fine house in the Avenue de l'Impératrice, which he had taken more for the commodiousness of the stables than for his own convenience.

"I wish to see M. de Breulh," said André, as he stopped breathless at the door, where a couple of footmen were chatting.

The men looked at him with supreme contempt. "He is out," one of them at last condescended to reply.

André had by this time recovered his coolness, and taking out De Breulh's card, wrote these words on it in pencil: "One moment's interview. ANDRÉ."

"Give this to your master as soon as he comes in," said he.

Then he descended the steps slowly. He was certain that M. de Breulh was in the house, and that he would send out after the person who had left the card almost at once. His conclusion proved right; in five minutes he was overtaken by the panting lackey, who, conducting him back to the house, showed him into a magnificently furnished library. De Breulh feared that some terrible event had taken place.

"What has happened?" said he.

"Sabine is dying;" and André at once proceeded to inform De Breulh of what had happened since his departure.

"But how can I help you?"

"You can go and make inquiries at the house."

"Reflect; yesterday I wrote to the Count, and broke off a marriage, the preliminaries of which had been completely settled; and within twenty-four hours to send and inquire after his daughter's health would be to be guilty of an act of inexcusable insolence; for it would look as if I fancied that Mademoiselle de Mussidan had been struck down by my rupture of the engagement."

"You are right," murmured André dejectedly.

"But," continued De Breulh, after a moment's reflection, "I have a distant relative, a lady who is also a connection of the Mussidan family, the Viscountess de Bois Arden, and she will be glad to be of service to me. She is young and giddy, but as true as steel. Come with me to her; my carriage is ready."

The footmen were surprised at seeing their master on such terms of intimacy with the shabbily dressed young man, but ventured, of course, on no remarks.

Not a word was exchanged during the brief drive to Madame de Bois Arden's house.

"Wait for me," exclaimed De Breulh, springing from the vehicle as soon as it drew up; "I will be back directly."

Madame de Bois Arden is justly called one of the handsomest women in Paris. Very fair, with masses of black hair, and a complexion to which art has united itself to the gifts of nature, she is a woman who has been everywhere, knows everything, talks incessantly, and generally very well. She spends forty thousand francs per annum on dress. She is always committing all sorts of imprudent acts, and scandal is ever busy with her name. Half a dozen of the opposite sex have been talked of in connection with her, while in reality she is a true and faithful wife, for, in spite of all her frivolity, she adores her husband, and is in great awe of him. Such was the character of the lady into whose apartment M. de Breulh was introduced. Madame de Bois Arden was engaged in admiring a very pretty fancy costume of the reign of Louis XV., one of Van Klopen's masterpieces, when M. de Breulh was announced, which she was going to wear, on her return from the opera, at a masquerade ball at the Austrian Ambassador's. Madame de Bois Arden greeted her visitor with effusion, for they had been acquaintances from childhood, and always addressed each other by their Christian names.

"What, you here at this hour, Gontran!" said the lady. "Is it a vision, or only a miracle?" But the smile died away upon her lips, as she caught a glimpse of her visitor's pale and harassed face. "Is there anything the matter?" asked she.

"Not yet," answered he, "but there may be, for

I hear that Mademoiselle de Mussidan is dangerously ill."

"Is she really? Poor Sabine! what is the matter with her?"

"I do not know; and I want you, Clotilde, to send one of your people to inquire into the truth of what we have heard."

Madame de Bois Arden opened her eyes very wide.

"Are you joking?" said she. "Why do you not send yourself?"

"It is impossible for me to do so; and if you have any kindness of heart, you do as I ask you; and I want you also to promise me not to say a word of this to any one."

Excited as she was by this mystery, Madame de Bois Arden did not ask another question.

"I will do exactly what you want," replied she, "and respect your secret. I would go at once, were it not that Bois Arden will never sit down to dinner without me; but the moment we have finished I will go."

"Thanks, a thousand times; and now I will go home and wait for news from you."

"Not at all,—you will remain here to dinner."

"I must,—I have a friend waiting for me."

"Do as you please, then," returned the Viscountess, laughing. "I will send round a note this evening."

De Breulh pressed her hand, and hurried down, and was met by André at the door, for he had been unable to sit still in the carriage.

"Keep up your courage. Madame de Bois Arden had not heard of Mademoiselle Sabine's illness, and this looks as if it was not a very serious matter. We shall have the real facts in three hours."

"Three hours!" groaned André, "what a lapse of time!"

"It is rather long, I admit; but we will talk of her while we wait, for you must stay and dine with me."

André yielded, for he had no longer the energy to contest anything. The dinner was exquisite, but the two men were not in a condition of mind to enjoy it, and scarcely consumed anything. Vainly did they endeavor to speak on indifferent subjects, and when the coffee had been served in the library, they relapsed into utter silence. As the clock struck ten, however, a knock was heard at the door, then whisperings, and the rustle of female attire, and lastly Madame de Bois Arden burst upon them like a tornado.

"Here am I," cried she.

It was certainly rather a hazardous step to pay such a late visit to a bachelor's house, but then the Viscountess de Bois Arden did exactly as she pleased.

"I have come here, Gontran," exclaimed she, with extreme vehemence, "to tell you that I think your conduct is abominable and ungentlemanly."

"Clotilde!"

"Hold your tongue! you are a wretch! Ah! now I can see why you did not wish to write and inquire about poor Sabine. You well knew the effect that your message would have on her."

M. de Breulh smiled as he turned to André and said,—

"You see that I was right in what I told you."

This remark for the first time attracted Madame de Bois Arden's attention to the fact that a stranger was present, and she trembled lest she had committed some grave indiscretion.

"Gracious heavens!" exclaimed she, with a start, "why, I thought that we were alone!"

"This gentleman has all my confidence," replied M. de Breulh seriously; and as he spoke he laid his hand upon André's shoulder. "Permit me to introduce M. André to you, my dear Clotilde; he may not be known to-day, but in a short time his reputation will be European."

André bowed, but for once in her life the Viscountess felt embarrassed, for she was surprised at the extremely shabby attire of this confidential friend, and then there seemed something wanting to the name.

"Then," resumed De Breulh, "Mademoiselle de Mussidan is really ill, and our information is correct."

"She is."

"Did you see her?"

"I did, Gontran; and had you seen her, your heart would have been filled with pity, and you would have repented your conduct toward her. The poor girl did not even know me. She lay in her bed, whiter than the very sheets, cold and inanimate as a figure of marble. Her large black eyes were staring wildly, and the only sign of life she exhibited was when the great tears coursed down her cheeks."

André had determined to restrain every token of emotion in the presence of the Viscountess, but her recital was too much for him.

"Ah!" said he, "she will die; I know it."

There was such intense anguish in his tone that even the practised woman of the world was softened.

"I assure you, sir," said she, "that you go too far; there is no present danger; the doctors say it is catalepsy, which often attacks persons of a nervous temperament upon the receipt of a sudden mental shock."

"But what shock has she received?" asked André.

"No one told me," answered she after a short pause, "that Sabine's illness was caused by the breaking off of her engagement; but, of course, I supposed that it was."

"That was not the reason, Clotilde; but you have told us nothing; pray, go on," interposed De Breulh.

The extreme calmness of her cousin, and a glance which she observed passing between him and André, enlightened the Viscountess somewhat.

"I asked as much as I dared," she replied, "but I could only get the vaguest answers. Sabine looked as if she were dead, and her father and mother hovered around her couch like two spectres. Had they slain her with their own hands, they could not have looked more guilty; their faces frightened me."

"Tell me precisely what answers were given to your questions," broke in he impatiently.

"Sabine had seemed so agitated all day, that her mother asked her if she was suffering any pain."

"We know that already."

"Indeed!" replied the Viscountess, with a look of surprise. "It seems, cousin, that you saw Sabine that afternoon, but what became of her afterward no one appears to know; but there is positive proof that she did not leave the house, and received no letters. At all events, it was more than an hour after her maid saw her enter her own room. Sabine said a few unintelligible words to the girl, who, seeing the pallor upon her mistress's face, ran up to her. Just as she did so, Sabine uttered a wild shriek, and fell to the ground. She was raised up and laid upon the bed, but since then she has neither moved nor spoken."

"That is not all," said De Breulh, who had watched his cousin keenly.

The Viscountess started, and avoided meeting her cousin's eye.

"I do not understand," she faltered. "Why do you look at me like that?"

De Breulh, who had been pacing up and down the room, suddenly halted in front of the Viscountess.

"My dear Clotilde," said he, "I am sure when I tell you that the tongue of scandal has often been busy with your name, I am telling you nothing new."

"Pooh!" answered the Viscountess. "What do I care for that?"

"But I always defended you. You are indiscreet—your presence here to-night shows this; but you are, after all, a true woman,—brave and true as steel."

"What do you mean by this exordium, Gontran?"

"This, Clotilde,—I want to know if I dare venture to intrust to you a secret which involves the honor of two persons, and, perhaps, the lives of more."

"Thank you, Gontran," answered she calmly. "You have formed a correct judgment of me."

But here André felt that he must interpose, and, taking a step forward, said, "Have you the right to speak?"

"My dear André," said De Breulh, "this is a matter in which my honor is as much concerned as yours. Will you not trust me?" Then turning to the Viscountess, he added, "Tell us all you heard."

"It is only something I heard from Modeste. You had hardly left the house, when the Baron de Clinchain made his appearance."

"An eccentric old fellow, a friend of the Count de Mussidan's. I know him."

"Just so; well, they had a stormy interview, and at the end of it, the Baron was taken ill, and it was with difficulty that he regained his carriage."

"That seems curious."

"Wait a bit. After that Octave and his wife had a terrible scene together, and Modeste thinks that her mistress must have heard something, for the Count's voice rang through the house like thunder."

Every word that the Viscountess uttered strengthened De Breulh's suspicions. "There is something mysterious in all this, Clotilde," said he, "as you will say when you know the whole truth," and, without omitting a single detail, he related the whole of Sabine and André's love story.

Madame de Bois Arden listened attentively, sometimes thrilled with horror, and at others pleased with this tale of innocent love.

"Forgive me," said she, when her cousin had concluded; "my reproaches and accusations were equally unfounded."

"Yes, yes; never mind that; but I am afraid that there is some hidden mystery which will place a fresh stumbling-block in our friend André's path."

"Do not say that," cried André, in terror. "What is it?"

"That I cannot tell; for Mademoiselle de Mussidan's sake, I have withdrawn all my pretensions to her hand,—not to leave the field open to any other intruder, but in order that she may be your wife."

"How are we to learn what has really happened?" asked the Viscountess.

"In some way or other we shall find out, if you will be our ally."

Most women are pleased to busy themselves about a

marriage, and the Viscountess was cheered to find herself mixed up in so romantic a drama.

"I am entirely at your beck and call," answered she. "Have you any plan?"

"Not yet, but I will soon. As far as Mademoiselle de Mussidan is concerned, we must act quite openly. André will write to her, asking for an explanation, and you shall see her to-morrow, and if she is well enough, give her his note."

The proposal was a startling one, and the Viscountess did not entertain it favorably.

"No," said she, "I think that would not do at all."

"Why not? However, let us leave it to André."

André, thus addressed, stepped forward, and said,—

"I do not think that it would be delicate to let Mademoiselle de Mussidan know that her secret is known to any one else than ourselves."

The Viscountess nodded assent.

"If," continued André, "the Viscountess will be good enough to ask Modeste to meet me at the corner of the Avenue de Matignon; I shall be there."

"A capital idea, sir," said the lady, "and I will give your message to Modeste." She broke off her speech suddenly, and uttered a pretty little shriek, as she noticed that the hands of the clock on the mantelpiece pointed to twenty to twelve. "Great heavens!" cried she, "and I am going to a ball at the Austrian Embassy, and now not even dressed." And, with a coquettish gesture, she drew her shawl around her, and ran out of the room, exclaiming as she descended the stairs, "I will call here to-morrow, Gontran, on my way to the Bois," and disappeared like lightning.

André and his host sat over the fire, and conversed for a long time. It seemed strange that two men who

had met that morning for the first time should now be on such intimate terms of friendship; but such was the case, for a mutual feeling of admiration and respect had sprung up in their hearts.

M. de Breulh wished to send André home in his carriage, but this the young man declined, and merely borrowed an overcoat to protect him from the inclemency of the weather.

"To-morrow," said he, as he made his way home, "Modeste shall tell all she knows, provided always that that charming society dame does not forget all about our existence before then."

Madame de Bois Arden, however, could sometimes be really in earnest. Upon her return from the ball she would not even go to bed, lest she should oversleep herself, and the next day André found Modeste waiting at the appointed spot, and learnt, to his great grief, that Sabine had not yet regained consciousness.

The family doctor betrayed no uneasiness, but expressed a wish for a consultation with another medical man. Meanwhile, the girl promised to meet André morning and evening in the same place, and give him such scraps of information as she had been able to pick up. For two whole days Mademoiselle de Mussidan's condition remained unchanged, and André spent his whole time between his own studio, the Avenue de Matignon, and M. de Breulh's, where he frequently met Madame de Bois Arden.

But on the third day Modeste informed him, with tears in her eyes, that though the cataleptic fit had passed away, Sabine was struggling with a severe attack of fever. Modeste and André were so interested in their conversation, that they did not perceive Floristan, who had gone out to post a letter to Mascarin.

"Listen, Modeste," whispered André, "you tell me that she is in danger,—very great danger."

"The doctor said that the crisis would take place to-day; be here at five this evening."

André staggered like a madman to De Breulh's house; and so excited was he that his friend insisted upon his taking some repose, and would not, when five o'clock arrived, permit André to go to the appointment alone. As they turned the corner, they saw Modeste hurrying toward them.

"She is saved, she is saved!" said she, "for she has fallen into a tranquil sleep, and the doctor says that she will recover."

André and De Breulh were transported by this news; but they did not know that they were watched by two men, Mascarin and Florestan, who did not let one of their movements escape them. Warned by a brief note from Florestan, Mascarin had driven swiftly to Father Canon's public-house, where he thought he was certain to find the domestic, but the man was not there, and Mascarin, unable to endure further suspense, sent for him to the Hôtel de Mussidan. When the servant informed Mascarin that the crisis was safely passed, he drew a deep breath of relief; for he no longer feared that the frail structure that he had built up with such patient care for twenty long years would be shattered at a blow by the chill hand of death. He bent his brow, however, when he heard of Modeste's daily interviews with the young man whom Florestan termed "Mademoiselle's lover."

"Ah," muttered he, "if I could only be present at one of those interviews!"

"And, as you say," returned Florestan, drawing out, as he spoke, a neat-looking watch, "it is just the hour

of their meeting; and as the place is always the same, you——”

“Come, then,” broke in his patron. They went out accordingly, and reached the Champs Elysées by a circuitous route. The place was admirably suited to their purpose, for close by were several of those little wooden huts, occupied in summer by the vendors of cakes and playthings.

“Let us get behind one of these,” said Florestan. Night was drawing in, but objects could still be distinguished, and in about five minutes Florestan whispered, “Look, there comes Modeste, and there is the lover, but he has a pal with him to-night. Why, what can she be telling him? He seems quite overcome.”

Mascarin divined the truth at once, and found that it would be a difficult task to interfere with the love of a man who displayed such intensity of feeling.

“Then,” remarked Mascarin, savagely, “that great booby, staggering about on his friend’s arm, is your young lady’s lover?”

“Just so, sir.”

“Then we must find out who he is.”

Florestan put on a crafty air, and replied in gentle accents.

“The day before yesterday, as I was smoking my pipe outside, I saw this young bantam swaggering down the street—not but what he seemed rather crestfallen; but I knew the reason for that, and should look just as much in the dumps if my young woman was laid up. I thought, as I had nothing to do, I might as well see who he was and where he lived; so, sticking my hands in my pockets, after him I sloped. He walked such a long way, that I got precious sick of my job, but at

last I ran him to earth in a house. I went straight up to the lodge, and showed the portress my tobacco pouch, and said, 'I picked up this; I think that the gentleman who has just gone in dropped it. Do you know him?' 'Of course I do,' said she. 'He is a painter; lives on the fourth floor; and his name is M. André.'"

"Was the house in the Rue de la Tour d'Auvergne?" broke in Mascarin.

"You are right, sir," returned the man, taken a little aback. "It seems, sir, that you are better informed than I am."

Mascarin did not notice the man's surprise, but he was struck with the strange persistency with which this young man seemed to cross his plans, for he found that the acquaintance of Rose and the lover of Mademoiselle de Mussidan were one and the same person, and he had a presentiment that he would in some way prove a hindrance to his plans.

The astute Mascarin concentrated all his attention upon André.

The latter said something to Modeste, which caused that young woman to raise her hands to heaven, as though in alarm.

"But who is the other?" asked he,—“the fellow that looks like an Englishman?”

"Do you not know?" returned the lackey. "Why, that is M. de Breulh-Faverlay."

"What, the man who was to marry Sabine?"

"Certainly."

Mascarin was not easily disconcerted, but this time a blasphemous oath burst from his lips.

"Do you mean," said he, "that De Breulh and this painter are friends?"

"That is more than I can tell. You seem to want to know a lot," answered Florestan, sulkily.

Modeste had now left the young men, who walked arm in arm in the direction of the Avenue de l'Impératrice.

"M. de Breulh takes his dismissal easily enough," observed Mascarin.

"He was not dismissed; it was he that wrote and broke off the engagement."

This time Mascarin contrived to conceal the terrible blow that this information caused to him, and even made some jesting remark as he took leave of Florestan; but he was in truth completely staggered, for after thoroughly believing that the game was won, he saw that, though perhaps not lost, his victory was postponed for an indefinite period.

"What!" said he, as he clenched his hand firmly, "shall the headstrong passion of this foolish boy mar my plans? Let him take care of himself; for if he walks in my path, he will find it a road that leads to his own destruction."



CHAPTER XXI.

AN ACADEMY OF MUSIC.

DR. HORTEBISE had for some time back given up arguing with Mascarin as to the advice the latter gave him. He had been ordered not to let Paul out of his sight, and he obeyed this command literally. He had taken him to dine at M. Martin Rigal's, though the host himself was absent; from there he took Paul to his

club, and finally wound up by forcing the young man to accept a bed at his house. They both slept late, and were sitting down to a luxurious breakfast, when the servant announced M. Tantine, and that worthy man made his appearance with the same smile upon his face which Paul remembered so well in the Hôtel de Perou. The sight of him threw the young man into a state of fury. "At last we meet," cried he. "I have an account to settle with you."

"You have an account to settle with me?" asked Daddy Tantine with a puzzled smile.

"Yes; was it not through you that I was accused of theft by that old hag, Madame Loupins?"

Tantine shrugged his shoulders.

"Dear me," said he; "I thought that M. Mascarin had explained everything, and that you were anxious to marry Mademoiselle Flavia, and that, above all, you were a young man of intelligence and tact."

Hortebise roared with laughter, and Paul, seeing his folly, blushed deeply and remained silent.

"I regret having disturbed you, doctor," resumed Tantine, "but I had strict orders to see you."

"Is there anything new then?"

"Yes; Mademoiselle de Mussidan is out of danger, and M. de Croisenois can commence proceedings at once."

The doctor drank off a glass of wine. "To the speedy marriage of our dear friend the Marquis and Mademoiselle Sabine," said he gayly.

"So be it," said Tantine; "I am also directed to beg M. Paul not to leave this house, but to send for his luggage and remain here."

Hortebise looked so much annoyed that Tantine

hastened to add: "Only as a temporary measure, for I am on the lookout for rooms for him now."

Paul looked delighted at the idea of having a home of his own.

"Good!" exclaimed the doctor merrily. "And now, my dear Tantaine, as you have executed all your commissions, you can stay and breakfast with us."

"Thanks for the honor; but I am very busy with affairs of the Duke de Champdoce and must see Perpignan at once." As he spoke he rose, making a little sign which Paul did not catch, and Hortebise accompanied him to the door of the vestibule. "Don't leave that lad alone," said Tantaine; "I will see about him to-morrow; meanwhile prepare him a little."

"I comprehend," answered Hortebise; "my kind regards to that dear fellow, Perpignan."

This Perpignan was well known—some people said too well known—in Paris. His real name was Isidore Crocheteau, and he had started life as a cook in a Palais Royal restaurant. Unfortunately a breach of the Eighth Commandment had caused him to suffer incarceration for a period of three years, and on his release he bloomed out into a private inquiry agent. His chief customers were jealous husbands, but as surely as one of these placed an affair in his hands, he would go to the erring wife and obtain a handsome price from her for his silence.

Mascarin and Perpignan had met in an affair of this kind; and as they mutually feared each other, they had tacitly agreed not to cross each other's path in that great wilderness of crime—Paris. But while Perpignan knew nothing of Mascarin's schemes and operations, the former was very well acquainted with the ex-cook's doings. He knew, for instance, that the income from

the Inquiry Office would not cover Perpignan's expenses, who dressed extravagantly, kept a carriage, affected artistic tastes, played cards, betted on races, and liked good dinners at the most expensive restaurants. "Where can he get his money from?" asked Mascarin of himself; and, after a long search, he succeeded in solving the riddle.

Daddy Tontaine, after leaving the doctor's, soon arrived at the residence of M. Perpignan, and rang the bell.

A fat woman answered the door. "M. Perpignan is out," said she.

"When will he be back?"

"Some time this evening."

"Can you tell me where I can find him, as it is of the utmost importance to both of us that I should see him at once?"

"He did not say where he was going to?"

"Perhaps he is at the factory," said Tontaine blandly.

The fat woman was utterly taken aback by this suggestion. "What do you know about that?" faltered she.

"You see I *do* know, and that is sufficient for you. Come, is he there?"

"I think so."

"Thank you, I will call on him then. An awfully long journey," muttered Tontaine, as he turned away; "but, perhaps, if I catch the worthy man in the midst of all his little business affairs, he will be more free in his language, and not so guarded in his actual admissions."

The old man went to his task with a will. He passed down the Rue Toumenon, skirted the Luxemburg, and

made his way into the Rue Guy Lussac; from thence he walked down the Rue Mouffetard, and thence direct into one of those crooked lanes which run between the Gobelins Factory and the Hôpital de l'Oursine. This is a portion of the city utterly unknown to the greater number of the Parisians. The streets are narrow and hardly afford room for vehicles. A valley forms the centre of the place, down which runs a muddy, sluggish stream, the banks of which are densely crowded with tanyards and iron works. On the one side of this valley is the busy Rue Mouffetard, and on the other one of the outer boulevard, while a long line of sickly-looking poplars mark the course of the semi-stagnant stream. Tantaine seemed to know the quarter well, and went on until he reached the Champs des Alouettes. Then, with a sigh of satisfaction, he halted before a large, three-storied house, standing on a piece of ground surrounded by a mouldering wooden fence. The aspect of the house had something sinister and gloomy about it, and for a moment Tantaine paused as if he could not make up his mind to enter it; but at last he did so. The interior was as dingy and dilapidated as the outside. There were two rooms on the ground floor, one of which was strewn with straw, with a few filthy-looking quilts and blankets spread over it. The next room was fitted up as a kitchen; in the centre was a long table composed of boards placed on trestles, and a dirty-looking woman with her head enveloped in a coarse red handkerchief, and grasping a big wooden spoon, was stirring the contents of a large pot in which some terrible-looking ingredients were cooking. On a small bed in a corner lay a little boy. Every now and then a shiver convulsed his frame, his face was deadly pale, and his hands almost transparent, while his great

black eyes glittered with the wild delirium of fever. Sometimes he would give a deep groan, and then the old beldame would turn angrily and threaten to strike him with her wooden spoon.

"But I am so ill," pleaded the boy.

"If you had brought home what you were told, you would not have been beaten, and then you would have had no fever," returned the woman harshly.

"Ah, me! I am sick and cold, and want to go away," wailed the child; "I want to see mammy."

Even Tantaine felt uneasy at this scene, and gave a gentle cough to announce his presence. The old woman turned round on him with an angry snarl. "Who do you want here?" growled she.

"Your master."

"He has not yet arrived, and may not come at all, for it is not his day; but you can see Poluche."

"And who may he be?"

"He is the professor," answered the hag contemptuously.

"And where is he?"

"In the music-room."

Tantaine went to the stairs, which were so dingy and dilapidated as to make an ascent a work of danger and difficulty. As he ascended higher, he became aware of a strange sound, something between the grinding of scissors and the snarling of cats. Then a moment's silence, a loud execration, and a cry of pain. Tantaine passed on, and coming to a rickety door, he opened it, and in another moment found himself in what the old hag downstairs had called the music-room. The partitions of all the rooms on the floor had been roughly torn down to form this apartment; hardly a pane of glass remained intact in the windows; the

dingy, whitewashed walls were covered with scrawls and drawings in charcoal. A suffocating, nauseous odor rose up, absolutely overpowering the smell from the neighboring tanyards. There was no furniture except a broken chair, upon which lay a dog whip with plaited leather lash. Round the room, against the wall, stood some twenty children, dirty, and in tattered clothes. Some had violins in their hands, and others stood behind harps as tall as themselves. Upon the violins Tantaine noticed there were chalk marks at various distances. In the middle of the room was a man, tall and erect as a dart, with flat, ugly features and lank, greasy hair hanging down on his shoulders. He, too, had a violin, and was evidently giving the children a lesson. Tantaine at once guessed that this was Professor Poluche.

"Listen," said he; "here, you Ascanie, play the chorus from the *Château de Marguerite*." As he spoke he drew his bow across his instrument, while the little Savoyard did his best to imitate him, and in a squeaking voice, in nasal tone, he sang:

"Ah! great heavens, how fine and grand
Is the palace!"

"You young rascal!" cried Poluche. "Have I not bid you fifty times that at the word 'palace' you are to place your bow on the fourth chalkmark and draw it across? Begin again."

Once again the boy commenced, but Poluche stopped him.

"I believe, you young villain, that you are doing it on purpose. Now, go through the whole chorus again; and if you do not do it right, look out for squalls."

Poor Ascanie was so muddled that he forgot all his instructions. Without any appearance of anger, the professor took up the whip and administered half a dozen severe cuts across the bare legs of the child, whose shouts soon filled the room.

"When you have done howling," remarked Poluche, "you can try again; and if you do not succeed, no supper for you to-night, my lad. Now, Giuseppe, it is your turn."

Giuseppe, though younger than Ascanie, was a greater proficient on the instrument, and went through his task without a single mistake.

"Good!" said Poluche; "if you get on like that, you will soon be fit to go out. You would like that, I suppose?"

"Yes," replied the delighted boy, "and I should like to bring in a few coppers too."

But the Professor did not waste too much time in idle converse.

"It is your turn, now Fabio," said he.

Fabio, a little mite of seven, with eyes black and sparkling as those of a dormouse; had just seen Tantaine in the doorway and pointed him out to the professor.

Poluche turned quickly round and found himself face to face with Tantaine, who had come quickly forward, his hat in his hand.

Had the professor seen an apparition, he could not have started more violently, for he did not like strangers.

"What do you want?" asked he.

"Reassure yourself, sir," said Tantaine, after having for a few seconds enjoyed his evident terror; "I am the intimate friend of the gentleman who employs

you, and have come here to discuss an important matter of business with him."

Poluche breathed more freely.

"Take a chair, sir," said he, offering the only one in the room. "My master will soon be here."

But Daddy Tantaine refused the offer, saying that he did not wish to intrude, but would wait until the lesson was over.

"I have nearly finished," remarked Poluche; "it is almost time to let these scamps have their soup."

Then turning to his pupils, who had not dared to stir a limb, he said,—

"There, that is enough for to-day; you can go."

The children did not hesitate for a moment, but tumbled over each other in their eagerness to get away, hoping, perhaps, that he might omit to execute certain threats that he had held out during the lesson. The hope was a vain one, for the equitable Poluche went to the head of the stairs and called out in a loud voice,—

"Mother Butor, you will give no soup to Monte and put Ravillet on half allowance."

Tantaine was much interested, for the scene was an entirely new one.

The professor raised his eyes to heaven.

"Would," said he, "that I might teach them the divine science as I would wish; but the master would not allow me; indeed, he would dismiss me if I attempted to do so."

"I do not understand you."

"Let me explain to you. You know that there are certain old women who, for a consideration, will train a linnet or a bullfinch to whistle any air?"

Tantaine, with all humility, confessed his ignorance of these matters.

"Well," said the professor, the only difference between those old women and myself is, that they teach birds and I boys; and I know which I had rather do."

Tantaine pointed to the whip.

"And how about this?" asked he.

Poluche shrugged his shoulders.

"Put yourself in my place for a little while," remarked he. "You see my master brings me all sorts of boys, and I have to cram music into them in the briefest period possible. Of course the child revolts, and I thrash him; but do not think he cares for this; the young imps thrive on blows. The only way that I can touch them is through their stomachs. I stop a quarter, a half, and sometimes the whole of their dinner. That fetches them, and you have no idea how a little starvation brings them on in music."

Daddy Tantaine felt a cold shiver creep over him as he listened to this frank exposition of the professor's mode of action.

"You can now understand," remarked the professor, "how some airs become popular in Paris. I have forty pupils all trying the same thing. I am drilling them now in the *Marguerite*, and in a little time you will have nothing else in the streets."

Poluche was proceeding to give Tantaine some further information, when a step was heard upon the stairs, and the professor remarked,—

"Here is the master; he never comes up here, because he is afraid of the stairs. You had better go down to him."

CHAPTER XXII.

DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND.

THE ex-cook appeared before Tantaine in all his appalling vulgarity as the latter descended the stairs. The proprietor of the musical academy was a stout, red-faced man, with an insolent mouth and a cynical eye. He was gorgeously dressed, and wore a profusion of jewelry. He was much startled at seeing Tantaine, whom he knew to be the redoubtable Mascarin's right-hand man. "A thousand thunders!" muttered he. "If these people have sent him here for me, I must take care what I am about," and with a friendly smile he extended his hand to Tantaine.

"Glad to see you," said he. "Now, what can I do for you, for I hope you have come to ask me to do something?"

"The veriest trifle," returned Tantaine.

"I am sorry that it is not something of importance, for I have the greatest respect for M. Mascarin."

This conversation had taken place in the window, and was interrupted every moment by the shouts and laughter of the children; but beneath these sounds of merriment came an occasional bitter wail of lamentation.

"What is that?" inquired Perpignan, in a voice of thunder. "Who presumes to be unhappy in this establishment?"

"It is two of the lads that I have put on half ration," returned Poluche. "I'll make them learn somehow or——"

A dark frown on the master's face arrested his further speech. "What do I hear?" roared Perpignan. "Do you dare, under my roof, to deprive those poor children of an ounce of food? It is scandalous, I may say, infamous, on your part, M. Poluche."

"But, sir," faltered the professor, "have you not told me hundreds of times——"

"That you were an idiot, and would never be anything better. Go and tell Mother Butor to give these poor children their dinner."

Repressing further manifestations of rage, Perpignan took Tantaine by the arm and led him into a little side-room, which he dignified by the name of his office. There was nothing in it but three chairs, a common deal table, and a few shelves containing leggers. "You have come on business, I presume," remarked Perpignan.

Tantaine nodded, and the two men seated themselves at the table, gazing keenly into each other's eyes, as though to read the thoughts that moved in the busy brain.

"How did you find out my little establishment down here?" asked Perpignan.

"By a mere chance," remarked Tantaine carelessly. "I go about a good deal, and hear many things. For instance, you have taken every precaution here, and though you are really the proprietor, yet the husband of your cook and housekeeper, Butor, is supposed to be the owner of the house—at least it stands in his name. Now, if anything untoward happened, you would vanish, and only Butor would remain a prey for the police."

Tantaine paused for a moment, and then slowly added, "Such tactics usually succeed unless a man has

some secret enemy, who would take advantage of his knowledge, to do him an injury by obtaining irrefragable proofs of his complicity."

The ex-cook easily perceived the threat that was hidden under these words. "They know something," muttered he, "and I must find out what it is."

"If a man has a clear conscience," said he aloud, "he is all right. I have nothing to conceal, and therefore nothing to fear. You have now seen my establishment; what do you think of it?"

"It seems to me a very well-conducted one."

"It may have occurred to you that a factory at Roubaix might have been a better investment, but I had not the capital to begin with."

Tantaine nodded. "It is not half a bad trade," said he.

"I agree with you. In the Rue St. Marguerite you will find more than one similar establishment; but I never cared for the situation of the Faubourg St. Antoine. My little angels find this spot more salubrious."

"Yes, yes," answered Tantaine amicably, "and if they howl too much when they are corrected, there are not too many neighbors to hear them."

Perpignan thought it best to take no notice of this observation. "The papers are always pitching into us," continued he. "They had much better stick to politics. The fact is, that the profits of our business are tremendously exaggerated."

"Well, you manage to make a living out of it?"

"I don't lose, I confess, but I have six little cherubs in hospital, besides the one in the kitchen, and these, of course, are a dead loss to me."

"That is a sad thing for you," answered Tantaine gravely.

Perpignan began to be amazed at his visitor's coolness.

"Damn it all," said he, "if you and Mascarin think the business such a profitable one, why don't you go in for it. You may perhaps think it easy to procure the kids; just try it. You have to go to Italy for most of them, then you have to smuggle them across the frontier like bales of contraband goods."

Perpignan paused to take breath, and Tantaine asked,—

"What sum do you make each of the lads bring in daily?"

"That depends," answered Perpignan hesitatingly.

"Well, you can give an average?"

"Say three francs then."

"Three francs!" repeated Tantaine with a genial smile, "and you have forty little cherubs, so that makes one hundred and twenty francs per day."

"Absurd!" retorted Perpignan; "do you think each of the lads bring in such a sum as that?"

"Ah! you know the way to make them do so."

"I don't understand you," answered Perpignan, in whose voice a shade of anxiety now began to appear.

"No offence, no offence," answered Tantaine; "but the fact is, the newspapers are doing you a great deal of harm, by retailing some of the means adopted by your colleague to make the boys do a good day's work. Do you recollect the sentence on that master who tied one of his lads down on a bed, and left him without food for two days at a stretch?"

"I don't care about such matters; no one can bring a charge of cruelty against me," retorted Perpignan angrily.

"A man with the kindest heart in the world may be the victim of circumstances."

Perpignan felt that the decisive moment was at hand.

"What do you mean?" asked he.

"Well, suppose, to punish one of your refractory lads, you were to shut him in the cellar. A storm comes on during the night, the gutter gets choked up, the cellar fills with water, and next morning you find the little cherub drowned like a rat in his hole?"

Perpignan's face was livid.

"Well, and what then?" asked he.

"Ah! now the awkward part of the matter comes. You would not care to send for the police, that might excite suspicion; the easiest thing is to dig a hole and shove the body into it."

Perpignan got up and placed his back against the door.

"You know too much, M. Tantine,—a great deal too much," said he.

Perpignan's manner was most threatening; but Tantine still smiled pleasantly, like a child who has just committed some simply mischievous act, the results of which it cannot foresee.

"The sentence isn't heavy," he continued; "five years' penal servitude, if evidence of previous good conduct could be put in; but if former antecedents were disclosed, such as a journey to Nancy——"

This was the last straw, and Perpignan broke out,—

"What do you mean?" said he; "and what do you want me to do?"

"Only a trifling service, as I told you before. My dear sir, do not put yourself in a rage," he added, as Perpignan seemed disposed to speak again. "Was it not you who first began to talk of your, 'em—well, let us say business?"

"Then you wanted to make yourself agreeable by talking all this rot to me. Well, shall I tell you in my turn what I think?"

"By all means, if it will not be giving you too much trouble."

"Then I tell you that you have come here on an errand which no man should venture to do alone. You are not of the age and build for business like this. It is a misfortune—a fatal one perhaps—to put yourself in my power, in such a house as this."

"But, my dear sir, what is likely to happen to me?"

The features of the ex-cook were convulsed with fury; he was in that mad state of rage in which a man has no control over himself. Mechanically his hand slipped into his pocket; but before he could draw it out again, Tantaine who had not lost one of his movements, sprang upon him and grasped him so tightly by the throat that he was powerless to adopt any offensive measures, in spite of his great strength and robust build. The struggle was not a long one; the old man hurled his adversary to the ground, and placed his foot on his chest, and held him down, his whole face and figure seemingly transfigured with the glories of strength and success.

"And so you wished to stab me,—to murder a poor and inoffensive old man. Do you think that I was fool enough to enter your cut-throat door without taking proper precautions?" And as he spoke he drew a revolver from his bosom. "Throw away your knife," added he sternly.

In obedience to this mandate, Perpignan, who was now entirely demoralized, threw the sharp-pointed weapon which he had contrived to open in his pocket into a corner of the room.

"Good," said Tantaine. "You are growing more reasonable now. Of course I came alone, but do you think that plenty of people did not know where I was going to? Had I not returned to-night, do you think that my master, M. Mascarin, would have been satisfied? and how long do you think that it would have been before he and the police would have been here? If you do not do all that I wish for the rest of your life, you will be the most ungrateful fellow in the world."

Perpignan was deeply mortified; he had been worsted in single combat, and now he was being found out, and these things had never happened to him before.

"Well, I suppose that I must give in," answered he sulkily.

"Quite so; it is a pity that you did not think of that before."

"You vexed me and made me angry."

"Just so; well, now, get up, take that chair, and let us talk reasonably."

Perpignan obeyed without a word.

"Now," said Tantaine, "I came here with a really magnificent proposal. But I adopted the course I pursued because I wished to prove to you that *you* belonged more absolutely to Mascarin than did your wretched foreign slaves to you. You are absolutely at his mercy, and he can crush you to powder whenever he likes."

"Your Mascarin is Satan himself," muttered the discomfited man. "Who can resist him?"

"Come, as you think thus, we can talk sensibly at last."

"Well," answered Perpignan ruefully, as he adjusted his disordered necktie, "say what you like, I have no answer to make."

"Let us begin at the commencement," said Tantaine. "For some days past your people have been following a certain Caroline Schimmel. A fellow of sixteen, called Ambrose, a lad with a harp, was told off for this duty. He is not to be trusted. Only a night or two ago one of my men made him drunk; and fearing lest his absence might create surprise, drove him here in a cab, and left him at the corner."

The ex-cook uttered an oath.

"Then you too are watching Caroline," said he. "I knew well that there was some one else in the field, but that was no matter of mine."

"Well, tell me why you are watching her?"

"How can you ask me? You know that my motto is silence and discretion, and that this is a secret intrusted to my honor."

Tantaine shrugged his shoulders.

"Why do you talk like that, when you know very well that you are following Ambrose on your own account, hoping by that means to penetrate a secret, only a small portion of which has been intrusted to you?" remarked he.

"Are you certain of this statement?" asked the man, with a cunning look.

"So sure that I can tell you that the matter was placed in your hands by a certain M. Catenac."

The expression in Perpignan's face changed from astonishment to fear.

"Why, this Mascarin knows everything," muttered he.

"No," replied Tantaine, "my master does not know everything, and the proof of this is, that I have come to ask you what occurred between Catenac's client and yourself, and this is the service that we expect from you."

“Well, if I must, I must. About three weeks ago, one morning, I had just finished with half a dozen clients at my office in the Rue de Fame, when my servant brought me Catenac’s card. After some talk, he asked me if I could find out a person that he had utterly lost sight of. Of course I said, yes, I could. Upon this he asked me to make an appointment for ten the next morning, when some one would call on me regarding the affair. At the appointed time a shabbily dressed man was shown in. I looked at him up and down, and saw that, in spite of his greasy hat and threadbare coat, his linen was of the finest kind, and that his shoes were the work of one of our best bootmakers. ‘Aha,’ said I to myself, ‘you thought to take me in, did you!’ I handed him a chair, and he at once proceeded to let me into his reasons for coming. ‘Sir,’ said he, ‘my life has not been a very happy one, and once I was compelled to take to the Foundling Asylum a child that I loved very dearly, the son of a woman whom I adored. She is dead now, and I am old and solitary. I have a small property, and would give half of it to recover the child. Tell me, is there any chance of my doing so?’ You must imagine, my dear sir,” continued he, after a slight pause, “that I was much interested in this story, for I said to myself, that the man’s fortune must be a very small one if half of it would not amply repay me for making a journey to the Foundling Hospital. So I agreed to undertake the business, but the old fellow was too sharp for me. ‘Stop a bit, and let me finish,’ said he, ‘and you will see that your task will not be so easy as you seem to think it.’ I, of course, bragged of my enormous sources of information, and the probability of ultimate success.”

"Keep to your story," said Tantaine impatiently, "I know all about that."

"I will leave you, then, to imagine all I said to the old man, who listened to me with great satisfaction. 'I only hope that you are as skilful as M. Catenac says you are, and have as much influence and power as you assert, for no man has a finer chance than you now have. I have tried all means up to this, but I have failed.' I went first to the hospital where the child had been placed, and they showed me the register containing the date of his admission, but no one knew what had become of him, for at twelve years of age he had left the place, and no one had heard of him since; and in spite of every effort, I have been unable to discover whether he was alive or dead."

"A pretty riddle to guess," remarked Tantaine.

"An enigma that it is impossible to solve," returned Perpignan. "How is one to get hold of a boy who vanished ten years ago, and who must now be a grown-up man?"

"We could do it."

Tantaine's tone was so decided, that the other man looked sharply at him with a vague suspicion rising in his breast that the affair had also been placed in Mascarin's hands; and if so, whether he had worked it with more success than himself.

"You might, for all I know; but I felt that the clue was absolutely wanting," answered Perpignan sulkily. "I put on a bold face, however, and asked for the boy's description. The man told me that he could provide me with an accurate one, for that many people, notably the lady superior, remembered the lad. He could also give other details which might be useful."

"And these you obtained, of course?"

"Not yet."

"Are you joking?"

"Not a bit. I do not know whether the old man was sharp enough to read in the expression of my features that I had not the smallest hope of success; be that as it may, he could give me no further information that day, declaring that he came in only to consult me, and that everything must be done in a most confidential way. I hastened to assure him that my office was a perfect tomb of secrets. He told me that he took that for granted. Then telling me that he wished me to draw up a *précis* of my intended course, he took out a note for five hundred francs, which he handed to me for my time. I refused to take it, though it cost me a struggle to do so, for I thought that I should make more out of him later on. But he insisted on my taking it, saying that he would see me again soon, and that Catenac would communicate with me. He left me less interested in the search than in who this old man could possibly be."

Tantaine felt that Perpignan was telling the truth.

"Did you not try and find out that?" asked he.

Perpignan hesitated; but feeling convinced that there was no loophole for escape, he answered, "Hardly had my visitor left than, slipping on a cap and a workman's blouse, I followed in his track, and saw him enter one of the finest houses in the Rue de Varennes."

"He lived there then?"

"He did, and he was a very well-known man—the Duke de Champdoce."

"Yes, I know all that," answered Tantaine, placidly, "but I can't, for the life of me, imagine the connection between the Duke and Caroline Schimmel."

Perpignan raised his eyebrows.

"Why did you put a man to watch her?" asked Tantaine.

"My reasons for doing so were most simple. I made every inquiry regarding the Duke; learned that he was very wealthy, and lived a very steady life. He is married, and loves his wife dearly. They had one son, whom they lost a year ago, and have never recovered from the shock. I imagine that this Duke, having lost his legitimate heir, wishes me to find his other son. Do you not think that I am right?"

"There is something in it; but, after all, you have not explained your reasons for watching Caroline."

Perpignan was no match for Mascarin's right-hand man, but he was keen enough to discern that Tantaine was putting a string of questions to him which had been prepared in advance. This he, however, was powerless to resent.

"As you may believe," said he, "I made every inquiry into the past as well as the present of the Duke, and also tried to discover who was the mother of the child, but in this I entirely failed."

"What! not with all your means?" cried Tantaine, with a sneer.

"Laugh at me as much as you like; but out of the thirty servants in the Champdoce establishment, not one has been there more than ten years. Nor could I anywhere lay my hands upon one who had been in the Duke's service in his youth. Once, however, as I was in the wineshop in the Rue de Varennes, I quite by chance heard allusion made to a woman who had been in the service of the Duke twenty-five years ago, and who was now in receipt of a small allowance from him. This woman was Caroline Schimmel. I easily found out her address, and set a watch on her."

"And of what use will she be to you?"

"Very little, I fear. And yet the allowance looks as if she had at one time done something out of the way for her employers. Can it be that she has any knowledge of the birth of this natural child?"

"I don't think much of your idea," returned Tantaine carelessly.

"Since then," continued Perpignan, "the Duke has never put in an appearance at my office."

"But how about Catenac?"

"I have seen him three times."

"Has he told you nothing more? Do you not even know in which hospital the child was placed?"

"No; and on my last visit I plainly told him that I was getting sick of all this mystery; and he said that he himself was tired, and was sorry that he had ever meddled in the affair."

Tantaine was not surprised at hearing this, and accounted for Catenac's change of front by the threats of Mascarin.

"Well, what do you draw from this?" asked he.

"That Catenac has no more information than I have. The Duke most likely proposes to drop the affair; but, were I in his place, I should be afraid to find the boy, however much I might at one time have desired to do so. He may be in prison—the most likely thing for a lad who, at twelve years of age, ran away from a place where he was well treated. I have, however, planned a mode of operation, for, with patience, money, and skill, much might be done."

"I agree with you."

"Then let me tell you. I have drawn an imaginary circle round Paris. I said to myself, 'I will visit every house and inn in the villages round within this radius;

I will enter every isolated dwelling, and will say to the inhabitants, "Do any of you remember at any time sheltering and feeding a child, dressed in such and such a manner?"' giving at the same time a description of him. I am sure that I should find some one who would answer in the affirmative. Then I should gain a clue which I would follow up to the end."

This plan appeared so ingenious to Tantaine, that he involuntarily exclaimed,—

"Good! excellent!"

Perpignan hardly knew whether Tantaine was praising or blaming him. His manner might have meant either.

"You are very fast," returned he dismally. "Perhaps presently you will be good enough to allow that I am not an absolute fool. Do you really think that I am an idiot? At any rate, I sometimes hit upon a judicious combination. For example, with regard to this boy, I have a notion which, if properly worked might lead to something."

"Might I ask what it is?"

"I speak confidentially. If it is impossible to lay our hands upon the real boy, why should we not substitute another?"

At this suggestion, Tantaine started violently.

"It would be most dangerous, most hazardous," gasped he.

"You are afraid, then?" said Perpignan, delighted at the effect his proposal had made.

"It seems it is you who were afraid," retorted Tantaine.

"You do not know me when you say that," said Perpignan.

"If you were not afraid," asked Tantaine, in his

most oily voice. "why did you not carry out your plan?"

"Because there was one obstacle that could not be got over."

"Well, I can't see it myself," returned Tantaine, desirous of hearing every detail.

"Ah, there is one thing that I omitted in my narrative. The Duke informed me that he could prove the identity of the boy by certain scars."

"Scars? And of what kind, pray?"

"Now you are asking me too much. I do not know."

On receiving this reply, Tantaine rose hastily from his chair, and thus concealed his agitation from his companion.

"I have a hundred apologies to make for taking up so much of your valuable time. My master has got it into his head that you were after the same game as ourselves. He was mistaken, and now we leave the field clear to you."

Before Perpignan could make any reply, the old man had passed through the doorway. On the threshold he paused, and said,—

"Were I in your place, I would stick to my first plan. You will never find the boy, but you will get several thousand francs out of the Duke, which I am sure will come in handy."

"There are scars now, then," muttered Tantaine, as he moved away from the house, "and that Master Catenac never said a word about them!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

FATHER AND SON.

Two hours after André had left the Avenue de Matignon, one of Mascarin's most trusty emissaries was at his heels, who could watch his actions with the tenacity of a bloodhound. André, however, now that he had heard of Sabine's convalescence, had entirely recovered the elasticity of his spirits, and would never have noticed that he was being followed. His heart, too, was much rejoiced at the friendship of M. de Breulh and the promise of assistance from the Viscountess de Bois Arden; and with the assistance of these two, he felt that he could end his difficulties.

"I must get to work again," muttered he, as he left M. de Breulh's hospitable house. "I have already lost too much time. To-morrow, if you look up at the scaffolding of a splendid house in the Champs Elysées, you will see me at work."

André was busy all night with his plans for the rich contractor, M. Gandelu, who wanted as much ornamental work on the outside of his house as he had florid decorations within. He rose with the lark, and having gazed for a moment on Sabine's portrait, started for the abode of M. Gandelu, the proud father of young Gaston. This celebrated contractor lived in a splendid house in the Rue Chasse d'Antin, until his more palatial residence should be completed.

When André presented himself at the door, an old servant, who knew him well, strongly urged him not to go up.

"Never," said he, "in all the time that I have been with master, have I seen him in such a towering rage. Only just listen!"

It was easy to hear the noise alluded to, mingled with the breaking of glass and the smashing of furniture.

"The master has been at this game for over an hour," remarked the servant, "ever since his lawyer, M. Catenac, has left him."

André, however, decided not to postpone his visit. "I must see him in spite of everything; show me up," said he.

With evident reluctance the domestic obeyed, and threw open the door of a room superbly furnished and decorated, in the centre of which stood M. Gandelu waving the leg of a chair frantically in his hand. He was a man of sixty years of age, but did not look fifty, built like a Hercules, with huge hands and muscular limbs which seemed to fret under the restraint of his fashionable garments. He had made his enormous fortune, of which he was considerably proud, by honest labor, and no one could say that he had not acted fairly throughout his whole career. He was coarse and violent in his manner, but he had a generous heart and never refused aid to the deserving and needy. He swore like a trooper, and his grammar was faulty; but for all that, his heart was in the right place, and he was a better man than many who boast of high birth and expensive education.

"What idiot is coming here to annoy me?" roared he, as soon as the door was opened.

"I have come by appointment," answered André, and the contractor's brow cleared as he saw who his visitor was.

"Ah, it is you, is it? Take a seat; that is, if there is a sound chair left in the room. I like you, for you have an honest face and don't shirk hard work. You needn't color up, though; modesty is no fault. Yes, there is something in you, and when you want a hundred thousand francs to go into business with, here it is ready for you; and had I a daughter, you should marry her, and I would build your house for you."

"I thank you much," said André; "but I have learned to depend entirely on myself."

"True," returned Gandelu, "you never knew your parents; you never knew what a kind father would do for his child. Do you know my son?" asked he, suddenly turning upon André.

This question at once gave André the solution of the scene before him. M. Gandelu was irritated at some folly that his son had committed. For a moment André hesitated; he did not care to say anything that might revive the old man's feeling of anger, and therefore merely replied that he had only met his son Gaston two or three times.

"Gaston," cried the old man, with a bitter oath; "do not call him that. Do you think it likely that old Nicholas Gandelu would ever have been ass enough to call his son Gaston? He was called Peter, after his grandfather, but it wasn't a good enough one for the young fool; he wanted a swell name, and Peter had too much the savor of hard work in it for my fine gentleman. But that isn't all; I could let that pass," continued the old man. "Pray, have you seen his cards? Over the name of Gaston de Gandelu is a count's coronet. He a count indeed! the son of a man who has carried a hod for years!"

"Young people will be young people," André ven-

tured to observe; but the old man's wrath would not be assuaged by a platitude like this.

"You can find no excuse for him, only the fellow is absolutely ashamed of his father. He consorts with titled fools and is in the seventh heaven if a waiter addresses him as 'Count,' not seeing that it is not he that is treated with respect, but the gold pieces of his old father, the working man."

André's position was now a most painful one, and he would have given a good deal not to be the recipient of a confidence which was the result of anger.

"He is only twenty, and yet see what a wreck he is," resumed Gandelu. "His eyes are dim, and he is getting bald; he stoops, and spends his nights in drink and bad company. I have, however, only myself to blame, for I have been far too lenient; and if he had asked me for my head, I believe that I should have given it to him. He had only to ask and have. After my wife's death, I had only the boy. Do you know what he has in this house? Why, rooms fit for a prince, two servants and four horses. I allow him, monthly, fifteen hundred francs, and he goes about calling me a niggard, and has already squandered every bit of his poor mother's fortune." He stopped, and turned pale, for at that moment the door opened, and young Gaston, or rather Peter, slouched into the room.

"It is the common fate of fathers to be disappointed in their offspring, and to see the sons who ought to have been their honor and glory the scourge to punish their worldly aspirations," exclaimed the old man.

"Good! that is really a very telling speech," murmured Gaston approvingly, "considering that you have not made a special study of elocution."

Fortunately his father did not catch these words, and

continued in a voice broken by emotion, "That, M. André, is my son, who for twenty years has been my sole care. Well, believe it or not, as you like, he has been speculating on my death, as you might speculate on a race-horse at Vincennes."

"No, no," put in Gaston, but his father stopped him with a disdainful gesture.

"Have at least the courage to acknowledge your fault. You thought me blind because I said nothing, but your past conduct has opened my eyes."

"But, father!"

"Do not attempt to deny it. This very morning my man of business, M. Catenac, wrote to me, and with that real courage which only true friends possess, told me all. I must tell you, M. André," resumed the contractor, "I was ill. I had a severe attack of the gout, such as a man seldom recovers from, and my son was constant in his attendance at my sick couch. This consoled me. 'He loves me after all,' said I. But it was only my testamentary arrangements that he wanted to discover, and he went straight to a money-lender called Clergot and raised a hundred thousand francs, assuring the blood-sucker that I had not many hours to live."

"It is a lie!" cried Gaston, his face crimsoning with shame.

The old man raised the leg of the chair in his hand, and made so threatening a movement that André flung himself between father and son. "Great heavens!" cried he, "think what you are doing, sir, and forbear."

The old man paused, passed his hand round his brow, and flung the weapon into a remote corner of the room. "I thank you," said he, grasping André's hand; "you have saved me from a great crime. In another moment I should have murdered him."

Gaston was no coward, and he still retained the position he had been in before.

"This is quite romantic," muttered he. "The governor seems to be going in for infanticide."

André did not allow him to finish the sentence, for, grasping the young man's wrist, he whispered fiercely, "Not another word; silence!"

"But I want to know what it all means?" answered the irrepressible youth.

"I had in my hands," said the old man, addressing André, and ignoring the presence of his son, the important paper he had copied. Yes; not more than an hour ago I read it. These were the terms: if I died within eight days from the date of signature, my son agreed to pay a bonus of thirty thousand francs; but if I lived for one month, he would take up the bill by paying one hundred and fifty thousand. If, however, by any unforeseen chance, I should recover entirely, he bound himself to pay Clergot the hundred thousand francs."

The old man tore the cravat from his swelling throat, and wiped the beads of cold sweat that bedewed his brow.

"When this man recovers his self-command," thought André, "he will never forgive me for having been the involuntary listener to this terrible tale." But in this André was mistaken, for unsophisticated nature requires sympathy, and Nicholas Gandelu would have said the same to the first comer.

"Before, however, delivering the hundred thousand francs, the usurer wished to make himself more secure, and asked for a certificate from some one who had seen me. This person was his friend. He spoke to me of a medical man, a specialist, who would understand my

case at once. Would I not see him? Never had I seen my son so tender and affectionate. I yielded to his entreaties at last, and one evening I said to him, 'Bring in this wonderful physician, if you really think he can do anything for me,' and he did bring him.

"Yes, M. André, he found a medical man base and vile enough to become the tool of my son, and a money-lender; and if I choose, I can expose him to the loathing of the world, and the contempt of his brethren.

"The fellow came, and his visit lasted nearly an hour. I can see him now, asking questions and feeling my pulse. He went away at last, and my son followed him. They both met Clergot, who was waiting in the street. 'You can pay him the cash; the old man won't last twenty-four hours longer,' said the doctor; and then my son came back happy and radiant, and assured me that I should soon be well again. And strange as it may seem, a change for the better took place that very night. Clergot had asked for forty-eight hours in which to raise the sum required. He heard of my convalescence, and my son lost the money.

"Was it courage you lacked?" asked the old man, turning for the first time to his son. "Did you not know that ten drops instead of one of the medicine I was taking would have freed you from me for ever?"

Gaston did not seem at all overwhelmed. Indeed, he was wondering how the matter had reached his father's ears, and how Catenac had discovered the rough draft of the agreement.

The contractor had imagined that his son would implore forgiveness; but seeing that he remained obdurate, his violence burst forth again. "And do you know what use my son would make of my fortune? He would squander it on a creature he picked up out

of the streets,—a woman he called Madame de Chantemille,—a fit companion for a noble count ! ”

The shaft had penetrated the impassibility which Gaston had up to this displayed. “ You shall not insult Zora,” said he.

“ I shall not,” returned his father with a grim laugh, “ take the trouble to do that ; you are not of age, and I shall clap your friend Madame de Chantemille into prison.”

“ You would not do that ! ”

“ Would I not ? You are a minor ; but your Zora, whose real name is Rose, is much older ; the law is wholly on my side.”

“ But father——”

“ There is no use in crying ; my lawyer has the matter in hand, and by nightfall your Zora will be securely caged.”

This blow was so cruel and unexpected, that the young man could only repeat,—

“ Zora in prison ! ”

“ Yes, in the House of Correction, and from thence to Saint Lazare. Catenac told me the very things to be done.”

“ Shameful ! ” exclaimed Gaston, “ Zora in prison ! Why, I and my friends will lay siege to the place. I will go to the Court, stand by her side, and depose that this all comes from your devilish malignity. I will say that I love and esteem her, and that as soon as I am of age I will marry her ; the papers will write about us. Go on, go on ; I rather like the idea.”

However great a man’s self-control may be, it has its limits. M. Gandelu had restrained himself even while he told his son of his villainous conduct ; but these revolting threats were more than he could en-

dure, and André seeing this, stepped forward, opened the door, and thrust the foolish youth into the corridor.

“What have you done?” cried the contractor; “do you not see that he will go and warn that vile creature, and that she will escape from justice?”

And as André, fearing he knew not what, tried to restrain him, the old man, exerting all his muscular strength, thrust him on one side with perfect ease, and rushed from the room, calling loudly to his servants.

André was horrified at the scene at which, in spite of himself, he had been compelled to assist as a witness. He was not a fool, and had lived too much in the world of art not to have witnessed many strange scenes and met with many dissolute characters; but, as a rule, the follies of the world had amused rather than disgusted him. But this display of want of feeling on the part of a son toward a father absolutely chilled his blood. In a few minutes M. Gandelu appeared with a calmer expression upon his face.

“I will tell you how matters now stand,” said he, in a voice that quivered in spite of his efforts. “My son is locked up in his room, and a trustworthy servant whom he cannot corrupt has mounted guard over him.”

“Do you not fear, sir, that in his excitement and anger he may——?”

The contractor shrugged his shoulders.

“You do not know him,” answered he, “if you imagine that he resembles me in any way. What do you think that he is doing now? Lying on his bed, face downward, yelling for his Zora. Zora, indeed! As if that was a name fit for a Christian. How is it that these creatures are enabled to drug our boys and lead

them anywhere? Had his mother not been a saint on earth, I should scarcely believe that he was my son."

The contractor sank into a chair and buried his face in his hands.

"You are in pain, sir?" said André.

"Yes; my heart is deeply wounded. Up to this time I have only felt as a father; now I feel as a man. Tomorrow I send for my family and consult with them; and I shall advertise that for the future I will not be responsible for any debts that my son may contract. He shall not have a penny, and will soon learn how society treats a man with empty pockets. As to the girl, she will disappear in double quick time. I have thoroughly weighed the consequences of sending this girl to gaol, and they are very terrible. My son will do as he has threatened, I am sure of that; and I can picture him tied to that infamous creature for life, looking into her face, and telling her that he adores her, and glorying in his dishonor, which will be repeated by every Parisian newspaper."

"But is there no other way of proceeding?" asked André.

"No, none whatever. If all modern fathers had my courage, we should not have so many profligate sons. It is impossible that this conferring with the doctor and the money-lender could have originated in my son's weak brain. He is a mere child, and some one must have put him up to it."

The poor father was already seeking for some excuse for the son's conduct.

"I must not dwell on this longer," continued Gandelu, "or I shall get as mad as I was before. I will look at your plans another day. Now, let us get out of

the house. Come and look at the new building in the Champs Elysées."

The mansion in question was situated at the corner of the Rue de Chantilly, near the Avenue des Champs Elysées, and the frontage of it was still marked by scaffolding, so that but little of it could be seen. A dozen workmen, engaged by André, were lounging about. They had expected to see him early, and were surprised at his non-appearance, as he was usually punctuality itself. André greeted them in a friendly manner, but M. Gandelu, though he was always on friendly terms with his workmen, passed by them as if he did not even notice their existence. He walked through the different rooms and examined them carelessly, without seeming to take any interest in them, for his thoughts were with his son,—his only son.

After a short time he turned to André.

"I cannot stay longer," said he; "I am not feeling well; I will be here to-morrow;" and he went away with his head bent down on his chest.

The workmen noticed his strange and unusual manner.

"He does not look very bright," remarked one to his comrade. "Since his illness he has not been the same man. I think he must have had some terrible shock."

CHAPTER XXIV.

AN ARTFUL TRICK.

ANDRÉ had removed his coat and donned his blouse, the sleeves of which were rolled up to his shoulders. "I must get to business," murmured he, "to make up for lost time." He set to work with great vigor, but had hardly got into the swing, when a lad came actively up the ladder and told him that a gentleman wished to see him, "and a real swell, too," added the boy. André was a good deal put out at being disturbed, but when he reached the street and saw that it was M. de Breulh-Faverlay who was waiting for him, his ill-humor disappeared like chaff before the wind.

"Ah, this is really kind of you," cried he; for he could never forget the debt of gratitude he owed to the gentleman. "A thousand thanks for remembering me. Excuse my not shaking hands, but see;" and he exhibited his palms all white with plaster. As he did so the smile died away on his lips, for he caught sight of his friend's face.

"What is the matter?" exclaimed he, anxiously. "Is Sabine worse? Has she had a relapse?"

De Breulh shook his head, but the expression of his face clearly said,—

"Would to heavens it were only that!"

But the news that Sabine was not worse had relieved André at once, and he patiently waited for his friend to explain.

"I have seen her twice for you," answered De Breulh; "but it is absolutely necessary that you should come to a prompt decision on an important affair."

"I am quite at your service," returned André a good deal surprised and troubled.

"Then come with me at once. I did not drive here, but we shall not be more than a quarter of an hour in reaching my house."

"I will follow you almost immediately. I only ask five minutes' grace to go up to the scaffold again."

"Have you any orders to give?"

"No, I have none."

"Why should you go, then?"

"To make myself a little more presentable."

"Is it an annoyance or inconvenience for you to go out in that dress?"

"Not a bit, I am thoroughly used to it; but it was for your sake."

"If that is all, come along."

"But people will stare at seeing you in company with a common workman."

"Let them stare." And drawing André's arm through his, M. de Breulh set off.

André was right; many persons did turn round to look at the fashionably dressed gentleman walking arm in arm with a mason in his working attire, but De Breulh took but little heed, and to all André's questions simply said, "Wait till we reach my house."

At length they arrived, without having exchanged twenty words, and entering the library closed the door. M. de Breulh did not inflict the torture of suspense upon his young friend a moment longer than was necessary.

"This morning, about twelve o'clock, as I was crossing the Avenue de Matignon, I saw Modeste, who had been waiting for you more than an hour."

"I could not help it."

"I know that. As soon as she saw me, she ran up to me at once. She was terribly disappointed at not having seen you; but knowing our intimacy, she intrusted me with a letter for you from Mademoiselle de Mussidan."

André shuddered; he felt that the note contained evil tidings, with which De Breulh was already acquainted. "Give it to me," said he, and with trembling hands he tore open the letter and perused its contents.

"DEAREST ANDRÉ,—

"I love you, and shall ever continue to do so, but I have duties—most holy ones—which I must fulfil; duties which my name and position demand of me, even should the act cost me my life. We shall never meet again in this world, and this letter is the last one you will ever receive from me. Before long you will see the announcement of my marriage. Pity me, for great as your wretchedness will be, it will be as nothing compared to mine. Heaven have mercy upon us both! André, try and tear me out of your heart. I have not even the right to die, and oh, my darling, this—this is the last word you will ever receive from your poor unhappy
SABINE."

If M. de Breulh had insisted upon taking André home with him before he handed him the letter, it was because Modeste had given him some inkling of its contents. He feared that the effect would be tremendous upon nerves so highly strung and sensitive as those of André. But he need not have been alarmed on this point. As the young painter mastered the contents of the letter his features became ghastly pale, and a shudder convulsed every nerve and muscle of his frame. With a mechanical gesture he extended the paper to M. de Breulh, uttering the one word, "Read."

His friend obeyed him, more alarmed by André's laconism than he would have been by some sudden explosion of passion.

"Do not lose heart," exclaimed he.

But André interrupted him. "Lose heart!" said he; "you do not know me. When Sabine was ill, perhaps dying, far away from me, I did feel cast down; but now that she tells me that she loves me, my feelings are of an entirely different nature."

M. de Breulh was about to speak, but André went on.

"What is this marriage contract which my poor Sabine announces to me, as if it was her death-warrant? Her parents must all along have intended to break with you, but you were beforehand with them. Can they have received a more advantageous offer of marriage already? It is scarcely likely. When she confided the secret of her life to you, she certainly knew nothing of this. What terrible event has happened since then? My brave Sabine would never have submitted unless some coercion had been used that she could not struggle against; she would rather have quitted her father's house for ever."

As André uttered these words De Breulh's mind was busy with similar reflections, for Modeste had given him some hint of the approaching marriage, and had begged him to be most careful how he communicated the facts to André.

"You must have noticed," continued the young painter, "the strange coincidence between Sabine's illness and this note. You left her happy and full of hope, and an hour afterward she falls senseless, as though struck by lightning; as soon as she recovers a little she sends me this terrible letter. Do you remem-

ber that Madame de Bois Arden told us that during Sabine's illness her father and mother never left her bedside? Was not this for fear lest some guilty secret of theirs might escape her lips in a crisis of delirium?"

"Yes, I remember that, and I have long had reason to imagine that there is some terrible family secret in the Mussidans' family, such as we too often find among the descendants of noble houses."

"What can it be?"

"That I have no means of ascertaining, but that there is one I am sure."

André turned away and paced rapidly up and down the room. "Yes," said he, suddenly, "there is a mystery; but you and I will leave no stone unturned until we penetrate it." He drew a chair close to the side of his friend, who was reclining on a couch. "Listen," said he, "and correct me if you fancy that I am not right in what I am saying. Do you believe that the most terrible necessity alone has compelled Sabine to write this letter?"

"Most certainly."

"Both the Count and Countess were willing to accept you as their son-in-law?"

"Exactly so."

"Could M. de Mussidan have found a more brilliant match for his daughter, one who could unite so many advantages of experience and education to so enormous a fortune?"

De Breulh could hardly repress a smile.

"I am not wishing to pay you a compliment," said André impatiently. "Reply to my question."

"Very well then, I admit that according to the opinion of the world, I was a most eligible suitor, and that M. de Mussidan would find it hard to replace me."

"Then tell me how it comes about that neither the Count nor Countess has made any effort to prevent this rupture?"

Their pride, perhaps, has been wounded."

Not so, for Modeste tells us that on the very day you sent the letter the Count was going to call on you to break off the engagement."

"Yes, that is so, if we are to believe Modeste."

As if to give more emphasis to his words, André started to his feet. "This," cried he, "this man, who has so suddenly appeared upon the scene, will marry Sabine, not only against her own will, but against that of her parents, and for what reason? Who is this man, and what is the mysterious power that he possesses? His power is too great to spring from an honorable source. Sabine is sacrificing herself to this man for some reason or other, and he, like a dastardly cur, is ready to take advantage of the nobleness of her heart."

"I admit the correctness of your supposition," said he; "and now, how do you propose to act?"

"I shall do nothing as yet," answered the young man, with a fierce gleam in his eyes. "Sabine asks me to tear her from my heart. I will affect to do so for the time. Modeste believes in me, and will help me. I have patience. The villain who has wrecked my life does not know me, and I will only reveal myself upon the day that I hold him helpless in my hand."

"Take care, André," urged De Breulh; "a false step would ruin your hopes for ever."

"I will make none; as soon as I have this man's name, I will insult him; there will be a duel, and I shall kill him—or he me."

"A duel will be the height of madness, and would ruin all your hopes of marriage with Sabine."

"The only thing that holds me back is that I do not wish that there should be a corpse between Sabine and myself. Blood on a bridal dress, they say, brings misery; and if this man is what I suspect him to be, I should be doing him too much honor if I crossed swords with him. No, I must have a deeper vengeance than this, for I can never forget that he nearly caused Sabine's death."

He paused for a few seconds, and once again broke the silence which reigned in the room.

"To abuse the power that he must possess shows what a miserable wretch he must be; and men do not attain such a height of infamy by a single bound. The course of his life must be full of similar crimes, growing deeper and deadlier as he moves on. I will make it my business to unmask him and to hold him up to the scorn and contempt of his fellow-men."

"Yes; that is the plan to pursue."

"And we will do so, sir. Ah! heaven help me! I say 'we,' for I have relied on you. The generous offer that you made to me I refused, and I was in the right in doing so; but I should now be a mere madman if I did not entreat you to grant me your aid and advice. We have both known hardship and are capable of going without food or sleep, if necessity requires it of us. We have both graduated in the school of poverty and sorrow. We can keep our plans to ourselves and act."

André paused, as if waiting for a reply, but his friend remained silent.

"My plan is most simple," resumed the young painter. "As soon as we know the fellow's name we shall be able to act. He will never suspect us, and we can follow him like his very shadow. There are pro-

fessional detectives who, for a comparatively small sum, will lay bare a man's entire life. Are we not as clever as this fine fellow? We can work well together in our different circles; you, in the world of fashion, can pick up intelligence that I could not hope to gain; while I, from my lowly position, will study the hidden side of his life, for I can talk to the servants lounging at the front doors or the grooms at the public-houses without suspicion."

M. de Breulh was delighted at finding that he could have some occupation which would fill up the dreary monotony of his life.

"I am yours!" cried he; "and will work with you heart and soul."

Before the artist could reply a loud blow was struck upon the library door, and a woman's voice exclaimed,—

"Let me in, Gontran, at once."

"It is Madame de Bois Arden," remarked De Breulh, drawing the bolt back; and the Viscountess rushed hastily into the room and threw herself into a low chair.

Her beautiful face was bedewed with tears, and she was in a terrible state of excitement.

"What is the matter, Clotilde?" asked De Breulh kindly, as he took her hand.

"Something terrible," answered she with a sob; "but you may be able to help me. Can you lend me twenty thousand francs?"

De Breulh smiled; a heavy weight had been lifted from his heart.

"If that is all you require, do not shed any more tears."

"But I want them at once."

"Can you give me half an hour?"

"Yes; but lose no time."

De Breulh drew a check and despatched his valet for the money.

"A thousand thanks!" said the Viscountess; "but money is not all that I require, I want your advice."

André was about to leave the cousins together, but the lady stopped him.

"Pray remain, M. André," said she; "you are not at all in the way; besides, I shall have to speak of some one in whom you take a very deep interest—of Mademoiselle de Mussidan, in short.

"I never knew such a strange occurrence," continued the Viscountess, recovering her spirits rapidly, "as that to which, my dear Gontran, you owe my visit. Well, I was just going up to dress, for I had been detained by visitor after visitor, when at two o'clock another came before I could give my order, 'Not at home.' This was the Marquis de Croisenois, the brother of the man who twenty years ago disappeared in so mysterious a manner. I hardly knew him at all, though of course we have met in society, and he bows to me in the Bois, but that is all."

"And yet he called on you to-day?" remarked De Breulh.

"Don't interrupt me," said the Viscountess. "Yes, he called, and that is enough. He is good-looking, faultlessly dressed, and talks well. He brought a letter from an old friend of my grandmother's, the Marchioness d'Arlanges. She is a dear old thing, she uses awful language, and some of her stories are quite too—you know what I mean. In the letter the old lady said that the Marquis was one of her friends, and begged me for her sake to do him the service he re-

quired. Of course I asked him to be seated, and assured him that I would do anything that lay in my power. Then he began talking about M. de Clinchain, and told me a funny story about that eccentric man and a little actress, when I heard a great noise in the anteroom. I was about to ring and inquire the cause, when the door flew open and in came Van Klopen, the ladies' tailor, with a very inflamed countenance. I thought that he had come in a hurry because he had hit on something extremely fetching and wished me to be the first to see it. But do you know what the impudent fellow wanted?"

A smile shone in De Breulh's eyes, as he answered,—
"Money, perhaps!"

"You are right," returned the Viscountess, gravely; "he brought my bill into my very drawing-room, and handed it in before a stranger. I never thought that a man who supplies the most aristocratic portion of society could have been guilty of such a piece of impertinence. I ordered him to leave the room, taking it for granted that he would do so with an apology, but I was wrong. He flew into a rage and threatened me, and swore that if I did not settle the bill on the spot, he would go to my husband. The bill was nearly twenty thousand francs; imagine my horror! I was so thunderstruck at the amount that I absolutely entreated him to give me time. But my humility added to his annoyance, and taking a seat in an armchair, he declared that he would not move from it until he received his money, or had seen my husband."

"What was Croisenois doing all this time?" asked M. de Breulh.

"He did nothing at first, but at this last piece of audacity he took out his pocketbook, and throwing it

in Van Klopen's face, said: 'Pay yourself, you insolent scoundrel, and get out of this.'"

"And the tailor went off?"

"No. 'I must give you a receipt,' said he, and taking writing materials from his pocket, he wrote at the foot of the bill, 'Received from the Marquis de Croisenois, on account of money owing by the Viscountess de Bois Arden, the sum of twenty thousand francs.'"

"Well," said De Breulh, looking very grave, "and after Van Klopen's departure, I suppose Croisenois remained to ask the favor regarding which he had called?"

"You are mistaken," answered his cousin. "I had great difficulty in making him speak; but at last he confessed that he was deeply in love with Mademoiselle de Mussidan, and entreated me to present him to her parents and exert all my influence in his behalf."

Both the young men started.

"That is the man!" cried they.

"What do you mean?" asked the Viscountess, looking from one to the other.

"That yon Marquis de Croisenois is a despicable scoundrel, who has imposed upon the Marchioness d'Arlanges. Just you listen to our reasons for coming to this conclusion." And with the most perfect clearness De Breulh laid the whole state of the case before the Viscountess.

The lady listened attentively, and then said,—

"Your premises are wrong; just let me say a word on the matter. You say that there is some man who, by means of the influence which he exercises over the Count and Countess, can coerce them into granting him Sabine's hand. But, my dear Gontran, an utter stranger to the family could not exercise this power.

Now M. de Croisenois has never entered the doors of the house, and came to me to ask for an introduction."

The justness of this remark silenced De Breulh, but André took another view of the matter.

"This seems all right at a first glance, but still, after the extraordinary scene that the Viscountess has described, I should like to ask a few questions. Was not Van Klopen's behavior very unexpected?"

"It was brutal and infamous."

"Are you not one of his best customers?"

"I am, and I have spent an enormous sum with him."

"But Van Klopen is nasty sometimes; did he not sue Mademoiselle de Riversac?" asked De Breulh.

"But he did not, I expect, force his way into her drawing-room and behave outrageously before a perfect stranger. Do you know M. de Croisenois?" returned André.

"Very slightly; he is of good family, and his brother George was much esteemed by all who knew him."

"Has he plenty of money?"

"I do not think so, but in time he will inherit a large fortune; very likely he is over head and ears in debt."

"And yet he had twenty thousand francs in his pocketbook; is not that rather a large sum to carry when you are simply making a morning call? and it is curious, too, that it should have been the exact sum wanted. Then there is another point; the pocketbook was hurled into Van Klopen's face. Did he submit without a word to such treatment?"

"He certainly said nothing," replied Madame de Bois Arden.

"One question more, if you please. Did Van Klopen

open the book and count the notes before he gave the receipt?"

The Viscountess thought for a moment.

"I was a good deal excited," said she at length, but I am almost sure that I saw no notes in Van Klopen's hands."

André's face grew radiant.

"Good, very good; he was told to pay himself, and yet he never looked to see if the money was there, but gave a receipt at once. Of course, as Van Klopen kept the pocketbook, the Marquis could have had nothing in it besides the exact sum that was required."

"It does seem odd," muttered De Breulh.

"But," said André, "your bill was not exactly twenty thousand francs, was it?"

"No," answered the Viscountess. "I ought to have had change to the amount of a hundred or a hundred and twenty francs, but I suppose he was too much excited to give it me."

"But for all that he could remember that he had writing materials with him, and give you a receipt?"

The Viscountess was utterly bewildered.

"And," continued André, "how was it that Van Klopen knew De Croisenois' name? And now, lastly, where is the receipt?"

Madame de Bois Arden turned very pale and trembled violently.

"Ah," said she, "I felt sure that something was going to happen, and it was on this very point that I wanted your advice. Well, I have not got this receipt. M. de Croisenois crumpled it up in his hand and threw it on the table. After a while, however, he took it up and put it in his pocket."

"It is all perfectly clear," said André in jubilant

tones; "M. de Croisenois had need of your aid, he saw that he could not easily obtain it, and so sought to bind you by the means of a loan made to you at a time of great need."

"You are right," said De Breulh.

The Viscountess' giddy mode of action had brought her into many scrapes, but never into so terrible a one as this.

"Great heavens!" cried she, "what do you think that M. de Croisenois will do with this receipt?"

"He will do nothing," answered M. de Breulh, "if you do everything to advance his suit; but pause for an instant, and he will show the hand of steel which has up to now been covered by the velvet glove."

"I am not alarmed at a new slander?" returned the Viscountess.

"And why not?" answered De Breulh. "You know very well that in these days of lavish expenditure and unbridled luxury there are many women in society who are so basely vile that they ruin their lovers with as little compunction as their frailer sisters. To-morrow even De Croisenois may say at the club, 'On my word that little Bois Arden costs me a tremendous lot,' and hands about this receipt for twenty thousand francs. What do you imagine that people will think then?"

"The world knows me too well to think so ill of me."

"No, no, Clotilde, there is no charity in society; they will simply say that you are his mistress, and finding that the allowance from your husband is not enough for your needs, you are ruining your lover. There will be a significant laugh among the members, and in time, a very short time, the scandal in a highly sensational form will come to the ears of your husband."

The Viscountess wrung her hands.

"It is too horrible," wailed she. "And do you know that Bois Arden would put the worst construction on the whole affair, for he declares that a woman will sacrifice anything in order to outshine her sex in dress. Ah, I will never run up another bill anywhere; tell me, Gontran, what I had better do. Can you not get the receipt from De Croisenois?"

M. de Breulh paused for a moment and then replied, "Of course I could do so, but such a step would be very damaging to your reputation. I have no proof; and if I went to him, he would deny everything of course, and it would make him your enemy for life."

"Besides," added André, "you would put him on his guard, and he would escape us."

The unhappy woman glanced from one to the other in utter despair.

"Then I am lost," she exclaimed. "Am I to remain for the rest of my days in this villain's power?"

"Not so," returned André, "for I hope soon to put it out of M. de Croisenois' power to injure any one. What did he say when he asked you to introduce him to the Mussidans?"

"Nothing pointed."

"Then, madame, do not disturb yourself to-night. So long as he hopes you will be useful, so long he will stay his hand. Do as he wishes; never allude to the receipt; introduce him and speak well of him, while I, aided by M. de Breulh, will do my utmost to unmask this scoundrel; and as long as he believes himself to be in perfect security, our task will be an easy one."

Just then the servant returned from the bank, and

as soon as the man had left the room De Breulh took the notes and placed them in his cousin's hand.

"Here is the money for De Croisenois," said he. "Take my advice, and give it to him this evening with a polite letter of thanks."

"A thousand thanks, Gontran; I will act as you advise."

"Remember you must not allude in your letter to his introduction to the Mussidans. What do you think, André?"

"I think a receipt for the money would be a great thing," answered he.

"But such a demand would arouse his suspicions."

"I think not, madame, and I see a way of doing it; have you a maid upon whom you could rely?"

"Yes, I have one."

"Good, then give the girl a letter and the notes done up in a separate parcel, and tell her exactly what she is to do. When she sees the Marquis, let her pretend to be alarmed at the great responsibility that she is incurring in carrying this large sum, and insist upon a receipt for her own protection."

"There is sound sense in that," said De Breulh.

"Yes, yes," said the Viscountess, "Josephine will do—as sharp a girl as you could find in a day's journey—and will manage the thing admirably. Trust to me," she continued, as a smile of hope spread over her face; "I will keep De Croisenois in a good humor; he will confide in me, and I will tell you everything. But, oh dear! what shall I do without Van Klopen? Why, there is not another man in Paris fit to stand in his shoes."

With these words the Viscountess rose to leave.

"I am completely worn out," remarked she; "and

I have a dinner-party to-night. Good-bye then, until we meet again;" and with her spirits evidently as joyous as ever, she tripped into her carriage.

"Now," said André, as soon as they were once more alone, "we are on the track of De Croisenois. He evidently holds Madame de Mussidan as he holds Madame de Bois Arden. His is a really honorable mode of action; he surprises a secret, and then turns extortioner."

CHAPTER XXV.

A NEW SKIN.

DR. HORTEBISE'S private arrangements were sadly upset by his being compelled to accede to the desire of Tantaine and Mascarin, and in granting hospitality to Paul Violaine; and in spite of the brilliant visions of the future, he often devoutly wished that Mascarin and his young friend were at the other side of the world; but for all that he never thought of attempting to evade the order he had received. He therefore set himself steadily to his task, endeavoring to form Paul's mind, blunt his conscience, and prepare him for the inevitable part that he would soon have to play.

Paul found in him a most affable companion, pleasant, witty, and gifted with great conversational powers. Five days were thus spent breakfasting at well-known restaurants, driving in the Bois, and dining at clubs of which the doctor was a member, while the evenings were passed at the banker's. The doctor played cards with his host, while Paul and Flavia conversed together in low whispers, or else hung over the piano

together. But every kind of agreeable existence comes to an end, and one day Daddy Tantaine entered the room, his face radiant with delight.

"I have secured you the sweetest little nest in the world," cried he merrily. "It is not so fine as this, but more in accordance with your position."

"Where is it?" asked Paul.

Tantaine waited. "You won't wear out much shoe leather," said he, "in walking to a certain banker's, for your lodgings are close to his house."

That Tantaine had a splendid talent for arrangement Paul realized as soon as he entered his new place of abode, which was in the Rue Montmartre, and consisted of some neat, quiet rooms, just such as an artist who had conquered his first difficulties would inhabit. The apartments were on the third floor, and comprised a tiny entrance hall, sitting-room, bed and dressing room. A piano stood near the window in the sitting-room. The furniture and curtains were tasteful and in good order, but nothing was new. One thing surprised Paul very much; he had been told that the apartments had been taken and furnished three days ago, and yet it seemed as if they had been inhabited for years, and that the owner had merely stepped out a few minutes before. The unmade bed, and the half-burnt candles in the sleeping-room added to this impression, while on the rug lay a pair of worn slippers. The fire had not gone out entirely, and a half-smoked cigar lay on the mantelpiece.

On the table in the sitting-room was a sheet of music paper, with a few bars jotted down upon it. Paul felt so convinced that he was in another person's rooms, that he could not help exclaiming, "But surely some one has been living in these chambers."

"We are in your own home, my dear boy," said Tantaine.

"But you took over everything, I suppose, and the original proprietor simply walked out?"

Tantaine smiled, as though an unequivocal compliment had been paid him.

"Why, do you not know your own home?" asked he; "you have been living here for the last twelve months."

"I can't understand you," answered Paul, opening his eyes in astonishment; "you must be jesting."

"I am entirely in earnest; for more than a year you have been established here. If you want a proof of the correctness of my assertion, call up the porter." He ran to the head of the staircase and called out, "Come up, Mother Brigaut."

In a few moments a stout old woman came panting into the room.

"And how are you, Mother Brigaut?" said Tantaine gayly. "I have a word or two to say to you. You know that gentleman, do you not?"

"What a question? as if I did not know one of the gentlemen lodging here?"

"What is his name?"

"M. Paul."

"What, plain M. Paul, and nothing else?"

"Well, sir, it is not his fault if he did not know his father or mother."

"What does he do?"

"He is a musician; he gives lessons on the piano, and composes music."

"Does he do a good business?"

"I can't say, sir, but I should guess about two or three hundred francs a month; and he makes that do,

for he is economical and quiet, and as modest as a young girl."

Tantaine's face shone all over with satisfaction.

"You must have known M. Paul for some time, as you seem so thoroughly acquainted with his habits?" said he.

"Well, I ought to, for he has been here nearly fifteen months, and all that time I have looked after his room."

"Do you know where he lived before he came here?"

"Of course I do, for I went to inquire about him in the Rue Jacob. The people there were quite cut up at his leaving, but you see this was more handy for the music publisher in the Rue Richelieu, for whom he works."

"Good, Mother Brigaut; that will do; you can leave us now."

As Paul listened to this brief conversation, he wondered if he was awake or asleep. Tantaine stood at the door and watched the woman down stairs; then he closed it carefully, and coming up to Paul, said,—

"Well, what do you think of all this?"

At first Paul was so astounded that he could hardly find words in which to express himself; but he remembered the words that Dr. Hortebise had so often dinned into his ears during the last five days,—

"Let nothing astonish you."

"I suppose," said he at last, "that you had taught the old woman her lesson beforehand."

"Merciful powers!" exclaimed Tantaine in tones of extreme disgust. "If these are all the ideas you have gained from what you have heard, our task will not be by any means an easy one."

Paul was wounded by Tantaine's contemptuous manner.

"I understand well enough, sir," answered he sulkily, "that this is merely a prologue to a romantic drama."

"You are right, my lad," cried he in a more satisfied voice; "and it is one that is quite indispensable. The plot of the drama will be revealed to you later on, and also the reward you will receive if you play your part well."

"But why cannot you tell me everything now?"

Tantaine shook his head.

"Have patience, you rash boy!" said he. "Rome was not built in a day. Be guided by me, and follow blindly the orders of those interested in you. This is your first lesson; think it over seriously."

"My first lesson! What do you mean?"

"Call it a rehearsal if you like. All that the good woman told you," continued Tantaine, "you must look upon as true; nay, it is true, and when you believe this thoroughly, you are quite prepared for the fray, but until then you must remain quiescent. Remember this, you cannot impress others unless you firmly believe yourself. The greatest impostors of all ages have ever been their own dupes."

At the word impostor, Paul seemed about to speak, but a wave of Tantaine's hand silenced him.

"You must cast aside your old skin, and enter that of another. Paul Violaine, the natural son of a woman who kept a small drapery shop at Poitiers, Paul Violaine, the youthful lover of Rose, no longer exists. He died of cold and hunger in a garret in the Hôtel de Perou, as M. de Loupins will testify when necessary."

The tone in which Tantaine spoke showed his intense earnestness, and with emphatic gestures he drove each successive idea into Paul's brain.

"You will rid yourself of your former recollections

as you do of an old coat, which you throw aside, and forget the very existence of. And not only that, but you must lose your memory, and that so entirely, that if any one in the street calls out Violaine, you will never even dream of turning round."

Paul's brain seemed to tremble beneath the crime that his companion was teaching him.

"Who am I then?" asked he.

A sardonic smile crossed Tantaine's face.

"You are just what the portress told you, Paul, and nothing more. Your first recollections are of a Foundling Hospital, and you never knew your parents. You have lived here fifteen months, and before that you resided in the Rue Jacob. The portress knows no more; but if you will come with me to the Rue Jacob, the people there can tell you more about your life when you were a lodger in the house. Perhaps, if you are careful, we may take you back to your more childish days, and even find you a father."

"But," said Paul, "I might be questioned regarding my past life: what then? M. Rigal or Mademoiselle Flavia might interrogate me at any moment?"

"I see; but do not disquiet yourself. You will be furnished with all necessary papers, so that you can account for all your life during the twenty-five years you spent in this world."

"Then I presume that the person into whose shoes I have crept was a composer and a musician like myself?"

Again Tantaine's patience gave way, and it was with an oath that he exclaimed,—

"Are you acting the part of a fool, or are you one in reality? No one has ever been here except you. Did you not hear what the old woman said? She told

you that you were a musician, a self-made one, and while waiting until your talents are appreciated, you give lessons in music."

"And to whom do I *give* them?"

Tantaine took three visiting cards from a china ornament on the mantelshelf.

"Here are three pupils of yours," said he, "who can pay you one hundred francs per month for two lessons a week, and two of them will assure you that you have taught them for some time. The third, Madame Grandorge, a widow, will vow that she owes all her success, which is very great, to your lessons. You will go and give these pupils their lessons at the hours noted on their cards, and you will be received as if you had often been to the house before; and remember to be perfectly at your ease."

"I will do my best to follow your instructions."

"One last piece of information. In addition to your lessons, you are in the habit of copying for certain wealthy amateurs the fragments of old and almost obsolete operas, and on the piano lies the work that you are engaged on for the Marquis de Croisenois, a charming composition by Valserra. You see," continued Tantaine, taking Paul by the arm, and showing him round the room, "that nothing has been forgotten, and that you might have lived here for years past. You have always been a steady young man, and have saved up a little money. In this drawer you will find eight certificates of scrip of the Bank of France."

Paul would have put many more questions, but the visitor was already on the threshold, and only paused to add these words,—

"I will call here to-morrow with Dr. Hortebise." Then, with a strange smile playing on his lips, he

added, as Mascarin had before, "You will be a duke yet."

The old portress was waiting for Tantaine, and as soon as she saw him coming down the stairs immersed in deep thought, out she ran toward him with as much alacrity as her corpulency would admit.

"Did I do it all right?" asked she.

"Hush!" answered he, pushing her quickly into her lodge, the door of which stood open. "Hush! are you mad or drunk, to talk like this, when you do not know who is listening?"

"I hope you were pleased with my success," continued the woman, aghast at his sudden anger.

"You did well—very well; you piled up the evidence perfectly. I shall have an excellent report to make of you to M. Mascarin."

"I am so glad; and now my husband and I are quite safe?"

The old man shook his head with an air of doubt.

"Well, I can hardly say that yet; the master's arm is long and strong; but you have numerous enemies. All the servants in the house hate you, and would be glad to see you come to grief."

"Is that really so, sir? How can that be, for both I and my husband have been very kind to all of them?"

"Yes, perhaps you have been lately, but how about the times before? You and your husband both acted very foolishly. Article 386 cannot be got now, and two women can swear that they saw you and your husband, with a bunch of keys in your hand, on the second floor."

The fat woman's face turned a sickly yellow, she clasped her hands, and whined in tones of piteous entreaty,—

"Don't speak so loud, sir, I beg of you."

"You made a terrible mistake in not coming to my master earlier, for there had been then so much talk that the matter had reached the ears of the police."

"But for all that, if M. Mascarin pleased——"

"He does please, my good woman, and is quite willing to serve you. I am sure that he will manage to break the inquiry; or if it must go on, he has several witnesses who will depose in your favor; but, you know, he gives nothing for nothing, and must have implicit obedience."

"Good, kind man that he is, my husband and I would go through fire and water for him, while my daughter, Euphenice, would do anything in the world for him."

Tantaine recoiled uneasily, for the old woman's gratitude was so demonstrative that he feared she was about to embrace him.

"All you have to do is to stick firmly to what you have said about Paul," continued he, when he found himself at a safe distance; "and if ever you breathe a word of what you have been doing, he will hand you over to the law, and then take care of Article 386."

It was evident that this portion of the Code, that had reference to the robbery of masters by servants, struck terror into the woman's soul.

"If I stood on the scaffold," said she, "I would tell the story about M. Paul exactly as I have been taught."

Her tone was so sincere, that Tantaine addressed her in a kindlier voice.

"Stick to that," said he, "and I can say to you, 'Hope.' Upon the day on which the young man's business is settled you will get a paper from me, which

will prove your complete innocence, and enable you to say, 'I have been grossly maligned.'"

"May the dear young man's business be settled sharp," said she.

"It will not be long before it is so; but, remember, in the meantime you must keep an eye upon him."

"I will do so."

"And, remember, report to me whoever comes to see him, no matter who it may be."

"Not a soul can go upstairs without my seeing or hearing him."

"Well, if any one, save the master, Dr. Hortebise, or myself comes, do not lose a moment, but come and report."

"You shall know in five minutes."

"I wonder if that is all I have to say?" mused Tantaine. "Ah! I remember: note exactly the hour at which this young man comes and goes. Do not have any conversation with him; answer all questions he addresses you with a simple 'Yes,' or 'No,' and, as I said before, watch his every movement."

And Tantaine turned to go away, paying no attention to the woman's eager protestations.

"Keep a strict watch," were his last words, "and, above all, see that the lad gets into no scrape."

In Tantaine's presence Paul had endeavored to assume an air of bravado, but as soon as he was left alone he was seized with such mortal terror, that he sank in a half fainting condition into an easy-chair. He felt that he was not going to put on a disguise for a brief period, but for life, and that now, though he rose in life, wealth, title, even a wife would all have been obtained by a shameful and skilfully planned deception, and this deception he must keep up until the day

of his death. He shuddered as he recalled Tantaine's words, "Paul Violaine is dead." He recalled the incidents in the life of the escaped galley-slave Coignard, who, under the name of Pontis de St. Hélène, absolutely assumed the rank of a general officer, and took command of a domain. Coignard was recognized and betrayed by an old fellow-prisoner, and this was exactly the risk that Paul knew he must run, for any of his old companions might recognize and denounce him. Had he on such an occasion sufficient presence of mind to turn laughingly to his accuser, and say, "Really, my good fellow, you are in error, for I never set eyes on you before?"

He felt that he could not do it, and had he any means of existence, he would have solved the difficulty by taking to flight. But he knew that men like Mascarin, Hortebise, and Tantaine were not easily eluded, and his heart sank within him as he remembered the various crumbs of information that each of these men had dropped before him. To agree to their sordid proposals, and to remain in the position in which he was, was certainly to incur a risk, but it was one that was a long way off, and might never eventually come to pass; while to change his mind would be as sure to bring down swift and condign punishment upon his head; and the weak young man naturally chose the more remote contingency, and with this determination the last qualms of his conscience expired.

The first night he slept badly in his new abode, for it seemed to him as if the spectre of the man whose place he was to usurp was hovering over his couch. But with the dawn of day, and especially when the hour arrived for him to go out and give his lessons, he felt his courage return to him, though rashness per-

haps would be the more correct word. And with a mien of perfect confidence he repaired to the house of Mademoiselle Grandorge, the oldest of his pupils. Impelled by the same feeling of curiosity as to how Paul would comport himself, both Dr. Hortebise and Father Tantine had been hanging about the Rue Montmartre, and taking advantage of a heavy dray that was passing, caught a good glimpse of the young man.

"Aha," chuckled Tantine, delighted at seeing Paul look so brisk and joyous, "our young cock is in full feather; last night he was decidedly rather nervous."

"Yes," answered the doctor, "he is on the right road, and I think that we shall have no further trouble with him."

They then thought it would be as well to see Mother Brigaut, and were received by the old woman with slavish deference.

"No one has been near the dear young gentleman," said she, in reply to their questions. "Last night he came down about seven o'clock, and asked where the nearest eating-house was. I directed him to Du Val's, and he was back by eight, and by eleven I saw that he had put out his light."

"How about to-day?"

"I went up stairs at nine, and he had just finished dressing. He told me to get his breakfast ready, which I did. He ate well, and I said to myself, 'Good; the bird is getting used to its cage.'"

"And then?"

"Then he commenced singing like a very bird, the dear fellow. His voice is as sweet as his face; any woman would fall in love with him. I'm precious glad that my girl, Euphenice, is nowhere near."

"And after that he went out?" continued Tantaine.
"Did he say how long he would be away?"

"Only to give his lessons. I suppose he expected that you would call."

"Very good," remarked the old man; then, addressing Dr. Hortebise, he said, "Perhaps, sir, you are going to the Registry Office?"

"Yes; I want to see Mascarin."

"He is not there; but if you want to see him on any special matter, you had better come to our young friend's apartment, and await his arrival."

"Very well, I will do so," answered the doctor.

Hortebise was much more impressed than Paul with the skill of the hand which had imparted such a look of long occupation to the rooms.

"On my word, the quiet simplicity of these rooms would induce any father to give his daughter to this young fellow."

The old man's silence surprised him, and, turning sharply round, he was struck by the gloomy look upon his features.

"What is the matter?" asked Hortebise, with some anxiety. "What is troubling you?"

Tantaine had thrown himself into a chair, and for a moment made no reply; then, springing to his feet, he gave the expiring embers a furious kick, and faced the doctor with folded arms.

"I see much trouble before us," said he at last.

The doctor's face grew as gloomy as that of his companion.

"Is it Perpignan who interferes?" asked he.

"No, Perpignan is only a fool; but he will do what I tell him."

"Then I really do not see——"

"Do not see," exclaimed Tantaine; "but luckily for us all, I am not so blind. Have you forgotten this marriage of De Croisenois? There lies the danger. All had gone so smoothly, every combination had been arranged, and every difficulty foreseen, and now——"

"Well, you had made too sure, that was all; and you were unprepared for the slightest check."

"Not so, but I had made no attempt to guard against the impossible."

"Of course, there are limits to all human intelligence, but pray explain yourself."

"This is it, then, doctor. The most adroit energy could never have put in our way such an obstacle as now threatens us. Have you in your experience of society ever come across a wealthy heiress who is indifferent to all the allurements of luxury, and is capable of disinterested love?"

The doctor smiled an expressive denial.

"But such an heiress does exist," said Tantaine, "and her name is Sabine de Mussidan. She loves—and whom do you think?—why a mere painter, who has crossed my path three times already. He is full, too, of energy and perseverance, and for these qualities I have never met his equal."

"What, a man without friends, money, or position, what can——"

A rapid gesture of Tantaine's checked his companion's speech.

"Unfortunately he is not without friends," remarked the genial Tantaine. "He has one friend at least; can you guess who it is? No less a personage than the man who was to have married Sabine, M. de Breulh-Faverlay."

At this unexpected news Hortebise remained silent and aghast.

"How on earth those two met I cannot imagine. It must have been Sabine who brought them together, but the facts remain the same. They are close friends anyhow. And these two men have in their interests the very woman that I had selected to push De Croisenois' suit."

"Is it possible?"

"That is my present belief. At any rate, these three had a long interview last night, and doubtless came to a decision hostile to the interests of the Marquis."

"What do you mean?" asked Hortebise, his lips tightly compressed with anxiety. "Do you mean that they are aware of the manner by which De Croisenois hopes to succeed?"

"Look here?" answered Tantine. "A general, on the eve of a battle, takes every precaution, but among his subordinates there are always fools, if not traitors. I had arranged a pretty little scene between Croisenois and Van Klopen, by which the Viscountess would be securely trapped. Unfortunately, though the rehearsal was excellent, the representation was simply idiotic. Neither of the actors took the least trouble to enter into the spirit of his part. I had arranged a scene full of delicacy and *finesse*, and they simply made a low, coarse exhibition of it and themselves. Fools! they thought it was the easiest thing in the world to deceive a woman; and finally the Marquis, to whom I had recommended the most perfect discretion, opened fire, and actually spoke of Sabine and his desire to press his suit. The Viscountess found, with a woman's keen perceptions, that there was something arranged

between Van Klopen and her visitor, and hurried off to her cousin, M. de Breulh-Faverlay for advice and assistance."

The doctor listened to this recital, pallid and trembling.

"Who told you all this?" gasped he.

"No one; I discovered it; and it was easy to do so. When we have a result, it is easy to trace it back to the cause. Yes, this is what took place."

"Why don't you say at once that the whole scheme is knocked on the head?" asked the doctor.

"Because I do not think that it is; I know that we have sustained a very severe check; but when you are playing *écarté* and your adversary has made five points to your one, you do not necessarily throw down the cards and give up the game? Not a bit; you hold on and strive to better your luck."

The worthy Dr. Hortebise did not know whether the most to admire the perseverance or deplore the obstinacy of the old man, and exclaimed,—

"Why, this is utter madness; it is like plunging headlong into a deep pit, which you can easily see in your path."

Tantaine gave a long, low whistle.

"My friend," said he, "what in your opinion would be the best course to pursue?"

"I should say, without a moment's hesitation, turn up the whole scheme, and look out for another one, which, if less lucrative, would not be so full of danger. You had hoped to win the game, and with good reason too. Now throw aside all feelings of wounded vanity, and accept your defeat. After all, it does not matter to us who Mademoiselle de Mussidan marries. The great enterprise fortunately does not lie in this

alliance. We have still the idea of the Company to which all old people must subscribe remaining to us, and we can work it up at once."

He stopped short, abashed by the look on Tantaine's face.

"It strikes me," resumed the doctor, a little mortified, "that my proposal is not utterly ridiculous, and certainly deserves some consideration."

"Perhaps so; but is it a practical one?"

"I see no reason why it should not be."

"Indeed, then, you look at the thing in a very different manner to myself. We are too far advanced, my dear doctor, to be our own masters. We must go on, and have no option to do otherwise. To beat a retreat would simply be to invite our enemies to fall upon our disorganized battalions. We must give battle; and as the first to strike has always the best chance of victory, we must strive to take the initiative."

"The idea is good, but these are mere words."

"Was the secret that we confided to De Croisenois only words?"

This thrust went home.

"Do you mean that you think he would betray us?" said he.

"Why should he not if it were to his interests to do so? Reflect, Croisenois is almost at the end of his tether. We have dangled the line of a princely fortune before his eyes. Do you think he would do nothing if we were to say, 'Excuse us, but we made a mistake; poor as you are, so you must remain, for we do not intend to help you?'"

"But is it necessary to say that at all?"

"Well, at any rate, whatever we choose to say, what limit do you think he will place upon his extortions

now that he holds our secret? We have taught him his music, and he will make us do our part in the chorus, and can blackmail us as well as we can others."

"We played a foolish game," answered Dr. Hortebise moodily.

"No; we had to confide in some one. Besides, the two affairs, that of Madame de Mussidan and the Duke de Champdoce, ran so well together. They were the simultaneous emanations of my brain. I worked them up together, and together they must stand or fall."

"Then you are determined to go on?"

"Yes; more determined than ever."

The doctor had been playing with his locket for some time, and the contact of the cold metal seemed to have affected his nerves; for it was in a trembling voice that he replied,—

"I vowed long ago that we should sink or swim together." He paused, and then, with a melancholy smile upon his face, continued,—“I have no intention of breaking my oath, you see; but I repeat, that your road seems to be a most perilous one, and I will add that I consider you headstrong and self-opinionated; but for all that, I will follow you, even though the path you have chosen leads to the grave. I have at this moment a something between my fingers that will save me from shame and disgrace—a little pill to be swallowed, a gasp, a little dizziness, and all is over.”

Tantaine did not seem to care for the doctor's explanation.

"There, that will do," said he. "If things come to the worst, you can use the contents of your locket as much as you like, but in the meantime leave it alone, and do not keep jingling it in that distracting manner. For people of our stamp a danger well known is a

comparatively slight peril, for threats furnish us with means of defence. Woe, I say, woe to the man who crosses my path, for I will hold my hand from nothing!" He stopped for a little, opened every door, and assured himself that there were no eavesdroppers, and then, in a low whisper, he said to Hortebise, "Do you not see that there is but one obstacle to our success, and that is André? Remove him, and the whole of our machinery will work as smoothly as ever."

Hortebise winced, as if suffering from a sudden pain.

"Do you mean——?" asked he.

But Tantaine interrupted him with a low laugh, terrible to listen to.

"And why not?" said he. "Is it not better to kill than to be killed?"

Hortebise trembled from head to foot. He had no objection to extorting money by the basest threats, but he drew the line at murder.

"And suppose we were found out?" muttered he.

"Nonsense! How could we be discovered? Justice always looks for a motive; how, then, could they bring it home to us? They could only find out that a young lady adored by De Breulh had thrown him over in order to marry André."

"Horrible!" murmured the doctor, much shocked.

"I daresay that it is horrible, and I have no wish to proceed to extremities. I only wish to speak of it as a remote possibility, and one that we may be compelled to adopt. I hate violence just as much as you do, and trust that it may not be necessary."

Just then the door opened, and Paul entered, a letter in his hand. He seemed in excellent spirits, and shook hands with both his visitors.

Tantaine smiled sarcastically as he contrasted Paul's

high spirits with the state of depression in which he had left him not many hours ago.

"Things are evidently going well with you," remarked the doctor, forcing a smile.

"Yes; I cannot find any reason for complaint."

"Have you given your lesson?"

"Yes; what a delightful woman Madame Grandorge is! she has treated me so kindly."

"That is a good reason for your being so happy," remarked the doctor, with a tinge of irony in his voice.

"Ah, that is not the only reason," returned Paul.

"Shall I be indiscreet if I ask the real cause, then?"

"I am not quite sure whether I ought to speak on this matter," said he fatuously.

"What! a love adventure already?" laughed the doctor.

The vanity of Paul's nature beamed out in a smile.

"Keep your secret, my boy," said Tantaine, in louder accents.

This, of course, was enough to loosen Paul's tongue.

"Do you think, sir," said he, "that I would keep anything from you?" He opened the letter he held in his hand, continuing: "The portress handed this to me as I came in; she said it was left by a bank messenger. Can you guess where it came from? Let me tell you—it is from Mademoiselle Flavia Rigal, and leaves no room to doubt of her sentiments toward me."

"Is that a fact?"

"It is so; and whenever I choose, Mademoiselle Flavia will be only too ready to become Madame Paul."

For an instant a bright flush crimsoned old Tantaine's wrinkled face, but it faded away almost as soon as it appeared.

"Then you feel happy?" asked he, with a slight quiver in his voice.

Paul threw back his coat, and, placing his fingers in the armholes of his waistcoat, remarked carelessly,—

"Yes, of course, I am happy, as you may suppose; but the news is not particularly startling to me. On my third visit to M. Rigal's, the girl let me know that I need not sigh in vain."

Tantaine covered his face with his hands as Paul passed his fingers through his hair, and, striking what he considered an imposing attitude, read as follows:—

"MY DEAR PAUL,—

"I was very naughty, and I repent of it. I could not sleep all night, for I was haunted by the look of sorrow I saw in your face when you took leave of me. Paul, I did it to try you. Can you forgive me? You might, for I suffered much more than you could have done. Some one who loves me—perhaps more than you do—has told me that when a girl shows all the depths of her heart to a man she runs the risk of his despising her. Can this be true? I hope not, Paul, for never—no, never—can I conceal my feelings; and the proof of my faith in you is that I am going now to tell you all. I am sure that if your good friend and mine, Dr. Hortebise, came to my father with a certain request from you, it would not be rejected.

"Your own

"FLAVIA."

"Did not this letter go straight to your heart?" asked Tantaine.

"Of course it did. Why, she will have a million for her wedding portion!"

On hearing these words, Tantaine started up with so threatening an aspect that Paul recoiled a step, but a warning look from the doctor restrained the old man's indignation.

"He is a perfect sham!" muttered he; "even his vices are mere pretence."

"He is our pupil, and is what we have made him," whispered Tantaine.

Meanwhile Tantaine had gone up to Paul, and, placing his hand caressingly on his shoulder, said,—

"My boy, you will never know how much you owe to Mademoiselle Flavia."

Paul could not understand the meaning of this scene. These men had done their best to pervert his morals, and to deaden the voice of his conscience, and now that he had hoped to earn their praise by an affectation of cynicism they were displeased with him. Before, however, he could ask a question, Tantaine had completely recovered his self-command.

"My dear boy," said he, "I am quite satisfied with you. I came here to-day expecting to find you still undecided, and I am pleased with the change."

"But, sir——" said Paul.

"On the contrary, you are firm and strong."

"Yes, he has got on so well," said the doctor, "that we should now treat him as one of ourselves, and confide more in him. To-night, my young friend, M. Mascarin will get from Caroline Schimmel the solution of the riddle that has for so long perplexed us. Be at the office to-morrow at ten o'clock, and you shall be told everything."

Paul would have asked more questions, but Tantaine cut him short with a brief good-morning, and went off hurriedly, taking the doctor with him, and seemingly wishing to avoid a hazardous and unpleasant explanation.

"Let us get out of this," whispered he. "In another moment I should have knocked the conceited ass

down. Oh, my Flavia! my poor Flavia! your weakness of to-day will yet cost you very dear!"

Paul remained rooted to the ground, with an expression of surprise and confusion upon every line of his face. All his pride and vanity had gone. "I wonder," muttered he, "what these disagreeable persons are saying about me? Perhaps laughing at my inexperience and ridiculing my aspirations." The idea made him grind his teeth with rage; but he was mistaken, for neither Tantaine nor the doctor mentioned his name after they had left his apartment. As they walked up the Rue Montmartre, all their ideas were turning upon how it would be easiest to checkmate André.

"I have not yet got sufficient information to act on," remarked Tantaine meditatively. "My present plan is to remain perfectly quiescent, and I have told Croise-nois not to make a move of any kind. I have, however, set a watch upon all three—André, the Countess, and De Breulh, and not one can take a step without my hearing of it. I have an eye and ear watching and listening when they think themselves in perfect privacy. Very soon I shall fathom their plans, and then——, but in the meantime have faith in me, and do not let the matter worry you."

On the boulevard Tantaine took leave of his friend.

"I shall very likely not see you to-night, for I have an appointment at the Grand Turk with that precious young rascal, Toto Chupin. I *must* find Caroline, for I am sure that with her lies the Champdoce secret. She is very cunning, but has a weakness for drink, and, with Satan's help, I hope to find out the special liquor which will make her open her lips freely."

CHAPTER XXVI.

AT THE GRAND TURK.

TANTAINÉ took a cab, and, promising the cabman a handsome gratuity if he would drive fast, stopped at the spot where the Rue Blanche intersects the Rue de Douai, and told the coachman to wait for him, and entered the house where the younger Gandelu had installed the fair Madame de Chantemille. It was some time before his ring at the door was answered, but at last the door was opened by a stout, red-faced girl, with an untidy cap. Upon seeing Tantaine, she uttered an exclamation of delight, for it was the cook that had been placed in Zora's employment by M. Mascarin's agency.

"Ah, Daddy Tantaine," said she, "you are as welcome as the sun in winter."

"Hush, hush," returned the old man, gazing cautiously round him.

"Don't be frightened," returned the girl. "Madame has gone to a place from whence there is no return ticket, at least, for some time. You know the greater the value of an article the closer we keep it under lock and key."

Tantaine gathered from this that Rose had been arrested, and his astonishment appeared to be unmeasured.

"Surely you don't mean that she has gone to quod?" said he.

"It is as I tell you," answered she; "but come in, and have a glass of wine, while you hear all about it."

She led the old man into the dining-room, round the table in which half a dozen guests were seated, just concluding a late breakfast. Tantaine at once recognized four of the several guests as servants whom he knew from their having applied for situations at the office, and there were two men of a very unprepossessing exterior.

"We are having a regular spree to-day," observed the cook, handing a bottle to Tantaine; "but yesterday there was not much of a jollification here, for just as I was setting about getting the dinner two fellows came in and asked for my mistress, and as soon as they saw her they clapped their hands on her and said that she must come to the stone jug. When madame heard this she shrieked so loud as to have been heard in the next street. She would not go a foot with them, clung to the furniture and banisters, so they just took her up by the head and feet, and carried her down to a cab that was standing at the door. I seem to bring ill luck wherever I go, for this is the fourth mistress I have seen taken off in this way; but come, you are taking nothing at all."

But Tantaine had had enough, and making an excuse, retired from a debauch which he saw would continue as long as the wine held out.

"All is going well," muttered he, as he climbed into the cab; "and now for the next one."

He drove straight to the house that the elder Gandelu was building in the Champs Elysées, and putting his head out of the window, he accosted a light, active young fellow who was warning the foot passengers not to pass under the scaffolding.

"Anything new, La Cordille?" enquired the old man.

“No, nothing; but tell the master I am keeping a good watch.”

From there Tantine visited a footman in De Breulh's employment, and a woman in the service of Madame de Bois Arden. Then, paying his fare, he started on foot for Father Canon's wine shop, in the Rue St. Honoré, where he met Florestan, who was as saucy and supercilious to Tantine as he was obsequious to Mascarin. But although he paid for Florestan's dinner, all that he could extort from him was, that Sabine was terribly depressed. It was fully eight o'clock before Tantine had got rid of Florestan, and hailing another cab, he ordered the driver to take him to the Grand Turk, in the Rue des Poissonniers.

The magnificent sign of the Grand Turk dances in the breeze, and invites such youths as Toto Chupin and his companions. The whole aspect of the exterior seemed to invite the passers-by to step in and try the good cheer provided within,—a good *table d'hôte* at six p.m., coffee, tea, liquors, and a grand ball to complete the work of digestion. A long corridor leads to this earthly Eden, and the two doors at the end of it open, the one into the dining, and the other into the ball-room. A motley crew collected there for the evening meal, and on Sundays it is next to impossible to procure a seat. But the dining-room is the Grand Turk's brightest attraction, for as soon as the dessert is over the head waiter makes a sign, and dishes and tablecloths are cleared away in a moment. The dining-room becomes a *café*, and the click of dominoes gives way to rattle of forks, while beer flows freely. This, however, is nothing, for, at a second signal, huge folding doors are thrown open, and the strains of an orchestra ring out as an invitation to the ball, to which

all diners are allowed free entrance. Nothing is danced but round dances, polkas, mazurkas, and waltzes.

The German element was very strong at the Grand Turk, and if a gentleman wished to make himself agreeable to his fair partners, it was necessary for him, at any rate, to be well up in the Alsatian dialect. The master of the ceremonies had already called upon the votaries of Terpsichore to take their places for the waltz as Daddy Tantaine entered the hall. The scene was a most animated one, and the air heavy with the scent of beer and tobacco, and would have asphyxiated any one not used to venture into such places.

It was the first time that he had ever visited the Grand Turk, and yet any one observing would have sworn that he was one of the regular frequenters as he marched idly through the rooms, making constant pauses at the bar. But glance around him as he might, he could see neither Toto Chupin nor Caroline Schimmel.

"Have I come here for nothing," muttered he, "or is the hour too early?"

It was hard to waste time thus, but at last he sat down and ordered some beer. His eyes wandered to a large picture on the wall, representing a fat, eastern-looking man, with a white turban and loose, blue garments, seated in a crimson chair, with his feet resting upon a yellow carpet. One hand was caressing his protuberant paunch, while the other was extended toward a glass of beer. Evidently this is the Grand Turk. And finally by an odalisque, who fills his goblet with the foaming infusion of malt and hops. This odalisque is very fair and stout, and some fair Alsatian damsel has evidently sat as the model. As Tantaine was gazing upon this wondrous work of art he heard a squeaking voice just behind him.

"That is certainly that young rogue Chupin," muttered he.

He turned sharply round, and two tables off, in a dark corner, he discovered the young gentleman that he had been looking for. As he gazed on the lad, he was not surprised that he had not recognized him at first, for Toto had been strangely transmogrified, and in no degree resembled the boy who had shivered in a tattered blouse in the archway near the Servants' Registry Office. He was now gorgeous to behold. From the moment that he had got his hundred francs he had chalked out a new line of life for himself, and was busy pursuing it. He had found that he could make all his friends merry, and he had succeeded. He had made a selection from the most astounding wares that the Parisian tailor keeps on hand. He had sneered at young Gaston de Gandelu, and called him an ape; but he had aped the ape. He wore a very short, light coat, a waistcoat that was hideous from its cut and brilliancy, and trousers strapped tightly under his feet. His collar was so tall and stiff, that he had the greatest difficulty in turning his head. He had gone to a barber, and his lank hair had been artistically curled. The table in front of him was covered with glasses and bottles. Two shocking looking-scamps of the true barrier bully type, with loose cravats and shiny-peaked caps, were seated by him, and were evidently his guests. Tantaine's first impulse was to catch the debauched youth by the ear, but he hesitated for an instant and reflection conquered the impulse. With the utmost caution so that he might not attract Toto's attention, he crept down to him, concealing himself as best he could behind one of the pillars that supported the gallery, and by this manœuvre found himself

so close to the lad that he could catch every word he said.

Chupin was talking volubly.

"Don't you call me a swell, nor yet say that I brag," said he. "I shall always make this kind of appearance, for to work in the manner I propose, a man must pay some attention to dress."

At this his companions roared with laughter.

"All right," returned Toto. "I'm precious sharp, though you may not think so, and shall go in for all kinds of elegant accomplishments, and come out a regular masher."

"Wonders will never cease," answered one of the men. "When you go on your trip for action in the Bois among the toffs, will you take me with you?"

"Any one can go to the Bois who has money: and just tell me who are those who make money. Why, those who have plenty of cheek and a good sound business. Well, I have learned my business from some real downy cards, who made it pay well. Why should I not do the same?"

With a sickening feeling of terror, Tantaine saw that the lad was half drunk. What could he be going to say? and how much did he know? Toto's guests evidently saw that he had taken too much; but as he seemed ready to let them into a secret, they paid great attention, and exchanged a look of intelligence. The young rogue's new clothes and his liberality all proved that he had found a means of gaining money; the only question was what the plan could be. To induce him to talk they passed the bottle rapidly and flattered him up. The younger man of the two shook his head with a smile.

"I don't believe you have any business at all," said he.

"Nor have I, if by business you mean some low handicraft. It is brain work I mean, my boy; and that's what I do."

"I don't doubt that a bit," answered the elder guest coaxingly.

"Come on! Tell us what it is," broke in the other. "You can't expect us to take your word."

"It is as easy as lying," replied Toto. "Listen a bit, and you shall have the whole bag of tricks. Suppose I saw Polyte steal a couple of pairs of boots from a trotter-case seller's stall——"

Polyte interrupted the narrator, protesting so strongly that he would not commit such an act, that Tantaine perceived at once that some such trifling act of larceny weighed heavily on his conscience.

"You needn't kick up such a row," returned Toto. "I am only just putting it as a thing that might happen. We will say you had done the trick, and that I had twigged you. Do you know what I should do? Well, I would hunt up Polyte, and say quietly, 'Halves, old man, or I will split.'"

"And I should give you a crack in the jaw," returned Polyte angrily.

Forgetting his fine dress, Toto playfully put his thumb to his nose and extended his fingers.

"You would not be such an ass," said he. "You would say to yourself, 'If I punch this chap, he will kick up no end of a row, and I shall be taken up, and perhaps sent to the mill.' No; you would be beastly civil, and would end by doing just as I wished."

"And this is what you call your business, is it?"

"Isn't it a good one—the mugs stand the racket, and the downy cards profit by it?"

"But there is no novelty in this; it is only blackmail after all."

"I never said it wasn't; but it is blackmailing perfected into a system."

As Toto made this reply he hammered on the table, calling for more drink.

"But," remarked Polyte, with an air of disappointment, "you don't get chances every day, and the business is often a precious poor one. You can't always be seeing chaps priggish boots."

"Pooh! pooh!" answered Toto, "if you want to make money in this business, you must keep your eyes about you. Our customers don't come to you, but there is nothing to prevent you going to them. You can hunt until you find them."

"And where are you to hunt, if you please?"

"Ah, that's tellings."

A long silence ensued, during which Tontaine was half tempted to come forward. By doing so he would assuredly nip all explanations in the bud; but, on the other hand, he wanted to hear all the young rascal had to say. He therefore only moved a little nearer, and listened more intently.

Forgetting his curls, Toto was abstractedly passing his fingers through his hair, and reflecting with all the wisdom of a muddled brain. Finally, he came to the conclusion that he might speak, and, leaning forward, he whispered,—

"You won't peach if I tell you the dodge?"

His companions assured him that he might have every confidence in them.

"Very well; I make my money in the Champs Elysées, and sometimes get a harvest twice a day."

"But there are no shoemakers' shops there."

"You are a fool," answered Toto contemptuously. "Do you think I blackmail thieves? That wouldn't be half good enough. Honest people, or at least people who call themselves honest, are my game. These are the ones who can be made to pay up."

Tantaine shuddered; he remembered that Mascarin had made use of the same expression, and at once surmised that Toto must have had an occasional ear to the keyhole.

"But," objected Polyte, "honest people have no occasion to pay up."

Toto struck his glass so heavily on the table that it flew to shivers.

"Will you let me speak?" said he.

"Go on, go on, my boy," returned his friend.

"Well, when I'm hard up for cash, I go into the Champs Elysées, and take a seat on one of the benches. From there I keep an eye on the cabs, and see who get out of them. If a respectable woman does so, I am sure of my bird."

"Do you think you know a respectable woman when you see her?"

"I should just think that I did. Well, when a respectable woman gets out of a cab where she ought not to have been, she looks about her on all sides, first to the right and then to the left, settles her veil, and, as soon as she is sure that no one is watching her, sets off as if old Nick was behind her."

"Well, what do you do then?"

"Why, I take the number of the cab, and follow the lady home. Then I wait until she has had time to get to her own rooms, and go to the porter and say, 'Will you give me the name of the lady who has just come in?'"

“And do you think the porter is fool enough to do so?”

“Not a bit; I always take the precaution of having a delicate little purse in my pocket; and when the man says, as he always does, ‘I don’t know,’ I pull out the purse and say, ‘I am sorry for that, for she dropped this as she came in, and I wanted to return it to her.’ The porter at once becomes awfully civil; she gives the name and number, and up I go. The first time I content myself with finding out if she is married or single. If she is single, it is no go; but if the reverse, I go on with the job.”

“Why, what do you do next?”

“Next morning I go there, and hang about until I see the husband go out. Then I go upstairs, and ask for the wife. It is ticklish work then, my lads; but I say, ‘Yesterday, madame, I was unlucky enough to leave my pocketbook in cab number so-and-so. Now, as I saw you hail the vehicle immediately after I had left it, I have come to ask you if you saw my pocketbook.’ The lady flies into a rage, denies all knowledge of the book, and threatens to have me turned out. Then, with the utmost politeness, I say, ‘I see, madame, that there is nothing to be done but to communicate the matter to your husband.’ Then she gets alarmed, and—she pays.”

“And you don’t see any more of her?”

“Not that day; but when the funds are low, I call and say, ‘It is I again, madame; I am the poor young man who lost his money in such and such a cab on a certain day of the month.’ And so the game goes on. A dozen such clients give a fellow a very fair income. Now, perhaps, you understand why I am always so well dressed, and always have money in my pocket.

When I was shabbily attired, they offered me a five-franc piece, but now they come down with a flimsy."

The young wretch spoke the truth; for to many women, who in a mad moment of passion may have forgotten themselves, and been tracked to their homes by some prowling blackmailer, life has been an endless journey of agony. Every knock at the door makes them start, and every footfall on the staircase causes a tremor as they think that the villain has come to betray their guilty secret.

"That is all talk," said Polyte; "such things are never done."

"They *are* done," returned Toto sulkily.

"Have you ever tried the dodge yourself, then?" sneered Polyte.

At another time Chupin would have lied, but the fumes of the drink he had taken, added to his natural self-conceit, had deprived him of all judgment.

"Well," muttered he, "if I have not done it myself exactly, I have seen others practise it often enough—on a much larger scale, it is true; but one can always do things in a more miniature fashion with perhaps a better chance of success."

"What! *you* have seen this done?"

"Of course I have."

"And had you a share in the swag?"

"To a certain extent. I have followed the cabs times without number, and have watched the goings on of these fine ladies and gentlemen; only I was working for others, like the dog that catches the hare, and never has a bit of it to eat. No, all I got was dry bread, with a kick or a cuff for dessert. I sha'n't put up with it any longer, and have made up my mind to open on my own account."

“And who has been employing you?”

A flash of sense passed through Chupin's muddled brain. He had never wished to injure Mascarin, but merely to increase his own importance by extolling the greatness of his employer.

“I worked for people who have no equal in Paris,” said he proudly. “They don't mince matters either, I can tell you; and they have more money than you could count in six months. There is not a thing they cannot do if they desire; and if I were to tell you——”

He stopped short, his mouth wide open, and his eyes dilated with terror, for before him stood old Daddy Tantaine.

Tantaine's face had a most benign expression upon it, and in a most paternal voice he exclaimed,—

“And so here you are at last, my lad; and, bless me, how fine! why, you look like a real swell.”

But Toto was terribly disconcerted. The mere appearance of Tantaine dissipated the fumes of liquor which had hitherto clouded the boy's brain, and by degrees he recollected all that he had said, and, becoming conscious of his folly, had a vague idea of some swift-coming retribution. Toto was a sharp lad, and he was by no means deceived by Tantaine's outward semblance of friendliness, and he almost felt as if his life depended on the promptness of his decision. The question was, had the old man heard anything of the preceding conversation?

“If the old rogue has been listening,” said he to himself, “I am in a hole, and no mistake.”

It was, therefore, with a simulated air of ease that he answered,—

“I was waiting for you, sir, and it was out of respect to you that I put on my very best togs.”

"That was very nice of you; I ought to thank you very much. And now, will you——"

Toto's courage was coming back to him rapidly.

"Will you take a glass of beer, or a liquor of brandy, sir?" said he.

But Daddy Tantaine excused himself on the plea that he had just been drinking.

"That is all the more reason for being thirsty," remarked Toto. "My friends and I have drunk the contents of all these bottles since dinner."

Tantaine raised his shabby hat at this semi-introduction, and the two roughs bowed uncouthly. They were not entirely satisfied with the appearance of the new-comer, and thought that this would be a good moment for taking leave of their host. The waltz had just concluded, and the master of the ceremonies was repeating his eternal refrain of—

"Take your places, ladies and gentlemen;" and taking advantage of the noise, Toto's friends shook hands with their host and adroitly mixed with the crowd.

"Good fellows! jolly fellows;" muttered Toto, striving to catch a last glimpse of them.

Tantaine gave a low, derisive whistle. "My lad," said he, "you keep execrable company, and one day you will repent it."

"I can look after myself, sir."

"Do as you like, my lad; it is no business of mine. But, take my word for it, you will come to grief some day. I have told you that often enough."

"If the old rascal suspected anything," thought Toto, "he would not talk in this way."

Wretched Toto! he did not know that when his spirits were rising the danger was terribly near, for Tantaine was just then saying to himself,—

“Ah! this lad is much too clever—too clever by half. If I were going on with the business, and could make it worth his while, how useful he would be to me! but just now it would be most imprudent to allow him to wander about and jabber when he gets drunk.”

Meanwhile Toto had called a waiter, and, flinging a ten-franc piece on the table, said haughtily: “Take your bill out of that.” But Tantaine pushed the money back toward the lad, and, drawing another ten-franc piece from his pocket, gave it to the waiter.

This unexpected act of generosity put the lad in the best possible humor. “All the better for me,” exclaimed he; “and now let us hunt up Caroline Schimmel.”

“Is she here? I could not find her.”

“Because you did not know where to look for her. She is at cards in the coffee-room. Come along, sir.”

But Tantaine laid his hand upon the boy’s arm.

“One moment,” said he. “Did you tell the woman just what I ordered you to say?”

“I did not omit a single word.”

“Tell me what you said, then.”

“For five days,” began the lad solemnly, “your Toto has been your Caroline’s shadow. We have played cards until all sorts of hours, and I took care that she should always win. I confided to her that I had a jolly old uncle,—a man not without means, a widower, and crazy to be married again,—who had seen her and had fallen in love with her.”

“Good! my lad, good! and what did she say?”

“Why, she grinned like half a dozen cats; only she is a bit artful, and I saw at once that she thought I was after her cash, but the mention of my uncle’s property soon chucked her off that idea.”

“Did you give my name?”

“Yes, at the end, I did. I knew that she had seen you, and so I kept it back as long as I could; but as soon as I mentioned it she looked rather confused, and cried out: ‘I know him quite well.’ So you see, sir, all you have now is to settle a day for the marriage. Come on; she expects you.”

Toto was right. The late domestic of the Duke de Champdoce was playing cards; but as soon as she caught sight of Toto and his pretended uncle, in spite of her holding an excellent hand, she threw up her cards, and received him with the utmost civility. Toto looked on with delight. Never had he seen the old rascal (as he inwardly called him in his heart) so polite, agreeable, and talkative. It was easy to see that Caroline Schimmel was yielding to his fascinations, for she had never had such extravagant compliments whispered in her ear in so persuasive a tone. But Taintaine did not confine his attentions to wine only: he first ordered a bowl of punch, and then followed that up by a bottle of the best brandy. All the old man’s lost youth seemed to have come back to him: he sang, he drank, and he danced. Toto watched them in utter surprise, as the old man whirled the clumsy figure of the woman round the room.

And he was rewarded for this tremendous exertion, for by ten o’clock she had consented, and Caroline left the Grand Turk on the arm of her future husband, having promised to take supper with him.

Next morning, when the scavengers came down from Montmartre to ply their matutinal avocations, they found the body of a woman lying on her face on the pavement. They raised her up and carried her to an hospital. She was not dead, as had been at first

supposed; and when the unhappy creature came to her senses, she said that her name was Caroline Schimmel, that she had been to supper at a restaurant with her betrothed, and that from that instant she remembered nothing. At her request, the surgeon had her conveyed to her home in the Rue Mercadet.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE LAST LINK.

FOR some days M. Mascarin had not shown himself at the office, and Beaumarchef was terribly harassed with inquiries regarding his absent master. Mascarin, on the day after the evening on which Tantaine had met Caroline Schimmel at the Grand Turk, was carefully shut up in his private room; his face and eyes were red and inflamed, and he occasionally sipped a glass of some cooling beverage which stood before him, and his compressed lips and corrugated brow showed how deeply he was meditating. Suddenly the door opened, and Dr. Hortebise entered the room.

"Well!" exclaimed Mascarin, "have you seen the Mussidans, as I told you to do?"

"Certainly," answered Hortebise briskly; "I saw the Countess, and told her how pressing the holders of her letters were growing, and urged on her the necessity for immediate action. She told me that both she and her husband had determined to yield, and that Sabine, though evidently broken-hearted, would not oppose the marriage."

"Good," said Mascarin; "and now, if Croisenois

only follows out the orders that I have given him, the marriage will take place without the knowledge of either De Breulh or André. Then we need fear them no longer. The prospectus of the new Company is ready, and can be issued almost immediately; but we meet to-day to discuss not that matter, but the more important one of the heir to the Champdoce title."

A timid knock at the door announced the arrival of Paul who came in hesitatingly, as if doubtful what sort of a reception he might receive; but Mascarin gave him the warmest possible welcome.

"Permit me," said he, "to offer you my congratulations on having won the affections of so estimable and wealthy a young lady as Mademoiselle Flavia. I may tell you that a friend of mine has informed me of the very flattering terms in which her father, M. Rigal, spoke of you, and I can assure you that if our mutual friend Dr. Hortebise were to go to the banker with an offer of marriage on your part, you have no cause to dread a refusal."

Paul blushed with pleasure, and as he was stammering out a few words, the door opened for the third time, and Catenac made his appearance. To cover the lateness of his arrival, he had clothed his face in smiles, and advanced with outstretched hands toward his confederates; but Mascarin's look and manner were so menacing, that he recoiled a few steps and gazed on him with an expression of the utmost wonder and surprise.

"What is the meaning of this reception?" asked he.

"Can you not guess?" returned Mascarin, his manner growing more and more threatening. "I have sounded the lowest depths of your infamy. I was sure

the other day that you meant to turn traitor, but you swore to the contrary, and you——”

“On my honor——”

“It is useless. One word from Perpignan set us on the right track. Were you or were you not ignorant that the Duke de Champdoce had a certain way of recognizing his son, and that was by a certain ineffaceable scar?”

“It had escaped my memory——”

The words faded from his lips, for even his great self-command failed him under Mascarin’s disdainful glance.

“Let me tell you what I think of you,” said the latter. “I knew that you were a coward and a traitor. Even convicts keep faith with each other, and I had not thought you so utterly infamous.”

“Then why have you forced me to act contrary to my wishes?”

This reply exasperated Mascarin so much that he grasped Catenac by the throat, and shook him violently.

“I made use of you, you viper,” said he, “because I had placed you in such a position that you could not harm us. And now you will serve me because I will show you that I can take everything from you—name, money, liberty, and *life*. All depends upon our success. If we fail, you fall into an abyss of the depth and horrors of which you can have no conception. I knew with whom I had to deal, and took my measures accordingly. The most crushing proofs of your crime are in the hands of a person who has precise orders how to act. When I give the signal, he moves; and when he moves, you are utterly lost.”

There was something so threatening in the silence

that followed this speech that Paul grew faint with apprehension.

"And," went on Mascarin, "it would be an evil day for you if anything were to happen to Hortebise, Paul, or myself; for if one of us were to die suddenly, your fate would be sealed. You cannot say that you have not been warned."

Catenac stood with his head bent upon his breast, rooted to the ground with terror. He felt that he was bound, and gagged, and fettered hand and foot. Mascarin swallowed some of the cooling draught that stood before him, and tranquilly commenced,—

"Suppose, Catenac, that I were to tell you that I know far more of the Champdoce matter than you do; for, after all, your knowledge is only derived from what the Duke has told you. You think that you have hit upon the truth; you were never more mistaken in your life. I, perhaps you are unaware, have been many years engaged in this matter. Perhaps you would like to know how I first thought of the affair. Do you remember that solicitor who had an office near the Law Courts, and did a great deal of blackmail business? If you do, you must remember that he got two years' hard labor."

"Yes, I remember the man," returned Catenac in a humble voice.

"He used," continued Mascarin, "to buy up waste paper, and search through the piles he had collected for any matters that might be concealed in the heterogeneous mass. And many things he must have found. In what sensational case have not letters played a prominent part? What man is there who has not at one time or other regretted that he has had pen and ink ready to his hand? If men were wise, they would

use those patent inks, which fade from the paper in a few days. I followed his example, and, among other strange discoveries, I made this one."

He took from his desk a piece of paper—ragged, dirty, and creased—and, handing it to Hortebise and Paul, said,—

"Read!"

They did so, and read the following strange word: "TNAFNEERTONIOMZEDNEREITIPZEYAETN ECONNISIUSEJECARG;" while underneath was written in another hand the word, "Never."

"It was evident that I had in my hands a letter written in cipher, and I concluded that the paper contained some important secret."

Catenac listened to this narrative with an air of contempt, for he was one of those foolish men who never know when it is best for them to yield.

"I daresay you are right," answered he with a slight sneer.

"Thank you," returned Mascarin coolly. "At any rate, I was deeply interested in solving this riddle, the more as I belonged to an association which owes its being and position to its skill in penetrating the secrets of others. I shut myself up in my room, and vowed that I would not leave it until I had worked out the cipher."

Paul, Hortebise, and Catenac examined the letter curiously, but could make nothing of it.

"I can't make head or tail of it," said the doctor impatiently.

Mascarin smiled as he took back the paper, and remarked,—

"At first I was as much puzzled as you were, and more than once was tempted to throw the document

into the waste-paper basket, but a secret feeling that it opened a way to all our fortunes restrained me. Of course there was the chance that I might only decipher some foolish jest, and no secret at all, but still I went on. If the commencement of the word was written in a woman's hand, the last word had evidently been added by a man. But why should a cryptogram have been used? Was it because the demand was of so dangerous and compromising a character that it was impossible to put it in plain language? If so, why was the last word not in cipher? Simply because the mere rejection of what was certainly a demand would in no manner compromise the writer. You will ask how it happens that demand and rejection are both on the same sheet of paper. I thought this over, and came to the conclusion that the letter had once been meant for the post, but had been sent by hand. Perhaps the writers may have occupied rooms in the same house. The woman, in the anguish of her soul, may have sent the letter by a servant to her husband, and he, transported by rage, may have hurriedly scrawled this word across it, and returned it again: 'Take this to your mistress.' Having settled this point, I attacked the cipher, and, after fourteen hours' hard work, hit upon its meaning.

"Accidentally I held the piece of paper between myself and the light, with the side on which the writing was turned from me, and read it at once. It was a cryptogram of the simplest kind, as the letters forming the words were simply reversed. I divided the letters into words, and made out this sentence: '*Grace, je suis innocente. Ayez pitié; rendez-moi notre enfant* (Mercy, I am innocent. Give me back our son).'"

Hortebise snatched up the paper and glanced at it.

"You are right," said he; "it is the art of cipher writing in its infancy."

"I had succeeded in reading it,—but how to make use of it! The mass of waste paper in which I found it had been purchased from a servant in a country house near Vendôme. A friend of mine, who was accustomed to drawing plans and maps, came to my aid, and discovered some faint signs of a crest in one corner of the paper. With the aid of a powerful magnifying glass, I discovered it to be the cognizance of the ducal house of Champdoce. The light that guided me was faint and uncertain, and many another man would have given up the quest. But the thought was with me in my waking hours, and was the companion of my pillow during the dark hours of the night. Six months later I knew that it was the Duchess who had addressed this missive to her husband, and why she had done so. By degrees I learned all the secret to which this scrap of paper gave me the clue; and if I have been a long while over it, it is because one link was wanting which I only discovered yesterday."

"Ah," said the doctor, "then Caroline Schimmel has spoken."

"Yes; drink was the magician that disclosed the secret that for twenty years she had guarded with unswerving fidelity."

As Mascarin uttered these words he opened a drawer, and drew from it a large pile of manuscript, which he waved over his head with an air of triumph.

"This is the greatest work that I have ever done," exclaimed he. "Listen to it, Hortebise, and you shall see how it is that I hold firmly, at the same time, both the Duke and Duchess of Champdoce, and Diana the Countess of Mussidan. Listen to me, Catenac,—you

who distrusted me, and were ready to play the traitor, and tell me if I do not grasp success in my strong right hand." Then, holding out the roll of papers to Paul, he cried, "And do you, my dear boy, take this and read it carefully. Let nothing escape you, for there is not one item, however trivial it may seem to you, that has not its importance. It is the history of a great and noble house, and one in which you are more interested than you may think."

Paul opened the manuscript, and, in a voice which quivered with emotion, he read the facts announced by Mascarin, which he had entitled "The Mystery of Champdoce."

The conclusion of this exciting narrative will be found in the volume called "The Mystery of Champdoce."

THE CHAMPDOCE MYSTERY

CHAPTER I.

A DUCAL MONOMANIAC.

THE traveller who wishes to go from Poitiers to London by the shortest route will find that the simplest way is to take a seat in the stage-coach which runs to Saumur; and when you book your place, the polite clerk tells you that you must take your seat punctually at six o'clock. The next morning, therefore, the traveller has to rise from his bed at a very early hour, and make a hurried and incomplete toilet, and on arriving, flushed and panting, at the office, discover that there was no occasion for such extreme haste.

In the hotel from whence the coach starts every one seems to be asleep, and a waiter, whose eyes are scarcely open, wanders languidly about. There is not the slightest good in losing your temper, or in pouring out a string of violent remonstrances. In a small restaurant opposite a cup of hot coffee can be procured, and it is there that the disappointed travellers congregate, to await the hour when the coach really makes a start.

At length, however, all is ready, the conductor utters a tremendous execration, the coachman cracks his whip, the horses spring forward, the wheels rattle, and

the coach is off at last. Whilst the conductor smokes his pipe tranquilly, the passengers gaze out of the windows and admire the beautiful aspect of the surrounding country. On each side stretch the woods and fields of Bevron. The covers are full of game, which has increased enormously, as the owner of the property has never allowed a shot to be fired since he had the misfortune, some twenty years ago, to kill one of his dependents whilst out shooting. On the right hand side some distance off rise the tower and battlements of the Château de Mussidan. It is two years ago since the Dowager Countess of Chevanche died, leaving all her fortune to her niece, Mademoiselle Sabine de Mussidan. She was a kind-hearted woman, rough and ready in her manner, but very popular amongst the peasantry. Farther off, on the top of some rising ground, appears an imposing structure, of an ancient style of architecture; this is the ancient residence of the Dukes of Champdoce. The left wing is a picturesque mass of ruins; the roof has fallen in, and the mullions of the windows are dotted with a thick growth of clustering ivy. Rain, storm, and sunshine have all done their work, and painted the mouldering walls with a hundred varied tints. In 1840 the inheritor of one of the noblest names of France resided here with his only son. The name of the present proprietor was Cæsar Guillaume Duepair de Champdoce. He was looked upon both by the gentry and peasantry of the country side as a most eccentric individual. He could be seen any day wandering about, dressed in the most shabby manner, and wearing a coat that was frequently in urgent need of repair, a leathern cap on his head, wooden shoes, and a stout oaken cudgel in his hand. In winter he

supplemented to these an ancient sheepskin coat. He was sixty years of age, very powerfully built, and possessing enormous strength. The expression upon his face showed that his will was as strong as his thews and sinews. Beneath his shaggy eyebrows twinkled a pair of light-gray eyes, which darkened when a fit of passion overtook him, and this was no unusual occurrence.

During his military career in the army of the Condé, he had received a sabre cut across his cheek, and the cicatrice imparted a strange and unpleasant expression to his face. He was not a bad-hearted man, but headstrong, violent, and tyrannical to a degree. The peasants saluted him with a mixture of respect and dread as he walked to the chapel, to which he was a regular attendant on Sundays, with his son. During the Mass he made the responses in an audible voice, and at its conclusion invariably put a five-franc piece into the plate. This, his subscription to the newspaper, and the sum he paid for being shaved twice each week, constituted the whole of his outlay upon himself. He kept an excellent table, however; plump fowls, vegetables of all kinds, and the most delicious fruit were never absent from it. Everything, however, that appeared upon his well-plenished board was the produce of his fields, gardens, or woods. The nobility and gentry of the neighborhood frequently invited him to their hospitable tables, for they looked upon him as the head and chief of the nobility of the county; but he always refused their invitations, saying plainly, "No man who has the slightest respect for himself will accept hospitalities which he is not in a position to return." It was not the grinding clutch of poverty that drove the Duke to this exercise

of severe economy, for his income from his estates brought him in fifty thousand francs per annum; and it was reported that his investments brought him in as much more. As a matter of course, therefore, he was looked upon as a miser, and a victim to the sordid vice of avarice.

His past life might, in some degree, offer an explanation of this conduct. Born in 1780, the Duke de Champdoce had joined the band of emigrants which swelled the ranks of Condé's army. An implacable opposer of the Revolution, he resided, during the glorious days of the Empire, in London, where dire poverty compelled him to gain a livelihood as a fencing master at the Restoration. He came back with the Bourbons to his native land, and, by an almost miraculous chance, was put again in possession of his ancestral domains. But in his opinion he was living in a state of utter destitution as compared to the enormous revenues enjoyed by the dead-and-gone members of the Champdoce family; and what pained him more was to see rise up by the side of the old aristocracy a new race which had attached itself to commerce and entered into business transactions. As he gazed upon the new order of things, the man whose pride of birth and position almost amounted to insanity, conceived the project to which he determined to devote the remainder of his life. He imagined that he had discovered a means by which he could restore the ancient house of Champdoce to all its former splendor and position. "I can," said he, "by living like a peasant and resorting to no unnecessary expense, treble my capital in twenty years; and if my son and my grandson will only follow my

example, the race of Champdoce will again recover the proud position that it formerly held. Faithful to this idea, he wedded, in 1820, although his heart was entirely untouched, a young girl of noble birth but utterly devoid of beauty, though possessed of a magnificent dowry. Their union was an extremely unhappy one, and many persons did not hesitate to accuse the Duke of treating with harshness and severity a young girl, who, having brought her husband five hundred thousand francs, could not understand why she should be refused a new dress when she urgently needed it. After twelve months of inconceivable unhappiness, she gave birth to a son who was baptized Louis Norbert, and six months afterwards she sank into an untimely grave.

The Duke did not seem to regret his loss very deeply. The boy appeared to be of a strong and robust constitution, and his mother's dowry would go to swell the revenues of the Champdoce family. He made his recent loss, too, the pretext for further retrenchments and economies.

Norbert was brought up exactly as a farmer's son would have been. Every morning he started off to work, carrying his day's provisions in a basket slung upon his back. As he grew older, he was taught to sow and reap, to estimate the value of a standing crop at a glance, and, last but not least, to drive a hard bargain. For a long time the Duke debated the expediency of permitting his son to be taught to read or write; and if he did so at last, it was owing to some severe remarks by the parish priest upon the day on which Norbert took the sacrament for the first time.

All went on well and smoothly until the day when Norbert, on his sixteenth birthday, accompanied his father to Poitiers for the first time.

At sixteen years of age, Louis Norbert de Champdoce looked fully twenty, and was as handsome a youth as could be seen for miles round. The sun had given a bronzed tint to his features which was exceedingly becoming. He had black hair, with a slight curl running through it, and large melancholy blue eyes, which he inherited from his mother. Poor girl! it was the sole beauty that she had possessed. He was utterly uncultured, and had been ruled with such a rod of iron by his father that he had never been a league from the Château. His ideas were barred by the little town of Bevron, with its sixty houses, its town hall, its small chapel, and principal river; and to him it seemed a spot full of noise and confusion. In the whole course of his life he had never spoken to three persons who did not belong to the district. Bred up in this secluded manner, it was almost impossible for him to understand that any one could lead a different existence to that of his own. His only pleasure was in procuring an abundant harvest, and his sole idea of excitement was High Mass on Sunday.

For more than a year the village girls had cast sly glances at him, but he was far too simple and innocent to notice this. When Mass was over, he generally walked over the farm with his father to inspect the work of the past week, or to set snares for the birds. His father at last determined to give him a wider experience, and one day said that he was to accompany him to Poitiers.

At a very early hour in the morning they started in one of the low country carts of the district, and

under the seat were small sacks, containing over forty thousand francs in silver money. Norbert had long wished to visit Poitiers, but had never done so, though it was but fifteen miles off. Poitiers is a quaint old town, with dilapidated pavements and tall, gloomy houses, the architecture of which dates from the tenth century; but Norbert thought that it must be one of the most magnificent cities in the world. It was market day when they drove in, and he was absolutely stupefied with surprise and excitement. He had never believed there could be so many people in one place, and hardly noticed that the cart had pulled up opposite a lawyer's office. His father shook him roughly by the shoulder.

"Come, Norbert, lad, we are there," said he.

The young man jumped to the ground, and assisted mechanically to remove the sacks. The servile manner of the lawyer did not strike him, nor did he listen to the conversation between him and his father. Finally, the business being concluded, they took their departure, and, driving to the Market Place, put up the horse and cart at an old-fashioned, dingy inn, where they took their breakfast in the public room at a table where the wagoners were having a violent quarrel over their meal. The Duke, however, had other business to transact than the investment of his money, for he wanted to find the whereabouts of a miller who was somewhat in his debt. Norbert waited for him in front of the inn, and could not help feeling rather uncomfortable at finding himself alone. All at once some one came up and touched him lightly on the shoulder. He turned round sharply, and found himself face to face with a young man, who, seeing his look of surprise, said,—

"What! have you entirely forgotten your old friend Montlouis?"

Montlouis was the son of one of the Duke's farmers, and he and Norbert had often played together in past years. They had driven their cows to the meadows together, and had spent long days together fishing or searching for birds' nests. The dress now worn by Montlouis had at first prevented Norbert from recognizing him, for he was attired in the uniform of the college at which his father had placed him, being desirous of making something more than a mere farmer of his son.

"What are you doing here?" asked Norbert.

"I am waiting for my father."

"So am I. Let us have a cup of coffee together."

Montlouis led his playmate into a small wine shop near at hand. He seemed a little disposed to presume upon the superior knowledge of the world which he had recently acquired.

"If there was a billiard-table here," said he, "we could pass away the time with a game, though, to be sure, it runs into money."

Norbert never had had more than a few pence in his pocket at one time, and at this remark the color rose to his face, and he felt much humiliated.

"My father," added the young collegian, "gives me all I ask for. I am certain of getting one, if not two prizes at the next examination; and when I have taken my degree, the Count de Mussidan has promised to make me his steward. What do you think that you will do?"

"I—I don't know," stammered Norbert.

"You will, I suppose, dig and toil in the fields, as your father has done before you. You are the son

of the noblest and the richest man for miles round, and yet you are not so happy as I am."

Upon the return of the Duke de Champdoce some little time after this conversation, he did not detect any change in his son's manner; but the words spoken by Montlouis had fallen into Norbert's brain like a subtle poison, and a few careless sentences uttered by an inconsiderate lad had annihilated the education of sixteen years, and a complete change had taken place in Norbert's mind, a change which was utterly unsuspected by those around him, for his manner of bringing up had taught him to keep his own counsel.

The fixed smile on his features entirely masked the angry feelings that were working in his breast. He went through his daily tasks, which had once been a pleasure to him, with utter disgust and loathing. His eyes had been suddenly opened, and he now understood a host of things which he had never before even endeavored to comprehend. He saw now that his proper position was among the nobles, whom he never saw except when they attended Mass at the little chapel in Bevron. The Count de Mussidan, so haughty and imposing, with his snow-white hair; the aristocratic-looking Marquis de Laurebourg, of whom the peasants stood in the greatest awe, were always courteous and even cordial in their salutations, while the noble dames smiled graciously upon him. Proud and haughty as they were, they evidently looked upon his father and himself as their equals, in spite of the coarse garments that they wore. The realization of these facts effected a great change in Norbert. He was the equal of all these people, and yet how great a gulf separated him from them. While he and his father tramped to Mass in heavy shoes, the others

drove up in their carriages with powdered footmen to open the doors. Why was this extraordinary difference? He knew enough of the value of crops and land to know that his father was as wealthy as any of these gentlemen. The laborers on the farm said that his father was a miser, and the villagers asserted that he got up at night and gazed with rapture upon the treasure that was hidden away from men's eyes.

"Norbert is an unhappy lad," they would say. "He who ought to be able to command all the pleasures of life is worse off than our own children."

He also recollected that one day, as his father was talking to the Marquis de Laurebourg, an old lady, who was doubtless the Marchioness, had said, "Poor boy! he was so early deprived of a mother's care!" What did that mean unless it was a reflection upon the arbitrary behavior of his father? Norbert saw that these people always had their children with them, and the sight of this filled him with jealousy, and brought tears of anguish to his eyes. Sometimes, as he trudged wearily behind his yoke of oxen, goad in hand, he would see some of these young scions of the aristocracy canter by on horseback, and the friendly wave of the hand, with which they greeted him almost appeared to his jaundiced mind a premeditated insult. What could they find to do in Paris, to which they all took wing at the first breath of winter? This was a question which he found himself utterly unable to solve. To drink to intoxication offered no charms to him, and yet this was the only pleasure which the villagers seemed to enjoy. Those young men must have some higher class of entertainment, but in what could it consist? Norbert could hardly read a line without spelling every word; but these new thoughts running

through his mind caused him to study, so as to improve his education. His father had often told him that he did not like lads who were always poring over books; and so Norbert did not discontinue his studies, but simply avoided bringing them under his father's notice. He knew that there was a large collection of books in one of the upstairs rooms of the Château. He managed to force the lock of the door, and he found some thousands of volumes, of which at least two hundred were novels, which had been the solace of his mother's unhappy life. With all the eagerness of a man who is at the point of starvation and finds an unexpected store of provisions, Norbert seized upon them. At first he had great difficulty in dividing fact from fiction.

He arrived at two conclusions from perusing this heterogeneous mass of literature—one was, that he was most unhappy; and the other was, that he hated his father with a cold and determined loathing. Had he dared, he would have shown this feeling openly, but the Duke de Champdoce inspired him with an unconquerable feeling of terror. This state of affairs continued for some months, and at the end of that time the Duke felt that he ought to make his son acquainted with his projects. One Sunday, after supper, he commenced this task. Norbert had never seen his father so animated as he was at this moment, when all his ancestral pride blazed in his eyes. He explained at length the acts and deeds of those heroes who had been the ornament of their house, and enumerated the influential marriages which had been made by them in the days when their very name was a power in the land. And what remained of all their power and rank, save their Parisian domicile, their old Châ-

teau, and some two hundred thousand francs of income?

Norbert could hardly credit what he heard; he had never believed that his father possessed such enormous wealth. "Why, it is inconceivable!" he muttered. And yet, as he looked round, he saw that the surroundings were those of a peasant's cottage. How could he endure so many discomforts and wounds to his pride? In his anger he absolutely started to his feet with the intention of reproaching his father, but his courage failed him, and he fell back into a chair, quivering with emotion.

The Duke de Champdoce was pacing up and down the room.

"Do you think it so little?" asked he angrily.

Norbert knew that not one of the neighboring nobility who had the reputation of being wealthy possessed half this annual income, and it was with a feeling of bitter anger in his heart that he listened to the broken words which fell from his father's lips. All at once the Duke halted in front of his son's chair.

"What fortune I have now," said he in a hoarse voice, "is little or nothing in times like these, when the tradesman contrives to make an almost unlimited income, and, setting up as a gentleman, imitates, not our virtues, but our vices; while the nobles, not understanding the present hour, are in poverty and want. Without money, nothing can be done. To hold his own against these mushroom fortunes, a Champdoce should possess millions. Neither you nor I, my son, will see our coffers overflowing with millions, but our descendants will reap the benefit of our toil. Our ancestors gained their name and glory by their determi-

nation; let us show that we are their worthy offspring."

As he approached the subject which had occupied his mind entirely for years, the old noble's voice quivered and shook.

"I have done my duty," said he, calming himself by a mighty effort, "and it is now your turn to do yours. You shall marry some wealthy heiress, and you shall bring up your son as I have reared and nurtured you. You will be able to leave him fifteen millions; and if he will only follow in our footsteps, he will be able to bequeath to his heir a fortune that a monarch might envy. And this shall and will come to pass, because it is my fixed determination."

This strange outburst of confidence petrified Norbert.

"The task is heavy and painful," continued the Duke, "but it is one that several scores of illustrious houses have accomplished. He who wishes to revive the fallen fortunes of some mighty house must live only in the future, and have no thought but for the prosperity of his descendants. More than once I have faltered and hesitated, but I have conquered my weakness, and now only live to make the line of Champdoce the most wealthy in France. You have seen me haggle for an hour over a wretched louis, but it was for the reason that at a future day one of our descendants might fling it to a beggar from the window of his magnificent equipage. Next year I will take you to Paris and show you our house there. You will see in it the most wonderful tapestry, pictures by the best masters, for I have ornamented and embellished it as a lover adorns a house for a beloved mistress, and that

house, Norbert, is the home that your grandchildren will dwell in."

The Duke uttered these words in a tone of jubilant triumph.

"I have spoken to you thus," resumed he, after a short pause, "because you are now of an age to listen to the truth, and because I wished you to understand the rules by which you are to regulate your life. You have now arrived at years of discretion, and must do of your own free will what you have up to this time done at my bidding. This is all that I have to say. To-morrow you will take twenty-five sacks of wheat to the miller at Bevroni."

Like all tyrannical despots, the Duke never contemplated for a moment the possibility of any one disobeying his commands; yet at this very moment Norbert was registering a solemn mental oath that he would never carry out his father's wishes. His anger, which his fears had so long restrained, now burst all bounds, and it was in the broad chestnut tree avenue, behind the Château, far from any listening ear, that he gave way to his despair. So long as he had only looked upon his father as a mere miser, he had permitted himself to indulge in hope; but now he understood him better, and saw that life-long plans, such as the Duke had framed, were not to be easily overruled.

"My father is mad," said he; "yes; decidedly mad."

He had made up his mind that for the present he would yield to his despotism, but afterwards, in the future, what was he to do?

It is an easy thing to find persons to give you bad

advice, and the very next day Norbert found one at Bevron in the shape of a certain man called Daumon, a bitter enemy of the Duke.

CHAPTER II.

A DANGEROUS ACQUAINTANCE.

DAUMON was not a native of this part of the country, and no one knew from whence he came. He said that he had been an attorney's clerk, and had certainly resided for a long time in Paris. He was a little man of fifty years of age, clean shaved, and with a sharp and cunning expression of countenance. His long nose, sharp, restless eyes, and thin lips, attracted attention at first sight. His whole aspect aroused a feeling of distrust. He had come to Bevron, some fifteen years before, with all his provisions in a cotton handkerchief slung over his shoulder. He was willing to make money in any way, and he prospered and rose. He owned fields, vineyards, and a cottage, which is at the juncture of the highway to Poitiers and the cross road that leads to Bevron. His aim and object were to be seen everywhere, to know everybody, and to have a finger in every pie in the neighborhood around. If any of the farmers or the laborers wanted small advances, they went to him, and he granted them loans at exorbitant rates of interest. He gave most disputants counsel, and had every point of law at his fingers' ends. He could teach people how to sail as close to the wind as possible, and yet to be beyond the reach of the law. He affected to be only too

anxious to ameliorate the lot of the peasant class, and yet he was drawing heavy sums from them by way of interest. He endeavored by every means in his power to rouse their feelings of animosity against both the priesthood and the gentry. His artful way of talking, and the long black coat which he wore, had given him the nickname of the "Counsellor" in the district. The reason why he disliked the Duke was because the latter had more than once shown himself hostile to him, and had taken him before the court of justice, from which Daumon only escaped by means of bribery of suborned witnesses. He vowed that he would be revenged for this, and for five years had been watching his opportunity, and this was the man whom Norbert met when he went to deliver his corn to the miller. As he was coming back with his empty wagon, Daumon asked for a lift back as far as the cross road that led to his cottage.

"I trust, sir," said he with the most servile courtesy, "that you will excuse the liberty I take, but I am so utterly crippled with rheumatism that I can hardly walk, Marquis."

Daumon had read somewhere that the eldest son of a Duke was entitled to be styled *Marquis*, and it was the first time that Norbert had been thus addressed. Before this he would have laughed at the appellation, but now his wounded vanity, and his exasperation at the unhappy condition in which he found himself, tempted him to accept the title without remonstrance.

"All right, I can give you a lift," said he, and the Counsellor clambered into the cart.

All the time that he was showering thanks upon Norbert for his courtesy he was watching the young man's face carefully.

"Evidently," thought the Counsellor to himself, "something unusual has taken place at the Château de Champdoce. Was not the opportunity for revenge here?"

Long since he had decided that through the son he could strike the father. But he must be cautious.

"You must have been up very early, Marquis," said he.

The young man made no reply.

"The Duke," resumed Daumon, "is most fortunate in having such a son as you. I know more than one father who says to his children, 'See what an excellent example the young Marquis de Champdoce sets to you all. He is not afraid of hard work, though he is noble by birth, and should not soil his hands by labor.'"

A sudden lurch brought the Counsellor's eloquence to a sudden close, but he speedily resumed again.

"I was watching you as you hefted the sacks. Heavens! what muscles! what a pair of shoulders!"

At any other moment Norbert would have gloried in such laudation, but now he felt displeased and annoyed, and vented his anger by a sharp cut at his team.

"When people say that you are as innocent as a girl," continued Daumon, "I always say that you are a sensible young fellow after all, and that if you choose to lead a regular life, it is far better than wasting your future fortune in wine, billiards, cards, or women."

"I don't know that I might not do something of the kind," returned Norbert.

"What did you say?" answered his wily companion.

"I said that if I were my own master, I would live as other young men."

The lad paused abruptly, and Daumon's eyes gleamed with joy.

"Aha," murmured he to himself; "I have the game in my own hands. I will teach his Grace to interfere with me."

Then, in a voice which could reach Norbert's ears, he continued,—

"Of course some parents are far too strict."

An impatient gesture from Norbert showed him that he had wounded him deeply.

"Yes, yes," put in the wily Counsellor, "as the head grows bald, and the blood begins to stagnate, they forget,—they forget the days when all was so different. They forget the time when they were young, and when they sowed their wild oats with so lavish a hand. When your father was twenty-five, he was precious wild. Ask your father, if you do not believe me."

At this moment the wagon passed the cross road, and Norbert pulled up.

"I cannot thank you enough, Marquis," said the Counsellor as he alighted with difficulty; "but if you would condescend to come and taste my brandy, I should esteem it a great honor."

Norbert hesitated for an instant: his reasoning powers urged him to decline the offer, but he refused to listen to them, and, fastening his horses to a tree, he followed Daumon down the by-road. The cottage was an excellent one, and extremely well furnished. A woman, who acted as Daumon's housekeeper, served the refreshments. The office—for he called his room an office, just as if he was a professional man—was

a strange-looking place. On one side was a desk covered with account books, and against the wall were sacks of seed. A number of books on legal matters crowded the shelves, and from the ceiling hung a quantity of dried herbs. The Counsellor welcomed the heir to the dukedom of Champdoce with the greatest deference, seated him in his own capacious leathern arm-chair, and pressed the brandy which he had refused upon him.

"Come, sir, another drop," said he, and, without waiting for Norbert's assent, he replenished the glass which stood before him.

"I got this brandy from a man down Arcachon way in return for a kindness that I did him; for, without boasting, I may say that I have done kindnesses for many people in my time." He raised his glass to his lips as he spoke. "It is good, is it not?" said he. "You can't get stuff with an aroma like that hereabouts."

The extreme deference of the man, coupled with the excellence of the spirit, opened Norbert's heart in a very short space of time. Up to the present the conduct of poor Norbert had been blameless, but now, without knowing anything of the Counsellor's character or reputation, he poured out all the secret sorrows of his heart, while Daumon chuckled secretly, preserving all the time the imperturbable face of a physician called in to visit a patient.

"Dear me! dear me!" said he; "this is really too bad. Poor fellow! I really pity you. Were it not for the deep respect that I have for the Duke, your father, I should feel inclined to say that he was not quite in his right senses."

"Yes," continued Norbert, the tears starting to his

eyes, "this is just how I am situated. My destiny has been marked out for me, and I am helpless to alter it. I had better a thousand times be lying under the cold greensward, than vegetate thus above ground."

The peculiar smile on Daumon's lips caused him to pause in his complaint.

"Perhaps," he went on, "you think that I am childish in talking thus?"

"Not at all, Marquis, you have suffered too deeply; but forgive me if I say that you are foolish to despond so much over the future that lies before you."

"Future!" repeated Norbert angrily, "what is the use of speaking to me of the future, when I may be kept in this horrible servitude for the next thirty years? My father is still hale and hearty."

"What of that? You will be of age soon, and then you will have full right to claim your mother's fortune."

The extreme surprise displayed by Norbert at this intelligence convinced the Counsellor that he was much more unsophisticated than he had supposed him to be.

"A man," continued he, "can, when he attains his majority, dispose of his inheritance as he thinks fit, and your mother's fortune will render you independent of your father."

"But I should never dare to claim it; how could I venture to do so?"

"You need not make the application personally; your solicitor would manage all that for you; but, of course, you must wait until you are of age."

"But I cannot wait until then," said Norbert; "I must at once free myself from this tyranny."

" Luckily there are ways."

" Do you really think so, Daumon?"

" Yes, and I will show you what is done every day. Nothing is more common in noble families. Would you like to be a soldier?"

" No, I do not care for that, and yet——"

" That is your last resource, Marquis. First, then, we could lay a plaint before the court."

" A plaint?"

" Certainly. Do you suppose that our laws do not provide for such a case as a father exceeding the proper bounds of parental authority? Tell me, has the Duke, your father, ever struck you?"

" Never once."

" Well, that is almost a pity. We will say that your father's property is worth two millions, and yet you derive so slight a benefit from this that you are known everywhere as the ' Young Savage of Champdoce '!"

Norbert started to his feet.

" Who dares speak of me like that?" said he furiously. " Tell me his name."

This outburst of passion did not in the smallest degree discompose Daumon.

" Your father has many enemies, Marquis," he resumed, " for his manners are overbearing and exacting; but you have many friends, and among them all you will find none more devoted than myself, humble though my position may be. Many ladies of high rank take a great interest in you. Only a day or two ago some persons were speaking of you in the presence of Mademoiselle de Laurebourg, and she blushed crimson at your name. Do you know Mademoiselle Diana?"

Norbert colored.

"Ah, I understand," replied Daumon. "And when you have broken the fetters that now bind you, we shall see something one of these days. And now——"

But at this moment Norbert's eyes caught a glimpse of the old-fashioned cuckoo clock that hung on the wall in one corner of the room. He started to his feet.

"Why, it is dinner-time!" said he. "What upon earth will my father say?"

"What, does he keep you in such order as that?"

But, never heeding the sarcastic question of the Counsellor, Norbert had regained his cart, and was driving off at full speed.

CHAPTER III.

A BOLD ADVENTURE.

DAUMON had in no way exaggerated when he said that Norbert was spoken of as the "Young Savage of Champdoce," though no one used this appellation in an insulting form. Public opinion had changed considerably regarding the Duke of Champdoce. The first time that he had made his appearance, wearing wooden shoes and a leathern jacket, every one had laughed, but this did not affect him at all, and in the end people began to term his dogged obstinacy indomitable perseverance. The gleam that shone from his hoarded millions imparted a brilliant lustre to his shabby garments. Why should they waste their pity upon a man who would eventually come into a gigantic fortune, and have the means of gratifying all his desires?

Mothers, with daughters especially, took a great interest in the young man, for to get a girl married to the "Young Savage of Champdoce" would be a feat to be proud of; but unluckily his father watched him with all the vigilance of a Spanish duenna. But there was a young girl who had long since secretly formed a design of her own, and this bold-hearted beauty was Diana de Laurebourg. It was with perfect justice that she had received the name of the "Belle of Poitiers." She was tall and very fair, with a dazzling complexion and masses of lustrous hair; but her eyes gleamed with a suppressed fire, which plainly showed the constitution of her nature. She had been brought up in a convent, and her parents, who had wished her to take the veil, had only been induced to remove her owing to her obstinate refusal to pronounce the vows, coupled with the earnest entreaties of the lady superior, who was kept in a constant state of ferment owing to the mutinous conduct of her pupil. Her father was wealthy, but all the property went over to her brother, ten years older than herself; and so Diana was portionless, with the exception of a paltry sum of forty thousand francs.

"My child," said her father to her the first day of her return, "you have come back to us once more, and now all you have to do is to fascinate some gentleman who is your equal in position and who has plenty of money. If you fail in that, back you go to the convent."

"Time enough to talk about that some years hence," answered the girl with a smile; "at present I am quite contented with being at home with you."

M. de Laurebourg had commented with some severity upon the conduct of the Duke de Champdoce

towards his son, but he was perfectly willing to sacrifice his daughter's heart for a suitable marriage.

"I shall gain my end," murmured the girl, "I am sure of it."

She had heard a friend of her father's speaking of Norbert and his colossal expectations.

"Why should I not marry him?" she asked of her own heart; and, with the utmost skill, she applied herself to the execution of her design; for the idea of being a duchess, with an income of two hundred thousand francs, was a most fascinating one. But how was she to meet Norbert? and how bring over the money-raking Duke to her side? Before, however, she could decide on any plan, she felt that she must see Norbert. He was pointed out to her one day at Mass, and she was struck by his beauty and by an ease of manner which even his shabby dress could not conceal. By the quick perception which many women possess, she dived into Norbert's inmost soul; she felt that he suffered, and her sympathy for him brought with it the dawn of love, and by the time she had left the chapel she had registered a solemn vow that she would one day be Norbert's wife. But she did not acquaint her parents with this determination on her part, preferring to carry out her plans without any aid or advice. Mademoiselle Diana was shrewd and practical, and not likely to err from want of judgment. The frank and open expression of her features concealed a mind of superior calibre, and one which well knew how to weigh the advantages of social rank and position. She affected a sudden sympathy with the poor, and visited them constantly, and might be frequently met in the lanes carrying soup

and other comforts to them. Her father declared, with a laugh, that she ought to have been a Sister of Charity, and did not notice the fact that all Diana's pensioners resided in the vicinity of Champdoce. But it was in vain that she wandered about, continually changing the hour of her visits. The "Savage of Champdoce" was not to be seen, nor was he even a regular attendant at Mass. At last a mere trifle changed the whole current of the young man's existence; for, a week after the conversation in which the Duke had laid bare his scheme to his son, he again referred to it, after their dinner, which they had partaken of at the same table with forty laborers, who had been hired to get in the harvest.

"You need not, my son," began the old gentleman, "go back with the laborers to-day."

"But, sir——"

"Allow me to continue, if you please. My confidential conversation with you the other night was merely a preliminary to my telling you that for the future I did not expect you to toil as hard as you had hitherto done, for I wish you to perform a duty less laborious, but more responsible; you will for the future act as farm-bailiff."

Norbert looked up suddenly into his father's face.

"For I wish you to become accustomed to independent action, so that at my death your sudden liberty may not intoxicate you."

The Duke then rose from his seat, and took a highly finished gun from a cupboard.

"I have been very much pleased with you for some time past," said he, "and this is a sign of my satisfaction. The gamekeeper has brought in a thor-

oughly trained dog, which will also be yours. Shoot as much as you like, and, as you cannot go about without money in your pocket, take this, but be careful of it; for remember that extravagance on your part will procrastinate the day upon which our descendants will resume their proper station in the world."

The Duke spoke for some time longer, but his son paid no heed to his words, and was too much astonished to accept the six five-franc pieces which his father tendered to him.

"I suppose," said the Duke at last in angry accents, "that you will have the grace to thank me."

"You will find that I am not ungrateful," stammered Norbert, aroused by this reproach.

The Duke turned away impatiently.

"What has the boy got into his head now?" muttered he.

It was owing to the advice of the priest of Bevron that the Duke had acted as he had done; but this indulgence came too late, for Norbert's detestation of his tyrant was too deeply buried in his heart to be easily eradicated.

A gun was not such a wonderful present after all—a matter of a few francs, perhaps. Had the Duke offered him the means of a better education, it would be a different matter; but as it was, he would still remain the "Young Savage of Champdoce."

However, Norbert took advantage of the permission accorded to him, and rambled daily over the estate with his gun and his dog Bruno, to which he had become very much attached. His thoughts often wandered to Daumon; but he had made inquiries, and had heard that the Counsellor was a most dangerous man, who would stick at nothing; but for all that, he

had made up his mind to go back to him again for further advice, though his better nature warned him of the precipice on the brink of which he was standing.

CHAPTER IV.

A FINANCIAL TRANSACTION.

DAUMON was expecting a visit from the young man, and had been waiting for him with the cool complacency of a bird-catcher, who, having arranged all his lines and snares, stands with folded arms until his feathered victims fall into his net. The line that he had displayed before the young man's eyes was the sight of liberty. Daumon had emissaries everywhere, and knew perfectly well what was going on at the Château de Champdoce, and could have repeated the exact words made use of by the Duke in his last conversation with his son, and was aware of the leave of liberty that had been granted to Norbert, and was as certain as possible that this small concession would only hasten the rebellion of the young Marquis.

He often took his evening stroll in the direction of Champdoce, and, pipe in mouth, would meditate over his schemes. Pausing on the brow of a hill that overlooked the Château, he would shake his fist, and mutter,—

“He will come; ah, yes, he must come to me!”

And he was in the right, for, after a week spent in indecision, Norbert knocked at the door of his father's bitterest enemy. Daumon, concealed behind the window curtain, had watched his approach, and it was

with the same air of deference that he welcomed the Marquis, as he took care to call him; but he affected to be so overcome by the honor of this visit that he could only falter out,—

“Marquis, I am your most humble servant.”

And Norbert, who had expected a very warm greeting, was much disconcerted. For a moment he thought of going away again, but his pride would not permit him to do so, for he had said to himself that it would be the act of a fool to go away this time without having accomplished anything.

“I want to have a bit of advice from you, Counsellor,” said he; “for, as I have but little experience in a certain matter, I should like to avail myself of your knowledge.”

“You do me too much honor, Marquis,” murmured the Counsellor with a low bow.

“But surely,” said the young man, “you must feel that you are bound to assist me after all you told me a day or two back. You mentioned two means by which I could regain my freedom, and hinted that there was a third one. I have come to you to-day to ask you what it was.”

Never did any man more successfully assume an air of astonishment than did Daumon at this moment.

“What,” said he, “do you absolutely remember those idle words I made use of then?”

“I do most decidedly.”

The villain’s heart of Daumon was filled with delight, but he replied,—

“Oh, Marquis! you must remember that we say many things that really have no special meaning, for between act and intention there is a tremendous dif-

ference. I often speak too freely, and that has more than once got me into trouble."

Norbert was no fool, in spite of his want of education, and the hot blood of his ancestors coursed freely through his veins. He now struck the butt-end of his gun heavily upon the floor.

"You treated me like a simpleton, then, it appears?" remarked he angrily.

"My dear Marquis——"

"And imagined that you could trifle with me. You managed to learn my real feelings for your own amusement; but, take care; this may cost you more than you think."

"Ah, Marquis, can you believe that I would act so basely?"

"What else can I think?"

Daumon paused for a moment, and then said,—

"You will be angry when you hear what I have to say, but I cannot help speaking the truth."

"I shall not be angry, and you can speak freely."

"I am but a very poor and humble man. What have I to gain by securing any note, and by encouraging you to brave your father's anger? Just think what must happen if I opposed the all-powerful Duke de Champdoce; why, I might find myself in prison in next to no time."

"And for what reason, if you please?" asked Norbert.

"Have you never studied law in the slightest degree, Marquis? Dear me, how neglectful some parents are! You are not of age, and there is a certain article, 354 in the code, that could be so worked that a poor humble creature like me could be locked up

for perhaps five years. The law deals very hardly when any one has dealings with a minor, the more especially when the father is a man of untold wealth. If the Duke should ever discover——”

“But how could he ever do so?”

Daumon made no reply, and his silence so plainly showed Norbert that the Counsellor did not trust him, that he repeated the question in an angry voice.

“Your blind subservience to your father is too well known.”

“You believe that I should confess everything to him?”

“You yourself told me that when his eyes were fixed on yours you could not avoid yielding to his will.”

Norbert’s anger gradually died away, as he replied in accents of intense bitterness,—

“I may be a savage, but I am not likely to become a traitor. If I once promised to keep a secret, no measures or tortures would tear it from me. I may fear my father, but I am a Champdoce, and fear no other mortal man. Do you understand me?”

“But, Marquis——”

“No other mortal man,” interrupted Norbert sternly, “will ever know from me that we have ever exchanged words together.”

An expression passed over the features of the Counsellor which cast a ray of hope upon the young man’s heart.

“Upon my word,” said he, “any one would judge from my hesitation that I had some wrong motive in acting as I am doing, but I never give bad advice, and any one will tell you the same about me, and this is the breviary by which I regulate all my actions.”

As he spoke, he took a book from his desk, and waved it aloft.

Norbert looked puzzled and angry.

"What do you mean?" asked he.

"Nothing, Marquis, nothing; have patience; your majority is not far off, and you have only a few years to wait. Remember that your father is an old man; let him carry out his plan for a few years longer, and——"

Norbert struck his fist savagely upon the table, crying out furiously. "It was not worth my coming here if this was all that you had to say;" and, whistling to Bruno, the young man prepared to quit the room.

"Ah, Marquis! you are far too hasty," said the Counsellor humbly.

Norbert paused. "Speak then," answered he roughly.

In a low, impressive voice, Daumon went on.

"Remember, Marquis, that though I should like to see you have a better understanding with your father, yet, at the same time, I should like to work for the happiness of you both. I am like a judge in court, who endeavors to bring about a compromise between the litigants. Can you not, while affecting perfect submission, live in a manner more suited to you? There are many young men of your age in a precisely similar position."

Norbert took a step forward and began to listen earnestly.

"You have more liberty now," continued Daumon. "Pray, does your father know how you employ your time?"

"He knows that I can do nothing but shoot."

"Well, I know what I would do if I were your age."

“ And what would that be? ”

“ First of all, I would stay at home sufficiently often not to arouse papa’s suspicions, and the rest of my leisure I would spend in Poitiers, which is a very pleasant town. I could take nice rooms in which I could be my own master. At Champdoce I could keep to my peasant’s clothes, but in Poitiers I would be dressed by the best tailor. I should pick up a few boon companions amongst the jolly students, and have plenty of friends, ladies as well as gentlemen. I would dance, sing, and drink, and would dip into every kind of life, so that——”

He paused for a second and then said, “ There ought to be a fast horse or so in your father’s stables, eh? Well then, if there are, why not take one for your own riding? Then at night, when you are supposed to be snug between the sheets, creep down to the stable, clap a bridle on the horse, and, hey, presto! you are in Poitiers. Put on the clothes suitable to the handsome young noble you are, and have a joyous carouse with your many companions; and if you do, next day, not choose to go back until the morning, the servants will only tell your father that you are out shooting.”

Norbert was a thoroughly strong, honest youth, and the idea of meanness and duplicity were most repugnant to his feelings in general; and yet he listened eagerly to this proposition, for oppression had utterly changed his nature. The career of dissipation and pleasure proposed so adroitly by Daumon dazzled his imagination and his eyes began to sparkle.

“ Well,” asked the Counsellor invidiously, “ and, pray, what is there to prevent you doing all this? ”

“ Want of funds,” returned Norbert, with a deep sigh; “ I should want a great deal, and I have hardly

any; if I were to ask my father for any, he would refuse me, and wonder——”

“Have you no friends who would find you such a sum as you would require until you came of age?”

“None at all;” and, overwhelmed with the sense of his utter helplessness, Norbert sank back upon a chair.

After a brief period of reflection, Daumon spoke with apparent reluctance,—

“No, Marquis, I cannot see you so miserably unhappy without doing my best to help you. A man is a fool who puts out his hand to interfere between father and son, but I will find money to lend you what you want.”

“Will you do so, Counsellor?”

“Unluckily I cannot, I am only a poor fellow, but some of the neighboring farmers intrust me with their savings for investment. Why should I not use them to make you comfortable and happy?”

Norbert was almost choked with emotion. “Can this be done?” asked he eagerly.

“Yes, Marquis; but you understand that you will have to pay very heavy interest on account of the risk incurred in lending money to a minor. For the law does not recognize such transactions, and I myself do not like them. If I were in your place, I would not borrow money on these terms, but wait until some friend could help me.”

“I have no friends,” again answered the young man.

Daumon shrugged his shoulders with the air of a man who says: “Well, I suppose I must give in, but at any rate I have done my duty.” Then he began aloud, “I am perfectly aware, Marquis, that, considering the wealth that must one day be yours, this transaction is a most paltry one.”

He then went on to enumerate the conditions of the loan, and at each clause he would stop and say, "Do you understand this?"

Norbert understood him so well that at the end of the conversation, in exchange for the thousand francs, he handed to the Counsellor the promissory notes for four thousand francs each, which were made payable to two farmers, who were entirely in Daumon's clutches. The young man, in addition, pledged his solemn word of honor that he would never disclose that the Counsellor had anything to do with the transaction.

"Remember, Marquis, prudence must be strictly observed. Come here to me only after the night has set in."

This was the last piece of advice that Daumon gave his client; and when he was again left alone, he perused with feelings of intense gratification, the two notes that Norbert had signed. They were entirely correct and binding, and drawn up in proper legal form. He had made up his mind to let the young man have all his savings, amounting to some forty thousand francs, and not to press for payment until the young man came into his fortune.

All this, however, hinged upon Norbert's silence and discretion, for, at the first inkling of the matter, the Duke would scatter all the edifice to the winds; but of this happening Daumon had no fear.

As Norbert walked along, followed by his dog, he could not resist putting his hands into his pockets and fingering the tempting, crisp banknotes which lurked there, and making sure that it was a reality and not a dream. That night seemed interminable; and the next morning, with his gun on his shoulder and his dog at his heels, he walked briskly along the road to Poitiers.

He had determined to follow Daumon's advice,—to have suitable rooms, and to make the acquaintance of some of the students. On his arrival at Poitiers, which he had only once before visited, Norbert felt like a half-fledged bird who knows not how to use its wings. He wandered about the streets, not knowing how to commence what he wanted. Finally, after a sojourn in the town of a very brief duration, he went to the inn where he had breakfasted with his father on his former visit, and, after an unsatisfactory meal, returned to Champdoce, as wretched as he had been joyful and hopeful at his early start in the morning. But later on he went to Daumon, who put him in communication with a friend who, for a commission, took the unsophisticated lad about, hired some furnished rooms, and finally introduced him to the best ladies in the town, while Norbert ordered clothes to the tune of five hundred francs. He now thought himself on the high road to the full gratification of his desires; but, alas! the reality, compared with what his imagination had pictured, appeared rank and chilling. His timidity and shyness arrested all his progress; he required an intimate friend, and where could he hit upon one?

One evening he entered the Café Castille. He found a large number of students collected there, and was a little disgusted at their turbulent gayety, and, hastily withdrawing, he spent the rest of the weary evening in his own rooms with Bruno, who, for his part, would have much preferred the open country. He had really only enjoyed the four evenings on which he had visited the Martre; but these limited hours of happiness did not make up for the web of falsehood in which he had enmeshed himself, or the daily dread of detection in which he lived.

The Duke had noticed his son's absence, but his suspicions were very wide of the truth. One morning he laughed at Norbert on the continued non-success of his shooting.

"Do your best to-day, my boy," said he, "and try and bring home some game, for we shall have a guest to dinner."

"To dinner, here?"

"Yes," answered the Duke suppressing a smile. "Yes, actually here; M. Puymandour is coming, and the dining-room must be opened and put into proper order."

"I will try and kill some game," answered Norbert to himself as he started on his errand.

This, however, was more easily resolved on than executed. At last he caught sight of an impudent rabbit near a hedge; he raised his gun and fired. A shriek of anguish followed the report, and Bruno dashed into the hedge, barking furiously.

CHAPTER V.

A BAD START.

DIANA DE LAUREBOURG was a strange compound; under an appearance of the most artless simplicity she concealed an iron will, and had hidden from every one of her family, and even from her most intimate friends, her firm resolve to become the Duchess of Champdoce. All her rambles in the neighborhood had turned out of no avail; and as the weather was now very uncertain, it seemed as if her long strolls in the country roads and

fields would soon come to an end. "The day must eventually come," murmured she, "when this invisible prince must make his appearance." And at last the long-expected day arrived.

It was in the middle of the month of November, and the weather was exceedingly soft and balmy for the time of year. The sky was blue, the few remaining leaves rustled on the trees, and an occasional bird whistled in the hedgerows. Diana de Laubourgh was walking slowly along the path leading to Mussidan, when all at once she heard a rustling of branches. She turned round sharply, and all the blood in her body seemed to rush suddenly to her heart, for through an opening in the hedge she caught sight of the man who for the past two months had occupied all her waking thoughts. Norbert was waiting for something with all the eagerness of a sportsman, his finger on the trigger of his gun.

Here was the opportunity for which she had waited so long, and with such ill-concealed impatience; and yet she could derive no advantage from it, for what would happen? Simply this: Norbert would bow to her, and she would reply by a slight inclination of her head, and perhaps two months might pass away before she met him again. Just as she was about to take some bold and decisive step she saw Norbert raise his gun and point it in her direction. She endeavored to call out to him, but her voice failed her, and in another moment the report rang out, and she felt a sharp pang, like the touch of a red-hot iron upon her ankle. With a wild shriek she threw up her arms and fell upon the pathway. She did not lose her senses, for she heard a cry in response to her own, and the crashing of something forcing its way through the hedge. Then she felt a

hot breath upon her face, and then something cold and wet touched her cheek. She opened her eyes languidly, and saw Bruno licking her face and hands.

At the same moment Norbert dashed through the hedge and stood before her. At once she realized the advantage of her position and closed her eyes once more. Norbert, as he hung over the seemingly unconscious form of this fair young creature, felt that his senses were deserting him, for he greatly feared that he had killed Mademoiselle de Laurebourg. His first impulse was to fly precipitately, and his second to give what aid he could to his victim. He knelt down by her, and, to his infinite relief, found that life was not extinct. He raised her beautiful head.

"Speak to me, mademoiselle, I entreat you," cried he.

All this time Diana was returning thanks to kind Providence for the fulfilment of her wishes. After a time she made a slight move, and Norbert uttered an exclamation of joy. Then, opening her beautiful eyes, she gazed upon the young man with the air of a person just awaking from a dream.

"It is I," faltered the distracted young man, "Norbert de Champdoce. But forgive me, and tell me if you are in pain?"

Pity came over the wounded girl. She gently drew herself away from the arm that encircled her, and said softly,—

"It is I who ought to apologize for my foolish weakness; for I am really more frightened than hurt."

Norbert felt that heaven had opened before his very eyes. "Let me go for help," exclaimed he.

"No, no; it was a mere scratch." And, raising her

skirt, she displayed a foot that might have turned a steadier head than Norbert's. "See," said she, "it is there that I am in pain."

And she pointed to a spot of blood upon the delicate white stocking. At the sight of this the young man's terror increased, and he started to his feet.

"Let me run to the Château," said he, "and in less than an hour——"

"Do nothing of the kind," interrupted the girl; "it is a mere nothing. Look, I can move my foot with ease."

"But let me entreat you——"

"Hush! we shall soon see what it is that has happened." And she inspected what she laughingly termed his terrible wound.

It was, as she had supposed, a mere nothing. One pellet had grazed the skin, another had lodged in the flesh, but it was quite on the surface.

"A surgeon must see to this," said Norbert.

"No, no." And with the point of a penknife she pulled out the little leaden shot. The young man remained still, holding his breath, as a child does when he is putting the topmost story in a house of cards. He had never heard so soft a voice, never gazed on so perfectly lovely a face. In the meantime Diana had torn up her handkerchief and bandaged the wound. "Now that is over," exclaimed she, with a light laugh, as she extended her slender fingers to Norbert, so that he might assist her to rise.

As soon as she was on her feet, she took a few steps with the prettiest limp imaginable.

"Are you in pain?" said he anxiously.

"No, I am not indeed; and by this evening I shall

have forgotten all about it. But confess, Marquis," she added, with a coquettish laugh, "that this is a droll way of making an acquaintance."

Norbert started at the word Marquis, for no one but Daumon had ever addressed him thus.

"She does not despise me," thought he.

"This little incident will be a lesson to me," continued she. "Mamma always has told me to keep to the highroad; but I preferred the by-paths because of the lovely scenery."

Norbert, for the first time in his life, realized that the view was a beautiful one.

"I am this way nearly every day," pursued Diana, "though I am very wicked to disobey my mother. I go to see poor La Berven. She is dying of consumption, poor thing, and I take her a little soup and wine every now and then."

She spoke like a real Sister of Mercy, and, in Norbert's opinion, wings only were lacking to transform her into a perfect angel.

"The poor woman has three children, and their father does nothing for them, for he drinks what he earns," the young girl went on.

Berven was one of the identical men to whom Norbert had given his promissory note for four thousand francs, for he was one of the two men who had intrusted Daumon with their savings for investment; but the young man was not in a condition to notice this. Diana had meantime slung her basket on her arm.

"Before I leave you to-day," said she, "I should so much like to ask a favor of you."

"A favor of me, mademoiselle?"

"Yes; oblige me by saying nothing of what has occurred to-day to any one; for should it come to my

parents' ears, they would undoubtedly deprive me of the little liberty that they now grant me."

"Mademoiselle," answered Norbert, "be sure that I will never mention the terrible accident that my awkwardness has caused."

"Thank you, Marquis," answered the girl, with a half-mocking courtesy. "Another time let me advise you, before you shoot, to look that no one is behind a hedge."

With these words she tripped away, without her tiny feet showing any signs of lameness. She had read Norbert's heart like the pages of a book, and felt that there was every chance of her winning the game. "I am sure of it now," said she; "I shall be the Duchess of Champdoce." How grateful she felt for that untimely shot! and she felt sure that Norbert had understood what she meant when she had said that she went along that path. She felt certain that the young man had not lost one word. She believed that the only opposition would come from his father. As she looked round for a moment, she saw Norbert standing fixed and motionless as the trees around him.

After Diana had departed, the unhappy lad felt as if she had taken half his life with her. Was it all a dream? He knelt down, and, after a slight search, discovered the little pellet, the cause of all the mischief; and, taking it up carefully, returned home. To his extreme surprise, he found the main gateway wide open, and from a window he heard his father's voice calling out in kindly accents,—

"Come up quickly, my boy, for our guest has arrived."

CHAPTER VI.

THE COUNT DE PUYMANDOUR.

SINCE the death of the Duchess of Champdoce the greater portion of the Château had been closed, but the reception rooms were always ready to be used at a very short notice.

The dining-room was a really magnificent apartment. There were massive buffets of carved oak, black with age, ornamented with brass mountings. The shelves groaned beneath their load of goblets and salvers of the brightest silver, engraved with the haughty armorial bearings of the house of Champdoce.

Standing near one of the windows, Norbert saw a man, stout, robust, bald and red-faced, wearing a mustache and slight beard. His clothes were evidently made by a first-rate tailor, but his appearance was utterly commonplace.

"This is my son," said the Duke, "the Marquis de Champdoce. Marquis, let me introduce you to the Count de Puymandour."

This was the first time that his father had ever addressed Norbert by his title, and he was greatly surprised. The great clock in the outer hall, which had not been going for fifteen years, now struck, and instantly a butler appeared, bearing a massive silver soup tureen, which he placed on the table, announcing solemnly that his Grace was served, and the little party at once seated themselves. A dinner in such a vast chamber would have been rather dull had it not been enlivened by the amusing tales and witty anecdotes of the Count de Puymandour, which he narrated in a jovial

but rather vulgar manner, seasoned with bursts of laughter. He ate with an excellent appetite, and praised the quality of the wine, which the Duke himself had chosen from the cellar, which he had filled with an immense stock for the benefit of his descendants. The Duke, who was generally so silent and morose, smiled buoyantly, and appeared to enjoy the pleasantries of his guest. Was this only the duty of the host, or did his geniality conceal some hidden scheme? Norbert was utterly unable to settle this question, for though not gifted with much penetration, he had studied his father's every look as a slave studies his master, and knew exactly what annoyed and what pleased him.

The Count de Puymandour lived in a magnificent house, with his daughter Marie, about three miles from Champdoce, and he was exceedingly fond of entertaining; but the gentry, who did not for a moment decline to accept his grand dinners, did not hesitate to say that Puymandour was a thief and a rogue. Had he been convicted of larceny, he could not have been spoken of with more disdainful contempt. But he was very wealthy, and possessed at least five millions of francs. Of course this was an excellent reason for hating him, but the fact was, that Puymandour was a very worthy man, and had made his money by speculation in wool on the Spanish frontier. For a long period he had lived happy and respected in his native town of Orthez, when all at once he was tempted by the thought of titular rank, and from that time his life was one long misery. He took the name of one of his estates, he bought his title in Italy, and ordered his coat-of-arms from a heraldic agent in Paris, and now his ambition was to be treated as a real nobleman. The mere

fact of dining with the eccentric Duke de Champdoce, who never invited any one to his table, was to him, as it were, a real patent of nobility.

At ten o'clock he rose and declared he must leave, and the Duke escorted him the length of the avenue to the great gates opening on the main road, and Norbert, who walked a few paces in the rear, caught now and then a few words of their conversation.

"Yes," remarked Puymandour, "I will give a million down."

Then came a few words from the Duke, of which Norbert could only catch the words, "thousands and millions."

He paid, however, but little attention, for his mind was many miles away. Since the unlooked-for meeting with that fair young face, he had thought of nothing else, and he mechanically shook hands with, and bade his guest "Good-night" when his father did.

When the Duke was sure that M. de Puymandour could not hear his voice, he took his son by the arm, and the bitterness of feeling which he had so long repressed burst forth in words.

"This," said he, "is a specimen of the mushroom aristocracy that has sprung up, and not a bad sample either; for though he is puffed up by ridiculous vanity, the man is shrewd and intelligent enough, and his descendants, who will have the advantages of a better education than their progenitors, will form a new class, with more wealth and as much influence as the old one."

For more than an hour the Duke de Champdoce enlarged on his favorite topic; but he might as well have been alone, for his son paid no attention to what he said, for his mind was still dwelling upon his ad-

ventures of the morning. Again that sweet, soft laugh, and that modulated voice rang in his ears. How foolish he must have seemed to her! and what a ridiculous figure he must have cut in her eyes! He had by no means omitted to engrave on the tablet of his memory the fact that Diana passed daily down the little path on her errand of bounty, and that there he had the chance of again seeing her. He fancied that he had so much to say to her; but as he found that his bashfulness would deprive him of the power of utterance, he determined to commit his sentiments to paper. That night he composed and destroyed some fifty letters. He did not dare to say openly, "I love you," and yet that was exactly what he wanted to express, and he strove, but in vain, to find words which would veil its abruptness and yet disclose the whole strength of his feelings. At last, however, one of his efforts satisfied him. Rising early, he snatched up his gun, and whistling to Bruno, made his way to the spot where he had the day before seen Diana stretched upon the ground. But he waited in vain, and hour after hour passed away, as he paced up and down in an agony of suspense. Diana did not come. The young lady had considered her plans thoroughly and kept away. The next day he might have been again disappointed but for a lucky circumstance. Norbert was seated on the turf, awaiting with fond expectation the young girl's approach and as Diana passed the opening to the pathway Bruno scented her, and rushed forward with a joyous bark. She had then no option but to walk up to the spot where Norbert was seated. Both the young people were for the moment equally embarrassed, and Norbert stood silent, holding in his hand the letter which had caused him so much labor to indite.

"I have ventured to wait for you here, mademoiselle," said he in a voice which trembled with suppressed emotion, "because I was full of anxiety to know how you have been. How did you contrive to return home with your wounded foot?"

He paused, awaiting a word of encouragement, but the girl made no reply, and he continued,—

"I was tempted to call and make inquiries at your father's house, but you had forbidden me to speak of the accident, and I did not dare to disobey you."

"I thank you sincerely," faltered Diana.

"Yesterday," the young man went on, "I passed the whole day here. Are you angry with me for my stupidity? I had thought that perhaps you had noticed my anxiety, and might have deigned to——"

He stopped short, terrified at his own audacity.

"Yesterday," returned Diana with the most ingenuous air in the world, and not appearing to perceive the young man's embarrassment, "I was detained at home by my mother."

"Yes," replied he, "for the past two days your form, lying senseless and bleeding on the ground, has ever been before my eyes, for I felt as if I were a murderer. I shall always see your pale, white face, and how, when I raised up your head it rested on my arm for a moment, and all the rapture——"

"You must not talk like that, Marquis," interrupted Diana, but she spoke in such a low tone that Norbert did not hear her and went on,—

"When I saw you yesterday my feelings so overpowered me that I could not put them into words; but as soon as you had left me, it appeared as if all grew dark around me, and throwing myself on my knees, I searched for the tiny leaden pellet that might have

caused your death. I at last found it, and no treasure upon earth will ever be more prized by me."

To avoid showing the gleam of joy that flashed from her eyes, Diana was compelled to turn her head on one side.

"Forgive me, mademoiselle," said Norbert, in despair, as he noticed this movement; "forgive me if I have offended you. Could you but know how dreary my past life has been, you would pardon me. It seemed to me, the very moment that I saw you, I had found a woman who would feel some slight interest in me, and that for her sweet compassion I would devote my whole life to her. But now I see how mad and foolish I have been, and I am plunged into the depths 'of despair.'"

"At your age, Marquis, you must not make use of a word like despair."

She accompanied these words with a glance sufficiently tender to restore all Norbert's courage.

"Ah, mademoiselle," said he; "do not trifle with me, for that would be too cruel."

She let her head droop on her bosom, and, falling upon his knees, he poured a stream of impassioned kisses upon her hands. Diana felt herself swept away by this stream of passion; she gasped, and her fingers trembled, as she found that she was trapped in the same snare that she had set for another. Her reason warned her that she must bring this dangerous interview to a conclusion.

"I am forgetting all about my poor pensioners," said she.

"Ah, if I might but accompany you!"

"And so you may, but you must walk fast."

It is quite true that great events spring from very trivial sources; and had Diana gone to visit La Besson,

Norbert might have heard something concerning Daulmon that would have put him on his guard; but, unfortunately, to-day Diana was bound on a visit to an old woman in another part of the parish.

Norbert looked on whilst this fair young creature busied herself in her work of charity, and then he silently placed two louis from the money he had borrowed, on the table, and left the cottage. Diana followed him, and, laying her finger upon her lips with the significant word "to-morrow," turned down the path that led to her father's house. Norbert could hardly believe his senses when he found himself again alone. Yes, this lovely girl had almost confessed her affection for him, and he was ready to pour out his life blood for her. He tore up the letter which had cost him so much trouble to compose, for he felt that he could make no use of it. He had now no anxieties regarding the future, and he thanked Providence for having caused him to meet Diana de Laurebourg. It never entered his brain that this apparently frank and open-hearted girl had materially furthered the acts of Providence. At supper that night he was so gay, and in such excellent spirits, that even his father's attention was at last attracted.

"I would lay a wager, my boy," remarked the Duke, "that you have had a good day's sport."

"You would win your wager," answered the young man boldly.

His father did not pursue the subject further; but as Norbert felt that he must give some color to his assertion, he stopped the next day, and purchased some quails and a hare. He waited fully half an hour for Diana; and when she did appear, her pale face and the

dark marks under her eyes showed that anxiety had caused her to pass a sleepless night.

No sooner had she parted from Norbert than she saw the risk that she was running by her imprudent conduct. She was endangering her whole future and her reputation,—all indeed that is most precious to a young girl. For an instant the thought of confiding all to her parents entered her brain; but she rejected the idea almost as soon as she had conceived it, for she felt that her father would believe that the parsimonious Duke de Champdoce would never consent to such a marriage, and that her entire liberty would be taken from her, and that she might even be sent back to the convent.

“I cannot stop now,” she murmured, “and must be content to run all risks to effect an object in which I am now doubly interested.”

Diana and Norbert had a long conversation together on this day in a spot which had become so dear to them both, and it was only the approach of a peasant that recalled the girl to the sense of her rash imprudence, and she insisted on going on her ostensible errand of charity. Norbert, as before, escorted her, and even went so far as to offer his arm, upon which she pressed when the road was steep or uneven.

These meetings took place daily, and after a few short minutes spent in conversation, the young lovers would set off on a ramble. More than once they were met by the villagers, and a little scandal began to arise. This was very imprudent on Diana's side; but it had been a part of her plan to permit her actions to be talked of by the tongue of scandal. Unfortunately the end of November was approaching, and the weather

growing extremely cold. One morning, as Norbert arose from his couch, he found that a sharp icy blast was swaying the bare branches of the trees, and that the rain was descending in torrents. On such a day as this he knew that it was vain to expect Diana, and, with his heart full of sadness, he took up a book and sat himself down by the huge fire that blazed in the great hall.

Mademoiselle de Laurebourg had, however, gone out, but it was in a carriage, and she had driven to a cottage to see a poor woman who had broken her leg, and who had nothing but the scanty earnings of her daughter Françoise upon which to exist. As soon as Diana entered the cottage she saw that something had gone wrong.

"What is the matter?" asked she.

The poor creature, with garrulous volubility, exhibited a summons which she had just received, and said that she owed three hundred francs, and that as she could no longer pay the interest, she had been summoned, and that her little property would be seized, and so a finishing stroke would be put to her troubles.

"It is the Counsellor," said she, "that rogue Daulmon, who has done all this."

The poor woman went on to say that when she went to her creditor to implore a little delay, he had scoffingly told her to send her pretty daughter to him to plead her cause.

Mademoiselle de Laurebourg was disgusted at this narrative, and her eyes gleamed with anger.

"I will see this wicked man," said she, "and will come back to you at once."

She drove straight to the Counsellor's house. Daulmon was engaged in writing when the housekeeper

ushered Diana into the office. He rose to his feet, and, taking off his velvet skull cap, made a profound bow, advancing at the same time a chair for his visitor's accommodation.

Though Diana knew nothing of this man, she was not so unsophisticated as Norbert, and was not imposed upon by the air of servile obsequiousness that he assumed. With a gesture of contempt, she declined the proffered seat, and this act made Daumon her bitter enemy.

"I have come," said she in the cold, disdainful words in which young girls of high birth address their inferiors,—“I have come to you from Widow Rouleau.”

“Ah! you know the poor creature then?”

“Yes, and I take a great interest in her.”

“You are a very kind young lady,” answered the Counsellor with a sinister smile.

“The poor woman is in the most terrible distress both of mind and body. She is confined to her bed with a fractured limb, and without any means of support.”

“Yes, I heard of her accident.”

“And yet you sent her a summons, and are ready to seize all she possesses in the world.”

Daumon put on an air of sympathy.

“Poor thing!” said he. “How true it is that misfortunes never come singly!”

Diana was disgusted at the man's cool effrontery.

“It seems to me,” answered she, “that her last trouble is of your making.”

“Is it possible?”

“Why, who is it but you who are the persecutor of this poor lone creature?”

“I!” answered he in extreme astonishment; “do

you really think that it is I? Ah! mademoiselle, why do you listen to the cruel tongues of scandal-mongers? To make a long story short, this poor woman bought barley, corn, potatoes, and three sheep from a man in the neighborhood, who gave her credit to the extent of I daresay three hundred francs. Well, in time, the man asked—most naturally—for his money, and failing to get it, came to me. I urged him to wait, but he would not listen to me, and vowed that if I did not do as he wished he would go to some one else. What was I to do? He had the law on his side too. Ah!" continued he, as though speaking to himself, "if I could only see a way of getting this poor creature out of her trouble! but that cannot be done without money."

He opened a drawer and pulled out about fifty francs.

"This is all my worldly wealth," said he sadly. "But how foolish I am! for, of course, when poor Widow Rouleau has a wealthy young lady to take an interest in her, she must have no further fear."

"I will speak to my father on the matter," answered Diana in a voice which showed that she had but little hope of interesting him in the widow's misfortunes.

Daumon's face fell.

"You will go to the Marquis de Laurebourg?" asked he. "Now, if you would take my advice, I should say, go to some intimate friend,—to the Marquis de Champdoce, for instance. I know," he went on, "that the Duke does not make his son a very handsome allowance; but the young gentleman will find no difficulty in raising whatever he may desire—as it will not be long before he is of age—without counting his marriage, which will put an enormous sum at his disposal even before that."

Diana fell in an instant into the trap the wily Daumon had laid for her.

"A marriage!" exclaimed she.

"I know very little about it; only I know that if the young man wishes to marry without his father's consent, he will have to wait at least five years."

"Five years?"

"Yes; the law requires that a young man who marries against his father's desire should be twenty-five years of age."

This last stroke was so totally unexpected, that the girl lost her head.

"Impossible!" cried she. "Are you not making a mistake?"

The Counsellor gave a quiet smile of triumph.

"I am not mistaken," said he, and calmly pointed out in the code the provision to which he had alluded. As Diana read the passage to which his finger pointed, he watched her as a cat watches a mouse.

"After all, what does it matter to me?" remarked Diana, making an effort to recover herself. "I will speak about this poor woman's case to my father;" and, with her limbs bending under her, she left the room.

As Daumon returned from accompanying her to the door, the Counsellor rubbed his hands.

"Things are getting decidedly warm," muttered he.

He felt that he must gain some further information, and this he could not get from Norbert. It would be also as well, he thought, to tell the sheriff to stay proceedings relative to the Widow Rouleau. By this means he might secure another interview with Mademoiselle de Laurebourg, and perhaps win the poor girl's confidence.

As Diana rode home, she abandoned herself to the grief which the intelligence that she had just heard had caused her, for the foresight of the framers of the law had rendered all her deeply laid plans of no avail.

"The Duke de Champdoce," murmured she to herself, "will never consent to his son's marriage with so scantily a dowered woman as I am; but as soon as Norbert is of age he can marry me, in spite of all his father's opposition; but, oh! 'tis a dreary time to wait."

For a moment she dared to think of the possible death of the old man; but she shuddered as she remembered how strong and healthy he was, and felt that the frail edifice of her hope had been crushed into ten thousand atoms. For all this, however, she did not lose courage. She was not one of those women who, at the first check, beat a retreat. She had not yet decided upon a fresh point of departure, but she had fully made up her mind that she would gain the victory. The first thing was to see Norbert with as little delay as possible. Just then the carriage pulled up at the widow's cottage, which she entered hastily.

"I have seen Daumon," said she. "Do not be alarmed; all matters will be arranged shortly."

Then, without listening to the thanks and blessings which the poor woman showered upon her, she said,—

"Give me a piece of paper to write on," and, standing near the casement, she wrote in pencil on a soiled scrap of paper the following words:—

"Diana would, perhaps, have been at the usual meeting place to-day, in spite of the weather, had she not been compelled to visit a poor woman in a contrary direction. Upon the same business, she will have to call to-morrow at the house of a man named Daumon."

She folded the note and said,—

“ This letter must be taken at once to M. Norbert de Champdoce. Who will carry it? ”

Françoise had made a smock frock for one of the farm servants at Champdoce, and the delivery of it formed a good excuse for going up to the Château, and she willingly undertook the errand.

The next day, in the midst of a heavy shower of rain, Norbert made his appearance at Daumon's office, saying, as a pretext for his visit, that he had exhausted his stock of money, and required a fresh supply. He too was feeling very unhappy, for he feared that his father might entertain matrimonial designs for him which would be utterly opposed to his passion for Mademoiselle de Laurebourg.

Had not the inexorable old man once said, “ You will marry a woman of wealth ”? But in the event of this matter being brought up, Norbert swore that he would no longer be obedient, but would resist to the last; and he calculated on receiving assistance from Daumon. He was on the point of referring to this matter, when a carriage drew up at the door of the cottage, and Mademoiselle de Laurebourg descended from it. Daumon at once saw how matters stood, and wasted no time in addressing Diana.

“ The sheriff will stop proceedings,” said he. “ I can show you his letter to that effect.”

He turned away, and searched as diligently for the letter as if it had existed anywhere except in his own imagination.

“ Dear me,” said he at length. “ I cannot find it. I must have left it in the other room. I have so much to do, that really there are times when I forget every-

thing. I must find it, however. Excuse me, I will be back immediately."

His sudden departure from the room had been a mere matter of calculation; for, guessing that an assassination had been planned, he thought that he might know what took place at it by a little eavesdropping. He therefore applied first his ear and then his eye to the keyhole, and by these means acquired all the information he desired.

A moment of privacy with the object of his affections seemed to Norbert an inestimable boon. When Diana had first entered, he was horrified at the terrible alteration that had taken place in the expression of her face. He seized her hand, which she made no effort to withdraw, and gazed fixedly into her eyes.

"Tell me," murmured he in accents of love and tenderness, "what it is that has gone wrong."

Diana sighed, then a tear coursed slowly down her cheek. Norbert was in the deepest despair at these signs of grief.

"Great heavens!" cried he. "Will you not trust me? Am not I your truest and most devoted friend?"

At first she refused to answer him, but at length she yielded to his entreaties, and confessed that the evening before her father had informed her that a young man had sought her hand in marriage, and one who was a perfectly eligible suitor.

Norbert listened to this avowal, trembling from head to foot, with a sudden access of jealousy.

"And did you make no objections?" asked he.

"How could I?" retorted she. "What can a girl do in opposition to the will of all her family, when she has to choose between the alternative that she loathes, or a life-long seclusion in a convent?"

Daumon shook with laughter, as he kept his ear closely to the keyhole.

"Good business," muttered he. "Not so bad. Here's a little girl from a convent. She has a clever brain and a glib tongue, and under my tuition would be a perfect wonder. If this country booby does not make an open declaration at once, I wonder what her next move will be?"

"And you hesitated," said Norbert reproachfully. "Remember you may escape from the walls of the convent, but not from the bonds of an ill-assorted marriage."

Diana, who looked more beautiful than ever in her despair, wrung her hands.

"What reason can I give to my father for declining this offer?" said she. "Every one knows that I am almost portionless, and that I am sacrificed to my brother, immolated upon the altar erected before the cruel idol of family pride; and how dare I refuse a suitable offer when one is made for my hand?"

"Have you forgotten me?" cried Norbert. "Have you no love for me?"

"Ah, my poor friend, you are no more free than I am."

"Then you look on me as a mere weak boy?" asked he, biting his lips.

"Your father is very powerful," answered she in tones of the deepest resignation; "his determination is inflexible, and his will inexorable. You are completely in his power."

"What do I care for my father?" cried the young man fiercely. "Am not I a Champdoce too? Woe be to any one, father or stranger, who comes between me and the woman I love devotedly; for I do love

you, Diana, and no mortal man shall take you from me."

He clasped Diana to his breast, and pressed a loving kiss upon her lips.

"Aha," muttered Daumon, who had lost nothing from his post of espial, "this is worth fifty thousand francs at least to me."

For a moment Diana remained clasped in her lover's embrace, and then, with a faint cry, released herself from him. She then felt that she loved him, and his kiss and caresses sent a thrill like liquid fire through her veins. She was half pleased and half terrified. She feared him, but she feared herself more.

"What, Diana! would you refuse me?" asked he, after a moment's pause. "Do you refuse me, when I implore you to be my wife, and to share my name with me? Will you not be the Duchess of Champdoce?"

Diana only replied with a glance; but if her eyes spoke plainly, that look said "Yes."

"Why, then," returned Norbert, "should we alarm ourselves with empty phantoms? Do you not trust me? My father may certainly oppose my plans, but before long I shall escape from his tyrannical sway, for I shall be of age."

"Ah, Norbert," returned she sadly, "you are feeding upon vain hopes. You must be twenty-five years of age before you can marry and give the shelter of your name to the woman whom you have chosen for your wife."

This was exactly the explanation for which Daumon had been waiting.

"Good again, my young lady," cried he. "And so this is why she came here. There is some credit in giving a lesson to so apt a pupil."

"It is impossible," cried Norbert, violently agitated; "such an iniquitous thing cannot be."

"You are mistaken," answered Diana calmly. "Unfortunately I am telling you exactly how matters stand. The law clearly fixes the age at twenty-five. During all this time will you remember that a broken-hearted girl——"

"Why talk to me of law? When I am of age, I shall have plenty of money," broke in Norbert; "and do you think that I will tamely submit to my father's oppression? No, I will wrest his consent from him."

During this conversation the Counsellor was carefully removing the dust from the knees of his trousers.

"I will pop in suddenly," thought he, "and catch a word or two which will do away with the necessity of all lengthy explanations."

He suited the action to the word, and appeared suddenly before the lovers. He was not at all disconcerted at the effect his entrance produced upon them, and remarked placidly, "I could not find the sheriff's letter, but I assure you that Widow Rouleau's matter shall be speedily and satisfactorily arranged."

Diana and Norbert exchanged glances of annoyance at finding their secret at the mercy of such a man. This evident distrust appeared to wound Daumon deeply.

"You have a perfect right," remarked he dejectedly, "to say, 'Mind your own business;' but the fact is, that I hate all kinds of injustice so much that I always take the side of the weakest, and so, when I come in and find you deploring your troubles, I say to myself, 'Doubtless here are two young people made for each other.'"

"You forget yourself," broke in Diana haughtily.

"I beg your pardon," stammered Daumon. "I am

but a poor peasant, and sometimes I speak out too plainly. I meant no harm, and I only hope that you will forgive me."

Daumon looked at Diana; and as she made no reply, he went on: "Well," says I to myself, "here are two young folks that have fallen in love, and have every right to do so, and yet they are kept apart by unreasonable and cruel-minded parents. They are young and know nothing of the law, and without help they would most certainly get into a muddle. Now, suppose I take their matter in hand, knowing the law thoroughly as I do, and being up to its weak as well as its strong points."

He spoke on in this strain for some minutes, and did not notice that they had withdrawn a little apart, and were whispering to each other.

"Why should we not trust him?" asked Norbert. "He has plenty of experience."

"He would betray us; he would do anything for money."

"That is all the better for us then; for if we promise him a handsome sum, he will not say a word of what has passed to-day."

"Do as you think best, Norbert."

Having thus gained Diana's assent, the young man turned to Daumon. "I put every faith in you, and so does Mademoiselle de Laurebourg. You know our exact situation. What do you advise?"

"Wait and hope," answered the Counsellor. "The slightest step taken before you are of age will be fatal to your prospects, but the day you are twenty-one I will undertake to show you several methods of bringing the Duke on his knees."

Nothing could make this speech more explicit; but

he was so cheerful and confident, that when Diana left the office, she felt a fountain of fresh hope well up in her heart.

This was nearly their last interview that year, for the winter came on rapidly and with increased severity, so that it was impossible for the lovers to meet out of doors, and the fear of spying eyes prevented them from taking advantage of Daumon's hospitality. Each day, however, the widow's daughter, Françoise, carried a letter to Laurebourg, and brought back a reply to Champdoce. The inhabitants of the various country houses had fled to more genial climates, and only the Marquis de Laurebourg, who was an inveterate sportsman, still lingered; but at the first heavy fall of snow he too determined to take refuge in the magnificent house that he owned in the town of Poitiers. Norbert had foreseen this, and had taken his measures accordingly. Two or three times in the week he mounted his horse and rode to the town. After changing his dress, he made haste to a certain garden wall in which there was a small door. At an agreed hour this door would gently open, and as Norbert slipped through he would find Diana ready to welcome him, looking more bewitching than ever. This great passion, which now enthralled his whole life, and the certainty that his love was returned, had done away with a great deal of his bashfulness and timidity. He had resumed his acquaintanceship with Montlouis, and had often been with him to the Café Castille. Montlouis was only for a short time at Poitiers, for as soon as spring began he was to join the young Count de Mussidan, who had promised to find some employment for him. The approaching departure was not at all to Montlouis' taste, as he was madly in love with a young

girl who resided in the town. He told all to Norbert; and as confidence begets confidence, he more than once accompanied the young Marquis to the door in the garden wall of the Count de Laurebourg's town house.

April came at last. The gentry returned to their country houses, and in time the happy day arrived when Diana de Laurebourg was to return to her father's country mansion. The lovers had now every opportunity to meet, and would exhort each other to have patience, and a week after Diana's return they spent a long day together in the woods. After this delicious day, Norbert, happy and light-hearted, returned to his father's house.

"Marquis," said the Duke, plunging at once into the topic nearest his heart, "I have found a wife for you, and in two months you will marry her."

CHAPTER VII.

AN UNLUCKY BLOW.

THE falling of a thunderbolt at his feet would have startled Norbert less than these words did. The Duke took, or affected to take, no notice of his son's extreme agitation, and in a careless manner he continued,—

"I suppose, my son, that it is hardly necessary for me to tell you the young lady's name. Mademoiselle Marie de Puymandour cannot fail to please you. She is excessively pretty, tall, dark, and with a fine figure. You saw her at Mass one day. What do you think of her?"

"Think!" stammered Norbert. "Really I——"

"Pshaw," replied the old gentleman; "I thought that you had begun to use your eyes. And look here, Marquis, you must adopt a different style of dress. You can go over with me to Poitiers to-morrow, and one of the tailors there will make you some clothes suitable to your rank, for I don't suppose that you wish to alarm your future wife by the uncouthness of your appearance."

"But, father——"

"Wait a moment, if you please. I shall have a suite of apartments reserved for you and your bride, and you can pass your honeymoon here. Take care you do not prolong it for too lengthened a period; and when it is all over, we can break the young woman into all our ways."

"But," interrupted Norbert hastily, "suppose I do not fancy this young lady?"

"Well, what then?"

"Suppose I should beg you to save me from a marriage which will render me most unhappy?"

The Duke shrugged his shoulders. "Why this is mere childishness," said he. "The marriage is a most suitable one, and it is my desire that it should take place."

"But, father," again commenced Norbert.

"What! Are you opposing my will?" asked his father angrily. "Pray, do you hesitate?"

"No," answered his son coldly, "I do not hesitate."

"Very good, then. A man of no position can consult the dictates of his heart when he takes a wife, but with a nobleman of rank and station it is certainly a different matter, for with the latter, marriage should be looked upon as a mere business transaction. I have

made excellent arrangements. Let me repeat to you the conditions. The Count will give two-thirds of his fortune, which is estimated at five millions—just think of that!—and when we get that, we shall be able to screw and save with better heart. Think of the restoration of our house, and the colossal fortune that our descendants will one day inherit, and realize all the beauties of a life of self-denial.”

While the Duke was uttering this string of incoherent sentences, he was pacing up and down the room, and now he halted immediately in front of his son. “You understand,” said he; “to-morrow you will go to Poitiers, and on Sunday we will dine at the house of your future father-in-law.”

In this fearful crisis Norbert did not know what to say or how to act.

“Father,” he once more commenced, “I have no wish to go to Poitiers to-morrow.”

“What are you saying? What in heaven’s name do you mean?”

“I mean that as I shall never love Mademoiselle de Puymandour, she will never be my wife.”

The Duke had never foreseen the chance of rebellion on the part of his son, and he could not bring his mind to receive such an unlooked-for event.

“You are mad,” said he at last, “and do not know what you are saying.”

“I know very well.”

“Think of what you are doing.”

“I have reflected.”

The Duke was making a violent effort to compose his ordinarily violent temper.

“Do you imagine,” answered he disdainfully, “that I shall be satisfied with an answer of this kind? I

hope that you will submit to my wishes, for I think that, as the head of the family, I have conceived a splendid plan for its future aggrandizement; and do you think that, for the mere whim of a boy, I will be turned aside from my fixed determination?"

"No, father," answered Norbert, "it is no boyish whim that makes me oppose your wishes. Tell me, have I not ever been a dutiful son to you? Have I ever refused to do what I was ordered? No; I have obeyed you implicitly. I am the son of the wealthiest man in Poitiers, and I have lived like a laborer's child. Whatever your mandates were, I have never complained or murmured at them."

"Well, and now I order you to marry Mademoiselle de Puymandour."

"Anything but that; I do not love her, and I shall never do so. Do you wish my whole life to be blighted? I entreat you to spare me this sacrifice!"

"My orders are given, and you must comply with them."

"No," answered Norbert quietly, "I will not comply with them."

A purple flush passed across the Duke's face, then it faded away, leaving every feature of a livid whiteness.

"Great heavens!" said he in a voice before which Norbert, at one time, would have quailed. "Whence comes the audacity that makes you venture to dispute my orders?"

"From the feeling that I am acting rightly."

"How long is it that it has been right for children to disobey their parents' commands?"

"Ever since parents began to issue unjust commands."

This speech put the finishing stroke to the Duke's rage. He made a step across the room, towards his son, raising the stick that he usually carried high in the air. For a moment he stood thus, and then, casting it aside, he exclaimed,—

“No, I cannot strike a Champdoce.”

Perhaps it was Norbert's intrepid attitude that restrained the Duke's frenzy, for he had not moved a muscle, but stood still, with his arms folded, and his head thrown haughtily back.

“No, this is an act of disobedience that I will not put up with,” exclaimed the old man in a voice of thunder, and, springing upon his son, he grasped him by the collar and dragged him up to a room on the second floor, and thrust him violently through the doorway.

“You have twenty-four hours in which to reflect whether you will be willing to accept the wife that I have chosen for you,” said he.

“I have already decided on that point,” answered Norbert quietly.

The Duke made no reply, but slammed the door, which was of massive oak, and secured by a lock of enormous proportions.

Norbert gazed round; the only other exit from the room was by means of a window some forty feet from the ground. The young man, however, imagined that some one would surely come to make up his bed for the night; that would give him two sheets; these he could knot together and thus secure a means of escape. He might not be able to see Diana at once, but he could easily send her a message by Daumon, warning her of what had taken place. Having arranged his plans, he threw himself into an arm-

chair with a more easy mind than he had experienced for many months past. The decisive step had been taken, and the relations between his father and himself clearly defined, and thus he naturally considered great progress had been made, and the task before him seemed as nothing to what he had already performed.

"My father," thought he, "must be half mad with passion."

And Norbert was not wrong in his opinion. When the Duke, as usual, took his place at the table, at which the farm laborers ate their meals, not one of them had the courage to make a single observation. Every one knew that a serious altercation had taken place between father and son, and each one was devoured by the pangs of ungratified curiosity.

As soon as the meal was concluded, the Duke called an old and trustworthy servant, who had been in his employment for over thirty years.

"Jean," said he, "your young master is locked up in the yellow room. Here is the key. Take him something to eat."

"Very good, your Grace."

"Wait a little. You will spend the night in his room and keep a strict watch upon him. He may design to make his escape. If he attempts it, restrain him, if necessary, by physical force. Should he prove too strong for you, call to me; I shall be near, and will come to your aid."

This unexpected precaution upon the Duke's part upset all Norbert's plans of escape. He endeavored to persuade Jean to allow him to go out for a couple of hours, giving his word of honor that he would return at the expiration of that time. Prayers and

menaces, however, had no effect. Had the young man gazed from the window, he would have seen his father striding moodily up and down the courtyard, with the thought gnawing at his heart that perhaps after all these many years of waiting his plans might yet be frustrated.

"There is a woman at the bottom of all this," said he to himself. "It is only woman's wiles that in this brief space of time would effect so complete a change in a young man's disposition. Besides, he would not have so obstinately declined to listen to the proposal I made him had not his affections been engaged elsewhere. Who can she be? and by what means shall I find her out?"

It would be absurd to question Norbert, and the Duke was excessively unwilling to institute any regular inquiry into the matter. He passed the whole night in gloomy indecision, but towards morning an inspiration came to him which he looked upon as a special interposition of Providence.

"Bruno," he exclaimed with a mighty oath. "The dog will show me the place that his master frequents and perhaps lead me to the very woman who has bewitched him."

This brilliant idea soothed him a great deal, and at one o'clock he took his seat as usual at the head of the table, and ordered food to be taken up to Norbert, but that none of the measures for his safe custody were to be relaxed.

When he thought the moment was a favorable one, he whistled to Bruno, and, though the dog rarely followed him, yet in the absence of his master, he condescended to accompany the Duke down the avenue to the front gates. Three roads branched off from here,

but the dog did not hesitate for a moment, and took the one to the left, like an animal who knew his destination perfectly well. Bruno went ahead for nearly half an hour, until he reached the exact spot where Diana had met with her accident. He made a cast round, but finding nothing, sat down, clearly saying,—

“Let us wait.”

“This, then,” muttered the Duke, “is the place where the lovers have been in the habit of meeting each other.”

The place was a very lonely one, and, standing on rising ground, commanded a view of the country for a long way round.

The Duke noticed this, and took up a position where the trunk of a giant oak almost concealed him from observation. He was delighted at his sagacity, and was almost in a good humor; for now that he had reflected, the danger did not seem by any means so great, for to whom could Norbert have lost his heart? To some little peasant girl, perhaps, who, thinking that the lad was an easy dupe, had tried to induce him to marry her. As these thoughts passed through the Duke’s brain, Bruno gave a joyous bark.

“Here she is,” muttered he, as he emerged from his hiding place, and at that moment Diana de Laurebourg made her appearance; but as soon as she saw the Duke she uttered a faint cry of alarm. She was inclined to turn and fly, but her strength failed her, and, extending her hands, she grasped the boughs of a slender birch tree that grew close by, to prevent herself from falling. The Duke was quite as much astonished as the young lady. He had expected to see a peasant girl, and here was the daughter of the Marquis de Laurebourg. But anger soon succeeded

to surprise; for though he might have had nothing to fear from the peasant, the daughter of the Marquis de Laurebourg was an utterly different antagonist. He could not rely upon aid from her family, as, for all he knew, they might be aiding and abetting her.

"Well, my child," began he, "you do not seem very glad to see me."

"Your Grace."

"Yes, when you come out to meet the son, it is annoying to meet the father; but do not blame poor Norbert, for I assure you he is not in fault."

Though Mademoiselle de Laurebourg had been startled at first, she was possessed of too strong a will to give in, and soon recovered her self-possession.

She never thought to screen herself by a denial of her reasons for being on the spot, for such a course she would have looked on as an act of treacherous cowardice.

"You are quite right," answered she. "I came here to meet your son, and therefore you will pardon me if I take my leave of you."

With a deep courtesy she was about to move away, when the Duke laid a restraining grip upon her arm.

"Permit me, my child," said he, endeavoring to put on a kind and paternal tone,—“let me say a few words to you. Do you know why Norbert did not come to meet you?”

"He has doubtless some very good reason."

"My son is locked up in a room, and my servants have my orders to prevent his making his escape by force, if necessary."

"Poor fellow! He deserves the deepest commiseration."

The Duke was much surprised at this piece of impertinence, as he considered it.

"I will tell you," returned he in tones of rising anger, "how it comes that I treat my son, the heir to my rank and fortune, in this manner."

He looked savagely angry as he spoke, but Diana answered negligently, "Pray go on; you quite interest me."

"Well then, listen to me. I have chosen a wife for Norbert; she is as young as you are—beautiful, clever, and wealthy."

"And of noble birth, of course."

The sarcasm conveyed in this reply roused the Duke to fury.

"Fifteen hundred thousand francs as a marriage portion will outweigh a coat of arms, even though it should be a tower argent on a field azure." The Duke paused as he made this allusion to the Laubourg arms, and then continued, "In addition to this, she has great expectations; and yet my son is mad enough to refuse the hand of this wealthy heiress."

"If you think that this marriage will cause your son's happiness, you are quite right in acting as you have done."

"Happiness! What has that to do with the matter, as long as it adds to the aggrandizement of our house and name? I have made up my mind that Norbert shall marry this girl; I have sworn it, and I never break my oath. I told him this myself."

Diana suffered acutely, but her pride supported her, whilst her confidence in Norbert was so great that she had the boldness to inquire, "And what did he say to that?"

"Norbert will become a dutiful son once more when he is removed from the malignant influence which has been so injurious to him," returned the Duke fiercely.

"Indeed."

"He will obey me, when I show him that though he may not value his name and position, there are others who do so; and that many a woman would fight a brave battle for the honor of being the Duchess of Champdoce. Young lady, my son is a mere boy; but I have known the world, and when I prove to the poor fool that it was only grasping ambition which assumed the garb of love, he will renounce his folly and resume his allegiance to me. I will tell him what I think of the poverty-stricken adventuresses of high birth, whose only weapons are their youth and beauty, and with which they think that they can win a wealthy husband in the battle of life."

"Continue, sir," broke in Diana haughtily. "Insult a defenceless girl with her poverty! It is a noble act, and one worthy of a high-born gentleman like yourself!"

"I believed," said the Duke, "that I was addressing the woman whose advice had led my son to break into open rebellion against my authority. Am I right or wrong? You can prove me to be mistaken by urging upon Norbert the necessity for submission."

She made no reply, but bent her head upon her bosom.

"You see," continued the Duke, "that I am correct, and that if you continue to act as you have done, I shall be justified in retaliating in any manner that I may deem fit. You have now been warned. Carry on this intrigue at your peril."

He placed such an insulting emphasis upon the word "intrigue" that Diana's anger rose to boiling point. At that instant, for the sake of vengeance, she would have risked her honor, her ambition, her very life itself.

Forgetting all prudence, she cast aside her mask of affected indifference, and, with her eyes flashing angry gleams of fire, and her cheeks burning, she said,—

"Listen to me. I, too, have sworn an oath, and it is that Norbert shall be my husband; and I tell you that he shall be so! Shut him up in prison, subject him to every indignity at the hands of your menials, but you will never break his spirit, or make him go back from his plighted word. If I bid him, he will resist your will even unto the bitter end. He and I will never yield. Believe me when I tell you, that before you attack a young girl's honor, you had better pause; for one day she will be a member of your family. Farewell."

Before the Duke could recover his senses, Diana was far down the path on her way homewards; and then he burst into a wild storm of menaces, oaths, and insults. He fancied that he was alone, but he was mistaken; for the whole of that strange scene had a hidden witness, and that witness was Daumon. He had heard of the treatment of the young Marquis from one of the servants at the Château, and his first thought had been to acquaint Diana with it. Unfortunately he saw no means of doing this. He dared not go to Laurebourg, and he would have died sooner than put pen to paper. He was in a position of the deepest embarrassment when the idea struck him of going to the lovers' trysting place. The little

cry that Diana had uttered upon perceiving the Duke had put him upon his guard. Bruno had found him out; but, as he knew him, merely fawned upon him. He was delighted at the fury of the Duke, whom he hated with cold and steady malignity; but the courage of Diana filled him with admiration. Her sublime audacity won his warmest praises, and he longed for her as an ally to aid him in his scheme of revenge. He knew that the girl would find herself in a terribly embarrassing position, and thus she would be sure to call upon him for advice before returning home.

"Now," thought he, "if I wish to profit by her anger, I ought to strike while the iron is hot; and to do so, I should be at home to meet her."

Without a moment's delay, he dashed through the woods, striving to get home without the young girl's perceiving him. His movements in the underwood caught the Duke's eye.

"Who is there?" exclaimed he, moving towards the spot from whence the rustling came. There was no reply. Surely he had not been mistaken. Calling to Bruno, he strove to put him on the scent, but the dog showed no signs of eagerness. He sniffed about for a time, and seemed to linger near one special spot. The Duke moved towards it, and distinctly saw the impression of two knees upon the grass.

"Some one has been eavesdropping," muttered he, much enraged at his discovery. "Who can it be? Has Norbert escaped from his prison?"

As he returned through the courtyard, he called one of the grooms to him.

"Where is my son?" asked he.

"Upstairs, your Grace," was the answer.

The Duke breathed more freely. Norbert was still in security, and therefore it could not have been the person who had been listening.

"But," added the lad, "the young master is half frantic."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, he declared that he would not remain in his room an instant longer; so old Jean called for help. He is awfully strong, and it took six of us to hold him. He said that if we would let him go, he would return in two hours, and that his honor and life were involved."

The Duke listened with a sarcastic smile. He cared nothing about the frantic struggles of his son, for his heart had grown cold and hard from the presence of the fixed idea which had actuated his conduct for so many years, and it was with the solemn face of a man who was fulfilling a sacred duty that he ascended to the room in which his son was imprisoned. Jean threw open the door, and the Duke paused for a moment on the threshold. The furniture had been overturned, some of it broken, and there were evident signs of a furious struggle having taken place.

A powerful laborer stood near the window, and Norbert was lying on the bed, with his face turned to the wall.

"Leave us," said the Duke, and the man withdrew at once.

"Get up, Norbert," he added; "I wish to speak to you."

His son obeyed him. Any one but the Duke would have been alarmed by the expression of the young man's face.

"What is the meaning of all this?" asked the old

nobleman in his most severe voice. "Are not my orders sufficient to insure obedience? I hear that absolute force has had to be used towards you during my absence. Tell me, my son, what plans you have devised during these hours of solitude, and what hopes you still venture to cherish."

"I intend to be free, and I will be so."

The Duke affected not to hear the reply, uttered as it was in a tone of decision.

"It was very easy for me to discover, from your obstinacy, that some woman had endeavored to entrap you, and by her insidious counsels inducing you to disobey your best friend."

He paused, but there was no reply.

"This woman—this dangerous woman—I have been in search of, and as you can conceive, I easily found her. I went to the Forest of Bevron, and there I need not tell you I found Mademoiselle de Laurebourg."

"Did you speak to her?"

"I did so, certainly. I told her my opinion of those manœuvring women who fascinate the dupes they intend to take advantage of——"

"Father!"

"Can it be possible that you, simple boy even as you are, could have been deceived by the pretended love of this wily young woman? It is not you, Marquis, that she loves, but our name and fortune; but *I* know if *she* does not that the law will imprison women who contrive to entrap young men who are under age."

Norbert turned deadly pale.

"Did you really say that to her?" asked he, in a low, hoarse voice, utterly unlike his own. "You dare to insult the woman I love, when you knew that I was

far away and unable to protect her! Take care, or I shall forget that you are my father."

"He actually threatens me," said the Duke, "my son threatens me;" and, raising the heavy stick he held in his hand, he struck Norbert a violent blow. By a fortunate movement the unhappy boy drew back, and so avoided the full force of the stroke, but the end of the stick struck him across the temple, inflicting a long though not a serious wound. In his blind rage Norbert was about to throw himself upon his father, when his eyes caught sight of the open door. Liberty and safety lay before him, and, with a bound, he was on the stairs, and before the Duke could shout for aid from the window, his son was tearing across the park with all the appearance and gesture of a madman.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE LITTLE GLASS BOTTLE.

IN order to avoid being seen by Mademoiselle de Laurebourg, Daumon had to take a much longer route to regain his home than the one that Diana had followed. This, however, he could not help. As soon as he arrived at his home he ran hastily upstairs and took from a cleverly concealed hiding-place in the wainscoting of his bedroom a small bottle of dark green glass, which he hastily slipped into his pocket. When he had once more descended to his office, he again took it out and examined it carefully to see that it had in no way been tampered with; then, with a hard, cruel smile, he placed it upon his desk among his ledgers

and account books. Diana de Laurebourg might pay him a visit as soon as she liked, for he was quite prepared for her, for he had slipped on his dressing-gown and placed his velvet skull cap upon his head, as if he had not quitted the house that day.

"Why on earth does she not come?" muttered he.

He began to be uneasy. He went to the window and glanced eagerly down the road; then he drew out his watch and examined the face of it, when all at once his ears detected a gentle tapping at the door of the office.

"Come in," said he.

The door opened, and Diana entered slowly, without uttering a word, and took no notice of the servile obsequiousness of the Counsellor; indeed, she hardly seemed to notice his presence, and with a deep sigh she threw herself into a chair.

In his inmost heart Daumon was filled with the utmost delight; he now understood why Diana had taken so long in reaching his house; it was because her interview with the Duke had almost overcome her.

She soon, however, recovered her energy, and shook off the languor that seemed to cling to her limbs, and, turning towards her host, said abruptly,—

"Counsellor, I have come to you for advice, which I sorely need. About an hour ago——"

With a gesture of sympathy Daumon interrupted her,—

"Alas!" said he; "spare me the recital, I know all."

"You know——"

"Yes, I know that M. Norbert is a prisoner at the Château. Yes, mademoiselle, I know this, and I know, too, that you have just met the Duke de Champdoce in the Forest of Bevron. I know, moreover, all that you

said to the old nobleman, for I have heard every word from a person who has just left."

In spite of her strong nerves, Diana was unable to restrain a movement of dismay and terror.

"But who told you of this?" murmured she.

"A man who was out cutting wood. Ah! my dear young lady, the forest is not a safe place to tell secrets in, for you never know whether watchful eyes and listening ears are not concealed behind every tree. This man, and I am afraid some of his companions, heard every word that was spoken, and as soon as you left the Duke the man scampered off to tell the story. I made him promise not to say a word, but he is a married man and is sure to tell it to his wife. Then there are his companions; dear me! it is most annoying."

"Then all is lost, and I am ruined," murmured she.

But her despair did not last long, for she was by no means the woman to throw down her arms and sue for mercy. She grasped the arm of the Counsellor.

"The end has not come yet, surely? Speak! what is to be done? You must have some plan. I am ready for anything, now that I have nothing to lose. No one shall ever say that that cowardly villain, the Duke de Champdoce, insulted me with impunity. Tell me, will you help me?"

"In the name of heaven!" cried he, "do not speak so loud. You do not know the adversary that you have to contend with."

"Are you afraid of him?"

"Yes, I do fear him; and what is more, I fear him very much. He is a determined man, and will gain his object at any cost or risk. Do you know that he

did his best to crush me because I summoned him to court on behalf of one of my clients? So that now, when any one comes to me and wishes to proceed against the Duke, I am glad to decline to take up the matter."

"And so," returned the young girl in a tone of cold contempt, "after leading us to this compromising position, you are ready to abandon us at the most critical moment?"

"Can you think such a thing, mademoiselle?"

"You can act as you please, Counsellor; Norbert is still left to me; he will protect me."

Daumon shook his head with an air of deep sorrow.

"How can we be sure that at this very moment the Marquis has not given in to all his father's wishes?"

"No," exclaimed the girl; "such a supposition is an insult to Norbert. He would sooner die than give in. He may be timid, but he is not a coward; the thoughts of me will give him the power to resist his father's tyranny."

Daumon allowed himself to fall into his great arm-chair as though overcome by the excitement of this interview.

"We can talk coolly enough here and with no one to threaten us; but the Marquis, on the other hand, is exposed to all his father's violence and ill treatment, moral as well as physical, without any defence or aid from a soul in the world, and in such times as these the strongest will may give way."

"Yes, I see it all; Norbert may give in, he may marry another woman, and I shall be left alone, with my reputation gone, and the scorn and scoff of all the neighborhood."

"But, mademoiselle, you still have——"

"All I have left is life, and that life I would gladly give for vengeance."

There was something so terribly determined in the young girl's voice that again Daumon started, and this time his start was sincere and not simulated.

"Yes, you are right," said he, "and there are many besides myself who have vowed to have revenge on the Duke, and their time will come, have no fear. A quiet shot in the woods in the dusk of the evening would settle many a long account. It has been tried, but the old man seems to have the luck of the evil one; and if the gun did not miss fire, the bullets flew wide of the mark. A judge might take a very serious view of such a matter, and term a crime what was merely an act of justice. Who can say whether the death of the Duke de Champdoce might not save him from the commission of many acts of tyranny and oppression and render many deserving persons happy?"

The face of Diana de Laurebourg turned deadly pale as she listened to these specious arguments.

"As things go," continued Daumon, "the Duke may go on living to a hundred; he is wealthy and influential, and to a certain degree looked up to. He will die peacefully in his bed, there will be a magnificent funeral, and masses will be sung for the repose of his soul."

While he spoke the Counsellor had taken the little bottle from beside his account books and was turning it over and over between his fingers.

"Yes," murmured he, thoughtfully; "the Duke is quite likely to outlive us all, unless, indeed——"

He took the cork from the bottle, and poured a little of the contents into the palm of his hand. A few

grains of fine white powder, glittering like crystal, appeared on the brown skin of the Counsellor.

"And yet," he went on, in cold, sinister accents, "let him but take a small pinch of this, and no one need fear his tyranny again in this world. No one is much afraid of a man who lies some six feet under ground, shut up in a strong oak coffin, with a finely carved gravestone over his head."

He stopped short, and fixed his keen eyes upon the agitated girl, who stood in front of him. For at least two minutes the man and the girl stood face to face, motionless, and without exchanging a word. Through the dead, weird silence, the pulsations of their hearts were plainly audible. It seemed as if before speaking again each wished to fathom the depths of guilt that lay in the other's heart. It was a compact entered into by look and not by speech; and Daumon so well understood this, that at length, when he did speak, his voice sank to a hoarse whisper, as though he himself feared to listen to the utterance of his own thoughts.

"A man taking this feels no pain. It is like a heavy, stunning blow on the forehead—in ten seconds all is over, no gasp, no cry, but the heart ceases to beat forever; and, best of all, it leaves no trace behind it. A little of this, such a little, in wine or coffee, would be enough. It is tasteless, colorless, and scentless, its presence is impossible to be detected."

"But in the event of a *post-mortem* examination?"

"By skilful analysts in Paris or the larger towns, there would be a chance; but in a place like this, never! Never, in fact, anywhere, unless there had been previous grounds for suspicion. Otherwise only apoplectic symptoms would be observed; and even if

it was traced, there comes the question, By whom was it administered?"

He stopped short, for a word rose to his lips which he did not dare utter; he raised his hands to his mouth, coughed slightly, and went on,—

"This substance is not sold by chemists; it is very rarely met with, difficult to prepare, and terribly expensive. The smallest quantity might be met with in the first-class laboratories for scientific purposes, but it is most unlikely for any one in these parts to possess any of this drug, or even to know of its existence."

"And yet you——"

"That is quite another matter. Years ago, when I was far away from here, it was in my power to render a great service to a distinguished chemist, and he made me a present of this combination of his skill. It would be impossible to trace this bottle; I have had it ten years, and the man who gave it to me is dead. Ten years? no, I am wrong, it is now twelve."

"And in all these years has not this substance lost any of its destructive powers?"

"I tried it only a month ago. I threw a pinch of it into a basin of milk and gave it to a powerful mastiff. He drank the milk and in ten seconds fell stark and dead."

"Horrible!" exclaimed Diana, covering her face with her hand, and recoiling from the tempter.

A sinister smile quivered upon the thin lips of the Counsellor.

"Why do you say horrible?" asked he; "the dog had shown symptoms of *rabies*, and had he bitten me, I might have expired in frightful torture. Was it not fair self-defence? Sometimes, however, a man is more dangerous than a dog. A man blights the whole

of my life; I strike him down openly, and the law convicts me and puts me to death; but I do not contemplate doing so, for I would suppress such a man secretly."

Diana placed her hands on the man's mouth and stopped a further exposition of his ideas.

"Listen to me," said she. But at this moment a heavy step was heard outside. "It is Norbert," gasped she.

"Impossible! it is more likely his father."

"It is Norbert," cried Mademoiselle de Laurebourg, and snatching the little bottle from the Counsellor's hands, she thrust it into her bosom. The door flew open, and Norbert appeared on the threshold. Diana and the Counsellor both uttered a shriek of terror. His livid countenance seemed to indicate that he had passed through some terrible scene; his gait was unsteady, his clothes torn and disordered, and his face stained with blood, which had flowed from a cut over his temple. Daumon imagined that some outrage had taken place.

"You have been wounded, Marquis?" said he.

"Yes, my father struck me."

"Can it be possible?"

"Yes, he struck me."

Mademoiselle Diana had feared this, and she trembled with the terror of her vague conjectures as she made a step towards her lover.

"Permit me to examine your wound," said she.

She placed both her hands at the side of his head and stood on tip-toe, the better to inspect the cut. As she did so, she shuddered; an inch lower, and the consequences might have been fatal.

"Quick," she said, "give me some rags and water."

Norbert gently disengaged himself. "It is a mere nothing," said he, "and can be looked after later on. Fortunately I did not receive the whole weight of the blow, which would otherwise have brought me senseless to the ground, and perhaps I should have been slain by my father's hand."

"By the Duke? and for what reason did he strike you?"

"Diana, he had grossly insulted you, and he dared to tell me of it. Had he forgotten that the blood of the race of Champdoce ran in my veins as well as in his?"

Mademoiselle de Laurebourg burst into a passion of tears.

"I," sobbed she, "I have brought all this upon you."

"You? Why, it is to you that he owes his life. He dared to strike me as if I had been a lackey, but the thoughts of you stayed my hand. I turned and fled, and never again will I enter that accursed house. I renounce the Duke de Champdoce, he is no longer my father, and I will never look upon his face again. Would that I could forget that such a man existed; but, no, I would rather that I remembered him for the sake of revenge."

Again the heart of Daumon overflowed with joy. All his deeply malignant spirit thrilled pleasantly as he heard these words.

"Marquis," said he, "perhaps you will now believe with me that in all misfortunes there is an element of luck, for your father has committed an act of imprudence which will yet cost him dear. It is very strange that so astute a man as the Duke de Champdoce should have allowed his passion to carry him away."

“What do you mean?”

“Simply that you can be freed from the tyranny of your father whenever you like now. We now have all that is necessary for lodging a formal plaint in court. We have sequestration of the person, threats and bodily violence by the aid of third parties, and words and blows which have endangered life; our case is entirely complete. A surgeon will examine your wound, and give a written deposition. We can produce plenty of evidence, and the wound on the head will tell its own story. As a commencement we will petition that we may not be ordered back to our father’s custody, and it will further be set forth that our reason for this is that a father has assaulted a son with undue and unnecessary violence. We shall be sure to gain the day, and——”

“Enough,” broke in Norbert; “will the decision give me the right to marry whom I please without my father’s consent?”

Daumon hesitated. Under the circumstances, it seemed to him very likely that the court would grant Norbert the liberty he desired; he, however, thought it advisable not to say so, and answered boldly, “No, Marquis, it will not do so.”

“Well, then, the Champdoce family have never exposed their differences to the public, nor will I begin to do so,” said Norbert decisively.

The Counsellor seemed surprised at this determination.

“If, Marquis,” he began, “I might venture to advise you——”

“No advice is necessary, my mind is entirely made up, but I need some help, and in twenty-four hours I

require a large sum of money—twenty thousand francs.”

“You can have them, Marquis, but I warn you that you will have to pay heavily for the accommodation.”

“That I care nothing for.”

Mademoiselle de Laurebourg was about to speak, but with a gesture of his hand Norbert arrested her.

“Do you not comprehend me, Diana?” said he; “we must fly, and that at once. We can find some safe retreat where we can live happily, where no one will harm us.”

“But this is mere madness!” cried Diana.

“You will be pursued,” remarked the Counsellor; “and most likely overtaken.”

“Can you not trust your life to me?” asked Norbert reproachfully. “I swear that I will devote everything to you, life, thought and will. On my knees I entreat you to fly with me.”

“I cannot,” murmured she; “it is impossible.”

“Then you do not love me,” said he in desponding accents. “I have been a thrice-besotted fool to believe that your heart was mine, for you can never have loved me.”

“Hear him, merciful powers! he says that I, who am all his, do not love him.”

“Then why cast aside our only chance of safety?”

“Norbert, dearest Norbert!”

“I understand you too well; you are alarmed at the idea of the world’s censure, and——”

He paused, checked by the gleam of reproach that shone in Diana’s eyes.

“Must it be so?” said she; “must I condescend to justify myself? You talk to me of the world’s cen-

sure? Have I not already defied it, and has it not sat in judgment upon me? And what have I done, after all? Every act and word that has passed between us I can repeat to my mother without a blush rising to my cheek; but would any one credit my words? No, not a living soul. Most likely the world has come to a decision. My reputation is gone, is utterly lost, and yet I am spotless as the driven snow."

Norbert was half-mad with anger.

"Who will dare to treat you with anything save with the most profound respect?" said he.

"Alas! my dear Norbert," replied she, "to-morrow the scandal will be even greater. While your father was talking to me with such brutal violence and contempt, he was overheard by a woodcutter and perhaps by some of his companions."

"It cannot be."

"No, it is quite true," returned Daumon. "I had it from the man myself."

Mademoiselle de Laurebourg shot one glance at the Counsellor; it was only a glance, but he comprehended at once that she wished to be left alone with her lover.

"Pardon me," said he, "but I think I have a visitor, and I must hinder any one from coming in here."

He left the room as he spoke, closing the door noisily behind him.

"And so," resumed Norbert when alone, "it seems that the Duke de Champdoce did not even take the ordinary precaution of assuring himself that you were in privacy before he spoke as he did, and was so carried away by his fury that he never thought that in casting dishonor upon you, he was heaping infamy

on me. Does he think by these means to compel me to marry the heiress whom he has chosen for me, the Mademoiselle de Puymandour?"

For the first time Diana learned the name of her rival.

"Ah!" moaned she between her sobs, "so it is Mademoiselle de Puymandour that he wants you to marry?"

"Yes, the same, or rather her enormous wealth; but may my hand wither before it clasps hers. Do you hear me, Diana?"

She gave a sad smile and murmured, "Poor Norbert!"

The heart of the young man sank; so melancholy was the tone of her voice.

"You are very cruel," said he. "What have I done to deserve this want of confidence?"

Diana made no reply, and Norbert, believing that he understood the reason why she refused to fly with him, said, "Is it because you have no faith in me, that you will not accompany me in my flight?"

"No; I have perfect faith in you."

"What is it, then? Do I not offer you fortune and happiness? Tell me what it is then."

She drew herself up, and said proudly, "Up to this time, my conscience has enabled me to hold my own against all the scandalous gossip that has been flying about, but now it says, 'Halt, Diana de Laurebourg! you have gone far enough.' My burden is heavy, my heart is breaking, but I must draw back now. No, Norbert; I cannot fly with you."

She paused for a moment, as though unable to proceed, and then went on with more firmness, "Were I alone and solitary in the world, I might act dif-

ferently; but I have a family, whose honor I must guard as I would my own."

"A family indeed, which sacrifices you to your elder brother."

"It may be so, and therefore my task is all the greater. Who ever heard of virtue as something easy to practise?"

Norbert never remembered what an example of rebellion she had set.

"My heart and my conscience dictate the same course to me. The result must ever be fatal, when a young girl sets at defiance the rules and laws of society; and you would never care to look with respect on one upon whom others gazed with the eye of contempt."

"What sort of an opinion have you of me, then?"

"I believe you to be a man, Norbert. Let us suppose that I fly with you, and that the next day I should hear that my father had been killed in a duel fought on my account; what then? Believe me that when I tell you to fly by yourself, I give you the best advice in my power. You will forget me, I know; but what else can I hope for?"

"Forget you!" said Norbert angrily. "Can *you* forget me?"

His face was so close to hers that she felt the hot breath upon her cheek.

"Yes," stammered she, with a violent effort, "I can."

Norbert drew a pace back, that he might read her meaning more fully in her eyes.

"And if I go away," asked he, "what will become of you?"

A sob burst from the young girl's breast, and her strength seemed to desert her limbs.

"I," answered she, in the calm, resigned voice of a Christian virgin about to be cast to the lions that roared in the arena, "I have my destiny. To-day is the last time that we shall ever meet. I shall return to my home, where everything will shortly be known. I shall find my father angry and menacing. He will place me in a carriage, and the next day I shall find myself within the walls of the hated convent."

"But that life would be one long, slow agony to you. You have told me this before."

"Yes," answered she, "it would be an agony, but it would also be an expiation; and when the burden grows too heavy, I have this."

And as she spoke, she drew the little bottle from its hiding-place in her bosom, and Norbert too well understood her meaning. The young man endeavored to take it from her, but she resisted. This contest seemed to exhaust her little strength, her beautiful eyes closed, and she sank senseless into Norbert's arms. In an agony of despair, the young man asked himself if she was dying; and yet there was sufficient life in her to enable her to whisper, soft and low, these words, "My only friend—let me have it back, dear Norbert." And then, with perfect clearness, she repeated all the deadly properties of the drug, and the directions for its use that the Counsellor had given to her.

On hearing the woman whom he loved with such intense passion confess that she would sooner die than live apart from him, Norbert's brain reeled.

"Diana, my own Diana!" repeated he, as he hung over her.

But she went on, as though speaking through the promptings of delirium.

"The very day after such a fair prospect! Ah, Duke de Champdoce! you are a hard and pitiless man. You have robbed me of all I held dear in the world, blackened my reputation, and tarnished my honor, and now you want my life."

Norbert uttered such a cry of anger, that even Daumon in the passage was startled by it. He placed Diana tenderly in the Counsellor's arm-chair, saying,—

"No, you shall not kill yourself, nor shall you leave me."

She smiled faintly, and held out her arms to him. Her magic spells were deftly woven.

"No," cried he; "the poison which you had intended to use on yourself shall become my weapon of vengeance, and the instrument of punishment of the one who has wronged you."

And with the gait of a man walking in his sleep, he left the Counsellor's office.

Hardly had the young man's footsteps died away, than Daumon entered the room. He had not lost a word or action in the foregoing scene, and he was terribly agitated; and he could scarcely believe his eyes when he saw Diana, whom he had supposed to be lying half-insensible in the arm-chair, standing at the window, gazing after Norbert, as he walked along the road leading from the Counsellor's cottage.

"Ah! what a woman!" muttered he. "Gracious powers, what a wonderful woman!"

When Diana had lost sight of her lover, she turned round to Daumon. Her face was pale, and her eyelids swollen, but her eyes flashed with the conviction of success.

"To-morrow, Counsellor," said she, "to-morrow I shall be the Duchess de Champdoce."

Daumon was so overwhelmed that, accustomed as he was to startling events and underhand trickery, he could find no words to express his feelings.

"That is to say," added Diana thoughtfully, "if all goes as it should to-night."

Daumon felt a cold shiver creep over him, but summoning up all his self-possession, he said, "I do not understand you. What is this that you hope will be accomplished to-night?"

She turned so contemptuous and sarcastic a look on him, that the words died away in his mouth, and he at once saw his mistake in thinking that he could sport with the girl's feelings as a cat plays with a mouse; for it was she who was playing with him, and she, a simple girl, had made this wily man of the world her dupe.

"Success is, of course, a certainty," answered she coldly; "but Norbert is impetuous, and impetuous people are often awkward. But I must return home at once. Ah, me!" she added, as her self-control gave way for a moment, "will this cruel night never pass away, and give way to the gentle light of dawn? Farewell, Counsellor. When we meet again, all matters will be settled, one way or other."

The Parthian dart which Mademoiselle de Laurebourg had cast behind her went true to the mark; the allusion to Norbert's impetuosity and awkwardness rendered the Counsellor very unhappy. He sat down in his arm-chair, and, resting his head on his hands, and his elbows on his desk, he strove to review the position thoroughly. Perhaps by now all might be

over. Where was Norbert, and what was he doing? he asked himself.

At the time that Daumon was reflecting, Norbert was on the road leading to Champdoce. He had entirely lost his head, but he found that his reason was clear and distinct. Those who have been accustomed to the treatment of maniacs know with what startling rapidity they form a chain of action, and the cloud that veiled Norbert's brain appeared to throw out into stronger relief the murderous determination he had formed. He had already decided how the deed was to be done. The common wine of the country was always served to the laborers at the table, but the Duke kept a better quality for his own drinking, and the bottle containing this was after meals placed on a shelf in a cupboard in the dining-room. It was thus within every one's reach, but not a soul in the household would have ventured to lay a finger upon it. Norbert's thoughts fell upon this bottle, and in his mind's eye he could see it standing in its accustomed place. He crossed the courtyard, and the laborers, engaged in their tasks, gazed at him curiously. He passed them, and entered the dining-room, which was untenanted. With a caution that was not to be expected from the agitation of his mind, he opened each door successively, in order to be certain that no eyes were gazing upon him. Then, with the greatest rapidity, he took down the bottle, drew the cork with his teeth, and dropped into the wine, not one, but two or three pinches of the contents of the little vial. He shook the bottle gently, to facilitate the dissolution of the powder. A few particles of the poison clung to the lip of the bottle; he wiped off these, not with a napkin, a pile of which lay on the shelf beside him, but

with his own handkerchief. He replaced the bottle in its accustomed place, and seating himself by the fire, awaited the course of events.

At this moment the Duke de Champdoce was coming up the avenue at a rapid pace. For the first time, perhaps, in his life, this man perceived that one of his last acts had been insensate and foolish in the extreme. All the possibilities of the law to which Daumon had alluded struck the Duke with overwhelming force, and he at once saw that his violent conduct had given ample grounds upon which to base a plaint, with results which he greatly feared. If the court entertained the matter, his son would most likely be removed from his control. He knew that such an idea would never cross Norbert's brain, but there were plenty of persons to suggest it to him. The danger of his position occurred to him, and at the same time he felt that he must frame his future conduct with extreme prudence. He had not given up his views regarding his son's marriage with Mademoiselle de Puymandour. No; he would sooner have resigned life itself, but he felt that he must renounce violence, and gain his ends by diplomacy. The first thing to be done was to get Norbert to return home, and the father greatly doubted whether the son would do so. While thinking over these things, with a settled gloom upon his face, one of the servants came running up to him with the news of Norbert's return.

"I hold him at last," muttered he, and hastened on to the Château.

When the Duke entered the dining-room, Norbert did not rise from his seat, and the Duke was disagreeably impressed by this breach of the rules of domestic etiquette.

"On my word," thought he, "it would appear that the young booby thinks that he owes me no kind of duty whatever."

He did not, however, allow his anger to be manifest in his features; besides, the sight of the blood, with which his son's face was still smeared, caused him to feel excessively uncomfortable.

"Norbert, my son," said he, "are you suffering? Why have you not had that cut attended to?"

The young man made no reply, and the Duke continued,—

"Why have you not washed the blood away? Is it left there as a reproach to me? There is no need for that, I assure you; for deeply do I deplore my violence."

Norbert still made no answer, and the Duke became more and more embarrassed. To give himself time for reflection, more than because he was thirsty, he took a glass, and filled it from his own special bottle.

Norbert trembled from head to foot as he saw this act.

"Come, my son," continued the Duke, "just try if you cannot find some palliation for what your old father has done. I am ready to ask your forgiveness, and to apologize, for a man of honor is never ashamed to acknowledge when he has been in the wrong."

He raised his glass, and raised it up to the light half mechanically. Norbert held his breath; the whole world seemed turning round.

"It is hard, very hard," continued the Duke, "for a father thus to humiliate himself in vain before his son."

It was useless for Norbert to turn away his head; he saw the Duke place the glass to his lips. He was

about to drink, but the young man could endure it no longer, and with a bound he sprang forward, snatched the glass from his father's hand, and hurled it from the window, shouting in a voice utterly unlike his own,—

“Do not drink.”

The Duke read the whole hideous truth in the face and manner of his son. His features quivered, his face grew purple, and his eyes filled with blood. He strove to speak, but only an inarticulate rattle could be heard; he then clasped his hands convulsively, swayed backwards and forwards, and then fell helplessly backwards, striking his head against an oaken sideboard that stood near. Norbert tore open the door.

“Quick, help!” cried he. “I have killed my father.”

CHAPTER IX.

THE HONOR OF THE NAME.

THE account that the Duke de Champdoce had given of M. de Puymandour's mad longing for rank and title was true, and afforded a melancholy instance of that peculiar kind of foolish vanity. He was a much happier man in his younger days, when he was known simply as Palouzet, which was his father's name, whose only wish for distinction was to be looked upon as an honest man. In those days he was much looked up to and respected, as a man who had possessed brains enough to amass a very large fortune by strictly honest means. All this vanished, however,

when the unhappy idea occurred to him to affix the title of Count to the name of an estate that he had recently purchased.

From that moment, all his tribulations in life may have been said to have commenced. The nobility laughed at his assumption of hereditary rank, while the middle classes frowned at his pretensions to be superior to them, so that he passed the existence of a shuttlecock, continually suspended in the air, and struck at and dismissed from either side.

It may, therefore, be easily imagined how excessively anxious he was to bring about the marriage between his daughter Marie and the son of that mighty nobleman, the Duke de Champdoce. He had offered to sacrifice one-third of his fortune for the honor of forming this connection, and would have given up the whole of it, could he but have seen a child in whose veins ran the united blood of Palouzet and the Champdoce seated upon his knee. A marriage of this kind would have given him a real position; for to have a Champdoce for a son-in-law would compel all scoffers to bridle their tongues.

The day after he had received a favorable reply from the Duke, M. de Puymandour thought that it was time to inform his daughter of his intentions. He never thought that she would make any opposition, and, of course, supposed that she would be as delighted as he was at the honor that awaited her. He was seated in a magnificently furnished room which he called his library when he arrived at this conclusion, and ringing the bell, ordered the servant to inquire of mademoiselle's maid if her mistress could grant him an interview. He gave this curious message, which did not appear to surprise the servant

in the least, with an air of the utmost importance. The communication between the father and daughter was always carried on upon this basis; and scoffers wickedly asserted that M. de Puymandour had modelled it upon a book of etiquette, for the guidance of her household, written by a venerable arch-duchess.

Shortly after the man had departed on his errand, a little tap came to the door.

"Come in," exclaimed M. de Puymandour.

And Mademoiselle Marie ran in and gave her father a kiss upon each cheek. He frowned slightly, and extricated himself from her embrace.

"I thought it better to come to you, my dear father," said she, "than to give you the trouble of coming all the way to me."

"You always forget that there are certain forms and ceremonies necessary for a young lady of your position."

Marie gave a little gentle smile, for she was no stranger to her father's absurd whims; but she never thwarted them, for she was very fond of him. She was a very charming young lady, and in the description that the Duke had given of her to his son, he had not flattered her at all. Though she differed greatly in appearance from Mademoiselle de Laurebourg, Marie's beauty was perfect in a style of its own. She was tall and well proportioned, and had all that easy grace of movement, characteristic of women of Southern parentage. Her large soft dark eyes offered a vivid contrast to her creamy complexion; her hair, in utter disregard of the fashionable mode of dressing, was loosely knotted at the back of her head. Her nature was soft and affectionate,

capable of the deepest devotion, while she had the most equable temper that can be imagined.

"Come, my dear papa," said she; "do not scold me any more. You know that the Marchioness of Arlanges has promised to teach me how to behave myself according to all the rules of fashionable society next winter, and I declare to you that I will so practise them up in secret, that you will be astonished when you behold them."

"How woman-like!" muttered her father. "She only scoffs at matters of the most vital importance."

He rose from his seat, and, placing his back to the fireplace, took up an imposing position, one hand buried in his waistcoat, and the other ready to gesticulate as occasion required.

"Oblige me with your deepest attention," commenced he. "You were eighteen years of age last month, and I have an important piece of intelligence to convey to you. I have had an offer of marriage for you."

Marie looked down, and endeavored to hide her confusion at these tidings.

"Before coming to a conclusion upon a matter of such importance," continued he, "it was, of course, necessary for me to go into the question most thoroughly. I spared no means of obtaining information, and I am quite certain that the proposed connection would be conducive to your future happiness. The suitor for your hand is but little older than yourself; he is very handsome, very wealthy, and is a Marquis by hereditary right."

"Has he spoken to you then?" inquired Marie in tones of extreme agitation.

"He! Whom do you mean by he?" asked M. de

Puymandour; and as his daughter did not reply, he repeated his question.

"Who? Why, George de Croisenois."

"Pray, what have you to do with Croisenois? Who is he, pray? Not that dandy with a mustache, that I have seen hanging about you this winter?"

"Yes," faltered Marie; "that is he."

"And why should you presume that he had asked me for your hand? Did he tell you that he was going to do so?"

"Father, I declare——"

"What, the daughter of a Puymandour has listened to a declaration of love unknown to her father? Ten thousand furies! Has he written to you? Where are those letters?"

"My dear father——"

"Silence; have you those letters? Let me see them. Come, no delay; I will have those bits of paper, if I turn the whole house upside down."

With a sigh Marie gave the much prized missives to her father; there were four only, fastened together with a morsel of blue ribbon.

He took one out at random, and read it aloud, with a running fire of oaths and invectives as a commentary upon its contents.

"MADEMOISELLE,—

"Though there is nothing upon earth that I dread so much as your anger, I dare, in spite of your commands to the contrary, to write to you once again. I have learned that you are about to quit Paris for several months. I am twenty-four years of age. I have neither father nor mother, and am entirely my own master. I belong to an ancient and honorable family. My fortune is a large one, and my love for you is of

the most honorable and devoted kind. My uncle, M. de Saumeuse, knows your father well; and will convey my proposals to him upon his return from Italy, in about two or three weeks' time. Once more intreating you to forgive me,

"I remain,

"Yours respectfully,

"GEORGE DE CROISENOIS."

"Very pretty indeed," said M. de Puymandour, as he replaced the letter in its envelope. "This is sufficient, and I need not read the others; but pray, what answer did you give?"

"That I must refer him to you, my dear father."

"Indeed, on my word, you do me too much honor; and did you really think that I would listen to such proposals? Perhaps you love him?"

She turned her lovely face towards her father, with the great tears rolling down her cheeks for her sole reply.

This mute confession, for as such he regarded it, put the finishing touch to M. de Puymandour's exasperation.

"You absolutely love him, and have the impudence to tell me so?"

Marie glanced at her father, and answered,—

"The Marquis de Croisenois is of good family."

"Pooh! you know nothing about it. Why, the first Croisenois was one of Richelieu's minions, and Louis XIII. conferred the title for some shady piece of business which he carried out for him. Has this fine Marquis any means of livelihood?"

"Certainly; about sixty thousand francs a year."

"Humbug! What did he mean by addressing you secretly? Only to compromise your name, and so

to secure your fortune, and perhaps to break off your marriage with another."

"But why suppose this?"

"I suppose nothing; I am merely going upon facts. What does a man of honor do when he falls in love?"

"My dear father——"

"He goes to his solicitor, acquaints him with his intentions, and explains what his means are; the solicitor goes to the family solicitor of the young lady, and when these men of the law have found out that all is satisfactory, then love is permitted to make his appearance upon the scene. And now you may as well attend to me. Forget De Croisenois as soon as you can, for I have chosen a husband for you, and, having pledged my word of honor, I will abide by it. On Sunday the eligible suitor will be introduced to you, and on Monday we will visit the Bishop, asking him to be good enough to perform the ceremony. On Tuesday you will show yourself in public with him, in order to announce the betrothal. Wednesday the marriage contract will be read. Thursday a grand dinner-party. Friday an exhibition of the marriage presents; Saturday a day of rest; Sunday the publication of the banns, and at the end of the following week the marriage will take place."

Mademoiselle Marie listened to her father's determination with intense horror.

"For pity's sake, my dear father, be serious," cried she.

M. de Puymandour paid no attention to her entreaty, but added, as an afterthought:

"Perhaps you would wish to know the name of the gentleman I have selected as a husband for you. He

is the Marquis Norbert, the son and heir of the Duke de Champdoce."

Marie turned deadly pale.

"But I do not know him; I have never seen him," faltered she.

"I know him, and that is quite sufficient. I have often told you that you should be a duchess, and I mean to keep my word."

Marie's affection for George de Croisenois was much deeper than she had told her father, much deeper even than she had dared to confess to herself, and she resented this disposal of her with more obstinacy than any one knowing her gentle nature would have supposed her capable of; but M. de Puymandour was not the man to give up for an instant the object which he had sworn to attain. He never gave his daughter an instant's peace, he argued, insisted, and bullied until, after three days' contest, Marie gave her assent with a flood of tears. The word had scarcely passed her lips, before her father, without even thanking her for her terrible sacrifice, exclaimed in a voice of triumph:

"I must take these tidings to Champdoce without a moment's delay."

He started at once, and as he passed through the doorway said:

"Good-by, my little duchess, good-by."

He was most desirous of seeing the Duke, for, on taking leave of him, the old nobleman had said, "You shall hear from me to-morrow"; but no letter had as yet reached him from Champdoce. This delay, however, had suited M. de Puymandour's plans, for it had enabled him to wring the consent from his daughter; but now that this had been done, he began

to feel very anxious, and to fear that there might be some unforeseen hitch in the affair.

When he reached Bevron, he saw Daumon talking earnestly with Françoise, the daughter of the Widow Rouleau. M. de Puymandour bowed graciously, and stopped to talk with the man, for he was just now seeking for popularity, as he was a candidate, and the elections would shortly take place; and, besides, he never failed to talk to persons who exercised any degree of influence, and he knew that Daumon was a most useful man in electioneering.

"Good morning, Counsellor," said he gayly. "What is the news to-day?"

Daumon bowed profoundly.

"Bad news, Count," answered he. "I hear that the Duke de Champdoce is seriously indisposed."

"The Duke ill—impossible!"

"This girl has just given me the information. Tell us all about it, Françoise."

"I heard to-day at the Château that the doctors had quite given him over."

"But what is the matter with him?"

"I did not hear."

M. de Puymandour stood perfectly aghast.

"It is always the way in this world," Daumon philosophically said. "In the midst of life we are in death!"

"Good morning, Counsellor," said De Puymandour; "I must try and find out something more about this."

Breathless, and with his mind filled with anxiety, he hurried on.

All the servants and laborers on the Champdoce estate were gathered together in a group, talking eagerly to each other, and as soon as M. de Puymandour

appeared, one of the servants, disengaging himself from his fellows, came towards him. This was the Duke's old, trustworthy servant.

"Well?" exclaimed M. de Puymandour.

"Oh, sir," cried the old man, "this is too horrible; my poor master will certainly die."

"But I do not know what is the matter with him; no one has told me anything, in fact."

"It was terribly sudden," answered the man. "It was about this time the day before yesterday that the Duke was alone with M. Norbert in the dining-room. All at once we heard a great outcry. We ran in and saw my poor master lying senseless on the ground, his face purple and distorted."

"He must have had a fit of apoplexy."

"Not exactly; the doctor called it a rush of blood to the brain; at least, I think that is what he said, and he added that the reason he did not die on the spot was because in falling he had cut open his head against the oaken sideboard, and the wound bled profusely. We carried him up to his bed; he showed no signs of life, and now——"

"Well, how is he now?"

"No one dare give an opinion; my poor master is quite unconscious, and should he recover—and I do not think for a moment that he will—the doctor says his mind will have entirely gone."

"Horrible! too horrible! and a man of such intellectual power, too. I shall not ask you to let me look at him, for I could do no good, and the sight would upset me. But can I not see M. Norbert?"

"Pray, do not attempt to do so, sir."

"I was his father's intimate friend, and if the con-

dolences of such a one could assuage the affliction under which——”

“Impossible!” answered the man in a quick, eager manner. “M. Norbert was with his father at the time of his seizure, and has given strict orders that he is not to be disturbed on any account; but I must go to him at once, for we are expecting the physicians who are coming from Poitiers.”

“Very well, then I will go now, but to-night I will send up one of my people for news.”

With these words, M. de Puymandour walked slowly away, absorbed in thought. The manner and expression of the servant had struck him as extremely strange. He noted the fact that Norbert was alone with his father at the time of the seizure, and, recalling to mind the opposition he had met with from his daughter, he began to imagine that the Duke had found his son rebellious, and that the apoplectic fit had been brought on by a sudden access of passion. Interest and ambition working together brought him singularly near the truth.

“If the Duke dies, or becomes a maniac,” thought he to himself, “the end as regards us will be the same, for Norbert will break off the match to a certainty.”

He felt that such a proceeding would cause him to be more jeered at and ridiculed than ever, and that the only path of escape left open to him was to marry his daughter to the Marquis de Croisenois, which was a most desirable alliance, in spite of all he had said against it. A voice close to his ear aroused him from his reflections: it was that of Daumon, who had come up unperceived.

"Was the girl's information correct, Count?" asked he. "How are the Duke and M. Norbert, for of course you have seen them both?"

"M. Norbert is too much agitated by the sad event to see any one."

"Of course that was to be looked for," returned the wily Counsellor; "for the seizure was terribly sudden."

M. de Puymandour was too much occupied with his own thoughts to spare much pity for Norbert. He would have given a great deal to have known what the young man was doing, and especially what he was thinking of at the present moment.

The poor lad was standing by the bedside of his dying father, watching eagerly for some indication, however slight, of returning life or reason. The hours of horror and self-reproach had entirely changed his feelings and ideas; for it was only at the instant when he saw his father raise the poisoned wine to his lips that he saw his crime in all its hideous enormity. His soul rose up in rebellion against his crime, and the words, "Parricide! murderer!" seemed to ring in his ears like a trumpet call. When his father fell to the ground, his instinct made him shout for aid; but an instant afterwards terror took possession of him, and, rushing from the house, he sought the open country, as though striving to escape from himself.

Jean, the old servant, who had noticed Norbert's strange look, was seized with a terrible fear. Trusted as he was by both the Duke and his son, he had many means of knowing all that was going on in the household, and was no stranger to the differences that had arisen recently between father and son. He knew

how violent the tempers of both were, and he also knew that some woman was urging on Norbert to a course of open rebellion. He had seen the cruel blow dealt by the Duke, and had wondered greatly when he saw Norbert return to the Château. Why had he done so? He had been in the courtyard when Norbert threw the glass from the window. Putting all these circumstances together, as soon as the inanimate body of the Duke had been laid upon a bed, Jean went into the dining-room, feeling sure that he should make some discovery which would confirm his suspicions. The bottle from which the Duke had filled his glass stood half emptied upon the table. With the greatest care, he poured a few drops of its contents into the hollow of his hand, and tasted it with the utmost caution. The wine still retained its customary taste and scent. Not trusting, however, to this, Jean, after making sure that he was not observed, carried the bottle to his own room, and concealed it. After taking this precaution, he ordered one of the other servants to remain by the side of the Duke until the arrival of the doctor, and then went in search of Norbert.

For two hours his efforts were fruitless. Giving up his search in despair, he turned once more to regain the Château, and, taking the path through the wood, suddenly perceived a human form stretched on the turf beneath a tree. He moved cautiously towards the figure, and at once recognized Norbert. The faithful servant bent over his young master, and shook him by the arm to arouse him from his state of stupor. At the first touch, Norbert started to his feet with a shriek of terror. With mingled fear and pity, Jean noticed the look that shone in the young

man's eyes, more like that of some hunted animal than a human being.

"Do not be alarmed, M. Norbert; it is only I," said he.

"And what do you want?"

"I came out to look for you, and to entreat you to come back with me to Champdoce."

"Back to Champdoce?" repeated Norbert hoarsely; "no, never!"

"You must, Master Norbert; for your absence now would cause a terrible scandal. Your place at this critical time is by the bedside of your father."

"Never! never!" repeated the poor boy; but he yielded passively when Jean passed his arm through his, and led him away towards the Château. Supported thus by the old man's arm, he crossed the courtyard, and ascended the staircase; but at his father's door he withdrew his hand, and struggled to get away.

"I will not; no, no, I cannot," gasped he.

"You must and you shall," returned the old man firmly. "Whatever your feelings may be, no stain shall rest on the family honor."

These words roused Norbert; he stepped across the room, and dropped on his knees by the bed, placing his forehead upon his father's icy hand. He burst into a passion of tears and sobs, and the simple peasants, who surrounded the couch of the insensible nobleman, breathed a sigh; for, from his pallid face and burning eyes, they believed he must be mad. They were not far out in this surmise; but the tears relieved his over-wrought brain, and with this relief came the sense of intense suffering. When the phy-

sician arrived, he was able to appear before him merely as a deeply anxious son.

"There is no hope for the Duke, I regret to say," said the medical man, who felt that it was useless to keep Norbert in suspense. "There is a feeble chance of saving his life; but even should we succeed in doing so, his intellect will be irretrievably gone. This is a sad truth, but I feel it my duty to inform you of it. I will come again to-morrow."

As the doctor left the room, Norbert threw himself into a chair, and clasped his hands round his head, which throbbed until it seemed as if it would burst. For more than half an hour he sat motionless, and then started to his feet with a stifled cry; for he remembered the bottle into which he had poured the poison, and which had been left on the table. Had any one drunk from it? What had become of it? The agony of his mind gave him the necessary strength to descend to the dining-room; but the bottle was not on the table, nor was it in its customary place in the cupboard. The unhappy boy was looking for it everywhere, when the door silently opened, and Jean appeared on the threshold. The expression upon his young master's face so startled the faithful old man that he nearly dropped the lighted candle that he carried in his hand.

"Why are you here, Master Norbert?" asked he in a voice that trembled with emotion.

"I was looking for—— I wanted to find——," faltered Norbert.

Jean's suspicions at once became certainties; he walked up to his young master, and whispered in his ear,—

"You are looking for the Duke's bottle of wine, are you not? It is quite safe; for I have taken it to my room. To-morrow the contents shall be emptied away, and there will be no proof existing."

Jean spoke in such a low voice that Norbert guessed rather than heard his words, and yet it seemed that the accusing whisper resounded like thunder through the Château, filling the old house from cellar to roof-tree.

"Be quiet," said he, laying his hand on the old man's lips, and gazing around him with wild and affrighted glances.

A more complete confession could hardly have been made.

"Fear nothing, Master Norbert," answered Jean; "we are quite alone. I know that there are words which should never be even breathed; and if I have ventured to speak, it was because it was my duty to warn you, and to inculcate on you the necessity of caution."

Norbert was filled with horror when he saw that the old man believed him to be really guilty.

"Jean," cried he, "you are wrong in your suspicions. I tell you that my father never tasted that wine. I snatched the glass from him before his lips had touched it. I flung it out into the courtyard, and, if you search, you will find its scattered fragments there still."

"I am not sitting in judgment upon you; what you tell me to believe I am ready to accept."

"Ah;" cried Norbert passionately, "he does not believe me; he thinks that I am guilty. I swear to you by all that I hold most sacred in this world, that I am innocent of this deed."

The attached servant shook his head with a melancholy air.

"Of course, of course," said he; "but it is for us two to save the honor of the house of Champdoce. Should it happen that any suspicions should be aroused, put all the guilt upon my shoulders. I will defend myself in a manner which will only fix the crime more firmly upon me. I will not throw away the bottle, but will retain it in my room, so that it may be found there, and its contents will be a dam-natory evidence against me. What matters it how a poor man like me is sent out of the world? but with you it is different. You——"

Norbert wrung his hands in abject despair; the sublime devotion of the old servant showed how firmly Jean believed in his criminality. He was about to assert his innocence further, when the loud sound of a closing door was heard above stairs.

"Hush!" said the old man; "some one approaches; we must not be seen whispering together like two plotters, for their suspicions would be certainly awakened; and I fear that my face or your eyes will reveal the secret. Quick, go upstairs, and endeavor, as soon as possible, to resume your calmness. I beg you not to compromise the honor of your name, which is in deadly peril."

Without another word Norbert obeyed. His father was alone, and only the man to whom Jean had delegated the task of watcher remained by his bedside. At the sight of his young master he rose.

"The prescription which the doctor ordered to be made up has arrived," said he. "I have administered a dose to the Duke, and it seems to me that the result has been favorable."

Norbert drew up a heavy arm-chair to the foot of the bed, and took his seat upon it. From this position he could see his father's face. His brain was dazed, and it was with the utmost difficulty that he could recall the chain of events which had drawn him towards the abyss into which he had so nearly been precipitated.

The veil had been taken from his eyes, and he now saw with perfect clearness and seemed again to hear his father's voice as it roughly warned him that the woman he loved was a mere plotter, who cared not for him, but was scheming for his fortune and his name. Then he had been furiously indignant and looked upon the words as almost blasphemous, but now he saw that his father was right. How was it that he had not before seen that Diana was flinging herself in his way, and that all her affected openness and simplicity were merely the perfections of art, and that step by step she had led him to the brink of the terrible precipice which yawned before him? The whole hideous part as played by Daumon was no longer a sealed book to him. She whom he had looked on as a pure and innocent girl was merely the accomplice of a scheming villain like the Counsellor, and after exciting his hatred and anger almost to madness, had placed the poison which was to take his father's life in his hands. A cold shiver ran through him as he realized this, and all his ardent love for Diana de Laurebourg was changed into a feeling of loathing and disgust.

At last the first pale rays of dawn broke through the casement, but before that Norbert, worn out with conflicting emotions, had fallen into a restless and uneasy sleep, and when he awoke the doctor was

standing by the bedside of the sick man. At the first sound made by Norbert as he stirred in the chair, the doctor came towards him, saying, "We shall preserve his life."

This prognostication was complete, for that very evening the Duke de Champdoce was able to move in his bed, the next day he uttered some incoherent words, and later on asked for food; but the will of iron had passed away, the features had lost their expression of determination, and the eye the glitter of pride and power. Never again would the Duke be able to exert that keen, stern intellect which had enabled him to influence all those around him; and in this terrible state of imbecility the haughty nobleman would ever remain, fed and looked after like a child, with no thought beyond his desires and his warm fire, and without a care for anything that was going on in the world around him.

After the enormity of his crime had been brought before him, the greatness of the punishment that he must endure now came across Norbert's mind. It was only now that Jean had ventured to tell him of M. de Puymandour's visit; and such a change had taken place in Norbert that he looked upon this visit as a special arrangement made by Providence.

"My father's will shall be carried out in every respect," said he to himself, and without an hour's delay he wrote to M. du Puymandour, begging him to call, and hoping that the grief which had fallen upon him had in no way altered the plan which had already been arranged.

CHAPTER X.

A THUNDERBOLT.

As the miner, who sets fire to the fuse and seeks shelter from the coming explosion, so did Diana de Laurebourg return to her father's house after her visit to Daumon. During dinner it was impossible for her to utter a word, and it was with the greatest difficulty that she succeeded in swallowing a mouthful. Fortunately neither her father nor mother took any notice of her. They had that day received a letter announcing the news that their son, for whose future prosperity they had sacrificed Diana, was lying dangerously ill in Paris, where he was living in great style. They were in terrible affliction, and spoke of starting at once, so as to be with him. They therefore expressed no surprise when, on leaving the table, Diana pleaded a severe headache as an excuse for retiring to her own room. When once she was alone, having dismissed her maid, she heaved a deep sigh of relief. She never thought of retiring to bed, but throwing open her window, leaned out with her elbow on the window-sill.

It seemed to her that Norbert would certainly make some effort to see her, or at any rate by some means to let her know whether he had succeeded or failed.

"But I must be patient," murmured she, "for I can't hear anything until the afternoon of to-morrow."

In spite, however, of her resolutions, patience fled from her mind, and as soon as the servants had begun moving about, she went out into the garden and took up a position which commanded a view of the

highroad, but no one appeared. The bell rang for breakfast. Again she had to seat herself at table with her parents, and the terrible penance of the past evening had to be repeated. At three o'clock she could endure the suspense no longer, and making her escape from the Château, she went over to Daumon, who, she felt, must have obtained some intelligence. Even if she found that he knew nothing, it would be a relief to speak to him and to ask him when he thought that this terrible delay would come to an end. But she got no comfort at Daumon's, for he had passed as miserable a night as herself, and was nearly dead with affright. He had remained in his office all the morning, starting at the slightest sound, and though he was as anxious as Diana for information, he had only gone out a little before her arrival. He met Mademoiselle Laurebourg on his return at the door of his cottage, and taking her inside, he informed her that at a late hour the night before the doctor had been sent for to Champdoce to attend on the Duke, who was supposed to be dying. Then he reproved her bitterly for her imprudence in visiting him.

"Do you wish," said he, "to show all Bevron that you and I are Norbert's accomplices?"

"What do you mean?" asked she.

"I mean that if the Duke does not die, we are lost. When I say we, I mean myself, for you, as the daughter of a noble family, will be sure to escape scot free, and I shall be left to pay for all."

"You said that the effect was immediate."

"I did say so, and I thought so too. Ah, if I had but reflected a little! You will however see that I do not intend to give in without a fight. I will defend myself by accusing you. I am an honest man,

and have been your dupe. You have thought to make me a mere tool; your fine Norbert is a fool, but he will pay for his doings with his head all the same."

At these gross insults Mademoiselle de Laurebourg rose to her feet and attempted to speak, but he cut her short.

"I can't stop to pick and choose my words, for I feel at the present moment as if the axe of the guillotine were suspended over my head. Now just oblige me by getting out of this, and never show your face here again."

"As you like. I will communicate with Champdoce."

"You shall not," exclaimed Daumon with a gesture of menace. "You might as well go and ask how the Duke enjoyed the taste of the poison."

His words, however, did not deter Diana, for any risk seemed preferable to her than the present state of suspense.

With a glance of contempt at the Counsellor she left the cottage, determined to act as she thought fit.

After Diana's departure, Daumon felt too that he must learn how matters were going on, and going over to the Widow Rouleau's, he despatched her daughter Françoise to the Château de Champdoce, under the pretext that he wanted some money which he had lent to one of the Duke's servants. He had instructed the girl so cunningly that she had no suspicion of the real end and object of her mission, and set out on it with the most implicit confidence. He had not long to wait for her return, for in about half an hour his messenger returned.

"Well," said he anxiously, "has the scamp sent my money?"

"No, sir, I am sorry to say that I could not even get to speak to him."

"How was that? Was he not at Champdoce?"

"I cannot even tell you that. Ever since the Duke has been ill, the great gates of the Château have been bolted, for it seems that the poor old gentleman is at his last gasp."

"Did you not hear what was the matter with him?"

"No, sir, the little I have told you I got from a stable boy, who spoke to me through a grating in the gate, but before he could say ten words Jean came up and sent him off."

"Do you mean Jean, the Duke's confidential man?"

"Just so," returned the girl, "and very angry he was. He abused the lad and told him to be off to the stables, and then asked, 'Well, my girl, and pray what do you want?' I told him that I had come with a message to the man Mechenit; but before I could say any more he broke in with, 'Well, he isn't here, you can call again in a month.'"

"You silly little fool, was that all you said?"

"Not quite, for I said that I must see Mechenit. Then, looking at me very suspiciously, he said, 'And who sent you here, you little spy?'"

The Counsellor started.

"Indeed! and what did you say in return?" asked he.

"Why, of course I said that you had sent me."

"Yes, yes, that was right."

"And then Jean rubbed his hand over his chin, and looking at me very curiously, said sternly,—

“‘So you have come from the Counsellor, have you? Ah, I see it all, and so shall he one of these days.’”

At these words Daumon felt his knees give way under him; but all further questioning was stopped by the appearance of M. de Puymandour on his way to Champdoce. He therefore dismissed Françoise, and awaited the return of this gentleman, from whom he hoped to gain the fullest information regarding the Duke's malady. The intelligence which he received calmed him a little, and repenting of his treatment of Diana, he went and hung about the gates of the Château de Laurebourg, until he was lucky enough to catch sight of the girl in the garden, for her anxiety would not permit her to remain in the house. He beckoned to her, and then said,—

“M. Norbert did not make the dose strong enough. The Duke is as strong as a horse; but it is all right, for should he live, he will be an idiot, and so our end is as much gained as if he had died.”

“But why does not Norbert write to me?” asked Diana seriously.

“Why, because he has some faint glimmerings of common sense. How do you know that he may not have half a dozen spies about him? You must wait.”

Diana and the Counsellor waited for a week, but Norbert made no sign. Diana suffered agonies, and the days seemed to pass with leaden feet. Sunday came at last. The Marchioness de Laurebourg had attended early Mass, and had given orders that her daughter should go to high Mass under the escort of her maid. Diana was highly pleased with this arrangement, for she hoped to have a chance of seeing Norbert, but she was disappointed. The Mass had

commenced when she entered, but the spot occupied by the Duke and his son was vacant. She followed the service in a purely mechanical manner, and at last noticed that the priest had taken his place in the pulpit.

This was generally an exciting moment for the inhabitants of Bevron, for it was immediately before the sermon that the banns of marriage were published. The priest gazed blandly down upon the expectant crowd, coughed slightly, used his handkerchief, and finally took from his breviary a sheet of paper.

"I have," said he, "to publish the banns of marriage between——" here he made a little pause, and all the congregation were on the tenterhooks of expectation; "between," he continued, "Monsieur Louis Norbert, Marquis de Champdoce, a minor, and only legitimate son of Guillaume Cæsar, Duke de Champdoce, and of his wife, Isabella de Barnaville, now deceased, but who both formerly resided in this parish, and Desirée Anne Marie Palouzet, minor, and legitimate daughter of René Augustus Palouzet, Count de Puymandour, and of Zoe Staplet, his wife, but now deceased, also residents of this parish."

This was the thunderbolt launched from the pulpit, which seemed to crush Diana into the earth, and her heart almost ceased to beat.

"Let any one," continued the priest, "who knows of any impediment to this marriage, take warning that he or she must acquaint us with it, under the penalty of excommunication. And at the same time let him be warned under the same penalty to bring forward nothing in malice or without some foundation."

An impediment! What irony lay veiled beneath that word. Mademoiselle de Laurebourg knew of more than one. A wild desire filled her heart to start from her seat and cry out,—

“It is impossible for this marriage to take place, for that Norbert was her affianced husband in the sight of Heaven, and that he was bound to her by the strongest of all links, that of crime.”

But by a gigantic effort she controlled herself, and remained motionless, pallid as a spectre, but with a forced smile on her lips, and with unparalleled audacity made a little sign to one of her female friends, which plainly meant, “This is, indeed, something unexpected.” All her mind was concentrated to preserve a calm and unmoved aspect. The singing of the choir seemed to die away, the strong odor of the incense almost overpowered her, and she felt that unless the service soon came to an end, she must fall insensible from her chair. At last the priest turned again to the congregation and droned out the *Ita missa est*, and all was over. Diana grasped the arm of her maid and forced her away, without saying a word. As she reached home, a servant ran up to her with a face upon which agitation was strongly painted.

“Ah, mademoiselle,” gasped he, “such a frightful calamity. Your father and mother are expecting you; it is really too terrible.”

Diana hastened to obey the summons. Her father and mother were seated near each other, evidently in deep distress. She went towards them, and the Marquis, drawing her to him, pressed her against his heart.

"Poor child! my dear daughter!" murmured he, "you are all that is left to us now."

Their son had died, and the sad news had been brought to the Château while Diana was at Mass. By her brother's death she had succeeded to a princely fortune, and would now be one of the richest heiresses for many a mile round. Had this event happened but a week before, her marriage to Norbert would have met with no opposition from his father, and she would never have plunged into this abyss of crime. It was more than the irony of fate; it was the manifest punishment of an angry Divinity. She shed no tear for her brother's death. Her thoughts were all firmly fixed on Norbert, and that fearful announcement made in the house of God rang still in her ears. What could be the meaning of this sudden arrangement, and why had the marriage been so suddenly decided on?

She felt that some mystery lay beneath it all, and vowed that she would fathom it to its nethermost depths. What was it that had taken place at Champdoce? Had the Duke, contrary to Daumon's prognostications, recovered? Had he discovered his son's insidious attack upon his life, and only pardoned it upon a blind compliance being given to his will? She passed away the whole day in these vain suppositions, and tried to think of every plan to stay the celebration of this union, for she had not given up her hopes, nor did she yet despair of ultimate success. Her new and unlooked-for fortune placed a fresh weapon at her disposal, and she felt that the victory would yet be hers if she could but see Norbert again, were it but for a single instant. Was she not cer-

tain of the absolute power that she exercised over him, for had she not by a few words induced him to enter upon the terrible path of crime? She must see him, and that without a moment's delay, for the danger was imminent. A day now would be worth a year hereafter. She determined that, upon that very night, she would visit Champdoce. A little after midnight, when all the inhabitants of the Château were wrapped in slumber, she crept on tiptoe down the grand staircase, and made her exit by a side door. She had arranged her plan as to how she would find Norbert, for he had often described the interior arrangements of the Château to her. She knew that his room was on the ground floor, with two windows looking on to the courtyard. When, however, she reached the old Château, she hesitated. Suppose that she should go to the wrong window. But she had gone too far to recede, and determined that if any one else than Norbert should open the window, she would turn and fly. She tapped at the window softly, and then more loudly. She had made no mistake. Norbert threw open the window, with the words,—

“Who is there?”

“It is I, Norbert; I, Diana.”

“What do you want?” asked Norbert in an agitated tone of voice. “What do you want to do here?”

She looked at him anxiously and hardly recognized his face, so great was the change that had come over it. It absolutely terrified her.

“Are you going to marry Mademoiselle de Puy-mandour?” asked she.

“Yes I am.”

“And yet you pretended to love me?”

"Yes, I loved you ardently, devotedly, with a love that drove me to crime; but you had no love; you cared but for rank and fortune."

Diana raised her hands to heaven in an agony of despair.

"Should I be here at this hour if what you say is true?" asked she wildly. "My brother is dead, and I am as wealthy as you are, Norbert, and yet I am here. You accuse me of being mercenary, and for what reason? Was it because I refused to fly with you from my father's house? Oh, Norbert, it was but the happiness of our future life that I strove to protect. It was——"

Her speech failed her, and her eyes dilated with horror, for the door behind Norbert opened, and the Duke de Champdoce entered the room, uttering a string of meaningless words, and laughing with that mirthless laugh which is so sure a sign of idiotcy.

"Can you understand now," exclaimed Norbert, pointing to his father, "why the remembrance of my love for you has become a hateful reminiscence? Do you dare to talk of happiness to me, when this spectre of a meditated crime will ever rise between us?" and with a meaning gesture he pointed to the open gate of the courtyard.

She turned; but before passing away, she cast a glance upon him full of the deepest fury and jealousy. She could not forgive Norbert for his share in the crime that she had herself prompted,—for the crime which had blighted all her hopes of happiness. Her farewell was a menace.

"Norbert," she said, as she glided through the gate like a spectre of the night, "I will have revenge, and that right soon."

CHAPTER XI.

MARRIAGE BELLS; FUNERAL KNELLS.

THREE days of hard work had completed all the arrangements necessary for the marriage of Norbert and Mademoiselle de Puymandour. He had been presented to the lady, and neither had received a favorable impression of the other. At the very first glance each one felt that inevitable repugnance which the lapse of years can never efface. While dreading the anger of her obdurate father, Marie had at one time thought of confiding the secret of her attachment to George de Croisenois to Norbert, for she had the idea that if she told him that her heart was another's, he might withdraw his pretensions to her hand; but several times, when the opportunity occurred, fear restrained her tongue, and she let the propitious moment pass away. Had she done so, Norbert would at once have eagerly grasped at a pretext for absolving himself from a promise which he had made mentally of obeying in all things a father who now, alas! had no means of enforcing his commands.

Each day he paid his visit to Puymandour as an accepted suitor, bearing a large bouquet with him, which he regularly presented to his betrothed upon his entrance into the drawing-room, which she accepted with a painful flush rising to her cheek. The pair conversed upon indifferent topics, while an aged female connection sat in the room to play propriety. For many hours they would remain thus, the girl

bending over her fancy work, and he vainly striving to find topics of conversation, and, consequently, saying hardly anything, in spite of Marie's feeble efforts to assist in the conversation. It was a slight relief when M. de Puymandour proposed a walk; but this was a rare occurrence, for that gentleman usually declared that he never had a moment's leisure. Never had he seemed so gay and busy since the approaching marriage of his daughter had been the theme of every tongue. He took all the preparations for the ceremony into his own hands, for he had determined that everything should be conducted on a scale of unparalleled magnificence. The Château was refurnished, and all the carriages repainted and varnished, while the Champdoce and the Puymandour arms were quartered together on their panels. This coat of arms was to be seen everywhere—over the doors, on the walls, and engraved on the silver, and it was believed that M. de Puymandour would have made no objection to their being branded on his breast.

In the midst of all this turmoil and bustle Norbert and Marie grew sadder and sadder as each day passed on. One day M. de Puymandour heard so astounding a piece of intelligence that he hurried into the drawing-room, where he knew that he should find the lovers (as he styled them) together.

"Well, my children," exclaimed he, "you have set such an excellent example, that everybody seems disposed to copy you, and the mayor and the priest will be kept to their work rather tightly this year."

His daughter tried to put on an appearance of interest at this speech.

"Yes," continued M. de Puymandour, "I have

just heard of a marriage that will come off almost directly after yours has been celebrated, and will make a stir, I can assure you."

"And whose is that, pray?"

"You are acquainted, I presume," returned her father, addressing himself to Norbert, "with the son of the Count de Mussidan?"

"What, the Viscount Octave?"

"The same."

"He lives in Paris, does he not?"

"Yes, generally; but he has been staying at Mussidan, and in the short space of a week has managed to lose his heart here; and to whom do you think? Come, give a guess."

"We cannot think who it can be, my dear father," said Marie, "and we are devoured with curiosity."

"It is reported that the Viscount de Mussidan has proposed for the hand of Mademoiselle de Laurebourg."

"Why," remarked Marie, "it is only three weeks since her brother died!"

Norbert flushed scarlet, and then turned a livid white; so great was his agitation at hearing this news, that he nearly dropped the album which he held in his hand.

"I like the Viscount," continued M. de Puymandour, "while Mademoiselle Diana is a charming girl. She is very handsome, and, I believe, has many talents; and she is a good model for you to copy, Marie, as you are so soon to become a duchess."

When he got upon his favorite hobby, it was very difficult to check M. de Puymandour. His daughter, therefore, waited until he had concluded, and then left the room, under the pretext of giving an order

to the servants. The Count hardly noticed her absence, as he had still Norbert at his mercy.

"Reverting again to Mademoiselle Diana," said he: "she looks charming in black, for women should look upon a death in the family as a most fortunate occurrence; but I ought not to be praising her to you, who are so well acquainted with her."

"I?" exclaimed Norbert.

"Yes, you. I do not suppose that you intend to deny that you have had a little flirtation with her?"

"I do not understand you."

"Well, *I* do then, my boy; I heard all about your making love to her. Why, you are really blushing! What is up now?"

"I can assure you——"

De Puymandour burst into a loud laugh.

"I have heard a good deal of your little country walks, and all the pretty things that you used to say to each other."

In vain did Norbert deny the whole thing, for his intended father-in-law would not believe him; and at last he got so annoyed that he refused to remain and dine with the Count, alleging anxiety for his father as an excuse. He returned home as soon as he possibly could, much agitated by what he had heard; and as he was walking rapidly on, he heard his name called by some one who was running after him: Norbert turned round, and found himself face to face with Montlouis.

"I have been here a week," said the young man. "I am here with my patron, for I have one now. I am now with the Viscount de Mussidan, as his private secretary. M. Octave is not the most agreeable man in the world to get on with, as he gets into

the most violent passions on very trivial occasions; but he has a good heart, after all, and I am very pleased with the position I have gained."

"I am very glad to hear it, Montlouis, very much pleased indeed."

"And you, Marquis, I hear, are to marry Mademoiselle de Puymandour; I could scarcely credit the news."

"And why, pray?"

"Because I remembered when we used to wait outside a certain garden wall, until we saw a certain door open discreetly."

"But you must efface all this from your memory, Montlouis."

"Do not be alarmed; save to you, my lips would never utter a word of this. No one else would ever make me speak."

"Stop!" said Norbert, with an angry gesture. "Do you venture to say——"

"To say what?"

"I wish you to understand that Mademoiselle Diana is as free from blame to-day as she was when first I met her. She has been indiscreet, but nothing more, I swear it before heaven!"

"I believe you perfectly."

In reality Montlouis did not believe one word of Norbert's assertion, and the young Marquis could read this in his companion's face.

"The more so," continued the secretary, "as the young lady is about to be married to my friend and patron."

"But where," asked Norbert, "did the Viscount meet with Mademoiselle de Laurebourg?"

"In Paris; the Viscount and her brother were very

intimate, and nursed him during his last illness, and as soon as the scheming parents heard of the Viscount being in the neighborhood they asked him to call on them. Of course he did so, and saw Made-moiselle Diana, and returned home in a perfect frenzy of love."

Norbert seemed so incensed at this that Mont-louis broke off his recital, feeling confident that the Marquis still loved Diana, and was consumed with the flame of jealousy.

"But, of course," he added carelessly, "nothing is yet settled."

Norbert, however, was too agitated to listen to the idle gossip of Montlouis any longer, so he pressed his hand and left him rather abruptly, walking away at the top of his speed, leaving his friend silent with astonishment. It seemed to Norbert as if he was imprisoned in one of those iron dungeons he had read of, which slowly contracted day by day, and at last crushed their victims to atoms. He saw Diana married to the Viscount de Mussidan, and compelled to meet daily the man who knew all about her illicit meetings with her former lover, and who had more than once, when Norbert was unable to leave Champ-doce, been intrusted with a letter or a message for her. And how would Montlouis behave under the circumstances? Would he possess the necessary tact and coolness to carry him through so difficult a position? What would be the end of this cruel concatenation of circumstances? Would Diana be able to endure the compromising witness of her youthful error? She would eagerly seek out some pretext for his dismissal; he could easily detect this, and in his anger at the loss of a position which he

had long desired, would turn on her and repeat the whole story. Should Montlouis let loose his tongue, the Viscount, indignant at the imposition that had been practised upon him, would separate from his wife. What would be Diana's conduct when she found herself left thus alone, and despised by the society of which she had hoped to be a queen? Would she not, in her turn, seek to revenge herself on Norbert? He had just asked himself whether at this juncture death would not be a blessing to him, when he caught sight of Françoise, the daughter of the Widow Rouleau, close by him. For two hours she had been awaiting his coming, concealed behind a hedge.

"I have something to give you, my lord Marquis," said she.

He took the letter that she held out to him, and, opening it, he read,—

"You said that I did not love you—perhaps this was but a test to prove my love. I am ready to fly with you to-night. I shall lose all, but it will be for your sake. Reflect, Norbert; there is yet time, but to-morrow it will be too late."

These were the words that Mademoiselle de Laurebourg had had the courage to pen, which to the former lover were full of the most thrilling eloquence. The usually bold, firm writing of Diana was, in the letter before him, confused and almost illegible, showing the writer's frame of mind. There were blurs and blisters upon the paper as though tears had fallen upon it, perhaps because the writing had been made purposely irregular and drops of water are an excellent substitute for tears.

"Does she really love me?" murmured he.

He hesitated; yes, he absolutely hesitated, im-

pressed by the idea that for him she was ready to sacrifice position and honor, that he had but to raise his finger and she was his, and that in the space of a couple of hours she might be the companion of his flight to some far-distant land. His pulse throbbed madly, and he could scarcely draw his breath, when some fifty paces down the road he caught sight of the figure of a man; it was his father. This was the second time that the Duke by his mere presence had spread the web of Diana's temptations and allurements.

"Never!" exclaimed Norbert, with such fire and energy that the girl fell back a pace. "Never! no, never!" and crushing up the letter, he dashed it upon the ground, from whence Françoise picked it up as he ran forward to meet his father. The Duke had recovered from his attack as far as the mere fact of his life not having been sacrificed; he could walk, sleep, eat and drink as he had formerly done. He could look at the laborers in the fields or the horses in the stables, but five minutes afterwards he had no recollection of what he heard or saw. The sudden loss of his father's aid would have caused Norbert much embarrassment had it not been for the shrewdness and sagacity of M. de Puymandour, who had assisted him greatly. But all these arrangements which had to be made had necessarily delayed the wedding. But it came at last; M. de Puymandour took absolute possession of him, and after the unhappy young man had passed a sleepless night, he was allowed no time for reflection. At eleven o'clock he entered the carriage, and was driven fast to the Mayor's office, and from thence to the chapel, and by twelve o'clock all was finished and he fettered for life. A little before dinner the Viscount de Mussidan came

to offer his congratulations, and gained them at the same time for himself by announcing his speedy union with Mademoiselle Diana de Laurebourg.

Five days later the newly married pair took possession of their mansion at Champdoce. Hampered with a wife whom he had never affected to love, and whose tearful face was a constant reproach to him, and with a father who was an utter imbecile, the thoughts of suicide more than once crossed Norbert's brain. One day a servant informed Norbert that his father refused to get up. A doctor was sent for, and he declared that the Duke was in a highly critical condition. A violent reaction had taken place, and all day the invalid was in a state of intense excitement. The power of speech, which he had almost entirely lost, seemed to have returned to him in a miraculous manner; at length, however, he became delirious, and Norbert dismissed the servants who had been watching by his father's bed, lest in the incoherent ravings of the invalid, the words "Paricide" or "Poison" should break forth. At eleven o'clock he grew calmer, and slept a little, when all at once he started up in bed, exclaiming: "Come here, Norbert," and Jean, who had remained by his old master's side, ran up to the bed and was much startled at the sight. The Duke had entirely recovered his former appearance. His eyes flashed, and his lips trembled, as they always did when he was greatly excited.

"Pardon, father; pardon," cried Norbert, falling upon his knees.

The Duke softly stretched out his hand. "I was mad with family pride," said he; "and God punished me. My son, I forgive you."

Norbert's sobs broke the stillness of the chamber.

“My son, I renounce my ideas,” continued the Duke. “I do not desire you to wed Mademoiselle de Puymandour if you feel that you cannot love her.”

“Father,” answered Norbert, “I have obeyed your wishes, and she is now my wife.”

A gleam of terrible anguish passed over the Duke's countenance; he raised his hands as though to shield his eyes from some grizzly spectre, and in tones of heartrending agony exclaimed: “Too late! too late!”

He fell back in terrible convulsions, and in a moment was dead. If, as has been often asserted, the veil of the hereafter is torn asunder, then the Duke de Champdoce had a glimpse into a terrible future.

CHAPTER XII.

“RASH WORD, RASH DEED.”

AFTER her repulse by Norbert, Diana, with the cold chill of death in her heart, made her way back to the Château of the De Laurebours, over the same road which but a short time before she had traveled full of expectation and hope. The sudden appearance of the Duke de Champdoce had filled her with alarm, but her imagination was not of that kind upon which unpleasant impressions remain for any long period; for after she had regained her room, and thrown aside her out-door attire, and removed all signs of mud-stains, she once more became herself, and even laughed a little rippling laugh at all her own past alarms. Overwhelmed with the shame

of her repulse, she had threatened Norbert; but as she reasoned calmly, she felt that it was not he for whom she felt the most violent animosity. All her hatred was reserved for that woman who had come between her and her lover—for Marie de Puymandour. Some hidden feeling warned her that she must look into Marie's past life for some reason for the rupture of her engagement with Norbert, though the banns had been already published. This was the frame of mind in which Diana was when the Viscount de Mussidan was introduced to her, the friend of the brother whose untimely death had left her such a wealthy heiress. He was tall and well made, with handsomely chiseled features; and, endowed with physical strength and health, Octave de Mussidan had the additional advantages of noble descent and princely fortune. Two women, both renowned for their wit and beauty, his aunt and his mother, had been intrusted with the education which would but enable him to shine in society.

Dispatched to Paris, with an ample allowance, at the age of twenty, he found himself, thanks to his birth and connections, in the very center of the world of fashion. At the sight of Mademoiselle de Laurebourg his heart was touched for the first time. Diana had never been more charmingly fascinating than she was at this period. Octave de Mussidan did not suit her fancy; there was too great a difference between him and Norbert, and nothing would ever efface from her memory the recollection of the young Marquis as he had appeared before her on the first day of their meeting in the Forest of Bevron, clad in his rustic garb, with the game he had shot dangling from his hand. She delighted to feast her recollection, and

thought fondly of his shyness and diffidence when he hardly ventured to raise his eyes to hers. Octave, however, fell a victim at the first glance he caught of Diana, and permitted himself to be swept away by the tide of his private emotions, which upon every visit that he paid to Laurebourg became more powerful and resistless. Like a true knight, who wishes that he himself should gain the love of his lady fair, Octave addressed himself directly to Diana, and after many attempts succeeded in finding himself alone with her, and then he asked her if she could permit him to crave of her father, the Marquis de Laurebourg, the honor of her hand. This appeal surprised her, for she had been so much absorbed in her own troubles that she had not even suspected his love for her. She was even frightened at his declaration, as is the patient when the surgeon informs him that he must use the knife. She glanced at De Mussidan strangely as he put this question to her, and after a moment's hesitation, replied that she would give him a reply the next day. After thinking the matter over, she wrote and dispatched the letter which Françoise had carried to Norbert. The prisoner in the dock, as he anxiously awaits the sentence of his judge, can alone appreciate Diana's state of agonized suspense as she stood at the end of the park at Laurebourg awaiting the return of the girl. Her anxiety of mind lasted nearly three hours, when Françoise hurried up breathless.

“What did the Marquis say?” asked Diana.

“He said nothing; that is, he cried out very angrily, ‘Never! no, never!’”

In order to prevent any suspicions arising in the girl's mind, Mademoiselle de Laurebourg contrived to

force a laugh, exclaiming: "Ah! indeed, that is just what I expected."

Françoise seemed as if she had something to say on the tip of her tongue, but Diana hurriedly dismissed her, pressing a coin into her hand. All anxiety was now at an end; for her there was no longer any suspense or anguish; all her struggles were now futile, and she felt grateful to Octave for having given her his love. "Once married," thought she, "I shall be free, and shall be able to follow the Duke and Duchess to Paris."

Upon her return to the Château, she found Octave awaiting her. His eyes put the question that his lips did not dare to utter; and, placing her hand in his with a gentle inclination of her head, she assented to his prayer.

This act on her part would, she believed, free her from the past; but she was in error. Upon hearing that his dastardly attempt at murder had failed, the Counsellor was for the time utterly overwhelmed with terror, but the news that he had gained from M. de Puymandour calmed his mind in a great measure. He was not, however, completely reassured until he heard for certain that the Duke had become a helpless maniac, and that the doctor, having given up all hopes of his patient's recovery, had discontinued his visits to the Château. As soon as he had heard that Norbert's marriage had been so soon followed by his father's death, he imagined that every cloud had disappeared from the sky. All danger now seemed at an end, and he recalled with glee that he had in his strong box the promissory notes, signed by Norbert, to the amount of twenty thousand francs, which he could demand at any moment, now that Norbert was

the reigning lord of Champdoce. The first step he took was to hang about the neighborhood of Laurebourg, for he thought that some lucky chance would surely favor him with an opportunity for a little conversation with Mademoiselle Diana. For several days in succession he was unsuccessful, but at last he was delighted at seeing her alone, walking in the direction of Bevron. Without her suspecting it, he followed her until the road passed through a small plantation, when he came up and addressed her.

“What do you want with me?” asked she angrily.

He made no direct reply; but after apologizing for his boldness, he began to offer his congratulations upon her approaching marriage, which was now the talk of the whole neighborhood, and which pleased him much, as M. de Mussidan was in every way superior to——

“Is that all you have to say to me?” asked Diana, interrupting his string of words.

As she turned from him, he had the audacity to lay his hand upon the edge of her jacket.

“I have more to say,” said he, “if you will honor me with your attention. Something about—you can guess what.”

“About whom or what?” asked she, making no effort to hide her supreme contempt.

He smiled, glanced around to see that no one was within hearing, and then said in a low voice,—

“It is about the bottle of poison.”

She recoiled, as though some venomous reptile had started up in front of her.

“What do you mean?” cried she. “How dare you speak to me thus?”

All his servile manner had now returned to him, and he uttered a string of complaints in a whining tone of voice. She had played him a most unfair trick, and had stolen a certain little glass bottle from his office; and if anything had leaked out, his head would have paid the penalty of a crime in which he had no hand. He was quite ill, owing to the suspense and anxiety he had endured; sleep would not come to his bed, and the pangs of remorse tortured him continually.

"Enough," cried Diana, stamping her foot angrily on the ground. "Enough, I say."

"Well, mademoiselle, I can no longer remain here. I am far too nervous, and I wish to go to some foreign country."

"Come, let me hear the real meaning of this long preface."

Thus adjured, Daumon spoke. He only wished for some little memento to cheer his days and nights of exile, some little recognition of his services; in fact, such a sum as would bring him in an income of three thousand francs.

"I understand you," replied Diana. "You wish to be paid for what you call your kindness."

"Ah, mademoiselle!"

"And you put a value of sixty thousand francs upon it; that is rather a high price, is it not?"

"Alas! it is not half what this unhappy business has cost me."

"Nonsense; your demand is preposterous."

"Demand!" returned he; "I make no demand. I come to you respectfully and with a little charity. If I were to demand, I should come to you in quite a different manner. I should say, 'Pay me such and such a sum, or I tell everything.' What have I to lose

if the whole story comes to light? A mere nothing. I am a poor man, and am growing old. You and M. Norbert are the ones that have something to fear. You are noble, rich, and young, and a happy future lies before you.”

Diana paused and thought for an instant.

“You are speaking,” answered she at last, “in a most foolish manner. When charges are made against people, proofs must be forthcoming.”

“Quite right, mademoiselle; but can you say that these proofs are not in my hands? Should you, however, desire to buy them, you are at liberty to do so. I give you the first option, and yet you grumble.”

As he spoke, he drew a battered leather pocket-book from his breast, and took from it a paper, which, after having been crumpled, had been carefully smoothed out again. Diana glanced at it, and then uttered a stifled cry of rage and fear, for she at once recognized her last letter to Norbert.

“That wretch, Françoise, has betrayed me,” exclaimed she, “and I saved her mother from a death by hunger and cold.”

The ‘Counsellor held out the letter to her. She thought that he had no suspicion of her, and made an attempt to snatch it from him; but he was on his guard, and drew back with a sarcastic smile on his face.

“No, mademoiselle,” said he; “this is not the little bottle of poison; however, I will give it to you, together with another one, when I have obtained what I ask. Nothing for nothing, however; and if I must go to the scaffold, I will do so in good company.”

Mademoiselle de Laurebourg was in utter despair.

“But I have no money,” said she. “Where is a girl to find such a sum?”

"M. Norbert can find it."

"Go to him, then."

Daumon made a negative sign with his head.

"I am not quite such a fool," answered he; "I know M. Norbert too well. He is the very image of his father. But you can manage him, mademoiselle; besides, you have much interest in having the matter settled."

"Counsellor!"

"There is no use in beating about the bush. I come to you humbly enough, and you treat me like so much dirt. I will not submit to this, as you will find to your cost. I never poisoned any one; but enough of this kind of thing. To-day is Tuesday; if on Friday, by six o'clock, I do not have what I have asked for, your father and the Count Octave will have a letter from me, and perhaps your fine marriage may come to nothing after all."

This insolence absolutely struck Diana dumb, and Daumon had disappeared round a turning of the road before she could find words to crush him for his vile attempt at extortion. She felt that he was capable of keeping his word, even if by so doing he seriously injured himself without gaining any advantage.

A nature like Diana's always looks danger boldly in the face. She had, however, but little choice how she would act—for to apply to Norbert was the only resource left to her—for she knew that he would do all in his power to ward off the danger which threatened both of them so nearly. The idea, however, of applying to him for aid was repugnant to her pride. To what depths of meanness and infamy had she descended! and to what avail had been all her aspirations of ambition and grandeur?

She was at the mercy of a wretch—of Daumon, in fact. She was forced to go as a suppliant to a man whom she had loved so well that she now hated him with a deadly hatred. But she did not hesitate for a moment. She went straight to the cottage of Widow Rouleau, and despatched Françoise in quest of Norbert.

She ordered the girl to tell him that he must without fail be at the wicket gate in the park wall at Laurebourg on the coming night, where she would meet him, and that the matter was one of life and death.

As Diana gave these orders to Françoise, the woman's nervous air and flushed features plainly showed that she was a mere creature of Daumon's; but Mademoiselle de Laurebourg felt it would be unwise to take any notice of her discovery, but to abstain from employing her in confidential communications for the future.

As the hour of the meeting drew near a host of doubts assailed her. Would Norbert come to the meeting? Had Françoise contrived to see him? Might he not be absent from home? It was now growing dark, and the servants brought candles into the dining-room, and Diana, contriving to slip away, gained the appointed spot. Norbert was waiting, and when he caught sight of her, rushed forward, but stopped as though restrained by a sudden thought, and remained still, as if rooted to the ground.

“You sent for me, mademoiselle?” said he.

“I did.”

After a pause, in which she succeeded in mastering her emotion, Diana began with the utmost volubility to explain the extortion that Dawson was endeavoring to practise upon her, magnifying, though there was

but little need to do so, all the threats and menaces that he had made use of. She had imagined that this last piece of roguery on the part of Daumon would drive Norbert into a furious passion, but to her surprise it had no such effect. He had suffered so much and so deeply, that his heart was almost dead against any further emotion.

"Do not let this trouble you," answered he apathetically; "I will see Daumon and settle with him."

"Can you leave me thus, at our last meeting, without even a word?" asked she.

"What have I to say? My father forgave me on his death-bed, and I pardon you."

"Farewell, Norbert; we shall see no more of each other. I am going to marry, as you have doubtless been informed. Can I oppose my parent's will? Besides, what does it signify? Farewell; remember no one wishes more sincerely for your future happiness than I do."

"Happy!" exclaimed Norbert. "How can I ever be happy again? If you know the secret, for pity's sake break it to me. Tell me how to forget and how to annihilate thought. Do you not know that I had planned a life of perfect happiness with you by my side? I had visions; and now plans and visions are alike hateful to me. And as they ever and anon recur to my memory, they will fill me with terror and despair."

As Diana heard these words of agony, a wild gleam of triumph shot from her eyes, but it faded away quickly, and left her cold and emotionless as a marble statue; and when she reappeared in the drawing-room, after taking leave of Norbert, her face wore so satis-

fied an expression, that the Viscount complimented her upon her apparent happiness.

She made some jesting retort, but there was a shade of earnestness mixed with her playfulness, for to her future husband she only wished to show the amiable side of her character; but all the time she was thinking. Will Norbert see Daumon in time?

The Duke kept his word, and the next day the faithful Jean discreetly handed her a packet. She opened it, and found that besides the two letters of which the Counsellor had spoken, it contained all her correspondence with Norbert—more than a hundred letters in all, some of great length, and all of them compromising to a certain extent. Her first thought was to destroy them, but on reflection she decided not to do so, and hid the packet in the same place as she had concealed the letters written by Norbert to her.

Norbert had given Daumon sixty thousand francs, and in addition owed him twenty thousand on his promissory notes. This sum, in addition to what he had already saved, would form such a snug little fortune that it would enable the Counsellor to quit Bevron, and take up his abode in Paris, where his peculiar talents would have more scope for development. And eight days later the village was thrown into a state of intense excitement by the fact becoming known that Daumon had shut up his house and departed for Paris, taking Françoise, the Widow Rouleau's daughter, with him. The Widow Rouleau was furious, and openly accused Mademoiselle de Laurebourg of having aided in the committal of the act which had deprived her of her daughter's services in her declining years; and the old woman who had acted

as housekeeper, who on Daumon's departure had thrown open the place, did not hesitate to assert that all her late master's legal lore had been acquired in prison, where he had undergone a sentence of ten years' penal servitude.

In spite of all this, however, Mademoiselle de Laurebourg was secretly delighted at the departure of Daumon and Françoise; for she experienced an intense feeling of relief at knowing that she no longer was in any risk of meeting her accomplice in her daily walks. Norbert, too, was going to Paris with his wife; and M. de Puymandour was going about saying that his daughter, the Duchess of Champdoce, would not return to this part of the country for some time to come.

Diana drew a long breath of relief, for it seemed to her as if all the threatening clouds, which had darkened the horizon, were fast breaking up and drifting away. Her future seemed clear, and she could continue the preparations for her marriage, which was to be celebrated in a fortnight's time; and the friend of Octave who had been asked to act as his best man had answered in the affirmative.

Diana had taken accurate measurement of the love that Octave lavished upon her, and did her utmost to increase it. She had another cruel idea, and that was, that the bewitching manner which she had assumed towards her betrothed was excellent practice, and by it she might judge of her future success in society when she resided in Paris. Octave was utterly conquered, as any other man would have been under similar circumstances.

Upon the day of her wedding she was dazzling in her beauty, and her face was radiant with happiness; but it was a mere mask, which she had put on to con-

ceal her real feelings. She knew that many curious eyes were fixed upon her as she left the chapel; and the crowd formed a lane for her to pass through. She saw many a glance of dislike cast upon her; but a more severe blow awaited her, for on her arrival at the Château de Mussidan, to which she was driven directly after the ceremony, the first person she met was Montlouis, who came forward to welcome her. Bold and self-possessed as she was, the sight of this man startled her, and a bright flush passed across her face. Fortunately Montlouis had had time to prepare himself for this meeting, and his face showed no token of recognition. But though his salutation was of the most respectful description, Madame de Mussidan thought she saw in his eyes that ironical expression of contempt which she had more than once seen in Daulmon's face.

“ That man must not, shall not, stay here,” she murmured to herself.

It was easy enough for her to ask her husband to dismiss Montlouis from his employ, but it was a dangerous step to take; and her easiest course was to defer the dismissal of the secretary until some really good pretext offered itself. Nor was this pretext long in presenting itself; for Octave was by no means satisfied with the young man's conduct. Montlouis, who had been full of zeal while in Paris, had renewed his *liaison*, on his return to Mussidan, with the girl with whom he had been formerly entangled at Poitiers. This, of course, could not be permitted to go on, and an explosion was clearly to be expected; but what Diana dreaded most was the accidental development of some unseen chance.

After she had been married some two weeks, when

Octave proposed in the afternoon that they should go for a walk, she agreed. Her preparations were soon completed, and they started off, blithe and lively as children on a holiday ramble. As they loitered in a wooded path, they heard a dog barking in the cover. It was Bruno, who rushed out, and, standing on his hind legs, endeavored to lick Diana's face.

"Help, help, Octave!" she exclaimed, and her husband, springing to her side, drove away the animal.

"Were you very much alarmed, dearest?" asked he.

"Yes," answered she faintly; "I was almost frightened to death."

"I do not think that he would do you any harm," remarked Octave.

"No matter; make him go away"; and as she spoke she struck at him with her parasol. But the dog never for a moment supposed that Diana was in earnest, and, supposing that she intended to play with him, as she had often done before, began to gambol round her, barking joyously the whole time.

"But this dog evidently knows you, Diana," observed the Viscount.

"Know me? Impossible!" and as she spoke Bruno ran up and licked her hand. "If he does, his memory is better than mine; at any rate, I am half afraid of him. Come, Octave, let us go."

They turned away, and Octave would have forgotten all about the occurrence had not Bruno, delighted at having found an old acquaintance, persisted in following them.

"This is strange," exclaimed the Viscount, "very strange indeed. Look here, my man," said he, addressing a peasant, who was engaged in clipping a hedge by the roadside, "do you know whose dog this is?"

“Yes, my lord, it belongs to the young Duke of Champdoce.”

“Of course,” answered Diana, “I have often seen the dog at the Widow Rouleau’s, and have occasionally given it a piece of bread. He was always with Françoise, who ran off with that man Daumon. Oh, yes, I know him now; here, Bruno, here!”

The dog rushed to her, and, stooping down, she caressed him, thus hoping to conceal her tell-tale face.

Octave drew his wife’s arm within his without another word. A strange feeling of doubt had arisen in his mind. Diana, too, was much disturbed, and abused herself mentally for having been so weak and cowardly. Why had she not at once confessed that she knew the dog? Had she said at once, “Why, that is Bruno, the Duke of Champdoce’s dog,” her husband would have thought no more about the matter; but her own folly had made much of a merely trivial incident.

Ever since that fatal walk the Viscount’s manner appeared to have changed, and more than once Diana fancied that she caught a look of suspicion in his eyes. How could she best manage to make him forget this unlucky event? She saw that for the rest of her life she must affect a terror of dogs; and, for the future, whenever she saw one, she uttered a little cry of alarm, and insisted upon all Octave’s being chained up. But for all this she lived in a perfect atmosphere of suspicion and anxiety, while the very ground upon which she walked seemed to have been mined beneath her feet. Her sole wish now was to fly from Mussidan, and leave Bevron and its environs, she cared not for what spot. It had been first arranged that immediately after the marriage they should make a short tour;

but, in spite of this, they still lingered at Mussidan; and all that Diana could do was to keep this previous determination before her husband, without making any direct attack.

The blow came at last, and was more unexpected and terrible than she had anticipated. On the afternoon of the 26th of October, as Diana was gazing from her window, an excited crowd rushed into the courtyard of the Château, followed by four men bearing a litter covered with a sheet, under which could be distinguished the rigid limbs of a dead body, while a cruel crimson stain upon one side of the white covering too plainly showed that some one had met with a violent death.

The hideous sight froze Diana with terror, and it was impossible for her to leave the window or quit the object on the litter, which seemed to have a terrible fascination for her. That very morning her husband, accompanied by his friend the Baron de Clinchain, Montlouis, and a servant named Ludovic, had gone out for a day's shooting. It was evident that something had happened to one of the party; which of them could it be? The doubt was not of very long duration; for at that moment her husband entered the courtyard, supported by M. de Clinchain and Ludovic. His face was deadly pale, and he seemed scarcely able to drag one leg after the other. The dead man therefore must be Montlouis. She need no longer plot and scheme for the dismissal of the secretary, for his tongue had been silenced for ever.

A ray of comfort dawned in Diana's heart at this idea, and gave her the strength to descend the staircase. Halfway down she met M. de Clinchain, who

was ascending. He seized her by the arm, and said hoarsely,—

"Go back, madame, go back!"

"But tell me what has happened."

"A terrible calamity. Go back to your room, I beg of you. Your husband will be here presently"; and, as Octave appeared, he absolutely pushed her into her own room.

Octave followed, and, extending his arms, pressed his wife closely to his breast, bursting as he did so into a passion of sobs.

"Ah!" cried M. de Clinchain joyously, "he is saved. See, he weeps; I had feared for his reason."

After many questions and incoherent answers, Madame de Mussidan at last arrived at the fact that her husband had shot Montlouis by accident. Diana believed this story, but it was far from the truth. Montlouis had met his death at her hands quite as much as the Duke de Champdoce had done. He had died because he was the possessor of a fatal secret.

This was what had really occurred. After lunch, Octave, who had drunk rather freely, began to rally Montlouis regarding his mysterious movements, and to assert that some woman must be at the bottom of them. At first Montlouis joined in the laugh; but at length M. de Mussidan became too personal in remarks regarding the woman his secretary loved, and Montlouis responded angrily. This influenced his master's temper, and he went on to say that he could no longer permit such doings, and he reproached his secretary for risking his present and future for a woman who was worthy neither of love nor respect, and who was notoriously unfaithful to him. Mont-

louis heard this last taunt with compressed lips and a deep cloud upon his brow.

"Do not utter a word more, Count," said he; "I forbid you to do so."

He spoke so disrespectfully that Octave was about to strike him, but Montlouis drew back and avoided the blow; but he was so intoxicated with fury that this last insult roused him beyond all bounds.

"By what right do you speak thus," said he, "who have married another man's mistress? It well becomes you to talk of woman's virtue, when your wife is a——"

He had no time to finish his sentence, for Octave, levelling his gun, shot him through the heart.

M. de Mussidan kept these facts from his wife because he really loved her, and true love is capable of any extreme; and he felt that, however strong the cause might be, he should never have the courage to separate from Diana; that whatever she might do in the future, or had already done in the past, he could not choose but forgive her.

Acquitted of all blame, thanks to Clinchain's and Ludovic's evidence—for they had mutually agreed that the tragical occurrence should be represented to have been the result of an accident—the conscience of M. de Mussidan left him but little peace. The girl whom Montlouis had loved had been driven from her home in disgrace, owing to having given birth to a son. Octave sought her out, and, without giving any reason for his generosity, told her that her son, whom she had named Paul, after his father, Montlouis, should never come to want.

Shortly after this sad occurrence, M. de Mussidan and his wife quitted Poitiers, for Diana had more than

once determined that she would make Paris her residence for the future. She had taken into her service a woman who had been in the service of Marie de Puymandour, and through her had discovered that, previous to her marriage with Norbert, Marie had loved George de Croisenois; and she intended to use this knowledge at some future date as a weapon with which to deal the Duke de Champdoce a deadly blow.

CHAPTER XIII.

A SCHEME OF VENGEANCE.

THE marriage between Norbert and Mademoiselle de Puymandour was entirely deficient in that brief, ephemeral light that shines over the honeymoon. The icy wall that stood between them became each day stronger and taller. There was no one to smooth away inequalities, no one to exercise a kindly influence over two characters, both haughty and determined. After his father's death, when Norbert announced his intention of residing in Paris, M. de Puymandour highly approved of this resolution, for he fancied that if he were to remain alone in the country, he could to a certain extent take the place and position of the late Duke, and, with the permission of his son-in-law, at once take up his residence at Champdoce.

Almost as soon as the young Duchess arrived in Paris she realized the fact that she was the most unfortunate woman in the world. As Champdoce was almost like her own home, her eyes lighted on familiar scenes; and if she went out, she was sure of being

greeted by kindly words and friendly features; but in Paris she only found solitude, for everything there was strange and hostile. The late Duke, pinching and parsimonious as he had been towards himself and his son, launched out into the wildest extravagances when he imagined he was working for his coming race, and the home which he had prepared for his great-grandchildren was the incarnation of splendor and luxury.

Upon the arrival of Norbert and his wife, they could almost fancy that they had only quitted their town house a few days before, so perfect were all the arrangements. Had Norbert been left to act for himself, he might have felt a little embarrassed, but his trusty servant Jean aided him with his advice, and the establishment was kept on a footing to do honor to the traditions of the house of Champdoce. Everything can be procured in Paris for money, and Jean had filled the ante-rooms with lackeys, the kitchens and offices with cooks and scullions, and the stables with grooms, coachmen, and horses, while every description of carriage stood in the place appointed for their reception.

But all this bustle and excitement did not seem in the eyes of the young Duchess to impart life to the house. It appeared to her dead and empty as a sepulchre. It seemed as if she were living beneath the weight of some vague and indefinable terror, some hideous and hidden spectre which might at any moment start from its hiding place and drive her mad with the alarm it excited. She had not a soul in whom she could confide. She had been forbidden by Norbert to renew her acquaintance with her old Parisian friends, for Norbert did not consider them of sufficiently good family, and in addition he had used the

pretext of the deep mourning they were in to put off receiving visitors for a twelvemonth at least. She felt herself alone and solitary, and, in this frame of mind, how was it possible for her not to let her thoughts wander once again to George de Croisenois. Had her father been willing, she might have been his wife now, and have been wandering hand in hand in some sequestered spot beneath the clear blue sky of Italy. *He* had loved her, while Norbert—.

Norbert was leading one of those mad, headstrong lives which have but two conclusions—ruin or suicide. His name had been put up for election at a fashionable club by his uncle, the Chevalier de Septaor, as soon as he arrived in Paris. He had been elected at once, being looked on as a decided acquisition to the list of members. He bore one of the oldest names to be found among the French nobility, while his fortune—gigantic as it was—had been magnified threefold by the tongue of common report. He was received with open arms everywhere, and lived in a perfect atmosphere of flattery. Not being able to shine by means of cultivation or polish, he sought to gain a position in his club by a certain roughness of demeanor and a cynical mode of speech. He flung away his money in every direction, kept racers, and was uniformly fortunate in his betting transactions. He frequented the world of gallantry, and was constantly to be seen in the company of women whose reputations were exceedingly equivocal. His days were spent on horseback, or in the fencing room, and his nights in drinking, gambling, and all kinds of debauchery. His wife scarcely ever saw him, for when he returned home it was usually with the first beams of day, either half intoxicated or savage from having lost large sums at

the gambling table. Jean, the old and trusty retainer of the house of Champdoce, was deeply grieved, not so much at seeing his master so rapidly pursuing the path to ruin as at the fact that he was ever surrounded by dissolute and disreputable acquaintances.

"Think of your name," he would urge; "of the honor of your name."

"And what does that matter," sneered Norbert, "provided that I live a jolly life, and shuffle out of the world rapidly?"

There was one fixed star in all the dark clouds that surrounded him, which now seemed to blaze brightly, and this star was Diana de Mussidan. Do what he would, it was impossible to efface her image from his memory. Even amidst the fumes of wine and the debauched revelry of the supper table he could see the form that he had once so passionately loved standing out like a pillar of light, clear and distinct against the darkness. He had led this demoralizing existence for fully six months, when one day, as he was riding down the Avenue des Champs Elysées, he saw a lady give him a friendly bow. She was seated in a magnificent open carriage, wrapped in the richest and most costly furs. Thinking that she might be one of the many actresses with whom he was acquainted, Norbert turned his horse's head towards the carriage; but as he got nearer he saw, to his extreme amazement and almost terror, that it was Diana de Mussidan who was seated in it. He did not turn back, however; and as the carriage had just drawn up, he reined in his horse alongside of it. Diana was as much agitated as he was, and for a moment neither of them spoke, but their eyes were firmly fixed upon each other, and they sat pale and breathless, as if each had some sad pre-

sentiment which fate was preparing for them both. At last Norbert felt that he must break the silence, for the servants were beginning to gaze upon them with eyes full of curiosity.

"What, madame, you here, in Paris?" said he with an effort.

She had drawn out a slender hand from the mass of furs in which she was enveloped, and extended it to him, as she replied in a tone which had a ring of tenderness beneath its commonplace tone,—

"Yes, we are established here, and I hope that we shall be as good friends as we were once before. Farewell, until we meet again."

As if her words had been a signal, the coachman struck his horses lightly with his whip, and the magnificent equipage rolled swiftly away. Norbert had not accepted Diana's proffered hand, but presently he realized the whole scene, and plunging his spurs into his horse dashed furiously up the Avenue in the direction of the Arc de Triomphe.

"Ah," said he, as a bitter pang of despair shot through his heart, "I still love her, and can never care for any one else; but I will see her again. She has not forgotten me. I could read it in her eyes, and detect it in the tones of her voice." Here a momentary gleam of reason crossed his brain. "But will a woman like Diana ever forgive an offence like mine? and when she seems most friendly the danger is the more near."

Unfortunately he thrust aside this idea, and refused to listen to the voice of reason. That evening he went down to his club with the intention of asking a few questions regarding the Mussidans. He heard enough to satisfy himself, and the next day he met

Madame de Mussidan in the Champs Elysées, and for many days afterwards in rapid succession. Each day they exchanged a few words, and at last Diana, with much simulated hesitation, promised to alight from her carriage when next they met in the Bois, and talk to Norbert unhampered by the presence of the domestics.

Madame de Mussidan had made the appointment for three o'clock, but before two Norbert was on the spot, in a fever of expectation and doubt.

"Is it I," asked he of himself, "waiting once more for Diana, as I have so often waited for her at Bevron?"

Ah, how many changes had taken place since then! He was now no longer waiting for Diana de Laurebourg, but for the Countess de Mussidan, another man's wife, while he also was a married man. It was no longer the whim of a monomaniac that kept them apart, but the dictates of law, honor, and the world.

"Why," said he, in a mad burst of passion, "why should we not set at defiance all the cold social rules framed by an artificial state of society; why should not the woman leave her husband and the man his wife?" Norbert had consulted his watch times without number before the appointed hour came. "Ah," sighed he, "suppose that she should not come after all."

As he said these words a cab stopped, and the Countess de Mussidan alighted from it. She came rapidly along towards him, crossing an open space without heeding the irregularities of the ground, as that diminished the distance which separated her from Norbert. He advanced to meet her, and taking his arm, they plunged into the recesses of the Bois. There had been heavy rain on the day previous, and the path-

way was wet and muddy, but Madame de Mussidan did not seem to notice this.

"Let us go on," said she, "until we are certain of not being seen from the road. I have taken every precaution. My carriage and servants are waiting for me in front of St. Philippe du Roule; but for all that I may have been watched."

"You were not so timid in bygone days."

"Then I was my own mistress; and if I lost my reputation, the loss affected me only; but on my wedding day I had a sacred trust confided to me—the honor of the man who has given me his name, and that I must guard with jealous care."

"Then you love me no longer."

She stopped suddenly, and overwhelming Norbert with one of those glacial glances which she knew so well how to assume, answered in measured accents,—

"Your memory fails you; all that has remained to me of the past is the rejection of a proposal conveyed in a certain letter that I wrote."

Norbert interrupted her by a piteous gesture of entreaty.

"Mercy!" said he. "You would pardon me if you knew all the horrors of the punishment that I am enduring. I was mad, blind, besotted, nor did I love you as I do at this moment."

A smile played round Diana's beautiful mouth, for Norbert had told her nothing that she did not know before, but she wished to hear it from his own lips.

"Alas!" murmured she; "I can only frame my reply with the fatal words, '*Too late!*'"

"Diana!"

He endeavored to seize her hand, but she drew it away with a rapid movement.

"Do not use that name," said she; "you have no right to do so. Is it not sufficient to have blighted the young girl's life? and yet you seek to compromise the honor of the wife. You must forget me; do you understand? It is to tell you this that I am here. The other day, when I saw you again, I lost my self-command. My heart leapt up at the sight of you, and, fool that I was, I permitted you to see this; but base no hopes on my weakness. I said to you, Let us be friends. It was a mere act of madness. We can never be friends, and had better, therefore, treat each other as strangers. Do you forget that lying tongues at Bevron accused me of being your mistress? Do you think that this falsehood has not reached my husband's ears? One day, when your name was mentioned in his presence, I saw a gleam of hatred and jealousy in his eye. Great heavens! should he, on my return, suspect that my hand had rested in yours, he would expel me from his house like some guilty wretch! The door of our house must remain for ever closed to you. I am miserable indeed. Be a man; and if your heart still holds one atom of the love you once bore for me, prove it by never seeking me again."

As she concluded she hurried away, leaving in Norbert's heart a more deadly poison than the one she had endeavored to persuade the son to administer to his father, the Duke de Champdoce. She knew each chord that vibrated in his heart, and could play on it at will. She felt sure that in a month he would again be her slave, and that she could exercise over him a sway more despotic than she had yet done, and, in addition to this, that he would assist her in executing a cruel scheme of revenge, which she had long been plotting.

After having followed Diana about like her very shadow for several days, Norbert at last again ventured to approach her in the Champs Elysées. She was angry, but not to such an extent that he feared to repeat his offence. Then she wept, but her tears could not force him to avoid her. At first her system of defence was very strong, then it gradually grew weaker. She granted him another interview, and then two others followed. But what were those meetings worth to him? They took place in a church or a public gallery, in places where they could scarcely exchange a grasp of the hand. At length she told him that she had thought of a place which would render their interviews less perilous, but that she hardly dared tell him where it was. He pressed her to tell him, and, by degrees, she permitted herself to be persuaded. Her idea was to become the friend of the Duchess of Champdoce.

Norbert now felt that she was more an angel than a woman, and it was agreed that on the next day he himself would introduce her to his wife.

CHAPTER XIV.

FALSE FRIEND, OLD LOVER.

It was on a Wednesday morning that the Duke de Champdoce, instead of, as usual, going to his own or one of his friends' clubs to breakfast, took his seat at the table where his wife was partaking of her morning meal. He was in excellent spirits, gay, and full of pleasant talk, a mood in which his wife had never seen him since their ill-fated marriage. The Duchess

could not understand this sudden change in her husband; it terrified and alarmed her, for she felt that it was the forerunner of some serious event, which would change the current of her life entirely.

Norbert waited until the domestics had completed their duty and retired, and as soon as he was alone with his wife he took her hand and kissed it with an air of gallantry.

"It has been a long time, my dear Marie, since I had resolved to open my heart to you entirely, and now a full and open explanation has become absolutely necessary."

"An explanation!" faltered Marie.

"Yes, certainly; but do not let the word alarm you. I fear that I must have appeared in your eyes the most morose and disagreeable of husbands. Permit me to explain. Since we came here, I have gone about my own affairs, I have gone out early and returned extremely late, and sometimes three days have elapsed without our even setting eyes on each other."

The young Duchess listened to him like a woman who could not believe her ears. Could this be her husband who was heaping reproaches upon himself in this manner?

"I have made no complaint," stammered she.

"I know that, Marie; you have a noble and forgiving nature; but, however, it is impossible, as a woman, that you should not have condemned me."

"Indeed, but I have not done so."

"So much the better for me. On this I shall not have to find either defence or excuse for my conduct; you must know, however, that you are ever foremost in my thoughts, even when I am away from you."

He was evidently doing his best to put on an air

of tenderness and affection, but he failed; for though his words were kind, the tone of his voice was neither tender nor sympathetic.

"I hope I know my duty," said the Duchess.

"Pray, Marie," broke in he, "do not let the word duty be uttered between us. You know that you have been much alone, because it was impossible for the friends of Mademoiselle de Puymandour to be those of the Duchess de Champdoce!"

"Have I made any opposition to your orders?"

"Then, too, our mourning prevents us going out into the world for five months longer at least."

"Have I asked to go out?"

"All the more reason that I should endeavor to make your home less dull for you. I should like you to have with you some person in whose society you could find pleasure and distraction. Not one of those foolish girls who have no thought save for balls and dress, but a sensible woman of the world, and, above all, one of your own age and rank,—a woman, in short, of whom you could make a friend. But where can such a one be found? It is a perilous quest to venture on, and upon such a friend often depends the happiness and misery of a home.

"But," continued he, after a brief pause, "I think that I have discovered the very one that will suit you. I met her at the house of Madame d'Ailange, who spoke eloquently of her charms of mind and body, and I hope to have the pleasure of presenting her to you to-day."

"Here, at our house?"

"Certainly; there is nothing odd in this. Besides, the lady is no stranger to us; she comes from our own part of the country, and you know her."

A flush came over his face, and he busied himself with the fire to conceal it as he added,—

“You recollect Mademoiselle de Laurebourg?”

“Do you mean Diana de Laurebourg?”

“Exactly so.”

“I saw very little of her, for my father and hers did not get on very well together. The Marquis de Laurebourg looked on us as too insignificant to——”

“Ah, well,” interrupted he, “I trust that the daughter will make up for the father’s shortcomings. She married just after our wedding had been celebrated, and her husband is the Count de Mussidan. She will call on you to-day, and I have told your servants to say that you are at home.”

The silence that followed this speech lasted for nearly a couple of minutes, and became exceedingly embarrassing, when suddenly the sound of wheels was heard on the gravel of the courtyard, and in a moment afterwards a servant came and announced that the Countess de Mussidan was in the drawing-room. Norbert rose, and, taking his wife’s arm, led her away.

“Come, Marie, come,” said he; “she has arrived.”

Diana had reflected deeply before she had taken this extraordinarily bold step. In paying a visit so contrary to all the usual rules of etiquette, she exposed herself to the chance of receiving a severe rebuff. The few seconds that elapsed while she was still alone in the drawing-room seemed like so many centuries; but the door was opened, and Norbert and his wife appeared. Then, with a charming smile, Madame de Mussidan rose and bowed gracefully to the Duchess de Champdoce, making a series of half-jesting apologies for her intrusion. She had been utterly unable, she said, to resist the pleasure she should experience in

seeing an old county neighbor, the more so as they were now separated by so short a distance. She had, therefore, disregarded all the rules of etiquette so that they might have a cosy chat about Poitiers, Bevron, Champdoce, and all the county where she had been born, and which she so dearly loved.

The Duchess listened in silence to this torrent of words, and the expression of her face showed how surprised she was at this unexpected visit. A less perfectly self-possessed woman than Diana de Mussidan might have felt abashed, but the slight annoyance was not to be compared to the prospective advantages that she hoped to gain, and she brought all the mettle of her talent and diplomacy into play.

Norbert was moving about the room, half ashamed of the ignoble part that he was playing. As soon as he thought that the welcome between the two ladies had been partially got over, and imagined that they were conversing more amicably together, he slipped out of the room, not knowing whether to be pleased or angry at the success of the trick.

The trick was rather a more difficult one than Diana had, from Norbert's account, anticipated, as she had thought that she would have been received by the Duchess like some ministering angel sent down to earth to console an unhappy captive. She had expected to find a simple, guileless woman, who, upon her first visit, would throw her arms round her visitor's neck and yield herself entirely to her influence. Far, however, from being dismayed, Diana was rather pleased at this unexpected difficulty, and so fully exerted all her powers of fascination, that when she took her leave, she believed that she had made a little progress.

On that very evening the Duchess remarked to her husband,—

“I think that I shall like Madame de Mussidan ; she seems an excellent kind of woman.”

“Excellent is just the proper word,” returned Norbert. “All Bevron was in tears when she was married and had to leave, for she was a real angel among the poor.”

Norbert was intensely gratified by Diana’s success ; for was it not for him that she had displayed all her skill, and was not this a proof that she still cherished a passion for him ?

He was not, however, quite so much pleased when he met Madame de Mussidan the next day in the Champs Elysées. She looked sad and thoughtful.

“What has gone wrong ?” asked he.

“I am very angry with myself for having listened to the voice of my own heart and to your entreaties,” answered she, “and I think that both of us have committed a grave error.”

“Indeed, and what have we done ?”

“Norbert, your wife suspects something.”

“Impossible ! why, she was praising you after you had left.”

“If that is the case, then she is indeed a much more clever woman than I had imagined, for she knows how to conceal her suspicions until she is in a position to prove them.”

Diana spoke with such a serious air of conviction, that Norbert became quite alarmed.

“What shall we do ?” asked he.

“The best thing would be to give up meeting each other, I think.”

“Never ; I tell you, never !”

"Let me reflect; in the meantime be prudent; for both our sakes, be prudent."

To further his ends, Norbert entirely changed his mode of life. He gave up going to his clubs, refused invitations to fast suppers, and no longer spent his nights in gambling and drinking. He drove out with his wife, and frequently spent his evenings with her, and at the club began to be looked on as quite a model husband. This great change, however, was not effected without many a severe inward struggle. He felt deeply humiliated at the life of deception that he was forced to lead, but Diana's hand, apparently so slight and frail, held him with a grip of steel.

"We must live in this way," said she, in answer to his expostulations, "first, because it must be so; and, secondly, because it is my will. On our present mode of conduct depends all our future safety, and I wish the Duchess to believe that with me happiness and content must have come to her fireside."

Norbert could not gainsay this very reasonable proposition on the part of Madame de Mussidan, for he was more in love than ever, and the terrible fear that if he went in any way contrary to her wishes that she would refuse to see him any more, stayed the words of objection that rose to his lips.

After hesitating for a little longer, the Duchess made up her mind to accept the offer of friendship which Diana had so ingenuously offered to her, and finished by giving herself up to the bitterest enemy that she had in the world. By degrees she had no secrets from her new friend, and one day, after a long and confidential conversation, she acknowledged to Diana the whole secret of the early love of her girlish days, the memory of which had never faded from the inmost

recesses of her heart, and was rash enough to mention George de Croisenois by name. Madame de Mussidan was overjoyed at what she considered so signal a victory.

"Now I have her," thought she, "and vengeance is within my grasp."

Marie and Diana were now like two sisters, and were almost constantly together; but this intimacy had not given to Norbert the facile means of meeting Diana which he had so ardently hoped for. Though Madame de Mussidan visited his house nearly every day, he absolutely saw less of her than he had done before, and sometimes weeks elapsed without his catching a glimpse of her face. She played her game with such consummate skill, that Marie was always placed as a barrier between Norbert and herself, as in the farce, when the lover wishes to embrace his mistress, he finds the wrinkled visage of the duenna offered to his lips. Sometimes he grew angry, but Diana always had some excellent reason with which to close his mouth. Sometimes she held up his pretensions to ridicule, and at others assumed a haughty air, which always quelled incipient rebellion upon his part.

"What did you expect of me?" she would say, "and of what base act did you do me the honor to consider me capable?"

He was treated exactly like a child, or more cruel still, like a person deficient in intellect, and this he was thoroughly aware of. He could not meet Madame de Mussidan as he had formerly done, for now in the Bois, at Longchamps, or at any place of public amusement she was invariably surrounded by a band of fashionable admirers, among whom George de Croisenois was always to be found. Norbert disliked all these

men, but he had a special antipathy to George de Croisenois, whom he regarded as a supercilious fool; but in this opinion he was entirely wrong, for the Marquis de Croisenois was looked upon as one of the most talented and witty men in Parisian society, and in this case the opinion of the world was a well-founded one. Many men envied him, but he had no enemies, and his honest and straightforward conduct was beyond all doubt. He had all the noble instincts of a knight of the days of chivalry.

“Pray,” asked Norbert, “what is it that you can see in this sneering dandy who is always hanging about you?”

But Diana, with a meaning smile, always made the same reply,—

“You ask too much; but some time you will learn all.”

Every day she contrived, when with the Duchess, to turn the conversation skilfully upon George de Croisenois, and she had in a manner accustomed Marie to look certain possibilities straight in the face, from the very idea of which she would a few months back have recoiled with horror. This point once gained, Madame de Mussidan believed that the moment had arrived to bring the former lovers together again, and fancied that one sudden and unexpected encounter would advance matters much more quickly than all her half-veiled insinuations. One day, therefore, when the Duchess had called on her friend, on entering the drawing-room, she found it only tenanted by George de Croisenois. An exclamation of astonishment fell from the lips of both as their eyes met; the cheek of each grew pale. The Duchess, overcome by her feelings, sank half-fainting into a chair near the door.

"Ah," murmured he, scarcely knowing the meaning of the words he uttered, "I had every confidence in you, and you have forgotten me."

"You do not believe the words you have just spoken," returned the Duchess haughtily; "but," she added in softer accents, "what could I do? I may have been weak in obeying my father, but for all that I have never forgotten the past."

Madame de Mussidan, who had stationed herself behind the closed door, caught every word, and a gleam of diabolical triumph flashed from her eyes. She felt sure that an interview which began in this manner would be certain to be repeated, and she was not in error. She soon saw that by some tacit understanding the Duchess and George contrived to meet constantly at her house, but this she carefully abstained from noticing. Things were working exactly as she desired, and she waited, for she could well afford to do so, knowing that the impending crash could not long be delayed.

CHAPTER XV.

A STAB IN THE DARK.

SEPTEMBER had now arrived; and though the weather was very bad, the Duke de Champdoce, accompanied by his faithful old servant, Jean, left Paris on a visit to his training stables. Having had a serious difference with Diana, he had made up his mind to try whether a long absence on his part would not have the effect of reducing her to submission, and at the same

time remembering the proverb, that "absence makes the heart grow fonder."

He had already been away two whole days, and was growing extremely anxious at not having heard from Madame de Mussidan, when one evening, as he was returning from a late inspection of his stud, he was informed that there was a man waiting to see him. The man was a poor old fellow belonging to the place, who eked out a wretched subsistence by begging, and executing occasional commissions.

"Do you want me?" asked the Duke.

With a sly look, the man drew from his pocket a letter.

"This is for you," muttered he.

"All right; give it to me, then."

"I was told to give it to you only in private."

"Never mind that; hand it over."

"Well, if I must, I must."

Norbert's sole thought was that this letter must have come from Diana, and throwing the man a coin, hurried to a spot where it was light enough to read the missive. He did not, however, recognize Diana's firm, bold hand on the envelope.

"Who the devil can this be from?" thought Norbert, as he tore open the outer covering. The paper within was soiled and greasy, and the handwriting was of the vilest description, it was full of bad spelling, and ran thus:—

"SIR,—

"I hardly dare tell you the truth, and yet my conscience will give me no relief until I do so. I can no longer bear to see a gentleman such as you are deceived by a woman who has no heart or honorable feeling. Your wife is unfaithful to you, and will soon make you

a laughing stock to all. You may trust to this being true, for I am a respectable woman, and you can easily find out if I am lying to you. Hide yourself this evening, so that you may command a view of the side-door in the wall of your garden, and between half-past ten and eleven you will see your wife's lover enter. It is a long time since he has been furnished with a key. The hour for the meeting has been judiciously fixed, for all the servants will be out; but I implore you not to be violent, for I would not do your wife any harm, but I feel that you ought to be warned.

"From one

"WHO KNOWS."

Norbert ran through the contents of this infamous anonymous letter in an instant. The blood surged madly through his brain, and he uttered a howl of fury. His servants ran in to see what was the matter.

"Where is the fellow who brought this letter?" said he. "Run after him and bring him back to me."

In a few minutes the sturdy grooms made their appearance, pushing in the messenger, who seemed overpowered with tears.

"I am not a thief," exclaimed he. "It was given to me, but I will give it back."

He was alluding to the louis given to him by Norbert, for the largeness of the sum made him think that the donor had made a mistake.

"Keep the money," said the Duke; "I meant it for you; but tell me who gave this letter to you."

"I can't tell you," answered the man. "If I ever saw him before, may my next glass of wine choke me. He got out of a cab just as I was passing near the bridge, and calling to me, said, 'Look at this letter; at half-past seven take it to the Duke de Champdoce, who lives by his stables in the road to the Forest. Do

you know the place?’ ‘Yes,’ I says, and then he slips the letter and a five-franc piece into my hand, got back into the cab, and off he went.”

“What was the man like?” asked he.

“Well, I can hardly say. He wasn’t young or old, or short or tall. I recollect he had a gold watch-chain on, but that was about all I noticed.”

“Very well; you can be off.”

At this moment Norbert’s anger was turned against the writer of the letter only, for he did not place the smallest credence in the accusations against his wife. If he did not love her, he at any rate respected her. “My wife,” said he to himself, “is an honorable and virtuous woman, and it is some discharged menial who has taken this cowardly mode of revenge.” A closer inspection of the letter seemed to show him that the faults in caligraphy were intentional. The concluding portion of the letter excited his attention, and, calling Jean, he asked him if it was true that all his servants would be absent from the house to-day.

“There will be none there this evening; not until late at night,” answered the old man.

“And why, pray?”

“Have you forgotten, your Grace, that the first coachman is going to be married, and the Duchess was good enough to say that all might go to the wedding dinner and ball, as long as some one remained at the porter’s lodge?”

After the first outburst, Norbert affected an air of calmness, and laughed at the idea of having permitted himself to be disturbed for so trivial a cause. But this was mere pretence, for doubt and suspicion had entered his soul, and no power on earth could expel them. “Why should not my wife be unfaithful to me?”

thought Norbert. "I give her credit for being honorable and right-minded, but then all deceived husbands have the same idea. Why should I not take advantage of this information, and judge for myself? But no. I will not stoop to such an act of baseness. I should be as infamous as the writer of this letter if I was to play the spy, as she recommends me to do." He glanced round, and perceived that his servants were looking at him with undisguised curiosity.

"Go to your work," said he. "Extinguish the lights, and see that all the doors and windows are carefully closed."

He had made up his mind now, and taking out his watch, saw that it was just eight o'clock. "I have time to reach Paris," muttered he, "by the appointed time." Then he called Jean to him again. There was no need to conceal anything from this trusty adherent of the house of Champdoce. "I must start for Paris," said the Duke, "without an instant's delay."

"On account of that letter?" asked the old man with an expression of the deepest sorrow upon his features.

"Yes, for that reason only."

"Some one has been making false charges against the Duchess."

"How do you know that?"

"It was easy enough to guess."

"Have the carriage got ready, and tell the coachman to wait for me in front of the club. I myself will go on foot."

"You must not do that," answered Jean gravely. "The servants may have conceived the same suspicions as I have. You ought to creep away without any one being a bit the wiser. The other domestics need not

even suppose that you have left the house. I can get you a horse out of the little stables without any one being the wiser. I will wait for you on the other side of the bridge."

"Good; but remember that I have not a moment to lose."

Jean left the room, and as he reached the passage Norbert heard him say to one of the servants, "Put some cold supper on the table; the Duke says that he is starving."

Norbert went into his bedroom, put on a great coat and a pair of high boots, and slipped into his pocket a revolver, the charges of which he had examined with the greatest care. The night was exceedingly dark, a fine, icy rain was falling, and the roads were very heavy. Norbert found Jean with the horse at the appointed spot, and as he leaped into the saddle the Duke exclaimed, "Not a soul saw me leave the house."

"Nor I either," returned the attached domestic. "I shall go back and act as if you were at supper. At three in the morning I will be in the wine-shop on the left-hand side of the road. When you return, give a gentle tap on the window-pane with the handle of your whip." Norbert sprang into the saddle, and sped away through the darkness like a phantom of the night. Jean had made an excellent choice in the horse he had brought for his master's use, and the animal made its way rapidly through the mud and rain; but Norbert by this time was half mad with excitement, and spurred him madly on. As he neared home a new idea crossed his brain. Suppose it was a practical joke on the part of some of the members of the club? In that case, they would doubtless be watching for his arrival, and, after talking to him on indifferent subjects, would, when he

betrayed any symptoms of impatience, overwhelm him with ridicule. The fear of this made him cautious. What should he do with the horse he was riding? The wine-shops were open, and perhaps he might pick up some man there who would take charge of it for him. As he was debating this point, his eye fell upon a soldier, probably on his way to barracks.

"My man," asked the Duke, "would you like to earn twenty francs?"

"I should think so, if it is nothing contrary to the rules and regulations of the army."

"It is only to take my horse and walk him up and down while I pay a visit close by."

"I can stay out of barracks a couple of hours longer, but no more," returned the soldier.

Norbert told the soldier where he was to wait for him, and then went on rapidly to his own house, and reached the side street along which ran the garden belonging to his magnificent residence. On the opposite side of the street the houses all had porticoes, and Norbert took up his position in one of these, and peered out carefully. He had studied the whole street, which was not a long one, from beginning to end, and was convinced that he was the only person in it. He made up his mind that he would wait until midnight; and if by that time no one appeared, he would feel confident that the Duchess was innocent, and return without any one but Jean having known of his expedition. From his position he could see that three windows on the second floor of his house were lighted up, and those windows were in his wife's sleeping apartment. "She is the last woman in the world to permit a lover to visit her," thought he. "No, no; the whole thing is a hoax." He began to think of the way in which he

had treated his wife. Had he nothing to reprobach himself with? Ten days after their marriage he had deserted her entirely; and if during the last few weeks he had paid her any attention, it was because he was acting in obedience to the whims of another woman. Suppose a lover was with her now, what right had he to interfere? The law gave him leave, but what did his conscience say? He leaned against the chill stone until he almost became as cold as it was. It seemed to him at that moment that life and hope were rapidly drifting away from him. He had lost all count of how long he had been on guard. He pulled out his watch, but it was too dark to distinguish the hands or the figures on the dial-plate. A neighboring clock struck the half-hour, but this gave him no clue as to the time. He had almost made up his mind to leave, when he heard the sound of a quick step coming down the street. It was the light, quick step of a sportsman,—of a man more accustomed to the woods and fields than the pavement and asphalt of Paris. Then a shadow fell upon the opposite wall, and almost immediately disappeared. Then Norbert knew that the door had opened and closed, and that the man had entered the garden. There could be no doubt upon this point, and yet the Duke would have given worlds to be able to disbelieve the evidence of his senses. It might be a burglar, but burglars seldom work alone; or it might be a visitor to one of the servants, but all the servants were absent. He again raised his eyes to the windows of his wife's room. All of a sudden the light grew brighter; either the lamp had been turned up, or fresh candles lighted. Yes, it was a candle, for he saw it borne across the room in the direction of the great staircase, and now he saw that the anonymous letter had spoken

the truth, and that he was on the brink of a discovery. A lover had entered the garden, and the lighted candle was a signal to him. Norbert shuddered; the blood seemed to course through his veins like streams of molten fire, and the misty atmosphere that surrounded him appeared to stifle him. He ran across the street, forced the lock, and rushed wildly into the garden.

CHAPTER XVI.

HUSBAND AND LOVER.

THE writer of the anonymous communication had only known the secret too well, for the Duchess de Champdoce was awaiting a visit that evening from George de Croisenois; this was, however, the first time. Step by step she had yielded, and at length had fallen into the snare laid for her by the treacherous woman whom she believed to be her truest friend. The evening before this eventful night she had been alone in Madame de Mussidan's drawing-room with George de Croisenois. She had been impressed by his ardent passion, and had listened with pleasure to his loving entreaties.

"I yield," said she. "Come to-morrow night, at half-past ten, to the little door in the garden wall; it will only be kept closed by a stone being placed against it inside; push it, and it will open; and when you have entered the garden, acquaint me with your presence by clapping your hands gently once or twice."

Diana had, from a secure hiding-place, overheard these words, and feeling certain that the Duchess would repent her rash promise, she kept close to her side until George's departure, to give her no chance of

retracting her promise. The next day she was constantly with her victim, and made an excuse for dining with her, so as not to quit her until the hour for the meeting had almost arrived.

It was not until she was left alone that the Duchess saw the full extent of her folly and rashness. She was terrified at the promise that she had given in a weak moment, and would have given worlds had she been able to retract.

There was yet, however, one means of safety left her—she could hurry downstairs and secure the garden gate. She started to her feet, determined to execute her project; but she was too late, for the appointed signal was heard through the chill gloom of the night. Unhappy woman! The light sound of George de Croisenois' palms striking one upon the other resounded in her ears like the dismal tolling of the funeral bell. She stooped to light a candle at the fire, but her hand trembled so that she could scarcely effect her object. She felt sure that George was still in the garden, though she had made no answer to his signal. She had never thought that he would have had the audacity to open a door that led into the house from the garden, but this is what he had done. In the most innocent manner imaginable, and so that her listener in no way suspected the special reason that she had for making this communication, Diana de Mussidan had informed George de Croisenois that upon this night all the domestics of the Champdoce household would be attending the coachman's wedding, and that consequently the mansion would be deserted. George knew also that the Duke was away at his training establishment, and he therefore opened the door, and walked boldly up the main staircase, so that when the Duchess,

with the lighted candle in her hand, came to the top steps she found herself face to face with George de Croisenois, pallid with emotion and quivering with excitement.

At the sight of the man she loved she started backwards with a low cry of anguish and despair.

"Fly!" she said "fly, or we are lost!"

He did not, however, seem to hear her, and the Duchess recoiled slowly, step by step, through the open door of her chamber, across the carpeted floor, until she reached the opposite wall of her room, and could go no farther.

George followed her, and pushed to the door of the room as he entered it. This brief delay, however, had sufficed to restore Marie to the full possession of her senses. "If I permit him to speak," thought she,— "if he once suspects that my love for him is still as strong as ever, I am lost."

Then she said aloud,—

"You must leave this house, and that instantly. I was mad when I said what I did yesterday. You are too noble and too generous not to listen to me when I tell you that the moment of infatuation is over, and that all my reason has returned to me, and my openness will convince you of the truth of what I say—George de Croisenois, I love you."

The young man uttered an exclamation of delight upon hearing this news.

"Yes," continued Marie, "I would give half the years of my remaining life to be your wife. Yes, George, I love you; but the voice of duty speaks louder than the whispers of the heart. I may die of grief, but there will be no stain upon my marriage robe, no remorse eating out my heart. Farewell!"

But the Marquis would not consent to this immediate dismissal, and appeared to be about to speak.

"Go!" said the Duchess, with an air of command. "Leave me at once!" Then, as he made no effort to obey her, she went on, "If you really love me, let my honor be as dear to you as your own, and never try to see me again. The peril we are now in shows how necessary this last determination of mine is. I am the Duchess de Champdoce, and I will keep the name that has been intrusted to me pure and unsullied, nor will I stoop to treachery or deception."

"Why do you use the word deception?" asked he. "I do, it is true, despise the woman who smiles upon the husband she is betraying, but I respect and honor the woman who risks all to follow the fortunes of the man she loves. Lay aside, Marie, name, title, fortune, and fly with me."

"I love you too much, George," answered she gently, "to ruin your future, for the day would surely come when you would regret all your self-denial, for a woman weighed down with a sense of her dishonor is a heavy burden for a man to bear."

George de Croisenois did not understand her thoroughly.

"You do not trust me," said he. "You would be dishonored. Shall I not share a portion of the world's censure? And, if you wish me, I will be a dishonored man also. To-night I will cheat at play at the club, be detected, and leave the room an outcast from the society of all honorable men for the future. Fly with me to some distant land, and we will live happily under whatever name you may choose."

"I must not listen to you," cried she wildly. "It is impossible now."

"Impossible!—and why? Tell me, I entreat you."

"Ah, George," sobbed she, "if you only knew——"

He placed his arm around her waist, and was about to press his lips on that fair brow, when all at once he felt Marie shiver in his clasp, and, raising one of her arms, point towards the door, which had opened silently during their conversation, and upon the threshold of which stood Norbert de Champdoce, gloomy and threatening.

The Marquis saw in an instant the terrible position in which his insensate folly had placed the woman he loved.

"Do not come any nearer," said he, addressing Norbert; "remain where you are."

A bitter laugh from the Duke made him realize the folly of his command. He supported the Duchess to a couch, and seated her upon it. She recovered consciousness almost immediately, and, as she opened her eyes, George read in them the most perfect forgiveness for the man who had ruined her life and hopes.

This look, and the fond assurance conveyed in it, restored all George's coolness and self-possession, and he turned towards Norbert.

"However compromising appearances may seem, I am the only one deserving punishment; the Duchess has nothing to reproach herself with in any way; it was without her knowledge, and without any encouragement from her, that I dared to enter this house, knowing as I did that the servants were all absent."

Norbert, however, still maintained the same gloomy silence. He too had need to collect his thoughts. As he ascended the stairs he knew that he should find the Duchess with a lover, but he had not calculated upon that lover being George de Croisenois, a man whom he

loathed and detested more than any one that he was in the habit of meeting in society. When he recognized George, it was with the utmost difficulty that he restrained himself from springing upon him and endeavoring to strangle him. He had suspected this man of having gained Diana's affections, and now he found him in the character of the lover of his wife, and he was silent simply because he had not yet made up his mind what he would say. If his face was outwardly calm and rigid as marble, while the flames of hell were raging in his heart, it was because his limbs for the moment refused to obey his will; but, in spite of this, Norbert was, for the time, literally insane.

Croisenois folded his arms, and continued,—

"I had only just come here at the moment of your arrival. Why were you not here to listen to all that passed between us? Would to heaven that you had been! then you would have understood all the grandeur and nobility of your wife's soul. I admit the magnitude of my fault, but I am at your service, and am prepared to give you the satisfaction that you will doubtless demand."

"From your words," answered Norbert slowly, "I presume that you allude to a duel; that is to say, that having effected my dishonor to-night, you purpose to kill me to-morrow morning. In the game that you have been playing a man stakes his life, and you, I think, have lost."

Croisenois bowed. "I am a dead man," thought he as he glanced towards the Duchess, "and not for your sake, but on account of quite another woman."

The sound of his own voice excited Norbert, and he went on more rapidly: "What need have I to risk my life in a duel? I come to my own home, I find you

with my wife, I blow out your brains, and the law will exonerate me." As he said these last words, he drew a revolver from his pocket and levelled it at George. The moment was an intensely exciting one, but Croisenois did not show any sign of emotion, Norbert did not press the trigger, and the suspense became more than could be borne.

"Fire!" cried George, "fire!"

"No," returned Norbert coldly; "on reflection I have come to the conclusion that your dead body would be a source of extreme inconvenience to me."

"You try my forbearance too far. What are your intentions?"

"I mean to kill you," answered Norbert in such a voice of concentrated ferocity that George shuddered in spite of all his courage, "but it shall not be with a pistol shot. It is said that blood will wash out any stain, but it is false; for even if all yours is shed, it will not remove the stain from my escutcheon. One of us must vanish from the face of the earth in such a manner that no trace of him may remain."

"I agree. Show me how this is to be done."

"I know a method," answered Norbert. "If I was certain that no human being was aware of your presence here to-night——"

"No one can possibly know it."

"Then," answered the Duke, "instead of taking advantage of the rights that the law gives me and shooting you down on the spot, I will consent to risk my life against yours."

George de Croisenois breathed a sigh of relief. "I am ready," replied he, "as I before told you."

"I heard you; but remember that this will be no

ordinary duel, in the light of day, with seconds to regulate the manner of our conduct."

"We will fight exactly as you wish."

"In that case, I name swords as the weapons, the garden as the spot, and this instant as the hour."

The Marquis cast a glance at the window.

"You think," observed Norbert, comprehending his look, "that the night is so dark that we cannot see the blades of our swords?"

"Quite so."

"You need not fear; there will be light enough for the death struggle of the one who remains in the garden, for you understand that one *will* remain."

"I understand you; shall we go down at once?"

Norbert shook his head in the negative.

"You are in too great a hurry," said he, "and have not given me the time to fix my conditions."

"I am listening."

"At the end of the garden there is a small plot of ground, so damp that nothing will grow there, and consequently is almost unfrequented; but for all that it is thither that you must follow me. We will each take spade and pick-axe, and in a very brief period we can hollow out a receptacle for the body of the one who falls. When this work is completed, we will take to our swords and fight to the death, and the one who can keep his feet shall finish his fallen adversary, drag his body to the hole, and shovel the earth over his remains."

"Never!" exclaimed Croisenois. "Never will I agree to such barbarous terms."

"Have a care then," returned Norbert; "for I shall use my rights. That clock points to five minutes to

eleven. If, when it strikes, you have not decided to accept my terms, I shall fire."

The barrel of the revolver was but a few inches from George de Croisenois' heart, and the finger of his most inveterate enemy was curved round the trigger; but his feelings had been so highly wrought up that he thought not of this danger. He only remembered that he had four minutes in which to make up his mind. The events of the last thirty minutes had pressed upon each other's heels with such surprising alacrity that he could hardly believe that they had really occurred, and it seemed to him as if it might not, after all, be only a hideous vision of the night.

"You have only two minutes more," remarked the Duke.

Croisenois started; his soul was far away from the terrible present. He glanced at the clock, then at his enemy, and lastly at Marie, who lay upon the couch, and from her ashen complexion might have been regarded as dead, save for the hysterical sobs which convulsed her frame. He felt that it was impossible to leave her in such a condition without aid of any kind, but he saw well that any show of pity on his part would only aggravate his offence. "Heaven have mercy on us!" muttered he. "We are at the mercy of a maniac," and with a feeling of deadly fear he asked himself what would be the fate of this woman, whom he loved so devotedly, were he to die. "For her sake," he thought, "I must slay this man, or her life will be one endless existence of torture—and slay him I will."

"I accept your terms," said he aloud.

He spoke just in time, for as the words were ut-

tered came the whirr of the machinery and then the first clear stroke of the bell.

"I thank you," answered Norbert coldly as he lowered the muzzle of his revolver.

The icy frigidity of manner in a period of extreme danger, which is the marked characteristic of a certain type of education, had now vanished from the Marquis's tone and behavior.

"But that is not all," he continued; "I, too, have certain conditions to propose."

"But we agreed——"

"Let me explain: we are going to fight in the dark in your garden without seconds. We are to dig a grave and the survivor is to bury his dead antagonist. Tell me, am I right?"

Norbert bowed.

"But," went on the Marquis, "how can you be certain that all will end here, and that the earth will be content to retain our secret? You do not know, and you do not seem to care, that if one day the secret should be disclosed and the survivor accused of being the murderer of the other, arrested, dragged before a tribunal, condemned, and sent to a life-long prison——"

"There is a chance of that, of course."

"And do you think that I will consent to run such a risk as that?"

"There is such a risk, of course," answered Norbert phlegmatically; "but that will be an incentive for you to conceal my death as I should conceal yours."

"That will not be sufficient for me," returned De Croisenois.

"Ah! take care," sneered Norbert, "or I shall begin to think that you are afraid."

"I *am* afraid; that is, afraid of being called a murderer."

"That is a danger to which I am equally liable with yourself."

Croisenois, however, was fully determined to carry his point. "You say," continued he, "that our chances are equal; but if I fall, who would dream of searching here for my remains? You are in your own house and can take every precaution; but suppose, on the other hand, I kill you. Shall I look to the Duchess to assist me? Will not the finger of suspicion be pointed at her? Shall she say to her gardener when all Paris is hunting for you, 'Mind that you do not meddle with the piece of land at the end of the garden.'"

The thought of the anonymous letter crossed Norbert's mind, and he remembered that the writer of it must be acquainted with the coming of George de Croisenois. "What do you propose then?" asked he.

"Merely that each of us, without stating the grounds of our quarrel, write down the conditions and sign our names as having accepted them."

"I agree; but use dispatch."

The two men, after the conditions had been subscribed, wrote two letters, dated from a foreign country, and the survivor of the combat was to post his dead adversary's letter, which would not fail to stop any search after the vanished man. When this talk was concluded, Norbert rose to his feet.

"One word in conclusion," said he: "a soldier is leading the horse on which I rode here up and down in the Place des Invalides. If you kill me, go and take the horse from the man, giving him the twenty francs I promised him."

"I will."

“Now let us go down.”

They left the room together. Norbert was stepping aside to permit Croisenois to descend the stairs first, when he felt his coat gently pulled, and, turning round, saw that the Duchess, too weak to rise to her feet, had crawled to him on her knees. The unhappy woman had heard everything, and in an almost inaudible voice she uttered an agonized prayer:

“Mercy, Norbert! have mercy! I swear to you that I am guiltless. You never loved me; why should you fight for me? Have pity! To-morrow, by all that I hold sacred, I swear to you that I will enter a convent, and you shall never see my face again. Have pity!”

“Pray heaven, madame, that it may be your lover’s sword that pierces my heart. It is your only hope, for then you will be free.”

He tore his coat from her fingers with brutal violence, and the unhappy woman fell to the floor with a shriek as he closed the door upon her, and followed his antagonist downstairs.

CHAPTER XVII.

BLADE TO BLADE.

SEVERAL times in the course of this interview Norbert de Champdoce had been on the point of bursting into a furious passion, but he restrained himself from a motive of self-pride; but now that his wife was no longer present, he showed a savage intensity of purpose and a deadly earnestness that was abso-

lutely appalling. As he followed Croisenois down the great staircase, he kept repeating the words, "Quick! quick! we have lost too much time already;" for he saw that a mere trifle might upset all his plans—such as a servant returning home before the others. When they reached the ground-floor, he led George into a by-room which looked like an armory, so filled was it with arms of all kinds and nations.

"Here," said he, with a bitter sneer, "we can find, I think, what we want"; and placing the candle he carried on the mantelpiece, he leaped upon the cushioned seat that ran round the room, and took down from the wall several pairs of duelling swords, and, throwing them upon the floor, exclaimed, "Choose your own weapon."

George was as anxious as Norbert to bring this painful scene to a close, for anything was preferable to this hideous state of suspense. The last despairing glance of the Duchess had pierced his heart like a dagger thrust, and when he saw Norbert thrust aside his trembling wife with such brutality, it was all that he could do to refrain from striking him down. He made no choice of weapons, but grasped the nearest, saying,—

"One will do as well as another."

"We cannot fight in this darkness," said Norbert, "but I have a means to remedy that. Come with me this way, so that we may avoid the observation of the porter."

They went into the stables, where he took up a large lantern, which he lighted.

"This," said he, "will afford ample light for our work."

"Ah, but the neighbors will see it, too; and at this

hour a light in the garden is sure to attract attention," observed George.

"Don't be afraid; my grounds are not overlooked."

They entered the garden, and soon reached the spot to which the Duke had alluded. Norbert hung the lantern on the bough of a tree, and it gave the same amount of light as an ordinary street lamp.

"We will dig the grave in that corner," observed he; "and when it is filled in, we can cover it with that heap of stones over there."

He threw off his great coat, and, handing a spade to Croisenois, took another himself, repeating firmly the words,—

"To work! to work!"

Croisenois would have toiled all night before he could have completed the task, but the muscles of the Duke were hardened by his former laborious life, and in forty minutes all was ready.

"That will do," said Norbert, exchanging his spade for a sword. "Take your guard."

Croisenois, however, did not immediately obey. Impassible by nature, he felt a cold shiver run through his frame; the dark night, the flickering lantern, and all these preparations, made in so cold-blooded a manner, affected his nerves. The grave, with its yawning mouth, fascinated him.

"Well," said Norbert impatiently, "are you not ready?"

"I will speak," exclaimed De Croisenois, driven to desperation. "In a few minutes one of us two will be lying dead on this spot. In the presence of death a man's words are to be relied on. Listen to me. I swear to you, on my honor and by all my hopes of fu-

ture salvation, that the Duchess de Champdoce is entirely free from guilt."

"You have said that before; why repeat it again?"

"Because it is my duty; because I am thinking that, if I die, it will be my insane passions that have caused the ruin of one of the best and purest women in the world. I entreat you to believe that she has nothing to repent of. See, I am not ashamed to descend to entreaty. Let my death, if you kill me, be an expiation for everything. Be gentle with your wife; and if you survive me, do not make her life one prolonged existence of agony."

"Silence, or I shall look upon you as a dastard," returned Norbert fiercely.

"Miserable fool!" said De Croisenois. "On guard, then, and may heaven decide the issue!"

There was a sharp clash as their swords crossed, and the combat began with intense vigor.

The space upon which the rays of the lantern cast a glimmering and uncertain light was but a small one; and while one of the combatants was in complete shade the other was in the light, and exposed to thrusts which he could not see. This was fatal to Croisenois, and, as he took a step forward, Norbert made a fierce lunge which pierced him to the heart.

The unfortunate man threw up his arms above his head; his sword escaping from his nerveless fingers and his knees bending under him, he fell heavily backwards without a word escaping from his lips. Thrice he endeavored to regain his feet, and thrice he failed in his attempts. He strove to speak, but he could only utter a few unintelligible words, for his life blood was suffocating him. A violent convulsion shook every limb, then arose a long, deep-drawn

sigh, and then silence—George de Croisenois was dead.

Yes, he was dead, and Norbert de Champdoce stood over him with a wild look of terror in his eyes, and his hair bristling upon his head, as a shudder of horror convulsed his body. Then, for the first time, he realized the horror of seeing a man slain by his own hand; and yet what affected Norbert most was not that he had killed George de Croisenois—for he believed that justice was on his side and that he could not have acted otherwise—but the perspiration stood in thick beads upon his forehead, as he thought that he must raise up that still warm and quivering body, and place it in its unhallowed grave.

He hesitated and reasoned with himself for some time, going over all the reasons that made dispatch so absolutely necessary—the risk of detection, and the honor of his name.

He stooped and prepared to raise it, but recoiled again before his hands had touched the body. His heart failed him, and once more he assumed an erect position. At last he nerved himself, grasped the body, and, with an immense exertion of strength, hurled it into the gaping grave. It fell with a dull, heavy sound which seemed to Norbert like the roar of an earthquake. The violent emotions which he had endured had ended by acting on his brain, and, snatching up the spade which his late antagonist had used with so unpracticed a hand, shovelled the earth upon the body, flattened down the ground, and finally covered it with straw and dead leaves.

“And this is the end of a man who wronged a Champdoce; yes, his life has paid the penalty of his deed.”

All at once, a few paces off, in the deep shadow of the trees, he thought that he detected the outline of a human head with a pair of glittering eyes fixed upon him. The shock was so terrible that for an instant he stopped and nearly fell, but he quickly recovered himself, and, snatching up his blood-stained sword, he dashed to the spot where he fancied he had seen this terrible witness of his deed.

At this rapid movement on the part of the Duke, a figure started up with a faint cry for mercy. It was a woman.

She fled with inconceivable swiftness towards the house, but he caught her just as she had gained the steps.

"Have mercy on me!" cried she. "Do not murder me!"

He dragged her back to where the lantern was hanging. She was a girl of about eighteen years of age, ugly, badly clothed, and dirty looking. Norbert looked earnestly at her, but could not say who she was, though he was certain that he had seen her face somewhere.

"Who are you?" asked he.

She burst into a flood of tears, but made no other reply.

"Come," resumed he, in more soothing accents; "you shall not be hurt. Tell me who you are."

"Caroline Schimmel."

"Caroline?" repeated he.

"Yes. I have been in your service as scullery maid for the last three months."

"How is it that you did not go to the wedding with the rest of them?"

"It was not my fault. I was asked, and I did so

long to go, but I was too shabby; I had no finery to put on. I am very poor now, for I have only fifteen francs a month, and none of the other maids would lend me anything to wear."

"How did you come into the garden?" asked Norbert.

"I was very miserable, and was sitting in the garret crying, when I suddenly saw a light down there. I thought it was theirs, and crept down the back stairs."

"And what did you see?"

"I saw it all."

"All what?"

"When I got down here, you and the other were digging. I thought you were looking for money! but ah, dear me! I was wrong. Then the other began to say something, but I couldn't catch a word; then you fought. Oh, it was awful! I was so frightened, I could not take my eyes off you. Then the other fell down on his back."

"And then?"

"Then," she faltered, "you buried him, and then
——"

"Could you recognize this—this other?"

"Yes, my lord duke, I did."

"Had you ever seen him before? Do you know who he was?"

"No."

"Listen to me, my girl. If you know how to hold your tongue, if you can forget all you have seen to-night, it will be the greatest piece of luck for you in the world that you did not go to this wedding."

"I won't open my lips to a soul, my lord duke. Hear me swear, I won't. Oh, do believe me!"

"Very well; keep your oath, and your fortune is made. To-morrow I will give you a fine, large sum of money, and you can go back to your village and marry some honest fellow to whom you have taken a fancy."

"Are you not making game of me?"

"No; go to your room and go to bed, as if nothing had happened. Jean will tell you what to do to-morrow, and you must obey him as you would me."

"Oh, my lord! oh, my lord duke!"

Unable to contain her delight, she mingled her laughter and her tears.

And Norbert knew that his name, his honor, and perhaps his life were in the hands of a wretched girl like this. All the peace and happiness of his life were gone, and he felt like some unhappy prisoner who through the bars of his dungeon sees his jailer's children sporting with lighted matches and a barrel of gunpowder. He was at her mercy, for well he knew that it would resolve into this—that the smallest wish of this girl would become an imperative command that he dared not disobey. However absurd might be her whims and caprices, she had but to express them, and he dared not resist. What means could he adopt to free himself from this odious state of servitude? He knew but of one—the dead tell no tales. There were four persons who were the sharers of Norbert's secret. First, the writer of the anonymous letter; then the Duchess; then Caroline Schimmel; and, finally, Jean, to whom he must confide all. With these thoughts ringing through his brain, Norbert carefully effaced the last traces of the duel, and then bent his steps towards his wife's chamber.

He had expected to find her still unconscious on the

spot where he had left her lying. Marie was seated in an armchair by the side of the fire; her face was terribly pale, and her eyes sparkling with the inward flame that consumed her.

"My honor has been vindicated; the Marquis de Croisenois is no more; I have slain your lover, madame."

Marie did not start; she had evidently prepared herself for this blow. Her face assumed a more proud and disdainful expression, and the light in her dark eyes grew brighter and brighter.

"You are wrong," said she, "M. de Croisenois was not my lover."

"You need no longer take the pains to lie; I ask nothing now."

Marie's utter calmness jarred inexpressibly upon Norbert's exasperated frame of mind. He would have given much to change this mood of hers, which he could not at all understand. But in vain did he say the most cutting things, and coupled them with bitter taunts, for she had reached a pitch of exaltation far above his sarcasms and abuse.

"I am not lying," answered she frigidly. "What should I gain by it? What more have I to gain in this world? You desire to learn the truth; here it is then: It was with my knowledge and permission that George was here to-night. He came because I had asked him to do so, and I left the gate in the garden wall open, so as to facilitate his entrance. He had not been more than five minutes in your room when you arrived, and he had never been there before. It would have been easy for me to have left you; but as I bear your name, I could not dishonor it. As you entered, he was entreating me to fly with him; both his

life and his honor were in my hands. Ah, why did I pause for an instant? Had I consented, he would still have been alive, and in some far distant country he and I might have learned that this world has something more to offer than unhappiness and misery. Yes, as you will have it, you shall have all. I loved him ere I knew that you even existed. I have only my own folly to blame, only my own unhappy weakness to deplore. Why did I not steadily refuse to become your wife? You say that you have slain George. Not so, for in my heart his memory will ever remain bright and ineffaceable."

"Beware!" said Norbert furiously, "beware if ____"

"Ah, would you kill me, too? Do not fear resistance; my life is a blank without him. He is dead; let death come to me; it would be a welcome visitant. The only kindness that you could now bestow upon me would be my death-blow. Strike then, and end it all! In death we should be united, George and I; and as my limbs grew stiff and my breath passed away, my whitening lips would murmur words of thanks."

Norbert listened to her, overwhelmed by the intensity of her passion, and marvelling that he had any power to feel after the terrible event which had fallen upon his devoted head.

Could this be Marie, the soft and gentle woman, who spoke with such passionate vehemence and boldly braved his anger? How could he have so misunderstood her? He forgot all his anger in his admiration. She seemed to him to have undergone a complete change. There was an unearthly style of beauty around her—her eyes blazed and shone with the lurid light of a far-distant planet, while her wealth of raven

hair fell in disordered masses on her shoulders. It was passion, real passion, that he beheld to-night, not that mere empty delusion which he had so long followed blindly. Marie was really capable of a deep-rooted feeling of adoration for the man she loved, while with Diana de Mussidan, the woman with the fair hair and the steel-blue eyes, love was but the lust of conquest, or the desire to jeer at a suitor's earnestness. Ah, what a revelation had been made to him now! and what would he not have given to have wiped out the past! He advanced towards her with outstretched arms.

"Marie!" said he, "Marie!"

"I forbid you to call me Marie!" shrieked she wildly.

He made no reply, but still advanced towards her, when, with a terrible cry, she recoiled from him.

"Blood!" she screamed, "ah, heavens! he has blood upon his hands!"

Norbert glanced downwards; upon the wristband of his shirt there was a tell-tale crimson stain.

The Duchess raised her hand, and pointed towards the door.

"Leave me," said she, with an extraordinary assumption of energy, "leave me; the secret of your crime is safe; I will not betray you or hand you over to justice. But remember that a murdered man stands between us, and that I loathe and execrate you."

Rage and jealousy tortured Norbert's soul. Though George de Croisenois was no more, he was still his successful rival in Marie's love.

"You forget," said he in a voice hoarse with passion, "that you are mine, and that, as your husband,

I can make your existence one long scene of agony and misery. Keep this fact in your memory. Tomorrow, at six o'clock, I shall be here."

The clock was striking two as he left the house and hastened to the spot where he had left his horse.

The soldier was still pacing backwards and forwards, leading the Duke's horse.

"My faith!" said the man, as soon as he perceived Norbert, "you pay precious long visits. I had only leave to go to the theatre, and I shall get into trouble over this."

"Pshaw! I promised you twenty francs. Here are two louis."

The soldier pocketed the money with an air of delighted surprise, and Norbert sprang into the saddle.

An hour later he gave the appointed signal upon the window pane, behind which the trusty Jean was waiting.

"Take care that no one sees you as you take the horse to the stable," said the Duke hastily, "and then come to me, for I want your assistance and advice."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE HEIR OF CHAMPDOCE.

As long as she was in Norbert's presence, anger and indignation gave the Duchess de Champdoce strength; but as soon as she was left alone her energy gave way, and with an outburst of tears she sank, half fainting, upon a couch. Her despair was augmented from the fact that she felt that had it not

been for her, George de Croisenois would never have met with his death.

"Had I not made that fatal appointment," she sobbed, "he would be alive and well now; my love has slain him as surely as if my hand had held the steel that has pierced his heart!"

She at first thought of seeking refuge with her father, but abandoned the idea almost immediately, for she felt that he would refuse to enter into her grievance, or would say, "You are a duchess; you have an enormous fortune. You must be happy; and if you are not, it must be your own fault."

In terrible anguish the night passed away; and when her maids entered the room, they found her lying on the floor, dressed as she had been the night before. No one knew what to do, and messengers were dispatched in all directions to summon medical advice.

Norbert's return was eagerly welcomed by the terrified domestics, and a general feeling of relief pervaded the establishment.

The Duke had grown very uneasy as to what might have happened during his absence. He questioned the servants as diplomatically as he could; and while he was thus engaged, the doctors who had been summoned arrived.

After seeing their patient, they did not for a moment conceal their opinion that the case was a very serious one, and that it was possible that she might not survive this mysterious seizure. They impressed upon Norbert the necessity of the Duchess being kept perfectly quiet and never left alone, and then departed, promising to call again in the afternoon.

Their injunctions were unnecessary, for Norbert had established himself by his wife's bedside, resolved

not to quit her until her health was re-established or death had intervened to release her from suffering. Fever had claimed her for its own, and in her delusion she uttered many incoherent ravings, the key to which Norbert alone held, and which filled his soul with dread and terror.

This was the second time that Norbert had been compelled to watch over a sick-bed, guarding within his heart a terrible secret. At Champdoce he had sat by his father's side, who could have revealed the terrible attempt against his life; and now it was his wife that he was keeping a watch on, lest her lips should utter the horrible secret of the death of George de Croisenois.

Compelled to remain by his wife's side, the thoughts of his past life forced themselves upon him, and he shuddered to think that, at the age of twenty-five, he had only to look back upon scenes of misery and crime, which cast a cloud of gloom and horror over the rest of his days. What a terrible future to come after so hideous a past!

He had another source of anxiety, and frequently rang the bell to inquire for Jean.

"Send him to me as soon as he comes," was his order.

At last Jean made his appearance, and his master led him into a deeply-recessed window.

"Well?" asked he.

"All is settled, my lord; be easy."

"And Caroline?"

"Has left. I gave her twenty thousand francs, and saw her into the train myself. She is going to the States, where she hopes to find a cousin who will marry her; at least, that is her intention."

Norbert heaved a deep sigh of relief, for the thought of Caroline Schimmel had laid like a heavy burden upon his heart.

"And how about the other matter?" asked he.

The old man shook his head.

"What has been done?"

"I have got hold of a young fellow who believes that I wish to send him to Egypt, to purchase cotton. He will start to-morrow, and will post the two letters written by the Marquis de Croisenois, one at Marseilles, and the other at Cairo."

"Do you not think that these letters will insure my perfect security?"

"I see that any indiscretion on our agent's part, or a mere act of carelessness, may ruin us."

"And yet it must be done."

After consulting together, the doctors had given some slight hope, but the position of the patient was still very precarious. It was suggested that her intellect might be permanently affected; and during all these long and anxious hours Norbert did not even dare to close his eyes, and it was with feelings of secret terror that he permitted the maids to perform their duties around their invalid mistress.

Upon the fourth day the fever took a favorable turn, and Marie slept, giving Norbert time to review his position.

How was it that Madame de Mussidan, who was a daily visitor, had not appeared at the house since that eventful night? He was so much surprised at this that he ventured to dispatch a short note, acquainting her of the sudden illness of his wife.

In an hour he received a reply, merely containing these words:—

"Can you account for M. de Mussidan's sudden determination to spend the winter in Italy? We leave this evening. Farewell.—D."

And so she, too, had abandoned him, taking with her all the hopes he had in the world. Still, however, his infatuation held its sway over him, and he forced himself to believe that she felt this separation as keenly as he did.

Some five days afterwards, when the Duchess de Champdoce had been pronounced out of immediate danger, one of the doctors took him mysteriously aside. He said that he wanted to inform the Duke of a startling, but he hoped a welcome piece of intelligence—that the Duchess de Champdoce was in the way to present the Duke with an heir to his title and estates.

It was the knowledge of this that had decided her not to leave her husband's roof, and had steeled her heart against George's entreaties. She had hesitated, and had almost yielded to the feelings of her heart, when this thought troubled her.

Unfortunately for herself, she had not disclosed her condition to her husband, and, at the news, all Norbert's former suspicions revived, and his wrath rose once more to an extraordinary height. His lips grew pale, and his eyes blazed with fury.

"Thank you, doctor!" exclaimed he. "Of course, the news is very welcome. Good-by. I must go to the Duchess at once."

Instead of going to his wife, Norbert went and locked himself up in his own private apartment. He had need to be alone, in order to look this fresh complication more fully in the face, and the more he reflected, the more convinced was he that he had been

the dupe of a guilty woman. He had begun by doubting, and he ended by being convinced that the child was not his. Was he to accept this degraded position, and rear up as his own the child of George de Croisenois? The child would grow up under his own roof-tree, bear his name, and finally inherit his title and gigantic fortune. "Never," muttered he. "No, never; for sooner than that, I will crush the life out of it with my own hands!"

The more he thought how he should have to deceive the world by feigning love and lavishing caresses upon this interloping child, the more he felt that it would be impossible to perform his task. He had, however, much to do at present. The sudden and mysterious disappearance of George de Croisenois had created much stir and excitement in Paris, and the letter which had been posted by the agent dispatched by Jean, instead of explaining matters, had only deepened the mystery and caused fresh grounds of surprise to arise in the minds of the friends of the Marquis and the police authorities. But the disappearance of the Marquis was only a nine days' wonder after all. Some other strange event excited the attention of the fickle public, and George de Croisenois' name was no longer in every one's mouth.

Norbert breathed freely once more, for he felt his secret was safe.

Diana de Mussidan had now been absent for three months and had not vouchsafed him a single line. A river of blood flowed between him and his wife. Among all his acquaintances he had not one friend on whom he could rely, and his reckless life of debauchery and dissipation began to weary him. His thoughts were always fixed upon this coming child.

How could he ever bear to bring it up as if it were his own? He had thought over many plans, but always trusted to the first one he had conceived. This was to procure an infant, it mattered not where or by what means, and substitute it for the new-born child of his wife. As time rolled on, he became more imbued with this idea, and at length he summoned Jean to him, that faithful old man, who served his master so truly out of affection to the house of Champdoce.

For the first time Jean raised an objection to his master's proposal, declaring that such an act would bring shame and misery upon all concerned in it; but when he found that Norbert was determined, and that, if he refused, his master would employ some less scrupulous agent, he, with tears in his eyes and a tremor in his voice, promised obedience.

About a month later, Jean came to his master and suggested that it would be best the *accouchement* of the Duchess should take place at a château belonging to the Champdoce family near Montroire, and that this once done, he, Jean, would arrange everything. The removal was effected almost at once, and the Duchess, who was a mere shadow of her former self, made no opposition. She and Norbert lived together as perfect strangers. Sometimes a week would elapse without their meeting; and if they had occasion to communicate, it was done by letter.

The estate to which Norbert had conducted the Duchess was admirably adapted for his purpose. The unhappy woman was entirely alone in the world, and had no one to whom she could apply for protection or advice. Her father, the Count de Puymandour, had died suddenly a month before, owing to chagrin caused by his defeat when a candidate for a seat in

the Chamber. The brief note from the despairing mother, in which followed the words, "Have mercy! Give me back my child!" hardly describes the terrible events that occurred in the lonely Château to which Norbert had conducted his innocent victim.

The child of the Duchess de Champdoce had been placed by Jean in the Foundling Hospital at Vendôme, while the infant that was baptized with the grandiloquent names of Anne René, Gontran de Duepair, Marquis de Champdoce, was the bastard child of a girl living near Montroire, who was known in the neighborhood as "The Witch."

CHAPTER XIX.

MASCARIN SPEAKS.

THIS was the conclusion of the manuscript handed by Mascarin to Paul Violaine, and the young man laid down the roll of paper with the remark, "And that is all."

He had consumed six hours in reading this sad account of the follies and crimes of the owners of illustrious names.

Mascarin had listened with the complacency of an author who hears his own work read aloud to him, but all the while he was keenly watching him beneath his spectacles and the faces of his companions. The effect that was produced was immense, and exactly what he had anticipated. Paul, Hortebise, and Catenac gazed upon each other with faces in which astonishment at the strange recital, and then at the power

of the man who had collected these facts together, were mingled, and Catenac was the first who spoke. The sound of his own voice seemed gradually to dispel the vague sense of apprehension that hung about the office.

"Aha!" cried he, "I always said that our old friend Mascarin would make his mark in literature. As soon as his pen touches the paper the business man vanishes; we have no longer a collection of dry facts and proofs, but the stirring pages of a sensational novel."

"Do you really consider that as a mere romance?" asked Hortebise.

"It reads like one certainly; you must allow that."

"Catenac," remarked Mascarin in his bitterly sarcastic tone, "is best able to pronounce upon the truth or falsehood of this narrative, as he is the professional adviser of this same Duke de Champdoce, the very Norbert whose life has just been read to you."

"I do not deny that there is some slight foundation to it," returned the lawyer.

"Then what is it that you do deny?"

"Nothing, nothing; I merely objected, more in jest than otherwise, to the sentimental manner in which you have set forward your case."

"Catenac," remarked Mascarin, addressing the others, "has received many confidential communications from his noble client, which he has not thought fit to communicate to us; and though he fancied that we were drifting into quicksands and among breakers, he displayed no signal of warning to save us from our danger, hoping, like a true friend, that, by this means, he might get rid of us."

Catenac began to utter protestations and denials, but Mascarin cut him short with an imperative gesture, and, after a long pause, he again commenced,—

“You must understand that my inquisitors have had but little to do in this affair, for my work has chiefly consisted in putting fragments together. It is not to me that you are indebted for the sensational (I think that that was the term used) part of my story, but rather to Madame de Mussidan and Norbert de Champdoce. I am sure that some of the phrases must have struck you considerably.”

“It seems to me,” objected Catenac—

“Perhaps,” broke in Mascarin, “you have forgotten the correspondence which the Countess de Mussidan preserved so carefully—both his letters and her own, which Norbert returned to her.”

“And have we those?”

“Of course we have, only there is a perfect romance contained in these letters. What I have read is a mere bald extract from them; and this is not all. The man who assisted me in the unravelling of this dark intrigue was the original promoter—Daumon.”

“What, is the Counsellor still alive?”

“Certainly, and you know him. He is not quite in his first youth, and has aged somewhat, but his intellect is as brilliant as ever.”

Catenac grew serious. “You tell me a great deal,” said he.

“I can tell you even more. I can tell you that the account of the deed was written under the dictation of Caroline Schimmel,” broke in Mascarin. “This unlucky woman started for Havre, intending to sail for the United States, but she got no further than that

seaport town, for the good looks and the persuasive tongue of a sailor induced her to alter her plans. As long as her money lasted he remained an ardent lover, but vanished with the disappearance of her last thousand-franc note. Starving and poverty-stricken, Caroline returned to Paris and to the Duke de Champdoce, who accepted her constant demands for money as a penitent expiation of his crime. But she remained faithful to her oath; and had it not been for her terrible propensity for drink, Tantaine would never have succeeded in extracting her secret from her. If, on her recovery from her fit of drink coma, she recollects what has taken place, she will, if I read her character right, go straight to the Duke de Champdoce and tell him that his secret has passed into better hands."

At this idea being promulgated, Catenac started from his chair with a loud oath.

"Did you think," asked Mascarin, "that I should feel so much at my ease if I found that there was the slightest risk? Let us consider what it is that Caroline can say. Who is it that she can accuse of having stolen her secret from her? Why, only a poor old wretch named Tantaine. How can the Duke possibly trace any connection between this miserable writer and Catenac?"

"Yes, I think that it would be a difficult task."

"Besides," pursued Mascarin, "what have we to fear from the Duke de Champdoce? Nothing, as far as I can see. Is he not as much in our power as the woman he formerly loved—Diana de Mussidan? Do we not hold the letters of both of them, and do we not know in what corner of his garden to dig to discover a damning piece of evidence? Remember that there will be no difficulty in identifying the skeleton,

for at the time of his disappearance, Croisenois had about him several Spanish doubloons, a fact which was given to the police."

"Well," said Catenac, "I will act faithfully. Tell me your plans, and I will let you know all that I hear from the Duke."

For a moment a smile hovered upon Mascarin's lips, for this time he placed firm reliance upon the good faith of the lawyer.

"Before we go further," said he, "let me conclude this narrative which Paul has just read. It is sad and simple. The united ages of the Duke and Duchess did not exceed fifty years; they had unlimited wealth, and bore one of the grandest historic names of France; they were surrounded with every appliance of luxury, and yet their lives were a perfect wreck. They simply dragged on an existence and had lost all hopes of happiness, but they made up their minds to conceal the skeleton of their house in the darkest cupboard, and the world knew nothing of their inner life. The Duchess suffered much in health, and merely went out to visit the sick and poor. The Duke worked hard to make up for the deficiencies of his early education, and made a name and reputation throughout Europe."

"And how about Madame de Mussidan?" asked Catenac.

"I am coming to that," returned Mascarin. "With that strange determination that fills the hearts of our women, she did not consider her revenge complete until Norbert learned that she was the sole instrument in heaping the crowning sorrow of his life on his head; and on her return from Italy, she sent for him and told him everything. Yes, she absolutely had the audacity to tell him that it was she who had done her

best to throw his wife into De Croisenois' arms. She told him that it was she who had worked the arrangements for the meeting, and had written the anonymous letter."

"Why did he not kill her?" cried Hortebise. "Had she not all his letters, and taunted him with the production of them? Ah, my dear friends, do not let us flatter ourselves that we have the sole monopoly of blackmailing. This high-born Countess plunged her hand into the Duke's coffers just as if she had been a mere adventuress. It is only ten days ago that she borrowed—you will observe the entry of it as a loan—a large sum to settle an account of Van Klopen's. But let us now speak of the child who took the place of the boy whom the Duchess brought into the world. You know him, doctor?"

"Yes, I have often seen him. He was a good-looking young fellow."

"He was, but he was a degraded scoundrel, after all. He was educated and brought up without regard to expense, but he always displayed low tastes, and, had he lived, would have brought discredit on the name he bore. He was a thorn in the side of the Duke and Duchess, and I believe that they felt great relief when he died of brain fever, brought on by a drunken debauch. His parents, or those whom he supposed to be such, were present at his death-bed, for they had learned to consider their sorrows as the just chastisement of heaven. The boy having died, the family of Champdoce seemed likely to become extinct, and then it was that Norbert decided to do what his wife had long urged upon him, to seek for and reclaim the child which he had caused to be placed in the Foundling Hospital at Vendôme. It went against his pride to

diverge from the course he had determined on as best, but doubts had arisen in his mind as to his wife's guilt, and Diana's confessions had reassured him as to the paternity of the missing boy. It was thus with hope in his heart, and furnished with every necessary document, that he started for Vendôme; but there a terrible disappointment awaited him. The authorities of the hospital, on consulting the register, found that a child had been admitted on the day and hour mentioned by Norbert, and that his description of the infant's clothing tallied exactly with the entries. But the child was no longer in the hospital, and there was no clue to his whereabouts. He had, at the age of twelve, been apprenticed to a tanner, but he had run away from his master, and the most active and energetic search had failed to arrest the fugitive."

Catenac listened to all these exact details with an unpleasant feeling gnawing at his heart, for he saw that his associates knew everything, and he had relied upon again securing their confidence by furnishing them with those details which were evidently already known to them. Mascarin, however, affected not to notice his surprise, and went on with his narrative.

"This terrible disappointment will certainly kill the Duke de Champdoce. It seemed to him that after having so bitterly expiated the crimes and follies of his youth, he might hope to have his old age in peace and quiet, with a son who might cheer the loneliness of his desolate fireside. His countenance, as soon as he appeared before the Duchess, who had been expecting his return in an agony of anguish and suspense, told her at once that all hope had fled. In a few days, however, the Duke had perfectly recovered from the shock, and had decided that to give up the

search would be an act of madness. The world is wide, and a friendless boy, without a name, difficult to trace; but, with ample funds, almost anything can be done, and he was willing to sacrifice both life and fortune to attain his object. So immense were his resources, that it was easy for him to employ the most skilful detectives; and whatever the result might be, he had come to look upon this task as a sacred duty to which he ought to devote all the remaining years of his life. He swore that he would never rest or cease from his search until he had been furnished with the indisputable proofs of the existence or the death of his son. He did not confide all this project to the Duchess; for he feared—and he had by this time learned to have some consideration for her enfeebled frame—her health had given way so completely that any extra degree of excitement might prove fatal to her. He, therefore, as a preliminary, applied to that element which in the Rue de Jérusalem acts as the terrestrial guardians of society. But the police could do nothing for the Duke. They heard what he had to say gravely, took notes, told him to call again later on, and there was an end to their proceedings. It can easily be understood that the rank and position of the Duke prevented him from making his name known in his inquiries; and as he dared not divulge the whole truth, he gave such a bald version of the case, that it excited no deep feelings of interest. At last he was sent to a certain M. Lecoq."

To Paul's utter astonishment, the name produced a sudden and terrible effect upon Doctor Hortebise, who started to his feet as if propelled from his chair by the unexpected application of some hidden motive power, and, fingering the locket that hung from his

chain, gazed round upon his associates with wild and excited eyes.

"Stop!" cried he. "If that fellow Lecoq is to put his nose into your case, I withdraw; I will have nothing to do with it, for it is certain to be a failure."

He appeared to be so thoroughly frightened, that Catenac condescended to smile.

"Yes, yes," said he, "I can understand your alarm; but be at ease; Lecoq has nothing to do with us."

But Hortebise was not satisfied with Catenac's assurance, and looked for confirmation from Mascarin.

"Lecoq has nothing to do with us," repeated his friend. "The fool said that his position prevented him from giving his time to any investigation of a private nature, which, by the way, is quite true. The Duke offered him a heavy sum to throw up his appointment, but he refused, saying he did not work for money, but from love for his profession."

"Which is quite true," interrupted Catenac.

"However," continued Mascarin, "to cut short my narrative, the Duke, on the refusal of Lecoq to act, applied to Catenac."

"Yes," answered the lawyer, "and the Duke has placed the conduct of the search in my hands."

"Have you formed any plan of action?"

"Not at present. The Duke said, 'Ask every living soul in the world, if you can succeed in no other way'; this is all the instruction he has given me; and," added he, with a slight shrug of his shoulders, "I am almost of Perpignan's opinion, that the search will be a fruitless one."

"Lecoq did not think so."

"He only said that he believed he should succeed if he were to take it in hand."

"Well," answered Mascarin coldly, "I have been certain of success from the very commencement."

"Have you been to Vendôme?" asked Catenac.

"Never mind, I have been somewhere, and at this very moment could place my hand upon the shoulder of the heir to the dukedom of Champdoce."

"Are you in earnest?"

"I was never more in earnest in my life. I have found him; only as it is impossible for me to appear in the matter, I shall delegate to you and Perpignan the happiness of restoring the lost son to his father's arms."

Catenac glanced from Mascarin to Hortebise, and from them to Paul, and seemed to wish to be certain that he was not being made an object of ridicule.

"And why do you not wish to appear in the matter?" asked he at last, in a suspicious tone of voice. "Do you foresee some risk, and want me to bear the brunt?"

Mascarin shrugged his shoulders.

"First," said he, "I am not a traitor, as you know well enough; and then the interests of all of us depend on your safety. Can one of us be compromised without endangering his associates? You know that this is impossible. All you have to do is to point out where the traces commence; others will follow them at their own risk, and all you will have to do will be to look calmly on."

"But——"

Mascarin lost his patience, and with a deep frown, replied,—

"That is enough. We require no more argument. I am the master, and it is for you to obey."

When Mascarin adopted this tone, resistance was

out of the question; and as he invariably made all yield to him, it was best to obey with a good grace, and Catenac relapsed into silence, completely subjugated and very much puzzled.

"Sit down at my desk," continued Mascarin, "and take careful notes of what I now say. Success is, as I have told you, inevitable, but I must be ably backed. All now depends upon your exactitude in obeying my orders; one false step may ruin us all. You have heard this, and cannot say that you are not fully warned."

CHAPTER XX.

A SUDDEN CHECK.

CATENAC seated himself at the writing-table without a word, concealing his anger and jealousy beneath a careless smile. Mascarin was no longer the plotter consulting with his confederates; he was the master issuing his orders to his subordinates. He had now taken from a box some of those square pieces of pasteboard, which he spent his time in reading over.

"Try and not miss one word of what I am saying," remarked he, bending his keen glance upon Paul; then, turning to Catenac, he continued, "Can you persuade the Duke de Champdoce and Perpignan to start for Vendôme on Saturday?"

"Perhaps I may be able to do so."

"I want a Yes or No. Can you or can you not make these people go there?"

"Well, yes, then."

"Very well. Then, on going to Vendôme, you will stop at the Hotel de Porte."

"Hotel de Porte," repeated Catenac, as he made a note of the name.

"Upon the day of your arrival at Vendôme," continued Mascarin, "you could do very little. Your time would be taken up in resting after your journey, and perhaps you may make a few preliminary inquiries. It will be on Sunday that you will go to the hospital together, and make the same inquiries which the Duke formerly made by himself. The lady superior is a woman of excellent taste and education, and she will do all that she can to be useful to you. Through her you will be able to obtain the boy's description, and the date on which he left the hospital to be apprenticed to a tanner. She will tell you that, disliking the employment, he ran away from them at the age of twelve and a half years, and that since then no trace of him has been found. You will hear from her that he was a tall, well-built lad, looking two years older than he really was, with an intelligent cast of features, and keen, bright eyes, full of health and good looks. He had on, on the day of his disappearance, blue and white striped trousers, a gray blouse, a cap with no peak, and a spotted silk cravat. Then, to assist you still further in your researches she will add that he carried in a bundle, enveloped in a red plaid cotton handkerchief, a white blouse, a pair of gray cloth trousers, and a pair of new shoes."

Catenac watched Mascarin as he was speaking with an expression of ill-concealed enmity.

"You are well informed, on my word," muttered he.

"I think I am," returned Mascarin. "After this you will go back to the hotel, and not until then—do

you understand?—and you will consult as to the first steps to be taken. The plan proposed by Perpignan is an excellent one.”

“What! you know it then?”

“Of course I do. He proposed to divide Vendôme and its suburbs into a certain number of circles, and to make a house-to-house visitation in each of them. Let him go to work in this manner. Of course, to do so, you will require a guide.”

“Of course we should require such a person.”

“Here, Catenac, I must leave a little to chance, for I am not quite omnipotent. But there are nine chances out of ten that your host will advise you to avail yourself of the services of a man called Fréjot, who acts as commissioner to the hotel. It may be, however, that he may designate some one else; but in that case you must, by some means or other, manage to employ the services of one other man.”

“What am I to say to him?”

“He understands what he is to do completely. Well, these preliminaries being settled, you will commence on Monday morning to search the suburb called Areines, under the guidance of Fréjot. Leave all responsibility to Perpignan, but make sure that the Duke comes with you. Ask the denizens a series of questions which you have prepared beforehand, such as ‘My friends, we are in search of a boy. A reward of ten thousand francs is offered to any one who will put us on his track. He must have left these parts in August, 1856, and some of you may have seen him.’”

Here Catenac stopped Mascarin.

“Wait a moment. Your own words are excellent; I will write them down.”

“All Monday,” continued Mascarin, “you will not make much progress, and for the next few days it will be the same, but on Saturday prepare yourself for a great surprise; for on that day Fréjot will take you to a large, lonely farmhouse, on the shores of a lake. This farm is held by a man named Lorgelin, who cultivates it with the assistance of his wife and his two sons. You will find these worthy people at dinner. They will offer you some refreshment, and you will accept. At the next word you utter you will find that they will glance at each other in a meaning manner, and the wife will exclaim, ‘Blessed Virgin! surely the gentleman is speaking of the poor lad we have so often talked about.’”

As Mascarin went on describing his arrangements, his whole form seemed to dilate, and his face shone with the knowledge of mastery and power. His voice was so clear and his manner so full of authority and command, that it carried conviction to the minds of all those who were seated listening to him. He spoke of what would happen as if he was dealing with an absolute certainty, and went on with such wonderful lucidity and force of reasoning that they seemed to be absolutely real.

“Oh! the farmer’s wife will say this, will she?” demanded Catenac, in a tone of the utmost surprise.

“Yes, this, and nothing more. Then the husband will explain that they found the poor lad half dead in a ditch by the side of the road, and that they took him home, and did what they could for him; and will add, this was in the beginning of September, 1856. You will offer to read him your description of the lad, but he will volunteer his own, which you will find exactly to tally with the one you have. Then Lorgelin

will tell you what an excellent lad he was, and how the farm seemed quite another place as long as he remained there. All the family will join in singing his praises—he was so good-tempered, so obliging, and at thirteen he could write like a lawyer's clerk. And then they will produce some of his writing in an old copy book. But after all the old woman, with a tear in her eye, will say that she found the lad had not much gratitude in his composition, for at the end of the following September he left the farm where he had received so much kindness. Yes, he left them to go away with some strolling performers. You will be absolutely affected by the words of these worthy people, and before you leave they will show you the clothes the lad left behind him."

Catenac was waiting for the conclusion, and then exclaimed, in rather a disappointed tone,—

"But I do not see what we have gained when Lorgelin's story has been repeated to us."

Mascarin raised his hand, as though to deprecate immediate criticism, and to ask for further patience on the part of his audience.

"Permit me to go on," said he. "You would now not know what to do, but Perpignan will not hesitate for a moment. He will tell you that he holds the end of the clue, and that all that remains to be done is to follow it up carefully."

"I think you overrate Perpignan's talents."

"Not a bit; each man to his own line of business. Besides, if he wanders off the course, you must get him back to it. In this you must act diplomatically. His first move will naturally be to take you to the office of the mayor of the township, where a register of licenses is kept. There you will find that in September, 1857,

there passed through the place a troop of travelling performers, consisting of nine persons, with the caravans, under the management of a man known as Vigoureux, nicknamed the Grasshopper."

Catenac rapidly jotted down these items. "Not so fast," said he; "I cannot follow you."

After a short pause, Mascarin continued.

"An attentive examination of the book will prove to you that no other troupe of itinerant performers passed through the place during that month; and it is clear that it must have been the Grasshopper with whom the lad went away. You will then peruse the man's description. Vigoureux, born at Bourgogne, Vosges. Age, forty-seven. Height, six feet two inches. Eyes, small and gray, rather near-sighted. Complexion dark. Third finger of left hand cut off at first joint. If you confound him, after reading this, with any other man of his profession, you must certainly be rather foolish."

"I shall now be able to find him," muttered Catenac.

"But that is Perpignan's business. You will see him put on an air of the greatest importance, and appear quite overjoyed at the news he has obtained at the office of the mayor. He will say that the inquiry at Vendôme is over, and that it will be best to return to Paris at once. Of course, you will make no objection. You will permit the Duke to make a handsome present to Lorgelin and Fréjot; but take care not to leave him behind you. I advise you to regain Paris without a moment's delay. The wily Perpignan, on your return, will at once take you to the head police office, where Vigoureux will have left his papers, like other men of his profession. If there is any difficulty in obtaining a sight of them, the Duke de Champdoce will act as a talisman. You will then discover that in

'1864, the man Vigoureux was sentenced to a term of imprisonment for disorderly conduct, and that he now keeps a wine-shop at the corner of the Rue Depleux."

"Stop a bit," said Catenac, "and let me take down the address."

"When you go there, you will recognize Vigoureux by the loss of his finger. He will at once admit that the lad followed him, and remained in the troupe for ten months. He was a good enough lad, but as grand as a peacock, and as lazy as a dormouse. He made great friends with an old Alsatian, called Fritz, who was the conductor of the orchestra, and by-and-by both were so fond of each other, that one day they went off in each other's company. Now you want to know what has become of Fritz? I know Vigoureux will get tired of this prolonged string of questions, and behave violently; then you will threaten him for having carried off a youth of tender years, and he will calm down, and become as mild as mother's milk, and will promise to gain information for you. In a week he will give the information that Fritz is to be found at the Hospital Magloire."

Absolutely dumb with surprise, the audience listened to these strange assertions, which dovetailed so exactly into each other, and seemed to have been the work of years of research.

"Fritz," continued Mascarin, "is a sly old dog. You will find an old, rickety, blue-eyed man at the hospital, and remember to tell the Duke de Champdoce that he must not put too much faith in him. This wily old Alsatian will tell you of all the sacrifices he made for the dear lad. He will tell you that he often went without his beer and tobacco in order to pay for the music lessons that he forced the boy to take. He will

tell you that he wanted to get him into the Government School of Music, for that he possessed great vocal and instrumental talent, and he cherished the hope of one day seeing him a great composer, like Weber or Mozart. I expect that this flow of self-praise will melt the heart of your client, for he will see that his son had made an effort to rise out of the mire by his own exertions, and will, in this energy, recognize one of the characteristics of the Champdoce family; and on the strength of this testimony he will almost be ready to accept the young man as his son."

Catenac had for some time past been striving to decipher the meaning hidden behind the inscrutable countenance of Mascarin, but in vain.

"Let us get on," said the lawyer impatiently. "All that you have told me I shall hear later on in the course of the inquiry."

"If your sagacity requires no further explanation from me," rejoined Mascarin, "you will, I trust, permit me to continue them for the benefit of our young friend, Paul Violaine. You will feel compassion when the Alsatian tells you of his sufferings, at the boys' description of him, and his subsequent prosperity in the Rue d'Arras. You had better listen to the old man as long as he continues to grumble on, the more so as you will detect in the rancor and bitterness of his remarks all the vexation of a disappointed speculator. He will confess to you besides that he subsists entirely on the bounty of the lad, whom he had stigmatized as an ungrateful villain. Of course, the Duke will have to leave behind him some testimonial of his pleasure, and you will hurry off to the Rue d'Arras. The proprietor of the house will tell you that some four years ago he got rid of this musician, the only one of his class who

had dared to establish himself there, and a small present and a few adroit questions will obtain for you the address of one of the young man's pupils, Madame Grandorge, a widow lady, residing in the Rue St. Louis. This lady will tell you that she does not know the address of her former master, but that he used to live at 57, Rue de la Harpe. From the Rue de la Harpe you will be sent to the Rue Jacob, and from thence to the Rue Montmartre, at the corner of the Rue Joquelet."

Mascarin paused, drew a long breath, and chuckled inwardly, as though at some excellent joke.

"Be comforted, Catenac," said he. "You have nearly reached the end of your journey. The portress at the house in the Rue Montmartre is the most obliging woman in the world. She will tell you that the musician still retains his rooms in the house, but that he resides there no longer, for he has made a lucky hit, and last month he married the daughter of a wealthy banker living close by. The young lady, Mademoiselle Rigal, saw him, and fell in love with him."

A clever man like Catenac should have foreseen what was coming, but he had not, and at this conclusion he uttered a loud exclamation of surprise.

"Yes, just so," said Mascarin, with an air of bland triumph. "The Duke de Champdoce will then drag you off to our mutual friend Martin Rigal, and there you will find our young *protégé*, the happy husband of the beautiful Flavia."

Mascarin drew himself up, and adjusted his glasses firmly on his nose.

"Now, my dear Catenac, show the liberality and amiability of your disposition by congratulating our friend Paul as Gontran, Marquis de Champdoce."

Hortebise, of course, knew what was coming; he knew the lines of the plot of the play as if he had been a joint author of it, and was as much excited as if he were assisting at a first rehearsal.

"Bravo!" he exclaimed, clapping his hands together. "Bravo, my dear Mascarin, you have excelled yourself to-day!"

Worried and perplexed as Paul had been, as Mascarin concluded he sank back in his chair, sick and giddy with emotion.

"Yes," said Mascarin in a clear and ringing voice, "I accept your praise without any affectation of false modesty. We have no reason to fear the intervention of that grain of sand which sometimes stops the working of the machine. Perpignan, poor fool though he is, will be our best friend, and will do our work quite unconsciously. Can the Duke retain any atom of suspicion after these minute investigations? Impossible. But to remove the slightest element of doubt, I have another and an additional plan. I will make him retrace the path upon which he has started. He shall take Paul to all these various places, and at all of them the statements will be even more fully confirmed. Paul, the son-in-law of Martin Rigal, the husband of Flavia, will be recognized in the Rue Montmartre, the Rue Jacob, and the Rue de la Harpe. He will be joyfully welcomed in the Rue d'Arras; Fritz will embrace his ungrateful pupil; Vigoureux will remind him of his skillful feats on the trapeze; the Lorgelin family will press the lad whom they gave shelter to, to their hearts, and this will happen, Catenac, because I will it, and because all the people from the portress in the Rue Montmartre to the Lorgelins are my slaves, and dare not disobey one single command which I may issue."

Catenac rose slowly and solemnly from his seat.

"I recognize your patience and ingenuity thoroughly, only I am going with one word to crush the fabric of hope that you have so carefully erected."

Catenac might be a coward, he might also be a traitor, but he was a clever and clear-sighted man too. Consequently Hortebise shivered as he heard these words, but Mascarin smiled disdainfully, basking in his dream of success.

"Go on then," said he.

"Well, then, let me tell you that you will not overreach and deceive the Duke."

"And why not, pray?" asked Mascarin. "But are you sure that I wish to deceive him? You have not been open with me, why should I be frank with you? Am I in the habit of confiding in those who do not repose confidence in me? Does Perpignan for a moment suspect the part that he is to play? Why may I not have judged it best to keep from you the fact that Paul is really the child you are seeking?"

Mascarin spoke so confidently that Catenac gazed upon him, hardly knowing to what conclusion to come, for his conscience was by no means clear. His intellect quickly dived into the depths of all probabilities, and yet he could not see in all these combinations any possible peril to himself.

"I only hope," said he, "that Paul is all that you represent him to be; but why all these precautions? Only, mark my words, the Duke has an infallible way of detecting, or rather of preventing, any attempt at imposition. It is ever thus, the most trivial circumstance will upset the best laid plans, and the inevitable destroy the combinations of the most astute intellect."

Mascarin interrupted his associate.

"Paul is the son of the Duke de Champdoce," said he decisively.

What was the meaning of this? Catenac felt that he was being played with, and grew angry.

"As you please; but you will, I presume, permit me to convince myself of the truth of this assertion."

Then, advancing towards Paul, the lawyer said,—

"Have the goodness to remove your coat."

Paul took it off, and threw it upon the back of a chair.

"Now," added Catenac, "roll up your right shirt sleeve to the shoulder."

Scarcely had the young man obeyed, and the lawyer cast a rapid glance at the bare flesh, than he turned to his associates and observed,—

"No, he is not the right man."

To his extreme surprise, Mascarin and Hortebise burst into a fit of unrestrained laughter.

"No," pursued the lawyer, "this is not the child who was sent to the Hospital of Vendôme, and the Duke will recognize this better than I can. You laugh, but it is because you do not know all."

"Enough," returned Mascarin, and then, turning to the doctor, he remarked, "Tell him, my friends, that we know more than he thinks."

"And so," said Hortebise, taking Paul's hand, "you are certain that this is not the lost child because he has not certain marks about him; but these will be seen upon the day on which Paul is introduced to the Duke, and legibly enough to satisfy the most unbelieving."

"What do you mean?"

"Let me explain in my own way. If in early childhood Paul had been scalded on his shoulder by boiling

water, he would have a scar whose appearance would denote its origin?"

Catenac nodded. "You are quite accurate," said he.

"Well, then, listen. Paul is coming home with me. I shall take him into my consulting-room; he will lie on a couch. I shall give him chloroform, for I do not wish him to suffer any pain. Mascarin will help me. Then I shall apply, on the proper part, a piece of flannel steeped in a certain liquid which is an invention of my own. I am not a fool, as you may have discovered before this; and in a drawer at home is a piece of flannel cut so as exactly to resemble the irregular outline of a scar of the kind you describe, and a few little bits here and there will do the rest of the work artistically. When the liquid has effected its work, which will be in ten minutes, I shall remove it, and apply an ointment, another invention of my own, to the wound; then I shall restore Paul to his senses, and go to dinner."

Mascarin rubbed his hands with delight.

"But you forget that a certain space of time is required to give a scar the appearance of not having been recent," objected Catenac.

"Let me speak," broke in the doctor. "If we only needed time—six months, say, or a year—we should postpone our concluding act until then; but I, Hortebise, assure you that in two months, thanks to another discovery of my own—will show you a scar that will pass muster, not perhaps before a fellow-practitioner, but certainly before the Duke."

Catenac's sunken eyes blazed as he thought of the prospective millions.

"May the devil fly away with all scruples!" cried he. "My friends, I am yours soul and body; you may rely on your devoted Catenac."

The doctor and Mascarin exchanged a look of triumph.

"Of course we share and share alike," observed the lawyer. "It is true that I come in rather late; but the part I play is a delicate and an important one, and you can do nothing without me."

"You shall have your share," answered Mascarin evasively.

"One word more," said the lawyer. "Do you think that the Duke has kept nothing back? The infant was hardly seen by him or the Duchess; but Jean saw it, and he, though very old and infirm, would come forward at any moment to defend the name and honor of the Champdoce family."

"Well, and what then?"

"Jean, you know, was against the substitution of another child. May he not have foreseen the chance of such a case as this arising?"

Mascarin looked grave. "I have thought of that before," returned he; "but what can be done?"

"I will find out," said Catenac. "Jean has the most implicit confidence in me, and I will question him."

The cold calmness of the lawyer had vanished, and Catenac only displayed the zealous eagerness of the man who, admitted at a late hour into an enterprise which he imagines will be lucrative, burns to do as much as he can to further it.

"But," added he, as an after-thought, "how can we be certain that there is no one to recognize Paul?"

"I can answer for that; his poverty had isolated him from all but a woman named Rose, and I took care that she should be sent to the prison of St. Lazare. At one time I was a little anxious, as I heard

that Paul had a patron; but he, as I have found out, was the Count de Mussidan, the murderer of Mont-louis, who, as you may have guessed, was Paul's father."

"We have nothing, then, to fear from that quarter," said the doctor.

"Nothing; and while you get on with your work, I will hurry on Paul's marriage with Rigal's daughter. But this will not prevent my busying myself in another quarter; for before a month Henri de Croise-nois will have floated his Company, and become the husband of Sabine de Mussidan."

"I think that it is about time for dinner," remarked Hortebise, and, turning to the *protégé* of the association, he added, "Come, Paul."

But Paul made no movement, and then for the first time it was seen that the poor boy had fainted, and they had to sprinkle cold water upon him before he regained consciousness.

"Surely," remarked the doctor, "it is not the idea of a trifling operation that you will not feel which has so frightened you?"

Paul shook his head. "It is not that," said he.

"What, then, is it?"

"Simply that the real man exists; I know him, and know where he lives."

"What do you mean?" they cried.

"I know him, I tell you—the son of the Duke de Champdoce."

"Let us hear all!" cried Mascarin, who was the first to come to his senses. "Explain yourself."

"Simply this. I know such a young man, and it was the thought of this that made me feel so ill. He is thirty-three. He was at the Foundling Hospital;

he left it at the age of twelve and a half years; and he has just such a scald on his shoulder, which he got when he was apprenticed to a tanner."

"And where," asked Mascarin quickly, "is this same young man? What is his name, and what does he do for a living?"

"He is a painter; his name is André, and he lives——"

A blasphemous oath from Mascarin interrupted him. "This is the third time," said he fiercely, "that this cursed fellow has crossed our path; but I swear that it shall be the last."

Hortebise and Catenac were livid with alarm.

"What do you intend to do?" asked they.

"I shall do nothing," answered he; "but you know that this André, in addition to being a painter, is an ornamental sculptor and house decorator, and so is often on lofty scaffolds. Have you never heard that accidents frequently happen to that class of people?"

CHAPTER XXI.

A MELANCHOLY MASHER.

WHEN Mascarin spoke of suppressing the man who stood in his way as easily as if he was alluding to extinguishing a candle, he was not aware that there was one circumstance which considerably enhanced the difficulty of his task, for André had been forewarned, and this note of warning had been sounded on the day on which he had received that letter from

Sabine, in which she spoke in such despairing terms of her approaching marriage, which she had been compelled to agree to to save the honor of her family. This feeling was strengthened by a long conversation he had had with M. de Breulh-Faverlay and the Viscountess de Bois Arden, in which it was unanimously decided that the Count and Countess de Mussidan were victims of some plot of which Henri de Croisenois was certainly one of the promoters. He had no conception on what side to look for the danger, but he had an instinctive feeling that it was impending. He prepared, therefore, to act on the defensive. It was not only his life that was in danger, but his love and his future happiness. M. de Breulh-Faverlay had also serious apprehensions for the safety of a man for whom he entertained so great a respect and regard.

"I would lay a heavy wager," said he, "that we have to do with some villainous blackmailers, and the difficulty of the business is, that we must do the work ourselves, for we dare not invite the aid of the police. We have no proof to offer, and the police will not stir a foot on mere suppositions, and we should not earn the thanks of those we are desirous of assisting if we called the attention of the law to certain acts in their past lives; for who can say what the terrible secret is, that some vile wretch holds over the heads of M. and Madame de Mussidan? and it is quite on the cards that the Count and the Countess might be compelled to join the blackmailers and oppose us. We must act with the greatest prudence and caution. Remember, that if you are out at night, you must avoid dark corners, for it would be the easiest thing in the world to put a knife into your back."

The conclusion that was arrived at, at this inter-

view, was that for the present André and De Breulh should cease to see each other so frequently. They felt convinced that a watch had been set on them, and that their intimacy would certainly be notified to De Croisenois; and of course they had every desire to cause him to imagine that they were not acting in any way together. The arrangement, therefore, that they entered into was that each should act from his own point of vantage against Henri de Croisenois, and that when necessary they should meet in the evening to compare notes in a small *café* in the Champs Elysées, not far from the house in which André was at work.

His courage was still as high as ever, but the first symptoms of rashness had vanished. He was a born diplomatist, and fully realized that cunning and treachery must be met by similar weapons. He must not break his engagement to M. Gandelu; but how could he superintend the workmen and keep an eye on Croisenois at the same time? Money was absolutely necessary, and yet he felt a strange disinclination to accept a loan from M. de Breulh. If he were to throw up his work, it would naturally create suspicion.

M. Gandelu had a shrewd head, and André, remembering the old man's kindness to him on all occasions, determined to confide the matter to him, and with this object he called on him the next morning as the clock was striking nine. His surprise was extreme when he saw Gaston de Gandelu in the courtyard. He was just the same looking Gaston, the lover of Madame de Chantemille, to the outward eye, but some grave calamity had evidently entirely changed the inner man. He was smoking his cigar with an air

of desperation, and seemed to be utterly weary of the world and its belongings.

At the moment André entered the young man caught sight of him.

"Halloo!" said he; "here is my artistic friend. I lay ten to one that you have come to ask my father to do you a favor."

"You are quite right; is he at home?"

"The governor is in the sulks; he has shut himself up, and will not see me."

"You are joking."

"Not I; the old man is a regular despot, and I am sick of everything."

Noticing that one of the grooms was listening, Gaston had sufficient sense to draw André a little on one side.

"Do you know," asked he, "that the governor has docked my screw and vows that he will advertise himself as not responsible for the debts of yours truly; but I cannot think he will do so, for that would be a regular smash-up for me. You haven't such a trifle as ten thousand francs about you that you could lend me, have you? I'd give twenty thousand for the accommodation when I came of age."

"I must say——," began André.

"All right; never mind; I understand. If you had the ready, you wouldn't be hanging about here; but for all that, I must have the cash. Hang it all, I signed bills to that amount payable to Verminet. Do you know the fellow?"

"Not at all."

"Where were you dragged up? Why, he is the head of the Mutual Loan Society. The only nuisance

is, that to make matters run a bit smooth, I wrote down the wrong name. Do you tumble, eh?"

"But, great heavens! that is forgery," said André, aghast.

"Not a bit, for I always intended to pay; besides, I wanted the money to square Van Klopen. You know *him*, I suppose?"

"No."

"Well, he is the chap to dress a girl. I had those costumes for Zora from him; but it is out and out the governor's fault. Why did he drive me to desperation? Yes, it is all the old man's doing. He wasn't satisfied with pitching into me, but he collared that poor, helpless lamb and shut her up. She never did him any harm, and I call it a right down cowardly and despicable act to hurt Zora."

"Zora," repeated André, who did not recognize the name.

"Yes, Zora; you know; you had a feed with us one day."

"Yes, yes; you mean Rose."

"That's it; but I don't like any one to call her by that ugly, common name. Well, the governor has gone mad about her, and filed a complaint against her of decoying a minor, as if I was a fellow any one could decoy. Well, the end of it was, that she is now in the prison of St. Lazare."

The tears started to the young man's eyes as he related his grievance.

"Poor Zora," he added; "I was never mashed on a woman like I was on her. And then what a splendid form she was! Why, the hairdresser said he had never seen such hair in his life; and she is at St.

Lazare. As soon as the police came for her, her first thoughts were of me, and she shrieked out, 'Poor Gaston will kill himself when he hears of this.' The cook told me this, and added that her mistress's sufferings were terrible. And she is at St. Lazare. I tried to see her, but it was no go"; and here the boy's voice broke into a sob.

"Come," said André, "keep up your spirits."

"Ah! you shall see if, as soon as I am twenty-one, I don't marry her. I don't put all the blame on the old man. He has been advised by his lawyer, a beast by the name of Catenac. Do you know *him*?"

"No."

"You don't seem to know any one. Well, I shall send him a challenge to-morrow. I have got my seconds all ready. By the way, would you like to act for me? I can easily get rid of one of the others."

"I have had no experience in such matters."

"Ah, then you would be of no use. My seconds must put him into a regular blue funk."

"In that case——"

"No; I know what you are going to say: you mean that I had best look out for a military swell; but, after all, the matter lies in a nutshell. I am the insulted party, and draw pistols at ten paces. If that frightens him, he will make the governor drop all this rubbish."

Had his mind not been so much occupied, this rhodomontade on Gaston's part would have amused André very much, but now he asked himself what would be the quickest way to escape from him.

Just at this moment a servant emerged from the house.

"Sir," said he, addressing André, "my master has seen you from his window, and begs that you will go up to him at once."

"I will be with him immediately," answered André; and, holding out his hand to Gaston, he took leave of him with a few words of encouragement.

CHAPTER XXII.

A GENTLEMAN IN DIFFICULTIES.

WHEN André had got rid of the young man, and had been ushered into M. Gandelu's presence, the change in that gentleman's appearance struck him with horror. His eyes were red and swollen as if he had been weeping, but as soon as he caught sight of André his face brightened, and he welcomed him warmly.

"Oh, it does me good to see you, and I bless the fortunate chance that has brought you here to-day."

"It is not a very fortunate chance," answered André, as he shook his head sadly.

For the first time Gandelu noticed the air of gravity which marked the young man, and the shade of sorrow upon his brow.

"What ails you, André?" asked he.

"A great misfortune is hanging over me."

"What do you mean?"

"The naked truth and this misfortune may bring death and despair to me."

"I am your friend, my dear boy," said the old man, "and would gladly be of service to you. Tell me if I can be of any use?"

"I come to you to-day to ask a favor at your hands."

"And you thought of the old man, then? I thank you for doing so. Give me your hand; I like to feel the grasp of an honest man's hand; it warms my heart."

"It is the secret of my life that I am going to confide to you," said he, with some solemnity.

M. Gandelu made no reply, but struck his clenched fist upon his breast, as though to show that any secret confided to him would be locked up in the safe security of his heart.

Then André hesitated no longer, and, with the exception of giving names, told the whole story of his love, his ambitions, and his hopes, and gave a clear account of how matters stood.

"How can I help you?" asked M. Gandelu.

"Allow me," said André, "to hand over the work with which you have intrusted me to one of my friends. I will retain the responsibility, but will merely act as one of the workmen. This, to a certain extent, will give me my liberty, while at the same time I shall be earning a little money, which is just now of vast importance to me."

"Is that what you call a favor?"

"Certainly, and a very great one, too."

Gandelu rose hastily, and, opening an iron safe which stood in one corner of the room, and taking from it a bundle of banknotes, he placed them on the table before André with an expressive look, which meant, "Take what you desire."

The unlooked-for kindness of this man, who forgot all his own sorrows in his anxiety to relieve the necessities of another, affected André deeply.

"I do not need money," began he.

With a wave of his hand Gandelu inspired silence.

"Take these twenty thousand francs," said he, "and then I can tell you why I asked you to come upstairs."

A refusal would have wounded the old man deeply, and so André took the proffered loan.

Gandelu resumed his seat, and remained in gloomy silence for some time.

"My dear boy," said he, in a voice broken by emotion, "a day or two back you saw something of the trouble that I am laboring under. I have no longer any respect or esteem for that wretched fool, my son, Pierre."

André had already guessed that he had been incensed with reference to something connected with Gaston.

"Your son has behaved very foolishly," said he; "but remember he is very young."

A sad smile passed over the old man's face.

"My son is old in vice," replied he. "I have thought the matter over only too plainly. Yesterday he declared that he would kill himself. An absurd threat. Up to this time I have been culpably weak, and it is no use now to act in an opposite direction. The unhappy boy is infatuated with a degraded woman named Rose, and I have had her locked up; but I have made up my mind to let her out again, and also to pay his debts. It is weak folly, I allow; but what am I to do? I am his father after all; and while I cannot respect her, I must love him. He has almost broken my heart, but it was his to do as he liked with."

André made no reply, and Gandelu went on.

"I have not deceived myself; my son is ruined. I can but stand by and wait for the end. If this Rose is not everything that is bad, her influence may be

of some use to him. But I want some one to undertake these negotiations, and I had hopes, André, that you would have been able to do so."

André felt that all his efforts ought to be devoted to the interests of Sabine, but at the same time he could not leave the kind old man to the mercy of others, and by a display of absolute heroism he determined to accede to the broken-hearted father's desires and briefly told him that he was at his service. Gandelu thanked him warmly, and André, seating himself at the table, the two men entered into a long discussion as to the best means to be adopted. It was finally decided that André should act with freedom and according to his own instincts, and that M. Gandelu should, to actual appearance, remain firm in the course he had entered upon, and should only be induced, by André's intercession, to adopt milder measures. The result justified their anticipations, for Gaston was even more crushed and downcast than André had imagined, and it was in an agony of suspense that he awaited the return of the young painter. As soon as he saw him descending the steps he sprang forward to greet him.

"Well," said he, in a tone of eager inquiry.

"Your father," returned André, "is terribly angry with you, but I hope to be able to induce him to do something for you."

"Will he set Zora at liberty?"

"Perhaps he will; but first he must have something more from you than promises—he must have stable guarantees."

At these words Gaston's face fell. "Guarantees," answered he sulkily. "Is not my word of honor enough? What sort of guarantees does he require?"

"That I cannot tell you, and you must find out for yourself; but I will do all I can for you."

Gaston gazed upon André in surprise.

"Do you mean to tell me," asked he, "that you can do pretty well what you like with the governor?"

"Not exactly; but surely you can see that I have a good deal of influence over him. If you want a proof of this, see, here is the money to take up these bills you told me of."

"What, Verminet's?"

"I suppose so. I am speaking of those to which you were mad enough to forge another man's name."

Foolish as the boy was, this act of his had caused him many a sleepless night, and he had reflected very often how he could possibly escape from the consequence of his act of rashness.

"Give me the money," cried he.

André shook his head, however. "Forgive me," said he, "but this money does not quit my hands until the bills are handed over to me. Your father's orders on this point are decided; but the sooner we settle the affair the better."

"That is too bad; the governor is as sly as a fox; but he must have his own way, I suppose, so come on. Only just wait till I slip on a coat more suitable to my position than this lounging suit."

He rushed away, and was back again in ten minutes as neat as a new pin, and full of gayety and good spirits.

"We can walk," said he, putting his arm through André's. "We have to go to the Rue St. Anne."

Verminet had his office in this street—the office of the Mutual Loan Society, of which he was the managing director. The house, in spite of its grandiloquent

title, was of excessively shabby exterior. The Mutual Loan Society was frequented by those who, having lost their credit, wished to obtain a fresh amount, and who, having no money, wanted to borrow some.

Verminet's plan of financial operations was perfectly simple. A tradesman on the verge of bankruptcy would come to him. Verminet would look into his case and make him sign bills for the sum he required, handing him in exchange bills drawn by other tradesmen in quite as serious a predicament as himself, and pocketed a commission of two per cent. upon both the transactions. Verminet obtained clients from the simple fact that an embarrassed tradesman is utterly reckless, cares not what he signs, and will clutch at a straw to keep his head above water. But there were many other transactions carried on at the office of the Mutual Loan Society, for its largest means of income was drawn from even less respectable sources, and it was alleged that many of these bogus bills which are occasionally cashed by some respectable bankers were manufactured there. At any rate, Verminet managed to make money somehow.

CHAPTER XXIII.

RINGING THE CHANGES.

ANDRÉ, who was gifted with plenty of intelligence, at once judged of the kind of business done by the Mutual Loan Society by the dinginess of the brass plate on the door and the generally dilapidated aspect of the house.

"I don't like the look of it at all," said he.

"It does not go in for show," answered Gaston,

affecting an air of wisdom, "but it is deemed handy sometimes. It does all sorts of business that you would never think of. A real downy card is Verminet."

André could easily believe this, for, of course, there could be but one opinion concerning the character of a man who could have induced a mere simpleton like Gaston to affix a forged signature to the bills which he had discounted. He made no remark, however, but entered the house, with the interior arrangements of which Gaston appeared to be perfectly familiar. They passed through a dirty, ill-smelling passage, went across a courtyard, cold and damp as a cell, and ascended a flight of stairs with a grimy balustrade. On the second floor Gaston made a halt before a door upon which several names were painted. They passed through into a large and lofty room. The paper on the walls of this delectable chamber was torn and spotted, and a light railing ran along it, behind which sat two or three clerks, whose chief occupation appeared to be consuming the breakfast which they had brought with them to the office. The heat of the stove, which was burning in one corner of the room, the general mouldiness of the atmosphere, and the smell of the coarse food, were sufficient to turn the stomach of any one coming in from the fresh air.

"Where is M. Verminet?" asked Gaston authoritatively.

"Engaged," replied one of the clerks, without pausing to empty his mouth before he replied.

"Don't you talk to me like that. What do I care whether he is engaged or not? Tell him that Gaston de Gandelu desires to see him at once."

The clerk was evidently impressed by his visitor's

manner, and, taking the card which was handed to him, made his exit through a door at the other end of the room.

Gaston was delighted at this first victory, and glanced at André with a triumphant smile.

The clerk came back almost at once. "M. Verminet," cried he, "has a client with him just now. He begs that you will excuse him for a few minutes, when he will see you"; and evidently anxious to be civil to the gorgeously attired youths before him, he added, "My master is just now engaged with M. de Croisenois."

"Aha," cried Gaston; "I will lay you ten to one that the dear Marquis will be delighted to see me."

André started on hearing this name, and his cheek crimsoned. The man whom he most hated in this world; the wretch who, by his possession of some compromising secret, was forcing Sabine into a detested marriage; the villain whom he, M. de Breulh, and Madame de Bois Arden had sworn to overreach, was within a few paces of him, and that now he should see him face to face. Their eyes would meet, and he would hear the tones of the scoundrel's voice. His rage and agitation were so intense that it was with the utmost difficulty that he concealed it. Luckily for him, Gaston was not paying the slightest attention to his companion; for having, at the clerk's invitation, taken a chair, he assumed an imposing attitude, which struck the shabby young man behind the railing with the deepest admiration.

"I suppose," said he, in a loud voice, "that you know my dear friend, the Marquis?"

André made some reply, which Gaston interpreted as a negative.

"Really," said he, "you know *no* one, as I told you before. Where have you lived? But you must have heard of him? Henri de Croisenois is one of my most intimate friends. He owes me over fifty louis that I won of him one night at baccarat."

André was now certain that he had estimated Verminet's character correctly, and the relations of the Marquis de Croisenois with this very equivocal personage assumed a meaning of great significance to him. He felt now that he had gained a clue, a beacon blazed out before him, and he saw his way more clearly into the difficult windings of this labyrinth of iniquity which he knew that he must penetrate before he gained the secret he longed for.

He felt like a child playing the game called "Magio Music," when, as the seeker nears the hiding place of the article of which he is in search, the strains of the piano swell higher and higher. He now found that the boy whose master he had become, knew, or said he knew, a good deal of this marquis. Why should he not gain some information from him?"

"Are you really intimate with the Marquis de Croisenois?" asked he.

"I should rather think I was," returned Gandelu the younger. "You will see that precious sharp. I know all about him, and who the girl is that he is ruining himself for, but I mustn't talk about that; mum's the word, you know."

At that moment the door opened, and the Marquis appeared, followed by Verminet.

Henri de Croisenois was attired in the most fashionable manner, and formed an utter contrast to the flashy dress of Gaston. He was smoking a cigar, and mechanically tapping his boots with an elegant

walking cane. In a moment the features and figure of the Viscount were indelibly photographed upon André's brain. He particularly noticed his eyes, which had in them a half-concealed look of terror, and his face bore the haunted expression of a person who expects some terrible blow to fall upon him at any moment.

At a little distance the Marquis seemed still young, but a closer inspection showed that the man looked even older than he really was, so worn and haggard were his mouth and eyes. Nights at the gaming-table and the anxiety as to where the fresh supplies should come from to furnish the means to prolong his life of debauchery had told heavily upon him. To-day, however, he seemed to be in the best temper imaginable, and in the most cheerful manner he addressed a few words to Verminet, in conclusion of the conversation that had been going on in the inner office.

"It is settled then," remarked he, "that I am to have nothing more to do with a business with which neither of us has any real concern?"

"Just so," answered Verminet.

"Very well, then; but remember that any mistake you may make in the other affair will be attended with the most serious results."

This caution seemed to suggest some new idea to Verminet, for he said something in a low voice to his client at which they both laughed.

Gaston was fidgeting about, very uneasy at the Marquis having paid no attention to him, and he now advanced with a magnificent salutation and a friendly wave of the hand. If the Marquis was charmed at meeting Gandelu, he concealed his delight in a most wonderful manner. He seemed surprised, but not

agreeably so; he bent his head, and he extended his gloved hand with a negligent, "Ah, pleased to see you." Then without taking any more notice of Gaston, he turned on his heel and continued his conversation with Verminet.

"The worst part is over," said he, "and therefore no time is to be lost. You must see Mascarin and Martin Rigal, the banker, to-day."

At these words André started. Were these people Croisenois' accomplices? Certainly he had accomplices on the brain just now, and their names remained deeply engraved on the tablets of his memory.

"Tantaine was here this morning," observed Verminet, "and told me that his master wanted to see me at four this afternoon. Van Klopen will be there also. Shall I say a word to him about your fine friend?"

"Pon my soul," remarked the Marquis, shrugging his shoulders, "I had nearly forgotten her. There will be a tremendous fuss made, for she will be wanting all sorts of things. Speak to Van Klopen certainly, but do not bind yourself. Remember that I do not care a bit for the fair Sara."

"Quite so; I understand," answered Verminet; "but keep things quiet, and do not have any open disturbances."

"Of course not. Good morning," and with a bow to the managing director and a nod to Gaston, he lunged out of the office, not condescending to take the slightest notice of André. Verminet invited André and Gaston into his sanctum, and, taking a seat, motioned to them to do the same. Verminet was a decided contrast to his office, which was shabby and dirty, for his dress did his tailor credit, and he ap-

peared to be clean. He was neither old nor young, and carried his years well. He was fresh and plump, wore his whiskers and hair cut in the English fashion, while his sunken eyes had no more expression in them than those of a fish.

Gandelu was in a hurry to begin.

"Let us get to business," said he. "Last week you lent me some money."

"Just so. Do you want any more?"

"No; I want to return my bills."

A cloud passed over Verminet's face.

"The first does not fall due until the 15th," remarked he.

"No matter; I have the money with me, and I will pay it on you handing over the bills to me."

"I can't do it."

"And why so, pray?"

"The bills have passed out of my hands."

Gaston could scarcely credit his ears, nor believe in the truth of this last statement, and was certainly upset, not knowing what to do.

"But," stammered he, "you promised, when I signed those bills, that they should never go out of your hands."

"I don't say I did not; but one can't always keep to one's promise. I was forced to part with them. I wanted money, and so had to discount them."

André was not at all surprised, for he had anticipated some such difficulty; and seeing that Gaston had entirely lost his head, he broke in on the conversation.

"Excuse me, sir," remarked he; "but it seems to me that there are certain circumstances in this case which should have made you keep your promise."

Verminet stared at him.

"Who have I the honor of speaking to?" asked he, instead of making a direct reply.

"I am a friend of M. de Gandelu's," returned André, thinking it best not to give any name.

"A confidential friend?"

"Entirely so. He had, I think, ten thousand francs from you."

"Pardon me, five thousand."

André turned toward his companion in some surprise.

Gaston grew crimson.

"What is the meaning of this?" asked the artist.

"Can't you see?" whispered Gaston. "I had ten because I wanted the other five for Zora."

"Oh, indeed," returned André, with a slight uplifting of his eyebrows. "Well, then, M. Verminet, it was five thousand francs that you lent to my young friend here. That was right enough; but what do you say to inducing him to forge a signature?"

"I! I do such a thing?" answered Verminet. "Why, I did not know that the signature was not genuine."

This insolent denial aroused the unhappy Gaston from his state of stupor.

"This is too much, a deuced deal too much," cried he. "Did you not yourself tell me that, for your own security, you must insist upon another name in addition to mine? Did you not give me a letter, and say, 'Write a signature like the one at the bottom of this, it is that of Martin Rigal, the banker in the Rue Montmartre'?"

"An utterly false accusation, without a shadow of

proof; and remember that a libel uttered in the presence of a third party is punishable by law."

"And yet, sir," continued André, "you did not hesitate for a moment in discounting these bills. Have you calculated what terrible results may come of this breach of faith on your part?—what will happen if this forged signature is presented to M. Martin Rigal?"

"Very unlikely. Gandelu is the drawer, Rigal merely the endorser. Bills, when due, are always presented to the drawer," returned Verminet laconically.

Evidently a trap had been laid for Gaston, but the reason was still buried in obscurity.

"Then," remarked André, "we have but one course to pursue: we must trace those notes to the hands in which they now are, and take them up."

"Quite right."

"But to enable us to do so, you must first let us know the name of the party who discounted them."

"I don't know; I have forgotten," answered Verminet, with a careless wave of his hand.

"Then," returned André, in a low, deep voice of concentrated fury, "let me advise you, for your own sake, to make an immediate call upon your powers of memory."

"Do you threaten me?"

"And if you do not succeed in remembering the name or names, the consequences may be more serious than you seem to anticipate."

Verminet saw that the young painter was in dangerous earnest, and rose from his chair, but André was too quick for him.

"No," said he, placing his back against the door;

"you will not leave this room until you have done what I require."

For fully ten minutes the men stood gazing at each other. Verminet was green with terror, while André's face, though pale, was firm and determined.

"If the scoundrel makes any resistance," said he to himself, "I will fling him out of the window."

"The man is a perfect athlete," thought Verminet, "and looks as if he would stick at nothing."

Seeing that he had better give in, the managing director took up a bulky ledger, and began to turn over the leaves with trembling fingers.

André saw that he was holding it upside down.

"There it is," cried Verminet at last.

"Bills for five thousand francs. Gandelu and Rigal, booked for discount to Van Klopen, ladies' tailor."

André was silent.

Why was it that Verminet had suggested Rigal's signature as the one he ought to imitate? and why had he handed the bills over to Van Klopen? Was it mere chance that had arranged it all? He did not believe it, but felt sure that some secret tie united them all together, Verminet, Van Klopen, Rigal, and the Marquis de Croisenois.

"Do you want anything more?" asked the manager of the Mutual Loan Society.

"Are the bills in Van Klopen's hands?"

"I can't say."

"Never mind; he will have to tell me where they are, if he has not got them," returned André.

They left the house, and as soon as they were again in the street André took his companion's arm, and hurried him off in the direction of the Rue de Grammont.

"I don't want to give this thief, Verminet, time to warn Van Klopen of what has taken place; I had rather fall upon him with the suddenness of an earthquake. Come, let us go to his establishment at once."

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE VANISHING BILLS.

HAD André known a little more of the man he had to deal with, he would have learned that no one could fall like an earthquake upon Van Klopen. Shut up in the sanctum where he composed the numberless costumes that were the wonder and delight of Paris, Van Klopen made as careful arrangements to secure himself from interview as the Turk does to guard the approaches to his seraglio; and so André and Gandelu were accosted in the entrance hall by his stately footmen, clad in gorgeous liveries, glittering with gold.

"M. van Klopen is engaged," cried they with one voice.

"Our business is of the utmost importance," asserted André.

"Our master is composing."

Entreaties, threats, and even a bribe of one hundred francs were alike useless; and André, seeing that he was about to be checkmated, was half tempted to take the men by the collar and hurl them on one side, but he calmed himself, and, already repenting of his violence at Verminet's, he determined on a course of submission, and so meekly followed the footmen into the famous waiting-room, styled by Van Klopen his pur-

gatory. The footmen, however, had spoken the truth, for several ladies of the highest rank and standing were awaiting the return of this *arbiter elegantiarum*. All of them turned as the young men entered—all save one, who was gazing out of the window, drawing with her pretty fingers on the window panes. André recognized her in an instant as Madame de Bois Arden.

"Is it possible?" thought he. "Can the Countess have returned here after what has occurred?"

Gaston felt that five charming pairs of eyes were fixed upon him, and studied to assume his most graceful posture.

After a brief time given to arrangement, André grew disgusted.

"I wish that she would look round," said he to himself. "I think she would feel rather ashamed. I will say a word to her."

He rose from his chair, and, without thinking how terribly he might compromise the lady, he took up a position at her side. She was, however, intently watching something that was going on in the street, and did not turn her head.

"Madame," said he.

She started, and, as she turned and recognized André, she uttered a little cry of surprise.

"Great heavens! is that you?"

"Yes, it is I."

"And here? I dare say that my presence in this place surprises you," she went on, "and that I have a short memory, and no feelings of pride."

André made no reply, and his silence was a sufficient rejoinder to the question.

"You do me a great injustice," muttered the Count-

ess. "I am here because De Breulh told me that in your interests I ought to pardon Van Klopen, and go to him again as I used to do; so you see, M. André, that it is never safe to judge by appearance, and a woman more than anything else."

"Will you forgive me?" asked André earnestly.

The lady interrupted him by a little wave of her hand, invisible to all save to him, which clearly said,—

"Take care; we are not alone."

She once more turned her eyes towards the street, and he mechanically did the same. By this means their faces were hidden from observation.

"De Breulh," went on the lady, "has heard a good deal about De Croisenois, and, as no doubt you can guess, but very little to his credit, and quite enough to justify any father in refusing him his daughter's hand; but in this case it is evident to me that De Mussidan is yielding to a secret pressure. We must ferret out some hidden crime in De Croisenois' past which will force him to withdraw his proposal."

"I shall find one," muttered André.

"But remember there is no time to be lost. According to our agreement, I treat him in the most charming manner, and he thinks that I am entirely devoted to his interests, and to-morrow I have arranged to introduce him to the Count and Countess at the Hotel de Mussidan, where the Count and Countess have agreed to receive him."

André started at this news.

"I saw," continued the lady, "that you were quite right in the opinion you had formed, for in the first place the common danger has almost reconciled the Count and Countess affectionately to each other, though it is notorious that they have always lived in

the most unhappy manner. Their faces are careworn and full of anxiety, and they watch every movement of Sabine with eager eyes. I think that they look upon her as a means of safety, but shudder at the sacrifice she is making on their account."

"And Sabine?"

"Her conduct is perfectly sublime, and she is ready to consummate the sacrifice without a murmur. Her self-sacrificing devotion is perfectly admirable; but what is more admirable still is the way in which she conceals the suffering that she endures from her parents. Noble-hearted girl! she is calm and silent, but she has always been so. She has grown thinner, and perhaps her cheek is a trifle paler, but her forehead was burning and seemed to scorch my lips as I kissed her. With this exception, however, there was nothing else about her that would betray her tortures. Modeste, her maid, told me, moreover, that when night came she seemed utterly worn out, and the poor girl, with tears in her eyes, declared 'that her dear mistress was killing herself.'"

André's eyes overflowed with tears.

"What have I done to deserve such love?" asked he.

A door suddenly opened, and André and the Viscountess turned hastily at the sound. It was Van Klopen who came in, crying, according to his usual custom,—

"Well, and whose turn is it next?"

When, however, he saw Gaston, his face grew white, and it was with a smile that he stepped towards him, motioning back the lady whose turn it was, and who protested loudly against this injustice.

"Ah, M. de Gandelu," said he, "you have come, I

suppose, to bespeak some fresh toilettes for that exquisite creature, Zora de Chantemille?"

"Not to-day," returned Gaston. "Zora is a little indisposed."

André, however, who had arranged the narrative that he was about to pour into the ears of the famous Van Klopen, was in too much haste to permit of any unnecessary delay.

"We have come here," said he hurriedly, "upon a matter of some moment. My friend, M. Gaston de Gandelu, is about to leave Paris for some months, and, before doing so, is anxious to settle all outstanding accounts, and retire all his bills, which may not yet have fallen due."

"Have I any bills of M. de Gandelu?" said Van Klopen slowly. "Ah, yes, I remember that I had some now. Yes, five bills of one thousand francs each, drawn by Gandelu, and accepted by Martin Rigal. I received them from the Mutual Loan Society, but they are no longer in my hands."

"Is that the case?" murmured Gaston, growing sick with apprehension.

"Yes, I sent them to my cloth merchants at St. Etienne, Rollon and Company."

Van Klopen was a clever scoundrel, but he sometimes lacked the necessary perception of when he had said enough; and this was proved to-day, for, agitated by the steady gaze that André kept upon him, he added,—

"If you do not believe my word, I can show you the acknowledgment that I received from that firm."

"It is unnecessary," replied André. "Your statement is quite sufficient."

"I should prefer to let you see the letter."

"No, thank you," replied André, not for a moment duped by the game that was being played. "Pray take no more trouble. We shall, I presume, find that the bills are at St. Etienne. There is no use in taking any more trouble about them, and we will wait until they arrive at maturity. I have the honor to wish you good morning."

And with these words he dragged away Gaston, who was actually about to consult Van Klopen as to the most becoming costume for Zora to appear in on leaving the prison of St. Lazare. When they were a few doors from the man-milliner's, André stopped and wrote down the names of Van Klopen's cloth merchants. Gaston was now quite at his ease.

"I think," remarked he, "that Van Klopen is a sharp fellow; he knows that I am to be relied on."

"Where do you think your bills are?"

"At St. Etienne's, of course."

The perfect innocence of the boy elicited from André a gesture of impatient commiseration.

"Listen to me," said he, "and see if you can comprehend the awful position in which you have placed yourself."

"I am listening, my dear fellow; pray go on."

"You drew these bills through Verminet because Van Klopen would not give you credit."

"Exactly so."

"How, then, do you account for the fact that this man, who was at first disinclined to trust you, should, without rhyme or reason, offer to supply you now as he did to-day?"

"The deuce! that never struck me. It does seem queer. Does he want to play me a nasty trick? But which of them is it—Verminet or Van Klopen?"

"It is plain to me that the pair of them have entered into a pleasant little plot to blackmail you."

Young Gandelu did not at all like this turn, and he exclaimed,—

"Blackmail me, indeed! why, I know my way about better than that. They won't get much out of me, I can tell you."

André shrugged his shoulders.

"Then," said he, "just tell me what you intend to say to Verminet when he comes to you upon the day your bills fall due, and says to you, 'Give me one hundred thousand francs for these five little bits of paper, or I go straight to your father with them'?"

"I should say, of course—ah, well, I really do not know what I should say."

"You could say nothing, except that you had been imposed on in the most infamous way. You would plead for time, and Verminet would give it to you if you would execute a deed insuring him one hundred thousand francs on the day you came of age."

"A hundred thousand devils are all the rogue would get from me. That's the way I do things, do you see? If people try and ride roughshod over me, I merely hit out, and then just look out for broken bones. Pay this chap? Not I! I know the governor would make an almighty shine, but I'll choose that sooner than be had like that."

He was quite serious, but could only put his feelings into the language he usually spoke.

"I think," answered André, "that your father would forgive this imprudence, but that it will be even harder for him to do so than it was to send a doctor to number the hours he had to live. He will forgive you because he is your father, and because he loves

you; but Verminet, when he finds that the threat to go to your father does not appall you, will menace you with criminal proceedings."

"Hulloo!" said Gandelu, stopping short. "I say, that is very poor fun," gasped he.

"There is no fun in it, for such fun, when brought to the notice of a court of justice, goes by the ugly name of forgery, and forgery means a swinging heavy sentence."

Gaston turned pale, and trembled from head to foot.

"Tried and sentenced," faltered he. "No, I don't believe you, but I hold no honors and will turn up my cards." He quite forgot that he was in the public street, and was talking at the top of his shrill falsetto voice, and gesticulating violently.

"The poor old governor, I might have made him so happy, and, after all, I have only been a torment to him. Ah, could I but begin once more; but then the cards are dealt, and I must go on with the game, and I have made a nice muddle of the whole thing before I am twenty years of age; but no criminal courts for me, no, the easiest way out of it is a pistol shot, for I am an honest man's son, and I will not bring more disgrace on him than I have already done."

"Do you really mean what you say?" asked André.

"Of course I do. I can be firm enough sometimes."

"Then we will not despair yet," answered the young painter. "I think that we shall be able to settle this ugly business, but you cannot be too cautious. Keep indoors, and remember that I may have urgent need of you at almost any time of day or night."

"I agree, but remember this, Zora is not to be forgotten."

"Don't fret over that; I will call and see her to-morrow. And now, farewell for to-day, as I have not an instant to lose," and with these words André hurried off.

André's reason for haste was that he had caught a few words addressed by Verminet to Croisenois—"I shall see Mascarin at four o'clock." And he determined to loiter about the Rue St. Anne, and watch the Managing Director when he came out, and so find out who this Mascarin was, who he was certain was mixed up in the plot. He darted down the Rue de Grammont like an arrow from a bow, and as the clock in a neighboring belfry chimed half-past three, he was in the Rue St. Anne. There was a small wine-shop almost opposite to the office of the Mutual Loan Society, and there André ensconced himself and made a frugal meal, while he was waiting for Verminet's appearance, and just as he had finished his light refreshment he saw the man he wanted come out of the office, and crept cautiously after him like a Red Indian on the trail of his enemy.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE SPY.

As Verminet swaggered down the street he had the air of a successful man, of a capitalist, in short, and the Managing Director of a highly lucrative concern. André had no difficulty in following his man, though detective's business was quite new to him, which is no such easy matter, although every one thinks that he can become one. André kept his man in sight, and

was astonished at the numerous acquaintances that Verminet seemed to have. Occasionally he said to himself, "Perhaps I am mistaken after all, for fancy is a bad pair of spectacles to see through. This man may be honest, and I have let my imagination lead me astray."

Meanwhile, Verminet who had reached the Boulevard Poissonnière, assumed a totally different air, throwing off his old manner as he cast away his cigar. When he had reached the Rue Montorgueil he turned underneath a large archway. Verminet had gone into the office of M. B. Mascarin, and that person simply kept a Servants' Registry Office for domestics of both sexes. In spite of his surprise, however, he determined to wait for Verminet to come out; and, not to give himself the air of loitering about the place, he crossed the road and appeared to be interested in watching three workmen who were engaged in fixing the revolving shutters to a new shop window. Luckily for the young painter he had not to wait a very long while, for in less than a quarter of an hour Verminet came out, accompanied by two men. The one was tall and thin, and wore a pair of spectacles with colored glasses, while the other was stout and ruddy, with the unmistakable air of a man of the world about him. André would have given the twenty thousand francs which he still had in his pocket if he could have heard a single word of their conversation. He was moving skilfully forward so as to place himself within earshot, when not two feet from him he heard a shrill whistle twice repeated. There was something so strange and curious in the sound of this whistle that André looked round and noticed that the three men whom he was watching had been also attracted by it.

The tall man with the colored glasses glanced suspiciously around him, and then after a nod to his companions turned and re-entered the office, while Verminet and the other walked away arm in arm. André was undecided; should he try and discover who these two men were? Near the entrance he saw a lad selling hot chestnuts. "Ah!" said he, "the little chestnut seller will always be there; but I may lose the others if I stay here." He followed the two men as quickly as possible. They did not go very far, and speedily entered a fine house in the Rue Montmartre. Here André was for a moment puzzled, as he did not know to whom they were paying a visit, but noticing an inscription on the wall of "Cashier's Office on the first floor," he exclaimed,—

"Ah! it is to the banker's they have gone!"

He questioned a man coming downstairs and heard that M. Martin Rigal, the banker, had his offices and residence there.

"I have struck a vein of good luck to-day," thought he; "and now if my little friend the chestnut seller can only tell me the names of these men, I have done a good day's work. I *do* hope that he has not gone."

The boy was still there, and he had two customers standing by the chafing-dish which contained the glowing charcoal, and a working lad in cap and blouse was arguing so hotly with the lad that they did not notice André's appearance.

"You can stow that chat," said the boy; "I have told your father the price I would take. You want my station and stock-in-trade. Hand over two hundred and fifty francs, and they are yours."

"But my dad will only give two hundred," returned the other.

"Then he don't need give nothing, for he won't get 'em," answered the chestnut vender sharply. "Two hundred francs for a pitch like this! why, I have sometimes taken ten francs and more, and that ain't a lie, on the word of Toto Chupin."

André was tickled with this strange designation, and addressed himself to the lad who bore it.

"My good boy," said he, "I think you were here an hour ago. Did you see anything of three gentlemen who came out of the house and stood talking together for a short time?"

The lad turned sharply round and examined his questioner from tip to toe with an air of the most supreme impertinence; and then, in a tone which matched his look, replied,—

"What does it signify to you who they are? Mind your own business, and be off!"

André had had some little experience of this delightful class of street arab, of which Toto Chupin was so favorable a specimen, and knew their habits, customs, and language.

"Come, my chicken," said he, "spit it out, it won't blister your tongue, to answer a man who asks a civil question."

"Well, then, I saw 'em, sharp enough, and what then?"

"Why, that I should like to have their names if they have such an article belonging to 'em!"

Toto raised his cap and scratched his head, as if to stimulate his brains, and as he brushed up his thick head of dirty yellow hair, he eyed André cunningly.

"And suppose I know the blokes' names and tells 'em out to you, what will you stand?" asked he.

"Ten sous."

The delightful youth puffed out his cheeks, then expelled the pent-up wind by a sudden slap, as a mark of his disgust at the meanness of the offer.

"Pull up your braces, my lord," said he sarcastically, "or you'll be losing the contents of your breeches pockets. Ten sous, indeed! Perhaps you'd like me to lend 'em to yer?"

André smiled pleasantly.

"Did you think, my little man, that I was going to offer you twenty thousand shiners?" asked he.

"Won again!" cried Toto; "I laid myself a new hat that you weren't a fool, and I have collared the stakes."

"Why do you think I am not a fool?"

"Because a fool would have begun by offering me five francs and gone up slick to ten, while you began at a modest figure."

The painter smiled.

"But you were too old a bird to be caught like that," continued the lad; and as he spoke, he stopped, and contracted his brow as if in deep perplexity. Of course he was acquainted with the names, but ought he to give them? Instantly he scented an enemy. Harmless people did not usually ask questions of itinerant chestnut venders, and to open his mouth might be to injure Mascarin, Beaumarchef, or the guileless Tantaine.

This last thought determined the lad.

"Keep your ten sous, my pippin," said the boy; "I'll tell you what you want to know all gratis and for nothing, because I've taken a real fancy to the cut of your mug. The tall chap was Mascarin, the fat un

Doctor Hortebise, and t'other—stop, let me think it out in my knowledge box; ah! I have it, he was Verminet."

André was so delighted that, drawing from his pocket a five-franc piece, he tossed it to the boy.

"Thanks, my noble lord," said Chupin, and was about to add something more in a similar vein, when he glanced down the street. His look changed in an instant, and he fixed his eyes upon the painter's face with a very strange expression.

"What is the matter, my lad?" asked André, surprised at this sudden change.

"Nothing," answered Chupin; "nothing at all; only as you seem a decentish sort of chap, I should recommend you to keep your wits about you, and to look out for squalls."

"Eh, what do you mean?"

"I mean—why—be careful, of course. Hang me if I exactly know what I do mean. It is just an idea that came to me all of a jump. But there, be off; I ain't going to say another word."

With much difficulty André repressed his astonishment. He saw that this young scamp was the possessor of many secrets which might be of inestimable value to him; but he also saw that he was determined to hold his tongue, and that it would at present be a waste of time to try and get anything out of him; and an empty cab passing at this moment, André hailed it, and told the coachman to drive fast to the Champs Elysées. In obedience to the warning that he had just received from Toto, he did not give the name of the *café* where he was to meet De Breulh, for he made up his mind to be careful, yes, extremely careful. He recollected the two odd whistles which

had seemed to make Mascarin wince, and which certainly broke off the conference of the three men, and he remembered that it was after a glance down the street that Toto had become less communicative and had given him that curt warning. "By heaven," said he, as the recollection of a story he had read not long ago dawned on him, "I am being followed." He lowered the front glass of the cab, and attracted the coachman's attention by pulling him by the sleeve.

"Listen to me," said he, as the man turned, "and do not slacken your speed. Here, take your five francs in advance."

"But look here——"

"Listen to me. Go as sharp as you can to the Rue de Matignon; turn down it, and, as you do so, go a bit slower; then drive on like lightning, and when you are in the Champs Elysées do what you like, for your cab will be empty."

The driver chuckled.

"Aha," said he; "I see you are being followed, and you want to give 'em leg bail."

"Yes, yes; you are right."

"Then listen to me. Take care when you jump, and don't do it on the pavement, for t'other is the safest."

André succeeded in alighting safely, and turned down a narrow court before his pursuer had entered the street; but it was vain for the young painter to lurk in a doorway, for after five minutes had elapsed there was nothing to be seen, and no spy had made his appearance.

"I have been over-cautious," muttered he.

More than a quarter of an hour had elapsed, and André felt that he might leave his hiding-place, and

go in quest of De Breulh; and as he approached the spot chosen for their meeting-place, he saw his friend's carriage, and near it was the owner, smoking a cigar. The two men caught sight of each other almost at the same moment. De Breulh advanced to greet the young man with extended hand.

"I have been waiting for you for the last twenty minutes," said he.

André commenced to apologize, but his friend checked him.

"Never mind," returned he; "I know that you must have had some excellent reasons; but, to tell you the honest truth, I had become rather nervous about you."

"Nervous! and why, pray?"

"Do you not recollect what I said the other evening? De Croisenois is a double-dyed scoundrel."

André remained silent, and his friend, putting his arm affectionately through his, continued,—

"Let us walk," said he; "it is better than sitting down in the *café*. I believe De Croisenois capable of anything. He has the prospect before him of a large fortune,—that of his brother George; but this he has already anticipated. A man in a position like this is not to be trifled with."

"I do not fear him."

"But I do. I am, however, a little relieved by the fact that he has never seen you."

The painter shook his head.

"Not only has he seen me, but I half believe that he suspects my designs."

"Impossible!"

"But I am sure that I have been followed to-day. I have no actual proof, but still I am fully convinced that it was so."

And André recounted all that had occurred during the day.

"You are certainly being watched," answered De Breulh, "and every step that you take will be known to your enemies, and at this very moment perhaps eyes are upon us."

As he spoke he glanced uneasily around; but it was quite dark, and he could see no one.

"We will give the spies a little gentle exercise," said he, "and if we dine together they will find it hard to discover the place."

De Breulh's coachman was dozing on the driving-seat. His master aroused him, and whispered some order in his ear. The two young men then got in, and the carriage started at a quick pace.

"What do you think of this expedient?" asked De Breulh. "We shall go at this pace for the next hour. We will then alight at the corner of the Chaussée d'Autin, and be free for the rest of the night, and those who wish to follow us to-night must have good eyes and legs."

All came to pass as De Breulh had arranged; but as he jumped out he saw a dark form slip from behind the carriage and mingle with the crowd on the Boulevard.

"By heavens," said he; "that was a man. I thought that I was throwing a spy off the track, and I was in reality only treating him to a drive."

To make sure, he took off his glove and felt the springs of the carriage.

"See," said he, "they are still warm from the contact with a human body."

The young painter was silent, but all was now explained: while he jumped from the cab, his tracker had

been carried away upon it. This discovery saddened the dinner, and a little after ten André left his friend and returned home.

CHAPTER XXVI.

MASCARIN MOVES.

THE Viscountess de Bois Arden had not been wrong when she told André in Van Klopen's establishment that community of sorrow had brought the Count and Countess of Mussidan nearer together, and that Sabine had made up her mind to sacrifice herself for the honor of the family. Unfortunately, however, this change in the relations of husband and wife had not taken place immediately; for after her interview with Doctor Hortebise, Diana's first impulse had not been to go to her husband, but to write to Norbert, who was as much compromised by the correspondence as she herself. Her first letter did not elicit a reply. She wrote a second, and then a third, in which, though she did not go into details, she let the Duke know that she was the victim of a dark intrigue, and that a deadly peril was hanging over her daughter's head. This last letter was brought back to her by the messenger, without any envelope, and across it Norbert had written,—

“The weapon which you have used against me has now been turned against yourself. Heaven is just.”

These words started up in letters of fire before her eyes as the presage of coming misfortune, and telling her that the hour of retribution had now come, and that she must be prepared to suffer, as an atonement

for her crimes. Then it was that she felt all was lost, and that she must go to her husband for aid, unless she desired that copies of the stolen letters should be sent to him; and in a little boudoir, adjoining Sabine's own room, she opened her heart and told her husband all. She performed it with all the skill of a woman who, without descending to falsehood, contrives to conceal the truth. But she could not hide the share that she had taken, both in the death of the late Duke of Champdoce and the disappearance of George de Croisenois.

The Count's brain reeled. He called up to his memory what Diana had been when he first saw and loved her at Laurebourg: how pure and modest she looked! what virginal candor sat upon her brow! and yet she was even then doing her best to urge on a son to murder his father.

De Mussidan had had hideous doubts concerning the relations of Norbert and Diana, both before and after marriage; but his wife firmly denied this at the moment when she was revealing the other guilty secrets of her past life. He had believed that Sabine was not his child, and now he had to reproach himself with the indifference he had displayed towards her.

He made no answer to the terrible revelation that was poured into his ears; but when the Countess had concluded, he rose and left the room, stretching out his hands and grasping the walls for support, like a drunken man.

The Count and Countess believed that Sabine had slept through this interview, but they were mistaken, for Sabine had heard all those fatal words—"ruin, dishonor, and despair!" At first she scarcely understood. Were not these words merely the offspring of her de-

lirium? She strove to shake it off, but too soon she knew that the whispered words were sad realities, and she lay on her bed quivering with terror. Much of the conversation escaped her, but she heard enough. Her mother's past sins were to be exposed if the daughter did not marry a man entirely unknown to her—the Marquis de Croisenois. She knew that her torments would not be of very long duration, for to part with her love for André would be to part with life itself. She made up her mind to live until she had saved her parents' honor by the sacrifice of herself, and then she would be free to accept the calm repose of the grave.

But the terrible revelation bore its fruits, for her fever came back, and a relapse was the result. But youth and a sound constitution gained the day, and when she was convalescent her will was as strong as ever.

Her first act was to write the letter to her lover which had driven him to the verge of distraction; and then, fearing lest her father might, in his agony and remorse, be driven to some rash act, she went to him and told him that she knew all.

“I never loved M. de Breulh,” said she with a pitiful smile, “and therefore the sacrifice is not so great after all.”

The Count was not for a moment the dupe of the generous-souled girl, but he did not dare to brave the scandal of the death of Montlouis, and still less the exposure of his wife's conduct. Time was passing, however, and the miscreants in whose power they were made no signs of life. Hortebise did not appear any more, and there were moments when the miserable Diana actually ventured to hope. “Have they forgotten us?” thought she.

Alas ! no ; they were people who never forget.

The Champdoce affair had been satisfactorily arranged, and every precaution had been taken to prevent the detection of Paul as an impostor, and engaged as he had been, Mascarin had no time to turn his attention to the marriage of Sabine and De Croisenois. The famous Limited Company, with the Marquis as chairman, had, too, to be started, the shares of which were to be taken up by the unhappy victims of the blackmailers ; but first some decided steps must be taken with the Mussidans, and Tantaine was dispatched on this errand.

This amiable individual, though he was going into such very excellent society, did not consider it necessary to make any improvement in his attire. This was the reason why the footman, upon seeing such a shabby visitor and hearing him ask for the Count or Countess, did not hesitate to reply, with a sneer, that his master and mistress had been out some months, and were not likely to return for a week or two. This fact did not disconcert the wily man, for drawing one of Mascarin's cards from his pocket, he begged the kind gentleman to take it upstairs, when he was sure that he would at once be sent for.

De Mussidan, when he read the name on the card, turned ghastly pale.

" Show him into the library," said he curtly.

Florestan left the room, and the Count mutely handed the card to his wife, but she had no need to read it.

" I can tell what it is," gasped she.

" The day for settling accounts has come," said the Count, " and this name is the fatal sign."

The Countess flung herself upon her knees, and tak-

ing the hand that hung placidly by his side, pressed her lips tenderly to it.

"Forgive me, Octave!" she murmured. "Will you not forgive me? I am a miserable wretch, and why did not Heaven punish me for the sins that I have committed, and not make others expiate my offences?"

The Count put her gently aside. He suffered intensely, and yet no word of reproach escaped his lips against the woman who had ruined his whole life.

"And Sabine," she went on, "must she, a De Mussidan, marry one of these wretched scoundrels?"

Sabine was the only one in the room who preserved her calmness; she had so schooled herself that her distress of mind was not apparent to the outward eye.

"Do not make yourselves miserable," said she, with a faint smile; "how do we know that M. de Croisenois may not make me an excellent husband after all?"

The Count gazed upon his daughter with a look of the fondest affection and gratitude.

"Dearest Sabine!" murmured he. Her fortitude had restored his self-command. "Let us be outwardly resigned," said he, "whatever our feelings may be. Time may do much for us, and at the very church door we may find means of escape."

CHAPTER XXVII.

A CRUEL SLUR.

FLORESTAN had conducted Tantaine to the sumptuous library, in which the Count had received Mascarin's visit; and, to pass away the time, the old man took a mental inventory of the contents of the room. He tried the texture of the curtains, looked at the handsome bindings of the books, and admired the magnificent bronzes on the mantelpiece.

"Aha," muttered he, as he tried the springs of a luxurious armchair, "everything is of the best, and when matters are settled, I half think that I should like a resting-place just like this——"

He checked himself, for the door opened, and the Count made his appearance, calm and dignified, but very pale. Tantaine made a low bow, pressing his greasy hat against his breast.

"Your humble servant to command," said he.

The Count had come to a sudden halt.

"Excuse me," said he, "but did you send up a card asking for an interview?"

"I am not Mascarin certainly, but I used that highly respectable gentleman's name, because I knew that my own was totally unknown to you. I am Tantaine, Adrien Tantaine."

M. de Mussidan gazed with extreme surprise upon the squalid individual before him. His mild and benevolent face inspired confidence, and yet he doubted him.

"I have come on the same business," pursued the old man. "I have been ordered to tell you that it must be hurried on."

The Count hastily closed the door and locked it; the manner of this man made him feel even too plainly the ignominy of his position.

"I understand," answered he. "But how is it that you have come, and not the other one?"

"He intended to come, but at the last moment he drew back; Mascarin, you see, has a great deal to lose, while I——" He paused, and holding up the tattered tails of his coat, turned round, as though to exhibit his shabby attire. "All my property is on my back," continued he.

"Then I can treat with you?" asked the Count.

Tantaine nodded his head. "Yes, Count, I have the missing leaves from the Baron's journal, and also, well—I suppose you know everything, all of your wife's correspondence."

"Enough," answered the Count, unable to hide his disgust. "Sit down."

"Now, Count, I will go to the point—are you going to put the police on us?"

"I have said that I would do nothing of the kind."

"Then we can get to business."

"Yes, if——"

The old man shrugged his shoulders.

"There is no 'if' in the case," returned he. "We state our conditions, for acceptance or rejection."

These words were uttered in a tone of such extreme insolence that the Count was strongly tempted to hurl the extortionate scoundrel from the window, but he contrived to restrain his passion.

"Let us hear the conditions then," said he impatiently.

Tantaine extracted from some hidden recess of his

coat a much-worn pocketbook, and drew from it a paper.

"Here are our conditions," returned he slowly. "The Count de Mussidan promises to give the hand of his daughter to Henri Marquis de Croisenois. He will give his daughter a wedding portion of six hundred thousand francs, and promises that the marriage shall take place without delay. The Marquis de Croisenois will be formally introduced at your house, and he must be cordially received. Four days afterwards he must be asked to dinner. On the fifteenth day from that M. de Mussidan will give a grand ball in honor of the signing of the marriage contract. The leaves from the diary and the whole of the correspondence will be handed to M. de Mussidan as soon as the civil ceremony is completed."

With firmly compressed lips and clenched hands, the Count sat listening to these conditions.

"And who can tell me," said he, "that you will keep your engagements, and that these papers will be restored to me at all?"

Tantaine looked at him with an air of pity.

"Your own good sense," answered he. "What more could we expect to get out of you than your daughter and your money?"

The Count did not answer, but paced up and down the room, eyeing the ambassador keenly, and endeavoring to detect some weak point in his manner of cynicism and audacity. Then speaking in the calm tone of a man who had made up his mind, he said,—

"You hold me as in a vice, and I admit myself vanquished. Stringent as your conditions are, I accept them."

"That is the right style of way to talk in," remarked Tantaine cheerfully.

"Then," continued the Count, with a ray of hope gleaming in his face, "why should I give my daughter to De Croisenois at all?—surely this is utterly unnecessary. What you want is simply six hundred thousand francs; well, you can have them, and leave me Sabine."

He paused and waited for the reply, believing that the day was his; but he was wrong.

"That would not be the same thing at all," answered Tantaine. "We should not gain our ends by such means."

"I can do more," said the Count. "Give me six months, and I will add a million to the sum I have already offered."

Tantaine did not appear impressed by the magnitude of this offer. "I think," remarked he, "that it will be better to close this interview, which, I confess, is becoming a little annoying. You agreed to accept the conditions. Are you still in that mind?"

The Count bowed. He could not trust himself to speak.

"Then," went on Tantaine, "I will take my leave. Remember, that as you fulfil your engagement, so we will keep to ours."

He had laid his hand on the handle of the door, when the Count said,—

"Another word, if you please. I can answer for myself and Madame de Mussidan, but how about my daughter?"

Tantaine's face changed. "What do you mean?" asked he.

"My daughter may refuse to accept M. de Croise-nois."

"Why should she? He is good-looking, pleasant, and agreeable."

"Still she may refuse him."

"If mademoiselle makes any objection," said the old man in peremptory accents, "you must let me see her for a few minutes, and after that you will have no further difficulty with her."

"Why, what could you have to say to my daughter?"

"I should say——"

"Well, what would you say?"

"I should say that if she loves any one, it is not M. de Breulh." He endeavored to pass through the half-opened door, but the Count closed it violently.

"You shall not leave this room," cried he, "until you have explained this insulting remark."

"I had no intention of offending you," answered Tantaine humbly. "I only——" He paused, and then, with an air of sarcasm which sat strangely upon a person of his appearance, went on, "I am aware that the heiress of a noble family may do many things without having her reputation compromised, when girls in a lower social grade would be forever lost by the commission of any one of them; and I am sure if the family of M. de Breulh knew that the young lady to whom he was engaged had been in the habit of passing her afternoons alone with a young man in his studio——"

He paused, and hastily drew a revolver, for it seemed as if the Count were about to throw himself upon him. "Softly, softly, if you please," cried he.

"Blows and insults are fatal mistakes. I have better information than yourself, that is all. I have more than ten times seen your daughter enter a house in the Rue Tour d'Auvergne, and, asking for M. André, creep silently up the staircase."

The Count felt that he was choking. He tore off his cravat, and cried wildly, "Proofs! give me proofs!"

During the last five minutes Tantaine had shifted his ground so skilfully that the heavy library table now stood between himself and the Count, and he was comparatively safe behind this extemporized defence.

"Proofs?" answered he. "Do you think that I carry them about with me? In a week I could give you the lovers' correspondence. That, you will say, is too long to wait; but you can set your doubts at rest at once. If you go to the address I will give you before eight to-morrow morning, and enter the room occupied by M. André, you will find the portrait of Mademoiselle Sabine carefully concealed from view behind a green curtain, and a very good portrait it is. I presume you will admit that it could not have been executed without a sitting."

"Leave this," cried the Count, "without a moment's delay."

Tantaine did not wait for a repetition of these words. He passed through the doorway, and as soon as he was outside he called out in cheerful accents, "Do not forget the address, Number 45, Rue Tour d'Auvergne, name of André, and mind and be there before eight a.m."

The Count made a rush at him on hearing this last insult, but he was too late, for Tantaine slammed the door, and was in the hall before the infuriated master of the house could open it. Tantaine had resumed all

his airs of humility, and took off his hat to the footmen as he descended the steps. "Yes," muttered he, as he walked along, "the idea was a happy one. André knows that he is watched, and will be careful; and now that M. de Mussidan is aware that his sweet, pure daughter has had a lover, he will be only too happy to accept the Marquis de Croisenois as his son-in-law." Tantaine believed that Sabine was more culpable than she really had been, for the idea of pure and honorable love had never entered his brain.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE TEMPTER.

By this time Tantaine was in the Champs Élysées, and stared anxiously around. "If my Toto makes no mistake," muttered he, "surely my order was plain enough."

The old man got very cross as he at last perceived the missing lad conversing with the proprietor of a pie-stall, having evidently been doing a little jawing with him.

"Toto," he called, "Toto, come here."

Toto Chupin heard him, for he looked round, but he did not move, for he was certainly much interested in the conversation he was carrying on. Tantaine shouted again, and this time more angrily than before, and Toto, reluctantly leaving his companion, came slowly up to his patron.

"You have been a nice time getting here," said the lad sulkily. "I was just going to cut it. Ain't you

well that you make such a row? If you ain't, I'd better go for a doctor."

"I am in a tremendous hurry, Toto."

"Yes, and so is the postman when he is behind time. I'm busy too."

"What, with the man you have just left?"

"Yes; he is a sharper chap than I am. How much do you earn every day, Daddy Tantaine? Well, that chap makes his thirty or forty francs every night, and does precious little for it. I should like a business like that, and I think that I shall secure one soon."

"Have patience. I thought that you were going into business with those two young men you were drinking beer with at the Grand Turk?"

Toto uttered a shrill cry of anger at these words. "Business with them?" shrieked he; "they are regular clever night thieves."

"Have they done you any harm, my poor lad?"

"Yes; they have utterly ruined me. Luckily, I saw Mascarin yesterday, and he set me up in the hot-chestnut line. He ain't a bad one, is Mascarin."

Tantaine curled his lips disdainfully. "Not a bad fellow, I dare say, as long as you don't ask him for anything."

Toto was so surprised at hearing Tantaine abuse Mascarin, that he was unable to utter a word.

"Ah, you may look surprised," continued the old man, "but when a man is rolling in riches, and leaves an old friend to starve, then he is not what I call a real good fellow. Now, Toto, you are a bright lad, and so I don't mind letting you know that I am only waiting for a good chance to drop Mascarin, and set up on my own account. Work for yourself, my boy."

"I know that; but it is a good deal easier to say than to do."

"You have tried then?"

"Yes, I have; but I came to grief over it. You know all about it as well as I do, for don't tell me you didn't hear every word I said that night you were hunting up Caroline Schimmel. However, I'll tell you. One day when I saw a lady who looked rather nervous get out of a cab, I followed her. I was decently togged out, so I rang at the door. I was so sure that I was going to make a haul that I would not have taken ninety-nine francs for the hundred that I expected to make. Well, I rang, a girl opened the door, and in I went. What an ass I made of myself! I found a great brute of a man there, who thrashed me within an inch of my life, and then kicked me down-stairs. See, he made his mark rather more plainly than I liked." And removing his cap, the boy showed several bruises about his forehead.

During this conversation Tantaine and the lad had been walking slowly up the Champs Elysées, and had by this time arrived just opposite M. Gandelu's house, where André was at work. Tantaine sat down on a bench.

"Let us rest a bit," said he; "I am tired out; and now let me tell you, my lad, that your tale only shows me that it is experience you want. Now, I have any amount of that, and I was really the prime mover in most of Mascarin's schemes. If I were to start on my own account, I should be driving in my carriage in twelve months. The only thing against my success is my age, for I am getting to be an old man. Why, even now I have a matter in my hands which is sim-

ply splendid. I have had half the money down, but I want a smart young fellow to pull it through."

"Why couldn't I be the smart young fellow?" asked Toto.

Tantaine shook his head. "You are as much too young as I am too old," answered he. "At your age you are too apt to be frightened, and would shrink back at the critical time. Besides, I have a conscience."

"And so have I," exclaimed Toto; "and it's grown like your own, old man; it can be stretched for miles and folded up into nothing."

"Well, we may be able to do something," returned Tantaine, as, drawing out a ragged check pocket-handkerchief, he wiped his glasses.

"Listen to me, my lad; I'll put what we call a supposititious case to you. You hate those two fellows who have robbed you, for I suppose that is what you meant; well, suppose you knew that they were at work all day on a high scaffold like that one opposite to us, what would you do?"

Toto scratched his head, and remarked after a pause,—

"If that crack-jawed idea you talk of was true," answered he, "those gay lads might as well make their wills, for I'd step up the scaffolding at night and just saw the planks that they are in the habit of clapping their toes on, half through, and when one of the mates stepped on it, why, there would be a bit of a smash, eh, Daddy Tantaine?"

"Not so bad, not so bad for a lad of your years," said the old man with an approving smile.

Toto's bosom swelled with pride.

"Besides," he continued, "I would arrange matters

so well that not a soul would think that I had done the trick."

"The more I hear you speak, Chupin," answered Tantaine, "the more I believe you are the lad I want, and I am sure that we shall make heaps of money together."

"I am cock sure of that too."

"You can use carpenters' tools, I think you once told me?"

"Yes."

"Well," continued Tantaine, "let me tell you then that I know an old man with any amount of money, and there is a fellow whom he hates and detests, a young chap who ran off with the girl he loved."

"The old bloke must have been jolly wild."

"Well, to tell the truth, he wasn't a bit pleased. Now it so happens that this gay young dog spends ten hours a day at least on that very scaffolding opposite to us. The old fellow, who has his head screwed on the right way, had the very same idea as yours, but he is too old and too stout to do the trick for himself; and, to cut the matter short, he would give five thousand francs to the persons who would carry out his idea. Just think, two thousand francs for a few cuts of a saw!"

The boy was violently agitated, but Tantaine pretended not to notice it.

"First, my lad," said he, "I must explain to you in what measure the old gentleman's plans are different from yours. If we did not take care, some other poor devil might break his neck, but I have hit on a dodge to avoid all this."

"I ain't curious, but I should like to hear it."

Tantaine smiled blandly.

"Listen! Do you see high up that little shed built of planks? That is used by the carvers and stone-cutters. Well, this little house, a couple of hundred feet above us, has a kind of a window; well, if this window and the planks below it were cut nearly through, any one leaning against it would be very likely to fall into the street and perhaps to hurt himself."

Chupin nodded.

"Now, suppose," went on Tantaine, "that the enemy of our old gentleman was in that little shed, all at once he hears a woman shriek, 'Help! it is I you love; help me!' what would this young fellow do? Why, he would recognize the voice, rush to the window, lean out, and as the woodwork and supports had been cut away, he would—— Well, do you see now?"

Chupin hesitated for a moment.

"I don't say I won't," muttered he; "but, look here, will the old chap pay down smart?"

"Yes, and besides, did I not tell you that he had given half down?"

The boy's eyes glistened as the old man unpinned the tattered lining of his pocket, and holding the pin between his teeth, pulled out the banknotes, each one for a thousand francs. Chupin's heart rose at the sight of this wealth.

"Is one of those for me?" asked he. Tantaine held the note towards the boy, who shuddered at the touch of the crisp paper and kissed the precious object in a paroxysm of pleasure. He then started from his seat, and regardless of the astonishment of the passers-by, executed a wild dance of triumph.

All was soon settled. Toto was to creep into the unfinished building by night, and not to leave it until he had completed his work. Tantaine, who had a

thought for everything, told the boy what sort of a saw to employ, and gave him the address of a man who supplied the best class instruments.

"You must remember, my dear lad," said he, "not to leave behind you any traces of your work which may cause suspicion. One grain of sawdust on the floor might spoil the whole game. Take a dark lantern with you, grease your saw, and rasp out the tooth-nicks of the saw when you have finished your work."

Toto listened to the old man in surprise; he had never thought that he was of so practical a turn. He promised that he would be careful, and imagining that he had received all his directions, rose to leave; but the old man still detained him.

"Here," said he, "suppose you tell me a little about Caroline Schimmel. You told Beaumarchef that she said I had made her scream, and that when she caught me, I should have a bad time of it, eh?"

"You weren't my partner then," returned the lad with an impudent laugh; "and I wanted to give you a bit of a fright. The truth is, that you made the poor old girl so drunk that she has had to go to the hospital."

Tantaine was overjoyed at this news, and, rising from his seat, said, "Where are you living now?"

"Nowhere in particular. Yesterday I slept in a stable, but there isn't room for all my furniture there, so I must shift."

"Would you like to have my room for a day or two?" asked Tantaine, chuckling at the boy's jest. "I have moved from there, but the attic is mine for another fortnight yet."

"I'm gone; where is it?"

"You know well enough, in the Hotel de Perou, Rue

de la Hachette. Then I will send a line to the landlady"; and tearing a leaf from his pocketbook, he scrawled on it a few words, saying that a young relative of his, M. Chupin, was to have his room.

This letter, together with his banknote, Toto carefully tied up in the corner of his neckerchief, and as he crossed the street the old man watched him for a moment, and then stood gazing at the workmen on the scaffolding. Just then Gandelu and his son came out, and the contractor paused to give a few instructions. For a few seconds Gaston and Chupin stood side by side, and a strange smile flitted across Tantaine's face as he noted this. "Both children of Paris," muttered he, "and both striking examples of the boasted civilization. The dandy struts along the pavement, while the street arab plays in the gutter."

But he had no time to spend in philosophical speculations, as the omnibus that he required appeared, and entering it, in another half-hour he entered Paul Violaine's lodgings in the Rue Montmartre.

The portress, Mother Brigaut, was at her post as Tantaine entered the courtyard and asked,—

"And how is our young gentleman to-day?"

"Better, sir, ever so much better; I made him a lovely bowl of soup yesterday, and he drank up every drop of it. He looks like a real king this morning, and the doctor sent in a dozen of wine to-day, which will, I am sure, effect a perfect cure."

With a smile and a nod Tantaine was making his way to the stairs, when Mother Brigaut prevented his progress.

"Some one was here yesterday," remarked she, "asking about M. Paul."

"What sort of a looking person was it?"

"Oh, a man like any other, nothing particular about him, but he wasn't a gentleman, for after keeping me for fully fifteen minutes talking and talking, he only gave me a five-franc piece."

The description was not one that would lead to a recognition of the person, and Tantaine asked in tones of extreme annoyance,—

"Did you not notice anything particular about the man?"

"Yes, he had on gold spectacles with the mountings as fine as a hair, and a watch chain as thick and heavy as I have ever seen."

"And is that all?"

"Yes," answered she. "Oh! there was one thing more—the person knows that you come here."

"Does he? Why do you think so?"

"Because all the time he was talking to me he was in a rare fidget, and always kept his eyes on the door."

"Thanks, Mother Brigaut; mind and keep a sharp lookout," returned Tantaine, as he slowly ascended the stairs.

Every now and then he paused to think. "Who upon earth can this fellow be?" asked he of himself. He reviewed the whole question—chances, probabilities, and risks, not one was neglected, but all in vain.

"A thousand devils!" growled he; "are the police at my heels?"

His nerves were terribly shaken, and he strove in vain to regain his customary audacity. By this time he had reached the door of Paul's room, and, on his ringing, the door was at once opened; but at the sight of this woman he started back, with a cry of angry surprise; for it was a female figure that stood before

him, a young girl—Flavia, the daughter of Martin Rigal, the banker.

The keen eyes of Tantaine showed him that Flavia's visit had not been of long duration. She had removed her hat and jacket, and was holding in her hand a piece of fancy work.

"Whom do you wish to see, sir?" asked she.

The old man strove to speak, but his lips would not frame a single sentence. A band of steel seemed to be compressing his throat, and he appeared like a man about to be seized with an apoplectic fit.

Flavia gazed upon the shabby-looking visitor with an expression of intense disgust. It seemed to her that she had seen him somewhere; in fact, there was an inexplicable manner about him which entirely puzzled her.

"I want to speak to M. Paul," said the old man in a low, hoarse whisper; "he is expecting me."

"Then come in; but just now his doctor is with him."

She threw open the door more widely, and stepped back, so that the greasy garments of the visitor might not touch her dress. He passed her with an abject bow, and crossed the little sitting-room with the air of a man who perfectly understands his way. He did not knock at the door of the bedroom, but went straight in; there a singular spectacle at once arrested his attention. Paul, with a very pale face, was seated on the bed, while Hortebise was attentively examining his bare shoulder. The whole of Paul's right arm and shoulder was a large open wound, which seemed to have been caused by a burn or scald, and must have been extremely painful. The doctor was bending over him, applying a cooling lotion to the injured place

with a small piece of sponge. He turned sharply round on Daddy Tantaine's entrance; and so accustomed were these men to read each other's faces at a glance that Hortebise saw at once what had happened; for Tantaine's expression plainly said, "Is Flavia mad to be here?" while the eyes of Hortebise answered, "She may be, but I could not help it."

Paul turned, too, and greeted the old man with an exclamation of delight.

"Come here," said he merrily, "and just see to what a wretched state I have been reduced between the doctor and M. Mascarin."

Tantaine examined the wound carefully. "Are you quite sure," asked he, "that not only will it deceive the Duke, who will see but with our eyes, but also those of his wife, and perhaps of his medical man?"

"We will hoodwink the lot of them."

"And how long must we wait," asked the old man, "until the place skins over, and assumes the appearance of having been there from childhood?"

"In a month's time Paul can be introduced to the Duke de Champdoce."

"Are you speaking seriously?"

"Listen to me. The scar will not be quite natural then, but I intend to subject it to various other modes of treatment."

The dressing was now over, and Paul's shirt being readjusted, he was permitted to lie down again.

"I am quite willing to remain here forever," said he, "as long as I am allowed to retain the services of the nurse that I have in the next room, and who, I am sure, is waiting with the greatest eagerness for your departure."

Hortebise fumed, and cast a glance at Paul which

seemed to say, "Be silent"; but the conceited young man paid no heed to it.

"How long has this charming nurse been with you?" asked Tantaine in an unnatural voice.

"Ever since I have been in bed," returned Paul with the air of a gay young fellow. "I wrote a note that I was unable to go over to her, so she came to me. I sent my letter at nine o'clock, and at ten minutes past she was with me."

The diplomatic doctor slipped behind Tantaine, and made violent gestures to endeavor to persuade Paul to keep silence, but all was in vain.

"M. Martin Rigal," continued the vain young fool, "passes the greater part of his life in his private office. As soon as he gets up he goes there, and is not seen for the rest of the day. Flavia can therefore do entirely as she likes. As soon as she knows that her worthy father is deep in his ledgers, she puts on her hat and runs round to me, and no one could have a kinder and a prettier visitor than she is."

The doctor was hard at work at his danger signals, but it was useless. Paul saw them, but did not comprehend their meaning; and Tantaine rubbed his glasses savagely.

"You are perhaps deceiving yourself a little," said he at last.

"And why? You know that Flavia loves me, poor girl. I ought to marry her, and of course I shall; but still, if I do not do so—well, you know, I need say no more."

"You wretched scoundrel!" exclaimed the usually placid Tantaine. His manner was so fierce and threatening that Paul shifted his position to one nearer the wall.

It was impossible for Tantaine to say another word, for Hortebise placed his hand upon his lips, and dragged him from the room.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE TAFILA COPPER MINES, LIMITED.

PAUL could not for the life of him imagine why Tantaine had left the room in apparently so angry a mood. He had certainly spoken of Flavia in a most improper manner; for the very weakness of which she had been guilty should have caused him to treat her with tender deference and respect. He could understand the anger of Hortebise, who was Rigal's friend; but what on earth had Tantaine in common with the wealthy banker and his daughter? Forgetful of the pain which the smallest movement upon his part produced, Paul sat up in his bed, and listened with intense eagerness, hoping to catch what was going on in the next room; but he could hear nothing through the thick walls and the closed door.

"What can they be doing?" asked he. "What fresh plot are they contriving?"

Daddy Tantaine and Hortebise passed out of the room hastily, but when they reached the staircase they stood still. The doctor wore the same smiling expression of face, and he endeavored to calm his companion, who appeared to be on the verge of desperation.

"Have courage," whispered he; "what is the use of

giving way to passion? You cannot help this; it is too late now. Besides, even if you could, you would not, as you know very well, indeed!"

The old man was moving his spectacles, not to wipe his glasses, but his eyes.

"Ah!" moaned he, "now I can enter into the feelings of M. de Mussidan when I proved to him that his daughter had a lover. I have been hard and pitiless, and I am cruelly punished."

"My old friend, you must not attach too much importance to what you have heard. Paul is a mere boy, and, of course, a boaster."

"Paul is a miserable cowardly dog," answered the old man in a fierce undertone. "Paul does not love the girl as she loves him; but what he says is true, only too true, I can feel. Between her father and her lover she would not hesitate for a moment. Ah! unhappy girl, what a terrible future lies before her."

He stopped himself abruptly.

"I cannot speak to her myself," resumed he; "do you, doctor, strive and make her have reason."

Hortebise shrugged his shoulders. "I will see what my powers of oratory can do," answered he; "but you are not quite yourself to-day. Remember that a chance word will betray the secret of our lives."

"Go at once, and I swear to you that, happen what may, I will be calm."

The doctor went back into Paul's room, while Tantine sat down on the topmost stair, his face buried in his hands.

Mademoiselle Flavia was just going to Paul, when the doctor again appeared.

"What, back again?" asked she petulantly. "I thought that you had been far away by this time."

"I want to say something to you," answered he, "and something of a rather serious nature. You must not elevate those charming eyebrows. I see you guess what I am going to say, and you are right. I am come to tell you that this is not the proper place for Mademoiselle Rigal."

"I know that."

This unexpected reply, made with the calmest air in the world, utterly disconcerted the smiling doctor.

"It seems to me——" began he.

"That I ought not to be here; but then, you see, I place duty before cold, worldly dictates. Paul is very ill, and has no one to take care of him except his affianced bride; for has not my father given his consent to our union?"

"Flavia, listen to the experience of a man of the world. The nature of men is such that they never forgive a woman for compromising her reputation, even though it be in their own favor. Do you know what people will say twenty-four hours after your marriage? Why, that you had been his mistress for weeks before, and that it was only the knowledge of that fact that inclined your father to consent to the alliance."

Flavia's face grew crimson. "Very well," said she, "I will obey, and never say again that I was obstinate; but let me say one word to Paul, and then I will leave him."

The doctor retired, not guessing that this obedience arose from a sudden suspicion which had arisen in Flavia's mind. "It is done," said he, as he rejoined Tantaine on the stairs; "let us hasten, for she will follow us at once."

By the time that Tantaine got into the street, he

seemed to have recovered a certain amount of his self-command. "We have succeeded," said he, "but we shall have to work hard, and this marriage must be hastened by every means in our power. It can be celebrated now without any risk, for in twelve hours the only obstacle that stands between that youth there and the colossal fortune of the Champdoce will have vanished away."

Though he had expected something of the kind, the face of the doctor grew very pale.

"What, André?" faltered he.

"André is in great danger, doctor, and may not survive to-morrow, and a portion of the work necessary to this end will be done to-night by our young friend Toto Chupin."

"By that young scamp? Why, only the other day you laughed when I suggested employing him."

"I shall this time kill two birds with one stone. Once an investigation is made—let us speak plainly—into André's death, there will be some inquiry made as to a certain window frame that has been sawed through, and suspicion will fall upon Toto Chupin, who will have been seen lurking about the spot. It will be proved that he purchased a saw, and that he changed just before a note for one thousand francs; he will be found in hiding in a garret in the Hotel de Perou."

The doctor looked aghast. "Are you mad?" cried he. "Toto will accuse you."

"Very likely, but by that time poor old Tantaine will be dead and buried. Then Mascarin will disappear, our faithful Beaumarchef will be in the United States, and we can afford to laugh at the police."

"It seems like a success," said the doctor, "but

push on for mercy's sake; all these delays and fluctuations will make me seriously ill."

The two worthy associates held this conversation concealed in a doorway, anxious to be sure that Flavia had kept her promise. In a brief space of time they saw her come out of the house and move in the direction of her father's bank.

"Now," said Tantaine, "I can go in peace, doctor; farewell for the present;" and without waiting for a reply he was walking rapidly away when he was stopped by Beaumarchef, who came up breathless and barred his passage.

"I was looking for you," cried he; "the Marquis de Croisenois is in the office and is swearing at me like anything."

"Go back to the office and tell the Marquis that the master will soon be with him;" and, thus speaking, Tantaine disappeared down a court by the side of Martin Rigal's house.

The Marquis was striding up and down the office, every now and then discharging a rumbling cannonade of oaths. "Fine business people," remarked he, "to make an appointment and then not to keep it!" He checked himself; for the door of the inner office slowly opened, and Mascarin appeared on the threshold. "Punctuality," said he, "does not consist in coming *before*, but *at* the time appointed."

The Marquis was cowed at once, and followed Mascarin into the sanctum and watched him with curious gaze as the redoubtable head of the association seemed to be searching for something among the papers on his desk. When Mascarin had found what he was in search of, he turned and addressed the Marquis.

"I desired to see you," said he, "with reference to the great financial enterprise which you are to launch almost immediately."

"Yes; I understand that we must discuss it, fully understand it, and feel our way."

Mascarin uttered a contemptuous whistle.

"Do you think," asked he, "that I am the kind of person to stand and wait while you feel your way? because if you do, the sooner you undeceive yourself the better. Things that I take in hand are carried out like a flash of lightning. You have been playing while I and Catenac have been working, and nothing remains to be done but to act."

"Act! What do you mean?"

"I mean that offices have been taken in the Rue Vivienne, that the articles of association have been drawn up, the directors chosen, and the Company registered. The printer brought the prospectus here yesterday; you can begin sending them out to-morrow."

"But——"

"Read it for yourself," said Mascarin, handing a printed paper to him. "Read, and then, perhaps, you will be convinced."

Croisenois, in a dazed sort of manner, accepted the paper and read it aloud.

COPPER MINES OF TAFILA, ALGERIA.

Chairman: THE MARQUIS HENRI DE CROISENOIS.

Capital: Four Million Francs.

This Company does not appeal to that rash class of speculators who are willing to incur great risks for the sake of obtaining for a time heavy dividends.

The shareholders in the Tafila Copper Mining Company, Limited, must not look for a dividend of more than six, or at the utmost seven, per cent.

"Well," interrupted Mascarin, "what do you think of this for a beginning?"

"It seems fair enough," answered De Croisenois, "but suppose others than those whose names you have in your black list take shares, what do you say we are to do then?"

"We should simply decline to allot shares to them, that is all. See the Article XX. in the Articles of Association. 'The Board of Directors may decline to allot shares to applicants without giving any reason for so doing.'"

"And suppose," continued the Marquis, "that one of our own people dispose of his share, may we not find our new shareholder a thorn in our side?"

"Article XXI. 'No transfer of stock is valid, unless passed by the Board of Directors, and recorded in the books of the Company,'" read out Mascarin.

"And how will the game be brought to a conclusion?"

"Easily enough. You will advertise one morning that two-thirds of the capital having been unsuccessfully sunk in the enterprise, you are compelled to apply for a winding-up of the Company under Article XVII. Six months afterwards you will announce that the liquidation of the Company has, after all expenses have been paid, left no balance whatsoever. Then you wash your hands of the whole thing, and the matter is at an end."

Croisenois felt that he had no ground to stand upon, but he ventured on one more objection.

"It seems rather a strange thing to launch this enterprise at the present moment. May it not interfere with my marriage prospects? and may not the Count

de Mussidan decline to give me his daughter and risk her dowry in this manner? One moment, I——”

The agent sneered and cut short the tergiversations of the Marquis.

“You mean, I suppose,” said he, “that when once you are safely married and have received Mademoiselle Sabine’s dowry, you will take leave of us. Not so, my dear young friend; and if this is your idea, put it aside, for it is utter nonsense. I should hold you then as I do now.”

The Marquis saw that any further struggle would be of no avail, and gave in.

* * * * *

That evening, when M. Martin Rigal emerged from his private office, his daughter Flavia was more than usually demonstrative in her tokens of affection. “How fondly I love you, my dearest father!” said she, as she rained kisses on his cheeks. “How good you are to me!” but on this occasion the banker was too much preoccupied to ask his daughter the reason for this extreme tenderness on her part.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE VEILED PORTRAIT.

THE danger with which André was menaced was most terrible, and the importance of the game he was playing made him feel that he had everything to fear from the boldness and audacity of his enemies. He knew this, and he also knew that spies dogged all his movements. What could be wanted but a favorable

opportunity to assassinate him? But even this knowledge did not make him hesitate for an instant, and all his caution was fully exercised, for he felt that should he perish, Sabine would be inevitably lost. On her account he acted with a prudence which was certainly not one of his general characteristics. He was quite aware that he might put himself under the protection of the police, but this he knew would be to imperil the honor of the Mussidan family. He was sure that with time and patience he should be able to unravel the plots of the villains who were at work. But he had not time to do so by degrees. No, he must make a bold dash at once. The hideous sacrifice of which Sabine was to be the victim was being hurried on, and it seemed to him as if his very existence was being carried away by the hours as they flitted by. He went over recent events carefully one by one, and he strove to piece them together as a child does the portions of a dissected map. He wanted to find out the one common interest that bound all these plotters together—Verminet, Van Klopen, Mascarin, Hortebise, and Martin Rigal. As he submitted all this strange combination of persons to the test, the thought of Gaston de Gandelu came across his mind.

"Is it not curious," thought he, "that this unhappy boy should be the victim of the cruel band of miscreants who are trying to destroy us? It is strange, very strange."

Suddenly he started to his feet, for a fresh idea had flashed across his brain—a thought that was as yet but crude and undefined, but which seemed to bear the promise of hope and deliverance. It seemed to him that the affair of young Gandelu was closely connected with his own, that they were part and parcel of the

same dark plot, and that these bills with their forged acceptance had more to do with him than he had ever imagined. How it was that he and Gaston could be connected he could not for a moment guess; yet now he would have cheerfully sworn that such was the case. Who was it that had informed the father of the son's conduct? Why, Catenac. Who had advised that proceedings should be taken against Rose, *alias* Zora? Why, Catenac again; and this same man, in addition to acting for Gandelu, it seems, was also the confidential solicitor of the Marquis de Croisenois and Verminet. Perhaps he had only obeyed their instructions. All this was very vague and unsatisfactory, but it might be something to go upon, and who could say what conclusion careful inquiry might not lead him to? and André determined to carry on his investigations, and endeavor to find the hidden links that connected this chain of rascality together. He had taken up a pencil with the view of making a few notes, when he heard a knock at his door. He glanced at the clock; it was not yet nine.

"Come in," cried he as he rose.

The door was thrown open, and the young artist started as he recognized in his early visitor the father of Sabine. It was after a sleepless night that the Count had decided to take the present step. He was terribly agitated, but had had time to prepare himself for this all-important interview.

"You will, I trust, pardon me, sir," said he, "for making such an early call upon you, but I thought that I should be sure to find you at this hour, and I much wanted to see you."

André bowed.

In the space of one brief instant a thousand sup-

positions, each one more unlikely than the other, coursed through his brain. Why had the Count called? Who could have given him his address? And was the visit friendly or hostile?

"I am a great admirer of paintings," began the Count, "and one of my friends upon whose taste I can rely has spoken to me in the warmest terms of your talent. This I trust will explain the liberty I have taken. Curiosity drove me to——"

He paused for a moment, and then added,—

"My name is the Marquis de Bevron."

The concealment of the Count's real name showed André that the visit was not entirely a friendly one, and André replied,—

"I am only too pleased to receive your visit. Unfortunately just now I have nothing ready, only a few rough sketches in short. Would you like to see them?"

The Count replied eagerly in the affirmative. He was terribly embarrassed under his fictitious name, and shrank before the honest, open gaze of the young artist, and his mental disturbance was completed by seeing in one corner of the room the picture covered with a green cloth, which Tantaine had alluded to. It was evident that the old villain had told the truth, and that his daughter's portrait was concealed behind this wrapper. She had evidently been here—had spent hours here, and whose fault was it? She had but listened to the voice of her heart, and had sought that affection abroad which she was unable to obtain at home. As the Count gazed upon the young man before him, he was forced to admit that Mademoiselle Sabine had not fixed her affections on an unworthy object, for at the very first glance he had been struck with the

manly beauty of the young artist, and the clear intelligence of his face.

"Ah," thought André, "you come to me under a name that is not your own, and I will respect your wish to remain unknown, but I will take advantage of it by letting you know things which I should not dare say to your face."

Great as was André's preoccupation, he could not fail to notice that his visitor's eyes sought the veiled picture with strange persistency. While M. de Musidan was looking at the various sketches on the walls, André had time to recover all his self-command.

"Let me congratulate you, sir," remarked the Count, as he returned to the spot where the painter was standing. "My friend's admiration was well founded. I am sorry, however, that you have nothing finished to show me. You say that you have nothing, I believe?"

"Nothing, Marquis."

"Not even that picture whose frame I can distinguish through the serge curtain that covers it?"

André blushed, though he had been expecting the question from the commencement.

"Excuse me," answered he; "that picture is certainly finished, but it is not on view."

The Count was now sure that Tantine's statement was correct.

"I suppose that it is some woman's portrait," remarked the false Marquis.

"You are quite correct."

Both men were much agitated at this moment, and avoided meeting each other's eyes.

The Count, however, had made up his mind that he would go on to the end.

"Ah, you are in love, I see!" remarked he with a forced laugh. "All great artists have depicted the charms of their mistresses on canvas."

"Stop," cried André with an angry glance in his eyes. "The picture you refer to is the portrait of the purest and most innocent girl in the world. I shall love her all my life; but, if possible, my respect for her is greater than my love. I should consider myself a most degraded wretch, had I ever whispered in her ear a word that her mother might not have listened to."

A feeling of the most instantaneous relief thrilled through M. de Mussidan's heart.

"You will pardon me," suggested he blandly, "but when one sees a portrait in a studio, the inference is that a sitting or two has taken place?"

"You are right. She came here secretly, and without the knowledge of her family, at the risk of her honor and reputation, thus affording me the strongest proof of her love. It was cruel of me," continued the young artist, "to accept this proof of her entire devotion, and yet not only did I accept it, but I pleaded for it on my bended knees, for how else was I to hear the music of her voice, or gladden my eyes with her beauty? We love each other, but a gulf wider than the stormy sea divides us. She is an heiress, come of a proud and haughty line of nobles, while I——"

André paused, waiting for some words either of encouragement or censure; but the Count remained silent, and the young man continued,—

"Do you know who I am? A poor foundling, placed in the Hospital of Vendôme, the illicit offspring of some poor betrayed girl. I started in the world with twenty francs in my pocket, and found my way to Paris; since then I have earned my bread by my

daily work. You only see here the more brilliant side of my life; for an artist here—I am a common workman elsewhere.”

If M. de Mussidan remained silent, it was from extreme admiration of the noble character, which was so unexpectedly revealed to him, and he was endeavoring to conceal it.

“She knows all this,” pursued André, “and yet she loves me. It was here, in this very room, that she vowed that she could never be the wife of another. Not a month ago, a gentleman, well born, wealthy, and fascinating, with every characteristic that a woman could love, was a suitor for her hand. She went boldly to him, told him the story of our love, and, like a noble-hearted gentleman, he withdrew at once, and to-day is my best and kindest friend. Now, Marquis, would you like to see this young girl’s picture?”

“Yes,” answered the Count, “and I shall feel deeply grateful to you for such a mark of confidence.”

André went to the picture, but as he touched the curtain he turned quickly towards his visitor.

“No,” said he, “I can no longer continue this farce; it is unworthy of me.”

M. de Mussidan turned pale.

“I am about to see Sabine de Mussidan’s portrait. Draw the curtain.”

André obeyed, and for a moment the Count stood entranced before the work of genius that met his eyes.

“It is she!” said the father. “Her very smile; the same soft light in her eyes. It is exquisite!”

Misfortune is a harsh teacher; some weeks ago he would have smiled superciliously at the mere idea of granting his daughter’s hand to a struggling artist, for

then he thought only of M. de Breulh, but now he would have esteemed it a precious boon had he been allowed to choose André as Sabine's husband. But Henri de Croisenois stood in the way, and as this idea flashed across the Count's mind he gave a perceptible start. He was sure from the excessive calmness of the young man that he must be well acquainted with all recent events. He asked the question, and André, in the most open manner, told him all he knew. The generosity of M. de Breulh, the kindness of Madame Bois Arden, his suspicions, his inquiries, his projects, and his hopes. M. de Mussidan gazed once more upon his daughter's portrait, and then, taking the hand of the young painter, said,—

“M. André, if ever we can free ourselves from those miscreants, whose daggers are pointed at our hearts, Sabine shall be your wife.”

CHAPTER XXXI.

GASTON'S DILEMMA.

YES, Sabine might yet be his, but between the lovers stood the forms of Croisenois and his associates. But now he felt strong enough to contend with them all.

“To work!” said he, “to work!”

Just then, however, he heard a sound of ringing laughter outside his door. He could distinguish a woman's voice, and also a man's, speaking in high, shrill tones. All at once his door burst open, and a hurricane of silks, velvets, feathers, and lace whirled

in. With extreme surprise, the young artist recognized the beautiful features of Rose, *alias* Zora de Chantemille, Gaston de Gandelu followed her, and at once began,—

“Here we are,” said he, “all right again. Did you expect to see us?”

“Not in the least.”

“Ah! well, it is a little surprise of the governor’s. On my word, I really will be a dutiful son for the future. To-day, the good old boy came into my room, and said, ‘This morning I took the necessary steps to release the person in whom you are interested. Go and meet her.’ What do you think of that? So off I ran to find Zora, and here we are.”

André did not pay much attention to Gaston, but was engaged in watching Zora, who was looking round the studio. She went up to Sabine’s portrait, and was about to draw the curtain, when André exclaimed,—

“Excuse me,” said he; “I must put this picture to dry.” And as the portrait stood on a movable easel, he wheeled it into the adjoining room.

“And now,” said Gaston, “I want you to come and breakfast with us to celebrate Zora’s happy release.”

“I am much obliged to you, but it is impossible. I must get on with my work.”

“Yes, yes; work is an excellent thing, but just now you must go and dress.”

“I assure you that it is quite out of the question. I cannot leave the studio yet.”

Gaston paused for a moment in deep thought.

“I have it,” said he triumphantly. “You will not come to breakfast; then breakfast shall come to you. I am off to order it.”

André ran after him, but Gaston was too quick, and he returned to the studio in anything but an amiable temper. Zora noticed his evident annoyance.

"He always goes on in this absurd way," said she, with a shrug of her pretty shoulders, "and thinks himself so clever and witty, bah!"

Her tone disclosed such contempt for Gaston that André looked at her in perplexed surprise.

"What do you look so astonished at? It is easy to see you do not know much of him. All his friends are just like him; if you listen to them for half an hour at a stretch, you get regularly sick. When I think of the terrible evenings that I have spent in their company, I feel ready to die with yawning;" and as she spoke, she suited the action to the word. "Ah! if he really loved me!" added she.

"Love you! Why, he adores you."

Zora made a little gesture of contempt which Toto Chupin might have envied.

"Do you think so?" said she. "Do you know what it is he loves in me? When people pass me they cry out, 'Isn't she good style?' and then the idiot is as pleased as Punch; but if I had on a cotton gown, he would think nothing of me."

Rose had evidently learned a good deal, as her beauty had never been so radiant. She was one glow of health and strength.

"Then my name was not good enough for him," she went on. "His aristocratic lips could not bring themselves to utter such a common name as Rose, so he christened me Zora, a regular puppy dog's name. He has plenty of money, but money is not everything after all. Paul had no money, and yet I loved him a thousand times better. On my word, I have almost

forgotten how to laugh, and yet I used to be as merry as the day was long."

"Why did you leave Paul then?"

"Well, you see, I wanted to experience what a woman feels when she has a Cashmere shawl on, so one fine morning I took wing. But there, who knows? Paul would very likely have left me one day. There was some one who was doing his best to separate us, an old blackguard called Tantaine, who lived in the same house."

"Ah!" answered he cautiously. "What interest could he have had in separating you?"

"I don't know," answered the girl, assuming a serious air; "but I am sure he was trying it on. A fellow doesn't hand over banknotes for nothing, and I saw him give one for five hundred francs to Paul; and more than that, he promised him that he should make a great fortune through a friend of his called Mascarin."

André started. He remembered the visit that Paul had made him, on the pretext of restoring the twenty francs he had borrowed, and at which he had boasted that he had an income of a thousand francs a month, and might make more, though he had not said how this was to be done. "I think that Paul has forgotten me. I saw him once at Van Klopen's, and he never attempted to say a word to me. He was certainly with that Mascarin at the time."

André could only draw one conclusion from this, either that Paul was protected by the band of conspirators, or else that he formed one of it. In that case he was useful to them; while Rose, who was in their way, was persecuted by them. André's mind came to this conclusion in an instant. It seemed to

him that if Catenac had been desirous of imprisoning Rose, it was because she was in the way, and her presence disturbed certain combinations. Before, however, he could work out his line of deduction, Gaston's shrill voice was heard upon the stairs, and in another moment he made his appearance.

"Place for the banquet," said he; "make way for the lordly feast."

Two waiters followed him, bearing a number of covered dishes on trays. At another time André would have been very angry at this invasion, and at the prospect of a breakfast that would last two or three hours and utterly change everything; but now he was inclined to bless Gaston for his happy idea, and, with the assistance of Rose, he speedily cleared a large table for the reception of the viands.

Gaston did nothing, but talked continually.

"And now I must tell you the joke of the day. Henri de Croisenois, one of my dearest friends, has absolutely launched a Company."

André nearly let fall a bottle, which he was about to place upon the table.

"Who told you this?" asked he quickly.

"Who told me? Why, a great big flaming poster. Tafila Copper Mines; capital, four millions. And my esteemed friend, Henri, has not a five-franc piece to keep the devil out of his pocket."

The face of the young artist expressed such blank surprise that Gaston burst into a loud laugh.

"You look just as I did when I read it. Henri de Croisenois, the chairman of a Company! Why, if you had been elected Pope, I should not have been more surprised. Tafila Copper Mines! What a joke! The shares are five hundred francs."

The waiters had now retired, and Gaston urged his friends to take their places at the table, and all seemed merry as a marriage bell; but many a gay commencement has a stormy ending.

Gaston, whose shallow brain could not stand the copious draughts of wine with which he washed down his repast, began all at once to overwhelm Zora with bitter reproaches at her not being able to comprehend how a man like him, who was destined to play a serious part in society, could have been led away, as he had been, by a person like her.

Gaston had a tongue which was never at a loss either to praise or blame, and Zora was equally ready to retort, and defended herself with such acrimony that the lad, knowing himself to be in fault, entirely lost the small remnant of temper which he still possessed, and dashed out of the room, declaring that he never wished to set eyes upon Zora again, and that she might keep all the presents that he had lavished upon her for all he cared.

His departure was hailed with delight by André, who, now that he was left alone with Zora, hoped to derive some further information from her, and especially a distinct description of Paul, whom he felt that he must now reckon among his adversaries. But his hopes were destined to be frustrated, for Zora was so filled with anger and excitement that she refused to listen to another word; and putting on her hat and mantle, with scarcely a glance at the mirror, rushed out of the studio with the utmost speed, declaring that she would seek out Paul, and make him revenge the insults that Gaston had put on her.

All this passed so rapidly that the young painter felt as if a tornado had passed through his humble

dwelling ; but as peace and calm returned, he began to see that Providence had directly interposed in his favor, and had sent Rose and Gaston to his place to furnish him with fresh and important facts. All that Rose had said, incomplete as her statement was, had thrown a ray of light upon an intrigue which, up till now, had been shaded in the thickest gloom. The relations of Paul with Mascarin explained why Catenac had been so anxious to have Rose imprisoned, and also seemed to hint vaguely at the reason for the extraction of the forged signatures from the simple Gaston. What could be the meaning of the Company started by De Croisenois at the very moment when he was about to celebrate his union with Sabine ?

André desired to see the advertisement of the Company for himself ; and without stopping to change his blouse, ran downstairs to the corner of the street, where Gaston had told him that the announcement of the Company was placarded up. He found it there, in a most conspicuous position, with all its advantages most temptingly set forth. Nothing was wanting ; and there was even a woodcut of Tafila, in Algiers, which represented the copper mines in full working operation ; while at the top, the name of the chairman, the Marquis de Croisenois, stood out in letters some six inches in height.

André stood gazing at this wonderful production for fully five minutes, when all at once a gleam of prudence flashed across his mind.

"I am a fool," said he to himself. "How do I know how many watchful eyes are now fixed on me, reading on my countenance my designs regarding this matter and its leading spirit?"

Upon his return to his room, he sat for more than

an hour, turning over the whole affair in his mind, and at length he flattered himself that he had hit upon an expedient. Behind the house in which he lodged was a large garden, belonging to some public institution, the front of which was in the Rue Laval. A wall of about seven feet in height divided these grounds from the premises in the Rue de la Tour d'Auvergne. Why should he not go out by the way of these ornamental grounds and so elude the vigilance of the spies who might be in waiting at the front of the house?

"I can," thought he, "alter my appearance so much that I shall not be recognized. I need not return here to sleep. I can ask a bed from Vignol, who will also help me in every possible way."

This Vignol was the friend to whom, at André's request, M. Gandelu had given the superintendence of the works at his new house in the Champs Elysées.

"I shall," continued he, "by this means escape entirely from De Croisenois and his emissaries, and can watch their game without their having any suspicion of my doing so. For the time being, of course, I must give up seeing those who have been helping me—De Breulh, Gandelu, Madame de Bois Arden, and M. de Mussidan; that, however, cannot be avoided. I can use the post, and by it will inform them all of the step that I have taken."

It was dark before he had finished his letters, and, of course, it was too late to try anything that day; consequently he went out, posted his letters, and dined at the nearest restaurant.

On his return home, he proceeded to arrange his disguise. He had it ready, among his clothes: a blue blouse, a pair of check trousers, well-worn shoes, and

a shabby cap, were all that he required, and he then applied himself to the task of altering his face. He first shaved off his beard. Then he twisted down two locks of hair, which he managed to make rest on his forehead. Then he commenced applying some coloring to his face with a paint-brush; but this he found to be an extremely difficult business, and it was not for a long while that he was satisfied with the results that he had produced. He then knotted an old handkerchief round his neck, and clapped his cap on one side, with the peak slanting over one eye. Then he took a last glance in the glass, and felt that he had rendered himself absolutely unrecognizable. He was about to impart a few finishing touches, when a knock came at his door. He was not expecting any one at such an hour, nine o'clock; for the waiters from the restaurant had already removed the remains of the feast.

"Who is there?" cried he.

"It is I," replied a weak voice; "I, Gaston de Gandelu."

André decided that he had no cause to distrust the lad, and so he opened his door.

"Has M. André gone out?" asked the poor boy faintly. "I thought I heard his voice."

Gaston had not penetrated his disguise, and this was André's first triumph; but he saw now that he must alter his voice, as well as his face.

"Don't you know me?" asked he.

It was evident that young Gaston had received some terrible shock; for it could not have been the quarrel in the morning that had reduced him to this abject state of prostration.

"What has gone wrong with you?" asked André kindly.

"I have come to bid you farewell; I am going to shoot myself in half an hour."

"Have you gone mad?"

"Not in the least," answered Gaston, passing his hand across his forehead in a distracted manner; "but those infernal bills have turned up. I was just leaving the dining-room, after having treated the governor to my company, when the butler whispered in my ear that there was a man outside who wanted to see me. I went out and found a dirty-looking old scamp, with his coat collar turned up round the nape of his neck."

"Did he say that his name was Tontaine?" exclaimed André.

"Ah! was that his name? Well, it doesn't matter. He told me in the most friendly manner that the holder of my bills had determined to place them in the hands of the police to-morrow at twelve o'clock, but that there was still a way for me to escape."

"And this was to take Rose out of France with you," said André quickly.

Gaston was overwhelmed with surprise.

"Who the deuce told you that?" asked he.

"No one; I guessed it; for it was only the conclusion of the plan which they had initiated when you were induced to forge Martin Rigal's signature. Well, what did you say?"

"That the idea was a ridiculous one, and that I would not stir a yard. They shall find out that I can be obstinate, too; besides, I can see their little game. As soon as I am out of the way they will go to the governor and bleed him."

But André was not listening to him. What was best to be done? To advise Gaston to go and take

Rose with him was to deprive himself of a great element of success; and to permit him to kill himself was, of course, out of the question.

"Just attend to me," said he at last; "I have an idea which I will tell you as soon as we are out of this house; but for reasons which are too long to go into at present it is necessary for me to get into the street without going through the door. You will, therefore, go away, and as the clock strikes twelve you will ring at the gateway of 29, Rue de Laval. When it is opened, ask some trivial question of the porter; and when you leave, take care that you do not close the gate. I shall be in the garden of the house and will slip out and join you."

The plan succeeded admirably, and in ten minutes Gaston and André were walking along the boulevards.

CHAPTER XXXII.

M. LECOQ.

THE Marquis de Croisenois lived in a fine new house on the Boulevard Malesherbes near the church of St. Augustine, and in a suite of rooms the rental of which was four thousand francs per annum. He had collected together sufficient relics of his former splendor to dazzle the eyes of the superficial observer. The apartment and the furniture stood in the name of his body-servant, while his horse and brougham were by the same fiction supposed to be the property of his coachman, for even in the midst of his ruin the Marquis de Croisenois could not go on foot like common people.

The Marquis had two servants only in his modest establishment—a coachman, who did a certain amount of indoor work, and a valet, who knew enough of cookery to prepare a bachelor breakfast. This valet Mascarin had seen once, and the man had then produced so unpleasant an impression on the astute proprietor of the Servants' Registry Office that he had set every means at work to discover who he was and from whence he came. Croisenois said that he had taken him into his service on the recommendation of an English baronet of his acquaintance, a certain Sir Richard Wakefield. The man was a Frenchman, but he had resided for some time in England, for he spoke that language with tolerable fluency. André knew nothing of these details, but he had heard of the existence of the valet from M. de Breulh, when he had asked where the Marquis lived.

At eight o'clock on the morning after he had surreptitiously left his home in the manner described, André took up his position in a small wine-shop not far from the abode of the Marquis de Croisenois. He had done this designedly, for he knew enough of the manner and customs of Parisian society to know that this was the hour usually selected by domestics in fashionable quarters to come out for a gossip while their masters were still in bed. André had more confidence in himself than heretofore, for he had succeeded in saving Gaston; and these were the means he had employed. After much trouble, and even by the use of threats, he had persuaded the boy to return to his father's house. He had gone with him; and though it was two in the morning, he had not hesitated to arouse M. Gandelu, senior, and tell him how his son

had been led on to commit the forgery, and how he threatened to commit suicide.

The poor old man was much moved.

"Tell him to come to me at once," said he, "and let him know that we two will save him."

André had not far to go, for Gaston was waiting in the next room in an agony of suspense.

As soon as he came into the old man's presence he fell upon his knees, with many promises of amendment for the future.

"I do not believe," remarked old Gandelu, "that these miscreants will venture to carry their threats into execution and place the matter in the hands of the police; but for all that, my son must not remain in a state of suspense. I will file a complaint against the Mutual Loan Society before twelve to-day, and we will see how an association will be dealt with that lends money to minors and urges them to forge signatures as security. It will, however, be as well for my son to leave for Belgium by the first train this morning; but, as you will see, he will not remain very many days."

André remained for the rest of the hours of darkness at the kind old man's house, and it was in Gaston's room that he renewed his "make-up" before leaving. The future looked very bright to him as he walked gayly up the Boulevard Malesherbes. The wine-shop in which he had taken up his position was admirably adapted for keeping watch on De Croise-nois, for he could not avoid seeing all who came in and went out of the house; and as there was no other wine-shop in the neighborhood, André felt sure that all the servants in the vicinity, and those of the Marquis,

of course, among the number, would come there in the course of the morning; so that here he could get into conversation with them, offer them a glass of wine, and, perhaps, get some information from them. The room was large and airy, and was full of customers, most of whom were servants. André was racking his brain for a means of getting into conversation with the proprietor, when two new-comers entered the room. These men were in full livery, while all the other servants had on morning jackets. As soon as they entered, an old man, with a calm expression of face, who was struggling perseveringly with a tough beefsteak at the same table as that by which André was seated, observed,—

“Ah! here comes the De Croisenois’ lot.”

“If they would only sit here,” thought André, “by the side of this fellow, who evidently knows them, I could hear all they said.”

By good luck they did so, begging that they might be served at once, as they were in a tremendous hurry.

“What is the haste this morning?” asked the old man who had recognized them.

“I have to drive the master to his office, for he has one now. He is chairman of a Copper Mining Company, and a fine thing it is, too. If you have any money laid by, M. Benoit, this is a grand chance for you.”

Benoit shook his head gravely.

“All is not gold that glitters,” said he sententiously; “nor, on the other hand, are things as bad as they are painted.”

Benoit was evidently a prudent man, and was not likely to commit himself.

"But if your master is going out, you, M. Mouret, will be free, and we can have a game at cards together."

"No, sir," answered the valet.

"What! are you engaged too?"

"Yes; I have to carry a bouquet of flowers to the young lady my master is engaged to. I have seen the young lady; she seems to be rather haughty."

The man, who wore an enormously high and stiff collar, was absolutely speaking of Sabine, and André could have twisted his neck with pleasure.

"Let us hope," remarked the coachman, as he hastily swallowed his breakfast, "that the Marquis does not intend to invest his wife's dowry in this new venture of his."

The men then ceased to speak of their master, and began to busy themselves with their own affairs, and went out again without alluding to him any further, leaving André to reflect what a difficult business the detective line was.

The customers looked upon him with distrustful eyes, for it must be confessed that his appearance was decidedly against him, and he had not yet acquired the necessary art of seeing and hearing while affecting to be doing neither; and it was easy for the dullest observer to be certain that it was not for the sake of obtaining a breakfast that he had entered the establishment. André had penetration enough to see the effect he had produced, and he became more and more embarrassed. He had finished his meal now, and had lighted a cigar, and had ordered a small glass of brandy. Nearly all the customers had withdrawn, leaving only five or six, who were playing cards at a table near the door. André was anxious to see Croise-

nois enter his carriage, and so he lingered, ordering another glass of brandy as an excuse.

He had just been served, when a man, whose dress very much resembled his own, lounged into the wine-shop. He was a tall, clumsily built fellow, with an insolent expression upon his beardless face. His coat and cap were in an equally dilapidated condition; and in the squeaky voice of the rough, he ordered a plate of beef and half a bottle of wine, and, as he brushed past André, upset his glass of brandy. The artist made no remark, though he felt quite sure that this act was intentional, as the fellow laughed impudently when he saw the damage that he had done. When his breakfast was served, he carelessly spit upon André's boots. The insult was so apparent that André began to reflect.

"Had he not succeeded in eluding his spies, as he thought that he had done? and was it not quite possible that this man had been sent to pick a quarrel with him, and deal him a disabling, or even a fatal blow?"

Prudence counselled him to leave the place at once, but he felt that he could not go until he had found out the real truth. There seemed to be but little doubt on the matter, however; for as the fellow cut up his meat, he jerked every bit of skin and gristle into his neighbor's lap; then, after finishing up his wine, he managed to upset the few drops remaining on to André's arm and shoulder. This was the finishing stroke.

"Please, remember," remarked André calmly, "that there is some one at the table besides yourself."

"Do you think I'm blind, mate?" returned the fellow brutally. "Mind your own business, or——" And to conclude the sentence, he shook his fist threateningly in the young man's face.

André started to his feet, and, with a well-directed blow in the chest, sent the fellow rolling under the table.

At the sound of the scuffle, the card-players turned round, and saw André standing erect, with quivering lips and eyes flashing with rage, while his antagonist was lying on the floor among the overturned chairs.

"Come, come! No squabbling here!" remarked one of the players.

The fellow scrambled to his feet, and made a savage rush at the young man, who, using his right foot skilfully, tripped his antagonist up, and sent him again rolling on the ground. It was most adroitly done, and secured the applause of the lookers-on, who now complained no longer, and were evidently interested in the scene.

Again the rough came up, but André contented himself with standing on the defensive. Some tables, a stool, and a glass were injured, and at last the proprietor came upon the scene of action.

"Get out of this," cried he, "and take care that I don't see your faces here again."

At these words, the rough burst out into a torrent of foul language.

"Don't put up with his cheek," said one of the customers; "give him in charge at once."

Hardly, however, had the manager started to summon the police, than, as if by magic, a body of them appeared; and André found himself walking down the boulevard between a couple, while his late antagonist followed in the safe custody of two more. To have attempted any resistance would have been utter folly, and the young man resigned himself to what he felt he could not help. But as he went on, he reflected on

the strange scene through which he had just passed. All had gone on so rapidly that he could hardly recall the events to his memory. He was, however, quite sure that this unprovoked assault concealed some motive with which at present he was unacquainted.

The police led their prisoners through the doorway of a dingy-looking old house, and then André saw that he was not at the regular police-station. The whole party entered an office, where a superintendent and two clerks were at work. The ruffian who had assaulted André changed his manner directly he entered the office; he threw his tattered cap upon a bench, passed his fingers through his hair, and shook hands with the superintendent; he then turned to André.

"Permit me, sir," said he, "to compliment you on being so handy with your fists. You precious nearly did for me, I can tell you."

At that moment a door opened at the other end of the room, and a voice was heard to say, "Send them in."

André and his late antagonist soon found themselves in an office evidently sacred to some one high up in the police. At a desk near the window was seated a man, with a rather distinguished air, wearing a white necktie and a pair of gold glasses.

"Have the goodness to take a seat," said this gentleman, addressing André with the most perfect urbanity.

He took a chair, half stupefied by the strangeness of the whole affair, and waited. Could he be awake, or was he dreaming? He could hardly tell.

"Before I say anything," remarked the gentleman in the gold spectacles, "I ought to apologize for a proceeding which is—well, what shall I call it?—a lit-

tle rough, perhaps; but it was necessary to make use of it to obtain this interview with you. Really, however, I had no choice. You are closely watched, and I did not wish the persons who had set spies on you to have any knowledge of this conference."

"Do you say I am watched?" stammered André.

"Yes, by a certain La Candéle, as sharp a fellow at that kind of work as you could find in Paris. Are you surprised at this?"

"Yes, for I had thought——"

The gentleman's features softened into a benevolent smile.

"You thought," he said, "that you had succeeded in throwing them off the scent. So I had imagined this morning, when I saw you in your present disguise. But permit me, my dear M. André, to assure you that there is great room for improvement in it. I admit that a first attempt is always to be looked on leniently; but it did not deceive La Candéle, and even at this distance I can plainly see your whole make-up; and what I can see, of course, is patent to others."

He rose from his seat, and came closer to André.

"Why on earth," asked he, "should you daub all this color on your face, which makes you look like an Indian warrior in his war-paint? Only two colors are necessary to change the whole face—red and black—at the eyebrows, the nostrils, and the corners of the mouth. Look here"; and taking from his pocket a gold pencil-case, he corrected the faults in the young artist's work.

As soon as he had finished, André went up to the mirror over the chimney-piece, and was surprised at the result.

"Now," said the strange gentleman, "you see the

futility of your attempts. La Candéle knew you at once. I wished to speak to you; so I sent for Palot, one of my men, and instructed him to pick a quarrel with you. The policemen arrested you, and we have met without any one being at all the wiser. Be kind enough to efface my little corrections, as they will be noticed in the street."

André obeyed, and as he rubbed away with the corner of his handkerchief, he vainly sought for some elucidation of this mystery.

The man with the gold spectacles had resumed his seat, and was refreshing himself with a pinch of snuff.

"And now," resumed he, "we will, if you please, have a little talk together. As you see, I know you. Doctor Loulleux tells me that he knows no one so high-minded and amiable as yourself. He declares that your honor is without a stain, and your courage undoubted."

"Ah! my dear sir!" interposed the painter, with a deep blush.

"Pray let me go on. M. Gandelu says that he would trust you with all he possessed, while all your comrades, with Vignol at their head, have the greatest respect and regard for you. So much for the present. As for your future, two of the greatest ornaments of the artistic world say that you will one day occupy a very high place in the profession. You gain now about fifteen francs a day. Am I correct?"

"Certainly," answered André, more bewildered than ever.

The gentleman smiled.

"Unfortunately," he went on, "my information ends here, for the means of inquiry possessed by the

police are, of course, very limited. They can only act upon facts, not on intentions, and so long as these are not displayed in open acts, the hands of the police are tied. It is only forty-eight hours since I heard of you for the first time, and I have already your biography in my pocket. I hear that the day before yesterday you were dining with M. de Breulh-Faverlay, and that this morning you were walking with young Gandelu, and that La Candéle was following you like a shadow. These are all facts, but——”

He paused, and cast a keen glance upon André, then, in a slow and measured voice, he continued,—

“But no one has been able to tell me why you dogged Verminet’s footsteps, or why you went to Mascarin’s house, or why, finally, you disguised yourself to keep a watch on the movements of the most honorable the Marquis de Croisenois. It is the motive that we cannot arrive at, for the facts are perfectly clear.”

André fidgeted uneasily in his chair beneath the spell of those magnetic glasses, which seemed to draw the truth from him.

“I cannot tell you, sir,” faltered he at last, “for the secret is not mine to divulge.”

“You will not trust me? Well, then, I must speak. Remember, all that I have told you was the account of what I knew positively; but, in addition to this, I have drawn my own inferences. You are watching De Croisenois because he is going to marry a wealthy heiress.”

André blushed crimson.

“We assume, therefore, that you wish to prevent this marriage; and why, pray? I have heard that Mademoiselle de Mussidan was formerly engaged to M. de Breulh-Faverlay. How comes it that the Count

and Countess de Mussidan prefer a ruined spendthrift to a wealthy and strictly honorable man? It is for you to answer this question. It is perfectly plain to me that they hand over their daughter to De Croisenois under pressure of some kind, and that means that a terrible secret exists with which Croisenois threatens them."

"Your deduction is wrong, sir," exclaimed André eagerly, "and you are quite wrong."

"Very good," was the calm reply. "Your emphatic denial shows that I am in the right. I want no further proofs. M. de Mussidan paid you a visit yesterday, and one of my agents reported that his face was much happier on leaving you than when he was on his way to your house. I therefore infer that you promised to release him from Croisenois' persecutions, and in return he promised you his daughter's hand in marriage. This, of course, explains your present disguise, and now tell me again that I am wrong, if you dare."

André would not lie, and therefore kept silence.

"And now," continued the gentleman, "how about the secret? Did not the Count tell it you? I do not know it; and yet I think that if I were to search for it, I could find it. I can call to my mind certain crimes which three generations of detectives have striven to find out. Did you ever hear that De Croisenois had an elder brother named George, who disappeared in a most wonderful manner? What became of him? This very George, twenty-three years back, was a friend of Madame de Mussidan's. Might not his disappearance have something to do with this marriage?"

"Are you the fiend himself?" cried the young man.

"I am M. Lecoq."

André started back in absolute dread at the name of this celebrated detective.

"M. Lecoq!" repeated he.

The vanity of the great detective was much flattered when he saw the impression that his name had produced.

"And now, my dear M. André," said he blandly, "now that you know who I am, may I not hope that you will be more communicative?"

M. de Mussidan had not told his secret to the young artist, but he had said enough for him to feel that the detective was correct in his inference.

"Surely," continued Lecoq, "we ought to be able to come to a more definite understanding, and I think that my openness should elicit some frankness on your side. I saw that you were watched by the very person that I was watching. For three days my men have followed you, and to-day I made up my mind that you could furnish me with the clue I am seeking."

"I, sir?"

"For many years," continued Lecoq, "I have been certain that an organized association of blackmailers exists in Paris; family differences, sin, shame, and sorrow are worked by these wretches like veritable gold mines, and bring them in enormous annual revenues."

"Ah," returned André, "I expected something of this kind."

"Of course, when I was quite sure of these facts," continued Lecoq, "I said to myself, 'I will break up this gang'; but it was easier said than done. There is one very peculiar thing about blackmailing. Those

who carry it on are almost certain of doing so with impunity, for the victims will pay and not complain. Yes, I tell you that I have often found out these unhappy pigeons, but never could get one to speak."

The detective was so indignant and acrimonious withal in his indignation, that André could not repress a smile.

"Very soon," continued Lecoq, "I recognized the futility of my attempts, and the impossibility of reaching these scoundrels through their victims, and then I determined to strike at the plunderers themselves, but this was a scheme that took patience and time. I have waited my chance for three years, and for eighteen months one of my men has been in the service of the Marquis de Croisenois, and up to now this band of villains has cost the government over ten thousand francs. That superlative scoundrel, Mascarin, has put several white threads in my hair. I believe him to be Tantaine; yes, and Martin Rigal too. The idea of there being a means of communication between the banker's house in the Rue Montmartre and the Servants' Registry Office in the Rue Montorgueil only came into my head this morning. But this time they have gone too far, and I have them. The idea of a Limited Company, the shares of which are to be taken up by their victims, is not at all a bad one. I know them all, from the chief, Mascarin-Tantaine-Rigal, down to their lowest agent, Toto Chupin, and Paul Violaine, the docile puppet of their will. We will get hold of the whole gang, and neither Van Klopen nor Catenac will escape. Just now the latter is travelling about with the Duke de Champdoce and a fellow named Perpignan, and two of my sweet lads are close upon them, and send in almost hourly reports of what is going

on. My trap has a tempting bait, the spring is strong, and we shall catch every one of them. And now do you still hesitate to confide all you know to me? I swear on my honor that I will respect as sacred what you tell me, no matter what may occur."

André yielded, as did every person who came under the influence of this remarkable man and his strange and inexplicable fascination. If he hid anything from him to-day, would not Lecoq be acquainted with it to-morrow? and so, with the most perfect frankness, he told his story and everything that he knew.

"Now," cried Lecoq, "I see it all clearly. Aha, they want to force young Gandelu to disappear with Rose, do they?"

Beneath his gold-rimmed spectacles his eyes flashed fiercely. He seemed to be occupied in drawing out his plan of campaign.

"From this moment," said he, "be at ease. In another month Mademoiselle de Mussidan shall be your wife; this I promise you, and the promises of Lecoq are never broken."

He paused for an instant, as though to collect his thoughts, and then continued,—

"I can answer for all, except for your life. So many are interested in your disappearance from this world, that every effort will be made to get rid of you. Do not cease your caution for an instant. Never eat twice running at the same restaurant, throw away food that has the slightest strange taste. Avoid crowds in the street; do not get into a cab; never lean from a window before ascertaining that its supports are solid; in a word, fear and suspect everything."

For a moment longer Lecoq detained the young artist.

"Tell me," said he, "have you the mark of a wound on your shoulder or arm?"

"I have, sir; the scar of a very severe scald."

"I thought so; yes, I was almost certain of it," said Lecoq thoughtfully; and as he conducted the young man to the door, he took leave of him with the same words that Mascarin had often used to Paul,—

"Farewell for the present, Duke de Champdoce."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THROUGH THE AIR.

AT these last words André turned round, but the door closed, and he heard the key grate in the lock. He passed through the outer office, where the superintendent, his two clerks, and his late adversary all seemed to gaze upon him with a glance of admiration and esteem.

He gained the open street.

What did those last words of Lecoq mean? He was a foundling, it is true; but what foundling has not had lofty aspirations, and felt that, for all he knew, he might be the scion of some noble house.

As soon as Lecoq thought that the coast was clear, he opened the door, and called the agent, Palot.

"My lad," said the great man, "you saw that young man who went out just now? He is a noble fellow, full of good feeling and honor. I look upon him as my friend."

Palot made a gesture signifying that henceforth his late antagonist was as something sacred in his eyes.

"You will be his shadow," pursued Lecoq, "and keep near enough to him to rush to his aid at a moment of danger. That gang, of which Mascarin is the head, want his life. You are my right-hand man, and I trust him to you. I have warned him, but youth is rash; and you will scent danger where he would never dream that it lurked. If there is any peril, dash boldly forward, but endeavor to let no one find out who you are. If you must speak to him—but only do so at the last extremity—whisper my name in his ear, and he will know you have come from me. Remember, you are answerable for him; but change your face. La Candéle and the others must not recognize in you the wine-shop bully; that would spoil all. What have you on under that blouse, a *commissionaire's* dress?"

"That will do; now change the face."

Palot pulled out a small parcel from his pocket, from which he extracted a red beard and wig, and, going to the mirror, adjusted them with dexterous activity; and, in a few minutes, went up to his master, who was waiting, saying,—

"How will this do?"

"Not bad, not bad," returned Lecoq; "and now to your work."

"Where shall I find him?" asked Palot.

"Somewhere near Mascarin's den, for I advised him not to give up playing the spy too suddenly."

Palot was off like the wind, and when he reached the Rue Montmartre, he caught sight of the person who had been intrusted to his care.

André was walking slowly along, thinking of Lecoq's cautions, when a young man, with his arm in a sling, overtook him, going in the same direction as he was. André was sure that it was Paul, and as he

knew that he could not be recognized, he passed him in his turn, and saw that it was indeed the Paul so much regretted by Zora.

"I will find out where he goes to," thought André.

He followed, and saw him enter the house of M. Rigal. Two women were gossiping near the door, and André heard one of them say,—

"That is the young fellow who is going to marry Flavia, the banker's daughter."

Paul, therefore, was to marry the daughter of the chief of the gang. Should he tell Lecoq this? But, of course, the detective knew it.

Time was passing, and André felt that he had but little space to gain the house that Gandelu was building in the Champs Elysées, if he wished to ask hospitality from his friend Vignol.

He found all the workmen there, and not one of them recognized him when he asked for Vignol.

"He is engaged up there," said one. "Take the staircase to the left."

The chief part of the ornamental work was in front, and it was there that the little hut which Tantaine had pointed out to Toto Chupin was erected. Vignol was in it, and was utterly surprised when André made himself known, for he did not recognize him under his strange disguise.

"It is nothing," returned the young man cautiously, as Vignol paused for an explanation; "only a little love affair."

"Do you expect to win a girl's heart by making such a guy of yourself?" asked his friend with a laugh.

"Hush! I will explain matters later on. Can you give me shelter for a night or two?"

He stopped himself, turned terribly pale, and listened intently. He fancied he had heard a woman's scream, and his own name uttered.

"André, it is I—your Sabine; help!"

Quick as lightning André rushed to the window, opened it, and leaned out to discover from whence those sounds came.

The young miscreant, Toto Chupin, had too fatally earned the note with which Tantaine had bribed him. The whole of the front of the window gave way with a loud crash, and André was hurled into space.

The hut was at least sixty feet from the pavement, and the fall was the more appalling because the body of André struck some of the intervening scaffolding first, and thence bounded off, until the unhappy young man fell with a dull thud, bleeding and senseless in the street.

Nearly three hundred persons in the Champs Elysées witnessed this hideous sight; for, at Vignol's cry, every one had stopped, and, frozen with horror, had not missed one detail of the grim tragedy.

In an instant a crowd was collected round the poor, inert mass of humanity which lay motionless in a pool of blood. But two workmen, roused by Vignol's shrieks, were soon on the spot, and pushed their way through the crowd of persons who were gazing with a morbid curiosity on the man who had fallen from a height of sixty feet.

André gave no sign of life. His face was dreadfully bruised, his eyes were closed, and a stream of blood poured from his mouth, as Vignol raised his friend's head upon his knee.

"He is dead!" cried the lookers on. "No one could survive such a fall."

"Let us take him to the Hospital Beaujon!" exclaimed Vignol. "We are close by there."

An ambulance was speedily procured, and the workmen, placing their insensible friend carefully in it, asked permission to carry him to the hospital.

One curious event had excited the attention of some of the lookers on. Just as André fell, a *commissaire* had rushed forward and seized a woman. She was one of the class of unfortunates who frequent the Champs Elysées, and she it was who had uttered the cry that had lured André to destruction. The woman made an effort to escape, but Palot, for it was he, caught her arm.

"Not a word," said he sternly. The wretched creature seemed in abject terror, and obeyed him.

"Why did you cry out?" asked he.

"I do not know."

"It is a lie!"

"No, it is true; a gentleman came up to me, and said, 'Madame, if you will cry out now, André, it is I—your Sabine; help! I will give you two louis.' Of course I agreed. He gave me the fifty francs, and I did as he asked me."

"What was this man like?"

"He was tall, old, and very shabby and dirty, with glasses on. I never set eyes on him before."

"Do you know," returned the *commissaire* sternly, "that the words you have uttered have caused the death of the poor fellow who has just fallen from the house?"

"Why did he not take more care?" asked she indifferently.

Palot, with an angry gesture, handed her over to a police-constable.

"Take her to the station-house," said he, "and do not lose sight of her, for she will be a most important witness at a trial that must soon come on."

"What the woman says is true," muttered Palot. "She did not know what she was doing, and it was Tantaine that gave her the two coins. He shall pay for this; but certainly, if the whole gang are collared, it won't bring the poor young fellow to life."

He had, however, not much time for reflection, for he had to gather up every link of evidence. How was it that this accident had occurred? The frame of the window had fallen out with André, and lay in fragments on the pavement. He picked up one of the pieces, and at once saw what had been done; the wood-work had been sawed almost in two, and the putty with which the marks of the cuts had been concealed still clung to the wood. Palot called one of the workmen, who appeared to be more intelligent than his fellows, pointed out the marks to him, and bade him gather up the fragments and put them in some place of security. This duty being accomplished, Palot joined the crowd; but he was too late, for André had been taken away to the hospital. He looked around to see if there was any one from whom he could gain information, and suddenly perceived on a bench some one whom he had often followed. It was Toto Chupin, no longer clad in the squalid rags of a day or two back. He was dressed in gorgeous array, but his face was livid, his eyes wild, and his lips kept moving convulsively, for he was a victim to a novel sensation—the pangs of remorse—and was meditating whether he should not go to the nearest police-station and give himself up, so that he might revenge himself on Tantaine, who had made him a murderer. For a moment the idea of arresting

Toto passed through Palot's mind, but he, after a moment's thought, muttered,—

"No; that would never do. We should risk losing the whole gang. Besides, he can't get away. I may even have committed an error in arresting that woman. My master will say that I am not to be trusted. He placed one of his friends in my charge, and this is what has happened. I knew that the young man's life was in deadly peril, and yet I let him enter a house in the course of erection; why, I might as well have cut his throat myself."

In a terrible state of anxiety, Palot presented himself at the hospital, and asked for the young man who had just been brought in.

"You mean Number 17?" returned one of the assistant-surgeons. "He is in a most critical state; we fear internal injuries, fracture of the skull, and—in fact, we fear everything."

It was two days before André recovered consciousness. It was midnight when he first woke again to the realities of life. At a glance he guessed where he was. He felt pain when he endeavored to turn over, but he could move his legs and one arm.

"How long have I been here, I wonder?" he thought.

He tried to think, but he was weak, and thoughts would not come at his command, and in a few seconds he dropped off to sleep again; and when he awoke, it was broad day; the ward was full of life and motion, for it was the hour of the house surgeon's visit. He was a young man still, with a cheerful face, followed by the band of students. He went from bed to bed, explaining cases, and cheering up the sufferers. When André's turn came, the surgeon told him that his

shoulder was put out, his arm broken in two places, a bad cut on his head, while his body was one mass of bruises; but, for all that, he was in luck to have got off so easily. André listened to him with but a vague understanding of his meaning, for, with the return of reason, the remembrance of Sabine had come, and he asked himself what would become of her while he was confined to his bed in the hospital. As this thought passed through his mind, he uttered a faint groan. One of the students, a stout person, with red whiskers, a white tie, and a rather shabby hat, who looked as if he had just arrived from the country, stepped up to his bed, and leaning over the patient, murmured, "Lecoq." André opened his eyes wide at the name.

"M. Lecoq," gasped he, wondering at the excellence of the disguise.

"Hush, who knows who is watching us? I come to give your mind ease, which will do you more good than all the doctor's stuff. Without in any way committing you, I have seen M. de Mussidan, and have furnished him with a valid excuse for postponing his daughter's marriage for another month. You must remain here; you could not be in a place of greater security; but even here you cannot be too cautious. Eat nothing that is not given you by some one who utters the word 'Lecoq.' M. Gandelu will certainly call to see you. If you want to see or write to me, the patient on your right will manage that; he is one of my men. You shall have news every day; but be patient and prudent."

"I can wait now," answered the young man, "because I have hope."

"Ah," murmured Lecoq, as he moved softly away, "is not hope the true secret of life and happiness?"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE DAY OF RECKONING.

M. LECOQ enjoined prudence and caution on André, and the utmost care on the part of his agents, because he was fully aware of the skill and cunning of the adversary with whom he had to cope.

"You should not talk or make a noise," he would say, "when you are fighting."

He could now prove that the head of this association, the man who concealed his identity under a threefold personality, was the instigator of a murder. But he did not intend to make use of this discovery at once, for he had sworn that he would take the whole gang, and his proceedings had been so carefully conducted that his victims did not for a moment suspect the net that was closing around them. The day after the accident to André, Mascarin sent an anonymous communication to the head of the police, giving up Toto as the author of the crime, and saying where he could be found.

"Of course," thought this wily plotter, "Toto will denounce Tantaine, but that worthy man is dead and buried, and I think that even the sharpest agents of the police will be unable to effect his resurrection."

Mascarin had carefully consumed in a large fire every particle of the tattered garments that Tantaine had been in the habit of wearing, and laughed merrily as he watched the columns of sombre smoke roll upwards.

"Look for him as much as you please," laughed he. "Old Daddy Tantaine has flown up the chimney."

The next business was to suppress Mascarin; this was a more difficult operation. Few would care to inquire about Tantaine, but Mascarin was well known as the head of a prosperous business; his disappearance would create a sensation, and the police would take up the matter. His best course would be to conduct matters openly, and sell his business on the plea of family affairs causing him to retire. He easily found a purchaser, and in twenty-four hours the matter had been arranged.

The night before handing over the business to his successor Mascarin had much to do. Assisted by Beaumarchef, he carried into Martin Rigal's private office the papers with which the Registry Office was crammed. This removal was effected by means of a door marked by a panel between Mascarin's office and the banker's private room; and when the last scrap of paper had been removed, Mascarin pointed out a heap of bricks and a supply of mortar to his faithful adherent.

"Wall up this door," said he.

It was a long and wearisome task, but it was at length completed, and by rubbing soot and dust over the new work it lost its appearance of freshness. The evening before Beaumarchef had received twelve thousand francs on the express condition that he would start at once for America, and the leave-taking between him and the master he had so faithfully served was a most affecting one. He knew hardly anything of the diabolical plots going on around him, and was the only innocent person in that house of crime.

Mascarin was in haste to depart; he had annihilated Tantaine in order to free himself from Toto. Mascarin was about to disappear, and he contemplated re-

taining his third personality, and in it to pass away the remainder of his life honored and respected; but he must first induct his successor into his business; and he went through the books with him, and explained all the practical working of the machinery. This took him nearly all day, and it was getting late when his luggage was put on a cab which he had in waiting. A new plate had already been placed on the door: "J. Robinet, late B. Mascarin."

Knowing that he must carry out the deception completely, Mascarin drove to the western railway station, and took a ticket for Rouen. He felt rather uncomfortable, for he feared that he was being watched, and he made up his mind not to leave a single trace behind him. At Rouen he abandoned his luggage, which he had taken care should afford no clue as to ownership, he also relinquished his beard and spectacles, and returned to Paris as the well-known banker, Martin Rigal, the pretty Flavia's father, having, as he thought, obliterated Mascarin as completely as he had done Taintaine; but he had not noticed in the train with him a very dark young man with piercing eyes, who looked like the traveller of some respectable commercial firm. As soon as he reached his home, and had tenderly embraced his daughter, he went to the private room of Martin Rigal, and opened it with the key that never left his person, and then gazed at a large rough mass of brickwork which disfigured one side of the room, and which was the remains of the wall that erewhile had been so hastily erected in the Office of the Servants' Registry.

"This won't do," muttered he; "it must be plastered, and then repapered."

He picked up the bits of brick and plaster that lay

on the floor, and threw them into the fire, and then pushed a large screen in front of the rough brickwork. He had just finished his work when Hortebise entered the room, with his perpetually smiling face.

"Now, you unbeliever," cried Mascarin gaily, "is not fortune within our grasp? Tantaine and Mascarin are dead, or rather, they never existed. Beaumarchef is on his way to America, La Candéle will be in London in a week, and now we may enjoy our millions."

"Heaven grant it," said the doctor piously.

"Pooh, pooh! we have nothing more to fear, as you would have known had you gone into the case as thoroughly as I have done. Who was the enemy whom we had most need to dread? Why, André. He certainly is not dead, but he is laid up for some weeks, and that is enough. Besides, he has given up the game, for one of my men who managed to get into the hospital says that he has not received a visitor or dispatched a letter for the last fifteen days."

"But he had friends."

"Pshaw! friends always forget you! Why, where was M. de Breulh-Faverlay?"

"It is the racing season, and he is a fixture in his stables."

"Madame de Bois Arden?"

"The new fashions are sufficient for her giddy head."

"M. Gandelu?"

"He has his son's affairs to look after and there is no one else of any consequence."

"And how about young Gandelu?"

"Oh! he has yielded to Tantaine's winning power, and has made it up with Rose, and the turtle doves have taken wing for Florence."

But the doctor was still dissatisfied.

"I am uneasy about the Mussidans," said he.

"And pray why? De Croisenois has been very well received. I don't say that Mademoiselle Sabine has exactly jumped into his arms, but she thanks him every evening for the flowers he sends in the morning, and you can't expect more than that."

"I wish the Count had not put off the marriage. Why did he do so?"

"It annoys me, too; but we can't have everything; set your mind at rest."

By this time the banker had contrived to reassure the doctor.

"Besides," he added, "everything is going on well, even our Tafila mines. I have taxed our people, according to their means, from one to twenty thousand francs, and we are certain of a million."

The doctor rubbed his hands, and a delicious prospect of enjoyments stretched out before him.

"I have seen Catenac," continued Martin Rigal. "He has returned from Vendôme, and the Duke de Champdoce is wild with hope and expectation, and is on the path which he thinks will take him to his son."

"And how about Perpignan?"

Mascarin laughed.

"Perpignan is just as much a dupe as the Duke is; he thinks absolutely that he has discovered all the clues that I myself placed on his road. Before, however, they have quite concluded their investigations, Paul will be my daughter's husband and Flavia the future Duchess of Champdoce, with an income that a monarch might envy."

He paused, for there was a light tap on the door, and Flavia entered. She bowed to the doctor, and, with

the graceful movement of a bird, perched herself upon her father's knee, and, throwing her arms round his neck, kissed him again and again.

"This is a very nice little preface," said the banker with a forced smile. "The favor is granted in advance, for, of course, this means that you have come to ask one."

The girl shook her head, and returned in the tone of one addressing a naughty child,—

"Oh, you bad papa! am I in the habit of selling my kisses? I am sure that I have only to ask and to have."

"Of course not, only——"

"I came to tell you that dinner was ready, and that Paul and I are both very hungry; and I only kissed you because I loved you; and if I had to choose a father again, out of the whole it would be you."

He smiled fondly.

"But for the last six weeks," said he, "you have not loved me so well."

"No," returned she with charming simplicity, "not for so long—nearly for fifteen days perhaps."

"And yet it is more than a month since the good doctor brought a certain young man to dinner."

Flavia uttered a frank, girlish laugh.

"I love you dearly," said she, "but especially for one thing."

"And what is that, pray?"

"Ah! that is the secret; but I will tell it you for all that. It is only within the last fortnight that I have found out how really good you have been, and how much trouble you took in bringing Paul to me; but to think that you should have to put on those ugly old clothes, that nasty beard and those spectacles."

At these words the banker started so abruptly to his feet that Flavia nearly fell to the ground.

"What do you mean by this?" said he.

"Do you suppose a daughter does not know her father? You might deceive others, but I——"

"Flavia, I do not comprehend your meaning."

"Do you mean to tell me," asked she, "that you did not come to Paul's rooms the day I was there?"

"Are you crazy? Listen to me."

"No, I will not; you must not tell me fibs. I am not a fool; and when you went out with the doctor, I listened at the door, and I heard a few words you said; and that isn't all, for when I got here, I hid myself and I saw you come into this room."

"But you said nothing to any one, Flavia?"

"No, certainly not."

Rigal breathed a sigh of relief.

"Of course I do not count Paul," continued the girl, "for he is the same as myself."

"Unhappy child!" exclaimed the banker in so furious a voice, and with such a threatening gesture of the hand, that for the first time in her life Flavia was afraid of her father.

"What have I done?" asked she, the tears springing to her eyes. "I only said to Paul that we should be terribly ungrateful if we did not worship him; for you don't know what he does for us. Why, he even dresses up in rags, and goes to see you."

Hortebise, who up to this time had not said a word, now interfered.

"And what did Paul say?" asked he.

"Paul? Oh, nothing for a moment. Then he cried out, 'I see it all now,' and laughed as if he would have gone into a fit."

"Did you not understand, my poor child, what this laugh meant? Paul thinks that you have been my accomplice, and believes that it was in obedience to your orders that I went to look for him."

"Well, and suppose he does?"

"A man like Paul never loves a woman who has run after him; and no matter how great her beauty may be, will always consider that she has thrown herself in his path. He will accept all her devotion, and make no more return than a stone or a wooden idol would do. You cannot see this, and God grant that it may be long before the bandage is removed from your eyes. Can you not read the quality of this foolish boy, who has not a manly instinct in him?"

"Enough!" she cried, "enough! I am not such a coward as to allow you to insult my husband."

He shuddered at the thought that his words might cost him his daughter's love, but Hortebise interposed by putting his arm round Flavia's waist and leading her from the room. When he returned, he observed,—

"I cannot understand your anger. It seems to me that all recrimination is most indiscreet, for you can at any moment break off this marriage."

"Do you think it nothing for me to be at the mercy of that cowardly wretch, Paul?"

"Not more so than you are by the foolish weakness of your daughter. Is not Paul our accomplice? and are we any more compromised because he has discovered the secret of your triple personality?"

"Ah! you have not a father's feelings. Up till now Paul did not know that I was Mascarin, and believed me to be the victim of blackmailers. As a dupe he respected me, as an accomplice he will scorn me. This disastrous marriage must be hastened."

Paul and Flavia's marriage took place at the end of the next week, and Paul left his simple bachelor abode to take possession of the magnificent suite of rooms prepared for him by the banker in his house in the Rue Montmartre. The change was great, but Paul was no longer surprised at anything. He did not feel the faintest tinge of remorse; he only feared one thing, and that was that by some blunder he might compromise his future, when the eventful day arrived which would give him the social position and standing of heir to a dukedom.

When, however, the Duke de Champdoce came, accompanied by Perpignan, the young impostor rose to the level of his masters, and played his part with most consummate skill. The Duke, whose life had been one long scene of misery, and who had so cruelly expiated the sins of his youth, seemed to have become suddenly lenient; and had Paul obeyed him, he would at once have established himself with his young wife at the Hotel de Champdoce, but Martin Rigal put a veto upon this, for he was not quite satisfied that his son-in-law was really the heir to the Champdoce dukedom; and finally it was agreed that the Duke should come to breakfast the next morning and take away Paul. Eleven was the hour fixed, but the Duke appeared at the banker's house at ten, where he, Catenac, Hortebise, and Paul were assembled together in solemn conclave.

"Now, papa," said Flavia, who kept her father on thorns by her gay and frolicsome criticisms, "you will no longer blame me for falling in love with a poor Bohemian, for you see that he is a Champdoce, and that his father possesses millions."

The Duke was now seated on the sofa, holding the hand of the young man whom he believed to be his son tightly in his. The Duchess, to whom he had given a hint of what was going on, had been taken seriously ill from over-excitement, but had recovered herself a little, and the Duke was describing this when he was suddenly interrupted by a series of dull and heavy blows struck upon the other side of the wall of the room. A pickaxe was evidently at work. The whole house was shaken by the violence of the attack, and a screen, which stood near the spot, was thrown down.

The plotters gazed upon each other with pale and terror-stricken faces, for it was evident that the fresh brick wall, the work of Mascarin and Beaumarchef, was being destroyed. The Duke sat in perfect amazement, for the alarm of his host and his friends was plainly evident. He could feel Paul's hand tremble in his, but could not understand why work evidently going on in the next house could cause such feelings of alarm. Flavia was the only one who had no suspicion, and she remarked, "Dear me! I should like to know the meaning of this disturbance."

"I will send and inquire," said her father; but scarcely had he opened the door than he retreated with a wild expression of terror in his face, and his arms stretched out in front of him, as though to bar the approach of some terrible spectre. In the doorway stood an eminently respectable-looking gentleman, wearing a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles, and behind him a commissary of police, girt with his official scarf, while farther back still were half a dozen police officers.

"M. Lecoq," cried the three confederates in one breath, while through their minds flashed the same terrible idea—"We are lost."

The celebrated detective advanced slowly into the room, curiously watching the group collected there. There was an air of entire satisfaction visible on his countenance.

"Aha!" he said, "I was right, it seems. I was sure that I was making no mistake in rapping at the other side of the wall. I knew that it would be heard in here."

By this time, however, the banker had, to all outward appearance, regained his self-command.

"What do you want here?" asked he insolently. "What is the meaning of this intrusion?"

"This gentleman will explain," returned Lecoq, stepping aside to make way for the commissary of police to come forward. "But, to shorten matters, I may tell you that I have obtained a warrant for your arrest, Martin Rigal, *alias* Tantaine, *alias* Mascarin."

"I don't understand you!"

"Indeed. Do you think that Tantaine has cleaned his hands so completely that not a drop of André's blood clings to the fingers of Martin Rigal?"

"On my word, you are speaking in riddles."

A bland smile passed over Lecoq's face as, drawing a folded letter from his pocket, he answered,—

"Perhaps you are acquainted with the handwriting of your daughter. Well, then, listen to what she wrote not so very long ago to the very Paul who is sitting on the sofa there.

" 'MY DEAREST PAUL,—

" 'We should be guilty of the deepest ingratitude if——' "

"Enough! enough!" cried the banker in a hoarse voice. "Lost, lost, lost! My own child has been my ruin!"

The calmest of the conspirators was now the one who was generally the first to take alarm, and this was the genial Doctor Hortebise. When he recognized Lecoq, he had gently opened his locket and taken from it a small pellet of grayish-colored paste, and, holding it between his fingers, had waited until his leader should declare that all hope was gone.

In the meantime Lecoq turned towards Catenac.

"And you too are included in this warrant," said he.

Catenac, perhaps owing to his legal training, made no reply to Lecoq, but addressing the commissary, observed,—

"I am the victim of a most unpleasant mistake, but my position——"

"The warrant is quite regular," returned the commissary. "You can see it if you desire."

"No, it is not necessary. I will only ask you to conduct me to the magistrate who issued it, and in five minutes all will be explained."

"Do you think so?" asked Lecoq in a quiet tone of sarcasm. "You have not heard, I can see, of what took place yesterday. A laborer, in the course of his work, discovers the remains of a newly-born infant, wrapped in a silk handkerchief and a shawl. The police soon set inquiries on foot, and have found the mother—a girl named Clarisse."

Had not Lecoq suddenly grasped Catenac's arm, the lawyer would have flown at Martin Rigal's throat.

"Villain, traitor!" panted he, "you have sold me!"

"My papers have been stolen," faltered the banker.

He now saw that the blows struck upon the other

side of the wall were merely a trick, for Lecoq had thought that a little preliminary fright would render them more amenable to reason.

Hortebise still looked on calmly; he knew that the game was lost.

"I belong to a respectable family," thought he, "and I will not bring dishonor upon it. I have no time to lose."

As he spoke he placed the contents of the locket between his lips and swallowed them.

"Ah," murmured he, as he did so, "with my constitution and digestion, it is really hard to end thus."

No one had noticed the doctor's movements, for Lecoq had moved the screen, and was showing the commissary a hole which had been made in the wall large enough for the body of a man to pass through. But a sudden sound cut these investigations short, for Hortebise had fallen to the ground, and was struggling in a series of terrible convulsions.

"How stupid of me not to have foreseen this," exclaimed Lecoq. "He has poisoned himself; let some one run for a doctor. Take him into another room and lay him on a bed."

While these orders were being carried out, Catenac was removed to a cab which was in waiting, and Martin Rigal seemed to have lapsed into a state of moody imbecility. Suddenly he started to his feet, crying,—

"My daughter Flavia! yes, her name is Flavia, what is to become of her? She has no fortune, and she is married to a man who can never provide for her. My child will perhaps starve. Oh, horrible thought!"

The man's strong mind had evidently given way, and his love for his child and the hideous future that lay before her had broken down the barrier that di-

vides reason from insanity. He was secured by the officers, raving and struggling. When Lecoq was left alone with the Duke, Paul and Flavia, he cast a glimpse of pity at the young girl, who had crouched down in a corner, and evidently hardly understood the terrible scene that had just passed.

"Your Grace," said he, turning to the Duke, "you have been the victim of a foul conspiracy; this young man is not your son; he is Paul Violaine, and is the son of a poor woman who kept a petty haberdashery shop in the provinces."

The miserable young fool began to bluster, and attempted to deny this statement; but Lecoq opened the door, and Rose appeared in a most becoming costume. Paul now made no effort to continue his protestations, but throwing himself on his knees, in whining accents confessed the whole fraud and pleaded for mercy, promising to give evidence against his accomplices.

"Do not despair, your Grace," said Lecoq, as he conducted the Duke to his carriage; "this certainly is not your son; but *I* have found him, and to-morrow, if you like, you shall be introduced to him."

CHAPTER XXXV.

"EVERY MAN TO HIS OWN PLACE."

OBEDIENT to the wishes of M. Lecoq, André resigned himself to a lengthy sojourn at the Hospital de Beaujon, and had even the courage to affect that state of profound indifference that had deceived Mascarin. The pretended sick man in the next bed to his told him all that had taken place, but the days seemed to be in-

terminable, and he was beginning to lose patience, when one morning he received a letter which caused a gleam of joy to pass through his heart. "All is right," wrote Lecoq. "Danger is at an end. Ask the house surgeon for leave to quit the hospital. Dress yourself smartly. You will find me waiting at the doors.—L."

André was not quite convalescent, for he might have to wear his arm in a sling for many weeks longer; but these considerations did not deter him. He now dressed himself in a suit which he had sent for to his rooms, and about nine o'clock he left the hospital.

He stood upon the steps inhaling deep draughts of the fresh air, and then began to wonder where the strange personage was to whom he owed his life. While he was deliberating what to do, an open carriage drew up before the door of the hospital.

"You have come at last," exclaimed André, rushing up to the gentleman who alighted from it. "I was getting quite anxious."

"I am about five minutes late," returned Lecoq; "but I was detained," and then, as André began to pour out his thanks, he added, "Get into the carriage; I have a great deal to say to you."

André obeyed, and as he did so, he detected something strange in the expression of his companion's face.

"What!" remarked Lecoq, "do you see by my face that I have something to tell you? You are getting quite a keen observer. Well, I have, indeed, for I have passed the night going through Mascarin's papers, and I have just gone through a painful scene—I may say, one of the most painful that I have ever

witnessed. The intellect of Mascarin," said he, "has given way under the tremendous pressure put upon it. The ruling passion of the villain's life was his love for his daughter. He imagines that Flavia and Paul are without a franc and in want of bread; he thinks that he continually hears his daughter crying to him for help. Then, on his knees, he entreats the warder to let him out, if only for a day, swearing that he will return as soon as he has succored his child. Then, when his prayer is refused, he bursts into a frenzied rage and tears at his door, howling like an infuriated animal; and this state may last to the end of his life, and every minute in it be a space of intolerable torture. Doctor Hortebise is dead; but the poison upon which he relied betrayed him, and he suffered agonies for twenty-four hours. Catenac will fight to the bitter end, but the proofs are clear against him, and he will be convicted of infanticide. In Rigal's papers I have found evidence against Perpignan, Verminet and Van Klopen, who will all certainly hear something about penal servitude. Nothing has been settled yet about Toto Chupin, for it must be remembered that he came and gave himself up."

"And what about Croisenois?"

"His Company will be treated like any other attempt to extort money by swindling, and the Marquis will be sent to prison for two months, and the money paid for shares returned to the dupes, and that, I think, is all that I have to tell you, except that by to-morrow M. Gandelu will receive back the bills to which his son affixed a forged signature. And now," continued Lecoq, after a short pause, "the time has come for me to tell you why, at our first interview, I

saluted you as the heir of the Duke de Champdoce. I had guessed your history, but it was only last night I heard all the details."

Then the detective gave a brief but concise account of the manuscript that Paul had read aloud. He did not tell much, however, but passed lightly over the acts of the Duke de Champdoce and Madame de Mussidan, for he did not wish André to cease to respect either his father or the mother of Sabine. The story was just concluded as the carriage drew up at the corner of the Rue de Matignon.

"Get down here," said Lecoq, "and mind and don't hurt your arm."

André obeyed mechanically.

"And now," went on Lecoq, "listen to me. The Count and Countess de Mussidan expect you to breakfast, and here is the note they handed to me for you. Come back to your studio by four o'clock, and I will then introduce you to your father; but till then, remember, absolute silence."

André was completely bewildered with his unexpected happiness. He walked instinctively to the Hotel de Mussidan and rang the bell. The intense civility of the footmen removed any misgivings that he might have felt, and, as he entered the dining-room, he darted back, for face to face with him was the portrait of Sabine which he had himself painted. At that moment the Count came forward to meet him with extended hands.

"Diana," said he to his wife, "this is our daughter's future husband." He then took Sabine's hand, which he laid in André's.

The young artist hardly dared raise his eyes to Sabine's face; when he did so, his heart grew very

sad, for the poor girl was but the shadow of her former self.

"You have suffered terribly," said he tenderly.

"Yes," answered she, "and I should have died had it lasted much longer."

André had the greatest difficulty in refraining from telling his secret to his beloved, and it was with even more difficulty that he tore himself away at half-past three.

He had not been five minutes in his studio when there was a knock at the door, and Lecoq entered, followed by an elderly gentleman of aristocratic and haughty appearance. It was the Duke de Champdoce.

"This gentleman," said the Duke, with a gesture of his hand towards Lecoq, "will have told you that certain circumstances rendered it expedient, according to my ideas, that I should not acknowledge you as my heir, but my son. The fault that I then committed has been cruelly expiated. I am not forty-eight; look at me."

The Duke looked at least sixty.

"My sins," continued the Duke, "still pursue me. To-day, in spite of all my desires, I cannot claim you as my legitimate son, for the law only permits me to give you my name and fortune by exercising the right of adoption."

André made no reply, and the Duke went on with evident hesitation,—

"You can certainly institute proceedings against me for the recovery of your rights, but——"

"Ah!" interrupted the young man, "really, what sort of person do you think I am? Do you believe me capable of dishonoring your name before I assumed it?"

The Duke drew a deep breath of relief. André's manner had checked and restrained him, for it was frigid and glacial to a degree. What a difference there was between the haughty mien of André and the gushing effusiveness of Paul!

"Will you permit me," asked André, "to address a few words to you?"

"A few words?"

"Yes. I did not like to use the word 'conditions,' but I think that you will understand what I mean. My daily toil for bread gave me neither the means nor leisure which I required to cultivate my art, for that is a profession that I could never give up."

"You will be certainly your own master."

André paused, as if to reflect.

"This is not all I had to say," he continued at last. "I love and am loved by a pure and beautiful girl; our marriage is arranged, and I think——"

"I think," broke in the Duke, "that you could not love any one who was not a fit bride for a member of our family."

"But I did not belong to this family yesterday. Be at ease, however, for she is worthy of a Champdoce. I am engaged to Sabine de Mussidan."

A deadly paleness overspread the Duke's face as he heard this name.

"Never," said he. "Never; I would rather see you dead at my feet."

"And I would gladly suffer ten thousand deaths sooner than give her up."

"Suppose I refuse my consent? Suppose that I forbid——?"

"You have no claim to exercise paternal authority over me; this can only be purchased by years of tender

care. Duke de Champdoce, I owe you nothing. Leave me to myself, as you have hitherto done, and all will be simplified."

The Duke reflected. Must he give up his son, who had been restored to him by such a series of almost miraculous chances, or must he see him married to Diana's daughter? Either alternative appeared to him to be equally disagreeable.

"I will not yield on the point," said he. "Besides, the Countess would never give her consent. She hates me as much as I hate her."

M. Lecoq, who had up to this moment looked on in silence, now thought it time to interpose.

"I think," remarked he blandly, "that I shall have no difficulty in obtaining the consent of Madame de Mussidan."

The Duke, at these words, threw open his arms.

"Come, my son!" said he. "All shall be as you desire."

That night Marie, Duchess de Champdoce, experienced happiness for the first time in the affection and caresses of a son who had been so long lost to her, and seemed to throw off the heavy burden that had so heavily pressed her down beneath its own weight.

When Madame de Mussidan heard that André was Norbert's son, she declared that nothing would induce her to give her consent to his marriage with her daughter; but among Mascarin's papers Lecoq had discovered the packet containing the compromising correspondence between the Duke de Champdoce and herself. The detective handed this over to her, and, in her gratitude, she promised to give up all further opposition to the match.

Lecoq always denied that this act came under the head of blackmailing.

André and Sabine took up their residence after marriage at the Château de Mussidan, which had been magnificently restored and decorated. They seldom leave it, for they love it for its vicinity to the leafy groves, in which they first learned that they had given their hearts to each other. And André frequently points out the unfinished work on the balcony, which was the occasion of his first visit to the Château de Mussidan. He says that he will complete it as soon as he has time, but it is doubtful whether he will ever find leisure to do this for a long time, for before the new year comes there is every chance of there being a baptism at the little chapel at Bevron.

THE COUNT'S MILLIONS

PART I.

PASCAL AND MARGUERITE.

I.

It was a Thursday evening, the fifteenth of October; and although only half-past six o'clock, it had been dark for some time already. The weather was cold, and the sky was as black as ink, while the wind blew tempestuously, and the rain fell in torrents.

The servants at the Hôtel de Chalusse, one of the most magnificent mansions in the Rue de Courcelles in Paris, were assembled in the porter's lodge, a little building comprising a couple of rooms standing on the right hand side of the great gateway. Here, as in all large mansions, the "concierge" or porter, M. Bourigeau, was a person of immense importance, always able and disposed to make any one who was inclined to doubt his authority, feel it in cruel fashion. As could be easily seen, he held all the other servants in his power. He could let them absent themselves without leave, if he chose, and conceal all returns late at night after the closing of public balls and wine-shops. Thus, it is needless to say that M. Bourigeau and his wife were treated by their fellow-servants with the most servile adulation.

The owner of the house was not at home that evening, so that M. Casimir, the count's head valet, was serving

coffee for the benefit of all the retainers. And while the company sipped the fragrant beverage which had been generously tintured with cognac, provided by the butler, they all united in abusing their common enemy, the master of the house. For the time being, a pert little waiting-maid, with an odious turn-up nose, had the floor. She was addressing her remarks to a big, burly, and rather insolent-looking fellow, who had been added only the evening before to the corps of footmen. "The place is really intolerable," she was saying. "The wages are high, the food of the very best, the livery just such as would show off a good-looking man to the best advantage, and Madame Léon, the housekeeper, who has entire charge of everything, is not too lynx-eyed."

"And the work?"

"A mere nothing. Think, there are eighteen of us to serve only two persons, the count and Mademoiselle Marguerite. But then there is never any pleasure, never any amusement here."

"What! is one bored then?"

"Bored to death. This grand house is worse than a tomb. No receptions, no dinners—nothing. Would you believe it, I have never seen the reception-rooms! They are always closed; and the furniture is dropping to pieces under its coverings. There are not three visitors in the course of a month."

She was evidently incensed, and the new footman seemed to share her indignation. "Why, how is it?" he exclaimed. "Is the count an owl? A man who's not yet fifty years old, and who's said to be worth several millions."

"Yes, millions; you may safely say it—and perhaps ten, perhaps twenty millions too."

"Then all the more reason why there should be

something going on here. What does he do with himself alone, all the blessed day?"

"Nothing. He reads in the library, or wanders about the garden. Sometimes, in the evening, he drives with Mademoiselle Marguerite to the Bois de Boulogne in a closed carriage; but that seldom happens. Besides, there is no such thing as teasing the poor man. I've been in the house for six months, and I've never heard him say anything but: 'yes'; 'no'; 'do this'; 'very well'; 'retire.' You would think these are the only words he knows. Ask M. Casimir if I'm not right."

"Our gov'nor isn't very gay, that's a fact," responded the valet.

The footman was listening with a serious air, as if greatly interested in the character of the people whom he was to serve. "And mademoiselle," he asked, "what does she say to such an existence?"

"Bless me! during the six months she has been here, she has never once complained."

"If she is bored," added M. Casimir, "she conceals it bravely."

"Naturally enough," sneered the waiting-maid, with an ironical gesture; "each month that mademoiselle remains here, brings her too much money for her to complain."

By the laugh that greeted this reply, and by the looks the older servants exchanged, the new-comer must have realized that he had discovered the secret skeleton hidden in every house. "What! what!" he exclaimed, on fire with curiosity; "is there really anything in that? To tell the truth, I was inclined to doubt it."

His companions were evidently about to tell him all they knew, or rather all they thought they knew, when the front-door bell rang vigorously.

"There he comes!" exclaimed the concierge; "but he's in too much of a hurry; he'll have to wait awhile."

He sullenly pulled the cord, however; the heavy door swayed on its hinges, and a cab-driver, breathless and hatless, burst into the room, crying, "Help! help!"

The servants sprang to their feet.

"Make haste!" continued the driver. "I was bringing a gentleman here—you must know him. He's outside, in my vehicle——"

Without pausing to listen any longer, the servants rushed out, and the driver's incoherent explanation at once became intelligible. At the bottom of the cab, a roomy four-wheeler, a man was lying all of a heap, speechless and motionless. He must have fallen forward, face downward, and owing to the jolting of the vehicle his head had slipped under the front seat.

"Poor devil!" muttered M. Casimir, "he must have had a stroke of apoplexy." The valet was peering into the vehicle as he spoke, and his comrades were approaching, when suddenly he drew back, uttering a cry of horror. "Ah, my God! it is the count!"

Whenever there is an accident in Paris, a throng of inquisitive spectators seems to spring up from the very pavement, and indeed more than fifty persons had already congregated round about the vehicle. This circumstance restored M. Casimir's composure; or, at least, some portion of it. "You must drive into the courtyard," he said, addressing the cabman. "M. Bourigeau, open the gate, if you please." And then, turning to another servant, he added:

"And you must make haste and fetch a physician—no matter who. Run to the nearest doctor, and don't return until you bring one with you."

The concierge had opened the gate, but the driver had disappeared; they called him, and on receiving no reply the valet seized the reins and skilfully guided the cab through the gateway.

Having escaped the scrutiny of the crowd, it now remained to remove the count from the vehicle, and this was a difficult task, on account of the singular position of his body; still, they succeeded at last, by opening both doors of the cab, the three strongest men uniting in their efforts. Then they placed him in a large arm-chair, carried him to his own room, and speedily had him undressed and in bed.

He had so far given no sign of life; and as he lay there with his head weighing heavily on the pillow, you might have thought that all was over. His most intimate friend would scarcely have recognized him. His features were swollen and discolored; his eyes were closed, and a dark purple circle, looking almost like a terrible bruise, extended round them. A spasm had twisted his lips, and his distorted mouth, which was drawn on one side and hung half open, imparted a most sinister expression to his face. In spite of every precaution, he had been wounded as he was removed from the cab. His forehead had been grazed by a piece of iron, and a tiny stream of blood was trickling down upon his face. However, he still breathed; and by listening attentively, one could distinguish a faint rattling in his throat.

The servants, who had been so garrulous a few moments before, were silent now. They lingered in the room, exchanging glances of mute consternation. Their faces were pale and sad, and there were tears in the eyes of some of them. What was passing in their minds? Perhaps they were overcome by that uncon-

querable fear which sudden and unexpected death always provokes. Perhaps they unconsciously loved this master, whose bread they ate. Perhaps their grief was only selfishness, and they were merely wondering what would become of them, where they should find another situation, and if it would prove a good one. Not knowing what to do, they talked together in subdued voices, each suggesting some remedy he had heard spoken of for such cases. The more sensible among them were proposing to go and inform mademoiselle or Madame Léon, whose rooms were on the floor above, when the rustling of a skirt against the door suddenly made them turn. The person whom they called "mademoiselle" was standing on the threshold.

Mademoiselle Marguerite was a beautiful young girl, about twenty years of age. She was a brunette of medium height, with big gloomy eyes shaded by thick eyebrows. Heavy masses of jet-black hair wreathed her lofty but rather sad and thoughtful forehead. There was something peculiar in her face—an expression of concentrated suffering, and a sort of proud resignation, mingled with timidity.

"What has happened?" she asked, gently. "What is the cause of all the noise I have heard? I have rung three times and the bell was not answered."

No one ventured to reply, and in her surprise she cast a hasty glance around. From where she stood, she could not see the bed stationed in an alcove; but she instantly noted the dejected attitude of the servants, the clothing scattered about the floor, and the disorder that pervaded this magnificent but severely furnished chamber, which was only lighted by the lamp which M. Bourigeau, the concierge, carried. A sudden dread seized her; she shuddered, and in a faltering voice she

added: "Why are you all here? Speak, tell me what has happened."

M. Casimir stepped forward. "A great misfortune, mademoiselle, a terrible misfortune. The count——"

And he paused, frightened by what he was about to say.

But Mademoiselle Marguerite had understood him. She clasped both hands to her heart, as if she had received a fatal wound, and uttered the single word: "Lost!"

The next moment she turned as pale as death, her head drooped, her eyes closed, and she staggered as if about to fall. Two maids sprang forward to support her, but she gently repulsed them, murmuring, "Thanks! thanks! I am strong now."

She was, in fact, sufficiently strong to conquer her weakness. She summoned all her resolution, and, paler than a statue, with set teeth and dry, glittering eyes, she approached the alcove. She stood there for a moment perfectly motionless, murmuring a few unintelligible words; but at last, crushed by her sorrow, she sank upon her knees beside the bed, buried her face in the counterpane and wept.

Deeply moved by the sight of this despair, the servants held their breath, wondering how it would all end. It ended suddenly. The girl sprang from her knees, as if a gleam of hope had darted through her heart. "A physician!" she said, eagerly.

"I have sent for one, mademoiselle," replied M. Casimir. And hearing a voice and a sound of footsteps on the staircase, he added: "And fortunately, here he comes."

The doctor entered. He was a young man, although his head was almost quite bald. He was short, very

thin, clean-shaven, and clad in black from head to foot. Without a word, without a bow, he walked straight to the bedside, lifted the unconscious man's eyelids, felt his pulse, and uncovered his chest, applying his ear to it. "This is a serious case," he said at the close of his examination.

Mademoiselle Marguerite, who had followed his movements with the most poignant anxiety, could not repress a sob. "But all hope is not lost, is it, monsieur?" she asked in a beseeching voice, with hands clasped in passionate entreaty. "You will save him, will you not—you will save him?"

"One may always hope for the best."

This was the doctor's only answer. He had drawn his case of instruments from his pocket, and was testing the points of his lancets on the tip of his finger. When he had found one to his liking: "I must ask you, mademoiselle," said he, "to order these women to retire, and to retire yourself. The men will remain to assist me, if I require help."

She obeyed submissively, but instead of returning to her own room, she remained in the hall, seating herself upon the lower step of the staircase near the door, counting the seconds, and drawing a thousand conjectures from the slightest sound.

Meanwhile, inside the room, the physician was proceeding slowly, not from temperament however, but from principle. Dr. Jodon—for such was his name—was an ambitious man who played a part. Educated by a "prince of science," more celebrated for the money he gained than for the cures he effected, he copied his master's method, his gestures, and even the inflections of his voice. By casting in people's eyes the same powder as his teacher had employed, he hoped to obtain the

same results: a large practice and an immense fortune. In his secret heart he was by no means disconcerted by his patient's condition; on the contrary, he did not consider the count's state nearly as precarious as it really was.

But bleeding and cupping alike failed to bring the sick man to consciousness. He remained speechless and motionless; the only result obtained, was that his breathing became a trifle easier. Finding his endeavors fruitless, the doctor at last declared that all immediate remedies were exhausted, that "the women" might be allowed to return, and that nothing now remained but to wait for the effect of the remedies he was about to prescribe, and which they must procure from the nearest chemist.

Any other man would have been touched by the agony of entreaty contained in the glance that Mademoiselle Marguerite cast upon the physician as she returned into the room; but it did not affect him in the least. He calmly said, "I cannot give my decision as yet."

"My God!" murmured the unhappy girl; "oh, my God, have mercy upon me!"

But the doctor, copying his model, had stationed himself near the fireplace, with his elbow leaning on the mantel-shelf, in a graceful, though rather pompous attitude. "Now," he said, addressing his remarks to M. Casimir, "I desire to make a few inquiries. Is this the first time the Count de Chalusse has had such an attack?"

"Yes, sir—at least since I have been in attendance upon him."

"Very good. That is a chance in our favor. Tell me—have you ever heard him complain of vertigo, or of a buzzing in his ears?"

"Never."

Mademoiselle Marguerite seemed inclined to volunteer some remark, but the doctor imposed silence upon her by a gesture, and continued his examination. "Is the count a great eater?" he inquired. "Does he drink heavily?"

"The count is moderation itself, monsieur, and he always takes a great deal of water with his wine."

The doctor listened with an air of intent thoughtfulness, his head slightly inclined forward, his brow contracted, and his under lip puffed out, while from time to time he stroked his beardless chin. He was copying his master. "The devil!" he said, *sotto voce*. "There must be some cause for such an attack, however. Nothing in the count's constitution predisposes him to such an accident——" Then, suddenly turning toward Mademoiselle Marguerite: "Do you know, mademoiselle, whether the count has experienced any very violent emotion during the past few days?"

"Something occurred this very morning, which seemed to annoy him very much."

"Ah! now we have it," said the doctor, with the air of an oracle. "Why did you not tell me all this at first? It will be necessary for you to give me the particulars, mademoiselle."

The young girl hesitated. The servants were dazed by the doctor's manner; but Mademoiselle Marguerite was far from sharing their awe and admiration. She would have given anything to have had the regular physician of the household there instead of him! As for this coarse examination in the presence of all these servants, and by the bedside of a man who, in spite of his apparent unconsciousness, was, perhaps, able to hear

and to comprehend, she looked upon it as a breach of delicacy, even of propriety.

"It is of the most urgent importance that I should be fully informed of these particulars," repeated the physician peremptorily.

After such an assertion, further hesitation was out of the question. Mademoiselle Marguerite seemed to collect her thoughts, and then she sadly said: "Just as we sat down to breakfast this morning, a letter was handed to the count. No sooner had his eyes fallen upon it, than he turned as white as his napkin. He rose from his seat and began to walk hastily up and down the dining-room, uttering exclamations of anger and sorrow. I spoke to him, but he did not seem to hear me. However, after a few moments, he resumed his seat at the table, and began to eat——"

"As usual?"

"He ate more than usual, monsieur. Only I must tell you that it seemed to me he was scarcely conscious of what he was doing. Four or five times he left the table, and then came back again. At last, after quite a struggle, he seemed to come to some decision. He tore the letter to pieces, and threw the pieces out of the window that opens upon the garden."

Mademoiselle Marguerite expressed herself with the utmost simplicity, and there was certainly nothing particularly extraordinary in her story. Still, those around her listened with breathless curiosity, as though they were expecting some startling revelation, so much does the human mind abhor that which is natural and incline to that which is mysterious.

Without seeming to notice the effect she had produced, and addressing herself to the physician alone, the girl continued: "After the letter was destroyed,

M. de Chalusse seemed himself again. Coffee was served, and he afterward lighted a cigar as usual. However, he soon let it go out. I dared not disturb him by any remarks; but suddenly he said to me: 'It's strange, but I feel very uncomfortable.' A moment passed, without either of us speaking, and then he added: 'I am certainly not well. Will you do me the favor to go to my room for me? Here is the key of my *escritoire*; open it, and on the upper shelf you will find a small bottle which please bring to me.' I noticed with some surprise that M. de Chalusse, who usually speaks very distinctly, stammered and hesitated considerably in making this request, but, unfortunately, I did not think much about it at the time. I did as he requested, and he poured eight or ten drops of the contents of the vial into a glass of water, and swallowed it."

So intense was Dr. Jodon's interest that he became himself again. He forgot to *attitudinize*. "And after that?" he asked, eagerly.

"After that, M. de Chalusse seemed to feel much better, and retired to his study as usual. I fancied that any annoyance the letter had caused him was forgotten; but I was wrong, for in the afternoon he sent a message, through Madame Léon, requesting me to join him in the garden. I hastened there, very much surprised, for the weather was extremely disagreeable. 'Dear Marguerite,' he said, on seeing me, 'help me to find the fragments of that letter which I flung from the window this morning. I would give half my fortune for an address which it must certainly have contained, but which I quite overlooked in my anger.' I helped him as he asked. He might have reasonably hoped to succeed, for it was raining when the scraps of paper were thrown out, and instead of flying through the air,

they fell directly on to the ground. We succeeded in finding a large number of the scraps, but what M. de Chalusse so particularly wanted was not to be read on any one of them. Several times he spoke of his regret, and cursed his precipitation."

M. Bourigeau, the concierge, and M. Casimir exchanged a significant smile. They had seen the count searching for the remnants of this letter, and had thought him little better than an idiot. But now everything was explained.

"I was much grieved at the count's disappointment," continued Mademoiselle Marguerite, "but suddenly he exclaimed, joyfully: 'That address—why, such a person will give it to me—what a fool I am!'"

The physician evinced such absorbing interest in this narrative that he forgot to retain his usual impassive attitude. "Such a person! Who—who was this person?" he inquired eagerly, without apparently realizing the impropriety of his question.

But the girl felt indignant. She silenced her indiscreet questioner with a haughty glance, and in the driest possible tone, replied: "I have forgotten the name."

Cut to the quick, the doctor suddenly resumed his master's pose; but all the same his imperturbable *sang-froid* was sensibly impaired. "Believe me, mademoiselle, that interest alone—a most respectful interest—"

She did not even seem to hear his excuse, but resumed: "I know, however, monsieur, that M. de Chalusse intended applying to the police if he failed to obtain this address from the person in question. After this he appeared to be entirely at ease. At three o'clock he rang for his valet, and ordered dinner two hours earlier than usual. We sat down to table at about half-past four. At five he rose, kissed me gayly, and left

the house on foot, telling me that he was confident of success, and that he did not expect to return before midnight." The poor child's firmness now gave way; her eyes filled with tears, and it was in a voice choked with sobs that she added, pointing to M. de Chalusse: "But at half-past six they brought him back as you see him now——"

An interval of silence ensued, so deep that one could hear the faint breathing of the unconscious man still lying motionless on his bed. However, the particulars of the attack were yet to be learned; and it was M. Casimir whom the physician next addressed. "What did the driver who brought your master home say to you?"

"Oh! almost nothing, sir; not ten words."

"You must find this man and bring him to me."

Two servants rushed out in search of him. He could not be far away, for his vehicle was still standing in the courtyard. They found him in a wine-shop near by. Some of the inquisitive spectators who had been disappointed in their curiosity by Casimir's thoughtfulness had treated him to some liquor, and in exchange he had told them all he knew about the affair. He had quite recovered from his fright, and was cheerful, even gay.

"Come make haste, you are wanted," said the servants.

He emptied his glass and followed them with very bad grace, muttering and swearing between his set teeth. The doctor, strange to say, was considerate enough to go out into the hall to question him; but no information of value was gained by the man's answers. He declared that the gentleman had hired him at twelve o'clock, hoping by this means to extort pay for five hours' driving, which, joined to the liberal gratuity

he could not fail to obtain, would remunerate him handsomely for his day's work. Living is dear, it should be remembered, and a fellow makes as much as he can.

When the cabby had gone off, still growling, although a couple of louis had been placed in his hand, the doctor returned to his patient. He involuntarily assumed his accustomed attitude, with crossed arms, a gloomy expression of countenance, and his forehead furrowed as if with thought and anxiety. But this time he was not acting a part. In spite, or rather by reason of, the full explanation that had been given him, he found something suspicious and mysterious in the whole affair. A thousand vague and undefinable suspicions crossed his mind. Was he in presence of a crime? Certainly, evidently not. But what was the cause then of the mystery and reticence he detected? Was he upon the track of some lamentable family secret—one of those terrible scandals, concealed for a long time, but which at last burst forth with startling effect? The prospect of being mixed up in such an affair caused him infinite pleasure. It would bring him into notice; he would be mentioned in the papers; and his increased practice would fill his hands with gold.

But what could he do to ingratiate himself with these people, impose himself upon them if needs be? He reflected for some time, and finally what he thought an excellent plan occurred to him. He approached Mademoiselle Marguerite, who was weeping in an arm-chair, and touched her gently on the shoulder. She sprang to her feet at once. "One more question, mademoiselle," said he, imparting as much solemnity to his tone as he could. "Do you know what liquid it was that M. de Chalusse took this morning?"

"Alas! no, monsieur."

"It is very important that I should know. The accuracy of my diagnosis is dependent upon it. What has become of the vial?"

"I think M. de Chalusse replaced it in his *escritoire*."

The physician pointed to an article of furniture to the left of the fireplace: "There?" he asked.

"Yes, *monsieur*."

He deliberated, but at last conquering his hesitation, he said: "Could we not obtain this vial?"

Mademoiselle Marguerite blushed. "I haven't the key," she faltered, in evident embarrassment.

M. Casimir approached: "It must be in the count's pocket, and if mademoiselle will allow me——"

But she stepped back with outstretched arms as if to protect the *escritoire*. "No," she exclaimed, "no—the *escritoire* shall not be touched. I will not permit it——"

"But, mademoiselle," insisted the doctor, "your father——"

"The Count de Chalusse is not my father!"

Dr. Jodon was greatly disconcerted by Mademoiselle Marguerite's vehemence. "Ah!" said he, in three different tones, "ah! ah!"

In less than a second, a thousand strange and contradictory suppositions darted through his brain. Who, then, could this girl be, if she were not Mademoiselle de Chalusse? What right had she in that house? How was it that she reigned as a sovereign there? Above all, why this angry outburst for no other apparent cause than a very natural and exceedingly insignificant request on his part?

However, she had regained her self-possession, and it was easy to see by her manner that she was seeking some means of escape from threatened danger. At

last she found it. "Casimir," she said, authoritatively, "search M. de Chalusse's pocket for the key of his *escritoire*."

Astonished by what he regarded as a new caprice, the valet obeyed. He gathered up the garments strewn over the floor, and eventually drew a key from one of the waistcoat pockets. Mademoiselle Marguerite took it from him, and then in a determined tone, exclaimed: "A hammer."

It was brought; whereupon, to the profound amazement of the physician, she knelt down beside the fireplace, laid the key upon one of the andirons, and with a heavy blow of the hammer, broke it into fragments. "Now," said she, quietly, "my mind will be at rest. I am certain," she added, turning toward the servants, "that M. de Chalusse would approve what I have done. When he recovers, he will have another key made."

The explanation was superfluous. All the servants understood the motive that had influenced her, and were saying to themselves, "Mademoiselle is right. It would not do to touch the *escritoire* of a dying man. Who knows but what there are millions in it? If anything were missed, why any of us might be accused. But if the key is destroyed, it will be impossible to suspect any one."

However, the physician's conjectures were of an entirely different nature. "What can there be in that *escritoire* which she desires to conceal?" he thought.

But there was no excuse for prolonging his visit. Once more he examined the sick man, whose condition remained unchanged; and then, after explaining what was to be done in his absence, he declared that he must leave at once, as he had a number of important visits

to make; he added, however, that he would return about midnight.

"Madame Léon and I will watch over M. de Chalusse," replied Mademoiselle Marguerite; "that is sufficient assurance, monsieur, that your orders will be obeyed to the letter. Only—you will not take offence, I trust, if I ask the count's regular physician to meet you in consultation."

Such a proposal was anything but pleasing to M. Jodon, who had met with the same misfortune in this aristocratic neighborhood several times before. When an accident happened, he was summoned because he chanced to be close at hand, but just as he was flattering himself that he had gained a desirable patient, he found himself in presence of some celebrated physician, who had come from a distance in his carriage. Accustomed to such disappointments, he knew how to conceal his dissatisfaction.

"Were I in your place, mademoiselle, I should do precisely what you suggest," he answered, "and should you think it unnecessary for me to call, I——"

"Oh! monsieur, on the contrary, I shall certainly expect you."

"In that case, very well." Thereupon he bowed and left the room.

But Mademoiselle Marguerite followed him on to the landing. "You know, monsieur," she said, speaking rapidly in an undertone, "that I am not M. de Chalusse's daughter. You may, therefore, tell me the truth. Is his condition hopeless?"

"Alarming—yes; hopeless—no."

"But, monsieur, this terrible unconsciousness——"

"It usually follows such an attack as he has been the victim of. Still we may hope that the paralysis will

gradually disappear, and the power of motion return after a time."

Mademoiselle Marguerite was listening, pale, agitated, and embarrassed. It was evident that she had a question on her lips which she scarcely dared to ask. At last, however, summoning all her courage, she exclaimed: "And if M. de Chalusse should not recover, will he die without regaining consciousness—without being able to speak?"

"I am unable to say, mademoiselle—the count's malady is one of those which set at naught all the hypotheses of science."

She thanked him sadly, sent a servant to summon Madame Léon, and returned to the count's room.

As for the doctor, he said to himself as he went downstairs, "What a strange girl! Is she afraid that the count will regain consciousness? or, on the contrary, does she wish him to speak? Is there any question of a will under all this? What else can it be? What is at stake?" His preoccupation was so intense that he almost forgot where he was going, and he paused on every step. It was not until the fresh air of the courtyard blew upon his face, reminding him of the realities of life, that the charlatanesque element in his nature regained the ascendancy. "My friend," he said, addressing M. Casimir, who was lighting him out, "you must at once have some straw spread over the street so as to deaden the sound of the vehicles. And to-morrow, you must inform the commissary of police."

Ten minutes later a thick bed of straw had been strewn across the thoroughfare, and the drivers of passing vehicles involuntarily slackened their speed, for every one in Paris knows what this signifies. M. Casimir personally superintended the work which was in-

trusted to the grooms, and he was about to return indoors again, when a young man, who had been walking up and down in front of the mansion for more than an hour, hastily approached him. He was a beardless fellow with a strangely wrinkled face, as leaden-tinted as that of a confirmed absinthe-drinker. His general expression was shrewd, and at the same time impudent, and surprising audacity gleamed in his eyes. "What do you want?" asked M. Casimir.

The young fellow bowed humbly, and replied, "Ah, don't you recognize me, monsieur? I'm Toto—excuse me—Victor Chupin, employed by M. Isidore Fortunat."

"Oh, yes. I recollect."

"I came, in obedience to my employer's orders, to inquire if you had obtained the information you promised him; but seeing that something had happened at your house, I didn't dare go in, but decided to watch for you——"

"And you did quite right, my lad. I have no information to give you—ah, yes! stop! The Marquis de Valorsay was closeted with the count for two hours yesterday. But what good will that do? The count has been taken suddenly ill, and he will scarcely live through the night."

Victor Chupin was thunderstruck. "Impossible!" he cried. "Is it for him that the straw has been strewed in the street?"

"It's for him."

"What a lucky fellow! No one would go to such expense for me! But I have an idea that my gov'nor will hardly laugh when I tell him this. Still, thank you all the same, m'sieur, and *au revoir*." He was darting off when a sudden thought detained him. "Excuse me," said he, with conjuror like volubility; "I was so

horrified that I forgot business. Tell me, m'sieur, if the count dies, you'll take charge of the funeral arrangements, won't you? Very well; a word of advice then. Don't go to the regular undertakers, but come to me: here's my address"—proffering a card—"I will treat with the undertakers for you, and take charge of everything. It will be much better and far cheaper for you, on account of certain arrangements I've made with these parties. Everything, to the very last plume, is warranted to give perfect satisfaction. Each item will be specified in the bill, and can be verified during the ceremony, no payment exacted until after delivery. Well, is it understood?"

The valet shrugged his shoulders. "Nonsense!" said he, carelessly; "what is all that to me?"

"Ah! I forgot to mention that there would be a commission of two hundred francs to divide between us."

"That's consideration. Give me your card, and rely on me. My compliments to M. Fortunat, please." And so saying, he re-entered the house.

Victor Chupin drew a huge silver watch from his pocket and consulted it. "Five minutes to eight," he growled, "and the gov'nor expects me at eight precisely. I shall have to stretch out my legs."

II.

M. ISIDORE FORTUNAT resided at No. 27 Place de la Bourse, on the third floor. He had a handsome suite of apartments: a drawing-room, a dining-room, a bedroom, a large outer office where his clerks worked, and a private one, which was the sanctuary of his thoughts and meditations. The whole cost him only six thousand francs a year, a mere trifle as rents go nowadays. His lease entitled him, moreover, to the use of a room ten feet square, up under the eaves, where he lodged his servant, Madame Dodelin, a woman of forty-six or thereabouts, who had met with reverses of fortune, and who now took such good charge of his establishment, that his table—for he ate at home—was truly fit for a sybarite.

Having been established here for five years or more, M. Fortunat was very well known in the neighborhood, and, as he paid his rent promptly, and met all his obligations without demur, he was generally respected. Besides, people knew very well from what source M. Fortunat derived his income. He gave his attention to contested claims, liquidations, the recovery of legacies, and so on, as was shown by the inscription in large letters which figured on the elegant brass plate adorning his door. He must have had a prosperous business, for he employed six collectors in addition to the clerks who wrote all day long in his office; and his clients were so numerous that the concierge was often heard to complain of the way they ran up and down the stairs, declaring that it was worse than a procession.

To be just, we must add that M. Fortunat's appear-

ance, manners and conduct were of a nature to quiet all suspicions. He was some thirty-eight years of age, extremely methodical in his habits, gentle and refined in his manner, intelligent, very good-looking, and always dressed in perfect taste. He was accused of being, in business matters, as cold, as polished, and as hard as one of the marble slabs of the Morgue; but then, no one was obliged to employ him unless they chose to do so. This much is certain: he did not frequent *cafés* or places of amusement. If he went out at all after dinner, it was only to pass the evening at the house of some rich client in the neighborhood. He detested the smell of tobacco, and was inclined to be devout—never failing to attend eight o'clock mass on Sunday mornings. His housekeeper suspected him of matrimonial designs, and perhaps she was right.

On the evening that the Count de Chalusse was struck with apoplexy M. Isidore Fortunat had been dining alone and was sipping a cup of tea when the door-bell rang, announcing the arrival of a visitor. Madame Dodelin hastened to open the door, and in walked Victor Chupin, breathless from his hurried walk. It had not taken him twenty-five minutes to cover the distance which separates the Rue de Courcelles from the Place de la Bourse.

"You are late, Victor," said M. Fortunat, quietly.

"That's true, monsieur, but it isn't my fault. Everything was in confusion down there, and I was obliged to wait——"

"How is that? Why?"

"The Count de Chalusse was stricken with apoplexy this evening, and he is probably dead by this time."

M. Fortunat sprang from his chair with a livid face

and trembling lips. "Stricken with apoplexy!" he exclaimed in a husky voice. "I am ruined!"

Then, fearing Madame Dodelin's curiosity, he seized the lamp and rushed into his office, crying to Chupin: "Follow me."

Chupin obeyed without a word, for he was a shrewd fellow, and knew how to make the best of a trying situation. He was not usually allowed to enter this private room, the floor of which was covered with a magnificent carpet; and so, after carefully closing the door, he remained standing, hat in hand, and looking somewhat intimidated. But M. Fortunat seemed to have forgotten his presence. After depositing the lamp on the mantel-shelf, he walked several times round and round the room like a hunted beast seeking for some means of egress.

"If the count is dead," he muttered, "the Marquis de Valorsay is lost! Farewell to the millions!"

The blow was so cruel, and so entirely unexpected, that he could not, would not believe in its reality. He walked straight to Chupin, and caught him by the collar, as if the young fellow had been the cause of this misfortune. "It isn't possible," said he; "the count *cannot* be dead. You are deceiving me, or they deceived you. You must have misunderstood—you only wished to give some excuse for your delay perhaps. Speak, say something!"

As a rule, Chupin was not easily impressed, but he felt almost frightened by his employer's agitation. "I only repeated what M. Casimir told me, monsieur," was his reply.

He then wished to furnish some particulars, but M. Fortunat had already resumed his furious tramp to and fro, giving vent to his wrath and despair in incoherent

exclamations. "Forty thousand francs lost!" he exclaimed. "Forty thousand francs, counted out there on my desk! I see them yet, counted and placed in the hand of the Marquis de Valorsay in exchange for his signature. My savings for a number of years, and I have only a worthless scrap of paper to show for them. That cursed marquis! And he was to come here this evening, and I was to give him ten thousand francs more. They are lying there in that drawer. Let him come, the wretch, let him come!"

Anger had positively brought foam to M. Fortunat's lips, and any one seeing him then would subsequently have had but little confidence in his customary good-natured air and unctuous politeness. "And yet the marquis is as much to be pitied as I am," he continued. "He loses as much, even more! And such a sure thing it seemed, too! What speculation can a fellow engage in after this? And a man must put his money somewhere; he can't bury it in the ground!"

Chupin listened with an air of profound commiseration; but it was only assumed. He was inwardly jubilant, for his interest in the affair was in direct opposition to that of his employer. Indeed, if M. Fortunat lost forty thousand francs by the Count de Chalusse's death, Chupin expected to make a hundred francs commission on the funeral.

"Still, he may have made a will!" pursued M. Fortunat. "But no, I'm sure he hasn't. A poor devil who has only a few sous to leave behind him always takes this precaution. He thinks he may be run over by an omnibus and suddenly killed, and he always writes and signs his last wishes. But millionaires don't think of such things; they believe themselves immortal!" He paused to reflect for a moment, for

power of reflection had returned to him. His excitement had quickly spent itself by reason of its very violence. "This much is certain," he resumed, slowly, and in a more composed voice, "whether the count has made a will or not, Valorsay will lose the millions he expected from Chalusse. If there is no will, Mademoiselle Marguerite won't have a sou, and then, good evening! If there is one, this devil of a girl, suddenly becoming her own mistress, and wealthy into the bargain, will send Monsieur de Valorsay about his business, especially if she loves another, as he himself admits—and in that case, again good evening!"

M. Fortunat drew out his handkerchief, and, pausing in front of the looking-glass, wiped the perspiration from his brow, and arranged his disordered hair. He was one of those men who may be stunned, but never crushed, by a catastrophe. "In conclusion," he muttered, "I must enter my forty thousand francs as an item in the profit and loss account. It only remains to be seen if it would not be possible to regain them in the same affair." He was again master of himself, and never had his mind been more clear. He seated himself at his desk, leant his elbows upon it, rested his head on his hands, and remained for some time perfectly motionless; but there was triumph in his gesture when he at last looked up again.

"I am safe," he muttered, so low that Chupin could not hear him. "What a fool I was! If there is no will a fourth of the millions shall be mine! Ah, when a man knows his ground, he never need lose the battle! But I must act quickly," he added, "very quickly." And so speaking, he rose and glanced at the clock. "Nine o'clock," said he. "I must open the campaign this very evening."

Motionless in his dark corner, Chupin still retained his commiserating attitude; but he was so oppressed with curiosity that he could scarcely breathe. He opened his eyes and ears to the utmost, and watched his employer's slightest movements with intense interest.

Prompt to act when he had once decided upon his course, M. Fortunat now drew from his desk a large portfolio, crammed full of letters, receipts, bills, deeds of property, and old parchments. "I can certainly discover the necessary pretext here," he murmured, rummaging through the mass of papers. But he did not at once find what he sought, and he was growing impatient, as could be seen by his feverish haste, when all at once he paused with a sigh of relief. "At last!"

He held in his hand a soiled and crumpled note of hand, affixed by a pin to a huissier's protest, thus proving conclusively that it had been dishonored. M. Fortunat waved these strips of paper triumphantly, and with a satisfied air exclaimed: "It is here that I must strike; it is here—if Casimir hasn't deceived me—that I shall find the indispensable information I need."

He was in such haste that he did not wait to put his portfolio in order. He threw it with the papers it had contained into the drawer of his desk again, and, approaching Chupin, he asked, "It was you, was it not, Victor, who obtained that information respecting the solvency of the Vantrassons, husband and wife, who let out furnished rooms?"

"Yes, monsieur, and I gave you the answer: nothing to hope for——"

"I know; but that doesn't matter. Do you remember their address?"

"Perfectly. They are now living on the Asnières

Road, beyond the fortifications, on the right hand side."

"What is the number?"

Chupin hesitated, reflected for a moment, and then began to scratch his head furiously, as he was in the habit of doing whenever his memory failed him and he wished to recall it to duty. "I'm not sure whether the number is eighteen or forty-six," he said, at last; "that is——"

"Never mind," interrupted M. Fortunat. "If I sent you to the house could you find it?"

"Oh—yes, m'sieur—at once—with my eyes shut. I can see the place perfectly—a rickety old barrack. There is a tract of unoccupied land on one side, and a kitchen-garden in the rear."

"Very well; you shall accompany me there."

Chupin seemed astonished by this strange proposal. "What, m'sieur," said he, "do you think of going there at this time of night?"

"Why not? Shall we find the establishment closed?"

"No; certainly not. Vantrasson doesn't merely keep furnished rooms; he's a grocer, and sells liquor too. His place is open until eleven o'clock at least. But if you are going there to present a bill, it's perhaps a little late. If I were in your place, m'sieur, I should wait till to-morrow. It's raining, and the streets are deserted. It's an out-of-the-way place too; and in such cases, a man has been known to settle his account with whatever came handiest—with a cudgel, or a bullet, for instance."

"Are you afraid?"

This question seemed so utterly absurd to Chupin that he was not in the least offended by it; his only answer was a disdainful shrug of the shoulders.

"Then we will go," remarked M. Fortunat. "While

I'm getting ready, go and hire a cab, and see that you get a good horse."

Chupin was off in an instant, tearing down the staircase like a tempest. There was a cab-stand only a few steps from the house, but he preferred to run to the jobmaster's stables in the Rue Feydeau.

"Cab, sir!" shouted several men, as they saw him approaching.

He made no reply, but began to examine the horses with the air of a connoisseur, until at last he found an animal that suited him. Thereupon he beckoned to the driver, and going to the little office where a woman sat reading: "My five sous, if you please," he said, authoritatively.

The woman looked at him. Most jobmasters are in the habit of giving five sous to any servant who comes in search of a cab for his master; and this was the custom here. But the keeper of the office, who felt sure that Chupin was not a servant, hesitated; and this made the young fellow angry. "Make haste," he cried, imperiously. "If you don't, I shall run to the nearest stand."

The woman at once threw him five sous, which he pocketed with a satisfied grin. They were his—rightfully his—since he had taken the trouble to gain them. He then hastily returned to the office to inform his employer that the cab was waiting at the door, and found himself face to face with a sight which made him open his eyes to their widest extent.

M. Fortunat had profited by his clerk's absence, not to disguise himself—that would be saying too much—but to make some changes in his appearance. He had arrayed himself in a long overcoat, shiny with grease and wear, and falling below his knees; in place of his

elegant satin cravat he had knotted a gaudy silk neckerchief about his throat; his boots were worn, and out of shape; and his hat would have been treated with contempt even by a dealer in old clothes. Of the prosperous Fortunat, so favorably known round about the Place de la Bourse, naught remained save his face and his hands. Another Fortunat had taken his place, more than needy in aspect—wretched, famished, gaunt with hunger, ready for any desperate deed. And, yet, he seemed at ease in this garb; it yielded to his every movement, as if he had worn it for a long time. The butterfly had become a chrysalis again. Chupin's admiring smile must have repaid him for his trouble. Since the young clerk evinced approval, M. Fortunat felt sure that Vantrasson would take him for what he wished to appear—a poor devil of an agent, who was acting on some other person's behalf. "Let us start at once," said he.

But just as he was leaving the ante-room, he remembered an order of great importance which he wished to give. He called Madame Dodelin, and without paying the slightest heed to her astonishment at seeing him thus attired: "If the Marquis de Valorsay comes, in my absence," said he—"and he *will* come—ask him to wait for me. I shall return before midnight. Don't take him into my office—he can wait in the drawing-room."

This last order was certainly unnecessary, since M. Fortunat had closed and double-locked his office door, and placed the key carefully in his own pocket. But perhaps he had forgotten this circumstance. There were now no traces of his recent anger and disappointment. He was in excellent humor; and you might have supposed that he was starting on an enterprise from which he expected to derive both pleasure and profit.

Chupin was climbing to a place on the box beside the driver when his employer bade him take a seat inside the vehicle. They were not long in reaching their destination, for the horse was really a good one, and the driver had been stimulated by the promise of a magnificent gratuity. In fact, M. Fortunat and his companion reached the Asnières Road in less than forty minutes.

In obedience to the orders he had received before starting, the cabman drew up on the right hand side of the road, at about a hundred paces from the city gate, beyond the fortifications. "Well, sir, here you are! Are you satisfied?" he inquired, as he opened the door.

"Perfectly satisfied," replied M. Fortunat. "Here is your promised gratuity. Now, you have only to wait for us. Don't stir from this place. Do you understand?"

But the driver shook his head. "Excuse me," he said, "but if it's all the same to you, I will station myself over there near the gate. Here, you see, I should be afraid to go to sleep, while over there——"

"Very well; suit yourself," M. Fortunat replied.

This precaution on the driver's part convinced him that Chupin had not exaggerated the evil reputation of this quarter of the Parisian suburbs. And, indeed, there was little of a reassuring character in the aspect of this broad road, quite deserted at this hour, and shrouded in the darkness of a tempestuous night. The rain had ceased falling, but the wind blew with increased violence, twisting the branches off the trees, tearing slates from the roofs, and shaking the street-lamps so furiously as to extinguish the gas. They could not see a step before them; the mud was ankle-

deep, and not a person, not a solitary soul was visible.

"Are we almost there?" M. Fortunat asked every ten paces.

"Almost there, m'sieur."

Chupin said this; but to tell the truth, he knew nothing about it. He tried to discover where he was, but did not succeed. Houses were becoming scanty, and vacant plots of building ground more numerous; it was only with the greatest difficulty that one could occasionally discern a light. At last, however, after a quarter of an hour's hard struggling, Chupin uttered a joyful cry. "Here we are, m'sieur—look!" said he.

A large building, five stories high, sinister of aspect, and standing quite alone, could just be distinguished in the darkness. It was already falling to pieces, and yet it was not entirely completed. Plainly enough, the speculator who had undertaken the enterprise had not been rich enough to complete it. On seeing the many closely pierced windows of the façade, a passer-by could not fail to divine for what purpose the building had been erected; and in order that no one should remain in ignorance of it, this inscription: "Furnished Rooms," figured in letters three feet high, between the third and fourth floors. The inside arrangements could be easily divined: innumerable rooms, all small and inconvenient, and let out at exorbitant rentals.

However, Victor Chupin's memory had misled him. This establishment was not on the right, but on the left-hand side of the road, a perfect mire through which M. Fortunat and his companion were obliged to cross. Their eyes having become accustomed to the darkness, they could discern sundry details as they approached the building. The ground floor comprised

two shops, one of which was closed, but the other was still open, and a faint light gleamed through the soiled red curtains. Over the frontage appeared the shopkeeper's name, Vantrasson, while on either side, in smaller letters, were the words: "Groceries and Provisions—Foreign and French Wines." Everything about this den denoted abject poverty and low debauchery.

M. Fortunat certainly did not recoil, but before entering the shop he was not sorry to have an opportunity to reconnoitre. He approached cautiously, and peered through the window at a place where a rent in the curtain allowed him some view of the interior. Behind the counter a woman who looked some fifty years of age was seated, mending a soiled dress by the light of a smoking lamp. She was short and very stout. She seemed literally weighed down, and puffed out by an unwholesome and unnatural mass of superfluous flesh; and she was as white as if her veins had been filled with water, instead of blood. Her hanging cheeks, her receding forehead, and her thin lips, imparted an alarming expression of wickedness and cunning to her countenance. At the farther end of the store Fortunat could vaguely discern the figure of a man seated on a stool. He seemed to be asleep, for his crossed arms rested on a table, with his head leaning on them.

"Good luck!" whispered Chupin in his employer's ear; "there is not a customer in the place. Vantrasson and his wife are alone." This circumstance was by no means displeasing to M. Fortunat, as could be seen by his expression of face. "So, m'sieur," continued Chupin, "you need have no fears. I'll remain here and watch, while you go in."

M. Fortunat did so. On hearing the door open and

shut, the woman laid down her work. "What can I do for monsieur?" she asked, in a wheedling voice.

M. Fortunat did not reply at once; but he drew the note with which he had provided himself from his pocket, and displayed it. "I am a huissier's clerk," he then exclaimed; "and I called in reference to this little matter—a note of hand for five hundred and eighty-three francs, value received in goods, signed Vantrasson, and made payable to the order of a person named Barutin."

"An execution!" said the woman, whose voice suddenly soured. "Vantrasson, wake up, and come and see about this."

This summons was unnecessary. On hearing the words "note of hand," the man had lifted his head; and at the name of Barutin, he rose and approached with a heavy, uncertain step, as if he had not yet slept off his intoxication. He was younger than his wife, tall, with a well-proportioned and athletic form. His features were regular, but the abuse of alcohol and all sorts of excesses had greatly marred them, and their present expression was one of ferocious brutishness. "What's that you are talking about?" he asked in a harsh, grating voice. "Is it to mock people that you come and ask for money on the 15th of October—rent day? Where have you seen any money left after the landlord has made his round? Besides, what is this bill? Give it me to look at."

M. Fortunat was not guilty of such folly; he did not intrust the paper to Vantrasson's hand, but held it a little distance from him, and then read it aloud.

When he had finished: "That note fell due eighteen months ago," declared Vantrasson. "It is worth nothing now——"

"You are mistaken—a note of this kind is of value any time within five years after the day it goes to protest."

"Possibly; but as Barutin has failed, and gone no one knows where, I am released——"

"Another mistake on your part. You owe these five hundred and eighty-three francs to the person who bought this note at Barutin's sale, and who has given my employer orders to prosecute——"

The blood had risen to Vantrasson's face. "And what of that? Do you suppose I've never been sued for debts before? Even the king can't take anything from a person who possesses nothing; and I own nothing. My furniture is all pawned or mortgaged, and my stock is not worth a hundred francs. When your employer finds it useless to waste money in worrying me, he'll let me alone. You can't injure a man like me."

"Do you really think so?"

"I'm sure of it."

"Unfortunately you are again mistaken, for although the holder of the note doesn't care so very much about obtaining his dues, he'll spend his own money like water to make trouble for you." And thereupon M. Fortunat began to draw a vivid and frightful picture of a poor debtor pursued by a rich creditor who harassed him, and tortured him, and hounded him everywhere, until not even a change of clothing was left him.

Vantrasson rolled his eyes and brandished his formidable fist in the most defiant manner; but his wife was evidently much alarmed. At last she could bear it no longer, and rising hastily she led her husband to the rear of the shop, saying: "Come, I must speak with you."

He followed her, and they remained for some little time conversing together in a low tone, but with excited gestures. When they returned, the woman opened the conversation. "Alas! sir," she said to M. Fortunat, "we have no money just now; business is so very bad, and if you prosecute us, we are lost. What can be done? You look like an honest man; give us your advice."

M. Fortunat did not reply at once; he was apparently absorbed in thought, but suddenly he exclaimed: "One owes a duty to unfortunate folks, and I'm going to tell you the exact truth. My employer, who isn't a bad man at heart, hasn't the slightest desire for revenge. He said to me: 'Go and see these Vantrassons, and if they seem to be worthy people, propose a compromise. If they choose to accept it, I shall be quite satisfied.'"

"And what is this compromise?"

"It is this: you must write an acknowledgment of the debt on a sheet of stamped paper, together with a promise to pay a little on account each month. In exchange I will give you this note of hand."

The husband and wife exchanged glances, and it was the woman who said: "We accept."

But to carry out this arrangement it was necessary to have a sheet of stamped paper, and the spurious clerk had neglected to provide himself with some. This circumstance seemed to annoy him greatly, and you might almost have sworn that he regretted the concession he had promised. Did he think of going? Madame Vantrasson feared so, and turning eagerly to her husband, she exclaimed: "Run to the tobacco shop in the Rue de Levis; you will find some paper there!"

He started off at once, and M. Fortunat breathed freely again. He had certainly retained his composure

admirably during the interview, but more than once he had fancied that Vantrasson was about to spring on him, crush him with his brawny hands, tear the note from him, burn it, and then throw him, Fortunat, out into the street, helpless and nearly dead. But now that danger had passed and Madame Vantrasson, fearing he might tire of waiting, was prodigal in her attentions. She brought him the only unbroken chair in the establishment, and insisted that he should partake of some refreshment—a glass of wine at the very least. While rummaging among the bottles, she alternately thanked him and complained, declaring she had a right to repine, since she had known better days—but fate had been against her ever since her marriage, though she had little thought she would end her days in such misery, after having been so happy in the Count de Chalusse's household many years before.

To all appearance, M. Fortunat listened with the mere superficial interest which ordinary politeness requires one to show, but in reality his heart was filled with intense delight. Coming here without any clearly-defined plan, circumstances had served him a thousand times better than he could reasonably have hoped. He had preserved his power over the Vantrassons, had won their confidence, had succeeded in obtaining a *tête-à-tête* with the wife, and to crown all, this woman alluded, of her own accord, to the very subject upon which he was longing to question her.

“Ah! if I were only back in the Count's household again,” she exclaimed. “Six hundred francs a year, and gifts worth double that amount. Those were good times for me. But you know how it is—one is never content with one's lot, and then the heart is weak——”

She had not succeeded in finding the sweet wine

which she proposed to her guest; so in its place she substituted a mixture of ratafia and brandy in two large glasses which she placed upon the counter. "One evening, to my sorrow," she resumed, "I met Vantrasson at a ball. It was the 13th day of the month. I might have known no good would come of it. Ah, you should have seen him at that time, in full uniform. He belonged to the Paris Guards then. All the women were crazy about soldiers, and my head was turned, too——" Her tone, her gestures, and the compression of her thin lips, revealed the bitterness of her disappointment and her unavailing regret. "Ah, these handsome men!" she continued; "don't talk to me about them! This one had heard of my savings. I had nineteen thousand francs, so he begged me to marry him, and I was fool enough to consent. Yes, fool—for I was forty, and he was only thirty. I might have known it was my money that he wanted, and not me. However, I gave up my situation, and even purchased a substitute for him, in order that I might have him all to myself."

She had gradually warmed with her theme, as she described her confidence and blind credulity, and then, with a tragic gesture, as if she desired to drive away these cruel memories, she suddenly seized her glass and emptied it at a draught.

Chupin, who was still at his post outside, experienced a thrill of envy, and involuntarily licked his lips. "A mixed ratafia," he said, longingly. "I shouldn't object to one myself."

However, this choice compound seemed to inspire Madame Vantrasson with renewed energy, for, with still greater earnestness, she resumed: "At first, all went well. We employed my savings in purchasing the

Hôtel des Espagnes, in the Rue Notre Dame des Victoires, and business prospered; there was never a vacant room. But any person who has drank, sir, will drink again. Vantrasson kept sober for a few months, but gradually he fell into his old habits. He was in such a condition most of the time that he was scarcely able to ask for food. And if that had been all! But, unfortunately, he was too handsome a man to be a good husband. One night he didn't come home, and the next day, when I ventured to reproach him—very gently, I assure you—he answered me with an oath and a blow. All our happiness was over! Monsicur declared that he was master, and would do as he liked. He drank and carried away all the wine from the cellar—he took all the money—he remained away for weeks together; and if I complained—more blows!”

Her voice trembled, and a tear gathered in her eye; but, wiping it away with the back of her hand, she resumed: “Vantrasson was always drunk, and I spent my time in crying my very eyes out. Business became very bad, and soon everybody left the house. We were obliged to sell it. We did so, and bought a small *café*. But by the end of the year we lost that. Fortunately, I still had a little money left, and so I bought a stock of groceries in my own name; but in less than six months the stock was eaten up, and we were cast into the street. What was to be done? Vantrasson drank worse than ever; he demanded money when he knew that I had none to give him, and he treated me even more cruelly than before. I lost courage—and yet one must live! Oh, you wouldn't believe it if I told you how we have lived for the past four years.” She did not tell him, but contented herself with adding, “When you begin to go down hill, there is no such thing as

stopping; you roll lower and lower, until you reach the bottom, as we have done. Here we live, no one knows how; we have to pay our rent each week, and if we are driven from this place, I see no refuge but the river."

"If I had been in your position, I should have left my husband," M. Fortunat ventured to remark.

"Yes—it would have been better, no doubt. People advised me to do so, and I tried. Three or four times I went away, and yet I always returned—it was stronger than myself. Besides, I'm his wife; I've paid dearly for him; he's mine—I won't yield him to any one else. He beats me, no doubt; I despise him, I hate him, and yet I——" She poured out part of a glass of brandy, and swallowed it; then, with a gesture of rage, she added: "I can't give him up! It's fate! As it is now, it will be until the end, until he starves, or I——"

M. Fortunat's countenance wore an expression of profound commiseration. A looker-on would have supposed him interested and sympathetic to the last degree; but in reality, he was furious. Time was passing, and the conversation was wandering farther and farther from the object of his visit. "I am surprised, madame," said he, "that you never applied to your former employer, the Count de Chalusse."

"Alas! I did apply to him for assistance several times——"

"With what result?"

"The first time I went to him he received me; I told him my troubles, and he gave me bank-notes to the amount of five thousand francs."

M. Fortunat raised his hands to the ceiling. "Five thousand francs!" he repeated, in a tone of astonishment; "this count must be very rich——"

"So rich, monsieur, that he doesn't know how much he's worth. He owns, nobody knows how many houses in Paris, châteaux in every part of the country, entire villages, forests—his gold comes in by the shovelful."

The spurious clerk closed his eyes, as if he were dazzled by this vision of wealth.

"The second time I went to the count's house," resumed Madame Vantrasson, "I didn't see him, but he sent me a thousand francs. The third and last time they gave me twenty francs at the door, and told me that the count had gone on a journey. I understood that I could hope for no further help from him. Besides, all the servants had been changed. One morning, without any apparent reason, M. de Chalusse dismissed all the old servants, so they told me. He even sent away the concierge and the housekeeper."

"Why didn't you apply to his wife?"

"M. de Chalusse isn't married. He never has been married."

From the expression of solicitude upon her guest's features, Madame Vantrasson supposed he was rack-ing his brain to discover some mode of escape from her present difficulties. "If I were in your place," he said, "I should try to interest his relatives and family in my case——"

"The count has no relatives."

"Impossible!"

"He hasn't, indeed. During the ten years I was in his service, I heard him say more than a dozen times that he alone was left of all his family—that all the others were dead. People pretend that this is the reason why he is so immensely rich."

M. Fortunat's interest was no longer assumed; he was rapidly approaching the real object of his visit.

"No relatives!" he muttered. "Who, then, will inherit his millions when he dies?"

Madame Vantrasson jerked her head. "Who can say?" she replied. "Everything will go to the government, probably, unless—— But no, that's impossible."

"What's impossible?"

"Nothing. I was thinking of the count's sister, Mademoiselle Hermine."

"His sister! Why, you said just now that he had no relatives."

"It's the same as if he hadn't; no one knows what has become of her, poor creature! Some say that she married; others declare that she died. It's quite a romance."

M. Isidore Fortunat was literally upon the rack; and to make his sufferings still more horrible, he dared not ask any direct question, nor allow his curiosity to become manifest, for fear of alarming the woman. "Let me see," said he; "I think—I am sure that I have heard—or that I have read—I cannot say which—some story about a Mademoiselle de Chalusse. It was something terrible, wasn't it?"

"Terrible, indeed. But what I was speaking of happened a long time ago—twenty-five or twenty-six years ago, at the very least. I was still in my own part of the country—at Besançon. No one knows the exact truth about the affair."

"What! not even you?"

"Oh! I—that's an entirely different thing. When I entered the count's service, six years later, there was still an old gardener who knew the whole story, and who told it to me, making me swear that I would never betray his confidence."

Lavish of details as she had been in telling her own story, it was evident that she was determined to exercise a prudent reserve in everything connected with the De Chalusse family; and M. Fortunat inwardly cursed this, to him, most unseasonable discretion. But he was experienced in these examinations, and he had at his command little tricks for loosening tongues, which even an investigating magistrate might have envied. Without seeming to attach the slightest importance to Madame Vantrasson's narrative, he rose with a startled air, like a man who suddenly realizes that he has forgotten himself. "Zounds!" he exclaimed, "we sit here gossiping, and it's growing late. I really can't wait for your husband. If I remain here any longer, I shall miss the last omnibus; and I live on the other side of the river, near the Luxembourg."

"But our agreement, monsieur?"

"We will draw that up at some future time. I shall be passing again, or I will send one of my colleagues to see you."

It was Madame Vantrasson's turn to tremble now. She feared, if she allowed this supposed clerk to go without signing the agreement, that the person who came in his stead might not prove so accommodating; and even if he called again himself, he might not be so kindly disposed. "Wait just a moment longer, monsieur," she pleaded; "my husband will soon be back, and the last omnibus doesn't leave the Rue de Levis until midnight."

"I wouldn't refuse, but this part of the suburbs is so lonely."

"Vantrasson will see you on your way." And, resolved to detain him at any cost, she poured out a fresh glass of liquor for him, and said: "Where were we?"

Oh, yes! I was about to tell you Mademoiselle Hermine's story."

Concealing his delight with an assumed air of resignation, M. Fortunat reseated himself, to the intense disgust of Chupin, who was thoroughly tired of waiting outside in the cold.

"I must tell you," began Madame Vantrasson, "that when this happened—at least twenty-five years ago—the De Chalusse family lived in the Rue Saint-Dominique. They occupied a superb mansion, with extensive grounds, full of splendid trees like those in the Tuileries gardens. Mademoiselle Hermine, who was then about eighteen or nineteen years old, was, according to all accounts, the prettiest young creature ever seen. Her skin was as white as milk, she had a profusion of golden hair, and her eyes were as blue as forget-me-nots. She was very kind and generous, they say, only, like all the rest of the family, she was very haughty and obstinate—oh, obstinate enough to allow herself to be roasted alive over a slow fire rather than yield an inch. That's the count's nature exactly. Having served him, I know something about it, to be sure, and——"

"Excuse me," interrupted M. Fortunat, who was determined to prevent these digressions, "and Mademoiselle Hermine?"

"I was coming to her. Although she was very beautiful and immensely rich, she had no suitors—for it was generally understood that she was to marry a marquis, whose father was a particular friend of the family. The parents had arranged the matter between them years before, and nothing was wanting but the young lady's consent; but Mademoiselle Hermine absolutely refused to hear the marquis's name mentioned.

They did everything to persuade her to consent to this marriage; they employed prayers and threats alike, but they might as well have talked to a stone. When they asked her why she refused to marry the marquis, she replied, 'Because'—and that was all. In fact, at last she declared she would leave home and take refuge in a convent, if they didn't cease to torment her. Her relatives were certain there must be some reason for her refusal. It isn't natural for a girl to reject a suitor who is young, handsome, rich, and a marquis besides. Her friends suspected there was something she wouldn't confess; and M. Raymond swore that he would watch his sister, and discover her secret."

"M. Raymond is the present Count de Chalusse, I suppose?" inquired M. Fortunat.

"Yes, monsieur. Such was the state of matters when, one night, the gardener thought he heard a noise in the pavilion, at the end of the garden. This pavilion was very large. I have seen it. It contained a sitting-room, a billiard-room, and a large fencing-hall. Naturally enough, the gardener got up to go and see what was the matter. As he left the house, he fancied he saw two persons moving about among the trees. He ran after them, but could find nothing. They had made their escape through a small gate leading from the garden into the street. When the gardener was telling me this story, he declared again and again that he had fancied the noise he had heard was made by some of the servants trying to leave the house secretly, and for this reason he didn't give the alarm. However, he hurried to the pavilion, but on seeing no light there, he went back to bed with an easy mind."

"And it was Mademoiselle Hermine eloping with a lover?" asked M. Fortunat.

Madame Vantrasson seemed as disappointed as an actor who has been deprived of an opportunity of producing a grand effect. "Wait a moment," she replied, "and you'll see. The night passed, morning came, and then the breakfast hour. But Mademoiselle Hermine did not make her appearance. Some one was sent to rap at her door—there was no answer. The door was opened—the young lady was not in her room, and the bed had not even been disturbed. In a few moments the whole household was in the wildest commotion; the mother weeping, and the father half wild with rage and sorrow. Of course, the next thought was of Mademoiselle Hermine's brother, and he was sent for. But, he, too, was not in his room, and his bed had not been touched. The excitement was becoming frenzy, when it occurred to the gardener to mention what he had heard and seen on the previous night. They hastened to the pavilion, and discovered what? Why, M. Raymond stretched upon the ground, stiff, cold, and motionless, weltering in his own blood. One of his rigid hands still grasped a sword. They lifted him up, carried him to the house, laid him upon his bed, and sent for a physician. He had received two dangerous wounds; one in the throat, the other in the breast. For more than a month he hung between life and death, and six weeks elapsed before he had strength to relate what had happened. He was lighting a cigar at his window when he thought he saw a woman's form flit through the garden. A suspicion that it might be his sister flashed through his mind; so he hastened down, stole noiselessly into the pavilion, and there he found his sister and a young man who was absolutely unknown to him. He might have killed the intruder, but instead of doing so, he told him they would fight

then and there. Weapons were within reach, and they fought, with the result that Raymond was wounded twice, in quick succession, and fell. His adversary, supposing him dead, thereupon fled from the spot, taking Mademoiselle Hermine with him."

At this point in her narrative Madame Vantrasson evinced a desire to pause and draw a breath, and perhaps partake of some slight refreshment; but M. Fortunat was impatient. The woman's husband might return at any moment. "And, after that?" he inquired.

"After that—well—M. Raymond recovered, and in about three months' time he was out again; but the parents, who were old folks, had received their death-blow. They never rallied from the shock. Perhaps they felt that it was their own hard-heartedness and obstinacy that had caused their daughter's ruin—and remorse is hard to bear. They waned perceptibly from day to day, and during the following year they were borne to the cemetery within two months of each other."

From the spurious clerk's demeanor it was easy to see that he had ceased thinking about his omnibus, and his hostess felt both reassured and flattered. "And Mademoiselle Hermine?" he inquired, eagerly.

"Alas! monsieur, no one ever knew where she went, or what became of her."

"Didn't they try to find her?"

"They searched for her everywhere, for I don't know how long; all the ablest detectives in France and in foreign countries tried to find her, but not one of them succeeded in discovering the slightest trace of her whereabouts. M. Raymond promised an enormous sum to the man who would find his sister's betrayer.

He wished to kill him, and he sought for him for years; but all in vain."

"And did they never receive any tidings of this unfortunate girl?"

"I was told that they heard from her twice. On the morning following her flight her parents received a letter, in which she implored their forgiveness. Five or six months later, she wrote again to say that she knew her brother was not dead. She confessed that she was a wicked, ungrateful girl—that she had been mad; but she said that her punishment had come, and it was terrible. She added that every link was severed between herself and her friends, and she hoped they would forget her as completely as if she had never existed. She went so far as to say that her children should never know who their mother was, and that never in her life again would she utter the name which she had so disgraced."

It was the old, sad story of a ruined girl paying for a moment's madness with her happiness and all her after life. A terrible drama, no doubt; but one that is of such frequent occurrence that it seems as commonplace as life itself. Thus any one who was acquainted with M. Isidore Fortunat would have been surprised to see how greatly he was moved by such a trifle. "Poor girl!" said he, in view of saying something. And then, in a tone of assumed carelessness, he inquired: "Did they never discover what scoundrel carried Mademoiselle de Chalusse away?"

"Never. Who he was, whence he came, whether he was young or old, how he became acquainted with Mademoiselle Hermine—these questions were never answered. It was rumored at one time that he was an American, a captain in the navy; but that was only a

rumor. To tell the truth, they never even discovered his name."

"What, not even his name?"

"Not even his name."

Unable to master his emotion, M. Fortunat had at least the presence of mind to rise and step back into the darker part of the shop. But his gesture of disappointment and the muttered oath that fell from his lips did not escape Madame Vantrasson. She was startled, and from that moment she looked upon the supposed clerk with evident distrust. It was not long before he again resumed his seat nearer the counter, still a trifle pale, perhaps, but apparently calm. Two questions more seemed indispensable to him, and yet either one of them would be sure to arouse suspicion. Nevertheless, he resolved to incur the risk of betraying himself. And, after all, what would it matter now? Did he not possess the information he had wished for, at least as much of it as it was in this woman's power to impart? "I can scarcely tell you, my dear madame, how much your narrative has interested me," he began. "I can confess now that I am slightly acquainted with the Count de Chalusse, and that I have frequently visited the house in the Rue de Courcelles, where he now resides."

"You!" exclaimed the woman, taking a hasty inventory of M. Fortunat's toilette.

"Yes, I—on the part of my employer, understand. Each time I've been to visit M. de Chalusse's I've seen a young lady whom I took for his daughter there. I was wrong, no doubt, since he isn't a married man——"

He paused. Astonishment and anger seemed to be almost suffocating his hostess. Without understanding how or why, she felt convinced that she had been

duped; and if she had obeyed her first impulse she would have attacked M. Isidore then and there. If she restrained this impulse, if she made an effort to control herself, it was only because she thought she held a better revenge in reserve.

"A young lady in the count's house!" she said, thoughtfully. "That's scarcely possible. I've never seen her; I've never heard her spoken of. How long has she been there?"

"For six or seven months?"

"In that case, I can't absolutely deny it. It's two years since I set foot in the count's house."

"I fancied this young lady might be the count's niece Mademoiselle Hermine's daughter."

Madame Vantrasson shook her head. "Put that fancy out of your head," she remarked. "The count said that his sister was dead to him from the evening of her flight."

"Who *can* this young girl be, then?"

"Bless me! I don't know. What sort of a looking person is she?"

"Very tall; a brunette."

"How old is she?"

"Eighteen or nineteen."

The woman made a rapid calculation on her fingers. "Nine and four are thirteen," she muttered, "and five are eighteen. Ah, ha!—why not? I must look into this."

"What did you say?"

"Nothing; a little reflection I was making to myself. Do you know this young lady's name?"

"It's Marguerite."

The woman's face clouded. "No; it can't be then," she muttered, in a scarcely audible voice.

M. Fortunat was on coals of fire. It was evident that this frightful creature, even if she knew nothing definite, had some idea, some vague suspicion of the truth. How could he compel her to speak now that she was on her guard? He had not time to ascertain, for the door suddenly opened, and Vantrasson appeared on the threshold. He was scarcely sober when he left the shop, but now he was fairly drunk; his heavy shamble had become a stagger. "Oh, you wretch, you brigand!" howled his wife; "you've been drinking again!"

He succeeded in maintaining his equilibrium, and, gazing at her with the phlegmatic stare peculiar to intoxicated men, he replied: "Well, what of that! Can't I have a little pleasure with my friends? I came across a couple of men who were just taking their fifteenth glass; why should I refuse a compliment?"

"You can't hold yourself up."

"That's true." And to prove it he tumbled on to a chair.

A torrent of abuse now flowed from Madame Vantrasson's lips! M. Fortunat only imperfectly distinguished the words "thief," "spy," and "detective;" but he could not mistake the meaning of the looks which she alternately gave her husband and himself. "It's a fortunate thing for you that my husband is in this condition," her glances plainly implied, "otherwise there would be an explanation, and then we should see——"

"I've had a lucky escape," thought the spurious clerk. But as matters stood there was nothing to fear. It was a case where one could show a brave front to the enemy without incurring the slightest danger. "Let your husband alone," said he. "If he has only brought

the paper that he was sent to fetch, I sha'n't have lost my evening to oblige you."

Vantrasson had brought not one sheet of stamped paper, but two. A bad pen and some muddy ink were produced, and M. Fortunat began to draw up an acknowledgment according to the established formula. However, it was necessary to mention the name of the creditor of whom he had spoken, and not wishing to state his own, he used that of poor Victor Chupin, who was at that very moment shivering at the door, little suspecting what liberty was being taken with his cognomen.

"Chupin!" repeated the vixen, as if to engrave the name on her memory; "Victor Chupin! I should just like to see him," she added, viciously.

When the document was finished, it became necessary to wake Vantrasson, so that he might sign it. He did so with very good grace, and his wife appended her signature beside her husband's. Thereupon M. Fortunat gave them in exchange the note which had served as a pretext for his visit. "And above all," he remarked, as he opened the door to go, "don't forget that you are to pay something on account each month."

"Go to the devil, and your account with you!" growled Madame Vantrasson.

But Fortunat did not hear this. He was already walking down the road by the side of Chupin, who was saying: "Well, here you are, at last, m'sieur! I thought you had taken a lease of that old barrack. If ever I come here again, I'll bring a foot-warmer with me."

But one of those fits of profound abstraction to which determined seekers after truth are subject had taken possession of M. Fortunat, and made him oblivious of

all surrounding circumstances. His heart had been full of hope when he reached the Asnières Road, but he went away gloomy and despondent; and quite unconscious of the darkness, the mud, and the rain, which was again falling, he silently plodded along in the middle of the highway. Chupin was obliged to stop him at the city gate, and remind him that the cab was waiting.

"That's true," was M. Fortunat's only answer. He entered the vehicle, certainly without knowing it; and as they rolled homeward, the thoughts that filled his brain to overflowing found vent in a sort of monologue, of which Chupin now and then caught a few words. "What a piece of business!" he muttered—"what a piece of business! I've had seven years' experience in such matters, and yet I've never met with an affair so shrouded in mystery. My forty thousand francs are in a precarious condition. Certainly I've lost money before through heirs whose existence I hadn't even suspected; but by reinstating these same heirs in their rights, I've regained my lost money, and received a handsome reward in addition; but in this case all is darkness; there isn't a single gleam of light—not the slightest clew. If I could only find them! But how can I search for people whose names I don't even know—for people who have escaped all the inquiries of the police? And where shall I look for them—in Europe, in America? It would be sheer madness! To whom, then, will the count's millions go?"

It was only the sudden stoppage of the cab in front of his own door that recalled M. Fortunat to the realities of life. "Here are twenty francs, Victor," he said to Chupin. "Pay the driver, and keep the rest yourself."

As he spoke, he sprang nimbly to the ground. A handsome brougham, drawn by two horses, was standing before the house. "The Marquis de Valorsay's carriage," muttered M. Fortunat. "He has been very patient; he has waited for me—or, rather, he has waited for my ten thousand francs. Well, we shall see."

III.

M. FORTUNAT had scarcely started off on his visit to the Vantrassons when the Marquis de Valorsay reached the Place de la Bourse.

"Monsieur has gone out," said Madame Dodelin, as she opened the door.

"You must be mistaken, my good woman."

"No, no; my master said you would, perhaps, wait for him."

"Very well; I will do so."

Faithful to the orders she had received, the servant conducted the visitor to the drawing-room, lit the tapers in the candelabra, and retired. "This is very strange!" growled the marquis. "Monsieur Fortunat makes an appointment, Monsieur Fortunat expects me to wait for him! What will happen next?" However, he drew a newspaper from his pocket, threw himself into an arm-chair, and waited.

By his habits and tastes, the Marquis de Valorsay belonged to that section of the aristocracy which has coined the term "high life" in view of describing its own manners and customs. The matters that engrossed the marquis's frivolous mind were club-life and first performances at the opera and the leading theatres, social duties and visits to the fashionable watering-

places, racing and the shooting and hunting seasons, together with his mistress and his tailor.

He considered that to ride in a steeple-chase was an act of prowess worthy of his ancestors; and when he galloped past the stand, clad as a jockey, in top-boots and a violet silk jacket, he believed he read admiration in every eye. This was his every-day life, which had been enlivened by a few salient episodes: two duels, an elopement with a married woman, a twenty-six hours' *séance* at the gaming table, and a fall from his horse, while hunting, which nearly cost him his life. These acts of valor had raised him considerably in the estimation of his friends, and procured him a celebrity of which he was not a little proud. The newspaper reporters were constantly mentioning his name, and the sporting journals never failed to chronicle his departure from Paris or his arrival in the city.

Unfortunately, such a life of busy idleness has its trials and its vicissitudes, and M. de Valorsay was a living proof of this. He was only thirty-three, but in spite of the care he expended upon his toilette, he looked at least forty. Wrinkles were beginning to show themselves; it required all the skill of his valet to conceal the bald spots on his cranium; and since his fall from his horse, he had been troubled by a slight stiffness in his right leg, which stiffness became perfect lameness in threatening weather. Premature lassitude pervaded his entire person, and when he relaxed in vigilance even his eyes betrayed a distaste for everything—weariness, satiety as it were. All the same, however, he bore himself with an undeniable air of distinction, albeit the haughtiness of his manner indicated an exaggerated idea of his own importance. He was indeed in the habit of treating all those whom

he considered his inferiors with supercilious sufficiency.

The clock on M. Fortunat's mantel-shelf struck eleven at last and the marquis rose to his feet with a muttered oath. "This is too much!" he growled, angrily.

He looked about for a bell, and seeing none, he was reduced to the dire necessity of opening the door himself, and calling some one. Madame Dodelin answered the summons. "Monsieur said he would return before midnight," she replied; "so he will certainly be here. There is no one like him for punctuality. Won't monsieur have patience a little longer?"

"Well, I will wait a few moments; but, my good woman, light the fire; my feet are frozen!"

M. Fortunat's drawing-room being used but seldom, was really as frigid as an iceberg; and to make matters still worse, M. de Valorsay was in evening dress, with only a light overcoat. The servant hesitated for an instant, thinking this visitor difficult to please, and inclined to make himself very much at home, still she obeyed.

"I think I ought to go," muttered the marquis. "I really think I ought to go." And yet he remained. Necessity, it should be remembered, effectually quiets the revolts of pride.

Left an orphan in his early childhood, placed in possession of an immense fortune at the age of twenty-three, M. de Valorsay had entered life like a famished man enters a dining-room. His name entitled him to a high position in the social world; and he installed himself at table without asking how much the banquet might cost him. It cost him dear, as he discovered at the end of the first year, on noting that his disbursements had considerably exceeded his large income. It

was very evident that if he went on in this way, each twelvemonth would deepen an abyss where in the one hundred and sixty thousand francs a year, left him by his father, would finally be swallowed up. But he had plenty of time to reflect upon this unpleasant possibility ere it could come to pass! And, besides, he found his present life so delightful, and he obtained so much gratification for his money, that he was unwilling to make any change. He possessed several fine estates, and he found plenty of men who were only too glad to lend him money on such excellent security. He borrowed timidly at first, but more boldly when he discovered what a mere trifle a mortgage is. Moreover, his wants increased in proportion to his vanity. Occupying a certain position in the opinion of his acquaintances, he did not wish to descend from the heights to which they had exalted him; and the very fact that he had been foolishly extravagant one year made it necessary for him to be guilty of similar folly during the succeeding twelvemonth. He failed to pay his creditors the interest that was due on his loans. They did not ask him for it; and perhaps he forgot that it was slowly but surely accumulating, and that at the end of a certain number of years the amount of his indebtedness would be doubled. He never thought what the end would be. He became absolutely ignorant of the condition of his affairs, and really arrived at the conclusion that his resources were inexhaustible. He believed this until one day when on going to his lawyer for some money, that gentleman coldly said: "You requested me to obtain one hundred thousand francs for you, Monsieur le Marquis—but I have only been able to procure fifty thousand—here they are. And do not hope for more. All your real estate is encumbered

beyond its value. Your creditors will probably leave you in undisturbed possession for another year—it will be to their interest—but when it has elapsed they will take possession of their own, as they have a perfect right to do.” Then, with a meaning smile, the smile of a wily prime minister, he added: “If I were in your place, Monsieur le Marquis, I would profit by this year of grace. You undoubtedly understand what I mean. I have the honor to wish you good-morning.”

What an awakening—after a glorious dream that had lasted for ten years. M. de Valorsay was stunned—crushed. For three days he remained immured in his own room, obstinately refusing to receive any one. “The marquis is ill,” was his valet’s answer to every visitor.

M. de Valorsay felt that he must have time to regain his mental equilibrium—to look his situation calmly in the face. It was a frightful one, for his ruin was complete, absolute. He could save nothing from the wreck. What was to become of him? What could he do? He set his wits to work; but he found that he was incapable of plying any kind of avocation. All the energy he had been endowed with by nature had been squandered—exhausted in pandering to his self-conceit. If he had been younger he might have turned soldier; but at his age he had not even this resource. Then it was that his notary’s smile recurred to his mind. “His advice was decidedly good,” he muttered. “All is not yet lost; one way of escape still remains—marriage.”

And why, indeed, shouldn’t he marry, and marry a rich wife too? No one knew anything about his misfortune; for a year at least, he would retain all the advantages that wealth bestows upon its possessor. His name alone was a great advantage. It would be very

strange if he could not find some manufacturer's or banker's daughter who would be only too delighted to have a marquisial coronet emblazoned on her carriage panels.

Having arrived at this conclusion, M. de Valorsay began his search, and it was not long before he thought he had found what he was seeking. But something was still necessary. The bestowers of large dowers are inclined to be suspicious; they like to have a clear understanding as to the financial position of the suitors who present themselves, and they not unfrequently ask for information. Accordingly, before committing himself, M. de Valorsay understood that it was necessary he should provide himself with an intelligent and devoted adviser. There must be some one to hold his creditors in check, to silence them, and obtain sundry concessions from them—in a word, some one to interest them in his success. With this object in view, M. de Valorsay applied to his notary; but the latter utterly refused to mix himself up in any such affair, and declared that the marquis's suggestion was almost an insult. Then touched, perhaps, by his client's apparent despair, he said, "But I can mention a person who might be of service to you. Go to M. Isidore Fortunat, No. 27 Place de la Bourse. If you succeed in interesting him in your marriage, it is an accomplished fact."

It was under these circumstances that the marquis became acquainted with M. Fortunat. M. de Valorsay was a man of no little penetration, and on his first visit he carefully weighed his new acquaintance. He found him to be the very counsellor he desired—prudent, and at the same time courageous; fertile in expedients; a thorough master of the art of evading the law, and not at all troubled by scruples. With such an adviser, it

would be mere child's play to conceal his financial embarrassments and deceive the most suspicious father-in-law. So M. de Valorsay did not hesitate a moment. He frankly disclosed his pecuniary condition and his matrimonial hopes, and concluded by promising M. Fortunat a certain percentage on the bride's dowry, to be paid on the day following the marriage.

After a prolonged conference, the agreement was drawn up and signed, and that very day M. Fortunat took the nobleman's interests in hand. How heartily, and with what confidence in his success, is shown by the fact that he had advanced forty thousand francs for his client's use, out of his own private purse. After such a proof of confidence the marquis could hardly have been dissatisfied with his adviser; in point of fact, he was delighted with him, and all the more so, as this invaluable man always treated him with extreme deference, verging on servility. And in M. de Valorsay's eyes this was a great consideration; for he was becoming more arrogant and more irascible in proportion as his right to be so diminished. Secretly disgusted with himself, and deeply humiliated by the shameful intrigue to which he had stooped, he took a secret satisfaction in crushing his accomplice with his imaginary superiority and lordly disdain. According as his humor was good or bad, he called him "my dear extortioner," "Mons. Fortunat," or "Master Twenty-per-cent." But though these sneers and insults drove the obsequious smile from M. Fortunat's lips, he was quite capable of including them in the bill under the head of sundries.

The unvarying deference and submission which M. de Valorsay's adviser displayed made his failure to keep the present appointment all the more remarkable.

Such neglect of the commonest rules of courtesy was inconceivable on the part of so polite a man; and the marquis's anger gradually changed to anxiety. "What can have happened?" he thought.

He was trying to decide whether he should leave or stay, when he heard a key grate in the lock of the outer door, and then some quick steps along the ante-room. "At last—here he is!" he muttered, with a sigh of relief.

He expected to see M. Fortunat enter the room at once, but he was disappointed. The agent had no desire to show himself in the garb which he had assumed for his excursion with Chupin; and so he had hastened to his room to don his wonted habiliments. He also desired a few moments for deliberation.

If—as was most probably the case—M. de Valorsay were ignorant of the Count de Chalusse's critical condition, was it advisable to tell him of it? M. Fortunat thought not, judging with reason that this would lead to a discussion and very possibly to a rupture, and he wished to avoid anything of the kind until he was quite certain of the count's death.

Meanwhile the marquis was thinking—he was a trifle late about it—that he had done wrong to wait in that drawing-room for three mortal hours. Was such conduct worthy of him? Had he shown himself proper respect? Would not M. Fortunat construe this as an acknowledgment of the importance of his services and his client's urgent need? Would he not become more exacting, more exorbitant in his demands? If the marquis could have made his escape unheard, he would, no doubt, have done so; but this was out of the question. So he resorted to a stratagem which seemed to him likely to save his compromised dignity.

He stretched himself out in his arm-chair, closed his eyes, and pretended to doze. Then, when M. Fortunat at last entered the drawing-room he sprang up as if he were suddenly aroused from slumber, rubbed his eyes, and exclaimed: "Eh! what's that? Upon my word I must have been asleep!"

But M. Fortunat was not deceived. He noticed, on the floor, a torn and crumpled newspaper, which betrayed the impatience and anger his client had experienced during his long waiting. "Well," resumed the marquis, "what time is it? Half-past twelve? This is a pretty time to keep an appointment fixed for ten o'clock. This is presuming on my good-nature, M. Fortunat! Do you know that my carriage has been waiting below ever since half-past nine, and that my horses have, perhaps, taken cold? A pair of horses worth six hundred louis!"

M. Fortunat listened to these reproaches with the deepest humility. "You must excuse me, Monsieur le Marquis," said he. "If I remained out so much later than usual, it was only because your business interests detained me."

"Zounds! that is about the same as if it had been your own business that detained you!" And well pleased with this joke, he added, "Ah well! How are affairs progressing?"

"On my side as well as could be desired."

The marquis had resumed his seat in the chimney-corner, and was poking the fire with a haughty, but poorly assumed air of indifference. "I am listening," he said carelessly.

"In that case, Monsieur le Marquis, I will state the facts in a few words, without going into particulars. Thanks to an expedient devised by me, we shall obtain

for twenty hours a release from all the mortgages that now encumber your estates. On that very day we will request a certificate from the recorder. This certificate will declare that your estates are free from all encumbrances; you will show this statement to M. de Chalusse, and all his doubts—that is, if he has any—will vanish. The plan was very simple; the only difficulty was about raising the money, but I have succeeded in doing so. All your creditors but two lent themselves very readily to the arrangement. I have now won the consent of the two who at first refused, but we shall have to pay dearly for it. It will cost you about twenty-six thousand francs.”

M. de Valorsay was so delighted that he could not refrain from clapping his hands. “Then the affair is virtually concluded,” he exclaimed. “In less than a month Mademoiselle Marguerite will be the Marquise de Valorsay, and I shall have a hundred thousand francs a year again.” Then, noting how gravely M. Fortunat shook his head: “Ah! so you doubt it!” he cried. “Very well; now it is your turn to listen. Yesterday I had a long conference with the Count de Chalusse, and everything has been settled. We exchanged our word of honor, Master Twenty-per-cent. The count does things in a princely fashion; he gives Mademoiselle Marguerite two millions.”

“Two millions!” the other repeated like an echo.

“Yes, my dear miser, neither more nor less. Only for private reasons, which he did not explain, the count stipulates that only two hundred thousand francs shall appear in the marriage contract. The remaining eighteen hundred thousand francs, he gives to me unreservedly and unconditionally. Upon my word, I think this very charming. How does it strike you?”

M. Fortunat made no reply. M. de Valorsay's gayety, instead of cheering, saddened him. "Ah! my fine fellow," he thought, "you would sing a different song if you knew that by this time M. de Chalusse is probably dead, and that most likely Mademoiselle Marguerite has only her beautiful eyes left her, and will dim them in weeping for her vanished millions."

But this brilliant scion of the aristocracy had no suspicion of the real state of affairs, for he continued: "You will say, perhaps, it is strange, that I, Ange-Marie Robert Dalbou, Marquis de Valorsay, should marry a girl whose father and mother no one knows, and whose only name is Marguerite. In this respect it is true that the match is not exactly a brilliant one. Still, as it will appear that she merely has a fortune of two hundred thousand francs, no one will accuse me of marrying for money on the strength of my name. On the contrary, it will seem to be a love-match, and people will suppose that I have grown young again." He paused, incensed by M. Fortunat's lack of enthusiasm. "Judging from your long face, Master Twenty-per-cent, one would fancy you doubted my success," he said.

"It is always best to doubt," replied his adviser, philosophically.

The marquis shrugged his shoulders. "Even when one has triumphed over all obstacles?" he asked sneeringly.

"Yes."

"Then, tell me, if you please, what prevents this marriage from being a foregone conclusion?"

"Mademoiselle Marguerite's consent, Monsieur le Marquis."

It was as if a glass of ice-water had been thrown in

M. de Valorsay's face. He started, turned as pale as death, and then exclaimed: "I shall have that; I am sure of it."

You could not say that M. Fortunat was angry. Such a man, as cold and as smooth as a hundred franc piece, has no useless passions. But he was intensely irritated to hear his client foolishly chanting the pæons of victory, while he was compelled to conceal his grief at the loss of his forty thousand francs, deep in the recesses of his heart. So, far from being touched by the marquis's evident alarm, it pleased him to be able to turn the dagger in the wound he had just inflicted. "You must excuse my incredulity," said he. "It comes entirely from something you, yourself, told me about a week ago."

"What did I tell you?"

"That you suspected Mademoiselle Marguerite of a—how shall I express it?—of a secret preference for some other person."

The gloomiest despondency had now followed the marquis's enthusiasm and exultation. He was evidently in torture. "I more than suspected it," said he.

"Ah!"

"I was certain of it, thanks to the count's house-keeper, Madame Léon, a miserable old woman whom I have hired to look after my interests. She has been watching Mademoiselle Marguerite, and saw a letter written by her——"

"Oh!"

"Certainly nothing has passed that Mademoiselle Marguerite has any cause to blush for. The letter, which is now in my possession, contains unmistakable proofs of that. She might proudly avow the love she has inspired, and which she undoubtedly returns. Yet——"

M. Fortunat's gaze was so intent that it became unbearable. "You see, then," he began, "that I had good cause to fear——"

Exasperated beyond endurance, M. de Valorsay sprang up so violently that he overturned his chair. "No!" he exclaimed, "no, a thousand times no! You are wrong—for the man who loves Mademoiselle Marguerite is now ruined. Yes, such is really the case. While we are sitting here, at this very moment, he is lost—irredeemably lost. Between him and the woman whom I wish to marry—whom I *shall* marry—I have dug so broad and deep an abyss that the strongest love cannot overleap it. It is better and worse than if I had killed him. Dead, he would have been mourned, perhaps; while now, the lowest and most degraded woman would turn from him in disgust, or, even if she loved him, she would not dare to confess it."

M. Fortunat seemed greatly disturbed. "Have you then put into execution the project—the plan you spoke of?" he faltered. "I thought you were only jesting."

The marquis lowered his head. "Yes," he answered.

His companion stood for a moment as if petrified, and then suddenly exclaimed: "What! You have done that—you—a gentleman?"

M. de Valorsay paced the floor in a state of intense agitation. Had he caught a glimpse of his own face in the looking-glass, it would have frightened him. "A gentleman!" he repeated, in a tone of suppressed rage; "a gentleman! That word is in everybody's mouth, nowadays. Pray, what do you understand by a gentleman, Mons. Fortunat? No doubt, you mean a heroic idiot who passed through life with a lofty mien, clad in all the virtues, as stoical as Job, and as resigned as a martyr—a sort of moral Don Quixote,

preaching the austere virtue, and practising it? But, unfortunately, nobility of soul and of purpose are expensive luxuries, and I am a ruined man. I am no saint! I love life and all that makes life beautiful and desirable—and to procure its pleasures I must fight with the weapons of the age. No doubt, it is grand to be honest; but in my case it is so impossible, that I prefer to be dishonest—to commit an act of shameful infamy which will yield a hundred thousand francs a year. This man is in my way—I suppress him—so much the worse for him—he has no business to be in my way. If I could have met him openly, I would have dispatched him according to the accepted code of honor; but, then, I should have had to renounce all idea of marrying Mademoiselle Marguerite, so I was obliged to find some other way. I could not choose my means. The drowning man does not reject the plank, which is his only chance of salvation, because it chances to be dirty.”

His gestures were even more forcible than his words; and when he concluded, he threw himself on to the sofa, holding his head tightly between his hands, as if he felt that it was bursting. Anger choked his utterance—not anger so much as something he would not confess, the quickening of his own conscience and the revolt of every honorable instinct; for, in spite of his sins of omission, and of commission, never, until this day, had he actually violated any clause of the code acknowledged by men of honor.

“You have been guilty of a most infamous act, Monsieur le Marquis,” said M. Fortunat, coldly.

“Oh! no moralizing, if you please.”

“Only evil will come of it.”

The marquis shrugged his shoulders, and in a tone of

bitter scorn, retorted: "Come, Mons. Fortunat, if you wish to lose the forty thousand francs you advanced to me, it's easy enough to do so. Run to Madame d'Argelés's house, ask for M. de Coralthe, and tell him I countermand my order. My rival will be saved, and will marry Mademoiselle Marguerite and her millions."

M. Fortunat remained silent. He could not tell the marquis: "My forty thousand francs are lost already. I know that only too well. Mademoiselle Marguerite is no longer the possessor of millions, and you have committed a useless crime." However, it was this conviction which imparted such an accent of eagerness to his words as he continued to plead the cause of virtue and of honesty. Would he have said as much if he had entertained any great hope of the success of the marquis's matrimonial enterprise? It is doubtful, still we must do M. Fortunat the justice to admit that he was really and sincerely horrified by what he had unhesitatingly styled an "infamous act."

The marquis listened to his agent for a few moments in silence, and then rose to his feet again. "All this is very true," he interrupted; "but I am, nevertheless, anxious to learn the result of my little plot. For this reason, Monsieur Fortunat, give me at once the five hundred louis you promised me, and I will then bid you good-evening."

The agent had been preparing himself for this moment, and yet he trembled. "I am deeply grieved, monsieur," he replied, with a doleful smile; "it was this matter that kept me out so much later than usual this evening. I hoped to have obtained the money from a banker, who has always accommodated me before—M. Prosper Bertomy, you know him: he married M. André Fauvel's niece——"

"Yes, I know; proceed, if you please."

"Ah, well! it was impossible for me to procure the money."

The marquis had hitherto been pale, but now his face flushed crimson. "This is a jest, I suppose," said he.

"Alas!—unfortunately—no."

There was a moment's silence, which the marquis probably spent in reflecting upon the probable consequences of this disappointment, for it was in an almost threatening tone that he eventually exclaimed: "You know that I must have this money at once—that I *must* have it."

M. Fortunat would certainly have preferred to lose a good pound of flesh rather than the sum of money mentioned; but, on the other hand, he felt that it would not do for him to sever his connection with his client until the death of the Count de Chalusse was certain; and being anxious to save his money and to keep his client, his embarrassment was extreme. "It was the most unfortunate thing in the world," he stammered; "I apprehended no difficulty whatever—" Then, suddenly clapping his hand to his forehead, he exclaimed: "But, Monsieur le Marquis, couldn't you borrow this amount from one of your friends, the Duke de Champdoce or the Count de Commarin?—that would be a good idea."

M. de Valorsay was anything but unsophisticated, and his natural shrewdness had been rendered much more acute by the difficulties with which he had recently been obliged to contend. M. Fortunat's confusion had not escaped his keen glance; and this last suggestion aroused his suspicions at once. "What!" he said, slowly, and with an air of evident distrust.

"*You* give me this advice, Master Twenty-per-cent. This is wonderful! How long is it since your opinions have undergone such a change?"

"My opinions?"

"Yes. Didn't you say to me during our first interview; 'The thing that will save you, is that you have never in your while life borrowed a louis from a friend. An ordinary creditor only thinks of a large interest; and if that is paid him he holds his peace. A friend is never satisfied until everybody knows that he has generously obliged you. It is far better to apply to a usurer.' I thought all that very sensible, and I quite agreed with you when you added: 'So, Monsieur le Marquis, no borrowing of this kind until after your marriage—not on any pretext whatever. Go without eating rather than do it. Your credit is still good; but it is being slowly undermined—and the indiscretion of a friend who chanced to say: "I think Valorsay is hard up," might fire the train, and then you'd explode.'"

M. Fortunat's embarrassment was really painful to witness. He was not usually wanting in courage, but the events of the evening had shaken his confidence and his composure. The hope of gain and the fear of loss had deprived him of his wonted clearness of mind. Feeling that he had just committed a terrible blunder, he racked his brain to find some way of repairing it, and finding none, his confusion increased.

"Did you, or didn't you, use that language?" insisted M. de Valorsay. "What have you to say in reply?"

"Circumstances——"

"What circumstances?"

"Urgent need—necessity. There is no rule without its exceptions. I did not imagine you would be so

rash. I have advanced you forty thousand francs in less than five months—it is outrageous. If I were in your place, I would be more reasonable—I would economize——”

He paused! in fact, he was compelled to pause by the piercing glance which M. de Valorsay turned upon him. He was furious with himself. “I am losing my wits,” he thought.

“Still more wise counsel,” remarked the ruined nobleman ironically. “While you are about it, why don’t you advise me to sell my horses and carriages, and establish myself in a garret in the Rue Amelot? Such a course would seem very natural, wouldn’t it? and, of course, it would inspire M. de Chalusse with boundless confidence!”

“But without going to such extremes——”

“Hold your tongue!” interrupted the marquis, violently. “Better than any one else you know that I cannot retrench, although the reality no longer exists. I am condemned, cost what it may, to keep up appearances. That is my only hope of salvation. I have gambled, given expensive suppers, indulged in dissipation of every kind, and I must continue to do so. I have come to hate Ninette Simplon, for whom I have committed so many acts of folly, and yet I still keep her—to show that I am rolling in wealth. I have thrown thousand-franc notes out of the window, and I mustn’t stop throwing them. Indeed, what would people say if I stopped! Why, ‘Valorsay is a ruined man!’ Then, farewell to my hopes of marrying an heiress. And so I am always gay and smiling; that is part of my *rôle*. What would my servants—the twenty spies that I pay—what would they think if they saw me thoughtful or disturbed? You would scarcely believe

it, M. Fortunat, but I have positively been reduced to dining on credit at my club, because I had paid, that morning, for a month's provender for my horses! It is true I have many valuable articles in my house, but I cannot dispose of them. People would recognize them at once; besides, they form a part of my stock-in-trade. An actor doesn't sell his costumes because he's hungry—he goes without food—and when it's time for the curtain to rise, he dons his satin and velvet garments, and, despite his empty stomach, he chants the praises of a bountiful table and rare old wine. That is what I am doing—I, Robert Dalbou, Marquis de Valorsay! At the races at Vincennes, about a fortnight ago, I was bowling along the boulevard behind my four-in-hand, when I heard a laborer say, 'How happy those rich people must be!' Happy, indeed! Why, I envied him his lot. He was sure that the morrow would be like the day that preceded it. On that occasion my entire fortune consisted of a single louis, which I had won at baccarat the evening before. As I entered the enclosure, Isabelle, the flower-girl, handed me a rose for my button-hole. I gave her my louis—but I longed to strangle her!"

He paused for a moment, and then, in a frenzy of passion, he advanced toward M. Fortunat, who instinctively retreated into the protecting embrasure of a window. "And for eight months I have lived this horrible life!" he resumed. "For eight months each moment has been so much torture. Ah! better poverty, prison, and shame! And now, when the prize is almost won, actuated either by treason or caprice, you try to make all my toil and all my suffering unavailing. You try to thwart me on the very threshold of success! No! I swear, by God's sacred name, it shall not be! I will

rather crush you, you miserable scoundrel—crush you like a venomous reptile!”

There was such a ring of fury in his voice that the crystals of the candelabra vibrated; and Madame Dodelin, in her kitchen, heard it, and shuddered. “Some one will certainly do M. Fortunat an injury one of these days,” she thought.

It was not by any means the first time that M. Fortunat had found himself at variance with clients of a sanguine temperament; but he had always escaped safe and sound, so that, after all, he was not particularly alarmed in the present instance, as was proved by the fact that he was still calm enough to reflect and plan. “In forty-eight hours I shall be certain of the count’s fate,” he thought; “he will be dead, or he will be in a fair way to recovery—so by promising to give this frenzied man what he desires on the day after to-morrow, I shall incur no risk.”

Taking advantage of an opportunity which M. de Valorsay furnished, on pausing to draw breath, he hastily exclaimed, “Really, Monsieur le Marquis, I cannot understand your anger.”

“What! scoundrel!”

“Excuse me. Before insulting me, permit me to explain——”

“No explanation—five hundred louis!”

“Have the kindness to allow me to finish. Yes, I know that you are in urgent need of money—not by-and-by, but now. To-day I was unable to procure it, nor can I promise it to-morrow; but on the day after to-morrow, Saturday, I shall certainly have it ready for you.”

The marquis seemed to be trying to read his agent’s very soul. “Are you in earnest?” he asked. “Show

your hand. If you don't intend to help me out of my embarrassment, say so."

"Ah, Monsieur le Marquis, am I not as much interested in your success as you yourself can be? Have you not received abundant proofs of my devotion?"

"Then I can rely upon you."

"Absolutely." And seeing a lingering doubt in his client's eyes, M. Fortunat added, "You have my word of honor!"

The clock struck three. The marquis took his hat and started toward the door. But M. Fortunat, in whose heart the word scoundrel was still rankling, stopped him. "Are you going to that lady's house now? What is she called? I've forgotten her name. Ah, yes, I remember now. Madame d'Argelès, isn't she called? It's at her place, I believe, that the reputation of Mademoiselle Marguerite's favored lover is to be ruined."

The marquis turned angrily. "What do you take me for, Master Twenty-per-cent?" he rudely asked. "That is one of those things no well-bred gentleman will do himself. But in Paris people can be found to do any kind of dirty work, if you are willing to pay them for it."

"Then how will you know the result?"

"Why, twenty minutes after the affair is over, M. de Coralh will be at my house. He is there even now, perhaps." And as this subject was anything but pleasant, he hastened away, exclaiming, "Get to bed, my dear extortioner. *Au revoir*. And, above all, remember your promise."

"My respects, Monsieur le Marquis."

But when the door closed, M. Fortunat's expression immediately changed. "Ah! you insult me!" he mut-

tered sullenly. "You rob me, and you call me a scoundrel into the bargain. You shall pay dearly for it, my fine fellow, no matter what may happen!"

IV.

It is in vain that the law has endeavored to shield private life from prying eyes. The scribes who pander to Parisian curiosity surmount all obstacles and brave every danger. Thanks to the "High Life" reporters, every newspaper reader is aware that twice a week—Mondays and Thursdays—Madame Lia d'Argelès holds a reception at her charming mansion in the Rue de Berry. Her guests find plenty of amusement there. They seldom dance; but card-playing begins at midnight, and a dainty supper is served before the departure of the guests.

It was on leaving one of these little entertainments that that unfortunate young man, Jules Chazel, a cashier in a large banking-house, committed suicide by blowing out his brains. The brilliant frequenters of Madame d'Argelès's entertainments considered this act proof of exceeding bad taste and deplorable weakness on his part. "The fellow was a coward," they declared. "Why, he had lost hardly a thousand louis!"

He had lost only that, it is true—a mere trifle as times go. Only the money was not his; he had taken it from the safe which was confided to his keeping, expecting, probably, to double the amount in a single night. In the morning, when he found himself alone, without a penny, and the deficit staring him in the face, the voice of conscience cried, "You are a thief!" and he lost his reason.

The event created a great sensation at the time, and

the *Petit Journal* published a curious story concerning this unfortunate young man's mother. The poor woman—she was a widow—sold all she possessed, even the bed on which she slept, and when she had succeeded in gathering together twenty thousand francs—the ransom of her son's honor—she carried them to the banker by whom her boy had been employed. He took them, without even asking the mother if she had enough left to purchase her dinner that evening; and the fine gentleman, who had won and pocketed Jules Chazel's stolen gold, thought the banker's conduct perfectly natural and just. It is true that Madame d'Argelès was in despair during forty-eight hours or so; for the police had begun a sort of investigation, and she feared this might frighten her visitors and empty her drawing-rooms. Not at all, however; on the contrary, she had good cause to congratulate herself upon the notoriety she gained through this suicide. For five days she was the talk of Paris, and Alfred d'Aunay even published her portrait in the *Illustrated Chronicle*.

Still, no one was able to say exactly who Madame Lia d'Argelès was. Who was she, and whence did she come? How had she lived until she sprang up, full grown, in the sunshine of the fashionable world? Did the splendid mansion in the Rue de Berry really belong to her? Was she as rich as she was supposed to be? Where had she acquired such manners, the manners of a thorough woman of the world, with her many accomplishments, as well as her remarkable skill as a musician? Everything connected with her was a subject of conjecture, even to the name inscribed upon her visiting cards—"Lia d'Argelès."

But no matter. Her house was always filled to overflowing; and at the very moment when the Marquis de

Valorsay and M. Fortunat were speaking of her, a dozen coroneted carriages stood before her door, and her rooms were thronged with guests. It was a little past midnight, and the bi-weekly card party had just been made up, when a footman announced, "Monsieur le Vicomte de Coralth! Monsieur Pascal Ferailleux!"

Few of the players deigned to raise their heads. But one man growled, "Good—two more players!" And four or five young men exclaimed, "Ah! here's Ferdinand! Good evening, my dear fellow!"

M. de Coralth was very young and remarkably good-looking, almost too good-looking, indeed; for his handsomeness was somewhat startling and unnatural. He had an exceedingly fair complexion, and large, melting black eyes, while a woman might have envied him his wavy brown hair and the exquisite delicacy of his skin. He dressed with great care and taste, and even coquetishly; his turn-down collar left his firm white throat uncovered, and his rose-tinted gloves fitted as perfectly as the skin upon his soft, delicate hands. He bowed familiarly on entering, and with a rather complacent smile on his lips, he approached Madame d'Argelès, who, half reclining in an easy chair near the fire-place, was conversing with two elderly gentlemen of grave and distinguished bearing. "How late you are, viscount," she remarked carelessly. "What have you been doing to-day? I fancied I saw you in the Bois, in the Marquis de Valorsay's dog-cart."

A slight flush suffused M. de Coralth's cheeks, and to hide it, perhaps, he turned toward the visitor who had entered with him, and drew him toward Madame d'Argelès, saying, "Allow me, madame, to present to you one of my great friends, M. Pascal Ferailleux, an

advocate whose name will be known to fame some day."

"Your friends are always welcome at my house, my dear viscount," replied Madame d'Argelès. And before Pascal had concluded his bow, she averted her head, and resumed her interrupted conversation.

The new-comer, however, was worthy of more than that cursory notice. He was a young man of five or six-and-twenty, dark-complexioned and tall; each movement of his person was imbued with that natural grace which is the result of perfect harmony of the muscles, and of more than common vigor. His features were irregular, but they gave evidence of energy, kindness of heart, and honesty of purpose. A man possessing such a proud, intelligent, and open brow, such a clear, straightforward gaze, and such finely-cut lips, could be no ordinary one. Deserted by his sponsor, who was shaking hands right and left, he seated himself on a sofa a little in the background; not because he was embarrassed, but because he felt that instinctive distrust of self which frequently seizes hold of a person on entering a crowd of strangers. He did his best to conceal his curiosity, but nevertheless he looked and listened with all his might.

The *salon* was an immense apartment, divided into two rooms by sliding doors and hangings. When Madame d'Argelès gave a ball, the rooms were thrown into one; but, as a general rule, one room was occupied by the card-players, and the other served as a refuge for those who wished to chat. The card-room, into which Pascal had been ushered, was an apartment of noble proportions, furnished in a style of tasteful magnificence. The tints of the carpet were subdued; there was not too much gilding on the cornices; the clock

upon the mantel-shelf was chaste and elegant in design. The only thing at all peculiar about the room and its appointments was a reflector, ingeniously arranged above the chandelier in such a way as to throw the full glare of the candles upon the card-table which stood directly beneath it. The table itself was adorned with a rich tapestry cover, but this was visible only at the corners, for it was covered, in turn, with a green baize cloth considerably the worse for wear. Madame d'Argelès's guests were probably not over fifty in number, but they all seemed to belong to the very best society. The majority of them were men of forty or thereabouts; several wore decorations, and two or three of the eldest were treated with marked deference. Certain well-known names which Pascal overheard surprised him greatly. "What! these men here?" he said to himself; "and I—I regarded my visit as a sort of clandestine frolic."

There were only seven or eight ladies present, none of them being especially attractive. Their toilettes were very costly, but in rather doubtful taste, and they wore a profusion of diamonds. Pascal noticed that these ladies were treated with perfect indifference, and that, whenever the gentlemen spoke to them, they assumed an air of politeness which was too exaggerated not to be ironical.

A score of persons were seated at the card-table, and the guests who had retired into the adjoining *salon* were silently watching the progress of the game, or quietly chatting in the corners of the room. It surprised him to note that every one spoke in very low tones; there was something very like respect, even awe, in this subdued murmur. One might have supposed that those present were celebrating the rites of some

mysterious worship. And is not gaming a species of idolatry, symbolized by cards, and which has its images, its fetishes, its miracles, its fanatics, and its martyrs?

Occasionally, above the accompaniment of whispers, rose the strange and incoherent exclamations of the players: "Here are twenty louis! I take it—I pass! The play is made! *Banco!*"

"What a strange gathering!" thought Pascal Feraillieur. "What singular people!" And he turned his attention to the mistress of the house, as if he hoped to decipher the solution of the enigma on her face.

But Madame Lia d'Argelès defied all analysis. She was one of those women whose uncertain age varies according to their mood, between the thirties and the fifties; one who did not look over thirty in the evening, but who would have been charged with being more than fifty the next morning. In her youth she must have been very beautiful, and she was still good-looking, though she had grown somewhat stout, and her face had become a trifle heavy, thus marring the symmetry of her very delicate features. A perfect blonde, she had eyes of so clear a blue that they seemed almost faded. The whiteness of her skin was so unnatural that it almost startled one. It was the dull, lifeless white which suggests an excessive use of cosmetics and rice powder, and long baths, late hours, and sleep at day-time, in a darkened room. Her face was utterly devoid of expression. One might have fancied that its muscles had become relaxed after terrible efforts to feign or to conceal some violent emotions; and there was something melancholy, almost terrifying in the eternal, and perhaps involuntary smile, which curved her lips. She wore a dress of black velvet, with

slashed sleeves and bodice, a new design of the famous man-milliner, Van Klopen.

Pascal was engaged in these observations when M. de Coralth, having made his round, came and sat down on the sofa beside him. "Well, what do you think of it?" he inquired.

"Upon my word!" replied the young advocate, "I am infinitely obliged to you for inviting me to accompany you here. I am intensely amused."

"Good! My philosopher is captivated."

"Not captivated, but interested, I confess." Then, in the tone of good-humor which was habitual to him, he added: "As for being the sage you call me, that's all nonsense. And to prove it, I'm going to risk my louis with the rest."

M. de Coralth seemed amazed, but a close observer might have detected a gleam of triumph in his eyes. "You are going to play—you?"

"Yes. Why not?"

"Take care!"

"Of what, pray? The worst I can do is to lose what I have in my pocket—something over two hundred francs."

The viscount shook his head thoughtfully. "It isn't that which one has cause to fear. The devil always has a hand in this business, and the first time a man plays he's sure to win."

"And is that a misfortune?"

"Yes, because the recollection of these first winnings is sure to lure you back to the gaming-table again. You go back, you lose, you try to recover your money, and that's the end of it—you become a gambler."

Pascal Ferailleux's smile was the smile of a man who has full confidence in himself. "My brain is not

so easily turned, I hope," said he. "I have the thought of my name, and the fortune I must make, as ballast for it."

"I beseech you not to play," insisted the viscount. "Listen to me; you don't know what this passion for play is; the strongest and the coldest natures succumb—don't play."

He had raised his voice, as if he intended to be overheard by two guests who had just approached the sofa. They did indeed hear him. "Can I believe my own eyes and ears!" exclaimed one of them, an elderly man. "Can this really be Ferdinand who is trying to shake the allegiance of the votaries of our noble lady—the Queen of Spades?"

M. de Coralith turned quickly round: "Yes, it is indeed I," he answered. "I have purchased with my patrimony the right of saying: 'Distrust yourself, and don't do as I've done,' to an inexperienced friend."

The wisest counsels, given in a certain fashion, never fail to produce an effect diametrically opposed to that which they seemingly aim at. M. de Coralith's persistence, and the importance he attached to a mere trifle, could not fail to annoy the most patient man in the world, and in fact his patronizing tone really irritated Pascal. "You are free, my friend, to do as you please," said he; "but I——"

"Are you resolved?" interrupted the viscount.

"Absolutely."

"So be it, then. You are no longer a child, and I have warned you. Let us play, then." Thereupon they approached the table; room was made for them, and they seated themselves, Pascal being on M. Ferdinand de Coralith's right-hand side.

The guests were playing "Baccarat tournant," a

game of terrible and infantile simplicity. There are no such things as skill or combination possible in it; science and calculation are useless. Chance alone decides, and decides with the rapidity of lightning. Amateurs certainly assert that, with great coolness and long practice, one can, in a measure at least, avert prolonged ill-luck. Maybe they are right, but it is not conclusively proved. Each person takes the cards in his turn, risks what he chooses, and when his stakes are covered, deals. If he wins, he is free to follow up his vein of good-luck, or to pass the deal. When he loses, the deal passes at once to the next player on the right.

A moment sufficed for Pascal Ferailleux to learn the rules of the game. It was already Ferdinand's deal. M. de Coralthe staked a hundred francs; the bet was taken; he dealt, lost, and handed the cards to Pascal.

The play, which had been rather timid at first—since it was necessary, as they say, to try the luck—had now become bolder. Several players had large piles of gold before them, and the heavy artillery—that is to say, bank-notes—were beginning to put in appearance. But Pascal had no false pride. “I stake a louis!” said he.

The smallness of the sum attracted instant attention, and two or three voices replied: “Taken!”

He dealt, and won. “Two louis!” he said again. This wager was also taken; he won, and his run of luck was so remarkable that, in a wonderfully short space of time, he won six hundred francs.

“Pass the deal,” whispered Ferdinand, and Pascal followed this advice. “Not because I desire to keep my winnings,” he whispered in M. de Coralthe's ear, “but because I wish to have enough to play until the end of the evening without risking anything.”

But such prudence was unnecessary so far as he was concerned. When the deal came to him again, fortune favored him even more than before. He started with a hundred francs, and doubling them each time in six successive deals, he won more than three thousand francs.

"The devil! Monsieur is in luck."—"Zounds! And he is playing for the first time."—"That accounts for it. The inexperienced always win."

Pascal could not fail to hear these comments. The blood mantled over his cheeks, and, conscious that he was flushing, he, as usually happens, flushed still more. His good fortune embarrassed him, as was evident, and he played most recklessly. Still his good luck did not desert him; and do what he would he won—won continually. In fact, by four o'clock in the morning he had thirty-five thousand francs before him.

For some time he had been the object of close attention. "Do you know this gentleman?" inquired one of the guests.

"No. He came with Coralth."

"He is an advocate, I understand."

And all these whispered doubts and suspicions, these questions fraught with an evil significance, these uncharitable replies, grew into a malevolent murmur, which resounded in Pascal's ears and bewildered him. He was really becoming most uncomfortable, when Madame d'Argelès approached the card-table and exclaimed: "This is the third time, gentlemen, that you have been told that supper is ready. What gentleman will offer me his arm?"

There was an evident unwillingness to leave the table, but an old gentleman who had been losing heavily rose to his feet. "Yes, let us go to sup-

per!" he exclaimed; "perhaps that will change the luck."

This was a decisive consideration. The room emptied as if by magic; and no one was left at the table but Pascal, who scarcely knew what to do with all the gold piled up before him. He succeeded, however, in distributing it in his pockets, and was about to join the other guests in the dining-room, when Madame d'Argelès abruptly barred his passage.

"I desire a word with you, monsieur," she said. Her face still retained its strange immobility, and the same stereotyped smile played about her lips. And yet her agitation was so evident that Pascal, in spite of his own uncasiness, noticed it, and was astonished by it.

"I am at your service, madame," he stammered, bowing.

She at once took his arm, and led him to the embrasure of a window. "I am a stranger to you, monsieur," she said, very hurriedly, and in very low tones, "and yet I must ask, and you must grant me, a great favor."

"Speak, madame."

She hesitated, as if at a loss for words, and then all of a sudden she said, eagerly: "You will leave this house at once, without warning any one, and while the other guests are at supper."

Pascal's astonishment changed into stupor.

"Why am I to go?" he asked.

"Because—but, no; I cannot tell you. Consider it only a caprice on my part—it is so; but I entreat you, don't refuse me. Do me this favor, and I shall be eternally grateful."

There was such an agony of supplication in her voice and her attitude, that Pascal was touched. A vague

presentiment of some terrible, irreparable misfortune disturbed his own heart. Nevertheless, he sadly shook his head, and bitterly exclaimed: "You are, perhaps, not aware that I have just won over thirty thousand francs."

"Yes, I am aware of it. And this is only another, and still stronger reason why you should protect yourself against possible loss. It is well to pattern after Charlemagne* in this house. The other night, the Count d'Antas quietly made his escape bareheaded. He took a thousand louis away with him, and left his hat in exchange. The count is a brave man; and far from indulging in blame, every one applauded him the next day. Come, you have decided, I see—you will go; and to be still more safe, I will show you out through the servants' hall, then no one can possibly see you."

Pascal had almost decided to yield to her entreaties; but this proposed retreat through the back-door was too revolting to his pride to be thought of for a moment. "I will never consent to such a thing," he declared. "What would they think of me? Besides I owe them their revenge and I shall give it to them."

Neither Madame d'Argelès nor Pascal had noticed M. de Coralth, who in the meantime had stolen into the room on tiptoe, and had been listening to their conversation, concealed behind the folds of a heavy curtain. He now suddenly revealed his presence. "Ah! my dear friend," he exclaimed, in a winning tone. "While I honor your scruples, I must say that I think madame is a hundred times right. If I were in your

*French gamblers use this expression which they explain by the fact that Charlemagne departed this life with all his possessions intact, having always added to his dominions without ever experiencing a loss. Historically this is no doubt incorrect, but none the less, the expression prevails in France.—[TRANS.]

place, if I had won what you have won, I shouldn't hesitate. Others might think what they pleased; you have the money, that is the main thing."

For the second time, the viscount's intervention decided Pascal. "I shall remain," he said, resolutely.

But Madame d'Argelès laid her hand imploringly on his arm. "I entreat you, monsieur," said she. "Go now, there is still time——"

"Yes, go," said the viscount, approvingly, "it would be a most excellent move. Retreat and save the cash."

These words were like the drop which makes the cup overflow. Crimson with anger and assailed by the strangest suspicions, Pascal turned from Madame d'Argelès and hastened into the dining-room. The conversation ceased entirely on his arrival there. He could not fail to understand that he had been the subject of it. A secret instinct warned him that all the men around him were his enemies—though he knew not why—and that they were plotting against him. He also perceived that his slightest movements were watched and commented upon. However he was a brave man; his conscience did not reproach him in the least, and he was one of those persons who, rather than wait for danger, provoke it.

So, with an almost defiant air, he seated himself beside a young lady dressed in pink *tulle*, and began to laugh and chat with her. He possessed a ready wit, and what is even better, tact; and for a quarter of an hour astonished those around him by his brilliant sallies. Champagne was flowing freely; and he drank four or five glasses in quick succession. Was he really conscious of what he was doing and saying? He subsequently declared that he was not, that he acted under

the influence of a sort of hallucination similar to that produced by the inhalation of carbonic gas.

However, the guests did not linger long at the supper-table. "Let us go back!" cried the old gentleman, who had insisted upon the suspension of the game; "we are wasting a deal of precious time here!"

Pascal rose with the others, and in his haste to enter the adjoining room he jostled two men who were talking together near the door. "So it is understood," said one of them.

"Yes, yes, leave it to me; I will act as executioner."

This word sent all Pascal's blood bounding to his heart. "Who is to be executed?" he thought. "I am evidently to be the victim. But what does it all mean?"

Meanwhile the players at the green table had changed places, and Pascal found himself seated not on Ferdinand's right, but directly opposite him, and between two men about his own age—one of them being the person who had announced his intention of acting as executioner. All eyes were fixed upon the unfortunate advocate when it came his turn to deal. He staked two hundred louis, and lost them. There was a slight commotion round the table; and one of the players who had lost most heavily, remarked in an undertone: "Don't look so hard at the gentleman—he won't have any more luck."

As Pascal heard this ironical remark, uttered in a tone which made it as insulting as a blow, a gleam of light darted through his puzzled brain. He suspected at last, what any person less honest than himself would have long before understood. He thought of rising and demanding an apology; but he was stunned, almost overcome by the horrors of his situation. His

ears tingled, and it seemed to him as if the beating of his heart were suspended.

However the game proceeded; but no one paid any attention to it. The stakes were insignificant, and loss or gain drew no exclamation from any one. The attention of the entire party was concentrated on Pascal; and he, with despair in his heart, followed the movements of the cards, which were passing from hand to hand, and fast approaching him again. When they reached him the silence became breathless, menacing, even sinister. The ladies, and the guests who were not playing, approached and leaned over the table in evident anxiety. "My God!" thought Pascal, "my God, if I can only lose!"

He was as pale as death; the perspiration trickled down from his hair upon his temples, and his hands trembled so much that he could scarcely hold the cards. "I will stake four thousand francs," he faltered.

"I take your bet," answered a voice.

Alas! the unfortunate fellow's wish was not gratified; he won. Then in the midst of the wildest confusion, he exclaimed: "Here are eight thousand francs!"

"Taken!"

But as he began to deal the cards, his neighbor sprang up, seized him roughly by the hands and cried: "This time I'm sure of it—you are a thief!"

With a bound, Pascal was on his feet. While his peril had been vague and undetermined, his energy had been paralyzed. But it was restored to him intact when his danger declared itself in all its horror. He pushed away the man who had caught his hands, with such violence that he sent him reeling under a sofa; then he stepped back and surveyed the excited throng with

an air of menace and defiance. Useless! Seven or eight players sprang upon him and overpowered him, as if he had been the vilest criminal.

Meanwhile, the executioner, as he had styled himself, had risen to his feet with his cravat untied, and his clothes in wild disorder. "Yes," he said, addressing Pascal, "you are a thief! I saw you slip other cards among those which were handed to you."

"Wretch!" gasped Pascal.

"I saw you—and I am going to prove it." So saying he turned to the mistress of the house, who had dropped into an arm-chair, and imperiously asked, "How many packs have we used?"

"Five."

"Then there ought to be two hundred and sixty cards upon the table."

Thereupon he counted them slowly and with particular care, and he found no fewer than three hundred and seven. "Well, scoundrel!" he cried; "are you still bold enough to deny it?"

Pascal had no desire to deny it. He knew that words would weigh as nothing against this material, tangible, incontrovertible proof. Forty-seven cards had been fraudulently inserted among the others. Certainly not by him! But by whom? Still he, alone, had been the gainer through the deception.

"You see that the coward will not even defend himself!" exclaimed one of the women.

He did not deign to turn his head. What did the insult matter to him? He knew himself to be innocent, and yet he felt that he was sinking to the lowest depths of infamy—he beheld himself disgraced, branded, ruined. And realizing that he must meet facts with facts, he besought God to grant him an

idea, an inspiration, that would unmask the real culprit.

But another person came to his aid. With a boldness which no one would have expected on his part, M. de Coralth placed himself in front of Pascal, and in a voice which betokened more indignation than sorrow, he exclaimed: "This is a terrible mistake, gentlemen. Pascal Ferailleux is my friend; and his past vouches for his present. Go to the Palais de Justice, and make inquiries respecting his character there. They will tell you how utterly impossible it is that this man can be guilty of the ignoble act he is accused of."

No one made any reply. In the opinion of all his listeners, Ferdinand was simply fulfilling a duty which it would have been difficult for him to escape. The old gentleman who had decided the suspension and the resumption of the game, gave audible expression to the prevailing sentiment of the party. He was a portly man, who puffed like a porpoise when he talked, and whom his companions called the baron. "Your words do you honor—really do you honor," he said, addressing Ferdinand—"and no possible blame can attach to you. That your friend is not an honest man is no fault of yours. There is no outward sign to distinguish scoundrels."

Pascal had so far not opened his lips. After struggling for a moment in the hands of his captors, he now stood perfectly motionless, glancing furiously around him as if hoping to discover the coward who had prepared the trap into which he had fallen. For he felt certain that he was the victim of some atrocious conspiracy, though it was impossible for him to divine what motive had actuated his enemies. Suddenly those who were holding him felt him tremble. He raised his

head; he fancied he could detect a ray of hope. "Shall I be allowed to speak in my own defence?" he asked.

"Speak!"

He tried to free himself; but those beside him would not relax their hold, so he desisted, and then, in a voice husky with emotion, he exclaimed: "I am innocent! I am the victim of an infamous plot. Who the author of it is I do not know. But there is some one here who must know." Angry exclamations and sneering laughs interrupted him. "Would you condemn me unheard?" he resumed, raising his voice. "Listen to me. About an hour ago, while you were at supper, Madame d'Argelès almost threw herself at my feet as she entreated me to leave this house. Her agitation astonished me. Now I understand it."

The gentleman known as the baron turned toward Madame d'Argelès: "Is what this man says true?"

She was greatly agitated, but she answered: "Yes."

"Why were you so anxious for him to go?"

"I don't know—a presentiment—it seemed to me that something was going to happen."

The least observant of the party could not fail to notice Madame d'Argelès's hesitation and confusion; but even the shrewdest were deceived. They supposed that she had seen the act committed, and had tried to induce the culprit to make his escape, in order to avoid a scandal.

Pascal saw he could expect no assistance from this source. "M. de Coralthe could assure you," he began.

"Oh, enough of that," interrupted a player. "I myself heard M. de Coralthe do his best to persuade you not to play."

So the unfortunate fellow's last and only hope had vanished. Still he made a supreme effort, and address-

ing Madame d'Argelès: "Madame," he said, in a voice trembling with anguish, "I entreat you, tell what you know. Will you allow an honorable man to be ruined before your very eyes? Will you abandon an innocent man whom you could save by a single word?" But she remained silent; and Pascal staggered as if some one had dealt him a terrible blow. "It is all over!" he muttered.

No one heard him; everybody was listening to the baron, who seemed to be very much put out. "We are wasting precious time with all this," said he. "We should have made at least five rounds while this absurd scene has been going on. We must put an end to it. What are you going to do with this fellow? I am in favor of sending for a commissary of police."

Such was not at all the opinion of the majority of the guests. Four or five of the ladies took flight at the bare suggestion and several men—the most aristocratic of the company—became angry at once. "Are you mad?" said one of them. "Do you want to see us all summoned as witnesses? You have probably forgotten that Garcia affair, and that rumpus at Jenny Fancy's house. A fine thing it would be to see, no one knows how many great names mixed up with those of sharpers and notorious women!"

Naturally of a florid complexion, the baron's face now became scarlet. "So it's fear of scandal that deters you! Zounds, sir! a man's courage should equal his vices. Look at me."

Celebrated for his income of eight hundred thousand francs a year, for his estates in Burgundy, for his passion for gaming, his horses, and his cook, the baron wielded a mighty influence. Still, on this occasion he did not carry the day, for it was decided that the

"sharper" should be allowed to depart unmolested. "Make him at least return the money," growled a loser; "compel him to disgorge."

"His winnings are there upon the table."

"Don't believe it," cried the baron. "All these scoundrels have secret pockets in which they stow away their plunder. Search him by all means."

"That's it—search him!"

Crushed by this unexpected, undeserved and incomprehensible misfortune, Pascal had almost yielded to his fate. But the shameful cry: "Search him!" kindled terrible wrath in his brain. He shook off his assailants as a lion shakes off the hounds that have attacked him, and, reaching the fireplace with a single bound, he snatched up a heavy bronze candelabrum and brandished it in the air, crying: "The first who approaches is a dead man!"

He was ready to strike, there was no doubt about it; and such a weapon in the hands of a determined man, becomes positively terrible. The danger seemed so great and so certain that his enemies paused—each encouraging his neighbor with his glance; but no one was inclined to engage in this struggle, by which the victor would merely gain a few bank-notes. "Stand back, and allow me to retire?" said Pascal, imperiously. They still hesitated; but finally made way. And, formidable in his indignation and audacity, he reached the door of the room unmolested, and disappeared.

This superb outburst of outraged honor, this marvellous energy—succeeding, as it did, the most complete mental prostration—and these terrible threats, had proved so prompt and awe-inspiring that no one had thought of cutting off Pascal's retreat. The guests had not recovered from their stupor, but were still stand-

ing silent and intimidated when they heard the outer door close after him.

It was a woman who at last broke the spell. "Ah, well!" she exclaimed, in a tone of intense admiration, "that handsome fellow is level-headed!"

"He naturally desired to save his plunder!"

It was the same expression that M. de Coralith had employed; and which had, perhaps, prevented Pascal from yielding to Madame d'Argelès's entreaties. Everybody applauded the sentiment—everybody, the baron excepted. This rich man, whose passions had dragged him into the vilest dens of Europe, was thoroughly acquainted with sharpers and scoundrels of every type, from those who ride in their carriages down to the barefooted vagabond. He knew the thief who grovels at his victim's feet, humbly confessing his crime, the desperate knave who swallows the notes he has stolen, the abject wretch who bares his back to receive the blows he deserves, and the rascal who boldly confronts his accusers and protests his innocence with the indignation of an honest man. But never, in any of these scoundrels, had the baron seen the proud, steadfast glance with which this man had awed his accusers.

With this thought uppermost in his mind he drew the person who had seized Pascal's hands at the card-table a little aside. "Tell me," said he, "did you actually see that young man slip the cards into the pack?"

"No, not exactly. But you know what we agreed at supper? We were sure that he was cheating; and it was necessary to find some pretext for counting the cards."

"What if he shouldn't be guilty, after all?"

"Who else could be guilty then? He was the only winner."

To this terrible argument—the same which had silenced Pascal—the baron made no reply. Indeed his intervention became necessary elsewhere, for the other guests were beginning to talk loudly and excitedly around the pile of gold and bank-notes which Pascal had left on the table. They had counted it, and found it to amount to the sum of thirty-six thousand three hundred and twenty francs; and it was the question of dividing it properly among the losers which was causing all this uproar. Among these guests, who belonged to the highest society—among these judges who had so summarily convicted an innocent man, and suggested the searching of a supposed sharper only a moment before—there were several who unblushingly misrepresented their losses. This was undeniable; for on adding the various amounts that were claimed together a grand total of ninety-one thousand francs was reached. Had this man who had just fled taken the difference between the two sums away with him? A difference amounting almost to fifty-five thousand francs? No, this was impossible; the supposition could not be entertained for a moment. However, the discussion might have taken an unfortunate turn, had it not been for the baron. In all matters relating to cards, his word was law. He quietly said, "It is all right;" and they submitted.

Nevertheless, he absolutely refused to take his share of the money; and after the division, rubbing his hands as if he were delighted to see this disagreeable affair concluded, he exclaimed: "It is only six o'clock; we have still time for a few rounds."

But the other guests, pale, disturbed, and secretly

ashamed of themselves, were eager to depart, and in fact they were already hastening to the cloak-room. "At least play a game of *écarté*," cried the baron, "a simple game of *écarté*, at twenty louis a point."

But no one listened, and he reluctantly prepared to follow his departing friends, who bowed to Madame d'Argelès on the landing, as they filed by. M. de Coralth, who was among the last to retire, had already reached the staircase, and descended two or three steps, when Madame d'Argelès called to him. "Remain," said she; "I want to speak with you."

"You will excuse me," he began; "I——"

But she again bade him "remain" in such an imperious tone that he dared not resist. He reascended the stairs, very much after the manner of a man who is being dragged into a dentist's office, and followed Madame d'Argelès into a small boudoir at the end of the gambling-room. As soon as the door was closed and locked, the mistress of the house turned to her prisoner. "Now you will explain," said she. "It was you who brought M. Pascal Ferailleux here."

"Alas! I know only too well that I ought to beg your forgiveness. However, this affair will cost me dear myself. It has already embroiled me in a difficulty with that fool of a Rochecote, with whom I shall have to fight in less than a couple of hours."

"Where did you make his acquaintance?"

"Whose—Rochecote's?"

Madame d'Argelès's sempiternal smile had altogether disappeared. "I am speaking seriously," said she, with a threatening ring in her voice. "How did you happen to become acquainted with M. Ferailleux?"

"That can be very easily explained. Seven or eight months ago I had need of an advocate's services, and

he was recommended to me. He managed my case very cleverly, and we kept up the acquaintance."

"What is his position?"

M. de Coralthe's features wore an expression of exceeding weariness as if he greatly longed to go to sleep. He had indeed installed himself in a large arm-chair, in a semi-recumbent position. "Upon my word, I don't know," he replied. "Pascal had always seemed to be the most irreproachable man in the world—a man you might call a philosopher! He lives in a retired part of the city, near the Panthéon, with his mother, who is a widow, a very respectable woman, always dressed in black. When she opened the door for me, on the occasion of my first visit, I thought some old family portrait had stepped down from its frame to receive me. I judge them to be in comfortable circumstances. Pascal has the reputation of being a remarkable man, and people supposed he would rise very high in his profession."

"But now he is ruined; his career is finished."

"Certainly! You can be quite sure that by this evening all Paris will know what occurred here last night."

He paused, meeting Madame Argelès's look of withering scorn with a cleverly assumed air of astonishment. "You are a villain! Monsieur de Coralthe," she said, indignantly.

"I—and why?"

"Because it was you who slipped those cards, which made M. Ferailleux win, into the pack; I saw you do it! And yielding to my entreaties, the young fellow was about to leave the house when you, intentionally, prevented him from saving himself. Oh! don't deny it."

M. de Coralthe rose in the coolest possible manner. "I deny nothing, my dear lady," he replied, "absolutely nothing. You and I understand each other."

Confounded by his unblushing impudence, Madame d'Argelès remained speechless for a moment. "You confess it!" she cried, at last. "You dare to confess it! Were you not afraid that I might speak and state what I had seen?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "No one would have believed you," he exclaimed.

"Yes, I should have been believed, Monsieur de Coralthe, for I could have given proofs. You must have forgotten that I know you, that your past life is no secret to me, that I know who you are, and what dishonored name you hide beneath your borrowed title! I could have told my guests that you are married—that you have abandoned your wife and child, leaving them to perish in want and misery—I could have told them where you obtain the thirty or forty thousand francs you spend each year. You must have forgotten that Rose told me everything, Monsieur—Paul!"

She had struck the right place this time, and with such precision that M. de Coralthe turned livid, and made a furious gesture, as if he were about to fell her to the ground. "Ah, take care!" he exclaimed; "take care!"

But his rage speedily subsided, and with his usual indifferent manner, and in a bantering tone, he said: "Well, what of that? Do you fancy that the world doesn't already suspect what you could reveal? People have suspected me of being even worse than I am. When you proclaim on the housetops that I am an adventurer, folks will only laugh at you, and I shall be

none the worse for it. A matter that would crush a dozen men like Pascal Ferailleux would not injure me in the least. I am accustomed to it. I must have luxury and enjoyment, everything that is pleasant and beautiful—and to procure all this, I do my very best. It is true that I don't derive my income from my estate in Brie; but I have plenty of money, and that is the essential thing. Besides, it is so difficult to earn a livelihood nowadays, and the love of luxury is so intense that no one knows at night what he may do—or, rather, what he won't do—the next day. And last, but not least, the people who ought to be despised are so numerous that contempt is an impossibility. A Parisian who happened to be so absurdly pretentious as to refuse to shake hands with such of his acquaintances as were not irreproachable characters, might walk for hours on the Boulevards without finding an occasion to take his hands out of his pockets.”

M. de Coralith talked well enough, and yet, in point of fact, all this was sheer bravado on his part. He knew better than any one else, on what a frail and uncertain basis his brilliant existence was established. Certainly, society does show great indulgence to people of doubtful reputation. It shuts its eyes and refuses to look or listen. But this is all the more reason why it should be pitiless when a person's guilt is positively established. Thus, although he assumed an air of insolent security, the “viscount” anxiously watched the effect of his words upon Madame d'Argelès. Fortunately for himself, he saw that she was abashed by his cynicism; and so he resumed: “Besides, as our friend, the baron, would say, we are wasting precious time in discussing improbable, and even impossible, suppositions. I was sufficiently well acquainted with

your heart and your intelligence, my dear madame, to be sure that you would not speak a word to my disparagement."

"Indeed! What prevented me from doing so?"

"*I* did; or perhaps I ought rather to say, your own good sense, which closed your mouth when Monsieur Pascal entreated you to speak in his defence. I am entitled to considerable indulgence, madame, and a great deal ought to be forgiven me. *My* mother, unfortunately, was an honest woman, who did not furnish me with the means of gratifying every whim."

Madame d'Argelès recoiled as if a serpent had suddenly crossed her path.

"What do you mean?" she faltered.

"You know as well as I do."

"I don't understand you—explain yourself."

With the impatient gesture of a man who finds himself compelled to answer an idle question, and assuming an air of hypocritical commiseration, he replied: "Well, since you insist upon it, I know, in Paris—in the Rue de Helder, to be more exact—a nice young fellow, whose lot I have often envied. He has wanted for nothing since the day he came into the world. At school, he had three times as much money as his richest playfellow. When his studies were finished, a tutor was provided—with his pockets full of gold—to conduct this favored youth to Italy, Egypt, and Greece. He is now studying law; and four times a year, with unvarying punctuality, he receives a letter from London containing five thousand francs. This is all the more remarkable, as this young man has neither a father nor a mother. He is alone in the world with his income of twenty thousand francs. I have heard him say, jestingly, that some good fairy must be watch-

ing over him; but I know that he believes himself to be the illegitimate son of some great English nobleman. Sometimes, when he has drunk a little too much, he talks of going in search of my lord, his father."

The effect M. de Coralth had created by these words must have been extremely gratifying to him, for Madame d'Argelès had fallen back in her chair, almost fainting. "So, my dear madame," he continued, "if I ever had any reason to fancy that you intended causing me any trouble, I should go to this charming youth and say: 'My good fellow, you are strangely deceived. Your money doesn't come from the treasure-box of an English peer, but from a small gambling den with which I am very well acquainted, having often had occasion to swell its revenues with my franc-pieces.' And if he mourned his vanished dreams, I should tell him: 'You are wrong; for, if the great nobleman is lost, the good fairy remains. She is none other than your mother, a very worthy person, whose only object in life is your comfort and advancement.' And if he doubted my word, I should bring him to his mother's house some *baccarat* night; and there would be a scene of recognition worthy of Fargueil's genius."

Any man but M. de Coralth would have had some compassion, for Madame d'Argelès was evidently suffering agony. "It is as I feared!" she moaned, in a scarcely audible voice.

However, he heard her. "What!" he exclaimed in a tone of intense astonishment; "did you really doubt it? No; I can't believe it; it would be doing injustice to your intelligence and experience. Are people like ourselves obliged to talk in order to understand each other? Should I ever have ventured to do what I have done, in your house, if I had not known the secret of

your maternal tenderness, delicacy of feeling, and devotion?"

She was weeping; big tears were rolling down her face, tracing a broad furrow through the powder on her cheeks. "He knows everything!" she murmured; "he knows everything!"

"By the merest chance, I assure you. As I don't like folks to meddle with my affairs, I never meddle with theirs. As I have just said, it was entirely the work of chance. One April afternoon I came to invite you to a drive in the Bois. I was ushered into this very room where we are sitting now, and found you writing. I said I would wait until you finished your letter; but some one called you, and you hastily left the room. How it was that I happened to approach your writing-table I cannot explain; but I did approach it, and read your unfinished letter. Upon my word it touched me deeply. I can give no better proof of the truth of my assertion than the fact that I can repeat it, almost word for word, even now. 'DEAR SIR,'—you wrote to your London correspondent—'I send you three thousand francs, in addition to the five thousand for the regular quarterly payment. Forward the money without delay. I fear the poor boy is greatly annoyed by his creditors. Yesterday I had the happiness of seeing him in the Rue de Helder, and I found him looking pale and careworn. When you send him this money, forward at the same time a letter of fatherly advice. It is true, he ought to work and win an honorable position for himself; but think of the dangers and temptation that beset him, alone and friendless, in this corrupt city.' There, my dear lady, your letter ended; but the name and address were given, and it was easy enough to understand it. You remember, perhaps, a

little incident that occurred after your return. On perceiving that you had forgotten your letter, you turned pale and glanced at me. 'Have you read it, and do you understand it?' your eyes asked; while mine replied: 'Yes, but I shall be silent.'

"And I shall be silent too," said Madame d'Argelès.

M. de Coralth took her hand and raised it to his lips. "I knew we should understand each other," he remarked, gravely. "I am not bad at heart, believe me; and if I had possessed money of my own, or a mother like you——"

She averted her face, fearing perhaps that M. de Coralth might read her opinion of him in her eyes; but after a short pause she exclaimed beseechingly: "Now that I am your accomplice, let me entreat you to do all you possibly can to prevent last night's affair from being noised abroad."

"Impossible."

"If not for M. Feraille's sake, for the sake of his poor widowed mother."

"Pascal must be put out of the way!"

"Why do you say that? Do you hate him so much then? What has he done to you?"

"To me, personally? Nothing—I even feel actual sympathy for him."

Madame d'Argelès was confounded. "What!" she stammered; "it wasn't on your own account that you did this?"

"Why, no."

She sprang to her feet, and quivering with scorn and indignation, cried: "Ah! then the deed is even more infamous—even more cowardly!" But alarmed by the threatening gleam in M. de Coralth's eyes, she went no further.

"A truce to these disagreeable truths," said he, coldly. "If we expressed our opinions of each other without reserve, in this world, we should soon come to hard words. Do you think I acted for my own pleasure? Suppose some one had seen me when I slipped the cards into the pack. If that had happened, *I* should have been ruined."

"And you think that no one suspects you?"

"No one. I lost more than a hundred louis myself. If Pascal belonged to our set, people might investigate the matter, perhaps; but to-morrow it will be forgotten."

"And will he have no suspicions?"

"He will have no proofs to offer, in any case."

Madame d'Argeles seemed to resign herself to the inevitable. "I hope you will, at least, tell me on whose behalf you acted," she remarked.

"Impossible," replied M. de Coralth. And, consulting his watch, he added, "But I am forgetting myself; I am forgetting that that idiot of a Rochecote is waiting for a sword-thrust. So go to sleep, my dear lady, and—till we meet again."

She accompanied him so far as the landing. "It is quite certain that he is hastening to the house of M. Ferailleux's enemy," she thought. And, calling her confidential servant, "Quick, Job," she said; "follow M. de Coralth. I want to know where he is going. And, above all, take care that he doesn't see you."

V.

IF through the length and breadth of Paris there is a really quiet, peaceful street, a refuge for the thoughtfully inclined, it is surely the broad Rue d'Ulm, which starts from the Place du Panthéon, and finishes abruptly at the Rue des Feuillantines. The shops are unassuming, and so few that one can easily count them. There is a wine-shop on the left-hand side, at the corner of the Rue de la Vieille-Estrapade; then a little toy-shop, then a washerwoman's and then a book-binder's establishment; while on the right-hand you will find the office of the *Bulletin*, with a locksmith's, a fruiterer's, and a baker's—that is all. Along the rest of the street run several spacious buildings, somewhat austere in appearance, though some of them are surrounded by large gardens. Here stands the Convent of the Sisters of the Cross, with the House of Our Lady of Adoration; while further on, near the Rue des Feuillantines, you find the Normal School, with the office of the General Omnibus Company hard by. At day-time you mostly meet grave and thoughtful faces in the street: priests, *savants*, professors, and clerks employed in the adjacent public libraries. The only stir is round about the omnibus office; and if occasional bursts of laughter are heard they are sure to come from the Normal School. After nightfall, a person might suppose himself to be at least a hundred leagues from the Boulevard Montmartre and the Opera-House, in some quiet old provincial town, at Poitiers, for instance. And it is only on listening attentively that you can catch even a faint echo of the tumult of Paris.

It was in this street—"out of the world," as M. de Coralith expressed it—that Pascal Ferailleux resided with his mother. They occupied a second floor, a pretty suite of five rooms, looking out upon a garden. Their rent was high. Indeed, they paid fourteen hundred francs a year. But this was a burden which Pascal's profession imposed upon him; for he, of course, required a private office and a little waiting-room for his clients. With this exception, the mother and son led a straightened, simple life. Their only servant was a woman who came at seven o'clock to do the heavy work, went home again at twelve, and did not return again until the evening, to serve dinner. Madame Ferailleux attended to everything, not blushing in the least when she was compelled to open the door for some client. Besides, she could do this without the least risk of encountering disrespect, so imposing and dignified were her manners and her person.

M. de Coralith had shown excellent judgment when he compared her to a family portrait. She was, in fact, exactly the person a painter would select to represent some old burgher's wife—a chaste and loving spouse, a devoted mother, an incomparable housewife—in one phrase, the faithful guardian of her husband's domestic happiness. She had just passed her fiftieth birthday, and looked fully her age. She had suffered. A close observer would have detected traces of weeping about her wrinkled eyelids; and the twinge of her lips was expressive of cruel anguish, heroically endured. Still, she was not severe, nor even too sedate; and the few friends who visited her were often really astonished at her wit. Besides, she was one of those women who have no history, and who find happiness in what others would call duty. Her life could be summed

up in a single sentence: she had loved; she had mourned.

The daughter of a petty clerk in one of the government departments, and merely dowered with a modest portion of three thousand francs, she had married a young man as poor as herself, but intelligent and industrious, whom she loved, and who adored her. This young man on marrying had sworn that he would make a fortune; not that he cared for money for himself, but he wished to provide his idol with every luxury. His love, enhancing his energy, no doubt hastened his success. Attached as a chemist to a large manufacturing establishment, his services soon became so invaluable to his employers that they gave him a considerable interest in the business. His name even obtained an honorable place among modern inventors; and we are indebted to him for the discovery of one of those brilliant colors that are extracted from common coal. At the end of ten years he had become a man of means. He loved his wife as fondly as on the day of their marriage, and he had a son—Pascal.

Unfortunate fellow! One day, in the full sunshine of happiness and success, while he was engaged in a series of experiments for the purpose of obtaining a durable, and at the same time perfectly harmless, green, the chemicals exploded, smashing the mortar which he held, and wounding him horribly about the head and chest. A fortnight later he died, apparently calm, but in reality a prey to bitter regrets. It was a terrible blow for his poor wife, and the thought of her son alone reconciled her to life. Pascal was now everything to her—her present and her future; and she solemnly vowed that she would make a noble man of him. But, alas! misfortunes never come singly. One

of her husband's friends, who acted as administrator to the estate, took a contemptible advantage of her inexperience. She went to sleep one night possessing an income of fifteen thousand francs, but she awoke to find herself ruined—so completely ruined that she did not know where to obtain her dinner for that same evening. Had she been alone in the world, she would not have grieved much over the catastrophe, but she was sadly affected by the thought that her son's future was, perhaps, irrevocably blighted, and that, in any case, this disaster would condemn him to enter life through the cramped and gloomy portals of poverty.

However, Madame Ferailleux was of too courageous and too proud a nature not to meet this danger with virile energy. She wasted no time in useless lamentations. She determined to repair the harm as far as it was in her power to repair it, resolving that her son's studies at the college of Louis-the-Great should not be interrupted, even if she had to labor with her own hands. And when she spoke of manual toil, it was no wild, unmeaning exaggeration born of sorrow and a passing flash of courage. She found employment as a day-servant and in sewing for large shops, until she at last obtained a situation as clerk in the establishment where her husband had been a partner. To obtain this she was obliged to acquire a knowledge of bookkeeping, but she was amply repaid for her trouble; for the situation was worth eighteen hundred francs a year, besides food and lodging. Then only did her efforts momentarily abate; she felt that her arduous task was drawing to a happy close. Pascal's expenses at school amounted to about nine hundred francs a year; she did not spend more than one hundred on herself; and thus

she was able to save nearly eight hundred francs a year.

It must be admitted that she was admirably seconded in her efforts by her son. Pascal was only twelve years old when his mother said to him: "I have ruined you, my son. Nothing remains of the fortune which your father accumulated by dint of toil and self-sacrifice. You will be obliged to rely upon yourself, my boy. God grant that in years to come you will not reproach me for my imprudence."

The child did not throw himself into her arms, but holding his head proudly erect, he answered: "I shall love you even more, dear mother, if that be possible. As for the fortune which my father left you, I will restore it to you again. I am no longer a school-boy, I am a man—as you shall see."

One could not fail to perceive that he had taken a solemn vow. Although he possessed a remarkable mind, and the power of acquiring knowledge rapidly, he had, so far, worked indifferently, and then only by fits and starts, whenever examination time drew near. But from that day forward he did not lose a moment. His remarks, which were at once comical and touching, were those of the head of a family, deeply impressed by a sense of his own responsibility. "You see," he said to his companions, who were astonished at his sudden thirst for knowledge, "I can't afford to wear out my breeches on the college forms, now that my poor mother has to pay for them with her work."

His good-humor was not in the least impaired by his resolve not to spend a single penny of his pocket money. With a tact unusual at his age, or indeed at any other, he bore his misfortunes simply and proudly, without any of the servile humility or sullen envy

which so often accompanies poverty. For three years in succession the highest prizes at the competitions rewarded him for his efforts; but these successes, far from elating him unduly, seemed to afford him but little satisfaction. "This is only glory," he thought; and his great ambition was to support himself.

He was soon able to do so, thanks to the kindness of the head-master, who offered him his tuition gratis if he would assist in superintending some of the lower classes. Thus one day when Madame Ferailleux presented herself as usual to make her quarterly payment, the steward replied: "You owe us nothing, madame; everything has been paid by your son."

She almost fainted; after bearing adversity so bravely, this happiness proved too much for her. She could scarcely believe it. A long explanation was necessary to convince her of the truth, and then big tears, tears of joy this time, gushed from her eyes.

In this way, Pascal Ferailleux paid all the expenses of his education until he had won his degree, arming himself so as to resist the trials that awaited him, and giving abundant proof of energy and ability. He wished to be a lawyer; and the law, he was forced to admit, is a profession which is almost beyond the reach of penniless young men. But there are no insurmountable obstacles for those whose hearts are really set on an object. On the very day that Pascal inscribed his name as a student at the law school, he entered an advocate's office as a clerk. His duties, which were extremely tiresome at first, had the two-fold advantage of familiarizing him with the forms of legal procedure, and of furnishing him with the means of prosecuting his studies. After he had been in the office six months, his employer agreed to pay him eight hundred francs a

year, which were increased to fifteen hundred at the end of the second twelvemonth. In three years, when he had passed his final examination qualifying him to practise, his patron raised him to the position of head-clerk, with a salary of three thousand francs, which Pascal was moreover able to increase considerably by drawing up documents for busy attorneys, and assisting them in the preparation of their least important cases.

It was certainly something wonderful to have achieved such a result in so short a time; but the most difficult part of his task had still to be accomplished. It was a perilous undertaking to abandon an assured position, to cast a certainty aside for the chances of life at the bar. It was a grave step—so grave, indeed, that Pascal hesitated for a long time. He was threatened with the danger that always threatens subordinates who are useful to their superiors. He felt that his employer, who was in the habit of relieving himself of his heaviest duties by intrusting them to him, would not be likely to forgive him for leaving. And on starting on his own account, he could ill afford to dispense with this lawyer's good-will. The patronage that could scarcely fail to follow him from an office where he had served for four years was the most substantial basis of his calculations for the future. Eventually he succeeded to his satisfaction, though not without some difficulty, and only by employing that supreme *finesse* which consists in absolute frankness.

Before his office had been open a fortnight, he had seven or eight briefs waiting their turn upon his desk, and his first efforts were such as win the approving smile of old judges, and draw from them the prediction: "That young man will rise in his profession."

He had not desired to make any display of his knowledge or talent, but merely to win the cases confided to him; and, unlike many beginners, he evinced no inclination to shine at his clients' expense. Rare modesty, and it served him well. His first ten months of practice brought him about eight thousand francs, absorbed in part by the expense attaching to a suitable office. The second year his fees increased by about one-half, and, feeling that his position was now assured, he insisted that his mother should resign her clerkship. He proved to her what was indeed the truth—that by superintending his establishment, she would save more than she made in her present position.

From that time the mother and the son had good reason to believe that their heroic energy had conquered fate. Clients became so numerous that Pascal found it necessary to draw nearer the business centre, and his rent was consequently doubled; but the income he derived from his profession increased so rapidly that he soon had twelve thousand francs safely invested as a resource against any emergency. Madame Ferailleux now laid aside the mourning she had worn since her husband's death. She felt that she owed it to Pascal; and, besides, after believing there was no more happiness left for her on earth, her heart rejoiced at her son's success.

Pascal was thus on the high-road to fame, when a complication in M. Ferdinand de Coralth's affairs brought that young nobleman to his office. The trouble arose from a little stock exchange operation which M. Ferdinand had engaged in—an affair which savored a trifle of knavery. It was strange, but Pascal rather took a liking to M. de Coralth. The honest worker felt interested in this dashing adventurer; he was al-

most dazzled by his brilliant vices, his wit, his hardihood, conceit, marvellous assurance, and careless impudence; and he studied this specimen of the Parisian flora with no little curiosity. M. de Coralth certainly did not confide the secret of his life and his resources to Pascal; but the latter's intelligence should have told him to distrust a man who treated the requirements of morality even more than cavalierly, and who had infinitely more wants than scruples. However, the young advocate seemed to have no suspicions; they exchanged visits occasionally, and it was Pascal himself who one day requested the viscount to take him to one of those "Reunions in High Life" which the newspapers describe in such glowing terms.

Madame Ferailleux was playing a game of whist with a party of old friends, according to her custom every Thursday evening, when M. de Coralth called to invite the young advocate to accompany him to Madame d'Argelès's reception. Pascal considered his friend's invitation exceedingly well timed. He dressed himself with more than ordinary care, and, as usual before going out, he approached his mother to kiss her and wish her good-bye. "How fine you are!" she said, smiling.

"I am going to a soirée, my dear mother," he replied; "and it is probable that I shall not return until very late. So don't wait for me, I beg of you; promise me to go to bed at your usual hour."

"Have you the night-key?"

"Yes."

"Very well, then; I will not wait for you. When you come in you will find your candle and some matches on the buffet in the ante-room. And wrap yourself up well, for it is very cold." Then raising her fore-

head to her son's lips, she gayly added: "A pleasant evening to you, my boy!"

Faithful to her promise, Madame Ferailleux retired at the usual hour; but she could not sleep. She certainly had no cause for anxiety, and yet the thought that her son was not at home filled her heart with vague misgivings such as she had never previously felt under similar circumstances. Possibly it was because she did not know where Pascal was going. Possibly M. de Coralthe was the cause of her strange disquietude, for she utterly disliked the viscount. Her woman's instinct warned her that there was something unwholesome about this young man's peculiar handsomeness, and that it was not safe to trust to his professions of friendship. At all events, she lay awake and heard the clock of the neighboring Normal School strike each successive hour—two, three, and four. "How late Pascal stays," she said to herself.

And suddenly a fear more poignant even than her presentiments darted through her mind. She sprang out of bed and rushed to the window. She fancied she had heard a terrible cry of distress in the deserted street. At that very moment, the insulting word "thief" was being hurled in her son's face. But the street was silent, and deciding that she had been mistaken, she went back to bed laughing at herself for her fears; and at last she fell asleep. But judge of her terror in the morning when, on rising to let the servant in, she saw Pascal's candle still standing on the buffet. Was it possible that he had not returned? She hastened to his room—he was not there. And it was nearly eight o'clock.

This was the first time that Pascal had spent a night from home without warning his mother in advance;

and such an act on the part of a man of his character was sufficient proof that something extraordinary had occurred. In an instant all the dangers that lurk in Paris after nightfall flashed through her mind. She remembered all the stories she had read of men decoyed into dark corners, of men stabbed at the turn of some deserted street, or thrown into the Seine while crossing one of the bridges. What should she do? Her first impulse was to run to the Commissary of Police's office or to the house of Pascal's friend; but on the other hand, she dared not go out, for fear he might return in her absence. Thus, in an agony of suspense, she waited—counting the seconds by the quick throbbings of her temples, and straining her ears to catch the slightest sound.

At last, about half-past eight o'clock, she heard a heavy, uncertain footfall on the stairs. She flew to the door and beheld her son. His clothes were torn and disordered; his cravat was missing, he wore no overcoat, and he was bareheaded. He looked very pale, and his teeth were chattering. His eyes stared vacantly, and his features had an almost idiotic expression. "Pascal, what has happened to you?" she asked.

He trembled from head to foot as the sound of her voice suddenly roused him from his stupor. "Nothing," he stammered; "nothing at all." And as his mother pressed him with questions, he pushed her gently aside and went on to his room.

"Poor child!" murmured Madame Ferailleux, at once grieved and reassured; "and he is always so temperate. Some one must have forced him to drink."

She was entirely wrong in her surmise, and yet Pascal's sensations were exactly like those of an in-

toxicated man. How he had returned home, by what road, and what had happened on the way, he could not tell. He had found his way back mechanically, merely by force of habit—physical memory, as it might be called. He had a vague impression, however, that he had sat down for some time on a bench in the Champs-Élysées, that he had felt extremely cold, and that he had been accosted by a policeman, who threatened him with arrest if he did not move on. The last thing he could clearly recollect was rushing from Madame d'Argelès's house in the Rue de Berry. He knew that he had descended the staircase slowly and deliberately; that the servants in the vestibule had stood aside to allow him to pass; and that, while crossing the courtyard, he had thrown away the candelabrum with which he had defended himself. After that, he remembered nothing distinctly. On reaching the street he had been overcome by the fresh air, just as a carouser is overcome on emerging from a heated dining-room. Perhaps the champagne which he had drank had contributed to this cerebral disorder. At all events, even now, in his own room, seated in his own arm-chair, and surrounded by familiar objects, he did not succeed in regaining the possession of his faculties.

He had barely strength enough to throw himself on to the bed, and in a moment he was sleeping with that heavy slumber which so often seizes hold of one on the occasion of a great crisis, and which has so frequently been observed among persons condemned to death, on the night preceding their execution. Four or five times his mother came to listen at the door. Once she entered, and seeing her son sleeping soundly, she could not repress a smile of satisfaction. "Poor Pascal!" she thought; "he can bear no excess but excess of

work. Heavens! how surprised and mortified he will be when he awakes!”

Alas! it was not a trifling mortification, but despair, which awaited the sleeper on his wakening; for the past, the present, and the future were presented simultaneously and visionlike to his imagination. Although he had scarcely regained the full use of his faculties, he was, to some extent, at least capable of reflection and deliberation, and he tried to look the situation bravely in the face. First, as to the past, he had not the shadow of a doubt. He realized that he had fallen into a vile trap, and the person who had laid it for him was undoubtedly M. de Coralthe, who, seated at his right, had prepared the “hands” with which he had won. This was evident. It seemed equally proven that Madame d’Argelès knew the real culprit—possibly she had detected him in the act, possibly he had taken her into his confidence. But what he could not fathom was M. de Coralthe’s motive. What could have prompted the viscount to commit such an atrocious act? The incentive must have been very powerful, since he had naturally incurred the danger of detection and of being considered an accomplice at the least. And then what influence had closed Madame d’Argelès’s lips? But after all, what was the use of these conjectures? It was an actual, unanswerable, and terrible fact that this infamous plot had been successful, and that Pascal was dishonored. He was honesty itself, and yet he was accused—more than that, *convicted*—of cheating at cards! He was innocent, and yet he could furnish no proofs of his innocence. He knew the real culprit, and yet he could see no way of unmasking him or even of accusing him. Do what he would, this atrocious, incomprehensive calumny would crush him. The bar was

closed against him; his career was ended. And the terrible conviction that there was no escape from the abyss into which he had fallen made his reason totter—he felt that he was incapable of deciding on the best course, and that he must have a friend's advice.

Full of this idea, he hastily changed his clothes, and hurried from his room. His mother was watching for him—inclined to laugh at him a little; but a single glance warned her that her son was in terrible trouble, and that some dire misfortune had certainly befallen him. “Pascal, in heaven's name, what has happened?” she cried.

“A slight difficulty—a mere trifle,” he replied.

“Where are you going?”

“To the Palais de Justice.” And such was really the case, for he hoped to meet his most intimate friend there.

Contrary to his usual custom, he took the little staircase on the right, leading to the grand vestibule, where several lawyers were assembled, earnestly engaged in conversation. They were evidently astonished to see Pascal, and their conversation abruptly ceased on his approach. They assumed a grave look and turned away their heads in disgust. The unfortunate man at once realized the truth, and pressed his hand to his forehead, with a despairing gesture, as he murmured: “Already!—already!”

However, he passed on, and not seeing his friend, he hurried to the little conference hall, where he found five of his fellow-advocates. On Pascal's entrance, two of them at once left the hall, while two of the others pretended to be very busily engaged in examining a brief which lay open on the table. The fifth, who did not move, was not the friend Pascal sought, but an old

college comrade named Dartelle. Pascal walked straight toward him. "Well?" he asked.

Dartelle handed him a *Figaro*, still damp from the printing-press, but crumpled and worn, as if it had already passed through more than a hundred hands. "Read!" said he.

Pascal read as follows: "There was great sensation and a terrible scandal last night at the residence of Madame d'A——, a well-known star of the first magnitude. A score of gentlemen of high rank and immense wealth were enjoying a quiet game of baccarat, when it was observed that M. F—— was winning in a most extraordinary manner. He was watched and detected in the very act of dexterously slipping some cards into the pack he held. Crushed by the overpowering evidence against him, he allowed himself to be searched, and without much demur consented to refund the fruit of his knavery, to the amount of two thousand louis. The strangest thing connected with this scandal is, that M. F——, who is an advocate by profession, has always enjoyed an enviable reputation for integrity; and, unfortunately, this prank cannot be attributed to a momentary fit of madness, for the fact that he had provided himself with these cards in advance proves the act to have been premeditated. One of the persons present was especially displeased. This was the Viscount de C——, who had introduced M. F—— to Madame d'A——. Extremely annoyed by this *contre-temps*, he took umbrage at an offensive remark made by M. de R——, and it was rumored that these gentlemen would cross swords at daybreak this morning.

"LATER INTELLIGENCE.—We learn at the moment of going to press that an encounter has just taken place between M. de R—— and M. de C——. M. de R——

received a slight wound in the side, but his condition is sufficiently satisfactory not to alarm his friends."

The paper slipped from Pascal's hand. His features were almost unrecognizable in his passion and despair. "It is an infamous lie!" he said, hoarsely. "I am innocent; I swear it upon my honor!" Dartelle averted his face, but not quickly enough to prevent Pascal from noticing the look of withering scorn in his eyes. Then, feeling that he was condemned, that his sentence was irrevocable, and that there was no longer any hope: "I know the only thing that remains for me to do!" he murmured.

Dartelle turned, his eyes glistening with tears. He seized Pascal's hands and pressed them with sorrowful tenderness, as if taking leave of a friend who is about to die. "Courage!" he whispered.

Pascal fled like a madman. "Yes," he repeated, as he rushed along the Boulevard Saint-Michel, "that is the only thing left me to do."

When he reached home he entered his office, double-locked the door, and wrote two letters—one to his mother, the other to the president of the order of Advocates. After a moment's thought he began a third, but tore it into pieces before he had completed it. Then, without an instant's hesitation, and like a man who had fully decided upon his course, he took a revolver and a box of cartridges from a drawer in his desk. "Poor mother!" he murmured; "it will kill her—but my disgrace would kill her too. Better shorten the agony."

He little fancied at that supreme moment that each of his gestures, each contraction of his features, were viewed by the mother whose name he faltered. Since her son had left her to go to the Palais de Justice, the

poor woman had remained almost crazy with anxiety; and when she heard him return and lock himself in his office—a thing he had never done before—a fearful presentiment was aroused in her mind. Gliding into her son's bedroom, she at once approached the door communicating with his office. The upper part of this portal was of glass; it was possible to see what was occurring in the adjoining room. When Madame Ferailleux perceived Pascal seat himself at his desk and begin to write, she felt a trifle reassured, and almost thought of going away. But a vague dread, stronger than reason or will, riveted her to the spot. A few moments later, when she saw the revolver in her son's hand, she understood everything. Her blood froze in her veins; and yet she had sufficient self-control to repress the cry of terror which sprang to her lips. She realized that the danger was terrible, imminent, extreme. Her heart, rather than her bewildered reason, told her that her son's life hung on a single thread. The slightest sound, a word, a rap on the door might hasten the unfortunate man's deed.

An inspiration from heaven came to the poor mother. Pascal had contented himself with locking the door leading to the ante-room. He had forgotten this one, or neglected it, not thinking that anybody would approach his office through his bedroom. But his mother perceived that this door opened toward her. So, turning the knob with the utmost caution, she flung it suddenly open, and reaching her son's side with a single bound, she clasped him closely in her arms. "Pascal, wretched boy! what would you do?"

He was so surprised that his weapon fell from his hand, and he sank back almost fainting in his arm-chair. The idea of denying his intention never once

occurred to him; besides, he was unable to articulate a word. But on his desk there lay a letter addressed to his mother which would speak for him.

Madame Ferailleux took it, tore the envelope open, and read: "Forgive me—I'm about to die. It must be so. I cannot survive dishonor; and I *am* dishonored."

"Dishonored!—you!" exclaimed the heartbroken mother. "My God! what does this mean? Speak. I implore you: tell me all—you must. I command you to do so. I command you!"

He complied with this at once supplicating and imperious behest, and related in a despairing voice the events which had wrought his woe. He did not omit a single particular, but tried rather to exaggerate than palliate the horrors of his situation. Perhaps he found a strange satisfaction in proving to himself that there was no hope left; possibly he believed his mother would say: "Yes, you are right; and death is your only refuge!"

As Madame Ferailleux listened, however, her eyes dilated with fear and horror, and she scarcely realized whether she were awake or in the midst of some frightful dream. For this was one of those unexpected catastrophes which are beyond the range of human foresight or even imagination, and which her mind could scarcely conceive or admit. But *she* did not doubt him, even though his friends had doubted him. Indeed, if he had himself told her that he was guilty of cheating at cards, she would have refused to believe him. When his story was ended, she exclaimed: "And you wished to kill yourself? Did you not think, senseless boy, that your death would give an appearance of truth to this vile calumny?"

With a mother's wonderful, sublime instinct, she had

found the most powerful reason that could be urged to induce Pascal to live. "Did you not feel, my son, that it showed a lack of courage on your part to brand yourself and your name with eternal infamy, in order to escape your present sufferings? This thought ought to have stayed your hand. An honest name is a sacred trust which no one has a right to abuse. Your father bequeathed it to you, pure and untarnished, and so you must preserve it. If others try to cover it with opprobrium, you must live to defend it."

He lowered his head despondently, and in a tone of profound discouragement, he replied: "But what can I do? How can I escape from the web which has been woven around me with such fiendish cunning? If I had possessed my usual presence of mind at the moment of the accusation, I might have defended and justified myself, perhaps. But now the misfortune is irreparable. How can I unmask the traitor, and what proofs of his guilt can I cast in his face?"

"All the same, you ought not to yield without a struggle," interrupted Madame Ferailleux, sternly. "It is wrong to abandon a task because it is difficult; it must be accepted, and, even if one perish in the struggle, there is, at least, the satisfaction of feeling that one has not failed in duty."

"But, mother——"

"I must not keep the truth from you, Pascal! What! are you lacking in energy? Come, my son, rise and raise your head. I shall not let you fight alone. I will fight with you."

Without speaking a word, Pascal caught hold of his mother's hands and pressed them to his lips. His face was wet with tears. His overstrained nerves relaxed under the soothing influence of maternal tenderness and

devotion. Reason, too, had regained her ascendancy. His mother's noble words found an echo in his own heart, and he now looked upon suicide as an act of madness and cowardice. Madame Ferailleux felt that the victory was assured, but this did not suffice; she wished to enlist Pascal in her plans. "It is evident," she resumed, "that M. de Coralthe is the author of this abominable plot. But what could have been his object? Has he any reason to fear you, Pascal? Has he confided to you, or have you discovered, any secret that might ruin him if it were divulged?"

"No, mother."

"Then he must be the vile instrument of some even more despicable being. Reflect, my son. Have you wounded any of your friends? Are you sure that you are in nobody's way? Consider carefully. Your profession has its dangers; and those who adopt it must expect to make bitter enemies."

Pascal trembled. It seemed to him as if a ray of light at last illumined the darkness—a dim and uncertain ray, it is true, but still a gleam of light.

"Who knows!" he muttered; "who knows!"

Madame Ferailleux reflected a few moments, and the nature of her reflections brought a flush to her brow. "This is one of those cases in which a mother should overstep reserve," said she. "If you had a mistress, my son——"

"I have none," he answered, promptly. Then his own face flushed, and after an instant's hesitation, he added: "But I entertain the most profound and reverent love for a young girl, the most beautiful and chaste being on earth—a girl who, in intelligence and heart, is worthy of you, my own mother."

Madame Ferailleux nodded her head gravely, as

much as to say that she had expected to find a woman at the bottom of the mystery. "And who is this young girl?" she inquired. "What is her name?"

"Marguerite."

"Marguerite who?"

Pascal's embarrassment increased. "She has no other name," he replied, hurriedly, "and she does not know her parents. She formerly lived in our street with her companion, Madame Léon, and an old female servant. It was there that I saw her for the first time. She now lives in the house of the Count de Chalusse, in the Rue de Courcelles."

"In what capacity?"

"The count has always taken care of her—she owes her education to him. He acts as her guardian; and although she has never spoken to me on the subject, I fancy that the Count de Chalusse is her father."

"And does this girl love you, Pascal?"

"I believe so, mother. She has promised me that she will have no other husband than myself."

"And the count?"

"He doesn't know—he doesn't even suspect anything about it. Day after day I have been trying to gather courage to tell you everything, and to ask you to go to the Count de Chalusse. But my position is so modest as yet. The count is immensely rich, and he intends to give Marguerite an enormous fortune—two millions, I believe——"

Madame Feraillieur interrupted him with a gesture. "Look no further," she said; "you have found the explanation."

Pascal sprang to his feet with crimson cheeks, flaming eyes, and quivering lips. "It may be so," he exclaimed; "it may be so! The count's immense fortune

may have tempted some miserable scoundrel. Who knows but some one may have been watching Marguerite, and have discovered that I am an obstacle?"

"Something told me that my suspicions were correct," said Madame Ferailleur. "I had no proofs, and yet I felt sure of it."

Pascal was absorbed in thought. "And what a strange coincidence," he eventually remarked. "Do you know, the last time I saw Marguerite, a week ago, she seemed so sad and anxious that I felt alarmed. I questioned her, but at first she would not answer. After a little while, however, as I insisted, she said: 'Ah, well, I fear the count is planning a marriage for me. M. de Chalusse has not said a word to me on the subject, but he has recently had several long conferences in private with a young man whose father rendered him a great service in former years. And this young man, whenever I meet him, looks at me in such a peculiar manner.'"

"What is his name?" asked Madame Ferailleur.

"I don't know—she didn't mention it; and her words so disturbed me that I did not think of asking. But she will tell me. This evening, if I don't succeed in obtaining an interview, I will write to her. If your suspicions are correct, mother, our secret is in the hands of three persons, and so it is a secret no longer——"

He paused suddenly to listen. The noise of a spirited altercation between the servant and some visitor, came from the ante-room. "I tell you that he *is* at home," said some one in a panting voice, "and I must see him and speak with him at once. It is such an urgent matter that I left a card-party just at the most critical moment to come here."

"I assure you, monsieur, that M. Ferailleux has gone out."

"Very well; I will wait for him, then. Take me to a room where I can sit down."

Pascal turned pale, for he recognized the voice of the individual who had suggested searching him at Madame d'Argelès's house. Nevertheless, he opened the door; and a man, with a face like a full moon, and who was puffing and panting like a locomotive, came forward with the assurance of a person who thinks he may do anything he chooses by reason of his wealth. "Zounds!" he exclaimed. "I knew perfectly well that you were here. You don't recognize me, perhaps, my dear sir. I am Baron Trigault—I came to——"

The words died away on his lips, and he became as embarrassed as if he had not possessed an income of eight hundred thousand francs a year. The fact is he had just perceived Madame Ferailleux. He bowed to her, and then, with a significant glance at Pascal he said: "I should like to speak to you in private, monsieur, in reference to a matter——"

Great as was Pascal's astonishment, he showed none of it on his face. "You can speak in my mother's presence," he replied, coldly; "she knows everything."

The baron's surprise found vent in a positive distortion of his features. "Ah!" said he, in three different tones; "ah! ah!" And as no one had offered him a seat, he approached an arm-chair and took possession of it, exclaiming, "You will allow me, I trust? Those stairs have put me in such a state!"

In spite of his unwieldy appearance, this wealthy man was endowed with great natural shrewdness and an unusually active mind. And while he pretended to be engaged in recovering his breath he studied the room

and its occupants. A revolver was lying on the floor beside a torn and crumpled letter, and tears were still glittering in the eyes of Madame Ferailleux and her son. A keen observer needed no further explanation of the scene.

"I will not conceal from you, monsieur," began the baron, "that I have been led here by certain compunctions of conscience." And, misinterpreting a gesture which Pascal made, "I mean what I say," he continued; "compunctions of conscience. I have them occasionally. Your departure this morning, after that—deplorable scene, caused certain doubts and suspicions to arise in my mind; and I said to myself, 'We have been too hasty; perhaps this young man may not be guilty.'"

"Monsieur!" interrupted Pascal, in a threatening tone.

"Excuse me, allow me to finish, if you please. Reflection, I must confess, only confirmed this impression, and increased my doubts. 'The devil!' I said to myself again; 'if this young man is innocent, the culprit must be one of the *habitués* of Madame d'Argeles's house—that is to say, a man with whom I play twice a week, and whom I shall play with again next Monday.' And then I became uneasy, and here I am!" Was the absurd reason which the baron gave for his visit the true one? It was difficult to decide. "I came," he continued, "thinking that a look at your home would teach me something; and now I have seen it, I am ready to take my oath that you are the victim of a vile conspiracy."

So saying he noisily blew his nose, but this did not prevent him from observing the quiet joy of Pascal and his mother. They were amazed. But although these

words were calculated to make them feel intensely happy, they still looked at their visitor with distrust. It is not natural for a person to interest himself in other people's misfortunes, unless he has some special motive for doing so; and what could this singular man's object be?

However, he did not seem in the slightest degree disconcerted by the glacial reserve with which his advances were received. "It is clear that you are in some one's way," he resumed, "and that this some one has invented this method of ruining you. There can be no question about it. The intention became manifest to my mind the moment I read the paragraph concerning you in the *Figaro*. Have you seen it? Yes? Well, what do you think of it? I would be willing to swear that it was written from notes furnished by your enemy. Moreover, the particulars are incorrect, and I am going to write a line of correction which I shall take to the office myself." So saying he transported his unwieldy person to Pascal's desk, and hastily wrote as follows:

"MR. EDITOR,

"As a witness of the scene that took place at Madame d'A——s's house last night, allow me to make an important correction. It is only too true that extra cards were introduced into the pack, but that they were introduced by M. F—— is not proven, since he was *not seen* to do it. I know that appearances are against him, but he nevertheless possesses my entire confidence and esteem.

"BARON TRIGAULT."

Meanwhile Madame Ferailleux and her son had exchanged significant glances. Their impressions were the same. This man could not be an enemy. When the baron had finished his letter, and had read it aloud,

Pascal, who was deeply moved, exclaimed: "I do not know how to express my gratitude to you, monsieur; but if you really wish to serve me, pray don't send that note. It would cause you a great deal of trouble and annoyance, and I should none the less be obliged to relinquish the practice of my profession—besides, I am especially anxious to be forgotten for a time."

"So be it—I understand you; you hope to discover the traitor, and you do not wish to put him on his guard. I approve of your prudence. But remember my words: if you ever need a helping hand, rap at my door; and when you hold the necessary proofs, I will furnish you with the means of rendering your justification even more startling than the affront." He prepared to go, but before crossing the threshold, he turned and said: "In future I shall watch the fingers of the player who sits on my left hand. And if I were in your place, I would obtain the notes from which that newspaper article was written. One never knows the benefit that may be derived, at a certain moment, from a page of writing."

As he started off, Madame Ferailleux sprang from her chair. "Pascal," she exclaimed, "that man knows something, and your enemies are his; I read it in his eyes. He, too, distrusts M. de Coralthe."

"I understood him, mother, and my mind is made up. I must disappear. From this moment Pascal Ferailleux no longer exists."

* * * * *

That same evening two large vans were standing outside Madame Ferailleux's house. She had sold her furniture without reserve, and was starting to join her son, who had already left for Le Havre, she said, in view of sailing to America.

VI.

"THERE are a number of patients waiting for me. I will drop in again about midnight. I still have several urgent visits to make." Thus had Dr. Jodon spoken to Mademoiselle Marguerite; and yet, when he left the Hôtel de Chalusse, after assuring himself that Casimir would have some straw spread over the street, the doctor quietly walked home. The visits he had spoken of merely existed in his imagination; but it was a part of his rôle to appear to be overrun with patients. To tell the truth, the only patient he had had to attend to that week was a superannuated porter, living in the Rue de la Pépinière, and whom he visited twice a day, for want of something better to do. The remainder of his time was spent in waiting for patients who never came, and in cursing the profession of medicine, which was ruined, he declared, by excessive competition, combined with certain rules of decorum which hampered young practitioners beyond endurance.

However, if Dr. Jodon had devoted one-half of the time he spent in cursing and building castles in the air to study, he might have, perhaps, raised his little skill to the height of his immense ambition. But neither work nor patience formed any part of his system. He was a man of the present age, and wished to rise speedily with as little trouble as possible. A certain amount of display and assurance, a little luck, and a good deal of advertising would, in his opinion, suffice to bring about this result. It was with this conviction, indeed, that he had taken up his abode in the Rue de Courcelles, situated in one of the most aristocratic quar-

ters of Paris. But so far, events had shown his theory to be incorrect. In spite of the greatest economy, very cleverly concealed, he had seen the little capital which constituted his entire fortune dwindle away. He had originally possessed but twenty thousand francs, a sum which in no wise corresponded with his lofty pretensions. He had paid his rent that very morning; and he could not close his eyes to the fact that the time was near at hand when he would be unable to pay it. What should he do then? When he thought of this contingency, and it was a subject that filled his mind to the exclusion of all other matters, he felt the fires of wrath and hatred kindle in his soul. He utterly refused to regard himself as the cause of his own misfortunes; on the contrary, following the example of many other disappointed individuals, he railed at mankind and everything in general—at circumstances, envious acquaintances, and enemies, whom he certainly did not possess.

At times he was capable of doing almost anything to gratify his lust for gold, for the privations which he had endured so long were like oil cast upon the flame of covetousness which was ever burning in his breast. In calmer moments he asked himself at what other door he could knock, in view of hastening the arrival of Fortune. Sometimes he thought of turning dentist, or of trying to find some capitalist who would join him in manufacturing one of those patent medicines which are warranted to yield their promoters a hundred thousand francs a year. On other occasions he dreamed of establishing a monster pharmacy, or of opening a private hospital. But money was needed to carry out any one of these plans, and he had no money. There was the rub. However, the time was fast approaching when

he must decide upon his course; he could not possibly hold out much longer.

His third year of practice in the Rue de Courcelles had not yielded him enough to pay his servant's wages. For he had a servant, of course. He had a valet for the same reason as he had a suite of rooms of a superficially sumptuous aspect. Faithful to his system, or, rather, to his master's system, he had sacrificed everything to show. The display of gilding in his apartments was such as to make a man of taste shut his eyes to escape the sight of it. There were gorgeous carpets and hangings, frescoed ceilings, spurious objects of *virtu*, and pier-tables loaded with ornaments. An unsophisticated youth from the country would certainly have been dazzled; but it would not do to examine these things too closely. There was more cotton than silk in the velvet covering of the furniture; and if various statuettes placed on brackets at a certain height had been closely inspected, it would have been found that they were of mere plaster, hidden beneath a coating of green paint, sprinkled with copper filings. This plaster, playing the part of bronze, was in perfect keeping with the man, his system, and the present age.

When the doctor reached home, his first question to his servant was as usual: "Has any one called?"

"No one."

The doctor sighed, and passing through his superb waiting-room, he entered his consulting sanctum, and seated himself in the chimney corner beside an infinitesimal fire. He was even more thoughtful than usual. The scene which he had just witnessed at the Count de Chalusse's house recurred to his mind, and he turned it over and over again in his brain, striving to find

some way by which he might derive an advantage from the mystery. For he was more than ever convinced that there was a mystery. He had been engrossed in these thoughts for some time, when his meditations were disturbed by a ring at the bell. Who could be calling at this hour?

The question was answered by his servant, who appeared and informed him that a lady, who was in a great hurry, was waiting in the reception-room. "Very well," was his reply; "but it is best to let her wait a few moments." For he had at least this merit: he never deviated from his system. Under no circumstances whatever would he have admitted a patient immediately; he wished him to wait so that he might have an opportunity of reflecting on the advantages of consulting a physician whose time was constantly occupied.

However, when ten minutes or so had elapsed, he opened the door, and a tall lady came quickly forward, throwing back the veil which had concealed her face. She must have been over forty-five; and if she had ever been handsome, there was nothing to indicate it now. She had brown hair, thickly sprinkled with gray, but very coarse and abundant, and growing low over her forehead; her nose was broad and flat; her lips were thick, and her eyes were dull and expressionless. However, her manners were gentle and rather melancholy; and one would have judged her to be somewhat of a devotee. Still for the time being she seemed greatly agitated. She seated herself at the doctor's invitation; and without waiting for him to ask any questions: "I ought to tell you at once, monsieur," she began, "that I am the Count de Chalusse's housekeeper."

In spite of his self-control, the doctor bounded from his chair. "Madame Léon?" he asked, in a tone of intense surprise.

She bowed, compressing her thick lips. "I am known by that name—yes, monsieur. But it is only my Christian name. The one I have a right to bear would not accord with my present position. Reverses of fortune are not rare in these days; and were it not for the consoling influences of religion, one would not have strength to endure them."

The physician was greatly puzzled. "What can she want of me?" he thought.

Meanwhile, she had resumed speaking: "I was much reduced in circumstances—at the end of my resources, indeed—when M. de Chalusse—a family friend—requested me to act as companion to a young girl in whom he was interested—Mademoiselle Marguerite. I accepted the position; and I thank God every day that I did so, for I feel a mother's affection for this young girl, and she loves me as fondly as if she were my own daughter." In support of her assertion, she drew a handkerchief from her pocket, and succeeded in forcing a few tears to her eyes. "Under these circumstances, doctor," she continued, "you cannot fail to understand that the interests of my dearly beloved Marguerite bring me to you. I was shut up in my own room when M. de Chalusse was brought home, and I did not hear of his illness until after your departure. Perhaps you might say that I ought to have waited until your next visit; but I had not sufficient patience to do so. One cannot submit without a struggle to the torture of suspense, when the future of a beloved daughter is at stake. So here I am." She paused to take breath, and then added, "I have come,

monsieur, to ask you to tell me the exact truth respecting the count's condition."

The doctor was expecting something very different, but nevertheless he replied with all due gravity and self-possession. "It is my painful duty to tell you, madame, that there is scarcely any hope, and that I expect a fatal termination within twenty-four hours, unless the patient should regain consciousness."

The housekeeper turned pale. "Then all is lost," she faltered, "all is lost!" And unable to articulate another word she rose to her feet, bowed, and abruptly left the room.

Before the grate, with his mouth half open, and his right arm extended in an interrupted gesture, the doctor stood speechless and disconcerted. It was only when the outer door closed with a bang that he seemed restored to consciousness. And as he heard the noise he sprang forward as if to recall his visitor. "Ah!" he exclaimed, with an oath, "the miserable old woman was mocking me!" And urged on by a wild, irrational impulse, he caught up his hat and darted out in pursuit. Madame Léon was considerably in advance of him, and was walking very quickly; still, by quickening his pace, he might have overtaken her. However, he did not join her, for he scarcely knew what excuse to offer for such a strange proceeding; he contented himself by cautiously following her at a little distance. Suddenly she stopped short. It was in front of a tobacconist's shop, where there was a post-office letter-box. The shop was closed, but the box was there with its little slit for letters to be dropped into it. Madame Léon evidently hesitated. She paused, as one always does before venturing upon a decisive act, from which there will be no return, whatever may be the conse-

quences. An observer never remains twenty minutes before a letter-box without witnessing this pantomime so expressive of irresolution. At last, however, she shrugged her shoulders with a gesture which eloquently expressed the result of her deliberations; and drawing a letter from her bosom, she dropped it into the box, and then hastened on more quickly than before.

"There is not the slightest doubt," thought the doctor, "that letter had been prepared in advance, and whether it should be sent or not depended on the answer I gave."

We have already said that M. Jodon was not a wealthy man, and yet he would willingly have given a hundred-franc note to have known the contents of this letter, or even the name of the person to whom it was addressed. But his chase was almost ended. Madame Léon had reached the Hôtel de Chalusse, and now went in. Should he follow her? His curiosity was torturing him to such a degree that he had an idea of doing so; and it required an heroic effort of will to resist the temptation successfully. But a gleam of common sense warned him that this would be a terrible blunder. Once already during the evening his conduct had attracted attention; and he began to realize that there was a better way of winning confidence than by intruding almost forcibly into other people's affairs. Accordingly he thoughtfully retraced his steps, feeling intensely disgusted with himself. "What a fool I am!" he grumbled. "If I had kept the old woman in suspense, instead of blurting out the truth, I might have learned the real object of her visit; for she had an object. But what was it?"

The doctor spent the two hours that remained to him before making his second visit in trying to discover it.

But, although nothing prevented him from exploring the boundless fields of improbable possibilities, he could think of nothing satisfactory. There was only one certain point, that Madame Léon and Mademoiselle Marguerite were equally interested in the question as to whether the count would regain consciousness or not. As to their interests in the matter, the doctor felt confident that they were not identical; he was persuaded that a secret enmity existed between them, and that the housekeeper had visited him without Mademoiselle Marguerite's knowledge. For he was not deceived by Madame Léon, or by her pretended devotion to Mademoiselle Marguerite. Her manner, her smooth words, her tone of pious resignation, and the allusion to the grand name she had the right to bear, were all calculated to impose upon one; but she had been too much disconcerted toward the last to remember her part. Dr. Jodon lacked the courage to return to his sumptuous rooms, and it was in a little *café* that he thus reflected upon the situation, while drinking some execrable beer brewed in Paris out of a glass manufactured in Bavaria.

At last midnight sounded—the hour had come. Still the doctor did not move. Having been obliged to wait himself, he wished, in revenge, to make the others wait, and it was not until the *café* closed that he again walked up the Rue de Courcelles. Madame Léon had left the gate ajar, and the doctor had no difficulty in making his way into the courtyard. As in the earlier part of the evening, the servants were assembled in the concierge's lodge; but the careless gayety which shone upon their faces a few hours before had given place to evident anxiety respecting their future prospects. Through the windows of the lodge they could be seen standing round

the two choice spirits of the household, M. Bourigeau, the concierge, and M. Casimir, the valet, who were engaged in earnest conversation. And if the doctor had listened, he would have heard such words as "wages," and "legacies," and "remuneration for faithful service," and "annuities" repeated over and over again.

But M. Jodon did not listen. Thinking he should find some servant inside, he entered the house. However, there was nobody to announce his presence; the door closed noiselessly behind him, the heavy carpet which covered the marble steps stifled the sound of his footsteps, and he ascended the first flight without seeing any one. The door opening into the count's room was open, the room itself being brilliantly lighted by a large fire, and a lamp which stood on a corner of the mantelshelf. Instinctively the doctor paused and looked in. There had been no change since his first visit. The count was still lying motionless on his pillows; his face was swollen, his eyelids were closed, but he still breathed, as was shown by the regular movement of the covering over his chest. Madame Léon and Mademoiselle Marguerite were his only attendants. The housekeeper, who sat back a little in the shade, was half reclining in an arm-chair with her hands clasped in her lap, her lips firmly compressed, and her eyes fixed upon vacancy. Pale but calm, and more imposing and more beautiful than ever, Mademoiselle Marguerite was kneeling beside the bed, eagerly watching for some sign of renewed life and intelligence on the count's face.

A little ashamed of his indiscretion, the doctor retreated seven or eight steps down the stairs, and then ascended them again, coughing slightly, so as to announce his approach. This time he was heard, for

Mademoiselle Marguerite came to the door to meet him. "Well?" he inquired.

"Alas!"

He advanced toward the bed, but before he had time to examine his patient Mademoiselle Marguerite handed him a scrap of paper. "The physician who usually attends M. de Chalusse has been here in your absence, monsieur," said she. "This is his prescription, and we have already administered a few drops of the potion."

M. Jodon, who was expecting this blow, bowed coldly.

"I must add," continued Mademoiselle Marguerite, "that the doctor approved of all that had been done; and I beg you will unite your skill with his in treating the case."

Unfortunately all the medical skill of the faculty would have availed nothing here. After another examination, Dr. Jodon declared that it would be necessary to wait for the action of nature, but that he must be dition. "And I will tell my servant to wake me at informed of the slightest change in the sick man's conscience if I am sent for," he added.

He was already leaving the room, when Madame Léon barred his passage. "Isn't it true, doctor, that one attentive person would suffice to watch over the count?" she asked.

"Most assuredly," he answered.

The housekeeper turned toward Mademoiselle Marguerite. "Ah, you see, my dear young lady," she said, "what did I tell you? Listen to me; take a little rest. Watching is not suitable work for one of your age——"

"It is useless to insist," interrupted the young girl,

resolutely. "I shall remain here. I shall watch over him myself."

The housekeeper made no reply; but it seemed to the doctor that the two women exchanged singular glances. "The devil!" he muttered, as he took his departure; "one might think that they distrusted each other!"

Perhaps he was right; but at all events he had scarcely left the house before Madame Léon again urged her dear young lady to take a few hours' rest. "What can you fear?" she insisted, in her wheedling voice. "Sha'n't I be here? Do you suppose your old Léon capable of losing herself in sleep, when your future depends upon a word from that poor man lying there?"

"Pray, cease."

"Ah, no! my dear young lady; my love for you compels me——"

"Oh, enough!" interrupted Mademoiselle Marguerite; "enough, Léon!"

Her tone was so determined that the housekeeper was compelled to yield; but not without a deep sigh, not without an imploring glance to Heaven, as if calling upon Providence to witness the purity of her motives and the usefulness of her praiseworthy efforts. "At least, my dear lady, wrap yourself up warmly. Shall I go and bring you your heavy travelling shawl?"

"Thanks, my dear Léon—Annette will bring it."

"Then, pray, send for it. But we are not going to watch alone? What should we do if we needed anything?"

"I will call," replied Marguerite.

This was unnecessary, for Dr. Jodon's departure from the house had put an abrupt termination to the servants' conference; and they were now assembled

on the landing, anxious and breathless, and peering eagerly into the sick-room.

Mademoiselle Marguerite went toward them. "Madame Léon and myself will remain with the count," she said. "Annette"—this was the woman whom she liked best of all the servants—"Casimir and a footman will spend the night in the little side *salon*. The others may retire."

Her orders were obeyed. Two o'clock sounded from the church-tower near by, and then the solemn and terrible silence was only broken by the hard breathing of the unconscious man and the implacable ticktack of the clock on the mantel-shelf, numbering the seconds which were left for him to live. From the streets outside, not a sound reached this princely abode, which stood between a vast courtyard and a garden as large as a park. Moreover, the straw which had been spread over the paving-stones effectually deadened the rumble of the few vehicles that passed. Enveloped in a soft, warm shawl, Madame Léon had again taken possession of her arm-chair, and while she pretended to be reading a prayer-book, she kept a close watch over her dear young lady, as if she were striving to discover her inmost thoughts. Mademoiselle Marguerite did not suspect this affectionate espionage. Besides, what would it have mattered to her? She had rolled a low arm-chair near the bedside, seated herself in it, and her eyes were fixed upon M. de Chalusse. Two or three times she started violently, and once even she said to Madame Léon: "Come—come and see!"

It seemed to her that there was a faint change in the patient's face; but it was only a fancy—she had been deceived by the shadows that played about the room, caused by the capricious flame in the grate. The hours

were creeping on, and the housekeeper, wearying at last of her fruitless watch, dropped asleep; her head fell forward on to her breast, her prayer-book slipped from her hands, and finally she began to snore. But Mademoiselle Marguerite did not perceive this, absorbed as she was in thoughts which, by reason of their very profundity, had ceased to be sorrowful. Perhaps she felt she was keeping a last vigil over her happiness, and that with the final breath of this dying man all her girlhood's dreams and all her dearest hopes would take flight for evermore. Undoubtedly her thoughts flew to the man to whom she had promised her life—to Pascal, to the unfortunate fellow whose honor was being stolen from him at that very moment, in a fashionable gaming-house.

About five o'clock the air became so close that she felt a sudden faintness, and opened the window to obtain a breath of fresh air. The noise aroused Madame Léon from her slumbers. She rose, yawned, and rather sullenly declared that she felt very queer, and would certainly fall ill if she did not take some refreshment. It became necessary to summon M. Casimir, who brought her a glass of Madeira and some biscuits. "Now I feel better," she murmured, after her repast. "My excessive sensibility will be the death of me." And so saying, she dropped asleep again.

Mademoiselle Marguerite had meanwhile returned to her seat; but her thoughts gradually became confused, her eyelids grew heavy, and although she struggled, she at last fell asleep in her turn, with her head resting on the count's bed. It was daylight when a strange and terrible shock awoke her. It seemed to her as if an icy hand, some dead person's hand, was gently stroking her head, and tenderly caressing her hair. She at once

sprang to her feet. The sick man had regained consciousness; his eyes were open and his right arm was moving. Mademoiselle Marguerite darted to the bell-rope and pulled it violently, and as a servant appeared in answer to the summons, she cried: "Run for the physician who lives near here—quick!—and tell him that the count is conscious."

In an instant, almost, the sick-room was full of servants, but the girl did not perceive it. She had approached M. de Chalusse, and taking his hand, she tenderly asked: "You hear me, do you not, monsieur? Do you understand me?"

His lips moved; but only a hollow, rattling sound, which was absolutely unintelligible, came from his throat. Still, he understood her; as it was easy to see by his gestures—despairing and painful ones, for paralysis had not released its hold on its victim, and it was only with great difficulty that he could slightly move his right arm. He evidently desired something. But what?

They mentioned the different articles in the room—everything indeed that they could think of. But in vain, until the housekeeper suddenly exclaimed: "He wishes to write."

That was, indeed, what he desired. With the hand that was comparatively free, with the hoarse rattle that was his only voice, M. de Chalusse answered, "Yes, yes!" and his eyes even turned to Madame Léon with an expression of joy and gratitude. They raised him on his pillows, and brought him a small writing-desk, with some paper, and a pen that had been dipped in ink. But like those around him, he had himself overestimated his strength; if he could move his hand, he could not *control* its movements. After a terrible effort

and intense suffering, however, he succeeded in tracing a few words, the meaning of which it was impossible to understand. It was only with the greatest difficulty that these words could be deciphered—"My entire fortune—give—friends—against——" This signified nothing.

In despair, he dropped the pen, and his glance and his hand turned to that part of the room opposite his bed. "Monsieur means his *escritoire*, perhaps?"

"Yes, yes," the sick man hoarsely answered.

"Perhaps the count wishes that it should be opened?"

"Yes, yes!" was the reply again.

"My God!" exclaimed Mademoiselle Marguerite, with a gesture of despair; "what have I done? I have broken the key. I feared the responsibility which would fall upon us all."

The expression of the count's face had become absolutely frightful. It indicated utter discouragement, the most bitter suffering, the most horrible despair. His soul was writhing in a body from which life had fled. Intelligence, mind, and will were fast bound in a corpse which they could not electrify. The consciousness of his own powerlessness caused him a paroxysm of frantic rage; his hands clinched, the veins in his throat swelled, his eyes almost started from their sockets, and in a harsh, shrill voice that had nothing human in it, he exclaimed: "Marguerite!—despoiled!—take care!—your mother!" And this was all—it was the supreme effort that broke the last link that bound the soul to earth.

"A priest!" cried Madame Léon! "A priest! In the name of Heaven, go for a priest!"

"Rather for a notary," suggested M. Casimir. "You see he wishes to make a will."

But at that moment the physician entered, pale and breathless. He walked straight to the bedside, glanced at the motionless form, and solemnly exclaimed: "The Count de Chalusse is dead!"

There was a moment's stupor—the stupor which always follows death, especially when death comes suddenly and unexpectedly. A feeling of mingled wonder, selfishness, and fear pervaded the group of servants. "Yes, it is over!" muttered the doctor; "it is all over!"

And as he was familiar with these painful scenes, and had lost none of his self-possession, he furtively studied Mademoiselle Marguerite's features and attitude. She seemed thunderstruck. With dry, fixed eyes and contracted features, she stood rooted to her place, gazing at the lifeless form as if she were expecting some miracle—as if she still hoped to hear those rigid lips reveal the secret which he had tried in vain to disclose, and which he had carried with him to the grave.

The physician was the only person who observed this. The other occupants of the room were exchanging looks of distress. Some of the women had fallen upon their knees, and were sobbing and praying in the same breath. But Madame Léon's sobs could be heard above the rest. They were at first inarticulate moans, but suddenly she sprang toward Mademoiselle Marguerite, and clasping her in her arms, she cried: "What a misfortune! My dearest child, what a loss!" Utterly incapable of uttering a word, the poor girl tried to free herself from this close embrace, but the housekeeper would not be repulsed, and continued: "Weep, my dear young lady, weep! Do not refuse to give vent to your sorrow."

She herself displayed so little self-control that the physician reprimanded her with considerable severity, whereat her emotion increased, and with her handkerchief pressed to her eyes, she sobbed: "Yes, doctor, yes; you are right; I ought to moderate my grief. But pray, doctor, remove my beloved Marguerite from this scene, which is too terrible for her young and tender heart. Persuade her to retire to her own room, so that she may ask God for strength to bear the misfortune which has befallen her."

The poor girl had certainly no intention of leaving the room, but before she could say so, M. Casimir stepped forward. "I think," he dryly observed, "that mademoiselle had better remain here."

"Eh?" said Madame Léon, looking up suddenly. "And why, if you please?"

"Because—because——"

Anger had dried the housekeeper's tears. "What do you mean?" she asked. "Do you pretend to prevent mademoiselle from doing as she chooses in her own house?"

M. Casimir gave vent to a contemptuous whistle, which, twenty-four hours earlier, would have been punished with a heavy blow from the man who was now lying there—dead. "Her own house!" he answered; "her own house! Yesterday I shouldn't have denied it; but to-day it's quite another thing. Is she a relative? No, she isn't. What are you talking about, then? We are all equals here."

He spoke so impudently that even the doctor felt indignant. "Scoundrel!" said he.

But the valet turned toward him with an air which proved that he was well acquainted with the doctor's servant, and, consequently, with all the secrets of the

master's life. "Call your own valet a scoundrel, if you choose," he retorted, "but not me. Your duties here are over, aren't they? So leave us to manage our own affairs. Thank heaven, I know what I'm talking about. Everybody knows that caution must be exercised in a dead man's house, especially when that house is full of money, and when, instead of relatives, there are—persons who—who are there nobody knows how or why. In case any valuables were missed, who would be accused of taking them? Why, the poor servants, of course. Ah, they have broad shoulders! Their trunks would be searched; and even if nothing were found, they would be sent to prison all the same. In the meantime other people would escape with the booty. No, Lisette! No one will stir from this room until the arrival of the justice——"

Madame Léon was bursting with rage. "All right!" she interrupted; "I'm going to send for the count's particular friend, General——"

"I don't care a fig for your general."

"Wretch!"

It was Mademoiselle Marguerite who put an end to this indecent dispute. Its increasing violence had aroused her from her stupor. Casimir's impudence brought a flush to her forehead, and stepping forward with haughty resolution, she exclaimed: "You forget that one never raises one's voice in the chamber of death." Her words were so true, and her manner so majestic, that M. Casimir was silenced. Then, pointing to the door, she coldly added: "Go for the justice of the peace, and don't set foot here again, except in his company."

He bowed, stammered an unintelligible apology, and left the room. "She always gets the best of me," he

growled, as he went downstairs. "But seals shall be put on everything."

When he entered the porter's lodge, M. Bourigean was just getting up, having slept all night, while his wife watched. "Quick," ordered M. Casimir; "make haste and finish dressing, and run for the justice of the peace—we must have him here at once. Everything must be done regularly and in order, upstairs."

The concierge was in despair. "Heavens!" he exclaimed; "so the master's dead! What a misfortune!"

"You may well say so; and this is the second time such a thing has happened to me. I remember now what a shrewd fellow named Chupin once said to me. 'If I were a servant,' he remarked, 'before entering a man's service, I'd make him insure his life for my benefit in one of those new-fangled companies, so that I might step into a handsome fortune if he took it into his head to die.' But make haste, Bourigean."

"That's a famous idea, but scarcely practicable," growled the concierge.

"I don't know whether it is or not. But at all events I'm terribly annoyed. The count was giving me enormous wages, and I had got him nicely into my ways. Well, after all, I shall only have to begin again!"

M. Bourigean had not yet attained to the heights of such serene philosophy, and as he buttoned his overcoat, he groaned: "Ah! you're not situated as I am, Casimir. You've only yourself to look out for. I have my furniture; and if I don't succeed in finding a position where I can have two rooms, I shall be obliged to sell part of it. What a blessed nuisance!"

As soon as he was dressed he started off on his mission; and M. Casimir, who dared not return to the house, began walking slowly to and fro in front of

the lodge. He had made some thirty turns or so, and was beginning to feel impatient, when he saw Victor Chupin approaching. "You are always on hand at the right moment," remarked M. Casimir. "It's all over!"

Chupin turned eagerly. "Then our bargain holds?" he exclaimed. "You understand what I mean—the funeral, you know."

"It isn't certain that I shall have anything to do with it; but call again in three hours from now."

"All right, I'll be here."

"And M. Fortunat?" asked Casimir.

"He received what he called a 'violent shock' last evening, but he's better this morning. He instructed me to tell you that he should look for you between twelve and one—you know where."

"I'll endeavor to be there, although it may be difficult for me to get away. If I go, however, I'll show him the letter that caused the count's illness; for the count threw it away, after tearing it into several pieces, and I found some of the bits which escaped his notice as well as mademoiselle's. It's a strange letter, upon my word!"

Chupin gazed at the valet with a look of mingled wonder and admiration. "By Jove!" he exclaimed, "how fortunate a man must be to secure a valet like you!"

His companion smiled complacently, but all of a sudden he remarked: "Make haste and go. I see Bourigeau in the distance, bringing the justice of the peace."

VII.

THE magistrate who was now approaching the Chalusse mansion in the concierge's company, exemplified in a remarkable manner all the ideas that are awakened in one's mind by the grand yet simple title of "Justice of the Peace." He was the very person you would like to think of as the family magistrate; as the promoter of friendly feeling; as the guardian of the rights of the absent, the young, and the weak; as the just arbiter in unfortunate differences between those who are closely related; a sage of wide experience and boundless benevolence; a judge whose paternal justice dispenses with all pomp and display, and who is allowed by French statutes to hold his court by his own fireside, providing the doors stand open. He was considerably over fifty, tall, and very thin, with bent shoulders. His clothes were rather old-fashioned in cut, but by no means ridiculous. The expression of his face was gentleness itself; but it would not have done to presume upon this gentleness, for his glance was keen and piercing—like the glance of all who are expert in diving into consciences, and discovering the secrets hidden there. Moreover, like all men who are accustomed to deliberate in public, his features were expressionless. He could see and hear everything, suspect and understand everything, without letting a muscle of his face move. And yet the *habitués* of his audience-chamber, and his clerks, pretended that they could always detect the nature of his impressions. A ring which he wore upon one of his fingers served as a barometer for those who knew him. If a difficult case, or one that em-

barrassed his conscience, presented itself, his eyes fixed themselves obstinately upon this ring. If he were satisfied that everything was right, he looked up again, and began playing with the ring, slipping it up and down between the first and second joint of his finger; but if he were displeased, he abruptly turned the bezel inside.

In appearance, he was sufficiently imposing to intimidate even M. Casimir. The proud valet bowed low as the magistrate approached, and with his heart in his mouth, and in an obsequious voice he said: "It was I who took the liberty of sending for you, monsieur."

"Ah!" said the magistrate, who already knew as much about the Hôtel de Chalusse, and the events of the past twelve hours, as M. Casimir himself; for on his way to the house, he had turned Bourigeau inside out like a glove, by means of a dozen gentle questions.

"If monsieur wishes I will explain," resumed M. Casimir.

"Nothing! It is quite unnecessary. Usher us in."

This "us" astonished the valet; but before they reached the house it was explained to him. He discovered a man of flourishing and even jovial mien who was walking along in the magistrate's shadow carrying a large black portfolio under his arm. This was evidently the clerk. He seemed to be as pleased with his employment as he was with himself; and as he followed M. Casimir, he examined the adornments of the mansion, the mosaics in the vestibule, the statuary and the frescoed walls with an appraiser's eye. Perhaps he was calculating how many years' salary it would require to pay for the decorating of this one staircase.

On the threshold of the death room the magistrate

paused. There had been some change during M. Casimir's absence. The doctor had left. The bed had been rearranged, and several candles were burning on a table covered with a white cloth. Madame Léon had gone to her own room, accompanied by two servants, to fetch a vessel of holy water and a branch of withered palm. She was now engaged in repeating the prayers for the dead, pausing from time to time to dip the palm branch in the holy water, and sprinkle the bed. Both windows had been opened in spite of the cold. On the marble hearth stood a chafing-dish full of embers from which rose spiral rings of smoke, filling the room with a pungent odor as a servant poured some vinegar and sugar on to the coals.

As the magistrate appeared, every one rose up. Then, after bestowing prolonged scrutiny upon the room and its occupants, he respectfully removed his hat, and walked in. "Why are so many people here?" he inquired.

"I suggested that they should remain," replied M. Casimir, "because——"

"You are—suspicious," interrupted the magistrate.

His clerk had already drawn a pen and some paper from his portfolio, and was engaged in reading the decision, rendered by the magistrate at the request of one Bourigeau, and in virtue of which, seals were about to be affixed to the deceased nobleman's personal effects. Since the magistrate had entered the room, his eyes had not once wandered from Mademoiselle Marguerite, who was standing near the fireplace, looking pale but composed. At last he approached her, and in a tone of deep sympathy: "Are you Mademoiselle Marguerite?" he asked.

She raised her clear eyes, rendered more beautiful

than ever, by the tears that trembled on her lashes, and in a faltering voice, replied: "Yes, monsieur."

"Are you a relative? Are you connected in any way with the Count de Chalusse? Have you any right to his property?"

"No, monsieur."

"Excuse me, mademoiselle, but these questions are indispensable. Who intrusted you to the care of M. de Chalusse, and by what right? Was it your father or your mother?"

"I have neither father nor mother, monsieur. I am alone in the world—utterly alone."

The magistrate glanced keenly round the room. "Ah! I understand," said he, at last; "advantage has been taken of your isolation to treat you with disrespect, to insult you, perhaps."

Every head drooped, and M. Casimir bitterly regretted that he had not remained below in the courtyard. Mademoiselle Marguerite looked at the magistrate in astonishment, for she was amazed by his penetration. She was ignorant of his conversation with Bourigeau on the road, and did not know that through the concierge's ridiculous statements and accusations, the magistrate had succeeded in discovering at least a portion of the truth.

"I shall have the honor of asking for a few moments' conversation with you presently, mademoiselle," he said. "But first, one question. I am told that the Count de Chalusse entertained a very lively affection for you. Are you sure that he has not taken care to provide for your future? Are you sure that he has not left a will?"

The girl shook her head. "He made one in my favor some time ago," she replied. "I saw it; he

gave it to me to read; but it was destroyed a fortnight after my arrival here, and in compliance with my request."

Madame Léon had hitherto been dumb with fear, but, conquering her weakness, she now decided to draw near and take part in the conversation. "How can you say that, my dear young lady?" she exclaimed. "You know that the count—God rest his soul!—was an extremely cautious man. I am certain that there is a will somewhere."

The magistrate's eyes were fixed on his ring. "It would be well to look, perhaps, before affixing the seals. You have a right to require this; so, if you wish——"

But she made no reply.

"Oh, yes!" insisted Madame Léon; "pray look, monsieur."

"But where should we be likely to find a will?"

"Certainly in this room—in this *escritoire*, or in one of the deceased count's cabinets."

The magistrate had learnt the story of the key from Bourigau, but all the same he asked: "Where is the key to this *escritoire*?"

"Alas! monsieur," replied Mademoiselle Marguerite, "I broke it last night when M. de Chalusse was brought home unconscious. I hoped to avert what has, nevertheless, happened. Besides, I knew that his *escritoire* contained something over two millions in gold and bank-notes."

Two millions—there! The occupants of the room stood aghast. Even the clerk was so startled that he let a blot fall upon his paper. Two millions! The magistrate was evidently reflecting. "Hum!" he murmured, meditatively. Then, as if deciding on his course, he exclaimed:

“Let a locksmith be sent for.”

A servant went in search of one; and while they were waiting for his return, the magistrate sat down beside his clerk and talked to him in a low voice. At last the locksmith appeared, with his bag of tools hanging over his shoulder, and set to work at once. He found his task a difficult one. His pick-locks would not catch, and he was talking of filing the bolt, when, by chance, he found the joint, and the door flew open. But the *escritoire* was empty. There were only a few papers, and a bottle about three-quarters full of a crimson liquid on the shelf. Had M. de Chalusse rose and shook off his winding sheet, the consternation would not have been greater. The same instinctive fear thrilled the hearts of everybody present. An enormous fortune had disappeared. The same suspicions would rest upon them all. And each servant already saw himself arrested, imprisoned, and dragged before a law court.

However, anger speedily followed bewilderment, and a furious clamor arose. “A robbery has been committed!” cried the servants, in concert. “Mademoiselle had the key. It is wrong to suspect the innocent!”

Revolting as this exhibition was, it did not modify the magistrate's calmness. He had witnessed too many such scenes in the course of his career, and, at least, a score of times he had been compelled to interpose between children who had come to blows over their inheritance before their father's body was even cold. “Silence!” he commanded sternly. And as the tumult did not cease, as the servants continued to cry, “The thief must be found. We shall have no difficulty in discovering the culprit,” the magistrate exclaimed, still

more imperiously: "Another word, and you all leave the room."

They were silenced; but there was a mute eloquence about their looks and gestures which it was impossible to misunderstand. Every eye was fixed upon Mademoiselle Marguerite with an almost ferocious expression. She knew it only too well; but, sublime in her energy, she stood, with her head proudly erect, facing the storm, and disdaining to answer these vile imputations. However she had a protector near by—the magistrate in person. "If this treasure has been diverted from the inheritance," said he, "the thief will be discovered and punished. But I wish to have one point explained—who said that Mademoiselle Marguerite had the key of the *escritoire*?"

"I did," replied a footman. "I was in the dining-room yesterday morning when the count gave it to her."

"For what purpose did he give it to her?"

"That she might obtain this vial—I recognized it at once. She brought it down to him."

"Did she return the key?"

"Yes; she gave it to him when she handed him the vial, and I saw him put it in his pocket."

The magistrate pointed to the bottle which was standing on the shelf. "Then the count himself must have put the vial back in its place," said he. "Further comment is unnecessary; for, if the money had then been missing, he could not have failed to discover the fact." No one had any reply to make to this quiet defence, which was, at the same time, a complete vindication. "And, besides," continued the magistrate, "who told you that this immense sum would be found here? Did you know it? Which one of you knew it?" And as nobody still ventured any remark, he added

in an even more severe tone, and without seeming to notice Mademoiselle Marguerite's look of gratitude, "It is by no means a proof of honesty to be so extremely suspicious. Would it not have been easier to suppose that the deceased had placed the money somewhere else, and that it will yet be found?"

The clerk had been even less disturbed than the magistrate. He also was *blasé*, having witnessed too many of those frightful and shameless dramas which are enacted at a dead man's bedside, to be surprised at anything. If he had deigned to glance at the *escritoire*, it was only because he was curious to see how small a space would suffice to contain two millions; and then he had begun to calculate how many years he would be obliged to remain a clerk before he could succeed in amassing such a fabulous sum. However, hearing his superior express the intention of continuing the search for the will, and the missing treasure, he abruptly abandoned his calculation, and exclaimed, "Then, I suppose, I can commence my report, monsieur?"

"Yes," replied the magistrate, "write as follows:" And in a monotonous voice he began to dictate the prescribed formula, an unnecessary proceeding, for the clerk was quite as familiar with it as the magistrate himself:—"On the 16th of October, 186—, at nine o'clock in the morning, in compliance with the request of the servants of the deceased Louis-Henri-Raymond de Durtal, Count de Chalusse, and in the interest of his presumptive heirs, and all others connected with him, and in accordance with the requirements of clauses 819 (Code Napoléon) and 909 (Code of Procedure), we, justice of the peace, accompanied by our clerk, visited the residence of the deceased aforesaid, in the Rue

de Courcelles, where, having entered a bedroom opening on to the courtyard, and lighted by two windows looking toward the south, we found the body of the deceased aforesaid, lying on his bed, and covered with a sheet. In this room were——” He paused in his dictation, and addressing the clerk, “Take down the names of all present,” said he. “That will require some little time, and, meanwhile, I will continue my search.”

They had, in fact, only examined the shelf of the *escritoire*, and the drawers were still to be inspected. In the first which he opened, the magistrate found ample proofs of the accuracy of the information which had been furnished him by Mademoiselle Marguerite. The drawer contained a memorandum which established the fact that the *Crédit Foncier* had lent M. de Chalusse the sum of eight hundred and fifty thousand francs, which had been remitted to him on the Saturday preceding his death. Beside this document lay a second memorandum, signed by a stockbroker named Pell, setting forth that the latter had sold for the count securities of various descriptions to the amount of fourteen hundred and twenty-three thousand francs, which sum had been paid to the count on the preceding Tuesday, partly in bank-notes and partly in gold. It was thus evident that M. de Chalusse had received a grand total of two million two hundred and seventy-three thousand francs within the past six days.

In the drawer which was next opened, the magistrate only found a number of deeds, bonds, leases, and mortgages; but they proved that public rumor, far from exaggerating the figures of the count's fortune, had diminished it, and this made it difficult to explain why he had contracted a loan. The third and last drawer

contained twenty-eight thousand francs, in packages of twenty-franc pieces. Finally, in a small casket, the magistrate found a packet of letters, yellow with age and bound together with a broad piece of blue velvet; as well as three or four withered bouquets, and a woman's glove, which had been worn by a hand of marvellous smallness. These were evidently the relics of some great passion of many years before; and the magistrate looked at them for a moment with a sigh.

His own interest prevented him from noticing Mademoiselle Marguerite's agitation. She had almost fainted on perceiving these souvenirs of the count's past life so suddenly exhumed. However, the examination of the *escritoire* being over, and the clerk having completed his task of recording the names of all the servants, the magistrate said, in a loud voice, "I shall now proceed to affix the seals; but, before doing so, I shall take a portion of the money found in this desk, and set it apart for the expenses of the household, in accordance with the law. Who will take charge of this money?"

"Oh, not I!" exclaimed Madame Léon.

"I will take charge of it," said M. Casimir.

"Then here are eight thousand francs, for which you will be held accountable."

M. Casimir being a prudent man, counted the money himself, and after doing so, "Who will attend to the count's obsequies?" he inquired.

"You, and without loss of time."

Proud of his new importance, the valet hastily left the room, his self-complacency increased by the thought that he was to breakfast with M. Isidore Fortunat, and would afterward share a fat commission with Victor Chupin.

However, the magistrate had already resumed his dictation: "And at this moment we have affixed bands of white tape, sealed at either end with red wax, bearing the impress of our seal as justice of the peace, to wit: *In the aforesaid chamber of the deceased: First,* A band of tape, covering the keyhole of the lock of the escritoire, which had been previously opened by a locksmith summoned by us, and closed again by the said locksmith——" And so the magistrate and his clerk went from one piece of furniture to another, duly specifying in the report each instance in which the seals were affixed.

From the count's bedroom they passed into his study, followed by Mademoiselle Marguerite, Madame Léon, and the servants. By noon every article of furniture in which M. de Chalusse would have been likely to deposit his valuables or a will, had been searched, and nothing, absolutely nothing, had been found. The magistrate had pursued his investigation with the feverish energy which the most self-possessed of men are apt to display under such circumstances, especially when influenced by the conviction that the object they are seeking is somewhere within their reach, perhaps under their very hand. Indeed, he was persuaded—he was sure—he would, in fact, have sworn that the Count de Chalusse had taken all the precautions natural in childless men, who have no near relatives to inherit their fortune, or who have placed their interest and affections beyond their family circle. And when he was obliged to abandon his search, his gesture indicated anger rather than discouragement; for apparent evidence had not shaken his conviction in the least. So he stood motionless, with his eyes riveted on his ring, as if waiting some miraculous inspiration from it. "For

the count's only fault, I am sure, was in being too cautious," he muttered. "This is frequently the case, and it would be quite in keeping with the character of this man, judging from what I know of him."

Madame Léon lifted her hands to heaven. "Ah, yes! such was, indeed, his nature," she remarked, approvingly. "Never, no never, have I seen such a suspicious and distrustful person as he was. Not in reference to money—no, indeed—for he left that lying about everywhere; but about his papers. He locked them up with the greatest care, as if he feared that some terrible secret might evaporate from them. It was a mania with him. If he had a letter to write, he barricaded his door, as if he were about to commit some horrible crime. More than once have I seen him——" The words died away on her lips, and she remained motionless and abashed, like a person who has just escaped some great peril. One word more, and involuntarily, without even knowing it, she would have confessed her besetting sin, which was listening at, and peering through, the keyholes of the doors that were closed against her. Still, she deluded herself with the belief that this slight indiscretion of her overready tongue had escaped the magistrate's notice.

He certainly did not seem to be conscious of it, for he was giving his attention entirely to Mademoiselle Marguerite, who seemed to have regained the cold reserve and melancholy resignation habitual to her. "You see, mademoiselle," he remarked, "that I have done all that is in my power to do. We must now leave the search to chance, and to the person who takes the inventory. Who knows what surprise may be in store for us in this immense house, of which we have only explored three rooms?"

She shook her head gently and replied: "I can never be sufficiently grateful for your kindness, monsieur, and for the great service you rendered me in crushing that infamous accusation. As regards the rest, I have never expected anything—I do not expect anything now."

She believed what she said, and her tone of voice proved this so unmistakably that the magistrate was surprised and somewhat disturbed. "Come, come, my young lady," he said, with almost paternal kindness of manner, "you ought not to despond. Still, you must have certain reasons for speaking as you do; and as I am free for an hour, we are going to have a plain talk, as if we were father and daughter."

On hearing these words, the clerk rose with a cloud on his jovial face. He impatiently jingled his bunch of keys; for as the seals are successively affixed, each key is confided to the clerk, to remain in his hands until the seals are removed.

"I understand," said the magistrate. "Your stomach, which is more exacting in its demands than mine, is not satisfied with a cup of chocolate till dinner-time. So, go and get your lunch; on your return, you will find me here. You may now conclude the report, and request these parties to sign it."

Urged on by hunger, the clerk hastily mumbled over the remainder of the formula, called all the names that he had inserted in the report, and each of the servants advanced in turn, signed his or her name, or made a cross, and then retired. Madame Léon read in the judge's face that she also was expected to withdraw; and she was reluctantly leaving the room, when Mademoiselle Marguerite detained her to ask: "Are you quite sure that nothing has come for me to-day?"

“Nothing, mademoiselle; I went in person to inquire of the concierge.”

“Did you post my letter last night?”

“Oh! my dear young lady, can you doubt it?”

The young girl stifled a sigh, and then, with a gesture of dismissal, she remarked, “M. de Fondège must be sent for.”

“The General?”

“Yes.”

“I will send for him at once,” replied the house-keeper; and thereupon she left the room, closing the door behind her with a vicious slam.

VIII.

THE justice of the peace and Mademoiselle Marguerite were at last alone in M. de Chalusse's study. This room, which the count had preferred above all others, was a spacious, magnificent, but rather gloomy apartment, with lofty walls and dark, richly carved furniture. Its present aspect was more than ever solemn and lugubrious, for it gave one a chill to see the bands of white tape affixed to the locks of the cabinets and bookcases. When the magistrate had installed himself in the count's arm-chair, and the girl had taken a seat near him, they remained looking at each other in silence for a few moments. The magistrate was asking himself how he should begin. Having fathomed Mademoiselle Marguerite's extreme sensitiveness and reserve, he said to himself that if he offended or alarmed her, she would refuse him her confidence, in which case he would be powerless to serve her as he wished to do. He had, in fact, an almost passionate desire to be of service to her, feeling himself drawn toward her by an inex-

plicable feeling of sympathy, in which esteem, respect, and admiration alike were blended, though he had only known her for a few hours. Still, he must make a beginning. "Mademoiselle," he said, at last, "I abstained from questioning you before the servants—and if I take the liberty of doing so now, it is not, believe me, out of any idle curiosity; moreover, you are not compelled to answer me. But you are young—and I am an old man; and it is my duty—even if my heart did not urge me to do so—to offer you the aid of my experience——"

"Speak, monsieur," interrupted Marguerite. "I will answer your questions frankly, or else not answer them at all."

"To resume, then," said he, "I am told that M. de Chalusse has no relatives, near or remote. Is this the truth?"

"So far as I know—yes, monsieur. Still, I have heard it said that a sister of his, Mademoiselle Hermine de Chalusse, abandoned her home twenty-five or thirty years ago, when she was about my age, and that she has never received her share of the enormous fortune left by her parents."

"And has this sister never given any sign of life?"

"Never! Still, monsieur, I have promised you to be perfectly frank. That letter which the Count de Chalusse received yesterday, that letter which I regard as the cause of his death—well, I have a presentiment that it came from his sister. It could only have been written by her or—by that other person whose letters—and souvenirs—you found in the *escritoire*."

"And—this other person—who can she be?" As the young girl made no reply, the magistrate did not insist, but continued: "And you, my child, who are you?"

She made a gesture of sorrowful resignation, and then, in a voice faltering with emotion, she answered: "I do not know, monsieur. Perhaps I am the count's daughter. I should be telling an untruth if I said that was not my belief. Yes, I believe it, but I have never been certain of it. Sometimes I have believed, sometimes I have doubted it. On certain days I have said to myself, 'Yes, it must be so!' and I have longed to throw my arms around his neck. But at other times I have exclaimed: 'No, it isn't possible!' and I have almost hated him. Besides, he never said a word on the subject—never a decisive word, at least. When I saw him for the first time, six years ago, I judged by the manner in which he forbade me to call him 'father,' that he would never answer any question I might ask on the subject."

If there was a man in the world inaccessible to idle curiosity, it was certainly this magistrate, whose profession condemned him to listen every day to family grievances, neighborly quarrels, complaints, accusations, and slander. And yet as he listened to Mademoiselle Marguerite, he experienced that strange disquietude which seizes hold of a person when a puzzling problem is presented. "Allow me to believe that many decisive proofs may have escaped your notice on account of your inexperience," he said.

But interrupting him with a gesture, she sadly remarked: "You are mistaken; I am not inexperienced."

He could not help smiling at what he considered her self-conceit. "Poor child!" said he; "how old are you? Eighteen?"

She shook her head. "Yes, by my certificate of birth I am only eighteen; but by the sufferings I have endured I am, perhaps, older than you are, monsieur,

despite your white hair. Those who have lived such a life as I have, are never young; they are old in suffering, even in their childhood. And if by experience you mean lack of confidence, a knowledge of good and evil, distrust of everything and everybody, mine, young girl though I be, will no doubt equal yours." She paused, hesitated for a moment, and then continued: "But why should I wait for you to question me? It is neither sincere nor dignified on my part to do so. The person who claims counsel owes absolute frankness to his adviser. I will speak to you as if I were communing with my own soul. I will tell you what no person has ever known—no one, not even Pascal. And believe me, my past life was full of bitter misery, although you find me here in this splendid house. But I have nothing to conceal; and if I have cause to blush, it is for others, not for myself."

Perhaps she was impelled by an irresistible desire to relieve her overburdened heart, after long years of self-restraint; perhaps she no longer felt sure of herself, and desired some other advice than the dictates of her conscience, in presence of the calamity which had befallen her. At all events, too much engrossed in her own thoughts to heed the magistrate's surprise, or hear the words he faltered, she rose from her seat, and, with her hands pressed tightly on her throbbing brow, she began to tell the story of her life.

"My first recollections," she said, "are of a narrow, cheerless courtyard, surrounded by grim and massive walls, so high that I could scarcely see the top of them. At noontime in summer the sun visited one little corner, where there was a stone bench; but in winter it never showed itself at all. There were five or six small, scrubby trees, with moss-grown trunks and feeble

branches, which put forth a few yellow leaves at springtime. We were some thirty children who assembled in this courtyard—children from five to eight years old, all clad alike in brown dresses, with a little blue handkerchief tied about our shoulders. We all wore blue caps on week-days, and white ones on Sundays, with woollen stockings, thick shoes, and a black ribbon, with a large metal cross dangling from our necks. Among us moved the good sisters, silent and sad, with their hands crossed in their large sleeves, their faces as white as their snowy caps, and their long strings of beads, set off with numerous copper medals, clanking when they walked like prisoners' chains. As a rule, each face wore the same expression of resignation, unvarying gentleness, and inexhaustible patience. But there were some who wore it only as one wears a mask—some whose eyes gleamed at times with passion, and who vented their cold, bitter anger upon us defenceless children. However, there was one sister, still young and very fair, whose manner was so gentle and so sad that even I, with my mere infantile intelligence, felt that she must have some terrible sorrow. During play-time she often took me on her knee and embraced me with convulsive tenderness, murmuring: 'Dear little one! darling little one!' Sometimes her endearments were irksome to me, but I never allowed her to see it, for fear of making her still more sad; and in my heart I was content and proud to suffer for and with her. Poor sister! I owe her the only happy hours of my infancy. She was called Sister Calliste. I do not know what has become of her, but often, when my heart fails me, I think of her, and even now I cannot mention her name without tears."

Mademoiselle Marguerite was indeed weeping—big

tears which she made no attempt to conceal were coursing down her cheeks. It cost her a great effort to continue: "You have already understood, monsieur, what I myself did not know for several years. I was in a foundling asylum, and I was a foundling myself. I cannot say that we lacked anything; and I should be ungrateful if I did not say and feel that these good sisters were charity personified. But, alas! their hearts had only a certain amount of tenderness to distribute between thirty poor little girls, and so each child's portion was small; the caresses were the same for all, and I longed to be loved differently, to have kind words and caresses for myself alone. We slept in little white beds with snowy curtains, in a clean, well-ventilated dormitory, in the centre of which stood a statue of the Virgin, who seemed to smile on us all alike. In winter we had a fire. Our clothes were warm and neat; our food was excellent. We were taught to read and write, to sew and embroider. There was a recreation hour between all the exercises. Those who were studious and good were rewarded; and twice a week we were taken into the country for a long walk. It was during one of these excursions that I learned from the talk of the passers-by, what we were, and what we were called. Sometimes, in the afternoon, we were visited by elegantly-attired ladies, who were accompanied by their own children, radiant with health and happiness. The good sisters told us that these were 'pious ladies,' or 'charitable ladies,' whom we must love and respect, and whom we must never forget to mention in our prayers. They always brought us toys and cakes. Sometimes the establishment was visited by priests and grave old gentlemen, whose sternness of manner alarmed us. They peered into every nook and corner,

asked questions about everything, assured themselves that everything was in its place, and some of them even tasted our soup. They were always satisfied; and the lady superior led them through the building, and bowed to them, exclaiming: 'We love them so much, the poor little dears!' And the gentlemen replied: 'Yes, yes, my dear sister, they are very fortunate.' And the gentlemen were right. Poor laborers' children are often obliged to endure privations which we knew nothing of; they are often obliged to make their supper off a piece of dry bread—but, then, the crust is given them by their mother, with a kiss."

The magistrate, who was extremely ill at ease, had not yet succeeded in finding a syllable to offer in reply. Indeed, Mademoiselle Marguerite had not given him an opportunity to speak, so rapidly had this long-repressed flood of recollections poured from her lips. When she spoke the word "mother," the magistrate fancied she would show some sign of emotion.

But he was mistaken. On the contrary, her voice became harsher, and a flash of anger, as it were, darted from her eyes.

"I suffered exceedingly in that asylum," she resumed. "Sister Calliste left the establishment, and all the surroundings chilled and repelled me. My only few hours of happiness were on Sundays, when we attended church. As the great organ pealed, and as I watched the priests officiating at the altar in their gorgeous vestments, I forgot my own sorrows. It seemed to me that I was ascending on the clouds of incense to the celestial sphere which the sisters so often talked to us about, and where they said each little girl would find her mother."

Mademoiselle Marguerite hesitated for an instant, as

if she were somewhat unwilling to give utterance to her thoughts; but at last, forcing herself to continue, she said: "Yes, I suffered exceedingly in that foundling asylum. Almost all my little companions were spiteful, unattractive in person, sallow, thin, and afflicted with all kinds of diseases, as if they were not unfortunate enough in being abandoned by their parents. And—to my shame, monsieur, I must confess it—these unfortunate little beings inspired me with unconquerable repugnance, with disgust bordering on aversion. I would rather have pressed my lips to a red-hot iron than to the forehead of one of these children. I did not reason on the subject, alas! I was only eight or nine years old; but I felt this antipathy in every fibre of my being. The others knew it too; and, in revenge, they ironically styled me 'the lady,' and left me severely alone. But sometimes, during playtime, when the good sisters' backs were turned, the children attacked me, beat me, and scratched my face and tore my clothes. I endured these onslaughts uncomplainingly, for I was conscious that I deserved them. But how many reprimands my torn clothes cost me! How many times I received only a dry crust for my supper, after being soundly scolded and called 'little careless.' But as I was quiet, studious, and industrious, a quicker learner than the majority of my companions, the sisters were fond of me. They said that I was a promising girl, and that they would have no difficulty in finding me a nice home with some of the rich and pious ladies who have a share in managing institutions of this kind. The only fault the sisters found with me was that I was sullen. But such was not really the case; I was only sad and resigned. Everything around me so depressed and saddened me that I withdrew into myself, and buried

all my thoughts and aspirations deep in my heart. If I had naturally been a bad child, I scarcely know what would have been the result of this. I have often asked myself the question in all sincerity, but I have been unable to reply, for one cannot be an impartial judge respecting one's self. However, this much is certain, although childhood generally leaves a train of pleasant recollections in a young girl's life, mine was only fraught with torture and misery, desperate struggles, and humiliation. I was unwilling to be confirmed because I did not wish to wear a certain dress which a 'benevolent lady' had presented for the use of the asylum, and which had belonged to a little girl of my own age who had died of consumption. The thought of arraying myself in this dress to approach the holy table frightened and revolted me as much as if I had been sentenced to drape myself in a winding-sheet. And yet it was the prettiest dress of all—white muslin beautifully embroidered. It had been ardently coveted by the other children, and had been given to me as a sort of reward of merit. And I dared not explain the cause of my unconquerable repugnance. Who would have understood me? I should only have been accused of undue sensitiveness and pride, absurd in one of my humble position. I was then only twelve years old; but no one knew the struggle in my mind save the old priest, my confessor. I could confess everything to him; he understood me, and did not reproach me. Still he answered: 'You must wear this dress, my child, for your pride must be broken. Go—I shall impose no other penance on you.' I obeyed him, full of superstitious terror; for it seemed to me that this was a frightful omen which would bring me misfortune, my whole life through. And I

was confirmed in the dead girl's embroidered dress."

During the five-and-twenty years that he had held the position of justice of the peace, the magistrate had listened to many confessions, wrung from wretched souls by stern necessity, or sorrow, but never had his heart been moved as it now was, by this narrative, told with such uncomplaining anguish, and in a tone of such sincerity. However she resumed her story. "The confirmation over, our life became as gloomily monotonous as before; we read the same pious books and did the same work at the same hours as formerly. It seemed to me that I was stifling in this atmosphere. I gasped for breath, and thought that anything would be preferable to this semblance of existence, which was not real life. I was thinking of applying for the 'good situation,' which had so often been mentioned to me, when one morning I was summoned into the steward's office—a mysterious and frightful place to us children. He himself was a stout, dirty man, wearing large blue spectacles and a black silk skullcap; and from morning until night, summer and winter, he sat writing at a desk behind a little grating, hung with green curtains. Round the room were ranged the registers, in which our names were recorded and our appearances described, together with the boxes containing the articles found upon us, which were carefully preserved to assist in identifying us should occasion arise. I entered this office with a throbbing heart. In addition to the stout gentleman and the Lady Superior, I found there a thin, wiry man, with cunning eyes, and a portly woman, with a coarse but rather good-natured face. The superior at once informed me that I was in the presence of M. and Madame Greloux, bookbinders, who had

come to the asylum in search of two apprentices, and she asked me if I should like to be one of them. Ah! monsieur, it seemed to me that heaven had opened before me and I boldly replied: 'Yes.' The gentleman in the black skullcap immediately emerged from his place behind the grating to explain my obligations and duties to me at length, especially insisting upon the point, that I ought to be grateful—I, a miserable foundling, reared by public charity—for the generosity which this good gentleman and lady showed in offering to take charge of me and employ me in their workshop. I must confess that I could not clearly realize in what this great generosity which he so highly praised consisted, nor did I perceive any reason why I should be particularly grateful. Still, to all the conditions imposed upon me, I answered, 'Yes, yes, yes!' so heartily that Madame Greloux seemed greatly pleased. 'It is evident that the child will be glad to get away,' she said to herself. Then the superior began to enumerate the obligations my employers would incur, repeating again and again that I was one of the very best girls in the asylum—pious, obedient, and industrious, reading and writing to perfection, and knowing how to sew and embroider as only those who are taught in such institutions can. She made Madame Greloux promise to watch over me as she would have watched over her own daughter; never to leave me alone; to take me to church, and allow me an occasional Sunday afternoon, so that I might pay a visit to the asylum. The gentleman with the spectacles and the skullcap then reminded the book-binder of the duties of an employer toward his apprentices, and turning to a bookcase behind him, he even took down a large volume from which he read extract after extract, which I listened to without understand-

ing a word, though I was quite sure that the book was written in French. At last, when the man and his wife had said 'Amen' to everything, the gentleman with the spectacles drew up a document which we all signed in turn. I belonged to a master?"

She paused. Here her childhood ended. But almost immediately she resumed: "My recollections of these people are not altogether unpleasant. They were harassed and wearied by their efforts to support their son in a style of living far above their position; but, despite their sacrifices, their son had no affection for them, and on this account I pitied them. However, not only was the husband gloomy and quick-tempered, but his wife also was subject to fits of passion, so that the apprentices often had a hard time of it. Still, between Madame Greloux's tempests of wrath there were occasional gleams of sunshine. After beating us for nothing, she would exclaim, with quite as little reason, 'Come and kiss me, and don't pout any more. Here are four sous; go and buy yourself some cakes.'"

The justice started in his arm-chair. Was it, indeed, Mademoiselle Marguerite who was speaking, the proud young girl with a queenlike bearing, whose voice rang out like crystal? Was it she indeed, who imitated the harsh, coarse dialect of the lower classes with such accuracy of intonation? Ah! at that moment, as her past life rose so vividly before her, it seemed to her as if she were still in the years gone by, and she fancied she could still hear the voice of the bookbinder's wife.

She did not even notice the magistrate's astonishment. "I had left the asylum," she continued, "and that was everything to me. I felt that a new and different life was beginning, and that was enough. I flattered myself that I might win a more earnest and

sincere affection among these honest, industrious toilers, than I had found in the asylum; and to win it and deserve it, I neglected nothing that good-will could suggest, or strength allow. My patrons no doubt fathomed my desire, and naturally enough, perhaps unconsciously, they took advantage of my wish to please. I can scarcely blame them. I had entered their home under certain conditions in view of learning a profession; they gradually made me their servant—it was praiseworthy economy on their part. What I had at first done of my own freewill and from a wish to please, at last became my daily task, which I was rigidly required to fulfil. Compelled to rise long before any one else in the house, I was expected to have everything in order by the time the others made their appearance with their eyes still heavy with sleep. It is true that my benefactors rewarded me after their fashion. On Sundays they took me with them on their excursions into the country, so as to give me a rest, they said, after the week's work. And I followed them along the dusty highways in the hot sunshine, panting, perspiring, and tottering under the weight of a heavy basket of provisions, which were eaten on the grass or in the woods, and the remnants of which fell to me. Madame Gre-loux's brother generally accompanied us; and his name would have lingered in my memory, even if it had not been a peculiar one. He was called Vantrasson. He was a tall, robust man, with eyes that made me tremble whenever he fixed them upon me. He was a soldier; intensely proud of his uniform; a great talker, and enchanted with himself. He evidently thought himself irresistible. It was from that man's mouth that I heard the first coarse word at which my unsophisticated heart took offence. It was not to be the last one. He finally

told me that he had taken a fancy to me, and I was obliged to complain to Madame Greloux of her brother's persecutions. But she only laughed at me, and said: 'Nonsense! He's merely talking to hear himself talk.' Yes, that was her answer. And yet she was an honest woman, a devoted wife, and a fond mother. Ah! if she had had a daughter. But with a poor apprentice, who has neither father nor mother, one need not be over-fastidious. She had made a great many promises to the lady superior, but she fancied that the utterance of a few commonplace words of warning relieved her of all further obligations. 'And so much the worse for those who allow themselves to be fooled,' she always added in conclusion.

"Fortunately, my pride, which I had so often been reproached with, shielded me. My condition might be humble, but my spirit was lofty. It was a blessing from God, this pride of mine, for it saved me from temptation, while so many fell around me. I slept, with the other apprentices, in the attic, where we were entirely beyond the control of those who should have been our guardians. That is to say, when the day's toil was over, and the work-shop closed, we were free—abandoned to our own instincts, and the most pernicious influences. And neither evil advice nor bad example was wanting. The women employed in the bindery in nowise restrained themselves in our presence, and we heard them tell marvellous stories that dazzled many a poor girl. They did not talk as they did from any evil design, or out of a spirit of calculation, but from pure thoughtlessness, and because they were quite devoid of moral sense. And they never tired of telling us of the pleasures of life, of fine dinners at restaurants, gay excursions to Joinville-le-Pont, and masked balls at

Montparnasse or the Elysée Montmartre. Ah! experience is quickly gained in these work-shops. Sometimes those who went off at night with ragged dresses and worn-out shoes, returned the next morning in superb toilettes to say that they resigned their situations, as they were not made for work, and intended to live like ladies. They departed radiant, but often before a month was over they came back, emaciated, hollow-eyed, and despairing, and humbly begged for a little work."

She paused, so crushed by the weight of these sad memories as to lose consciousness of the present. And the judge also remained silent, not daring to question her. And, besides, what good would it do? What could she tell him about these poor little apprentices that he did not know already? If he was surprised at anything, it was that this beautiful young girl, who had been left alone and defenceless, had possessed sufficient strength of character to escape the horrible dangers that threatened her.

However, it was not long before Mademoiselle Marguerite shook off the torpor which had stolen over her. "I ought not to boast of my strength, sir," she resumed. "Besides my pride, I had a hope to sustain me—a hope which I clung to with the tenacity of despair. I wished to become expert at my profession, for I had learned that skilled workers were always in demand, and could always command good wages. So when my household duties were over, I still found time to learn the business, and made such rapid progress that I astonished even my employer. I knew that I should soon be able to make five or six francs a day; and this prospect was pleasant enough to make me forget the present, well-nigh intolerable as it sometimes

was. During the last winter that I spent with my employers, their orders were so numerous and pressing that they worked on Sundays as well as on week days, and it was with difficulty that I obtained an hour twice a month to pay a visit to the good sisters who had cared for me in my childhood. I had never failed in this duty, and indeed it had now become my only pleasure. My employer's conscience compelled him to pay me a trifle occasionally for the additional toil he imposed upon me, and the few francs I thus received I carried to the poor children at the asylum. After living all my life on public charity, I was able to give in my turn; and this thought gratified my pride, and increased my importance in my own eyes. I was nearly fifteen, and my term of apprenticeship had almost expired, when one bright day in March, I saw one of the lay sisters of the asylum enter the work-room. She was in a flutter of excitement; her face was crimson, and she was so breathless from her hurried ascent of the stairs that she gasped rather than said to me: 'Quick! come—follow me! Some one is waiting for you!' 'Who?—where?'—'Make haste! Ah! my dear child, if you only knew——' I hesitated; but Madame Greloux pushed me toward the door, exclaiming: 'Be off, you little stupid!' I followed the sister without thinking of changing my dress—without even removing the kitchen apron I wore. Downstairs, at the front door, stood the most magnificent carriage I had ever seen in my life. Its rich silk cushions were so beautiful that I scarcely dared to enter it; and I was all the more intimidated by a footman in gorgeous livery, who respectfully opened the door at our approach. 'You must get into the carriage,' said the sister; 'it was sent for you.' I obeyed her, and before

I had recovered from my astonishment we had reached the asylum, and I was ushered into the office where the contract which bound me as an apprentice had been signed. As soon as I entered, the superior took me by the hand and led me toward a gentleman who was sitting near the window. 'Marguerite,' said she, 'salute Monsieur le Comte de Chalusse.'

IX.

FOR some little time there had been a noise of footsteps and a subdued murmur of voices in the vestibule. Annoyed by this interruption, although he perfectly understood its cause, the magistrate rose and hastily opened the door. He was not mistaken. His clerk had returned from lunch, and the time of waiting seemed extremely long to him. "Ah! it's you," said the magistrate. "Very well! begin your inventory. It won't be long before I join you." And closing the door he resumed his seat again. Mademoiselle Marguerite was so absorbed in her narrative that she scarcely noticed this incident, and he had not seated himself before she resumed. "In all my life, I had never seen such an imposing looking person as the Count de Chalusse. His manner, attire, and features could not fail to inspire a child like me with fear and respect. I was so awed that I had scarcely enough presence of mind to bow to him. He glanced at me coldly, and exclaimed: 'Ah! is this the young girl you were speaking of?' The count's tone betrayed such disagreeable surprise that the superior was dismayed. She looked at me, and seemed indignant at my more than modest attire. 'It's a shame to allow a child to leave home dressed in this fashion,' she angrily exclaimed. And she almost

tore my huge apron off me, and then with her own hands began to arrange my hair as if to display me to better advantage. 'Ah! these employers,' she exclaimed, 'the best of them are bad. How they do deceive you. It's impossible to place any confidence in their promises. Still, one can't always be at their heels.'

"But the superior's efforts were wasted, for M. de Chalusse had turned away and had begun talking with some gentlemen near by. For the office was full that morning. Five or six gentlemen, whom I recognized as the directors of the asylum, were standing round the steward in the black skullcap. They were evidently talking about me. I was certain of this by the glances they gave me, glances which, however, were full of kindness. The superior joined the group and began speaking with unusual vivacity, while standing in the recess of a window, I listened with all my might. But I must have overestimated my intelligence, for I could gain no meaning whatever from the phrases which followed each other in rapid succession; though the words 'adoption,' 'emancipation,' 'dowry,' 'compensation,' 'reimbursement for sums expended,' recurred again and again. I was only certain of one point: the Count de Chalusse wished something, and these gentlemen were specifying other things in exchange. To each of their demands he answered: 'Yes, yes—it's granted. That's understood.' But at last he began to grow impatient, and in a voice which impressed one with the idea that he was accustomed to command, he exclaimed, 'I will do whatever you wish. Do you desire anything more?' The gentlemen at once became silent, and the superior hastily declared that M. de Chalusse was a thousand times too good, but that one could expect no

less of him, the last representative of one of the greatest and oldest families of France.

“I cannot describe the surprise and indignation that were raging in my soul. I divined—I felt that it was *my fate, my future, my life* that were being decided, and I was not even consulted on the matter. They were disposing of me as if they were sure in advance of my consent. My pride revolted at the thought, but I could not find a word to say in protest. Crimson with shame, confused and furious, I was wondering how I could interfere, when suddenly the consultation ceased and the gentlemen at once surrounded me. One of them, a little old man with a vapid smile and twinkling eyes, tapped me on the cheek, and said: ‘So she is as good as she is pretty!’ I could have struck him; but all the others laughed approvingly, with the exception of M. de Chalusse, whose manner became more and more frigid, and whose lips wore a constrained smile, as if he had resolved to keep his temper despite all provocation. It seemed to me that he was suffering terribly, and I afterward learned that I had not been mistaken. Far from imitating the old gentleman’s manner, he bowed to me very gravely, with an air of deference that quite abashed me, and went away after saying that he would return the next day to conclude the arrangements.

“I was at last left alone with the superior, whom I longed to question, but she gave me no time to do so, for with extreme volubility she began to tell me of my surprising good fortune, which was an unanswerable and conclusive proof of the kindness and protection of Providence. ‘The count,’ she said, ‘was to become my guardian. He would certainly give me a dowry; and by and by, if I were grateful to him for his good-

ness, he would adopt me, a poor, fatherless and motherless girl, and I should bear the great name of Durtal de Chalusse, and inherit an immense fortune.' In conclusion, she said that there was no limit to the count's generosity, that he had consented to reimburse the asylum the money that had been spent on me, that he had offered to dower, I do not know how many poor girls, and that he had promised to build a chapel for the use of the establishment. This was all true, incredible as it might seem. That very morning, M. de Chalusse had called at the asylum, declared that he was old and childless, a bachelor without any near relatives, and that he wished to adopt a poor orphan. They had given him a list of all the children in the institution, and he had chosen me. 'A mere chance, my dear Marguerite,' repeated the superior. 'A mere chance—or rather a true miracle.' It did, indeed, seem a miracle, but I was more surprised than elated. I longed to be alone, so as to deliberate and reflect, for I knew that I was free to accept or decline this dazzling offer.

"I timidly asked permission to return to my employers to inform them of what had happened and consult with them; but my request was refused. The superior told me that I must deliberate and decide alone; and that when once my decision was taken, there could be no change. So I remained at the asylum, and dined at the superior's table; and during the night I occupied the room of a sister who was absent. What surprised me most of all was the deference with which I was treated. The sisters all seemed to consider me a person of great importance. And yet I hesitated.

"My indecision may seem absurd and hypocritical; but it was really sincere. My present situation was

certainly by no means an enviable one. But the worst was over; my term as an apprentice had nearly expired, and my future seemed assured. My future! What could it be with the Count de Chalusse? It was painted in such brilliant colors that it frightened me. Why had the count chosen me in preference to any of the other girls? Was it really chance which had decided him in his choice? On reflecting, the miracle seemed to me to have been prepared in advance, and I fancied that it must conceal some mystery. More than this, the thought of yielding myself up to a stranger terrified me. Forty-eight hours had been granted me to consider my decision, and till the very last instant I remained in doubt. Who knows? Perhaps it would have been better for me if I had returned to my humble life. At all events, I should have been spared a great deal of sorrow and humiliation. But I lacked the courage; and when the time expired, I consented to the new arrangement.

“Should I live a thousand years I shall never forget the day I left the foundling asylum to become the Count de Chalusse’s ward. It was a Saturday, and I had given my answer to the superior on the evening before. The next morning I received a visit from my former employers, who, having been informed of the great change in my prospects, had come to bid me good-bye. The cancelling of my apprenticeship had at first caused some trouble, but eventually the count’s gold silenced their objections. Still, they were sorry to part with me, as I plainly saw. Their eyes were moist with tears. They were sorry to lose the poor little servant who had served them so faithfully. At the same time, however, I noticed evident constraint in their manner. They no longer said ‘thee’ and ‘thou’ to me; they

no longer spoke roughly; but they said 'you,' and addressed me as 'mademoiselle.' Poor people! they awkwardly apologized for having ventured to accept my services, declaring in the same breath that they should never be able to replace me at the same price. Madame Greloux, moreover, declared that she should never forgive herself for not having sharply reproved her brother for his abominable conduct. He was a good-for-nothing fellow, she said, as was proved by the fact that he had dared to raise his eyes to me. For the first time in my life, I felt that I was sincerely loved; and I was so deeply touched that if my decision had not been written and signed, I should certainly have returned to live with these worthy people. But it was too late. A sister came to tell me that the superior wished to see me. I bade Father and Mother Greloux farewell and went downstairs.

"In the superior's room, a lady and two shop-girls, laden with boxes and parcels, were waiting for me. It was a dressmaker who had come with some clothes suited to my new station in life. I was told that she had been sent by the Count de Chalusse. This great nobleman thought of everything; and, although he had thirty servants to do his bidding, he never disdained to occupy himself with the pettiest details. So, for the first time, I was arrayed in rustling silk and clinging cashmere. My toilette was no trifling affair. All the good sisters clustered round me, and tried to beautify me with the same care and patience as they would have displayed in adorning the Virgin's statue for a fête-day. A secret instinct warned me that they were overdoing the matter, and that they were making me look ridiculous; but I did not mind. I allowed them to please themselves. I could still feel Madame Greloux's tears

on my hand, and the scene seemed to me as lugubrious as the last toilette of a prisoner under sentence of death. When they had completed their task, I heard a buzz of admiration round me. If the sisters were worthy of belief, they had never seen such a wonderful transformation. Those who were in the class-rooms or the sewing-room, were summoned to view and admire me, and some of the elder children were also admitted. Perhaps I was intended as an example for the latter, for I heard the lady superior say to them, 'You see, my dear children, the result of good behavior. Be diligent and dutiful, like our dear Marguerite, and God will reward you as He has rewarded her.' And, meantime, miserable in my finery, I waited—waited for M. de Chalusse, who was coming to take me away.

"At the appointed hour he appeared, with the same air of haughty reserve, that had so awed me on the occasion of our first meeting. He scarcely deigned to look at me, and although I watched him with poignant anxiety, I could read neither blame nor approval on his face. 'You see that your wishes have been scrupulously obeyed, Monsieur le Comte,' said the superior. 'I thank you,' he replied; 'and I shall prove the extent of my gratitude to the poor children under your charge.' Then, turning to me: 'Marguerite,' he said, 'take leave of—your mothers, and tell them that you will never forget their kindness.'"

The girl paused, for her emotion had rendered her words almost unintelligible. But, with an effort, she speedily conquered her weakness.

"It was only then," she continued, "that I realized how much I loved these poor nuns, whom I had sometimes almost cursed. I felt now how close the ties

were, that bound me to this hospitable roof, and to these unfortunate children, my companions in misery and loneliness. It seemed to me as if my heart were breaking; and the superior, who was generally so impassible, appeared scarcely less moved than myself. At last, M. de Chalusse took me by the hand and led me away. In the street there was a carriage waiting for us, not such a beautiful one as that which had been sent to fetch me from my workshop, but a much larger one, with trunks and boxes piled on its roof. It was drawn by four gray horses. I felt more dead than alive, as I entered the carriage and took the seat which the count pointed out. He sat down opposite to me. All the sisters had assembled at the door of the asylum, and even the superior wept without making any attempt to hide her tears. 'Farewell!' they all cried; 'farewell, farewell, dear child! Don't forget your old friends. We shall pray for your happiness.' Alas! God could not have heard their prayers. At a sign from M. de Chalusse, a footman closed the door, the postilions cracked their whips, and the heavy vehicle rolled away.

"The die was cast. Henceforth, an impassable gulf was to separate me from this asylum, whither I had been carried in my infancy half dead, and wrapped in swaddling clothes, from which every mark that could possibly lead to identification had been carefully cut away. Whatever my future might prove, I felt that my past was gone forever. But I was too greatly agitated even to think; and crouching in a corner of the carriage, I watched M. de Chalusse with the poignant anxiety a slave displays as he studies his new master. Ah! monsieur, what a wondrous change! A mask seemed to have fallen from the count's face; his

lips quivered, a tender light beamed in his eyes, and he drew me to him, exclaiming: 'Oh, Marguerite! my beloved Marguerite! At last—at last!' He sobbed—this old man, whom I had thought as cold and as insensible as marble; he crushed me in his close embrace, he almost smothered me with kisses. And I was frightfully agitated by the strange, indefinable feeling, kindled in my heart; but I no longer trembled with fear. An inward voice whispered that this was but the renewal of a former tie—one which had somehow been mysteriously broken. However, as I remembered the superior's assertion that it was a miracle in my favor—a wonderful interposition of Providence, I had courage enough to ask: 'So it was not chance that guided you in your choice?'

"My question seemed to take him by surprise. 'Poor Marguerite!' he murmured, 'dearly beloved child! for years I have been laboring to bring about this chance!' Instantly all the romantic stories I had heard in the asylum recurred to my mind. And Heaven knows there are plenty of these stories transmitted by the sisters from generation to generation, till they have become a sort of Golden Legend for poor foundlings. That sad formula, 'Father and mother unknown,' which figures on certificates of birth, acts as a dangerous stimulant for unhealthy imaginations, and leaves an open door for the most extravagant hopes. And thus influenced, I fixed my eyes on the face of the Count de Chalusse, striving to discover some resemblance in his features to my own. But he did not seem to notice my intent gaze, and following his train of thought, he muttered: 'Chance! It was necessary that they should think so, and they did think so. And yet the cleverest detectives in Paris, from old Tabaret

to Fortunat, both masters in the art of following up a clue, had exhausted their resources in helping me in my despairing search.' The agony of suspense I was enduring had become intolerable; and unable to restrain myself longer, I exclaimed, with a wildly throbbing heart: 'Then, you are my father, Monsieur le Comte?' He pressed his hand to my lips with such violence that he hurt me, and then, in a voice quivering with excitement, he replied: 'Imprudent girl! What can you mean? Forget that unfortunate idea. Never utter the name of father—you hear me—never! I forbid it!' He had become extremely pale, and he looked anxiously around him, as if he feared that some one had overheard me—as if he had forgotten that we were alone in a carriage which was dashing onward at full speed!

"I was stupefied and alarmed by the sudden terror which M. de Chalusse had displayed and could not control. What could it all mean? What sorrowful recollections, what mysterious apprehensions, had my words aroused in the count's mind? I could not understand or imagine why he should regard my question as strange or unnatural. On the contrary, I thought it perfectly natural, dictated as it had been by circumstances, and by the count's own words and manner. And, in spite of my confusion and agitation, the inexplicable voice which we call presentiment whispered in my heart: 'He has forbidden you to *call* him father, but he has not said that he is not your father.' However, I had not time to reflect or to question M. de Chalusse any more, though at that moment I should have had the courage to do so; afterward I did not dare.

"Our carriage had drawn up outside the railway

station, and the next instant we alighted. Then, for the first time, I learned the magical power of money, I, a poor girl—reared by public charity—and who for three years had worked for my daily bread. M. de Chalusse found the servants, who were to accompany us, awaiting him. They had thought of everything, and made every possible arrangement for our comfort. I had scarcely time to glance round me before we were on the platform in front of a train, which was ready to start. I perceived the very carriage that had brought us to the station already fastened on a low open truck, and I was advancing to climb into it, when M. de Chalusse stopped me. ‘Not there,’ said he, ‘come with me.’ I followed him, and he led me to a magnificent saloon carriage, much higher and roomier than the others, and emblazoned with the Chalusse coat-of-arms. ‘This is our carriage, dear Marguerite,’ he said. I got in. The whistle sounded; and the train started off.”

Mademoiselle Marguerite was growing very tired. Big drops of perspiration stood out on her forehead, she panted for breath, and her voice began to fail her.

The magistrate was almost frightened. “Pray rest a little, mademoiselle,” he entreated, “there is no hurry.”

But she shook her head and replied: “It is better to go on. I should never have courage to begin again if I paused.” And thereupon she continued: “I had never gone farther than Versailles. This journey was at first as delightful as a glimpse into fairy-land. Our carriage was one of those costly whims which some millionaires indulge in. It consisted of a central saloon—a perfect *chef-d’œuvre* of taste and luxury—with two compartments at either end, furnished with comfortable sleeping accommodation. And all this, the count seemed never weary of repeating, was mine—mine alone.

Leaning back on the velvet cushions, I gazed at the changing landscape, as the train rushed madly on. Leaning over me, M. de Chalusse named all the towns and villages we passed: Brunoy, Melun, Fontainebleau, Villeneuve, Sens, Laroche. And each time the train stopped the servants came to ask if we wished for anything. When we reached Lyons, in the middle of the night, we found a delicious supper awaiting us. It was served as soon as we alighted, and in due time we were warned that the train was ready to start, and then we resumed our journey. You can imagine, perhaps, how marvellous all this seemed to a poor little apprentice, whose only ambition a week before was to earn five francs a day. What a change indeed! At last the count made me retire to one of the compartments, where I soon fell asleep, abandoning my efforts to distinguish what was dreamlike in my situation from reality. However, when I woke up I became terribly anxious. I asked myself what was awaiting me at the end of this long journey. M. de Chalusse's manner continued kind, and even affectionate; but he had regained his accustomed reserve and self-control, and I realized that it would be useless on my part to question him. At last, after a thirty hours' journey by rail, we again entered the count's berline, drawn by post-horses, and eventually M. de Chalusse said to me: 'Here is Cannes—we are at our journey's end.'

"In this town, which is one of the most charming that overlook the blue waters of the Mediterranean, the count owned a palace embowered among lovely orange-trees, only a few steps from the sea, and in full view of the myrtle and laurel groves which deck the isles of Sainte Marguerite. He told me that he proposed spending a few months here in seclusion, so as to give

me time to accustom myself to my new position and the luxury that surrounded me. I was, indeed, extremely awkward, and my excessive timidity was increased by my pride. I did not know what to say, or what to do. I did not know how to use my hands, nor how to walk, nor how to carry myself. Everything embarrassed and frightened me; and I was conscious of my awkwardness, without being able to remedy it. I saw my blunders, and knew that I spoke a different language to that which was spoken around me. And yet the memory of Cannes will ever be dear to me. For there I first met the only friend I have now left in this world. I did not exchange a word with him, but by the quickened throbbings of my heart, when our eyes met, I felt that he would exert a powerful influence over my life, and events have since proved that I was not deceived. At that time, however, he was a stranger to me; and nothing on earth would have induced me to make inquiries concerning him. It was only by chance I learned that he lived in Paris, that his name was Pascal, and that he had come south as a companion to a sick friend.

“By a single word the count could have insured the happiness of my life and his own, but he did not speak it. He was the kindest and most indulgent of guardians, and I was often affected to tears by his tenderness. But, although my slightest wish was law, he did not grant me his confidence. The secret—the mystery that stood between us—was like a wall of ice. Still, I was gradually becoming accustomed to my new life, and my mind was regaining its equilibrium, when one evening the count returned home more agitated and excited, if possible, than on the day of my departure from the asylum. He summoned his valet,

and, in a tone that admitted no reply, he exclaimed, 'I wish to leave Cannes at once—I must start in less than an hour—so procure some post-horses instantly.' And in answer to my inquiring glance, he said: 'It must be. It would be folly to hesitate. Each moment increases the peril that threatens us.'

"I was very young, inexperienced, and totally ignorant of life; but my sufferings, my loneliness, and the prospect of being compelled to rely upon myself, had imparted to my mind that precocious maturity which is so often observed among the children of the poor. Knowing from the very first that there was some mystery connected with the count's life, I had studied him with a child's patient sagacity—a sagacity which is all the more dangerous, as it is unsuspected—and I had come to the conclusion that a constant dread rendered his life a burden. Could it be for himself that he trembled, this great nobleman, who was so powerful by reason of his exalted rank, his connections, and his wealth? Certainly not. Was it for me, then? Undoubtedly it was. But why? It had not taken me long to discover that he was concealing me, or, at least, that he endeavored by all means in his power to prevent my presence in his house from being known beyond a very limited circle of friends. Our hurried departure from Cannes confirmed me in my impression.

"It might have been truly called a flight. We left that same evening at eleven o'clock, in a pouring rain, with the first horses that could be procured. Our only attendant was the count's valet—not Casimir, the man who insulted me a little while ago—but another man, an old and valued servant, who has since died, unfortunately, and who possessed his master's entire confi-

dence. The other servants were dismissed with a princely gratuity, and told to disperse two days after our departure. We did not return to Paris, but journeyed toward the Italian frontier, and on arriving at Nice in the dead of night, we drove directly to the quay. The postilions unharnessed the horses, and we remained in the carriage. The valet, however, hastened off, and more than two hours elapsed before he returned. He declared that he had found it very difficult to procure what he wished for, but that at last, by a prodigal outlay of money, he had succeeded in overcoming all obstacles. What M. de Chalusse desired was a vessel ready for sea, and the bark which the valet had chartered now came up to the quay. Our carriage was put on board, we went below, and before daybreak we were under way.

“Three days later we were in Genoa, registered under a false name in a second class hotel. While we were on the open sea, the count had seemed to be less agitated, but now he was far from calm, and the precautions he took proved that he still feared pursuit. A malefactor flying from justice could not have taken greater pains to mislead the detectives on his track. And facts proved conclusively that I was the sole cause of the count’s apprehension. On one occasion I even heard him discussing with his valet the feasibility of clothing me in masculine attire. And it was only the difficulty of obtaining a suitable costume that prevented him from carrying this project into execution. I ought to mention, however, that the servant did not share his master’s anxiety, for three or four times I overheard him saying: ‘The count is too good to worry himself so much about such bad stock. Besides, she won’t overtake us. It isn’t certain that she has even

followed us. How can she know anything about it?' She! Who was she? This is what I racked my brain to discover, but without success. I must confess, monsieur, that being of a practical nature, and not in the least degree romantic, I arrived at the conclusion that the peril chiefly existed in the count's imagination, or that he greatly exaggerated it. Still he suffered none the less on that account, as was shown by the fact that the following month was spent in hurried journeys from one Italian city to another.

"It was the end of May before M. de Chalusse would consent to return to France; and then we went direct to Lyons. We had spent a couple of days there, when the count informed me that prudence required us to separate for a time—that our safety demanded this sacrifice. And without giving me time to say a word, he began to explain the advantages that would accrue from such an arrangement. I was extremely ignorant, and he wished me to profit by our temporary separation to raise my knowledge to a level with my new social position. He had, accordingly, made arrangements for me to enter the convent of Sainte-Marthe, an educational establishment which is as celebrated in the department of the Rhone as the Convent des Oiseaux is in Paris. He added that it would not be prudent for him to visit me; and he made me solemnly promise that I would never mention his name to any of my schoolmates. I was to send any letters I might write to an address which he would give me, and he would sign his answers with a fictitious name. He also told me that the lady superior of Sainte-Marthe knew his secret, and that I could confide in her. He was so restless and so miserably unhappy on the day when he acquainted me with these plans, that I really believed

him insane. Nevertheless, I replied that I would obey him, and to tell the truth, I was not ill pleased at the thought of the change. My life with M. de Chalusse was a monotonous and cheerless one. I was almost dying of *ennui*, for I had been accustomed to work, bustle, and confusion with the Greloux, and I felt delighted at the prospect of finding myself among companions of my own age.

“Unfortunately, M. de Chalusse had forgotten one circumstance, which made my two years’ sojourn at Sainte-Marthe a lingering and cruel agony. At first I was kindly treated by my schoolmates. A new pupil is always welcome, for her arrival relieves the monotony of convent-life. But it was not long before my companions wished to know my name; and I had none other than Marguerite to give them. They were astonished and wished to know who my parents were. I could not tell an untruth; and I was obliged to confess that I knew nothing at all respecting my father or my mother. After that ‘the bastard’—for such was the name they gave me—was soon condemned to isolation. No one would associate with me during play-time. No one would sit beside me in the school-room. At the piano lesson, the girl who played after me pretended to wipe the keyboard carefully before commencing her exercises. I struggled bravely against this unjust ostracism; but all in vain. I was so unlike these other girls in character and disposition, and I had, moreover, been guilty of a great imprudence. I had been silly enough to show my companions the costly jewels which M. de Chalusse had given me, but which I never wore. And on two occasions I had proved to them that I had more money at my disposal than all the other pupils together. If I had been poor, they would, perhaps, have treated

me with affected sympathy ; but as I was rich, I became an enemy. It was war ; and one of those merciless wars which sometimes rage so furiously in convents, despite their seeming quiet.

“ I should surprise you, monsieur, if I told you what refined torture these daughters of noblemen invented to gratify their petty spite. I might have complained to the superior, but I scorned to do so. I buried my sorrow deep in my heart, as I had done years before ; and I firmly resolved never to show ought but a smiling, placid face, so as to prove to my enemies that they were powerless to disturb my peace of mind. Study became my refuge and consolation ; and I plunged into work with the energy of despair. I should probably still live at Sainte-Marthe now, had it not been for a trivial circumstance. One day I had a quarrel with my most determined enemy, a girl named Anaïs de Rochecote. I was a thousand times right ; and I would not yield. The superior dared not tell me I was wrong. Anaïs was furious, and wrote I don’t know what falsehoods to her mother. Madame de Rochecote thereupon interested the mothers of five or six other pupils in her daughter’s quarrel, and one evening these ladies came in a body, and nobly and courageously demanded that the ‘bastard’ should be expelled. It was impossible, outrageous, monstrous, they declared, that their daughters should be compelled to associate with a girl like me—a nameless girl, who humiliated the other girls with her ill-gotten wealth. The superior tried to take my part ; but these ladies declared they would take their daughters from the convent if I were not sent away. There was no help for it : I was sacrificed. Summoned by telegraph, M. de Chalusse hastened to Lyons, and two days later I left Sainte-Marthe

with jeers and opprobrious epithets ringing in my ears."

X.

ONCE before, that very morning, the magistrate had witnessed a display of the virile energy with which misfortune and suffering had endowed this proud but naturally timid girl. But he was none the less surprised at the sudden explosion of hatred which he now beheld; for it was hatred. The way in which Mademoiselle Marguerite's voice had quivered as she pronounced the name of Anaïs de Rochecote proved, unmistakably, that hers was one of those haughty natures that never forget an insult. All signs of fatigue had now disappeared. She had sprung from her chair, and remembrance of the shameful, cowardly affront she had received had brought a vivid flush to her cheeks and a bright gleam to her eyes.

"This atrocious humiliation happened scarcely a year ago, monsieur," she resumed; "and there is but little left for me to tell you. My expulsion from Sainte-Marthe made M. de Chalusse frantic with indignation. He knew something that I was ignorant of—that Madame de Rochecote, who enacted the part of a severe and implacable censor, was famed for the laxity of her morals. The count's first impulse was to wreak vengeance on my persecutors; for, in spite of his usual coolness, M. de Chalusse had a furious temper at times. It was only with the greatest difficulty that I dissuaded him from challenging General de Rochecote, who was living at the time. However, it now became necessary to make some other arrangements for me. M. de Chalusse offered to find another school, promising to take

such precautions as would insure my peace of mind. But I interrupted him before he had spoken a dozen words, declaring I would rather return to the bookbinders than chance another such experiment. And what I said I meant. A subterfuge—a fictitious name, for instance—could alone shield me from persecution similar to what I had endured at Sainte-Marthe. But I knew that I was incapable of playing such a part—I felt that I should somehow confess everything. My firmness imparted some resolution to M. de Chalusse. He exclaimed, with an oath, that I was right—that he was weary of all this deception and concealment, and that he would make arrangements to have me near him. ‘Yes,’ he concluded, embracing me, ‘the die is cast, come what may!’

“However, these measures required a certain delay; and, in the meantime, he decided to install me in Paris, which is the only place where one can successfully hide from prying eyes. He purchased a small but convenient house, surrounded by a garden, in the neighborhood of the Luxembourg Palace, and here he installed me, with two old women and a trusty man-servant. As I needed a chaperon, he went in quest of one, and found Madame Léon.”

On hearing this name, the magistrate gave the young girl a searching look, as if he hoped to discover what estimate she had formed of the housekeeper’s character, as well as what degree of confidence she had granted her. But Mademoiselle Marguerite’s face remained unaltered in expression.

“After so many trials,” she resumed, “I thought I should now find rest and peace. Yes, I believed so; and the few months I spent in that quiet house will be the happiest of my life—I am sure of it. Judge of

my surprise when, on going down into the little garden on the second day after my arrival, I saw the young man whom I had met at Cannes, and whose face had lingered in my memory for more than two years as the type of all that was best and noblest in the human countenance. He was standing near the gate. A cloud passed before my eyes. What mysterious freak of fate had caused him to pause there at that particular moment? This much is certain, he recognized me as I had recognized him. He bowed, smiling somewhat, and I fled indoors again, indignant with myself for not being angry at his audacity. I made many plans that day, but the next morning, at the same hour, I hid myself behind a Venetian blind, and saw him pause at the gate, and gaze at the garden with evident anxiety. I soon learned that he lived near by, with his widowed mother; and twice a day, when he went to the Palais de Justice and returned, he passed my home."

Her cheeks were crimson now, her eyes were lowered, and she was evidently embarrassed. But suddenly, as if ashamed of her blushes, she proudly raised her head, and said, in a firmer voice: "Shall I tell you our simple story? Is it necessary? I should not have concealed anything that has passed from my mother, if I had been so happy as to possess a mother. A few moments' conversation now and then, the exchange of a few letters, the pressure of a hand through the garden gate, and that is all. Still, I have been guilty of a grave and irreparable fault: I have disobeyed the one rule of my life—frankness; and I am cruelly punished for doing so. I did not tell all this to M. de Chalusse—in fact, I dared not. I was ashamed of my cowardice; from day to day I vowed that I would confess

everything, and yet I procrastinated. I said to myself every night, 'It shall be done to-morrow;' but when the morrow came I said, 'I will give myself another day—just one more day.' Indeed, my courage failed me when I thought of the count's aristocratic prejudices; and besides, I knew how ambitious he was for my future. On the other hand, moreover, Pascal was always pleading: 'Don't speak now. My circumstances are constantly improving. The day is not far off when I shall be able to offer you wealth and fame. When that day comes I will go to your guardian and ask him for your hand; but in Heaven's name don't speak now.' I understood Pascal's motives well enough. The count's immense fortune frightened him, and he feared that he would be accused of being a fortune-hunter. So I waited, with that secret anguish which still haunts those who have been unhappy even when their present is peaceful, and their future seems bright. I kept my secret, saying to myself that such happiness was not meant for me, that it would soon take flight.

"It took flight all too soon. One morning I heard a carriage draw up outside our door, and the next moment the Count de Chalusse entered the sitting-room. 'Everything is ready to receive you at the Hôtel de Chalusse, Marguerite,' said he, 'come!' He ceremoniously offered me his arm, and I accompanied him. I could not even leave a message for Pascal, for I had never made a confidante of Madame Léon. Still, a faint hope sustained me. I thought that the precautions taken by M. de Chalusse would somewhat dispel the uncertainty of my position, and furnish me at least with some idea of the vague danger which threatened me. But no. His efforts, so far as I could discover,

had been confined to changing his servants. Our life in this grand house was the same as it had been at Cannes—even more secluded, if that were possible. The count had aged considerably. It was evident that he was sinking beneath the burden of some ever-present sorrow. ‘I am condemning you to a cheerless and melancholy youth,’ he sometimes said to me, ‘but it will not last forever—patience, patience!’ Did he really love me? I think so. But his affection showed itself in a strange manner. Sometimes his voice was so tender that my heart was touched. At others there was a look of hatred in his eyes which terrified me. Occasionally he was severe almost to brutality, and then the next moment he would implore me to forgive him, order the carriage, take me with him to his jewellers’, and insist upon me accepting some costly ornaments. Madame Léon declares that my jewels are worth more than twenty thousand francs. At times I wondered if his capricious affection and sternness were really intended for myself. It often seemed to me that I was only a shadow—the phantom of some absent person, in his eyes. It is certain that he often requested me to dress myself or to arrange my hair in a certain fashion, to wear such and such a color, or to use a particular perfume which he gave me. Frequently, when I was moving about the house, he suddenly exclaimed: ‘Marguerite! I entreat you, remain just where you are!’

“I obeyed him, but the illusion had already vanished. A sob or an oath would come from his lips, and then in an angry voice he would bid me leave the room.”

The magistrate did not raise his eyes from his talismanic ring; it might have been supposed that it had fascinated him. Still, his expression denoted profound

commiseration, and he shook his head thoughtfully. The idea had occurred to him that this unfortunate young girl had been the victim, not precisely of a madman, but of one of those maniacs who have just enough reason left to invent the tortures they inflict upon those around them.

Speaking more slowly than before, as if she were desirous of attracting increased attention on the magistrate's part, Mademoiselle Marguerite now continued: "If I reminded M. de Chalusse of a person whom he had formerly loved, that person may have been my mother. I say, *may have been*, because I am not certain of it. All my efforts to discover the truth were unavailing. M. de Chalusse seemed to take a malicious pleasure in destroying all my carefully-arranged theories, and in upsetting the conjectures which he had encouraged himself only twenty-four hours previously. Heaven only knows how anxiously I listened to his slightest word! And it can be easily understood why I did so. My strange and compromising connection with him drove me nearly frantic. It was not strange that people's suspicions were aroused. True, he had changed all his servants before my arrival here; but he had requested Madame Léon to remain with me, and who can tell what reports she may have circulated? It has often happened that when returning from mass on Sundays, I have overheard persons say, 'Look! there is the Count de Chalusse's mistress!' Oh! not a single humiliation has been spared me—not a single one! However, on one point I did not feel the shadow of a doubt. The count had known my mother. He frequently alluded to her, sometimes with an outburst of passion which made me think that he had once adored, and still loved her; sometimes, with insults and curses

which impressed me with the idea that she had cruelly injured him. But most frequently he reproached her for having unhesitatingly sacrificed me to insure her own safety. He said she could have had no heart; and that it was an unheard of, incomprehensible, and monstrous thing that a woman could enjoy luxury and wealth, undisturbed by remorse, knowing that her innocent and defenceless child was exposed all the while to the hardships and temptations of abject poverty. I was also certain that my mother was a married woman, for M. de Chalusse alluded to her husband more than once. He hated him with a terrible hatred. One evening, when he was more communicative than usual, he gave me to understand that the great danger he dreaded for me came either from my mother or her husband. He afterward did his best to counteract this impression; but he did not succeed in convincing me that his previous assertion was untrue."

The magistrate looked searchingly at Mademoiselle Marguerite. "Then those letters which we found just now in the *escritoire* are from your mother, mademoiselle?" he remarked.

The girl blushed. She had previously been questioned respecting these letters, and she had then made no reply. Now, she hesitated for a moment, and then quietly said: "Your opinion coincides with mine, monsieur."

Thereupon, as if she wished to avoid any further questioning on the subject, she hurriedly continued: "At last a new and even greater trouble came—a positive calamity, which made me forget the disgrace attached to my birth. One morning at breakfast, about a month ago, the count informed me that he expected two guests to dinner that evening. This was such an

unusual occurrence that I was struck speechless with astonishment. 'It is extraordinary, I admit,' he added, gayly; 'but it is nevertheless true. M. de Fondège and the Marquis de Valorsay will dine here this evening. So, my dear Marguerite, look your prettiest in honor of our old friend.' At six o'clock the two gentlemen arrived together. I was well acquainted with M. de Fondège—the general, as he was commonly called. He was the count's only intimate friend, and often visited us. But I had never before seen the Marquis de Valorsay, nor had I ever heard his name until M. de Chalusse mentioned it that morning. I don't pretend to judge him. I will only say that as soon as I saw him, the dislike I felt for him bordered on aversion. My false position rendered his close scrutiny actually painful to me, and his attentions and compliments pleased me no better. At dinner he addressed his conversation exclusively to me, and I particularly remember a certain picture he drew of a model household, which positively disgusted me. In his opinion, a husband ought to content himself with being his wife's prime minister—the slave of her slightest caprice. He intended, if he married, to allow the Marquise de Valorsay perfect freedom, with an unlimited amount of money, the handsomest carriages, and the most magnificent diamonds in Paris—everything, indeed, that could gratify her vanity, and render her existence a fairylike dream. 'With such ideas on her husband's part the marchioness will be very difficult to please if she is not contented with her lot,' he added, glancing covertly at me. This exasperated me beyond endurance, and I dryly replied: 'The mere thought of such a husband would drive me to the shelter of a convent.' He seemed considerably discon-

certed; and I noticed that the general, I mean M. de Fondège, gave him a mischievous look.

“However, when the gentlemen had gone, M. de Chalusse scolded me severely. He said that my sentimental philosophy was quite out of place in a drawing-room, and that my ideas of life, marriage, and duty could only have been gained in a foundling asylum. As I attempted to reply, he interrupted me to sound the praises of the Marquis de Valorsay, who not only came of an ancient family, and possessed immense, unencumbered estates, but was a talented, handsome man into the bargain; in short, one of those favored mortals whom all young girls sigh for. The scales fell from my eyes. I instantly understood that M. de Chalusse had selected the Marquis de Valorsay to be my husband, and thus the marquis had designedly explained his matrimonial programme for my benefit. It was a snare to catch the bird. I felt indignant that he should suppose me so wanting in delicacy of feeling and nobility of character as to be dazzled by the life of display and facile pleasure which he had depicted. I had disliked him at first, and now I despised him; for it was impossible to misunderstand the shameless proposal concealed beneath his half-jesting words. He offered me my liberty in exchange for my fortune. That is only a fair contract, one might say. Perhaps so; but if he were willing to do this for a certain amount of money, what would he not do for a sum twice or thrice as large? Such were my impressions, though I asked myself again and again if I were not mistaken. No; the events that followed only confirmed my suspicions. Three days later the marquis came again. His visit was to the count, and they held a long conference in this study. Having occasion to enter the room, after

the marquis's departure, I noticed on the table a number of title deeds which he had probably brought for the count's inspection. On the following week there was another conference, and this time a lawyer was present. Any further doubts I might have felt were dispelled by Madame Léon, who was always well informed—thanks to her habit of listening at the keyholes. 'They are talking of marrying you to the Marquis de Valorsay—I heard them,' she remarked to me.

"However, the information did not terrify me. I had profited by the time allowed me for reflection, and I had decided upon the course I should pursue. I am timid, but I am not weak; and I was determined to resist M. de Chalusse's will in this matter, even if it became necessary for me to leave his house, and renounce all hopes of the wealth he had promised me. Still I said nothing to Pascal of my mental struggle and final determination. I did not wish to bind him by the advice which he would certainly have given me. I had his troth, and that sufficed. And it was with a thrill of joy that I said to myself: 'What does it matter if M. de Chalusse should be so angered by my refusal to obey him as to drive me from his house? It will rather be so much the better; Pascal will protect me.'

"But resistance is only possible when you are attacked; and M. de Chalusse did not even allude to the subject—perhaps because affairs had not yet been satisfactorily arranged between the marquis and himself—possibly because he wished to deprive me of the power to oppose him by taking me unawares. It would have been great imprudence on my part to broach the subject myself, and so I waited calmly and resignedly, storing up all my energy for the decisive hour. I

willingly confess that I am not a heroine of romance—I do not look upon money with the contempt it deserves. I was resolved to wed solely in accordance with the dictates of my heart; but I wished, and *hoped*, that M. de Chalusse would give me, not a fortune, but a modest dowry. He had become more communicative than usual on money matters, and took no pains to conceal the fact that he was engaged in raising the largest possible amount of ready cash. He received frequent visits from his stockbroker, and sometimes when the latter had left him, he showed me rolls of bank-notes and packages of bonds, saying, as he did so: ‘You see that your future is assured, my dear Marguerite.’

“I am only doing the count justice when I say that my future was a subject of constant anxiety to him during the last few months of his life. Less than a fortnight after he had taken me from the asylum, he drew up a will, in which he adopted me and made me his sole legatee. But he afterward destroyed this document on the plea that it did not afford me sufficient security; and a dozen others shared the same fate. For his mind was constantly occupied with the subject, and he seemed to have a presentiment that his death would be a sudden one. I am forced to admit that he seemed less anxious to endow me with his fortune than to frustrate the hopes of some persons I did not know. When he burned his last will in my presence, he remarked: ‘This document is useless: they would contest it, and probably succeed in having it set aside. I have thought of a better way; I have found an expedient which will provide for all emergencies.’ And as I ventured some timid objection—for it was repugnant to my sense of honor to act as an

instrument of vengeance or injustice, or assist, even passively, in despoiling any person of his rightful inheritance—he harshly, almost brutally, replied: ‘Mind your own business! I will disappoint the folks who are waiting for my property as they deserve to be disappointed. They covet my estates do they! Very well, they shall have them. I will leave them my property, but they shall find it mortgaged to its full value.’

“Unfortunate man! all his plans have failed. The heirs whom he hated so bitterly, and whom I don’t even know, whose existence people have not even suspected, can now come, and they will find the wealth he was determined to deprive them of intact. He dreamed of a brilliant destiny for me—a proud name, and the rank of a marchioness—and he has not even succeeded in protecting me from the most shameful insults. I have been accused of theft before his body was even cold. He wished to make me rich, frightfully rich, and he has not left me enough to buy my bread—literally, not enough to buy bread. He was in constant terror concerning my safety, and he died without even telling me what were the mysterious dangers which threatened me; without even telling me something which I am morally certain of—that he was my father. He raised me against my will to the highest social position—he placed that wonderful talisman, gold, in my hand; he showed me the world at my feet; and suddenly he allowed me to fall even to lower depths of misery than those in which he found me. Ah! M. de Chalusse, it would have been far better for me if you had left me in the foundling asylum to have earned my own bread. And yet, I freely forgive you.”

Mademoiselle Marguerite reflected for a moment, questioning her memory to ascertain if she had told

everything—if she had forgotten any particulars of importance. And as it seemed to her that she had nothing more to add, she approached the magistrate, and, with impressive solemnity of tone and manner, exclaimed: “My life up to the present hour is now as well known to you as it is to myself. You know what even the friend, who is my only hope, does not know as yet. And now, when I tell him what I really am, will he think me unworthy of him?”

The magistrate sprang to his feet, impelled by an irresistible force. Two big tears, the first he had shed for years, trembled on his eyelashes, and coursed down his furrowed cheeks. “You are a noble creature, my child,” he replied, in a voice faltering with emotion; “and if I had a son, I should deem myself fortunate if he chose a wife like you.”

She clasped her hands, with a gesture of intense joy and relief, and then sank into an arm-chair, murmuring: “Oh, thanks, monsieur, thanks!” For she was thinking of Pascal; and she had feared he might shrink from her when she fully revealed to him her wretched, sorrowful past, of which he was entirely ignorant. But the magistrate’s words had reassured her.

XI.

THE clock on the mantel-shelf struck half-past four. The magistrate and Mademoiselle Marguerite could hear stealthy footsteps in the hall, and a rustling near the door. The servants were prowling round about the study, wondering what was the reason of this prolonged conference. “I must see how the clerk is progressing with the inventory,” said the magistrate. “Excuse

me if I absent myself for a moment; I will soon return." And so saying he rose and left the room.

But it was only a pretext. He really wished to conceal his emotion and regain his composure, for he had been deeply affected by the young girl's narrative. He also needed time for reflection, for the situation had become extremely complicated since Mademoiselle Marguerite had informed him of the existence of heirs—of those mysterious enemies who had poisoned the count's peace. These persons would, of course, require to know what had become of the millions deposited in the *escritoire*, and who would be held accountable for the missing treasure? Mademoiselle Marguerite, unquestionably. Such were the thoughts that flitted through the magistrate's mind as he listened to his clerk's report. Nor was this all; for having solicited Mademoiselle Marguerite's confidence, he must now advise her. And this was a matter of some difficulty.

However, when he returned to the study he was quite self-possessed and impassive again, and he was pleased to see that on her side the unfortunate girl had, to some extent, at least, recovered her wonted composure. "Let us now discuss the situation calmly," he began. "I shall convince you that your prospects are not so frightful as you imagine. But before speaking of the future, will you allow me to refer to the past?" The girl bowed her consent. "Let us first of all consider the subject of the missing millions. They were certainly in the *escritoire* when M. de Chalusse replaced the vial; but now they are not to be found, so that the count must have taken them away with him."

"That thought occurred to me also."

"Did the treasure form a large package?"

"Yes, it was large; but it could have been easily

concealed under the cloak which M. de Chalusse wore."

"Very good! What was the time when he left the house?"

"About five o'clock."

"When was he brought back?"

"At about half-past six."

"Where did the cabman pick him up?"

"Near the church of Notre Dame de Lorette, so he told me."

"Do you know the driver's number?"

"Casimir asked him for it, I believe."

Had any one inquired the reason of this semi-official examination, the magistrate would have replied that Mademoiselle Marguerite's interests alone influenced him in the course he was taking. This was quite true; and yet, without being altogether conscious of the fact, he was also impelled by another motive. This affair interested, almost fascinated, him on account of its mysterious surroundings, and influenced by the desire for arriving at the truth which is inherent in every human heart, he was anxious to solve the riddle. After a few moments' thoughtful silence, he remarked: "So the point of departure in our investigation, if there is an investigation, will be this: M. de Chalusse left the house with two millions in his possession; and while he was absent, he either disposed of that enormous sum—or else it was stolen from him."

Mademoiselle Marguerite shuddered. "Oh! stolen," she faltered.

"Yes, my child—anything is possible. We must consider the situation in every possible light. But to continue. Where was M. de Chalusse going?"

"To the house of a gentleman who would, he

thought, be able to furnish the address given in the letter he had torn up."

"What was this gentleman's name?"

"Fortunat."

The magistrate wrote the name down on his tablets, and then, resuming his examination, he said: "Now, in reference to this unfortunate letter which, in your opinion, was the cause of the count's death, what did it say?"

"I don't know, monsieur. It is true that I helped the count in collecting the fragments, but I did not read what was written on them."

"That is of little account. The main thing is to ascertain who wrote the letter. You told me that it could only have come from the sister who disappeared thirty years ago, or else from your mother."

"That was, and still is, my opinion."

The magistrate toyed with his ring; and a smile of satisfaction stole over his face. "Very well!" he exclaimed, "in less than five minutes I shall be able to tell you whether the letter was from your mother or not. My method is perfectly simple. I have only to compare the handwriting with that of the letters found in the *escritoire*."

Mademoiselle Marguerite sprang up, exclaiming: "What a happy idea!"

But without seeming to notice the girl's surprise, he added: "Where are the remnants of this letter which you and the count picked up in the garden?"

"M. de Chalusse placed them in his pocket."

"They must be found. Tell the count's valet to look for them."

The girl rang; but M. Casimir, who was supposed to be engaged in making preparations for the funeral,

was not in the house. However, another servant and Madame Léon offered their services, and certainly displayed the most laudable zeal, but their search was fruitless; the fragments of the letter could not be found. "How unfortunate!" muttered the magistrate, as he watched them turn the pockets of the count's clothes inside out. "What a fatality! That letter would probably have solved the mystery."

Compelled to submit to this disappointment, he returned to the study; but he was evidently discouraged. Although he did not consider the mystery insoluble, far from it, he realized that time and research would be required to arrive at a solution, and that the affair was quite beyond his province. One hope alone remained.

By carefully studying the last words which M. de Chalusse had written and spoken he might arrive at the intention which had dictated them. Experience had wonderfully sharpened his penetration, and perhaps he might discover a hidden meaning which would throw light upon all this doubt and uncertainty. Accordingly, he asked Mademoiselle Marguerite for the paper upon which the count had endeavored to pen his last wishes; and in addition he requested her to write on a card the dying man's last words in the order they had been uttered. But on combining the written and the spoken words the only result obtained was as follows:—"My entire fortune—give—friends—against—Marguerite—despoiled—your mother—take care." These twelve incoherent words revealed the count's absorbing and poignant anxiety concerning his fortune and Marguerite's future, and also the fear and aversion with which Marguerite's mother inspired him. But that was all; the sense was not precise enough for any practical purpose. Certainly the word "give" needed no explana-

tion. It was plain that the count had endeavored to write, "I give my entire fortune." The meaning of the word "despoiled" was also clear. It had evidently been wrung from the half-unconscious man by the horrible thought that Marguerite—his own daughter, unquestionably—would not have a penny of all the millions he had intended for her. "Take care" also explained itself. But there were two words which seemed absolutely incomprehensible to the magistrate, and which he vainly strove to connect with the others in an intelligible manner. These were the words "friends" and "against," and they were the most legibly written of all. For the thirtieth time the magistrate was repeating them in an undertone, when a rap came at the door, and almost immediately Madame Léon entered the room.

"What is it?" inquired Mademoiselle Marguerite.

Laying a package of letters, addressed to M. de Chalusse, on the desk, the housekeeper replied: "These have just come by the post for the poor count. Heaven rest his soul!" And then handing a newspaper to Mademoiselle Marguerite, she added, in an unctuous tone: "And some one left this paper for mademoiselle at the same time."

"This paper—for me? You must be mistaken."

"Not at all. I was in the concierge's lodge when the messenger brought it; and he said it was for Mademoiselle Marguerite, from one of her friends." And with these words she made one of her very best courtesies, and withdrew.

The girl had taken the newspaper, and now, with an air of astonishment and apprehension, she slowly unfolded it. What first attracted her attention was a paragraph on the first page marked round with red

chalk. The paper had evidently been sent in order that she might read this particular passage, and accordingly she began to peruse it. "There was a great sensation and a terrible scandal last evening at the residence of Madame d'A——, a well known star of the first magnitude——"

It was the shameful article which described the events that had robbed Pascal of his honor. And to make assurance doubly sure, to prevent the least mistake concerning the printed initials, the coward who sent the paper had appended the names of the persons mixed up in the affair, at full length, in pencil. He had written d'Argelès, Pascal Ferailleux, Ferdinand de Coralthe, Rochecote. And yet, in spite of these precautions, the girl did not at first seize the full meaning of the article; and she was obliged to read it over again. But when she finally understood it—when the horrible truth burst upon her—the paper fell from her nerveless hands, she turned as pale as death, and, gasping for breath, leaned heavily against the wall for support.

Her features expressed such terrible suffering that the magistrate sprang from his chair with a bound. "What has happened?" he eagerly asked.

She tried to reply, but finding herself unable to do so, she pointed to the paper lying upon the floor, and gasped: "There! there!"

The magistrate understood everything at the first glance; and this man, who had witnessed so much misery—who had been the confidant of so many martyrs—was filled with consternation at thought of the misfortunes which destiny was heaping upon this defenceless girl. He approached her, and led her gently to an arm-chair, upon which she sank, half fainting. "Poor child!" he murmured. "The man you had

chosen—the man whom you would have sacrificed everything for—is Pascal Feraillieur, is he not?”

“Yes, it is he.”

“He is an advocate?”

“As I have already told you, monsieur.”

“Does he live in the Rue d’Ulm?”

“Yes.”

The magistrate shook his head sadly. “It is the same,” said he. “I also know him, my poor child; and I loved and honored him. Yesterday I should have told you that he was worthy of you. He was above slander. But now, see what depths love of play has brought him to. He is a thief!”

Mademoiselle Marguerite’s weakness vanished. She sprang from her chair, and indignantly faced the magistrate. “It is false!” she cried, vehemently; “and what that paper says is false as well!”

Had her reason been affected by so many successive blows? It seemed likely; for, livid a moment before, her face had now turned scarlet. She trembled nervously from head to foot, and there was a gleam of insanity in her big black eyes.

“If she doesn’t weep, she is lost,” thought the magistrate. And, instead of encouraging her to hope, he deemed it best to try and destroy what he considered a dangerous illusion. “Alas! my poor child,” he said sadly, “you must not deceive yourself. The newspapers are often hasty in their judgment; but an article like that is only published when proof of its truth is furnished by witnesses of unimpeachable veracity.”

She shrugged her shoulders as if she were listening to some monstrous absurdities, and then thoughtfully muttered: “Ah! now Pascal’s silence is explained; now

I understand why he has not yet replied to the letter I wrote him last night."

The magistrate persevered, however, and added: "So, after the article you have just read, no one can entertain the shadow of a doubt."

Mademoiselle Marguerite hastily interrupted him. "But I have not doubted him for a second!" she exclaimed. "Doubt Pascal! I doubt Pascal! I would sooner doubt myself. I might commit a dishonorable act; I am only a poor, weak, ignorant girl, while he—he—— You don't know, then, that he was my conscience? Before undertaking anything, before deciding upon anything, if ever I felt any doubt, I asked myself, 'What would he do?' And the mere thought of him is sufficient to banish any unworthy idea from my heart." Her tone and manner betokened complete and unwavering confidence; and her faith imparted an almost sublime expression to her face. "If I was overcome, monsieur," she continued, "it was only because I was appalled by the audacity of the accusation. How was it possible to make Pascal even *seem* to be guilty of a dishonorable act? This is beyond my powers of comprehension. I am only certain of one thing—that he is innocent. If the whole world rose to testify against him, it would not shake my faith in him, and even if he confessed that he was guilty I should be more likely to believe that he was crazed than culpable!"

A bitter smile curved her lips, she was beginning to judge the situation more correctly, and in a calmer tone she resumed: "Moreover, what does circumstantial evidence prove? Did you not this morning hear all our servants declaring that I was accountable for M. de Chalusse's millions? Who knows what might have

happened if it had not been for your intervention? Perhaps, by this time, I should have been in prison."

"This is not a parallel case, my child."

"It is a parallel case, monsieur. Suppose, for one moment, that I had been formally accused—what do you think Pascal would have replied if people had gone to him, and said, 'Marguerite is a thief?' He would have laughed them to scorn, and have exclaimed, 'Impossible!'"

The magistrate's mind was made up. In his opinion, Pascal Ferailleur was guilty. Still it was useless to argue with the girl, for he felt that he should not be able to convince her. However, he determined, if possible, to ascertain her plans in order to oppose them, if they seemed to him at all dangerous. "Perhaps you are right, my child," he conceded, "still, this unfortunate affair must change all your arrangements."

"Rather, it modifies them." Surprised by her calmness, he looked at her inquiringly. "An hour ago," she added, "I had resolved to go to Pascal and claim his aid and protection as one claims an undeniable right or the fulfilment of a solemn promise; but now——"

"Well?" eagerly asked the magistrate.

"I am still resolved to go to him—but as an humble suppliant. And I shall say to him, 'You are suffering, but no sorrow is intolerable when there are two to bear the burden; and so, here I am. Everything else may fail you—your dearest friends may basely desert you; but here am I. Whatever your plans may be—whether you have decided to leave Europe or to remain in Paris to watch for your hour of vengeance, you will need a faithful, trusty companion—a confidant—and here I am! Wife, friend, sister—I will be which ever you desire. I am yours—yours unconditionally.'" And as

if in reply to a gesture of surprise which escaped the magistrate, she added: "He is unhappy—I am free—I love him!"

The magistrate was struck dumb with astonishment. He knew that she would surely do what she said; he had realized that she was one of those generous, heroic women who are capable of any sacrifice for the man they love—a woman who would never shrink from what she considered to be her duty, who was utterly incapable of weak hesitancy or selfish calculation.

"Fortunately, my dear young lady, your devotion will no doubt be useless," he said at last.

"And why?"

"Because M. Ferailleux owes it to you, and, what is more, he owes it to himself, *not* to accept such a sacrifice." Failing to understand his meaning, she looked at him inquiringly. "You will forgive me, I trust," he continued, "if I warn you to prepare for a disappointment. Innocent or guilty, M. Ferailleux is—disgraced. Unless something little short of a miracle comes to help him, his career is ended. This is one of those charges—one of those slanders, if you prefer that term, which a man can never shake off. So how can you hope that he will consent to link your destiny to his?"

She had not thought of this objection, and it seemed to her a terrible one. Tears came to her dark eyes, and in a despondent voice she murmured: "God grant that he will not evince such cruel generosity. The only great and true misfortune that could strike me now would be to have him repel me. M. de Chalusse's death leaves me without means—without bread; but now I can almost bless my poverty since it enables me to ask him what would become of me if he abandoned

me, and who would protect me if he refused to do so. The brilliant career he dreamed of is ended, you say. Ah, well! I will console him, and though we are unfortunate, we may yet be happy. Our enemies are triumphant—so be it: we should only tarnish our honor by stooping to contend against such villainy. But in some new land, in America, perhaps, we shall be able to find some quiet spot where we can begin a new and better career.” It was almost impossible to believe that it was Mademoiselle Marguerite, usually so haughtily reserved, who was now speaking with such passionate vehemence. And to whom was she talking in this fashion? To a stranger, whom she saw for the first time. But she was urged on by circumstances, the influence of which was stronger than her own will. They had led her to reveal her dearest and most sacred feelings and to display her real nature free from any kind of disguise.

However, the magistrate concealed the emotion and sympathy which filled his heart and refused to admit that the girl’s hopes were likely to be realized. “And if M. Feraillieur refused to accept your sacrifice?” he asked.

“It is not a sacrifice, monsieur.”

“No matter; but supposing he refused it, what should you do?”

“What should I do?” she muttered. “I don’t know. Still I should have no difficulty in earning a livelihood. I have been told that I have a remarkable voice. I might, perhaps, go upon the stage.”

The magistrate sprang from his arm-chair. “You become an actress, *you?*”

“Under such circumstances it would little matter what became of me!”

“But you don’t suspect—you cannot imagine——”

He was at a loss for words to explain the nature of his objections to such a career; and it was Mademoiselle Marguerite who found them for him. “I suspect that theatrical life is an abominable life for a woman,” she said, gravely; “but I know that there are many noble and chaste women who have adopted the profession. That is enough for me. My pride is a sufficient protection. It preserved me as an apprentice; it would preserve me as an actress. I might be slandered; but that is not an irremediable misfortune. I despise the world too much to be troubled by its opinion so long as I have the approval of my own conscience. And why should I not become a great *artiste* if I consecrated all the intelligence, passion, energy, and will I might possess, to my art?”

Hearing a knock at the door she paused; and a moment later a footman entered with lights, for night was falling. He was closely followed by another servant, who said: “Mademoiselle, the Marquis de Valorsay is below, and wishes to know if mademoiselle will grant him the honor of an interview.”

XII.

ON hearing M. de Valorsay’s name, Mademoiselle Marguerite and the magistrate exchanged glances full of wondering conjecture. The girl was undecided what course to pursue; but the magistrate put an end to her perplexity. “Ask the marquis to come up,” he said to the servant.

The footman left the room; and, as soon as he had disappeared, Mademoiselle Marguerite exclaimed:

"What, monsieur! after all I have told you, you still wish me to receive him?"

"It is absolutely necessary that you should do so. You must know what he wishes and what hope brings him here. Calm yourself, and submit to necessity."

In a sort of bewilderment, the girl hastily arranged her disordered dress, and caught up her wavy hair which had fallen over her shoulders. "Ah! monsieur," she remarked, "don't you understand that he still believes me to be the count's heiress? In his eyes, I am still surrounded by the glamor of the millions which are mine no longer."

"Hush! here he comes!"

The Marquis de Valorsay was indeed upon the threshold, and a moment later he entered the room. He was clad with the exquisite taste of those intelligent gentlemen to whom the color of a pair of trousers is a momentous matter, and whose ambition is satisfied if they are regarded as a sovereign authority respecting the cut of a waistcoat. As a rule, his expression of face merely denoted supreme contentment with himself and indifference as to others, but now, strange to say, he looked grave and almost solemn. His right leg—the unfortunate limb which had been broken when he fell from his horse in Ireland—seemed stiff, and dragged a trifle more than usual, but this was probably solely due to the influence of the atmosphere. He bowed to Mademoiselle Marguerite with every mark of profound respect, and without seeming to notice the magistrate's presence.

"You will excuse me, I trust, mademoiselle," said he, "in having insisted upon seeing you, so that I might express my deep sympathy. I have just heard

of the terrible misfortune which has befallen you—the sudden death of your father.”

She drew back as if she were terrified, and repeated: “My father!”

The marquis did not evince the slightest surprise. “I know,” said he, in a voice which he tried to make as feeling as possible, “I know that M. de Chalusse kept this fact concealed from you; but he confided his secret to me.”

“To you?” interrupted the magistrate, who was unable to restrain himself any longer.

The marquis turned haughtily to this old man dressed in black, and in the dry tone one uses in speaking to an indiscreet inferior, he replied: “To me, yes, monsieur; and he acquainted me not only by word of mouth, but in writing also, with the motives which influenced him, expressing his fixed intention, not only of recognizing Mademoiselle Marguerite as his daughter, but also of adopting her in order to insure her undisputed right to his fortune and his name.”

“Ah!” said the magistrate as if suddenly enlightened; “ah! ah!”

But without noticing this exclamation which was, at least, remarkable in tone, M. de Valorsay again turned to Mademoiselle Marguerite, and continued: “Your ignorance on this subject, mademoiselle, convinces me that your servants have not deceived me in telling me that M. de Chalusse was struck down without the slightest warning. But they have told me one thing which I cannot believe. They have told me that the count made no provision for you, that he left no will, and that—excuse a liberty which is prompted only by the most respectful interest—and that, the result of this incomprehensible and culpable neglect is that you

are ruined and almost without means. Can this be possible?"

"It is the exact truth, monsieur," replied Mademoiselle Marguerite. "I am reduced to the necessity of working for my daily bread."

She spoke these words with a sort of satisfaction, expecting that the marquis would betray his disappointed covetousness by some significant gesture or exclamation, and she was already prepared to rejoice at his confusion. But her expectations were not realized. Instead of evincing the slightest dismay or even regret, M. de Valorsay drew a long breath, as if a great burden had been lifted from his heart, and his eyes sparkled with apparent delight. "Then I may venture to speak," he exclaimed, with unconcealed satisfaction, "I will speak, mademoiselle, if you will deign to allow me."

She looked at him with anxious curiosity, wondering what was to come. "Speak, monsieur," she faltered.

"I will obey you, mademoiselle," he said, bowing again. "But first, allow me to tell you how great my hopes have been. M. de Chalusse's death is an irreparable misfortune for me as for yourself. He had allowed me, mademoiselle, to aspire to the honor of becoming a suitor for your hand. If he did not speak to you on the subject, it was only because he wished to leave you absolutely free, and impose upon me the difficult task of winning your consent. But between him and me everything had been arranged in principle, and he was to give a dowry of three millions of francs to Mademoiselle Marguerite de Chalusse, his daughter."

"I am no longer Mademoiselle de Chalusse, Monsieur le Marquis, and I am no longer the possessor of a fortune."

He felt the sharp sting of this retort, for the blood rose to his cheeks, still he did not lose his composure. "If you were still rich, mademoiselle," he replied, in the reproachful tone of an honest man who feels that he is misunderstood, "I should, perhaps, have strength to keep the sentiments with which you have inspired me a secret in my own heart; but——" He rose, and with a gesture which was not devoid of grace, and in a full ringing voice he added: "But you are no longer the possessor of millions; and so I may tell you, Mademoiselle Marguerite, that I love you. Will you be my wife?"

The poor girl was obliged to exercise all her powers of self-control to restrain an exclamation of dismay. It was indeed more than dismay; she was absolutely terrified by the Marquis de Valorsay's unexpected declaration, and she could only falter: "Monsieur! monsieur!"

But with an air of winning frankness he continued: "Need I tell you who I am, mademoiselle? No; that is unnecessary. The fact that my suit was approved of by M. de Chalusse is the best recommendation I can offer you. The pure and stainless name I bear is one of the proudest in France; and though my fortune may have been somewhat impaired by youthful folly, it is still more than sufficient to maintain an establishment in keeping with my rank."

Mademoiselle Marguerite was still powerless to reply. Her presence of mind had entirely deserted her, and her tongue seemed to cleave to her palate. She glanced entreatingly at the old magistrate, as if imploring his intervention, but he was so absorbed in contemplating his wonderful ring, that one might have imagined he was oblivious of all that was going on around him.

"I am aware that I have so far not been fortunate enough to please you, mademoiselle," continued the marquis. "M. de Chalusse did not conceal it from me—I remember, alas! that I advocated in your presence a number of stupid theories, which must have given you a very poor opinion of me. But you will forgive me, I trust. My ideas have entirely changed since I have learned to understand and appreciate your vigorous intellect and nobility of soul. I thoughtlessly spoke to you in the language which is usually addressed to young ladies of our rank of life—frivolous beauties, who are spoiled by vanity and luxury, and who look upon marriage only as a means of enfranchisement."

His words were disjointed as if emotion choked his utterance. At times, it seemed as if he could scarcely command his feelings; and then his voice became so faint and trembling that it was scarcely intelligible.

However, by allowing him to continue, by listening to what he said, Mademoiselle Marguerite was encouraging him, even more—virtually binding herself. She understood that this was the case, and making a powerful effort, she interrupted him, saying: "I assure you, Monsieur le Marquis, that I am deeply touched—and grateful—but I am no longer free."

"Pray, mademoiselle, pray do not reply to-day. Grant me a little time to overcome your prejudices."

She shook her head, and in a firmer voice, replied: "I have no prejudices; but for some time past already, my future has been decided, irrevocably decided."

He seemed thunderstruck, and his manner apparently indicated that the possibility of a repulse had never entered his mind. His eyes wandered restlessly from Mademoiselle Marguerite to the countenance of the old magistrate, who remained as impassive as a sphinx,

and at last they lighted on a newspaper which was lying on the floor at the young girl's feet. "Do not deprive me of all hope," he murmured.

She made no answer, and understanding her silence, he was about to retire when the door suddenly opened and a servant announced: "Monsieur de Fondège."

Mademoiselle Marguerite touched the magistrate on the shoulder to attract his attention. "This gentleman is M. de Chalusse's friend whom I sent for this morning."

At the same moment a man who looked some sixty years of age entered the room. He was very tall, and as straight as the letter I, being arrayed in a long blue frock-coat, while his neck, which was as red and as wrinkled as that of a turkey-cock, was encased in a very high and stiff satin cravat. On seeing his ruddy face, his closely cropped hair, his little eyes twinkling under his bushy eyebrows, and his formidable mustaches à la Victor Emmanuel, you would have immediately exclaimed: "That man is an old soldier!"

A great mistake! M. de Fondège had never been in the service, and it was only in mockery of his somewhat bellicose manners and appearance that some twenty years previously his friends had dubbed him "the General." However, the appellation had clung to him. The nickname had been changed to a title, and now M. de Fondège was known as "the General" everywhere. He was invited and announced as "the General." Many people believed that he had really been one, and perhaps he fancied so himself, for he had long been in the habit of inscribing "General A. de Fondège" on his visiting cards. The nickname had had a decisive influence on his life. He had endeavored to show himself worthy of it, and the manners he had at

first assumed, eventually became natural ones. He seemed to be the conventional old soldier—irascible and jovial at the same time; brusque and kind; at once frank, sensible and brutal; as simple as a child, and yet as true as steel. He swore the most tremendous oaths in a deep bass voice, and whenever he talked his arms revolved like the sails of a windmill. However, Madame de Fondège, who was a very angular lady, with a sharp nose and very thin lips, assured people that her husband was not so terrible as he appeared. He was not considered very shrewd, and he pretended to have an intense dislike for business matters. No one knew anything precise about his fortune, but he had a great many friends who invited him to dinner, and they all declared that he was in very comfortable circumstances.

On entering the study this worthy man did not pay the slightest attention to the Marquis de Valorsay, although they were intimate friends. He walked straight up to Mademoiselle Marguerite, caught her in his long arms, and pressed her to his heart, brushing her face with his huge mustaches as he pretended to kiss her. "Courage, my dear," he growled; "courage. Don't give way. Follow my example. Look at me!" So saying he stepped back, and it was really amusing to see the extraordinary effort he made to combine a soldier's stoicism with a friend's sorrow. "You must wonder at my delay, my dear," he resumed, "but it was not my fault. I was at Madame de Rochecote's when I was informed that your messenger was at home waiting for me. I returned, and heard the frightful news. It was a thunderbolt. A friend of thirty years' standing! A thousand thunderclaps! I acted as his second when he fought his first duel. Poor Chalusse!

A man as sturdy as an oak, and who ought to have outlived us all. But it is always so; the best soldiers always file by first at dress-parade."

The Marquis de Valorsay had beaten a retreat, the magistrate was hidden in a dark corner, and Mademoiselle Marguerite, who was accustomed to the General's manner, remained silent, being well aware that there was no chance of putting in a word as long as he had possession of the floor. "Fortunately, poor Chalusse was a prudent man," continued M. de Fondège. "He loved you devotedly, my dear, as his testamentary provisions must have shown you."

"His provisions?"

"Yes, most certainly. Surely you don't mean to try and conceal anything from one who knows all. Ah! you will be one of the greatest catches in Europe, and you will have plenty of suitors."

Mademoiselle Marguerite sadly shook her head. "You are mistaken, General; the count left no will, and has made no provision whatever for me."

M. de Fondège trembled, turned a trifle pale, and in a faltering voice, exclaimed: "What! You tell me that? Chalusse! A thousand thunderclaps! It isn't possible."

"The count was stricken with apoplexy in a cab. He went out about five o'clock, on foot, and a little before seven he was brought home unconscious. Where he had been we don't know."

"You don't know? you don't know?"

"Alas! no; and he was only able to utter a few incoherent words before he died." Thereupon the poor girl began a brief account of what had taken place during the last four-and-twenty hours. Had she been less absorbed in her narrative she would have noticed

that the General was not listening to her. He was sitting at the count's desk and was toying with the letters which Madame Léon had brought into the room a short time previously. One of them especially seemed to attract his attention, to exercise a sort of fascination over him as it were. He looked at it with hungry eyes, and whenever he touched it, his hand trembled, or involuntarily clinched. His face, moreover, had become livid; his eyes twitched nervously; he seemed to have a difficulty in breathing, and big drops of perspiration trickled down his forehead. If the magistrate were able to see the General's face, he must certainly have been of opinion that a terrible conflict was raging in his mind. The struggle lasted indeed for fully five minutes, and then suddenly, certain that no one saw him, he caught up the letter in question and slipped it into his pocket.

Poor Marguerite was now finishing her story: "You see, monsieur, that, far from being an heiress, as you suppose, I am homeless and penniless," she said.

The General had risen from his chair, and was striding up and down the room with every token of intense agitation. "It's true," he said apparently unconscious of his words. "She's ruined—lost—the misfortune is complete!" Then, suddenly pausing with folded arms in front of Mademoiselle Marguerite: "What are you going to do?" he asked.

"God will not forsake me, General," she replied.

He turned on his heel and resumed his promenade, wildly gesticulating and indulging in a furious monologue which was certainly not very easy to follow. "Frightful! terrible!" he growled. "The daughter of an old comrade—zounds!—of a friend of thirty years' standing—to be left in such a plight! Never, a thousand thunderclaps!—never! Poor child!—a heart of

gold, and as pretty as an angel! This horrible Paris would devour her at a single mouthful! It would be a crime—an abomination! It sha'n't be!—the old veterans are here, firm as rocks!”

Thereupon, approaching the poor girl again, he exclaimed in a coarse but seemingly feeling voice: “*Mademoiselle Marguerite*.”

“General?”

“You are acquainted with my son, *Gustave Fondège*, are you not?”

“I think I have heard you speak of him to *M. de Chalusse* several times.”

The General tugged furiously at his mustaches as was his wont whenever he was perplexed or embarrassed. “My son,” he resumed, “is twenty-seven. He’s now a lieutenant of hussars, and will soon be promoted to the rank of captain. He’s a handsome fellow, sure to make his way in the world, for he’s not wanting in spirit. As I never attempt to hide the truth, I must confess that he’s a trifle dissipated; but his heart is all right, and a charming little wife would soon turn him from the error of his ways, and he’d become the pearl of husbands.” He paused, passed his forefinger three or four times between his collar and his neck, and then, in a half-strangled voice, he added: “*Mademoiselle Marguerite*, I have the honor to ask for your hand in marriage on behalf of *Lieutenant Gustave de Fondège*, my son.”

There was a dangerous gleam of anger in *Mademoiselle Marguerite*’s eyes, as she coldly replied: “I am honored by your request, *monsieur*; but my future is already decided.”

Some seconds elapsed before *M. de Fondège* could recover his powers of speech. “This is a piece of fool-

ishness," he faltered, at last with singular agitation. "Let me hope that you will reconsider the matter. And if Gustave doesn't please you, we will find some one better. But under no circumstances will Chalusse's old comrade ever desert you. I shall send Madame de Fondège to see you this evening. She's a good woman and you will understand each other. Come, answer me, what do you say to it?"

His persistence irritated the poor girl beyond endurance, and to put an end to the painful scene, she at last asked: "Would you not like to look—for the last time—at M. de Chalusse?"

"Ah! yes, certainly—an old friend of thirty years' standing." So saying he advanced toward the door leading into the death-room, but on reaching the threshold, he cried in sudden terror: "Oh! no, no, I could not." And with these words he withdrew or rather he fled from the room down the stairs.

As long as the General had been there, the magistrate had given no sign of life. But seated beyond the circle of light cast by the lamps, he had remained an attentive spectator of the scene, and now that he found himself once more alone with Mademoiselle Marguerite he came forward, and leaning against the mantelpiece and looking her full in the face he exclaimed: "Well, my child?"

The girl trembled like a culprit awaiting sentence of death, and it was in a hollow voice that she replied: "I understood——"

"What?" insisted the pitiless magistrate.

She raised her beautiful eyes, in which angry tears were still glittering, and then answered in a voice which quivered with suppressed passion, "I have fathomed the infamy of those two men who have just left the

house. I understood the insult their apparent generosity conceals. They had questioned the servants, and had ascertained that two millions were missing. Ah, the scoundrels! They believe that I have stolen those millions; and they came to ask me to share the ill-gotten wealth with them. What an insult! and to think that I am powerless to avenge it! Ah! the servants' suspicions were nothing in comparison with this. At least, they did not ask for a share of the booty as the price of their silence!"

The magistrate shook his head as if this explanation scarcely satisfied him. "There is something else, there is certainly something else," he repeated. But the doors were still open, so he closed them carefully, and then returned to the girl he was so desirous of advising. "I wish to tell you," he said, "that you have mistaken the motives which induced these gentlemen to ask for your hand in marriage."

"Do you believe, then, that you have fathomed them?"

"I could almost swear that I had. Didn't you remark a great difference in their manner? Didn't one of them, the marquis, behave with all the calmness and composure which are the result of reflection and calculation? The other, on the contrary, acted most precipitately, as if he had suddenly come to a determination, and formed a plan on the impulse of the moment."

Mademoiselle Marguerite reflected.

"That's true," she said, "that's indeed true. Now I recollect the difference."

"And this is my explanation of it," resumed the magistrate. "'The Marquis de Valorsay,' I said to myself, 'must have proofs in his possession that Mademoiselle Marguerite is the count's daughter—written

and conclusive proofs, that is certain—probably a voluntary admission of the fact from the father. Who can prove that M. de Valorsay does not possess this acknowledgment? In fact, he must possess it. He hinted it himself.’ Accordingly on hearing of the count’s sudden death, he said to himself, ‘If Marguerite was my wife, and if I could prove her to be M. de Chalusse’s daughter, I should obtain several millions.’ Whereupon he consulted his legal adviser who assured him that it would be the best course he could pursue; and so he came here. You repulsed him, but he will soon make another assault, you may rest assured of that. And some day or other he will come to you and say, ‘Whether we marry or not, let us divide.’”

Mademoiselle Marguerite was amazed. The magistrate’s words seemed to dispel the mist which had hitherto hidden the truth from view. “Yes,” she exclaimed, “yes, you are right, monsieur.”

He was silent for a moment, and then he resumed: “I understand M. de Fondège’s motive less clearly; but still I have some clue. He had not questioned the servants. That is evident from the fact that on his arrival here he believed you to be the sole legatee. He was also aware that M. de Chalusse had taken certain precautions we are ignorant of, but which he is no doubt fully acquainted with. What you told him about your poverty amazed him, and he immediately evinced a desire to atone for the count’s neglect with as much eagerness as if he were the cause of this negligence himself. And, indeed, judging by the agitation he displayed when he was imploring you to become his son’s wife, one might almost imagine that the sight of your misery awakened a remorse which he was endeavoring to quiet. Now, draw your own conclusions.”

The wretched girl looked questioningly at the magistrate as if she hesitated to trust the thoughts which his words had awakened in her mind. "Then you think, monsieur," she said, with evident reluctance, "you think, you suppose, that the General is acquainted with the whereabouts of the missing millions?"

"Quite correct," answered the magistrate, and then as if he feared that he had gone too far, he added: "but draw your own conclusions respecting the matter. You have the whole night before you. We will talk it over again to-morrow, and if I can be of service to you in any way, I shall be only too glad."

"But, monsieur——"

"Oh—to-morrow, to-morrow—I must go to dinner now; besides, my clerk must be getting terribly impatient."

The clerk was, indeed, out of temper. Not that he had finished taking an inventory of the appurtenances of this immense house, but because he considered that he had done quite enough work for one day. And yet his discontent was sensibly diminished when he calculated the amount he would receive for his pains. During the nine years he had held this office he had never made such an extensive inventory before. He seemed somewhat dazzled, and as he followed his superior out of the house, he remarked: "Do you know, monsieur, that as nearly as I can discover the deceased's fortune must amount to more than twenty millions—an income of a million a year! And to think that the poor young lady shouldn't have a penny of it. I suspect she's crying her eyes out."

But the clerk was mistaken. Mademoiselle Marguerite was then questioning M. Casimir respecting the arrangements which he had made for the funeral, and

when this sad duty was concluded, she consented to take a little food standing in front of the sideboard in the dining-room. Then she went to kneel in the count's room, where four members of the parochial clergy were reciting the prayers for the dead.

She was so exhausted with fatigue that she could scarcely speak, and her eyelids were heavy with sleep. But she had another task to fulfil, a task which she deemed a sacred duty. She sent a servant for a cab, threw a shawl over her shoulders, and left the house accompanied by Madame Léon. The cabman drove as fast as possible to the house where Pascal and his mother resided in the Rue d'Ulm; but on arriving there, the front door was found to be closed, and the light in the vestibule was extinguished. Marguerite was obliged to ring five or six times before the concierge made his appearance.

"I wish to see Monsieur Ferailleux," she quietly said.

The man glanced at her scornfully, and then replied: "He no longer lives here. The landlord doesn't want any thieves in his house. He's sold his rubbish and started for America, with his old witch of a mother."

So saying he closed the door again, and Marguerite was so overwhelmed by this last and unexpected misfortune, that she could hardly stagger back to the vehicle. "Gone!" she murmured; "gone! without a thought of me! Or does he believe me to be like all the rest? But I will find him again. That man Fortunat, who ascertained addresses for M. de Chalusse, will find Pascal for me."

XIII.

FEW people have any idea of the great number of estates which, in default of heirs to claim them, annually revert to the government. The treasury derives large sums from this source every year. And this is easily explained, for nowadays family ties are becoming less and less binding. Brothers cease to meet; their children no longer know each other; and the members of the second generation are as perfect strangers as though they were not united by a bond of consanguinity. The young man whom love of adventure lures to a far-off country, and the young girl who marries against her parents' wishes, soon cease to exist for their relatives. No one even inquires what has become of them. Those who remain at home are afraid to ask whether they are prosperous or unfortunate, lest they should be called upon to assist the wanderers. Forgotten themselves, the adventurers in their turn soon forget. If fortune smiles upon them, they are careful not to inform their relatives. Poor—they have been cast off; wealthy—they themselves deny their kindred. Having become rich unaided, they find an egotistical satisfaction in spending their money alone in accordance with their own fancies. Now when a man of this class dies what happens? The servants and people around him profit of his loneliness and isolation, and the justice of the peace is only summoned to affix the seals, after they have removed all the portable property. An inventory is taken, and after a few formalities, as no heirs present themselves, the court declares the inheritance to be in abeyance, and appoints a trustee.

This trustee's duties are very simple. He manages the property and remits the income to the Treasury until a legal judgment declares the estate the property of the country, regardless of any heirs who may present themselves in future.

"If I only had a twentieth part of the money that is lost in this way, my fortune would be made," exclaimed a shrewd man, some thirty years ago.

The person who spoke was Antoine Vaudoré. For six months he secretly nursed the idea, studying it, examining it in all respects, weighing its advantages and disadvantages, and at last he decided that it was a good one. That same year, indeed, assisted by a little capital which he had obtained no one knew how, he created a new, strange, and untried profession to supply a new demand.

Thus Vaudoré was the first man who made heir-hunting a profession. As will be generally admitted, it is not a profession that can be successfully followed by a craven. It requires the exercise of unusual shrewdness, untiring activity, extraordinary energy and courage, as well as great tact and varied knowledge. The man who would follow it successfully must possess the boldness of a gambler, the *sang-froid* of a duelist, the keen perceptive powers and patience of a detective, and the resources and quick wit of the shrewdest attorney.

It is easier to decry the profession than to exercise it. To begin with, the heir-hunter must be posted up with information respecting unclaimed inheritances, and he must have sufficient acquaintance with the legal world to be able to obtain information from the clerks of the different courts, notaries, and so on. When he learns that a man has died without any known heirs,

his first care is to ascertain the amount of unclaimed property, to see if it will pay him to take up the case. If he finds that the inheritance is a valuable one, he begins operations without delay. He must first ascertain the deceased's full name and age. It is easy to procure this information; but it is more difficult to discover the name of the place where the deceased was born, his profession, what countries he lived in, his tastes and mode of life—in a word, everything that constitutes a complete biography.

However, when he has armed himself with the more indispensable facts, our agent opens the campaign with extreme prudence, for it would be ruinous to awake suspicion. It is curious to observe the incomparable address which the agent displays in his efforts to learn the particulars of the deceased's life, by consulting his friends, his enemies, his debtors, and all who ever knew him, until at last some one is found who says: "Such and such a man—why, he came from our part of the country. I never knew *him*, but I am acquainted with one of his brothers—with one of his uncles—or with one of his nephews."

Very often years of constant research, a large outlay of money, and costly and skilful advertising in all the European journals, are necessary before this result is reached. And it is only when it has been attained that the agent can take time to breathe. But now the chances are greatly in his favor. The worst is over. The portion of his task which depended on chance alone is concluded. The rest is a matter of skill, tact, and shrewdness. The detective must give place to the crafty lawyer. The agent must confer with this heir, who has been discovered at the cost of so much time and trouble, and induce him to bestow a portion of this

prospective wealth on the person who is able to establish his claim. There must be an agreement in writing clearly stating what proportion—a tenth, a third, or a half—the agent will be entitled to. The negotiation is a very delicate and difficult one, requiring prodigious presence of mind, and an amount of duplicity which would make the most astute diplomatist turn pale with envy. Occasionally, the heir suspects the truth, sneers at the proposition, and hurries off to claim the whole of the inheritance that belongs to him. The agent may then bid his hopes farewell. He has worked and spent money for nothing.

However, such a misfortune is of rare occurrence. On hearing of the unexpected good fortune that has befallen him, the heir is generally unsuspecting, and willingly promises to pay the amount demanded of him. A contract is drawn up and signed; and then, but only then, does the agent take his client into his confidence. "You are the relative of such a person, are you not?" "Yes." "Very well. He is dead, and you are his heir. Thank Providence, and make haste to claim your money."

As a rule, the heir loyally fulfils his obligation. But sometimes it happens that, when he has obtained undisputed possession of the property, he declares that he has been swindled, and refuses to fulfil his part of the contract. Then the case must go to the courts. It is true, however, that the judgment of the tribunals generally recalls the refractory client to a sense of gratitude and humility.

Now our friend M. Isidore Fortunat was a hunter of missing heirs. Undoubtedly he often engaged in other business which was a trifle less respectable; but heir-hunting was one of the best and most substantial

sources of his income. So we can readily understand why he so quickly left off lamenting the loss of the forty thousand francs lent to the Marquis de Valorsay.

Changing his tactics, he said to himself that, even if he had lost this amount through M. de Chalusse's sudden death, it was much less than he might obtain if he succeeded in discovering the unknown heirs to so many millions. And he had some reason to hope that he would be able to do so. Having been employed by M. de Chalusse when the latter was seeking Mademoiselle Marguerite, M. Fortunat had gained some valuable information respecting his client, and the additional particulars which he had obtained from Madame Vantrasson elated him to such an extent that more than once he exclaimed: "Ah, well! it is, perhaps, a blessing in disguise, after all."

Still, M. Isidore Fortunat slept but little after his stormy interview with the Marquis de Valorsay. A loss of forty thousand francs is not likely to impart a roseate hue to one's dreams—and M. Fortunat prized his money as if it had been the very marrow of his bones. By way of consolation, he assured himself that he would not merely regain the sum, but triple it; and yet this encouragement did not entirely restore his peace of mind. The gain was only a possibility, and the loss was a certainty. So he twisted, and turned, and tossed on his bed as if it had been a hot gridiron, exhausting himself in surmises, and preparing his mind for the difficulties which he would be obliged to overcome.

His plan was a simple one, but its execution was fraught with difficulties. "I must discover M. de Chalusse's sister, if she is still living—I must discover her children, if she is dead," he said to himself. It was

easy to say this; but how was he to do it? How could he hope to find this unfortunate girl, who had abandoned her home thirty years previously, to fly, no one knew where, or with whom? How was he to gain any idea of the life she had lived, or the fate that had befallen her? At what point on the social scale, and in what country, should he begin his investigations? These daughters of noble houses, who desert the paternal roof in a moment of madness, generally die most miserably after a wretched life. The girl of the lower classes is armed against misfortune, and has been trained for the conflict. She can measure and calculate the force of her fall, and regulate and control it to a certain extent. But the others cannot. They have never known privation and hardship, and are, therefore, defenceless. And for the very reason that they have been hurled from a great height, they often fall down into the lowest depths of infamy.

"If morning would only come," sighed M. Isidore Fortunat, as he tossed restlessly to and fro. "As soon as morning comes I will set to work!"

But just before daybreak he fell asleep; and at nine o'clock he was still slumbering so soundly that Madame Dodelin, his housekeeper, had considerable difficulty in waking him. "Your clerks have come," she exclaimed, shaking him vigorously; "and two clients are waiting for you in the reception-room."

He sprang up, hastily dressed himself, and went into his office. It cost him no little effort to receive his visitors that morning; but it would have been folly to neglect all his other business for the uncertain Chalusse affair. The first client who entered was a man still young, of common, even vulgar appearance. Not being acquainted with M. Fortunat, he deemed it proper to

introduce himself without delay. "My name is Leplaintre, and I am a coal merchant," said he. "I was recommended to call on you by my friend Bouscat, who was formerly in the wine trade."

M. Fortunat bowed. "Pray be seated," was his reply. "I remember your friend very well. If I am not mistaken I gave him some advice with reference to his third failure."

"Precisely; and it is because I find myself in the same fix as Bouscat that I have called on you. Business is very bad, and I have notes to a large amount overdue, so that——"

"You will be obliged to go into bankruptcy."

"Alas! I fear so."

M. Fortunat already knew what his client desired, but it was against his principles to meet these propositions more than half way. "Will you state your case?" said he.

The coal merchant blushed. It was hard to confess the truth; but the effort had to be made. "This is my case," he replied, at last. "Among my creditors I have several enemies, who will refuse me a release. They would like to deprive me of everything I possess. And in that case, what would become of me? Is it right that I should be compelled to starve?"

"It is a bad outlook."

"It is, indeed, monsieur; and for this reason, I desire—if possible, if I can do so without danger—for I am an honest man, monsieur—I wish to retain a little property—secretly, of course, not for myself, by any means, but I have a young wife and——"

M. Fortunat took compassion on the man's embarrassment. "In short," he interrupted, "you wish to conceal a part of your capital from your creditors?"

On hearing this precise and formal statement of his honorable intentions, the coal-merchant trembled. His feelings of integrity would not have been alarmed by a periphrasis, but this plain speaking shocked him. "Oh, monsieur!" he protested, "I would rather blow my brains out than defraud my creditors of a single penny that was rightfully theirs. What I am doing is for their interest, you understand. I shall begin business again under my wife's name; and if I succeed, they shall be paid—yes, monsieur, every sou, with interest. Ah! if I had only myself to think of, it would be quite different; but I have two children, two little girls, so that——"

"Very well," replied M. Fortunat. "I should suggest to you the same expedient as I suggested to your friend Bouscat. But you must gather a little ready money together before going into bankruptcy."

"I can do that by secretly disposing of a part of my stock, so——"

"In that case, you are saved. Sell it and put the money beyond your creditors' reach."

The worthy merchant scratched his ear in evident perplexity. "Excuse me," said he. "I had thought of this plan; but it seemed to me—dishonorable—and—also very dangerous. How could I explain this decrease in my stock? My creditors hate me. If they suspected anything, they would accuse me of fraud, and perhaps throw me into prison; and then——"

M. Fortunat shrugged his shoulders. "When I give advice," he roughly replied, "I furnish the means of following it without danger. Listen to me attentively. Let us suppose, for a moment, that some time ago you purchased, at a very high figure, a quantity of stocks and shares, which are to-day almost worthless, could

not this unfortunate investment account for the absence of the sum which you wish to set aside? Your creditors would be obliged to value these securities, not at their present, but at their former value."

"Evidently; but, unfortunately, I do not possess any such securities."

"You can purchase them."

The coal-merchant opened his eyes in astonishment. "Excuse me," he muttered, "I don't exactly understand you."

He did not understand in the least; but M. Fortunat enlightened him by opening his safe, and displaying an enormous bundle of stocks and shares which had flooded the country a few years previously, and ruined a great many poor, ignorant fools which were hungering for wealth; among them were shares in the Tifila Mining Company, the Berchem Coal Mines, the Greenland Fisheries, the Mutual Trust and Loan Association, and so on. There had been a time when each of these securities would have fetched five hundred or a thousand francs at the Bourse, but now they were not worth the paper on which they were printed.

"Let us suppose, my dear sir," resumed M. Fortunat, "that you had a drawer full of these securities——"

But the other did not allow him to finish. "I see," he exclaimed; "I see—I can sell my stock, and put the proceeds in my pocket with perfect safety. There is enough to represent my capital a thousand times over."

And, in a paroxysm of delight, he added:

"Give me enough of these shares to represent a capital of one hundred and twenty thousand francs; and give me some of each kind. I should like my creditors to have a variety."

Thereupon M. Fortunat counted out a pile of these worthless securities as carefully as if he had been handling bank-notes; and his client at the same time drew out his pocketbook.

"How much do I owe you?" he inquired.

"Three thousand francs."

The honest merchant bounded from his chair. "Three thousand francs!" he repeated. "You must be jesting. That trash is not worth a louis."

"I would not even give five francs for it," rejoined M. Fortunat, coldly; "but it is true that I don't desire to purchase these shares in my creditors' interest. With you it is quite a different matter—this trash, as you very justly call it, will save you at least a hundred thousand francs. I ask only three per cent., which is certainly not dear. Still, you know, I don't force any one to purchase them." And, in a terribly significant tone, he added: "You can undoubtedly buy similar securities on better terms; but take care you don't arouse your creditors' suspicions by applying elsewhere."

"He would betray me, the scoundrel!" thought the merchant. And, realizing that he had fallen into a trap, "Here are three thousand francs," he sighed; "but at least, my dear sir, give me good measure, and throw in a few thousand francs more."

The coal-merchant smiled the ghastly smile of a man who sees no way of escape from imposition, and has, therefore, resolved to submit with the best grace possible. But M. Fortunat's gravity did not relax. He gave what he had promised—neither more nor less—in exchange for the bank-notes, and even gravely exclaimed: "See if the amount is correct."

His client pocketed the shares without counting them; but before leaving the room he made his estima-

ble adviser promise to assist him at the decisive moment, and help him to prepare one of those clear financial statements which make creditors say: "This is an honest man who has been extremely unfortunate."

M. Fortunat was admirably fitted to render this little service; for he devoted such part of his time as was not spent in hunting for missing heirs to difficult liquidations, and he had indeed made bankruptcy a specialty in which he was without a rival. The business was a remunerative one, thanks to the expedient he had revealed to the coal-merchant—an expedient which is common enough nowadays, but of which he might almost be called the inventor. It consisted in compelling the persons who asked for his advice to purchase worthless shares at whatever price he chose to set upon them, and they were forced to submit, under penalty of denunciation and exposure.

The client who followed the coal-merchant proved to be a simple creature, who had called to ask for some advice respecting a slight difficulty between himself and his landlord. M. Fortunat speedily disposed of him, and then, opening the door leading into the outer office, he called: "Cashier!"

A shabbily-dressed man, some thirty-five years of age, at once entered the private sanctum, carrying a money-bag in one hand and a ledger in the other.

"How many debtors were visited yesterday?" inquired M. Fortunat.

"Two hundred and thirty-seven."

"What was the amount collected?"

"Eighty-nine francs."

M. Isidore Fortunat's grimace was expressive of satisfaction. "Not bad," said he, "not at all bad."

Then a singular performance began. M. Fortunat called over the names of his debtors, one by one, and the cashier answered each name by reading a memorandum written against it on the margin of a list he held. "Such a one," said the agent, "and such a one—and such——" Whereupon the cashier replied: "Has paid two francs—was not at home—paid twenty sous—would not pay anything."

How did it happen that M. Fortunat had so many debtors? This question can be easily answered. In settling bankrupts' estates it was easy for him to purchase a large number of debts which were considered worthless, at a trifling cost, and he reaped a bountiful harvest on a field which would have yielded nothing to another person. It was not because he was rigorous in his demands; he conquered by patience, gentleness, and politeness, but also by unwearying perseverance and tenacity. When he decided that a debtor was to pay him a certain sum, it was paid. He never relaxed in his efforts. Every other day some one was sent to visit the debtor, to follow him, and harass him; he was surrounded by M. Fortunat's agents; they pursued him to his office, shop, or *café*—everywhere, continually, incessantly—and always with the most perfect urbanity. At last even the most determined succumbed; to escape this frightful persecution, they, somehow or other, found the money to satisfy M. Fortunat's claim. Besides Victor Chupin, he had five other agents whose business it was to visit these poor wretches. A list was assigned to each man every morning; and when evening came, he made his report to the cashier, who in turn reported to his employer. This branch of industry added considerably to the profits of M. Fortunat's

other business, and was the third and last string to his bow.

The report proceeded as usual, but it was quite evident that M. Fortunat's thoughts were elsewhere. He paused each moment to listen eagerly for the slightest sound outside, for before receiving the coal-merchant he had told Victor Chupin to run to the Rue de Courcelles and ask M. Casimir for news of the Count de Chalusse. He had done this more than an hour before; and Victor Chupin, who was usually so prompt, had not yet made his appearance.

At last, however, he returned, whereupon M. Fortunat dismissed the cashier, and addressed his messenger: "Well?" he asked.

"He is no longer living. They think he died without a will, and that the pretty young lady will be turned out of the house."

This information agreed so perfectly with M. Fortunat's presentiments that he did not even wince, but calmly asked: "Will Casimir keep his appointment?"

"He told me that he would endeavor to come, and I'd wager a hundred to one that he will be there; he would travel ten leagues to put something good into his stomach."

M. Fortunat's opinion coincided with Chupin's. "Very well," said he. "Only you were a long time on the road, Victor."

"That's true, m'sieur; but I had a little matter of my own to attend to—a matter of a hundred francs, if you please."

M. Fortunat knit his brows angrily. "It's only right to attend to business," said he; "but you think too much of money, Victor—altogether too much. You are insatiable."

The young man proudly lifted his head, and with an air of importance, replied: "I have so many responsibilities——"

"Responsibilities!—you?"

"Yes, indeed, m'sieur. And why not? My poor, good mother hasn't been able to work for a year, and who would care for her if I didn't? Certainly not my father, the good-for-nothing scamp, who squandered all the Duke de Sairmeuse's money without giving us a sou of it. Besides, I'm like other men, I'm anxious to be rich, and enjoy myself. I should like to ride in my carriage like other people do. And whenever a *gamin*, such as I was once, opened the door for *me*, I should put a five-franc piece in his hand——"

He was interrupted by Madame Dodelin, the worthy housekeeper, who rushed into the room without knocking, in a terrible state of excitement. "Monsieur!" she exclaimed, in the same tone as if she would have called "Fire!" "here is Monsieur de Valorsay."

M. Fortunat sprang up and turned extremely pale. "What to the devil brings him here?" he anxiously stammered. "Tell him that I've gone out—tell him——"

But it was useless, for the marquis at that very moment entered the room, and the agent could only dismiss his housekeeper and Chupin.

M. de Valorsay seemed to be very angry, and it looked as if he meant to give vent to his passion. Indeed, as soon as he was alone with M. Fortunat, he began: "So this is the way you betray your friends, Master Twenty-per-Cent! Why did you deceive me last night about the ten thousand francs you had promised me? Why didn't you tell me the truth? You knew of the misfortune that had befallen M. de Cha-

lusse. I heard of it first scarcely an hour ago through a letter from Madame Léon."

M. Fortunat hesitated somewhat. He was a quiet man, opposed to violence of any kind; and it seemed to him that M. de Valorsay was twisting and turning his cane in a most ominous manner. "I must confess, Monsieur le Marquis," he at last replied, "that I had not the courage to tell you of the dreadful misfortune which had befallen us."

"How—*us*?"

"Certainly. If you lose the hope of several millions, I also lose the amount I advanced to you, forty thousand francs—my entire fortune. And yet, you see that I don't complain. Do as I do—confess that the game is lost."

The marquis was listening with an air of suppressed wrath; his face was crimson, there was a dark frown on his brow, and his hands were clinched. He was apparently furious with passion, but in reality he was perfectly self-possessed. The best proof that can be given of his coolness is that he was carefully studying M. Fortunat's face, and trying to discover the agent's real intentions under his meaningless words. He had expected to find "his dear extortioner" exasperated by his loss, cursing and swearing, and demanding his money—but not at all. He found him more gentle and calm, colder and more reserved than ever; brimful of resignation indeed, and preaching submission to the inevitable. "What can this mean?" he thought, with an anxious heart. "What mischief is the scoundrel plotting now? I'd wager a thousand to one that he's forging some thunderbolt to crush me." And, in a haughty tone, he said aloud:

"In a word, you desert me."

With a deprecatory gesture, M. Fortunat exclaimed: "I desert you, Monsieur le Marquis! What have I done that you should think so ill of me? Alas! circumstances are the only traitors. I shouldn't like to deprive you of the courage you so much need, but, honestly, it would be folly to struggle against destiny. How can you hope to succeed in your plans? Have you not resorted to every possible expedient to prolong your apparently brilliant existence until the present time? Are you not at such a point that you must marry Mademoiselle Marguerite in a month's time, or perish? And now the count's millions are lost! If I might be allowed to give you some advice, I should say, 'The shipwreck is inevitable; think only of saving yourself.' By tact and shrewdness, you might yet save something from your creditors. Compromise with them. And if you need my services, here I am. Go to Nice, and give me a power of attorney to act for you. From the *débris* of your fortune, I will undertake to guarantee you a competence which would satisfy many an ambitious man."

The marquis laughed sneeringly. "Excellent!" he exclaimed. "You would rid yourself of me and recover your forty thousand francs at the same time. A very clever arrangement."

M. Fortunat realized that his client understood him; but what did it matter? "I assure you——" he began.

But the marquis silenced him with a contemptuous gesture. "Let us stop this nonsense," said he. "We understand each other better than that. I have never made any attempt to deceive you, nor have I ever supposed that I had succeeded in doing so, and pray do me the honor to consider me as shrewd as yourself." And still refusing to listen to the agent, he continued:

"If I have come to you, it is only because the case is not so desperate as you suppose. I still hold some valuable cards which you are ignorant of. In your opinion, and every one else's, Mademoiselle Marguerite is ruined. But I know that she is still worth three millions, at the very least."

"Mademoiselle Marguerite?"

"Yes, Monsieur Twenty-per-Cent. Let her become my wife, and the very next day I will place her in possession of an income of a hundred and fifty thousand francs. But she must marry me first; and this scornful maiden will not grant me her hand unless I can convince her of my love and disinterestedness."

"But your rival?"

M. de Valorsay gave a nervous start, but quickly controlled himself. "He no longer exists. Read this day's *Figaro*, and you will be edified. I have no rival now. If I can only conceal my financial embarrassment a little longer, she is mine. A friendless and homeless girl cannot defend herself long in Paris—especially when she has an adviser like Madame Léon. Oh! I shall win her! I shall have her!—she is a necessity to me. Now you can judge if it would be wise on your part to deprive me of your assistance. Would you like to know what I want? Simply this—the means to sustain me two or three months longer—some thirty thousand francs. You can procure the money—will you? It would make, in all, seventy thousand francs that I should owe you, and I will promise to pay you two hundred and fifty thousand if I succeed—and I shall succeed! Such profit is worth some risk. Reflect, and decide. But no more subterfuges, if you please. Let your answer be plain yes or no."

Without a second's hesitation, M. Fortunat replied, "No."

The flush on the marquis's face deepened, and his voice became a trifle harsher; but that was all. "Confess, then, that you have resolved to ruin me," he said. "You refuse before you have heard me to the end. Wait, at least, until I have told you my plans, and shown you the solid foundation which my hopes rest upon."

But M. Fortunat had resolved to listen to nothing. He wished for no explanations, so distrustful was he of himself—so much did he fear that his adventurous nature would urge him to incur further risk. He was positively afraid of the Marquis de Valorsay's eloquence; besides, he knew well enough that the person who consents to listen is at least half convinced. "Tell me nothing, monsieur," he hastily answered; "it would be useless. I haven't the money. If I had given you ten thousand francs last night, I should have been compelled to borrow them of M. Prosper Bertomy. And even if I had the money, I should still say 'Impossible.' Every man has his system—his theory, you know. Mine is, never to run after my money. With me, whatever I may lose, I regard it as finally lost; I think no more about it, and turn to something else. So your forty thousand francs have already been entered on my profit and loss account. And yet it would be easy enough for you to repay me, if you would follow my advice and go quietly into bankruptcy."

"Never!" interrupted M. de Valorsay; "never! I do not wish to temporize," he continued. "I will save all, or save nothing. If you refuse me your help, I shall apply elsewhere. I will never give my good friends, who detest me, and whom I cordially hate in

return, the delicious joy of seeing the Marquis de Valorsay fall step by step from the high position he has occupied. I will never truckle to the men whom I have eclipsed for fifteen years. No, never! I would rather die, or even commit the greatest crime!"

He suddenly checked himself, a trifle astonished, perhaps, by his own plain-speaking; and, for a moment, he and M. Fortunat looked into each other's eyes, striving to divine their respective secret thoughts.

The marquis was the first to speak. "And so," said he, in a tone which he strove to make persuasive, but which was threatening instead, "it is settled—your decision is final?"

"Final."

"You will not even condescend to listen to my explanation?"

"It would be a loss of time."

On receiving this cruel reply, M. de Valorsay struck the desk such a formidable blow with his clenched fist that several bundles of papers fell to the floor. His anger was not feigned now. "What are you plotting, then?" he exclaimed; "and what do you intend to do? What is your object in betraying me? Take care! It is my life that I am going to defend, and as truly as there is a God in heaven, I shall defend it well. A man who is determined to blow his brains out if he is defeated, is a terribly dangerous adversary. Woe to you, if I ever find you standing between me and the Count de Chalusse's millions!"

Every drop of blood had fled from M. Fortunat's face, still his mien was composed and dignified. "You do wrong to threaten me," said he. "I don't fear you in the least. If I were your enemy, I should bring suit against you for the forty thousand francs you owe

me. I should not obtain my money, of course, but I could shatter the tottering edifice of your fortune by a single blow. Besides, you forget that I possess a copy of our agreement, signed by your own hand, and that I have only to show it to Mademoiselle Marguerite to give her a just opinion of your disinterestedness. Let us sever our connection now, monsieur, and each go his own way without reference to the other. If you should succeed you will repay me."

Victory perched upon the agent's banner, and it was with a feeling of pride that he saw his noble client depart, white and speechless with rage. "What aascal that marquis is," he muttered. "I would certainly warn Mademoiselle Marguerite, poor girl, if I were not so much afraid of him."

XIV.

M. CASIMIR, the deceased Count de Chalusse's valet, was neither better nor worse than most of his fellows. Old men tell us that there formerly existed a race of faithful servants, who considered themselves a part of the family that employed them, and who unhesitatingly embraced its interests and its ideas. At the same time their masters requited their devotion by efficacious protection and provision for the future. But such masters and such servants are nowadays only found in the old melodramas performed at the Ambigu, in "The Emigré," for instance, or in "The Last of the Châteaueux." At present servants wander from one house to another, looking on their abode as a mere inn where they may find shelter till they are disposed for another journey. And families receive them as

transient, and not unfrequently as dangerous, guests, whom it is always wise to treat with distrust. The key of the wine-cellar is not confided to these unreliable inmates; they are intrusted with the charge of little else than the children—a practice which is often productive of terrible results.

M. Casimir was no doubt honest, in the strict sense of the word. He would have scorned to rob his master of a ten-sous piece; and yet he would not have hesitated in the least to defraud him of a hundred francs, if an opportunity had presented itself. Vain and rapacious in disposition, he consoled himself by refusing to obey any one save his employer, by envying him with his whole heart, and by cursing fate for not having made him the Count de Chalusse instead of the Count de Chalusse's servant. As he received high wages, he served passably well; but he employed the best part of his energy in watching the count. He scented some great family secret in the household, and he felt angry and humiliated that this secret had not been intrusted to his discretion. And if he had discovered nothing, it was because M. de Chalusse had been caution personified, as Madame Léon had declared.

Thus it happened that when M. Casimir saw Mademoiselle Marguerite and the count searching in the garden for the fragments of a letter destroyed in a paroxysm of rage which he had personally witnessed, his natural curiosity was heightened to such a degree as to become unendurable. He would have given a month's wages, and something over, to have known the contents of that letter, the fragments of which were being so carefully collected by the count. And when he heard M. de Chalusse tell Mademoiselle Marguerite that the most important part of the letter was still lack-

ing, and saw his master relinquish his fruitless search, the worthy valet vowed that he would be more skilful or more fortunate than his master; and after diligent effort, he actually succeeded in recovering five tiny scraps of paper, which had been blown into the shrubbery.

They were covered with delicate handwriting, a lady's unquestionably; but he was utterly unable to extract the slightest meaning from them. Nevertheless, he preserved them with jealous care, and was careful not to say that he had found them. The incoherent words which he had deciphered on these scraps of paper mixed strangely in his brain, and he grew more and more anxious to learn what connection there was between this letter and the count's attack. This explains his extreme readiness to search the count's clothes when Mademoiselle Marguerite told him to look for the key of the *escritoire*. And fortune favored him, for he not only found the key, but he also discovered the torn fragments of the letter, and having crumpled them up in the palm of his hand, he contrived to slip them into his pocket. Fruitless dexterity! M. Casimir had joined these scraps to the fragments he had found himself, he had read and re-read the epistle, but it told him nothing; or, at least, the information it conveyed was so vague and incomplete that it heightened his curiosity all the more. Once he almost decided to give the letter to Mademoiselle Marguerite, but he resisted this impulse, saying to himself: "Ah, no; I'm not such a fool! It might be of use to her."

And M. Casimir had no desire to be of service to this unhappy girl, who had always treated him with kindness. He hated her, under the pretence that she was not in her proper place, that no one knew who or what she was, and that it was absurd that he—he, Casimir—

should be compelled to receive orders from her. The infamous slander which Mademoiselle Marguerite had overheard on her way home from church, "There goes the rich Count de Chalusse's mistress," was M. Casimir's work. He had sworn to be avenged on this haughty creature; and no one can say what he might have attempted, if it had not been for the intervention of the magistrate. Imperatively called to order, M. Casimir consoled himself by the thought that the magistrate had intrusted him with eight thousand francs and the charge of the establishment. Nothing could have pleased him better. First and foremost, it afforded him a magnificent opportunity to display his authority and act the master, and it also enabled him to carry out his compact with Victor Chupin, and repair to the rendezvous which M. Isidore Fortunat had appointed.

Leaving his comrades to watch the magistrate's operations, he sent M. Bourigeau to report the count's death at the district mayor's office, and then lighting a cigar he walked out of the house, and strolled leisurely up the Rue de Courcelles. The place appointed for his meeting with M. Fortunat was on the Boulevard Haussmann, almost opposite Binder's, the famous carriage builder. Although it was rather a wine-shop than a restaurant, a capital breakfast could be obtained there as M. Casimir had ascertained to his satisfaction several times before. "Has no one called for me?" he asked, as he went in.

"No one."

He consulted his watch, and evinced considerable surprise. "Not yet noon!" he exclaimed. "I'm in advance; and as that is the case, give me a glass of absinthe and a newspaper."

He was obeyed with far more alacrity than his deceased master had ever required him to show, and he forthwith plunged into the report of the doings at the Bourse, with the eagerness of a man who has an all-sufficient reason for his anxiety in a drawer at home. Having emptied one glass of absinthe, he was about to order a second, when he felt a tap on the shoulder, and on turning round he beheld M. Isidore Fortunat.

In accordance with his wont, the agent was attired in a style of severe elegance—with gloves and boots fitting him to perfection—but an unusually winning smile played upon his lips. "You see I have been waiting for you," exclaimed M. Casimir.

"I am late, it's true," replied M. Fortunat, "but we will do our best to make up for lost time; for, I trust, you will do me the honor of breakfasting with me?"

"Really, I don't know that I ought."

"Yes, yes, you must. They will give us a private room; we must have a talk."

It was certainly not for the pleasure of the thing that M. Fortunat cultivated M. Casimir's acquaintance, and entertained him at breakfast. M. Fortunat, who was a very proud man, considered this connection somewhat beneath his dignity; but at first, circumstances, and afterward interest, had required him to overcome his repugnance. It was through the Count de Chalusse that he had made M. Casimir's acquaintance. While the count was employing the agent he had frequently sent his valet to him with messages and letters. Naturally, M. Casimir had talked on these occasions, and the agent had listened to him; hence this superficial friendship. Subsequently when the marriage contemplated by the Marquis de Valorsay was in course of

preparation, M. Fortunat had profited of the opportunity to make the count's servant his spy; and it had been easy to find a pretext for continuing the acquaintance, as M. Casimir was a speculator, or rather a dabbler in stocks and shares. So, whenever he needed information, M. Fortunat invited M. Casimir to breakfast, knowing the potent influence of a good bottle of wine offered at the right moment. It is needless to say that he exercised uncommon care in the composition of the *menu* on a day like this when his future course depended, perhaps, on a word more or less.

M. Casimir's eye sparkled as he took his seat at the table opposite his entertainer. The crafty agent had chosen a little room looking out on to the boulevard. Not that it was more spacious or elegant than the others, but it was isolated, and this was a very great advantage; for every one knows how unsafe and perfidious are those so-called private rooms which are merely separated from each other by a thin partition, scarcely thicker than a sheet of paper. It was not long before M. Fortunat had reason to congratulate himself on his foresight, for the breakfast began with a dish of shrimps, and M. Casimir had not finished his twelfth, washed down by a glass of chablis, before he declared that he could see no impropriety in confiding certain things to a friend.

The events of the morning had completely turned his head; and gratified vanity and good cheer excited him to such a degree that he discoursed with unwonted volubility. With total disregard of prudence, he talked with inexcusable freedom of the Count de Chalusse, and M. de Valorsay, and especially of his enemy, Mademoiselle Marguerite. "For it is she," he exclaimed, rapping on the table with his knife—"it is she who has

taken the missing millions! How she did it, no one will ever know, for she has not an equal in craftiness; but it's she who has stolen them, I'm sure of it! I would have taken my oath to that effect before the magistrate, and I would have proved it, too, if he hadn't taken her part because she's pretty—for she is devilishly pretty."

Even if M. Fortunat had wished to put in a word or two, he could have found no opportunity. But his guest's loquacity did not displease him; it gave him an opportunity for reflection. Strange thoughts arose in his mind; and connecting M. Casimir's affirmations with the assurances of the Marquis de Valorsay, he was amazed at the coincidence. "It's very singular!" he thought. "Has this girl really stolen the money? and has the marquis discovered the fact through Madame Léon, and determined to profit by the theft? In that case, I may get my money back, after all! I must look into the matter."

A partridge and a bottle of Pomard followed the shrimps and chablis; and M. Casimir's loquacity increased, and his voice rose higher and higher. He wandered from one absurd story to another, and from slander to slander, until suddenly, and without the slightest warning, he began to speak of the mysterious letter which he considered the undoubted cause of the count's illness.

At the first word respecting this missive, M. Fortunat started violently. "Nonsense!" said he, with an incredulous air. "Why the devil should this letter have had such an influence?"

"I don't know. But it is certain—it had." And, in support of his assertion, he told M. Fortunat how the count had destroyed the letter almost without reading

it, and how he had afterward searched for the fragments, in order to find an address it had contained. "And I'm quite sure," said the valet, "that the count intended to apply to you for the address of the person who wrote the letter."

"Are you sure of that?"

"As sure as I am of drinking Pomard!" exclaimed M. Casimir, draining his glass.

Rarely had the agent experienced such emotion. He did not doubt but what this missive contained the solution of the mystery. "Were the scraps of this letter found?" he asked.

"I have them," cried the valet, triumphantly. "I have them in my pocket, and, what's more, I have the whole of them!"

This declaration made M. Fortunat turn pale with delight. "Indeed—indeed!" said he; "it must be a strange production."

His companion pursed up his lips disdainfully. "May be so, may be not," he retorted. "It's impossible to understand a word of it. The only thing certain about it is that it was written by a woman."

"Ah!"

"Yes, by a former mistress, undoubtedly. And, naturally, she asks for money for a child. Women of that class always do so. They've tried the game with me more than a dozen times, but I'm not so easily caught." And bursting with vanity, he related three or four love affairs in which, according to his own account, he must have played a most ignoble part.

If M. Fortunat's chair had been a gridiron, heated by an excellent fire, he could not have felt more uncomfortable. After pouring out bumper after bumper for his guest, he perceived that he had gone too far, and

that it would not be easy to check him. "And this letter?" he interrupted, at last.

"Well?"

"You promised to let me read it."

"That's true—that's quite true; but it would be as well to have some mocha first, would it not? What if we ordered some mocha, eh?"

Coffee was served, and when the waiter had closed the door, M. Casimir drew the letter, the scraps of which were fixed together, from his pocket, and unfolded it, saying: "Attention; I'm going to read."

This did not suit M. Fortunat's fancy. He would infinitely have preferred perusing it himself; but it is impossible to argue with an intoxicated man, and so M. Casimir with a more and more indistinct enunciation read as follows: "'Paris, October 14, 186—.' So the lady lives in Paris, as usual. After this she puts neither 'monsieur,' nor 'my friend,' nor 'dear count,' nothing at all. She begins abruptly: 'Once before, many years ago, I came to you as a suppliant. You were pitiless, and did not even deign to answer me. And yet, as I told you, I was on the verge of a terrible precipice; my brain was reeling, vertigo had seized hold of me. Deserted, I was wandering about Paris, homeless and penniless, and my child was starving!'"

M. Casimir paused to laugh. "That's like all the rest of them," he exclaimed; "that is exactly like all the rest! I've ten such letters in my drawer, even more imperative in their demands. If you'll come home with me after breakfast, I'll show them to you. We'll have a hearty laugh over them!"

"Let us finish this first."

"Of course." And he resumed: "'If I had been alone, I should not have hesitated. I was so wretched

that death seemed a refuge to me. But what was to become of my child? Should I kill him, and destroy myself afterward? I thought of doing so, but I lacked the courage. And what I implored you in pity to give me, was rightfully mine. I had only to present myself at your house and demand it. Alas! I did not know that then. I believed myself bound by a solemn oath, and you inspired me with inexpressible terror. And still I could not see my child die of starvation before my very eyes. So I abandoned myself to my fate, and I have sunk so low that I have been obliged to separate from my son. He must not know the shame to which he owes his livelihood. And he is ignorant even of my existence.’”

M. Fortunat was as motionless as if he had been turned to stone. After the information he had obtained respecting the count's past, and after the story told him by Madame Vantrasson, he could scarcely doubt. “This letter,” he thought, “can only be from Mademoiselle Hermine de Chalusse.”

However, M. Casimir resumed his reading: “‘If I apply to you again, if from the depth of infamy into which I have fallen, I again call upon you for help, it is because I am at the end of my resources—because, before I die, I must see my son's future assured. It is not a fortune that I ask for him, but sufficient to live upon, and I expect to receive it from you.’”

Once more the valet paused in his perusal of the letter to remark: “There it is again—sufficient to live upon, and I expect to receive it from you!—Excellent! Women are remarkable creatures, upon my word! But listen to the rest! ‘It is absolutely necessary that I should see you as soon as possible. Oblige me, therefore, by calling to-morrow, October 15th, at the Hôtel

de Homburg, in the Rue du Helder. You will ask for Madame Lucy Huntley, and they will conduct you to me. I shall expect you from three o'clock to six. Come. I implore you, come. It is painful to me to add that if I do not hear from you, I am resolved to demand and *obtain*—no matter what may be the consequences—the means which I have, so far, asked of you on my bended knees and with clasped hands.'”

Having finished the letter, M. Casimir laid it on the table, and poured out a glassful of brandy, which he drained at a single draught. “And that’s all,” he remarked. “No signature—not even an initial. It was a so-called respectable woman who wrote that. They never sign their notes, the hussies! for fear of compromising themselves, as I’ve reason to know.” And so saying, he laughed the idiotic laugh of a man who has been drinking immoderately. “If I had time,” he resumed, “I should make some inquiries about this Madame Lucy Huntley—a feigned name, evidently. I should like to know—— But what’s the matter with you, Monsieur Fortunat? You are as pale as death. Are you ill?”

To tell the truth, the agent did look as if he were indisposed. “Thanks,” he stammered. “I’m very well, only I just remembered that some one is waiting for me.”

“Who?”

“A client.”

“Nonsense!” rejoined the valet; “make some excuse; let him go about his business. Aren’t you rich enough? Pour us out another glass of wine; it will make you all right again.”

M. Fortunat complied, but he performed the task so awkwardly, or, rather, so skilfully, that he drew toward

him, with his sleeve, the letter which was lying beside M. Casimir's plate. "To your health," said the valet. "To yours," replied M. Fortunat. And in drawing back the arm he had extended to chink glasses with his guest, he caused the letter to fall on his knees.

M. Casimir, who had not observed this successful manœuvre, was trying to light his cigar; and while vainly consuming a large quantity of matches in the attempt, he exclaimed: "What you just said, my friend, means that you would like to desert me. That won't do, my dear fellow! You are going home with me; and I will read you some love-letters from a woman of the world. Then we will go to Mourglop's, and play a game of billiards. That's the place to enjoy one's self. You'll see Joseph, of the Commarin household, a splendid comedian."

"Very well; but first I must settle the score here."

"Yes, pay."

M. Fortunat rang for his bill. He had obtained more information than he expected; he had the letter in his pocket, and he had now only one desire, to rid himself of M. Casimir. But this was no easy task. Drunken men cling tenaciously to their friends; and M. Fortunat was asking himself what strategy he could employ, when the waiter entered, and said: "There's a very light-complexioned man here, who looks as if he were a huissier's clerk. He wishes to speak with you, gentlemen."

"Ah! it's Chupin!" exclaimed the valet. "He is a friend. Let him come in, and bring us another glass. 'The more the merrier,' as the saying goes."

What could Chupin want? M. Fortunat had no idea, but he was none the less grateful for his coming, being determined to hand this troublesome Casimir

over to his keeping. On entering the room Chupin realized the valet's condition at the first glance, and his face clouded. He bowed politely to M. Fortunat, but addressed Casimir in an extremely discontented tone. "It's three o'clock," said he, "and I've come, as we agreed, to arrange with you about the count's funeral."

These words had the effect of a cold shower-bath on M. Casimir. "Upon my word, I had forgotten—forgotten entirely, upon my word!" And the thought of his condition, and the responsibility he had accepted, coming upon him at the same time, he continued: "Good Heavens! I'm in a nice state! It is all I can do to stand. What will they think at the house? What will they say?"

M. Fortunat had drawn his clerk a little on one side. "Victor," said he, quickly and earnestly, "I must go at once. Everything has been paid for; but in case you need some money for a cab or anything of the sort, here are ten francs. If there's any you don't use, keep it for yourself. I leave this fool in your charge; take care of him."

The sight of the ten-franc piece made Chupin's face brighten a little. "Very well," he replied. "I understand the business. I served my apprenticeship as a 'guardian angel' when my grandmother kept the *Poivrière*."*

"Above all, don't let him return home in his present state."

"Have no fears, monsieur, I must talk business with him, and so I shall have him all right in a jiffy." And as M. Fortunat made his escape, Chupin beckoned to the waiter, and said:

* See "Lecoq the Detective" by Emile Gaboriau.

"Fetch me some very strong coffee, a handful of salt, and a lemon. There's nothing better for bringing a drunken man to his senses."

XV.

M. FORTUNAT left the restaurant, almost on the run, for he feared that he might be pursued and overtaken by M. Casimir. But after he had gone a couple of hundred paces, he paused, not so much to take breath, as to collect his scattered wits; and though the weather was cold, he seated himself on a bench to reflect.

Never in all his changeful life had he known such intense anxiety and torturing suspense as he had just experienced in that little room in the restaurant. He had longed for positive information and he had obtained it; but it had upset all his plans and annihilated all his hopes. Imagining that the count's heirs had been lost sight of, he had determined to find them and make a bargain with them, before they learned that they were worth their millions. But on the contrary, these heirs were close at hand, watching M. de Chalusse, and knowing their rights so well that they were ready to fight for them. "For it was certainly the count's sister who wrote the letter which I have in my pocket," he murmured. "Not wishing to receive him at her own home, she prudently appointed a meeting at a hotel. But what about this name of Huntley? Is it really hers, or is it only assumed for the occasion? Is it the name of the man who enticed her from home, or is it the name given to the son from whom she has separated herself?"

But after all what was the use of all these conjec-

tures? There was but one certain and positive thing, and this was that the money he had counted upon had escaped him; and he experienced as acute a pang as if he had lost forty thousand francs a second time. Perhaps, at that moment, he was sorry that he had severed his connection with the marquis. Still, he was not the man to despond, however desperate his plight might appear, without an attempt to better his situation. He knew how many surprising and sudden changes in fortune have been brought about by some apparently trivial action. "I must discover this sister," he said to himself—"I must ascertain her position and her plans. If she has no one to advise her, I will offer my services; and who knows——"

A cab was passing; M. Fortunat hailed it, and ordered the Jehu to drive him to the Rue du Helder, No. 43, Hôtel de Homburg.

Was it by chance or premeditation that this establishment had received the name of one of the gambling dens of Europe? Perhaps the following information may serve to answer the question. The Hôtel de Homburg was one of those flash hostelries frequented by adventurers of distinction, who are attracted to Paris by the millions that are annually squandered there. Spurious counts and questionable Russian princesses were sure to find a cordial welcome there with princely luxury, moderate prices, and—but very little confidence. Each person was called by the title which it pleased him to give on his arrival—Excellency or Prince, according to his fancy. He could also find numerous servants carefully drilled to play the part of old family retainers, and carriages upon which the most elaborate coat-of-arms could be painted at an hour's notice. Nor was there any difficulty whatever in immediately

procuring all the accessories of a life of grandeur—all that is needful to dazzle the unsuspecting, to throw dust in people's eyes, and to dupe one's chance acquaintances. All these things were provided without delay, by the month, by the day or by the hour, just as the applicant pleased. But there was no such thing as credit there. Bills were presented every evening, to those lodgers who did not pay in advance: and he who could not, or would not, settle the score, even if he were Excellency or Prince, was requested to depart at once, and his trunks were held as security.

When M. Fortunat entered the office of the hotel, a woman, with a crafty looking face, was holding a conference with an elderly gentleman, who had a black velvet skullcap on his head, and a magnifying glass in his hand. They applied their eyes to the glass in turn, and were engaged in examining some very handsome diamonds, which had no doubt been offered in lieu of money by some noble but impecunious foreigner. On hearing M. Fortunat enter, the woman looked up.

"What do you desire, monsieur?" she inquired, politely.

"I wish to see Madame Lucy Huntley."

The woman did not reply at first, but raised her eyes to the ceiling, as if she were reading there the list of all the foreigners of distinction who honored the Hôtel de Homburg by their presence at that moment. "Lucy Huntley!" she repeated. "I don't recollect that name! I don't think there's such a person in the house—Lucy Huntley! What kind of a person is she?"

For many reasons M. Fortunat could not answer. First of all, he did not know. But he was not in the least disconcerted, and he avoided the question without the slightest embarrassment, at the same time trying to

quicken the woman's faulty memory. "The person I wished to see was here on Friday, between three and six in the afternoon; and she was waiting for a visitor with an anxiety which could not possibly have escaped your notice."

This detail quickened the memory of the man with the magnifying glass—none other than the woman's husband and landlord of the hotel. "Ah! the gentleman is speaking of the lady of No. 2—you remember—the same who insisted upon having the large private room."

"To be sure," replied the wife; "where could my wits have been!" And turning to M. Fortunat: "Excuse my forgetfulness," she added. "The lady is no longer in the house; she only remained here for a few hours."

This reply did not surprise M. Fortunat—he had expected it; and yet he assumed an air of the utmost consternation. "Only a few hours!" he repeated, like a despairing echo.

"Yes, monsieur. She arrived here about eleven o'clock in the morning, with only a large valise by way of luggage, and she left that same evening at eight o'clock."

"Alas! and where was she going?"

"She didn't tell me."

You might have sworn that M. Fortunat was about to burst into tears. "Poor Lucy!" said he, in a tragical tone; "it was for me, madame, that she was waiting. But it was only this morning that I received her letter appointing a meeting here. She must have been in despair. The post can't be depended on!"

The husband and wife simultaneously shrugged their shoulders, and the expression of their faces unmistak-

ably implied: "What can we do about it? It is no business of ours. Don't trouble us."

But M. Fortunat was not the man to be dismayed by such a trifle.

"She was taken to the railway station, no doubt," he insisted.

"Really, I know nothing about it."

"You told me just now that she had a large valise, so she could not have left your hotel on foot. She must have asked for a vehicle. Who was sent to fetch it? One of your boys? If I could find the driver I should, perhaps, be able to obtain some valuable information from him."

The husband and wife exchanged a whole volume of suspicions in a single glance. M. Isidore Fortunat's appearance was incontestably respectable, but they were well aware that those strange men styled detectives are perfectly conversant with the art of dressing to perfection. So the hotelkeeper quickly decided on his course. "Your idea is an excellent one," he said to M. Fortunat. "This lady must certainly have taken a vehicle on leaving; and what is more, it must have been a vehicle belonging to the hotel. If you will follow me, we will make some inquiries on the subject."

And rising with a willingness that augured well for their success, he led the agent into the courtyard, where five or six vehicles were stationed, while the drivers lounged on a bench, chatting and smoking their pipes. "Which of you was employed by a lady yesterday evening at about eight o'clock?"

"What sort of a person was she?"

"She was a handsome woman, between thirty and forty years' old, very fair, rather stout, and dressed in black. She had a large Russia-leather travelling-bag."

"I took her," answered one of the drivers promptly.

M. Fortunat advanced toward the man with open arms, and with such eagerness that it might have been supposed he meant to embrace him. "Ah, my worthy fellow!" he exclaimed, "you can save my life!"

The driver looked exceedingly pleased. He was thinking that this gentleman would certainly requite his salvation by a magnificent gratuity. "What do you want of me?" he asked.

"Tell me where you drove this lady?"

"I took her to the Rue de Berry."

"To what number?"

"Ah, I can't tell. I've forgotten it."

But M. Fortunat no longer felt any anxiety. "Very good," said he. "You've forgotten it—that's not at all strange. But you would know the house again, wouldn't you?"

"Undoubtedly I should."

"Will you take me there?"

"Certainly, sir. This is my vehicle."

The hunter of missing heirs at once climbed inside; but it was not until the carriage had left the courtyard that the landlord returned to his office. "That man must be a detective," he remarked to his wife.

"So I fancy."

"It's strange we're not acquainted with him. He must be a new member of the force."

But M. Fortunat was quite indifferent as to what impression he had left behind him at the Hôtel de Homburg, for he never expected to set foot there again. The one essential thing was that he had obtained the information he wished for, and even a description of the lady, and he felt that he was now

really on the track. The vehicle soon reached the Rue de Berry, and drew up in front of a charming little private house. "Here we are, monsieur," said the driver, bowing at the door.

M. Fortunat sprang nimbly on to the pavement, and handed five francs to the coachman, who went off growling and swearing, for he thought the reward a contemptibly small one, coming as it did from a man whose life had been saved, according to his own confession. However, the person the Jehu anathematized certainly did not hear him. Standing motionless where he had alighted, M. Fortunat scrutinized the house in front of him with close attention. "So she lives here," he muttered. "This is the place; but I can't present myself without knowing her name. I must make some inquiries."

There was a wine-shop some fifty paces distant, and thither M. Fortunat hastened, and ordered a glass of currant syrup. As he slowly sipped the beverage, he pointed to the house in question, with an air of well-assumed indifference, and asked: "Whom does that pretty dwelling belong to?"

"To Madame Lia d'Argelès," answered the landlady.

M. Fortunat started. He well remembered that this was the name the Marquis de Valorsay had mentioned when speaking of the vile conspiracy he had planned. It was at this woman's house that the man whom Mademoiselle Marguerite loved had been disgraced! Still he managed to master his surprise, and in a light, frank tone he resumed: "What a pretty name! And what does this lady do?"

"What does she do? Why, she amuses herself."

M. Fortunat seemed astonished. "Dash it!" said

he. "She must amuse herself to good purpose to have a house like that. Is she pretty?"

"That depends on taste. She's no longer young, at any rate; but she has superb golden hair. And, oh! how white she is—as white as snow, monsieur—as white as snow! She has a fine figure as well, and a most distinguished bearing—pays cash, too, to the very last farthing."

There could no longer be any doubt. The portrait sketched by the wine-vendor fully corresponded with the description given by the hotelkeeper in the Rue de Helder. Accordingly, M. Fortunat drained his glass, and threw fifty centimes on the counter. Then, crossing the street, he boldly rang at the door of Madame d'Argelès's house. If any one had asked him what he proposed doing and saying if he succeeded in effecting an entrance, he might have replied with perfect sincerity, "I don't know." The fact is, he had but one aim, one settled purpose in his mind. He was obstinately, *furiously* resolved to derive some benefit, small or great, from this mysterious affair. As for the means of execution, he relied entirely on his audacity and *sang-froid*, convinced that they would not fail him when the decisive moment came. "First of all, I must see this lady," he said to himself. "The first words will depend solely upon my first impressions. After that, I shall be guided by circumstances."

An old serving-man, in a quiet, tasteful livery, opened the door, whereupon M. Fortunat, in a tone of authority, asked: "Madame Lia d'Argelès?"

"Madame does not receive on Friday," was the reply.

With a petulant gesture, M. Fortunat rejoined: "All the same, I must speak with her to-day. It is on a

matter of the greatest importance. Give her my card." So saying, he held out a bit of pasteboard, on which, below his name, were inscribed the words: "Liquidations. Settlements effected for insolvent parties."

"Ah! that's a different thing," said the servant. "Will monsieur take the trouble to follow me?"

M. Fortunat did take the trouble; and he was conducted into a large drawing-room where he was requested to sit down and await madame's coming. Left to himself, he began an inventory of the apartment, as a general studies the ground on which he is about to give battle. No trace remained of the unfortunate scene of the previous night, save a broken candelabrum on the chimney-piece. It was the one which Pascal Feraillieur had armed himself with, when they talked of searching him, and which he had thrown down in the courtyard, as he left the house. But this detail did not attract M. Fortunat's attention. The only thing that puzzled him was the large reflector placed above the chandelier, and it took him some time to fathom with what object it was placed there. Without precisely intimidating him, the luxurious appointments of the house aroused his astonishment. "Everything here is in princely style," he muttered, "and this shows that all the lunatics are not at Charenton yet. If Madame d'Argelès lacked bread in days gone by, she does so no longer—that's evident."

Naturally enough this reflection led him to wonder why such a rich woman should become the Marquis de Valorsay's accomplice, and lend a hand in so vile and cowardly a plot, which horrified even him—Fortunat. "For she must be an accomplice," he thought.

And he marvelled at the freak of fate which had connected the unfortunate man who had been sacrificed

with the unacknowledged daughter, and the cast-off sister, of the Count de Chalusse. A vague presentiment, the mysterious voice of instinct, warned him, moreover, that his profit in the affair would depend upon the antagonism, or alliance, of Mademoiselle Marguerite and Madame d'Argelès. But his meditations were suddenly interrupted by the sound of a discussion in an adjoining room. He stepped eagerly forward, hoping to hear something, and he did hear a man saying in a coarse voice: "What! I leave an interesting game, and lose precious time in coming to offer you my services; and you receive me like this! Zounds! madame, this will teach me not to meddle with what doesn't concern me, in future. So, good-bye, my dear lady. You'll learn some day, to your cost, the real nature of this villain of a Coralthe whom you now defend so warmly."

This name of Coralthe was also one of those which were engraven upon M. Fortunat's memory; and yet he did not notice it at the moment. His attention was so absorbed by what he had just heard that he could not fix his mind upon the object of his mission; and he only abandoned his conjectures on hearing a rustling of skirts against the panels of the door leading into the hall.

The next moment Madame Lia d'Argelès entered the room. She was arrayed in a very elegant dressing-gown of gray cashmere, with blue satin trimmings, her hair was beautifully arranged, and she had neglected none of the usual artifices of the toilette-table; still any one would have considered her to be over forty years of age. Her sad face wore an expression of melancholy resignation; and there were signs of recent tears in her swollen eyes, surrounded by bluish circles. She

glanced at her visitor, and, in anything but an encouraging tone exclaimed: "You desired to speak with me, I believe?"

M. Fortunat bowed, almost disconcerted. He had expected to meet one of those stupid, ignorant young women, who make themselves conspicuous at the afternoon promenade in the Bois de Boulogne; and he found himself in the presence of an evidently cultivated and imperious woman, who, even in her degradation, retained all her pride of race, and awed him, despite all his coolness and assurance. "I do, indeed, madame, wish to confer with you respecting some important interests," he answered.

She sank on to a chair; and, without asking her visitor to take a seat: "Explain yourself," she said, briefly.

M. Fortunat's knowledge of the importance of the game in which he had already risked so much had already restored his presence of mind. He had only needed a glance to form a true estimate of Madame d'Argelès's character; and he realized that it would require a sudden, powerful, and well-directed blow to shatter her composure. "I have the unpleasant duty of informing you of a great misfortune, madame," he began. "A person who is very dear to you, and who is nearly related to you, was a victim of a frightful accident yesterday evening and died this morning."

This gloomy preamble did not seem to produce the slightest effect on Madame d'Argelès. "Whom are you speaking of?" she coldly asked.

M. Fortunat assumed his most solemn manner as he replied: "Of your brother, madame—of the Count de Chalusse."

She sprang up, and a convulsive shudder shook her from head to foot. "Raymond is dead!" she faltered.

"Alas! yes, madame. Struck with death at the very moment he was repairing to the appointment you had given him at the Hôtel de Homburg."

This clever falsehood, which was not entirely one, would, so the agent thought, be of advantage to him, since it would prove he was acquainted with previous events. But Madame d'Argelès did not seem to notice, or even to hear the remark. She had fallen back in her arm-chair, paler than death. "How did he die?" she asked.

"From an attack of apoplexy."

"My God!" exclaimed the wretched woman, who now suspected the truth; "my God, forgive me. It was my letter that killed him!" and she wept as if her heart were breaking—this woman who had suffered and wept so much.

It is needless to say that M. Fortunat was moved with sympathy; he always evinced a respectful sympathy for the woes of others; but in the present instance, his emotion was greatly mitigated by the satisfaction he felt at having succeeded so quickly and so completely. Madame d'Argelès had confessed everything! This was indeed a victory, for it must be admitted that he had trembled lest she should deny all, and bid him leave the house. He still saw many difficulties between his pocket and the Count de Chalusse's money; but he did not despair of conquering them after such a successful beginning. And he was muttering some words of consolation, when Madame d'Argelès suddenly looked up and said: "I must see him—I will see him once more! Come, monsieur!" But a terrible memory rooted her to the spot and with a despair-

ing gesture, and in a voice quivering with anguish she exclaimed:

“No, no—I cannot even do that.”

M. Fortunat was not a little disturbed; and it was with a look of something very like consternation that he glanced at Madame d’Argelès, who had reseated herself and was now sobbing violently, with her face hidden on the arm of her chair. “What prevents her?” he thought. “Why this sudden terror now that her brother is dead? Is she unwilling to confess that she is a Chalusse? She must make up her mind to it, however, if she wishes to receive the count’s property—and she must make up her mind to it, for my sake, if not for her own.”

He remained silent, until it seemed to him that Madame d’Argelès was calmer, then: “Excuse me, madame,” he began, “for breaking in upon your very natural grief, but duty requires me to remind you of your interests.”

With the passive docility of those who are wretched, she wiped away her tears, and replied, gently: “I am listening, monsieur.”

He had had time to prepare his discourse. “First of all, madame,” he remarked, “I must tell you that I was the count’s confidential agent. In him I lose a protector. Respect alone prevents me from saying a friend. He had no secrets from me.” M. Fortunat saw so plainly that Madame d’Argelès did not understand a word of this sentimental exordium that he thought it necessary to add: “I tell you this, not so much to gain your consideration and good-will, as to explain to you how I became acquainted with these matters relating to your family—how I became aware of your existence, for instance, which no one else sus-

pected." He paused, hoping for some reply, a word, a sign, but not receiving this encouragement, he continued: "I must, first of all, call your attention to the peculiar situation of M. de Chalusse, and to the circumstances which immediately preceded and attended his departure from life. His death was so unexpected that he was unable to make any disposition of his property by will, or even to indicate his last wishes. This, madame, is fortunate for you. M. de Chalusse had certain prejudices against you, as you are aware. Poor count. He certainly had the best heart in the world, and yet hatred with him was almost barbaric in its intensity. There can be no doubt whatever, that he had determined to deprive you of your inheritance. With this intention he had already begun to convert his estates into ready money, and had he lived six months longer you would not have received a penny."

With a gesture of indifference, which was difficult to explain after the vehemence and the threatening tone of her letter, Madame d'Argelès murmured:

"Ah, well! what does it matter?"

"What does it matter?" repeated M. Fortunat. "I see, madame, that your grief prevents you from realizing the extent of the peril you have escaped. M. de Chalusse had other, and more powerful reasons even than his hatred for wishing to deprive you of your share of his property. He had sworn that he would give a princely fortune to his beloved daughter."

For the first time, Madame d'Argelès's features assumed an expression of surprise. "What, my brother had a child?"

"Yes, madame, an illegitimate daughter, Mademoiselle Marguerite, a lovely and charming girl whom I

had the pleasure of restoring to his care some years ago. She has been living with him for six months or so; and he was about to marry her, with an enormous dowry, to a nobleman bearing one of the proudest names in France, the Marquis de Valorsay."

The name shook Madame d'Argelès as if she had experienced the shock of an electric battery, and springing to her feet, with flashing eyes: "You say that my brother's daughter was to marry M. de Valorsay?" she asked.

"It was decided—the marquis adored her."

"But she—she did not love him—confess that she did not love him."

M. Fortunat did not know what to reply. The question took him completely by surprise; and feeling that his answer would have a very considerable influence upon what might follow, he hesitated.

"Will you answer me?" insisted Madame d'Argelès, imperiously. "She loved another, did she not?"

"To tell the truth, I believe she did," the agent stammered. "But I have no proof of it, madame."

"Ah! the wretch!" she exclaimed with a threatening gesture; "the traitor! the infamous scoundrel! Now I understand it all. And to think that it occurred in *my* house. But no; it was best so, I can still repair everything." And darting to the bell-rope, she pulled it violently.

A servant at once appeared. "Job," she said, "hasten after Baron Trigault—he left the house a moment ago—and bring him back. I must speak with him. If you do not overtake him, go to his club, to his house, to the houses of his friends, go to every place where there is any chance of finding him. Make haste, and do not return without him."

And as the man turned to obey, she added: "My carriage must be in the courtyard. Take it."

Meanwhile M. Fortunat's expression of countenance had undergone a marked change. "Well!" thought he, "I have just made a mess of it! M. Valorsay is unmasked; and now, may I be hung, if he ever marries Mademoiselle Marguerite. Certainly, I do not owe much to the scoundrel, for he has defrauded me of forty thousand francs, but what will he say when he discovers what I've done? He will never believe me if I tell him that it was an involuntary blunder, and Heaven only knows what revenge he will plan! A man of his disposition, knowing that he is ruined, is capable of anything! So much the worse for me. Before night I shall warn the commissary of police in my district, and I shall not go out unarmed!"

The servant went off, and Madame d'Argelès then turned to her visitor again. But she seemed literally transfigured by the storm of passion which was raging in her heart and mind; her cheeks were crimson, and an unwonted energy sparkled in her eyes. "Let us finish this business," she said, curtly; "I am expecting some one."

M. Fortunat bowed with a rather pompous, but at the same time obsequious air. "I have only a few more words to say," he declared. "M. de Chalusse having no other heir, I have come to acquaint you with your rights."

"Very good; continue, if you please."

"You have only to present yourself, and establish your identity, to be put in possession of your brother's property."

Madame d'Argelès gave the agent a look of mingled irony and distrust; and after a moment's reflection, she

replied: "I am very grateful for your interest, monsieur; but if I have any rights, it is not my intention to urge them."

It seemed to M. Fortunat as if he were suddenly falling from some immense height. "You are not in earnest," he exclaimed, "or you are ignorant of the fact that M. de Chalusse leaves perhaps twenty millions behind him."

"My course is decided on, monsieur; irrevocably decided on."

"Very well, madame; but it often happens that the court institutes inquiries for the heirs of large fortunes, and this may happen in your case."

"I should reply that I was not a member of the Chalusse family, and that would end it. Startled by the news of my brother's death, I allowed my secret to escape me. I shall know how to keep it in future."

Anger succeeded astonishment in M. Fortunat's mind. "Madame, madame, what can you be thinking of?" he cried, impetuously. "Accept—in Heaven's name—accept this inheritance; if not for yourself, for the sake of——"

In his excitement, he was about to commit a terrible blunder. He saw it in time, and checked himself.

"For the sake of whom?" asked Madame d'Argelès, in an altered voice.

"For the sake of Mademoiselle Marguerite, madame; for the sake of this poor child, who is your niece. The count never having acknowledged her as his daughter, she will be left actually without bread, while her father's millions go to enrich the state."

"That will suffice, monsieur; I will think of it. And now, enough!"

The dismissal was so imperious that M. Fortunat

bowed and went off, completely bewildered by this denouement. "She's crazy!" he said to himself. "Crazy in the fullest sense of the word. She refuses the count's millions from a silly fear of telling people that she belongs to the Chalusse family. She threatened her brother, but she would never have carried her threats into execution. And she prefers her present position to such a fortune. What lunacy!" But, although he was disappointed and angry, he did not by any means despair. "Fortunately for me," he thought, "this proud and haughty lady has a son somewhere in the world. And she'll do for him what she would not consent to do for herself. Through her, with a little patience and Victor Chupin's aid, I shall succeed in discovering this boy. He must be an intelligent youth—and we'll see if he surrenders his millions as easily as his mamma does."

XVI.

It is a terrible task to break suddenly with one's past, without even having had time for preparation; to renounce the life one has so far lived, to return to the starting point, and begin existence anew; to abandon everything—the position one has gained, the work one has become familiar with, every fondly cherished hope, and friend, and habit; to forsake the known to plunge into the unknown, to leave the certain for the uncertain, and desert light for darkness; to cast one's identity aside, assume a strange individuality, become a living lie, change name, position, face, and clothes—in one phrase, to cease to be one's self, in order to become some one else.

This is indeed, a terrible ordeal, and requires an amount of resolution and energy which few human beings possess. The boldest hesitate before such a sacrifice, and many a man has surrendered himself to justice rather than resort to this last extremity. And yet this was what Pascal Ferailleux had the courage to do, on the morrow of the shameful conspiracy that had deprived him of his good name. When his mother's exhortations and Baron Trigault's encouraging words had restored his wonted clearness of perception, the only course he felt disposed to pursue was to disappear and fly from the storm of slander and contempt; and then, in a secure hiding-place, to watch for the time and opportunity of rehabilitation and revenge.

Madame Ferailleux and her son made all needful arrangements. "I shall start out at once," said Pascal, "and before two hours have elapsed I shall have found a modest lodging, where we must conceal ourselves for the present. I know a locality that will suit us, and where no one will certainly ever think of looking for us."

"And I," asked Madame Ferailleux, "what shall I do in the meantime?"

"You, mother; you must, at once, sell all that we possess here—everything—even my books. You will only keep such of our linen and clothes as you can pack in three or four trunks. We are undoubtedly watched; and so it is of the utmost importance that every one should imagine I have left Paris, and that you are going to join me."

"And when everything is sold, and my trunks are ready?"

"Then, mother, you must send some one for a cab, and order the driver to take you to the Western Rail-

way Station, where you will have the trunks removed from the cab and placed in the baggage-room, as if you did not intend to leave Paris till the next day."

"Very good, I will do so; even if any one is watching us, he won't be likely to suspect this ruse. But afterward?"

"Afterward, mother, you must go to the waiting-room upstairs, and you will find me there. I will then take you to the rooms I shall have rented, and tomorrow we'll send a messenger with the receipt the railway people will give you, to fetch our luggage for us."

Madame Ferailleur approved of this plan, deeming herself fortunate in this great calamity that despair had not destroyed her son's energy and resources of mind. "Shall we retain our name, Pascal?"

"Oh, no. That would be an unpardonable imprudence."

"What name shall we take, then? I must know, for they may ask me at the station."

He reflected for a moment and then said: "We'll take your maiden name, mother. It will bring us good luck. Our new lodgings shall be hired in the name of the Widow Mauméjan."

They talked for some time longer, anxious to take every precaution that prudence could suggest. And when they were convinced that they had forgotten nothing, Madame Ferailleur suggested that Pascal should start off. But before doing so he had a sacred duty to perform. "I must warn Marguerite," he muttered. And seating himself at his desk, he wrote his beloved a concise and exact account of the events which had taken place. He told her of the course he intended to pursue; and promised her that she should know his

new abode as soon as he knew it himself. In conclusion, he entreated her to grant him an interview, in which he could give her the full particulars of the affair and acquaint her with his hopes. As for exculpating himself, even by so much as a single word—as for explaining the snare he had been the victim of, the idea never once occurred to him. He was worthy of Mademoiselle Marguerite; he knew that not a doubt would disturb the perfect faith she had in his honor.

Leaning over her son's shoulder, Madame Ferailleux read what he had written. "Do you intend to trust this letter to the post?" she inquired. "Are you sure, perfectly sure, that it will reach Mademoiselle Marguerite, and not some one else who might use it against you?"

Pascal shook his head. "I know how to insure its safe receipt," he replied. "Some time ago, Marguerite told me that if ever any great peril threatened us, I might call for the housekeeper at the Chalusse mansion and intrust my message to her. The danger is sufficiently great to justify such a course in the present instance. So I shall pass down the Rue de Courcelles, ask to see Madame Léon, and give her this letter. Have no fear, my dear mother."

As he spoke, he began to pack all the legal documents which had been confided to him into a large box, which was to be carried to one of his former friends, who would distribute the papers among the people they belonged to. He next made a small bundle of the few important private papers and valuables he possessed; and then, ready for the sacrifice, he took a last survey of the pleasant home where success had smiled so favorably upon his efforts, where he had been so happy, and where he had cherished such bright dreams of the

future. Overcome by a flood of recollections, the tears sprang to his eyes. He embraced his mother, and fled precipitately from the house.

"Poor child!" murmured Madame Ferailleur; "poor Pascal!"

Was she not also to be pitied? This was the second time within twenty years that a thunderbolt had fallen on her in the full sunlight of happiness. And yet now, as on the day following her husband's death, she found in her heart the robust energy and heroic maternal constancy which enable one to rise above every misfortune. It was in a firm voice that she ordered her servant to go in search of the nearest furniture dealer, no matter which, provided he would pay cash. And when the man arrived she showed him through the rooms with stoical calmness. God alone knew how intensely she was suffering. And yet while she was waiting for the dealer, each piece of furniture had acquired an extraordinary value in her eyes. It seemed to her as if each object were a part of herself, and when the man turned and twisted a chair or a table she almost considered it a personal affront.

The rich, who are accustomed from birth to the luxury that surrounds them, are ignorant of the terrible sufferings which attend such cases as these. The persons who do suffer are those of the middle classes, not the *parvenus*, but those who bid fair to become *parvenus* when misfortune overtook them. Their hearts bleed when inexorable necessity deprives them of all the little comforts with which they had gradually surrounded themselves, for there is not an object that does not recall a long ungratified desire, and the almost infantile joy of possession. What happiness they felt on the day when they purchased that large arm-chair! How

many times they had gone to admire those velvet curtains in the shop windows before buying them! Those carpets represented months of self-denial. And that pretty clock—ah! they had fancied it would only herald the flight of prosperous and pleasant hours. And all these things the dealer handles, and shakes, and jeers at, and depreciates. He will scarcely condescend to purchase. Who would care to buy such trash? He knows that the owner is in need of money, and he profits by this knowledge. It is his business. “How much did this cost you?” he asks, as he inspects one piece of furniture after another.

“So much.”

“Well, you must have been terribly cheated.”

You know very well that if there is a cheat in the world, it is this same man; but what can you say? Any other dealer you might send for would act in the same way. Now, Madame Ferailleux’s furniture had cost some ten thousand francs; and, although it was no longer new, it was worth at least a third of that sum. But she obtained only seven hundred and sixty francs for it. It is true, however, that she was in haste, and that she was paid cash.

Nine o’clock was striking when her trunks were at last piled on a cab, and she called out to the driver: “Take me to the Place du Havre—to the railway station.” Once before, when defrauded by a scoundrel, she had been obliged to part with all her household treasures. Once before she had left her home, taking merely the wreck of her fortune with her. But what a difference between then and now!

Then, the esteem and sympathy of all who knew her was hers, and the admiring praise she received divested the sacrifice of much of its bitterness, and increased

her courage two-fold. Now, she was flying secretly, and alone, under an assumed name, trembling at the thought of pursuit or recognition—flying as a criminal flies at thought of his crime, and fear of punishment. She had far less suffered on the day, when, with her son upon her knees, she journeyed to the cemetery, following all that was mortal of the man who had been her only thought, her love, her pride, her happiness, and hope. Though crushed by the sense of her irreparable loss, she had not rebelled against the hand that struck her; but now it was human wickedness that assailed her through her son, and her suffering was like that of the innocent man who perishes for want of power to prove his innocence. Her husband's death had not caused her such bitter tears as her son's dishonor. She who was so proud, and who had such good reason to be proud, she could note the glances of scorn she was favored with as she left her home. She heard the insulting remarks made by some of her neighbors, who, like so many folks, found their chief delight in other people's misfortunes.

"Crocodile tears," some had exclaimed. "She is going to meet her son; and with what he has stolen they will live like princes in America." Rumor, which enlarges and misrepresents everything, had, indeed, absurdly exaggerated the affair at Madame d'Argelès's house. It was reported in the Rue d'Ulm that Pascal had spent every night at the gaming table for more than five years; and that, being an incomparable trickster, he had stolen millions.

Meanwhile, Madame Ferailleux was approaching the station. The cab horse soon slackened its pace to climb the acclivity of the Rue d'Amsterdam; and shortly afterward the vehicle drew up in the courtyard of the

railway station. Faithfully observing the directions which had been given her, the worthy woman had her trunks taken to the baggage-room, declaring that she should not leave Paris until the next day, whereupon she received a receipt from the man in charge of the room. She was oppressed by vague apprehensions, and looked closely at every one who passed her; fearing the presence of spies, and knowing full well that the most profound secrecy could alone insure the success of Pascal's plans. However, she did not see a single suspicious looking person. Some Englishmen—those strange travellers, who are at the same time so foolishly prodigal and so ridiculously miserly—were making a great hue and cry over the four sous gratuity claimed by a poor commissionaire; but these were the only persons in sight.

Partially reassured, Madame Ferailleux hastily ascended the staircase, and entered the large waiting-room. It was here that Pascal had promised to meet her; but, though she looked round on all sides, she did not perceive him. Still, this delay did not alarm her much; nor was it at all strange, since Pascal had scarcely known what he would have to do when he left the house. She seated herself on a bench, as far back in the shade as possible and gazed sadly at the ever-changing throng, when all of a sudden she was startled by a man, who abruptly paused in front of her. This man proved to be Pascal. But his hair had been closely cut, and he had shaved off his beard. And thus shorn, with his smooth face, and with a brown silk neckerchief in lieu of the white muslin tie he usually wore, he was so greatly changed that for an instant his own mother did not recognize him. "Well?" asked Madame Ferailleux, as she realized his identity.

"I have succeeded. We have secured such rooms as I wished for."

"Where?"

"Ah!—a long way off, my poor mother—many a league from those we have known and loved—in a thinly populated part of the suburbs, on the Route de la Révolte, just outside the fortifications, and almost at the point where it intersects the Asnières road. You will not be very comfortable there, but you will have the pleasure of a little garden."

She rose, summoning all her energy. "What does it matter where or what our abode is?" she interrupted, with forced gayety. "I am confident that we shall not remain there long."

But it seemed as if her son did not share her hopes, for he remained silent and dejected; and as his mother observed him closely, she fancied by the expression of his eyes, that some new anxiety had been added to all his other troubles.

"What is the matter?" she inquired, unable to master her alarm—"what has happened?"

"Ah! a great misfortune!"

"My God! still another?"

"I have been to the Rue de Courcelles; and I have spoken to Madame Léon."

"What did she say?"

"The Count de Chalusse died this morning."

Madame Ferailleur drew a long breath, as if greatly relieved. She was certainly expecting to hear something very different, and she did not understand why this death should be a great misfortune to them personally. One point, however, she did realize, that it was imprudent, and even dangerous, to carry on this conversation in a hall where a hundred persons were

passing and repassing every minute. So she took her son's arm, and led him away, saying: "Come, let us go."

Pascal had kept the cab which he had been using during the afternoon; and having installed his mother inside, he got in himself, and gave his new address to the driver. "Now tell me all," said Madame Feraille.

Poor Pascal was in that state of mind in which it costs one actual suffering to talk; but he wished to mitigate his mother's anxiety as much as possible; and moreover, he did not like her to suppose him wanting in endurance. So, with a powerful effort, he shook off the lethargy that was creeping over him, and in a voice loud enough to be heard above the noise of the carriage wheels, he began: "This is what I have done, mother, since I left you. I remembered that some time ago, while I was appraising some property, I had seen three or four houses on the Route de la Révolte, admirably suited to our present wants. Naturally I went there first. A suite of rooms was vacant in one of these houses. I have taken it; and in order that nothing may interfere with the liberty of my movements, I have paid six months' rent in advance. Here is the receipt, drawn up in the name we shall henceforth bear." So saying, he showed his mother a document in which the landlord declared that he had received from M. Mauméjan the sum of three hundred and fifty francs for two quarters' rent, etc. "My bargain concluded," he resumed, "I returned into Paris, and entered the first furniture shop I saw. I meant to hire the necessary things to furnish our little home, but the dealer made all sorts of objections. He trembled for his furniture, he wanted a sum of money to be

deposited as security, or the guarantee of three responsible business men. Seeing this, and knowing that I had no time to lose, I preferred to purchase such articles as were absolutely necessary. One of the conditions of the purchase was that everything should be in the house and in its place by eleven o'clock to-night. As I stipulated in writing that the dealer should forfeit three hundred francs in case he failed to fulfil his agreement, I can rely upon his punctuality; I confided the key of our lodgings to him, and he must now be there waiting for us."

So, before thinking of his love, and Mademoiselle Marguerite, Pascal had taken the necessary measures for the execution of his plan to regain his lost honor. Madame Ferailleux had scarcely supposed him capable of so much courage and firmness, and she rewarded him with a warm pressure of the hand. Then, as he was silent: "When did you see Madame Léon, then?" she asked.

"When all the household arrangements were completed, mother. On leaving the furniture-shop, I found that I had still an hour and a quarter before me. I could defer no longer, and at the risk of obliging you to wait for me, I hastened to the Rue de Courcelles."

It was evident that Pascal felt extreme embarrassment in speaking of Mademoiselle Marguerite. There is an instinctive delicacy and dislike of publicity in all deep passion, and true and chaste love is ever averse to laying aside the veil with which it conceals itself from the inquisitive. Madame Ferailleux understood this feeling; but she was a mother, and as such, jealous of her son's tenderness, and anxious for particulars concerning this rival who had suddenly usurped her place in the heart where she had long reigned supreme.

She was also a woman—that is to say, distrustful and suspicious in reference to all other women. So, without taking pity on Pascal's embarrassment, she urged him to continue.

"I gave the driver five francs on condition that he would hurry his horses," he resumed, "and we were rattling along at a rapid rate, when, suddenly, near the Hôtel de Chalusse, I noticed a change in the motion of the vehicle. I looked out and saw that we were driving over a thick layer of straw which had been spread across the street. I can scarcely describe my feelings on seeing this. A cold perspiration came over me—I fancied I saw Marguerite in agony, dying—far from me, and calling me in vain. Without waiting for the vehicle to stop, I sprang to the ground, and was obliged to exercise all my self-control to prevent myself from rushing into the concierge's lodge, and wildly asking: 'Who is dying here?' But an unforeseen difficulty presented itself. It was evident that I ought not to go in person to inquire for Madame Léon. Whom could I send? There were no commissionaires at the street corners, and nothing would have induced me to confide the message to any of the lads in the neighboring wine-shops. Fortunately, my driver—the same who is driving us now—is an obliging fellow, and I intrusted him with the commission, while I stood guard over his horses. Ten minutes later, Madame Léon left the house and came to meet me. I knew her at once, for I had seen her a hundred times with Marguerite when they lived near the Luxembourg; and having seen me pass and repass so often, she recognized me in spite of my changed appearance. Her first words, 'M. de Chalusse is dead,' relieved my heart of a terrible weight. I could breathe again. But she was in such

haste that she could not stop to tell me any particulars. Still I gave her my letter, and she promised me a prompt reply from Marguerite. Everybody will be up and moving about the house to-night, and she said she could easily make her escape for a few moments. So, at half-past twelve to-night she will be at the little garden gate, and if I am promptly at hand, I shall have a reply from Marguerite."

Madame Ferailleux seemed to be expecting something more, and as Pascal remained silent, she remarked: "You spoke of a great misfortune. In what does it consist? I do not perceive it."

With an almost threatening gesture, and in a gloomy voice, he answered: "The misfortune is this: if it had not been for this abominable conspiracy, which has dishonored me, Marguerite would have been my wife before a month had elapsed, for now she is free, absolutely free to obey the dictates of her own will and heart."

"Then why do you complain?"

"Oh, mother! don't you understand? How can I marry her? Would it be right for me to think of offering her a dishonored name? It seems to me that I should be guilty of a most contemptible act—of something even worse than a crime—if I dared speak to her of my love and our future before I have crushed the villains who have ruined me."

Regret, anger, and the consciousness of his present powerlessness drew from him tears which fell upon Madame Ferailleux's heart like molten lead; but she succeeded in concealing her agony. "All the more reason," she answered, almost coldly, "why you should not lose a second, but devote all your energy and intelligence to the work of justification."

"Oh, I shall have my revenge, never fear. But in the meantime, what is to become of *her*? Think, mother, she is alone in the world, without a single friend. It is enough to drive one mad!"

"She loves you, you tell me. What have you to fear? Now she will be freed from the persecutions of the suitor they intended to force upon her, whom she has spoken to you about—the Marquis de Valorsay, is it not?"

This name sent Pascal's blood to his brain. "Ah, the scoundrel!" he exclaimed. "If there was a God in heaven——"

"Wretched boy!" interrupted Madame Ferailleux; "you blaspheme when Providence has already interposed on your behalf. And who suffers most at this moment, do you think?—you, strong in your innocence, or the marquis, who realizes that he has committed an infamous crime in vain?"

The sudden stopping of the cab put an end to their conversation. Leaving the Route d'Asnières, the driver had turned into the Route de la Révolte, and had drawn up in front of an unpretentious two-storied house which stood entirely alone. "We have arrived, mother," said Pascal.

A man, who was standing on the threshold, stepped forward to open the cab door. It was the furniture-dealer. "Here you are at last, M. Mauméjan," said he. "Come in, and you'll see that I've strictly fulfilled the conditions of our contract." His words proved true. He was paid the sum stipulated, and went away satisfied.

"Now, my dear mother," said Pascal, "allow me to do the honors of the poor abode I have selected."

He had taken only the ground floor of this humble

dwelling. The story above, which had an independent entrance and staircase, was occupied by the quiet family of the owner. Although the space was small, the architect had made the most of it. He had divided it into four small rooms, separated by a corridor; and the kitchen looked out upon a little garden about four times as large as an ordinary sheet. The furniture which Pascal had purchased was more than plain; but it was well suited to this humble abode. It had just been brought in, but any one would have supposed it had been in its place for a couple of years.

"We shall be very comfortable here," declared Madame Feraille. "Yes, very comfortable. By tomorrow evening you won't recognize the place. I have saved a few trifles from the wreck—some curtains, a couple of lamps, a clock—you'll see. It's wonderful how much four trunks can be made to hold."

When his mother set him such a noble example Pascal would have blushed to allow himself to be outdone. He very quietly explained the reasons which had influenced him in choosing these rooms, the principal one being that there was no concierge, and he was therefore assured absolute liberty in his movements, as well as entire immunity from indiscreet gossip. "Certainly, my dear mother," he added, "it is a lonely and unattractive neighborhood; but you will find all the necessities of life near at hand. The owner of the house lives on the floor above. I have talked with the wife—they seem to be honest, quiet people—and she will pilot you about. I inquired for some one to do the heavy work, and she mentioned a poor woman named Vantrasson, who lives in the neighborhood, and who is anxious to obtain employment. They were to inform her this evening, and you will see her to-mor-

row. And above all, don't forget that you are henceforth Madame Mauméjan."

Occupied with these arrangements for the future, he was still talking, when Madame Ferailleur, drawing out her watch, gently remarked: "And your appointment? You forget that the cab is waiting at the door."

It was true; he had forgotten it. He caught up his hat, hastily embraced his mother, and sprang into the vehicle. The horses were almost exhausted, but the driver was so willing that he found a means of making them trot as far as the Rue de Courcelles. However, on arriving there, he declared that his animals and himself could endure no more, and after receiving the amount due to him, he departed.

The air was chilly, the night dark, and the street deserted. The gloomy silence was only disturbed at long intervals by the opening or shutting of a door, or by the distant tread of some belated pedestrian. Having at least twenty minutes to wait, Pascal sat down on the curbstone opposite the Hôtel de Chalusse, and fixed his eyes upon the building as if he were striving to penetrate the massive walls, and see what was passing within. Only one window—that of the room where the dead man was lying—was lighted up, and he could vaguely distinguish the motionless form of a woman standing with her forehead pressed against the pane of glass. A prey to the indescribable agony which seizes a man when he feels that his life is at stake—that his future is about to be irrevocably decided—Pascal counted the seconds as they passed by. He found it impossible to reflect, to deliberate, to decide on any plan of action. He forgot the tortures he had endured during the last twenty-four hours; Coralth, Valorsay, Madame d'Argelès, the baron, no longer existed for

him. He forgot his loss of honor and position, and the disgrace attached to his name. The past was annihilated, as it were, and he could think of no future beyond the next few moments. His physical condition undoubtedly contributed to his mental weakness. He had taken no food that day, and he was faint from want of nourishment. He had come without an overcoat, moreover, and the cold night air chilled him to the bone. There was a strange ringing in his ears, and a mist swam before his eyes. At last the bell at the Beaujon Hospital tolled the appointed hour, and roused him from his lethargy. He seemed to hear a voice crying to him in the darkness, "Up! the hour has come!"

Trembling, and with tottering limbs, he dragged himself to the little gate opening into the gardens of the Chalusse mansion. Soon it softly opened, and Madame Léon appeared. Ah! it was not she that Pascal had hoped to see. Unfortunate man! He had been listening to that mysterious echo of our own desires which we so often mistake for a presentiment; and it had whispered in his heart: "Marguerite herself will come!"

With the candor of wretchedness, he could not refrain from telling Madame Léon the hope he had entertained. But, on hearing him, the housekeeper recoiled with a gesture of outraged propriety, and reproachfully exclaimed: "What are you thinking of, monsieur? What! could you suppose that Mademoiselle Marguerite would abandon her place by her dead father's bedside to come to a rendezvous? Ah! you should think better of her than that, the dear child!"

He sighed deeply, and in a scarcely audible voice, he asked: "Hasn't she even sent me a reply?"

"Yes, monsieur, she has; and although it is a great indiscretion on my part, I bring you the letter. Here it is. Now, good-evening. I must go at once. What would become of me if the servants discovered my absence, and found that I had gone out alone——"

She was hurrying away, but Pascal detained her. "Pray wait until I see what she has written," he said, imploringly. "I shall perhaps be obliged to send her some message in reply."

Madame Léon obeyed, though with rather bad grace, and not without several times repeating: "Make haste!"—while Pascal ran to a street lamp near by. It was not a letter that Marguerite had sent him, but a short note, written on a scrap of crumpled paper, folded, and not sealed. It was written in pencil; and the handwriting was irregular and indistinct. Still, by the flickering light of the gas, Pascal deciphered the word "Monsieur." It made him shudder. "Monsieur!" What did this mean? In writing to him of recent times, Marguerite had always said, "My dear Pascal," or, "My friend."

Nevertheless, he continued: "I have not had the courage to resist the entreaties made to me by the Count de Chalusse, my father, in his last agony. I have solemnly pledged myself to become the wife of the Marquis de Valorsay.

"One cannot break a promise made to the dying. I shall keep mine, even though my heart break. I shall do my duty. God will give me strength and courage. Forget her whom you loved. She is now the betrothed of another, and honor commands her to forget your very name. Once more, and for the last time, farewell! If you love me, you will not try to see me again. It would only add to my misery.

"Think as though she were dead—she who signs herself—MARGUERITE."

The commonplace wording of this letter, and the mistakes in spelling that marred it, entirely escaped Pascal's notice. He only understood one thing, that Marguerite was lost to him, and that she was on the point of becoming the wife of the vile scoundrel who had planned the snare which had ruined him at the Hôtel d'Argelès. Breathless, despairing, and half crazed with rage, he sprang toward Madame Léon. "Marguerite, where is she?" he demanded, in a hoarse, unnatural voice; "I must see her!"

"Oh! monsieur, what do you ask? Is it possible? Allow me to explain to you——" But the housekeeper was unable to finish her sentence, for Pascal had caught her by the hands, and holding them in a vicelike grip, he repeated: "I must see Marguerite, and speak to her. I must tell her that she has been deceived; I will unmask the scoundrel who——"

The frightened housekeeper struggled with all her might, trying her best to reach the little gate which was standing open. "You hurt me!" she cried. "Are you mad? Let me go or I shall call for help?" And twice indeed she shouted in a loud voice, "Help! murder!"

But her cries were lost in the stillness of the night. If any one heard them, no one came; still they recalled Pascal to a sense of the situation, and he was ashamed of his violence. He released Madame Léon, and his manner suddenly became as humble as it had been threatening. "Excuse me," he said, entreatingly. "I am suffering so much that I don't know what I'm doing. I beseech you to take me to Mademoiselle Marguerite, or else run and beg her to come here. I ask but a moment."

Madame Léon pretended to be listening attentively; but, in reality, she was quietly manœuvring to gain the garden gate. Soon she succeeded in doing so, whereupon, with marvellous strength and agility, she pushed Pascal away, and sprang inside the garden, closing the gate after her, and saying as she did so, "Be-gone, you scoundrel!"

This was the final blow; and for more than a minute Pascal stood motionless in front of the gate, stupefied with mingled rage and sorrow. His condition was not unlike that of a man who, after falling to the bottom of a precipice, is dragging himself up, all mangled and bleeding, swearing that he will yet save himself, when suddenly a heavy stone which he had loosened in his descent, falls forward and crushes him. All that he had so far endured was nothing in comparison with the thought that Valorsay would wed Marguerite. Was such a thing possible? Would God permit such a monstrous iniquity? "No, that shall never be," he muttered. "I will murder the scoundrel rather; and afterward justice may do whatever it likes with me."

He experienced that implacable, merciless thirsting for vengeance which does not even recoil before the commission of a crime to secure satisfaction, and this longing inflamed him with such energy that, although he had been so utterly exhausted a few moments before—he was not half an hour in making his way back to his new home. His mother, who was waiting for him with an anxious heart, was surprised by the flush on his cheeks, and the light glittering in his eyes. "Ah, you bring good news," she exclaimed.

His only answer was to hand her the letter which Madame Léon had given him, saying as he did so, "Read."

Madame Ferailleux's eyes fell upon the words: "Once more, and for the last time, farewell!" She understood everything, turned very pale, and in a trembling voice exclaimed: "Don't grieve, my son; the girl did not love you."

"Oh, mother! if you knew——"

But she checked him with a gesture, and lifting her head proudly, she said: "I know what it is to love, Pascal—it is to have perfect faith. If the whole world had accused your father of a crime, would a single doubt of his innocence have ever entered my mind? This girl has doubted you. They have told her that you cheated at cards—and she has believed it. You have failed to see that this oath at the bedside of the dying count is only an excuse."

It was true; the thought had not occurred to Pascal. "My God!" he cried in agony; "are you the only one who believes in my innocence?"

"Without proofs—yes. It must be your task to obtain these proofs."

"And I shall obtain them," he rejoined, in a tone of determination. "I am strong now that I have Marguerite's life to defend—for they have deceived her, mother, or she would never have given me up. Oh! don't shake your head. I love her, and so I trust her."

XVII.

M. ISIDORE FORTUNAT was not the man to go to sleep over a plan when it was once formed. Whenever he said to himself, "I'll do this, or that," he did it as soon as possible—that very evening, rather than the next day. Having sworn that he would find out Madame

d'Argelès's son, the heir to the Count de Chalusse's millions, it did not take him long to decide which of his agents he would select to assist him in this difficult task. Thus his first care, on returning home, was to ask his bookkeeper for Victor Chupin's address.

"He lives in the Faubourg Saint-Denis," replied the bookkeeper, "at No. —."

"Very well," muttered M. Fortunat; "I'll go there as soon as I have eaten my dinner." And, indeed, as soon as he had swallowed his coffee, he requested Madame Dodelin to bring him his overcoat, and half an hour later he reached the door of the house where his clerk resided.

The house was one of those huge, ungainly structures, large enough to shelter the population of a small village, with three or four courtyards, as many staircases as there are letters in the alphabet, and a concierge who seldom remembers the names of the tenants except on quarter-days when he goes to collect the rent, and at New Year, when he expects a gratuity. But, by one of those lucky chances made expressly for M. Fortunat, the porter did recollect Chupin, knew him and was kindly disposed toward him, and so he told the visitor exactly how and where to find him. It was very simple. He had only to cross the first courtyard, take staircase D, on the left-hand side, ascend to the sixth floor, go straight ahead, etc., etc.

Thanks to this unusual civility, M. Fortunat did not lose his way more than five times before reaching the door upon which was fastened a bit of pasteboard bearing Victor Chupin's name. Noticing that a bell-rope hung beside the door, M. Fortunat pulled it, whereupon there was a tinkling, and a voice called out, "Come in!" He complied, and found himself in a

small and cheaply furnished room, which was, however, radiant with the cleanliness which is in itself a luxury. The waxed floor shone like a mirror; the furniture was brilliantly polished, and the counterpane and curtains of the bed were as white as snow. What first attracted the agent's attention was the number of superfluous articles scattered about the apartment—some plaster statuettes on either side of a gilt clock, an *étagère* crowded with knickknacks, and five or six passable engravings. When he entered, Victor Chupin was sitting, in his shirt-sleeves, at a little table, where, by the light of a small lamp, and with a zeal that brought a flush to his cheeks, he was copying, in a very fair hand a page from a French dictionary. Near the bed, in the shade, sat a poorly but neatly clad woman about forty years of age, who was knitting industriously with some long wooden needles.

"M. Victor Chupin?" inquired M. Fortunat.

The sound of his voice made the young man spring to his feet. He quickly lifted the shade from his lamp, and, without attempting to conceal his astonishment, exclaimed: "M'sieur Fortunat!—at this hour! Where's the fire?" Then, in a grave manner that contrasted strangely with his accustomed levity: "Mother," said he, "this is one of my patrons, M'sieur Fortunat—you know—the gentleman whom I collect for."

The knitter rose, bowed respectfully, and said: "I hope, sir, that you are pleased with my son, and that he's honest."

"Certainly, madame," replied the agent; "certainly. Victor is one of my best and most reliable clerks."

"Then I'm content," said the woman, reseating herself.

Chupin also seemed delighted. "This is my good

mother, sir," said he. "She's almost blind now; but, in less than six months she will be able to stand at her window and see a pin in the middle of the street, so the physician who is treating her eyes promised me; then we shall be all right again. But take a seat, sir. May we venture to offer you anything?"

Although his clerk had more than once alluded to his responsibilities, M. Fortunat was amazed. He marvelled at the perfume of honesty which exhaled from these poor people, at the dignity of this humble woman, and at the protecting and respectful affection evinced by her son—a young man, whose usual tone of voice and general behavior had seemed to indicate that he was decidedly a scapegrace. "Thanks, Victor," he replied, "I won't take any refreshment. I've just left the dinner-table. I've come to give you my instructions respecting a very important and very urgent matter."

Chupin at once understood that his employer wished for a private interview. Accordingly, he took up the lamp, opened a door, and, in the pompous tone of a rich banker who is inviting some important personage to enter his private room, he said: "Will you be kind enough to step into my chamber, m'sieur?"

The room which Chupin so emphatically denominated his "chamber" was a tiny nook, extraordinarily clean, it is true, but scantily furnished with a small iron bedstead, a trunk, and a chair. He offered the chair to his visitor, placed the lamp on the trunk, and seated himself on the bed, saying as he did so: "This is scarcely on so grand a scale as your establishment, m'sieur; but I am going to ask the landlord to gild the window of my snuff-box."

M. Fortunat was positively touched. He held out his

hand to his clerk and exclaimed: "You're a worthy fellow, Chupin."

"Nonsense, m'sieur, one does what one can; but, zounds! how hard it is to make money honestly! If my good mother could only see, she would help me famously, for there is no one like her for work! But you see one can't become a millionaire by knitting!"

"Doesn't your father live with you?"

Chupin's eyes gleamed angrily. "Ah! don't speak of that man to me, m'sieur!" he exclaimed, "or I shall hurt somebody." And then, as if he felt it necessary to explain and excuse his vindictive exclamation, he added: "My father, Polyte Chupin, is a good-for-nothing scamp. And yet he's had his opportunities. First, he was fortunate enough to find a wife like my mother, who is honesty itself—so much so that she was called Toinon the Virtuous when she was young. She idolized him, and nearly killed herself by working to earn money for him. And yet he abused her so much, and made her weep so much, that she has become blind. But that's not all. One morning there came to him—I don't know whence or how—enough money for him to have lived like a gentleman. I believe it was a munificent reward for some service he had rendered a great nobleman at the time when my grandmother, who is now dead, kept a dramshop called the Poivrière. Any other man would have treasured that money, but not he. What he did was to carouse day and night, and all the while my poor mother was working her fingers to the bone to earn food for me. She never saw a penny of all his money; and, indeed, once when she asked him to pay the rent, he beat her so cruelly that she was laid up in bed for a week.

However, monsieur, you can very readily understand that when a man leads that kind of life, he speedily comes to the end of his banking account. So my father was soon without a penny in his purse, and then he was obliged to work in order to get something to eat, and this didn't suit him at all. But when he didn't know where to find a crust he remembered us; he sought us out, and found us. Once I lent him a hundred sous; the next day he came for forty more, and the next for three francs; then for five francs again. And so it was every day: 'Give me this, or give me that!' At last I said, 'Enough of this, the bank's closed!' Then, what do you think he did? He watched the house until he saw me go out; then he came in with a second-hand furniture-dealer, and tried to sell everything, pretending that he was the master. And my poor, dear mother would have allowed him to do it. Fortunately, I happened to come in again. Let him sell my furniture? Not I. I would sooner have been chopped in pieces! I went and complained to the commissary of police, who made my father leave the house, and since then we've lived in peace."

Certainly this was more than sufficient to explain and excuse Victor Chupin's indignation. And yet he had prudently withheld the most serious and important cause of his dislike. What he refrained from telling was that years before, when he was still a mere child, without will or discernment, his father had taken him from his mother, and had started him down that terrible descent, which inevitably leads one to prison or the gallows, unless there be an almost miraculous interposition on one's behalf. This miracle had occurred in Chupin's case; but he did not boast of it.

"Come, come!" said M. Fortunat, "don't worry

too much about it. A father's a father after all, and yours will undoubtedly reform by and by."

He said this as he would have said anything else, out of politeness and for the sake of testifying a friendly interest; but he really cared no more for this information concerning the Chupin family than the grand Turk. His first emotion had quickly vanished; and he was beginning to find these confidential disclosures rather wearisome. "Let us get back to business," he remarked; "that is to say, to Casimir. What did you do with the fool after my departure?"

"First, monsieur, I sobered him; which was no easy task. The greedy idiot had converted himself into a wine-cask! At last, however, when he could talk as well as you and I, and walk straight, I took him back to the Hôtel de Chalusse."

"That was right. But didn't you have some business to transact with him?"

"That's been arranged, monsieur; the agreement has been signed. The count will have the best of funerals—the finest hearse out, with six horses, twenty-four mourning coaches—a grand display, in fact. It will be worth seeing."

M. Fortunat smiled graciously. "That ought to bring you a handsome commission," he said, benignly.

Employed by the job, Chupin was the master of his own time, free to utilize his intelligence and industry as he chose, but M. Fortunat did not like his subordinates to make any money except through him. Hence his approval, in the present instance, was so remarkable that it awakened Chupin's suspicions. "I shall make a few sous, probably," he modestly replied, "a trifle to aid my good mother in keeping the pot boiling."

"So much the better, my boy," said M. Fortunat.

"I like to see money gained by those who make a good use of it. And to prove this, I'm about to employ you in an affair which will pay you handsomely if you prosecute it successfully."

Chupin's eyes brightened at first but grew dark a moment afterward, for delight had been quickly followed by a feeling of distrust. He thought it exceedingly strange that an employer should take the trouble to climb to a sixth floor merely for the purpose of conferring a favor on his clerk. There must be something behind all this; and so it behove him to keep his eyes open. However, he knew how to conceal his real feelings; and it was with a joyous air that he exclaimed: "Eh! What? Money? Now? What must I do to earn it?"

"Oh! a mere trifle," replied the agent; "almost nothing, indeed." And drawing his chair nearer to the bed on which his employée was seated, he added: "But first, one question, Victor. By the way in which a woman looks at a young man in the street, at the theatre or anywhere—would you know if she were watching her son?"

Chupin shrugged his shoulders. "What a question!" he retorted. "Nonsense! monsieur, it would be impossible to deceive me. I should only have to remember my mother's eyes when I return home in the evening. Poor woman! although she's half blind, she sees me—and if you wish to make her happy, you've only to tell her I'm the handsomest and most amiable youth in Paris."

M. Fortunat could not refrain from rubbing his hands, so delighted was he to see his idea so perfectly understood and so admirably expressed. "Good!" he declared; "very good! That's intelligence, if I am

any judge. I have not been deceived in you, Victor."

Victor was on fire with curiosity. "What am I to do, monsieur?" he asked eagerly.

"This: you must follow a woman whom I shall point out to you, follow her everywhere without once losing sight of her, and so skilfully as not to let her suspect it. You must watch her every glance, and when her eyes tell you that she is looking at her son, your task will be nearly over. You will then only have to follow this son, and find out his name and address, what he does, and how he lives. I don't know if I explain what I mean very clearly."

This doubt was awakened in M. Fortunat's mind by Chupin's features, which were expressive of lively astonishment and discontent. "Excuse me, monsieur," he said, at last, "I do not understand at all."

"It's very simple, however. The lady in question has a son about twenty. I know it—I'm sure of it. But she denies it; she conceals the fact, and he doesn't even know her. She secretly watches over him, however—she provides him with money, and every day she finds some way of seeing him. Now, it is to my interest to find this son."

Chupin's mobile face became actually threatening in its expression; he frowned darkly, and his lips quivered. Still this did not prevent M. Fortunat from adding, with the assurance of a man who does not even suspect the possibility of a refusal: "Now, when shall we set about our task?"

"Never!" cried Chupin, violently; and, rising, he continued: "No! I wouldn't let my good mother eat bread earned in that way—it would strangle her! Turn spy! I? Thanks—some one else may have the job!"

He had become as red as a turkey-cock, and such was his indignation that he forgot his accustomed reserve and the caution with which he had so far concealed his antecedents. "I know this game—I've tried it!" he went on, vehemently. "One might as well take one's ticket to prison by a direct road. I should be there now if it hadn't been for Monsieur André. I was thirsting for gold, and, like the brigand that I was, I should have killed the man; but in revenge he drew me from the mire and placed my feet on solid ground once more. And now, shall I go back to my vile tricks again? Why, I'd rather cut my leg off! I'm to hunt down this poor woman—I'm to discover her secret so that you may extort money from her, am I? No, not I! I should like to be rich, and I shall be rich; but I'll make my money honestly. I hope to touch my hundred-franc pieces without being obliged to wash my hands afterward. So, a very good evening to your establishment."

M. Fortunat was amazed, and at the same time much annoyed, to find himself forsaken on account of such a trifle. He feared, too, that Chupin might let his tongue wag if he left his employment. So, since he had confided this project to Chupin, he was determined that Chupin alone should carry it into execution. Assuming his most severe and injured manner, he sternly exclaimed: "I think you have lost your senses." His demeanor and intonation were so perfectly cool that Chupin seemed slightly abashed. "It seems that you think me capable of urging you to commit some dangerous and dishonorable act," continued M. Fortunat.

"Why—no—m'sieur—I assure you——"

There was such evident hesitation in the utterance of this "no" that the agent at once resumed: "Come,

you are not ignorant of the fact that in addition to my business as a collector, I give my attention to the discovery of the heirs of unclaimed estates? You are aware of this? Very well then: pray tell me how I am to find them without searching for them? If I wish this lady to be watched, it is only in view of reaching a poor lad who is likely to be defrauded of the wealth that rightfully belongs to him. And when I give you a chance to make forty or fifty francs in a couple of days, you receive my proposition in this style! You are an ingrate and a fool, Victor!"

Chupin's nature combined, in a remarkable degree, the vices and peculiarities of the dweller in the Paris faubourgs, who is born old, but who, when aged in years, still remains a *gamin*. In his youth he had seen many strange things, and acquired a knowledge of life that would have put the experience of a philosopher to shame. But he was not fit to cope with M. Fortunat, who had an immense advantage over him, by reason of his position of employer, as well as by his fortune and education. So Chupin was both bewildered and disconcerted by the cool arguments his patron brought forward; and what most effectually allayed his suspicions was the small compensation offered for the work—merely forty or fifty francs. "Small potatoes, upon my word!" he thought. "Just the price of an honest service; he would have offered more for a piece of rascality." So, after considering a moment, he said, aloud: "Very well; I'm your man, m'sieur."

M. Fortunat was secretly laughing at the success of his ruse. Having come with the intention of offering his agent a handsome sum, he was agreeably surprised to find that Chupin's scruples would enable him to save his money. "If I hadn't found you engaged in study,

Victor," he said, "I should have thought you had been drinking. What venomous insect stung you so suddenly? Haven't I confided similar undertakings to you twenty times since you have been in my employment? Who ransacked Paris to find certain debtors who were concealing themselves? Who discovered the Vantrassons for me? Victor Chupin. Very well. Then allow me to say that I see nothing in this case in any way differing from the others, nor can I understand why this should be wrong, if the others were not."

Chupin could only have answered this remark by saying that there had been no mystery about the previous affairs, that they had not been proposed to him late at night at his own home, and that he had acted openly, as a person who represents a creditor has a recognized right to act. But, though he felt that there *was* a difference in the present case, it would have been very difficult for him to explain in what this difference consisted. Hence, in his most resolute tone: "I'm only a fool, m'sieur," he declared; "but I shall know how to make amends for my folly."

"That means you have recovered your senses," said M. Fortunat, ironically. "Really, that's fortunate. But let me give you one bit of advice: watch yourself, and learn to bridle your tongue. You won't always find me in such a good humor as I am this evening."

So saying, he rose, passed out into the adjoining room, bowed civilly to his clerk's mother, and went off. His last words, as he crossed the threshold, were, "So I shall rely upon you. Be at the office to-morrow a little before noon."

"It's agreed m'sieur."

The blind woman had risen, and had bowed respectfully; but, as soon as she was alone with her son, she

asked: "What is this business he bids you undertake in such a high and mighty tone?"

"Oh! an every-day matter, mother."

The old woman shook her head. "Why were you talking so loud then?" she inquired. "Weren't you quarrelling? It must be something very grave when it's necessary to conceal it from me. I couldn't see your employer's face, my son; but I heard his voice, and it didn't please me. It isn't the voice of an honest, straightforward man. Take care, Toto, and don't allow yourself to be cajoled—be prudent."

However, it was quite unnecessary to recommend prudence to Victor Chupin. He had promised his assistance, but not without a mental reservation. "No need to see danger till it comes," he had said to himself. "If the thing proves to be of questionable propriety after all, then good-evening; I desert."

It remains to know what he meant by questionable propriety; the meaning of the expression is rather vague. He had returned in all honesty and sincerity of purpose to an honest life, and nothing in the world would have induced him, avaricious though he was, to commit an act that was positively wrong. Only the line that separates good from evil was not very clearly defined in his mind. This was due in a great measure to his education, and to the fact that it had been long before he realized that police regulations do not constitute the highest moral law. It was due also to chance, and, since he had no decided calling, to the necessity of depending for a livelihood upon the many strange professions which impecunious and untrained individuals, both of the higher and lower classes, adopt in Paris.

However, on the following morning he arrayed him-

self in his best apparel, and at exactly half-past eleven o'clock he rang at his employer's door. M. Fortunat had made quick work with his clients that morning, and was ready, dressed to go out. He took up his hat and said only the one word, "Come." The place where the agent conducted his clerk was the wine-shop in the Rue de Berry, where he had made inquiries respecting Madame d'Argelès the evening before; and on arriving there, he generously offered him a breakfast. Before entering, however, he pointed out Madame d'Argelès's pretty house on the opposite side of the street, and said to him: "The woman whom you are to follow, and whose son you are to discover, will emerge from that house."

At that moment, after a night passed in meditating upon his mother's prophetic warnings, Chupin was again beset by the same scruples which had so greatly disturbed him on the previous evening. However, they soon vanished when he heard the wine-vendor, in reply to M. Fortunat's skilful questions, begin to relate all he knew concerning Madame Lia d'Argelès, and the scandalous doings at her house. The seeker after lost heirs and his clerk were served at a little table near the door; and while they partook of the classical beef-steak and potatoes—M. Fortunat eating daintily, and Chupin bolting his food with the appetite of a shipwrecked mariner—they watched the house opposite.

Madame d'Argelès received on Saturdays, and, as Chupin remarked, "there was a regular procession of visitors."

Standing beside M. Fortunat, and flattered by the attention which such a well-dressed gentleman paid to his chatter, the landlord of the house mentioned the names of all the visitors he knew. And he knew a good

number of them, for the coachmen came to his shop for refreshments when their masters were spending the night in play at Madame d'Argelès's house. So he was able to name the Viscount de Coralthe, who dashed up to the door in a two-horse phaeton, as well as Baron Trigault, who came on foot, for exercise, puffing and blowing like a seal. The wine-vendor, moreover, told his customers that Madame d'Argelès never went out before half-past two or three o'clock, and then always in a carriage—a piece of information which must have troubled Chupin; for, as soon as the landlord had left them to serve some other customers, he leant forward and said to M. Fortunat: "Did you hear that? How is it possible to track a person who's in a carriage?"

"By following in another vehicle, of course."

"Certainly, m'sieur; that's as clear as daylight. But that isn't the question. The point is this: How can one watch the face of a person who turns her back to you? I must see this woman's face to know whom she looks at, and how."

This objection, grave as it appeared, did not seem to disturb M. Fortunat. "Don't worry about that, Victor," he replied. "Under such circumstances, a mother wouldn't try to see her son from a rapidly moving carriage. She will undoubtedly alight, and contrive some means of passing and repassing him—of touching him, if possible. Your task will only consist in following her closely enough to be on the ground as soon as she is. Confine your efforts to that; and if you fail to-day, you'll succeed to-morrow or the day after—the essential thing is to be patient."

He did better than to preach patience—he practised it. The hours wore away, and yet he did not stir from his post, though nothing could have been more dis-

agreeable to him than to remain on exhibition, as it were, at the door of a wine-shop. At last, at a little before three o'clock, the gates over the way turned upon their hinges, and a dark-blue victoria, in which a woman was seated, rolled forth into the street. "Look!" said M. Fortunat, eagerly. "There she is!"

XVIII.

THE woman in the carriage was none other than Madame Lia d'Argelès. She was attired in one of those startling costumes which are the rage nowadays, and which impart the same bold and brazen appearance to all who wear them: so much so, that the most experienced observers are no longer able to distinguish the honest mother of a family from a notorious character. A Dutchman, named Van Klopen, who was originally a tailor at Rotterdam, rightfully ascribes the honor of this progress to himself. One can scarcely explain how it happens that this individual, who calls himself "the dressmaker of the queens of Europe," has become the arbiter of Parisian elegance; but it is an undeniable fact that he does reign over fashion. He decrees the colors that shall be worn, decides whether dresses shall be short or long, whether paniers shall be adopted or discarded, whether ruches and puffs and flowers shall be allowed, and in what form; and his subjects, the so-called elegant women of Paris, obey him implicitly.

Madame d'Argelès would personally have preferred less finery, perhaps, but it would not have done for her to be out of the fashion. She wore an imperceptible hat, balanced on an immense pyramidal chignon, from

which escaped a torrent of wavy hair. "What a beautiful woman!" exclaimed the dazzled Chupin, and indeed, seen from this distance, she did not look a day more than thirty-five—an age when beauty possesses all the alluring charm of the luscious fruit of autumn. She was giving orders for the drive, and her coachman, with a rose in his buttonhole, listened while he reined in the spirited horse. "The weather's superb," added Chupin. "She'll no doubt drive round the lakes in the Bois de Boulogne——"

"Ah, she's off!" interrupted M. Fortunat. "Run, Victor, run! and don't be miserly as regards carriage hire; all your expenses shall be liberally refunded you."

Chupin was already far away. Madame d'Argeles's horse went swiftly enough, but the agent's emissary had the limbs and the endurance of a stag, and he kept pace with the victoria without much difficulty. And as he ran along, his brain was busy. "If I don't take a cab," he said to himself, "if I follow the woman on foot, I shall have a perfect right to pocket the forty-five sous an hour—fifty, counting the gratuity—that a cab would cost."

But on reaching the Champ Elysées, he discovered, to his regret, that this plan was impracticable, for on running down the Avenue de l'Impératrice after the rapidly driven carriage, he could not fail to attract attention. Stifling a sigh of regret, and seeing a cab at a stand near by, he hastily hailed it. "Where do you want to go, sir?" inquired the driver.

"Just follow that blue victoria, in which a handsome lady is seated, my good fellow."

The order did not surprise the cabman, but rather the person who gave it; for in spite of his fine apparel, Chupin did not seem quite the man for such an ad-

venture. "Excuse me," said the Jehu, in a slightly ironical tone, "I——"

"I said exactly what I mean," retorted Chupin, whose pride was severely wounded. "And no more talk—hurry on, or we shall miss the track."

This last remark was correct, for if Madame d'Argelès's coachman had not slackened his horse's speed on passing round the Arc de Triomphe, the woman would have escaped Chupin, for that day at least. However, this circumstance gave the cabman an opportunity to overtake the victoria; and after that the two vehicles kept close together as they proceeded down the Avenue de l'Impératrice. But at the entrance of the Bois de Boulogne Chupin ordered his driver to stop. "Halt!" he exclaimed; "I shall get out. Pay the extra cab charges for passing beyond the limits of Paris!—never! I'll crawl on my hands and knees first. Here are forty sous for your fare—and good-evening to you."

And, as the blue victoria was already some distance in advance, he started off at the top of his speed to overtake it. This manœuvre was the result of his meditations while riding along. "What will this fine lady do when she gets to the Bois?" he asked himself. "Why, her coachman will take his place in the procession, and drive her slowly round and round the lakes. Meantime I can trot along beside her without attracting attention—and it will be good for my health."

His expectations were realized in every respect. The victoria soon turned to the left, and took its place in the long line of equipages which were slowly winding round the lake. Having gained the foot-path which borders the sheet of water, Chupin followed the carriage easily enough, with his hands in his pockets, and

his heart jubilant at the thought that he would gain the sum supposed to have been spent in cab hire, in addition to the compensation which had been promised him. "This is a strange way of enjoying one's self," he muttered, as he trotted along. "There can't be much pleasure in going round and round this lake. If ever I'm rich, I'll find some other way of amusing myself."

Poor Chupin did not know that people do not go to the Bois to enjoy themselves, but rather to torment others. This broad drive is in reality only a field for the airing of vanity—a sort of open-air bazaar for the display of dresses and equipages. People come here to see and to be seen; and, moreover, this is neutral ground, where so-called honest women can meet those notorious characters from whom they are elsewhere separated by an impassable abyss. What exquisite pleasure it must be to the dames of society to find themselves beside Jenny Fancy or Ninette Simplon, or any other of those young ladies whom they habitually call "creatures," but whom they are continually talking of, and whose toilettes, make-up, and jargon, they assiduously copy!

However, Chupin indulged in none of these reflections. He was engaged in noting Madame d'Argelès's evident anxiety and restlessness. She looked eagerly on all sides, sometimes half leaning out of her carriage, and immediately turning her head whenever she heard the gallop of a horseman behind her. She was evidently looking or waiting for some one, but the person did not make his appearance, and so, growing weary of waiting, after driving three times round the lake, she made a sign to her coachman, who at once drew out of line, and turned his horse into a side-path. Chupin

hastened after the victoria, keeping it in sight until he was fortunate enough to meet an empty cab, which he at once hired. Madame d'Argelès's coachman, who had received his orders, now drove down the Champs Elysées, again crossed the Place de la Concorde, turned into the boulevards, and stopped short at the corner of the Chaussée d'Antin, where, having tied a thick veil over her face, Madame Lia abruptly alighted and walked away.

This was done so quickly that Chupin barely had time to fling two francs to his driver and rush after her. She had already turned round the corner of the Rue du Helder, and was walking rapidly up the street. It was a little after five o'clock, and dusk was setting in. Madame d'Argelès had taken the side of the street allotted to the uneven numbers. After she had passed the Hôtel de Homburg, she slackened her pace, and eagerly scrutinized one of the houses opposite—No. 48. Her examination lasted but a moment, and seemed to be satisfactory. She then turned, and rapidly retraced her steps as far as the boulevard, when, crossing the street to the side of the even numbers, she walked up it again very slowly, stopping before every shop-window.

Convinced that he had almost reached the goal, Chupin also crossed, and followed closely at her heels. He soon saw her start and resume her rapid gait. A young man was coming toward her so quickly indeed that she had not time to avoid him, and a collision ensued, whereupon the young man gave vent to an oath, and hurling an opprobrious epithet in her face, passed on.

Chupin shuddered. "What if that should be her son?" he thought. And while he pretended to be gaz-

ing into a shop window, he stealthily watched the poor woman. She had paused, and he was so near that he could almost have touched her. He saw her raise her veil and follow her insulter with a look which it was impossible to misunderstand. "Oh! oh! It was her son that called her that——" said Chupin to himself, quite horrified. And without more ado, he hastened after the young man.

He was between two and four-and-twenty years of age, rather above the medium height, with very light hair and an extremely pale complexion. His slight mustache would have been almost imperceptible if it had not been dyed several shades darker than his hair. He was attired with that studied carelessness which many consider to be the height of elegance, but which is just the reverse. And his bearing, his mustache, and his low hat, tipped rakishly over one ear, gave him an arrogant, pretentious, rowdyish appearance. "Zounds! that fellow doesn't suit my fancy," growled Chupin, as he trotted along. For he was almost running in his efforts to keep pace with Madame d'Argelès's insulter. The latter's haste was soon explained. He was carrying a letter which he wished to have delivered, and no doubt he feared he would not be able to find a commissionaire. Having discovered one at last, he called him, gave him the missive, and then pursued his way more leisurely.

He had reached the boulevard, when a florid-faced youth, remarkably short and stout, rushed toward him with both hands amicably extended, at the same time crying, loud enough to attract the attention of the passers-by: "Is it possible that this is my dear Wilkie?"

"Yes—alive and in the flesh," replied the young man.

"Well, and what the devil have you been doing with yourself? Last Sunday, at the races, I looked for you everywhere, and not a vestige of Wilkie was to be found. However, you were wise not to go. I am three hundred louis out of pocket. I staked everything on Domingo, the Marquis de Valorsay's horse. I thought I was sure to win—yes, sure. Well, Domingo came in third. Can you understand that? If every one didn't know that Valorsay was a millionaire, it might be supposed there had been some foul play—yes, upon my word—that he had bet against his own horse, and forbidden his jockey to win the race." But the speaker did not really believe this, so he continued, more gayly: "Fortunately, I shall retrieve my losses to-morrow, at Vincennes. Shall we see you there?"

"Probably."

"Then good-by, until to-morrow."

"Until to-morrow."

Thereupon they shook hands, and each departed on his way.

Chupin had not lost a word of this conversation. "Valorsay a millionaire!" he said to himself. "That's good! Ah, well! now I know my little gamecock's name, and I also know that he goes to the races. Wilkie that must be an English name; I like the name of d'Argelès better. But where the devil is he going now?"

M. Wilkie had simply paused to replenish his cigar-case at the tobacco office of the Grand Hôtel; and, after lighting a cigar, he came out again, and walked up the boulevard in the direction of the Faubourg Montmartre. He was no longer in a hurry now; he strolled along in view of killing time, displaying his charms, and staring impudently at every woman who passed. With

his shoulders drawn up on a level with his ears, and his chest thrown back, he dragged his feet after him as if his limbs were half paralyzed; he was indeed doing his best to create the impression that he was used up, exhausted, broken down by excesses and dissipation. For that is the fashion—the latest fancy—*chic!*

“Will you never have done?” growled Chupin.

“You shall pay for this, you little wretch!” He was so indignant that the *gamin* element in his nature stirred again under his fine broadcloth, and he had a wild longing to throw stones at M. Wilkie. He would certainly have trodden on his heels, and have picked a quarrel with him, had it not been for a fear of failing in his mission, and thereby losing his promised reward.

He followed his man closely, for the crowd was very great. Night was coming on, and the gas was lit on all sides. The weather was very mild, and there was not an unoccupied table in front of the *cafés*, for it was now the absinthe hour. How does it happen that every evening, between five and seven o’clock, every one in Paris who is known—who is somebody or something—can be found between the Passage de l’Opera and the Passage Jouffroy? Hereabout you may hear all the latest news and gossip of the fashionable world, the last political canards—all the incidents of Parisian life which will be recorded by the papers on the following morning. You may learn the price of stocks, and obtain tips for to-morrow’s Bourse; ascertain how much Mademoiselle A’s necklace cost, and who gave it to her; with the latest news from Prussia; and the name of the bank chairman or cashier who has absconded during the day, and the amount he has taken with him.

The crowd became more dense as the Faubourg

Montmartre was approached, but Wilkie made his way through the throng with the ease of an old *boulevardier*. He must have had a large circle of acquaintances, for he distributed bows right and left, and was spoken to by five or six promenaders. He did not pass the Terrasse Jouffroy, but, pausing there, he purchased an evening paper, retraced his steps, and about seven o'clock reached the Café Riche, which he entered triumphantly. He did not even touch the rim of his hat on going in—that would have been excessively *bad form*; but he called a waiter, in a very loud voice, and imperiously ordered him to serve dinner on a table near the window, where he could see the boulevard—and be seen.

“And now my little fighting-cock is going to feed,” thought Chupin. He, too, was hungry; and he was trying to think of some modest restaurant in the neighborhood, when two young men passed near him and glanced into the *café*.

“Look, there’s Wilkie!” observed one of them.

“That’s so, upon my word!” responded the other. “And he has money, too; fortune has smiled upon him.”

“How do you know that?”

“Why, by watching the fellow; one can tell the condition of his purse as correctly as he could himself. If his funds are low, he has his meals brought to his room from a cook-shop where he has credit; his mustache droops despondingly; he is humble even to servility with his friends, and he brushes his hair over his forehead. When he is in average circumstances, he dines at Launay’s, waxes his mustache, and brushes his hair back from his face. But when he dines at the Café Riche, my boy, when he has dyed his mustache, and tips

his hat over his ear, and deports himself in that arrogant fashion, why, he has at least five or six thousand francs in his pocket, and all is well with him."

"Where does he get his money from?"

"Who can tell?"

"Is he rich?"

"He must have plenty of money—I lent him ten louis once, and he paid me back."

"Zounds! He's a very honorable fellow, then." Thereupon the two young men laughed, and passed on.

Chupin had been greatly edified. "Now I know you as well as if I were your concierge," he muttered, addressing the unconscious Wilkie; "and when I've followed you home, and learned your number, I shall have richly earned the fifty francs M. Fortunat promised me." As well as he could judge through the window-pane, M. Wilkie was eating his dinner with an excellent appetite. "Ah!" he exclaimed, not without envy, "these fighting-cocks take good care of their stomachs. He's there for an hour at least, and I shall have time to run and swallow a mouthful myself."

So saying, Chupin hastened to a small restaurant in a neighboring street, and magnificently disbursed the sum of thirty-nine sous. Such extravagance was unusual on his part, for he had lived very frugally since he had taken a vow to become rich. Formerly, when he lived from hand to mouth—to use his own expression—he indulged in cigars and in absinthe; but now he contented himself with the fare of an anchorite, drank nothing but water, and only smoked when some one gave him a cigar. Nor was this any great privation to him, since he gained a penny by it—and a penny was another grain of sand added to the foundation of his future wealth. However, this evening he indulged

in the extravagance of a glass of wine, deciding in his own mind that he had fairly earned it.

When he returned to his post in front of the *Café Riche*, M. Wilkie was no longer alone at his table. He was finishing his coffee in the company of a man of his own age, who was remarkably good-looking—almost too good-looking, in fact—and a glance at whom caused Chupin to exclaim: “What! what! I’ve seen that face somewhere before——”. But he racked his brain in vain in trying to remember who this new-comer was, in trying to set a name on this face, which was positively annoying in its classical beauty, and which he felt convinced had occupied a place among the phantoms of his past. Irritated beyond endurance by what he termed his stupidity, he was trying to decide whether he should enter the *café* or not, when he saw M. Wilkie take his bill from the hands of a waiter, glance at it, and throw a *louis* on the table. His companion had drawn out his pocketbook for the ostensible purpose of paying for the coffee he had taken; but Wilkie, with a cordial gesture, forbade it, and made that magnificent, imperious sign to the waiter, which so clearly implies: “Take nothing! All is paid! Keep the change.” Thereupon the servant gravely retired, more than ever convinced of the fact that vanity increases the fabulous total of Parisian gratuities by more than a million francs a year.

“My gallant youths are coming out,” thought Chupin. “I must keep my ears open.” And approaching the door, he dropped on one knee, and pretended to be engaged in tying his shoestrings. This is one of the thousand expedients adopted by spies and inquisitive people. And when a man is foolish enough to tell his secrets in the street, he should at least be wise enough

to distrust the people near him who pretend to be absorbed in something else; for in nine cases out of ten these persons are listening to him, possibly for pay, or possibly from curiosity.

However, the young men whom Chupin was watching were far from suspecting that they were under surveillance. M. Wilkie came out first, talking very loud, as often happens when a man has just partaken of a good dinner, and is blessed with an excellent digestion. "Come, Coralth, my good fellow, you won't desert me in this way? I have a box for the *Variétés*, and you must go with me. We'll see if Silly imitates Thérèse as perfectly as they say."

"But I have an appointment."

"Oh, well, let it wait. Come, viscount, is it agreed?"

"Ah, you do with me just as you like."

"Good! But, first of all let us take a glass of beer to finish our cigars. And do you know whom you will find in my box?"

At this moment they passed, and Chupin rose to his feet. "Coralth," he muttered, "Viscount de Coralth. He's not one of our clients. Let me see, Coralth. This is certainly the first time I have ever heard the name. Can it be that I'm mistaken? Impossible!"

The more he reflected, the more thoroughly he became convinced of the accuracy of his first impression, consoling himself with the thought that a name has but a slight significance after all. His preoccupation had at least the advantage of shortening the time which he spent in promenading to and fro, while the friends sat outside a *café* smoking and drinking. It was still M. Wilkie who monopolized the conversation, while his companion listened with his elbow resting on the table, occasionally nodding his head in token of approbation.

One thing that incensed Chupin was that they loitered there, when one of them had a ticket for a box at the theatre in his pocket.

"Idiots!" he growled; "they'll wait till the play's half over before they go in. And then they'll let the doors slam behind them for the express purpose of disturbing everybody. Fools, go!"

As if they had heard the command, they rose suddenly, and an instant after they entered the *Variétés*. They entered, but Chupin remained on the pavement, scratching his head furiously, in accordance with his habit whenever he wished to develop his powers of imagination. He was trying to think how he might procure admission to the theatre without paying for it. For several years he had seen every play put upon the stage in Paris, without spending a sou, and he felt that it would be actually degrading to purchase a ticket at the office now. "Pay to see a farce!" he thought. "Not I. I must know some one here—I'll wait for the entr'acte."

The wisdom of this course became apparent when among those who left the theatre at the close of the first act he recognized an old acquaintance, who was now working on the *claque*,* and who at once procured him a ticket of admission for nothing. "Well, it is a good thing to have friends everywhere," he muttered, as he took the seat assigned him.

It was a very good place they had given him—a seat in the second gallery commanding an excellent view of the house. The first glance around told him that his "customers," as he styled them, were in a box exactly

* The body of hired applauders who are employed at most Parisian theatres to stimulate the enthusiasm of the audience.—[Trans.]

opposite. They were now in the company of two damsels in startling toilettes, with exceedingly dishevelled yellow hair, who moved restlessly about, and giggled and stared, and tried in every possible way to attract attention. And their stratagem succeeded. However, this did not seem to please the Viscount de Coralth, who kept himself as far back in the shade as he possibly could. But young Wilkie was evidently delighted, and seemed manifestly proud of the attention which the public was compelled to bestow upon his box. He offered himself as much as possible to the gaze of the audience; moved about, leaned forward, and made himself fully as conspicuous as his fair companions. Less than ever did Chupin now forgive Wilkie for the insult he had cast in the face of Madame Lia d'Argelès, who was probably his mother.

As for the play, M. Fortunat's emissary did not hear twenty words of it. He was so overcome with fatigue that he soon fell asleep. The noise and bustle of each entr'acte aroused him a little, but he did not thoroughly wake up until the close of the performance. His "customers" were still in their box, and M. Wilkie was gallantly wrapping the ladies in their cloaks and shawls. In the vestibule, he and M. de Coralth were joined by several other young men, and the whole party adjourned to a neighboring *café*. "These people are certainly afflicted with an unquenchable thirst," growled Chupin. "I wonder if this is their everyday life?"

He, too, was thirsty after his hastily eaten dinner; and necessity prevailing over economy, he seated himself at a table outside the *café*, and called for a glass of beer, in which he moistened his parched lips with a sigh of intense satisfaction. He sipped the beverage

slowly, in order to make it last the longer, but this did not prevent his glass from becoming dry long before M. Wilkie and his friends were ready to leave. "It seems to me we are going to stay here all night," he thought, angrily.

His ill-humor was not strange under the circumstances, for it was one o'clock in the morning; and after carrying all the tables and chairs round about, inside, a waiter came to ask Chupin to go away. All the other *cafés* were closing too, and the fastening of bolts or the clanking of shutter chains could be heard on every side. On the pavement stood groups of waiters in their shirt-sleeves, stretching and yawning, and inhaling the fresh night air with delight. The boulevard was fast becoming deserted—the men were going off in little groups, and female forms could be seen gliding along in the dark shadow cast by the houses. The police were watching everywhere, with a word of menace ever ready on their lips; and soon the only means of egress from the *cafés* were the narrow, low doorways cut in the shutters through which the last customers—the insatiable, who are always ordering one thimbleful more to finish—passed out.

It was through a portal of this sort that M. Wilkie and his companions at last emerged, and on perceiving them, Chupin gave a grunt of satisfaction. "At last," he thought, "I can follow the man to his door, take his number, and go home."

But his joy was short-lived, for M. Wilkie proposed that the whole party should go and take supper. M. de Coralth demurred to the idea, but the others overruled his objections, and dragged him away with them.

XIX.

"Ан! this is a bad job!" growled Chupin. "Go, go, and never stop!"

What exasperated him even more than his want of sleep was the thought that his good mother must be waiting for him at home in an agony of anxiety; for since his reformation he had become remarkably regular in his habits. What should he do? "Go home," said Reason; "it will be easy enough to find this Wilkie again. There can be little doubt that he lives at No. 48, in the Rue du Helder." "Remain," whispered Avarice; "and, since you have accomplished so much, finish your work. M. Fortunat won't pay for conjectures, but for a certainty."

Love of money carried the day; so, weaving an interminable chaplet of oaths, he followed the party until they entered Brébant's restaurant, one of the best known establishments which remain open at night-time. It was nearly two o'clock in the morning now; the boulevard was silent and deserted, and yet this restaurant was brilliantly lighted from top to bottom, and snatches of song and shouts of laughter, with the clatter of knives and forks and the clink of glasses, could be heard through the half opened windows.

"Eight dozen Marennes for No. 6," shouted a waiter to the man who opened oysters near the restaurant door.

On hearing this order, Chupin shook his clenched fist at the stars. "The wretches!" he muttered through his set teeth; "bad luck to them! Those oysters are for their mouths, plainly enough, for there

are eight of them in all, counting those yellow-haired women. They will, no doubt, remain at table until six o'clock in the morning. And they call this enjoying themselves. And meanwhile, poor little Chupin must wear out his shoe-leather on the pavement. Ah! they shall pay for this!"

It ought to have been some consolation to him to see that he was not alone in his misery, for in front of the restaurant stood a dozen cabs with sleepy drivers, who were waiting for chance to send them one of those half-intoxicated passengers who refuse to pay more than fifteen sous for their fare, but give their Jehu a gratuity of a louis. All these vehicles belonged to the peculiar category known as "night cabs"—dilapidated conveyances with soiled, ragged linings, and drawn by half-starved, jaded horses.

However, Chupin neither thought of these vehicles, nor of the poor horses, nor, indeed, of the drivers themselves. His wrath had been succeeded by philosophical resignation; he accepted with good grace what he could not avoid. As the night air had become very cool, he turned up the collar of his overcoat, and began to pace to and fro on the pavement in front of the restaurant. He had made a hundred turns perhaps, passing the events of the day in review, when suddenly such a strange and startling idea flashed across his mind that he stood motionless, lost in astonishment. Reflecting on the manner in which M. Wilkie and the Viscount de Coralthe had behaved during the evening, a singular suspicion assailed him. While M. Wilkie gradually lost his wits, M. de Coralthe had become remarkably cold and reserved. He had seemed to oppose all M. Wilkie's propositions; but he had agreed to them at last, so that his objections had pro-

duced much the same effect as a stimulant. It seemed then as if M. de Coralth had some strange interest in wishing to gain ascendancy over his friend. At least such was Chupin's opinion. "Oh, oh!" he murmured. "What if *he* should be working up the same little scheme? What if he were acquainted with Madame Lia d'Argelès? What if he knew that there's a fortune waiting for a claimant? I shouldn't at all be surprised if I found that he wanted to cook his bread in our oven. But father Fortunat wouldn't be pleased with the news. Ah! no—he wouldn't even smile——"

While carrying on this little conversation with himself, he stood just in front of the restaurant, looking up into the air, when all of a sudden a window was thrown noisily open, and the figures of two men became plainly visible. They were engaged in a friendly struggle; one of them seemed to be trying to seize hold of something which the other had in his hand, and which he refused to part with. One of these men was M. Wilkie as Chupin at once perceived. "Good!" he said to himself; "this is the beginning of the end!"

As he spoke, M. Wilkie's hat fell on the window-sill, slipped off, and dropped on to the pavement below. With a natural impulse Chupin picked it up, and he was turning it over and over in his hands, when M. Wilkie leant out of the window and shouted in a voice that was thick with wine: "Halloo! Eh, there! Who picked up my hat? Honesty shall be rewarded. A glass of champagne and a cigar for the fellow who'll bring it me in room No. 6."

Chupin hesitated. By going up, he might, perhaps, compromise the success of his mission. But on the other hand his curiosity was aroused, and he very much wished to see, with his own eyes, how these young men

were amusing themselves. Besides, he would have an opportunity of examining this handsome viscount, whom he was certain he had met before, though he could not tell when or where. In the meantime, M. Wilkie had perceived him.

"Come, you simpleton!" he cried; "make haste. You can't be very thirsty."

The thought of the viscount decided Chupin. Entering the restaurant and climbing the staircase, he had just reached the landing when a pale-looking man, who had a smoothly-shaven face and was dressed in black, barred his way and asked: "What do you want?"

"M'sieur, here's a hat which fell from one of your windows and——"

"All right, hand it here."

But Chupin did not seem to hear this order. He was beginning a long explanation, when a curtain near by was pushed aside, and M. Wilkie called out: "Philippe! eh, Philippe!—bring me the man who picked up my hat."

"Ah!" said Chupin, "you see, m'sieur, that he asks for me."

"Very well," said Philippe. "Go on, then." And raising the *portière* he pushed Chupin into room No. 6.

It was a small, square apartment, with a very low ceiling. The temperature was like that of a furnace, and the glare of the gaslights almost blinded one. The supper was over, but the table had not yet been cleared, and plates full of leavings showed that the guests had fairly exhausted their appetites. Still, with the exception of M. Wilkie, every one present seemed to be terribly bored. In one corner, with her head resting on a piano, sat one of the yellow-haired damsels, fast

asleep, while, beside the window, M. de Coralth was smoking with his elbows propped upon the table. The four other young men were looking on phlegmatically. "Ah! here's my hat," exclaimed M. Wilkie, as soon as Chupin appeared. "Wait and receive your promised reward." And thereupon he rang the bell, crying at the top of his voice: "Henry, you sleepy-head—a clean glass and some more of the widow Cliquot's champagne!"

Several bottles were standing upon the table, only half empty, and one of M. Wilkie's friends called his attention to this fact, but he shrugged his shoulders disdainfully. "You must take me for a fool," he said, contemptuously. "A man doesn't drink stale wine when he has the prospect of such an inheritance as is coming to me——"

"Wilkie!" interrupted M. de Coralth, quickly; "Wilkie!"

But he was too late; Chupin had heard and understood everything. His conjectures had proved correct. M. Wilkie knew his right to the estate; M. Fortunat had been forestalled by the viscount, and would merely have his labor for his pains. "No chance for the guv'nor!" thought the agent's emissary. "And what a blow after the De Valorsay affair! It's enough to give him the jaundice!"

For a youth of his age, Chupin controlled his feelings admirably; but the revelation came so suddenly that he had started despite himself, and changed color a trifle. M. de Coralth saw this; and, though he was far from suspecting the truth, his long repressed anger burst forth. He rose abruptly, took up a bottle, and filling the nearest glass, he rudely exclaimed: "Come, drink that—make haste—and clear out!"

Victor Chupin must have become very sensitive since his conversion. In former times he was not wont to be so susceptible as to lose his temper when some one chanced to address him in a rather peremptory manner, or to offer him wine out of the first available glass. But M. de Coralth inspired him with one of those inexplicable aversions which cannot be restrained. "Eh! tell me if it's because we've drank champagne together before that you talk to me like that?" the young fellow retorted, savagely.

It was only a random shot, but it reached home. The viscount seemed touched to the quick. "You hear that, Wilkie," said he. "This will teach you that the time of your compatriot, Lord Seymour, has passed by. The good-humored race of plebeians who respectfully submitted to the blows with which noblemen honored them after drinking, has died out. This ought to cure you of your unfortunate habit of placing yourself on terms of equality with all the vagabonds you meet."

Chupin's hair fairly bristled with anger. "What! what!" he exclaimed; "I'll teach you to call me a vagabond, you scoundrel!"

His gesture, his attitude, and his eyes were so expressive of defiance and menace that two of the guests sprang up and caught him by the arm. "Go, go," they said.

But he freed himself from their grasp. "Go!" he replied. "Never! He called me a vagabond. Am I to pocket the insult quietly and walk off with it? You can scarcely expect that. First, I demand an apology."

This was asking too much of the Viscount de Coralth. "Let the fool alone," he remarked, with affected coolness, "and ring for the waiters to kick him out."

It did not require this new insult to put Chupin in a furious passion. "Come on!" he exclaimed. "Ah, ha! Where's the fellow who'll turn me out? Let him come. I'll teach him a lesson!" And as he spoke he squared his shoulders, inflated his chest, and threw the weight of his entire body on his left leg, after the most approved method of sparring-masters.

"Go, go!" insisted Wilkie's friends.

"Yes, I'll go with pleasure, but your friend must go, too. Is he a man? Then let him come, and we'll settle this outside." And seeing that they were again trying to seize him: "Hands off!" he thundered, "or I'll strike. You were not obliged to invite me here. It isn't my business to furnish amusement to parties who've drunk too much wine. And why should you despise me? It's true I haven't any money while you have plenty—that I work and you carouse. Still that's no reason why you should scorn me. Besides, those who are poor in the morning are sometimes rich in the evening. Every dog has his day. I have an idea that I shall have some coin when yours is all gone. Then it will be my turn to laugh; and as I'm a good-natured fellow, I will give you my half-smoked cigars."

M. Wilkie seemed delighted. He had climbed on to the piano and seated himself, with his feet on the keyboard; and there, as on a judgment seat, he listened and applauded, alternately taking Chupin's part, and then the viscount's. "Bravo, *gamin!*" or, "Give it to him, Coralith!" he shouted in turn.

This irritated the viscount exceedingly. "I see that we shall be obliged to call in the police to settle the affair," he said, sneeringly.

"The police!" roared Chupin. "Ah! that won't do, you scamp——" But his voice died away in his

throat, and he stood motionless, speechless, with his arm raised as if he were about to strike, and his eyes dilated with astonishment.

For a change of expression in M. de Coralth's face had enlightened him; and he suddenly recollected when and under what circumstances he had known this so-called viscount. He remembered, too, the name he had borne when he first met him. "Oh!" he stammered; "oh! oh!"

However, the effect of this discovery was to dispel his anger, or rather to restore his calmness, and, addressing M. de Coralth, he exclaimed: "Don't be angry at what I've said, m'sieur; it was only a jest—I know that there's a wide difference between a poor devil like me and a viscount like you—I haven't a sou, you see, and that maddens me. But I'm not so very bad-looking, fortunately, and I'm always hoping that the daughter of some rich banker will fall in love with me and marry me. Some people have such luck, you know. If I meet with any you may be sure I shall pass myself off as the lost child of some great personage—of a duke, for instance—and if the real son exists, and troubles me, why I'll quietly put him out of the way, if possible."

With but one exception the persons present did not understand a single word of this apparent nonsense; and indeed the yellow-haired damsels stared at the speaker in amazement. Still it was evident that each of these words had a meaning, and a terrible meaning for M. de Coralth. Accustomed for years to control his features, he remained apparently unmoved—he even smiled; but a close observer could have detected anguish in his eyes, and he had become very pale. At last, unable to endure the scene any longer, he drew a

hundred-franc bank-note from his pocketbook, crumpled it in his hand and threw it at Chupin, saying: "That's a very pretty story you are telling, my boy; but we've had enough of it. Take your pay and leave us."

Unfortunately, the note struck Chupin full in the face. He uttered a hoarse cry of rage, and, by the way in which he seized and brandished an empty bottle, it might have been imagined that M. de Coralthe was about to have his head broken. But no. Thanks to a supreme effort of will, Chupin conquered this mad fury; and, dropping the bottle, he remarked to the young women who were uttering panic-stricken shrieks: "Be quiet; don't you see that I was only in fun."

But even M. Wilkie had found the fun a little rough, and even dangerous. Several of the young fellows present sprang up, with the evident intention of pushing Chupin out of the room, but he checked them with a gesture. "Don't disturb yourselves, gentlemen," he said. "I'm going, only let me find the bank-note which this gentleman threw at me."

"That's quite proper," replied M. Wilkie, approvingly; "look for it."

Chupin did so, and at last found it lying almost under the piano. "Now," he remarked, "I should like a cigar."

A score or so were lying in a dish. He gravely selected one of them and coolly cut off the end of it before placing it in his mouth. Those around watched him with an air of profound astonishment, not understanding this ironical calmness following so closely upon such a storm of passion. Then he, Victor Chupin, who had, it seems to me, but one aim in life—to become rich—Victor Chupin, who loved money above anything else, and had stifled all other passions in his

soul—he who often worked two whole days to earn five francs—he who did not disdain to claim his five sous when he went to hire a cab for his employer—he, Chupin, twisted the bank-note in his fingers, lit it at the gas, and used it to light his cigar.

“Ah! he’s crazy!” murmured the yellow-haired damsels, with despair in their voices.

But M. Wilkie was enthusiastic. “There’s form!” said he. “Fine form and no mistake!”

But Chupin did not even deign to turn his head. He opened the door, and standing on the threshold, he bowed to M. de Coralith with an ironical smile. “Until we meet again, Monsieur Paul,” said he. “And kindly remember me to Madame Paul, if you please.”

If the others had been less astonished, they would have no doubt have remarked the prodigious effect of this name upon their brilliant friend. He became ghastly pale and fell back in his chair. Then, suddenly, he bounded up as if he wished to attack his enemy. But pursuit seemed likely to yield no result, for Chupin was already on the boulevard.

It was daybreak. Paris was waking up; the bakers were standing at their doors, and boys in their shirt-sleeves, with their eyes swollen with sleep, were taking down the shutters of the wine-shops. A cloud of dust, raised by the street-sweepers, hung in the distance; the rag-pickers wandered about, peering among the rubbish; the noisy milk-carts jolted along at a gallop, and workmen were proceeding to their daily toil, with hunches of bread in their hands. The morning air was very chilly; nevertheless, Chupin seated himself on a bench across the boulevard, at a spot where he could watch the entrance of the restaurant without being seen. He had just experienced one of

those sudden shocks which so disturb the mind, that one becomes insensible to outward circumstances, whatever they may be. He had recognized in the so-called Viscount de Coralthe, the man whom he had hated above all others in the world, or, rather, the only man whom he hated, for his was not a bad heart. Impressionable to excess like a true child of the faubourgs, he had the Parisian's strange mobility of feeling. If his anger was kindled by a trifle, the merest nothing usually sufficed to extinguish it. But matters were different respecting this handsome viscount! "God! how I hate him!" he hissed through his set teeth. "God! how I hate him!"

For once, years before, as he had confessed to M. Fortunat, Chupin had been guilty of a cowardly and abominable act, which had nearly cost a man his life. And this crime, if it had been successful, would have benefited the very fellow who concealed his sinful, shameful past under the high-sounding name of Coralthe. How was it that Chupin had not recognized him at once? Because he had worked for this fellow without knowing him, receiving his orders through the miserable wretches who pandered to his vices. He had only seen him personally once or twice, and had never spoken to him. Later—too late—he discovered what vile intrigue it was that he had served. And when he became sincerely repentant he loathed this Coralthe who had caused his crime.

Nor was this all. The recognition of Coralthe had inspired him with remorse. It had aroused in the recesses of his conscience a threatening voice which cried: "What are you doing here? You are acting as a spy for a man you distrust, and whose real designs you are ignorant of. It was in this way you began

before. Have you forgotten what it led to? Have you not sin enough already upon your conscience? Blood enough upon your hands? It is folly to pretend that one may serve as a tool for villains, and still remain an honest man!"

It was this voice which had given Chupin the courage to light his cigar with the bank-note. And this voice still tortured him, as seated on the bench he now tried to review the situation. Where, indeed, was he? With rare good luck he had discovered the son whom Madame Lia d'Argelès had so long and successfully concealed. But contrary to all expectations, this young fellow already knew of the inheritance which he was entitled to. M. de Coralith had already achieved what M. Fortunat had meant to do; and so the plan was a failure, and it was useless to persist in it.

This would have ended the matter if Chupin had not chanced to know the Viscount de Coralith's shameful past. And this knowledge changed everything, for it gave him the power to interfere in a most effectual manner. Armed with this secret, he could bestow the victory on M. Fortunat, and force M. de Coralith to capitulate. And he could do this all the more easily, as he was sure that Coralith had not recognized him, and that he was perhaps ignorant of his very existence. Chupin had allowed himself to be carried away by a sudden impulse of anger which he regretted; he had made an ironical illusion to his enemy's past life, but after all this had done no particular harm. So nothing prevented him from lending M. Fortunat his assistance, and thus killing two birds with one stone. He could have his revenge on Coralith, and at the same time insure his patron a large fee, of which he could claim a considerable share for himself. But no! The

idea of deriving any profit whatever from this affair inspired him with a feeling of disgust—honor triumphed over his naturally crafty and avaricious nature. It seemed to him that any money made in this way would soil his fingers; for he realized there must be some deep villainy under all this plotting and planning; he was sure of it, since Coralith was mixed up in the affair. "I will serve my guv'nor for nothing," he decided. "When a man is avenged, he's well paid."

Chupin decided upon this course because he could think of no better plan. Still, if he had been master of events he would have acted otherwise. He would have quietly presented the government with this inheritance which he found M. Wilkie so unworthy of. "The devil only knows what he'll do with it," he thought. "He'll squander it as my father squandered the fortune that was given him. It is only fools who meet with such luck as that."

However, his meditations did not prevent him from keeping a close watch over the restaurant, for it was of the utmost importance that M. Wilkie should not escape him. It was now broad daylight, and customers were leaving the establishment; for, after passing what is generally conceded to be a joyous night, they felt the need of returning home to rest and sleep. Chupin watched them as they emerged. There were some who came out with drooping heads, mumbling incoherent phrases; while others who were equally intoxicated, but more nervous, evinced considerable animation, and sang snatches of songs, or jested loudly with the street-sweepers as they passed on. The more sober, surprised by the sunlight, and blushing at themselves, slunk hastily and quietly away. There was one man,

moreover, whom the waiters were obliged to carry to his cab, for he could no longer stand on his feet.

At last Chupin saw the individual clad in black whom Wilkie had addressed as Philippe, and who had endeavored to prevent him from entering the restaurant, come out, and walk rapidly away. He was warmly clad in a thick overcoat, but he shivered, and his pale, wan face betrayed the man who is a martyr to the pleasures of others—the man who is condemned to be up all night and sleep only in the daytime—the man who can tell you how much folly and beastliness lurk in the depths of the wine-cup, and who knows exactly how many yawns are expressed by the verb “to amuse one’s self.” Chupin was beginning to feel uneasy. “Can M. Wilkie and his friends have made their escape?” he wondered.

But at that very moment they made their appearance. They lingered awhile on the pavement to chat, and Chupin had an opportunity of observing the effect of their night’s dissipation on their faces. The brilliant sunlight made their eyes blink, and the cold sent purple blotches to their bloated cheeks. As for the young women with yellow hair, they appeared as they really were—hideous. They entered the only cab that remained, the most dilapidated one of all, and the driver of which had no little difficulty in setting his horse in motion; whereupon the gentlemen went off on foot.

Many persons would have been vexed and even humiliated by the necessity of appearing at this hour on the boulevard in disorderly attire, which plainly indicated that they had spent the night in debauchery. But with the exception of the Viscount de Coralthe, who was evidently out of humor, the party seemed delighted with themselves, as it was easy to see by the way they met the glances of the passers-by. They considered them-

selves first-class form—they were producing an effect—they were astonishing people. And what more could they desire?

One thing is certain—they were irritating Chupin terribly. He was following them on the opposite side of the boulevard, at some little distance in the rear, for he was afraid of being recognized. “The wretches!” he growled. “One couldn’t draw a pint of manly blood from the veins of all six of them. Ah, if they knew how I hate them!”

But he had not long to nurse his wrath. On reaching the Rue Drouot, two of the gentlemen left the party, and two more went down the Rue Lepelletier. M. Wilkie and the viscount were left to walk down the boulevard alone. They linked their arms and carried on an animated conversation until they reached the Rue du Helder, where they shook hands and separated. What had they said at parting? What agreement had been made between them? Chupin would willingly have given a hundred sous from his private purse to have known. He would have given as much more to have been able to double himself, in order to pursue the viscount, who had started off in the direction of the Madeleine, without having to give up watching and following his friend. But the days of miracles are over. So Chupin sighed, and, following Wilkie, he soon saw him enter No. 48 of the Rue du Helder. The concierge, who was at the door busily engaged in polishing the bell-handle, bowed respectfully. “So there it is!” grumbled Chupin. “I knew he lived there—I knew it by the way that Madame d’Argelès looked at the windows yesterday evening. Poor woman! Ah! her son’s a fine fellow and no mistake!”

His compassion for the unhappy mother seemed to

recall him to a sense of duty. "Scoundrel that I am!" he exclaimed, striking his forehead with his clenched fist. "Why, I'm forgetting my own good mother!" And as his task was now ended, he started off on the run, taking the shortest cut to the Faubourg Saint-Denis. "Poor mother!" he said to himself as he tore along, "what a night she must have had! She must have cried her eyes out!"

He spoke the truth. The poor woman had passed a night of agony—counting the hours, and trembling each time the door of the house opened, announcing some tenant's return. And as morning approached, her anxiety increased. "For her son would not have allowed her to remain in such suspense," she said to herself, "unless he had met with some accident or encountered some of his former friends—those detestable scamps who had tried to make him as vile as themselves." Perhaps he had met his father, Polyte Chupin, the man whom she still loved in spite of everything, because he was her husband, but whom she judged, and whom indeed she knew, to be capable of any crime. And of all misfortunes, it was an accident, even a fatal accident, that she dreaded least. In her heroic soul the voice of honor spoke even more loudly than the imperious instinct of maternity; and she would rather have found her son lying dead on the marble slabs of the Morgue than seated in the dock at the Assize Court.

Her poor eyes were weary of weeping when she at last recognized Victor's familiar step approaching down the passage. She hastily opened the door, and as soon as she *felt* that he was near her, for she could not see him, she asked: "Where have you spent the night? Where have you come from? What has happened?"

His only answer was to fling his arms round her neck, following alike the impulse of his heart and the advice of experience, which told him that this would be the best explanation he could give. Still it did not prevent him from trying to justify himself, although he was careful not to confess the truth, for he dreaded his mother's censure, knowing well enough that she would be less indulgent than his own conscience.

"I believe you, my son," said the good woman, gravely; "you wouldn't deceive me, I'm sure." And she added: "What reassured me, when you kissed me, was that you hadn't been drinking."

Chupin did not speak a word; this confidence made him strangely uneasy. "May I be hung," he thought, "if after this I ever do anything that I can't confess to this poor good woman!"

But he hadn't time for sentimental reflections. He had gone too far to draw back, and it was necessary for him to report the result of his researches as soon as possible. Accordingly, he hastily ate a morsel, for he was faint with hunger, and started out again, promising to return to dinner. He was in all the greater haste as it was Sunday. M. Fortunat was in the habit of passing these days in the country, and Chupin feared he might fail to see him if he was not expeditious in his movements. And while running to the Place de la Bourse, he carefully prepared the story he meant to relate, deeply impressed by the wisdom of the popular maxim which says: "It is not always well to tell the whole truth." Ought he to describe the scene at the restaurant, mention Coralthe, and say that there was nothing more to be done respecting M. Wilkie? After mature deliberation he decided in the negative. If he

revealed everything, M. Fortunat might become discouraged and abandon the affair. It would be better to let him discover the truth himself, and profit by his anger to indicate a means of vengeance.

It happened that M. Fortunat had decided not to go to the country that Sunday. He had slept later than usual, and was still in his dressing-gown when Chupin made his appearance. He uttered a joyful cry on seeing his emissary, feeling assured that he must be the bearer of good news, since he came so early. "You have succeeded, then?" he exclaimed.

"Yes, monsieur."

"You have discovered Madame d'Argelès's son?"

"I have him."

"Ah! I knew that you were a clever fellow. Quick, tell me everything. But no, wait a moment."

He rang the bell, and Madame Dodelin at once made her appearance. "Put another plate on the table," said the agent. "M. Chupin will breakfast with me—and serve us at once. You agree, don't you, Victor? It's ten o'clock; I'm hungry; and we can talk better over a bottle of wine."

This was a great honor; and it gave Chupin a fitting idea of the value of the service he had rendered. He was not too much elated, however; though he felt very sorry that he had eaten before he came. On his side, M. Fortunat by no means regretted having conferred this favor on his clerk, for the story which the latter related, caused him intense delight. "Very good!—well done," he exclaimed every other minute. "I could not have done better myself. You shall be abundantly rewarded, Victor, if this affair is successful." And at this thought his satisfaction overflowed in a complacent monologue: "Why shouldn't it succeed?" he

asked himself. "Could anything be more simple and certain? I can make any demand I please—one, two, three hundred thousand francs. Ah, it was a good thing that the Count de Chalusse died! Now, I can forgive Valorsay. Let him keep my forty thousand francs; he's quite welcome to them! Let him marry Mademoiselle Marguerite; I wish them a large and flourishing family! And Madame d'Argelès, too, has my benediction!"

He was so confident his fortune was made that at noon he could restrain himself no longer. He hired a cab and accompanied by Chupin he set out for M. Wilkie's abode, declaring that he would wake that young gentleman up if needs be, but at all events he must see him without delay. When he reached the Rue du Helder, he told Chupin to wait in the cab, and then entering the house, he asked: "Monsieur Wilkie?"

"On the second floor, the door to the right," replied the concierge.

M. Fortunat ascended the stairs very slowly, for he felt the necessity of regaining all his composure, and it was not until he had brought himself to a proper frame of mind that he rang the bell. A small servant, M. Wilkie's fag, who took his revenge in robbing his employer most outrageously, came to the door, and began by declaring that his master was out of town. But M. Fortunat understood how to force doors open, and his manœuvres succeeded so well that he was finally allowed to enter a small sitting-room, while the servant went off, saying: "I will go and inform monsieur."

Instead of wasting time in congratulating himself on this first achievement the agent began to inspect the

room in which he found himself, as well as another apartment, the door of which stood open. For he was of the opinion that a dwelling-place indicates the character of its inmate, as surely as a shell indicates the form of the creature that inhabits it. M. Wilkie was comfortably lodged; but his rooms were most pretentiously ornamented. They were indeed decorated in more than doubtful taste. There were very few books lying about, but costly riding-whips, spurs, rifles, cartridge-boxes, and all the paraphernalia of a fashionable sporting man, were here in abundance.

The only pictures on the wall were a few portraits of celebrated horses, which foreshadowed the fact that M. Wilkie must have, at least, an eighth share in some well-known racer. After this inspection, M. Fortunat smiled complacently. "This young fellow has expensive tastes," he thought. "It will be very easy to manage him."

However his reflections were interrupted by the return of the servant, who exclaimed: "My master is in the dining-room, and if monsieur will enter——"

The heir-hunter did enter, and found himself face to face with M. Wilkie, who was partaking of a cup of chocolate. He was not only up, but he was dressed to go out—dressed in such a style that he would have been taken for a respectable groom. A couple of hours' sleep had made him himself again; and he had regained the arrogance of manner which was the distinguishing trait of his character, and a sure sign that he was in prosperous circumstances. As his unknown visitor entered he looked up, and brusquely asked: "What do you want?"

"I called on business, monsieur."

"Ah, well! this isn't a favorable moment. I must

be at Vincennes for the races. I'm interested in a horse. So, you understand——"

M. Fortunat was secretly amused by M. Wilkie's nonchalance. "The young fellow won't be in so much of a hurry when he learns my business," he thought. And he replied aloud: "I can explain what brings me in a few words, monsieur."

"Proceed, then."

M. Fortunat began by closing the door which had been intentionally left open by the servant; and then, returning to M. Wilkie's side, he began with an air of the greatest mystery: "What would you give a shrewd man if he suddenly placed you in undisputed possession of an immense fortune—of a million—two millions, perhaps?"

He had prepared this little effect most carefully, and he fully expected to see M. Wilkie fall on his knees before him. But not at all; the young gentleman's face never moved a muscle; and it was in the calmest possible tone, and with his mouth half full that he replied: "I know the rest. You come, don't you, to sell me the secret of an unclaimed inheritance, which belongs to me? Very well, you have come too late."

If the ceiling had fallen and crushed M. Fortunat there and then he would, mentally at least, have not been in a more pitiable condition. He stood silent, motionless, utterly confounded, with his mouth wide open, and such an expression of consternation in his eyes that M. Wilkie burst into a hearty laugh. Still the agent struggled against fate, and ultimately faltered: "Let me explain—permit me——"

"Oh, it would be useless. I know my rights. I have already arranged with a party to prosecute my

claims; the agreement will be signed on the day after to-morrow."

"With whom?"

"Ah, excuse me; that's my affair."

He had finished his chocolate, and he now poured out a glass of ice-water, drank it, wiped his mouth, and rose from the table. "You will excuse me, my dear sir, if I leave you," he remarked. "As I said before, I am going to Vincennes. I have staked a thousand louis on 'Pompier de Nanterre,' my horse, and my friends have ventured ten times as much. Who knows what may happen if I'm not there at the start?" And then, ignoring M. Fortunat as completely as if he had not existed, M. Wilkie exclaimed: "Toby, you fool! where are you? Is my carriage below? Quick, bring me my cane, my gloves, and my glasses. Take down that basket of champagne. Run and put on your new livery. Make haste, you little beast, I shall be too late."

M. Fortunat left the room. The frightful anger that had followed his idiotic stupor sent his blood rushing madly to his brain. A purple mist swam before his eyes; there was a loud ringing in his ears, and with each pulsation of his heart his head seemed to receive a blow from a heavy hammer. His feelings were so terrible that he was really frightened. "Am I about to have an attack of apoplexy?" he wondered. And, as every surrounding object seemed to whirl around him, the very floor itself apparently rising and falling under his feet, he remained on the landing waiting for this horrible vertigo to subside and doing his best to reason with himself. It was fully five minutes before he dared to risk the descent; and even when he reached the street, his features were so frightfully distorted that Chupin trembled.

He sprang out, assisted his employer into the cab, and bade the driver return to the Place de la Bourse. It was really pitiful to see the despair which had succeeded M. Fortunat's joyful confidence. "This is the end of everything," he groaned. "I'm robbed, despoiled, ruined! And such a sure thing as it seemed. These misfortunes happen to no one but me! Some one in advance of me! Some one else will capture the prize! Oh, if I knew the wretch, if I only knew him!"

"One moment," interrupted Chupin; "I think I know the man."

M. Fortunat gave a violent start. "Impossible!" he exclaimed.

"Excuse me, monsieur—it must be a vile rascal named Coralth."

It was a bellow rather than a cry of rage that escaped M. Fortunat's lips. To a man of his experience, only a glimmer of light was required to reveal the whole situation. "Ah! I understand!—I see!" he exclaimed. "Yes, you are right, Victor; it's he—Coralth—Valorsay's tool! Coralth was the traitor who, in obedience to Valorsay's orders, ruined the man who loved Mademoiselle Marguerite. The deed was done at Madame d'Argelès's house. So Coralth knows her, and knows her secret. It's he who has outwitted me." He reflected for a moment, and then, in a very different tone, he said: "I shall never see a penny of the count's millions, and my forty thousand francs are gone forever; but, as Heaven hears me, I will have some satisfaction for my money. Ah!—so Coralth and Valorsay combine to ruin me! Very well!—since this is the case, I shall espouse the cause of Mademoiselle Marguerite and of the unfortunate man they've ruined. Ah, my cherubs, you don't know Fortunat yet! Now

we'll see if the innocent don't get the best of you, and if they don't unmask you. I shall do my best, since you have forced me to do it—and gratis too!"

Chupin was radiant; his vengeance was assured. "And I, monsieur," said he, "will give you some information about this Coralthe. First of all, the scoundrel's married and his wife keeps a tobacco-shop somewhere near the Route d'Asnières. I'll find her for you—see if I don't."

The sudden stopping of the vehicle which had reached the Place de la Bourse, cut his words short. M. Fortunat ordered him to pay the driver, while he himself rushed upstairs, eager to arrange his plan of campaign—to use his own expression. In his absence a commissioner had brought a letter for him which Madame Dodelin now produced. He broke the seal, and read to his intense surprise: "Monsieur—I am the ward of the late Count de Chalusse. I must speak to you. Will you grant me an interview on Wednesday next, at a quarter-past three o'clock? Yours respectfully,

"MARGUERITE."

XX.

WHEN Mademoiselle Marguerite left the dead count's bedside at ten o'clock at night to repair to Pascal Feraillleur's house, she did not yet despair of the future. Father, friend, rank, security, fortune—she had lost all these in a single moment—but she could still see a promise of happiness in the distance.

She suffered undoubtedly, and yet she experienced a sort of bitter pleasure at the thought of uniting her life to the man who was as unfortunate as her-

self, who was slandered as she herself had been slandered, branded with the most cruel and unjust imputations, and had neither fortune nor friends. Others might scorn them; but what did they care for the world's disdain so long as they had the approval of their consciences? Would not their mutual esteem suffice since they loved each other? It seemed to Marguerite that their very misfortunes would bind them more closely to each other, and cement the bonds of their love more strongly. And if it were absolutely necessary for them to leave France—ah, well! they would leave it. To them Fatherland would always be the spot where they lived together.

As the cab approached the Rue d'Ulm she pictured Pascal's sorrow, and the joy and surprise he would feel when she suddenly appeared before him, and faltered: "They accuse you—here I am! I know that you are innocent, and I love you!"

But the brutal voice of the concierge, informing her of Pascal's secret departure, in the most insulting terms, abruptly dispelled her dreams. If Pascal had failed her, everything had failed her. If she had lost him, she had lost her all. The world seemed empty—struggling would be folly—happiness was only an empty name. She indeed longed for death!

Madame Léon who had a set of formulas adapted to all circumstances, undertook to console her. "Weep, my dear young lady, weep; it will do you good. Ah! this is certainly a horrible catastrophe. You are young, fortunately, and Time is a great consoler. M. Ferailleur isn't the only man on earth. Others will love you. There are others who love you already!"

"Silence!" interrupted Marguerite, more revolted than if she had heard a libertine whispering shameful

proposals in her ear. "Silence! I forbid you to add another word." To speak of another—what sacrilege! Poor girl. She was one of those whose life is bound up in one love alone, and if that fails them—it is death!

The thought that she was utterly alone added to the horror of her situation. Whom could she depend upon? Not on Madame Léon. She distrusted her; she had no confidence whatever in her. Should she ask for the advice of either of her suitors? The Marquis de Valorsay inspired her with unconquerable aversion, and she despised the so-called General de Fondège. So her only friend, her only protector was a stranger, the old justice of the peace who had taken her defence, by crushing the slander of the servants, and whom she had opened her heart to. But he would soon forget her, she thought; and the future, such as it was presented to her imagination, seemed a terrible one. However, she was too courageous to remain for long in despair—she struggled against her sorrow; and the thought that she might, perhaps, reach Pascal through M. Fortunat at last occurred to her mind. This hope was her sole chance of salvation. She clung to it as a shipwrecked mariner clings to the plank which is his only hope of life.

When she returned to the mansion her mind was made up, and she had regained her usual composure. For ten minutes or so she had been praying by the count's bedside, when M. Bourigeau, the concierge, appeared and handed her a letter which had just been brought to the house. It was addressed to "Mademoiselle Marguerite de Durtal de Chalusse, at the Hôtel de Chalusse, Rue de Courcelles."

Mademoiselle Marguerite blushed. Who was it that addressed her by this name which she no longer had

the right to bear? She studied the handwriting for a moment, but she did not remember ever having seen it before. At last, however, she opened the letter and read: "My dear, dear child." "Dear child!" indeed. What could this mean? Was there any one in the world sufficiently interested in her welfare, or loving her enough, to address her in this style? She quickly turned the sheet to see the signature; and when her eyes fell on it she turned pale. "Ah!" she exclaimed, involuntarily, "ah! ah!"

The letter was signed: "Athénaïs de Fondège." It had been written by the General's wife. She resumed her perusal of it, and this is what she read: "I this instant hear of the cruel loss you have sustained, and also learn that, for want of testamentary provisions, the poor Count de Chalusse leaves you, his idolized daughter, almost without resources. I will not attempt to offer you consolation, God alone can assuage certain sorrows. I should come and weep with you if I were not kept in bed by illness. But to-morrow, whatever happens, I shall be with you before breakfast. It is at such a time as this, my poor dear afflicted child, that one can tell one's true friends; and we are yours as I hope to prove. The General feels that he should be insulting and betraying the memory of a man who was his dearest friend for thirty years, if he did not take the count's place, if he did not become your second father. He has offered you our modest home; you have refused. Why? With the authority conferred upon me by my age and my position as the mother of a family, I tell you that you ought to accept. What other course can you possibly think of? Where would you go, my poor, dear child? But we will discuss this matter to-morrow. I shall find a way to persuade you

to love us, and to allow yourself to be loved. In *my* heart you will fill the place of the beloved and lamented daughter I have lost—my beautiful and gentle Bathilde. Once more I say farewell until to-morrow—trusting that you will accept the sympathy and affection of your best friend,

“ATHÉNAÏS DE FONDÈGE.”

Mademoiselle Marguerite was thunderstruck, for the writer of this epistle was a lady whom she had only met five or six times, who had never visited her, and with whom she had scarcely exchanged twenty words. Moreover, she well remembered certain glances with which Madame de Fondège had, on one occasion, tried to crush her—glances so full of cruel contempt that they had drawn bitter tears of sorrow, shame, and anger, from the poor girl. The count himself had said to her at the time: “Don’t be so childish, Marguerite, as to trouble yourself about this foolish and impudent woman.”

And now this same woman sent her a letter overflowing with sympathy, and claimed her affection and confidence in the tone of an old and tried friend. Was such a change natural? Not being what is called a credulous person, Mademoiselle Marguerite was unable to believe it. She divined that Madame de Fondège must have had some hidden motive in writing such a letter—but what motive was it? Alas! she divined this also only too well. The General, suspecting that she had stolen the missing money, had imparted his suspicions to his wife; and she, being as avaricious and as unscrupulous as himself, was doing her best to secure the booty for her son. Such a calculation is a common one nowadays. Steal yourself? Fie, never! You would

not dare. Besides, you are honest. But it is quite a different thing to profit by other people's rascality. Besides, there are no risks to be encountered.

On perusing the letter a second time, it seemed to Mademoiselle Marguerite that she could hear the General and his wife discussing the means of obtaining a share of the two millions. She could hear Madame de Fondège saying to her husband: "You are a block-head! You frightened the girl by your precipitancy and roughness. But fortunately, I'm here. Let me manage the affair; and I'll prove that women are far more clever than men." And, thereupon, she had seized her pen, and commenced this letter. In Mademoiselle Marguerite's opinion, the epistle betrayed the joint efforts of the pair. She could have sworn that the husband had dictated the sentence: "The General feels that he should be insulting and betraying the memory of a man who was his dearest friend for thirty years, if he did not become your second father." On the other hand, the phrase, "I shall find a way to persuade you to love us, and to allow yourself to be loved," was unmistakably the wife's work. The writer's insincerity was fully revealed by one passage of the letter. "You will fill the place of the beloved daughter I have lost," wrote Madame de Fondège. It is true that she had once had a daughter; but the child had died of croup when only six months old, and more than twenty-five years previously.

It was strange, moreover, that this letter had not been sent until ten o'clock in the evening; but, on reflection, Mademoiselle Marguerite was able to explain this circumstance satisfactorily to herself. Before taking any decided step, M. and Madame de Fondège had wished to consult their son; and they had been unable

to see him until late in the evening. However, as soon as the brilliant hussar had approved the noble scheme concocted by his parents, a servant had been dispatched with the letter. All these surmises were surely very plausible; but it was difficult to reconcile them with the opinion advanced by the magistrate—that M. de Fondège must know what had become of the missing millions.

Mademoiselle Marguerite did not think of this, however. She was losing her presence of mind at thought of the odious suspicions which rested on her, suspicions which she had seemed to read in the eyes of all who approached her, from Dr. Jodon to the Marquis de Valorsay. It is true that the magistrate had taken her defence; he had silenced the servants, but would that suffice? Would she not remain branded by an abominable accusation? And even the consciousness of her innocence did not reassure her, for Pascal's case warned her that innocence is not a sufficient safeguard against slander.

Could she hope to escape when he had succumbed? She could tell by the agony that was torturing her own heart, how much he must have suffered. Where was he now? Beyond the frontiers of France? They had told her so, but she did not, could not believe it. Knowing him as she knew him, it seemed to her impossible that he had accepted his fate so quickly and without a struggle. A secret presentiment told her that his absence was only feigned, that he was only biding his time, and that M. Fortunat would not have far to go in search of him. It was in M. de Chalusse's bedroom that she thus reflected, but a few steps from the bed on which reposed all that was mortal of the man whose weakness had made her life one long martyrdom, whose

want of foresight had ruined her future, but whom she had not the heart to censure. She was standing in front of the window with her burning forehead resting against the glass. At that very moment Pascal was waiting, seated on the curbstone opposite the mansion. At that very moment he was watching the shadow on the window-curtain, wondering if it were not Marguerite's. If the night had been clear she might have discerned the motionless watcher in the street below, and divined that it was Pascal. But how could she suspect his presence? How could she suspect that he had hastened to the Rue de Courcelles as she had hastened to the Rue d'Ulm?

It was almost midnight when a slight noise, a sound of stealthy footsteps, made her turn. Madame Léon was leaving the room, and a moment later Marguerite heard the house-door leading into the garden open and shut again. There was nothing extraordinary about such an occurrence, and yet a strange misgiving assailed her. Why, she could not explain; but many trivial circumstances, suddenly invested with a new and alarming significance, recurred to her mind. She remembered that Madame Léon had been restless and nervous all the evening. The housekeeper, who was usually so inactive, who lounged in her arm-chair for hours together, had been moving uneasily about, going up and down stairs at least a dozen times, and continually glancing at her watch or the clock. Twice, moreover, had the concierge come to tell her that some one wished to see her. "Where can she be going now, at midnight?" thought Mademoiselle Marguerite; "she who is usually so timid?"

At first, the girl resisted her desire to solve the question; her suspicions seemed absurd to her, and, be-

sides, it was distasteful to her to play the spy. Still, she listened, waiting to hear Madame Léon re-enter the house. But more than a quarter of an hour elapsed, and yet the door did not open or close again. Either Madame Léon had not left the house at all, or else she was still outside. "This is very strange!" thought Mademoiselle Marguerite. "Was I mistaken? I must convince myself." And, obeying a mysterious influence, stronger than her own will, she left the room and went down the stairs. She had reached the hall, when the garden door suddenly opened, and Madame Léon came in. The lights in the hall were burning brightly, so that it was easy to observe the housekeeper's manner and countenance. She was panting for breath, like a person who had been running. She was very pale, and her dress was disordered. Her cap-strings were untied, and her cap had slipped from her head and was hanging over her shoulders. "What is the matter with you?" asked Mademoiselle Marguerite in astonishment. "Where have you been?"

On seeing the girl Madame Léon recoiled. Should she fly off or remain? She hesitated for an instant; and it was easy to read her hesitation in her eyes. She decided to remain; but it was with a constrained smile and in an unnatural voice that she replied: "Why do you speak to me like that, my dear young lady? One might suppose you were angry with me. You must know very well that I've been in the garden!"

"At this hour of the night?"

"*Mon Dieu!* yes—and not for pleasure, I assure you—not by any means—I—I——" She was evidently seeking for some excuse; and, for a moment or two, she stammered forth one incoherent sentence after an-

other, trying to gain time and imploring Heaven to grant her an inspiration.

"Well?" insisted Mademoiselle Marguerite, impatiently. "Why did you go out?"

"Ah! I—I—thought I heard Mirza barking in the garden. I thought she had been forgotten in all the confusion, and that the poor creature had been shut out, so I summoned all my courage, and——"

Mirza was an old spaniel that M. de Chalusse had been very fond of, and the animal's caprices were respected by all the inmates of the house.

"That's very strange," remarked Mademoiselle Marguerite, "for when you rose to leave the room, half an hour ago, Mirza was sleeping at your feet."

"What—really—is it possible?"

"It's certain."

But the worthy woman had already recovered her self-possession and her accustomed loquacity at the same time. "Ah! my dear young lady," she said, bravely, "I'm in such sorrow that I'm losing my senses completely. Still, it was only from the kindest of motives that I ventured into the garden, and I had scarcely entered it before I saw something white run away from me—I felt sure it was Mirza—and so I ran after it. But I could find nothing. I called 'Mirza! Mirza!' and still nothing. I searched under all the trees, and yet I could not find her. It was as dark as pitch, and suddenly a terrible fear seized hold of me—such a terrible fright that I really believe I called for help, and I ran back to the house half crazed."

Any one hearing her would have sworn that she was telling the truth. But, unfortunately, her earlier manner had proved her guilt.

Mademoiselle Marguerite was not deceived when she

said to herself: "I am on the track of some abominable act." However, she had sufficient self-control to conceal her suspicions; and she pretended to be perfectly satisfied with the explanation which the housekeeper had concocted. "Ah, my dear Léon, you are altogether too timid; it's absurd," she said, kindly.

The housekeeper hung her head. "I know that I make myself ridiculous," she said, humbly. "But how can I help it? When a person's frightened, she can't reason. And that white object which I saw, as plainly as I see you, what could it have been?" And, convinced that her fable was believed, she grew bolder, and ventured to add: "Oh, my dear young lady, I shall tremble all night if the garden isn't searched. Pray send the servants out to look. There are so many thieves and rascals in Paris!"

Under any other circumstances Mademoiselle Marguerite would have refused to listen to this ridiculous request; but, determined to repay the hypocrite in her own coin, she replied: "Very well; it shall be done." And calling M. Casimir and Bourigeau, the concierge, she ordered them to take a lantern and explore the garden carefully.

They obeyed, though with rather bad grace, not being particularly courageous, either of them, and, of course, they found nothing.

"No matter," said Madame Léon, "I feel safe now." And she did indeed feel more tranquil in mind. "I had a lucky escape!" she said to herself. "What would have become of me, if Mademoiselle Marguerite had discovered the truth?"

But the housekeeper congratulated herself on her victory too soon. Mademoiselle Marguerite not only suspected her of treason, but she was endeavoring to

procure proofs of it. She felt certain that the plausible housekeeper had deceived her, and cruelly wronged her as well. But what she could not understand was, how Madame Léon had been able to do so. She had spent a long time in fruitless conjectures, when suddenly she remembered the little garden gate. "The deceitful creature must have used that gate," she thought.

It was easy for her to verify her suspicion. The little gate had not been exactly condemned, but many months had elapsed since it had been used; so it would be a very simple matter to ascertain whether it had been recently opened or not. "And I will know for certain before an hour has passed," said Mademoiselle Marguerite to herself.

Having come to this conclusion, she feigned sleep, keeping a sharp watch over Madame Léon from between her half-closed eyelids. The housekeeper, after twisting uneasily in her arm-chair, at last became quiet again; and it was soon evident that she was sleeping soundly. Thereupon Mademoiselle Marguerite rose to her feet and stole noiselessly from the room downstairs into the garden. She had provided herself with a candle and some matches, and as soon as she struck a light, she saw that her surmises were correct. The little gate had just been opened and closed again. The cobwebs round about the bolts were torn and broken; the rust which had filled the keyhole had been removed, and on the dust covering the lock the impress of a hand could be detected. "And I have confided my most precious secrets to this wicked woman!" thought Mademoiselle Marguerite. "Fool that I was!"

Already thoroughly convinced, she extinguished her candle. Still, having discovered so much, she wished to pursue her investigation to the end, and so she

opened the little gate. The ground outside had been soaked by the recent rains, and had not yet dried, and by the light of the neighboring street-lamp, she plainly distinguished a number of well-defined footprints on the muddy soil. An experienced observer would have realized by the disposition of these footprints that something like a struggle had taken place here; but Mademoiselle Marguerite was not sufficiently expert for that. She only understood what a child would have understood—that two people had been standing here for some time. Poor girl! She had not seen Pascal when he was sitting in front of the mansion some hours before! And now no presentiment warned her that these footprints were his. In her opinion, the man who had been talking with Madame Léon was either M. de Fondège, or the Marquis de Valorsay—that is to say, Madame Léon was hired to watch her and to render an account of all she said and did.

Her first impulse was to denounce and dismiss this miserable hypocrite; but as she was returning to the house, an idea which an old diplomatist need not have been ashamed of entered her mind. She said to herself that as Madame Léon was unmasked she was no longer to be feared; so why should she be sent away? A known spy can undoubtedly be made a most valuable auxiliary. "Why shouldn't I make use of this wicked woman?" thought Mademoiselle Marguerite. "I can conceal from her what I don't wish her to know, and with a little skill I can make her carry to her employers such information as will serve my plans. By watching her, I shall soon discover my enemy; and who knows if, by this means, I may not succeed in finding an explanation of the fatality that pursues me?"

When Mademoiselle Marguerite returned to her

place beside the count's bedside, she had calmly and irrevocably made up her mind. She would not only retain Madame Léon in her service, but she would display even greater confidence in her than before. Such a course was most repugnant to Marguerite's loyal, truthful nature; but reason whispered to her that in fighting with villains, it is often necessary to use their weapons; and she had her honor, her life, and her future to defend. A strange and but imperfectly defined suspicion had entered her mind. To-night, for the first time, she thought she could discover a mysterious connection between Pascal's misfortunes and her own. Was it mere chance which had struck them at the same time, and in much the same manner? Who would have profited by the abominable crime which had dishonored her lover, had it not been for M. de Chalusse's death and her own firmness? Evidently the Marquis de Valorsay, for whom Pascal's flight had left the field clear.

All these thoughts were well calculated to drive away sleep; but the poor girl was only twenty, and it was the second night she had watched by the count's bedside. Thus at last fatigue overcame her, and she fell asleep.

In the morning, about seven o'clock, Madame Léon was obliged to shake her to rouse her from the kind of lethargy into which she had fallen. "Mademoiselle," said the housekeeper, in her honeyed voice; "dear mademoiselle, wake up at once!"

"What is the matter? What is it?"

"Ah! how can I explain? My dear young lady, the undertaker's men have come to make arrangements for the ceremony."

Those in charge of the last rites had indeed arrived,

and their heavy tread could be heard in the hall and in the courtyard. M. Casimir, who was bursting with self-sufficiency, hurried here, there, and everywhere, indicating, with an imperious gesture, where he wished the black hangings, embroidered with silver and emblazoned with the De Chalusse arms, to be suspended. As the magistrate had given him *carte-blanche*, he deemed it proper, as he remarked to Concierge Bourigeau, to have everything done in grand style. But he took good care not to reveal the fact that he had exacted a very handsome commission from all the people he employed. The hundred francs derived from Chupin had only whetted his appetite for more. At all events, he had certainly spared no pains in view of having everything as magnificent as possible; and it was not until he considered the display thoroughly satisfactory that he went to warn Mademoiselle Marguerite. "I come to beg mademoiselle to retire to her own room," he said.

"Retire—why?"

He did not reply by words, but pointed to the bed on which the body was lying, and the poor girl realized that the moment of eternal separation had come. She rose, and dragged herself to the bedside. Death had now effaced all traces of the count's last agony. His face wore its accustomed expression again, and it might have been fancied that he was asleep. For a long time Mademoiselle Marguerite stood looking at him, as if to engrave the features she would never behold again upon her memory. "Mademoiselle," insisted M. Casimir; "mademoiselle, do not remain here."

She heard him, and summoning all her strength, she leaned over the bed, kissed M. de Chalusse, and went away. But she was too late, for in passing through the

hall she encountered the undertakers, who carried on their shoulders a long metallic case enclosed in two oaken ones. And she had scarcely reached her own room before a smell of resin told her that the men were closing the coffin which contained all that was mortal of M. de Chalusse, her father.

So, none of those terrible details, which so increase one's grief, were spared her. But she had already suffered so much that she had reached a state of gloomy apathy, almost insensibility; and the exercise of her faculties was virtually suspended. Whiter than marble, she fell, rather than seated herself, on a chair, scarcely perceiving Madame Léon, who had followed her.

The worthy housekeeper was greatly excited, and not without cause. As there were no relations, it had been decided that M. de Fondège, the count's oldest friend, should do the honors of the mansion to the persons invited to attend the funeral; and he had sworn that he would be under arms at daybreak, and that they might positively depend upon him. But the hour fixed for the ceremony was approaching, several persons had already arrived, and yet M. de Fondège had not put in an appearance. "It is incomprehensible," exclaimed Madame Léon. "The General is usually punctuality personified. He must have met with some accident." And in her anxiety she stationed herself at the window, whence she could command a view of the courtyard, carefully scrutinizing every fresh arrival.

At last, about half-past nine o'clock, she suddenly exclaimed: "Here he is! Do you hear, mademoiselle, here's the General!"

A moment later, indeed, there was a gentle rap at the door, and M. de Fondège entered. "Ah, I'm late!"

he exclaimed; "but, dash it all! it's not my fault!" And, struck by Mademoiselle Marguerite's immobility, he advanced and took her hand. "And you, my dear little one, what is the matter with you?" he asked. "Have you been ill? You are frightfully pale."

She succeeded in shaking off the torpor which was stealing over her, and replied in a faint voice: "I am not ill, monsieur."

"So much the better, my dear child, so much the better. It is our little heart that is suffering, is it not? Yes—yes—I understand. But your old friends will console you. You received my wife's letter, did you not? Ah, well! what she told you, she will do—she will do it. And to prove it, in spite of her illness, she followed me—in fact, she is here!"

XXI.

MADemoiselle MARGUERITE sprang to her feet, quivering with indignation. Her eyes sparkled and her lips trembled as she threw back her head with a superb gesture of scorn, which loosened her beautiful dark hair, and caused it to fall in rippling masses over her shoulders. "Ah! Madame de Fondège is here!" she repeated, in a tone of crushing contempt—"Madame de Fondège, your wife, here!"

It seemed to her an impossibility to receive the hypocrite who had written the letter of the previous evening—the accomplice of the scoundrels who took advantage of her wretchedness and isolation. Her heart revolted at the thought of meeting this woman, who had neither conscience nor shame, who could stoop so low as to intrigue for the millions which she fancied had

been stolen. Mademoiselle Marguerite was about to forbid her to enter, or to retire herself, when the thought of her determination to act stealthily restrained her. She instantly realized her imprudence, and, mastering herself with a great effort, she murmured: "Madame de Fondège is too kind! How can I ever express my gratitude?"

Madame de Fondège must have heard this, for at the same moment she entered the room. She was short, and very stout—a faded blonde, with her complexion spoilt by a multitude of freckles. She had very large hands, broad, thick feet, and a shrill voice; and the vulgarity of her appearance was all the more noticeable on account of her pretensions to elegance. For although her father had been a wood-merchant, she boasted of her exalted birth, and endeavored to impress people with the magnificence of her style of living, though her fortune was problematical, and her household conducted in the most frugal style. Her attire suggested a continual conflict between elegance and economy—between real poverty and feigned prodigality. She wore a corsage and overskirt of black satin; but the upper part of the underskirt, which was not visible, was made of lute-string costing thirty sous a yard, and her laces were Chantilly only in appearance. Still, her love of finery had never carried her so far as shop-lifting, or induced her to part with her honor for gewgaws—irregularities which are so common nowadays, even among wives and mothers of families, that people are no longer astonished to hear of them.

No—Madame de Fondège was a faithful wife, in the strict and legal sense of the word. But how she revenged herself! She was "virtuous;" but so dangerously virtuous that one might have supposed she

was so against her will, and that she bitterly regretted it. She ruled her husband with a rod of iron. And he who was so terrible in appearance, he who twirled his ferocious mustaches in such a threatening manner, he who swore horribly enough to make an old hussar blush, became more submissive than a child, and more timid than a lamb when he was beside his wife. He trembled when she turned her pale blue eyes upon him in a certain fashion. And woe to him if he ventured to rebel. She suppressed his pocket-money, and during these penitential seasons he was reduced to the necessity of asking his friends to lend him twenty-franc pieces, which he generally forgot to return.

Madame de Fondège was, as a rule, most imperious, envious, and spiteful in disposition; but on coming to the Hôtel de Chalusse she had provided herself with any amount of sweetness and sensibility, and when she entered the room, she held her handkerchief to her lips as if to stifle her sobs. The General led her toward Mademoiselle Marguerite, and, in a semi-solemn, semi-sentimental tone, he exclaimed: "Dear Athénaïs, this is the daughter of my best and oldest friend. I know your heart—I know that she will find in you a second mother."

Mademoiselle Marguerite stood speechless and rigid. Persuaded that Madame de Fondège was about to throw her arms round her neck and kiss her, she was imposing the most terrible constraint upon herself, in order to conceal her horror and aversion. But she was unnecessarily alarmed. The hypocrisy of the General's wife was superior to that of Madame Léon. Madame de Fondège contented herself with pressing Mademoiselle Marguerite's hands and faltering: "What a misfortune! So young—so sudden! It is frightful!"

And, as she received no reply, she added, with an air of sorrowful dignity: "I dare not ask your full confidence, my dear unfortunate child. Confidence can be born only of long acquaintance and mutual esteem. But you will learn to know me. You will give me that sweet name of mother when I shall have deserved it."

Standing at a little distance off, the General listened with the air of a man who has a profound respect for his wife's ability. "Now the ice is broken," he thought, "it will be strange if Athénaïs doesn't do whatever she pleases with that little savage."

His hopes were so brightly reflected upon his countenance, that Madame Léon, who was furtively watching him, became alarmed. "Ah! what do these people want?" she said to herself; "and what do all these endearments mean? Upon my word, I must warn my patron at once." And, fancying that no one noticed her, she slipped quietly and noiselessly from the room.

But Mademoiselle Marguerite was on the watch. Determined to fathom the plotting that was going on around her, and frustrate it, she realized that everything depended upon her watchfulness and her ability to profit even by the most futile incidents. She had noticed the General's triumphant smile, and the look of anxiety that had suddenly clouded Madame Léon's face, so, without troubling herself about "the proprieties," she asked M. and Madame de Fondège to excuse her for a second, and darted after the housekeeper. Ah! she did not need to go far. Leaning over the banisters, she saw Madame Léon and the Marquis de Valorsay in earnest conversation in the hall below; the marquis as phlegmatic and as haughty as usual, but the housekeeper fairly excited. Marguerite at once understood that as Madame Léon knew that the marquis was

among the funeral guests, she had gone to warn him of Madame de Fondège's presence. This trivial circumstance proved that M. de Fondège's interests were opposed to those of M. de Valorsay; that they must, therefore, hate each other, and that, with a little patience and skill, she might utilize them, one against the other. It also proved that Madame Léon was the Marquis de Valorsay's paid spy, and that he must therefore have long been aware of Pascal's existence. But she lacked the time to follow out this train of thought. Her absence might awaken the Fondèges' suspicions; and her success depended on letting them suppose that she was their dupe. She therefore returned to them as soon as possible, excusing herself for her abrupt departure as well as she could; but she was not accustomed to deceive, and her embarrassment might have betrayed her had it not been for the General, who fortunately interrupted her by saying: "I, too, must excuse myself, my dear child; but Madame de Fondège will remain with you. I must fulfil a sacred duty. They are waiting for me downstairs, and they are no doubt becoming impatient. It is the first time in my life that I was ever behind time."

The General was right in losing no more time. At least a hundred and fifty guests had assembled in the reception-rooms on the ground floor, and they were beginning to think it very strange that they should be kept waiting in this style. And yet curiosity somewhat tempered their impatience. Some of the strange circumstances attending the count's death had been noised abroad; and some well-informed persons declared that a fabulous sum of money had been stolen by a young girl. It is true, they did not think this embezzlement a positive crime. It certainly proved that the young

lady in question possessed a strong and determined character; and many of the proudest among the guests would gladly have taken the place of De Valorsay, who, it was rumored, was about to marry the pretty thief and her millions.

The person who was most disturbed by the delay was the master of the ceremonies. Arrayed in his best uniform, his thin legs encased in black silk stockings, his mantle thrown gracefully over his shoulders, and his cocked hat under his arm, he was looking anxiously about for some one in the assembled crowd to whom he could give the signal for departure. He was already talking of starting off when M. de Fondège appeared. The friends of M. de Chalusse who were to hold the cords of the pall came forward. There was a moment's confusion, then the hearse started, and the whole cortège filed out of the courtyard.

Deep silence followed, so deep that the noise made in closing the heavy gates came upon one with startling effect. "Ah!" moaned Madame de Fondège, "it is over."

Marguerite's only reply was a despairing gesture. It would have been impossible for her to articulate a syllable—her tears were choking her. What would she not have given to be alone at this moment—to have been able to abandon herself without constraint to her emotions! Alas! prudence condemned her to play a part even now. The thought of her future and her honor lent her strength to submit to the deceitful consolations of a woman whom she knew to be a dangerous enemy. And the General's wife was by no means sparing of her consolatory phrases; in fact, it was only after a long homily on the uncertainty of life below that she ventured to approach the subject of her letter

of the previous evening. "For it is necessary to face the inevitable," she pursued. "The troublesome realities of life have no respect for our grief. So it is with you, my dear child; you would find a bitter pleasure in giving vent to your sorrow, but you are compelled to think of your future. As M. de Chalusse has no heirs, this house will be closed—you can remain here no longer."

"I know it, madame."

"Where will you go?"

"Alas! I don't know."

Madame de Fondège raised her handkerchief to her eyes as if to wipe a furtive tear away, and then, almost roughly, she exclaimed: "I must tell you the truth, my child. Listen to me. I see only two courses for you to adopt. Either to ask the protection of some respectable family, or to enter a convent. This is your only hope of safety."

Mademoiselle Marguerite bowed her head, without replying. To learn the plans which the General's wife had formed she must let her disclose them. However, the girl's silence seemed to make Madame de Fondège uncomfortable, and at last she resumed: "Is it possible that you think of braving the perils of life alone? I cannot believe it! It would be madness. Young, beautiful, and attractive as you are, it is impossible for you to live unprotected. Even if you had sufficient strength of character to lead a pure and honest life, the world would none the less refuse you its esteem. Mere prejudice, you say? You are quite right; but it is nevertheless true that a young girl who braves public opinion is lost."

It was easy to see by Madame de Fondège's earnestness that she feared Mademoiselle Marguerite would

avail herself of this opportunity of recovering her liberty. "What shall I do, then?" asked the girl.

"There is the convent."

"But I love life."

"Then ask the protection of some respectable family."

"The idea of being in any one's charge is disagreeable to me."

Strange to say, Madame de Fondège did not protest, did not speak of her own house. She was too proud for that. Having once offered hospitality, she thought it would arouse suspicion if she insisted. So she contented herself with enumerating the arguments for and against the two propositions, remarking from time to time: "Come, you must decide! Don't wait until the last moment!"

Mademoiselle Marguerite had already decided; but before announcing her decision, she wished to confer with the only friend she had in the world—the old justice of the peace. On the previous evening he had said to her: "Farewell until to-morrow," and knowing that his work in the house had not been concluded, she was extremely surprised that he had not yet put in an appearance.

While conversing with Madame de Fondège she had dexterously avoided compromising herself in any way, when suddenly a servant appeared and announced the magistrate's arrival. He entered the room, with his usual benevolent smile upon his lips, but his searching eyes were never once taken off Madame de Fondège's face. He bowed, made a few polite remarks, and then addressing Marguerite, he said: "I must speak with you, mademoiselle, at once. You may tell madame, however, that you will certainly return in less than a quarter of an hour."

Marguerite followed him, and when they were alone in the count's study and the doors had been carefully closed, the magistrate exclaimed: "I have been thinking a great deal of you, my child, a great deal; and it seems to me that I can explain certain things which worried you yesterday. But first of all, what has happened since I left you?"

Briefly, but with remarkable precision, Marguerite recounted the various incidents which had occurred—her useless journey to the Rue d'Ulm, Madame Léon's strange midnight ramble and conversation with the Marquis de Valorsay, Madame de Fondège's letter, and lastly, her visit and all that she had said.

The magistrate listened with his eyes fixed on his ring. "This is very serious, very serious," he said at last. "Perhaps you are right. Perhaps M. Ferailleux is innocent. And yet, why should he abscond? why should he leave the country?"

"Ah! monsieur, Pascal's flight is only feigned. He is in Paris—concealed somewhere—I'm sure of it; and I know a man who will find him for me. Only one thing puzzles me—his silence. To disappear without a word, without giving me any sign of life——"

The magistrate interrupted her by a gesture. "I see nothing surprising in that since your companion is the Marquis de Valorsay's spy. How do you know that she has not intercepted or destroyed some letter from M. Pascal?"

Mademoiselle Marguerite turned pale. "Great Heavens! how blind I have been!" she exclaimed. "I did not think of that. Oh, the wretch! if one could only question her and make her confess her crime. It is horrible to think that if I wish to arrive at the truth, I must remain with her

and treat her in the future just as I have treated her till now."

But the magistrate was not the man to wander from the subject he was investigating. "Let us return to Madame de Fondège," said he. "She is extremely unwilling to see you go out into the world alone. Why?—through affection? No. Why, then? This is what we must ascertain. Secondly, she seems indifferent as to whether you accept her hospitality or enter a convent."

"She seems to prefer that I should enter a convent."

"Very well. What conclusion can we draw from that? Simply, that the Fondège family don't particularly care about keeping you with them, or marrying you to their son. If they don't desire this, it is because they are perfectly sure that the missing money was not taken by you. Now, let me ask, how can they be so certain? Simply because they know where the missing millions are—and if they know——"

"Ah! monsieur, it is because they've stolen them!"

The magistrate was silent. He had turned the bezel of his ring inside, a sure sign of stormy weather, so his clerk would have said—and though he had his features under excellent control he could not entirely conceal some signs of a severe mental conflict he was undergoing. "Well, yes, my child," he said, at last. "Yes, it is my conviction that the Fondèges possess the millions you saw in the count's *escritoire*, and which we have been unable to find. How they obtained possession of the money I can't conceive—but they have it, or else logic is no longer logic." He paused again for a moment, and then he resumed, more slowly: "In acquainting you with my opinion on this subject, I have given you, a young girl, almost a child, a proof of esteem and confidence which, it seems to me, few men

are worthy of; for I may be deceived, and a magistrate ought not to accuse a person unless he is absolutely certain of his guilt. So you must forget what I have just told you, Mademoiselle Marguerite."

She looked at him with an air of utter astonishment. "You advise me to forget," she murmured, "you wish me to forget."

"Yes; you must conceal these suspicions in the deepest recesses of your heart, until the time comes when you have sufficient proof to convict the culprits. It is true that it will be a difficult task to collect such proofs; but it is not impossible, with the aid of time, which divulges so many crimes. And you may count upon me; I will give you the benefit of all my influence and experience. It shall never be said that I allowed a defenceless girl to be crushed while I saw any chance of saving her."

Tears came to Mademoiselle Marguerite's eyes. So the world was not composed entirely of scoundrels! "Ah! how kind you are, monsieur," she said; "how kind you are!"

"To be sure!" he interrupted, in a benevolent tone. "But, my child, you must help yourself. Remember this: if the Fondèges suspect *our* suspicions, all is lost. Repeat this to yourself at every moment in the day—and be discreet, impenetrable; for people with unclean consciences and hands are always distrustful of others."

There was no necessity to say anything more on this point; and so, with a sudden change of tone he asked: "Have you any plan?"

She felt that she could, and ought, to confide everything to this worthy old man, and so rising to her feet, with a look of energy and determination on her face, she replied in a firm voice: "My decision is taken,

monsieur, subject, of course, to your approval. In the first place I shall keep Madame Léon with me, in whatever capacity she likes, it doesn't matter what. Through her I shall no doubt be able to watch the Marquis de Valorsay, and perhaps eventually discover his hopes and his aim. In the second place, I shall accept the hospitality offered me by the General and his wife. With them, I shall be in the very centre of the intrigue, and in a position to collect proofs of their infamy."

The magistrate gave vent to an exclamation of delight. "You are a brave girl, Mademoiselle Marguerite," he said, "and at the same time a prudent one. Yes; that is the proper course to pursue."

Nothing now remained save to make arrangements for her departure. She possessed some very handsome diamonds and other costly jewels; should she keep them? "They are undoubtedly mine," said she; "but after the infamous accusations levelled at me, I can't consent to take them away with me. They are worth a very handsome amount. I shall leave them with you, monsieur. If the courts restore them to me later—well—I shall take them—and not without pleasure, I frankly confess." Then as the magistrate questioned her anxiously as to her resources, she replied: "Oh! I'm not without money. M. de Chalusse was generosity itself, and my tastes are very simple. From the money he gave me for my clothes I saved more than eight thousand francs in less than six months. That is more than sufficient to maintain me for a year."

The magistrate then explained that when the court took possession of this immense estate, it would surely allow her a certain sum. For whether the count was her father or not, he was at any rate her officially appointed guardian, and she would be considered a minor.

And in support of his assertion, he quoted Article 367 of the Civil Code, which says: "In the event of the officially appointed guardian dying without adopting his ward, the said ward shall be furnished during her minority with the means of subsistence from the said guardian's estate," etc., etc.

"An additional reason why I should give up my jewels," said Mademoiselle Marguerite.

The only point that now remained was to decide upon some plan by which she could communicate with her friend, the magistrate, without the knowledge of the General or his wife. The magistrate accordingly explained a system of correspondence which would defy the closest surveillance, and then added: "Now, make haste back to your visitor. Who knows what suspicions your absence may have caused her?"

But Mademoiselle Marguerite had one more request to make. She had often seen in M. de Chalusse's possession a little note-book, in which he entered the names and addresses of the persons with whom he had business transactions. M. Fortunat's address must be there, so she asked and obtained permission to examine this note-book, and to her great joy, under the letter "F," she found the entry: "Fortunat (Isidore), No. 28 Place de la Bourse." "Ah! I'm sure that I shall find Pascal now!" she exclaimed. And after once more thanking the magistrate, she returned to her room again.

Madame de Fondège was awaiting her with feverish impatience. "How long you stayed!" she cried.

"I had so many explanations to give, madame."

"How you are tormented, my poor child!"

"Oh, shamefully!"

This furnished Madame de Fondège with another

excuse for proffering her advice. But Mademoiselle Marguerite would not allow herself to be convinced at once. She raised a great many objections, and parleyed for a long time before telling Madame de Fondège that she would be happy to accept the hospitality which had been offered her. And her consent was by no means unconditional. She insisted on paying her board, and expressed the wish to retain the services of Madame Léon to whom she was so much attached. The worthy housekeeper was present at this conference. For an instant she had feared that Mademoiselle Marguerite suspected her manœuvres, but her fears were now dispelled, and she even congratulated herself on her skilfulness. Everything was arranged, and the agreement had been sealed with a kiss, when the General returned about four o'clock. "Ah, my dear!" cried his wife, "what happiness! We have a daughter!"

But even this intelligence was scarcely sufficient to revive her husband's drooping spirits. He had almost fainted when he heard the earth falling on M. de Chalusse's coffin; and this display of weakness on the part of a man adorned with such terrible and ferocious mustaches had excited no little comment. "Yes, it is a great happiness!" he now replied. "But thunder and lightning! I never doubted the dear girl's heart!"

Still both he and his wife could scarcely conceal their disappointment when the magistrate informed them that their beloved daughter would not take her diamonds. "Dash it!" growled the General. "I recognize her father in this! What delicacy! almost too much, perhaps!"

However, when the magistrate informed him that the court would undoubtedly order the restitution of the jewels, his face brightened again, and he went down

to superintend the removal of Mademoiselle Marguerite's trunks, which were being loaded on one of the vehicles of the establishment.

Then the moment of departure came. Mademoiselle Marguerite acknowledged the parting remarks of the servants, who were secretly delighted to be freed from her presence, and then, before entering the carriage, she cast a long, sad look upon this princely mansion which she had once had the right to believe her own, but which she was, alas! now leaving, in all probability, for ever.

END OF PART I.

Baron Trigault's Vengeance

I.

VENGEANCE! that is the first, the only thought, when a man finds himself victimized, when his honor and fortune, his present and future, are wrecked by a vile conspiracy! The torment he endures under such circumstances can only be alleviated by the prospect of inflicting them a hundredfold upon his persecutors. And nothing seems impossible at the first moment, when hatred surges in the brain, and the foam of anger rises to the lips; no obstacle seems insurmountable, or, rather, none are perceived. But later, when the faculties have regained their equilibrium, one can measure the distance which separates the dream from reality, the project from execution. And on setting to work, how many discouragements arise! The fever of revolt passes by, and the victim wavers. He still breathes bitter vengeance, but he does not act. He despairs, and asks himself what would be the good of it? And in this way the success of villainy is once more assured.

Similar despondency attacked Pascal Ferailleux when he awoke for the first time in the abode where he had hidden himself under the name of Mauméjan. A frightful slander had crushed him to the earth—he could kill his slanderer, but afterward—? How was he to reach and stifle the slander itself? As well try to hold a handful of water; as well try to stay with extended arms the progress of the poisonous breeze which

wafts an epidemic on its wings. So the hope that had momentarily lightened his heart faded away again. Since he had received that fatal letter from Madame Léon the evening before, he believed that Marguerite was lost to him forever, and in this case, it was useless to struggle against fate. What would be the use of victory even if he conquered? Marguerite lost to him—what did the rest matter? Ah! if he had been alone in the world. But he had his mother to think of;—he belonged to this brave-hearted woman, who had saved him from suicide already. “I will not yield, then; I will struggle on for her sake,” he muttered, like a man who foresees the futility of his efforts.

He rose, and had nearly finished dressing, when he heard a rap at his chamber door. “It is I, my son,” said Madame Ferailleux outside.

Pascal hastened to admit her. “I have come for you because the woman you spoke about last evening is already here, and before employing her, I want your advice.”

“Then the woman doesn’t please you, mother?”

“I want you to see her.”

On entering the little parlor with his mother, Pascal found himself in the presence of a portly, pale-faced woman, with thin lips and restless eyes, who bowed obsequiously. It was indeed Madame Vantrasson, the landlady of the model lodging-house, who was seeking employment for the three or four hours which were at her disposal in the morning, she said. It certainly was not for pleasure that she had decided to go out to service again; her dignity suffered terribly by this fall—but then the stomach has to be cared for. Tenants were not numerous at the model lodging-house, in spite of its seductive title; and those who slept there occa-

sionally, almost invariably succeeded in stealing something. Nor did the grocery store pay; the few half-pence which were left there occasionally in exchange for a glass of liquor were pocketed by Vantrasson, who spent them at some neighboring establishment; for it is a well-known fact that the wine a man drinks in his own shop is always bitter in flavor. So, having no credit at the butcher's or the baker's, Madame Vantrasson was sometimes reduced to living for days together upon the contents of the shop—mouldy figs or dry raisins—which she washed down with torrents of *ratafia*, her only consolation here below.

But this was not a satisfying diet, as she was forced to confess; so she decided to find some work, that would furnish her with food and a little money, which she vowed she would never allow her worthy husband to see.

"What would you charge per month?" inquired Pascal.

She seemed to reflect, and after a great deal of counting on her fingers, she finally declared that she would be content with breakfast and fifteen francs a month, on condition she was allowed to do the marketing. The first question of French cooks, on presenting themselves for a situation, is almost invariably, "Shall I do the marketing?" which of course means, "Shall I have any opportunities for stealing?" Everybody knows this, and nobody is astonished at it.

"I shall do the marketing myself," declared Madame Ferailleux, boldly.

"Then I shall want thirty francs a month," replied Madame Vantrasson, promptly.

Pascal and his mother exchanged glances. They were both unfavorably impressed by this woman, and were equally determined to rid themselves of her, which

it was easy enough to do. "Too dear!" said Madame Ferailleux; "I have never given over fifteen francs."

But Madame Vantrasson was not the woman to be easily discouraged, especially as she knew that if she failed to obtain this situation, she might have considerable difficulty in finding another one. She could only hope to obtain employment from strangers and newcomers, who were ignorant of the reputation of the model lodging-house. So in view of softening the hearts of Pascal and his mother, she began to relate the history of her life, skilfully mingling the false with the true, and representing herself as an unfortunate victim of circumstances, and the inhuman cruelty of relatives. For she belonged, like her husband, to a very respectable family, as the Mauméjans might easily ascertain by inquiry. Vantrasson's sister was the wife of a man named Greloux, who had once been a bookbinder in the Rue Saint-Denis, but who had now retired from business with a competency. "Why had this Greloux refused to save them from bankruptcy? Because one could never hope for a favor from relatives," she groaned; "they are jealous if you succeed; and if you are unfortunate, they cast you off."

However, these doleful complaints, far from rendering Madame Vantrasson interesting, imparted a deceitful and most disagreeable expression to her countenance. "I told you that I could only give fifteen francs," interrupted Madame Ferailleux—"take it or leave it."

Madame Vantrasson protested. She expressed her willingness to deduct five francs from the sum she had named, but more—it was impossible! Would they haggle over ten francs to secure such a treasure as herself, an honest, settled woman, who was entirely

devoted to her employers? "Besides, I have been a grand cook in my time," she added, "and I have not lost all my skill. Monsieur and madame would be delighted with my cooking, for I have seen more than one fine gentleman smack his lips over my sauces when I was in the employment of the Count de Chalusse."

Pascal and his mother could not repress a start on hearing this name; but it was in a tone of well-assumed indifference that Madame Ferailleux repeated, "M. de Chalusse?"

"Yes, madame—a count—and so rich that he didn't know how much he was worth. If he were still alive I shouldn't be compelled to go out to service again. But he's dead and he's to be buried this very day." And with an air of profound secrecy, she added: "On going yesterday to the Hôtel de Chalusse to ask for a little help, I heard of the great misfortune. Vantrasson, my husband, accompanied me, and while we were talking with the concierge, a young woman passed through the hall, and he recognized her as a person who some time ago was—well—no better than she should be. Now, however, she's a young lady as lofty as the clouds, and the deceased count has been passing her off as his daughter. Ah! this is a strange world."

Pascal had become whiter than the ceiling. His eyes blazed; and Madame Ferailleux trembled. "Very well," she said, "I will give you twenty-five francs—but on condition you come without complaining if I sometimes require your services of an evening. On these occasions I will give you your dinner." And taking five francs from her pocket she placed them in Madame Vantrasson's hand, adding: "Here is your earnest money."

The other quickly pocketed the coin, not a little sur-

prised by this sudden decision which she had scarcely hoped for, and which she by no means understood. Still she was so delighted with this dénouement that she expressed her willingness to enter upon her duties at once; and to get rid of her Madame Ferailleux was obliged to send her out to purchase the necessary supplies for breakfast. Then, as soon as she was alone with her son, she turned to him and asked: "Well, Pascal?"

But the wretched man seemed turned to stone, and seeing that he neither spoke nor moved, she continued in a severe tone: "Is this the way you keep your resolutions and your oaths! You express your intention of accomplishing a task which requires inexhaustible patience and dissimulation, and at the very first unforeseen circumstance your coolness deserts you, and you lose your head completely. If it had not been for me you would have betrayed yourself in that woman's presence. You must renounce your revenge, and tamely submit to be conquered by the Marquis de Valorsay if your face is to be an open book in which any one may read your secret plans and thoughts."

Pascal shook his head dejectedly. "Didn't you hear, mother?" he faltered.

"Hear what?"

"What that vile woman said? This young lady whom she spoke of, whom her husband recognized, can be none other than Marguerite."

"I am sure of it."

He recoiled in horror. "You are sure of it!" he repeated; "and you can tell me this unmoved—coldly, as if it were a natural, a possible thing. Didn't you understand the shameful meaning of her insinuations? Didn't you see her hypocritical smile and the malice

gleaming in her eyes?" He pressed his hands to his burning brow, and groaned: "And I did not crush the infamous wretch! I did not fell her to the ground!"

Ah! if she had obeyed the impulse of her heart, Madame Ferailleux would have thrown her arms round her son's neck, and have mingled her tears with his, but reason prevailed. The worthy woman's heart was pervaded with that lofty sentiment of duty which sustains the humble heroines of the fireside, and lends them even more courage than the reckless adventurers whose names are recorded by history could boast of. She felt that Pascal must not be consoled, but spurred on to fresh efforts; and so mustering all her courage, she said: "Are you acquainted with Mademoiselle Marguerite's past life? No. You only know that hers has been a life of great vicissitudes—and so it is not strange that she should be slandered."

"In that case, mother," said Pascal, "you were wrong to interrupt Madame Vantrasson. She would probably have told us many things."

"I interrupted her, it is true, and sent her away—and you know why. But she is in our service now; and when you are calm, when you have regained your senses, nothing will prevent you from questioning her. It may be useful for you to know who this man Vantrasson is, and how and where he met Mademoiselle Marguerite."

Shame, sorrow, and rage, brought tears to Pascal's eyes. "My God!" he exclaimed, "to be reduced to the unspeakable misery of hearing my mother doubt Marguerite!" He did not doubt her. *He* could have listened to the most infamous accusations against her without feeling a single doubt. However, Madame Ferailleux had sufficient self-control to shrug her shoul-

ders. "Ah, well! silence this slander," she exclaimed. "I wish for nothing better; but don't forget that we have ourselves to rehabilitate. To crush your enemies will be far more profitable to Mademoiselle Marguerite than vain threats and weak lamentations. It seemed to me that you had sworn to act, not to complain."

This ironical thrust touched Pascal's sensitive mind to the quick; he rose at once to his feet, and coldly said, "That's true. I thank you for having recalled me to myself."

She made no rejoinder, but mentally thanked God. She had read her son's heart, and perceiving his hesitation and weakness she had supplied the stimulus he needed. Now she saw him as she wished to see him. Now he was ready to reproach himself for his lack of courage and his weakness in displaying his feelings. And as a test of his powers of endurance, he decided not to question Madame Vantrasson till four or five days had elapsed. If her suspicions had been aroused, this delay would suffice to dispel them.

He said but little during breakfast; for he was now eager to commence the struggle. He longed to act, and yet he scarcely knew how to begin the campaign. First of all, he must study the enemy's position—gain some knowledge of the men he had to deal with, find out exactly who the Marquis de Valorsay and the Viscount de Coralth were. Where could he obtain information respecting these two men? Should he be compelled to follow them and to gather up here and there such scraps of intelligence as came in his way? This method of proceeding would be slow and inconvenient in the extreme. He was revolving the subject in his mind when he suddenly remembered the man who, on the morning that followed the scene at Madame

d'Argelès's house, had come to him in the Rue d'Ulm to give him a proof of his confidence. He remembered that this strange man had said: "If you ever need a helping hand, come to me." And at the recollection he made up his mind. "I am going to Baron Trigault's," he remarked to his mother; "if my presentiments don't deceive me, he will be of service to us."

In less than half an hour he was on his way. He had dressed himself in the oldest clothes he possessed; and this, with the change he had made by cutting off his hair and beard, had so altered his appearance that it was necessary to look at him several times, and most attentively, to recognize him. The visiting cards which he carried in his pocket bore the inscription: "P. Mauméjan, Business Agent, Route de la Révolte." His knowledge of Parisian life had induced him to choose the same profession as M. Fortunat followed—a profession which opens almost every door. "I will enter the nearest *café* and ask for a directory," he said to himself. "I shall certainly find Baron Trigault's address in it."

The baron lived in the Rue de la Ville-l'Evêque. His mansion was one of the largest and most magnificent in the opulent district of the Madeleine, and its aspect was perfectly in keeping with its owner's character as an expert financier, and a shrewd manufacturer, the possessor of valuable mines. The marvellous luxury so surprised Pascal, that he asked himself how the owner of this princely abode could find any pleasure at the gaming table of the Hôtel d'Argelès. Five or six footmen were lounging about the courtyard when he entered it. He walked straight up to one of them, and with his hat in his hand, asked: "Baron Trigault, if you please?"

If he had asked for the Grand Turk the valet would not have looked at him with greater astonishment. His surprise, indeed, seemed so profound that Pascal feared he had made some mistake and added: "Doesn't he live here?"

The servant laughed heartily. "This is certainly his house," he replied, "and strange to say, by some fortunate chance, he's here."

"I wish to speak with him on business."

The servant called one of his colleagues. "Eh! Florestan—is the baron receiving?"

"The baroness hasn't forbidden it."

This seemed to satisfy the footman; for, turning to Pascal he said: "In that case, you can follow me."

II.

THE sumptuous interior of the Trigault mansion was on a par with its external magnificence. Even the entrance bespoke the lavish millionaire, eager to conquer difficulties, jealous of achieving the impossible, and never haggling when his fancies were concerned. The spacious hall, paved with costly mosaics, had been transformed into a conservatory full of flowers, which were renewed every morning. Rare plants climbed the walls up gilded trellis work, or hung from the ceiling in vases of rare old china, while from among the depths of verdure peered forth exquisite statues, the work of sculptors of renown. On a rustic bench sat a couple of tall footmen, as bright in their gorgeous liveries as gold coins fresh from the mint; still, despite their splendor, they were stretching and yawning to such a degree, that it seemed as if they would ultimately dislocate their jaws and arms.

"Tell me," inquired the servant who was escorting Pascal, "can any one speak to the baron?"

"Why?"

"This gentleman has something to say to him."

The two valets eyed the unknown visitor, plainly considering him to be one of those persons who have no existence for the menials of fashionable establishments, and finally burst into a hearty laugh. "Upon my word!" exclaimed the eldest, "he's just in time. Announce him, and madame will be greatly obliged to you. She and monsieur have been quarrelling for a good half-hour. And, heavenly powers, isn't he tantalizing!"

The most intense curiosity gleamed in the eyes of Pascal's conductor, and with an airy of secrecy, he asked: "What is the cause of the rumpus? That Fernand, no doubt—or some one else?"

"No; this morning it's about M. Van Klopen."

"Madame's dressmaker?"

"The same. Monsieur and madame were breakfasting together—a most unusual thing—when M. Van Klopen made his appearance. I thought to myself, when I admitted him: 'Look out for storms!' I scented one in the air, and in fact the dressmaker hadn't been in the room five minutes before we heard the baron's voice rising higher and higher. I said to myself: 'Whew! the mantua-maker is presenting his bill!' Madame cried and went on like mad; but, pshaw! when the master really begins, there's no one like him. There isn't a cab-driver in Paris who's his equal for swearing."

"And M. Van Klopen?"

"Oh, he's used to such scenes! When gentlemen abuse him he does the same as dogs do when they come

up out of the water; he just shakes his head and troubles himself no more about it. He has decidedly the best of the row. He has furnished the goods, and he'll have to be paid sooner or later——”

“What! hasn't he been paid then?”

“I don't know; he's still here.”

A terrible crash of breaking china interrupted this edifying conversation. “There!” exclaimed one of the footmen, “that's monsieur; he has smashed two or three hundred francs' worth of dishes. He *must* be rich to pay such a price for his angry fits.”

“Well,” observed the other, “if I were in monsieur's place I should be angry too. Would you let your wife have her dresses fitted on by a man? I says that it's indecent. I'm only a servant, but——”

“Nonsense, it's the fashion. Besides, monsieur does not care about that. A man who——”

He stopped short; in fact, the others had motioned him to be silent. The baron was surrounded by exceptional servants, and the presence of a stranger acted as a restraint upon them. For this reason, one of them, after asking Pascal for his card, opened a door and ushered him into a small room, saying: “I will go and inform the baron. Please wait here.”

“Here,” as he called it, was a sort of smoking-room hung with cashmere of fantastic design and gorgeous hues, and encircled by a low, cushioned divan, covered with the same material. A profusion of rare and costly objects was to be seen on all sides, armor, statuary, pictures, and richly ornamented weapons. But Pascal, already amazed by the conversation of the servants, did not think of examining these objects of *virtu*. Through a partially open doorway, directly opposite the one he had entered by, came the sound of loud voices in excited

conversation. Baron Trigault, the baroness, and the famous Van Klopen were evidently in the adjoining room. It was a woman, the baroness, who was speaking, and the quivering of her clear and somewhat shrill voice betrayed a violent irritation, which was only restrained with the greatest difficulty. "It is hard for the wife of one of the richest men in Paris to see a bill for absolute necessities disputed in this style," she was saying.

A man's voice, with a strong Teutonic accent, the voice of Van Klopen, the Hollander, caught up the refrain. "Yes, strict necessities, one can swear to that. And if, before flying into a passion, Monsieur le Baron had taken the trouble to glance over my little bill, he would have seen——"

"No more! You bore me to death. Besides I haven't time to listen to your nonsense; they are waiting for me to play a game of whist at the club."

This time it was the master of the house, Baron Trigault, who spoke, and Pascal recognized his voice instantly.

"If monsieur would only allow me to read the items. It will take but a moment," rejoined Van Klopen. And as if he had construed the oath that answered him as an exclamation of assent, he began: "In June, a Hungarian costume with jacket and sash, two train dresses with upper skirts and trimmings of lace, a Medici's polonaise, a jockey costume, a walking costume, a riding-habit, two morning-dresses, a Velléda costume, an evening dress."

"I was obliged to attend the races very frequently during the month of June," remarked the baroness.

But the illustrious adorer of female loveliness had already resumed his reading. "In July we have: two

morning-jackets, one promenade costume, one sailor suit, one Watteau shepherdess costume, one ordinary bathing-suit, with material for parasol and shoes to match, one Pompadour bathing-suit, one dressing-gown, one close-fitting Medicis mantle, two opera cloaks——”

“And I was certainly not the most elegantly attired of the ladies at Trouville, where I spent the month of July,” interrupted the baroness.

“There are but few entries in the month of August,” continued Van Klopen. “We have: a morning-dress, a travelling-dress, with trimmings——” And he went on and on, gasping for breath, rattling off the ridiculous names which he gave to his “creations,” and interrupted every now and then by the blow of a clinched fist on the table, or by a savage oath.

Pascal stood in the smoking-room, motionless with astonishment. He did not know what surprised him the most, Van Klopen’s impudence in daring to read such a bill, the foolishness of the woman who had ordered all these things, or the patience of the husband who was undoubtedly going to pay for them. At last, after what seemed an interminable enumeration, Van Klopen exclaimed: “And that’s all!”

“Yes, that’s all,” repeated the baroness, like an echo.

“That’s all!” exclaimed the baron——“that’s all! That is to say, in four months, at least seven hundred yards of silk, velvet, satin, and muslin, have been put on this woman’s back!”

“The dresses of the present day require a great deal of material. Monsieur le Baron will understand that flounces, puffs, and ruches——”

“Naturally! Total, twenty-seven thousand francs!”

“Excuse me! Twenty-seven thousand nine hundred and thirty-three francs, ninety centimes.”

"Call it twenty-eight thousand francs then. Ah, well, M. Van Klopen, if you are ever paid for this rubbish it won't be by me."

If Van Klopen was expecting this dénouement, Pascal wasn't; in fact, he was so startled, that an exclamation escaped him which would have betrayed his presence under almost any other circumstances. What amazed him most was the baron's perfect calmness, following, as it did, such a fit of furious passion, violent enough even to be heard in the vestibule. "Either he has extraordinary control over himself or this scene conceals some mystery," thought Pascal.

Meanwhile, the man-milliner continued to urge his claims—but the baron, instead of replying, only whistled; and wounded by this breach of good manners, Van Klopen at last exclaimed: "I have had dealings with all the distinguished men in Europe, and never before did one of them refuse to pay me for his wife's toilettes."

"Very well—I don't pay for them—there's the difference. Do you suppose that I, Baron Trigault, that I've worked like a negro for twenty years merely for the purpose of aiding your charming and useful branch of industry? Gather up your papers, Mr. Ladies' Tailor. There may be husbands who believe themselves responsible for their wives' follies—it's quite possible there are—but I'm not made of that kind of stuff. I allow Madame Trigault eight thousand francs a month for her toilette—that is sufficient—and it is a matter for you and her to arrange together. What did I tell you last year when I paid a bill of forty thousand francs? That I would not be responsible for any more of my wife's debts. And I not only said it, I formally notified you through my private secretary."

"I remember, indeed——"

"Then why do you come to me with your bill? It is with my wife that you have opened an account. Apply to her, and leave me in peace."

"Madame promised me——"

"Teach her to keep her promises."

"It costs a great deal to retain one's position as a leader of fashion; and many of the most distinguished ladies are obliged to run into debt," urged Van Klopen.

"That's their business. But my wife is not a fine lady. She is simply Madame Trigault, a baroness, thanks to her husband's gold and the condescension of a worthy German prince, who was in want of money. *She* is not a person of consequence—she has no rank to keep up."

The baroness must have attached immense importance to the satisfying of Van Klopen's demands, for concealing the anger this humiliating scene undoubtedly caused her, she condescended to try and explain, and even to entreat. "I have been a little extravagant, perhaps," she said; "but I will be more prudent in future. Pay, monsieur—pay just once more."

"No!"

"If not for my sake, for your own."

"Not a farthing."

By the baron's tone, Pascal realized that his wife would never shake his fixed determination. Such must also have been the opinion of the illustrious ruler of fashion, for he returned to the charge with an argument he had held in reserve. "If this is the case, I shall, to my great regret, be obliged to fail in the respect I owe to Monsieur le Baron, and to place this bill in the hands of a solicitor."

"Send him along—send him along."

"I cannot believe that monsieur wishes a law-suit."

"In that you are greatly mistaken. Nothing would please me better. It would at last give me an opportunity to say what I think about your dealings. Do *you* think that wives are to turn their husbands into machines for supplying money? You draw the bow-string too tightly, my dear fellow—it will break. I'll proclaim on the house-top what others dare not say, and we'll see if I don't succeed in organizing a little crusade against you." And animated by the sound of his own words, his anger came back to him, and in a louder and ever louder voice he continued: "Ah! you prate of the scandal that would be created by my resistance to your demands. That's your system; but, with me, it won't succeed. You threaten me with a law-suit; very good. I'll take it upon myself to enlighten Paris, for I know your secrets, Mr. Dress-maker. I know the goings on in your establishment. It isn't always to talk about dress that ladies stop at your place on returning from the Bois. You sell silks and satins no doubt; but you sell Madeira, and excellent cigarettes as well, and there are some who don't walk very straight on leaving your establishment, but smell suspiciously of tobacco and absinthe. Oh, yes, let us go to law, by all means! I shall have an advocate who will know how to explain the parts your customers pay, and who will reveal how, with your assistance, they obtain money from other sources than their husband's cash-box."

When M. Van Klopen was addressed in this style, he was not at all pleased. "And I!" he exclaimed, "I will tell people that Baron Trigault, after losing all his money at play, repays his creditors with curses."

The noise of an overturned chair told Pascal that the

baron had sprung up in a furious passion. "You may say what you like, you rascally fool! but not in my house," he shouted. "Leave—leave, or I will ring——"

"Monsieur——"

"Leave, leave, I tell you, or I sha'n't have the patience to wait for a servant!"

He must have joined action to word, and have seized Van Klopen by the collar to thrust him into the hall, for Pascal heard a sound of scuffling, a series of oaths worthy of a coal-heaver, two or three frightened cries from the baroness, and several guttural exclamations in German. Then a door closed with such violence that the whole house shook, and a magnificent clock, fixed to the wall of the smoking-room, fell on to the floor.

If Pascal had not heard this scene, he would have deemed it incredible. How could one suppose that a creditor would leave this princely mansion with his bill unpaid? But more and more clearly he understood that there must be some greater cause of difference between husband and wife than this bill of twenty-eight thousand francs. For what was this amount to a confirmed gambler who, without as much as a frown, gained or lost a fortune every evening of his life. Evidently there was some skeleton in this household—one of those terrible secrets which make a man and his wife enemies, and all the more bitter enemies as they are bound together by a chain which it is impossible to break. And undoubtedly, a good many of the insults which the baron had heaped upon Van Klopen must have been intended for the baroness. These thoughts darted through Pascal's mind with the rapidity of lightning, and showed him the horrible position in which he was placed. The baron, who had been so favorably disposed toward him, and from whom he was expecting a

great service, would undoubtedly hate him, undoubtedly become his enemy, when he learned that he had been a listener, although an involuntary one, to this conversation with Van Klopen. How did it happen that he had been placed in this dangerous position? What had become of the footman who had taken his card? These were questions which he was unable to answer. And what was he to do? If he could have retired noiselessly, if he could have reached the courtyard and have made his escape without being observed he would not have hesitated. But was this plan practicable? And would not his card betray him? Would it not be discovered sooner or later that he had been in the smoking-room while M. Van Klopen was in the dining-room? In any case, delicacy of feeling as well as his own interest forbade him to remain any longer a listener to the private conversation of the baron and his wife.

He therefore noisily moved a chair, and coughed in that affected style which means in every country: "Take care—I'm here!" But he did not succeed in attracting attention. And yet the silence was profound; he could distinctly hear the creaking of the baron's boots, as he paced to and fro, and the sound of fingers nervously beating a tattoo on the table. If he desired to avoid hearing the confidential conversation, which would no doubt ensue between the baron and his wife, there was but one course for him to pursue, and that was to reveal his presence at once. He was about to do so, when some one opened a door which must have led from the hall into the dining-room. He listened attentively, but only heard a few confused words, to which the baron replied: "Very well. That's sufficient. I will see him in a moment."

Pascal breathed freely once more. "They have just

given him my card," he thought. "I can remain now; he will come here in a moment."

The baron must really have started to leave the room, for his wife exclaimed: "One word more: have you quite decided?"

"Oh, fully!"

"You are resolved to leave me exposed to the persecutions of my dressmaker?"

"Van Klopen is too charming and polite to cause you the least worry."

"You will brave the disgrace of a law-suit?"

"Nonsense! You know very well that he won't bring any action against me—unfortunately. And, besides, pray tell me where the disgrace would be? I have a foolish wife—is that my fault? I oppose her absurd extravagance—haven't I a right to do so? If all husbands were as courageous, we should soon close the establishments of these artful men, who minister to your vanity, and use you ladies as puppets, or living advertisements, to display the absurd fashions which enrich them."

The baron took two or three more steps forward, as if about to leave the room, but his wife interposed: "The Baroness Trigault, whose husband has an income of seven or eight hundred thousand francs a year, can't go about clad like a simple woman of the middle classes."

"I should see nothing so very improper in that."

"Oh, I know. Only your ideas don't coincide with mine. I shall never consent to make myself ridiculous among the ladies of my set—among my friends."

"It would indeed be a pity to arouse the disapproval of your friends."

This sneering remark certainly irritated the baroness,

for it was with the greatest vehemence that she replied: "All my friends are ladies of the highest rank in society—noble ladies!"

The baron no doubt shrugged his shoulders, for in a tone of crushing irony and scorn, he exclaimed: "Noble ladies! whom do you call noble ladies, pray? The brainless fools who only think of displaying themselves and making themselves notorious?—the senseless idiots who pique themselves on surpassing lewd women in audacity, extravagance, and effrontery, who fleece their husbands as cleverly as courtesans fleece their lovers? Noble ladies! who drink, and smoke, and carouse, who attend masked balls, and talk slang! Noble ladies! the idiots who long for the applause of the crowd, and consider notoriety to be desirable and flattering. A woman is only noble by her virtues—and the chief of all virtues, modesty, is entirely wanting in your illustrious friends——"

"Monsieur," interrupted the baroness, in a voice husky with anger, "you forget yourself—you——"

But the baron was well under way. "If it is scandal that crowns one a great lady, you *are* one—and one of the greatest; for you are notorious—almost as notorious as Jenny Fancy. Can't I learn from the newspapers all your sayings and gestures, your amusements, your occupations, and the toilettes you wear? It is impossible to read of a first performance at a theatre, or of a horse-race, without finding your name coupled with that of Jenny Fancy, or Cora Pearl, or Ninette Simphon. I should be a very strange husband indeed, if I wasn't proud and delighted. Ah! you are a treasure to the reporters. On the day before yesterday the Baroness Trigault skated in the Bois. Yesterday she was driving in her pony-carriage. To-day she distinguished herself

by her skill at pigeon-shooting. To-morrow she will display herself half nude in some *tableaux vivants*. On the day after to-morrow she will inaugurate a new style of hair-dressing, and take part in a comedy. It is always the Baroness Trigault who is the observed of all observers at Vincennes. The Baroness Trigault has lost five hundred louis in betting. The Baroness Trigault uses her lorgnette with charming impertinence. It is she who has declared it proper form to take a 'drop' on returning from the Bois. No one is so famed for 'form,' as the baroness—and silk merchants have bestowed her name upon a color. People rave of the Trigault blue—what glory! There are also *costumes Trigault*, for the witty, elegant baroness has a host of admirers who follow her everywhere, and loudly sing her praises. This is what I, a plain, honest man, read every day in the newspapers. The whole world not only knows how my wife dresses, but how she looks *en dishabille*, and how she is formed; folks are aware that she has an exquisite foot, a divinely-shaped leg, and a perfect hand. No one is ignorant of the fact that my wife's shoulders are of dazzling whiteness, and that high on the left shoulder there is a most enticing little mole. I had the satisfaction of reading this particular last evening. It is charming, upon my word! and I am truly a fortunate man!"

In the smoking-room, Pascal could hear the baroness angrily stamp her foot, as she exclaimed: "It is an outrageous insult—your journalists are most impertinent."

"Why? Do they ever trouble honest women?"

"They wouldn't trouble me if I had a husband who knew how to make them treat me with respect!"

The baron laughed a strident, nervous laugh, which it was not pleasant to hear, and which revealed the fact

that intense suffering was hidden beneath all this banter. "Would you like me to fight a duel then? After twenty years has the idea of ridding yourself of me occurred to you again? I can scarcely believe it. You know too well that you would receive none of my money, that I have guarded against that. Besides, you would be inconsolable if the newspapers ceased talking about you for a single day. Respect yourself, and you will be respected. The publicity you complain of is the last anchor which prevents society from drifting one knows not where. Those who would not listen to the warning voice of honor and conscience are restrained by the fear of a little paragraph which might disclose their shame. Now that a woman no longer has a conscience, the newspapers act in place of it. And I think it quite right, for it is our only hope of salvation."

By the stir in the adjoining room, Pascal felt sure that the baroness had stationed herself before the door to prevent her husband from leaving her. "Ah! well, monsieur," she exclaimed, "I declare to you that I must have Van Klopen's twenty-eight thousand francs before this evening. I will have them, too; I am resolved to have them, and you will give them to me."

"Oh!" thundered the baron, "you *will* have them—you will——" He paused, and then, after a moment's reflection, he said: "Very well. So be it! I will give you this amount, but not just now. Still if, as you say, it is absolutely necessary that you should have it to-day, there is a means of procuring it. Pawn your diamonds for thirty thousand francs—I authorize you to do so; and I give you my word of honor that I will redeem them within a week. Say, will you do this?" And, as the baroness made no reply, he continued: "You don't answer! shall I tell you why? It is be-

cause your diamonds were long since sold and replaced by imitation ones; it is because you are head over heels in debt; it is because you have stooped so low as to borrow your maid's savings; it is because you already owe three thousand francs to one of my coachmen; it is because our steward lends you money at the rate of thirty or forty per cent."

"It is false!"

The baron sneered. "You certainly must think me a much greater fool than I really am!" he replied. "I'm not often at home, it's true—the sight of you exasperates me; but I know what's going on. You believe me your dupe, but you are altogether mistaken. It is not twenty-seven thousand francs you owe Van Klopen, but fifty or sixty thousand. However, he is careful not to demand payment. If he brought me a bill this morning, it was only because you had begged him to do so, and because it had been agreed he should give you the money back if I paid him. In short, if you require twenty-eight thousand francs before to-night, it is because M. Fernand de Coralthe has demanded that sum, and because you have promised to give it to him!"

Leaning against the wall of the smoking-room, speechless and motionless, holding his breath, with his hands pressed upon his heart, as if to stop its throbings, Pascal Ferailleux listened. He no longer thought of flying; he no longer thought of reproaching himself for his enforced indiscretion. He had lost all consciousness of his position. The name of the Viscount de Coralthe, thus mentioned in the course of this frightful scene, came as a revelation to him. He now understood the meaning of the baron's conduct. His visit to the Rue d'Ulm, and his promises of help were all

explained. "My mother was right," he thought; "the baron hates that miserable viscount mortally. He will do all in his power to assist me."

Meanwhile, the baroness energetically denied her husband's charges. She swore that she did not know what he meant. What had M. de Coralthe to do with all this? She commanded her husband to speak more plainly—to explain his odious insinuations.

He allowed her to speak for a moment, and then suddenly, in a harsh, sarcastic voice, he interrupted her by saying: "Oh! enough! No more hypocrisy! Why do you try to defend yourself? What matters one crime more? I know only too well that what I say is true; and if you desire proofs, they shall be in your hands in less than half an hour. It is a long time since I was blind—full twenty years! Nothing concerning you has escaped my knowledge and observation since the cursed day when I discovered the depths of your disgrace and infamy—since the terrible evening when I heard you plan to murder me in cold blood. You had grown accustomed to freedom of action; while I, who had gone off with the first gold-seekers, was braving a thousand dangers in California, so as to win wealth and luxury for you more quickly. Fool that I was! No task seemed too hard or too distasteful when I thought of you—and I was always thinking of you. My mind was at peace—I had perfect faith in you. We had a daughter; and if a fear or a doubt entered my mind, I told myself that the sight of her cradle would drive all evil thoughts from your heart. The adultery of a childless wife may be forgiven or explained; but that of a mother, never! Fool! idiot! that I was! With what joyous pride, on my return after an absence of eighteen months, I showed you the treasures I had

brought back with me! I had two hundred thousand francs! I said to you as I embraced you: 'It is yours, my well-beloved, the source of all my happiness!' But you did not care for me—I wearied you! You loved another! And while you were deceiving me with your caresses, you were, with fiendish skill, preparing a conspiracy which, if it had succeeded, would have resulted in my death! I should consider myself amply revenged if I could make you suffer for a single day all the torments that I endured for long months. For this was not all! You had not even the excuse, if excuse it be, of a powerful, all-absorbing passion. Convinced of your treachery, I resolved to ascertain everything, and I discovered that in my absence you had become a mother. Why didn't I kill you? How did I have the courage to remain silent and conceal what I knew? Ah! it was because, by watching you, I hoped to discover the cursed bastard and your accomplice. It was because I dreamed of a vengeance as terrible as the offence. I said to myself that the day would come when, at any risk, you would try to see your child again, to embrace her, and provide for her future. Fool! fool that I was! You had already forgotten her! When you received news of my intended return, she was sent to some foundling asylum, or left to die upon some door-step. Have you ever thought of her? Have you ever asked what has become of her? ever asked yourself if she had needed bread while you have been living in almost regal luxury? ever asked yourself into what depths of vice she may have fallen?"

"Always the same ridiculous accusation!" exclaimed the baroness.

"Yes, always!"

"You must know, however, that this story of a

child is only a vile slander. I told you so when you spoke of it to me a dozen years afterward. I have repeated it a thousand times since."

The baron uttered a sigh that was very like a sob, and without paying any heed to his wife's words, he continued: "If I consented to allow you to remain under my roof, it was only for the sake of our daughter. I trembled lest the scandal of a separation should fall upon her. But it was useless suffering on my part. She was as surely lost as you yourself were; and it was your work, too!"

"What! you blame me for that?"

"Whom ought I to blame, then? Who took her to balls, and theatres and races—to every place where a young girl ought *not* to be taken? Who initiated her into what you call high life? and who used her as a discreet and easy chaperon? Who married her to a wretch who is a disgrace to the title he bears, and who has completed the work of demoralization you began? And what is your daughter to-day? Her extravagance has made her notorious even among the shameless women who pretend to be leaders of society. She is scarcely twenty-two, and there is not a single prejudice left for her to brave! Her husband is the companion of actresses and courtesans; her own companions are no better—and in less than two years the million of francs which I bestowed on her as a dowry has been squandered, recklessly squandered—for there isn't a penny of it left. And, at this very hour, my daughter and my son-in-law are plotting to extort money from me. On the day before yesterday—listen carefully to this—my son-in-law came to ask me for a hundred thousand francs, and when I refused them, he threatened if I did not give them to him that he would pub-

lish some letters written by my daughter—by his wife—to some low scoundrel. I was horrified and gave him what he asked. But that same evening I learned that the husband and wife, my daughter and my son-in-law, had concocted this vile conspiracy together. Yes, I have positive proofs of it. Leaving here, and not wishing to return home that day, he telegraphed the good news to his wife. But in his delight he made a mistake in the address, and the telegram was brought here. I opened it, and read: ‘Papa has fallen into the trap, my darling. I beat my drum, and he surrendered at once.’ Yes, that is what he dared to write, and sign with his own name, and then send to his wife—my daughter!”

Pascal was absolutely terrified. He wondered if he were not the victim of some absurd nightmare—if his senses were not playing him false. He had little conception of the terrible dramas which are constantly enacted in these superb mansions, so admired and envied by the passing crowd. He thought that the baroness would be crushed—that she would fall on her knees before her husband. What a mistake! The tone of her voice told him that, instead of yielding, she was only bent on retaliation.

“Does your son-in-law do anything worse than you?” she exclaimed. “How dare you censure him—you who drag your name through all the gambling dens of Europe?”

“Wretch!” interrupted the baron, “wretch!” But quickly mastering himself, he remarked: “Yes, it’s true that I gamble. People say, ‘That great Baron Trigault is never without cards in his hands!’ But you know very well that I really hold gambling in horror—that I loathe it. But when I play, I sometimes

forget—for I must forget. I tried drink, but it wouldn't drown thought, so I had recourse to cards; and when the stakes are large, and my fortune is imperilled, I sometimes lose consciousness of my misery!"

The baroness gave vent to a cold, sneering laugh, and, in a tone of mocking commiseration, she said: "Poor baron! It is no doubt in the hope of forgetting your sorrows that you spend all your time—when you are not gambling—with a woman named Lia d'Argelès. She's rather pretty. I have seen her several times in the Bois——"

"Be silent!" exclaimed the baron, "be silent! Don't insult an unfortunate woman who is a thousand times better than yourself." And, feeling that he could endure no more—that he could no longer restrain his passion, he cried: "Out of my sight! Go! or I sha'n't be responsible for my acts!"

Pascal heard a chair move, the floor creak, and a moment afterward a lady passed quickly through the smoking-room. How was it that she did not perceive him? No doubt, because she was greatly agitated, in spite of her bravado. And, besides, he was standing a little back in the shade. But he saw her, and his brain reeled. "Good Lord! what a likeness!" he murmured.

III.

It was as if he had seen an apparition, and he was vainly striving to drive away a terrible, mysterious fear, when a heavy footfall made the floor of the dining-room creak anew. The noise restored him to consciousness of his position. "It is the baron!" he

thought; "he is coming this way! If he finds me here I am lost; he will never consent to help me. A man would never forgive another man for hearing what I have just heard."

Why should he not try to make his escape? The card, bearing the name of Mauméjan, would be no proof of his visit. He could see the baron somewhere else some other day—elsewhere than at his own house, so that he need not fear the recognition of the servants. These thoughts flashed through his mind, and he was about to fly, when a harsh cry held him spell-bound. Baron Trigault was standing on the threshold. His emotion, as is almost always the case with corpulent people, was evinced by a frightful distortion of his features. His face was transformed, his lips had become perfectly white, and his eyes seemed to be starting from their sockets. "How came you here?" he asked, in a husky voice.

"Your servants ushered me into this room."

"Who are you?"

"What! monsieur, don't you recognize me?" rejoined Pascal, who in his agitation forgot that the baron had seen him only twice before. He forgot the absence of his beard, his almost ragged clothing, and all the precautions he had taken to render recognition impossible.

"I have never met any person named Mauméjan," said the baron.

"Ah! monsieur, that's not my name. Have you forgotten the innocent man who was caught in that infamous snare set for him by the Viscount de Coralth?"

"Yes, yes," replied the baron, "I remember you now." And then recollecting the terrible scene that

had just taken place in the adjoining room: "How long have you been here?" he asked.

Should Pascal tell a falsehood, or confess the truth? He hesitated, but his hesitation lasted scarcely the tenth part of a second. "I have been here about half an hour," he replied.

The baron's livid cheeks suddenly became purple, his eyes glittered, and it seemed by his threatening gesture as if he were strongly tempted to murder this man, who had discovered the terrible, disgraceful secrets of his domestic life. But it was a mere flash of energy. The terrible ordeal which he had just passed through had exhausted him mentally and physically, and it was in a faltering voice that he resumed: "Then you have not lost a word—a word of what was said in the other room?"

"Not a word."

The baron sank on to the divan. "So the knowledge of my disgrace is no longer confined to myself!" he exclaimed. "A stranger's eye has penetrated the depths of misery I have fallen into! The secret of my wretchedness and shame is mine no longer!"

"Oh, monsieur, monsieur!" interrupted Pascal. "Before I recross the threshold of your home, all shall have been forgotten. I swear it by all that is most sacred!"

He had raised his hand as if to take a solemn oath, when the baron caught hold of it, and, pressing it with sorrowful gratitude, exclaimed: "I believe you! You are a man of honor—I only needed to see your home to be convinced of that. You will not laugh at my misfortunes or my misery!" He must have been suffering frightfully, for big tears rolled slowly down his cheeks. "What have I done, my God! that I should

be so cruelly punished?" he continued. "I have always been generous and charitable, and ready to help all who applied to me. I am utterly alone! I have a wife and a daughter—but they hate me. They long for my death, which would give them possession of my wealth. What torture! For months together I dared not eat a morsel of food, either in my own house, or in the house of my son-in-law. I feared poison; and I never partook of a dish until I had seen my daughter or my wife do so. To prevent a crime, I was obliged to resort to the strangest expedients. I made a will, and left my property in such a way that if I die, my family will not receive one penny. So, they now have an interest in prolonging my life." As he spoke he sprang up with an almost frenzied air, and, seizing Pascal by the arm, again continued. "Nor is this all! This woman—my wife—you know—you have heard the extent of her shame and degradation. Ah, well! I—love her!"

Pascal recoiled with an exclamation of mingled horror and consternation.

"This amazes you, eh?" rejoined the baron. "It is indeed incomprehensible, monstrous—but it is the truth. It is to gratify her desire for luxury that I have toiled to amass millions. If I purchased a title, which is absurd and ridiculous, it was only because I wished to satisfy her vanity. Do what she may, I can only see in her the chaste and beautiful wife of our early married life. It is cowardly, absurd, ridiculous—I realize it; but my love is stronger than my reason or my will. I love her madly, passionately; I cannot tear her from my heart!"

So speaking, he sank sobbing on to the divan again. Was this, indeed, the frivolous and jovial Baron

Trigault whom Pascal had seen at Madame d'Argelès's house—the man of self-satisfied mien and superb assurance, the good-natured cynic, the frequenter of gambling-dens? Alas, yes! But the baron whom the world knew was only a comedian; this was the real man.

After a little while he succeeded in controlling his emotion, and in a comparatively calm voice he exclaimed: "But it is useless to distract one's mind with an incurable evil. Let us speak of yourself, M. Ferailleur. To what do I owe the honor of this visit?"

"To your own kind offer, monsieur, and the hope that you will help me in refuting this slander, and wreaking vengeance upon those who have ruined me."

"Oh! yes, I will help you in that to the full extent of my power," exclaimed the baron. But experience reminded him that confidential disclosures ought not to be made with the doors open, so he rose, shut them, and returning to Pascal, said: "Explain in what way I can be of service to you, monsieur."

It was not without many misgivings that Pascal had presented himself at the baron's house, but after what he had heard he felt no further hesitation; he could speak with perfect freedom. "It is quite unnecessary for me to tell you, Monsieur le Baron," he began, "that the cards which made me win were inserted in the pack by M. de Coralth—that is proven beyond question, and whatever the consequences may be, I shall have my revenge. But before striking him, I wish to reach the man whose instrument he was."

"What! you suppose——"

"I don't suppose—I am sure that M. de Coralth acted in obedience to the instructions of some other scoundrel whose courage does not equal his meanness."

"Perhaps so! I think he would shrink from nothing in the way of rascality. But who could have employed him in this vile work of dishonoring an honest man?"

"The Marquis de Valorsay."

On hearing this name, the baron bounded to his feet. "Impossible!" he exclaimed; "absolutely impossible! M. de Valorsay is incapable of the villainy you ascribe to him. What do I say?—he is even above suspicion. I have known him for years, and I have never met a more loyal, more honorable, or more courageous man. He is one of my few trusted friends; we see each other almost every day. I am expecting a visit from him even now."

"Still it was he who incited M. de Coralthe to do the deed."

"But why? What could have been his object?"

"To win a young girl whom I love. She—loved me, and he saw that I was an obstacle. He put me out of the way more surely than if he had murdered me. If I died, she might mourn for me—dishonored, she would spurn me——"

"Is Valorsay so madly in love with the girl, then?"

"I think he cares but very little for her."

"Then why——"

"She is the heiress of several millions."

It was evident that this explanation did not shake Baron Trigault's faith in his friend. "But the marquis has an income of a hundred and fifty or two hundred thousand francs," said he; "that is an all-sufficient justification. With his fortune and his name, he is in a position to choose his wife from among all the heiresses of France. Why should he address his attentions in particular to the woman you love? Ah! if he were poor—if his fortune were impaired—if he felt

the need of regilding his escutcheon, like my son-in-law——”

He paused; there was a rap at the door. The baron called out: “Come in,” and a valet appeared, and informed his master that the Marquis de Valorsay wished to speak with him.

It was the enemy! Pascal's features were distorted with rage; but he did not stir—he did not utter a word. “Ask the marquis into the next room,” said the baron. “I will join him there at once.” Then as the servant retired, the baron turned to Pascal and said: “Well, M. Ferailleux, do you divine my intentions?”

“I think so, monsieur. You probably intend me to hear the conversation you are going to have with M. de Valorsay.”

“Exactly. I shall leave the door open, and you can listen.”

This word, “listen,” was uttered without bitterness, or even reproach; and yet Pascal could not help blushing and hanging his head. “I wish to prove to you that your suspicions are without foundation,” pursued the baron. “Rest assured that I shall prove this conclusively. I will conduct the conversation in the form of a cross-examination, and after the marquis's departure, you will be obliged to confess that you were wrong.”

“Or you, that I am right?”

“So be it. Any one is liable to be mistaken, and I am not obstinate.”

He was about to leave the room, when Pascal detained him. “I scarcely know how to testify my gratitude even now, monsieur, and yet—if I dared—if I did not fear to abuse your kindness, I should ask one more favor.”

“Speak, Monsieur Ferailleux.”

“It is this, I do not know the Marquis de Valorsay; and if, instead of leaving the door wide open, you would partially close it, I should hear as distinctly, and I could also see him.”

“Agreed,” replied the baron. And, opening the door, he passed into the dining-room, with his right hand cordially extended, and saying, in his most genial tones: “Excuse me, my dear friend, for keeping you waiting. I received your letter this morning, and I was expecting you, but some unexpected business required my attention just now. Are you quite well?”

As the baron entered the room, the marquis had stepped quickly forward to meet him. Either he was inspired with fresh hope, or else he had wonderful powers of self-control, for never had he looked more calm—never had his face evinced haughtier indifference, more complete satisfaction with himself, and greater contempt for others. He was dressed with even more than usual care, and in perfect taste as well; moreover, his valet had surpassed himself in dressing his hair—for one would have sworn that his locks were still luxuriant. If he experienced any secret anxiety, it only showed itself in a slightly increased stiffness of his right leg—the limb broken in hunting. “I ought rather to inquire concerning your own health,” he remarked. “You seem greatly disturbed; your cravat is untied.” And, pointing to the broken china scattered about the floor, he added: “On seeing this, I asked myself if an accident had not happened.”

“The baroness was taken suddenly ill at the breakfast table. Her fainting fit startled me a little. But it was a mere trifle. She has quite recovered already, and you may rely upon her applauding your victory at

Vincennes to-day. She has I don't know how many hundred louis staked upon your horses."

The marquis's countenance assumed an expression of cordial regret. "I am very sorry, upon my word!" he exclaimed. "But I sha'n't take part in the races at Vincennes. I have withdrawn my horses. And, in future, I shall have nothing to do with racing."

"Nonsense!"

"It is the truth, however. I have been led to this determination by the infamous slander which has been circulated respecting me."

This answer was a mere trifle, but it somewhat shook Baron Trigault's confidence. "You have been slandered!" he muttered.

"Abominably. Last Sunday the best horse in my stables, Domingo, came in third. He was the favorite in the ring. You can understand the rest. I have been accused of manœuvring to have my own horse beaten. People have declared that it was my interest he should be beaten, and that I had an understanding with my jockey to that effect. This is an every-day occurrence, I know very well; but, as regards myself, it is none the less an infamous lie!"

"Who has dared to circulate such a report?"

"Oh, how can I tell? It is a fact, however, that the story has been circulated everywhere, but in such a cautious manner that there is no way of calling the authors to account. They have even gone so far as to say that this piece of knavery brought me in an enormous sum, and that I used Rochecotte's, Kervau-lieu's, and Coralthe's names in betting against my own horse."

The baron's agitation was so great that M. de Valorsay observed it, though he did not understand the

cause. Living in the same society with the Baroness Trigault, and knowing her story, he thought that Coralith's name might, perhaps, have irritated the baron. "And so," he quickly continued, "don't be surprised if, during the coming week, you see the sale of my horses announced."

"What! you are going to sell——"

"All my horses—yes, baron. I have nineteen; and it will be very strange if I don't get eight or ten thousand louis for the lot. Domingo alone is worth more than forty thousand francs."

To talk of selling—of realizing something you possess—rings ominously in people's ears. The person who talks of selling proclaims his need of money—and often his approaching ruin. "It will save you at least a hundred and fifty or sixty thousand francs a year," observed the baron.

"Double it and you won't come up to the mark. Ah! my dear baron, you have yet to learn that there is nothing so ruinous as a racing stable. It's worse than gambling; and women, in comparison, are a real economy. Ninette costs me less than Domingo, with his jockey, his trainer, and his grooms. My manager declares that the twenty-three thousand francs I won last year, cost me at least fifty thousand."

Was he boasting, or was he speaking the truth? The baron was engaged in a rapid calculation. "What does Valorsay spend a year?" he was saying to himself. "Let us say two hundred and fifty thousand francs for his stable; forty thousand francs for Ninette Simplon; eighty thousand for his household expenses, and at least thirty thousand for personal matters, travelling, and play. All this amounts to something like four hundred and thirty thousand francs a year.

Does his income equal that sum? Certainly not. Then he must have been living on the principal—he is ruined.”

Meanwhile the marquis gayly continued: “You see, I’m going to make a change in my mode of life. Ah! it surprises you! But one must make an end of it, sooner or later. I begin to find a bachelor life not so very pleasant after all; there is rheumatism in prospect, and my digestion is becoming impaired—in short, I feel that it is time for marriage, baron; and—I am about to marry.”

“You!”

“Yes, I. What, haven’t you heard of it, yet? It has been talked of at the club for three days or more.”

“No, this is the first intimation I have received of it. It is true, however, that I have not been to the club for three days. I have made a wager with Kami-Bey, you know—that rich Turk—and as our sittings are eight or ten hours long, we play in his apartments at the Grand Hôtel. And so you are to be married,” the baron continued, after a slight pause. “Ah, well! I know one person who won’t be pleased.”

“Who, pray?”

“Ninette Simplon.”

M. de Valorsay laughed heartily. “As if that would make any difference to me!” he exclaimed. And then in a most confidential manner he resumed: “She will soon be consoled. Ninette Simplon is a shrewd girl—a girl whom I have always suspected of having an account book in place of a heart. I know she has at least three hundred thousand francs safely invested; her furniture and diamonds are worth as much more. Why should she regret me? Add to this that I have promised her fifty thousand francs to dry her tears with

on my wedding-day, and you will understand that she really longs to see me married."

"I understand," replied the baron; "Ninette Simphon won't trouble you. But I can't understand why you should talk of economy on the eve of a marriage which will no doubt double your fortune; for I'm sure you won't surrender your liberty without good and substantial reasons."

"You are mistaken."

"How mistaken?"

"Well, I won't hesitate to confess to you, my dear baron, that the girl I am about to marry hasn't a penny of her own. My future wife has no dowry save her black eyes—but they are certainly superb ones."

This assertion seemed to disprove Pascal's statements. "Can it really be you who are talking in this strain?" cried the baron. "You, a practical, worldly man, give way to such a burst of sentiment?"

"Well, yes."

The baron opened his eyes in astonishment. "Ah! then you adore your future bride!"

"Adore only feebly expresses my feelings."

"I must be dreaming."

Valorsay shrugged his shoulders with the air of a man who has made up his mind to accept the banter of his friends; and in a tone of mingled sentimentality and irony, he said: "I know that it's absurd, and that I shall be the laughing-stock of my acquaintances. Still it doesn't matter; I have never been coward enough to hide my feelings. I'm in love, my dear baron, as madly in love as a young collegian—sufficiently in love to watch my lady's house at night even when I have no possible hope of seeing her. I thought myself *blasé*, I boasted of being invulnerable. Well, one fine morning

I woke up with the heart of a youth of twenty beating in my breast—a heart which trembled at the slightest glance from the girl I love, and sent purple flushes to my face. Naturally I tried to reason with myself. I was ashamed of my weakness; but the more clearly I showed myself my folly, the more obstinate my heart became. And perhaps my folly is not such a great one after all. Such perfect beauty united with such modesty, grace, and nobility of soul, such passion, candor, and talent, cannot be met twice in a lifetime. I intend to leave Paris. We shall first of all go to Italy, my wife and I. After a while we shall return and install ourselves at Valorsay, like two turtle-doves. Upon my word, my imagination paints a charming picture of the calm and happy life we shall lead there! I don't deserve such good fortune. I must have been born under a lucky star!"

Had he been less engrossed in his narrative, he would have heard the sound of a stifled oath in the adjoining room; and had he been less absorbed in the part he was playing, he would have observed a cloud on his companion's brow. The baron was a keen observer, and he had detected a false ring in this apparently vehement outburst of passion. "I understand it now, my dear marquis," said he; "you have met the descendant of some illustrious but impoverished family."

"You are wrong. My future bride has no other name than her Christian name of Marguerite."

"It is a regular romance then!"

"You are quite right; it is a romance. Were you acquainted with the Count de Chalusse, who died a few days ago?"

"No; but I have often heard him spoken of."

"Well, it is his daughter whom I am about to marry—his illegitimate daughter."

The baron started. "Excuse me," said he; "M. de Chalusse was immensely rich, and he was a bachelor. How does it happen then that his daughter, even though she be his illegitimate child, should find herself penniless?"

"A mere chance—a fatality. M. de Chalusse died very suddenly; he had no time to make a will or to acknowledge his daughter."

"But why had he not taken some precautions?"

"A formal recognition of his daughter was attended by too many difficulties, and even dangers. Mademoiselle Marguerite had been abandoned by her mother when only five or six months old; it is only a few years since M. de Chalusse, after a thousand vain attempts, at last succeeded in finding her."

It was no longer on Pascal's account, but on his own, that Baron Trigault listened with breathless attention. "How very strange," he exclaimed, in default of something better to say. "How very strange!"

"Isn't it? It is as good as a novel."

"Would it be—indiscreet——"

"To inquire? Certainly not. The count told me the whole story, without entering into particulars—you understand. When he was quite young, M. de Chalusse became enamoured of a charming young lady, whose husband had gone to tempt fortune in America. Being an honest woman, she resisted the count's advances for awhile—a very little while; but in less than a year after her husband's departure, she gave birth to a pretty little daughter, Mademoiselle Marguerite. But then why had the husband gone to America?"

"Yes," faltered the baron; "why—why, indeed?"

"Everything was progressing finely, when M. de Chalusse was in his turn obliged to start for Germany, having been informed that a sister of his, who had fled from the paternal roof with nobody knows who, had been seen there. He had been absent some four months or so, when one morning the post brought him a letter from his pretty mistress, who wrote: 'We are lost! My husband is at Marseilles: he will be here to-morrow. Never attempt to see me again. Fear everything from him. Farewell.' On receiving this letter, M. de Chalusse flung himself into a postchaise, and returned to Paris. He was determined, absolutely determined, to have his daughter. But he arrived too late. On hearing of her husband's return, the young wife had lost her head. She had but one thought—to conceal her fault, at any cost; and one night, being completely disguised, she left her child on a doorstep in the vicinity of the central markets——"

The marquis suddenly paused in his story to exclaim: "Why, what is the matter with you, my dear baron? What is the matter? Are you ill? Shall I ring?"

The baron was as pale as if the last drop of blood had been drawn from his veins, and there were dark purple circles about his eyes. Still, on being questioned, he managed to answer in a choked voice, but not without a terrible effort: "Nothing! It is nothing. A mere trifle! It will be over in a moment. It is over!" Still his limbs trembled so much that he could not stand, and he sank on to a chair, murmuring: "I entreat you, marquis—continue. It is very interesting—very interesting indeed."

M. de Valorsay resumed his narrative. "The husband was incontestably an artless fellow; but he was

also, it appears, a man of remarkable energy and determination. Having somehow ascertained that his wife had given birth to a child in his absence, he moved heaven and earth not only to discover the child, but its father also. He had sworn to kill them both; and he was a man to keep his vow unmoved by a thought of the guillotine. And if you require a proof of his strength of character, here it is: He said nothing to his wife on the subject, he did not utter a single reproach; he treated her exactly as he had done before his absence. But he watched her, or employed others to watch her, both day and night, convinced that she would finally commit some act of imprudence which would give him the clue he wanted. Fortunately, she was very shrewd. She soon discovered that her husband knew everything, and she warned M. de Chalusse, thus saving his life."

It is not at all remarkable that the Marquis de Valorsay should have failed to see any connection between his narrative and the baron's agitation. What possible connection could there be between opulent Baron Trigault and the poor devil who went to seek his fortune in America? What imaginable connection could there be between the confirmed gambler, who was Kami-Bey's companion, Lia d'Argelès's friend, and the husband who for ten long years had pursued the man who, by seducing his wife, had robbed him of all the happiness of life? Another point that would have dispelled any suspicions on the marquis's part was that he had found the baron greatly agitated on arriving, and that he now seemed to be gradually regaining his composure. So he continued his story in his customary light, mocking tone. It is the perfection of good taste and high breeding—"proper form," indeed, not to be

astonished or moved by anything, in fact to sneer at everything, and hold one's self quite above the emotions which disturb the minds of plebeians.

Thus the marquis continued: "I am necessarily compelled to omit many particulars, my dear baron. The count was not very explicit when he reached this part of his story; but, in spite of his reticence, I learned that he had been tricked in his turn, that certain papers had been stolen from him, and that he had been defrauded in many ways by his *inamorata*. I also know that M. de Chalusse's whole life was haunted by the thought of the husband he had wronged. He felt a presentiment that he would die by this man's hand. He saw danger on every side. If he went out alone in the evening, which was an exceedingly rare occurrence, he turned the street corners with infinite caution; it seemed to him that he could always see the gleam of a poniard or a pistol in the shade. I should never have believed in this constant terror on the part of a really brave man, if he had not confessed it to me with his own lips. Ten or twelve years passed before he dared to make the slightest attempt to find his daughter, so much did he fear to arouse his enemy's attention. It was not until he had discovered that the husband had become discouraged and had discontinued his search, that the count began his. It was a long and arduous one, but at last it succeeded, thanks to the assistance of a clever scoundrel named Fortunat."

The baron with difficulty repressed a movement of eager curiosity, and remarked: "What a peculiar name!"

"And his first name is Isidore. Ah! he's a smooth-tongued scoundrel, a rascal of the most dangerous kind, who richly deserves to be in jail. How it is that he is

allowed to prosecute his dishonorable calling I can't understand; but it is none the less true that he does follow it, and without the slightest attempt at concealment, at an office he has on the Place de la Bourse."

This name and address were engraved upon the baron's memory, never to be effaced.

"However," resumed M. de Valorsay, "the poor count was fated to have no peace. The husband had scarcely ceased to torment him, he had scarcely begun to breathe freely, when the wife attacked him in her turn. She must have been one of those vile and despicable women who make a man hate the entire sex. Pretending that the count had turned her from the path of duty, and destroyed her life and happiness, she lost no opportunity of tormenting him. She would not allow M. de Chalusse to keep the child with him, nor would she consent to his adopting the girl. She declared it an act of imprudence, which would surely set her husband upon the track, sooner or later. And when the count announced his intention of legally adopting the child, in spite of her protests, she declared that, rather than allow it, she would confess everything to her husband."

"The count was a patient man," sneered the baron.

"Not so patient as you may suppose. His submission was due to some secret cause which he never confided to me. There must have been some great crime under all this. In any case, the poor count found it impossible to escape this terrible woman. He took refuge at Cannes; but she followed him. He travelled through Italy, for I don't know how many months under an assumed name, but all in vain. He was at last compelled to conceal his daughter in some provincial convent. During the last few months of his life

he obtained peace—that is to say, he bought it. This lady's husband must either be very poor or exceedingly stingy; and as she was exceedingly fond of luxury, M. de Chalusse effected a compromise by giving her a large sum monthly, and also by paying her dress-maker's bills."

The baron sprang to his feet with a passionate exclamation. "The vile wretch!" he said.

But he quickly reseated himself, and the exclamation astonished M. de Valorsay so little that he quietly concluded by saying: "And this is the reason, baron, why my beloved Marguerite, the future Marquise de Valorsay, has no dowry."

The baron cast a look of positive anguish at the door of the smoking-room. He had heard a slight movement there; and he trembled with fear lest Pascal, maddened with anger and jealousy, should rush in and throw himself upon the marquis. Plainly enough, this perilous situation could not last much longer. The baron's own powers of self-control and dissimulation were almost exhausted, and so postponing until another time the many questions he still wished to ask M. de Valorsay, he made haste to check these confidential disclosures. "Upon my word," he exclaimed, with a forced laugh, "I was expecting something quite different. This affair begins like a genuine romance, and ends, as everything ends nowadays, in money!"

IV.

As a millionaire and a gambler, Baron Trigault enjoyed all sorts of privileges. He assumed the right to be brutal, ill-bred, cynical and bold; to be one of those persons who declare that folks must take them as they find them. But his rudeness now was so thoroughly offensive that under any other circumstances the marquis would have resented it. However, he had special reasons for preserving his temper, so he decided to laugh.

"Yes, these stories always end in the same way, baron," said he. "You haven't touched a card this morning, and I know your hands are itching. Excuse me for making you waste precious time, as you say; but what you have just heard was only a necessary preface."

"Only a preface?"

"Yes; but don't be discouraged. I have arrived at the object of my visit now."

As Baron Trigault was supposed to enjoy an income of at least eight hundred thousand francs a year, he received in the course of a twelvemonth at least a million applications for money or help, and for this reason he had not an equal for detecting a coming appeal. "Good heavens!" he thought, "Valorsay is going to ask me for money." In fact, he felt certain that the marquis's pretended carelessness concealed real embarrassment, and that it was difficult for him to find the words he wanted.

"So I am about to marry," M. de Valorsay resumed—"I wish to break off my former life, to turn over a new leaf. And now the wedding gifts, the two

fêtes that I propose giving, the repairs at Valorsay, and the honeymoon with my wife—all these things will cost a nice little sum.”

“A nice little sum, indeed!”

“Ah, well! as I’m not going to wed an heiress, I fear I shall run a trifle short. The matter was worrying me a little, when I thought of you. I said to myself: ‘The baron, who always has money at his disposal, will no doubt let me have the use of five thousand louis for a year.’”

The baron’s eyes were fixed upon his companion’s face. “Zounds!” he exclaimed in a half-grieved, half-petulant tone; “I haven’t the amount!”

It was not disappointment that showed itself on the marquis’s face; it was absolute despair, quickly concealed.

But the baron had detected it; and he realized his applicant’s urgent need. He felt certain that M. de Valorsay was financially ruined—and yet, as it did not suit his plans to refuse, he hastily added: “When I say I haven’t that amount, I mean that I haven’t got it on hand just at this moment. But I shall have it within forty-eight hours; and if you are at home at this time on the day after to-morrow, I will send you one of my agents, who will arrange the matter with you.”

A moment before, the marquis had allowed his consternation to show itself; but this time he knew how to conceal the joy that filled his soul. So it was in the most indifferent manner, as if the affair were one of trivial importance, that he thanked the baron for being so obliging. Plainly enough, he now longed to make his escape, and indeed, after rattling off a few commonplace remarks, he rose to his feet and took his

leave, exclaiming: "Till the day after to-morrow, then!"

The baron sank into an arm-chair, completely overcome. A martyr to a passion that was stronger than reason itself, the victim of a fatal love which he had not been able to drive from his heart, Baron Trigault had passed many terrible hours, but never had he been so completely crushed as at this moment when chance revealed the secret which he had vainly pursued for years. The old wounds in his heart opened afresh, and his sufferings were poignant beyond description. All his efforts to save this woman whom he at once loved and hated from the depths of degradation, had proved unavailing. "And she has extorted money from the Count de Chalusse," he thought; "she sold him the right to adopt their own daughter." And so strange are the workings of the human heart, that this circumstance, trivial in comparison with many others, drove the unfortunate baron almost frantic with rage. What did it avail him that he had become one of the richest men in Paris? He allowed his wife eight thousand francs a month, almost one hundred thousand francs a year, merely for her dresses and fancies. Not a quarter-day passed, but what he paid her debts to a large amount, and in spite of all this, she had sunk so low as to extort money from a man who had once loved her. "What can she do with it all?" muttered the baron, overcome with sorrow and indignation. "How can she succeed in spending the income of several millions?"

A name, the name of Ferdinand de Coralth, rose to his lips; but he did not pronounce it. He saw Pascal emerging from the smoking-room; and though he had forgotten the young advocate's very existence, his ap-

pearance now restored him to a consciousness of reality. "Ah, well! M. Ferailleux?" he said, like a man suddenly aroused from some terrible nightmare. Pascal tried to make some reply, but he was unable to do so—such a flood of incoherent thoughts was seething and foaming in his brain. "Did you hear, M. de Valorsay?" continued the baron. "Now we know, beyond the possibility of doubt, who Mademoiselle Marguerite's mother is. What is to be done? What would you do in my place?"

"Ah, monsieur! how can I tell?"

"Wouldn't your first thought be of vengeance! It is mine. But upon whom can I wreak my vengeance? Upon the Count de Chalusse? He is dead. Upon my wife? Yes, I might do so; but I lack the courage—Mademoiselle Marguerite remains."

"But she is innocent, monsieur; she has never wronged you."

The baron did not seem to hear this exclamation. "And to make Mademoiselle Marguerite's life one long misery," said he, "I need only favor her marriage with the marquis. Ah, he would make her cruelly expiate the crime of her birth."

"But you won't do so!" cried Pascal, in a transport, "it would be shameful; I won't allow it. Never, I swear before high Heaven! never, while I live, shall Valorsay marry Marguerite. He may perhaps vanquish me in the coming struggle; he may lead her to the threshold of the church, but there he will find me—armed—and I will have justice—human justice in default of legal satisfaction. And, afterward, the law may take its course!"

The baron looked at him with deep emotion. "Ah, you know what it is to love!" he exclaimed; and in a

hollow voice, he added: "and thus it was that I loved Marguerite's mother."

The breakfast-table had not been cleared, and a large decanter of water was still standing on it. The baron poured out two large glasses, which he drained with feverish avidity, and then he began to walk aimlessly about the room.

Pascal held his peace. It seemed to him that his own destiny was being decided in this man's mind, that his whole future depended upon the determination he arrived at. A prisoner awaiting the verdict of the jury could not have suffered more intense anxiety. At last, when a minute, which seemed a century, had elapsed, the baron paused. "Now as before, M. Ferailleux," he said, roughly, "I'm for you and with you. Give me your hand—that's right. Honest people ought to protect and assist one another when scoundrels assail them. We will reinstate you in public esteem, monsieur. We will unmask Coralth, and we will crush Valorsay if we find that he is really the instigator of the infamous plot that ruined you."

"What, monsieur! Can you doubt it after your conversation with him?"

The baron shook his head. "I've no doubt but what Valorsay is ruined financially," said he. "I am certain that my hundred thousand francs will be lost forever if I lend them to him. I would be willing to swear that he bet against his own horse and prevented the animal from winning, as he is accused of doing."

"You must see, then——"

"Excuse me—all this does *not* explain the great discrepancy between your allegations and his story. You assure me that he cares nothing whatever for Mademoiselle Marguerite; he pretends that he adores her."

"Yes, monsieur, yes—the scoundrel dared to say so. Ah! if I had not been deterred by a fear of losing my revenge!"

"I understand; but allow me to conclude. According to you, Mademoiselle Marguerite possesses several millions. According to him, she hasn't a penny of her own. Which is right? I believe he is. His desire to borrow a hundred thousand francs of me proves it; and, besides, he wouldn't have come this morning to tell me a falsehood, which would be discovered tomorrow. Still, if he is telling the truth, it is impossible to explain the foul conspiracy you have suffered by."

This objection had previously presented itself to Pascal's mind, and he had found an explanation which seemed to him a plausible one. "M. de Chalusse was not dead," said he, "when M. de Coralth and M. de Valorsay decided on this plan of ridding themselves of me. Consequently, Mademoiselle Marguerite was still an heiress."

"That's true; but the very day after the commission of the crime, the accomplices must have discovered that it could do them no good; so, why have they still persisted in their scheme?"

Pascal tried to find a satisfactory answer, but failed.

"There must be some iniquitous mystery in this affair, which neither you nor I suspect," remarked the baron.

"That is exactly what my mother told me."

"Ah! that's Madame Ferailleur's opinion? Then it is a good one. Come, let us reason a little. Mademoiselle Marguerite loved you, you say?"

"Yes."

"And she has suddenly broken off the engagement?"

"She wrote to me that the Count de Chalusse extorted from her a promise on his death-bed, that she would marry the Marquis de Valorsay."

The baron sprang to his feet. "Stop," he cried—"stop! We now have a clue to the truth, perhaps. Ah! so Mademoiselle Marguerite has written to you that M. de Chalusse commanded her to marry the marquis! Then the count must have been fully restored to consciousness before he breathed his last. On the other hand, Valorsay pretends that Mademoiselle Marguerite is left without resources, simply because the count died too suddenly to be able to write or to sign a couple of lines. Can you reconcile these two versions of the affair, M. Ferailleur? Certainly not. Then which version is false? We must ascertain that point. When shall you see Mademoiselle Marguerite again?"

"She has requested me *never* to try to see her again."

"Very well! She must be disobeyed. You must discover some way of seeing her without anyone's knowledge. She is undoubtedly watched, so don't write on any account." He reflected for a moment, and then added: "We shall, perhaps, become morally certain of Valorsay's and Coralthe's guilt, but there's a wide difference between this and the establishment of their guilt by material proofs. Two scoundrels who league to ruin an honest man don't sign a contract to that effect before a notary. Proofs! Ah! where shall we find them? We must gain an intimate knowledge of Valorsay's private life. The best plan would be to find some man devoted to our interests who would watch him, and insinuate himself into his confidence."

Pascal interrupted the baron with an eager gesture.

Hope glittered in his eyes. "Yes!" he exclaimed, "yes; it is necessary that M. de Valorsay should be watched by a man of quick perception—a man clever enough to make himself useful to the marquis, and capable of rendering him an important service in case of need. I will be the man, monsieur, if you will allow me. The thought occurred to me just now while I was listening to you. You promised to send some one to Valorsay's house with money. I entreat you to allow me to take the place of the man you intended to send. The marquis doesn't know me, and I am sufficiently sure of myself to promise you that I will not betray my identity. I will present myself as your agent; he will give me his confidence. I shall take him money or fair promises, I shall be well received, and I have a plan——"

He was interrupted by a rap at the door. The next moment a footman entered, and informed his master that a messenger wished to speak to him on urgent business. "Let him come in," said the baron.

It was Job, Madame Lia d'Argelès's confidential servant, who entered the room. He bowed respectfully, and, with an air of profound mystery exclaimed: "I have been looking for the baron everywhere. I was ordered by madame not to return without him."

"Very well," said M. Trigault. "I will go with you at once."

V.

How was it that a clever man like M. Fortunat made such a blunder as to choose a Sunday, and a racing Sunday too, to call on M. Wilkie. His anxiety might explain the mistake, but it did not justify it. He felt certain, that under any other circumstances he would not have been dismissed so cavalierly. He would at least have been allowed to develop his proposals, and then who knows what might have happened?

But the races had interfered with his plans. M. Wilkie had been compelled to attend to Pompier de Nanterre, that famous steeplechaser, of which he owned one-third part, and he had, moreover, to give orders to the jockey, whose lord and master he was to an equal extent. These were sacred duties, since Wilkie's share in a race-horse constituted his only claim to a footing in fashionable society. But it was a strong claim—a claim that justified the display of whips and spurs that decorated his apartments in the Rue du Helder, and allowed him to aspire to the character of a sporting man. Wilkie really imagined that folks were waiting for him at Vincennes; and that the *fête* would not be complete without his presence.

Still, when he presented himself inside the enclosure, a cigar in his mouth, and his racing card dangling from his button-hole, he was obliged to confess that his entrance did not create much of a sensation. An astonishing bit of news had imparted unusual excitement to the ring. People were eagerly discussing the Marquis de Valorsay's sudden determination to pay forfeit and withdraw his horses from the contest; and the best

informed declared that in the betting-rooms the evening before he had openly announced his intention of selling his racing stable. If the marquis had hoped that by adopting this course he would silence the suspicions which had been aroused, he was doomed to grievous disappointment. The rumor that he had secretly bet against his own horse, Domingo, on the previous Sunday, and that he had given orders not to let the animal win the race, was steadily gaining credence.

Large sums had been staked on Domingo's success. He had been the favorite in the betting ring and the losers were by no means pleased. Some declared that they had seen the jockey hold Domingo back; and they insisted that it was necessary to make an example, and disqualify both the marquis and his jockey. Still one weighty circumstance pleaded in M. de Valorsay's favor—his fortune, or, at least, the fortune he was supposed to possess. "Why should such a rich man stoop to cheat?" asked his defenders. "To put money into one's pocket in this way is even worse than to cheat at cards! Besides, it's impossible! Valorsay is above such contemptible charges. He is a perfect gentleman."

"Perhaps so," replied the skeptical bystanders. "But people said exactly the same of Croisenois, of the Duc de H., and Baron P., who were finally convicted of the same rascality that Valorsay is accused of."

"It's an infamous slander! If he had been inclined to cheat, he could have easily diverted suspicion. He would have let Domingo come in second, not third!"

"If he were not guilty, and afraid of detection, he wouldn't pay forfeit to-day nor sell his horses."

"He only retires from the turf because he's going to marry——"

“Nonsense! That’s no reason whatever.”

Like all gamblers, the frequenters of the turf are distrustful and inclined to be quarrelsome. No one is above their suspicions when they lose nor above their wrath when they are duped. And this Domingo affair united all the losers against Valorsay; they formed a little battalion of enemies who were no doubt powerless for the time being, but who were ready to take a startling revenge whenever a good opportunity presented itself. Naturally enough, M. Wilkie sided with the marquis, whom he had heard his friend, M. de Coralith, speak of on several occasions. “Accuse the dear marquis!” he exclaimed. “It’s contemptible, outrageous. Why, only last evening he said to me, ‘My good friend, Domingo’s defeat cost me two thousand louis!’” M. de Valorsay had said nothing of the kind, for the very good reason that he did not even know Wilkie by sight; still, no one paid much heed to the assertion, whereat Wilkie felt vexed, and resolved to turn his attention to his jockey.

The latter was a lazy, worthless fellow, who had been dismissed from every stable he had previously served in, and who swindled and robbed the young gentlemen who employed him without either limit or shame. Although he made them pay him a very high salary—something like eight thousand francs a year—on the plea that it was most repugnant to his feelings to act as a groom, trainer, and jockey at the same time, he regularly every month presented them with fabulous bills from the grain merchant, the veterinary surgeon, and the harness-maker. In addition, he regularly sold Pompier’s oats in order to obtain liquor, and in fact the poor animal was so nearly starved that he could scarcely stand on his legs. The jockey ascribed the

horse's extreme thinness to a system of rigorous training; and the owners did not question the statement in the least. He had made them believe, and they in turn had made many others believe, that Pompier de Nanterre would certainly win such and such a race; and, trusting in this fallacious promise, they risked their money on the poor animal—and lost it.

In point of fact, this jockey would have been the happiest mortal in the world if such things as steeple-chases had never existed. In the first place, he judged, with no little reason, that it was dangerous to leap hurdles on such an animal as Pompier; and, secondly, nothing irritated him so much as to be obliged to promenade with his three employers in turn. But how could he refuse, since he knew that if these young men hired him, it was chiefly, or only in view of, displaying themselves in his company. It afforded them untold satisfaction to walk to and fro along the course in front of the grand stand, with their jockey in his orange jacket with green sleeves. They were firmly convinced that he reflected enormous credit upon them, and their hearts swelled with joy at the thought of the envy they no doubt inspired. This conviction gave rise indeed to terrible quarrels, in which each of the three owners was wont to accuse the others of monopolizing the jockey.

On this occasion, M. Wilkie—being fortunate enough to arrive the first—immediately repaired to Pompier de Nanterre's stall. Never had circumstances been more favorable for a display of the animal's speed. The day was magnificent; the stands were crowded, and thousands of eager spectators were pushing and jostling one another beyond the ropes which limited the course. M. Wilkie seemed to be everywhere; he showed him-

self in a dozen different places at once, always followed by his jockey, whom he ordered about in a loud voice, with many excited gesticulations. And how great his delight was when, as he passed through the crowd, he heard people exclaim: "That gentleman has a racing stable. His horses are going to compete!" What bliss thrilled his heart when he overheard the admiring exclamation of some worthy shopkeeper who was greatly impressed by the gay silk jacket and the top-boots!

But, unfortunately, this happiness could not last forever. His partners arrived, and claimed the jockey in their turn. So M. Wilkie left the course and strolled about among the carriages, until at last he found an equipage which was occupied by the young ladies who had accepted his invitation to supper the evening before, and who were now making a profuse display of the very yellowest hair they possessed. This afforded him another opportunity of attracting public attention, and to giving proofs of his "form," for he had not filled the box of his carriage with champagne for nothing. At last the decisive moment came, and he made himself conspicuous by shouting. "Now! Now! Here he is! Look! Bravo, Pompier! One hundred on Pompier!"

But, alas! poor Pompier de Nanterre fell exhausted before half the distance was accomplished; and that evening Wilkie described his defeat, with a profusion of technical terms that inspired the uninitiated with the deepest awe. "What a disaster, my friends," he exclaimed. "Pompier de Nanterre, an incomparable steeplechaser, to break down in such a fashion! And beaten by whom? My Mustapha, an outsider, without any record whatever! The ring was intensely excited—and I was simply crazed."

However, his defeat did not affect him very deeply. It was forgotten at thought of the inheritance which his friend Coralth had spoken to him about. And to-morrow M. de Coralth would tell him the secret. He had only twenty hours longer to wait! "To-morrow! to-morrow!" he said to himself again and again, with a thrill of mingled joy and impatience. And what bright visions of future glory haunted him! He saw himself the possessor of a magnificent stud, of sufficient wealth to gratify every fancy; he would splash mud upon all the passers-by, and especially upon his former acquaintances, as he dashed past them in his superb equipage; the best tailor should invent astonishing garments for him; he would make himself conspicuous at all the first performances in a stage-box, with the most notorious women in Paris; his *fêtes* would be described in the papers; he would be the continual subject of comment; he would be credited with splendid, perfect "form."

It is true that M. de Coralth had promised him all this, without a word of explanation; but what did that matter? Should he doubt his friend's word? Never! The viscount was not merely his model, but his oracle as well. By the way in which he spoke of him, it might have been supposed that they had been friends from their childhood, or, at least, that they had known each other for years. Such was not the case, however. Their acquaintance dated only seven or eight months back, and their first meeting had apparently been the result of chance; though it is needless to say, perhaps, that this chance had been carefully prepared by M. de Coralth. Having discovered Madame Lia d'Argelès's secret, the viscount watched Wilkie, ascertained where he spent his evenings, contrived a way of introducing

himself into his society, and on their third meeting was skilful enough to render him a service—in other words, to lend him some money. From that moment the conquest was assured; for M. de Coralthe possessed in an eminent degree all the attributes that were likely to dazzle and charm the gifted owner of *Pompier de Nanterre*. First of all, there was his title, then his impudent assurance and his apparent wealth, and last, but by no means least, his numerous and fashionable acquaintances. He was not long in discovering his advantage, and in profiting by it. And without giving M. Wilkie an inkling of the truth, he succeeded in obtaining from him as accurate a knowledge of his past career as the young fellow himself possessed.

M. Wilkie did not know much concerning his origin or his early life; and his history, so far as he was acquainted with it, could be told in a few words. His earliest recollection was of the ocean. He was sure, perfectly sure, that he had made a very long sea voyage when only a little child, and he looked upon America as his birthplace. The French language was certainly not the first he had learned, for he still remembered a limited number of English phrases. The English word “father” was among those that lingered in his memory; and now, after a lapse of twenty years, he pronounced it without the least foreign accent. But while he remembered the word perfectly well, no recollection remained to him of the person he had called by that name. His first sensations were those of hunger, weariness, and cold. He recollected, and very distinctly too, how on one long winter night, a woman had dragged him after her through the streets of Paris, in an icy rain. He could still see himself as he wandered on, crying with weariness, and begging for some-

thing to eat. And then the poor woman who held him by the hand lifted him in her arms and carried him on—on, until her own strength failed, and she was obliged to set him on the ground again. A vague portrait of this woman, who was most probably his mother, still lingered in his memory. According to his description, she was extremely handsome, tall, and very fair. He had been particularly impressed with the pale tint and profusion of her beautiful hair.

Their poverty had not lasted long. He remembered being installed with his mother in a very handsome suite of rooms. A man, who was still young, and whom he called "Monsieur Jacques," came every day, and brought him sweetmeats and playthings. He thought he must have been about four years old at that time. However, he had enjoyed this comfortable state of things scarcely a month, when one morning a stranger presented himself. The visitor held a long conference with his mother, or, at least, with the person whom he called by that name. He did not understand what they were talking about, but he was none the less very uneasy. The result of the interview must have justified his instinctive fear, for his mother took him on her lap, and embraced him with convulsive tenderness. She sobbed violently, and repeated again and again in a faltering voice: "Poor child! my beloved Wilkie! I shall never kiss you again—never, never! Alas! It must be so! Give me courage, my God!"

Those were the exact words; Wilkie was sure on that point. It seemed to him he could still hear that despairing farewell. For it was indeed a farewell. The stranger took him in his arms and carried him away, in spite of his cries and struggles to escape. This person to whose care he was confided was the master

of a small boarding-school, and his wife was the kindest and most patient of women. However, this did not prevent Wilkie from crying and begging for his mother at first; but gradually he forgot her. He was not unhappy, for he was petted and indulged more than any of the other pupils, and he spent most of his time playing on the terrace or wandering about the garden. But this charming life could not last for ever. According to his calculation, he was just ten years old when, one Sunday, toward the end of October, a grave-looking, red-whiskered gentleman, clad in solemn black with a white necktie, presented himself at the school, and declared that he had been instructed by Wilkie's relatives to place him in a college to continue his education.

Young Wilkie's lamentations were long and loud; but they did not prevent M. Patterson—for that was the gentleman's name—from taking him to the college of Louis-the-Great, where he was entered as a boarder. As he did not study, and as he was only endowed with a small amount of intelligence, he learned scarcely anything during the years he remained there. Every Sunday and every *fête* day, M. Patterson made his appearance at ten o'clock precisely, took Wilkie for a walk in Paris or the environs, gave him his breakfast and dinner at some of the best restaurants, bought everything he expressed a desire to have, and at nine o'clock precisely took him back to the college again. During the holidays M. Patterson kept the boy with him, refusing him nothing in the way of pleasure, granting all his wishes, but never losing sight of him for a moment. And if Wilkie complained of this constant watchfulness, M. Patterson always replied, "I must obey orders;" and this answer invariably put an end to the discussion.

So things went on until it became time for Wilkie to take his degree. He presented himself for examination; and, of course, he failed. Fortunately, however, M. Patterson was not at a loss for an expedient. He placed his charge in a private school; and the following year, at a cost of five thousand francs, he beguiled a poor devil into running the risk of three years' imprisonment, by assuming M. Wilkie's name, and passing the examination in his place. In possession of the precious diploma which opens the door of every career, M. Wilkie now hoped that his pockets would be filled, and that he would then be set at liberty. But the hope was vain! M. Patterson placed him in the hands of an old tutor who had been engaged to travel with him through Europe; and as this tutor held the purse-strings, Wilkie was obliged to follow him through Germany, England, and Italy.

When he returned to Paris he was just twenty years old, and the very next day M. Patterson conducted him to the suite of rooms which he still occupied in the Rue du Helder. "You are now in your own home, M. Wilkie," said M. Patterson in his most impressive manner. "You are now old enough to be responsible for your own actions, and I hope you will conduct yourself like an honest man. From this moment you are your own master. Those who gave you your education desire you to study law. If I were in your place, I should obey them. If you wish to be somebody, and to acquire a fortune, work, for you have no property, nor anything to expect from any one. The allowance which is granted you, a far too liberal one in my opinion, may be cut off at any moment. I don't think it right to conceal this fact from you. But at all events until then, I am instructed to pay you five thousand

francs quarterly. Here is the amount for the first quarter, and in three months' time I shall send you a similar amount. I say 'shall *send*,' because my business compels me to return to England, and take up my abode there. Here is my London address; and if any serious trouble befalls you, write to me. Now, my duty being fulfilled, farewell."

"Go to the devil, you old preacher!" growled Wilkie, as he saw the door close on the retreating figure of M. Patterson, who had acted as his guardian for ten years. None of M. Patterson's wise advice lingered in the young fellow's mind. To use a familiar expression, "It went in through one ear and came out through the other." Only two facts had made an impression upon him: that he was to be his own master henceforth, and that he had a fortune at his command. There it lay upon the table, five thousand francs in glittering gold.

If M. Wilkie had taken the trouble to attentively examine the rooms which had suddenly become his own, he would perhaps have recognized the fact that a loving hand had prepared them for his reception. Countless details revealed the delicate taste of a woman, and the thoughtful tenderness of a mother. None of those little superfluities which delight a young man had been forgotten. There was a box of choice cigars upon the table, and a jar of tobacco on the mantel-shelf. But Wilkie did not take time to discover this. He hastily slipped five hundred francs into his pocket, locked the rest of his money in a drawer, and went out with as lofty an air as if all Paris belonged to him, or as if he had enough money to purchase it.

He had resolved to give a *fête* in honor of his deliverance, and so he hurried off in search of some of his

old college chums. He found two of them; and, although it was very wounding to his self-love, M. Wilkie was obliged to confess to them that this was his first taste of liberty, and that he scarcely knew what to do with himself. Of course his friends assured him that they could quickly make him acquainted with the only life that it was worth while living; and, to prove it, they accepted the invitation to dinner which he immediately offered them. It was a remarkable repast. Other acquaintances dropped in, the wine flowed in rivers; and after dinner they danced. And at day-break, having served his apprenticeship at *baccarat*, M. Wilkie found himself without a penny in his pocket, and face to face with a bill of four hundred francs, for which amount he was obliged to go to his rooms, under the escort of one of the waiters. This first experiment ought to have disgusted him, or at least have made him reflect. But no. He felt quite in his element in the society of dissipated young men and enamelled women. He swore that he would win a place in their midst, and an influential place too. But it was easier to form this plan than to carry it into execution, as he discovered when, at the end of the month, he counted his money to see what remained of the five thousand francs that had been given him for his quarterly allowance. He had just three hundred francs left.

Twenty thousand francs a year is what one chooses to make it—wealth or poverty. Twenty thousand francs a year represents about sixty francs a day; but what are sixty francs to a high liver, who breakfasts and dines at the best restaurants, whose clothes are designed by an illustrious tailor, who declines to make a pair of trousers for less than a hundred francs? What are three louis a day to a man who hires a box for first

performances at the opera, to a man who gambles and gives expensive suppers, to a man who drives out with yellow-haired demoiselles, and who owns a race-horse? Measuring his purse and his ambition, M. Wilkie discovered that he should never succeed in making both ends meet. "How do other people manage?" he wondered. A puzzling question! Every evening a thousand gorgeously appressed gentlemen, with a cigar in their mouth and a flower in their button-hole, may be seen promenading between the *Chaussée d'Antin* and the *Faubourg Montmartre*. Everybody knows them, and they know everybody, but how they exist is a problem which it is impossible to solve. How do they live, and what do they live on? Everybody knows that they have no property; they do nothing, and yet they are reckless in their expenditures, and rail at work and jeer at economy. What source do they derive their money from? What vile business are they engaged in?

However, M. Wilkie did not devote much time to solving this question. "My relatives must wish me to starve," he said to himself. "Not I—I'm not that sort of a person, as I'll soon let them know." And thereupon he wrote to M. Patterson. By return of post that gentleman sent him a cheque for one thousand francs—a mere drop in the bucket. M. Wilkie felt indignant and so he wrote again. This time he was obliged to wait for a reply. Still at last it came. M. Patterson sent him two thousand francs, and an interminable epistle full of reproaches. The interesting young man threw the letter into the fire, and went out to hire a carriage by the month and a servant.

From that day forward, his life was spent in demanding money and waiting for it. He employed in quick succession every pretext that could soften the

hearts of obdurate relatives, or find the way to the most closely guarded cash-box. He was ill—he had contracted a debt of honor—he had imprudently lent money to an unscrupulous friend—he was about to be arrested for debt. And in accordance with the favorable or unfavorable character of the replies his manner became humble or impertinent, so that his friends soon learned to judge very accurately of the condition of his purse by the way he wore his mustaches. He became wise with experience, however; and on adding all the sums he had received together, he decided that his family must be very rich to allow him so much money. And this thought made him anxious to fathom the mystery of his birth and his infancy. He finally persuaded himself that he was the son of a great English nobleman—a member of the House of Lords, who was twenty times a millionaire. And he more than half believed it when he told his creditors that his lordship, his father, would some day or other come to Paris and pay all his debts. Unfortunately it was not M. Wilkie's noble father that arrived, but a letter from M. Patterson, which was couched as follows:

“MY DEAR SIR, a considerable sum was placed in my hands to meet your unexpected requirements; and in compliance with your repeated appeals, I have remitted the entire amount to you. Not a penny remains in my possession—so that my instructions have been fulfilled. Spare yourself the trouble of making any fresh demands; they will meet with no reply. In future you will not receive a penny above your allowance, which in my opinion is already too large a one for a young man of your age.”

This letter proved a terrible blow to Wilkie. What should he do? He felt that M. Patterson would not

revoke his decision; and indeed he wrote him several imploring letters, in vain. Yet never had his need of money been so urgent. His creditors were becoming uneasy; bills actually rained in upon his concierge; his next quarterly allowance was not due for some time to come, and it was only through the pawnbroker that he could obtain money for his more pressing requirements. He had begun to consider himself ruined. He saw himself reduced to dismissing his carriage, to selling his third share of *Pompier de Nanterre* and losing the esteem of all his witty friends.

He was in the depths of despair, when one morning his servant woke him up with the announcement that the Viscount de Coralth was in the sitting-room and wished to speak with him on very important business. It was not usually an easy task to entice M. Wilkie from his bed, but the name his servant mentioned seemed to have a prodigious effect upon him. He bounded on to the floor, and as he hastily dressed himself, he muttered: "The viscount here, at this hour! It's astonishing! What if he's going to fight a duel and wishes me to be his second? That would be a piece of grand good luck and no mistake. It would assure my position at once. Certainly something must have happened!"

This last remark was by no means a proof of any remarkable perspicuity on M. Wilkie's part. As M. de Coralth never went to bed until two or three o'clock in the morning, he was by no means an early riser, and only some very powerful reason could explain the presence of his blue-lined brougham in the street before nine o'clock A.M. And the influence that had made him rise betimes in the present case had indeed been extremely powerful. Although the brilliant viscount had

discovered Madame d'Argelès's secret, several months previously, he had so far disclosed it to no one. It was certainly not from any delicacy of feeling that he had held his peace; but only because it had not been for his interest to speak. Now, however, the sudden death of the Count de Chalusse changed the situation. He heard of the catastrophe at his club on the evening after the count's death, and his emotion was so great that he actually declined to take part in a game of *baccarat* that was just beginning. "The devil!" he exclaimed. "Let me think a moment. Madame d'Argelès is the heiress of all these millions—will she come forward and claim them? From what I know of her, I am inclined to think that she won't. Will she ever go to Wilkie and confess that she, Lia d'Argelès, is a Chalusse, and that he is her illegitimate son? Never! She would rather relinquish her millions, both for herself and for him, than take such a step. She is so ridiculously antiquated in her notions." And then he began to study what advantages he might derive from his knowledge of the situation.

M. de Coralth, like all persons whose present is more or less uncertain, had great misgivings concerning his future. Just now he was cunning enough to find a means of procuring the thirty or forty thousand francs a year that were indispensable to his comfort; but he had not a farthing laid by, and the vein of silver he was now working might fail him at any moment. The slightest indiscretion, the least blunder, might hurl him from his splendor into the mire. The perspiration started out on his forehead when he thought of his peril. He passionately longed for a more assured position—for a little capital that would insure him his bread until the end of his days, and rid him of the grim

phantom of poverty forever. And it was this desire which inspired him with the same plan that M. Fortunat had formed. "Why shouldn't I inform Wilkie?" he said to himself. "If I present him with a fortune, the simpleton ought certainly to give me some reward." But to carry this plan into execution it would be necessary to brave Madame d'Argelès's anger; and that was attended by no little danger. If he knew something about her, she on her side knew everything connected with his past life. She had only to speak to ruin him forever. Still, after weighing all the advantages and all the dangers, he decided to act, convinced that Madame d'Argelès might be kept ignorant of his treason, providing he only played his cards skilfully. And his matutinal visit to M. Wilkie was caused by a fear that he might not be the only person knowing the truth, and that some one else might forestall him.

"You here, at sunrise, my friend!" exclaimed Wilkie, as he entered the room where the viscount was seated. "What has happened?"

"To me?—nothing," replied the viscount. "It was solely on your account that I deviated from my usual habits."

"What is it? You frighten me."

"Oh! don't be alarmed. I have only some good news to communicate," and in a careless tone which cleverly concealed his anxiety, the viscount added: "I have come, my dear Wilkie, to ask you what you would be willing to give the man who put you in possession of a fortune of several millions?"

M. Wilkie's face turned from white to purple at least three times in ten seconds; and it was in a strangely altered voice that he replied: "Ah! that's good—very good—excellent!" He tried his best to laugh, but he

was completely overcome; and, in fact, he had cherished so many extravagant hopes that nothing seemed impossible to him.

"Never in all my life have I spoken more seriously," insisted the viscount.

His companion at first made no reply. It was easy to divine the conflict that was raging in his mind, between the hope that the news was true and the fear of being made the victim of a practical joke. "Come, my friend," he said at last, "do you want to poke fun at me? That wouldn't be polite. A debtor is always sacred, and I owe you twenty-five louis. This is scarcely the time to talk of millions. My relatives have cut off my supplies; and my creditors are overwhelming me with their bills——"

But M. de Coralthe checked him, saying gravely: "Upon my honor, I am not jesting. What would you give a man who——"

"I would give him half of the fortune he gave me."

"That's too much!"

"No, no!"

He was in earnest, certainly. What wouldn't a man promise in all sincerity of soul to a fellow mortal who gave him money when he had none—when he needed it urgently and must have it to save himself from ruin?

At such a moment no commission, however large, seems exorbitant. It is afterward, when the day of settlement comes, that people begin to find fault with the rate of interest.

"If I tell you that one-half is too much, it is because such is really the case. And I am the best judge of the matter, since I am the man who can put you in possession of this enormous fortune."

M. Wilkie started back in speechless amazement.

"This astonishes you!" said the viscount; "and why, pray? Is it because I ask for a commission?"

"Oh! not at all!"

"It is not perhaps a very gentlemanly proceeding, but it is a sensible one. Business is business. In the afternoon, when I am in a restaurant, at the club, or in a lady's boudoir, I am merely the viscount and the grand seigneur. All money questions sicken me. I am careless, liberal, and obliging to a fault. But in the morning I am simply Coralith, a man of the middle classes who doesn't pay his bills without examining them, and who watches his money, because he doesn't wish to be ruined and end his brilliant career as a common soldier in some foreign legion."

M. Wilkie did not allow him to continue. He believed, and his joy was wild—delirious. "Enough, enough!" he interrupted. "A difficulty between us! Never! I am yours without reserve! Do you understand me? How much must you have? Do you wish for it all?"

But the viscount was unmoved. "It is not fitting that I should fix upon the indemnity which is due to me. I will consult a man of business; and I will decide upon this point on the day after to-morrow, when I shall explain everything to you."

"On the day after to-morrow! You won't leave me in suspense for forty-eight hours?"

"It is unavoidable. I have still some important information to procure. I lost no time in coming to you, so that I might put you on your guard. If any scoundrel comes to you with proposals, be extremely careful. Some agents, when they obtain a hold on an estate, leave nothing for the rightful owner. So don't treat with any one."

"Oh, no! You may rest assured I won't."

"I should be quieter in mind if I had your promise in writing."

Without a word, Wilkie darted to a table, and wrote a short contract by which he bound himself to give M. Ferdinand de Coralth one-half of the inheritance which the aforesaid Coralth might prove him to be entitled to. The viscount read the document, placed it in his pocket, and then said, as he took up his hat:

"Very well. I will see you again on Monday."

But M. Wilkie's doubts were beginning to return. "Monday, so be it!" said he; "but swear that you are not deceiving me."

"What, do you still doubt me?"

M. Wilkie reflected for a moment; and suddenly a brilliant inspiration darted through his brain. "If you are speaking the truth, I shall soon be rich," said he. "But, in the meantime, life is hard. I haven't a penny, and it isn't a pleasant situation. I have a horse entered for the race to-morrow, Pompier de Nanterre. You know the animal very well. The chances are enormously in his favor. So, if it wouldn't inconvenience you to lend me fifty louis——"

"Certainly," interrupted the viscount, cordially. "Certainly; with the greatest pleasure."

And drawing a beautiful little notebook from his pocket he took from it not one, but two bank-notes of a thousand francs, and handed them to M. Wilkie, saying: "Monsieur believes me now, does he not?"

As will be readily believed, it was not for his own pleasure that M. de Coralth postponed his confidential disclosures for a couple of days. He knew Wilkie perfectly well, and felt that it was dangerous to let him roam about Paris with half of an important secret.

Postponement generally furnishes fate with weapons against oneself. But it was impossible for the viscount to act otherwise. He had not seen the Marquis de Valorsay since the Count de Chalusse's death and he dared not conclude the contract with Wilkie before he had conferred with him, for he was completely in the marquis's power. At the least suspicion of treason, M. de Valorsay would close his hand, and he, Coralith, would be crushed like an egg-shell. It was to the house of his formidable associate that he repaired on leaving M. Wilkie; and in a single breath he told the marquis all that he knew, and the plans that he had formed.

M. de Valorsay's astonishment must have been intense when he heard that Lia d'Argelès was a Chalusse, but he knew how to maintain his composure. He listened quietly, and when the viscount had completed his story, he asked: "Why did you wait so long before telling me all this?"

"I didn't see how it could interest you in the least."

The marquis looked at him keenly, and then calmly said: "In other words, you were waiting to see whether it would be most advantageous to you to be with me or against me."

"How can you think——"

"I don't think, I'm sure of it. As long as I was strong support for you, you were devoted to me. But now I am tottering, and you are ready to betray me."

"Excuse me! The step I am about to take——"

"What, haven't you taken it already?" interrupted the marquis, quickly. And shrugging his shoulders, he added: "Observe that I don't reproach you in the least. Only remember this: we survive or we perish together."

By the angry gleam in M. de Coralth's eyes, the marquis must have realized that his companion was disposed to rebel; still this knowledge did not seem to disquiet him, for it was in the same icy tone that he continued: "Besides, your plans, far from conflicting with mine, will be of service to me. Yes, Madame d'Argelès must lay claim to the count's estate. If she hesitates, her son will compel her to urge her claims, will he not?"

"Oh, you may rest assured of that."

"And when he becomes rich, will you be able to retain your influence over him?"

"Rich or poor, I can mould him like wax."

"Very good. Marguerite was escaping me, but I shall soon have her in my power. I have a plan. The Fondèges think they can outwit me, but we shall soon see about that." The viscount was watching his companion stealthily; as the latter perceived, and so in a tone of brusque cordiality, he resumed: "Excuse me for not keeping you to breakfast, but I must go out immediately—Baron Trigault is waiting for me at his house. Let us part friends—*au revoir*—and, above all, keep me well posted about matters in general."

M. de Coralth's temper was already somewhat ruffled when he entered Valorsay's house; and he was in a furious passion when he left it. "So we are to survive or perish together," he growled. "Thanks for the preference you display for my society. Is it my fault that the fool has squandered his fortune? I fancy I've had enough of his threats and airs."

Still his wrath was not so violent as to make him forget his own interests. He at once went to inquire if the agreement which M. Wilkie had just signed would be binding. The lawyer whom he consulted replied

that, at all events, a reasonable compensation would most probably be granted by the courts, in case of any difficulty; and he suggested a little plan which was a *chef d'œuvre* in its way, at the same time advising his client to strike the iron while it was hot.

It was not yet noon, and the viscount determined to act upon the suggestion at once; he now bitterly regretted the delay he had specified. "I must find Wilkie at once," he said to himself. But he did not succeed in meeting him until the evening, when he found him at the Café Riche—and in what a condition too! The two bottles of wine which the young fool had drunk at dinner had gone to his head, and he was enumerating, in a loud voice, the desires he meant to gratify as soon as he came into possession of his millions. "What a brute!" thought the enraged viscount. "If I leave him to himself, no one knows what foolish thing he may do or say. I must remain with him until he becomes sober again."

So he followed him to the theatre, and thence to Brébant's, where he was sitting feeling terribly bored, when M. Wilkie conceived the unfortunate idea of inviting Victor Chupin to come up and take some refreshment. The scene which followed greatly alarmed the viscount. Who could this young man be? He did not remember having ever seen him before, and yet the young scamp was evidently well acquainted with his past life, for he had cast the name of Paul in his face, as a deadly insult. Surely this was enough to make the viscount shudder! How did it happen that this young man had been just on the spot ready to pick up Wilkie's hat? Was it mere chance? Certainly not. He could not believe it. Then why was the fellow there? Evi-

dently to watch somebody. And whom? Why, him—Coralth—undoubtedly.

In going through life as he had done, a man makes enemies at every step; and he had an imposing number of foes, whom he only held in check by his unbounded impudence and his renown as a duellist. Thus it was not strange if some one had set a snare for him; it was rather a miracle that he had not fallen into one before. The dangers that threatened him were so formidable that he was almost tempted to relinquish his attack on Madame d'Argelès. Was it prudent to incur the risk of making this woman an enemy? All Sunday he hesitated. It would be very easy to get out of the scrape. He could concoct some story for Wilkie's benefit, and that would be the end of it. But on the other hand, there was the prospect of netting at least five hundred thousand francs—a fortune—a competency, and the idea was too tempting to be relinquished.

So on Monday morning, at about ten o'clock, he presented himself at Wilkie's house, looking pale with anxiety, and far more solemn in manner than usual. "Let us say but little, and that to the point," he remarked on entering. "The secret I am about to reveal to you will make you rich; but it might ruin me if it were known that you obtained this information through me. You will therefore swear, upon your honor as a gentleman, never to betray me, under any circumstances, or for any reason."

M. Wilkie extended his hand and solemnly exclaimed: "I swear!"

"Very well, then. Now my mind is at rest. It is scarcely necessary for me to add that if you break your oath you are a dead man. You know me. You know

how I handle a sword; and don't forget it." His manner was so threatening that Wilkie shuddered. "You will certainly be questioned," continued M. de Coralth; "but you must reply that you received the information through one of Mr. Patterson's friends. Now let us sign our formal contract in lieu of the temporary one you gave me the other day."

It is needless to say that Wilkie signed it eagerly. Not so the viscount; he read the document through carefully, before appending his signature, and then exclaimed: "The estate that belongs to you is that of the Count de Chalusse, your uncle. He leaves, I am informed, at least eight or ten millions of property."

By M. Wilkie's excited gestures, by the glitter in his eyes, it might have been supposed that this wonderful good fortune was too much for him, and that he was going mad. "I knew that I belonged to a noble family," he began. "The Count de Chalusse my uncle! I shall have a coronet on the corner of my visiting cards."

But with a gesture M. de Coralth silenced him. "Wait a little before you rejoice," said he. "Yes, your mother is the sister of the Count de Chalusse, and it is through her that you are an heir to the estate. But—don't grieve too much—there are similar misfortunes in many of our most distinguished families—circumstances—the obstinacy of parents—a love more powerful than reason——" The viscount paused, certainly he had no prejudices; but at the moment of telling this interesting young man who his mother really was, he hesitated.

"Go on," insisted M. Wilkie.

"Well—when your mother was a young girl, about twenty, she fled from her paternal home with a man she loved. Forsaken afterward, she found herself in

the depths of poverty. She was obliged to live. You were starving. So she changed her name, and now she is known as Lia d'Argelès."

M. Wilkie sprang to his feet. "Lia d'Argelès!" he exclaimed. Then, with a burst of laughter, he added: "Nevertheless, I think it a piece of grand good luck!"

VI.

"THIS man carries away your secret; you are lost." A sinister voice whispered these words in Madame Lia d'Argelès's heart when M. Isidore Fortunat, after being rudely dismissed, closed the door of her drawing-room behind him. This man had addressed her by the ancient and illustrious name of Chalusse which she had not heard for twenty years, and which she had forbidden her own lips to pronounce. This man knew that she, Lia d'Argelès, was really a Durtal de Chalusse.

This frightful certainty overwhelmed her. It is true this man Fortunat had declared that his visit was entirely disinterested. He had pretended that his regard for the Chalusse family, and the compassion aroused in his heart by the unfortunate plight of Mademoiselle Marguerite, were the only motives that had influenced him in taking this step. However, Madame d'Argelès's experience in life had left her but limited faith in apparent or pretended disinterestedness. This is a practical age; chivalrous sentiments are expensive—as she had learned conclusively. "If the man came here," she murmured, "it was only because he thought he might derive some benefit from the prosecution of my claim to my poor brother's estate. In refusing to listen to his entreaties, I have deprived him of this expected

profit and so I have made him my enemy. Ah! I was foolish to send him away like that! I ought to have pretended to listen—I ought to have bound him by all sorts of promises.”

She suddenly paused. It occurred to her that M. Fortunat could not have gone very far; so that, if she sent for him to come back, she might perhaps be able to repair her blunder. Without losing a second, she rushed downstairs, and ordered her concierge and a servant to run after the gentleman who had just left the house, and ask him to return; to tell him that she had reflected, and wished to speak to him again. They rushed out in pursuit, and she remained in the courtyard, her heart heavy with anxiety. Too late! About a quarter of an hour afterward her emissaries returned. They had made all possible haste in contrary directions, but they had seen no one in the street who at all resembled the person they were looking for. They had questioned the shopkeepers, but no one had seen him pass. “It doesn’t matter,” faltered Madame d’Argelès, in a tone that belied her words. And, anxious to escape the evident curiosity of her servants, she hastened back to the little boudoir where she usually spent her mornings.

M. Fortunat had left his card—that is to say, his address—and it would have been an easy matter to send a servant to his house. She was strongly tempted to do so; but she ultimately decided that it would be better to wait—that an hour more or less would make but little difference. She had sent her trusty servant, Job, for Baron Trigault; he would probably return with the baron at any moment; and the baron would advise her. He would know at once what was the best course for her to pursue. And so she waited for his coming in

breathless anxiety; and the more she reflected, the more imminent her peril seemed, for she realized that M. Fortunat must be a very dangerous and cunning man. He had set a trap for her, and she had allowed herself to be caught. Perhaps he had only suspected the truth when he presented himself at the house. He had suddenly announced the death of the Count de Chalusse; she had betrayed herself; and any doubts he might have entertained were dispelled. "If I had only had sufficient presence of mind to deny it," she murmured. "If I had only been courageous enough to reply that I knew absolutely nothing about the person he spoke of. Ah! then he would have gone away convinced that he was mistaken."

But would the smooth-spoken visitor have declared that he knew everything, if he had not really penetrated the mystery of her life? It was scarcely probable. He had implored her to accept the property, if not for her own sake at least for the sake of another. And when she asked him whom he meant he had answered, "Mademoiselle Marguerite," but he was undoubtedly thinking of Wilkie. So this man, this Isidore Fortunat, knew that she had a son. Perhaps he was even acquainted with him personally. In his anger he would very likely hasten to Wilkie's rooms and tell him everything. This thought filled the wretched woman's heart with despair. What! Had she not yet expiated her fault? Must she suffer again?

For the first time a terrible doubt came over her. What she had formerly regarded as a most sublime effort of maternal love, was, perhaps, even a greater crime than the first she had committed. She had given her honor as the price of her son's happiness and prosperity. Had she a right to do so? Did not the money

she had lavished upon him contain every germ of corruption, misfortune, and shame? How terrible Wilkie's grief and rage would be if he chanced to hear the truth!

Alas! he would certainly pay no heed to the extenuating circumstances; he would close his ears to all attempts at justification. He would be pitiless. He would have naught but hatred and scorn to bestow upon a mother who had fallen from the highest rank in society down to everlasting infamy. She fancied she heard him saying in an indignant voice, "It would have been better to have allowed me to die of starvation than to have given me bread purchased at such a price! Why have you dishonored me by your ill-gotten wealth? Fallen, you might have raised yourself by honest toil. You ought to have made me a laborer, and not a spoiled idler, incapable of earning an honest livelihood. As the son of a poor, betrayed, and deserted woman, with whom I could have shared my scanty earnings, I might have looked the world proudly in the face. But where can the son of Lia d'Argelès hide his disgrace after playing the gentleman for twenty years with Lia d'Argelès's money?" Yes, Wilkie would certainly say this if he ever learned the truth; and he would learn it—she felt sure of it. How could she hope to keep a secret which was known to Baron Trigault, M. Patterson, the Viscount de Coralth, and M. Fortunat—four persons! She had confidence in the first two; she believed she had a hold on the third, but the fourth—Fortunat!

The hours went by; and still Job did not return. What was the meaning of this delay? Had he failed to find the baron? At last the sound of carriage-wheels in the courtyard made her start. "That's Job!" she said to herself. "He brings the baron."

Alas! no. Job returned alone. And yet the honest

fellow had spared neither pains nor horseflesh. He had visited every place where there was the least probability of finding the baron, and he was everywhere told that Baron Trigault had not been seen for several days. "In that case, you ought to have gone to his house. Perhaps he is there," remarked Madame d'Argelès.

"Madame knows that the baron is never at home. I did go there, however, but in vain."

This chanced to be one of three consecutive days which Baron Trigault had spent with Kami-Bey, the Turkish ambassador. It had been agreed between them that they should play until one or the other had lost five hundred thousand francs; and, in order to prevent any waste of "precious time," as the baron was wont to remark, they neither of them stirred from the Grand Hôtel, where Kami-Bey had a suite of rooms. They ate and slept there. By some strange chance, Madame d'Argelès had not heard of this duel with bank-notes, although nothing else was talked of at the clubs; indeed, the *Figaro* had already published a minute description of the apartment where the contest was going on; and every evening it gave the results. According to the latest accounts, the baron had the advantage; he had won about two hundred and eighty thousand francs.

"I only returned to inform madame that I had so far been unsuccessful," said Job. "But I will recommence the search at once."

"That is unnecessary," replied Madame d'Argelès. "The baron will undoubtedly drop in this evening, after dinner, as usual."

She said this, and tried her best to believe it; but in her secret heart she felt that she could no longer depend upon the baron's assistance. "I wounded him this

morning," she thought. "He went away more angry than I had ever seen him before. He is incensed with me; and who knows how long it will be before he comes again?"

Still she waited, with feverish anxiety, listening breathlessly to every sound in the street, and trembling each time she heard or fancied she heard a carriage stop at the door. However, at two o'clock in the morning the baron had not made his appearance. "It is too late—he won't come!" she murmured.

But now her sufferings were less intolerable, for excess of wretchedness had deadened her sensibility. Utter prostration paralyzed her energies and benumbed her mind. Ruin seemed so inevitable that she no longer thought of avoiding it; she awaited it with that blind resignation displayed by Spanish women, who, when they hear the roll of thunder, fall upon their knees, convinced that lightning is about to strike their defenceless heads. She tottered to her room, flung herself on the bed, and instantly fell asleep. Yes, she slept the heavy, leaden slumber which always follows a great mental crisis, and which falls like God's blessing upon a tortured mind. On waking up, her first act was to ring for her maid, in order to send a message to Job, to go out again in search of the baron. But the faithful servant had divined his mistress's wishes, and had already started off of his own accord. It was past mid-day when he returned, but his face was radiant; and it was in a triumphant voice that he announced: "Monsieur le Baron Trigault."

Madame d'Argelès sprang up, and greeted the baron with a joyful exclamation. "Ah! how kind of you to come!" she exclaimed. "You are most welcome. If you knew how anxiously I have been waiting for you!"

He made no reply. "If you knew," continued Madame d'Argelès, "if you only knew——"

But she paused, for in spite of her own agitation, she was suddenly struck by the peculiar expression on her visitor's face. He was standing silent and motionless in the centre of the room, and his eyes were fixed upon her with a strange, persistent stare in which she could read all the contradictory feelings which were battling for mastery in his mind—anger, hatred, pity, and forgiveness. Madame d'Argelès shuddered. So her cup of sorrow was not yet full. A new misfortune was about to fall upon her. She had hoped that the baron would be able to alleviate her wretchedness, but it seemed as if he were fated to increase it. "Why do you look at me like that?" she asked, anxiously. "What have I done?"

"You, my poor Lia—nothing!"

"Then—what is it? Oh, my God! you frighten me."

"What is it? Well, I am going to tell you," he said, as he stepped forward and took her hand in his own. "You know that I have been infamously duped and deceived, that the happiness of my life has been destroyed by a scoundrel who tempted the wife I so fondly loved to forget her duty, and trample her honor under foot. You have heard my vows of vengeance if I ever succeeded in discovering him. Ah, well, Lia, I have discovered him. The man who stole my share of earthly happiness was the Count de Chalusse, your brother."

With a sudden gesture Madame d'Argelès freed her hand from the baron's grasp, and recoiled as terrified, as if she had seen a spectre rise up before her. Then with her hands extended as if to ward off the horrible apparition, she exclaimed: "O, my God!"

A bitter smile curved the baron's lips. "What do

you fear?" he asked. "Isn't your brother dead? He has defrauded me alike of happiness and vengeance!"

If her son's life had depended on a single word, Madame d'Argelès could not have uttered it. She knew what mental agony had urged the baron to a sort of moral suicide, and led him to contract the vice in which he wasted his life and squandered, or, at least risk, his millions.

"Nor is this all," he continued. "Listen. As I have often told you, I was sure that my wife became a mother in my absence. I sought the child for years, hoping that through the offspring I might discover the father. Ah, well! I've found what I sought, at last. The child is now a beautiful young girl. She lives at the Hôtel de Chalusse as your brother's daughter. She is known as Mademoiselle Marguerite."

Madame d'Argelès listened, leaning against the wall for support, and trembling like a leaf. Her reason was shaken by so many repeated blows, and her son, her brother, Marguerite, Pascal Ferailleur, Coralth, Valorsay—all those whom she loved or feared, or hated—rose like spectres before her troubled brain. The horror of the truth exceeded her most frightful apprehensions. The strangeness of the reality surpassed every flight of fancy. And, moreover, the baron's calmness increased her stupor. She so often had heard him give vent to his rage and despair in terrible threats, that she could not believe he would be thus resigned. But was his calmness real? Was it not a mask, would not his fury suddenly break forth?

However, he continued, "It is thus that destiny makes us its sport—it is thus that it laughs at our plans. Do you remember, Lia, the day when I met you wandering through the streets of Paris—with your child in

your arms—pale and half dead with fatigue, faint for want of food, homeless and penniless? You saw no refuge but in death, as you have since told me. How could I imagine when I rescued you that I was saving my greatest enemy's sister from suicide—the sister of the man whom I was vainly pursuing? And yet this might not be the end, if I chose to have it otherwise. The count is dead, but I can still return him disgrace for disgrace. He dishonored me. What prevents me from casting ineffaceable opprobrium upon the great name of Chalusse, of which he was so proud? He seduced my wife. To-day I can tell all Paris what his sister has been and what she is to-day."

Ah! it was this—yes, it was this that Madame d'Argelès had dreaded. She fell upon her knees, and, with clasped hands she entreated: "Pity!—oh! have pity—forgive me! Have mercy! Have I not always been a faithful and devoted friend to you? Think of the past you have just invoked! Who helped you then to bear your intolerable sufferings? Don't you remember the day when you, yourself, had determined to die by your own hand? There was a woman who persuaded you to abandon the thought of suicide. It was I!"

He looked at her for a moment with a softer expression, tears came to his eyes, and rolled down his cheeks. Then suddenly he raised her, and placed her in an arm-chair, exclaiming: "Ah! you know very well that I shall not do what I said. Don't you know me better than that? Are you not sure of my affection, are you not aware that you are sacred in my eyes?" He was evidently striving hard to master his emotion. "Besides," he added, "I had already pardoned before coming here. It was foolish on my part, perhaps, and for nothing in the world would I confess it to my acquaint-

ances, but it is none the less true. I shall have my revenge in a certain fashion, however. I need only hold my peace, and the daughter of M. de Chalusse and Madame Trigault would become a lost woman. Is this not so? Very well, I shall offer her my assistance. It may, or may not, be another absurd and ridiculous fancy added to the many I have been guilty of. But no matter. I have promised. And why, indeed, should this poor girl be held responsible for the sins of her parents? I—I declare myself on her side against the world!”

Madame d'Argelès rose, her face radiant with joy and hope. “Then perhaps we are saved!” she exclaimed. “Ah! I knew when I sent for you that I should not appeal to your heart in vain!”

She took hold of his hand as if to raise it to her lips; but he gently withdrew it, and inquired, with an air of astonishment: “What do you mean?”

“That I have been cruelly punished for not wishing you to assist that unfortunate man who was dishonored here the other evening.”

“Pascal Ferailleux?”

“Yes, he is innocent. The Viscount de Coralthe is a scoundrel. It was he who slipped the cards which made M. Ferailleux win, into the pack, and he did it at the Marquis de Valorsay's instigation.”

The baron looked at Madame d'Argelès with profound amazement. “What!” said he; “you knew this and you allowed it? You were cruel enough to remain silent when that innocent man entreated you to testify on his behalf! You allowed this atrocious crime to be executed under your own roof, and under your very eyes?”

“I was then ignorant of Mademoiselle Marguerite's

existence. I did not know that the young man was beloved by my brother's daughter—I did not know—”

The baron interrupted her, and exclaimed, indignantly: “Ah! what does that matter? It was none the less an abominable action.”

She hung her head, and in a scarcely audible voice replied: “I was not free. I submitted to a will that was stronger than my own. If you had heard M. de Coralthe's threats you would not censure me so severely. He has discovered my secret; he knows Wilkie—I am in his power. Don't frown—I make no attempt to excuse myself—I am only explaining the position in which I was placed. My peril is imminent; I have only confidence in you—you alone can aid me; listen!”

Thereupon she hastily explained M. de Coralthe's position respecting herself, what she had been able to ascertain concerning the Marquis de Valorsay's plans, the alarming visit she had received from M. Fortunat, his advice and insinuations, the dangers she apprehended, and her firm determination to deliver Mademoiselle Marguerite from the machinations of her enemies. Madame d'Argelès's disclosures formed, as it were, a sequel to the confidential revelations of Pascal Ferailleux, and the involuntary confession of the Marquis de Valorsay; and the baron could no longer doubt the existence of the shameful intrigue which had been planned in view of obtaining possession of the count's millions. And if he did not, at first, understand the motives, he at least began to discern what means had been employed. He now understood why Valorsay persisted in his plan of marrying Mademoiselle Marguerite, even without a fortune. “The wretch knows through Coralthe that Madame d'Argelès is a Chalusse,” he said to himself; “and when Mademoiselle Mar-

guerite has become his wife, he intends to oblige Madame d'Argelès to accept her brother's estate and share it with him."

At that same moment Madame d'Argelès finished her narrative. "And now, what shall I do?" she added.

The baron was stroking his chin, as was his usual habit when his mind was deeply exercised. "The first thing to be done," he replied, "is to show Coralth in his real colors, and prove M. Ferailleux's innocence. It will probably cost me a hundred thousand francs to do so, but I shall not grudge the money. I should probably spend as much or even more in play next summer; and the amount had better be spent in a good cause than in swelling the dividends of my friend Blanc, at Baden."

"But M. de Coralth will speak out as soon as he finds that I have revealed his shameful past."

"Let him speak."

Madame d'Argelès shuddered. "Then the name of Chalusse will be disgraced," said she; "and Wilkie will know who his mother is."

"No."

"But——"

"Ah! allow me to finish, my dear friend. I have my plan, and it is as plain as daylight. This evening you will write to your London correspondent. Request M. Patterson to summon your son to England, under any pretext whatever; let him pretend that he wishes to give him some money, for instance. He will go there, of course, and then we will keep him there. Coralth certainly won't run after him, and we shall have nothing more to fear on that score."

"Great heavens!" murmured Madame d'Argelès, "why did this idea never occur to me?"

The baron had now completely recovered his composure. "As regards yourself," said he, "the plan you ought to adopt is still more simple. What is your furniture worth? About a hundred thousand francs, isn't it? Very well, then. You will sign me notes, dated some time back, to the amount of a hundred thousand francs. On the day these notes fall due, on Monday, for instance, they will be presented for payment. You will refuse to pay them. A writ will be served, and an attachment placed upon your furniture; but you will offer no resistance. I don't know if I explain my meaning very clearly."

"Oh, very clearly!"

"So your property is seized. You make no opposition, and next week we shall have flaming posters on all the walls, telling Paris that the furniture, wardrobe, cashmeres, laces, and diamonds of Madame Lia d'Argelès will be sold without reserve, at public auction, in the Rue Drouot, with the view of satisfying the claims of her creditors. You can imagine the sensation this announcement will create. I can see your friends and the frequenters of your drawing-room meeting one another in the street, and saying: 'Ah, well! what's this about poor d'Argelès?' 'Pshaw!—no doubt it's a voluntary sale.' 'Not at all; she's really ruined. Everything is mortgaged above its value.' 'Indeed, I'm very sorry to hear it. She was a good creature.' 'Oh, excellent; a deal of amusement could be found at her house,—only between you and me——' 'Well?' 'Well, she was no longer young.' 'That's true. However, I shall attend the sale, and I think I shall bid.' And, in fact, your acquaintances won't fail to repair to the Hôtel Drouot, and maybe your most intimate friends will yield to their generous impulses sufficiently to offer

twenty sous for one of the dainty trifles on your *étagères*."

Overcome with shame, Madame d'Argelès hung her head. She had never before so keenly felt the disgrace of her situation. She had never so clearly realized what a deep abyss she had fallen into. And this crushing humiliation came from whom? From the only friend she possessed—from the man who was her only hope, Baron Trigault.

And what made it all the more frightful was, that he did not seem to be in the least degree conscious of the cruelty of his words. Indeed, he continued, in a tone of bitter irony: "Of course, you will have an exhibition before the sale, and you will see all the dolls that hairdressers, milliners and fools call great ladies, come running to the show. They will come to see how a notorious woman lives, and to ascertain if there are any good bargains to be had. This is the right form. These great ladies would be delighted to display diamonds purchased at the sale of a woman of the *demi monde*. Oh! don't fear—your exhibition will be visited by my wife and daughter, by the Viscountess de Bois d'Ardon, by Madame de Rochecote, her five daughters, and a great many more. Then the papers will take up the refrain; they will give an account of your financial difficulties, and tell the public what you paid for your pictures."

It was with a sort of terror-stricken curiosity that Madame d'Argelès watched the baron. It had been many years since she had seen him in such a frame of mind—since she had heard him talk in such a cynical fashion. "I am ready to follow your advice," said she, "but afterward?"

"What, don't you understand the object I have in

view? Afterward you will disappear. I know five or six journalists; and it would be very strange if I could not convince one of them that you had died upon an hospital pallet. It will furnish the subject of a touching, and what is better, a moral article. The papers will say, 'Another star has disappeared. This is the miserable end of all the poor wretches whose passing luxury scandalizes honest women.' "

"And what will become of me?"

"A respected woman, Lia. You will go to England, install yourself in some pretty cottage near London, and create a new identity for yourself. The proceeds of your sale will supply your wants and Wilkie's for more than a year. Before that time has elapsed you will have succeeded in accumulating the necessary proofs of your identity, and then you can assert your claims and take possession of your brother's estate."

Madame d'Argelès sprang to her feet. "Never! never!" she exclaimed, vehemently.

The baron evidently thought he must have misunderstood her. "What!" he stammered; "you will relinquish the millions that are legally yours, to the government?"

"Yes—I am resolved—it must be so."

"Will you sacrifice your son's future in this style?"

"No, it isn't in my power to do that; but Wilkie will do so, later, on, I'm sure of it."

"But this is simply folly."

A feverish agitation had now succeeded Madame d'Argelès's torpor; there was an expression of scorn and anger on her rigid features, and her eyes, usually so dull and lifeless, fairly blazed. "It is not folly," she exclaimed, "but vengeance!" And as the astonished baron opened his lips to question her: "Let me finish," she said imperiously, "and then you shall judge

me. I have told you with perfect frankness everything concerning my past life, save this—this—that I am married, Monsieur le Baron, legally married. I am bound by a chain that nothing can break, and my husband is a scoundrel. You would be frightened if you knew half the extent of his villainy. Oh! do not shake your head. I ought not to be suspected of exaggeration when I speak in this style of a man whom I once loved so devotedly. For I loved him, alas!—even to madness—loved him so much that I forgot self, family, honor, and all the most sacred duties. I loved him so madly that I was willing to follow him, while his hands were still wet with my brother's blood. Ah! chastisement could not fail to come, and it was terrible, like the sin. This man for whom I had abandoned everything—whom I had made my idol—do you know what he said to me the third day after my flight from home? ‘You must be more stupid than an owl to have forgotten to take your jewels.’ Yes, those were the very words he said to me, with a furious air. And then I could measure the depths of the abyss into which I had plunged. This man, with whom I had been so infatuated, did not love me at all, he had never loved me. It had only been cold calculation on his part. He had devoted months to the task of winning my heart, just as he would have devoted them to some business transaction. He only saw in me the fortune that I was to inherit. Oh! he didn't conceal it from me. ‘If your parents are not monsters,’ he was always saying, ‘they will finally become reconciled to our marriage. They will give you a handsome fortune and we will divide it. I will give you back your liberty, and then we can each of us be happy in our own way.’ It was for this reason that he wished to marry me. I consented on account of my

unborn child. My father and mother had died, and he hoped to prevail upon me to claim my share of the paternal fortune. As for claiming it himself, he dared not. He was a coward, and he was afraid of my brother. But I took a solemn oath that he should never have a farthing of the wealth he coveted, and neither threats nor *blows* could compel me to assert my claim. God only knows how much I had suffered from his brutality when I at last succeeded in making my escape with Wilkie. He has sought us everywhere for fifteen years, but he has not yet succeeded in finding a trace of us. Still he has not ceased to watch my brother. I am sure of that, my presentiments never deceive me. So, if I followed your advice—if I claimed possession of my brother's fortune—my husband would instantly appear with our marriage contract in his hands, and demand everything. Shall I enrich him? No, never, never! I would rather die of want! I would rather see Wilkie die of starvation before my very eyes!”

Madame d'Argelès spoke in that tone of concentrated rage which betrays years of repressed passion and unflinching resolution. One could scarcely hope to modify her views even by the wisest and most practical advice. The baron did not even think of attempting to do so. He had known Madame d'Argelès for years; he had seen so many proofs of her invincible energy and determination. She possessed the distinguishing characteristic of her family in a remarkable degree—that proverbial Chalusse obstinacy which Madame Vantrasson had alluded to in her conversation with M. Fortunat.

She was silent for a moment, and then, in a firm tone she said: “Still, I will follow your advice in part, baron. This evening I will write to M. Patterson and

request him to send for Wilkie. In less than a fortnight I shall have sold my furniture and disappeared. I shall remain poor. My fortune is not so large as people suppose. No matter. My son is a man; he must learn to earn his own living."

"My banking account is always at your disposal, Lia."

"Thanks, my friend, thanks a thousand times; but it will not be necessary for me to accept your kind offer. When Wilkie was a child I did not refuse. But now I would dig the ground with my own hands, rather than give him a louis that came from you. You think me full of contradictions! Perhaps I am. It is certain that I am no longer what I was yesterday. This trouble has torn away the bandage that covered my eyes. I can see my conduct clearly now, and I condemn it. I sinned for my son's sake, more than for my own. But I might have rehabilitated myself through him, and now he will perhaps be dishonored through me." Her breathing came short and hard, and it was in a choked voice that she continued: "Wilkie shall work for me and for himself. If he is strong, he will save us. If he is weak—ah, well! we shall perish. But there has been cowardice and shame enough! It shall never be said that I sacrificed the honor of a noble name and the happiness of my brother's child to my son. I see what my duty is, and I shall do it."

The baron nodded approvingly. "That's no doubt right," said he. "Only allow me to tell you that all is not lost yet. The code has a weapon for every just cause. Perhaps there will be a way for you to obtain and hold your fortune independent of your husband."

"Alas! I made inquiries on the subject years ago, and I was told that it would be impossible. Still, you

might investigate the matter. I have confidence in you. I know that you would not advise me rashly ;—but don't delay. The worst misfortune would be less intolerable than this suspense."

"I will lose no time. M. Ferailleux is a very clever lawyer, I am told. I will consult him."

"And what shall I do about this man Fortunat, who called upon me?"

The baron reflected for a moment. "The safest thing would be to take no action whatever at present," he replied. "If he has any evil designs, a visit or a letter from you would only hasten them."

By the way Madame d'Argelès shook her head, it was easy to see that she had very little hope. "All this will end badly," she murmured.

The baron shared her opinion, but he did not think it wise or kind to discourage her. "Nonsense!" he said lightly, "luck is going to change; it is always changing."

Then as he heard the clock strike, he sprang from his arm-chair in dismay. "Two o'clock," he exclaimed, "and Kami-Bey is waiting for me. I certainly haven't been wasting time here, but I ought to have been at the Grand Hôtel at noon. Kami is quite capable of suspecting a man of any knavery. These Turks are strange creatures. It's true that I am now a winner to the tune of two hundred and eighty thousand francs." He settled his hat firmly on his head, and opening the door, he added: "Good-by, my dear madame, I will soon see you again, and in the meantime don't deviate in the least from your usual habits. Our success depends, in a great measure, upon the fancied security of our enemies!"

Madame d'Argelès considered this advice so sensible

that half an hour later she went out for her daily drive in the Bois, little suspecting that M. Fortunat's spy, Victor Chupin, was dogging her carriage. It was most imprudent on her part to have gone to Wilkie's house on her return. She incurred such a risk of awakening suspicion by wandering about near her son's home that she seldom allowed herself that pleasure, but sometimes her anxiety overpowered her reason. So, on this occasion, she ordered the coachman to stop near the Rue du Helder, and she reached the street just in time to betray her secret to Victor Chupin, and receive a foul insult from M. Wilkie. The latter's cruel words stabbed her to the heart, and yet she tried to construe them as mere proofs of her son's honesty of feeling—as proof of his scorn for the depraved creatures who haunt the boulevards each evening. But though her energy was indomitable, her physical strength was not equal to her will. On returning home, she felt so ill that she was obliged to go to bed. She shivered with cold, and yet the blood that flowed in her veins seemed to her like molten lead. The physician who was summoned declared that her illness was a mere trifle, but prescribed rest and quiet. And as he was a very discerning man, he added, not without a malicious smile, that any excess is injurious—excess of pleasure as well as any other. As it was Sunday, Madame d'Argelès was able to obey the physician, and so she closed her doors against every one, the baron excepted. Still, fearing that this seclusion might seem a little strange, she ordered her concierge to tell any visitors that she had gone into the country, and would not return until her usual reception-day. She would then be compelled to open her doors as usual. For what would the *habitués* of the house, who had played there every Monday for years, say if

they found the doors closed? She was less her own mistress than an actress—she had no right to weep or suffer in solitude.

So, at about seven o'clock on Monday evening, although still grievously suffering both in mind and body, she arranged herself to receive her guests. From among all her dresses, she chose the same dark robe she had worn on the night when Pascal Ferailleux was ruined at her house; and as she was even paler than usual, she tried to conceal the fact by a prodigal use of *rouge*. At ten o'clock, when the first arrivals entered the brilliantly lighted rooms, they found her seated as usual on the sofa, near the fire, with the same eternal, unchangeable smile upon her lips. There were at least forty persons in the room, and the gambling had become quite animated when the baron entered. Madame d'Argelès read in his eyes that he was the bearer of good news. "Everything is going on well," he whispered, as he shook hands with her. "I have seen M. Ferailleux—I wouldn't give ten sous for Valorsay's and Coralth's chances."

This intelligence revived Madame d'Argelès's drooping spirits, and she received M. de Coralth with perfect composure when he came to pay his respects to her soon afterward. For he had the impudence to come, in order to dispel any suspicions that might have been aroused anent his complicity in the card-cheating affair. The hostess's calmness amazed him. Was she still ignorant of her brother's death and the complications arising from it, or was she only acting a part? He was so anxious and undecided, that instead of mingling with the groups of talkers, he at once took a seat at the card-table, whence he could watch the poor woman's every movement.

Both rooms were full, and almost everybody was engaged in play, when, shortly after midnight, a servant entered the room, whispered a few words in his mistress's ear, and handed her a card. She took it, glanced at it, and uttered so harsh, so terrible, so heart-broken a cry, that several of the guests sprang to their feet. "What is it? What is it?" they asked. She tried to reply, but could not. Her lips parted, she opened her mouth, but no sound came forth. She turned ghastly white under her rouge, and a wild, unnatural light gleamed in her eyes. One curious guest, without a thought of harm, tried to take the card, which she still held in her clinched hand; but she repulsed him with such an imperious gesture that he recoiled in terror. "What is it? What is the matter with her?" was the astonished query on every side.

At last, with a terrible effort, she managed to reply, "Nothing." And then, after clinging for a moment to the mantel-shelf, in order to steady herself, she tottered out of the room.

VII.

It was not enough to tell M. Wilkie the secret of his birth. He must be taught how to utilize the knowledge. The Viscount de Coralthe devoted himself to this task, and burdened Wilkie with such a host of injunctions, that it was quite evident he had but a poor opinion of his pupil's sagacity. "That woman d'Argelès," he thought, "is as sharp as steel. She will deceive this young idiot completely, if I don't warn him."

So he did warn him; and Wilkie was instructed exactly what to do and say, how to answer any questions,

and what position to take up according to circumstances. Moreover, he was especially enjoined to distrust tears, and not to let himself be put out of countenance by haughty airs. The viscount spent at least an hour in giving explanations and advice, to the great disgust of M. Wilkie, who, feeling that he was being treated like a child, somewhat testily declared that he was no fool, and that he knew how to take care of himself as well as any one else. Still, this did not prevent M. de Coralthe from persisting in his instructions until he was persuaded that he had prepared his pupil for all possible emergencies. He then rose to depart. "That's all, I think," he remarked, with a shade of uneasiness. "I've traced the plan—you must execute it, and keep cool, or the game's lost."

His companion rose proudly. "If it fails, it won't be from any fault of mine," he answered with unmistakable petulance.

"Lose no time."

"There's no danger of that."

"And understand, that whatever happens, my name is not to be mentioned."

"Yes, yes."

"If there should be any new revelations, I will inform you."

"At the club?"

"Yes, but don't be uneasy; the affair is as good as concluded."

"I hope so, indeed."

Wilkie gave a sigh of relief as he saw his visitor depart. He wished to be alone, so as to brood over the delights that the future had in store for him. He was no longer to be limited to a paltry allowance of twenty

thousand francs! No more debts, no more ungratified longings. He would have millions at his disposal! He seemed to see them, to hold them, to feel them gliding in golden waves between his fingers! What horses he would have! what carriages! what mistresses! And a gleam of envy that he had detected in M. de Coralthe's eyes put the finishing touch to his bliss. To be envied by this brilliant viscount, his model and his ideal, what happiness it was!

The reputation that Madame d'Argelès bore had at first cast a shadow over his joy; but this shadow had soon vanished. He was troubled by no foolish prejudices, and personally he cared little or nothing for his mother's reputation. The prejudices of society must, of course, be considered. But nonsense! society has no prejudices nowadays when millionaires are concerned, and asks no questions respecting their parents. Society only requires passports of the indigent. Besides, no matter what Madame d'Argelès might have done, she was none the less a Chalusse, the descendant of one of the most aristocratic families in France.

Such were Wilkie's meditations while he was engaged in dressing himself with more than usual care. He had been quite shocked by the suggestion that Madame d'Argelès might try to deny him, and he wished to appear before her in the most advantageous light. His toilette was consequently a lengthy operation. However, shortly after twelve o'clock he was ready. He cast a last admiring glance at himself in the mirror, twirled his mustaches, and departed on his mission. He even went on foot, which was a concession to what he considered M. de Coralthe's absurd ideas. The aspect of the Hôtel d'Argelès, in the Rue de Berry, impressed him favorably, but, at the same time, it some-

what disturbed his superb assurance. "Everything is very stylish here," he muttered.

A couple of servants—the concierge and Job—were standing at the door engaged in conversation. M. Wilkie approached them, and in his most imposing manner, but not without a slight tremble in his voice, requested to see Madame d'Argelès. "Madame is in the country," replied the concierge; "she will not return before this evening. If monsieur will leave his card——"

"Oh! that's quite unnecessary. I shall be passing again."

This, too, was in obedience to the instructions of M. de Coralthe, who had advised him not to send in his name, but to gain admission into Madame d'Argelès's presence as speedily as possible, without giving her time to prepare herself for the interview; and Wilkie had ultimately decided that these precautions might not prove as superfluous as he had at first supposed. But this first mishap annoyed him extremely. What should he do? how should he kill time till the evening? A cab was passing. He hired it for a drive to the Bois, whence he returned to the boulevards, played a game of billiards with one of the co-proprietors of *Pompier de Nanterre*, and finally dined at the *Café Riche*, devoting as much time as possible to the operation. He was finishing his coffee when the clock struck eight. He caught up his hat, drew on his gloves, and hastened to the *Hôtel d'Argelès* again.

"Madame has not yet returned," said the concierge, who knew that his mistress had only just risen from her bed, "but I don't think it will be long. And if monsieur wishes——"

"No," replied M. Wilkie brusquely; and he was

going off in a furious passion, when, on crossing the street, he chanced to turn his head and notice that the reception rooms were brilliantly lighted up. "Ah! I think that a very shabby trick!" grumbled the intelligent youth. "They won't succeed in playing that game on me again. Why, she's there now!"

It occurred to him that Madame d'Argelès had perhaps described him to her servants, and had given them strict orders not to admit him. "I'll find out if that is the case, even if I have to wait here until to-morrow morning," he thought, angrily. However, he had not been on guard very long, when he saw a brougham stop in front of the mansion, whereupon the gate opened, as if by enchantment. The vehicle entered the courtyard, deposited its occupants, and drove away. A second carriage soon appeared, then a third, and then five or six in quick succession. "And does she think I'll wear out my shoe-leather here, while everybody else is allowed to enter?" he grumbled. "Never!—I've an idea." And, without giving himself time for further deliberation, he returned to his rooms, arrayed himself in evening-dress, and sent for his carriage. "You will drive to No. — in the Rue de Berry," he said. "There is a *soirée* there, and you can drive directly into the courtyard." The coachman obeyed, and M. Wilkie realized that his idea was really an excellent one.

As soon as he alighted, the doors were thrown open, and he ascended a handsome staircase, heavily carpeted, and adorned with flowers. Two liveried footmen were standing at the door of the drawing-room, and one of them advanced to relieve Wilkie of his overcoat, but his services were declined. "I don't wish to go in," said the young man roughly. "I wish to speak with

Madame d'Argelès in private. She is expecting me—inform her. Here is my card."

The servant was hesitating, when Job, suspecting some mystery perhaps, approached. "Take in the gentleman's card," he said, with an air of authority; and, opening the door of a small room on the left-hand side of the staircase, he invited Wilkie to enter, saying, "If monsieur will be kind enough to take a seat, I will summon madame at once."

M. Wilkie sank into an arm-chair, considerably overcome. The air of luxury that pervaded the entire establishment, the liveried servants, the lights and flowers, all impressed him much more deeply than he would have been willing to confess. And in spite of his affected arrogance, he felt that the superb assurance which was the dominant trait in his character was deserting him. In his breast, moreover, in the place where physiologists locate the heart, he felt certain extraordinary movements which strongly resembled palpitations. For the first time it occurred to him that this woman, whose peace he had come to destroy, was not only the heiress of the Count de Chalusse's millions, but also his mother, that is to say, the good fairy whose protection had followed him everywhere since he entered the world. The thought that he was about to commit an atrocious act entered his mind, but he drove it away. It was too late now to draw back, or even to reflect.

Suddenly a door opposite the one by which he had entered opened, and Madame d'Argelès appeared on the threshold. She was no longer the woman whose anguish and terror had alarmed her guests. During the brief moment of respite which fate had granted her, she had summoned all her energy and courage, and had mastered her despair. She felt that her salvation

depended upon her calmness, and she had succeeded in appearing calm, haughty, and disdainful—as impassive as if she had been a statue. “Was it you, sir, who sent me this card?” she inquired.

Greatly disconcerted, M. Wilkie could only bow and stammer out an almost unintelligible answer. “Excuse me! I am much grieved, upon my word! I disturb you, perhaps——”

“You are Monsieur Wilkie!” interrupted Madame d’Argelès, in a tone of mingled irony and disdain.

“Yes,” he replied, drawling out the name affectedly, “I am M. Wilkie.”

“Did you desire to speak with me?” inquired Madame d’Argelès, dryly.

“In fact—yes. I should like——”

“Very well. I will listen to you, although your visit is most inopportune, for I have eighty guests or more in my drawing-room. Still, speak!”

It was very easy to say “speak,” but unfortunately for M. Wilkie he could not articulate a syllable. His tongue was as stiff, and as dry, as if it had been paralyzed. He nervously passed and repassed his fingers between his neck and his collar, but although this gave full play to his cravat, his words did not leave his throat any more readily. For he had imagined that Madame d’Argelès would be like other women he had known, but not at all. He found her to be an extremely proud and awe-inspiring creature, who, to use his own vocabulary, *scuelched* him completely. “I wished to say to you,” he repeated, “I wished to say to you——” But the words he was seeking would not come; and, so at last, angry with himself, he exclaimed: “Ah! you know as well as I, why I have come. Do you dare to pretend that you don’t know?”

She looked at him with admirably feigned astonishment, glanced despairingly at the ceiling, shrugged her shoulders, and replied: "Most certainly I don't know—unless indeed it be a wager."

"A wager!" M. Wilkie wondered if he were not the victim of some practical joke, and if there were not a crowd of listeners hidden somewhere, who, after enjoying his discomfiture, would suddenly make their appearance, holding their sides. This fear restored his presence of mind. "Well, then," he replied, huskily, "this is my reason. I know nothing respecting my parents. This morning, a man with whom you are well acquainted, assured me that I was—your son. I was completely stunned at first, but after a while I recovered sufficiently to call here, and found that you had gone out."

He was interrupted by a nervous laugh from Madame d'Argelès. For she was heroic enough to laugh, although death was in her heart, and although the nails of her clinched hands were embedded deep in her quivering flesh. "And you believed him, monsieur?" she exclaimed. "Really, this is too absurd! I—your mother! Why, look at me——"

He was doing nothing else, he was watching her with all the powers of penetration he possessed. Madame d'Argelès's laugh had an unnatural ring that awakened his suspicions. All Coralthe's recommendations buzzed confusedly in his ears, and he judged that the moment had come "to do the sentimental," as he would have expressed it. So he lowered his head, and in an agrieved tone, exclaimed: "Ah! you think it very amusing, I don't. Do you realize how wretched it makes one to live as utterly alone as a leper, without a soul to love or care for you? Other young men have a mother,

sisters, relatives. I have no one! Ah! if—— But I only have friends while my money lasts.” He wiped his eyes, dry as they were, with his handkerchief, and in a still more pathetic tone, resumed: “Not that I want for anything; I receive a very handsome allowance. But when my relatives have given me the wherewithal to keep me from starving, they imagine their duty is fulfilled. I think this very hard. I didn’t come into the world at my own request, did I? I didn’t ask to be born. If I was such an annoyance to them when I came into existence, why didn’t they throw me into the river? Then they would have been well rid of me, and I should be out of my misery!”

He stopped short, struck dumb with amazement, for Madame d’Argelès had thrown herself on her knees at his feet. “Have mercy!” she faltered; “Wilkie, my son, forgive me!” Alas! the unfortunate woman had failed in playing a part which was too difficult for a mother’s heart. “You have suffered cruelly, my son,” she continued; “but I—I—— Ah! you can’t conceive the frightful agony it costs a mother to separate from her child! But you were not deserted, Wilkie; don’t say that. Have you not felt my love in the air around you? *You* forgotten? Know, then, that for years and years I have seen you every day, and that all my thoughts and all my hopes are centered in you alone! Wilkie!”

She dragged herself toward him with her hands clasped in an agony of supplication, while he recoiled, frightened by this outburst of passion, and utterly amazed by his easily won victory. The poor woman misunderstood this movement. “Great God!” she exclaimed, “he spurns me; he loathes me. Ah! I knew it would be so. Oh! why did you come? What infamous

wretch sent you here? Name him, Wilkie! Do you understand, now, why I concealed myself from you? I dreaded the day when I should blush before you, before my own son. And yet it was for your sake. Death would have been a rest, a welcome release for me. But your breath was ebbing away, your poor little arms no longer had strength to clasp me round the neck. And then I cried: 'Perish my soul and body, if only my child can be saved!' I believed such a sacrifice permissible in a mother. I am punished for it as if it were a crime. I thought you would be happy, my Wilkie. I said to myself that you, my pride and joy, would move freely and proudly far above me and my shame. I accepted ignominy, so that your honor might be preserved intact. I knew the horrors of abject poverty, and I wished to save my son from it. I would have licked up the very mire in your pathway to save you from a stain. I renounced all hope for myself, and I consecrated all that was noble and generous in my nature to you. Oh! I will discover the vile coward who sent you here, who betrayed my secret. I will discover him and I will have my revenge! You were never to know this, Wilkie. In parting from you, I took a solemn oath never to see you again, and to die without the supreme consolation of feeling your lips upon my forehead."

She could not continue; sobs choked her utterance. And for more than a minute the silence was so profound that one could hear the sound of low conversation in the hall outside, the exclamations of the players as they greeted each unexpected turn of luck, and occasionally a cry of "Banco!" or "I stake one hundred louis!" Standing silent and motionless near the window, Wilkie gazed with consternation at Madame d'Argelès, his

mother, who was crouching in the middle of the room with her face hidden in her hands, and sobbing as if her heart would break. He would willingly have given his third share in *Pompier de Nanterre* to have made his escape. The strangeness of the scene appalled him. It was not emotion that he felt, but an instinctive fear mingled with commiseration. And he was not only ill at ease, but he was angry with himself for what he secretly styled his weakness. "Women are incomprehensible," he thought. "It would be so easy to explain things quietly and properly, but they must always cry and have a sort of melodrama."

Suddenly the sound of footsteps near the door roused him from his stupor. He shuddered at the thought that some one might come in. He hated the very idea of ridicule. So summoning all his courage he went toward Madame d'Argelès, and, raising her from the floor, he exclaimed: "Don't cry so. You grieve me, upon my word! Pray get up. Some one is coming. Do you hear me? Some one is coming." Thereupon, as she offered no resistance, he half led, half carried her to an arm-chair, into which she sank heavily. "Now she is going to faint!" thought Wilkie, in despair. What should he do? Call for help? He dared not. However, necessity inspired him. He knelt at Madame d'Argelès's feet, and gently said: "Come, come, be reasonable! Why do you give way like this? I don't reproach you!"

Slowly, with an air of humility which was indescribably touching, she took her hands from her face, and for the first time raised her tear-stained eyes to her son's. "Wilkie," she murmured.

"Madame!"

She heaved a deep sigh, and in a half-stifled voice:

"*Madame!*" she repeated. "Will you not call me mother?"

"Yes, of course—certainly. But—only you know it will take me some time to acquire the habit. I shall do so, of course; but I shall have to get used to it, you know."

"True, very true!—but tell me it is not mere pity that leads you to make this promise? If you should hate me—if you should curse me—how should I bear it! Ah! when a woman reaches the years of understanding one should never cease repeating to her: 'Take care! Your son will be twenty some day, and you will have to meet his searching gaze. You will have to render an account of your honor to him!' My God! If women thought of this, they would never sin. To be reduced to such a state of abject misery that one dares not lift one's head before one's own son! Alas! Wilkie, I know only too well that you cannot help despising me."

"No, indeed. Not at all! What an idea!"

"Tell me that you forgive me!"

"I do, upon my word I do."

Poor woman, her face brightened. She so longed to believe him! And her son was beside her, so near that she felt his breath upon her cheek. It was he indeed. Had they ever been separated? She almost doubted it, she had lived so near him in thought. It was with a sort of ecstasy that she looked at him. There was a world of entreaty in her eyes; they seemed to be begging a caress; she raised her quivering lips to his, but he did not observe it. For a long time she hesitated, fearing he might spurn her; but at last, yielding to a supreme impulse, she threw her arms around his neck, drew him toward her, and pressed him to her heart in

a close embrace. "My son! my son!" she repeated; "to have you with me again, after all these years!"

Unfortunately, no whirlwind of passion was capable of carrying M. Wilkie beyond himself. His emotion was now spent and his mind had regained its usual indifference. He flattered himself that he was a man of mettle—and he remained as cold as ice beneath his mother's kisses. Indeed, he barely tolerated them; and if he did allow her to embrace him, it was only because he did not know how to refuse. "Will she never have done?" he thought. "This is a pretty state of things! I must be very attractive. How Costard and Serpillon would laugh if they saw me now." Costard and Serpillon were his intimate friends, the co-proprietors of the famous steeplechaser.

In her rapture, however, Madame d'Argelès did not observe the peculiar expression on her son's face. She had compelled him to take a chair opposite her, and, with nervous volubility, she continued: "If I don't deny myself the happiness of embracing you again, it is because I have not broken the vow I took never to make myself known to you. When I entered this room, I was firmly resolved to convince you, no matter how, that you had been deceived. God knows that it was not my fault if I did not succeed. There are some sacrifices that are above human strength."

M. Wilkie deigned to smile. "Oh! yes, I saw your little game," he said, with a knowing air. "But I had been well posted, and besides, it is not very easy to fool me."

Madame d'Argelès did not even hear him. "Perhaps destiny is weary of afflicting us," she continued; "perhaps a new life is about to begin. Through you, Wilkie, I can again be happy. I, who for years have

lived without even hope. But will you have courage to forget?"

"What?"

She hung her head, and in an almost inaudible voice replied, "The past, Wilkie."

But with an air of the greatest indifference, he snapped his fingers, and exclaimed: "Nonsense! What is past is past. Such things are soon forgotten. Paris has known many such cases. You are my mother; I care very little for public opinion. I begin by pleasing myself, and I consult other people afterward; and when they are dissatisfied, I tell them to mind their own business."

The poor woman listened to these words with a joy bordering on rapture. One might have supposed that the strangeness of her son's expressions would have surprised her—have enlightened her in regard to his true character—but no. She only saw and understood one thing—that he had no intention of casting her off, but was indeed ready to devote himself to her. "My God!" she faltered, "is this really true? Will you allow me to remain with you? Oh, don't reply rashly! Consider well, before you promise to make such a sacrifice. Think how much sorrow and pain it will cost you."

"I have considered. It is decided—mother."

She sprang up, wild with hope and enthusiasm. "Then we are saved!" she cried. "Blessed be he who betrayed my secret! And I doubted your courage, my Wilkie! At last I can escape from this hell! This very night we will fly from this house, without one backward glance. I will never set foot in these rooms again—the detested gamblers who are sitting here shall never see me again. From this moment Lia d'Argelès is dead."

M. Wilkie positively felt like a man who had just fallen from the clouds. "What, fly?" he stammered. "Where shall we go, then?"

"To a country where we are unknown, Wilkie—to a land where you will not have to blush for your mother."

"But——"

"Trust yourself to me, my son. I know a pleasant village near London where we can find a refuge. My connections in England are such that you need not fear the obstacles one generally meets with among foreigners. M. Patterson, who manages a large manufacturing establishment, will, I know, be happy to be of service to us—but we shall not be indebted to any one for long, now that you have resolved to work."

On hearing these words, M. Wilkie sprang up in dismay. "Excuse me," he said, "I don't understand you. You propose to set me to work in M. Patterson's factory? Well, to tell the truth, that doesn't suit me at all."

It was impossible to mistake M. Wilkie's manner, his tone, or gesture. They revealed him in his true character. Madame d'Argelès saw her terrible mistake at once. The bandage fell from her eyes. She had taken her dreams for realities, and the desires of her own heart for those of her son. She rose, trembling with sorrow and with indignation. "Wilkie!" she exclaimed, "Wilkie, wretched boy! what did you dare to hope?"

And, without giving him time to reply, she continued: "Then it was only idle curiosity that brought you here. You wished to know the source of the money which you spend like water. Very well, you may see for yourself. This is a gambling house; one of those establishments frequented by distinguished personages, which

the police ignore, or which they cannot suppress. The hubbub you hear is made by the players. Men are ruined here. Some poor wretches have blown their brains out on leaving the house; others have parted with the last vestige of honor here. And the business pays me well. One louis out of every hundred that change hands falls to my share. This is the source of your wealth, my son."

This anger, which succeeded such deep grief—this outburst of disdain, following such abject humility—considerably astonished M. Wilkie. "Allow me to ask——" he began.

But he was not allowed a hearing. "Fool!" continued Madame d'Argelès, "did nothing warn you that in coming here you would deprive yourself forever of the income you received? Did no inward voice tell you that all would be changed when you compelled me, Lia d'Argelès, to say, 'Well, yes, it is true; you are my son?' So long as you did not know who and what I was, I had a mother's right to watch over you. I could help you without disgracing you, without despising you. But now that you know me, and know what I am, I can do nothing more for you—nothing! I would rather let you starve than succor you, for I would rather see you dead than dishonored by my money."

"But——"

"What! would you still consent to receive the allowance I have made you, even if I consented to continue it?"

Had a viper raised its head in M. Wilkie's path he would not have recoiled more quickly. "Never!" he exclaimed. "Ah, no! What do you take me for?"

This repugnance was sincere; there could be no doubt of that, and it seemed to give Madame d'Argelès a ray

of hope. "I have misjudged him," she thought. "Poor Wilkie! Evil advice has led him astray; but he is not bad at heart. In that case, my poor child," she said aloud, "you must see that a new life is about to commence for you. What do you intend to do? How will you gain a livelihood? People must have food, and clothes, and a roof to shelter them. These things cost money. And where will you obtain it—you who rebel at the very word work? Ah! if I had only listened to M. Patterson. He was not blind like myself. He was always telling me that I was spoiling you, and ruining your future by giving you so much money. Do you know that you have spent more than fifty thousand francs during the past two years? How have you squandered them? Have you been to the law-school a dozen times? No. But you can be seen at the races, at the opera, in the fashionable restaurants, and at every place of amusement where a young man can squander money. And who are your associates? Dissipated and heartless idlers, grooms, gamblers, and abandoned women."

A sneer from M. Wilkie interrupted her. To think that any one should dare to attack his friends, his tastes, and his pleasures. Such a thing was not to be tolerated. "This is astonishing—astonishing, upon my word!" said he. "You moralizing! that's really too good! I should like a few minutes to laugh; it is too ridiculous!"

Was he really conscious of the cruelty of his ironical words? The blow was so terrible that Madame d'Argelès staggered beneath it. She was prepared for anything and everything except this insult from her son. Still, she accepted it without rebellion, although it was in a tone of heart-broken anguish that she replied: "Perhaps I have no right to tell you the truth. I hope

the future will prove that I am wrong. However, you are without resources, and you have no profession. Pray Heaven that you may never know what it is to be hungry and to have no bread."

For some time already the ingenious young man had shown unmistakable signs of impatience. This gloomy prediction irritated him beyond endurance.

"All this is empty talk," he interrupted. "I don't mean to work, for it's not at all in my line. Still, I don't expect to want for anything! That's plain enough, I hope."

Madame d'Argelès did not wince. "What do you mean to do then?" she asked, coldly. "I don't understand you."

He shrugged his shoulders impatiently. "Are we to keep up this farce for ever?" he petulantly exclaimed. "It doesn't take with me. You know what I mean as well as I do. Why do you talk to me about dying of starvation? What about the fortune?"

"What fortune?"

"Eh? why, my uncle's, of course! Your brother's, the Count de Chalusse."

Now M. Wilkie's visit, manner, assurance, wheedling, and contradictions were all explained. That maternal confidence which is so strong in the hearts of mothers vanished from Madame d'Argelès's for ever. The depths of selfishness and cunning she discerned in Wilkie's mind appalled her. She now understood why he had declared himself ready to brave public opinion—why he had proved willing to accept his share of the past ignominy. It was not his mother's, but the Count de Chalusse's estate that he claimed. "Ah! so you've heard of that," she said, in a tone of bitter irony. And then, remembering M. Isidore Fortunat, she asked:

"Some one has sold you this valuable secret. How much have you promised to pay him in case of success?"

Although Wilkie prided himself on being very clever, he did not pretend to be a diplomatist, and, indeed, he was greatly disconcerted by this question; still, recovering himself, he replied: "It doesn't matter how I obtained the information—whether I paid for it, or whether it cost me nothing—but I know that you are a Chalusse, and that you are the heiress of the count's property, which is valued at eight or ten millions of francs. Do you deny it?"

Madame d'Argelès sadly shook her head. "I deny nothing," she replied, "but I am about to tell you something which will destroy all your plans and extinguish your hopes. I am resolved, understand, and my resolution is irrevocable, never to assert my rights. To receive this fortune, I should be obliged to confess that Lia d'Argelès is a Chalusse—and that is a confession which no consideration whatever will wring from me."

She imagined that this declaration would silence and discomfit Wilkie, but she was mistaken. If he had been obliged to depend upon himself he would perhaps have been conquered by it; but he was armed with weapons which had been furnished by the cunning viscount. So he shrugged his shoulders, and coolly replied: "In that case we should remain poor, and the government would take possession of our millions. One moment. I have something to say in this matter. You may renounce your claim, but I shall not renounce mine. I am your son, and I shall claim the property."

"Even if I entreated you on my knees not to do so?"

"Yes."

Madame d'Argelès's eyes flashed. "Very well. I

will show you that this estate can never be yours. By what right will you lay claim to it? Because you are my son? But I will deny that you are. I will declare upon oath that you are nothing to me, and that I don't even know you."

But even this did not daunt Wilkie. He drew from his pocket a scrap of paper, and flourishing it triumphantly, he exclaimed: "It would be extremely cruel on your part to deny me, but I foresaw such a contingency, and here is my answer, copied from the civil code: 'Article 341. Inquiry as to maternity allowed, etc., etc.'"

What the exact bearing of Wilkie's threat might be Madame d'Argelès did not know. But she felt that this Article 341 would no doubt destroy her last hope; for the person who had chosen this weapon from the code to place it in Wilkie's hand must have chosen it carefully. She understood the situation perfectly. With her experience of life, she could not fail to understand the despicable part Wilkie was playing. And though it was not her son who had conceived this odious plot, it was more than enough to know that he had consented to carry it into execution. Should she try to persuade Wilkie to abandon this shameful scheme? She might have done so if she had not been so horrified by the utter want of principle which she had discovered in his character. But, under the circumstances, she realized that any effort in this direction would prove unavailing. So it was purely from a sense of duty and to prevent her conscience from reproaching her that she exclaimed: "So you will apply to the courts in order to constrain me to acknowledge you as my son?"

"If you are not reasonable——"

"That is to say, you care nothing for the scandal that will be created by such a course. In order to prove yourself a member of the Chalusse family you will begin by disgracing the name and dragging it through the mire."

Wilkie had no wish to prolong this discussion. So much talk about an affair, which, in his opinion, at least, was an extremely simple one, seemed to him utterly ridiculous, and irritated him beyond endurance. "It strikes me this is much ado about nothing," he remarked. "One would suppose, to hear you talk, that you were the greatest criminal in the world. Goodness is all very well in its way, but there is such a thing as having too much of it! Break loose from this life to-morrow, assume your rightful name, install yourself at the Hôtel de Chalusse, and in a week from now no one will remember that you were once known as Lia d'Argelès. I wager one hundred louis on it. Why, if people attempted to rake up the past life of their acquaintances, they should have far too much to do. Folks do not trouble themselves as to whether a person has done this or that; the essential thing is to have plenty of money. And if any fool speaks slightly of you, you can reply: 'I have an income of five hundred thousand francs,' and he'll say no more."

Madame d'Argelès listened, speechless with horror and disgust. Was it really her son who was speaking in this style, and to her of all people in the world? M. Wilkie misunderstood her silence. He had an excellent opinion of himself, but he was rather surprised at the effect of his eloquence. "Besides, I'm tired of vegetating, and having only one name," he continued. "I want to be on the move. Even with the small allowance I've had, I have gained a very good position

in society; and if I had plenty of money I should be the most stylish man in Paris. The count's estate belongs to me, and so I must have it—in fact, I will have it. So believe me when I tell you that it will be much better for you if you acknowledge me without any fuss! Now, will you do so? No? Once, twice, three times? Is it still no? Very well then; to-morrow, then, you may expect an official notice. I wish you good-evening.”

He bowed; he was really going, for his hand was already on the door-knob. But Madame d'Argeles detained him with a gesture. “One word more,” she said, in a voice hoarse with emotion.

He scarcely deigned to come back, and he made no attempt to conceal his impatience. “Well, what is it?” he asked, hastily.

“I wish to give you a bit of parting advice. The court will undoubtedly decide in your favor; I shall be placed in possession of my brother's estate; but neither you nor I will have the disposal of these millions.”

“Why?”

“Because, though this fortune belongs to me, the control of it belongs to your father.”

M. Wilkie was thunderstruck. “To my father?” he exclaimed. “Impossible!”

“It is so, however; and you would not have been ignorant of the fact, if your greed for money had not made you forget to question me. You believe yourself an illegitimate child. Wilkie, you are mistaken. You are my legitimate child. I am a married woman——”

“Bah!”

“And my husband—your father—is not dead. If he is not here now, threatening our safety, it is because I have succeeded in eluding him. He lost all trace of us eighteen years ago. Since then he has been con-

stantly striving to discover us, but in vain. He is still watching, you may be sure of that; and as soon as there is any talk of a law-suit respecting the Chalusse property, you will see him appear, armed with his rights. He is the head of the family—your master and mine. Ah! this seems to disturb you. You will find him full of insatiable greed for wealth, a greed which has been whetted by twenty years' waiting. You may yet see the day when you will regret the paltry twenty thousand francs a year formerly given you by your poor mother."

Wilkie's face was whiter than his shirt. "You are deceiving me," he stammered.

"To-morrow I will show you my marriage certificate."

"Why not this evening?"

"Because it is locked up in a room which is now full of people."

"And what was my father's name?"

"Arthur Gordon—he is an American."

"Then my name is Wilkie Gordon?"

"Yes."

"And—is my father rich?" he inquired.

"No."

"What does he do?"

"Everything that a man can do when he has a taste for luxury and a horror for work."

This reply was so explicit in its brevity, and implied so many terrible accusations, that Wilkie was dismayed. "The devil!" he exclaimed, "and where does he live!"

"He lives at Baden or Homburg in the summer; in Paris or at Monaco in the winter."

"Oh! oh! oh!" ejaculated Wilkie, in three different tones. He knew what he had to expect from such a

father as that. Anger now followed stupor—one of those terrible, white rages which stir the bile and not the blood. He saw his hopes and his cherished visions fade. Luxury and notoriety, high-stepping horses, yellow-haired mistresses, all vanished. He pictured himself reduced to a mere pittance, and held in check and domineered over by a brutal father. “Ah! I understand your game,” he hissed through his set teeth. “If you would only quietly assert your rights, everything could be arranged privately, and I should have time to put the property out of my father’s reach before he could claim it. Instead of doing that—as you hate me—you compel me to make the affair public, so that my father will hear of it and defraud me of everything. But you won’t play this trick on me. You are going to write at once, and make known your claim to your brother’s estate.”

“No.”

“Ah! you won’t? You refuse——” He approached threateningly, and caught hold of her arm. “Take care!” he vociferated; “take care! Do not infuriate me beyond endurance——”

As cold and rigid as marble, Madame d’Argelès faced him with the undaunted glance of a martyr whose spirit no violence can subdue. “You will obtain nothing from me,” she said, firmly; “nothing, nothing, nothing!”

Maddened with rage and disappointment, M. Wilkie dared to lift his hand as if about to strike her. But at this moment the door was flung open, and a man sprang upon him. It was Baron Trigault.

Like the other guests, the baron had seen the terrible effect produced upon Madame d’Argelès by a simple visiting card. But he had this advantage over the

others: he thought he could divine and explain the reason of this sudden, seemingly incomprehensible terror. "The poor woman has been betrayed," he thought; "her son is here!" Still, while the other players crowded around their hostess, he did not leave the card-table. He was sitting opposite M. de Coralthe, and he had seen the dashing viscount start and change color. His suspicions were instantly aroused, and he wished to verify them. He therefore pretended to be more than ever absorbed in the cards, and swore lustily at the deserters who had broken up the game. "Come back, gentleman, come back," he cried, angrily. "We are wasting precious time. While you have been trifling there, I might have gained—or lost—a hundred louis."

He was nevertheless greatly alarmed, and the prolonged absence of Madame d'Argelès increased his fears each moment. At the end of an hour he could restrain himself no longer. So taking advantage of a heavy loss, he rose from the table, swearing that the beastly turmoil of a few moments before had changed the luck. Then passing into the adjoining drawing-room, he managed to make his escape unobserved. "Where is madame?" he inquired of the first servant he met.

"In the little sitting-room."

"Alone?"

"No; a young gentleman is with her."

The baron no longer doubted the correctness of his conjectures, and his disquietude increased. Quickly, and as if he had been in his own house, he hastened to the door of the little sitting-room and listened. At that moment rage was imparting a truly frightful intonation to M. Wilkie's voice. The baron really felt alarmed. He stooped, applied his eye to the keyhole, and seeing

M. Wilkie with his hand uplifted, he burst open the door and went in. He arrived only just in time to fell Wilkie to the floor, and save Madame d'Argelès from that most terrible of humiliations: the degradation of being struck by her own son. "Ah, you rascal!" cried the worthy baron, transported with indignation, "you beggarly rascal! you brigand! Is this the way you treat an unfortunate woman who has sacrificed herself for you—your mother? You try to strike your mother, when you ought to kiss her very foot-prints!"

As livid as if his blood had been suddenly turned to gall—with quivering lips and eyes starting from their sockets—M. Wilkie rose, with difficulty, to his feet, at the same time rubbing his left elbow which had struck against the corner of a piece of furniture, in his fall. "Scoundrel! You brutal scoundrel!" he growled, ferociously. And then, retreating a step: "Who gave you permission to come in here?" he added. "Who are you? By what right do you meddle with my affairs?"

"By the right that every honest man possesses to chastise a cowardly rascal."

M. Wilkie shook his fist at the baron. "You are a coward yourself," he retorted. "You had better learn who you are talking to! You must mend your manners a little, you old——"

The word he uttered was so vile that no man could fail to resent it, much less the baron, who was already frantic with passion. His face turned as purple as if he were stricken with apoplexy, and such furious rage gleamed in his eyes that Madame d'Argelès was frightened. She feared she should see her son butchered before her very eyes, and she extended her arms

as if to protect him. "Jacques," she said beseechingly, "Jacques!"

This was the name which was indelibly impressed upon Wilkie's memory—the name he had heard when he was but a child. Jacques—that was the name of the man who had brought him cakes and toys in the comfortable rooms where he had remained only a few days. He understood, or at least he thought he understood, everything. "Ah, ha!" he exclaimed, with a laugh that was at once both ferocious and idiotic. "This is very fine—monsieur is the lover. He has the say here—he——"

He did not have time to finish his sentence, for quick as thought the baron caught him by the collar, lifted him from the ground with irresistible strength, and flung him on his knees at Madame d'Argelès's feet, exclaiming: "Ask her pardon, you vile wretch! Ask her pardon, or——" "Or" meant the baron's clinched fist descending like a sledge-hammer on M. Wilkie's head.

The worthy youth was frightened—so terribly frightened that his teeth chattered. "Pardon!" he faltered.

"Louder—speak up better than that. Your mother must answer you!"

Alas! the poor woman could no longer hear. She had endured so much during the past hour that her strength was exhausted, and she had fallen back in her arm-chair in a deep swoon. The baron waited for a moment, and seeing that her eyes remained obstinately closed, he exclaimed: "This is your work, wretch!"

And lifting him again, as easily as if he had been a child, he set him on his feet, saying in a calmer tone, but in one that admitted of no reply: "Arrange your clothes and go."

This advice was not unnecessary. Baron Trigault had a powerful hand; and M. Wilkie's attire was decidedly the worse for the encounter. He had lost his cravat, his shirt-front was crumpled and torn, and his waistcoat—one of those that open to the waist and are fastened by a single button—hung down in the most dejected manner. He obeyed the baron's order without a word, but not without considerable difficulty, for his hands trembled like a leaf. When he had finished, the baron exclaimed: "Now be off; and never set foot here again—understand me—never set foot here again, never!"

M. Wilkie made no reply until he reached the door leading into the hall. But when he had opened it, he suddenly regained his powers of speech. "I'm not afraid of you," he cried, with frantic violence. "You have taken advantage of your superior strength—you are a coward. But this shall not end here. No!—you shall answer for it. I shall find your address, and to-morrow you will receive a visit from my friends M. Costard and M. Serpillon. I am the insulted party—and I choose swords!"

A frightful oath from the baron somewhat hastened M. Wilkie's exit. He went out into the hall, and holding the door open, in a way that would enable him to close it at the shortest notice, he shouted back, so as to be heard by all the servants: "Yes; I will have satisfaction. I will not stand such treatment. Is it any fault of mine that Madame d'Argelès is a Chalusse, and that she wishes to defraud me of my fortune. To-morrow, I call you all to witness, there will be a lawyer here. You don't frighten me. Here is my card!" And actually, before he closed the door, he threw one of his cards into the middle of the room.

The baron did not trouble himself to pick it up; his attention was devoted to Madame d'Argelès. She was lying back in her arm-chair, white, motionless and rigid, to all appearance dead. What should the baron do? He did not wish to call the servants; they had heard too much already—but he had almost decided to do so, when his eyes fell upon a tiny aquarium, in a corner of the room. He dipped his handkerchief in it; and alternately bathed Madame d'Argelès's temples and chafed her hands. It was not long before the cold water revived her. She trembled, a convulsive shudder shook her from head to foot, and at last she opened her eyes, murmuring: "Wilkie!"

"I have sent him away," replied the baron.

Poor woman! with returning life came the consciousness of the terrible reality. "He is my son!" she moaned, "my son, my Wilkie!" Then with a despairing gesture she pressed her hands to her forehead as if to calm its throbbings. "And I believed that my sin was expiated," she pursued. "I thought I had been sufficiently punished. Fool that I was! This is my chastisement, Jacques. Ah! women like me have no right to be mothers!"

A burning tear coursed down the baron's cheek; but he concealed his emotion as well as he could, and said, in a tone of assumed gayety: "Nonsense! Wilkie is young—he will mend his ways! We were all ridiculous when we were twenty. We have all caused our mothers many anxious nights. Time will set everything to rights, and put some ballast in this young madcap's brains. Besides, your friend Patterson doesn't seem to me quite free from blame. In knowledge of books, he may have been unequalled; but as a guardian for youth, he must have been the worst of fools. After keeping

your son on a short allowance for years, he suddenly gorges him with oats—or I should say, money—lets him loose; and then seems surprised because the boy is guilty of acts of folly. It would be a miracle if he were not. So take courage, and hope for the best, my dear Lia.”

She shook her head despondingly. “Do you suppose that my heart hasn’t pleaded for him?” she said. “I am his mother; I can never cease to love him, whatever he may do. Even now I am ready to give a drop of blood for each tear I can save him. But I am not blind; I have read his nature. Wilkie has no heart.”

“Ah! my dear friend, how do you know what shameful advice he may have received before coming to you?”

Madame d’Argelès half rose, and said, in an agitated voice: “What! you try to make me believe that? ‘Advice!’ Then he must have found a man who said to him: ‘Go to the house of this unfortunate woman who gave you birth, and order her to publish her dishonor and yours. If she refuses, insult and beat her!’ You know, even better than I, baron, that this is impossible. In the vilest natures, and when every other honorable feeling has been lost, love for one’s mother survives. Even convicts deprive themselves of their wine, and sell their rations, in order to send a trifle now and then to their mothers—while he——”

She paused, not because she shrunk from what she was about to say, but because she was exhausted and out of breath. She rested for a moment, and then resumed in a calmer tone: “Besides, the person who sent him here had counselled coolness and prudence. I discovered this at once. It was only toward the close of the interview, and after an unexpected revelation from

me, that he lost all control over himself. The thought that he would lose my brother's millions crazed him. Oh! that fatal and accursed money! Wilkie's adviser wished him to employ legal means to obtain an acknowledgment of his parentage; and he had copied from the Code a clause which is applicable to this case. By this one circumstance I am convinced that his adviser is a man of experience in such matters—in other words, the business agent——”

“What business agent?” inquired the baron.

“The person who called here the other day, M. Isidore Fortunat. Ah! why didn't I not bribe him to hold his peace?”

The baron had entirely forgotten the existence of Victor Chupin's honorable employer. “You are mistaken, Lia,” he replied. “M. Fortunat has had no hand in this.”

“Then who could have betrayed my secret?”

“Why, your former ally, the rascal for whose sake you allowed Pascal Ferailleur to be sacrificed—the Viscount de Coralthe!”

The bare supposition of such treachery on the viscount's part brought a flush of indignant anger to Madame d'Argelès's cheek. “Ah! if I thought that!” she exclaimed. And then, remembering what reasons the baron had for hating M. de Coralthe, she murmured: “No! Your animosity misleads you—he wouldn't dare!”

The baron read her thoughts. “So you are persuaded that it is personal vengeance that I am pursuing?” said he. “You think that fear of ridicule and public odium prevents me from striking M. de Coralthe in my own name, and that I am endeavoring to find some other excuse to crush him. This might have been

so once; but it is not the case now. When I promised M. Ferailleux to do all in my power to save the young girl he loves, Mademoiselle Marguerite, my wife's daughter, I renounced all thought of self, all my former plans. And why should you doubt Coralthe's treachery? You, yourself, promised me to unmask *him*. If he has betrayed *you*, my poor Lia, he has only been a little in advance of you."

She hung her head and made no reply. She had forgotten this.

"Besides," continued the baron, "you ought to know that when I make such a statement I have some better foundation for it than mere conjecture. It was to some purpose that I watched M. de Coralthe during your absence. When the servant handed you that card he turned extremely pale. Why? Because he knew whose card it was. After you left the room his hands trembled like leaves, and his mind was no longer occupied with the game. He—who is usually such a cautious player—risked his money recklessly. When the cards came to him he did still worse; and though luck favored him, he made the strangest blunders, and lost. His agitation and preoccupation were so marked as to attract attention; and one acquaintance laughingly inquired if he were ill, while another jestingly remarked that he had dined and wine a little too much. The traitor was evidently on coals of fire. I could see the perspiration on his forehead, and each time the door opened or shut, he changed color, as if he expected to see you and Wilkie enter. A dozen times I surprised him listening eagerly, as if by dint of attention, or by the magnetic force of his will, he hoped to hear what you and your son were saying. With a single word I could have wrung a confession from him."

This explanation was so plausible that Madame d'Argelès felt half convinced. "Ah! if you had only spoken that word!" she murmured. The baron smiled a crafty and malicious smile, which would have chilled M. de Coralthe's very blood if he had chanced to see it. "I am not so stupid!" he replied. "We mustn't frighten the fish till we are quite ready. Our net is the Chalusse estate, and Coralthe and Valorsay will enter it of their own accord. It is not my plan, but M. Ferailleux's. There's a man for you! and if Mademoiselle Marguerite is worthy of him they will make a noble pair. Without suspecting it, your son has perhaps rendered us an important service this evening—"

"Alas!" faltered Madame d'Argelès, "I am none the less ruined—the name of Chalusse is none the less dishonored!"

She wanted to return to the drawing-room; but she was compelled to relinquish this idea. The expression of her face betrayed too plainly the terrible ordeal she had passed through. The servants had heard M. Wilkie's parting words; and news of this sort flies about with the rapidity of lightning. That very night, indeed, it was currently reported at the clubs that there would be no more card-playing at the d'Argelès establishment, as that lady was a Chalusse, and consequently the aunt of the beautiful young girl whom M. and Madame de Fondège had taken under their protection.

VIII.

UNUSUAL strength of character, unbounded confidence in one's own energy, with thorough contempt of danger, and an invincible determination to triumph or perish, are all required of the person who, like *Mademoiselle Marguerite*, intrusts herself to the care of strangers—worse yet, to the care of actual enemies. It is no small matter to place yourself in the power of smooth-tongued hypocrites and impostors, who are anxious for your ruin, and whom you know to be capable of anything. And the task is a mighty one—to brave unknown dangers, perilous seductions, perfidious counsels, and perhaps even violence, at the same time retaining a calm eye and smiling lips. Yet such was the heroism that *Marguerite*, although scarcely twenty, displayed when she left the *Hôtel de Chalusse* to accept the hospitality of the *Fondège* family. And, to crown all, she took *Madame Léon* with her—*Madame Léon*, whom she knew to be the *Marquis de Valorsay's* spy.

But, brave as she was, when the moment of departure came her heart almost failed her. There was despair in the parting glance she cast upon the princely mansion and the familiar faces of the servants. And there was no one to encourage or sustain her. Ah, yes! standing at a window on the second floor, with his forehead pressed close against the pane of glass, she saw the only friend she had in the world—the old magistrate who had defended, encouraged, and sustained her—the man who had promised her his assistance and advice, and prophesied ultimate success.

"Shall I be a coward?" she thought; "shall I be unworthy of Pascal?" And she resolutely entered the carriage, mentally exclaiming: "The die is cast!"

The General insisted that she should take a place beside Madame de Fondège on the back seat; while he found a place next to Madame Léon on the seat facing them. The drive was a silent and tedious one. The night was coming on; it was a time when all Paris was on the move, and the carriage was delayed at each street corner by a crowd of passing vehicles. The conversation was solely kept alive by the exertions of Madame de Fondège, whose shrill voice rose above the rumble of the wheels, as she chronicled the virtues of the late Count de Chalusse, and congratulated Mademoiselle Marguerite on the wisdom of her decision. Her remarks were of a commonplace description, and yet each word she uttered evinced intense satisfaction, almost delight, as if she had won some unexpected victory. Occasionally, the General leaned from the carriage window to see if the vehicle laden with Mademoiselle Marguerite's trunks was following them, but he said nothing.

At last they reached his residence in the Rue Pigalle. He alighted first, offered his hand successively to his wife, Mademoiselle Marguerite, and Madame Léon, and motioned the coachman to drive away.

But the man did not stir. "Pardon—excuse me, monsieur," he said, "but my employers bade—requested me——"

"What?"

"To ask you—you know, for the fare—thirty-five francs—not counting the little gratuity."

"Very well!—I will pay you to-morrow."

"Excuse me, monsieur; but if it is all the same to

you, would you do so this evening? My employer said that the bill had been standing a long time already."

"What, scoundrel!"

But Madame de Fondège, who was on the point of entering the house, suddenly stepped back, and drawing out her pocketbook, exclaimed: "That's enough! Here are thirty-five francs."

The man went to his carriage lamp to count the money, and seeing that he had the exact amount—"And my gratuity?" he asked.

"I give none to insolent people," replied the General.

"You should take a cab if you haven't money enough to pay for coaches," replied the driver with an oath. "I'll be even with you yet."

Marguerite heard no more, for Madame de Fondège caught her by the arm and hurried her up the staircase, saying: "Quick! we must make haste. Your baggage is here already, and we must see if the rooms I intended for you—for you and your companion—suit you."

When Marguerite reached the second floor, Madame de Fondège hunted in her pocket for her latch-key. Not finding it, she rang. A tall man-servant of impudent appearance and arrayed in a glaring livery opened the door, carrying an old battered iron candlestick, in which a tiny scrap of candle was glaring and flickering. "What!" exclaimed Madame de Fondège, "the reception-room not lighted yet? This is scandalous! What have you been doing in my absence? Come, make haste. Light the lamp. Tell the cook that I have some guests to dine with me. Call my maid. See that M. Gustave's room is in order. Go down and see if the General doesn't need your assistance about the baggage."

Finding it difficult to choose between so many contradictory orders, the servant did not choose at all. He placed his rusty candlestick on one of the side-tables in the reception-room, and gravely, without saying a single word, went out into the passage leading to the kitchen. "Evariste!" cried Madame de Fondège, crimson with anger, "Evariste, you insolent fellow!"

As he deigned no reply, she rushed out in pursuit of him. And soon the sound of a violent altercation arose; the servant lavishing insults upon his mistress, and she unable to find any response, save, "I dismiss you; you are an insolent scamp—I dismiss you."

Madame Léon, who was standing near Mademoiselle Marguerite in the reception-room, seemed greatly amused. "This is a strange household," said she. "A fine beginning, upon my word."

But the worthy housekeeper was the last person on earth to whom Mademoiselle Marguerite wished to reveal her thoughts. "Hush, Léon," she replied. "We are the cause of all this disturbance, and I am very sorry for it."

The retort that rose to the housekeeper's lips was checked by the return of Madame de Fondège, followed by a servant-girl with a turn-up nose, a pert manner, and who carried a lighted candle in her hand.

"How can I apologize, madame," began Mademoiselle Marguerite, "for all the trouble I am giving you?"

"Ah! my dear child, I've never been so happy. Come, come, and see your room." And while they crossed several scantily-furnished apartments, Madame de Fondège continued: "It is I who ought to apologize to you. I fear you will pine for the splendors of the Hôtel de Chalusse. We are not millionaires like your

poor father. We have only a modest competence, no more. But here we are!"

The maid had opened a door, and Mademoiselle Marguerite entered a good-sized room lighted by two windows, hung with soiled wall paper, and adorned with chintz curtains, from which the sun had extracted most of the coloring. Everything was in disorder here, and, in fact, the whole room was extremely dirty. The bed was not made, the washstand was dirty, some woollen stockings were hanging over the side of the rumpled bed, and on the mantel-shelf stood an ancient clock, an empty beer bottle, and some glasses. On the floor, on the furniture, in the corners, everywhere in fact, stumps of cigars were scattered in profusion, as if they had positively rained down.

"What!" gasped Madame de Fondège, "you haven't put this room in order, Justine?"

"Indeed, madame, I haven't had time."

"But it's more than a month since M. Gustave slept here?"

"I know it; but madame must remember that I have been very much hurried this last month, having to do all the washing and ironing since the laundress——"

"That's sufficient," interrupted Madame de Fondège. And turning to Marguerite, she said: "You will, I am sure, excuse this disorder, my dear child. By this time to-morrow the room shall be transformed into one of those dainty nests of muslin and flowers which young girls delight in."

Connected with this apartment, which was known to the household as the lieutenant's room, there was a much smaller chamber lighted only by a single window, and originally intended for a dressing-room. It had two doors, one of them communicating with Mar-

guerite's room, and the other with the passage ; and it was now offered to Madame Léon, who on comparing these quarters with the spacious suite of rooms she had occupied at the Hôtel de Chalusse, had considerable difficulty in repressing a grimace. Still she did not hesitate nor even murmur. M. de Valorsay's orders bound her to Marguerite, and she deemed it fortunate that she was allowed to follow her. And whether the marquis succeeded or not, he had promised her a sufficiently liberal reward to compensate for all personal discomfort. So, in the sweetest of voices, and with a feigned humility of manner, she declared this little room to be even much too good for a poor widow whose misfortunes had compelled her to abdicate her position in society.

The attentions which M. and Madame de Fondège showed her contributed not a little to her resignation. Without knowing exactly what the General and his wife expected from Mademoiselle Marguerite, she was shrewd enough to divine that they hoped to gain some important advantage. Now her "dear child" had declared her to be a trusted friend, who was indispensable to her existence and comfort. "So these people will pay assiduous court to me," she thought. And being quite ready to play a double part as the spy of the Marquis de Valorsay, and the Fondège family, and quite willing to espouse the latter's cause should that prove to be the more remunerative course, she saw a long series of polite attentions and gifts before her.

That very evening her prophecies were realized ; and she received a proof of consideration which positively delighted her. It was decided that she should take her meals at the family table, a thing which had never happened at the Hôtel de Chalusse. Mademoiselle

Marguerite raised a few objections, which Madame Léon answered with a venomous look, but Madame de Fondège insisted upon the arrangement, not understanding, she said, graciously, why they need deprive themselves of the society of such an agreeable and distinguished person. Madame Léon in no wise doubted but this favor was due to her merit alone, but Mademoiselle Marguerite, who was more discerning, saw that their hostess was really furious at the idea, but was compelled to submit to it by the imperious necessity of preventing Madame Léon from coming in contact with the servants, who might make some decidedly compromising disclosures. For there were evidently many little mysteries and make-shifts to be concealed in this household. For instance, while the servants were carrying the luggage upstairs, Marguerite discovered Madame de Fondège and her maid in close consultation, whispering with that volubility which betrays an unexpected and pressing perplexity. What were they talking about? She listened without any compunctions of conscience, and the words "a pair of sheets," repeated again and again, furnished her with abundant food for reflection. "Is it possible," she thought, "that they have no sheets to give us?"

It did not take her long to discover the maid's opinion of the establishment in which she served; for while she brandished her broom and duster, this girl, exasperated undoubtedly by the increase of work she saw in store for her, growled and cursed the old barrack where one was worked to death, where one never had enough to eat, and where the wages were always in arrears. Mademoiselle Marguerite was doing her best to aid the maid, who was greatly surprised to find this handsome, queenly young lady so obliging, when Evariste, the

same who had received warning an hour before, made his appearance, and announced in an insolent tone that "Madame la Comtesse was served."

For Madame de Fondège exacted this title. She had improvised it, as her husband had improvised his title of General, and without much more difficulty. By a search in the family archives she had discovered—so she declared to her intimate friends—that she was the descendant of a noble family, and that one of her ancestors had held a most important position at the court of Francis I. or of Louis XII. Indeed, she sometimes confounded them. However, people who had not known her father, the wood merchant, saw nothing impossible in the statements.

Evariste was dressed as a butler should be dressed when he announces dinner to a person of rank. In the daytime when he discharged the duties of footman, he was gorgeous in gold lace; but in the evening, he arrayed himself in severe black, such as is appropriate to the butler of an aristocratic household. Immediately after his announcement everybody repaired to the sumptuous dining-room which, with its huge sideboards, loaded with silver and rare china, looked not unlike a museum. Such was the display, indeed, that when Mademoiselle Marguerite took a seat at the table, between the General and his wife, and opposite Madame Léon, she asked herself if she had not been the victim of that dangerous optical delusion known as prejudice. She noticed that the supply of knives and forks was rather scanty; but many economical housewives keep most of their silver under lock and key; besides the china was very handsome and marked with the General's monogram, surmounted by his wife's coronet.

However, the dinner was badly cooked and poorly served. One might have supposed it to be a scullery maid's first attempt. Still the General devoured it with delight. He partook ravenously of every dish, a flush rose to his cheeks, and an expression of profound satisfaction was visible upon his countenance. "From this," thought Mademoiselle Marguerite, "I must infer that he usually goes hungry, and that this seems a positive feast to him." In fact, he seemed bubbling over with contentment. He twirled his mustaches à la Victor Emmanuel, and rolled his "r," as he said, "*Sacr-r-r-r-c bleu!*" even more ferociously than usual. It was only by a powerful effort that he restrained himself from indulging in various witticisms which would have been most unseemly in the presence of a poor girl who had just lost her father and all her hopes of fortune. But he did forget himself so much as to say that the drive to the cemetery had whetted his appetite, and to address his wife as Madame Range-à-bord, a title which had been bestowed upon her by a sailor brother.

Crimson with anger to the very roots of her coarse, sandy hair—amazed to see her husband deport himself in this style, and almost suffocated by the necessity of restraining her wrath, Madame de Fondège was heroic enough to smile, though her eyes flashed ominously. But the General was not at all dismayed. On the contrary, he cared so little for his wife's displeasure that, when the dessert was served, he turned to the servant, and, with a wink that Mademoiselle Marguerite noticed, "Evariste," he ordered, "go to the wine-cellar, and bring me a bottle of old Bordeaux."

The valet, who had just received a week's notice, was only too glad of an opportunity for revenge. So

with a malicious smile, and in a drawling tone, he replied: "Then monsieur must give me the money. Monsieur knows very well that neither the grocer nor the wine-merchant will trust him any longer."

M. de Fondège rose from the table, looking very pale; but before he had time to utter a word, his wife came to the rescue. "You know, my dear, that I don't trust the key of my cellar to this lad. Evariste, call Justine."

The pert-looking chambermaid appeared, and her mistress told her where she would find the key of the famous cellar. About a quarter of an hour afterward, one of those bottles which grocers and wine-merchants prepare for the benefit of credulous customers was brought in—a bottle duly covered with dust and mould to give it a venerable appearance, and festooned with cobwebs, such as the urchins of Paris collect and sell at from fifteen sous to two francs a pound, according to quality. But the Bordeaux did not restore the General's equanimity. He was silent and subdued; and his relief was evident when, after the coffee had been served, his wife exclaimed: "We won't keep you from your club, my dear. I want a chat with our dear child."

Since she dismissed the General so unceremoniously, Madame de Fondège evidently wished for a *tête-à-tête* with Mademoiselle Marguerite. At least Madame Léon thought so, or feigned to think so, and addressing the young girl, she said: "I shall be obliged to leave you for a couple of hours, my dear young lady. My relatives would never forgive me if I did not inform them of my change of residence."

This was the first time since she had been engaged by the Count de Chalusse, that the estimable "com-

panion" had ever made any direct allusion to her relatives, and what is more, to relatives residing in Paris. She had previously only spoken of them in general terms, giving people to understand that her relatives had not been unfortunate like herself—that they still retained their exalted rank, though she had fallen, and that she found it difficult to decline the favors they longed to heap upon her.

However, Mademoiselle Marguerite evinced no surprise. "Go at once and inform your relatives, my dear Léon," she said, without a shade of sarcasm in her manner. "I hope they won't be offended by your devotion to me." But in her secret heart, she thought: "This hypocrite is going to report to the Marquis de Valorsay, and these relatives of hers will furnish her with excuses for future visits to him."

The General went off, the servants began to clear the table, and Mademoiselle Marguerite followed her hostess to the drawing-room. It was a lofty and spacious apartment, lighted by three windows, and even more sumptuous in its appointments than the dining-room. Furniture, carpets, and hangings, were all in rather poor taste, perhaps, but costly, very costly. As the evening was a cold one, Madame de Fondège ordered the fire to be lighted. She seated herself on a sofa near the mantelpiece, and when Mademoiselle Marguerite had taken a chair opposite her, she began, "Now, my dear child, let us have a quiet talk."

Mademoiselle Marguerite expected some important communication, so that she was not a little surprised when Madame de Fondège resumed: "Have you thought about your mourning?"

"About my mourning, madame?"

"Yes. I mean, have you decided what dresses you

will purchase? It is an important matter, my dear—more important than you suppose. They are making costumes entirely of *crêpe* now, puffed and plaited, and extremely stylish. I saw one that would suit you well. You may think that a costume for deep mourning made with puffs would be a trifle *loud*, but that depends upon tastes. The Duchess de Veljo wore one only eleven days after her husband's death; and she allowed some of her hair, which is superb, to fall over her shoulders, *à la pleurcuse*, and the effect was extremely touching." Was Madame de Fondège speaking sincerely? There could be no doubt of it. Her features, which had been distorted with anger when the General took it into his head to order the bottle of Bordeaux, had regained their usual placidity of expression, and had even brightened a little. "I am entirely at your service, my dear, if you wish any shopping done," she continued. "And if you are not quite pleased with your dressmaker, I will take you to mine, who works like an angel. But how absurd I am. You will of course employ Van Klopen. I go to him occasionally myself, but only on great occasions. Between you and me, I think him a trifle too high in his charges."

Mademoiselle Marguerite could scarcely repress a smile. "I must confess, madame, that from my infancy I have been in the habit of making almost all my dresses myself."

The General's wife raised her eyes to Heaven in real or feigned astonishment. "Yourself!" she repeated four or five times, as if to make sure that she had heard aright. "Yourself! That is incomprehensible! You, the daughter of a man who possessed an income of five or six hundred thousand francs a year! Still I know that poor M. de Chalusse, though unquestionably a very

worthy and excellent man, was peculiar in some of his ideas."

"Excuse me, madame. What I did, I did for my own pleasure."

But this assertion exceeded Madame de Fondège's powers of comprehension. "Impossible!" she murmured, "impossible! But, my poor child, what did you do for fashions—for patterns?"

The immense importance she attached to the matter was so manifest that Marguerite could not refrain from smiling. "I was probably not a very close follower of the fashions," she replied. "The dress that I am wearing now——."

"Is very pretty, my child, and it becomes you extremely; that's the truth. Only, to be frank, I must confess that this style is no longer worn—no—not at all. You must have your new dresses made in quite a different way."

"But I already have more dresses than I need, madame."

"What! black dresses?"

"I seldom wear anything but black."

Evidently her hostess had never heard anything like this before. "Oh! all right," said she, "these dresses will doubtless do very well for your first months of mourning—but afterward? Do you suppose, my poor dear, that I'm going to allow you to shut yourself up as you did at the Hôtel de Chalusse? Good heavens! how dull it must have been for you, alone in that big house, without society or friends."

A tear fell from Marguerite's long lashes. "I was very happy there, madame," she murmured.

"You think so; but you will change your mind. When one has never tasted real pleasure, one

cannot realize how gloomy one's life really is. No doubt, you were very unhappy alone with M. de Chalusse."

"Oh! madame——"

"Tut! tut! my dear, I know what I am talking about. Wait until you have been introduced into society before you boast of the charms of solitude. Poor dear! I doubt if you have ever attended a ball in your whole life. No! I was sure of it, and you are twenty! Fortunately, I am here. I will take your mother's place, and we will make up for lost time! Beautiful as you are, my child—for you are divinely beautiful—you will reign as a queen wherever you appear. Doesn't that thought make that cold little heart of yours throb more quickly? Ah! *fêtes* and music, wonderful toilettes and the flashing of diamonds, the admiration of gentlemen, the envy of rivals, the consciousness of one's own beauty, are these delights not enough to fill any woman's life? It is intoxication, perhaps, but an intoxication which is happiness."

Was she sincere, or did she hope to dazzle this lonely girl, and then rule her through the tastes she might succeed in giving her? As is not unfrequently the case with callous natures, Madame de Fondège was a compound of frankness and cunning. What she was saying now she really meant; and as it was to her interest to say it, she urged her opinions boldly and even eloquently. Twenty-four hours earlier, proud and truthful Marguerite would have silenced her at once. She would have told her that such pleasures could never have any charm for her, and that she felt only scorn and disgust for such worthless aims and sordid desires. But having resolved to appear a dupe, she concealed her real feelings under an air of surprise, and was aston-

ished and even ashamed to find that she could dissemble so well.

"Besides," continued Madame de Fondège, "a marriageable young girl should never shut herself up like a nun. She will never find a husband if she remains at home—and she must marry. Indeed, marriage is a sensible woman's only object in life, since it is her emancipation."

Was Madame de Fondège going to plead her son's cause? Mademoiselle Marguerite almost believed it—but the lady was too shrewd for that. She took good care not to mention as much as Lieutenant Gustave's name.

"The season will certainly be unusually brilliant," she said, "and it will begin very early. On the fifth of November, the Countess de Commarin will give a superb *fête*; all Paris will be there. On the seventh, there will be a ball at the house of the Viscountess de Bois d'Ardon. On the eleventh, there will be a concert, followed by a ball, at the superb mansion of the Baroness Trigault—you know—the wife of that strange man who spends all his time in playing cards."

"This is the first time I ever heard the name mentioned."

"Really! and you have been living in Paris for years. It seems incomprehensible. You must know then, my dear little ignoramus, that the Baroness Trigault is one of the most distinguished ladies in Paris, and certainly the best dressed. I am sure her bill at Van Klopen's is not less than a hundred thousand francs a year—and that is saying enough, is it not?" And with genuine pride, she added: "The baroness is my friend. I will introduce you to her."

Having once started on this theme, Madame de

Fondège was not easily silenced. It was evidently her ambition to be considered a woman of the world, and to be acquainted with all the leaders of fashionable society; and, in fact, if one listened to her conversation for an hour one could learn all the gossip of the day. Though she was unable to interest herself in this tittle-tattle, Marguerite was pretending to listen to it with profound attention when the drawing-room door suddenly opened and Evariste appeared with an impudent smile on his face. "Madame Landoire, the milliner, is here, and desires to speak with Madame la Comtesse," he said.

On hearing this name, Madame de Fondège started as if she had been stung by a viper. "Let her wait," she said quickly. "I will see her in a moment."

The order was useless, for the visitor was already on the threshold. She was a tall, dark-haired, ill-mannered woman. "Ah! I've found you at last," she said, rudely, "and I'm not sorry. This is the fourth time I've come here with my bill."

Madame de Fondège pointed to Mademoiselle Marguerite, and exclaimed: "Wait, at least, until I am alone before you speak to me on business."

Madame Landoire shrugged her shoulders. "As if you were ever alone," she growled. "I wish to put an end to this."

"Step into my room then, and we will put an end to it, and at once."

This opportunity to escape from Madame de Fondège must not be allowed to pass; so Marguerite asked permission to withdraw, declaring, what was really the truth, that she felt completely tired out. After receiving a maternal kiss from her hostess, accompanied by a "sleep well, my dear child," she retired to her own

room. Thanks to Madame Léon's absence, she found herself alone, and, drawing a blotting-pad from one of her trunks, she hastily wrote a note to M. Isidore Fortunat, telling him that she would call upon him on the following Tuesday. "I must be very awkward," she thought, "if to-morrow, on going to mass, I can't find an opportunity to throw this note into a letter-box without being observed."

It was fortunate that she had lost no time, for her writing-case was scarcely in its place again before Madame Léon entered, evidently out of sorts. "Well," asked Marguerite, "did you see your friends?"

"Don't speak of it, my dear young lady; they were all of them away from home—they had gone to the play."

"Ah?"

"So I shall go again early to-morrow morning; you must realize how important it is."

"Yes, I understand."

But Madame Léon, who was usually so loquacious, did not seem to be in a talkative mood that evening, and, after kissing her dear young lady, she went into her own room.

"She did not succeed in finding the Marquis de Valorsay," thought Marguerite, "and being in doubt as to the part she is to play, she feels furious."

The young girl tried to sum up the impressions of the evening, and to decide upon a plan of conduct, but she felt sad and very weary. She said to herself that rest would be more beneficial than anything else, and that her mind would be clearer on the morrow; so after a fervent prayer in which Pascal Feraillleur's name was mentioned several times, she prepared for bed. But before she fell asleep she was able to col-

lect another bit of evidence. The sheets on her bed were new.

If Marguerite had been born in the Hôtel de Chalusse, if she had known a father's and a mother's tender care from her infancy, if she had always been protected by a large fortune from the stern realities of life, there would have been no hope for her now that she was left poor and alone—for how can a girl avoid dangers she is ignorant of? But from her earliest childhood Marguerite had studied the difficult science of real life under the best of teachers—misfortune. Cast upon her own resources at the age of thirteen, she had learned to look upon everybody and everything with distrust; and by relying only on herself, she had become strangely cautious and clear-sighted. She knew how to watch and how to listen, how to deliberate and how to act. Two men, the Marquis de Valorsay and M. de Fondège's son, coveted her hand; and one of the two, the marquis, so she believed, was capable of any crime. Still she felt no fears. She had been in danger once before when she was little more than a child, when the brother of her employer insulted her with his attentions, but she had escaped unharmed.

Deceit was certainly most repugnant to her truth-loving nature; but it was the only weapon of defence she possessed. And so on the following day she carefully studied the abode of her entertainers. And certainly the study was instructive. The General's household was truly Parisian in character; or, at least, it was what a Parisian household inevitably becomes when its inmates fall a prey to the constantly increasing passion for luxury and display, to the *furore* for aping the habits and expenditure of millionaires, and to the noble and elevated desire of humiliating and outshining

their neighbors. Ease, health, and comfort had been unscrupulously sacrificed to show. The dining-room was magnificent, the drawing-room superb; but these were the only comfortably furnished apartments in the establishment. The other rooms were bare and desolate. It is true that Madame de Fondège had a handsome wardrobe with glass doors in her own room, but this was an article which the friend of the fashionable Baroness Trigault could not possibly dispense with. On the other hand, her bed had no curtains.

The aspect of the place fittingly explained the habits and manners of the inmates. What sinister fears must have haunted them! for how could this extreme destitution in one part of the establishment be reconciled with the luxury noticeable in the other, except by the fact that a desperate struggle to keep up appearances was constantly going on? And this constant anxiety made out-door noise, excitement, and gayety a necessity of their existence, and caused them to welcome anything that took them from the home where they had barely sufficient to deceive society, and not enough to impose upon their creditors. "And they keep three servants," thought Mademoiselle Marguerite—"three enemies who spend their time in ridiculing them, and torturing their vanity."

Thus, on the very first day after her arrival, she realized the real situation of the General and his wife. They were certainly on the verge of ruin when Mademoiselle Marguerite accepted their hospitality. Everything went to prove this: the coachman's insolent demand, the servants' impudence, the grocer's refusal to furnish a single bottle of wine on credit, the milliner's persistence, and, lastly, the new sheets on the visitors' beds. "Yes," thought Mademoiselle Marguerite to

herself, "the Fondèges were ruined when I came here. They would never have sunk so low if they had not been utterly destitute of resources. So, if they rise again, if money and credit come back again, then the old magistrate is right—they have obtained possession of the Chalusse millions!"

IX.

ON this side, at least, Mademoiselle Marguerite had no very wide field of investigation to explore. Her common sense told her that her task would merely consist in carefully watching the behavior of the General and his wife, in noting their expenditure, and so on. It was a matter of close attention, and of infinitesimal trifles. Nor was she much encouraged by her first success. It was, perhaps, important; and yet it might be nothing. For she felt that the real difficulties would not begin until she became morally certain that the General had stolen the millions that were missing from the count's *escritoire*. Even then it would remain for her to discover how he had obtained possession of this money. And when she had succeeded in doing this, would her task be ended? Certainly not. She must obtain sufficient evidence to give her the right of accusing the General openly, and in the face of every one. She must have material and indisputable proofs before she could say: "A robbery has been committed. I was accused of it. I was innocent. Here is the culprit!"

What a long journey must be made before this goal was reached! No matter! Now that she had a positive and fixed point of departure, she felt that she pos-

sessed enough energy to sustain her in her endeavors for years, if need be. What troubled her most was that she could not logically explain the conduct of her enemies from the time M. de Fondège had asked her hand for his son up to the present moment. And first, why had they been so audacious or so imprudent as to bring her to their own home if they had really stolen one of those immense amounts that are sure to betray their possessors? "They are mad," she thought, "or else they must deem me blind, deaf, and more stupid than mortal ever was!" Secondly, why should they be so anxious to marry her to their son, Lieutenant Gustave? This also was a puzzling question. However, she was fully decided on one point: the suspicions of the Fondège family must not be aroused. If they were on their guard, it would be the easiest thing in the world for them to pay their debts quietly, and increase their expenditure so imperceptibly that she would not be able to prove a sudden acquisition of wealth.

But the events of the next few days dispelled these apprehensions. That very afternoon, although it was Sunday, it became evident that a shower of gold had fallen on the General's abode. The door-bell rang incessantly for several hours, and an interminable procession of tradesmen entered. It looked very much as if M. de Fondège had called a meeting of his creditors. They came in haughty and arrogant, with their hats upon their heads, and surly of speech, like people who have made up their minds to accept their loss, but who intend to pay themselves in rudeness. They were ushered into the drawing-room where the General was holding his *levée*; they remained there from five to ten minutes, and then, bowing low with hat in hand, they retired with radiant countenances, and an obsequious

smile on their lips. So they had been paid. And as if to prove to Mademoiselle Marguerite that her suspicions were correct, she chanced to be present when the livery stable-keeper presented his bill.

Madame de Fondège received him very haughtily. "Ah! here you are!" she exclaimed, rudely, as soon as he appeared. "So you are the man who teaches his drivers to insult his customers? That is an excellent way to gain patronage. What! I hire a one-horse carriage from you by the month, and because I happen to wish for a two-horse vehicle for a single day, you make me pay the difference. You should demand payment in advance if you are so suspicious."

The stable-keeper, who had a bill for nearly four thousand francs in his pocket, stood listening with the air of a man who is meditating some crushing reply; but she did not give him time to deliver it. "When I have cause to complain of the people I employ, I dismiss them and replace them by others. Insolence is one of those things that I never forgive. Give me your bill."

The man, in whose face doubt, fear, and hope had succeeded each other in swift succession, thereupon drew an interminable bill from his pocket. And when he saw the bank-notes, when he saw the bill paid without dispute or even examination, he was seized with a wondering respect, and his voice became sweeter than honey. They say the payment of a bad debt delights a merchant a thousand times more than the settlement of fifty good ones. The truth of this assertion became apparent in the present case. Mademoiselle Marguerite thought the man was going to beg "Madame la Comtesse to do him the favor to withhold a portion of the small amount." For the Parisian tradesman is so

constituted that very frequently it is not necessary to pay him money, but only to show it.

However, this creditor's abnegation did not extend so far; still he did entreat Madame la Comtesse not to leave him on account of a blunder—for it was a blunder—he swore it on his children's heads. His coachman was only a fool and a drunkard, who had misunderstood him entirely, and whom he should ignominiously dismiss on returning to his establishment. But “Madame la Comtesse” was inflexible. She sent the man about his business, saying, “I never place myself in a position to be treated with disrespect a second time.”

This probably accounted for the fact that Evariste, the footman, who had been so wanting in respect the previous evening, had been sent away that very morning. Mademoiselle Marguerite did not see him again. Dinner was served by a new servant, who had been sent by an Employment Office, and engaged without a question, no doubt because Evariste's livery fitted him like a glove. Had the cook also been replaced? Mademoiselle Marguerite thought so, though she had no means of convincing herself on this point. It was certain, however, that the Sunday dinner was utterly unlike that of the evening before. Quality had replaced quantity, and care, profusion. It was not necessary to send to the cellar for a bottle of Château-Laroze; it made its appearance at the proper moment, warmed to the precise degree of temperature, and seemed quite to the taste of excellent Madame Léon.

In twenty-four hours the Fondège family had been raised to such affluence that they must have asked themselves if it were possible they had ever known the agonies of that life of false appearances and sham luxury which is a thousand times worse than an ex-

istence of abject poverty. "Is it possible that I am deceived?" Marguerite said to herself, on retiring to her room that evening. For it surprised her that a keen-sighted person like Madame Léon should not have remarked this revolution; but the worthy companion merely declared the General and his wife to be charming people, and did not cease to congratulate her dear young lady upon having accepted their hospitality. "I feel quite at home here," said she; "and though my room is a trifle small, I shall have nothing to wish for when it has been refurnished."

Mademoiselle Marguerite spent a restless and uncomfortable night. In spite of her reason, in spite of the convincing proofs she had seen, the most disturbing doubts returned. Might she not have judged the situation with a prejudiced mind? Had the Fondèges really been as reduced in circumstances as she supposed? Like every one who has been unfortunate, she feared illusions, and was extremely distrustful of everything that seemed to favor her hopes and wishes. The only thing that really encouraged her was the thought that she could consult the old magistrate, and that M. de Chalusse's former agent might succeed in finding Pascal Ferailleux. M. Fortunat must have received her letter by this time: he would undoubtedly expect her on Tuesday, and it only remained for her to invent some excuse which would give her a couple of hours' liberty without awakening suspicion.

She rose early the next morning, and had almost completed her toilette, when she heard some one in the passage outside rapping at the door of Madame Léon's room. "Who's there?" inquired that worthy lady.

It was Justine, Madame de Fondège's maid, who

answered in a pert voice, "Here is a letter, madame, which has just been sent up by the concierge. It is addressed to Madame Léon. That is your name, is it not?"

Marguerite staggered as if she had received a heavy blow. "My God! a letter from the Marquis de Valorsay!" she thought.

It was evident that the estimable lady was expecting this missive by the eagerness with which she sprang out of bed and opened the door. And Marguerite heard her say to the servant in her sweetest voice: "A thousand thanks, my child! Ah! this is a great relief. I have heard from my brother-in-law at last. I recognize his hand-writing." And then the door closed again.

Standing silent and motionless in the middle of her room, Marguerite listened with that feverish anxiety that excites the perceptive faculties to the utmost degree. An inward voice, stronger than reason, told her that this letter threatened her happiness, her future, perhaps her life! But how could she convince herself of the truth of this presentiment? If she had followed her first impulse, she would have rushed into Madame Léon's room and have snatched the letter from her hands. But if she did this, she would betray herself, and prove that she was not the dupe they supposed her to be, and this supposition on the part of her enemies constituted her only chance of salvation.

If she could only watch Madame Léon as she read the letter, and gain some information from the expression of her face; but this seemed impossible, for the keyhole was blocked up by the key, which had been left in the lock on the other side. Suddenly a crack in the partition attracted her attention, and finding that it extended through the wall, she realized she might

watch what was passing in the adjoining room. So she approached the spot on tiptoe, and, with bated breath, stooped and looked in.

In her impatience to learn the contents of her letter, Madame Léon had not gone back to bed. She had broken the seal, and was reading the missive, standing barefooted in her night-dress, directly opposite the little crevice. She read line after line, and word after word, and her knitted brows and compressed lips suggested deep concentration of thought mingled with discontent. At last she shrugged her shoulders, muttered a few inaudible words, and laid the open letter upon the rickety chest of drawers, which, with two chairs and a bed, constituted the entire furniture of her apartment.

"My God!" exclaimed Marguerite, with bated breath, "if she would only forget it!"

But she did not forget it. She began to dress, and when she had finished she read the letter again, and then placed it carefully in one of the drawers, which she locked, putting the key in her pocket.

"I shall never know, then," thought Marguerite; "no, I shall never know. But I must know—and I will!" she added vehemently.

From that moment a firm determination to obtain that letter took possession of her mind; and so deeply was she occupied in seeking for some means to surmount the difficulties which stood in her way that she did not say a dozen words during breakfast. "I must be a fool if I can't find some way of gaining possession of that letter," she said to herself again and again. "I'm sure I could find in it the explanation of the abominable intrigue which Pascal and I are the victims of."

Happily, her preoccupation was not remarked. Each person present was too deeply engrossed in his or her

own concerns to notice the behavior of the others. Madame Léon's mind was occupied with the news she had just received; and, besides, her attention was considerably attracted by some partridges garnished with truffles, and a bottle of Château-Laroze. For she was rather fond of good living, the dear lady, as she confessed herself, adding that no one is perfect. The General talked of nothing but a certain pair of horses which he was to look at that afternoon, and which he thought of buying—being quite disgusted with job-masters, so he declared. Besides, he expected to get the animals at a bargain, as they were the property of a young gentleman who had been led to commit certain misdemeanors by his love of gambling and his passion for a notorious woman who was afflicted with an insatiable desire for jewelry.

As for Madame de Fondège, her head seemed to have been completely turned by the prospect of the approaching *fête* at the Countess de Commarin's. She had only a fortnight left to make her preparations. All the evening before, through part of the night, and ever since she had been awake that morning, she had been racking her brain to arrive at an effective combination of colors and materials. And at the cost of a terrible headache, she had at last conceived one of those *toilettes* which are sure to make a sensation, and which the newspaper reporters will mention as noticeable for its "*chic*." "Picture to yourself," she said, all ablaze with enthusiasm, "picture to yourself a robe of tea-flower silk, trimmed with bands of heavy holland-tinted satin, thickly embroidered with flowers. A wide flounce of Valenciennes at the bottom of the skirt. Over this, I shall wear a tunic of pearl-gray *crêpe*, edged with a fringe of the various shades in the dress, and forming a panier behind."

But how much trouble, time and labor must be expended before such an elaborate *chef-d'œuvre* could be completed! How many conferences with the dress-maker, with the florist, and the embroiderer! How many doubts, how many inevitable mistakes! Ah! there was not a moment to lose! Madame de Fondège, who was dressed to go out, and who had already sent for a carriage, insisted that Mademoiselle Marguerite should accompany her. And certainly, the General's wife deemed the proposal a seductive one. It is a very fashionable amusement to run from one shop to another, even when one cannot, or will not, buy. It is a custom, which some noble ladies have imported from America, to the despair of the poor shopkeepers. And thus every fine afternoon, the swell shops are filled to overflowing with richly-attired dames and damsels, who ask to see all the new goods. It is far more amusing than remaining at home. And when they return to dinner in the evening, after inspecting hundreds of yards of silk and satin, they are very well pleased with themselves, for they have not lost the day. Nor do the shrewdest always return from these expeditions empty-handed. A dozen gloves or a piece of lace can be hidden so easily in the folds of a mantle!

And yet, to Madame de Fondège's great surprise, Marguerite declined the invitation. "I have so many things to put in order," she added, feeling that an excuse was indispensable.

But Madame Léon, who had not the same reasons as her dear child for wishing to remain at home, kindly offered her services. She was acquainted with several of the best shops, she declared, particularly with the establishment of a dealer in laces, in the Rue de Mulhouse, and thanks to an introduction from her, Madame

de Fondège could not fail to conclude a very advantageous bargain there. "Very well," replied Madame de Fondège, "I will take you with me, then; but make haste and dress while I put on my bonnet."

They left the breakfast-room at the same time, closely followed by Mademoiselle Marguerite, who was disturbed by a hope which she scarcely dared confess to herself. With her forehead resting against the wall, and her eye peering through the tiny crack, she watched her governess change her dress, throw a shawl over her shoulders, put on her best bonnet, and, after a glance at the looking-glass, rush from the room, exclaiming: "Here I am, my dear countess. I'm ready."

And a few moments afterward they left the house together.

As the outer door closed after them, Marguerite's brain whirled. If she were not deceived, Madame Léon had left the key of the drawers in the pocket of the dress she had just taken off. So it was with a wildly throbbing heart that she opened the communicating door and entered her "companion's" room. She hastily approached the bed on which the dress was lying, and, with a trembling hand, she began to search for the pocket. Fortune favored her! The key was there. The letter was within her reach. But she was about to do a deed against which her whole nature revolted. To steal a key, to force an article of furniture open, and violate the secret of a private correspondence, these were actions so repugnant to her sense of honor, and her pride, that for some time she stood irresolute. At last the instinct of self-preservation overpowered her scruples. Was not her honor, and Pascal's honor also, at stake—as well as their mutual love and happiness? "It would be folly to hesitate," she mur-

mured. And with a firm hand she placed the key in the lock.

The latter was out of order and the drawer was only opened with difficulty. But there, on some clothes which Madame Léon had not yet found time to arrange, Marguerite saw the letter. She eagerly snatched it up, unfolded it, and read: "Dear Madame Léon—" "Dear me," she muttered, "here is the name in full. This is an indiscretion which will render denial difficult." And she resumed her perusal: "Your letter, which I have just received, confirms what my servants had already told me: that twice during my absence—on Saturday evening and Sunday morning—you called at my house to see me." So Mademoiselle Marguerite's penetration had served her well. All this talk about anxious relatives had only been an excuse invented by Madame Léon to enable her to absent herself whenever occasion required. "I regret," continued the letter, "that you did not find me at home, for I have instructions of the greatest importance to give you. We are approaching the decisive moment. I have formed a plan which will completely, and forever, efface all remembrance of that cursed P. F., in case any one condescended to think of him after the disgrace we fastened upon him the other evening at the house of Madame d'Argelès." P. F.—these initials of course meant Pascal Ferailleur. Then he was innocent, and she held an undeniable, irrefutable proof of his innocence in her hands. How coolly and impudently Valorsay confessed his atrocious crime! "A bold stroke is in contemplation which, if no unfortunate and well-nigh impossible accident occur, will throw the girl into my arms." Marguerite shuddered. "The girl" referred to her, of course. "Thanks to the assistance of one of my friends," added the letter, "I can

place this proud damsel in a perilous, terribly perilous position, from which she cannot possibly extricate herself unaided. But, just as she gives herself up for lost, I shall interpose. I shall save her; and it will be strange if gratitude does not work the necessary miracle in my favor. The plan is certain to succeed. Still, it will be all the better if the physician who attended M. de C—— in his last moments, and whom you spoke to me about (Dr. Jodon, if I remember rightly), will consent to lend us a helping hand. What kind of a man is he? If he is accessible to the seductive influence of a few thousand francs, I shall consider the business as good as concluded. Your conduct up to the present time has been a *chef-d'œuvre*, for which you shall be amply compensated. You have cause to know that I am not ungrateful. Let the F's continue their intrigues, and even pretend to favor them. I am not afraid of these people. I understand their game perfectly, and know why they wish my little one to marry their son. But when they become troublesome, I shall crush them like glass. In spite of these explanations, which I have just given you for your guidance, it is very necessary that I should see you. I shall look for you on Tuesday afternoon, between three and four o'clock. Above all, don't fail to bring me the desired information respecting Dr. Jodon. I am, my dear madame, devotedly yours—V." Below ran a postscript which read as follows: "When you come on Tuesday bring this letter with you. We will burn it together. Don't imagine that I distrust you—but there is nothing so dangerous as letters."

For some time Marguerite stood, stunned and appalled by the Marquis de Valorsay's audacity, and by the language of this letter, which was at once so obscure and so clear, every line of it threatening her future.

The reality surpassed her worst apprehensions, but realizing the gravity of the situation, she shook off the torpor stealing over her. She felt that every second was precious, and that she must act, and act at once. But what should she do? Simply return the letter to its place, and continue to act the *rôle* of a dupe, as if nothing had happened? No; that must not be. It would be madness not to seize this flagrant proof of the Marquis de Valorsay's infamy. But on the other hand, if she kept the letter, Madame Léon would immediately discover its loss, and an explanation would be unavoidable. M. de Valorsay would be worsted, but not annihilated, and the plans which made the physician's intervention a necessity would never be revealed. She thought of hastening to her friend the old magistrate; but he lived a long way off, and time was pressing. Besides she might not find him at home. Then she thought of going to a notary, to a judge. She would show them the letter, and they could take a copy of it. But no—this would do no good—the marquis could still deny it. She was becoming desperate, and was accusing herself of stupidity, when a sudden inspiration illumined her mind, turning night into day, as it were. "Oh, Pascal, we are saved!" she exclaimed. And without pausing to deliberate any longer, she threw a mantle over her shoulders, hastily tied on her bonnet, and hurried from the house, without saying a word to any one.

Unfortunately she was not acquainted with this part of Paris, and on reaching the Rue Pigalle she was at a loss for her way. Unwilling to waste any more time, she hastily entered a grocer's shop at the corner of the Rue Pigalle and the Rue Notre Dame de Lorette, and anxiously inquired: "Do you know any photographer in this neighborhood, monsieur?"

Her agitation made this question seem so singular that the grocer looked at her closely for a moment, as if to make sure that she was not jesting. "You have only to go down the Rue Notre Dame de Lorette," he replied, "and on the left-hand side, at the foot of the hill, you will find the photographer Carjat."

"Thank you."

The grocer stepped to the door to watch her. "That girl is certainly light-headed," he thought.

Her demeanor was really so extraordinary that it attracted the attention of the passers-by. She saw this, and slackening her pace, tried to become more composed. At the spot the grocer had indicated, she perceived several show frames filled with photographs hanging on either side of a broad, open gateway, above which ran the name, "E. Carjat." She went in, and seeing a man standing at the door of an elegant pavilion on the right-hand side of a large courtyard, she approached him, and asked for his employer.

"He is here," replied the man. "Does madame come for a photograph?"

"Yes."

"Then will madame be so kind as to pass in. She will not be obliged to wait long. There are only four or five persons before her."

Four or five persons! How long would she be obliged to wait?—half an hour—two hours? She had not the slightest idea. But she *did* know that she had not a second to lose, that Madame Léon might return at any moment, and find the letter missing; and, to crown all, she remembered now that she had not even locked the drawer again. "I cannot wait," she said, imperiously. "I must speak to M. Carjat at once."

"But——"

"At once, I tell you. Go and tell him that he must come."

Her tone was so commanding, and there was so much authority in her glance, that the servant hesitated no longer. He ushered her into a little sitting-room, and said, "If madame will take a seat, I will call monsieur."

She sank on to a chair, for her limbs were failing her. She was beginning to realize the strangeness of the step she had taken—to fear the result it might lead to—and to be astonished at her own boldness. But she had no time to prepare what she wished to say, for a man of five-and-thirty, wearing a mustache and imperial, and clad in a velvet coat, entered the room, and bowing with an air of surprise, exclaimed: "You desire to speak with me, madame?"

"I have a great favor to ask of you, monsieur."

"Of me?"

She drew M. de Valorsay's letter from her pocket, and, showing it to the photographer, she said, "I have come to you, monsieur, to ask you to photograph this letter—but at once—before me—and quickly—very quickly. The honor of two persons is imperilled by each moment I lose here."

Mademoiselle Marguerite's embarrassment was extreme. Her cheeks were crimson, and she trembled like a leaf. Still her attitude was proud, generous enthusiasm glowed in her dark eyes, and her tone of voice revealed the serenity of a lofty soul ready to dare anything for a just and noble cause. This striking contrast—this struggle between girlish timidity and a lover's virgil energy, endowed her with a strange and powerful charm, which the photographer made no at-

tempt to resist. Unusual as was the request, he did not hesitate. "I am ready to do what you desire, madame," he replied, bowing again.

"Oh! monsieur, how can I ever thank you?"

He did not stop to listen to her thanks. Not wishing to return to the reception-room, where five or six clients were impatiently awaiting their turn, he called one of his subordinates, and ordered him to bring the necessary apparatus at once. While he was speaking, Mademoiselle Marguerite paused; but, as soon as his instructions were concluded, she remarked: "Perhaps you are too hasty, sir. You have not allowed me to explain; and perhaps what I desire is impossible. I came on the impulse of the moment, without any knowledge on the subject. Before you set to work, I must know if what you can do will answer my purpose."

"Speak, madame."

"Will the copy you obtain be precisely like the original in every particular?"

"In every particular."

"The writing will be the same—exactly the same?"

"Absolutely the same."

"So like, that if one of your photographs should be presented to the person who wrote this letter——"

"He could no more deny his handwriting than he could if some one handed him the letter itself."

"And the operation will leave no trace on the original?"

"None."

A smile of triumph played upon Mademoiselle Marguerite's lips. It was as she had thought; the defensive plan which she had suddenly conceived was a good one. "One more question, sir," she resumed. "I am only a poor, ignorant girl; excuse me, and give me the

benefit of your knowledge. This letter will be returned to its author to-morrow, and he will burn it. But afterward, in case of any difficulty—in case of a law-suit—or in case it should be necessary for me to prove certain things which one might establish by means of this letter, would one of your photographs be admitted as evidence? ”

The photographer did not answer for a moment. Now he understood Mademoiselle Marguerite's motive, and the importance she attached to a fac-simile. But this imparted an unexpected gravity to the service he was called upon to perform. He therefore wished some time for reflection, and he scrutinized Mademoiselle Marguerite as if he were trying to read her very soul. Was it possible that this young girl, with such a pure and noble brow, and with such frank, honest eyes, could be meditating any cowardly, dishonorable act? No, he could not believe it. In whom, or in what, could he trust if such a countenance deceived him? “My fac-simile would certainly be admitted as evidence,” he replied at last; “and this would not be the first time that the decision of a court has depended on proofs which have been photographed by me.”

Meanwhile, his assistant had returned, bringing the necessary apparatus with him. When all was ready, the photographer asked her, “Will you give me the letter, madame? ”

She hesitated for a second—only for a second. The man's honest, kindly face told her that he would not betray her, that he would rather give her assistance. So she handed him the Marquis de Valorsay's letter, saying, with melancholy dignity, “It is my happiness and my future that I place in your hands—and I have no fears.”

He read her thoughts, and understood that she either dared not ask for a pledge of secrecy, or else that she thought it unnecessary. He took pity on her, and his last doubt fled. "I shall read this letter, madame," said he, "but I am the only person who will read it. I give you my word on that! No one but myself will see the proofs."

Greatly moved, she offered him her hand, and simply said, "Thanks; I am more than repaid."

To obtain an absolutely perfect fac-simile of a letter is a delicate and sometimes lengthy operation. However, at the end of about twenty minutes, the photographer possessed two negatives that promised him perfect proofs. He looked at them with a satisfied air; and then returning the letter to Mademoiselle Marguerite, he said, "In less than three days the fac-similes will be ready, madame; and if you will tell me to what address I ought to send them——"

She trembled on hearing these words, and quickly answered, "Don't send them, sir—keep them carefully. Great heavens! all would be lost if it came to the knowledge of any one. I will send for them, or come myself." And, feeling the extent of her obligation, she added, "But I will not go without introducing myself—I am Mademoiselle Marguerite de Chalusse." And, thereupon, she went off, leaving the photographer surprised at the adventure and dazzled by his strange visitor's beauty.

Rather more than an hour had elapsed since Marguerite left M. de Fondège's house. "How time flies!" she murmured, quickening her pace as much as she could without exciting remark—"how time flies!" But, hurried as she was, she stopped and spent five minutes at a shop in the Rue Notre Dame de Lorette, where

she purchased some black ribbon and a few other trifles. How else could she explain and justify her absence, if the servants, who had probably discovered she had gone out, chanced to speak of it?

But her heart throbbed as if it would burst as she ascended the General's staircase, and anxiety checked her breathing as she rang the bell. "What if Madame de Fondège and Madame Léon had returned, and the abstraction of the letter been discovered!" Fortunately, Madame de Fondège required more than an hour to purchase the materials for the elaborate toilette she had dreamt of. The ladies were still out, and Mademoiselle Marguerite found everything in the same condition as she had left it. She carefully placed the letter in the drawer again, locked it, and put the key in the pocket of Madame Léon's dress. Then she breathed freely once more; and, for the first time in six days, she felt something very like joy in her heart. Now she had no fear of the Marquis de Valorsay. She had him in her power. He would destroy his letter the next day, and think that he was annihilating all proofs of his infamy. Not so. At the decisive moment, at the very moment of his triumph, she would produce the photograph of this letter, and crush him. And she—only a young girl—had outwitted this consummate scoundrel! "I have not been unworthy of Pascal," she said to herself, with a flash of pride.

However, her nature was not one of those weak ones which are become intoxicated by the first symptom of success, and then relax in their efforts. When her excitement had abated a little, she was inclined to disparage rather than to exaggerate the advantage she had gained. What she desired was a complete, startling, incontestable victory. It was not enough to prove Val-

orsay's *guilt*—she was resolved to penetrate his designs, to discover why he pursued her so desperately. And, though she felt that she possessed a formidable weapon of defence, she could not drive away her gloomy forebodings when she thought of the threats contained in the marquis's letter. "Thanks to the assistance of one of my friends," he wrote, "I can place this proud girl in a perilous, terribly perilous, position, from which she cannot possibly extricate herself unaided."

These words persistently lingered in Mademoiselle Marguerite's mind. What was the danger hanging over her? whence would it come? and in what form? What abominable machination might she not expect from the villain who had deliberately dishonored Pascal? How would he attack her? Would he strive to ruin her reputation, or did he intend to forcibly abduct her? Would he attempt to decoy her into a trap where she would be subjected to the insults of the vilest wretches? A thousand frightful memories of the time when she was an apprentice drove her nearly frantic. "I will never go out unarmed," she thought, "and woe to the man who raises his hand against me!"

The vagueness of the threat increased her fears. No one is courageous enough to confront an unknown, mysterious, and always imminent danger without sometimes faltering. Nor was this all. The marquis was not her only enemy. She had the Fondège family to dread—these dangerous hypocrites, who had taken her to their home so that they might ruin her the more surely. M. de Valorsay wrote that he had no fears of the Fondèges—that he understood their little game. What was their little game? No doubt they were resolved that she should become their son's wife, even if they were obliged to use force to win her consent. At

this thought a sudden terror seized her soul, so full of peace and hope an instant before. When she was attacked, would she have time to produce and use the fac-simile of Valorsay's letter? "I must reveal my secret to a friend—to a trusty friend—who will avenge me!" she muttered.

Fortunately she had a friend in whom she could safely confide—the old magistrate who had given her such proofs of sympathy. She felt that she needed the advice of a riper experience than her own, and the thought of consulting him at once occurred to her. She was alone; she had no spy to fear; and it would be folly not to profit by the few moments of liberty that remained. So she drew her writing-case from her trunk, and, after barricading her door to prevent a surprise, she wrote her friend an account of the events which had taken place since their last interview. She told him everything with rare precision and accuracy of detail, sending him a copy of Valorsay's letter, and informing him that, in case any misfortune befell her, he could obtain the fac-similes from Carjat. She finished her letter, but did not seal it. "If anything should happen before I have an opportunity to post it, I will add a postscript," she said to herself.

She had made all possible haste, fearing that Madame de Fondège and Madame Léon might return at any moment. But this was truly a chimerical apprehension. It was nearly six o'clock when the two shoppers made their appearance, wearied with the labors of the day, but in fine spirits. Besides purchasing every requisite for that wonderful costume of hers, the General's wife had found some laces of rare beauty, which she had secured for the mere trifle of four thousand francs. "It was one of those opportunities one ought always to

profit by," she said, as she displayed her purchase. "Besides, it is the same with lace as with diamonds, you should purchase them when you can—then you have them. It isn't an outlay—it's an investment." Subtle reasoning that has cost many a husband dear!

On her side, Madame Léon proudly showed her dear young lady a very pretty present which Madame de Fondège had given her. "So money is no longer lacking in this household," thought Mademoiselle Marguerite, all the more confirmed in her suspicions.

The General came in a little later, accompanied by a friend, and Marguerite soon discovered that the worthy man had spent the day as profitably as his wife. He too was quite tired out; and he had reason to be fatigued. First, he had purchased the horses belonging to the ruined spendthrift, and he had paid five thousand francs for them, a mere trifle for such animals. Less than an hour after the purchase he had refused almost double that amount from a celebrated *connoisseur* in horse-flesh, M. de Breulh-Faverlay. This excellent speculation had put him in such good humor that he had been unable to resist the temptation of purchasing a beautiful saddle-horse, which they let him have for a hundred louis. He had not been foolish, for he was sure that he could sell the animal again at an advance of a thousand francs whenever he wished to do so. "So," remarked his friend, "if you bought such a horse every day, you would make three hundred and sixty-five thousand francs a year."

Was this only a jest—one of those witticisms which people who boast of wonderful bargains must expect to parry, or had the remark a more serious meaning? Marguerite could not determine. One thing is certain, the General did not lose his temper, but gayly continued

his account of the way in which he had spent his time. Having purchased the horses, his next task was to find a carriage, and he had heard of a *barouche* which a Russian prince had ordered but didn't take, so that the builder was willing to sell it at less than cost price; and to recoup this worthy man, the General had purchased a brougham as well. He had, moreover, hired stabling in the Rue Pigalle, only a few steps from the house, and he expected a coachman and a groom the following morning.

"And all this will cost us less than the miserable vehicle we have been hiring by the year," observed Madame de Fondège, gravely. "Oh, I know what I say. I've counted the cost. What with gratuities and extras, it costs us now fully a thousand francs a month, and three horses and a coachman won't cost you more. And what a difference! I shall no longer be obliged to blush for the skinny horses the stable-keeper sends me, nor to endure the insolence of his men. The first outlay frightened me a little; but that is made now, and I am delighted. We will save it in something else."

"In laces, no doubt," thought Mademoiselle Marguerite. She was intensely exasperated, and on regaining her chamber she said to herself, for the tenth time, "What do they take me for? Do they think me an idiot to flaunt the millions they have stolen from my father—that they have stolen from me—before my eyes in this fashion? A common thief would take care not to excite suspicion by a foolish expenditure of the fruits of his knavery, but they—they have lost their senses."

Madame Léon was already in bed, and when Mademoiselle Marguerite was satisfied that she was asleep, she took her letter from her trunk, and added this post-script: "P. S.—It is impossible to retain the shadow

of a doubt, M. and Madame de Fondège have spent certainly twenty thousand francs to-day. This audacity must arise from a conviction that no proofs of the crime they have committed exist. Still they continue to talk to me about their son, Lieutenant Gustave. He will be presented to me to-morrow. To-morrow, also, between three and four, I shall be at the house of a man who can perhaps discover Pascal's hiding-place for me,—the house of M. Isidore Fortunat. I hope to make my escape easily enough, for at that same hour, Madame Léon has an appointment with the Marquis de Valorsay."

X.

THE old legend of Achilles's heel will be eternally true. A man may be humble or powerful, feeble or strong, but there are none of us without some weak spot in our armor, a spot vulnerable beyond all others, a certain place where wounds prove most dangerous and painful. M. Isidore Fortunat's weak place was his cash-box. To attack him there was to endanger his life—to wound him at a point where all his sensibility centred. For it was in this cash-box and not in his breast that his heart really throbbed. His safe made him happy or dejected. Happy when it was filled to overflowing by some brilliant operation, and dejected when he saw it become empty as some imprudent transaction failed.

This then explains his frenzy on that ill-fated Sunday, when, after being brutally dismissed by M. Wilkie, he returned to his rooms in the company of his clerk, Victor Chupin. This explains, too, the intensity of the hatred he now felt for the Marquis de Valorsay and the

Viscount de Coralth. The former, the marquis, had defrauded him of forty thousand francs in glittering gold. The other, the viscount, had suddenly sprung up out of the ground, and carried off from under his very nose that magnificent prize, the Chalusse inheritance, which he had considered as good as won. And he had not only been defrauded and swindled—such were his own expressions—but he had been tricked, deceived, duped, and outwitted, and by whom? By people who did not make it their profession to be shrewd, like he did himself. Just fancy, his business was to outwit others, and a couple of mere amateurs had outgeneraled him. He had not only suffered in pocket, he had been humiliated as well, and so he indulged in threats of such terrible import.

However, at the very moment when he was dreaming of wreaking vengeance on the Marquis de Valorsay and the Viscount de Coralth, his housekeeper, austere Madame Dodelin, handed him Mademoiselle Marguerite's letter. He read it with intense astonishment, rubbing his eyes as if to assure himself that he were really awake. "Tuesday," he repeated, "the day after to-morrow—at your house—between three and four o'clock—I must speak with you."

His manner was so strange, and his usually impassive face so disturbed by conflicting feelings, that Madame Dodelin's curiosity overcame her prudence, and she remained standing in front of him with open mouth, staring with all her eyes and listening with all her ears. He perceived this, and angrily exclaimed: "What are you doing here? You are watching me, I do believe. Get back to your kitchen, or——"

She fled in alarm, and he then entered his private office. His heart was leaping with joy, and he laughed

wickedly at the hope of a speedy revenge. "She's on the scent," he muttered; "and she has luck in her favor. She has chanced to apply to me on the very day that I had resolved to defend and rehabilitate her lover, the honest fool who allowed himself to be dishonored by those unscrupulous blackguards. Just as I was thinking of going in search of her, she comes to me. As I was about to write to her, she writes to me. Who can deny the existence of Providence after this?" Like many other people, M. Fortunat piously believed in Providence when things went to his liking, but it is sad to add that in the contrary case he denied its existence. "If she has any courage," he resumed, "and she seems to have plenty of it, Valorsay and Coralth will be in a tight place soon. And if it takes ten thousand francs to put them there, and if neither Mademoiselle Marguerite nor M. Ferailleux has the amount—ah, well! I'll advance—well, at least five thousand—without charging them any commission. I'll even pay the expenses out of my own pocket, if necessary. Ah, my fine fellows, you've laughed too soon. In a week's time we'll see who laughs last."

He paused, for Victor Chupin, who had lingered behind to pay the driver, had just entered the room. "You gave me twenty francs, m'sieur," he remarked to his employer. "I paid the driver four francs and five sous, here's the change."

"Keep it yourself, Victor," said M. Fortunat.

What! keep fifteen francs and fifteen sous? Under any other circumstances such unusual generosity would have drawn a grimace of satisfaction from young Chupin. But to-day he did not even smile; he slipped the money carelessly into his pocket, and scarcely deigned to say "thanks," in the coldest possible tone.

Absorbed in thought, M. Fortunat did not remark this little circumstance. "We have them, Victor," he resumed. "I told you that Valorsay and Coralth should pay me for their treason. Vengeance is near. Read this letter." Victor read it slowly, and as soon as he had finished his employer ejaculated, "Well?"

But Chupin was not a person to give advice lightly. "Excuse me, m'sieur," said he, "but in order to answer you, I must have some knowledge of the affair. I only know what you've told me—which is little enough—and what I've guessed. In fact, I know nothing at all."

M. Fortunat reflected for a moment. "You are right, Victor," he said, at last. "So far the explanation I gave you was all that was necessary; but now that I expect more important services from you, I ought to tell you the whole truth, or at least all I know about the affair. This will prove my great confidence in you." Whereupon, he acquainted Chupin with everything he knew concerning the history of M. de Chalusse, the Marquis de Valorsay, and Mademoiselle Marguerite.

However, if he expected these disclosures to elevate him in his subordinate's estimation he was greatly mistaken. Chupin had sufficient experience and common sense to read his master's character and discern his motives. He saw plainly enough that this honest impulse on M. Fortunat's part came from disappointed avarice and wounded vanity, and that the agent would have allowed the Marquis de Valorsay to carry out his infamous scheme without any compunctions of conscience, providing he, himself, had not been injured by it. Still, the young fellow did not allow his real feelings to appear on his face. First, it was not his business to tell M. Fortunat his opinion of him; and in the

second place, he did not deem it an opportune moment for a declaration of his sentiments. So, when his employer paused, he exclaimed: "Well, we must outwit these scoundrels—for I'll join you, m'sieur; and I flatter myself that I can be very useful to you. Do you want the particulars of the viscount's past life? If so, I can furnish them. I know the brigand. He's married, as I told you before, and I'll find his wife for you in a few days. I don't know exactly where she lives, but she keeps a tobacco store, somewhere, and that's enough. She'll tell you how much he's a viscount. Ha! ha! Viscount just as much as I am—and no more. I can tell you the scrapes he has been in."

"No doubt; but the most important thing is to know how he's living now, and on what!"

"Not by honest work, I can tell you. But give me a little time, and I'll find out for sure. As soon as I can go home, change my clothes, and disguise myself, I'll start after him; and may I be hung, if I don't return with a complete report before Tuesday."

A smile of satisfaction appeared on M. Fortunat's face. "Good, Victor!" he said, approvingly, "very good! I see that you will serve me with your usual zeal and intelligence. Rest assured that you will be rewarded as you have never been rewarded before. As long as you are engaged in this affair, you shall have ten francs a day; and I'll pay your board, your cab-hire, and all your expenses."

This was a most liberal offer, and yet, far from seeming delighted, Chupin gravely shook his head. "You know how I value money, m'sieur," he began.

"Too much, Victor, my boy, too much——"

"Excuse me, it's because I have responsibilities, m'sieur. You know my establishment"—he spoke this

word with a grandiloquent air—"you have seen my good mother—my expenses are heavy——"

"In short, you don't think I offer you enough?"

"On the contrary, sir—but you don't allow me to finish. I love money, don't I? But no matter, I don't want to be paid for this business. I don't want either my board or my expenses, not a penny—nothing. I'll serve you, but for my own sake, for my own pleasure—*gratis*."

M. Fortunat could not restrain an exclamation of astonishment. Chupin, who was as eager for gain as an old usurer—Chupin, as grasping as avarice itself, refuse money! This was something which he had never seen before, and which he would no doubt never see again.

Victor had become very much excited; his usually pale cheeks were crimson, and in a harsh voice, he continued: "It's a fancy of mine—that's all. I have eight hundred francs hidden in my room, the fruit of years of work. I'll spend the last penny of it if need be; and if I can see Coralth in the mire, I shall say, 'My money has been well expended.' I'd rather see that day dawn than be the possessor of a hundred thousand francs. If a horrible vision haunted you every night, and prevented you from sleeping, wouldn't you give something to get rid of it? Very well! that brigand's my nightmare. There must be an end to it."

M. de Coralth, who was a man of wide experience, would certainly have felt alarmed if he had seen his unknown enemy at the present moment, for Victor's eyes, usually a pale and undecided blue, were glittering like steel, and his hands were clinched most threateningly. "For he was the cause of all my trouble," he continued, gloomily. "I've told you, sir, that I was

guilty of an infamous deed once upon a time. If it hadn't been for a miracle I should have killed a man—the king of men. Ah, well! if Monsieur André had broken his back by falling from a fifth-floor window, my Coralthe would be the Duc de Champdoce to-day. And shall he be allowed to ride about in his carriage, and deceive and ruin honest people? No—there are too many such villains at large for public safety. Wait a little, Coralthe—I owe you something, and I always pay my debts. When M. André saved me, though I richly deserved to have my throat cut, he made no conditions. He only said, 'If you are not irredeemably bad you will be honest after this.' And he said these words as he was lying there as pale as death with his shoulder broken, and his body mangled from his fall. Great heavens! I felt smaller than—than nothing before him. But I swore that I would do honor to his teachings—and when evil thoughts enter my mind, and when I feel a thirst for liquor, I say to myself, 'Wait a bit, and—and M. André will take a glass with you.' And that quenches my thirst instantly. I have his portrait at home, and every night, before going to bed, I tell him the history of the day—and sometimes I fancy that he smiles at me. All this is very absurd, perhaps, but I'm not ashamed of it. M. André and my good mother, they are my supports, my crutches, and with them I'm not afraid of making a false step." Schebel, the German philosopher, who has written a treatise on Volition, in four volumes, was no greater a man than Chupin. "So you may keep your money, sir," he resumed. "I'm an honest fellow, and honest men ought to ask no reward for the performance of a duty. Coralthe mustn't be allowed to triumph over the innocent chap he ruined. What did you call him?"

Ferailleux? It's an odd name. Never mind—we'll get him out of this scrape; he shall marry his sweetheart after all; and I'll dance at the wedding."

As he finished speaking he laughed a shrill, dangerous laugh, which revealed his sharp teeth—but such invincible determination was apparent on his face, that M. Fortunat felt no misgivings. He was sure that this volunteer would be of more service than the highest-priced hireling. "So I can count on you, Victor?" he inquired.

"As upon yourself."

"And you hope to have some positive information by Tuesday?"

"Before then, I hope, if nothing goes amiss."

"Very well; I will devote my attention to Ferailleux then. As to Valorsay's affairs, I am better acquainted with them than he is himself. We must be prepared to enter upon the campaign when Mademoiselle Marguerite comes, and we will act in accordance with her instructions."

Chupin had already caught up his hat; but just as he was leaving the room, he paused abruptly. "How stupid!" he exclaimed. "I had forgotten the principal thing. Where does Coralth live?"

"Unfortunately, I don't know."

According to his habit when things did not go to his liking, Chupin began to scratch his head furiously. "That's bad," growled he. "Viscounts of his stamp don't parade their addresses in the directory. Still, I shall find him." However, although he expressed this conviction he went off decidedly out of temper.

"I shall lose the entire evening hunting up the rascal's address," he grumbled, as he hastened homeward. "And whom shall I ask for it?—Madame d'Argelès's

concierge? Would he know it—M. Wilkie's servant? That would be dangerous." He thought of roaming round about M. de Valorsay's residence, and of bribing one of the valets; but while crossing the boulevard, the sight of Brebant's Restaurant put a new idea into his head. "I have it!" he muttered; "my man's caught!" And he darted into the nearest *café* where he ordered some beer and writing materials.

Under other circumstances, he would have hesitated to employ so hazardous an expedient as the one he was about to resort to, but the character of his adversaries justified any course; besides, time was passing, and he had no choice of resources. As soon as the waiter served him, he drained his glass of beer to give himself an inspiration, and then, in his finest hand, he wrote:

"MY DEAR VISCOUNT—Here's the amount—one hundred francs—that I lost to you last evening at *piquet*.
When shall I have my revenge? Your friend,
 VALORSAY."

When he had finished this letter he read it over three or four times, asking himself if this were the style of composition that very fashionable folks employ in repaying their debts. To tell the truth, he doubted it. In the rough draft which he penned at first, he had written *bezique*, but in the copy he wrote *piquet*, which he deemed a more aristocratic game. "However," said he, "no one will examine it closely!"

Then, as soon as the ink was dry, he folded the letter and slipped it into an envelope with a hundred franc-note which he drew from an old pocketbook. He next addressed the envelope as follows: "Monsieur le Vicomte de Coralth, En Ville," and having completed his preparations, he paid his score, and hastened to

Brebant's Two waiters were standing at the doorway, and, showing them the letter, he politely asked: "Do you happen to know this name? A gentleman dropped this letter on leaving your place last evening. I ran after him to return it; but I couldn't overtake him."

The waiters examined the address. "Coralth!" they replied. "We scarcely know him. He isn't a regular customer, but he comes here occasionally."

"And where does he live?"

"Why do you wish to know?"

"So as to take him this letter, to be sure!"

The waiters shrugged their shoulders. "Let the letter go; it is not worth while to trouble yourself."

Chupin had foreseen this objection, and was prepared for it. "But there's money in the letter," he remonstrated. And opening the envelope, he showed the bank-note which he had taken from his own pocket-book.

This changed the matter entirely. "That is quite a different thing," remarked one of the waiters. "If you find money, you are, of course, responsible for it. But just leave it here at the desk, and the next time the viscount comes in, the cashier will give it to him."

A cold chill crept over Chupin at the thought of losing his bank-note in this way. "Ah! I don't fancy that idea!" he exclaimed. "Leave it here? Never in life! Who'd get the reward? A viscount is always generous; it is quite likely he would give me twenty francs as a reward for my honesty. And that's why I want his address."

The argument was of a nature to touch the waiters; they thought the young man quite right; but they did not know M. de Coralth's address, and they saw no

way of procuring it. "Unless perhaps the porter knows," observed one of them.

The porter, on being called, remembered that he had once been sent to M. de Coralthe's house for an overcoat. "I've forgotten his number," he declared; "but he lives in the Rue d'Anjou, near the corner of the Rue de la Ville l'Évêque."

This direction was not remarkable for its precision, but it was more than sufficient for a pure-blooded Parisian like Victor Chupin. "Many thanks for your kindness," he said to the porter. "A blind man, perhaps, might not be able to go straight to M. de Coralthe's house from your directions, but I have eyes and a tongue as well. And, believe me, if there's any reward, you shall see that I know how to repay a good turn."

"And if you don't find the viscount," added the waiters, "bring the money here, and it will be returned to him."

"Naturally!" replied Chupin. And he strode hurriedly away. "Return!" he muttered; "not I! I thought for a moment they had their hands on my precious bank-note."

But he had already recovered from his fright, and as he turned his steps homeward he congratulated himself on the success of his stratagem. "For my viscount is caught," he said to himself. "The Rue d'Anjou Saint Honoré hasn't a hundred numbers in it, and even if I'm compelled to go from door to door, my task will soon be accomplished."

On reaching home he found his mother engaged in knitting, as usual. This was the only avocation that her almost complete blindness allowed her to pursue; and she followed it constantly. "Ah! here you are,

Toto," she exclaimed, joyously. "I didn't expect you so soon. Don't you scent a savory smell? As you must be greatly tired after being up all night, I'm making you a stew."

As customary when he returned, Chupin embraced the good woman with the respectful tenderness which had so surprised M. Fortunat. "You are always kind," said he, "but, unfortunately, I can't remain to dine with you."

"But you promised me."

"That's true, mamma; but business, you see—business."

The worthy woman shook her head. "Always business!" she exclaimed.

"Yes—when a fellow hasn't ten thousand francs a year."

"You have become a worker, Toto, and that makes me very happy; but you are too eager for money, and that frightens me."

"That's to say, you fear I shall do something dishonest. Ah! mother! do you think I can forget you and Monsieur André?"

His mother said no more, and he entered the tiny nook which he so pompously styled his chamber, and quickly changed the clothes he was wearing (his Sunday toggery) for an old pair of checked trousers, a black blouse, and a glazed cap. And when he had finished, and given a peculiar turn to his hair, no one would have recognized him. In place of M. Fortunat's respectable clerk, there appeared one of those vagabonds who hang about *cafés* and theatres from six in the evening till midnight, and spend the rest of their time playing cards in the low drinking dens near the *barrières*. It was the old Chupin come to life once

more—Toto Chupin as he had appeared before his conversion. And as he took a last look in the little glass hanging over the table, he was himself astonished at the transformation. “Ah!” he muttered, “I was a sorry looking devil in those days.”

Although he had cautiously avoided making any noise in dressing, his mother, with the wonderfully acute hearing of the blind, had followed each of his movements as surely as if she had been standing near watching him. “You have changed your clothes, Toto,” she remarked.

“Yes, mother.”

“But why have you put on your blouse, my son?”

Although accustomed to his mother's remarkable quickness of perception, he was amazed. Still he did not think of denying it. She would only have to extend her hand to prove that he was telling a falsehood. The blind woman's usually placid face had become stern. “So it is necessary to disguise yourself,” she said, gravely.

“But, mother——”

“Hush, my son! When a man doesn't wish to be recognized, he's evidently doing something he's ashamed of. Ever since your employer came here, you have been concealing something from me. Take care, Toto! Since I heard that man's voice, I'm sure that he is quite as capable of urging you to commit a crime as others were in days gone by.”

The blind woman was preaching to a convert; for during the past three days, M. Fortunat had shown himself in such a light that Chupin had secretly resolved to change his employer. “I promise you I'll leave him, mother,” he declared, “so you may be quite easy in mind.”

"Very well; but now, at this moment, where are you going?"

There was only one way of completely reassuring the good woman, and that was to tell her all. Chupin did so with absolute frankness. "Ah, well!" she said, when the narrative was finished. "You see now how easy it is to lead you astray! How could you be induced to play the part of a spy, when you know so well what it leads to? It's only God's protecting care that has saved you again from an act which you would have reproached yourself for all your life. Your employer's intentions are good now; but they *were* criminal when he ordered you to follow Madame d'Argelès. Poor woman! She had sacrificed herself for her son, she had concealed herself from him, and you were working to betray her. Poor creature! how she must have suffered, and how much I pity her! To be what she is, and to see herself denounced by her own son! I, who am only a poor plebeian, should die of shame under such circumstances."

Chupin blew his nose so loudly that the window-panes rattled; this was his way of repressing his emotion whenever it threatened to overcome him. "You speak like the good mother that you are," he exclaimed at last, "and I'm prouder of you than if you were the handsomest and richest lady in Paris, for you're certainly the most honest and virtuous; and I should be a thorough scoundrel if I caused you a moment's sorrow. And if ever I set my foot in such a mess again, I hope some one will cut it off. But for this once——"

"For this once, you may go, Toto; I give my consent."

He went off with a lighter heart; and on reaching the Rue d'Anjou he immediately began his investigations.

They were not successful at first. At every house where he made inquiries nobody had any knowledge of the Viscount de Coralthe. He had visited half the buildings in the street, when he reached one of the handsomest houses, in front of which stood a cart laden with plants and flowers. An old man, who seemed to be the concierge, and a valet in a red waistcoat, were removing the plants from the vehicle and arranging them in a line under the *porte cochère*. As soon as the cart was emptied, it drove away, whereupon Chupin stepped forward, and addressing the concierge, asked: "Does the Viscount de Coralthe live here?"

"Yes. What do you want with him?"

Having foreseen this question, Chupin had prepared a reply. "I certainly don't come to call on him," he answered. "My reason for inquiring is this: just now, as I passed near the Madeleine, a very elegant lady called me, and said: 'M. de Coralthe lives in the Rue d'Anjou, but I've forgotten the number. I can't go about from door to door making inquiries, so if you'll go there and ascertain his address for me, I'll give you five francs for yourself,' so my money's made."

Profiting by his old Parisian experience, Chupin had chosen such a clever excuse that both his listeners heartily laughed. "Well, Father Moulinet," cried the servant in the red waistcoat, "what do you say to that? Are there any elegant ladies who give five francs for *your* address?"

"Is there any lady who's likely to send such flowers as these to *you*?" was the response.

Chupin was about to retire with a bow, when the concierge stopped him. "You accomplish your errands so well that perhaps you'd be willing to take these

flower-pots up to the second floor, if we gave you a glass of wine!"

No proposal could have suited Chupin better. Although he was prone to exaggerate his own powers and the fecundity of his resources, he had not flattered himself with the hope that he should succeed in crossing the threshold of M. de Coralith's rooms. For, without any great mental effort, he had realized that the servant arrayed in the red waistcoat was in the viscount's employ, and these flowers were to be carried to his apartments. However any signs of satisfaction would have seemed singular under the circumstances, and so he sulkily replied: "A glass of wine! you had better say two."

"Well, I'll say a whole bottleful, my boy, if that suits you any better," replied the servant, with the charming good-nature so often displayed by people who are giving other folk's property away.

"Then I'm at your service!" exclaimed Chupin. And, loading himself with a host of flower-pots as skilfully as if he had been accustomed to handling them all his life, he added: "Now, lead the way."

The valet and the concierge preceded him with empty hands, of course; and, on reaching the second floor, they opened a door, and said: "This is the place. Come in."

Chupin had expected to find that M. de Coralith's apartments were handsomer than his own in the Faubourg Saint Denis; but he had scarcely imagined such luxury as pervaded this establishment. The chandeliers seemed marvels in his eyes; and the sumptuous chairs and couches eclipsed M. Fortunat's wonderful sofa completely. "So he no longer amuses himself with petty rascalities," thought Chupin, as he surveyed the

rooms. "Monsieur's working on a grand scale now. Decidedly this mustn't be allowed to continue."

Thereupon he busied himself placing the flowers in the numerous jardinières scattered about the rooms, as well as in a tiny conservatory, cleverly contrived on the balcony, and adjoining a little apartment with silk hangings, that was used as a smoking-room. Under the surveillance of the concierge and the valet he was allowed to visit the whole apartments. He admired the drawing-room, filled to overflowing with costly trifles; the dining-room, furnished in old oak; the luxurious bed-room with its bed mounted upon a platform, as if it were a throne, and the library filled with richly bound volumes. Everything was beautiful, sumptuous and magnificent, and Chupin admired, though he did not envy, this luxury. He said to himself that, if ever he became rich, his establishment should be quite different. He would have preferred rather more simplicity, a trifle less satin, velvet, hangings, mirrors and gilding. Still this did not prevent him from going into ecstasies over each room he entered; and he expressed his admiration so artlessly that the valet, feeling as much flattered as if he were the owner of the place, took a sort of pride in exhibiting everything.

He showed Chupin the target which the viscount practised at with pistols for an hour every morning; for Monsieur le Vicomte was a capital marksman, and could lodge eight balls out of ten in the neck of a bottle at a distance of twenty paces. He also displayed his master's swords; for Monsieur le Vicomte handled side arms as adroitly as pistols. He took a lesson every day from one of the best fencing-masters in Paris; and his duels had always terminated fortunately. He also showed the viscount's blue velvet dressing-

gown, his fur-trimmed slippers, and even his elaborately embroidered night-shirts. But it was the dressing-room that most astonished and stupefied Chupin. He stood gazing in open-mouthed wonder at the immense white marble table, with its water spigots and its basins, its sponges and boxes, its pots and vials and cups; and he counted the brushes by the dozen—brushes hard and soft, brushes for the hair, for the beard, for the hands, and the application of cosmetic to the mustaches and eyebrows. Never had he seen in one collection such a variety of steel and silver instruments, knives, pincers, scissors, and files. "One might think oneself in a chiropodist's, or a dentist's establishment," remarked Chupin to the servant. "Does your master use all these every day?"

"Certainly, or rather twice a day—morning and evening—at his toilette."

Chupin expressed his feelings with a grimace and an exclamation of mocking wonder. "Ah, well! he must have a clean skin," he said.

His listeners laughed heartily; and the concierge, after exchanging a significant glance with the valet, said *sotto voce*, "Zounds! it's his business to be a handsome fellow!" The mystery was solved.

While Chupin changed the contents of the jardinières, and remained upstairs in the intervals between the nine or ten journeys he made to the *porte-cochère* for more flowers, he listened attentively to the conversation between the concierge and the valet, and heard snatches of sentences that enlightened him wonderfully. Moreover, whenever a question arose as to placing a plant in one place rather than another, the valet stated as a conclusive argument that the baroness liked it in such or such a place, or that she would be better pleased

with this or that arrangement, or that he must comply with the instructions she had given him. Chupin was therefore obliged to conclude that the flowers had been sent here by a baroness who possessed certain rights in the establishment. But who was she?

He was manœuvring cleverly in the hope of ascertaining this point, when a carriage was heard driving into the courtyard below. "Monsieur must have returned!" exclaimed the valet, darting to the window.

Chupin also ran to look out, and saw a very elegant blue-lined brougham, drawn by a superb horse, but he did not perceive the viscount. In point of fact, M. de Coralth was already climbing the stairs, four at a time, and, a moment later, he entered the room, angrily exclaiming, "Florent, what does this mean? Why have you left all the doors open?"

Florent was the servant in the red waistcoat. He slightly shrugged his shoulders like a servant who knows too many of his master's secrets to have anything to fear, and in the calmest possible tone replied, "If the doors are open, it is only because the baroness has just sent some flowers. On Sunday, too, what a funny idea! And I have been treating Father Moulinet and this worthy fellow" (pointing to Chupin) "to a glass of wine, to acknowledge their kindness in assisting me."

Fearing recognition, Chupin hid his face as much as possible; but M. de Coralth did not pay the slightest attention to him. There was a dark frown on his handsome, usually smiling countenance, and his hair was in great disorder. Evidently enough, something had greatly annoyed him. "I am going out again," he remarked to his valet, "but first of all I must write two letters which you must deliver immediately."

He passed into the drawing-room as he spoke, and Florent scarcely waited till the door was closed before uttering an oath. "May the devil take him!" he exclaimed. "Here he sets me on the go again. It is five o'clock, too, and I have an appointment in half an hour."

A sudden hope quickened the throbbings of Chupin's heart. He touched the valet's arm, and in his most persuasive tone remarked: "I've nothing to do, and as your wine was so good, I'll do your errands for you, if you'll pay me for the wear and tear of shoe-leather."

Chupin's appearance must have inspired confidence, for the servant replied:—"Well—I don't refuse—but we'll see."

The viscount did not spend much time in writing; he speedily reappeared holding two letters which he flung upon the table, saying: "One of these is for the baroness. You must deliver it into *her* hands or into the hands of her maid—there will be no answer. You will afterward take the other to the person it is addressed to, and you must wait for an answer which you will place on my writing-table—and make haste." So saying, the viscount went off as he had entered—on the run—and a moment later, his brougham was heard rolling out of the courtyard.

Florent was crimson with rage. "There," said he, addressing Chupin rather than the concierge, "what did I tell you? A letter to be placed in madame's own hands or in the hands of her maid, and to be concealed from the baron, who is on the watch, of course. Naturally no one can execute that commission but myself."

"That's true!" replied Chupin; "but how about the other?"

The valet had not yet examined the second letter. He now took it from the table, and glanced at the address. "Ah," said he, "I can confide this one to you, my good fellow, and it's very fortunate, for it is to be taken to a place on the other side of the river. Upon my word! masters are strange creatures! You manage your work so as to have a little leisure, and the moment you think yourself free, pouf!—they send you anywhere in creation without even asking if it suits your convenience. If it hadn't been for you, I should have missed a dinner with some very charming ladies. But, above all, don't loiter on the way. I don't mind paying your omnibus fare if you like. And you heard him say there would be an answer. You can give it to Moulinet, and in exchange, he'll give you fifteen sous for your trouble, and six sous for your omnibus fare. Besides, if you can extract anything from the party the letter's intended for, you are quite welcome to it."

"Agreed, sir! Grant me time enough to give an answer to the lady who is waiting at the Madeleine, and I'm on my way. Give me the letter."

"Here it is," said the valet, handing it to Chupin. But as the latter glanced at the address he turned deadly pale, and his eyes almost started from their sockets. For this is what he read: "Madame Paul. Dealer in Tobacco. Quai de la Seine." Great as was his self-control, his emotion was too evident to escape notice. "What's the matter with you?" asked the concierge and the valet in the same breath. "What has happened to you?"

A powerful effort of will restored this young fellow's coolness, and ready in an instant with an excuse for his blunder, he replied, "I have changed my mind. What! you'd only give me fifteen sous to measure

such a distance as that! Why, it isn't a walk—it's a journey!"

His explanation was accepted without demur. His listeners thought he was only taking advantage of the need they had of his services—as was perfectly natural under the circumstances. "What! So you are dissatisfied!" cried the valet. "Very well! you shall have thirty sous—but be off!"

"So I will, at once," replied Chupin. And, imitating the whistle of a locomotive with wonderful perfection, he darted away at a pace which augured a speedy return.

However, when he was some twenty yards from the house he stopped short, glanced around him, and espying a dark corner slipped into it. "That fool in the red waistcoat will be coming out to take the letter to that famous baroness," he thought. "I'm here, and I'll watch him and see where he goes. I should like to find out the name of the kind and charitable lady who watches over his brigand of a master with such tender care."

The day and the hour were in his favor. Night was coming on, hastened by a thick fog; the street lamps were not yet lighted, and as it was Sunday most of the shops were closed. It grew dark so rapidly that Chupin was scarcely able to recognize Florent when he at last emerged from the house. It is true that he looked altogether unlike the servant in the red waistcoat. As he had the key to the wardrobe containing his master's clothes, he did not hesitate to use them whenever an opportunity offered. On this occasion he had appropriated a pair of those delicately tinted trousers which were M. de Coralith's specialty, with a handsome overcoat, a trifle too small for him, and a very elegant hat.

"Fine doings, indeed!" growled Chupin as he started in pursuit. "My servants sha'n't serve me in that way if I ever have any."

But he paused in his soliloquy, and prudently hid himself under a neighboring gateway. The gorgeous Florent was ringing at the door of one of the most magnificent mansions in the Rue de la Ville l'Evêque. The door was opened, and he went in. "Ah! ah!" thought Chupin, "he hadn't far to go. The viscount and the baroness are shrewd. When you have flowers to send to anybody it's convenient to be neighbors!"

He glanced round, and seeing an old man smoking his pipe on the threshold of a shop, he approached him and asked politely: "Can you tell me whom that big house belongs to?"

"To Baron Trigault," replied the man, without releasing his hold on his pipe.

"Thank you, monsieur," replied Chupin, gravely. "I inquired, because I think of buying a house——" And repeating the name of Trigault several times to impress it upon his memory he darted off on his errand.

It might be supposed that his unexpected success had delighted him, but, on the contrary, it rendered him even more exacting. The letter he carried burned his pocket like a red-hot iron. "Madame Paul," he muttered, "that must be the rascal's wife. First, Paul is his Christian name; secondly, I've been told that his wife keeps a tobacco shop—so the case is plain. But the strangest thing about it is that this husband and wife should write to each other, when I fancied them at dagger's ends." Chupin would have given a pint of his own blood to know the contents of the missive. The idea of opening it occurred to him, and it must be confessed that it was not a feeling of delicacy that pre-

vented him. He was deterred by a large seal which had been carefully affixed, and which would plainly furnish evidence if the letter were tampered with. Thus Chupin was punished for Florent's faults, for this seal was the viscount's' invariable precaution against his servant's prying curiosity. So our enterprising youth could only read and re-read the superscription and smell the paper, which was strongly scented with verbena. He fancied that there was some mysterious connection between this letter intended for M. de Coralthe's wife and the missive sent to the baroness. And why should it not be so? Had they not both been written under the influence of anger? Still he failed to perceive any possible connection between the rich baroness and the poor tobacco dealer, and his cogitations only made him more perplexed than ever. However, his efforts to solve the mystery did not interfere with the free use of his limbs, and he soon found himself on the Quai de la Seine. "Here I am," he muttered. "I've come more quickly than an omnibus."

The Quai de la Seine is a broad road, connecting the Rue de Flandres with the canal de l'Ourcq. On the left-hand side it is bordered with miserable shanties interspersed with some tiny shops, and several huge coal dépôts. On the right-hand side—that next to the canal—there are also a few provision stores. In the daytime there is no noisier nor livelier place than this same Quai; but nothing could be more gloomy at night-time when the shops are closed, when the few gas-lamps only increase the grimness of the shadows, and when the only sound that breaks the silence is the rippling of the water as its smooth surface is ruffled by some boatman propelling his skiff through the canal.

"The viscount must certainly have made a mistake," thought Chupin; "there is no such shop on the Quai." He was wrong, however; for after passing the Rue de Soissons he espied the red lantern of a tobacco-shop, glimmering through the fog.

XI.

HAVING almost reached the goal, Chupin slackened his pace. He approached the shop very cautiously and peered inside, deeming it prudent to reconnoitre a little before he went in. And certainly there was nothing to prevent a prolonged scrutiny. The night was very dark, the quay deserted. No one was to be seen; not a sound broke the stillness. The darkness, the surroundings, and the silence were sinister enough to make even Chupin shudder, though he was usually as thoroughly at home in the loneliest and most dangerous byways of Paris as an honest man of the middle classes would be in the different apartments of his modest household. "That scoundrel's wife must have less than a hundred thousand a year if she takes up her abode here!" thought Chupin.

And, in fact, nothing could be more repulsive than the tenement in which Madame Paul had installed herself. It was but one story high, and built of clay, and it had fallen to ruin to such an extent that it had been found necessary to prop it up with timber, and to nail some old boards over the yawning fissures in the walls. "If I lived here, I certainly shouldn't feel quite at ease on a windy day," continued Chupin, *sotto voce*.

The shop itself was of a fair size, but most wretched

in its appointments, and disgustingly dirty. The floor was covered with that black and glutinous coal-dust which forms the soil of the Quai de la Seine. An auctioneer would have sold the entire stock and fixtures for a few shillings. Four stone jars, and a couple of pairs of scales, a few odd tumblers, filled with pipes and packets of cigarettes, some wine-glasses, and three or four labelled bottles, five or six boxes of cigars, and as many packages of musty tobacco, constituted the entire stock in trade.

As Chupin compared this vile den with the viscount's luxurious abode, his blood fairly boiled in his veins. "He ought to be shot for this, if for nothing else," he muttered through his set teeth. "To let his wife die of starvation here!" For it was M. de Coralthe's wife who kept this shop. Chupin, who had seen her years before, recognized her now as she sat behind her counter, although she was cruelly changed. "That's her," he murmured. "That's certainly Mademoiselle Flavie."

He had used her maiden name in speaking of her. Poor woman! She was undoubtedly still young—but sorrow, regret, and privations, days spent in hard work to earn a miserable subsistence, and nights spent in weeping, had made her old, haggard, and wrinkled before her time. Of her once remarkable beauty naught remained but her hair, which was still magnificent, though it was in wild disorder, and looked as if it had not been touched by a comb for weeks; and her big black eyes, which gleamed with the phosphorescent and destructive brilliancy of fever. Everything about her person bespoke terrible reverses, borne without dignity. Even if she had struggled at first, it was easy to see that she struggled no longer. Her attire—her torn and soiled silk dress, and her dirty cap—revealed thorough

indolence, and that morbid indifference which at times follows great misfortunes with weak natures.

"Such is life," thought Chupin, philosophically. "Here's a girl who was brought up like a queen and allowed to have her own way in everything! If any one had predicted this in those days, how she would have sneered! I can see her now as she looked that day when I met her driving her gray ponies. If people didn't clear the road it was so much the worse for them! In those times Paris was like some great shop where she could select whatever she chose. She said: 'I want this,' and she got it. She saw a handsome young fellow and wanted him for her husband; her father, who could refuse her nothing, consented, and now behold the result!"

He had lingered longer at the window than he had meant to do, perhaps because he could see that the young woman was talking with some person in a back room, the door of which stood open. Chupin tried to find out who this person was, but he did not succeed; and he was about to go in when suddenly he saw Madame Paul rise from her seat and say a few words with an air of displeasure. And this time her eyes, instead of turning to the open door, were fixed on a part of the shop directly opposite her. "Is there some one there as well, then?" Chupin wondered.

He changed his post of observation, and, by standing on tiptoe, he succeeded in distinguishing a puny little boy, some three or four years old, and clad in rags, who was playing with the remnants of a toy-horse. The sight of this child increased Chupin's indignation. "So there's a child?" he growled. "The rascal not only deserts his wife, but he leaves his child to starve! We may as well make a note of that: and when we

settle up our accounts, he shall pay dearly for his villainy." With this threat he brusquely entered the shop.

"What do you wish, sir?" asked the woman.

"Nothing; I bring you a letter, madame."

"A letter for me! You must be mistaken."

"Excuse me; aren't you Madame Paul?"

"Yes."

"Then this is for you." And he handed her the missive which Florent had confided to his care.

Madame Paul took hold of it with some hesitation, eying the messenger suspiciously meanwhile; but, on seeing the handwriting, she uttered a cry of surprise. And, turning toward the open door, she called, "M. Mouchon! M. Mouchon! It's from him—it's from my husband; from Paul. Come, come!"

A bald-headed, corpulent man, who looked some fifty years of age, now timidly emerged from the room behind the shop with a cap in his hand. "Ah, well! my dear child," he said, in an oily voice, "what was I telling you just now? Everything comes to those who know how to wait."

However she had already broken the seal, and she was now reading the letter eagerly, clapping her hands with delight as she finished its perusal. "He consents!" she exclaimed. "He's frightened—he begs me to wait a little—look—read!"

But M. Mouchon could not read without his spectacles, and he lost at least two minutes in searching his pockets before he found them. And when they were adjusted, the light was so dim that it took him at least three minutes more to decipher the missive. Chupin had spent this time in scrutinizing—in appraising the man, as it were. "What is this venerable gen-

tleman doing here?" he thought. "He's a middle class man, that's evident from his linen. He's married—there's a wedding-ring on his finger; he has a daughter, for the ends of his necktie are embroidered. He lives in the neighborhood, for, well dressed as he is, he wears a cap. But what was he doing there in that back room in the dark?"

Meanwhile M. Mouchon had finished reading the letter. "What did I tell you?" he said complacently.

"Yes, you were right!" answered Madame Paul as she took up the letter and read it again with her eyes sparkling with joy. "And now what shall I do?" she asked. "Wait, shall I not?"

"No, no!" exclaimed the elderly gentleman, in evident dismay. "You must strike the iron while it's hot."

"But he promises me——"

"To promise and to keep one's promises are two different things."

"He wants a reply."

"Tell him——" But he stopped short, calling her attention with a gesture to the messenger, whose eyes were glittering with intense curiosity.

She understood. So filling a glass with some liquor, she placed it before Chupin, and offered him a cigar, saying: "Take a seat—here's something to keep you from feeling impatient while you wait here." Thereupon she followed the old gentleman into the adjoining room, and closed the door.

Even if Chupin had not possessed the precocious penetration he owed to his life of adventure, the young woman and the old gentleman had said enough to enable him to form a correct estimate of the situation. He was certain now that he knew the contents of the letter as perfectly as if he had read it. M. de Coral's

anger, and his order to make haste, were both explained. Moreover, Chupin distinctly saw what connection there was between the letter to the baroness and the letter to Madame Paul. He understood that one was the natural consequence of the other. Deserted by her husband, Madame Paul had at last become weary of poverty and privations. She had instituted a search for her husband, and, having found him, she had written to him in this style: "I consent to abstain from interfering with you, but only on conditions that you provide means of subsistence for me, your lawfully wedded wife, and for your child. If you refuse, I shall urge my claims, and ruin you. The scandal won't be of much use to me, it's true, but at least I shall no longer be obliged to endure the torture of knowing that you are surrounded by every luxury while I am dying of starvation."

Yes, she had evidently written that. It might not be the precise text; but no doubt it was the purport of her letter. On receiving it, Coralth had become alarmed. He knew only too well that if his wife made herself known and revealed his past, it would be all over with him. But he had no money. Charming young men like the Viscount de Coralth never have any money on hand. So, in this emergency, the dashing young fellow had written to his wife imploring her to have patience, and to the baroness, entreating, or rather commanding her to advance him a certain sum at once.

This was no doubt the case, and yet there was one circumstance which puzzled Chupin exceedingly. In former years, he had heard it asserted that Mademoiselle Flavie was the very personification of pride, and that she adored her husband even to madness. Had this great love vanished? Had poverty and sorrow

broken her spirit to such a degree that she was willing to stoop to such shameful concessions! If she were acquainted with her husband's present life, how did it happen that she did not prefer starvation, or the almshouse and a pauper's grave to his assistance? Chupin could understand how, in a moment of passion, she might be driven to denounce her husband in the presence of his fashionable acquaintances, how she might be impelled to ruin him so as to avenge herself; but he could not possibly understand how she could consent to profit by the ignominy of the man she loved. "The plan isn't hers," said Chupin to himself, after a moment's reflection. "It's probably the work of that stout old gentleman."

There was a means of verifying his suspicions, for on returning into the adjoining room, Madame Paul had not taken her son with her. He was still sitting on the muddy floor of the shop, playing with his dilapidated horse. Chupin called him. "Come here, my little fellow," said he.

The child rose, and timidly approached, his eyes dilating with distrust and astonishment. The poor boy's repulsive uncleanness was a terrible charge against the mother. Did she no longer love her own offspring? The untidiness of sorrow and poverty has its bounds. A long time must have passed since the child's face and hands had been washed, and his soiled clothes were literally falling to rags. Still, he was a handsome little fellow, and seemed fairly intelligent, in spite of his bashfulness. He was very light-haired, and in features he was extremely like M. de Coralth. Chupin took him on his knees, and, after looking to see if the door communicating with the inner room were securely closed, he asked: "What's your name, little chap?"

"Paul."

"Do you know your father?"

"No."

"Doesn't your mother ever talk to you about him?"

"Oh, yes!"

"And what does she say?"

"That he's rich—very rich."

"And what else?"

The child did not reply; perhaps his mother had forbidden him to say anything on the subject—perhaps that instinct which precedes intelligence, just as the dawn precedes daylight, warned him to be prudent with a stranger. "Doesn't your papa ever come to see you?" insisted Chupin.

"Never."

"Why?"

"Mamma is very poor."

"And wouldn't you like to go and see him?"

"I don't know. But he'll come some day, and take us away with him to a large house. We shall be all right, then; and he will give us a deal of money and pretty dresses, and I shall have plenty of toys."

Satisfied on this point, Chupin, pushed his investigations farther. "And do you know this old gentleman who is with your mamma in the other room?"

"Oh, yes!—that's Mouchon."

"And who's Mouchon?"

"He's the gentleman who owns that beautiful garden at the corner of the Rue Riquet, where there are such splendid grapes. I'm going with him to get some."

"Does he often come to see you?"

"Every evening. He always has goodies in his pocket for mamma and me."

"Why does he sit in that back room without any light?"

"Oh, he says that the customers mustn't see him."

It would have been an abominable act to continue this examination, and make this child the innocent accuser of his own mother. Chupin felt conscience-smitten even now. So he kissed the cleanest spot he could find on the boy's face, and set him on the floor again, saying, "Go and play."

The child had revealed his mother's character with cruel precision. What had she told him about his father? That he was rich, and that, in case he returned, he would give them plenty of money and fine clothes. The woman's nature stood revealed in all its deformity. Chupin had good cause to feel proud of his discernment—all his suppositions had been confirmed. He had read Mouchon's character at a glance. He had recognized him as one of those wily evil-minded men who employ their leisure to the profit of their depravity—one of those patient, cold-blooded hypocrites who make poverty their purveyor, and whose passion is prodigal only in advice. "So he's paying his court to Madame Paul," thought Chupin. "Isn't it shameful? The old villain! he might at least give her enough to eat!"

So far his preoccupation had made him forget his wine and his cigar. He emptied the glass at a single draught, but it proved far more difficult to light the cigar. "Zounds! this is a non-combustible," he growled. "When I arrive at smoking ten sous cigars, I sha'n't come here to buy them."

However, with the help of several matches and a great deal of drawing, he had almost succeeded, when the door opened, and Madame Paul reappeared with a

letter in her hand. She seemed greatly agitated; her anxiety was unmistakable. "I can't decide," she was saying to Mouchon, whose figure Chupin could only dimly distinguish in the darkness. "No, I can't. If I send this letter, I must forever renounce all hope of my husband's return. Whatever happens, he will never forgive me."

"He can't treat you worse than he does now, at all events," replied the old gentleman. "Besides, a gloved cat has never caught a mouse yet."

"He'll hate me."

"The man who wants his dog to love him, beats it; and, besides, when the wine is drawn, one must drink it."

This singular logic seemed to decide her. She handed the letter to Chupin, and drawing a franc from her pocket she offered it to him. "This is for your trouble," she said.

He involuntarily held out his hand to take the money, but quickly withdrew it, exclaiming: "No, thank you; keep it. I've been paid already." And, thereupon, he left the shop.

Chupin's mother—his poor good mother, as he called her—would certainly have felt proud and delighted at her son's disinterestedness. That very morning, he had refused the ten francs a day that M. Fortunat had offered him, and this evening he declined the twenty sous proffered him by Madame Paul. This was apparently a trifle, and yet in reality it was something marvellous, unprecedented, on the part of this poor lad, who, having neither trade nor profession, was obliged to earn his daily bread through the medium of those chance opportunities which the lower classes of Paris are continually seeking. As he returned to the Rue

de Flandres, he muttered: "Take twenty sous from that poor creature, who hasn't had enough to satisfy her hunger for heaven knows how long! That would be altogether unworthy of a man."

It is only just to say that money had never given him a feeling of satisfaction at all comparable with that which he now experienced. He was impressed, too, with a sense of vastly-increased importance on thinking that all the faculties, and all the energy he had once employed in the service of evil, were now consecrated to the service of good. By becoming the instrument of Pascal Feraille's salvation he would, in some measure, atone for the crime he had committed years before.

Chupin's mind was so busily occupied with these thoughts that he reached the Rue d'Anjou and M. de Coral's house almost before he was aware of it. To his great surprise, the concierge and his wife were not alone. Florent was there, taking coffee with them. The valet had divested himself of his borrowed finery, and had donned his red waistcoat again. He seemed to be in a savage humor; and his anger was not at all strange under the circumstances. There was but a step from M. de Coral's house to the baroness's residence, but fatalities may attend even a step! The baroness, on receiving the letter from her maid, had sent a message to Florent requesting him to wait, as she desired to speak with him! and she had been so inconsiderate as to keep him waiting for more than an hour, so that he had missed his appointment with the charming ladies he had spoken of. In his despair he had returned home to seek consolation in the society of his friend the concierge. "Have you the answer?" he asked.

"Yes, here it is," replied Chupin, and Florent had

just slipped the letter into his pocket, and was engaged in counting out the thirty sous which he had promised his messenger, when the familiar cry, "Open, please," was heard outside.

M. de Coralith had returned. He sprang to the ground as soon as the carriage entered the courtyard, and on perceiving his servant, he exclaimed: "Have you executed my commissions?"

"They have been executed, monsieur."

"Did you see the baroness?"

"She made me wait two hours to tell me that the viscount need not be worried in the least; that she would certainly be able to comply with his request to-morrow."

M. de Coralith seemed to breathe more freely. "And the other party?" he inquired.

"Gave me this for monsieur."

The viscount seized the missive, with an eager hand, tore it open, read it at one glance, and flew into such a paroxysm of passion that he quite forgot those around him, and began to tear the letter, and utter a string of oaths which would have astonished a cab-driver. But suddenly realizing his imprudence, he mastered his rage, and exclaimed, with a forced laugh: "Ah! these women! they are enough to drive one mad!" And deeming this a sufficient explanation, he added, addressing Florent. "Come and undress me; I must be up early to-morrow morning."

This remark was not lost upon Chupin, and at seven o'clock the next morning he mounted guard at M. de Coralith's door. All through the day he followed the viscount about, first to the Marquis de Valorsay's, then to the office of a business agent, then to M. Wilkie's, then, in the afternoon, to Baroness Trigault's, and

finally, in the evening, to the house of Madame d'Argeles. Here, by making himself useful to the servants, by his zeal in opening and shutting the doors of the carriages that left the house, he succeeded in gathering some information concerning the frightful scene which had taken place between the mother and the son. He perceived M. Wilkie leave the house with his clothes in disorder, and subsequently he saw the viscount emerge. He followed him, first to the house of the Marquis de Valorsay, and afterward to M. Wilkie's rooms, where he remained till nearly daybreak.

Thus, when Chupin presented himself in M. Fortunat's office at two o'clock on the Tuesday afternoon, he felt that he held every possible clue to the shameful intrigue which would ruin the viscount as soon as it was made public.

M. Fortunat knew that his agent was shrewd, but he had not done justice to his abilities; and it was, indeed, with something very like envy that he listened to Chupin's clear and circumstantial report. "I have not been as successful," he remarked, when Chupin's story was ended. But he had not time to explain how or why, for just as he was about to do so, Madame Dodelin appeared, and announced that the young lady he expected was there. "Let her come in!" exclaimed M. Fortunat, eagerly—"let her come in!"

Mademoiselle Marguerite had not been compelled to resort to any subterfuge to make her escape from Madame de Fondège's house. The General had decamped early in the morning to try his horses and his carriages, announcing, moreover, that he would breakfast at the club. And as soon as her breakfast was concluded, Madame de Fondège had hurried off to her dressmaker's, warning the household that she would

not return before dinner-time. A little while later, Madame Léon had suddenly remembered that her noble relative would certainly be expecting a visit from her, and so she dressed herself in haste, and went off, first to Dr. Jodon's and thence to the Marquis de Valorsay's.

Thus, Mademoiselle Marguerite had been able to make her escape without attracting any one's attention, and she would be able to remain away as many hours as she chose, since the servants would not know how long she had been absent even if they saw her when she returned. An empty cab was passing as she left the house, so she hailed it and got in. The step she was about to take cost her a terrible effort. It was a difficult task for her, a girl naturally so reserved, to confide in a stranger, and open to him her maidenly heart, filled with love for Pascal Feraille! Still, she was much calmer than she had been on the previous evening, when she called on the photographer for a fac-simile of M. de Valorsay's letter. Several circumstances combined to reassure her. M. Fortunat knew her already, since he was the agent whom the Count de Chalusse had employed to carry on the investigations which had resulted in her discovery at the foundling asylum. A vague presentiment told her that this man was better acquainted with her past life than she was herself, and that he could, if he chose, tell her her mother's name—the name of the woman whom the count so dreaded, and who had so pitilessly deserted her. However, her heart beat more quickly, and she felt that she was turning pale when, at Madame Dodelin's invitation, she at last entered M. Fortunat's private office. She took in the room and its occupants with a single glance. The handsome appointments of the office surprised her, for she had expected to see a

den. The agent's polite manner and rather elegant appearance disconcerted her, for she had expected to meet a coarse and illiterate boor; and finally, Victor Chupin, who was standing twisting his cap near the fireplace, attired in a blouse and a pair of ragged trousers, fairly alarmed her. Still, no sign of her agitation was perceptible on her countenance. Not a muscle of her beautiful, proud face moved—her glance remained clear and haughty, and she exclaimed in a ringing voice: "I am the late Count de Chalusse's ward, Mademoiselle Marguerite. You have received my letter, I suppose?"

M. Fortunat bowed with all the grace of manner he was wont to display in the circles where he went wife-hunting, and with a somewhat pretentious gesture he advanced an arm-chair, and asked his visitor to sit down. "Your letter reached me, mademoiselle," he replied, "and I was expecting you—flattered and honored beyond expression by your confidence. My door, indeed, was closed to any one but you."

Marguerite took the proffered seat, and there was a moment's silence. M. Fortunat found it difficult to believe that this beautiful, imposing young girl could be the poor little apprentice whom he had seen in the book-bindery, years before, clad in a coarse serge frock, with dishevelled hair covered with scraps of paper. In the meantime, Marguerite was regretting the necessity of confiding in this man, for the more she looked at him, the more she was convinced that he was not an honest, straightforward person; and she would infinitely have preferred a cynical scoundrel to this plausible and polite gentleman, whom she strongly suspected of being a hypocrite. She remained silent, waiting for M. Fortunat to dismiss the young man in the

blouse, whose presence she could not explain, and who stood in a sort of mute ecstasy, staring at her with eyes expressive of the most intense surprise and the liveliest admiration. But weary at last of this fruitless delay, she exclaimed: "I have come, monsieur, to confer with you respecting certain matters which require the most profound secrecy."

Chupin understood her, for he blushed to the tips of his ears, and started as if to leave the room. But his employer detained him with a gesture.

"Remain, Victor," he said kindly, and, turning to Mademoiselle Marguerite, he added: "You have no indiscretion to fear from this worthy fellow, mademoiselle. He knows everything, and he has already been actively at work—and with the best result—on your behalf."

"I don't understand you, sir," replied the girl.

M. Fortunat smiled sweetly. "I have already taken your business in hand, mademoiselle," said he. "An hour after the receipt of your letter I began the campaign."

"But I had not told you——"

"What you wished of me—that's true. But I allowed myself to suspect——"

"Ah!"

"I fancied I might conclude that you wished the help of my experience and poor ability in clearing an innocent man who has been vilely slandered, M. Pascal Ferailleux."

Marguerite sprang to her feet, at once agitated and alarmed. "How did you know this?" she exclaimed.

M. Fortunat had left his arm-chair, and was now leaning against the mantel-shelf, in what he considered a most becoming and awe-inspiring attitude, with

his thumb in the armhole of his waistcoat. "Ah! nothing could be more simple," he answered, in much the same tone as a conqueror might assume to explain his feat. "It is part of my profession to penetrate the intentions of persons who deign to honor me with their confidence. So my surmises are correct; at least you have not said the contrary?"

She had said nothing. When her first surprise was over, she vainly endeavored to find a plausible explanation of M. Fortunat's acquaintance with her affairs, for she was not at all deceived by his pretended perspicacity. Meanwhile, delighted by the supposed effect he had produced, he recklessly continued: "Reserve your amazement for what I am about to disclose, for I have made several important discoveries. It must have been your good angel who inspired you with the idea of coming to me. You would have shuddered if you had realized the dangers that threatened you. But now you have nothing to fear; I am watching. I am here, and I hold in my hand all the threads of the abominable intrigue for ruining you. For it is you, your person, and your fortune that are imperilled. It was solely on your account that M. Ferailleux was attacked. And I can tell you the names of the scoundrels who ruined him. The crime originated with the person who had the most powerful interest in the matter—the Marquis de Valorsay. His agent was a scoundrel who is generally known as the Viscount de Coralthe; but Chupin here can tell you his real name and his shameful past. You preferred M. Ferailleux, hence it was necessary to put him out of the way. M. de Chalusse had promised your hand to the Marquis de Valorsay. This marriage was Valorsay's only resource—the plank that might save the drowning man. People fancy he

is rich; but he is ruined. Yes, ruined completely, irretrievably. He was in such desperate straits that he had almost determined to blow his brains out before the hope of marrying you entered his mind."

"Ah!" thought Chupin, "my employer is well under way."

This was indeed the case. The name of Valorsay was quite sufficient to set all M. Fortunat's bile in motion. All thought of his ex-client irritated him beyond endurance. Unfortunately for him, however, his anger in the present instance had ruined his plans. He had intended to take Mademoiselle Marguerite by surprise, to work upon her imagination, to make her talk without saying anything himself, and to remain master of the situation. But on the contrary he had revealed everything; and he did not discover this until it was too late to retrieve his blunder. "How the Marquis de Valorsay has kept his head above water is a wonder to me," he continued. "His creditors have been threatening to sue him for more than six months. How he has been able to keep them quiet since M. de Chalusse's death, I cannot understand. However, this much is certain, mademoiselle: the marquis has not renounced his intention of becoming your husband; and to attain that object he won't hesitate to employ any means that may promise to prove effectual."

Completely mistress of herself, Mademoiselle Marguerite listened with an impassive face. "I know all this," she replied, in a frigid tone.

"What! you know——"

"Yes; but there is one thing that baffles my powers of comprehension. My dowry was the only temptation to M. de Valorsay, was it not? Why does he still wish to marry me, now that I have no fortune?"

M. Fortunat had gradually lost all his advantage. "I have asked myself the same question," he replied, "and I think I have found an answer. I believe that the marquis has in his possession a letter, or a will, or a document of some sort, written by M. de Chalusse—in fact an instrument in which the count acknowledges you as his daughter, and which consequently establishes your right to his property."

"And the marquis could urge this claim if he became my husband?"

"Certainly he could."

M. Fortunat explained M. de Valorsay's conduct exactly as the old magistrate had done. However, Made-moiselle Marguerite discreetly refrained from committing herself. The great interest that M. Fortunat seemed to take in her affairs aroused her distrust; and she decided to do what he had attempted in vain—that is, allow him to do all the talking, and to conceal all that she knew herself. "Perhaps you are right," she remarked, "but it is necessary to prove the truth of your assertion."

"I can prove that Valorsay hasn't a shilling, and that he has lived for a year by expedients which render him liable to arrest and prosecution at any time. I can prove that he deceived M. de Chalusse as to his financial position. I can prove that he conspired with M. de Coralth to ruin your lover. Wouldn't this be something?"

She smiled in a way that was exceedingly irritating to his vanity, and in a tone of good-natured incredulity, she remarked: "It is easy to *say* these things."

"And to do them," rejoined M. Fortunat, quickly. "I never promise what I cannot perform. A man should never touch a pen when he is meditating any

evil act. Of course, no one is fool enough to write down his infamy in detail. But a man cannot always be on the *qui vive*. There will be a word in one letter, a sentence in another, an allusion in a third. And by combining these words, phrases, and allusions, one may finally discover the truth."

He suddenly checked himself, warned of his fresh imprudence by the expression on Mademoiselle Marguerite's face. She drew back, and looking him full in the eyes, she exclaimed: "Then you have been in M. de Valorsay's confidence, sir? Would you be willing to swear that you never helped him in his designs?"

A silent and ignored witness of this scene, Victor Chupin was secretly delighted. "Hit!" he thought—"hit just in the bull's-eye. Zounds! there's a woman for you! She has beaten the guv'nor on every point."

M. Fortunat was so taken by surprise that he made no attempt to deny his guilt. "I confess that I acted as M. de Valorsay's adviser for some time," he replied, "and he frequently spoke to me of his intention of marrying a rich wife in order to retrieve his shattered fortunes. Upon my word, I see nothing so very bad about that! It is not a strictly honest proceeding, perhaps, but it is done every day. What is marriage in this age? Merely a business transaction, is it not? Perhaps it would be more correct to say that it is a transaction in which one person tries to cheat the other. The fathers-in-law are deceived, or the husband, or the wife, and sometimes all of them together. But when I discovered this scheme for ruining M. Ferailleur, I cried 'halt!' My conscience revolted at that. Dishonor an innocent man! It was base, cowardly, outrageous! And not being able to prevent this infamous act, I swore that I would avenge it."

Would Mademoiselle Marguerite accept this explanation? Chupin feared so, and accordingly turning quickly to his employer, he remarked: "To say nothing of the fact that this fine gentleman has swindled you outrageously, shrewd as you are—cheating you out of the forty thousand francs you lent him, and which he was to pay you eighty thousand for."

M. Fortunat cast a withering look at his clerk, but the mischief was done: denial was useless. He seemed fated to blunder in this affair. "Well, yes," he declared, "it's true. Valorsay *has* defrauded me, and I have sworn to have my revenge. I won't rest until I see him ruined."

Mademoiselle Marguerite was partially reassured, for she understood his zeal now. Her scorn for the man was only increased; but she was convinced that he would serve her faithfully. "I like this much better," said she. "It is better to have no concealment. You desire M. de Valorsay's ruin. I desire the rehabilitation of M. Ferailleux. So our interests are in common. But before acting in this matter, we must know M. Ferailleux's wishes."

"They cannot be considered."

"And why?"

"Because no one knows what has become of him. When the desire for revenge first took possession of me, I at once thought of him. I procured his address, and went to the Rue d'Ulm. But he had gone away. The very day after his misfortune, M. Ferailleux sold his furniture and went away with his mother."

"I am aware of that, and I have come to ask you to search for him. To discover his hiding-place will be only child's play to you."

"Do you suppose I haven't thought of this?" re-

plied M. Fortunat. "Why, I spent all day yesterday searching for him. By questioning the people in the neighborhood I finally succeeded in ascertaining that Madame Ferailleux left her home in a cab several hours after her son, and took a very large quantity of baggage with her. Well, do you know where she drove? To the Western railway station. I am sure of this, and I know she told a porter there that her destination was London. M. Ferailleux is now *en route* for America, and we shall never hear of him again!"

Mademoiselle Marguerite shook her head. "You are mistaken, sir," said she.

"There can be no mistake about what I have just told you."

"I don't question the result of your investigations, but appearances are deceitful. I thoroughly understand M. Ferailleux's character, and he is not the man to be crushed by an infamous calumny. He may seem to fly, he may disappear, he may conceal himself for a time, but it is only to make his vengeance more certain. What! Pascal, who is energy itself, who possesses an iron will, and invincible determination, would he renounce his honor, his future, and the woman he loves without a struggle? If he had felt that his case was hopeless, he would have destroyed himself, and as he has not done so, he is not without hope. He has not left Paris; I am sure of it."

M. Fortunat was not convinced. In his opinion this was only sentiment and rubbish. Still there was one person present who was deeply impressed by the confidence of this young girl, who was the most beautiful creature he had ever seen, and whose devotion and energy filled his heart with admiration, and this person was Chupin. He stepped forward with his eyes spark-

ling with enthusiasm, and in a feeling voice he exclaimed: "I understand your idea! Yes, M. Ferailleur is in Paris. And I shall be unworthy of the name of Chupin, if I don't find him for you in less than a fortnight!"

XII.

MADemoiselle MARGUERITE knew Pascal Ferailleur. Suddenly struck down in the full sunlight of happiness by a terrible misfortune, he, of course, experienced moments of frenzy and terrible depression; but he was incapable of the cowardice which M. Fortunat had accused him of.

Mademoiselle Marguerite only did him justice when she said that the sole condition on which he could consent to live was that of consecrating his life, and all his strength, intelligence and will to confounding this infamous calumny. And still she did not know the extent of Pascal's misfortune. How could she suppose that he believed himself deserted by her? How could she know the doubts and fears and the anguish that had been roused in his heart by the note which Madame Léon had given him at the garden gate? What did she know of the poignant suspicions that had rent his mind, after listening to Madame Vantrasson's disparaging insinuations?

It must be admitted that he was indebted to his mother alone for his escape from suicide—that grim madness that seizes hold of so many desperate, despairing men. And it was still to his mother—the incomparable guardian of his honor—that he owed his reso-

lution on the morning he applied to Baron Trigault. And his courage met with its first reward.

He was no longer the same man when he left the princely mansion which he had entered with his heart so full of anguish. He was still somewhat bewildered with the strange scenes which he had involuntarily witnessed, the secrets he had overheard, and the revelations which had been made to him; but a light gleamed on the horizon—a fitful and uncertain light, it is true, but nevertheless a hopeful gleam. At least, he would no longer have to struggle alone. An honest and experienced man, powerful by reason of his reputation, his connections and his fortune, had promised him his help. Thanks to this man whom misfortune had made a truer friend than years could have done, he would have access to the wretch who had deprived him both of his honor and of the woman he loved. He knew the weak spot in the marquis's armor now; he knew where and how to strike, and he felt sure that he should succeed in winning Valorsay's confidence, and in obtaining irrefutable proofs of his villainy.

Pascal was eager to inform his mother of the fortunate result of his visit, but certain arrangements which were needful for the success of his plans required his attention, and it was nearly five o'clock when he reached the Route de la Révolte. Madame Ferailleux was just returning home when he arrived, which surprised him considerably, for he had not known that she had intended going out. The cab she had used was still standing before the door, and she had not had time to take off her shawl and bonnet when he entered the house. She uttered a joyful cry on perceiving her son. She was so accustomed to read his secret thoughts on his face, that it was unnecessary for him to say a

word; before he had even opened his lips, she cried: "So you have succeeded?"

"Yes, mother, beyond my hopes."

"I was not deceived, then, in the worthy man who came to offer us his assistance?"

"No, certainly not. Do what I may, I can never repay him for his generosity and self-denial. If you knew, my dear mother, if you only knew——"

"What?"

He kissed her as if he wished to apologize for what he was about to say, and then he quickly replied: "Marguerite is the daughter of Baroness Trigault."

Madame Ferailleur started back, as if she had seen a reptile spring up in her pathway. "The daughter of the baroness!" she faltered. "Great Heavens!"

"It is the truth, mother; listen to me." And in a voice that trembled with emotion, he rapidly related all he had learned by his visit to the baron, softening the truth as much as he could without concealing it. But prevarication was useless. Madame Ferailleur's indignation and disgust were none the less evident. "That woman is a shameless creature," she said, coldly, when her son's narrative was concluded.

Pascal made no reply. He knew only too well that his mother was right, and yet it wounded him cruelly to hear her speak in this style. For the baroness was Marguerite's mother after all.

"So," continued Madame Ferailleur, with increasing indignation, "creatures do exist who are destitute even of the maternal instincts of animals. I am an honest woman myself; I don't say it in self-glorification, it's no credit to me; my mother was a saint, and I loved my husband; what some people call duty was my happiness, so I may be allowed to speak on this subject.

I don't excuse infidelity, but I can understand how such a thing is possible. Yes, I can understand how a beautiful young woman, who is left alone in a city like Paris, may lose her senses, and forget the worthy man who has exiled himself for her sake, and who is braving a thousand dangers to win a fortune for her. The husband who exposes his honor and happiness to such terrible risk, is an imprudent man. But when this woman has erred, when she has given birth to a child, how she can abandon it, how she can cast it off as if it were a dog, I cannot comprehend. I could imagine infanticide more easily. No, such a woman has no heart, no bowels of compassion. There is nothing human in her! For how could she live, how could she sleep with the thought that somewhere in the world her own child, the flesh of her flesh, was exposed to all the temptations of poverty, and the horrors of shame and vice? And she, the possessor of millions, she, the inmate of a palace, thinking only of dress and pleasure! How was it that she didn't ask herself every minute, 'Where is my daughter now, and what is she doing? What is she living on? Has she shelter, clothes and food? To what depths of degradation she may have sunk? Perhaps she has so far lived by honest toil, and perhaps at this very moment this support fails her, and she is abandoning herself to a life of infamy.' Great God! how does this woman dare to step out of doors? On seeing the poor wretches who have been driven to vice by want, how can she fail to say to herself: 'That, perhaps, is my daughter!'

Pascal turned pale, moved to the depths of his soul by his mother's extraordinary vehemence. He trembled lest she should say: "And you, my son, would you marry the child of such a mother?" For he knew

his mother's prejudices, and the great importance she attached to a spotless reputation transmitted from parent to child, from generation to generation. "The baroness knew that her husband adored her, and hearing of his return she became terrified; she lost her senses," he ventured to say in extenuation.

"Would you try to defend her?" exclaimed Madame Ferailleur. "Do you really think one can atone for a fault by a crime?"

"No, certainly not, but——"

"Perhaps you would censure the baroness more severely if you knew what her daughter has suffered—if you knew the perils and miseries she has been exposed to from the moment her mother left her on a door-step, near the central markets, till the day when her father found her. It is a miracle that she did not perish."

Where had Madame Ferailleur learned these particulars? Pascal asked himself this question without being able to answer it. "I don't understand you, mother," he faltered.

"Then you know nothing of Mademoiselle Marguerite's past life. Is it possible she never told you anything about it?"

"I only know that she has been very unhappy."

"Has she never alluded to the time when she was an apprentice?"

"She has only told me that she earned her living with her own hands at one time of her life."

"Well, I am better informed on the subject."

Pascal's amazement was changed to terror. "You, mother, you!"

"Yes; I—I have been to the asylum where she was received and educated. I have had a conversation with

two Sisters of Charity who remember her, and it is scarcely an hour since I left the people to whom she was formerly bound as an apprentice."

Standing opposite his mother with one hand convulsively clutching the back of the chair he was leaning on, Pascal tried to nerve himself for some terrible blow. For was not his life at stake? Did not his whole future depend upon the revelations Madame Ferailleur was about to make? "So this was your object in going out, mother?" he faltered.

"Yes."

"And you went without warning me?"

"Was it necessary? What! you love a young girl, you swear in my presence that she shall be your wife, and you think it strange that I should try to ascertain whether she is worthy of you or not? It would be very strange if I did not do so."

"This idea occurred to you so suddenly!"

Madame Ferailleur gave an almost imperceptible shrug of the shoulders, as if she were astonished to have to answer such puerile objections. "Have you already forgotten the disparaging remarks made by our new servant, Madame Vantrasson?"

"Good Heavens!"

"I understood her base insinuations as well as you did, and after your departure I questioned her, or rather I allowed her to tell her story, and I ascertained that Mademoiselle Marguerite had once been an apprentice of Vantrasson's brother-in-law, a man named Greloux, who was formerly a bookbinder in the Rue Saint-Denis, but who has now retired from business. It was there that Vantrasson met Mademoiselle Marguerite, and this is why he was so greatly surprised to see her doing the mistress at the Hôtel de Chalusse."

It seemed to Pascal that the throbbing of his heart stopped his breath.

"By a little tact I obtained the Greloux's address from Madame Vantrasson," resumed his mother. "Then I sent for a cab and drove there at once."

"And you saw them?"

"Yes; thanks to a falsehood which doesn't trouble my conscience much, I succeeded in effecting an entrance, and had an hour's conversation with them." His mother's icy tones frightened Pascal. Her slowness tortured him, and still he dared not press her. "The Greloux family," she continued, "seem to be what are called worthy people, that is, incapable of committing any crime that is punishable by the code, and very proud of their income of seven thousand francs a year. They must have been very much attached to Mademoiselle Marguerite, for they were lavish in their protestations of affection when I mentioned her name. The husband in particular seemed to regard her with a feeling of something like gratitude."

"Ah! you see, mother, you see!"

"As for the wife, it was easy to see that she had sincerely regretted the loss of the best apprentice, the most honest servant, and the best worker she had ever seen in her life. And yet, from her own story, I should be willing to swear that she had abused the poor child, and had made a slave of her." Tears glittered in Pascal's eyes, but he breathed freely once more. "As for Vantrasson," resumed Madame Ferailleux, "it is certain that he took a violent fancy to his sister's apprentice. This man, who has since become an infamous scoundrel, was then only a rake, an unprincipled drunkard and libertine. He fancied the poor little apprentice

—she was then but thirteen years old—would be only too glad to become the mistress of her employer's brother; but she scornfully repulsed him, and his vanity was so deeply wounded that he persecuted the poor girl to such an extent that she was obliged to complain, first to Madame Greloux, who—to her shame be it said—treated these insults as mere nonsense; and afterward to Greloux himself, who was probably delighted to have an opportunity of ridding himself of his indolent brother-in-law, for he turned him out of the house.”

The thought that so vile a rascal as this man Vantasson should have dared to insult Marguerite made Pascal frantic with indignation. “The wretch!” he exclaimed; “the wretch!” But without seeming to notice her son's anger, Madame Ferailleux continued: “They pretended they had not seen their former apprentice since she had been living in grandeur, as they expressed it. But in this they lied to me. For they saw her at least once, and that was on the day she brought them twenty thousand francs, which proved the nucleus of their fortune. They did not mention this fact, however.”

“Dear Marguerite!” murmured Pascal, “dear Marguerite!” And then aloud: “But where did you learn these last details, mother?” he inquired.

“At the asylum where Mademoiselle Marguerite was brought up, and there, too, I only heard words of praise. ‘Never,’ said the superior, ‘have I had a more gifted, sweeter-tempered or more attractive charge.’ They had reproached her sometimes for being too reserved, and her self-respect had often been mistaken for inordinate pride; but she had not forgotten the asylum any more than she had forgotten her former

patrons. On one occasion the superior received from her the sum of twenty-five thousand francs, and a year ago she presented the institution with one hundred thousand francs, the yearly income of which is to constitute the marriage dowry of some deserving orphan."

Pascal was greatly elated. "Well, mother!" he exclaimed, "well, is it strange that I love her?" Madame Ferailleux made no reply, and a sorrowful apprehension seized hold of him. "You are silent," said he, "and why? When the blessed day that will allow me to wed Marguerite arrives, you surely won't oppose our marriage?"

"No, my son, nothing that I have learned gives me the right to do so."

"The right! Ah, you are unjust, mother."

"Unjust! Haven't I faithfully reported all that was told me, although I knew it would only increase your passion?"

"That's true, but——"

Madame Ferailleux sadly shook her head. "Do you think," she interrupted, "that I can, without sorrow, see you choose a girl of no family, a girl who is outside the pale of social recognition? Don't you understand my disquietude when I think that the girl that you will marry is the daughter of such a woman as Baroness Trigault, an unfortunate girl whom her mother cannot even recognize, since her mother is a married woman——"

"Ah! mother, is that Marguerite's fault?"

"Did I say it was her fault? No—I only pray God that you may never have to repent of choosing a wife whose past life must ever remain an impenetrable mystery!"

Pascal had become very pale. "Mother!" he said in a quivering voice, "mother!"

"I mean that you will only know so much of Mademoiselle Marguerite's past life as she may choose to tell you," continued the obdurate old lady. "You heard Madame Vantrasson's ignoble allegations. It has been said that she was the mistress, not the daughter, of the Count de Chalusse. Who knows what vile accusations you may be forced to meet? And what is your refuge, if doubts should ever assail you? Mademoiselle Marguerite's word! Will this be sufficient? It is now, perhaps; but will it suffice in years to come? I would have my son's wife above suspicion; and she—why, there is not a single episode in her life that does not expose her to the most atrocious calumny."

"What does calumny matter? it will never shake my faith in her. The misfortunes which you reproach Marguerite for sanctify her in my eyes."

"Pascal!"

"What! Am I to scorn her because she has been unfortunate? Am I to regard her birth as a crime? Am I to despise her because her *mother* is a despicable woman? No—God be praised! the day when illegitimate children, the innocent victims of their mother's faults, were branded as outcasts, is past."

But Madame Ferailleux's prejudices were too deeply rooted to be shaken by these arguments. "I won't discuss this question, my son," she interrupted, "but take care. By declaring children irresponsible for their mother's faults, you will break the strongest tie that binds a woman to duty. If the son of a pure and virtuous wife, and the son of an adulterous woman meet upon equal ground, those who are held in check

only by the thought of their children will finally say to themselves, what does it matter?"

It was the first time that a cloud had ever arisen between mother and son. On hearing his dearest hopes thus attacked, Pascal was tempted to rebel, and a flood of bitter words rose to his lips. However he had strength enough to control himself. "Marguerite alone can triumph over these implacable prejudices," he thought; "when my mother knows her, she will feel how unjust they are!"

And as he found it difficult to remain master of himself, he stammered some excuse, and abruptly retired to his own room, where he threw himself on his bed. He felt that it was not his place to reproach his mother or censure her for her opinions. What mother had ever been so devoted as she had been? And who knows?—it was, perhaps, from these same rigid prejudices that this simple-minded and heroic woman had derived her energy, her enthusiastic love of God, her hatred of evil, and that virility of spirit which misfortune had been powerless to daunt. Besides, had she not promised to offer no opposition to his marriage! And was not this a great concession, a sacrifice which must have cost her a severe struggle? And where can one find the mother who does not count as one of the sublime joys of maternity the task of seeking a wife for her son, of choosing from among all others the young girl who will be the companion of his life, the angel of his dark and of his prosperous days? His mind was occupied with these thoughts when his door suddenly opened, and he sprang up, exclaiming: "Who is it?"

It was Madame Vantrasson, who came to announce that dinner was ready—a dinner which she had herself

prepared, for on going out Madame Ferailleux had left her in charge of the household. On seeing this woman, Pascal was overcome with rage and indignation, and felt a wild desire to annihilate her. He knew that she was only a vile slanderer, but she might meet other beings as vile as herself who would be only too glad to believe her falsehoods. And to think that he was powerless to punish her! He now realized the suffering his mother had spoken of—the most atrocious suffering which the lover can endure—powerlessness to protect the object of his affections, when she is assailed. Engrossed in these gloomy thoughts, Pascal preserved a sullen silence during the repast. He ate because his mother filled his plate; but if he had been questioned, he could scarcely have told what he was eating. And yet, the modest dinner was excellent. Madame Vantrasson was really a good cook, and in this first effort in her new situation she had surpassed herself. Her vanity as a *cordons-bleus* was piqued because she did not receive the compliments she expected, and which she felt she deserved. Four or five times she asked impatiently, “Isn’t that good?” and as the only reply was a scarcely enthusiastic “Very good,” she vowed she would never again waste so much care and talent upon such unappreciative people.

Madame Ferailleux was as silent as her son, and seemed equally anxious to finish with the repast. She evidently wanted to get rid of Madame Vantrasson, and in fact as soon as the simple dessert had been placed on the table, she turned to her, and said: “You may go home now. I will attend to the rest.”

Irritated by the taciturnity of these strange folks, the landlady of the Model Lodging House withdrew, and they soon heard the street door close behind her with

a loud bang as she left the house. Pascal drew a long breath as if relieved of a heavy weight. While Madame Vantrasson had been in the room he had scarcely dared to raise his eyes, so great was his dread of encountering the gaze of this woman, whose malignity was but poorly veiled by her smooth-tongued hypocrisy. He really feared he should not be able to resist his desire to strangle her. However, Madame Ferailleux must have understood her son's agitation, for as soon as they were alone, she said: "So you have not forgiven me for my plain speaking?"

"How can I be angry with you, mother, when I know that you are thinking only of my happiness? But how sorry I shall be if your prejudices——"

Madame Ferailleux checked him with a gesture. "Let us say no more on the subject," she remarked. "Mademoiselle Marguerite will be the innocent cause of one of the greatest disappointments of my life; but I have no reason to hate her—and I have always been able to show justice even to the persons I loved the least. I have done so in this instance, and I am going perhaps to give you a convincing proof of it."

"A proof?"

"Yes."

She reflected for a moment and then she asked: "Did you not tell me, my son, that Mademoiselle Marguerite's education has not suffered on account of her neglected childhood?"

"And it's quite true, mother."

"She worked diligently, you said, so as to improve herself?"

"Marguerite knows all that an unusually talented girl can learn in four years, when she finds herself very

unhappy, and study proves her only refuge and consolation."

"If she wrote you a note would it be written grammatically, and be free from any mistakes in spelling?"

"Oh, certainly!" exclaimed Pascal, and a sudden inspiration made him pause abruptly. He darted to his own room, and a minute later he returned with a package of letters, which he laid on the table, saying: "Here, mother, read and see for yourself."

Madame Ferailleur drew her spectacles from their case, and, after adjusting them, she began to read.

With his elbows on the table, and his head resting upon his hands, Pascal eagerly watched his mother, anxious to read her impressions on her face. She was evidently astonished. She had not expected these letters would express such nobility of sentiment, an energy no whit inferior to her own, and even an echo of her own prejudices. For this strange young girl shared Madame Ferailleur's rather bigoted opinions. Again and again she asked herself if her birth and past had not created an impassable abyss between Pascal and herself. And she had not felt satisfied on this point until the day when the gray-haired magistrate, after hearing her story, said: "If I had a son, I should be proud to have him beloved by you!"

It soon became apparent that Madame Ferailleur was deeply moved, and once she even raised her glasses to wipe away a furtive tear which made Pascal's heart leap with very joy. "These letters are admirable," she said at last; "and no young girl, reared by a virtuous mother, could have given better expression to nobler sentiments; but——" She paused, not wishing to wound her son's feelings, and as he insisted, she added:

"But, these letters have the irreparable fault of being addressed to you, Pascal!"

This, however, was the expiring cry of her intractable obstinacy. "Now," she resumed, "wait before you censure your mother." So saying, she rose, opened a drawer, and taking from it a torn and crumpled scrap of paper, she handed it to her son, exclaiming: "Read this attentively."

This proved to be the note in pencil which Madame Léon had given to Pascal, and which he had divined rather than read by the light of the street-lamp; he had handed it to his mother on his return, and she had kept it. He had scarcely been in his right mind the evening he received it, but now he was enjoying the free exercise of all his faculties. He no sooner glanced at the note than he sprang up, and in an excited voice, exclaimed, "Marguerite never wrote this!"

The strange discovery seemed to stupefy him. "I was mad, raving mad!" he muttered. "The fraud is palpable, unmistakable. How could I have failed to discover it?" And as if he felt the need of convincing himself that he was not deceived, he continued, speaking to himself rather than to his mother: "The handwriting is not unlike Marguerite's, it's true; but it's only a clever counterfeit. And who doesn't know that all writings in pencil resemble each other more or less? Besides, it's certain that Marguerite, who is simplicity itself, would not have made use of such pretentious melodramatic phrases. How could I have been so stupid as to believe that she ever thought or wrote this: 'One cannot break a promise made to the dying; I shall keep mine even though my heart break.' And again: 'Forget, therefore, the girl who has loved you so much; she is now the betrothed of another, and

honor requires she should forget even your name!’” He read these passages with an extravagant emphasis, which heightened their absurdity. “And what shall I say of these mistakes in spelling?” he resumed. “You noticed them, of course, mother?—command is written with a single ‘m,’ and supplicate with one ‘p.’ These are certainly not mistakes that we can attribute to haste! Ignorance is proved since the blunder is always the same. The forger is evidently in the habit of omitting one of the double letters.”

Madame Ferailleux listened with an impassive face. “And these mistakes are all the more inexcusable since this letter is only a copy,” she observed, quietly.

“What?”

“Yes; a verbatim copy. Yesterday evening, while I was examining it for the twentieth time, it occurred to me that I had read some portions of it before. Where, and under what circumstances? It was a puzzle which kept me awake most of the night. But this morning I suddenly remembered a book which I had seen in the hands of the workmen at the factory, and which I had often laughed over. So, while I was out this morning I entered a book-shop, and purchased the volume. That’s it, there on the corner of the mantel-shelf. Take it and see.”

Pascal obeyed, and noticed with surprise that the work was entitled, “The Indispensable and Complete Letter-writer, for Both Sexes, in Every Condition of Life.”

“Now turn to the page I have marked,” said Madame Ferailleux.

He did so, and read: “(*Model 198*). Letter from a young lady who has promised her dying father to renounce the man she loves, and to bestow her hand

upon another." Doubt was no longer possible. Line for line and word for word, the mistakes in spelling excepted, the note was an exact copy of the stilted prose of the "Indispensable Letter-writer."

It seemed to Pascal as if the scales had suddenly fallen from his eyes, and that he could now understand the whole intrigue which had been planned to separate him from Marguerite. His enemies had dishonored him in the hope that she would reject and scorn him, and, disappointed in their expectations, they had planned this pretended rupture of the engagement to prevent him from making any attempt at self-justification. So, in spite of some short-lived doubts, his love had been more clear-sighted than reason, and stronger than appearances. He had been quite right, then, in saying to his mother: "I can never believe that Marguerite deserts me at a moment when I am so wretched—that she condemns me unheard, and has no greater confidence in me than in my accusers. Appearances may indicate the contrary, but I am right." Certain circumstances, which had previously seemed contradictory, now strengthened this belief. "How is it," he said to himself, "that Marguerite writes to me that her father, on his death-bed, made her promise to renounce me, while Valorsay declares the Count de Chalusse died so suddenly, that he had not even time to acknowledge his daughter or to bequeath her his immense fortune? One of these stories must be false; and which of them? The one in this note most probably. As for the letter itself, it must have been the work of Madame Léon."

If he had not already possessed irrefutable proofs of this, the "Indispensable Letter-writer" would have shown it. The housekeeper's perturbation when she

met him at the garden gate was now explained. She was shuddering at the thought that she might be followed and watched, and that Marguerite might appear at any moment, and discover everything.

"I think it would be a good plan to let this poor young girl know that her companion is Valorsay's spy," remarked Madame Ferailleur.

Pascal was about to approve this suggestion, when a sudden thought deterred him. "They must be watching Marguerite very closely," he replied, "and if I attempt to see her, if I even venture to write to her, our enemies would undoubtedly discover it. And then, farewell to the success of my plans."

"Then you prefer to leave her exposed to these dangers?"

"Yes, even admitting there is danger, which is by no means certain. Owing to her past life, Marguerite's experience is far in advance of her years, and if some one told me that she had fathomed Madame Léon's character, I should not be at all surprised."

It was necessary to ascertain what had become of Marguerite; and Pascal was puzzling his brain to discover how this might be done, when suddenly he exclaimed: "Madame Vantrasson! We have her; let us make use of her. It will be easy to find some excuse for sending her to the Hôtel de Chalusse: she will gossip with the servants there, and in that way we can discover the changes that have taken place."

This was a heroic resolution on Pascal's part, and one which he would have recoiled from the evening before. But it is easy to be brave when one is hopeful; and he saw his chances of success increase so rapidly that he no longer feared the obstacles that had once seemed almost insurmountable. Even his mother's op-

position had ceased to alarm him. For why should he fear after the surprising proof she had given him of her love of justice, proving that the pretended letter from Mademoiselle Marguerite was really a forgery?

He slept but little that night and did not stir from the house on the following day. He was busily engaged in perfecting his plan of attack against the marquis. His advantages were considerable, thanks to Baron Trigault, who had placed a hundred thousand francs at his disposal; but the essential point was to use this amount in such a way as to win Valorsay's confidence, and induce him to betray himself. Pascal's hours of meditation were not spent in vain, and when it became time for him to repair to his enemy's house, he said to his mother: "I've found a plan; and if the baron will let me follow it out, Valorsay is mine!"

XIII.

It was pure childishness on Pascal's part to doubt Baron Trigault's willingness to agree even with closed eyes to any measures he might propose. He ought to have recollected that their interests were identical, that they hated the same men with equal hatred, and that they were equally resolved upon vengeance. And certainly the events which had occurred since their last interview had not been of a nature to modify the baron's intentions. However, misfortune had rendered Pascal timid and suspicious, and it was not until he reached the baron's house that his fears vanished. The manner in which the servants received him proved that the baron greatly esteemed him: for the man must be stupid indeed who does not know that the greeting of

the servants is ever in harmony with the feelings of the master of the house. "Will you be kind enough to follow me?" said the servant to whom he handed his card. "The baron is very busy, but that doesn't matter. He gave orders that monsieur should be shown up as soon as he arrived."

Pascal followed without a word. The elegance of this princely abode never varied. The same careless, prodigal, regal luxury was apparent everywhere. The servants—whose name was legion—were always passing noiselessly to and fro. A pair of horses, worth at least a thousand louis, and harnessed to the baroness's brougham, were stamping and neighing in the courtyard; and the hall was, as usual, fragrant with the perfume of rare flowers, renewed every morning.

On his first visit Pascal had only seen the apartments on the ground floor. This time his guide remarked that he would take him upstairs to the baron's private room. He was slowly ascending the broad marble staircase and admiring the bronze balustrade, the rich carpet, the magnificent frescoes, and the costly statuary, when a rustle of silk resounded near him. He had only time to step aside, and a lady passed him rapidly, without turning her head, or even deigning to look at him. She did not appear more than forty, and she was still very beautiful, with her golden hair dressed high on the back of her head. Her costume, brilliant enough in hue to frighten a cab horse, was extremely eccentric in cut; but it certainly set off her peculiar style of beauty to admirable advantage.

"That's the baroness," whispered the servant, after she had passed.

Pascal did not need to be told this. He had seen her but once, and then only for a second; but it had been

under such circumstances that he should never forget her so long as he lived. And now he understood the strange and terrible impression which had been produced upon him when he saw her first. Mademoiselle Marguerite was the living prototype of this lady, save as regards the color of her hair. And there would have been no difference in this respect had the baroness allowed her locks to retain their natural tint. Her hair had been black, like Marguerite's, and black it had remained until she was thirty-five, when she bleached it to the fashionable color of the time. And every fourth day even now her hairdresser came to apply a certain compound to her head, after which she remained in the bright sunlight for several hours, so as to impart a livelier shade of gold to her dyed locks.

Pascal had scarcely regained his composure, when the servant opened the door of an immense apartment as large as a handsome *suite* of rooms, and magnificently furnished. Here sat the baron, surrounded by several clerks, who were busily engaged in putting a pile of papers and documents in order.

But as soon as Pascal entered, the baron rose, and cordially holding out his hand, exclaimed, "Ah! here you are at last, Monsieur Mauméjan!"

So he had not forgotten the name which Pascal had assumed. This was a favorable omen. "I called, monsieur——" began the young man.

"Yes—I know—I know!" interrupted the baron. "Come, we must have a talk."

And, taking Pascal's arm, he led him into his private sanctum, separated from the large apartment by folding-doors, which had been removed, and replaced by hangings. Once there he indicated by a gesture that they could be heard in the adjoining room, and that it was

necessary to speak in a low tone. "You have no doubt come," said he, "for the money I promised that dear Marquis de Valorsay—I have it all ready for you; here it is." So saying, he opened an *escritoire*, and took out a large roll of bank-notes, which he handed to Pascal. "Here, count it," he added, "and see if the amount is correct."

But Pascal, whose face had suddenly become as red as fire, did not utter a word in reply. On receiving this money a new but quite natural thought had entered his mind for the first time. "What is the matter?" inquired the baron, surprised by this sudden embarrassment. "What has happened to you?"

"Nothing, monsieur, nothing! Only I was asking myself—if I ought—if I can accept this money."

"Bah! and why not?"

"Because if you lend it to M. de Valorsay, it is perhaps lost."

"*Perhaps!* You are polite——"

"Yes, monsieur, you are right. I ought to have said that it is sure to be lost; and hence my embarrassment. Is it not solely on my account that you sacrifice a sum which would be a fortune to many men? Yes. Very well, then. I am asking myself if it is right for me to accept such a sacrifice, when it is by no means certain that I shall ever be able to requite it. Shall I ever have a hundred thousand francs to repay you?"

"But isn't this money absolutely necessary to enable you to win Valorsay's confidence?"

"Yes, and if it belonged to me I should not hesitate."

Though the baron had formed a high estimate of Pascal's character, he was astonished and deeply touched by these scruples, and this excessive delicacy of feeling. Like most opulent men, he knew few poor

people who wore their poverty with grace and dignity, and who did not snatch at a twenty-franc piece wherever they chanced to find it. "Ah, well, my dear Ferailleur," he said, kindly, "don't trouble yourself on this score. It's not at your request nor solely on your account that I make this sacrifice."

"Oh!"

"No; I give you my word of honor it isn't. Leaving you quite out of the question, I should still have lent Valorsay this money; and if you do not wish to take it to him, I shall send it by some one else."

After that, Pascal could not demur any further. He took the baron's proffered hand and pressed it warmly, uttering only this one word, made more eloquent than any protestations by the fervor with which it was spoken: "Thanks!"

The baron shrugged his shoulders good-naturedly, like a man who fails to see that he has done anything at all meritorious, or even worthy of the slightest acknowledgment. "And you must understand, my dear sir," he resumed, "that you can employ this sum as you choose, in advancing your interests, which are identical with mine. You can give the money to Valorsay at such a time and under such conditions as will best serve your plans. Give it to him in an hour or in a month, all at once or in fifty different instalments, as you please. Only use it like the rope one ties round a dog's neck before drowning him."

The keenest penetration was concealed beneath the baron's careless good-nature. Pascal knew this, and feeling that his protector understood him, he said: "You overpower me with kindness."

"Nonsense!"

"You offer me just what I came to ask for."

"So much the better."

"But you will allow me to explain my intentions?"

"It is quite unnecessary, my dear sir."

"Excuse me; if I follow my present plan, I shall be obliged to ascribe certain sentiments, words, and even acts, to you, which you might perhaps disavow, and—"

With a careless toss of the head, accompanied by a disdainful snap of the fingers, the baron interrupted him. "Set to work, and don't give yourself the slightest uneasiness about that. You may do whatever you like, if you only succeed in unmasking this dear marquis, and Coralth, his worthy acolyte. Show me up in whatever light you choose. Who will you be in Valorsay's eyes? Why, Mauméjan, one of my business agents, and I can always throw the blame on you." And as if to prove that he had divined even the details of the scheme devised by his young friend, he added: "Besides, every one knows that a millionaire's business agent is anything but a pleasant person to deal with. A millionaire, who is not a fool, must always smile, and no matter how absurd the demands upon him may be, he must always answer: 'Yes, certainly, certainly—I should be only too happy!' But then he adds: 'You must arrange the matter with my agent. Confer with him.' And it is the unlucky agent who must object, declare that his employer has no money at his disposal just now, and finally say, 'No.'"

Pascal was still disposed to insist, but the baron was obdurate. "Oh! enough, enough!" he exclaimed. "Don't waste precious time in idle discussion. The days are only twenty-four hours long: and as you see, I'm very busy, so busy that I've not touched a card since the day before yesterday. I am preparing a delightful surprise for Madame Trigault, my daughter, and my

son-in-law. It has been rather a delicate operation, but I flatter myself that I have succeeded finely." And he laughed a laugh that was not pleasant to hear. "You see, I've had enough of paying several hundred thousand francs a year for the privilege of being sneered at by my wife, scorned by my daughter, swindled by my son-in-law, and vilified and anathematized by all three of them. I am still willing to go on paying, but only on conditions that they give me in return for my money, if not the reality, at least a show of love, affection, and respect. I'm determined to have the semblance of these things; I'm quite resolved on that. Yes, I will have myself treated with deference. I'll be petted and coddled and made much of, or else I'll suspend payment. It was one of my old friends, a *parvenu* like myself—a man whose domestic happiness I have envied for many years—who gave me this receipt: 'At home,' said he, 'with my wife, my daughters, and my sons-in-law, I'm like a peer of England at an hotel. I order first-class happiness at so much a month. If I get it I pay for it; if I don't get it, I cut off the supplies. When I get extras I pay for them cheerfully, without haggling. Follow my example, my old friend, and you'll have a comfortable life.' And I shall follow his advice, M. Ferailleux, for I am convinced that his theory is sound and practicable. I have led this life long enough. I'll spend my last days in peace, or, as God hears me, I'll let my family die of starvation!"

His face was purple, and the veins on his forehead stood out like whipcords, but not so much from anger as from the constraint he imposed upon himself by speaking in a whisper. He drew a long breath, and then in a calmer tone, resumed: "But you must make

haste and succeed, M. Ferailleux, if you don't want the young girl you love to be deprived of her rightful heritage. You do not know into what unworthy hands the Chalusse property is about to fall." He was on the point of telling Pascal the story of Madame d'Argelès and M. Wilkie, when he was interrupted by the sound of a lively controversy in the hall.

"Who's taking such liberty in my house?" the baron began. But the next instant he heard some one fling open the door of the large room adjoining, and then a coarse, guttural voice called out: "What! he isn't here! This is too much!"

The baron made an angry gesture. "That's Kami-Bey," said he, "the Turk whom I am playing that great game of cards with. The devil take him! He will be sure to force his way in here—so we may as well join him, M. Ferailleux."

On reëntering the adjoining apartment Pascal beheld a very corpulent man, with a very red face, a straggling beard, a flat nose, small, beadlike eyes, and sensual lips. He was clad in a black frock-coat, buttoned tight to the throat, and he wore a fez. This costume gave him the appearance of a chunky bottle, sealed with red wax. Such, indeed, was Kami-Bey, a specimen of those semi-barbarians, loaded with gold, who are not attracted to Paris by its splendors and glories, but rather by its corruption—people who come there persuaded that money will purchase anything and everything, and who often return home with the same conviction. Kami was no doubt more impudent, more cynical and more arrogant than others of his class. As he was more wealthy, he had more followers; he had been more toadied and flattered, and victimized to a greater extent by the host of female in-

triguer, who look upon every foreigner as their rightful prey.

He spoke French passably well, but with an abominable accent. "Here you are at last!" he exclaimed, as the baron entered the room. "I was becoming very anxious."

"About what, prince?"

Why Kami-Bey was called prince no one knew, not even the man himself. Perhaps it was because the lackey who opened his carriage door on his arrival at the Grand Hôtel had addressed him by that title.

"About what!" he repeated. "You have won more than three hundred thousand francs from me, and I was wondering if you intended to give me the slip."

The baron frowned, and this time he omitted the title of prince altogether. "It seems to me, sir, that according to our agreement, we were to play until one of us had won five hundred thousand francs," he said haughtily.

"That's true—but we ought to play every day."

"Possibly: but I'm very busy just now. I wrote to you explaining this, did I not? If you are at all uneasy, tear up the book in which the results of our games are noted, and that shall be the end of it. You will gain considerably by the operation."

Kami-Bey felt that the baron would not tolerate his arrogance, and so with more moderation he exclaimed: "It isn't strange that I've become suspicious. I'm so victimized on every side. Because I'm a foreigner and immensely rich, everybody fancies he has a right to plunder me. Men, women, hotel-keepers and merchants, all unite in defrauding me. If I buy pictures, they sell me vile daubs at fabulous prices. They ask ridiculous amounts for horses, and then give me worthless, worn-out animals. Everybody borrows money

from me—and I'm never repaid. I shall be ruined if this sort of thing goes on much longer."

He had taken a seat, and the baron saw that he was not likely to get rid of his guest very soon; so approaching Pascal he whispered: "You had better go off, or you may miss Valorsay. And be careful, mind; for he is exceedingly shrewd. Courage and good luck!"

Courage! It was not necessary to recommend that to Pascal. He who had triumphed over his despair in the terrible hours, when he had reason to suppose that Marguerite believed him guilty and had abandoned him, could scarcely lack courage. While he was condemned to inaction, his mind had no doubt been assailed by countless doubts and fears; but now that he knew whom he was to attack—now that the decisive moment had come, he was endowed with indomitable energy; he had turned to bronze, and he felt sure that nothing could disconcert or even trouble him in future. The weapons he had to use were not at all to his taste, but he had not been allowed a choice in the matter; and since his enemies had decided on a warfare of duplicity, he was resolved to surpass them in cunning, and vanquish them by deception.

So, while hastening to the Marquis de Valorsay's residence, he took stock of his chances, and recapitulated his resources, striving to foresee and remember everything. Thus if he failed—for he admitted the possibility of defeat, without believing in it—he would have no cause to reproach himself. Only fools find consolation in saying: "Who could have foreseen that?" Great minds do foresee. And Pascal felt almost certain that he was fully prepared for any emergency.

That morning, before leaving home, he had dressed with extreme care, realizing that the shabby clothes he had worn on his first visit to the Trigault mansion would not be appropriate on such an occasion as this. The baron's agent could scarcely have a poverty-stricken appearance, for contact with millionaires is supposed to procure wealth as surely as proximity to fire insures warmth. So he arrayed himself in a suit of black, which was neither too elegant nor too much worn, and donned a broad white necktie. He could see only one immediate, decisive chance against him. M. de Valorsay might possibly recognize him. He thought not, but he was not sure; and anxious on this account, he at first decided to disguise himself. However, on reflection, he concluded not to do so. An imperfect disguise would attract attention and awaken suspicion; and could he really disguise his physiognomy? He was certain he could not. Very few men are capable of doing so successfully, even after long experience. Only two or three detectives and half a dozen actors possess the art of really changing their lineaments. Thus after weighing the pros and cons, Pascal determined to present himself as he was at the marquis's house.

On approaching M. de Valorsay's residence in the Avenue des Champs Elysées, he slackened his pace. The mansion, which stood between a courtyard and a garden, was very large and handsome. The stables and carriage-house—really elegant structures—stood on either side of the courtyard, near the half-open gate of which five or six servants were amusing themselves by teasing a large dog. Pascal was just saying to himself that the coast was clear, and that he should incur no danger by going in, when he saw the servants

step aside, the gate swing back, and M. de Coralthe emerged, accompanied by a young, fair-haired man, whose mustaches were waxed and turned up in the most audacious fashion. They were arm in arm, and turned in the direction of the Arc de Triomphe. Pascal's heart thrilled with joy. "Fate favors me!" he said to himself. "If it hadn't been for Kani-Bey, who detained me a full quarter of an hour at Baron Trigault's, I should have found myself face to face with that miserable viscount, and then all would have been lost. But now I'm safe!"

It was with this encouraging thought that he approached the house.

"The marquis is very busy this morning," said the servant to whom Pascal addressed himself at the gate. "I doubt if he can see you." But when Pascal handed him one of his visiting cards, bearing the name of Mauméjan, with this addition in pencil: "Who calls as the representative of Baron Trigault," the valet's face changed as if by enchantment. "Oh!" said he, "that's quite a different matter. If you come from Baron Trigault, you will be received with all the respect due to the Messiah. Come in. I will announce you myself."

Everything in M. de Valorsay's house, as at the baron's residence, indicated great wealth, and yet a close observer would have detected a difference. The luxury of the Rue de la Ville-l'Evêque was of a real and substantial character, which one did not find in the Avenue des Champs Elysées. Everything in the marquis's abode bore marks of the haste which mars the merest trifle produced at the present age. "Take a seat here, and I will see where the marquis is," said the servant, as he ushered Pascal into a large drawing-

room. The apartment was elegantly furnished, but had somewhat lost its freshness; the carpet, which had once been a marvel of beauty, was stained in several places, and as the servants had not always been careful to keep the shutters closed, the sunlight had perceptibly faded the curtains. The attention of visitors was at once attracted by the number of gold and silver cups, vases, and statuettes scattered about on side-tables and cheffoniers. Each of these objects bore an inscription, setting forth that it had been won at such a race, in such a year, by such a horse, belonging to the Marquis de Valorsay. These were indeed the marquis's chief claims to glory, and had cost him at least half of the immense fortune he had inherited. However, Pascal did not take much interest in these trophies, so the time of waiting seemed long. "Valorsay is playing the diplomat," he thought. "He doesn't wish to appear to be anxious. Unfortunately, his servant has betrayed him."

At last the valet returned. "The marquis will see you now, monsieur," said he.

This summons affected Pascal's heart like the first roll of a drum beating the charge. But his coolness did not desert him. "Now is the decisive moment," he thought. "Heaven grant that he may not recognize me!" And with a firm step he followed the valet.

M. de Valorsay was seated in the apartment he usually occupied when he remained at home—a little smoking-room connected with his bedroom. He was to all intents busily engaged in examining some sporting journals. A bottle of Madeira and a partially filled glass stood near him. As the servant announced "Monsieur Mauméjan!" he looked up and his eyes met Pascal's. But his glance did not waver; not a

muscle of his face moved; his countenance retained its usually cold and disdainful expression. Evidently he had not the slightest suspicion that the man he had tried to ruin—his mortal enemy—was standing there before him.

“M. Mauméjan,” said he, “Baron Trigault’s agent?”

“Yes, monsieur——”

“Pray be seated. I am just finishing here; I shall be at leisure in a moment.”

Pascal took a chair. He had feared that he might not be able to retain his self-control when he found himself in the presence of the scoundrel who, after destroying his happiness, ruining his future, and depriving him of his honor—dearer than life itself—was at that moment endeavoring, by the most infamous manœuvres, to rob him of the woman he loved. “If my blood mounted to my brain,” he had thought, “I should spring upon him and strangle him!” But no. His arteries did not throb more quickly; it was with perfect calmness—the calmness of a strong nature—that he stealthily watched M. de Valorsay. If he had seen him a week before he would have been startled by the change which the past few days had wrought in this brilliant nobleman’s appearance. He was little more than a shadow of his former self. And seen at this hour, before placing himself in his valet’s hands, before his premature decrepitude had been concealed by the artifices of the toilet, he was really frightful. His face was haggard, and his red and swollen eyelids betrayed a long-continued want of sleep.

The fact is, he had suffered terribly during the past week. A man may be a scapegrace and a spendthrift and may boast of it; he may have no principle and no conscience; he may be immoral, he may defy God and

the devil, but it is nevertheless true that he suffers fearful anguish of mind when he is guilty, for the first time, of a positive crime, forbidden by the laws and punishable with the galleys. And who can say how many crimes the Marquis de Valorsay had committed since the day he provided his accomplice, the Viscount de Coralth, with those fatal cards? And apart from this there was something extremely appalling in the position of this ruined millionaire, who was contending desperately against his creditors for the vain appearance of splendor, with the despairing energy of a shipwrecked mariner struggling for the possession of a floating spar. Had he not confessed to M. Fortunat that he had suffered the tortures of the damned in his struggle to maintain a show of wealth, while he was often without a penny in his pocket, and was ever subject to the pitiless surveillance of thirty servants? His agony, when he thought of his precarious condition, could only be compared to that of a miner, who, while ascending from the bowels of the earth, finds that the rope, upon which his life depends, is slowly parting strand by strand, and who asks himself, in terror, if the few threads that still remain unsevered will be strong enough to raise him to the mouth of the pit.

However, the moment which M. de Valorsay had asked for had lengthened into a quarter of an hour, and he had not yet finished his work. "What the devil is he doing?" wondered Pascal, who was following his enemy's slightest movement with eager curiosity.

Countless sporting newspapers were strewn over the table, the chairs, and the floor around the marquis, who took them up one after another, glanced rapidly through their columns, and threw them on the floor again, or placed them on a pile before him, first mark-

ing certain passages with a red pencil. At last, probably fearing that Pascal was growing impatient, he looked up and said:

"I am really very sorry to keep you waiting so long, but some one is waiting for this work to be completed."

"Oh! pray continue, Monsieur le Marquis," interrupted Pascal. "Strange to say, I have a little leisure at my command just now."

The marquis seemed to feel that it was necessary to make some remark in acknowledgment of this courtesy on his visitor's part, and so, as he continued his work, he condescended to explain its purpose. "I am playing the part of a commentator," he remarked. "I sold seven of my horses a few days ago, and the purchaser, before paying the stipulated price, naturally required an exact and authentic statement of each animal's performances. However, even this does not seem to have satisfied the gentleman, for he has now taken it into his head to ask for such copies of the sporting journals as record the victories or defeats of the animals he has purchased. A gentleman is not so exacting generally. It is true, however, that I have a foreigner to deal with—one of those half-civilized nabobs who come here every year to astonish the Parisians with their wealth and display, and who, by their idiotic prodigality, have so increased the price of everything that life has become well-nigh an impossibility to such of us as don't care to squander an entire fortune in a couple of years. These folks are the curse of Paris, for, with but few exceptions, they only use their millions to enrich notorious women, scoundrels, hotel-keepers, and jockeys."

Pascal at once thought of the foreigner, Kami-Bey, whom he had met at Baron Trigault's half an hour

before, and who had complained so bitterly of having had worthless scrubs palmed off upon him when he fancied he had purchased valuable animals. "Kami-Bey must be this exacting purchaser," thought Pascal, "and it's probable that the marquis, desperately straitened as he is, has committed one of those frauds which lead their perpetrator to prison?" The surmise was by no means far-fetched, for in sporting matters, at least, there was cause to suspect Valorsay of great elasticity of conscience. Had he not already been accused of defrauding Domingo's champions by a conspiracy?

At last the marquis heaved a sigh of relief. "I've finished," he muttered, as he tied up the bundle of papers he had laid aside, and after ringing the bell, he said to the servant who answered the summons: "Here, take this package to Prince Kami at the Grand Hôtel."

Pascal's presentiments had not deceived him, and he said to himself: "This is a good thing to know. Before this evening I shall look into this affair a little."

A storm was decidedly gathering over the Marquis de Valorsay's head. Did he know it? Certainly he must have expected it. Still he had sworn to stand fast until the end. Besides, he would not concede that all was lost; and, like most great gamblers, he told himself that since he had so much at stake, he might reasonably hope to succeed. He rose, stretched himself, as a man is apt to do after the conclusion of a tiresome task, and then, leaning against the mantelshelf, he exclaimed: "Now, Monsieur Mauméjan, let us speak of the business that brings you here." His negligent attitude and his careless tone were admirably assumed, but a shrewd observer would not have been deceived by them, or by the indifferent manner in which

he added: "You bring me some money from Baron Trigault?"

Pascal shook his head, as he replied: "I regret to say that I don't, Monsieur le Marquis."

This response had the same effect as a heavy rock falling upon M. de Valorsay's bald pate. He turned whiter than his linen, and even tottered, as if his lame leg, which was so much affected by sudden changes in the weather, had utterly refused all service. "What! you haven't—this is undoubtedly a joke."

"It is only too serious!"

"But I had the baron's word."

"Oh! his word!"

"I had his solemn promise."

"It is sometimes impossible to keep one's promises, sir."

The consequences of this disappointment must have been terrible, for the marquis could not maintain his self-control. Still he strove valiantly to conceal his emotion. He thought to himself that if he allowed this man to see what a terrible blow this really was, he would virtually confess his absolute ruin, and have to renounce the struggle, and own himself vanquished and lost. So, summoning all his energy, he mastered his emotion in some degree, and, instead of appearing desperate, succeeded in looking only irritated and annoyed. "In short," he resumed, angrily, "you have brought no money! I counted on a hundred thousand francs this morning. Nothing! This is kind on the baron's part! But probably he doesn't understand the embarrassing position in which he places me."

"Excuse me, Monsieur le Marquis, he understands it so well that, instead of informing you by a simple note, he sent me to acquaint you with his sincere regret.

When I left him an hour ago, he was really disconsolate. He was particularly anxious I should tell you that it was not his fault. He counted upon the payment of two very large amounts, and both of these have failed him."

The marquis had now recovered a little from the shock, though he was still very pale. He looked at Pascal with evident distrust, for he knew with what sweet excuses well-bred people envelope their refusals. "So the baron is disconsolate," he remarked, in a tone of perceptible irony.

"He is indeed!"

"Poor baron! Ah! I pity him—pity him deeply."

As cold and as unmoved as a statue, Pascal seemed quite unconscious of the effect of the message he had brought—quite unconscious of Valorsay's sufferings and self-constraint. "You think I am jesting, monsieur," he said, quietly, "but I assure you that the baron is very short of money just now."

"Nonsense! a man worth seven or eight millions of francs."

"I should say ten millions, at least."

"Then the excuse is all the more absurd."

Pascal shrugged his shoulders disdainfully. "It astonishes me, Monsieur le Marquis, to hear *you* speak in this way. It is not the magnitude of a man's income that constitutes affluence, but rather the way in which that income is spent. In this foolish age, almost all rich people are in arrears. What income does the baron derive from his ten millions of francs? Not more than five hundred thousand. A very handsome fortune, no doubt, and I should be more than content with it. But the baron gambles, and the baroness is the most elegant—in other words, the most extravagant

—woman in Paris. They both of them love luxury, and their establishment is kept up in princely style. What are five hundred thousand francs under such circumstances as those? Their situation must be something like that of several millionaires of my acquaintance, who are obliged to take their silver to the pawnbroker's while waiting for their rents to fall due."

This excuse might not be true, but it was certainly a very plausible one. Had not a recent lawsuit revealed the fact that certain rich folks, who had an income of more than a hundred thousand francs a year, had kept a thieving coachman for six months, simply because, in all that time, they were not able to raise the eight hundred francs they owed him, and which must be paid before he was dismissed? M. de Valorsay knew this, but a terrible disquietude seized him. Had people begun to suspect *his* embarrassment? Had any rumor of it reached Baron Trigault's ears? This was what he wished to ascertain. "Let us understand each other, Monsieur Mauméjan," said he; "the baron was unable to procure this money he had promised me to-day—but when will he let me have it?"

Pascal opened his eyes in pretended astonishment, and it was with an air of the utmost simplicity that he replied, "I concluded the baron would take no further action in the matter. I judged so from his parting words: 'It consoles me a little,' he said, 'to think that the Marquis de Valorsay is very rich and very well known, and that he has a dozen friends who will be delighted to do him this trifling service.'"

Until now, M. de Valorsay had cherished a hope that the loan was only delayed, and the certainty that the decision was final, crushed him. "My ruin's known," he thought, and feeling that his strength was deserting

him, he poured out a brimming glass of Madeira, which he emptied at a single draught. The wine lent him fictitious energy. Fury mounted to his brain; he lost all control over himself, and springing up, with his face purple with rage, he exclaimed: "It's a shame! an infamous shame! and Trigault deserves to be severely punished. He has no business to keep a man in hot water for three days about such a trifle. If he had said 'No' in the first place, I should have made other arrangements, and I shouldn't now find myself in a dilemma from which I see no possible way of escape. No gentleman would have been guilty of such a contemptible act—no one but a shopkeeper or a thief would have stooped to such meanness! This is the result of admitting these ridiculous *parvenus* into society, just because they happen to have money."

It certainly hurt Pascal to hear these insults heaped upon the baron, and it hurt him all the more since they were entirely due to the course he had personally adopted.

However, a gesture, even a frown, might endanger the success of his undertaking, so he preserved an impassive countenance. "I must say that I don't understand your indignation, Monsieur le Marquis," he said, coldly. "I can see why you might feel annoyed, but why you should fly into a passion——"

"Ah! you don't know——" began M. de Valorsay, but he stopped short. It was time. The truth had almost escaped his lips.

"Know what?" inquired Pascal.

But the marquis was again upon his guard. "I have a debt that must be paid this evening, at all hazards—a sacred obligation—in short, a debt of honor."

"A debt of one hundred thousand francs?"

"No, it is only twenty-five thousand."

"Is it possible that a rich man like you can be troubled about such a trifling sum, which any one would lend you?"

M. de Valorsay interrupted him with a contemptuous sneer. "Didn't you just tell me that we were living in an age when no one has any money except those who are in business? The richest of my friends have only enough for themselves, even if they have enough. The time of old stockings, stuffed full of savings, is past! Shall I apply to a banker? He would ask two days for reflection, and he would require the names of two or three of my friends on the note. If I go to my notary, there will be endless forms to be gone through, and remonstrances without number."

For a moment or more already, Pascal had been moving about uneasily on his chair, like a man who is waiting for an opportunity to make a suggestion, and as soon as M. de Valorsay paused to take breath, he exclaimed: "Upon my word! if I dared——"

"Well?"

"I would offer to obtain you these twenty-five thousand francs."

"You?"

"Yes, I."

"Before six o'clock this evening?"

"Certainly."

A glass of ice-water presented to a parched traveller while journeying over the desert sands of Sahara could not impart greater relief and delight than the marquis experienced on hearing Pascal's offer. He literally felt that he was restored to life.

For ruin was inevitable if he did not succeed in obtaining twenty-five thousand francs that day. If he

could procure that amount he might obtain a momentary respite, and to gain time was the main thing. Moreover, the offer was a sufficient proof that his financial difficulties were not known. "Ah! I have had a fortunate escape," he thought. "What if I had revealed the truth!"

But he was careful to conceal the secret joy that filled his heart. He feared lest he might say "Yes" too quickly, so betray his secret, and place himself at the mercy of the baron's envoy. "I would willingly accept your offer," he exclaimed, "if——"

"If what?"

"Would it be proper for me, after the baron has treated me in such a contemptible manner, to have any dealings with one of his subordinates?"

Pascal protested vigorously. "Allow me to say," he exclaimed, "that I am not any one's subordinate. Trigault is my client, like thirty or forty others—nothing more. He employs me in certain difficult and delicate negotiations, which I conduct to the best of my ability. He pays me, and we are each of us perfectly independent of the other."

From the look which Valorsay gave Pascal, one would have sworn that he suspected who his visitor really was. But such was not the case. It was simply this: a strange, but by no means impossible, idea had flashed through the marquis's mind—"Oh!" thought he, "this unknown party with whom Mauméjan offers to negotiate the loan, is probably none other than the baron himself. That worthy gambler has invented this ingenious method of obliging me so as to extort a rate of interest which he would not dare to demand openly. And why not? There have been plenty of such instances. Isn't it a well-known fact that the N——

Brothers, the most rigidly honest financiers in the world, have never under any circumstances directly obliged one of their friends? If their own father, of whom they always speak with the greatest veneration, asked them to lend him fifty francs for a month, they would say to him as they do to every one else: 'We are rather cramped just now; but see that rascal B——.' And that rascal B——, who is the most pliable tool in existence, will, providing father N—— offers unquestionable security, lend the old gentleman his son's money at from twelve to fifteen per cent. interest, plus a small commission."

These ideas and recollections were of considerable assistance in restoring Valorsay's composure. "Enough said, then," he answered, lightly. "I accept with pleasure. But——"

"Ah! so there is a but!"

"There is always one. I must warn you that it will be difficult for me to repay this loan in less than two months."

This, then, was the time he thought necessary for the accomplishment of his designs.

"That does not matter," replied Pascal, "and even if you desire a longer delay——"

"That will be unnecessary, thank you! But there is one thing more."

"What is that?"

"What will this negotiation cost me?"

Pascal had expected this question, and he had prepared a reply which was in perfect keeping with the spirit of the *rôle* he had assumed. "I shall charge you the ordinary rates," he answered, "six per cent. interest, plus one-and-a-half per cent. commission."

"Bah!"

"Plus the remuneration for my trouble and services."

"And what remuneration will satisfy you?"

"One thousand francs. Is it too much?"

If the marquis had retained the shadow of a doubt, it vanished now. "Ah!" he sneered, "that strikes me as a very liberal compensation for your services!"

But he would gladly have recalled the sneer when he saw how the agent received it. Pascal drew up his head with a deeply injured air, and remarked in the chilling tone of a person who is strongly tempted to retract his word, "Then there is nothing more to be said, M. le Marquis; and since you find the conditions onerous——"

"I did not say so," interrupted M. de Valorsay, quickly—"I did not even think it!"

This gave Pascal an opportunity to present his programme, and he availed himself of it. "Others may pretend to oblige people merely from motives of friendship," he remarked. "But I am more honest. If I do anything in the way of business, I expect to be paid for it; and I vary my terms according to my clients' need. It would be impossible to have a fixed price for services like mine. When, on two different occasions, I saved a gentleman of your acquaintance from bankruptcy, I asked ten thousand francs the first time, and fifteen thousand the second. Was that an exaggerated estimate of my services? I might boast with truth that I once assured the marriage of a brilliant viscount by keeping his creditors quiet while his courtship was in progress. The day after the wedding he paid me twenty thousand francs. Didn't he owe them to me? If, instead of being a trifle short of money, you happened to be ruined, I should not ask you merely for a thousand francs. I should study your position,

and fix my terms according to the magnitude of the peril from which I rescued you."

There was not a sentence, not a word of this cynical explanation which had not been carefully studied beforehand. There was not an expression which was not a tempting bait to the marquis's evil instincts. But M de Valorsay made no sign. "I see that you are a shrewd man, Monsieur Mauméjan," said he, "and if I am ever in difficulty I shall apply to you."

Pascal bowed with an air of assumed modesty; but he was inwardly jubilant, for he felt that his enemy would certainly fall into the trap which had been set for him. "And now, when shall I have this money?" inquired the marquis.

"By four o'clock."

"And I need fear no disappointment as in the baron's case?"

"Certainly not. What interest would M. Trigault have in lending you a hundred thousand francs? None whatever. With me it is quite a different thing. The profit I'm to realize is your security. In business matters distrust your friends. Apply to usurers rather than to them. Question people who are in difficulties, and ninety-five out of a hundred will tell you that their worst troubles have been caused by those who called themselves their best friends."

He had risen to take leave, when the door of the smoking-room opened, and a servant appeared and said in an undertone: "Madame Léon is in the drawing-room with Dr. Jodon. They wish to see you, monsieur."

Though Pascal had armed himself well against any unexpected mischance, he changed color on hearing the name of the worthy housekeeper. "All is lost if this creature sees and recognizes me!" he thought.

Fortunately the marquis was too much engrossed in his own affairs to note the momentary agitation of Baron Trigault's envoy. "It is strange that I can't have five minutes' peace and quietness," he said. "I told you that I was at home to no one."

"But——"

"Enough! Let the lady and gentleman wait."

The servant withdrew.

The thought of passing out through the drawing-room filled Pascal with consternation. How could he hope to escape Madame Léon's keen eyes? Fortunately M. de Valorsay came to his relief, for as Pascal was about to open the same door by which he had entered, the marquis exclaimed: "Not that way! Pass out here—this is the shortest way."

And leading him through his bedroom the marquis conducted him to the staircase, where he even feigned to offer him his hand, saying: "A speedy return, dear M. Mauméjan."

It is not at the moment of peril that people endure the worst agony; it is afterward, when they have escaped it. As he went down the staircase, Pascal wiped the cold sweat from his forehead. "Ah! it was a narrow escape!" he exclaimed, under his breath.

He felt proud of the manner in which he had sustained a part so repugnant to his nature. He was amazed to find that he could utter falsehoods with such a calm, unblushing face—he was astonished at his own audacity. And what a success he had achieved! He felt certain that he had just slipped round M. de Valorsay's neck the noose which would strangle him later on. Still he was considerably disturbed by Madame Léon's visit to the marquis. "What is she doing here

with this physician?" he asked himself again and again. "Who is this man? What new piece of infamy are they plotting to require his services?" One of those presentiments which are prompted by the logic of events, told him that this physician had been, or would be, one of the actors in the vile conspiracy of which he and Mademoiselle Marguerite were the victims. But he had no leisure to devote to the solution of this enigma. Time was flying, and before returning to the marquis's house he must find out what had aroused the suspicions of the purchaser of those horses, the biographies of which had been so rigidly exacted. Through the baron, he might hope to obtain an interview with Kami-Bey—and so it was to the baron's house that Pascal directed his steps.

After the more than cordial reception which the baron had granted him that morning, it was quite natural that the servants should receive him as a friend of the household. They would scarcely allow him to explain what he desired. It was the pompous head valet in person who ushered him into one of the small reception-rooms, exclaiming: "The baron's engaged, but I'm sure he would be annoyed if he failed to see you; and I will inform him at once."

A moment later, the baron entered quite breathless from his hurried descent of the staircase. "Ah! you have been successful," he exclaimed, on seeing Pascal's face.

"Everything is progressing as favorably as I could wish, Monsieur le Baron, but I must speak with that foreigner whom I met here this morning."

"Kami-Bey?"

"Yes." And in a few words, Pascal explained the situation.

"Providence is certainly on our side," said the baron, thoughtfully. "Kami is still here."

"Is it possible?"

"It's a fact. Did you think it would be easy to get rid of this confounded Turk! He invited himself to breakfast without the slightest ceremony, and would give me no peace until I promised to play with him for two hours. I was closeted with him, cards in hand, when they told me you were here. Come, we'll go and question him."

They found the interesting foreigner in a savage mood. He had been winning when the servant came for the baron, and he feared that an interruption would change the luck. "What the devil took you away?" he exclaimed, with that coarseness of manner which was habitual with him, and which the flatterers around him styled "form." "A man should no more be disturbed when he's playing than when he's eating."

"Come, come, prince," said the baron, good-naturedly, "don't be angry, and I'll give you three hours instead of two. But I have a favor to ask of you."

The foreigner at once thrust his hand into his pocket, with such a natural gesture, that neither the baron nor Pascal could repress a smile, and he himself understanding the cause of their merriment broke into a hearty laugh. "It's purely from force of habit," said he. "Ah! since I've been in Paris—— But what do you wish?"

The baron sat down, and gravely replied: "You told us scarcely an hour ago that you had been cheated in the purchase of some horses."

"Cheated! it was worse than highway robbery."

"Would it be indiscreet to ask you by whom you have been defrauded?"

Kami-Bey's purple cheeks became a trifle pale. "Hum!" said he, in an altered tone of voice, "that is a delicate question. My defrauder appears to be a dangerous fellow—a duellist—and if I disclose his knavery, he is quite capable of picking a quarrel with me—not that I am afraid of him, I assure you, but my principles don't allow me to fight. When a man has an income of a million, he doesn't care to expose himself to the dangers of a duel."

"But, prince, in France folks don't do a scoundrel the honor to cross swords with him."

"That's just what my steward, who is a Frenchman, told me; but no matter. Besides, I am not sufficiently sure of the man's guilt to noise it abroad. I have no positive proofs as yet."

He was evidently terribly frightened, and the first thing to be done was to reassure him. "Come," insisted the baron, "tell us the man's name. This gentleman here"—pointing to Pascal—"is one of my most esteemed friends. I will answer for him as I would for myself; and we will swear upon our honor not to reveal the secret we ask you for, without your permission."

"Truly?"

"You have our word of honor," replied both the baron and Pascal in a breath.

After casting a half-frightened glance around him, the worthy Turk seemed to gather courage. But no! He deliberated some time, and then rejoined: "Really, I'm not sufficiently convinced of the accuracy of my suspicions to incur the risk of accusing a man who belongs in the very best society; a man who is very rich and very highly respected, and who would tolerate no imputations upon his character."

It was plain that he would not speak. The baron shrugged his shoulders, but Pascal stepped bravely forward. "Then I will tell you, prince," he said, "the name that you are determined to hide from us."

"Oh!"

"But you must allow me to remark that the baron and myself retract the promise we made you just now."

"Naturally."

"Then, your defrauder is the Marquis de Valorsay!"

If Kami-Bey had seen an emissary of his sovereign enter the room carrying the fatal bow-string he would not have seemed more terror-stricken. He sprang nervously on to his short, fat legs, his eyes wildly dilating and his hands fluttering despairingly. "Don't speak so loud! don't speak so loud!" he exclaimed, imploringly.

As he did not even attempt to deny it, the truth of the assertion might be taken for granted. But Pascal was not content with this. "Now that we know the fact, I hope, Prince, that you will be sufficiently obliged to tell us how it all happened," he remarked.

Poor Kami. He was in despair. "Alas!" he replied, reluctantly, "nothing could be more simple. I wanted to set up a racing stable. Not that I care much for sport. I can scarcely distinguish a horse from a mule—but morning and evening, everybody says to me: 'Prince, a man like you ought to make your name celebrated on the turf.' Besides I never open a paper without reading: 'Such a man ought to be a patron of the noblest of sports.' At last, I said to myself: 'Yes, they are right. I ought to take part in racing.' So I began to look about for some horses. I had purchased several, when the Marquis de Valorsay proposed to sell me some of his, some that were very well known, and

that had—so he assured me—won at least ten times the amount they had cost him. I accepted his offer, and visited his stables, where I selected seven of his best horses and paid for them; and I paid a good round price, I assure you. Now comes the knavery. He has not given me the horses I purchased. The real animals, the valuable ones—have been sold in England under false names, and although the horses sent to me may be like the others in appearance, they are really only common animals, wanting both in blood and speed.”

Pascal and the baron exchanged astonished glances. It must be confessed that frauds of every description are common enough in the racing world, and a great deal of dishonest manœuvring results from greed for gain united with the fever of gambling. But never before had any one been accused of such an audacious and impudent piece of rascality as that which Kami-Bey imputed to Valorsay.

“How did you fail to discover this at the outset, prince?” inquired Pascal in an incredulous tone.

“Because my time was so much occupied.”

“But your servants?”

“Ah! that’s another thing. I shouldn’t be at all surprised if it were proved that the man who has charge of my stables had been bribed by the marquis.”

“Then, how were your suspicions aroused?”

“It was only by the merest chance. A jockey whom I thought of employing had often ridden one of the animals which I fancied myself the owner of. Naturally, I showed him the horse, but he had no sooner set eyes on it than he exclaimed: ‘That the horse! Never! You’ve been cheated, prince!’ Then we examined the others, and the fraud became apparent.”

Knowing Kami's character better than Pascal, the baron had good reason to distrust the accuracy of these statements. For the Turkish millionaire's superb contempt of money was only affected. Vanity alone unloosed his purse-strings. He was quite capable of presenting Jenny Fancy with a necklace costing five-and-twenty thousand francs for the sake of seeing his generosity recorded in the *Gaulois* or the *Figaro* the next day; but he would refuse to give a trifle to the mother of a starving family. Besides, it was his ambition to be regarded as the most swindled man in Europe. But though he was shamefully imposed upon, it was not voluntarily—for there was a strong dose of Arabian avarice and distrust in his composition.

"Frankly, prince," said the baron, "your story sounds like one of the wild legends of your native land. Valorsay is certainly no fool. How is it possible that he could have been guilty of so gross a fraud—a fraud which might be, which could not fail to be discovered in twenty-four hours—and which, once proven, would dishonor him forever?"

"Before perpetrating such a piece of deception upon any one else, he would have thought twice; but upon me it's different. Isn't it an established fact that a person incurs no risk in robbing Kami-Bey?"

"Had I been in your place I should have quietly instituted an investigation."

"What good would that have done? Besides, the sale was only conditional, and took place under the seal of secrecy. The marquis reserved the right to take his horses back on payment of a stipulated sum, and the time he was to have for consideration only expired on the day before yesterday."

"Eh! why didn't you tell us that at first?" cried the baron.

The marquis's rascality was now easily explained. Finding himself in a desperate strait, and feeling that his salvation was certain if he could only gain a little time, he had yielded to temptation, saying to himself, like unfaithful cashiers when they first appropriate their employers' money: "I will pay it back, and no one will ever know it!" However, when the day of settlement came he had found himself in as deplorable a plight as on the day of the robbery, and he had been compelled to yield to the force of circumstances.

"And what do you intend to do, prince?" asked Pascal.

"Ah! I am still in doubt. I have compelled the marquis to give me the papers in which the exploits of these horses are recorded. These statements will be of service in case of a law-suit. But shall I or shall I not enter a complaint against him? If it were a mere question of money I should let the matter drop; but he has defrauded and deceived me so outrageously that it annoys me. On the other hand, to confess that he has cheated me in this fashion would cover me with ridicule. Besides, the man is a dangerous enemy. And what would become of me if I happened to side against him? I should be compelled to leave Paris. Ah! I'd give ten thousand francs to any one who'd settle this cursed affair for me!"

His perplexity was so great, and his anger so intense, for that once he tore off his eternal fez and flung it on to the table, swearing like a drayman. However, controlling himself at last, he exclaimed in a tone of assumed indifference: "No matter, there's been enough said on this subject for one day—I'm here to play—

so let us begin, baron. For we are wasting precious time, as you so often remark."

Pascal had nothing more to learn; so he shook hands with the baron, made an appointment with him for the same evening, and went away.

It was only half-past two; a good hour and a half remained at his disposal. "I will profit by this opportunity to eat something," he thought; a sudden faintness reminding him that he had taken nothing but a cup of chocolate that day. Thereupon perceiving a *café* near by, he entered it, ordered breakfast, and lingered there until it was time to return to the Marquis de Valorsay's. He would have gone there before the appointed time if he had merely listened to the promptings of his impatience, so thoroughly was he persuaded that this second interview would be decisive. But prudence advised him not to expose himself to the danger of an encounter with Madame Léon and Dr. Jodon.

"Well! Monsieur Mauméjan," cried the marquis, as soon as Pascal made his appearance. He had been counting the seconds with intense anxiety, as his tone of voice unmistakably revealed.

In reply Pascal gravely drew from his pocket twenty-four bank-notes, of a thousand francs each, and he placed them upon the table, saying: "Here is the amount, Monsieur le Marquis. I have, of course, deducted my commission. Now, if you will write and sign a note for twenty-five thousand francs, payable to my order two months hence, our business for to-day will be concluded."

M. de Valorsay's hand trembled nervously as he penned the desired note, for, until the very last moment, he had doubted the promises of this unknown agent who had made his appearance so opportunely. Then,

when the document was signed, he carelessly slipped the money into a drawer and exclaimed: "So here's the needful to pay my debt of honor; but my embarrassment is none the less great. These twenty-four thousand francs won't take the place of the hundred thousand which Baron Trigault promised me."

And, as Pascal made no reply, the marquis began a desultory tramp up and down the smoking-room. He was very pale, his brows were knit; he looked like a man who was meditating a decisive step, and who was calculating the consequences. But having no time to waste in hesitation, he soon paused in front of Pascal, and exclaimed: "Since you have just lent me twenty-four thousand francs, why won't you lend me the rest?"

But Pascal shook his head. "One risks nothing by advancing twenty-five thousand francs to a person in your position, Monsieur le Marquis. Whatever happens, such a sum as that can always be gathered from the wreck. But double or triple the amount! The deuce! that requires reflection, and I must understand the situation thoroughly."

"And if I told you that I am—almost ruined, what would you reply?"

"I shouldn't be so very much surprised."

M. de Valorsay had now gone too far to draw back. "Ah, well!" he resumed, "the truth is this—my affairs are terribly involved."

"The devil! You should have told me that sooner."

"Wait; I am about to retrieve my fortune—to make it even larger than it has ever been. I am on the point of contracting a marriage which will make me one of the richest men in Paris; but I must have a little time to bring the affair to a successful termination, and I

need money—and my creditors are pressing me unmercifully. You told me this morning that you once assisted a man who was in a similar position. Will you help me? You can set your own price on your services.”

More easily overcome by joy than by sorrow, Pascal almost betrayed himself. He had attained his object. Still, he succeeded in conquering his emotion, and it was in a perfectly calm voice that he replied: “I can promise nothing until I understand the situation, Monsieur le Marquis. Will you explain it to me? I am listening.”

XIV.

It was nearly midnight when M. Wilkie left the Hôtel d'Argelès after the terrible scene in which he had revealed his true character. On seeing him pass out with haggard eyes, colorless lips, and disordered clothing, the servants gathered in the vestibule took him at first for another of those ruined gamblers who not unfrequently left the house with despair in their hearts.

“Another fellow who's had bad luck!” they remarked sneeringly to one another.

“No doubt about that. He is pretty effectually used up, judging from appearances,” one of them remarked.

It was not until some moments later that they learned a portion of the truth through the servants who had been on duty upstairs, and who now ran down in great terror, crying that Madame d'Argelès was dying, and that a physician must be summoned at once.

M. Wilkie was already far away, hastening up the

boulevard with an agile step. Any one else would have been overcome with shame and sorrow—would have been frightened by the thought of what he had done, and have striven to find some way to conceal his disgrace; but he, not in the least. In this frightful crisis, he was only conscious of one fact—that just as he raised his hand to strike Madame Lia d'Argelès, his mother, a big, burly individual had burst into the room, like a bombshell, caught him by the throat, forced him upon his knees, and compelled him to ask the lady's pardon. He, Wilkie, to be humiliated in this style! He would never endure that. This was an affront he could not swallow, one of those insults that cry out for vengeance and for blood. "Ah! the great brute shall pay for it," he repeated, again and again, grinding his teeth. And if he hastened up the boulevard, it was only because he hoped to meet his two chosen friends, M. Costard and the Viscount de Serpillon, the co-proprietors of *Pompier de Nanterre*.

For he intended to place his outraged honor in their care. They should be his seconds, and present his demand for satisfaction to the man who had insulted him. A duel was the only thing that could appease his furious anger and heal his wounded pride. And a great scandal, which he would be the hero of, was not without a certain charm for him. What a glorious chance to win notoriety at an epoch when newspapers have become public laundries, in which every one washes his soiled linen and dries it in the glare of publicity! He saw his already remarkable reputation enhanced by the interest that always attaches to people who are talked about, and he could hear in advance the flattering whisper which would greet his appearance everywhere: "You see that young man?—he is the hero of that

famous adventure," etc. Moreover, he was already twisting and turning the terms of the notice which his seconds must have inserted in the *Figaro*, hesitating between two or three equally startling beginnings: "Another famous duel," or "Yesterday, after a scandalous scene, an encounter," etc., etc.

Unfortunately, he did not meet either M. Costard or the Viscount de Serpillon. Strange to say, they were not in any of the *cafés*, where the flower of French chivalry usually congregates, in the company of golden-haired young women, from nine in the evening until one o'clock in the morning. This disappointment grieved M. Wilkie sorely, although he derived some benefit from it, for his disordered attire attracted attention at each place he entered, and acquaintances eagerly inquired: "Where have you come from, and what has happened to you?" Whereupon he replied with an air of profound secrecy: "Pray don't speak of it. A shocking affair! If it were noised abroad I should be inconsolable."

At last the *cafés* began to close, and promenaders became rare. M. Wilkie, much to his regret, was obliged to go home. When he had locked his door and donned his dressing-gown, he sat down to think over the events of the day, and collect his scattered wits. What most troubled and disquieted him was not the condition in which he had left Madame Lia d'Argelès, his mother, who was, perhaps, dying, through his fault! It was not the terrible sacrifice that this poor woman had made for him in a transport of maternal love! It was not the thought of the source from which the money he had squandered for so many years had been derived. No, M. Wilkie was quite above such paltry considerations—good enough for commonplace and antiquated people.

"He was too clever for that. Ah! yes. He had a stronger stomach, and was up with the times!" If he were sorely vexed in spirit it was because he thought that the immense property which he had believed his own had slipped, perhaps for ever, from his grasp. For rising threateningly between the Chalusse millions and himself, he pictured the form of his father, this man whom he did not know, but whose very name had made Madame d'Argelès shudder.

M. Wilkie was seized with terror when he looked his actual situation in the face. What was to become of him? He was certain that Madame d'Argelès would not give him another sou. She could not—he recognized that fact. His intelligence was equal to that. On the other hand, if he ever obtained anything from the count's estate, which was more than doubtful, would he not be obliged to wait a long time for it? Yes, in all probability such would be the case. Then how should he live, how would he be able to obtain food in the meantime? His despair was so poignant that tears came to his eyes; and he bitterly deplored the step he had taken. Yes, he actually sighed for the past; he longed to live over again the very years in which he had so often complained of his destiny. Then, though not a millionaire by any means, he at least wanted for nothing. Every quarter-day a very considerable allowance was promptly paid him, and, in great emergencies, he could apply to Mr. Patterson, who always sent a favorable answer if not drawn upon too heavily. Yes, he sighed for that time! Ah! if he had only then realized how fortunate he was! Had he not been one of the most opulent members of the society in which he moved? Had he not been flattered and admired more than any of his companions? Had he

not found the most exquisite happiness in his part ownership of *Pompier de Nanterre*!

Now, what remained? Nothing, save anxiety concerning the future, and all sorts of uncertainties and terrors! What a mistake! What a blunder he had made! Ah! if he could only begin again. He sincerely wished that the great adversary of mankind had the Viscount de Coralth in his clutches. For, in his despair, it was the once dear viscount that he blamed, accused, and cursed.

He was in this ungrateful frame of mind when a loud, almost savage, ring came at his door. As his servant slept in an attic upstairs, Wilkie was quite alone in his rooms, so he took the lamp and went to open the door himself. At this hour of the night, the visitor could only be M. Costard or the Viscount de Serpillon, or perhaps both of them. "They have heard that I was looking for them, and so they have hastened here," he thought.

But he was mistaken. The visitor was neither of these gentlemen, but M. Ferdinand de Coralth in person. Prudence had compelled the viscount to leave Madame d'Argelès's card-party one of the last, but as soon as he was out of the house he had rushed to the Marquis de Valorsay's to hold a conference with him, far from suspecting that he was followed, and that an auxiliary of Pascal Ferailleux and Mademoiselle Marguerite was even then waiting for him below—an enemy as formidable as he was humble—Victor Chupin.

At sight of the man who had so long been his model—the friend who had advised what he styled his blunder—Wilkie was so surprised that he almost dropped his lamp. Then as his wrath kindled, "Ah! so it's

you!" he exclaimed, angrily. "You come at a good time!"

But M. de Coralthe was too much exasperated to notice Wilkie's strange greeting. Seizing him roughly by the arm, and closing the door with a kick, he dragged Wilkie back into the little drawing-room. "Yes, it's I," he said, curtly. "It's I—come to inquire if you have gone mad?"

"Viscount!"

"I can find no other explanation of your conduct! What! You choose Madame d'Argelès's reception day, and an hour when there are fifty guests in her drawing-room to present yourself!"

"Ah, well! it wasn't from choice. I had been there twice before, and had the doors shut in my face."

"You ought to have gone back ten times, a hundred times, a thousand times, rather than have accomplished such an idiotic prank as this."

"Excuse me."

"What did I recommend? Prudence, calmness and moderation, persuasive gentleness, sentiments of the loftiest nature, tenderness, a shower of tears——"

"Possibly, but——"

"But instead of that, you fall upon this woman like a thunderbolt, and set the whole household in the wildest commotion. What could you be thinking of, to make such an absurd and frightful scene? For you howled and shrieked like a street hawker, and we could hear you in the drawing-room. If all is not irretrievably lost, there must be a special Providence for the benefit of fools!"

In his dismay, Wilkie endeavored to falter some excuses, but he was only able to begin a few sentences which died away, uncompleted in his throat. The vio-

lence shown by M. de Coralth, who was usually as cold and as polished as marble, quieted his own wrath. Still toward the last he felt disposed to rebel against the insults that were being heaped upon him. "Do you know, viscount, that I begin to think this very strange," he exclaimed. "If any one else had led me into such a scrape, I should have called him to account in double-quick time."

M. de Coralth shrugged his shoulders with an air of contempt, and threateningly replied: "Understand, once for all, that you had better not attempt to bully me! Now, tell me what passed between your mother and yourself?"

"First I should like——"

"Dash it all! Do you suppose that I intend to remain here all night? Tell me what occurred, and be quick about it. And try to speak the truth."

It was one of M. Wilkie's greatest boasts that he had an indomitable will—an iron nature. But the viscount exercised powerful influence over him, and, to tell the truth, inspired him with a form of emotion which was nearly akin to fear. Moreover, a glimmer of reason had at last penetrated his befogged brain: he saw that M. de Coralth was right—that he had acted like a fool, and that, if he hoped to escape from the dangers that threatened him, he must take the advice of more experienced men than himself. So, ceasing his recriminations, he began to describe what he styled his explanation with Madame d'Argelès. All went well at first; for he dared not misrepresent the facts.

But when he came to the intervention of the man who had prevented him from striking his mother, he turned crimson, and rage again filled his heart. "I'm

sorry I let myself get into such a mess!" he exclaimed. "You should have seen my condition. My shirt-collar was torn, and my cravat hung in tatters. He was much stronger than I—the contemptible scoundrel!—ah! if it hadn't been for that—— But I shall have my revenge. Yes, he shall learn that he can't trample a man under foot with impunity. To-morrow two of my friends will call upon him; and if he refuses to apologize or to give me satisfaction, I'll cane him."

It was evident enough that M. de Coralthe had to exercise considerable constraint to listen to these fine projects. "I must warn you that you ought to speak in other terms of an honorable and honored gentleman," he interrupted, at last.

"Eh! what! You know him then?"

"Yes, Madame d'Argelès's defender is Baron Trigault."

M. Wilkie's heart bounded with joy, as he heard this name. "Ah! this is capital!" he exclaimed. "What! So it was Baron Trigault—the noted gambler—who owns such a magnificent house in the Rue de la Ville l'Evêque, the husband of that extremely stylish lady, that notorious *cocotte*——"

The viscount sprang from his chair, and interrupting M. Wilkie: "I advise you, for the sake of your own safety," he said, measuring his words to give them greater weight, "never to mention the Baroness Trigault's name except in terms of the most profound respect."

There was no misunderstanding M. de Coralthe's tone, and his glance said plainly that he would not allow much time to pass before putting his threat into execution. Having always lived in a lower circle to that in which the baroness sparkled with such lively bril-

liancy, M. Wilkie was ignorant of the reasons that induced his distinguished friend to defend her so warmly; but he *did* understand that it would be highly imprudent to insist, or even to discuss the matter. So, in his most persuasive manner, he resumed: "Let us say no more about the wife, but give our attention to the husband. So it was the baron who insulted me! A duel with him—what good luck! Well! he may sleep in peace to-night, but as soon as he is up in the morning he will find Costard and Serpillon on hand. Serpillon has not an equal as a second. First, he knows the best places for a meeting; then he lends the combatants weapons when they have none; he procures a physician; and he is on excellent terms with the journalists, who publish reports of these encounters."

The viscount had never had a very exalted opinion of Wilkie's intelligence, but now he was amazed to see how greatly he had overestimated it. "Enough of such foolishness," he interrupted, curtly. "This duel will never take place."

"I should like to know who will prevent it?"

"I will, if you persist in such an absurd idea. You ought to have sense enough to know that the baron would kick Serpillon out of the house, and that you would only cover yourself with ridicule. So, between your duel and my help make your choice, and quickly."

The prospect of sending his seconds to demand satisfaction from Baron Trigault was certainly a very attractive one. But, on the other hand, Wilkie could not afford to dispense with M. de Coralthe's services. "But the baron has insulted me," he urged.

"Well, you can demand satisfaction when you obtain possession of your property; but the least scandal now would spoil your last chances."

"I will abandon the project, then," sighed Wilkie, despondently; "but pray advise me. What do you think of my situation?"

M. de Coralith seemed to consider a moment, and then gravely replied: "I think that, *unassisted*, you have no chance whatever. You have no standing, no influential connections, no position—you are not even a Frenchman."

"Alas! that is precisely what I have said to myself."

"Still, I am convinced that with some assistance you might overcome your mother's resistance, and even your father's pretensions."

"Yes, but where could I find protectors?"

The viscount's gravity seemed to increase. "Listen to me," said he; "I will do for you what I would not do for any one else. I will endeavor to interest in your cause one of my friends, who is all powerful by reason of his name, his fortune, and his connections—the Marquis de Valorsay, in fact."

"The one who is so well known upon the turf?"

"The same."

"And you will introduce me to him?"

"Yes. Be ready to-morrow at eleven o'clock, and I will call for you and take you to his house. If he interests himself in your cause, it is as good as gained." And as his companion overwhelmed him with thanks, he rose, and said: "I must go now. No more foolishness, and be ready to-morrow at the appointed time."

Thanks to the surprising mutability of temper which was the most striking characteristic of his nature, M. Wilkie was already consoled for his blunder.

He had received M. de Coralith as an enemy; but he now escorted him to the door with every obsequious attention—in fact, just as if he looked upon him as his

preserver. A word which the viscount had dropped during the conversation had considerably helped to bring about this sudden revulsion of feelings. "You cannot fail to understand that if the Marquis de Valorsay espouses your cause, you will want for nothing. And if a lawsuit is unavoidable, he will be perfectly willing to advance the necessary funds." How could M. Wilkie lack confidence after that? The brightest hopes, the most ecstatic visions had succeeded the gloomy forebodings of a few hours before. The mere thought of being presented to M. de Valorsay, a nobleman celebrated for his adventures, his horses, and his fortune, more than sufficed to make him forget his troubles. What rapture to become that illustrious nobleman's acquaintance, perhaps his friend! To move in the same orbit as this star of the first magnitude which would inevitably cast some of its lustre upon him! Now he would be a somebody in the world. He felt that he had grown a head taller, and Heaven only knows with what disdain poor Costard and Serpillon would have been received had they chanced to present themselves at that moment.

It is needless to say that Wilkie dressed with infinite care on the following morning, no doubt in the hope of making a conquest of the marquis at first sight. He tried his best to solve the problem of appearing at the same time most *recherché* but at ease, excessively elegant and yet unostentatious; and he devoted himself to the task so unreservedly that he lost all conception of the flight of time: so that on seeing M. de Coralthe enter his rooms, he exclaimed in unfeigned astonishment: "You here already?"

It seemed to him that barely five minutes had elapsed since he took his place before the looking-glass to study

attitudes and gestures, with a new and elegant mode of bowing and sitting down, like an actor practising the effects which are to win him applause.

"Why do you say 'already?'" replied the viscount. "I am a quarter of an hour behind time. Are you not ready?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Let us start at once, then; my brougham is outside."

The drive was a silent one. M. Ferdinand de Coralthe, whose smooth white skin would ordinarily have excited the envy of a young girl, did not look like himself. His face was swollen and covered with blotches, and there were dark blue circles round his eyes. He seemed, moreover, to be in a most savage humor. "He hasn't had sleep enough," thought M. Wilkie, with his usual discernment; "he hasn't a bronze constitution like myself."

M. Wilkie himself was insensible to fatigue, and although he had not closed his eyes the previous night, he only felt that nervous trepidation which invariably attacks *débutants*, and makes the throat so marvellously dry. For the first, and probably the last time in his life, M. Wilkie distrusted his own powers, and feared that he was not "quite up to the mark," as he elegantly expressed it.

The sight of the Marquis de Valorsay's handsome mansion was not likely to restore his assurance. When he entered the courtyard, where the master's mailphaeton stood in waiting; when through the open doors of the handsome stables he espied the many valuable horses neighing in their stalls, and the numerous carriages shrouded in linen covers; when he counted the valets on duty in the vestibule, and when he ascended

the staircase behind a lackey attired in a black dress-coat, and as serious in mien as a notary; when he passed through the handsome drawing-rooms, filled to overflowing with pictures, armor, statuary, and all the trophies gained by the marquis's horses upon the turf, M. Wilkie mentally acknowledged that he knew nothing of high life, and that what he had considered luxury was scarcely the shadow of the reality. He felt actually ashamed of his own ignorance. This feeling of inferiority became so powerful that he was almost tempted to turn and fly, when the man clothed in black opened the door and announced, in a clear voice: "M. le Vicomte de Coralthe!—M. Wilkie."

With a most gracious and dignified air—the air of a true *grand seigneur*—the only portion of his inheritance which he had preserved intact, the marquis rose to his feet, and, offering his hand to M. de Coralthe, exclaimed: "You are most welcome, viscount. This gentleman is undoubtedly the young friend you spoke of in the note I received from you this morning?"

"The same; and really he stands greatly in need of your kindness. He finds himself in an extremely delicate position, and knows no one who can lend him a helping hand."

"Ah, well, I will lend him one with pleasure, since he is your friend. But I must know the circumstances before I can act. Sit down, gentlemen, and enlighten me."

M. Wilkie had prepared his story in advance, a touching and witty narrative; but when the moment came to begin it, he found himself unable to speak. He opened his mouth, but no sound issued from his lips, and it seemed as if he had been stricken dumb. Accordingly it was M. de Coralthe who made a state-

ment of the case, and he did it well. The narrative thus gained considerably in clearness and precision; and even M. Wilkie noticed that his friend understood how to present the events in their most favorable light, and how to omit them altogether when his heartless conduct would have appeared too odious. He also noticed—and he considered it an excellent omen—that M. de Valorsay was listening with the closest attention.

Worthy marquis! if his own interests had been in jeopardy he could not have appeared more deeply concerned. When the viscount had concluded his story, he gravely exclaimed: "Your young friend is indeed in a most critical position, a position from which he cannot escape without being terribly victimized, if he's left dependent on his own resources."

"But it is understood that you will help him, is it not?"

M. de Valorsay reflected for a little, and then, addressing M. Wilkie, replied: "Yes, I consent to assist you, monsieur. First, because your cause seems to me just, and, also, because you are M. de Coralthe's friend. I promise you my aid on one condition—that you will follow my advice implicitly."

The interesting young man lifted his hand, and, by dint of a powerful effort, he succeeded in articulating: "Anything you wish!—upon my sacred word!"

"You must understand that when I engage in an enterprise, it must not fail. The eye of the public is upon me, and I have my *prestige* to maintain. I have given you a great mark of confidence, for in lending you my influence I become, in some measure at least, your sponsor. But I cannot accept this great responsibility unless I am allowed absolute control of the affair."

"Of course."

"And I think that we ought to begin operations this very day. The main thing is to circumvent your father, the terrible man with whom your mother has threatened you."

"Ah! but how?"

"I shall dress at once and go to the Hôtel de Chalusse, in order to ascertain what has occurred there. You on your side must hasten to Madame d'Argelès and request her politely, but firmly, to furnish you with the necessary proofs to assert your rights. If she consents, well and good! If she refuses, we will consult some lawyer as to the next step. In any case, call here again at four o'clock."

But the thought of meeting Madame d'Argelès again was anything but pleasing to Wilkie. "I would willingly yield that undertaking to some one else," said he. "Cannot some one else go in my place?"

Fortunately M. de Coralth knew how to encourage him. "What! are you afraid?" he asked.

Afraid! he?—never! It was easy to see that by the way he settled his hat on his head and went off, slamming the door noisily behind him.

"What an idiot!" muttered M. de Coralth. "And to think that there are ten thousand in Paris built upon the very same plan!"

M. de Valorsay gravely shook his head. "Let us thank fortune that he is as he is. No youth who possessed either heart or intelligence would play the part that I intend for him, and enable me to obtain proud Marguerite and her millions. But I fear he won't go to Madame d'Argelès's house. You noticed his repugnance!"

"Oh, you needn't trouble yourself in the least on that account—he'll go. He would go to the devil if

the noble Marquis de Valorsay ordered him to do so."

M. de Coralth understood Wilkie perfectly. The fear of being considered a coward by a nobleman like the Marquis de Valorsay was more than sufficient, not only to divest him of all his scruples, but even to induce him to commit any act of folly, or actually a crime. For if he had looked upon M. de Coralth as an oracle, he considered the marquis to be a perfect god.

Accordingly, as he hastened toward Madame d'Argelès's residence, he said to himself: "Why shouldn't I go to her house? I've done her no injury. Besides, she won't eat me." And remembering that he should be obliged to render a report of this interview, he resolved to assert his superiority and to remain cool and unmoved, as he had seen M. de Coralth do so often.

However, the unusual aspect of the house excited his surprise, and puzzled him not a little. Three huge furniture vans, heavily laden, were standing outside the gate. In the courtyard there were two more vehicles of the same description, which a dozen men or so were busily engaged in loading. "Ah, ha!" muttered M. Wilkie, "it was fortunate that I came—very fortunate; so she was going to run away!" Thereupon, approaching a group of servants who were in close conference in the hall, he demanded, in his most imperious manner: "Madame d'Argelès!"

The servants remembered the visitor perfectly; they now knew who he really was, and they could not understand how he could have the impudence and audacity to come there again so soon after the shameful scene of the previous evening. "Madame is at home," replied one of the men, in anything but a polite tone; "and I will go and see if she will consent to see you. Wait here."

He went off, leaving M. Wilkie in the vestibule to settle his collar and twirl his puny mustaches, with affected indifference; but in reality he was far from comfortable. For the servants did not hesitate to stare at him, and it was quite impossible not to read their contempt in their glances. They even sneered audibly and pointed at him; and he heard five or six epithets more expressive than elegant which could only have been meant for himself. "The fools!" thought he, boiling with anger. "The scoundrels! Ah! if I dared—— If a gentleman like myself was allowed to notice such blackguards, how I'd chastise them!"

But the valet who had gone to warn Madame d'Argelès soon reappeared and put an end to his sufferings. "Madame will see you," said the man, impudently. "Ah! if I were in her place——"

"Come, make haste," rejoined Wilkie, indignantly, and following the servant, he was ushered into a room which had already been divested of its hangings, curtains, and furniture. He here found Madame d'Argelès engaged in packing a large trunk with household linen and sundry articles of clothing.

By a sort of miracle the unfortunate woman had survived the terrible shock which had at first threatened to have an immediately fatal effect. Still she had none the less received her death-blow. It was only necessary to look at her to be assured of that. She was so greatly changed that when M. Wilkie's eyes first fell on her, he asked himself if this were really the same person whom he had met on the previous evening. Henceforth she would be an old woman. You would have taken her for over fifty, so terrible had been the sufferings caused her by the shameful conduct of her son. In this sad-eyed, haggard-faced woman, clad in

black, no one would have recognized the notorious Lia d'Argelès, who, only the evening before, had driven round the lake, reclining on the cushions of her victoria, and eclipsing all the women around her by the splendor of her toilette. Nothing now remained of the gay worldling but the golden hair which she was condemned to see always the same, since its tint had been fixed by dyes as indelible as the stains upon her past.

She rose with difficulty when M. Wilkie entered, and in the expressionless voice of those who are without hope, she asked: "What do you wish of me?"

As usual, when the time came to carry out his happiest conceptions, his courage failed him. "I came to talk about our affairs, you know," he replied, "and I find you moving."

"I am not moving."

"Nonsense! you can't make me believe that! What's the meaning of these carts in the courtyard?"

"They are here to convey all the furniture in the house to the auction-rooms."

Wilkie was struck dumb for a moment, but eventually recovering himself a little, he exclaimed: "What! you are going to sell everything?"

"Yes."

"Astonishing, upon my honor! But afterward?"

"I shall leave Paris."

"Bah! and where are you going?"

With a gesture of utter indifference, she gently replied: "I don't know; I shall go where no one will know me, and where it will be possible for me to hide my shame."

A terrible disquietude seized hold of Wilkie. This sudden change of residence, this departure which so

strongly resembled flight, this cold greeting when he expected passionate reproaches, seemed to indicate that Madame d'Argelès's resolution would successfully resist any amount of entreaty on his part. "The devil," he remarked, "I don't think this at all pleasant! What is to become of *me*? How am I to obtain possession of the Count de Chalusse's estate? That's what I am after! It's rightfully mine, and I'm determined to have it, as I told you once before. And when I've once taken anything into my head——"

He paused, for he could no longer face the scornful glances that Madame d'Argelès was giving him. "Don't be alarmed," she replied bitterly, "I shall leave you the means of asserting your right to my parents' estate."

"Ah—so——"

"Your threats obliged me to decide contrary to my own wishes. I felt that no amount of slander or disgrace would daunt you."

"Of course not, when so many millions are at stake."

"I reflected, and I saw that nothing would arrest you upon your downward path except a large fortune. If you were poor and compelled to earn your daily bread—a task which you are probably incapable of performing—who can tell what depths of degradation you might descend to? With your instincts and your vices, who knows what crime you wouldn't commit to obtain money? It wouldn't be long before you were in the dock, and I should hear of you only through your disgrace. But, on the other hand, if you were rich, you would probably lead an honest life, like many others, who, wanting for nothing, are not tempted to do wrong, who, in fact, show virtue in which there is nothing worthy of praise. For real virtue implies temptation—a struggle and victory."

Although he did not understand these remarks very well, M. Wilkie evinced a desire to offer some objections; but Madame d'Argelès had already resumed: "So I went to my notary this morning. I told him everything; and by this time my renunciation of my rights to the estate of the Count de Chalusse is already recorded."

"What! your renunciation. Oh! no."

"Allow me to finish since you don't understand me. As soon as I renounce the inheritance it becomes yours."

"Truly?"

"I have no wish to deceive you. I only desire that the name of Lia d'Argelès should not be mentioned. I will give you the necessary proofs to establish your identity; my marriage contract and your certificate of birth."

It was joy that made M. Wilkie speechless now. "And when will you give me these documents?" he faltered, after a short pause.

"You shall have them before you leave this house; but first of all I must talk with you."

XV.

AGITATED and excited though he was, M. Wilkie had not once ceased to think of M. de Coralthe and the Marquis de Valorsay. What would they do in such a position, and how should he act to conform himself to the probable example of these models of deportment? Manifestly he ought to assume that stolid and insolent air of boredom which is considered a sure indication of birth and breeding. Convinced of this, and seized with

a laudable desire to emulate such distinguished examples, he had perched himself upon a trunk, where he still sat with his legs crossed. He now pretended to suppress a yawn, as he growled, "What! some more long phrases—and another melodramatic display?"

Absorbed in the memories she had invoked, Madame d'Argelès paid no heed to Wilkie's impertinence. "Yes, I must talk with you," she said, "and more for your sake than for my own. I must tell you who I am, and through what strange vicissitudes I have passed. You know what family I belong to. I will tell you, however—for you may be ignorant of the fact—that our house is the equal of any in France in lineage, splendor of alliance, and fortune. When I was a child, my parents lived at the Hôtel de Chalusse, in the Faubourg Saint Germain, a perfect palace, surrounded by one of those immense gardens, which are no longer seen in Paris—a real park, shaded with century-old trees. Certainly everything that money could procure, or vanity desire, was within my reach; and yet my youth was wretchedly unhappy. I scarcely knew my father, who was devoured by ambition, and had thrown himself body and soul into the vortex of politics. Either my mother did not love me, or thought it beneath her dignity to make any display of sensibility; but at all events her reserve had raised a wall of ice between herself and me. As for my brother he was too much engrossed in pleasure to think of a mere child. So I lived quite alone, too proud to accept the love and friendship of my inferiors—abandoned to the dangerous inspirations of solitude, and with no other consolation than my books—books which had been chosen for me by my mother's confessor, and which were calculated to fill my imagination with visionary and romantic fancies.

The only conversation I heard dealt with the means of leaving all the family fortune to my brother, so that he might uphold the splendor of the name, and with the necessity of marrying me to some superannuated nobleman who would take me without a dowry, or of compelling me to enter one of those aristocratic convents, which are the refuge, and often the prison, of poor girls of noble birth.

“I do not pretend to justify my fault, I am only explaining it. I thought myself the most unfortunate being in the world—and such I really was, since I honestly believed it—when I happened to meet Arthur Gordon, your father. I saw him for the first time at a *fête* given at the house of the Comte de Commarin. How he, a mere adventurer, had succeeded in forcing his way into the most exclusive society in the world, is a point which I have never been able to explain. But, alas! it is only too true that when our glances met for the first time, my heart was stirred to its inmost depths; I felt that it was no longer mine—that I was no longer free! Ah! why does not God allow a man’s face to reflect at least something of his nature? This man, who was a corrupt and audacious hypocrite, had that air of apparent nobility and frankness which inspires you with unlimited confidence, and the melancholy expression on his features seemed to indicate that he had known sorrow, and had good cause to rail at destiny. In his whole appearance there was certainly a mysterious and fatal charm. I afterward learned that this was only a natural result of the wild life he had led. He was only twenty-six, and he had already been the commander of a slave ship, and had fought in Mexico at the head of one of those guerilla bands which make politics an excuse for pillage and murder. He divined

only too well the impression he had made upon my heart. I met him twice afterward in society. He did not speak to me; he even pretended to avoid me, but standing a little on one side, he watched my every movement with burning eyes in which I fancied I could read a passion as absorbing as my own. At last he ventured to write to me. The moment a letter addressed to me in an unknown hand was covertly handed me by my maid, I divined that it came from him. I was frightened, and my first impulse was to take it, not to my mother—whom I regarded as my natural enemy—but to my father. However, he chanced to be absent; I kept the letter, I read it, I answered it—and he wrote again.

“Alas! from that moment my conduct was inexcusable. I knew that it was worse than a fault to continue this clandestine correspondence. I knew my parents would never give my hand in marriage to a man who was not of noble birth. I knew that I was risking my reputation, the spotless honor of our house, my happiness, and life! Still I persisted—I was possessed with a strange madness that made me ready to brave every danger. Besides, he gave me no time to breathe, or reflect. Everywhere, constantly, every instant, he compelled me to think of him. By some miracle of address and audacity, he had discovered a means of intruding upon my presence, even in my father’s house. For instance, every morning I found the vases in my room full of choice flowers, though I was never able to discover what hands had placed them there. Ah! how can one help believing in an omnipresent passion which one inhales with the very air one breathes! How can one resist it?

“I only discovered Arthur Gordon’s object when it

was too late. He had come to Paris with the fixed determination of trapping some rich heiress, and forcing her family to give her to him with a large dowry, after one of those disgraceful scandals which render a marriage inevitable. At the very same time he was pursuing two other rich young girls, persuaded that one of the three would certainly become his victim.

"I was the first to yield. One of those unforeseen events which are the work of Providence, was destined to decide my fate. Several times, already, in compliance with Arthur's urgent entreaties, I had met him at night time in a little pavilion in our garden. This pavilion contained a billiard-room and a spacious gallery in which my brother practised fencing and pistol shooting with his masters and friends. There, thanks to the liberty I enjoyed, we thought ourselves perfectly secure from observation, and we were imprudent enough to light the candles. One night when I had just joined Arthur in the pavilion, I thought I heard the sound of hoarse, heavy breathing behind me. I turned round in a fright and saw my brother standing on the threshold. Oh! then I realized how guilty I had been! I felt that one or the other of these two men—my lover or my brother—would not leave that room alive.

"I tried to speak, to throw myself between them, but I found I could neither speak nor move; it was as if I had been turned to stone. Nor did they exchange a word at first. But at last my brother drew two swords from their scabbards, and throwing one at Arthur's feet, exclaimed: 'I have no wish to assassinate you. Defend yourself, and save your life if you can!' And as Arthur hesitated, and seemed to be trying to gain time instead of picking up the weapon that was lying

on the floor near him, my brother struck him in the face with the flat side of his sword, and cried: 'Now will you fight, you coward!' In an instant it was all over. Arthur caught up the sword, and springing upon my brother, disarmed him, and wounded him in the breast. I saw this. I saw the blood spurt out upon my lover's hands. I saw my brother stagger, beat the air wildly with his hands, and fall apparently lifeless to the floor. Then I, too, lost consciousness and fell!"

Any one who had seen Madame d'Argelès as she stood there recoiling in horror, with her features contracted, and her eyes dilated, would have realized that by strength of will she had dispelled the mists enshrouding the past, and distinctly beheld the scene she was describing. She seemed to experience anew the same agony of terror she had felt twenty years before; and this lent such poignant intensity to the interest of her narrative that if M. Wilkie's heart was not exactly touched, he was, as he afterward confessed, at least rather interested. But Madame d'Argelès seemed to have forgotten his existence. She wiped away the foam-flecked blood which had risen to her lips, and in the same mournful voice resumed her story.

"When I regained my senses it was morning, and I was lying, still dressed, on a bed in a strange room. Arthur Gordon was standing at the foot of the bed anxiously watching my movements. He did not give me time to question him. 'You are in my house,' said he. 'Your brother is dead!' Almighty God! I thought I should die as well. I hoped so. I prayed for death. But, in spite of my sobs, he pitilessly continued: 'It is a terrible misfortune which I shall never cease to regret. And yet, it was his own fault. You, who witnessed the scene, know that it was so. You can still

see on my face the mark of the blow he dealt me. I only defended myself and you.' I was ignorant then of the accepted code of duelling. I did not know that by throwing himself upon my brother before he was on guard, Arthur Gordon had virtually assassinated him. He relied upon my ignorance for the success of the sinister farce he was playing. 'When I saw your brother fall,' he continued, 'I was wild with terror; and not knowing what I did, I caught you up in my arms and brought you here. But don't tremble, I know that you are not in my house of your own free will. A carriage is below and awaits your orders to convey you to your parents' home. It will be easy to find an explanation for last night's catastrophe. Slander will not venture to attack such a family as yours.' He spoke in the constrained tone, and with that air which a brave man, condemned to death, would assume in giving utterance to his last wishes. I felt as if I were going mad. 'And you!' I exclaimed, 'you! What will become of you?' He shook his head, and with a look of anguish, replied: 'Me! What does it matter about me! I am ruined undoubtedly. So much the better. Nothing matters now that I must live apart from you'! Ah! he knew my heart. He knew his power! Swayed by an emotion which was madness rather than heroism, I sprang toward him, and clasped him in my arms: 'Then I, too, am lost!' I cried. 'Since fate united us, nothing but death shall separate us. I love you. I am your accomplice. Let the curse fall upon both!'

"A keen observer would certainly have detected a gleam of fiendish joy in his eyes. But he protested, or pretended to protest. With feigned energy he refused to accept such a sacrifice. He could not link my des-

tiny to his, for misery had ever been his lot; and now that this last and most terrible misfortune had overtaken him, he was more than ever convinced that there was a curse hanging over him! He would not suffer me to bring misery upon myself, and eternal remorse upon him. But the more he repulsed me, the more obstinately I clung to him. The more forcibly he showed the horror of the sacrifice, the more I was convinced that my honor compelled me to make it. So at last he yielded, or seemed to yield, with transports of gratitude and love. 'Well! yes, I accept your sacrifice, my darling!' he exclaimed. 'I accept it; and before the God who is looking down upon us, I swear that I will do all that is in human power to repay such sublime and marvellous devotion.' And, bending over me, he printed a kiss upon my forehead. 'But we must fly!' he resumed, quickly. 'I have my happiness to defend now! I will not suffer any one to discover us and separate us now. We must start at once, without losing a moment, and gain my native land, America. There, we shall be safe. For rest assured they will search for us. Who knows but even now the officers of the law are upon our track? Your family is all-powerful—I am a mere nobody—we should be crushed if they discover us. They would bury you in a gloomy cloister, and I should be tried as a common thief, or as a vile assassin.' My only answer was: 'Let us go! Let us go at once!'

"It had been easy for him to foresee what the result of this interview would be. A vehicle was indeed waiting at the door, but not for the purpose of conveying me to the Hôtel de Chalusse—as was proved conclusively by the fact that his trunks were already strapped upon it. Besides, the coachman must have received his instructions in advance, for he drove us straight to the

Hâvre Railway station without a word. It was not until some months afterward that these trifles, which entirely escaped my notice at the time, opened my eyes to the truth. When we reached the station we found a train ready to start, and we took our places in it. I tried to quiet my conscience with miserable sophistries. Remembering that God has said to woman: To follow thy husband thou shalt abandon all else, native land, paternal home, parents and friends, I told myself that this was the husband whom my heart had instinctively chosen, and that it was my duty to follow him and share his destiny. And thus I fled with him, although I thought I left a corpse behind me—the corpse of my only brother.”

M. Wilkie was actually so much interested that he forgot his anxiety concerning his attitude, and no longer thought of M. de Coralthe and the Marquis de Valorsay. He even sprang up, and exclaimed: “Amazing!”

But Madame d’Argelès had already resumed: “Such was my great, inexcusable, irreparable fault. I have told you the whole truth, without trying either to conceal or justify anything. Listen to my chastisement! On our arrival at Le Hâvre the next day, Arthur confessed that he was greatly embarrassed financially. Owing to our precipitate flight, he had not had time to realize the property he possessed—at least so he told me—a banker, on whom he had depended, had moreover failed him, and he had not sufficient money to pay our passage to New York. This amazed me. My education had been absurd, like that of most young girls in my station. I knew nothing of real life, of its requirements and difficulties. I knew, of course, that there were rich people and poor people, that money was a

necessity, and that those who did not possess it would stoop to any meanness to obtain it. But all this was not very clear in my mind, and I never suspected that a few francs more or less would be a matter of vital importance. So I was not in the least prepared for the request to which this confession served as preface, and Arthur Gordon was obliged to ask me point-blank if I did not happen to have some money about me, or some jewelry which could be converted into money. I gave him all I had, my purse containing a few louis, a ring and a necklace, with a handsome diamond cross attached to it. However, the total value was comparatively small, and such was Arthur's disappointment that he made a remark which frightened me even then, though I did not fully understand its shameful meaning until afterward: 'A woman who repairs to a *rendezvous* should always have all the valuables she possesses about her. One never knows what may happen.'

"Want of money was keeping us prisoners at Le Havre, when Arthur Gordon chanced to meet an old acquaintance, who was the captain of an American sailing vessel. He confided his embarrassment to his friend, and the latter, whose vessel was to sail at the end of the same week, kindly offered us a free passage. The voyage was one long torture to me, for it was then that I first served my apprenticeship in shame and disgrace. By the captain's offensive gallantry, the lower officers' familiarity of manner, and the sailors' ironical glances whenever I appeared on deck, I saw that my position was a secret for no one. Everybody knew that I was the mistress and not the wife of the man whom I called my husband; and, without being really conscious of it, perhaps, they made me cruelly expiate my

fault. Moreover, reason had regained its ascendancy, my eyes were gradually opening to the truth, and I was beginning to learn the real character of the scoundrel for whom I had sacrificed all that makes life desirable.

“Not that he had wholly ceased to practise dissimulation. But after the evening meal he often lingered at table smoking and drinking with his friend the captain, and when he joined me afterward, heated with alcohol, he shocked me by advocating theories which were both novel and repulsive to me. Once, after drinking more than usual, he entirely forgot his assumed part, and revealed himself in his true character. He declared he bitterly regretted that our love affair had ended so disastrously. It was deplorable to think that so happily conceived and so skilfully conducted a scheme should have terminated in bloodshed. And the blow had fallen just as he fancied he had reached the goal; just as he thought he would reap the reward of his labor. In a few weeks’ more time he would undoubtedly have gained sufficient influence over me to persuade me to elope with him. This would, of course, have caused a great scandal; the next day there would have been a family conclave; a compromise would have been effected, and finally, a marriage arranged with a large dowry, to hush up the affair. ‘And I should now be a rich man,’ he added, ‘a very rich man—I should be rolling through the streets of Paris in my carriage, instead of being on board this cursed ship, eating salt cod twice a day, and living on charity.’

“Ah! it was no longer possible to doubt. The truth was as clear as daylight. I had never been loved, not even an hour, not even a moment. The loving letters which had blinded me, the protestations of affection which had deceived me, had been addressed to my

father's millions, not to myself. And not unfrequently I saw Arthur Gordon's face darken, as he talked with evident anxiety about what he could do to earn a living for himself and me in America. 'I have had trouble enough to get on alone,' he grumbled. 'What will it be now? To burden myself with a penniless wife! What egregious folly! And yet I couldn't have acted differently—I was compelled to do it.' Why had he been compelled to do it? why had he not acted differently?—that was what I vainly puzzled my brain to explain. However, his gloomy fears of poverty were not realized. A delightful surprise awaited him at New York. A relative had recently died, leaving him a legacy of fifty thousand dollars—a small fortune. I hoped that he would now cease his constant complaints, but he seemed even more displeased than before. 'Such is the irony of fate,' he repeated again and again. 'With this money, I might easily have married a wife worth a hundred thousand dollars, and then I should be rich at last!' After that, I had good reason to expect that I should soon be forsaken—but no, shortly after our arrival, he married me. Had he done so out of respect for his word? I believed so. But, alas! this marriage was the result of calculation, like everything else he did.

"We were living in New York, when one evening he came home, looking very pale and agitated. He had a French newspaper in his hand. 'Read this,' he said, handing it to me. I took the paper as he bade me, and read that my brother had not been killed, that he was improving, and that his recovery was now certain. And as I fell on my knees, bursting into tears, and thanking God for freeing me from such terrible remorse, he exclaimed: 'We are in a nice fix! I advise

you to congratulate yourself!’ From that time forward, I noticed he displayed the feverish anxiety of a man who feels that he is constantly threatened with some great danger. A few days afterward, he said to me: ‘I cannot endure this! Have our trunks ready to-morrow, and we will start South. Instead of calling ourselves Gordon, we’ll travel under the name of Grant.’ I did not venture to question him. He had quite mastered me by his cruel tyranny, and I was accustomed to obey him like a slave in terror of the lash. However, during our long journey, I learned the cause of our flight and change of name.

“‘Your brother, d——n him,’ he said, one day, ‘is hunting for me everywhere! He wants to kill me or to deliver me up to justice, I don’t know which. He pretends that I tried to murder him!’ It was strange; but Arthur Gordon, who was bravery personified, and who exposed himself again and again to the most frightful dangers, felt a wild, unreasoning, inconceivable fear of my brother. It was this dread that had decided him to burden himself with me. He feared that if he left me, lying unconscious beside my brother’s lifeless form, I might on recovering my senses reveal the truth, and unconsciously act as his accuser. You were born in Richmond, Wilkie, where we remained nearly a month, during which time I saw but little of your father. He had formed the acquaintance of several rich planters, and spent his time hunting and gambling with them. Unfortunately, fifty thousand dollars could not last long at this rate; and, in spite of his skill as a gambler, he returned home one morning ruined. A fortnight later when he had sold our effects, and borrowed all the money he could, we embarked again for France. It was not until we reached Paris

that I discovered the reasons that had influenced him in returning to Europe. He had heard of my father and mother's death, and intended to compel me to claim my share of the property. He dared not appear in person on account of my brother. At last the hour of my vengeance had arrived; for I had taken a solemn oath that this scoundrel who had ruined me should never enjoy the fortune which had been his only object in seducing me. I had sworn to die inch by inch and by the most frightful tortures rather than give him one penny of the Chalusse millions. And I kept my word.

"When I told him that I was resolved not to assert my rights, he seemed utterly confounded. He could not understand how the down-trodden slave dared to revolt against him. And when he found that my decision was irrevocable, I thought he would have an attack of apoplexy. It made him wild with rage to think that he was only separated from this immense fortune—the dream of his life—by a single word of mine, and to find that he had not the power to extort that word from me. Then began a struggle between us, which became more and more frightful as the money he possessed gradually dwindled away. But it was in vain that he resorted to brutal treatment; in vain that he struck me, tortured me, and dragged me about the floor by the hair of my head! The thought that I was avenged, that his sufferings equalled mine, increased my courage a hundredfold, and made me almost insensible to physical pain. He would certainly have been the first to grow weary of the struggle, if a fiendish plan had not occurred to him. He said to himself that if he could not conquer the wife, he *could* conquer the mother, and he threatened to turn his bru-

talities to you, Wilkie. To save you—for I knew what he was capable of—I pretended to waver, and I asked twenty-four hours for reflection. He granted them. But the next day I left him forever, flying from him with you in my arms.”

M. Wilkie turned white, and a cold chill crept up his spine. However, it was not pity for his mother's sufferings, nor shame for his father's infamy that agitated him, but ever the same terrible fear of incurring the enmity of this dangerous coveter of the Chalusse millions. Would he be able to hold his father at bay even with the assistance of M. de Coralthe and the Marquis de Valorsay? A thousand questions rose to his lips, for he was eager to hear the particulars of his mother's flight; but Madame d'Argelès hurried on with her story as if she feared her strength would fail before she reached the end.

“I was alone with you, Wilkie, in this great city,” she resumed. “A hundred francs was all that I possessed. My first care was to find a place of shelter. For sixteen francs a month, which I was compelled to pay in advance, I found a small, meagrely furnished room in the Faubourg Saint Martin. It was badly ventilated and miserably lighted, but still it was shelter. I said to myself that we could live there together by my work, Wilkie. I was a proficient in feminine accomplishments; I was an excellent musician, and I thought I should have no difficulty in earning the four or five francs a day which I considered absolutely necessary for our subsistence. Alas! I discovered only too soon what chimerical hopes I had cherished. To give music lessons it is necessary to obtain pupils. Where should I find them? I had no one to recommend me, and I scarcely dared show myself in the streets,

so great was my fear that your father would discover our hiding-place. At last, I decided to try to find some employment in needlework, and timidly offered my services at several shops. Alas! it is only those who have gone about from door to door soliciting work who know the misery of the thing. To ask alms would be scarcely more humiliating. People sneered at me, and replied (when they deigned to reply at all) that 'there was no business doing, and they had all the help they wanted.' My evident inexperience was probably the cause of many of these refusals, as well as my attire, for I still had the appearance of being a rich woman. Who knows what they took me for? Still the thought of you sustained me, Wilkie, and nothing daunted me.

"I finally succeeded in obtaining some bands of muslin to embroider, and some pieces of tapestry work to fill in. Unremunerative employment, no doubt, especially to one ignorant of the art of working quickly, rather than well. By rising with daylight, and working until late at night, I scarcely succeeded in earning twenty sous a day. And it was not long before even this scanty resource failed me. Winter came, and the cold weather with it. One morning I changed my last five-franc piece—it lasted us a week. Then I pawned and sold everything that was not absolutely indispensable until nothing was left me but my patched dress and a single skirt. And soon an evening came when the owner of our miserable den turned us into the street because I could no longer pay the rent.

"This was the final blow! I tottered away, clinging to the walls for support; too weak from lack of food to carry you. The rain was falling, and chilled us to the bones. You were crying bitterly. And all that

night and all the next day, aimless and hopeless, we wandered about the streets. I must either die of want or return to your father. I preferred death. Toward evening—instinct having led me to the Seine—I sat down on one of the stone benches of the Point-Neuf, holding you on my knees and watching the flow of the dark river below. There was a strange fascination—a promise of peace in its depths—that impelled me almost irresistibly to plunge into the flood. If I had been alone in the world, I should not have stopped to consider a second, but on your account, Wilkie, I hesitated.”

Moved by the thought of the danger he had escaped, M. Wilkie shuddered. “*B-r-r-r!*” he growled. “You did well to hesitate.”

She did not even hear him, but continued: “I at last decided that it was best to put an end to this misery, and rising with difficulty, I was approaching the parapet, when a gruff voice beside us exclaimed: ‘What are you doing there?’ I turned, thinking some police officer had spoken, but I was mistaken. By the light of the street lamp, I perceived a man who looked some thirty years of age, and had a frank and rather genial face. Why this stranger instantly inspired me with unlimited confidence I don’t know. Perhaps it was an unconscious horror of death that made me long for any token of human sympathy. However it may have been, I told him my story, but not without changing the names, and omitting many particulars. He had taken a seat beside me on the bench, and I saw big tears roll down his cheeks as I proceeded with my narrative. ‘It is ever so! it is ever so!’ he muttered. ‘To love is to incur the risk of martyrdom. It is to offer one’s self as a victim to every perfidy, to the

basest treason and ingratitude.' The man who spoke in this fashion was Baron Trigault. He did not allow me to finish my story. 'Enough!' he suddenly exclaimed, 'follow me!' A cab was passing, he made us get in, and an hour later we were in a comfortable room, beside a blazing fire, with a generously spread table before us. The next day, moreover, we were installed in a pleasant home. Alas! why wasn't the baron generous to the last? You were saved, Wilkie, but at what a price!"

She paused for a moment, her face redder than fire; but soon mastering her agitation, she resumed: "There was one great cause of dissension between the baron and myself. I wished you to be educated, Wilkie, like the son of a noble family, while he desired you should receive the practical training suited to a youth who would have to make his own way in the world, and win position, fortune, and even name for himself. Ah! he was a thousand times right, as events have since proved only too well! But maternal love blinded me, and, after an angry discussion, he went away, declaring he would not see me again until I became more reasonable. He thought that reflection would cure me of my folly. Unfortunately, he was not acquainted with the fatal obstinacy which is the distinguishing characteristic of the Chalusse family. While I was wondering how I could find the means of carrying the plans I had formed for you into execution, two of the baron's acquaintances presented themselves, with the following proposal: Aware of the enormous profits derived by clandestine gambling dens, they had conceived the project of opening a public establishment on a large scale, where any Parisian or foreigner, if he seemed to be a gentleman, and possessed of means, would find no diffi-

culty in obtaining admission. By taking certain precautions, and by establishing this gambling den in a private drawing-room, they believed the scheme practicable, and came to suggest that I should keep the drawing-room in question, and be their partner in the enterprise. Scarcely knowing what I pledged myself to, I accepted their offer, influenced—I should rather say decided—by the exalted positions which both these gentlemen occupied, by the public consideration they enjoyed, and the honored names they bore. And that same week this house was rented and furnished, and I was installed in it under the name of Lia d'Argelès.

“ But this was not all. There still remained the task of creating for myself one of those scandalous reputations that attract public attention. This proved an easy task, thanks to the assistance of my silent partners, and the innocent simplicity of several of their friends and certain journalists. As for myself, I did my best to insure the success of the horrible farce which was to lend infamous notoriety to the name of Lia d'Argelès. I had magnificent equipages and superb dresses, and I made myself conspicuous at the theatres and all places of public resort. As is generally the case when one is acting contrary to conscience, I called the most absurd sophistries to my assistance. I tried to convince myself that appearances are nothing, that reality is everything, and that it did not matter if I were known as a courtesan since rumor lied, and my life *was* really chaste. When the baron hastened to me and tried to rescue me from the abyss into which I had flung myself, it was too late. I had discovered that the business would prove successful; and for your sake, I longed for money as passionately, as madly, as any miser. Last year my gaming-room yielded more than one hun-

dred and fifty thousand francs clear profit, and I received as my share the thirty-five thousand francs which you squandered. Now you know me as I really am. My associates, my partners, the men whose secret I have faithfully kept, walk the streets with their heads erect. They boast of their unsullied honor, and they are respected by every one. Such is the truth, and I have no reason to make their disgrace known. Besides, if I proclaimed it from the house-tops, no one would believe me. But you are my son, and I owe you the truth, the whole truth!"

In any age but the present, Madame d'Argelès's story would have seemed absolutely incredible. Nowadays, however, such episodes are by no means rare. Two men—two men of exalted rank and highly respected, to use a common expression—associate in opening a gaming-house under the very eyes of the police, and in coining money out of a woman's supposed disgrace. 'Tis after all but an everyday occurrence.

The unhappy woman had told her story with apparent coldness, and yet, in her secret heart, she perhaps hoped that by disclosing her terrible sacrifice and long martyrdom, she would draw a burst of gratitude and tenderness from her son, calculated to repay her for all her sufferings. But the hope was vain. It would have been easier to draw water from a solid rock than to extract a sympathetic tear from Wilkie's eyes. He was only alive to the practical side of this narrative, and what impressed him most was the impudent assurance of Madame d'Argelès's business associates. "Not a bad idea; not bad at all," he exclaimed. And, boiling over with curiosity, he continued: "I would give something handsome to know those men's names. Really

you ought to tell me. It would be worth one's while to know."

Any other person than this interesting young man would have been crushed by the look his mother gave him—a look embodying the deepest disappointment and contempt. "I think you must be mad," she remarked coldly. And as he sprang up, astonished that any one should doubt his abundant supply of good sense, "Let us put an end to this," she sternly added.

Thereupon she hastily went into the adjoining room, reappearing a moment later with a roll of papers in her hand. "Here," she remarked, "is my marriage certificate, your certificate of birth, and a copy of my renunciation—a perfectly valid document, since the court has authorized it, owing to my husband's absence. All these proofs I am ready and willing to place at your disposal, but on one condition."

This last word fell like a cold shower-bath upon Wilkie's exultant joy. "What is this condition?" he anxiously inquired.

"It is that you should sign this deed, which has been drawn up by my notary—a deed by which you pledge yourself to hand me the sum of two million francs on the day you come into possession of the Chalusse property."

Two millions! The immensity of the sum struck Wilkie dumb with consternation. Nor did he forget that he would be compelled to give the Viscount de Coralthe the large reward he had promised him—a reward promised in writing, unfortunately. "I shall have nothing left," he began, piteously.

But with a disdainful gesture Madame d'Argelès interrupted him. "Set your mind at rest," said she. "You will still be immensely rich. All the estimates

which have been made are far below the mark. When I was a girl I often heard my father say that his income amounted to more than eight hundred thousand francs a year. My brother inherited the whole property, and I would be willing to swear that he never spent more than half of his income."

Wilkie's nerves had never been subjected to so severe a shock. He tottered and his brain whirled. "Oh! oh!" he stammered. This was all he could say.

"Only I must warn you of a more than probable deception," pursued Madame d'Argelès. "As my brother was firmly resolved to deprive me even of my rightful portion of the estate, he concealed his fortune in every possible way. It will undoubtedly require considerable time and trouble to gain possession of the whole. However I know a man, formerly the Count de Chalusse's confidential agent, who might aid you in this task."

"And this man's name?"

"Is Isidore Fortunat. I saved his card for you. Here it is."

M. Wilkie took it up, placed it carefully in his pocket, and then exclaimed: "That being the case, I consent to sign, but after this you need not complain. Two millions at five per cent. ought to greatly alleviate one's sufferings."

Madame d'Argelès did not deign to notice this delicate irony. "I will tell you in advance to what purpose I intend to apply this sum," she said.

"Ah!"

"I intend one of these two millions to serve as the dowry of a young girl who would have been the Count de Chalusse's sole legatee, if his death had not been so sudden and so unexpected."

"And the other one?"

"The other I intend to invest for you in such a way that you can only touch the interest of it, so that you will not want for bread after you have squandered your inheritance, even to the very last penny."

This wise precaution could not fail to shock such a brilliant young man as M. Wilkie. "Do you take me for a fool?" he exclaimed. "I may appear very generous, but I am shrewd enough, never you fear."

"Sign," interrupted Madame d'Argelès, coldly.

But he attempted to prove that he was no fool by reading and re-reading the contract before he would consent to append his name to it. At last, however, he did so, and stowed away the proofs which insured him the much-coveted property.

"Now," said Madame d'Argelès, "I have one request to make of you. Whenever your father makes his appearance and lays claim to this fortune, I entreat you to avoid a lawsuit, which would only make your mother's shame and the disgrace attached to the hitherto stainless name of Chalusse still more widely known. Compromise with him. You will be rich enough to satisfy his greed without feeling it."

M. Wilkie remained silent for a moment, as if he were deliberating upon the course he ought to pursue. "If my father is reasonable, I will be the same," he said at last. "I will choose as an arbiter between us one of my friends—a man who acts on the square, like myself—the Marquis de Valorsay."

"My God! do you know him?"

"He is one of my most intimate friends."

Madame d'Argelès had become very pale. "Wretched boy!" she exclaimed. "You don't know that it's the marquis——" She paused abruptly. One word more

and she would have betrayed Pascal Feraillleur's secret plans, with which she had been made acquainted by Baron Trigault. Had she a right to do this, even to put her son on his guard against a man whom she considered the greatest villain in the world?

"Well?" insisted M. Wilkie, in surprise.

But Madame d'Argelès had recovered her self-possession. "I only wished to warn you against too close a connection with the Marquis de Valorsay. He has an excellent position in society, but yours will be far more brilliant. His star is on the wane; yours is just rising. All that he is regretting, you have a right to hope for. Perhaps even now he is jealous of you, and wishes to persuade you to take some false step."

"Ah! you little know him!"

"I have warned you."

M. Wilkie took up his hat, but, though he was longing to depart, embarrassment kept him to the spot. He vaguely felt that he ought not to leave his mother in this style. "I hope I shall soon have some good news to bring you," he began.

"Before night I shall have left this house," she answered.

"Of course. But you are going to give me your new address."

"No."

"What?—No!"

She shook her head sadly, and in a scarcely audible voice responded: "It is not likely that we shall meet again."

"And the two millions that I am to turn over to you?"

"Mr. Patterson will collect the money. As for me, say to yourself that I'm dead. You have broken the

only link that bound me to life, by proving the futility of the most terrible sacrifices. However, I am a mother, and I forgive you." Then as he did not move, and as she felt that her strength was deserting her, she dragged herself from the room, murmuring, "Farewell!"

XVI.

STUPEFIED with astonishment, M. Wilkie stood for a moment silent and motionless. "Allow me," he faltered at last; "allow me—I wish to explain." But Madame d'Argelès did not even turn her head; the door closed behind her and he was left alone.

However strong a man's nature may be, he always has certain moments of weakness. For instance, at the present moment Wilkie was completely at a loss what to do. Not that he repented, he was incapable of that; but there are hours when the most hardened conscience is touched, and when long dormant instincts at last assert their rights. If he had obeyed his first impulse, he would have darted after his mother and thrown himself on his knees before her. But reflection, remembrance of the Viscount de Coralith, and the Marquis de Valorsay, made him silent the noblest voice that had spoken in his soul for many a long day. So, with his head proudly erect, he went off, twirling his mustaches and followed by the whispers of the servants—whispers which were ready to change into hisses at any moment.

But what did he care for the opinion of these plebeians! Before he was a hundred paces from the house his emotion had vanished, and he was thinking how he

could most agreeably spend the time until the hour appointed for his second interview with M. de Valorsay. He had not breakfasted, but "his stomach was out of sorts," as he said to himself, and it would really have been impossible for him to swallow a morsel. Thus not caring to return home, he started in quest of one of his former intimates, with the generous intention of overpowering him with the great news. Unfortunately he failed to find this friend, and eager to vent the pride that was suffocating him, in some way or other, he entered the shop of an engraver, whom he crushed by his importance, and ordered some visiting cards bearing the inscription W. de Gordon-Chalusse, with a count's coronet in one of the corners.

Thus occupied, time flew by so quickly that he was a trifle late in keeping his appointment with his dear friend the marquis. Wilkie found M. de Valorsay as he had left him—in his smoking-room, talking with the Viscount de Coralthe. Not that the marquis had been idle, but it had barely taken him an hour to set in motion the machinery which he had had in complete readiness since the evening before. "Victory!" cried Wilkie, as he appeared on the threshold. "It was a hard battle, but I asserted my rights. I am the acknowledged heir! the millions are mine!" And without giving his friends time to congratulate him, he began to describe his interview with Madame d'Argelès, presenting his conduct in the most odious light possible, pretending he had indulged in all sorts of harsh rejoinders, and making himself out to be "a man of bronze," or "a block of marble," as he said.

"You are certainly more courageous than I fancied," said M. de Valorsay gravely, when the narrative was ended.

“Is that really so?”

“It is, indeed. Now the world is before you. Let your story be noised abroad—and it will be noised abroad—and you will become a hero. Imagine the amazement of Paris when it learns that Lia d’Argelès was a virtuous woman, who sacrificed her reputation for the sake of her son—a martyr, whose disgrace was only a shameful falsehood invented by two men of rank to increase the attractions of their gambling-den! It will take the newspapers a month to digest this strange romance. And whom will all this notoriety fall upon? Upon you, my dear sir; and as your millions will lend an additional charm to the romance, you will become the lion of the season.”

M. Wilkie was really too much overwhelmed to feel elated. “Upon my word, you overpower me, my dear marquis—you quite overpower me,” he stammered.

“I too have been at work,” resumed the marquis. “And I have made numerous inquiries, in accordance with my promise. I almost regret it, for what I have discovered is—very singular, to say the least. I was just saying so to Coralthe when you came in. What I have learned makes it extremely unpleasant for me, to find myself mixed up in the affair; accordingly, I have requested the persons who gave me this information to call here. You shall hear their story, and then you must decide for yourself.” So saying, he rang the bell, and as soon as a servant answered the summons, he exclaimed: “Show M. Casimir in.”

When the lackey had retired to carry out this order, the marquis remarked: “Casimir was the deceased count’s valet. He is a clever fellow, honest, intelligent, and well up in his business—such a man as you will

need, in fact, and I won't try to conceal the fact that the hope of entering your service has aided considerably in unloosening his tongue."

M. Casimir, who was irreproachably clad in black, with a white cambric tie round his neck, entered the room at this very moment, smiling and bowing obsequiously. "This gentleman, my good fellow," said M. de Valorsay, pointing to Wilkie, "is your former master's only heir. A proof of devotion might induce him to keep you with him. What you told me a little while ago is of great importance to him; see if you can repeat it now for his benefit."

In his anxiety to secure a good situation, M. Casimir had ventured to apply to the Marquis de Valorsay; he had talked a good deal, and the marquis had conceived the plan of making him an unsuspecting accomplice. "I never deny my words," replied the valet, "and since monsieur is the heir to the property, I won't hesitate to tell him that immense sums have been stolen from the late count's estate."

M. Wilkie bounded from his chair. "Immense sums!" he exclaimed. "Is it possible!"

"Monsieur shall judge. On the morning preceding his death, the count had more than two millions in bank-notes and bonds stowed away in his *escritoire*, but when the justice of the peace came to take the inventory, the money could not be found. We servants were terribly alarmed, for we feared that suspicion would fall upon us."

Ah! if Wilkie had only been alone he would have given vent to his true feelings. But here, under the eyes of the marquis and M. de Coralth, he felt that he must maintain an air of stoical indifference. He *almost* succeeded in doing so, and in a tolerably firm voice he

remarked: "This is not very pleasant news. Two millions! that's a good haul. Tell me, my friend, have you any clue to the thief?"

The valet's troubled glance betrayed an uneasy conscience, but he had gone too far to draw back. "I shouldn't like to accuse an innocent person," he replied, "but there was some one who constantly had access to that *escritoire*."

"And who was that?"

"Mademoiselle Marguerite."

"I don't know the lady."

"She's a young girl who is—at least people say—the count's illegitimate daughter. Her word was law in the house."

"What has become of her?"

"She has gone to live with General de Fondège, one of the count's friends. She wouldn't take her jewels and diamonds away with her, which seemed very strange, for they are worth more than a hundred thousand francs. Even Bourigeau said to me: 'That's unnatural, M. Casimir.' Bourigeau is the concierge of the house, a very worthy man. Monsieur will not find his equal."

Unfortunately, this tribute to the merits of the valet's friend was interrupted by the arrival of a footman, who, after tapping respectfully at the door, entered the room and exclaimed: "The doctor is here, and desires to speak with Monsieur le Marquis."

"Very well," replied M. de Valorsay, "ask him to wait. When I ring, you can usher him in." Then addressing M. Casimir, he added:

"You may retire for the present, but don't leave the house. M. Wilkie will acquaint you with his intentions by and by."

The valet thereupon backed out of the room, bowing profoundly.

"There is a story for you!" exclaimed M. Wilkie as soon as the door was closed. "A robbery of two millions!"

The marquis shook his head, and remarked, gravely: "That's a mere nothing. I suspect something far more terrible."

"What, pray? Upon my word! you frighten me."

"Wait! I may be mistaken. Even the doctor may be deceived. But you shall judge for yourself." As he spoke, he pulled the bell-rope, and an instant after, the servant announced: "Dr. Jodon."

It was, indeed, the same physician who had annoyed Mademoiselle Marguerite by his persistent curiosity and impertinent questions, at the Count de Chalusse's bedside; the same crafty and ambitious man, constantly tormented by covetousness, and ready to do anything to gratify it—the man of the period, in short, who sacrificed everything to the display by which he hoped to deceive other people, and who was almost starving in the midst of his mock splendor.

M. Casimir was an innocent accomplice, but the doctor knew what he was doing. Interviewed on behalf of the Marquis de Valorsay by Madame Léon, he had fathomed the whole mystery at once. These two crafty natures had read and understood each other. No definite words had passed between them—they were both too shrewd for that; and yet, a compact had been concluded by which each had tacitly agreed to serve the other according to his need.

As soon as the physician appeared, M. de Valorsay rose and shook hands with him; then, offering him an arm-chair, he remarked: "I will not conceal from you,

doctor, that I have in some measure prepared this gentleman"—designating M. Wilkie—"for your terrible revelation."

By the doctor's attitude, a keen observer might have divined the secret trepidation that always precedes a bad action which has been conceived and decided upon in cold blood.

"To tell the truth," he began, speaking slowly, and with some difficulty, "now that the moment for speaking has come, I almost hesitate. Our profession has painful exigencies. Perhaps it is now too late. If there had been any of the count's relatives in the house, or even an heir at the time, I should have insisted upon an autopsy. But now——"

On hearing the word "autopsy," M. Wilkie looked round with startled eyes. He opened his lips to interrupt the speaker, but the physician had already resumed his narrative. "Besides, I had only suspicions," he said, "suspicions based, it is true, upon strange and alarming circumstances. I am a man, that is to say, I am liable to error. In the kingdom of science it would be unpardonable temerity on my part to affirm——"

"To affirm what?" interrupted M. Wilkie.

The physician did not seem to hear him, but continued in the same dogmatic tone. "The count apparently died from an attack of apoplexy, but certain poisons produce similar and even identical symptoms which are apt to deceive the most experienced medical men. The persistent efforts of the count's intellect, his muscular rigidity alternating with utter relaxation, the dilation of the pupils of his eyes, and more than aught else the violence of his last convulsions, have led me to ask myself if some criminal had not hastened his end."

Whiter than his shirt, and trembling like a leaf, M. Wilkie sprang from his chair. "I understand!" he exclaimed. "The count was murdered—poisoned."

But the physician replied with an energetic protest. "Oh, not so fast!" said he. "Don't mistake my conjectures for assertions. Still, I ought not to conceal the circumstances which awakened my suspicions. On the morning preceding his attack, the count took two spoonfuls of the contents of a vial which the people in charge could not or would not produce. When I asked what this vial contained, the answer was: 'A medicine to prevent apoplexy.' I don't say that this is false, but prove it. As for the motive that led to the crime, it is apparent at once. The *escritoire* contained two millions of francs, and the money has disappeared. Show me the vial, find the money, and I will admit that I am wrong. But until then, I shall have my suspicions."

He did not speak like a physician but like an examining magistrate, and his alarming deductions found their way even to M. Wilkie's dull brain. "Who could have committed the crime?" he asked.

"It could only have been the person likely to profit by it; and only one person besides the count knew that the money was in the house, and had possession of the key of this *escritoire*."

"And this person?"

"Is the count's illegitimate daughter, who lived in the house with him—Mademoiselle Marguerite."

M. Wilkie sank into his chair again, completely overwhelmed. The coincidence between the doctor's deposition and M. Casimir's testimony was too remarkable to pass unnoticed. Further doubt seemed impossible. "Ah! this is most unfortunate!" faltered Wilkie.

"What a pity! Such difficulties never assail any one but me! What am I to do?" And in his distress he glanced from the doctor to the Marquis de Valorsay, and then at M. de Coralthe, as if seeking inspiration from each of them.

"My profession forbids my acting as an adviser in such cases," replied the physician, "but these gentlemen have not the same reasons for keeping silent."

"Excuse me," interrupted the marquis quickly; "but this is one of those cases in which a man must be left to his own inspirations. The most I can do, is to say what course I should pursue if I were one of the deceased count's relatives or heirs."

"Pray tell me, my dear marquis," sighed Wilkie. "You would render me an immense service by doing so."

M. de Valorsay seemed to reflect for a moment; and then he solemnly exclaimed: "I should feel that my honor required me to investigate every circumstance connected with this mysterious affair. Before receiving a man's estate, one must know the cause of his death, so as to avenge him if he has been foully murdered."

For M. Wilkie the oracle had spoken. "Such is my opinion exactly," he declared. "But what course would you pursue, my dear marquis? How would you set about solving this mystery?"

"I should appeal to the authorities."

"Ah!"

"And this very day, this very hour, without losing a second, I should address a communication to the public prosecutor, informing him of the robbery which is patent to any one, and referring to the possibility of foul play."

"Yes, that would be an excellent idea; but there is

one slight drawback—I don't know how to draw up such a communication."

"I know no more about it than you do yourself; but any lawyer or notary will give you the necessary information. Are you acquainted with any such person? Would you like me to give you the address of my business man? He is a very clever fellow, who has almost all the members of my club as his clients."

This last reason was more than sufficient to fix M. Wilkie's choice. "Where can I find him?" he inquired.

"At his house—he is always there at this hour. Come! here is a scrap of paper and a pencil. You had better make a note of his address. Write: 'Maumèjan, Route de la Révolte.' Tell him that I sent you, and he will treat you with the same consideration as he would show to me. He lives a long way off, but my brougham is standing in the courtyard; so take it, and when your consultation is over, come back and dine with me."

"Ah! you are too kind!" exclaimed M. Wilkie. "You overpower me, my dear marquis, you do, upon my word! I shall fly and be back in a moment."

He went off looking radiant; and a moment later the carriage which was to take him to M. Maumèjan's was heard rolling out of the courtyard.

The doctor had already taken up his hat and cane. "You will excuse me for leaving you so abruptly, Monsieur le Marquis," said he, "but I have an engagement to discuss a business matter."

"Indeed!"

"I am negotiating for the purchase of a dentist's establishment."

"What, you?"

"Yes, I. You may tell me that this is a downfall, but I will answer, 'It will give me a living.' Medicine is becoming a more and more unremunerative profession. However hard a physician may work, he can scarcely pay for the water he uses in washing his hands. I have an opportunity of purchasing the business of a well-established and well-known dentist, in an excellent neighborhood. Why not avail myself of it? Only one thing worries me—the lack of funds."

The marquis had expected the doctor would require remuneration for his services. Before compromising himself any further, M. Jodon wished to know what compensation he was to receive. The marquis was so sure of this, that he quickly exclaimed: "Ah, my dear doctor, if you have need of twenty thousand francs, I shall be only too happy to offer them to you."

"Really?"

"Upon my honor!"

"And when can you let me have the money?"

"In three or four days' time."

The bargain was concluded. The doctor was now ready to find traces of any poison whatsoever in the Count de Chalusse's exhumed remains. He pressed the marquis's hand and then went off, exclaiming: "Whatever happens you can count upon me."

Left alone with the Viscount de Coralthe, and consequently freed from all restraint, M. de Valorsay rose with a long-drawn sigh of relief. "What an interminable *séance*!" he growled. And, approaching his acolyte, who was sitting silent and motionless in an arm-chair, he slapped him on the shoulder, exclaiming: "Are you ill that you sit there like that, as still as a mummy?"

The viscount turned as if he had been suddenly

aroused from slumber. "I'm well enough," he answered somewhat roughly. "I was only thinking."

"Your thoughts are not very pleasant, to judge from the look on your face."

"No. I was thinking of the fate that you are preparing for us."

"Oh! A truce to disagreeable prophecies, please! Besides, it's too late to draw back, or to even think of retreat. The Rubicon is passed."

"Alas! that is the cause of my anxiety. If it hadn't been for my wretched past, which you have threatened me with like a dagger, I should long ago have left you to incur this danger alone. You were useful to me in times past, I admit. You presented me to the Baroness Trigault, to whose patronage I owe my present means, but I am paying too dearly for your services in allowing myself to be made the instrument of your dangerous schemes. Who aided you in defrauding Kami-Bey? Who bet for you against your own horse Domingo? Who risked his life in slipping those cards in the pack which Pascal Ferailleux held? It was Coralth, always Coralth."

A gesture of anger escaped the marquis, but resolving to restrain himself, he made no rejoinder. It was not until after he had walked five or six times round the smoking-room and grown more calm that he returned to the viscount's side. "Really, I don't recognize you," he began. "Is it really you who have turned coward? And at what a moment, pray? Why, on the very eve of success."

"I wish I could believe you."

"Facts shall convince you. This morning I might have doubted, but now, thanks to that vain idiot who goes by the name of Wilkie, I am sure, perfectly,

mathematically sure of success. Mauméjan, who is entirely devoted to me, and who is the greediest, most avaricious scoundrel alive, will draw up such a complaint that Marguerite will sleep in prison. Moreover, other witnesses will be summoned. By what Casimir has said, you can judge what the other servants will say. This testimony will be sufficient to convict her of the robbery. As for the poisoning, you heard Dr. Jodon. Can I depend upon him? Evidently, if I pay without haggling. Very well; I shall pay."

But all this did not reassure M. de Coralth. "The accusation will fall to the ground," said he, "as soon as the famous vial from which M. de Chalusse took two spoonfuls is found."

"Excuse me; it won't be found."

"But why?"

"Because I know where it is, my dear friend. It is in the count's *escritoire*, but it won't be there any longer on the day after to-morrow."

"Who will remove it?"

"A skilful fellow whom Madame Léon has found for me. Everything has been carefully arranged. To-morrow night at the latest Madame Léon will let this man into the Hôtel de Chalusse by the garden gate, which she has kept the key of. Vantrasson, as the man is called, knows the management of the house, and he will break open the *escritoire* and take the vial away. You may say that there are seals upon the furniture, placed there by the justice of the peace. That's true, but this man tells me that he can remove and replace them in such a way as to defy detection; and as the lock has been forced once already—the day after the count's death—a second attempt to break the *escritoire* open will not be detected."

The viscount remarked, with an ironical air: "All that is perfect; but the autopsy will reveal the falseness of the accusation."

"Naturally—but an autopsy will require time, and that will suit my plans admirably. After eight or ten days' solitary confinement and several rigid examinations, Mademoiselle Marguerite's energy and courage will flag. What do you think she will reply to the man who says to her: 'I love you, and for your sake I will attempt the impossible. Swear to become my wife and I will establish your innocence?'"

"I think she will say: 'Save me and I will marry you!'"

M. de Valorsay clapped his hands. "Bravo!" he exclaimed; "you have spoken the truth. Remember, now, that your dark forebodings are only chimeras! Yes, she will swear it, and I know she is the woman to keep her vow, even if she died of sorrow. And the very next day I will go to the examining magistrate and say to him: 'Marguerite a thief! Ah, what a frightful mistake. A robbery has been committed, it's true; but I know the real culprit—a scoundrel who fancied that by destroying a single letter he would annihilate all traces of the breach of fidelity he had committed. Fortunately, the Count de Chalusse distrusted this man, and proof of his breach of trust is in existence. I have this proof in my hands.' And I will show a letter establishing the truth of my assertion."

No forebodings clouded the marquis's joy; he saw no obstacles; it seemed to him as if he had already triumphed. "And the day following," he resumed, "when Marguerite becomes my wife, I shall take from a certain drawer a certain document, given to me by M. de Chalusse when I was on the point of becoming

his son-in-law, and in which he recognizes Marguerite as his daughter, and makes her his sole legatee. And this document is perfectly *en règle*, and unattackable. Mauméjan, who has examined it, guarantees that the value of the count's estate cannot be less than ten millions. Five will go to Madame d'Argelès, or her son Wilkie, as their share of the property. The remaining five will be mine. Come, confess that the plan is admirable!"

"Admirable, undoubtedly; but terribly complicated. When there are so many wheels within wheels, one of them is always sure to get out of order."

"Nonsense!"

"Besides, you have I don't know how many accomplices—Mauméjan, the doctor, Madame Léon, and Vantrasson, not counting myself. Will all these people perform their duties satisfactorily?"

"Each of them is as much interested in my success as I am myself."

"But we have enemies—Madame d'Argelès, Fortunat——"

"Madame d'Argelès is about to leave Paris. If Fortunat is troublesome I will purchase his silence; Mauméjan has promised me money."

But M. de Coralthe had kept his strongest argument until the last. "And Pascal Ferailleux?" said he. "You have forgotten him."

No; M. de Valorsay had not forgotten him. You do not forget the man you have ruined and dishonored. Still, it was in a careless tone that ill accorded with his state of mind that the marquis replied: "The poor devil must be *en route* for America by this time."

The viscount shook his head. "That's what I've in vain been trying to convince myself of," said he. "Do

you know that Pascal was virtually expelled from the Palais de Justice, and that his name has been struck off the list of advocates? If he hasn't blown his brains out, it is only because he hopes to prove his innocence. Ah! if you knew him as well as I do, you wouldn't be so tranquil in mind!"

He stopped short for the door had suddenly opened. The interruption made the marquis frown, but anger gave way to anxiety when he perceived Madame Léon, who entered the room out of breath and extremely red in the face.

"There wasn't a cab to be had!" she groaned. "Just my luck. I came on foot, and ran the whole way. I'm utterly exhausted;" and so saying, she sank into an arm-chair.

M. de Valorsay had turned very pale. "Defer your complaints until another time," he said, harshly. "What has happened? Tell me."

The estimable woman raised her hands to heaven, as she plaintively replied: "There is so much to tell? First, Mademoiselle Marguerite has written two letters, but I have failed to discover to whom they were sent. Secondly, she remained for more than an hour yesterday evening in the drawing-room with the General's son, Lieutenant Gustave, and, on parting, they shook hands like a couple of friends, and said, 'It is agreed.'"

"And is that all?"

"One moment and you'll see. This morning Mademoiselle went out with Madame de Fondège to call on the Baroness Trigault. I do not know what took place there, but there must have been a terrible scene; for they brought Mademoiselle Marguerite back unconscious, in one of the baron's carriages."

"Do you hear that, viscount?" exclaimed M. de Valorsay.

"Yes! You shall have the explanation to-morrow," answered M. de Coralth.

"And last, but not least," resumed Madame Léon, "on returning home this evening at about five o'clock, I fancied I saw Mademoiselle Marguerite leave the house and go up the Rue Pigalle. I had thought she was ill and in bed, and I said to myself, 'This is very strange.' So I hastened after her. It was indeed she. Of course, I followed her. And what did I see? Why, Mademoiselle paused to talk with a vagabond, clad in a blouse. They exchanged notes, and Mademoiselle Marguerite returned home. And here I am. She must certainly suspect something. What is to be done?"

If M. de Valorsay were frightened, he did not show it. "Many thanks for your zeal, my dear lady," he replied, "but all this is a mere nothing. Return home at once; you will receive my instructions to-morrow."

XVII.

MADemoiselle MARGUERITE had been greatly surprised on the occasion of her visit to M. Fortunat when she saw Victor Chupin suddenly step forward and eagerly exclaim: "I shall be unworthy of the name I bear if I do not find M. Ferailleux for you in less than a fortnight."

It is true that M. Fortunat's clerk did not appear to the best advantage on this occasion. In order to watch M. de Coralth, he had again arrayed himself in his cast-off clothes, and with his blouse and his worn-out shoes, his "knockers" and his glazed cap, he looked the

vagabond to perfection. Still, strange as it may seem, Mademoiselle Marguerite did not once doubt the devotion of this strange auxiliary. Without an instant's hesitation she replied, "I accept your services, monsieur."

Chupin felt at least a head taller as he heard this beautiful young girl speak to him in a voice as clear and as sonorous as crystal. "Ah! you are right to trust me," he rejoined, striking his chest with his clinched hand, "for I have a heart—but——"

"But what, monsieur?"

"I am wondering if you would consent to do what I wish. It would be a very good plan, but if it displeases you, we will say no more about it."

"And what do you wish?"

"To see you every day, so as to tell you what I've done, and to obtain such directions as I may require. I'm well aware that I can't go to M. de Fondège's door and ask to speak to you; but there are other ways of seeing each other. For instance, every evening at five o'clock precisely, I might pass along the Rue Pigalle, and warn you of my presence by such a signal as this: 'Pi-ouit!'" So saying he gave vent to the peculiar call, half whistle, half ejaculation, which is familiar to the Parisian working-classes. "Then," he resumed, "you might come down and I would tell you the news; besides, I might often help you by doing errands."

Mademoiselle Marguerite reflected for a moment, and then bowing her head, she replied:

"What you suggest is quite practicable. On and after to-morrow evening I will watch for you; and if I don't come down at the end of half an hour, you will know that I am unavoidably detained."

Chupin ought to have been satisfied. But no, he had still another request to make; and instinct, supplying

the lack of education, told him that it was a delicate one. Indeed, he dared not present his petition; but his embarrassment was so evident, and he twisted his poor cap so despairingly, that at last the young girl gently asked him: "Is there anything more?"

He still hesitated, but eventually, mustering all his courage, he replied: "Well, yes, mademoiselle. I've never seen Monsieur Ferailleur. Is he tall or short, light or dark, stout or thin? I do not know. I might stand face to face with him without being able to say, 'It's he.' But it would be quite a different thing if I only had a photograph of him."

A crimson flush spread over Mademoiselle Marguerite's face. Still she answered, unaffectedly, "I will give you M. Ferailleur's photograph to-morrow, monsieur."

"Then I shall be all right!" exclaimed Chupin. "Have no fears, mademoiselle, we shall outwit these scoundrels!"

So far a silent witness of this scene, M. Fortunat now felt it his duty to interfere. He was not particularly pleased by his clerk's suddenly increased importance; and yet it mattered little to him, for his only object was to revenge himself on Valorsay. "Victor is a capable and trustworthy young fellow, mademoiselle," he declared; "he has grown up under my training, and I think you will find him a faithful servant."

A "have you finished, you old liar?" rose to Chupin's lips, but respect for Mademoiselle Marguerite prevented him from uttering the words. "Then everything is decided," she said, pleasantly. And with a smile she offered her hand to Chupin as one does in concluding a bargain.

If he had yielded to his first impulse he would have

thrown himself on his knees and kissed this hand of hers, the whitest and most beautiful he had ever seen. As it was, he only ventured to touch it with his fingertips, and yet he changed color two or three times. "What a woman!" he exclaimed, when she had left them. "A perfect queen! A man would willingly allow himself to be chopped in pieces for her sake; and she's as good and as clever as she's handsome. Did you notice, monsieur, that she did not offer to pay me. She understood that I offered to work for her for my own pleasure, for my own satisfaction and honor. Heavens! how I should have chafed if she had offered me money. How provoked I should have been!"

Chupin was so fascinated that he wished no reward for his toil! This was so astonishing that M. Fortunat remained for a moment speechless with surprise. "Have you gone mad, Victor?" he inquired at last.

"Mad! I?—not at all; I'm only becoming——" He stopped short. He was going to add: "an honest man." But it is scarcely proper to talk about the rope in the hangman's house, and there are certain words which should never be pronounced in the presence of certain people. Chupin knew this, and so he quickly resumed: "When I become rich, when I'm a great banker, and have a host of clerks who spend their time in counting my gold behind a grating, I should like to have a wife of my own like that. But I must be off about my business now, so till we meet again, monsieur."

The foregoing conversation will explain how it happened that Madame Léon chanced to surprise her dear young lady in close conversation with a vagabond clad in a blouse. Victor Chupin was not a person to make promises and then leave them unfulfilled. Though he

was usually unimpressionable, like all who lead a precarious existence, still, when his emotions were once aroused, they did not spend themselves in empty protestations. It became his fixed determination to find Pascal Ferailleux, and the difficulties of the task in no wise weakened his resolution. His starting point was that Pascal had lived in the Rue d'Ulm, and had suddenly gone off with his mother, with the apparent intention of sailing for America. This was all he knew positively, and everything else was mere conjecture. Still Mademoiselle Marguerite had convinced him that instead of leaving Paris, Pascal was really still there, only waiting for an opportunity to establish his innocence, and to wreak his vengeance upon M. de Coralthe and the Marquis de Valorsay. On the other hand, with such a slight basis to depend upon, was it not almost madness to hope to discover a man who had such strong reasons for concealing himself? Chupin did not think so; in fact, when he declared his determination to perform this feat, his plan was already perfected.

On leaving M. Fortunat's office, he hastened straight to the Rue d'Ulm, at the top of his speed. The concierge of the house where Pascal had formerly resided was by no means a polite individual. He was the very same man who had answered Mademoiselle Marguerite's questions so rudely; but Chupin had a way of conciliating even the most crabby doorkeeper, and of drawing from him such information as he desired. He learned that at nine o'clock on the sixteenth of October Madame Ferailleux, after seeing her trunks securely strapped on to a cab, had entered the vehicle, ordering the driver to take her to the Railway Station in the Place du Hâvre! Chupin wished to ascertain the number of the cab, but the concierge could not give it-

He mentioned, however, that this cab had been procured by Madame Ferailleux's servant-woman, who lived only a few steps from the house. A moment later Chupin was knocking at this woman's door. She was a very worthy person, and bitterly regretted the misfortunes which had befallen her former employers. She confirmed the doorkeeper's story, but unfortunately she, too, had quite forgotten the number of the vehicle. All she could say was that she had hired it at the cab stand in the Rue Soufflot, and that the driver was a portly, pleasant-faced man.

Chupin repaired at once to the Rue Soufflot, where he found the man in charge of the stand in the most savage mood imaginable. He began by asking Chupin what right he had to question him, why he wished to do so, and if he took him for a spy. He added that his duty only consisted in noting the arrivals and departures of the drivers, and that he could give no information whatever. There was evidently nothing to be gained from this ferocious personage; and yet Chupin bowed none the less politely as he left the little office. "This is bad," he growled, as he walked away, for he was really at a loss what to do next; and if not discouraged, he was at least extremely disconcerted and perplexed. Ah! if he had only had a card from the prefecture of police in his pocket, or if he had been more imposing in appearance, he would have encountered no obstacles; he might then have tracked this cab through the streets of Paris as easily as he could have followed a man bearing a lighted lantern through the darkness. But poor and humble, without letters of recommendation, and with no other auxiliaries than his own shrewdness and experience, he had a great deal to contend against. Pausing in his walk, he had taken off

his cap and was scratching his head furiously, when suddenly he exclaimed: "What an ass I am!" in so loud a tone that several passers-by turned to see who was applying this unflattering epithet to himself.

Chupin had just remembered one of M. Isidore Fortunat's debtors, a man whom he often visited in the hope of extorting some trilling amount from him, and who was employed in the Central office of the Paris Cab Company. "If any one can help me out of this difficulty, it must be that fellow," he said to himself. "I hope I shall find him at his desk! Come, Victor, my boy, you must look alive!"

However, he could not present himself at the office in the garb he then wore, and so, much against his will, he went home and changed his clothes. Then he took a cab at his own expense, and drove with all possible speed to the main office of the Cab Company, in the Avenue de Ségur. Nevertheless it was already ten o'clock when he arrived there. He was more fortunate than he had dared to hope. The man he wanted had charge of a certain department, and was compelled to return to the office every evening after dinner. He was there now.

He was a poor devil who, while receiving a salary of fifteen hundred francs a year, spent a couple of thousand, and utilized his wits in defending his meagre salary from his creditors. On perceiving Chupin, he made a wrathful gesture, and his first words were: "I haven't got a penny."

But Chupin smiled his most genial smile. "What!" said he, "do you fancy I've come to collect money from you here, and at this hour? You don't know me. I merely came to ask a favor of you."

The clerk's clouded face brightened. "Since that is

the case, pray take a seat, and tell me how I can serve you," he replied.

"Very well. At nine o'clock in the evening, on the sixteenth of October, a lady living in the Rue d'Ulm sent to the stand in the Rue Soufflot for a cab. Her baggage was placed upon it, and she went away no one knows where. However, this lady is a relative of my employer, and he so much wishes to find her that he would willingly give a hundred francs over and above the amount you owe him, to ascertain the number of the vehicle. He pretends that you can give him this number if you choose; and it isn't an impossibility, is it?"

"On the contrary, nothing could be easier," replied the clerk, glad of an opportunity to explain the ingenious mechanism of the office to an outsider. "Have you ten minutes to spare?"

"Ten days, if necessary," rejoined Chupin.

"Then you shall see." So saying the clerk rose and went into the adjoining room, whence a moment later he returned carrying a large green box. "This contains the October reports sent in every evening by the branch offices," he remarked in explanation. He next opened the box, glanced over the documents it contained, and joyfully exclaimed: "Here we have it. This is the report sent in by the superintendent of the cabstand in the Rue Soufflot on the 16th October. Here is a list of the vehicles that arrived or left from a quarter to nine o'clock till a quarter past nine. Five cabs came in, but we need not trouble ourselves about them. Three went out bearing the numbers 1781, 3025, and 2140. One of these three must have taken your employer's relative."

"Then I must question the three drivers."

The clerk shrugged his shoulders. "What is the

use of doing that?" he said, disdainfully. "Ah! you don't understand the way in which we manage our business! The drivers are artful, but the company isn't a fool. By expending a hundred and fifty thousand francs on its detective force every year, it knows what each cab is doing at each hour of the day. I will now look for the reports sent in respecting these three drivers. One of the three will give us the desired information."

This time the search was a considerably longer one, and Chupin was beginning to grow impatient, when the clerk waved a soiled and crumpled sheet of paper triumphantly in the air, and cried: "What did I tell you? This is the report concerning the driver of No. 2140. Listen: Friday, at ten minutes past nine, sent to the Rue d'Ulm—— What do you think of that?"

"It's astonishing! But where can I find this driver?"

"I can't say, just at this moment; he's on duty now. But as he belongs to this division he will be back sooner or later, so you had better wait."

"I will wait then; only as I've had no dinner, I'll go out and get a mouthful to eat. I can promise you that M. Fortunat will send you back your note cancelled."

Chupin was really very hungry, and so he rushed off to a little eating-house which he had remarked on his way to the office. There for eighteen sous he dined, or rather supped, like a prince; and as he subsequently treated himself to a cup of coffee and a glass of brandy, as a reward for his toil, some little time had elapsed when he returned to the office. However, No. 2140 had not returned in his absence, so he stationed himself at the door to wait for it.

His patience was severely tried, for it was past mid-

night when Chupin saw the long-looked-for vehicle enter the courtyard. The driver slowly descended from his box and then went into the cashier's office to pay over his day's earnings, and hand in his report. Then he came out again evidently bound for home. As the servant-woman had said, he was a stout, jovial-faced man, and he did not hesitate to accept a glass of "no matter what" in a wine-shop that was still open. Whether he believed the story that Chupin told to excuse his questions or not, at all events he answered them very readily. He perfectly remembered having been sent to the Rue d'Ulm, and spoke of his "fare" as a respectable-looking old lady, enumerated the number of her trunks, boxes, and packages, and even described their form. He had taken her to the railway station, stopping at the entrance in the Rue d'Amsterdam; and when the porters inquired, as usual, "Where is this baggage to go?" the old lady had answered, "To London."

Chupin felt decidedly crestfallen on hearing this. He had fancied that Madame Ferailleux had merely announced her intention of driving to the Hâvre railway station so as to set possible spies on the wrong track, and he would have willingly wagered anything, that after going a short distance she had given the cabman different instructions. Not so, however, he had taken her straight to the station. Was Mademoiselle Marguerite deceived then? Had Pascal really fled from his enemies without an attempt at resistance? Such a course seemed impossible on his part. Thinking over all this, Chupin slept but little that night, and the next morning, before five o'clock, he was wandering about the Rue d'Amsterdam peering into the wine-shops in search of some railway porter. It did not take him

long to find one, and having done so, he made him the best of friends in less than no time. Although this porter knew nothing about the matter himself, he took Chupin to a comrade who remembered handling the baggage of an old lady bound for London, on the evening of the sixteenth. However, this baggage was not put into the train after all; the old lady had left it in the cloak-room, and the next day a fat woman of unprepossessing appearance had called for the things, and had taken them away, after paying the charges for storage. This circumstance had been impressed on the porter's mind by the fact that the woman had not given him a farthing gratuity, although he had been much more obliging than the regulations required. However, when she went off, she remarked in a honeyed voice, but with an exceedingly impudent air: "I'll repay you for your kindness, my lad. I keep a wine-shop on the Route d'Asnières, and if you ever happen to pass that way with one of your comrades, come in, and I'll reward you with a famous drink!"

What had exasperated the porter almost beyond endurance, was the certainty he felt that she was mocking him. "For she didn't give me her name or address, the old witch!" he growled. "She had better look out, if I ever get hold of her again!"

But Chupin had already gone off, unmoved by his informant's grievances. Now that he had discovered the stratagem which Madame Ferailleux had employed to elude her pursuers, his conjectures were changed into certainties. This information proved that Pascal *was* concealed somewhere in Paris; but where? If he could only find out this woman who had called for the trunks, it would lead to the discovery of Madame Ferailleux and her son, but how was he to ascertain the woman's

whereabouts? She had said that she kept a wine-shop on the Route d'Asnières. Was this true? Was it not more likely that this vague direction was only a fresh precaution?

This much was certain: Chupin, who knew every wine-shop on the Route d'Asnières, did not remember any such powerful matron as the porter had described. He had not forgotten Madame Vantrasson. But to imagine any bond of interest between Pascal and such a woman as she was, seemed absurd in the extreme. However, as he found himself in such a plight and could not afford to let any chance escape, he repaired merely for form's sake to the Vantrasson establishment. It had not changed in the least since the evening he visited it in company with M. Fortunat—but seen in the full light of day, it appeared even more dingy and dilapidated. Madame Vantrasson was not in her accustomed place, behind the counter, between her black cat—her latest idol—and the bottles from which she prepared her ratafia, now her supreme consolation here below. There was no one in the shop but the landlord. Seated at a table, with a lighted candle near him, he was engaged in an occupation which would have set Chupin's mind working if he had noticed it. Vantrasson had taken some wax from a sealed bottle, and, after melting it at the flame of the candle, he let it drop slowly on to the table. He then pressed a sou upon it, and when the wax had become sufficiently cool and stiff, he removed it from the table without destroying the impression, by means of a thin bladed knife similar to those which glaziers use. However, Chupin did not remark this singular employment. He was engaged in mentally ejaculating, "Good! the old woman isn't here." And as his plan of campaign

was already prepared, he entered without further hesitation.

As Vantrasson heard the door turn upon its hinges, he rose so awkwardly, or rather so skilfully, as to let all his implements, wax, knife, and impressions, fall on the floor behind the counter. "What can I do to serve you?" he asked, in a husky voice.

"Nothing. I wished to speak with your wife."

"She has gone out. She works for a family in the morning."

This was a gleam of light. Chupin had not thought of the only hypothesis that could explain what seemed inexplicable to him. However, he knew how to conceal his satisfaction, and so with an air of disappointment, he remarked: "That's too bad! I shall be obliged to call again."

"So you have a secret to tell my wife?"

"Not at all."

"Won't I do as well, then?"

"I'll tell you how it is. I'm employed in the baggage room of the western railway station, and I wanted to know if your wife didn't call there a few days ago for some trunks?"

The landlord's features betrayed the vague perturbation of a person who can count the days by his mistakes, and it was with evident hesitation that he replied:

"Yes, my wife went to the Hâvre station for some baggage last Sunday."

"I thought so. Well, this is my errand: either the clerk forgot to ask her for her receipt, or else he lost it. He can't find it anywhere. I came to ask your wife if she hadn't kept it. When she returns, please deliver my message; and if she has the receipt, pray send it to me through the post."

The ruse was not particularly clever, but it was sufficiently so to deceive Vantrasson. "To whom am I to send this receipt?" he asked.

"To me, Victor Chupin, Faubourg Saint Denis," was the reply.

Imprudent youth! alas, he little suspected what a liberty M. Fortunat had taken with his name on the evening he visited the Vantrassons. But on his side the landlord of the Model Lodging House had not forgotten the name mentioned by the agent. He turned pale with anger on beholding his supposed creditor, and quickly slipping between the visitor and the door, he said: "So your name is Victor Chupin?"

"Yes, certainly."

"And you are in the employment of the Railway Company?"

"As I just told you."

"That doesn't prevent you from acting as a collector, does it?"

Chupin instinctively recoiled, convinced that he had betrayed himself by some blunder, but unable to discover in what he had erred. "I did do something in that line formerly," he faltered.

Vantrasson doubted no longer. "So you confess that you are a vile scoundrel!" he exclaimed. "You confess that you purchased an old promissory note of mine for fourpence, and then sent a man here to seize my goods! Ah! you'd like to trample the poor under foot, would you! Very well. I have you now, and I'll settle your account! Take that!" And so saying, he dealt his supposed creditor a terrible blow with his clinched fist that sent him reeling to the other end of the shop.

Fortunately, Chupin was very nimble. He did not

lose his footing, but sprung over a table and used it as a rampart to shield himself from his dangerous assailant. In the open field, he could easily have protected himself; but here in this narrow space, and hemmed in a corner, he felt that despite this barrier he was lost. "What a devil of a mess!" he thought, as with wonderful agility he avoided Vantrasson's fist, a fist that would have felled an ox. He had an idea of calling for assistance. But would any one hear him? Would any one reply? And if help came, would not the police be sure to hear of the broil? And if they did, would there not be an investigation which would perhaps disturb Pascal's plans? Fearing to injure those whom he wished to serve, he resolved to let himself be hacked to pieces rather than allow a cry to escape him; but he changed his tactics, and instead of attempting to parry the blows as he had done before, he now only thought of gaining the door, inch by inch.

He had almost reached it, not without suffering considerable injury, when it suddenly opened, and a young man clad in black, with a smooth shaven face, entered the shop, and sternly exclaimed: "Why! what's all this?"

The sight of the newcomer seemed to stupefy Vantrasson. "Ah! it is you, Monsieur Mauméjan?" he faltered, with a crestfallen air. "It's nothing; we were only in fun."

M. Mauméjan seemed perfectly satisfied with this explanation; and in the indifferent tone of a man who is delivering a message, the meaning of which he scarcely understood, he said: "A person who knows that your wife is in my employ requested me to ask you if you would be ready to attend to that little matter she spoke of."

"Certainly. I was preparing for it a moment ago."

Chupin heard no more. He had hurried out, his clothes in disorder, and himself not a little hurt; but his delight made him lose all thought of his injuries. "That's M. Feraillieur," he muttered, "I'm sure of it, and I'm going to prove it." So saying he hid himself in the doorway of a vacant house a few paces distant from the Vantrassons', and waited.

Then as soon as M. Mauméjan emerged from the Model Lodging House, he followed him. The young man with the clean shaven face walked up the Route d'Asnières, turned to the right into the Route de la Révolte, and at last paused before a house of humble aspect. At that moment Chupin darted toward him, and softly called, "M'sieur Feraillieur!"

The young man turned instinctively. Then seeing his mistake, and feeling that he had betrayed himself, he sprang upon Chupin, and caught him by the wrists: "Scoundrel! who are you?" he exclaimed. "Who has hired you to follow me! What do you want of me?"

"Not so fast, m'sieur! Don't be so rough! You hurt me. I'm sent by Mademoiselle Marguerite!"

XVIII.

"O GOD! send Pascal to my aid," prayed Mademoiselle Marguerite, as she left M. Fortunat's house. Now she understood the intrigue she had been the victim of; but, instead of reassuring her the agent had frightened her, by revealing the Marquis de Valorsay's desperate plight. She realized what frenzied rage must fill this man's heart as he felt himself gradually slipping from the heights of opulence, down into the depths of pov-

erty and crime. What might he not dare, in order to preserve even the semblance of grandeur for a year, or a month, or a day longer! Had they measured the extent of his villainy? Would he even hesitate at murder? And the poor girl asked herself with a shudder if Pascal were still living; and a vision of his bleeding corpse, lying lifeless in some deserted street, rose before her. And who could tell what dangers threatened her personally? For, though she knew the past, she could not read the future. What did M. de Valorsay's letter mean? and what was the fate that he held in reserve for her, and that made him so sanguine of success? The impression produced upon her mind was so terrible that for a moment she thought of hastening to the old justice of the peace to ask for his protection and a refuge. But this weakness did not last long. Should she lose her energy? Should her will fail her at the decisive moment? "No, a thousand times no!" she said to herself again and again. "I will die if needs be, but I will die fighting!" And the nearer she approached the Rue Pigalle, the more energetically she drove away her apprehension, and sought for an excuse calculated to satisfy any one who might have noticed her long absence.

An unnecessary precaution. She found the house as when she left it, abandoned to the mercy of the servants—the strangers sent the evening before from the employment office. Important matters still kept the General and his wife from home. The husband had to show his horses; and the wife was intent upon shopping. As for Madame Léon, most of her time seemed to be taken up by the family of relatives she had so suddenly discovered. Alone, free from all *espionage*, and wishing to ward off despondency by occupation,

Mademoiselle Marguerite was just beginning a letter to her friend the old magistrate, when a servant entered and announced that her dressmaker was there and wished to speak with her. "Let her come in," replied Marguerite, with unusual vivacity. "Let her come in at once."

A lady who looked some forty years of age, plainly dressed, but of distinguished appearance, was thereupon ushered into the room. Like any well-bred modiste, she bowed respectfully while the servant was present, but as soon as he had left the room she approached Mademoiselle Marguerite and took hold of her hands: "My dear young lady," said she, "I am the sister-in-law of your old friend, the magistrate. Having an important message to send to you, he was trying to find a person whom he could trust to play the part of a dressmaker, as had been agreed upon between you, when I offered my services, thinking he could find no one more trusty than myself."

Tears glittered in Mademoiselle Marguerite's eyes. The slightest token of sympathy is so sweet to the heart of the lonely and unfortunate! "How can I ever thank you, madame?" she faltered.

"By not attempting to thank me at all, and by reading this letter as soon as possible."

The note she now produced ran as follows:

"MY DEAR CHILD—At last I am on the track of the thieves. By conferring with the people from whom M. de Chalusse received the money a couple of days before his death, I have been fortunate enough to obtain from them some minute details respecting the missing bonds, as well as the numbers of the bank-notes which were deposited in the *escritoire*. With this information, we cannot fail to prove the guilt of the culprits sooner or

later. You write me word that the Fondèges are spending money lavishly; try and find out the names of the people they deal with, and communicate them to me. Once more, I tell you that I am sure of success. Courage!"

"Well!" said the spurious dressmaker, when she saw that Marguerite had finished reading the letter. "What answer shall I take my brother-in-law?"

"Tell him that he shall certainly have the information he requires to-morrow. To-day, I can only give him the name of the carriage builder, from whom M. de Fondège has purchased his new carriages."

"Give it to me in writing, it is much the safest way."

Mademoiselle Marguerite did so, and her visitor who, as a woman, was delighted to find herself mixed up in an intrigue, then went off repeating the old magistrate's advice: "Courage!"

But it was no longer necessary to encourage Mademoiselle Marguerite. The assurance of being so effectually helped, had already increased her courage an hundredfold. The future that had seemed so gloomy only a moment before, had now suddenly brightened. By means of the negative in the keeping of the photographer, Carjat, she had the Marquis de Valorsay in her power; and the magistrate, thanks to the numbers of the bank-notes, could soon prove the guilt of the Fondèges. The protection of Providence was made evident in an unmistakable manner. Thus it was with a placid and almost smiling face that she successively greeted Madame Léon, who returned home quite played out, then Madame de Fondège, who made her appearance attended by two shop-boys overladen with packages, and finally the General, who brought his son, Lieutenant Gustave, with him to dinner.

The lieutenant was a good-looking fellow of twenty-seven, or thereabouts, with laughing eyes and a heavy mustache. He made a great clanking with his spurs, and wore the somewhat theatrical uniform of the 13th Hussars rather ostentatiously. He bowed to Mademoiselle Marguerite with a smile that was too becoming to be displeasing; and he offered her his arm with an air of triumph to lead her to the dining-room, as soon as the servant came to announce that "Madame la Comtesse was served."

Seated opposite to him at table, the young girl could not refrain from furtively watching the man whom they wished to compel her to marry. Never had she seen such intense self-complacency coupled with such utter mediocrity. It was evident that he was doing his best to produce a favorable impression; but as the dinner progressed, his conversation became rather venturesome. He gradually grew extremely animated; and three or four adventures of garrison life which he persisted in relating despite his mother's frowns, were calculated to convince his hearers that he was a great favorite with the fair sex. It was the good cheer that loosened his tongue. There could be no possible doubt on that score; and, indeed, while drinking a glass of the Château Laroze, to which Madame Léon had taken such a liking, he was indiscreet enough to declare that if his mother had always kept house in this fashion, he should have been inclined to ask for more frequent leaves of absence.

However, strange to say, after the coffee was served, the conversation languished till at last it died out almost entirely. Madame de Fondège was the first to disappear on the pretext that some domestic affairs required her attention. The General was the next to

rise and go out, in order to smoke a cigar; and finally Madame Léon made her escape without saying a word. So Mademoiselle Marguerite was left quite alone with Lieutenant Gustave. It was evident enough to the young girl that this had been preconcerted; and she asked herself what kind of an opinion M. and Madame de Fondège could have of her delicacy. The proceeding made her so indignant that she was on the point of rising from the table and of retiring like the others, when reason restrained her. She said to herself that perhaps she might gain some useful information from this young man, and so she remained.

His face was crimson, and he seemed by far the more embarrassed of the two. He sat with one elbow resting on the table, and with his gaze persistently fixed upon a tiny glass half full of brandy which he held in his hand, as if he hoped to gain some sublime inspiration from it. At last, after an interval of irksome silence, he ventured to exclaim: "Mademoiselle, should you like to be an officer's wife?"

"I don't know," answered Marguerite.

"Really! But at least you understand my motive in asking this question?"

"No."

Any one but the complacent lieutenant would have been disconcerted by Mademoiselle Marguerite's dry tone; but he did not even notice it. The effort that he was making in his intense desire to be eloquent and persuasive absorbed the attention of all his faculties. "Then permit me to explain, mademoiselle," he resumed. "We meet this evening for the first time, but our acquaintance is not the affair of a day. For I know not how long my father and mother have continually been chanting your praises. 'Mademoiselle Marguerite

does this; Mademoiselle Marguerite does that.' They never cease talking of you, declaring that heart, wit, talent, beauty, all womanly charms are united in your person. And they have never wearied of telling me that the man whom you honored with your preference would be the happiest of mortals. However, so far I had no desire to marry, and I distrusted them. In fact, I had conceived a most violent prejudice against you. Yes, upon my honor! I felt sure that I should dislike you; but I have seen you and all is changed. As soon as my eyes fell upon you, I experienced a powerful revulsion of feeling. I was never so smitten in my life—and I said to myself, 'Lieutenant, it is all over—you are caught at last!'

Pale with anger, astonished and humiliated beyond measure, the young girl listened with her head lowered, vainly trying to find words to express the feelings which disturbed her; but M. Gustave, misunderstanding her silence, and congratulating himself upon the effect he had produced, grew bolder, and with the tenderest and most impassioned inflection he could impart to his voice, continued: "Who could fail to be impressed as I have been? How could one behold, without rapturous admiration, such beautiful eyes, such glorious black hair, such smiling lips, such a graceful mien, such wonderful charms of person and of mind? How would it be possible to listen, unmoved, to a voice which is clearer and purer than crystal? Ah! my mother's descriptions fell far short of the truth. But how can one describe the perfections of an angel? To any one who has the happiness or the misfortune of knowing you, there can only be one woman in the world!"

He had gradually approached her chair, and now extended his hand to take hold of Marguerite's, and prob-

ably raise it to his lips. But she shrank from the contact as from red-hot iron, and rising hurriedly, with her eyes flashing, and her voice quivering with indignation: "Monsieur!" she exclaimed, "Monsieur!"

He was so surprised that he stood as if petrified, with his eyes wide open and his hand still extended. "Permit me—allow me to explain," he stammered. But she declined to listen. "Who has told you that you could address such words to me with impunity?" she continued. "Your parents, I suppose; I daresay they told you to be bold. And that is why they have left us, and why no servant has appeared. Ah! they make me pay dearly for the hospitality they have given me!" As she spoke the tears started from her eyes and glistened on her long lashes. "Whom did you fancy you were speaking to?" she added. "Would you have been so audacious if I had a father or a brother to resent your insults?"

The lieutenant started as if he had been lashed with a whip. "Ah! you are severe!" he exclaimed.

And a happy inspiration entering his mind, he continued: "A man does not insult a woman, mademoiselle, when, while telling her that he loves her and thinks her beautiful, he offers her his name and life."

Mademoiselle Marguerite shrugged her shoulders ironically, and remained for a moment silent. She was very proud, and her pride had been cruelly wounded; but reason told her that a continuation of this scene would render a prolonged sojourn in the General's house impossible; and where could she go, without exciting malevolent remarks? Whom could she ask an asylum of? Still this consideration alone would not have sufficed to silence her. But she remembered that a quarrel and a rupture with the Fondèges would cer-

tainly imperil the success of her plans. "So I will swallow even this affront," she said to herself; and then in a tone of melancholy bitterness, she remarked, aloud: "A man cannot set a very high value on his name when he offers it to a woman whom he knows absolutely nothing about."

"Excuse me—you forget that my mother——"

"Your mother has only known me for a week."

An expression of intense surprise appeared on the lieutenant's face. "Is it possible?" he murmured.

"Your father has met me five or six times at the table of the Count de Chalusse, who was his friend—but what does he know of me?" resumed Mademoiselle Marguerite. "That I came to the Hôtel de Chalusse a year ago, and that the count treated me like a daughter—that is all! Who I am, where I was reared, and how, and what my past life has been, these are matters that M. de Fondège knows nothing whatever about."

"My parents told me that you were the daughter of the Count de Chalusse, mademoiselle."

"What proof have they of it? They ought to have told you that I was an unfortunate foundling, with no other name than that of Marguerite."

"Oh!"

"They ought to have told you that I am poor, very poor, and that I should probably have been reduced to the necessity of toiling for my daily bread, if it had not been for them."

An incredulous smile curved the lieutenant's lips. He fancied that Mademoiselle Marguerite only wished to prove his disinterestedness, and this thought restored his assurance. "Perhaps you are exaggerating a little, mademoiselle," he replied.

"I am not exaggerating—I possess but ten thousand

francs in the world—I swear it by all that I hold sacred.”

“That would not even be the dowry required of an officer’s wife by law,” muttered the lieutenant.

Was his incredulity sincere or affected? What had his parents really told him? Had they confided everything to him, and was he their accomplice? or had they told him nothing? All these questions flashed rapidly through Marguerite’s mind. “You suppose that I am rich, monsieur,” she resumed at last. “I understand that only too well. If I was, you ought to shun me as you would shun a criminal, for I could only be wealthy through a crime.”

“Mademoiselle——”

“Yes, through a crime. After M. de Chalusse’s death, two million francs that had been placed in his *escritoire* for safe keeping, could not be found. Who stole the money? I myself have been accused of the theft. Your father must have told you of this, as well as of the cloud of suspicion that is still hanging over me.”

She paused, for the lieutenant had become whiter than his shirt. “Good God!” he exclaimed in a tone of horror, as if a terrible light had suddenly broken upon his mind. He made a movement as if to leave the room, but suddenly changing his mind, he bowed low before Mademoiselle Marguerite, and said, in a husky voice: “Forgive me, mademoiselle, I did not know what I was doing. I have been misinformed. I have been beguiled by false hopes. I entreat you to say that you forgive me.”

“I forgive you, monsieur.”

But still he lingered. “I am only a poor devil of a lieutenant,” he resumed, “with no other fortune than

my epaulettes, no other prospects than an uncertain advancement. I have been foolish and thoughtless. I have committed many acts of folly; but there is nothing in my past life for which I have cause to blush." He looked fixedly at Mademoiselle Marguerite, as if he were striving to read her inmost soul; and in a solemn tone, that contrasted strangely with his usual levity of manner, he added: "If the name I bear should ever be compromised, my prospects would be blighted forever! The only course left for me would be to tender my resignation. I will leave nothing undone to preserve my honor in the eyes of the world, and to right those who have been wronged. Promise me not to interfere with my plans."

Mademoiselle Marguerite trembled like a leaf. She now realized her terrible imprudence. He had divined everything. As she remained silent, he continued wildly: "I entreat you. Do you wish me to beg you at your feet?"

Ah! it was a terrible sacrifice that he demanded of her. But how could she remain obdurate in the presence of such intense anguish? "I will remain neutral," she replied, "that is all I can promise. Providence shall decide."

"Thank you," he said, sadly, suspecting that perhaps it was already too late—"thank you." Then he turned to go, and, in fact, he had already opened the door, when a forlorn hope brought him back to Mademoiselle Marguerite, whose hand he took, timidly faltering, "We are friends, are we not?"

She did not withdraw her icy hand, and in a scarcely audible voice, she repeated: "We are friends?"

Convinced that he could obtain nothing more from her than her promised neutrality, the lieutenant there-

upon hastily left the room, and she sank back in her chair more dead than alive. "Great God! what is coming now?" she murmured.

She thought she could understand the unfortunate young man's intentions, and she listened with a throbbing heart, expecting to hear a stormy explanation between his parents and himself. In point of fact, she almost immediately afterward heard the lieutenant inquire in a stern, imperious voice: "Where is my father?"

"The General has just gone to his club."

"And my mother?"

"A friend of hers called a few moments ago to take her to the opera."

"What madness!"

That was all. The outer door opened and closed again with extreme violence, and then Marguerite heard nothing save the sneering remarks of the servants.

It was, indeed, madness on the part of M. and Madame de Fondège not to have waited to learn the result of this interview, planned by themselves, and upon which their very lives depended. But delirium seemed to have seized them since, thanks to a still inexplicable crime, they had suddenly found themselves in possession of an immense fortune. Perhaps in this wild pursuit of pleasure, in the haste they displayed to satisfy their covetous longings, they hoped to forget or silence the threatening voice of conscience. Such was Mademoiselle Marguerite's conclusion; but she was not long left to undisturbed meditation. By the lieutenant's departure the restrictions which had been placed upon the servants' movements had evidently been removed, for they came in to clear the table.

Having with some little difficulty obtained a candle

from one of these model servants, Mademoiselle Marguerite now retired to her own room. In her anxiety, she forgot Madame Léon, but the latter had not forgotten her; she was even now listening at the drawing-room door, inconsolable to think that she had not succeeded in hearing at least part of the conversation between the lieutenant and her dear young lady. Marguerite had no wish to reflect over what had occurred. As she was determined to keep the promise which Lieutenant Gustave had wrung from her, it mattered little whether she had committed a great mistake in allowing him to discover her knowledge of his parent's guilt, and in listening to his entreaties. A secret presentiment warned her that the punishment which would overtake the General and his wife would be none the less terrible, despite her own forbearance, and that they would find their son more inexorable than the severest judge.

The essential thing was to warn the old magistrate; and so in a couple of pages she summarized the scene of the evening, feeling sure that she would find an opportunity to post her letter on the following day. This duty accomplished, she took a book and went to bed, hoping to drive away her gloomy thoughts by reading. But the hope was vain. Her eyes read the words, followed the lines and crossed the pages, but her mind utterly refused to obey her will, and in spite of all her efforts persisted in turning to the shrewd youth who had solemnly sworn to find Pascal for her. A little after midnight Madame de Fondège returned from the opera, and at once proceeded to reprimand her maid for not having lighted a fire. The General returned some time afterward, and he was evidently in the best of spirits.

"They have not seen their son," said Mademoiselle Marguerite to herself, and this anxiety, combined with many others, tortured her so cruelly, that she did not fall asleep until near daybreak. Even then she did not slumber long. It was scarcely half-past seven when she was aroused by a strange commotion and a loud sound of hammering. She was trying to imagine the cause of all this uproar, when Madame de Fondège, already arrayed in a marvellous robe composed of three skirts and an enormous puff, entered the room. "I have come to take you away, my dear child," she exclaimed. "The owner of the house has decided to make some repairs, and the workmen have already invaded our apartments. The General has taken flight, let us follow his example—so make yourself beautiful and we'll go at once."

Without a word, the young girl hastened to obey, while Madame de Fondège expatiated on the delightful drive they would take together in the wonderful brougham which the General had purchased a couple of days before. As for Lieutenant Gustave, she did not even mention his name.

Accustomed to the superb equipages of the Chalusse establishment, Mademoiselle Marguerite did not consider the much-lauded brougham at all remarkable. At the most, it was very showy, having apparently been selected with a view to attracting as much attention as possible. Madame de Fondège was not in a mood to consider this an objection that morning. She was evidently in a nervous state of mind, extremely restless and excited, indeed, it seemed impossible for her to keep still. In default of something better to do, she visited at least a dozen shops, asking to see everything, finding everything frightful, and purchasing without

regard to price. It might have been fancied that she wished to buy all Paris. About ten o'clock she dragged Marguerite to Van Klopen's. Received as a *habituée* of the establishment, thanks to the numerous orders she had given within the past few days, she was even allowed to enter the mysterious saloon in which the illustrious ruler of Fashion served such of his clients as had a predilection for absinthe or madeira. On leaving the place, and before entering the carriage again, Madame de Fondège turned to Marguerite and inquired: "Where shall we go now? I have given the servants an 'outing' on account of the workmen, and we cannot breakfast at home. Why can't we go to a restaurant, we two? Many of the most distinguished ladies are in the habit of doing so. You will see how people will look at us! I am sure it will amuse you immensely."

"Ah! madame, you forget that it is not a fortnight since the count's death!"

Madame de Fondège was about to make an impatient reply, but she mastered the impulse, and in a tone of hypocritical compassion, exclaimed: "Poor child! poor, dear child! that's true. I had forgotten. Well, such being the case, we'll go and ask Baroness Trigault to give us our breakfast. You will see a lovely woman." And addressing the coachman she instructed him to drive to the Trigault mansion in the Rue de la Ville l'Evêque.

When Madame de Fondège's brougham drew up before the door, the baron was standing in the courtyard with a cigar between his teeth, examining a pair of horses which had been sent him on approbation. He did not like his wife's friend, and he usually avoided her. But precisely because he was acquainted with the General's crime and Pascal's plans, he thought it politic

to seem amiable. So, on recognizing Madame de Fondège through the carriage window, he hastened forward with outstretched hand to assist her in alighting. "Did you come to take breakfast with us?" he asked. "That would be a most delightful——"

The remainder of the sentence died unuttered upon his lips. His face became crimson, and the cigar he was holding slipped from his fingers. He had just perceived Mademoiselle Marguerite, and his consternation was so apparent that Madame de Fondège could not fail to remark it; however, she attributed it to the girl's remarkable beauty. "This is Mademoiselle de Chalusse, my dear baron," said she, "the daughter of the noble and esteemed friend whom we so bitterly lament."

Ah! it was not necessary to tell the baron who this young girl was; he knew it only too well. He was not overcome for long; a thought of vengeance speedily flashed through his mind. It seemed to him that Providence itself offered him the means of putting an end to an intolerable situation. Regaining his self-control by a powerful effort, he preceded Madame de Fondège through the magnificent apartments of the mansion, lightly saying: "My wife is in her *boudoir*. She will be delighted to see you. But first of all, I have a good secret to confide to you. So let me take this young lady to the baroness, and you and I can join them in a moment!" Thereupon, without waiting for any rejoinder, he took Marguerite's arm and led her toward the end of the hall. Then opening a door, he exclaimed in a mocking voice: "Madame Trigault, allow me to present to you the daughter of the Count de Chalusse." And adding in a whisper: "This is your mother, young girl," he pushed the astonished Marguerite into the

room, closed the door, and returned to Madame de Fondège.

Paler than her white muslin wrapper, the Baroness Trigault sprang from her chair. This was the woman who, while her husband was braving death to win fortune for her, had been dazzled by the Count de Chalusse's wealth, and who, later in life, when she was the richest of the rich, had sunk into the very depths of degradation—had stooped, indeed, to a Coralth! The baroness had once been marvellously beautiful, and even now, many murmurs of admiration greeted her when she dashed through the Champs Elysées in her magnificent equipage, attired in one of those eccentric costumes which she alone dared to wear. She was a type of the wife created by the customs of fashionable society; the woman who feels elated when her name appears in the newspapers and in the chronicles of Parisian "high life"; who has no thought of her deserted fireside, but is ever tormented by a terrible thirst for bustle and excitement; whose head is empty, and whose heart is dry—the woman who only exists for the world; and who is devoured by unappeasable covetousness, and who, at times, envies an actress's liberty, and the notoriety of the leaders of the *demi-monde*; the woman who is always in quest of fresh excitement, and fails to find it; the woman who is *blasé*, and prematurely old in mind and body, and who yet still clings despairingly to her fleeting youth.

Inaccessible to any emotion but vanity, the baroness had never shed a tear over her husband's sufferings. She was sure of her absolute power over him. What did the rest matter? She even gloried in her knowledge that she could make this man—who loved her in spite of everything—at one moment furious with rage

or wild with grief, and then an instant afterward plunge him into the rapture of a senseless ecstasy by a word, a smile, or a caress. For such was her power, and she often exercised it mercilessly. Even after the frightful scene that Pascal had witnessed, she had made another appeal to the baron, and he had been weak enough to give her the thirty thousand francs which M. de Coralthe needed to purchase his wife's silence.

However, this time the baroness trembled. Her usual shrewdness had not deserted her, and she perfectly understood all that Marguerite's presence in that house portended. Since her husband brought this young girl—her daughter—to her, he must know everything, and have taken some fatal resolution. Had she, indeed, exhausted the patience which she had fancied inexhaustible? She was not ignorant of the fact that her husband had disposed of his immense fortune in a way that would enable him to say and prove that he was insolvent whenever occasion required; and if he found courage to apply for a legal separation, what could she hope to obtain from the courts? A bare living, almost nothing. In such a case, how could she exist? She would be compelled to spend her last years in the same poverty that had made her youth so wretched. She saw herself—ah! what a frightful misfortune—turned out of her princely home, and reduced to furnished apartments rented for five hundred francs a year!

Mademoiselle Marguerite was no less startled and horror-stricken than Madame Trigault, and she stood rooted to the spot, exactly where the baron had left her. Silent and motionless, they confronted each other for a moment which seemed a century to both of them. The resemblance which had astonished Pascal could not fail to strike them, for it was still more noticeable

now that they stood face to face. But anything was preferable to this torturing suspense, and so, summoning all her courage, the baroness broke the silence by saying: "You are the daughter of the Count de Chalusse?"

"I think so, but I have no proofs of it."

"And—your mother?"

"I do not know her, madame, and I have no desire to know her."

Disconcerted by this brief but implacable reply, Madame Trigault hung her head.

"What could I have to say to my mother?" continued Marguerite. "That I hate her? My courage would fail me to do so. And yet, how can I think without bitterness of the woman who, after abandoning me herself, endeavored to deprive me of my father's love and protection? I could have forgiven anything but that. Ah! I have not always been so patient and resigned! The laws of our country do not forbid illegitimate children to search for their parents, and more than once I have said to myself that I would discover my mother, and have my revenge."

"But you have no means of discovering her?"

"In this you are greatly mistaken, madame. After the Count de Chalusse's death, a package of letters, a glove, and some withered flowers were found in one of the drawers of his *escritoire*."

The baroness started back as if a yawning chasm had suddenly opened at her feet. "My letters!" she exclaimed. "Ah! wretched woman that I am, he kept them! It is all over! I am lost, for of course, they have been read."

"The ribbon securing them together has not even been untied."

"Is that true? Don't deceive me! Where are they, then—where are they?"

"Under the protection of the seals affixed by the justice of the peace."

Madame Trigault tottered, as if she were about to fall. "Then it is only a reprieve," she moaned, "and I am none the less ruined. Those cursed letters will necessarily be read, and all will be discovered. They will see——" The thought of what they would see endowed her with the energy of despair, and clutching hold of Marguerite's wrists: "Listen!" said she, approaching so near that her hot breath scorched the girl's cheeks, "no one must be allowed to see those letters!—it must not be! I will tell you what they contain. I hated my husband; I loved the Count de Chalusse madly, and he had sworn that he would marry me if ever I became a widow. Do you understand now? The name of the poison I obtained—how I proposed to administer it, and what its effects would be—all this is plainly written in my own handwriting and signed—yes, signed—with my own name. The plot failed, but it was none the less real, positive, palpable—and those letters are a proof of it. But they shall never be read—no—not if I am obliged to set fire to the Hôtel de Chalusse with my own hand."

Now the count's constant terror, the fear with which this woman had inspired him, were explained. He was an accomplice—he also had written no doubt, and she had preserved his letters as he had preserved hers. Crime had bound them indissolubly together.

Horried beyond expression, Marguerite freed herself from Madame Trigault's grasp. "I swear to you, madame, that everything any human being can do to save your letters shall be done by me," she exclaimed.

"And have you any hope of success?"

"Yes," replied the girl, remembering her friend, the magistrate.

Moved by a far more powerful emotion than any she had ever known before, the baroness uttered an exclamation of joy. "Ah! how good you are!" she exclaimed—"how generous! how noble! You take your revenge in giving me back life, honor, everything—for you are my daughter; do you not know it? Did they not tell you, before bringing you here, that I was the hated and unnatural mother who abandoned you?"

She advanced with tearful eyes and outstretched arms, but Marguerite sternly waved her back. "Spare yourself, madame, and spare me, the humiliation of an unnecessary explanation."

"Marguerite! Good God! you repulse me. After all you have promised to do for me, will you not forgive me?"

"I will try to forget, madame," replied the girl and she was already stepping toward the door when the baroness threw herself at her feet, crying, in a heart-rending tone: "Have pity, Marguerite, I am your mother. One has no right to deny one's own mother."

But the young girl passed on. "My mother is dead, madame; I do not know you!" And she left the room without even turning her head, without even glancing at the baroness, who had fallen upon the floor in a deep swoon.

XIX.

BARON TRIGAULT still held Madame de Fondège a prisoner in the hall. What did he say to her in justification of the expedient he had improvised? His own agitation was so great that he himself scarcely knew, and it mattered but little after all, for the good lady did not even pretend to listen to his apologies. Although by no means overshrewd, she suspected some great mystery, some choice bit of scandal, perhaps, and her eyes never once wandered from the door leading to the boudoir. At last this door opened again, and Made-moiselle Marguerite reappeared. "Great heavens!" exclaimed Madame de Fondège; "what has happened to my poor child?"

For the unfortunate girl advanced with an automatic tread, her eyes fixed on vacancy, and her hands outstretched, as if feeling her way. It indeed seemed to her as if the floor swayed to and fro under her feet, as if the walls tottered, as if the ceiling were about to fall upon her and crush her.

Madame de Fondège sprang forward. "What is the matter, my dearest?"

Alas! the poor girl was utterly overcome. "It is but a trifle," she faltered. But her eyes closed, her hands clutched wildly for some support, and she would have fallen to the ground if the baron had not caught her in his arms and carried her to a sofa. "Help!" cried Madame de Fondège, "help, she is dying!—a physician!"

But there was no need of a physician. One of the maids came with some fresh water and a bottle of

smelling salts, and Marguerite soon recovered sufficiently to sit up, and cast a frightened glance around her, while she mechanically passed her hand again and again over her cold forehead. "Do you feel better, my darling?" inquired Madame de Fondège at last.

"Yes."

"Ah! you gave me a terrible fright; see how I tremble." But the worthy lady's fright was as nothing in comparison with the curiosity that tortured her. It was so powerful, indeed, that she could not control it. "What has happened?" she asked.

"Nothing, madame, nothing."

"But——"

"I am subject to such attacks. I was very cold, and the heat of the room made me feel faint."

Although she could only speak with the greatest difficulty, the baron realized by her tone that she would never reveal what had taken place, and his gratitude and relief knew no bounds. "Don't tire the poor child," he said to Madame de Fondège. "The best thing you can do would be to take her home and put her to bed."

"I agree with you; but, unfortunately, I have sent away my brougham with orders not to return for me until one o'clock."

"Is that the only difficulty? If so, you shall have a carriage at once, my dear madame." So saying, the baron made a sign to one of the servants, and the man started on his mission at once.

Madame de Fondège was silent but furious. "He is actually putting me out of doors," she thought. "This is a little too much! And why doesn't the baroness make her appearance—she must certainly have heard my voice? What does it all mean? However, I'm sure Marguerite will tell me when we are alone."

But Madame de Fondège was wrong, for she vainly plied the girl with questions all the way from the Rue de la Ville l'Evêque to the Rue Pigalle. She could only obtain this unvarying and obstinate reply: "Nothing has happened. What do you suppose could have happened?"

Never in her whole life had Madame de Fondège been so incensed. "The blockhead!" she mentally exclaimed. "Who ever saw such obstinacy! Hateful creature!—I could beat her!"

She did not beat her, but on reaching the house she eagerly asked: "Do you feel strong enough to go up stairs alone?"

"Yes, madame."

"Then I will leave you. You know Van Klopen expects me again at one o'clock precisely; and I have not breakfasted yet. Remember that my servants are at your disposal, and don't hesitate to call them. You are at home, recollect."

It was not without considerable difficulty—not without being compelled to stop and rest several times on her way up stairs—that Mademoiselle Marguerite succeeded in reaching the apartments of the Fondège family. "Where is madame?" inquired the servant who opened the door.

"She is still out."

"Will she return to dinner?"

"I don't know."

"M. Gustave has been here three times already; he was very angry when he found that there was no one at home—he went on terribly. Besides, the workmen have turned everything topsy-turvy."

However, Marguerite had already reached her own room, and thrown herself on the bed. She was suffer-

ing terribly. Her brave spirit still retained its energy; but the flesh had succumbed. Every vein and artery throbbed with violence, and while a chill seemed to come to her heart, her head burned as if it had been on fire. "My Lord," she thought, "am I going to fall ill at the last moment, just when I have most need of all my strength?"

She tried to sleep, but was unable to do so. How could she free herself from the thought that haunted her? Her mother! To think that such a woman was her mother! Was it not enough to make her die of sorrow and shame? And yet this woman must be saved—the proofs of her crime must be annihilated with her letters. Marguerite asked herself whether the old magistrate would have it in his power to help her in this respect. Perhaps not, and then what could she do? She asked herself if she had not been too cruel, too severe. Guilty or not, the baroness was still her mother. Had she the right to be pitiless, when by stretching out her hand she might, perhaps, have rescued the wretched woman from her terrible life.

Thus thinking, the young girl sat alone and forgotten in her little room. The hours went by, and daylight had begun to wane, when suddenly a shrill whistle resounded in the street, under her windows. "Pi-ouit." It came upon her like an electric shock, and with a bound she sprang to her feet. For this cry was the signal that had been agreed upon between herself and the young man who had so abruptly offered to help her on the occasion of her visit to M. Fortunat's office. Was she mistaken? No—for on listening she heard the cry resound a second time, even more shrill and prolonged than before.

This was no time for hesitation, and so she went

down stairs at once. Hope sent new blood coursing through her veins and endowed her with invincible energy. On reaching the street-door, she paused and looked around her. At a short distance off she perceived a young fellow clad in a blouse, who was apparently engaged in examining the goods displayed in a shop window. Despite his position, he saw her also, for coming nearer, he hurriedly exclaimed: "Follow me at a little distance in the rear until I stop."

Marguerite obeyed him in breathless suspense. The young fellow was our friend Victor Chupin, now somewhat the worse for his encounter with Vantrasson that same morning. His face was considerably disfigured, and one of his eyes was black and swollen; nevertheless he was in a state of ecstatic happiness. Happy, and yet anxious; for, as he preceded Mademoiselle Marguerite, he said to himself: "How shall I tell her that I have succeeded? There must be no folly. If I tell her the news suddenly, she will most likely faint, so I must break the news gently."

On reaching the Rue Boursault, he turned the corner, and paused, waiting for Mademoiselle Marguerite to join him. "What is the news?" she anxiously asked.

"Everything is progressing finely—slowly, but finely."

"You know something, monsieur! Speak! Don't you see how anxious I am?"

He did see it only too well; and his embarrassment increased to such a pitch that he began to scratch his head furiously. At last he decided on a plan. "First of all, mademoiselle, brace yourself against the wall, and now stand firm. Yes, like that. Now, are you all right? Well, I have found M. Feraille!"

Chupin's precaution was a wise one, for Marguerite

tottered. Such a success, so quickly gained, was indeed astounding. "Is it possible?" she murmured.

"So possible that I have a letter for you from M. Feraille in my pocket, mademoiselle. Here it is—I am to wait for an answer."

She took the note he handed her, broke the seal with trembling hand, and read as follows:

"We are approaching the end, my dearest. One step more and we shall triumph. But I must see you to-day at any risk. Leave the house this evening at eight o'clock. My mother will be waiting for you in a cab, at the corner of the Rue Pigalle and the Rue Boursault. Come, and let no fear of arousing the suspicions of the Fondèges deter you. They are henceforth powerless to injure you.
PASCAL."

"I will go!" replied Marguerite at once, careless of the obstacles that might impede the fulfilment of her promise. For it was quite possible that serious difficulties might arise. Madame Léon, who had been invisible since the morning, might suddenly reappear, or the General and his wife might return to dinner. And what could Marguerite answer if they asked her where she wanted to go alone, and at such an hour of the evening? And if they attempted to prevent her from keeping her appointment, how could she resist? All these were weighty questions and yet she did not hesitate. Pascal had spoken; that sufficed, and she was determined to obey him implicitly, cost what it might. If he advised such a step, it was because he deemed it best and necessary; and she willingly submitted to the instructions of the man in whom she felt such unbounded confidence.

Having told Chupin that she might be relied upon

for the evening, she was retracing her way home, when suddenly the thought occurred to her that she ought not to neglect this opportunity to place a decisive weapon in Pascal's hands. She was close to the Rue Notre Dame de Lorette and so without more ado she hurried to the establishment of Carjat the photographer. He was fortunately disengaged, and she at once obtained from him a proof of the compromising letter written by the Marquis de Valorsay to Madame Léon. She placed it carefully in her pocket, thanked the photographer, and then hurried back to the Rue Pigalle to wait for the hour appointed in Pascal's letter. Fortunately none of her unpleasant apprehensions were realized. The dinner-hour came and passed, and still the house remained deserted. The workmen had gone off and the laughter and chatter of the servants in the kitchen were the only sounds that broke the stillness. Faint for want of food—for she had taken no nourishment during the day—Marguerite had considerable difficulty in obtaining something to eat from the servants. At last, however, they gave her some soup and cold meat, served on a corner of the bare table in the dining-room. It was half-past seven when she finished this frugal meal. She waited a moment, and then fearing she might keep Madame Ferailleux waiting, she went down into the street.

A cab was waiting at the corner of the Rue Boursault, as indicated. Its windows were lowered, and in the shade one could discern the face and white hair of an elderly lady. Glancing behind her to assure herself that she had not been followed, Marguerite eagerly approached the vehicle, whereupon a kindly voice exclaimed: "Jump in quickly, mademoiselle."

Marguerite obeyed, and the door was scarcely closed

behind her before the driver had urged his horse into a gallop. He had evidently received his instructions in advance, as well as the promise of a magnificent gratuity.

Sitting side by side on the back seat, the old lady and the young girl remained silent, but this did not prevent them from casting stealthy glances at each other, and striving to distinguish one another's features whenever the vehicle passed in front of some brilliantly lighted shop. They had never met before, and their anxiety to become acquainted was intense, for they each felt that the other would exert a decisive influence upon her life. All of Madame Feraille's friends would undoubtedly have been surprised at the step she had taken, and yet it was quite in accordance with her character. As long as she had entertained any hope of preventing this marriage she had not hesitated to express and even exaggerate her objections and repugnance. But her point of view was entirely changed when conquered by the strength of her son's passion, she at last yielded a reluctant consent. The young girl who was destined to be her daughter-in-law at once became sacred in her eyes; and it seemed to her an act of duty to watch over Marguerite, and shield her reputation. Having considered the subject, she had decided that it was not proper for her son's betrothed to run about the streets alone in the evening. Might it not compromise her honor? and later on might it not furnish venomous Madame de Fondège with an opportunity to exercise her slanderous tongue? Thus the puritanical old lady had come to fetch Marguerite, so that whenever occasion required she might be able to say: "I was there!"

As for Marguerite, after the trials of the day, she yielded without reserve to the feeling of rest and happi-

ness that now filled her heart. Again and again had Pascal spoken of his mother's prejudices and the inflexibility of her principles. But he had also spoken of her dauntless energy, the nobility of her nature, and of her love and devotion to him. With Marguerite, moreover, one consideration—one which she would scarcely have admitted, perhaps—outweighed all others: Madame Ferailleux was Pascal's mother. For that reason alone, if for no other, she was prepared to worship her. How fervently she blessed this noble woman, who, a widow, and ruined in fortune by an unprincipled scoundrel, had bravely toiled to educate her son, making him the man whom Marguerite had freely chosen from among all others. She would have knelt before this grand but simple-hearted mother had she dared; she would have kissed her hands. And a poignant regret came to her heart when she remembered her own mother, Baroness Trigault, and compared her with this matchless woman.

Meanwhile the cab had passed the outer boulevards, and was now whirling along the Route d'Asnières, as fast as the horse could drag it. "We are almost there," remarked Madame Ferailleux, speaking for the first time.

Marguerite's response was inaudible; she was so overcome with emotion. The driver had just turned the corner of the Route de la Révolte; and it was not long before he checked his panting horse. "Look, mademoiselle," said Madame Ferailleux again, "this is our home."

Upon the threshold, bareheaded, and breathless with impatience and hope, stood a man who was counting the seconds with the violent throbbings of his heart. He did not wait for the cab to stop, but springing to the door, he opened it; and then, catching Marguerite

in his arms, he carried her into the house with a cry of joy. She had not even time to look around her, ere he had placed her in an arm-chair, and fallen on his knees before her. "At last I see you again, my beloved Marguerite," he exclaimed. "You are mine—nothing shall part us again!"

They sobbed in each other's arms. They could bear adversity unmoved; but their composure deserted them in this excess of happiness; and standing in the doorway, Madame Ferailleux felt the tears come to her eyes as she stood watching them.

"How can I tell you all that I have suffered!" said Pascal, whose voice was hoarse with feeling. "The papers have told you all the details, I suppose. How I was accused of cheating at cards; how the vile epithet 'thief' was cast in my face; how they tried to search me; how my most intimate friends deserted me; how I was virtually expelled from the Palais de Justice. All this is terrible, is it not? Ah, well! it is nothing in comparison with the intense, unendurable anguish I experienced in thinking that you believed the infamous calumny which disgraced me."

Marguerite rose to her feet. "You thought that!" she exclaimed. "You believed that I doubted you? I! Like you, I have been accused of robbery myself. Do you believe me guilty?"

"Good God! I suspect you!"

"Then why——"

"I was mad, Marguerite, my only love, I was mad! But who would not have lost his senses under such circumstances? It was the very day after this atrocious conspiracy. I had seen Madame Léon, and had trusted her with a letter for you in which I entreated you to grant me five minutes' conversation."

"Alas! I never received it."

"I know that now; but then I was deceived. I went to the little garden gate to await your coming, but it was Madame Léon who appeared. She brought me a note written in pencil and signed with your name, bidding me an eternal farewell. And, fool that I was, I did not see that the note was a forgery!"

Mademoiselle Marguerite was amazed. The veil was now torn aside, and the truth revealed to her. Now she remembered Madame Léon's embarrassment when she met her returning from the garden on the night following the count's death. "Ah, well! Pascal," she said, "do you know what I was doing at almost the same moment? Alarmed at having received no news from you, I hastened to the Rue d'Ulm, where I learned that you had sold your furniture and started for America. Any other woman might have believed herself deserted under such circumstances, but not I. I felt sure that you had not fled in ignominious fashion. I was convinced that you had only concealed yourself for a time in order to strike your enemies more surely."

"Do not shame me, Marguerite. It is true that of us two I showed myself the weaker."

Lost in the rapture of the present moment, they had forgotten the past and the future, the agony they had endured, the dangers that still threatened them, and even the existence of their enemies.

But Madame Ferailleux was watching. She pointed to the clock, and earnestly exclaimed: "Time is passing, my son. Each moment that is wasted endangers our success. Should any suspicion bring Madame Vantresson here, all would be lost."

"She cannot come upon us unawares, my dear mother. Chupin has promised not to lose sight of

her. If she stirs from her shop, he will hasten here and throw a stone against the shutters to warn us."

But even this did not satisfy Madame Ferailleur.

"You forget, Pascal," she insisted, "that Mademoiselle Marguerite must be at home again by ten o'clock, if she consents to the ordeal you feel obliged to impose upon her."

This was the voice of duty recalling Pascal to the stern realities of life. He slowly rose, conquered his emotion, and, after reflecting for a moment, said: "First of all, Marguerite, I owe you the truth and an exact statement of our situation. Circumstances have compelled me to act without consulting you. Have I done right or wrong? You shall judge." And without stopping to listen to the girl's protestations, he rapidly explained how he had managed to win M. de Valorsay's confidence, discover his plans, and become his trusted accomplice. "This scoundrel's plan is very simple," he continued. "He is determined to marry you. Why? Because, though you are not aware of it, you are rich, and the sole heiress to the fortune of the Count de Chalusse, your father. This surprises you, does it not? Very well! listen to me. Deceived by the Marquis de Valorsay, the Count de Chalusse had promised him your hand. These arrangements were nearly completed, though you had not been informed of them. In fact, everything had been decided. At the outset, however, a grave difficulty had presented itself. The marquis wished your father to acknowledge you before your marriage, but this he refused to do. 'It would expose me to the most frightful dangers,' he declared. 'However, I will recognize Marguerite as my daughter in my will, and, at the same time, leave all my property to her.' But the marquis would not listen to this proposal.

'I don't doubt your good intentions, my dear count,' said he, 'but suppose this will should be contested, your property might pass into other hands.' This difficulty put a stop to the proceedings for some time. The marquis asked for guarantees; the other refused to give them—until, at last, M. de Chalusse discovered an expedient which would satisfy both parties. He confided to M. de Valorsay's keeping a will in which he recognized you as his daughter, and bequeathed you his entire fortune. This document, the validity of which is unquestionable, has been carefully preserved by the marquis. He has not spoken of its existence; and he would destroy it rather than restore it to you at present. But as soon as you became his wife, he intended to produce it and thus obtain possession of the count's millions."

"Ah! the old justice of the peace was not mistaken," murmured Mademoiselle Marguerite.

Pascal did not hear her. All his faculties were absorbed in the attempt he was making to give a clear and concise explanation, for he had much to say, and it was growing late. "As for the enormous sum you have been accused of taking," he continued, "I know what has become of it; it is in the hands of M. de Fondège."

"I know that, Pascal—I'm sure of it; but the proof, the proof!"

"The proof exists, and, like the will, it is in the hands of the Marquis de Valorsay."

"Is it possible! Great Heavens! You are sure you are not deceived?"

"I have seen the proof, and it is overpowering, irrefutable! I have touched it—I have held it in my hands. And it explains everything which may have seemed strange and incomprehensible to you. The letter which

M. de Chalusse received on the day of his death was written by his sister. She asked in it for her share of the family estate, threatening him with a terrible scandal if he refused to comply with her request. Had the count decided to brave this scandal rather than yield? We have good reason to suppose so. However, this much is certain: he had a terrible hatred, not so much for his sister, perhaps, as for the man who had seduced her, and afterward married her, actuated by avaricious motives alone. He had sworn thousands of times that neither husband nor wife should ever have a penny of the large fortune which really belonged to them. Believing that a lawsuit was now inevitable, and wishing to conceal his wealth, he was greatly embarrassed by the large amount of money he had on hand. What should he do with it? Where could he hide it? He finally decided to intrust it to the keeping of M. de Fondège, who was known as an eccentric man, but whose honesty seemed to be above suspicion. So, when he left home, on the afternoon of his illness, he took the package of bank-notes and bonds, which you had noticed in the *escritoire* that morning, away with him. We shall never know what passed between your father and the General—we can only surmise. But what I do know, and what I shall be able to prove, is that M. de Fondège accepted the trust, and that he gave an acknowledgment of it in the form of a letter, which read as follows:

“MY DEAR COUNT DE CHALUSSE—I hereby acknowledge the receipt, on Thursday, October 15, 186—, of the sum of two millions, two hundred and fifty thousand francs, which I shall deposit, in my name, at the Bank of France, subject to the orders of Mademoiselle Marguerite, your daughter, on the day she presents this

letter. And believe, my dear count, in the absolute devotion of your old comrade,

“GENERAL DE FONDÈGE.”

Mademoiselle Marguerite was thunderstruck. “Who can have furnished you with these particulars?” she inquired.

“The Marquis de Valorsay, my dearest; and I will explain how he was enabled to do so. M. de Fondège wrote the address of his ‘old comrade’ on this letter, which was folded and sealed, but not enclosed in an envelope. M. de Chalusse proposed to post it himself, so that the official stamp might authenticate its date. But on reflection, he became uneasy. He felt that this tiny, perishable scrap of paper would be the only proof of the deposit which he had confided to M. de Fondège’s honor. This scrap might be lost, burned, or stolen. Then what would happen? He had so often seen trustees betray the confidence of which they had seemed worthy. So M. de Chalusse racked his brains to discover a means of protection from an improbable but possible misfortune. He found it. Passing a stationer’s shop, he went in, purchased one of those letter-presses which merchants use in their correspondence, and, under pretext of trying it, took a copy of M. de Fondège’s letter. Having done this, he placed the copy in an envelope addressed to the Marquis de Valorsay, and, with his heart relieved of all anxiety, posted it at the same time as the original letter. A few moments later he got into the cab in which he was stricken down with apoplexy.”

Extraordinary as Pascal’s explanations must have seemed to her, Marguerite did not doubt their accuracy in the least. “Then it is the copy of this letter which

you saw in the possession of the Marquis de Valorsay?"

"Yes."

"And the original?"

"M. de Fondège alone can tell what has become of that. It is evident that he has somehow succeeded in obtaining possession of it. Would he have dared to squander money as he has done if he had not been convinced that there was no proof of his guilt in existence? Perhaps on hearing of the count's sudden death he bribed the concierge at the Hôtel de Chalusse to watch for this letter and return it to him. But on this subject I have only conjectures to offer. If they wish you to marry their son, it is probably because it seems too hard that you should be left in abject poverty while they are enjoying the fortune they have stolen from you. The vilest scoundrels have their scruples. Besides, a marriage with their son would protect them against any possible mischance in the future."

He was silent for a moment, and then more slowly resumed: "You see, Marguerite, we have clear, palpable, and irrefutable proofs of *your* innocence; but in my efforts to clear my own name of disgrace, I have been far less fortunate. I have tried in vain to collect material proofs of the conspiracy against me. It is only by proving the guilt of the Marquis de Valorsay and the Viscount de Coralth that I can establish my innocence, and so far I am powerless to do so."

Mademoiselle Marguerite's face brightened with supreme joy. "Then I can serve you, in my turn, my only love," she exclaimed. "Ah! blessed be God who inspired me, and who thus rewards me for an hour of courage. My poor father's plan also occurred to me, Pascal. Was it not strange? The material proof of

your innocence which you have sought for in vain, is in my possession, written and signed by the Marquis de Valorsay. Like M. de Fondège, he believes that the letter which proves his guilt is annihilated. He burned it himself, and yet it exists." So saying, she drew from her bosom one of the copies which she had received from Carjat the photographer, and handed it to Pascal, adding, "Look!"

Pascal eagerly perused the marvellous fac-simile of the letter which the marquis had written to Madame Léon. "Ah! this is the scoundrel's death warrant," he exclaimed, exultantly. And approaching Madame Ferailleux, who still stood leaning against the door, silent and motionless: "Look, mother," he repeated, "look!"

And he pointed to this paragraph which was so convincing and so explicit, that the most exacting jury would have asked for no further evidence. "I have formed a plan which will completely efface all remembrance of that cursed P. F., in case any one could condescend to think of him, after the disgrace we fastened upon him the other evening at the house of Madame d'A——."

"Nor is this all," resumed Mademoiselle Marguerite. "There are other letters which will prove that this plot was the marquis's work and which give the name of his accomplice, Coralith. And these letters are in the possession of a man of dubious integrity, who was once the marquis's ally, but who has now become his enemy. He is known as Isidore Fortunat, and lives in the Place de la Bourse."

Marguerite felt that Madame Ferailleux's keen glance was riveted upon her. She intuitively divined what was passing in the mind of the puritanical old lady,

and realized that her whole future, and the happiness of her entire wedded life, depended upon her conduct at that moment. So, desirous of making a full confession, she hastily exclaimed: "My conduct may have seemed strange in a young girl, Pascal. A timid, inexperienced girl, who had been carefully kept from all knowledge of life and evil, would have been crushed by such a burden of disgrace, and could only have wept and prayed. I did weep and pray; but I also struggled and fought. In the hour of peril I found myself endowed with some of the courage and energy which distinguished the poor women of the people among whom I formerly earned my bread. The teachings and miseries of the past were not lost to me!" And as simply as if she were telling the most natural thing in the world, she described the struggle she had undertaken against the world, strong in her faith in Pascal and in his love.

"Ah, you are a noble and courageous girl!" exclaimed Madame Ferailleux. "You are worthy of my son, and you will proudly guard our honest name!"

For some little time already the obstinate old lady had been struggling against the sympathetic emotion that filled her heart, and big tears were coursing down her wrinkled cheeks.

Unable to restrain herself any longer, she now threw both arms around Marguerite's neck, and drew her toward her in a long embrace, murmuring: "Marguerite, my daughter! Ah! how unjust my prejudices were!"

It might be thought that Pascal was transported with joy on hearing this, but no; the lines of care on his forehead deepened, as he said: "Happiness is so near!

Why must a final test, another humiliation, separate us from it?"

But Marguerite now felt strong enough to meet even martyrdom with a smile. "Speak, Pascal!" said she, "don't you see that it is almost ten o'clock?"

He hesitated; there was grief in his eyes and his breath came quick and hard, as he resumed: "For your sake and mine, we must conquer, at any price. This is the only reason that can justify the horrible expedient I have to suggest. M. de Valorsay, as you know, has boasted of his power to overcome your resistance, and he really believes that he possesses this power. Why I have not killed him again and again when he has been at my mercy, I can scarcely understand. The only thing that gave me power to restrain myself was my desire for as sure, as terrible, and as public a revenge as the humiliation he inflicted on me. His plan for your ruin is such as only a scoundrel like himself could conceive. With the assistance of his vile tool, Coralthe, he has formed a league, offensive and defensive, with the son of the Count de Chalusse's sister, who is the only acknowledged heir at this moment—a young man destitute of heart and intelligence, and inordinately vain, but neither better nor worse than many others who figure respectably in society. His name is Wilkie Gordon. The marquis has acquired great influence over him, and has persuaded him that it is his duty to denounce you to the authorities. He has, in short, accused you of defrauding the heirs of the Chalusse estate of two millions of francs and also of poisoning the count."

The girl shrugged her shoulders disdainfully. "As for the robbery, we have an answer to that," she an-

swered, "and as regards the poisoning—really the accusation is too absurd!"

But Pascal still looked gloomy. "The matter is more serious than you suppose," he replied. "They have found a physician—a vile, cowardly scoundrel—who for a certain sum has consented to appear in support of the accusation."

"Dr. Jodon, I presume!"

"Yes; and this is not all. The count's *escritoire* contains the vial of medicine of which he drank a portion on the day of his death. Well, to-morrow night, Madame Léon will open the garden gate of the Hôtel de Chalusse and admit a rascal who will abstract the vial."

Marguerite shuddered. Now she understood the fiendish cunning of the plot. "It might ruin me!" she murmured.

Pascal nodded affirmatively. "M. de Valorsay wishes you to consider yourself as irretrievably lost, and then he intends to offer to save you on condition that you consent to marry him. I should say, however, that M. Wilkie is ignorant of the atrocious projects he is abetting. They are known only to the marquis and M. de Coralthe; and it is I who, under the name of Mauméjan, act as their adviser. It was to me that the marquis sent M. Wilkie for assistance in drawing up this accusation. I myself wrote out the denunciation, which was as terrible and as formidable as our bitterest enemy could possibly desire, combining, as it did, with perfidious art, the reports of the valets and the suspicions of the physician, and establishing the connection between the robbery and the murder. It finished by demanding a thorough investigation. And M. Wilkie copied and signed this

document, and carried it to the prosecution office himself."

Mademoiselle Marguerite sank half-fainting into an arm-chair. "You have done this!" she faltered.

"It was necessary, my daughter," whispered Madame Ferailleux.

"Yes, it was necessary, absolutely necessary," repeated Pascal, "as you will see. Justice, which is a human institution, and limited in its powers, cannot fathom motives, read thoughts, or interfere with plans, however abominable they may be, or however near realization. Before it can interfere, the law must have material, tangible proof, convincing to the senses. Until you are arrested, the crimes committed by M. de Valorsay, and those associated with him, do not come within the reach of human justice; but as soon as you are in prison, I can hasten to our friend the justice of the peace, and we shall go at once to the investigating magistrate and explain everything. Now, when your innocence and the guilt of your accusers have been established, what do you fancy the authorities will do? They will wait until your enemies declare themselves, in order to capture them all at once, and prevent the escape of a single one. To-morrow night some clever detectives will watch the Hôtel de Chalusse, and just as Madame Léon and the wretch with her think themselves sure of success, they will be caught in the very act and arrested. When they are examined by a magistrate, who is conversant with the whole affair, can they deny their guilt? No; certainly not. Acting upon their confession, the authorities will force an entrance into Valorsay's house, where they will find your father's will and the receipt given by M. de Fondège—in a word, all the proofs of their guilt. And while this

search is going on, all your enemies, reassured by your arrest, will be at a grand *soirée* given by Baron Trigault. I shall be there as well."

Mademoiselle Marguerite had mastered her momentary weakness. She rose to her feet, and in a firm voice exclaimed: "You have acted rightly."

"Ah! there was no other way. And yet I wished to see you, to learn if this course were too repugnant to you."

She interrupted him with a gesture. "When shall I be arrested?" she asked, quietly.

"This evening or to-morrow," was his answer.

"Very well! I have only one request to make. The Fondèges have a son who has no hand in the affair, but who will be more severely punished than his parents, if we do not spare them. Could you not——"

"I can do nothing, Marguerite. I am powerless now."

Everything was soon arranged. Marguerite raised her forehead to Pascal for his parting kiss, and went away accompanied by Madame Ferailleux, who escorted her to the corner of the Rue Boursault. The General and his wife had returned home in advance of Marguerite. She found them sitting in the drawing-room, with distorted faces and teeth chattering with fear. With them was a bearded man who, as soon as she appeared, exclaimed:

"You are Mademoiselle Marguerite, are you not? I arrest you in the name of the law. There is my warrant." And without more ado he led her away.

XX.

MONEY, which nowadays has taken the place of the good fairies of former times, had gratified M. Wilkie's every longing in a single night. Without any period of transition, dreamlike as it were, he had passed from what he called "straitened circumstances" to the splendid enjoyment of a princely fortune. Madame d'Argelès's renunciation had been so correctly drawn up, that as soon as he presented his claims and displayed his credentials he was placed in possession of the Chalusse estate. It is true that a few trifling difficulties presented themselves. For instance, the old justice of the peace who had affixed the seals refused to remove them from certain articles of furniture, especially from the late count's *escritoire*, without an order from the court, and several days were needed to obtain this. But what did that matter to M. Wilkie? The house, with its splendid reception-rooms, pictures, statuary and gardens, was at his disposal, and he installed himself therein at once. Twenty horses neighed and stamped in his stables; there were at least a dozen carriages in the coach-house. He devoted his attention exclusively to the horses and vehicles; but acting upon the advice of Casimir, who had become his valet and oracle, he retained all the former servants of the house, from Bourigeau the concierge down to the humblest scullery maid. Still, he gave them to understand that this was only a temporary arrangement. A man like himself, living in this progressive age, could scarcely be expected to content himself with what had satisfied the

Count de Chalusse. "For I have my plans," he remarked to Casimir, "but let Paris wait awhile."

He repudiated his former friends. Costard and Serpillon, pretended viscounts though they were, were quite beneath the notice of a Gordon-Chalusse, as M. Wilkie styled himself on his visiting cards. However, he purchased their share of Pompier de Nanterre, feeling convinced that this remarkable steeplechaser had a brilliant future before him. He did not trouble himself to any great extent about his mother. Like every one else, he knew that she had disappeared, but nothing further. On the other hand, the thought of his father, the terrible *chevalier d'industrie*, hung over his joy like a pall; and each time the great entrance bell announced a visitor, he trembled, turned pale, and muttered: "Perhaps it's he!"

Tortured by this fear, he clung closely to the Marquis de Valorsay as if he felt that this distinguished friend was a powerful support. Besides, people of rank and distinction naturally exercised a powerful attraction over him, and he fancied he grew several inches taller when, in some public place, in the street, or a restaurant, he was able to call out, "I say, Valorsay, my good friend," or, "Upon my word! my dear marquis!"

M. de Valorsay received these effusions graciously enough, although, in point of fact, he was terribly bored by the platitudes of his new acquaintance. He intended to send him to Coventry later on, but just now M. Wilkie was too useful to be ignored. So he had introduced him to his club, and was seen with him everywhere—in the Bois, at the restaurants, and the theatres. At times, some of his friends inquired: "Who is that queer little fellow?" with a touch of irony in their

tone, but when the marquis carelessly answered: "A poor devil who has just come into possession of a property worth twenty millions!" they became serious, and requested the pleasure and honor of an introduction to this fortunate young man.

So M. de Valorsay had invited Gordon-Chalusse to accompany him to Baron Trigault's approaching *fête*. It was to be an entertainment for gentlemen only, a monster card-party; but every one knew the wealthy baron, and no doubt with a view of stimulating curiosity he had declared, and the *Figaro* had repeated, that he had a great surprise in store for his guests. Oh! such a surprise! They could have no idea what it was! This *fête* was to take place on the second day after Mademoiselle Marguerite's arrest; and on the appointed evening, between nine and ten o'clock, M. de Valorsay and his friend Coralthe sat together in the former's smoking-room waiting for Wilkie to call for them, as had been agreed upon. They were both in the best of spirits. The viscount's apprehensions had been entirely dispelled; and the marquis had quite forgotten the twinges of pain in his injured limb. "Marguerite will only leave prison to marry me," said M. de Valorsay, triumphantly; and he added: "What a willing tool this Wilkie is! A single word sufficed to make him give all his servants leave of absence. The Hôtel de Chalusse will be deserted, and Madame Léon and Vantrasson can operate at their leisure."

It was ten o'clock when M. Wilkie made his appearance. "Come, my good friends!" said he, "my carriage is below."

They started off at once, and five minutes later they were ushered into the presence of Baron Trigault, who received M. Wilkie as if he had never seen him before.

There was quite a crowd already. At least three or four hundred people had assembled in the Baron's reception-rooms, and among them were several former *habitués* of Madame d'Argelès's house; one could also espy M. de Fondège ferociously twirling his mustaches as usual, together with Kami-Bey, who was conspicuous by reason of his portly form and eternal red fez. However, among these men, all noticeable for their studied elegance of attire and manner, and all of them known to M. de Valorsay, there moved numerous others of very different appearance. Their waistcoats were less open, and their clothes did not fit them as perfectly; on the other hand, there was something else than a look of idiotic self-complacency on their faces. "Who can these people be?" whispered the marquis to M. de Coralith. "They look like lawyers or magistrates." But although he said this he did not really believe it, and it was without the slightest feeling of anxiety that he strolled from group to group, shaking hands with his friends and introducing M. Wilkie.

A strange rumor was in circulation among the guests. Many of them declared—where could they have heard such a thing?—that in consequence of a quarrel with her husband, Madame Trigault had left Paris the evening before. They even went so far as to repeat her parting words to the Baron: "You will never see me again," she had said. "You are amply avenged. Farewell!" However, the best informed among the guests, the folks who were thoroughly acquainted with all the scandals of the day, declared the story false, and said that if the baroness had really fled, handsome Viscount de Coralith would not appear so calm and smiling.

The report *was* true, however. But M. de Coralith

did not trouble himself much about the baroness now. Had he not got in his pocket M. Wilkie's signature insuring him upward of half a million? Standing near one of the windows in the main reception-room, between the Marquis de Valorsay and M. Wilkie, the brilliant viscount was gayly chatting with them, when a footman, in a voice loud enough to interrupt all conversation, suddenly announced: "M. Mauméjan!"

It seemed such a perfectly natural thing to M. de Valorsay that Mauméjan, as one of the baron's business agents, should be received at his house, that he was not in the least disturbed. But M. de Coralthe, having heard the name, wished to see the man who had aided and advised the marquis so effectually. He abruptly turned, and as he did so the words he would have spoken died upon his lips. He became livid, his eyes seemed to start from their sockets, and it was with difficulty that he ejaculated: "He!"

"Who?" inquired the astonished marquis.

"Look!"

M. de Valorsay did so, and to his utter amazement he perceived a numerous party in the rear of the man announced under the name of Mauméjan. First came Mademoiselle Marguerite, leaning on the arm of the white-haired magistrate, and then Madame Ferailleux; next M. Isidore Fortunat, and finally Chupin—Victor Chupin, resplendent in a handsome, bran-new, black dress-suit.

The marquis could no longer fail to understand the truth. He realized who Mauméjan really was, and the audacious comedy he had been duped by. He was so frightfully agitated that five or six persons sprang forward exclaiming: "What is the matter, marquis? Are you ill?" But he made no reply. He felt that he

was caught in a trap, and he glanced wildly around him seeking for some loophole of escape.

However, the word of command had evidently been given. Suddenly all the guests scattered about the various drawing-rooms poured into the main hall, and the doors were closed. Then, with a solemnity of manner which no one had ever seen him display before, Baron Trigault took the so-called Mauméjan by the hand and led him into the centre of the apartment opposite the lofty chimney-piece. "Gentlemen," he began, in a commanding tone, "this is M. Pascal Feraille, the honorable man who was falsely accused of cheating at cards at Madame d'Argelès's house. You owe him a hearing."

Pascal was greatly agitated. The strangeness of the situation, the certainty of speedy and startling rehabilitation, perhaps the joy of vengeance, the silence, which was so profound that he could hear his own panting breath, and the many eyes riveted upon him, all combined to unnerve him. But only for a moment. He swiftly conquered his weakness, and surveying his audience with flashing eyes, he explained, in a clear and ringing voice, the shameful conspiracy to obtain possession of the count's millions, and the abominable machinations by which Mademoiselle Marguerite and himself had been victimized. Then when he had finished his explanations he added, in a still more commanding voice, "Now look; you can read the culprits' guilt on their faces. One is the scoundrel known to you as the Viscount de Coralthe, but Paul Violaine is his true name. He was formerly an accomplice of the notorious Mascarot; he is a cowardly villain, for he is married, and leaves his wife and children to die of starvation!" The Viscount de Coralthe fairly bellowed with

rage. But Pascal did not heed him. "The other criminal is the Marquis de Valorsay," he added, in the same ringing tone. There was, moreover, a third culprit who would have inspired mingled pity and disgust if any one had noticed him shrinking into a corner, terrified and muttering: "It wasn't my fault, my wife compelled me to do it!" This was General de Fondège.

Pascal did not mention his name. But it was not absolutely necessary he should do so, and besides, he remembered Marguerite's entreaty respecting the son.

However, while the young lawyer was speaking, the marquis had summoned all his energy and assurance to his aid. Desperate as his plight might be, he would not surrender. "This is an infamous conspiracy," he exclaimed. "Baron, you shall atone for this. The man's an impostor!—he lies!—all that he says is false!"

"Yes, it is false!" echoed M. de Coralthe.

But a clamor arose, drowning these protestations, and the most opprobrious epithets could be heard on every side.

"How will you prove your assertion?" cried M. de Valorsay.

"Don't try that dodge on us!" shouted Chupin. "Vantrasson and mother Léon have confessed everything."

"Who defrauded us all with Domingo?" cried several people; and, loud above all the others, Kami-Bey bawled out: "To say nothing of the fact that the sale of your racing stud was a complete swindle!"

Meanwhile, Pascal's former friends and associates, his brother advocates and the magistrates who had listened to his first efforts at the bar, crowded round him, pressing his hands, embracing him almost to suffocation, censuring themselves for having suspected him,

the very soul of honor, and pleading in self-justification the degenerate age in which we live—an age in which we daily see those whom we had considered immaculate suddenly yield to temptation. And a murmur of respectful admiration rose from the throng when the excitement had subsided a little, and the guests had an opportunity to observe Mademoiselle Marguerite, whose eyes sparkled more brightly than ever through her happy tears; and whose beauty acquired an almost sublime expression from her deep emotion.

The wretched Valorsay felt that all was over—that he was irretrievably lost. Seized by a blind fury like that which impels a hunted animal to turn and face the hounds that pursue him, and bid them defiance, he confronted the throng with his face distorted with passion, his eyes bloodshot, and foam upon his lips; he was absolutely frightful in his cynicism, hatred, and scorn. “Ah! well, yes!” he exclaimed—“yes, all that you have just heard is true. I was sinking, and I tried to save myself as best I could. Beggars cannot be choosers; I staked my all upon a single die. If I had won, you would have been at my feet; but I have lost and you spurn me. Cowards! hypocrites! that you are, insult me if you like, but tell me how many among you all are sufficiently pure and upright to have a right to despise me! Are there a hundred among you? are there even fifty?”

A tempest of hisses momentarily drowned his voice, but as soon as the uproar had ceased, he resumed, sneeringly: “Ah! the truth wounds you, my dear friends. Pray, don’t pretend to be so distressingly virtuous! I was ruined—that is the long and short of it. But what man of you is not embarrassed? Who among you finds his income sufficient? Which one of you is

not encroaching upon his capital? And when you have come to your last louis, you will do what I have done, or something worse. Do not deny it, for not one among you has a more uncompromising conscience, more moral firmness, or more generous aspirations than I once possessed. You are pursuing what I pursued. You desire what I desired—a life of luxury, brief if it must be, but happy—a life of gayety, wild excitement, and dissipation. You, too, have a passion for pleasure and gambling, race-horses, and notorious women, a table always bountifully spread, glasses ever overflowing with wine, all the delights of luxury, and everything that gratifies your vanity! But an abyss of shame awaits you at the end of it all. I am in it now. I await you there, for there you will surely, necessarily, inevitably come. Ah, ha! you will not then think my downfall so very strange. Let me pass! make way! if you please.”

He advanced with his head haughtily erect, and would actually have made his escape if a frightened servant had not at that moment appeared crying: “Monsieur—Monsieur le Baron! a commissary of police is downstairs. He is coming up. He has a warrant!”

The marquis’s frenzied assurance deserted him. He turned even paler than he already was if that were possible, and reeled like an ox but partially stunned by the butcher’s hammer. Suddenly a desperate resolution could be read in his eyes, the resolution of the condemned criminal, who, knowing that he cannot escape the scaffold, ascends it with a firm step.

He hastily approached Baron Trigault, and asked in a husky voice: “Will you allow me to be arrested in your house, baron? me—a Valorsay!”

It might have been supposed that the baron had expected this reproach, for without a word he led the marquis and M. de Coralth to a little room at the end of the hall, pushed them inside, and closed the door again.

It was time he did so, for the commissary of police was already upon the threshold. "Which of you gentlemen is the Marquis de Valorsay?" he asked. "Which of you is Paul Violaine, *alias* the Viscount de——"

The sharp report of firearms suddenly interrupted him. Every one at once rushed to the little room, where the wretched men had been conducted. There extended, face upward, on the floor, lay the Marquis de Valorsay, with his brains oozing from his fractured skull, and his right hand still clutching a revolver. He was dead. "And the other!" cried the throng; "the other!"

The open window, and a curtain rudely torn from its fastenings and secured to the balustrade, told how M. de Coralth had made his escape. It was not till later that people learned what precautions the baron had taken. On the table in that room he had laid two revolvers, and two packages containing ten thousand francs each. The viscount had not hesitated.

* * * * *

Pascal Feraillieur and Mademoiselle Marguerite de Chalusse were married at the church of Saint Etienne du Mont, only a few steps from the Rue d'Ulm. Those who knew the mystery connected with the bride's parentage were greatly astonished when they saw Baron Trigault act as a witness on this occasion, in company with the venerable justice of the peace. But

such was the fact, nevertheless. Treated more and more outrageously by his daughter and her husband, separated from his wife, who had nearly lost her reason, although her letters were saved, the baron has nowadays found affection and a home with Pascal and his wife. He plays cards but seldom now—only an occasional game of *piquet* with Madame Ferailleux, and he amuses himself by making her start when she is too long in discarding, by ejaculating, in a stentorian voice: “We are wasting precious time!” Sometimes they go out together, to the great astonishment of such as chance to meet the puritanical old lady leaning on the baron’s arm. She often goes to visit and console the widow Gordon, formerly known as Lia d’Argelès, who now keeps an establishment near Montrouge, where she provides poor, betrayed and forsaken girls with a home and employment. She has yet to receive any token of remembrance from her son. As for her husband, she supposes he is dead or incarcerated in some prison.

It is to Madame Gordon that the Fondèges are often indebted for bread. Obligated to disgorge their plunder, and left with no resources save the fifty francs a month allowed them by their son, who has been promoted to the rank of captain, their poverty is necessarily extreme. Oh! those Fondèges! M. Fortunat only speaks of them with horror. But he is loud in his praises of Madame Marguerite, who repaid him the forty thousand francs he had advanced to M. de Valorsay. He speaks in the highest terms of Chupin also; but in this, he is scarcely sincere, for Victor, who has been set up in business by Pascal, told him very plainly that he was determined not to put his hand to any more dirty work, and that expression, “dirty work,” rankles in M. Fortunat’s heart.

Chupin's resolution did not, however, prevent him from attending the trial of Vantrasson and Madame Léon—the former of whom was sentenced to hard labor for life, and the latter to ten years' imprisonment. Nothing is known concerning M. de Coralth; but his wife has disappeared, to the great disappointment of M. Mouchon. As a dentist, Dr. Jodon is successful. As for M. Wilkie, you can learn anything you wish to know concerning him in the newspapers, for his sayings, doings, and movements, are constantly being chronicled. The reporters exhaust all the resources of their vocabulary in describing his horses, carriages, and stables, and the gorgeous liveries of his servants. His changes of residence are always mentioned; his brilliant sayings are quoted. He is a social success; he is admired, fondled, and flattered. He makes a great stir in the fashionable world—in fact, he reigns over it like a king. After all, assurance is the winning card in the game of life!

THE END.

THE GILDED CLIQUE.



I.

FEW houses in Paris are better kept, or of more inviting aspect, than No. 23 Rue de la Grange, where everything wears an air of Dutch-like neatness and cleanliness. The neighbours might use the brass plate on the door as a shaving-glass, the pavement of the hall is polished till it shines, and the woodwork of the staircase is varnished to perfection. In the vestibule numerous notices, couched in the peculiar style which Parisian landlords habitually affect, request the tenants to respect other people's property, quite regardless of the high rents they have to pay. "Wipe your boots, if you please," says one of the placards to all who enter the house. "No spitting permitted on the stairs" declares another—obviously intended for more particularly ill-mannered tenants and visitors,—while a third, in the same curt style, authoritatively enunciates that no dogs are allowed on the premises.

And yet, although it has always been spick and span, "No. 23" enjoyed, at the time we write of, but a sorry reputation in the neighbourhood. Was it worse than other houses—than No. 21 for instance, or No. 25? Probably not; but there is a fate for houses as well as for men and books. The first storey was rented by two independent gentlemen and their families, whose minds were as simple as their lives. On the second floor were the offices and abode of a tax-receiver, who dabbled at times, it was reported, in usury on his own private account. The third storey was let to a wealthy man, a baron, so people said, who only turned up at long intervals, preferring, according to his own statement, to live on his estates in the province of Saintonge. The whole of the fourth floor was occupied by an individual familiarly known as Papa Ravinet, who dealt in all sorts of second-hand merchandise—furniture, garments, *bric-à-brac*, and so on—his rooms being replete with a medley collection of things which he was wont to purchase at sales by auction. The fifth and top-most storey of the house was divided into numerous small rooms and closets, mainly rented by artisans and clerks, who almost without exception left for their avocations early in the morning and returned home late at night. A second block in the rear of the building facing the street had a staircase of its own, and was occupied by still humbler tenants, whose presence in this central part of Paris was explained by the difficulty of letting small lodgings.

However this may have been, the house had a bad reputation, and its

inmates had to bear the consequences. Not one of them would have been trusted with a crown's worth of goods in any of the neighbouring shops. No one however stood, rightly or wrongly, in such bad repute as the door-keeper or *concierge*, who from a little window just inside the *porte-cochère* watched over the safety of the whole house. Master Chevassat and his wife were severely cut by all their colleagues in the street, and the most scandalous reports were circulated concerning them. Chevassat was said to be well off, having acquired his means by lending money at the remunerative rate of a hundred per cent. per month. He increased his income, moreover, by acting, so it was stated, as the agent of the tax-receiver and the dealer in second-hand goods, superintending the executions they ordered whenever poor debtors were unable to pay. Against Madame Chevassat there were yet even more grievous charges, for folks pretended she would do anything for money, and had launched many a poor girl into a profligate career. This worthy couple had previously lived in the fashionable Faubourg St Honoré, which it was said they had been compelled to leave on account of various ugly occurrences. Finally, they were reported to have a son named Justin, a handsome fellow of five-and-thirty, who lived in the best society, and whom they literally worshipped. He, however, was ashamed of his parents, though he would frequently come at night-time and ask them for money. It must be confessed that none of the gossips of the street had ever seen this son, and the origin of the report was altogether lost in mystery. As for the Chevassats, when any of this tittle-tattle reached their ears, they simply shrugged their shoulders, and remarked that they cared little for public opinion as long as their own consciences were clear.

One Saturday evening towards the close of last December, the door-keeper and his wife were just sitting down to dinner, when an individual, wearing a flowered-silk waistcoat and a long frock coat with an immense collar, rushed precipitately into their room. He was a man of fifty or thereabouts, of medium height, with a clean shaven face, and small bright yellow eyes, which shone with restless eagerness from under thick bushy brows. "Quick, Chevassat!" he cried in a tone of alarm. "Take your lamp and follow me—an accident has happened upstairs."

The Chevassats were quite frightened by the new comer's disturbed expression of countenance, and the woman nervously enquired, "Dear me, what is the matter, M. Ravinet?"

"The matter! the matter," rejoined the dealer in second-hand merchandise (for the messenger of ill-omen was none other than the tenant of the fourth floor). "Why, while I was on the landing just now, I fancied I heard a death-rattle on the floor above. I listened for a moment, and hearing nothing further, I was going into my rooms again, when I heard a confused sound of sobbing and sighing,—as if some one was in agony, in fact, at the point of death."

"And then?" ejaculated Master Chevassat.

"Why, then I determined to come and find you," replied the dealer. "I cannot be positively sure, but still I could almost swear that the moans came from the room of Mlle. Henriette, that pretty young girl who lives just above me. Come, let us go and see if there is anything amiss with her."

But the Chevassats did not stir from their seats. "Mlle. Henriette is not at home," said the wife in a frigid tone. "She went out a little while ago, and told me she would not come back till nine o'clock; you

must have been mistaken, M. Ravinet. Perhaps you had a ringing in your ears, or—”

“No, no; I certainly heard the moaning, and we must find out where it came from.”

During this conversation the door of the *concierge's* room had remained open, and several people of the house overhearing Papa Ravinet's story, and the exclamations of the Chevassats while crossing the hall, had paused, and listened with natural inquisitiveness: “Yes,” they repeated in chorus, “We must find out what is the matter.”

Chevassat did not dare to resist such a collective summons, and rising from his seat with a sigh, he muttered, “Well, let us go, then.” The whole party, composed of Chevassat and his wife, Papa Ravinet, and the lookers-on, thereupon ascended the staircase. As they tramped from flight to flight, the occupants of the various floors opened their doors to ascertain what was going on, and on learning that something was likely to happen, they almost all left their rooms and joined the procession, so that when the door-keeper paused on the landing of the fifth floor to draw breath, he had well nigh a dozen persons behind him. Mlle. Henriette's room was the first on the left. Chevassat began by rapping gently at the door, but, finding that mildness had no effect, he knocked louder and louder, until at last his heavy fist shook all the flimsy partition walls around. Between each blow he cried, “Mlle. Henriette! Mlle. Henriette, you are wanted!” But as all his hammering and shouting failed to elicit any response, he at last turned round with a triumphant air, and exclaimed, “Well, you see my wife was right: she's not at home!”

While Chevassat was knocking, however, M. Ravinet had been on his knees, in turn applying eye and ear to the keyhole, and at this moment he sprang to his feet with a pale face: “'Tis all over!” he cried. “We are too late!” Then, as the bystanders looked at him, bewildered, he added furiously, “Have you no noses? can't you smell that abominable charcoal?”

The lookers-on forthwith began to sniff, and soon agreed that the dealer was in the right. Moreover, Chevassat's repeated blows had had considerable effect on the fastenings of the door, and a sickening vapour now filtered through the apertures around the framework. Every one shuddered, and a woman tremulously exclaimed, “She has destroyed herself!” As it happens only too frequently in such cases, all the bystanders hesitated, and a pause ensued before Chevassat ventured to remark, “Ah, well, I must go for the police.”

“That's right!” retorted the dealer in second-hand merchandise. “At this moment there is perhaps still a chance of saving the poor girl's life, but when you come back it will of course be too late.”

“What's to be done, then?”

“Why, break in the door.”

“I don't dare.”

“Well, then, I will;” and suiting the action to the word, Papa Ravinet put his shoulder to the worm-eaten door, the lock of which almost instantly gave way. A mass of vapour rolled out into the passage, and the frightened lookers-on instinctively shrank back. But curiosity speedily mastered fear. Every one was now convinced that the poor girl was lying dead inside the room, and one and all strove to distinguish her form through the dense fumes. But their efforts were fruitless. The feeble light of the lamp carried by Chevassat had gone out in the foul air, and the darkness would have been utterly impenetrable, save for the ruddy glow of the charcoal

burning away in two little hand-stoves, amid tiny heaps of white ashes. Papa Ravinet had, however, gone too far already to remain waiting in the passage. "Where is the window?" he asked, turning to the house-porter.

"On the right-hand side."

"Very well, I'll open it;" and he boldly plunged into the dark room. A moment afterwards a crash of breaking glass was heard, and a current of air being established, the smoke was speedily carried away into space. As soon as it was possible to breathe inside the room everyone rushed in. It was certainly a death-rattle that Papa Ravinet had heard. Stretched at full length on a thin mattress, destitute alike of sheet, blanket, and counterpane, lay a young girl, barely twenty years of age, clad in a flimsy dress of black merino. Her limbs were already stiff, and she was apparently lifeless. "To die so young, and in such a manner!" exclaimed the women of the party, sobbing aloud.

But the dealer in second-hand goods did not waste his time in sentimental lamentation. Approaching the bed, he carefully scrutinized the girl. "She is not dead yet," he cried; "No, she cannot be dead! Come, ladies, try and prolong her life till the doctor comes. Give her air—plenty of air—try to get some breath into her lungs. Cut her dress open, pour some vinegar on her face, rub her limbs with some warm woollen stuff."

The women cheerfully obeyed these orders, though none of them entertained any hope of success. "Poor child," said one of them, "no doubt she was crossed in love." "Or else she was starving," significantly whispered another. It was indeed plain enough that this humble room was the abode of extreme poverty. The only articles of furniture were the bed, a chest of drawers, and two chairs. There were no curtains to the window, no clothes in the bag standing in a corner, not a ribbon in the drawers. Everything that could be disposed of had plainly been pawned or sold, bit by bit, little by little. The bed clothes had followed the wearing apparel, and even half the wool had been removed from the mattress. Too proud to complain, friendless owing to timidity perhaps, the poor girl had gone through all the stages of suffering which utter poverty entails.

Papa Ravinet was thinking of all this when he espied a paper lying on the chest of drawers. Taking it up, he read the following lines:—"Let no one be accused—I die voluntarily. I beg Madame Chevassat to deliver the two letters I leave lying beside this paper. She will be paid whatever I may owe her.—HENRIETTE." Hard by, the dealer perceived the mentioned missives, the addresses of which he eagerly scanned. The first was directed to the "Count de Ville-Ha dry, 115 Rue de Varennes," and the second to "M. Maxime de Brévan, 62 Rue Lafitte." As he perused the latter superscription a strange gleam came into Papa Ravinet's yellow eyes, a wicked smile played round his lips, and he uttered a very peculiar "Ah!" A moment later, however, his brow became as dark as before, and he glanced around him with mingled anxiety and suspicion to see if any one had noticed his momentary change of expression. No, he had escaped observation, and the letters also had remained unperceived—for all the inmates of the room were busy trying to recall Mlle. Henriette to consciousness. Papa Ravinet then reupon slipped the paper and the two letters into the pocket of his frock coat with a dexterity and speed that might have excited a professional pilferer's jealousy.

He then turned towards the women who were bending over the bed. They were greatly excited, for one of them declared that she had felt the

body tremble, a statement which the others generally refused to credit. The point was soon to be decided. After perhaps twenty seconds of suspense, during which all held their breath, an exclamation burst forth. "She is alive! She has moved!" Indeed, doubt was no longer possible. The poor girl had stirred, very faintly perhaps, but still in a sufficiently perceptible manner for everyone to notice it. Moreover, a slight colour had returned to her pallid cheeks, her bosom began to heave, her clenched teeth parted, and she stretched forth her neck as if to imbibe the fresh air. The women standing around were as appalled as if they had witnessed a miracle. One of them, a lady living on the first floor, who supported the poor child's head as she gazed about her with a blank, unmeaning glance, spoke to her, but she did not answer. Plainly she could not hear. "Never mind," said Papa Ravinet, "she is saved, and when the doctor arrives there will be little remaining for him to do. Still, she must be attended to, poor girl, for we cannot leave her here alone." The bystanders fully understood the drift of the dealer's words, and yet only one or two of them proffered a timid assent. Uninfluenced however by their evident reluctance, he calmly continued, "She must be put to bed properly, with another mattress, a couple of blankets, and a counterpane. We want firing as well, for it's terribly cold here, and tea and sugar, and a candle." Although he did not mention everything that might be needed, his improvised list, such as it was, proved already a great deal too long for most of the people standing round. The tax-receiver's wife grandly laid a five-franc piece on the mantelshelf and then slipped outside, several of the others following her example in the latter if not in the former respect. Papa Ravinet, indeed, found himself abandoned by everyone, excepting the Chevassats and the two ladies living on the first floor. The worthy fellow smiled significantly, and after a momentary pause exclaimed, "Fortunately I deal in all sorts of goods. Please wait here a moment, while I just run downstairs to fetch the needful. After that we'll see what remains to be done."

Mother Chevassat was quite amazed. "Am I going mad?" she said to herself, "or has some one changed Papa Ravinet?" The fact is, that the dealer in second-hand merchandise did not precisely enjoy a reputation for generosity and benevolence. However, he soon reappeared, quaking under the weight of two heavy mattresses; and on returning a second time, he brought, not merely all the remaining articles he had mentioned, but several others besides. Mlle. Henriette was now breathing more freely, though her limbs and features were still rigid. She was evidently unconscious of her situation; and the ladies of the first floor, although very willing to help her, were extremely puzzled as to what they ought to do. "The only thing is to put her to bed," said Papa Ravinet. "When the doctor comes he will very likely bleed her." And turning to Chevassat, he added, "We are in the way of these ladies: so suppose we go down to my rooms and drink a glass together? We can come back when the child has been comfortably put to bed."

The good-natured dealer lived in the midst of his thousand-and-one purchases. He slept just where he could, or, rather, wherever a sale cleared space for his accommodation,—reposing one night in a costly carved bed of Louis Quatorze style, and the next on a common lounge merely worth a few francs. For the time being he occupied a little closet not more than three-quarters full; and it was to this encumbered apartment that he now conducted Master Chevassat.

After pouring some brandy into two small wine-glasses, and putting a

kettle on the fire, he sank into an arm-chair, exclaiming, "Well, what a terrible thing this is!"

The doorkeeper had been well drilled by his wife, and answered neither yes nor no; but Papa Ravinet was a man of experience, and knew well enough how to loosen his visitor's tongue. "The most disagreeable thing about it," said he, with an absent air, "is, that the doctor will report the matter to the police, and there will be a legal investigation."

Master Chevassat nearly dropped his glass. "What? The police in the house? Well, good-bye, then, to our tenants; we are lost. Why did that stupid girl try to kill herself, I wonder! But perhaps you are mistaken, M. Ravinet?"

"No, I am not. But you jump to erroneous conclusions. All the police will ask you is—who that girl is, how she supports herself, and where she lived before she came here."

"That's exactly what I can't tell."

The dealer in old clothes seemed amazed: and frowned ominously as he asked, "Then how did it happen that Mlle. Henriette came to live here?"

The doorkeeper was evidently ill at ease, and it was with affected assurance that he replied, "Oh, it's as clear as sunlight; and, if you like, I'll tell you the story: you will see there has been no harm done."

"Let us hear, then."

"Well, one day, about a year ago, a well-dressed young fellow, with an eye-glass stuck in his eye—a thoroughly fashionable young man—came into my room and said he had seen a notice outside, stating that there was a room to let in the house. He wanted to see it; and although I told him it was a wretched garret, unfit for a gentleman like himself, he insisted, and so I took him upstairs."

"To the room where Mlle. Henriette has been living?"

"Exactly. I thought he would be disgusted; but no. He looked out of the window, tried the door, examined the partition-wall, and eventually said, 'The room suits me, and I'll take it.' Thereupon he hands me a twenty-franc piece to close the bargain. I was amazed."

If M. Ravinet felt any interest in this story, at all events he took pains not to show it; for his eyes wandered to and fro as if his thoughts were elsewhere—indeed, as if he were heartily bored with Chevassat's tedious account. "And who was that fashionable young man?" he asked.

"Ah! that's more than I know, except that his name is Maxime."

At the mention of this name the old dealer almost sprang from his seat. He changed colour, and a strange gleam came once more into his small yellowish eyes. However, he recovered himself so promptly, that his visitor did not notice his temporary excitement; and it was in a tone of the utmost indifference that he remarked, "So the young fellow did not give you his family name?"

"No."

"But ought you not to have inquired?"

"Ah, there's the trouble! I did not do so," answered Chevassat, who was now gradually surmounting his original embarrassment, and preparing himself in anticipation of the police enquiry. "I know it was wrong," he continued; "but I don't think you would have acted differently in my place, sir. Just think! My room belonged to M. Maxime; for I had his money in my pocket. I asked him most politely where he lived, and if any furniture would come, whereupon he laughed in my face, and with-

out even letting me finish my question, exclaimed, 'Do I look like a man who lives in a place like this? And, when he saw I was puzzled, he proceeded to tell me that he intended to rent the room for a young person from the country, in whom he took an interest; observing that the receipts for rent must all be made out in the name of Mlle. Henriette. That was clear enough, wasn't it? Still, it was my duty to know who Mlle. Henriette was; so I asked him civilly enough. But he became angry, and told me that was none of my business, adding, that some furniture would presently be sent." The doorkeeper paused, waiting for Papa Ravinet to express his approval either by word or gesture; but as the dealer remained mute and motionless, he continued, "In short, I did not dare to insist, and everything was done as he desired. The same day a dealer in second-hand furniture brought the goods you have seen upstairs; and on the morrow, just before noon, Mlle. Henriette arrived. She had not much luggage with her—in fact, merely a hand-bag."

The old dealer was stooping over the fire, apparently giving all his attention to the kettle, in which the water was beginning to boil. "It seems to me, my friend," said he, "that you did not act very wisely. Still, if that is really everything, I don't think you are likely to be troubled."

"What else could there be?" asked Chevassat.

"How do I know?" But if that young damsel had been carried off by M. Maxime, if you lent a hand in an elopement, you might find yourself in a nasty pickle. The law is very strict when minors are concerned."

"Oh, I have told you the whole truth," protested the doorkeeper, with a solemn air.

On this point, however, Papa Ravinet had his doubts. "That is your look-out," he said, shrugging his shoulders. "Still, you may be sure you will be asked how it happens that one of your tenants became reduced to such a state of abject poverty without your giving notice to anybody."

"Why, surely I don't wait on the tenants. They are free to do what they like in their rooms."

"Quite right, Master Chevassat, quite right! So you did not know that M. Maxime no longer came to see Mlle. Henriette?"

"But he still came to see her."

At these words Papa Ravinet raised his arms to heaven, as if horror-struck, and exclaimed, "What! is it possible? That handsome young fellow knew how the poor girl suffered? He knew that she was dying of hunger?"

Master Chevassat grew more and more disturbed. He began to perceive the drift of the dealer's questions, and realised how unsatisfactory his answers were. "Ah! you ask too many questions," he said at last. "It was not my duty to watch M. Maxime. As for Mlle. Henriette, as soon as she is able to move—the little serpent!—I'll send her off about her business."

But Papa Ravinet shook his head, and softly rejoined, "No, no, Chevassat, you won't do that, for from to-day I mean to pay her rent. And, more than that, if you wish to oblige me, you will be very kind to her,—you hear?—and even respectful, if you please."

There was no misunderstanding the meaning of the word "oblige," pronounced as the old dealer pronounced it; and yet he was about to enforce the recommendation, when a fretting voice was heard calling on the stairs, "Chevassat! where are you, Chevassat?"

"My wife wants me," exclaimed the doorkeeper; and, delighted to get

away, he added, "I understand, M. Ravinet; she shall be treated as politely as if she were the landlord's daughter. But excuse me, I have to attend to my duties; and, as my wife calls me, I must go down stairs."

Without waiting for an answer he then slipped out, quite unable to guess why the old dealer should take such a sudden interest in the tenant on the fifth floor.

"The rascal!" muttered Papa Ravinet, as soon as he was alone,— "the rascal!" But he had not yet found out everything he wanted to know, and he knew he had no time to lose.

Removing the kettle from the fire, and drawing Mlle. Henriette's two letters from his pocket, he held the one addressed to M. Maxime de Brévan over the steam of the boiling water. In a moment the gum securing the envelope softened, and the letter could easily be opened without leaving any trace of the act. The missive ran as follows:—"You are victorious, M. de Brévan. When you read this, I shall have ceased to live. You may raise your head again: you are relieved of all fears. Daniel can come back. I shall carry the secret of your infamy and cowardice to the grave. And yet, no! I can forgive you, having but a few moments longer to live; but God will not pardon you. I feel that I shall be avenged. And, if a miracle be needed, that miracle will be accomplished, so that the man who thought you were his friend may learn how and why died the poor girl whom he had entrusted to your honour.—H."

On reading these lines, Papa Ravinet became furious. "What?" growled he in a tone of bitter hatred, "Maxime de Brévan's honour! A pretty security, indeed!" However, his excitement did not deter him from manipulating the other letter, addressed to the Count de Ville-Handry, in precisely the same manner. The operation was equally successful; and, without the slightest hesitation, the dealer read:—"DEAR FATHER,—Broken down with anxiety, and faint from exhaustion, I have waited till this morning for an answer to the humble letter which I wrote you on my knees. You have never replied to it: you are inexorable. I see I must die. Alas! I can hardly say I die willingly. I must appear very guilty in your eyes, father, for you to abandon me in this manner to the hatred of Sarah Brandon and her people. And yet, I have suffered terribly. I struggled hard before I could make up my mind to leave home, the home where my mother died, where I had been so happy, and so tenderly beloved as a child by both of you. Ah, if you but knew! And yet it was so little I asked of you!—barely enough to bury my *undeserved* disgrace in a convent. Yes, *undeserved*, father; for at the moment of appearing before God—at an hour when no one dares to pervert the truth—I declare, that despite all slanderous reports, I have ever preserved the honour of our name."

Tears rolled down Papa Ravinet's cheeks as he read this heart-rending missive; and it was in a half-stifled voice that he murmured, "Poor, poor child! And to think that for a whole year I have lived under the same roof with her without knowing it. But, fortunately, I am still in time. Oh, what a friend chance can be when it chooses!"

None of the inmates of the house would have recognised Papa Ravinet at this moment, for he was literally transfigured. He was no longer the cunning dealer in second-hand articles, the old scamp with the sharp, vulgar face, so well known at all public sales, when he always sat in the front row, watching for good bargains, and keeping cool while all around were in a state of fervent excitement. The letters he had just read had re-opened more than one heart-wound of old times—wounds badly scarred

and badly healed. He was suffering intensely; and pain, wrath, and hope of vengeance long delayed, imparted to his features a strange expression of energy and nobility. Resting his elbows on the table, holding his head in his hands, and looking apparently into the far past, he seemed to be recalling the miseries of former times, and tracing out the vague outlines of some great scheme of the future. And as his thoughts progressed, he broke out into a strange, spasmodic soliloquy: "Yes," he murmured, "yes, I recognise your work, Sarah Brandon! Poor child, poor child! Crushed by such horrible intrigues! And that Daniel, who intrusted her to Maxime de Brévan's care, who is he? Why did she not write to him when she suffered thus? Ah, if she had trusted me! What a sad fate! How can I ever hope to induce her to confide in me?" At this moment an old clock standing in a corner struck seven, and the dealer was suddenly recalled to the present.

"Dear me!" he growled. "I was falling asleep; and time is precious. I must go up-stairs and hear the child's confession."

With amazing dexterity he then replaced the letters in their envelopes, and dried and smoothed them down, till every trace of the steam had entirely disappeared. Then glancing at his work with an air of satisfaction, he remarked, "Not so badly done for an amateur, after all. A post-office expert in the *cabinet noir* could scarcely have done better. I think I can risk returning them."

So speaking he rapidly climbed the stairs to the fifth floor, where Mme. Chevassat barred his way on the landing in a manner which clearly showed that she had been lying in wait for him. "Well, my dear sir," said she in her sweetest manner, "so you have become Mlle. Henriette's banker?"

"Yes; do you object to it?"

"Oh, not at all! It is none of my business; only"—she stopped, smiling equivocally, and then added, "only she is a remarkably pretty girl; and I was just saying to myself, 'Upon my word, M. Ravinet has good taste.'"

The dealer was on the point of giving her a sharp reply; but he controlled himself in time, remembering how important it was to mislead the woman; so forcing himself to smile, he said, "You know I count upon your being discreet."

On reaching Mlle. Henriette's room, he found that he must, at least, give some credit to Mme. Chevassat and the two ladies from the first floor, who had skilfully turned the articles he had contributed to use. The room, which an hour previously had been so cold and bare, now wore an air of comparative comfort. On the drawers stood a lamp, with its shade so adjusted that the light might not hurt the patient's eyes. A bright fire blazed in the fire-place, several old curtains had been hung before the window, one over the other, so as to replace for the time the missing panes; while on the table were a tea-kettle, a china cup, and two small medicine-bottles. So the doctor had called during Ravinet's absence. He had bled the poor girl, prescribed some medicine, and departed, with the assurance that nothing more was needed but perfect quiet. In fact, had it not been for the patient's pallid cheeks, no traces remained of her sufferings or of the terrible danger from which she had so marvellously escaped. Lying at ease on her now comfortable bed, with its thick mattresses and snow-white sheets, her head reposing on a couple of pillows, she was breathing freely, as was evident from the steady, regular rise and

fall of her bosom under the coverlet. But life and consciousness had also brought back to her a full sense of her distressing position ; and with her brow resting on her arm, almost concealed by thick locks of golden hair, she was lying motionless looking into space, the big tears gathering beneath her eyelids, slowly dropping meanwhile down her cheeks. Sorrow imparts at times an additional charm to beauty, and when, as Papa Ravinet entered the room, he beheld her thus, he paused abruptly, struck with admiration. But as he did not wish his acts to be misinterpreted, or to be accused of prying, he coughed, so as to announce his arrival, and then stepped forward again.

On hearing him, Henriette roused herself, and speaking in a faint, feeble voice, said, " Ah ! it is you, sir. Those kind ladies have told me everything. You have saved my life." Then, shaking her head, she added, " You have rendered me a sad service, sir."

She uttered these words so simply, but in a tone of such harrowing grief, that Papa Ravinet was overcome. " Unhappy child ! " he exclaimed, " you surely do not think of trying it over again ? " She made no answer. It was as good as if she had said, Yes. " Why, you must be mad ! " resumed the old man, excited almost beyond control. " To give up life at your age ! No doubt you are suffering now ; but you can hardly imagine what compensation Providence may have in store for you hereafter—"

Interrupting him by a gesture, she rejoined, " There was no future for me, sir, when I sought refuge in death."

" But—"

" Oh, don't try to convince me, sir ! I did what I had to do. I felt that life was leaving me, and I only wished to shorten my agony. I had not eaten anything for three days when I lit that charcoal, and to procure it, I had to risk a falsehood, and cheat the woman who let me have it on credit. And yet, God knows, I was not wanting in courage. I would have cheerfully done the coarsest, hardest work. But how could I procure employment ? I asked Mme. Chevassat a hundred times to obtain work for me ; but she always laughed in my face ; and, when I begged all the harder, she said—" Henriette paused, and the crimson blush of shame suffused her features. She did not dare to repeat what the doorkeeper's wife had said to her. But she added, in a voice trembling with womanly virtue and indignation, " Ah, that woman is a wicked creature ! "

The old dealer was probably fully acquainted with Mme. Chevassat's character. He guessed only too readily what kind of advice she had given this poor girl of twenty, who had turned to her for help in her dire distress. He could not repress an oath which would have startled even that estimable female, and then warmly replied, " I understand you, Mlle. Henriette, I understand. Do you think I don't know what you must have suffered ? I know poverty as well as you do. I can understand your purpose only too well. Who would not give up life itself when everybody abandons us ? But I do not understand your despair, now that circumstances have changed."

" Alas, sir, how have they changed ? "

" How ? What do you mean ? Don't you see me ? Do you think I would abandon you, after arriving just in time to save your life ? That would be pretty conduct ! No, my dear child, compose yourself : poverty shall not come near you again, I'll see to that. You want some one to advise you, to defend you ; and here I am : if you have enemies, let them beware ! Come, smile again, and think of the good times a-coming." But

she did not smile: she looked frightened, almost stupefied. Making a supreme effort, she looked fixedly at the old man to see if she could read his real thoughts in his face. He, on his part, was seriously disturbed by his failure to win her confidence. "Do you doubt my promises?" he asked.

She shook her head; and speaking slowly, as if to give her words greater weight, she said, "I beg your pardon, sir. I do not doubt you. But I cannot understand why you should offer me your kind protection."

Papa Ravinet affected greater surprise than he really felt, and, raising his hands to heaven, exclaimed, "Great God! she mistrusts my goodwill."

"Sir!"

"Pray what can you have to fear from me? I am an old man: you are almost a child. I come to help you. Is it not perfectly natural and simple?" She said nothing; and he remained for a moment buried in thought, as if trying to divine her motive for refusing his help. Suddenly he struck his forehead, and exclaimed, "Ah, I have it. That woman Chevassat has talked to you about me, no doubt. Ah, the viper. I'll crush her one of these days! Come, let us be frank: what has she told you?" He hoped that Henriette would at least give him a word of reply. He waited; but none came. Then breaking forth with strange vehemence, and in language one would scarcely have expected a man like him to use, he continued—"Well, I will tell you what the old thief said. She told you Papa Ravinet was a dangerous man, of bad repute, who plied all kinds of suspicious callings in the dark. She told you that the old scamp was a usurer, who knew no law, and kept no promise; whose only principle was profit; who dealt in everything with everybody, selling one day old iron in junk-shops, and on the morrow cashmere shawls to fashionable ladies; lending money on imaginary securities—the talent of men and the beauty of women. In short, she told you that it was a piece of good fortune for a woman to obtain my protection, and you knew it was a disgrace." He paused, as if to allow the poor girl time to form her judgment, and then proceeded in a calmer tone—"Let us suppose that there is such a Papa Ravinet as she has described. But there is another one whom only a very few people know, a man who has been sorely tried by misfortune; and it is he who now offers you his help!"

There is no surer way of inducing people to believe in such virtues as we may possess, or pretend to possess, than to accuse ourselves of failings, and even vices, from which we are exempt. But, if the old fellow had calculated upon this policy, he failed signally in his object. Henriette remained as icy as ever, and merely said, "Believe me, sir, I am exceedingly grateful to you for all you have done for me, and for your efforts to convince me."

Papa Ravinet looked disappointed. "So you reject my offers," said he, "simply because I do not explain them by any of the usual motives. But what can I tell you? Suppose I told you that I have a daughter who has secretly left me; that I do not know what has become of her, and that her memory makes me anxious to serve you. May I not have said to myself, that she is struggling with poverty like you; that she has been in similar fashion abandoned by her lover?"

The poor girl turned deadly pale as the dealer spoke in this strain, and, raising herself on her pillows, eagerly interrupted him—"You are mistaken, sir. My position here may justify such suspicions, I know; but I have no lover."

"I believe you," he replied; "I swear I believe you. But, if that is

so, how did you get here? and how were you reduced to such extreme suffering?"

At last Papa Ravinet had touched the right chord. Henriette was deeply moved; and tears started from her eyes. "There are secrets which cannot be revealed," she murmured.

"Not even when life and honour depend on them?"

"Yes."

"But—"

"Oh, pray do not insist!"

If Henriette had known the old merchant, she would have read in his eyes the satisfaction he now felt. A moment before he had despaired of ever gaining her confidence; but at present he felt almost sure of success, and determined to strike a decisive blow. "I confess," said he, "that I have tried my best to win your confidence; but it was solely in your own interest. If it had been otherwise, do you think I should have asked you these questions, when it was so easy for me to ascertain everything by simply tearing a piece of paper?"

The poor girl could not restrain a cry of alarm. "You mean my letters?" she said.

"I have them both."

"Ah! Then that is why the ladies who nursed me looked everywhere for them in vain."

Papa Ravinet's only answer was to draw the missives from his pocket, and to lay them on the bed with an air of injured innocence. To all appearances the envelopes had not been touched. Henriette gave them a glance, and then, holding out her hand to the dealer, she said, "I thank you, sir."

Ravinet did not stir; but he realised that this mock proof of honesty had helped him more than all his eloquence. "After all," said he, in a hurried tone, "I could not resist the temptation to read the directions, and draw my own conclusions. Who is the Count de Ville-Handry? Your father, I suppose. And M. Maxime de Brévan? No doubt the young man who called to see you so often. Ah, if you would only trust me! If you knew how a little experience of the world often helps us to overcome the greatest difficulties!" He was evidently deeply moved. "However, wait till you are perfectly well again before coming to any decision. Consider the matter carefully. You need only tell me the bare facts I ought to know in order to advise you."

"Yes, indeed! In that way I might—"

"Well, then, I'll wait as long as you wish me to wait—two days, ten days."

"Very well."

"Only, I pray you, promise me solemnly to give up all idea of suicide."

"I promise you solemnly I will."

Papa Ravinet's eyes shone with delight; and he joyfully exclaimed, "Done! I'll come up again to-morrow; for, to tell the truth, I am tired to death, and must go and lie down."

This was plainly a pious fib on the old fellow's part; for, instead of returning to his rooms, he left the house, and, on reaching the street, concealed himself in a dark corner, whence he could watch the front door. Here he remained exposed to wind and rain, now and then giving vent to a low oath, and stamping his feet to keep them warm. At last, just as eleven was striking, a cab stopped in front of No. 23, and a young man alighted, rang the bell, and entered the house.

"That's Maxime de Brévan," murmured the dealer; adding in a savage voice, "I knew he would come, the scoundrel! to see if the charcoal had done its work." But a moment later the young man came out again, and sprang into the vehicle, which quickly drove away. "Aha!" laughed Papa Ravinet, "No chance for you my fine fellow! You have lost your game; you'll have to try your luck elsewhere; and this time I am on hand. I hold you fast; and instead of one bill to pay, there will be two."

II.

As a rule it is only in novels that unknown people suddenly take it into their heads to tell the story of their career, and acquaint their neighbours with their most important secrets. In real life things do not go quite so fast. For a long while after the old dealer's departure, Henriette remained reflecting over her position, and asking herself what decision she should take. Who could this odd individual be? What could be thought of a man who denounced himself as a dangerous and suspicious character? Was he really what he seemed? The girl almost doubted it; for although quite inexperienced, she had still been struck by certain astounding changes in Papa Ravinet's manner. Thus, in moments of animation, his air was no longer in keeping with the singular antiquated costume he wore; and his language, usually careless and slangy, became correct and almost elegant. What was his business? Had he always been a dealer in second-hand articles before he became a tenant of No. 23 Rue de la Grange, three years ago? One might easily have imagined that Papa Ravinet (was this his real name?) had previously held a very different position. And why not? Is not Paris the haven where all the shipwrecked sailors of society seek a refuge? Does not Paris alone offer to the wretched and the guilty a hiding-place, where they may begin life anew, lost and unknown in the "madding crowd?" Many a man, after shining in society, has suddenly disappeared, and been sought for in vain by friend and foe; and yet he is still in Paris, wearing strange attire, and earning a livelihood in the most unexpected way. Might not the old dealer be such an individual? And yet, even if this were the case, his eagerness to assist Henriette, and his perseverance in offering her advice, could scarcely have been explained. Was he merely acting out of charity? Alas! Christian charity is seldom so pressing. Did he know who Henriette was? Had they ever met together at any previous period? Had his interests ever coincided with hers? Was he anxious to requite some kindness shown him? or did he count upon some reward in the future? Who could tell? "Would it not be the height of imprudence to place myself in this man's power?" thought the poor girl. But if, on the other hand, she rejected his offers, she must subside again into the same state of forlorn wretchedness from which she had sought to save herself by suicide. This last prospect was all the more alarming, as, like all persons rescued at the last hour, after draining the cup of suffering to the dregs, the poor girl now began to cling to life with almost desperate affection. It seemed as if the contact with death had at once wiped out all memory of the past, and all dread of the future. "O Daniel!" she murmured tremblingly—"O Daniel! my only friend on earth, what would you suffer if you knew that the very means you chose to secure my safety nearly lost me to you!" To refuse Papa Ravinet's proffered

assistance would have required more energy than she possessed. An inward voice constantly repeated—"The old man is your only hope."

It never occurred to her to conceal the truth from Papa Ravinet, or to deceive him by a fictitious story. She only deliberated how she might tell him the truth without acquainting him with everything; how she might confess sufficient to enable him to serve her, and yet not betray a secret which she held dearer than happiness, reputation, and life itself. Unfortunately, she was the victim of one of those intrigues which originate and progress within the narrow circle of a family,—intrigues of the most abominable character, which people suspect, and are often fully acquainted with, and which yet remain unpunished, as they are beyond the reach of the law. Henriette's father, the Count de Ville-Handry, was in 1845 one of the wealthiest landowners of the province of Anjou. The good folks of Rosiers and Saint Mathurin were fond of pointing out to strangers the massive towers of Ville-Handry, a magnificent castle, half hidden by noble old trees, on the beautiful slopes which line the Loire. "There," they said, "lives a true nobleman, a little too proud, perhaps, but, nevertheless, a true nobleman." For, contrary to the usual state of things in the country, where envy is apt to engender hatred, the count, despite his title and his wealth, was conspicuously popular. He was then about forty years of age, tall and good-looking, and albeit somewhat solemn and reserved, still at times grandly affable and obliging, and even good-natured to boot; that is, so long as no one spoke in his presence of the reigning family, the nobility or the clergy, of his hounds, the wines he vintaged, or of various other subjects on which he had what he chose to consider his "own opinions." As he seldom spoke, and even then with remarkable brevity, he managed to say fewer foolish things than most people are in the habit of uttering, and thus he won the reputation of being clever and well informed, of which he was very proud and careful. He lived freely, almost profusely, putting aside each year but little more than half his income. He was dressed by a Paris tailor, and always wore the most exquisite boots and gloves. The castle was kept in handsome style, and the pleasure-grounds were a great source of expense. The stables sheltered six hunters, and the kennels a pack of hounds; while idling in the hall one always found half-a-dozen lazy servants, whose gorgeous liveries, adorned with the family coat-of-arms, were a source of perpetual wonder at Saint Mathurin. The count himself would have been perfect, but for his inordinate passion for the chase. As soon as the season opened, he was ever afield, now on foot and now in the saddle—now breaking through thickets in search of a boar, and now up to his knees in the marshes after water-fowl. He carried these proceedings so far, that the ladies of the neighbourhood, with marriageable daughters, blamed him to his face for his imprudence, and scolded him for risking his precious health so recklessly.

This wealthy nobleman of forty was still unmarried. And yet he had not lacked opportunities to assume the bonds of Hymen, for there was not a mother for twenty miles around who did not covet this prize for her daughter—ten thousand a-year, and a great name. He had only to appear at a ball, and at once he became the hero of the evening. Mothers and daughters alike lavished their sweetest smiles on him; and flattering welcomes were forthcoming on all sides. But all manœuvres had been fruitless; he had escaped every snare, and defeated every matchmaker's cunning devices. Why was he so averse to matrimony? His friends

referred the explanation to a certain person, half housekeeper, half companion, who lived at the castle, and who was both very pretty and very designing. But, then, there are malicious tongues everywhere.

However, in July 1847, an event occurred which was calculated to impart some plausibility to these idle, gossiping tales. One fine day the count's housekeeper died most unexpectedly, and six weeks later it was reported that the Count de Ville-Handry was going to be married. The report was correct. The count did marry; and the fact could not be doubted any longer, when the banns were read, and the announcement appeared in the official journal. And whom do you think he married? Why, the daughter of a poor widow, the Baroness de Rupert, who was living in great poverty at a place called Rosiers, her sole income being a small pension granted her for her husband's services as a colonel of artillery.

She did not even belong to a good old family, nor was she either a native of the province. No one exactly knew who she was, or where she came from. Some people said the colonel had married her in Austria; others, in Sweden. Her husband, they added, had merely been created a baron under the first empire, and had no genuine right to call himself a noble. On the other hand, Pauline de Rupert, then twenty-three years old, was in the full bloom of early womanhood, and marvellously beautiful. Moreover, she had hitherto been looked upon as a sensible, modest girl, possessed of every quality and virtue that can make life happy. But now people mainly insisted on the fact that she had no dowry—not a farthing, not even a *trousseau*! The idea of the count marrying her amazed everyone; and a perfect storm of indignation swept over the country-side. Was it possible, was it natural, that a great nobleman like M. de Ville-Handry should end in this miserable, ridiculous fashion,—and marry a penniless girl, an adventuress,—he who had had the pick and choice of the richest and greatest heiresses of the land? Was the count a fool? or was he only insane about Mlle. de Rupert? Was she not, perhaps, after all, a designing hypocrite, who, in her retired home, had quietly woven the net in which the lion of Anjou was now held captive? People would have been less astonished if they had known that, for some years, a great intimacy had existed between the bride's mother and the deceased housekeeper at the castle. But, on the other hand, this fact might have led to more scandalous surmises still.

However this might be, the count was not long allowed to remain in doubt as to the change of opinion in the neighbourhood. He realised it as soon as he paid his usual visits at Angers, or called on the nobility near him. No more affectionate smiles, tender welcomes, or little white hands stealthily seeking his. The doors that formerly seemed to fly open at his mere approach now turned but slowly on their hinges: some even remained closed, the owners being reported not at home, although the count knew perfectly well that they were indoors at the time. One very noble and pious old lady, who gave the keynote to Angevin society, had said to her friends in the most decided manner, "For my part, I will never receive at my house a damsel who used to give music-lessons to my nieces, even if she had caught and entrapped a Bourbon!" The charge was true. Pauline, in order to provide her mother with some of the comforts which are almost indispensable to old age, had given lessons on the pianoforte to several young ladies residing in the neighbourhood. Her terms had been low enough; and yet she was now blamed precisely for accepting such paltry remuneration. Folks would indeed have blamed her for the noblest

of virtues ; for all the blame was cast on her. When people met her, they averted their heads, so as not to have to bow to her ; and, even when she was leaning on the count's arm, there were some who spoke most courteously to him, and yet did not say a word to his wife, as if they had not seen her, or as though she had not existed at all. This impertinence went so far, that at last one day the count was so enraged that he seized one of his neighbours by the collar of his coat and shook him violently, exclaiming—"Don't you see the countess, my wife, sir ? How shall I chastise you to cure you of your near-sightedness ?" Foreseeing a duel, the impertinent individual apologised, and his experience put others on their guard. But their opinions remained unchanged : open war only changed into secret opposition—that was all.

Fate, however, always kinder than man, held a reward in store for the count, which amply repaid him for his heroism in marrying a penniless girl. One of his wife's uncles, a banker at Dresden, died, leaving his "beloved niece Pauline" a legacy of two and a-half million francs. This opulent individual, who had never assisted his sister in her trouble, and who would have utterly disinherited Mlle. de Rupert had she remained the mere daughter of a soldier of fortune, had been flattered by the idea of inscribing in his will the name of the "high and mighty Countess de Ville-Handry." This unexpected piece of good fortune ought to have delighted the young wife. She might now have revenged herself on all her slanderers, and acquired unbounded popularity. But far from appearing glad, she had never looked sadder than on the day when the great news reached her. For on that very day she for the first time cursed her marriage. The voice of conscience reminded her that she ought never to have yielded to her mother's entreaties and orders. An excellent daughter, destined to become the best of mothers, and the most faithful of wives, she had literally sacrificed herself. And now she perceived that her sacrifice had been superfluous.

Ah, why had she not resisted, at least for the purpose of gaining time ? For in her girlhood she had dreamed of a very different future. Long before giving her hand to the count she had, of her own free will, given her heart to another. She had bestowed her first and warmest affections upon a young man who was only two or three years older than herself—Peter Champcey, the son of one of those wealthy farmers who live in the valley of the Loire. He worshipped her. Unfortunately, from the very first there had been an obstacle between them—Pauline's poverty. It could not be expected that such keen, thrifty peasants, as Champcey's father and mother, would ever allow one of their sons—they had two—to perpetrate so foolish an act as marrying for love.

They had toiled hard for their children's benefit ; Peter, the elder, was to be a lawyer ; while Daniel, the younger, who longed to go to sea, was studying day and night preparing for the examination he must pass before entering the service of the state. The old couple were not a little proud of these "gentlemen," their sons ; and they told everybody they knew, that, in return for the education they were giving their boys, they expected them to marry large fortunes. Peter knew his parents so well, that he never mentioned Pauline to them. "When I am of age,"* he said

* In France, a young man cannot marry without his parents' consent until he is five-and-twenty, and even then he is obliged to signify his intentions by formal *sommations respectueuses*.—*Trans.*

to himself, "it will be a different matter." Ah! why had not Pauline's mother waited at least till then? Poor girl! on the day she entered the castle of Ville-Handry, she had sworn she would bury this love of hers so deep in the innermost recesses of her heart, that it should never resuscitate nor hinder her from performing her duty. And hitherto she had kept her word; but now it suddenly broke forth, more powerful than ever, till it well-nigh overcame her. What had become of the man she should have waited for? When he had heard that she was going to marry the count, he had written her a last letter, in which he overwhelmed her with irony and contempt. Had he since forgotten her? At all events, he also had married; and the two lovers, who had once hoped to walk hand-in-hand through life, were now each following a different road.

For long hours the young countess struggled in the solitude of her chamber against the ghosts of the past which crowded round her. But, if ever a guilty thought called a blush to her brow, she quickly conquered it. Like a brave, loyal woman, she renewed her oath, and swore to devote herself entirely to her husband. He had rescued her from abject poverty, and bestowed upon her his fortune and his name; and in requital she must make him happy. She needed all her courage, all her energy, to fulfil her vows: for two years of married life had shewn her the count as he really was—with a narrow mind, empty thoughts, and cold heart. She had long since discovered that the brilliant man of the world, whom everybody considered so clever, was in reality an absolute nullity, incapable of propounding any idea that was not suggested to him by others, and at the same time full of overweening self-esteem and absurd obstinacy. The worst was, however, that the count felt a growing repugnance for his wife. He had heard so many people say that she was not his equal, that he finally believed it himself; and besides, he blamed her for the prestige he had lost. An ordinary woman would have shrunk from the difficult task which Pauline saw lying before her, and would have contented herself with respecting her marriage-vows. But the countess was not an ordinary woman. She meant to do more than her duty. Fortunately, a cradle somewhat lightened her task. She had a daughter, her Henriette; and upon that darling curly head she built a thousand castles in the air. Shaking off the languor to which she had given way for nearly two years, she began to study the count with all the sagacity that hope of a high reward is apt to give.

A remark accidentally made by her husband shed a new light on her destiny. One morning, in the course of conversation after breakfast, he happened to say, "Ah! Nancy was very fond of you. The day before she died, when she knew she was going, she made me promise her that I would marry you." This Nancy was the count's former housekeeper; and after such a significant remark, the young countess clearly realised what position she had really held at the castle. She understood how, though keeping in the background, and exaggerating the humility of her position, she had been in truth the count's intellect, energy, and will. Her influence over him had, besides, been so powerful, that it had survived her, and she had been obeyed even when already gone. Although cruelly humiliated by this confession on her husband's part, the countess had sufficient self-control not to blame him for his weakness. "Well, be it so," she remarked to herself, "for his happiness and our peace, I will stoop to play the same part Nancy played."

This was more easily said than done; for the count was not the man to be led openly, nor was he willing to listen to good advice, simply because

it was good. Irritable, jealous, and despotic, like all weak men, he was ever resenting imaginary insults to his authority, declaring that he meant to be master everywhere, in everything, and forever. He was so sensitive on this point, that no sooner had his wife evinced the merest purpose of her own, than he at once opposed and prohibited it. "I am not a weather-cock!" was one of his favourite sayings. Poor fellow! he did not know that those that turn against the wind revolve quite as well as those that follow the breeze. But the countess was less ignorant, and her knowledge gave her strength. After toiling patiently and cautiously during several months, she fancied she had learnt the secret of managing him, and would henceforth be able to influence his will whenever she was in earnest.

An opportunity to make the experiment was soon offered. Although the nobility of the neighbourhood had generally altered in their behaviour towards the countess, and treated her with due courtesy, especially since she had become an heiress, she scarcely found Ville-Handry a pleasant place of sojourn, and was anxious to leave Anjou. The sites around recalled too many painful memories. There were lanes and paths she could never tread without a pang at her heart. On the other hand, it was well known that the count had sworn to end his days on his estate. He hated large cities; and the mere idea of leaving his castle, where everything was arranged to suit his habits, invariably raised his ire. Hence, when it was reported that he meant to leave Ville-Handry, and had purchased a mansion in Paris, intending to establish himself permanently in the capital, people set the rumour down as a joke, and obstinately refused to believe in it. And yet it was true; and, strange to say, although it was the countess who by her diplomacy had imparted this intention to M. de Ville-Handry, he really believed that he was acting against her desires. He was indeed delighted. "My wife," he said, "was altogether opposed to our going to Paris; but I am not a weather-cock. I insisted on having my way, and she had to yield at last." Thus, towards the close of 1851, the Count and Countess de Varennes moved to a princely mansion in the aristocratic Rue de Varennes, which did not cost them more than a third of its real value, for, owing to the gloomy political situation, house property then found no purchasers in Paris.

It had been comparatively child's play to bring the count to the capital; the real difficulty was to keep him there. Deprived of the active exercise and the fresh air he had enjoyed in the country, without any of his usual occupations and duties, he might either give way to weariness or seek refuge in dissipation. His wife realised this danger, and determined to provide the count with suitable employment and amusement. Before leaving Anjou she had already sown in his mind the seed of a passion, which, in a man of fifty, may acquire pre-eminence above all others—ambition,—and, in point of fact, he came to Paris with the secret desire and hope of winning political renown. The countess, who was well aware, however, of the dangers that beset a neophyte in the legislative arena, had determined to begin by examining the situation, so as to be able to guide her husband in the future. Her rank and fortune proved of great assistance to her in this enterprise. She managed to attract all the celebrities of the day to her receptions, and her Wednesdays and Saturdays soon became famous throughout Paris. People of admitted importance were flattered by an invitation to one of her grand dinners, or even to one of her smaller parties on Sundays. The mansion in the Rue de Varennes was considered neutral ground, where political intriguing and party strife

were alike tabooed. The countess spent a whole winter pursuing her investigations; and her guests, as they saw her seated modestly by the fireside, fancied that she was entirely occupied with her pretty little girl, Henriette, who was constantly with her. But, in point of fact, she was carefully listening to the conversation around her, and striving, with all her mental powers, to understand the great questions of the day. She studied the characters of the men of import who met in her *salons*; noted the passions that influenced several of them, and detected the trickery of others—taking especial care to distinguish those who might prove enemies, and those who might become allies, and whom it was therefore expedient to conciliate. Like certain imperfectly informed professors, who “read up” in the morning the subject they mean to treat in the afternoon, she carefully grounded herself for the lessons she meant soon to give, and, thanks to her superior intellect and feminine shrewdness, she had not to endure too long a period of probation. At the beginning of the following winter the count, who had so far kept aloof from politics, came out with his opinions. He soon made his mark, aided by his prepossessing appearance, elegant manners, and imperturbable self-possession. He spoke in public, and the common-sense of his remarks—so rare a quality in an orator—at once created a favourable impression. He advised others, and they were struck by his sagacity. He had soon numerous enthusiastic partisans, and, of course, as many violent adversaries. His friends encouraged him to become the leader of his party; and he worked day and night to achieve that end. “Unfortunately I have to pay for it at home,” he said to his intimate friends; “for my wife is one of those timid women who cannot understand that men are made for the excitement of public life. I should still be in the provinces if I had listened to her.”

She enjoyed her work in quiet delight. The greater her husband's success, the prouder she became of her own usefulness. Her feelings were akin to those of the dramatist who hears an audience applaud his production. But there was this wonderful feature in her work,—that nobody suspected her; no one, not even her own child. She concealed from Henriette the fact that she was the count's Mentor and Egeria, as jealously as she hid it from the world; and she not merely taught her to love him as her father, but to respect and admire him as a man of eminence. Of course, the count was the very last man to suspect such a thing. The countess's diplomacy might have been fully revealed to him, but he would have treated the whole matter as a joke. He fancied that he had himself discovered the whole line of proceeding which his wife had so carefully traced out for him. In the full sincerity of his heart, he believed he had composed the speeches she drew up for him; and the newspaper articles and letters she dictated appeared to him all to have sprung from his own fertile brain. He was even sometimes surprised at his wife's want of good sense, and pointed out to her, ironically, that the steps from which she tried hardest to dissuade him were the most successful he took. He did not know that the countess, well acquainted with his obstinacy, invariably pleaded in favour of a contrary course to that which she was desirous he should adopt. No irony could turn her from her design. She guarded her secret most carefully; and the more he gloried in his utter nullity, the more she delighted in her work, finding ample compensation for his sarcasm and contempt in the approval of her own conscience. The count had been generous (!) enough to marry her when she was penniless: she owed him the historic name she bore and a large fortune; but, in return, she had

given him, and without his knowledge, a position of some eminence. She had made him happy in the only way in which a man of inferior abilities can be made happy,—by gratifying his vanity. Thus she was no longer under any obligation to him, for, as she said to herself, “we are quits, fairly quits!”

She reproached herself no longer for allowing her thoughts to turn at times to the man of her early choice. Poor fellow! She had been his evil star. His existence had been embittered from the day he was forsaken by the woman he loved better than life itself. His parents had “hunted up” an heiress, and he had dutifully married her. But the good old people had been unlucky. The bride, chosen among a thousand, had brought their son a fortune of half-a-million francs; but she proved a bad woman, and after eight years of intolerable matrimonial bondage, Peter Champey had shot himself, unable to endure any longer his domestic misfortunes, and his wife’s disgraceful infidelity. He had, however, avoided committing this crime at Augers, where he held a high official position. He had gone to Rosiers, where Pauline’s mother had lived in poverty; and there, in a narrow lane, nigh the Ruperts’ former abode, his body was found by some peasants coming home from market, his features being so fearfully disfigured that at first no one recognised him. The affair created a terrible sensation. The countess first heard of it through her husband. He could not understand, he said, how a man in a good position, with a large income at hand and a bright future before him, could destroy himself in this fashion. “And to chose such a strange place for his suicide!” he added. “It is evident the man was mad.” But the countess did not hear this last remark. She had fainted. She understood only too well why Peter had wished to die in that sequestered lane, beneath the shadow of the old elm trees. “I killed him,” she thought, “I killed him!” The blow was so sudden and so severe, that she could scarcely bear it. However, her mother died nearly at the same time, and this misfortune helped to explain her utter prostration and grief. Mme. de Rupert had been gradually failing, ever since obtaining the object of her desires. She lived in real luxury during her last years, and her selfishness was so intense that she never realised the cruelty she had exercised in sacrificing her daughter. For Pauline had been truly sacrificed, and never did woman suffer as acutely as she did from the day her lover’s suicide added bitter remorse to all her former grief. What would have become of her if her child had not bound her to life? For she resolved to live: feeling that she must do so for Henriette’s sake.

Thus she struggled on alone, for she had not a soul in whom she could confide; when one afternoon, as she was going down-stairs, a servant approached and told her that a young man in naval uniform wished to have the honour of speaking with her. The servant handed her the visitor’s card, on which she read the name “DANIEL CHAMPEY.” It was Peter’s brother. Pale as death, the countess turned as if to escape. “What answer does Madame wish me to give?” asked the servant, rather surprised at the emotion his mistress shewed. Mme. de Ville-Handry was faint and dizzy. “Show him up,” she replied in a scarcely audible voice, —“show him up.” When she raised her eyes again, a young man, of three or four-and-twenty, with a frank open face, and clear, bright eyes beaming with intelligence and energy, stood before her. The countess pointed to a chair near her: she was quite unable to speak. The young fellow could not help noticing her embarrassment; but he did not guess its cause, for

Peter had never mentioned Pauline's name in his father's house. So he sat down, and explained the object of his visit. After graduating at the Naval Academy, he had been appointed as a midshipman on board "*The Formidable*," with which vessel he still served. A younger man had recently been wrongly promoted over him: and he had asked for leave of absence to appeal to the Minister of Marine in Paris. He was sure of the justice of his claims; but he also knew that strong recommendations never spoil a good cause. In fact, he hoped that the Count de Ville-Handry, of whose kindness and great influence he had heard a great deal, would consent to endorse his appeal.

While listening, the countess had gradually recovered her calmness. "My husband will be happy to serve a countryman of his," she replied; "and he will tell you so himself, if you will wait for him and stay to dinner."

Daniel did stay. At the table he was seated next to Henriette, then fifteen years of age; and the countess, seeing these young people side by side, was suddenly struck with an idea which seemed to her nothing less than an inspiration from on high. Why might she not entrust her daughter's future happiness to the brother of the man who had loved her so dearly? In this way she might make some amends for her own conduct, and show some respect to his memory. "Yes," she said to herself that night before falling asleep, "it must be so. Daniel shall be Henriette's husband."

Thus it happened that, a fortnight afterwards, the Count de Ville-Handry pointed out Daniel to one of his intimate friends, and remarked, "That young Champcey is a very remarkable young man: he has a great future before him. And one of these days, when he is a lieutenant, and a few years older, if it so happened that he liked Henriette, and asked me for my consent, I should not say No. The countess might think and say what she pleased: I should have to remind her that I am the master."

From that time forward Daniel became a constant visitor at the house in the Rue de Varennes. He had not only obtained ample satisfaction at headquarters, but, by the powerful influence of certain high personages, he had been temporarily assigned to office-duty at the Ministry of Marine, with the promise of a better position in active service hereafter. Thus Daniel and Henriette met frequently, and, to all appearances, began to love each other. "O God!" thought the countess, "why are they not a few years older?" For several months Mme. de Ville-Handry had been troubled by dismal presentiments. She felt she would not live long; and she trembled at the idea of leaving her child without any other protector than the count. If Henriette had at least known the truth, and, instead of admiring her father as a man of superior ability, had learned to mistrust his judgment! Over and over again the countess was on the point of revealing her secret, but excessive delicacy always kept her from doing so.

One night, on returning from a ball, she was suddenly seized with vertigo. She did not think much of it, but asked for a cup of tea. When it came, she was standing in her dressing-room before the fire-place, undoing her hair; but instead of taking it, she suddenly raised her hand to her throat, gave vent to a hoarse moan, and fell back. The servants raised her up, and in an instant the whole house was astir. Several physicians were sent for, but all in vain. The Countess de Ville-Handry had died from disease of the heart.

III.

HENRIETTE, roused by the voices on the landing, and the tramp on the staircase, and suspecting that some accident had happened, had rushed at once into her mother's room, where she heard the doctors utter the fatal sentence, "It is all over!" There were five or six of them in the room; and one of them, an elderly man whose eyes were swollen from sleeplessness, and who was utterly overcome with fatigue, had drawn the count into a corner, and, pressing his hand, was repeating over and over again, "Courage, my dear sir, courage!" M. de Ville-Handry's eyes were turned to the floor, and a cold perspiration had gathered on his pallid brow. He evidently did not understand the physician, for he continued to stammer incessantly,—*"It is nothing, I hope. Did you not say it was nothing?"* Some misfortunes come with such terrible overwhelming suddenness, that the mind, literally stunned, refuses to believe them, and doubts that they have taken place even when they have occurred before one's own eyes. How could any one imagine or understand that the countess, who but a moment previously was standing there apparently full of life and in perfect health, happy so far as the world knew, and beloved by everybody—how could one conceive that she had all at once ceased to exist? They had laid her on her bed in her ball dress—a robe of blue satin, richly trimmed with lace. The flowers were still in her hair; and the blow had come with such suddenness, that, even in death, she retained the appearance of life: her corpse was still warm, her skin transparent, and her limbs supple. Even her eyes, still wide open, retained their expression, and betrayed the last sensation that had filled her heart and mind—a feeling of terror. Maybe that at that last moment she had had a revelation of the future which her excessive cautiousness had prepared for her daughter.

"Mamma is not dead; oh, no! she cannot be dead!" exclaimed Henriette. And she went from one doctor to the other, urging them, beseeching them, to find some means—. What were they doing there, looking blankly at each other, instead of acting? Were they not going to revive her,—they whose business it was to cure people, and who surely had saved numbers of patients? The men of science turned aside, distressed by her terrible grief, and expressing their inability to help by a gesture; and then the poor girl returned to the bed, and, bending over her mother's corpse, watched with a painfully-bewildered air for her return to life. It seemed to Henriette as if she felt that noble heart still beating under her hand, and as if those lips, sealed forever by death, would speak again to reassure her. The doctors and the maids attempted to take her away from the heart-rending scene: they begged her to go to her room; but she insisted upon remaining. They tried to remove her by force; but she clung to the bed, and vowed they should tear her to pieces sooner than make her leave her mother. At last, however, the truth broke upon her mind. She fell upon her knees by the bedside, hiding her face in the hangings, and repeating amid her sobs, "Mamma, darling mamma!"

It was nearly morning, and the pale dawn was stealing into the room, when at last several sisters of charity who had been sent for arrived, soon followed by a couple of priests. A little later, one of the count's friends put in an

appearance, and undertook to superintend all those sickening preparations which christian civilization (!) requires in such cases. On the next day the funeral took place. More than three hundred persons called to condole with the count, or left their cards, and fully thirty ladies came and kissed Henriette, calling her their poor dear child. Then the clatter of horses' hoofs was heard in the courtyard, there was a sound of coachmen quarrelling; orders were given; and at last the hearse rolled solemnly away—and that was everything.

Henriette wept and prayed in her own room.* Late in the day the count and his daughter sat down at table alone for the first time in their lives; but they did not eat a morsel. How could they do so, in presence of the empty seat, once occupied by her who was the life of the house, and now never to be filled again? During long weeks they wandered about the house without any definite purpose, but as if looking or hoping for something to happen. The countess was not merely mourned, however, by her husband and her daughter. Daniel had loved her like a mother; and a mysterious voice warned him that, in losing her, he had well-nigh lost Henriette as well. He had called several times at the house in the Rue de Varennes; but it was only a fortnight later that he was admitted. When Henriette saw him, she felt sorry she had not received him earlier, for he had apparently suffered as much as herself: his face was pale, and his eyes were red. They remained for some time without exchanging a word, feeling instinctively, however, that their common grief bound them more firmly than ever to each other. The count, in the meantime, walked up and down the drawing-room. He was so changed, that many would have failed to recognize him. There was a strange want of steadiness in his gait; he looked almost like a paralytic, whose crutches had suddenly given way. Was he really conscious of the immense loss he had sustained? Despite his sorrow this was scarcely probable, given his excessive vanity. "I shall master my grief as soon as I return to work," he said.

He ought to have abandoned politics forever, but he foolishly resumed his duties at a time when they had become unusually difficult, and when great things were expected of him. Two or three absurd, ridiculous, in fact, unpardonable blunders, ruined both his political prestige and influence. No one suspected the truth, however. Folks attributed the sudden failure of his faculties to the great sorrow his wife's death had caused him. "Who would have thought he loved her so dearly?" they asked one another. Henriette was as much misled as the others, and perhaps even more. Her respect and admiration, far from being diminished, increased every day. She loved him all the more dearly as she watched the apparent effects of his incurable sorrow. He was really deeply grieved, but only by his fall. How had it happened? He tortured his mind in vain: for he could not find a plausible explanation. "It is perfectly inexplicable," he would say; he was the victim of a plot, of a coalition, of mankind's fickleness and black ingratitude. At first he had serious thoughts of returning to Anjou. But with time his wounded

* It may here be remarked, for the benefit of the reader imperfectly acquainted with French manners and customs, that it is not usual in Parisian society for a wife to attend her husband's funeral, for a mother to attend her child's, or for a daughter to attend her mother's. Wife, mother, and daughter alike, are presumed to be so crushed by grief as to be physically incapable of attending. Excepting as regards the working-classes, and in some instances the lower *bourgeoisie*, the only women that attend Parisian funerals are distant relatives or friends.—*Trans.*

vanity began to heal: he forgot his misfortunes, and adopted new habits of life. He was a great deal at his club now, rode about on horseback, went to the theatre, and dined with his friends. At first Henriette was delighted; for her father's health had begun to give her serious concern. But she was not a little amazed when she saw him lay aside his mourning, and in lieu of wearing attire suited to his age, adopt the eccentric fashions of the day, donning brilliant waistcoats and trousers of fantastic patterns. A few days later matters grew worse. One morning the count, who was quite grey, made his appearance at breakfast with jet black beard and hair. Henriette could not restrain an expression of amazement; where-upon he remarked, with considerable embarrassment, "My valet is making an experiment: he thinks this is better suited to my complexion, and makes me look younger."

Something strange was evidently occurring in the count's life. But what was it? Henriette, although ignorant of the world, and innocence personified, was, nevertheless, a woman, and hence endowed with all the keen instinct of her sex, which is often of more value than experience. She reflected, and fancied she could guess what was happening. After three days' hesitation, she at last ventured to confide her troubles to Daniel. But she had only spoken a few words when he interrupted her, "Don't trouble yourself about that, Mlle. Henriette," said he, blushing deeply; "don't let your father's conduct worry you."

This advice was more easily given than followed; for the count's ways became more extraordinary every day. He had gradually drifted away from the friends of his married life, and to the high-bred society he had formerly frequented, he now seemed to prefer the company of people of questionable manners and breeding. Of a morning a number of young fellows on horseback would call at the mansion in the Rue de Varennes. They were clad in unceremonious costume, and came in smoking their cigars, making themselves quite at home, and freely imbibing absinthe and other liqueurs. In the afternoon, another set of men made their appearance—intensely vulgar individuals, with huge whiskers and enormous watch-chains, who gesticulated vehemently, and were on the best terms with the servants. The count closeted himself with these strange characters, and their discussions were so loud, they could be heard all over the house. What was all this noisy conversation about? The count undertook to enlighten his daughter. He told her, that, having abandoned politics, he intended to devote himself henceforth to financial and commercial enterprise, and hoped confidently to realise an enormous fortune, while, at the same time, rendering important services to certain branches of industry. A fortune? Was he in want of money? Why, with his own property, and his wife's fortune, he already possessed an income of half-a-million francs. Was that not enough for a man of sixty-five, and a young girl who did not spend a thousand a-year on her toilet? It was with the greatest timidity that Henriette, afraid of hurting her father's feelings, asked him why he wanted more money.

He laughed heartily, playfully tapped her cheek, and said, "Ah, you would like to rule your papa, would you?" And in a more serious tone he added, "Am I so old, my little lady, that I ought to subside into retirement? Have you, also, gone over to my enemies?"

"Oh, dear papa!"

"Well, my child, then you ought to know that a man like myself cannot condemn himself to inactivity without serious risk for his life. I don't

require any more money : what I need is an outlet for my energy and talents."

This was so sensible a reply, that both Henriette and Daniel were re-assured. The countess had taught both of them to look upon her husband as a man of genius : so that they were convinced he would succeed in any enterprise he embarked in. Besides, Daniel hoped that business matters would keep the count from playing the fashionable young man. But it seemed as if nothing could turn him from this folly : every day he endeavoured to give a yet more juvenile turn to his appearance. He dressed in the very latest fashion, and never left the house without a camellia or a rosebud in his buttonhole. He no longer contented himself with dyeing his hair, but actually began to rouge, and used such strong perfumes, that one might have followed his track through the streets by the scent he diffused around him. At times he would sit for hours in an arm-chair, with his brow knit, his eyes fixed on the ceiling, and his thoughts apparently occupied with some grave problem. If he was spoken to on these occasions, he started like a criminal caught in the act. He had quite lost the magnificent appetite, in which, likening himself to the Grand Monarque, he had once taken a special pride ; and he constantly complained of oppression in the chest, and of palpitation of the heart. His daughter repeatedly found him with tears in his eyes—big tears, which, struggling through his dyed beard, fell like drops of ink on to his white shirt-front. Then, again, these fits of melancholy would be followed by sudden outbursts of joy. He would rub his hands till they pained him ; sing and almost dance with delight. Now and then a *commissionnaire* (it was always the same man) brought him a letter. The count invariably tore it from his hands, threw him a gold piece, and hurried into his study. "Poor papa !" said Henriette to Daniel. "There are moments when I tremble for his mind."

At last, one evening after dinner, when he had drunk more than usually, perhaps in order to fire himself with courage, he drew his daughter on to his knee, and said in his softest voice, "Confess, my dear child, that in your innermost heart you have more than once thought me a very bad father. I dare say you blame me for leaving you so constantly alone in this large house, where you must feel very weary by yourself."

There were good grounds for such a charge, for Henriette was left more completely to herself than if her father had been a clerk or a workman, whose avocations kept them perforce from home all day long. The clerk and the workman, at least, take their children out on Sundays. Nevertheless, she quietly replied, "I am never weary, papa."

"Really ? Why, how do you occupy yourself ?"

"Oh ! in the first place I attend to the housekeeping, and try my best to make home pleasant to you. Then I embroider, sew, and study. In the afternoon my music-teacher and my English master come. In the evening, I read."

The count smiled, but it was a forced smile. "Never mind !" he broke in, "such a lonely life cannot last. A girl of your age stands in need of some one to advise and pet her—an affectionate and devoted friend. This is why I have been thinking of giving you another mamma."

Henriette drew away the arm which she had wound round her father's neck ; and, rising suddenly to her feet, exclaimed, "You think of marrying again ?"

He turned his head aside, hesitated for a little, and then replied, "Yes."

At first the poor girl could not utter a word ; her stupor, indignation, and

bitter grief were so intense. But making an effort, she at last rejoined in a tremulous voice, "Oh, papa, I cannot believe you—what! you mean to bring another wife to this house where everything reminds us of our loss? You want another woman to sit in mamma's chair, and rest her feet on the cushion she embroidered? Perhaps you would even want me to call her 'mamma' as well? Oh, dear papa! surely you can't think of such profanation!"

The count's embarrassment was pitiful in the extreme; and yet, if Henriette had been less excited, she would have read in his eyes that his mind was made up. "What I mean to do will be done in your interest, my dear child," he stammered out at last. "I am old; I may die; we have no near relations: what would become of you without a friend?"

She blushed crimson; and timidly replied, "But, papa, there is M. Daniel Champcey."

"Well?" ejaculated the count, whose eyes shone with delight as he saw she was falling into the pit he had prepared for her.

"I thought—I had hoped—poor mamma had told me—in fact, since you allowed M. Daniel to come here," stammered the poor girl.

"You thought I intended to make him my son-in-law?" asked her father; and seeing she made no answer, he continued, "That was in fact one of your mother's ideas. She certainly had very odd notions, against which I had to use the whole strength of my firm will. A sailor is a sorry kind of husband, my dear child; a word from his minister may separate him from his wife for years." Henriette still remained silent. She began to realise the nature of the bargain her father proposed, and felt indignant. He, on his side, considered he had said enough for this occasion, so he left her with these words, "Consider, my child; for my part, I will also think over the matter."

"What should she do?" she asked herself, as soon as she was alone. After a moment's reflection she took a pen, and for the first time in her life wrote to Daniel:—"I must speak to you *instantly*. Pray come.—HENRIETTE." She gave the letter to a servant, ordering him to carry it at once to its address; and remained waiting in a state of feverish anxiety for Daniel to arrive.

Daniel Champcey rented three rooms in the neighbouring Rue de l'Université, his windows looking out on the garden of an adjoining mansion—a pleasure-ground replete with flowers, and where the birds carolled all day long. He spent nearly all the time that was not occupied by his official duties at home. A walk in company with his friend, Maxime de Brévan; a visit to one of the theatres whenever some new dramatic masterpiece was performed; and two or three calls a-week at the Count de Ville-Handry's mansion;—such were his sole and certainly very harmless amusements. "A genuine old maid, that sailor," quoth the doorkeeper of the house. The truth is, that, if Daniel's natural refinement had not kept him from contact with what Parisians call "pleasure," his ardent love for Henriette would have sufficed to prevent his falling into bad company. A pure, noble love, such as his, based upon perfect confidence in the girl to whom it is given, is quite sufficient to fill a life-time; for it lends an absorbing charm to the present, and tinges the horizon of the future with all the radiant hues of the rainbow. But the more he loved Henriette, the more he felt it his duty to make himself worthy of her, and deserve her affection. He was not ambitious. He had chosen a profession which he loved. He had considerable means of his own; and his private

income and pay as an officer quite secured him against want. For himself he needed nothing more. But Henriette belonged to an ancient family; her father had held a high position, and was immensely wealthy. Even if she only brought Daniel her own private fortune, this dowry would be ten times as considerable as his own capital. The young officer realised his disadvantage. He did not wish his wife to stoop to him, and hence he toiled incessantly, waking up each morning with the renewed determination to make for himself one of those names that outweigh the most ancient parchments, and to win one of those positions which cause a wife to be as proud as she is fond of her husband. Fortunately, the times were favourable to his ambition. The French fleet was in course of transformation; but the service itself was as yet unreformed, waiting, apparently, for the hand of a man of genius. And why might not he be that man? Supported by his love, he saw nothing impossible in the idea, and fancied he could overcome all obstacles. He was certainly already giving brilliant promise of great things. "Do you see that d—— little fellow there, with his quiet ways?" said Admiral Penhoël one day to his young officers. "Well, look at him: he'll checkmate you all."

When the count's servant arrived with Henriette's letter, Daniel was seated in his little study, busy finishing a paper for the minister. He realised that something extraordinary must have happened for Henriette, who was usually so reserved, to write to him, and especially in such brief but urgent terms. "Has anything happened at the count's?" he asked the servant.

"No, sir, not that I know."

"The count is not ill?"

"No, sir."

"And Mlle. Henriette?"

"My mistress is quite well."

Daniel breathed more freely. "Tell Mlle. Henriette I will come at once; and make haste, or I shall arrive before you."

Having dressed as soon as the servant left, Daniel walked rapidly towards the Rue de Varennes. "I have, no doubt, alarmed myself unnecessarily," he thought, as he approached the house. "Perhaps she has only some commission for me." But he was still beset with dark presentiments, and realised, as soon as he entered the drawing-room, that his first impression had been correct; for Henriette was seated by the fire, with pale cheeks and lips, and swollen eyes. "What is the matter?" he exclaimed, scarcely waiting for the door to be closed behind him. "What has happened?"

"Something terrible, M. Daniel."

"Tell me, pray, what? You frighten me."

"My father is going to marry again."

At first Daniel was amazed; then recalling the count's attempts at rejuvenescence, he exclaimed, "Oh, oh! that explains everything."

But Henriette interrupted him; and, in a half-stifled voice, proceeded to repeat, almost word for word, the conversation she had had with her father.

"You have guessed right, Mlle.," said Daniel, when she had finished. "Your father evidently meant to propose a bargain to you."

"Ah, how horrible!"

"He wished you to understand, that, if you would consent to his marriage, he would consent—" Shocked at what he was going to add, he paused abruptly.

But Henriette boldly finished the phrase,—“To ours, you mean,” cried she—“to ours? Yes, so I understood it; and that was why I sent for you to advise me.”

Poor fellow? She asked him to seal his own fate. “I think you ought to consent,” he stammered.

Trembling with indignation, she rose and replied, “Never, never!”

Daniel was overcome by this sudden shock. Never! He saw all his hopes shattered, his life’s happiness destroyed, Henriette lost to him for ever. But the very imminence of the danger restored his energy. Mastering his grief, he rejoined, with counterfeit calmness, “I beseech you to let me explain why I gave you this advice. Believe me, your father does not require your consent at all. You cannot act without his approval; but he can marry without asking you for yours. No law authorises children to oppose their parents’ follies. What your father wishes is your tacit approval; the certainty that his new wife will be kindly received. If you refuse, he will, nevertheless, pursue his course despite all your objections.”

“Oh!”

“I am, unfortunately, only too sure of that. If he spoke to you of his plans, you may be sure he had made up his mind. Your resistance will only lead to our separation. *He* might possibly forgive you; but *she*—Don’t you think she would avail herself of her influence over him,—and might not her hatred have terrible consequences? She must be a dangerous woman, Henriette,—a woman capable of anything.”

“Why?”

He hesitated for a moment, scarcely daring to express his thoughts; but at last he replied slowly, weighing every word, “Because—because this marriage can, on her side, only be a speculation. Your father is immensely wealthy; she covets his fortune.”

Daniel’s reasoning was so plausible, and he pleaded his cause with such eagerness, that Henriette’s resolution was evidently shaken. “You want me to yield?” she asked.

“I beseech you to do so.”

She shook her head sadly, and rejoined in a tone of utter dejection, “Very well. It shall be as you desire. I will not oppose this profanation. But you may be sure my weakness will have no good result.” Then offering her hand to Daniel, she added, “I will see you again to-morrow evening. By that time I shall know the name of the woman my father is going to marry; for I shall ask him who she is, and will tell you.”

She was spared the trouble of attacking the subject, for on the following morning the count’s first words were, “Well, have you thought it over?”

She looked at him till he was constrained to glance aside; and then in a tone of resignation she replied, “Father, you are master here. I should not speak the truth if I said, the idea of a stranger coming here did not make me suffer cruelly. But I will receive her with all due respect.”

Ah! the count was scarcely prepared for so speedy a consent. “Do not speak of respect,” he said. “Tell me that you will be tender, affectionate, and kind! Ah! if you knew her, Henriette! She is an angel.”

“How old is she?”

“Twenty-five.” The count read in his daughter’s eyes that she thought his new wife much too young for him; and therefore swiftly added, “Your mother was two years younger when I married her.” This was true; but he forgot that he himself was twenty years younger at the time.

"However," he continued, "you will see her: I shall ask her to let me present you to her. She is a foreigner, of excellent family, very rich, marvellously clever and beautiful; and her name is Sarah Brandon."

That evening, when Henriette told Daniel her future step-mother's name, he started with an air of despair, and exclaimed, "Good heavens! if Maxime de Brévan is not mistaken, that is worse than anything we could possibly anticipate."

IV

WHEN Henriette saw how the young officer was overcome by the mere mention of that name, Sarah Brandon, she felt the blood freeze in her veins. She knew perfectly well that a man like Daniel was not likely to be so overwhelmed without good cause. "Do you know the woman, Daniel?" she asked. Regretting his want of self-possession, he was already thinking how he could remedy his imprudence. "I swear to you," he began.

"Oh, don't swear! I see you know who she is."

"I know nothing about her."

"But—"

"It is true I heard her spoken of once, a long time ago."

"By whom?"

"By one of my friends, Maxime de Brévan, a fine, noble fellow."

"What sort of woman is she?"

"Ah, me! I can't tell you. Maxime happened to mention her in a casual way; and I never thought I should hear of her again. If I seemed so greatly surprised just now, it was because I remembered, all of a sudden, an ugly story in which Maxime said she had been involved, and then—" Daniel was no expert in the art of telling fibs; so, when he found that he was talking nonsense, he turned his head away to avoid Henriette's eyes.

"Do you really think I am not strong enough to hear the truth?" said she, interrupting him in a reproachful voice.

At first he did not reply. Overcome by the strange position in which he found himself, he sought for a means of escape, and found none. At last he said, "You must give me time before I tell you any more. I know nothing positive; and I dare say I am unnecessarily alarmed. I will tell you everything as soon as I am better informed."

"When will that be?"

"This evening, if I can find Maxime de Brévan at home, as I hope to do: if I miss him, you must wait till to-morrow."

"And if your suspicions prove correct; if what you fear, and now conceal from me, is a fact,—what must I do then?"

Without a moment's hesitation he answered solemnly, "I am not going to tell you again how I love you, Henriette; I am not going to tell you that to lose you would be death to me, and that in our family we do not value life very highly: you know that, don't you? But, in spite of all that, if my fears should be well founded, as I apprehend they are, I should not hesitate to say to you, whatever might be the consequences, Henriette, and even if we had to part forever, that we must try our utmost, indeed employ all possible means in our power, to prevent your father from marrying Sarah Brandon."

In spite of her sufferings, Henriette's heart leapt with unspeakable happiness and joy. Ah! he deserved to be loved,—this man whom her

heart had freely chosen,—this man who gave her such an overwhelming proof of his devotion. She offered him her hand; and, with her eyes beaming with enthusiasm and tenderness, she said, “And I,—I swear by the sacred memory of my mother, that whatever may happen, and whatever force may be employed, I will never belong to any one but you.”

Daniel had seized her hand, and held it for some time pressed to his lips. Then, as rapture gave way to calmer thoughts, he said, “I must leave you at once, Henriette, if I want to catch Maxime.”

His head was in a whirl, his thoughts in a maze, as he left the house. His life and his happiness were at stake; and a single word would decide his fate despite himself.

Hailing a passing cab, he sprung quickly inside, shouting to the driver, —“Quick, my good fellow, take me to No. 61 Rue Laffitte, and you shall have 5 francs.”

This was Maxime de Brévan’s address. Daniel’s friend was a tall, light-haired, full-bearded man of thirty or thirty-five, with a bright eye and pleasing face. Associating on intimate terms with the members of what is called “Parisian high life”—*viveurs*, whose only occupation is pleasure-seeking, he was very popular among them all. They said he was a man who could always be relied upon, always ready to render a service when it was in his power, a pleasant companion, and an excellent second whenever one had to fight a duel. He enjoyed an unblemished reputation. And yet, far from following the advice of the philosopher, who bids us screen our life from public gaze, Maxime de Brévan seemed desirous of letting everybody into his secrets. He was so anxious to tell everyone where he had been, and what he had been doing, that one might have imagined he was always preparing an *alibi*. Thus he told the whole world that the Brévans came originally from the province of Maine, and that he was the last, the sole representative, of that old family. Not that he prided himself particularly on his ancestors; he acknowledged frankly that there was very little left of their ancient splendour; in fact, nothing but a bare competence. He never stated, however, what this “competence” amounted to, and his most intimate friends could not tell whether he had an income of one or ten thousand francs a-year. This much was certain, that, to his great honour and glory, he had solved the problem of retaining his independence and dignity while associating—a comparatively poor man—with the wealthiest of the gilded youth of Paris. His rooms were simple and unpretentious; he kept but a single servant; his carriage was hired by the month. Maxime de Brévan and Daniel had become friends in the simplest possible way. They had been introduced to each other at a ball by a common friend, a lieutenant in the navy. They had left the entertainment together with the view of walking home in company, and as it was a fine, mild, moonlight night, they loitered awhile on the Place de la Concorde smoking their cigars. Had Maxime really felt much sympathy for the young officer? Perhaps so. At all events, Daniel had been irresistibly attracted by Maxime’s peculiar ways, and especially by the cool stoicism with which he spoke of his genteel poverty. They had met several times again, and finally had become intimate.

Brévan was just dressing for the opera when Daniel entered his room. As was his wont, he uttered a cry of delight on perceiving his friend. “What!” said he, “the hermit student from the other side of the river in this worldly region, and at this hour? What good wind blows you over here?” Then, suddenly noticing Daniel’s terrified appearance,

he added,—“But what am I talking about? You look frightened out of your wits. What’s the matter?”

“A great misfortune, I fear,” replied Daniel.

“How so? What is it?”

“And I want you to help me.”

“Don’t you know that I am at your service?”

Daniel certainly thought so. “I thank you in advance, my dear Maxime,” said he; “but I don’t wish to give you too much trouble. I have a long story to tell, and you are just going out—”

“Oh, I was only going out for want of something better to do,” interrupted Brévan with a shake of the head. “So sit down, and tell me everything.”

The news that Henriette had imparted to him, and the fear of losing her for ever, had so unnerved Daniel that he had hastened to his friend without reflecting what he ought to tell him. Now that the moment to speak was at hand he remained silent. The thought had just occurred to him, that the Count de Ville-Handry’s secret was not his own, and that he ought if possible to avoid betraying it, even though he might rely upon his friend’s discretion. Instead of replying, he therefore paced the room in an agonised state of mind, seeking for some plausible excuse to ask the question he had on his tongue. His irresolution lasted so long that Maxime, who had lately heard of several cases of brain disease, asked himself if Daniel could possibly have lost his mind. No; for suddenly the young officer stopped in front of his friend and exclaimed, in a short, sharp tone,—“First of all, Maxime, swear that you will never, under any circumstances, repeat to any human being a word of what I am going to tell you.”

Thoroughly mystified, Brévan raised his hand, “I pledge my word of honour,” he replied.

This promise seemed to reassure Daniel, who, when he thought he had regained sufficient self-possession, continued,—“A few months ago, my dear friend, I heard you telling somebody a horrible story concerning a certain Mme. Sarah Brandon—”

“Mademoiselle, not Madame, if you please.”

“Well, it does not matter. You know her?”

“Certainly. Everybody knows her.”

Daniel did not notice the extreme self-conceit with which these words were uttered. “All right then,” said he. “Now, Maxime, I conjure you, by our friendship, tell me frankly what you think of her. What kind of a woman is this Sarah Brandon?”

The expression of his features, as well as his voice, evinced such extreme excitement, that Brévan was perfectly amazed. “But, my dear fellow, you ask me in a manner—”

“I must know the truth, I tell you. It is of the utmost importance to me.”

Struck by a sudden thought, Brévan clapped his hand to his forehead, and exclaimed,—“Oh, I see! You are in love with Sarah!”

Daniel would never have thought of such a subterfuge in order to avoid mentioning the Count de Ville-Handry’s name, but, as it was thus offered to him, he determined to profit by the opportunity. “Well, yes, suppose it is so,” he said, with a sigh.

Maxime raised his hands to heaven, and in a tone of painful conviction rejoined, “In that case you are right. You ought to make enquiries; for you may be close upon a terrible misfortune.”

"Ah, is she really so formidable?"

Maxime shrugged his shoulders as if he considered it ridiculous that he should be called upon to enunciate a well-known fact, and remarked, "I should think so."

There seemed to be no reason why Daniel should persist in his questions after that. These words ought to have proved sufficient. Nevertheless he continued in a subdued voice, "Pray explain yourself, Maxime! Don't you know, that, as I lead a very quiet life, I know nothing?"

Brévan assumed a more serious look than hitherto, and rising and leaning against the mantelpiece, replied, "What do you wish me to tell you? It is only fools who bid lovers beware; and to warn a man who refuses to be warned, is useless. Are you really in love with Sarah, or are you not? If you are, nothing that I could say would change your mind. Suppose I were to tell you that she is an abominable creature, an infamous forger, who has already on her conscience the death of three poor devils, who loved her just as you do? Suppose I told you worse things than these, and could prove them? Do you know what would happen? You would press my hand with effusion. You would overwhelm me with thanks, with tears in your eyes. You would vow, in the candor of your heart, that you are forever cured; and, when you left me—"

"Well?"

"You would rush to your beloved, tell her all I had said, and beseech her to clear herself of these charges."

"I beg your pardon: I am not one of those men who—"

But Brévan was growing more and more excited. "Nonsense!" said he, interrupting his friend. "You are a man like all other men. Passion does not reason, nor calculate; and that is the secret of its strength. As long as we have a spark of common-sense left we are not really in love. That is a fact, I tell you; and no will, no amount of energy, can alter it. There are people who tell you soberly that they have been in love without losing their senses, and who reproach you for not keeping cool. But that's all bosh! And now, my dear fellow, have the kindness to accept this cigar, and let us take a walk."

Was it really as Brévan said? Was it true that real love robs us of the faculty of reasoning, and of distinguishing truth from falsehood? Did he not love Henriette truly, because he was on the point of giving her up for the sake of duty?

No, that could not be. Brévan had been speaking of another kind of love,—a love neither pure nor chaste. He spoke of those passions which confound our senses and mislead our judgment, which are as destructive as fire, and leave nothing behind but disaster, disgrace, and remorse.

But all the more painful did Daniel's thoughts become when he remembered that the Count de Ville-Handry was seized with one of these terrible passions for a worthless creature. He could not accept Maxime's offer.

"One word, I pray you," he said. "Suppose I lose my free will, and surrender absolutely: what will become of me?"

Brévan looked at him with an air of pity, and replied,

"Not much will happen to you; only—" He paused, and then with mingled sternness and sarcasm he asked,

"You ask me to predict your fate, eh? Well, let it be so. Have you a large fortune?"

"A few hundred thousand francs."

"Well, in six months they will be gone ; in a year you will be overwhelmed with debt, and at your wits' end ; in less than a year and a-half you will become a forger."

"Maxime !"

"Ah ! You ask me to tell you the truth. Then, as to your naval position. It is now excellent : you have been promoted as rapidly as merit could claim, at least so everybody says. You might be an admiral one of these days. But in six months you will be nothing at all ; you will have resigned your commission, or you will have been dismissed."

"Allow me—"

"No. You are an honest man, the most honourable man I know ; but after six months' acquaintance with Sarah Brandon, you will have lost your self-respect so completely, that you will have become a drunkard. There's your portrait. 'It's not a flattering one,' you will say. But you wanted to have it. And now let us go."

This time he was determined ; and Daniel realised that he would not obtain another word from him, unless he changed his tactics. Accordingly, just as Brévan opened the door, he said,—

"Maxime, you must forgive me for a very innocent deception, which was suggested by your own words. It is not I who am in love with Miss Brandon."

"Who is it, then ?" asked Brévan in amazement.

"One of my friends."

"What name ?"

"I wish you would render the service I owe you doubly valuable by not asking me that question,—at least, not to-day."

Daniel spoke with such an accent of sincerity, that not a shadow of doubt remained on Maxime's mind. It was not Daniel who had fallen in love with Sarah Brandon, that was certain ; still, Brévan could not conceal his trouble, and his disappointment even, as he exclaimed,

"Well done, Daniel ! Don't tell me that you ingenuous people can't deceive anybody !"

However, he said nothing more about it ; and, while Daniel was repeating his apologies, he quietly returned to the fireside and sat down. After a moment's silence he began again,

"Let us assume, then, that it is one of your friends who is bewitched ?"

"Yes."

"And the matter is—serious ?"

"Alas ! He talks of marrying the woman."

Maxime shrugged his shoulders contemptuously, and said,

"As to that, console yourself. Sarah would never consent."

"But she herself has made the suggestion."

This time Maxime started and looked stupefied.

"Then your friend must be very rich."

"He is immensely rich."

"He bears a great name, and holds a high position ?"

"His name is one of the oldest and noblest in the province of Anjou."

"And he is a very old man ?"

"He is sixty-five."

"Ah, she told me she would succeed," exclaimed Brévan, striking the marble slab of the mantelpiece with his fist ; and with an indescribable accent of mingled admiration and hatred, he added in a lower tone, as if speaking to himself, "What a woman ! Oh, what a woman !"

Daniel, who was himself greatly excited, and far too busy with his own

thoughts to observe what was going on, did not notice his friend's agitation. "Now you will understand my great curiosity," he continued quietly. "In order to prevent the scandal of such a marriage, my friend's family would do anything in the world. But how can you attack a woman whose antecedents and mode of life are unknown?"

"Yes, I understand," said Brévan—"I understand." The expression of his features shewed that he was making a great mental effort. He remained for some time absorbed in thought; but at last, as if coming to a decision, he resumed, "No I don't see any way of preventing this marriage; none at all."

"Still, from what you told me—"

"What!"

"About this woman's cupidity—"

"Well?"

"If she were offered a large sum, four or five hundred thousand francs?"

Maxime laughed aloud. "You might offer a million francs," said he, "and she would laugh at you as I'm doing. Do you think she would be fool enough to content herself with part of a fortune when she can have the whole, with a great name and a high position into the bargain?" Daniel opened his lips to present another suggestion; but Maxime, altogether laying aside his usual half-dreamy, mocking manner, continued, as if roused by a matter of great personal interest, "You do not understand me, my dear friend. Miss Brandon is not one of those vulgar hawks, who, in broad daylight, seize upon a poor pigeon, pluck it and cast it aside, bleeding, but still alive."

"Then, Maxime, she must be—"

"Well, I tell you you misunderstand her. Miss Brandon—" He paused, and, looking at Daniel much as a judge examines a criminal's features, he added in an almost threatening voice, "By telling you what little I know about her, Daniel, I give you the highest proof of confidence which one man can give to another. I esteem you too highly to exact a formal promise of discretion, but if you ever mention my name in connection with this affair, if you ever let any one suspect that you learned what I am going to tell you from me, you will dishonour yourself."

Daniel, who was deeply moved, seized his friend's hand, and pressing it affectionately, replied, "Ah! you know that Daniel Champcey is to be relied upon."

Maxime knew it; for he continued, "Miss Sarah Brandon is one of those cosmopolitan adventuresses, whom the railways now-a-days bring to Paris from the four quarters of the world. Like a great many others, she has come to our capital to spread her net, and catch her birds. However, she is more intelligent and ambitious than most of her kind; and she possesses a real genius for intrigue. She means to have a fortune, and is not at all scrupulous as to the means she may employ to win it; but she is also anxious to retain public respect. I should not be surprised if anyone told me she was born within ten miles of Paris; but she calls herself an American. She certainly speaks English perfectly, and knows a great deal more of America than you know of Paris. I have heard her relate her family history to a large and attentive audience; but I won't say I believed it. According to her own account, Mr Brandon, her father, a thoroughbred Yankee, was a man of great enterprise and energy, who during his lifetime made his fortune and lost it, at least ten times in succession. Fortunately for her he happened to be wealthy when he died—leaving behind him, in fact, several

million dollars. According to her account, he was a banker and broker in New York, at the epoch when the civil war broke out. He entered the army, and in less than six months, thanks to his marvellous energy, he was created a general. When peace returned, he was quite without occupation, and did not know what on earth to do with himself. Fortunately, his good star led him to a region where large tracts of land were for sale. He purchased them for a few thousand dollars, and soon afterwards discovered on his estate the most productive oil-wells in all America. He was on the point of becoming another Peabody when he lost his life in a fearful accident, being burnt to death in a fire that destroyed one of his establishments. As for her mother, Sarah says, she lost her when she was quite young, in a most romantic, though horrible manner."

"What!" interrupted Daniel, "has nobody taken the trouble to ascertain the truth of all these statements?"

"I'm sure I don't know. But I certainly have met Americans who were acquainted with a broker Brandon, a Gen. Brandon, a petroleum Brandon."

"She may have borrowed the name."

"Certainly, especially as the original man is said to have died in America. However, Miss Brandon has now been living for five years in Paris. She came here accompanied by a Mrs. Brian, a relative of hers, who is the dryest, boniest person you can imagine, but at the same time the slyest woman I ever met. In addition she brought with her a kind of protector, an Englishman, who is also a relative of hers, probably on her mother's side. He is called Sir Thomas Elgin, and is altogether a most extraordinary character, as stiff as a poker, but evidently a dangerous man, never opening his mouth except to eat. He is a famous hand at small-swords, however, and at pistols he snuffs his candle nine times out of ten at a distance of thirty yards. This Elgin, whom people familiarly call "Sir Tom," and Mrs Brian, always reside with Miss Brandon. When they first arrived they took up their quarters near the Champs Elysées, in a house which they furnished most sumptuously. Sir Tom, who is a capital judge of horse-flesh, soon procured his ward a pair of grey horses, which created quite a sensation at the afternoon drive in the Bois,—attracting everyone's attention to the fair occupant of the carriage they drew. Heaven knows how Sarah had managed to get hold of letters of introduction. But two or three of the most influential members of the American colony here received her at their houses. After that, everything was easy enough. She gradually crept into society; and now she is welcomed almost everywhere, visiting not only the best people, but even certain families which have a reputation of being most exclusive. In fact, if she has enemies, she has fanatic partisans as well. Some folks may say she's an adventuress; but others—and by no means the least acute—assure you that she is an angel, only needing wings to fly away from this wicked world. They talk of her as a poor little orphan girl, whom people slander simply because they envy her youth, beauty, and wealth."

"Ah, so she's rich?"

"Miss Brandon spends at least a hundred thousand francs a-year."

"And no one inquires where they come from?"

"From her sainted father's petroleum-wells, my dear fellow. Petroleum explains everything." Brévan seemed to take a kind of savage delight in witnessing Daniel's despair, and in explaining to him how solidly and skilfully Sarah Brandon's position in the world had been established. Had he any desire to prevent a struggle with her by exaggerating her strength;

Or rather, knowing Daniel as he did, was he trying to goad him into a contest with this formidable adversary? At all events, he continued in that frigid tone which imparts additional bitterness to sarcasm, "Besides, my dear Daniel, if you are ever introduced to Miss Brandon, and I pray you will believe me, people are not so easily introduced to her,—you will at first be quite astonished by the prevailing tone of her household. The air is redolent with a perfume of hypocrisy which would delight the stiffest Quaker. Cant rules supreme there."

Daniel was evidently becoming utterly bewildered. "But how, how can you reconcile that," he asked, "with Miss Brandon's thoroughly worldly life."

"Oh, very easily, my dear fellow! and this is an additional proof of her skill. To the outer world, Miss Brandon is all levity, indiscretion, coquettishness, and even worse. She drives her own phaeton. She declares she has a right to do as she pleases, out of doors, according to the code which governs American young ladies. But at home she bows to the tastes and wishes of her relative, Mrs. Brian, who displays all the prudishness of an austere Puritan. Then stiff Sir Tom is always at her side, and he never jokes. Oh! the three understood each other perfectly: the parts are carefully distributed, and—"

"There is no way, then, of getting at this woman?" asked Daniel, interrupting his friend.

"I think not."

"But that adventure which you spoke of some time ago?"

"Which one? The affair with poor Kergrist?"

"How do I know? It was a fearful story: that's all I remember. What did I, at that time, care for Miss Brandon? Now, to be sure—"

"Now, you think that story might become a weapon in your hands? No, Daniel. Still, it is not a very long one; and I can tell it to you now, in more detail than I could before. Some fifteen months ago, a nice young fellow, called Charles de Kergrist, arrived in Paris. He had as yet lost none of his illusions, being barely five-and-twenty, and having something like half a million of francs of his own, to do as he liked with. Directly he saw Miss Brandon, he 'took fire.' He fell desperately in love with her. What his relations were with her no one can positively say—I mean, with sufficient evidence to carry conviction to others,—for the young man was a model of discretion. But, some eight months afterwards, when Miss Brandon's neighbours opened their shutters one morning, they espied a corpse dangling, a few feet above the ground, from the iron fastenings of the young lady's window. Upon inspection, the dead man proved to be that unlucky fellow Kergrist. A letter was found in the pocket of his overcoat, in which he declared he committed suicide because an unrequited affection had made life unbearable. Now, this letter—mark the fact—was open; that is to say, it had been sealed, and the seal was broken."

"By whom?"

"Let me finish. As you may imagine, the affair caused a great sensation. Kergrist's family took the matter up; there was an enquiry, and it was discovered that the half million francs which Kergrist had brought to Paris with him had utterly disappeared."

"What! and Miss Brandon did not lose her reputation?"

"You know very well she didn't," replied Maxime, with an ironical smile. "On the contrary, her partisans profited by the occasion to praise

her virtue and chastity. 'If she had been weak,' they said, 'Kergrist wouldn't have hanged himself.' Besides, they added, 'how can a girl, be she ever so pure and innocent, prevent her lovers from hanging themselves at her window?' As for the money, they said, it must have been lost at some gaming-table. Kergrist was reported to have been seen at Baden-Baden and Homburg : and no doubt he played there."

"And society was content with such an explanation?"

"Yes: why not? To be sure, some sceptical persons told the story very differently. According to their account, Sarah had been Kergrist's mistress, and had sent him off about his business as soon as she had eased him of his coin. They declared that, on the evening before his death, he had called on her at the usual hour, and was refused admittance, whereupon he begged, and wept, and finally threatened to kill himself. Like a fool he really did so; and Miss Brandon, stationing herself behind the blinds, watched all his preparations, saw him fasten the rope to the outside hinges of her window, slip the noose round his neck, and swing himself off into eternity; watching him closely during his agony, and remaining there till the last convulsions were over."

"Horrible!" whispered Daniel,—“too horrible!”

But Maxime seized him by the arm, and, in a low, hoarse voice, continued,—“Ay, that is what some people said; and there is still worse to come. As soon as she saw that Kergrist was dead, she slipped down-stairs like a cat, stealthily opened the house-door, and, gliding along the wall till she reached the body, actually searched the still quivering corpse to make sure there was nothing in the pockets that could possibly compromise her. Finding Kergrist's last letter, she took it away with her, broke the seal, and read it; and, having ascertained that her name was not mentioned in it, she had the amazing audacity to return to the body, and to put the letter back into the pocket. Then she breathed freely. She had got rid of a man she feared. She went to bed, and slept soundly.”

“The woman's a monster!” exclaimed Daniel, who had become livid.

Brévan made no rejoinder; his eyes were gleaming with intense hatred : his lips quivering with indignation. He no longer thought of discretion, or caution, but gave himself up entirely to his feelings. “I have not done yet, Daniel,” he said, after a pause. “There is another crime on record, dating from Miss Brandon's first appearance in Parisian society. You ought to know about that as well. One evening, four years ago, the manager of the Mutual Discount Society came into the cashier's room to tell him that, on the following day, the board of directors would examine his books. The cashier, an unfortunate man named Malgat, replied that everything was ready; but, the moment the manager turned his back, he took a sheet of paper, and wrote something to this effect:—‘Forgive me. I have been an honest man for forty years: but a fatal passion has driven me mad. I have abstracted from the bank money that was intrusted to my care; and in order to conceal my defalcations I have forged several entries. I cannot conceal my crime any longer. The first defalcation occurred only six months ago. The entire deficiency amounts to about four hundred thousand francs. I cannot survive my disgrace: in an hour I shall have ceased to live.’ Malgat laid this letter in a prominent position on his desk, and then rushed out, without a sou in his pocket, to go and throw himself into the canal. But when he reached the margin, and saw the foul, black water, he grew frightened. For hours and hours he walked up and down, madly, asking God to give him courage. If he did not kill himself, what was he

to do? He could not fly, for he had no money. Where could he hide? He could not return to the bank; for, by this time, his crime must have become known there. In his distress he ran as far as the Champs Elysées, and late at night he knocked at the door of Miss Brandon's house. She and the others did not as yet know what had happened, so that he was admitted. Then, in his wild despair, he told them everything, begging them to give him merely a couple of hundreds out of the four hundred thousand francs he had stolen to give to Miss Brandon,—a hundred only, to enable him to escape to Belgium. They refused. And when he begged and prayed, falling on his knees to Sarah, Sir Tcm seized him by the shoulders, and turned him out of the house."

Overcome by his intense excitement, Maxime at this moment fell into an easy-chair, where he remained some time, with fixed eyes and clouded brow, repenting, perhaps, of his frankness and forgetfulness of ties that bound him to others. However, when he rose again, his rare strength of will had enabled him to reassume his usual phlegmatic manner; and he continued in a mocking tone, "I see from your looks, Daniel, that you think the story monstrous, improbable, and almost impossible. Nevertheless, four years ago, it was believed in many parts of Paris, and embellished by a number of hideous details which I will spare you. If you care to refer to the papers of that year, you will find it related by them all. But four years are four centuries in Paris. To say nothing of the many similar occurrences that have happened since."

Daniel bowed his head sadly. He felt a kind of painful emotion, such as he had never before experienced in his life. "It is not so much the story itself that overcomes me," said he at last; "what I can't understand is, how this woman could have refused the beggarly pittance Malgat required in order to evade justice, and escape to Belgium."

"Nevertheless, it was so," repeated M. de Brévan; and he swiftly added, "at least, people say so."

Daniel did not notice this cautious correction, but pensively continued, "Supposing the thing were true, would not Miss Brandon have been afraid of exasperating the unfortunate cashier, and of driving him to some desperate resolution? In his rage he might have left the house, hurried to the office of a commissary of police, and confessed everything, laying all the evidence he possessed before a magistrate—"

"That is precisely what the fair American's advocates said at the time," interrupted Brévan with a sardonic laugh. "But I tell you, her peculiarity is exactly the daring manner in which she ventures upon the most dangerous steps. She does not pretend to avoid difficulties; she crushes them. Her prudence consists in carrying imprudence to its farthest limits."

"But—"

"Besides, you ought to credit her with sufficient astuteness and experience to know she had taken the most careful precautions, destroying all proof of her own complicity, and feeling quite safe in that direction. Moreover, she had studied Malgat's character, just as she studied Kergrist's. Consequently, she was quite sure that neither of them would accuse her, even at the moment of death. And yet, in the case of this Mutual Discount Society, her calculations did not prove absolutely correct."

"How so?"

"Well, it became known that she had received Malgat two or three times secretly, for he did not openly enter her house; and papers hinted that 'the fair foreigner was no stranger to small peculations.' Public

opinion was veering round, when it was reported she had been summoned to appear before a magistrate. This proved, however, a fortunate occurrence for her : for she came out of the investigation whiter and purer than Alpine snow."

"Oh !"

"And so perfectly cleared, that, when the whole matter was brought into court, she was not even summoned as a witness."

"What !" exclaimed Daniel, starting to his feet, "Malgat submitted to the agony of trial, and the infamy of condemnation, without allowing a word to escape?"

"No. It was by default that he was sentenced to ten years' confinement."

"And what has become of the poor devil?"

"Who knows? They say he killed himself. Two months later a body, in an advanced state of decomposition, was found in the forest of Saint Germain, and people declared it was Malgat's." As he spoke, a cloud passed over Brévan's brow, and it was in a lower tone and with some hesitation that he continued, "Somebody who used to be intimate with Malgat has told me, however, that he met him one day, not long ago, in front of the great auction-mart, in the Rue Drouot. This man declares he recognised Malgat, although he was most artistically disguised, and for this reason I have thought more than once, that a day may yet come after all, when Miss Sarah will have a terrible account to settle with her implacable creditor." He passed his hand across his brow as if to drive away such a thought, and then, with a forced laugh, he added, "Now, my dear fellow, I have reached the end of my story. The particulars I have given you were all imparted to me by Miss Sarah's friends as well as by her enemies. Some of them may be found in the old newspapers, but I have learnt a great deal by my own long and patient observation. And, if you ask me what interest I could have in knowing such a woman, I would tell you frankly, my dear Daniel, that I also was once in love with her ! But I was too small a personage, and too poor a devil, for Miss Brandon to take any interest in me. As soon as she perceived that her abominable coquetry had set my head on fire, and that I had become an idiot, a madman, a fool—on that very day she laughed in my face. Ah ! I tell you, she played with me, at first, as if I had been a child, and then sent me off as if I had been a lackey. And now I hate her as intensely as I loved her ; so, if I can help you, in secret, without it becoming known, you may count upon me."

Why should Daniel have doubted the veracity of his friend's statements? Had not Maxime voluntarily confessed his folly, his love for this adventuress, thus anticipating all questions, and making a clean breast of the whole matter? Thus, far from calling any of his friend's assertions into question, Champey thanked providence for having sent him such an ally, such a friend, who had lived long enough in Parisian society to know all the scandalous intrigues broached under cover of apparent integrity. Taking Maxime by the hand, he exclaimed in a tone of deep feeling, "Now, my friend, we are bound to each other for life."

Brévan seemed greatly touched, and raised his hand as if to wipe a tear from his eyes. But he was not a man to give way to sentiment. "Well, how about your friend?" he asked. "How can we prevent his marrying Sarah? Does any plan occur to you? No? Ah ! you see, it will be hard work." For a few minutes he remained in apparent meditation ; then speaking slowly and with marked emphasis, as if to give additional weight to his words and impress them forcibly on Daniel's mind, he resumed,

"We must attack Miss Brandon herself if we wish to master the situation. If we could only find out who she really is, and where she really comes from, the game would be ours. Fortunately, skilful spies can easily be found in Paris, and work well, providing they are handsomely paid." As the clock on the mantelpiece struck half-past ten, he started and stopped. Then springing to his feet as if suddenly inspired by a bright idea, he hurriedly exclaimed, "But now I think of it, Daniel, you don't know Miss Brandon: you have never even seen her!"

"No, indeed!"

"Well, that's a pity. We must at least know our enemies if we are to contend against them. I want you to see Miss Sarah."

"But who can point her out to me? where? when?"

"I will do so to-night, at the opera. I can bet she will be there!"

Daniel had assumed evening dress before calling upon Henriette, so that there was nothing to prevent him from accepting his friend's proposal. A moment later they were both in the street, and reached the theatre just as the curtain rose on the fourth act of *Don Giovanni*. They were, fortunately, able to secure two stalls. The performance was splendid; but what did they care for the singers on the boards, or for Mozart's divine music. Brévan raised his opera-glass to his eyes, and, rapidly surveying the house, soon found what he was looking for. Nudging Daniel with his elbow, he whispered in his ear, "See, there, in the third box from the stage on the grand tier, look, there she is!"

V.

DANIEL looked up, and in the box which Maxime had indicated he perceived a young woman of such rare and dazzling beauty, that he could hardly restrain a cry of admiration. She was leaning forward, resting one arm on the velvet cushion of the box, listening attentively to the music. Her hair, which although wonderfully profuse, was so carefully arranged that it was plain it was all her own, gleamed with the bright refulgency of refined gold. Long lashes shaded her large soft eyes, which changed from the deepest to the lightest blue whenever she raised the lids. Her lips smiled with all the freshness of early womanhood, revealing as they parted two rows of pearly teeth, matchless in their beauty and regularity. "Is it possible," murmured Daniel to himself; "can that be the wretched creature whom Maxime has described to me?" A little behind Miss Brandon, an angular bony face could be discerned, surmounted by an absurd bunch of feathers. This was the countenance of Mrs Brian, whose eyes perpetually flashed indignation, and whose thin lips, half parted, seemed always on the point of saying "Shocking!" Still farther back, in the shadow of the box and barely discernable after long examination, appeared a tall, stiff figure, a shiny bald head, two dark, deep-sunken eyes, a hooked nose, and a pair of immense streaming whiskers. Their owner was Sir Thomas Elgin, commonly known as "Sir Tom." As Daniel gazed at the smiling beauty in front, and the stern old woman and placid old man in the background, he felt doubts of all kinds creeping into his mind. Might not Maxime be mistaken? Hadn't he merely repeated the atrocious slanders of the envious world? The thought worried Daniel; and he would have mentioned his doubts to Maxime: but his neighbours were musical enthusiasts, and, as soon as he bent over to whisper into his friend's ear, they began to growl,

and, on his trying to speak, requested him to remain silent. At last the curtain fell. Several spectators left the house; others simply rose to look round them; but Maxime and Daniel retained their seats. They were giving their whole attention to Miss Brandon's box, when they suddenly perceived the door open to admit a gentleman who, at their distance off, looked like a very young man. His complexion was exceedingly brilliant, his beard jet black, and his curly hair most carefully arranged. He had his opera-hat under his arm, a camellia in his button-hole; and his straw-coloured kid gloves were so tight, that it looked as if they must inevitably burst the instant he used his hands. "The Count de Ville-Handry!" said Daniel to himself.

"Your old friend, eh!" exclaimed Maxime, bending over and touching the young officer's arm; "Miss Brandon's happy lover?"

"Yes, you're right, I must confess it," replied Champcey, who was on the point of explaining why he had not mentioned the count's name, when M. de Brévan spoke again,—“Just look, Daniel; just look!”

The count had taken a seat in the front part of the box, by Miss Brandon's side, and was talking to her with studied affectation, bending forward, gesticulating, and laughing till he showed every one of the long yellow teeth that were left him. He was evidently on exhibition, and desired to be seen by everyone. Suddenly, however, after Miss Brandon had said a few words to him, he rose and left the box. The stage bell was ringing, and the curtain was about to rise again, "Let us go," said Daniel to M. de Brévan: "I am suffering." The idea that Henriette's father should be seen in public conducting himself so ridiculously mortified him beyond description. And he no longer entertained any doubts concerning Miss Brandon's evil intentions; he had clearly marked how she spurred the old man on, and fanned his feeble flame.

The two friends had just left the theatre and were turning towards the boulevards, when they came face to face with a gentleman wearing a furred pelisse, behind whom walked a servant laden with an armful of magnificent cut roses. The first comer was the Count de Ville-Handry, who, on suddenly finding Daniel before him, evinced considerable embarrassment. "What, is it you?" he asked, after a pause. "Where on earth do you come from?"

"From the opera."

"And you run away before the fifth act? That is a crime against the majesty of Mozart. Come, go back with me, and I promise you a pleasant surprise."

"Go," whispered Brévan in his friend's ear; "that's the very opportunity I was wishing for." And with these words he raised his hat and went his way.

Daniel, taken rather by surprise, thereupon accompanied the count, who, approaching the carriages which were waiting for the wealthier spectators at the opera, halted in front of a capacious landau—open, despite the cold weather, and guarded by a coachman and two footmen in gorgeous livery. On perceiving the count, they all three uncovered respectfully; but, without taking any notice of them, he turned to the porter carrying the flowers, and exclaimed, "Scatter those roses in this carriage." The man hesitated. He was the servant of a famous florist, and had often seen people pay ten and fifteen napoleons for a bouquet, but he considered this too much of a joke. However, as the count insisted, he at last did as he was bid, receiving a handsome fee for his trouble.

M. de Ville-Handry then returned to the opera-house, Daniel following him, filled with amazement. Love had evidently made the count forget his years, and lent renewed youth to his jaded limbs. He bounded up the steps of the grand staircase, and in a few seconds reached Miss Brandon's box. Taking Daniel by the hand, and, drawing him towards the American *belle*, he exclaimed, "Allow me to present to you M. Daniel Champcey, one of our most distinguished naval officers."

Daniel bowed, first to Sarah, and then to Mrs Brian, and long, stiff Sir Tom.

"I need not tell you, my dear count," said Sarah, "that your friends are always welcome here." And turning to Daniel, she added, "Besides, I may say I have known you for some time already."

"Me, Mademoiselle?"

"Yes, Monsieur. And I even know that you are a most frequent visitor at Count de Ville-Handry's house." She looked at Daniel with an air of malicious simplicity, and continued, "I don't mean to say that your visits are entirely due to your friendship for the count. I have heard something of a certain young lady—"

"Sarah," interrupted Mrs Brian, "what you are saying is highly improper." This reproof, far from checking Miss Brandon's merriment, only seemed to increase it. Without losing sight of Daniel, she turned to her aunt, and replied, "Since the count is not opposed to this gentleman paying his attentions to his daughter, I think I may safely speak of them. It would be really too extraordinary if anything happened to interfere with his hopes!"

Daniel, who had blushed scarlet a moment before, suddenly turned deadly pale. After all he had been told, these words sounded to him, in spite of the laugh that accompanied them, like a warning and a threat. But he was not allowed time to reflect. The performance was coming to a close, and Miss Brandon was now drawing a fur cloak over her shoulders. She left the box on the count's arm; while Daniel escorted Mrs Brian, being closely followed by tall, stiff Sir Tom. The landau was at the door. The servants had let down the steps, and Miss Brandon prepared to get in; but as her foot touched the bottom of the carriage, she drew back, half frightened, and exclaimed, "What's that? What can be there?"

The count advanced, looking somewhat embarrassed. "You are fond of roses," he said, "and I have ventured to order a few." So saying, he took up some of the leaves and showed them to her.

"You certainly are bent upon making me angry," replied Miss Brandon, whose fright had almost turned to wrath. "You want everyone to say that I urge you to commit all kinds of follies. What a glorious thing for a millionaire to waste a dozen napoleons on flowers." Then, perceiving by the light of the street lamp that the count's face evinced deep disappointment, she added in a tone calculated to make him lose his little remaining reason, "Your attention would have been more welcome if you had brought me a sou's worth of violets."

In the meantime Mrs Brian had taken her seat by Miss Brandon's side; Sir Tom also had installed himself in the carriage; and it was now the count's turn. Just as one of the footmen was about to close the door, Sarah bent forward towards Daniel, and said, "I hope I shall have the pleasure of soon seeing you again. Our dear count will give you my address, and tell you my reception-days. I must tell you that we American girls dote upon naval officers, and that I—"

The remainder was lost in the noise of the rolling wheels, and the carriage was already some distance off before Daniel could recover from his amazement. All these strange events, occurring successively in the course of a few hours, and breaking suddenly upon so calm and quiet a life, had so unnerved him, that he was not quite sure whether he was awake or dreaming. Alas! he was not dreaming. This beautiful Miss Brandon, who had just driven away, was only too real; and there, on the muddy pavement, a handful of rose leaves testified to the power of her charms, and the folly of her aged lover. "Ah, we are lost!" exclaimed Daniel, in so loud a voice, that several passers-by stopped, expecting one of those street dramas which the halfpenny papers describe in such effusive style. They were disappointed, however. For, noticing that he attracted attention, Daniel shrugged his shoulders, and walked quickly off towards the boulevards. He had promised Henriette to tell her that very evening, if possible, what he had found out; but it was too late now, for midnight was striking. "I'll go to-morrow," he said to himself. Whilst strolling leisurely down the boulevards, still brilliantly illuminated and crowded with people, he endeavoured to examine the situation with all requisite calmness. He had at first imagined that he would merely have to contend against one of these common *intriguantes* who only wished to secure a competency for their old age, and clumsily spread their nets in hopes of catching a victim—lower-class adventuresses who may more or less easily be got rid of by the payment of a sum of money. Had Sarah Brandon been such a woman, he would still have had some hope; but no, she was a far more formidable character. He realised now that Maxime de Brévan had told him the truth. How could he hope to compete with such a woman? and with what weapons could he attack her? How could she be reached? Was it not pure folly to think even of making her abandon her designs on the magnificent fortune which she evidently looked upon as her own already, enjoying, as it were, its sweets in anticipation. "Oh, for an inspiration!" murmured Daniel, but none came; and he tortured his mind in vain.

On reaching home, he went to bed as usual; but the consciousness of his misfortunes prevented him from sleeping. Indeed, he did not close his eyes all night. Nevertheless, at 9 a.m. he was up and dressed, and about to go out, when some one knocked at his door. The visitor proved to be M. de Brévan, who came to enquire what had occurred after their separation on the previous night. "Well?" asked he.

"Ah!" replied Daniel, "I think the wisest plan would be to give it up."

"Upon my word, you are in a great hurry to surrender."

"And what would you do in my place, eh? That woman has beauty enough to drive anyone mad; and the count is a lost man." And before Maxime had time to make any rejoinder, Daniel told him simply and frankly all about his love for Henriette, the hopes he had been encouraged to cherish, and the dangers that threatened his happiness in life. "For I can no longer deceive myself, Maxime," he concluded, with a tone of utter despair; "I can foresee what will happen. Henriette will do everything in her power to prevent her father from marrying Miss Brandon: she will struggle on to the bitter end at any risk. Ought I to help her? Certainly I ought; but can we succeed? No! we shall only transform Miss Brandon into a mortal enemy, and on the morning after her wedding, her first thought will be how to avenge herself, and how to separate Henriette and myself forever."

Little as Brévan was generally given to sentiment, he was evidently deeply touched by his friend's despair. "In short, my dear fellow," he said, "you have reached the point at which one no longer knows what to do. All the more reason, then, for you to listen to a friend's advice. You must have yourself introduced at Miss Brandon's house."

"She invited me herself, last night."

"Well, then, don't hesitate, but go as soon as you can."

"What for?"

"Not for much. But just pay Miss Brandon some compliments, be all attention to Mrs Brian, and try to win over Sir Thomas Elgin. Finally, and above everything, be all ears and eyes."

"I am sorry to say I do not understand you yet."

"What? Cannot you realise that the position of these daring adventurers, however secure it appears, may, after all, hang on a single thread, and that nothing but an opportunity may be wanting to sever that thread. When anything and everything may happen at any moment, what can one do but wait and watch?"

Daniel did not seem convinced. "Miss Brandon will no doubt talk to me about her marriage," he rejoined.

"Certainly, she will."

"What can I say?"

"Nothing,—neither yes nor no,—but smile, or run away : at all events, gain time."

At this moment Maxime was interrupted by Daniel's servant, who, entering the room with a card in his hand, informed his master that there was a gentleman, in a carriage down-stairs, who wished to know if M. Champcey could be seen. "What is his name?" asked Daniel.

"The Count de Ville-Handry. Here is his card."

"Quick!" rejoined Daniel; "ask him to kindly walk up."

M. de Brévan had started from his seat, and was standing, with his hat on, near the door. As the servant left, he said, "I'm off."

"Why?"

"Because the count must not find me here. You would be compelled to introduce me to him; he might remember my name; and, if he were to tell Sarah that I'm your friend, everything would be lost." Whereupon he turned to go; but at the same moment the outer door was opened, and he added, "There's the count! I'm caught."

But Daniel promptly opened his bedroom door, and pushed Maxime into his sleeping apartment. It was high time, for at the same moment the count entered.

VI.

M. DE VILLE-HANDRY must have risen early that day. Although it was not yet ten o'clock, he was already brilliant, rouged, dyed, and frizzed. A result which it had naturally taken some hours to achieve. As he entered, he drew a long breath, and exclaimed, "Ah! You live pretty high up, my dear Daniel." For the moment he forgot that he was playing the young man; but speedily correcting himself, he added vivaciously,— "Not that I complain of it; oh, dear, no! A few storeys to climb—what is that to me?" At the same time he stretched out his leg, and caressed his calf, as if to exhibit its vigour and suppleness, while Daniel, full of

respect for his future father-in-law, drew forward his easiest arm-chair. The count sat down, and seeking to hide such embarrassment, as he may have felt, by an apparent airiness of manner, continued,—“I am sure, my dear Daniel, you must be very surprised and puzzled to see me here; are you not?”

“I confess I am, sir. If you wished to speak to me, you had only to drop me a line, and I would have waited upon you at once.”

“I am sure you would! But it was not necessary, for, in fact, I have nothing to say to you. I shouldn’t have come to see you if I hadn’t missed an appointment. I was to meet one of my fellow-members of the Corps Législatif, but he did not come to the rendezvous. On my way home, I happened to pass your house, and said to myself, ‘Why not go up and see my sailor friend? I might ask him what he thinks of a certain young lady to whom he had the honour of being presented last night.’”

Now or never was the favourable moment for following Maxime’s advice: hence Daniel, instead of replying, simply smiled as pleasantly as he could.

But this did not satisfy the count, who repeated his question more directly. “Come, tell us frankly, what do you think of Miss Brandon?”

“She is one of the greatest beauties I have ever seen in my life.”

The Count de Ville-Handry’s eyes beamed with delighted pride as he heard these words. “Say she is *the* greatest beauty, the most marvellous beauty, you ever saw,” he exclaimed. “And that beauty of hers, M. Champcey, is her least attraction. When she opens her lips, the charms of her mind make one forget those of her person; and on learning to know her better, her beauty and attainments give precedence to her refreshing artlessness, her chastity and purity.” This excessive, all but idiotic, admiration, this implicit, absurd faith in his innamorata, imparted a strange, almost ecstatic expression to the count’s painted face. “And to think,” he said to himself, but in a tone loud enough to be heard, “to think it was by pure chance that I ever met her!” On hearing this Daniel started involuntarily, whereat the count, seemingly disturbed, repeated his words with additional emphasis. “Yes, I met her by chance alone; and I can prove it to you.” Then settling in his chair like a man who intends to speak for some length of time, he continued in that emphatic style which so well indicated the high opinion he had of himself,—“You know, my friend, how deeply I was affected by the death of the Countess de Ville-Haudry. It is true she was not exactly the companion a statesman of my rank should have chosen. Her intellect rarely rose beyond the effort to distinguish a ball-dress from a dinner-toilette. But she was a good woman, attentive, discreet, and devoted to me; an excellent manager, economical, and yet jealous of the high reputation of my house.” Thus, in all sincerity, did the count speak of the woman to whom he owed all his political eminence, and who, for sixteen long years, had endeavoured to instil some ideas into his empty head. “In short,” he pursued, “the death of my wife so completely upset me, that I lost all taste for the avocations which had so far been dear to me, and set about looking for occupation elsewhere. Soon after, when I got into the habit of going frequently to my club, I fell in with Sir Thomas Elgin; and although we never became intimate, we always exchanged a friendly greeting, and occasionally a cigar. Sir Tom, as they call him, is an excellent horseman, and used to ride every morning in the Bois. I had also been recommended to take similar exercise, and the result was that we frequently met in the Avenue des Poteaux. We

wished each other good morning, and at times we cantered for a while side by side. I am rather reserved; but Sir Tom is even more so; and it scarcely seemed as if our acquaintance would ripen into anything better, when an accident brought us together. One morning while we were returning from a ride, Sir Tom's mare, a vicious brute, suddenly shied, and with such effect that, despite his horsemanship, he was thrown. I alighted instantly, with the view of assisting him to remount, but he could not rise. As you know, it requires something serious to disable an Englishman. However, as we afterwards discovered, he had not merely sprained an ankle, but dislocated the knee of the same leg as well. There was no one at hand, and I was feeling seriously embarrassed, when two soldiers fortunately came up. One of them procured a cab, and we took Sir Tom home. He was suffering badly, and groaned a good deal. We had great difficulty in removing him from the vehicle, and getting him up-stairs. I was walking ahead, and had just reached the second floor, when a door suddenly opened, and a young girl appeared on the threshold. The noise on the stairs had startled her, and she had hastened out of her room, only partially dressed. A *fichu* was loosely thrown over her shoulders, and her hair streamed from under a coquettish morning cap. Scarcely had she perceived Sir Tom in the servants' arms, than—imagining no doubt that he was seriously wounded, or perhaps even worse—she turned as pale as death and fell forward. She would have been precipitated headforemost down the stairs, if I had not fortunately caught her in my arms. She had fainted, and for a moment I held her leaning on my shoulder, and feeling her heart beat—almost imperceptibly—against mine. Her cap had fallen, and her golden locks streamed around me, nearly touching the floor. All this scarcely lasted a minute; for, on recovering her senses, and finding herself in a man's arms, she looked extremely distressed, and slipped away into her room."

The count paused. The recollection of this incident so unnerved him, that his frame quivered, his voice faltered, and his cheeks turned pale under their thick coating of rouge. He did not attempt to conceal his emotion. "I am a poor old fellow," he continued; "and between you and I, Daniel, I may tell you that the fair sex have not,—well, not exactly—proved unkind to me. In fact, I fancied that love and passion had no more secrets for me. Well, I was mistaken, for never in my life had I experienced such a sensation as that which seized hold of me while Miss Brandon was reclining in my arms." So saying, M. de Ville-Handry produced a cambric handkerchief, saturated with opoponax, and wiped his forehead—doing so, of course, with infinite care, so as not to damage his valet's artistic work. "I trust," he continued, "that you will soon be better acquainted with Miss Brandon. After once seeing her, I was seized with a longing to see her again. Fortunately I had a convenient pretext for calling, and, in fact, the very next day I was at her door again, inquiring after Sir Thomas Elgin. I was shown into his room, and found him reclining on an invalid's chair, with his leg bandaged. Beside him sat an elderly lady, to whom I was introduced, and who was none other than Mrs Brian. They received me most politely, but not without some reserve; and although I staid longer than is ordinary under such circumstances, I did not see a sign of Miss Sarah. She was equally invisible on subsequent occasions, and I positively came to the conclusion that she purposely avoided me. However, one day, Sir Tom, who was rapidly improving, expressed a desire to take a short turn in the Champs Elysées.

I offered him my arm, which he accepted; and as we were returning, he asked me if I would be kind enough to take pot-luck with him."

However important this information might be for Daniel, he had for some time been lending an inattentive ear to the count's story, for he had fancied he heard a strange faint noise which he could not account for. At last on looking round he divined the cause. His bedroom door, which he had carefully closed after pushing M. de Brévan into the inner apartment, was now ajar. No doubt Maxime, tired of confinement and excited by curiosity, had opened it so as to listen to M. de Ville-Handry's narrative."

The count, however, was still quite ignorant of M. de Brévan's presence. "So," said he, "I was to see Miss Brandon again. Upon my word I was less excited on the day I made my first speech. However, as you are aware, I have some little power over myself; and I had already recovered my calmness, when Sir Tom confessed that he would have invited me long before, but for the fear of offending his young relative, who had declared she would never meet me again. I was grieved, and asked how I had offended her. Whereupon Sir Tom, with his usual composure, remarked, 'Oh, she doesn't blame you, but herself, on account of that ridiculous scene the other day.' Do you hear, Daniel, he called that adorable scene which I have just described to you, 'ridiculous!' It is only English and Americans who can perpetrate such absurdities. I have since found out that they had to insist with all their authority to induce Miss Brandon to receive me; but she had tact enough not to let me divine it when I was formally presented to her, just before dinner. No doubt, she blushed deeply; but we shook hands cordially enough, and to put me at my ease, she cut my first formal compliment short with the remark, 'You are Tom's friend, so I am sure we shall be friends as well.' Ah! Daniel! you admired Miss Brandon at the theatre; but you ought to see her at home. Elsewhere she sacrifices herself to the requirements of society, but at home she can venture to be herself. We soon became friends, as she had foretold; so soon, in fact, that I was quite surprised when I found her speaking to me like an old acquaintance. I soon discovered the reason of this. Our French girls, my dear Daniel, are charming, no doubt; but they are generally frivolous, badly informed, and care for nothing else but balls, novels, and fashion. But with American young ladies matters are different. They are so brought up that at an early date their minds occupy themselves with the same subjects that fill their parents' thoughts,—politics, parliamentary debates, industrial topics, scientific discoveries, and so on. A man like myself, known abroad and at home during a long political career of some distinction, could not be a stranger to Miss Brandon. My earnestness in defending causes which I considered just had often excited her enthusiasm; and moved by my speeches, which she was in the habit of reading, she had frequently thought of the speaker. I think I can hear her now exclaiming, with that crystal voice of hers, 'Oh, yes! I knew you, count; I knew you long ago. And many a day I wished I were a friend of yours, so that I might say to you, Well done, sir! your policy is grand and noble!' And it is evident she had done so, for she remembered a number of passages from my speeches, which I had forgotten myself, and quoted them almost literally. At times, I was amazed at some peculiarly bold thoughts she expressed; and, when I complimented her upon them, she broke out into loud laughter, exclaiming,—'Why, count, those are your own ideas: I got them from you. You said so and so on such and such an occasion.' And when, on returning home at night-time,

I looked into my papers to ascertain the truth, I almost always found that Miss Brandon had been right. Need I tell you after that, that I soon became a constant visitor at the house in the Rue du Cirque? But what I must tell you is, that I found there the most perfect and purest happiness I have ever known upon earth. I was filled with respect and admiration when I noted the rigid morality of the household, blended with the heartiest cheerfulness. I spent my happiest hours there between Mrs Brian, the Puritan lady,—so strict as regards herself, so indulgent for others; and Sir Thomas Elgin, the noblest and best of men, who under an appearance of icy coldness conceals the warmest and kindest of hearts."

What was the Count de Ville-Handry aiming at? or had he no aim at all? Was it his object merely to make Daniel the confidant of his amazing love romance? Or did he simply yield to the natural desire of all lovers, to find an outlet for their exuberant feelings, and talk of their passion even when they know that indiscretion may compromise success? Daniel asked himself these questions; but the count did not allow him time to reflect and answer them. After a brief pause, he roused himself, and suddenly changing his tone: "I guess what you think, my dear Daniel. You say to yourself, 'The Count de Ville-Handry was in love.' Well, I assure you you are mistaken."

Daniel started from his chair, and, overcome by amazement, exclaimed, "Can it be possible?"

"Exactly so: I give you my word of honour. The feelings which attracted me towards Miss Brandon were the same that bound me to my daughter. But as I am a shrewd observer, and have some knowledge of the human heart, I could not help being struck by a change in Miss Brandon's features, and especially in her manner. After treating me with the greatest freedom and familiarity, she suddenly became reserved, and almost cold. It was evident to me that she was embarrassed in my presence. Our constant intercourse, far from uniting us more closely, seemed to frighten her. You may guess how I interpreted this change, my dear Daniel. But, as I have never been a conceited man, I thought I might be mistaken. I watched her carefully, and soon realised that, if on my side I only loved Miss Brandon with a fatherly affection, I had yet succeeded in inspiring her with a more tender sentiment."

In any other person, this senile self-conceit would have appeared intensely absurd to Daniel: in Henriette's father, it pained him deeply. The count noticed his downcast look, and, misinterpreting it, asked him, "Do you doubt what I say?"

"Oh, no, sir!"

"Very well, then. I can assure you, at all events, that the discovery so disturbed and surprised me, that for three days I could not think calmly over the matter, nor decide what I ought to do. Still, it was necessary I should make up my mind. I did not for a moment think of abusing the confidence of this innocent child; and yet I knew, I felt, she was absolutely in my power. But no! It would have been infamous for me to repay excellent Mrs Brian's hospitality, and noble Sir Tom's kindness, with such ingratitude. On the other hand, must I necessarily deny myself those pleasant visits to the house in the Rue du Cirque, and break with friends who were so dear to me? I thought of that as well; but I had not the courage to do so." He hesitated for a moment, trying to read Daniel's real opinion in his eyes. Then after a pause, he added gravely, "It was then only that the idea of marrying her occurred to me."

Daniel had been expecting the fatal announcement, so that however heavy the blow might be, he was prepared for it. He did not move. His apparent indifference seemed to surprise the count, who, with an expression of discontent, curtly repeated, "Yes, I thought of marrying her. You will say, 'It was a serious matter.' I knew that only too well; and for this reason I did not decide the question in a hurry, but weighed the *pros* and *cons* most carefully. I am not one of those weak men, as I am sure you know, who can easily be hoodwinked, and who fancy they alone possess the secret of perennial youth. No, no; I know myself, and am fully aware, better than anybody else, that I am approaching maturer years. This was, in fact, the first objection that arose in my mind. But then I answered it triumphantly by the fact, that age is not a matter to be decided by one's certificate of birth, for, in point of fact, we are only as old as we appear to be. Now, thanks to an exceptionally sober and peaceful life, forty years of which were spent in the country—thanks, moreover, to an iron constitution, and to the extreme care I have always taken of my health, I possess a—what shall I say?—a vigour which many young men, who can hardly drag one foot after the other, might very well envy." So saying, M. de Ville-Handry rose to his feet, straightened his spine, and stretched out his well-shaped leg. Then, when he thought that Daniel had sufficiently admired him, he continued, "Now, what of Miss Brandon? You think, perhaps, that she is still in her teens? No, far from that! She is at least twenty-five, my dear friend; and, for a woman, twenty-five years mean—ah, ah!" He smiled ironically, as if to say that a woman of twenty-five appeared to him an old, a very old woman. "Besides," continued he, "I know how serious her disposition is, and am well acquainted with her eminent good sense. You may rely upon me when I tell you I have studied her. A thousand trifles, of no weight in appearance, and unnoticed by herself in all probability, have told me that she does not at all care for young men. She has learnt to appreciate the true value of young husbands of thirty, who are all fire and flame in the honeymoon, and who, six months later, wearied of pure and tranquil happiness, seek their delights elsewhere. It is not only of late that I have found out how truly she values what is, after all, most desirable in this world—a great name worthily borne by a true man, and a reputation that would shed new radiance upon her. How often have I heard her say to Mrs Brian, 'Above all, aunt, I want to be proud of my husband; I want to see everybody's eye sparkle with admiration and envy as soon as I mention his name, which will be mine as well; I want people to whisper around me, 'Ah, how happy she is to be loved by such a man!'" The count shook his head gravely, and continued in a solemn tone, "I examined myself, Daniel, and found that I answered all Miss Brandon's expectations; and the result of my meditations was, that I should be a madman to allow such happiness to escape me. Accordingly, having firmly made up my mind, I went to Sir Thomas Elgin to acquaint him with my intentions. I cannot describe to you his amazement. 'You are joking,' he said at first, 'and that grieves me deeply.' But when he saw that I had never spoken more seriously in my life, he, usually so phlegmatic, became perfectly furious, and I fell from the clouds when he told me outright that he meant to do all he could to prevent such a match. I had to use all my skill to make him change his mind. All I could obtain from him, after more than two hours' discussion, was a promise that he would remain neutral, and would leave Mrs Brian the responsibility of refusing or accepting my offer."

The worthy count laughed as he spoke—laughed most heartily—recalling no doubt his discussion with Sir Tom, and the diplomatic skill he had evinced. “So I went to Mrs Brian,” he resumed. “Ah! she did not mince matters. At the first word, she called me—God forgive her—an old fool, and plainly told me that I must never show myself in the Rue du Cirque again. I insisted; but in vain. She would not even listen to me, the old Puritan; and, when I became pressing, she dropped me a solemn courtesy, and left me alone in the room, looking foolish enough, I am sure. For the time I could only retire, and I did so, hoping that her interview with her niece might induce her to change her mind. Not at all, however, for when I called at the house the next day, the servants said that Sir Tom was out, and that Mrs Brian and Miss Brandon had just left for Fontainebleau. The day after, the same result; and so on for a whole week. I was growing more and more restless, when one morning a *commissionaire* brought me a letter. It was Miss Brandon who wrote. She asked me to be in the Bois de Boulogne, near the cascade, at four o’clock that very afternoon, adding, that she was going out riding with Sir Tom, and would find a means to escape from him and meet me. As a matter of course, I was punctual; and a few minutes after my arrival I perceived her riding towards me at full speed. She had scarcely reached my side than she exclaimed, ‘They are watching me so jealously, that I could not write to you till to-day. I am deeply wounded by this want of confidence, and cannot endure it any longer. Here I am, carry me off, let us go!’ Never, Daniel, never have I seen her look more marvellously beautiful than she looked at that moment. She was flushed with excitement and the rapid ride; her eyes shone with courage and passion, and her lips trembled. ‘I know I am ruining myself,’ she continued, ‘and you as well—you will probably despise me. But never mind! Let us be gone!’” The count paused, overcome with excitement; but at last recovering himself, he continued—“To hear a beautiful woman tell you that! Ah, Daniel! such an experience alone is worth a man’s whole life. And yet I had the courage, mad as I was, to speak to her words of reason. Yes, I had the courage, and almost fabulous control over myself, to conjure her to return home. She began to weep, and accused me of indifference. But I had discovered a way out of the difficulty, and rejoined, ‘Sarah, go home. Write me what you have just told me, and I am sure I shall compel your friends to grant me your hand.’ She did so, and then what I had foreseen came to pass. In the face of such proof of what they called our madness, Sir Tom and Mrs Brian did not dare to oppose our plans any longer. After some little hesitation, and imposing certain honorable conditions, they said to Sarah and myself, ‘Well, as you are determined—go and get married.’”

This is what the Count de Ville-Handry called “chance.” The whole chain of circumstances which he himself recorded, from Sir Tom’s accident and Miss Brandon’s fainting fit, the meeting near the cascade, and the suggested elopement—even the sudden enthusiasm of a frivolous young woman for his political opinions, and her amazing knowledge of his speeches—all seemed to him perfectly natural and simple. Daniel was thunderstruck. He could not possibly understand how a man like the count could be so perfectly blind to the intrigue that was going on around him. Limited, however, as were M. de Ville-Handry’s powers of perception, he none the less noted Daniel’s preoccupation. “Come,” said he, “what are you thinking of? Let us hear your opinion. Tell me frankly that you suspect Miss

Brandon of trying to catch me in her snares, or, at least, of self-interest."

"I do not say so," stammered Daniel.

"No, but you think so; and that is worse. Well, I think I can convince you of your mistake. What do you think Miss Brandon would gain by marrying me? A fortune, no doubt. I have only one word to reply, but that is sufficient: Miss Brandon is richer than I am myself." Even if this were true, Daniel knew well enough from Maxime's account how the adventuress had acquired her wealth, and he could not repress a shudder, which the count noticed with no little irritation. "Yes, richer than I am," he repeated. "The oil-wells she has inherited from her father bring her in, one year with the other, some two hundred thousand francs annually, and this in spite of their being sadly mismanaged. If they were properly attended to, they would yield three, four, or five times as much, or even more. Sir Tom has proved to me that they are an almost inexhaustible source of wealth. If petroleum was not fabulously profitable, how would you account for the oil-fever with which these cool, calculating Yankees have suddenly been seized, and which has made even more millionnaires than the gold-fever in California and the Territories? Ah! there is something to be made in that direction yet, and something grand, if one only disposed of a large capital." He was growing excited, and forgetting himself—almost to the point of revealing some hidden secret; but managing to recover himself in time, he continued more calmly, "However, enough of that. I trust your suspicions are removed. You may tell me, perhaps, that Miss Brandon takes me because she can do no better. Mistaken again, my friend. At this very moment she is called upon to choose between me and a much younger man than myself, a man whose fortune, moreover, is larger than mine—Count Gordon-Chalusse."

Why was it that the Count de Ville-Handry seemed to appeal to Daniel, and to plead his cause before him? Daniel did not even think of asking himself the question, for his mind was in a state of utter confusion. Still, as the count insisted on having his opinion, repeatedly asking, "Well, do you see any other objection?" he at last forgot Maxime's prudent warning, and said in a troubled voice, "No doubt, count, you know Miss Brandon's family?"

"Certainly! Do you think I would buy a cat in a bag? Her excellent father was a model of honesty."

"And—her previous life?"

The count started from his chair, and casting a savage glance at Daniel exclaimed, "Oh, oh! I see that one of those rascally slanderers, who have tried to tarnish the honour of the noblest and chastest of women, has already been at work here, anticipating my communication to you, and repeating the infamous calumnies I myself have heard of. You must give me the name of the scoundrel." Daniel instinctively turned towards the door, behind which M. de Brévan was listening. Perhaps he expected him to appear; but Maxime did not stir. "Sarah's previous life!" continued the count, "I know every hour of it; and I can answer for it as for my own. The darling! Before consenting to be mine, she insisted upon my knowing everything; yes, everything, without reserve or boastfulness; and I know what she has suffered. Did they not actually say she had been the accomplice of a wretched thief, a cashier, who robbed his employers? Did they not say she had driven a foolish young man, a gambler, to commit suicide; and that she had watched him destroy himself? Ah! you have

only to look at Miss Brandon to realise that these vile stories were concocted by malicious enemies and rivals. And look here, Daniel, you may believe me: whenever you see people calumniate a man or woman, you may rest assured that that man or woman has, somehow or other, wounded or humiliated some mean, envious fool, who cannot endure his or her superiority in point of fortune, rank, beauty, or talent."

M. de Ville-Handry had actually recovered his youthful energy in defending his inamorata. There was a brighter gleam in his eyes, a stronger ring in his voice, and more animation in his gestures. "But no more of that painful topic," he said, "let us talk seriously." And rising again from his chair, and leaning against the mantelpiece in front of Daniel, he continued, "I told you that Sir Tom and Mrs Brian insisted upon certain conditions before they consented to our marriage. One of them is, that Miss Brandon is to be received by my relations as she deserves to be, not only respectfully, but affectionately, even tenderly. Now, so far as this point is concerned, I have some remote cousins, who, having nothing to expect from me when I die, do not trouble themselves any more about me than I trouble myself about them. But I have a daughter; and there is the danger. I know she is distressed at the idea of my marrying again. She cannot bear the idea of another woman taking her mother's place, bearing her name, and ruling in my house!" Daniel at last realised what he was to understand by that unsuccessful appointment which had procured him the pleasure of the Count de Ville-Handry's visit. "Now," resumed the latter, "I know my daughter. She is her mother over again,—weak, but obstinate beyond endurance. If she has taken it into her head to receive Miss Brandon uncivilly, she will do so, notwithstanding all she has promised me, and there will be a terrible scene. In this case, if Miss Brandon consents, in spite of everything, to carry out our present intentions, my house will become a perfect hell upon earth. She—my wife—would no doubt suffer terribly. Now, the question is, whether I have sufficient influence over Henriette to bring her to reason. I scarcely think so; but the influence I may not possess may be at the command of a very honourable young man I know; and that man is you." Daniel flushed scarlet. It was the first time that the count spoke so clearly. "I have never disapproved of my poor wife's plans," resumed M. de Ville-Handry; "and the proof is, that I have allowed you to pay your attentions to my daughter. But now I make this condition: if my daughter behaves as she ought towards Miss Brandon,—that is, as a tender and devoted sister, then, six months after my marriage, there shall be another wedding at my house." Daniel was about to speak; but the count prevented him, continuing—"No, not a word! I have shown you the wisdom of my decision, and you may act accordingly." He had already put on his hat and opened the door, when he added, "Ah! one thing more. Miss Brandon has asked me to present you to her to-night. She wants to speak to you. Come and dine with me; and after dinner we will go to the Rue du Cirque. Now, pray think of what I have told you and good-bye!"

VII.

THE COUNT DE VILLE-HANDRY had hardly closed the door when M. de Brévan rushed out of his hiding-place. "Was I right?" he exclaimed.

But Daniel did not hear his friend, whose very presence he had forgotten.

Overcome by the great effort he had made to conceal his feelings, he had sunk on to a chair, where he still remained hiding his face in his hands, and mournfully repeating, "The count has lost his mind altogether; we are ruined."

His grief was so intense, that M. de Brévan was plainly touched. After looking at him compassionately for some minutes, he touched his shoulder, exclaiming, "Daniel!"

This time the young officer heard his friend, and starting like a man suddenly roused from slumber, he recalled what had just happened, and asked, "You heard what he said, Maxime?"

"Yes, I did—in fact I did not lose a single word or gesture. But do not blame me for my indiscretion. It enables me to give you some friendly advice. You know I have paid dearly for my experience." He hesitated for a moment, as if at a loss how to express himself, and then curtly asked: "You love Mlle. de Ville-Handry?"

"More than life itself: don't you know I do?"

"Well, if that is so, give up all thoughts of useless resistance; induce Mlle. Henriette to do as her father wishes; and persuade Miss Brandon to let your wedding take place a month after her own. But ask for special pledges. Mlle. de Ville-Handry may suffer somewhat during the month's interval; but, on the morrow of your wedding you will carry her off to your own home, and leave the old man to his amorous folly."

This suggestion disclosed a new prospect for Daniel. "I had not thought of that," said he.

"It is all you can do."

"Yes; no doubt it is the course that prudence would advise,—but in following it should I act honourably?"

"Oh, honour! honour!"

"Would it not be wrong for me to abandon the poor old fellow to the mercy of Miss Brandon and her accomplices?"

"You will never be able to rescue him, my dear boy."

"Still, I ought at least to try. You yourself thought so yesterday, and even this morning, not two hours ago."

Maxime could scarcely conceal his impatience. "I did not know then what I know now," he replied.

Daniel had risen, and was walking up and down the room, answering his own objections, rather than M. de Brévan's—"If I were the only person concerned in the matter," said he, "I might perhaps capitulate. But Henriette would never do so. Her father says, she is as weak as a child; but I fully believe that, in a moment of emergency, she would shew great energy and will."

"What need is there for you to tell her at all who Miss Brandon is?"

"I have pledged my word of honour to tell her everything."

M. de Brévan shrugged his shoulders, as much as to say, "Such folly is unpardonable"—and raising his voice, he exclaimed, "In that case, my poor fellow, you had better give up your Henriette altogether."

"Not yet, my friend, not yet!" rejoined Daniel, who had seemingly mastered his despair. "An honest man who defends his life and honour is pretty strong after all. It is true I have little or no experience, but I have you, Maxime; and I know I can always count upon you."

Daniel did not seem to notice that M. de Brévan, who the other evening had been all fire and energy, was now perceptibly cooler, as if—conscious of having made a mistake—he wished to retrace his steps. "Certainly,

you may count upon me," he replied quietly; "but what on earth can be done?"

"Well, what you said yourself. I shall call upon Miss Brandon, and watch her. I shall dissemble, and gain time. If necessary, I shall employ private detectives, and investigate her antecedents. I shall try to interest some high personage in my favour,—my minister, for instance, who is very kind to me. Besides, I have an idea."

"Ah!"

"Suppose we could find that unlucky cashier, whom you told me about, and who you fancy is still alive. What was his name? Oh, Malgat! An advertisement inserted in all the leading newspapers of Europe would, no doubt, reach him; and the hope of vengeance—"

M. de Brévan's cheeks reddened perceptibly; and with strange vehemence he exclaimed, "What nonsense!" Then in a more collected tone he added, "You forget that Malgat has been sentenced to several years' penal servitude, and that he will take your advertisement to be a police trick, and consequently conceal himself more carefully than ever."

But Daniel was not so easily shaken. "Well, I will think it over," he replied. "Perhaps something might be done with that young man whom M. de Ville-Handry mentioned—Count Gordon-Chalusse. If I thought he were really anxious for Miss Brandon's hand—"

"I have heard it said, and I am sure it's true, that young Gordon is a perfect idiot, mad with vanity, and determined on anything to heighten his notoriety. As Miss Brandon is very famous, he would marry her in the same way as he would pay a couple of hundred thousand francs for a race horse."

"And how do you account for Miss Brandon's refusal?"

"Why, by the young fool's character. She's very well aware that after three months' matrimony Gordon would decamp, and that there would be a legal separation before the year was over. And besides, Gordon is only five-and-twenty, and likely to live a good deal longer than a lover who is already nearly out of his sixties."

Maxime's intonation imparted terrible significance to his words; and Daniel turned pale and stammered,—"*Heavens!* Do you think Miss Brandon could—"

"Could do anything, most assuredly,—except, perhaps, get into trouble with the police. I have heard her say that only fools employ steel and poison." As he spoke, a strange smile crossed M. de Brévan's lips; and he added, "It is true there are other means—less prompt, perhaps, but much safer—by which one may get rid of troublesome people. You ask what they are? Why, the same no doubt that she employed to get rid of poor Kergrist and Malgat,—purely moral means, based upon her thorough knowledge of her victims' characters, and her own infernal power over them."

Daniel tried in vain to obtain more positive information from his friend. De Brévan answered him evasively; perhaps because he did not dare to speak out freely, and reveal his real thoughts; or, perhaps, because it came within his plans to content himself with adding this last terror to all Daniel's other apprehensions. Maxime's embarrassment, unmistakeable a moment ago, had now quite disappeared, as if he had come to some final decision after long hesitation. He who had advised all kinds of concessions now suggested the most energetic resistance, and seemed confident of success. When he at last left Daniel, he had made the young officer

promise to keep him hourly acquainted with whatever happened, and, above all, to try every means in his power to unmask Miss Brandon. "How he hates her!" ejaculated Daniel when he was alone, and in his simplicity he again asked himself whether, after all, his friend's hatred might not be rather far fetched. Champcey could understand well enough that a young and beautiful woman, actuated by covetousness and ambition, might feign a love that she did not really feel for a foolish old millionaire, with the view of inducing him to marry her—bartering, as it were, her charms for gold. Such things happen every day in modern society, and are accepted quite naturally by people, said to be respectable. The same woman might, moreover, surmise that she would speedily become a widow, thus regaining her liberty, with the agreeable addendum of a large fortune. Such surmises are equally frequent. But it was a more serious thing to conclude that she would deliberately hasten her aged husband's death by criminal means. Maxime's prediction so seriously disturbed Daniel, that he remained for hours in gloomy meditation—forgetting alike his official duties and the count's invitation to dinner. At nightfall, however, his servant roused him from his reverie, and he suddenly remembered that he had not kept his promise, to acquaint Henriette with whatever he discovered concerning Miss Brandon.

Mlle. de Ville-Handry had passed a sleepless night and anxious day, wondering why Daniel did not return, starting at each footstep on the stairs, at each rumble of wheels in the street below. She was positively thinking of going to his rooms in the Rue de l'Université, when a servant entered, and announced "M. Champcey." Starting to her feet, she was about to greet her dilatory lover in reproachful strains, when, glancing at his sad face, she realised that he on his side must have suffered, and that some great misfortune had befallen them both. "Ah," she exclaimed, "Your fears were well grounded!"

"Yes—unfortunately," answered Daniel.

"Tell me everything," she replied.

"Your father called on me this morning," answered the young officer, "and offered me your hand, providing I obtained your consent to his marriage with Miss Brandon." And then, faithful to his promise, he repeated everything he had learnt from Maxime and the count, merely omitting such details as were unfit for Henriette's ears, and the last and most terrible charge which M. de Brévan had preferred against the adventurer.

"To think of my father marrying such a creature," exclaimed Henriette when he had finished. "It is impossible for me to sit still and smile, when such ruin and disgrace threaten us. I shall oppose Miss Brandon with all my strength and energy."

"Nevertheless, she may succeed," remarked Daniel.

"Succeed! Well, at all events, she shall never conquer me. My hand shall never touch her's, and if my father persists, I will seek refuge in a convent."

"M. de Ville-Handry would never consent to that."

"Then I will shut myself up in my room, and never leave it again. I scarcely think they will drag me out by force."

She spoke with an earnestness and a determination which nothing seemed likely to shake or break; and yet Daniel was oppressed with sad presentiments. "Miss Brandon will not come here alone," said he.

"Who will come with her, then?"

"Why, her relatives—Sir Thomas Elgin and Mrs Brian. O Henriette, my love, to think that you should be exposed to the persecution of such odious beings."

"I am not afraid of them," replied Mlle. de Ville-Handry, proudly raising her head; and in a gentler tone she added, "Besides, won't you always be near me, to advise and protect me in case of danger?"

"I? Why, one of their first efforts will be to try and part us."

"Yes, I know well enough that the house will no longer be open to you."

"Well, then?"

Blushing to the roots of her hair, and averting her glance, Henriette resumed, "If they force me to do so, I must act as a girl in ordinary circumstances never should do. I will meet you secretly. I will win over one of my maids, the most discreet I can find, and through her we may correspond."

This arrangement did not seemingly relieve Daniel from his apprehensions, for with quivering lips he asked, "And then?"

Henriette understood his embarrassment and timidity. "I thought," said she, "that you would be willing to wait until the law authorises me to make my own choice; and when that day comes, I promise you, Daniel, that whatever my father may say, I will ask you for your arm, and in broad daylight leave this house never to re-enter it again."

Seizing his true love's hand and carrying it to his lips, Daniel repeated with rapture, "Ah, you have restored me to hope."

Then seated side by side they discussed their plans, and Daniel explained that he intended to make one last effort to avert this marriage; asking Henriette to hide her intentions from her father until the result of this final scheme was known. After infinite pleading, she at last consented. "I will do what you desire," she said; "but believe me, all your efforts will be in vain."

She was interrupted by the Count de Ville-Handry's arrival. He kissed his daughter, said a few words about the weather, and then, drawing Daniel into a bay window, eagerly asked, "Have you spoken to her?"

"Yes; Mlle. Henriette wants a few days to consider."

"That's absurd," replied the count with a look of displeasure. "Nothing could be more ridiculous. But, after all, it's your own business, my dear Daniel. And, if you want any additional motive, I will tell you that my daughter is very rich. She will have more than two million francs of her own."

"Sir!" exclaimed Daniel indignantly. But the Count de Ville-Handry had already turned upon his heels; and the butler was at the door, announcing that dinner was on the table.

Although the repast was excellent in itself, it was a very dull matter, indeed, so far as conversation was concerned. However, it was promptly despatched; for the count seemed to be sitting on needles, and looked at his watch every other minute. Coffee had just been handed round, when, turning to Daniel, he exclaimed, "Let us make haste. Miss Brandon expects us." And scarcely allowing the young officer time to take leave of Henriette, he led him to his carriage, pushed him inside, jumped in afterwards, and called out to the coachman, "To Miss Brandon's, in the Rue du Cirque! Drive fast!"

VIII.

THE coachman knew well enough what the count meant when he said, "Drive fast!" On such occasions he urged his horses into their very sharpest trot, and, but for his great skill, many a foot-passenger would have been run over. This evening, however, the count twice lowered the window to call out, "Don't drive at a walk!" The fact is, that, in spite of his efforts to assume a grave air, such as befits a statesman, he was as impatient, and as vain of his love, as a young undergraduate hurrying to his first rendezvous. During dinner he had been sullen and silent; but now he was talkative, and chatted away, without at all troubling himself concerning his companion's silence. Daniel did not even listen. Enconced in a corner of the well-padded vehicle, he was trying his utmost to control his feelings, for the idea of finding himself face to face with this formidable adventuress, Miss Brandon, was strangely exciting him, and he knew that he needed to retain all his composure and energy.

Ten minutes sufficed to drive the whole distance to the Rue du Cirque. "Here we are," cried the count, who, without waiting for the footman to assist him in alighting, sprang out of the vehicle, and impetuously raised the knocker garnishing the door of Miss Brandon's residence. The house was not one of those pretentious buildings which attract the attention of passers by. Seen from the street, it appeared singularly modest and unassuming, but then neither the garden nor the stables and carriage-house were visible. A servant took the visitors' overcoats, and escorted them to the first floor. Scarcely had they reached the landing, than the count paused and stammered as if his breath were failing him,—"*There, there!*"

Daniel was at a loss to divine his meaning, but in point of fact the count wished to apprise him that this was the spot where he had held Miss Brandon in his arms on the day she fainted. However, Daniel had no time to ask any questions, for here came another servant, who, with a low bow, informed the visitors that Mrs Brian and Miss Brandon had just risen from table, and were still engaged at their toilettes. At the same time he asked them to walk into the grand drawing-room, adding that he would inform Sir Thomas Elgin of their arrival.

"All right," rejoined the count, in a tone which indicated that he considered himself perfectly at home in Miss Brandon's house, and, followed by Daniel, he at once entered the great reception-room. Evidence of Mrs Brian's puritanic tastes was here to be found on all sides. All the appointments were of great value, but they had a cold, stiff, mournful air. The furniture was singularly angular, and there was altogether a want of comfort and cosiness about the room. The clock on the mantelpiece was surmounted by a bronze group, portraying a couple of biblical personages, and the only other work of art—if such it could be called—was a huge painting, affixed to the wall, facing the fire-place. This was the full-length portrait of a man of fifty or thereabouts, attired in a fancy uniform with enormous epaulettes. He wore a plumed hat on his head; a huge sabre hung at his side, and a blue sash, into which a couple of revolvers were thrust, encircled his waist. "General Brandon, Miss Sarah's father," remarked the Count de Ville-Handry in a tone of deep respect, which positively unnerved Daniel. "As a work of art, this portrait, no doubt, leaves much to be wished for; but I am told that the likeness is excellent."

However that might be, there was certainly no resemblance between the American general's tanned features and Miss Brandon's delicate lineaments. When Daniel approached the painting, he fancied he could detect a studied and intentional coarseness of execution about it. It seemed as if the artist had purposely executed a daub; for by the side of glaring anatomical inaccuracies one noted unmistakable traces of a master's hand; for instance, one of the ears, half hid behind the hair, was admirably rendered.

However, before Daniel could draw any conclusions from this strange discovery, Sir Thomas Elgin entered the room. He was in evening dress, and looked taller and stiffer than ever in his white cravat; he walked a little lame, and leant for support on a stout cane. "What, my dear Sir Tom!" exclaimed the count, "does your leg still trouble you?"

"Oh, a great deal!" replied the honourable gentleman, with a marked English accent,—"a great deal since this morning. The doctor thinks there must be something the matter with the bone." And obeying the tendency we all have to display our ailments, he slightly drew up his trousers so as to show the bandages he wore.

The Count de Ville-Handry assumed a look of commiseration, and then, forgetting that he had introduced Daniel already the night before at the opera-house, he presented him over again. This ceremony being accomplished, he remarked, "Upon my word, I am almost ashamed to appear so early; but I knew you expected company to-night."

"Oh, only a few persons!"

"And I desired to see you for a few moments alone."

Sir Thomas Elgin smiled, or rather, he made a horrible grimace. Then caressing his whiskers, he exclaimed, "Miss Sarah has been informed of your arrival; and I heard her tell Mrs Brian that she was nearly ready. I cannot imagine how she can spend so much time at her toilet."

While the pair chatted before the fire-place,—Sir Tom stretched out in an easy-chair, and the count leaning against the mantelpiece,—Daniel withdrew to a window looking on to the court-yard and garden behind the house. With his brow resting against the cool glass, he remained in meditation. He could not understand this wound of Sir Thomas Elgin's. "Is it possible that his fall was an intentional one?" he asked himself, "or did he really break his leg? If he did so, that fainting-fit might have been natural, and not pre-arranged; but—" He was just plunging into a new train of doubt and speculation, when the noise of a carriage entering the court-yard roused him from his thoughts. He looked out. A hrougham had stopped before the back door. A lady alighted; and he could scarcely repress an exclamation of surprise, for he thought he recognized her. For a moment he remained uncertain, but she suddenly raised her head to speak to the coachman, and as she did so, the light of a lamp fell full upon her features. There could be no further doubt. This woman was Miss Brandon. She flew up the steps, and entered the house. Daniel distinctly heard the heavy door close behind her. At the opera, the night before, a single word uttered by her had sufficed to enlighten him. And now here was an unmistakable tangible fact to support his earlier suspicions. To increase the count's passionate impatience he had been told that Miss Brandon had not quite finished dressing, but was making all haste to come down to him. Not a word had been said of her absence from the house, or of her expected return. Where had she been? What new intrigue had compelled her to leave the house at such a moment? It must evidently have been something of great importance to have kept her out so late,

when, as she was bound to know, the count was waiting for her. This incident threw a flood of light on the cunning policy of these adventurers, on Sir Thomas Elgin's and Mrs Brian's clever and active complicity. Daniel now fully understood their game, and realized how the Count de Ville-Handry had been entrapped. He himself could never have escaped such snares. What skilful actors these *intriguants* were! And how perfect all their arrangements, down to the merest points of detail. The stiff puritanic elegance of the grand drawing-room was calculated to dispel many a doubt; and as for "General" Brandon's horrible portrait, it was simply a stroke of genius. Daniel no longer believed in Sir Tom's broken leg. "It is no more broken than mine," he mused, but at the same time he greatly marvelled at the honourable baronet's self-denial in consenting to wear his leg bandaged up for months, just as if it really had been injured. "To-night," he continued, "the performance will, no doubt, be specially artistic, as they expected me." Now fully enlightened, and with every doubt dispelled, the young officer composed himself for the coming battle; and fearing that his isolation and dreamy look might betray his thoughts, he returned to the fire-place, where the count and Sir Tom were still engaged in familiar conversation.

M. de Ville-Handry was just detailing his arrangements for his wedding. He meant to reside with his wife on the second floor of his mansion, for he intended dividing the first floor into two suites of apartments,—one for Sir Thomas Elgin, and the other for Mrs Brian; knowing very well that his adored Sarah would never consent to part from the dear relatives who had been father and mother to her. The last words remained in his throat: for he paused as if suddenly petrified, with his eyes starting from their sockets and his mouth wide open. Mrs Brian had entered the room, followed by Miss Brandon. On this occasion Daniel was even more impressed with the young American's beauty than on the previous night at the opera. Sarah's personal charms were, moreover, enhanced by the striking toilette she wore,—a puce coloured robe, profusely embroidered with tiny bouquets of Chinese silk, and trimmed with a long lace flounce. In her hair, as carelessly arranged as usual, she only wore a spray of fuchsia, but the crimson bells produced a charming effect as they mingled with her golden curls, and fell gracefully over the nape of her neck. Approaching the Count de Ville-Handry with a smile, and offering him her brow to kiss, she shyly asked, "Do I look well, dear count?"

The count quivered from head to foot, and had scarcely sufficient command over himself to stretch out his lips and stammer in an ecstatic tone, "Oh beautiful, too beautiful!"

"It has taken you long enough, I am sure," remarked Sir Tom severely,—"too long!" And yet he might have known that in point of fact Miss Brandon had accomplished a miracle of expeditiousness; for a quarter of an hour had not elapsed since her return to the house.

"You are an impertinent fellow, Tom," she rejoined with a girlish laugh, "and I am glad the count's presence relieves me from your eternal sermons."

"Sarah!" exclaimed Mrs Brian reprovingly.

But Miss Brandon had already turned, offering her hand to Daniel—"I am so glad you have come!" she said. "I am sure we shall understand each other admirably." She spoke these words as softly as possible; but, if he had known her better, he would have read in her eyes that her ideas had completely changed since the preceding night;—then she wished him well, now she hated him intensely.

"Understand each other?" he repeated as he bowed. "In what?"

She made no rejoinder. Indeed, their conversation was interrupted by a servant, who, opening the door, announced several of the usual visitors. It was now ten o'clock, and for an hour or so there was a constant arrival of guests. At eleven there were fully a hundred persons in the grand and small drawing-rooms, without counting the occupants of two side apartments where card tables had been set out. Some of the men who attended the adventuress's reception were not perhaps of immaculate reputations, but they all belonged to that section of society which Parisian chroniclers call "High Life"—a circle which clothes the vices and frailties of humanity in radiant garb, and which has to be carefully studied before its imperfections can be detected beneath the splendid livery of fashion. The younger men were especially remarkable for the superlative elegance of their attire, and the faultless arrangement of their hair; and the older ones, for their air of importance and endless brochettes of decorations. Those who might claim any degree of eminence, either by reason of their names or positions, were eagerly recognised by the deferential manner in which they were received. It was for the especial benefit of these more notable members of the gathering that the Count de Ville-Handry arrogantly aired his good fortune; now ordering the servants here and there, as if he had been the master of the house, and now, with mock modesty, strolling from group to group, catering for every available compliment anent Miss Brandon's beauty and his own good luck. Gracefully reclining in an easy-chair near the fire-place, Sarah played the part of a young queen surrounded by her court. But, despite the multitude of her admirers, and the constant succession of compliments she had to listen to, she never for one moment lost sight of Daniel, but watched him stealthily, seeking to divine his thoughts by the expression of his features. At one moment she even shocked her crowd of worshippers by suddenly leaving her place to ask him why he held himself so aloof, and whether he felt indisposed. Then, perceiving that he was a perfect stranger in such a gathering, she was gracious enough to point out to him some of the most remarkable among her visitors—acquainting him, indeed, so persistently with the names of her distinguished friends, that Daniel began to think she must have divined his intentions, and desired to warn him against entering on a struggle. It was, indeed, as if she had said, "You see what friends I have, and how they could defend me if you dared to attack me."

Nevertheless, he was not discouraged, for he had already estimated the difficulty of his undertaking, and the obstacles he was likely to encounter. While the conversation was progressing around him, he arranged in his head a plan, which, he hoped, would enable him to fathom this dangerous siren's antecedents. He was so preoccupied with this scheme that he did not notice that the guests were rapidly retiring, and, indeed, he was still wrapt in reverie when only a few intimate friends and a few card-players—engaged at their last game—remained of all the brilliant throng. However, he was roused at last by Miss Brandon's voice exclaiming, "Will you grant me ten minutes' conversation, M. Champcey?"

As he rose mechanically to his feet Mrs Brian interposed—exclaiming in English, "Your conduct is most improper, Sarah!" and Sir Thomas Elgin added, "Shocking!" But Miss Brandon merely shrugged her shoulders, and rejoined, "Our dear count alone would have a right to judge my conduct; and he has authorised me to do what I am doing." Then turning to Daniel, she added, "Come with me, sir."

IX.

SHE led him to a small boudoir of fresh and coquettish aspect, and which seemed almost a conservatory, so replete was it with rare and fragrant flowers. Large vases, filled with floral marvels, stood before the windows, the frames of which were overgrown with luxuriant creepers. The walls were hung with bright silk, and the light bamboo chairs covered with the same material. If the great reception-room reflected Mrs Brian's character, this charming boudoir surely represented Miss Brandon's own exquisite taste. Seating herself on a small sofa, she began, after a short pause, "My aunt was right : it would have been more proper for me to convey to you what I want to say through Sir Thomas Elgin. But, in my country girls are independent ; and, when my interests are at stake, I trust no one but myself." She spoke these words in a bewitching, ingenuous manner, or rather with the would-be cunning air of a child bent on some formidable task. "I have heard that my dear aunt went to see you this afternoon," she continued, "so no doubt you know that in less than a month I shall be the Countess de Ville-Handry ?" Daniel was surprised. In less than a month ! What could be done in so short a time ? "Now," concluded Miss Brandon, "I wish to hear from your own lips whether you see—any—objections to this match."

She spoke so frankly, that it was plain she was utterly ignorant of that article in the code of social laws which directs a French girl never to speak of matrimony without blushing to the roots of her hair. Daniel, on the contrary, was most embarrassed. "I confess," he replied with much hesitation, "that I do not understand, that I cannot possibly explain to myself, why you do me the honour—"

"To consult you ? Excuse me : I think you understand me perfectly well. Has not Mlle. de Ville-Handry's hand been promised you ?"

"The count has allowed me to hope—"

"He has pledged his word, sir, under certain conditions, and has told me everything. I speak, therefore, to the Count de Ville-Handry's son-in-law, and I repeat, Do you see any objections to this match ?"

The question was too precise to allow of any prevarication. And yet Daniel was anxious to gain time, and avoid any positive answer. For the first time in his life he uttered a falsehood, and stammered out, "I see no objection."

"Really ?"

"Really."

She shook her head as if scarcely satisfied, and then continued slowly, "If that be the case, you will not refuse me a great favour. Carried away by her grief at seeing her father marry again, Mlle. de Ville-Handry hates me without even knowing me. Will you promise me to use your influence in trying to persuade her to change her disposition towards me ?"

Never had honest Daniel Champcey been tried so hard. "I am afraid you over-estimate my influence," he answered in diplomatic fashion.

"I do not ask of you to succeed," she rejoined, giving him a sharp and penetrating glance, which made him fairly start, "only give me your word that you will do your best, and I shall be very much obliged to you. Will you give me that promise ?"

Could he do so ? The situation was so exceptional, and it was so desir-

able he should lull the enemy into security for a time, that for a moment he was inclined to pledge his word. Nay, more than inclined, for he made an effort to do so. But his lips refused to utter a false oath.

"You see," resumed Miss Brandon coldly,—"you see you were deceiving me." And, turning away from him, she hid her face in her hands, apparently overcome by grief. "What a disgrace! Great God! What humiliation!" she repeated, in a tone of bitter sorrow. But suddenly her features brightened as if with a ray of hope, and she exclaimed, "Well, let it be so. I like it all the better so. A mean man would not have hesitated at an oath, however determined he might have been not to keep it. Whilst you—I can trust you: you are a man of honour, and all is not lost yet. What is the cause of your aversion? Is it a question of money, —the count's fortune?"

"Miss Brandon!"

"No, it is not that, I see; I was quite sure it was not. What can it be, then? Tell me, sir, I beseech you, tell me!"

"What could he tell her?" Silence was his only answer.

"Ah!" ejaculated Sarah, clenching her teeth convulsively, "I understand;" and she made a supreme effort to control her sobs; but, nevertheless, big tears, resembling diamonds of matchless beauty, rolled slowly down from between her quivering eyelashes. "Yes," she said, "I understand. I understand that the infamous slanders of my enemies have reached you, and that you have believed them. You have, no doubt, been told that I am an adventuress, come from nowhere; that my father, the brave defender of the Union, exists only in the painting in the drawing-room; that no one knows whence I derive my income; that Tom, that noble soul, and Mrs Brian, a saint upon earth, are my accomplices. Confess, you have been told all that, and have believed it."

Superb in her wrath, with glowing cheeks and quivering lips, she rose to her feet, and added in a tone of bitter sarcasm, "Ah! when people are called upon to admire a noble deed, they refuse to believe in it, and only grant their praise after a rigorous inquiry; but if it is a question of slander, they dispense with all ceremony, and however monstrous the thing may appear, however improbable it may sound, they believe it instantly. They do not hesitate to repeat calumnies which utterly dishonour a woman, which kill her morally. If I were a man, and had been told that Miss Brandon was an adventuress, I should have set about ascertaining the truth. America is not so far off. I should have soon found the ten thousand men who served under Gen. Brandon, and they would have told me what sort of man their leader was. I should have visited the oil-regions of Pennsylvania, and have learnt on the spot that the petroleum wells belonging to Sir Thomas Elgin, Mrs Brian, and Miss Brandon, yield a larger revenue than many a principality."

Daniel was amazed at the candour and boldness with which Sarah approached this terrible subject. For her to speak with such energy and in such a tone, she must either be possessed of unsurpassed impudence, or else—he had to confess it—she must be innocent.

Overcome by the effort she had made, she had sunk back on the sofa, and now continued in a lower tone of voice, as if speaking to herself, "But have I a right to complain? I reap what I sowed. Alas! Tom has told me so, often enough, and I would not believe him. I was not twenty years old when I came to Paris, after my poor father's death. I had been brought up in America, where young girls know no other law but that of

their own consciences. They tell us at home that our first duty is to be truthful; but in France, young girls are, before everything else, taught how to practice hypocrisy. While we are told never to blush, except when we have done wrong, they are taught to affect prudishness under all circumstances. French people labour to save appearances: whilst we Americans aim at reality. In Philadelphia, I did everything I chose, provided I did not think it wrong, and I fancied I could do the same here. Poor me! I forgot the wickedness of the world. I went out riding alone in the morning; I went to church alone; and, if I needed anything for my toilet, I ordered the carriage, and drove out alone to buy it. I did not feel bound to cast down my eyes every time a man spoke to me, and, if he was amusing and witty, I laughed at what he said. If a new fashion pleased me, I adopted it. I committed all these crimes. I was young, rich, and popular, and these were so many more offences against the social code of Paris. The result was, that I had scarcely been here a year when people said that that wretch Malgat—" She paused as she uttered the cashier's name; and, springing to her feet, bounded towards Daniel, both of whose hands she grasped as she continued, "Malgat! Have your friends talked to you about Malgat?" And, as he hesitated to reply, she added, "Ah, answer me! Don't you see that your hesitation is an insult?"

"Well,—yes," stammered the young officer.

With a gesture of despair she raised her hands to heaven, calling God, as it were, to witness her humiliation, and asking Him for an inspiration. Then, as if with sudden resolution, she exclaimed, "But I have proofs, unimpeachable proofs, of Malgat's rascality." And, without waiting for another word, she hurried into the adjoining room.

Daniel remained motionless in the centre of the boudoir. He was positively thunderstruck; and so faultlessly did Miss Brandon pass from one emotion to the other—sounding in turn each chord of passion, that he again almost asked himself if she were really acting. "What a woman!" he murmured to himself, unconsciously repeating his friend de Brévan's words,—“What a woman! And how well she defends herself!”

But Miss Brandon had already returned, carrying a small casket of costly wood, inlaid with ivory. Resuming her seat on the sofa, she exclaimed, in a sharp, curt tone, indicative of suppressed passion, "First of all, I must thank you, M. Champcey, for your frankness, for it enables me to defend myself. I knew that I had been calumniated; but it is a difficult thing to bring slanderers to book, though, fortunately, through you I am now able to face them. May I ask you to listen to me,—for I swear to you, by my mother's memory, that you shall learn the truth—the whole truth." Pausing for a moment, she opened the casket, and rummaged among the papers it contained as if in search of some particular document. Then, with feverish haste, she continued, "M. Malgat was the cashier and confidential clerk of the Mutual Discount Society, a large and powerful banking company. Sir Thomas Elgin had some business with him, a few weeks after our arrival here, for the purpose of drawing funds he had left in Philadelphia. Malgat was very obliging, and Sir Tom, to show his appreciation, invited him to dine here. This is how he became acquainted with Mrs Brian and myself. He was a man of forty or thereabouts, of medium height, neither good-looking nor ugly, but polite, though not refined in manners. I should have paid but little attention to him if a strange expression which came at times into his little yellow eyes had not fairly frightened me. I can't explain his look to you, but it was that

of a vicious man. My impression was so strong, that I could not help telling Tom that I felt sure Malgat would turn out badly, and that it was very wrong on his part to trust him in money matters. Tom only laughed at my presentiments; and I distinctly remember that even Mrs Brian scolded me for judging a man by his mere appearance, declaring that there were very honest men in the world who had yellow eyes. I must acknowledge, moreover, that M. Malgat behaved perfectly well whenever he was here. As Sir Tom was imperfectly acquainted with Parisian customs, and had some money to invest, he asked Malgat to advise him. Whenever we received drafts on the Mutual Discount Society, he always saved us the trouble of going to cash them, and brought the money here himself. After a while, when Sir Tom took it into his head to try some small speculations on 'change, M. Malgat offered his assistance; but, in point of fact, they never had any luck." While speaking, Miss Brandon had found the papers she was looking for, and she now handed them to Daniel, saying, "If you at all doubt what I say, look at these."

The documents offered for Daniel's inspection were a dozen slips of paper, on which Malgat reported his operations at the Bourse, carried on on Sir Thomas Elgin's account, and with the latter's money. They all finished in the same fashion,—“We have lost considerably; but are bound to be more fortunate next time. There is a capital chance with such and such shares: send me all the money you can spare.” Although the purport of the missives was invariably the same, the funds alluded to varied in each letter. “It's very strange,” ejaculated Daniel, speaking rather to himself than to Miss Brandon.

“Strange? Yes, indeed!” rejoined Sarah. “But please read this other letter, which is more explicit still. Read it aloud, pray.”

So speaking, she handed Daniel a note couched in the following terms:—“Paris, Dec. 5.—Sir Thomas Elgin.—Dear Sir,—In a position of great distress, and at a loss where to turn for a helping hand, I make so bold as to write to you—a man of high honour and integrity—and confess that, to my everlasting shame, I have committed a crime. Whilst carrying on your speculations, I gave way to temptation, and speculated on my own account. The little money I possessed soon disappeared, and in my endeavours to recover it I lost my head; so that, at the present hour, I owe more than fifty thousand francs, taken from the safe of the society. Will you have pity on me? Will you be generous enough to lend me that sum? I may not be able to return it in less than six or seven years; but I will repay you, I swear it, with interest. I await your answer, like a criminal waiting for the verdict of the jury. It is a matter of life and death with me; and as you decide, so I may be saved, or disgraced forever.—A. MALGAT.” On the margin, methodical Sir Tom had noted, in his angular handwriting, “Answered immediately. Sent M. M. a cheque for 50,000 francs, to be drawn from funds deposited with the Mutual Discount Society. No interest to be paid.”

“And that,” stammered Daniel, “that is the man—”

“Whom I was charged with having turned aside from the paths of honesty; yes, sir! Now you learn to know him. But wait. You see, he was saved. It was not long before he appeared here again with his false face bathed in tears. I can find no words to convey to you his exaggerated expressions of gratitude. He refused to shake hands with Sir Thomas Elgin, because, he said, he was no longer worthy of such an honour. He spoke of nothing but devotion unto death. It is true that

Sir Tom carried his generosity to extremes. He, who is a model of honesty, and would have starved rather than touch money intrusted to his care, consoled Malgat, telling him that there were some temptations too strong to be resisted, and repeating all the paradoxical phrases which have been specially invented for the justification of thieves. Malgat had still some money of his own ; but Sir Tom did not ask him for it, for fear of hurting his feelings. He continued to invite him, and urged him to come and dine with us as formerly." Miss Brandon paused, laughing with that strange nervous laugh, which is often the precursor of an hysterical fit. Then in a hoarse voice, she continued, "Do you know, M. Champcey, how Malgat repaid all this kindness? Read this last note : it will restore me your esteem, I trust." With these words she produced yet another letter, written by Malgat to Sir Thomas Elgin.

"I deceived you," it began. "I had not merely taken 50,000 frs. from the bank, but more than 300,000. By means of false entries I had managed to conceal my defalcations until now ; but I can do so no longer. The directors have begun to suspect me : and the chairman has just told me that to-morrow the books will be examined. I am lost. I ought to kill myself, I know ; but I have not the courage to do so. I venture to ask you to furnish me with the means of escaping from France. I beseech you on my knees, in the name of all that is dear to you, for mercy's sake ; for I am penniless, and cannot even pay my railway fare as far as the frontier. Nor can I return home, for I am watched. Once more, have pity on an unfortunate man, and leave your answer with the *concierge*. I will call for it at about nine o'clock.—A. MALGAT." Not on the margin, as before, but right across the lines, Sir Thomas Elgin had laconically penned, "Answered immediately. No ! The scamp !" Daniel was too fearfully excited to speak a word ; it was as much as he could do to return Miss Brandon the letter. "We were dining alone the day that note arrived," said she, "and Sir Tom was so indignant that he forgot his usual reserve, and told us everything. For myself I could not help pitying the wretched man, and I besought Tom to furnish him with means to escape. He was inflexible ; but, perceiving my distress, he tried to reassure me by saying that Malgat would certainly not come, for he would not dare to expect an answer to such a letter." Pressing both her hands against her heart, as if to still its beating, she continued in a weaker voice, "Nevertheless he came, and, seeing his hopes disappointed, he insisted upon speaking to us. The servants allowed him to come up-stairs. Ah ! if I lived a thousand years, I should never forget that fearful scene. Feeling that all was lost, this thief, this defaulter, became positively enraged : he demanded money. At first he asked for it on his knees in humble words ; but, when he found that this plan did not answer, he rose to his feet in a perfect fury, and, with foaming mouth and bloodshot eyes, overwhelmed us with the coarsest insults. At last Tom's patience gave out, and he rang for the servants. They had to employ force to drag him out ; and, as they forced him down-stairs, he threatened us with his fists, and swore that he would be avenged."

Miss Brandon shuddered so repeatedly while she spoke, that Daniel fancied she was about to faint. But, after an effort, she seemingly mastered her weakness, and resumed her narrative in a more decided tone. "By degrees the impression caused on us all by this horrible scene faded from our minds, until we only thought of it as a bad dream. If we mentioned Malgat at all, it was only with pity and contempt ; for what could he do

to us? Nothing, you may say. Even if he dared to accuse us of some great crime, we thought no one would listen to him, and that we should never hear of it. How could we imagine that folks would question our integrity on the mere word of such a scoundrel? In the meanwhile, his crime had become known; and all the papers were full of it, adding a number of more or less reliable particulars. They exaggerated the amount he had stolen; and declared he had succeeded in escaping to England, the police having lost his traces in London. As for myself, I had nearly forgotten the whole matter. He had undoubtedly fled; but, before leaving Paris, he had schemed out the vengeance he threatened us with. I cannot say how or where he found people mean enough to serve his purposes, or even who they were; but perhaps, as Mrs Brian suggested, he contented himself with sending anonymous letters to some of our acquaintances, who did not like us, or envied us. At all events, in less than a week after his disappearance, it was reported everywhere, that I, Sarah Brandon, had been this defaulter's accomplice; and that the sums he had stolen might easily be found if my private drawers could only be searched. Yes, that is what folks said, at first in a cautious whisper, then in a louder tone, and finally openly, and before all the world. Soon the papers took the matter up. They repeated these slanders, arranging them to suit their purpose, and speaking of me with a thousand infamous insinuations. They said that Malgat had acted in the American style, and remarked that it was quite natural he should go to a foreign country, after having been associated with a certain foreign lady."

A crimson flush suffused Sarah's cheeks; her bosom heaved with emotion, and her features assumed in turn an expression of shame, indignation, resentment, and desire for revenge. "Conscious of our honesty," she resumed, "we paid no attention to these scurrilous reports. Indeed, we were as yet ignorant of them. It is true I had noticed some of our acquaintances whisper together, and smile and look at each other in a strange manner, in my presence, but I had not troubled myself as to the cause. However, one afternoon, while we were out, a paper was left at the house, and this acquainted us with the true state of things. It was a summons for me to appear before an investigating magistrate. It came like a thunderbolt. Sir Tom was so enraged that he swore I should not go. He declared he would discover my traducers, and challenge and kill everyone who repeated these abominable slanders. He insisted on going out at once, and Mrs Brian and myself were quite unable to detain him. He roughly pushed us aside, and, taking Malgat's letters, hurried out of the house. We were left in a state of suspense and anxiety till midnight, when he returned fairly exhausted. He had seen all our friends he could think of, and had everywhere been told that he was too simple to give a thought to such infamous reports: that they were too absurd to be believed." At this point of her narrative Miss Brandon nearly gave way, sobs intercepting her words; but once more she mastered her emotion, and continued, "I went the next day to the Palais de Justice, and, after being kept waiting for a long time in a dark passage, I was conducted before the magistrate in his private room. He was an elderly man, with hard features and piercing eyes, and received me as brutally as if I had been a criminal. But when I had shown him the letters you have just read, his manner suddenly changed, pity got the better of him, and I thought I saw a tear in his eye. Ah! I shall be eternally grateful to him for the words he said when I left his office,— 'Poor, young girl! Justice bows reverently before your innocence. Would

to God that the world could be made to do the same.” She paused anew, and then fixing her eyes, trembling with mingled fear and hope, upon Daniel, she added in a supplicating voice, “The world has been more cruel than justice itself; but you, sir, will you be harder than the magistrate?”

Ah! Daniel was sorely embarrassed what to answer. His brain was whirling. “Sir!” begged Miss Brandon again. “M. Champcey!” Her eyes were still fixed upon him, and he instinctively turned his head aside, feeling that, when his glance met hers, all his will and energy were, as if by a strange fascination, paralysed. “Great God!” exclaimed Miss Brandon, with grieved surprise, “he still doubts me. M. Champcey, speak, I pray you? Do you doubt the authenticity of those letters? Ah, if you do, take them; for I do not hesitate to confide them to you, although they are the only proofs of my innocence. Take and show them to the clerks who sat for twenty years in the same office with Malgat, and they will tell you the handwriting is his; that he himself signed his own condemnation when penning them. And, if that is not enough, go to the magistrate who examined me: his name is Patrigent.”

This last appeal failed, like the preceding ones, to elicit any reply from Daniel. In his confusion he had sunk on to a chair, and with his elbow resting on a small stand, and his brow on his hands, he was endeavouring to think and reason. As he remained thus, Miss Brandon rose, approached him softly, and, taking one of his hands, murmured gently, “I beseech you!” But as if suddenly electrified by the touch of this soft, warm hand, Daniel rose so hastily, that he upset the chair; and, trembling with mysterious terror, exclaimed, “Kergrist!”

Miss Brandon bounded back as if suddenly scorched by fire. From crimson her face turned livid; she darted at Daniel a glance of burning hatred. “Oh!” she murmured, “oh!” as if she could find no words to express her feelings. Was she going away? It seemed for one moment as if she thought of doing so, for she walked towards the door; but, apparently changing her mind, she abruptly turned and faced Daniel again. “This is the first time in my life,” she said, in a quivering voice, “that I condescend to justify myself against such infamous charges; and you abuse my patience by heaping insult after insult upon me. But never mind. I look upon you as Henriette’s husband; and, since I have commenced, I mean to finish.” Daniel tried to say a few words of apology; but she interrupted him,—“Well, yes; one night a young man, Charles de Kergrist,—a profligate, a gambler, crowning his scandalous life in the vilest and meanest fashion,—did come and kill himself under my window. On the morrow a great outcry arose against me, and three days later the madman’s brother, M. René de Kergrist, came to ask Sir Thomas Elgin for an explanation. But do you know what came of this explanation? Charles de Kergrist, it was shewn, had killed himself in a state of drunkenness after supper. He committed suicide because he had lost his fortune at Homburg and Baden; because he had exhausted his last resources; because his father, ashamed of his disgraceful conduct, refused to acknowledge him any longer. And, if he chose my window for his suicide, it was because he wished to satisfy a petty grievance. Looking upon me as an heiress, with a fortune that would enable him to continue his extravagant life, he had courted me, and had been refused by Sir Thomas Elgin. Finally, at the time the catastrophe occurred, I was sixty miles from here, at Tours, staying with one of Sir Tom’s friends, Mr Palmer, who deposed—” And, as Daniel looked at her with an air of utter bewilderment, she added,—“Perhaps you will ask me

for proofs of what I state. I have none to give you. But I know a man who can give you what you want, and that man is M. de Kergrist's brother; for, since those explanations, he has continued to be our friend,—one of our best friends. And he was here to-night, and you must have seen him; for he came and spoke to me while you were standing by me. He lives in Paris; and Sir Tom will give you his address."

Casting on Daniel a glance in which pity and contempt were strangely mingled, she then concluded, in her proudest tone,—“And now, sir, since I have deigned to stand here like a criminal, sit in judgment on me. Question me, and I will answer. What else have you to charge me with?”

In the exercise of judicial functions, calmness is, of all things, most requisite, and Daniel was but too conscious of his intense excitement; he knew he could not prevent his features from expressing his utter bewilderment. Hence he gave up all discussion, and simply said, “I believe you, Miss Brandon, I believe you.”

The beautiful Sarah's eyes sparkled for a moment with joy; and in a tone of voice which sounded like the echo of her heart, she said, “Oh, thank you! now I am sure you will win me Mlle. Henriette's friendship.”

Why did she mention that name? It broke the charm which had conquered Daniel. He perceived how weak he had been, and felt ashamed of himself. “Excuse me from answering that point to-night,” he replied, with sudden sternness. “I should like to consider.”

She looked at him stupefied. “What do you mean?” she asked. “Have I removed your doubts and suspicions, or not? Perhaps you wish to consult one of my enemies?”

She spoke in a tone of such profound disdain that Daniel, stung to the quick, forgot the discretion he had intended to observe, and retorted: “Since you insist upon it, Miss Brandon, I must confess that there is one doubt which you have not removed.”

“Which?”

Daniel hesitated, regretting that he had allowed those words to escape him. But he had gone too far now to retract. “I do not understand,” he replied, “how you can marry the Count de Ville-Handry.”

“Why not?”

“You are young, and I am told you are immensely rich. Now, the count is sixty-eight years old.”

She, who had been so daring that nothing seemed likely to disconcert her, now lowered her head like a timid girl fresh from boarding-school, and a crimson flush suffused not merely her face, but even her neck and arms. “You are cruel, sir!” she stammered: “the secret into which you pry is one of those which a girl hardly dares to confide to her mother.”

Daniel's eyes brightened with anticipated triumph, for he fancied he had caught her at last. “Ah, indeed!” said he ironically.

But, without wavering, Miss Brandon replied, “You wish for an explanation; well, let it be so. For your sake, I will lay aside the reserve which girls are taught to retain in such matters. I do not love the Count de Ville-Handry.” Daniel started, for this confession seemed to him the height of imprudence. “I do not love him,—at least, not with real love; and I have never allowed him to hope for such a feeling. Still, I shall be most happy to become his wife. Do not expect me to explain to you what is going on in my mind. I myself hardly understand it as yet. I can give no precise name to the feeling of sympathy which attracts me towards him. I have been captivated by his wit and kindness: his words have an indescribable

charm for me. That is all I can tell you." Daniel could scarcely believe his ears. "And," she continued, "if you must have motives of more ordinary character, I will confess to you that I can no longer endure this life, harassed as I am by such vile slander. M. de Ville-Handry's residence appears to me an asylum, where I shall bury my disappointments and sorrow, and find peace, with a position commanding respect. Ah! you need not be afraid for that great and noble name. I shall bear it worthily and nobly, and shrink from no sacrifice to enhance its splendour. You may say that I am a calculating woman. I dare say I am; but I see nothing mean or disgraceful in my hopes."

Daniel had thought he had confounded her, and it was she who crushed him by her bold frankness; for there was nothing to say, no reasonable objection to make. Fifty out of every hundred marriages in France are contracted under very similar circumstances.

"During the last two years," resumed Miss Brandon, "I have had twenty offers; and among them three or four that would have been acceptable to the daughter of a duchess. I refused them, in spite of Sir Thomas Elgin and Mrs Brian. Only yesterday, a man of twenty-five, a Gordon-Chalusse, was here at my feet. I sent him off like the others, preferring my dear count. And why?" She remained for a moment buried in thought, her eyes swimming in tears; and, answering apparently her own questions rather than Daniel's, continued,—“Thanks to my beauty, as the world calls it,—a fatal beauty, alas!—I have been admired, courted, overwhelmed with compliments. I am told that I move in the most elegant and polished society in Europe; and yet I have looked in vain for the man whose glance could, even momentarily, disturb the peace of my heart. On all sides I have met with men of similar stereotyped perfection: men whose characters have no more creases than a new coat, all equally eager and gallant: capital card-players, capital talkers, capital dancers, capital horsemen. But I had dreamed of something above the ordinary attainments of society.” She paused, and then with a gesture of energy, and eyes beaming with enthusiasm, she exclaimed, “What I dreamed of was a man of noble heart, with an inflexible will, capable of attempting what others dared not,—what, I do not know, but something grand, perilous, impossible. I dreamed of one of those ambitious men, with a pale brow, a longing look, whose eyes sparkle with genius,—one of those strong men who dictate to the multitude, and who remove mountains by the force of their will. Ah! to repay the love of such a man I would have found treasures of tenderness in my heart, which must remain unapplied, like wealth buried beneath the sea. I would have drunk deep from the cup of hope; my pulse would have kept time with the fever of his excitement. For his sake, I would have made myself small, humble, useful: I would have watched his looks for the shadow of a desire. But how proud I would have been,—I, his wife,—of his success and glory, of the reverence paid him by his admirers, and the hatred of his enemies!”

As she spoke, there was a ring in her voice that would have stirred the heart of a stoic, and the splendour of her beauty seemed to illuminate the room. Gradually, one by one, Daniel's suspicions fell to pieces. Who could have questioned the sincerity of such a defence? As if ashamed of her passing vehemence, it was in a calmer and slower tone that she continued, “Now, sir, you know me better than any other person in this world. You alone have read the innermost heart of Sarah Brandon. And yet I see you to-day for the first time in my life. And yet you are

the first man who has ever dared to speak harshly to me, harsh unto insult. Will you cause me to repent of my frankness? Surely you will not be so cruel. I know you to be a man of honour and high principles; I know how, in order to save a name which you revere, you have risked your prospects in life, the girl you love, and an enormous fortune. Yes, Mlle. de Ville-Handry has made no ordinary choice." And with a gesture of utter despondency she concluded, "And I,—I know my fate."

Then followed a pause, a terrible pause. They were standing face to face, quivering with excitement, their eyes eloquent with deep feeling.

The air was impregnated with intoxicating floral perfumes, charged as it were with all the subtle vapours of passion; and, indeed, so enervating was the atmosphere, that Daniel became almost unconscious of the surroundings: he had lost all control over his mind, the blood was rushing to his head, and his temples throbbed as if with some mysterious delirium.

"Yes," Miss Brandon began once more in a tremulous tone,—“Yes, my fate is sealed. I must become the Countess de Ville-Handry, or I am lost. And once more, sir, I beseech you to induce Mlle. Henriette to receive me like an elder sister. Ah! if I were the woman you think I am, what should I care for Mlle. Henriette and her enmity? You know very well that the count will go on at any hazard. And yet I beg,—I, who am accustomed to command everywhere. What more can I do? Do you want to see me at your feet? Here I am.” And as she said this, she really sank upon her knees; and clutching hold of Daniel’s hands, pressed them against her burning brow. “Great God!” she sighed, “to be refused by him—*by him!*”

Her hair, which had become partially loosened, streamed over Daniel’s hands. He quivered from head to foot; and, leaning forward, raised and held her, half inanimate, with her head resting on his shoulder. “Miss Brandon!” he gasped in a hoarse, low voice. They were so near each other that their breath mingled, and Daniel could feel her bosom throbbing tumultuously against his heart, and burning him as it were with its unnatural heat. Drunk, so to say, with sudden passion, oblivious of everything, he pressed his yearning lips upon those of this strange girl. But with a sudden start she drew back, and cried, “Daniel! you unhappy man!” Then bursting into tears, she stammered, “Go! I beg you, go! I ask for nothing now. If I must be lost, I must.”

With the vehemence of delirium he replied, “Your will be done, Sarah: I am yours. You may count upon me.” And then like a madman he rushed from the room, bounded down the stairs, and finding the front door open, he hurried out into the street.

X.

It was an early winter that year; there was a cold, biting wind, and the opaque clouds hung so low that it seemed as if they nearly touched the house-tops. As the blast whistled through the trees lining the Champs Elysées, and rustled among the shrubbery, Daniel feverishly hastened onward without aim or purpose—solely bent upon flight. But at last the keen wind and prolonged motion restored him to some degree of consciousness, and he realised that he was bareheaded, and scantily clothed—having left both his hat and overcoat at Miss Brandon’s house. Almost simultaneously he remembered that the Count de Ville-Handry was wait-

ing for him in the grand drawing-room, together with Sir Thomas Elgin and Mrs Brian. What would they say and think? In what an awful predicament he had placed himself! There might have been some means of escaping from this labyrinth, and now, in his folly, he had closed all outlets. It seemed as if he had had some singular, terrible dream; he was like a drunkard, suddenly sobered, and seeking to remember what he has done whilst under the influence of alcohol. One by one he recalled the emotions through which he had passed during that hour just spent with Miss Brandon—an hour of madness which would weigh heavily upon his future fate, and whose sixty minutes had for him been fraught with more experience than all his life so far. What! He had been warned, put upon his guard, fully apprized of all Miss Brandon's devices. De Brévan had acquainted him with the weird power of her eyes: and he himself had caught her that very evening openly deceiving others. And yet, despite all this, like a feeble, helpless fool, he had allowed himself to be fascinated by her. He had forgotten everything,—even his darling Henriette, his sole thought for so many years. “Fool!” he said to himself, “what have I done?”

Unmindful of the persistent blast, and of the snow now beginning to fall, he sat down on the steps of one of the houses at the end of the Rue du Cirque, and, with his elbows on his knees, he pressed his hands to his brow, as if to force his brain to suggest to him some means of salvation. He tried to retrace the various phases of his interview with Miss Brandon in order to find out how, after beginning like a battle, it had ended as a love-scene. And thus recalling to memory all she had told him in her soft, sweet voice, he asked himself if she had not really been slandered. If there was truly anything amiss in her past life, it might be that the fault rested with the equivocal personages watching over her,—Sir Thomas Elgin and Mrs Brian. What boldness she had displayed in her defence! but also, what lofty nobility! How penetrating was her accent of sincerity when she admitted that she did not love the Count de Ville-Handry with real love—adding that, until now, no man had even succeeded in quickening her pulse! Was she then of marble, delighting only in foolish vanity? No; a thousand times no! The most accomplished artist could never have spoken with that glowing convincing intonation which is the sublime gift of truth alone. Despite all Daniel's efforts, he could not forget her, and he trembled as he remembered certain words which had virtually betrayed the secret of her heart. Could she have said more pointedly, “The only man I could love is yourself?” At this thought Daniel's heart bounded with eager, unspeakable desires; for, after all, he was a man, neither worse nor better than his fellows; and there are but too many men now-a-days who would value a few hours of happiness with such a woman as Miss Brandon more highly than a whole lifetime of pure love beside a chaste and noble woman. “Still, even if she loves me,” he repeated, as his better nature regained the upper hand, “what is it to me? Can I love her—I?”

He then tried to divine what might have happened since his flight from the house. How had Miss Brandon explained his escape? How had she accounted for her own excitement? Influenced by an invincible impulse, he rose and approached the house, and ensconced in the shadow of a doorway opposite, he stood anxiously watching the windows, as if they could tell him what was going on inside. The grand drawing-room was still brilliantly illuminated, and the shadows of people passing to and fro within were cast repeatedly upon the white curtains. At one moment a man

approached one of the windows, and, after looking out, suddenly drew back; Daniel distinctly recognised him as the Count de Ville-Handry. What did it mean? Had Miss Brandon been suddenly taken ill, and were her people anxious about her? Such were Daniel's thoughts, when the *porte cochère* of the house grated on its hinges. A servant threw it wide open, and then a small brougham drawn by a single horse emerged from inside and turned rapidly towards the Champs Elysées. Before this was accomplished, however, the light of one of the lamps affixed to the gateway had illuminated the interior of the vehicle, and, as at the beginning of the evening, Daniel recognised in its occupant—Miss Brandon. The shock was so great that he staggered.

"She has deceived me!" he exclaimed, grinding his teeth with rage: "she has treated me like an imbecile, an idiot!" Then suddenly conceiving a strange plan, he added,—*"I must know where she is going at four o'clock in the morning. I will follow her."*

Unfortunately for him Miss Brandon's coachman had apparently received special orders; for he drove down the avenue as fast as the horse could go, and the animal was an admirable trotter, carefully selected by Sir Tom, who, as previously mentioned, was one of the best judges of horse-flesh in Paris. Still, Daniel was nimble; and the hope of vengeance lent him wonderful strength and speed.

"If I could only meet a cab!" he thought. But no vehicle was to be seen; so with his elbows against his sides, and husbanding his breath, he bounded after the brougham—so successfully, indeed, that for a moment he actually gained ground. When Miss Brandon reached the Place de la Concorde, he was only a few yards behind her carriage. But here the coachman touched up his horse, which suddenly increased its pace, crossed the place, and trotted swiftly up the Rue Royale. Daniel felt his breath failing him, and a stitch in his side, growing more acute every moment, impeded his further progress. He was on the point of abandoning the pursuit, when he perceived a cab approaching him from the Madeleine, the driver half-asleep on the box. Throwing himself before the horses, he cried: "Driver, a hundred francs for you if you follow that brougham!"

But the driver, suddenly roused in the middle of the street by a man with a bare head, and in evening costume, and who moreover offered him such an enormous fare, thought that some drunkard was trying to play him a practical joke, and furiously replied, "Look out, you rascal! Get out of the way, or I'll drive over you." And so saying, he whipped up his horse with such effect that Daniel would have been driven over if he had not promptly jumped aside. This incident, brief as it may seem in words, had occupied some time, and when he looked for the brougham, he perceived that it was already turning into the boulevard. It would have been arrant folly to attempt continuing pursuit. He must submit to his defeat. What could he do? It occurred to him that he might wake up Maxime, and ask him for advice. But no,—fate was against him, and he gave up the idea. He walked slowly home, and threw himself into an arm-chair, determined not to go to bed till he had found some means of extricating himself from the consequences of his folly. But he had now spent two days in a state of scarcely imaginable excitement and anxiety. He had not closed his eyes for forty-eight hours, and despite himself, he could not keep awake. Thus he fell asleep, dreaming that he was prosecuting his investigations concerning Miss Brandon's antecedents, and that he had found the right track at last.

It was broad daylight when he awoke, chilled and stiffened : for he had not changed his clothes on returning home, and his fire had gone out. His first impulse was one of wrath against himself for having slept. What ! he had succumbed so easily ?—he, a sailor, who remembered well having remained forty, and even sixty, hours on deck when his vessel was threatened by a hurricane ? Had his peaceful and monotonous office life during the last two years weakened him to such a point ?

He did not realise that the greatest physical fatigue is trifling in comparison with deep moral excitement, which at times shakes the human system to its very foundations. However, whilst he busied himself in kindling a large fire, he grew conscious that the rest had done him good. The last evil effects of his excitement the night before had passed away ; the charm that had fascinated him was broken ; and he once more felt master of all his faculties. His folly now seemed to him so utterly inexplicable, that, if he had but tasted a glass of lemonade at Miss Brandon's house, he would have been inclined to believe they had given him one of those drugs which set the brain on fire, and produce a kind of delirium. But he had taken nothing, so that he must look elsewhere for the cause of his weakness. After all the cause was nothing, it was the consequences that required his attention, and he had every reason to fear they would be fatal. Whilst he was busy speculating as to the future, his servant entered the room carrying a hat and an overcoat on his arm. "Sir," said the valet, smiling maliciously, "you forgot these things at the house where you spent the evening yesterday. A servant on horseback has just brought them, together with this letter, and is waiting for an answer."

Daniel took the letter handed to him, and for a minute or more examined the direction. The handwriting was a woman's, small and delicate, and having no affinity whatever with the hideous long angular style of penmanship which English and American ladies habitually affect. At last he tore open the envelope, whence escaped a delicate but penetrating perfume, which he had inhaled, as he well remembered, in Miss Brandon's rooms. The letter was indeed from her, and on the top of the page appeared her name, Sarah, in small blue Gothic characters. "Is it really so, O Daniel?" she wrote, "that you are entirely mine, and that I can count upon you ! You told me so to-night. Do you still remember your promises?"

Daniel was thunderstruck. Miss Brandon had told him that she was imprudence personified ; and here she gave him positive proof of it. Might not these few lines become a terrible weapon against her ? Did they not admit of the most extraordinary interpretation ? He was roused from his reverie by his servant asking, "What shall I tell the man, sir?"

"Ah, wait !" answered Daniel angrily, and sitting down at his writing-table, he penned the following lines :—"Certainly, Miss Brandon, I remember the promises you extorted from me when I was not master of myself : I remember them but too well." At this point a strange thought flashed through his mind, and he abruptly paused. What ! After being caught in the very first trap she had set for his inexperience, was he to risk falling into a second one ? He tore his unfinished letter to pieces, and, turning to his servant, exclaimed, "Tell the man I'm out ; and make haste and get me a cab !" Then, when he was once more alone, he murmured, "Yes, it is better so. It is much better to leave Miss Brandon in uncertainty. She cannot even suspect that I know of her driving out this morning. She imagines I am still in the dark ; well, let her believe it."

Still, this letter of hers seemed to presage some fresh intrigue, the idea of

which troubled Daniel exceedingly. Miss Brandon was certain of achieving her end: what more did she want? What other mysterious aim could she have in view? "Ah! I cannot make it out," sighed Daniel. "I must consult de Brévan." On his writing-table, in an unfinished state, lay the important and urgent work which the minister had entrusted to him. But the minister, the department, his position, his preferment,—all these considerations weighed nothing whatever at such a moment. After swiftly changing his clothes, he hurried down-stairs, and whilst driving to his friend's house, pondered over the surprise that Maxime would undoubtedly evince at the news he had to communicate. When Daniel reached the Rue Lafitte he found M. de Brévan standing in his shirt-sleeves before an immense marble table, covered with pots and bottles, combs, brushes, and sponges, pincers, polishers, and files, engaged, in fact, in a most elaborate toilette. If Maxime in some degree expected Daniel, he had certainly not expected him so early, for his features assumed an expression which seemed to prohibit all confidential talk. But Daniel was too preoccupied to notice this. He shook hands with his friend, sank heavily into an arm-chair, and exclaimed, "I went to see Miss Brandon last night. She made me promise all she wanted. I cannot imagine how it came about!"

"Let us hear," said M. de Brévan.

Without the least hesitation Daniel then related how Miss Brandon had taken him into her boudoir, and exculpated herself from all complicity in Malgat's defalcations by showing him the letters the wretched man had written. "Strange letters!" said he, "which, if authentic—"

M. de Brévan shrugged his shoulders. "You were warned," he said, "and yet you promised all she wanted! Don't you think she might have made you sign your own death-sentence?"

"But Kergist?" exclaimed Daniel. "Kergist's brother is her friend."

"I dare say. But do you imagine he is any cleverer than you are?"

Although he was by no means satisfied, Daniel proceeded with his narrative, describing his amazement when Miss Brandon told him that she did not really love the Count de Ville-Handry.

"Ah! ha!" exclaimed Maxime, with a loud ironical laugh. "Of course! And then she went on, telling you that she had never yet loved anybody, having vainly looked for the man she dreamed of. She so described the phoenix to you, that you asked yourself, 'What does she mean? Why, she must mean me!' And that idea tickled you prodigiously. Then she threw herself at your feet, and you raised her up; she had fainted; she sobbed like a distressed dove in your arms; and you,—well, you lost your head."

Daniel was overcome. "How could you know that?" he stammered.

Maxime could not look his friend in the face, but his voice was as steady as ever as he replied, in a tone of bitter sarcasm, "I guess it. Didn't I tell you I knew Miss Brandon? She has only one card in her hand; but it suffices; it always makes a trick."

To be deceived, and made ridiculous, is one of those misfortunes which we confess to ourselves; but it is a very different matter to hear another person relate our ill-luck, and laugh at our stupidity. Daniel could not conceal his impatience, and dryly responded, "If I have been Miss Brandon's dupe, my dear Maxime, I am so no longer, as you yourself can see."

"Ah, ah! indeed?"

"No, not in the least. And, thanks to her; for she herself destroyed my illusions."

"Pshaw!"

"Unconsciously, of course. After running away from her like a fool, I was wandering about the streets near her house, when I saw her drive away in her brougham."

"Oh, come, now!"

"I saw her distinctly. It was four o'clock in the morning, mind!"

"Is it possible? And what did you do?"

"I followed her."

M. de Brévan nearly dropped the brush with which he was polishing his finger-nails, but he mastered his confusion so promptly that Daniel did not perceive it. "Ah! you followed her," he exclaimed in a voice which all his efforts could not completely steady. "Then, of course, you know where she went."

"Unfortunately no; for she drove so fast, that, quick as I am, I lost sight of her near the Madeleine."

M. de Brévan was certainly breathing more freely as he rejoined, "How provoking, you lost a fine opportunity. However, I am by no means astonished that you are at last enlightened."

"Oh! I am so; you may believe me. And yet—"

"Well, yet?"

"Daniel hesitated, as if in fear of another sardonic smile from Maxime. However, making an effort, he resumed, "Well, I am asking myself whether all that Miss Brandon says about her childhood, family, and fortune might not, after all, be true."

Maxime assumed the expression of a sensible man who is forced to listen to a lunatic's nonsense.

"You think I am absurd," said Daniel. "Perhaps I am; but then, pray explain to me how is it that Miss Brandon, who, if she is an adventuress, must be anxious to conceal her past, has pointed out to me the very means of ascertaining everything about her, and even of learning the precise amount of her income? America is not so far off!"

M. de Brévan's face no longer expressed astonishment: he looked absolutely bewildered. "What!" cried he, "do you seriously think of undertaking a trip to America?"

"Why not?"

"Ah, my dear friend, excuse my saying it, but really you are altogether too simple for your age. What! haven't you yet been able to divine the meaning of that suggestion? And yet it is patent enough. When Miss Brandon saw you, and had taken your measure, she said to herself, 'This excellent young man is in my way, he must try a change of air a few thousand miles off.' And thereupon she suggested to you that pleasant trip to America."

After what Daniel had heard of Miss Brandon's character, this explanation sounded by no means improbable. Still, as he was not quite satisfied, he exclaimed, "Whether I go or stay, the wedding will still take place, so that she has no real interest in my being abroad. Believe me, Maxime, there is something else underneath. Besides this marriage, Miss Brandon must be pursuing some other plan."

"What plan?"

"Ah! That's what I can't find out. But, depend upon it, I am not mistaken. I need no better evidence than the fact that she wrote to me this morning."

"What! She has written to you?" exclaimed Maxime, starting up.

"Yes: and it is that cursed letter, more than anything else, that brings

me here. Just read it; and, if you can understand its meaning, you are more fortunate than I am."

M. de Brévan read the five lines of Miss Brandon's missive at a glance. "It is incomprehensible," said he, turning very pale. "A note, and such an indiscreet one too, from a woman who never writes!" Glancing at Daniel as if he wished to penetrate his innermost thoughts, he slowly added, "Suppose she really loved you, what would you say then?"

"It is hardly generous for you to make sport of me, Maxime," answered Daniel, with a look of disgust. "I may be a bit of a fool, but I am not such a fool as to be conceited to that point."

"That's no answer to my question," rejoined de Brévan; "and I repeat it. What would you say?"

"I would say, that I execrate her!"

"Oh! oh! If you hate her so bitterly, you are very near loving her."

"I despise her; and without esteem—"

"That's an old story; but it's no impediment."

"Finally, you know how fondly I love Mlle. de Ville-Haudry."

"Certainly I do: but it's not the same thing."

M. de Brévan had at last finished his careful toilet. Donning a dressing-gown, he now adjourned with Daniel into his sitting-room, where, ensconcing himself in an easy-chair, and assuming the professional air of a physician questioning a patient, he asked, "And what have you said in reply?"

"Nothing."

"That's right; and for the future I advise you to follow the same plan. Don't say a word. Can you do anything to prevent Miss Brandon from carrying out her purpose? No! Let her go on, then."

"But—"

"Let me finish. It is not only your own interest to act in this fashion, but Mlle. Henriette's interest as well. You will be inconsolable on the day you are parted; but you, yourself, will at least be free to act. Mlle. Henriette, on the other hand, will be compelled to live under the same roof with Miss Brandon; and you don't know what a stepmother can do to torture her husband's child." Daniel trembled. He had already thought of that contingency, and the idea had made him shudder. "For the present," continued de Brévan, "the most important thing is to find out how your flight has been explained. We may be able to draw our conclusions from what has been said on the subject."

"I'll try to find that out at once," replied Daniel; and, after shaking hands with Maxime, he hurried down-stairs to his cab, and bade the driver convey him as fast as possible to the Count de Ville-Haudry's mansion.

The count was at home—walking up and down his study in the most excited manner. Something serious had evidently occurred, for although it was nearly noon he had not yet entrusted himself to his valet's artistic hands. Directly Daniel was ushered into the room he stopped short, and, crossing his arms over his chest, angrily exclaimed, "Ah! here you are, M. Champcey. Well, you are behaving nicely!"

"I, count? How so?"

"How so? Who else overwhelmed Miss Sarah with insults at the very time when she was trying to explain everything to you? Who else, ashamed of his scandalous conduct, ran away, not daring to remain in the house?" What had the count been told? certainly not the truth. "And do you know, M. Champcey," he continued, "what was the effect of your brutality? Miss Brandon was seized with such a terrible nervous attack,

that they had to send the carriage for a doctor. You unlucky man, you might have killed her! Of course, I was not allowed to enter her room; but from the drawing-room even I could at times hear her painful moans and sobs. It was only at eight o'clock this morning that she grew calmer and was able to rest; and then Mrs Brian, taking pity on my grief, allowed me to see her, sleeping like an infant."

Daniel listened to this narrative in a state of amazement, stupefied, so to say, by the impudence displayed by Sir Tom and Mrs Brian, and hardly able to understand the count's astonishing credulity. "How abominable!" thought he. "Here am I acting, despite myself, as Miss Brandon's accomplice. Must I actually aid her in obtaining possession of this unlucky man?" But what could he do? Should he speak? Should he tell the count, that if he had really heard moans and sobs, they were certainly not uttered by Miss Brandon? Should he tell him that, while he was dying with anxiety, his chaste innamorata was driving about Paris, Heaven knows where and to whom? The thought of doing so occurred to Daniel. But what would have been the good of it? Would the count believe him? Most probably not. He would only increase his entanglement, which was already complicated enough. Besides, it was impossible for him to tell the whole truth and show that letter he carried in his pocket. Still, he tried to excuse himself, and began,—“Believe me, count, I am too much of a gentleman to insult a woman.”

“Oh, pray, spare me a useless rigmarole,” cried M. de Ville-Handry, rudely interrupting him. “Besides, I don’t blame you particularly. I know the heart of man well enough to realize that you did not so much follow your own inspirations as my daughter’s suggestions.” Such an idea on the count’s part was ominous, and Daniel hastily made another effort at explanation. But the count stamped his foot and fiercely cried, “No more! I mean to put a stop to all this absurd opposition at once. Am I no longer master in my own house? Am I to be treated like a servant, and laughed at into the bargain? Ah! I’ll show you all who’s the master.” Growing a trifle calmer after this outburst, he continued—“Ah, M. Champcey! I didn’t expect this from you. Poor Sarah! To think that I could not spare her such a humiliation! But it is the last; and this very day, as soon as she wakes, she shall know that all is ended. I have just sent for my daughter to tell her that the wedding-day is fixed. All the formalities are fulfilled. We have the necessary papers—”

He paused, for at this moment Henriette entered the room. “You wish to speak to me, papa?” she asked.

“Yes.”

Gracing Daniel with a sweet glance, Henriette approached the count, and offered him her forehead to kiss; but he waived her back, and assuming an air of supreme solemnity, exclaimed, “I have sent for you, my daughter, to inform you that to-morrow fortnight I shall marry Miss Brandon.” Henriette must have been prepared for something of the kind, for she did not evince any great emotion. Her feelings only betrayed themselves in her sudden pallor, and the ray of wrath which for one second shot from her eyes. “Under these circumstances,” continued the count, it is not proper or decent that you should remain a stranger to the angel who is to be your mother, and I shall therefore introduce you to her this very afternoon.”

“The young girl gently shook her head, and replied, “No!”

“What!” cried the count, flushing crimson, “You dare! What would you say if I threatened to carry you forcibly to Miss Brandon’s house?”

“I should say, father, that that is the only way to make me go there.”

Her attitude was firm, though not defiant. She spoke in a calm, gentle voice, but it was evident that she had taken an unchangeable resolution.

"Then you detest, you envy Miss Brandon?" rejoined M. de Ville-Handry, quite amazed at the audacity shewn by this usually timid girl.

"I, father? Why should I? I only know that she cannot become the Countess de Ville-Handry, after filling all Paris with evil reports."

"Who has told you so? M. Champcey, no doubt."

"Everybody has told me so, father."

"So, because she has been slandered, the poor girl—"

"I am willing to think she is innocent; but the Countess de Ville-Handry should be above suspicion." As she spoke Henriette raised herself to her full height; and then in a louder voice, she added, "You are master here, father, and can do as you choose. But I—I owe it to myself, and to my mother's memory, to protest by all the means in my power; and I shall protest."

The count stammered and stared. The blood was rising to his head. "At last I know and understand you, Henriette," cried he. "I was not mistaken. It was you who sent M. Champcey to Miss Brandon, to insult her at her own house."

"Sir!" interrupted Daniel in a threatening tone.

But the count could not be restrained; and, with his eyes almost starting from their sockets, he continued,—“Yes, I read your innermost heart, Henriette. You are afraid of losing a part of your inheritance.”

Stung by this insult, Henriette rejoined, "But don't you see, father, that it is this woman who wants your fortune, and that she does not love you, and cannot do so."

"Why, if you please?"

The Count de Ville-Handry had asked this question of his daughter once before, and in almost the same words. Then she had not dared to answer him; but now, insulted by a woman she despised, and carried away by her feelings, she momentarily forgot all filial respect. Grasping her father's arm and drawing him towards a looking-glass, she exclaimed in a hoarse voice, "You ask my why? Well, look there! look at yourself!"

If the count had contented himself with trusting nature he would have looked barely sixty—or some ten years younger than he really was; but his partiality for the artifices of the toilet table had spoilt everything; and on this occasion, with his scanty hair half white and half dyed, with the rouge and paint of yesterday cracked and fallen away in places, he was certainly a sorry spectacle indeed. Did he see himself in the looking-glass as he really was,—hideous? At all events he turned livid; and, with bitter, concentrated rage, exclaimed, "You infamous girl." Then, as she burst into sobs, terrified as much by her own audacity as by his words, he continued—"No acting please. At four o'clock precisely I shall send for you. If I find you dressed, and ready to accompany me to Miss Brandon's house, all right. If not, M. Champcey has been here for the last time in his life; and you will never—do you hear?—never be his wife. Now I will leave you alone together; you can reflect." So saying he left the room, closing the door so violently that the whole house seemed to shake.

No more hope;—both Henriette and Daniel were crushed by this certain conviction. The crisis could no longer be postponed. In a few hours' time the mischief would be done. Daniel was the first to shake off the stupor of despair; and, taking Henriette by the hand, he asked her, "You have heard what your father said. What will you do?"

"What I said I would, whatever it may cost me."

"But could you not—"

"Yield?" exclaimed the young girl. And, looking at Daniel with grieved surprise, she added, "Would you really dare to give me that advice,—you who had only to look at Miss Brandon to lose your self-control so far as to overwhelm her with insults?"

"Henriette, I swear—"

"And this to such an extent that my father accused you of having done so at my bidding. Ah, you have been very imprudent, Daniel!"

The unhappy man wrung his hands with despair. How terribly he was punished for a moment's forgetfulness! He had already blamed himself for not revealing the infamous trickery practised on the count by Sir Tom and Mrs Brian while Miss Brandon was driving about Paris. And now he was in a still more difficult position: he could not even give a glimpse of the true state of things. He made no rejoinder; and Henriette gloried in his silence. "You see," she said, "that, if your heart condemns me, your reason and your conscience approve of my decision."

Without replying, he rose and paced the room like a wild beast searching for some outlet from its cage. He felt he was caught, hemmed in on all sides, that he could do nothing,—nothing at all. "Ah, we must surrender!" he exclaimed at last, in a tone of bitter grief: "we must do so, for we are helpless. Let us give up the struggle: reason demands it. We have done enough; we have done our duty." Trembling with emotion, he spoke on for some time, bringing forward the most conclusive arguments he could think of one by one, love lending him the while all its persuasive power. And at last it looked as if Henriette's determination were giving way, as if she were beginning to hesitate. It was so; but she still struggled against her own emotion, and exclaimed in a low tone, "No doubt, Daniel, you think I am not yet wretched enough." And giving him a long, anxious glance, she added, "Say no more, or I shall begin to fear that you dread the interval that must elapse till we can be united, and that you doubt me—or yourself."

He blushed, finding himself thus half detected; but still impelled by his presentiments, he insisted,—"No, I do not doubt; but I cannot reconcile myself to the idea of your having to live under the same roof with Miss Brandon, Elgin, and Mrs Brian. Since this abominable adventuress must triumph, let us fly. I have a respectable old kinswoman of mine living in Anjou who will be very proud to offer you her hospitality."

Henriette raised her hand to interrupt him. "In other words," said she, "I, who risk my happiness in order to avoid a blot upon the name of Ville-Handry, I ought to tarnish it in an almost ineffaceable manner. That cannot be. I occupy a post of honour which I shall not abandon. The more formidable Miss Brandon is, the more it becomes my duty to remain here in order to watch over my father." At these words Daniel trembled, for he now remembered what M. de Brévan had told him of Miss Brandon's devices for getting rid of troublesome people. Did Henriette's instinct lead her to anticipate a crime? No, not such a crime, at least. "You will understand my decision all the better," she continued, "when I tell you what a strange discovery I have made. This morning a gentleman, who said he was a lawyer, called here, and asked to see the Count de Ville-Handry, with whom, he declared, he had a most important appointment. The servants told him their master was out; whereupon he became angry, declared it wasn't possible, and talked so loud, that I came to see what was the matter. Directly he saw me, and found out who I was, he quieted

down, and begged me to take charge of the draft of a legal paper which he had been directed to prepare, and which he desired me to hand to my father. I promised to do so ; but, as I was carrying the paper up-stairs to lay it on my father's writing-table, I happened to look at it. Do you know what it was ? The statutes of a new speculative company, of which my father was to be chairman."

"Good heavens ! Is it possible ?"

"Yes, unfortunately. Just under the title of the company I read 'The Count de Ville-Haudry, Chairman and Chief Director,' after which all his other titles and dignities were enumerated, together with the high offices he has filled, and the French and foreign decorations he has received."

Daniel could no longer doubt. "Ah !" said he, "we knew that they would try to obtain possession of your father's fortune, and now we have proof of it. But what can we do against their cunning manœuvres ?"

Bowing her head, she answered in a tone of resignation, "I have heard it said that the mere presence of an inoffensive child is often sufficient to intimidate the boldest criminals, and frighten them away. If God wills it so, that shall be my part." Then, as Daniel tried once more to insist, she resumed, "You forget, my dear friend, that this is, perhaps for many years, the last time we shall ever be alone together. Let us think of the future. I have secured the services of one of my maids, to whom you must direct your letters. Her name is Clarisse Pontois. If any grave, unforeseen emergency should necessitate our seeing one another, Clarisse will bring you the key of the little garden-gate, and you will come."

Both of them had their eyes filled with tears ; and the anguish of their hearts increased as the hands of the clock revolved round the dial. They knew they would have to part ; and could they hope ever to meet again ? It had just struck four o'clock, when M. de Ville-Haudry reappeared. Stung to the quick by what he called his daughter's insulting remarks, he had stimulated his valet's zeal with such effect that the latter had evidently surpassed himself in the arrangement of his master's hair, and especially in freshening his complexion. "Well, Henriette ?" asked the count.

"My decision remains unchanged, father."

The count was probably prepared for this answer, for he momentarily succeeded in controlling his temper. "Once more, Henriette," he said, "consider ! Don't decide rashly, relying simply upon odious slanders." So saying he drew from his pocket a photograph, gave it a loving look, and handing it to his daughter, added,—"Here is Miss Brandon's portrait. Look at it, and tell me if the woman to whom God has given such a charming face and such sublime eyes can have a bad heart."

Henriette examined the likeness attentively, and, returning it to her father, coldly replied, "This woman is certainly beautiful. Now I can explain to myself that new company of which you are to be the chairman."

The count turned pale at this unexpected answer : "Unhappy child ! Unhappy child !" he cried, "You dare insult an angel ?"

Mad with rage, he had raised his hand, and was about to strike his daughter, when Daniel seized his wrist and threateningly exclaimed, "Ah, sir, have a care ! have a care !"

Giving the young officer a look of concentrated hatred, the count freed himself, and pointed to the door. "M. Champcey," he said, "I order you to leave this house instantly ; and I forbid you ever entering it again. My servants will be informed, that, if one of them ever allows you to cross the threshold of this house, he will be instantly dismissed. Go, sir !"

XI.

FOUR-AND-TWENTY hours after Daniel, pale and staggering, turned his back on the Count de Ville-Handry's mansion, he had not yet recovered from this last blow. The situation was desperate indeed. He had made a mortal enemy of the man whom it was his greatest interest to conciliate ; and the latter, who of his own accord would have parted with him regretfully, had now turned him disgracefully out of his house. Daniel could hardly account to himself for the way in which all this had happened. Indeed, when he recalled the events of the last few days, he asked himself whether he were dreaming or awake. His own conduct had been pitiful, and then fate had been against him,—Fate, the blind goddess which we all accuse when frightened with our own responsibility. He was still cursing fortune, and shrinking from contact with the future, when, to his great surprise, a letter reached him from Henriette. Thus it was she who anticipated him, and who, realising how desperate he must be, had sufficient tact to write to him almost cheerfully. "Immediately after your departure, my dear Daniel, my father ordered me to my own room, and decided that I should stay there till I became more reasonable. I know I shall remain there a long time. What we need most of all, oh, my only friend ! is courage. Will you have as much as your Henriette?"

"She is right," exclaimed Daniel, moved to tears ; "what we need is courage,—I must be brave." And with the view of shaking off his despair, and recovering that calmness which would be requisite when the hour of action sounded, he vowed he would return to work. But this was more easily said than done, for he found that he could not divert his thoughts from his misfortunes. He was disgusted now with the studies which had once delighted him. It seemed as if the balance of his life was utterly destroyed. Thus he still led the existence of a desperate man. Early every morning he hurried to M. de Brévan, and remained in his company as long as possible. When left to himself, he wandered at hap-hazard along the boulevards, or up the Champs Elysées. He dined early, hurried home again, and donning a rough overcoat which he had worn on board ship, went to roam round about the palace of his beloved, hoping that by some chance he might obtain a glimpse of her. He was dying of inaction ; and yet, what could he do ? His situation was not unlike that of the purchaser of a lottery ticket, who is constrained to cross his arms and wait till the prizes are drawn to know his fate. He had spent a week or so in this condition, when one morning, just as he was going out, his bell rang. He went to the door, and was confronted by a lady, who, without saying a word, swiftly walked in, and promptly shut the door behind her. Although she was enveloped in a long cloak which completely hid her figure, and wore a thick veil before her face, Daniel recognized her at once. "Miss Brandon !" he exclaimed.

In the meantime she had raised her veil. "Yes, it is I," she replied, "risking another slander in addition to all the others that have been raised against me, Daniel."

Amazed at a step which secured to him the height of imprudence, he remained standing in the ante-chamber, and did not even think of inviting Miss Brandon to enter his sitting-room. She entered it of her own accord, however ; and when he had followed her, she resumed :—"I came,

sir, to ask you what you have done with the promise you gave me the other night at my house?" A pause followed, and as Daniel did not reply, she continued—"Come, I see you are like all the others. When men pledge their word to other men, who are a match for them, they consider it a point of honour to keep it; but if the promise is given to a woman, they toss it aside, and boast of having done so." Whilst she was speaking, Daniel could scarcely control himself, but she pretended not to notice his agitation, and coldly pursued: "I—I have a better memory than you, sir; and I mean to prove it to you. I know what has happened at M. de Ville-Handry's house; he has told me everything. You allowed yourself to be carried away so far as to raise your hand against him."

"He was going to strike his daughter, and I withheld his arm."

"No, sir! my dear count is incapable of such violence; and yet his own daughter had dared to taunt him with his weakness, pretending that he had been induced by me to establish a speculative company." Daniel made no rejoinder, so she continued: "And you—you allowed Mlle. Henriette to say all these absurd offensive things. The idea of me inducing the count to engage in an enterprise where money might be lost! What interest could I have in doing so?" Her voice began to tremble; and her beautiful eyes filled with tears. "Interest!" she resumed. "Money! The world can think of no other motive now-a-days. Money! I have enough of it. If I marry the count, you know why I do it,—you! And you also know that it depended, and perhaps, at this moment, still depends, upon one single man whether I break off that match this very day or not." As she spoke she looked at him in a manner which would all but have caused a statue to tremble on its pedestal.

But he, with his heart full of hatred, retained his previous frigid manner, enjoying the revenge which was thus presented to him. "I will believe whatever you wish to say," he replied in a mocking tone, "if you will answer me a single question."

"Ask, sir."

"The other night, when I left you, where did you go in your carriage?"

He expected she would become confused, turn pale, and stammer. Not at all. "Ah! you know that?" she said, with an accent of admirable candour. "Ah! I committed almost as imprudent an act as I am doing now. Suppose some fool only saw me leave your rooms?"

Excuse me, but that is no answer. Where did you go?" And as she remained silent, surprised by Daniel's firmness, he added, sneeringly, "Then you confess it would be madness to believe you? Let us break off here, and pray God that I may be able to forget all the wrong you have done me."

Miss Brandon's beautiful eyes filled with tears of grief or rage. Folding her hands she exclaimed, in a suppliant tone, "I beg you, M. Champcey, grant me only five minutes. I must speak to you. If you knew—"

He could not lay hands on a woman to turn her out, so making her a low bow, he withdrew into his bedroom, closing the door behind him. Then at once applying his eye to the keyhole, he perceived Miss Brandon, whose features were convulsed with rage, threaten him with her clenched hand, and hastily leave the room. "She was going to dig another pit for me," thought Daniel. And the idea that he had avoided it made him, for at least some hours, forget his sorrow.

On the following day, however, on returning home from one of his usual rambles, he found an official package awaiting him. It contained two letters, one of which informed him that he was promoted to the rank of a lieutenant;

while the other ordered him to report four days hence at Rochefort, on board the frigate "Conquest," now lying in the roadstead, and waiting for two battalions of marines to be transferred to Cochin China. Daniel had for long years, and with all a young man's eager ambition, desired the promotion now granted him—the first *étape* towards distinguished rank. But now that his oft-repeated wishes were realised, far from experiencing delight, he almost gave way to a feeling of despair. For with the news of his promotion came the fatal order to a distant land. Why was such an order sent to him? He occupied at the Ministry a post in which he could render valuable services, while so many of his comrades, idly waiting in port, were anxiously watching for a chance to go into active service. "Ah!" he exclaimed suddenly, as a fresh thought filled his heart with rage, "Miss Brandon has had a hand in this, I ought to have seen it at once." She had begun by having him banished from the Count de Ville-Handry's house, so that he and Henriette might neither meet nor speak together, and now she was intent on raising another barrier between them—one of those obstacles which no lover's ingenuity could overcome,—a thousand miles of ocean. "No, no!" he cried in his anguish, "It shall not be. Rather give up my career,—rather send in my resignation."

Hence, on the following morning he donned his uniform, determined to lay the matter, first of all, before the officer who was his immediate superior, and resolved, if he did not succeed with him, to apply to the minister in person. Daniel's superior was a worthy old captain, an excellent man in reality, but who had so long assumed the manner of a stern official, that he had finished by altogether becoming what he merely wished to appear. When Daniel entered his office, he fancied he came to inform him of his promotion, so making a great effort to smile, he hailed him with these words, "Well, Lieut. Champcey, we are satisfied, I hope?" But perceiving immediately afterwards that Daniel did not wear the epaulets of his new rank, he added,—“Why, how's that, lieutenant? Perhaps you have not yet heard—”

"I beg your pardon, captain," answered Daniel.

"Why on earth, then, have you no epaulets?" rejoined the official, frowning, as if he thought such carelessness augured ill for the service.

Daniel excused himself as well as he could, which was very little, and then boldly approached the purpose of his visit. "I have received an order for active service."

"I know,—on board 'The Conquest,' now in the roadstead at Rochfort and bound for Cochin China."

"I have to be at my post in four days."

"And you think the time too short? It is short. But impossible to grant you ten minutes more."

"I don't ask for leave of absence, captain: I want the favour—to be allowed to keep my place here."

The old officer could hardly retain his seat. "You would prefer not to go on board ship," he exclaimed, "the very day after your promotion? Ah, come, you are mad!"

Daniel shook his head sadly. "Believe me, captain," he replied, "I obey the most imperative duty."

Leaning back in his chair, with his eyes fixed on the ceiling, the captain seemed as if he were looking for some such duty. "Is it your family that keeps you?" he suddenly asked.

"I have no family."

"Are you going to be married immediately?"

"Unfortunately, no!"

"Perhaps your fortune is in danger?"

"No, captain."

"Then what the devil do you mean with your imperative duty?" cried the old officer; adding, in his gruffest tone, "You mean no doubt that your position here is more agreeable than service on board ship. I understand it. You come to the office at eleven o'clock; if the weather is cold, you have a nice warm room to shelter you. Even supposing that there is anything to do, you take it easy; and at five o'clock you are free. In the evening you can stroll along the boulevards; you have your *café*, your friends, and your favourite theatre. All that is no doubt a great deal more pleasant than having to pace deck in the midst of a gale. Finally, to crown everything, you have no doubt some pretty little friend who says she loves you dearly, and begins to weep like a Magdalen at the mere thought of your leaving her."

"But, captain—"

"Silence, sir! That is the universal story with you young officers; as soon as you have been six months in Paris, nothing can move you away again. Upon my word, when people prefer living like private citizens, they ought to change their profession. In the meantime, however, you are a sailor; you have received your orders; and you must go. You have still three days to make your arrangements, and say good-bye."

This meant that Daniel might retire, but the young officer was determined to carry matters to extremes. "Excuse me for one moment, captain," said he. "If my place can't really be filled by one of my comrades, I shall be compelled to send in my resignation."

"I told you you were a fool!" furiously ejaculated the old official, bounding from his chair.

"It is a matter of life and death with me, captain," pleaded Daniel. And if you only knew my reasons; if I could tell them—"

"Reasons which can't be told are always bad ones. I insist upon what I have told you."

"Then, captain, I shall be compelled, to my infinite sorrow, to insist upon offering my resignation."

The old sailor's brow grew darker and darker. "Your resignation, your resignation!" he growled. "You talk of it very lightly. It remains to be seen whether it will be accepted. 'The Conquest' is not sailing on a pleasure-party: she is sent out to take part in a serious campaign, and will probably be absent for some time. We have unpleasant complications in Cochin China, and are sending out reinforcements. You are still in France; but are actually under orders to meet the enemy. Now, men don't resign in the face of the enemy, Lieut. Champcey!"

Daniel turned very pale. "You are severe, captain," he said.

"I have no idea, I assure you, of being gentle; and if my severity can induce you to change your mind—"

"Unfortunately, I cannot alter my decision."

The old officer rose, and paced the room, giving vent to his anger in oaths of various kinds; then suddenly halting in front of Daniel, he drily remarked, "If that is so, the case is serious: I must report it to the minister in person. What time is it? Eleven o'clock. Come here again at half-past twelve. I shall have settled the matter then."

Quite certain that his superior would say nothing in his favour, Daniel

retired, and was hurrying out of the building, down a narrow passage, when he heard a voice calling him by name. On looking up he found himself face to face with a couple of comrades, young fellows of his own age, with whom he had been most intimate at the Naval Academy. "So you are our superior now?" said one of them; and then, in all sincerity, they both began to congratulate him on his promotion, expressing their delight that he should be distinguished in accordance with his merits. Their compliments and praises galled Daniel excessively. Each of their good wishes was in reality a stroke of sarcasm. "You are going out as a lieutenant," said one of them at last, "and no doubt you will come back a captain."

"But I am not going out," replied Daniel fiercely; "I have handed in my resignation." And leaving his two friends looking at each other in amazement, he strode rapidly away. He had certainly not foreseen all these difficulties; and in his wrath he accused his superior of injustice and tyranny. "I must stay in Paris; and I will stay," he said to himself. Reflection, far from calming him, only excited him the more. On leaving home he had only intended to offer his resignation as an extreme measure, but now he was determined to leave the service, no matter what the minister might say. Had he not an ample income of his own? and could he not always find honourable employment? This course would be far preferable to continuing in a profession where a man is never his own master, but always liable to be ordered, at a moment's warning, to heaven knows what part of the world. Thus did he reason while lunching in the neighbourhood; and when he returned to the Ministry, shortly after noon, he already looked upon himself as no longer belonging to the navy.

It was the audience hour, and the ante-room was crowded with officers of every rank, some in uniform, and others in civilian costume. The conversation was very animated, for Daniel could hear the hum of voices from the vestibule. He entered the ante-chamber, however, and at once all became silent. Plainly enough the assembled officers had been talking about him. Additional evidence of this was furnished by the forced smiles and cautious glances with which he was received. "What can it mean?" he asked himself, inwardly disturbed.

At this moment a young fellow in civilian dress, with whom Daniel was unacquainted, called out across the room to an old officer in a seedy uniform, —a lean, sunburnt, wrinkled old seadog, whose eyes bore traces of recent ophthalmia—"Why do you stop, lieutenant? We were much interested, I assure you."

The officer appealed to hesitated for a moment, as if he were making up his mind to perform a disagreeable duty, and then resumed: "Well, we got there, convinced that we had taken all necessary precautions, and that there was, consequently, nothing to fear—fine precautions they proved! In the course of a week the whole crew was laid up; while as for the staff, little Bertram and myself were the only officers able to appear on deck. Moreover, my eyes were in a state. You see what they are now. The captain was the first to die, and the same evening five sailors followed suit, and seven the next day. The day after we lost our first lieutenant and two non-commissioned officers. The like was never seen before."

Daniel turned to his neighbour. "Who is that officer?" he asked.

"Lieutenant Dutac of 'The Valorous,' just returned from Cochin China."

Light was dawning in Daniel's mind: "When did 'The Valorous' come in?" he asked again.

"She made the port of Brest six days ago."

"And so, you see," continued the old lieutenant, "we had heavy losses out there. The fighting wasn't of so much account, though the people are true gallow birds, and gave us some little trouble. But the climate, ah! Algeria is nothing in comparison!"

"Ay," quoth the young fellow in civilian dress, "I've heard that said before. Well, no doubt, you are glad to be home again."

"As for that, of course, one can hardly be sorry. Still, if they order me out again, I must naturally go. Some one must go, as you know, for reinforcements are sadly needed. Perhaps I shouldn't mind seeing another man in my place—but, after all, as we sailors are bound to be eaten by the fish some time or other, it doesn't much matter when it happens."

Under a trivial form this remark conveyed to Daniel a most impressive lesson. An officer does not resign when under orders to face the enemy. Plainly enough the loungers in the ante-room had been discussing his resignation prior to his arrival, and no doubt they attributed it to fear. The idea that he might be suspected of cowardice fairly unnerved Daniel. What could he do to prove that he was not a coward? Should he challenge every one of these men, and fight a score of duels? Would that prove that he had not shrunk from the unknown perils of a distant campaign—from hardship, privation, and disease? No; unless he was determined to remain a marked man for life, he must withdraw his resignation, and start at once. Accordingly, stepping towards Lieutenant Dutac, he exclaimed, in a voice loud enough to be heard by every one in the room, "I had just been ordered to the place you come from, lieutenant, and had sent in my resignation; but after what you have said—things I really knew nothing of—I shall go."

There was a murmur of approbation, and some one was heard to exclaim, "Ah! I was sure of it." Daniel at once realised, by the sudden change of everyone's manner, that he had chosen the only way to save his honour, seriously compromised a moment before. However, although satisfied with himself, he could not help thinking that the scene he had just witnessed was, on the whole, a very extraordinary one. Was he not the victim of some diabolical intrigue? Assuming that Miss Brandon had caused the minister to order him into active service, might she not also have taken every step to compel him to obey that order? Were all the individuals in civilian dress, lounging about the ante-room, really naval officers? The young fellow who had asked Lieutenant Dutac to go on with his story had disappeared, and despite Daniel's repeated enquiries, no one present could say who he was. Soon afterwards Daniel was summoned into his superior's presence. "I'll follow your advice, captain," he said, as he crossed the threshold of the office, "and in three days I shall be on board 'The Conquest.'"

The captain's face cleared up, and he replied approvingly, "Very good! You did well to change your mind; for your business began to look ugly. The minister is very angry with you."

"The minister? And why?"

"*Primo*, he had charged you with a very important duty."

"To be sure," stammered Daniel, hanging his head; "but I have been suffering so severely." The fact is, he had totally forgotten his work.

"*Secundo*," continued the old officer, "he was doubtful whether you were in your senses; and I agree with him, for he tells me that you yourself solicited this appointment on foreign service in urgent terms."

"His Excellency is mistaken," stammered Daniel in amazement.

"Ah! I beg your pardon: I have myself seen your letter."

Daniel already realised a portion of the truth. "I wish I could see it too!" cried he. "Captain, I beseech you, show me that letter!"

The old officer almost began to think that Champcey was really not in his right mind. "I have not got it," he answered. "It's among your papers in the Bureau for Personal Affairs."

Daniel hurried to the office mentioned to him, and, after some little trouble, obtained permission to look at his papers. On opening the portfolio handed to him, the first thing he perceived was a letter, dated two days before, in which he urgently requested the minister to grant him the special favour of being despatched with the expedition to Cochín China on board the frigate "Conquest." Daniel was, of course, quite sure that he had written no such letter. But the handwriting was so precisely like his own, letter for letter, and the signature particularly was so admirably imitated, that he felt for a moment utterly bewildered, mistrusting, as it were, his own eyes and reason. The forgery was so admirable, that if the matter had been one of ordinary importance, and the letter had been dated a fortnight or so previously, he would certainly have suspected his memory rather than the document before him. Plainly enough this letter had been written at Miss Brandon's instigation, and, no doubt, one of her accomplices, perhaps the great Sir Tom himself, had penned it. Ah! now Daniel understood the adventuress's insolent assurance when she insisted upon his taking poor Malgat's letters, saying, "Go and show them to the clerks who knew him during so many years, they will tell you if they were written by him or not." No one would have opined that Malgat's letters were forgeries; and yet, no doubt, the unfortunate cashier's handwriting had been imitated with the same distressing perfection as his own. Could he profit by this strange discovery? Ought he to mention it? What would be the use? Would he be believed if he charged Miss Brandon with forgery? Would an investigation even be consented to? and if so, what would be its result? Could he hope to find an expert prepared to swear that he had not written this letter, when he himself, if each line had been presented to him separately, would have felt bound to acknowledge it as his own handwriting? Was it not far more probable, on the contrary, that, after his conduct in the morning, his charges would be ascribed to a mistake, or interpreted as some weak invention on his part to cover his retreat. Hence, it was best to remain silent, and defer revenge till a later day, when his plans being fully matured, he would be able to crush Sarah Brandon and her accomplices once and for ever. Still, he did not wish the false letter, which might become a formidable piece of evidence against him, to remain among his papers; for no doubt Miss Brandon would soon find an opportunity of having it withdrawn. He obtained permission to copy it; and having done so, succeeded, without being seen, in substituting his copy for the original. Then, knowing he had no time to lose, he hurried away, and jumping into a passing cab drove to M. de Brévan's.

XII.

DESPITE the thought of his approaching separation from Henriette, Daniel felt wonderfully relieved now that he had taken an irrevocable decision. But for his rankling hatred of Sarah Brandon, his mind would almost have

been at peace. On reaching the Rue Lafitte he found that Maxime had just returned home after breakfasting with some friends at the Café Anglais. In a dozen words he told him everything, and then producing the forged letter, which he attributed to Miss Brandon's literary attainments and Sir Tom's penmanship, he handed it to his friend. While Maxime launched forth into exclamations of wonder and indignation, he resumed, "Now, my dear fellow, pray, listen to me. It may be that I may have to entrust you with my last will and testament."

"Don't take such a gloomy look of things," pleaded M. de Brévan.

"Oh, I know what I'm saying. I certainly do not hope to die out there; but the climate's murderous, and I may encounter a bullet or a shell. It is always best to be prepared. Now, you alone, Maxime, are acquainted with all my private affairs. I have no secret from you. If I have friends whom I have known longer, at all events, I have none in whom I feel more confidence. Besides, my old friends are all sailors,—men who, like myself, may be at any moment despatched Heaven only knows where. Now, I need a safe, reliable, and experienced man, possessing both prudence and energy, and who is certain not to leave Paris. Will you be that man, Maxime?"

Rising from his seat, and pressing his right hand against his heart, M. de Brévan warmly replied, "Between us, Daniel, oaths are useless: don't you think so? Therefore, I will simply say, you may count upon me."

"And I do count upon you," exclaimed Daniel,—“yes, blindly and absolutely; and I am going to give you striking proof of it.” For a moment it seemed as if he were trying to find some brief and yet impressive form for his communication; and then speaking very rapidly, he continued,—“In leaving France, my one great source of torment is that I am compelled to leave Henriette in the hands of the enemy. God can only know what persecution she will have to endure! My heart bleeds at the mere thought. Miss Brandon must be meditating some terrible blow, or she would not have been so anxious to exile me.” So great was his distress that he almost sobbed, and it was only after a moment that he could control his emotion. “Now, Maxime, I ask you to watch over Henriette. I entrust her to you as I would intrust her to my brother, if I had one.” M. de Brévan seemed about to raise some objection, but Daniel cut him short, resuming, “I will tell you how you can watch over Mlle. de Ville-Handry. To-morrow evening I shall see her, and acquaint her with the new misfortune which has befallen us. I shall take leave of her at the same time. I know she will be terrified; but, to reassure her, I shall explain to her that I leave a friend behind me—my *alter ego*—ready to assist her at her first summons, and prepared to incur any danger when her interests are at stake. I shall tell her to appeal to you as if to myself; to write to you as she used to write to me; to keep you informed of all they may attempt; to consult and obey you without hesitation. As for what you will have to do, Maxime, I can only speak in a general way, as I know nothing of Miss Brandon's plans. I rely upon your experience to do what is most expedient. Still, there is one possibility which I can already foresee. It may be that life at home will become intolerable, and that Henriette will be anxious to leave her father's house. Even if she should not wish to do so, you may think it inexpedient for her to remain there, and have to advise escape. In either case, you must confide Henriette to the care of an old lady, a relative of mine, who lives at Rosiers, a little village in the department of Maine-et-Loire, and whose address I will give you before starting. At the same time I will inform her of what may

happen." He paused, trying to remember if there was anything else, and, recalling nothing, concluded, "This, my dear Maxime, is all I expect you to do for me."

"Friend Daniel, you may sail without fear," solemnly answered M. de Brévan, with the air of a man who feels that he deserves the confidence placed in him.

But Daniel had not done yet. Pressing his friend's hand, he thanked him, and then seeking to assume a careless air, so as to hide the embarrassment he really felt, he resumed—"The only question now is to provide means for carrying out these measures, and other possible contingencies. You are not rich, my dear Maxime—I mean, rich in comparison with many of your friends: you told me so more than once."

In speaking thus, he touched a wound which was always sore. "Ay," answered M. de Brévan, "in comparison with most of my friends, with men like Gordon-Chalusse, for instance, I am a very poor devil indeed."

Daniel did not notice Maxime's bitterness of manner. "Now," said he, "suppose, at a given moment, that a sum of money, perhaps a large one, should be needed to assure Henriette's safety. Are you sure you will always have sufficient at your disposal, and be able to disburse it without inconvenience?"

"Ah! you expect too much of me; but I have friends."

"And you would apply to them? And expose yourself to the humiliation of those set excuses which serve to conceal refusals! I could never allow that."

"I assure you—"

"Let me tell you that I have forgotten nothing. Although my means are modest, I can, by selling some shares, realize enough to secure you against any urgent embarrassment. Besides, I have property in Anjou, worth from two to three hundred thousand francs, and I mean to sell it."

"Eh?" ejaculated de Brévan with surprise.

"Yes, I mean to sell it. You heard right. I shall only retain my old home, my father's house, with the little garden in front, and the adjoining orchard and meadow. My father and my mother lived and died in that house, and I find them there, so to say, whenever I enter it. Their memory still fills the rooms after so many years. The garden and the orchard are the first little bits of land my father bought with his earnings as a ploughboy. He dug and planted them in his leisure hours, and there is literally not a foot of soil he did not moisten with his sweat. They are sacred to me; but, as for the rest—I have already given orders."

"And you expect to sell everything before your departure?"

"Oh, no! But won't you be there?"

"What can I do?"

"Take my place, I should think. I will leave you a power-of-attorney. You will have to be quick, but perhaps you may get 250,000 francs for the property. Invest the proceeds so as to be able to use them at any moment. And, if ever Henriette is compelled to leave her father's house, hand the money over to her."

M. de Brévan had turned very pale. "Excuse me," he said, "excuse me."

"What?"

"Well, it seems to me it would be more suitable to leave some one else in charge of that."

"Whom?"

"Oh! I don't know,—a more experienced man! It may be that the

property will not bring as much as you expect. Or I might make a mistake in investing the money. Money questions are so delicate !”

“I really don’t understand why you should hesitate to undertake so simple a thing,” replied Daniel, shrugging his shoulders, “when you have already consented to render me so signal and difficult a service.”

So simple a thing ! That was certainly not M. de Brévan’s opinion. A nervous shiver, which he could hardly conceal, ran down his backbone ; perspiration gathered on his temples ; and he turned ashy pale. “Two hundred and fifty thousand francs ! That’s a very large sum,” said he.

“No doubt,” rejoined Daniel carelessly ; and, glancing at the clock, he added, “Half-past three. Come, Maxime, be quick. I’ve a cab waiting, and we must see my notary before four o’clock.”

This notary was an exceptional man. He took an interest in his clients’ affairs, and sometimes even listened to their explanations. When Daniel had told him what he intended doing, he replied, “Well, you only have to give M. de Brévan a power-of-attorney in proper form.”

“Can it be drawn up at once ?” asked Daniel.

“Why not ? It can be recorded this evening ; and to-morrow—”

“Well, then, lose no time.”

The notary called his chief clerk, briefly gave him his instructions, and then drew Daniel into a recess, not unlike an enormous cupboard, where, to quote his own expression, he was wont to “confess” his clients. “How is it, M. Champcey ?” he asked ; “do you really owe so much money to this M. de Brévan ?”

“I don’t owe him a son.”

“And yet you place your entire fortune in his hands ! You must have marvellous confidence in the man.”

“As much as in myself.”

“That’s a good deal. And suppose he ran away with the proceeds of your property during your absence ?”

For a moment Daniel was a little shaken ; but he nevertheless replied, “Oh, there are still some honest folks in the world.”

“Ah !” laughed the notary. And from the manner in which he shook his head, it was evident that experience had made him very sceptical indeed on that subject. “If you would only listen to me,” he resumed, “I could prove to you—”

“I have no wish to change my mind,” interrupted Daniel ; “and even if I did wish to do so, I cannot retract my word. There are particular circumstances in this case which I cannot explain to you in so short a time.”

The notary raised his eyes to the ceiling, and rejoined in a tone of deep commiseration, “At least, let me make him give you a deed of defeasance.”

“As you please, sir.”

This was done, but in such carefully guarded terms, that Maxime’s susceptibility could not possibly have been offended. When the power-of-attorney and the deed were signed, and the two friends left the worthy notary’s office, it was five o’clock, and consequently too late for Daniel to write to Henriette to send him the key of the little garden-gate for that same evening. However, he wrote to obtain it for the following night. Then, after dining with M. de Brévan, he hurried hither and thither in search of the thousand little things which have always to be purchased on the eve of a long journey.

He returned home late, and was fortunate enough to fall asleep directly he was in bed. The next morning he partook of *déjeuner* in his rooms,

so as to guard against being absent when the key was brought him. It came towards one o'clock, and was handed to him by a tall woman on the wrong side of twenty, whose eyes were perpetually turned to the ground, and whose thin lips seemed to be always engaged in reciting a *Pater* or an *Ave*. This was Clarisse, whom Henriette considered to be the safest of her maids, and whom she had taken into her confidence. "Mademoiselle," said the messenger, "has given me this key and this letter for you, sir. She expects an answer."

Daniel tore open the envelope and read as follows:—"Take care, my dear friend! in resorting to this dangerous expedient, which we ought to reserve for the last extremity. Is what you have to tell me really as important as you say? I can hardly believe it; and yet I send you the key. Tell Clarisse the precise hour at which you will be here." Ah! the poor girl had no idea of the terrible news that was in store for her. "Request Mlle. Henriette," said Daniel to the maid, "to expect me at seven o'clock."

Slipping the key into his pocket he then hurried away. He had only a short afternoon to himself, and there were still a thousand things to get, and countless preparations to make. On calling at the notary's, he found the papers ready: all the formalities had been fulfilled. But, as the worthy notary produced the deeds, he exclaimed in a prophetic tone, "Take care, M. Champcey, reflect! I call it tempting a man pretty strongly to hand him over such an amount of property on the eve of starting on a long and dangerous expedition."

"Ah! What do I care for my fortune, if I only see Henriette again?"

The notary looked discouraged. "Ah! if there is a woman in the affair," he remarked, "I have nothing more to say."

A moment later, and Daniel had quite forgotten his legal adviser's gloomy presentiments. Seated in M. de Brévan's little sitting-room, he was handing over his deeds and papers to his confidant, explaining to him how he might make the most of the different parcels of land that were to be sold, how certain woods might be disposed of together, and how, on the other hand, a large farm, now held by one tenant, might be advantageously divided into small lots, and offered for auction. M. de Brévan did not look so pale now. He had recovered his self-possession, and, laying aside his usual reserve, shewed himself all eagerness to study his friend's affairs. He promised to do his utmost so that Daniel might be no loser, and with this object would go to Anjou himself, so as to call on likely purchasers and be present at the sale. In his opinion, it would be wiser to sell piecemeal, without hurry. If money were needed, why, a loan could always be obtained of the Credit Foncier. Daniel was deeply touched by his friend's expressions of devotion, the more so as he had always fancied that Maxime was inclined to be selfish; and he was especially gratified when M. de Brévan told him that, with the view of helping matters, he would endeavour to overcome his aversion for Miss Brandon, and try and obtain an introduction to the Count de Ville-Handry's mansion, so as to be a constant visitor there as soon as the approaching marriage had taken place. No doubt he would have to play a disagreeable part; but, on the other hand, he would have frequent opportunities of seeing Mlle. Henriette; he would hear of everything that happened, and be at hand whenever she needed advice or assistance. "My dear Maxime," exclaimed Daniel, "my dear friend, how can I ever thank you for all you are doing for me!"

As on the previous day, they dined together at one of the restaurants on the boulevard; and after dinner M. de Brévan insisted upon escorting his

friend as far as the Count de Ville-Handry's house. It was a cold, clear night. There was not a cloud in the sky, and the moon shone so brightly that one could have read by its light. Seven o'clock was just striking at a neighbouring convent. "Come, courage, my friend!" said M. de Brévan, and cordially pressing Daniel's hand, he walked away.

Daniel had not answered a word. Terribly excited, he had approached the little garden door, at the same time anxiously glancing round him. The street was deserted. But he trembled so violently, that for a moment he thought he would never be able to turn the key in the rusty lock. At last, however, he succeeded in doing so, and then noiselessly slipped into the garden. He was the first on the spot. Hiding himself in the shade of some tall trees, he waited. A couple of minutes elapsed, and he was growing terribly anxious, when at last he heard some dry twigs crackle under the pressure of rapid footsteps. A shadow passed between the trees. He walked forward, and found Henriette standing before him. "What is the matter?" she asked anxiously. "Clarisse said you looked so pale and careworn, that I have been terribly frightened ever since she returned."

Daniel had come to the conclusion that the plain truth would be less cruel than the most skilful prevarications. "I have been ordered on active service," he replied, "and must be on board the day after to-morrow."

And then, without concealing anything, he told her all he had suffered since the day before. The blow was so terrible that she leant against a tree for support. It seemed as if she did not even hear Daniel, but she must have done so, for, suddenly rousing herself, she said, "You will not obey that order. It is impossible for you to obey it."

"Henriette, my honour is at stake."

"Ah, what does it matter?" He was about to reply, when she resumed in a broken voice, "You will certainly not go when you have heard me. You think I am strong, brave, and capable of breasting the storm? You are mistaken. I was only drawing upon your energy, Daniel. I am a child, full of daring as long as it rests on its mother's knee, but helpless as soon as it feels that it is left to itself. I am only a woman: I am weak."

The unhappy man felt his own strength failing him, and could no longer bear his self-restraint. "You insist upon sending me off in utter despair?" he cried. "Ah, I have hardly courage enough for myself!"

"It would be courage to stay, to despise public opinion," retorted Henriette, with a nervous laugh. And, as if anything appeared to her preferable to such a separation, she added,—"Listen! If you will stay, I will yield. Let us go together to my father, and I will tell him that I have overcome my aversion to Miss Brandon. I will ask him to present me to her: I will humble myself before her."

"That is impossible, Henriette."

She bent towards him, joining her hands; and repeated in a suppliant voice, "Stay, I beg you, in the name of our happiness! If you have ever loved me, if you love me now, stay!"

Daniel had foreseen this heart-rending scene; but he had vowed that, even if his heart should break, he would have sufficient firmness to resist Henriette's prayers and tears. "If I were weak enough to give way now," he said, "you would despise me before the month is over; and I, desperate at having to drag out a life of disgrace, would have no other resource but suicide." Henriette listened, standing as motionless as a statue. She felt in her heart that Daniel's resolution was not to be shaken. "I am going, my love," he resumed in a gentle voice, "but I leave you a friend

of mine,—a true and noble friend, who will watch over you. You have heard me speak of him often,—Maxime de Brévan. He knows my wishes. Whatever may happen, consult him. Ah! I should leave more cheerfully if you would promise me to trust this faithful friend, to listen to his advice, and follow his directions.”

“I promise you, Daniel, I will obey him.” She would have said more, but at this moment a rustling of dry leaves was heard. They turned, and perceived a man cautiously approaching them. “My father!” cried Henriette, and pushing Daniel towards the gate, she begged him to fly.

To remain would only have been to risk a painful explanation, insults, and perhaps even a personal collision. Daniel understood this only too well. “Farewell,” said he, “farewell! To-morrow you will receive a letter from me.” And with these words he made his escape; but not swiftly enough to avoid hearing the count angrily exclaim: “Ah, ah! Is this the virtuous young lady who dares to insult Miss Sarah?”

As soon as Daniel had locked the door again he listened for a moment, hoping that he might hear something important. But he could only detect a few indistinct exclamations, and then nothing,—nothing more. It was all over now. He would have to sail without seeing Henriette again, without holding her once in his arms. And yet he had told her nothing of all he had meant to tell her: he had not spoken to her of half his recommendations, nor given her a thousandth part of his tender farewells. How had they been surprised? How was it that the count had staid at home, instead of hurrying off immediately after dinner, as was his custom? Why had he inquired after his daughter, he who generally took no more trouble about her than if she had not existed? “Ah, we have been betrayed!” thought the unhappy man. By whom? No doubt by that unpleasant looking maid whom he had seen in the afternoon, by that very Clarisse in whom Henriette placed such confidence. If that were so,—and it was only too probable,—how would they be able to correspond in the future. Here again Maxime de Brévan seemed his only resource. Ah! how plainly he recognised in all this Miss Brandon’s execrably cunning policy. “The wretch!” he cried. “The infamous woman!” Wrath, mad wrath, set his brains on fire. To think he could do nothing against that woman! “But she does not stand alone!” he suddenly exclaimed. “There is a man who shelters her under his responsibility,—Sir Tom!” The latter might be insulted; struck in the face, and thus compelled to fight. And without thinking for one moment of the folly of this plan, Daniel hurried off to the Rue du Cirque.

Although it was barely eight o’clock, no lights could be distinguished in the windows of Miss Brandon’s house, and it looked as if everybody were asleep. He rang the bell, however, and asked for Sir Thomas Elgin. Sir Tom was out, so the door-keeper said; whereupon Daniel enquired—“At what hour will he be back?”

“He is not coming home to-night.” And whether he had received special instructions, or was only acting upon general orders, the servant added,—“Mrs Brian is at the theatre; but Miss Brandon is at home.”

Daniel’s wrath changed into a kind of cold fury. “They expected me,” he murmured, and the thought made him hesitate. Should he see Miss Brandon? What would be the good of it? He was just turning away, when a new idea suddenly occurred to him. Why should he not talk with her, try and come to an understanding, and perhaps make a bargain with her? “Show me to Miss Brandon’s rooms,” he said to the servant.

As usual, when left alone in the house, she was in the little boudoir,

where Daniel had already once conversed with her. Dressed in a long peignoir of pale blue cashmere, her hair scarcely taken up at all, she was reclining on a sofa, reading a new novel. As the door opened, she carelessly asked, without even turning her head, "Who's that?" But directly the servant announced M. Champcey, she rose with a bound, apparently almost terrified, dropping the book she held in her hand. "Yon!" she murmured, as soon as the servant had left. "Here, and of your own accord?"

Firmly resolved this time to remain master of his emotions, Daniel had paused in the middle of the room, and stood there as stiff as a statue. "Don't you know, madam, what brings me here?" he asked. All your combinations have succeeded: you triumph, and we surrender."

"I do not understand you," she stammered, looking at him with seeming amazement. "I don't know what you mean."

He shrugged his shoulders, and continued in a frigid tone,—“Pray, do me the honour not to think me altogether a fool. I have seen the letter, signed with my name, which you sent to the minister, my superior. I have held that masterpiece of forgery in my hand, and know now how you propose to free yourself of my presence.”

“So it's true!” cried Miss Brandon, with an angry gesture. “He has done it; he has dared to do it!”

“Who is this ‘he’? Sir Thomas Elgin, no doubt?”

“No, not he; another man.”

“Name him!”

She hesitated, hung her head, and then, apparently making a great effort, replied: “I knew they wished to separate us; and, without knowing precisely what means they would employ, I suspected them. And when I came to you the other day, I wanted to say to you, ‘Have a care!’ but you drove me from your presence, M. Champcey.” He looked upon her with such an ironical smile that she broke off, and exclaimed, “Ah, he does not believe me! Tell me that you don't believe!”

He bowed ceremoniously, and answered in his gravest manner, “I believe, Miss Brandon, that you desire to become the Countess de Ville-Handry; and you clear everything out of your path that can hinder you in your plans.” She tried to interrupt him, but without allowing her to do so, he continued,—“Pray, note, that I make no charges. Come, let us play openly. You are too sensible and too practical to hate us—Mlle. Henriette and myself—from gratuitous and purely platonic motives. You hate us because we are in your way. How are we in your way? Tell me; and, if you will promise to help us,—we—Henriette and I—pledge ourselves not to stand in your way.”

Miss Brandon looked as if she could not trust her ears. “But, sir, this is a bargain, I should say, which you propose?”

“Yes, indeed! And, so that there may be no misunderstanding, I will mention the precise terms of it: if you will swear to be kind to Henriette during my absence, to protect her against all violence on her father's part, and never to force her to act contrary to her sentiments for me, I will give you, in return, my word that I will abandon to you, without dispute or reserve, the whole of the Count de Ville-Handry's fortune.”

Miss Brandon heard these words with every sign of emotion. The tears rolled down her cheeks, and she responded in a low voice, “Have I not yet been humiliated enough. Must you add shame to shame? Daniel, can you possibly think me so mean?” And checking the sobs which impeded

her utterance, she proceeded,—“And yet I cannot blame you for it, I cannot. No, you are right! Everything is against me: everything bears witness against me. Yes, I must appear a very wicked woman in your eyes. But if you only knew the truth, Daniel—if I could, if I dared, tell you everything.” With a trembling step she drew nearer to him, and then continued in a still lower tone, as if she feared to be overheard,—“Cannot you yet understand that I am no longer my own? Do you not realise that I am bound and fettered? I have no longer the right to have a will of my own. If they say, ‘Do this!’ I must needs do it. What a life I lead! Great God! Ah, if you had been willing, Daniel! if you were willing even now!” As she spoke she grew more and more excited; her eyes, moist with tears, shone with matchless splendour; passing blushes suffused her face; and her voice had a strange entrancing vibration. Was she forgetting herself? Was she really about to betray her secret, or merely inventing some new falsehood? Why not let her go on?

At last, however, he was obliged to speak. “That is no answer, Miss Brandon,” he said. “Will you promise me to protect Henriette?”

“Do you really love her so dearly, your Henriette?”

“Better than life!”

Miss Brandon turned as white as the lace on her dress: her eyes flashed indignation; and, drying her tears, she curtly ejaculated, “Oh!”

“You will give me no answer, Miss,” repeated Daniel? And, as she persisted in her silence, he resumed, “Very well, then, I understand. You declare open war. Let it be so! Only listen to me carefully. I am setting out on a dangerous expedition, and you hope I shall never return. Undeceive yourself, Miss Brandon, I shall return. With a passion like mine, with so much love in one’s heart, and so much hatred, a man can defy everything. The murderous climate will not touch me; and, if I had ten bullets in my body, I should still have the strength to return, and hold you to account for your conduct towards Henriette. And if you have touched a hair on her head, if you have made her shed a single tear, by all that is holy, it will bring misfortune to you, and to others also!” He turned to leave, but, on reaching the threshold, added, “I ought to tell you, moreover, that I leave a faithful friend behind me; and if the count or his daughter should happen to die very suddenly, the authorities will be duly warned. And now, madame, farewell—or rather, till we meet again!”

At eight o’clock on the following evening, after leaving with M. de Brévan a long letter for Henriette, and giving him his last instructions, Daniel took his seat in the train which was to convey him to Rochefort and “The Conquest.”

XIII.

It was a week after Daniel’s departure, a Wednesday, and about half-past eleven o’clock. Some thirty equipages, certainly the most elegant of all Paris, were ranged around the aristocratic church of St. Clotilde. In the pretty little square facing the edifice a couple of hundred idlers stood gaping and staring, and every passer-by paused to enquire what was going on. “A wedding, and a very grand one,” was the invariable answer. “In fact, the grandest thing you ever saw. The bridegroom is a nobleman of fabulous wealth—the Count de Ville-Handry—and the bride is an

American lady. They have been inside the church for some time already, and will soon come out again!"

Under the porch a dozen swells, clad in orthodox black,* with yellow kid gloves, and white cravats showing under their overcoats—evidently members of the wedding-party—were chatting together while waiting for the end of the ceremony. If they were amused, they hardly showed it; for several of them could hardly help yawning, and the others only continued to keep up a broken conversation. Suddenly, however, a small pill-box brougham drove up, and stopped at the gate of the square.

"Ah! ah," said a young man—one of the party under the porch. "Here comes M. de Brévan."

The speaker was not mistaken. Maxime leisurely alighted from his carriage, and approached the church in his usual phlegmatic manner. He shook hands with such of the party as he knew—that is, with most of them—and then in an easy tone enquired, "Who has seen the bride?"

"I!" replied an old beau, who smiled perpetually so as to display the thirty-two teeth his dentist had furnished him with.

"Well, what do you think of her?"

"She is always sublime in her beauty, my dear fellow. When she walked up the aisle to kneel down at the altar, a murmur of admiration followed her. Upon my word, I thought they would applaud."

This was too much enthusiasm, and M. de Brévan cut it short by asking, "And the Count de Ville-Handry?"

"Well, really," replied the old beau ironically, "the dear count can boast of having a valet who is almost as expert as Rachel, the famous English enameller. At a little distance you would have sworn he was only sixteen, and that he was going to be confirmed instead of married."

"Ah! ah! But what was his expression?"

"Oh—well—he seemed restless."

"I can understand that," observed a stout, elderly gentleman, who was said not to be very happily married.

Everybody laughed, except a very young man, a mere youth, who, not catching the joke, enquired, "Why so?"

A man of thirty or thereabouts, of most distinguished mien, and whom the others addressed, according to the degree of intimacy they could claim, either as "monseigneur," or "my dear duke," was gracious enough to reply, "Because, my dear viscount, Miss Brandon is one of those ladies who, under ordinary circumstances, are never married. They are courted and worshipped; they make us commit a thousand follies; allow us to ruin ourselves; and finally, to blow our brains out for them,—all well and good. But as for allowing them to bear our name, never!"

"No doubt a number of stories have been told about her," observed de Brévan; "but now-a-days there's such a lot of gossip. However—"

"You certainly would not ask me to prove that she had been in the dock, or had escaped from prison," interrupted the duke. "People say that good society is very exclusive in France; but really it does not deserve that reputation. Except, perhaps, at a score of mansions, where old traditions are still respected, every street door is open to the first

* Despite one or two attempts in a contrary sense, the Parisians, and even those of the highest social standing, still persist in attending matrimonial celebrations in evening dress. They frequently act in a similar fashion at funerals; and to the British eye, this display of swallow tails, opera hats, and patent leather boots, in the open sunlight, naturally has a peculiar, not to say distressing, effect.—*Trans.*

person, man or woman, who drives up in a carriage. And the number of those who do so is steadily increasing. Where do they all come from? Who knows? From Russia, Turkey, America, Hungary, from any country providing it's a long way off. How do they live? That's a mystery. But they do live, and live well into the bargain. They are rich, or at least they seem to be so; and they shine and sparkle, intrigue, conspire, and extort. I verily believe that this cosmopolitan crowd of adventurers will end by making itself master of everything. You may say that the matter is of little interest to me, and perhaps that's true. I don't mingle as a rule in what boulevardian journalists call 'High Life,' or fraternize with the mob which is termed 'All Paris.' I willingly shake hands with the workmen who work for me, and who earn their living worthily; but I do not shake hands with those ambiguous personages who have no title but their impudence, and no means of living but their underhand intrigues."

He addressed himself apparently to no one in particular, for as he spoke he gazed listlessly at the crowd in the square, and yet his manner was sufficiently peculiar to justify the surmise that he wished his words to be heard by some one among his listeners. It was evident enough, however, that the loungers in the porch considered his doctrines to be utterly out of season, and, indeed, almost ridiculous. One young man, who was extremely well-dressed, and sported such a darling black moustache, even turned to a neighbour, and asked, "Who is our friend, the preacher?"

"What! don't you know him?" replied the other. "That's the Duke de Champdoce, who married a Princess de Mussidan. Quite an original."

M. de Brévan, who had remained perfectly impassive, now remarked: "At all events, Miss Brandon can scarcely have married the count from motives of interest, for she is immensely rich herself."

"I consider her most disinterested," remarked another bystander, one of M. de Ville-Handry's intimate friends. "I have it from the count himself that none of his property is settled upon Miss Brandon."

"That certainly is marvellously disinterested," ejaculated the Duke de Champdoce, who, having said what he meant to say, now entered the church, leaving the others to carry on the conversation.

"Well, I fancy I know some one who is not particularly pleased with this marriage," said the old beau with the artificial teeth.

"Whom do you mean?"

"The Count de Ville-Handry's daughter. I have looked for her all over the church, and she is certainly not there."

"I am told she has been suddenly taken ill," rejoined another loungeur.

"So they say," interposed a young man; "but the fact is, that a friend of mine saw her just now, driving out in an open cab, in full dress. It appears she intended this pretty piece of scandal as a wedding-present for her step-mother."

"Upon my word, I should not like to stand in the count's shoes," observed M. de Brévan, shrugging his shoulders.

The remarks exchanged under the porch of St. Clotilde faithfully re-echoed the conversation going on in society. Public opinion was decidedly in Miss Brandon's favour, and those who remembered the past, like that eccentric nobleman the Duke de Champdoce, were few and far between. So brilliant was Sarah's success, that it even shed lustre on her relatives; and one young Anglomaniac sung the praises of Sir Thomas Elgin and Mrs Brian in glowing strains. He was interrupted by the announcement that the ceremony was now over, and that the bride and

bridegroom were in the vestry receiving the congratulations of their friends. On hearing this, everyone ceased talking and hurried into the church. The vestry was crammed to overflowing. The Count de Ville-Handry's more intimate friends were in turn inscribing their names on the marriage-register placed on a table near the window; while leaning against one of the cupboards appropriated to the vestments and holy vessels stood Miss Brandon—now Countess de Ville-Handry—with grim Mrs Brian and tall, stiff Sir Tom close beside her. Her admirers had certainly not exaggerated her beauty. Her white bridal robe was wonderfully becoming, and she had assumed for the occasion an exquisite look of ingenuous innocence. Some eight or ten young *élégantes* stood round her, and overwhelmed her with congratulations and compliments, which she acknowledged in a slightly tremulous voice, and with modestly cast-down eyes. The "happy man" was in the meantime airing his felicity in the centre of the room, blissfully repeating the words "my wife" at least a dozen times every minute. Nevertheless, at intervals a shadow crossed his victorious brow, especially when some awkward blunderer remarked, "How unfortunate that Mlle. Henriette is indisposed! How pleased she would have been to attend the ceremony!" It was not, perhaps, merely the blunderers who spoke in this fashion, but the malicious ones as well. Nearly every one was aware that there were unpleasant complications awaiting the count at home. Indeed, something had been suspected since the beginning of the ceremony, for just as the count was about to kneel down by the bride's side in front of the high altar, a servant, wearing his livery, hurried into the church and whispered a few words in his ear. The guests who were nearest to him saw him turn very pale and clench his fist with rage. What the servant had told him was easily guessed, when a notorious old gossip, the Countess de Bois, who arrived late, informed all her friends that she had just met Mlle. de Ville-Handry driving about in an open cab. Thus, when the congratulations had been hurriedly got through in the vestry, no one was surprised to hear the count order his coachman to drive home as swiftly as possible. He had invited some twenty guests to a grand great wedding-breakfast; but he seemed to have forgotten them. And once in his carriage, alone with Mrs Brian, Sir Tom, and the young countess, he burst into loud imprecations and absurd threats. On reaching the house, he did not wait for the coachman to drive as usual round the sweep, but springing out of the vehicle he cut right across the open space, leapt up the steps, and bounded into the hall. Wrath momentarily lent him the muscles of youth. "Ernest, send Ernest here," he cried, entering a small drawing-room, the door of which was open. Ernest was the count's valet, the skilful artist to whom he was indebted for his roseate complexion. "Where is mademoiselle?" he asked, directly Ernest appeared.

"Gone out, sir."

"When?"

"Immediately after you, sir."

The young countess, Mrs Brian, and Sir Tom had now entered the room. "Do you hear that?" asked the count, turning towards them; and addressing his valet again, he enquired, "How did it happen?"

"Very naturally. The gates had not been closed behind your carriage, sir, when the young lady rang her bell. A servant went to see what she wanted, and she ordered the landau to be brought round. She was told very respectfully that all three coachmen were out, and that there

was no one to drive her. 'If that's the case,' she answered, 'I want you to run and get me an open cab.' And, when the servant hesitated, she added, 'If you don't go instantly, I shall go myself.'

The count trembled with rage. "And then?" he asked, seeing that his valet paused.

"Then the servant was frightened, and did what she wanted."

"He is dismissed, the fool!" exclaimed M. de Ville-Handry.

"But allow me to say, sir," commenced Ernest.

"No. Let his wages be paid. And you go on."

Without showing any embarrassment, the valet shrugged his shoulders, and blandly continued—"When the cab entered the courtyard we saw the young lady come down in a splendid toilet, such as we had never seen her wear before,—not pretty exactly, but so conspicuous, that it must have attracted everybody's attention. She settled herself coolly on the cushions, while we looked at her in amazement; and then turning to me, she said, 'Ernest, tell my father that I shall not be back to lunch. I have a good many calls to make; and, as the weather is fine, I shall afterwards go to the Bois de Boulogne.' Thereupon the gates were opened, and off she went. It was then that I took the liberty to send you word, sir."

In all his life the Count de Ville-Handry had never been so furious. The veins in his neck began to swell, and his eyes became bloodshot, as if he were about to have an apoplectic fit. "You ought to have kept her from going out," he said hoarsely. "Why didn't you do so? You ought to have made her go back to her own room, used force if necessary—locked her up—bound her—anything!"

"You had given no orders, sir."

"You ought not to have required orders to do your duty. To let a mad woman run about! an impudent girl, whom I caught the other day in the garden with a man!" He spoke so loud that his voice was heard in the adjoining reception-room, where his guests were beginning to assemble. The unhappy man! He disgraced his own child.

"I beseech you, my dear friend, be calm!" exclaimed the young countess, approaching him.

"No, this must end; and I mean to punish the wicked girl."

"I beseech you, my dear count, don't destroy the happiness of the first day of our married life. Henriette is only a child: she did not know what she was doing."

Mrs Brian was not of the same opinion. "The count is right," said she. "The young lady's conduct is perfectly shocking."

"Ah, ah! Brian, how about our bargain?" interrupted Sir Tom. "Was it not understood that we should not meddle with the count's private affairs?"

Thus every one at once took up a preassigned part. The countess advocated forbearance; Mrs Brian advised discipline; and Sir Tom assumed an attitude of impartiality. After this the count was soon calmed, but with such a scene as its preface, the wedding-breakfast could not be very merry. The guests, who had overheard nearly everything, exchanged strange looks with each other. "The count's daughter," they thought, "and a lover? That can hardly be!"

In vain did M. de Ville-Handry try to look indifferent; in vain did the young countess display all her rare gifts. Everybody was embarrassed; nobody could summon up a smile; and every five minutes the conversation broke down. At half-past four o'clock the last guest escaped, and

the count remained alone with his new family. It was growing dark, and lamps were just being brought in, when wheels were heard rolling in the courtyard. The count rose to his feet, and turned pale. "Here she comes!" he said. "Here is my daughter!"

It was indeed Henriette. It may be asked how a young girl, usually so reserved, and naturally so timid, could have made up her mind to cause such a scandal? But the most timid people are precisely the boldest on certain occasions. Forced to abandon their natural course, they neither reason nor calculate, but, losing all self-possession, rush blindly into danger, impelled, as it were, by a kind of madness. Now, for nearly a fortnight Henriette had experienced the most bitter emotions. After her interview with Daniel in the garden her father had overwhelmed her with insults and reproaches,—speaking even in presence of the servants, as if anxious to have it reported on all sides that his daughter had disgraced herself. When Henriette had declined to be present either at the reading of the marriage contract between himself and Miss Brandon or at their wedding, he again flew into a violent passion, and each day, as the decisive moment drew nearer, a fresh lamentable scene occurred. Perhaps Henriette might have modified her opposition if her father had only used a little discretion, tried the powers of persuasion, or sought to touch her heart by speaking to her of herself, of her future happiness and peace. But no! he invariably spoke to her in a threatening manner, and the consequence was that Henriette determined to make her protest as public as she could by showing herself to all Paris whilst her father and Miss Brandon were being married at St. Clotilde. She had no one to whom she could confide her grief, no one to tell her that all the disgrace of such a scandal would fall back upon herself. Donning a very showy costume, so as to attract as much attention as possible, she spent the day in driving about to all the places where she thought she would meet most of her acquaintances. Night alone compelled her to return; and although physically exhausted, she was morally upheld by the absurd idea that she had done her duty, and shown herself worthy of Daniel. She had just alighted, and was about to pay her driver, when the count's valet came up, and said, as disrespectfully as he dared, "My master has ordered me to tell you to come to him as soon as you returned."

"Where is my father?"

"In the large reception-room."

"Alone?"

"No. The countess, Mrs Brian, and Sir Thomas Elgin are with him."

"Very well. I am coming;" and mustering all her courage, and looking whiter and colder than the marble statues in the vestibule, she opened the door of the reception-room and entered, stiffly erect.

"Ah, here you are?" exclaimed the count, restored to a certain degree of calmness by the very excess of his wrath,— "Here you are!"

"Yes, father."

"Where have you been?"

She had at a glance taken in the whole scene; and on perceiving the new countess, and those whom she called her accomplices, resentment conquered every other feeling. With a haughty smile she answered, "I have been to the Bois de Boulogne. In the morning I went out to make some purchases; later, knowing that the Duchess de Champdoce is unwell, and does not go out, I went to lunch with her; after that, as the weather was so fine—"

But the Count de Ville-Handry could endure it no longer. Seizing his

daughter by the wrists, he lifted her bodily, and, dragging her towards the Countess Sarah, he cried, "On your knees, unhappy child! on your knees, and ask the best of women to pardon you for all these insults!"

"You hurt me terribly, father," was Henriette's only reply.

But the countess had already thrown herself between them. "For heaven's sake, mademoiselle," she said, "spare your father!" And, as Henriette measured her from head to foot with an insulting glance, she continued, "Dear count, don't you see that your violence is killing me?"

On hearing this, M. de Ville-Handry promptly let his daughter go, and, drawing back, exclaimed, "Thank her, thank this angel of goodness who intercedes on your behalf! But have a care! my patience is at an end. There are such things as houses of correction for rebellious children and perverse daughters."

"Let it be so, father," answered Henriette with startling energy. "Choose the very strictest of these houses, and send me there. Whatever I may have to suffer there, it will be better than remaining here to see my mother's place occupied by that—woman!"

"Wretch!" gasped the count, who was nearly suffocating. Making a violent effort he tore off his cravat; and conscious that he was no longer master of himself, he cried to his daughter, "Leave me, leave me! or I answer for nothing."

She hesitated for one moment; and then giving the countess one more look of defiance, she slowly retired from the room.

XIV

"WELL, I am sure the count can boast that he has had a curious wedding-day." So said the footmen standing in the hall, just as Henriette left the reception-room. She heard them, and without knowing whether they approved of her conduct, or laughed at it, she felt gratified, so eager is passion for encouragement, no matter whence it comes. She had not gone half-way up-stairs to her own rooms, when all the bells of the house began to ring. Greatly surprised, she bent over the balusters to listen. The servants were rushing about; hurried steps could be heard in the vestibule, and the imperious voice of the count's valet could be distinguished, exclaiming, "Salts, quick! Fresh water. The countess has a nervous attack."

Henriette's lips curved into a bitter smile. "At least," she said to herself, "I shall have poisoned this woman's joy." And fearing to be caught listening, she went up-stairs. But, when she was alone once more, the poor girl was obliged to recognize the utter futility of her fancied triumph. Whom had she wounded after all? Her father. However unwell the countess might be to-night,—and perhaps she was not really unwell,—she would certainly be well again in the morning; and then what would be the advantage of the scandal she had caused in hopes of ruining her? Henriette perceived the folly of her course now when it was too late. Still, she fancied that what she had done that day pledged her for the future. The road she had taken evidently led nowhere, and yet it seemed to her miserable cowardice to shrink from going on.

Rising at daybreak, she was deliberating on what weak point she might make her next attack, when there came a knock at the door, and Clarisse, her own maid, entered. "Here is a letter for you, mademoiselle," she said. "I have received it this moment, in an envelope addressed to me."

Henriette examined the missive for some minutes studying the handwriting, which she did not know. Who could write to her in this fashion, except Maxime de Brévan, the friend whom Daniel had told her to rely on, and who had, so far, given her no sign of life? Her surmise was correct. It was M. de Brévan who wrote as follows :—"MADAM,—Like all Paris, I have heard of your proud and noble protest on the day of your father's unfortunate marriage. Egotists and fools will perhaps blame you. But you may despise them; for all the best men are on your side. And my dear Daniel, if he were here, would approve and admire your courage, as I do myself." She drew a full breath, as if her heart were relieved of a heavy burden. Daniel's friend approved her conduct. This sufficed to stifle the voice of reason, and dispel every idea of prudence. Moreover, M. de Brévan advised obstinate, dogged resistance in well-nigh every line of his letter. Towards the close, however, he turned to another subject. "At the moment of taking the train, Daniel handed me a letter, in which he expresses his innermost thoughts. With a sagacity worthy of such a heart, he foresees and solves in advance all the difficulties with which your step-mother will no doubt seek to embarrass you. This letter is too precious to be intrusted to the post. I shall therefore procure an introduction to your father's house before the end of the week, and will then have the honour of placing that letter in your own hands. I may add, that tomorrow I shall have an opportunity of sending Daniel news from here. If you wish to write to him, send me your letter to-day, to No. 62 Rue Lafitte, and I will enclose it in mine." Finally, there came a postscript couched as follows :—"Above everything, mistrust Sir Thomas Elgin."

This last recommendation filled Henriette's mind with vague and terrible apprehensions. "Why should I mistrust him more than the others?" she asked herself. But a more pleasing thought dispelled her anxiety. Here was an opportunity to send Daniel news promptly and safely, and she must make haste to write to him. Seating herself at her little writing-table she went to work, to acquaint her only friend on earth with all her bitter sufferings and uncertain hopes. Eleven o'clock struck just as she had finished filling eight long pages with all she felt uppermost in her heart. She was about to rise, when suddenly she felt a sensation of faintness and giddiness steal over her. What could it mean? Ah! now she remembered that she had eaten nothing since noon the day before. "I mustn't starve myself," she exclaimed almost merrily as she promptly recovered herself. Her long chat with Daniel had evidently rekindled her hopes. She rang the bell, and bade her maid bring her some breakfast.

Mlle. de Ville-Handry occupied three rooms. The first, her sitting-room, opened upon the landing; on the right was her bed-chamber, and on the left a boudoir, containing her piano and bookcase. When Henriette took her meals up-stairs, as had often happened of late, she had them served in the sitting-room. Entering that apartment, she proceeded to clear the table of the albums and little trifles which were lying about, so as to expedite matters, when the maid reappeared with empty hands. "Ah, mademoiselle, the count has given orders not to take anything up-stairs."

"That cannot be."

But a mocking voice outside responded, "It is so!" and a moment later M. de Ville-Handry made his appearance, already dressed, curled and painted, and having the expression of a man who is about to enjoy his revenge. Bidding the maid leave the room, he turned towards his daughter and resumed: "Yes, indeed, my dear Henriette, I have given strict

orders that your meals are not to be served to you up here. Why should you indulge in such fancies? Are you unwell? If you are, we will send for the doctor. If not, you will do me the favour to come down and take your meals in the dining-room with the family,—that is, with the countess and myself, Sir Thomas Elgin, and Mrs Brian."

"But, father!"

"There is no father who could stand this. The time of weakness has gone by, like the time of passion: so you must come down. You will do so whenever you please; for a day or two you'll pout, perhaps: but hunger drives the wolf into the village; and on the third day we shall see you come down as soon as the bell rings. I have appealed to your heart in vain: you see I am forced to appeal to your stomach."

Tears of shame and humiliation glistened in Henriette's eyes, despite all her efforts to remain impassive. Could this idea of starving her into obedience have originated with her father? No, he would never have thought of it! It was evidently a woman's thought, and the result of bitter, savage hatred. The poor girl felt that she was conquered; and her heart revolted at the thought that she would be forced to yield. She could imagine the exultation of the new countess when she, Count de Ville-Handry's daughter, appeared in the dining-room, brought there by want—by hunger. "Father," she begged, "send me nothing but bread and water, but spare me that exposure."

But if the count was repeating a lesson, he had learned it well. His features retained the same sardonic expression; and he coldly rejoined, "I have told you what I desire. You have heard it, and that is enough."

He was turning to leave the room, when his daughter held him back. "Father," she said, "listen to me."

"Well, what is it now?"

"Yesterday you threatened to shut me up."

"Well?"

"To-day it is I who beseech you to do so. Send me to a convent. However harsh and strict the rules may be, however sad the life, I shall find there some relief in my sorrow, and will bless you with all my heart."

"A fine idea," said he, shrugging his shoulders; "why, directly you reached the convent, you would at once write to every one we know that my wife had turned you out of the house; that you had been obliged to escape from threats and bad treatment: you would repeat all the stock complaints of the innocent young girl who is persecuted by a wicked step-mother. Not so, my dear, not so!" The breakfast bell, which was ringing below, interrupted him. "You hear, Henriette," he said,— "consult your stomach; and, according to what it tells you, come down, or stay here."

He left the room, quite proud at having performed what he called an act of paternal authority, without vouchsafing a glance at his daughter, who had sunk back on to a chair—for she was overcome, poor child! It was all over: she could struggle no longer. People who did not shrink from such measures to conquer her might resort to the last extremities. Whatever she did, sooner or later she must succumb. Hence, why not as well give way at once? She saw clearly that, the longer she postponed surrender, the sweeter victory would be to the countess, and the more painful the sacrifice to herself. Mustering, therefore, all her energy, she went down into the dining-room, where the others were already at table.

She had imagined that her appearance would be greeted by some

insulting remark. Not at all. The others hardly seemed to notice her. The countess paused in her previous talk to say "Good-morning, *mademoiselle!*" and then went on without betraying the slightest emotion. Henriette had even to acknowledge that they had been considerate. Her place had not been laid next to her stepmother, but between Mrs Brian and Sir Thomas Elgin. She sat down, and, while eating, stealthily observed these strangers, who were henceforth the masters of her destiny. She was at once struck with the marvellous dazzling beauty of Countess Sarah, of which the photograph shown her by her father afforded but a faint idea. The young countess had barely taken time to put on a wrapper before coming down to breakfast. Her complexion was more animated than usual, and she exhibited all the touching confusion of a young bride, being constantly more or less embarrassed. Henriette realised only too well the influence such a woman was likely to have over an old man who had fallen in love with her. The thought made her tremble. Again, grim Mrs Brian seemed hardly less formidable; for her dull, heavy eyes, and lean, yellow face spoke of nothing but wickedness and obstinacy. Still, judging by appearances, it seemed, after all, that the least to be feared was tall, stiff Sir Tom. Seated by her side, he discreetly paid her some little attentions; and, on observing him more closely, she detected in his eyes something like a gleam of commiseration. "And yet," she thought, "M. de Brévan warned me particularly against him."

Directly breakfast was over Henriette rose, and, having bowed without saying a word, was returning to her room, when she met some of the servants on the stairs carrying a heavy wardrobe. Upon inquiry she learned that, as Sir Tom and Mrs Brian were henceforth to live in the house, they were bringing in their furniture. Shaking her head sadly, she hurried into her rooms, where a still greater surprise was awaiting her. Three servants were hard at work taking down her furniture, under the superintendence of Ernest, the count's valet. "What are you doing here?" she asked. "Who has allowed you?"

"We are only obeying the count's orders, replied M. Ernest. "We are getting your rooms ready for Madame Brian." And turning to his colleagues he said—"Go on, you fellows! Take out that sofa."

"What?" thought Henriette, "these eager adventurers had taken possession of the house and reigned there absolutely, and yet that was not enough for them! They meant even to turn her out of her rooms." This impudence seemed so monstrous, that, unable to believe her eyes and ears, she yielded to a sudden impulse, returned to the dining-room, and asked her father: "Is it really true that you have ordered my furniture to be removed?"

"Yes, my daughter. My architect will transform your three rooms into a large reception-room for Mrs Brian, who had not space enough for—"

"I cannot understand," exclaimed the young countess with a gesture of displeasure, "how Aunt Brian can accept that."

"I beg your pardon," exclaimed Mrs Brian, "the count is doing this entirely without my consent."

"Sarah, my darling," rejoined the count, "permit me to be sole judge in all arrangements that concern my daughter." Count M. de Ville-Handry's tone was so firm as he said this, that one would have sworn the idea of dislodging Henriette had sprung from his own brains. "I never act thoughtlessly," he continued, "and always take time to mature my decisions. In this case I act from motives of the most ordinary propriety. Mrs Brian

is no longer young : my daughter is a mere child. If one of the two has to submit to some slight inconvenience, it is certainly my daughter."

All of a sudden Sir Thomas Elgin rose. "I should like," he began, and then, unfortunately, the rest of his phrase was lost in an indistinct murmur. He was no doubt at that moment recalling a promise he had made. Determined to keep his word not to interfere in the count's family affairs, and yet, on the other hand, indignant at what he considered an odious abuse of power, he abruptly left the room. His looks and gestures so clearly evinced these conflicting sentiments that Henriette was quite touched.

In the meantime M. de Ville-Handry had resumed speaking. "I have decided," said he, "that my daughter shall in future occupy the rooms formerly used by her mother's companion. They are small, but more than sufficient for her. Besides, they have this advantage, that they can be easily overlooked from one of our own rooms, my dear Sarah ; and that is an important point in dealing with an imprudent girl, who has so sadly abused the liberty she enjoyed, thanks to my blind confidence."

What could Henriette answer ? If she had been alone with her father she would certainly have defended herself, tried to induce him to reconsider his decision, and possibly have begged him to do so on her knees. But here, in the presence of these two women, with the Countess Sarah's mocking eyes upon her, it was impossible ! Ah ! she would have died a thousand times over rather than give these miserable adventurers the joy and satisfaction of such self-humiliation. "Let them crush me," she thought, "they shall never hear me complain, or cry for mercy." So when her father, who had been quietly watching her, asked, "Well ?" She simply replied, "You shall be obeyed this very night," and calmly left the room, holding her head erect, and without having shed a tear.

God knew, however, what she suffered. It certainly caused her no little sorrow to have to give up those little rooms where she had spent so many hours, and which recalled such sweet memories, but that was nothing in comparison with the prospect of having to live under the Countess Sarah's very eyes. They would not even leave her at liberty to weep. On the other side of the partition the countess would hear and delight in every sigh that escaped her.

She was suddenly roused from her distress by the recollection of the letter she had written to Daniel. If M. de Brévan was to have it that same day, there was not a moment to lose. Already it was too late for post, and she would have to send it by messenger. Accordingly, she rang the bell for Clarisse, her confidante, for the purpose of sending it to the Rue Lafitte. But, instead of Clarisse, one of the housemaids appeared, saying, "Your own maid is not in the house, mademoiselle. Mrs Brian has sent her to the Rue du Cirque. If I can do anything for you—"

"No, I thank you !" replied Henriette.

It seemed, then, that she counted for nothing any more in the house. She was not allowed to take her meals by herself ; she was turned out of her own rooms ; and the maid, long attached to her service, was taken from her. And she was forced to submit to these humiliations without a chance of repelling them. Time was passing, however, and it was growing each minute more difficult to let M. de Brévan have her letter in time for the night mail. "Well," said Henriette to herself, "I will take it myself." And although in all her life she had, perhaps, not been more than twice alone in the street, she put on her bonnet, wrapped herself up in a cloak, and swiftly went down-stairs. The door-keeper, a tall, imposing

funkey, who was very proud of his richly laced livery, was sitting in front of the little pavilion where he lived, smoking, and reading his paper. "Open the gate!" said Henriette.

But without taking his pipe from his mouth, or even rising from his seat, the fellow answered, "The count has sent me orders never to let you go out without a verbal or written permission from him, so that—"

"You impudent fellow!" exclaimed Henriette; and she resolutely walked towards the ponderous gate, and stretched out her hand to pull the bolt. But the man, divining her intention, and quicker than herself, rushed up to the gate, bawling as loud as he could, "Mademoiselle, Mademoiselle, I have my orders, and I shall lose my place."

On hearing his cries, a dozen servants idling about the stables, the vestibule, and the inner court, hastened to the spot. A moment later Sir Tom appeared, ready to go out on horseback, and finally the count himself. "What do you want? What are you doing there?" he asked.

"You see, I wish to go out."

"Alone?" laughed the count; and, pointing to the door-keeper, he harshly resumed: "This man would be instantly dismissed if he allowed you to leave the house alone. Oh, you need not look at me in that way! Henceforth you will only go out when and with whom it pleases me. And don't hope to escape my watchful observation. I have foreseen everything. The little gate you had a key of has been nailed up. And, if ever a man should dare to steal into the garden, the gardeners have orders to shoot him down like a dog, whether it be the man with whom I caught you the other night, or some one else."

Henriette staggered under this mean and cowardly insult; but, immediately collecting herself, she exclaimed: "Great God! Am I delirious? Father, are you aware of what you are saying?" And, as the suppressed laughter of the servants reached her, she added with almost convulsive vehemence, "At least, say who the man was with whom you saw me in the garden, so that everyone may hear his name. Tell them that it was M. Daniel Champcey,—he whom my mother chose for me among all,—he whom you received daily at your house during long years, and to whom you solemnly promised my hand, who was my betrothed, and who would now be my husband if we had chosen to approve of your unfortunate marriage! Tell them that it was M. Daniel Champcey, whom you had sent off the day before, and whom a crime, a forgery committed by your Sarah, forced to go to sea,—for he had to be got out of the way at any cost. As long as he was in Paris you would never have dared to treat me as you do now."

Overcome by this unexpected violence, the count could only stammer out a few incoherent words. Henriette was about to continue, when she felt herself taken by the arm, and gently but irresistibly led towards the house. It was Sir Tom, trying to save her from her own excitement. She looked at him, and noticed that a big tear was slowly rolling down the usually impassive baronet's cheek.

He led her as far as the staircase, and then, when she had laid hold of the balusters, he murmured, "Poor girl!" and hurried rapidly away.

Ay, poor girl, indeed! Her reason was giving way under all these terrible blows; and seized with a kind of vertigo, she hastened up-stairs, fancying she could still hear her father's abominable charges and the servants' laughter. "O God," she sobbed, "have pity on me!" She felt in her heart that she had no hope left now but God, delivered up as she

was to pitiless enemies, sacrificed to the implacable hatred of her step-mother, abandoned by everyone, and betrayed and openly renounced by her own father. Occupied with her gloomy thoughts, the poor girl paid no attention to the flight of time, but she was roused at last by the ringing of the dinner-bell. She was free not to go down; but she revolted at the idea that the Countess Sarah might think her overcome. "That must not be," she murmured; "she shall never know how much I suffer!" And ringing for Clarisse, who had in the meantime returned, she bade her dress her quickly. While changing her attire, a paper rustled in the pocket of the dress she took off, and she then remembered her letter to Daniel. Although it was now very late, she thought it best to try and let M. de Brévan have it, and accordingly she asked Clarisse to take a cab and repair to the Rue Lafitte. "Try and find some excuse," she said, "if you are asked why you are going out; and above all, be discreet."

Then, arrayed in one of her most becoming dresses, and with her beautiful hair daintily arranged, she went down-stairs, so determined to conceal her emotion that she actually had a smile on her lips as she entered the dining-room. Fever imparted unwonted animation to her features and a strange brilliancy to her eyes. Her beauty, of recent times somewhat impaired, again became so conspicuous, that it almost eclipsed that of the countess. Even the count was struck by it, and exclaimed, glancing at his young wife,—“Oh, oh!” This was, however, the only notice taken of Henriette. No one seemed aware of her presence, except Sir Tom, whose eyes softened whenever he looked at her. But what was that to her? Affecting a composure she was far from feeling, she was making an effort to eat, when a servant entered the room, and respectfully whispered a few words in the countess's ear. "Very well," she said; "I'll be there directly." And, without vouchsafing any explanation, she left the table, remaining perhaps ten minutes away.

"What was it?" asked Count de Ville-Handry with an accent of tender interest when his young wife returned.

"Nothing, my dear," she replied as she took her seat again,—“nothing, only some orders to give.”

Still, Henriette thought she noticed an expression of cruel satisfaction under her step-mother's apparent indifference. More than that, she fancied she detected the countess and Mrs Brian exchange rapid glances, one implying, "Well," and the other answering, "All right." "These wretches," thought the poor girl, "have prepared some fresh insult for me." And her suspicions became so intense, that when dinner was over, instead of returning to her own rooms, she followed her father and his new "friends" into the drawing-room. They did not long remain alone. The count and his young wife had probably announced that they would be "at home" that evening; for soon a number of visitors arrived, some of them old friends of the Ville-Handry family, but the great majority intimates from the Rue du Cirque. Henriette was too busily engaged in watching her step-mother to notice how eagerly she herself was examined, what glances the visitors cast at her, and how careful the married ladies, as well as the young girls, were to leave her by herself. It required a brutal scene to open her mind to the truth, and to bring her thoughts back to the horrible reality of her situation. By degrees, as the number of visitors increased, the conversation ceased to be general, and little groups were formed. In this way two ladies came and sat down near Henriette. She did not know them, but judged them to be friends of the Countess Sarah, noting

especially that one of them had a strong foreign accent. They were talking together, and Henriette instinctively listened to them. "Why didn't you bring your daughter?" asked one of them.

"How could I?" replied the other. "I would not bring her here for the world. Don't you know what kind of a girl the count's daughter is? It is incredible, and almost too scandalous. On the day of her father's marriage, and with the connivance of a servant, who has since been dismissed, she ran away with some one, and the police had to be employed to find out where she was, and bring her back home. If it had not been for our dear Sarah, she would have been sent to a house of correction."

A stifled cry interrupted them, and, on looking round, they perceived that Henriette had suddenly fainted, and fallen to the ground. Instantly, and with one impulse, everybody was up. But the honourable Sir Thomas Elgin was swifter than all the others, and rushed to the spot with such surprising promptness at the very moment when the accident happened, that it almost seemed as if he had had a presentiment, and was watching for the precise moment when his assistance would be needed. Raising Henriette with a powerful arm, he laid her on a sofa, not forgetting to slip a cushion under her head. At once the countess and the other ladies crowded around the fainting girl, rubbing the palms of her hands, moistening her temples with aromatic vinegar and cologne, and persistently holding bottles of salts to her nostrils. Still, all efforts to revive her proved fruitless; and this was so extraordinary, that even the Count de Ville-Handry began to be moved, although at first he had been heard to exclaim,—*"Pshaw! Leave her alone. It's nothing."* Senile love had not yet entirely extinguished all fatherly instincts; and anxiety rekindled the affection he had formerly felt for his child. Accordingly, rushing into the hall, he called to the footmen there on duty,—*"Quick! Let some one run for a doctor; never mind which,—the nearest!"*

This acted as a signal for the guests to scatter. Finding that this fainting-fit lasted too long, and fearing perhaps a fatal termination, a painful scene, and tears, they one by one slyly slipped out of the house. In this way the countess, Mrs Brian, Sir Tom, and the unhappy father, found themselves soon once more alone with Henriette, who was still unconscious. "We ought not to leave her here," said Sarah: "she will be better in bed."

"Yes, that's true: you are right!" replied the count. "I shall have her carried to her room."

He was stretching out his hand to pull the bell, when Sir Tom interposed, and exclaimed in a voice of deep emotion, "Never mind, count, I'll carry her myself." And, without waiting for an answer, he took her up like a feather and carried her to her room, followed by the count and countess. He could not, of course, remain in Henriette's room; but it looked as if he could not tear himself away. For some time the servants, quite amazed thereat, saw him walk up and down the passage with feverish steps, and, in spite of his usual impassiveness, evince every sign of extraordinary excitement. Every ten minutes he paused in his walk to ask at the door, in an anxious voice: "Well?"

"She is still in the same condition," was the answer. In the meantime two physicians had arrived, but without obtaining any better result than the countess and her friends. They exhausted all the usual remedies for such cases, and evidently began to be surprised at the persistency of the symptoms. Nor could the Count de Ville-Handry suppress his growing anxiety as he saw *them* consulting in the recess of one of the windows,

discussing more energetic means to be employed. At last, towards midnight, Sir Tom perceived the young countess come out of Henriette's room. "How is she?" he eagerly asked. "She's coming to," replied the countess, in a loud voice, so as to be heard by the servants,—“and that is why I am leaving her. She dislikes me so terribly, poor unhappy child, that I fear my presence might do her harm.”

Henriette had indeed recovered consciousness. First, a shiver ran through her whole frame, and then she tried painfully and repeatedly to raise herself on her pillows, and look around. She evidently did not remember what had happened, and mechanically passed her hand to and fro across her forehead, as if to brush away the dark veil hanging over her mind: at the same time, looking with haggard eyes at the doctors, her father, and her confidante, Clarisse, who knelt by her bedside, weeping. At last when, all of a sudden, the horrid reality broke upon her mind, she threw herself back, and cried out,—“O God!”

But she was saved; and the doctors soon withdrew, declaring that there was nothing to apprehend now, provided their prescriptions were carefully observed. The count then approached his daughter, and, taking her hands, asked with an air of unusual affection, “Come, child. What has happened? What was the matter?”

She looked at him in utter despair, and then in a low voice replied:—“Nothing! only you have ruined me, father.”

“How, how?” asked the count. “What do you mean?” And embarrassed, perhaps angry with himself, and trying to find an excuse for what he had done, he added, simpering,—“Is it not your own fault? Why do you treat Sarah so badly, and do all you can to exasperate me?”

“Yes, you are right. It is my fault,” murmured Henriette. She spoke in a tone of bitter irony now; but afterwards, when she was alone and quiet, she had to acknowledge and confess to herself, that it was as she had said. The scandal by which she had intended to overwhelm her step-mother had fallen back upon herself and crushed her.

Still, the next morning she was a little better; and, in spite of all that Clarisse could say, she would get up, and go down-stairs, for all her hopes henceforth depended on that letter written by Daniel. She had been waiting day after day for M. de Brévan, who was to bring it to her; and would not have missed him for anything in the world. However, she waited for him in vain that day, and, indeed, during the remainder of the week. Attributing his delay to some new misfortune, she was thinking of writing to him, when at last, on Tuesday evening—when the countess held her second reception,—a servant suddenly announced, “M. Palmer,—M. de Brévan!” Such was Henriette's emotion that she abruptly turned towards the door, eager to see the man Daniel had called his second self. The first of the two visitors was an elderly individual, with grey hair, and looking as grave and solemn as a member of parliament; the other, who might be thirty or thirty-five years old, had a cold and haughty appearance, his thin lips curving into a sardonic smile. “That is the man!” said Henriette to herself: “That's Daniel's friend!” Upon examining him, she thought his composure affected, and his whole appearance lacking in frankness. Still, she never thought for a moment of distrusting M. de Brévan. Daniel had blindly recommended him to her: and that was enough. She had been too severely punished when trying to follow her own inspirations ever to think of repeating the experiment. She kept M. de Brévan in view, and noticed that, after being presented to the Coun-

tess Sarah and her husband, he threw himself into the throng of visitors. At that moment the reception was at its height. After awhile, steering through the various groups, he managed to approach her, gaining a vacant chair by her side. The air of perfect indifference with which he sat down shewed that he had fully measured the danger of risking a confidential talk with a young lady under the eyes of fifty or sixty persons. He commenced with some of those set phrases current in society, speaking loud enough to be heard by the people near them, and to satisfy their curiosity if they had a fancy for listening. Noticing that Henriette had turned very red, and fixed her eyes most anxiously upon him, he ventured to say in an undertone, "I beg you, mademoiselle, affect a little more indifference. Smile: we may be watched. Remember that we must not seem to know each other." And then in a loud voice he began to sing the praises of the last new play that had been performed, until finally, thinking that he had quieted all possible suspicions, he drew a little nearer, and, casting down his eyes, remarked, "It is useless to tell you, mademoiselle, that I am Maxime de Brévan."

"I heard your name announced, monsieur," replied Henriette.

"I took the liberty of writing to you, mademoiselle, under cover to your maid, according to Daniel's orders; but I hope you will excuse me."

"I have nothing to excuse, monsieur, but to thank you very much, from the bottom of my heart, for your generous devotion." No man is perfect; and when M. de Brévan heard these words, a passing blush suffused his cheeks; he coughed two or three times, and passed his hand between his collar and his neck, as if troubled in his throat. "You must have thought," she continued, "that I was not in any great haste to avail myself of your kind offer; but—there were difficulties—in my way—"

"Oh, yes! I know," broke in M. de Brévan, sadly shaking his head: "your maid has told me. For she found me at home, as no doubt you have heard; and your letter arrived just in time to be sent on with mine. They will gain a fortnight in this way; for the mail for Cochin China does not leave more than once a month,—on the 29th." But he paused suddenly, or rather raised his voice to resume his account of the new drama, for two young ladies had stopped just before them. As soon as they had moved on, he resumed,—“I bring you Daniel's letter, mademoiselle. I have folded it up very small, and I have it here in my hand: if you will let your handkerchief fall, I'll slip it into it as I pick it up.” The trick was not new; and it was by no means difficult of accomplishment. Still, so far as Henriette was concerned, it was performed awkwardly enough. She failed to let her handkerchief fall in a natural manner, and when she took it back again, she made a far too eager gesture. Moreover, as she felt the crisp paper under the cambric folds, she blushed perceptibly. Fortunately, M. de Brévan had the presence of mind to rise, and move his chair so as to help her in concealing her embarrassment. Then, when he saw her calm again, he sat down once more, and resumed in a tone of deep interest, "Now, allow me to inquire after your position here."

"It is terrible."

"Do they harraß you?"

"Oh, fearfully!"

"No doubt, your step-mother?"

"Alas! who else would do it? But she dissembles, veiling her malignity under affected gentleness. In appearance she is all kindness to me. And my poor father becomes a willing instrument in her hands,—my poor father, formerly so kind, and so fond of me!"

She was deeply moved; and M. de Brévan perceived that tears were starting from her eyes. "Mademoiselle," said he in a frightened tone, "for heaven's sake control yourself!" And, anxious to turn Henriette's thoughts from her father, he asked, "How does Mrs Brian behave towards you?"

"She always sides against me."

"Naturally. And Sir Tom?"

"You wrote to me that I ought to mistrust him particularly, and so I do; but, I must confess, he alone seems to be touched by my misfortunes."

"Ah! that is the very reason why you ought to fear him."

"Why so?"

"For a moment M. de Brévan hesitated, and then, after cautiously glancing round, he rapidly replied, "Because he might very well cherish the hope of replacing Daniel in your heart, and of becoming your husband."

"Great God!" exclaimed Henriette, sinking back in her chair with an expression of horror. "Is it possible?"

"I am quite sure of it," replied M. de Brévan. And, as if he had frightened himself by this revelation, he added, "Yes, I am quite sure of it. I have read that man's heart; and before long you will have some terrible evidence of his intentions. But I beg you, mademoiselle, let this remain a secret between us, to be kept religiously. Never allow yourself the slightest allusion."

"What can I do?" murmured the poor girl, "what can I do? You alone, sir, can advise me."

For some time M. de Brévan remained silent; but at last he sorrowfully replied, "My experience, mademoiselle, supplies me with but one advice,—be patient; say and do as little as possible; and endeavour to appear insensible to their insults. I would say to you, if you will excuse the triviality of the comparison, imitate those feeble insects who simulate death when they are touched. They are defenceless; and that is their only chance of escape." He rose from his seat; and, bowing deeply to Henriette, he added, "I must also warn you, mademoiselle, not to be surprised if you see me doing everything in my power to win your step-mother's good-will. Believe that such duplicity is very distasteful to my character. But I have no other means of obtaining the privilege of coming here frequently, of seeing you, and being useful to you, as I promised your friend Daniel I would."

XV.

DURING Daniel's last visits to Henriette, he had not concealed from her the fact that Maxime de Brévan had formerly been on intimate terms with Sarah Brandon and her friends. However, in explaining his reasons for wishing to renew these relations, M. de Brévan had acted with his usual diplomacy. Otherwise, Henriette might have conceived some vague suspicions when she saw him, soon after leaving her, enter into a long conversation with the countess, then speak with Sir Tom, and finally chat most confidentially with austere Mrs Brian. But, under the circumstances, she was by no means surprised. Moreover, her mind was now thousands of miles away. She was indeed thinking of Daniel, and the precious letter in her pocket, and regretted that she had not the right to run away and read it at once. For adversity was gradually teaching her the advantages

of circumspection; and she realised that it would be unwise to leave the room before the last guests had retired. Thus it was past two o'clock in the morning before she could open the missive, after dismissing her maid Clarisse. Unfortunately, she did not find it to contain what she had hoped for,—advice, or rather directions for her future conduct. The fact is, that, in his terrible distress, Daniel was no longer sufficiently master of himself to look calmly into the future, and weigh the probabilities. In his despair he had filled three pages with assurances of his love, with promises that his last thoughts would be for her, and with prayers that she would not forget him. Hardly twenty lines were devoted to advice, and yet he ought to have entered into the most precise and minute details. All his suggestions amounted to this,—arm yourself with patience and resignation till my return. Do not leave your father's house unless at the last extremity—if threatened, for instance, with immediate danger,—and under no circumstances do so without first of all consulting Maxime. To complete Daniel's blunder, his excessive delicacy had made him shrink from saying anything likely to wound his friend's over-sensitive feelings, and thus he had omitted to acquaint Henriette with certain most important circumstances. For instance, he merely told her that if flight became her only resource, she need not hesitate from pecuniary considerations, for he had foreseen everything, and made all needful provision. These words were by no means precise enough for her to guess that her lover had blindly entrusted his entire fortune to his friend Maxime. However, both M. de Brévan and Daniel expressed the same opinion as to her future course, and this sufficed to reassure her. She determined to follow their advice, and to submit without a word of complaint or a gesture of resistance to all the insults and outrages her enemies might heap upon her. She meant to follow the example which Maxime had drawn from insect life.

During the following weeks it was not so difficult for her to adhere to this resolution. Whether it were weariness or calculation, her enemies seemed to forget her. Except at meals, they took no more notice of her than if she had not existed. The sudden impulse of affection which had actuated the Count de Ville-Handry on the evening when he thought his daughter's life in danger had long since passed away. He only honoured her now with ironical glances, and never addressed a word to her. The countess observed a kind of affectionate reserve, like a well-disposed person who has seen all her advances repelled, but who, although hurt, is quite ready to make friends at the first sign from the opposite side. As for grim Mrs Brian, she never opened her thin lips but to make some unpleasant remark, of which a single word was intelligible: "shocking!" There remained Sir Thomas Elgin, whose sympathetic pity daily became more manifest. But, since Maxime's warning, Henriette anxiously avoided him. She led a truly wretched life, despite the absence of any fresh "scene;" for she was virtually kept a prisoner, being only occasionally allowed to take even a stroll in the garden. Months elapsed, and she never went beyond the garden walls, save on Sunday mornings to attend mass at a neighbouring church. Her father could scarcely refuse her that, and yet he only allowed her to absent herself escorted by his valet, who had express orders not to allow her to speak to anyone whatsoever, and to "apprehend" her (this was M. de Ville-Handry's own expression), and bring her home by force if she made the least attempt to escape. They were not merely afraid of her escaping, but even seemed to dread her having any secret communication with the outer world. To fix her suspicions on that

point, she one morning asked her father's permission to send to the Duchess de Champdoce, and beg her to come and spend the day with her. But the Count brutally replied, that he did not desire to see the Duchess de Champdoce; and that, besides, she was not in Paris, as her husband had taken her south to hasten her recovery from a long illness. On another occasion, towards the end of February—spring was early that year, and there had been a succession of several fine days—the poor child could not help expressing a desire to take exercise and breathe a little fresh air, whereupon her father replied: "Every day your mother and I drive for an hour or two in the Bois de Boulogne. Why don't you go with us?"

Henriette made no rejoinder. She would sooner have suffered martyrdom than have appeared in public, seated in the same carriage as the countess, and by her side.

In the meanwhile she had no other assistance or support than such as she received from M. de Brévan, who, in accordance with the plan he had mentioned to her, had succeeded in acquiring the right to be a frequent visitor. He was on the best terms with Mrs Brian; and the count invited him to dinner several times. By this time Henriette had quite overcome all prejudice against him. He displayed such a respectful interest in her welfare, such almost feminine delicacy, and so much prudence and discretion, that she blessed Daniel for having left her this friend upon whose devotion she counted as on a brother's. Had he not on certain evenings, when she was well-nigh overcome with despair, restored her courage by whispering, "Be brave: here is another day gone! Daniel will soon be back!"

The greater Henriette's isolation became, the more she observed what was going on around her. And she thought she noticed some very strange changes. Her mother would never have been able to recognise her reception-rooms. What had become of the select society the count's first wife had gathered together and fashioned into something like a court, over which her husband towered like a king? Now-a-days the mansion had, so to say, become the headquarters of that motley society which forms the "Foreign Legion" of pleasure and scandal. Sarah Brandon, now Countess de Ville-Handry, was surrounded by the members of that strange cosmopolitan aristocracy which the corrupt government of that arch adventurer, the Third Napoleon, welcomed to Paris—an aristocracy often owing its titles to disgraceful services rendered to some crowned debauchee, and oftener still having no real right to noble rank, and yet, nevertheless, by its extravagance and splendour, dazzling the multitude and puzzling the police. The notoriously tainted members of this set, which journalists, forgetful of the national dignity, have christened "All Paris," were certainly not received by the young countess, who was too clever to commit such a blunder; but she welcomed to her house many and many of those equivocal cosmopolitan personages whose revenues come less from good acres in the broad sunlight than from the credulity and folly of mankind. At first the Count de Ville-Handry had been rather shocked by this new society, whose manners and customs were unknown to him, and whose language even he hardly understood. But it had not taken long to acclimatize him. He was the flag that covers the merchandise, the nominal master, although, in reality he exercised no authority whatever. He was treated with the most profound respect, and all Sarah's subjects and allies vied with each other in flattering him. They displayed such abject admiration for his talents that he fancied he had regained the prestige he had enjoyed in former days, thanks to his first wife's skilful management, and assumed an

air of grotesque importance on a par with his revived vanity. He was, moreover, again occupying all the lawyers and agents who had been in the habit of calling upon him before his marriage. They now reappeared, with a legion of those famished speculators whom the mere report of a great enterprise attracts as invincibly as a fly is attracted by a lump of sugar. The count would shut himself up in his study with these men, and often spend the whole afternoon with them there. Henriette was wondering what new misfortune was about to happen, when, to her amazement, her father unhesitatingly gave up the splendid apartments on the ground floor of the house, and allowed them to be cut up into an infinite number of small rooms. On the doors there soon appeared various inscriptions, of a kind seldom found in aristocratic mansions, such as "*Office*," "*Board Room*," "*Secretary*," "*Cashier's Room*," &c. Then cartloads of office-furniture arrived,—tables, desks, and chairs; next, mountains of huge volumes, ledgers, day-books, and so on; and finally, two huge safes, as large as many a bachelor's lodging.

Henriette was now seriously alarmed, and knowing beforehand that no one in the house would answer her questions, she turned to M. de Brévan, who, in an off-hand manner, assured her that he knew nothing about the matter, but would inquire, and let her know as soon as possible. There was no necessity, however, for him to do so, for one morning, while Henriette was wandering listlessly round the offices, she noticed a huge poster affixed to one of the doors. On approaching she read as follows:—

THE FRANCO-AMERICAN COMPANY,

For the development of the

PENNSYLVANIA PETROLEUM WELLS.

Capital.—TEN MILLIONS OF FRANCS.

In Twenty Thousand Shares of 500 Francs each.

The Charter may be seen at the Office of M. Lilois, public notary.

Chairman: THE COUNT DE VILLE-HANDRY, Grand Cross of the Legion of Honour; Member of the Corps Legislatif, &c., &c., &c.

Applications for shares will be received on and after the 25th of March.

Principal Office at the

COUNT DE VILLE-HANDRY'S MANSION, RUE DE VARENNES.

Branch Office—RUE LEPELLETIER, No. 79.

At the foot, in small print, followed a most elaborate prospectus, setting forth, in glowing terms, the imperative necessity which had led to the establishment of the Pennsylvania Petroleum Company, the nature of its proposed operations, the immense services it would render to the world at large, and, above all, the huge profits which would promptly accrue to the shareholders. Then came a semi-scientific account of the nature of petroleum, in which it was clearly demonstrated that this admirable product represented, in comparison with other oils, a saving of more than sixty per cent.; that it gave a light of matchless purity and brilliancy; that it burnt without the least smell; and, above all, that, in spite of the statements made by interested persons, there was no possible danger of explosion connected with its use. "In less than twenty years," continued the prospectus in a strain of lyric prophecy, "petroleum will have taken the place of all the primitive and useless illuminating mediums now employed. It will replace, in like manner, all the coarse and troublesome varieties of fuel of our day. In less than twenty years the whole world will be lighted and heated by petroleum; and the oil-wells of Pennsylvania

are inexhaustible." To crown the whole affair, the placard finished with an effusive eulogy of the chairman, the famous Count de Ville-Handry, who was spoken of as a man sent by Providence; especial mention being made of his colossal private fortune, which, it was suggested, would effectively screen the shareholders from any risk. Henriette was overwhelmed with surprise. "Ah!" said she, "so this is what Sarah Brandon and her accomplices were aiming at. My father is ruined!" She could not understand how he could assume the whole responsibility of such a hazardous enterprise, and deliberately run the terrible risk of failure. With his deeply-rooted aristocratic prejudices, moreover, how could he ever consent to lend his name to an industrial enterprise? "It must have required prodigious patience and cunning," she thought, "to induce him to surrender his cherished old convictions. They must have worried him terribly, and brought fearful pressure to bear upon him."

She was therefore truly amazed when, two days afterwards, she accidentally witnessed a lively discussion between her father and the countess on the subject of these famous placards, which were now scattered all over Paris, and, indeed, all over France. The countess seemed to be distressed by the whole affair, and laid before her husband all the objections which Henriette herself would have liked to have urged; and she did so with all the authority she derived from the count's passionate affection. She did not understand, she said, how her husband, a nobleman of ancient lineage, could stoop to "money-making." Had he not enough wealth already? Would he be any happier if he had twice or thrice as many thousands a-year? He met all these objections with an indulgent smile, like a great artist who hears an ignoramus criticise his work. And, when the countess paused, he deigned to explain to her in that emphatic manner which betrayed his intense conceit, that if he, a representative of the very oldest nobility, threw himself into the great industrial movement of the century, it was for the purpose of setting a lofty example. He had no desire for "filthy lucre," he assured her; but only desired to render his country a great service. "Too dangerous a service!" replied the countess. "If you succeed, as you hope, who will thank you for it? No one. More than that, if you speak of disinterestedness, people will laugh in your face. If the thing fails, on the other hand, who will have to pay? You yourself; and folks will call you a blockhead into the bargain."

The Count de Ville-Handry shrugged his shoulders; and, taking his wife by the hand, replied: "Would you love me less if I were ruined?"

She raised her beautiful eyes beaming with affection, and replied in a soft voice, "God is my witness, my friend, that I should be delighted to be able to prove to you that I did not marry you for money."

"Sarah!" cried the count in ecstasy, "Sarah, my darling, that word is worth the whole of the fortune you blame me for risking."

Much as Henriette was inclined to mistrust appearances, she never supposed that this scene had been most cunningly devised with the view of impressing the coming industrial enterprise more forcibly than ever on the count's feeble mind. She fancied that this Petroleum Company, founded at Sir Tom's instigation, was really unpleasant to the countess; and that discord reigned in the enemy's camp. The result of her meditations was a long letter to a nobleman for whom her mother had always entertained great esteem,—the Duke de Champdoce. After explaining to him her situation, she told him all that she knew of the new enterprise, and besought him to interfere whilst it was yet time. When her letter was

ready she gave it to Clarisse, urging her to carry it at once to its address ; but having by chance followed the maid down-stairs, she saw her enter the countess's room and hand her the letter. So she was betrayed even by the girl whom she thought so devoted to her interests. How long had this treachery been going on ? Perhaps ever since the outset of her troubles. Many things which had hitherto seemed perfectly incomprehensible were now fully explained. In her despair and wrath she forgot the reserve she had sought to impose upon herself, and rushing into the countess's room, exclaimed :—" Give me that letter, madame ! "

Clarisse had fled when she saw her treachery discovered. " I shall hand this letter, mademoiselle," replied the countess coldly, " to your father, as it is my duty to do."

" Ah, take care, madame ! " cried Henriette with a threatening gesture ; " take care ! My patience has its limits." Her attitude and accent were so ominous that the countess thought it prudent to put a table between herself and her victim. But suddenly a great revolution took place in Henriette's heart, and, in a calmer tone, she continued—" Let us have an explanation, madame, while we are alone. What do you want me to do ? "

" Nothing, I assure you."

" Nothing ? Who is it, then, that has meanly slandered me, and robbed me of my father's affection, who surrounds me with spies, and overwhelms me with insults ? Who forces me to lead this wretched life to which I am condemned ! "

The countess's features showed how deeply she was reflecting. She was evidently calculating the effect of some new plan. " You will have it so," she replied resolutely. " Very well, then, I will be frank with you. Yes, I am bent upon ruining you. Why ? You know it as well as I do. I will ask you, in my turn, who did everything that could possibly be done to prevent my marriage ? Who endeavoured to crush me ? Who would like to drive me from this house branded with infamy ? Is it not you,—always you ? Yes, you are right. I hate you : I hate you unto death, and I mean to avenge myself ! "

" Madame ! "

" Wait ! What harm had I done you before my marriage ? None. You did not even know me by name. People came and told you atrocious stories invented by my enemies, and you believed them. Your father told you, ' They are wicked libels.' What did you answer ? That ' only those are libelled who deserve it.' I wanted to prove to you that it isn't so. You are the purest, chastest girl I know : are you not ? Very well. I admit it, but I defy you to find a single person around you who does not believe that you have had lovers."

Extreme situations have this peculiarity, that the principal actors may be agitated by the most furious passions, and still outwardly preserve the greatest calmness. Thus these two women, who were burning with mortal hatred, spoke with almost calm voices. " And you think, madame," resumed Henriette, " that sufferings like mine can be long continued ? "

" They will be continued till it pleases me to put an end to them."

" Or till I come of age."

The countess made a great effort to conceal her surprise. " Oh, oh ! " said she to herself.

" Or," continued the young girl, " till he whom you parted from me—M. Daniel Champcey—returns."

" Stop, mademoiselle, You are mistaken. I did not send Daniel away."

Daniel! the countess familiarly called him by his christian name. Had she any right to do so? What was the meaning of this extraordinary impudence? Henriette conjectured it to be only a new insult; no suspicion entered her mind, and she replied ironically,—“Then it wasn’t you who sent that letter to the Ministry of Marine? It wasn’t you who ordered and paid for the forged document which caused M. Champey to be sent abroad?”

“No; and I told him so myself, the day before he left, in his own room.”

Henriette was overwhelmed. What? This woman had gone to see Daniel? Was it true? Assuredly not. It was not even plausible. “In his room?” she repeated,—“In his room?”

“Why, yes, in the Rue de l’Universite. I foresaw the trick, and I wished to prevent it, but unfortunately I failed. I had a thousand reasons for wishing that he should remain in Paris.”

“A thousand reasons? You? Tell me only one?”

The countess courtesied, as if excusing herself for being forced to tell the truth against her inclination, and added simply,—“I love him!”

As if she had suddenly seen an abyss opening beneath her feet, Henriette threw herself back, pale, trembling, her eyes starting from their sockets. “You—love—Daniel!” she stammered,—“you love him!” And, agitated by a nervous tremor, she added, laughing painfully,—“But he—he? Can you hope that he will ever love you?”

“Yes, any day I wish it. And I shall wish it the day when he returns.”

Was she speaking seriously? or was the whole scene only a bit of cruel sport? This is what Henriette asked herself, as far as she was able to control her intellect; for she felt her head growing dizzy, and her thoughts rushed wildly through her mind. “You love Daniel!” she repeated once more, “And yet you were married the very week after his departure!”

“Alas, yes!”

“And what was my father to you? A magnificent prey, which you did not like to let escape,—an easy dupe. After all, you acknowledge it yourself, it was his fortune you wanted. It was for his money’s sake that you—you,—the marvellously-beautiful young woman,—married the old man.”

A smile curved the countess’s lips, revealing all the deep treachery of her secret calculations. “I? I coveted the dear count’s fortune?” said she, with an ironical laugh. “You can’t mean it, mademoiselle? Have you so completely forgotten how, only the other day in your presence, I tried my utmost to turn him from this enterprize in which he is about to embark all he possesses?”

Henriette hardly knew whether she was awake or asleep. Was she not, perhaps, under the influence of some hallucination caused by fever? “And you dare tell all these things to me, to the Count de Ville-Handry’s own daughter, your husband’s daughter,” she said.

“Why not?” asked the countess. And, shrugging her shoulders, she added in a careless tone,—“Do you think I am afraid of your reporting me to him? You are at liberty to try it. Listen. I think I hear your father’s footstep in the hall: call him in, and tell him what we have been talking about.” And, as Henriette made no rejoinder, she laughed, and resumed,—“Ah! you hesitate. You don’t dare do it? Well, you are wrong. I mean to hand him your letter, and I shall call him.”

There was no need for it; for at the same moment the count entered, followed by grim Mrs Brian. On perceiving his wife and daughter

together, his face lighted up immediately, and he exclaimed—"What! You are here, both of you, chatting amicably like two charming sisters? My Henriette has come back to her senses, I trust." They were both silent; and then noting how fiercely they looked at each other, he continued in a bitter tone—"No, I see I'm mistaken! I am not so fortunate. What is the matter? What has happened?"

The countess shook her head sorrowfully, and replied,—“Your daughter has written a letter to one of my cruellest enemies—to a man who, as you know, slandered me meanly on our wedding-day,—in short, to the Duke de Champdoce!”

“And has any one of my servants dared to carry that letter?”

“No, my friend! It was brought to me in obedience to your orders; and the young lady haughtily summoned me to return it to her.”

“That letter?” cried the count, “Where is it?”

“Perhaps it would be better to throw it into the fire without reading it,” said the countess, as she handed it to him.

But he had already torn the envelope open, and was reading the first lines. Almost immediately a flush suffused his forehead, and his eyes became bloodshot, for Henriette, sure of the Duke de Champdoce, had not hesitated to open her heart to him, but had described her situation as it really was; painting her step-mother as he had anticipated she would be; and at frequent intervals came phrases which were so many dagger-thrusts to the poor infatuated count. “This is unheard of!” he growled with a curse. “This is incomprehensible! Such perversity has never been known before.” And approaching his daughter, with crossed arms, he cried with a voice of thunder,—“You wretch! Will you disgrace us all?”

She made no reply. As immovable as a statue, she did not even tremble under the storm. Besides, what could she do? Defend herself? She would not stoop to do that. Repeat the countess's impudent avowals? What would be the use? Did she not know beforehand that her father would never believe her.

In the meantime grim Mrs Brian had taken a seat by the side of her beloved Sarah. “If for my sins,” said she, “I were afflicted with such a daughter, I would get her a husband as soon as possible.”

“I have thought of that,” replied the count; “and I believe I have even hit upon an arrangement which—” But, when he noted his daughter's watchful eye fixed upon him, he paused, and, pointing towards the door, brutally exclaimed: “You are in the way here!”

Without saying a word she left the room, much less troubled by her father's fury than by the countess's strange confessions. She only now began to measure the full extent of her step-mother's hatred. She knew that she was too practical a woman to waste her time in making idle speeches. Hence, if she had stated that she loved Daniel,—a statement which Henriette believed to be untrue,—if she had impudently confessed that she coveted her husband's fortune, she had a purpose in view. What was that purpose? How could anyone unearth the truth from among such a mass of falsehood and deception? At all events, the scene was strange enough to confound any one's judgment. And when Henriette that evening found an opportunity to tell M. de Brévan what had happened, he trembled in his chair, and was so overwhelmed with surprise that he forgot his usual precautions, and exclaimed almost aloud,—“That isn't possible!” He—usually so impassive—was certainly terribly excited, and

in less than five minutes he changed colour fully a dozen times. It seemed as if he perceived the edifice of all his hopes crumbling to pieces. At last, after a little reflection, he remarked, "Perhaps it would be wise, mademoiselle, for you to leave the house."

"What? How can I do that?" she answered sorrowfully. "After such odious slander, my honour and Daniel's honour oblige me to remain here. He recommends me only to fly at the last extremity, and when there is no other resource left. Now, I ask you, shall I be more unhappy or more seriously threatened to-morrow than I am to-day? Evidently not."

XVI.

THE confidence which Henriette expressed was not real. She had terrible presentiments, and a secret voice seemed to tell her that this scene—no doubt carefully prepared beforehand—was but another step leading to the final catastrophe. Some days, however, passed by, and nothing unusual happened. It seemed as if her persecutors had resolved to give her a short respite. She was not even so carefully watched as usual. The countess kept out of her way, and Mrs Brian no longer frightened her with her incessant taunts. Her father she seldom saw, for he was entirely absorbed in the preparations for launching the Pennsylvania Petroleum Company; and thus a week later, it seemed as if everyone had forgotten the terrible explosion caused by her letter to the Duke de Champdoce. It should be mentioned, however, that on the very evening after that distressing scene, Sir Thomas Elgin's generous indignation so far got the better of his usual reserve, and repeated pledges of neutrality, that he took the Countess Sarah aside, and sharply reproached her. "You will have to eat your own words," he said among other things, "if you use such abominable means to gratify your spite." It is true that, while speaking to his kinswoman, he took pains to be overheard by Henriette. And, indeed, as if fearing that she might not fully appreciate his sentiments, he stealthily pressed her hand, and whispered into her ear,—“Poor, dear girl! Fortunately I am here, and will watch.”

This sounded like a promise to afford her protection, which certainly would have proved efficacious if it had been sincere. But was it sincere? "No: most assuredly not!" replied M. de Brévan when he was consulted. "It can be nothing but vile hypocrisy, and the beginning of an abominable farce. However, you will see, mademoiselle."

The first spectacle offered to Henriette's view was a complete transformation in Sir Tom's manner. He, once so frigid and reserved, lately so sympathetically benevolent, now began to shew signs of a yet more tender sentiment. It was not pity now which beamed forth from his big, blue-china eyes, but the suppressed flame of a discreet passion. In public he did not particularly commit himself; but there was no little attention which he did not stealthily pay Henriette. He never left the room before her; and, on the reception-evenings, he always took a seat by her side, and remained there till the end. The most unpleasant consequence of these manœuvres was that it prevented her from speaking to M. de Brévan. The latter naturally became very indignant, and conceived so violent a dislike for Sir Tom that he could hardly contain himself. "Well, mademoiselle," he said to Henriette, on one of the few occasions when he

was able to speak to her,—“well, what did I tell you? Does the scamp show his hand clearly enough now?”

Henriette did all she could to discourage her eccentric lover; but it was impossible for her to avoid him, as they lived under the same roof, and sat down twice a-day at the same table. “The simplest way,” was M. de Brévan’s advice, “would be, perhaps, to provoke an explanation.”

However, Sir Tom did not wait to be asked. One morning, after breakfast, he waited for Henriette in the hall; and, directly she appeared, he exclaimed in an embarrassed manner, “I must speak to you, mademoiselle, it is absolutely necessary.”

She did not manifest any surprise, but simply replied, “Follow me, sir.”

They both entered the drawing-room, and remained a minute standing face to face without exchanging a word, she striving to keep up her spirits, and he, so overcome, that he had apparently lost the use of his voice. At last, all of a sudden, and after making, as it were, a supreme effort, Sir Tom began in a panting voice to inform Henriette that it was in her power to make him the happiest or most miserable of mortals. Touched by her innocence, and the persecutions to which she was exposed, he had at first pitied her; and then, daily discovering her more excellent qualities, her unusual energy blended with charming bashfulness, he had no longer been able to resist such marvellous attractions.

Henriette, who was convinced that Sir Tom was only acting a wretched farce, observed him as closely as she could, and at the first pause he made began,—“Believe me, sir—”

“Oh! I beseech you, mademoiselle,” he resumed with unusual vehemence, “Let me finish. Many in my place would have spoken to your father; but I thought that would hardly be fair in your exceptional position. Still, I have reason to believe that the Count de Ville-Handry would look upon my proposals with favour. But then he might try to do violence to your feelings; and I wish to be indebted to you alone, mademoiselle; I wish you to decide freely, for—” An expression of intense anxiety contracted his usually impassive features; and he added with great earnestness, “Mademoiselle Henriette, I am an honourable man: I love you. Will you be my wife?”

By a stroke of instinctive genius he had found the only argument calculated to prove his sincerity. However, what did that matter to Henriette? “Believe me, sir,” she replied, “I fully appreciate the honour you do me; but I am no longer free—”

“I beseech you—”

“I have freely chosen M. Daniel Champcey from among all others. My life is in his hands.”

Sir Tom tottered as if he had received a heavy blow, and stammered, “Will you not leave me a glimpse of hope?”

“I should act wrongly in doing so, sir; and I have never yet deceived any one.”

Sir Thomas Elgin was not one of those men who easily despair of effecting their object, although on the morrow he became a changed man, as if Henriette’s refusal had withered the very roots of his life. His attitude, gestures, and tone of voice were most dejected. He looked as if he had grown taller and thinner. A bitter smile curved his lips; and his magnificent whiskers, usually so admirably cared for, hung uncombed down either side of his chest. And his intense melancholy increased every day, till at last it became so evident that people asked the countess, “What is the matter with poor Sir Tom? He looks as gloomy as a mourning coach.”

"Ah ! he's very unhappy," was the answer, accompanied by a sigh, intended to increase curiosity, and stimulate people to observe him more closely. Several persons did so, and soon noted that he no longer took his seat by Henriette as formerly, and that he, indeed, avoided every occasion of speaking to her. However, he was not resigned—far from it. He had merely modified his tactics. He only laid siege from a distance now, spending whole evenings looking at her in mute ecstasy. He followed her everywhere, as if he had been her shadow, and one might have fancied that he was ubiquitous, for he was inevitably seen wherever she might be—at times leaning against the door-frame, at others resting his elbow on the mantelpiece, and invariably with his eyes fixed upon her. Even when she did not see him, she felt his looks still weighing, as it were, upon her. When M. de Brévan was informed of the honourable baronet's importunate attentions, he seemed to have great difficulty in checking his indignation, and even spoke of challenging Sir Tom—only abandoning the idea when Henriette pointed out that, after such an encounter, he would no longer be able to visit the house, and would thus deprive her of the only friend to whom she could look for assistance. He yielded ; and then, after careful consideration, remarked, "This abominable persecution must not be allowed to go on, mademoiselle. You ought to complain to the Count de Ville-Handry."

She reluctantly decided to do so ; but the count stopped her at the first word she uttered. "Your vanity must lead you astray, girl. Before thinking of a little, insignificant person like yourself, Sir Thomas Elgin, who is one of the most eminent financiers I have ever met, would certainly look a long time elsewhere."

"Excuse me, father—"

"Stop ! If, however, you don't deceive yourself, it would be the greatest piece of good-luck you could hope for, and an honour of which you ought to be very proud indeed. Do you think it would be easy to find a husband for you after all the unpleasant talk your conduct has occasioned ?"

"I don't wish to marry, father."

"Perhaps not. However, as such a marriage would meet all my wishes, and tighten the bonds which already unite us to this honourable family, and if Sir Thomas Elgin really has such intentions as you mention, I think I should know how to compel you to marry him. However, I shall speak to him, and see."

He spoke to him indeed, and soon enough, for the very next morning the countess and Mrs Brian purposely went out, so as to leave Henriette and Sir Tom alone. The honourable baronet looked sadder than usual. "Is it really true, mademoiselle," he asked, "that you have complained to your father?"

"Your pertinacity compelled me to do so," replied Henriette.

"Is the idea of becoming my wife so very revolting to you ?"

"I have told you, sir, I am no longer free."

"Yes, to be sure ! You love M. Daniel Champcey. You love him. He knows it ; for you told him so, no doubt : and yet he has forsaken you."

Sometimes, in her innermost heart, Henriette had for a moment doubted Daniel ; still, she would allow no one else to do so. So she haughtily replied, "It was a point of honour with M. Champcey, and so it was with me. If he had hesitated, I should have been the first to say to him, 'Duty calls : you must go.'"

Sir Tom shook his head with a sardonic smile, and rejoined :—"But he did not hesitate. It is ten months now since he left you ; and no one

knows how many more months, or, indeed, how many years, he will be absent. For his sake you suffer martyrdom; and when he returns, he may have long since forgotten you."

Henriette's eyes beamed with faith as she rose to her full height, and replied, "I believe in Daniel as surely as in myself."

"And if it were proved that you were mistaken?"

"The person who did so would render me a very sad service, which would bring no reward to any one."

Sir Tom's lips parted as if he were about to answer. But some hidden thought seemingly made him pause, and he merely remarked, with a gesture of despair, "Keep your illusions, mademoiselle,—farewell."

He was about to leave the room, when she intercepted him, and imperatively exclaimed, "You have gone too far, sir, to retrace your steps. You are bound now to justify your insidious insinuations, or to confess that they were false."

"You will have it so?" said he. "Well, let it be so. Know then, since you insist upon it, that M. Daniel Champcey has been deceiving you most wickedly; that he does not love you, and probably never did love you."

"That's what you say," replied Henriette.

Her haughty bearing, and the disdain with which she spoke, could not fail to exasperate Sir Tom. He checked himself, however, and resumed in a curt, incisive tone, "I say so because it is so; and any one but you, possessing a less noble ignorance of evil, would long since have discovered the truth. To what cause do you attribute Sarah's implacable enmity? To the recollection of your conduct on her wedding-day? Ah! if that had been everything, her resentment would have died out months ago. Jealousy alone is capable of such fierce and insatiable hatred—a hatred which neither tears nor submission can disarm, which time increases instead of diminishing. Between Sarah and you, Mlle. Henriette, there stands a man."

"A man?"

"Yes,—M. Daniel Champcey."

Henriette felt as if a sharp knife had been plunged into her bosom. "I don't understand you, sir," he said.

Shrugging his shoulders, and assuming an air of commiseration, he resumed, "What? Can't you understand that Sarah is your rival; that she loves M. Champcey; that she is madly in love with him? Ah! they cruelly deceived both Mrs Brian and myself."

"How so?"

He turned his head aside and murmured, as if speaking to himself, "Yes, his mistress."

"That's false," retorted Henriette, with almost masculine fierceness.

"You asked me to tell the truth," said Sir Tom coldly, "and I have done so. Try to remember. Have you forgotten that little scene, after which M. Champcey fled from our house in the middle of the night, bare-headed, and without even taking his overcoat?"

"Sir?"

"Didn't you think that was extraordinary? That night, you see, we discovered the whole thing. After being one of the foremost to advise Sarah to marry your father, M. Champcey came and asked her to give up all idea of such a marriage. He had previously tried to break it off through your agency, mademoiselle, thus using his influence over his betrothed for the benefit of his passion."

"Ah! what an impudent lie!" ejaculated Henriette.

"I have proofs," coldly rejoined Sir Tom, apparently disdaining the insult.

"What proofs?"

"Letters written by M. Champcey to Sarah. I have obtained two of them, and have them here in my pocket-book."

He was feeling in his pocket when she stopped him. "These letters would prove nothing to me, sir," said she.

"But—"

Giving him a withering glance, she continued in a contemptuous voice, "The persons who sent a letter to the Minister of Marine, purporting to have come from Daniel, can have no difficulty in imitating his signature. Let us break off here, sir. I forbid you ever to speak to me again."

"Is that your last word?" asked Sir Tom with a fierce laugh.

Instead of answering him, she drew a step aside, and pointed to the door.

"Well," said Sir Tom, in a threatening manner, "remember this: I have sworn you shall be my wife, whether you will or not; and my wife you shall be!"

"Leave the room, sir, or I must give it up to you!"

He retired, swearing; and then, more dead than alive, Henriette sank into an arm-chair. As long as she had been in presence of the enemy her pride had enabled her to retain the appearance of absolute faith in Daniel; but, now she was alone, terrible doubts beset her mind. Might there not be something true at the bottom of Sir Tom's evident exaggerations? Had not Sarah also boasted that she loved Daniel, and that she had been to see him at his rooms? Finally, when Daniel told her of his adventure in the Rue du Cirque, had he not grown embarrassed towards the end of his narrative, and failed to fully explain the reasons of his flight? To crown the matter, when she had tried to obtain additional information on the subject from M. de Brévan, she had been struck by his confusion, and the lame way in which he defended his friend. "Ah, now all is really over!" she thought. "The measure of my sufferings is full indeed!"

Unhappily for her, such was not the case. A new infamous, monstrous, persecution awaited her, by the side of which all the others amounted to nothing. "Whether you will or not, you shall be mine." Such had been Sir Tom's words, and from that moment he seemed bent upon convincing her that he would shrink from nothing—not even from violence. He was no longer the sympathetic defender of former days, nor the timid lover, nor the sighing, rejected suitor, following Henriette all over the house like a pet dog. He became a kind of wild beast, ever harassing and persecuting her, and glaring at her with lustful eyes; he lay in wait for her in all the passages, seemingly seeking an opportunity to throw himself upon her; projecting his lips as if to touch her cheeks, and extending his arms as if to seize her round the waist. A drunken lackey pursuing a scullion would not have looked or acted more impudently. In her terror, the poor girl threw herself at her father's feet, and besought him to protect her. But he pushed her back, and reproached her for slandering a most honourable and inoffensive man. Blindness could go no farther. Sir Tom probably knew of her failure; for the next day he laughed in her face, as if he felt that he might now venture upon anything. And he did venture upon something that so far had seemed impossible. One evening, or

rather one night, when the count and countess were at a ball, he came and knocked at Henriette's bedroom door. In her fright she rang the bell, and the servants who came up freed her from her persecutor. But from that moment her terrors had no limit; and whenever the count went out at night with his wife, she barricaded herself in her room, and spent the whole night, dressed, on a chair. Could she remain any longer standing on the brink of an abyss without name? She thought she could not; and after long and painful hesitation, she said one evening to M. de Brévan, "My mind is made up: I must fly."

Taken aback, as if he had received a blow, with open mouth and glaring eyes, M. de Brévan turned deadly pale; and the perspiration pearded in large drops on his temples, while his hands trembled like those of a man who is about to seize a long-coveted prize. "So, you are decided," he stammered, "you will leave your father's house?"

"I must," she replied; and her eyes filled with tears. "And the sooner I can do so the better—for every moment I spend here now may bring a new danger. And yet, before risking anything decisive, it might be better first to write to Daniel's aunt in order to ask her about the directions she may have received, and to tell her that I shall soon come to ask for her pity and protection."

"What? Do you think of seeking refuge at that estimable lady's house?"

"Certainly."

M. de Brévan, now master of himself again, and calculating with his usual calmness, gravely shook his head, and said,—“You ought to be careful, mademoiselle. It might be very imprudent to seek an asylum at the house of our friend's relative.”

“But Daniel recommended me to do so in his letter.”

“Yes; but he did not consider the consequences of the advice he gave you. Don't deceive yourself: the wrath of your enemies will be terrible when they discover you have escaped. They will pursue you; employ the police; and search for you all over France. Now, it is evident that the very first persons they may suspect of harbouring you will be Daniel's relatives. The old lady's house will be watched at once. How can you escape from inquiry and pursuit there? It would be folly to hope for safety there.”

Henriette hung her head pensively. “Perhaps you are right, sir,” said she.

“Now,” continued M. de Brévan, “let us see what they would do if they discovered you. As you are not of age, you are entirely dependent on your father's will. At your step-mother's instigation he would attack Daniel's aunt on the charge of abducting a minor, and would bring you back here.”

She seemed to reflect, and then suddenly exclaimed: “I can implore the assistance of the Duchess de Champdoce.”

“Unfortunately, mademoiselle, you were told the truth. For a year now the Duke de Champdoce and his wife have been travelling in Italy.”

A gesture of despair revealed the poor girl's dejection. “Great God!” she said, “what can I do?”

A smile flitted across M. de Brévan's face, and he answered in his most persuasive manner,—“Will you permit me to offer you some advice, mademoiselle?”

“Ah, sir! I beg you to do so, for heaven's sake.”

“Well, this is the only plan that seems to me feasible. To-morrow

morning I will rent a suitable lodging, a modest little chamber in some quiet house, where you may live till you come of age, or till Daniel returns. No detective will ever think of seeking for the Count de Ville-Handry's daughter in a poor needlewoman's garret."

"And must I stay there alone, forsaken and lost?"

"It is a sacrifice which seems to me necessary for safety's sake."

She remained for a moment weighing the two alternatives—should she remain at home, or accept M. de Brévan's proposition. At last she spoke. "I will follow your advice, sir; only—"

She blushed deeply, and was evidently painfully embarrassed. "You see," she said, after long hesitation, "all this will cost money. Formerly I always used to have a thousand francs or so somewhere in my drawers; but now—"

"Mademoiselle," interrupted M. de Brévan, "is not my whole fortune entirely at your disposal?"

"To be sure, I have my jewels; and they are valuable."

"For that very reason you ought not to take them with you. We must guard against everything. We may fail. My share in the attempt may be discovered, and who knows what charges might be brought against me?"

This remark would have sufficed to enlighten many people as to Maxime's real character, but it failed to enlighten Henriette. "Well, prepare everything as you think best, sir," she said sadly. "I rely entirely upon your friendship, devotion, and honour."

M. de Brévan had a slight attack of coughing, which prevented him from answering at first. Then, finding that Henriette was bent upon escaping, he tried to devise a plan. She proposed that they should wait for a night when the count might take the countess to a ball. She might then slip into the garden, and climb the wall. But the attempt seemed too dangerous in M. de Brévan's eyes. "I think," said he, "that I can manage something better. Isn't the Count de Ville-Handry soon going to give a grand entertainment?"

"Yes, on the day after to-morrow,—Thursday."

"All right. On Thursday morning, mademoiselle, you must complain of a bad headache, and send for the doctor. He will prescribe something, I dare say, which you will not take; but the others, thinking you are indisposed, will watch you less carefully. At night, however, towards ten o'clock, you must come down and conceal yourself at the foot of the back-stairs, in the corner of the courtyard. You can do that, I presume?"

"Very easily, sir."

"In that case, all will be right. I will be here with a carriage at ten o'clock precisely. My coachman, whom I will instruct beforehand, will pretend to make a mistake, and drive to the side door instead of drawing up at the grand entrance. I shall jump out at once, and you,—you must spring swiftly into the carriage."

"Yes, that can be done."

"As the curtains will be down, no one will see you. The carriage will drive out again, and wait for me outside; and ten minutes later I shall have joined you." The plan being agreed upon, M. de Brévan then regulated his watch by Henriette's, for everything depended on punctuality, and rising, he said,—“We have already conversed longer than was prudent. I shan't speak to you again to-night. Till Thursday.”

And in a faint voice she replied, "Till Thursday."

XVII.

THIS one phrase sealed Henriette's fate, and she knew it. She was fully aware of the terrible rashness of her plan. The voice of conscience seemed to whisper that she was staking her honour, life, and every earthly hope upon one card. She clearly foresaw what the world would say after her flight. She would be lost, and could only hope for rehabilitation when Daniel returned. Ah! if she could only have been as sure of his heart now as formerly! But the countess's cunning innuendoes, and Sir Tom's impudent assertions, had fulfilled their mission, and shaken her faith. Daniel had been absent for nearly a year now, and she had written to him regularly every month; but in reply she had only received from him two letters through M. de Brévan,—and what letters they were! Very polite, very cold, and almost without a word of hope. What if Daniel abandoned her when he returned? And yet the more she reflected, the more she was impressed with the absolute necessity of flight. Yes, she must face unknown dangers to escape a peril which she realised full well. In doing so, she had to rely upon a man who was almost a stranger to her; but then, he was the only one who could help her to escape the persecution of a scoundrel who had become her father's boon-companion, friend, and counsellor! She had to sacrifice her reputation,—that is, the semblance of honour; but she saved the reality,—honour itself. Still, it was very hard, and she passed the whole of the next day—Wednesday—in a state of unspeakable anguish. On Thursday morning, however, she followed M. de Brévan's directions, and complained of a violent headache. The doctor who was sent for found her very feverish, and ordered her to keep her bed. He little knew that he was thus restoring the poor girl to liberty. On being left alone she rose and tidied her drawers, carefully going through all her letters and papers, putting aside all those that she wished to take with her, and burning such as she did not wish the countess to find and read. As M. de Brévan had recommended her not to take her jewels, she merely kept about her person such as she wore every day, and left the others openly displayed on a *chiffonnier*. It was impossible for her to take much baggage; and yet some linen was indispensable. Upon reflection, she decided to take a travelling-bag which her mother had given her—inside which, in addition to a few articles of clothing, she slipped a dressing-case, with gold fittings of exquisite workmanship. Then, having finished her preparations, she sat down and wrote her father a long letter, in which she fully explained the motives of her desperate resolution. After that she waited. Night had fallen long since; and the last preparations for a princely entertainment filled the mansion with noise and motion. She could hear the hasty steps of busy servants, the loud orders of her father's valet and steward, and the hammering of upholsterers giving a final touch here and there. By-and-bye carriage wheels were heard rolling into the courtyard, and the first guests arrived. Henriette had now but a short time to wait, and she counted the last minutes with mingled dread and impatience. At last her watch pointed to a quarter to ten, and then rising almost automatically, she threw a long cashmere shawl over her shoulders, and, taking her bag in her hand, left her room, and slipped along the passages to the servants' staircase. Holding her breath she paused, peered down

the stairs, listened anxiously, and then neither hearing nor perceiving any one, hastened down to the little hall below. She remained here in the darkness seated on her bag—her breath coming short and faint, and her hair moist with cold perspiration. At last she heard a clock strike ten; and the final vibration had not yet died away, when M. de Brévan's carriage drew up at the door.

Maxime's coachman was certainly a skilful driver. Pretending to lose control over his horse, he made it turn, and forced it back with such admirable awkwardness, that the vehicle finally stopped close beside the wall, the right hand door being just in front of the dark little vestibule where Henriette was standing. M. de Brévan at once jumped out. Henriette sprang forward unperceived, and a moment later the carriage slowly drove out of the courtyard, and drew up along the footway of the Rue de Varennes some little distance off. The scheme had succeeded. Mlle. de Ville-Handry had left her father's house, and set at defiance all the established laws of society. She was now entirely at the mercy of circumstances, and was saved or lost according to the turn events might take. But her prostration was now too great to allow her to reflect, for her feverish excitement had passed away with the danger of being intercepted, and she was reclining scarcely conscious on the cushions of the carriage, when the door opened and M. de Brévan reappeared. "Well, mademoiselle," cried he, in a strangely embarrassed voice, "we have won the day. I have just presented my respects to the Countess Sarah and her worthy companions; I have shaken hands with the Count de Ville-Handry; and no one has the shadow of a suspicion." And, as Henriette made no remark, he added,—“Now we must make haste, for it is indispensable I should show myself at the ball again as soon as possible. Your lodgings are ready for you, mademoiselle, and with your leave we will drive there at once.”

Raising herself from her recumbent position, she replied with a great effort, "Let us do so, sir!"

M. de Brévan had already jumped into the carriage, which now started off at a rapid pace; and, while they were driving along, he explained to Henriette how she would have to behave in the house where he had engaged a lodging for her. He had spoken of her, he said, as one of his relatives from the provinces, who, having suffered a reverse of fortune, had come to Paris in the hope of finding some means of earning her living. "Remember this romance, mademoiselle," said he, "and act and speak in accordance with it. Be especially careful never to mention my name or your father's. Remember that you are still under age, that you will be searched for anxiously, and that the slightest indiscretion may put your persecutors on your trail." Then, noticing the tears that were coursing down her cheeks, he sought to take her hand as if to comfort her, and in doing so, remarked the bag she had decided to bring away. "What's that?" he asked in a tone which, despite its affected gentleness, revealed considerable apprehension.

"Oh, it only contains some indispensable articles."

"Ah! then you did not take your jewels after all, mademoiselle."

"No, certainly not, sir!" answered Henriette.

M. de Brévan's persistency on this subject began to strike her as odd; and she would perhaps have expressed her surprise if the carriage had not at that moment suddenly stopped before No. 23 Rue de la Grange.

"Here we are, mademoiselle," said M. de Brévan. And, jumping out,

he gave the bell a vigorous pull, which caused the door to open immediately. The *concierge's* room was still lighted up, and M. de Brévan walked straight towards it, opening the door with an air of authority, as if he had been the master of the house. "It is I," he said.

The door-keeper and his wife, who had been dozing over their newspapers, started up at once. "Monsieur Maxime!" they said with one voice. "I bring you the young kinswoman I spoke to you of,—Mlle. Henriette," rejoined M. de Brévan.

If Mlle. de Ville-Handry had had the slightest knowledge of Parisian customs, she would have guessed, from the door-keeper's bows and his wife's courtesies, that they had received a handsome gratuity in advance. "The young lady's room is quite ready," said the man.

"My husband arranged everything himself," added the wife; "and I made a fine fire there as early as five o'clock, so as to take out the dampness."

"Let us go up then," said de Brévan.

As the gas on the stairs had already been put out, Mme. Chevassat lighted a candle, and, walking ahead so as to show the way, climbed the stairs to the fifth floor, where, at the corner of a dark passage, she opened a door, exclaiming, "Here we are! The young lady will see how nice it is."

It might possibly have been nice in her eyes: but Henriette, accustomed to the splendour of her father's mansion, could not repress a gesture of disgust. She would not have allowed the least of her maids to occupy such a garret at home. However, never mind. She went in bravely, placed her travelling-bag on the drawers, and took off her shawl, as if to assume possession of the apartment. However, her first impression had not escaped M. de Brévan, and, drawing her into the passage while the woman was stirring the fire, he remarked, in a low voice, "It is a terrible room; but prudence induced me to choose it."

"I like it as it is, sir."

"You will want a great many things, no doubt; but we will see to that to-morrow. To-night I must leave you: you know how important it is that I should be seen again at your father's house."

"You are quite right, sir: go, make haste!"

Still, before leaving, he once more recommended his "young kinswoman" to Mme. Chevassat, who assured him, over and over again, that she was quite willing to place herself at the young lady's disposal. The pair left the room together, and Henriette could hear them on the stairs—Maxime again repeating his recommendations, and the woman all complacency and honeyed words. Left to herself, the last vestiges of Henriette's excitement passed away, and she now felt intensely astonished at what she had dared to do. Standing by the mantelpiece, and gazing into the little looking-glass at her own pale face, she murmured, "Is that myself, my own self?" Yes, it was, indeed, herself, the opulent Count de Ville-Haudry's only daughter, here, in a strange house, in a wretched garret-room, which she called her own—yesterday, surrounded by princely splendour, waited on by an army of retainers, and now in want of almost everything, and having for her only servant the old woman to whom M. de Brévan had recommended her. Was it possible? She could hardly believe it herself. Still, she by no means repented of what she had done. She could have remained no longer in her father's house, where she was exposed to the vilest insults from everyone. Wishing to occupy her mind and shake off these dismal thoughts, she rose and began to explore her new home, and to examine all it contained. It was one of those lodgings which landlords rarely trouble themselves

about, and which they never repair, being always sure of letting them just as they are. The tiled floor was going to pieces; the ceiling was cracked and blackened; the greasy, dirty, grey wall-paper was stained with the finger-marks of all the previous occupants; and the furniture was in full keeping with the rest—a walnut bedstead with faded calico curtains, a chest of drawers, a table, two chairs, and a miserable arm-chair: that was all. A short curtain hung before the window. By the side of the bed a little strip of carpet was stretched, and on the mantelpiece stood a zinc clock between two blue glass vases. Nothing else! How could M. de Brévan ever have selected such a room, such a hole? Henriette could not understand it. He had told her, and she had believed that they must use extreme caution. But would she have been any more compromised, or in greater danger of being discovered, if the walls had been papered anew, the tiled floor covered with a simple felt carpet, and the room furnished, altogether, a little more decently? Still, she did not conceive any suspicion even yet. She thought it mattered very little where and how she was lodged. She hoped it was, after all, only for a short time; and consoled herself with the thought that a convent cell would have been worse still. And anything was better than her father's house. "At least," she said, "I shall be quiet and undisturbed here."

Perhaps she was to enjoy moral quiet; but, as to any other peace, she was soon taught differently. Accustomed to the profound stillness of her father's mansion at night-time, Henriette had naturally no idea of the incessant racket that prevails on the upper floors of second and third-class Paris houses, which shelter as many inhabitants as a decent sized village, and where the tenants, merely separated from each other by thin partition-walls, live, so to say, in public. Under such circumstances, one only acquires the faculty of sleeping after long experience; and the poor girl had to undergo her apprenticeship. It was past four o'clock before she could manage to sleep; and then her slumber was so heavy, that she was not roused by the general stir throughout the house at daybreak. When she awoke, a faint sun-ray was gliding into the room through the flimsy curtain, and the hands of the zinc clock pointed to noon. She rose at once and began to dress. When she awoke the day before, she had only to ring her bell, and her maid promptly appeared, lit a fire, brought her her slippers, and helped her to don a warm, wadded dressing-gown. How different matters were to-day. The thought carried her back to her father's house. What were they doing there at this hour? Her escape was certainly known by this time. No doubt they had sent the servants out in all directions. Her father had most probably gone to obtain the assistance of the police. She felt almost happy at the idea of being so safely concealed; and, looking round her room, which appeared even more wretched in the day-time than by candle-light, she murmured:—"No, they will never think of looking for me here!"

In the meantime she had discovered a small supply of wood near the fire-place; and, as it was cold, she was about to light a fire, when someone knocked at her door. She opened it, and found Mme. Chevassat, the door-keeper's wife, waiting on the threshold. "It is I, my pretty young lady," said the old woman as she entered. "Not seeing you come down, I said to myself, 'I must go and look after her.' Now, have you slept well?"

"Very well, madame, thank you!"

"Now, that's right. And how is your appetite? For that was what I came up about. Don't you think you could eat a little something?"

"I would be obliged to you, madame," replied Henriette, "if you would bring me up some breakfast."

"If I would! As often as you desire, my pretty young lady. Just give me time to boil an egg, and grill a cutlet, and I'll be up again."

Ordinarily sour-tempered, and as bitter as wormwood, Mme. Chevassat seemed bent on displaying extraordinary amiability towards Henriette, hiding, moreover, under a veil of sympathy, the annoying eagerness of her eyes. Her hypocrisy was all wasted, however, for it was too manifest not to arouse suspicion. "I am sure," thought Henriette, "that she must be a bad woman." And she was confirmed in this idea when the door-keeper's wife returned. After setting out the breakfast on a little table before the fire, Mme. Chevassat installed herself on a chair near the door, and continued talking, without once pausing, whilst Henriette partook of her improvised meal. According to the old woman, the poor girl ought to thank her guardian angel for having brought her to this charming house, No. 23 Rue de la Grange, where there was such a *concierge* with such a wife!—he, the best of men; and she, a real treasure of kindness, gentleness, and, above all, discretion. "Quite an exceptional house, as far as the tenants are concerned," added garrulous Mme. Chevassat. "They are all people of high standing or great respectability, from the wealthy old ladies on the first floor to Papa Ravinet on the fourth landing, and without even excepting the young ladies who live in the small rooms of the back building." Then, having passed all the tenants in review, she began to sing the praises of M. de Brévan, whom she invariably called M. Maxime. She declared that he had won her heart the first time he called at the house, the day before yesterday, to engage Henriette's room. She had never seen a more perfect gentleman: so kind, polite, and liberal! With her great experience, she had at once realised that he was one of those men who inspire violent passions, and secure lasting attachments. Besides, added she, with a hideous leer, she was sure of his deep interest in her pretty tenant; and was, indeed, so well convinced of it that she would willingly devote herself to her service, even without any prospect of payment. However, this did not prevent her from informing Henriette, as soon as she had finished breakfast,—“You owe me two francs, mademoiselle; and, if you like, I can board you for five francs a-day.” Thereupon she began to explain that this would be a mere act of kindness on her part, for, considering how dear everything was, she would certainly be a loser. She was rattling on in this strain when Henriette abruptly stopped her, and, drawing a twenty-franc piece from her purse, exclaimed—“Pay yourself, madame.”

This was evidently not what the woman expected; for, drawing back with an air of offended dignity, she replied, “What do you take me to be, mam’selle? Do you think me capable of asking for payment?” And, shrugging her shoulders, she added, “Besides, don’t your expenses concern M. Maxime?” Thereupon she quickly folded the napkin, took up the plates, and disappeared.

Henriette did not know what to think. No doubt this woman was pursuing some mysterious aim with all her foolish talk; but what could that aim be? This was not the only cause for anxiety. The poor girl now realised that she was altogether at M. de Brévan’s mercy. The only money she possessed amounted to some two hundred francs, and she was in want of everything; she had neither another dress, nor another petticoat. Why had M. de Brévan not thought of that beforehand? Was he waiting for

her to acquaint him with her distress, and ask him for money? She could scarcely think so, and rather attributed his neglect to his excitement, fancying that he would soon call to inquire after her, and place himself at her service. But the day slowly passed, night came, and still he did not appear. What could it mean? What unforeseen event could have happened? What misfortune could have befallen him? Distracted by a thousand apprehensions, Henriette was more than once on the point of going to his house.

It was only at two o'clock on the following afternoon that M. de Brévan at last put in an appearance. He was evidently embarrassed, despite the easy air he tried to affect. He had not come the previous day, he said, as he was sure the Countess Sarah had had him watched. Mlle. de Ville-Handry's flight from her father's house was known all over Paris, and he was suspected of having aided and abetted her: at least, so some acquaintances of his had told him at his club. He added, that it would be imprudent in him to stay longer; and left without having said a word concerning future plans, and apparently without having noticed Henriette's destitution. And thus, for three days, he only called, to leave almost instantly. He always presented himself in an embarrassed manner, as if he had something very important to tell her; then suddenly his brow would darken, and he would leave without saying anything of moment. At last Henriette could endure this atrocious uncertainty no longer. She determined to provoke an explanation, when, on the fourth day, M. de Brévan made his appearance, more agitated even than usual. On entering the room he locked the door behind him, and exclaimed, in a hoarse voice, "I must speak to you, mademoiselle, yes, I must!" He was extremely pale, his lips quivered, and his eyes shone like those of a man who has sought courage in strong drink.

"I am ready to listen," nervously replied the poor girl.

He hesitated again for a moment; and then, apparently overcoming his reluctance by a great effort, he resumed, "Well, I wish to ask you if you have ever suspected what my real reasons were for assisting you to escape?"

"Why, I think you acted out of pity for me, and out of friendship for M. Daniel Champcey."

"No! You are entirely mistaken."

On hearing these words Henriette instinctively drew back. "Ah!" she muttered.

Pale a moment before, M. de Brévan had now flushed crimson: "Have you really noticed nothing else," he asked. "Are you really not aware that I love you?"

Could this infamy be true? Surely M. de Brévan was either drunk or mad. "Leave me, sir," exclaimed Henriette peremptorily.

But, far from turning to leave the room, he advanced towards her with open arms, and continued, "Yes, I love you madly, and have done so ever since I saw you for the first time."

Henriette had in the meanwhile swiftly retreated, and opened the window. "If you advance another step, I shall cry for help," she said.

He paused, and, changing his tone, exclaimed, "Ah! You refuse? Well, what are you hoping for? For Daniel's return? Don't you know that he loves Sarah?"

"Ah! You abuse my forlorn condition infamously!" retorted the poor girl. And, as he still insisted, she added, "Why don't you go, coward? Why don't you go? Must I call?"

Frightened by the idea of her screaming for help, the scoundrel backed to the door, unlocked it, set it ajar, and as he left exclaimed, "You refuse to listen to me to-day ; but, before the month is over, you will beg me to come to your assistance. You are ruined ; and I alone can rescue you."

XVIII.

At last, then, Henriette knew the truth. Overcome with horror, quivering with nervous spasms, she tried to realise the depth of the abyss into which she had thrown herself : with childlike simplicity she had voluntarily walked into the pit that had been dug for her. Who, however, would have thought of mistrusting Daniel's friend, especially after Daniel's own advice ? Who could have suspected such monstrous rascality ? Ah ! Now she understood all that hitherto seemed mysterious in M. de Brévan's conduct. She understood why he had so urgently recommended her not to take her jewels, nor, indeed, any object of value with her, when escaping from her father's house ; for, if she had had her jewellery, she would have been in possession of a small fortune : she would have been independent, and above want for at least a couple of years. But M. de Brévan wished her to find herself destitute. He knew, the scoundrel ! with what crushing contempt she would reject his first proposals ; but he flattered himself with the hope that isolation, fear, and want, would at last reduce her to submission. And this man had been Daniel's friend ! And it was he to whose care Daniel had entrusted her on leaving France ! What atrocious deception ! Sir Thomas Elgin was, no doubt, an unscrupulous villain ; but he was known as such : he was known to be capable of anything, and thus people were on their guard. But this man—was he not a thousand times meaner and viler ?—had waited with a smiling face during a whole year for the hour of treachery : he had prepared a hideous crime under the veil of the noblest friendship ! Henriette thought she could divine the traitor's final aim. By forcing her to marry him, he no doubt thought he would secure a large portion of the Count de Ville-Handry's immense fortune. Hence the rivalry between Sir Tom and M. de Brévan. They both coveted the same thing ; and each trembled lest the other obtained the treasure he wanted to secure. The idea that Maxime was the Countess Sarah's accomplice did not enter Henriette's mind. On the contrary, she thought they were enemies, and divided by antagonistic interests. "Ah !" she murmured, "they have one feeling, at all events, in common—hatred against me."

A few months ago, so fearful and so sudden a catastrophe would have probably crushed Henriette. But she had endured so many blows during the past year, that she had strength enough to support this new misfortune. The human heart, be it remembered, learns how to bear grief just as the body learns to endure fatigue. Moreover, she called to her assistance the remembrance of Daniel. She had doubted him for one moment, but her faith had returned intact and perfect. Her reason told her that, if he had really loved Sarah Brandon, her enemies—Sir Thomas Elgin and M. de Brévan—would not have taken such pains to induce her to believe that such was the case. Hence, he would certainly return to her, as devoted as when he left. But, great God ! how grieved and enraged he would be when he learned how wickedly and cowardly he had been betrayed by the man whom he called his friend ! Still, he would know how to restore

Henriette to her proper position, and how to avenge her. "And I shall wait for him," she said, with her teeth firmly set,—*"I shall wait for him!"*

How? This was a question she did not ask herself; for she was yet in that first stage of enthusiasm, when, full of heroic resolutions, we fail to perceive the obstacles that have to be overcome. However, she was soon made acquainted with the first difficulties in her way, thanks to Mme. Chevassat, when the latter brought her her dinner at six o'clock, according to the agreement they had made. The old woman's face had a deeply grieved expression, and it really seemed as if there were tears in her eyes. "Well, well, my beautiful young lady," she said in her sweetest voice, "so you have quarrelled with our dear M. Maxime?"

Henriette was so convinced of the futility of an explanation, and so fearful of new dangers, that she simply replied,—*"Yes, madame."*

"I was afraid of it," replied the woman, "for I just now saw him come down-stairs with a dreadfully long face. You see, he's in love with you, that kind young man; and you may believe me when I tell you so, for I know what men are." She expected an answer; for generally her eloquence was very effective with her tenants. But, as no reply came, she went on,—*"However, we must hope that the trouble will soon blow over."*

"No!" exclaimed Henriette.

Mme. Chevassat seemed confounded. "How savage you are!" she resumed at last. "Well, it is your own look-out. Only, I should like to know what you mean to do?"

"About what?"

"Why, about your board."

"I shall find means, madame, you may be sure."

The old woman, however, knew from experience what that cruel word, "living," sometimes means with poor, forsaken girls, and shaking her head seriously, she said,—*"So much the better; so much the better! Only I know you owe a good deal of money."*

"Owe?"

"Why, yes! The furniture here has never been paid for."

"What? The furniture—"

"Of course, M. Maxime was going to pay for it: he told me so. But if you fall out together in this way—well, you understand, don't you?"

Henriette hardly did understand such fearful infamy; still, she did not betray her indignation and surprise, but simply asked,—*"What did the furniture cost? do you know?"*

"I don't know, I'm sure, but I should think something like five or six hundred francs, for things are so dear now-a-days!"

The whole was probably not worth more than a hundred and fifty or two hundred francs. "Very well, I'll pay," said Henriette. "The man will give me forty-eight hours' time, I presume?"

"Oh, certainly!"

As the poor girl was now quite sure that this honied-mouthed Megera was employed by M. de Brévan to watch her, she affected a perfectly calm air, and, on finishing dinner, even insisted on paying her some fifty francs, which she owed for the last few days' board and some small purchases. But, when the old woman was gone, she sank on to a chair, exclaiming, *"I am lost!"*

There was in fact no refuge for her: no help to be expected. Should she return to her father, and implore her stepmother's pity? Ah! death itself would be preferable to such humiliation. And besides, in flying from M. de Brévan, would she not fall into Sir Thomas Elgin's clutches? Should

she seek assistance from some of the old family friends? But which of them could she confide in? Since her mother's death, no one seemed to have remembered her, unless for the purpose of slandering her. The only ones who might have made her cause their own were the Duke and the Duchess de Champdoce, who were in Italy, as she had been assured. "I can count upon nobody but myself," she repeated,—"myself, myself!" And rousing herself at the thought, she added, "Well, let it be so, I will save myself." After all, if she could but manage to live till she came of age, or till Daniel returned, all would come right again. "Is it really so hard to live?" she asked herself. "Are there not many girls, poor people's daughters, who are as completely forsaken as I am, and yet manage to subsist. Why should not I succeed as well as them?" Why? Because poor people's children serve, so to say, from the cradle, an apprenticeship of poverty,—because they are neither afraid of a day without work, nor of a day without bread,—because cruel experience arms them for the struggle,—because they know life, and know Paris,—because their industry is commensurate with their wants,—and because they have an innate capacity to turn well-nigh everything to some advantage, thanks to their smartness, enterprise, and energy. But the Count de Ville-Handry's only daughter—the heiress of many millions, reared, so to say, in a hot-house—according to the foolish custom of modern society—knew nothing at all of life, of its bitter realities, struggles, and sufferings. The only thing in her favour was her courage. "That is enough," she said to herself. "What we will do, we can do."

So, determined to ask no one for assistance, she set to work examining her resources. The only objects of any value she owned were the cashmere which she had wrapped round her when she fled, the dressing-case in her mother's travelling-bag, a brooch, a watch, a pair of pretty earrings, and, lastly, two rings, which by some lucky accident she had forgotten to take off, and one of which was somewhat valuable. All these things she thought must have cost, at least, eight or nine thousand francs; but how much would they sell for? On this question her whole future depended. Moreover, how could she dispose of them? She wished to settle the matter at once, and rid herself of this terrible uncertainty. She especially wished to pay for the furniture in her room. Whom could she ask to help her? Not for the world would she have confided in Mme. Chevassat; for she instinctively realised that, if she once acquainted that terrible woman with her destitution, she would be bound hand and foot to her. While she was thus meditating, she thought of the Mont de Piété.* She had heard its offices spoken of, but only knew that poor people could obtain money there by depositing a pledge. "That's where I must go," she said to herself. But how was she to find an office? She scarcely knew; and yet she at once went down-stairs and left the house, without even answering astonished Mme. Chevassat's inquisitive question as to where she was going in such a hurry. Turning at the first corner, she went on at haphazard, paying no attention to the passers-by, but exclusively occupied in looking at the houses and the inscriptions over the shops. However, for more than an hour she wandered on without finding what she wanted; and to make matters worse, dusk was already setting in. "Still, I won't go home till I have found an office," she said to herself, wrathfully. And mustering up all her courage, she approached a

* This is the public pawnbroking establishment of Paris, with branch offices scattered through the city.—*Trans.*

sergent-de-ville, and, flushing crimson, asked him, "Will you be kind enough, sir, to direct me to one of the Mont de Piété offices?"

The man looked at her with compassionate inquisitiveness, as if wondering what misfortune had befallen so distinguished a looking young woman, and then answered with a sigh, "You will find one, madame, at the corner of the first street on the right."

Hastily thanking him, Henriette hurried in the direction he named, entered the house he mentioned, went up-stairs to the first floor, opened a door, and found herself in a large room, where some twenty people were standing about, waiting. On the right hand three or four clerks, shut off from the public by a railing breast-high, were writing down depositors' names, and counting out money. From time to time another clerk appeared at a kind of inner window, and carried the articles offered as pledges into an adjoining room to undergo valuation. After waiting some five minutes or so, and watching the proceedings, Henriette was able to realise the main features of the system, and thought it unnecessary to question any of the bystanders. Trembling, as if she had committed a crime, she approached the window, and laid on the ledge the most valuable of her two rings. Then she waited, without daring to look up; for it seemed to her as if all the bystanders' eyes were fixed upon her.

"A diamond ring!" cried the clerk. "Nine hundred francs. Whose is it?"

The large amount caused everyone to turn round; and a tall, impudent looking, over-dressed female remarked, "Oh, oh! The damsel doesn't stint herself!"

Crimson with shame, Henriette stepped towards the clerk and whispered, "It is my ring, sir."

The clerk looked at her, and then softly asked, "You have your papers?"

"Papers? What for?"

"The papers that establish your identity. A passport, a receipt for rent, or anything."

The bystanders laughed at the ignorance this girl displayed. "I have no such papers, sir," she stammered.

"Then we can make no advance."

So thus her last hope vanished. Holding out her hand, she said, "Please give me back my ring."

"No, no, my dear!" replied the clerk with a laugh, "that can't be done. You shall have it back when you bring me your papers, or when you come accompanied by two tradespeople who are known to us."

"But, sir,—"

"That's the rule. And, considering that he had lost time enough, he resumed :—"One velvet cloak! Thirty francs. Whose is it?"

Henriette hastened out of the room and down the stairs, pursued, it seemed to her, by the cries of the crowd. How that clerk had looked at her! Did he think she had stolen the ring? And what would become of it? The police would no doubt make enquiries, she would be tracked and discovered, carried back to her father's house, and given up to Sir Tom. She had hardly sufficient strength to return to the Rue de la Grange, and there fatigue, fright, and excitement made her forget her earlier resolutions. She confessed her discomfiture to Mme. Chevassat.

That estimable female tried to look as grave as an attorney consulted on a very delicate subject; but when Henriette had finished her story, she seemingly melted and exclaimed—"Poor little kitten, poor little innocent

kitten!" But, if she succeeded in assuming a tone of sincere sympathy, the greedy look in her eyes clearly betrayed her satisfaction at seeing Henriette at last at her feet. "After all," she said, "you are prodigiously lucky in your misfortunes, for really you are altogether too imprudent." And as the poor girl looked up in astonishment, not understanding Mme. Chevassat's meaning, the latter resumed—"Yes, you ran a great risk; and I can easily prove it to you. Who are you? Well, you need not turn pale like that: I don't ask any questions. But, after all, if you carry your jewels yourself to the pawn-shop, you, so to say, rush right into the lion's mouth. If they had arrested you when they saw you had no papers; if they had taken you before a magistrate—eh? Ah! my young lady, you would have fared pretty badly, I dare say." And then, changing her tone, she began scolding her tenant for having concealed her troubles from her. That was very wrong; and, besides, it hurt her feelings. Why had she given her money last night? Did she ask for money? Did she look like such a terrible creditor? She knew, God be thanked! what life was here below, and that we are bound to help one another. To be sure, there was that furniture-dealer, who must be paid; but she would have been quite willing to make him wait; and why shouldn't he do so? She had got very different people to wait! Why, only last week she sent an upholsterer about his business, and a dressmaker as well, for bothering one of her tenants in the back building,—the very nicest, and prettiest, and best of them all. Thus she chattered on with amazing volubility, till at last, when she thought she had made a sufficiently strong impression on her "poor little pussy-cat," she said,—“However, one can easily see, my dear, that you are a mere child. Pawn your poor little jewels! Why, that's absurd, for isn't there some one at hand quite ready to do anything for you?" At this sudden, but not altogether unexpected, attack, Henriette trembled. "For I am sure," continued Mme. Chevassat, "that if you only chose, poor M. Maxime could give you everything he possesses."

Henriette gave the door-keeper's wife such a look that that usually imperturbable female seemed quite disconcerted. "I forbid you," cried the poor girl, in a voice trembling with indignation,—“I forbid you positively ever to mention his name to me."

The woman shrugged her shoulders. "As you like it," she answered. And then, to change the conversation, she added, "Well, let us return to your ring. What do you propose to do?"

"That is exactly why I came to you," replied Henriette. "I don't know what is to be done in such a case."

Mme. Chevassat smiled, evidently well pleased. "And you did very well to come to us," she said. "Chevassat will go to the office, taking the charcoal-dealer and the grocer next door with him; and before going to bed you shall have your money, I promise you! Chevassat understands how to make the clerks perform their duty, and no mistake."

That evening, indeed, the excellent mau really condescended to go upstairs, and hand Henriette eight hundred and ninety-five francs. He did not bring the whole nine hundred, he said; for, having put his two neighbours to some inconvenience, he was bound, according to established usage, to invite them to take something. For himself, he had, of course, kept nothing—oh, nothing at all! He could take his oath upon that; for he greatly preferred to leave that little matter to the beautiful young lady's liberality. "Here are ten francs," curtly retorted Henriette, in order to put an end to his unpleasant chattering.

Thus, with a few gold-pieces previously remaining in her purse, the poor girl had a capital of about a thousand francs in hand. How many days, how many months, this sum would have lasted, had it not been for that unfortunate furniture-dealer. He did not fail to present himself the very next day, accompanied by Mme. Chevassat, and he boldly asked for five hundred and seventy-nine francs. Such a sum for the few second-hand pieces of furniture which garnished that wretched garret! It was a clear swindle, and such an impudent one, that Henriette felt overwhelmed. However, she paid the money. When the man had left, she sadly counted from one hand into the other the twenty-three pieces of gold remaining to her, and in the midst of her musings a thought occurred to her which might have led to salvation had she only acted on it. Why not stealthily leave the house, go to the Orleans railway station, take the first train for Anjou, and seek shelter at the home of Daniel's aunt. Alas! she contented herself with writing to her, and did not start.

XIX.

THIS inspiration was, moreover, destined to be the last favour vouchsafed by Providence—one of those opportunities which, once allowed to pass, never return. From that moment she felt the net, in which she had been ensnared, tighten day by day more closely around her. She had vowed to economize her little hoard as if it had been the blood of life itself. But how could she economize? Was it not necessary that she should buy many indispensable things? When M. de Brévan had engaged this garret-room, he had thought of nothing, or rather he had taken every possible measure to ensure his victim being speedily reduced to utter destitution. Henriette's only clothes were those on her back; she had not even a change of linen, a second pair of shoes, or a towel to wipe her hands—excepting one which the woman down-stairs had lent her. A girl accustomed to all the refinements of cleanliness could not possibly endure such privations; and thus she spent in a variety of small purchases more than a hundred and fifty francs. The sum was enormous for one in her position, and yet she merely bought such things as she considered absolutely indispensable. The worst, however, was, that she had to pay Mme. Chevassat five francs a-day for her board. These five francs troubled her grievously, for she would have been quite willing to live on bread and water. But in that direction she thought it impossible to economize; for one evening, when she hinted at the necessity of retrenching, Mme. Chevassat gave her a venomous, significant glance, which revealed the possibility of another danger. Might not that woman denounce her? These five francs thus became a kind of daily ransom which she paid to secure Mme. Chevassat's forbearance and good-will. It is true that, for this consideration, the woman was all attention towards her "poor little pussy-cat," as she had definitively dubbed Henriette, becoming daily more familiar, and adding this odious and irritating presumption to all the poor girl's other tortures. Many a time Henriette had been made so indignant that she had thought of rebelling; but she had never dared to do so. She indeed submitted to this familiarity for the same reason as she paid her five francs a-day. Taking her silence for consent, the obnoxious old female now cast aside all restraint, and declared she could not understand how her "little pussy-cat," young and pretty

as she was, could consent to live as she did. Was that a life? And thereupon she reverted to M. Maxime, who continued to call regularly twice a-day—the poor young man!—to enquire after Henriette. “More than that, my little pussy,” added Mme. Chevassat, “you will see that one of these days he will summon up courage enough to come and offer you an apology.”

That, however, was too much for Henriette to believe. “He will never have such consummate impudence,” she thought. But once again she was mistaken; for one morning, just as she had finished tidying her room, she heard a discreet knock outside. Thinking it was Mme. Chevassat with her breakfast, she opened the door without asking who was there, and started back with amazement and terror on recognizing M. de Brévan. He was extremely pale; his lips trembled; and his eyes were dim. He seemed, moreover, to have great difficulty in speaking. “I have come, mademoiselle,” he said at last, “to ask if you have reconsidered.” She made no reply, but gave him a look of supreme contempt, for which he was apparently prepared. “I know,” he continued, “that my conduct must appear abominable in your eyes. I have led you into this snare, and I have meanly betrayed a friend’s confidence; but I have an excuse. My passion is stronger either than my will or reason.”

“A vile passion for money!”

“You may think so, mademoiselle, if you choose. I shall not even attempt to clear myself. That is not what I came for. I came solely for the purpose of enlightening you in regard to your own position, which you do not seem to realize.”

If she had followed her first impulse, Henriette would have ordered him away. But she thought she ought to know his intentions and plans; so, overcoming her disgust, she remained silent, as if waiting for him to continue. “In the first place,” said M. de Brévan, apparently trying to collect his thoughts, “bear this in mind, mademoiselle. Your reputation is lost, and lost through me. All Paris is by this time convinced that I have run away with you, and that I keep you concealed in some charming retreat, where we enjoy our mutual love; in fact, that you are my mistress.” He seemed to expect an explosion of wrath. By no means! Henriette remained quite motionless. “What would you have?” he resumed sarcastically. “My coachman has been gossiping; and two friends of mine, who reached your father’s house on foot just when I drove up, saw you jump into my brougham; and, as if that were not enough, that absurd fellow Sir Tom must needs call me out. We have had a duel, and I have wounded him.”

The manner in which Henriette shrugged her shoulders clearly showed that she did not believe M. de Brévan’s statements. “If you doubt it, mademoiselle,” said he, “pray, read this paragraph, at the top of the second column.” And with these words he handed her a newspaper.

“In the Bois de Vincennes yesterday,” read Henriette, “a duel with swords was fought between M. M. de B—— and one of the most distinguished members of our Anglo-American colony. After five minutes’ close combat, Sir T. E—— was wounded in the arm. It is rumoured that this duel was connected with the recent surprising disappearance of one of the greatest heiresses of the Faubourg Saint Germain. Lucky M. de B—— is reported to know too much of the beautiful young lady’s present home for the peace of the family. However, it would be indiscreet to say more at present on the subject of an adventure which will ere long, no doubt, end in a happy and brilliant marriage.”

"You see, mademoiselle," said M. de Brévan, when he thought Henriette had had time enough to read the paragraph, "you see it is not I who advise marriage. If you will become my wife, your honour is safe."

"Ah, sir!"

That simple exclamation was uttered in so contemptuous a tone, that M. de Brévan seemed to turn, if possible, whiter than before. "Ah! I see you prefer marrying Sir Thomas Elgin," he said; and, as she shrugged her shoulders by way of reply, he resumed, "Oh, I am not joking! He or I; you have no other alternative. Sooner or later you will have to choose."

"I shall not choose, sir."

"Oh, just wait till poverty comes. You think, perhaps, you will only need to implore your father to come to your assistance. Don't flatter yourself with that idea. Your father has no other will than the countess Sarah's, and she is determined to make you marry Sir Tom."

"I shall not appeal to my father, sir."

"Then you probably count upon Daniel's return? Ah, believe me! do not indulge in such dreams. I have already told you that Daniel loves the Countess Sarah; and, even if he did not love her, you have been too publicly disgraced for him ever to give you his name. But that is nothing yet. Go to the Ministry of Marine and enquire. The officials will tell you that 'The Conquest' is out on a cruise of two years more. By the time Daniel returns, if indeed he returns at all (which is far from certain), you will long since have become Lady Elgin or Mme. de Brévan, unless—"

Henriette looked at him so fixedly that he could not sustain her glance, but lowered his eyes. "Unless I die!" said she impressively. "Did you not mean that? Be it so." M. de Brévan bowed, as if such indeed were his meaning. Then, opening the door, he exclaimed—"Let me hope, mademoiselle, that this is not your last word. I shall, however, have the honour of calling every week to receive your orders." And, with another bow, he left the room.

"What brought him here, the wretch! What does he want of me?" asked Henriette of herself as soon as she was alone. She did not believe a word of the pretexts M. de Brévan had assigned for his visit. She could not admit that he had really come to see if she had reflected, nor that he really cherished the abominable hope that misery, hunger, and fear would drive her into his arms. "He ought to know me well enough," she thought, "to be sure that I would prefer death a thousand times." It seemed to her that some all-powerful consideration must have absolutely compelled M. de Brévan to visit her,—for his manner had sufficiently shewn that the visit was scarcely to his liking. But then, what could that consideration be? His words, which she easily recalled, threw no light on the matter at all. She herself had already realised what he had told her concerning the consequences of her flight. The only new information he had imparted concerned his duel with Sir Tom; and, on consideration, this occurrence seemed to her natural enough. For did they not both covet with equal eagerness the fortune she would inherit from her mother as soon as she came of age? To her mind, their antagonistic interests explained their mutual hatred; for she was convinced that they hated one another mortally. The idea that Sir Tom and M. de Brévan understood each other, and pursued a common purpose, never entered her mind; and, indeed, if it had suggested itself, she would have rejected it as absurd. Must she, then, come to the conclusion that the only purpose of M. de

Brévan's visit was to drive her to despair? But why should he do so? what advantage would he reap from that? A lover does not seek to terrify and disgust the girl whose hand he seeks to win;—and yet this is how M. de Brévan had acted, so that he must have some very different aim to matrimony. What could it be? Surely he was not acting in this abominable manner for the mere pleasure of doing so. It was certain that when Daniel returned, whether he still loved Henriette or not, M. de Brévan would at all events have a terrible account to settle with him. Did M. de Brévan ever think of Daniel's return? No doubt he did; and with secret terror too. There was proof of that in one phrase that had escaped him. After saying, "When Daniel returns," he had added, "if, indeed, he ever does so, which is by no means sure." Why this proviso? Had he any reason to think that Daniel might perish in this dangerous campaign? Now she remembered—yes, she remembered distinctly—that M. de Brévan had smiled in a very peculiar way while uttering these words. At this recollection her heart sank within her, and she felt as if she were about to faint. Was he not capable of anything, the villain,—capable even of arming an assassin? "Oh, I must warn Daniel!" she exclaimed, "I must warn him, and at once." Accordingly, although she had written him a long letter only the day before, she sat down and wrote again, begging him to be watchful, to mistrust everybody, for his life was certainly threatened. Prudently enough she posted this letter herself, feeling convinced that if she confided it to Mme. Chevassat, the latter would hand it to M. de Brévan.

It was astonishing, however, how the door-keeper's wife seemed to become every day more attached to Henriette, and how expansive and demonstrative her affection grew. At all hours of the day, and on the most trivial pretexts, she would come up, sit down, and chatter away at a surprising rate. She no longer restrained herself in the least, but talked "from the bottom of her heart" with her "dear little pussy-cat," as if Henriette had been her own daughter. Moreover, she now cynically developed certain strange doctrines which she had formerly only hinted at; and it seemed as if she had been purposely deputed by Henriette's enemies for the special purpose of demoralizing and depraving her, and driving her, if possible, into that brilliant easy life of sin which is the ruin of so many unhappy women. Fortunately, in this case, the messenger was ill-chosen. Mme. Chevassat's eloquence might have inflamed the imagination of some low-born, ambitious girl, but it only disgusted Henriette. She had got into the habit of thinking of other things while the old woman was holding forth; and her mind fled to regions Mme. Chevassat had never heard of. Still, her life was a very sad one. She never went out; but spent her time at home, reading, or working at some embroidery—a masterpiece of patience and taste—which she had undertaken in the faint hope that it might prove useful in a moment of distress. However, a new source of trouble soon roused her from this monotonous existence. Her money rapidly diminished, and at last one day she had to change her last piece of gold. It was necessary to resort to the Monte de Piété again, for the month of April had just come round, and Mme. Chevassat had given her to understand—in homely words it is true—that she had better get ready to pay her quarter's rent, amounting to a hundred francs. She therefore entrusted the door-keeper with her other ring, and calculating by what had been lent her on the first one, she hoped on this occasion to obtain some five or six hundred francs. To her surprise, however, the man only brought her one hundred and ninety

francs. At first she believed he had robbed her; and she gave him to understand that she thought so.

Flying into a rage, he threw the pawn ticket on the table, and exclaimed, "just look at that, and remember to whom you are talking!"

Taking up the paper, she read plainly enough:—"Advanced, two hundred francs." Worthy M. Chevassat, be it noted, had charged ten francs for his time and trouble. Convinced that she had accused him unjustly, Henriette now hastened to apologise; but it was only by means of a second ten-franc piece that she at last succeeded in soothing his wounded feelings. She was quite ignorant of the fact that a person is always at liberty to pawn an object for only a portion of its estimated value, and never thought of studying the printed memoranda on the paper. Grievously disappointed at not having obtained what she hoped for, Henriette reflected how she might obtain other resources; for, after paying her rent, only enough money for a fortnight's subsistence would remain to her. This time she thought she would try and sell—not pawn—her dressing-case with the gold fittings, and she requested obliging Mme. Chevassat to find her a purchaser.

At first the old woman raised a host of objections. "It's folly to sell such a pretty toy!" she said. Just think, you'll never see it again. If, on the other hand, you pawn it, you can take it out again as soon as you have a little money." But she lost her pains, and at last consented to fetch a dealer in toilet-articles—whom she declared to be an excellent, worthy man, in whose honesty one might have all confidence. And he really showed himself worthy of her recommendation; for he instantly offered five hundred francs for the dressing-case, which was not worth much more than three times that amount. Nor was this his last bid. After an hour's irritating discussion, and after pretending, at least, a dozen times to leave the room, he at last sorrowfully produced his purse, and counted on the table the seven hundred francs in gold upon which Henriette had stoutly insisted. That was enough to pay Mme. Chevassat for four months' board. But then, what should she do afterwards? She must make this money last as long as possible; and accordingly, that very evening, she summoned all her courage and firmly told the old woman that in future she wished her to prepare her only one meal a-day—that is, her dinner. She chose this half-measure so as to avoid a regular falling out, which she feared might lead to fatal results. Contrary to her expectations, the door-keeper's wife appeared neither surprised nor angry. She only shrugged her shoulders, and replied: "As you like, my little pussy-cat. Only believe me, it is no use economising in one's eating."

From the day of this *coup d'état*, Henriette went down every morning herself to buy a penny roll and the little supply of milk which constituted her breakfast. For the rest of the day she did not leave her room, but busied herself with her embroidery; and the distressing monotony of her life was only interrupted by M. de Brévan's periodical visits. For he did not forget his threat; and Henriette was sure to see him regularly every week. He invariably presented himself with a solemn air, and coldly asked if she had reflected since he had last had the honour of presenting his respects to her. As a rule, she only answered him by a look of contempt; but he did not seem in the least disconcerted. He bowed respectfully, and invariably said before leaving the room, "Next time, then: I can wait. Oh! I have time: I can wait."

If he hoped by this means to conquer Henriette more promptly, he was

entirely mistaken. His periodical insults only revived her wrath and increased her energy. Her pride rose at the thought of this incessant struggle ; and she vowed that she would be victorious. It was this sentiment which inspired her with a thought, which, in its results, was destined to have a decisive influence on her future. It was now the end of June, and she noticed with alarm that her little treasure was growing smaller and smaller. One day, when Mme. Chevassat seemed to be unusually good humoured, she ventured to ask her if she could not procure her some work, saying, that she was considered quite skilful in all kinds of needlework.

"What nonsense," replied the woman with a loud laugh. "Are hands like yours made to work?" And when Henriette insisted, and showed her, as a specimen of what she could do, the embroidery she was engaged on, Mme. Chevassat retorted : "It is very pretty, no doubt, but embroidering from morning till night would not enable a fairy to keep a canary-bird."

There was probably some truth in what she said, exaggerated as it sounded ; and the poor girl hastened to add that she understood other kinds of work also. She was a first-class musician, for instance, and fully able to give music-lessons, or teach singing, if she could only obtain pupils. At these words a gleam of diabolical satisfaction lighted up the old woman's eyes, and she exclaimed, "Why, my 'pussy-cat,' could you play dance-music, like those artistes who go to fashionable people's entertainments."

"Certainly, I could."

"Well, that's a talent worth something ! Why did you not tell me before ? I will think of it, and you shall see."

On the next Saturday, early in the morning, she came to Henriette's room with the bright face of a bearer of good news. "I have thought of you," she said as she entered. "We have a tenant in the house who is going to give a large party to-night. I have mentioned you to her ; and she says she will give you thirty francs if you will make her guests dance. Thirty francs ! That's a big sum ; and besides, if the people are pleased, you will get more customers."

"In what part of the house does this lady live ?"

"On the second floor of the back building, looking on to the yard. Her name's Madame Hilaire ; she's a very nice person indeed, and so kind, there's no one like her. You would have to be there at nine o'clock precisely."

"Very well, I'll go." Elated with hope, Henriette spent a part of the afternoon in mending her only dress, a black silk, unfortunately much worn, and already often repaired. Still, by dint of skill and patience, she had managed to look quite respectable when she rang at Mme. Hilaire's door. She was shown into a room rather oddly furnished, but brilliantly lighted up, where seven or eight ladies in flaming costumes, and as many fashionably dressed gentlemen, were smoking and taking coffee.

They had evidently just dined ; and judging from their eyes and voices, the wine had circulated pretty freely at the repast.

"Ah ! here's our musician," exclaimed a tall, dark-haired woman, with a pretty face but vulgar air, who proved to be Mme. Hilaire. "Will you take a drop of something, my dear ?" she asked, turning to Henriette.

The poor girl blushed crimson, and seemed painfully embarrassed. While she was apologising for declining, Mme. Hilaire roughly interrupted her and exclaimed, "Not thirsty, eh ? all right. Well, you can take something by-and-bye. In the meantime will you play us a quadrille ? and mark the time, please." Then imitating with distressing accuracy the

barking voice habitually assumed by masters of ceremonies at public balls, she called out,—“Take your positions, take your positions : a quadrille !”

Seated at the piano, Henriette turned her back to the dancers ; but in a mirror placed above the instrument she could perceive every movement made by Mme. Hilaire and her guests. By this means she was speedily confirmed in what she had suspected from the beginning. She understood into what company Mother Chevassat had thrown her. However, she had sufficient self-control to finish the quadrille. But when the last figure had been danced she rose, and, approaching Mme. Hilaire, stammered in the most embarrassed manner,—“Please excuse me, madame, but I cannot stay. I feel very unwell. I could not play any more.”

“How funny !” cried one of the gentlemen. “Why, here’s our ball at an end !”

“Hush, Julius !” exclaimed Mme. Hilaire. “Don’t you see how pale she is,—as pale as death, poor child ! What is the matter with you, my dear ! Is it the heat that makes you feel badly ? It is stifling hot here.” And, as Henriette walked towards the door, she added,—“Oh, wait ! I don’t trouble people for nothing. Come, Julius, turn your pockets inside out, and give the little one a twenty-franc piece.”

The poor girl was almost outside the room, but turning round she replied,—“Thank you, madame ; but you owe me nothing.” It was high time for her to leave. Her first surprise had been followed by mad anger, which drove the blood to her head, and drew bitter tears from her eyes. To think that Mme. Chevassat had entrapped her in that manner ! What could have been the wretched woman’s object ? Carried away by an irresistible impulse, and no longer mistress of herself, Henriette rushed down-stairs, and swept like a whirlwind into the door-keeper’s room. “How could you dare to send me to such people ? You knew all about it, you wretch !” she cried.

Master Chevassat was the first to rise. “Eh, what’s the matter ?” he asked ; “do you know whom you are talking to ?”

But his wife motioned him to be quiet, and, turning to Henriette, cynically exclaimed, “Well, what next ? Aren’t those people good enough for you ; eh ? In the first place, I am tired of your ways, my ‘pussy-cat.’ Beggars like you ought to stop at home and behave properly, instead of running away with young men, and gadding about the world with lovers.” Thereupon she took advantage of the fact that Henriette had paused on the threshold to push her brutally out of the room, and fiercely bang the door.

On reaching her own room, the poor girl began to reproach herself for her fit of passion. “Ah !” she murmured as she wept, “those who are weak and unhappy have no right to complain. Who knows what this wicked woman will now do to avenge herself ?”

She ascertained that two days afterwards. On coming down-stairs as usual, a little before seven o’clock, in order to buy her roll and milk for breakfast, she met Mme. Hilaire in the courtyard of the house. The tenant of the back building turned as red as a poppy, and rushing up to Henriette, seized her by the arm, and shook her furiously, at the same time bawling out at the top of her voice, “Ah ! so it’s you, you miserable little beggar. You’ve been slandering me, eh ? You wicked little minx. A beggar I had sent for to enable her to earn thirty francs ! And I must needs think she is ill, and pity her, and ask Julius to give her a twenty-franc piece.”

Henriette felt that she ought not to blame this woman, who, after all, had shown her nothing but kindness. But she was thoroughly frightened,

and tried to get away; whereupon the excited female clutched her still more tightly, and screamed still louder, till at last several tenants came to their windows to see what was the matter. "You'll have to pay for it," yelled Mme. Hilaire, carried away by wrath. "You'll have to clear out of the house, I can tell you!"

The threat was not an idle one, for that very afternoon the same lamentable scene was repeated; and to make matters worse, Mme. Hilaire had friends in the house, who espoused her quarrel, and fell upon Henriette whenever she appeared. They lay in wait for her by turns; and she no sooner ventured upon the staircase than shouts were raised against her: so that the unfortunate girl no longer dared leave her room. Early in the morning, as soon as the front door was opened, she ran out to buy her daily provisions; and then, swiftly returning, barricaded herself in her chamber, not to stir out of it again during the day. She certainly did wish she were able to leave the house; but where could she go to? The Unknown frightened her, moreover; for might it not have still greater terrors in reserve? At last she was quite without money again. In July her rent had cost her a hundred francs, and she had been compelled to buy a simple alpaca dress, in place of her old black silk one, which was literally falling to pieces. At the beginning of August she reached the end of her resources. Nor would she even have been able to eke them so long if, ever since that evening at Mme. Hilaire's, she had not entirely dispensed with Mme. Chevassat's expensive board. She had at first rejoiced over this rupture, which freed her from the importunities of the door-keeper's wife, and enabled her to curtail her daily expenditure, but now she was placed in an awkward predicament. She had still a few things that she might sell—her cashmere, her watch, her earrings, and brooch; but without the Chevassats' assistance she didn't know how to dispose of them. All that the woman had said to frighten her from going to the pawnshop herself returned to mind; and she pictured herself arrested, questioned, conveyed to her father's house, and handed over to Sarah and Sir Tom. However, her need daily became more pressing; and at last one evening, after long hesitation, she slipped out of the house to try and find a purchaser for her brooch and earrings. She sought for one of those dark little shops she had read of in books, which the police always suspect and watch, and where most traffic is done in stolen goods. At last she found such a one as she desired, and a withered, bespectacled old crone, who plainly took her to be a thief, and did not even ask her her name, gave her a hundred and forty francs for her jewels.

Henriette realised well enough that this paltry sum meant merely a brief respite; and hence, overcoming all her reserve and reluctance, she vowed she would make every effort in her power to obtain work. She kept her word, and went from shop to shop, from door to door, so to say, soliciting employment, much as one might have asked for alms, promising to discharge any duty in return merely for her board and lodging. But it was written that everything should turn against her. Her beauty, her distinguished air, all the more conspicuous owing to her modest attire, and her very manner of speaking, were so many obstacles in her way. Who could think of engaging as a servant a girl who looked like a duchess? Thus on all sides she encountered cold faces and ironical smiles. She was refused everywhere, though now and then some portly libertine answered her application by an impudent declaration of love. Whilst out of doors, she attentively scrutinized all the little bills and notices setting

forth that workwomen were "wanted" at such and such addresses, and she perseveringly trudged from one place to the other. But, here again she met with insurmountable difficulties. There was no end of questions. "Who are you? Where have you been? By whom have you been employed?" and finally, always the same distressing answer,—“We cannot employ persons like you.” At last she went to an employment agency. She had noticed one, on the door of which figured a huge placard offering "situations" worth from 35 to 1000 francs a-month. On going up-stairs, a loquacious individual began by making her deposit a fee of 10 francs, and then told her that he had exactly what she wanted, only it was necessary she should call again the next day. She returned ten times in succession, and always with the same result, but, on the eleventh occasion, the man gave her the address of two shops, in one of which he assured her she would certainly find employment. However, they both proved to be low, boozing dens, where young women of prepossessing appearance were wanted to serve absinthe, and generally amuse the customers. This was Henriette's last effort. She was literally worn out with ineffectual struggling, and virtually gave up the fight. Another eighteen months must elapse before she came of age. Since leaving her father's house, she had not received a line from Daniel, although she had constantly written to him, and she had no means of ascertaining the date of his return. On one occasion, following M. de Brévan's advice, she had summoned courage enough to go to the Ministry of Marine, and inquire if they had any news about "The Conquest;" whereupon a clerk jocularly replied, that the vessel might be afloat "another year or two." How could she hope to wait so long? Why maintain the useless struggle? She felt an acute pain in her chest, she had a distressing cough, and after walking a few yards, her legs habitually tottered, and she was seized with a cold perspiration. She now spent most of her time in bed—shivering with a nervous chill, or else lost, as it were, in a kind of stupor. She realized that she was daily becoming weaker, and often murmured, "Ah, if I could only die!" This was the last favour she asked of God. Henceforth, a miracle alone could save her; and she hardly wished to be saved. She became quite indifferent to everything: fancying that she had exhausted all human suffering, and that there was nothing left for her to fear. The last misfortune which now befell her did not even draw from her a sigh. One afternoon, while out of doors, she had left her window open, and a sudden breeze, slamming the blinds, caused a chair, on which she had hung her cashmere shawl, to overturn. The shawl fell into the fire-place among the dying embers, and when Henriette returned she found it half-burnt. It was her only remaining article of value, and she might at any time have sold it for several hundred francs. However, on realising this last calamity, she simply said to herself, "After all, what does it matter? I shall be spared some three months' suffering, that's all." And, with these words, she dismissed the matter from her mind.

She, moreover, in nowise troubled herself about her rent when it became due in October. "I shan't be able to pay it," she thought. "Mme. Chevassat will give me notice, and then it will all be over." To her great surprise, however, the female down-stairs did not at all scold her for not having the money ready. On the contrary, she volunteered to ask the landlord to give her time, and this inexplicable forbearance gave Henriette a week's respite. At last, however, she woke up one morning feeling half-famished, but without a halfpenny in her possession, and, indeed, without

anything for which she thought it possible to obtain money. So this, then, was the end; a little courage, and she would die of cold and starvation. But, willing as she had hitherto been to die, now, at this last hour, she shrunk from the prospect with affright. She knew that life meant either M. de Brévan or Sir Tom, and yet she was afraid of death. After all, she was but twenty years of age. Never had she felt such a longing to live—to live merely a month, a week, a day longer! If only her shawl had not been burnt! What could she do? Glancing round her room she espied the embroidery on which she had worked so long. This work was, in point of fact, a dress of simple material enriched with an exquisite design of marvellous workmanship in coloured silk. Unfortunately, the embroidery was only half-finished. "Never mind," thought Henriette, "perhaps I may be able to obtain something for it." And hastily wrapping it up, she carried it to the old crone who had already purchased her carrings, and subsequently her watch.

The old woman stared in amazement on beholding this marvellous sample of skill and patience. "It's really magnificent," she said, "and, if it were finished, it would be worth a mint of money; but as it is, no one could turn it to account." However, after some little hesitation, she consented to give twenty francs for it, solely from love of art, she said; for it was money thrown away.

These twenty francs were, for Henriette, an unexpected release. "They will last me a month," she thought, resolving to live on dry bread alone; "and who can tell what a month may bring forth?" And this unfortunate girl's mother had left her two-and-a-half million francs. Ah! if she had but had a single friend to advise her in her inexperience! But she had been faithful to her vow never to divulge her secret; and the most terrible anguish had never torn from her a single complaint.

M. de Brévan knew this full well; for he still called regularly once a week. His perseverance, which had at first inflamed Henriette's courage, now tortured her most cruelly. "Ah, I shall be avenged!" she said to him one day. "Daniel will come back."

But, shrugging his shoulders, he answered,—“If you count upon that alone, you may as well surrender, and become my wife at once.”

She turned her head from him with an expression of ineffable disgust. Rather the icy arms of Death! It seemed, indeed, as if the long sleep would be her only refuge from suffering. By the end of November her twenty francs were exhausted; and to prolong her existence she had to resort to the last desperate expedients of extreme destitution. She sold, in turn, everything that she could carry out of the house without being stopped by the door-keeper's wife. First, she sacrificed her linen, then her coverlet and curtains. She even removed the wool from her mattress, and disposed of it in small parcels. Thus, at times she obtained a franc, at others half-a-franc, and at others again a penny to buy a roll.

Christmas-day came, and she found herself hungry and shivering in her denuded room. She wore but a single petticoat under her thin alpaca dress; she had nothing to cover herself with during the night. Two evenings before, in a moment of utter misery, she had written her father a long letter. He had never answered it. She had written again the night before, and still there was no reply. "I am hungry," she had said, "and have no bread. If by noon to-morrow you have not come to my assistance, an hour later I shall be dead." Noon had come and gone—not a line, not a single word of message had she received. It was all over.

Still frantically clinging to a last hope, she allowed herself till four o'clock. She made all her preparations ; she told Mme. Chevassat that she would be out during the evening, and after some difficulty procured on credit a small stock of charcoal. Then she wrote two letters,—a last one to her father, and the other to M. de Brévan.

Having carefully closed her door, she next kindled two small fires, and, after commending her soul to God, lay down on her bed. It was then five o'clock. The fumes of the charcoal spread slowly through the room, bedimming the light of the flaring candle. It seemed as if some heavy weight were pressing on her temples, and by degrees she began to suffocate. Suddenly she felt a painful sensation in the chest ; then a kind of delirium set in. She had a strange ringing in her ears ; her pulse beat with extraordinary vehemence ; nausea nearly convulsed her ; and from time to time she felt as if her head were bursting. At last the candle went out. Mad-dened by the sensation of imminent death, she tried to rise, but could not. She attempted to cry out, but her voice merely rattled in her throat. Then her ideas became utterly confused. Breathing seemed suddenly to cease, and she suffered no longer.

XX.

A FEW minutes longer, and all would have been really over. The Count de Ville-Handry's daughter was dying ! In a moment she would be dead. But at that precise instant Papa Ravinet, the dealer in second-hand merchandise, living on the fourth floor, chanced to come out of his rooms. If he had left as usual by the front staircase he would have heard nothing ; but providentially he turned to go down the back-stairs, and at that moment heard the poor girl's death-rattle. In our egotistical times many a man would not have troubled himself with the matter ; but Papa Ravinet at once hurried down to inform the door-keeper. Many a man again would have been quieted by the composure the Chevassats displayed, and satisfied with their assurance that Henriette was not at home. The old dealer, however, insisted on investigating the matter, and, in spite of the door-keepers' evident reluctance, he compelled them to go up-stairs : and, indeed, by his language and example, induced nearly all the tenants to interest themselves in the case. Again, it was Papa Ravinet who provided everything that was required when the poor girl was found stretched half-dead on her miserable bed.

On recovering consciousness, Henriette's first sensation was a very strange one. In the first place, she was utterly amazed at finding herself in a warm bed,—she who, for so many days, had endured all the tortures of bitter cold. Then, looking round, she was dazzled by the light of the lamp standing on the chest of drawers, and the beautiful, bright fire burning in the fire-place. Next, she beheld with stupefaction all the unknown women who were leaning over her attentively watching her movements. Had her father at last come to her assistance ? No, that could not be, for he would have been there ; and she looked for him in vain among all these strange people. Then understanding, from a remark made by one of the bystanders, that she had been rescued from death by chance alone, she was seized with a feeling of bitter grief. "To have suffered all that a dying person can suffer," she thought, "and then not to die after all !" At this idea she almost hated these people who were busying themselves around her. No

doubt they had brought her back to life, but would they enable her to subsist?

She now clearly distinguished what was going on in her room, and recognized the ladies from the first floor, to whom mendacious Mother Chevassat was explaining that "her poor little pussy-cat" had sadly deceived her affectionate heart in order to carry out her fatal purpose. "You see, I did not dream of such a thing," protested the abominable old female in a whining tone. "A poor little pussy-cat, who was always merry, and this morning yet sang like a bird. I thought she might be a little embarrassed, but never suspected such misery. You see, ladies, she was as proud as a queen: she would rather have died than ask for assistance; and yet she knew she had only to say a word to me. Why, in October, when I saw she would not be able to pay her rent, I readily became responsible for her?" So saying, the infamous old hypocrite bent over the poor girl, kissed her on her forehead, and tenderly resumed,—"Didn't you love me, eh, dear little pussy-cat; didn't you? I know you loved poor old Mother Chevassat."

Henriette shrank with horror and disgust from contact with the abominable old female's lying lips. However, the emotion this incident caused her did more to revive her than all the attention she received; but naturally, it was only after the doctor, who had been sent for, came and bled her, that she recovered the free use of her faculties. Then, in a faint voice she thanked the people round her for all their kindness, assuring them that she felt much better now, and might safely be left alone. The ladies from the first floor, whom curiosity had brought up-stairs just as they were about to dine, thereupon slipped away; but Mme. Chevassat pertinaciously remained by the bedside, as if anxious to find herself alone with her victim. Scarcely had the others left than her expression, look, and tone of voice completely changed. "Well," she commenced, "I suppose you are happy now! You have advertised my house, and it will all be in the papers. Everybody will pity you, and think your lover a cold-blooded villain, who has let you die of starvation." The poor girl deprecated the charge with such a sweet, gentle expression of face, that a savage would have felt compassion; but then Mother Chevassat was what is called a civilized being. "You know well enough, I should think," she resumed in a bitter tone, "that dear M. Maxime did all he could to save you. Only the day before yesterday he offered you his whole fortune—"

"Madame," stammered Henriette, "have you no mercy?"

Mercy?—Mme. Chevassat! What a joke! "You would accept nothing from M. Maxime," continued the old woman. "Just tell me why, pray? You wanted to play the virtuous woman, eh? Well; if that was so, why have you accepted that ugly old miser's offer? He'll make life hard enough to you. Ah, you have fallen into nice hands!" With a great effort, Henriette raised herself on her pillows, and asked,—"What do you mean?"

"Oh, you know well enough! I'm not so surprised, for he has been looking after you for a long time already."

Papa Ravinet, it should be mentioned, had discreetly withdrawn as soon as Henriette opened her eyes, so as to leave the women standing about at liberty to undress her. She had therefore not seen the man who had saved her, and did not at all understand Mme. Chevassat's allusions. "Explain yourself, madame; explain!" she said.

"Ah, upon my word! it's not difficult. Don't you know that the man who heard you groaning, and brought us up here, is the old dealer on the

fourth floor. Why, it's he who's presented you with all those bed things, and all that firing. And he won't stop there, I'm sure. Just have a little patience, and you will soon know well enough what I mean."

It must be borne in mind that Mother Chevassat had always pictured Papa Ravinet to Henriette as an arrant scoundrel—no doubt to prevent her from offering him anything she might have to sell. "What have I to be afraid of?" asked Henriette.

The woman hesitated for a moment, but at last replied—"If I told you why, you would simply repeat it to him as soon as he comes back."

"No, I promise you."

"Swear it, on your mother's sacred memory."

"I swear."

Apparently reassured by this solemn oath, the old woman drew closer to Henriette, and began in a low voice,—“Well, I mean this: if you accept what Papa Ravinet offers you now, in six months you will be worse than any of Mme. Hilaire's girls. The old rascal has ruined more than one who were just as good as you are. That's his business; and, upon my word! he understands it. Now, forewarned is forearmed. I am going down to prepare you some soup, and shall be back by-and-bye. And above all, you hear, not a word!”

Once more had Mother Chevassat hurled Henriette into an abyss of despair. “Great God!” said the poor girl, “can it really be that this old man's generous assistance is a new snare?” With her elbow resting on her pillow, her forehead supported by her hand, her eyes streaming with tears, she endeavoured to collect her scattered ideas, and her meditations might have lasted some time if she had not suddenly heard some one coughing at the door. She instinctively trembled, and raised her head. On the threshold of the room stood the old dealer looking at her.

After a long conversation with the door-keeper, and some words with his amiable wife, Papa Ravinet had come up-stairs to inquire after his patient. Henriette guessed who he was, rather than recognized him; for, although living in the same house, she had seldom met him before, and then only while quickly crossing the courtyard. “So this,” she thought, “is the man who wishes to ruin me,—the wretch whom I must avoid.” It is true that the dealer, with his mournful face, his thick, brush-like eyebrows, and his small yellow eyes perpetually darting suspicious glances right and left, was an enigmatical-looking personage, scarcely calculated to inspire confidence at first sight. However, despite the embarrassment Mother Chevassat's statement caused her, Henriette none the less thanked him very heartily for his help, care, and generosity in providing her with everything she wanted.

“Oh! you owe me no thanks,” he said. “I have only done my duty, and very imperfectly too.” Then somewhat grimly he began to tell her that what he had done was nothing in comparison with what he meant to do.

How persuasively he talked, in hopes of winning Henriette's confidence, and how she hesitated under the influence of Mother Chevassat's last words; how at last, by returning her her letters apparently intact, he succeeded in overcoming her antipathy, and obtained from her a promise to let him help her in her trouble—all this has been related in our first chapter. When the old dealer at last retired, and Henriette was left alone, she asked herself how far she ought to confide in him at the interview fixed for the morrow. Had he not already guessed, by the direction of one of her letters, that she was the Count de Ville-Handry's daughter? And if

she was to have kept anything from him, was it not precisely that very fact? Hence, she had best tell him everything. The more the poor girl thought over this strange adventure, the more she became convinced of Mother Chevassat's deception and Papa Ravinet's sincerity. He might help her, and then, perhaps, she would be able to wait for Daniel's return and her own rehabilitation. Even if the old dealer deceived her, she would be no worse off than before, no nearer death than she had been a few hours previously. So, why not make the trial—tell him the whole truth, and ask him to advise her.

This is what Henriette had made up her mind to do, when, at nine o'clock the next morning, Papa Ravinet ushered himself into her room. He was very pale, and his expression of face and tone of voice betrayed a feeling of mingled anxiety and emotion. "Well?" asked he, so absorbed in the one thought that he forgot even to inquire how the poor girl had passed the night.

"I have made up my mind, sir; sit down, please, and listen to me," replied Henriette, pointing to a chair.

On leaving her the previous night, the old dealer had felt convinced that she would ultimately confide in him, but he had scarcely expected that she would do so so soon. "At last!" he exclaimed with beaming eyes and a strange, almost unnatural, gesture of delight.

"I am quite aware," resumed Henriette in an impressive voice, "that I am about to act most rashly. It is scarcely prudent to place oneself in the power of a stranger—especially when one has been warned not to trust him."

"Oh, mademoiselle," interrupted Papa Ravinet, "believe me—"

"I think," she rejoined, speaking with even additional solemnity, "that you would be the meanest and worst of men if you deceived me. As it is, I rely upon your honour." And then, in a firm voice, she began to relate the story of her life, ever since that fatal evening when her father had acquainted her with his intention to give her a second mother.

The old dealer had sat down just in front of Henriette, and he fixed his eyes upon her as if anxious to enter into her thoughts, and anticipate her meaning. His face was all aglow with excitement, like the face of a gambler watching the little white ball of the roulette table, which is about to enrich or ruin him. At times it seemed almost as if he had foreseen Henriette's terrible story, and experienced a bitter satisfaction at finding his presentiments confirmed. Every now and then, at certain phases in the poor girl's narrative, he would interrupt her and ejaculate, "Yes, yes, of course that had to come next." And, moreover, he was apparently even better acquainted than Henriette with Sarah Brandon and her band—as if, indeed, he had lived with them on terms of intimacy; and, whenever the occasion offered, he passed judgment on their conduct with amazing alacrity and assurance. "Ah! There I recognise Sarah and Mrs Brian," he said at one moment. "Yes, Sir Tom never does otherwise," he remarked a little later on. "That's Maxime de Brévan all over," he ejaculated on a third occasion. And, as the story progressed, he burst at times into bitter laughter or threatening imprecations. "What a trick!" he exclaimed at one point. "What an infernal snare!" By-and-bye he turned deadly pale, and trembled on his chair, as if he felt ill, and were about to fall. Henriette was at that moment giving him Daniel's version, as obtained from M. de Brévan, of M. de Kergrist's death and Malgat's disappearance—describing how it was that the unfortunate cashier had left such an immense deficit behind him; how he had been condemned to penal servitude; and how a body, believed to be his, had been found in a wood near Paris. However, the old

dealer promptly regained his self-possession, and as soon as the poor girl had finished her narrative he sprang to his feet, and exclaimed in a threatening voice: "I have them now, the wretches!—this time I have them!" Then, overcome with excessive excitement, he sank on to his chair again, covering his face with his hands.

Henriette was thunderstruck, and looked aghast at the old man, in whom she now placed her hopes. On the previous night she had already had some suspicions that he was not what he seemed to be, and now she was sure he was not. But then, who could he be? How could she hope to solve such a problem. All she divined was that Sarah Brandon, Mrs Brian, and Sir Thomas Elgin, as well as M. de Brévan, had, at some time or other, come into contact with Papa Ravinet, and that he hated them mortally. That indeed seemed certain, unless, indeed, the old dealer was seeking to deceive her—for Henriette, who had not yet quite dismissed her doubts, could not prevent this afterthought from flashing through her mind. However, Papa Ravinet had in the meantime mastered his emotion. "Let no one, henceforth, deny the existence of Providence!" he exclaimed. "Fools alone can do so. M. de Brévan had every reason to think that this house would entomb his crime as safely as the grave itself, and so he brought you here. And it happens I must chance to live here as well,—I! of all men,—and he is unaware of it! By a kind of miracle we are brought together under the same roof—you, the Count de Ville-Handry's daughter and myself,—and, at the very moment when de Brévan is about to triumph, Providence brings us together, and our meeting effects his ruin!" The old dealer's voice evinced the fierce joy he felt at the thought of approaching vengeance, his sallow cheeks flushed with excitement, and his eyes shone more brilliantly than ever. "For M. de Brévan was triumphing last night," he continued. "That woman Chevassat, his confederate, had watched you, and, observing your preparations for suicide, had bidden him rejoice, for at last he was about to get rid of you."

"Is it possible?" stammered Henriette with a shudder.

Looking at her half surprised, the old man rejoined, "What! after all you have seen of M. de Brévan, didn't you ever suspect him of planning your death?"

"Why, yes! I sometimes thought so."

"You were right in doing so, mademoiselle. Ah! you don't know your enemies yet. But I know them, for I have had a chance of measuring the depth of their wickedness. And for your safety you ought to follow my advice."

"I will, sir."

Papa Ravinet was evidently a little embarrassed, but at last he said, "You see, mademoiselle, I shall have to ask you to trust me blindly."

"I will do so."

"Well, it is of the utmost importance that you should escape beyond reach of M. de Brévan: he must lose every trace of you, and, consequently, you must leave this house."

"I will leave it."

"And in the way I say?"

"I will obey you in every point."

The last shadow of anxiety, hitherto overclouding the old dealer's brow, vanished as if by magic. "Then all will go well," he said, rubbing his hands; "I guarantee the rest. Let us make our arrangements at once. I have been here a long time, and that woman Chevassat must be dying

of curiosity. However, we must not let her suspect that we are acting in concert." As if afraid that some inquisitive person might be listening outside, Papa Ravinet thereupon drew his chair close to Henriette's bed, and whispered, "As soon as I have turned my back, that woman will come up, burning with curiosity to know what has transpired between us. You must pretend to be disgusted with me. Let her understand that you think me a wicked old man, who wants you to pay the price of infamy for his services."

Henriette flushed crimson. "But, monsieur,—" stammered she.

"Perhaps you dislike telling a falsehood?"

"You see—I can't, I fear. It wouldn't be easy to lie well enough to deceive Mme. Chevassat."

"Ah, mademoiselle, you must do so! it can't be helped. By remembering the necessity, you may succeed in misleading her. Remember that we must fight the enemy with her own weapons."

"Well, I will try, sir."

"So be it. The rest is a small matter. At nightfall you must dress yourself, and watch for the moment when the door-keeper sets about lighting the gas. As soon as you see him on the front staircase, make haste and run down by the back-stairs. I will take measures to have the woman Chevassat either engaged or out of the house: and so you will find it easy enough to slip out without being perceived. Directly you are in the street, turn to the right. At the first corner, in front of the great Auction-Mart, you will see a cab, with a coloured handkerchief like this protruding out of the window. Jump into it at once. I shall be inside. There, that is all you have to do. Have I made it all clear to you?"

"Oh, perfectly, sir!"

"Then we understand each other. Do you feel strong enough?"

"Yes, sir. You may rely on me."

Everything passed off just as the old dealer had planned; and Henriette played her part so well, that at night, when her disappearance was discovered, Mother Chevassat was neither surprised nor disturbed. "She was tired of life, the girl!" she said to her husband. "I saw it by her manner when I was up-stairs. We'll no doubt see her again at the Morgue. As the charcoal failed to do the work, she has tried water instead."

XXI.

DEAR WOMAN! She would not have gone to bed so quietly, nor have fallen asleep so comfortably, if she had suspected the truth. She owed most of her peace of mind to the certainty that Henriette had left the house bareheaded, with wretched, worn-out shoes on her feet, and nothing but one petticoat and a thin alpaca dress on her body. Now she was quite sure that, as the poor girl was in such a state of destitution, she would soon weary of wandering through the streets of Paris on this cold December night, and would be irresistibly drawn towards the Seine. Unfortunately for the estimable female's calculations, something very different happened. On being left alone in her room, after Papa Ravinet's departure, Henriette felt strengthened in her determination to trust the old dealer blindly: besides, she had, so to say, no other choice on earth. Accordingly, after receiving Mother Chevassat's visit, and playing the

part indicated by the dealer, she rose from her bed, and although still very faint, installed herself by the window watching for the time to act. At last the first shades of night fell over the great city, and the public clocks could be heard striking four o'clock. With a lamp in his hand, the door-keeper left his room and ascended the staircase to light the gas on the various landings. "Now's the time," murmured Henriette; and casting a last look at the wretched room where she had suffered and wept so much, and where, indeed, she had expected to die, she slipped out into the passage. The back-stairs were quite dark, so that she was not recognized by two persons she met as she went down. The courtyard, moreover, was deserted, and the door-keeper's room unoccupied; so she crossed the hall, and with one bound reached the street. Thirty or forty yards on the left-hand she espied the cab in which Papa Ravinet was waiting for her, and running towards it, she at once sprung in; the driver, who had previously received his instructions, whipping up his horse as soon as he heard the door slam. "And now, sir," began Henriette, at once turning to the old dealer, "where are you taking me?"

The gas in the shops from time to time lighted up the interior of the vehicle, and enabled her to see her companion's features. He was looking at her with manifest satisfaction; and a smile of friendly malice played upon his lips. "Ah!" he replied, "that is a great secret. But you will know soon, for the man drives well."

The poor horse went, indeed, as fast as if the five-franc piece which the driver had received had infused the noble blood of the swiftest racer into its veins. They drove down the street at a furious rate, turned at first to the right, and subsequently in several directions, and at last pulled up before a house of modest appearance. Papa Ravinet promptly jumped out, and, having assisted Henriette in alighting, drew her into the house, with the words:—"You will see what a surprise I have in store for you." On reaching the landing of the third floor the old man paused, took a key out of his pocket, and opened the door facing the staircase. Then, before she had time to consider, Henriette found herself gently pushed into a small sitting-room, where an elderly lady was embroidering at a frame by the light of a large copper lamp. "Dear sister," said Papa Ravinet, still pausing on the threshold, "here is the young lady I spoke to you about, and who does us the honour to accept our hospitality."

The elderly lady slowly pricked her needle into the canvas, pushed back the frame, and rose. She seemed some fifty years of age, and must originally have been beautiful. But age and sorrow had whitened her hair and furrowed her face, and habits of silence and meditation had given her lips a peculiar curve. She was dressed in black, and in a provincial style: "You are welcome, mademoiselle," she said in a grave voice. "You will find in our modest home the peace and sympathy you need."

In the meantime Papa Ravinet had come forward; bowing to Henriette, he said,—"I beg to present to you Mme. Bertollé, or rather, my dear sister Marie, a widow, and a saint, who has devoted herself to her brother, and has sacrificed everything to him,—her fortune, her peace, and very life."

Ah! there was no mistaking the look which the old man gave his sister; he plainly worshipped her. But, as if embarrassed by his praise, she interrupted him saying, "You told me so late, Antoine, that I have not been able to attend to all your orders. However, the young lady's room is ready, and if you like—"

"Yes, we must show her the way."

Taking up the lamp, the old lady opened a door leading from the parlour into a small, comfortably furnished room, where everything was exquisitely tidy, and which exhaled that fresh odour of lavender so dear to all house-keepers from the country. The bright fire on the hearth cast lustre on the polished furniture, and the curtains were as white as snow. At one glance the old dealer had taken in everything; and, after a smile of gratitude addressed to his sister, he said to Henriette,—“This is your room, mademoiselle.”

The poor girl was so touched that she sought in vain for words to express her gratitude. However, Mme. Bertolle did not give her time to speak, but showed her, spread out on the bed, various articles in white linen, a couple of petticoats, several pairs of stockings, and a warm grey flannel dressing-wrapper, while at the foot were a pair of slippers. “This will answer for a change to-night, mademoiselle,” she said; “I have provided what was most pressing: to-morrow we will see about the rest.”

Big tears—tears of happiness and gratitude—now rolled down Henriette’s pale cheeks. Yes, indeed! this was a surprise, and a delicious one, which her new protector with his ingenious foresight had prepared for her. “Ah, you are so kind!” she said, giving her hands to brother and sister,—“you are so kind! How can I ever repay what you are doing for me?” Then overcoming her emotion, and turning to Papa Ravinet, she added, “But pray, who are you, sir,—you who succour a poor girl who is an utter stranger to you, increasing the value of your assistance by your great delicacy?”

It was Mme. Bertolle who replied. “My brother, mademoiselle,” said she, “is an unfortunate man, who has paid for a moment’s forgetfulness of duty with his happiness, prospects, and very life. Do not question him. Let him be for you what he is for all of us,—Antoine Ravinet, dealer in curiosities.”

Mme. Bertolle’s voice betrayed such great sorrow, silently endured, that Henriette felt ashamed, regretting her indiscretion. But the old man intervened:—“What I may say to you, mademoiselle,” he exclaimed, “is, that you owe me no gratitude,—no, none whatever. I am doing what my own interest commands me to do; and I deserve no credit for it. Why do you speak of gratitude? It is I who shall forever be under obligations to you for the immense service you render me.”

He seemed to be inspired by his own words; his figure straightened, his eyes flashed fire, and he was on the point of letting, perhaps, some secret escape him, when his sister intervened, saying reproachfully,—“Antoine! Antoine!”

“You are right; you are right! my dear,” he replied,—“I am forgetting myself here; and I ought already to be back in the Rue de la Grange. It is of the utmost importance that that woman Chevassat should not miss me a moment to-night.”

He was already turning to leave them, when the old lady caught him by the arm, and said, “You ought to go back, I know; only be careful! It is a miracle that M. de Brévan has never met and recognized you during the year he has been coming to the house you live in. If such a misfortune should happen now, our enemies might once more escape us. After the young lady’s desperate act, he would not fail to recognize the man who saved her. What can you do to avoid meeting him?”

“I have thought of that danger,” replied Papa Ravinet. “And when I get back, I shall tell the two Chevassats a little story to frighten them, so that they will advise de Brévan never to appear there, except at

night-time, as he formerly did." Thereupon he bowed to Henriette, and left with these words,—“To-morrow we will consult together.” A shipwrecked mariner, saved from death at the last moment, could not experience a sense of greater happiness than Henriette did when retiring to rest that night. Her spirits had been additionally revived by the evening spent in company with Papa Ravinet’s sister. The widow, free alike from embarrassment and affectation, possessed a kind of quiet dignity which showed itself in certain words and ways, which Henriette duly noted. Ruined all of a sudden, she did not say how—some months after her husband’s death—she had seen herself reduced from almost opulence to poverty, and all its privations. This had happened some five years previously; since then she had practised the strictest economy, though never neglecting her appearance. She had but one servant: a woman who came for a couple of hours every morning to clean and tidy the rooms. She herself did all the other work, washing and ironing her own linen, cooking only twice a-week, and eating cold meat on the other days, as much to save money as to save time: for her time had its value. She embroidered for a fashionable shop, which paid her very good prices; and in the summer there were days when she earned nearly five francs. Ruin had been a severe blow to her: she did not conceal it. But gradually she had become reconciled to her reduced position, and had practised economy with unflinching severity, and in the smallest details of every-day life. At present, the very privations she imposed upon herself gave her, as it were, a kind of secret satisfaction, such as results from the consciousness of having accomplished a duty—a satisfaction all the greater as the duty is harder to perform; though what duty her’s had been she did not say. “Mme. Bertolle is a noble woman,” thought Henriette when she retired that night, after a modest repast. But while rendering due homage to the character of her protector’s sister, she could not fathom the mystery which enveloped the lives of this worthy couple, which relenting fate had at last placed in her way. What was the mystery? For there was one; and, far from trying to conceal it, they had begged Henriette not to inquire into it. To make matters stranger, it seemed as if their past had been in some way connected with her own. How could that be, and how could their future depend in any way on her’s? But fatigue soon put an end to her meditations, and confused her ideas; and, for the first time in two years, she fell asleep with a sense of perfect security; she slept peacefully, without starting at the slightest noise, without wondering whether her enemies were watching her, without suspecting the very walls of her room.

When she awoke the next morning, calm and refreshed, it was broad daylight, nearly ten o’clock; and a pale sun-ray was darting over the polished furniture. As she opened her eyes, she espied the dealer’s sister standing at the foot of her bed, like a good genius who had been watching over her slumbers. “Oh, how lazy I am!” she exclaimed, with a child’s hearty laugh, for she felt quite at home in this little bedroom, where she had only spent a night: indeed, she felt as much at home here as she had been in her father’s mansion, when her mother was still alive; and it seemed to her as if she had lived here many a year. “My brother called about half-an-hour ago,” said Madame Bertolle, “and wished to talk with you, but we did not like to wake you. You needed repose so much! He will be back in the evening, and dine with us.”

The bright smile which had lighted up Heuricette’s face faded away at once. Absorbed in the happiness of the moment, she had forgotten all her troubles; and these few words recalled her to the reality of her position,

to the sufferings of the past and the uncertainty of the future. The good widow assisted her in rising; and they spent the day together in the little parlour, cutting out and making-up a black silk dress for which Papa Ravinet had brought the material in the morning, and which was to take the place of Henriette's miserable, worn-out alpaca. When she first saw the silk, she remembered all the kind widow had told her of their excessive economy, and only succeeded with difficulty in checking her tears. "Why should you go to such an expense?" she sadly said. "Would not a woollen dress have done quite as well? The hospitality which you offer me must in itself be a heavy charge. I should never forgive myself for becoming a source of still greater privations to such kind friends."

But Mme. Bertolle shook her head and replied, "Don't be afraid, child. We have money enough."

They had just lighted the lamp at dusk, when they heard a key in the outer door of the apartment; and a moment later Papa Ravinet made his appearance. He was very red; and, although it was freezing out of doors, he was streaming with perspiration. "I am exhausted," said he, sinking into an arm-chair, and wiping his forehead with his coloured check handkerchief. "You can imagine how I have been running about to-day! I wanted to take an omnibus to come home; but they were all full."

Henriette sprang to her feet, and exclaimed,—“You have been to see my father?”

“No, mademoiselle. The Count de Ville-Handry left his mansion a week ago.”

A mad thought—the hope that her father might have separated from his wife—crossed Henriette's mind. “And the countess,” she asked,—“the Countess Sarah?”

“She has gone with her husband. They are living in the Rue Lepelletier, in a modest apartment over the office of the Pennsylvania Petroleum Company. Sir Tom and Mrs Brian are there as well. They have kept only two servants,—Ernest, the count's valet, and a woman called Clarisse.”

Henriette failed to notice the name of the creature whose treachery had been one of the principal causes of her misfortunes. “How could my father have ever been induced to leave his house?” she asked.

“He sold it, mademoiselle, ten days ago.”

“Great God! My father must be ruined!”

The old man bowed his head. “Yes!” said he.

So thus the sad presentiments Henriette had felt when first she heard of the Pennsylvania Petroleum Company were realised. But never, never! would she have imagined so speedy a downfall. “My father ruined!” she repeated, as if she were unable to realize the news. “And only a year ago he had an income of nearly four hundred thousand francs. Nine million francs swallowed up in twelve months! nine millions!” And as the enormity of the amount seemed out of all proportion with the shortness of the time, she turned at last to the old dealer and said, “It cannot be. You must be mistaken, sir: some one has misled you.”

Papa Ravinet smiled with bitter irony, and replied, as if much puzzled by Henriette's doubts. “What, mademoiselle, can't you understand it yet? Unfortunately, what I tell you is only too true; and, if you want proofs—” So saying, he drew a newspaper from his pocket and handed it to Henriette, pointing out an article marked with a red pencil on the first page.

The paper was one of those ephemeral financial sheets which are started in Paris from time to time, and profess to teach people how to become rich

in a very short time without running the least risk. This particular print, which had been originated only a few months previously, was captivatingly entitled "*La Prudence*." Henriette turned to the article M. Ravinet had marked, and read aloud as follows:—"We shall never tire of repeating to our subscribers the maxim, in one word, which forms the title of this journal,—'Prudence, prudence!' Let our readers beware of trusting new enterprises. Out of a hundred affairs launched at the Bourse, fully sixty are simply down-right swindles, projected for the purpose of speedily easing fool-hardy speculators of their cash. Of the remaining forty, five-and-twenty savour far too much of gambling, and must be regarded with suspicion; and even among the last fifteen a careful selection must be made before we are able to name the few that offer safe guarantees."

Henriette paused, unable to understand the meaning of all this trash; but Papa Ravinet remarked, "That's only the honey of the preface, the sirup intended to conceal the bitterness of the medicine. Go on, and you will understand." Accordingly, she continued to read,—“A recent event, we ought to say a recent disaster, has just confirmed the soundness of our doctrines, and justifies but too clearly our admonition to be careful. A company, which started into existence last year with amazing suddenness, which filled all the papers with its flaming advertisements, and decorated every blank wall with its gigantic posters—a company which, according to its own 'puffs,' was certain to enrich its shareholders, is already unable to pay the least dividend on its paid-up capital. As for the capital itself—but we will not anticipate events. All our readers will have understood that we refer to the Pennsylvania Petroleum Company, which, during the last week, has been the subject of such excited comment. Its shares, nominally worth 500 frs. apiece, and issued at a large premium, are now being quoted on the Bourse at from 90 to a 100 francs each.” For a moment Henriette's grief prevented her from continuing. "O God!" she murmured, weeping bitterly, "O God!" But at last, mastering her weakness, she resumed her perusal. "And yet, if ever any company seemed to offer every desirable material and moral guarantee it was certainly this one. As its promoter and director figured a man who, in his day, was looked up to as a statesman endowed with rare administrative talents, and whose reputation for sterling integrity seemed to be above all suspicion. Need we say that this was the much vaunted Count de Ville-Handry? When the company hurst into being, this high-sounding name was shouted from the housetops. It was the Count de Ville-Handry here, and the Count de Ville-Handry there. He was to enrich the country with a new branch of industry, and to change vile petroleum into precious gold. It was especially brought into notice that the noble count's personal fortune almost equalled the whole of the new company's capital—that is, 10 million francs. Hence he was described as risking his own money rather than other people's. It is now a year since all these dazzling promises were made. What remains of them? A certain number of shares worth but a fifth part of their nominal value yesterday, and worth, perhaps, nothing at all to-morrow, and, in addition, a more than doubtful capital. Who could have expected in our days to see Law's Mississippi Scheme revived?"

The paper fell from the poor girl's hands. She had turned as pale as death, and Mme. Bertolle noticing how she staggered, took her in her arms to support her. "How horrible," murmured Henriette: "How horrible."

Still, she had not yet read everything, and Papa Ravinet therefore picked up the paper, and read the following paragraph aloud:—"Two delegates

of the shareholders of the Pennsylvania Petroleum Company are to sail this morning from Le Havre for New York. These gentlemen have been sent out by their fellow-sufferers to examine the land on which the oil-wells, which constitute the only security, are situated. Some people have gone so far as to doubt even the very existence of such oil-wells." Again, on another page, under the heading of "Miscellanea," there appeared the following lines: "The Count de Ville-Handry's mansion was sold last week. This magnificent building, with the princely grounds attached to it, was knocked down to the highest bidder for the sum of 875,000 francs. The misfortune is, that house and grounds are burdened with mortgages, amounting altogether to nearly 500,000 francs."

"All this is simply infamous," stammered Henriette in an almost inaudible tone. "Nobody will believe such atrocious libels."

Papa Ravinet and his sister exchanged looks of distress. The poor girl evidently did not realise how her father had been duped; and yet, seeing her so crushed, they scarcely dared to enlighten her. At last, however, the old dealer, knowing but too well that uncertainty is always more painful than truth, ventured to say, "Your father is fearfully slandered, no doubt, but I have tried to inform myself, and two facts are certain. The Count de Ville-Handry is ruined; and the shares of the company have fallen to 100 francs." Changing his voice he added, almost in a whisper, "This has happened because it is believed that the capital of the company has been appropriated to other purposes, and lost in speculations on the Bourse."

He had been right in counting upon Henriette's admirable energy of character. A glance of indignation shot from her eyes, and instantaneously dried her tears; and with surprising fierceness she exclaimed, "That's an infamous slander!" Inexperienced as she was, she nevertheless instinctively realised the terrible nature of such a charge, and perhaps, also, its natural consequences. And, greatly excited, she continued, "To accuse my father of such an abuse of confidence,—of embezzlement! Why should he have risked other people's money on the Bourse? To procure more money for himself? An adventurer, having nothing to lose,—a man eager to become wealthy, and ready to risk everything in the attempt, might do that, but surely you wouldn't expect such conduct from the Count de Ville-Handry,—a man whom everybody knows and respects,—a great nobleman, with a fortune of many millions of his own!" As she spoke, she shrugged her shoulders, and laughed contemptuously.

"You forget, mademoiselle," rejoined Papa Ravinet, with increased solemnity, "that your father is no longer his own master. He has no more will or strength than a child: he is completely under the control of one of those formidable creatures, who seem to possess a philter, by which they can beguile the senses and destroy reason. You forget—"

"I forget nothing, sir. My father is old; he is feeble; he is in love, and—credulous. People may have made him believe things that are not true, but no power on earth could convince him that a dishonest act is honest, and much less induce him to commit such an act."

"Ah, mademoiselle," retorted the old dealer, "I am perfectly convinced of Count de Ville-Handry's integrity, but I also know that he was utterly ignorant of business. What did he understand about these speculations he was drawn into? Nothing at all. It is a difficult and often a dangerous thing to manage a large capital. They no doubt deceived him, cheated him, misled him, and drove him at last to the verge of bankruptcy."

"Who?"

Papa Ravinet trembled on his chair, and, raising his hands to the ceiling, exclaimed,—“Who? You ask who? Why, those who had an interest in it, the wretches by whom he was surrounded,—Sarah, Sir Tom—”

“I don’t think the Countess Sarah looked with a favourable eye upon the formation of this company,” said Henriette, shaking her head; and, noticing that the dealer was about to raise an objection, she continued,—“Besides, what interest could she have in ruining my father? Evidently none. His ruin meant her own, for she was absolute mistress of his fortune, and free to dispose of it as she chose.”

Proud of the accuracy of her judgment, Henriette glanced triumphantly at Papa Ravinet, who now realised that he must strike a decisive blow. Encouraged by a gesture from his sister, he began: “Pray, listen to me, mademoiselle. So far I have only repeated to you what is being said at the Bourse. As I told you, people say that the capital of the Pennsylvania Petroleum Company has been swallowed up by unlucky speculations at the Bourse. But I don’t believe these reports. On the contrary, I am quite sure that these millions were not lost at the Bourse, as they were never used for the purpose of speculating.”

“Still—”

“Still they have none the less disappeared, and your father is probably the last man in the world to tell us how and where they have disappeared. But I know it; and, when it becomes a question of recovering these enormous sums, I shall cry out, ‘Search Sarah Brandon, Countess de Ville-Handry; search Sir Thomas Elgin and Mrs Brian; search Maxime de Brévan, their wretched tool!’”

Now at last a terrible light broke upon Henriette’s mind. “Then,” stammered she, “these infamous slanders have only been concocted to conceal an impudent robbery.”

“Quite so.”

The young girl seemed to be making a great effort to comprehend; at last she said, “And in that case, the articles in the papers—”

“Were written by the wretches who have robbed your father. Yes, mademoiselle, that’s the truth!” And, shaking his fist with a threatening air, Papa Ravinet added,—“Oh! there is no doubt of it. How long has this paper existed? Barely six months. It was established, you may be sure, with the sole object of utilising it one day for publishing the articles you have just read.”

Although Henriette could not well understand by what ingenious combinations such enormous sums could be abstracted, her doubts were conquered by Papa Ravinet’s air of earnest conviction. “Then,” said she, “the wretches now mean to ruin my father entirely!”

“They must do so for their own safety. The money has been stolen, you see: so there must be a thief. For the world and the law courts, the criminal will be your father.”

“For the law courts?”

“Yes, unfortunately!”

The poor girl’s eyes wandered from the brother to the sister with a terrible expression of bewilderment. At last she asked,—“And do you believe Sarah will allow my father’s name to be dishonoured in that fashion—the name she bears, and was so proud of?”

“She will, perhaps, even insist upon it.”

“Good heavens! What do you mean? Why should she?”

Noticing her brother's hesitation, the old lady took it upon herself to answer. Touching Henriette's arm, she said in a subdued voice, "Because, you see, my poor child, now that Sarah has obtained possession of the fortune she wanted, your father is in her way; because, you see, she wants to be free—do you understand?—free!"

Henriette uttered a cry of such horror that both the brother and the sister at once realised that she had not misunderstood the horrible meaning of that word "free."

But, since the blow had fallen, the old dealer did not think the rest need be concealed from Henriette. Rising to his feet, and, leaning against the mantelpiece, he addressed the terrified girl in these words, "You must at last learn to know the execrable woman who has sworn to ruin you. I know, by my own experience, what crimes she is capable of; and I see clear in the dark night of her infernal intrigues. I know that this woman with the chaste brow, open smile, and soft eyes, has the genius and instincts of a murderess, and has never counted upon anything else but murder for the gratification of her lusts." The old man's attitude and gestures alike revealed an eager, intense thirst for vengeance. He no longer measured his words carefully; but they overflowed from his lips as they came to his tongue boiling under the pressure of his rage.

"Antoine!" said the old lady more than once,—*"Antoine, brother! I beseech you!"*

But he did not even seem to hear this friendly voice, ordinarily all-powerful. "And now, mademoiselle," he continued, "must I still explain to you the simple and yet formidable plan by which Sarah Brandon has succeeded in obtaining by one effort the immense fortune of the Ville-Handry family? From the first day, she realised that you were standing between her and those millions: and so she attacked you first of all. A brave and honest man, M. Daniel Champcey, loved you; he would have protected you: therefore she got him out of the way. Society might have interested itself in you, and have taken your side; so she beguiled your father to slander you, ruin your reputation, and expose you to the contempt of the world. As you might, perhaps, have tried to find a protector, and have secured one, she placed by your side her wretched tool and spy, a forger, a criminal whom she knew capable of what even an accomplished galley-slave would have shrunk from with disgust and horror: I mean Maxime de Brévan."

The very excess of Henriette's emotion had partially restored her energy, and she exclaimed: "But haven't I told you, sir, that Daniel himself confided me to M. de Brévan's care? Haven't I told you—"

The old dealer smiled almost contemptuously, and continued,—*"What does that prove? Nothing but M. de Brévan's skill in carrying out Sarah Brandon's orders. In order to obtain more complete mastery over you, he began by obtaining mastery over M. Champcey. How he succeeded in doing so, I don't know. But we shall know it when we want to know it; for we are going to find out everything. To resume, however. Through M. de Brévan Sarah was kept informed of all your thoughts and hopes, of every word you wrote to M. Champcey, and of all he said in reply; for no doubt he did answer, and they suppressed his letters, just as they, very probably, intercepted all of yours which you did not post yourself. However, as long as you remained under your father's roof, Sarah could attempt nothing against your life, and so she determined to make you fly from home, and Sir Tom's mean*

persecutions served their purpose. You thought, and perhaps still think, that the scoundrel really wanted your hand. Undeceive yourself. Your enemies knew your character too well to hope that you would ever break your word, and become faithless to M. Champcey. But they were bent upon handing you over to M. de Brévan. And so, poor child! you were handed over to him. Maxime had no more idea of marrying you than Sir Tom had; and when he dared to approach you with open arms, he was quite prepared to be rejected with disgust. But he had received orders to add the horror of his persecutions to the horror of your isolation and destitution. For he was quite sure, the scoundrel! that the secret of your sufferings would be well kept. He had carefully chosen the house in which you were to die of hunger and misery. The two Chevassats were bound to be his devoted accomplices, even unto death, and thus he had the amazing boldness, and inconceivable brutality, to watch your slow agony. No doubt he became quite impatient at your delaying suicide so long. Finally, you were driven to it; and your death would have realised their atrocious hopes, if Providence had not miraculously stepped in,—that Providence which always, sooner or later, takes its revenge, whatever the wicked may say to the contrary. Yes, these wretches thought they had now surely got rid of you, when I appeared upon the scene. That very morning, the woman Chevassat had no doubt told them, ‘She’ll do it to-night!’ And that same evening, Sarah, Mrs Brian, and Sir Tom no doubt hopefully asked each other, ‘Is it all over?’”

Poor Henriette had remained listening with pallid cheeks, parted lips, and dilated eyes. It seemed to her as if a sun-ray were suddenly illuminating the dark abyss from which she had been snatched. “Yes,” she said, “yes: now I see it all.” Then, as the old dealer, out of breath, and hoarse with indignation, paused for a moment, she asked,—“Still, there is one circumstance I scarcely understand: Sarah insists that she knew nothing of the forged letter by means of which Daniel was sent abroad. She told me, on the contrary, that she had wished to keep him here, because she loved him, and he loved her.”

“Ah! don’t believe those lies,” interrupted Madame Bertolle.

“No, certainly not! We ought not to believe such things,” said Papa Ravinet, scratching his head. “And yet, I wonder if there is not some new trick in that. Unless, indeed— But no, that would be almost too lucky for us: Unless Sarah were really in love with M. Champcey!” And, as if he were afraid of having given rise to hopes founded upon this contingency, he immediately added—“But let us return to facts. When Sarah was sure of you, she turned her attention to your father. While they were slowly murdering you, she profited of the Count de Ville-Handry’s inexperience to lead him into a path at the end of which he was bound to leave his honour behind him. Just observe that the articles you read are dated on the very day you would probably have died. That is clear moral proof of her crime. Thinking that she had got rid of you, she evidently said to herself, ‘And now for the father.’”

“Good heavens!” cried Henriette. “Yes, the proofs are coming out; the crime will be disclosed. I have no doubt the murderers told each other that the Count de Ville-Handry would never survive such a foul stain on his honour. And so they dared everything, feeling sure that he would carry the secret of their wickedness with him to the grave.”

Papa Ravinet leisurely wiped the perspiration from his brow. “Yes,”

said he in a hoarse voice, "that was probably, indeed certainly, how Sarah Brandon reasoned in her own mind."

"What! you knew all this?" rejoined Henriette, with flushed cheeks and burning eyes. "You knew that they were murdering my father, and you did not warn him? Ah, that was cruel cautiousness!" And like a young lioness she dashed towards the door.

But Mme. Bertolle intercepted her, and cried, "Henriette, my poor child! where are you going?"

"To save my father, madame. Perhaps at this very moment he is struggling in the last agonies of death, just as I struggled only two nights ago." In her excitement, she had caught hold of the door-knob, and endeavoured to move the old lady out of the way.

However, Papa Ravinet now intervened, and clasping Henriette's arm, he said to her impressively, "I swear to you, mademoiselle, by all you hold sacred, and my sister will swear to you in like manner, that your father's life is in no kind of danger." On hearing this the poor girl gave up the struggle; but her face still wore an expression of harassing anxiety. "Do you wish to prevent our triumph?" continued the old man. "Would you like to warn our enemies, put them on their guard, and deprive us of all hopes of revenge?" Henriette passed her hand across her brow, as if endeavouring to recover her peace of mind. "Remember," resumed the dealer in a persuasive voice, "remember that such imprudence would save our enemies, without saving your father. Pray consider and answer me. Do you really think that your arguments would be stronger than Sarah Brandon's? You cannot so far underrate your enemy's diabolical cunning. Why, she has no doubt taken all possible measures to keep your father's faith in her unshaken, and to let him die as he has lived, completely deceived by her, and murmuring with his last breath words of supreme love for the woman who kills him."

These arguments were so peremptory, that Henriette let go the door-knob, and slowly returned to her seat by the fire. And yet she was far from being reassured. "If I were to appeal to the police," she suddenly proposed.

"Poor child!" said Mme. Bertolle, who had sat down by her side and taken her hands in her own. "Don't you see that this creature's whole power lies in the fact that she employs means which are not within the reach of human justice. Believe me, my child, it is best for you to rely blindly on my brother."

Once more the old dealer had resumed his place by the mantelpiece. "Yes, Mlle. Henriette, rely on me," said he. "I have as much reason to curse Sarah Brandon as you have, and perhaps I hate her more. Rely on me; for my hatred has now been watching and waiting for years, ever anxious to reach her, and secure revenge. Yes, for long years I have been lying in wait, thirsting for vengeance, and pursuing her tracks with a Red Indian's unwearied perseverance. I have associated with the lowest of the low, and stirred up heaps of infamy to find out who she really is, and who her accomplices are, whence they came, and how they have met together to plot such fearful crimes,—and I have found out everything. And yet in Sarah Brandon's whole career,—albeit a career of theft and murder,—I have not so far found a single fact which might bring her within the reach of the law, so cunning is her wickedness." Then, as his face brightened with an air of triumph, he added, in a louder voice, "However, this time success seemed to her so sure and so easy, that she has neglected her usual precautions. Fager to enjoy her millions, and weary of affect-

ing love for your poor father, she has been too eager. And she is lost, if we on our side only know how to be prudent. As for your father, mademoiselle, I have my reasons for feeling safe about him. According to your mother's marriage-contract, and in consequence of a bequest of two millions and a-half left her by one of her uncles, your father's estate is your debtor to the amount of three millions; which sum is invested in mortgages on his Anjou estates. He cannot touch that money, even if he became a bankrupt. Should he die before you, that sum remains still yours; and it is only in the event of your dying the first, that it would go to him. Now Sarah is so insatiable that she has sworn she will have these three millions as well."

"Ah," exclaimed Henriette, "You are right! It is Sarah's interest that my father should live; and so he will live, as long as she does not know whether I am dead or alive—in fact, as long as she does not know what has become of me."

"And she must not know that for some time to come," chimed in the old man. "You ought to see how anxious your enemies are, since you have slipped out of their hands. Last night that woman Chevassat had come to the conclusion that you had gone out of the world altogether; but this morning matters looked very differently. Maxime de Brévan had been there, making a terrible row, and beating her (God forgive him!) because she had relaxed in her watchfulness. The rascal! He has been spending the whole day in running from the Prefecture de Police to the Morgue, and back again. Destitute as you were, and almost without clothes, they ask themselves what could have become of you? I, for my part, did not show; and the Chevassats are far from suspecting that I dabbled in the matter. Ah! It will soon be our turn; and if you will only accept my suggestions, mademoiselle, everything will one day come right again."

It was past nine o'clock when the old dealer, his sister, and Henriette sat down to their modest meal. In the interval a hopeful smile had reappeared on Henriette's face, and she looked almost happy, when, about midnight, Papa Ravinet left them with the words,—“To-morrow evening I shall perhaps have some news. I am going to the Ministry of Marine.”

Precisely at six o'clock on the following evening he again put in an appearance, this time carrying a carpet bag, and gesticulating so strangely, that it really seemed as if he had gone mad. “I want some money!” he cried out to his sister as soon as he entered. “I am afraid I have not enough; and make haste: I have to be at the Lyons Railway Station at seven o'clock.”

“What is the matter? What are you going to do?” asked both his sister and Henriette, plainly alarmed by his strange manner.

“The matter?” he rejoined. “Why, nothing! Only Heaven itself has declared in our favour. I went to the Ministry of Marine to-day. ‘The Conquest’ will remain another year in Cochin China; but M. Champcey is coming back to Europe. He was to have taken passage on board a merchant-vessel, ‘The Saint Louis,’ which is expected at Marseilles every day, if indeed she has not already come in. And I—I am going to Marseilles, for I must see M. Champcey before anybody else can see him.” Then as soon as his sister had handed him a couple of thousand francs in bank notes, and Henriette had written a short note of introduction to Daniel, to serve in case of need, he rushed out, exclaiming,—“To-morrow I will send you a telegram!”

XXII.

If there is a civilized profession more arduous than others it is surely the sailor's—so arduous, indeed, that one is almost disposed to ask how men can be found bold enough to embrace it, and firm enough in their resolution not to abandon it after a first trial. Not, however, on account of the peril and fatigue connected with it, but because it constitutes an existence unlike all others, in many instances quite incompatible with the exercise of free will. The sailor is usually most attached to his home. Many, one might almost say most sailors, are married; and by a kind of special grace they are apt to enjoy their short happiness on shore, as if it were destined to be eternal, and quite indifferent as to what the morrow may bring forth. But behold! one fine morning, all of a sudden, a letter comes from the Admiralty. It is an order to sail. The seaman must go, abandoning everything and everybody,—mother, family, and friends,—perhaps the wife he has married the day before, or the young mother smiling beside her first-born's cradle, or the sweetheart who was but just now looking joyfully at her bridal veil. He must start, and stifle the ominous voices rising from the depths of his heart, which ask him, "Will you ever return? and, if so, will you find them all, your dear ones? and, if you find them, will they not have changed? will they have preserved your memory as faithfully as you will have preserved their's?" In reality, it is only in comic operas that sailors are seen singing their most cheerful songs at the moment of starting on a long and perilous voyage. Their leave-takings are almost always sad and solemn. Such, indeed, was the case when "The Conquest" sailed,—with Daniel Champcey on board as second lieutenant. On reaching Rochefort at five o'clock in the morning, he at once went on board, and slept the first night in his berth. Early the next day the ship weighed anchor. Daniel probably suffered more than any other man on board, though he succeeded in affecting a certain air of indifference. The thought that he had left Henriette in the hands of adventurers, who were capable of anything, caused him constant anxiety and grief; and now, for the first time, a thousand doubts assailed him concerning Maxime de Brévan: would he not be exposed to terrible temptation on being thrown thus suddenly into the society of a great heiress? Might he not some day covet her millions, and try and profit of her peculiar situation, in order to win them for himself? Daniel believed too firmly in Henriette to apprehend that she would even listen to de Brévan. But he reasoned, very justly, that she would find herself in a desperate condition indeed, if M. de Brévan turned traitor and went over to the enemy—that is, the Countess Sarah. "And yet," thought Daniel, "my last directions were to urge her to trust implicitly in Maxime, and follow his advice as if it were my own!"

In the midst of this anxiety, he hardly recollected that he had also intrusted Maxime with everything he possessed. What was money to him in comparison with Henriette? His thoughts were as gloomy as ever, when a week after the sailing of "The Conquest" a violent tempest arose, endangering the vessel's safety for fully three days. As the ship tossed to and fro, and the crew battled manfully with the elements, Daniel's anxiety for Henriette was vanquished by a sense of official responsibility; and when at last the storm was conquered, he was actually able to enjoy a good night's rest, the first he had had since leaving Paris. On awaking, he

was surprised to feel comparative peace of mind. Henceforth his fate was no longer in his own hands: it had been proved, beyond doubt, that he was unable to control events; and thus resignation crept into the place of anxiety. His only hope was that he might, perhaps, soon receive a letter from Henriette, or maybe find one waiting for him on reaching his destination. For it was quite possible that "The Conquest" might be outstripped by some speedier vessel, starting three weeks later or so from France. She was an old wooden sailing frigate, and fully justified her evil reputation as the worst sailer of the French fleet. Moreover, an alternate exchange of calms and gales kept her much longer than usual on the voyage, a most tedious and uncomfortable one. The ship was indeed so crowded with passengers, that seamen and officers had hardly half the space usually allotted to them on board. In addition to her crew, she carried half a battalion of marines, and a hundred and sixty mechanics of various kinds, whom the government was sending out for the use of the colony. Some of these artisans, who had determined to settle in Cochin China altogether, had their families with them; others, who were younger men, were merely going out to have an opportunity of seeing foreign lands, and earn, perhaps, a little money. They were occasionally called upon to assist in handling the ship, and, on the whole, they were orderly and willing enough, with the exception of four or five, who proved so unruly, that they had to be put in irons on two or three occasions.

Time passed by, and "The Conquest" had been out three months, when one afternoon, whilst Daniel was superintending a difficult manœuvre, he was suddenly seen to stagger, raise his arms, and fell back on to the deck. Several seamen at once ran towards him and raised him up, but he gave no sign of life, and blood poured freely from his mouth and nostrils. Daniel had won the hearts of all the crew by his even temper, strict attention to duty, and kindness when disengaged towards all who came in contact with him. Hence, as soon as the accident became known, sailors and officers hurried to the spot from all parts of the vessel. What had happened? Why had he fallen? No one could tell; for no one had seen anything. However, he must be seriously hurt if the large pool of blood staining the deck was at all acceptable as evidence. He was promptly carried to the infirmary; and, as soon as he recovered his senses, the surgeons discovered the cause of his fall and fainting. He had a severe wound on the back of his head, a little behind the left ear,—a wound such as a heavy hammer in the hands of a powerful man might have produced. Who had dealt this terrible blow, which a miracle alone had apparently prevented from crushing the skull? No one could explain it—neither the surgeons nor the officers standing round the wounded man's couch; and when at last Daniel himself could be questioned, he knew no more about it than the others. There had been no one standing near him; nor had he seen anybody approach him at the time of the accident: the blow, moreover, had been so violent, that he had at once fallen down unconscious. These particulars were soon reported among the sailors and passengers on deck, and were at first received with incredulous smiles, and, when they could not longer be doubted, with bursts of indignation. What! Lieut. Champcey had been struck on deck, in broad daylight! How? By whom? The whole affair was so mysterious that the captain at once ordered a searching enquiry. At length some hairs and a clot of blood were noticed on a heavy pulley among the rigging, and seemed to furnish some kind of explanation. It was surmised that the rope to which this pulley was

fastened had slipped through the hands of one of the sailors engaged in the rigging, during the manœuvre superintended by Daniel, and that the man, frightened by the consequences of his awkwardness, but, nevertheless, preserving his presence of mind, had drawn it up again so promptly that he had not been noticed. Could it be hoped that he would accuse himself? Evidently not. Besides, what would be the use of it? The wounded man himself was the first to request that the inquiry might be stopped. So at the end of a fortnight, when Champcey returned to duty, his shipmates ceased talking of the accident. Such things frequently happen on board ship, and besides, the idea that "The Conquest" was approaching her destination now filled every mind, and furnished the exclusive topic of conversation. And really, one fine evening, just as the sun was setting, they came in sight of land, and the next morning, at daybreak, the frigate sailed into the Dong-Nai, the king of Cochin Chinese rivers, which is so wide and deep, that vessels of the largest tonnage can ascend it without difficulty as far as Saigon. Standing on deck, Daniel watched the scenery of the river banks—strange in aspect, and exhaling pestilential fevers from their black yielding slime. Mangoes and mangroves, with supple, snake-like roots extending deep under the water, cast a refreshing shadow on either side, and in their rear, every shade of green was in turn presented to the eye, from the bluish, sickly hue of the idrys to the dark, metallic tinge of the stenias. Farther inland, wild vines and lianas, aloes, and cacti formed impenetrable thickets, from which, like fluted columns, sprang gigantic cocoa and graceful areca-palms. Here and there, through occasional clearings, one could perceive, stretching as far as the horizon, a vast expanse of fever-breeding marsh-land—an immense slough covered with undulating vegetation, which opened and closed again under the breeze, like the sea itself. "Ah! that's Saigon, is it?" exclaimed a merry voice at Daniel's side. He turned and espied his best friend on board, the first lieutenant, who, offering him a telescope, added with an air of satisfaction,—“Look! there, do you see? At last we've reached our destination. In two hours, Champcey, we shall be riding at anchor.”

In the distance one could, indeed, detect against the deep blue sky the outlines of the curved roofs of the Saigon pagodas; but another long hour was to elapse before, at a turn in the river, the town itself appeared to view—scarcely as handsome and as inviting as French geographers would have us to believe. Saigon in those days mainly consisted of one wide street running parallel with the right bank of the Dong-Nai—a primitive, unpaved street cut up into ruts, interrupted every now and then by large open spaces, and having on either side a succession of monotonous timber houses roofed with rice-straw or palm-leaves. Thousands of boats were moored along the river-bank, forming, as it were, a kind of floating suburb, tenanted by a strange medley of Annamites, Hindoos, and Chinamen. At a short distance from the river rose a few massive buildings roofed with red tiles, and here and there on the outskirts appeared some Annamite farm nestling among copses of areca-palms. Finally, on an eminence, Daniel beheld the citadel, serving both as an arsenal and as the residence of the French commander, just as in former times it had sheltered the Spanish colonel. Any town where we may happen to land after a protracted voyage has always certain attractions, so that all the officers of the "Conquest," excepting the few on duty, went ashore as soon as the ship cast anchor. Most of them at once repaired to the government house to inquire whether any letters from France had arrived before them. It,

indeed, so happened that a couple of swifter sailers—a French vessel and an English clipper, which had started nearly a month after the “Conquest”—had already reached Saigon a week or so in advance of the dilatory old frigate, and among the letters they carried there proved to be two for Daniel. He received them with feverish hands and beating heart. But on glancing at the addresses he at once turned pale—for on neither of them did he recognise Henriette’s handwriting. However, he tore open the envelopes, and glanced at the signatures. The first letter was signed, “Maxime de Brévan;” and the other, “Countess de Ville-Handry,” *née* Sarah Brandon. Daniel commenced with the latter, in which, after informing him of her marriage, Sarah described at great length Henriette’s conduct on the wedding-day. “Any other person but myself,” she said, “would have been incensed at this atrocious insult, and would have profited of her position to revenge herself. But I, although not usually of a forgiving mind, will forgive her, Daniel, for your sake, and because I cannot see any one suffer who has loved you.” Finally, Sarah’s letter ended with the following postscript: “Ah! why did you not prevent my marriage, when you might have done so by a word? They think I have reached the height of my wishes, and yet in truth I have never been more wretched.”

This letter fairly enraged Daniel, who thought he could detect a strain of covert irony in every line. “This miserable woman laughs at me,” he mused; “and when she pretends she will forgive Henriette, she really means that she hates her, and is determined to persecute her.” However, he was fortunately somewhat reassured by Maxime’s note. M. de Brévan confirmed Sarah’s account of the wedding fracas, adding, moreover, that Mlle. Henriette was very sad, but resigned; and that her step-mother treated her with the greatest kindness. Curiously enough, he did not say a word of the large amounts intrusted to his care, nor mention the sale of Daniel’s landed property, nor the price he had obtained for it. However, Daniel did not notice this: all his thoughts were for Henriette. “Why has she not written,” he asked himself, “when both the others found means to write?”

Overwhelmed with disappointment, he sat down on a wooden bench near one of the windows of the office where the letters were distributed, and travelling back in thought to France, he fancied himself once more under the trees in the count’s garden. There, in the pale moonlight, he thought he could again discern the form of his beloved as she stole towards him between the ancient elms. But a friendly touch on the shoulder suddenly recalled him to reality. Four or five brother officers were standing around him, gay, and smiling: “Well, Champcey,” they asked, “are you coming?”

“Where?”

“Why, to dinner!” And as he looked at them with the air of a man who has just woke up and not yet had time to collect his thoughts, they continued, “Yes, to dinner. It appears Saigon possesses an admirable French restaurant, the cook of which is not merely a Parisian, but a great culinary artist as well. Come, get up, and let us go.”

In Daniel’s frame of mind, however, solitude had irresistible attractions, and he trembled at the idea of having to tear himself away from his gloomy reverie, and take part in some careless conversation. “I can’t dine with you to-day, my friends,” he said to his comrades.

“You are joking.”

“No, I’m not. I must return on board.”

Then only were the others struck by his sad expression; and, changing

their tone, they asked him with evident concern, "What is the matter, Champey? Have you heard of any misfortune, any death?"

"No."

"You have had letters from France, I see."

"They bring me nothing sad; but I was expecting news, which hasn't come; that's all."

"Oh? then you must come with us."

"Don't force me, pray: I should prove a sorry companion."

Despite all their efforts they failed to induce Daniel to change his mind, and at the door of the government house they went their way, whilst he sadly retraced his steps towards the harbour. He speedily reached the banks of the Dong-Nai; but here he encountered difficulties which he had not previously thought of. The night was so dark, that he could hardly pick his way along an uncompleted wharf, strewn with enormous stones and piles of timber. Not a light in all the native huts around; and despite all his efforts he could but barely discern the dark outlines of the vessels lying at anchor in the river, and the lighthouse reflector obscured by the fog. He called in vain. No voice replied. The surrounding silence was broken only by the low wash of the river as it flowed along. "How on earth," thought Daniel, "shall I find our boat?" Still, after a long and patient search, he did succeed in finding it moored and half lost amidst a crowd of native craft. However, the boat seemed to be empty, and it was only on going aboard that he discovered a boy fast asleep in the bottom, wrapped up in a strip of carpet used to cover the officers' seats. Daniel shook him testily, and the youngster slowly rose, grumbling evidently with annoyance at having his sleep disturbed. "Well, what's the matter?" he growled.

"Where are the men?" asked Daniel.

Quite awake now, the lad, who had good eyes, managed to discern Champey's gold epaulets, and immediately becoming most respectful, replied, "Lieutenant, all the men are in town."

"How so? All of them?"

"Why, yes, lieutenant! When you came ashore the first lieutenant told the boatswain, that as he and the other officers would not return on board till late, the men might go and eat a mouthful, and drink a glass, provided none of them got drunk."

Daniel now remembered this circumstance, which he had momentarily forgotten. "And where did the men go?" he asked.

"I don't know, lieutenant."

Daniel looked at the large, heavy boat, as if asking himself whether he could row it back to "The Conquest" with the mere assistance of this lad. No, on reflection, that was impracticable. "Well, go to sleep again," he said to the boy. And jumping on shore again, without uttering a word of disappointment, he turned to go in search of his comrades, when he suddenly perceived a man whose features it was impossible to distinguish in the darkness, spring as it were out of the fog. "Who are you?" asked Daniel.

"Mr Officer," answered the man in an almost unintelligible jargon, a horrible medley of English, French, and Spanish, "I heard you tell the youngster in the boat there—"

"Well?"

"I thought you wanted to get back on board your ship?"

"Why, yes, I do."

"Well, then, if you like, I am a boatman and I can take you over."

There was no reason why Daniel should mistrust the man. In all ports of the world, and at any hour of the day or night, men are to be found waiting on the wharves for belated sailors, whom they usually charge a heavy price for their services. "Ah! you are a boatman, eh?" said Daniel, quite pleased at the encounter. "Well, where is your boat?"

"There, Mr Officer, a little way down; just follow me. But what ship do you want to go to?"

"That ship there." And Daniel pointed out the lights of "The Conquest," lying some six hundred yards off in the river.

"That's rather far," grumbled the man: "for the current's very strong."

"I'll give you a couple of francs for your trouble."

"Ah! if that's it, all right," exclaimed the man, clapping his hands with apparent delight. "Come along, Mr Officer, a little farther down. There, that's my boat. Get in, now steady!"

Daniel followed his directions; but he was so struck by the man's awkwardness in getting the boat off, that he could not help saying to him—

"Ah, my boy, you are not a boatman, after all!"

"I beg your pardon, sir: I used to be one before I came to this country."

"Where do you come from, then?"

"From Shanghai."

"Well, at all events you have a good deal to learn to make a proper sailor."

Noticing that the boat was very small, a mere nutshell in fact, Daniel thought he could, if needs be, take the oars and pull himself and the man. However, sitting down, and stretching out his legs, he resumed for the time being his gloomy meditation, from which he was abruptly roused by a most unexpected occurrence. Owing to a wrong movement of the boatman, or some other cause, the little craft suddenly upset, and Daniel was thrown into the river. To make matters worse, one of his feet was so closely jammed in between two planks, that at first he could not extricate himself, but *nolens volens* had to go under water. The thought that he was lost flashed through his mind; but, desperate as his position was, he was not the man to give up life without a struggle, and in a supreme effort, gathering up all his strength and energy, he caught hold of the boat, that had turned over just above him, and pushed it so forcibly, that he loosened his foot, and at the same moment reached the surface. It was high time; for he had imbibed no little water. "Now, he thought, "I have a chance of saving myself!" A very faint chance, alas!—so faint, in fact, that it required all Daniel's strong will and invincible courage to give it any effect. A furious current carried him down like a straw; the little boat, which might have furnished some support, had disappeared; and he knew nothing about this formidable Dong-Nai, except that it went on widening to its mouth. There was nothing to guide him; for the night was so dark, that land and water, the river and its banks, were all blended in the same well-nigh impenetrable obscurity. What had become of the boatman, however? "Ahoy, my man!" called Daniel at hap-hazard. But no answer came. Had the unfortunate fellow been swept off as well? Had he got back into the boat again? Perhaps he was drowned already. All of a sudden Daniel's heart trembled with joy and hope. A few hundred yards ahead he perceived a red light, indicating a vessel at anchor, and at once he directed all his efforts towards that point. He was carried thither with almost bewildering rapidity. With incredible presence of mind, and great precision, he succeeded in clutching hold of the anchor-chain, at the

very moment when the current drove him to it. With the desperate strength that such terrible peril imparts, he held on, and recovering his breath, shrieked, with all the strength of his lungs, "Help, help, help!"

From the ship there at once came a call, "Hold on!" proving that his appeal had been heard, and that help was at hand; but, alas! at the same moment, an eddy in the terrible current tore the chain, slippery with mud, out of his stiffened hands with irresistible violence. Rolled over by the water, he was rudely thrown against the side of the vessel, went under, and was carried off. When he rose to the surface again, the red light was far behind him, and below no other light could be seen. No human help was henceforth within reach. Daniel could now count only upon himself in trying to make one of the banks. Although he could not measure the distance, which seemed very great, he fancied the task would not be beyond his strength, if he were only naked. But his clothes encumbered him terribly; and the water they imbibed made them, of course, more weighty and oppressive every minute. "I shall certainly be drowned," he thought, "if I cannot get rid of my clothes." Excellent swimmer as he was, the task was no easy one. Still he accomplished it. After prodigious efforts of strength and skill, he finally got rid of his shoes; and then, as if in defiance of the element against which he was struggling, he cried:—"I shall pull through! I shall see Henriette again!"

But it had cost him an enormous amount of time to undress; and how could he calculate the distance which this current—one of the swiftest in the world—had carried him? As he tried to recall all he knew about the river, he remembered having noticed that, a mile or so below Saigon, it was as wide as a branch of the sea. According to his calculation, he must now be near that spot. "Never mind," he said to himself, "I mean to get out of this." And not knowing which bank he was nearest to, he resolved to swim towards the right one, on which Saigon stands.

He had been swimming for half-an-hour or so, and already began to feel his muscles stiffen, and his joints lose their elasticity, while his hands and feet grew cold, and his breathing became shorter, when he noticed from the wash of the water that he was near the shore. Soon he felt the ground under his feet; but, the moment he touched it, he sank up to his waist in the glue-like slime, which makes the banks of all the Cochinchina rivers so peculiarly dangerous. There was the land, no doubt, and only the darkness prevented him from seeing it; and yet his situation was more desperate than ever. His legs were caught as in a vice; the muddy water boiled up almost to his lips; and, at every effort to extricate himself, he sank deeper, a little at a time, but always a little more. His presence of mind, as well as his strength, now began to leave him, and his thoughts were growing more and more confused, when, while instinctively feeling for a hold, he happily touched a mangrove root. That root might save his life. First he tried its strength, and then, finding it sufficiently solid, he grasped it firmly, and gently hoisted himself up. Next, creeping cautiously over the treacherous mud, he finally succeeded in reaching firm ground, and fell down exhausted. He was saved from drowning, no doubt; but what was to become of him—naked, exhausted, chilled as he was, and lost at dead of night in a strange, deserted country? However, after a moment's repose he rose to his feet, and tried to walk on. But on all sides an entanglement of creeping lianes and cactus-thorns barred his way. "Well," he said at last, "I must stay here till day-break."

He spent the rest of the night walking up and down, and beating his chest, in order to lessen the terrible chills which penetrated to the very marrow of his bones. At dawn he perceived that he was, so to say, imprisoned in the midst of an almost impenetrable thicket, from which he only extricated himself after prodigies of ingenuity and courage. At last, after a walk of four hours, he reached the outskirts of Saigon. Some sailors of a merchant-ship, whom he met on the way, lent him a few clothes, and carried him on board "The Conquest," which he reached more dead than alive.

"Where do you come from, great God! in such a state?" exclaimed his comrades when they saw him. "What has happened to you?" And, when he told them all that had happened since they parted, they rejoined, "Well, Champeey, you are certainly a lucky fellow. This is the second accident from which you escape almost miraculously. But mind the third!"

"Mind the third!" that was exactly what Daniel thought. For, in the midst of all his frightful sufferings the night before, he had indulged in many gloomy reflections. That mysterious blow which had stunned him on board ship; this boat sinking suddenly, without any apparent cause—were these merely chance occurrences? He had been struck with the awkwardness of the boatman who had so unexpectedly turned up to offer him his services. This man, although a wretched sailor, might, however, be a first-class swimmer; and, having taken all his measures before upsetting the boat, might easily have reached land after the accident. "That fellow," mused Daniel, "plainly wished me to drown. But why? Evidently not for his own sake. Who is it, then, that wants to put me out of the way? Sarah Brandon? No, that can't be!" It was, indeed, improbable to imagine that a wretch in her pay should have found his way on board "The Conquest," and have been precisely at the right moment on the wharf, the first time Daniel went on shore. And yet his suspicions troubled him to such a degree, that he determined to make every effort to solve the mystery. To begin, he asked for a list of all the men who had been allowed to go on shore the night before; and in reply he learned that out of the ship's crew only the seamen manning the different boats had been in Saigon, but that, as permission had been given to all the emigrants to land, several of them had also gone on shore. Despite his great weakness, Daniel then went to the chief police official, and asked him for an inspector, with whom he proceeded to the wharf, to the spot where the ship's boat had been moored the night before. He asked the police agent to inquire round about whether any boatman had disappeared since the previous day. On all sides came a negative answer; but at last Daniel was shewn an unfortunate Annamite who had been wandering up and down the river bank since early morning, tearing his hair, and crying that he had been robbed—for some one had stolen his boat. On the previous night Daniel had been unable to distinguish either the features or the dress of the man whose services he had accepted; but he had heard his voice, and remembered its peculiar intonation so perfectly, that he would have recognised it among thousands. Besides, this Annamite did not know a word of French, as a dozen persons testified; and born and bred on the river, he was quite an expert boatman—not at all the clumsy fellow by whom Daniel had been accosted. Finally, it was clear enough that if the Annamite had been the guilty party, he would not have made so much noise over the loss of his boat. After this enquiry, Daniel's conclusion was summed up in these words, "There can be no doubt about it. That mysterious boatman was paid to drown me."

XXIII.

No man, however brave he may think himself, can refrain from trembling at the idea that he has just miraculously escaped assassination. The strongest hearted must feel their blood chill at the thought that the would-be murderer will no doubt speedily renew his attempt, and that the next time no miracle may intervene to prevent his purpose. This was Daniel's position. He instinctively realised that war had been declared against him,—a savage, pitiless warfare, replete with treachery and cunning snare and ambush. It seemed that he had beside him, dogging him like his very shadow, a terrible, determined foe, who, stimulated by the thirst of gain, was ever on the watch, waiting for an opportunity to murder him with impunity. The infernal cunning displayed in the two first attempts on Daniel's life enabled him to estimate at its true value the murderous skill of the man, who, as he thought, had been hired by Sarah Brandon for the purpose of "suppressing him." However, he did not say a word to his comrades of the danger to which he was exposed, and indeed, as soon as he had recovered from the first shock, he assumed an air of cheerfulness which he had not shown during the whole voyage, and under which he successfully concealed his apprehensions. "It would never do," he said to himself, "to let my enemy know that I am on the watch."

However, from that moment his suspicions never fell asleep; and even in his slightest acts he observed the greatest circumspection. He never put one foot before the other, so to say, without first having examined the ground; he never trusted himself to a rope without having first tried its solidity, and he made it a law to eat and drink nothing, not even a crust and a glass of water, but what came from the officers' table. These perpetual precautions and incessant apprehensions proved exceedingly repugnant to him; but he felt that, under such circumstances, carelessness would be no longer courage, but simply folly. His enemies had engaged him in a duel in which he wished to be victorious: so he must at least defend himself properly. He felt, moreover, that he was Henriette's only possible future protector; and that, if he died, she would certainly be lost. And he also thought not merely of defending himself, but of unmasking the murderer, and the infamous woman by whom he was employed. Thus he quietly but tenaciously continued his investigations. In reference to the seamen manning the ship's boats, he learned that, while they were on shore, none of them had been ten minutes out of his companions' sight, so that the pretended boatman evidently did not belong to "The Conquest's" crew. Nor could he have belonged to the detachment of marine infantry, for not a single soldier had been allowed to leave the vessel. However, there remained the emigrants, fifty or sixty of whom had spent the night in Saigon. Could Daniel's would-be murderer be one of them? Would that supposition tally with the circumstances of the first attempt on his life? Perhaps so, for several of the younger emigrants, wishing to relieve the tedium of their voyage, had often lent a hand in working the ship. Moreover, after careful enquiry, Daniel ascertained that four of these fellows had been with the sailors on the yards when he received that mysterious blow from above, which stunned and nearly killed him. Unfortunately, however, he was unable to discover exactly who these four fellows were. Still the result of his investigation sufficed to make life on

board far more endurable. He could perform his duties in perfect safety, since he was now sure that the guilty man was not one of the crew. He even felt great relief at the thought that his would-be murderer need not be sought for among those frank, brave tars. At least, none of them had been bribed with gold to kill him. So far as the emigrants were concerned, they had, unfortunately for his further investigations, been already scattered among the different establishments of the colony, according to its requirements: so, at least for the present, he had to abandon a plan he had formed of talking with every one of them until he recognized the spurious boatman's voice.

Besides, he himself was not to remain at Saigon. After a first expedition, which kept him away for two months, he obtained command of a steam-sloop, detached to explore and take the bearings of the River Kamboja, from the sea to Mitho, the second city of Cochin China. This was no easy task; for the Kamboja had already defeated the efforts of several hydrographic engineers by its capricious and constant changes—nearly every pass and every turn varying with the monsoons, both in direction and depth. In addition, the mission had its own difficulties and dangers. The Kamboja itself is not only obstructed by foul swamps, but it flows between vast, marshy plains, which, in the rainy season, are covered with water; while in the dry weather, under the burning sun, they exhale that fatal malaria which has already cost thousands of lives. In less than a week after Daniel set out, three of the men under his orders died before his eyes, after a few hours' illness, and amid atrocious convulsions. A form of cholera had carried them off. During the following four months, moreover, seven others succumbed to fever, contracted in these pestilential swamps. And towards the end of the expedition, when the work was nearly finished, the survivors were so weakened, that they had hardly strength enough to hold themselves up. Daniel alone had not yet suffered from these terrible scourges. And yet he had never spared himself, nor hesitated in doing his duty. To sustain and electrify these men,—exhausted by sickness, and irritated at wasting their lives upon work that had no reward—a leader of uncommon intrepidity was needed, and such a leader they found in Daniel.

He had told Sarah Brandon on the eve of his departure,—“With a love like mine, with a hatred like mine in his heart, a man can defy everything. The murderous climate will not harm me; and, if I had six bullets in my body, I should still find strength enough to return and call you to account for your conduct towards Henriette.” He certainly had need of all the dauntless energy which passion inspires to sustain him in his trials. But to him physical suffering was nothing in comparison with mental anxiety. At night, while his men slept, his tortured mind kept him awake pondering over his sufferings, and wondering what was happening to Henriette. For although a year had now elapsed since he left Paris to sail on board “*The Conquest*,” he had not received a single letter from her—not one. Each time a vessel arrived from France with despatches, his hopes revived; and each time they were disappointed. “Well,” he would remark, “I can wait for the next.” And then he began counting the days; and when some long-expected ship arrived at last, there never, never once came a letter from Henriette. How could this silence be explained? What strange events could have happened? What must he think, hope, or fear? This uncertainty was terrible. Daniel would have been less tortured if some one had suddenly come and told him, “Mlle. de Ville-Handry is dead.” Yes, less tortured, for true love in its savage selfishness suffers

less from death than from treason. If Henriette had died, Daniel would have been crushed ; and maybe despair would have driven him to extreme measures ; but he would have been relieved of that horrible doubt within him, that doubt as to her promises, and those suspicions which would return despite all he did to conquer them. However, he knew that she was alive ; for hardly a vessel arrived from France or England without bringing him a letter from Maxime, or from the Countess Sarah.

For Sarah insisted upon writing to him, as if there existed a mysterious bond between them, which she defied him to break. "I obey," she said, "an impulse more powerful than reason and will alike. It is stronger than I am myself, stronger than all things else : I must write to you, I cannot help it." At another time she said,—"Do you remember that evening, O Daniel ! when, pressing Sarah Brandon to your heart, you swore to be her's forever ? The Countess de Ville-Handry can never forget it." Under the most indifferent words, a passion seemed to palpitate and struggle, but partially restrained. Her letters read like the conversations of timid lovers, who talk about the rain and the weather in voices trembling with desire, and with looks burning with passion. "Could she really be in love with me ?" thought Daniel, "and could that be her punishment ?" Then, again, swearing like the roughest of his men, he added,—“Am I to be a fool forever ? Isn't it quite clear that this wicked woman only tries to lull my suspicions ? She is evidently preparing her defence, in case the rascal who tried to murder me should be caught, and compromise her by his confession.” Every letter from the Countess Sarah, moreover, brought some news about her "step-daughter." But she always spoke of Henriette with extreme reserve, and in ambiguous terms, as if counting upon Daniel's sagacity to guess what she could not or would not write. According to her account, Henriette had become reconciled to her father's marriage. The poor child's melancholy had entirely disappeared. She was very friendly with Sir Tom. Indeed, her coquettish ways became quite alarming ; and her indiscretion provoked the gossip of visitors. Daniel might as well accustom himself to the idea, that, on his return, he would find Henriette a married woman. "She lies, the wretch !" said Daniel : "yes, she lies !" But he tried in vain to resist : every letter from Sarah brought him the germ of some new suspicion, which fermented in his mind like the miasma in the veins of his men.

The information furnished by Maxime de Brévan was different, and often contradictory even, but by no means more reassuring. His letters betrayed the perplexity and hesitation of a man who is all anxiety to soften hard truths. According to him, the Countess Sarah and Mlle. de Ville-Handry did not get on well together ; but he was compelled to say, that the wrong was all on the young lady's side, for she seemed to make it the study of her life to mortify her step-mother, while the latter bore the most irritating provocations with unchanging sweetness. He alluded to the calumnies which endangered Henriette's reputation, and even admitted that she had given some ground for them by her thoughtless acts. He finally added that he foresaw the moment when she would leave her father's house, in spite of all his advice to the contrary.

"And not one line from her," exclaimed Daniel,—“not one line. And yet he wrote her letter after letter, beseeching her to answer him, whatever might be the matter ; imploring her to hide nothing, however terrible ; for the certainty even of a misfortune would be a blessing in comparison with this torturing uncertainty. He wrote without once imagining that she suffered the same torments as himself, that their

letters were intercepted, and that she had no more news of him than he had of her.

Time passed, however, and Daniel returned to Saigon, bringing back with him one of the finest hydrographic works that exist on Cochin China. It was well known that this work had cost an immense amount of labour, privation, and life : hence he was rewarded as if he had won a battle,—and he was rewarded instantly, thanks to special powers conferred upon his chief, subject only to confirmation in France, which in such cases was never refused. All the survivors of the expedition were mentioned in the official report ; two were decorated ; and Daniel was promoted to be an officer of the Legion of Honour. Under other circumstances, this distinction, doubly valuable to so young a man, would have made him supremely happy : but now it left him indifferent. The fact was, that these long trials had worn out the elasticity of his heart ; and the sources of joy, as well as those of sorrow, had dried up. He no longer struggled against despair, but came to believe that Henriette had forgotten him, and would never be his wife. He knew well enough that he himself could never love another woman, and life without Henriette seemed such a dreary prospect, that at times he really asked himself whether it were worth living. There were moments when he looked lovingly at his pistols, and asked, "Why should I not spare Sarah Brandon the trouble?" It was a feeling of hatred that restrained his hand. He must, he thought, at least resign himself to life until he had taken his revenge. Harassed by these anxieties, he withdrew more and more from society, and gave up going on shore ; and his brother officers felt anxious for him as they watched him walking restlessly up and down the quarter-deck, with a pale face and glowing eyes : for Daniel was a great favourite with his comrades. His superiority was so evident, that none disputed it : the others might envy him, but they could never be jealous of him. Some of them thought he had brought back from the Kamboja the germ of one of those implacable diseases which demoralize the strongest, and, breaking out with sudden swiftness, carry a man off in a few hours. "You ought not to become a misanthrope, Champcey," they were in the habit of saying. "Come, for Heaven's sake, shake off that sadness." And they added in a jesting tone, "Decidedly, you regret the Kamboja !"

Intended for a joke, these words, after all, only expressed the truth. Daniel did regret his mission, its hardships and perils. While it lasted, responsibility, fatigue, hard work, and danger had at least procured him some hours of forgetfulness ; whereas comparative idleness now left him face to face with his distressing thoughts. It was the desire, the necessity almost, of escaping in some manner from himself, which induced him one day to join several of his comrades in a great hunting-party. On the eve of the expedition, he had a curious presentiment. "A fine opportunity," he thought, "for the assassin hired by Sarah Brandon !" And then shrugging his shoulders, he added with a bitter laugh, "What ! am I hesitating ? As if a life like mine were worth protecting against danger !"

On the following day, when the party reached the hunting-ground, Daniel received his instructions, and, like his comrades, had a post assigned him by the leader. He found himself placed between two brother officers, with a thicket behind him, and a narrow ravine—through which all the game must necessarily pass as it was driven down by a crowd of Ammanites—in front. The sport had been going on for an hour or so, when those nearest Daniel suddenly saw him drop his rifle, turn over, and fall to the ground, exclaiming : "This time they haven't missed me."

At the outcry raised by those who witnessed the occurrence, several other sportsmen hastened up, and among them the chief surgeon of "The Conquest," one of those old "pill-makers," who, under an air of scepticism, and a rough, almost brutal manner, conceal great skill and almost feminine tenderness. As soon as he saw the wounded man, whom his friends had stretched on his back, with an overcoat to serve as a pillow, he frowned, and growled—"He won't live."

The officers were thunderstruck. "Poor Champcey!" said one of them, "to escape the Kamboja fevers, and be killed here at a pleasure-party! Do you recollect, doctor, what you said on the occasion of his second accident,—'Mind the third'?"

The old doctor was not listening. Kneeling down, he had rapidly stripped Daniel's coat off his back. The poor fellow had been wounded by a bullet, a little in the rear of the right side, between the fourth and fifth rib. The old surgeon had soon found the little, round wound, but he was unable to ascertain at first sight where the projectile was lodged. However, he ventured to remark, "All things considered, he may perhaps pull through. The bullet may not have injured any vital part, for projectiles often take curious turns and twists. I should almost be disposed to answer for M. Champcey, if I had him in a good bed in the hospital at Saigon. At all events, we must try to get him there alive. Let one of you gentlemen tell the sailors who have come with us to cut down some young saplings, and make a litter of branches."

At this moment, the old surgeon's orders were abruptly interrupted by the noise of a struggle, interspersed with mingled oaths and groans. Twenty yards or so from the spot where Daniel had fallen, a couple of sailors could be seen coming out of the thicket, dragging a man with a gun, who interrupted his swearing to shriek, "Will you let me go, you parcel of ruffians! Let me go, or I'll hurt you!" He struggled so furiously in the arms of the two sailors, clinging with an iron grip to every available root, branch, and rock, turning and twisting at every step, that at last the men, furious at his resistance, lifted him up bodily, and threw him at the chief surgeon's feet, exclaiming,—"*Here's the scoundrel who has killed our lieutenant!*"

The culprit was a man of medium height, with a moustached, bearded face, and lack-lustre eyes. He was dressed like an Annamite of the middle classes, wearing a blouse buttoned at the side, trousers in the Chinese style, and sandals of red leather. Still it was evident that he was a European. "Where did you find him?" asked the surgeon.

"Down there, commandant, behind that big bush in the rear of Lieut. Champcey, to the right."

"Why do you accuse him?"

"Why? We have good reasons, I should think. He was in hiding, and when we saw him, he was lying flat on the ground, trembling with fear. We all of us said at once, 'Surely there's the man who fired that shot.'"

In the meantime the fellow had raised himself erect, and assumed an air of almost provoking assurance. "They lie!" he exclaimed. "Yes, they lie, the cowards!"

This insult would have procured him a sound drubbing, had not the old surgeon motioned the sailors back. Then, continuing his interrogatory, he asked,—"*Why were you hiding?*"

"I wasn't hiding."

"What were you doing, then, crouching in the bush?"

"I was at my post, like the others. Do people require a permit to carry arms in Cochin China? I was not invited to your hunting-party, to be sure; but I am fond of game; and I said to myself, 'Even if I did shoot two or three head out of the hundreds the drivers bring down, I shan't interfere much with the officers' sport.'"

The doctor let him talk on for some time, observing him closely with his sagacious eye; then, suddenly he exclaimed, "Give me your gun!"

The man turned so pale that all the officers standing round noticed it. Still he did as he was bid, remarking: "Here it is. It was lent me by one of my friends."

The doctor examined the weapon very carefully; and, after inspecting the lock, he said, "Both barrels of your gun are empty; and they were not discharged more than two minutes ago."

"That's so: I fired both barrels at an animal that passed me within reach."

"One of the bullets may have gone astray."

"That can't be. I was aiming in the direction of the open ground over there; and I was turning my back to the officer."

To everybody's surprise, the doctor's face, ordinarily crafty enough, now looked all benevolent curiosity,—and the two sailors who had captured the man were so distressed on noticing his kindly look that they ventured to exclaim, "Oh, commandant! don't believe him, the dirty dog!"

But the man, evidently encouraged by the surgeon's apparent kindness, boldly asked if he were not to be allowed to defend himself, impudently adding, "After all, whether I defend myself or not, it will, no doubt, be all the same. Ah! if I were only a sailor, or a soldier. But then I am nothing but a poor civilian; and everybody knows civilians must have broad shoulders in this part of the world. Wrong or right, as soon as they are accused, they are convicted."

The doctor now seemed to have made up his mind; for interrupting this flow of words, he remarked benevolently,—“Calm yourself, my friend. There is a test which will clearly establish your innocence. The bullet that wounded Lieut. Champcey is still in his body, and I am the man who will have to take it out. All of us use conical bullets, whereas I see from your gun that you use round ones. So there is no mistake possible. I do not know if you understand me?"

Yes, the fellow understood well enough,—so well, indeed, that his pale face turned livid, and he glanced round him with frightened eyes. For an instant he hesitated, counting up his chances no doubt; then, suddenly falling on his knees, folding his hands, and beating the ground with his forehead, he cried out, "I confess! Yes, perhaps it was I who wounded the officer. I heard the bushes moving in his direction, and I fired at a guess. What a misfortune! O God, what a mischance! Ah! I would give my life to save him if I could. It was an accident, gentlemen, I swear. Such accidents happen every day in hunting: the papers are full of them. Great God! what an unfortunate man I am!"

The surgeon had stepped back. He now ordered the two sailors who had arrested the man to make sure of him, bind his hands, and take him to Saigon to prison. One of the officers, he said, would write a few lines, which they must take with them. The prisoner seemed annihilated. "A misfortune is not a crime," he sighed. "I am an honest mechanic."

"We shall see that in Saigon," answered the surgeon; and he thereupon hastened away to ascertain if all the preparations had been made to carry the wounded man. In less than twenty minutes, and with that marvellous

skill which is one of the characteristics of good sailors, a solid litter had been constructed. The bottom formed a real couch of leaves; and overhead a kind of screen had been made of larger branches. When Daniel was lifted and placed on the litter, he uttered a low cry of pain. This was the first sign of life he had given since his fall. "And now, my friends," said the doctor, "let us start! And bear in mind, that if you shake the lieutenant, you'll simply kill him."

It was eight in the morning when the melancholy procession started homeward; and it was not until three A.M. that it reached Saigon, in the midst of one of those deluging down-pours for which Cochin China is renowned. The sailors who carried the litter on which Daniel lay had walked eighteen hours without being relieved, through an almost impassable region, where at each moment a passage had to be cut through dense thickets of aloes, cacti, and jack-trees. Several times the officers offered to take the seamen's places; but they always refused, and trudged on, taking as they went as ingenious precautions as a mother might have devised for her dying infant. Accordingly, although the march lasted so long, the dying man felt no shock; and the old surgeon, who was quite touched, remarked to the officers around him,—“Good fellows, how careful they are! You might have stood a full glass of water on the litter, and they would not have spilled a drop.”

Two officers had hastened on in advance to have a room prepared for Daniel. He was carried there; and when he had been gently laid on the bed, officers and seamen withdrew into an adjoining room to await the doctor's sentence. He was aided in his task by two assistant surgeons who had been roused in the meantime. Hope was very faint. During the journey Daniel had recovered consciousness, and had even uttered a few words—incoherent ones, however—clearly showing that he was more or less delirious. He had been questioned once or twice; but his answers had shown that he had no recollection of the accident which had befallen him, nor sense of his present condition; so that the general opinion among the seamen, who all had more or less experience of shot-wounds, was, that fever would carry off their lieutenant before sunrise. Suddenly, all comments were hushed and all eyes were turned towards the old surgeon, who had just appeared at the door of the sick-room. With a pleasant, hopeful smile on his lips, he announced: “Our poor Champcey is doing as well as could be expected; and I should almost be sure of his recovery, if it were not for the great heat.” And, silencing the murmur of satisfaction which this good news provoked, he continued: “Serious as the wound undoubtedly is, it is nothing in comparison with what it might have been; and what is more, gentlemen, I have the *corpus delicti*.” So saying, he showed the bystanders a spherical bullet which he held between his thumb and forefinger. “This,” said he, “is another example of the odd freaks projectiles sometimes indulge in. This bullet, in lieu of going straight through our poor friend's body, had turned round his ribs and lodged itself near the backbone. I found it almost on the surface; and nothing was needed to dislodge it but a slight push with the probe.”

The gun taken from the murderer had been deposited in a corner of the room: it was now produced, the bullet was tried, and found to fit the barrel exactly. “Now we have a tangible proof,” exclaimed one young officer, “an unmistakable proof that the scoundrel our men caught is Daniel's murderer. Ah, he might as well have kept his confession!”

“Gently, gentlemen, gently!” replied the old surgeon with a frown.

"Don't let us be overhasty in accusing a poor fellow of such a fearful crime, when, perhaps, he is only guilty of imprudence."

"O doctor, doctor!" protested half-a-dozen voices.

"I beg your pardon! Don't let us be hasty, I say; let us consider. For murder there must be a motive, and a very powerful motive; for, apart from the risk, no man in his senses is capable of killing another solely for the purpose of shedding blood. Now, in this case, I look in vain for any reason which could have induced this fellow to commit a murder. He certainly did not expect to rob our poor comrade. Perhaps you may say he was actuated by hatred or a desire for revenge. Well, that may be. But, before a man makes up his mind to shoot even the man he hates, he must have been cruelly offended by him; and for this to occur they must have already come into contact. Now, I ask you, is it not more probable that the prisoner saw Champcey this morning for the first time?"

"I beg your pardon, commandant! He knew him perfectly well," interrupted one of the sailors, who had been charged with conducting the culprit to prison. He came forward, twisting his worsted cap in his hands; and when the surgeon ordered him to speak out, he resumed: "Yes, the rascal knew the lieutenant as well as I know you, commandant; for he was one of the emigrants we brought out here eighteen months ago."

"Are you sure of that?"

"As sure as I see you, commandant. At first my comrade and I did not recognise him, for a year and a-half in this wretched country change a man horribly; but, while we were taking him to jail, we said to one another, 'We've seen that face before.' So we made him talk; and after a bit he admitted that he had been one of the passengers, and that he even knew my name, which is Baptiste Lefloch."

The sailor's statement made a great impression upon all the bystanders except the old surgeon. It is true he was looked upon, on board "The Conquest," as particularly obstinate in clinging to his opinions. "Do you know," he asked the sailor, "if this man was one of the four or five who were put in irons during the voyage?"

"No, he was not one of them, commandant."

"Did he ever have anything to do with Lieut. Champcey? Was he ever reprimanded by him, or punished? Has he ever spoken to him?"

"Ah, commandant! that is more than I can tell."

The old surgeon thereupon shrugged his shoulders, and remarked: "You see, gentlemen, this statement is too vague to prove anything. Believe me, don't let us judge the case before the trial, and let us go to bed."

The dawn was just breaking as officers and seamen retired to their quarters. The surgeon was turning to lie down on a bed he had ordered to be put up in a room adjoining that occupied by the wounded man, when the first lieutenant of "The Conquest" returned, exclaiming, "I should like to have a word in private with you, doctor."

"Very well," replied the old surgeon, and, locking the door, he added, "I'm listening."

The lieutenant reflected for a moment, like a man seeking for the best manner in which to express an important idea, and then asked: "Between us, doctor, do you believe it was an accident or a crime?"

The surgeon plainly hesitated. "I don't mind telling you frankly," said he, "but you only, pray understand, that I don't believe it was an accident. But as we have no evidence—"

"Excuse me! I think I have evidence."

"How's that?"

"You shall judge yourself. As you know, I was not far from Champcey when he fell, and, as he staggered, I heard him cry, 'This time they haven't missed me!'"

"Did he really say so?"

"Word for word. And Saint Edme, who was farther from him than I was, heard it as distinctly as I did."

To the lieutenant's great surprise, the chief surgeon seemed only moderately surprised; in fact, his eyes shone like those of a man who congratulates himself on having foreseen exactly what he is now told to be a fact. Drawing a chair up to the fireplace, where a huge fire had been kindled to dry his clothes, he sat down, and said,—“Do you know, my dear lieutenant, that what you tell me is a matter of the greatest importance? What may we not conclude from those words, 'This time they haven't missed me?' In the first place, it proves that Champcey was aware that his life was in danger. Secondly, that plural, 'They,' shows that he knew he was watched and threatened by several people: hence the scamp we have caught must have accomplices. And thirdly, those words, 'This time,' indicate that an attempt on his life has been made before.”

"That is just what I thought, doctor."

"Well," resumed the old surgeon, looking very solemn, "I had a very clear presentiment of all that as soon as I looked at the murderer. Do you remember the man's amazing impudence as long as he thought he could not be convicted of the crime? And then, when he found that his gun would betray him, how abject and painfully humble he became! Obviously such a man is capable of anything."

"Oh! you need only look at him—"

"Yes, indeed! Well, while I was watching him, I instinctively recalled the two remarkable accidents which so nearly killed poor Champcey,—that pulley that fell upon him from the skies, and that boating adventure in the Dong-Nai. However, I was still doubtful; but after what you tell me, I am sure. Yes, I am ready to take my oath that this wretch is the vile tool of some people who hate or fear Champcey; who are deeply interested in his death; and who, being too cowardly to do their own business themselves, are rich enough to hire an assassin."

"But, doctor," objected the lieutenant, "just now, when we were all together, you insisted—"

"Upon a diametrically opposite doctrine; eh?"

"Precisely."

The old surgeon smiled. "I had my reasons," said he. "The more I am persuaded that this man is an assassin, the less I am disposed to proclaim it on the housetops. He certainly has accomplices, and, if we wish to reach them, we must by all means reassure them, and let them imagine that everybody thinks it was an accident. If we frighten them they will simply vanish before we can stretch out our hands to seize them."

"Champcey might be questioned: perhaps he could furnish some information," suggested the lieutenant.

"Question my patient!" retorted the old surgeon. "Kill him, you mean! No! If I am to have the wonderful good-luck to pull him through, no one shall come near his bed for a month. And, moreover, it will be very fortunate indeed if in a month's time he has sufficiently recovered to carry on a conversation. And, besides, it is a question whether Champcey would be disposed to tell us what he knows, or what he suspects. That is

very doubtful. Twice before, he was almost killed, but did he ever tell us his secret? And no doubt he still has the same reasons to keep silent. At all events, I will think it over, and go and see the officials as soon as they are out of bed. But I must ask you, lieutenant, to keep my secret till further orders. Will you promise?"

"On my word, doctor."

"Then you may rest assured our poor friend shall be avenged. And now, as I have barely two hours to rest, please excuse me."

XXIV.

As soon as he was alone, the old surgeon threw himself on his bed; but he could not sleep. He had never in his life been so much puzzled. The more he reflected over this crime the more it seemed to him that it was the result of some terrible mysterious intrigue; and the very circumstance of having, as he fancied, raised a corner of the veil, fired him with the desire to draw it aside altogether. "Why," said he to himself, "why mightn't the scamp we hold be the author of the other two attempts as well? There is nothing improbable in that supposition. The man, once engaged, might easily have been shipped on board 'The Conquest'; and might have left France saying to himself that it would be odd indeed, if during a long voyage, or in a land like this, he did not find a chance to earn his money without running much risk." The result of the chief surgeon's meditations was, that at nine o'clock he hurried to the office of the local public prosecutor, to whom he explained the matter very fully and plainly; and, an hour afterwards, he crossed the yard on his way to the prison, accompanied by an investigating magistrate and his clerk. "How is the man the sailors brought here last night?" he asked the jailer.

"Badly, sir. He wouldn't eat."

"What did he say when he got here?"

"Nothing. He seemed stupefied."

"You didn't try to make him talk?"

"Why, yes, a little. He answered that he had done some mischief; that he was in despair, and wished he were dead."

The magistrate looked at the surgeon as if to say, "Just as I expected from what you told me!" Then, in his turn addressing the jailer, he said,—"Show us to the prisoner's cell."

The culprit had been put into a small cell on the first floor, and when the party entered, they found him seated on his bed, in an attitude of meditation. But on perceiving the surgeon, he sprung to his feet, and, with outstretched arms and rolling eyes, exclaimed,—"The officer's dead!"

"No," replied the surgeon, "no! Calm yourself. The wound is a very bad one; but in a fortnight he will be up again."

These words fell like a heavy blow upon the prisoner. He turned pale; his lips quivered; and he trembled in every limb. Still he promptly mastered this weakness of the flesh; and falling on his knees, with folded hands, he murmured in the most dramatic manner,—"Then I am not a murderer! O God, I thank thee!" And his lips moved as if he were whispering a fervent prayer.

It was evidently a case of the coarsest hypocrisy; for his looks were at utter variance with his words and voice. The magistrate, however, seemed to be taken in. "You show proper feelings," he said.

"Now get up and answer me. Your name and age?"

"Evariste Crochard, surnamed Bagnolet, aged thirty-five."

"Where were you born?"

"At Bagnolet, near Paris. And on that account—"

"Never mind. Your profession?" asked the magistrate; and as the man hesitated, he added: "In your own interest I advise you to tell the truth. It always comes out in the end; and your position would be a very serious one if you tried to deceive me. So answer at once."

"Well, I am an engraver on metal; but I have been in the army: I served my time in the marine infantry."

"What brought you to Cochinchina?"

"The desire to find work. I was tired of Paris. There was no work for engravers there, and I met a friend who told me the government wanted good workmen for the colonies."

"What was your friend's name?"

The fellow flushed slightly, and answered,—"I've forgotten it."

"That is very unfortunate for you," coldly remarked the magistrate.

"Come, make an effort; try to remember."

"I know I can't: it is not worth the trouble."

"Well; but no doubt you recollect the profession of the man who knew so well that the government needed workmen out here? What was it?"

This time the prisoner turned crimson with rage, and cried with extraordinary vehemence,—"How do I know? Besides, what did I care about his name and profession? I learned from him that workmen were wanted. I called at the Ministry, obtained a passage, and that's all."

Standing in a corner of the cell, the old surgeon did not lose a word the murderer said, or a motion he made. And he could hardly refrain from rubbing his hands with delight as he observed the magistrate's marvellous skill in dealing with all those little points, which, when summed up at the end of an investigation, form an overwhelming mass of evidence for the prosecution. The magistrate in the meantime impassively resumed: "Well, let us leave that question, as it seems to irritate you, and deal with your sojourn here. How have you supported yourself at Saigon?"

"By my work, of course! I've two arms; and I'm not an idler."

"You have found employment as an engraver on metal, eh?"

Evariste Crochard, surnamed Bagnolet, could hardly conceal his impatience. "If you won't let me have my say," he broke out insolently, "it isn't worth while questioning me."

The magistrate did not seem to notice the man's impertinent manner, but coldly retorted—"Oh! talk as much as you like. I can wait."

"Well, then, the day after we landed, M. Farniol, the landlord of the French restaurant, offered me a place as waiter. Of course I accepted, and staid there a year. Now I wait at table at the Hôtel de France, kept by M. Roy. You can send for my two masters: they will tell you whether they have to complain of me."

"They will certainly be examined. Well, where do you live?"

"At the Hôtel de France, of course, where I am employed."

The magistrate looked more and more benevolent. "And is it a good situation—waiter at a restaurant or hotel?" he asked.

"Why, yes—pretty good."

"It pays well; eh?"

"That depends—sometimes it does; at other times it doesn't. When it's the season—"

"That's so everywhere. But let us be accurate. You have been now eighteen months in Saigon ; no doubt you have laid up something?"

The man looked troubled and amazed, as if he had suddenly discovered that the magistrate's apparent benevolence had led him on to dangerous ground. "If I have put anything aside, it is not worth mentioning," he answered evasively.

"On the contrary, let us mention it. About how much have you saved?"

Bagnolet's looks, and the tremor of his lips, betrayed his inward rage. "I don't know," he sharply replied.

With an admirably affected gesture of surprise the magistrate asked, "What! You don't know how much you have laid by? That's too improbable! When people save money, one sau after another, to provide for their old age, they know pretty well—"

"Well, then, take it for granted that I have saved nothing."

"As you like. Only it is my duty to show you the effect of your declaration. You tell me you have not laid any money by, don't you? Now, what would you say if, after search is made, the police should happen to find a certain sum of money on your person, or elsewhere?"

"They won't find any."

"So much the better for you ; for, now, it would be a terrible charge."

"Let them search."

"They are doing so now, and not only in your room, but elsewhere also. They will soon know if you have invested any money, or if you have deposited it with any of your acquaintances."

"I may have brought some money with me from home."

"No; for you told me that you could no longer live in Paris, as you could find no work." Crochard, surnamed Bagnolet, started so violently, that the surgeon really thought he was going to attack the magistrate. The rascal plainly realised he had been caught in a net, the meshes of which were drawing tighter and tighter around him ; and these apparently inoffensive questions suddenly assumed a terrible meaning. "Just answer me in one word," resumed the magistrate, "Did you bring any money from France, or not?"

The man rose, and his lips parted to utter an oath ; but he checked himself, sat down again, and laughing ferociously, exclaimed, "Ah ! you would like to 'squeeze' me, and make me cut my own throat, eh? But luckily, I can see through you ; and I refuse to answer."

"You mean you want to consider. Have a care ! You need not consider in order to tell the truth." And, as the man remained obstinately silent, the magistrate again resumed, "You know what you are accused of? You are suspected of having fired at the officer with intent to kill him."

"That's an abominable lie !"

"So you say. How did you know that the officers of 'The Conquest' had arranged a large hunting-party?"

"I had heard them speak of it at *table d'hôte*."

"And you left your service on purpose to attend this hunt, some twelve leagues from Saigon? That's certainly singular."

"Not at all ; for I'm very fond of sport. And I thought that if I could bring back some game, I should be able to sell it at a good profit."

"And you would have added that profit to your other savings, wouldn't you?" Crochard, surnamed Bagnolet, was evidently stung by this ironical question, but, as he said nothing, the magistrate continued,— "Explain to us how the thing happened."

On this ground the murderer knew he was at home, having had ample

time to prepare himself; and with an accuracy which did great honour either to his memory or veracity, he repeated what he had told the surgeon on the spot, at the time of the catastrophe. He only added, that he had concealed himself, because he had realised that his awkwardness would expose him to a terrible charge. And as he continued his account, warming up with its plausibility, he recovered the impudence, or rather insolence, which seemed to be the prominent feature of his character. "Do you know the officer you wounded?" asked the magistrate when he had finished.

"Yes, I made the voyage with him. He is Lieut. Champcey."

"Have you any complaint against him?"

"None at all." And in a bitter tone, he added, "What connection do you think there could be between a poor devil like myself and an officer like him? Would he have condescended even to look at me? Would I have dared to speak to him? If I know him, it is only because I have seen him, some distance off, walking up and down the quarter-deck with the other officers after a good meal, while we fellows in the fore-castle had to fill our bellies with salt fish."

"So you had no reason to hate him?"

"None: as little as anybody else."

Seated on a wretched little footstool, his paper on his knees, and an inkhorn in his hand, the magistrate's clerk was rapidly taking down the questions and answers. His superior now told him that the examination was over, and turning to the prisoner, remarked: "That is enough for to-day. I am bound to tell you that, having so far only detained you as a matter of precaution, I shall now issue a formal order for your arrest."

"You mean that I am to be kept in jail?"

"Yes, until the court decides whether you are guilty of murder or involuntary manslaughter."

Crochard, surnamed Bagnolet, seemed to have foreseen this conclusion: for he coolly shrugged his shoulders, and said,—“In that case I shall have my linen changed pretty often here; for if I had been wicked enough to plot a murder, I should not have been fool enough to say so.”

"Who knows?" replied the magistrate. "Some evidence is as good as a confession." And, turning to his clerk, he added,—“Read the prisoner's statements over to him.”

A moment afterwards, when this formality had been fulfilled, the magistrate and the old surgeon left the room. The former looked extremely grave, and remarked: "You were right, doctor: that man's a murderer. That friend, whose name he would not tell us, is the rascal who employs him. And I mean to get that person's name out of him, if M. Champcey recovers, and will only give me the slightest hint. So nurse your patient, doctor, as carefully as possible."

It was at least superfluous to recommend Daniel to the surgeon. If the old fellow was inexorable as regards all lazy fellows who pretended they felt ill for the purpose of shirking work, he was all attention and tenderness for his real patients; and his tenderness increased with the gravity of their ailment. He would not have hesitated a moment between an admiral who was slightly unwell, and the youngest midshipman of the fleet who was dangerously wounded. The admiral might have waited a long time before he would have left the midshipman,—an originality far less frequent than we imagine. To secure the old surgeon's best services Champcey's condition alone would therefore have amply sufficed. But in addition, like all who had ever sailed with Daniel, the surgeon also had conceived a

lively interest in him, and greatly admired his character. Besides, he knew that his patient alone could solve the mystery which puzzled him so much. Unfortunately, Daniel's condition was such as defy all professional skill, and where everything depends on time, nature, and constitution. To try and question him would have been absurd; for he had so far continued delirious. At times he thought he was on board his sloop in the swamps of the Kamboja; but most frequently he imagined himself fighting against enemies bent upon his ruin. The name of Sarah Brandon, Mrs. Brian, and Thomas Elgin, were constantly on his lips, intermingled with threats and imprecations. For twenty days he remained in this condition; and for twenty days and twenty nights his "man," Baptiste Lefloch, one of those who had caught the murderer, remained at his bedside, watching his slightest movements, and nursing him with the utmost care and devotion. One day, when the old surgeon complimented Lefloch on his watchfulness and attention, the gallant fellow remarked, "Ah! when we were on the Kamboja expedition, and Baptiste Lefloch was writhing like a worm in the gripe of the cholera, and already quite blue and cold, Lieut. Champcey did not send for one of those lazy Annamites to rub him, but came himself, and rubbed him till he brought back heat and life itself. So now, you see, I want to do some little for him."

"You would be a great scamp if you didn't," replied the surgeon, who hardly left the wounded man himself. He visited him four or five times a day, once at least every night, and in the afternoon he would remain for hours sitting by his bedside, examining him, and experiencing, according to the symptoms, sudden fluctuations of hope and fear. It was by listening to the patient's delirious talk that he learned a part, at least, of Daniel's history: how he was to have married a daughter of the Count de Ville-Handry, who himself had married an adventuress; and how he had been separated from his betrothed by means of a forged letter. The doctor's conjectures were thus confirmed: such cowardly forgers would not hesitate to hire an assassin. But the worthy surgeon was too deeply impressed by the dignity of his profession to divulge secrets which he had heard at a patient's bedside, and whenever the magistrate, growing more and more impatient, called to make enquiries, he was always answered,—"I have nothing new to tell you. It will take weeks yet before you can examine my patient. Crochard is no doubt tired of prison; but he must wait."

In the meantime, Daniel's long delirium had been followed by a state of torpor. Gradually he began to regain the partial use of his mind, recognising the persons around him, and even stammering a few sensible words. But he was still so exceedingly weak, that one or two short sentences quite exhausted him. However, at last he began to inquire, "Are there no letters for me from France?" A question which Lefloch, in obedience to the doctor's orders, always answered in the negative. In doing so he told a falsehood, for since Daniel had been laid up, three vessels had arrived at Saigon, two French and one English; and in their post-bags there were eight or ten letters for Lieut. Champcey. But the old surgeon said to himself, and not without good reason, "It is no doubt cruel to leave the poor fellow in such uncertainty: but this uncertainty is free from, at least, imminent danger, whereas any excitement would kill him as surely as I could blow out a candle."

A fortnight elapsed; and Daniel recovered some little strength: even entering into a kind of convalescence, if a man who is unable to turn over in bed without assistance can be called a convalescent. But, with this physical improvement, mental worry returned; and as he gradually

ascertained how long he had been laid up, his anxiety assumed an alarming character. "There must be letters for me," he said to his man: "you keep them from me. I must have them." At last the old surgeon came to the conclusion that this excessive anxiety was likely to become as dangerous as the excitement he dreaded: so he said one day,—*"Let us run the risk."*

It was a burning hot afternoon, and Daniel had now been an invalid for seven weeks. Lefloch raised him on his pillows, *"stowed him away,"* as he called it; and the surgeon handed him his letters. Daniel uttered a cry of delight, for at the first glance he recognized Henriette's writing on three of the envelopes. *"At last she writes!"* he exclaimed, as he kissed them.

The shock was so violent, that the surgeon was almost frightened. *"Be calm, my dear fellow,"* he said. *"Be calm! Be a man, forsooth!"*

"Never mind me, doctor," rejoined Daniel with a smile, *"you know joy is never dangerous; and nothing but joy can come from her who writes to me. However, just see how calm I am!"* So calm, indeed, that he did not even take the time to see which was the oldest of his letters. Opening one of them at hap-hazard, he read,—*"Daniel, my dear Daniel, my only friend, how could you intrust me to such an infamous scoundrel? How could you hand your poor Henriette over to such a wretch? This Maxime de Brévan, this scoundrel, whom you considered your friend, if you knew—"* This was the long letter written by Henriette the day after M. de Brévan had told her he loved her, and that sooner or later, whether she chose or not, she must be his, giving her the choice between the horrors of starvation and the disgrace of becoming his wife. As Daniel went on reading, his face grew even paler than before; his eyes distended, and perspiration trickled down his temples. He trembled so violently, that his teeth fairly rattled, and agonizing sobs rose from his chest. At last he reached the concluding lines,—*"Now,"* the young girl wrote, *"if none of my letters have reached you, they must have been intercepted. But I am going to post this one myself. For God's sake, Daniel, return! Come back quick, if you wish to save, not your Henriette's honour, but her life!"*

Then the surgeon and the sailor witnessed a surprising sight. This man, who just now had been unable to raise himself on his pillows, who looked more like a skeleton than a human being, and had scarcely his breath left him,—threw back his blankets with one hand, and sprang into the middle of the room, crying, with a terrible voice,—*"My clothes, Lefloch, my clothes!"* The doctor had hastened forward to support him; but he pushed him aside with one arm, continuing,—*"By the holy name of God, Lefloch, make haste! Run to the harbour, man! there must be a steamer there. I buy it. Let it get up steam instantly. In an hour I must be on my way."* But this great effort exhausted him. He tottered; his eyes closed; and he fainted in the sailor's arms, stammering,—*"That letter, doctor, that letter: read it, and you will see I must go."*

Raising his lieutenant, and holding him like a child in his arms, Lefloch carried him back to his bed; but, for more than ten minutes, the surgeon and the faithful seaman were unable to tell whether they had not a corpse before their eyes, and were wasting all their attentions. No! It was Lefloch who first noticed a slight tremor. *"He moves! Look, commandant, he moves! He is alive. We'll pull him through yet."*

They indeed succeeded in rekindling this nearly extinguished life, but they could not restore the vanished intellect. Daniel's cold, indifferent stare, when he at last opened his eyes again, told them that his tottering

reason had not been strong enough to sustain this new shock. And yet he must have retained some glimpses of the past ; for his efforts to collect his thoughts were unmistakable. He passed his hands over his forehead, as if trying to get rid of the mist which enshrouded his mind. Then a convulsion shook him ; and his lips overflowed with incoherent words, in which the recollection of the fearful reality, and the extravagant conceptions of delirium, were strangely mingled. "I foresaw it," said the chief surgeon. "I foresaw it but too fully." He had by this time exhausted all the resources of his skill and long experience ; he had followed all the suggestions nature vouchsafed ; and he could now do nothing more but wait. Picking up the fatal letter, he went towards one of the windows to read it. Daniel had said enough in his wanderings to enable the doctor to understand the poor girl's appeal ; and Lefloch, who watched him, saw a big tear trickle down his cheek, as he growled,—“This is enough to madden a fellow !” Then like a man who is no longer master of himself, but who must move somehow or other, he stuffed the letter into his pocket, and left the room, swearing all the oaths of his vocabulary.

It so chanced that precisely at that moment, the magistrate who was investigating the case called at the hospital to enquire after Champcey's health. Perceiving the old surgeon as he entered the courtyard, he hastened forward to question him. "Lieut. Champcey is lost !" said the doctor in a tone of despair.

"Good Heavens ! What do you mean ?"

"What I think. He has a violent brain-fever, and weakened, exhausted, extenuated as he is, how can he endure it ? He can't : that's evident. It would take another miracle to save him now ; and you may rest assured it won't take place. In less than twenty-four hours he will be a dead man, and his murderers will triumph."

"Come, come, doctor !" interrupted the magistrate.

"I should like to know how you could keep them from triumphing ?" continued the old surgeon, sarcastically. "If Champcey dies, you will be bound to release that scamp Crochard, for there will be no evidence against him. Or, if you send him before a court, he will merely be declared guilty of involuntary homicide. And yet you know, as well as I do, that he wantonly fired at one of the noblest men I have ever met. And, when he has served his term, he will receive the price of Champcey's life, and spend it in orgies ; while the real criminals, who have hired him, will go about the world with lofty pride, rich, honoured, and haughty."

"Doctor !"

But the old original was not to be stopped. "Ah, let me alone !" said he. "Your human justice,—do you want me to tell you what I think of it ? I am ashamed of it ! When you have sent three or four stupid murderers to the scaffold, and some few dozen blundering thieves to prison during the course of the year, you fold your black gowns around you, and proudly proclaim that all is well, and that society may sleep soundly—under your protection. Well, do you know what is the real state of things ? You only catch the fools. The others, the intelligent ones, find their way through the meshes of your laws, and, relying on their cleverness and your want of power, enjoy the fruit of their crimes in all the pride of impunity, and no doubt they will continue doing so until—" He hesitated, and apparently forgetful of his usual atheism, added : "Until the day of divine judgment."

Far from appearing offended by this outburst of indignation, the magis-

trate, who had listened impassively, profited of the doctor having to draw breath to remark: "You must have discovered something new."

"Most assuredly I have. I think I hold at last the thread of the fearful plot which is killing poor Champcey. Ah, if he were only to live! But he cannot live."

"Well, well, console yourself, doctor. You said human justice has its limits, and that many criminals escape punishment; but in this case, whether M. Champcey lives or dies, justice shall be done, I promise you!"

He spoke in a tone of such absolute certainty, that the old surgeon was struck by it. "Has the murderer confessed the crime!" he asked.

"No," replied the magistrate; "nor have I seen him again since the first examination. But I have not been dozing. Far from it, I have been searching; and I think I have sufficient evidence now to establish the truth. And if you, on your side, have any positive information?"

"Yes, I have; and I think I am justified now in communicating it to you. I have a letter." The old surgeon was pulling Henriette's missive out of his pocket, when the magistrate stopped him, and suggested that they could not talk freely in a courtyard, where everyone was liable to watch them from the surrounding windows.

Accordingly, they repaired together to the magistrate's office, and as soon as they had sat down, the legal functionary began: "I shall ask you for your information by-and-bye. First listen to what I have to say. I now know who Evariste Crochard, surnamed Bagnolet, really is; and I know the principal events of his life. Ah! it has cost me time and labour enough; but human justice is patient, doctor. As this man was a passenger on board 'The Conquest' during more than four months, in company with a hundred and fifty other emigrants, I thought that he might have indulged in some long chats with his fellows, so as to lessen the monotony of so long a voyage. He is a ready speaker—a Parisian—so naturally endowed with a fair amount of bounce; he formerly served as a soldier, moreover, and he has travelled a good deal. So he was, no doubt, always sure of an audience. Accordingly I sent, one by one, for all the former passengers on board 'The Conquest' whom I could find, altogether a hundred, perhaps; and I examined them. I soon found out that my presumption was not unfounded. Almost every one of them had learnt some particular of Bagnolet's life—some more, some less, according to the degree of honesty or immorality which Bagnolet fancied he detected in them. I collected all their statements; I completed and compared them, one by the other; and with the assistance of the prisoner's own confession, I was able to reconstitute his biography in every noteworthy particular."

Without seeming to notice the surgeon's astonishment, he then opened a large case on his table; and, drawing from it a huge bundle of papers, he exclaimed, "Here are the verbal statements of my hundred and odd witnesses." Then, pointing to four or five sheets of paper, covered with very fine close writing, he added, "And here are my extracts. Now listen."

And at once he commenced reading this biography of the prisoner—pausing every now and then to make some additional remark, or to explain what he had written. "*Evariste Crochard*, surnamed *Bagnolet*, was born at Bagnolet in 1820, and is, consequently, older than he says. According to his own account, his parents were very honest people. His father was foreman in a copper foundry; and his mother a seamstress. They may be still living; but for many years they have not seen their son. The prisoner was sent to school; and, if you believe him, he learned

quickly, and showed remarkable talents. But in his twelfth year he joined several bad companions of his own age, and frequently absented himself from home for weeks at a time—roaming all the while about Paris. How did he subsist on these occasions? He has never given a satisfactory explanation. But he has made such precise statements about the life of young thieves in the capital, that many witnesses suspect him of having helped his mates to rob street stalls. At all events his father, distressed by his misconduct, and despairing of ever seeing him mend his ways, had him sent to a house of correction when he was fourteen years old. Released at the end of eighteen months, he says he was next bound as an apprentice, and soon learned his calling well enough to support himself. But this cannot be true; for four witnesses, one of whom is of the very same profession as Crochard, declare that they have seen him at work, and that, if he ever was a skilled mechanic, he is so no longer. Besides, he cannot have been long at work; for he had been a year in prison again when the revolution of 1848 occurred. He has himself told this to more than five and twenty persons, though he has explained his imprisonment very differently; indeed, almost every witness has received a new version. One was told that he had been sentenced for having stabbed one of his companions while drunk; another, that it was for a row in a wine-shop; and a third, that he was innocently involved with others in an attempt to rob a foreigner. The prosecution is, therefore, fairly entitled to conclude that Crochard was sentenced simply as a thief. Released soon after the revolution, he did not resume his profession, but secured a place as machinist in a theatre on the boulevards. At the end of three months he was turned off, on account of 'improper conduct with women,' according to one; or, if we believe another statement, on account of a robbery committed in one of the actor's dressing-rooms. Unable to procure work, he engaged himself as groom in a circus company, and thus travelled through the provinces. But at Marseilles, he was wounded in a fight, and had to go to an hospital, where he remained three months. On returning to Paris, he associated himself with a tight-rope dancer, but he was soon called upon to enter the army. By good luck he escaped the *conscription*. But the next year we find him negotiating with a dealer in military 'substitutes;' and he confesses having sold himself merely to get hold of fifteen hundred francs' bounty money, and be able to spend them in debauch. Having successfully concealed his antecedents, he was next admitted as a substitute in the 13th Regiment of the line; but, before a year had elapsed, he had to be punished for insubordination by being sent to Algeria. He remained there sixteen months, and conducted himself well enough to be incorporated in the First Regiment of Marine Infantry, one battalion of which was to be sent to Senegambia. He had, however, by no means given up his bad ways; for very soon afterwards he was condemned to ten years' penal servitude for committing burglary in a house at night-time."

The chief surgeon, who had for some minutes shown unmistakable signs of impatience, now suddenly rose to his feet and exclaimed, "Excuse me if I interrupt you, but can you rely upon the veracity of your witnesses?"

"Why should I doubt them?"

"Because it seems to me very improbable that a cunning fellow like Crochard should have denounced himself."

"But he has not denounced himself, for although he has often mentioned this condemnation, he has always attributed it to acts of violence against a superior. On that point he has never varied in his statements."

"Then how on earth did you learn—"

"The truth? Oh! very simply. I inquired at Saigon; and I succeeded in finding a sergeant in the Second Regiment of Marine Infantry, who was in the First Regiment at the same time as Crochard. He gave me all these particulars. And there is no mistake about the identity; for as soon as I said 'Crochard,' the sergeant exclaimed, 'Oh, yes! Crochard, surnamed Bagnolet.'" The doctor bowed in token of satisfaction, and the magistrate then continued: "I resume the account. The prisoner's statements since his arrest are too insignificant to be reported here. There is only one peculiarity of importance for the prosecution, which may possibly enable us to trace the instigators of this crime. On three occasions, and in the presence of, at least, three witnesses each time, Crochard has remarked in almost the same words,—'No one would believe the strange acquaintances a man makes in prison. You meet there young men of good birth, who have done something foolish, and lots of folks who, wanting to make a fortune all at once, were not lucky in their venture. When they come out again, many of these fellows get into very good positions; and then, if you meet them, they don't know you. I have known some people in 'quod,' who now ride in their carriages.'"

"Ah," muttered the old surgeon, "might not some of these folks that Crochard met in prison have armed his hand?"

"That is the very question I asked myself."

"Because, you see, some of Daniel's enemies are fearful people; and if you knew the contents of the letter I have—that dreadful letter which, no doubt, will be the cause of that poor boy's death—"

"Allow me to finish, doctor," interrupted the man of law. And then, he resumed in a rapid tone, "Here follows a blank. How the prisoner lived in Paris, where he returned after his release, is not known. The prosecution is reduced to conjectures, for Crochard has refused to give details, and only makes very general statements as to these years. We only know that when he left Paris to sail on board 'The Conquest,' everything he took with him was new,—his tools, his linen, and the clothes he wore, from the cap on his head to his shoes. Why were they all new?"

"Upon my word, sir," remarked the surgeon, "I surrender; and I do begin to hope that Lieut. Champcey may still be avenged."

"Yes," rejoined the magistrate, with a tone of delicate irony, "I really think human justice may this time reach the culprits. But wait before you congratulate me."

The old surgeon was too candid to try even to conceal his astonishment.

"What!" said he, "you have more evidence still?"

"The biography I have just read establishes nothing," observed the magistrate. "Probabilities and presumptions, however strong they may be, don't conquer jurymen. They require proof, positive proof, before they return a verdict of 'guilty.' Well, such proof I have." And, so saying, from the same box whence he had taken the papers concerning Crochard's life, the magistrate now drew a letter, which he shook emphatically in the surgeon's face. "Here is something," he said, "which was sent to the public prosecutor twelve days after the last attempt had been made on M. Champcey's life. Listen!" And he read as follows: "SIR,—A sailor, who has come over to Boen-Hoa, where I live with my wife, has told us that a certain Crochard, surnamed Bagnolet, has shot, and perhaps mortally wounded, Lieut. Champcey of the ship 'Conquest.' In connection with this misfortune, my wife thinks, and I also consider it a matter of conscience.

that we should acquaint you with a very serious affair. One day, during our voyage out here, I happened to be on a yard-arm, side by side with Crochard, helping the seamen to furl a sail, when I saw him drop a huge pulley, which fell on Lieut. Champcey, and knocked him down. No one else noticed it; and Crochard at once pulled the rope up again. I was just considering whether I ought to report him, when he implored me to keep the matter secret; for he had been very unfortunate in life, and if I spoke he would be ruined. Thinking that he had been simply awkward, I allowed myself to be moved, and promised Crochard that the matter should remain between us. But what has happened since proves very clearly, as my wife says, that I was wrong in keeping silent; and I am now ready to tell everything, whatever may be the consequences. Still, sir, I beg you will protect me, in case Crochard should think of avenging himself on me or on my family—a thing which might very easily happen, as he is a very bad man, capable of anything. As I cannot write, my wife sends you this letter. And we are, with the most profound respect, &c."

"And have you seen the writer of this letter?" asked the doctor.

"Certainly! The man's a blacksmith. He has been here, he and his wife. Ah! if the man had been left to his own counsels, he would have kept it all secret, for he is so terribly afraid of Crochard; but, fortunately, his wife had more courage."

"Decidedly," growled the surgeon. "The women are, after all, the better part of creation."

The magistrate carefully replaced the letter in the box, and then resumed in his usual calm voice: "Thus the first attempt at murder is duly and fully proved. As for the second—the affair on the *Dong-Nai*—we are not yet quite so far advanced. Still I have hopes, for I have found out that Crochard is a first-rate swimmer. Only three months ago he bet a waiter at the hotel where he was engaged, that he would swim twice across the *Dong-Nai*, at the spot where the current is strongest; and he did it."

"But that is evidence, isn't it?"

"No; it is only a probability in favour of the prosecution. But I have another string to my bow. The register on board ship proves that Crochard went on shore the very evening '*The Conquest*' arrived. Where did he spend that evening; and in whose company? Not one of my hundred and odd witnesses saw him that night. And that is not everything. No one noticed, the next day, that his clothes were wet. Therefore he must have changed them; and to do that, he must have bought some others—for he had nothing with him but what he had on. Where did he buy these new clothes? That is a point I mean to ascertain as soon as I am able to give up carrying on the investigation secretly, as I have done so far. For I never forget that the real criminals are in France, and will surely escape us if they learn that their wretched accomplice here is in trouble."

Once more the surgeon drew Henriette's letter from his pocket, and handed it to the magistrate, saying, "I know who they are, the real culprits—Sarah Brandon, Maxime de Brévan, and the others."

But the magistrate once more waived back the letter, and replied, "It is not enough for us to know them, doctor: we want evidence against them—clear, positive, irrefutable evidence. This evidence we will get from Crochard. Oh, I know these rascals' ways. As soon as they see they are overwhelmed by the evidence against them, and feel they are in real danger, they hasten to denounce their accomplices, and to assist justice in apprehending them. This prisoner will do just the same. When I have succeeded

in establishing the fact that he was hired to murder M. Champcey, he will tell me who hired him; and he will have to confess that he was hired, when I show him how much of the money he received for the purpose is now left."

The old surgeon once more sprung from his chair. "What!" he cried, "you have found Crochard's treasure?"

"No," replied the magistrate, "not yet; but I think I know where it is. I have had a good deal of trouble on the matter. After the first examination, I was morally certain that the prisoner had a relatively large sum hidden somewhere, and I first gave all my attention to his room. I had all the furniture taken to pieces, the coverings of the chairs removed, and even the paper stripped from the walls. All in vain. I was beginning to despair of finding Crochard's hiding-place, when a thought struck me, and I sent for the man with whom he made the bet about swimming across the Dong-Nai. He came; and— But I prefer reading you his evidence." So saying, the magistrate drew a document from his bundle of papers, and read the following extract from his clerk's minutes. "*Magistrate.*—At what point of the river did Crochard swim across? *Witness.*—A little below the town. *M.*—Where did he undress? *W.*—At the spot where he went into the water, just opposite Wang-Tai's tile-factory. *M.*—What did he do with his clothes? *W.* (very much surprised)—Nothing. *M.*—Excuse me: he must have done something. Try to recollect. *W.* (striking his forehead)—Why, yes! I remember now. When Bagnolet had undressed, I saw he looked annoyed, as if he disliked going into the water. But no! that wasn't it. He was afraid about his clothes; and did not seem satisfied till I told him I would keep watch over them. They consisted of a mean pair of trousers and a cheap blouse. As they bothered me to hold, I put them down on the ground, at the foot of a tree. In the meantime he had done his work, and came back; but, instead of listening to my compliments, he furiously shouted, 'My clothes!' 'Well,' said I, 'they are not lost. There they are.' Whereupon he pushed me back fiercely, without saying a word, and ran like a madman to pick up his clothes."

The chief surgeon was electrified. "I understand; yes, I understand," said he, rising from his seat.

XXV.

THUS proceeding from one point to another with energy, patience, and sagacity, the magistrate had succeeded in proving Crochard's guilt, and the existence of accomplices who had instigated the crime. Undoubtedly he was proud of the feat, hard as he tried to retain his usual impassive appearance; and probably it was only to raise himself the higher in the old surgeon's estimation, that he had hitherto refused to look at Henriette's letter, wishing indeed to prove that he could afford to dispense with such assistance. But, now that he had proved this so amply, he quickly asked for the letter, and read it. Like the chief surgeon, he was struck and amazed by M. de Brévan's wickedness. "This is exactly what we wanted," he exclaimed.—"a positive proof of complicity. He would never have dared to treat Mlle. de Ville-Handry in so infamous a manner if he had not been convinced, in fact quite sure, that Lieut. Champcey would never return to France." Then, after a few minutes' reflection, he added,— "And yet I fancy there must be something else that we have not yet discovered. Why had

Lieut. Champcey's death been determined on, even before he sailed? What pressing need can M. de Brévan have had to suppress him at that time? Something must have happened between the two which we don't yet know. What it is, I can't conceive. But the future evidently has some fearful mystery in reserve for us." The surgeon and the magistrate had been so preoccupied with their thoughts, that they had not realised the flight of time; hence they were considerably astonished now to note that dusk was already falling. Returning Henriette's letter to the surgeon, the magistrate asked him, "Is this the only one M. Champcey has received?"

"No; but it is the only one he has opened."

"Would you object to handing me the others?"

The excellent doctor hesitated. "I will hand them to you," he said at last, "if the interests of justice require it. But why not wait?"

He did not dare say, "Why not wait for M. Champcey's death?" but the magistrate understood him. "Very well," said he, "let us wait."

While talking, they had reached the door. They shook hands; and the chief surgeon, whose mind was full of dark presentiments, then slowly walked back towards the hospital. A great surprise awaited him there. Daniel, whom he had left in a desperate condition—at death's door, so to say—Daniel was sleeping, calmly and soundly. His pale face had regained its usual expression, and his breathing was free and regular. "It's almost incredible," muttered the old surgeon, whose experience was quite at fault. "Or am I an ass, and our science only a bubble?" And turning to Lefloch, who was standing by, he asked, "How long has your master been sleeping like that?"

"For an hour, commandant."

"How did he fall asleep?"

"Quite naturally, commandant. After you left, the lieutenant was rather wild for some little time, but at last he quieted down, and asked for something to drink. I gave him a cup of *tisane*,—he drank it, and then asked me to help him turn over towards the wall. I did so, and I saw him rest his head on his hand, as if he were thinking. But about a quarter of an hour later, all of a sudden, I fancied I heard him gasp. I came up softly on tiptoe, and looked at him. But he wasn't gasping, he was crying like a baby; and what I had heard were sobs. Ah, commandant! I know him, you see; and I know he must have suffered something terrible for a man like him to cry like that. By God! if I only knew where to find the rascals who've caused him all this worry, I'd precious soon do for them—with your leave, commandant." The worthy tar spoke with genuine emotion, and, as he clenched his fists, something bright, which looked prodigiously like a tear, started from his eyes and trickled down his cheeks. "Well," he continued, in a hoarse voice, "I guessed at once why the lieutenant asked me to turn him towards the wall, and I went back to my seat without his hearing me. A moment afterwards, he began talking aloud. But he was right in his senses now, I can tell you."

"What did he say?"

"Ah! he kept on saying, 'Henriette, Henriette!' Still that sweetheart of his, whom he was always calling for when he had the fever. And then he said, 'I've killed her, I'm the cause of her death. What a fool, what an idiot I was! He has sworn to kill us both, the scoundrel! He swore it no doubt the very day when, like a fool, I confided Henriette and all my fortune to him.'"

"Did he say that?"

"The very words, commandant, but better, a great deal better."

The surgeon seemed amazed. "The magistrate was not mistaken," he muttered. "He suspected there was something else; and here it is."

"You say, commandant?" asked the sailor.

"Nothing of interest to you, my man. Go on, please."

"Well, after that—but there's nothing more to tell, except that I didn't hear anything more. The lieutenant remained in the same position till I lighted the lamp; when he ordered me to turn him round again, and lower the lamp-shade. When I'd done so, I heard him give two or three big sighs, and the next time I looked up, he was asleep like you see him now."

"And how did his eyes look when he fell asleep?"

"Quite calm and bright."

"Well," muttered the surgeon to himself, "he'll pull through, I am sure now. I said there couldn't be another miracle; and yet here we have one." And turning to Lefloch, he added, "If your officer wakes up during the night, you must send for me at once."

The seaman promised to obey the order, but Daniel did not wake up; and he had but just opened his eyes on the following morning, at about eight o'clock, when the chief surgeon entered the room. Glancing at his patient, he exclaimed, "Ah, well, I'm glad to see that our imprudence yesterday will have no bad effects!"

Daniel made no rejoinder; but, after the old surgeon had carefully examined him, he began, "Now, doctor, one question, a single one: In how many days shall I be able to get up and take ship?"

"Ah! my dear lieutenant, there is time enough to talk about that."

"No, doctor, no! I must have an answer. Fix a time, and I shall have the courage to wait; but uncertainty will kill me. Yes, I shall manage to wait, much as I may suffer."

The surgeon was evidently deeply touched. "I know what you suffer, my poor Champcey," he said; "I read that letter which came much nearer killing you than Crochard's bullet. Well, I think that in a month's time you will be able to sail."

"A month!" ejaculated Daniel, as if he had said a century. And after a pause he added,—"That is not everything, doctor: I want to ask you for the other letters which I did not read yesterday."

"What? No, no. That would be too imprudent."

"No, doctor, don't trouble yourself. The blow has fallen. If I didn't lose my mind altogether yesterday, that shows my reason can stand the most terrible trial. God be thanked, I have all my energy now. I know I must live, if I want to save Henriette—or avenge her, if I arrive too late. That thought, you may be sure, will suffice to keep me alive."

The surgeon hesitated no longer, and the next moment Daniel opened Henriette's other letters. One of them, very long, was mainly a repetition of the first he had read. The other consisted only of a few lines:—"M. de Brévan has just left me. When he told me mockingly that I need not count upon your return, and cast an atrocious look at me, I easily understood his meaning. Daniel, that man wants your life; and he has hired a murderer! For my sake, if not for your own, I beseech you to be careful. Take care, be watchful; remember that you are the only friend and hope of your poor Henriette." It was now truly seen that Daniel had not presumed too much of his strength and courage. Not a muscle in his face moved as he read these lines; his eye remained straight and clear; and it was with a bitter touch of irony in his voice that he exclaimed,—"**Look**

at this, doctor. Here's the explanation of the strange ill-luck that has pursued me ever since I left France."

At a glance the doctor read Henriette's warning, which came, alas! too late. "M. Champcey," said he, "you ought to remember that M. de Brévan could not foresee that the murderer he hired would be caught."

This was an unexpected revelation for Daniel, who at once became all attention. "What? Has the man who fired at me been arrested?"

Lefloch, quite unable to restrain himself at this juncture, impetuously replied,—“I should say so, lieutenant, and by my hand, too, before his gun had cooled.”

The doctor did not wait for the questions which he read in his patient's eyes. "Yes, it's just as Lefloch says, lieutenant," he observed; "and if you have not been told anything about it before, it was because the slightest excitement might have proved fatal. Yesterday's experience has only proved that too clearly. Yes, the murderer's in jail."

"And his account's square," growled the sailor.

"Oh, I don't want him punished any more than the bullet which hit me," rejoined Daniel, shrugging his shoulders. "That wretched fellow is a mere tool. But you, doctor, you know who are the real criminals."

"And justice shall be done, I swear!" broke in the old surgeon, who looked upon his patient's cause with as much interest as if it were his own.

"Our lucky star has sent us an investigating magistrate who is no trifle; and who, if I am not much mistaken, would like very much to leave Saigon with a loud flourish of trumpets." He remained silent for a moment, watching his patient out of the corner of his eye, and then suddenly exclaimed,—“Now I think of it, why couldn't you see the magistrate? He is all anxiety to question you. Consider, lieutenant, do you feel strong enough to see him?”

"Let him come by all means," cried Daniel, "let him come! Pray, doctor, go for him at once!"

"I will do my best, my dear Champcey. I will go immediately, and leave you to finish your correspondence."

He left the room with these words; and Daniel turned to the other letters, which were still lying on his bed. There were seven of them,—four from the Countess Sarah, and three from Maxime. But what could they tell him now? What did he care for the falsehoods and slander they contained? However, he thought it as well just to glance at them. Faithful to her system, Sarah wrote volumes; and from line to line, in some way or other, her real or feigned love for Daniel broke forth more freely than ever. Had all her usual prudence forsaken her, or did she feel quite sure that her letters would never reach M. de Ville-Handry? At all events, it seemed as if she were animated with an intense, irresistible passion, which, in defiance of all attempts at control, was now breaking forth, like a long smouldering fire. She said but little respecting Henriette, and yet enough to terrify Daniel, if he had not known the truth. Both she and de Brévan mentioned that Mlle. de Ville-Handry had left her father's house, and insinuated that she had eloped with some unknown lover, and was leading a life of ignominy. M. de Brévan declared that his heart bled at having to impart such grievous tidings, but friendship required that he should speak the truth. These impudent lies fairly enraged Daniel, and his meditations were painful in the extreme. However, the old surgeon soon returned with the magistrate, thus putting an end to his reverie. For more than an hour Daniel had to answer an avalanche of questions. But the investigation had been

carried on with such rare sagacity, that he could only furnish the prosecution with a single new fact,—the surrender of his entire fortune into M. de Brévan's hands. Somewhat ashamed of his imprudence in this respect, he tried to excuse himself; and, when he had concluded his explanations, the magistrate observed, "Now, one more question: would you recognize the man who attempted to drown you in the Dong-Nai?"

"No, sir."

"Ah! that's a pity. That man was Crochard, I'm sure; but he will deny it; and the prosecution will have nothing but probabilities to oppose to his denial, unless I can find the place where he changed his clothes."

"Excuse me, there is yet another way of ascertaining his identity, for the scoundrel's voice is so deeply printed on my mind, that even at this moment, while I am speaking to you, I think I can hear it; I should certainly recognize it among a thousand."

For a moment the magistrate hesitated, but at length making up his mind, he exclaimed, "Well, it's worth trying." And handing his clerk, who had been a silent witness of this scene, an order to have the prisoner brought to the hospital, he said, "Take this to the jail, and make haste."

A month had now elapsed since Crochard's arrest; and imprisonment, far from discouraging him, had raised his spirits. At first his examination had frightened him; but, as the days went by, he recovered all his usual bounce:—"They are evidently searching for evidence," he thought; "but, as they can find none, they will have to let me go."

He looked, therefore, as insolent as ever as he entered Daniel's room, exclaiming in an arrogant tone: "Well? I ask for justice: I am tired of jail. If I am guilty, send me to the guillotine: if I am innocent—" But Daniel did not let him finish. "That's the man!" he exclaimed: "I am ready to swear to it, that's the man!"

Great as was Crochard's impudence, he was fairly astonished, and darted his rapid, restless eyes in turn at the chief surgeon, the magistrate, and Lefloch, who stood at the foot of his officer's bed. The prisoner had too much experience of legal matters not to realise now that he had given way to absurd illusions, and that his position was far more dangerous than he had imagined. But what was the exact meaning of this scene? what had the prosecution found out? and what did they positively know? The effort he made to guess all this imparted to his features an expression of atrocious anxiety. "Did you hear that, Crochard?" asked the magistrate.

By a great effort the prisoner had recovered his self-control; and he now replied,—"I am not deaf. I hear perfectly well; only I don't understand."

"On the contrary," retorted the magistrate, "you understand only too well. Lieut. Champcey says you are the man who tried to drown him in the Dong-Nai. He recognizes you."

"That's impossible!" exclaimed the prisoner. "That's impossible; for —" But the rest of the phrase remained in his throat. A sudden reflection had shown him the trap prepared for him,—a trap familiar to examining magistrates, and terrible in its very simplicity. But for that reflection, Crochard would have gone on saying, "That's impossible: for the night was too dark to distinguish a man's features." And those words would have been equivalent to a confession; and he would have had nothing to answer the magistrate, if the latter had rejoined: "How do you know that it was so dark on the banks of the Dong-Nai? It seems you were there; eh?" Quite pallid with fright, the prisoner therefore simply said,—"The officer must be mistaken."

"I think not," replied the magistrate; and turning to Daniel, he asked him,—"Do you persist in your declaration, lieutenant?"

"More than ever, sir; I am positive I recognize the man's voice. When he offered me his boat, he spoke a strange kind of jargon, intermingled with English and Spanish words; but he did not think of changing his intonation and Parisian accent."

Affecting an assurance which he was far from really feeling, Crochard carelessly shrugged his shoulders, and exclaimed, "Do I speak English? Do I speak Spanish?"

"No, very likely not; but like all Frenchmen who live in this colony, and like all the marines, you no doubt know a certain number of words of both of these languages."

To the great surprise of the doctor and Daniel, the prisoner did not deny it; it seemed as if he felt he was on dangerous ground. "Never mind!" he exclaimed in the most arrogant manner. "But I must say it's hard to accuse an honest man of a crime, simply because his voice resembles the voice of a rascal."

"Do you pretend you are an honest man?" asked the magistrate.

"What! I pretend? Send for my employers."

"That isn't necessary. I know your antecedents, from the first petty theft that procured you four months' imprisonment, down to the burglary which sent you to the penitentiary for ten years, when you were in the army."

Crochard looked absolutely stupefied, but he was not the man to give up a game in which his head was at stake without fighting for it. "Well, there you are mistaken," he coolly said. "I was condemned to ten years, that's true, when I was a soldier; but it was for having struck an officer who had punished me unjustly."

"You lie. A man who was in your regiment, and who is now in garrison here in Saigon, will prove it."

For the first time the prisoner really seemed disturbed. He perceived his past, which until now he had thought unknown or forgotten, suddenly rising up in witness against him, and he knew well enough what weight such antecedents as his would have in the scales of justice. So he changed his tactics; and, assuming an air of abject humility, replied, "Well, a man may have committed a fault and still be incapable of murder."

"That's not your case."

"Oh! how can you say such a thing? Why, I wouldn't as much as harm a fly. Unlucky gun! Must I needs have such a mishap?"

The magistrate had for some time been looking at the prisoner with an air of profound disgust? "Look here, my man!" said he. "Spare us these useless denials. Justice knows everything it wants to know. That shot was the third attempt you made to murder a man."

Crochard drew back and turned livid. But he had still strength enough to reply, in a half-strangled voice,— "That's false!"

However, the magistrate had too much evidence to prolong the examination on that point, so he simply said—"Well, who then dropped a heavy pulley on M. Champcey's head during the voyage? Come, don't deny it. The emigrant who was near you, and saw you, and who promised he would not report you at the time, has since given evidence. Do you want to see him?" Once more Crochard opened his lips to protest his innocence; but he could not articulate a sound. He was literally crushed, annihilated; he quaked in every limb; and his teeth rattled in his mouth. He looked like a man at the foot of the guillotine; and may be that, feeling

he was lost, he had a vision of the fatal instrument. "Believe me, continued the magistrate, "don't insist: you had better tell the truth."

For another minute yet the scoundrel hesitated. Then, perceiving no other hope but in the mercy of his judge, he fell on his knees, and stammered, "I am a wretched man."

An exclamation of astonishment simultaneously escaped the doctor, Daniel, and Ledoch. But the man of law was not surprised. He knew in advance that the first victory would be easily won, and that the real difficulty would be to induce the prisoner to confess the name of the person who had hired him. So, without giving him time to recover, he asked, "Now, what reasons had you for persecuting M. Champcey in this way?"

The prisoner rose again; and making an effort, he slowly said, "I hated him. During the voyage he once threatened to have me put in irons."

"That's false!" said Daniel.

"Do you hear?" asked the lawyer. "So you won't tell us the truth? Well, I will tell it for you. You were hired to kill Lieut. Champcey, and you wanted to earn your money. You received a certain sum in advance; and you were to receive a larger sum after his death."

"I swear—"

"Don't swear! The sum in your possession, and which you can't account for, is positive proof of what I say."

"Alas! I possess nothing. You may inquire, and search."

The moment had now come for the magistrate to strike a decisive blow, and ascertain the value of his system of induction. Instead of answering the prisoner, he therefore turned to the colonial gendarmes who were present, and said to them,—"Take the prisoner into the next room. Strip him, and examine all his clothes carefully: see if there is nothing hid in the lining."

The gendarmes were already advancing to seize the prisoner, when he sprang aside, and savagely exclaimed, "No need for that! I have three one thousand-franc-notes sewn up in the lining of my trousers."

This time the pride of success quite got the better of the magistrate's hitherto imperturbable coldness. He uttered a low cry of satisfaction, and could not refrain from glancing triumphantly at Daniel and the surgeon, as much as to say, "Well? What did I tell you?" But this lasted for a second only: the next instant his features resumed their wonted expression of frigidity; and, turning to the prisoner, he said in a tone of command,—"Hand me those notes!"

Crochard did not stir; but his livid countenance betrayed his sufferings. At this moment, he was certainly not acting a part. What! must he give up those three thousand francs—the price of his foul, execrable crime—the sum for which he had risked his life and soul! Gathering up his strength, he cast a furious look round the room, asking himself, perhaps, if in lieu of escaping he might not at least vent his wrath on some one present. "The notes!" repeated the magistrate. "Must I order force to be used?"

Convinced of the futility of resistance, and of the folly of attempting to escape, Crochard hung his head. "But I can't undo the seams of my trousers with my nails," he said. "Give me a knife or a pair of scissors."

They were careful not to do so. But, at a sign from the magistrate, one of the gendarmes approached, and, drawing a penknife from his pocket, ripped up the seam at the place the prisoner pointed out. He literally writhed with agony when a tiny paper parcel was drawn forth; for, as is frequently observed among criminals, he was far more concerned about his money than about his life, which was in such imminent danger. "That's

my money !” he shrieked. “No one has a right to take it from me. It is infamous to ill-use and rob a man who has been unfortunate.”

The magistrate, who was no doubt quite accustomed to such scenes, did not even listen to Crochard, but quietly opened the packet. It consisted of three notes of a thousand francs each, wrapped up in a very greasy sheet of letter-paper, worn through about the folds. There was nothing peculiar about the bank notes, but faint traces of writing could be discerned on the letter-paper, and the words, “Rue del’Université,” at least, were distinctly legible. “What is this paper, Crochard ?” asked the magistrate.

“I don’t know. I suppose I picked it up somewhere.”

“What? Are you going to lie again? What’s the use of your doing so? This is evidently the address of some one who lives in Paris, in the Rue de l’Université.”

“Ah, sir !” exclaimed Daniel, turning in his bed, “I used to live there.”

A faint blush suffused the magistrate’s face—his usual sign of self-satisfaction; and as if answering his own thoughts he muttered, “Everything is becoming clear.” And yet, to his listeners’ great surprise, he abandoned this point; and, returning to the prisoner, asked him,—“So you acknowledge having received money to murder Lieut. Champcey?”

“I never said so.”

“No; but the three thousand francs concealed on your person prove that very clearly. From whom did you receive this money?”

“From nobody. They are my savings.”

The magistrate shrugged his shoulders; and looking sternly at Crochard, remarked—“I previously compelled you to make a certain confession, and I mean to do so again and again. You will gain nothing, believe me, by struggling against justice; and you can’t save the wretches who tempted you to commit this crime. There is only one course open to you, if you wish for mercy; and that is frankness. Don’t forget that !”

The murderer was, perhaps, better able to appreciate the importance of such advice than any of the others who were present. Still he remained silent for a moment, trembling nervously, as if some terrible struggle were going on in his mind. “I don’t denounce people,” he was heard to mutter. “A bargain’s a bargain. I’m not a tell-tale.” But then, all of a sudden, making up his mind, and showing himself just the man the magistrate had expected to find, he exclaimed with a cynical laugh,—“Upon my word, so much the worse for them ! Since I’m caught, why shouldn’t they be caught as well? Besides, who would have pocketed the big prize if I had succeeded? Not I, that’s certain; and yet it was I who risked most. Well, then, the man who hired me to ‘do the lieutenant’s business’ is called Justin Chevassat.”

Daniel and the surgeon exchanged looks of utter disappointment. This was not the name they had been waiting for with such anxiety. “You don’t deceive me, Crochard?” asked the magistrate, who alone had been able to conceal his feelings.

“You may take my head if I lie !”

Did he tell the truth? The magistrate thought he did; for, turning to Daniel, he asked,—“Do you know anybody named Chevassat?”

“No. It’s the first time in my life I hear the name.”

“Perhaps Chevassat was only an agent,” suggested the surgeon.

“Yes, that may be,” replied the magistrate; “although, in such matters, people generally do their own work.” And continuing his examination, he asked the prisoner,—“Who is this Justin Chevassat?”

"One of my friends."

"A friend richer than yourself, I should think?"

"As to that—why, yes; for he has always plenty of money in his pocket, dresses in the latest fashion, and drives his own carriage."

"What is his profession?"

"Oh, I can't tell you that, for I never asked him, and he never told me. Once I said to him, 'Do you know you look like a very lucky fellow!' But he replied, 'Oh, not so lucky as you think;' and that was all."

"Where does he live?"

"In Paris, 39 Rue Louis-le-Grand."

"Do you write to him there! For I daresay you have written to him since you have been at Saigon."

"I send my letters to M. X. O. X. 88, Poste Restante, Paris."

It was now evident that, far from endeavouring to save his accomplices, Crochard, surnamed Bagnolet, would do all he could to aid justice in discovering them. He began to show the system he intended to adopt,—to throw all the responsibility and the odium of his crime on the man who hired him, and figure himself as a poor devil, quite destitute when tempted, and dazzled by such magnificent promises, that he had not the strength to resist. "Where and how did you make Chevassat's acquaintance?"

"I made his acquaintance in prison."

"Ah! that's becoming interesting. And do you know what crime he had been sentenced for?"

"For forgery, I believe, and theft as well."

"And what was his calling before he was condemned?"

"He was employed by a banker, I think, or else as cashier by some large firm. At all events, he had money to handle; and it stuck to his fingers."

"You are so well informed with regard to this man's antecedents, that I'm surprised you know nothing of his present means of existence."

"He has plenty of money: that's all I know."

"Had you lost sight of him?"

"Why, yes. Chevassat was set free long before I was. I believe he was pardoned; and I hadn't met him for more than fifteen years."

"How did you find him again, then?"

"Oh! by the merest chance, and a very bad chance it was for me; since, but for him, I shouldn't be here."

XXVI.

If a stranger had suddenly entered Daniel's room at that moment, he would never have imagined, from Crochard's attitude, that this scoundrel was charged with a capital crime, and was standing before a magistrate, and in presence of the very man whom he had tried to assassinate three times in succession. Quite at home as regards the law, so far as it is studied in convict prisons, he had speedily realised that his situation was by no means so desperate as he had imagined in his first moment of fright; for if the jury rendered a verdict of guilty, entailing sentence of death, it would be against the instigator of the crime, while he, himself, would probably get off with a few years' penal servitude. So he accepted his position with that almost bestial indifference which characterizes people who are ready for everything and anything. He had recovered from the stupefaction he had experienced on learning that his antecedents and previous crimes were known to the

prosecution, and from the rage the loss of his bank-notes had caused him. And now, forgetful of his position as a murderer, he sought to play his part as a street and prison orator, accustomed to make himself heard, and extremely proud of his eloquence. He assumed a studied position, and remained for a few moments in thought, as if preparing himself for his speech. "It was a Friday," he at last began, "an unlucky day,—a week or so before 'The Conquest' sailed. It might have been two o'clock. I had eaten nothing; I had not a sou in my pockets; and I was loafing along the boulevards, thinking how I might procure some money. I had crossed several streets, when a carriage stopped close to me; and I saw a very fine gentleman step out with a cigar in his mouth, a gold chain across his waistcoat, and a flower in his buttonhole. He entered a glove shop. At once I said to myself, 'Curious! I fancy I've seen that head somewhere before?' Thereupon, I stationed myself near the shop, a little on one side, so as to be able to watch the fellow without being noticed myself. He was laughing and talking, and showing his white teeth, while a pretty girl tried him on a pair of gloves. The more I looked at him, the more I thought, 'Bagnolet, although that sweet soul don't look as if he were a member of your society, you know him.' However, as I couldn't name him, I was going away, when suddenly my memory came back to me. '*Crétonnerre*,' I said, 'it's an old comrade. I shall get some dinner after all.' Of course, I wasn't positively sure—for fifteen years make a difference in a man, especially when he doesn't particularly care to be recognized. But I had a little plan of my own to ascertain the truth. I waited for my man; and just as he was crossing the pavement to get into his carriage, I stepped up, and called, 'Eh, Chevassat!' The scamp! Although I didn't speak very loud, he jumped as if he'd heard a cannon suddenly go off. And white he was,—as white as his collar. However, he wasn't without his compass. He puts up his eyeglass, and looks at me up and down; and then asks in his finest manner, 'What is it, my good fellow? Do you want to speak to me?' Thereupon, quite sure of my business, I answered him, 'Yes, I should like a word or two with you, Justin Chevassat. Don't you recollect me? Evariste Crochard, surnamed Bagnolet; eh? Do you recollect now!' However, he continued to hold his head high, and looked at me. At last he says, 'If you don't clear out, I'll call a sergent-de-ville.' Well, the mustard got into my nose; and so as to annoy him, and collect a crowd, I began to say, 'What, what! The police? Just call them, please do! They will take us before a magistrate, no doubt, but I don't fancy they'll hang me, even if I am mistaken; and if I'm not, well then, they'll laugh prodigiously. What have I to risk? Nothing at all; for I haven't got anything worth losing.' While I was talking, I looked at him like a fellow who's got nothing in his stomach, but means to put something into it before long, and he—he looked at me quite as hard, and wished, perhaps, that his eyes were pistols, which they weren't. At last, however, when he saw I was determined, he softened down. 'Don't make a noise,' he whispered. The fact is, he was getting frightened of all the idlers who stopped to look at us,—and so breaking out into a merry laugh, just so as to deceive the others, he whispers to me again as fast as he can,—'Dressed like you are, I can't ask you to get into my carriage, that would only compromise us both for no good whatever; but I'll send my coachman away and walk home. Just you follow me a little way off, and when we get into a quiet street, we'll take a cab and talk.' As I felt sure of catching him again if he tried to escape, I gave him a wink, and said, 'All right, I understand.'

At this point the magistrate interrupted the prisoner, and bade him take a moment's rest. It was of importance that Crochard's evidence should be taken down in writing, word for word; and the clerk, fast as he wrote, had not been quite able to keep pace with the narrative. However, as soon as the prisoner's last phrases had been consigned to paper, the magistrate told him to go on again, but not to speak quite so fast. Crochard received the recommendation with a smile, for it gave him time to select his words, and thus flattered his vanity. "Well," said he, "Chevassat gave an order to his coachman, who whipped up his horse and drove away; and then he promenaded down the boulevard, flourishing his cane and puffing his cigar, just as if he hadn't the bellyache at the thought that dear old Bagnolet was following on his heels. I must say he had lots of friends, very genteel ones too, who wished him good evening as he passed along, while some even stopped him, shook hands with him, and offered to treat him; but he promptly left them, saying, 'Pray excuse me, I am in a hurry!' And to be sure so he was, for wasn't I behind him, listening to everything he and his friends said, and laughing in my sleeve?"

Whatever advantage there may be in not interrupting a great talker, who warms up as he proceeds, and, consequently, forgets many precautions, the magistrate became impatient. "Spare us your impressions," said he.

This was not what Crochard expected, and he looked extremely hurt as he resumed: "Well, my fine fellow went down the boulevard as far as the new opera-house, turned to the right, crossed the open square, and took the first street on the left. Here a cab passes, he hails it, and orders the driver to take us to Vincennes. We jump in; and his first care is to let down the blinds. Then he looks at me with a smile, holds out his hand, and says, 'Well, old man! how are you?' At first, when I saw myself so well received, I was quite surprised, but on reflection I thought it wasn't natural for him to be so soft. 'He's getting some trick ready,' said I to myself. 'Keep your eyes open, Bagnolet.' However, I answered him aloud, 'Then you are not angry that I spoke to you; eh?' He laughs, and answers, 'No.' 'But you didn't look quite pleased,' says I, 'and I fancied you wanted to get rid of me.' 'You're mistaken,' said he. 'But look here, I mean to talk to you frankly. For a moment I was surprised; but I wasn't annoyed. I have long foreseen that something of the kind would happen: and I know that every time I go out I run the risk of meeting an old comrade. You are not the first one who has recognized me, but I am prepared to save myself all annoyance. If I wanted to get rid of you, this very evening you would have lost all traces of me, thanks to a little dodge I have invented; and besides, as you are in Paris without leave, you would be in jail again within four-and-twenty hours.' He told me all this so calmly, that I felt it was so, and that the scamp had some special trick of his own. 'So,' said I, 'you rather like meeting an old friend; eh?' He looked me straight in the face and replied, 'Yes; and the proof of it is, that if you were not here, sitting at my side, and if I had known where to find you, I should have gone in search of you. I have something for you to do.'"

From this point forward Bagnolet had every reason to be satisfied with his audience. Although the magistrate retained his customary impassive attitude, Daniel and the old surgeon listened with breathless attention. They realised that the prisoner was reaching the really important part of his confession, and eagerly waited for his revelations. As for Lefloch, he stood by, listening with open mouth, his ingenuous features betraying the various

emotions he experienced, as the prisoner—who but for him would probably have escaped justice—proceeded with his singular narrative. “O! course,” continued Crochard, “when Chevassat talked of something to do, I opened my ears. ‘Why,’ said I, ‘I thought you had retired from business.’ And I really thought he had. ‘You are mistaken,’ he replied. ‘Since I left the place you know, I have been living pretty nicely. But I have not put anything by; and if an accident I have reason to fear should happen to me, I should find myself without a son.’ He wouldn’t tell me anything more about himself although I tried to question him, and I then had to tell him what I had been doing since my release. That didn’t take very long. I just told him that nothing I had tried had succeeded; that I had lost my last situation as waiter in a drinking den; and that for a month now I had been loafing about the streets without a sou, a change of linen, or a lodging, and no bed but the quarries. ‘If that’s the case,’ said he, ‘you shall see what a comrade is.’ The cab had been rolling along while we were talking, and we had now reached the suburbs. Chevassat raised the window-blind, looked out, and seeing a clothing store, told the driver to stop. Then he turns to me and says, ‘Come, old man, we’ll begin by making you look decent.’ So we got out, and upon my word he buys me a shirt, a suit of clothes, a pair of boots, and a chimney-pot hat! There was a watchmaker a little farther down the street, and he positively makes me a present of a gold watch—the one that was taken from me when you put me in jail here. Well, after spending five hundred francs or so, he gives me eighty more to play the gentleman with. I did thank him, and no mistake, when we got into the cab again. But ah! I shouldn’t have been so delighted if I’d known the price he meant me to pay for all this; for in the first place—”

“Oh, go on!” interrupted the magistrate.

Not without some disappointment, Crochard had to acknowledge to himself that purely personal particulars had seemingly no interest for his listeners, so with a spiteful look he resumed in a faster tone: “All these purchases occupied some time; so that it was six o’clock, and almost dark, when we reached Vincennes. Chevassat stops the cab, pays the driver, and, taking me by the arm, says, ‘You must be hungry, old fellow, let’s go and get some dinner.’ First of all, however, we had a glass of absinthe together, and then Chevassat goes straight to the best restaurant, asks for a private room, and orders dinner. Ah, what a dinner! Merely to hear it ordered made my mouth water. We sat down, and as I didn’t fear anything, I wouldn’t have changed places with the Pope. And I talked, and ate, and drank: I drank, perhaps, most; for I had not had anything to drink for a long time; and besides, I was rather excited. Chevassat unbuttoned, and told lots of funny stories which set me laughing heartily. But when the coffee had been served, with all kinds of liqueurs and fifty penny cigars, he suddenly got up, went to the door, and carefully bolted it. Then he comes back, and sits down right in front of me, with his elbows on the table. ‘Now, old man,’ he says, ‘we have had enough laughing and talking. I’m a good fellow, you know; but you yourself will understand that I’m not treating you merely for the sake of your pretty face. I want a good stout fellow; and I thought you might be the man.’ Upon my word, he told me this in such a peculiar way, that I felt nervous, and began to be afraid of him. Still I hid my fears, and said, ‘Well, let us see. What’s the row?’ Then he replies, ‘Why, as I told you before, I have not laid by a sou. But, if anything happened to a certain person I know, I

should be rich ; and you might be rich as well, if you were willing to give him a little push with the elbow, so as to send him off rather sooner.”

Earnestly bent upon acting the part necessary for his system of defence, the prisoner assumed a more and more hypocritical expression of repentance ; but the magistrate, although no doubt thoroughly disgusted with this absurd comedy, did not move a muscle of his face, nor make the slightest gesture. Unquestionably he was anxious not to break the thread of this important evidence. “ Ah, sir ! ” exclaimed Crochard, with his hand on his heart, “ when I heard Chevassat talk like that, I felt my heart turn up, and I said to him, ‘ Good Lord, what do you mean : you want me to commit a murder ? Never ! I’d rather die first ! ’ But he only laughed in my face, and answered, ‘ Don’t be a fool : who talks of murder ? I spoke of an accident. Besides, you would not risk anything. The thing would happen to him abroad. ’ Still I continued to refuse, and even spoke of going away ; but Chevassat produced a big knife, and told me that now I had his secret I was bound to go on. If not ! and he gave me such a terrible look, that, upon my word, I was fairly frightened, and sat down again. Then all at once he became quite as jolly as he had been before ; and whilst he kept pouring brandy into my glass, he explained to me that I should be a fool to hesitate, for I should never find such a chance again of making my fortune. I might easily succeed, he said ; and then I should have an income of my own, keep a carriage like he did, wear quite as fine clothes, and dine every day just as we had been dining that evening. I became more and more excited. The gold he kept on speaking of fairly dazzled my mind, and besides, all the liquor I had been drinking got into my head. To urge me on he drew out his big knife again, and flourished it before my face ; and at last I didn’t know what I was saying or doing. I got up ; and, striking the table with my fist, I cried out, ‘ I’m your man ! ’ ”

Although this scene, as Crochard described it, had probably never taken place, save in his own lively imagination, Daniel could not help trembling under his coverlet at the thought of these two scoundrels planning his death, with glass in hand, and their elbows resting on the wine-stained tablecloth. Leffoch, on his side, was grasping the head of the bedstead so tightly that the wood positively cracked. Perhaps he fancied he was throttling the man who talked so coolly of murdering his lieutenant. As for the magistrate and the old surgeon, they were both intently watching the prisoner, who, having drawn a handkerchief from his pocket, was diligently rubbing his eyes, as if he hoped to extract a few tears from them. “ Come, come ! ” said the magistrate, “ Don’t let us have a scene.”

Crochard heaved a deep sigh, and then continued in a tearful tone, “ I really can’t say what happened after that. I was dead drunk, and don’t recollect another point ; but from what Chevassat told me afterwards, I had to be carried into a cab, and he took me to a hotel in the neighbourhood, where he hired a room for me. When I woke up the next morning, a little before noon, my head was as heavy as lead ; and in trying to recall what had happened at the restaurant, I fancied it was merely the bad wine that had given me the nightmare. But, unfortunately, it was no dream ; and I soon found that out, when a waiter came up with a letter for me. Chevassat wrote asking me to come to his house and have breakfast, for the purpose of talking business with him. Well, I went to the address he gave, and asked the *conciierge* where M. Justin Chevassat lived in the house ; and he directed me to the second floor, on the right hand. I went

up, rang the bell ; a servant opened the door, and I found Chevassat in a dressing-gown, lying on a sofa in an elegant room. On the way I had made up my mind to tell him positively that he need not count upon me ; for the whole affair horrified me, and I retracted all I had said. But, as soon as I began, he became perfectly furious, called me a coward and a traitor, and told me that I had no alternative between making my fortune or having his long knife stuck between my shoulders. At the same time he spread a great heap of gold out before me. Then, yes—then I became weak. I felt I was caught. Chevassat frightened me, and the gold intoxicated me. I pledged my word ; and the bargain was made.”

As he said this, Crochard, surnamed Bagnolet, heaved a deep sigh of relief, like a man whose heart has been lightened of a grievous burden. He, indeed, felt greatly relieved. It was a hard task to have to confess everything on the spot, without a moment's respite to combine a plan of apology, and the scoundrel fancied he had managed cleverly enough to prepare a number of extenuating circumstances for the day of trial. However, the magistrate promptly intervened, “Wait a bit,” said he. “What were the conditions that you and Chevassat agreed upon?”

“Oh ! very simple, sir. I, for my part, said yes to everything he proposed. He magnetized me, I tell you ! So we agreed that he should pay me four thousand francs in advance, and six thousand certain afterwards, as well as a portion of the sum he might secure.”

“So you undertook to murder a man for ten thousand francs?”

“I thought—”

“Such a sum is very far from those fabulous amounts which you said had blinded and carried you away.”

“Excuse me ! there was a share in the great fortune as well.”

“Ah ! but you knew very well that Chevassat would never have given you anything out of it.”

Crochard's hands twitched nervously. “Chevassat cheat me ! *crétonnerre !*” cried he. “But no ; he knows me ; he would never have dared—”

Catching the prisoner's eye, the magistrate quietly retorted, “Then why did you tell me that that man magnetized you, and frightened you out of your wits?” The scamp had been caught, and, instead of answering, hung his head, and tried to sob. “Repentance is all very well,” resumed the magistrate, who did not seem to be in the least degree touched ; “but just now it would be better for you to explain how your trip to Cochin China was arranged. Come, collect yourself, and give us the particulars.”

“Well, as to that,” replied the prisoner, “Chevassat explained everything to me at breakfast ; and the very same day he gave me the address you found on the paper in which my bank-notes were wrapped.”

“Why did he give you M. Champcey's address?”

“So that I might know him personally.”

“Well, go on.”

“At first, when I heard he was a lieutenant in the navy, I said I must give it up, for I knew that there's no trilling with naval officers. But Chevassat bullied me, so that at last I lost my head again, and promised everything he wished. ‘Besides,’ he said, ‘listen to my plan. The Ministry of Marine has advertised for mechanics to go to Saigon. There are still several vacancies : so you must go and offer yourself. The officials will accept you, and even pay your journey to Rochefort : and a boat will carry you out to the frigate “Conquest,” anchored in the roadstead. Do you know whom you'll find on board ? Why, our man, Lieut. Champcey. Well now, I tell

you that if any accident happens to him, either during the voyage or at Saigon, that accident will pass unnoticed, like a letter through the post.' Yes, that's what he told me, every word of it; and I think I can hear him now. And I—I was so completely bewildered, that I could find nothing to say in return. However, one thing reassured me; and I thought, 'Well, after all, with my antecedents, they won't accept me at the Ministry.' But when I mentioned the difficulty to Chevassat, he simply laughed. 'You are surely more of a fool than I thought,' he said. 'Are your condemnations written on your face? No, I should say. Well, as you will exhibit your papers in excellent order, you will be accepted.' I opened my eyes and said, 'What you say is all very pretty, but the mischief is that, as I haven't worked at my profession for more than fifteen years, I have no papers at all.' He shrugs his shoulders, and answers, 'You shall have your papers.' That point worries me; so I retort, 'If I have to steal somebody's papers, and change my name, I won't do it.' But the brigand had his plan. 'You shall keep your own name,' he said, touching me on the shoulder. 'You shall always be Crochard, surnamed Bagnolet; and you shall have your papers as an engraver on metal as perfect as anybody can have them.' And, to be sure, two days afterwards he gave me a set of papers, with signatures and seals, all in perfect order."

"The papers found in your room, eh?" asked the magistrate.

"Exactly."

"Where did Chevassat procure them?"

"Procure them? Why, he concocted them himself. He can do anything he chooses with his pen, the scamp! If he takes it into his head to imitate your own handwriting, you would fancy you had written it yourself."

Daniel and the old surgeon exchanged significant glances. This was a strong and very important point in connection with the forged letter sent to the Ministry of Marine, and considered to have emanated from Daniel himself. The magistrate was as much struck by this fact as they were; but his features remained unchanged; and clinging to his original plan in spite of all the incidents of the examination, he asked, "These papers caused no suspicion?"

"None whatever. I had only to show them, and the officials accepted me. Besides, Chevassat said he would enlist some people in my behalf; perhaps I had been specially recommended."

"And so you sailed?"

"Yes. At the Ministry they gave me my ticket and some money for travelling expenses; and, five days after my first meeting with Chevassat, I was on board 'The Conquest.' Lieut. Champcey was not there. Ah! I began to hope he would not join the expedition at all. Unfortunately, he arrived forty-eight hours afterwards, and we sailed at once."

"Now, Crochard," said the magistrate, "I cannot impress too strongly on your mind how important it is for your own interests that you should tell the truth. Remember, all your statements will be verified. Do you know whether Chevassat lives in Paris under an assumed name?"

"No, sir: I always heard him called Chevassat."

"What? By everybody?"

"Well, I mean by his *concierge* and servants."

The magistrate considered for a moment how he should frame his next question; and then, all of a sudden, he asked, "Suppose the—accident, as you call it, had succeeded. You would have taken ship; have arrived in France; and gone to Paris: now, how would you have found Chevassat to claim your six thousand francs?"

"Why, I should have gone to his house, where I breakfasted with him; and if he had left, the *concierge* would have told me where he was living now."

"Then you really think you saw him at his own rooms? Consider. If you left him only for a couple of hours, between your first meeting and your subsequent visit, he might easily have improvised new quarters for himself."

"Ah, I told the truth, sir. When dinner was over, I had lost my wits, and I did not get wide awake again till noon the next day. Chevassat had the whole night and next morning to do as he liked." Then, as a suspicion suddenly flashed through Crochard's mind, he exclaimed, "Ah, the brigand! Why did he urge me never to write to him otherwise than 'Poste Restante'?"

The magistrate had turned to his clerk. "Just go down," said he, "and see if any of the merchants in town have a Paris Directory."

The clerk sped off like an arrow, and promptly returned with the required volume. The magistrate then at once referred to the address in the Rue Louis-le-Grand, and found against "No. 39" the mention "*Langlois, Sumptuous Apartments for Families and Single Persons. Superior Attendance.*" "I was almost sure of it," he said to himself, and, handing Daniel the paper on which the words Rue de l'Université could be deciphered, he asked,— "Do you know that handwriting, M. Champcey?"

Too full of the lawyer's shrewd surmises to express any surprise, Daniel looked at the words, and coolly replied, "That is de Brévan's writing."

Crochard's pale face flushed crimson. He was furious at the idea of having been duped by his accomplice, by the man who had instigated his crime, for which he would probably never have received the promised reward. "Ah, the brigand!" he exclaimed. "And to think I was very near not denouncing him at all!" A faint smile crossed the magistrate's face. His object had been attained. He had foreseen this wrath on the prisoner's part; he had indeed carefully prepared it, trusting that it would bring him full light on the whole subject. "To cheat me, me!" continued Crochard with extraordinary vehemence,— "to cheat a friend, an old comrade! Ah, the rascal! But he shan't go to paradise if I can help it! Ah, you want to cut off my head, eh? Well take it and have done with it. I shall be satisfied, providing he has his cut off as well."

"But he hasn't even been arrested yet."

"Oh, its easy enough to catch him, sir. He must be anxious at not hearing from me; and I am sure he goes every day to the post-office to inquire if there are no letters yet for M. X. O. X. 88. I can write to him. Do you want me to do so? I can tell him that I have once more missed it, and that I have been caught even, but that the police have found out nothing, and have set me free again. I'm sure the scamp will keep quiet after that; and all the police will have to do will be to go and arrest him at his lodgings."

The magistrate had allowed the prisoner to give free vent to his rage, knowing by experience how intensely criminals hate an accomplice who betrays them. And he was in hopes that Crochard's rage might suggest some new idea, or furnish him with new facts. However, on perceiving that he was not likely to gain much, he said, "Justice cannot stoop to such expedients." And noticing how disappointed Crochard looked, he added, "You had better try and recollect all you can. Have you forgotten or concealed anything that might assist us in carrying out this investigation?"

"No: I think I have told you everything."

"You cannot furnish any additional evidence of Justin Chevassat's

complicity, of his efforts to tempt you to commit this crime, or of the forgery he committed in providing a false set of papers for you?"

"No! Ah, he is a clever fellow, and leaves no trace behind him that could convict him. And yet, if we could meet face to face, I'd undertake, just by looking at him, to get the truth out of him somehow."

"You will meet face to face, I promise you."

The prisoner seemed amazed. "Are you going to send for Chevassat?" he asked; and on learning that, on the contrary, he was to be sent home to be tried there, a flash of joy darted from his eyes. He knew the voyage would not be a pleasant one; but the prospect of being tried in France was to his mind as good as an escape from capital punishment. Besides, he delighted in advance in the idea of seeing Chevassat in court, seated by his side as a fellow-prisoner. "Ah," said he, "so you mean to send me home."

"Yes, on board the first State vessel that leaves Saigon."

The magistrate went to the table where the clerk was writing, and rapidly glanced over the long deposition to see if anything had been overlooked. At last he exclaimed, "Now give me as accurate a description of Justin Chevassat as you can."

Crochard passed his hand repeatedly over his forehead; and then with his eyes staring into space, and his neck distended as if he perceived a phantom, he replied: "Chevassat is a man of my age; but he does not look more than seven or eight and twenty. That is what made me hesitate at first when I met him on the boulevard. He is a handsome fellow, tall, well built, and wearing all his beard. He looks clever; he has soft eyes; and his face inspires confidence at once."

"Ah! that's Maxime all over," exclaimed Daniel; and turning to Lefloch, he added: "Since my illness, hasn't some of my luggage been brought here from on board ship?"

"Yes, lieutenant, all of it."

"Well, try and find a big red book with silver clasps. You have no doubt often seen me looking at it."

"Yes, lieutenant; and I know where it is." And opening one of the trunks, piled up in a corner of the room, he drew from it a photograph album, which, upon a sign from Daniel, he handed to the magistrate.

"Please ask the prisoner," said Daniel at the same time, "if, among the sixty or seventy portraits in that book, he can recognise any one of them?"

The album was handed to Crochard, who turned over leaf after leaf, till all of a sudden he cried out, "Here he is, Justin Chevassat! Oh! that's his face, I'm sure of it." From his bed Daniel could see the photograph, and he immediately rejoined, "That is Maxime's portrait."

After this decisive evidence, there could be no longer any doubt about Justin Chevassat and Maxime de Brévan being one and the same person. The investigation was complete, as far as it could be carried on in Saigon: the remaining evidence had to be collected in Paris. The magistrate therefore directed the clerk to read over Crochard's statement, and the prisoner listened to the perusal without raising a single objection. But when he had signed it, and the gendarmes were about to handcuff him, prior to leading him back to jail, he asked leave to make an addition. The magistrate assented, and Crochard at once began: "I do not want to excuse myself, nor to pretend I'm innocent, but, on the other hand, I don't like to seem worse than I really am." He had assumed a very decided position, and evidently aimed at imparting to his words an expression of coarse but perfect frankness. "It was not in my power to do what I had undertaken

to do. It never entered my head to kill the lieutenant treacherously. If I had been a brute, he would no longer be here. For I might have done his business most effectively a dozen times, but I didn't venture. I tried in vain to think of Chevassat's big promises : at the last moment, my heart always failed me. The thing was too much for me. And the proof of it is, that I missed him ten yards off. The only time when I tried it really in earnest was in the little boat, because then I ran some risk : it was like a duel, for my life was as much at stake as the lieutenant's. I can swim as well as anybody, to be sure ; but in a river like the Dong-Nai, at night-time, and with such a current, no swimmer can hold his own. The lieutenant got out of it ; but I was very nearly drowned. I could not get on land again until I had been carried down two miles or more ; and when I did get on shore, I sank in the mud up to my hips. Now, I humbly beg the lieutenant's pardon ; and you shall see if I am going to let Chevassat escape." Thereupon he held out his hands for the gyves with a theatrical gesture, and left the room.

XXVII.

IN the meantime, the long, trying scene had exhausted Daniel, and he lay panting on his bed. The surgeon and the lawyer withdrew, to let him have some rest. He certainly needed it ; but how could he sleep with the fearful idea of Henriette being at the mercy of Justin Chevassat, *alias* Maxime de Brévan, a forger, a former galley-slave, and the accomplice and friend of Crochard, surnamed Bagnolet ? To be sure he was pretty certain that Maxime de Brévan would not escape punishment. But what would be the use of vengeance now, when it was too late, when Henriette must have long since been forced to seek in suicide the only refuge from Brévan's persecution. He had done the only thing that could be done. On recovering his reason after his terrible sufferings, he had hastened to write to Henriette, begging her to take courage, and promising her that he would soon be near her. In this letter he had enclosed the sum of four thousand francs. It was on its way. But how long would it take to reach her ? Three or four months, perhaps even more. Would it reach her in time ? Might it not be intercepted, like the others ? All these anxieties tortured Daniel, and made his situation intolerable.

However, his convalescence pursued its usual course, and a fortnight after Crochard's confession, he could get up : he spent the afternoon in an arm-chair, and was even able to take a few steps in his room. The next week he was able to get down into the garden of the hospital, and to walk about, leaning on Lefloch's arm. And with his strength and health, hope, also, began to return ; when, all of a sudden, two letters from Henriette rekindled the fever. In one the poor girl told him how she had lived so far on the money obtained from the sale of the little jewellery she had taken with her, and expressed her intention of seeking employment of some sort in order to support herself. In the other, however, she wrote, "None of my efforts to procure work has so far succeeded. The future is getting darker and darker. I shall soon be without bread. Still I shall struggle on to the last extremity, were it only to defer our enemies' triumph. But, Daniel, if you wish to see your Henriette again, come back : oh, pray, come back !" This letter drove Daniel to despair. What could he look forward to now ? No doubt, to a final missive in which Henriette

would tell him, "It is all over—I am dying—Farewell!" The thought almost maddened him. So he sent for the chief surgeon, shewed him Henriette's despairing appeal, and declared that he must start for France.

"I am sure," thought the old surgeon when he had read the letter, "I am sure I should do the same if I were in this poor fellow's place. But would such an act of imprudence be of any use to him? No: for he could not reach the mouth of the Dong-Nai alive. So it is my duty to keep him here: and that can be done, as he is still unable to go out alone: and Lefloch will obey me, I am sure, when I tell him that his master's life depends upon his obedience." However, as he knew it would never do to meet so decided a determination as Daniel's by a flat refusal, he replied aloud, "Very well, then; let it be as you choose!" Only he came in again the same evening, and, with an air of disappointment, remarked, "It is all very well to talk of going, but there is one difficulty in the way of which we neither thought, and that is, there is no vessel going home."

"Really, doctor?"

"Ah! my dear friend," replied the old surgeon boldly, "do you think I could deceive you?"

Evidently Daniel thought him quite capable of doing so; but he took good care not to show his suspicions, resolving to make other inquiries as soon as an opportunity offered. It came the very next morning. Two friends of his called to see him. He sent Lefloch out of the room on some pretext or other, and then begged them to go down to the port, and engage a passage for him,—no, not for himself, but for his man, whom urgent business recalled to France. The two officers eagerly disappeared. They staid away three hours; and, when they came back, their answer was the same as the doctor's. They declared they had made inquiries on all sides; and were quite sure there was not a single vessel in Saigon ready to sail for home. Ten other persons whom Daniel asked to do the same thing brought him the same answer. And yet, that very week, two ships sailed—one for Havre and the other for Bordeaux. But the doorkeeper of the hospital and Lefloch were so well drilled, that no visitor reached Daniel without having thoroughly learned his lesson. So thus he was kept quiet for a fortnight; but, at the end of that time, he declared he felt quite well enough to look out for a ship himself; and that, if he could do no better, he should sail for Singapore, where he would certainly find a passage home. It would, of course, have been simple folly to try and detain a man who was so bent upon his purpose; and, as his first visit to the port would have revealed to him the true state of things, the old surgeon preferred to make a clean breast of it. When he learned that he had missed two ships, Daniel was at first naturally very much incensed. But the surgeon was prepared with his justification, and replied with an air of solemnity which he rarely assumed,—"I have only obeyed my conscience. If I had let you set sail in your condition, I should have virtually sent you to your grave, and have thus deprived Mlle. de Ville-Handry of her last and only chance of salvation."

"But if I get there too late," answered Daniel—too late by a week or a day—don't you think, doctor, that I shall curse your prudence? And who knows, now, when a ship will leave?"

"When? Why, in five days' time; and that ship is the 'Saint Louis,' a famous clipper, and so good a sailer that you will easily overtake the two big three-masters that have sailed before you."

Then offering his hand to Daniel, he added,—"Come, don't blame an old friend who has done what he thought his duty."

Daniel was too painfully affected to pay much attention to the old surgeon's conclusive and sensible reasons; he only realized that his friends had taken advantage of his condition to keep him in the dark. Still he also felt that it would have been black ingratitude and foolish obstinacy to harbour the slightest resentment, so taking the proffered hand, and pressing it warmly, he replied with genuine emotion,—"Whatever the future may have in store for me, doctor, I shall never forget that I owe my life to your skill and devotion."

"I have attended you as I would have attended anyone else," retorted the surgeon, as usual concealing his true feelings under an affected *brusquerie*, "that's my duty, and you need not trouble yourself about your gratitude. If any one owes me thanks, it's Mlle. de Ville-Handry; and I beg you will remind her of it when she is your wife. And now be good enough to dismiss all these dismal ideas, and remember that you have only five days longer to tremble with impatience in this abominable country."

He spoke as though those five days were nothing; but they seemed an eternity to Daniel. He had soon made all his preparations for departure, and obtained a furlough for Lefloch, who was to go with him, and at noon the same day he was asking himself with terror, how he should be able to employ all his remaining time. Fortunately, that very afternoon he was asked to go and see the magistrate at the court-house. Daniel found the shrewd investigator greatly changed. A mail which had just arrived had brought him the news of his appointment to a judgeship, which he had long anxiously desired, and which would enable him to return to France. He meant to sail in a frigate which was to leave towards the end of the month, and in which Crochard also was to be sent home. "He hoped," he said, "that his new appointment would enable him to sit in judgment on the case in which Daniel was interested, and that he should have Justin Chevassat, *alias* de Brévan, in the dock before him. It was in connection with the case that he had asked Daniel to call; for having learned from the chief surgeon that he would sail in a few days, he wished to entrust to him an important packet, which he must hand to the public prosecutor as soon as he reached Paris. "This," said he, "is an additional precaution we take to prevent Maxime de Brévan from escaping us."

It was five o'clock when Daniel left the court-house; and on the little square in front he found the old surgeon waiting to take him off to dinner, and a game of whist in the evening. So, when he undressed at night, he said to himself, "After all the day has not been so very long!" But then there were four more to come! Obeying an invincible attraction he betook himself every day to the port where the "Saint Louis" was taking its cargo on board, and spent hour after hour watching the Chinese and Annamite stevedores as they lowered bale after bale into the hold. It seemed to him that they were abominably slow and lazy, and he constantly betook himself with some complaint or other to the little *café* on the wharf, where the captain of the "Saint Louis" was generally to be found. "Your men will never finish, captain," he would say. "You will never be ready by Sunday."

"Don't be afraid, lieutenant," the captain invariably replied, with his strong Marseilles accent. "The 'Saint Louis,' I tell you, beats the Indian mail in punctuality." And indeed, on Saturday, when Champcey went as usual to the *café*, the captain exclaimed,—"Well, what did I tell you? We

are all ready. At five o'clock I shall get my mail at the post-office; and to-morrow morning we start. I was just going to send you word that you had better sleep on board."

That evening the officers of the "Conquest" gave Daniel a farewell dinner; and it was nearly midnight when, after having once more shaken hands with the old chief surgeon, he took possession of his state-room, one of the largest on board the "Saint Louis," and in which two berths had been fitted up, so that, in case of need, Lefloch might be at hand to attend his master. At last, towards four o'clock in the morning, Daniel was roused by a noise of clanking chains, accompanied by the singing of sailors. He hastened on deck. The anchors were being weighed, and an hour afterwards the "Saint Louis" sped down the Dong-Nai, impelled both by the wind and the rapid current. "Now," said Daniel to Lefloch, "I shall judge, by the time it takes us to get home, if fortune is on my side."

Yes, fate at last declared for him. Never had the most favourable winds hastened a ship so swiftly home before. The "Saint Louis" was a first-class sailer; and the captain, stimulated by the presence of a lieutenant of the fleet, exacted the utmost from his ship; so that on the seventeenth day after leaving Saigon, on a fine winter afternoon, Daniel could see the hills above Marseilles rising from the blue waters of the Mediterranean. He was reaching the end, both of his voyage and his anxiety. Yet two days more, and he would be in Paris, and his fate would be irrevocably sealed. But would they let him go on shore that evening? He trembled as he thought of all the formalities which have to be observed when a ship arrives in port. The quarantine authorities might raise difficulties, and cause a fresh delay. Standing by the captain's side, he was watching the masts, loaded with all the canvas they could carry, when a cry from the lookout man attracted his attention. The seaman reported that a small boat was making signals of distress, at two ship's lengths on the starboard side. The captain and Daniel exchanged glances of disappointment. The slightest delay at this moment deprived them of all hope of going on shore that night. And who could tell how long it would take them to rescue the men on board that boat? "Well, never mind!" said Daniel. "We have to do it."

"I wish they were in paradise!" swore the captain. Nevertheless, he had everything done to slacken speed, and then tacked so as to approach the little boat. It was a difficult and tedious manoeuvre; but at last, after half-an-hour's work, the seamen of the 'Saint Louis' managed to throw a rope into the skiff. It carried two men, who at once boarded the clipper. One of them was a young sailor, and the other an individual of fifty or thereabouts, attired very much like a country gentleman. He seemed ill at ease, and glanced round in all directions. However, whilst they were hoisting themselves up by the man-rope, the captain of the "Saint Louis" had had time to examine their boat, and to see that it was in good condition, and everything in it in perfect order. Crimson with wrath, he caught the young sailor by his collar; and, shaking him roughly, exclaimed with a formidable oath, "Are you making fun of me? What wicked joke have you been playing?"

Like the captain, the seamen of the "Saint Louis" had also perceived that nothing in the condition of the skiff warranted the signals of distress which had excited their sympathy; and they felt very indignant at what they considered a stupid mystification. They surrounded the sailor with a threatening air, while he struggled in the captain's hand, and cried in his Marseilles jargon,—“Let go! You're throttling me! It is not my fault.

It was the gentleman there, who hired my boat for a sail. I wouldn't make the signal; but—"

However, the poor fellow would probably have experienced some very rough treatment, if the "gentleman" he referred to had not hastened forward, exclaiming,—“Let that poor boy go! I am the only one to blame!”

The enraged captain pushed the speaker back, and, giving him a savage look, retorted, “Ah! so it was you who dared—”

“Yes, I did. But I had my reasons. This is surely the ‘Saint Louis,’ coming from Saigon?”

“Yes. What next?”

“You have on board Lieut. Champcey of the navy?”

Daniel, who had been a silent witness of the scene, now stepped forward, greatly puzzled. “I am Lieut. Champcey, sir,” he said. “What do you desire?”

But, instead of replying, the “gentleman” raised his hands to heaven in a perfect ecstasy of joy, and murmured: “We triumph at last!” Then turning to Daniel and the captain, he said,—“But come, gentlemen, come! I must explain my conduct; and we must be alone for what I have to tell you.” When he first appeared on deck, the queer old customer had seemed very pale, as if he had just had an attack of sea-sickness, but now he had apparently quite recovered, and although the vessel rolled considerably, he followed the captain and Daniel to the quarter-deck with a firm step. “Could I be here, if I hadn’t used a stratagem?” he asked as soon as they were alone. “Evidently not. And yet I had the most powerful motive in wishing to board the ‘Saint Louis’ before she entered port: so I didn’t hesitate.” Then drawing from his pocket a folded sheet of paper, he added, “Here is my apology, Lieut. Champcey: see if it is sufficient.”

Utterly amazed, the young officer took the paper and read, “I am saved, Daniel; and I owe my life to the man who will hand you this. I shall also owe him the joy of seeing you again. Confide in him as you would in your best and most devoted friend; and, I beseech you, do not hesitate to follow his advice literally.—HENRIETTE.” Daniel turned deadly pale, and tottered. This unexpected happiness overcame him. “Then—it is true—she is alive,” he stammered.

“She is at my sister’s house, safe from all danger.”

“And you, sir, you saved her?”

“I did.”

Prompt like thought, Daniel grasped the old man’s hands, and exclaimed, “Never, sir, never, whatever may happen, can I thank you enough. But remember, you can count upon Lieutenant Champcey under all circumstances, and on all occasions.”

The queer old fellow’s lips curved into a strange smile; and, shaking his head, he said, “Before long I shall remind you of your promise, lieutenant.”

Standing between the two men, the astonished captain of the “Saint Louis” looked alternately at both of them, listening without understanding, and imagining marvellous things. The only point he mastered was, that his presence was, to say the least, not useful. “Well,” said he to Daniel, “if this was done to oblige you, lieutenant, I suppose we can’t blame this gentleman for the ugly trick he played us.”

“Blame him? Oh, certainly not!”

“Then I’ll leave you. I believe I treated the sailor who brought him rather roughly; but I’ll order him a glass of brandy, which will set him right again.” With these words the captain discreetly withdrew.

"You may perhaps say, M. Champcey," said the hearer of Henriette's letter, "that it would have been much more simple to wait for you in port, and hand you my note of introduction there. But, in point of fact, it would have been most imprudent. Now, I heard of your coming home at the Ministry of Marine, and others may have heard of it as well. So as soon as the "Saint Louis" was signalled in Marseilles, a spy, no doubt, came down to the port, intending to follow and watch you, and report everything you may do."

"What does it matter?"

"Ah! don't say that, sir! If our enemies hear of our meeting, you see—if they only find out that we have conversed together—everything would be lost. They would realise the danger that threatens them, and escape."

Daniel could hardly trust his ears. "Our enemies?" he asked, emphasizing the word "our."

"Yes: I mean *our* enemies—Sarah Brandon, Countess de Ville-Handry, Maxime de Brévan, Thomas Elgin, and Mrs Brian. Do you know that for five years I have only lived in hopes of being able to punish them. Yes, for five years I have followed them with the perseverance of an Indian—patiently, incessantly, undermining each inch of ground beneath their steps. And they suspect nothing. I doubt whether they are aware of my existence. Besides, even if they knew I lived they would scarcely care, for they have pushed me so far down into the mud, that they cannot imagine I could ever rise again, even to their level. They triumph with impunity; they boast of their unpunished wickedness, and think they are strong and safe from all attacks, because they have the prestige and power of gold. And yet their hour is nigh. I, who have been compelled to hide, and subsist on my daily labour—I have attained my end. Everything is ready; and I have only to touch the proud fabric of their crimes for it to fall upon them, and crush them all beneath its ruins. Ah! if I could see them only suffer one-fourth of what they have made me suffer, I should die content." Henriette's messenger seemed to have grown a foot taller; hatred distorted his previously placid face; his voice trembled with rage; and his yellow eyes shone with feverish passion.

Daniel wondered what the people who had sworn to ruin himself and Henriette could have done to this queer-looking individual in the bright-flowered waistcoat and high-collared coat. "But who are you, sir?" he asked.

"Who am I?" replied the man, as emphatically as if he were going to make a revelation; "who am I?" But he paused; and, dropping his head and lowering his voice, he simply said, "I am Antoine Ravinet, dealer in curiosities."

In the meantime the clipper had been making way rapidly. The white country-houses on the high bluffs amid the pine-groves were already easily distinguished, and the outlines of the Château d'If rose clearly against the deep blue sky. "We are getting very near," exclaimed Papa Ravinet; "and I must return to my boat. I did not come out so far for any one to see me board the 'Saint Louis.'" And when Daniel offered him his state-room as a place of concealment, he replied, "No, no! I must go back to Paris by rail to-night. I came down for the sole purpose of telling you this—Mlle. Henriette is at my sister's house; but you must take care not to come there. Neither Sarah nor Brévan know what has become of her: they think she has thrown herself into the river; and this conviction

is our safety and strength. As they will certainly have you watched, the slightest imprudence might betray us."

"But I must see Henriette, sir."

"Certainly; and I have found the means for it. Instead of going to your former lodgings, go to the Hôtel du Louvre. I will arrange that my sister and Mlle. de Ville-Handry shall take rooms there before you reach Paris; and you may be sure to have news in less than a quarter of an hour after your arrival. But, heavens, how near we are! I must make haste." At Daniel's request the ship lay by long enough to allow Papa Ravinet and his sailor to get back into their boat again. When they were safely stowed away, and just as they cast off the man-rope, the old dealer called to Daniel, "We shall soon see you! Rely upon me! To-night Mlle. Henriette shall have a telegram."

XXVIII.

WHILE Papa Ravinet, standing on the deck of the "Saint Louis," was pressing Daniel's hand, and bidding him farewell, there were two poor women in Paris praying and watching with breathless anxiety—Mme. Bertolle, the old dealer's sister; and Henriette, Count de Ville-Handry's daughter. Papa Ravinet's conduct on the previous night had been so extraordinary that they were both lost in conjecture as to what was going to happen. Was it really true that Daniel was returning to France? When might they expect news—a telegram from the old dealer—and how long would it take him to reach Marseilles? Neither of them were acquainted with the route from Paris to the south of France. They were ignorant of the distances, the names of the stations, and even of most of the large towns through which the railroad passes. "We must try and get a railway-guide," said Mme. Bertolle at last, just after they had made a pretence at dining. And, quite proud of her happy thought, she at once went down-stairs, hurried to the nearest library, and soon reappeared, triumphantly flourishing a yellow pamphlet. "Now we shall see it all, my dear child," she exclaimed. Then, placing the guide on the tablecloth between them, they looked for the page giving the trains from Paris to Lyons and Marseilles. The express which Papa Ravinet was to have taken was next referred to, and they delighted in counting up how swiftly the train travelled, and noting all the stations where it stopped. Then, when the table was cleared, instead of going industriously to work as usual, they kept constantly glancing at the clock, and, after consulting the guide, remarked to each other,—"He is at Montereau now." "He must be beyond Sens." "He will soon be at Tonnerre."

A childish satisfaction, no doubt, and a very idle occupation. But who of us has not, at least once in his life, derived a wonderful pleasure, or perhaps unspeakable relief from impatience or even grief, by thus following through space some loved one who was hastening away, or coming home? Towards midnight, however, the old lady remarked that it was getting late, and that it would be best to go to bed. "Do you think you will sleep, madame?" asked Henriette, surprised.

"No, my child; but—"

"Oh! I, for my part,—I couldn't sleep. The work on which we were busy to-day is very pressing, you say: suppose we finish it?"

"Well, let us sit up then," said the widow.

The poor women, although more or less reduced to conjectures by Papa Ravinet's laconic answers, knew well enough that some great event was in preparation, something unexpected, and yet decisive. What it was they did not know; but they understood, or rather felt, that Daniel's return would totally change the aspect of affairs. But would Daniel really come? "If he does come," said Henriette, "why did they only the other day tell me, at the Ministry of Marine, that he was not coming? Then, again, why should he come home in a merchant-vessel, and not on board his frigate?"

"Your letters have probably reached him at last," explained the old lady; "and, as soon as he received them, he came home."

Gradually, however, after having exhausted all conjectures, and discussed all contingencies, Henriette became silent. When it struck half-past three, she said once more,—“Ah! M. Ravinet is at the Lyons station now.” Then her hand became less and less active in drawing the worsted, her head swayed from side to side, and her eyelids lowered unconsciously. Mme. Bertolle then advised her to retire; and this time she did not refuse.

It was past ten o'clock when she awoke; and upon entering the sitting-room, the widow greeted her with the exclamation,—“My brother is at last reaching Marseilles!”

“Ah! then it will not be long before we have news,” replied Henriette.

But there are times when we think electricity the slowest of messengers. At two o'clock in the afternoon nothing had arrived, and the poor women were beginning to accuse the old dealer of having forgotten them, when, at last, there came a ring at the bell. It was indeed the telegraph messenger, with his black leather ponch. The old lady signed her receipt with marvellous promptness; and, tearing the envelope open, she hastily read,—“MARSEILLES, 12.40 A.M. ‘Saint-Louis’ signalled by telegraph this morning. Will be in to-night. I shall hire boat to go and meet her, provided Champcey is on board. Another telegram this evening.—RAVINET.”

“But this does not tell us anything,” exclaimed Henriette, terribly disappointed. “Just see, madame, your brother is not even sure whether M. Champcey is on board the ‘Saint Louis.’”

Perhaps Mme. Bertolle also was a little disappointed; but at all events she was not the person to show it. “Well, what did you expect, dear child? Antoine has only been an hour or two in Marseilles: how do you think he can know? We must wait till the evening. It is only a matter of a few hours.”

She said this very quietly; but all who have ever undergone the anguish of expectation know how it grows more and more intolerable as the decisive moment approaches. Strenuously as the old lady endeavoured to control her excitement, she could not long conceal the nervous fever which was consuming her. Ten times during the afternoon she opened the window, to look—what for? She could not have told herself, for she well knew nothing could come as yet. At night she could not stay in any one place. She tried in vain to work at her embroidery: her fingers refused to do their duty. At last, at ten minutes past nine, the telegraph man appeared again, as impassive as ever. This time it was Henriette who took hold of the despatch; and, before opening it, she endured half-a-minute's fearful suspense, as if realising that the paper contained the secret of her fate. Then, with a sudden impulse, she tore the envelope open

and read, almost at a glance,—“MARSEILLES, 6.45 P.M. I have seen Champey. All well; devoted to Henriette. Return this evening. Will be in Paris to-morrow evening at seven o'clock. Prepare your trunks as if you were to start on a month's journey immediately after my return. All is going well.” Pale as death, and trembling like a leaf, but with parted lips and bright eyes, Henriette sunk on to a chair. Up to this moment she had doubted everything. Up to this hour, until she held the proof in her hand, she had not allowed herself to hope. Such intense happiness seems impossible to the miserable. But now she stammered out, “Daniel is in France! Daniel! Nothing more to fear: the future is ours. I am safe now.” But people do not die of joy; and, when she had recovered her equanimity, Henriette realised how cruel the incoherent phrases that had escaped her in her excitement must have seemed to the old dealer's sister. Rising with a start, and, grasping Mme. Bertolle's hands, she said to her,—“Good heavens! what am I saying! Ah, you will pardon me, madame, I am sure; but I feel as if I did not know what I am doing. Safe! I owe it to you and your brother, if I am safe. Had it not been for you, Daniel would have found nothing of me but a cross at the cemetery, and a name stained and destroyed by infamous slander.”

The old lady did not hear a word. She had picked up the despatch and read it; and, overcome by its contents, had sat down near the fireplace, utterly insensible to the outside world. A look of bitter hatred distorted her usually calm and gentle features; and, in a hoarse voice, she repeatedly muttered through her clenched teeth, “We shall be avenged.”

Henriette knew already that the old dealer and his sister hated her enemies, Sarah Brandon and Maxime de Brévan; but she had never yet realised how intense that hatred was, at least on Mme. Bertolle's side. What had caused it? This she could not fathom. It was evident enough that Papa Ravinet was not the first comer. Albeit ill-bred and coarse in Rue de la Grange, amid the thousand articles of his trade, he became a very different man as soon as he reached his sister's house. And as regards the Widow Bertolle, she was evidently a woman of superior intellect and education. How had they both been reduced to these extremely modest circumstances? By reverses of fortune? That accounted for everything, but it explained nothing. Such were Henriette's thoughts, when the old lady roused her from her meditations. “You saw, my dear child,” said she, “that my brother wishes us to be ready to set out on a long journey as soon as he comes home.”

“Yes, madame; and I am quite astonished at it.”

“I can understand that, but, although I know no more than you do of my brother's intentions, I know he does nothing without a purpose. We ought, therefore, in prudence, to comply with his wishes.”

Accordingly, they made their arrangements; and the next day Mme. Bertolle went out to purchase whatever was necessary,—a couple of ready-made dresses for Henriette, with shoes and extra linen. Towards five o'clock in the afternoon, all preparations were completed; and everything was carefully stowed away in three large trunks. According to Papa Ravinet's telegram, they had only some two hours more to wait, three hours at the worst. Still they were out of their reckoning, for it struck half-past eight before the worthy fellow arrived, evidently broken down by the long and rapid journey he had just made. “At last!” exclaimed Mme. Bertolle. “We hardly expected you any longer to-night.”

“Oh, my dear sister! don't you think I suffered when I thought of

your impatience?" replied he. "But it was absolutely necessary I should show myself in the Rue de la Grange."

"You have seen Mme. Chevassat?"

"I have just come from her. She is quite at her ease. I am sure she is convinced that Mlle. de Ville-Handry has killed herself; for she goes religiously every morning to the Morgue."

Henriette shuddered. "And M. de Brévan?" she asked.

Papa Ravinet looked worried. "Ah, I don't feel so safe there," he replied. "The man I left in charge of him has foolishly lost sight of him." Then noticing the trunks, he resumed: "But I am talking, and time flies. You are ready, I see. Let us go. I have a cab at the door. We can talk on the way." As he spoke he observed a look of reluctance on Henriette's face, and therefore added with a kindly smile, "You need not fear anything, Mlle. Henriette: we are not going away from M. Champey, far from it. But, you see, he could not have come here twice without betraying the secret of your existence."

"Where are we going?" asked Mme. Bertolle.

"To the Hôtel du Louvre, dear sister, where you will take rooms for Mme. and Mlle. Bertolle. Be calm: my plans are laid." Thereupon he ran out on to the landing to call the *concierge* to help him take the trunks down-stairs.

Although the manœuvres required by Papa Ravinet's appearance on board the "Saint Louis" had taken up but comparatively little time, the delay had been long enough to prevent the ship from going through all the formalities that same evening. She had therefore to drop anchor at some distance from the port, to the great disgust of the crew, who saw Marseilles all ablaze before them, and could count the wine-shops, and hear the songs of the seamen on shore as they walked along the quays in merry bands. The least unhappy of all on board happened, for once in a way, to be Daniel. His terrible excitement had given way to perfect calm. His strained nerves had relaxed; and he felt the delight of a man who can at last throw down the heavy burden he has so long borne on his shoulders. Papa Ravinet had given him no particulars; but he did not regret it—in fact, he hardly noticed it. He knew positively that Henriette was alive; that she was in safety, and still loved him. That sufficed. "Well, lieutenant," said Lefloch, delighted at his master's joy, "didn't I tell you so? Good wind during the passage always brings good news upon landing."

That night, for the first time since Daniel had heard of the Count de Ville-Handry's marriage, he slept with the sweet sleep that hope imparts. He was only roused by the arrival of the officials in the quarantine boat; and when he came on deck, he found there was nothing more to prevent his going on shore. The clocks of Marseilles were just striking noon when, followed by his faithful man, he at last set his foot once more on the soil of France; and as he remembered how a vile plot had long ago driven him from home, his eyes flashed fire and his fists clenched: "Here I am," he seemed to say, "and my vengeance will be terrible!" However, neither his joy nor his excitement led him to forget Papa Ravinet's apprehensions, eccentric and exaggerated as he thought them. It seemed to him improbable that a spy should be waiting on the quay, in the midst of the noisy bustling crowd, intending to follow his track and report his minutest actions; and yet he determined to verify his informant's surmises without delay. Accordingly, instead of simply following the quay, turning up the

Canebière, and taking the first street on the right leading to the Hôtel du Luxembourg, he purposely strolled down several narrow and less frequented thoroughfares, turning at times to see if he were being followed. On reaching the hotel he had to acknowledge that the old dealer had been right in his surmises,—for a tall, dark complexioned, unprepossessing looking fellow had followed the same circuitous route as himself, invariably keeping some thirty yards or so in the rear. As this individual calmly sauntered along with his hands in his pockets, he hardly suspected the danger he incurred by practising his profession within reach of Lefloch. The idea of being tracked fairly maddened the worthy tar, and he repeatedly proposed “running foul” of the spy, and settling his account. “I can do it in a second,” he assured his master. “I have only to go up to him, catch him by the necktie, give him a couple of twists, and then—good-night. He won’t track anybody again.”

Daniel had to exercise all his authority to prevent Lefloch from carrying out this plan, and he found it still harder to shew his attendant how necessary it was that the scamp should not suspect that he had been detected. “Besides,” he added, “it is not yet proved that we are really being watched: it may merely be a curious coincidence.”

“That may be so,” growled Lefloch; but doubt was no longer possible, when just before dinner, as they looked out of the window, they espied the same man sauntering up and down in front of the hotel. At night they again met him at the railway station, and he took the same express train as themselves for Paris. They recognised him once more in the refreshment-room at Lyons. And he was the first person they perceived as they alighted at the Paris terminus.

However, Daniel did not worry himself about the man. His one thought was that he was each minute getting nearer and nearer to Henriette. Too impatient to wait for his trunks, he left Lefloch in charge, and jumped into a cab, promising the driver a napoleon if he would take him as fast as possible to the Hôtel du Louvre. When such remuneration is offered, the lean horses of the Paris cabs contrive to equal an English thorough-bred, so that three quarters of an hour later, Daniel was already duly installed in his room at the hotel. But now a thousand anxious doubts assailed him. Had he understood Papa Ravinet correctly? Had the worthy man given him the right directions? Might they not, excited as they both were, have easily made a mistake? “In less than a quarter of an hour after your arrival, you shall have news.” So had Papa Ravinet spoken to Daniel. Less than a quarter of an hour! It seemed to Daniel as if he had been an eternity in this room; and, in his impatience, he was almost breaking out into imprecations, when there came a knock at the door. “Come in!” he cried.

A waiter appeared, and handed him a visiting-card, on which was written, “Mme. Bertolle, third floor, No. 55.” And as the fellow did not instantly retreat, Daniel repeated almost furiously, “Didn’t I tell you it was all right?” He did not wish the man to witness his excitement, the most intense excitement he had ever experienced. His hands shook, he felt a burning sensation in his throat, and his knees knocked together. Glancing at himself in the mirror, he was startled to see how pale he looked. “Am I going to be taken ill?” he thought. And perceiving on the table a decanter full of water, he filled a large glass, and drank it at one draught. Then feeling somewhat better, he hastily left the room. But, once outside, he was so overcome, that despite the directions hung up at every turn, he soon lost his way in the long passages and interminable staircases, and had finally

to ask an attendant, who, pointing out a door which he had passed fully half-a-dozen times already, exclaimed, "That's No. 55."

Daniel knocked gently, and the door at once opened, as if somebody had been standing behind it, ready to turn the handle. As he entered almost tottering, he saw, as through a mist, Papa Ravinet and an old lady standing on his right hand side; and farther back, in front of him, near the window, the loved one of his heart. Uttering a cry, he sprang forward; but Henriette as quickly bounded to meet him, throwing both arms around his neck, and leaning upon his chest, sobbing and stammering,—“Daniel, Daniel! at last!”

XXIX.

It was exactly two years since Daniel and Henriette had been parted by the foulest treachery. What had not happened since then? What unheard-of, improbable events; what trials, tribulation, and sufferings! They had endured all that the human heart can endure. Each day, so to say, in these two years had brought them its share of grief and sorrow. How often they had both despaired of the future! And how often they had sighed for death! And yet, after all these storms and miseries, here they were reunited once more, in unspeakable happiness, forgetting everything,—their enemies and the whole world, the anxieties of the past, and the uncertainty of the future. They remained thus for a long time, clasped in a close embrace, overcome with happiness, unable, as yet, to believe in the reality for which they had sighed so long, unable to speak a word, but laughing and weeping in one breath. “How they love each other!” whispered Mme. Bertolle in her brother's ear,—“the poor young people!” And big tears rolled down her cheeks; while the old dealer, not less touched, but showing his emotion differently, clenched his fists, and retorted, “All right, all right! Those wretches will have to pay for everything.”

In the meantime Daniel gradually mastered his emotion, and leading Henriette to an arm-chair beside the fireplace, he sat down in front of her, took her hands in his own, and asked her to give him a faithful account of the two terrible years which had just elapsed. She had to acquaint him with everything,—her humiliations at home, the insults and slanders she had endured, her father's incomprehensible blindness and infatuation, her step-mother's provocations, and Sir Tom's horrible attentions. In short, she had to describe in every detail the abominable plot formed to drive her from home, and compel her to abandon herself to Maxime de Brévan. Daniel listened in a perfect rage; and at last, loosening his hold on Henriette's hands, he rose, exclaiming, “Your father—your father—oh, the wretched old man! To think of him abandoning his daughter to such scoundrels!” And as the poor girl looked at him imploringly, he resumed: “Well, well, I will say nothing more of the count. He is your father, and that's enough. But that Thomas Elgin, I swear by God he shall die by my hand; and as for Sarah Brandon—”

He was interrupted by the old dealer, who tapped him lightly on the shoulder, and exclaimed, “You mustn't do that honour to Sir Tom, M. Champcey. People like him don't die by the sword of honest men.”

Immediately afterwards Henriette resumed her narrative, and spoke of her surprise and amazement when she reached that garret-room in the Rue de la Grange, with its scanty second-hand furniture. “To think that he took you to a place like that, Henriette,” interrupted Daniel, “when I had

entrusted him with all my fortune, to place it at your disposal in case of need."

"What!" exclaimed the old dealer, "you had—" He did not finish, but looked at the young officer with an air of utter amazement, as if he were gazing at some improbable phenomenon, never seen before.

"Yes," replied Daniel. "I know it was an insane thing, and it was still worse to intrust Henriette to his care. But I believed in his friendship."

"And besides," remarked Mme. Bertolle, "how could you suspect such atrocious treachery? There are crimes which honest hearts never even conceive."

Henriette now continued describing her misfortunes; but when she began to speak of Mme. Chevassat's villany, Daniel interrupted her in a state of great excitement,—"What!" asked he, "was the door-keeper in the Rue de la Grange named Chevassat?"

"Yes—why?" asked Henriette.

"Because Brévan's real name is Justin Chevassat."

"Ah! you know that?" exclaimed Papa Ravinet.

"I learned it three months ago; and I also know that my friend, proud Monsieur Maxime de Brévan, who has been received in the most aristocratic salons of Paris, was once merely a vulgar convict condemned for forgery."

"Then," stammered Henriette, "this scoundrel was—"

"Chevassat's son; yes," finished Mme. Bertolle.

The poor girl was quite overcome by this discovery.

"How did you learn that?" asked Ravinet of Daniel.

"Through the man my friend Maxime hired to murder me."

"Ah! I thought the coward would try to get you out of the way, Daniel," cried Henriette. "I wrote to you to be careful."

"And I received your letter, my darling, but unfortunately too late. After having missed me twice, the murderer fired at me; and when your letter came, I was in my bed almost dying."

"What has become of the murderer?" asked Papa Ravinet.

"He was arrested, and confessed, thanks to the astonishing skill of the magistrate who carried on the investigation."

"What has become of him?"

"He has now left Saigon. They have sent him home to be tried here."

"And Brévan?"

"I am surprised he has not yet been arrested. The papers in the case were sent to Paris by a vessel which started a fortnight before I did. To be sure, the 'Saint Louis' may have got ahead of her. At all events, I have in my keeping a letter to the Public Prosecutor."

Papa Ravinet seemed almost delirious with joy. He gesticulated like a madman, and laughed hysterically as he exclaimed, "I shall see Brévan on the scaffold! Yes, I shall!"

From that moment there was an end of all logical sequence in the conversation. Questions followed and crossed without order or connection. Answers came at hap-hazard. Each one wanted to be heard; and at times all spoke at once. Thus the explanations which, by a little management, might have been exchanged in twenty minutes, took up more than two hours. At last, by dint of great efforts, it became possible to ascertain the sum total of the various information imparted by Papa Ravinet, Daniel, and Henriette. The truth began to disengage itself from chaos; and the plot formed by Sarah Brandon and her accomplices appeared in all its infamy. A plan of striking simplicity, no doubt, and the success of which

seemed to have hung upon a hair :—If on Christmas night the old dealer, instead of going down by the back-stairs, had taken the front staircase, he would never have heard Henriette's dying groans, and the poor child would have been lost. If Crochard's bullet had wounded Daniel in the slightest degree nearer the heart, he would have been killed.

And still the old dealer was not quite satisfied. He looked as if he thought certain points required fuller explanation. "Look here, M. Champcey," he began at last, "the more I think of it, the more I am convinced that Sarah Brandon had nothing to do with those attempts to murder you. Her perversity is too scientific to employ such means, which always leave traces behind, and finally conduct to a court of justice. She always acts alone, when her mind is made up; and her accomplices aid her unconsciously, so that they can never betray her."

"M. de Brévan told me the same thing," observed Daniel.

"However," continued Papa Ravinet, "that man Crochard certainly was employed to kill you. But could Brévan have done so without Sarah's knowledge, and perhaps even contrary to her wishes?"

"That's possible; but why should he have done so?"

"To secure your fortune," said Henriette.

"That's one explanation," replied Papa Ravinet with a shrewd look. "I don't say no to it; but it's not the true one yet. Murder is so dangerous an expedient, that even the boldest criminals only resort to it at the last extremity, and generally very much against their inclination. Couldn't Brévan have possessed himself of M. Champcey's property without murdering him? Of course he could. So we must look for another motive. You may say that fear drove him to it. But no; for, when he engaged Crochard, he could scarcely foresee all the infamy he would have to resort to during the succeeding year. Believe my experience, it seems to me that M. Champcey's murder was planned very hurriedly and awkwardly, under the influence of passion or violent hatred, or perhaps—" He paused abruptly, and seemed to reflect and deliberate. Then all of a sudden, looking strangely at Daniel, he asked him, "Could the Countess Sarah be in love with you, M. Champcey?"

Daniel flushed crimson. He had not forgotten that fatal evening, when, for a moment, he had held Sarah Brandon in his arms; and the intoxicating delirium of that moment had left in his heart a bitter persistent pang of remorse. He had never dared to confess to Henriette that Sarah had actually come to his rooms alone. And even to-night, while describing his passage out, and his adventures at Saigon, he had not said a word of the letters written to him by the countess. "Sarah Brandon in love with me?" he stammered, "What an idea!"

But he could not tell a falsehood; and Henriette would not have been a woman if she had not noticed his embarrassment. "Why not?" she asked. And looking fixedly at Daniel, she continued: "That wretched woman impudently boasted to my face that she loved you; and more than that, she swore that you had loved her as well, and were still in love with her. She laughed at me contemptuously, telling me that she had it in her power to make you do anything she chose, and offering to show me your letters." She paused for a moment, and, averting her head, added, with a great effort, "Finally, Sir Thomas Elgin assured me that Sarah Brandon had been your mistress, and that her marriage with my father only took place in consequence of a quarrel between you."

Daniel had listened, trembling with indignation. "And you could

believe that slander!" he cried. "Oh, no, no! tell me that there is no need for me to justify myself." Then turning to Papa Ravinet, he said, "Suppose we admit, for a moment, that she might have been in love, as you say, what would that prove?"

The cunning old dealer's yellow eyes sparkled with malicious delight and satisfaction. "Ah! you wouldn't ask me that if you knew Sarah Brandon's antecedents as well as I do. Ask my sister about her and Maxime de Brévan, and she will tell you why I look upon that apparently trifling circumstance as so very important." Mme. Bertolle nodded assent; and Papa Ravinet continued: "Excuse me, M. Champcey, if I insist, and especially if I do so in Mlle. Henriette's presence; but our interest, I might almost say our safety, requires it. Maxime de Brévan is caught, to be sure; but he is only a vulgar criminal; and as yet we have neither caught Thomas Elgin nor Mrs Brian, who are far more formidable; nor, above all, Sarah Brandon, who is a thousand times more wicked and guilty than all the others. You will tell me that we have ninety-nine chances out of a hundred on our side; maybe. But a single slight mistake may lead us altogether astray; and then there is an end to all our hopes, and these fiends would triumph after all!"

Daniel realised that the old dealer was right; and so, without hesitating any longer, but looking stealthily at Henriette, he replied, "Since that is the case, I won't conceal from you that the Countess Sarah has written me a dozen letters of at least an extraordinary nature."

"You have kept them, I hope?"

"Yes; they are all in one of my trunks."

Papa Ravinet was evidently much embarrassed; but at last he said,— "Ah! if I might dare? But no: it would, perhaps, be asking too much to beg you to let me see them?"

He did not know how ready Daniel was to grant the request. As he was now desirous of acquainting Henriette with everything, it was as well that she should read these letters; on perusing them she would perceive, that if the countess had frequently written to him, he on his side had never returned an answer. "You can never ask too much, M. Ravinet," he replied. "My servant Lefloch must have arrived by this time with the trunks; and if you will give me time to go down to my room, you shall have the letters at once."

He was on the point of leaving, when the old dealer held him back, exclaiming, "You forget the man who has been following you from Marseilles. Wait till my sister has made sure that nobody is watching outside."

Mme. Bertolle at once left the room, but she noticed nothing suspicious, finding all the passages silent and deserted. The spy had probably gone to make his report to his employers. Accordingly, Daniel promptly went down-stairs; and, when he returned, he carried a packet of faded, crumpled papers, which he handed to Papa Ravinet with the words, "Here they are!"

Strange as it may seem, when the dealer touched these letters, impregnated with the peculiar perfume used by Sarah Brandon, he trembled and turned pale. Perhaps in order to conceal his embarrassment, or perchance to be able to reflect at ease, he took a candlestick from the mantelpiece, and sat down by himself at a side-table. Mme. Bertolle, Daniel, and Henriette remained silent; and nothing broke the stillness but the rustling of the paper, and Papa Ravinet's voice, as he muttered, "This is fabulous,— Sarah writing such things! She didn't even disguise her handwriting,— she who had never committed an imprudence in her life: she ruins herself,

for she actually signs her name !” But he had seen enough, and folding up the letters, he turned to Champcey, exclaiming, “No doubt now ! Sarah loves you madly. Ah ! how she loves you. Well, well, all heartless women love like this, when a sudden passion conquers them, and sets their brains and senses on fire.” Daniel noticed a look of concern on Henriette’s face ; and, quite distressed, he made a sign to the old gentleman to stop. But Papa Ravinet was too preoccupied with his thoughts to notice the gesture, and so he rattled on, “Yes, now I understand it all—Sarah Brandon wasn’t able to keep her secret ; and Brévan, furious with jealousy on discovering her love for you, did not reflect, that by hiring a murderer he would simply ruin himself. Ah, it’s all clear now ; and by this correspondence, Sarah Brandon, you are ours !”

What could be Papa Ravinet’s plan. Did he expect to use these letters as weapons against her ? or did he propose to send them to the Count de Ville-Handry in order to open his eyes ? Daniel trembled at the idea ; for his loyalty rebelled against such a vengeance. “You see,” said he, “I shouldn’t like to use a woman’s correspondence, however odious and contemptible she may be.”

“I had no idea of asking such a thing of you,” replied the old dealer. “No : it is something very different I want you to do.” And observing that Daniel still seemed very embarrassed, he added, “You ought not to give way to exaggerated feelings of delicacy, M. Champcey. All weapons are fair when we are called upon to defend our lives and honour ; and that is how we are situated. If you don’t hasten to strike Sarah Brandon, she will simply anticipate us.”

He had been leaning against the mantelpiece, close to Mme. Bertolle, who sat there silent and motionless ; and now raising his head, and looking attentively at Henriette and Daniel by turns, he resumed : “Perhaps neither of you is exactly conscious of the position in which you stand. Having been reunited to-night, after such terrible trials, and having, both of you, escaped death almost miraculously, you no doubt feel as if all trouble were ended, and the future secured. If that is the case, I must undeceive you. You are situated precisely as you were the day before M. Champcey left France. You still cannot marry without the Count de Ville-Handry’s consent, and you know very well that the Countess Sarah will not let him give it. Do you think of defying prejudices, and proudly confessing your love ? Ah, have a care ! If you sin against social conventionalities, you will risk all future happiness in life. Perhaps you fancy you might hide yourselves ; but however careful you might be, the world would find you out, and fools and hypocrites would overwhelm you with slander. And Mlle. Henriette has been too much slandered already.” To soar in the azure air, and be suddenly precipitated to earth’s low level ; to indulge in the sweetest dreams, and be abruptly recalled to stern reality—this is, figuratively, what Daniel and Henriette experienced at that moment. The old dealer’s calm, collected voice sounded cruel to them, and yet he was but a sincere friend, performing a painful, though necessary duty in dispelling all deceptive illusions. “Now,” he resumed, “At the best, what could we hope for ? That M. de Ville-Handry would not compel his daughter to marry another man. But would that be enough ? Evidently not ; for as soon as Sarah Brandon learns that Mlle. Henriette has not committed suicide, but is at the Hôtel du Louvre, within easy reach of M. Daniel Champcey, she will prevail on her husband to shut his daughter up in a convent. For another year, Mlle. Henriette is yet under

paternal control; that is, in this case, at the mercy of a revengeful step-mother, who looks upon her as a successful rival."

The thought that Henriette might once more be taken from him chilled Daniel's blood, and he exclaimed, "Ah, you are right, and I never dreamed of any of these things! Joy had blinded my eyes completely."

"Oh, wait a bit!" continued Papa Ravinet, impetuously. I haven't yet shown you the most urgent danger. The Count de Ville-Handry, who had I don't know how many millions when you knew him, is now completely ruined. Of all he once owned—lands, forests, castles, deeds, and bonds—there is nothing left. His last sou, his last rod of land, has been taken from him. All that remains is the sum coming to Mlle. Henriette from her mother, and that he cannot touch. You left him living like a prince in his mansion in the Rue de Varennes: you will find him vegetating on the fourth floor of a lodging-house. The day is drawing near when Sarah Brandon will get rid of him, just as she got rid of Kergrist, of Malgat the cashier, and others. The means are at hand. The count's name is already seriously compromised. The company he established is falling to pieces; and the papers hold him up to public contempt. If he cannot pay to-day, to-morrow he will be charged with fraudulent bankruptcy. Now, I ask you, is the count a man to survive such disgrace?"

For some time Henriette had been unable to suppress her sobs; and now she broke out into piteous lamentations: "Ah, sir!" she said, "you have misled me. You assured me that my father's life was in no danger."

"And I still tell you that it is not in danger. Would I be here if I thought that Sarah was quite ready to act?"

Daniel, on his side, had suffered acutely during this discussion; and he now impetuously exclaimed, "Wouldn't it be a crime for us to think and wait, and calculate, when such great dangers are impending? Come, sir, let us go—"

"Where?"

"Ah, how do I know? To the public prosecutor, to the count, to a lawyer who can advise us. There must be something that can be done."

The old dealer did not stir. "And what could we tell the lawyer?" asked he. "That Sarah Brandon made the Count de Ville-Handry fall madly in love with her? That's no crime. That she made him marry her? That was her right. That the count has launched forth in speculations? She opposed it. That he understood nothing of business? How could she help that! That he has been duped, cheated, and finally ruined in two short years? Apparently she is quite as much ruined as he is. That, so as to delay the catastrophe, he has resorted to fraudulent means? She is sorry for it. That he will not survive the taint on his ancient name? What can she do? Sarah, who was able to clear herself after Malgat disappeared, will certainly not be at a loss now to establish her innocence."

"But the count, sir, the count! Can't we go to him?"

"Well, suppose we did. What do you think M. de Ville-Handry would say to you? However, to-morrow you shall hear what he has to say." Daniel began to feel dismayed. "What can be done, then," he asked.

"We must wait till we have sufficient evidence in hand to crush Sarah Brandon, Sir Tom, and Mrs Brian at one blow."

"Well, but how can we obtain such evidence?"

The old dealer glanced significantly at his sister, smiled, and answered in a strange tone, "I have collected some, and as for the rest,—well, I don't care about it as I know that the Countess Sarah is really in love with you."

Daniel now began to divine the part Papa Ravinet expected him to play. Still, he did not object : but lowering his head under Henriette's clear glance, he said, "I will do what you wish me to do, sir."

The old gentleman gave vent to an exclamation of delight, as if he were relieved of an overwhelming anxiety. "Then," said he, "we will begin the campaign to-morrow morning. But we must know exactly who are the enemies we have to meet. So I will ask you to listen to me."

XXX.

It was striking midnight ; but the occupants of the little room at the Hôtel du Louvre hardly thought of sleep. How could they realise the flight of time, while all their faculties were preoccupied with the immense interests at stake ? On the struggle they were about to engage in depended the Count de Ville-Handry's life and honour, and Daniel's and Henriette's happiness and future. As regards Papa Ravinet and his sister, they had said,—“For us, even more than that depends upon it.”

The old dealer now drew up an easy-chair, sat down, and began as follows, in a somewhat husky voice : “The Countess Sarah never had a right to be called Sarah Brandon, and she is not an American. Her real name, by which she was known up to her sixteenth year, is Ernestine Bergot ; and she was born in Paris, in the Faubourg Saint Martin. It would be difficult to tell you in detail the life she led during her childhood ; and besides, there are some things that can't be told. Her childhood might certainly be her excuse, if she could be excused at all. Her mother was one of those unfortunate women who come from the provinces in wooden shoes, and, six months later, dress in the latest fashion ; living a short, gay life, which invariably ends in the hospital. Her mother was neither better nor worse than other women of her class. When Ernestine was born, she had neither the sense to part with her, nor the courage—perhaps (who knows ?) she had not the means—to mend her ways. So the little one grew up by God's mercy, but at the devil's bidding, living by mere chance ; one day stuffed with lollypops, and on the morrow whipped without mercy, and frequently fed by the charity of neighbours, while her mother remained for weeks at a time absent from her lodgings. At four years old, she wandered through the neighbourhood dressed in tattered silk or velvet, with a faded ribbon in her hair, worn-out old shoes on her feet, and most frequently no stockings to keep her legs warm. So no wonder she had a hoarse voice, and shivered with cold. Just like the lost dogs who rove here and there looking for a bone, she pried about the gutters seeking for fallen half-pence, so as to buy a screw of fried potatoes, or may be some damaged fruit. Later on, she extended the circle of her excursions, and wandered all over Paris, in the company of other children like herself ; stopping on the boulevards to look at the brilliant shops ; pausing on the open squares to see some mountebanks perform ; learning how to steal from street stalls, and at night-time asking in a plaintive voice for alms on behalf of her poor, sick father. At twelve years old she was as thin as a plank, and as green as a June apple, with sharp elbows and long red hands. But she had beautiful light hair, teeth like a young dog's, and large impudent eyes. As you saw her go along, raising her head with an air of saucy indifference, and coquettish, despite her rags, you easily guessed that she was a daughter of Paris—the feminine counterpart of the much abused ‘*gamin*’ ; a thousand

times more wicked than he is, and far more dangerous to society. She was, indeed, as depraved as the worst of sinners, fearing neither God nor the devil—nor, indeed, anything excepting the police. For from them she derived her only notions of morality; for it would have been love's labour lost to talk to her of virtue or duty. Indeed, such words would have conveyed no meaning to her imagination; and she was equally ignorant of the abstract ideas they represent. One day, however, her mother, who had virtually made a servant of her, had a praiseworthy inspiration. Finding that she had some money, she dressed the girl anew from head to foot, bought her a kind of outfit, and apprenticed her to a dressmaker. But it came too late. Every kind of restraint was naturally intolerable to such a vagabond nature, and at the end of the very first week she ran away from her mistress, stealing a hundred francs—and as long as these lasted, she roamed through Paris. When they were spent, and she felt hungry, she decided to return to her mother. But her mother had moved, and no one knew what had become of her. She was inquired after, but never found. Any other person would have been in despair. Not she. The same day she engaged herself as a waitress at a *brasserie*, and, on being turned out there, she found employment at a low restaurant, where she had to wash up the plates and dishes. She was soon sent away from there as well, and became a servant in two or three other places of still lower character; till at last, utterly disgusted, she determined to do nothing at all. She was sinking into the gutter; she was on the point of being ruined before reaching womanhood, like fruit which spoils before it is ripe, when a man turned up who was fated to arm her for life's struggle, and to change a mere vulgar little thief into the accomplished monster of perversity, you know."

Here Papa Ravinet suddenly paused, and, looking at Daniel, exclaimed: "You must not believe, M. Champcey, that these details are imaginary. I have spent five years in tracing out Sarah's early life—five years going from door to door, in search of information. A dealer in second-hand goods enters everywhere without exciting suspicion. And then I have witnesses to prove everything I have told you so far—witnesses whom I shall summon, and who will speak whenever it becomes necessary to establish the countess's identity. Daniel made no reply. Like Henriette, and even Mme. Bertolle, he was completely fascinated by the old dealer's manner and tone. The latter, after a few minutes' rest, continued as follows: "The man who picked up Sarah was an old German artist, both a painter and musician, a man of rare genius, though looked upon by ignorant folks as a maniac. One winter morning he heard a girl singing in the courtyard of his house. He looked out. It was Sarah. Struck by the pure notes of her voice, her intelligent glance, and promise of future beauty, and at the same time compassionating her apparent destitution, he called to her to come up to his studio. She came, he questioned her, and on learning that she was alone in the world, he remarked, 'Well, if you will stay with me, I will adopt you; you shall be my daughter; and I will make you an eminent artist.' The studio was warm, and it was bitterly cold outside. Sarah had no roof over her head, and had eaten nothing for twenty-four hours. So she accepted the old artist's offer. In doing so, be it understood, she fancied, in her perversity, that the kind old man had other intentions besides those he mentioned in offering her a home. She was mistaken, however. He merely recognised her budding talents, and his only object was to transform her into a true marvel, which would astonish the world. It was a hard task, no doubt. Sarah could not even read; indeed, she knew nothing except sin.

Threats and blows were not apt to make an impression on her, as the old artist, no doubt, soon realised; but a friend of his has told me that he at last succeeded in bending her to his will, and inducing her to study by appealing to her pride and vanity. He kindled boundless thoughts of ambition in her mind, skilfully fanned her innate covetousness, and fairly intoxicated her with fairy-like hopes, promising her success and renown—wealth, adulation, and every good thing on earth—if she would but study as he directed. Well, she did work, and with steady perseverance,—thus plainly shewing that she had full faith in his promises, and that he had acquired great influence over her by appealing to her vanity. Extreme difficulties invariably attend so late a beginning, but her amazing natural gifts soon shewed themselves, and in a short time her progress was almost miraculous. She had soon realised how ignorant she was of the world, and she perceived that society did not exclusively consist, as she had hitherto imagined, of people like those she had known. Besides, the old artist was a man of wide experience, and all but inexhaustible information. In his youth he had been protected by the Emperor of Austria, and had frequented the Court of Vienna. Moreover, several of his operas had been brought out in Italy; and he had been admitted to the best society in Paris. Of an evening, while sipping his coffee, with his feet on the fender and his long pipe in his mouth, he would often forget himself amid the recollections of his earlier days, and Sarah would listen eagerly, while he described the splendour of courts, the beauty of women, the magnificence of their toilets, and the intrigues he had ofttimes seen going on around him. He spoke to her of the men whose portraits he had painted, of life and manners behind the stage, of the great singers who had sung in his operas, and the great ladies he had met in society. Two years went by, and no one could recognize the lean, wretched looking little vagabond girl of the Faubourg St Martin in this fresh, rosy maid, with lustrous eyes and modest mien, whom the people of the house called the ‘pretty artist of the fourth floor.’ So far as modesty was concerned, the change unfortunately was only on the surface. Sarah was already too thoroughly corrupted, when the old artist picked her up, to be capable of being entirely transformed. He thought he had infused his own rough honesty into her veins; but in truth he had only taught her a new vice,—hypocrisy. Her powers of dissimulation, however, had naturally far from reached their present stage of development, and, unable at last to endure the peaceful life of the old artist’s home any longer—pining, in fact, for sin—she could not restrain herself from begging him to obtain her a theatrical engagement. She was already a very fair musician, and her voice possessed amazing power for her age. But the old artist peremptorily refused her request. He wished her *début* to become an apotheosis; and had decided, as he told her, that she should not appear in public till her voice and talents were perfected,—that is, certainly not before her nineteenth or twentieth year. That meant that she must wait three or four years longer,—a century! In former times, Sarah would not have hesitated a moment: she would simply have run away. But education had changed her ideas, and she asked herself what could she do alone in the world without either friends or money? She pined for her liberty, no doubt, but she was afraid of destitution. Vice attracted her; but it was gorgeous vice,—vice which rides in a carriage, and bespatters poor, honest women on foot,—the vice which is envied by the crowd, and worshipped by the foolish. So, as this was not yet within her reach, she remained with her old master and studied hard. Perhaps, in spite of herself and her execrable instincts, she would really have

become a great artist, if the old German had not been suddenly taken from her by a terrible accident. One spring afternoon, he was smoking his pipe at the window, when he heard a noise in the street, and leaned over to see what occasioned it. But the bar on which he rested gave way, and he tried in vain to hold on by the window frame: he was precipitated from the fourth storey on to the ground below. Death was instantaneous. I have seen the police report of the accident, which states that the fall was unavoidable; and that the calamity would no doubt have occurred earlier, if the bad winter weather had not deterred the old artist from looking out of the window before. In fact, the window railing had snapped asunder just where it joined the wall,—and here it was noticed to be almost eaten through with rust. The wood, too, was quite loose, the mortar that originally had kept it in place having seemingly been eaten away by the winter frosts.”

Daniel and Henriette had turned very pale. It was evident that the same terrible suspicion had flashed through both their minds. “Ah! it was Sarah’s work,” they exclaimed simultaneously. “No doubt she poured acid on the bar to eat it away, and purposely loosened the mortar. She had, no doubt, been watching for months to see her benefactor fall and kill himself.”

Papa Ravinet shook his head. “I do not say that,” he said; “and, at all events, it would be impossible to prove it now. It is certain that no one suspected Sarah. She seemed to be in despair; and everybody pitied her sincerely. For was she not ruined by this misfortune? The old artist had left no will. His relatives rushed to his rooms; and after searching Sarah’s trunks, at once turned her out of doors, telling her that she ought to be very grateful for being allowed to take away all she said she owed to her late patron’s munificence. Still the inheritance was by no means what the relatives had expected. They had imagined they would find considerable savings in the old man’s private drawers, but all they discovered were a few bonds, worth altogether some ten or twelve thousand francs, and a paltry sum in cash. Ah! I long endeavoured to find out what became of the old artist’s other bonds and his ready money—for undoubtedly he was possessed of considerable means. However, after a most minute and patient investigation, all I managed to discover was that on the 17th of April that year—that is, five days before the poor German’s fall—a certain Ernestine Bergot had deposited a sum of fifteen hundred francs at the district savings’ bank.”

“Ah, you see!” exclaimed Daniel. “Weary of the simple life she led with the old man, she murdered him to get hold of his money.”

Papa Ravinet did not seemingly hear the interruption. “What Sarah did during the three first months of her freedom, I cannot tell,” continued he. “If she went and rented furnished lodgings, she did so under a false name. A clerk at the Prefecture, who is a great lover of curiosities, and for whom I have procured many a good bargain, obliged me by having all the lodging-house lists of tenants, which as you know the police exact, carefully examined, from April to July of that same year. However, no Ernestine Bergot could be found. I am quite sure, however, that she thought of the stage, for a former secretary of the Theatre Lyrique told me he distinctly recollected a certain Ernestine, beautiful beyond description, who came several times and requested a trial. She was, however, refused, simply because her pretensions were almost ridiculous. And this was quite natural; for her head was still full of all her old master’s ambitious dreams. The first positive trace I find of her during that year

dates from the end of the summer, when she was living in a fashionable street with a talented and wealthy young painter, named Planix. It appears that he literally worshipped her; that he loved her passionately, and was so absurdly jealous, that he became desperate whenever she staid out an hour later than he expected. Now, with Sarah's well-known horror of restraint, she cannot have particularly liked this life; and yet she bore her yoke patiently till fate threw Maxime de Brévan across her path."

At the name of the scoundrel to whom they owed so much of their misery, Henriette and Daniel instinctively trembled, and looked at each other. However, Papa Ravinet did not give them time to ask any questions, but continued as calmly as if he had been reading a report: "Several years had already elapsed since Justin Chevassat, after his release from the galleys, had assumed the style and title of a nobleman. Now-a-days it is easy enough for an adventurer to penetrate into what is called Parisian 'High Life.' He only needs a little bounce, and a high-sounding name—picked up no matter where. Justin Chevassat met with great success on his entrance into 'Society.' He had carefully prepared himself for all emergencies, like those adventurers who never travel abroad without having their passports in much better order than most honest folks. He had learned prudence by experience: for his antecedents were stormy enough. His parents, now residing in the Rue de la Grange, lived some 38 or 40 years ago in the neighbourhood of the Faubourg St Honoré, where they kept a little wine-shop and eating-house, principally frequented by the servants of the neighbourhood. Although they were people of easy principles, they were not at that epoch absolutely dishonest. When their son Justin was born, they became most ambitious for him, and determined to sacrifice all their savings, and even to stint themselves, so as to bring him up like a gentleman. Such ideas are, after all, common enough among a certain set of people. Accordingly, Justin was sent to school, where he conducted himself just badly enough to be perpetually on the brink of being sent away, without ever being really expelled. However, the Chevassats had become so accustomed to look upon their son as a superior being, that it never entered their mind to think he was not the first, the best, and most remarkable pupil of the establishment. If his reports were bad,—and such they always were,—they accused the teachers of partiality. If he had gained no prizes at the end of the year—and he never gained a single one—they tried to console him for being subjected to such cruel injustice. In fact, he was altogether a spoilt child. The consequences of such a system need hardly be pointed out. He grew to despise his parents thoroughly; in fact, he seemed heartily ashamed of them, and treated them as if they had been his servants. Whenever he was at home, during the holiday time, he would rather have cut his right arm off than lend his father a helping hand, or pour out a glass of wine for a customer. Indeed, he even staid away from the house on the plea that he could not endure the smell from the kitchen. He was at college now; but when he reached his seventeenth year, although his course was far from completed, he declared that he was tired of studying, and meant to give it up. His father timidly asked him what he proposed doing, and he simply replied by shrugging his shoulders. He really did nothing. His delight was to dress himself in the height of the fashion; to walk up and down before the most renowned restaurants, with a tooth-pick in his mouth; to hire a carriage, and drive it himself, with a hired groom in livery by his side. At night he gambled in questionable clubs; and, when he lost, the till in his father's shop enabled him to settle

his 'differences.' His parents had rented, and comfortably furnished, a nice set of rooms for him in their house, and tried their utmost to keep him at home, even neglecting their own business to attend to his orders. But this did not prevent him from being constantly away. He declared he could not possibly receive his friends in a house where his name was to be seen above the door of such a low establishment. It was indeed his despair to be the son of a restaurant-keeper, and to be called Chevassat. But greater grief was in store for him, after two years of this idle, expensive life. One fine morning, when he needed a thousand francs or so, his parents told him, with tears in their eyes, that they had not a hundred francs in the house; that they were at the end of their resources; that a promissory note of theirs had been protested the day before; and that they were at that moment on the verge of bankruptcy. They did not reproach Justin with having spent all their savings: far from it. Indeed, incredible as it may seem, they humbly asked his pardon if they were no longer able to provide for his wants. And trembling with fear, they at last ventured to suggest, that perhaps it would be as well if he could find some kind of work. He coolly told them that he would think it over, but that he must have his thousand francs. And he got them, for his father and mother had still their watches and a little jewellery, all of which they pawned, handing him the proceeds. Still he saw that the till he had considered inexhaustible was really empty, and that it would be the same with his pockets, unless he could devise some means of filling them. Accordingly, he endeavoured to obtain some employment; and his god-father, formerly the valet of the old Marquis de Brévan, found him a post in the office of a banker, who wished to train a reliable young man to the business, with the view of ultimately entrusting him with the keeping of a large part of his funds."

Papa Ravinet's tone of voice changed so perceptibly as he uttered these last words, that Daniel and Henriette, with one impulse, asked him, "Is anything the matter, sir?"

He did not make any reply; but his sister, Mme. Bertolle, exclaimed, "No, there is nothing the matter with my brother;" and she looked at him with a nod of encouragement.

"I am all right," he said, like an echo; and then making a great effort, he continued: "In those days Justin Chevassat was as great a dissembler as now, and equally capable of resorting to any device in furtherance of his object. The hope of enriching himself by one great stroke had already seized hold of him, and it induced him to change his life and manners in the most radical manner. This hitherto lazy profligate now rose at day-break, worked for ten hours like a horse, and became the model of clerks. He had resolved to win his patron's favour and confidence, and succeeded in doing so by practising the most consummate hypocrisy; so that, only two years after entering the banker's service, he was already promoted to the post of chief-cashier and confidential clerk. In those times absconding cashiers were far less numerous than now-a-days. Bankers and financial companies did not include robbery by their own clerks among the ordinary risks. When they considered the keys of their safe were in the hands of an honest man, they slept soundly enough; and thus Justin Chevassat's patron had been sleeping for ten months, when one Sunday he happened to have especial need of certain papers which Justin usually kept in one of the drawers of his desk. Justin was sent for, but he was not at home, having left to spend the day with some friends, no one exactly knew where. Accordingly, the banker sent for a locksmith to open

the drawer. The first thing he saw, inside, was a draft signed by himself; and yet he had never put his name to such a paper. Still, most certainly, it was his signature: he would have sworn to it in court. His first amazement was succeeded by grievous apprehension. He had the other drawers opened in the same manner, searched them, and soon discovered all the details of a formidable and most ingenious plan, by which he was to be robbed at a single blow of more than a million francs. If he had slept soundly one month longer, he would have been half-ruined. That favourite clerk of his was merely a matchless forgerer. So, without more ado, he went to the Prefecture de Police; and the next morning, when Chevassat arrived at the office as usual, he was arrested. It was then thought that his crime was confined to this abortive attempt. Not so, however, for an examination of all the books and papers soon revealed other misdeeds. It was found that, on the very day after his appointment as confidential clerk, he had stolen five thousand francs, concealing his theft by means of a false entry. Since then not a week had elapsed without his laying hands on more or less considerable sums, and all these thefts had been most ingeniously concealed by such skilful imitations of other people's signatures, that once, when he had been ill for a fortnight, his substitute had never noticed the slightest thing wrong. In short, it appeared that his defalcations amounted altogether to some four hundred thousand francs, and the question was, what had he done with so large a sum of money? His defence was that he had been seized with a sudden uncontrollable idea to speculate on the Bourse—and, after all, was not that natural enough, for did not his own employer speculate there? Having lost some money, and fearing he should lose his situation if he did not pay, the fatal thought occurred to him of borrowing from the strong-box. From that moment he had only cherished the idea of restoring what he had abstracted. If he speculated anew, it was in hopes of gaining enough to cover the deficiency. But ill-luck pursued him; the deficit grew larger and larger, and, overcome with remorse and terror, he almost became mad, and ceased to restrain himself. He laid great stress upon the fact that the whole 400,000 francs had been lost at the Bourse; but, unfortunately, the forged checks and drafts in his drawer destroyed the force of this plea. The investigating magistrate suspected Justin's parents of knowing what had really become of this missing money. He questioned them, and obtained sufficient evidence against them to justify their arrest. But they could not be convicted at the trial, and had to be released. For Justin, however, matters looked serious; but he was lucky enough to be defended by a young advocate who initiated in his case a system of pleading which has since become very popular. He made no effort to exculpate his client, but boldly attacked the banker. 'Was it sensible,' he asked, 'to trust so young a man with such large sums? Was it not tempting him beyond his powers of resistance, and almost provoking him to become dishonest? What, this banker never examined his books for so many months? What kind of a business was it, where a cashier could so easily abstract 400,000 francs and remain undiscovered? And then how immoral for a banker to speculate at the Bourse, and thus set a bad example to his young, inexperienced clerks!' In the result Justin Chevassat escaped with twenty years' penal servitude. At the *bagne* of Brest he played the 'repentant criminal,' overcome with sorrow for the past, and determined to make amends in the future. He carried on this comedy so successfully, that, after three years and a-half, he was

pardoned. But he had not lost his time. Contact with professional criminals had sharpened his wits, and completed his education as a rogue,—inspiring him, moreover, with the idea of bursting forth in a new shape, under which no one would ever suspect his former identity.”

Papa Ravinet paused to draw breath, and then resumed: “I can tell you accurately now he did this. Through his godfather, the valet, who had died before his trial, Justin knew the history of the Brévan family in its minutest particulars. It was a very sad story. The old marquis had died insolvent, after losing every one of his five sons, who had gone abroad to make their fortunes. The family had thus become extinct; but Justin proposed to perpetuate it for his own advantage. He knew that the Brévans were originally from Maine; that they had formerly owned immense estates in the neighbourhood of Le Mans; and that they had not been there for more than twenty years. Would they still be remembered in a district where they had once been all-powerful? Most certainly they would. Would people take the trouble to inquire minutely what had become of the marquis and his five sons? As certainly not. Accordingly, as soon as Chevassat was free, he began by doing all he could to destroy every trace of his former identity; and, when he thought he had accomplished this, he went to Le Mans, assuming the name of one of the marquis's sons, who had been nearly of his own age. Everyone really believed that he was Maxime de Brévan, and, indeed, who would have doubted it when he purchased the ruined old family castle, and a small farm adjoining it, for a considerable sum in hard cash? Where did that cash come from? No doubt it formed part of those 400,000 francs said to have been lost at the Bourse,—but, in reality, confided for safe keeping to Justin's father and mother. He now took the precaution of living on his little estate for four years, leading the life of a country-gentleman, received with open arms by the nobility of the neighbourhood, forming friendships, gaining supporters, and becoming more and more identified as Maxime de Brévan. His aim was no doubt to marry an heiress, so as to consolidate his position; and he nearly carried out his plan. He was on the point of marrying a young lady from Le Mans, who would have brought him half-a-million francs in cash, and the banns had already been published, when, all of a sudden, the marriage was broken off, no one knew why. At all events, he was so disappointed by his failure, that he sold his property again, and left the province. For the next three years he lived in Paris, more completely Maxime de Brévan than ever; and then he met Sarah Brandon.”

We have condensed this narrative; but, in point of fact, Papa Ravinet had been speaking now for nearly three hours, and he was beginning to feel exhausted. He showed his weariness in his face, and his voice almost failed him. Still it was in vain that Daniel, Henriette, and Mme. Bertolle united in begging him to retire and take a little rest. “No,” said he, “I will go on to the end. You do not know how important it is that M. Champcey should be in a position to act to-morrow, or rather to-day.” Then returning to his subject, he proceeded: “It was at a fancy ball, given by M. Planix, that Sarah Brandon, at that time still known as Ernestine Bergot, and Justin Chevassat, now Maxime de Brévan, met for the first time. He was quite overpowered by her marvellous beauty; and she was strangely impressed by the peculiar expression on Maxime's face. Perhaps they divined each other's character, and had an intuitive perception of who they were. At all events, they danced several times together; sat side by side at supper; talked long and intimately; and were already fast friends when the ball came to a close.

After that they met frequently ; and, if it were not profanation, I would say they fell in love. They seemed made on purpose to understand, and, so to say, complement, each other—being equally corrupt, having the same sinful desires, and equally free from all old-fashioned prejudices about justice, morals, and honour. Thus they could hardly help coming to some understanding to associate their ambitions and future plans. It is evident that they talked together most freely ; in fact, that they had no secrets for each other ; and it is this mutual knowledge of each other's antecedents that prolonged their intimacy, when their *liaison* no longer existed. Now-a-days they hate each other ; but they are also afraid of each other. They have often tried to break off their intimacy—but they have always been compelled to renew it, owing to mutual interests. At first they had to conceal their connection, for they had no money. With what was left to her out of what she had stolen from her old German master, and what she had obtained from M. Planix, Sarah could not make up more than some forty thousand francs, which was not enough to 'set up' the most modest establishment. As to M. de Brévan, he had come to the end of the sums purloined from his employer, and for the last eight or ten months he had been reduced to all kinds of dangerous expedients. He no doubt still rode in his carriage ; but he had been more than once very happy to extort a napoleon or two from his parents. He visited them, of course, only in secret ; for they had in the meantime been reduced to the post of door-keepers or *concierges* at No. 23 Rue de la Grange. Thus, far from being able to assist Sarah, he was perfectly delighted when one fine day she brought him ten thousand francs to alleviate his distress. She did not give him this money for nothing, for on subsequent occasions she repeatedly suggested to Maxime that their future would be secure if they could only set their hands on Planix's money. Planix was so infatuated, so madly in love with her, that although quite a young man, she persuaded him to make a will in her favour ; and when this success had been achieved, M. de Brévan, whose turn it was to help, introduced into the circle which Sarah and Planix frequented, one of his personal friends, who was considered, and who really was, the best swordsman in Paris—a good fellow otherwise, honour itself, and rather patient in temper than given to quarrelling. However, without compromising herself, and with that abominable skill which is peculiarly her own, Sarah coquetted just enough with this young man, M. de Pont-Aver, to tempt him to pay her some attentions. But that very night she complained to M. Planix of his persecution, so skilfully exciting her protector's jealousy, that, three days later, he allowed himself to be carried away by passion, and struck M. de Pont-Aver in the presence of a dozen friends."

"Of course a duel was the result. They fought with swords one Saturday morning, in the wood of Vincennes, and, after a brief encounter, M. Planix fell dead, pierced to the heart. He was not yet twenty-seven years old. The poor young fellow's will was opened and read the same day by the district justice of the peace, who had been sent for to seal up the property. To Sarah's infinite discomfiture, this will was scarcely what she had expected. One day, thinking of his relatives, and greatly annoyed with Sarah for having absented herself, a thing she often did now-a-days to go and consult with de Brévan, Planix, who was jealousy personified, had added a couple of lines as a codicil. He still said, 'I appoint Mdle. Ernestine Bergot my residuary legatee ;' but he had written underneath, 'on condition that she pays to each of my sisters the sum of a hundred and

fifty thousand francs.' Now this was more than three-fourths of his whole fortune. Accordingly, when she reached Brévan's rooms that night, her first words were, 'We have been robbed ! Planix was a scamp ! We shan't have a hundred thousand francs left for ourselves.' She declared, moreover, that such a sum would barely suffice for a year's expenditure, whereupon de Brévan suggested that they might go to one of the German gambling resorts, and try and increase their capital. He was, in fact, an innate gambler ; and to persuade Sarah, he promised to turn her 100,000 francs into a million ; she yielded, tempted by the very boldness of his proposition. They resolved not to stop playing till they had won this million, or lost everything. And so they went to Homburg, where they fought the bank with marvellous skill and almost incredible coolness. I have met an old croupier who recollects them even now. Twice they were on the point of staking their last thousand-franc-note ; and one lucky day they had won as much as four hundred thousand francs. That day, Maxime proposed they should leave Homburg, but Sarah, who kept the money, refused, repeating her favourite motto, 'All, or nothing.' It was nothing. Victory remained, as usual, with the 'big battalions ;' and one evening the two partners returned to their lodgings, ruined, penniless, without even a watch left between them, and owing the hotel-keeper a considerable sum of money. Maxime spoke of blowing his brains out ; but Sarah, on the contrary, had never been merrier. The next morning she dressed very early and went out, saying she had a plan in her head, and would soon be back. But she failed to return ; and M. de Brévan waited for her in vain throughout the day. In the evening, however, a messenger brought him a letter. He opened the envelope, and found three thousand franc notes inside, together with the following note :—'When you receive these lines, I shall be far from Homburg. Do not wait for me. I enclose you enough to enable you to return to Paris. You shall see me again when our fortune is made—ERNESTINE.' Maxime was at first overcome with amazement, and then rage got the better of him. What, she had abandoned him in this unceremonious fashion ? Who had she gone off with ? Where had she gone ? He must find her and punish her for her faithlessness. He now recollected that during the last week or so, since fortune had forsaken them, he had on two or three occasions surprised her in the 'Salon de la Conversation,' talking with a thin elongated individual of forty or thereabouts, who was in the habit of wandering through the rooms, attracting considerable attention by his huge whiskers, stiff carriage, and wearied expression. Ruined as she was, perhaps she had gone off with this individual, who looked as if he might well be a millionaire. Where had he been staying ? Maxime soon found out that, and hurried to the hostelry in question—the Hôtel des Trois Rois. But he arrived too late. The elongated individual had left that morning for Frankfort, by the 10.45 train, with an elderly lady and a remarkably pretty girl. Sure of his game now, M. de Brévan started for Frankfort, convinced that Sarah's brilliant beauty would guide him like a star. But he explored the town in vain, inquiring at all the hotels, and pestering everyone with his eager questions. He could find no trace of the fugitives. He returned to Homburg the same night in a desperate state of mind, for during their five months' intimacy Sarah had gained such ascendancy over him, that now, that he was left to his own resources, he felt like a lost child. What could he do ? If he returned to Paris he must encounter his creditors, who, after his long absence, would certainly fall upon him at once. How could he

induce them to wait? Where could he obtain the money to pay them, at least, a percentage of their dues? How could he support himself? The future looked black indeed, and yet at last he mustered up sufficient courage to return to Paris and face the storm. Resuming his old life of expedients, he managed, by associating himself with another adventurer of his own stamp, to pass through the crisis, and secure sufficient for his most pressing needs, without compromising his assumed name. Still at the best it was only a makeshift life, and over and over again he asked himself, what had become of Ernestine Bergot."

"She was then in America. The tall, stiff individual and the elderly lady, who had carried her off, were Sir Thomas Elgin and Mrs Brian. What were their real names? I cannot tell you, for I have not had time to go into their antecedents. However, you may be quite certain that Elgin is no more a baronet than I am. Both of them belong to that class of adventurers who are always to be met hanging about the continental spas, watering places, and gambling resorts. They were both of English origin, and had so far managed to live pleasantly enough, of course at the expense of innumerable confiding dupes. Old age, however, was now approaching, and they were growing fearful for the future, when chance threw Ernestine Bergot across their path. They divined her character easily enough, and fancied she would furnish them with the means of acquiring a large fortune. So they offered to take her into partnership, furnishing everything they possessed, a hundred thousand francs or so, as capital for their projected enterprise. They proposed to use her as a snare and decoy, realising well enough that her beauty would suffice to entrap innumerable fools, and bring in a rich harvest of bank-notes. The idea was by no means novel—as you seem to think, M. Champeey—nor is the case a rare one. At all fashionable European resorts, young women of great beauty will be found backed up by cosmopolitan adventurers, and intent on ruining all such foolish *viveurs* as fall into their clutches. Sometimes they make their mark. Some have obtained royal favour; others have married dukes; and others again, unlucky in their ventures, now-a-days keep low gambling hells, or have recommenced the struggle as the chaperones and abettors of younger women. Now Elgin and Mrs Brian had decided to exhibit Sarah in Paris. She was to marry a duke with any number of millions; and they were to be remunerated for their trouble by receiving an annual allowance of some fifty or sixty thousand francs. But, in order to carry out the project with a good chance of success, it was indispensable that her identity, and even nationality, should be changed. She must reappear on the horizon like an unknown star; and, above all, she must be properly trained and schooled for the part she was to play. Hence the trip to America, and her long sojourn there. Chance helped them in a surprising way; for scarcely had they landed when they found they could easily introduce the girl as the daughter of General Brandon, just as Justin Chevassat had managed to become Maxime de Brévan. Brandon had really existed, but was now dead. At the epoch of the civil war, he had sent his wife and only daughter to Europe. People had subsequently heard of the wife's death, but what had become of the daughter no one knew. Thus, Ernestine Bergot was at once introduced into the best society at Philadelphia as Sarah Brandon. With the same idea as de Brévan, moreover, Elgin, despite his limited means, prudently purchased for a thousand dollars a considerable tract of land in the western part of the State where there were as yet no traces of any oil-wells, but where

some might very well be found, and had the property entered in his ward's name. I have documentary proof of all these particulars, and can produce it whenever necessary."

For some time already, Daniel and Henriette had been looking at each other in amazement. They were wonderfully impressed by the sagacity, cunning, patience, and labour which the old dealer must have expended in collecting all this curious information. But without noticing their surprise, he calmly continued, after a short pause: "Sir Tom and Mrs Brian soon realised what a good stroke of business they had done in securing Sarah's services. They began to teach her English at the outset; and as she only possessed a smattering of that tongue when she landed in America, the deficiency was explained by her prolonged residence in Europe under the care of foreign folks. Six months later, however, this wonderful girl spoke English perfectly, and people pointed to the circumstance as an instance of how swiftly the maternal tongue always returns, no matter how long it may have been forgotten or left unpractised. Moreover, as soon as Mrs Brian had explained to her the part she was expected to play, she had assumed it so naturally and perfectly, that one looked in vain for any trace of art. She had instinctively realised the immense advantage she would derive from reappearing in Europe as an American girl, and the irresistible effect she might easily produce by her air of freedom and bold ingenuousness. Finally, at the end of eighteen months sojourn in America, Elgin decided that the time had come for her to appear upon the stage. It was, therefore, twenty-eight months after their parting at Homburg, that M. de Brévan received, one morning, the following note: 'Come to-night, at nine o'clock, to Sir Thomas Elgin's house in the Rue du Cirque, and be prepared for a surprise.' He went there. A tall man, whom he didn't know, opened the door of the drawing-room; and, at the sight of a young lady who sat beside the fire, he could not help exclaiming, 'Ernestine, is that you?' But she interrupted him at once, saying, 'You are mistaken; Ernestine Bergot is dead, and buried by the side of Justin Chevassat, my dear M. de Brévan. Now don't look so amazed, but come and kiss Miss Sarah Brandon's hand.' It was heaven opening for Maxime. She had at last come back to him,—this woman, who had crossed his life like a tempest crosses the ocean, and whose memory he had ever retained in his heart. She had returned more beautiful than ever, and he fancied that love had brought her back. His vanity led him astray. Sarah had long since ceased to admire him. She had learned to appreciate him at his just value, and realised that he was too timid, over-cautious, petty in all his ideas and plans, like all needy scamps, and incapable of conceiving any vast design. Still although she now despised him she needed him. About to embark on a very dangerous game, she felt the necessity of having at least one accomplice in whom she could place perfect trust. To be sure there were Mrs Brian and Sir Tom, but she mistrusted them. They held her, and she had no hold on them. On the other hand, Maxime de Brévan was entirely hers, dependent on her pleasure, like the clay in a sculptor's hands. It is true he was most distressed when he heard that the immense fortune he coveted was still to be made, and that Sarah was no farther advanced now than she had been on the day of their separation. She might even have said that she was less so; for the two years and more which had just elapsed had played havoc with Sir Tom's and Mrs Brian's savings; and when they had settled for their establishment in the Rue du Cirque, and for the hire of a brougham, a landau, and two saddle-horses, they had hardly twenty thousand francs left altogether.

They knew, therefore, that they must succeed or sink during the coming year. And thus driven to bay, they were doubly to be feared. They were determined to pounce upon the first victim that might pass within reach, and chance at that moment offered them as a prey the unlucky cashier of the Mutual Discount Society—Malgat."

XXXI.

THE old dealer's fatigue seemed now to have altogether disappeared. He was sitting erect, with flashing eyes, and once more resumed his story, this time in a strangely strident voice: "It was an October afternoon when Malgat saw Sarah Brandon for the first time. He was then a man of forty, content with his lot in life, and rather simple, as is usually the case with those who have never mixed up in the intrigues of society. He had one great absorbing passion, however,—a mania for collecting curiosities, articles of vertu, bric-a-brac of every description, and his happiest moments were those when he managed to purchase a piece of china or some antique article of furniture for a cheap price. He was not rich, having long since spent all his little patrimony on his collections; but his situation brought him in some 12,000 francs a-year, and he was sure of an adequate pension in his old age. He had been head cashier for fifteen years, during which hundreds of millions of francs had passed through his hands without once arousing a covetous thought. His employers did not merely esteem him; they were positively his friends, and their confidence in him was so great, that they would have laughed in the face of any one who came and told them, 'Malgat is a thief!' One day he was standing near his safe, when a gentleman entered the office to cash a draft drawn by the Central Bank of Philadelphia upon the Mutual Discount Society. This gentleman, who was Sir Thomas Elgin, made a number of inquiries, and spoke such imperfect French, that Malgat asked him, for convenience sake, to step inside the railing. He came in, and behind him walked Sarah Brandon. At first sight Malgat was so impressed by her fascinating beauty that he fairly lost his head. He could scarcely stammer out an answer to Sir Tom's questions, and was lost in a kind of idiotic delight. He was the victim of one of those strange overwhelming passions which fairly deprive us of the free use of our faculties. Sarah had keenly noticed the impression she had produced. To be sure, Malgat was far from being the ideal millionaire husband these adventurers were seeking for; but, after all, he kept the keys of a safe in which millions were deposited, and something might no doubt be got out of him to enable the 'clique' to wait for better times. They had soon formed their plan, and the very next day Sir Tom presented himself alone at the office to ask for some fresh information. He returned three days later with another draft, and by the end of the week he had furnished Malgat with an opportunity to render him some trifling services. Thus a connection was established; and, at the end of a fortnight, Sir Tom could, with all propriety, ask the cashier to dine with him in the Rue du Cirque. One of those presentiments which we ought always to listen to warned Malgat not to accept the invitation; but he was already no longer his own master. He went to that dinner, and came away madly in love. The commonest politeness required that he should pay Mrs Brian and Sir Tom an 'after dinner' visit, and this first call was followed by many others. A man less blinded by passion might have

grown mistrustful on noting the eagerness with which these wretches, impelled by necessity, carried on the intrigue. Six weeks after their first meeting, Malgat fancied that Sarah was in love with him. It was an absurd, foolish, insane idea, no doubt, and yet such was his fancy. He thought that Sarah's rapturous glances were genuine, he believed in the marvellous sweetness of her voice, and was especially struck by the blushes of apparent confusion which his coming invariably provoked. The second act of the comedy at once followed. One day Mrs Brian pretended all of a sudden to notice something amiss, and promptly requested Malgat never to set foot again within that house. She accused him of an attempt to seduce Sarah Brandon. You can imagine, no doubt, how the fool protested, explaining the purity of his intentions, and swearing that he would be the happiest of mortals if they would condescend to grant him their niece's hand. But Sir Tom haughtily asked him how he dared to think of such a thing, for surely he was no fit match for a young lady with a dowry of two hundred thousand dollars. Malgat went away in despair, and fully determined to kill himself. Indeed, he was just sitting down to make his will, when the door-keeper of the house he lived in came up-stairs with a letter from Sarah. "When a girl like myself loves," wrote the artful siren, 'she loves for life, and belongs to the man she has chosen, or to nobody. If your love be true, if dangers and difficulties terrify you no more than they terrify me, knock to-morrow night, at ten o'clock, at the side-gate of the courtyard. I will open it.' Mad with joy and hope, Malgat went to that fatal meeting, and Sarah flung her arms round his neck, and exclaimed: 'I love you. Let us run away.' Ah! if he had taken her at her word, the plot might perhaps have been defeated; for she would certainly not have fled with him. But she had divined the cashier's character, his morals as well as his material probity, and, in making the proposal, she knew well enough that he would not accept it. Indeed, the poor fool said to himself that it would be a mean thing to abuse this pure, trustful girl's attachment, separate her from her family, and ruin her forever. So, with wonderful self-denial he dissuaded her from taking such a step, and induced her to be patient, saying that he would do all he could to overcome the obstacles in their way, and that time would no doubt come to their assistance."

Papa Ravinet paused, almost overcome by his own excitement. At length, when a cup of strong tea and a short rest had in some measure restored him, he resumed as follows: "After leaving that meeting, Malgat was at first unable to reason with himself, but later on he realised that there was no hope of inducing Sir Tom and Mrs Brian to consent to such a match. There was but one way of securing possession of the woman he so madly worshipped, the course she had herself suggested—elopement. But then he must bid good-bye for ever to his quiet life, and venture upon an unknown future. And, besides, he had no money. How could he expose this heiress, who abandoned everything for his sake—this beautiful girl, who was accustomed to every imaginable luxury—to want and humiliation? No: he could never dare do that. And yet his entire available capital did not amount to five thousand francs. His fortune was invested in bric-a-brac, and although he knew that his collection was worth a considerable amount, how could he hope to find a purchaser for it at a moment's notice? For time was pressing. He had seen Sarah several times secretly; and on each occasion she had appeared more mournful and dejected. She had always some distressing news to impart. Mrs Brian spoke of giving her in

marriage to a friend of hers. Sir Tom had proposed to take her abroad. And, with such troubles to worry him, the unfortunate cashier had also to attend to his daily duties, tens and hundreds of thousands of francs constantly passing through his hands, and yet never, I swear it, did he once think of abstracting a single halfpenny. He had determined to sell his collections at any price he could get, so as to be ready for flight, when one day, a few moments before the office closed, a lady, muffled up in a long cloak and wearing a thick veil, entered his private room, where as usual he was quite alone. She raised her veil, and he recognised Sarah Brandon. Without more ado she told him, in a few words, that Sir Tom had found out their secret meetings, and had bidden her to prepare to start for Philadelphia the very next morning. The crisis had come. They must choose now between two things,—they must either fly that same night, or separate forever. Ah! never had Sarah been so beautiful as at this moment, when she was seemingly maddened by grief; never had her beauty exhaled such a powerful, irresistible charm. Her bosom heaved, she spoke in sobs, and big tears, like scattered pearls, coursed down her pale cheeks. The imminence of the danger extorted from Malgat a confession of the reasons that had made him hesitate so long. He told her, cruelly humiliated by the avowal, that he had no money. ‘No money? No money?’ she cried with crushing irony. And when Malgat, more ashamed of his poverty than if it had been a crime, blushed to the roots of his hair, she pointed to the immense safe, full of notes and gold, exclaiming,—‘Why, what is all that?’ Malgat sprang towards the safe, stretching out his arms as if to defend it, and, fairly terrified, asked, ‘What are you thinking of? And my honour?’ ‘Well, and mine?’ replied Sarah, looking him straight in the face. ‘Is my honour nothing? Am I not going to sacrifice it for you?’ She said this in a tone and with a look which would have tempted an angel. Malgat fell helplessly into a chair. Then she approached him, and, with burning, passionate glances, resumed,—‘If you loved me really! Ah, if you really loved me!’ And then she bent over him, tremulous with passion, and their lips almost met. ‘If you loved me as I love you,’ she whispered again. It was all over; Malgat was lost. He drew Sarah towards him, and kissing her, replied,—‘Very well, then; Yes!’ At once she disengaged herself, and eagerly seizing one parcel of bank-notes after another, packed them into a little morocco bag she held in her hand. At last, when the bag was full, she said,—‘Now we are safe. To-night, at ten o’clock, be at the gate of the courtyard with a vehicle. To-morrow, at daybreak, we shall be beyond the frontier. Now we are bound to each other forever,—and remember I love you!’ So saying, she turned to leave, and let her go.”

The old dealer had now become ghastly white, and large drops of perspiration trickled down his cheeks. After swallowing another cup of tea at a gulp, he continued with a bitter laugh: “You suppose, no doubt, that when Sarah had left him, Malgat came to himself again? By no means. It seemed as if the infamous creature had inspired him with her own genius for evil. Far from repenting, he rejoiced over what had been done; and when he learned that, on the following day, the directors would meet to examine the books, he positively laughed at the thought of the faces they would make; for, as I told you, he was mad. With all the coolness of a hardened thief, he calculated the total amount that had been abstracted: it was four hundred thousand francs. Then so as to conceal the true state of things, he took his books, and, with almost diabolical skill, altered the

figures, and changed the entries, so as to make it appear as if the defalcation was of long standing, and as if various sums had been abstracted during several successive months. When he had finished his fearful task, he wrote the chairman a hypocritical letter, in which he stated that he had robbed the safe in order to pay his differences at the Bourse, and that being unable to conceal his crime any longer, he was going to commit suicide. When this was done he left his office, as if nothing had happened. The proof that he acted under the influence of a species of hallucination is that he didn't feel the slightest remorse or fear. Thinking it best not to return home or to encumber himself with luggage, he dined at a restaurant, spent a few minutes at a café, and then posted his letter to the chairman, so that it might reach him early in the morning. At ten o'clock he knocked at the little gate of the house in the Rue du Cirque, and to his surprise a servant opened it, and mysteriously told him to go up-stairs, as the young lady was waiting for him. On hearing this, Malgat was seized with a terrible presentiment; still, he had strength and nerve enough to enter the drawing-room on the first floor, where he found Sarah and Maxime de Brévan sitting side by side on a sofa. They were laughing so loud that Malgat could hear them as he went up-stairs. 'Ah!' said Sarah, as soon as he entered, 'It's you. Well, what do you want now?' Such a reception ought surely to have opened Malgat's eyes; but no! and he was beginning to stammer out some explanation, when she interrupted him, saying, 'Let us speak frankly. You come to run away with me, don't you? Well, that's simply nonsense. Look at yourself, my friend, and tell me if a girl like myself can be in love with a man like you. As for that small loan, it does not pay me, I assure you, by half, for the sublime little comedy I have had to play. Believe me, at all events, when I tell you that I have taken every precaution so as not to be troubled by anything you may say or do. And now, sir, I wish you good-evening; or must I go? Ah! she might have continued speaking a long time yet, and Malgat would not have thought of interrupting her. The fearful truth broke all of a sudden upon him. He realised the enormity of the crime; he discerned its fatal consequences, and knew he was ruined. The voice of conscience clamoured noisily, 'You are a thief! You are a forger! You are dishonoured!' However, when he saw Sarah rise to leave the room, he felt so enraged that he sprang forward, exclaiming, 'Yes, I am lost; but you shall die, Sarah Brandon!' Poor fool! he did not reflect that these wretches had, of course, foreseen his wrath, and were prepared for the emergency. With the suppleness of one of those lost children of the gutter among whom she had formerly lived, Sarah escaped from Malgat's grasp, and by a clever trick threw him into an arm-chair. Before he could rise again, he was held fast by Maxime de Brévan and Sir Tom, who, having heard the noise, rushed in from the adjoining room. Malgat did not attempt to resist. What would have been the use? And, besides, a faint hope was dawning in his mind. It seemed to him impossible that such a monstrous wrong could be perpetrated with impunity, and he fancied he would only have to reveal the truth to have the whole clique properly punished. 'Let me go!' he said at last. 'I must go!' But they did not allow him to leave as yet. They guessed what was transpiring in his mind, and Sir Tom coolly asked him, 'Where do you think of going? Do you mean to denounce us? Have a care! You would only sacrifice yourself, without doing us any harm. If you think you can use Sarah's letter, in which she appoints a meeting with you, as a weapon

against us, you are mistaken. She did not write it herself ; and, moreover, she can prove an *alibi*. You see we have prepared everything for this business during the last three months : and nothing has been left to chance. Don't forget that I have commissioned you at least twenty times to buy or sell for me at the Bourse, and that the transactions were always carried on in your name, at my request. How can you say you did not speculate at the Bourse ?' The poor cashier's heart sank within him. Had he not himself, for fear of suspicion falling upon Sarah Brandon, told the directors in his letter to them, that he had been tempted by unlucky speculations ? Had he not altered the entries in his books in order to prove this assertion ? Would they believe him if he were now to tell the truth ? While he was thinking, Sir Tom went on—' Have you forgotten the letters you wrote to me for the purpose of borrowing money, and in which you confess your defalcations ? Here they are. You can read them.' These letters, M. Champcey, were those which Sarah showed you ; and on seeing them, Malgat was frightened out of his wits. He had never written such letters ; and yet there was his handwriting, imitated with such amazing perfection, that he began to doubt his own senses. However, he realised that no one would look upon them as forgeries. Ah ! Maxime de Brévan is an admirable calligraphic artist, as his letter to the Ministry of Marine has no doubt proved it to you. To resume, however. While Malgat sat there well-nigh stupefied, Sarah began to speak. ' Look here,' said she, ' I'll give you some advice. Here are ten thousand francs : take them, and run for your life. It is still time to take the train for Brussels.' But Malgat rose to his feet, exclaiming, ' No ! There is nothing left for me but to die. May my blood fall upon you !' And then he rushed out with the laughter of those wretches ringing in his ears."

Daniel and Henriette were unable to repress a shudder of horror while listening to these last particulars, and Mme. Bertolle seemed utterly overcome. However, Papa Ravinet raised his voice once more, speaking this time with evident haste : " Whether Malgat committed suicide or not," said he, " he was never heard of again. The trial came on, and he was condemned by default to ten years' penal servitude. Sarah also was examined by a magistrate ; but she transformed her examination into a victory. And that was everything. This crime, one of the most atrocious ever conceived by human wickedness, went to swell the long list of unpunished outrages. The thieves triumphed impudently in broad daylight. They had four hundred thousand francs, and could have retired from business. But no. Twenty thousand francs a-year was far too little for them. They accepted this fortune as an instalment on account, while waiting for a fresh victim. Unfortunately for them, they could not at first find one. Their establishment was mounted upon a most expensive footing. M. de Brévan had, of course, claimed his share of the spoils ; Sir Tom was a gambler ; Sarah loved diamonds ; and even grim Mrs Briau had her own private vices. In short, these 400,000 francs had almost been expended when Sarah discovered another prey. This time her victim was a handsome young man, scarcely out of his teens, of a generous and chivalrous nature. He was an orphan, and had come from his native province with a heart full of illusions, and half-a-million of francs in his pocket. His name was Charles de Kergrist. Maxime managed to introduce him to the house in the Rue du Cirque. He saw Sarah, and was dazzled by her beauty. He fell madly in love with her, and was lost at once. Ah ! He didn't last long. At the end of five months his half-

million was in Sarah's hands. And when he hadn't a sou left, she well-nigh forced him to write her three forged drafts, swearing, that on the day they became due, she would take them up herself. But when that day came, and he called at the Rue du Cirque, he was received just as Malgat had been received. He was told that the forgery had been discovered: that a complaint had been lodged with the Public Prosecutor, and that he was ruined. They also offered him money to escape. Poor Kergrist! They had not miscalculated the effects of this statement. He came of a family in which a keen sense of honour had been hereditary for many generations, and did not hesitate. As soon as he left the house, he hanged himself outside Sarah's window, thinking that this course would expose the woman who had ruined him to public censure. Poor boy! They had deceived him. He was not dishonoured. The forgery had never been discovered; in fact, the drafts had never been used at all. A careful investigation revealed nothing against Sarah Brandon; but the scandal of the suicide diminished her prestige. She felt it; and, giving up her more inordinate dreams of greatness, she thought of marrying a wealthy fool, M. Gordon-Chalusse, when Sir Tom spoke to her of the Count de Ville-Handry. In fortune, rank, and age, the count was exactly what Sarah had so often dreamed of, and so she pounced upon him at once. You know well enough, M. Champcey, how the old gentleman was drawn to the Rue du Cirque, ensnared, intoxicated, and led on to marry this adventuress. But you are ignorant so far of the fact that this marriage brought discord into the camp. M. de Brévan would not hear of it; and it was in hopes of preventing it that he spoke to you so frankly of Sarah Brandon. When you went to ask his advice, he was on bad terms with her; she had turned him off, and refused to give him any more money. And he was so mortally offended, that he would even have betrayed her to the legal officials, if he had known how to do so without inculpating himself. Afterwards, when de Brévan saw that Sarah was positively determined to marry M. de Ville-Handry, you were the very person to reconcile them again, inasmuch as you gave Maxime an opportunity of rendering Sarah a great service. He did not then anticipate that she would ever fall in love with you, and, in her turn, succumb to one of those desperate passions which she had so often kindled in others for her own pecuniary advantage. This discovery made him furious; and Sarah's love, and Maxime's rage, will explain to you the double plot that has been going on. Sarah loved you, and wanted to get rid of Henriette, who was your betrothed; while Maxime, stung by jealousy, did all he could to hasten your death."

Overcome with fatigue, Papa Ravinet now fell back in his chair, and remained silent for more than five minutes. Then making a final effort, he exclaimed: "Now, let us sum up. I know how Sarah, Sir Tom, and Mrs Brian went to work to rob the Count de Ville-Handry, and ruin him. I know what they have done with the millions which they report have been lost in speculations, and I have the proofs in my hand. Therefore, I can ruin them, without reference to their other crimes. Crochard's affidavit alone suffices to ruin M. de Brévan; and the two Chevassats, husband and wife, have caught themselves by keeping the four thousand francs you sent to Mlle. Henriette. We have them safe, the wretches! The hour of vengeance has come at last."

Henriette did not let him conclude: "And my father, sir, my father?" she exclaimed.

"M. Champcey will save him, madame."

Daniel, who was deeply moved, now asked, "What am I to do?"

"You must call on the Countess Sarah, and look as if you had forgotten everything that has happened,—especially as if you had forgotten all about Mlle. Henriette."

The young officer flushed crimson, and stammered in reply: "But I can't play such a part as that—I should never know how to." But Henriette laid her hand on his shoulder, and giving him a searching look, quietly asked: "Have you any reasons for hesitating?"

He hung his head, and answered, "Well, I will go."

XXXII.

It was two o'clock in the afternoon when Daniel alighted from a cab in front of the offices of the Pennsylvania Petroleum Company—79 Rue Lepelletier—above which the Count de Ville-Handry now resided. He had never before felt so embarrassed, or so dissatisfied with himself. In vain had Papa Ravinet and Mme. Bertolle tried to convince him that all reprisals were fair with a woman like Sarah Brandon; and had it not been for Henriette, whose confidence he was fearful of forfeiting, he certainly would not have ventured on this distasteful enterprise. On enquiring of a clerk, he learnt that the 'chairman' was in his rooms, on the third floor. He went up-stairs, rang at the door, and was ushered in by Clarisse, the pious maid who had betrayed poor Henriette. As Daniel was conducted through the dark ante-room, he could not help noticing an offensive smell from the kitchen, and was surprised, indeed, to find such an aristocratic nobleman as M. de Ville-Handry living in such questionable quarters. The count was in the sitting-room, leaning over an immense table, covered with papers. He had greatly aged. His pendant under lip imparted an almost idiotic expression to his features, and his bleared, watery eyes told a strange tale. Still he had not given up his attempts at rejuvenescence, for he was rouged and dyed as carefully as ever. On recognising Daniel, he pushed back his papers; and offering the young officer his hand, as if they had parted on friendly terms the day before, he said, "Ah, so here you are back among us again! Upon my word, I am very glad to see you! We know what you have been doing out there; for my wife sent me again and again to the Ministry of Marine to see if there were any news of you. And you have become an officer of the Legion of Honour! You ought to be pleased."

"Fortune has favoured me, count."

"Alas! I am sorry I cannot say as much for myself," replied M. de Ville-Handry, with a sigh. "You must be surprised," he continued, "to find me living in such a dog's kennel, I who formerly— But so it goes. 'The ups and downs of speculation,' says Sir Tom. Look here, my dear Daniel, let me give you a piece of advice: never speculate in industrial enterprises! Now-a-days it is mere gambling, furious gambling; and everybody cheats his neighbour. If you stake a single napoleon, you are in for everything. That's my story, and yet I thought I might enrich my country by a new source of revenue. On the first day I issued shares, speculators got hold of them, and they have crushed me over and over again, till my whole fortune has been spent in useless efforts to keep up the market value. And yet Sir Tom says I have fought as bravely on this slippery ground as my ancestors ever did in the lists." At frequent intervals the unfortunate old man passed his hand over his face, as if trying to drive away painful thoughts:

and at last he went on in a different tone of voice : " However, I am far from complaining. My misfortunes have been the source of the purest, highest, domestic happiness. It is to them I owe the knowledge of my wife's devotion : they have taught me how dearly Sarah loves me. I alone can tell what treasures are contained in that angelic heart, which slanderers dared to calumniate. Ah ! I think I can hear her now, when I told her one evening how embarrassed I had become in financial matters. ' To have concealed that from me ! ' she exclaimed,—' from me, your wife : that was very wrong ! ' And the very next day she showed me her sublime courage. She sold her diamonds to bring me the proceeds, and gave her whole fortune up to me. And since we have been living here, she goes out on foot, like a simple citizen's wife ; and more than once I have caught her preparing our modest meals with her own hands." While the count spoke, tears streamed down his furrowed cheeks, leaving ghastly lines on the rouged and whitened surface. " And I," he resumed in a tone of despair,—" I could not reward her for such love and so many sacrifices. How did I compensate her for being my only consolation, my joy, my sole happiness in life ! I ruined her ; I impoverished her ! If I were to die to-morrow, she would be penniless."

Daniel trembled. " Ah, count," he exclaimed, " don't speak of dying ! Men like you live a hundred years."

But the old man lowered his voice, and rejoined, " You see, I have not yet told you everything. But you are my friend ; and I know I can open my heart to you. I did not have the—the—cleverness to overcome all the restrictions which hamper this kind of business. I was imprudent, in spite of all Sir Tom's warnings. To-morrow there will be a meeting of the shareholders ; and if they do not grant me what I shall have to ask of them, I may be in trouble. And when a man calls himself the Count de Ville-Handry, rather than appear in court—you know what I mean !"

At this moment he was interrupted by one of his clerks, who brought him a letter. He glanced at it, and then replied, " Tell them I am coming." And turning again to Daniel, he added, " I must leave you ; but the countess is at home, and she would never forgive me if I did not let you present your respects to her. Come ! But be careful and don't say a word of my troubles. It would kill her." Before Daniel could recover from his bewilderment, the count had opened a door and pushed him into an inner room, exclaiming, " Sarah, here is M. Champcey."

The countess started up as if she had received an electric shock. Her husband had left them ; but, even if he had been still in the room, she would probably not have been able to control herself. " You ! " she cried, " Daniel, my Daniel ! " And turning to Mrs Brian, who was sitting by the window, she said, " Leave us."

" Your conduct is perfectly shocking, Sarah," began the grim lady. But the countess interrupted her, as harshly as if she had been speaking to a servant, saying, " You are in the way, and I must request you to leave the room."

Mrs Brian did so without another word ; and Sarah sank into an arm-chair, as if overcome by sudden good fortune. Her eyes were fixed on Daniel, who stood motionless in the centre of the room. She wore a simple black merino dress ; there was no jewellery whatever about her person ; but her marvellous, fatal beauty seemed all the more dazzling. The years had passed without leaving any more traces on her features than the spring breeze leaves on an expanding rose. Her hair still gleamed with golden

rays ; her rosy lips smiled sweetly ; and her velvet eyes were as caressing as ever. Once before Daniel had been thus alone with her ; and at the recollection he began to tremble. Then, thinking of his purpose, and the treacherous part he was about to play, he felt a desire to escape. It was she who broke the charm. "I presume you know," said she, "all about the misfortunes that have befallen us. Your betrothed, Henriette ? Has the count told you ?"

Daniel had taken a chair. "The count said nothing about his daughter," he replied.

"Well, then, my saddest presentiments have been fulfilled. Unhappy girl ! I did what I could to keep her in the right path. But she fell, step by step, and finally so low, that one day, when a ray of sense reached her mind, she went and killed herself."

It was done. Sarah had overcome Daniel's last lingering hesitation. Now he was in the right temper to meet cunning with cunning. So with admirably-feigned indifference, he answered, "Ah !" And, encouraged by the joyous surprise he read in Sarah's eyes, he proceeded : "This expedition has cost me dear. Count de Ville-Handry has just informed me that he has lost his whole fortune, and I'm in the same condition."

"What ! You are—"

"Ruined. Yes : that's to say, I have been robbed,—robbed of every sou I ever had. On the eve of my departure, I intrusted property worth three or four hundred thousand francs—in fact, all I ever possessed—to M. de Brévan, with orders to hold it at Mlle. Henriette's disposal. He found it easier to appropriate the whole to himself. So, you see, I am reduced to my pay as a lieutenant, which isn't much."

Sarah looked at Daniel with perfect amazement. In any other man, this prodigious confidence in a friend would have appeared to her the height of human folly : in Daniel, she thought it sublime. "Is that the reason why they have arrested M. de Brévan ?" she asked.

Daniel had not heard of his former friend's arrest. "What !" said he, "Maxime—"

"Was arrested last night, and is kept in close confinement."

However well Papa Ravinet had prepared Daniel for this interview, he could never have hoped to manage the conversation as well as chance did.

"It can't be for having robbed me," he replied. "M. de Brévan must have been arrested for having attempted to murder me."

A lioness just robbed of her whelps could not rise with greater fury in her eyes than Sarah did when she heard these words. "What !" she cried, "He dared to touch you !"

"Not personally ; oh, no ! But he hired a felon, who was caught, and has confessed everything. I suppose the order to apprehend my friend Maxime reached here before me, although it left Saigon some time later than I did."

Might not M. de Brévan be as cowardly as Crochard when he saw that all was lost ? This idea, one would think, should have made Sarah tremble.

But it never occurred to her. "Ah, the wretch !" she repeated. "The scoundrel, the rascal !" And, sitting down by Daniel's side, she asked him to give her all the particulars of this thrice-repeated attempt at murder, from which he had so miraculously escaped. The countess never doubted for a moment but that Daniel was as madly in love with her as Planix, Malgat, Kergrist, and all the others had been, for she had grown so accustomed to find her beauty irresistible. How could it have occurred

to her that this man, the very first whom she sincerely loved, should also be the first and only one to escape her snares? She was, moreover, additionally deceived by the double mirage of love and absence. During those two years she had so often thought of Daniel, so constantly lived with him in her mind, that she mistook the illusion of her desires for reality, and was no longer able to distinguish between her dreams and the real fact.

In the meantime he described to her his present position, lamenting over the treachery by which he had been ruined, and adding, how hard he would find it to begin life anew at his age. And she, generally so clear-sighted, was not surprised to find that this man, who had been disinterestedness itself, should all of a sudden deplore his losses so bitterly, and value money so highly. "Why don't you marry a rich woman!" she suddenly asked him.

With a perfection of affected candour he would not have thought himself capable of the day before, he instantly replied, "What? Do you—you, Sarah—give me such advice?"

He said this so naturally, and with such an air of aggrieved surprise, that she was as delighted as if he had made her the most passionate avowal.

"You love me? Do you really, really love me?" she asked; but before Daniel could reply, the servant was heard turning the handle of the door outside. "Go now," added the countess in an undertone. "You shall know to-morrow whom I have chosen for you. Come and breakfast with us at eleven o'clock. Now go." And, kissing him on his lips till they burnt with unholy fire, she pushed him out of the room.

He staggered like a drunken man as he went down the stairs. "I am playing an abominable game," he said to himself. "She does love me! What a woman!" To rouse him from his stupor, nothing less than the sight of Papa Ravinet was needed. The old dealer was ensconced inside Daniel's cab. "Why, how are you here?" asked the young officer.

"Why, I thought I might be useful—and, indeed, if it hadn't been for me, the count would have detained you and prevented you from seeing Sarah alone. So I came to your rescue by sending him up a letter. Now, tell me everything."

While they were driving along, Daniel repeated his conversation with the count and Sarah; and when he had concluded, the old dealer exclaimed, "We have the whole matter in our hands now. But there is not a minute to lose. Go back to the hotel, and wait for me there. I must go to the Public Prosecutor."

At the hotel Daniel found Henriette dying with anxiety. Still, she only asked after her father. Was it pride, or was it prudence? At all events, she did not mention Sarah's name. They did not, however, have much time for conversation, for Papa Ravinet came back sooner than expected, and looked particularly excited. He drew Daniel aside to give him his last directions, and did not leave till midnight, when he went away, exclaiming: "The ground is burning under our feet: be punctual to-morrow."

At the appointed time Daniel presented himself in the Rue Lepelletier, where the count received him like the day before. "Ah!" he exclaimed, "you come just in time. Mrs Brian is away; Sir Tom is out on business; and I shall have to leave you directly after *déjeûner*. You must keep the countess company. Come, Sarah, let us sit down."

It was an ill-omened repast. The count was ghastly pale under his paint, and was constantly trembling from head to foot. The countess affected an air of childlike happiness; but her sharp and sudden gestures betrayed the storm which was raging in her heart. Daniel noticed that she

incessantly filled the count's glass with strong wine; and that, in order to make him take more, she herself drank an unusual quantity. Just as it struck twelve, the Count de Ville-Handry got up. "Well," he said, with the air and the voice of a man preparing to mount the scaffold, "it must be done: they are waiting for me." And, after kissing his wife with passionate tenderness, he shook hands with Daniel, and hurried out of the room. Sarah, whose cheeks were all aglow, had also risen, and remained for a minute listening attentively. When she was quite sure that the count had gone down-stairs, she exclaimed, "Now, Daniel, look at me! Need I tell you what woman I have chosen for you? It is—I."

He trembled as he heard her speak; but, making a supreme effort to control himself, he succeeded in forcing a smile to his face, and answered, with mingled tenderness and irony, "Why! why speak to me of unattainable happiness? Are you not married?"

"I may be a widow."

These words had a fearful meaning, coming from her lips. But Daniel was prepared for them, and merely rejoined, "To be sure you may. But, unfortunately, you are ruined. You are as poor as I am; and we are too clever to think of uniting poverty with poverty."

She looked at him with a strange, sinister smile. She was evidently hesitating. A last ray of reason faintly showed her the abyss at her feet. But pride and passion won the day. Besides, she had taken too much wine; and her usually cool head was in a state of delirium. "And if I were not ruined?" she asked at last, "What would you say then?"

"I should say that you are the very woman an ambitious man of thirty might dream of in his most glorious visions."

She believed him. Yes, she really believed that what he said was true; so, throwing aside all restraint, she resumed: "Well, then, I will tell you. I am rich,—immensely rich. The fortune which once belonged to the Count de Ville-Handry, and which he thinks has been lost in unlucky speculations,—the whole of it is in my hands. Ah! I have suffered horribly to have to play the loving wife to this decrepit old man during two long years. But I thought of you, my Daniel; and that thought sustained me. I knew you would come back; and I wanted to have treasures to give you. And I have them. Those coveted millions are mine, and you are here; and now I can say to you, 'Take them, they are yours: I give them to you like I give myself.'" She had drawn herself up to her full height as she spoke these words; and she looked splendid and fearful at the same time, as she shook her head defiantly, till her golden hair became loosened, and streamed over her shoulders.

Daniel felt as if his reason was giving way. Still he had sufficient strength to answer,—"But, unfortunately, you are not yet a widow."

"Not a widow!" she retorted in a strident voice. "Do you know what the Count de Ville-Handry is doing at this moment? He is beseeching his shareholders to relieve him from the effects of his mismanagement. If they refuse, he will be brought up in court, and tried as a defaulter. Well, I tell you they will refuse; for among the largest shareholders there are three who belong to me: I have bribed them to refuse. What do you think the count will do when he finds himself dishonoured and disgraced? I can tell you that; for I watched him write his will, and load his revolver."

At that moment they both heard the outer door of the apartment open. Sarah turned as pale as death itself, and, clutching hold of Daniel's arm,

she whispered, "Listen!" Heavy steps were heard in the adjoining room, then—nothing more! "It is he!" she whispered again. "Our fate is hanging in the scales—" She had scarcely spoken when a loud report was heard, making the windows rattle. For an instant she almost writhed in a convulsive spasm, and then with a great effort she shrieked, "Free at last, Daniel: we are free!" And, rushing to the door, she opened it.

She opened it, and uttered a cry of terror. For on the threshold stood the Count de Ville-Handry, with distorted features, and holding a smoking revolver in his hand. "No," he said, "Sarah, no, you are not free!"

Livid, and with her eyeballs starting from their sockets, the wretched woman had shrunk back to a door opening from the dining-room into her bed-chamber. She was not despairing yet. She was plainly trying to think of one of those almost incredible excuses which are at times accepted by credulous old men when violent passions seize them in their dotage. However, she abandoned the thought, when the count stepped forward, allowing Papa Ravinet to be seen behind him. "Malgat!" she cried,— "Malgat!" And so saying, she held out her hands before her as if to defend herself from a ghost. But there was more to come, for behind Malgat Henriette could now be seen leaning on Mme. Bertolle's arm. "She also," muttered Sarah,— "she too!" The terrible truth at last dawned on her mind: she saw the snare in which she had been caught, and felt that she was lost. So turning to Daniel, she exclaimed, "Poor man! Who made you do this? It was not in your loyal heart to plan such treachery against a woman. Are you mad? And don't you know, that for the privilege of being loved by me as I love you, and were it only for a day, Malgat would again rob his employers, and the count once more sacrifice his millions, and even honour itself?"

She said this; but at the same time she had slipped one of her hands behind her, and was feeling for the knob of the door. At last she grasped it, and instantly disappeared into her bedroom before any one could prevent her. "Never mind!" said Malgat. "All the outer doors are guarded."

But she had not meant to escape. There she was again, pale and yet defiant. Glancing around her, she exclaimed almost mockingly, "I have loved; and now I can die. That is just. I have loved. Ah! Planix, Malgat, and Kergrist ought to have taught me what becomes of those who really love." Then looking at Daniel, she went on, "And you—you will know what you have lost when I am no more. I may die; but the memory of my love will never die: it will rankle in your heart like a wound which opens afresh every day, and the soreness of which steadily increases. You triumph now, Henriette; but remember, that between your lips and Daniel's there will forever rise the shadow of Sarah Brandon!" As she uttered these last words, she swiftly raised a small phial to her lips, imbibed the contents at one gulp, and, sinking into a chair, spoke for the last time. "Now I defy you all!"

"Ah, she escapes us!" exclaimed Malgat, "she escapes from justice!" And so saying, he rushed forward as if to try and prevent her from effecting her purpose; but Daniel caught him by the arm and said,— "Let her die."

She was already writhing in horrible convulsions; and the penetrating smell of bitter almonds, which slowly pervaded the room, told but too plainly that the poison she had taken was one from which there is no rescue. She was carried to her bed; and in less than ten minutes she was dead, without having uttered another word.

Henriette and Mrs Bertolle were kneeling piously beside the bed, and

the count was sobbing in a corner of the room, when an inspector of police entered. "The woman Brian is not to be found," he said; "but Elgin has been arrested. Where is the Countess de Ville-Handry?" Daniel pointed to the body. "Dead!" exclaimed the officer. "Then I have nothing more to do here."

He was going out, when Malgat detained him: "I beg your pardon, sir," said the old fellow. "I wish to state that I am not Ravinet, dealer in curiosities, but that my true name is Malgat, formerly cashier of the Mutual Discount Society, and sentenced by default to ten years' penal servitude. I am ready to be tried, and place myself in your hands."

XXXIII.

THE magistrate from Saigon saw his hopes fulfilled, and, thanks to his promotion, was commissioned to preside at the trial of the case, which he had so ably investigated. After the jury had returned a verdict of guilty, he sentenced Justin Chevassat, *alias* Maxime de Brévan, to penal servitude for life. Crochard, surnamed Bagnolet, got off with twenty years; and the two Chevassats escaped with half that term of solitary confinement. The trial of Thomas Elgin, which came on during the same session, revealed a system of swindling, so bold and daring, that it appeared at first sight almost incredible. Especial surprise was evinced by the Parisians when it was shown that he had issued false shares of the Pennsylvania Petroleum Company, and had induced M. de Ville-Handry to buy them in as genuine ones—thus ruining, by the same process, the count as a private individual, and the company over which he presided. Elgin was sentenced to twenty years' solitary confinement.

These scandalous proceedings had one good result. They saved the poor count's honour, but they revealed, at the same time, such prodigious unfitness for business on his part, that people began to suspect how dependent he must have been in former times on his first wife, Henriette's mother. He remained, however, relatively poor. Thomas Elgin had been made to refund, and possession had even been obtained of Sarah Brandon's fortune; but the count was called upon to make amends for his want of business capacity. When he had satisfied all his creditors, and handed over to his daughter a part of her maternal inheritance, he had hardly more than thirty thousand francs a-year left. Of the whole "clique," grim Mrs Brian alone escaped.

Malgat, having surrendered to justice within the prescribed limits of time, was tried anew. The matter was naturally a mere formality. His own advocate had very little to say, for the Public Prosecutor himself presented the unfortunate cashier's defence; and after fully explaining the circumstances which had led him to permit a crime, rather than to commit it himself, he said to the jury: "Now, gentlemen, that you know what was Malgat's offence, you must learn how he expiated that crime. When he left the miserable woman who had ruined him, maddened by grief, and determined to kill himself, he went home, where he found his sister, one of those women who have religiously preserved the domestic virtues of our forefathers, and who know of no compromise in questions of honour. She had soon forced her brother to confess his fatal secret, and, overcoming the horror she naturally felt, she found in her heart words which moved him, and led him to reconsider his determination. She told him that suicide

was but an additional crime, and that he was, in honour, bound to live, so that he might make amends, and restore the money he had stolen. Hope once more rose in his heart, and filled him with unexpected energy. And yet what obstacles he had to overcome! How would he ever be able to refund four hundred thousand francs? How could he manage to earn so much money? and where? How could he do anything at all, now that he was compelled to live in concealment? Do you know, gentlemen, what his sister did in this terrible emergency? She had a moderate income derived from State bonds, all of which she sold, taking the proceeds to the chairman of the Mutual Discount Society, begging him to be patient as to the remainder, and promising that he should be repaid, capital and interest alike. She asked for nothing but secrecy; and he pledged himself to that. Since that day, gentlemen of the jury, the brother and the sister have lived a life of incessant toil, denying themselves everything but what was indispensable to sustain existence. And to-day Malgat owes nothing to the Society: he has paid every sou. He fell once; but he has risen again. And the dock of this court, where he now sits as a prisoner, will become to him a place of honour, for by your decision, gentlemen, you will efface all stains from his reputation, and restore him to his position in society." After such a speech, Malgat was naturally acquitted.

In due course Henriette and Daniel were married. At the ceremony the bridegroom's best-men were Malgat and the old chief surgeon of the frigate "Conquest." Several persons noticed that, contrary to usage, the bride wore a dress of embroidered muslin. It was the robe which Henriette had so often covered with her tears, in those days of destitution, when she had fruitlessly tried to live by her daily labour. Malgat had hunted it up, and purchased it: it was his wedding-gift.

The Count de Ville-Handry seldom sees his son-in-law. He still blames him in his heart for Sarah's death; for despite everything he heard and saw, he worships her still, even beyond the grave. He frequently remarks, with tears in his eyes,—“She was slandered.” But he is the only one who can think so. And yet there are mischief-makers who would be delighted to revive once more all the infamous slander which Sarah originated, in hopes of ruining Henriette: “Mme. Champcey,” they say, “is certainly a charming woman; but it seems that in former days—” However, these folks take good care to keep out of the way of Daniel and his faithful servant, Lefloch.

THE END.

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1890

THE CATASTROPHE.

Part II.

A TERRIBLE MYSTERY.

I.

ALL along the outer boulevards of Paris from the Ternes to Belleville there was no better café than the "Café de Périclès," which, thanks to its brilliant lights, could be distinguished a quarter of a league away when the twilight had set in. It had been opened in 1865 on the ground floor of a new house by a Prussian named Justus Putzenhofer, who had been attracted to Paris not only by the hope of making his fortune, but also, so he declared, by his strong liking for the French nation. In conducting this establishment he was assisted by his wife, who was still young, and by a cousin who, although apallingly ugly, rejoiced in the name of Adonis, and was amiability itself. As for Madame Justus, she was short, plump and rosy, and many frequenters of the place thought her most attractive when she arranged the plates of sandwiches on the counter and poured out the foaming Bavarian beer.

No café keeper was ever so obliging towards his customers as Herr Justus. Whenever he heard a discontented grumble or a harsh exclamation he laid down his pipe and hastened to ascertain what had gone wrong. Nor was he ever courageous enough to dismiss a well-known customer at closing time. Not he—he simply put up the shutters, and after making sure that no indiscreet ray of light could be detected through the chinks by the vigilant police, he allowed his customers to tarry as long as they pleased. If this practice had been discovered the worthy German would certainly have been severely punished, as closing regulations are very strictly enforced in Paris; and for this reason he was in the habit of sending his cousin Adonis to bed on these occasions, as if he doubted his watchfulness, and mounting guard himself. Seated near the window, he watched and listened, and whenever he heard the measured tread of the police approaching on their beat he would hastily say to his belated customers: "Hush! For heaven's sake, gentlemen, speak low."

One night Justus Putzenhofer was thus engaged in listening while three habitués of his establishment played a game of cards together. One of them was a respectable gentleman of the neighbourhood, named Rivet, another a young journalist, named Aristide Peyrolas, and the third a medical practitioner who had recently taken up his abode at Montmartre, Dr. Valentin Legris, a man of thirty or thereabouts. They were busy playing, and the clock had just struck the half hour—half-past one—when all at once an appalling shriek was heard on the boulevard outside. The players instantly

threw down their cards, and simultaneously started to their feet. "Did you hear that?" they exclaimed, addressing Justus.

But the phlegmatic German was not the man to be disturbed by such a trifle. "I heard it; yes, of course I heard it. It came from one of those wretched drunkards who roam about the outer boulevards all night long, fighting and quarrelling with every one they meet. In my opinion the police would do far better to keep their eyes on the roughs, rather than meddle with an innocent fellow like myself, who interferes with nobody."

Peyrolas shrugged his shoulders. "The police!" he muttered, in tone of bitter sarcasm, "they only trouble themselves about trifles."

However, the explanation given by the Prussian seemed so plausible, that the party had already returned to their cards, when all at once there came another shriek—more terrifying even than the first one. "Help! help!" cried a voice.

This time there was no mistake; the tone was one of unspeakable agony. "It is some deed of violence!" cried the doctor, and he darted towards the door:

But prudent Justus had sprung in front of it. "Gentlemen," he pleaded, in the most imploring tone, "have you forgotten that you are here against the law? Besides, I can't allow you to run any risk."

But the gentlemen hastily thrust him aside, and taking down the bars themselves, they dashed out on to the boulevard. Nothing! Not a human being within sight. The broad thoroughfare seemed quite deserted, although through the stillness one could distinguish the distant sound of running feet.

"I told you, gentlemen, that it was nothing," said Justus.

But this was by no means the doctor's opinion. "If people run like that," he said, as he listened, "it is because some evil deed has been committed. Let us look!"

This was more easily said than done, for the night was so dark you could not see your hand before you. Moreover, a thick fog was rising, and this increased the difficulty. No matter—the party crossed the sidewalk, and examined the whole neighbourhood with infinite care. Suddenly M. Rivet uttered an exclamation, and his two companions darted towards him. "What is it?" they cried in the same breath.

"I have found something—a body here on the ground. I stumbled over it."

The doctor and Peyrolas stooped down, and perceived a man who was lying with his face in the mud, and to all appearance unconscious.

"Well, well!" muttered the journalist—"and this is Paris in 1870! People are assassinated with quite as much impunity as they used to be in the Forest of Bondy. Where on earth do the police keep themselves?"

But the doctor paid no attention to the angry journalist. He was kneeling beside the man on the ground, and trying to ascertain his condition. "He's not dead," he said at last; "and perhaps we may be able to revive him." And, with little regard for the fears of the terrified Prussian, he called: "Hullo, Justus! Come and help us to carry this poor devil into your place."

The German was a man who knew how to extract good from evil; so he meekly obeyed, and carried the unconscious man in his own robust arms into the café, where he laid him on a billiard-table.

The card players were then able to examine the man whose life they had in all probability saved. He was a handsome fellow, between twenty-five and thirty, wearing a full black beard. The light of the lamp, suspended

above the billiard-table, fell full on his face, and showed how extremely pale he was. His clothes were covered with mud and blood, but they were elegant and well made; while his linen was exquisitely fine and white. There was one singular circumstance; several tiny scraps of paper had remained between his half-parted lips, as if, at the very moment when he lost his consciousness, he had had coolness enough to swallow some dangerous document. But the doctor was the only one who noticed this, and he did not speak of it. He rolled up his sleeves, and as he proceeded to divest the unconscious man of his clothes, he called for some water, a sponge, and old linen. "And wake your wife instantly, Justus," he said, "she must scrape some lint for me."

But it was unnecessary to summon Madame Justus, for at this moment she appeared, shivering in her dressing-gown, and upon perceiving the young man stretched out on the billiard-table, she gave vent to shriek after shriek. "Hush!" said her husband. "It's a poor fellow whom I rescued from some murderers just now;" for Justus began to realise that he might make something out of the affair. "He will come to, Dr. Legris, will he not?"

"Yes!" said the doctor, who had finished his examination of the wound. "It is not as bad as I thought. If the blow which he received here on the shoulder had fallen on his neck, he would, at this minute be as dead as Julius Caesar—for a knife sharp enough to have made this gash would have speedily severed the artery. But as it is he will be on his feet again in less than a month's time."

While Justus and his wife were listening to the doctor, the journalist had drawn Rivet aside, and was exclaiming with an inspired air, "I shall write an article on this subject, at once—it shall be one to move the masses. I shall say that the present government employs the police to organize rows and riots, while these roughs assassinate us. I shall draw up a petition——"

"Do be quiet," interrupted the doctor, impatiently, "for the poor fellow is coming to himself."

The wounded man had indeed opened his eyes—and with the assistance of Justus had raised himself to a sitting position. He looked about him with wild, affrighted eyes—knowing neither the room in which he found himself, nor the persons by whom he was surrounded.

"I must thank you, gentlemen," he faltered at last, "for having saved my life at the risk of your own."

The doctor here stopped him. "Our merit is not as great as you imagine," he said. "When we reached you your would-be murderers had fled."

Intense astonishment was depicted on the countenance of the wounded man. "Had fled!" he muttered; "fled without killing me!" And as if a sudden thought struck him. "Have I been robbed?" he hastily asked.

His clothes were given him, and he found that his watch and purse had disappeared. "Then they were thieves after all!" he said, as if this loss proved the falsity of some previous conviction.

The journalist and his quiet friend, M. Rivet, paid no attention to the man's strange manner. But Dr. Legris duly noted it. It is really a little odd, he thought, that this man should be so astonished at not having been murdered; and it is strange that he should be assaulted at this hour, and in this part of Paris, for any other cause than robbery. Suspecting some mystery, the practitioner exclaimed, "Have you any idea who the men were who attacked you?"

"Not the slightest,"

"Should you know them again?"

"I did not even see them."

"The night is certainly very dark, but——"

"My dear sir, I was flat on the ground before I realized that I was surrounded by murderers," cried the young fellow. "If I had received the slightest warning I should have defended myself—and successfully too!" And he unquestionably would have done so, for all about him indicated strength and activity. "The snare was skilfully managed," he continued, "I was on my way home, and had just passed this café, when I heard some one groaning. I stood still and listened. I heard the groans again, and on looking about I finally discovered a man half lying on the ground. I leaned over him, and as I did so, I received a blow from a heavy stick on my head, and was felled to the ground."

"The assassins were hiding behind a tree, I suppose," said M. Rivet, sagely.

"I was merely stunned," continued the stranger, "and in a moment or two I realized where I was; but, as I struggled to my feet, again, I suddenly felt a sharp pain between my shoulders, and uttered a shriek, I fear. I remember nothing more."

To all appearance the doctor heard this narrative unmoved, but he was watching the young man very closely. "Very well," he said, "you must make a formal complaint, and give your evidence to-morrow morning."

But the stranger started. "No, no!" he cried; "on no account whatever." And he spoke these words in such a tone of terror, that every one except the doctor was astonished.

"Upon my word!" Rivet whispered to the journalist, "one would think he was afraid of seeing the inside of a law court!"

The stranger in some measure, realised the effect he had produced, and spoke again: "I shall make no complaint; and if you are willing, gentlemen, to add another favour to the very great one you have already done me, you will entirely forget to-night's occurrence."

The anxiety with which he awaited a reply was so evident that the doctor took pity on him. "We will respect your secret, sir," he said; "you have our word to that effect."

"Agreed," added Peyrolas, "and yet what an article I could have made out of it!"

This point having been settled, the wounded man seemed to feel infinite relief, drank a soothing mixture handed him by Madame Justus, and declared he was well enough to go home. And, as his new friends assisted him in putting on his coat, he added: "My name is Raymond Delorge, gentleman, and I reside in the Rue Blanche. I hope at some future time to show you my gratitude." But he had over-estimated his strength, for as he tried to walk, he tottered. "I don't like this," he said; "my head swims and my limbs seems very weak."

"I knew you could not walk home," said the doctor; "but as your heart seemed set upon it, I decided to let you see for yourself. Adonis has gone for a vehicle, and one will be here immediately."

Cabs pass all night along the Boulevard de Clichy, and the landlord's cousin had but little difficulty in procuring one. The doctor helped the wounded man into the vehicle, and then took a seat by his side, while the driver snapped his whip over the weary horses. Rarely had Dr. Legris' curiosity been so much excited, and he with difficulty repressed the innumerable questions which hovered on his lips. However Raymond Delorge did

not seem to notice this as he quietly asked, "Do you think, doctor, that I shall be obliged to remain in bed for any time?"

"For a few days—yes."

"But it will be more than an inconvenience to me—it will be a positive misfortune."

"But——"

"And that's not all. I am at a loss to know how I can account for this accident. I have lost my father, and reside with my mother and sister, and I have every wish to spare them unnecessary alarm. They are naturally nervous."

"Say nothing about it then—hide the garments which would tell the story—and simply call yourself indisposed."

"I was thinking of that—but I shall need a medical man."

"Who, of course, must be your accomplice," hastily interrupted the doctor. "Very well, I will come and see you." He almost instantly regretted the precipitation with which he had made this offer, but he had no time to say anything more, for the cab stopped. The young man alighted slowly, but without assistance, and as he clutched hold of the knob on the door of the house he lived at, he exclaimed: "You will excuse me, doctor, if I do not ask you to come in to-night, but I know very well that my mother never closes her eyes until I return home, and the fact of another person being with me at this late hour would seem very strange to her. I must also ask you, sir, to kindly pay the driver, for the scoundrels have left me without a penny."

"All right. But you must not stand here in the night air. Be very prudent. You will see me at noon." And thereupon the doctor dismissed the cab, preferring to walk home.

"What a strange adventure!" he muttered as he went along, "and what a strange fellow! What could that letter have been which he swallowed? And why is he unwilling to enter a complaint? However, I flatter myself that I shall find out the enigma to-morrow, and so I won't puzzle myself about it to-night."

But this was easier said than done, and the fact is that Dr. Legris' busy brain worked on, refusing to rest. The next day it was with the greatest difficulty that he refrained from calling at the house in the Rue Blanche before twelve o'clock, but, in fact, the hour had barely struck when he rung at the door. An old man servant, who looked like a retired veteran, at once answered the ring, and he had evidently been warned, for, on perceiving the doctor, he exclaimed: "My young master expects you, and if you will kindly follow me, I will show you to his room."

The doctor found his patient much better than he had ventured to expect, and, when he had examined the wound and prescribed the proper course to follow, he took a chair, vaguely hoping for some clue to the mystery. But the wounded man did not make the slightest allusion to the affair, except to say, in answer to a question, that his mother had no suspicion that anything out of the common way had happened. He then at once turned the conversation into another channel.

This was the result of Dr. Legris' daily visits for more than a week. He was always received most cordially by Raymond, who welcomed him moreover with an air of especial frankness, as if he desired to keep up this chance acquaintance; but any allusions to himself, his own affairs, and his family, were carefully avoided. Ten days elapsed without the doctor even seeing his patient's mother or sister. And when of an evening Peyrolas, the

journalist, or Rivet asked for news of young Delorge, the mortified medical man could only say, "He's the same as cured now, and he will come in here some evening. He is a good enough fellow in his way, but uncommonly reserved. He was a pupil in the Polytechnique School, and became a civil engineer."

This was, indeed, all that the doctor had discovered up to a certain carnival Sunday—the 28th of February, 1870—when at about five o'clock in the afternoon he called on Raymond. His patient started on seeing him, and exclaimed, "I was afraid, doctor, that you wouldn't come!" The young fellow's usual apathy of manner had vanished, and he spoke in an agitated voice, while his eyes glittered with fever. "Has anything happened?" asked Dr. Legris.

Instead of speaking Raymond took a letter from his table and handed it to his friend. This missive bore no signature, and it was written on coarse paper in red ink. It ran as follows:—"An event which Monsieur Delorge must witness will occur to-night. He *must* go to the ball at La Reine Blanche. A man will go up to him and say, 'I come from the Garden of the Elysée.' Monsieur Delorge must follow that man, wherever he leads him. If he is not willing to do this for his own sake, he will do it for hers; and let him believe, in following these instructions, that they come from a friend."

The doctor perused this singular communication, and then quietly said, "I think your enemies wish to finish the work they began the other night." "And yet," answered Raymond, gravely, "It is my duty to obey this letter."

He spoke in so firm a tone that the doctor did not dream of contesting the point. "At least," he said, "you must not go alone!"

Raymond had apparently expected this reply, for he looked Dr. Legris full in the face, and said, "Unfortunately, I have no one whom I can apply to. My life is a singularly lonely one. My only two intimate friends are far away. Where could I hope to find a man who would brave unknown danger for my sake, and first swear absolute secrecy?"

It was not mere curiosity that actuated the doctor now. Little as he knew young Delorge, he had learned to appreciate many excellent qualities he possessed. He had taken a strange liking to him, and having once rescued him from death, he did not hesitate now that danger showed itself anew. "Who will do it?" he replied in a firm voice. "Why, I will—yes, I will go with you, and I will swear to be dumb."

And, indeed, a few hours later Dr. Legris and Raymond Delorge were on their way to the dancing hall appointed by the anonymous letter.

II.

WHEN you reach the top of the Rue Fontaine-Sainte-Georges of an evening you can perceive straight in front of you, on the other side of the outer boulevard, a large number of gas burners, arranged as a garland above a very spacious portal. This conducts to the Bal de la Reine Blanche, one of the typical dancing establishments of Paris. On the right hand side is a wine shop, divided by flimsy partitions into a number of private compartments. On the left there is a cheap pastry cook's, where the working people in the neighbourhood come to purchase dainties of the most appalling description—fruit tarts and cakes garnished with cream. It is not the *élite* of

Paris who dance at La Reine Blanche—but decency of appearance, manners, and conduct are strictly exacted. On ball nights—that is to say on Sundays, Mondays, and Thursdays—crowds of young fellows with shiny caps and equally lustrous hair, are to be seen hurrying towards the establishment. It was an especially festive occasion the evening when Raymond Delorge and Dr. Legris presented themselves at the door. Two huge placards—one on each side of the portal—announced that a grand and fancy masked ball would take place that night in honour of the Carnival. They walked in and followed a long avenue, planted on each side with evergreens, till they reached a vestibule, where two attendants were on duty. Thence they passed into the ballroom, which was not unlike a large barn in its proportions, being extremely narrow and long, with a very low ceiling, ornamented with extraordinary frescoes. At the further end was a raised platform, where serious-minded people talked and drank, while the floor—or rather the space reserved for dancers—was encompassed by a ballustrade, beyond which a number of small tables were arranged.

The *fete* was at its height when our two friends entered. Amid the din of a number of trombones and other noisy instruments, some two hundred persons of either sex—all equally red and out of breath—were dancing in a state of wild enthusiasm and excitement which made them seem as if they had fallen victims to an epileptic attack. Seated at the tables round about another couple of hundred more persons of both sexes were drinking wine and beer with unextinguishable thirst. The heat was intense, the gas blazed, and the odour was unendurable, while from the floor there rose a cloud of dust, which settled on the coats and dresses of the dancers.

Despite the placards, which promised a masquerade, there were very few fancy costumes among the dubious-looking coats. And what costumes they were:—nameless rags, which had done duty year after year, at Carnival after Carnival, on the backs of bibulous, disorderly fellows, who had covered them with wine stains at *barrière* drinking dens. It was only with some difficulty that the doctor and Raymond found a place on the platform, whence they could overlook the scene, and a vacant table. Hardly were they seated than a waiter appeared, and asked what he should bring them. "Two glasses of beer," said the doctor in reply.

Thanks to his height and his square shoulders, and the stentorian voice with which he shouted, "By your leave!" the waiter was able to shove through the crowd, and could soon be seen returning with the beer; but before he put down the tray, he exclaimed: "Twenty sous—in advance as usual." Dr. Legris paid the sum mechanically, without paying attention to the singularity of the demand. He had placed himself at Raymond's disposal, and had determined not to evince the least inquisitiveness, no matter how much he might feel. On his side Raymond Delorge was at a thousand leagues from the present situation. With his elbows resting on the wine-stained table, and his eyes fixed on vacancy, he sat, absorbed in painful thought. He did not seem cognizant of where he found himself, and failed to notice that polkas were succeeding quadrilles, and waltzes, mazurkas, and time fast passing on. The doctor, however, was by no means so indifferent to the passage of time; he repeatedly drew out his watch, and finally, losing patience, he shook his companion's arm, exclaiming: "Do you know that the night is wearing on, and that our man has not yet put in an appearance? If your letter should prove to be a stupid mystification—"

Raymond started like a sleeper who is suddenly awakened. "Impossible!" he replied.

"And why? This letter alludes to a mysterious 'she'—a 'she' who loves you probably. May it not be that—"

"You are quite off the track" answered Raymond with some impatience. "You remember the words of the letter, don't you. The man who will accost me is to say, 'I come from the Garden of the Elysée!' Very well, it was there that my father, General Delorge, was killed, on the 30th of November, 1851."

Raymond's tone, and the fierce gleam in his eyes awoke a thousand conjectures in the doctor's mind. But he had no time to reply, for his attention was attracted by one of the rare maskers in the ball-room, who had been watching them for some time already. He was a short man, of decidedly commonplace appearance, although his costume comprised a pair of velvet knee breeches, a cloak faced with satin, which had been white, and a Spanish vest, to which half the buttons were lacking. On his head he wore a red *toque* with a long plume.

"Can this be the fellow?" thought Dr. Legris.

He was not mistaken in his conjecture, for suddenly the man approached Raymond, tapped him familiarly on the shoulder, and, in a voice hoarse by addiction to alcohol, exclaimed: "I come from the Garden of the Elysée."

As if he had been worked by a spring, young Delorge rose to his feet and replied: "I am ready to follow you."

"In that case come quick, for I am very late," and the man took off his mask and wiped his face.

This gave Dr. Legris great satisfaction, and, studying the man's countenance, he said to himself: "He is utterly incapable of a crime; but I wonder if he proposes to go out with us in that dress?"

To the physician's relief, however, as soon as the unknown individual reached the vestibule, he took up a long cloak and threw it over his shoulders, at the same time exchanging his plumed *toque* for a shabby felt hat. Then, with an air of self-congratulation, he muttered: "It does not take me long to change my skin; and if your legs are as good as mine—" But he suddenly stopped, realizing, in fact, for the first time, that Raymond was not alone. "Oh! oh! oh!" he exclaimed—each oh! being ejaculated in a higher key than the preceding one—"I was told that there was only one person—"

The doctor was about to speak, when Raymond silenced him with a gesture. "If this gentleman cannot go with me," he said quietly, "I shall give up the idea entirely."

The masquerader was evidently perplexed, and angrily scratched his nose. This was probably a habit with him when he wished to quicken his thoughts, and it apparently succeeded on this occasion, for he suddenly exclaimed: "What a fool I am! I can settle it in a minute. Don't move." And, so saying, he dashed into the ball-room.

"We are fools!" exclaimed Dr. Legris. "This fellow has gone back for instructions; so the person who employs him—the author of the anonymous letter—is in the ball-room. I will follow him and see whom he speaks to!"

But no—it was too late, for at that very moment the man reappeared. "It's all right!" he said carelessly. "You can both go; it's just the same in the end."

As they left the dancing hall, the clock struck one. The economical administration of La Reine Blanche had extinguished the outer gaslights at midnight. The pastry-cook had put up his shutters, and all was dark and quiet in the streets. Not even a cab was to be seen on the Boulevard de Clichy, and it was only at a distance that a police officer could be perceived

making his lonely rounds. The weather, which had been bad enough all day, had now become perfectly frightful. A perfect tornado was blowing over Paris, twisting the young trees on the boulevard, hurling chimney-pots from the houses, and ripping the slates off the roofs. Still the night was not dark, and at times the moon peered through the clouds which were hurrying across the sky, its disc being mirrored in the shining pools of the sidewalks and the gutters.

But little did the doctor or Raymond care for the weather. They pulled their coat-collars up to their ears and silently followed their guide, who, with his hands in his pockets, whistled as he trudged along. On leaving *La Reine Blanche* he turned in the direction of Batignolles, but suddenly stopping short, he entered the avenue leading to the Montmartre or Northern Cemetery. It is a wide avenue, where funeral trinkets and emblems are sold of a daytime, but which has no other outlet than the portal of the cemetery, seen at the further end. The doctor was aware of this, and so, abruptly stopping, he called to the guide. "Where on earth are you taking us?"

"Just where I was told."

"I dare say. But that gate yonder must be shut, as it always is at night time, and except by retracing our steps there is no exit from this place."

"I dare say," repeated the man; "but you had better come on all the same."

"One moment," said the doctor, and hurriedly addressing Raymond in a low voice, he added: "If you knew me better than you do, it would not be necessary for me to tell you that I am not the man to draw back from a thing I undertake. But I confess that I do like to know what I am about. Our expedition seems to me a most singular affair. Excuse my questions—but nine times out of ten when a man receives an anonymous letter he knows what name to put at the bottom of it."

Raymond stopped with a gesture. "The letter may have come either from a mortal enemy or from a devoted friend—that is all I can tell you."

Dr. Legris smiled, as if quite satisfied with this evasive reply; and then, in a surly sort of tone he said to the guide, "Go on."

The man thereupon approached the gate of the cemetery, and was about to pull the bell, when Raymond caught him by the arm. "Take care," he said, "neither my friend nor myself are persons whom you can joke with, with impunity."

The man shrugged his shoulders. "I'm ordered to give you no explanation whatever," he said. "I've received my instructions, and I obey them. If you wish to conclude this affair you must let me do as I'm bid. If you're afraid you had best go back. It doesn't make the smallest difference to me. I'm paid in advance." And so speaking, he jostled some silver in the pockets of his velvet breeches.

"But——"

"There's no but—it must be yes or no—and you must say the word at once, for I've no desire to melt away in this rain. Still I must make one remark before we go any further. If you utter a single word it may cost us dear—you must keep very quiet. We are playing for heavier stakes than you imagine."

Dr. Legris leaned toward his companion. "Let us go on," he whispered.

"So be it," said Raymond, "and we won't speak except in a whisper."

The man thereupon rang the bell. Two minutes elapsed—a sound of footsteps was heard, two or three oaths were sworn, and then the gate was

opened. A man carrying a lantern, and apparently just aroused from bed, for his nightcap was drawn over his ears, appeared at the portal. "What do you want?" he roughly asked.

The guide pulled a paper out of his pocket and thrust it under the eyes of the man with the nightcap, who calmly hung his lantern on the bolt of the door and examined this paper, scrutinizing certain stamps it bore. "How many of you are there?" he said, as he finished.

"Three."

"Come in then."

They obeyed, and having carefully closed the door, the keeper asked: "There's no need of my going with you, I suppose."

"Not in the least," answered the guide.

"Well, then I shall turn in—so good-night." And thus speaking the keeper lounged back into his lodge, swinging his lantern as he went.

The man from *La Reine Blanche* watched him depart with an air of profound indifference; but when the door closed and all was dark again, he drew a long breath of relief, as if he had escaped some great danger. "Good-riddance to you!" he muttered, snapping his fingers. Raymond and his friend were more puzzled than ever, but he apparently cared little for this. "Here we are!" he gaily added, as he led them along. "Here we are!"

They were by this time at a few steps from the marble pedestal on which lies the bronze effigy of Godefroy Cavaignac. Before them, as far as the eye could reach, there stretched the immense field of rest—the City of the Dead. Certainly neither the doctor nor Raymond were accessible to those superstitious terrors which haunt weak brains—and yet, by degrees they felt that mysterious chill and awe caused by the presence of death, creep over them. At least, however, their guide did not lose heart. "The worst is done," he said; "but if we don't hurry now, we might as well have remained away. Come on!" And without the slightest hesitation, in fact as if he had been quite at home, the man turned into a wide avenue, on the right hand side, which was bordered by stately monuments.

Without an objection—without a word—the young men followed him. Where, they knew not, nor did they ask themselves, so utterly were their ideas disturbed by the strangeness of their situation. The rain had ceased falling, but the wind had increased in fury, and swept through the trees, which sighed and groaned like living things. The clouds flew across the sky, screening the moon from time to time. The shadows seemed endowed with vitality, and the white statues looked like ghosts amid the tall dark cypress trees. However, the party moved on—through several avenues, down several steps, then up a steep ascent, and finally stopped near the chapel, built by the Champdoce family.

"Halt!" exclaimed the guide. "We have reached our destination."

It was clear that he knew every foot of the ground, for he drew the young men behind a thick clump of evergreens, and bade them crouch down. They hesitated. "And what then?" asked the doctor.

"What then? Why keep your eyes and ears open, that's all you'll have to do. Look straight before you."

From the spot where they stood Raymond and the doctor could see some thirty yards in front of them, a portion of the cemetery wall, skirting the *Rue de Maistre*. The ground between them and this wall was level, and contained but one tomb, which was undergoing repairs. The front slab had been removed, and one could detect a narrow cavity. The workmen must have been there all day, and oddly enough, had left their tools lying about.

"And now?" began the doctor again.

"Now you are to hold your tongue and not move," answered the guide rudely.

Having reached this point in their adventure, it was not worth while for the young men to raise any objection, so they waited in anxious silence, but not without asking themselves if they were fools—if they were the victims of some practical joke. Was it possible that they had been brought to this cemetery in the middle of the night by an unknown individual whom they had met at a public ball, and who yet wore his masquerading costume? They were cogitating in this fashion when their guide suddenly started, and whispered, for the first time, with an air of emotion. "Hush! look at the wall!"

Above this wall a human figure now slowly appeared. It was that of a man, and it was light enough to see that he wore a cap and a long dark blouse. He sat himself astride on the wall and then drew up a ladder from the street, and carefully dropped it into the cemetery, securing it to the wall again as if preparing for descent. Raymond and the doctor hastily turned to their guide to question him. But he placed his hands over their mouths and murmured, "Hush! Not a word! Wait and watch!"

And presently another person appeared on the wall, dressed precisely like the first one. They seemed to be consulting each other; but at last they descended the wall, and moved about a little, evidently listening. Being finally reassured, they went back to their ladder, and probably made some signal, for almost immediately a third person appeared. So far as could be seen this third individual, by his air and dress, seemed to belong to a higher social grade than the others; he appeared, in fact, to be their master. He evidently questioned them, and satisfied by their replies, he, in his turn, made a sign to some one else in the street. The result was, that a moment later a woman's head rose above the wall.

"Well, well!" muttered the man from *La Reine Blanche*, "she is a cool one I do declare!"

The lady, for she was evidently no common woman, was dressed in black, and wore so thick a veil, that her features could not have been distinguished even in broad daylight. The gentleman offered his hand to assist her down the ladder, but she pushed him aside, and descended into the cemetery without help. The whole party now approached the tomb that was undergoing repairs, and passed so near the spot where the doctor and Raymond were concealed, that the two young fellows could hear each word that was spoken. "Here it is," said the man who seemed to be directing the enterprise.

"Very well," replied the lady, in an imperious tone; "then all we have to do is to make haste!"

As if they were only waiting for these words, the two men in blouses each took a forgotten pickaxe from the ground, and noiselessly removed the slabs of the tomb. This being accomplished, they both stooped, and with their combined strength raised a coffin. Standing beside the veiled lady, the well-dressed man was overlooking the work. "Now, *Madame la Duchesse*," said he, "you will see if I have deceived you. Go on," he added, turning to his men, who, with perfect ease and coolness, inserted their tools under the coffin lid and raised it with a strange cracking sound.

Then the lady, who was called *Madame la Duchesse*, darted forward, bent over the coffin, and plunged her arms inside. It was in a tone of wild, delirious joy, that she, at the same time exclaimed: "Empty! The coffin is empty!"

Motionless behind the cypress trees which screened them, the doctor and Raymond Delorge waited for a word which might reveal to them the meaning of this most extraordinary, almost unprecedented scene. They asked themselves what motives could induce people to scale the walls of one of the cemeteries in the heart of Paris, and violate the secrets of a tomb. But the word they waited for was not spoken. Without a syllable the lady and the gentleman turned away, and, ascending the ladder, disappeared over the wall again. The two men in blouses alone remained in the cemetery. They quickly readjusted the lid of the coffin, and placed it inside the tomb again, then they set the slabs in position, and rapidly effaced all evidence of the place having been tampered with. As soon as this work was completed they went off in their turn, taking their ladder with them over the wall. Of the scene which the doctor and Raymond had just witnessed, not a vestige remained to testify to its reality—everything had vanished as with one of those visions which haunt us during the night time and fade with dawn. It was high time, too, that the drama should end, for Raymond could bear no more. He grasped their guide by the arm and shook him vigorously. "Tell me," he said, "how dare you bring us to look on at this shameless sacrilege? Who are these people? Whose coffin is it that is empty? What have I to do with it? Give us your facts and names."

The man slowly disengaged himself. "You are off the track, master," he answered, in an impertinent tone. "The people who paid me to bring you here told me nothing of these secrets. I know nothing; but I have an idea that all you want to learn is inscribed on that tomb."

"Of course!" rejoined Raymond and the doctor at the same moment; and leaving their guide they hurried to the tomb, which was of simple aspect. The inscription it bore ran as follows:—

MARIE SIDONIE.

DIED AT THE AGE OF TWENTY-SEVEN.

Pray for her.

"Well?" ejaculated the doctor inquisitively.

But Raymond seemed utterly bewildered. "No family name," he answered, "and 'Sidonie' gives me no clue—for I have not the smallest recollection——"

"Don't trouble yourself," said the doctor; "I assure you that it is not worth while. Let us return to our guide."

This was easier said than done, however, for when they reached the clump of cypresses again their man had fled. They called—no answer. They listened—not a sound. They looked around—not a human being in sight. "We are nicely fooled," said the doctor, in a tone rather of anger than surprise; "fooled as if we were children."

"But this man——"

"Is far away, I fancy. Still, there's little probability of his getting out at this hour. We shall find him, no doubt, for I see no way of leaving ourselves." This was true enough, and yet a moment later the doctor cried: "Never mind, I have a plan, and its very audacity may bring success. Let us get to the gate again."

Unfortunately, they were so little acquainted with the cemetery that they had not the least idea in what part of it they stood. They wandered on among the tombs, and Raymond nervously exclaimed: "Suppose we were found here, how on earth should we explain our presence?"

That situation was indeed perplexing; but at last the doctor thought he recognized the avenue they had first taken. He was right; for on following it they soon beheld the *rond-point* and the keeper's lodge. "Now for it!" whispered the doctor, and he immediately tapped at the window.

"Who goes there?" called a voice from within.

"It's us, of course," answered the doctor, sturdily. "We want to go out."

"What, already? Your companion, who has just gone, told me you would stay till daybreak."

"We've changed our minds."

"Then wait a moment," said the guard, "and I'll be there." He was not very long, to be sure, in making an appearance, and he then at once opened the gate, exclaiming, "Till next time!" as the doctor and Raymond hastily passed out. M. Legris did not answer this remark, however; he was rubbing his hands, and then, as soon as the gate was closed behind him, he muttered, "We have our man."

III.

THE doctor founded all his hopes upon a single and a seemingly unimportant circumstance, which had totally escaped Raymond. On the road to the cemetery their guide had remarked: "Do you think it was for my own pleasure that I left the ball, just when I was enjoying it most, and had made a chance acquaintance?" From this the doctor leaped to the conclusion that this mysterious person would return to his interrupted amusement.

"Unless he thinks we mean to follow him," objected Raymond.

"That's just what he won't do! He thinks us shut up in the cemetery for the rest of the night. I'm only afraid of one thing—that the ball may be over."

It was not, however, for on reaching the *Barrière Blanche* they saw the windows of the dancing hall still flaring with lights.

"Shall we go in?" asked Raymond.

The doctor hesitated. "No," he replied; "in my opinion it would be unwise to do so, for, of course, it is to this person's interest to avoid us—"

"Yes," interrupted Raymond, hastily, "that may be so, but for ours he must speak, and I propose to shake the truth out of him!"

"Let me take the lead in the matter, my dear friend," replied Dr. Legris. "Believe me, we must act with the greatest possible caution. I, naturally, have more *sang-froid* than you; so wait here while I go in and cautiously reconnoitre."

At *La Reine Blanche*, as at all public balls at carnival time, there was a room where fancy costumes could be hired. The doctor at once went there, and, for the sum of three francs and ten sous, an old woman, who looked very much like a witch, placed a long nondescript garment of black alpaca, which she dignified by the name of "*domino*," at his disposal. This so-called domino was dirty and altogether unpleasant in smell, and at any other moment it would surely have repelled our fastidious friend. But this was no time to stand and deliberate, so, thrusting his arms into the sleeves, and pulling the hood over his head, he made his way into the ball-room.

Only some sixty or eighty indefatigable dancers remained there. The doctor looked about, and in a corner, seated at a table, he perceived the mysterious guide. Beside him sat a remarkable being in the dress of a Bayadère—a woman at once surprisingly ugly and excessively thin.

"Luck is on our side!" thought Dr. Legris, and leaving the ball-room, he got rid of his domino and hastened back to Raymond.

"Now," he said to him, "we have only to discover where this man lives and what his name is. To do this we had better take a cab and sit in it and watch until we see him leave the ball. As soon as he comes out we will tell the driver to follow him wherever he goes—whether on foot or in a vehicle. It is certainly an odd business we are engaged in, but I see no other way of finding out the truth."

Raymond agreed to the proposal, and scarcely had he and Dr. Legris installed themselves in a passing cab than their whilom guide appeared with the emaciated Bayadère on his arm. He had resumed his cloak, and his companion had thrown a red and black plaid shawl over her shoulders. The doctor at once peered through the window behind the driver, and pointed these two figures out to him. "Follow them," he said, "and don't let them suspect your purpose. If you succeed you shall have twenty francs."

"All right!" replied the driver with a wink, and they started off.

Day was breaking, and, as is usually the case after a tempest, the morning was a clear one. The street-sweepers were already abroad with their brooms, and the thoroughfares leading from the heights of Montmartre were full of workmen repairing to their daily toil. However, the man in the cloak and his companion were not disturbed by the jeers and jibes they encountered as they went along the Boulevard Rochechouart, but answered back good-naturedly. Their destination seemed a long way off, but finally, after turning innumerable corners, they reached the Rue Feutrier.

The cab thereupon abruptly drew up, and the driver, leaning towards his "fares," exclaimed: "Your maskers have entered that house!" And he pointed to a building of wretched appearance, above the door of which appeared a notice: "Furnished rooms to let." At the door sat a stout man, wearing a blue apron and smoking a matutinal pipe.

"Are you the master of this house?" asked the doctor.

"Yes, sir," answered the man, taking off his cap as he spoke.

"We want to inquire about a person who has just entered—a man wearing a cloak."

"Who was with a lady?"

"Precisely. My friend and I wish to see him on a matter of great importance—a matter which involves much money."

The landlord raised his arms with a despairing gesture. "Too bad!" he cried, "too bad!"

"What do you mean?"

"Monsieur Potencier—for that is his name—is no longer one of my lodgers."

"But he just went in."

The landlord smiled. "That's so; but he and the lady only went through the house," and moving aside he pointed to an interminable passage, which ended in another street.

This was like a pail of cold water thrown on the heads of the doctor and his friend. It was most irritating to have taken so much trouble for such a humiliating result. However, M. Legris was not discouraged. "If Monsieur Potencier is not your tenant, you can at least give us his present address?"

"No, indeed. He doesn't like to have people meddle with his affairs, and so he always keeps himself very quiet."

"So you can't tell us where he resides?"

"It's quite impossible."

The doctor pulled out his pocket-book and seemed to be looking for something. The three or four hundred franc notes which it contained seemed to multiply indefinitely as he fingered them. "It's a great pity," he said, "for Monsieur Potencier to lose so much money. But perhaps this may do. Send him this card, and tell him I wish to see him as soon as possible," and so saying he extended a piece of pasteboard, which was simply his own professional card:

DR. VALENTINE LEGRIS,
PLACE DU THEATRE, MONTMARTRE.
Consultations daily from one to three.
Free on Mondays and Thursdays.

One aspect of the doctor's well-filled pocket-book seemed to have made a profound impression on the landlord of the house. "I don't think," he said, "that I shall be able to execute this commission; but I will keep your card, and if I should happen to see Monsieur Potencier——"

"You will give it to him? Thank you; and now good morning."

Of course the doctor did not imagine that his card would call forth a visit from Monsieur Potencier, but he was one of those persons who never leave a stone unturned. "This man has escaped us," he said to Raymond as they went back to their vehicle. "I doubt if we shall set eyes on him again!"

"I don't know about that," answered Raymond, "for I have just got an idea. How did we manage to get into the cemetery? Was it not through a paper which he presented to the keeper, who, after reading it, put it into his pocket? Must not this paper have been a permit given by the Administrative Bureau, on some pretext which, of course, we can't divine, but which——"

"You are right," answered the doctor; "I agree with you entirely."

"Well, then, this permit must, of course, bear the name of the person it was given to, so that if the keeper still has it in his possession, and would permit us to look at it——"

Dr. Legris struck his forehead. "Why the deuce didn't I think of that before?" he exclaimed. "Come on quick."

But the driver was not disposed to take them any further. His stable, he said, was close at hand, and his poor beast had been on his legs all night. They lost more than an hour in looking for another cab, and fifteen minutes in hunting up a commissionaire who would take a note to Madame Delorge to explain her son's absence. Then, as they were worn out with fatigue and lack of food, they repaired to the Café Périclès, where Justus brought them a cup of chocolate. On entering they met the journalist, Peyrolas,

who was in the seventh heaven of delight, having published an article which would make a martyr of him, and send him to prison for a month.

It was not far from ten o'clock in the morning when Raymond and the doctor at last turned into the avenue leading to the cemetery. "We must be very cautious," said M. Legris, "and before we speak to the keeper we will look about a little."

They soon found that the precaution was a wise one, for hardly had they passed through the entrance gate than they saw a group of policemen and keepers talking together with extraordinary earnestness. "Look," said the doctor in an undertone, "something is going on evidently. Let us try and discover what it is. But take care——"

Assuming as far as they were able an air of indifference they slowly contrived to reach the outskirts of the group. An old keeper with a white beard had the floor for the time being. "I should have done just as my comrade did," he said. "How on earth could any one suspect such rascality? These men come in the middle of the night to the gate of the cemetery, they present a paper from the prefect which states that they are detectives, and are to be allowed to enter the cemetery at any hour. So of course they come in."

"But the permit was forged," said a police agent, impatiently.

"But how was my comrade to know that?"

"That is true, for the printed form must have been stolen from the office. Still the signatures and seals are all counterfeit, and so miserably imitated that any one ought to have seen it."

"You would have detected it, of course; but if a poor fellow is woke up at dead of night I hold him excusable for making a blunder."

To justify their presence near the group, Raymond and the doctor pretended to have much difficulty in lighting their cigars.

"But what did the fellows want?" continued a police-officer.

"Who can say?" answered another.

"All we can do now," whispered a third, "is to make a careful examination, and see if everything is in order."

"One thing is certain," continued the first speaker, "they can't escape. The police will be on their track at once, for the keeper remembers them perfectly. He declares he would recognise one of them anywhere. He was young, he says, and well dressed, with a full beard, parted in the middle. He was wrapped up in a very long overcoat, and wore a wide-brimmed hat and a white choaker."

The doctor grasped Raymond's arm, and drew him into the cemetery. The description he had heard corresponded with his own appearance, and indeed had any one of the group chanced to look round, Dr. Legris would have found himself in an awkward position. "This is a pretty state of things," he exclaimed, when they were out of hearing.

Raymond was quite in despair. "I shall never forgive myself," he said, "for the annoyance I have caused you. It seems to me that there is some fatality about me; for I injure the people I should most like to serve. I ought to live alone."

But the doctor's countenance was serene again. "If that be so," he answered, kindly, "you have all the more need of a friend with whose aid and devotion you can more firmly withstand mischance."

The words "friend" and "devotion" fell from his lips with all their admirable significance. But he was not fond of fine phrases, and detested effusive scenes; so, seeing that Raymond was sincerely touched, he added,

"But we will speak of this later on. At present we must attend to the matter in hand, which, it must be admitted, is becoming terribly complicated. We cannot now go to the keeper to question him—it would be the height of imprudence." He paused for a moment, and then resumed: "However, I do not yet give up the hope of finding a clue to the enigma. Let us try and discover the spot where we were at last night."

The cemetery was now divested of its nocturnal terrors. A haven of rest for the departed, it was, nevertheless, full of motion and life. People were constantly passing with flowers and wreaths of immortelles, while from a distance came the regular sound of pick-axes and the monotonous song of a gardener. Beside the paths the grass was growing green, the early spring flowers were blooming, and the bees were humming busily. As the two young men wandered through the labyrinth of tombs looking for the place they wished to find, the doctor suddenly exclaimed: "It has just occurred to me that if, as you say, the two Christian names on that tomb recall nothing to you, the family name, which must, of course, be inscribed on the register, might, perhaps, do so."

Raymond started. "But, doctor," he exclaimed, "we can't examine the register ourselves, now that we have learned that the permit was false."

"No; but we can send some one else——"

He paused, and, after looking round him, added: "This is the clump of cypress, I am sure, and the very spot where we stood."

He was right. They could see the tomb which had been so sacrilegiously profaned. It was just as they had left it—that is to say, surrounded by piles of mortar and refuse, with the workmen's tools still on the ground. At this sight the doctor frowned. He had hoped to find the repairs finished and the tomb entirely closed up again. Since the profanation could in no other way be securely concealed, he took it for granted that it would have been done. But no; the uneven stones, many of them half falling apart, at once told the story. Raymond realised this, too, for, in reply to his friend's exclamation of alarm, he said: "You heard what the keepers said—that they meant to inspect the cemetery at once."

"Yes, I heard them, and if they come here, as of course they will, these slabs in this disorder will at once attract their attention. They will begin an examination and discover that the coffin-lid has been forced open, and that the coffin itself is empty."

Raymond felt his brain reeling. "So that——" he stammered.

"So that if we are recognized we shall certainly be arrested, imprisoned, and accused of an odious and frightful crime. And we shall possibly be condemned to——"

"You appal me, doctor."

"Very possibly. But prove your innocence if you can. Tell the truth to any judge in the land. Tell him that, in compliance with an anonymous letter, you and I went to a ball at La Reine Blanche to meet an unknown man; that this man appeared in a carnival-costume, and that we followed him here; that he told us to conceal ourselves; that we saw four persons, one of whom the others called the duchess, pass over the wall, and then proceed to violate this tomb. Yes, tell this story to any judge. Why, he would laugh at you, and say you are mad; that no such thing could, by any possibility, happen in a civilized city like Paris." And without allowing Raymond to intervene, the doctor continued: "Besides, this is not everything. The authorities would ask if people usually erected tombs to receive empty coffins. We might repeat what we saw, but they would shrug their

shoulders, and finally turn on us and demand the body of this Marie Sidonie."

Dr. Legris actually turned pale as he spoke, so vivid did the danger appear, and overcome with unreasoning dread, he caught hold of Raymond's arm. "Let us go at once," he exclaimed.

As the doctor lost his self-possession, however, Raymond grew cooler and more composed. "Go!" he repeated. "How can we go? Do you forget that our description has been given? To hasten now—or even to appear to avoid observation—would be to denounce ourselves."

It was most extraordinary that they had not been noticed as they came in, for their appearance was singular enough. Their adventure of the night had left its traces on their weather-stained garments; their trousers were very soiled and muddy, like their hats, which after being covered with dust in the ball-room, had subsequently been drenched with rain. The doctor looked at himself, and then at his companion. "I am a little off my balance," he said, with a constrained smile; and yet you must admit that the most ordinary prudence requires that we should get out of this cemetery as speedily as possible. The longer we wait, the smaller will be the number of persons hanging about the gate, and the greater our danger will become. So let us arrange our clothes as well as possible, and then we will mingle in the first funeral procession that is going out, and hold our heads down as if we were absorbed in grief."

IV.

THE doctor's advice was followed, and a short time afterwards he and Raymond had passed in safety, but not without apprehension, through the dreaded portal of the cemetery. Once in the avenue they were safe; and yet they did not breathe freely until they reached the Café Périolès again. They ordered breakfast in a small room on the second floor—which Justus reserved for his most desirable customers—so as to be able to talk freely, and escape that terrible journalist, Peyrolas, who, lying in ambush behind the front door, insisted on reading his tremendous article to every new comer.

Under the influence of a juicy cutlet and some good Bordeaux, Dr. Legris was soon himself again, and as he filled Raymond's glass, he said, "I think this will be a lesson to us. In future we had better keep as far from that cemetery as the limits of Paris will allow. This another instance of the danger a man incurs in wearing a white cravat!"

But Raymond would not smile. As long as he had anything to do, any steps to take in this mysterious matter he had kept up his courage and energy. Now, however, he was in a state of prostration and merely muttered in reply to his companion: "Yes;—we shall never find out anything—I see it plainly enough!"

Dr. Legris shrugged his shoulders and finished his breakfast in silence. When he had lighted his cigar, however, just as coffee was served, he said: "You are mistaken, my dear friend—I think you will very soon puzzle out this enigma."

Raymond shook his head, and the doctor opened the door to satisfy himself that Justus was not listening outside, in accordance with one of his pleasing habits, and then returning to the table, seated himself again opposite his new friend. "Now," he resumed, "let us reason together calmly, and try to set our bewildered ideas in order, for I am inclined to believe that we have behaved like children. You probably have certain reasons which I

know nothing about for being so much disturbed. But I, on the contrary, have been affected in the most extraordinary way, when you take into consideration that I am a physician and a sceptic." At this point Raymond tried to speak, but the doctor hastily continued, "The truth is, that we both of us allowed our imaginations to run away with us. But that's over. Now I ask, why should we at once conclude that we are incapable of elucidating this mystery? Listen to me a moment." Raymond sighed. "Let us proceed methodically," resumed the doctor—nothing daunted. "First of all it is clear that this affair was of sufficient importance to induce these people to incur the very great risks they did. Their motive is what we must discover. So far we only know one thing—that the interests of the two principal parties were identical. The man triumphed, and the woman was overwhelmed with joy, as if at the realization of her fondest hopes. To all appearance they simply wished to discover whether Marie Sidonie's grave was occupied or not."

Dr. Legris paused as if expecting some answer or remark, but as Raymond did not speak, he went on—"The organiser of this audacious enterprise—the well-dressed man, the gentleman of the party—unquestionably knew that the coffin was vacant. If you remember, he exclaimed, just as the lid was opened, 'You will now see, Madame la Duchesse, that I have not deceived you.' She had evidently doubted, for otherwise she would not have been so exceedingly joyful when she ascertained the truth with her own eyes."

This point seemed to be so clearly established that Raymond was roused from his apathy. "Such being the case," continued the doctor, "the conclusion we are forced to arrive at is that somewhere in this world there is a living, healthy woman—a woman who is supposed to be dead and buried—Marie Sidonie by name."

He spoke these words in a tone of such profound conviction that Raymond started. "Then," said he, "we must also believe in some odious piece of deception."

"Precisely."

"But for what reason? Why——"

"I wish I only knew!" cried the doctor. "But on this point we have no clue. One thing alone is clear, which is, that the duchess had everything to expect, everything to look for from the existence of this Marie Sidonie."

For a minute Raymond was silent. "But," said he, at last, "I cannot understand what interest I am supposed to have in this plot. Why should I be drawn into it?"

This was precisely what puzzled the doctor, and he could find no plausible reply to the question. "How can I divine the reason," he answered, "if you cannot? Still, it is clear that you would not have been summoned to witness this apparently incomprehensible scene, unless your presence had not been considered indispensable by these people."

"But who are they?"

"People who know you well—for the anonymous letter not only alluded to the death of General Delorge, your father, but also to a woman who loved you. It is clear, too, that the person who wrote it was quite sure of your compliance, for everything was in readiness—even to the forged document which opened the gate of the cemetery. Another proof that they considered your presence of the utmost importance is that they allowed you to take a friend with you—a friend who could have no especial reasons, such as you might have, to keep the secret—and refrain from disclosing the whole affair

to the police." Dr. Legris tossed aside his cigar, which had gone out while he talked, and continued his course of induction. "I infer, therefore," said he, "that the writer of the anonymous letter must be the man we saw—the man with the lady who was called the duchess."

"I agree with you," muttered Raymond.

"I am sure of it; for it was perfectly clear to me that he suspected our presence, or rather knew that we were there behind the clump of cypress."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that I have a proof which would satisfy the most incredulous jury. Recall when these two men in blouses came over the wall, and descended into the cemetery. What did they do?"

"As well as I can remember," answered Raymond, "they looked about and listened."

"To ascertain, in short, if there were any spies."

"Evidently."

"Then I am right. Now, don't you think that such rascals as these would have taken greater precautions and have been far more careful in their investigations if their employers had not previously said to them, 'Don't go near the cypress tree on your left, for I have placed people there who must not be disturbed?'"

"I see," muttered Raymond—"I see. Yes; I think that man was the writer of the letter."

The doctor was quite radiant; for, as a rule, it affords a man great pleasure to be able to display his peculiar order of talent. "Ah! that man," he suddenly cried, forgetting his oath not to ask a single question.

"And who is he? Do you suspect any one?"

Raymond's face grew dark. "Doctor!" he said. But M. Legris calmly continued: "And this duchess, can you not give her a name?"

"I know several women who bear that title. The Duchesse de Maumussy, the Duchesse de Maillefert——"

"Then, perhaps——"

Raymond shrugged his shoulders impatiently. "This proves nothing," he exclaimed, "for it offers no possible clue to the reasons why I should have been involved in last night's occurrence. Do you doubt my word? Must I again assure you, on all I hold most sacred, that I am at an utter loss to understand the affair, and that I have never known any one by the name of Marie Sidonie?"

The young physician coloured. "Have I been indiscreet?" he asked. "Tell me frankly if you would like me to forget what has happened. Say the word, and I will never speak of it again to you."

But Raymond was already ashamed of his burst of irritation, and he caught hold of the doctor's hand. "Enough!" he cried, "there must be no half-way confidences with a friend like you. Come and dine with us this evening, and we will see if there is anything in my past life which can possibly explain last night's mystery."

Part II.

GENERAL DELORGE.

I.

ONE evening, in a rare moment of expansiveness, Raymond Delorge had said to Dr. Legris, "How wretched a man is when he has nothing to expect or hope! Here am I, not yet twenty, and if it were not that my death would kill my mother, I should long since have blown out my brains."

The story of this young man's life will explain his mournful despair. His father, General Pierre Delorge, had been what is called a "soldier of fortune"—that is to say, one of those military men who had no other recommendation than their merit and their bravery; no wealth save their swords, and each rise in whose promotion is the reward of some undoubted service or gallant act. The son of a cabinet-maker at Poitiers, who had served as a volunteer in 1792, Pierre Delorge, rocked in childhood to the music of the glorious legends of the armies of the First Republic, had, on his eighteenth birthday, entered a regiment of Dragoons. His education was very defective, but his mind was full of tales of battle, and he felt that he was of the same metal as those heroic soldiers whom his father so often talked about. Unfortunately, it was now the period of the Restoration—1820—and the sons of revolutionary artisans were by no means held in high esteem. For a long time Pierre Delorge had no opportunity of distinguishing himself, but he had determined to profit by the years of peace and the enforced leisure of garrison life to remedy the deficiencies of his education. That long hours which his companions spent in *cafés* over their punch bowls were by him employed in hard study; for he saved enough from his small pay to pay for teachers and to buy books. He was laughed at and called a recluse; he was ridiculed for his adherence to his duties, but he went on his way unheeding. He was a faithful friend, always ready to serve his comrades in an emergency; and his modesty and courage were such that they could not escape some recognition, even in these unfavourable times. The revolution of 1830 found him in Algeria, where he had risen to the rank of a lieutenant. After the fall of Algiers, where he behaved with great gallantry, he was decorated. He spent eight years in Northern Africa, and was present at all the more notable engagements. At Constantine he was wounded, and at Monzaïa also. He received the Cross of the Legion of Honour on the battlefield, and after a second and third promotion, he returned to France with his regiment in 1839. He was then thirty-seven years of age, and was allotted garrison duties at Vendôme, where, in consequence of the reputation which had preceded him, and the curiosity he aroused, he was presented to the ruling power of the town—Mademoiselle de la Rochecordeau. This lady, who was some fifty years of age, had never married. She was thin and yellow, with a hooked nose like the beak of a bird of prey. She was as noble as she was proud, devoted to cards, and credited with being a great gossip. However, when any one at Vendôme touched ever so lightly on her faults, the reply was sure to be made: "Very true, no doubt; but then she is so good and so very generous!"

Now, she enjoyed this great reputation of generosity and goodness merely because she had for ten years supported under her roof the daughter of her deceased sister, Madame Elizabeth de Lespéran, and yet this was neither a spontaneous nor a voluntary act on the old lady's part. When the Marquis de Lespéran died, just a year after his wife, leaving no son behind him, Mademoiselle de la Rochecordeau did her best to compel the rich Lespérans, of Montoire, to take charge of the girl. But these good, generous relatives were not disposed to embarrass themselves with their brother's daughter. One of the ladies of the family actually said: "The old witch had better keep the child!" and mademoiselle did keep her. "Poor as I am," she exclaimed, "I will keep her if it were only to make these people blush for their own meanness."

She kept Elizabeth—and at what a cost to the poor child!—for the old lady, disappointed and vindictive, made her niece's life a constant torture. Elizabeth never tried on a new dress without undergoing the most humiliating reproofs and hearing a long lecture on the coquetry of simpletons who think themselves pretty, interspersed with groans anent the excessive dearth of stuffs, and the extortions of dressmakers. The girl never put on a new pair of boots without hearing her aunt say to a friend, "That child would wear out iron itself. Roulleau, the shoe-maker in the Grande-Rue, finds her his best customer. And yet she ought to have some idea of the sacrifices I am daily making for her."

The situation would, no doubt, have been even worse but for a relative who came to see Mademoiselle de la Rochecordeau occasionally, and of whom she stood in more terror than of her confessor. This was the old Baron de Glorière, a bachelor and a collector of articles of *virtu*, who had conceived a warm affection for Elizabeth. It was to him she owed the only doll she ever had—a doll to whom she confided all her childish woes, and it was he who, as she grew up, gave her an occasional pretty toilette and some little jewelry. He was not rich, merely possessing an income of a few thousand francs, with his Château de Glorière, where he resided. This château, it was said, contained many objects of great value—pictures, furniture, and bronzes; but the old collector would have died of hunger rather than have sold the tiniest article among them. "Don't be so severe with your niece," he kept saying to Mademoiselle de la Rochecordeau, and perhaps, she would have obeyed him had Elizabeth been less pretty. But the girl's brilliant beauty filled her with rage, and she did her best to hide it. Elizabeth's shapely figure was clad in plain, ill-fitting garments, but she could not conceal its grace. Her hair was superb, and her pretty little hands, in spite of the rough duties they were condemned to, were still delicate and white. Even the exquisite shape of her foot could be detected, despite the clumsy shoes she wore. "Any other girl would certainly have the small-pox!" grumbled the old lady, as she looked at her niece discontentedly; and in fact, she would have been delighted if this ailment had disfigured the poor child for life.

It was at one of this charitable relative's soirées, enlivened by stale cake and gooseberry syrup, that Elizabeth de Lespéran appeared for the first time to Pierre Delorge. The word "appeared" is advisedly used, for he was, as by a celestial vision, fascinated and entranced. Then he was struck by the poor orphan's modest grace, by her sweetness of disposition, and by the dignity with which she endured her aunt's ill treatment. His heart ached at the manner in which the habitués of the house spoke to her, and it was touched by the reserved and almost haughty air she adopted. When he left Mademoiselle de la Rochecordeau's house on the night we speak of, instead of

returning home, he strolled along the banks of the Loire until it was midnight, although he knew he must be in the saddle at five o'clock in the morning. He felt the need of reflection, for a new idea had just entered his brain, and that was the idea of marriage. "Why should I not marry? My rank and my pay justify me in doing so. I can already keep up a modest establishment, and I have six thousand francs in hand to start with, while my pay will now go on increasing."

When at last he returned to his quarters, he for the first time in his life, perhaps, studied his mirror, and wondered what effect he produced on people who saw him for the first time. He was tall, well built, and had acquired just that degree of embonpoint which is becoming. His dark hair was brushed back from his bronzed brow. The honesty and loyalty of his nature could be read in his eyes; his moustache veiled without concealing his firmly cut lips. He gazed at the mirror, and did not think himself altogether ill-looking, still he did not wish to incur the risk of a great disappointment, and so, before aught else, he made some curious inquiries. He had no difficulty in ascertaining the exact position of Elizabeth de Lespéran. "Not having a sou," said some one, "she will die an old maid just like her aunt."

The officer was delighted with this news, and he became a constant visitor at Mademoiselle de la Rochecordeau's house, although the entertainments there were not of the most festive description, for the guests were mostly fanatical unmarried ladies of high birth, with an invalid or two, and several priests. But Commandant Delorge did not feel that he was paying too dearly for the innumerable games of Boston he was compelled to play, for they gave him an opportunity to contemplate Elizabeth at his ease, and he occasionally found means of conversing with her, though he did not dare to touch on the subject which was never out of his mind. At last, however, he began to think, from the fleeting colour which came to the girl's cheeks whenever he called at the house, and from the fact that a certain shutter was gently moved whenever he passed by on horseback, that she was not unkindly disposed towards him. He was indeed now only waiting for some favourable occasion to declare himself, when, towards the end of February, he fancied that Elizabeth was losing her beautiful complexion, and that dark circles were gathering under her big blue eyes. He did not rest until he had discovered the reason of this change. The fact is, a new notion had taken possession of Mademoiselle de la Rochecordeau, who, on the pretence that she could not sleep, now insisted on her niece reading to her the greater part of the night. In the morning the old lady pulled up her eider-down quilt and slept till noon, but poor Elizabeth was obliged to rise as early as the servants. Thus she did not obtain more than three or four hours' sleep of a night.

When Pierre Delorge heard this, he burst into such a rage that his orderly fled in fear from the room. "This must stop," muttered the commandant, "for otherwise the old woman would kill her."

Accordingly on the next day, it was a lovely afternoon, the young officer presented himself before Mademoiselle de la Rochecordeau, and, without any preamble, abruptly exclaimed: "Mademoiselle, I have the honour to ask you for the hand of your niece, Mademoiselle Elizabeth de Lespéran." And thereupon, without waiting for a reply, he gave the old lady an account of his means, his origin, and hopes for the future.

Intensely surprised, Mademoiselle de la Rochecordeau examined him as if he had been a natural curiosity. "But," said she, "the child has not a sou—no dowry whatever."

Without being in the least disconcerted, the commandant replied, that this made no difference to him, and that he was aware of it, besides. The old lady was more amazed than ever, but she terminated the interview by declaring, that she must have some time for decision.

The fact is, that she was utterly upset at the idea of losing Elizabeth. What would become of her if this submissive slave were freed from her tyranny—if this resigned victim were stolen from her? Who would take care of her if she fell ill? Who would mend her lace and help in making her dresses? Why this niece of hers was worth three servants. "No, this marriage shall never take place," she exclaimed, as soon as Commandant Delorge had gone off; and she at once turned her mind to thinking of some good reason of withholding her consent.

She soon found one. What! Could the son of a Poitiers artisan, a mere soldier of fortune, marry the daughter of the noble Marquis de Lespéran? "Never!" she cried. "Never." It is simply preposterous! My sister would rise from her tomb at the very thought!"

Unfortunately for Mademoiselle de la Rochecordeau, her feelings were not shared by her niece, who, when she saw the commandant arrive, in full uniform, at so unusual an hour, was gifted with a perception of the truth. Without an instant's delay, or stopping to discuss the impropriety of an act which she would have unhesitatingly condemned an hour before, she darted like lightning into a small room connected with the *salon*, whence she could hear all that was said by the commandant and her aunt. So great was her agitation that she was very nearly caught by Pierre, but she retreated in season and repaired to her room, locking herself inside. "What will my aunt say?" she asked herself, over and over again. "When will she give her answer, and what will it be?" Alas! Elizabeth knew her aunt too well to doubt her decision. "She will reject him!" she cried in an agonizing voice. "He will think himself disdained, and I shall never see him again. What shall I do?"

She reflected for a moment, and inspiration coming to her, she wrote this laconic note to Monsieur de Glorière:—"My Dear Good Friend,—You will render an immense service to your little friend if you will call here at once, this very day—as if by chance—to see my aunt. I can safely leave everything else to your prudence and discretion.

"ELIZABETH."

However, it was one thing to write this note, and another to send it. The difficulty was to have it immediately taken to the Château de Glorière, which was a full league distant from Vendôme. However, with an audacity that surprised herself, Elizabeth sent her aunt's one servant to fetch a boy in the neighbourhood who occasionally did errands for the house. He soon appeared. "Do you know where the Baron de Glorière lives?" she eagerly asked him.

"Oh, yes," answered the lad.

"He must have this letter within an hour. Mind you only give it to him. Now, hurry!" And to impart strength to the boy's legs, she placed in his hand a silver piece, all she possessed in the world. "Heaven grant," she said to herself, "that Monsieur de Glorière may be at home."

And he was at home. Wrapped in his large-flowered dressing gown, the old collector was engaged in dusting his rare pictures and idolized china when Elizabeth's letter reached him. He read it at a glance.

"Ah!" he muttered, "prudence and discretion! What does that mean?" However, as soon as the lad had gone, he hurriedly dressed himself, deter-

mined to repair with all possible speed to Mademoiselle de la Rochecordeau's house, "for it is very evident," he said, "that something strange has happened. What can this disagreeable old maid intend to do to my poor Elizabeth?"

The disagreeable old maid was by no means pleased when, some four hours or so after Commandant Delorge's departure, she saw the Baron de Glorière enter her drawing-room. However, he shewed himself very amiable, and hid his anxiety under the frankest smiles. For a moment she thought of saying nothing about the request for her niece's hand; but on reflection she decided that it would not do to hide the secret from the most influential member of the family, so she told the story slowly and reluctantly.

As soon as the baron understood what she meant, he interrupted her, exclaiming: "God is good! I never dared hope that our little niece would have such luck as this."

"Luck! Why, the man is the son of a common mechanic."

"Who cares what his father was? The son himself is a gallant soldier, and has a noble heart."

With an air of great dignity, Mademoiselle de la Rochecordeau undertook to express *her* opinion to the baron. But it was loss of time. "I fancy," he rejoined, "that if you were twenty years younger, and if this handsome soldier had come for you instead of for Elizabeth, you would not look upon him as so audacious!" The old lady choked down the angry rejoinder which half rose to her lips. "As for myself," continued the baron, "I am going to tell this gallant gentleman what I think of the matter." And, disregarding the old lady's expostulations, he took his leave.

By a wonderful chance, just as Monsieur de Glorière left the drawing-room, Elizabeth was passing through the hall. He took her by the hand, and in a tone of indulgent raillery, exclaimed: "Ah! Ah! Miss Cunning! so you like the gallant soldier. Well, well, there is no need of blushing so furiously; you can rely on me!" And, so saying, he went off.

As he passed through the street he talked steadily to himself. "This good Demoiselle de la Rochecordeau is becoming absolutely unendurable. How can she have been so blind! Did she suppose that the mere charm of her soirées attracted this soldier to her house?"

Meanwhile Pierre Delorge was by no means in a comfortable state of mind. He knew something about what Elizabeth had to endure from her aunt, and he naturally anticipated difficulties. As he saw the Baron de Glorière enter his modest rooms, he grew very pale. "Well," he hastily exclaimed, without a preliminary good-morning.

"Well," answered the baron, "I have come to tell you that Mademoiselle de la Rochecordeau does not seem inclined to give you her fair niece's hand."

The poor commandant turned pale.

"But I also wished to say that you need not despair. The old lady is not the sole mistress of the situation. The family have a voice in the matter, and as I claim to be one of the council, you may count on me."

Pierre Delorge began to express his earnest thanks, but the baron quickly put a stop to them. "You may thank me coming out of church," said he. "In the meantime, we must keep our eyes open, for the old lady is very shrewd. We will, therefore, go out for a walk together, and then you will dine with me at the hotel. After dinner you must take me with you to the officers' club, and I will play a game of checkers with your colonel, who, I hear, plays wonderfully well. Now, as I am a near relative of Mademoiselle de Lespéran, and as we have never been seen together before, the good

gossips of this town will at once scent something new, and infer that you are going to marry her. Public opinion will be with us, and that is a great point in a place like this, and has effected a good many marriages already."

The baron's programme was fully carried out with precisely the results he had anticipated. Mademoiselle de la Rochecordeau was still in bed on the following day, when one of her especial cronies arrived with the news that every one was talking of the approaching marriage of Mademoiselle de Lespéran and Commandant Delorge.

The old lady half choked with anger. "It is the blackest of treasons," she cried—"an act unworthy of a gentleman! I shall have an explanation with him, and I shall tell him precisely what I think."

However, she did not do so, for she began to realize that such a step would be the height of folly. Still, as she was not a woman to give up a point gracefully, she betook herself to solicitude, so as to think of some means of getting out of the difficulty. Why should she not take Elizabeth away? She and her niece might establish themselves at some watering-place until Pierre Delorge's regiment had left Vendôme. Such a plan would cost a great deal of money, no doubt, for expenses are heavy at watering-places; but the sacrifice seemed light to her compared to the thought of her loneliness should she lose Elizabeth. She smiled at the idea of the Baron de Glorière's discomfiture when he called upon her. He would be told that she and her niece were travelling, and would be absent for several months! It was a delightful dream, no doubt, but too fine a one to be realized, as the old lady soon discovered. The very next day she sent for her niece and told her to begin packing for a long journey, for they would leave Vendôme that very evening. But an extraordinary thing now occurred. The girl looked at her aunt and respectfully replied: "Excuse me, but I cannot leave Vendôme just now."

The old lady felt as if she were losing her senses. "You cannot leave Vendôme!" she stammered; "and why, if you please?"

"You know as well as I do, aunt."

"Explain yourself, if you please."

"Well, I wish to know what answer you intend giving to a request which was made of you yesterday, and which you promised to reply to."

"If Mademoiselle de la Rochecordeau had seen one of the statues of the town church descend from its niche, she would not have been more astonished. How did her niece know anything about it? and how, knowing it, did she dare to confess her knowledge? "It is the height of impudence!" she exclaimed. "But at all events, Mademoiselle, if you wish to know my reply, hear it: I say, distinctly, that never, while I live, shall a niece of mine marry this low-born cur! Is that clear enough? Are you quite satisfied with my reply? and will you have the goodness to attend to our trunks with all possible speed?"

In vain, however, did the old lady try to re-assert her empire over Elizabeth; the girl's will, once as flexible as a willow wand, had suddenly become as hard as steel. Pale, with sparkling eyes, she began to speak. "Forgive me, aunt; but——"

"But what?"

"Your decision is too hasty. You have not consulted any one. I am an orphan, and have a right to appeal to a family council!"

"A family council, indeed!" cried the old lady in such a rage that her very lips were white. "I should only be doing my duty if I took you by the arm and put you out of doors—if I drove you from under my roof!"

Her rage was so intense that Heaven only knows what she would have done if the baron had not just then appeared upon the scene. His unexpected presence seemed to have the same effect upon her as a cold shower-bath. "Ah!" she exclaimed, "you have come to gloat over your work, have you?"

He had just come from making a round of visits. He had seen every member of the family, and had brought from each of them a formal consent, in writing, to Mademoiselle de Lespéran's marriage with Commandant Delorge. "I know," said the baron, "that what I have done is a little irregular; but, if you prefer it, I can summon a family council in due form."

"It is quite unnecessary," muttered Mademoiselle de la Rochecordeau; and, as she dropped on to a chair, tears of rage rolled down her hollow cheeks.

So great seemed her grief that Elizabeth began to regret her firmness. All the humiliations which she had undergone for twelve long years were effaced. She only remembered the hospitality she had received. The old lady had the game in her hands at that moment. With one word, with one hypocritical caress, she could have riveted the chains anew, and have indefinitely retarded the marriage. But as the young girl, much moved, hurried towards her, she angrily exclaimed: "Leave me—leave me! You triumph to-day, but your joy will not last. God punishes ingratitude, and He will punish you through your husband. May you be as miserable as you deserve to be! As for the little I have to leave behind me, you may now say farewell to it, for not a halfpenny will you ever see." Then, turning to the baron, she continued: "Elizabeth's relatives have, of course, the right to give their consent to her marriage, but I do not think they can impose the objectionable society of this man Delorge upon me in my own house. I shall, therefore, be infinitely obliged if you will point out to me the speediest possible means of ridding myself of this refractory niece of mine."

The baron coldly bowed. "I foresaw this question," he said, "and I have made all necessary arrangements."

It was, indeed, at Glorière that the lovers saw each other during the few weeks which now elapsed prior to their marriage. What weeks these were, and how dear the memory of them proved throughout their lives! How often did the commandant live these days over again. He remembered how fast he rode after morning parade, how he espied a white shadow afar off among the trees, how, leaping from his horse, he offered his arm to Elizabeth, and then how lingeringly they walked up the shady avenue to the house, from the open doors of which came the sound of a cheery voice exclaiming: "Make haste, little ones. My poor François has announced breakfast three times already."

It was the baron who spoke, and coming out on to the steps he cordially shook hands with the commandant, and led the way to the dining-room, a lofty apartment, surrounded with dressers and buffets, decked out with specimens of every kind of *faïence* and porcelain, purchased piece by piece by the indefatigable collector. After their meal the lovers wandered over the grounds of Glorière—a simple home, but embowered among superb trees, with magnificent mossy rocks and sloping banks near at hand, and a lovely view of the river. The baron usually excused himself on the pretence that he had something to do with his collection, and the lovers sat in some shady corner and talked of the happy future before them. What had they to fear

now? Nothing whatever. Fate smiled upon them, and they had but little ambition—little care for worldly honours, fashion, and wealth. Still, at times a cloud settled over Elizabeth's face, and Pierre would say to her tenderly, "You are thinking of your aunt?"

He was right; for it was not without bitter tears that Elizabeth de Lespéran had bidden the dreary house at Vendôme, where she had been so unhappy, good-bye; and she felt a certain vague and unreasoning self-reproach for having left it. Her aunt's last words were by no means cheerful ones—"May you be as miserable as you deserve to be," and they haunted her like a terrible dream, and awakened a vague apprehension, which was like a spot on her sun—a shadow on her happiness. "What wouldn't I give," she said to Pierre, "if my aunt would only be reconciled to us and come to our wedding."

"Unfortunately, my love," urged the commandant, "she has prevented us from holding out the olive branch by accusing us of manœuvring for her fortune. Believe me, we have nothing to do but forget her, as, on her side, she has probably forgotten us ere now."

But in this idea he was mistaken, for the old lady was busy thinking of her niece, and if she gave no sign of life, it was merely because she had not yet lost all hope of revenge. She had ascertained that a clause of the army regulations forbids an officer to marry unless his bride brings him a marriage portion of twenty thousand francs. "Now," said Mademoiselle de la Rochecordeau to herself, "where can these two lovers pick up twenty thousand francs? Elizabeth hasn't a sou, and the commandant has merely six thousand francs, which will not more than suffice for the *trousseau*, the *corbeille*, and the wedding."

However, the old maid was again mistaken. Delorge was not the man to start on an enterprise without foreseeing all its consequences, and, knowing Elizabeth's poverty, he had taken all needful precautions. His father, after fifty years of hard toil, had acquired a small estate near Poitiers, which he let for four hundred crowns a year, and which was valued at sixty thousand francs. Accordingly, Pierre wrote thus frankly to his father: "I love a young girl who is an orphan, and poor. The only obstacle to our marriage is that she does not possess the dowry which is required of an officer's wife—twenty thousand francs. Are you willing to give her the title deeds of your estate? You will understand that it is a mere formality, and will in no way diminish your income from Les Moulineaux."

To this application the old cabinet-maker at once replied: "Why do you ask me the question? Les Moulineaux belongs to you quite as much as to me, and you are at liberty to do precisely as you choose with it. You know that I am very well off, for every year I save more than a third of my income. Embrace your bride for me, and tell her that I shall send her a pair of diamond ear-rings worthy of the wife of an officer of your position."

And so thus the marriage of Pierre Delorge and Elizabeth de Lespéran was solemnised one sunny day in May, 1840. The previous evening Mademoiselle de la Rochecordeau had taken to her bed.

"I have lost all hope," she said to one of her friends. "I know Elizabeth. Her husband will beat her, and she will be wretchedly unhappy."

II.

POOR old maid! She was again mistaken, for the commandant did not beat his wife. From the day of their marriage they enjoyed in all its fulness the intense happiness they had dreamed of under the trees at La Glorière. Outside annoyances connected with Delorge's profession had lost their power to vex him for any length of time; and when, contrary to his expectations and the rules of the service, his regiment was changed twice in one year, from garrison to garrison, his wife on her side gaily exclaimed: "It doesn't matter as long as we can be together!" And at other times she would smile and sigh as she murmured: "I am glad of those worries, for we are so happy that I am sometimes absolutely frightened."

And this was true enough; for Madame Delorge was haunted by vague apprehensions, particularly during the earlier months of her married life. In vain did her husband laugh at her. She had suffered too much as Elizabeth de Lespéran to be quickly reassured by the happiness she enjoyed as Pierre's wife. Often, when she was alone, she compared her past with her present, and at the memory of certain privations she had endured and the humiliations which had been inflicted upon her, the tears rushed to her eyes, and she sobbed bitterly. One day her husband abruptly entered the room, and was dismayed at the pitiful sight. "What is the matter?" he cried.

But the sight of him—his very voice—at once brought back her smiles again, and throwing her arms round his neck, she answered: "Nothing, dear. I am foolish and very happy."

By degrees, as she realised that the past was indeed the past, her nerves relaxed, and she grew calm and content. As a woman she kept all the promises of her girlhood, and was generally beloved, even in the regiment, where not a voice was raised in criticism of her conduct. This was singular and unusual, inasmuch as a regiment is simply a perambulating village, with a flagstaff instead of a steeple, full of gossip and curiosity, and dragging with its baggage through France all the petty feminine jealousies and spite which, taken up by husbands and brothers, become good solid hates. The happiness of the commandant and his wife became complete when God sent them a son, whom they named after the good friend they had not forgotten, the Baron de Glorière. He consented to leave his treasures and inspect the new arrival, and was rewarded for his compliance by discovering quite a mine of curiosities at Pontivy, where the regiment was stationed at the time of the boy's birth. The baron brought some news of Mademoiselle de la Rochecordeau, who was daily becoming more and more of a devotee, and changed her servant twice a week, for her increasing religious fervour did not at all seem to have improved her temper, though, on the other hand, her health had never been better. "You will see," said the baron, "she will end by burying us all."

The old gentleman went home again with evident reluctance, and made the commandant and his wife swear that they would come every summer and spend at least a fortnight with him at Glorière. "If you do not come for your own sake, or for mine," he said, "come at least for my godson's health—he'll grow up like grass in the country air!"

On the night of their old friend's departure, the Delorges seemed to find their house very empty. How much more so would it have been the case had they known it was the last time they should ever see him! And yet it was so; for only two months later, while standing on some steps dusting a

picture, he overbalanced himself and fell to the ground. When François, his faithful valet, reached him, he had ceased to breathe. "It is an avenging Providence!" sighed Mademoiselle de la Rochecordeau, piously, on hearing of the baron's sudden death. "God grant peace to his soul! There's one rascal less in the world!"

This rascal, as it happened, left a will which appointed Madame Pierre Delorge, *nee* Elizabeth de Lespéran, his sole legatee, and with it there was a letter addressed to the commandant and his wife. "My mind will be at rest, my dear children," wrote the baron, "when I have arranged all my worldly affairs. I am growing old, and no one knows what may happen at any time. My sight and my judgment are alike weakened, for I actually bought a wretched copy the other day for a genuine Breughel de Velours. As I love you better than aught else in the world, I bequeath to you all I possess. First, my little income from well invested funds—three thousand two hundred francs. My Château de Glorière, as it stands and with all it contains. Do not thank me for it. I know that you will always prize the spot where under the old elms you two learned to love each other. You would never allow Glorière to pass into strangers' hands. If it entered the market, I am sure that fat old silk mercer in the Rue de l'Hôpital would buy it, and then his giggling daughter would drive away my ghost. My collections are very dear to me. They have been the charm and occupation of my life, and yet I wish to sell them. The wandering life you lead would prevent you from having them with you; and if they were left at the château under the care of François—faithful as he is—they would come to grief. I have, however, selected and numbered—as you will see in my will—some sixty pieces, the most valuable in my collection—pictures and bronzes— which I beg you to retain. They will, of course, be cumbersome in moving from place to place, but they will impart a home-like cultivated look to the apartments you may occupy. As for the rest, sell them with as little delay as possible, and if you honour my memory, at the highest possible price. No one must ever say that my collection was a two-and-sixpenny affair. If you take my advice, you will have the sale at Tours, where my collection is already known, and where at least twenty amateurs reside. Have the sale bills well posted at Blois, Orleans, and Le Mans, and spare no expense in newspaper advertising. Is this all I have to say? Yes. Then, dear children, farewell. Talk to little Raymond sometimes of your old and most affectionate friend,

"RAYMOND D'ARCES,
"Baron de Glorière.

"P.S.—I wish that my faithful servant François may spend the rest of his days at Glorière, with an annuity of four hundred francs."

Commandant Delorge's eyes were full of tears when he finished reading this feeling letter. "This is the first sorrow we have known since our marriage," he said to his sobbing wife, who was leaning over his shoulder. "And it is a great one, for such a friend can never be replaced."

After considerable perplexity and a long consultation, the commandant applied for a fortnight's leave, and started for Vendôme to carry out the baron's wishes. Brief as the interval was, he found that the baron was nearly forgotten. But people woke up once more when one morning they found the walls covered with huge placards, on which appeared the following announcement in huge letters:—"GREAT AUCTION SALE of *Antique Furniture—Valuable Pictures—Engravings—Bronzes—Faïences—Tapestries, Arms and Books*, comprising the collection of the late **BARON DE GLORIÈRE.**"

The mere idea of this sale, which was announced to take place at the end of the month at Tours, made all the people of Vendôme laugh aloud. "So it seems, then," said one of them, "that this eccentric old man's heirs seriously believe that he amassed some valuable things at Glorière!" And others, shaking their heads, answered: "They will find themselves much mistaken, then, for the things won't fetch a thousand crowns. But they ought to have been sold here. The expense of advertising and removal will be enormous and absorb all the proceeds!"

But this was not the commandant's opinion; he had been often struck by the beauty of certain objects in the collection, though he was nothing of a connoisseur, and he also had too much confidence in the baron's intelligence and shrewdness to believe that he could have so strangely overrated the value of his treasures. However, the interest he took in the sale, and the care with which he managed its details, were really not so much prompted by personal motives as by respect for the memory of his old friend. "The more they sell for," he said, "the greater will be the stupefaction of these simpletons, who now look upon the baron as a half-witted lunatic!"

The commandant's only mistake was that he expressed these sentiments before persons who did not understand them, and who, as soon as he had turned his back exclaimed to each other, "What nonsense! Does this man fancy he fooled us with all this display of disinterestedness. He thinks us too simple by half!"

In the meantime, all the objects appointed by the baron had been carefully put aside, with at least a hundred more, selected from among the tapestries, pictures, and weapons. The remainder on being offered for sale cleared one hundred and twenty-three thousand five hundred francs. "And observe, commandant," said the expert who had come down from Paris, "observe that you have taken out the cream of the collection. The things you retain are worth more than all those we have sold. I am myself ready to give you this moment thirty thousand francs for four of your pictures at my choice."

The fabulous result of the sale caused a profound sensation at Vendôme. The persons who had most ridiculed the baron's mania were thunderstruck. "By Jove!" they muttered, "it is not such a bad thing as it seems to pick up old curiosities!" And from that day forth Monsieur Pigorin, the fat silk mercer, adopted the habit of calling every afternoon at the second-hand shops in the town, hoping to pick up some of these wonders which lucky people buy for ten sous, and sell again for as many thousand francs. Mademoiselle de la Rochecordeau had taken to her bed, as she always did when especially annoyed. "Who would ever have fancied that the eccentric old animal at Glorière possessed a fortune!" she muttered. "My niece found it out, it seems! Trust her for that. Well, well! They thoroughly fooled the old man, and now they have their reward! How they must laugh!"

The commandant did not laugh, however, but felt sincerely grateful to the good old man who, after insuring the happiness of his life, had also endowed him with that blessed sense of security for the future. "If I die on the field of battle now," he said to himself, "or by an accident, my last moments will not be embittered by the thought that I leave my wife and child without bread."

Thus it was with pious tenderness that Madame Delorge and her husband hung up the pictures and arranged the bronzes and china bequeathed to them by their old friend. Their furnished rooms at Pontivy at once became not only home like, but as one of the officers said, they acquired by

the magnificence of these art treasures almost a regal aspect. However, in spite of the generally credited report, that Madame Delorge had inherited the fortune of a millionaire uncle, the household went on in the same way—and a very modest way it was; for two servants were all they kept, with occasional assistance from the commandant's orderly, an old Alsatian named Krauss, who had been with his master for four and twenty years, and proudly boasted that in all that time he had not been away from him during four and twenty hours. He was now quite as devoted to Madame Delorge as to her husband, and had constituted himself Raymond's guardian, watching over him with a mother's attention, a lover's jealousy, and the faithful submission of a hound. However, this did not quite please the commandant. "It will never do," he said at times. "Krauss will ruin our boy, and make him insupportably selfish."

The boy was a year old when his father was made a lieutenant-colonel, for those were the days when wealth was a claim to advancement; and Lieutenant-Colonel Delorge, who was said to enjoy an income of twenty thousand livres, was soon promoted to a full colonelcy, and ordered to assume command of a regiment at Oran, in Algeria. This order marred the pleasure with which he received the congratulations of his friends. Should he take his wife and child with him, and expose them to the fatigues of such a voyage, and then to the perils of such a climate? But at the first word of objection he uttered, Madame Delorge checked him. "I knew what I was doing when I married you," she quietly said. "I am a soldier's wife. Wherever my husband goes, I go too!"

Accordingly they departed together, and three weeks afterwards, such speed had they made, they were located in one of those charming houses with shady gardens extending in terraces above the ravine of Santa-Cruz. The colonel at once learned why he had been ordered to set out with all possible despatch. The colony was in commotion. Algeria and Morocco were in a state of insurrection. In fact a formidable rising was projected, with the view of throwing all the French into the sea, and re-establishing the former Mahomedan rule.

The son of the Emperor of Morocco was at the head of the enterprise, and had massed his troops on the banks of the river Isly, feeling so sure of victory that he had already selected the officers who should command in his name at Oran and Mascara. He did not take into consideration the fact that Marshal Bugeaud commanded the French forces, and preferred offensive to defensive tactics. Thus, Colonel Delorge had scarcely established himself at Oran when he received orders to move forward with his regiment.

It was four o'clock in the afternoon when the order reached the colonel, and he at once turned to his young wife. "The regiment marches at midnight," he said as gaily as possible.

He expected tears and a despairing scene, but he was mistaken. Elizabeth grew very pale; a strange, fixed look came into her eyes, but she simply answered: "Very well." And then, without another word, she busied herself in preparing such things as her husband required. She forgot nothing, not even a bundle of bandages and some lint. More moved by her self-possession than he would have been by her tears, the colonel tried to comfort her. "Why do you attend to these things?" he said. "Krauss knows all about them." But she was not to be turned from her purpose.

The twenty thousand inhabitants of Oran were all in the streets that night, and wild shouts saluted the regiment as it left the town, with banners flying and trumpets sounding. Madame Delorge had not given way;

crushing down her choking emotion, and forcing a smile to her lips, she had embraced her husband once more as he put his foot in the stirrup, and then, holding up her boy, she said: "Kiss your father and say to him, 'Come back soon.'"

"Come back soon," stammered the child. Then came a final embrace, and the Colonel rode away.

Elizabeth watched until her husband was out of sight, and then, on turning to go into the house again, she fell unconscious on the ground.

"Don't be anxious," Pierre had said to her, "we shall be back by the end of the month." And he was right, for Marshal Bugeaud gained the battle of Isly a week later, with ten thousand men against thirty thousand. Colonel Delorge had two horses killed under him, and his garments were in shreds, having been literally torn to shreds by yataghans, though he himself escaped with only one wound in the right arm.

"I was sure you would come back to me," said his wife, when the regiment returned to Oran; "for if you had been killed I should have felt it here," and she pressed her hand to her heart.

The Colonel's wound was long in healing, for the fatigue of forced marches, and the excessive heat, had greatly aggravated it; and even when it was healed, there was an annoying stiffness about Pierre's arm which rendered certain movements almost impossible. As a reward for his gallantry, and in compensation for his wound, he was invested with important functions, which gave him an opportunity of displaying his excellent administrative abilities. It was to him that the Minister of War alluded when, in 1847, he said, in the Chamber of Deputies: "With officers like that, I would undertake to colonize Algeria in ten years!"

Thus, Colonel Delorge's reputation, both as soldier and administrator, was well established when the revolution of 1848 took place; and he thanked destiny for keeping him far from Paris when civil war was causing rivers of blood to flow. It was about this time that his wife gave birth to a girl, who received the name of Pauline. Madame Delorge was now perfectly happy—all her vague apprehensions had left her—her husband and her two children occupied all her thoughts. Poor woman! She should have remembered that fate is a pitiless creditor, and insists upon full payment.

III.

It was the end of March, 1849, and Prince Louis Napoléon Bonaparte was President of the Republic, when the military circles of Oran began to talk about three civilians who had just arrived from Paris and taken rooms at the Hôtel de la Paix. One of them was a young man of prepossessing air and manner, wearing a full beard, and calling himself the Vicomte de Maumussy. The second was older. His moustache was very long, and waxed to an appalling degree. He registered his name as Victor de Combelaïne. Both of these two gentlemen were decorated with the Legion of Honour. The third was a more humble individual, and also more difficult to estimate. He was stout and short, very ruddy and very bald. The extreme loudness of his appearance was increased by a huge gold chain and numerous rings on his fingers. Although he did not seem particularly old, his companions called him Father Coutanceau. The party had come to Africa, they declared, to obtain certain grants of land and inaugurate an agricultural enterprise. This may have been the case, but their conduct was

not consistent with the idea; for they paid little heed to the colonists, and devoted all their time and attention to the military men. And often at nightfall officers from distant parts were seen entering the rooms occupied by the strangers with a thousand precautions against being noticed; while, on the other hand, the mysterious trio were always driving and riding about, and even spending a day or two at a time with some of the officers in their quarters. They seemed, too, to have plenty of money—for they lived well, and drank the best Bordeaux and champagne.

"I am annoyed by these men," said Commandant Delorge to his wife one night. "One would think they were recruiting agents; but who can they recruit in this colony."

"Why do you not institute some inquiries," said his wife.

Inquiries were indeed made, and it was finally ascertained that Maumussy's name was really Chingrot, and that no one knew whence he derived his title of viscount. He was one of those individuals who hang on to young men of wealthy parentage, the young bloods who dissipate their fortunes before they have them. The culminating features in Monsieur Chingrot de Maumussy's career had been an elopement with an unfortunate woman whom he had ruined, a duel, and a spell of extraordinary luck at baccarat. After this he had steadily gone down hill, though he made certain spasmodic efforts to rise again, trying well-nigh every path in life—journalism, trade, politics, and stocks, for there were no limits either to his conceit or his ambition. It was true, moreover, that he was by no means deficient in intelligence, wit, and *savoir-faire*. He talked agreeably and fluently, with all the cool audacity of a man who has nothing more to lose. Accused of being always lucky at cards, and threatened by creditors, not with the debtor's prison, but with the House of Correction; blackballed at all the clubs, and turned out of the Bourse, Monsieur de Maumussy had suddenly disappeared from the boulevards in the month of February, 1848, since when his existence had been an enigma. Not less disreputable had been the life of his companion, Monsieur Victor de Combelaïne, on a lower rung of the social ladder—lower, because no one knew who he was, whence he came, nor even what was this gentleman's birthplace. No one, in fact, had ever heard of Monsieur de Combelaïne, his father. His mother, it was said, was a noble Hungarian lady. The only thing certain was that De Combelaïne had been a soldier, for he was known to have belonged to a regiment of hussars; and the trades people in the towns where that regiment had been quartered spoke feelingly of the bills he had left unpaid. In spite of all this, he owed to some mysterious influence a scandalously rapid advancement. He had attained the rank of captain, when in consequence of a scandalous adventure, the secret of which was well guarded, he tried to commit suicide. Being foiled in this attempt, he grew fond of life once more; but no one seemed very fond of him. Eventually he resigned his captaincy, some said voluntarily, and others under compulsion. Now the question arose in his mind how he should manage to live. At first he became a wholesale perfumer's traveller, next he opened some fencing rooms where he made money for a time. Then there was trouble again; one of his pupils was challenged, the master took his place, killed his adversary, and was compelled to leave the country. He took refuge in Belgium, where he became an actor, and at the end of ten months was hissed off the stage. Next came a brief period devoted to politics; and finally, Combelaïne adopted a profession which his enemies rightly called that of a spy. He had now fallen so low that he was ready to do anything for the sake of money. He was brave, possibly, but his courage

after all, was mere confidence in himself, and a feeling of absolute certainty that he could achieve his ends, stopping at nothing as he did. In his eyes murder was the merest trifle, at which he only hesitated when he thought the arm of the law would be swift with its vengeance.

Compared to these two worthy personages, Monsieur Coutanceau was absolutely saintly. He was in reality a commonplace rogue, who for fifteen years had devoted his life to criminal law, with such results that he himself passed several months in prison. He was consoled for this accident, however, by having well feathered his nest, and invested his ill-gotten earnings so that they brought him in an income of eighty thousand francs. Despite his air of good-natured indifference, he was in reality vain and ambitious to an extraordinary degree. Having escaped with his neck from certain disgraceful transactions, he had grown to believe himself a financier of great genius, and was quite ready to risk all he had to prove that such was the fact. Finally it must be stated that these three associates were connected with all the movements promoted by a well-known Bonapartist association, commonly called the Club des Culottes de Peau.

One morning Madame Delorge experienced great surprise, for standing at a window, she perceived the Vicomte de Maumussy and M. de Combelaïne coming towards her house. They asked to see the colonel, and were at once shown to his private room. What did they want? Madame Delorge did not even ask herself. Household duties had suddenly required her attention and she was busily engaged when she was abruptly startled by the sound of loud voices. She listened, and could hardly believe her ears when she heard her husband, who was apparently in the greatest possible rage, utter the most violent and appalling oaths. Almost immediately a sound of hurried footsteps was heard on the stairs—the visitors were apparently leaving in very great haste. The colonel was close on their heels, and as soon as he reached the hall he called out to his orderly: "Krauss, look at those two persons, and if ever they come here again remember that I am not at home."

Colonel Delorge must have been very angry, for two hours later, when he took his seat at table he had not regained his usual equanimity; and yet he was evidently fighting for composure. He talked more than was usual with him, and also with more vehemence, although the topic of conversation was unimportant. He was vexed with his boy for some childish blunder, and when Pauline cried he lost his temper entirely, and declared that it was impossible to think with crying children in the house.

His wife looked at him with boundless astonishment, for she had never before seen him in this mood. She dared not question him, however, in the presence of the servants; but when they had left the room the colonel himself was the first to speak. "How would you like to be the wife of a general?" he asked.

Like all loving wives, Madame Delorge was very ambitious for her husband, and supposing that he had some good news for her, she answered:

"Very much, of course; but why do you ask me?"

"Because they are looking for generals."

"Whom do you mean by 'they'?" she asked.

"Those two estimable individuals who were here this morning;" and without waiting for his wife to speak he continued: "This is the case. The officers holding the rank of generals are not enough for the present needs of the army. Bedeau, Bugeaud, Lamoricière, and Changarnier are in the way. New ones are wanted immediately, and from among them a Minister of

War will be chosen; and in order to court popularity we are to undertake new expeditions against the tribes."

His wife turned pale at the thought of the battle of Isly, and in a trembling voice she asked: "Are you going, Pierre?"

"If I receive my orders, of course. But don't be troubled; the orders will not come. I have none of the requisite qualities. So don't rely too strongly on being a general's wife, for since this morning it has become highly improbable that the honour will ever be yours." He rolled up his napkin as he spoke, tossed it on the table, and then pushing back his chair, hastily left the room.

"Mercy on us!" muttered Krauss.

This scene amounted to nothing perhaps, and in ninety-nine houses out of a hundred it would have passed unnoticed. But as a grain of sand falling into a pure mountain brook suffices to mar its purity, so did this brief violence disturb the peace and harmony of this happy home.

"There is no doubt about it!" thought Madame Delorge. "Something has happened, and I believe that these two adventurers have more or less to do with it." But in vain did her imagination try to establish any possible connection between the so-called Vicomte de Maumussy or his shady companion and her loyal husband.

These two personages had by this time succeeded in gathering quite a little circle about them. The vicomte was now regarded as a power in the political world of the colony. Monsieur de Combelaïne, invited to a fencing match, distinguished himself in wonderful style. On his side Coutanceau gambled, lost, and paid, with the best grace in the world. They gave dinners and good wine, followed by *soirées*, where boundless quantities of punch were served. But at last one day they went off as silently and as quietly as they had come. Madame Delorge breathed a sigh of relief, for she had instinctively learned to associate her husband's unwonted moodiness with their presence.

"Now," she thought, "Pierre will be like himself once more."

Not at all. On the contrary, the colonel became more and more absorbed. Preparations were being made throughout the colony for the expedition he had spoken of to his wife, but he did not yet know if his regiment would be included in it. It was not, and this proved a great mortification to both men and officers, who had confidently looked forward to winning promotion by gallant deeds.

"Our colonel is out of favour," they said among themselves. And of this they became still more certain when they saw several other colonels, of far less distinction, ordered off.

The powers that were, however, probably considered that it would be most impolitic to sacrifice a man so generally esteemed and respected as Colonel Delorge, and accordingly he received his promotion to the rank of General of Brigade early in 1851, and with it the order to return to Paris and report to the Minister of War. But his advancement seemed to irritate rather than please him; so much so that every one noticed the constrained smile with which he received the congratulations addressed to him on all sides. And that evening, when he and his wife were alone, he said to her: "Do you know what I ought to do if I had an ounce of common sense? I ought to send in my resignation, and we would go and live at Glorière. We have a large income now."

But she hastily exclaimed: "It would be the height of folly, and a thing you must not do, at least if I have any influence over you."

And Madame Delorge did have influence over her husband, for she induced him to relinquish the idea, already nearly decided upon, of leaving the service. She was well aware that she assumed a grave responsibility, but she did not shrink from it, so great was her love for her husband and her children, and so strong her wish to do her duty to both. No personal consideration influenced her, for, in fact, the proposal to return to Glorière thrilled her very heart and offered a thousand temptations. Her husband knew this well, and so her words had additional weight when she said: "Be patient, Pierre, and reflect well. Don't yield to a momentary impulse of discouragement, which you would be sure to regret later on. You can send in your resignation at any time, you know!"

Ah! if he had but told her the truth. But no, he remained silent, and they left Oran followed by their devoted servant Karuss.

On presenting himself at the War Office General Delorge learned that his new duties would henceforth keep him in Paris, whereupon he and his wife looked about in search of a suitable residence, and finally selected a pretty little villa surrounded by a large garden at Passy. The price they paid was high, but they disregarded this, on account of the advantages of the garden for their children.

A month later Madame Delorge began to repent having thrown any obstacle in her husband's path when he had wished to resign. He was still loving and tender, but she felt he was slipping away from her. He had so far never concerned himself with politics, and had often been heard to say that a country was in a perilous condition when its generals dropped their swords and took up the pen—and left their saddles for a seat in parliament.

It was, however, very difficult for him in his position to hold himself aloof from public affairs in that fatal year 1851. The uncertainty of the future and its risks were beginning to be profoundly felt in Paris. Every day some new and astonishing report was in circulation, justified by the conduct of the singular persons who now made themselves conspicuous. From every part of France there trooped to the capital like so many dogs scenting a new quarry, all the shady or blighted individuals who had failed in life—the withered fruits as it were of each profession—the disappointed and the scoundrels. Since returning from a diplomatic mission in Germany the Vicomte de Maumussy had been appointed to important functions. The papers named Monsieur Coutanceau for a prefecture—while the Comte de Combelaïne—for he had grown to be a count—occupied a confidential position near Prince Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte, President of the French Republic.

What part did General Delorge take in the struggles of the times? Madame Delorge never knew, for the day had passed when she was the confidante of her husband's most secret thoughts. He never said one word to her of his secret plans and opinions. Whenever she asked him any questions, he answered them vaguely, or turned the conversation. Knowing him as she did, she realised that his mind was absorbed in something which, for some reason or other, he wished to keep from her. He rarely went out, but he received a great many visitors—among them numerous deputies. And finally in October she heard him give orders to admit one of the men whom he had formerly so ignominiously expelled from his house—the Comte de Combelaïne.

From that day forth it may be said that Madame Delorge vaguely expected some catastrophe, and it finally came on the 30th of November. The most trifling occurrences of that day were destined to be ineffaceably

engraven on the unhappy woman's memory. It was Sunday. The general rose in much better spirits than usual, and after breakfast, though the weather was cold and foggy, he went down to the lower end of the garden with his son to practise pistol shooting at a target he had had installed there. When at last they came back to the house Raymond said to his mother: "I missed the bull's eye six times, but papa hit it regularly, though he was obliged to use his left hand."

"Yes," added the general, "that confounded right arm of mine twinged frightfully to-day, and it is so stiff I can only move it with difficulty." And, sitting by the fire, he proposed to his wife that they should go together to the theatre that evening.

But while he was yet speaking Krauss came in with a letter. At the sight of the handwriting, the general frowned. He read the missive twice, and crushing it in his hands, he threw it into the fire, exclaiming: "No! A thousand times no!" Then he seemed to reflect, and a minute later he exclaimed: "Little wife, you won't have the pleasure I just promised you. I must keep an appointment which was indefinitely made, and which is now fixed for this evening, as this letter informs me." Then ringing for Krauss, he added:

"Have my full dress ready. I shall dress at half-past eight."

The general's gaiety had fled. He hurried to his private room and did not appear again till dinner time. At nine o'clock he sent Krauss for a vehicle, and, as he kissed his wife, he said: "I shall not be late."

Another moment and he was gone!

IV

So Madame Delorge was to pass this evening as she had passed many others of late—alone with her children. Pauline asleep in the next room, and Raymond preparing his lessons for the next day. Two things comforted her. The general had gone out in full dress, which seemed to indicate some occasion of ceremony. And he had promised to come home early. With this remembrance to cheer her, she determined to find something to occupy the long hours of waiting—hoping that she might become sufficiently interested to forget to look at the clock. When Raymond had finished his lessons she played several games of dominoes with him, and then sent him off to bed. At eleven she was alone in the drawing-room, and counted the strokes. "He will not come before twelve," she said, half aloud. Then to occupy her time she took up a book, but she could not become interested in it. She began to think of the happy days when her husband had belonged to her entirely. It then required some most extraordinary event to drag him away from her and his fireside in the evening; and if he were obliged to leave her, he always said where he was going and with what object. Then indeed he had no secret from her, and she did not feel that the meshes of some strange intrigue were gathering more and more closely around her.

At last the clock struck twelve. "He will be soon here now!" she said aloud, and then relapsed into her train of thoughts again. With strange persistency there flitted through her mind all the events which had followed the visit of M. de Maumussy and M. de Combelaïne to Oran, and in each one she seemed to detect their mysterious and fatal influences. The injustice with which the general had been treated originated, she firmly believed, with

these two men. Ah! why had she not consented to his resigning his commission.

It was one o'clock, and no general as yet. For a time Madame Delorge wandered restlessly about the room, and then went to the window and looked out into the darkness of the night. Not a sound disturbed the mournful silence of this quiet corner of Passy—not a rumble of wheels, nor a voice, nor the sound of a footstep. The night was very dark, and everything was wrapped in fog as in a winding sheet. She shivered, closed her window, and added a log to the fire. She asked herself if she and her husband had not made a mistake in taking a house so far from the centre of Paris. Passy, in the winter time after ten o'clock at night was the end of the world, and a cab driver could only be persuaded to drive there with difficulty. Perhaps at this very moment the general was impatiently looking for a vehicle. Perhaps he would even be compelled to return on foot. "No, he will come in a cab," she thought, "because he knows how foolishly anxious I always become when he remains out late."

However, in spite of all this reasoning she grew sadder and more and more disturbed. How dreary her once glad life had become! Her happiness and peace seemed to have flown for ever away! Why had she allowed herself to be thrust aside in this fashion? Why had she not torn this secret from her husband—this secret which evidently harassed him so sorely?

Two o'clock! She could not take her eyes from the clock. She counted each minute, each second, and again and again said to herself: "Before the large hand is there I shall hear his step!"

But the large hand, with its even, imperceptible motion, passed the fixed point, and still not a sound came. The unhappy woman thought of the letter which had deprived her of the pleasant evening she had promised herself. Where had this wretched document come from? What could it have contained to induce her husband to say with such fierceness, "no—a thousand times no!" At last she heard the church bell ring four o'clock matins, and, faint and sick with suspense, she staggered to the window again. "What can have happened to him!" she asked herself; and the idea of some terrible accident took possession of her mind. She left the drawing-room and entered the hall, which was dimly lighted by a lamp which was dying out. On one of the chairs sat Krauss—but he was not asleep; for, as his mistress's dress rustled, he started up, and in the same tone with which he would have answered to the roll call, he exclaimed, "Madame!"

The poor woman's heart sank. Why was not this man asleep—he who always dropped off whenever he had the slightest opportunity? Had he any especial reason for being anxious? "Krauss," she said, "do you know where your master went?"

"No, madame."

"Didn't you hear the address he gave to the driver?"

"No, madame," answered Krauss again; and then he added: "Nothing can have happened to the general, madame; he had his sword with him."

Madame Delorge turned silently away. She felt certain now that something terrible had come to pass. She entered her son's room and kissed him on his forehead as he slept. "Poor boy!" she said. "God grant that he will not awake to sorrow!"

The dawn broke gray and cold, and suddenly the ringing of the bell at the garden gate resounded through the house. "It is he!" she cried—for she thought she recognized her husband's way of ringing, and she was

darting towards the door when her strength failed her, and she sank on to a chair.

There she remained listening to every sound. She heard Krauss open the gate, which creaked on its hinges. Then she distinguished several voices and a sound of steps on the gravel walk. "It is very strange," she thought; "Pierre has not come home alone."

But the same steps entered the house—heavy steps coming nearer up the stairs—unsteady ones, as if a heavy burden were being carried. Mad with terror, she started to her feet. But at the same moment the drawing-room door was thrown open, and two men, whom she did not know, came in followed by Krauss, who was as white as the plaster of the wall against which he leaned.

"My husband!" she gasped.

One of the men, who was pale and trembling with emotion, advanced towards her. "Courage, madame," he said, with respectful sympathy.

She understood, poor thing; and in a faint voice murmured: "Dead—is he dead?" "Her eyes closed, as if she could not look the terrible truth in the face, but as Krauss started forward she opened them and waved him aside. "Take me to him," she said; "I must see him! Where is he?"

One of the strangers pointed to an open doorway, and Madame Delorge rushed through it into her husband's bedroom, which was lighted by a single candle alone. Upon the bed, the eider-down quilt of which had been hastily caught off and thrown into a corner, lay the body of General Delorge, already cold and stiff. His eyes were wide open, and his face wore a terrible expression of mingled hate and contempt. His coat was stained with mud and partially unbuttoned, and one of his epaulettes was missing. On a chair near the bed lay his cloak, his unsheathed sword, and his hat, the plumes of which were drenched with rain.

At this appalling sight the poor woman stopped short with dilated eyes and her arms extended, as if to ward off some terrible vision. She could not believe in the reality of what she saw. But this only lasted for a moment. She approached the bed and threw both arms around the inanimate body of the man whom she adored, as if, in her wild grief, she hoped that her embraces would restore life to the heart which for so many years had beaten only for herself.

"Poor woman!" muttered one of the strangers, in a tone loud enough to be heard by Krauss.

But at this moment she started back with a wild look of horror. "Blood!" she cried. "Blood!"

Her hands were indeed red with blood, and spots could be seen on the lace trimmings of her sleeves. "Ah! my husband has been assassinated," she added.

But the younger of the two strangers shook his head. "No!" he said, "you are spared that crowning sorrow. General Delorge fell in a duel."

"And after a fair and honest contest," added the other.

She looked at them both in turn without seeming to understand them, and then slowly repeated: "A duel—honest contest!"

Meanwhile the two men talked together in a corner. One of them—the younger one—was again the spokesman; he came forward and bowed profoundly. "We were charged," he said, "with a most fearful mission. We have fulfilled it, and, unless we can serve you, or you have some orders to give, we ask your permission to retire." He waited for a reply, and, as none came, he added: "Here is my card, madame, and I beg you to command my services whenever you may need them."

He laid a card on the mantel-shelf as he spoke, and then he and his companion withdrew, without any one in the room thinking of detaining them.

Madame Delorge was kneeling at the foot of the bed, holding one of the dear, cold hands. "Pierre," she murmured, "forgive me. It is I who have killed you. You foresaw this death the day you spoke of retiring from the world and living at Glorière. And I prevented you—poor fool that I was—and it was I who led you into the midst of your enemies——"

So agonized was her tone that poor Krauss could not bear it. He touched her lightly on the shoulder. "Madame," he said, "madame."

But she did not seem to hear him. "At Glorière we might have been so happy," she exclaimed—"and now this horrible, sudden death! I will not live without you, my beloved——"

Poor Krauss sobbed aloud. "She is crazy," he said. "She means to kill herself, and then what will become of the poor children and I?" He was praying for some help, some inspiration from Heaven, when suddenly he heard a loud cry of grief. He turned and beheld Raymond, who, aroused by the bustle, had come into the room. The lad hastened to his mother, and throwing his arms around her neck, cried, amid convulsed sobs: "Dead! My poor father is dead!"

Perhaps this was the poor woman's salvation. Her son's arms, his tears falling on her face, recalled her to herself, to duty, and to life. She remembered that she was a mother as well as a wife; that she did not belong to herself; that she had no right to die. She kissed her son tenderly, and for a time murmured soft, broken words. At last she spoke aloud again. "Tell me all you know, Krauss," she said. "I can bear it now."

The old soldier looked at her inquisitively. "What do you wish me to tell you, madame?" he stammered.

"Tell me how your master died, Krauss. There was a duel—but where, and with whom?"

"Alas! madame, I don't know."

"Didn't these men, who were probably the general's seconds, give you the particulars?"

"No, madame—none."

She naturally supposed that he was concealing something from her, and so, somewhat harshly, she rejoined: "I insist on your speaking, Krauss."

The poor fellow was desperate. "On my honour, madame, I know nothing. I was so overcome that I never asked a question. I hurried to the door when I heard the bell—a vehicle was there, and two men got out and asked if this house belonged to General Delorge. I answered yes. They then asked whom they were speaking to, and when I said I was the general's orderly they replied: 'Then we can tell you everything. Your master has just been killed in a duel.' I felt as if I were stunned, and answered, 'Impossible!' 'Not impossible,' said the men, 'for the body is here, and you must help us to carry it upstairs.' Then they asked if the general was married, and where you were. I told them you were up, whereupon they said that was better, perhaps, and that when we had carried the body upstairs they would see you, if you were willing. This is just what we did, and you know the rest."

As Krauss spoke, the widow's pale cheeks flushed with anger. "And is this all?" she asked.

"All, madame."

She waved her hand, and in a tone of bitter irony, exclaimed: "And this is the way of the world! A man fights a duel—he is killed—and his friends

—his seconds—perhaps the very men who pushed the matter to this climax—think they have done their entire duty when they have brought his body back to his house, where they arrive at daylight, and said to his widow, ‘Here is your husband; we have nothing more to do with the affair.’”

Krauss fully understood his mistress’s grief, but her indignation was beyond his comprehension. In his judgment, a duel was one of those accidents of life, like a fall from a horse or a cannon-ball—and if a man died it little mattered, in his opinion, whether it was on the battle-field or in his bed. As to the conduct of the two strangers, it seemed to him so natural that he even undertook to defend them. “Excuse me, madame,” he remarked, “but these two gentlemen asked you before they left if they could be of use to you.”

“I daresay; but I did not notice,” she answered, wearily.

“And one of them even left his card. Would you like to see it?”

“Yes, give it to me.”

He handed it to her, and she read aloud: “Dr. J. Buiron, Rue des Sausstayses.” A physician then had been present at the duel, or had been called in immediately afterwards. This discovery comforted the poor wife, for she fancied that some attempt had been made to save her husband. “We must see this Dr. Buiron again, and ask him for the particulars!” she said, whereupon Krauss turned to go at once. “Wait,” added his mistress, “you are needed here. I must send some else—and who shall that be?”

Madame Delorge had lived a life of great retirement at all times, but since her return to Paris it had almost been one of isolation. Devoting herself to the education of her children she barely saw anyone, and it seemed at first as if there were nobody to whom she could turn on this pressing emergency.

Krauss came to her assistance. “You know, madame, how much our neighbour, Monsieur Ducoudray, loved my master——”

“You are right, go to him,” replied the widow.

This M. Ducoudray was Delorge’s nearest neighbour, for a simple hedge divided their respective gardens. He was a man who had been in trade, and had retired after amassing a comfortable fortune. He had all the faults of the traditional Parisian of the middle classes, being endowed with mingled simplicity and cunning. He was sceptical and superstitious; obliging, and yet selfish; intensely ignorant, and yet always ready with his opinion on all subjects. By no means lacking acuteness, he busied himself with politics, found fault with every government, constantly advised a revolution, and was always prepared to take refuge in his cellar on the day it burst out. He was a widower, with one child, a daughter, married in the provinces. He was careful of his dress, looked younger than his years, had by no means lost the wish to please, and occasionally alluded to the possibility of marrying again. His intercourse with the general had begun with the flowers and vines they had exchanged; and after a time the two men saw each other every day. Being quite at home in Paris, M. Ducoudray was enabled to serve the general and his wife in many little ways. He enjoyed executing commissions, and he was delighted, for instance, when the general asked him to buy a stock of firewood for him.

Such was the man who, ten minutes after Krauss had gone for him, entered the drawing-room, where Madame Delorge was waiting. He was pale and trembling with emotion. “Oh! madame,” he cried, “What a terrible misfortune!” And the broken-hearted widow was compelled to listen to some of those well-meant condolences which fall on great sorrows like

boiling oil on live coals. "It is a very strange affair," said M. Ducoudray, "for it is not natural for people to fight duels in the middle of the night." Madame Delorge started. Stunned by the blow, she had not made this reflection, simple as it was. "No," continued the worthy man, "affairs of honour are not usually settled like that. Seconds are chosen, you know, on both sides, and these seconds meet and settle all preliminaries. At least this was the way things were done in my time."

When he at last stopped talking, Madame Delorge explained what she wanted of him.

"Certainly," he said, "I understand. I will take a vehicle at once and go and see this physician, and I will hasten back to tell you what he says."

He left the room as he spoke, and hardly had he gone than Krauss appeared at the door of the general's bed-chamber. "Madame!" he exclaimed, in a hoarse voice, "madame!"

The old orderly who had been so pale with anguish a moment before was now transfigured. Bright colour flushed his tawny cheeks and his eyes flamed angrily.

"What is it?" asked Madame Delorge in dismay.

"It is this, madame," replied the old soldier, with a threatening gesture; "my general was not killed in a duel!"

She did not at first grasp his meaning, but stared at him wildly. "Krauss," she slowly said, "what do you mean?"

"I mean what I say, madame. There has been no duel."

Madame Delorge started to her feet. "I am his wife—his widow! I am no coward! Whom have you seen? Who has told you anything?"

"No one, madame. But the wound tells me all. Listen to me, dearest mistress, and you will see precisely what I mean. You have seen my general and I when we were teaching Master Raymond to fence. You noticed that we each stood sideways so as to present as little surface as possible to our opponent. Well—in a duel the position is the same. Consequently, if one receives a wound it is on the side nearest one's adversary—that is to say, on the side of the arm which holds the sword."

Madame Delorge was listening breathlessly.

"Now," continued Krauss, slowly and distinctly, "if my general were to fight a duel which side would be present to his adversary? The right side? By no means. No; for since Isly he has not been able to use his right arm."

"Yes, yes! and yesterday he could not hold even a pistol in his right hand. I see—my God—I see!"

"Exactly! And when he fenced it was with his left hand. Very well, it is under the right breast, and well towards the side that the general received the terrible wound which killed him. This proof and the reasoning were clear. Besides," continued the old soldier, "I have another proof. Yesterday I buckled a new sword to my master's side, one he wore for the first time; and I am ready to take my oath that this sword has never been crossed with another."

"It is plain, then," murmured Madame Delorge, half fainting, "that my husband has been murdered!"

V.

For the second time this formidable accusation had passed the heart-broken widow's lips; but at first the words had been a despairing cry, which had escaped her almost unconsciously, when she saw the blood on her hands—whereas this time the charge was deliberate. "Krauss," she said, as soon as she could speak, "go to the police-office, and send some one to me at once!"

At this moment her little girl was brought to her, and the poor mother took the child in her arms and kissed her passionately. "Yes, my darling," she said, "your poor father shall be avenged. All the strength of mind and body which God has endowed me with shall be devoted to that purpose."

She could say no more—her sufferings were too acute, and she gave the child back to the nurse, bidding the latter take her away.

It was not long before the Commissary of Police arrived. He was tall and thin, with a large nose and small eyes. His gait, gestures, and voice all indicated that he had an extremely good opinion of himself. An old gentleman wrapped up in a fur coat accompanied him. This was the official physician who always attended on such dismal occasions. The commissary spread paper and pens with an ink-bottle on the table in a business-like way, and then, being seated, pompously exclaimed: "Madame, I am ready."

Rapidly, and as clearly as possible, Madame Delorge then laid before him all the particulars she knew of this disastrous event, mentioning in conclusion the astonishment of her neighbour, M. Ducoudray, who refused to admit the possibility of a duel in the night, and her own suspicions and those of Krauss.

"Is that all?" asked the commissary who was quite unmoved.

"All, sir."

Thereupon he took the floor, and, in a didactic tone he pointed out to her the frequent injustice of such suspicions. He was, he said, far from agreeing with M. Ducoudray, who was hardly the man to judge of such matters. He had known in his own experience, no less than ten duels in the night. Such occurrences might be rare among the middle classes, but among military men they were by no means uncommon. Hot-blooded men are not apt, when they wear swords, to think much of the time or place at which they use them. He was long in expressing this opinion, for he carefully rounded his periods and weighed his words, and frequently looked at the medical man for his approbation.

Madame Delorge felt her blood boiling in her veins. "In short, sir——" she began.

But he imposed silence upon her with a majestic gesture, and went on in an unchanged voice: "I have now made my notes, and I wish to see the defunct."

The courageous woman rose to accompany the commissary, and, without heeding his advice to remain where she was, she, herself, opened the door leading into the next room. Everything was already changed there, thanks to Krauss. On the bed now drawn out of the alcove, lay the body of the general, covered with a sheet, which fell in stiff folds to the floor. At the head of the bed, on a table having a white cloth, stood a crucifix between two lighted candles, while a branch of palm was dipped in a bowl of holy water. Two priests were kneeling in front of the crucifix and reciting the prayers for the dead.

The doctor turned down the sheet and examined the body, now undressed and cleansed of all stains of blood, and in medical terms he proceeded to state

the position and dimensions of the fatal wound. He said that the body showed no other indications of recent violence, but he described several old scars, particularly one on the right arm, and concluded his examination by expressing the opinion that there was nothing to preclude the idea of an honourable duel. If the death were the result of a crime, the crime had been committed by some one standing very close to the general, some one in whom he placed every confidence, and in that case there had been no contest of any kind.

"But," cried honest Krauss, "the crime is shown by the fact that my master is wounded in the right side. You can see for yourself that it was impossible for him to hold a sword in his right hand."

The doctor shook his head. "You are wandering from my department," he said. "I can only state what I see. I have already noted that the defunct has a large scar on his right arm. But I cannot now tell what difficulty, whether great or small, he had in using that arm."

Then came the examination of the general's sword. It was new, as Krauss had said, and the commissary admitted that it had never been used. "But the general may have employed another sword," he added. "I know several instances."

Here Madame Delorge interposed. "Let us admit, for a moment, the supposition that my husband fought a duel—that he used another sword than his own—why, then, in that case is his own out of the scabbard?"

But the commissary was by no means pleased by this acuteness, and he coolly answered: "Justice never sleeps; and if a crime has been committed, madame, it will certainly be punished." He thereupon put the general's sword back into the scabbard and sealed it, lighting his wax at one of the candles which burned at the head of the corpse, and saying as he did so that it would be unnecessary to examine it again.

The doctor had by this time finished his dreary task, and had spread the sheet over the general's body again. The two men then rapidly completed the remaining formalities of the law, and, bowing low, they retired with slow and solemn steps.

A thousand lamentable details then claimed Madame Delorge's attention; it is only in romances that great griefs are never intruded upon by vulgar cares and the odious requirements of civilization. Alone, without any relatives, without friends to spare her this additional trial, the unhappy widow was compelled to occupy herself with all the dismal details of the funeral; and there were letters also to be written. In addition to this, the shock to Raymond's nerves proved so great that he was suddenly taken alarmingly ill. All this confusion and activity prevented Madame Delorge from noticing the fact that M. Ducoudray had not returned, although he had started off at ten o'clock in the morning, and it was now four in the afternoon. It was quite dark before he arrived, and in what a state he was! Pale, exhausted, and covered with mud.

"Good heavens!" cried Madame Delorge, "what has happened to you?"

The worthy man smiled faintly. "Nothing, madame, except that I could find neither cab nor omnibus. I got caught in a shower, and was compelled to walk back through the mud. But that's nothing. I have fulfilled my mission, and will tell you the whole story."

He thereupon settled himself in his chair with the air of a man whose narrative was likely to prove a lengthy one. "On leaving here," he said, "I went at once to Dr. Buiron's, but he was out; his servant told me he would return, however, at one o'clock, as that was his consultation hour. As I had

two hours before me, I then went to breakfast, but I returned at one, and found the doctor, who seems to me a very honest man. As soon as he knew that I came from you, he said, 'I counted on being asked to give an account of the occurrences of last night, and so I wrote them down before I slept.' This paper, madame, he confided to me, and I will, with your permission, now proceed to read it."

M. Ducoudray thereupon wiped his spectacles, drew a paper from his pocket, unfolded it, and began to read as follows:—"An account of what happened to me on the night from November 30th to December 1st, 1851. It was about two o'clock, and I was asleep, when my door-bell rang violently. My servant almost immediately entered my room with a young cavalry officer, who, in a state of great agitation, said to me: 'Doctor, a great misfortune has just occurred; one of our generals is mortally wounded. Come with me quickly.' I dressed as rapidly as possible, and followed this officer. He led me to the Elysée—to the palace of the prince-president. But we did not go in by the main gate. He opened a side entrance, crossed a court-yard, and finally introduced me into a large gallery situated on the ground floor, and lighted by a lantern, which seemed to have been brought from a neighbouring stable. We there found three men wearing evening dress. They were talking with great earnestness, and evidently belonged to the highest class of society. They uttered an exclamation of satisfaction when I appeared, and hastily led me to a corner, where, under a cloak, there lay a man in a general's uniform—they called him General Delorge. I instantly saw that he must have been dead for at least a couple of hours. However, I made an examination, and discovered a sword wound in the right side, which must have been almost immediately fatal. I asked what had happened, and was told that General Delorge and one of his colleagues had, after a violent altercation, gone out into the garden and fought by the light of a lantern held by a stable-boy. No reply was made to various questions I addressed to the party, but I was asked to accompany one of these gentlemen to the late General's house and deliver the body to his widow. This I could not refuse to do. A cab was sent for, in which the corpse was placed, and I got in with a gentleman, whose name is unknown to me. He did not speak one word on our way to Passy, and when we left the house after fulfilling our mission he merely said: 'Take the cab—I have business in this neighbourhood.' He then handed me two hundred francs in two notes. On my return to my room I wrote down these facts, which I swear to be precisely accurate."

Whiter than snow—with dilated eyes and her hands clutching hold of the arms of her chair—Madame Delorge leaned forward, listening to each word, which confirmed all her suspicions. Why this mystery unless there were some crime to hide? Why was this body concealed in this lower room—why this conference between these men—this tardy summoning of a physician—the going and coming through these private doors, and this obstinate refusal to reply to all questions? Thus pondering, the poor woman, when M. Ducoudray ceased to read, murmured half to herself: "We must have proofs! And how shall we procure them?" The worthy man slowly took a pinch of snuff, and then rejoined: "These are the facts, and this is all I could hear from the doctor. However, I then determined to go to the Elysée."

Madame Delorge started. "Oh! monsieur," she exclaimed, "how can I ever thank you—"

He interrupted her with a deprecatory gesture. "When I take an idea into my head," he said, "I am apt to carry it out without much delay, and

three minutes later I was at the president's palace. I had decided to address myself to the commandant—a tall, handsome man, who at first looked at me with rather a suspicious air. No, he knew nothing of what had taken place the night before at the Elysée; he was relieved at midnight, and the officer on duty had said nothing of any extraordinary event. And as I continued to talk, he begged me politely, but firmly, to leave the guard-room, and allow him to attend to his duties. That was not very encouraging. But I would not own myself beaten. I determined to try and enter the palace. I went to the main entrance and said as I entered, 'Upholsterer?' But a doorkeeper caught me by the arm and wheeled me round—'Upholsterers,' said he, 'do not come in at this gate.'

M. Ducoudray might have made his tale less lengthy, but it would have been cruel to interrupt him. "Thus defeated," said he, "I tried another device. I stood outside near the gate, determined to accost all the officers who came out. Ah, madame, the military men of my youth were more polite than those of to-day! Every one to whom I spoke glared at me disdainfully, and said: 'What are you talking about? Duel! I know nothing of any duel!'"

To Madame Delorge this was only another proof of the mystery in which the crime was enshrouded. She knew that her husband was so much liked and respected that the news of his death would surely have created a great sensation among his brother officers.

"I began to feel somewhat discouraged," continued M. Ducoudray, "when I noticed a man of forty, or thereabouts, wearing civilian dress. However, his moustache and his general demeanour indicated that he was an officer. I went up to him, and without the least preamble I said, 'Sir, I am the nearest relative of General Delorge.' By the start he gave I saw that he knew more than the others, but he nevertheless answered me in precisely the same way. 'Sir,' said I, 'he was brought home dead this morning at daybreak; the persons who brought him said he was killed in a duel, but they did not give either the name of his adversary or those of his seconds. We are resolved to know them. I spoke very loudly, and made a great many gesticulations. The passers-by stopped to know what was going on; and my man did not like this. 'For Heaven's sake,' he said, 'don't talk so loud. I know something about the affair, and after all I see no harm in telling you what I know. Last evening, Madame Salvage, the former friend of Queen Hortense, and who, as you are no doubt aware, does the honours of the palace, held a small reception there. I was among the guests. About midnight I was talking with some friends in the vestibule when I heard voices raised in dispute on the stairs. Two men who were in a towering rage, and one whom I recognised as General Delorge, were coming down. The other one said to him: 'We have our swords, sir, and there is the garden; a groom from the stables will hold a lantern.' Thereupon they went out, and this morning I learned that poor Delorge had been killed.'"

Madame Delorge rose to her feet. "And the other man!" she cried, "what was his name?"

"Alas!" answered M. Ducoudray, "the person I spoke to would not, or could not tell it me. I endeavoured to obtain it by threats. I told him that a duel without seconds is an assassination, to which he rejoined that there was a witness if there were no seconds; and when I asked what witness he meant, he replied: 'The groom who held the lantern.' Now, Madame, it is this groom that we must find, for he must know the truth!"

Overwhelmed by a conviction of her own helplessness, Madame Delorge could not speak. What could she do? She was a widow, friendless, without influence or support, and her plans had already been disapproved of by the Commissary of Police, who had talked to her of the wickedness of suspicions.

"In your place, madame," said Ducoudray, "I should appeal to some of the general's friends. Some of them would, no doubt, take up the investigation. If I knew who they were —"

"Wait a moment!" said Madame Delorge, as she hastened from the room, soon reappearing with a little book in which her husband had noted down addresses. She hastily turned over the leaves and read name after name, at hap-hazard: "Comte de Commarin, Rue de l'Université; The Duc de Champdoce, Rue de Varennes; General Changarnier, Rue du Faubourg-Saint Honoré; General Lamoricière, Rue Las Cases; General Bedeau, Rue de l'Université."

"That's enough," interrupted Ducoudray. "If one of the generals you have named would take your cause in hand, why if a crime has been committed, as I believe, General Delorge will be avenged."

She was silent for a moment, and then, in a low firm voice, replied; "I will act to-morrow."

VI.

It was the second of December, 1851, a Tuesday. After a night of sleepless sorrow passed beside the lifeless body of the only man she had ever loved, Madame Delorge sent for a cab and drove away from her home. She had often heard her husband speak of General Bedeau as one of the bravest and most loyal men in the army. She had often seen him, and often received him at her table while they were residing in Algeria. It was to him, therefore, that she thought of first applying, and on her way to his residence she asked herself what she should say to arouse his sympathy effectually. But a sudden shock interrupted the course of her reflections. Her cab had been stopped near the Pont d'Iéna, and in some surprise she looked out to ascertain the cause, and also the meaning of the noise she heard. It was a detachment of artillery, three or four batteries, passing at full speed across the bridge, and turning abruptly to the right along the Quai de Billy. Madame Delorge could distinguish the cannons and caissons and the soldiers in their long blue overcoats, while the officers, sabres in hand, galloped up and down the column, shouting their commands in voices which rose above the rattle of the wheels. As soon as this body had swept by, the cab went on again, but not very far, for midway down the Quai de la Conférence it stopped afresh, and Madame Delorge heard her driver bandying words with some one she could not see. She lowered the glass in front. "What is the matter?" she asked.

"It seems," said the man, sulkily, "that vehicles are not allowed to pass. Look, madame!"

She looked—and saw that the whole length of the Champs Elysées—as far as the Place de la Concorde—was filled with cavalry drawn up arranged in line.

"They say," grumbled the coachman, "that we must cross the Seine by the Pont d'Iéna. It's abominable, I think!" and as he turned his horse's head he said, with an oath, "The devil take all reviews!"

Madame Delorge also supposed that a review was going on, and was

troubled lest she might, consequently fail to find General Bedeau at home. All the troops in Paris seemed to have turned out of their quarters. Regiments were spread out along the left bank of the Seine, while others were massed on the Esplanade des Invalides and around the Palace of the Corps Législatif. Here the cab could move no further, and Madame Delorge determined to proceed the rest of the way on foot. But the further she went the more astonished she became at the immense number of men under arms. The whole neighbourhood, moreover, had a strange look. An unusual number of police were moving about, and groups clustered at every corner reading placards affixed to the walls. Madame Delorge knew nothing of the intrigues and the political passions of this troubled epoch, and she was at a loss to understand this excitement. After all, what did it matter to her? Grief is selfish, and she saw no connection between this agitation and her husband's death.

Absorbed in her own thoughts she hurried on, but at the corner of the Rue de Bellechasse and the Rue de l'Université she could go no further, for a compact crowd had assembled there. A man was talking with angry vehemence in the centre of the throng, and she instinctively stopped to hear what he said. "It is an unheard-of crime! a most monstrous thing to arrest a man like that!" On hearing this, Madame Delorge turned to an old man at her side who seemed to be as angry as the others. "Who is it," she asked, "that has been arrested?"

"Bedeau, madame, General Bedeau."

She nearly fainted at the news, and then with the idea that the man was playing a joke upon her, she said: "Impossible! you are not in earnest?"

"I am, indeed," he answered. "Bedeau was arrested this morning as if he had been a vile criminal—dragged out of bed by six agents of the police, and carried off to prison. He struggled bravely, and called from the window of the cab: 'Treason! Treason! I am General Bedeau. Help, citizens! It is the Vice-President of the National Assembly who is being carried away!'"

"Yes," interposed another man, "that is exactly what he said."

At this moment a body of police arrived to clear the street, and in the twinkling of an eye the crowd scattered in every direction, while Madame Delorge took refuge under a door-way. The poor woman decided to go and see General Lamoricière, since to reach Bedeau was impossible. Accordingly she turned back, and at last entered the Rue de Las-Cases, where all was calm, silent, and deserted. There was not a human being to be seen from one end of the street to the other. The door of number 11 stood open, and Madame Delorge entered. At the foot of the stairs stood an old woman, who was evidently the concierge, talking with two young men, lodgers in the house. Madame Delorge went toward them, and, with a tinge of anxiety in her voice, asked: "Where shall I find General Lamoricière?"

The group started back and examined her with distrust. But at last the concierge answered: "He is arrested."

Madame Delorge caught at the wall for support. "He, too!" she cried.

"Yes, madame—this morning at daybreak. He called for aid, and they told him they would put a gag in his mouth if he did not hold his tongue." The woman's eyes blazed as she continued: "When the police came they told my husband to take them to the general's rooms, and he wouldn't do so. He shouted as loud as he could, 'Robbers! Help!' And then do you know what happened?" As she spoke she threw open the door of her room

and showed a poor fellow groaning on the bed. "That's the state the wretches left him in," she cried. "There were ten of them, and then they wanted to kill him, and, in fact, one of them cut him with his sword. But if there's justice left in France to-day we'll have it."

Seeing the ungovernable emotion of Madame Delorge, the two young men thought she must be a relative of the illustrious general, and so they courteously said, "Don't be troubled, madame, there's no danger—no one will dare touch a hair of his head. Besides, he is not the only one who is arrested—Cavaignac, Changarnier, Charras, and Thiers himself, are probably all at Mazas by this time!"

Without waiting to hear another word, Madame Delorge turned and fled. All her hopes were crushed. To whom could she turn now? Who would aid her now that all those on whom she relied were in prison? However, she hurried on towards the Palace of the Corps Législatif. Troops were drawn up all round the square, and under the portico she saw a confused mass of soldiers and citizens. Near her a voice called out: "The representatives, too!"

"The representatives first!" replied another voice. So then, the representatives of the people were to be driven from the palace by the soldiery! However, some of them resisted, whereupon they were pushed and buffeted, while two or three who attempted to address the crowd were hustled down a side street. Madame Delorge was nearly taken off her feet in the midst of the crowd, when suddenly a man, whom she recognized as a representative she had often seen with her husband, came towards her. In a hoarse voice he abruptly said to her, "You are Madame Delorge, I believe?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, madame, you see what is going on. The President of the Republic strangles the Republic which he had sworn to defend and protect. He dissolves the Assembly at the point of the bayonet. And he has found generals in the French army willing to aid him in this dastardly betrayal of his trust. But General Delorge, madame, is the soul of honour and loyalty. Does he know what is going on? Go to him, I implore you, and beg him to hasten here."

"General Delorge is dead," replied the widow in a choked voice.

"Dead!" repeated the deputy, like an echo; and then, transported with rage, he cried: "But we will avenge him, madame; we will avenge him! He could not be bought it seems. This *coup d'état* cannot succeed!"

Madame Delorge felt that she had at last met one of those courageous men who are revolted by crime, and are ready to devote themselves to the just cause of the feeble and the oppressed. But at this moment she saw him surrounded by a gesticulating crowd. She wished to speak to him again, but it was impossible. The surging crowd carried her further and further away. Young men were shouting at her side: "The Constitution is violated! Louis Bonaparte is beyond the pale of the law!"

By this time Madame Delorge began to have a dim perception of the motives which had prompted her husband's murder. This plot, which had slowly matured in darkness, needed many accomplices. One word from any of the generals might have defeated it, and this word her husband might have uttered. Perhaps he had discovered the secret, or it might have been heedlessly confided to him by one of those concerned. At last, then, Madame Delorge realized how closely her destiny was associated with that of the *coup d'état*. If it failed she would not lack assistance in her work of vengeance; but if it succeeded, she would never be listened to.

Suddenly a sharp pang came to her heart. The general's funeral was to take place at three o'clock; it was now twelve, and she was at an appalling distance from home. She forgot her fatigue, and hastened back to the spot she had left her cab; but it was no longer there—the driver had been obliged to retreat before the advancing troops, and it was only after a long search that she at last found it on the Quai d'Orsay. "Home!" she said, as she sunk into her seat; "and drive with the greatest possible speed."

This was a simple order to give, but one that proved impossible to execute on account of the incessant movements of the troops. The driver whipped up his horse, but was obliged to stop just as he entered the Champs Elysées. The President of the Republic, Prince Louis Napoléon Bonaparte, was advancing on horseback down the avenue, accompanied by a numerous escort, among which she recognized the Comte de Combelaïne. Then a sudden inspiration flashed through her mind, and extending her arms, "It is he!" she cried; "it is he!"

But the cry was unheard in the noise, except by De Combelaïne, who glanced into the cab. His eyes met the widow's, and in them her fancy read a gleam of the ironical triumph which is born of impunity. And why not? If the result of the *coup d'état* yet seemed doubtful near the Palais Bourbon, all foretold a victory here near the Elysées. The prince, surrounded by his gorgeous escort—all gold and feathers—was smiling and bowing to the right and to the left, while above the sound of trumpet and bugle there rose from among the intoxicated troops not only shouts of "Long live the President!" but the more significant one of "Long live the Emperor!" In the crowd on the pavement Madame Delorge detected consternation and stupefaction, but threats and imprecations were rare. Only one or two sceptics hazarded allusions to Louis Napoléon's previous ventures at Boulogne and Strasburg. "It is all over!" murmured the poor woman. "All over!"

The triumphal cortege passed on. The driver was then able to move again, and twenty minutes later the vehicle drew up before the door of the villa at Passy, where faithful Krauss awaited his mistress. "Ah! madame," he cried, "we have been so anxious ever since you left. M. Ducoudray was just going to look for you; we did not know what to do."

It was two o'clock, and the undertakers were already there. The door of the house was hung with black. "Where is—my husband?" asked the poor woman.

Krauss trembled apprehensively. "Alas!" he said, "the coffin was brought some time ago, and I laid my general in it."

"You did right," she answered, as with automatic steps, and with fixed, tearless eyes, she slowly ascended the stairs.

The coffin stood on three trestles, covered with a black pall, in the middle of the bedroom. On the pall lay a large white cross, and near by knelt two priests and M. Ducoudray. "Let every one leave the room," said the widow, in a tone which admitted of no questions, "and send my son to me."

She was obeyed, and for a moment she stood alone before the coffin which contained not only all that was mortal of her husband, but also her very happiness, her hopes, her youth. She shivered at the thought that any other hands than hers had laid the lawn over the face which would soon crumble into dust, and she was about to give orders to have the lid of the coffin removed again when she felt her dress pulled from behind. It was her son who sobbed: "Mamma, it is I; you sent for me. Oh! do speak to me!"

She took his hand, and holding it in hers, laid it on the coffin, "I sent for you, my son," she said, "in hopes that the recollection of this frightful moment may never leave your mind. You were a child yesterday, but this terrible misfortune makes you a man. You have a sacred duty to fulfil."

The little fellow looked at her earnestly.

"You have been told," she continued—"I told you myself—that your father was killed in a duel. That is not true. Your father—a brave and gallant soldier—was assassinated, and I know his murderer! Yes, I am ready to swear that I know him." She gasped for breath, and then went on more slowly, emphasising each word, "Everything will be done, my boy, to conceal the truth; and maybe all our efforts will prove useless. Maybe the assassin will appear far beyond and above our reach. That does not matter, Raymond, your father shall be avenged. To this work I shall consecrate my life—you must do the same. Swear to me, my son, that you will devote all your energy, all your intelligence, and all your strength to this sacred cause."

With a solemn gesture Raymond raised his hand, and answered "I swear!"

Before Madame Delorge could add another word heavy steps were heard outside, and some undertakers' assistants appeared at the door, remarking "The coffin looks as if it were pretty heavy."

They proceeded to raise the black drapery, and then the widow felt as if her heart were breaking and her reason deserting her. "No, you shall not take him away," she cried, clutching at the coffin. But it was the last effort she made—her arm fell beside her, and she sank, an inert mass, upon the floor.

VII.

It was midnight before Madame Delorge recovered the power of suffering. She was lying on her son's bed, and her maid was asleep in a chair hard by. The poor woman realised that she had only recovered consciousness to fall into that leaden slumber which follows a season of intense emotion. But a great peace rested upon her soul. Her grief was not less overwhelming, it was simply calmer. She now felt capable of facing her present situation and the duties which belonged to her future. Her maid awoke with a start, and, approaching the bed, asked her: "Are you better, madame?"

"Yes, much better—where are my children?"

"Both asleep, madame. But M. Ducoudray would not leave until you were better."

"Very well, then, give me my dressing gown—I will see him. I am not ill—and I must see M. Ducoudray."

That gentleman was eager to hear what Madame Delorge had done that morning. He had vaguely heard of the *coup d'état*, but he was unwilling to go into the city to obtain more information until he had seen her. He started up as the widow entered the drawing-room, and when his eyes rested upon her the words he would have spoken died away upon his lips. And no wonder; her hair had grown white—as is rarely the case in real life, though in romances it is of common occurrence—and twenty hours had done the melancholy work of twenty years. Elizabeth, the beautiful, happy wife, was no more; the cold and stately person he beheld was the Widow Delorge.

But she paid no attention to his amazement; indeed, it is doubtful if she perceived it. She at once proceeded to tell him the morning's story. He was utterly bewildered and enraged—all the more so, indeed, as he was a Liberal to the back-bone. He had always been opposed to the tyrant, Louis Philippe, and had even done much, in a quiet way, towards the fall of the oppressor—for which on bended knee, in the silence of his own room, he now, morning and night, implored the forgiveness of Almighty God. In short, he shared all the widow's suspicions. They both decided that the general must have been aware of Louis Napoléon's plot, that advances had been made to him, that he had rejected them and even threatened to expose the whole affair, and had thereupon been killed so that the secret of the conspiracy might not be revealed. But was the murderer M. de Combelaïne? This was a point that M. Ducoudray was not prepared to admit; for he remarked that a smile on a man's lips was no proof that he had committed a crime.

"But he did! I know he did," cried Madame Delorge. "That man has been our evil genius. All our misfortunes date from the day when he, with his two companions, arrived at Oran. They were then preparing this *coup d'état*. Now I know what they must have proposed to my husband when they were so ignominiously dismissed from our house. I have never since seen M. de Maumussy, but De Combelaïne has been here twice. I know I am right; this is one of those presentiments which never deceive."

"In all this public excitement," remarked M. Ducoudray, "my poor friend's death will pass almost unperceived. It is a hard thing to say, dear madame, but when Paris is calm again the general's death will have been forgotten. I doubt even if we shall obtain an inquest. And our witnesses, where are they?"

He was interrupted by the sudden appearance of Krauss, who was brandishing a paper. The good old fellow checked himself on seeing Madame Delorge, whom he supposed to be in bed, but after a moment's hesitation he began: "I am afraid that Marie, the cook, has made a great blunder. To-day, while the funeral was going on, a man came to speak to madame on important business; in connection, he said, with my poor master. Madame was asleep, and the cook was alone—for we had all gone to the cemetery—so she sent the man away again. He went off reluctantly she said; but before doing so he asked for a pencil and paper, and wrote this."

So saying Krauss handed the paper to his mistress, who after reading it at a glance, passed it on to Ducoudray. "You ask for witnesses," she said, quietly. "What do you think of that one?"

The writing on this paper ran as follows: "*Laurent Cornevin, groom at the Elysée stables, residing at Montmartre, Rue Mercadet, No. 16.*"

M. Ducoudray started up in excitement. "It is the very one!" he exclaimed—"the very groom who held the lantern. This man knows the truth. What a misfortune that I was not here when he came. And why was not this address given to us before?"

Krauss was in despair. "Because," he replied, "the woman—poor simpleton—attached no importance to it, and it was by the merest chance that she spoke of it to me."

Ducoudray had come to a grand decision. "Never mind!" he said,—"we can repair the mistake easily enough. I will see this man early to-morrow morning. The city may not be altogether quiet to-morrow, but as I am a Parisian by birth, a revolution does not alarm me."

Worthy M. Ducoudray's kind eagerness was due, in a great degree, to a motive which he discreetly kept in the background. He had indulged in con-

siderable reflection during the last twenty-four hours, and had asked himself why it would not be a good thing for himself and Madame Delorge to marry at some future period. He himself could see no obstacle to the plan. The lady was not yet forty, to be sure, while he was over sixty; but if she was still beautiful, he looked much younger than his years, and a difference of twenty summers between husband and wife is, after all, nothing very uncommon. Madame Delorge's despair did not discourage him either, for had he not been equally crushed when his wife died, and had he not eventually got over it? Of course it would be the same with her. Is there a sorrow in the world that resists the slow work of time and the dissolving action of weeks succeeding days, and years following months? No—none whatever. He therefore arranged a plan of action. To have risked a word to the widow would have been tantamount to closing her doors against him. But if he could only make himself necessary to her he considered that the ultimate success of his project would be certain. So he determined to adopt the rôle of a confidential friend until she some day realized that he was absolutely indispensable to her, and then he would suddenly unmask his batteries. He could not ask for a better occasion to serve her than this one, for Madame Delorge would refuse nothing to the man who aided her in her work of investigation. In addition, moreover, M. Ducoudray felt a certain satisfaction in being concerned in the affair, for the mystery interested him. It never entered his brain that he was incurring any risk by his interference, and he did not realize that this 2nd of December and the *coup d'état* might end most disastrously for himself as well as for hundreds of thousands of other people.

The chaotic mass of his new ideas agitated him to such a degree that he never closed his eyes that night. He rose at seven, dressed, and took a cup of coffee, and half an hour afterwards was out of doors. It was a dark and rainy morning. The shops in the streets of Passy were being slowly opened. Very few persons were to be met and these were mostly workmen, who talked in low voices with an uneasy air. It was not, however, until M. Ducoudray reached the Place de la Concorde that he realized the gravity of the events that had already taken place and those that were now proceeding. The first division of the Army of Paris, under the orders of General Carrelet, occupied the same position as on the day before in the Champs Elysées, in view of commanding the approaches to the Tuileries and the Elysée Palace. "Well, well!" ejaculated the astonished Ducoudray. "I never saw so many soldiers before!"

The painful shock he experienced was increased when he approached a group which had assembled in the Rue Castiglione, before a recently posted placard. A young man was relating what had occurred at the meeting held by the deputies at the townhall of the Tenth Arrondissement. "There were three hundred representatives present," he said, indignantly, "and they had voted for the removal of the president, and had appointed General Oudinot commander-in-chief, when an officer—a lieutenant—presented himself, and ordered them to disperse. They refused, declaring that they would only yield to force; whereupon the hall was invaded by soldiers, who arrested the representatives and carried them off to prison."

At this point the speaker was interrupted by a police agent who roughly ordered the group to disperse. "It is against the law," he said, "for crowds to collect at the street corners."

This language excited Ducoudray's wrath. "Why do they put up placards then," he asked, "if we are not to be allowed to stop and read them?"

"Move on, I tell you," rejoined the police agent; "if you don't I'll——" here he stopped, but he gave Ducoudray such a threatening look that our worthy friend fancied he could already hear the rattle of his jailer's keys.

He meekly obeyed the injunction to be gone, but as he did so he reflected that it might be as well to defer his visit to Montmartre. In that case, however, what would Madame Delorge think, and what would she say? So he went on again, and on reaching the boulevard he found that the excitement there was very great. But few of the shops were open, and written notices were affixed to the trees, calling on the people to arm themselves. But a police agent passing by saw them, and immediately tore them off. "This looks bad! I smell powder!" said Ducoudray, to himself, and in fact just as he reached the Rue Drouot several young men rushed past him, crying, "To arms! to arms! A representative has been killed in the Faubourg Saint Antoine! To arms!"

"They are right!" said Ducoudray, fiercely, to a man beside him.

The man in question started, but he made no reply, in fact he walked on all the faster. A moment later up came a company of light infantry from the direction of the Madeleine, and our friend turned into the Rue Drouot. Fear imparted the fleetness of youth to his aged limbs, and it was with arrow-like speed that he climbed the Rue des Martyrs. The further he got from the boulevards the quieter the city became. Shopkeepers stood as usual at their doors, and laughed together, shrugging their shoulders with a satirical air. Ducoudray thought, however, that he should find Montmartre in a state of disturbance. Not at all. Never had this unusually excited district looked calmer. At last Ducoudray reached the Rue Mercadet, and repaired to the house indicated on the paper given to the cook.

It was a huge building, five storeys high; and judging from the closely set windows it was divided into innumerable rooms. A long, narrow passage, very dirty and very dark, led to the porter's abode, a little hole under the stairs. Here sat an old woman of whom our friend inquired: "Laurent Cornevin, if you please?"

"He is not at home, but his wife is," said the woman.

"He is married, then?"

"To be sure he is, and has five children!"

With the idea that he should learn from the wife where her husband was, Ducoudray asked what floor the Cornevins lived on. "The first," chuckled the old woman—"the first coming down from the sky, you understand."

Thus informed, M. Ducoudray climbed the stairs, and at the very top of them he met a woman who proved to be Madame Cornevin herself. She was tall, well built, young, and if not handsome, at all events very pleasant looking, with a frank, honest face. She was poorly but very cleanly dressed, and carried a bright healthy child, six or eight months old, in her arms.

"Come this way, sir," she said, showing her guest into a room shining with cleanliness, and then he perceived that her eyes were swollen with tears.

"Madame," he began, "I wish to see your husband on most important business. Where shall I find him?"

"Alas! sir, I don't know myself."

M. Ducoudray started. "What on earth do you mean?" he asked.

"Just what I say, sir," and the woman's eyes filled as she continued: "He did not come home last night, but I was not anxious, for though it was his off-night, I thought he had taken some comrade's duty. Still, when it

was light I thought I would run to the Elysée and find out, but his companions declared that they had not seen him for three days! I can't understand it; for he's a man who loves his home and children, and has no bad habits. I fear, sir, that something must have happened to him."

Worthy M. Ducoudray had grown very pale, for the disappearance of the one solitary witness of General Delorge's death struck him as much more than a coincidence. He concealed his emotion, however, as best he could.

"Come, come, my good woman," he said, "you must not be so unhappy. Your husband will come back again. He has been detained by some comrade."

"Impossible, sir, for they are all at the Elysée, and they none of them know where he is."

Ducoudray felt a cold chill pass down his spine. One crime had been committed—why not another to conceal the first? "When did you last see your husband?" he asked.

"Yesterday morning, when he went out, saying that he had an errand to do at Passy."

"And he did not say what this errand was?"

"No; he only mentioned that he had to call on the wife of a general on important business."

Two little boys rushed in at this moment, but shrank back on perceiving a stranger. Their mother seemed surprised to see them, and severely asked: "Why have you come home at this hour?"

"The master sent us. He said: 'Run home quick and stay indoors, for there's going to be a revolution.'"

Madame Cornevin turned pale. Although she had been to the Elysée that morning, she had evidently not heard of anything. "A revolution," she murmured, "and I don't know where Laurent is!"

"Is he interested in politics?"

"He! no, sir. He was never interested in anything but in working for the children and me."

Never had our good friend felt so uncomfortable. A thousand vague apprehensions assailed him. This house seemed to him bristling with dangers, and the very floor burned his feet. "I will not trouble you further," he said, "I will call again to-morrow, and then of course your husband will be here."

"And who shall I tell him called?"

M. Ducoudray shuddered at this natural question. No, he would not give his name; it would be the height of imprudence. So he opened his pocket-book, as if to find a card, and then carelessly said: "Never mind! Just say that Monsieur Krauss came to see him."

That was not especially heroic, but the old gentleman was all goose flesh at the thought of Cornevin's being suppressed simply because he possessed an inconvenient secret; and as he descended the stairs he recapitulated to himself the various means he knew of to get rid of a man, from hiring a well-paid assassin and his dagger to employing a cook, induced by golden promises to slip a little poison into some soup. Once out of the house, however, the fresh air and the movement of the streets had their natural effect, and Ducoudray smiled at his exaggerated fears. However, as he approached the boulevards he noticed that the excitement was on the increase—it was indeed much greater now than it had been earlier in the day. Constant shouts went up from the crowd. "The constitution has been violated—Louis Napoléon is beyond the law! To arms! to arms!" Then a man passed

by with a gun over his shoulder. "Come on, citizens!" he cried; "there is fighting in the Rue Rambuteau."

At these words Ducoudray pricked up his ears like an old war-horse at the sound of a trumpet. "This is getting hot!" he muttered. Meanwhile the crowd became more compact and more animated each moment. Speeches were delivered by eager orators, who stood on the chairs in front of the cafés. They read the decree pronounced by the Assembly of the Tenth Arrondissement against Louis Napoléon. Policemen with swords moved up and down among the crowd. Cavalry clattered along the boulevards; the crowd opened to let the horses pass, and then closed up again. Cries of "Vive la République!" arose in every direction. The general fever seized hold of M. Ducoudray—he recalled the glorious days of July—he forgot Passy, Madame Delorge, the general, and M. de Combelaine. "I must see the end of this!" he murmured, as he went into a café on the Boulevard des Italiens for breakfast.

Here he heard all sorts of reports—some true and some false, often very absurd ones—but all of them threatening resistance. It was said that the authors of the *coup d'état* were losing their heads—that M. de Maupas was trembling with fear at the prefecture of police—that General Magnan hesitated—that Lamoricière would not act—that four carriages stood in the court-yard of the Elysée, with horses harnessed, all ready to bear the president and his accomplices far away, and "with him all the treasure he had collected!" added the best informed. Like the true Parisian Ducoudray boasted of being, he imbibed all these reports with the most eager credulity, accepting as the truth whatever pleased him. He had begun to look upon the *coup d'état* as a failure when he left the restaurant, but he soon realized his mistake; for, during the short space of time he had spent at breakfast, the mobile physiognomy of the boulevard had changed. The crowd had become more compact, if possible, but it was ominously silent. Not a laugh was heard; and there were no more shouts of "Down with Soulouque!" which had previously caused the soldiers to open their eyes in astonishment. However, troops were still hurrying to and fro.

"Is there fighting going on anywhere?" asked Ducoudray.

"Yes; there are barricades in the Rue Transnonain, in the Rue Beaubourg, and the Rue Grenetat."

"And the police let them stand," said a man near by.

Suddenly came a shout—followed by profound stillness. "What is it?" asked Ducoudray of two young men who were hurrying past.

"Saint-Arnaud's proclamation."

"Where is it?"

"At the next street corner."

The worthy man hurried there, and amid the indignant remarks of a couple of hundred persons standing round about, he read: "Inhabitants of Paris: The Minister of War calls your attention to the following decree: Each individual caught erecting or defending a barricade, or with arms in his hand, will be shot down.

"LE ROY DE SAINT-ARNAUD,

"Minister of War."

This was brief, significant, and to the point; it embodied, moreover, the entire policy of the *coup d'état*. However, the proclamation seemed to kindle resistance rather than quell it. "They only want a pretext to fire on us," said a man with a white beard. And at this moment, as if to point his words, there came the noise of a violent fusillade in the direction of the

Quartier des Gravilliers. And presently, moreover, a young man dashed by, shouting as he went: "It is in the Rue Aumaire—I am going for a gun."

More than one had the same idea, for two steps further on M. Ducoudray saw a shop-keeper put up his shutters and write on them with chalk: "Arms given to any one applying."

As the night came on, however, the firing diminished. By dint of using his elbows freely, our friend had finally got as far as the Château d'Eau—when all at once a hoarse cry rose from a thousand throats, and he found himself swept along with the crowd. A woman who had lost her hat, and who had a little girl with her, clung desperately to his arm, and implored him to save her child. He tried to help her, but he was thrown against a tree. A whirlwind seemed to pass over him, he caught sight of the flash of a sword, and closed his eyes. When he opened them again, he was alone; the crowd had dispersed indeed, for several squadrons of lancers had charged, and men were now picking up the wounded.

"And what will to-morrow be?" groaned the old gentleman, who, knowing Paris so well, felt that bitter revenge would be wreaked for this rash act.

Never had a revolution seemed so imminent as on that evening, the 3rd of December, 1851. Despite the renewed protestations and prohibitions of the police, crowds gathered at every corner—blouses jostled coats, and hands hardened by toil grasped white ones daintily gloved. Barricades, moreover, were being rapidly erected in every direction. However, eager as our friend was to see more of the contest, he felt that it was now high time for him to return to Madame Delorge, and as a cab passed by he hailed it and got inside.

VIII.

WHEN M. Ducoudray reached the villa at Passy it was nearly nine o'clock in the evening, and he asked himself what on earth he was to say to the widow. "I have nothing to hide," he reflected, "and yet I certainly acted wisely in not leaving my name. She will not understand it, though, I'm sure." And he sighed despondently.

He expected to find Madame Delorge wild with suspense; but she quietly took her little girl from her lap as he entered the room, and calmly exclaimed: "Well, sir?" She was very pale, but her demeanour shewed that she was firmly determined to keep up her courage and fulfil her duties. Raymond was seated at the table learning his lessons, and as Madame Delorge repeated her query, M. Ducoudray looked meaningly at the boy, as if to say, "Shall I speak before him?"

"Most certainly. When he is older he will inherit my task if I have not accomplished it, and it is advisable that he should learn each event as it takes place."

Accordingly, the worthy man sat down and described all the occurrences he had witnessed, the attitude of the crowd, and the dangers he had escaped.

"And Cornevin," interrupted Madame Delorge—"the gooom at the Elysée stables—have you seen him?"

"No—only his wife," replied Ducoudray hesitatingly. He really did not dare to tell the whole truth to Madame Delorge, for fear of frightening her, but she insisted on his speaking, and when he had done so she exclaimed: "Ah! indeed! I expected something like that."

Thereupon, the good man eagerly added that Cornevin would, of course, be back again in a day or two, but she rejoined: "Why do you try to encourage me with hopes which you do not feel yourself? This fellow was too important a witness not to be got rid of in some way or another. Besides, he was all the more dangerous as he was honest. He was watched, of course, and when he was seen coming here his fate was sealed. Circumstances were propitious for his disappearance. What is the fate of one man in such times as these?"

Ducoudray turned pale. "We ought to gather courage and hope, madame," he said, "for the *coup d'état* will not succeed."

"But it will, sir."

"Oh, excuse me; I have spent the whole day in the streets, and I understand the feelings of the people——"

"Nevertheless," interrupted Madame Delorge, "the *coup d'état* will succeed. I have learned a great deal since I saw you last night. I have been looking over my husband's papers. He long since foresaw what has now happened—and that is why he wished to resign before returning to Paris. An unfinished letter in his own handwriting convinces me of this, but, unfortunately, I cannot discover for whom it was intended. 'My friend,' he writes, 'be on your guard—all is ready for the grand *coup*. It may burst forth at any moment—to-night or to-morrow—perhaps at this very moment while I am writing these words. Don't lose a minute. The stupid dissensions among honest men insure success to the first knave who chooses to snatch at power.'"

"And you believe this? You believe that the general's enemies—his murderers—will soon occupy the highest places in the land?"

"I do."

"And yet, madame, you hold to your own plans of—vengeance?"

The poor woman started. "Why should you call justice vengeance?" she asked. "A murder has been committed—I only ask that the murderer may be detected and punished. Is that too much to ask?"

"Alas! madame," answered her worthy friend. "If the *coup d'état* really triumphs, M. de Combeilaine will be beyond your reach!"

"That may be so," replied Madame Delorge, "but some very insignificant cause often does the most mischief. The subsidence of a little sand will cause the most solid-looking edifice to fall to the ground. An express train travels swiftly, but a child may have placed a pebble on the track, and the powerful engine rolls to the bottom of an abyss. I may be this stone, sir—this grain of sand."

These words decided M. Ducoudray to beat a retreat as fast as possible—for he felt far from comfortable, and was no longer so determined to devote himself body and soul to the cause of the general's widow. "Dear me! How she talks!" he said to himself. "Heaven only knows what mad acts her hatred will impel her to commit. She is a very dangerous person to have anything to do with. If the *coup d'état* proves a fiasco, as I think it will—why, then I shall side with Madame Delorge against De Combeilaine. But if, on the contrary, it succeeds—well, I can only say that I am too old to sacrifice my peace of mind and body."

The next morning he rose at an early hour, but he still retained too vivid a remembrance of the charge of lancers to venture into the heart of Paris again without having ascertained what was going on there. Accordingly he went out to consult various tradespeople he knew in Passy, where, despite the distance from Paris there now prevailed considerable

excitement. There were rumours of the arrest of several more generals, and of risings at Rheims and Orleans. By ten o'clock Ducoudray could bear it no longer. Remembering that one of his friends resided on the Boulevard Montmartre, he started off, determined to ask his friend's permission to sit at one of his windows and watch the scene. "There, at least," thought he, "I shall be in safety."

The crowd on the Boulevards was as large, and even more hostile than on the day before. Orators were hoisted on to the shoulders of their companions, and held forth in violent language. On the walls there were new placards, which ran as follows :

"The erection of barricades in the public streets is strictly forbidden. People are warned not to assemble in crowds, which will be dispersed by force. Let peaceable citizens remain at home.

"Paris, December 4th, 1851.

"DE MAUPAS.

"Prefect of Police."

M. Ducoudray was momentarily tempted to follow the Prefect's advice and return to Passy, but the remarks he heard about him speedily changed his mind again. "They threaten well," said one young man, with a sneer, "Their bark is worse than their bite. They talk like this, but they will never dare to carry out their threats."

This was also Ducoudray's opinion, and he accordingly proceeded as far as the corner of the Rue des Capucines, where he saw a tall old man—said to be a representative who had escaped arrest—addressing the crowd, and explaining with considerable precision what form the resistance of the people ought to take.

"There are sixty thousand soldiers under arms to-day," said one man in the throng.

"Well fed and with plenty to drink," added another.

"Ay, they are all half drunk," remarked a third.

"Very well, then," said the orator, "let us be careful, and give them no reason for any violence."

The crowd seemed to be curious rather than angry, though when an officer galloped by there would occasionally be a shout of "Down with the traitors! No dictator!" On hearing this M. Ducoudray became triumphant. "Ah!" said he to a neighbour in crowd, "these *coup d'état* gentlemen may shake in their shoes!" and feeling quite reassured he went on towards the Rue de Richelieu.

All at once a loud clamour arose. An officer of the National Guard, galloping at full speed down the street, had turned his horse too short, and the animal reared and threw his rider. A crowd at once surrounded and threatened the dismounted horseman, but some young fellows interposed and hustled him through the throng into an adjoining house.

By this time Ducoudray had reached the abode of the person whom he meant to ask for a window. His friend gave him a cordial welcome, and asked him how things were going. "These *coup d'état* people would retreat if they could," rejoined Ducoudray, authoritatively; "but they can't—they've burned their ships. They really meditated a *coup de bourse* rather than a *coup d'état*. From Louis Napoléon, the president, down to Maumussy and Combelaïne, they are all of them impoverished men. What would become of them if they retreated now?"

At this moment the noise of a cannonade so violent and so close that the windows rattled, interrupted his remarks. Both men turned very pale. "Good heavens!" cried Ducoudray, "what is that?"

"Cannons," answered his friend, laconically; then, after a pause, he added: "I have been expecting it, for a very strong barricade has been erected on the boulevard nearly opposite the Gymnase theatre."

There now came another discharge, and they at once hastened to the window. Strangely enough, the crowd below seemed no more moved by these cannons than they might have been by the toy ones at Francoini's circus. No one was sufficiently curious to go and see what had happened. Women and children moved about as on the days of a great review. And yet the crowd constantly had to part to make room for passing litters conveying wounded men. Two o'clock was on the point of striking when from the direction of the Madelaine there came the roll of drums. "The troops! the troops!" cried the crowd. But no one seemed to be alarmed, and, in fact, far from dispersing, the people stationed themselves in rows along the sidewalks, as if a great procession were coming.

However, their sense of security did not last long. The troops, who were commanded by General Canrobert, marched on in a never ending file, and with each regiment came a battery of artillery. The soldiers, so Ducoudray thought, were unusually animated. There was a sparkle in their eyes and a restlessness about their movements as if they had been tiptling. Many of the officers, moreover, were smoking. All this time distant cannonading was heard, and the two men at the window could see the smoke from the battery at the top of the Boulevard Poissonnière. They leaned out to obtain yet a better view, when all at once from the head of the column there came a quick fusillade. The people fled in all directions, and still the firing continued. "It is only powder!" stammered M. Ducoudray. "It must be powder! They would never fire like that on an unarmed crowd, on women and children."

A bullet which whistled past him, and struck the wall two inches from his head, cut his words short. More dead than alive the two friends threw themselves flat on the floor. It was quite time they did so, for a hail-storm of bullets now crashed through the windows, riddling the curtains and smashing a mirror and a clock inside the room. Meanwhile above the noise rose the angry shouts of the soldiery: "Shut your windows! Close your houses!"

This lasted for ten minutes. Then came a long silence, followed by frightful shrieks and groans. Finally not a sound.

Some time elapsed before M. Ducoudray and his friend dared to crawl to the window and look out. There were only soldiers on the boulevard now. They were leaning on their smoking guns, some glaring angrily up at the windows, and others apparently stupefied by the scene. On the sidewalks, up and down, lay half a hundred bodies or so, including several women and two or three children. Near the corner of the Rue Montmartre something glittered. A poor little "coco" vendor, who had taken it into his head to offer his beverage to the troops, was lying there with his bright metal filter on his back, pierced with twenty balls. Suddenly a shop door was timidly opened, and some men came out cautiously, picked a poor fellow who was wounded off the pavement, and carried him into the shop. Meantime detachments of six or eight soldiers were going from house to house, and could be seen at the windows of each successive floor. "They are making domiciliary visits," whispered Ducoudray in his friend's ear. "They will come here, too."

And, indeed, in another moment they heard an imperative knock and then loud shouts of "Open at once, or we break down the door."

They hastily threw the door open. The soldiers came in and began to search the rooms, opening every wardrobe and closet, and probing the beds with their bayonets. One of them even took hold of Ducoudray's hands and smelt them, to make sure that he had not been using firearms.

"Oh! could you suppose it sir?" cried the worthy man.

"Could I suppose?" interrupted the angry soldier—"I suppose nothing—I only know that we were fired at from the windows, and those who fired must be found."

Ducoudray was about to speak, but the young lieutenant in command of the men made a sign to him to remain quiet. The officer seemed greatly disturbed. "It is a frightful catastrophe," he said to the two friends, while his soldiers continued their search of the house. "We did all that was in human power to avert this calamity; but our men were like mad. They would hear nothing we said—they even threatened us. Carried away by the recollection of the 'war of the windows' in those dark days of June, they thought themselves surrounded by invisible enemies. Every house seemed full of weapons. Besides, most of the men had been drinking, and at the first shot they went wild——" He said no more, being interrupted by a noise on the upper floor, on hearing which he hastened out of the room.

Ducoudray and his friend were now alone, and they looked at each other in silent consternation, for neither of them cared to speak. It was another tenant of the house, who aroused them. He was very pale, and carried his arm in a sling. Returning home from business just at the moment of the fray he had been wounded by a bullet. "And I was lucky in getting off so well," he said, "for two poor devils were killed at my side."

He then went on to describe what he had seen. He mentioned a bookseller who had opened the door of his shop to the frightened crowd, and who, as a reward, was shot dead in sight of his wife and children; and he related occurrences that had taken place along the line. Several of the cafés had been sacked, so to speak, and the refugees driven out of their shelter. At the Cercle du Commerce several members had been severely wounded, while opposite the Hôtel Sallandrouze he had seen an artillery officer throw himself in front of his guns, and call out to his men: "Now—fire. Thank God the first shot will kill me."

The new-comer also reported that there had been little or no resistance; for none of the barricades were held. When the moment came to defend them, those who had raised them disappeared as if by magic. The troops had only to appear to conquer. And besides, what were a thousand or twelve hundred persons against an entire army?

M. Ducoudray listened pale and trembling, and frequently wiped the cold sweat from his brow. "I must go home! I must go home!" he repeated again and again with idiotic reiteration, and finally about six o'clock he started off. "I was so utterly upset," he said later on in describing his emotions on this calamitous day—"I was really so afraid that I feared nothing." The troops were now bivouacking all along the boulevards. Fires had been lighted, and the flames threw strange, fantastic shadows on the house fronts. The soldiers were eating and drinking gaily, as after a great victory. Wine ran freely, and here and there the blue flame of a punch-bowl could be seen. With these exceptions the city was sad to a degree.

As Ducoudray walked through the deserted streets, he thought to himself: "Who will call, ask after or care a sou about the death of General Delorge, or the disappearance of poor Cornevin? What do two victims, more or less, matter in such times as these?" Still he thought it his

duty to call on Madame Delorge before he went home. He found her with her children, and looking so calm that he thought she knew nothing of the day's fatal events. "Poor, dear lady," he said, "your hopes are all crushed. The *coup d'état* is successful, and M. de Combelaine is now all powerful!"

IX.

MONSIEUR DUCOUDRAY was right this time. Never within the memory of man had Paris been so sorrowful as on the morning of the 5th of December. The boulevards were in possession of the troops—vehicles were not allowed to pass along them. From the Bastille to the Madeleine, all the shops were closed; and yet—so peculiarly are Parisians constituted—it was scarcely noon when crowds began to collect again. Groups gathered on the sidewalks about the piles of yellow sand covering the pools of blood of the night before. People stood also before the Hôtel Sallandrouze, the front of which was riddled with bullets. But it was before the Cité Bergère in the Rue du Faubourg-Montmartre, that the crowd was most dense. The iron gate was shut and locked, but through the bars some thirty-five or forty bodies could be seen. They were the poor creatures who had been killed the day before, and whose bodies had not been claimed or recognized. Among them were three women. "A most salutary sight!" muttered some apologist for the *coup d'état*, for such were beginning to appear, now that its success was no longer doubtful.

Yes, the French people were conquered, and they hastened to express their opinions through the *plebiscite*, which, when Louis Napoléon asked if he did not deserve a reward, answered by more than seven million ayes against seven hundred thousand nays. Now the quarry gathered round the game. M. de Maumussy was spoken of for a ministerial portfolio; M. de Combelaine, now more of a count than ever, was appointed to an important and lucrative position, and M. Coutanceau announced the establishment of a great financial enterprise supported by the Government.

No one followed all these events with more interest than M. Ducoudray. He, who usually held his head so high, now went about timidly with his eyes cast down, as if he was eager to escape observation. The secret he possessed in reference to the death of General Delorge weighed heavily on his soul. And when he saw any especially arbitrary or violent measure of the men in power succeed, the very marrow in his bones was chilled. "I trust in Heaven," he said "that they will forget me."

He would perhaps have been less uneasy had he been able to induce Madame Delorge to give up her plans of vengeance. But he failed in his attempts. "The triumph of the wicked will not last long," was her invariable reply. "An edifice, the first stone of which was sealed with blood, must crumble sooner or later."

Then her friend urged her at least to defer any steps until a more auspicious moment. "What would she gain," he asked, "by raising her voice now?" To these incessant remonstrances Madame Delorge finally made no reply. Only, at every meal, the general's place was laid precisely as if he were still living, for she had declared that it should be so until she had obtained justice. "That vacant chair," she said, "will remind us of our duty."

At last, M. Ducoudray began almost to detest her. "She is simply

crazy," he said. "Never in my life did I see such a headstrong creature."

Madame Delorge had penetration enough to see what was going on in the mind of her old neighbour. So she talked less to him of her designs, though she had in no degree relinquished them. She determined, as soon as Paris was calmed down, to make a formal complaint—with what result she could not tell. If an inquest were ordered she would at least learn the name of her husband's adversary, or, as she opined, his murderer. Still up to this time her instinctive belief in the complicity of the Count de Combelaine was supported by no material proof.

However, before she could file any formal complaint she must find the only witness of the general's death. When a fortnight had elapsed after M. Ducoudray's visit to Cornevin, and nothing had been heard from him, she determined to write to the man's wife, and beg her to call upon her. It was on a Saturday that the faithful Krauss carried this letter to Montmartre, and on the following afternoon the groom's wife presented herself at the villa. M. Ducoudray was there, as was his habit at this time of day. Not having been forewarned, he started and grew very red when Krauss entered the sitting-room and informed his mistress that Madame Cornevin wished to see her. Ah! if the good old gentleman could have only gone up through the ceiling or got out of the room unseen. But alas for him, there was no escape.

"Let her come in," answered Madame Delorge, eagerly.

The poor woman appeared with a child in her arms, and it was not necessary to ask if her husband had returned. M. Ducoudray would not have known her if she had not sent in her name, so greatly was she changed by three weeks' sorrow and suspense. She was but the shadow of the youthful, healthy looking woman he had seen in the Rue Mercadet—so proud of her children, and of her clean, orderly home.

Her thinness was appalling; her dark calico dress hung in loose folds over her bust and shoulders, while every drop of blood had left her face. She had wept so much that her eyelids were scarlet, and her tears had worn furrows along her cheeks. As for the child, however, he was as dimpled and as healthy as before. The poor woman's face brightened when she saw the old gentleman. "Ah! Monsieur Krauss," she cried, whereupon M. Ducoudray wished he could fade away.

"You are mistaken, dear madame, you are mistaken," he stammered.

Madame Cornevin looked very much amazed, and then, in a timid way, as if fearing she had made a blunder, she remarked: "Was it not the name of Krauss you gave me, sir? I wrote it down as soon as you had gone."

"That will do," interrupted Ducoudray, "that will do." And then with the sterile volubility of the people who attempted to explain an inexplicable thing, he undertook to justify what he called his little mistake.

But Madame Delorge did not care; she calmed him with a kind smile, and then took a chair nearer Madame Cornevin. "Can it be possible, my poor woman," she said, "that you have had no news from your husband yet?"

"None, madame."

"What have you done?"

"First, I went looking among the dead, and examined the bodies of all the men who were killed; and when, on the 6th of December, a neighbour told me that there were at least a hundred more bodies in the cemetery at Montmartre, I hastened there. It was true; they were laid out in a line, with all but their heads buried. Oh, it was awful to look at! One poor

lady found her husband, though, and nearly fainted. Thank Heaven, mine was not there."

Madame Delorge shuddered. "Then why do you feel sure that your husband is dead?" she asked.

"Because a police agent told me so. You see, madame, I said to myself, when I heard of the arrests that were made, that perhaps Laurent might be among them, and I thought that if he were sent to the colonies as a punishment that I might perhaps go too, and then we could be happy again. So I went off to an office where I inquired. They told me to come back in a week. I did so, and then they said that among the arrests there was no person answering to the name of Cornevin."

Madame Delorge remained silent for a moment; she was expressly struck by the woman's persistent conviction that her husband had been killed. "Why are you so sure," she asked at last, "that your husband was in the fight? You told this gentleman the day you first saw him that Cornevin cared nothing for politics."

"I did not know then as much as I know now. It seems that my husband had made some new acquaintances—bad fellows—and they led him astray. He was faithful to his duties and kind to me—but he belonged all the same to secret societies."

"Who told you so?"

"The head groom."

"Did you go to the Elysée, then?"

"Yes, madame, several times."

At this point Ducoudray leaned towards Madame Delorge; he was very uneasy, and he whispered to her that he thought she had better say no more. But she did not take the slightest notice of his intervention, for the decisive moment of the interview had come. "In your place, my poor woman," she continued, "I should have applied to one of his comrades rather than to the head groom."

"I did that afterwards, madame. I sent to his very best friend, a man named Grollet. He was as unhappy as I am, and as soon as he saw me he burst into tears."

"But what did he say?"

"He said that the head groom was quite right, that Laurent had been busy with matters he had better not have meddled with."

Madame Delorge and M. Ducoudray exchanged glances. "And what were these matters?"

"He didn't say."

"Did you hear anything of a duel?" asked Madame Delorge.

"Of a duel?"

"Yes, of a duel, which took place in the Garden of the Elysée, and in which a man was killed."

"No, indeed," was the reply, spoken in a tone of such sincerity that it was impossible to doubt the woman. She evidently knew nothing.

Nevertheless, Madame Delorge was not disposed to relinquish the matter. "Won't you try," she said gently, "and see if you can't remember what occurred the last time your husband was at home? Did he not leave in view of coming to Passy—to see the wife of a general, to see me? I feel certain that he must have told you something of that urgent business."

"No, madame, not a word."

"What! didn't he allude to a man that was killed in the Garden of the Elysée on the night of the 30th of November?"

Madame Cornevin started. "Who was killed?" she asked.

"My husband—General Delorge."

The good woman drew a long breath. She was evidently trying to collect her thoughts, and striving to find any possible connection between the general's death and Cornevin's disappearance. "Do you think, then, that my husband was present at that duel?" she finally asked.

"If there was a duel—which we are much inclined to doubt," said Ducoudray, forgetting his prudent resolutions. "The scene," he continued, "was lighted by a stable lantern which Cornevin held. He alone knows the truth—and if the general said a word when he stood there, your husband must have heard it!"

Madame Cornevin started to her feet with flashing eyes. "Ah! I understand!" she cried. "I see now why Laurent was so sad, and why he did not wish to stay at the stables. He knew everything, and they were afraid of his testimony." The woman's excitement increased as she spoke, and in a tone that Ducoudray never forgot as long as he lived, she added through her clenched teeth: "Let them take care!—those who have committed this crime. I care nothing for life compared to vengeance!"

Even Madame Delorge was dismayed at her vehemence. "Alas!" she said, "my sorrow is like your own——"

"No, madame," interrupted the woman. "If I were alone in the world you might say that—but I have children."

"And so have I—two."

"Yes—but they are your consolation, while mine are my despair, for it was Laurent's toil that put bread in their mouths. And now what is to become of us? Can I earn enough to feed six of us? Even if I were to work night and day it would be impossible. Must I go to the Relief Office and have my name entered? I should be admitted, I have no doubt. But long days of suspense would follow, and we should starve in the meantime. If the baker shakes his head and refuses me credit, what shall I say to the children when they cluster round me crying with hunger? Must I beg from door to door with my children clinging to my skirts? Must I steal?—I can't. I should not have the courage."

Big tears were falling from Madame Delorge's eyes. That same morning she had thought she was the most wretched woman in the world, and now she saw one who was even more unhappy than herself. She took both of Madame Cornevin's hands in hers. "Be calm," she said, "as long as I live you shall want for nothing!"

The woman smiled sadly. She plainly fancied that these words were but the promises born of passing compassion, and destined to be forgotten on the morrow. Madame Delorge detected this, and so in a solemn tone she added: "I swear to you that I mean what I say—that I shall always, as you may need assistance, be ready to render it. I shall never forget that if your husband has disappeared it was probably because he wished to bring me the last words spoken by mine. And I will do more; if you will intrust your dear sons to me they shall be brought up with my own, and as my own."

Again did worthy M. Ducoudray allow himself to be carried away. "Rely on me, too, my poor woman!"

Madame Cornevin doubted no longer, but falling on her knees before the widow, and kissing her hands she stammered: "Thank you—oh, thank you for my children's sake! You have saved their lives. We can never sufficiently evince our gratitude for such goodness!"

"Who can tell?" said Madame Delorge; and then she added; "The time may come when we shall be able to avenge our husbands."

"On that day," cried Madame Cornevin, "rely on me. Tell me what I am to do, and no matter what it may be I will do it. And the children will not hesitate to give their lives if need be. They shall be told each day how they lost their father, and that it is their duty to see that justice is done!"

The two women stood facing each other, holding each other's hands. The general's widow and the groom's widow were bound together by a solemn compact of hatred. M. Ducoudray felt a cold chill creep up his back, and he was very sorry he had spoken, "for they are both mad," he thought—"quite as mad as March hares." And when Madame Cornevin had departed—carrying with her the first instalment of an annuity of twelve hundred francs—the good man undertook to prove to Madame Delorge the utter folly of mixing herself up with the affairs of the groom's wife. She did not argue the point—she listened in silence—but very early the next morning she went out to the Rue des Saussayes to call on Dr. Buiron. He was at home, and recognised her as soon as she entered. He hastened to offer her a chair, thus concealing his own embarrassment and arranging his replies, possibly, to the questions he foresaw.

But she cut his attentions short. "I intend, sir," she said, "to file my complaint at once and apply for an inquest. My husband, you know, has been assassinated."

He started back and immediately exclaimed: "I, Madame—I know nothing of the kind!"

The widow was not surprised. The astonishing cordiality of her welcome had prepared her for this answer. "And yet, sir, the very care you took in writing your account of the event proves that it struck you as being very strange."

Madame Delorge was pale and cold, while the physician was flushed and animated. "I do not know, madame," he said, "that you have the right to refer to a paper which I intrusted to the discretion of Monsieur Ducoudray. What does it matter, however, and what does it prove? Simply that I was deeply impressed by the events of a night so sad for you. Since then I have reflected, and I recognise the blunder I made, for really—"

He stammered and grew confused, and seemed to wither into nothingness under the widow's contemptuous glance. "Would you speak thus," she asked, "if the *coup d'état* had not succeeded?"

"Madame!" he cried, indignantly; and then, with sudden decision, as if, so to speak, he were bent on jumping straight into the mud, he proceeded with considerable vehemence: "You are right; events have unquestionably affected my judgment. The affair is political in all its bearings. Is it wise for me to meddle in it? I am young, and just starting in my profession. I have no experience, and I have a mother to support. Why should I make enemies for myself?"

Madame Delorge rose from her own chair. "That is all you have to say, I presume?"

"Yes, madame, all."

"Farewell! I shall utter no reproaches; your own conscience will do that." And with these words she left the room.

"Poor miserable coward," she murmured on her way out. "Is he afraid? Has he been bought by my husband's murderer?"

She was not discouraged, however, but drove at once to the Rue Jacob, where resided a lawyer, M. Roberjot by name, who had formerly been

employed by her husband. Young—not yet thirty—of an excellent social position—and possessed of considerable property, M. Roberjot was one of those lawyers whose destiny seems clearly indicated early in life. However, he had drawn himself into his shell, and remained there since the second of December, waiting until he was quite certain whether he had better attach himself to the new government or attach himself to the opposition.

He was utterly amazed when he saw Madame Delorge enter his office, and while he handed her a chair he closely scrutinized her countenance. It was with the utmost attention he listened to her, and when she had ceased speaking, he exclaimed: “Madame, I am inclined to believe that your conjectures are only too near the truth. What you say throws new light on this great mystery.”

“Do you mean that you have already heard it spoken of?” she eagerly asked.

He at once answered, “Yes.”

“Who is talking of it?” she inquired.

“Not the public, madame, for it is stunned by the rapid succession of events—but the people among whom I live, and who are acquainted always with what goes on in Paris. However, I hardly know if I ought to repeat to you what they say.”

“Go on, sir.”

He hesitated. “First, madame, let me say that I look on all the various reports respecting your husband as absolutely false. It is said that he committed suicide.”

“My husband! And why in the name of Heaven?”

“It is asserted that he had made most compromising engagements with both sides—that he had written several letters—most imprudent ones—that, in short, he was playing a double game, and that, threatened with exposure, he lost his head, and ran his sword through his body.”

Madame Delorge rose from her chair. “It is an infamous calumny!” she cried. “What scoundrel invented and circulated such an infamous tale?”

“Ah! madame, does any one ever know the authors of the thousand calumnies which circulate through Paris?”

“Go on, sir; what else have you heard?”

“That General Delorge fell in a duel, arising from some dispute about money; a large sum, it is said, had secretly disappeared from the prince-president’s private room.”

Tears of mingled anger and grief sprang to the poor widow’s eyes. “Enough, sir, enough! I can bear no more. Whence come these tales? You do not know, but I do. It was not enough, it seems, to assassinate my husband; they wish to dishonour his memory. But that shall not be—I will appeal to the Press.”

M. Roberjot shook his head: “Alas! madame, I doubt if you would find a paper willing to publish a line on your behalf.”

Finally, however, at her entreaties, he consented to take her to the office of an influential paper, the editor of which professed to feel an implacable hatred against the government. He listened to Madame Delorge’s story with appalling imprecations, but when she had finished he told her that the Press was reduced to absolute silence, and that an allusion to this affair would close their offices. He wished he could help her, but he could not face utter ruin. “And these are the men of to-day!” sighed Madame Delorge as she returned to Passy. But all the same, she duly filed her complaint on the morrow.

X.

WHEN a complaint is filed in proper form it is quite impossible that no notice can be taken of it. Now, Madame Delorge had complied with all the requirements of the law as duly advised by M. Roberjot, who had warmly espoused her cause. This dark and mysterious affair had put an end to his perplexities, and decided his course. Henceforth Roberjot would belong to the opposition, and so, with the greatest caution and diplomacy, he had drawn up Madame Delorge's complaint against some person or persons unknown. Each circumstance which, in his opinion, went to show that a crime had been committed was duly specified—from Krauss's assertion that the general's sword had never been drawn in a duel down to that seemingly overwhelming proof, the disappearance of the unhappy Cornevin. In conclusion, and so that justice might make no mistake, M. Roberjot named the Comte de Combelaine in a phrase which, although of very meek appearance, was in reality more terrible than any formal charge. "And now," he said to Madame Delorge, "we can do nothing more—we can only wait."

She did not wait long. Her complaint had been filed on the Tuesday, and on the Wednesday her worthy neighbour, Ducoudray, appeared about five o'clock, dressed in black as if for a funeral, and with a face as solemn as his garments. "They have begun," he cried. "The investigation has commenced. I have just come from the Palais de Justice."

Madame Delorge flushed, for, dreading her friend's remonstrance, she had carefully concealed her complaint from him.

"Yesterday," he continued, "while I was at dinner, I received a summons to appear before the investigating magistrate. Shall I confess that I was really disturbed, for I dislike court rooms and judges very much. However, as there was no escape, I went to the Palais de Justice at eleven o'clock this morning, and was at once ushered into the magistrate's presence. He was a man of about my build, with his hair parted down the middle, and a pair of huge whiskers. His face was very pale, and his lips as thin as threads. He returned my bow politely, but he looked at me from head to foot for a good minute. Then he asked me my name, my age, and my profession, and all at once he most abruptly asked, 'And what do you know about the death of General Delorge?' It was then my turn to look at him, and I did so, and folded my arms. 'I know,' I replied, 'that he was assassinated in the most cowardly manner.'"

Madame Delorge started, and looked at her old friend in utter bewilderment. "You said that!" she cried.

"Yes, just that. Ah! I know what you are thinking, dear madame. You fancy that I have changed very much. But that is not so. I am not a hero; I am, in fact, somewhat a coward, but I am hot-headed, and hot-hearted; and to tell you the truth, I spend half my life regretting what I have done in the other half!" Quite pleased with this explanation of his conduct, M. Ducoudray then returned to his narrative. "My reply did not seem to please the judge; for he gave me a vindictive glance, and, in a tone that turned me all goose-flesh, exclaimed: 'You are going a little too fast, sir.' Thereupon I answered dryly: 'If I move fast it is because I have proofs to back me.' To which he simply replied, 'Ah!' After turning over some papers he began again. 'Let us hear these proofs,' he said, and of course I did not need to be asked twice. I talked so fast that he checked

me three or four times—for you will understand that every word I uttered was taken down on paper.”

In his eagerness the good old gentleman forgot where he was; he gesticulated with unusual violence, and jammed his hat down over his eyes, as he continued: “When I had finished, the magistrate coldly remarked: ‘In all this, sir, I can see your own opinion, but I don’t perceive the slightest proof.’ ‘No proof,’ I exclaimed, and I began again. But he stopped me, saying, ‘That will do; I know everything you can tell me.’ His coolness so exasperated me that I lost my temper, ‘I cannot understand,’ I cried, ‘why General Delorge’s widow was forced to file a complaint herself—justice ought to have forestalled her.’ ‘Why are you so sure,’ asked my man, with a frown, ‘that no steps have been taken?’ But I am not such a fool as to be quieted by such a question. ‘I am not sure,’ I answered; ‘but if any steps have been taken they seem to have been very quickly ended.’ At this the magistrate grew angry. ‘What do you mean by that?’ he exclaimed. ‘Nothing,’ said I, ‘nothing at all, only if the *coup d’état* had not succeeded my friend’s murderer would, no doubt, have been discovered ere now.”

At this point M. Ducoudray drew a long sigh, and shook his head in a dismal fashion, “I said those very words,” he continued, “and I actually shivered at my own audacity. But my thrust had reached home—for the magistrate’s icy coldness left him. ‘Take care, Monsieur Ducoudray,’ he hissed, ‘take care! people who are lacking in respect to those in power are punished severely!’ I wanted to reply; but I heard the gendarmes in the passage outside, and so I dropped my head a little, and assumed a meek attitude. ‘Monsieur Ducoudray,’ continued the magistrate, ‘you must learn that there is no human power that can prevent the course of justice. I should not hesitate to issue a warrant for the arrest of the prime mover in this *coup d’état* if I thought him guilty.’ This sounded very well no doubt, but I knew it was all nonsense. However, I determined to keep this opinion to myself. My evidence was read over to me, and I listened to it with considerable horror, and after I had signed it the dignified magistrate gave me permission to retire. Before I had done so, however, he said to me: ‘Remember that we keep an eye upon you!’ whereupon, I bowed, and came straight here.”

Madame Delorge extended both hands to her visitor, and exclaimed in a feeling voice: “You are a good friend and a good man. Forgive me for having misjudged you.”

But he did not press his lips to her hands. He drearily shook his head. “You judged me correctly,” he answered, “and you owe me no gratitude whatever. It was merely my own folly that made me speak. But what is done is done. And, now, here I am a declared enemy of the government, which has its eye on me! What do you think of that? It was a very different thing to be in the opposition in Louis Philippe’s time.” He paused for a moment, and slightly shuddered as he mentally recapitulated what had occurred. Then raising his voice again, he said, “Well, they may push me to the end if they choose, I won’t retract a word—I’ll stand to my guns. To-night I am going to Madame Cornevin’s which will be a Godsend to the spies who are told off to watch me. Yes, I’ll go, and carry her help and consolation. Yes, madame, you agreed to assume the expense of educating the eldest son, and I’ll do the same for the younger one. That’s settled—and you may be sure I shan’t make the boy an admirer of *coups d’état*—but I must go, so good-night, madame.”

Had the worthy man remained another half hour he would have seen a summons served on Krauss, and have witnessed the terror of the old servant, who was more appalled than if a dozen muskets had been levelled at him. He at once took the paper to Madame Delorge. "What am I to do?" he asked.

If his mistress had told him to say that he had, with his own eyes, seen the general murdered by M. de Combelaïne, he would have done so, without hesitation. "You must tell the truth Krauss," she said, "and only the truth. But you must not allow yourself to be intimidated."

"I'm not afraid; I only want the murderers to be punished," he rejoined. However, he was by no means easy in mind when he set out for the Palais de Justice, and on his return he seemed utterly crushed and dispirited.

"What did they say to you, Krauss?" asked his mistress.

"Not very much."

"Did they ask about the sword?"

"Indeed they did; and the magistrate even sent for two fencing masters, and asked them a lot of questions. At last they told him that in a regular duel the swords must strike each other, but that in a sudden fight it might be different."

"Then what did the magistrate say about my husband not being able to use his right arm?"

"He said that the discussion of that point would be reserved."

After this Madame Delorge did not know what to think. "Will they examine me?" she asked herself; and then she added: "If that magistrate is honest, and will listen to me for ten minutes, there will not remain the shadow of a doubt in his mind."

"But he will not listen to you! It is a political affair—and we are on the losing side," objected M. Ducoudray, who was, however, much mistaken:

On Wednesday, Madame Delorge received a summons to appear on the following day at a fixed hour, and to take her son with her. Why was that? What did they hope to extort from this lad of eleven? Could he say anything that could be used against his father? This fear prevented the poor woman from sleeping, and induced her to repair to M. Roberjot's office, with her son, before going to the Palais de Justice. The valet who opened the door said that his master was at home, but very much engaged with several journalists. "Never mind!" she answered; "I will wait. Take him this card."

The servant thereupon raised no further objection, but showed the widow and Raymond into a small sitting-room. A very thin partition separated this apartment from the lawyer's private office, and as the door was partially open Madame Delorge could not only hear but see. There was a heated discussion going on, and big words and phrases, such as "Resistance"—"Vindication of the rights of the people," and so on were frequently being used. It was quite clear that M. Roberjot was preparing himself for the next elections. Would he condescend to attend to a client at such a moment? It was doubtful, she thought; but in point of fact he soon appeared, having dismissed his political friends.

She raised her eyes to his face and was infinitely astonished at what she saw. The happy, contented lawyer whom she had met at the first interview had seemingly disappeared, and given place to a politician. M. Roberjot had grown ten years older—there were wrinkles on his brow, and his hair and beard were cut differently. Once so careful in his dress, his

clothes were now shabby and old, and his whole person indicated ambition. His eyes were contradictory, for they had a quiet disdainful gleam, which at times seemed to mock the hollow phrases on his tongue. He hurried Madame Delorge into his private office, and taking the summons she handed him, he read it carefully through. He frowned as he finished. "Ah!" he said, musingly, as if answering certain mental objections. "So Barban d'Avranchel has had his finger in this!"

Madame Delorge had noticed his name on the paper. "How will that affect me—for good or evil?" she eagerly asked.

"I hardly know. M. d'Avranchel is an Orleanist, and must be furious at the way things are going. However, a man's conscience is often led far astray by ambition; but he has always been looked upon as a man of probity."

"Then why, pray, ought I to regret that he is connected with with the matter?"

The lawyer shrugged his shoulders. "The truth is, this gentleman is not popular as a magistrate. He is cold and hard, and always strikes me as one of those men who put on an air of great solemnity to conceal their deficiency of brains."

Madame Delorge felt her heart sink. Of all misfortunes, there is none worse than to have to deal with a dull, obstinate man. "Another thing troubles me, sir," she said: "Why does he order me to bring my son? Do they wish to make him say something which he might regret in later years?"

The lawyer looked at the boy's intelligent face. "Master Raymond," he answered, with a smile, is far too clever for M. d'Avranchel." And taking the lad's hand, as he spoke, he drew him nearer to his side. "You are not easily abashed, are you?" he asked.

"I am not timid," the boy replied, in a low, steady voice.

"Then it will all go well. An examination, you know, need only terrify those who have anything to conceal." M. Roberjot now rose, and though he continued to speak to Raymond, his words were evidently meant for the mother. "Remember that you are neither to feel nor show any fear when you enter the magistrate's presence. Look him full in the face—listen to his questions, and don't answer them hastily—take time to consider well—and if you do not understand them perfectly, ask to have them repeated. Let your replies be as concise as possible. When he asks you anything which you can answer with a simple yes or no, confine yourself to that. If you are in doubt, say you do not know. No ifs, or buts, or supposes; mind and avoid all air of argument or dispute."

Thus warned and advised, Madame Delorge and her son started off for the Palais de Justice. When she gave her name to the attendant, he politely exclaimed; "This way, madame; M. d'Avranchel is expecting you." The young man's attention was marked, but she was not quite sure that she liked it.

The room which she was shown to was small and very dingy. A ragged carpet covered the floor, while opposite the door stood a mahogany desk, and on the right hand side a table at which a clerk was seated. M. Barban d'Avranchel stood near the chimney-piece. He bowed stiffly and pointed to an arm-chair, but did not speak for a moment or two, and when finally his lips parted it was only to ask: "You are Madame Delorge, *née* Lespéran, are you not?"

"Yes, sir."

"Give me your name in full, your age, the place and date of your marriage, the number of your children, and the date of their birth."

Madame Delorge obeyed, and the clerk took down all these particulars. The magistrate, who had installed himself in his arm chair, then turned to Raymond. "Come here, my young friend," he said, adding as Raymond approached him: "Your father, I believe, suffered in one of his arms?"

Standing where he did, Raymond could not see his mother, so he instinctively turned towards her, but the magistrate coldly remarked: "It is not in your mother's eyes that you are to read your replies, but in your own memory. You heard my question. Now answer it."

"Yes, sir; my father's right arm hurt him very badly."

"How do you know that?"

"Because he could not use it. When he gave me my fencing lesson he always used his left arm."

"But was not that to teach you to defend yourself against a left-handed adversary? Perhaps he was left-handed himself?"

"No, sir—I know he was not."

"How do you know it?"

The boy thought for a moment; he had not forgotten M. Roberjot's instructions. "I am sure of it," he answered, slowly, "for papa tried several times to take his foil in his right hand, but he was obliged to drop it, saying, 'I can't, it hurts me too badly.'"

"You mean that it gave him great pain to put himself on guard and hold the foil in his right hand?"

"Yes, sir."

Madame Delorge understood only too well what the magistrate was leading up to, and so she eagerly said: "Allow me to explain, sir."

But the magistrate immediately silenced her. "I beg you not to intervene, madame; it is your son who is now under examination, not yourself." And turning again to Raymond: "So that being the state of the case—your father could not always use his right arm as it pained him, but still it was possible for him to do so?"

The boy became indignant on finding that such a meaning was given to his words. "I did not say that, sir," he replied. "I said that he often tried to use it, and couldn't—and that is very different."

The magistrate did not speak—he seemed busy with some papers on his desk. When he had found what he wanted, he turned to Madame Delorge. "Your servant, madame, one Krauss by name, informed me that the pain the general suffered in his arm was greater sometimes than at others—according to the season."

"Yes, sir, according to the temperature. The day my husband was killed, he suffered more than usual."

"That very morning," interposed Raymond, "we were firing at a target and he could not even lift his pistol in his right hand."

Inexperienced as Madam Delorge was she perfectly realized that the whole matter turned upon this point. "When, in compliance with my request," she continued, hastily, "the commissary of police called at my house at Passy he was accompanied by a physician, who at once examined my husband's body. He must have seen the wounds which my husband received on his arm at Isly when——"

"He did see them," interrupted the magistrate "he has described them also—and I will read what he says;" and so saying he took up a paper. "On the right arm three scars, which might impede the motion of the muscles—but to what extent it is impossible to determine."

"Madame Delorge uttered an indignant exclamation. "What! Is that

all he says?" she cried. "But the scars were terrible ones; one of them alone commenced at the shoulder and extended as far as the elbow. I shall ask for an examination of my husband's body."

Her excitement was increasing, but the magistrate silenced her. "That will do," he cried, authoritatively. "The question is easily settled. The general wore his sword on his left side, and which hand did he use to draw it? Why the right one? I have the evidence of three officers who, since he was wounded, have often seen him do so, and do so on horseback, too, which enhanced the difficulty of the movement. General Delorge's right arm was stiff unquestionably, and in a duel he would probably have used his left one but in a sudden gust of passion, having drawn his sword, as was his habit, with his right hand, he continued to use it regardless of pain, and, in fact he attacked his adversary with it. I use the word attacked advisedly, for I have been informed that he was the aggressor."

At this unexpected charge Madame Delorge flushed crimson. "My husband was murdered, sir," she cried; "murdered—do you understand—and I know by whom."

The magistrate frowned. "Not another word, madame—not another word. You forget that if there be an offence greater than that of leaving a crime unpunished it is that of accusing an innocent person. Justice has neglected nothing in searching for the truth, and we have obtained it. I am, indeed, now about to lay it before you in detail." So saying, he rose, and approaching the chimney-piece, leaned against it. "Your complaint was entirely superfluous," he added, "and it is well you should know so. It was on December 1st that the Commissary of Police at Passy called at your house."

"I sent for him, sir."

"That makes no difference. He and the physician with him were afterwards examined, and a legal inquiry was ordered. You see that Justice never slumbers. Even in these dark and troubled days, when human passions run riot, Justice still watches with her hand on her sword, and as unmoved as the rock beaten by the tempest." M. d'Avranchel stopped short—he had forgotten where he was. "Madame," he resumed, in a scarcely less pompous tone, "on the 5th of December I began investigating this mysterious affair, and to-day, after six weeks' laborious toil, I have torn away the veil that shrouded it. Urbain," he added to his clerk, "bring me the report which I told you to copy yesterday."

The clerk rose and produced a formidable-looking document, whereupon the magistrate, with a stern request to Madame Delorge not to interrupt him, began to read it aloud.

XI.

"On the 30th of November, 1851, at twenty minutes past nine o'clock in the evening, General Pierre Delorge left his residence in the Rue Sainte-Claire, at Passy. He was in full uniform, and wore his sword and his decorations. His servant, Krauss by name, closed the door of the cab No. 739, which drove to the Rue de l'Université, to the house of a retired officer, Colonel César Lefert. What took place there is not known, as Colonel Lefert has left France in consequence of the events of December 2nd. It is only known that General Delorge left the colonel at ten minutes past ten o'clock, having been with him precisely twenty-five minutes, and entered

his cab again, bidding the driver take him as rapidly as possible to the Elysée Palace. The driver states that the general was very excited and disturbed. He reached the Elysée at half-past ten, and found several people there—officers, deputies, and members of the diplomatic body—one of whom Fabio Farussi, who was well known to the general, has been examined by us. Eight or ten ladies were also present but the prince president was absent. After paying his respects to Madame Salvage, who does the honors of the palace, General Delorge went round the rooms and spoke to such of his acquaintance as were there. He was so pale that every one noticed it, and some even asked him if he were ill. His lips trembled—as Monsieur Fabio Farussi states in his deposition—and his eyes had a very strange look. He was constantly asking, “Hasn’t M. de Maumussy come in this evening? Hasn’t M. de Combelaïne arrived?” And each time he uttered these names his hearers were struck by the marked indistinctness of his tone, and it was clear that he had great difficulty in controlling himself. In fact it was impossible for him to converse, and so he went to a card-table and stood looking on at the game. The players also were struck by his peculiar manner; and, when he, himself, began to play, they had to remind him each time that it was his turn to lay down a card, for he kept his eyes fixed on the door instead of on the card-table. This lasted for an hour; when suddenly he rose from his chair and walked away in the middle of a game.

“The Count de Combelaïne had just been announced. The general hurried towards him, and they began to talk with so many gesticulations that every one was surprised. At the same time, however, they spoke in so low a tone, that hardly a word they said could be overheard. ‘Let us find some other place,’ exclaimed the general at last, in an audible voice; ‘we must be somewhere where we can talk freely;’ whereupon M. de Combelaïne replied: ‘Let us wait until Maumussy arrives—I assure you that he is coming.’

“But General Delorge would not listen. ‘If you choose to have a scene here,’ he answered, ‘so be it—only remember that it is none of my seeking.’

“These words decided M. de Combelaïne, and with the general he entered one of the small sitting-rooms which was vacant. They had not been there three minutes when M. de Maumussy joined them. No one else ventured to intrude, but one or two of the guests were so near the open door that it was impossible for them not to see and hear a portion of what took place. For instance, they suddenly heard the general say: ‘You are a villain, M. de Combelaïne—a villain whom I intend to send into another world. You wear a sword—let us go outside.’

“M. de Combelaïne at once replied: ‘You know very well that I am not afraid of a duel, but I don’t choose to have any scandal. Wait until to-morrow.’

“M. de Maumussy did his best to calm them both, addressing first one and then the other. But the general seemed to have lost his head. ‘Come with me now,’ he repeated to De Combelaïne. ‘You must come now or I shall slap your face here in this room.’

“M. de Combelaïne could bear no more.

“Very well! let us go down to the garden at once!’ he cried, and they crossed the room, and went down the stairs.”

“Ah! I was right then,” exclaimed Madame Delorge. “It was he—it was M. de Combelaïne, who murdered my husband!”

Surprised by the audacity of this interruption, the magistrate raised his eyes and fixed them angrily on Madame Delorge. But he resumed reading as if she had not spoken. "The clock was striking half-past eleven when the two men left the room. Their departure attracted comparatively little attention, for at that moment a young English girl of great beauty, and greater talent, had just gone to the piano, and most of the guests were anxious to hear her. However, several officers started to follow General Delorge and M. de Combelaïne, but they were stopped by the Viscount de Maumussy. Three of these officers have been examined and their testimony is the same. They aver that M. de Maumussy was calm and quite self-possessed, and that he said: 'Don't trouble yourselves, gentlemen—it's a mere trifle. Delorge boils over as easily as a saucepan of milk. I will arrange it myself.'

"Still one of the general's friends, Monsieur Fabio Farussi, insisted on following him. 'Take care, said M. de Maumussy: 'you know that a quarrel becomes more difficult to smooth over with each additional spectator.'

"However, M. Farussi would not yield the point, and he and Maumussy went out together. Their discussion lasted some little time. In fact, a quarter of an hour had elapsed when they asked a lackey in the vestibule where the general had gone. 'Into the garden,' was the reply. They hurried out, but hardly had they reached the lower step, than they met M. de Combelaïne, who was pale and agitated, with a sword in his hand. 'It is horrible!' he cried; 'horrible—and for such a trifle too!'

"What do you mean?"

"Delorge!—I think I have killed him—he threw himself on my sword, and fell without a sound.'

"Where?"

"Behind the hedge—there where you see the light.' And throwing down his sword, M. de Combelaïne rushed away as if pursued by an avenging fury.

"Never," said M. Farussi in his evidence, 'did I see a man in such despair.' And, unfortunately, this despair was only too well founded. When M. de Maumussy and M. Fabio Farussi reached the general, they found him breathing his last."

Madame Delorge was listening like a prisoner on the rack, whose stoicism will not even allow him to groan. "I accept all those details, sir," she said, in a choked voice; "but is there one of them, I ask you, which proves that my husband was not assassinated?"

"Enough, madame!" rejoined the magistrate, sternly. "Listen to the rest of this report, and you will see what the law has ascertained." And then he began to read again: "It has been the duty of the investigation to ascertain what took place from the moment when the two adversaries left the room in the palace together, till that, when one of them was found lying dead in the garden, and with this object, before questioning M. de Combelaïne, it was deemed best to collect other evidence. One witness, Buc by name, the lackey who was on the stairs when the two adversaries passed him, stated that what he saw and heard astonished him so much that he remembered every word. The general, he says, was the first to go down the stairs, and at each step he turned with an insulting epithet to M. de Combelaïne—'His insults were so gross,' said Buc, in his evidence, 'that I would have strangled any man who dared to address them to me!' Two other servants saw them pass and noticed their excited manner, but they heard or remembered nothing of what they said. The general still led the way. Near the

garden door they met the private secretary of the Minister of the Interior, who was struck by their odd manner, and spoke to them, but obtained no answer. He heard M. de Combelaïne say: 'Come, this is preposterous—wait until to-morrow.'

"However, they went out into the garden, leaving the door half open. Hardly knowing why, the secretary approached the steps, and heard M. de Combelaïne call a groom and bid him bring a lantern from the stables. This groom knew the truth, and we have his evidence."

Madame Delorge started up. "Have you found him?" she cried. "Have you found the man who held the lantern?"

"Yes, madame—we have found him and questioned him—and thinking that you yourself might like to speak to him, I have him in the next room. Urbain!" he said to his clerk, "call in the witness."

Madame Delorge was utterly bewildered. "What, is it really so?" she asked in a trembling voice. "Have you found the poor man, whom his wife believes to be dead, and whom she is now wearing mourning for—Laurent Cornevin——"

"I do not know any Cornevin, madame."

"Good heavens, sir—it was he who——"

"It was he whom you mentioned in your complaint; but you were deceived. It was not he who obeyed M. de Combelaïne's summons and ran forward with a lantern, and this point is easily proved, for Cornevin was not on duty that night."

"But I am sure of what I stated, sir."

"Very well, madame; tell me on what basis your certainty is founded."

Rapidly, and with great vehemence, Madame Delorge gave her reasons. But alas!—as she spoke, these reasons, which had lately seemed to her all powerful, now grew weak and tame. Why was she so sure that the man who held the lantern was Cornevin? The only reason she could adduce was that he had come the next day to Passy, and left his address at her house, and that he had since totally disappeared. The magistrate, still calm and cold, allowed the poor woman to flounder about in the sea of perplexity for some time. But at last he intervened. "You must admit, madame," he said, "that there is really nothing in all this which justifies your statement. Carried away by your grief, you have accepted as truths the fancies of a man whose age ought to have rendered him more circumspect. I allude to your neighbour, that extremely ignorant and headstrong person, M. Ducoudray."

From the contemptuous manner in which these words were uttered, it was easy to see that Ducoudray had greatly displeased the magistrate.

"So then," angrily exclaimed Madame Delorge, "we have dreamed that Cornevin has disappeared——"

"Madame!"

"And even-handed, infallible Justice is quite unmoved by this man's mysterious disappearance and the misery of his family."

For the first time the magistrate's impassive face evinced a human sentiment—anger. "The strong arm of the law," he said, "is yet busy searching for Laurent Cornevin. As yet——"

"He has not been found!"

"No, but all goes to show that he was not among those slain on the occasion of the *coup d'état*. We are inclined to believe that he is among those disturbers of the peace who were arrested, and that he gave a false name to put the police off the track."

"Why should he do so?"

"Perhaps from a desire to disconnect himself from his past life. But why should we trouble ourselves about this man—he is nothing to us!"

"Nothing to us!" cried Madame Delorge, and starting up from her chair she continued, "I tell you that this man must be found, for he alone knows the truth, which you believe you know. In the name of my dead husband, in the name of my children, and the Cornevin family, I command you to find this man!"

This was too much for the magistrate's patience. With an imperious wave of the hand, he silenced Madame Delorge and then proceeded: "Not another word like that, madame! Do you know who these Cornevins are, these people in whom you interest yourself so much? I can show you the truth if you are ignorant of it." And so speaking he drew from his desk two papers bearing the seal of the Prefect of Police, and handed one of them to Madame Delorge. "Read this, if you please," he added.

She took the document in her hands and read as follows: "Cornevin (Laurent), thirty-two years of age, born at Fécamp. Residing at Montmartre, Rue Mercadet. Married to Julie Cochard—five children. Cornevin has left no good reputation behind him at the various situations he has held as stable boy and groom. He knew his business and fulfilled his duties, but he was insolent and brutal. Found guilty in 1846 of assault and battery, he would have been sent to prison but for the entreaties of one of his former masters. In 1850 he was engaged at the Elysée Palace; he had just left the Marquis d'Arange, who gave him a very good character, but we all know what that amounts to. At the Elysée everybody began by liking and praising him, but his deplorable disposition for quarreling soon evinced itself, and he was solely kept for his punctuality and experience. In 1851 he suddenly changed; he became the boon companion of a band of rascals, and was an intimate friend of a wine-shop politician, who was afterwards punished for theft. It had just been decided that Cornevin must be sent away, when suddenly he disappeared without a word of warning. His month's wages are still due him."

As soon as Madame Delorge had finished perusing this document, the magistrate handed her the second one which was couched in these terms: "Julie Cochard, wife of Cornevin (Laurent), twenty-eight years of age, and born in Paris. Is looked upon in her neighbourhood (Montmartre) as a good wife and house-keeper, and her morals, it is said, are all they should be—at all events since her marriage. It would be difficult to say precisely what her previous conduct was, for she had plenty of very bad examples among her relatives. Her father was imprisoned several times for theft, and her mother's morals were very bad. Julie Cochard's eldest sister, Adèle, was formerly a ballet-girl, and she is now known in certain society as Flora Misri."

If the magistrate had relied upon these police reports to separate Madame Delorge from the Cornevin family, he found himself egregiously mistaken. She did not indulge in a word of comment—and for many reasons. In the first place, the interest she took in the Cornevins was independent of all these circumstances. "Cornevin knew the truth," she thought to herself; "the eagerness with which he hastened to me is the cause of his disappearance. Besides, notwithstanding the language used in these documents, what did these accusations amount to? It was said that the husband was brutal and coarse—and why not? If he had received the education of a gentleman, he would certainly not have been a groom. On the other hand the wife was reproached with the conduct of her mother, her father, and her sister, but there was not a word against herself." These reflections flashed through

Madame Delorge's mind, but she in no wise mentioned them as she handed the papers back to the magistrate.

"Who then is the man who held the lantern?" she asked.

"A comrade of Cornevin's," answered the magistrate; "a man named Grollet."

Madame Delorge started. That was the name of the man whom Madame Cornevin had been to see, who had been so kind to her, kept her to breakfast, and elicited from her all the information necessary to play his part. "Ah! Grollet indeed!" said Madame Delorge, replying to her own objections rather than addressing the magistrate.

"Yes, and a very honest man he is, too—loved and respected by all about him. I have made every inquiry, and hear nothing but praise of him. But here he comes, so you can judge for yourself."

The door opened, and, behind Urbain, the magistrate's clerk, there came a tall fellow, who looked somewhat frightened and embarrassed. "Come in, my good fellow," said the magistrate. "Come a little nearer."

Madame Delorge scanned the new comer closely; he had what is commonly known as a good face, with full cheeks, a flat nose, and a large mouth with sensual lips. His eyes alone struck one by their mobility.

"Grollet," said the magistrate, "have the goodness to describe to me the scene you witnessed in the Garden of the Elysée Palace on the night of November 30th."

"Oh! let me think a moment, sir."

"Certainly. Begin at the moment you were summoned."

Grollet twisted the Scotch cap he held in his hands, scratched his head, and then, in a trembling hesitating fashion began: "Well, it was Sunday evening, about half past eleven; I was rubbing down an aide-de-camp's horse when I suddenly heard a voice: 'Hullo, there! Bring a lantern at once!' This may be a means of earning a little money, I said to myself, and so unhooking a lantern, I hastened to the garden. I saw two gentlemen there, M. de Combelaïne, whom I had often seen, and a general, whom I afterwards heard was General Delorge. They were standing so close to one another that their faces nearly touched, and they were calling each other the most terrible names. As soon as I appeared one of them, the general, said—'Here comes a light!' and then stamping his feet, he continued—'On guard! on guard.' Then drawing his sword as he spoke, he made a thrust at M. de Combelaïne, which I thought would cut him in two. But no; the count sprang on one side, and threw out his arm in such a way that when the general lunged he threw himself on his adversary's sword, which entered his side. He did not even groan; but threw up his arms and fell to the ground——"

On hearing this, Raymond, poor boy, burst into passionate sobs. But Madame Delorge did not weep—her wound was bleeding inwardly. "Then my husband did not speak a single word?" she asked.

"No, madame, not one—Ah! yes, I ran to the general and knelt at his side—and he did say something I could not understand, but I thought it was Elise."

This, in Madame Delorge's estimation, was the finishing touch of iniquity. Her husband's enemies had taught her name to this man so as to give an air of reality to his story.

"Oh, this is infamous!" she exclaimed.

"Madame," rejoined the magistrate indignantly.

"Don't you see that this man is repeating a lesson learned by heart? Don't you see that this man is a false witness?" resumed the widow.

"You are insulting a worthy man and justice——"

But she was not listening to him. She had risen and approached Grollet. "Do you dare tell me on your oath that you are not a false witness? Look me in the face if you dare!"

White, and with lowered head, Grollet retreated to the wall. "I have told the truth," he stammered.

"You lie! The man who held the lantern was Cornevin. It was the poor fellow whose friend you pretended to be, and whose wife you welcomed with hypocritical tears. It was Cornevin, I say—and I believe that he himself has since been murdered because he witnessed the crime—and now you——"

Trembling like a leaf, Grollet tried to raise his hand. "I swear," he murmured, "before God I swear——"

"Don't swear," interrupted Madame Delorge. "Tell us, rather, how much these men have given you to purchase your assistance. However large the sum may have been you have thrown yourself away. To-morrow you will realize that each one of your gold pieces is stained with blood. Listen, now, to the voice of your conscience, and remember that the truth will certainly become known."

Madame Delorge had nearly won the day, for Grollet caught his breath, stunned by this explosion of anger and grief, and seemed to shrink into himself. Ah, if the magistrate had been one of those shrewd men who can dive into consciences! But, no. Firmly entrenched behind the belief in his own infallibility, he saw and heard nothing save Madame Delorge's haughtiness and tone of authority, and, irritated by what he considered an assumption of his own prerogatives he exclaimed: "Madame, you exceed all bounds!"

"Ah, sir!" rejoined the poor woman, "if you would only——"

But there was no longer time. Cornevin's old friend had had time to measure the peril he had incurred, and straightening himself up like a drowning man, preparing for one last supreme effort, he exclaimed: "If I were to be burned alive I couldn't tell you more than I have!"

The moment that decides human destinies was past, as Madame Delorge understood; and, dizzy with disappointment, she sank into her arm-chair at her son's side.

The magistrate made a few severe remarks respecting the danger of such passionate outbursts, and declared that he would defend his witness against a repetition of such attacks. "Go on, my friend," he continued, turning to Grollet.

The witness obeyed, and in a more confident tone of voice exclaimed: "When the Viscount de Maumussy, and another gentleman who hastened to the spot, realized that the general was dead, they said: 'We must conceal this terrible misfortune from every one, and more especially from the prince president! What shall be done?' Thereupon I ventured to mention a disused room which I had the key of, and M. de Maumussy quickly answered: 'You are right. Come at once.' We three carried the body into this room without being seen by any one, and for a long time I was left alone with the general's body, as M. de Maumussy and M. Farussi had gone back to the palace to find a physician. They wanted the key, too, of one of the private doors of the Elysée, and they kept on saying: 'The president will never forgive us if he should hear of this!' At about three o'clock in the morning they returned with a doctor, who as soon as he lifted the cloak that covered the general, said: 'My presence is useless—death must have been instantaneous.' Thereupon the gentlemen talked earnestly together, and it was finally decided that the general's body must be taken to his own house before

dawn. However, they hesitated as to which of them ought to accompany the doctor. I was sent for a cab, and when I returned the body was placed in it, and the vehicle drove away. It was then that M. de Maumussy took me aside. 'Grollet,' he said, 'if ever a word passes your lips respecting this night's occurrence, remember that your place, which is a good one, is lost.' Naturally I swore to hold my tongue, except, of course, if the law commanded me to speak. To-day I have told you the whole truth."

"That will do," said the magistrate approvingly; "you can now retire." And as soon as Grollet was gone he turned to Madame Delorge. "You will now admit, madame," he said, "the injustice of your accusations."

The unhappy woman rose slowly from her chair. "You have obeyed the dictates of your conscience, sir—I cannot reproach you," she replied. "The future will show which of us is mistaken. Good morning." And taking her boy by the hand, she added: "Come, Raymond, we have nothing more to do in the Palais de Justice." Thereupon she departed, leaving M. d'Avranchel singularly disturbed.

"If this woman should be right, after all, and we all wrong!" he muttered when he was alone. "In that case I have been successfully imposed upon by villains, and am the dupe of a most successfully played comedy. In that case—but no, no, it is impossible! This woman is mad, and M. de Combelaïne is innocent."

XII.

"EXACTLY what I expected!" said M. Roberjot, when Madame Delorge, who repaired at once to his office, gave him an account of the foregoing proceedings. "And yet," he added, thoughtfully, "D'Avranchel cannot be suspected of connivance."

"You wouldn't say that, sir, if, like me, you had seen that man Grollet ready to fall on his knees—ready to ask pardon and confess everything!"

The lawyer shook his head. "Neither of us, dear madame, are good judges, for we are interested parties and our opinions are already fixed. You must find an impartial arbiter, and give him all the particulars of your husband's death as they have been enumerated by M. d'Avranchel. Lay before him the testimony of all these witnesses who agree in so singular a fashion, and when you have done that what do you think the arbiter will reply? Why, he will tell you, 'Madame, all the probabilities are in favor of M. de Combelaïne.'" He leant his elbow on his desk as he spoke, and then added, thoughtfully: "There's no use attempting to disguise it, these people are strong—very strong."

Nothing displeased Madame Delorge so much as any tribute paid to the sagacity of her enemies. "And so," she remarked in a tone of bitter irony, "you intend to bow down before these strong people?"

The lawyer looked very much surprised. "I don't understand you," he said.

She did not reply, but her very silence was significant.

"So, then, you class me with Dr. Buiron, do you?" asked M. Roberjot. "And why, pray? I am one of those persons who submit to an accomplished event, but who never accept it. The proof of this is that this new government, this government founded on the atrocious crime of the 2nd of December, will find no bitterer opponent than myself." As she spoke he looked at Madame Delorge with a peculiar expression, and then continued, in a voice

which perceptibly trembled: "A week ago I could not have expressed myself so decidedly, for, I will confess it, I was then hesitating. But you came here, and, without your own knowledge, you decided my future."

Then, after taking several turns up and down the room, he resumed: "And yet no one had so many reasons for acquiescing. What have I to ask of life that it has not generously given me? I am still young—I have ample means, and I have succeeded at the bar far beyond my hopes——"

But Madame Delorge was in no mood to notice her companion's strange agitation. One fixed idea had taken possession of her life. "What are we to do now?" she abruptly asked.

If M. Roberjot was somewhat shocked at being interrupted in this fashion, he had the good sense to conceal it. "To do now? Nothing! We must wait."

"Wait for what?"

"For the opportunity which never fails to come to those who know how to wait patiently."

Madame Delorge turned away despairingly. "Alas!" she cried, "every day that passes divests me of one of my hopes. Yesterday I met one of my husband's old friends, and he hardly bowed to me. In a year he will say, 'Delorge!—who's Delorge?' My husband was a noble, a valiant soldier—but will this reputation follow him to his grave? No—those slanders which you yourself repeated to me, will remain like so many stains on his memory. In ten years from now my son will have become a man, and some of those folks who know everybody's affairs, will say, 'Oh, he's the son of General Delorge, you know, who was killed in a duel arising out of some scandalous money transaction.'"

But Raymond started to his feet. "No, mamma, no," he exclaimed; "when I'm a man no one will ever dare to say that!"

The lawyer took the boy's hands in his. "You are right, my lad," he said—"very right; and you, madame, are mistaken—you have everything to hope from time. The general is more to be dreaded now than ever."

"Alas! sir, if I could but believe you."

"You must believe me. The proverb which says, 'The dead are the only ones who never return,' is absurd, for in politics they are the only ones who do return. It would be very easy to rule if we could put persons well under ground as soon as they begin to be troublesome. But a government goes on triumphantly, braves all opposition, and laughs at all attacks; it has its creatures, its judges, and its soldiers; it believes in itself, and finds plenty of people to believe in it as well; but some fine morning somebody wanders into a cemetery, spells out some forgotten name on a tombstone, and utters it aloud—and the sound of this name spoken afresh comes like an earthquake—the government crumbles into dust."

Madame Delorge sighed. "Ah!" said she, "I shall never see what you desire."

"Who knows? When I tell you that there is nothing to be done I don't wish to be understood as advising a cowardly resignation. By no means—for we still have Cornevin."

"Cornevin!" slowly repeated Madame Delorge.

"Yes, for it is on this man that all our hopes depend," continued M. Roberjot. "Has he been assassinated? I don't think so. M. de Combelaïne is too wise to risk committing a crime which was not indispensable. But in the recent tumult it was easy to conjure Cornevin away. If he has been arrested, it is our business to discover where he is imprisoned."

"I have thought a great deal about Cornevin myself," answered the widow. "I believe him to be still alive, and I believe he has it in his power to provide me with all the weapons I need for my revenge. With this belief, indeed, I have done my best to attach his wife to me."

"You know her, then?"

"Certainly! and I have agreed to give her a small annuity. The eldest of her sons, moreover, will be educated with my lad, and precisely in the same way." The lawyer looked at his client in such utter amazement that she added: "Was not this a sacred duty?"

"It may be so," answered Roberjot, "but it is the height of imprudence." She opened her lips to expostulate, but he gave her no time to speak. "Do you think I blame you, madame?" he cried. "Most assuredly not. But you must not allow your acts to be known. Help this woman and her family as much as you choose, but let it be done as quietly as possible."

"And why, sir?"

"Simply because if Laurent Cornevin seems to be abandoned by all the world he will soon be forgotten. But to give his wife your support openly, is to call attention to him. Poor and friendless, he could in no way meet his powerful enemies. But as the ally of the widow of General Delorge, he becomes a permanent danger. Oblivion would be his best chance for liberty. Your name written in the prison register against his own means indefinite confinement. The day you received his wife, madame, you double-locked his prison door."

Madame Delorge lowered her head in profound discouragement, for she realised the truth and justice of this reasoning. She saw, moreover, that M. Roberjot's and M. Ducoudray's advice were one and the same. To keep quiet, to work, if work she must, like a mole, underground, was all she could and ought to do. Still the very word wait, made the blood boil in her veins, and there were moments when she could hardly restrain herself. She felt that her own right hand was armed with sufficient strength to enable her to transpierce the heart of the man who had robbed her of her husband and her happiness. "My mistake is irreparable," she said, at last; "and to act differently now would be only to add another blunder to the first."

"There is another point to be considered," rejoined the lawyer; "a man like M. de Combeldaine with such a past life as his own must have a great deal to conceal. We must discover some of the particulars of his past life. My position will give me certain facilities, and with reasonable adroitness on my part I may find out the truth; but I must first have authority from you."

As this interview proceeded, M. Roberjot's feelings gained the better of him. He gazed fixedly and almost lovingly on Madame Delorge, and, lawyer as he was, he bungled and hesitated in his words. But the widow saw nothing of it, the woman in her had died on that fatal night when her husband's body was brought home. The idea that she could ever love again, that any one could raise his eyes to her, would have seemed sacrilege as it were. M. Roberjot saw that he was not understood, and he came to a sudden determination. "My boy," he said to Raymond, "there are some fine engravings on the table in my drawing-room; will you go and look at them while I talk to your mamma."

Left alone with Madame Delorge, he moved restlessly in his chair, played with his pen, and coughed. He was afraid of speaking the words that rose to his lips, and at last, in view of regaining countenance, he reverted to the business on hand. "I told you, madame, the first time I

saw you," he said, "that your cause was mine, that I had espoused it. You have spoken to me of M. de Combelaine's deposition, which the magistrate read to you——"

"No, sir, you are mistaken—he did not read it to me; I did not give him time."

"But did you not see that this deposition was of the utmost importance to you? I would have told you the motive which De Combelaine chose to attribute to his duel with your husband."

Madame Delorge sighed. "Ah," said she, "this is another mistake I have made. But this one I can, at least, repair, for I can ask Monsieur d'Avranchel for a copy of the deposition."

Roberjot shook his head. "It would be useless," he answered, "for M. de Combelaine has already spread it abroad."

"And what does he say?"

"He attributes his altercation with General Delorge to a personal private matter. Upon my word, madame, I hardly know how to speak of it."

"I can bear anything, sir."

"Very well, then; De Combelaine affirms that General Delorge could not forgive his attentions to a certain lady——"

He paused, expecting an explosion of jealousy, but Madame Delorge calmly smiled. "That is absurd," she replied.

"So I said," hastily rejoined the lawyer, ashamed of his own hope.

"It is as ridiculous as it is odious," continued the widow, with the proud confidence of a woman sure of the noble love she had inspired. "M. de Combelaine is really very ingenious in his inventions." She smiled sadly as she spoke, and then added, in a tone of utter contempt: "And does any one know who that lady may be?"

"Yes—she is a very pretty person—very well known—and is said to have spent De Combelaine's money very freely."

"I thought he had none to spend."

"So did I; but people who are better informed than myself say that he was beggared by this very Flora Misri."

"Flora Misri!" exclaimed Madame Delorge—"Is that woman M. de Combelaine's mistress?"

"She has been so for many years, I believe," answered the lawyer, who was unable to understand his client's emotion. "Do you know anything of this woman?" he asked.

"Yes, I know her, sir," she replied; and emphasizing each word as she spoke, she continued: "This woman's true name is Adèle Corchard. She is the sister of Laurent Cornevin's wife."

Roberjot could not believe his ears. "Are you sure of what you say, madame?"

"Certainly, I am. I heard the name for the first time this morning in the office of the magistrate, who considered it almost a crime on Madame Cornevin's part that she was the sister of such a woman."

The lawyer began to reflect, bringing all his intellect to bear upon this point in view of seeing what advantage he could derive from it. "This woman," he muttered, "must naturally know more than almost anybody else about De Combelaine's past life—probably more than even the Baroness d'Eljonsen knows. But how are we to get at her? How can we open her mouth?"

Madame Delorge did not lose a word of his remarks. "Perhaps we might obtain some information about this woman from Madame Cornevin," she said.

"Do they see each other?"

"Ah! I don't know—I doubt it, however."

"If they are not on good terms, then, a visit at the present moment would awaken suspicion at once."

"But Cornevin's wife is very intelligent."

"No doubt; and then the disappearance of her husband would be a pretext for a renewal of intercourse. But of course De Combelaïne knows that Madame Cornevin and Flora are sisters, and I should not be surprised if he were already on the watch." Roberjot relapsed again into thought, but suddenly he exclaimed: "I must have time to arrange a plan, for one imprudent step would be fatal. I must feel my way. One of my friends is very intimate with the Baroness d'Eljonsen, and, I am sure, he can tell me something which will be useful."

"The Baroness d'Eljonsen?" repeated Madame Delorge, to whom this name conveyed no information.

"Yes, she is the lady who brought De Combelaïne up. It is said she was the most faithful of all the prince-president's friends when he was in exile," replied the lawyer, and then he added, in a tone of calm firmness: "Come what may, madame, you can rely on me. I will do all that human ability can do—only——" he hesitated—"only you must allow me to call on you, for urgent circumstances might arise——"

Madame Delorge did not allow him to finish. "Is it necessary, sir, for me to assure you that you will always be welcome under my roof?" She rose as she spoke, for she had heard some one walking about impatiently in the waiting-room. "I beg your pardon, sir," she added, "for having kept you so long;" and calling Raymond, she drew her long widow's veil over her face and took her leave.

"Ah! that woman knows how to love," muttered the lawyer with a sigh; and then, as if feeling the need of air, he threw open the window and glanced down the street. He was looking for Madame Delorge, and he soon saw her cross the pavement in the direction of her cab, enter it, and drive rapidly away. Clients were waiting for him in the next room; he had heard them, but he did not care—he still leaned on the window-sill, insensible to the cold, and oblivious of everything around him, for he was wrapped in one of those reveries which absorb every faculty.

M. Roberjot was by no means an inexperienced or a simple man. In common with most lawyers, he had had many young and attractive clients, of whom more than one had said to him with tearful eyes: "You are my only hope and reliance! My honour, my happiness, my very life depend on you." M. Roberjot had done much for these fair clients, but never before had his own heart been touched as Madame Delorge had touched it. His life was entirely upset—all his ideas were modified—a new horizon seemed offered to his gaze, and he hardly knew himself. "Can I be in love?" he asked himself, without realizing that those words were at once question and answer. In love—he! An old sceptic—a lawyer absorbed in musty books! But the idea which a fortnight earlier would have struck him as the height of absurdity, did not now bring a smile to his lips. Why shouldn't he be in love, and why not with Madame Delorge? Had she not the freshness and modest grace of a girl? Where could he find a more tender heart, united with greater courage and energy, and higher intelligence? Suddenly he started. "But she," he thought; "she will never love me."

He then took a rapid survey of what he called his chances. Alas! he

saw none. A man might triumph over a rival were that rival living; but how could he expect to efface from a woman's heart the memory of a man who was now invested with every superhuman quality? "There is only one way of reaching her," thought the lawyer. "It must be through gratitude. Nothing will touch her like the hope of avenging her murdered husband. Will she not give herself to the man who helps her in that task?"

He became so excited at this idea that he would have liked to call out the Count de Combelaïne that very moment. But a slight noise caused him to turn, and on doing so he saw one of his servants on the threshold of the room. "What do you want?" he asked in an irritated tone.

"There are two clients to see you, sir."

"Let them come back to-morrow."

"And the stout contractor is here, sir, the one who has so many men employed—the one who is interested in your election, I mean, sir."

"Let him go to the devil!"

The servant stood open-mouthed in surprise, for the word election generally produced a very different effect with his master.

"Say that I am very much occupied, and can see no one this evening," resumed the lawyer.

"Then, sir, I must tell M. Verdale——"

"M. Verdale! Is he here as well? Why the deuce did you not say so before? Show him in at once."

This eagerness may be explained by the fact that M. Verdale was the friend whom M. Roberjot had mentioned to Madame Delorge—the one who was acquainted with the Baroness d'Eljonsen, the patroness of the Count de Combelaïne.

XIII.

M. VERDALE was a tall, stout man, with huge coarse hands. He was frightfully common-looking, but by no means deficient either in intelligence or acuteness. An architect by profession, he had obtained the Grand State Prize which enabled him to sojourn for three years at Rome at the expense of the Government, and nominally for purposes of study. He returned to Paris with a portfolio full of plans and drawings, and with the determination to make his fortune as quickly as possible, and not to be over-scrupulous as to the means he used in doing so. Still for ten years he had only pursued shadows. His plans had never left his portfolio. He was still poor, and more eager than ever to become rich. At college he and Roberjot had known each other well, and although their paths in life had become totally different, they still kept up friendly intercourse. More than once had the unappreciated architect, as he called himself, called on his old class-mate for a loan of a couple of hundred francs, or for a word of advice respecting the little business which came to him now and then. However, poverty and disappointment had not changed his nature. He was always gay, impudent, and vulgar, and rattled on in a sort of dialect of his own—composed of professional phrases, souvenirs of classical study, and quotations picked up at the theatres.

He now entered his friend's private room brandishing a long roll of paper. "What's up," he cried, "that you sit here alone and make everybody wait? Have you become a minister?"

"Not yet."

"But you are to be elected as a deputy, if I am to believe report."

"My friends urge me to become a candidate, I admit, but I have not yet decided."

The architect screamed with laughter. "Poor, dear boy!" he cried, "how your shrinking, violet-like modesty must suffer! Cruel friends—sad obligations! But hesitation would be a crime; it is great, it is glorious to sacrifice oneself for one's country!"

Accustomed as he was to his friend's ways, Roberjot smiled, although he was hardly in a smiling mood.

"In short," resumed Verdale, "you feel your stomach strong enough to swallow all the toads and vipers of such a position; you mean to become a deputy? And a member of the Opposition, I presume?"

"Most assuredly."

"And yet you know what Thiers has said—'The Empire is made!'"

The lawyer shrugged his shoulders. "We will unmake it then!"

M. Verdale took off his hat. "Accept my thanks," he said; "your confidence delights me." And then, in a tone of feigned humility, he added: "No, let it last—this empire—at least long enough to allow me to make my fortune. You will do that for an old friend, I am sure. Just let me make enough money to pay you what I owe you."

"You think, then, that you will grow rich under the empire?"

"I do, indeed; and as there are nowadays some fifty thousand men in Paris who have the same belief, I am inclined to fancy that the empire will last!"

"The deuce it will!"

"I don't say that everybody will succeed, but I shall. I am told that the emperor, or the prince president rather, has gorgeous plans. Well, I have some equally gorgeous ones, and we can do a great deal together. Just let him say the word and my portfolio opens. He wants a Paris of marble, and I'm ready to build him a city of palaces! There will be millions spent, and I fancy that a trifle will fall into my pocket."

Verdale had a quick scent, as his friend well knew. "And so," said the latter, "you intend to pay court to the president?"

"Oh! not yet. But I'm gradually creeping near him, through patrons to whom nothing will be refused. The president may have all the vices that are ascribed to him, but he also possesses a marvellous memory. It's only necessary to have said 'God bless you' to him when he was in exile for him to consider that you have a claim on his gratitude."

"But will the folks about him have as good a memory as he has? Won't they influence him?"

"No; I know where the skeleton's hidden!" cried the architect. And then, as if annoyed at his own eagerness, he added: "When I say that I mean I am acquainted with sufficient things to prevent folks from forgetting me. To give you a proof of it, I may tell you that the paper I hold in my hand is the plan of a mansion which the Baroness d'Eljonsen is going to build in the Champs Elysées."

"The baroness going to build! Why, not a month ago I heard that she was in great need."

"Yes, when she was at Rome. But times have changed—so changed, indeed, that M. de Maumussy has commissioned me to find him a suitable estate between the Seine and the Champs Elysées; so changed that M. de Combelaïne wants a plan for a country house; so terribly changed that M. Coutanceau has promised to appoint me chief architect of a building society

which he means to found, with a capital of—I don't know how many millions. So you see these men don't merely know how to conquer, but they know how to reap the advantages of victory as well!"

The lawyer shook his head, and then in a significant tone he said: "I see you are on the road to become a millionaire."

"I certainly am," answered the architect, "only"—and he slightly frowned, and proceeded in a graver voice—"only while the future is mine, the present belongs to my creditors. I am in the situation of a man who has inherited a large fortune which is lying idle and waiting for him at Marseilles, while he himself is dying of hunger in Paris, without a penny to pay his railway fare from Paris to Marseilles!"

Verdale's visit was now explained. "Well," said the lawyer—as if he did not understand——

"Well, my dear boy, it is for you to rescue me from starvation by enabling me to buy a ticket for the express train which will take me from zero to millions. I want eight thousand francs."

"The deuce you do!" cried his friend. "Do you think I'm a banker and have nothing to do but unlock my safe? Eight thousand francs! Why, that's just half my annual income; and not only have I not got it, but I don't know where I could obtain it!"

The architect colored. "And yet I must have it, and within forty-eight hours, too!"

"But what on earth do you want with such an amount?"

"I wish to make a dash with it!"

"Good Heaven! I thought you far above such follies."

"I was so, and that is the very rock which has brought me to grief!"

"What do you mean?"

"Precisely what I say. You are the son of a rich family, and you have not had to learn that fools refuse to recognize talent unless it is set in a rich frame. You have talent of your own of course, and a fair measure of success, but do you fancy that your beautiful apartment, your furniture, carpets, pictures, and books, count for nothing in your success? When clients ring at your bell a stylish man-servant opens the door, and the client who meant to pay you fifty francs for your opinion, says to himself, 'I must make it a hundred, I see, from this valet.' And then when he is shown into your waiting-room and sees the old oak furniture, he mentally adds on a little more; and finally when he enters this room he is fairly dazzled, and before going out he leaves a hundred and fifty francs on your table."

The lawyer laughed.

"I wish to do the same," continued the architect. "I now live on the fourth floor of a wretched house where no one would take the trouble to come to find me. All this must be changed, my friend. The new rule ought to be called the rule of 'dust in the eyes.' So let us throw our share of dust!"

M. Roberjot hesitated. He did not feel willing to flatter the hopes of the unappreciated architect to the tune of eight thousand francs, but to refuse them meant the loss of the assistance he most needed, in carrying out his dearest plans, and indeed Roberjot would have gladly sacrificed far more than this amount to unmask M. de Combelaïne, and throw him, bound hand and foot, at Madame Delorge's feet. Like all hesitating persons, he took a third course. "I don't say you are wrong," he remarked to his friend: "but do you really require the amount you have named? Would not half as much do?—at least for the present? Later on I might do more."

Verdale's eyes gleamed bright with hope. "No," he said; "I need every copper of it."

"But——"

"But me no buts—I've no time to rise slowly. I want to burst forth like a meteor, and I must come up in the night like a mushroom. It is no use for you to point to yourself as an example. You started early in life, and you were pushed by your family. But I'm no longer young, in fact I feel as old as some of the streets I want to demolish. My mother, who was a market fish-woman, wouldn't be of much assistance to me I fancy. You know my position; you know that I am married and have a boy eleven years old, and that on account of my poverty I'm obliged to let wife and son live in the country with my stingy old father-in-law, who reproaches them at every meal with what they eat, and writes to me regularly every month that I am a worthless scamp, and that if I can't get work as an architect, I ought to turn mason!" He was becoming extremely excited, and talked so fast that his friend could not put in a word. "For a long time," he continued, "I laughed at this situation, but now I weep at it. The front is becoming moldy, the walls are shaky, and I feel draughts all about me. It's dreary work living alone when a man has a pretty little wife. My beard is growing white; I am tired of this Bohemian life—in short, tired of creeping along in the ditches. I want to catch you up at one leap. I have as much ability as yourself. I took the grand prize!"

"I admit all that, my friend."

"Well, then—lend me what I ask, and to-morrow I shall have an apartment, to which clients will speedily learn their way when it is shown them by the Baroness d'Eljonsen, by the Count de Combelaïne, and the Viscount de Maumussy."

The lawyer still hesitated. "Why don't you go to the people you name?"

Verdale shrugged his shoulders—shoulders broad enough to carry many a heavy burden. "I'm not quite such a fool as that!" he answered. "Did you ever see a hungry dog give up a portion of his bones? No; these folks would simply send me packing, and withdraw all their influence."

"But, old friend, I haven't got the money—that's the simple truth."

"But you have credit, as the actor said at the Variétés."

"I have a little landed property, it's true."

"And isn't that money? You must sell it at once, for there will never be such a good time as this. Sell it, and you'll thank me for ever. Do a good action and a good stroke of business at one and the same time."

The lawyer demurred a little longer, but gently, like a man who is disposed to yield; and M. Verdale saw this, for his natural shrewdness had grown much sharper during the last few years of struggle. "Come now, my boy," said he, "lend me a helping hand and I'm saved!"

There was a rap at the door and a servant entered with a lamp. The lawyer gave his friend a cool, keen glance. "It's a great service, comrade, which you ask of me," he said.

"I know it very well."

"You have chances of success, I know, but still your calculations may not be realized."

"I know that too."

"And then these eight thousand francs would simply join the three or four thousand you already owe me!"

The architect started and colored. He trembled all the more, as he had believed the victory gained. "You are very hard on me," he stammered.

"Not at all—I simply wish to point out to you what the situation is, and to show you that if I decide to oblige you, I shall do so merely out of friendship."

"And I shall be eternally grateful to you," cried Verdale, enthusiastically.

However this enthusiasm did not seem to touch M. Roberjot very strongly.

"And I, too, my dear comrade," he coldly said, "I'm in need of service also."

"Well, if it's I who can help you—you may rely on me!"

"Take care—perhaps for the sake of obliging me you may be compelled to disoblige the persons you just named to me."

It was almost impossible to ascertain from the lawyer's tone whether he was in jest or in earnest. But Verdale at once replied: "I shouldn't hesitate a single moment—I should do what you desired."

"And yet you like these people?" remarked Roberjot.

"Yes, I like them, as a man likes the stairs that takes him to the woman he adores!" It was clear that the architect looked at things with eyes of the present day, and neither his convictions nor his principles would occasion much trouble. "Come, now, Roberjot," he exclaimed, "you have something on your mind—you distrust me?"

"No, certainly not!"

"Then out with it—how can I serve you? You have a grievance against one of the persons whom you call my friends?"

"Precisely."

Verdale's face darkened. "It's a great pity," he said, hesitatingly—"still I was your friend before I was theirs—so—so open your heart to me!"

M. Roberjot had only wished to test his friend, and it seemed to him that the result was not quite the thing. He was struck by the semi-reluctant tone in which Verdale had just spoken, and he asked himself if the architect hesitated before having the money what might he not do later on? M. Roberjot concluded that unrestrained generosity would be the best card to play; and so stifling a sigh: "My old comrade," he said, with apparently sincere emotion, "I'm not in the habit of being paid for the favours I do my friends—and in proof of it, I promise to give the sum you require within forty-eight hours, and without any condition whatever."

The lawyer's intuition proved correct—the architect was quite touched. "Show me at any time how I can serve you," said he, "and you may count on me. What am I to do—shall I quarrel with any of these men? Say so, and I'll do it instantly. With eight thousand francs the future is mine. Instead of being a government architect, I'll belong to the opposition. Now I call that a good idea!"

M. Roberjot smiled. "There you go!" he said; "just as you always do. Do you know what I was going to ask? Only for a little information respecting M. de Combelaïne."

Was the architect satisfied with this explanation? At all events he replied: "Information! Well, you shall have it in full and in detail."

At this moment a servant appeared to remind his master that dinner was on the table, and was growing cold. "I'll dine with you Roberjot!" cried Verdale; "and after dinner, over a bottle of your good Burgundy, I'll talk to your heart's content."

They took their seats at table; it was many years since Verdale had been so gay. He already felt the eight thousand francs in his pocket—and ambition, hope of success, with the juicy viands and generous wines, excited him to an unwonted degree. "Now, then," said he, when the dessert was served, "what do you want me to tell you about De Combelaïne? But how

can I talk of him without speaking of the Baroness d'Eljonsen? I must first say a few words of her. When I first knew this estimable lady it was in Rome, where I had been sent by our government. I was introduced at her house, and she did me the honor to take a fancy to me. If I had had any money, she would have borrowed it, but I had none, unfortunately for both of us. However, one day, after exacting from me an oath of eternal secrecy—an oath which I violate for you—she condescended to ask me to take some of her jewels to a pawnshop in the Eternal City. How old is she, you may ask? Upon my life I don't know—at least, not within twenty years. She may not be fifty—she may be over sixty. She is without her equal in ability to repair the ravages of Time. It was a secret she bought in London of some famous ensembler there. For half a century no one has ever seen her as God made her. She must sleep in her paint as some great generals sleep in their boots and spurs. People are ignorant of her real position in the world as of her years, but I know that she is deep in politics. This woman is in fact one of those cosmopolitan intrigantes who are ready to do such dirty work that it would appall an ordinary spy. How many persons has she betrayed in her time? How many has she bought and sold?"

"A cheerful portrait, upon my word!" muttered the lawyer.

For some reason or other this remark pleased the architect extremely. "I have a happy knack at description, you will admit," he said, with a loud laugh—and, emptying his glass, he continued: "All the world, friend Roberjot, would not speak as freely as I do. Madame d'Eljonsen has a good memory, and it is not a good thing to have her for an enemy. Those who know her best hold her in great fear."

"Nonsense!"

"No, not nonsense at all. It may be cowardly, it may be petty; but so it is. For fully forty years there has not been a handful of mud thrown anywhere in Europe without her having a finger in it. After all, I think such people have their merits. We know what to think of her and we don't always know what to think of our relations and friends. She knows any amount of things. She has several times forgotten herself in my presence and thought aloud. She knows the answers to a host of enigmas which history, despite all its spectacles and microscopes, will never be able to decipher. And this is why she will always hold her own. When she is hard up she draws some forgotten or hushed-up scandal from her bag, and addresses herself to the interested parties with the simple words: 'Buy, or I publish!' And they buy, of course. This dear baroness is the Muse of Blackmail. She sells a secret when she's in need as other people sell a jewel, and she swears that her resources are unexhaustible, and I am inclined to believe her—for she has served the Russian police as well as the Austrian, and there is not a man of any renown in Europe who has not been received in her drawing-room."

"No, no, not her *drawing-room*."

"Yes—my dear fellow—her drawing-room. You mustn't look on her as a vulgar intrigante. I will show you her portrait, painted when she was little more than twenty; and when you see it you will admit that a woman with such eyes like those is not likely to be fooled. In 1845 she kept a sort of boarding-house in London, and it is whispered that it was not altogether respectable. In 1822 she might have married a German prince who would have placed a coronet on her head."

"A romance," sniffed Roberjot disdainfully,

Verdale stopped short, with a displeased look. "Upon my word, my dear fellow, you really grieve me. How is it that you, as intelligent, as talented, in fact, as you are, can be so suspicious? You are like those persons who, on hearing a story, say, 'No, no, that's impossible, for nothing of the kind ever happened to my laundress!'"

"That may be—but all the same I want facts, and only facts!"

The architect frowned. "In other words, I weary you," said he.

"Very well; I'll content myself with answering. Now, question me."

However, this little spurt of temper had no effect on the lawyer—he calmly proceeded to ask questions, as had been suggested. "First, tell me precisely who Madame d'Eljonsen is?"

In the monotonous tone of a schoolboy reciting a lesson, Verdale replied: "French by birth—belonging to an old family in Brittany—noble and poor. Her father lived in a château—so dilapidated that even the rats had deserted it—about three leagues from Morlaix. Mademoiselle de la Roche-du-Hou was about twenty when she made the acquaintance of a very wealthy Swiss merchant, M. Eljonsen, whom business and ill-luck had brought to Morlaix. In three winks he asked her to marry him. The date of the marriage is not known precisely. However, she followed her husband, of course, and they lived at Riga—the centre of his commercial operations. Their union was by no means happy. M. Eljonsen seemed to be overwhelmed with grief at having married this beauty, and in less than a year he died, leaving his widow a fabulous fortune. It is not on the books that she wept, but she left Riga, where she was frightfully bored, and adding a 'd' and an apostrophe to her husband's name, with the title of baroness, she established herself at Vienna. She lived such a prodigal life there that in three years she was not only ruined, but she was pursued by her creditors, and threatened with several actions. She finally ran away and went to Switzerland, and thence to London, Munich, and Naples."

"But where does M. de Combelaïne come in?"

"I am getting to him," answered M. Verdale. "Now that you know the lady, I wish to say that wherever she went through Europe she took with her a boy named Victor, whom she seemed to adore."

"Her son, I presume."

"So people said—but they were mistaken. Madame d'Eljonsen cannot dissimulate—and if Victor had been her son, she would have said so. No, she simply announced that Victor had been entrusted to her care. By whom? Ah! that's the mystery. Some persons believe that his mother was a great lady—as they say on the stage—while others think she was a London girl of the middle classes."

"But what do you think?"

"I? oh! nothing."

"But still——"

"I know many things," said the architect, with a smile, "but I don't know everything. All that I can state with certainty is that this boy became the Combelaïne who seems to interest you so much."

Roberjot was no longer impatient. "And this name of Combelaïne—where did it come from?" he asked.

"Ah! that's another story, too. Madame d'Eljonsen, as I have said, is a very clever woman, but she is mortal like the rest of us. For very many years she had a weakness, and this weakness was called the Count de Combelaïne, who was a most excellent gentleman, but literally penniless. It was at Vienna that the baroness first met him, and after that they never

parted, at least as long as he lived. When young Victor was about to enter the world the count said to him, 'You have no name, take mine, it has been born by honest gentlemen and brave soldiers; so take it, and may it bring you good fortune.'

M. Roberjot made a gesture to impose silence on his friend, for a servant was entering with coffee and liqueurs; but as soon as the valet had retired, the lawyer said; "And now let us have the history of this lady's adopted son."

But the brief interruption seemed to have wrought a change in the architect's mind; his fluency seemed to have deserted him now that M. de Combelaïne was the person under discussion. "You cross-examine me as if I were a witness in a court of justice," he answered.

The lawyer tried to conceal his annoyance. "In other words—you now think it more prudent not to say any more."

"My dear fellow, this Victor de Combelaïne is a most dangerous fellow."

"Of whom you are afraid?"

Verdale shrugged his shoulders. "Yes, I am afraid of him, but only on your account, for I think you have some folly in your head. Look out what you do, for Combelaïne is not to be trifled with. You know he has killed five or six poor devils in as many duels."

"Why do men fight with such a fellow?"

"People fight with him, because while there are plenty of scandalous stories about him afloat, nothing is known with certainty."

Roberjot grew impatient again. "You promised me your assistance," he said; "if you wish to withdraw that promise, say so."

"I have no such desire. If I seem evasive, it is simply because I am endeavouring to find some means of being useful to you. But how can I hope to do so as long as you tell me nothing of your intentions, nor of what you are driving at?"

"It is not my secret," answered the lawyer.

The architect pricked up his ears. "Ah! there's a secret, is there? Then mystery and discretion. I will continue. This name of De Combelaïne, which is not the man's own, appears to be his only patrimony. I say appears to be, because there is really something else which justifies all the romantic legends of his birth. I allude to a certain mysterious protection which has been extended to him ever since he became a man. It obtained him a captaincy in the army which neither his means nor his conduct justified. Overwhelmed with debts, he was constantly doing things which would have caused the dismissal of any other officer in the service. However, he at last abused his privileges to such an extent, that one day he was compelled to send in his resignation, after swearing he would blow out his brains."

"In what year did that occur?"

"Upon my life I don't know. But it can be easily ascertained." Thereupon the architect laughed and continued: "I have nearly finished," he said. "For to follow De Combelaïne after he left the army would be as foolish as to try and follow a Will-o'-the-wisp."

"But how has he lived?"

"By his wits! Madame d'Eljonsen has come to his help several times—and during the last few years a woman, whose lover he is, has also greatly assisted him."

"Do you mean Flora Misri?"

"Precisely. It is said that she has lent him enormous sums with the security of a first mortgage on his lucky star."

The advocate thought for a moment. "And yet," said he, "this man nowadays has weight and influence. It is incredible!"

Verdale nodded. "I really don't see why you are so much astonished. Have you ever conspired, Roberjot? No—very well! However, if you ever do you will realize that such matters cause a man to make some odd acquaintances."

"I don't understand you."

"I simply mean that Prince Louis—our president of to-day, and our emperor to-morrow—has a very great many acquaintances." It was clear enough that the architect knew very well what he was talking about. "The president," he continued, "would perhaps now be glad if he did not possess so many good cousins. But a man can't conspire unhelped, and if he loses his memory his old acquaintances are apt to call on him and say, 'You remember me; I was at such a place with you.'"

M. Roberjot felt he had gained little by this desultory information—he had allowed himself to indulge in the insane hope that he might obtain from Verdale some startling revelation which could be utilized at once; but the result was very different. Perhaps the architect knew more. Indeed, no doubt, he did; but there seemed little or no prospect of loosening his tongue any further. However, the lawyer was not the man to break his word. "Come in to my private office," he said to Verdale, "and I'll give you what I promised."

The architect turned pale with joy. "Ah! you are a friend, like there are few in this world!" he cried.

And it was quite true—for Roberjot at once handed his friend the title deeds of the estate he meant to sell, at the same time giving him a letter to his notary, as he was far too busy to attend to the matter himself. Verdale was not displeased at this, but contemplated with respectful admiration the paper which represented a fortune. Up to this moment he had been tormented with doubts, hardly daring to believe in his own good luck; but now, without the least request for a security, he was presented with the eight thousand francs which would enable him to realize the millions he dreamt of. With a grateful impulse he grasped his friend's hand and cried: "I shall be a millionaire and you will be a deputy—*tu Marcellus eris*!"

XIV.

"Yes, I shall be a deputy," said M. Roberjot to himself. "It must be so, for it is really the only way I have of getting at De Combelaïne."

For the next few days he occupied himself about his election with feverish activity. He was more than once disgusted—as Verdale had prophesied—but he closed his eyes and thought of Madame Delorge. "For the time will surely come when she will realize her debt to me," he thought to himself.

When the success of his election seemed beyond doubt, he determined to avail himself of the permission she had given him to call on her at Passy. When he reached the villa he found the garden gate open, and in the open space before the house there were two lads taking a lesson in riding from an old man with a gray moustache. For a few moments the lawyer stood looking at the scene; but suddenly one of the lads saw him, and ran towards him saying: "Ah! Monsieur Roberjot, it's you!"

It was Raymond who spoke, and the lawyer shook hands with him, replying, "So you have not forgotten me, my little friend."

"I never forget my father's friends, sir," eagerly rejoined the boy, and beckoning to his comrade he called, "Come here, Léon, come and speak to this gentleman."

Léon complied. He was not as tall as young Delorge, but his shoulders were broader and he was altogether much stouter. He was a little awkward in his new clothes, but there was nothing underbred in his air or manner. "This is Léon Cornevin," said Raymond, "the eldest son of Laurent Cornevin, whom mamma spoke to you about. He has been here a week, and we are studying together. He is learning Latin at a day-school, as I am far ahead of him in that, but he works so hard that he'll soon catch up with me."

"I promised my mother," said Léon, "that I would do my best to profit of Madame Delorge's kindness."

"We shall always be together," interrupted Raymond, eagerly; "we shall be like brothers, and enter the Polytechnic School together."

"And when we are men," added Léon, in a tone of condensed hatred which was positively startling in a child so young—"when we are men we shall go in search of the cowards who murdered General Delorge and my father."

The lawyer was at a loss what reply to make, when he was relieved from his embarrassment by a carefully-dressed old gentleman who had just entered the garden, and who now advanced, saying with the most gracious air: "Monsieur Roberjot, if I am not mistaken?"

"Yes, sir."

"I would have wagered my life on it. I recognized you solely from the description which was given me of you. I myself, sir, am M. Ducoudray, an old and very devoted friend of General Delorge."

"I know you by name, sir."

"Ah! yes—Madame Delorge has, no doubt, spoken to you about me. She knows my devotion to her and hers. But you are tardy in calling on us, sir. We had become somewhat uneasy. Have the goodness to follow me; Madame Delorge will be delighted to see you. She is just now engaged with Madame Cornevin." And bidding the boys resume their lesson, he led the advocate, who was quite stunned by this flow of words, up the steps. At the top of them he stopped, and pointing to Léon, asked: "What do you think of that boy?"

"I think him a manly little fellow."

"Precisely; he is a lad of promise. With an intelligence far in advance of his age, he fully grasps the immensity of the misfortune which has fallen on him, as well as the extent of the goodness shown him by Madame Delorge. He already has an aim in life!" So saying, the worthy old gentleman sighed. "Ah, why isn't his brother like him?" he added.

"What brother?"

"Why, poor Cornevin's second son whom I have adopted to a certain extent."

M. Roberjot congratulated M. Ducoudray on his generosity, but the latter rejoined, "I am really not the one to praise. It is Madame Delorge. When she looks at you in a certain way she inspires you with ideas which otherwise you would never have. I could not keep Jean with me, however, as I am not married, and so I have placed him at college. He has been there for a week, and in that brief time I have twice received complaints from his teachers. He is not lacking in intelligence, quite the contrary;

but he is indolent, and at the same time mischievous. Not only won't he do anything himself, but he prevents the other pupils from studying. Yet he has a certain talent at drawing—enough at all events, to caricature his professors. He says that before his brother kills Combeldaine he intends to torture him. Ah! he's a nice lad and no mistake."

M. Roberjot was no longer listening to Ducoudray, but wondering at the strange association of these three children so different in temperament and disposition, and yet bound together by one thought and hope. Only a woman could have imbued these lads with such a spirit of revenge, and he recognized Madame Delorge's work.

"Come what may, however," continued M. Ducoudray, "I shall not abandon this boy, although the government scarcely relishes the protection I give him. The powers that be, will, no doubt, do all they dare to compel me to abandon him."

"Don't you somewhat exaggerate matters?" asked M. Roberjot, who was a little startled.

"By no means—I mean what I say. I have proofs of it. I have received letters which don't leave a shadow of a doubt. I am looked upon, and watched as a dangerous man—I am surrounded by spies."

"Oh no!"

"Yes, sir, such is the case. But I am on my guard, and all my preparations are made to start for a foreign land at the shortest possible notice. My trunk is packed, and I have a secret exit from my house, while round my waist I wear a belt full of money at this very moment."

The lawyer did not laugh, although Ducoudray's fears were really very ridiculous. His conduct since his alarm was so great, was all the more worthy of praise. For after all a man's courage is not to be measured by the actual peril he braves, but by the peril he thinks he braves. "However," continued Ducoudray in a feeling tone: "I find my reward in the friendship and confidence bestowed on me by my beloved friend's widow. But one word on this point—we must endeavour not to excite her too much. She is now in her husband's library with Madame Cornevin."

The two men entered the house as they spoke, and made their way to the apartment where the two women sat together side by side, like two friends, engaged in sorting various papers and letters. On seeing M. Roberjot, Madame Delorge rose and held out her hand.

"At last, sir," she said, "I can thank you in my own house for all your kindness to a poor woman who has no other claim to your attention than her misfortunes."

A man of heart and mind suffers intensely on receiving praises which he does not feel to be his due. "Alas!" stammered the lawyer, "I have done nothing, madame, to deserve your thanks," and thereupon he tried to turn the conversation, being eagerly assisted by Ducoudray, who was by no means pleased to hear Madame Delorge speak gratefully to any other man than himself.

"We have had some news," said Madame Delorge, in answer to the lawyer's inquiries. "At least we think we have had news of Laurent Cornevin. We feel certain, at all events, that he is living. Julie," she added, turning to the poor woman at her side, "tell these gentlemen what has happened. They must know everything so as to be able to advise us."

M. Roberjot looked at the groom's wife, and was astonished by her appearance of comparative refinement. Her grief and her daily intercourse with Madame Delorge had done much to raise her above her previous station.

He admired her superb black eyes, the dignified carriage of her head, and her heavy braids of chestnut hair.

As Madame Delorge spoke to her, a flush came to her brow, but she did not hesitate. "My parents," she said, "were very poor, and had a large family. At times they were so discouraged that they did not always act rightly. My father drank, and my mother—God forgive her!—did the same. But it is an awful thing for a woman not to have bread to put in her children's mouths. I don't wish to find fault with my parents; I'm only trying to excuse their children. I was one of four daughters, and the only one who had any chance of a good husband. The others, seeing that there were more blows than bread in the house, left it one after the other. Poor little sisters! they only changed one hard fate for another that was worse. They had shame to endure in addition to poverty. One of my sisters was named Adèle. She was the prettiest of us all; in fact, she was the prettiest girl I ever saw in my life, with her big blue eyes, her fresh lips, and fair hair, which was so long and so thick that the neighbours used to come and see it unbound. She went off with the son of a tenant in the same house—a quarrelsome, tipsy fellow, who had been a year in prison for stealing. I never expected to see her again, but one evening, four years later, I had gone with Laurent to the theatre, when suddenly he touched me on the elbow. 'Just look,' said he, 'at that girl in the corner of the stage.' I looked, as he told me, and I started. 'Why, I believe, it's my sister Adèle,' said I. This girl was playing the part of a water-nymph, and on referring to our programme we read the name of Flora Misri."

Somewhat surprised at the turn this narrative was taking, M. Ducoudray and M. Roberjot glanced significantly at one another. However, Madame Cornevin proceeded: "This name, Flora Misri, first threw us off the track. 'We are mistaken,' said my husband, 'it isn't your sister.' I dared not contradict him, because the change was so startling. When I had last seen Adèle she wore shoes down at heel, and a dingy calico dress, while this Water-Nymph had a most dazzling costume of satin and gold, with jewels in her hair, and shining boots. And yet the more I looked at her the more certain I felt that it was Adèle. 'What if it were,' at last said my husband impatiently; 'what would you do?' 'I should try to speak to her,' I replied. He remained silent for a moment, and then he said: 'We had better go out when the curtain falls again and ask the door-keeper something about her.'

"Well, this was no sooner said than done. We hastened as fast as possible to the stage door, where in a frightfully dirty little den, we saw an old woman who was drinking brandy with two or three *figurantes*. This woman looked at us with utter contempt, tossed her nose in the air, and haughtily asked, 'What do you want here?' My husband politely explained that he wished to know if Mademoiselle Flora Misri's real name was not Adèle Cochard, but the old woman rudely replied, 'How do I know? I should have work and no mistake, if I undertook to find out the real names of all these ladies!' whereupon she laughed at us scornfully, and the girls who were with her did the same. 'In that case,' said I, 'will you kindly tell us how we can get at Mademoiselle Misri?' However, she laughed even more than before, and asked where on earth we came from to imagine we could walk into a theatre like we might walk into a mill. Still, finally she condescended to say that we might wait outside until Mademoiselle Flora went away, or else we might write her a line which might be sent to her at once.

"My husband decided on the latter course, whereupon the *concierge* gave him a pencil, with which he wrote a note to the Water-Nymph, telling her that if she were really Adèle Cochard, and would have the kindness to look up at the amphitheatre she would there see her sister Julie. We then went back to our seats, Laurent being in a great state of indignation against the *concierge*, though I did not think much about her. The Water-Nymph soon appeared, and I felt certain that her first look was for us. I was not mistaken, for our eyes met and she wafted me a kiss. I was greatly agitated. To think of meeting in this fashion after four years' separation. I wondered how I should be able to speak to my sister, when, during the next *entr'acte*, a female attendant appeared and asked my husband if he were Laurent Cornevin. My husband said yes, and the woman thereupon gave him a letter. My husband wished to hand her a gratuity, but she went off saying, 'No, I am already paid.' I was quite touched at this attention on my sister's part. Laurent opened the letter, in which Adèle said she was dying to see us, but could not possibly come to us that evening. However, as the next day was Sunday, she wished us to come with the children to breakfast with her at eleven o'clock in the Rue de Douai.

"Laurent did not say much, but he rose the next morning as gay as a lark, and said he was going to have his beard trimmed in honour of the Water-Nymph. It was striking eleven when we reached the Rue de Douai with our three children. My sister resided on the second floor of a handsome new house. A woman with a familiar, saucy smile, opened the door, and received us as if we had been expected. She showed us into a room which struck me as the height of luxury, though Laurent did not think so. He had served in very great families, and he whispered that all that glittered was not gold, and that what he saw was not worth much. A moment later in sailed my sister in a superb dressing-gown, trimmed with lace. She was delighted to see us, and embraced us cordially. She was astonished at seeing my children. 'You have three already,' she exclaimed. 'Just think of it! and I never knew it!' However, I had not been with my sister for five minutes when I began to regret our meeting. She had only retained the bitterest memories of our youth. She complained, with extraordinary violence, of all our family, of our brothers and sisters in turn; of our father—whom she called 'the old drunkard'—and of our mother, whom she seemed to hate. My husband was as much displeased as I was at the tone she adopted, and I was beginning to feel very uncomfortable, when, suddenly, the servant came to say that breakfast was on the table.

"The dining-room seemed to me even more imposing than the drawing-room, for the furniture was in carved oak, and the sideboard was full of glass and china. Adèle, or Flora rather, had spared no expense, and either from a desire to dazzle us or from an honest wish to please, she had ordered a princely repast. The table groaned under the weight of good things, and beside each plate there were four or five glasses with a quantity of other things which I did not even know the use of. All this display troubled me. Besides, I saw my husband's face grow dark. My sister insisted on his drinking her wine, and, unfortunately, he obeyed her too well, for his eyes grew very bright and his cheeks very pale. 'Take care,' I said, in a low tone, but he paid no attention to my remonstrances, but went on drinking just the same.

"We had been at table for more than two hours when a new dish of meat was brought in under a silver cover. 'What, some more!' cried my husband; and then, examining my sister, he said: 'You must have a large for-

tune to spend money in this way.' 'Yes, I have money!' she answered, carelessly. 'You are well paid, then, at your theatre?' said he. She stared at him, and then laughed. 'I am paid just twenty francs a month, and I furnish my own costume.'

"An angry gesture came from my husband, and I really thought he was going to kick the table over. He looked at me and then at my sister. 'Mademoiselle Flora, you are a very shrewd woman,' he said. I tried to make my sister hold her tongue, but my words and signs were all in vain. 'I have been lucky, I admit,' she said, 'but I wasn't so at first. I had a notion when I ran away from home that larks would fall from the sky already roasted into my mouth. Fine larks they were! The man I followed was a perfect fiend, and we had not been together a fortnight before he beat me. Ah, if girls only knew! But I was stupid in those days, and the fellow frightened me out of my senses. When he had spent all the money he had at the wine shops he bade me get some more—the how was none of his business he said, with a sneer—if not he would beat me. You may say I could have left him. Very true; but where was I to go? I should, no doubt, be in his clutches to this day if he had not quarrelled with a man and drawn a knife, whereupon the police nabbed him. Fortunately the theatre wanted some pretty girls just at that time. I applied and was received, and since then I have nothing to complain of.' I quailed under the look which my husband here riveted on me. Had it been my life, his wife's that was being recorded, he could not have been more exasperated. 'As to my being shrewd,' continued Flora, who saw nothing whatever, 'I'm hardly that, for I may know how to get money, but I don't know how to keep it. If I were firmer I might have made some good investments; but I am too good-natured by far, and the result is that I am robbed and imposed upon.'

"She went on in this way with increasing bitterness, when suddenly the door opened, and a tall, thin man came in. His moustaches were well waxed, his hat was a little over one ear, and he had a cigar in his mouth. He did not say good morning, nor utter a civil word to any one, but he just looked at my sister, and then angrily exclaimed: 'What! not yet dressed! What on earth have you been doing all the morning?'—'You can see for yourself, Victor; I have been breakfasting with my relatives.' Never shall I forget the look with which he surveyed us. 'That may be all very nice,' said he, 'but, all the same, you ought to have been dressed. The carriage is waiting'—'Is it?' said my sister. 'Well, then, send it away. You bore me to death, Victor, with your tyranny!' But he interrupted her. 'What on earth do you mean?' he cried; and, raising her from her chair, despite her resistance and cries, he pushed her into the next room."

Madame Delorge and the two gentlemen were listening with that silent disgust with which one hears a record of disgraceful conduct. However, Madame Cornevin had only paused to draw a long breath, and she then proceeded speaking more rapidly than before: "I was horrified and ashamed, but before I could decide what to do or say, my youngest child woke up and began to cry. Laurent was as white as a sheet, and I really thought he would fly at this man's throat. My husband's strength was so prodigious that I dared not think what might happen if his rage got beyond his control. We could hear my sister's voice and her companion's in the next room, and we could even distinguish the insulting epithets they exchanged. Then came a crash of glass, a scuffle, and a shriek. 'Help! help!' cried my sister. 'This is too much!' said my husband, and he was about to rush into the next room, when I fell on my knees before him and implored him

to be quiet. 'You are right,' said Laurent; 'I won't interfere; the scene is too disgraceful. But come away—come instantly, and bring the children.' I obeyed without the least argument. Never had I heard my husband speak in such a voice before. When we got outside he pulled my arm through his and almost dragged me along. At last, when we reached a quiet place, he stopped, folded his arms, and looked at me. 'Well!' he said. I burst into tears. He shook his head sadly, and in a gentle voice exclaimed: 'I thank God every day that you are my wife. I love you and respect you—but from this day forth you must never set your foot in your sister's house. Do you hear?' I heard him, and promised to obey—while he, seeing how sorely I was hurt, said kindly: 'And now, what shall we do? It seems to me we had better finish the day in the country.'

Here Madame Cornevin's voice broke as if with emotion, but she was determined to finish her narrative, and in a moment she had resumed as follows:—"I fully intended to keep my promise to my husband; but of course I could not foresee that my sister would come to me. However, she did come on the very next day, quite gay and smiling, arrayed in a gorgeous toilette, and with her pockets full of sweetmeats. As soon as she was seated she began to explain the scene of the day before. She averred that all lovers had similar freaks; that anger made men say a host of things which they were heartily ashamed of an hour later—things, too, which were not true. But she saw that I was not convinced by her arguments, and then she began to cry, and declared she was the most miserable of women. 'Why don't you leave him?' I exclaimed, indignantly. What was my surprise to hear her say that she did not dare to do so. She hated him, she despised him, and yet she clung to him. He seemed to have bewitched her. She unfolded all the terrible details of her existence, which was apparently so brilliant—and said more than once; 'With all your hard work and your poverty, your life is far happier than mine.' I was, of course, obliged to tell her that my husband had forbidden me to see her, and I supposed she would be very angry on hearing this; but no, she simply bowed her head, and said, sadly, 'He is right! I should do the same if I were in his place!'

"She came again and again, and when I told Laurent of it, he replied: 'I can't bid you put your sister out of doors, but ask her if she won't come in a less conspicuous dress.' She did this, and continued to call and see me whenever she had any special trouble, at times helping me with my work and talking with considerable frankness. She declared, too, that she respected my husband all the more for refusing to see her. Adèle—or Flora, rather—was not a bad girl then—nor is she bad now. She has a good heart, and she is tender and generous. Her first impulses are always good ones. But she is weak and fickle, and from one hour to another she will change all her ideas, projects, and wishes. The last person who speaks is always right with her.

"I was, therefore, not in the least astonished to see her change entirely in about a year's time. She adopted a most mysterious air, and spoke of grave events which were near at hand; 'I have become a very serious personage,' she said. 'I am interested in politics. She now never complained of this Victor, whom we had seen with her, but, on the contrary, she audibly blessed her stars that she had met him; 'For I shall insist' she added, 'on his getting your husband a lucrative position. Only yesterday I obtained through his influence a little tobacco shop for an old crone I knew. Of course I could do far more than that for my sister.' I was naturally quite dazzled and I told my husband what she said. He flew into a passion at the first

word, swearing that I bid fair to become as bad as my sister, whose boastings were all lies, and even if they were not, he was too proud to accept such patronage. I was unwise enough to repeat this to Flora, who was naturally much exasperated. 'I know many a man,' she said, 'who would be only too glad to accept Victor's protection, and lick his boots besides.' After this we grew cooler towards each other, my sister and I, and her visits became less frequent. I had not seen her for three months, when our misfortunes came—General Delorge was killed and my husband disappeared. I should never have dreamed, however, of applying to my sister but for the advice given me by Madame Delorge, for how could I have supposed that Victor and De Combelaine were one and the same person? I discovered this, however, for while watching for M. de Combelaine I saw this Victor, and recognised him."

"Madame Delorge thought this a very important circumstance; and according to her advice I went on Saturday evening to call on my sister. She does not now reside in the Rue de Douai, in the apartment which formerly struck me as so magnificent. She now has a much finer one on the Boulevard des Capucines. On entering the house I was instructed to go up the servants' stairs, and when I told a footman in livery that I wished to see Madame Flora Misri, he laughed in my face and said: 'Impossible! We have ten persons dining with us.' I insisted, but the man lost patience, and I believe he was about to push me out of the apartment when my sister crossed the passage. As soon as she saw me, she uttered a little shriek of surprise, and without noticing the servant's astonished look, she said: 'What has happened, dear?' I told her as briefly as possible of my great loss, but I took care to make no allusion to General Delorge. 'It's horrible,' she cried—'horrible! What will you do without your husband, with your five children to provide for? No, no,' she added, hastily, 'I won't bear this—my people shan't be meddled with. Wait a moment, I'll soon be back.' So saying, she disappeared. I heard a door open and shut, and then came a noise of voices in earnest discussion. Presently Flora came back to me with a beaming face. 'Keep up your courage,' she said; 'Victor will attend to that matter, and at another time prevent Laurent from meddling with what doesn't concern him! Come and see me to-morrow!'"

My heart leaped with joy, and it was with the greatest impatience that I waited for the next day, which, alas! had a bitter disappointment in store for me. When I went to see my sister I found her out of temper and embarrassed. 'My poor Julie,' she said, as I kissed her, 'I deceived you last night; not wilfully, but because I was deceived myself. No one knows what has become of your husband. The police have done their best to find some trace of him, but all to no avail.' She handed me some money as she spoke, but I rejected it with scorn, for it seemed to me as if it were the price of my husband's liberty or blood. And then I went away, feeling certain that I had nothing to hope for from my sister—but comforted all the same by a voice which seemed to tell me that my husband was not dead, and that I should yet see him again."

XV.

MADAME CORNEVIN had hardly finished her narrative when Madame Delorge looked at her two friends in turn, and asked: "What do you think of this?"

"I think," said the lawyer, "that Flora and De Combelaïne were taken by surprise when Madame Cornevin first called on them. The next day, however, they had discussed the situation, and hence their final reply, from which I infer that Cornevin is not only alive but that they know where he is—"

"Precisely!" interrupted Madame Delorge.

"If he is living, he will be our witness," resumed the lawyer.

"And I'll find him!" exclaimed Ducoudray, starting to his feet. "It will be a new trade to me—that of a spy and detective—but I'm not ashamed of it. It is always honourable to serve a just cause, especially when success awaits one as surely as it does in this instance."

Madame Delorge thanked her friend, but her eyes were still fixed on M. Roberjot. "What shall we do?" she asked. The lawyer shook his head. "Wait—wait, that is all. Wait and hope."

Madame Delorge had foreseen this reply. "Well, I will wait" she answered. "My son and Léon have been talking to you, I believe. You have heard of their projects, and I will arm myself with patience."

When M. Roberjot withdrew, he was greatly disturbed in mind. "How on earth am I to make her love me!" he murmured. How? Only by avenging her husband. This conviction recalled him to a sense of his political duties, and also reminded him of his friend Verdale, whom he had not seen since the evening when he entrusted him with his title-deed. However, he was not astonished at the delay which had occurred, for it might have been caused by the desire to secure a more favourable moment for the sale. Still he was none the less pleased when on returning home he found a letter awaiting him, addressed in the handwriting of the unappreciated architect. But, to his consternation, the missive ran as follows:—

"Friend Roberjot—If, on receipt of this note, you see fit to have me arrested you can do, so I shall be condemned to five years imprisonment, or more. I have sold your estate, and I have appropriated its full value—not the sum you agreed to let me have, but the entire amount—one hundred and eighteen thousand nine hundred and thirty-one francs! I know what you will say—that it is a most scandalous abuse of confidence—but I could not help it. The most extraordinary opportunity presented itself of making from three to five hundred thousand francs within a fortnight, and I could not resist the temptation. And if you are good enough to keep quiet, I will bring you half the profits in fifteen days from now.

"VERDALE."

M. Roberjot sank on to a chair. "Ah! the wretch," he cried; "I'm ruined!"

However philosophical a man may be, or superior to sublunary concerns, he rarely accepts such a loss as this with perfect equanimity; and in this especial case circumstances made the misfortune particularly bitter. "He shall not escape me like this," muttered the lawyer; "he shall repent of his villany between four walls!" He rushed down the stairs as he spoke—nearly overturning his faithful servant, who had only just time to step aside as he asked with considerable timidity: "Will you be back to dinner, sir?"

As if that were a time to think of dinner—when he was hurrying to

make his complaint against this traitor in due form! Fortunately, or unfortunately, as will be shown later on, it was growing dark, and Roberjot was compelled to postpone his intentions by remembering that at this time of day he would find no one at the Palace of Justice.

After a moment's reflection he hailed a passing cab, jumped inside, and once seated, he began to read the letter again. He plainly detected between the lines the threat that if he made a row he might say good-bye to his money for good, while if he submitted there was at least the bare possibility that he might at some time or other see it again. In that case what should he do? Still in a woful state of indecision he drove to the office of his notary, who received him with a significant exclamation, "Well, how are you, you extravagant fellow!" he cried. "What do you intend to do with all the money you have turned your acres into?"

"Then my determination surprised you?"

"Of course it did—for I consider this a very bad time to sell. But your letter was so urgent——"

"Urgent?" repeated the lawyer, in bewilderment.

"Yes; and its urgent language, coupled with your friend's explanations, convinced me of the uselessness of any remonstrances. But it seems to me that you don't look over-pleased yourself. Are you sorry?"

"No, not at all—of course not;—but did you keep my letter? Please show it to me."

The notary looked somewhat surprised. "What do you want it for?" he asked.

That was precisely what Roberjot did not care to say. He knew that a full explanation at the present moment would commit him irretrievably, and so, in a careless tone, he answered: "Oh! never mind."

This was hardly satisfactory, but nevertheless the notary opened a drawer and took out a letter which he handed to his friend. The architect had certainly made a bold stroke, for he had altogether suppressed the original letter with which M. Roberjot had intrusted him and forged another in which he, Roberjot, gave his notary orders to immediately sell his property at any sacrifice, and hand the proceeds to M. Verdale. The reasons given by the architect to justify this precipitation were very plausible, and showed a thorough acquaintance with Roberjot's affairs.

"What has gone wrong, my boy?" said the notary. "You are as white as a sheet."

"It's nothing," said the advocate, with an effort, "only you must do me a favor. You must keep this letter as if it were a most precious jewel, for it is literally priceless to me!"

"Sleep in peace, my dear fellow; I will put it in my safe if you like!"

Enlightened as to Verdale's manner of operating, Roberjot had nothing more to do at his notary's, so he took his leave, and twenty minutes later he reached the lodging-house where the architect had resided for several years. The landlord, a stout, red-faced man, with a bald head, appeared in person to answer M. Roberjot's inquiries, to which he simply said, "M. Verdale is away on a journey."

The advocate was fully prepared for an answer of this kind. "When did he go?" he asked.

"He left at two o'clock."

"Will he be long away?"

The landlord looked at Roberjot earnestly. "Are you M. Verdale's friend?" he asked.

"Most certainly," replied the lawyer, in a tone of concentrated bitterness, "and a very dear and tried one."

"Then," said the landlord, "you are the very one whom M. Verdale mentioned, just as he was getting into the cab to drive to the station. He said you would come this very evening in a great rage to ask for him."

Although Roberjot was in no laughing mood, he could not refrain from smiling at this singular forecast on the architect's part. "Yes, I'm that friend," he said, "and I can assure you that I am in quite as much of a rage as he desired."

The landlord bowed profoundly. "Yes, he must have meant you, that's clear," he rejoined. "And, he said, 'Father Bonnet, tell this friend of mine not to be in a hurry, but to wait and see, and, above all, not to be anxious. Whatever happens, this day two weeks hence, I shall be at home again.'"

The landlord paused abruptly, being disconcerted by the advocate's eyes, which were obstinately riveted on him. "Why do you look at me in that way?" he asked.

"Simply because you are deceiving me."

"Oh! sir."

"I feel quite sure of what I say," continued the lawyer. "M. Verdale is not absent. M. Verdale is in this house."

The man lifted his hand as if to call Heaven to witness that he spoke the truth, and then, in a solemn tone, he replied: "M. Verdale left this afternoon—and I hope all my tenants will move away if I'm lying now. If you don't believe me, sir, I will take you to your friend's room—it is empty, and my wife has taken away the sheets."

This last detail went too far—when a man proves too much he proves nothing. This was evidently M. Roberjot's opinion, for he drew out his pocket-book. "Be kind enough, sir," he quietly said, "not to think me more of a simpleton than you are yourself. M. Verdale has changed his room—that is all. Show me where he is and this thousand-franc note shall be yours."

The man's eyes glittered with cupidity, and he stretched out his hand towards the money, but it was not yielded to his grasp. "I have told the truth," he said, sadly. "M. Verdale is away, but he will return in two weeks from to-day."

It was useless to argue further, but M. Roberjot went away thoroughly convinced that the architect was concealed somewhere within the four walls of that dingy hotel. He could easily satisfy himself on the point by filing his complaint and asking for a search warrant—but would that be prudent or wise? "I must be particularly cautious," he said, "with such a cunning fellow as that knave. The least false step will carry off the very small chance I now possess of getting a franc of my money back again." And as the clock struck nine just then he remembered that he was hungry, and regardless of the servant who was waiting for him, he went into the Restaurant Magny and ordered dinner.

The more he thought over the affair the more certain he became that M. Verdale was still in Paris—and consequently the more hopeful he felt. "If he stays here," he said to himself, "it is because he has told me the truth and has embarked in some great speculation, the result of which is still uncertain. I hope to Heaven he will succeed, for in that case he will bring my money back." All things considered, he decided that it was best to wait until the time fixed by the architect had expired. His complaint would be

equally forcible a fortnight later, and in the mean time he would not lose his only chance. "But if in two weeks from to-day, at high noon, there are no tidings of this noble friend, Verdale," he muttered, "at one o'clock precisely the police will be on his heels."

XVI.

WHILST M. Roberjot was thus cogitating anent his imperiled fortune, Madame Delorge, with the assistance of M. Ducoudray's experience, was occupied in attending to hers. At the moment of the first shock she had calmed herself with the hope of immediate vengeance, but she now realized her mistake.

She no longer believed, as the folks round about her said, and as it was the fashion to say, that the year would not elapse without another revolution which should sweep the president and his partisans from their position. But she was firmly persuaded that a government founded on such a crime as that of the 2nd of December must end disastrously, and that a day would come when its foundations undermined by the innocent blood shed on the Boulevard Montmartre, would give way entirely. The stronger her faith in the future, the more firmly did Madame Delorge feel the necessity of waiting—and thus she summoned strength to attend to those maternal duties, neglect of which often upsets the finest projects. By her husband's death she of course, no longer received his pay of ten thousand francs a year, and yet her expenses were increased. First, she had agreed to allow Madame Cornevin a pension of twelve hundred francs and she had promised to defray the expenses of the education of Cornevin's son, and intended to make this education as complete as possible. The charges in this respect, would of course, increase each year. In three years, moreover, masters would be required for her own daughter Pauline. She, not unnaturally decided to retain Krauss, who on his side had told her, in so many words, that he would never leave her, nor accept any wages from her, but would rather go in search of work to increase his mistress's income.

On the other hand what had Madame Delorge to depend upon. Eleven thousand francs per annum she supposed; but she was mistaken. Her friend, M. Ducoudray, true to his instincts and habits as a business man, took great pains to undeceive her, but eventually showed her clearly that her income could not be estimated at more than nine thousand francs; if it might occasionally turn out better, well and good; but she must not rely upon it.

It was in the general's study that the widow and her friend discussed these important questions, and it struck the worthy Ducoudray that he should never have a better opportunity for inserting a wedge in regard to his matrimonial hopes, which he had by no means abandoned. Accordingly in a somewhat trembling voice, for his heart beat as it did when he made his declaration to the first Madame Ducoudray—he began a long and somewhat complicated speech, which was designed to enlighten his dear friend's widow. "If she were quite right," said he, "in taking all needful measures for the future, she was equally wrong in making them binding and irrevocable. Human nature is changeable. Was she sure, could she be sure, that before eighteen months or a few years had elapsed, some event might not take place which would disturb all her calculations? Was she not still young? Solitude would not, perhaps, always prove as tempting as now. Her children would

grow up—three children—since Léon Cornevin might now be regarded as one of them—and she would need a man's hand to guide them."

Here the worthy old fellow's voice died away, for Madame Delorge was looking at him with so strange an expression that he felt frightened. "Are you speaking to me of the possibility of a second marriage?" she coldly asked.

He bowed, but dared not speak.

"If such an idea should ever enter my head," continued the widow, "I should repel it as if it were a crime."

Ducoudray turned a bright scarlet. "I hope to Heaven," he said, to himself, "that she had no notion I was thinking of myself!" For he had lived three months in such intimate companionship with Madame Delorge, who was superior to any woman he had previously met; he had grown accustomed to thinking of her, to acting for her, and obeying all her inspirations; and he shivered at the prospect of returning to his former lonely life in which his only amusement had been the chatter of his housekeeper.

However, Madame Delorge had no idea of the castles in the air which her old neighbour had built up, and attaching small importance to his words, she abruptly resumed, to his great delight, the discussion of her plans for the future. In the first place, ought she to remain where she was? Ought not this villa to be given up, dear as it was to her, and filled, with a thousand recollections of her husband? The rent was too heavy, and it required the care of too many servants. "I have given notice," she murmured, "because I knew I ought to do so. But where shall we go?"

The Château de Glorierès offered many advantages. There she could reside in comfort, reaping the many advantages of a land owner living on his estate. She could place Raymond and Léon at the College de Vendôme, which has a certain reputation, with the advantage of moderate charges. But this was one side of the question. To bury herself in the country would, in Madame Delorge's opinion, be to desert the field of warfare, and relinquish all hope of profiting by events. And so she said to herself, "I shall remain at Paris, cost what it will." And worthy Ducoudray was commissioned to find an apartment suited to her means, somewhere in the centre of Paris. A young servant girl of fifteen or sixteen, with old Krauss, would, she thought, be all she needed. Krauss she knew to be a good cook or a good nurse, in whatever capacity she might require him. It was with difficulty that M. Ducoudray refrained from offering to place every sou he had in the world at his friend's disposal. His heart was very soft and he grieved to see this woman whom he so adored crushed by such sordid cares! Still he dared not speak the word. The next day he started in search of an apartment, and after climbing hundreds of staircases, and facing as many janitors, he at last discovered, in the Rue Blanche, a suite of rooms which seemed to fulfil all one could reasonably expect for nine hundred francs per annum. It consisted of five apartments with a kitchen and a cellar, with a servant's room in the attic.

Madame Delorge went to see it, found it to her taste, and as it was vacant, agreed to take possession immediately. She at once began her preparations for moving, and, one afternoon, while she was in her *salon* packing some ornaments, Krauss entered, looking so pale and so frightened that she thought him the herald of some evil news. "What is it?" she cried.

The faithful servant could hardly speak. "One of the murderers of my dear general is in the hall," he gasped. "He wishes to see you, madame, and has sent in this card."

Madame Delorge looked at the card and saw that it bore the name of the Viscount de Maumussy. She turned very pale, as if she were about to faint. What could this man want? Still struggling for composure, she replied, "Show him in."

The old soldier went to obey her orders, while she darted to a door and called the two boys. They hastened to her, and she bade them enter the drawing-room and not lose one word of what would be said. They had no time to ask a question, for an instant later M. de Maumussy entered the *salon*, announced by Krauss. He was, as usual, carefully dressed in the latest style, gloved with a delicate shade of gray, with an eyeglass dangling across his coat, and holding in his right hand a slender cane—his air and manner offering a fashionable combination of English stiffness and French levity. He was as he had been for years; his beard admirably trimmed, his curly hair combed over his high wide forehead, his expression at once insolently benevolent, and patronizing, his eyes quick, and vivacious, and his lips curved into a mocking smile.

The spectral attitude of Madame Delorge, who stood pale and shadowy in her heavy mourning, with the two boys at her side, would have disconcerted any other man than M. de Maumussy. But he had not been named the "imperturbable" for nothing. As he crossed the threshold he bowed profoundly with that air of courtesy which was, his admirers said, "one of his greatest charms." "My visit," he began, "seems to astonish you somewhat, madame."

"Very much, sir," answered Madame Delorge, haughtily.

He bowed more profoundly than before, and advanced to the centre of the drawing-room. "You will excuse it, I trust," he continued, "when I have had the honour of explaining its motive."

"Speak, sir."

The viscount's eyes wandered from chair to chair with a look that clearly said: "Don't you intend to ask me to sit down?" And as Madame Delorge did not seem to understand these glances, he exclaimed: "My explanations will be a trifle long, madame."

"Ah! you will have the kindness to abridge them as much as possible, sir."

His first impulse, it was evident, was to take the chair which was not offered him, but he did not dare do so. Standing, therefore, and in an impassive voice, he continued: "You treat me as an enemy, and, although I am grieved, I am not surprised by it. I know the weight of the blow that has fallen upon you, for I well realised the value of Delorge, his intelligence and goodness of heart."

"And was that the reason you wished him murdered?"

The viscount did not wince. "You are mistaken, madame," he said; "the general fell in a duel, after an honest fight!"

"No one, sir, has a stronger interest than yourself in thus stating the case."

M. de Maumussy shook his head. "I am willing to admit to you, madame, that the explanations which have been furnished to you were false. There were reasons of State that necessitated them. Delorge was, in reality, the victim of a mistake. Had I controlled events, not a hair of his head would have been touched. But fate ordained otherwise. All that I was allowed to do I did. He was warned, and he had only to look out for himself. Had he pleased to be on the winning side, he could have done so."

"My husband was an honest man, sir."

"I know it, madame; and that is why I should be so glad to-day, were he living, to see him working with us, for I am certain he would be. He

was too intelligent not to recognise that the government which satisfied the greater number of interests would necessarily be the lawful one. But I am going too far; the disaster which occurred, resulted from an indiscretion of M. de Combelaïne——”

At this point M. de Maumussy hesitated; however, if he hoped for a word of encouragement he did not get it, for the widow and the two boys remained perfectly silent. At last he continued: “M. de Combelaïne, in spite of what I had said, fancied that General Delorge was with the *coup d'état*, and for this reason wrote to him, and made an appointment at the Elysée Palace. The general was punctual, and Combelaïne at once took him into a small drawing-room, where, without the least preamble, he foolishly proceeded to explain the plan of the movement which had been organized to save France. Delorge listened in silence, but when Combelaïne had finished, he exclaimed: ‘You are a villain, and I shall denounce you!’ As you may imagine, this proved a terrible blow for the count. He saw himself dishonoured, lost; he had also irretrievably compromised the success of the organization, and endangered not merely himself but also the prince president. Almost any man would have lost his head under similar circumstances. So he started forward and exclaimed: ‘No, you will not denounce me, for you shall not leave this place alive.’”

Madame Delorge gave vent to a stifled sob. “And he did not!” she sighed.

“No, he did not; but not by reason of any crime,” rejoined De Maumussy, eagerly. “Listen to me. It was at that very moment that I entered the little drawing-room. I grasped the situation at a glance, and I was appalled. I darted between the two adversaries, and I insisted on your husband listening to reason. I entreated him not to take advantage of the confidence that had so imprudently been placed in him. I told him if he would give us his word of honour to remain silent for forty-eight hours, we would ask no more. But he positively refused to do this. He had taken Combelaïne by the arm and shook him violently, declaring that, if he did not follow him to the garden at once, he would drag him there, after slapping his face in presence of all the people assembled in the reception rooms. De Combelaïne then did precisely what every man in the world would have done—he followed the general to the garden, and if the chances of the duel were in his favour, he is to be pitied, or cursed, if you will, but not accused of being a murderer.”

“Have you finished, sir?” asked Madame Delorge, coldly, as M. de Maumussy paused to draw breath.

“I have told you the exact truth, madame.”

“Then, sir, allow me to leave you. Come, my children.” She did not ring to have him shown out by a servant. She did worse—she retired herself so as to oblige him to withdraw.

However, just as she reached the door he exclaimed: “One word more, madame.”

She paused for a moment, showing perfectly well by her air and manner, that she would accept no explanations and listen to no arguments. “I am in a hurry,” she said.

The utter contempt of her tone would have wounded any man in the least degree sensitive; but the viscount was one of those persons who sacrifice themselves to the success of the enterprise they have on hand, declaring that a man is avenged by his success. So he restrained himself, and in a most friendly tone retorted: “General Delorge, madame, was a brave soldier, and has left many friends——”

The widow started.

"And these friends," resumed M. de Maumussy, "remembered him, that is to say, they remembered those who were dearest to him. The general was of poor parentage, and his generosity was proverbial in the army. He has left no fortune——"

"He has left an honoured name, sir, and a spotless sword."

A faint colour rose to De Maumussy's cheeks. He was growing impatient. "This woman is stupid with her Roman airs!" he thought to himself, and then he said aloud: "You are right, madame, but unfortunately in this corrupt nineteenth century, a heritage like that, no matter how glorious and enviable it may be, it is not quite enough. You are about to find yourself face to face with the trials of straightened circumstances."

"May I ask sir, what——"

"Excuse me, madame, it matters much to me, and I am anxious, not to repair, for that is impossible, but to soften as much as possible the grievous misfortune which it was not in my power to avert. I ventured to come here to-day so as to have, personally, the pleasure of telling you that your name is set down for a pension of six thousand francs——"

"I refuse it, sir," rejoined Madame Delorge.

"Permit me——"

"I refuse it absolutely."

Any other person than De Maumussy would have felt himself beaten and incapable of replying. Not he, however. "Have you the right to do so, madame?" he asked; "you are not alone—you have children—these two boys whom I see at your side. For them, if not for yourself, are you not very-hasty in taking a decision which you will repent of, perhaps, when it is too late?"

This was too much for Madame Delorge. "Enough, sir," she cried, in a trembling voice, "Enough! Do you imagine that I am so blind that I do not fully understand the shameful reasons for this last insult—the insult of your presence under my roof? Weak as I am, helpless as I seem, you are troubled by me—a shadow terrifies an assassin! In your eyes I am more than a remorse, I am a threat! This is why you were told, 'Offer her money—she will accept it, and hold her tongue; we shall then no longer be uneasy. If she should ever venture to open her lips we shall be able to reply, Why do you talk of your husband—haven't we paid you for him?'"

Positively there was more moderation than anger in the look which De Maumussy now gave Madame Delorge. He flattered himself on being somewhat of an artist, and never had he seen contempt and anger so magnificently expressed. "She is superb!" he thought.

Meanwhile, she proceeded in breathless haste: "We do not choose to be paid, sir. We don't choose to barter the chances which the future may have in store for us. We—my children and myself—intend to cherish our hatred and nurse our vengeance!"

An enigmatical smile flitted over De Maumussy's lips. Was it not natural that he should hold this poor widow's threats in derision.

"Yes, and we shall have our turn yet!" cried Léon Cornevin; "and later on, when I'm a man, and stand face to face with you, you will have cause to remember what I now say."

"I hope, Monsieur Delorge——" began the viscount.

"I am not the son of General Delorge," replied the boy with an angry gesture; "I am the son of Cornevin, the groom."

"And I, sir, am Raymond Delorge," said the other boy; "and I swear

to you that I intend to be a man before my time, so that I may the earlier avenge my father."

Was De Maumussy stirred by this hatred, and had he a presentiment of the future? Or did he think the threats and vehemence of these two children utterly unworthy of notice? No one could have told from the quiet tone in which he replied: "Thanks for your lesson, madame, it is a fortunate thing for me that there is no man here who shares your sentiments."

"You are mistaken, villain! for here is one!" cried a hoarse voice.

The vicomte hastily turned. On the threshold of the room stood Krauss, who was as pale as death, with a pistol in each hand. De Maumussy threw himself on one side with an exclamation. But Madame Delorge darted towards Krauss and caught him by the arm. "What are you going to do?" she exclaimed.

"Let me be, madame," he answered, with a threatening laugh; "it will be soon over. Ah! villain—after murdering my general, you come here to insult his wife!"

It was only with great difficulty that Madame Delorge succeeded in restraining the old trooper. "Go, sir," she cried to the viscount. "For Heaven's sake, go!"

He hesitated. Perhaps he feared that they might think him a coward, and he was brave—this quality must be granted to him—so brave indeed that his colour had not changed, although his life depended on an imperceptible movement of Krauss's finger. At last, however, he went slowly towards the door. "Adieu, madame," he said, as he crossed the threshold. "Now, whether you desire it or not, the amount of your pension will be paid to you!"

XVII.

MADAME DELORGE hardly heard this last sarcasm, which was the key-note to De Maumussy's character. She needed all her presence of mind to hold Krauss and prevent him from following the viscount. It was only with the greatest difficulty that she recalled him to reason. She finally sent for Ducoudray, and his solicitations had to be added to her solemn entreaties, and Raymond's remonstrances before the obstinate old trooper would give the solemn oath she asked—and swear to renounce his plans of too summary a justice.

"This has really been a terrible scene," said Ducoudray, as he drew the charges of both pistols, "and the consequences of it are something appalling."

On this score, however, Madame Delorge was by no means dismayed. The only thing which disturbed her was the pension threatened by De Maumussy. Was she to be exposed to the frightful humiliation of reading some morning in the *Moniteur*: "The Prince President, whose solicitude for the army is well known, has decided that a life pension of six thousand francs shall be paid from his private purse to the widow of General Pierre Delorge."

In that case what should she do? The matter so tormented her that she could not close her eyes all night—and the next day at nine o'clock she went to ask for M. Roberjot's advice. It was a Thursday, the very day, as it happened, when the term fixed by M. Verdale as the limit of his old friend's patience, was to expire. When the anxious woman arrived at the lawyer's residence, the servant said that his master had just gone out, but would return in a few minutes. Knowing the rooms, Madame Delorge was about to enter M. Roberjot's office, when the valet stopped her, saying: "Not there, madame,

not there—some one is already waiting for my master in there,” and thereupon he showed her into a small parlour—the one in which she had been received on the occasion of her first visit, and where she had heard the lawyer enunciate his political opinions.

But this time the door was open, and from the chair she took she could partially view the interior of M. Roberjot's office. The man who was waiting there did not seem to notice her entrance into the parlour. He was walking up and down in evident agitation, and from time to time giving utterance to such exclamations as these: “Where on earth can he have gone? He must have expected me.”

Suddenly, however, he stopped, for a door on the other side of the office had opened, and a moment later Madame Delorge saw this strange visitor dart to that part of the room which was beyond her range of vision. “Well! What did I say?” he exclaimed, “am I not a man of my word?”

Madame Delorge recognised her lawyer's voice as he replied: “It is as well that you kept it, for on the stroke of twelve I should have filed my complaint.”

He walked forward as he spoke to the centre of the room, where Madame Delorge could see him being followed by his visitor, whose attitude was very humble. With a vague presentiment that some grave explanation was impending, Madame Delorge tried to make her presence known by coughing and moving her chair. But they did not seem to hear her. The lawyer had taken a seat at his desk, while the other, who continued standing, earnestly exclaimed: “Do you know that you receive me like a dog who interferes in a game of ten-pins? You are not courteous. Haven't I kept my word? Suppose I hadn't come?”

“You would have been just what you are now—a dishonest man, Monsieur Verdale.”

The architect—for he it was—lightly shrugged his shoulders. “Come, now,” he replied, “can't you make up your mind to forgive me for the fright I have occasioned you?”

The lawyer's clenched hand came down with a furious bang on his desk. “Enough of these impudent jokes,” he said. “Let us have facts, not phrases.”

The architect's previous embarrassment and humility must have been feigned, for they in no way corresponded with the gay volubility of the words which now poured from his lips. “Listen to my confession,” he said. “I admit that my proceedings were—well, a little hasty. But I really had no choice—any one would have done as I did. Look at it yourself. On the very morrow of the day when you intrusted your papers to me, I was crossing the Place de la Bourse to go to your agent's, when I met Coutanceau. I stopped him, and said just as I always say to him: ‘Ah! Master Strongbox, when do you intend to make my fortune?’ I took it for granted that he would reply as he always did: ‘To-morrow, at half-past nine.’ But not at all; he looked at me and curtly replied, ‘Can you keep a secret?’ Considerably surprised, I answered, ‘Of course I can, if my fortune depends on my doing so.’ Whereupon he grasped me by a button and whispered: ‘Try to obtain a hundred thousand francs within four days from now. Bring this amount to me, and I assure you that there are ninety-nine chances to one that I can make half a million for you.’ I'm no chicken, Roberjot, but I assure you when I heard this I felt faint and ill. ‘Are you in earnest?’ I asked. ‘Most certainly!’ was his reply. And shrugging his shoulders, he added: ‘I'm willing to stake every franc I own on the chances.’ On hearing

this I was literally dazzled; my head swam. Five hundred thousand francs! What should I do?"

Madame Delorge heard every word of this strange confession, and considerably dismayed at being an involuntary confidante of a secret communication, she asked herself what she should do—if she had better show herself, or softly retire, telling the servant in the hall that she would return later on. However, M. Verdale proceeded: "It was then, friend Roberjot, that the thought came to me of borrowing the title deed which you had intrusted to me without asking your consent. I was horror-struck at my own audacity—I realized all I risked; I thought of the convict's cell to which I might be consigned, and the thought was not an agreeable one. But if the chances were in my favor, what then? I might go to bed poor and wake up wealthy and—this was a most powerful temptation. I am no angel, and I yielded. A voice crying out to me that I should succeed inspired me with extraordinary courage. I went home and tried to imitate your writing exactly, and indeed with very little trouble I composed and wrote a letter in which you ordered your agent to sell the estate and pay the proceeds over to your good friend, Verdale. I thought the imitation perfect, but, of course, I could not tell how it would strike the agent. I was dreadfully nervous while he read it. He accepted it, however, without question, and the very next day handed me one hundred and eighty thousand beautiful francs, which I carried at once to Coutanceau."

Madame Delorge, who had risen to depart, sank into her chair again.

"The wine was drawn, you see," continued the architect, "and good or bad, it must be swallowed. I knew I ought to see you at once—but I asked myself how you would take it. Should I throw myself at your feet and beg your pardon? I really thought of doing so for a moment. It would have been a stupid thing, however. I examined the situation in all its aspects, and the result of my meditations was the letter I wrote to you—a letter which was really a masterpiece—as it compelled you to silence if you wished to regain any portion of your money. I gave explicit instructions to my landlord, knowing that you could go to him for information. You were shrewd enough to grasp the truth. I was in my rooms, as you suspected, but you could not buy my landlord as you tried to do. I shut myself up for two weeks, and suffered all the tortures of a man condemned to death, but in hope of being reprieved. Look at me and see if I am not ten years older! You, without knowing it, risked your fortune, while I, you see, risked my skin. I intended, if the speculation was a failure, to blow out my brains!"

He assumed a tragic air and position as he uttered these last words, vainly hoping to touch his friend's heart. "All these explanations are utterly useless," said M. Roberjot.

The architect folded his arms and stepped back. "Don't you understand?" he asked.

"Understand what?"

"That my presence here announces success!" And then, in a tone of triumph, he continued: "For I have succeeded fully and entirely—far beyond my wildest hopes. I have made my fortune and yours. This very morning, not two hours ago, Coutanceau's cashier paid me four hundred and eighty thousand francs. From this sum, of course, there is the amount of your involuntary loan to be deducted; but the rest we will divide like brothers. We are rich, my boy, rich! Will you pardon me now? Admit my wisdom and greatness. Throw aside your solemn air and shake hands with me, old friend."

But the lawyer did not seem disposed to do so. "You are wrong, Monsieur Verdale," he said.

The architect feared that he was not understood. "He does not believe me!" he cried. "Wait a moment, St. Thomas—wait, if you please." And making a dash at his portfolio, which he had deposited on a chair, he drew from it an enormous pile of bank-notes, and spread them out on the desk. "Feel them," he cried; "look at them, lay your hands on them! It is all ours! Victory! Long live Coutanceau!"

But the words of triumph died away on his lips when he saw the disgusted gesture with which the lawyer pushed aside the money, and he was quite aghast when Roberjot replied: "Count out the amount you owe me, if you please, and take the rest away."

"You are jesting, surely," said the architect.

"I never spoke more seriously," was the reply.

"Don't you understand me, my boy—don't you realize that I wish to share my profits with you——"

The lawyer angrily interrupted the speaker: "Your persistence, sir, is an insult."

The architect's face flushed. "Roberjot, you are hard—very hard. I have been guilty of a very great—imprudence; but it seems to me that when I repair——"

The lawyer laughed. "How can you repair what you have done, except by making me an accomplice of a forgery? That will do. Pay me what you owe me and let us have done with each other. We will not discuss the matter—since we should never understand each other."

This was quite true, for the architect was utterly bewildered. He counted out a hundred and eighty thousand francs, and laid that amount in notes before M. Roberjot. "Here is the money," he said.

"Very well," was the reply.

M. Verdale shrugged his shoulders. "If you intend to take this tone," he said, "I have to ask that you will return the letter I wrote you."

But Monsieur Roberjot started up. "No!" he exclaimed, in a firm tone; "that letter is mine, and you shall never have it. I shall keep it!"

Trembling like a leaf, Madame Delorge looked and listened, almost forgetting the peculiarity of her position. Overwhelmed by this unexpected refusal, the architect literally swayed like a drunken man, and looked at his friend with haggard eyes for a moment or two in silence. Then he murmured: "You wish to frighten me, Roberjot, do you not? You wish to avenge yourself for the suspense I have kept you in? Admit it. It is impossible that you really intend to retain that letter."

"It is quite possible."

"But why?—for what end?"

"Because——"

"Do you intend to file a complaint, although I have returned you your money?"

"You know that I do not."

"What do you wish to do, then?"

"I have no explanations to make."

"Roberjot!"

The two men stood face to face—the lawyer cool and self-possessed, the other trembling nervously. "You must see," continued Verdale, "that it is quite impossible for me to leave my letter in your possession. It is too compromising for me."

"It ought never to have been written."

A silence ensued—so profound that Madame Delorge could hear the architect's laboured breathing. "To allow this devilish letter to remain in your hands is to give you the power that God alone possesses over mankind. It is to abandon my honour, my future, and my life to you; and also the life, honour, and future of my son. It is to give myself up to you bound hand and foot, to acknowledge myself your slave, your dog—your thing."

The lawyer did not answer.

"To leave this letter with you," continued his companion, "would be to relinquish hope, happiness, and repose for ever. To-day I am rich, to-morrow I shall be a millionaire; and within a year I shall be a man of influence. But a persistent voice will breathe in my ear the words, 'All you have gained—fortune, honour, and consideration, are at the mercy of this man. He has only to speak, and the edifice you have built with such pains will crumble to dust. To-morrow, we shall be arrayed against one another as enemies, for to-morrow the empire will be declared. You will be its determined adversary, and I its obstinate defender? What will happen? Will you come to me with this letter in your hand, and say to me: 'I forbid you to entertain such and such opinions?' or will you say, 'I command you to betray those whom you serve, and who believe in you——'"

With a quick jesture Roberjot interrupted him. "Do you realise," he asked, "that you are insulting me?"

The architect smiled grimly. "Will you tell me," he cried, "what you wish to do with this letter?"

"I keep it because I know what you are capable of. Your ambition is boundless, and nothing holds you in check; the recollection of this letter may possibly do so. You may recall it some time when you are about to attempt a similar transaction, and be restrained by it."

"Indeed! And what part do you suppose I am to play in the future? At this same time yesterday I hadn't a sou in the world."

"Be at ease; the letter will not leave my drawer."

The architect started forward so impetuously that Madame Delorge thought he was about to strike the lawyer. But no, he checked himself and said, quietly. "And this is your final decision?"

"Yes."

"And you wish me to leave you thus?"

Roberjot did not speak.

"Farewell," said M. Verdale, and taking up his hat and portfolio he walked towards the door, beyond Madame Delorge's range of view. Suddenly, however, he came back as if inspired by a new hope, and said, in a supplicating voice: "What can I do to get this letter? Shall I give twenty thousand francs to the poor—or twice that sum? Shall I found an hospital or a school? Speak!"

"I have nothing to say."

The architect tore his hair. "My friend, my school companion! shall I humiliate myself before you? Do you realize what it costs me?" Tears stood in his eyes as he spoke. "I admit my error—I confess it, and ask your pardon. In the name of your mother give me that letter."

The lawyer was moved, and Madame Delorge saw that he was inclined to yield, although he repeated his refusal. But the architect could no longer control himself. He leaped at the lawyer and seized him by the throat, crying: "The letter! give me the letter!—where is it? Answer me at once—or by the God that made me, you are a dead man!"

Fortunately Roberjot had not lost his self-possession. He shook off his adversary and rushed into the parlour, where the general's widow stood in dismay.

"Wretch!" cried the architect, "you shall not escape me!" And seizing a poniard which served as a paper-knife, he darted after the lawyer. But he found himself face to face with Madame Delorge. His terror was so great that he stood transfixed, shaking from head to foot. At the same moment, the servant who had heard the noise, hurried into the room. The architect looked wildly around him, and, throwing down his dagger, cried: "I'm lost! I'm lost!" and then fled like a madman.

The servant hastened to the assistance of his master, who had fallen on to a chair. So furious had been Verdale's grasp that the lawyer was fairly choking, and it was some time before he recovered complete consciousness. His first thought and look were then for Madame Delorge who, pale with emotion, stood close by his side. "Your courage has saved my life, madame," he said, and with his foot he pushed aside the weapon dropped by the architect.

"I will summon the police!" exclaimed the servant, but his master instantly forbade him to take any such step. "Moreover," he said, "if you wish to please me, you will not breathe a word of what has happened to any human being."

"But if that man comes back again," urged the servant.

"He will not come back again, you need not be disturbed," said the lawyer, with a faint smile. "He will send, however, for he has left behind him all that he holds most dear." And, so saying, he showed Madame Delorge the portfolio stuffed full of bank-notes. "Poor Verdale," he resumed, "as soon as he is himself again he will be terribly anxious."

But Madame Delorge did not smile. "Have you not been a little hard, sir—a little pitiless?"

"I! can you ask me such a question?"

"I most involuntarily heard the whole conversation, and I am sorry for the poor man. He has unquestionably been very guilty—but he repents."

"You don't know him!" interrupted the lawyer. "He will do the same thing to-morrow under similar circumstances. You thought him desperate. He was only angry at finding himself in my power—for I hold him with a firm grasp. These are the rascals who blackmail honest men. But this time the case will be reversed; for an honest man will blackmail a rascal in the interests of justice."

Madame Delorge shook her head. "No matter," she said; "the wisest course would have been to return the letter to him."

"And to let him do the same thing again?" asked the lawyer. "No, no," he continued, "it is with this pretty system that honest men are perpetually deceived; it will continue to be so until they make up their minds to punish the criminals themselves whenever they catch them in the act. I begin to feel sorry that I did not have Verdale arrested; it was a miserable weakness that restrained me. I was afraid of losing my money. I had a vague hope that if I waited patiently, I should get it again. You have no comprehension of that fellow. He has found his path easy to tread, and he will mount rapidly now. Before ten years have elapsed I expect to see him on the topmost rung of the social ladder—minister of public works, perhaps—and pocketing millions. He will hate me like death, and I ought to hold on to his letter, if only from motives of ordinary prudence."

But Madame Delorge did not seem convinced; and Roberjot added, after

a brief silence: "My strongest reason for resisting this rascal's entreaties was on your account. Verdale is the friend of your enemies, and—I am willing to wager my life—he has been the lover of the Baroness d'Eljensen, and is still the confidant of Coutanceau and De Combelaine."

Madame Delorge colored, and was about to speak, when a ring at the bell resounded through the house.

"Can that be Verdale back again?" muttered the lawyer.

But at that moment his servant came in with a card, saying that a gentleman wished to see him for a moment on urgent business. M. Roberjot read the card aloud: "Dr. Buiron, President of the Sanitary Commission for the City of Paris."

"Dr. Buiron!" cried Madame Delorge. "He is the man who first gave me the idea that my husband had been assassinated, and then contradicted it."

"And you see, madame, that this contradiction has won him an official post." The lawyer then addressing his servant, said: "Show the gentleman into my study." He entered it himself, but left the door so that Madame Delorge could both see and hear the doctor. He had not changed, save that his stiffness and importance was increased. He bowed gravely, and in a pompous tone, began: "I am Monsieur Verdale's friend."

M. Roberjot's lips parted to say, "I am very sorry for you," but he restrained himself and uttered a simple—"ah!"

"He has sent me," continued the physician, "to ask you for a portfolio he left here by accident."

"And which contains a large sum of money?"

"Precisely, three hundred and sixty-two thousand francs in bank-notes and securities."

The doctor must have had a good conscience not to quiver—and he did not—under the look which the lawyer gave him, as he replied, "I am ready to hand you this portfolio and the money it contains, but I must have a receipt from you in return."

The doctor bowed acquiescence, and after verifying the contents of the portfolio, he gave a receipt in due form, and went off.

"There goes another no better than the first," said the lawyer, returning to Madame Delorge, who received him with great reserve and no little embarrassment. She had begun to realize the extent of M. Roberjot's interest in her, and so it was with great haste that she laid the object of her visit before him, and told him of the pension with which she had been threatened. But the lawyer could discover no way in which she could avoid this crowning insult.

"There is but one means," he said, "and that is doubtful. My election is almost certain. I can threaten Monsieur de Maumussy that if he persists I will inform the Chamber of the whole matter. But even then would any good come of it?"

Madame Delorge felt greatly discouraged when she left M. Roberjot. "And this," she said, "is the only man who can aid me. He is honorable and thoroughly good. And yet I cannot go to him, for I clearly see that he loves me."

XVIII.

HOWEVER, the widow's energy was too great to be daunted by any unforeseen obstacle. "I must learn to do without Monsieur Roberjot's assistance," she said to herself; "but my husband's murder will be none the less surely avenged."

This was now her dominant idea. She well knew that when the mind is always on the stretch, directed toward one end, its natural strength is quadrupled, and the weakest are gifted with a giant's strength. "We shall be compelled to wait for years!" Ducoudray had said to her. "I could wait for centuries," had been Madame Delorge's reply.

Her first care in moving from Passy to her new home, had been to arrange the general's study just as it had been at the villa. Furniture, hangings, curtains, all were the same, and to see the open desk, the cards, and half-finished letter, just as the general had left them, one would have thought him on the point of returning. One thing alone was different, and this was a matter that astonished the poor woman's few visitors. Across the general's portrait hung a sword, the one he had worn on the night of his death. It hung just as it had been brought to her, in its mud bespattered scabbard, sealed as it had been by the commissary of police at Passy. Not a day passed but what Madame Delorge showed it to her son, saying that it would be his right some day to break that seal, and that there hung the weapon he must use to avenge his father's murder. At each meal, whether there were guests or not, the general's chair was placed at the table, and his place set. At first M. Ducoudray's appetite had been taken away by what he considered a very lugubrious proceeding, but he had at last grown accustomed to the empty chair, which he said to himself was like an empty grave between himself and the widow.

Apart from these details never was a sorrow so unostentatiously displayed. The people residing in the same house, realized as they saw the widow looking so pale and cold, and surrounded by her children, that some great grief had befallen her; but they knew nothing of her story. They could elicit nothing from the faithful attendant Krauss, and the servant girl had been recently engaged, and could have told nothing even if she had been so inclined.

Madame Delorge had, moreover, adopted a style of life, the simplicity and economy of which were apparent to all lookers on—and they found little to gratify their curiosity. She rose early, and with her young servant put the rooms in order and prepared breakfast. Later in the day she took her seat near the general's desk and mended linen and clothes, whilst superintending the studies of her children. Twice a day Krauss escorted the two boys to school and home again. They were rarely heard in the house—and indeed their application to their studies was so great that Madame Delorge was frequently obliged to speak peremptorily to tear them from their books. Sunday alone changed the peaceful routine of their life, for Jean Cornevin—M. Ducoudray's adopted son—then came to pass the day with them; and, if the weather was fine, the old gentleman took the three boys into the country. He had grown accustomed to Jean's turbulence, of which he had once complained to M. Roberjot, and he now talked a great deal of the lad's vivacity and cleverness, of his skill with his pencil, and so on, declaring that the day would come when the boy would make his mark in the world as an artist. Sometimes Ducoudray induced Madame Delorge to be of the party; and then,

as the restaurants in the neighbourhood of Paris are beyond narrow purses, Krauss followed them, carrying a large basket full of provisions which they partook of seated on the grass.

Worthy M. Ducoudray had given his friend's widow one of those proofs of affection which are worth volumes of protestations. He had moved. For her sake he had abandoned Passy. He, the selfish egotist, had given up his pretty villa, the house which he had built to suit himself, his tastes and habits, and where everything which could render life easy and agreeable was to be found. One fine morning, without giving a hint of his intentions to anyone, he had established himself on the third floor of a house in the Rue Chaptal. He was by no means as comfortable as at Passy. But he lived only a few yards from Madame Delorge, and could pay her two visits every day. Without him the widow would certainly have felt inexpressibly lonely. All her husband's friends had been scattered by the *coup d'état*, exiled, reduced to flight, or living in the country. Of all the people she had been in the habit of seeing, she now only met two or three at rare intervals.

M. Roberjot came occasionally. Despite her wish to show him her gratitude for his kindness, she had received him in a way to make him understand that the hope he cherished could never be realized. On a par with M. Ducoudray, Madame Delorge's most frequent companion, was Madame Cornevin. By the advice of her benefactress, the groom's wife had left Montmartre and established herself in the Rue Pigale with her three daughters, Clarisse, Eulalie, and Louise. Her rent, of course, was very much larger than before. She paid four hundred francs per annum, which seemed enormous to her; but Madame Delorge had traced out a plan which rendered this expenditure indispensable. Madame Cornevin had been a very skilful seamstress before her marriage, and since her husband's disappearance she had placed herself under a fashionable dressmaker. There she recalled her previous skill, learned certain details of the trade, and obtained an idea of the fashions. "And when you are sure of yourself," said Madame Delorge, "you will take work to do at home, and your three daughters will sew with you. Monsieur Ducoudray and myself will find customers for you, and when your husband comes back his surprise will be great to find his wife at the head of a large establishment."

M. Ducoudray approved of this plan, and devoted considerable time and no small amount of money to searching for the lost man, who was the only witness of the death of General Delorge. A most difficult task it was—more difficult and more perilous than he had imagined. To hunt up a person whom you have no trace of is difficult enough when you can act openly, use the newspapers and the subtle army of European police. What must it be, then, when you have to act alone, when you are obliged to shroud each step in mystery, and act in deadly fear of the Rue de Jerusalem! And this was precisely Ducoudray's position—and yet he had one great chance. Cornevin—admitting that he lived, and nothing proved this better than the behaviour of Flora Misri—must be imprisoned somewhere; for if he were free he would of course, hasten to his wife and children, whom he adored, and whom he must imagine had been reduced to frightful misery. It was clear, too, that he must be most carefully guarded, as otherwise he would have given signs of life by means of a letter, a note, or a word.

M. Ducoudray had his agents at work, half a dozen of those fellows whom the police are obliged to dismiss from time to time, and who afterwards resort to the "private inquiry" business. Each week the worthy man drew several bank notes from his pocket merely to hear the words, "We are on the

track." Then he would rub his hands, without remembering how many times he had laughed at this old phrase. These proceedings were the habitual subject of his conversation with Madame Delorge, except when Madame Cornevin was present—for it was considered advisable that the poor woman should not be kept in suspense by hearing of the various measures taken to find her husband. It would have only meant keeping her wound for ever open.

Madame Cornevin, on her side, however, was also at work. Hard as it was for her, she had gone to see her sister again, and implored her to use her influence with M. de Combelaine. But at the first words Flora Misri had flown into a violent rage. "I admit," she said, "that Victor is all powerful. He has obtained a tobacco shop for my mother, and a place for my father, where he has nothing to do. But Victor would be very stupid to serve people who only wish to injure him. What are you doing this very day? You are spending your whole time with the wife of that general whom Victor killed in a duel—a mad woman, who would set the world on fire for the sake of injuring us! What are you two plotting, with the aid of that old fellow who never leaves you? Do you think we know **no** thing of your performances?"

This interview, on being reported to Madame Delorge, gave her a great deal to think of, "De Combelaine and Madame Misri have penetrated your secret," she said to her old friend Ducoudray; "they have heard of your investigations."

"It is impossible," he said, "for I have never opened my lips to a human being." He determined, however, to take counsel of M. Roberjot.

"You are deceived," said the lawyer, instantly. "The men whom you are paying are employed by De Combelaine also. Spies who don't work for both sides would not be spies. Remember what I say."

The good man was thunderstruck, but convinced. "I will dismiss them this very evening!" he cried, going off in high dudgeon at the thought he had been so fooled.

Nothing annoyed M. Roberjot more than these awkward attempts on Ducoudray's part, for he, too, was trying to find Laurent Cornevin. The fact that he was a member of the opposition had placed him in relation with a large number of voluntary exiles, and with many who were proscribed. He had interested them in the fate of the poor groom, by explaining to them the importance of his testimony, and he had strong hopes of ascertaining what he wanted to know through them.

Meantime, however, the government, which so many prophets had declared would collapse before the end of the month, seemed to be stronger than ever. The newspapers were curbed and silent, so were the deputies; not a discordant voice had troubled the flow of blessings and flattery poured upon the prince-president. His journey through the departments, arranged by an able manager, proved one long ovation, and on returning to Paris, he walked under a triumphal arch, while a fashionable barber displayed a transparency with the inscription, "*Ave Cesar.*" Soon indeed the Senate hailed the prince as emperor, and a *plebiscite* consecrated the empire.

The reign of Napoleon III. began. He formed a court after the model of his uncle's. Courtiers eager for places, crowded around him. M. de Combelaine received a post of responsibility; De Maumussy scattered money to the winds, Madame d'Eljonsen rented a palace while waiting to build; M. Verdale became one of the official architects, and Dr. Buiron one of the physicians attached to the court.

"Where will they stop!" cried M. Ducoudray in dismay.

But Madame Delorge was very calm.

"The higher they climb," she answered, "the greater their fall will be. God is just. Patience!"

But, recognized by all the powers of Europe, called "cousin and brother" by the King of Prussia and "good friend" by the Emperor of Russia, Louis Napoleon had reason to believe that the throne of December was strongly built, and that he might dream in peace of founding a dynasty. One morning, in January, 1853, M. Ducoudray appeared rather earlier than usual in Madame Delorge's drawing-room with a newspaper in his hand. "Well!" he cried, "it is all settled; we are to have a superb wedding! The emperor is to be married." It was true, for at this same hour all Paris was discussing the manifesto which Louis Napoleon had issued, and which began: "I yield to the wish so often manifested by my country, and announce my marriage——"

"And whom does he marry?" asked Madame Delorge.

"A young Spaniard," was the reply, "Mademoiselle Eugénie de Montijo, Comtesse de Téba."

Mademoiselle de Montijo was not unknown to the Parisians, for during the presidency the attention of the *habitués* of the opera had often been turned to a box, in which sat a woman of mature age and ungracious countenance, and a young girl who, despite the smallest of eyes, was none the less exceedingly beautiful. The two ladies were the Countess de Montijo and her daughter. It was very soon noticed that their names always figured on the list of guests at all the presidential *fêtes*, either at Compiègne or at Fontainebleau. The chroniclers of the court never ceased to sing the merits and graces of the young Spaniard, lauding the abundance of her fair hair and the whiteness of her complexion. Considerable anxiety was felt, if not expressed respecting the queen of the presidential *fêtes*, and at last public curiosity was excited to such a degree that crowds gathered before any shop she was known to be in, and to escape notice she gave up attending the opera. Her position at court was uncertain enough, however, for many people, including those who had every reason to wish to penetrate their master's secrets, to believe that amorganatic marriage had been contracted between herself and the emperor. The official announcement of the wedding, accordingly amazed the Parisians, and, notwithstanding the many excellent reasons alleged in the manifesto, the news was coldly received.

Many people regarded the marriage as so extraordinary that they explained it as an act of pique on the emperor's part. They related how Louis Napoleon, in search of a wife, had sent ambassadors to Germany—that inexhaustible nursery for marriageable princesses—where several powers had been applied to, but not one found willing to accept his overtures. It was said that he had in vain asked for the hand of the daughter of Prince Wasa, son of Charles XIII. of Sweden, and that a princess of Hohenzollern had also been refused him.

"This may all be true," said M. Ducoudray; "but all the same, I don't see why an emperor can't, like any simple citizen, marry the woman he likes best."

This opinion, reasonable as it may seem, was by no means that of the emperor's family. There were rumours of violent scenes, and it was said the Princess Mathilde had thrown herself at her cousin's feet imploring him, in the name of the most sacred interests of his family, not to contract such an alliance. However, this repugnance and these objections, if they really

existed, did not prevent the Princess Mathilde from carrying the bride's train, when the wedding day came.

Paris was much excited over the bride's *trousseau*. A certain lace dress caused an immense amount of gossip—and the Dangeaus of the new *régime* sighed that there was not time to modify the somewhat superannuated setting of the crown diamonds. The city of Paris voted six hundred thousand francs for the presentation of a necklace to the new empress, but Mademoiselle de Montijo wrote to the prefect to ask him to devote this sum to charity. Finally, on the 20th of January, 1853, the "civil" wedding took place at the Tuileries. The grand master of the ceremonies went with two court carriages for the imperial *fiancée*. The grand chamberlain, attended by the principal officers of the court, waited at the foot of the staircase of the Pavilion of Flora, to lead her into the private drawing-room where the emperor, Prince Jérôme and other members of his family, the cardinals, ambassadors, and ministers-plenipotentiary then in Paris were assembled. Napoleon III. wore the uniform of a general, with the Order of the Golden Fleece, while on her side the future empress wore a robe of point d'Alençon over a white satin skirt, while round her throat was the necklace ordered by the city of Paris, and which the emperor had purchased and presented to her. At nine o'clock the grand master of the ceremonies, who had received his orders from the emperor, led the way to the Salle des Maréchaux, where the civil wedding was to take place. It proved a tedious ceremony, so many persons had to sign their names!

But, at last, when no one else advanced to take up the pen the cortege moved on to the Salle de Spectacle, where the performers from the Opera House were waiting to execute a cantata, the words of which had been written by Méry. whilst Auber had composed the music:—

"A notre impératrice aux doux climats choisie,
Chantez avec des voix qui sachent nous ravir,
Les airs que redira l'écho d'Andalousie
Aux collines du Gage et du Guadalquivir.

"Espagne bien-aimée,
Ou le ciel est vermeil,
C'est toi qui l'as formée
D'un rayon de soleil!"

On the following day, January, 30th, an enormous crowd thronged the streets and gathered in the neighbourhood of Notre Dame, where the religious ceremony of marriage was to take place. A little before noon the gates of the Tuileries opened to allow of the egress of a couple of carriages, which old Parisians recognized as having seen at the coronation of Napoleon I. and the baptism of the King of Rome. The emperor and empress were in the first vehicle and Prince Napoleon and Prince Jérôme in the second one. Salutes were fired when the imperial pair returned from the ceremony, and showed themselves on the grand balcony of the Tuileries, and that evening, when dinner was over, a wedding cantata, composed by Madame Mélanie Waldor, was sung by the performers of the Opéra Comique, attired in Spanish costumes.

"Célestes concerts,
Douce harmonie,
Glissez dans les airs :
Chantez la grace unie
Au génie,
Chantez Eugénie
Et les amours
Durant toujours."

It was M. Ducoudray who acquainted Madame Delorge with all these particulars. A Parisian to the marrow of his bones, the good man prided himself on knowing everything that took place. Whenever five or six hundred open-mouthed spectators gathered together, one was sure to see him in the first row. It was thus that for fifty years he had witnessed every public event in France. He had seen the entrance of the allies in 1814, and the return from Elba the next year; he had seen Louis XVIII. and Charles X., Louis Philippe and the Republic of 1848. This was why, when he looked on the procession of Napoleon III. and the new empress, he said to himself: "Pshaw! This will end like all the rest."

During this marriage festival he was not so much struck by the grave and solemn air of M. de Combelaïne and the Viscount de Maumussy as they drove by in their carriages, as by the lack of enthusiasm shown by the populace. The scene-shifters of the ovation, the prompters and stage managers had all performed their tasks, no doubt, for the crowd was immense, and the railway lines had brought thousands of provincials to Paris—provincials who crushed and hustled the Parisians on the streets and boulevards; but this crowd was utterly unmoved—and, in fact, if there was any emotion at all, it was astonishment mingled with fear. Here and there judiciously scattered along the line of the procession were groups chosen to utter shouts of welcome and acclamations, but they aroused no echo. These official applauders awakened no enthusiasm.

In addition to the ordered poems, there were others of a very different flavour. It is when the liberty of the press is most restricted that anonymous pamphlets, shameful placards, and unworthy calumnies, are most widely circulated. What would have made the subject of an article couched in guarded language, then becomes the theme of a song which literally respects nothing. The article would have been forgotten in twenty-four hours, but the song lingers in memory and flies on the wings of some popular melody to the farthest limits of France, penetrating even to the most secluded villages. Mademoiselle de Montijo's early youth had not been without a dash of romance and a spice of adventure, and thus it offered a broad field for calumny and misrepresentation. Her mother, liking movement, change, and travel, life at watering-places, *fêtes*, and theatrical performances, had for several years dragged her from place to place—to London, Paris, and Pau, and through Germany. Parisians are prejudiced, and provincial Frenchmen even more so—and they cannot accept the free manners of foreign girls. They could not deny the beauty of the emperor's wife, but they insisted on its being marred by defects. Her warmest adherents called her good and kind, but far from clever; firm, but headstrong; simple, but coquettish; bigoted, rather than religious; *dévoté*, in fact, after the unreasoning fashion of a woman of her nation. "She recalls Marie-Antoinette, whom she professes to adore," said some of those dangerous friends whose praise conceals a treachery—intentional or otherwise. On the other hand, people of sense waited before they made up their minds—but they waited with anxiety, knowing the fatal influence which the example of a young and beautiful sovereign must exercise over the manners and morals of her time.

The new empress's position was a most difficult one in a court which dated from yesterday. She was surrounded by enemies, snares and ambushes; she found herself among people who were so astonished to see her where she was that they could hardly look at her without a laugh. To pass so abruptly from a roving life to the inexorable obligations of a throne

is something of a trial to a young woman. To find herself all at once the centre of observation, to be always *en scène*, to speak to everyone about everything, to occupy herself with fashions and politics, to show herself serious and frivolous, to be a woman of the world and a woman of heart, to keep the secret of her impressions, her sympathies and likings, and surmount her aversions, is indeed a formidable task. The Empress Eugénie did not succeed. If her courtiers told her she was popular, they deceived her—she never was. In vain did she multiply her benevolent works, her charitable institutions; she never touched the heart of the people. Sceptical and mocking France only respects the solemn. The French only understand a queen moving about in brocade and train, with a majestic step, and wearing a golden-jewelled crown, and they were astonished to see the empress in a short ruffled skirt, with high-heeled boots, and a pretty fresh hat, such as all the women about her wore on their heads. "Her simplicity is admirable," cried her partisans.

"No dignity!" grumbled the others.

It may here be remarked that the husbands whose wives adopted this admirable simplicity found it very costly. They discovered that all these pretty little dresses of inexpensive materials trimmed and scalloped, flounced and laced, ended by reason of their number, in being ten times dearer than the richer toilettes of other times. However, husbands were told that this was the fashion, and what could they say in reply? They grumbled at first, and then they became accustomed to it—their wives must do like other women of course. Thus the dressmakers had a glorious harvest, and one of them a "man milliner," gave himself such airs of importance, that one was reminded of the mantuamaker who, in the days of Marie Antoinette, so proudly exclaimed: "Her majesty and I have been at work together!"

Never had such extravagance been known—families were first ruined, and then corrupted—for no one chose to be eclipsed. Every frog swelled out in hopes of equalling the ox. Many of them burst. Enormous fortunes were made, and how? no one knew, but this sudden luxury aroused strange suspicions. When Combelaine rolled past in his brougham, drawn by a pair of magnificent horses—Combelaine, whom all Paris had seen in shoes down at heel—when Maumussy, once driven by his creditors from the boulevard, now shone forth as a gorgeous vision, and Madame d'Eljonsen, now the Princess d'Eljonsen, astonished all Paris by the magnificence of her *fêtes*—folks involuntarily clapped their hands on their pockets and said: "Where the deuce do these people get all their money?"

Matters, indeed, came to such a pass, that the official *Moniteur* was compelled to deny certain infamous statements which were circulated—reports spread on the Bourse and elsewhere respecting certain financial operations that high functionaries were accused of dabbling in. And, meantime, the price of everything went up, and money seemed to decrease in value. Worthy M. Ducoudray, who had been considered wealthy, began to think he had made a great mistake in retiring from business with so little. "If this goes on!" he sometimes said, "I shall end by not having enough to buy dry bread."

XIX.

"But it will not last—there is no need for alarm!" said various political prophets, in tones of calm confidence. It is true that it would have been quite impossible for them to say on what they founded their certainty. During these first years of the empire the most preposterous tales were circulated. At every turning you met people who said to you mysteriously, "You have heard the news, I presume. The empire won't last another month. The money's running low—the next instalment of interest on the National Debt will not be paid!"

However, Madame Delorge was not the sort of person to be moved by these puerilities; and if M. Ducoudray was inclined to argue her into credulity, she had M. Roberjot to hold her firm, for he was in a better position than almost anyone else to judge of the situation and the march of events. He had been elected and had taken his seat as a deputy. Bitter opponent as he was of the empire, he had not yet reached the point when it is necessary to wear those spectacles which shorten the vision. So he shook his head sadly as he said: "The empire will last for years, and if a war should chance to come, and a successful one, the opposition will be well nigh powerless."

M. Roberjot, like all men of sense, realized that war was the very essence of the empire. No doubt, Napoleon III. had said at Bordeaux: "The empire is peace." But it was clear that this was a mere saying—one of those promises that there is no risk in uttering, and which one can afterwards keep or break as one pleases. It was in the past that the real sentiments of the emperor were to be looked for—in his proclamations at Boulogne and Strasbourg, and still more in his replies before the Chamber of Peers during his trial. There, speaking to his judges, but addressing France, he had exclaimed: "I represent a principle, a cause, and a defeat. The principle is the sovereignty of the people, the cause is that of the empire, the defeat, Waterloo. The principle you have admitted, the cause you have served, the defeat you burn to avenge."

"And Napoleon III. will avenge it," said his partisans, boastfully, "and in exchange for the sterile liberties which he takes from France, he will give her the prestige of military glory."

Public opinion was therefore well prepared when it became known that France was going to war with Russia. England was this time our ally; her soldiers were to fight side by side with ours. Paris was all astir, but not with doubt or anxiety. We could only be conquerors. And, in truth, the Second Empire soon had a victory to chronicle—one gained by a man of the *coup d'état*, the Marshal de Saint-Arnaud. He was happy in dying soon afterwards with a flag for his winding sheet. But French impatience needed more than this victory of the Alma, and so Paris welcomed as certain, as incontestable, a despatch which had been brought, it was said, by a Cossack, and which announced the fall of Sebastopol. It was, indeed, chronicled by the official journal, whereupon stock rose, and Paris illuminated; but the next day it was understood that the Cossack was a financial *canard*, and that Sebastopol stood as firm as a rock. However, beyond causing large sums of money to change hands this false report had no evil consequences. French impatience only advanced events. After an heroic resistance, Sebastopol fell into our power, and following almost immediately on this glorious news

came the intelligence that the Emperor of Russia was at the point of death, that a congress would unite at Paris, and that peace would be signed against the desires of England.

Whilst the negotiations were pending, an event took place of great importance to the imperial family, one which filled all those, who owed their fortunes to the empire, with joy. It was officially announced that the empress was in an interesting condition, and on the 15th of March, 1856, the President of the Corps Législatif informed his colleagues that her majesty was at that moment suffering the pangs of childbirth. The most contradictory reports were at once circulated. It was said that the empress was very ill, that the accoucheur of the English queen, who had arrived in the night, despaired of her life. Others declared that the child—a girl—was dying. The truth was that, after considerable suffering, the empress had been delivered of a boy, at about three o'clock in the afternoon.

"Thus is the dynasty perpetuated!" said the imperial journals, and, in fact, everything smiled on the emperor, and the empire was at the height of its power. On the day when the plenipotentiaries came in full uniform to the Tuileries to present the treaty of Paris, they had signed, Napoleon III. appeared to be the arbiter of Europe.

"Why do you talk to me of Providence and divine justice?" said M. Ducoudray, that evening, to Madame Delorge, who had need of all her strength and hope in these days. If she had considered her enemies as beyond her reach on the morrow of the *coup d'état*, what was she to think now, when their fortune, allied to that of the empire, seemed imperishable.

After years of incessant investigation, the fate of Laurent Cornevin was still shrouded in mystery, and Roberjot himself said: "We have been misled by Flora Misri's words. Poor Laurent must have been murdered long since."

This was also the conviction of Cornevin's wife, who, after long hoping against hope, now put on her bills "The Widow Cornevin," for she had her bills now. The advice given by Madame Delorge had brought her happiness and prosperity. Her small establishment had succeeded to a degree that surpassed all expectations. Hardly had she set up in business for herself than customers of the best class came to her so rapidly that she was obliged to take two assistants, in addition to her daughters, and then four more. Soon, moreover, she had to employ a forewoman, for she had as much as she could do to receive customers and take their measures and try on their dresses. Then the rooms in the Rue Pigale were found to be too small, and, after much hesitation, she yielded to the solicitations of Madame Delorge and M. Ducoudray, and took another apartment in the Chaussée d'Antin, at an enormous rental. It was the rent which had caused her to hesitate, for like all persons who have known much trouble, she distrusted prosperity, regarding all the favours of fortune as so many snares. "Suppose I should be unable to pay this rent!" she said to her friends. "Why not be content when one is doing well?"

But M. Ducoudray would not listen to this reasoning. "Where," he asked, "would he be now if he had confined himself to that narrow shop where his parents had vegetated for fifty years, making both ends meet with infinite difficulty. No, no," he continued, "you must go on. I will come to the rescue if you need me."

And he insisted on her accepting a loan of a thousand crowns, with which to move and establish herself, for he wished that everything should be perfect in the new establishment she started, and in harmony with the

fashionable locality. So she had a reception-room, with a handsome carpet, chandelier, and mirrors. And the public did honour to her in a fashion which flattered the experience of the old merchant. In vain did Madame Cornevin raise her prices; all her former customers followed, new ones came crowding in, and she speedily became one of the fashionable dressmakers. So that on the third anniversary of her installation, when she made out her accounts on the 31st of December, she found that she had made, in the past twelve months, more than twenty thousand francs, and that when every bill was paid she would have eight thousand to invest. And yet her expenses had greatly increased, for she no longer accepted the allowance made her by Madame Delorge, but in fact insisted on paying a certain amount towards the expenses of her son Léon, who was being brought up with Raymond. She also defrayed half the amount of her son Jean's bills. She no longer allowed her daughters to sew all day, but sent them to school in the neighbourhood, where they received that practical education which is essential in France to a merchant's wife. For herself, the courageous woman spent nothing. She reproached herself even for the few francs which she paid every month to an old teacher, who, each evening after the departure of her workwomen, came to give her a lesson, for she felt the necessity of raising herself to the level of her new position. She did not wish her children to blush for her later on, and refrain from showing her letters, because they were misspelt.

She was an example of what an ordinary intelligence, backed up by a strong will, can accomplish. No one that ever saw her in her handsome *salon* receiving her noble and elegant clients would have recognised the brave and honest but somewhat coarse housekeeper of Montmartre, who could be seen twice a week going up the Rue Mercadet with her bundle of wet linen which she had just washed at the public wash-house, and which she meant to dry at her window. Her constant companionship with Madame Delorge had given her an air and manner and certain little ways which no one would have imagined her capable of. She was not out of place in the house of her protectress. She was very reserved and silent when any guests were present, and she simply appeared to be a woman of extreme timidity. But there was no prosperity capable of effacing from her memory all that she had suffered and the immense loss she had sustained. Six years after the disappearance of her husband she would turn pale and her superb black eyes would flash fire at the very sound of the Count de Combelaïne's name. "Those who pretend that Time effaces all," she said, "have never known what it is to love or to hate." To her, indeed, Time was as nothing.

One Sunday, in 1857, it was arranged she should dine at her friend's with M. Ducoudray and the children. She came in late, and so agitated that she could hardly speak. She had just met Grollet, the employé in the Elysée stables, whom MM. de Maumussy and de Combelaïne had so skillfully substituted for Laurent Cornevin. "It was in the Rue Blanche that I met him," she said, in answer to the questions of her friends. "I knew him when he turned the corner, though I had not seen him since the day when he offered me breakfast, albeit he was already meditating his frightful treason. He is a very different person now. He looks like a wealthy shopkeeper. He wears a watch-chain with links as big as finger-rings, and a shirt with diamond studs. He knew me, too. He came up to me and looked at me from head to foot with a most impudent expression. 'Upon my life!' he said, 'we are dressed like a duchess—we make silk dresses nowadays, don't we? I am delighted to see that we have found worthy

successors to poor Cornevin!’ His tone and look were so insulting that tears of anger came to my eyes. But I kept them back. I wished to know what he was doing, and I asked him several questions. Time has brought him good luck apparently, and the blood-money of my poor Laurent has increased in his hands. He left the Elysée after the *coup d’état* and started a livery stable, as he knew his business and is skilful. As he had powerful protectors his business has prospered, and he is now at the head of one of the most important establishments in Paris. Nor is this all. He is associated with an architect of fabulous wealth—a man named Verdale. They two buy land and houses where the new streets are going to be cut, and as the architect knows everything that is planned in the way of improvements, they make as much money as they like.”

Too prudent to confide to anyone the secret she had suppressed, Madame Delorge was the only person present who knew the origin of the architect’s great fortune, and she alone could wonder at that mysterious law which binds rascals together. “But is the architect after all so very wealthy?” she asked M. Roberjot at his first visit.

“My good friend Verdale,” he replied, in that tone of biting irony which made him so many enemies—“my dear and honourable classmate ought to be and is undoubtedly fabulously rich. He has put a *de* before his name already, and some fine morning he will awake a baron, and decorated. I saw his card the other day—it was ‘A. de Verdale.’”

Madame Delorge looked at her adviser in amazement. “Do you see this man nowadays?” she asked.

“He comes to see me sometimes.”

“What! in spite of that terrible letter?”

“On account of that terrible letter. He comes regularly every six months to buy it, and at each visit he offers me a little higher price than before. The last time he named 500,000 francs.” The enormity of the sum took away his companion’s breath. “Why are you so astonished?” asked the lawyer. “That is not such a very large sum for my friend. Has he not the Princess d’Eljonsen as his Egeria? She is a lady who is very subject to dreams. As soon as she has one, she sends for her architect, and when he appears she says. ‘Verdale, I saw a new street in my dreams; it run from such a point to such another, and passed by certain places.’ ‘Very well, princess,’ says my dear friend. And at once, without the smallest hesitation, he begins to buy all the estates he can get hold of on the line the princess has indicated. And he does wisely, for the street is decided on shortly afterwards. My Verdale is acute; he gets superb indemnities from the municipality, hands over a portion of the proceeds to the princess, and the thing is done.”

Madame Delorge looked at M. Roberjot with sincere admiration. We are ready to admit to our readers that there was nothing in his conduct which could be called heroic, but she had lived too long not to know that in our days such disinterestedness as he had displayed in refusing a share of Verdale’s money is rare, and that it is not every one who relinquishes an enormous sum which might have been accepted without danger, and without injuring anyone. She extended her hand. “You have done nobly, sir,” she said, “and I thank you!”

But the lawyer hardly dared touch her fingers, for he, too, had resisted the dissolving action of Time. He had renounced all hope of being loved by Madame Delorge, but he had never ceased to love her; and he had the satisfaction of seeing that events had served him better than he had dared to

hope. The cruel pecuniary cares which had embittered Madame Delorge's days, and had rendered her nights sleepless during the first months of her widowhood, had disappeared—comfort and ease had returned to her fireside, for she was no longer hampered by the annuity she allowed Madame Cornevin. Léon cost her nearly nothing, and finally two unexpected legacies had doubled her capital. The first of these had come from the father of her husband. The poor man had not long survived the death of his son, who was his pride and his joy. He had talked of living with his daughter-in-law, but when the time came for him to leave the farm where he had resided so many years, his courage failed him. He lived a few months longer, and when he died he bequeathed sixty thousand francs to his daughter-in-law. The second inheritance she received came from Mademoiselle de la Roche-cordeau, and was most unexpected, for twice a day during fifteen years the old lady had sworn that she would throw her fortune into the Loire rather than leave a farthing of it to her niece. Unfortunately for her charitable intentions she had, although a *dévot*e, so terrible a fear of death that she could never decide to make a will. "It will be time," she always said, "to call in a notary when I feel my end approaching."

She did not feel it, however; for one evening when she had dined more heavily than usual, she flew into one of those fits of anger which were not uncommon with her, and was suddenly struck down by apoplexy. She only had time to murmur, "I am dying, and Elizabeth will have everything!"

And Elizabeth did have nearly all; for, as the nearest relative, she received seven-tenths of what her aunt left, or about 150,000 francs. She accepted this money, and explained to her son her reasons for doing so. "I believe, my boy," she remarked, moreover; "that this fortune will never induce you to imitate those young men who dissipate their money and health in vulgar pleasures—nor ought it ever induce you to neglect the sacred duties you are called upon to fulfill."

These words were almost exactly the same that Madame Cornevin repeated to her son each time she found herself with him. "Remember that your father has been cowardly assassinated by wretches whose crime he had detected, and that we do not even know what has become of his body."

Perhaps M. de Combelaine and M. de Maumussy would have been surprised had they realized the change which eight years had wrought in these two women, whom they considered weak, friendless, and poor. They were no longer so. They were both nearly rich—rich enough, at all events, to pay well for their vengeance. Their children, who had been a heavy charge, were now a support. Raymond Delorge, Léon and Jean Cornevin, were nearly men—and the hour was nigh when the hopes of Madame Delorge might prove realities rather than chimeras.

Part III.

RAYMOND.

I.

It was a proud and happy day to the two mothers when they contemplated their sons, and said to each other: Our task is fulfilled, and we can wait in peace for the hour we desire. We may now delegate the struggle to our children. We may die, perhaps, but the task we have undertaken will be carried on by arms more robust than our own. Their pride and their confidence were certainly well founded. Eleven years had passed since that bloody catastrophe at the Elysée. It was now the close of 1863. Raymond and Léon were on the point of leaving the Polytechnic School, where they had studied together. They had worked hard, with that obstinate perseverance which is occasionally a characteristic of youth, and their scholastic career had proved one long success. The two names, Delorge and Cornevin, linked together year after year at prized day celebrations, at last attracted the notice of the few Parisians who knew anything of contemporary history. If that of Cornevin was new to them, that of Delorge seemed familiar. "Delorge!" they said; "where have we heard that name before? Wait a moment! Was it not that of the general whose mysterious death made so slight a stir at the time of the *coup d'état*, and who was said to have been killed in a duel by M. de Combelaïne?"

The fact is that neither Léon nor Raymond, in spite of Madame Delorge's caution, had been perfectly discreet. They had their boyish friendships, and could not avoid alluding to the past, or speaking of their present hatred, thirst for vengeance, and hopes for the future. The friends in whom they confided often repeated the dramatic story to their parents at home.

At the grand distribution of prizes, which followed the competition between the State schools in Paris, in 1859, Raymond took first honours, and his success was made the occasion for a noisy outbreak. The young fellows all rose, waved their caps, and shouted, "Bravo, Delorge! Three cheers for the son of General Delorge!" And they kept this up with such persistence, that the Minister of Public Instruction turned deadly pale. This manifestation was annoying and absurd, declared the semi-official newspaper, the *Constitutionnel*, and if we had the honour of managing the school to which young Delorge belongs, we should request this precocious disturber of the public peace, and his friends, to finish their studies elsewhere.

However, the next day, the head reporter of an opposition journal called on Madame Delorge, and begged her to tell him all she knew of the circumstances of her husband's death. "He proposed," he said, "to start an agitation which would prove useful to the cause of liberty, and very probably result in a full inquiry being made."

M. Ducoudray, who was present at this interview, was unable to hide his satisfaction, "A splendid chance!" he whispered in the widow's ears.

But she did not so regard it. It seemed to her that it would be profanation to abandon her husband's pure name to newspaper warfare. She shuddered at the idea, and implored the journalist to relinquish his plan. "No, no, sir," she said; "let the dead sleep in peace!"

After this the boys resumed their studies, and finally left the Polytechnic School with highly creditable honours. They were just twenty, but they seemed older than their years. Tall, broad-shouldered, of herculean strength, like his father, young Cornevin, with his fair skin, light hair, and calm composure, was often taken for an Englishman. Although quite capable of an act of folly, he was one of those young fellows who control themselves, and go on to the very end, imperturbably and methodically. Very different was Raymond, who was remarkably good-looking, tall and dark-haired, with pale cheeks, and flashing eyes, and all the grace and fascination of a southerner; he was endowed, too, with a voice and eloquence of language, which thrilled all who heard him. He was full of enthusiasm, capable of prodigious feats, but easily discouraged. His quick, vivacious mind conceived most brilliant projects, started them well, and managed them wisely for a time, but at the first check he lost his head. In presence of an obstacle which Léon would have struggled with and conquered, he retreated helplessly! Jean Cornevin described him well when he said: "Raymond has the courage of a hero, the nerves of a woman, and the sensibility of a child."

Jean, on his side, was totally unlike both his brother and young Delorge. He had never been a brilliant student. At seventeen indeed he threw off school-yoke, declaring that he had had enough of it, and in future should do nothing but paint and draw. Short and dark, plain, but for his eyes which flashed with wit and humour, Jean Cornevin concealed under an air of affected carelessness a very keen intelligence, remarkable ability, and unbounded ambition. Prompt to seize the ridiculous side of things, and having a pitiless tongue, he was in the habit of saying that he should make his enemies help him attain his ends.

However, great as was the diversity of these young men's temperaments and ideas, it did not prevent them from feeling the most hearty affection for one another. One tie united them—stronger even than those of relationship—a common hatred and common sorrow. They often disagreed in their discussions as to the means to be adopted to reach the goal—but the object before them was the same. They were each determined to make any sacrifice to punish the scoundrels who had robbed them of their fathers. Chivalric Delorge would cry out: "I shall fight my enemies openly, in broad daylight!" While cold, methodical Léon would say: "We must learn to watch for the propitious occasion which never fails to come to patient men."

Jean, who was at once incapable of moderation, and full of wrath, then exclaimed in his turn: "Why do you talk, Raymond, of fighting in broad daylight? Was it not in the dark that our fathers were slain? With such enemies no night is too dark, and no weapons are disloyal. I would become the boon companion of convicts, if it were necessary to achieve my purpose. And you, Léon, enrage me by preaching patience. To wait is simply to allow these fellows to enjoy their crime in peace."

He acted on these opinions with so much energy that at eighteen he was involved in that famous plot of the Bois de Bologne, the discovery of which placed thirty-seven persons in the dock, a dozen of whom were transported to Lambessa. What rendered Jean Cornevin's situation extremely unpleasant was, that when his room was searched a series of sketches were

found, called "The Panthéon of the Second Empire." They caricatured all the leading men of the times, and "their wickedness," said the Commissary of Police, in his report, "made me shudder with indignation."

However, M. Roberjot took active steps to liberate this precocious conspirator, and was successful. "You see now," said his brother to him when he was released from the Conciergerie where he had been detained for some weeks—"You see now what your mad precipitation leads you to. You are henceforth a marked man, and we, too, as your companions, may always consider ourselves under the eye of the police. And it is all the more stupid," continued Léon, "for the empire has reached its zenith, and has nothing to do but to descend."

To say this was bold, if not premature—for there were as yet but few clear-sighted people who could detect the rottenness beneath the seeming prosperity of the reign of Napoleon III. The very excess of this seeming prosperity was one great cause of ruin. For it is not in vain that brutal passions are over-stimulated—whether they be sensual appetites or a thirst for gold. Léon, being an attentive and intelligent observer, could detect the embarrassment which certain participators in the *coup d'état* were now causing the government by their cupidity. He knew that the Minister of the Interior, M. Billaud, had issued a circular, in which he alluded to certain individuals who, boasting of an influence they had never possessed, succeeded in gaining a large income by demanding a tithe from the promoters of all great enterprises. This circular, as may be imagined, had caused much talk. "Who are these certain individuals?" people asked, inquisitively.

Then the Minister of War in his turn launched a circular "to prevent the officers of the army from applying too often to the emperor for money."

"Well! well!" muttered the public, "is our ruler going to desert the army!"

The truth is, the emperor had a perception of the danger. When Ponsard brought out his comedy, "*La Bourse*,"—which pilloried Stock Exchange speculators—at the Théâtre Français, Napoleon III. wrote to him to congratulate him, at the same time begging him to bring all his talent to bear against the fatal passion of gambling. Similar congratulations were also sent to M. Oscar de Vallée, after the publication of his book, "*Les Manieurs d'Argent*," which dealt with the same subject. But what could a comedy, a book, and two imperial letters do towards curbing speculation? Many persons who speculated in stocks hardly possessed a competence. Meantime prices were steadily going up. The huge houses by which Verdale and his friends were pocketing enormous sums, occasioned a great advance in rentals, although the *Moniteur* persistently declared that the number of new houses built largely surpassed that of those which were demolished. After all, this was quite possible. But as landlords now only built palaces, divided into immense apartments, people with limited incomes did not know where to live, for they could not expend the sixth of their revenue on rent. It is true that Paris had become a sort of caravansary whither from all quarters of the globe there flocked all those who had money to spend, and those who wished to make a fortune, no matter by what means. It is certain that the theatres, ball-rooms, and restaurants were never so well filled. It is true that legions of women, with yellow hair and glaring toilettes, invaded the boulevards, driving honest housewives and mothers indoors. It is also certain that the return from the races—from those of Vincennes, for instance, with hundreds of carriages crowded with young men and women excited by champagne—furnished great amusement to the

humble denizens of the faubourgs; and Lord Holland was unquestionably right when he wrote to the *Times*: "Paris is the city where the most amusement can be obtained." However, on the other hand, as an acute observer said: "It is all very fine—but this is the road to ruin!"

Raymond Delorge and Léon Cornevin knew, by the way in which Roberjot talked, that the men who had been stripped and crushed by the *coup d'état*, were shaking themselves, raising their heads, and preparing for revenge. And yet, although the empire was execrated by very many people, numbers looked upon it as a lesser evil, and remarked: "The sword of Napoleon III. is preferable to the daggers of the sworn foes of public order and peace!" This was an allusion to the perverse utterances of the socialists, and the absurd theories revealed by certain law suits—that of the Marianne society for instance, and that of the Commune Revolutionnaire.

It is true that the rising generation, of which Raymond and the young Corvenins formed part, were irritated by the prudence of their elders. When Beranger died, a hundred thousand persons followed his funeral procession, in which the representatives of the government figured, knowing that he had been the poet of the First Empire, at a time when Liberalism and Bonapartism rhymed; knowing, too, that he had done more for the popularity of Napoleon I. with his one refrain—

"Parlez-nous de lui, grand'mère,
Grand'mère parlez-nous de lui."

than all the official panegyrists put together. Not a shout disturbed the solemn quiet of the funeral ceremony, but ten or twelve wild youths endeavoured to force the gates of the cemetery, which the police kept closed. However, they were promptly arrested. Jean Cornevin, who was attracted by the noise, as a moth is attracted by light, was among them; and his brother, with Raymond, went to see him that night at the station-house, to which he had been consigned. But they could not obtain his release, nor could all the exertions of M. Roberjot mitigate his sentence. He spent a month in prison. A little later, Cavaignac's death took place, almost unnoticed. It was on his estate of Ourne, in the Sarthe, that this worthy citizen, who had shown as much disinterestedness and dignity as any man in France, breathed his last in comparative oblivion. However, his body was brought to Paris and interred in the Montmartre Cemetery, in the same tomb as that of his brother. No funeral orations were delivered, for the government confiscated them, as it had confiscated the addresses which were to have been spoken beside the graves of Lamennais and Marrast.

It was about this time that Raymond Delorge put in execution a long cherished project. The day he was one and-twenty he summoned the two Corvenins, and in a more solemn tone than was common to him, he said: "I am about to appeal to your friendship for a very great favour, but what I say you must regard as confidential. I have made up my mind to challenge De Combelaïne, and I expect you two to be my seconds."

Léon Cornevin started. "You are mad, Raymond!" he cried.

Raymond had expected some reply of this kind. "Mad or not, this is what I shall do," was his reply.

"And if we refuse?"

Raymond shook his head sadly, but in a more determined tone than before, he rejoined: "I should regret it, but I should try and find some other friends not more devoted but less prudent than yourselves!"

They knew Raymond so thoroughly that they recognized the futility of any attempt to dissuade him.

If anything, moreover, could have affected him, it would have been the significant silence of the adventurous Jean, who was generally ready for anything.

Léon did not propose to give up the point, however. "Let us admit," he said, "that we undertake the mission you desire to intrust to us, my dear Raymond, what are we to say to Monsieur de Combelaine?"

"That he must fight with me!"

Even Jean shrugged his shoulders at this. "But on what ground?" he cried. "Why?" The colour rose to Raymond's face. "What!" he cried. "Has not this scoundrel assassinated my father?"

Léon interrupted him. "That is very true, only, as you know, he denies it. Besides, is there not a certain paper, signed and sealed, which declares De Combelaine to be innocent, and asserts that General Delorge fell in honourable combat?"

"And what does that prove?"

"Simply that De Combelaine will refuse your challenge."

"No—for he is brave—or rather, he has faith in his skill as a swordsman. No—for I hate him, and he must be tired of thinking of me and my vengeance. No—for he won't be sorry, having killed the father, to have a means of honestly getting rid of the son."

"And if he does refuse?"

"Then you can tell him that I will compel him to fight."

"And if he still refuses?"

"Then I will take the affair on my shoulders."

Léon Cornevin was about to reply, but Jean spoke first; he was very much provoked by Raymond's obstinacy. "And you say," he cried, "that I am a headstrong scatterbrain! You must have lost your senses to think for a moment that De Combelaine will follow you on to the field. It is true, that once upon a time, when he had nothing to lose, he might have done so—for a mere nothing. But now he is as wealthy as he pleases. Life has a very different aspect to him, and yet you imagine he will risk his precious skin as you propose! Pshaw! he is not quite such a fool."

It was with the resigned air of a man caught in a thunder-shower that Raymond heard these words. "I came," he said, when there was a moment's pause, "not to ask advice, but a service. Will you be my seconds or not? If you say yes, we will arrange details—if not, I will go elsewhere, and in an hour I shall have what I need."

The two brothers looked at each other. If they refused, would not Raymond turn to comparative strangers, as he threatened, and was it not far better they should act as his seconds, for indifferent persons, either from stupidity or malice, might do something absurd.

"Very well," said Jean, at last, "we will act as your seconds."

Raymond's stiffened features relaxed. "Ah! thanks," he cried, "thanks. I knew I could rely on you!"

But the warmth of his thanks did not dispel the reserve of his friends. "Don't thank us," interrupted Léon, abruptly, "for it is against our convictions that we embark in this affair. Give us your instructions. We will follow them."

At all events Raymond had succeeded, and he smiled on hearing this. "My instructions are simple enough," he replied. "I wish to fight with De Combelaine. Let him choose the weapons, hour, and place. I care for

nothing except to see him stand in front of me. You need not be troubled. Good swordsman as he may be, I am no novice, as you know, and I fancy that I shall prove a disagreeable surprise to him.

The two brothers made no further objection. As they could not avoid the affair, they cared little about the details. "Very well," they said, "we will call on your man to-morrow."

And they did so at nine o'clock in the morning.

II.

M. DE COMBELAINE resided in the Rue du Cirque, in a small, but new and most luxurious mansion, which he owed, it was said, to imperial munificence in return for certain services which are not often boasted of. There was nothing commonplace about this house, which was Verdale's architectural masterpiece. It stood at the end of a court-yard, being reached by a flight of marble steps, decorated on either side with tall faience vases. On the right and the left were the servants' quarters—the stables where eight magnificent horses ate their oats out of marble mangers—and the carriage-house full of equipages covered with green cloth.

"Upon my life!" grumbled Léon Cornevin, "the emperor lodges his friends well!"

Before the gate stood the porter, a stout man of jovial countenance, who was smoking his morning cigar, an expensive one.

"Yes, the count receives this morning," he said, in answer to the young men's inquiries. "You can go in."

They proceeded to the hall, paved with marble and resplendent with gilding, where a footman in a showy livery took their cards, and conducted them into an ante-room, where he asked them to wait. There were already three gentlemen there when our young friends entered. They were standing near a window talking, and their conversation was so interesting that they paid no attention to the new arrivals. "Well, then," asked one of the three, "do you intend to let him have the carriage?"

"How can I do otherwise?" sighed the person who was spoken to. "Am I not too far in to retreat? Do you know that he owes me fifty thousand francs?"

"The deuce he does!" interrupted the third. "Why on earth were you so mad as to let him have that amount of credit?"

"But he owes you twenty thousand!"

"That's true, but I have just come to say that he must pay me so much on account."

"He won't give you a sou."

"Then I will levy on the furniture——"

"And then——"

"Then! Why, I will obtain a judgment in my favour, and take everything—the house, the horses—and your carriages, my dear fellow!——" The others laughed; but so ominously that the speaker added: "What is there to laugh at? Perhaps you will kindly tell me?"

"Oh! certainly; my boy, you don't get up quite early enough in the morning to take in M. de Combelaïne. Don't take the trouble to do what you suggest—your stamped paper would be thrown away. Everything he has here is in some other person's name. His furniture belongs to the upholsterer—his horses are in the name of his valet——"

"But the house?"

"Is mouldy with mortgages. The emperor had barely given it to him when he raised money on it."

Jean and Léon held their breaths lest they might betray their presence, and so interrupt this instructive conversation.

"Good Heavens!" said the man who had been threatening, "are his affairs in such a state as that?"

"He is ruined—that's all!"

"And yet he made a hundred thousand francs by one single speculation a little while ago!"

"Call it a hundred and fifty thousand."

"He has two or three matters on hand to-day——"

"Excuse me; he has a dozen."

"Which will bring him as much more."

"Double as much, you may say."

"And he is ruined!"

"To that point that his servants have no wages, except what they steal. They don't suffer, however. You are a jeweller, well give a ring to his valet, and what he'll tell you will make you open your eyes, I fancy."

At any other time Jean and Léon would have shouted with laughter, so comical was the jeweller's consternation. "Is this man a gulf," he cried—"a bottomless abyss?"

"That's it, precisely."

"What does he do with all his money?"

"He spends it, of course."

"In what way? He pays for nothing."

"He gambles, my boy. Women and suppers. Bets at the races—*fêles* and journeys. Do you think that they cost nothing?"

But they checked their speech suddenly, for at this moment a valet appeared and approached Raymond's friends. "The count wishes to see you in his private room, gentlemen," he said, bowing.

M. de Combelaïne was perhaps as impoverished as his tradespeople had said; but there was no sign of it in these apartments, which displayed all the aggressive luxury typical of the Second Empire—the luxury of the *parvenu* eager to dazzle and enjoy. That was all that the two young men noticed as they passed through a preposterously decorated dining-room, and a vast reception-hall which was one mass of gilding. They were really disturbed by the thought of finding themselves face to face with their father's murderer. How their hearts beat when the servant threw open the door and announced them.

They entered the count's study, or rather smoking-room, which more than any other indicated its master's tastes and habits. There were no books, no papers lying about, but a quantity of arms of all epochs and climes—guns and swords, pieces of armour, sabres, and daggers. On the table or desk lay five or six revolvers of different systems, waiting for the count to try them and pronounce an opinion on their respective worth. Near this table M. de Combelaïne, who was attired in a gorgeous dressing-gown, sat, or rather reclined, in a huge arm-chair. He had succeeded in acquiring a new mask appropriate to the circumstances and to his new situation. And the audience who had hissed him at Brussels when he performed on the stage would never have recognized him with his hair brought down over his temples, his moustache outrageously waxed, his eyes gleaming mournfully, and every other feature impassive. He copied his master—that was all—the

master who took such pains to deaden his eyes, darken his beard, petrify his face, and prevent his lips from giving vent to aught but commonplace, expressionless words. So well, indeed, had the emperor succeeded in these efforts that the acute Italians named him Taciturn III.

When Léon and Jean Cornevin appeared, M. de Combelaine rose, and showing them chairs, exclaimed: "Be seated, gentlemen."

But they both replied at once: "We will stand, sir, if you please."

Their idea was that the count would feign not to know their names; but in this they were mistaken. "Gentlemen," he said, "at the time of the *coup d'état* a man called Laurent Cornevin disappeared. Was he a relative of yours?"

"We are his sons," answered Léon.

"Excuse my question, gentlemen. Laurent occupied a very humble position at the Elysée?"

"He was a groom."

"While you, gentlemen——"

"We," interrupted Jean, in a hoarse voice, "we ought, I am well aware, to have starved to death, and no doubt those who suppressed the father believed that hunger would soon do as much for the children; but God decided differently. We were fortunate in finding friends who made us what we are."

It was without the slightest sign of emotion that M. de Combelaine bowed. "I can well understand your feelings, gentlemen," he said, "when you speak of your father. His disappearance was one of those frightful accidents of which too many occur in times of civil disturbances."

"Oh! an accident—was it?" said Jean.

The Count did not seem to hear, but calmly continued speaking. "This was, of course," said he, "a most cruel blow to the unfortunate man's family. I suffered also, for this mysterious disappearance exposed me to the most odious suspicions, which not even a solemn decision of the judicial authorities failed to dispel entirely. My enemies dared to insinuate that Laurent Cornevin had been the witness of a crime."

Jean's brains reeled at the idea of such audacity as the count displayed. "We did not come here to ask for an account of our father's death," he interrupted.

M. de Combelaine did not wink. "It would be quite natural if you did," he blandly replied, "especially after the detestable reports which have been circulated. Were you to do so, I should reply that all the influence and credit I possess have been employed in trying to find your father. Yes, all that it is humanely possible to do I have done—uselessly, alas!—as I can show you." Léon was about to speak, but De Combelaine stopped him with a gesture, and went on. "Permit me. When I am attacked I must be allowed to defend myself. I knew the unfortunate situation of your mother. I ascertained it all from a person who is your mother's sister—your aunt, therefore—and a lady for whom I have an especial regard. I speak of Madame Flori Misri. But was it possible for me to openly aid your mother, worthy as she was? Of course not, for it would have been to give my enemies an opportunity for circulating even greater falsehoods. I told Flora to assist her sister, but Madame Cornevin rejected her help most haughtily. Was that my fault? If you doubt my good will towards your family, allow me to remind you that it was through my influence that your grandparents each obtained a lucrative position. I would also remind you

that I have secured for one of your mother's brothers a sinecure which places him above want."

Jean Cornevin could not endure another word. A succession of slaps on his cheek could not have enraged him more than this enumeration of certain relatives, all of whom he held in utter horror. "Enough!" he exclaimed in a threatening tone; "I have told you that it was not for ourselves we came here. We were sent by our intimate friend—by our brother Raymond, the son of General Delorge."

Remarkable as had been M. de Combelaïne's composure, he started now. "Ah! What does he want of me?"

"Raymond Delorge wishes to revenge his father," cried Jean; "he wishes to meet you in a duel——"

M. de Combelaïne was far too intelligent not to have looked forward to something of this kind. His features were unmoved, but his colour changed. He was evidently holding himself in check. After a moment's silence he replied: "I don't know that I blame Monsieur Raymond Delorge; I should do the same were I in his place. But I—I cannot accept the meeting he proposes."

"And yet, sir——"

"I declare that a duel between us is simply impossible," interrupted the count. "Yes, it is true I killed General Delorge, but it was in self-defence, for I loved him, and I only fought with him after I had been insulted and threatened by him; and after this horrible misfortune, after killing the father, would you have me run the risk of killing the son? No, not at any price! On the day following that deplorable duel in the Garden of the Elysée, I swore a solemn oath never to fight again, and I shall keep that oath, no matter what happens."

"That is a prudent decision when a man has a great deal to lose," muttered Léon Cornevin.

M. de Combelaïne must have also sworn that he would keep his temper, for he did not wince. "I have given you my decision, gentlemen," he said.

But Léon had something more to say. "I shall not urge you, sir," he replied, in an icy tone, "only it is my duty to warn you of the consequences of your refusal——"

"Ah!"

"Raymond is determined to obtain the satisfaction to which he considers himself entitled——"

"Sir——"

"He will stop at nothing to compel you to accede to his wishes; he will resort to violence——"

"Not a word more, sir," cried De Combelaïne, starting up. "Not a word more!" and with a convulsive gesture his hand involuntarily grasped one of the revolvers lying on the table. The Combelaïne of bygone times, the quarrelsome gambler, to whom a duel was almost an every day affair, seemed resuscitated. "You do not know the kind of man I am," he continued. "You do not know that if a human being had formerly spoken as you have just done he would not have left this room alive!"

"Do you think, then, that we ought to have left you in ignorance of our friend's intentions?" asked Léon, calmly.

De Combelaïne started forward with a terrible gesture. "Very well, then," he cried, "at the first indication of any violence from Raymond Delorge, I ——" But he stopped short, being greatly agitated.

At last, however, he mastered himself with a superhuman effort. "Nothing," he replied; "nothing!" And so saying, he laid down the revolver he held; and then, in a calmer tone, although his voice still trembled, he continued. "This affair is too grave a one for me to give a positive answer without consideration. Will Monsieur Delorge grant me twenty-four hours?"

"Most certainly."

"Then, gentlemen, give me your address. At noon—on the day after to-morrow—one of my friends will call upon you, and let you know my decision."

Feeling much disturbed, and not all pleased with themselves, the two brothers left the house, where shame was veiled with splendour. They felt they had made a great mistake in accepting this mission from Raymond, and they had only too clearly understood what De Combelaïne meant from his very first words. This man had not merely murdered General Delorge, but their own father as well, and he had instantly availed himself of their false position. Had he not at once confounded them with their mother's family, with that family, alas! the sons of which grew up for the prison of Mazas, and the daughters for Saint Lazare! Had he not taunted them with what he had done for their grandparents? Had he not boasted that their aunt, their mother's sister, Flora Misri, was his mistress? What a disgrace. And yet they had been compelled to bear all these insults spoken in a tone of quiet impudence. "The scoundrel!" cried Jean, as they passed through the gate. "I should have preferred his firing on us with the revolver he had in his hand."

Léon shook his head. "We are children," he said, "and we have been guilty of the most abject piece of folly. When a man attacks a wild beast he ought to be armed well enough to kill it. We attacked Combelaïne, and we are unarmed. This man had forgotten us—but we have recalled our existence to him, and reminded him that we may become dangerous. He won't fight—but our imprudence will cost us dear."

The two brothers well knew that Raymond was expecting them with keen anxiety, but circumstances were now so critical, and they felt themselves charged with so heavy a responsibility, that they determined to consult M. Roberjot before seeing their friend, and this in spite of the promise of secrecy which he had exacted from them. The lawyer was just taking his seat at table when they were ushered in. "Ah!" he cried, "is Master Jean in trouble again?"

Léon was greatly embarrassed, but still he accurately related the whole affair—Raymond's entreaties—their spell of waiting in the ante-room—the talk of the tradespeople—De Combelaïne's reception, his refusal and anger, and final request for twenty-four hours' delay. M. Roberjot waited till the young fellow had finished, and then angrily exclaimed, "The devil take you!" Léon, who was utterly aghast, attempted to speak; but the lawyer would not listen. "That your brother Jean should be guilty of such folly," he cried "does not surprise me; but you, Léon—a sensible fellow, a sage, a philosopher——"

"But, sir," expostulated Léon, "if we had not yielded to Raymond he would have appealed to the first person he saw——"

"But why on earth did you not tell me, gentlemen? I would have shown Raymond the folly of his conduct, and if he had persisted I should have collared him and said: 'Look here, young man, before fighting with any other person you must first fight with me.'" Roberjot was so angry

that he forgot to eat, and with his knife in one hand and his fork in the other, he gesticulated as if he had been addressing the Chamber of Deputies. "So your idea," he continued "is that, when you have a mortal enemy, and see him on the verge of an abyss, you ought to call out to him to take care?"

When Jean Cornevin, who was a rash, headstrong fellow, was guilty of an act of folly, he owned it with the best grace in the world, but Léon, cold and grave by nature, was destitute of this ingratiating quality. He did not like to seem in the wrong, and if, however, he was shown his mistake, he was all the more disposed to persist in it. "I don't see," he answered, in rather a piqued tone, "how our step can change Monsieur de Combelaïne's situation."

Roberjot shrugged his shoulders. "Since you don't see it," said he, "I will explain. For the last ten years De Combelaïne has improved the advantages he derived from the *coup d'état*. For ten years he has been receiving vast sums. He sells his influence, and that of his friends. He makes money at the Bourse out of the secrets that are confided to him, or that he surprises; and he draws at sight on the imperial purse. However, where is he to-day? Of all the millions he has handled, nothing remains but the regret that he has not had more, and a mad longing to recover them. His situation is just what it was on the eve of the 2nd of December. No, I am mistaken—it is worse; for he is ten years older; he has less courage and far more extravagant habits. His creditors harassed him then for hundreds of francs, but to-day they worry him for millions."

"Yes, but he has resources," murmured Léon.

"He had them, it is true; but he has them no longer. No, not one; they are all exhausted. He has no influence to-day, for he has abused and used it for himself, his mistresses, and the first scamps who came to him with well-lined pockets. Not one of his friends would lend him a hundred louis, and his signature is not worth a hundred sous. Do you know how the emperor would reply to his cries of distress? By ten thousand francs a year in quarterly payments! How would he live in that case, he who has never yet been able to make both ends meet. He realizes this fully well, and so he is talking of marrying."

"Of marrying?"

"And why not? You wouldn't give him your daughter if you had one—nor would I; but other people don't think as we do."

"But this man——"

"This man, my dear boy, will give his wife the title of countess, which will stand for a time, and he will open the doors of the Tuileries for her. This man, if his father-in-law is not absolutely notorious, will have him decorated—perhaps elected deputy, or possibly senator."

Jean smiled. "This lawyer believes in parliamentary functions, at all events," he thought.

But Léon did not smile. "Well, then why doesn't M. de Combelaïne marry," he asked, "if his wife's dowry would set him afloat again?"

"That is precisely what I could not find out for some time," answered Roberjot; "but I know now. He dares not——"

"Oh!"

"He dares not, because there is a certain person who has designs on him, and this person knows so many of his secrets that he dares not make an enemy of her. He cannot marry her, nor will she allow him to marry any one else."

"And who is this person?"

"Oh! you know her," answered the advocate, and, after a little hesitation, he added:—"It is Madame Flora Misri—the woman who, while De Combelaïne was throwing money out of the window, picked it up and invested it. She is a shrewd, managing woman, notwithstanding all her affected airs. She is a good accountant, and has managed affairs so well that now when the count is ruined to that degree that he hardly knows where to find twenty-five louis, Flora is wealthy, with fully a million and a half in the hands of her notary."

It was with manifest impatience—the impatience of a man whose wound is touched—that Léon listened. "In that case," he said, "I don't see what possible influence our step can have on De Combelaïne's determination."

The lawyer smiled. "Obstinate, as usual," he rejoined, and then he added, quickly: "But let us go on. Monsieur de Combelaïne is at the end of his tether. A good dowry would save him; but, as I said, he does not wish to marry Flora Misri, and she does not wish him to marry any one else. Of course he meant to do something to get himself out of the mess, and what was it? At all events he is so pressed, he cannot wait, and I believe he would have embarked on some perilous enterprise which would have settled his fate. However, you select just the very moment to call out to him, 'Look out, your enemies are watching you!' Don't you see that he will be prudent now. 'Forewarned means forearmed.'"

Léon was obstinate, but not to the extent of denying tangible evidence. "Excuse me, sir," said he, "I had not looked so far. We have been even madder than I supposed. But now what are we to do? For this is the question I came to ask."

Having finished his breakfast, Roberjot rose from table. "If I were free," he said, "I would go with you, but I have business to attend to; still, I will be with you to-morrow to receive the message from Monsieur de Combelaïne. Try to make Raymond hear reason in the meantime."

This was more easily advised than executed, for, on learning what M. de Combelaïne had said, and that his friends had consulted M. Roberjot, Raymond fell into a violent rage, declaring that it was a terrible thing not to have a friend in whom he could confide. The next day, however, when the lawyer appeared, the young fellow seemed calm, either because reflection had sobered him, or because he was more impressed by Roberjot than he wished to let it appear.

"I am punctual, I hope!" said the lawyer, gaily. "Has any one come?"

"Not yet," answered Léon. And without allowing the advocate time for a rejoinder, the young fellow drew him to an open window, and quickly whispered: "I am troubled about Raymond. I know him. He is quiet, as you see, but it is only because he is meditating some folly in case De Combelaïne persists in his refusal."

"And he will persist," answered Roberjot, "I am certain of that. But re-assure yourselves, my measures are taken. There comes our ambassador I believe."

A brougham drawn by two magnificent horses was just drawing up in front of the house. A stout man alighted, and went in; and a minute later was ushered into the presence of the friends. He was a heavily whiskered man of forty-five, altogether too well dressed, with tight-fitting pearl-gray gloves, which seemed on the point of bursting. "I am the friend of the Count de Combelaïne, gentlemen," he said, as he crossed the threshold, and I come—I come——" But the rest of his words died away on his

lips, and a sudden pallor overspread his countenance. He had seen M. Roberjot near the window. "You here?" he stammered—"you."

"Myself, dear M. Verdale," replied the lawyer, with the most ironical politeness. "I am the friend, the intimate friend, you understand, of M. Raymond Delorge, and I have come to know what Count de Combelaïne's friends have advised him to do."

Raymond, Jean, and Léon were utterly amazed. What connection was there between these two men? Some secret plainly, for the one seemed the submissive slave of the other. Verdale's gay, patronizing air had left him, and his attitude had become most humble. "We have decided," he said, with some little hesitation, "that the count ought not to accept the challenge of M. Raymond Delorge, who, we trust, will understand why this duel is an impossibility. If he should see fit to put certain threats he has made into execution, my friend the count, will have him bound over to keep the peace."

"Very well," rejoined the lawyer, coldly, "we will talk the matter over."

But hardly had Verdale retired, or, rather, fled from the spot, than Raymond's anger burst forth. "He will have me bound over to keep the peace, will he? Well, we'll see. This very evening, at the opera, I'll give him an opportunity."

Léon and Jean thought that the lawyer would give an angry answer, but not at all; he simply walked towards the door, calmly opened it, and there on the threshold, now, stood Madame Delorge.

"My mother!" stammered Raymond, considerably disconcerted.

"Yes, your mother!" said she, advancing to meet him. "Fortunately, a friend has warned her of your folly. Poor foolish boy? Don't you realize that to call M. de Combelaïne out is to acknowledge his innocence. Do men fight with cowardly assassins? To let him cross his sword with yours would be to relinquish all claim on justice. And justice must be done to us, Raymond. Your father must be avenged!"

III.

IN warning Madame Delorge, Roberjot had proved that he well understood Raymond's character. He knew that he himself would have vainly expended time and eloquence in trying to turn Raymond from a design so long cherished, a design which he had come to regard not only as excellent, but practicable. However, his mother's entreaties won from him a solemn promise to relinquish it. "You have done me a sorry favour," he said, a few days later, to Roberjot. "Before interfering, you ought to have learned something of my life. Do you know that since my father's death, never a day has passed without my mother showing me the sword, sealed in its scabbard, which hangs above my father's portrait. 'Remember, my son,' she says, 'that yours is the task and the right to avenge your father.' Do you know that now, after ten years, my father's place is daily laid at our table, and that I never take my seat without my mother's eyes turning to the empty chair, without her saying in a cold, measured tone, 'This chair will always be placed here, Raymond, until justice has been done to us!' Do you know that even my sister—even our old servant Krauss—keeps saying to me, that it is for me to punish the assassin?" Hot tears of rage stood in the unhappy young man's eyes, and it was in a stifled voice that he continued: "With this constant reference to the subject, how could my

imagination remain unexcited? Is it living to be haunted by the spectre of my assassinated father? I had found the means, as I thought, the only means—a duel—and you have prevented it. But in the name of Heaven, tell me what I am to do—for do something I must—and at once? Give me some advice? Ah! I see that you are going to say to me, as my mother said: 'Let us wait!' Wait! And for what—a miracle? Ah! I lack faith in that advice. There are no more miracles, and we shall wait until De Combelaine dies in his bed."

Raymond's despair was increased by the thought that Combelaine and his friends would regard him as a boyish boaster—who talked more than he acted. "How these people will laugh at us!" he said to Léon Cornevin. But De Combelaine did not laugh, as was proved by subsequent events.

On leaving the Polytechnic School, Raymond Delorge had entered *l'Ecole des Ponts et Chaussées*, and was a State engineer by profession. As to Léon, he loathed any employment under government, and therefore connected himself with a railway company, and as his abilities were of a high order and his knowledge very considerable, he was allowed at first to hope for, and finally promised, a situation corresponding with his deserts, and the services he had already rendered to the company. He believed himself, on the eve of obtaining this situation, when one morning the manager sent for him, and in the most embarrassed way, announced that it had been decided, in opposition to his own advice and wishes, to give the position to another candidate. The manager added that he was the more worried as the rival candidate was not clever, and——

"It is unfortunate," interrupted Léon coldly; "but there is no need of any apology."

However, notwithstanding his philosophy, Léon was in reality thunder-struck. The company's decision was all the more extraordinary as the man they had taken was not a graduate of the Polytechnic School—for which establishment railway directors usually have a great weakness. "It is perfectly incomprehensible," he said to his mother, who was more afflicted than himself by his disappointment. However, it was not long before he obtained a key to the mystery. Difficulties were incessantly thrown in his way by the people in whose employment he was, until at last it became clear that they were determined to get rid of him—or, rather, determined to annoy and worry him into forwarding his resignation. But why—why?

"My dear Cornevin," said the chief engineer one day, "you have some enemies among the directors."

"Impossible!" cried Léon.

"But it is so—and if it had not been for our manager, who has bravely stood up for you, you would long since have been grossly insulted!"

On hearing this a ray of light flashed on Léon's mind. However, before aught else, he determined to see M. Roberjot.

"Believe me," said the lawyer, "you must not show fight—your enemy is M. de Maumussy."

"I thought you told me that he and De Combelaine were at daggers drawn?"

"Yes, so they were; but Raymond's imprudent step united them again against the common enemy. Now, as your company solicits a grant, and has need of Maumussy, you must not hesitate a moment, but send in your resignation at once."

Raymond was fairly enraged when he heard of this. "Ah! Why did you not allow me to kill that venomous reptile De Combelaine?" he cried.

Three months had not elapsed since Léon's resignation, when Paris, and in fact all Europe, were startled by an attempt to murder the emperor. An Italian, Felice Orsini, accompanied by two accomplices, repaired in front of the Opera House in the Rue Lepelletier, and tried to kill Napoleon III. by throwing several explosive bombs under his carriage. The emperor escaped, but forty-seven persons were killed or wounded. Strangely enough, the police had taken no steps to prevent this attempt. We say strangely enough, inasmuch as they had been warned that a large number of exceedingly dangerous bombs had been manufactured in London. They had been warned of Orsini's departure for France, with his accomplices, and yet these men were not arrested, but were allowed to remain quietly in Paris for nearly a month. "What on earth were the police thinking of?" remarked the Parisians, when these particulars came to their knowledge; and their astonishment was not unreasonable. Canler, in his memoirs, published the following year, and at once suppressed, formally accused the police of incapacity, negligence, and something even worse. The result was that the prefect of police sent in his resignation. "The least he can do!" muttered the Parisians, who were considerably alarmed for their personal safety. However, their uneasiness took another form when they saw General Espinasse, one of the prime movers of the *coup d'état*, and whose reputation for hardness and brutality was proverbial, called to the head of affairs. "This minister of the interior, with a sabre at his side, is certainly no improvement," said one of the newspapers, for which saying it was promptly suppressed. However, the paper was right, and a few days later a law was passed which armed the government with discretionary powers. Certain people, more imperialist even than the emperor, hastened to express their gratification at this display of greater firmness on the part of the government, which they attested had been far too lenient. One of them even said in a cynical way: "Orsini has done some good; he has shown us a means of getting rid of troublesome people."

That was quite true, for the police made arrests on all sides, without discernment or investigation. It was imagined that their zeal would abate when it had been clearly established that the Orsini affair was not a national conspiracy, but the work of foreigners alone. However, such was not the case. Far from diminishing after Orsini's trial and execution, the number of arrests increased throughout France. There was simply a little more method—that was all. And once more, as in 1852, vessels loaded with suspected persons set sail for Cayenne and Lambessa. Like all liberal-minded people, Raymond Delorge and Léon Cornevin were painfully impressed by so much useless violence, and wondered how it would all end. One morning, they had just risen, when the valet of their friend M. Roberjot was ushered in. He brought a hurried note from his master, and having failed to find a cab, he had run with it all the way to the Rue Pigalle. This is what M. Roberjot wrote to Léon: "Send your brother Jean to Belgium or England on a tour. Let him start to-day rather than to-morrow, this morning rather than this evening."

"Jean is in danger!" cried Raymond, "and yet he seems to have given up dabbling in politics." But Léon shook his head. He did not speak, for he did not wish to hurt Raymond's feelings by remarking that it was no doubt M. de Comberlaine who had devised this means of getting rid of one of them. "Let us hasten and warn Jean!" added Raymond, and at once they started off.

Jean had his studio in a new building on the Boulevard de Clichy. The

concierge, who was also Jean's housekeeper, was standing at her door when the two young men reached it. "Ah! gentlemen!" she cried, "what a terrible business!" Léon's and Raymond's hearts sank within them. Had they arrived too late? "Poor Master Jean has just been arrested," continued the woman, drying her eyes with the corner of her apron. "They have just taken him away in a cab."

Raymond was as white as a sheet, and fairly staggered under the blow. However, Léon shook off his own apprehensions in his wish to comfort his friend. "Let us know all that has happened," he quietly asked.

Several shopkeepers in the neighbourhood who had witnessed the arrest, now crowded forward to listen. "Come into my room," said the woman; "we can be overheard here." And as the young men followed her, she closed the door. "This is how it was," she began; "at day-break five individuals arrived and asked for Jean Cornevin, the artist. I was going to take him his coffee that very moment. These men looked so odd that I had a great mind to say my young gentleman was in the country, when one of them threw open his coat and showed me his tricolour scarf, saying to me: 'No nonsense, now! On what floor is this fellow Cornevin's studio?' My heart leapt to my mouth, and I almost let my coffee fall on the floor. 'He lives on the fifth floor, the door on the right,' I answered. 'Good,' said the one with the scarf, who was a commissary of police, and he walked up the stairs with his men. But he did not tell me to stay behind, so I went too. Ah! if I could only have warned Master Jean! He was as unsuspecting as possible, and was painting in his studio, with his back to the door, which was open on account of the stove smoking. He was so busy that he did not even turn round on hearing the footsteps, but merely asked: 'Who's there?' 'In the name of the law I arrest you,' was the answer. 'Arrest me!' cried Master Jean, and never did I see a man so astonished. 'Why do you arrest me?' 'You will find that out soon enough,' was the answer. 'You have only to follow me now.' You know, gentlemen, how quick Master Jean is. When he heard this rough answer he turned as red as a lobster, and I thought he was going to throw his palette at the man's head. But he reflected in time, and began to dress, while the police looked into every corner and drawer. When he saw this he said with a laugh: 'If you find anything there, please show it to me, won't you?' When he was ready he asked permission to write a note to his mother, but was refused, and then they led him away. There was a vehicle outside; he got in with two of the men, and one of them on the box, and then off they went."

When the woman's story was over the two young men breathed freely, for they remembered that at the time of Jean's first arrest, he had been compromised by the papers and drawings found in his rooms. This time, however, it was clear that nothing had been discovered. "The most important point now," said Léon, "is to discover where my poor brother has been taken."

The woman began to weep. "I did my best, gentlemen," she sobbed—"I was all ears—but I couldn't catch a word. The coachman must have received his orders in advance, for he drove off without a word being said to him."

"But was nothing said to you?" asked Léon.

"No, sir, nothing, except that just as the commissary of police went out he handed me the key, and said I was responsible to master Jean's family for the safety of all the property he left in the rooms."

Léon shuddered. This precaution suggested that Jean might not soon return home.

"Oh ! Jean," murmured Raymond, "dear unfortunate friend."

But Léon was cold and calm again. "Give me that key," he said, to the *concierge*, "we will go up stairs."

At the first glance the truth of the woman's story became apparent. It was evident that Jean had been at work when the police entered, for the paint was not dry on the canvas. His brushes lay on the floor with his palette freshly set that morning, and his tubes were scattered in every direction, many of them having been crushed under the feet of the rough visitors. By the way in which the young artist's working blouse was tossed on the chair, it was easy to divine how hastily he had dressed. In short, on all sides there were traces of the efforts made by the police to discover compromising papers.

"We have not a moment to lose," said Léon ; "we must find out this very day where my brother is."

They thereupon hurried to inform Madame Delorge, who, on hearing the sad news, exclaimed : "I recognize the hand of Combelaïne in this ;" and, less generous than Léon had been, she added to her son, "And this is the result of your senseless provocation."

More exasperated even than all the others, Ducoudray on his side exclaimed : "Why does not De Combelaïne have us all arrested ?"

It was decided that it would be best to keep Madame Cornevin in ignorance of her son's arrest for a few days, for were he to be liberated at once she would be saved an immense amount of anxiety. However, this kind consideration was useless, for Jean's *concierge* had been to see Madame Cornevin, and had told her everything ; and while the friends sat deliberating as to the steps they should take the poor mother came in looking as pale as death but with flashing eyes. "Is this true?" she cried. No one dared answer. "It is true, then—the wretches have taken my son now, as they did my husband! As I came here I was nearly run over by a carriage in which I recognized M. de Combelaïne and Flora Misri, smiling and happy. Oh, my God, it is hard to doubt Thy justice!" And, crushed by grief she sank on to a sofa and burst into tears.

At that moment M. Roberjot's valet arrived with another letter from his master. "At the same time, as I sent a warning to you this morning I sent another to Jean. Alas ! I was myself warned too late, for when my messenger reached the spot Jean had already been arrested. Find out if you can where he was taken. I shall try to ascertain this on my side also."

But in vain for four days did Jean's friends besiege the doors of every jail in Paris. The only intelligence they could obtain came to Léon from an official of the Prefecture of Police, a man who was colder than the iron chain of a well and more discreet than a prison door. "Your brother is in excellent health," he said ; "this is all I can tell you to-day. Come back in a fortnight."

"That is precisely what they said to me," sighed the poor mother, "when I went there to ask for my husband. I shall never see my son again!"

However, on the fifth day after Jean's arrest one of his artist friends came with a letter he had received, and which Jean had addressed to him, fearing that a direction in the name of Cornevin would cause it to be suppressed. This is what he wrote : "I have done my best to obtain permission to write to you, and I am refused. However, a convict with whom I have been talking says that for ten francs he will get a letter posted. I would gladly give a thousand to be certain that he is speaking the truth. I have been at Marseilles since yesterday, and I have never been in better health. Having suspected when they arrested me that I was to take some charming

trip, I provided myself with linen and money—for fortunately I had some money in my rooms. I have reason to believe that this very evening I shall be sent to Guyana. Ah ! dearest mother, if I were sure that you were not weeping your precious eyes out I should be delighted with this voyage. Just think of the superb studies I can make for future pictures. Don't be distressed, dear mother ; all will come right again. I kiss you again and again."

This tender letter, which was so like Jean in its careless gaiety, calmed Madame Cornevin's grief for the time being, but did not dispel her fears. She pictured her beloved son, living among criminals and condemned to the companionship of convicts. She saw him hurried on board of a ship between a double file of soldiers. She followed him in her thoughts until her tears burst forth. "I shall never see him again!" she cried. However, on the receipt of this letter Raymond and Léon set out for Marseilles, wishing to be near their brother and friend—hoping to see him, and let him know that he was not deserted and forgotten. But they were too late. The vessel in which Jean had embarked had gone two hours. So they were told, indeed, by a young woman whom they met at the docks. She carried a child in her arms, and was sadly watching the horizon. Far off a light cloud trailed across the sky. She pointed to it and said : "That is the smoke, the smoke of the ship." Alas ! it bore away her husband, the father of her child. "What will become of me ?" she sobbed. "What will become of me and my little one ?"

Alas ! How many similar complaints rose towards the God of Justice from all parts of France in those grim days of fiendish despotism.

The newspapers were silent. Had they spoken their existence would have been compromised. General Espinasse ruled with a heavy hand, and yet the empire was in reality no stronger than before. The government began to realize that something must be done to arouse the nation from the apathy into which it had fallen ; and this something could only be war. The emperor hesitated between two pretexts which offered equal advantages—the redemption of Poland or the freedom of Italy. Italy, served by Cavour, won the day. On the 3rd of May, 1859, the emperor announced to the French nation that he was about to draw the sword in favour of the independence of the Italian people, and that he should not sheath it again until he had freed Italy to the shores of the Adriatic. Since the 1st of January, a war with Austria had been anticipated, and the excitement was very great. This war, impolitic as it was, was welcomed with enthusiasm by all classes. The regiments marched through Paris with colours flying and drums beating, and when, on the 10th of May, the emperor left the Tuileries to drive to the Lyons station, he was welcomed with such acclamations as had never before met his ears, and as he was never to hear again. This day was indeed his one solitary day of popularity throughout his reign.

But Italy was not freed to the Adriatic. After the victory of Magenta—which gave General MacMahon a marshal's baton and the title of duke, and when General Espinasse was killed—after the glorious and bloody fight of Solferino, it was suddenly discovered that the Emperors of France and of Austria, Napoleon III. and Francis Joseph, had met at Villa Franca, and had agreed on the terms of a peace which was signed. Were the promises of the imperial proclamation declaring that Italy should be freed fulfilled ? By no means. And this was why the peace enraged the Italians. Why had the emperor abandoned his plans ? Some said from fear of revolution—others, that he had yielded to the representations of the great powers, who dreaded

a universal war. At all events, both in Italy and France, the deception was cruel, and the irritation great. The return of the army was very unlike its departure. "What good has this war done us?" people asked, and they commented sharply on the blunders of the campaign, which short as it had been, had fully revealed the weakness of French military organization. The troops, it was asserted, had not been concentrated with fitting rapidity. The arrangements had been faulty in every respect. Sometimes the soldiers were literally without bread to eat; and more than once they had lacked ammunition. The generals, moreover, had not acted in unison, and patriotism had not driven rivalry from their hearts. When peace was signed Marshal Neil and Marshal Canrobert quarrelled so violently that the emperor was forced to interfere, or a duel would certainly have taken place.

However, with his extraordinary pretensions to be the arbiter of Europe, the restorer of the liberties of nations, Napoleon III. could not possibly perpetuate in France the system of repression which had followed the Orsini affair. So, on the 15th of August, 1859, there appeared in the *Moniteur*, a decree which said: "Amnesty full and entire is granted to all persons arrested in virtue of the law on Public Safety."

"Good Heavens!" cried Madame Cornevin, when Raymond told her the news; "I am going to see my boy again."

Jean was living. His health had not suffered, and during his year's absence he had contrived to write to them pretty often. After an interminable voyage he had been landed at the Devil's Island, the smallest of the Salvation Isles, and also the dreariest, as all the trees had been cut down to furnish materials for boats, and to lessen the chances of escape. "For the first time," wrote Jean to his brother, "I feel utterly discouraged when I look at the low sandy beach, swept incessantly by all the winds that blow, where there is not a tree, merely a few scanty shrubs to be seen, and where there are no other signs of civilization but such as are furnished by the various buildings, half forts and half prisons." Fortunately, however, Jean was not of a nature to be easily crushed. "It would please the persons who sent me here too much," he wrote, "and as I have no other way of annoying them, I intend to play them the very bad trick of retaining both my health and my spirits."

He kept his word, and bore up without a murmur under the rough discipline of jailors, and the constant society of criminals. He took pains to say, also, that the unhealthiness of the climate had been greatly exaggerated. "I feel my pulse every morning," he wrote, "I look at my tongue in my shaving-glass. I watch every symptom in my stomach, but all in vain: I cannot discover the smallest ailment. It took me some little time to become accustomed to the food, but I have succeeded. The governor of the island, who is a lieutenant of marines, met me yesterday, examined me from head to foot, and said, in a tone of profound surprise, 'Upon my life! I think you have grown fat.' 'Is that forbidden?' I asked; 'and if it is not, I propose to return to you stouter than when I went away.'"

"What a fellow he is!" cried M. Ducoudray, quite touched by this unconquerable cheerfulness. "I do believe that he could jest on the scaffold."

Jean's situation on the Devil's Island at last improved. For on orders received from Cayenne he was exempted from hard labour, and given a room to himself. He was a prisoner still, but the entire island was his prison—it belonged to him. He had got rid of the odious dormitory; he had a retreat to himself, where he could sit and think and build hopes for

the future. He was at last able to satisfy the aspirations for work which had tormented him for months. And as a proof of this, he wrote to his mother describing the house he lived in, and sent a sketch of it. "You see," he said, "that it is no palace. My floor is beaten earth, my roof is the cover of a huge box; but I have an iron bedstead, a chair, and an unheard-of luxury, a mosquito net, which is the envy of all beholders."

His cheerfulness could not last, however; lassitude and homesickness were taking possession of him, when an unexpected happiness probably saved his life. He had just risen one morning, when the governor of the island came in and told him that, according to orders just received, he was to be sent to Cayenne. Jean knew that this was considered very desirable, and had seen many of his companions leave with joy, but they had had some protecting influence to push them, or else possessed the art of persuasion, while he, on the contrary, knew no one, and was not of a nature to bow down and ask for favours. It was therefore with some distrust that he at first received the news. "Will that be any better?" he asked.

"Be any better," repeated the governor. "Do you not think it will be better to leave the companionship of criminals and enjoy a semi-liberty in the midst of the semi-civilization of a French colony? What a question to ask!"

"But changes don't always bring happiness," murmured Jean.

He was not long, however, in changing his opinion. The sutler at the Devil's Island had been in the habit, for some time past, of selling Jean's drawings at Cayenne. One of them had chanced to fall into the hands of the leading merchant in the colony, who, struck by the talent they displayed, had interested himself in the artist's fate. It was this worthy man who received Jean at the dock on his arrival at Cayenne, "You will come straight to my house," he said; and Jean welcomed so cordially, and treated with such unexpected hospitality, soon recovered his spirits and self-reliance. He had made many plans for the future, when, on September 28th, 1859, the proclamation of amnesty reached Cayenne.

"France! Am I then to see France again?" cried Jean, half mad with joy. And two months later to a day, he held his mother in his arms.

"All our sorrows are forgotten," she murmured, "now that I have you here once more!"

But this was not Jean's opinion. The very night of his return he took his brother and Raymond aside, "Listen, my friends," he said: "I have brought a great joy with me, I believe, from Cayenne. I have brought almost the certainty that our father is not dead!"

IV.

JEAN expected a shout of joy, but his words were received in silence. Léon and Raymond looked at him as if they thought him quite mad. "Do you know what you are saying, my dear brother?" asked Léon, gently.

"Perfectly."

"Then why have you waited until now to tell us this? Why have you not written it?"

"Because certain secrets can't be confided to a letter when one is a prisoner. All letters must be delivered open to one's jailer." And without waiting for the questions which he read in his companion's eyes, he continued, speaking rapidly, "First, I must tell how I learned what I know.

I was settled comfortably with the merchant of whom I wrote, and wanted to buy an easel. I could not find one, and then asked for a workman who could make one.

"I was sent to a man named Nantel who had been transported after the *coup d'état*, and had been long since pardoned; but instead of returning to France, he had married a young girl of the colony, and was making quite a little fortune by his ingenuity in preparing hard-wood roofing, for in Guyana wood takes the place of slates. I found him to be a man about forty, with an intelligent face, and he instantly understood what I wanted. He promised to execute the commission at once, and I gave him my name and address, so that he might bring the easel to me when finished. But instead of writing down the address in a little book he had taken from a drawer for the purpose, this worthy fellow stood looking at me with the strangest expression, 'What on earth is the matter?' I exclaimed.

"'Nothing,' he said, 'only that the name of Cornevin brings back all sorts of recollections to me.' 'Have you ever known anyone of the name?' I asked. 'Yes; a poor fellow exiled like myself in 1851.' At this reply, I felt hope leap in my heart, and I cried out: 'What was the Christian name of the man you speak of?' 'It was Laurent,' answered Nantel.

"'This was conclusive. Chance? no; Providence had led me to this man who had known my father, who had seen him since the fatal day when he was torn away from us, and who could probably tell me something which would enable me to trace him. 'I am the son of Laurent Cornevin,' I said. 'For the last ten years we have moved heaven and earth to find him, and we were finally forced to the conclusion that he was killed during the fatal month of December——' 'No, that is not so,' said Nantel, 'for I was with him at Brest, and then we were together again on the Devil's Island.' I was filled with rage at the thought that my father had been imprisoned in the same spot where I had suffered so much; and at the idea, too, that his feet had trod those rocks where I had sat and dreamed of France for so many dreary hours. But where was he now?' 'Is he dead?' I asked in a trembling voice; 'did he, with all his anxieties telling on him, succumb to the influence of the climate?' 'No,' answered Nantel, 'he tried to escape, and I have always fancied he succeeded; in fact, I subsequently saw one of his companions, who told me he got safely off.'"

Jean's excitement was affecting his listeners. For the first time for ten years a ray of light, feeble enough to be sure, but a certain one, was cast on the darkness and mystery of their past.

But Jean continued: "As you may imagine, I overwhelmed Nantel with questions, whereupon he asked me to follow him into his back shop, and said he must think the whole matter over and would tell me everything he knew. I made him put his story into writing, and he did so and signed it. And in fact here it is. So saying Jean drew from his pocket a roll of coarse paper, covered with writing in an uncultivated hand, and began to read it.

"At the request of Jean Cornevin, artist, exiled to Guyana, I, Antoine Nantel, carpenter, living at Cayenne, write all I know of the history of Laurent Cornevin, swearing at the same time to tell the truth and nothing but the truth. On the 3rd of December, 1851, I was in the Rue du Petit-Carreau, where there was a barricade, and where some fighting had been going on. I was arrested and taken to the nearest station-house. The next day I was sent to Brest. Anxiety and fatigue made me ill, and, on my arrival at Brest, the physician ordered me to the hospital. I had been there a week, when one night I was woke up by a loud noise. A man who was

insensible and covered with blood was being brought in and placed on the bed next to mine. The nurses crowded around him, and I heard one of them say, "If he revives at all I will send for the priest." But he lay unconscious all night; still when the surgeon-in-chief came and looked at him in the morning, he said he could save him. I found out later who the poor fellow was; he had been arrested the same day as myself, but, on reaching Brest, had managed to evade the vigilance of his guardians and get out on the roof of the prison. To do this required marvellous agility and strength. Unfortunately his foot slipped, and he fell from an enormous height on to the road below. His leg was broken, and he was frightfully injured about the head. All the same, however, he soon got better. But in vain did I try to enter into conversation with him; he would only answer me with a yes or a no—if he condescended to answer at all. All day long he would lie in his bed, with his eyes fixed on the ceiling, and his hands clenched. But at night it was a different thing. Then I heard him sob more than once, and mutter: 'My poor wife! my poor children!' This was all so dreadful to me that I asked the matron to change my bed. Of course I was laughed at, but my neighbour was told that he must keep quiet, as he troubled the patients near him. Thereupon the poor fellow looked at me with the saddest eyes in the world, and said, 'I am sorry to have disturbed you.' I had only three louis in the world, but I would gladly have given them to him if I hadn't asked to have my bed changed, and I said to myself, 'What a hard creature I am! Here I am without a human being to regret. No one cares where I am or how I am. And here is this poor fellow with his wife and children left behind him!' I naturally begged my neighbour's pardon—he was No. 23 and I 22—and told him he might sigh and groan as much as he pleased. But after that I never heard a sound, and this was really worse than before.

"One afternoon one of the police inspectors came into the ward. He saw No. 23 warming himself near the stove, so he went up to him and tapped him on his shoulder: 'Ah! my poor Boutin,' he said gaily, 'have you got over your gymnastics?' No. 23 did not reply. 'Are you deaf?' asked the inspector. The man did not speak, and this made the inspector get furious. 'Do you intend to answer me?' he said. 'Yes, when you call me by my right name.' The inspector shrugged his shoulders. 'The same old notion!' he said contemptuously. 'My name is not Boutin,' was the reply.

"'Ah!' said the inspector, 'I think you ought to be tired of that song. Listen to me, take my advice, and give up denying your identity. What on earth is the use of such obstinacy? You are known; you were arrested under the name of Boutin; you were sent here as Boutin, and that is the name inscribed at Brest. Boutin you are, and Boutin you will remain as long as you live.' 'Just as you say,' replied 23. But as soon as the inspector had gone, he turned towards me, and said in a low voice: 'Did you hear?'

"I was vexed, for it was clear that he distrusted me. I spoke to him no more after that, and I found it pretty hard, for we were the only two Parisians, the only two political prisoners—I may say, too, the only two honest men in that great hospital ward. The others were all convicts, and my tongue should have withered in my mouth rather than have addressed them. Time passed on. No. 23 and I were still in the hospital, but one fine morning in February the surgeon, without saying a word to us, signed our papers of dismissal, and the superintendent came in and shouted out: "Nos. 22 and 23 will leave to-day, and sleep to-night on board the transport vessel—the 'Rhône.' Pack your trunks!"

"This was a little joke, for I had been arrested in my shirt sleeves. But 23 started up pale and trembling—'Will you do me a service?' he hastily said. I naturally answered yes, whereupon he rejoined, 'Before we leave here we shall be searched, I presume——' 'I suppose so,' I replied. 'But not in the same way,' said he. 'Your search will be a mere matter of form, but I shall be examined most carefully.' 'Why this difference?' I asked. 'Because,' he answered, 'I am suspected of having about me a thing which I really possess, and which I have hitherto been fortunate enough to keep out of their clutches. Will you take care of it? Will you swear to use all your ingenuity to conceal it, and give it back to me on board the vessel?' I gave him the promise he asked, whereupon he ripped open the waist-band of his pantaloons, and drew out a letter folded into the smallest possible compass. He gave it to me, and, according to his advice, I hid it in the woollen cap I wore. As it belonged to the Administration it would not be taken from me.

"The precaution was a wise one, and No. 23's provisions were fully realized. I was nominally searched; that is, I was made to undress in one room, and go into another, where I was given some clothes belonging to the government. No. 23 was now no longer the man I had seen him—indifferent to all that was going on. His faculties were all awake. Instead of quietly obeying, he fought, so to speak, over every shred. He said his clothes were his own; that no one had any right to take them; and that he would be cut to pieces rather than give them up. In a word, he acted to perfection the part of a man who thinks he is about to lose something most precious. I was almost deceived myself, although I had the letter inside the lining of my cap. Of course he was obliged to yield. He was carried into the next room and dressed in his new clothing by force. I noticed that a man, who had much the look of having just come from the Prefecture of Police in Paris, inspected all these proceedings. That same evening we went on board the transport ship, and I gave 23 his letter. He snatched hold of it with joy, and pressed it to his breast. Then he exclaimed, 'We shall be well out at sea before the brigands will have time to examine every thread of my cast-off garments, and before they find out that they have been cheated.' Then crushing my hands in his, he continued: 'And you, my comrade, what shall I say to you? It is more than life you have given me—it is more than the life of all those who are dear to me. It is my honour you have saved by saving this scrap of paper on which a dying man traced his last words, and intrusted them to me.'

Raymond started to his feet. "Merciful God!" he exclaimed, "is it possible that my father, before he died, had time to write the name of his assassin?" And grasping his friends' hands, he continued: "Oh, friends and brothers, what don't I not owe to you? Your father was sacrificed for my mother and her children. It was because your father was bent on fulfilling the sacred trust of a dying man that he was dragged from prison to prison. O, my friends, how shall ever I recompense this sublime devotion?"

It was Jean who answered. "You owe us nothing, Raymond, but your friendship. Your mother has done everything for us, and we owe to her all that we are—we two men—and my mother and sisters——"

"Our father only did his duty," interrupted Léon, "and poor and humble as was his station, I am proud of being his son."

Jean now resumed his perusal of the manuscript. "All this," continued Nantel, "only inflamed my curiosity, but I dared not ask a question, as it seemed to me that it would be like asking him to pay me, as it were, for the

services I had rendered him by preserving this precious letter. When I say letter, I mean a square envelope, closely sealed, without any superscription, and containing only a small bit of paper. No. 23 had put it into an envelope the better to preserve it. I was very much puzzled, but taking all the precautions I had witnessed into consideration, and remembering the change of name, I made up my mind that 23 was one of the prime-movers in the resistance shown to the *coup d'état*—not one of those instigators who put other poor fellows in front and disappear themselves at the first hint of danger, but one of those who stand forward boldly and drink the wine they have drawn. I, therefore, did not treat him as an equal, but as a superior, and endeavoured to show by my respect and devotion the appreciation I had of his services. He did not notice this for some time, and then he asked what I meant. I told him of course. 'Alas! my poor fellow,' he replied, 'you are very much mistaken. I never took the smallest interest in politics, and my misfortune has nothing to do with it.' But I was not convinced. 'You are exiled on that ground?' I said. 'True,' he replied—'because that was the easiest way of getting rid of me.' 'And why did they change your name?' 'Because they wished to rob me of my identity. My name is Laurent Cornevin—and I'm a person of no importance whatever. I was a mere groom in a stable. But the greatest sometimes tremble before the lowliest.' He passed his hand slowly over his brow, and if to drive away painful thoughts, and then he added slowly: 'I have trusted all this to you, my good Nantel, because you are a worthy man and I respect you, and because, thanks to this paper which you preserved, a certain crime will be punished. But let us never speak of these things again.'

"Cornevin was a very taciturn person, and soon relapsed into his former mood—he hardly seemed to notice anything. The weather was frightful. Our vessel rolled and tipped, and I was deadly sick for a week. On the whole, we were not badly treated. Our food was the same as the sailors', with the exception of their ration of brandy. We had fresh meat occasionally, and wine. At night we were allowed a hammock. We had a good captain. He said to us the day we started: 'So long as you behave well I will grant you every privilege in my power, but at the first sign of insubordination I shall come down heavily on you.' The system was a good one, for all went smoothly. Still we suffered from want of air and exercise, for, as we only went on deck in divisions, each of us could at the most remain there a couple of hours each day. When Cornevin's turn came, he invariably seated himself on a coil of rope, and in spite of rain or sun, wind or cold, there he sat, with his eyes fixed on that side of the horizon where he supposed France to be. One day he seemed sadder than usual, and I tried to cheer him, but he shook his head. 'How can I cheer up,' said he, 'when I think of my wife and five little children. What has become of them? They were dependent on my labour, and when I was taken away they had only sixty-five francs in the house.' At another time, he looked at the water in a way that frightened me. 'What are you thinking about?' I asked. He smiled sadly. 'Don't be troubled Nantel; my life isn't my own,' he said. 'God allowed me to witness certain things, so that I might become the instrument of His justice. I have a task to fulfil—and I shall fulfil it!' These are all the confidences which Laurent Cornevin made to me, and yet I am sure he trusted me. He liked me too, for he offered me his ration of wine very often, saying: 'Drink it; you need it more than I.' He was right in saying so, for all his sufferings had in no degree injured his magnificent physique. One day, when I expressed my

amazement at his superb health, he said that a fixed idea was a splendid preservative, and that he was not sick, because he could not be.

"I was overjoyed when, one day, a sailor told me that in less than twenty-four hours we should sight land, and he was right, for the next morning, when I was on deck, I espied afar off a light-brownish mist, which I was told was Guyana. Finally, there rose two high arid rocks, and then the various islands. At last we cast anchor off the Salvation Isles. Everyone on board the ship was in ecstasies, except Laurent, who sat as usual on his coil of rope, apparently oblivious of everything. Seeing this, I shook his arm. 'Look!' I cried. 'We have arrived!' But he shrugged his shoulders. 'What is there to rejoice at?' he asked.

"True enough, and I recognized the justice of his question when we landed. Nothing was ready to receive us. A single block-house and a store-house stood there. We slept under boughs, like so many savages in the woods, and shivered in the white fog, which is regarded as so unhealthy that it is called the Europeans' winding-sheet. As to food we were not as well off as on board the 'Rhône.' Twice each week a steamer brought us provisions from Cayenne. After answering to the roll-call, night and morning, we were at liberty to wander at will over the island, snare the birds, fish and catch turtles. As my trade had been that of a carpenter, I built a little hut which I shared with my comrade Laurent, in whom I had begun to notice a certain change. He was still taciturn, but a look of resolution had succeeded his earlier seeming resignation. He now talked of his family without a break in his voice, or a tear in his eye. 'By this time,' he said, 'their fate is decided; either God has taken pity on them, or He has forgotten them; in that case they have long since died.'

"I was the more astonished at this change in Laurent as the vigilance with which he was guarded had increased rather than relaxed. He was persistently called Boutin, and he as persistently replied that Boutin was not his name. He was never allowed to make one of the gang which was employed on the vessels which occasionally put into port. Once, however, he succeeded in speaking to a sailor, and asked him to post a letter for him at Cayenne. But this letter was intercepted. It only contained, so Laurent afterwards told me, the words "I am living," and was addressed to a widow in Paris, and signed with his real name. He was taken before the governor, condemned to solitary confinement for fifteen days, with half rations. When I saw him at the end of the fortnight, he said to me: 'I don't blame the governor. He thinks me a dangerous man, for he has been told so. He is a soldier and obeys orders. But the others!'

"Who these others were he did not tell me, but after this his habits changed. Instead of working with me on little articles which we sent to Cayenne for sale, and the proceeds of which naturally improved our table, Laurent spent all his days in the woods, and did not appear until the roll call at six. One night he said to me: 'Nantel, my resolution is taken. I have prepared everything, and to-morrow I make my escape!' I shuddered, for I was well acquainted with the difficulties of the passage past the Devil's Island, where a small boat was sure to be swamped even on the calmest days. But supposing he got past this point safely—what then? He had neither arms or provisions. 'You can't do it!' I cried. 'I shall try, at all events,' was his cool reply; 'and more than that, I shall succeed. God, who uses me for His ends, will protect me!'

"It was by no means the first time that Cornevin had expressed the conviction of having been chosen by Providence for an especial mission.

I, however, had always turned the subject when he said such things, as I did not like the glitter in his eye. I really feared that his reason would be shattered by the trials he had endured. But that night I determined to be frank, and I told him that he took his fancies for realities, and I reminded him of the many attempts at escape from this island, not one of which had succeeded. 'Comrade,' he said, 'I thank you. I know very well that I can only hope to escape by a miracle, but cease to oppose me—the miracle will be performed. A voice tells me so!' I honestly believed that my companion had gone mad. Alas! he was not the first whose reason had fled. Others among us also spoke of the voices they heard. I was tempted to go to the governor, but I concluded that treason under any excuse, or with any motive, is still treason. I decided that if I could not restrain Laurent unaided, he must be allowed to accomplish his destiny. He then told me that he had built a boat, and he intended to row out to sea, where he hoped to find some vessel which would take him on board. The next day he showed me what he called his boat. Good heavens, it was a mere raft, and so imperfectly put together, that the first wave would tear it asunder! Two long branches flattened at the end were the oars.

"And is it in that thing," I asked, 'that you intend to brave the waves?' On hearing this he lost patience. 'Enough!' he cried, 'I won't hear one word more either of advice or remonstrance.'

"However, I could not let him start like this. I set to work in the woods, and in a week I built a boat which would stand in fair weather. The next Sunday all was ready, and what a Sunday it was! for my companion was to leave on the morrow. Each time I looked at him tears filled my eyes, but he was gay enough, anxious only on one score—respecting that letter which he cherished with so much care. He put it into a small vial and hung it round his neck. The night came—we both answered to the roll call, and as usual retired to our hut. We waited there awhile, and then Cornevin said: 'Come—it is time.' We started off. Certain precautions were necessary, for we were not allowed to roam over the island at night time. It was about eleven o'clock, and the night was very dark. The tide was going out among the rocks, and, as usual, the water seemed very agitated. Heavy yellow waves broke with a great noise on the pebbly beach, but on looking out further I saw it was as smooth as a billiard table. 'Laurent,' I said, 'think well—it is not yet too late.' 'Help me to launch the boat,' was his reply. It was a difficult thing to do, but we succeeded nevertheless, and my fragile craft at last floated beside a rock. Laurent pressed my hands. 'As long as I live,' he said, 'I shall remember what I owe to you.' 'Poor fellow,' I thought, 'you will not have many hours to remember this.'

"However, he pushed off his boat. Both the wind and the current were in his favour. For more than an hour I stood there, and then I climbed a high rock. The moon had risen, the sea glittered like a mirror of silver, and half a league away I saw a tiny black spot—it was Cornevin's boat. 'He will row all night,' I thought, 'unless submerged by some wave, and in the morning his strength will have gone. Then his provisions will be exhausted, and he will die of hunger!' I had just said this when, all at once, I saw a light cloud, as it were, on the horizon, a cloud which seemed to be approaching the island. A hope was aroused in my breast. If it were a ship! I concentrated all my attention on this cloud, and soon doubt became impossible. It was really a ship under full sail coming directly towards the island. I had laughed at Laurent. I had thought his faith in

Providence utter madness, and now I believed. It seemed to me that I was a witness of one of those startling miracles which sometimes confound the reason and crush the pride of man. Was it not a miracle, indeed, to see a ship in these waters? for during my year of sojourn on the island the only ones I had seen were those belonging to the French government and connected with the penal colonies. I shuddered! What if this vessel were one of these! Laurent, in that case, would be brought back in irons and then sent to Cayenne. My next agony was, had my comrade seen this ship which I distinguished so clearly from the height at which I stood. I looked at the tiny black speck which, as well as I could judge, was now half way between the island and the vessel. Laurent had hoisted his sail, for the appearance of the boat had changed, and it looked like a gigantic sea-bird. However, I dared wait no longer, for I was half a league from camp, and day was near at hand. Fortunately I got back safely.

“‘Boutin! Boutin! Boutin!’ read the guard at the roll call. Naturally there was no reply, whereupon the guard turned to me. ‘Where is your comrade?’ he asked. I replied that I did not know; that he had left me the night before, and I had not seen him since. As nothing more was said to me just then, I got away as soon as I could, and returned to the rock from which I had watched Laurent’s departure. I had been away three hours, and now it was in vain that I scanned the horizon—I could see nothing. I returned to the camp hardly expecting to hear anything of my comrade. But that is precisely what did happen. The steamboat running from Cayenne to the island was unloading; I was sent down to assist, and I heard one of the sailors say that he had seen an American brig off the island that morning. She had been to Demerara for repairs after a terrible gale. ‘So,’ I said to myself, ‘Laurent is free at last, and can use that letter which cost him so dear.’ I was so happy at this idea that I was perfectly indifferent to the threats uttered that night by the guard, who was furious when no Boutin appeared at roll call. It was on the following afternoon that the truth became known. I was just eating my dinner when one of the guards burst in like a bombshell, and in a furious tone commanded me to go with him to the governor. I obeyed, but I affected great astonishment at being summoned in this way. ‘Just wait a bit,’ was the guard’s grim rejoinder. ‘You will soon be polished off!’

“The governor’s face was anything but reassuring, and I saw at once that there was trouble in store for me. ‘Where is Boutin?’ he cried. As I persisted in saying that I did not know, he declared he would make me know, and ordered two soldiers to march me down to the shore where Laurent’s boat lay. It had been washed up by the waves, and two soldiers had discovered it. My heart sank within me! So my poor comrade had been drowned after all. But I was comforted presently on finding that the boat was in good condition. The sail and provisions alone were missing. Was not this a proof that Laurent had been taken on board of the American brig? ‘Now,’ said the governor sternly, ‘will you continue to deny the part you have played in Boutin’s escape?’ I did continue to deny it, of course, but as I was the only carpenter on the island my work betrayed me. I was sent to prison, and kept there a long time. Fortunately carpenters were in demand at Cayenne, and at last I was sent there. The next year I married. I heard nothing of Laurent Cornevin for a long time; but one evening, while I was in a *café* at Cayenne, I heard an American sailor relate how once in passing the Salvation Island his ship had picked up a French convict. I took this sailor aside, and discovered that the convict in question

must have been Laurent Cornevin, and that he had worked his passage to Talcahuana in Chili on board the brig."

V.

JEAN CORNEVIN now rolled up Nantel's manuscript and looked at his brother and Raymond. "Well?" he asked.

They did not answer. They had expected something more than this abrupt termination, and they were disappointed. "Is that all?" inquired Raymond.

"All, Nantel has not written one word more," said Jean, and in answer to his companions' repeated questions, he added impatiently: "Can't you see that this narrative has cost Nantel a prodigious effort. Don't you think that if he had known any more I should have elicited it from him. For two whole months I teased Nantel with questions, hoping that in his narrative he had forgotten some petty detail that would be of value to me. No, he knows nothing more than is written there." So saying, Jean rose. "I consider you basely ungrateful," he resumed, "that instead of rejoicing at these unexpected revelations, you merely deplore the absence of more. Look at this. Let us see where we are. Our suspicions have become certainties; we were convinced that the general was assassinated in the presence of a witness. Now we are sure of it. Yesterday, Léon, you thought your father was dead—now you know that if he bears any name it is that of Boutin. We know he did not die at Cayenne, but that in 1853 he landed in safety at a small town in Chili, having a letter written by General Delorge in his possession."

But Léon here spoke: "I do not wish to differ with you, dear brother, but the very story which to you proves our father's existence, to me proves his death. Let me explain, and you will see I am right. In 1853, our father was free and in Chili; that was ten years ago. Why have we not heard a word from him since? If you admit that during these ten years he has forgotten us—my mother and ourselves—his plans of vengeance, and France, I will say, 'Yes, it is possible he still lives! But not otherwise.'"

However, Jean was not convinced. "I see what you mean," he answered, "but I have faith, the faith that Nantel had when he saw the vessel approach from the distant horizon to rescue our father from his frail boat. I know he is living. God has spared his life for His own good purposes."

Who was right? Raymond himself could not decide, but he leaned toward Jean's belief. However, the young men decided to say nothing to their mothers until they had seen M. Roberjot, who listened attentively to Nantel's narrative. He said little, but it was plain that he adopted Jean's view. He proposed to take certain steps at once; the first being to apply to the police for information respecting Boutin. A week later he received the following note from the Prefecture de Police: "Boutin (Louis), thirty-four years of age, born in Paris. Seized with arms in his hands behind a barricade in the Rue du Petit-Carreau, on the 4th of December, 1851, and sent to the Conciergerie. Sent to Brest on the 21st of December, under the custody of Inspector Brichant. Reached Brest on the 22nd. Admitted to the hospital the same day, having been injured in attempting an escape. Sailed on board the transport vessel 'Rhône' to Guyana. Died on the 29th of January, 1853, while attempting his escape on a boat of his own construction. Body not found."

This note was absolute proof of the accuracy of Nantel's narrative. If it had been equally easy to prove that Boutin and Cornevin were one and the same, the Count de Combelaïne might well have trembled. Two other points, moreover, were made clear by this note: first, that the government had no idea that Cornevin had escaped with his life, and that M. de Combelaïne fancied himself forever rid of the witness of his crime. However, these results were not enough for Jean, whereupon Léon proposed to write to the French Consul at the small Chilian town, where Cornevin had landed. "Take care," said Jean. "Remember that a single inconsiderate step may arouse the suspicions of our enemies, and put them on the track. Remember that if our father be living this will expose him to new dangers." On another occasion he remarked, "Well, I will consent to believe in my father's death if you will have it so; but in that case, where is the letter Nantel spoke of? Don't you feel certain he must have confided it to some one to deliver to us?"

Jean's manner was at the same time so mysterious, that Léon remarked, "I am quite convinced, that my brother is about to do something very rash."

Indeed a week later Jean announced that he meant to start for Chili at once. "You are mad!" said Léon.

"Not quite," answered the young painter; "only I should become so if I were to remain here in this state of uncertainty."

It was useless to argue with Jean, as Léon well knew; but he thought he had one irrefutable objection. "And the money?" he asked.

"I have a thousand crowns."

"And do you think of going to Chili with that trifle?"

"No, I intend to ask you and Raymond for more."

"And suppose we refuse?"

Jean shrugged his shoulders. "In that case I shall take the MSS. to Madame Delorge and our mother, and I am quite sure that when they know what I want to do they will give me money enough."

This was so perfectly true that Léon and Raymond felt conquered. "Do as you choose," they said; and as their united purses did not supply the requisite amount, they applied to M. Ducoudray, who enthusiastically exclaimed; "Jean is right, and if I were not so old I would go too." And he agreed to obtain Madame Cornevin's consent.

"It would be a great comfort," he said to her, carelessly, "if Jean took a notion to travel. There is a great deal of political excitement just now, and if he stays in Paris, reckless as he is, he will be in trouble by the end of the month."

The very next day the poor mother urged her son—the son from whom she had been so long separated—to go away again, and at the end of the week all preparations being completed, Léon and Raymond saw him embark at Bordeaux for Valparaiso. M. Roberjot had duly bidden him good-bye, saying: "Come back soon, Jean, and bring proofs with you. It seems to me that I already feel the first puffs of the tempest which will sweep away the empire, and the Maumussys and the Combelaïnes, the Princesses d'Eljonsen, the Verdales, and all the Drs. Buiron, into the bargain."

Had many persons heard the honourable deputy talk in this fashion they would have shrugged their shoulders and said, "Nonsense!" and apparently with reason, for never had the empire seemed stronger. The political machine wound up on the 2nd of December, continued to work with apparent smoothness. Paris was still the city of *fêtes* and pleasure. Gold

flowed freely; and those on the summit of the social ladder vied in squandering money in the most foolish and reckless way. The luxury was simply prodigious. Any foreigner who on a fair spring afternoon drove through the Bois de Boulogne returned home bewildered and dazzled by the magnificence of the display, just like the simple Switzer who wrote: "Paris is the city of millionaires! All the inhabitants have horses and carriages."

However, war with Mexico had just been declared, and there were sundry misgivings despite the pompous phrases with which the government tried to justify and exalt this strange expedition. If a questioning voice was raised in the chamber of deputies, it was quickly silenced. The newspapers had a great deal to say, but dared not say it. And yet the public knew—or thought they knew—the real motives of this adventurous campaign. They talked of imprudent speculations and wholesale robbery, and the Republicans declared that the real aim of the Mexican war was to insure the payment of an usurious interest to influential personages who had purchased claims on the Mexican government for a mere song. In fact, the French army was to do bailiffs' work—and for the advantage of whom? The names of several of the creditors were given, and even the amount of their probable profits. It was affirmed that M. de Maumussy would have a share of the cake, as well as De Combelaine and the Princess d'Eljonsen; and those who heard these tales marvelled at the corruption of the times. If this expedition to Mexico had proved a success, it would have been a vastly different matter: for France pardons everything to success. But, undertaken by folks who knew nothing of the country they proposed conquering, nor of the men with whom they would have to fight, this fatal war could only lead to disaster. The very beginning was a check, soon repaired, it is true, and gloriously avenged—but afterwards? The Archduke Maximilian of Austria was sent to Mexico, and proclaimed emperor against the will of the Mexicans. The small French army became lost in an immense stretch of country, and suddenly France learned that, acting on the pressure of the United States, the Imperial government had decided to evacuate Mexico. Then came the retreat and embarkation of the French army under the command of Bazaine. The dénouement of the drama was not far off. Having vainly begged the Emperor Napoleon for men and money, the Empress Charlotte of Mexico went mad; and then one morning the news came of Maximilian's execution.

The shame of having been powerless to prevent this execution was all that the empire derived from the Mexican war. As to what it cost France in men and treasure no one knew until much later. "But it was a glorious idea—the greatest of the whole reign," repeated certain officious persons over and over again. It may have been so; only while this beautiful idea was being put into execution, Prussia had gained the battle of Sadowa and crushed Austria. True enough, it was said that the empire had been promised a compensation by Count von Bismark. "The new-born power of Prussia should not alarm us—quite the contrary," said one of the orators of the day in the chamber of deputies.

"Quite the contrary, is very well said," wrote M. Roberjot to Raymond Delorge. "However, I am not an optimist, and I think I see the beginning of the end."

VI.

RAYMOND Delorge and Léon Cornevin had left Paris, shortly after Jean's departure for Valparaiso, M. Roberjot having said to them :

"Go without uneasiness—I will constitute myself your faithful correspondent, and if anything occurs which renders your presence here necessary, I will telegraph to you."

And he kept his word, no small merit, with a man as frightfully busy as himself. He wrote daily to the exiles, as he called them, and exiles was the word, for it was not of their own free will that they left Paris. But life is full of inexorable necessities, and when a man's without a fortune he is compelled to submit to the exigencies of a profession to earn his bread and butter. This was why Léon Cornevin had started in search of a new field of labour, directly after resigning his position at the railway company. He was by no means exacting—his ability was remarkable—he was highly recommended, and yet, such was the crush in Paris, that every corner was filled. He could find literally nothing in the city or its environs. Tired of struggling, he at last resigned himself to accepting a position on a Spanish railroad, and started for Madrid.

As for Raymond, he had been sent to Tours by the Minister of Public Works to assist in studying the means of preventing the periodical inundations of the Loire. And the young man was delighted by the change. He was for the first time freed from the fixed idea which had filled his life since boyhood. He seemed to see unknown horizons opening wide before him. He realized, so to speak, that he was young, and that he was only twenty-seven, and that he had had no youth.

The inspector whom he was to assist proved to be the best of men. He was the Baron de Boursonne, the last survivor of one of the oldest and best known families in Poitou. It is true that nothing annoyed him more than to hear himself addressed by his title. "I am Father Boursonne," he used to grunt in a tone which was by no means paternal. A former pupil of the Polytechnic School, M. de Boursonne, had once espoused the Saint Simon doctrine, and had spent a handsome fortune in experimenting in that direction. However, while his former associates had all succeeded in finding honourable and lucrative posts, the baron had been kept in the background and given subordinate positions, far below his abilities. Still his heart had not been soured or hardened by this injustice, but his temper had become exceedingly irritable. Folks said of him : "A good man, no doubt! An honest man, too—but an oddity!"

The truth is that he took infinite pains to appear precisely the contrary of what he really was. An aristocrat in the best sense of the word, with a high-cultured, sensitive mind, he affected the language of a peasant and the most absolute cynicism. One of his greatest delights was to wear the shabbiest garments in the world as if to furnish a contrast to his noble, refined countenance. Raymond, when he first called upon the inspector, was dressed to pay a morning visit, and the old gentleman looked at him for a moment in astonishment. "Well! well! Monsieur Delorge," he said, "you have a good tailor—but isn't it a great bore to be dressed like that?" And as Raymond, disturbed by this astounding reception, did not know what to say, M. de Boursonne continued : "Come on! We will go and see our workmen." Then without giving Raymond time to change his clothes he

dragged him to the banks of the Loire, and seemed to take especial delight in seeing the young man bespattered with mud from head to foot, and wet up to his knees.

Despite this malicious pleasantry, however, and several other mild practical jokes in the same style, Raymond had not been with the baron a week without detecting the real man under the rough envelope and recognizing how worthy he was of esteem and affection. On his side, M. de Boursonne conceived a very hearty liking for the young engineer, and chose him as his chief assistant in his studies. The plan which M. de Boursonne had formed, in view of curbing the inundations of the Loire, soon compelled him to leave Tours and establish himself in the centre of operations. He at first chose Saumur for his headquarters. And Saumur, with its wooded heights, its old château, its islands, white houses, and spreading fields was very charming.

Unfortunately, on the very day when the baron arrived in search of a suitable lodging, he was walking along with his nose in the air, when he was nearly knocked over by a party of pupils from the cavalry school, who dashed madly down the street. "There are too many soldiers here for me," he said to Raymond. "We will go somewhere else!"

They next tried Rosiers, and remained there. Not because this little town is one of the prettiest mirrored in the blue waters of the Loire, nor because the hills of Saint Mathurin have irresistible attractions, but because the inn of the Rising Sun proved scrupulously clean; because Bérú, the innkeeper, gave a pretty room to the baron and a comfortable one to Raymond; because this same innkeeper also turned out to be a wonderful cook, and had some excellent wine in his cellar. And, moreover, it was the end of September, there were plenty of partridges in the vicinity of Rosiers, and M. de Boursonne, despite his years and near-sightedness, was an unwearying sportsman.

It was a Saturday when the worthy baron reached Rosiers and installed himself at the Rising Sun, with his suite of draughtsmen and engineers.

A week later he and Raymond could truly assert that they were as well acquainted with the environs as any man in the provinces. They had seen all there was to see, from the Roman camp at Chênehutte, the castle-keep at Trêves, and the church of Cunault, to the Celtic remains at Gennes and the Fountain of Avort; from the terraced gardens sloping down to the Loire to the high perched Manor of Ville Haudry, once so magnificent, but so neglected since the count's marriage with Mademoiselle Rupair.* After all this sightseeing, M. de Boursonne and Raymond went to their work—which was work indeed, for it consisted in tracing out a vast system of dikes, reservoirs and canals which it was calculated would make the hitherto disastrous inundations of the Loire a positive benefit to the dwellers on the banks.

The baron and Raymond generally breakfasted early, and went off for the day with a basket of provisions prepared by Bérú himself on the previous evening. At sunset they turned their faces homeward, and dined together at the Rising Sun, in a little private room, the windows of which looked out on the highroad. Then the baron lighted his pipe. Raymond smoked a cigar, and they sat talking and playing cards until ten o'clock. Sometimes an old artillery officer, who also usually dined at the inn, joined them. He,

* See "The Gilded Clique," by Emile Gaboriau.

too, had been a pupil at the Polytechnic School, and his good qualities and advanced opinions had won M. de Boursonne's admiration.

A few days elapsed thus in peaceful monotony, when one morning, while the baron and Raymond were waiting for Bérú to bring in breakfast, they heard a great clatter of horses' hoofs over the highway. M. de Boursonne, who was curiosity itself, looked out of the window. "The deuce!" he cried. "Come here, Delorge."

Raymond complied. A dozen or fifteen horses were passing along the road, all of them superbly caprisoned, and led by servants in long English vests and high boots.

"What's all this cavalry?" asked the baron of Master Bérú, who at this moment came in with a dish in either hand. "Is there to be a circus at Rosiers?"

But the innkeeper was quite shocked by the suggestion, and he answered in a dignified way: "I fancy, sir, that you did not notice the coronet on the saddle-cloths."

"A coronet! Ah! I beg the coronet's pardon. Delorge, look, your eyes are better than mine." And he put up his glasses. "Yes, to be sure," he said; "Bérú is right. But what does that prove?"

The innkeeper bowed with considerable solemnity, and replied: "It proves that the horses belong to the duchess."

The old baron started as if a wasp had stung him, and, in a tone of comical surprise, exclaimed: "Good heavens! Can it be that we have a duchess in this neighbourhood, and Bérú never told us of it?"

"Sir," replied the innkeeper, "she does not usually live in the country."

"Ah! I breathe once more."

"She resides in Paris, but she generally spends a month here at this season."

"And what is the name of your duchess?"

Bérú straightened himself up. "Maillefert—Duchess de Maillefert," he replied.

"Then," said Raymond, "she is the owner of that château I saw on the road from Gennes to Trèves."

"Precisely."

The baron had taken his seat at table, and while he went on eating he said: "We hear of the duchess, but tell us something of the Duke—What the deuce is the name?"

"Maillefert, your honour, Maillefert."

"Who is the duke?"

"He is dead, your honour."

M. de Boursonne poured out a glass of wine, "*De Profundis!*" he murmured. And when he had drained his glass: "You hear, Delorge," he said, "this duchess is a widow. The next question is, has she a heart to conquer? Come, Bérú, tell us some more. Is she young?"

"Young! That depends."

"What do you mean by that oracular reply?"

"I mean to say, your honour, that when you see her passing by, superbly dressed, no one would think her more than thirty—only—"

"Well?"

"She must be double that age, for she has children who are as old as that."

"Indeed," cried the baron. Any one who did not know him would have thought he was highly interested. "Children!" he exclaimed; "grown up children! And how many has she?"

"Two. A son, Monsieur Philippe, who has been called the duke ever since his father's death; a handsome young fellow though somewhat pale. He rides about on horseback and drinks like a fish. And then there is one daughter. Mademoiselle Simone."

"Simone!" repeated the old gentleman. "That is a very nice name."

"Do you think so? Well, if I had a daughter I shouldn't call her Simone; but, then, there is no accounting for tastes. They have a mania in that family for giving that name to the girls, in memory of one of their grandfathers, who was quite famous, at least so I've heard. Still the name seems the loveliest in the world when you know the young lady who bears it——"

"Do you hear that, Delorge?" said the baron.

The interruption apparently annoyed Bérú. "Well," he added, "she may not be any prettier than other girls, but she's better than any of them. And if you go into some of the houses of the poor round about here, sir, you could hear all about her."

"Indeed! Then Mademoiselle Simone is very charitable when she is here for the month?"

"Mademoiselle Simone never goes away, sir."

"Bless my soul!"

"It's odd, sir, isn't it? But they pretend that mother and daughter don't get on well together. So Mademoiselle Simone lives at Maillefert all the year round, while her mother and brother live in Paris. It can't be very gay for a girl of twenty to live alone in this big deserted château with no other society than her English governess, who is thinner and stiffer than a stick, as yellow as butter, with tearful eyes, and a nose as red as my own."

M. de Boursonne had now just finished breakfasting. He rose to his feet, and as he lighted his pipe he said: "All the same, I should have liked a circus. It would have been an amusement."

Bérú smiled discreetly. "I think," he said, "that the duchess's arrival will prove more amusing to you gentlemen than any troop of mountebanks could have been."

"And how, pray?"

"Because she likes excitement. She never comes alone, but always has a number of stylish young men and ladies with her. And they hunt and fish, dine and sup, dance and have fireworks—and, in short, keep up one continual *fête* by night and day."

At this moment M. de Boursonne caught sight of his servant standing at the door with a basket of provisions. "Tell me some more this evening," he said to Bérú; and addressing Raymond, he added: "It is time for us to set to work, my boy." Whereupon he left the room, leaving the innkeeper in a high state of displeasure at being so unmercifully cut short in his gossip.

As the old engineer strode along the embankment fringing the Loire, he muttered: "What singular people we French are! Now, here is this Bérú, who prates of equality, and who, as soon as the duchess arrives, falls into a fever of adoration. He is a democrat, he says, but he would give his inn and all his saucepans to hear himself called Monsieur de Bérú." The baron paused for a word of approbation from Raymond, but the young fellow was occupied with very different thoughts. So he continued: "This family is a good one—there is none higher than the Mailleferts. It is one of the very few remaining in France, it is of the pure old stock; it is connected with the Sairmeuses, the Montmorencys, and the Champdoces."

At this point he stopped to draw a long breath; and then he exclaimed—"Raymond!" The young man started.

"Upon my word," resumed the baron, "you look as if you had fallen from the skies! What on earth are you thinking of?"

"Of nothing, sir, I'm afraid."

"Ah! Suppose I told you that you were thinking of Mademoiselle Simone de Maillefert?"

Raymond coloured like a school-girl. "Indeed, sir," he replied, "why on earth should I think of a girl I never saw, and whom in all probability I never shall see."

"I don't know about that," answered the baron. "Besides, when I was your age, the few words we have heard from Bérú would have kindled my imagination respecting her. What a strange sort of life she must lead, thus deserted by her family!"

"Pshaw!"

"Why 'pshaw?' I should like to see you alone in that huge *château* *tele-à-tête* with the English governess. How is it that she isn't married? She ought to be. Unless I am greatly mistaken, these people are as rich as Jews. They have an estate in the Loire Inférieure—a piece of property which is larger than the Republic of Saint Marino, and the Principality of Monaco united. The island of Noirmoutiers was once theirs. What on earth is the reason why this little girl isn't married!" He walked on a few steps in silence, and then exclaimed: "Perhaps she is deformed—or she may be horribly ugly, humpbacked, lame, bald, or deaf. Who knows? No; that fool of a Bérú would have said so."

"Besides," said Raymond, quietly, "a young girl, as rich as you describe is never ugly."

The old engineer burst out laughing. "True, my boy—true! Well, then go ahead and weave your romance. You have all the accessories—the rivers, the hills, the woods, and an old castle. What a lovely framework for a love adventure! Do you have dreams? Well, let me tell you, here is a new sleeping beauty waiting for prince Charming to come and wake her."

"Unfortunately I am no prince," said Raymond, laughing.

"True, my dear fellow. You have that immense advantage, and I congratulate you heartily on your lowly station. You are young, and a pupil of the Polytechnic School."

"And poor."

"For the present, yes. But you have a future before you. The family that would not open its arms to you would be difficult to suit. It seems to me that Madame de Maillefert cares precious little for her daughter."

Raymond shook his head. "It is an outrageous thing," he answered, "to leave her here in this way."

"It is very strange, certainly. I really feel quite desirous of making the acquaintance of this Duchess de Maillefert. But you, Delorge, must know her."

"I! Why should I know her?"

"You are a Parisian."

"In one sense I am, of course; but——"

"In a sense which must have caused you to meet the duchess in society."

However, they had now reached the scene of their operations, and in his usual hasty fashion the baron gave his orders, and put his men to work.

For Raymond and the old engineer not to know anything of the Duchess

de Maillefert even by reputation, showed that they neither of them went into society, and were quite ignorant of what occurred in the highest circles of the Second Empire. They must have never read the newspapers—which were full of her name. The duchess was an intimate friend of the Viscountess de Bois d'Ardon, and the young Duchess de Maumussy—she was a rival of the Baroness Trigault and of the celebrated Sarah Brandon, Countess de la Ville-Haudry; she was in fact the leader of the seven or eight women who enjoyed the enviable and precious privilege of filling the pages of society journals. There was not a gilded youth in Paris who did not know her from having seen her in the Bois de Boulogne—at the races, and the opera, at the seaside, and at Baden-Baden—at skating clubs, and shooting matches—everywhere, in short, where there was noise, display and a crowd. She spent, it was said, more than a million francs per annum. Van Klopen, the celebrated man milliner—that impudent Hollander who for ten years had been the arbiter of feminine elegance—Van Klopen, who said, “my dear” to the fashionable beauties he served, declared indeed that the Duchess de Maillefert was his very best customer. If misfortune had overtaken her the newspaper reporters ought, by good rights, to have clubbed together and allowed her a pension, for during years they had netted large sums by describing her wonderful toilettes, her equipages, horses, and eccentricities, and by repeating the clever sayings that fell from her lips. They had described how she supped at the Moulin Rouge, how she drove down the Champs Elysées with a cigar in her mouth, and how, having had a dispute with a cabman, she stunned him with a torrent of slang as pure as anything that could have been heard in the lowest part of Paris.

However, the baron and Raymond spoke no more of her that day; in fact, they had forgotten her, when on their way home in the evening two capacious carriages going towards the railway station passed them on the high road. “Ah!” said the baron, “the duchess comes to-night, it seems—her carriages are now going to meet her, I fancy.”

Indeed, when they reached the Rising Sun they found the innkeeper looking for them, so as to be able to inform them. “The duchess arrives by the seven o'clock express.” The worthy man was radiant as he spoke, and his round face shone like his sign.

“We saw the carriages,” answered the baron, “but we were surprised not to see Mademoiselle Simone in one of them.”

“Yes, its odd enough,” said the innkeeper, “a young girl who hasn't seen her mother for months, ought to hasten to meet her!” Raymond, whom the baron was watching out of the corner of his eye, was listening attentively. “But it is always like that,” continued the innkeeper; “I have heard that mademoiselle would very much prefer it, if her mother and brother never came to Maillefert at all. Accustomed as she is to her solitary life—living like a cloistered nun—it must bewilder and frighten her, to see such a crowd of people, and hear so much noise all at once. She must feel like an osprey suddenly let loose in the sunlight, and so she gives the company the cold shoulder. Monsieur Casimir, the major-domo, tells me that while there has been company at the château during the last two years she has not set foot outside her own room.”

“And the duchess yields to these caprices?”

“She can't prevent them, for Mademoiselle Simone, saint as she is, has a will of her own. And perhaps she's right in a way—for the month the duchess spends here is a pretty costly one.”

“Pshaw!” said Raymond; “the Maillefert family is wealthy.”

"I don't know about that!" muttered Bérú, "I don't know about that." And drawing closer to Raymond and the baron, he added in a low, mysterious voice, "You never know where you are with these great fortunes! But I do know one thing, that the duchess has been selling property."

"You can't mean it!"

"I do, indeed. You know the beautiful farms in the valley on the way to St. Mathurin—well, they once belonged to the Maillefert estates; but last winter the agent cut them up into small lots and sold them. I bought a patch for a couple of thousand crowns, myself." But, the innkeeper suddenly checked himself and listened. The sharp, shrill whistle of a locomotive could be heard. "There's the train," he cried, "and in five minutes the duchess and her party will be at the station."

The baron laughed that peculiar laugh which prevented people from knowing whether he were speaking in jest or in earnest. "Well, Master Bérú," he said, "I congratulate the Maillefert family on having a devoted adherent and a faithful servant in you."

This did not please the innkeeper, for he drew himself up in his white vest, and in his most dignified manner replied: "I am not the servant of any one!"

Raymond laughed aloud.

"Excuse me, dear Master Bérú," said the baron, gravely. "I fancied on seeing your delight——"

"I was simply pleased, sir, because the arrival of the duchess makes business lively. For instance, her major-domo and the young duke's valet come here a great deal——"

"What an honour!" interrupted the baron, who was growing tired of the amusement afforded him by studying the worthy innkeeper. "Are we to have no dinner to-night?" he asked; "or must we fast in order to honour the duchess's return?"

Suddenly recalled to his duties, the innkeeper felt ashamed of his chatter and rushed from the room. His voice was soon heard in the passage crying: "Madame Bérú, bring the gentlemen their dinner."

The gas was lighted when the Baron de Boursonne and Raymond took their seats at table. As they partook of some excellent soup, the baron exclaimed: "That fool of a Bérú is quite a character." And then hearing a sudden grating of wheels, he added with affected solemnity: "The duchess has certainly arrived!"

Her carriage seemed indeed to have stopped before the inn. A strange voice could be heard in the vestibule, a thin, sharp voice at once imperious, and affected in tone. "Bérú," said its possessor; "Bérú, where the deuce are you? Bring lights here instantly—my servants have forgotten the lanterns. And bring a glass of water to my mother!"

At this moment the door of the dining-room was thrown open, and a young man of about twenty-five came in with his hat on his head, a cigar between his teeth, and a glass in his eye.

"That must be the young duke," said the baron in a low voice.

He was not mistaken, M. de Maillefert was of medium height, thin, or rather emaciated, with a hollow chest and round shoulders; a pair of long light whiskers framed his weary looking face, which was very pale, with high cheek bones, and thin and colourless lips. "The deuce take you!" he cried to the innkeeper, "why don't you take the water to my mother?"

At this moment Madame Bérú hurried forward with a tray in her hand, but all at once a whirlwind of velvet and lace swept into the room. The

wearer was a tall woman with pale yellow hair, which escaped profusely from under a small straw bonnet with a white *aigrette*. She wore one of those light coloured travelling dresses, short and capriciously trimmed, which had made Van Klopen's fortune.

Pouring herself out some water she drained the glass. "I was dying of thirst," she said. And then dipping a corner of her embroidered handkerchief in the water, she bathed her eyes, murmuring: "The idea of not being able to get a glass of water at the station!"

Meanwhile, talking and laughing were heard outside, and the carriage lamps were flashing. Unaffectedly curious, the baron rose and looked out; he fancied there were seven or eight persons in the carriages. But he had little time for his observations, for the duchess and her son speedily joined their guests, the vehicles rolled away, and the ordinary quiet of the night came over the little inn.

VII.

ON the morrow of the duchess's arrival, Raymond was smoking a cigar at the door of the Rising Sun and waiting for the baron, when the postman approached and handed him a letter. Raymond at once recognized the handwriting of his friend M. Roberjot. He broke the seal and hastily read as follows:—"Dear Raymond—As you will remember, it was agreed when your brother Jean left that all his important letters should be addressed to me, lest his plans and the real object of his journey should in any way be discovered by his mother or yours. Jean has remembered this, and I have just received a letter from him, of which I send you a copy."

This copy was in Roberjot's own writing. He had evidently not cared to confide the task even to his trustworthy secretary. "After the vilest voyage," it began, "prolonged to an extraordinary extent by contrary winds and disheartening calms, I at last arrived at Valparaiso, well and full of hope. But I rejoiced too soon, for it was by no means an easy matter to get from Valparaiso to Talcahuana, where my father landed. I was told that I must wait a month, to which I naturally objected, for under the circumstances a month struck me as an eternity. I therefore searched for a private mode of conveyance, and, thanks to the energy and intelligence of a compatriot, I found a worthy man who, owning half a dozen horses, agreed to convey me and my baggage quickly and cheaply. But this agreement was a mere figure of speech. To travel on horseback through a charming country is, as you know, very nice, but it is not the most expeditious way of getting over the ground. At last, however, after a protracted journey, my guide said to me: 'Look—here we are!'

"I looked and espied a long row of one-storied houses, built of bricks dried in the sun. And this was the town of Talcahuana. It had been so often destroyed by earthquakes that its four thousand inhabitants were tired of building anything but huts. Ah! my dear friend, you will believe me when I say that I was nearly suffocated with emotion when I entered the village in the dim twilight. As I traversed the lonely streets, or rather lanes, I said to myself that my father was perhaps living in one of these very cabins, and that within forty-eight hours, perhaps, I should find him, and receive from his hands that letter which would give us the weapon we had longed for during fifteen years.

"Although I found a comfortable bed in the house of a French trader, I

could not sleep; for I longed for daylight to begin my search. It came, but my first investigations brought no result. The climate of Chili is delightful, and life seems easy and simple there. The fair Chilians are so attractive that no ship ever anchors in Concepcion Bay without several sailors deserting. For this reason the arrival of strangers is not so much remarked, and thus my task became all the more difficult, and I saw myself compelled to adopt a course which I had sworn to you, half in jest, I would try—namely, that of questioning every living being in the town, one after the other. I asked if they had ever heard of a Frenchman named Cornevin, or Boutin, who had arrived at Talcahuana early in 1853 on board of an American brig. I added, to recall him to their recollection, that he was a political prisoner who had escaped from the Devil's Island; and then I ventured on sketching a portrait of my father, my own faint recollection of him being assisted by a careful description given me by Nantel. But, alas! so many years had elapsed—so many American brigs had anchored off Talcahuana—that no one could give me the slightest clue.

"I began to feel discouraged, and said to myself that Raymond and Léon were right in advising me not to undertake this journey, when all at once I was favoured with a piece of wonderful good-luck. Talcahuana is not a large town, and people freely occupy themselves with the affairs of their neighbours. I was soon known, the motive of my voyage was discussed, and people became quite interested in the young French painter who was looking for his father—a political exile. I knew this, and was therefore hardly surprised when, one afternoon when I was kept in-doors by the heat, I was told that some one wished to see me. This some one proved to be an old smuggler, who had been detained for two months on the other side of the Cordilleras, and who had returned to Talcahuana only the night before. He perfectly remembered the Frenchman I had described, and the story of whose escape he had often heard; he could not remember his name, however; still he was sure I might hear more by applying to an old smuggler named Pincheira, who lived at a little port only a short distance off.

"In ten minutes I was on horseback, and in a couple of hours had found my man. As soon as I began my story he told me that he remembered my father very well, and he at once gave me such details that I saw I was on the right track at last. Our father was known to Pincheira under the name of Boutin. He was nearly famished, he said, when he first knew him, and he was clad in rags. Pincheira's compassion was aroused, and he was fully repaid for the help he gave, for he had never seen so industrious a man, or one more greedy of gain—indeed our father saved every sou he earned, declaring he needed to become rich, and would do so, or die in the attempt.

"A year later it appears that Pincheira's son took a notion to try his fortune in Australia, and my father went with him. Pincheira himself knew nothing more, but he declared that his son now living at Melbourne could undoubtedly give me further information. The old smuggler's last words when I left him were—'Your father is either dead or a millionaire!'

"To-morrow I start for Valparaiso, where I shall find some means of getting to Australia. Good-bye for some time, my dear friend. I shall write to my mother. My regards to Raymond and Léon.—Yours gratefully, JEAN."

To this epistle M. Roberjot had added a few words: "You see, dear Raymond, that Jean has done wonders. I send a copy of this letter to Léon by this same mail. Your mother and Madame Cornevin are in good health,

though they both miss their sons. There is nothing new here, but a change must soon come, for the embarrassment of the Imperial Government is more and more visible. Shall we have a Prussian war? Shall we have a liberal ministry? The one and the other perhaps—perhaps neither of them. You will have heard through the papers of the marriage of M. de Maumussy with a young Italian princess of great wealth. He has also been created a duke in honour of the occasion. My honourable friend Verdale asserts that M. de Combelaïne has now decided to marry with or without Flora Misri's consent. So if you happen to know of an heiress there would be a suitable husband for her! I have only ten more words to say. Be prepared for any event, for troublous times are at hand.—Your sincere friend, ROBERTOT."

Leaning against one of the doorposts of the Rising Sun, Raymond read Jean's letter over and over again. A new-born hope filled his heart, and at the same time he felt a sting of self-reproach. Jean Cornevin had acted, while he, Raymond Delorge, had done nothing—literally nothing. He was only aroused from his meditation by the boisterous voice of the baron, who gave him a friendly slap on the shoulder, and called out: "Are you as deaf as I am near-sighted? A nice pair we make, to be sure! Haven't you heard the landlord tell us three times that breakfast was on the table?"

Raymond had never acquainted his kind friend with the tragic mystery of his life; so he tried to smile, and followed him to the dining-room. But it was in vain that he tried to shake off his gloomy thoughts. He had not a word to say to M. de Boursonne, who, on his side, was gayer and more talkative than usual. However, when they started forth the fresh air restored Raymond in some degree. It was delightful weather, one of those mellow autumnal days with which Anjou is favoured every year. Never had the lovely valley of the Loire been more beautiful. The air was full of perfume and the buzz of bees. September rains had kept the meadows as green as in spring time, and August suns had imparted the softest tints to the woods. The leaves of the poplar trees, trembling in the breeze, seemed woven of gold thread. Over the hedges, scarlet with haws, hang delicate branches of clematis. "One month more of such weather, my dear Delorge," said the baron, gaily, "and we shall have completed our work from Tours to Rosiers."

They were then working on the left bank of the Loire, between Gennes and Les Tuffeaux, and to reach the scene of operation they had to follow a delightful road skirting the river, and shaded by tall, overhanging trees. Behind them trudged their attendant, carrying the lunch-basket. The dead twigs and leaves crackled and rustled under their feet as they walked along, but suddenly from the direction of Maillefert, there came louder music, the baying of dogs and the blowing of horns. "They are hunting near here!" cried the baron, and he stood still to listen. "If I'm not mistaken," he added, "the fair duchess must be entertaining her friends in the woods to-day." And he called to the attendant who was a native of the place. "Are there any deer in those woods over there?" he asked.

"I don't think so, sir. I don't fancy there are any deer about here except in the Parc de la Ville Haudry—but they are not allowed to be shot."

"Then what are the dogs after?"

"Oh! when the duchess comes, sir, she brings foxes in barrels with her, and lets one of them loose whenever she wishes some amusement, so I suppose the dogs and the huntsmen are galloping after a fox of hers."

The baron nodded. "Excellent!" he said; "a most aristocratic way of

breaking their necks!" By this time he and Raymond had reached their men, who were at work, and they soon forgot all about the dogs and the hunt.

Daylight was waning and a light fog was creeping up the valley when Raymond left off work. He lighted a cigar, and while waiting for the baron to jot down the result of certain soundings, he took a seat at the foot of a tree beside the road. He had not been there for five minutes when down the road under the spreading vault of the lofty trees, there came a woman who was walking very rapidly. She was simply dressed in brown silk, and wore a broad brimmed straw hat. Her face was entirely hidden by a parasol which she held in front of it to ward off the rays of the setting sun right before her. Raymond was looking at her with a certain amount of curiosity, admiring the grace of her walk, when, to his surprise, she suddenly stopped short but ten paces off. She seemed to be listening and waiting. Then all at once she closed her parasol, darted through the scanty hedge and made her way into a small grove, where she stood perfectly still. Raymond was struck by the timid, frightened expression of her face. She had not seen him, and had no suspicion that he was near her, but he could see her very clearly. She was a girl of twenty or thereabouts, with a fair, gentle face; a blonde, with large blue eyes.

"She is hiding," thought Raymond, "but from whom, and why?"

It was not long before he learned. The grating of wheels and the clatter of hoofs caused him to turn his head, and he saw an open carriage drawn by a pair of magnificent horses coming towards him. It was one of the same carriages he had seen on its way to the station the night before. There were two ladies carelessly lying back in it. They were both of them pretty, but exceedingly overdressed. Following the carriage came a number of horsemen, and in the centre of this group rode the Duchess de Maillefert looking bold and conspicuous in her close-fitting habit and tall hat.

"It is true," said a mocking voice behind the young engineer, "I should never think the duchess was more than twenty."

Raymond turned. The baron stood beside him with his hands in his pockets and an ironical smile on his lips. However, the young man made no rejoinder. All his attention was turned to the grove where the young lady had taken refuge. Suddenly he saw her emerge cautiously from its shelter, listen, and then, considering the danger over, return to the highway. As she did so she perceived the two engineers. She gave vent to an exclamation of mingled surprise and alarm, and looked quite ready for flight. But gathering her courage together, she passed them, acknowledging their respectful salute with a slight bow.

Never was a man so astonished as the baron. He stood there with his eye-glass on his nose, and his hat in his hand. "Where on earth did this girl come from?" he asked at last.

Raymond did not answer. He would have found it difficult to explain why, but he shrank from describing the little scene he had witnessed to the baron. "She must have sprung up out of the ground," continued M. de Boursonne. "If she isn't a ghost, I should like to know her name."

The baron's usual attendant had overheard these remarks, and he now came forward with a respectful bow, and said: "That young lady, sir, is Mademoiselle Simone de Maillefert."

"Ah!"

"Yes, sir, and she came out of that little grove, where I saw her hide when she heard her mother and the party coming. It's very strange, sir, that

you've never seen the young lady before, for she's always in the woods and the fields, sometimes with her English governess, sometimes on foot, and sometimes on horseback, and I must say that I never saw any one take hedges and ditches better than she does."

With a gesture, the baron thanked the attendant for his information, and when he was alone again with Raymond, he said. "I can't get this young girl out of my head. Don't you think it queer that she is so much afraid of being seen by her mother? Do you not remember what the innkeeper told us?"

"Yes; but Bérú is a simpleton," replied Raymond.

"No doubt," rejoined the baron. "However I would give a good deal if the old artillery officer would come and smoke his pipe with us to night!"

Some good fairy must have heard this wish, for hardly had they finished dinner than the artillery officer appeared, ushered in by the landlord of the Rising Sun. And he was not alone. "He had taken the liberty," he said, as he entered, "to bring his nephew, Monsieur Savinien de Chènehutte, who was passing the day with him." M. de Chènehutte was a good-looking fellow of thirty, wide-shouldered and red-faced, with a self-satisfied air, and dressed carefully, but in atrocious taste. He was well-off, and lived on his estate. In reality, his name was simply Bizet, but he had adopted the name of Chènehutte to distinguish himself from his brothers. He liked it, and as it was the name of one of his estates, he put it on his visiting cards.

To the baron's first questions respecting Mademoiselle de Maillefert, the old artillery officer answered, with the indifferent air of a man who is too much absorbed in himself to care for others: "I know nothing about the young lady."

But De Chènehutte was better informed. "This girl's ways are very peculiar, certainly," said he; "she came to Maillefert about five years ago, and when people said that her mother had abandoned her, as it were, they wanted to be kind to her. The most distinguished ladies made advances to her, but she received them in the most haughty way, and did not even return their visits.

"Which certainly does not speak well for her bringing up," said the baron.

"They are all the same in that family," continued young De Chènehutte, "they despise all their neighbours. Do you know where the young duke goes for companions when he's here? Why to the cavalry school at Saumur!"

"Impossible!"

"It's true, I assure you—ask my uncle there. We are too insignificant for them. They bring their guests from Paris and Angers."

The baron was jubilant: he had found his man. "Listen to what this gentleman says, my dear Delorge, for it is very interesting. So the duchess, then, never invites the people hereabouts?"

"No, for she knows her invitations would not be accepted."

"And why?"

M. Bizet drew his chair closer to the baron's. "Because," he answered in a mysterious whisper—"because the duchess is a most compromising woman."

"Impossible!"

"Ask my uncle. He will tell you that her fortune, which was once enormous, is nearly gone; he will tell you also that her reputation has gone with it—that each year she makes herself conspicuous with some fresh simpleton. As for her *fêtes*, men can of course go to them, but not their wives and daughters."

If the baron enjoyed all this, Raymond did not, so he abruptly asked, "But what has all this to do with the young lady?"

M. Bizet de Chènehutte winked in a way which was meant to be very acute. "Oh!" said he, "she's quite another person. The boot there is on the other leg. She is as cunning as her mother is reckless. And yet to hear the talk of the peasants, you would suppose her to be the best and purest, as well as the most charitable, of women."

"And that strikes me as being a pretty good reputation."

"Yes, but it's only talk. Now, look at it for yourself. Is Mademoiselle Simone forced to live as she does? No! She is no uglier than other women, and she is immensely rich."

"But you just said the duchess was ruined."

"And that is quite true," answered Bizet; "but the young lady has a fortune in her own right. Maillefert belongs to her, and her wealth is simply enormous."

The old artillery officer burst into a laugh. "You may believe my nephew," he said, "for he is well informed."

The nephew coloured. "All the world knows——" he began.

"Yes, and you better than all the world; for last year, when you came to the conclusion that Mademoiselle Simone would make a charming Lady of Chènehutte, you took pains to inform yourself most fully."

The flush on Bizet's face deepened to crimson. "I made a great mistake last year," he said, "and I am ready to admit it. I reflected in time, however, and saw that if the young lady isolates herself in this manner it is because she has a good reason for doing so. Now, when you look at a girl's reason, you generally find a lover."

Raymond, who had been gradually growing angry, now started up impulsively and exclaimed: "You lie, sir; you lie!"

The bright colour on Bizet's face died away. "You must recall those words, sir," he rejoined.

Raymond shrugged his shoulders. "Most willingly," he replied, "if you will name this young lady's lover."

"No, sir; I will do nothing of the kind. You shall hear from me!" and so saying, Bizet rushed from the room.

"I am glad he's gone!" exclaimed the artillery officer. "Why is it that young people are always quarrelling?" Then turning to Raymond he added:

"I don't say that my nephew was right, but you will admit your language was unparliamentary."

"Sir?"

"There are some words that should never be heard, particularly when a man has had a good dinner, as my nephew always has when he dines with me." As he spoke, the old officer knocked the ashes out of his superb meerschaum and put it carefully into its case. "Silly—superlatively silly!" he muttered. "Where am I to look for my nephew now, I should like to know? I wonder if he has gone to the Café du Commerce. For this matter must be settled at once, and I count on you, baron, to bring M. Delorge to his senses while I quiet my nephew." And so saying he went off.

As soon as the baron heard the door close he walked up to Raymond, and crossing his arms, exclaimed: "You drank too much wine at dinner, or else you have lost your mind."

"Why, sir?"

The baron raised his arms despairingly. "He asks why!" he cried, in

a tone of compassion. "I also ask why you have seen fit to fly into a passion on account of the senseless chatter of an underbred idiot. I thought the man very amusing, and I expected to spend a very pleasant evening, which you have spoiled entirely."

But Raymond had not yet recovered from the passion he had been thrown into by what he had heard. "The fellow said things that made my blood boil," he exclaimed.

"What things?"

"He said the young lady had a lover."

"What if he did? What is it to you?"

Raymond was somewhat embarrassed. "Isn't it clear," he said, "that it's so much low slander, prompted by the refusal he received from the young lady's family?"

The baron shrugged his shoulders up to his ears. "And what if it is? How on earth does that affect you? Are you Mademoiselle Simone's brother, friend, or relative? Do you know her? Have you ever spoken to her?"

Raymond occupied himself with lighting a cigar, and seemed to have a great deal of trouble with the matches. "I dare say I have been absurd," he said.

"Indeed you have! Utterly ridiculous."

"However, no man shall ever insult a woman by speaking of her in that way in my presence. And if all men rebuked such scoundrels promptly, the reputation of young girls would not be at the mercy of such light tongues. I have a sister, and if some villain spoke of her as this man Bizet spoke of Mademoiselle Simone, I would be grateful to any man who undertook her defence."

At any other time the baron would have been quite interested by Raymond's excitement, but he wished now to cool him down and not add oil to the flames. He therefore said: "That is all very well—but you have said enough on this occasion. The artillery officer will bring his nephew back so you must shake hands with him, and let the matter end."

At this moment the street door opened—but it was not the Bizets, returning; it was a young man who asked to see M. Raymond Delorge in private. "Oh! you may speak before this gentleman," said Raymond.

The young man thereupon seated himself, with his legs well apart and his hands on his knees, and then, in a solemn tone, he explained that he had been sent by his friend, M. de Chènehutte, who had been grievously insulted by M. Delorge, in view of arranging a duel.

"Tut! tut!" said the baron.

But Raymond interposed. "I am quite ready to meet Monsieur Bizet de Chènehutte," he replied.

"Then, please name your seconds, sir, and we will arrange preliminaries."

Raymond had not thought of this. "I have not had time to choose seconds, sir, but it will not take long. Where shall they meet you?"

"At my house, sir—not two steps from here," and the young man handed his card to Raymond, bowed, and retired with the dignity of a high priest.

M. de Boursonne was out of patience. "I hope you are satisfied now, Delorge!" he cried. "You have a duel well started—but where are your seconds coming from?"

"I depend on you, Sir, to act as one of them."

"On me! Upon my word, you must be quite mad if you think that I, your chief, will sanction your folly by my presence. No, indeed. It would

be a disgrace, and only increase the scandal. Don't you realize that you will become the talk of the whole country side? And for the matter of that, it will be the same with Mademoiselle Simone. A nice service you have rendered that poor girl. A perfect Don Quixote, you are! You think I will be your second! You are mad, my dear boy."

It is possible that this reply was not unexpected by Raymond. "Very well," he replied, "then I will ask M. Béru to find me two men in the neighbourhood who have formerly served in the army. They won't refuse."

The baron did not seem to hear. He was walking up and down the dining-room smoking his pipe. Suddenly, however, he exclaimed: "No, Delorge, you must not do that. You are a good fellow and I will serve you. Of course you see that I shall get into trouble, but never mind. I will take one of the assistants with me and go and see your men."

"Ah! sir," began Raymond who was greatly pleased.

"That will do! That will do!" said the baron. You may thank me to-morrow—just now we will talk sense. What weapons do you prefer?"

"It is not for me to choose."

"Never mind that, answer my question. Which do you prefer, pistols or swords?"

"I don't care."

"The deuce you don't! Are you bad with both?"

To the baron's great surprise, all Raymond's animation had vanished. He had turned pale, and it was in a low voice that he replied: "I am both a good shot and a good swordsman, sir, so unquestionably superior with both, that I feel myself to be acting almost dishonourably in meeting this young man."

The baron's eyes twinkled behind his glasses. "Are you in jest?" he asked.

"By no means, sir; I was never more serious. For years I have lived in the hope of fighting a duel with a man whom I mortally hate, and who is one of the most skilful shots and swordsmen in Paris. For years I have never missed practising daily in a shooting gallery and a fencing room. I challenged my enemy—he refused the challenge; but my dexterity remains to me."

The baron did not ask a question; which was very nice on his part. He left the room, and when he returned in an hour later he said to Raymond: "It is all settled; you will use your sword to-morrow morning at eight o'clock."

VIII.

RAYMOND warmly expressed his thanks and tried to excuse himself for the distasteful task he had imposed on the old gentleman. "I am glad," he said, "that my adversary has selected swords, for with those weapons I can manage the affair as I choose." And this was all he said.

The baron saw that the young fellow's mood had changed during his absence, for he was now pale and depressed; and as the old gentleman went to his room, he said to himself: "What does this all mean? I wonder if what the boy said about his superiority was mere talk? He surely can't be afraid!"

No—Raymond was not afraid, but during that hour of waiting he had reflected. His irritation had abated, and he passed condemnation on his

own conduct. Had he any right to risk his life? His father had been assassinated by scoundrels who lived unpunished, honoured, and rich; and instead of exclusively thinking of revenging his murdered father, he was, like the Don Quixote the baron called him, about to fight the first foe he came across, for the good fame of an unknown woman. With such thoughts, it was impossible for him to close his eyes, and in the morning his face showed such signs of sleeplessness that the baron could not refrain from saying: "Good Heavens, my dear fellow, what has gone wrong with you? Are you ill?"

The tone in which these questions were asked told Raymond what were the suspicions in the baron's mind, and so thus summarily recalled to the situation and its exigencies, he said "I was never better, sir, I——"

But he was interrupted by the inkeeper, who, having listened at the door to some purpose, now came in and said that as the gentlemen were going out so early, he had taken the liberty of preparing something for them to eat. This attention delighted the old engineer. In vain did he talk with a certain roughness of manner; his heart was very soft, and he realized now that he was very fond of Raymond, so when he saw him about to eat, he exclaimed: "Look out; a man who is going to fight a duel should keep his stomach empty. It is better in case of accidents."

"Never fear!" cried Raymond.

"I do fear—and remember that I have seen very inexperienced persons do clever swordsmen much harm."

The more the baron watched Raymond the more puzzled he was by the singular variations of his mood. "There must be some mystery in this boy's life," he said, "of which I know nothing."

However, Raymond drank a glass of wine and then gaily said "I'm ready, my dear baron," whereupon they started off.

The meeting place was on the other side of the Loire, on the outskirts of a little wood, and as they walked rapidly over the bridge the baron said: "I'm willing to wager my life that Bizet will make an apology."

But he was mistaken. Round about Saumur almost all the young men are swordsmen, and none of them are cowards—although some may be fools, and Bizet probably the greatest among them. Besides, he had spoken so much and so violently the night before at the café of Rosiers that there was no retreat open to him. He was well known in the province, and occupied a certain position. Did he not possess a pair of thoroughbreds, one of which he himself rode at the Saumur races in a pink jacket? Had he not also five dogs, three of which were turn-spits, but which he called his hounds? So was he not entitled to deference? Raymond soon pointed him out to the baron, for he was approaching the meeting-place by another path.

His uncle, who looked sadly out of temper, was with him, acting as one of his seconds, together with a young man who was pale and troubled. On the outskirts of the grove the two adversaries stopped and bowed to each other, while the old artillery officer, setting all established rules at defiance, went up to the baron, and said: "Tell me, sir, are we to let these young idiots quarrel for a mere word?"

"It is certainly absurd," answered the baron. "Let your nephew name the lady's lover and my principal will withdraw his offensive word."

"Go on, then—if you will," grumbled the officer, and he drew two swords from a serge wrapper and handed one to each of the two adversaries.

They took up their positions, and he stepped back. While the seconds had been talking together, Raymond had caught sight of several pairs of

eyes peering from among the bushes. "Am I crazy?" he said to himself. "It is certainly a most extraordinary freak of imagination."

But it was not imagination. The news of the duel had spread through Rosiers, and as amusements and strong emotions are as rare there as in all similar places, a considerable number of people had promised themselves the pleasure of witnessing the scene. They had discovered the place appointed for the meeting, and had been waiting there since sunrise. There was even one lady present, and her imprudence injured her reputation, for people charitably interpreted it as proof of the great interest she took in M. Bizet de Chêneshutte.

Raymond knew nothing of all this, but Bizet did, and the knowledge caused him to cross swords with considerable vigour. He had no doubt of victory, for he had taken lessons of a good master, and he was quite satisfied with his proficiency. Alas! in ten seconds he recognized his own weakness. Vainly did he multiply his attacks—turning and bounding, retreating and advancing—he only succeeded in putting himself out of breath. Cold and composed—as quite at ease as if he had been using buttoned foils, in a fencing-room, Raymond seemed to be playing with his adversary until, with one quick turn, he knocked the sword from Bizet's hand and sent it flying.

"Enough!" cried the old officer, dashing between them. "Enough!"

This was also the opinion of his nephew; but he felt so many pairs of eyes upon him that, in his rage and humiliation, he determined to make an effort to retrieve the combat. "No, it is not enough!" he cried, picking up his sword. "That was a mere accident."

But this was not the view his uncle took of the case, for approaching the baron, he said: "It is clear that my nephew is as much at the mercy of your man as a mouse would be in the claws of a cat. For Heaven's sake, don't let them go on!"

Without answering yes or no, the baron went towards Raymond and said in a low, quiet voice: "No misplaced generosity—I see you are a clever swordsman—finish the matter with a little flesh wound; this might go on for hours."

Raymond hesitated. He had resolved to punish Bizet, but his wish was to disarm him over and over again until he acknowledged himself conquered. He felt, however, that he must accede to the wishes of his friend. So he answered: "As you please, sir."

The baron now moved aside again. "Take your positions, gentlemen," he said, "and after the next bout we shall call on you to stop, whatever be the result."

It was with the blind rage of a wild beast that Bizet now threw himself on Raymond. His cheeks were whiter than linen, his eyes suffused with blood, and his lips tightly compressed. Foolish though he was, he had divined the intentions of his adversary, and the thought of ignominious defeat was more than he could bear. He even wished to receive a wound. He would have preferred a pretty bad one rather than leave the field without a scratch. He, therefore, tried rather to be wounded than to defend himself, and Raymond on his side managed so well, that his sword merely pierced the fleshy part of Bizet's arm.

"Touched!" said that interesting young man, dropping his sword and falling into the arms of his seconds, who, on seeing the blood, ran to his assistance. Then three or four stifled exclamations were heard in the thicket; but the anxiety was not of long duration, for the old officer, who knew some-

thing of wounds, looked at this one, and said, half smiling, "He won't die this time!"

Bizet opened his eyes. "No, no," he said, in a faint voice; "it is nothing—the feeling of that cold, cold steel is over."

He was perfectly delighted by this solution, which saved him from the ridicule which would otherwise have been his portion. The superiority of his rival was so manifest that his wound was rather a distinction than aught else. When he was on his feet again he advanced to Raymond, and in the most tragic tone, exclaimed: "I confess my error, I implore you to accept my apologies, and I wish the whole universe could hear them."

"Ah!" whispered the baron mockingly in Raymond's ear, "you are now exalted to an enviable rank; you are now Bizet's best friend!"

"That is to say I have made a fool of myself," thought Raymond, who at present realized that the duel had had a great many spectators.

M. Bizet perfectly understood Raymond's generosity, and, much to his credit, he was not angered by it. He insisted on the party of six going home together. Poor Raymond! What with the baron, who overwhelmed him with sarcastic congratulation, and De Chènehutte, who crushed him with protestations of friendship, he walked along with bowed head, feeling much as if he were going to a dentist's to have a tooth pulled out.

They had just reached the bridge when a lady on horseback was seen trotting quickly towards them. "Mademoiselle Simone de Maillefert," said Bizet, with a most respectful bow, as she passed by; and he then snatched hold of Raymond's hand. "I assure you," he said, "now that I know your sentiments for that young lady, she will always be sacred to me."

This speech fully realized the prediction of the baron, who had said the evening before: "If you think you are doing this young lady a service you grossly deceive yourself."

Thus easily is a woman, though she be as pure as snow, compromised and injured. Small towns are especially pitiless in this respect, and everyone at Rosiers knew that Mademoiselle de Maillefert had been the cause of this duel. In vain did Raymond say: "On my honour I know nothing whatever about this young lady, I never even spoke to her. I am only here for a short time, and shall probably leave without even being introduced to her. She does not even know of my existence. I undertook her defence just as I should take that of any woman who was grossly insulted."

But this was unknown language for Rosiers. It is only in romances that ladies find such disinterested defenders. When a man risks his life for a woman he has some tangible reasons. All this was implied by Bizet's tone, and his wink signified more—it meant this: "If we meet Mademoiselle Simone on our road, it is because she knew of the duel and was anxious."

All these considerations weighed so heavily on Raymond that he was silenced. He realized, too, that the less he said now the better. In vain did he try to get rid of his recent adversary—Bizet clung to him as obstinately as lime to the wing of a bird caught in a snare. Wishing to be especially agreeable, he insisted on talking about Mademoiselle de Maillefert, and laid the blame of his foolish words on his uncle's good wine. "I admit, Monsieur Delorge," he said, "that I should have been delighted if she had been willing to marry me. Not that I think her pretty, but she is very nice. She is not clever; all the women, in fact, call her very dull, but she has plenty of good common sense. Do you know that she manages all her enormous fortune herself?"

"My dear sir!" expostulated Raymond.

But no, the ingenuous youth continued: "I am pretty clever in business affairs myself, but this girl of twenty is cleverer than I. She attends also to some of her mother's and brother's matters. They are perfect sieves, they are—they never keep a sou. She directs the labourers, understands the crops, manages the vineyards, and pays off the workmen——"

"I entreat you," interrupted Raymond, "to select some other topic of conversation. Anything you choose, except——"

"Except what interests you most!" continued the simpleton, with a bland smile. "I admit that it is a little trying when a man is modest to enumerate all the treasures he possesses, or is about to possess. But I wish to repair my error of last night. In all Anjou there is not another woman like the one you have chosen. I admit that she is very haughty, and although familiar with the peasants, she treats us with unsupportable pride. But a husband like yourself will soon change all that. She has excellent qualities. She understands the management of money, and is economical in spite of her great wealth. Her tastes are simple; no luxury or nonsense in her toilets, which are too plain, in fact." He sighed as he spoke, and with his hand on his heart, continued: "What a pair we should have made had she been my wife! In ten years we should have quadrupled our capital! I mean what I say. I should have discarded the duchess and her brother, and I advise you to do the same. The duchess would crunch down the devil and his horns, and in a short time there would be nothing left. As to the young duke, he has long since got rid of his last inch of land, and he is up to his ears in debt. In Paris, at Angers, at Saumur, even at Rosiers, he owes money to everybody—lawyers, usurers, and tradespeople."—

If Bizet had been told that Raymond had great difficulty in refraining from flying at his throat and strangling him, he would no doubt have been much surprised. Still this was the fact. When they reached Rosiers, Bizet was very anxious to take him to his uncle's to breakfast, declaring that reconciliations were never real ones until they were sealed over a bottle. But Raymond could stand no more. "Impossible! Another time!" he replied, abruptly, and bowing to his recent adversary, he went off with long strides in the direction of the Rising Sun.

Now that all danger was over, the old engineer thought he had a right to take the bridle off his tongue, and so as he walked on beside Raymond, he muttered: "A nice day this has been! A day well begun! It is not noon yet. We have time for several more acts of folly."

"Ought I to have apologised to that idiot then? Is that what you wished me to do?"

"No—by no means. I should think you ought to be proud, however, that after ten years' practice, which have given you wonderful dexterity, you have achieved the great feat of pricking Monsieur Bizet de Chênehutte in the arm."

A cruel foe acquainted with Raymond's past could not have wounded him more severely. He turned very pale, and in a hoarse voice he replied: "Don't say things like that to me, sir. You will make me regret that I did not nail the animal to a tree like an impaled butterfly."

"I should not have lifted my finger to prevent you," grumbled the baron. "But," he continued, "between you, you have hopelessly compromised this young lady."

"I am sick of hearing about her!" cried Raymond. But he did not tell the truth. Something told him that this young girl, whom he as yet merely knew by name, would have a decided influence upon his future. In what way he knew not, but the sentiment clung to him.

"This Delorge is a strange fellow!" said the baron to himself. "I am convinced that there is some mystery in his life, the knowledge of which would give me a key to the strange contradictions I find in his character. He must be made to tell it me, that is all there is about it!"

On reaching the inn they were received with joyous exclamations by Master Béru, who stood watching for them at the door, with his snowy apron and knife stuck in his belt. "I told my wife this morning," he said, "that nothing would happen to you, but all the same, she insisted in going off to church to burn a taper before the altar."

"Dear me!" said the baron. "This is too much. We are the talk of the whole country side."

"I have said nothing, your honour. I never talk about what goes on in my house. It was M. Bizet who told the whole story. He talked half the night long at the café to a room full of people."

"Delightful!" muttered the baron, as he strode angrily into the dining-room, followed by Raymond.

Béru followed them, and apparently desirous of pleasing them, he fell tooth and nail on M. Bizet de Chênehutte. "He was conceited and miserly," he said. "He lived on bread and onions at home, so as to save money to make a show with at Rosiers. And I'm not surprised," he said, "at his bitterness against Mademoiselle de Maillefert, for she has unwittingly been the cause of his being laughed at by every one round about here. He asked her to marry him. Heaven only knows how he dared do so, or what put such an idea into his head. The idea of such a thing! As if a Maillefert would become Madame Bizet." At this point the worthy innkeeper looked round to see if any one was listening, for he liked to stand well with everybody. Then, lowering his voice, he added: "Everybody was on M. Delorge's side, and everybody was pleased when it was known that M. Bizet was wounded. There were two or three servants from the château at the café last night, and they could hardly contain themselves. I have just seen the old gardener, who has Mademoiselle Simone's confidence, and he was going from house to house with the air of a man who was trying to find out something."

Contrary to his habit, the baron let the conversation drop, and as soon as Béru was gone he turned to Raymond and said: "This threatens to turn out a fine adventure!"

Raymond restrained a movement of impatience. "I cannot conceive, monsieur," he said, "how a man of your intelligence can pay any attention to this innkeeper's foolish chatter." The baron smiled sweetly. "Go on my boy," he said to himself; "I will push you so hard that you will have to tell me your secret." Then, aloud, he replied, "What is there so ridiculous in this worthy man's narrative? Mademoiselle Simone hears that a young engineer has fought a duel in her defence, and she sends to find out something about this gentleman.—Now, what is the use of turning so red?"

Raymond had certainly coloured, but it was with anger. "Really, sir," he replied, "you are making me pay dearly for the service you have rendered me."

The baron said no more; he had gone as far as he dared, and for the rest of the day he made no further allusion to Mademoiselle de Maillefert. But that evening, at dinner, Master Béru handed them each a letter, which had been brought, he said, by a servant in livery.

The baron promptly opened the envelope bearing his name, and after glancing at the card it contained, he exclaimed: "Upon my life, Delorge, I

believe our adventure is bearing fruit. Open your letter and see if it be not a counterpart of mine. Open it, pray."

Raymond complied, and found an invitation card, which was couched as follows: "The Duchess de Maillefert presents her compliments and requests Monsieur Raymond Delorge to do her the honour of spending Saturday evening (October 24th) at the Château de Maillefert."

The baron was delighted. "Well! what have you to say to that?" he asked.

"I say that it is most extraordinary."

"And why? It is your duel, my dear fellow, that has won us this honour which Bizet would gladly have given his best horse for. This is what I call conquering an invitation at the point of the sword."

"Oh!"

"But there is no 'oh' about it. The duchess has it in her power to show you her gratitude, and she is eager to seize the opportunity."

"And yet—"

"You will be presented to Mademoiselle Simone."

Raymond reflected for a moment, with a frown on his brow. "I don't think I shall accept the invitation," he said.

The baron raised his arms in despair.

"You would never refuse it!" he cried.

"I am hesitating."

"And why?"

"Because, sir," answered Raymond—"because——" He stopped short. He was seeking for an excuse, for on no account whatever would he have told the truth. "Because," he said at last, I should have the air of going there to be thanked."

"That is not badly said," answered the baron, who was, however, by no means duped by these words. "As for myself," he continued, shaking the invitation, "I shall accept. Yes, savage, rustic, peasant as I am, I must see one of those *fêtes* which have so scandalized that innocent creature, Bizet. My dress-coat is at Tours with the rest of my luggage, and I shall write to-night to have it sent to me."

IX.

THERE are two Châteaux de Maillefert. The old one, formerly known as the Château de Chalendray, once crowned the summit of the slope and commanded the course of the Loire. Dismantled by Richelieu, however, it soon fell into ruins, and to-day ivy and brambles climb over two crumbling towers, which are all that remain. The new château is built lower down the hill. It is a large building in the best style of Italian art, with two wings and a flight of broad low steps in front. The wide entrance-gates, which were spared by the Revolution, are at once curious and beautiful, and the carvings in the chapel have great artistic value. The gardens are unrivalled, notwithstanding the comparative neglect in which they have been left for years. Designed in the style of the gardens of Marly, they form a succession of terraces connected by marble steps descending to the waters of the Loire. Clusters of trees, tall shrubbery and vines screen the walls, while beyond are dense masses of park trees. An avenue, nearly a thousand yards long, and shaded by century-old elms, leads from the high-road to the modern château. And up this avenue walked Raymond and the baron at about ten

o'clock on the Saturday evening specified in their invitation. After much perplexity and doubt, Raymond had decided to accept this most unexpected opportunity of making the acquaintance of Mademoiselle Simone de Maillefert, and he had tried to convince himself that he went to the château for any other reason than the real one. "It is pure curiosity," he said. "How could I love a girl whom I never spoke to? Before three months are over I shall have left Rosiers for ever, and I shall never hear her name again!"

However, he was out of spirits and dissatisfied with himself, and barely answered the continual observations of the baron, who himself was by no means in an over-amiable frame of mind. He wore his dress-coat, which had come from Tours, and was full of creases. It was one of those good old coats with long tails and tight sleeves, which, after doing twenty-five years' good service, are cut up by economical mothers into an entire suit for a boy of ten years old. "What nonsense that fool, Bérú, said!" he grumbled, "when he pretended that the duchess was *obliged* to sell her land. When people are ruined they don't give such *fêtes* as this. Why, the mere illumination of this avenue costs as much as it would cost you and me to live on for a month!" And he was right, for countless Venetian lanterns were disposed among the trees, and gave the approach to the château a fairy-like aspect. "It is positively humiliating to come on our legs," continued the old engineer, "we ought to drive up in state. You ought to have borrowed your dear friend Monsieur Bizet's cabriolet!"

They were indeed probably the only guests who arrived on foot. The few pedestrians they espied among the trees were only persons attracted by curiosity from the village, who came to spy and mock. Carriages, however, were constantly passing them, conveying aristocratic dames and damsels in full ball-dress; and when they reached the court-yard they saw that, spacious as it was, it was too small for the many equipages that kept arriving. There were three rows of vehicles ranged along the walls, the handsome carriages which had brought millionaire beauties from Saumur or Angers standing beside the light wagons and chaises of the gentlemen farmers from Trèves or Saint-Mathurin. In the middle of the court-yard a kind of shed had been raised, and here, by the light of a blazing fire, innumerable servants in livery were warming themselves, and emptying bottles of wine standing in formidable array on a long table. "Happy innovation," remarked the baron, "and one which will land some of the carriages in the ditches on their way back. It quite reconciles me to coming on foot."

However, they hastened indoors, for it was clear that the *fête* had long since begun. All the front windows were blazing with light; the buzz of the crowd could be heard, and above it rose the music of the orchestra. In the marble hall stood numerous footmen arrayed in the Maillefert livery, and intent on showing the guests to the first floor, where several cloak-rooms, already crowded, had been thrown open. As the baron did not like crowds, he sought and found a vacant apartment, the door of which stood open like the others. In a moment Raymond was ready. But the baron was not so expeditious. He wiped his spectacles, looked for his handkerchief, and pulled on his gloves. "The arrangements are all good, so far," he said; "we will see——" But he stopped short, for in an adjoining apartment, the door of which, hidden by a curtain, stood open, a discussion could be heard going on. "Hush!" said the baron, and without the smallest shame he went toward the curtain.

"It is really most extraordinary," said a sharp, imperious female voice;

"it is incredible that you have not begun your toilette. Are you crazy, Simone? What on earth have you been doing?"

"You know, mamma," was the reply, in a sweet, pure tone, "I was attending to the last preparations for your *fete*."

"That is precisely what I complain of. Why should you perform duties which belong to my majordomo?"

"That may be, mamma, but my superintendence has certainly saved fifteen hundred or two thousand francs."

"Enough! This passion for economy is simply disgusting."

"And yet I should never have been able to serve you or my brother without it."

"Nice services! Rather than mortgage your meadows at Authion you have allowed Philippe to sell his property."

"I told you why, mamma. My income belongs to you and my brother, but neither of you shall touch the capital."

"Simone!"

"Yes—I mean what I say. You need never hope for concessions or weakness on this point. I shall defend my property, and if I die you will find that the capital will still be beyond your reach. You and Philippe will always have enough to live on no matter what you do. The Mailleferts shan't die in the almshouse."

If the baron had been alone and free to do as he pleased, he would have slipped under the sofa rather than have lost the end of this discussion, which threw such a startling light on the relative positions of the duchess and her daughter. Unfortunately, he was not alone. Raymond stood rooted to the floor, as it were, by surprise. He was intensely annoyed at the position in which he and the baron had been placed by a valet's stupidity in leaving this room open; and so, approaching the old engineer, he softly said: "Come, sir, let us go at once."

But the baron waved him aside. "Hush!" said he.

The discussion between mother and daughter was becoming more and more bitter, and attacks and rejoinders succeeded each other with extraordinary vivacity. "Ah, you forget yourself, Simone," cried the duchess at last. "You are wanting in respect to me—your mother—and to your brother, who is the head of the family."

"Madame!" implored the girl, "do you know there are at least five hundred persons in your rooms, and that all of them are commenting on your absence?"

"They are equally astonished at yours!"

"Not at all; for people know my dislike for society."

"They know that you affect to dislike it, and they know that it is most unnatural at your age, and they ask why it is."

"You know why, mamma."

"I know that you are the talk of the whole neighbourhood. I know that my daughter is the subject of brawls in wine shops, and that she has become a sort of heroine for foolish boys to go out and fight about. I am resolved to end all this. I won't tolerate these eccentricities for another day. No, you shan't adopt the *rôle* of a persecuted daughter. Your conduct is a tacit censure of mine. You have done this sort of thing long enough."

"Raymond caught hold of the baron's arm. "I insist," he said, in a low, indignant voice—"I insist on your coming away this moment. Come, or I shall go and leave you alone!"

The baron was obliged to yield, but when he reached the passage he

exclaimed: "I am quite proud of the opinion this excellent duchess so gracefully expressed of us. Wine-shop brawlers, foolish boys! Well, well!"

What did Raymond care for the opinion of the duchess? "I pity Mademoiselle Simone, sir," he said.

"Yes, with such a mother her life can't be a path of roses."

"And what resignation! Not a complaint!"

"Indeed? I think, on the contrary, she complained to some purpose. But she is right, poor child!" He turned round on the stairs, and in a more serious tone than was usual with him, said: "She is a brave, good girl. I would put my hand in the fire for her, and I like my hands and dislike pain. She is proud of her name, and she has a right to be so. She sacrifices herself to this illustrious name of Maillefert. She forgets herself, her youth, her beauty, and her dowry, to become the majordomo of an extravagant mother and wasteful brother." Never, according to Raymond's idea, had he heard the baron speak so well. "It is an odd family," continued the old gentleman, "where the daughter holds the key of the strong-box and mounts guard over the cash. We live in strange times. I have already seen a father and son ruin themselves together, but I never saw a mother and son do the same thing before. It is something new. Well, well!" He descended two or three more steps and then stopped again.

"I should really like to know whom our invitation comes from; from the mother, the brother, or the sister?"

Raymond would have very much liked to know the same thing, but he made no reply.

They had now again reached the hall, where a dozen belated guests were hurrying towards the stairs. A lackey, looking as solemn as a peer of England, preceded them to the door of the reception-room, and as they gave their names, he announced them: "Monsieur Raymond Delorge. The Baron de Boursonne."

The old engineer started, as if some one had poured a torrent of ice-water down his back. "How did the fellow know I was a baron?" he grumbled.

"You told him so, sir," answered Raymond, laughing.

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, I heard you."

The good man shook his head. "Vanity of vanities," he murmured. "Such is the contagion of example. Give me your arm, my dear Delorge, so that we may not lose each other."

The precaution was a wise one, for the crush was great, and all the more so as a dance had just finished, and the gentlemen were looking for seats for their partners. When Mademoiselle Simone had said there were five hundred persons present she was far from the truth, for there were twice that number circulating through the three large drawing-rooms and the vast gallery which formed one wing of the château. Nothing could be more magnificent than these apartments, with their decorated ceilings, gilded cornices, large mirrors, and tall chimneys surmounted by the De Maillefert arms. And yet there was something in all this splendour which indicated past rather than present opulence. It was easy to see that these reception-rooms were seldom used. The curtains, as well as the seats against the wall, came from some furniture dealer at Angers, who had let them for a night and who would take them away in the next day.

"Wouldn't one swear," said the baron to Raymond, "that robbers had been in the place? And such is the case; but the robber is the dear duchess herself. Not being able to carry off the château, she has taken away the

furniture, the old carved woodwork, credences and antique tapestries, in fact all the artistic treasures which old families are so proud of, and which are handed down from generation to generation."

Our friends, however, were probably the only persons who proved such keen observers, for the ball was at its height, and to the gay refrains of a couple of orchestras, the fairest and wealthiest heiresses of Anjou were dancing with the simple delight of peasant girls. Mothers and chaperons sat against the walls in silk and velvet, their necks glittering with jewels and their heads covered with feathers or diamonds. At all the doors, and in the recesses of the windows, stood groups of white cravated men in conversation. Further on, from two small rooms communicating with the gallery, came the chink of gold on green tablecovers, and the sound of voices repeating the mystic words: "It is your play, I pass!" And meanwhile, lackeys were moving about carrying trays of ices, champagne, and sweetmeats.

"We have not done our duty," said the baron to Raymond. "We have not been received by any one. Where is the duchess? Hasn't she yet appeared?"

If they had listened to what was being said round about them, they would have found that other people were similarly puzzled. One over-dressed old lady, who was conversing with a stout gentleman, exclaimed: "It is her usual habit."

"Then why entertain?" was the question.

"Ah! dear marquis, when a woman has so much money, how else can she spend it?"

They both laughed knowingly; and then the marquis added: "At all events, she has never given a more superb *fête*."

"Never a more general one."

"That was what I meant to say. It must have been for some especial purpose."

"And it was."

"You know what it is then?"

"Certainly," said the marquis, and on hearing him the baron and Raymond forgot the ball and listened. "Yes," he resumed, "I am quite sure I know what the ball is given for. She wishes to marry her daughter." The old lady laughed. "Why are you amused, countess?" asked the marquis.

"Because you know very well that the girl's marriage would ruin our dear duchess. It is this little Cinderella who pays the fiddler when the duchess dances. Her husband would keep his wife's fortune, as he ought to do, instead of letting her mother and brother devour it. Go and ask the duchess for Simone's hand for your son, and see what she answers. Unless——"

"Unless what?"

"Unless you consent to give a receipt for the dowry without receiving it."

"The stout marquis scratched his ear—which was his way of sharpening his ideas. "Perhaps you are right," he said; "but what does the duchess mean to do, then? Is she looking for a wife for Philippe?"

"Heavens and earth! what family would have him? He might find, perhaps, some ambitious merchant at Angers who would give a million or two for his name and his title, but he will never find a wife in our circle."

"I give it up, then. Come, dear countess, tell me what you know. I swear never to repeat it."

"It isn't worth the trouble, for the whole world will know in a week what I can tell you."

"Countess, I am in agony——"

"Then let me inform you that the duchess is here on an election campaign."

The marquis was so surprised that he started back, and in doing so trod on the foot of the baron, who was nearer than discretion warranted. "I beg ten thousand pardons, sir," said the marquis, graciously, and then hastily turning to the countess again he exclaimed: "What you say is incredible."

"It is true, all the same. Don't you know that the duchess is always at the Tuileries; that she goes with the court to Compiègne; and that she is seen everywhere with Maumussy's wife, and that she will, one of these days, be a lady-in-waiting to the empress?"

"A Duchess de Maillefert!"

"Precisely. When you are drowning you catch at anything, and the duchess and her son are in a very bad way. What will become of them when they have used up Simone's fortune? This is the question they ask themselves, and they have turned to the empire for an answer. They intend to obtain some sinecure—something very lucrative. Only as the empire does not give these sinecures for nothing, the duchess has promised to influence the legitimist nobility of Anjou, and lead us all to the feet of their imperial majesties."

"But it's monstrous!"

"Wait a moment. To make this dear duchess's political mission a trifle easier, the men in power have placed at her disposal a certain number of comfortable situations in the State service, which she will distribute. She has already offered me one for my son-in-law, who is not rich, as you know, and who has a large family."

"I must be dreaming, countess."

"That is to say you doubt, and you want proofs. Well look about you and you will see all the high functionaries of the department. You will see the Prefect of Saumur—and our own—the general commanding the corps d'armée, the commandant of the military school, with all the mayors, registrars of deeds, the provincial treasurers, and the inspectors."

Raymond and the baron looked at each other significantly. Their invitation was now explained.

"This being the case," rejoined the marquis, "I shall say good-night to the duchess, and let her understand that none of us will cross her threshold again. But where is she? What an extraordinary house! Not a lady to do the honours. Have you seen Mademoiselle Simone?"

"Not yet."

"And Philippe?"

"Ah! he must be in the card-room."

At this moment there was a movement among the throng, and as Raymond and the baron raised themselves on tip-toe, they saw the duchess and her daughter on the threshold.

X.

MOTHER and daughter looked like two sisters, so lightly had the years rested on the duchess's polished brow, and so little hold had the cares of life taken on her volatile, careless, selfish nature. Besides, the art of dress had no secret for her. Renouncing her usual eccentricity for this occasion—perhaps on account of her mission—she wore one of those exquisitely simple toilettes

which will always be the envy and the despair of provincial belles—toilettes in which every detail is blended to make a perfect whole. Her dress was of sea-green hue, the upper skirt being caught up with branches of eglantine, and the corsage being cut just low enough to show the beauty of her shoulders, but not to display them. Mademoiselle Simone, on the contrary, looked older than her years. Anxiety and care had cast a shadow over her sweet face betimes, and imparted something melancholy even to her smile. She wore a simple white dress, with a sprig of fuchsia, in her fair hair.

"Look at them," murmured the baron, "and tell me which of the two a stranger would call the elder, at first sight?"

"Mademoiselle Simone is very lovely."

"Yes, she certainly is. But, bless my soul, what strange creatures women are! Who would ever suppose that these two had just had a violent dispute?"

The worthy engineer was near-sighted. If his eyes had been as keen as his mental powers of observation, he would have detected that the colour on the duchess's cheeks was not natural, and that there was still an angry light in her eyes. He would have seen, too, that Simone was deadly pale, and that a tear trembled on her long lashes. But Raymond saw this, and he sighed.

She was now only a step or two from him, leaning on her mother's arm as they passed down the long gallery. Strangely enough, their guests by no means crowded eagerly around them—they were confronted on all sides by grave faces, constrained smiles and stately bows. The fact is, the story told by the countess to her friend had made the round of the rooms, and many of the Legitimist nobles had sworn never to enter Maillefert again. Raymond, indeed, heard one gentleman say: "It is an abominable snare, and but for my daughter, who is crazy to dance a little longer, I should go away at once."

The duchess was too keen not to divine what was going on, and to realize the disastrous results of her combinations. But she was also too much a woman of the world not to know how to hide her impressions and control her countenance. The more she met with reserve and disapproval the more gracious and smiling she became, till she elicited at least some few words of common-place politeness even from the most hostile.

"This is very curious," said the baron to Raymond, "and very interesting. Let us follow the duchess."

Having crossed the gallery, Madame de Maillefert had entered one of the cardrooms, where several young men were playing. She paused in front of a table on which several little piles of gold could be seen. "Are you not playing very high, gentlemen?" said the duchess.

One of the young men hastily raised his head. He was fair-haired, with a glass in his eye, and a very high standing collar; his waistcoat being secured by a single button, while the sleeves of his coat were ridiculously broad. "No, indeed, my dear mother," he answered; "there are a dozen of us, and only three hundred louis are on the table. It is a very mild little game, I assure you."

At this moment his adversary played, and the young duke dashed at his cards on the table in evident irritation. "It's clear that I'm not in luck to-night," he said.

Mademoiselle Simone gently laid her hand on his shoulder, at the same time whispering: "This ill-luck is a just punishment. Are you not ashamed to be here, when there are pretty girls in want of a partner?"

"That's a good joke!" he answered, sulkily. "The idea of my dancing a quadrille! Gentlemen, do you hear what my sister says?" and he went on with his play.

"The king!" he suddenly exclaimed.

"Philippe! dear Philippe!" coaxed his sister.

"I must say I don't think much of that young gentleman," muttered the baron to Raymond. "He's perfectly ridiculous with his hair parted in the middle, his eye-glass, his idiotic laugh, and his self-sufficient air!"

This was precisely Raymond's opinion, but he did not reply, for he was too much occupied in watching the duchess and her daughter, who had just seated themselves on a sofa in the gallery. "Now is our time," said the baron. "We will go and pay our respects to the ladies."

"Is it necessary?" objected Raymond.

"I should say that the most ordinary politeness required it."

"But I——"

The baron interrupted him. "Do you fear an allusion to your duel? You mustn't be disturbed—I doubt if these ladies have even heard of it. Our conjectures were entirely false. You heard what that old lady said—it is to our profession as State engineers that we owe our invitations. No one knows us here."

To their great surprise, however, just as the baron made his best bow before the duchess, an old gentleman standing beside her exclaimed, "The Baron de Boursonne, Madame la Duchesse, the great engineer who has the charge of the works on the Loire."

The duchess made some complimentary remark, but the worthy man hardly waited for its termination before he presented—"Monsieur Raymond Delorge, my friend and assistant."

Redder than any poppy, Raymond bowed in his turn, but not so low that he did not perceive Mademoiselle Simone's very forehead suffused with a flush deeper than his own, nor so quickly that he did not surprise a vivid gleam in her eyes, and a gesture promptly repressed, which indicated that her first impulse had been to hold out her hand.

The young fellow's heart was thrilled. "She knows of it," he said to himself, "and she is grateful."

The baron had noticed nothing of all this. He was deep in conversation with the gentleman who had addressed him by name, and who evidently was assisting the duchess in her political undertaking. However, this same individual soon broached such extraordinary theories respecting the coming elections, that the old engineer hastily interrupted him. "As I understand you, sir," he said, "you would like to turn the Loire into an election agent. You would like to use it to inundate the property of the folks who vote wrongly, and—and order it to respect that of the peasants who vote well. It is a brilliant idea. But rather a difficult one to carry into execution. Ask Monsieur Delorge."

But Raymond was not near enough to answer. He had seen Mademoiselle Simone leave her mother's side, and obeying an irresistible impulse he had followed her through the crowd, and finally stationed himself in a spot whence he could watch every expression on her face. She was sitting near two old ladies who were both talking to her at once.

Raymond was wonderstruck by the peculiar reserve with which the duchess and her daughter were treated in their own house. While the men stood in groups ruminating over the strange news anent the political mission confided to the duchess, while the older women laughed behind their fans,

the young people only thought of deriving as much enjoyment as possible from this rare break in the monotony of country life. "It is extraordinary," thought Raymond. "One would think it a subscription ball, where each person pays his money." At this moment his attention was attracted by five young men, who one after the other bowed before Simone, and evidently asked for a dance. But she refused them all. She preferred to sit where she was, not that she was much interested in the conversation of the two old ladies, for her thoughts were evidently elsewhere. Her eyes were riveted in one direction, and anxiety, anger, and grief, alternately appeared on her expressive face. "What is it that so absorbs her," wondered Raymond.

He could see nothing from where he stood, but he gradually worked his way near Simone, and soon discovered that she was looking in the direction of the card room. "Ah! I understand," said Raymond to himself, and he quietly walked into the room."

The young duke was still playing, and by the contractions of his frivolous features, it was easy to see that luck was still against him. He fingered his cards nervously, and constantly uttered some exclamation of annoyance. "It is disgusting! Not a decent card in my hand. You have all the luck," and so on.

His adversary, who was perfectly calm and self-possessed, had a countenance indicating limited intelligence, but great obstinacy. His turn to deal came; he shuffled the cards methodically, cut, and turned up—a king. "That makes me five," he said quietly—"I have won?" and with these words he drew the pile of gold towards him. "Shall we go on?" he asked.

But Philippe rose abruptly. "No," he replied; "I shall play no more; I should lose the coat off my back to-night. Do you know, gentlemen, that I am minus fifteen thousand francs by this evening's play?"

"Pshaw!" said one of the men. "What are fifteen thousand francs to you?"

Was he speaking seriously. Philippe looked at him to ascertain, but as the other bore his gaze unmoved: "Very well: let us have one more game," he said to his late adversary—"double or quits!" The other player did not reply. "Do you refuse?" urged the duke, turning pale. "Isn't the word of a Maillefert as good as a bond?"

He spoke so loud that it was impossible for Simone not to hear him. Raymond looked at her. She had turned whiter than her dress.

"I await your decision, sir," said the duke, in an almost threatening tone.

But the other was quite undisturbed. "The decision does not depend on me," he said.

"I don't understand you."

"Listen. I belong to a well-known club at Angers, all the members of which have sworn a solemn oath never to play for any larger sum than lies on the table. Article 7th of our by-laws states that whoever breaks his word in this respect is liable to a penalty amounting to double the sum. It would, therefore, cost me thirty thousand francs to have the honour of continuing to play as you propose."

The duke looked thunderstruck. "But this is an offence," he stammered "A direct insult."

"Oh! not all, sir."

A profound silence fell on the room—a silence that was all the more dreary on account of the gay music of the orchestra in the adjoining hall

All the men at the card-tables were looking on. They evidently dreaded some violent altercation. But at this moment Mademoiselle Simone entered. Poor girl! she tried to smile, as she took Philippe's arm, and turning towards their guests she said: "Allow me to take my brother away for a few moments."

"She has done well," said one of the players, when the brother and sister had gone off.

"Yes," added another, "she has indeed. This dear duke is delightful when he talks of losing the coat off his back. He lost it long ago. It is his sister's gown that he now runs the risk of losing."

From where Raymond stood he could see the brother and the sister talking together. The girl left her brother, and, returning in a few minutes time, she slipped a little package into his hand. He then quickly turned away, and re-entered the card-room.

"Now," said he, laying a number of bank notes on the table as he spoke. "Now, sir, you can play without breaking your oath. Another game—double or quits." The duke's late adversary was startled out of his usual imperturbability. "However," resumed Philippe, "you know that this is a matter of ten thousand francs. If you win it will be twenty thousand. Of course, I do not wish to urge you if you are unwilling to run the risk of losing the amount you have already won."

The laugh was now on the duke's side. Everyone in the card-room gathered round the table, and the game began. It was watched with breathless interest, and finally Philippe won. Radiant with triumph, he now exclaimed: "Will you continue? As I am under no oath, I can play as long as you please."

It was with the keenest anxiety that Raymond had watched the play and its consequences. All that Simone had suffered he had suffered too. He had pictured to himself her agony at hearing the name she bore so insulted, for undoubtedly Philippe had been cruelly insulted. All that his adversary had said of the club rules was a piece of pure fiction, invented to get rid of those players who pocket their winnings, and who, if they lose, never pay. And plainly enough the Duke de Maillefert was looked upon as one of these. "It was this," thought Raymond, "that decided the girl to give her brother the sum he needed."

All the players stood looking on, with bated breath while the two men fought over the young girl's savings. But as soon as Raymond saw that Philippe was victorious, he darted towards Simone with the words: "He has won!"

She started as violently as if she had been asleep and a pistol had been fired off in her ear. "Sir!" she exclaimed, but as she raised her head her eyes met those of Raymond; her face flushed, and in a faint voice she uttered a few words of thanks. The two old ladies, near whom she sat, opened their eyes in astonishment at the sight of this stranger addressing Mademoiselle de Maillefert with such evident emotion. "Is he playing still?" asked Simone.

"No," answered Raymond, "he is standing near the window talking."

As he spoke his voice faltered. He had just noticed the eyes of one of the old ladies riveted upon him, and he realized that he had harmed Simone by exposing her to remark. Indignant with himself, deploring his own folly, and not knowing what to do or say, he stood for a moment in silence. Then, as an idea came to him, he asked: "Will you do me the honour, mademoiselle, to dance the next quadrille with me?"

She half rose and resealed herself. "I can't," she said. "I have declined so many times this evening. I did not feel well enough."

Raymond turned pale. "Cannot I persuade you?" he urged.

The girl's hesitation was so plain, that one of the ladies bent her head with its nodding plumes towards her. "You are too scrupulous, my child. You did not feel well enough to dance when you refused those gentlemen. That was right enough. Now that you are better, this gentleman asks you, and you accept. Take my advice, make the most of your youth, and dance."

Simone did not understand the perfidy of these words, nor did she notice the venomous smile which accompanied them. So she rose, laid her trembling hand on Raymond's arm, and went to the dancing gallery with him.

The pitiless baron would now have laughed heartily at his young friend, who moved about as if he were in a dream. He asked himself if he were a conceited fool—if the sympathy he seemed to read in this girl's eyes was not a freak of his own imagination. What mysterious affinities bound them together? How had she divined his interest in her? Ah! had they only been alone he would have fallen at her feet, and sworn fidelity forever.

However, the orchestra was playing the first bars of a quadrille, and they had only time to take their places. Raymond felt that curious eyes were fixed upon him, and that it was imperative he should control his emotion and make a few common-place remarks to his partner.

Alas! he could not think of a word to say; not one of those phrases which are usually exchanged at such moments would come to his lips. Perhaps Simone took pity on him, for she presently asked some question about the baron's undertakings. It was with all the eagerness of a drowning man snatching at a branch that Raymond answered her; and he began with amazing volubility to describe their plans and studies. "I am lost!" he said to himself, meanwhile. "She will think me a fool with this prosy scientific chatter."

However the interminable dance ended at last, and Simone asked to be taken to her mother, who sat in the same place with a little cluster of people near her. But her eyes were flashing with anger, in consequence of the acute attacks of the baron, who had almost compelled her to confess the meaning of her entertainment. Seeing her daughter on Raymond's arm, she asked in a vexed tone if she had been dancing.

"Yes, mamma."

"With this gentleman?"

"Yes."

"But I thought I heard you tell Monsieur de Luxé that you were indisposed and would not dance to-night?"

The girl seated herself without replying, and Raymond would perhaps have committed the blunder of offering some apology, had he not been touched on the shoulder. He turned and found himself face to face with the baron. "I am tired out," said the old gentleman. "Balls are not much in my line. Let us be off."

Raymond followed him, and they went towards the room where they had left their coats. But the door was shut and locked on the inside. "Well! this is nice, upon my word," grumbled the baron.

He was trying to open the door, when an old servant out of livery hastened towards him. "What can I do for you, gentlemen?" he asked.

"We want our coats, which are in that room."

The servant looked at them with an odd expression. "It was by a mistake," he said, "that you were shown into that room. It belongs to the suite of Miss Dodge, the English governess."

At any other time the baron would have felt it his duty to obtain all the information possible respecting this Miss Dodge, but for the moment he was greatly out of patience. "Do you mean," he asked, "that the governess has locked up our overcoats?"

"No, indeed, they have been taken away, and if you will take the trouble, gentlemen, to follow me——"

They did so, and found that everything belonging to them had been carefully removed to another room. Then they donned their overcoats and hurried down the stairs.

It was now three o'clock. The elder people had gone off, and their carriage-lamps shone through the trees along the road beside the river. Only the fanatics remained at Maillefert—those who dance until the last candle has burned out, until the last musician in the orchestra has played his final note. These indefatigable persons were in yet the gayest spirits, and their shadows could be seen whirling past the windows. The coachmen in the court-yard were dozing round the fire, except three or four of them who had become perfectly drunk and highly quarrelsome. The lanterns of the avenue had been extinguished, or rather had burned down. Occasionally a dim one was to be seen emitting more smoke than light.

"And this is what people call amusing themselves!" was the baron's philosophical remark, as he walked along. However just as he was passing through the gateway of the grounds he drew an old portfolio from his pocket and examined it by the light of the huge lantern hanging above. "Zounds!" he muttered.

"What is the matter?" asked Raymond.

"Did you leave any papers in the pocket of your overcoat?" asked the baron.

Raymond felt to see. "Yes," he replied, "two or three old letters and some visiting cards."

"So I fancied," answered the baron. "Well, what will you wager but that Mademoiselle Simone knows her discussion with her mother was overheard—and overheard by us, mind you?"

"I should be in despair if I thought so."

"Well, then, you may despair as much as you please, for nothing is more certain," rejoined the baron. "But come let us walk on, for we are heated, and the night is cool. I will prove the point to you: first, our overcoats were carefully taken from that room; next, my portfolio has been examined, and a servant was stationed near the door, which was locked."

This was clear enough, and Raymond could no longer doubt. "But why," asked he, "should you think it is the young lady who knows of our involuntary indiscretion—why not the duchess, or why not both of them?"

"You have me there!" answered the baron; "for in regard to these points I have no reasons, only a moral conviction. Still, if Madame de Maillefert had known that we possessed her secret, she would have been more civil to us out of fear—for she was hardly polite."

"True!" murmured Raymond.

"Now, how did the young lady treat you? I know she danced with you after refusing half a dozen other applications."

"Ah! sir."

"I know it, for I saw it," said the baron, laughing; but he instantly

recovered his gravity. "This noble duchess," he said in an irritated voice, "ought to be shorn of her sunny locks and dressed in a convict's garb for the rest of her days. And as for her amiable son, he ought to be sent on a voyage round the world, with a recommendation to the captain to let him feel the virtues of the cat-o'-nine tails." Then, with more moderation, he added: "If I were in your place, friend Delorge—if my good star put such a girl as this one in my path, I——"

"Well?"

"Well! She should be my wife in spite of everything. I would move mountains and scale abysses to win her. She should be my wife or my life would be a blank." He stopped short, being perhaps a little ashamed of his enthusiasm, and then suddenly, without choosing to hear Raymond's reply he exclaimed: "But here we are—and that idiot Bérú is coming down to open the door. Good-night. Sleep well. But you understand what I say—she should be my wife."

THE CATASTROPHE.



Part IV.

MAILLEFERT.

I.

It was late when Raymond woke up. As it was Sunday, he told Master Béru not to rouse him, even for breakfast. The weather was superb. It was one of those splendid autumn mornings, frequent in the valley of the Loire—when a light mist hovers over the hills, and above the fading trees, which stretch as far as the eye can reach. Raymond opened his window, and the fresh air swept into his room. The high street of Rosiers was gay and noisy. High mass was just over, and groups of peasant girls stood outside the church chattering and laughing—their rosy faces shining with health under their white caps.

However, instead of busying himself with his toilette, Raymond installed himself in the cosy arm-chair which the innkeeper had brought from Saumur for his especial comfort, and remained buried in thought. The baron's last words still rang in his ears. "She should be my wife!" "Yes," he said, half aloud—"yes, she must be my wife!" He realised that it was of no use to fight any longer with himself—he knew that he loved Simone de Maillefert. He loved her with that all-absorbing love which sometimes takes possession of a man's faculties, which fills all his thoughts, and in fact his whole life, and, according to its success or defeat, makes him either the happiest or most wretched of mortals. But she—would she love him in return? He asked himself this question and thought of her blushes, the emotion he had read on her expressive face, and said to himself—"I am not indifferent to her!" and he experienced a thrill of hope.

Still he recalled what the baron had said, that the girl knew of his having undertaken her defence, and of his having fought with Bizet on her account. "Poor fool that I am," he said, "to take what is only commonplace gratitude for a token of serious interest." But as he was ready to scale mountains and disregard all obstacles for her sake, he determined to calmly weigh all his chances of success. Alas! they seemed to fade as he examined them, for even supposing that Simone loved him, what then?

He now knew enough respecting the family matters of the Mailleferts to feel convinced that the duchess and her son would, with all their strength and energy, oppose Simone's marriage to any one. Would not the poor child's

marriage deprive them of the enjoyment of her income, which was now their only resource? And, besides, he realized that this girl had consecrated her life to an overwhelming task. And he believed her heroic enough to eat her heart out rather than renounce watching over the honour of the family, and preserving her great name from the opprobrium to which it was constantly exposed by the mad prodigality of her mother and brother. Who was he, Raymond Dolorge, to dare to aspire to the hand of a girl of her beauty, rank, and wealth? A poor engineer, with only his salary and a modest inheritance to depend upon. And this was not all! What would his mother say when she heard of his love, his hopes, and projects? He could divine Madame Delorge's astonishment, he could even hear the words she would use. "Shame on you!" she would say, "have you forgotten your murdered father? Shame on you that you can think of personal happiness while Maumussy and Combelaïne still remain unpunished." And, as if to increase Raymond's sadness, his conscience pointed out to him the most extraordinary examples of tenacious fidelity. His mother, to begin with; then Madame Cornevin, who had brought up her five children and educated them so far above their station; then Léon Cornevin, who had retained all his indomitable will, even though his career had been blighted; and Jean, also, who had deserted country, friends, and family to search for his father, and recover the letter which General Delorge had written and confided to the care of the loyal and unfortunate groom. Was not Roberjot's conduct, and even that of timid M. Ducoudray, a cruel reproach to Raymond? "Yes, it is true," he said—"it is true that I am unworthy, and yet I love her. I am no longer master of myself, for I love her!"

The very excess of his enthusiasm recalled him to the consciousness that if he lingered much longer in his room the baron would come in person to summon him. Accordingly he hurried down stairs and found his friend holding court, as the baron himself termed it. Every Sunday after church he summoned Master Béru and cross-examined him with wonderful keenness and patience as to the peasants of the neighbourhood, declaring that he derived from his answers an immense amount of information which aided him in his work. He had just heard a peasant in the vicinity that had had his best meadows rendered utterly sterile for years by the inundation of 1866, when he caught sight of Raymond in the passage. He immediately abandoned Béru and several peasants who had joined the conference, and hurried after the young man. "What a lazy fellow you are!" he cried. "Do you know that I breakfasted an hour ago?" Near-sighted as he was, he could not help starting as he caught sight of Raymond's face. "Are you ill?" he asked.

"Not at all; I am only tired."

"Tired? With one ball—an innocent quadrille and a few glasses of mild punch!" And as Raymond did not reply, the baron looked at him for a moment. "Ah! I have it," he cried; "Mademoiselle de Maillefert——"

The entrance of Madame Béru with some fresh-laid eggs for Raymond's meal checked the good man. But when she had retired—"By my faith!" he continued, "I fail to see why the recollection of the most charming young girl in the world should give a lover such a funereal aspect."

"Alas!" sighed Raymond.

"You have discovered obstacles?"

"Insurmountable ones."

The old engineer shrugged his shoulders. "Upon my word," he muttered, "the young men of our day are easily discouraged. They are heroes

when the paths are smooth and flowery, but they are baffled and turn back at the first mole hill they encounter."

"Sir——"

"Just be quiet! You will only say that you like facile enterprises, but allow me to remark that one only achieves fame by scaling apparently inaccessible mountains. A man may be proud of having climbed Mont Blanc, but he does not say much of the Heights of Montmartre. When I was your age the impossible had charms for me; and even old as I am to-day, I believe in miracles. The sorceress who accomplishes them is at the bidding of us all. She is called 'Will.'"

He expressed his convictions in the tone of a man whose theories are not merely experimental ones. But Raymond's face did not brighten. "If you knew, sir," he began, "all that I have to struggle against."

He was in one of those moods when the most treasured secrets rise to the lips, and if the old engineer had realized this he would soon have learned the mystery which had so troubled him. But just then he was occupied with the practical side of the affair. "The truth is, my boy," he began, "while you were dancing with the daughter, I yielded to the temptation of teasing the mother. It was a stupid thing to do, and she wished me six feet under ground. The end being that we shall never be asked again to the château, and you are cut adrift from the young lady!" He smoked his pipe for a few moments in silence, and then he added; "I suppose we ought to make our peace, but how? That is indeed the puzzle. I must go back now to my good people, who are growing impatient, but later on we will have another little talk."

When Raymond had finished breakfasting he lighted a cigar and went out. It was, he said to himself, merely to enjoy the air and the sunshine, and to be alone. Only chance led him to the other side of the Loire, and induced him to take a little path which wound up a hill, whence he could look down on the Maillefer gardens and a portion of the park. From the spot where he had stationed himself he could see the various guests who had come with the duchess from Paris, walking up and down the balconies and leaning over the railings. There were a dozen of them or more, men and women, and from their lively gestures, it was easy to see that they did not find the time hang heavy on their hands. For the first time Raymond felt a pang of envy. He envied the young men whom he saw laughing and talking. They, at least, were on good terms with the duchess, and her door was readily opened to them. He himself had a right to call at the château to be sure, or rather it was his duty to call there now, but he was quite sure that when he presented himself some insolent lackey would tell him that the ladies do not receive. He would have nothing else to do but to hand the man his card, and that would be the end of it. However he was somewhat consoled by not seeing Simone. Where was she? He was indulging in vague surmises when strangely enough he obtained an indirect answer from two peasants who were talking together by the side of the road. They seemed somewhat jolly, and wore their Sunday garments.

"Hallo, Bruneau!" said one of them. "Where are you going?"

"To the château."

"What! On Sunday? You won't see the young lady to-day."

"Yes, I shall, for it's on Sunday that she sees her farmers, so as not to disturb them on other days."

"And what are you going to the château for?"

"To take some money there."

"Why, I thought you only paid your rent at Christmas time."

"And so I do, but the young lady asked me and two or three others to pay her half in advance this year."

"And you are going to do so?"

"I am going to do better. I am taking her the whole."

"I suppose if she asked you for two years in advance, you would take her five?"

"I should try to oblige her, I'm sure."

"And your wife—what does she say?"

"She says that if I had to borrow money, I must do it, as Mademoiselle Simone wants it. Madame Bruneau remembers one night when she was so ill that she could not move hand or foot, and the baby had the croup. The young lady came on horseback through a driving rain, and then went to Saumur for the medicine the doctor ordered."

The other had nothing to say to this, and so the men separated.

"What can have happened," thought Raymond, "that Mademoiselle de Maillefert is reduced to ask for advances from her tenants? What new folly of her mother's is she compelled to repair, or what new iniquity of her brother's is she forced to hide?" And his heart ached as he thought of the poor young creature, harassed and preyed upon by these cormorants. She must have an iron will to resist their entreaties so long. But the day would surely come, when wearied in soul and body by this atrocious combat, she would say: "Take it all; spend it, throw it away—and with it the honour of our house!" It was with unspeakable joy that Raymond thought of the possible ruin of Simone de Maillefert. When that day came, he would be near her, and then he might confess his love without being suspected of a shameful speculation.

Such were his thoughts as he walked back towards the inn. He had just reached the suspension bridge when he heard himself called, and on turning he perceived the redoubtable Bizet, with his arm in a sling. "Good morning!" exclaimed the young provincial. "I hear you were at the ball last night. I congratulate you. You have conquered, it seems. The statue is animated! Her beautiful eyes look tenderly upon you! She danced, and smiled! It was quite a wonder. Oh, I have heard all about it!"

Raymond calculated the height of the bridge and the depth of the water—and had great difficulty in restraining himself from pitching Bizet over the parapet.

"Come now," continued his companion, "what is the use of being so reserved with a friend—for we are friends. Two men who have tried to kill each other are always friends for life. When is the marriage coming off?"

"Good morning!" said Raymond, and he marched away, leaving Bizet looking after him with an expression of wonder and indignation on his face.

Raymond was intensely annoyed; from what this young fellow had said he could judge what inferences had been drawn by the persons who saw Simone reject partner after partner and then accept himself. He realized that if all this gossip reached the duchess it would only give her another reason for closing her doors on him. This, too, was the opinion of the baron to whom he confided his fears. "I wish to heaven," cried Raymond, "that I had Bizet in the field again. I would certainly nail him to a tree."

The baron frowned. "And you would make a great mistake! Your dear Bizet is only a fool, and as fools are in the majority in this world, it is of little use to try and exterminate them. Let us rather endeavour to find some way to make our peace at the château."

But they found none, although they spent the whole evening thinking it over. And night, that counsellor divine, sent them no inspiration. Raymond was, therefore, rather dismal on the next day when he returned with the baron to the scene of their operations.

They were then finishing some soundings near Les Tuffeaux at a point where the Loire winds so closely to the slopes that they are merely separated by a narrow field and a road cut up by the constant passage of heavily laden carts.

The morning passed quickly, and about three o'clock, while they partook of luncheon and rested near the road, one of their assistants exclaimed: "Hallo! Here comes Madame de Maillefert and her party!"

The baron and Raymond started to their feet; and only a few yards away, at a point where the road skirted some huge moss-grown rocks, they espied seven or eight persons, of either sex, on horseback, who were slowly riding towards them. In front came the duchess, attired in a close-fitting riding-habit and her yellow hair arranged with studied carelessness under her tall hat. On reaching the baron and his companion she reined in her horse, and in her most gracious manner bid them good morning. "I surprise you at work, baron," she said, addressing M. de Boursonne.

The latter was never over-pleased when his title struck his ear; but on this occasion sacrificing himself on the shrine of his young friends's hopes, he assumed his very best smile and gaily replied: "Yes, madame—but we have nearly finished for to-day."

"And our lovely valley will owe you an eternal debt of gratitude if you succeed in rescuing it from the Loire."

"We are doing our best, madame—my young comrade Delorge and I."

This reply was intended to give Raymond an opportunity of mingling in the conversation. But the young fellow did not avail himself of it. He noticed but one thing, that Madambiselle Simone was not of the party.

The young duke was there in a light gray coat, a huge stiff shirt collar, and one of those small felt hats with a blue ribbon and a green-gauze veil, turned round the brim, which the emperor had just brought into vogue. He now spoke, and asked Raymond, "Are you doing all this work to prevent inundations?"

"Ours is a preparatory work."

"Curious! very curious!" answered the young nobleman, and making his horse leap the ditch as he spoke, he found himself in the meadow by Raymond's side.

The duke was less preposterous on horseback than on foot. His chest seemed less hollow and his shoulders less rounded; and as Béru had said, he was thoroughly at home when mounted, and when he was thrown, it was in a sportsmanlike way, of which he rather boasted. He rode about examining all the instruments, and seemed as astonished by all he saw as if he had been a thorough savage. "Curious! very curious," he repeated,

In the meantime Madame de Maillefert was talking to the baron. "This work must be prodigiously expensive," she said.

"Yes, madame; it will cost several millions."

She turned towards a beautiful brunette, who was with her, and said in a sentimental tone: "How is it possible for a country not to cherish a government which spends so much money in view of insuring its prosperity?"

But she had no time to say more, for her son at this moment returned to her side. "On my honour, mother, you should come here on foot some day

to see these gentlemen use their instruments. It is very odd—very curious indeed—upon my honour it is!”

“We will certainly come again,” replied the duchess; “but in the meantime I hope we shall see these gentlemen at the château.” It was to the baron she spoke, but it was at Raymond she smiled.

“We always have a game of cards in the evening,” remarked the duke encouragingly.

His mother now gathered up her reins. “We shall expect you this evening, gentlemen,” she said; and without waiting for a reply, she touched her horse with her whip, and was off.

“No dress coats!” called the duke over his shoulder; “remember that!”

They were far away before Raymond and the baron had recovered from their surprise, and were able to ask each other what this last piece of politeness indicated. Was it possible to attribute it to chance—to one of those fancies that pass through such a brain as that of the Duchess de Maillefert ten times a day? No; it couldn’t be that. Each detail of the scene indicated deliberate premeditation, and the words and conduct of mother and son alike betrayed a concerted plan. It was clear that they wished to arrive at intimacy with the two engineers. But why, with what object? “They are bored with each other probably,” said Raymond.

“Do you mean,” asked the baron, with a satirical laugh, “that our noble hosts rely on us to amuse their guests by the charms of our conversation?” So saying he caught Raymond’s arm, and whirled him round. “Look me in the white of the eye. Now then, do you know what notion I have taken into my head? It is that the duchess wants you to marry her daughter.”

Raymond’s face flushed. “Your jesting is cruel,” said he.

“I am not jesting.”

“Then you forgot that the duchess and her son are living on Mademoiselle Simone’s income, and naturally don’t wish her to marry.”

“I know it would be their ruin, at least in appearance; but appearances are deceitful. We will soon find out. We shall accept their invitation, shall we not?”

Raymond hesitated. “I hardly know,” he replied.

The baron laughed aloud, and clapping his young friend on the shoulder, he exclaimed: “Hypocrite! hypocrite!”

It was quite true, however, that Raymond was hesitating. Like one of those excitable sportsmen who, when the game rises, becomes so dazzled and nervous he can see nothing, Raymond was never quite able to profit of opportunities. However, at the last moment, just after dinner, the baron asked him, “Shall we go?”

Raymond had not decided; but driven into a corner, he almost involuntarily answered, “Yes, we will go.”

The duchess received them in a small room on the first floor. She half rose from her chair as they entered, extended both hands, and exclaimed: “Welcome, gentlemen!” while the duke flew to them and shook hands as if they had been long lost brothers.

“What the deuce does it mean?” thought the baron. But Raymond never gave it a thought. He was looking at Simone, sitting beside the beautiful brunette, whom he had already seen on horseback with the duchess, and his heart sank as he espied the look of utter surprise with which she surveyed him. “She knows nothing of her mother’s invitation,” he thought. “She did not know I was coming this evening.”

Following the baron's example, he bowed to all the ladies in the drawing-room, and then turned towards three young men, who were laughing and talking with Philippe by the chimney-piece, on which stood an open liquor case. One of those pianists who might be taken for barbers, with their well-combed, well-oiled hair, and who go from château to château all summer in search of some *grande dame* inclined to cultivate their talents sat before the instrument and was playing a rhythmical air. But music had no charms for the young Duke de Maillfert, and he profited by the entrance of our friends to say to the pianist: "Lovely! A charming melody! Yes, on my word! But if you have no objection, we will rest there for to-night."

With the sad resignation of unappreciated genius, the performer closed the piano and leaned against the case. "Ladies and gentlemen," continued Philippe, "as we have an addition to our circle to-night, suppose we have a game of cards—a little *bac*."

"Oh! not baccarat!" exclaimed one of the ladies; "that's a man's game, and it is sure to end in a quarrel. Let us play roulette."

"Oh! yes, roulette," said another lady.

"That is to say that you want another opportunity to empty my pockets," cried the duke, with a laugh. "But I have no objection." And thereupon he rang the bell. "Bring the roulette," he said to the footman who appeared in answer to the summons.

Raymond fancied that every eye was turned mockingly upon him, and he dared not look at Simone. However, the servants brought in the roulette, and arranged it on a table. "To our places!" cried the duke: "we are wasting a great deal of precious time."

Everybody gathered round the table with the exception of the baron. "Will you not join us?" asked the duchess, graciously. "Don't you play?"

"Never, madame."

"Curious that! Upon my word, that is very curious. And why, pray?"

"Because I am afraid of losing."

The reply was rather equivocal, and the duchess promptly asked, "Do you think we play for the sake of winning?"

"Certainly I do," replied the old gentleman, with his usual imperturbability.

M. Philippe having declared that he should sustain the bank with his last farthing, installed himself before a pile of money, and imitating the monotonous, drawling tone of the Rhineland croupiers exclaimed: "Make your game, gentlemen and ladies—make your game."

Chance, assisted by the baron, perhaps, or by the duchess, had placed Raymond between Simone and the brunette with beautiful eyes. The baron fancied that he noticed some significant glances and furtive smiles as the young girl came towards the table. "Did you ever play roulette, sir?" asked the brunette, of Raymond, as Philippe pressed the spring.

"Never madame."

"Then let me show you," and she briefly explained the principles of the game. The ball stopped. "You have lost!" cried the duke. "You are a very bad adviser, duchess."

He spoke to the brunette. She is a duchess, too, thought Raymond. But what did he care? He only wanted a chance to say a word to Simone. But what could he say? What commonplace remarks should he utter? He thought, too, that Simone was equally anxious to speak to him, and he paid no attention to the fact that he had already lost once or twice. Everybody

was laughing round the table, and Raymond would have given words to have been able to say anything. "My vicinity does not seem to bring you good luck," murmured the brunette.

Raymond bowed awkwardly, in a rage at his own stupidity.

"Come ladies and gentlemen—make your game!" cried the duke again. This time the brunette lost on the red. "Upon my word, duchess," said one of the young men, "you will be penniless soon. You had better write to Monsieur de Maumussy to send you some money."

"Maumussy!" Had he heard aright? Raymond asked himself, and he felt faint and ill. Could this woman be the Duchess de Maumussy?

"Oh!" said one lady, "the Duke de Maumussy is not like certain husbands of my acquaintance—he does not wait for his wife to ask for money! Not he!"

There was no more room for doubt. Raymond mechanically responded to the call of the noble croupier, and pursued his train of thought.

"Chance favours you now," said the Duchess de Maumussy. "Shall we go into partnership?"

Raymond started back in horror, but with a great effort of self control he managed to murmur in a faint voice: "Oh, certainly, with pleasure."

He was filled with a wild longing to fly. Ah! if he could only get away without a scene. Fortunately, the baron was watching him and perceived that something had gone wrong, so when tea and some light refreshments were brought at ten o'clock, he said: "Come my dear Delorge, we must be off." Madame de Maillefert wished to retain them, but he pleaded urgent work on the morrow, promised to return again very shortly, and went off with Raymond.

When they were outside, the worthy old fellow asked: "My boy, what is the matter? Your arm trembles like a leaf."

"I cannot talk now, sir," was the reply.

They reached the Rising Sun in profound silence. M. Béru was waiting for them, and on seeing Raymond, he said: "The postman has brought you two letters from Paris. There they are."

Raymond took the letters without a word of thanks, and passed up the stairs with an uncertain tread. The innkeeper noticed this, and asked if he were ill. "Oh, no," replied the baron, but as he entered his chamber he muttered: "What the deuce has gone wrong between the boy and his lady-love?" For he thought that no one but Simone could have put Raymond into such a state. "The lady, on the other side, was very pretty," he resumed, "and she looked at him with very loving eyes, but he answered her once in a very odd way."

His pipe was finished, and he knocked out the ashes. "It may have been nothing after all," he reflected: "that young fellow is as nervous as a girl. I dare say he is sound asleep by this time."

II.

BUT Raymond was not asleep. He was sitting in an arm-chair trying to collect his ideas. "How weak I am!" he muttered. "How cowardly!"

Poor boy! He was neither weak nor cowardly. He was the victim of a situation which he had not created, of a Past which he dragged about with him, as a prisoner drags his chain. Madame Delorge had not realized that it is impossible to limit a man to one idea, no matter how vast it may be.

She had not understood that, while her own life was virtually ended, her son's was but beginning; that if all were dead in her, everything in him was new-born. She had not said to herself that, in imposing this superhuman task upon him, she ran the risk of making him loathe it, when a great passion overtook him—when his love and what he called his duty might be at variance.

"No," he said to himself, "I do not forget that my father was murdered in the basest manner. I would give my life to bring his murderers to justice. But I love Mademoiselle Simone, and must I give up seeing her, because Madame de Maumussy is at the Château de Maillefert? How is Madame de Maumussy guilty? She may have been married greatly against her will to this miserable adventurer."

As he spoke he turned the letters he had received to and fro in his hands. One of them came from Roberjot, the other from his mother. He hesitated to open them, having a presentiment that he might find they contained something calculated to crush the hopes which were becoming so dear to him. "Nevertheless, I must read them," he murmured, at last, and broke the seal of his mother's letter first.

"Dear Raymond—The hour of our vengeance is close at hand. I feel it myself, and all our friends believe it. What proves to me that the empire is crumbling is that your father's old friends, who seemed to have forgotten our existence, have all come back to see me. All Paris is absorbed in a very scandalous suit which has been brought against Monsieur de Maumussy by his wife's family. It has been said that De Combeldaine—more ruined than ever—was on the point of marrying Madame Cornevin's unworthy sister, Flora Misri, when the marriage was broke off at the last moment for some most disgraceful reasons. Raymond, my beloved son, remember your father. Keep yourself free from all entanglements, and be ready to act at any moment. Your sister, Pauline, and I, kiss you warmly.—ELIZABETH DELORGE."

"Free! ready to act!" murmured Raymond, with a bitter laugh. "I have lived so for twenty years!" And he opened the lawyer's letter. "I have but one moment," wrote that gentleman, to copy a letter which I have just received from Jean. Read and you will see if the brave fellow is losing his time."

Jean wrote as follows:—"Dear Friends:—After a frightful voyage, during which we should have been drowned, but for the aid of an English clipper, we have at last reached Australia. It was Sunday—the day before yesterday—that I first trod the streets of Melbourne. I at once sought out the man with whom my father left Chili—Pécheira, the smuggler's son. I found his house without the least difficulty, for he is now one of the leading merchants in Melbourne. But he himself was at the mines, and the manager I saw could give me no idea of the probable date of his return. Still this same man said he knew that when Pécheira first came to Australia he was accompanied by a Frenchman named Boutin. I am certain that this Boutin was my father, Laurent Cornevin, and I am convinced that Pécheira can tell me what has become of him. This makes me very happy—for I see the beginning of the end. When our ancestors wished to achieve a difficult task, they imposed upon themselves some rude penance which was a perpetual stimulant. I have therefore sworn that I will never touch brush or palette until I take my father in my arms if he be living, or until I have prayed on his tomb if he be dead. So you may hope my friends, that you will see me soon.—JEAN CORNEVIN."

It was with deep discouragement that Raymond dropped this letter. "If I were not mad," he said, "if I had one ray of courage, I should never enter the Château de Maillefert again." He was, alas! one of those unfortunate beings who are nailed by their imaginations on some chimerical Calvary, who look far in advance of events, and suffer more terribly from the catastrophes they picture to themselves than from real misfortunes.

After a night of struggle his resolution was taken. "I will never try to see Mademoiselle Simone again—never—not if the sacrifice kills me!" he swore.

When he went down to breakfast he was sustained by that bitter satisfaction that a man feels in having conquered some terrible temptation, and his face was composed and smiling. He expected a thousand questions, attacks and jests; but, to his infinite surprise, the baron said nothing, for, to tell the truth, the old gentleman was very acute. He saw that the young fellow's sufferings had been real and intense. "It is clear," he said to himself, "that there is more than I suspected—more than a love affair!"

But precisely because this was his conviction, he was the more careful not to refer to the events of the previous evening—that is not refer to them directly. He felt that Raymond was anxious to keep his secret, and each word he spoke was pre-arranged to tempt his young friend to confession. For instance in talking of the approaching completion of this section of their work, he found an opportunity of remarking that they would soon leave Rosiers. But instead of noting sadness on Raymond's face, he only detected a kind of gloomy joy.

"I wish we could go off to-morrow!" was the young man's reply, spoken in a tone of heartfelt sincerity. He meant what he said. He wished that material obstacles of sea and land might separate him from Mademoiselle Simone, and thus effectually prevent his yielding to temptation.

"I do not understand the fellow!" muttered the baron, who was not altogether actuated by curiosity in his wish to penetrate Raymond's secret. He knew the young man to be so inexperienced, so loyal, and so disposed to believe in the loyalty of others, that he felt him to be an easy dupe—one of those simple fellows who fall into all the snares which are spread out for them. "If he would only trust me," thought the worthy old engineer—"if he would allow himself to be guided by my experience, like a blind man by his chain, he would be freed from all his entanglements. Heaven knows where they will lead him! and the boy is too confoundedly proud to tell his old chief."

This idea worried him so much that he hardly ate any breakfast, and swallowed his coffee so hot that he burned his mouth, and ended by getting into a most abominable temper. He lighted his pipe, and took a seat on one of the stone benches in front of the Rising Sun, beside Madame Béru, who was enjoying the balmy air, with her hands placidly folded over her fat stomach. "I am positively too good and too kind," he said to Raymond. "Our men take advantage of me. There is not one of them here yet."

Raymond ventured to say a word in defence. "But you know that we are never as early as this."

"What if we are not? It is their business to be on the spot waiting for us; and in future they shall be, or I'll know the reason why!"

From time to time the baron was apt to issue these terrible decrees, but the real goodness of his character speedily caused him to annul them. However, he was discontentedly ruminating anent his delinquents, when at the end of the street he saw a groom wearing the Maillefert livery coming

towards the inn at a rapid trot. At this sight his good humour returned to him. "I will bet you any amount," he said, "that yonder magnificent being is coming to us."

Nor was he mistaken. When the servant reached the Rising Sun, he drew up his horse, and addressing Madame Bérú, he asked if M. Delorge were there. Raymond stepped forward while the servant dismounted, and drew an envelope from his belt. "I was told to give this to you, sir."

"Is there an answer required?"

"I think not, sir," and the man swung himself into his saddle again and rode off.

Raymond looked at the letter with a strange reluctance to open it. At last he made a mighty effort, and as he tore it open, a quantity of bank-notes fluttered out.

"What the deuce is that!" exclaimed the old engineer.

The letter was written in a very delicate hand, on thick paper. Raymond read it at a glance: "Sir—You left so hastily that we did not settle our accounts. We were partners, if you remember. After your departure I continued playing—thinking that you would not care much if I lost our common stock. Instead of losing, however, I was favoured by the most insolent good luck, and gained two thousand eight hundred francs, of which I send you your half. You see, our partnership brought us good luck

"DUCHESS DE MAUMUSSY."

Raymond turned pale. "Oh! this is too much!" he gasped. And in a transport of rage he crushed the letter and the bank-notes together. "Madame Bérú," he said, in a hoarse voice.

"Sir?"

"Your priest is a worthy man, I believe?"

"Oh! the best in the world, sir; charitable to a degree, and stinting himself for the poor."

"Very well, then, take him this for his poor parishioners." And he tossed the letter and the bank-notes into the apron of the worthy woman, who was stunned with astonishment. Never were eyes so comically anxious as those with which she looked from the money to the baron, who, to tell the truth, was quite as astonished as the woman herself.

"Do you think that Monsieur Delorge was in jest?" she asked, as soon as the young man was out of sight.

"No, I don't," answered the baron.

"But it's such a big sum. What will the *cure* think?"

"You had better wait a little. Let me see," and the baron adroitly withdrew the letter, leaving only the bank-notes in the woman's apron.

"I think," he muttered, "that I had better order a straight-jacket for my maniac. What does this money mean?"

The letter he held would explain everything he thought, but, curious as he was, the idea never occurred to him of reading it. He hurried after Raymond, whom he found in the dining-room drinking a glass of water. "You are too generous, my boy!" he cried, as he went in.

"Eh, sir?" said the young man; "why the money scorched my hands, and I have sent it to the only destination it could have."

The old engineer shrugged his shoulders. "Very good," he said. "But did you know that you gave the letter also to Mother Bérú?"

"And what of that?"

"Simply that every villager would have seen it before twenty-four hours elapsed."

"It is of no consequence, sir—the whole world might read it."

The baron did not wait an instant longer, but with the most eager curiosity and rapt attention he read and re-read the letter. "Well," he said at last with a mocking smile, "I know more than one exquisite who would be taken off his feet by a note like this, and its intoxicating perfume."

"Sir!"

"She is a lovely creature, this young duchess, with her beautiful eyes, which are soft and flashing by turns."

Raymond started up: "Don't ever speak to me of that woman again, sir!" he cried. "She fills me with horror. Yes, with horror," he repeated. "It is the greatest misfortune for me that I ever met her, and I know perfectly well that she will some day be fatal to me."

As was customary with the baron, he did not allow his impressions of this affair to be seen. "We must start," he said hastily; "we have no time to lose."

They left the room together, and on their way out the baron heard Raymond tell Madame Béru to carry the money at once to the priest. Then they proceeded to their duties. However, important as the day's work was for the old engineer, he performed it with limited attention, for he was forming his plans for the evening.

"Let us go to Maillefert," he said when dinner was over.

"I don't feel quite well to-night," Raymond replied.

"Never mind. Come with me and be cheered up."

"No, it's impossible."

"To-morrow, then——"

"No, not to-morrow, either."

"Do you think that because you won a heavy sum at the house you never ought to go there again? What will they think of you?"

"Just what they please," answered Raymond, coldly. "Their opinions are profoundly indifferent to me."

"And Mademoiselle Simone?"

Raymond turned pale. "Why do you find so much satisfaction in tormenting me?" he asked.

"Good night," rejoined the baron, as he left the room, annoyed by the young man's reproaches. "I shall go to the château to-night for his sake," he muttered, "and we will see if the people there are as discreet as he is."

Five minutes later he was walking up the avenue. As on the evening before, the duchess was seated in the small drawing-room on the first floor, but fewer persons were with her. Several had left that morning, and Philippe had gone to Angers with a friend for forty-eight hours. However, the young Duchess de Maumussy was there, sitting by Simone's side on the sofa, facing the door. She wore a black dress, with poppy-coloured ruffles, and a cluster of red pinks, the last of the season, bedecked her hair. Her theatrical beauty was dazzling on this occasion. Her eyes emitted phosphorescent gleams through their fringed lashes, and her skin was exquisite with its pearly reflections. Simone's pale refined beauty looked wan beside her's, and, moreover, the young girl seemed weary.

"I am truly glad to see you," said Madame de Maillefert when the baron was announced. "But you are alone," she added, with a tinge of disappointment in her voice; "what has become of Monsieur Delorge?"

"He is poorly," said the baron, in a melancholy tone. "Very poorly, indeed."

He had provided himself with his glasses before he said this, and he

watched Simone and the young duchess keenly as he spoke. He saw them start and exchange involuntary glances. "Good!" he said to himself, "that's one point."

Unfortunately he had no time to profit by what he felt to be a discovery, for two noblemen from the neighbourhood, with their wives, now entered the room. They had bitten at the bait offered by the duchess, and, after disapproving of the Imperial government for eighteen years, they decided, in 1869, to change and adhere to it. They made certain conditions, it is true, for one of them asked to be the ministerial candidate at the approaching elections, while the other wished to be made a prefect. "These people," thought the baron, "are rather late in the day in their change of political opinions." Then, seeing that Simone had vacated her seat beside Madame de Maumussy, he quietly made his way towards it.

"I will confess the fair penitent," he said to himself, as he carefully framed his questions. But his diplomacy was needless, and he speedily became convinced, almost immediately acquired the certainty, that she had never seen Raymond before this visit to Maillefert. As if the old gentleman had not been almost a total stranger to her, she began to talk of her native land, Italy, and her family, relating all her past life with surprising frankness. The baron was astonished, although he had formerly lived in Rome and Florence, and retained vivid recollection of the ingenuousness of Italian women, and their horror of affectation and prudery.

The young Duchess de Maumussy knew nothing of the world, and she acknowledged it with great sincerity, mentioning that she had spent twenty years in a convent at Naples, where she had a very dull time of it she said. One fine morning, however, her father told her he had found a husband for her, a great French lord, who, in exchange for her enormous dowry, would assist his wife's family with his political influence. In a fortnight she was Duchess de Maumussy. She had made no objections. In fact she was very grateful to be released from the convent. She had been dazzled by her change of position—by the bustle of the paternal mansion succeeding to the quiet of the cloister—by the lovely toilettes of her marriage trousseau, and the flattering words murmured in her ear. When all this pleasing bewilderment was over it was too late. It was not that she had any reason to complain of her husband. The Duke de Maumussy was perfect—attentive to her slightest wishes, always seeing that her purse was full, specifying for pin-money on her behalf in all his negotiations, and providing her with the finest diamonds and most gorgeous equipages in Paris. Thus was she loved and envied on all sides. She spoke of her husband with affection—only he was not the husband she had dreamed of when she talked with her young friends in Naples. The duke was elegant and witty, tenderly sentimental or ironically so, as the fancy took him. But he was thirty years older than she was; he might have been her father. He was old and she was young. She often doubted if she were married, for sometimes three or four days elapsed without her seeing him. Politics and business absorbed his days and pleasure devoured his nights. So that under the spur of ambition or the lash of necessity he led a most restless existence. He allowed her entire liberty, and made such a parade of doing so that she sometimes felt humiliated by her independence.

It was in the most simple and natural tone that she confided all this to the baron, who said to himself: "She is too artless by far. What is her purpose in telling me these things? For me to repeat them to Raymond? Singular commission!"

He saw that he was not alone in hearing what the young duchess said, for Simone had returned and taken a chair close by. One of the other ladies began to talk to her, but Simone's thoughts were evidently elsewhere. She heard—was indeed listening to what Madame de Maumassy was saying, and she did not lose one word of it. Her cheeks became even paler, and her eyes flashed fire as she listened.

"Both these women love the boy," thought the baron. "They have discovered it, and they hate each other. But why? and why has he fled? Was he afraid to choose?"

At this moment the long-haired pianist, who had been taking an inspiring walk by moonlight, sat down at the piano, and as the duke was not there, he soon filled the room with the sounds of the instrument.

The old engineer profited by this occasion to take his leave, with a feeling of satisfaction, but a little doubtful whether he ought to speak to Raymond of his discoveries or not. On the whole, he decided that it would be wiser to remain silent, at least for the time being. It was clear that the young man was very unhappy; in truth, his determination not to return to Maillefert cost him dear. To feel that he had but to extend his hand and reach the happiness he longed for, was almost unbearable. He could not leave the Rising Sun without seeing the terraces of Maillefert, and the white front of the château through the trees on the other side of the Loire. He had almost decided either to ask for a change or to resign, when on the following Sunday, after mass, while the baron was as usual holding court, he went out and turned his steps towards the slope overlooking the gardens of Maillefert.

At a turn of the road he found himself face to face with Simone. She was not alone, for she had her English governess, Miss Lydia Dodge, a tall angular person, with a red nose and pale face, beside her. Simone must have just left church, for the governess carried two prayer books. Confused to such a degree that his limbs trembled under him, Raymond stood still; and as the young girl, equally disturbed, also stopped, they stood looking at each other in such embarrassment that Miss Lydia could not conceal her astonishment.

It was Simone who spoke first. "You have been ill, I think," she said, in a low voice. "I trust you are better!"

"Thank you."

"And that we shall soon see you at the château."

Miss Lydia now said a few words in English, but the girl did not seem to hear them; for she did not reply to her governess.

But she added to Raymond "I hope you will come."

Miss Lydia coughed, and thought it advisable to interfere. "Is this the gentleman," she asked, "who has just given fourteen hundred francs to the poor of Rosiers?"

Raymond started.

"How did you know that, mademoiselle?" he asked.

"Because the priest has just said so."

"Do you mean that he mentioned my name?"

"No," said Simone; "but he described you so well that the grateful poor recognized you at once." And as Miss Lydia drew her on, she added:

"Let us soon see you, sir."

Bewildered, as by an apparition, Raymond stood looking after the two ladies as long as he could see them. Then heaving a long sigh, he murmured: "I could make her love me, I am sure of it."

To persist in his previous resolutions with such a hope in his heart, the

young man must have been very differently made from what he was. "It is no use to struggle against Destiny!" he said, aloud—and these words admitted his defeat. "I shall remain!" he added, in a defiant tone.

All recollection of the task he had undertaken, the remembrance of his murdered father, and the unpunished assassins, the fear of his mother's cutting reproaches, the thought of the disapproval and surprise of his friends—the Cornevins, Roberjot and Ducoudray, everything vanished, and while he retraced his steps to the Rising Sun, he said: "What does it matter if Simone loves me!"

Like an invalid who is determined not to think of his fatal malady, Raymond resolved not to brood over the past, and so at dinner, his face was gay and hopeful. Instead of sitting silently wrapped in dreary thought he talked and laughed, and, when coffee was served, he said to the baron: "Shall we go to Maillefert this evening?"

The old engineer started, and after examining his young companion with some curiosity, and noticing the strange excited look in his eyes, he answered, quietly: "Yes, let us go!"

A warm welcome awaited Raymond at Maillefert. An old friend of the family could not have been better received. The duchess actually rose from her seat and advanced to meet him, saying:

"Here comes our convalescent. Do you know that we have been very uneasy about you?"

The duke who had returned from Angers, paused in a scandalous story he was telling to one of his friends, to shake hands with his dear Delorge. "We have missed you fearfully," he said, "on my honour we have."

Raymond, who was now in the possession of all his faculties, asked himself the reason of this surprising cordiality from mother and son, and wondered what could be their aim, for surely they must have one. With this thought he set himself on his guard. He looked at Simone, who as usual was very quietly dressed. Indeed, she always wore the simplest of toilettes, toilettes which looked almost poor by the side of those adorning her mother's friends, but she was radiant that night; her fair hair was almost luminous, and her eyes and complexion were absolutely brilliant. She reminded one of some portrait painted by the Titian, which had long hung in a corner in the shade, and was now suddenly brought forward into the light. "I did not really see her the other evening," thought the baron, "or it is an absolute transfiguration."

The Duchess de Maumussy struck him as less beautiful. Seated at a little lacquer table, she seemed absorbed in reading a number of the *Vie Parisienne*; but her eyes were really fixed on Raymond with an expression which, had he seen it, would have startled him.

"I think we had better have a little *bac*," said the young duke.

But the proposal was not a happy one, for that evening Madame de Maillefert had invited five or six noble ladies of the neighbourhood whom she was particularly anxious to enlist in her election projects, and this word "*bac*" caused them to compress their lips with disapproval. With a glance at her son, the duchess quickly rejoined: "No—no cards to-night; let us rather have a little dance."

The pianist, who sat dreaming in a corner, frowned, for he knew what a frightful task would now be his. He saw himself, the inspired but unappreciated genius, condemned, and not for the first time either, to play common-place dance music for the amusement of Madame de Maillefert's guests. He beheld himself, the composer of admirable melodies, reduced to

playing Offenbach, Hervé, and such like. However he dared not refuse, so he rose with a melancholy, martyr-like look, and walked to the instrument. "Play us a quadrille from 'Orphée aux Enfers,' " said his hostess.

Raymond at once asked Simone to dance with him. She hesitated before accepting the invitation, and her lips parted as if to say something; but she saw that all eyes were fixed on her, and so without more ado she accepted.

Raymond had sworn to himself that on this occasion he would not remain stupidly silent as he had done at the ball—and kept his word; but Simone did not seem to hear him. She only had eyes for the Duchess de Maumussy, who was dancing with Philippe de Maillefert.

When the quadrille was over, and as Raymond led her to her seat, she said, rapidly and in an almost inaudible voice: "You must dance with the Duchess de Maumussy!"

He looked at her in amazement. "You must," she repeated, and her eyes plainly asked: "Are you afraid?"

It is certain that she could have breathed no more distasteful command, for Raymond upon his way to the chateau had thought to himself: "I can contrive to avoid that woman."

However, he meekly obeyed Mademoiselle Simone, and went towards the duchess. Before he opened his lips, she rose and took his arm, as if she had been waiting for him. After a formidable series of chords the unappreciated pianist attacked a waltz. No retreat was possible, so surmounting his repugnance, Raymond encircled the slender waist of the young duchess; she placed her exquisitely gloved hand on his shoulder, and they waltzed off. At first they moved but slowly, but as the pianist quickened the measure, they turned with increasing rapidity. Raymond's brain was strangely bewildered by the motion of the waltz. He forgot where he was, and wondered if he were not a prey to one of those horrible nightmares which make sleep a torture. "Can it be I," he asked himself, "holding the wife of one of my father's murderers in my arms!"

However, they had only taken a few turns more when she asked him to stop, saying she was fatigued, although her breathing seemed as easy as that of a sleeping child. Raymond on his side was out of breath, and his forehead was covered with drops of perspiration.

"Do you know," exclaimed Madame de Maumussy, abruptly, "that the report of your magnificent alms has come to Maillefert?" She laughed; but it was not a pleasant laugh; and without waiting for an answer she continued: "You are very rich, then?"

"Alas! no, madame."

"Then your generosity is all the more creditable!" But this was not what her black eyes said, for they haughtily asked: "Why have you given away precisely the sum that I sent you?"

Raymond instantly understood that unless he wished to make her his enemy, he must find some plausible excuse; and so inspired by necessity, he replied: "I played the other night—for the first time in my life, madame. When I received your letter, I was in an agony of fear lest I had lost. What would have become of me in that case—I, who am but a poor engineer? so I trembled, lest this money so easily and rapidly acquired, might inspire me with a fatal passion for play. And if I gave it to the poor, it was so that I might have the right never to touch a card again, and yet not incur the risk of having it said that I feared losing my winnings."

As Raymond proceeded with this plausible explanation, the duchess's face resumed its usual expression. "This is the truth?" she asked.

"Ah, madame, why should I tell you a falsehood?"

She smiled instead of speaking: and as the music had finished, she took Raymond's arm to return to the seat which she had previously occupied. He already fancied himself free, and was manœuvring to return to Simone; but the duchess swiftly commenced talking again, so that he could not possibly leave her without showing excessive rudeness. Taking as her text what he had said about being a poor engineer, Madame de Maumussy questioned him concerning his affairs in the most friendly manner. How long was it since he had left the Polytechnic School? Where had he been? Was his position in accordance with his merits? Raymond tried to answer as if he understood her, but all the time he was watching Simone, who was so seated that he could see her in a mirror hanging behind Madame de Maumussy. However the girl's face only expressed a little annoyance—nothing more serious. Meanwhile the duchess proceeded with her remarks. The baron had informed her, she told him, that the authorities had been very unjust to his young associate, although Raymond's reputation was already well established as one of the best graduates of the engineering school. "Now was this true?" she asked. Fortunately a diversion came at this moment, for Simone was not the only person who had not taken her eyes from Raymond and the duchess. The baron also had watched them closely, and he was surprised to see his young friend talk so long with a woman whom he knew he disliked. "Perhaps I had best go to his assistance," he said to himself. And leaving Madame de Maillefert to the mercy of her rapacious guests, the placehunters, he swiftly approached the younger duchess.

"Did you not tell me," she exclaimed, as soon as he was within hearing, "that this gentleman was too modest in making his worth known?"

"I did, indeed, madame."

"Well, then, it becomes our duty to do it for him."

The baron smiled. "I am not in odour of sanctity," he replied, "and my recommendation would be quite without value."

"But I can do a great deal," eagerly interrupted the duchess; and at once, in her Italian accent, she began to boast of her influence over her husband, who was all powerful, she said, and who had too often used his influence to find places for persons of inferior capacity to refuse to serve a man of real talent. She declared that the duke would do what she desired with the greatest possible willingness.

Raymond, whose thoughts may be easily imagined, made no reply, and the situation, despite the baron's presence, was becoming extremely awkward when the unappreciated pianist, ascertaining that the guests had danced sufficiently, closed the piano, and with an air of profound humiliation seated himself in his corner again. At the same time the lordlings from the neighbourhood took their leave. Madame de Maumussy saw that that the baron was waiting with polite impatience for Raymond, so she bid them both good night, but not without neglecting to say to the young engineer: "We will speak of this again. It will not be my fault if the future does not recompense you for the past."

Without knowing very well what he did or said, the young man pressed her hand. In the mirror he had just seen Simone approach her mother, say a few words and leave the room, but not without giving Madame de Maumussy one last, strange look. "I shall not see her again to-night," he

thought. "Why did she leave the room? I have been the victim of my own foolish vanity, and she does not care for me as I hoped she did."

Madame de Maillefert and her son, so haughty and indifferent generally, now approached the baron and his young friend, and did not let them depart until they had obtained a formal promise that they would dine at the château on the following day.

They started off, and as soon as they were alone, the baron asked Raymond—"Come, what is this charade they are playing in your honour?"

"Ah, I know no more than you, sir."

"You see, my dear boy," continued the old engineer, "you would be making a great mistake if you looked at their politeness as a proof of their regard and liking. Such people never take so much trouble without a motive. Have you any idea what it can be?"

"Not in the least."

The old engineer seemed to be thinking. He was piqued by Raymond's reserve. With that delicious lack of self-knowledge which even the wisest have, he exclaimed—"I never meddle with other people's affairs, nor do I wish to force your confidence; but I should not be true to the friendship I feel for you did I not say, 'Look out and be careful!'"

These exhortations were needless; for unused as Raymond was to drawing-room diplomacy, inexperienced as he might be in those miserable intrigues which are veiled by the politeness of good society, he understood that something strange was going on about him. An instinct, superior to all experience, warned him that he was threatened by some serious danger. But what could this danger be? Was it the Duchess de Maumussy whom he was to fear? If the vanity which lurks even in the most modest man's heart did not deceive him, the young duchess took more than a friendly interest in his welfare. Might it not happen that this interest had a different foundation to what he had imagined. Jean Cornevin's last letter returned to his mind. Had not Jean said Laurent Cornevin was in all probability living? And in that case the proof of Maumussy's and Combelaïne's crime still existed. Might not the assassins know this, and might they not be living in momentary expectation of being unmasked? If this were so, then Raymond asked himself if the Duchess de Maumussy had not possibly been sent to Maillefert with the sole purpose of deluding him by magnificent promises, and inducing him to abandon any intentions he might have formed of punishing the assassins?

"In that case," he thought, "Madame de Maillefert and her son are in the plot, and this would explain their advances."

But Mademoiselle Simone was not; for while she compelled Raymond to dance with their guest, she at the same time gave him a warning glance. "I must speak to her," he said to himself. "I must find the courage to ask her to enlighten me."

Unfortunately when he reached the château on the following evening, Simone was not in the reception room, where the guests usually assembled, pending the announcement of dinner, and, indeed Madame de Maillefert seemed very much vexed by the girl's absence. "She is insupportable," she declared, "with her mania for rushing about the country, as if she were a poor country gentleman, with all his business on his own shoulders."

Raymond was standing near the young Duchess de Maumussy, who instantly remarked—"It is strange, certainly; Mademoiselle de Maillefert has most eccentric habits for a girl of her rank and with such a fortune, too. For, do you know, it is said that she possesses eight millions, and that she will present this large sum to the man who is skilful enough to please

her." The allusion was direct, insulting, and evidently premeditated—and in fact as if the young duchess feared that she might not have been understood, she added—"A girl as rich as that ought to renounce all hope of being loved for herself!"

Twenty-four hours before, Raymond would have taken up the cudgels on Simone's behalf; but he was learning self-control and so he made no rejoinder. The dinner was not very gay, for only four or five of the Parisian guests, who had been invited to the château, now remained. The others had flown back to the capital with the first frost. And if the duchess still lingered in the country, it was, as she herself declared, on account of business matters. The evening passed without Simone appearing, although at eight o'clock she had sent Miss Dodge to inform her mother of her return.

"Is she vexed with me?" thought Raymond, as he entered the Rising Sun. "She evidently avoids me!"

The next day, however, when he called at the château with the baron he found no one but Simone in the room they were shown to. Did she expect him? This was certainly the baron's idea—for after a few words he approached the window and remained there, although it was quite dark. It is true, however, that by reason of the very darkness the polished panes of glass served almost as a mirror in reflecting the faces of the two young people. Raymond did his best to control his agitation, for was not this the occasion he had longed for? And he felt that he must snatch at it.

Hardly had he opened his lips, however, than Simone interrupted him. She was very pale, and the contraction of her trembling lips testified to her agitation. "Was it you, sir," she asked, "who, on the night of the ball, was shown into Miss Lydia's private sitting-room?"

"By one of your servants, mademoiselle."

"I know. My mother and I were in the next room engaged in a most painful discussion, and we undoubtedly spoke very loud."

Raymond turned pale. His indiscretion had been involuntary, and but for the baron he would have left the room at the first words that met his ear. He could not say this, of course, nor could he utter a falsehood.

"You spoke rather loud, certainly," he stammered.

"So that you heard all we said?" He did not answer. "Did you hear me?" insisted the young girl.

Never did the word yes cost Raymond so bitter a pang. Would she hate him for evermore? No. She looked at him steadily, but with no anger in her eyes. "And what did you infer from what you heard?" she asked.

"That your devotion is sublime."

"That is no answer," she said, impatiently.

Raymond was puzzled for a moment; but suddenly he exclaimed: "Do you mean that you wish for my advice?"

She leaned towards him with as much anxiety as if her future destiny depended on his words. "I do, indeed," she said.

He, too, had a strange feeling that his reply was of supreme importance both for himself and her; and so he carefully weighed his words. "Not only do I admire your course, mademoiselle, but I approve of it as the only one worthy of a Maillefert. Had I been asked by you I should have advised it. You consider yourself to be merely the custodian of the immense fortune bequeathed to you. You are right. This fortune belongs in a degree to the house of Maillefert, and you feel it ought to be expended to sustain the honour and glory of a great name."

The girl's eyes lighted up with joy and thankfulness. "Do you mean that all ought to be expended in that way?" she asked.

"Yes, every farthing."

"You really mean this?"

"I do, indeed, for on this I found my dearest hopes."

She stopped him with a gesture. "To deceive one now would be unworthy of a man who, hearing a young girl insulted, risked his life to defend her—and—I believe you——" As she spoke she held out her hand to Raymond, who clasped it in both his own. "Believe in me, too," she added, "only——"

She did not finish. All the blood in her heart flew to her face. Raymond turned and perceived the Duchess de Maumussy standing on the threshold. Had she heard anything? and had she purposely selected for her appearance the very moment which instinct told her was most fraught with danger for herself and her influence? She certainly seemed greatly disturbed. Her very lips were white. "Where is your mother?" she asked Simone.

The young girl hesitated. In fact she was afraid to trust her voice to speak. However, the baron came to her assistance. He bowed in the most deferential way, and replied. "The duchess and her son, so we were informed by the servant who admitted us, are engaged with two of the sub-prefects of the department."

This was true, as perhaps Madame de Maumussy was already aware. However, she laughed unnaturally and then dropped on to a chair. "How droll it is," she exclaimed, "to see this dear dear duchess and this excellent duke busying themselves with politics." Then, all at once, with the feverish volubility of people who are afraid of silence, she began to talk of the events now occurring in Paris. She could speak with authority on the matter, she said, for she had that morning received a letter from her husband. The duke had written that he was not satisfied with the way things were going. In his opinion the imperial government was getting into trouble. The emperor closed his ears to the advice of his old friends, and listened to charlatans and clap trap politicians. The influence of the empress had brought men who were unfitted for power into office.

"I was mistaken," thought Raymond, as he heard her talk in this fashion. "This woman was not sent here by my enemies. If she knew who I was, she would never speak like that."

Whatever the cause may have been, it was nevertheless certain that something had roused the Duchess de Maumussy from her habitual apathy and nonchalance. All her being vibrated, colour rose to her cheeks, and she panted for breath as she spoke of her husband and his friends, of the men in office, and the intrigues of the hour—her stinging criticism dealing in turn with the emperor, the empress and the court. "She knows everything," thought the baron; but at the same time he shrewdly suspected that Madame de Maumussy was merely talking to hide the real cause of her anger.

The proof of this was, that when her hostess entered the room with her son, the young duchess received them with almost insulting jests, respecting the long conference they had had with their political friends. Raymond and the baron were also able to measure the important position which the young duchess must occupy by the self-control of Madame de Maillefert who but gently replied: "My dear Clélie, you certainly have an attack of the nerves to-night."

"You are mistaken," answered Madame de Maumussy, with an unnatural laugh; "I was never in better health or spirits."

When our friends left the château an hour later, the baron was more puzzled than ever. "Well!" he asked, "what do you make out of all this?"

Raymond, who was in the seventh heaven, promptly replied: "This has been the happiest day of my life."

"The deuce it has!"

"Yes, I worship Mademoiselle de Maillefert, and from what occurred to-night I believe that she is not indifferent to me. Did you hear what she said to me?"

"Perfectly, and if French is French, and if I am not an old fool, she plainly asked you if you would be willing to marry her without a dowry."

Raymond's face was radiant. "That was just what I thought she meant me to understand."

The baron shrugged his shoulders. "And what then?" he asked.

Raymond looked puzzled. "In my opinion," he said, "Mademoiselle Simone's dowry is the only obstacle between us. If the dowry is suppressed, the obstacle ceases to exist."

"So you believe that matters will go smoothly now?"

Like all impressionable natures, Raymond could pass in one moment from the greatest enthusiasm to the most profound depression. "Mademoiselle Simone," he answered, in a troubled voice, "told me to believe in her, and I shall obey her blindly."

After this stormy evening, after Madame de Maumussy's strange behaviour, after involuntarily witnessing her semi-quarrel with the Duchess de Maillefert, Raymond was not without some anxiety as to the reception awaiting him on his next visit at the château. His anxiety was superfluous, however, for he was even better received than before. Indeed in less than a week he was made to feel as much at home at the château as if it had belonged to his own family. A future son-in-law could not have been treated with more delicate consideration, or with more charming attentions. The duchess no longer called him Monsieur Delorge, but Monsieur Raymond, and sometimes merely Raymond.

"She had better come out with it and call him 'my dear son-in-law,' " thought the baron.

Philippe's familiarity was even more remarkable than his mother's, and all the more significant as it was displayed abroad. Every day, after breakfast, he went to join the engineers at their work along the river, spending hours in watching their operations with every sign of eager interest. He walked with Raymond through Rosiers arm-in-arm. He drove him to Saumur and to Angers. He dropped in at the Rising Sun and shared his dinner, saying that the cooking was better than at Maillefert, and at last he even dragged the young engineer to the best café in the place for a game of billiards. Madame de Maillefert, on her side, was never so cordial as when she had strangers in her drawing-room. She then took occasion to show her intimacy with Raymond, and called him by his christian name. It was also clear that the duchess and her son purposely left him with Simone—for whenever they walked in the grounds Madame de Maillefert would invariably say: "Give your arm to Simone, my dear Raymond." She herself took the baron's, while Philippe offered his to the young duchess.

And regularly, too, did Raymond find himself alone with Simone. The poor fellow was almost frightened. He could not credit the fact that his path was so smoothened for him—he dared not believe that no obstacles would arise.

"You think it too good to last?" said the old engineer.

"I cannot comprehend it—that is what I mean," answered Raymond.

"I have not yet made up my mind what to believe," said the baron. "What I suspect is a different matter." But he would not explain himself further, saying that if he were correct, facts would soon speak for themselves.

However, the more expansive the duchess became, the more reserve did Simone show. The more ingeniously her mother arranged *tele-d-tele* meetings with Raymond, the more carefully she avoided them. She was rarely out of the shadow of her governess's skirts, and Miss Lydia now took part in all their conversations. "She hates me!" thought Raymond, in profound despair. "What can I have done?"

He thought she grew colder, paler, and stiffer each day. She rode about all day long, was rarely indoors, and was as busy with the people under her orders as any gentleman farmer. "Poor child!" said the baron; "they will end by killing her."

Her eyes were often red, as though she had been weeping, and at times Raymond felt he could bear it no longer—that he must speak to her. One day, finding her in tears, he exclaimed, regardless of the presence of the governess, "Either banish me from your presence, or allow me to share your grief." She did not answer, whereupon Raymond urged her to speak. "Who is troubling you?" he asked so fiercely that the governess started. "Do you think while I live," he continued, "that any one that breathes shall make you unhappy?"

But with gentle sweetness she interrupted him: "Do you wish to drive me to despair?" she murmured. "Do you wish to ruin us?"

"Us!" she said, "us!" Raymond heard it. "Can I do *nothing*?" he asked.

"Nothing."

"But this anxiety is killing me!"

"Do you think," she said, with her eyes fixed on his, "that I do not suffer also." But to all his ardent entreaties for an explanation, she would only reply: "I cannot—I have no right to utter a word."

Poor Miss Dodge looked on in wonder at this strange scene.

"You are pitiless, mademoiselle," stammered Raymond. "It would be even less cruel to banish me from your presence."

Simone checked him. "You are robbing me of all my courage," she said, "at the very moment when I need it most." And then, as if she were afraid of betraying herself, she took the arm of her governess and hurried from the room, leaving Raymond crushed by a sense of his own powerlessness.

He pictured Simone's situation, in which horror was increased by mystery; and he realized that she stood alone, without friends or advice. Hearing a noise, he suddenly raised his eyes. The Duchess de Maumassy had entered the room, and stood looking at him. He shivered, for, to his mind, her glance was full of cutting irony. This was the first time she had spoken to him since the evening she had behaved so strangely. "What is the matter?" she softly said.

Without pausing to reflect, Raymond walked towards her. "The matter is this," he said, "that I love Mademoiselle Simone more than life itself—more than all the world—that is, I cannot possibly bear to see her so wretched, and I am fully determined to discover who it is who is killing her by inches."

She did not flinch under his gaze. Not one of her eyelashes quivered. "Do you intend that for me?" she asked.

"Yes, madame."

The young duchess hesitated; but finally walking towards the door of the room, which had remained partially open, she securely closed it, and then returned to Raymond. "Have you sense enough left, Monsieur Delorge, to understand what I say?"

"I am perfectly calm, madame."

"Then listen to the advice of a friend. Leave Maillefert, not in an hour, but this very moment."

Raymond laughed. "Do I trouble you so much," he asked.

She looked at him haughtily.

"You!—trouble me!" she rejoined. Then, shrugging her shoulders, she continued more gently: "You think the young lady of the house loves you. Perhaps she thinks so herself. But you are both mistaken. True passion neither reflects nor reasons; but Simone has a calculating mind. If she really loved you she would say one word—only one word—and might be your wife. She will not say it!"

Raymond laughed again. "I am at a loss," he said, "to understand the motive which prompts you to tell me this."

The young duchess's eyes flashed fire, but she controlled her voice, and answered, in an under tone: "If you happened to be in a house which was about to fall, and a passer-by called out to you to take care, would you stop to analyze his motives. I am that passer-by. Your heart is too good, and you have too great a contempt for money to condescend to artifices and intriguing. You have no suspicion what persons who thirst for luxury and amusement may be induced to do. Don't acquire the knowledge at your own expense. Your place is not here. The more warmly you are received the more fear you ought to feel. Believe me, it is not mere life you risk."

If there was real commiseration in this woman's tone of voice, Raymond at all events did not perceive it. He imagined that she wished to insult him. And catching hold of her arm, "Speak!" he cried. "You have said too much—not to say more——"

But she disengaged herself, and, with a contemptuous glance, rejoined: "I think you are perfectly mad!" Thereupon she approached the piano and began to play in a loud key.

The more Raymond pondered over the mysterious words he had just heard the more gloomy his apprehensions became. Was Madame de Maumussy sincere in her wish to warn him, or was she acting a part? However, in either case was it not best for him to try and wring the truth from her? "Madame," he began.

But she did not seem to hear him; her fingers were darting over the keys with marvellous agility. Perhaps she really did not hear. Thinking this he went towards her, and gently touched her shoulder. "Well!" she asked, half turning to him.

"Have pity on me," he resumed.

"I shall tell you no more—it is useless to urge me." Then, as she saw that Raymond determined to persist, she added: "Very well, I abandon the field!" And she left the room humming an air from the opera she had been playing.

Raymond hesitated. Fortunately a ray of sense was left him, and he determined to go off at once. In the vestibule he met the Duchess de

Maillefert, who was taking leave of an old lady who had been paying her a visit. As soon as she saw Raymond she exclaimed: "You are not going yet, surely!"

He did not answer her, however, but rushed down the steps and thence along the avenue. It seemed to him that he was treading upon a board stretched over an abyss—a board that was bending and cracking beneath him. And meanwhile a voice sounded in his ears—the voice of conscience—declaring that he deserved his fate—he, the son of General Delorge—for mingling with the folks who were the friends of his father's murderers. On reaching his room at the inn he spent hours in alternate fits of despair and rage, when suddenly the door opened and the baron appeared. "I have just come from Maillefert," he said, "and I left everyone in great surprise at your sudden disappearance. I am not curious——"

Raymond turned towards him. "You shall know everything, sir," he said.

And then, with the most punctilious exactitude, he related his interviews with Simone and the young duchess.

The baron listened, and when Raymond had finished, "Fire and fury," he exclaimed. "Nervous, excitable people like yourself ought to stay at home."

"That is a very easy thing to say, sir. But what would you have done in my place?"

"I should have taken good care not to offend Madame de Maumussy."

"That woman is my enemy, sir."

"I dare say. But the duchess is an Italian—that is to say, a woman who yields to impressions of the moment—who, instead of analyzing her emotions, allows herself to be carried away by them. Take my advice. Go back to the château, as if nothing had happened."

And, to all appearance, nothing had; for when Raymond appeared at Maillefert, the next day, all was calm as usual. "Have you seen Philippe?" asked the duchess.

"No, madame."

"He has gone to the station to meet our friends, who are coming by the nine o'clock express."

"You expect guests, then?"

"Yes," she said, "we are expecting my dear Clélie's husband, the Duke de Maumussy, who will bring with him the famous architect, Monsieur Verdale, and the Count de Combelaïne as well."

At any other time Raymond would have been crushed by the mere mention of these names. But human nature like steel plunged red-hot into an icy torrent, sometimes acquires superior qualities of resistance and elasticity and is at times endowed, by suffering, with marvellous energy. Thus Raymond turned pale, but his voice was steady as he replied: "You expect them to-night, then?"

Madame de Maillefert looked at the clock. "They will be here in less than an hour," she replied. And she immediately began a most enthusiastic panegyric of the Duke de Maumussy, whose chivalric character and extraordinary political abilities she professed to admire very much. Combelaïne also had her respect as a devoted servant of the empire—an heroic soldier, ready to pour out his blood for his country; in fact he reminded her, she said, of one of those loyal cavaliers who in knightly times asked, in dying, to be buried at the feet of the sovereign they had served.

Sufficiently master of himself not to go off again in a fury, Raymond

approached the sofa where Simone sat near a little work-table. Still he did not get rid of the duchess, who with a great display of animation went on to describe the merits of the great architect Verdale, the self-made man who by reason of his talents, had reached the highest rank in his profession, and made an immense fortune. She was thinking of making some changes at Maillefert, and M. Verdale would give her some ideas.

On hearing this Simone looked up in such evident surprise that her mother was quite disgusted. "Yes indeed," she continued, in a determined tone; "Yes; these old barracks must be made more habitable. I have reasons for thinking that the year 1870 will not elapse without her Majesty the Empress doing our house the honour of spending a day or two in it."

But Raymond did not hear her. He was watching the clock and calculating how many minutes longer he could venture to remain at the château.

"Do you know, dear Clélie," asked the duchess, "how many days your husband proposes to give us?"

"No; he has not told me," replied Madame de Maumussy looking up from a paper she was pretending to read.

Raymond must go in ten minutes. He glanced around the room, which to him was sanctified by so many hours of hope. He looked at Simone, who was industriously engaged, not with some useless delicate work, but in sewing some baby linen, which she had promised to a poor girl. At last the clock struck nine, and Raymond rose.

"Do not go yet," cried the duchess; "wait and see our friends."

"Impossible, madame; the baron is expecting me."

"In that case," replied Madame de Maillefert with a charming smile, "I will not detain you. But come to-morrow."

He bowed without a word; faintly pressed the hand which Simone extended to him, and then departed. The night was dark and cold; the sky black with clouds, and a furious wind was tearing through the trees. Raymond gave full vent to his rage as soon as he was out of doors. But as he reached the suspension bridge he paused—a carriage was rapidly approaching, and inside, by the light of the lamps, he could distinguish four men—M. Philippe and his friends.

III.

It was nearly midnight when Raymond entered the Rising Sun, where Master Béru sat in the kitchen making up his accounts. On seeing the young fellow he exclaimed; "Please go to the baron at once, sir; he is very impatient to see you."

Raymond found the baron walking up and down the large sitting-room. "At last!" exclaimed the old gentleman. "You can't retreat now! You are in for it!"

"What is the matter?"

"Something serious. Your dear Duchess de Maillefert deserves—well, never mind. Sit down; we must talk together."

But as he was a prudent man, he began by assuring himself that all the doors were carefully closed, and that no one was listening, after which he returned to his companion. "You know," said he, solemnly, "that it is a rule of mine never to meddle with other people's business."

Raymond had many a time smiled at his superior's self-delusion in this

respect, but he was not in the mood to do so now. So he waited for more to come.

"For your sake," continued the baron, "I shall do violence to the principles of my whole life. We have now lived together for months. I have realized that you are generous, loyal, and sincere—too sincere in fact. And so I have become—what shall I say—accustomed—no interested—yes, interested in you as if you were my son."

All these preliminaries on the baron's part ought to have startled Raymond, but he simply replied: "I will listen to you, sir, as if you were my own father."

The baron walked up and down the room for a moment and then suddenly stopped short. "This a matter in which your honour is involved," he said.

"My honour!" exclaimed Raymond.

"Yes; there is not a minute to lose. No time for hesitation or temporizing. To-morrow you must go to Maillefert, and formally ask the Duchess de Maillefert to give you the hand of her daughter, Mademoiselle Simone."

"What on earth do you mean?" cried Raymond.

"I mean what I say—it must be done," answered the baron. "It is absolutely the only way by which you can retain one ray of reputation and escape from the shameful snare which has been laid for your too confiding feet."

Raymond passed his hand over his brow. "I hear you, sir," he said, "but I do not understand you."

"And to think," continued the baron, sadly, "that it was I who encouraged you to love Mademoiselle Simone. Fool that I was! It is to-day reported throughout the district, at Saumur and even at Angers, that Simone de Maillefert is your mistress."

Raymond started to his feet. "This is the result of that Bizet de Chenet's cowardly slander," he cried in a hoarse voice.

But the baron stopped him. "Bizet is a fool," said he, "and his words have no weight. If Simone has lost her reputation it is through her own mother. I mean what I say. The duchess has openly declared not to one person, but to several that she hoped to induce you to marry her daughter—although you had seduced her, and were now tired of her."

A frightful cry of rage burst from Raymond's lips. "Never!" he exclaimed, "No mother ever said such a thing."

"She did say it—I know she did!"

"Very well, then. In that case I shall not defer going to the château until to-morrow; I shall go there to-night. I will tear this miserable woman's tongue out, and nail it to the door."

This explosion of despair was anticipated by the baron, who caught hold of his young companion's hand. "Before you do anything," he said, "you must listen to me. Listen and decide for yourself. It is more than a month, is it not, since Madame de Maillefert made such extraordinary advances to us that our suspicions were awakened? Did I not say to you at the time that my suspicions were of an odious character?"

"Yes, you did."

"Very well. From that hour all my powers of perception have been on the alert. Not a day has passed without my trying to solve this mystery, and that is why you have seen me hovering around Madame de Maumussy, for I thought she knew the truth."

"And she did, of course?"

"No; she was ignorant of it until three days ago, I am sure of that.

When she learned it I can't precisely tell. She may have been her hostess's unconscious accomplice. At all events, as soon as she knew it she advised you to fly."

"Proceed," said Raymond.

"As I could discover nothing from her," continued the baron, "I looked elsewhere. My foolish title and my family connections opened the doors of several houses in the neighbourhood to me. I made everybody talk about the Mailleferts, hoping to glean an item of intelligence here and there, and which, added together, might prove important."

"Ah," murmured Raymond, "how shall I ever repay you?"

"By allowing me to be your guide, my dear boy. But wait—I lost all my trouble until this very evening, when I called at the house of Madame de Lachère, that lady, you remember, whose husband wants to be made a prefect—'Your young colleague is behaving disgracefully,' she said to me, in a severe tone. Feeling that I was on the track, I fortunately contented myself with an inane smile. 'How so?' I asked, 'Oh! you need not be so cautious with me,' she replied, 'for I know everything.' I bowed. 'In that case, madame, you are wiser than I,' I said, whereupon she laughed. 'My dear baron,' she continued, 'it was the duchess herself, who, in an agony of grief, confided her daughter's situation to me, and told me of the efforts she was making to induce the man who had seduced her to marry her, late in the day as it was.'"

"The woman lied!" cried Raymond.

The baron shook his head. "So I thought myself at first, and indeed I allowed her to see that I doubted her." But she declared that she was not the only person to whom Madame de Maillefert had made this most incredible revelation, and to prove it to me she called one of her friends, who she said knew the same thing from the same source. As I still seemed to doubt, she then summoned her husband, who assured me that he had heard from the son the same story that his wife had heard from the mother."

"What! from the duke?" cried Raymond. "Simone's brother? But why," he exclaimed—"why this abominable slander?"

"Why? Because the duchess and her noble son have nothing but Simone's income to live upon. If she marries they are lost. They intend that she shan't marry—and this is why I want you to go to-morrow and ask for Mademoiselle Simone's hand."

Raymond hesitated. "I am at this moment in a most horrible state of perplexity," he stammered. "I am not free to do as I should like."

The baron looked aghast. "Can you hesitate?" he cried.

"Ah! if you knew the truth," exclaimed Raymond; and this time, carried away by the situation, he confided his whole story—the story of his father's murder, and his mother's hopes of vengeance—to his old friend.

"I understand," said the baron, when the young man had finished speaking. "I now see the reason of all your strange hesitation. But you must not waver. There is no reason in the world strong enough to let a pure young girl remain for a moment under such an infamous accusation."

"You are right. I will do exactly as you advise," said Raymond, and they parted for the night.

Day was beginning to break, gray and sad, when Raymond awoke after an hour's heavy sleep. He felt utterly exhausted, but his head was clear and ready for any emergency. It was Wednesday, December 1st, 1869; that is to say, seventeen years previously, to a day, General Delorge had fallen the victim of cowardly assassins. And he, Raymond Delorge—he

who, on the lid of his father's coffin, had sworn eternal vengeance on his murderers, was on his way to meet them. But imperious, inexorable necessity required it—he must, before aught else, protect poor Simone.

And so, dressed in the traditional costume customary on such occasions, he started forth at noon precisely. “I shall go with you,” said the baron, “but let us understand each other. I shall remain in the reception-room, and you must see the Duchess de Maillefert alone—my presence might make her angry—and you must force an explanation from her.”

As they walked along, Raymond asked, “How do you think the duchess will receive me?”

“Who knows! Perhaps as a saviour. Possibly as a lackey.”

“And the others?”

“What others? Oh, you mean those men! Let them rest for the time being. Besides, what do you care for such scoundrels. Hold your head high, young friend. It is for them to bow before you.”

All the valets were in their places in the spacious vestibule. “They look more like creditors than lackeys,” said the old baron; “and I should infinitely prefer to wait on myself than to be waited on by them.”

The servants usually rose when Raymond or the chief appeared, but on this occasion only one of them shuffled to his feet. “Is the Duchess de Maillefert at home?” asked the baron.

“She is out,” answered the valet, in the assured tone of a servant who has received his orders.

“Did she say when she would be in?”

“My mistress never gives any such instructions.”

Raymond and the baron exchanged glances. “We will wait, then,” said the old gentleman.

The footman answered in a most offensive tone: “I told you, gentlemen, that Madame la Duchesse was out, that no one knew when she would come in—or if she would ever come at all!”

The baron's face flushed. He asked Raymond for a card. “Take this,” he said to the servant—“take this instantly to Madame de Maillefert; or, if she is really out, give it to her on her return. Monsieur Delorge wishes to see her as soon as possible. Now show us to the drawing-room.”

His tone was so imperious, that the valet obeyed him, grumbling, “Well! I can't help it. She must say what she chooses.”

As soon as they were alone in the reception-room, Raymond exclaimed: “Well, this is a good beginning!” But, before the baron could reply, the door opened again, and the same footman re-appeared. “Madame la Duchesse will receive the gentlemen,” he said.

“Go,” said the baron; “I will wait here.”

It was in a sort of boudoir, between her dressing-room and sleeping apartment, that the Duchess de Maillefert received young Delorge. She had been dressing when the card was taken to her. Exceedingly angry, she sent away her maid, and contented herself with twisting her hair into a knot and assuming a pink dressing-gown trimmed with lace, which had once been magnificent, but was now faded and tumbled. Nothing could have been less attractive, less gracious, or less noble in appearance, than this woman disturbed in the great work of her existence. Without the artifices of the toilette-table she appeared such as she really was; such as she had become—thanks to increasing age, and thanks, still more, to powder and rouge, cosmetics and lotions. In fact, *fêtes*, excitement, the keen pursuit of money, financial anxieties, all the troubles of her stormy life, had greatly

impaired her once remarkable beauty. She was seated in a large arm-chair, with her feet on a cushion, when Raymond entered. She looked at him from head to foot as he approached her. "You are alone?" she said, in a sharp voice.

"The Baron de Boursonne is waiting for me down stairs."

"That is a great pity! I should have liked to compliment him on his charming ways."

"Madame!"

"Is he not your adviser?"

"He is my devoted friend."

"Ah! indeed! And it he then who teaches you to insist on seeing people contrary to the orders they give their servants?"

"It was necessary for me to speak to you."

"You could not wait a day, of course?"

"No, madame."

The lady shrugged her shoulders disdainfully, and settled herself in her chair. "Very well; then, now that you are here, say what you have to say!"

Far from disconcerting Raymond, this insulting reception only increased his coolness. "Madame," he began, "I belong to an honourable family. My father, whom I had the misfortune to lose when I was very young, was a general in the French army; my mother springs from the De Lespéran family, which is of good and old nobility. I am not yet thirty; I am a civil engineer; and I ask the honour of your daughter's hand."

It was with the bewildered air of a woman contemplating an absolute phenomenon that the duchess examined the young man.

"And it was to say this," she asked, "that you insisted on seeing me to-day?"

"For that only, madame——"

Raymond's coolness seemed to annoy her.

"Do you know who we are?" she exclaimed.

"I know, madame, that your daughter belongs to an illustrious family, that she is the descendant of a long line of loyal and valiant gentlemen, who have bequeathed from father to son a spotless name and pure traditions of honour and duty."

The duchess coloured, and eager to punish what she felt to be an insult, she asked: "Do you know what my daughter's fortune is?"

"Not positively, madame."

"But you have some idea, I presume. Let me tell you that her capital is about seven millions of francs. Rather a tempting amount, I think."

Insulting as was this speech, Raymond heard it, to all appearance, unmoved. "I await your reply," he coldly said.

"My reply!" she cried angrily. "Do you imagine, sir, that I attach any importance to such a preposterous request? Can you have really hoped anything from me?"

"I hoped nothing, madame." She started, and Raymond proceeded: "I had a duty to fulfil; I have accomplished it. I shall never speak to you again on this subject. I wished to give public evidence of my respectful admiration for Mademoiselle de Maillefort. I have done so. I have also openly expressed my intention of taking this step, and I shall as openly publish your reply."

He bowed, and turned to the door, but Madame de Maillefort stopped him. "What do you mean?" she asked, in a very different tone.

"What I say, nothing else."

"Simone has been talking to you. Simone sent you to me."

"No, madame, I swear to you that she has not."

"She loves you, however; you know she does."

For these words Raymond was almost willing to forgive the duchess. "God grant that you are speaking the truth, madame," he replied, in a trembling voice.

The duchess, who was pale and frowning, seemed greatly troubled, but all at once a sudden inspiration lighted up her face. "Wait a moment," she said. "It is Simone who shall answer you herself."

She rang, and as soon as her maid appeared, she exclaimed, "Find Mademoiselle Simone, and bid her come to me instantly."

What strange idea had now entered this unworthy mother's head? Troubled beyond expression, Raymond felt that he should not be able to contain himself were Simone to appear, and yet he knew that he should more than ever require all his self-control.

IV.

"You love Simone?" asked the duchess abruptly.

"Madame——"

"My dear sir, your fate is in her hands. One word from her and I yield. It is for you to obtain that word from her." She checked herself and listened.

"There she comes!" she added.

Nor was the duchess mistaken, for Simone now appeared at the door of the boudoir. "Good heavens!" she cried, when her eyes lighted on Raymond, whose presence in the château she was ignorant of.

"Come in, Simone," said her mother, and the girl complied, looking from the duchess to Raymond with earnest inquiry in her beautiful eyes.

"My dear Simone," began Madame de Maillefert, "a most important event has just taken place. This gentleman has asked me for your hand."

The poor child's face flushed scarlet. "Mamma!" she cried, with a faint hope of recalling her mother to her senses.

But nothing ever checked the duchess when she had an aim in view. "I know by experience what a hell a home without love is, and so I desire, my daughter, that you should obey the dictates of your own heart. What shall I say to Monsieur Raymond Delorge?"

Confused, humiliated, and shocked, the girl dropped her head. "Have pity, mamma! Let us talk when we are alone."

The duchess shrugged her shoulders. "There it is!" she cried. "You always pass as a virgin martyr, and I am the victim, as usual. I wish that our conversation should have a witness, and I am very pleased that this gentleman is here."

Tears started to the girl's eyes. "Is it possible, mamma," she murmured, "that you are willing to admit a stranger to the knowledge of the sad disagreements in our family?"

"Oh! do you consider Monsieur Delorge a stranger?"

Raymond had just decided that the best course he could adopt was to depart, and these words decided him. "I will retire," he said. "Heaven forbid that my presence should ever be an annoyance to you."

But the duchess started from her chair and placed herself against the

door. "Stay!" she exclaimed, in an imperative tone. "Simone must explain herself once for all, this very moment." Then turning to her daughter, she coldly added: "Speak."

Anger had dried Simone's tears. "You wish me to speak," she said. "Very well." And she averted her face to avoid Raymond's eyes. "I consent," she added "to become this gentleman's wife, but only on the conditions which I stated to you before."

Only one reflection deterred Raymond from throwing himself at the feet of the trembling girl. Plainly enough the question of his marriage with her had been already discussed between mother and daughter.

"That is to say, on the condition that the ruin of our house shall be completed for this gentleman's benefit," sneered the duchess.

"Mamma, how can you say such a thing?"

"I only say what is true."

"How can you accuse me of ruining our house, when I have done all in my power to sustain it, and am ready to sacrifice everything?"

"Yes, everything except what I ask you. I ask nothing for myself, Heaven knows. I am an old woman, and only require a few thousand louis to pay my entrance fee at a convent. But your brother——"

"I cannot——"

"Your brother is the head of our house——the heir of our name. Philippe is Duke de Maillefert, and you owe him respect and submission."

"Mamma, it is useless to insist."

Then the old discussion about money—the same kind of thing that Raymond had overheard on the night of the ball—began again; but, under these circumstances, how infinitely more degrading!

"Take care, Simone!" said the duchess at last, her voice trembling with anger. "Take care! You will compel me to give Monsieur Delorge a refusal." And turning to Raymond, she exclaimed, fiercely, "You hear her! You pretend to love her, and yet you have nothing to say!"

"I have faith in Mademoiselle Simone," he replied, using the words the girl had used to him. "Her decisions are sacred to me."

The duchess laughed aloud. "In other words," she said, "you love my daughter, but you love her money more. I expected this. I knew very well how much faith to put in your wonderful disinterestedness."

Simone raised her head, and when she saw Raymond turn pale under this insult she could no longer keep silent. "You may insult me, mamma, as much as you please; I am accustomed to it. But you must not accuse Monsieur Delorge of cupidity. It is more than I can bear. I know his feelings on the point. He thinks, as I do, that I ought to sustain the family dignity with all that I possess."

The duchess laughed her hateful laugh once more. "And this is why you refuse to give half of your fortune to your brother?"

"I do more than that now."

"How is that?"

"I give him—or rather you—my entire income."

"But keep your capital, and hold us at your mercy. If you should chance to change your mind some day, the Duke de Maillefert would be without bread."

"I never shall change my mind."

"Who knows? Let us suppose you married, and became the mother of a family. You would then begin to think that your money belonged more to your husband and your children than to your mother and your brother."

Mademoiselle Simone stamped her foot nervously, apparently forgetful of the presence of Raymond, who stood leaning on the back of a chair, listening. "I have told you, mamma," she said, "that I was willing to sign a paper which would ensure you and my brother the entire use of my income."

"Your income! Do you imagine that your brother could ever marry on such conditions? What family would receive him?"

"If my brother wishes to marry I will promise to settle half my property on his children."

The duchess curled her lips. "What a legal tone you adopt!" she said.

Meanwhile Raymond's admiration increased for Simone, while his contempt for her mother passed all bounds.

"What a head you have?" cried the duchess. "A will of iron—you are precisely like your father. Nothing moved him, nothing touched him—he would never bend."

"It is you, mamma, whose obstinacy passes all belief," said Simone, quietly.

The duchess turned quickly upon her daughter. "Enough! Once more, Simone, and for the last time, will you divide with your brother?"

"The capital? No, I cannot."

"Take care. Repeat this, and it is the immediate, irrevocable rupture of a marriage which you have at heart——"

"Ah! you are pitiless!" interrupted Simone. "You know very well that I am forbidden to do what you ask."

"Forbidden?"

"You know that I am bound by a solemn oath, sworn before God, on the hand of a dying man——"

The duchess shrugged her shoulders. "You always say the same thing!"

"Yes, mamma, and I always shall." As the girl spoke her beauty was sublime. "Do you forget my father's death?" she cried. "It was five years ago, to be sure, and many events have taken place since then, but I remember—yes, I remember——"

"Simone!" said her mother, fiercely. "Simone!"

But the girl continued. "I was not sixteen. I was still at school. It was a winter's morning, and I was still asleep. I was awakened by one of the under teachers: 'Make haste!' she said. 'Dress quickly. A carriage is at the door. An accident has happened to your father. He is dying.'"

"It was true; my father was returning from Nice, and on alighting from the train while it was yet in motion, on arriving in Paris, he was thrown down and crushed by the wheels. When I reached home the servants were wild. You, my mother, were at a ball, no one knew where. My brother had been away for twenty-four hours. My father was lying on a mattress on the floor of the drawing-room. Poor papa! He was in agony, and it was a wonder that he still lived and was conscious. 'Here she is!' he murmured, when I appeared. And all at once he gathered his strength together. 'Listen to me quietly,' he said. 'There is no time to lose. Understand me. I have made no will. With the exception of your share, my fortune will to-morrow be at the disposal of your mother and your brother. How long will it last? And when it is gone, what will they do? To what depths will they drag this glorious name of Maillefert, which is found on every page of the history of France—the name which my ancestors bequeathed to me without spot or blemish.'"

Madame de Maillefert tried desperately to prevent Simone from continuing

her narrative. "You forgot that we are not alone," she said with a threatening frown.

"You were the first to forget it, madame," answered the young girl, coldly, and addressing Raymond, she continued: "I knelt at my father's side. He said to me: 'Simone, you are only fifteen, but it is on you that I depend to uphold this house. Fortunately, on your side, you will be enormously rich, and this means salvation. As soon as your mother and brother have devoured their fortune, they will want yours. Refuse! Give them your income to the last louis. It is your duty to do so; but never, under any pretext, yield your capital. You will be tortured, harassed, circumvented, martyred. Stand firm, or I shall rise from my tomb to curse you! I urge this for your own sake and for the sake of our name. Protect your mother and brother from themselves. It may be that you will marry some day, but the man you marry must understand that your fortune is only a sacred trust.' His voice grew faint, but at a sign he made, I laid a crucifix on his breast. 'Swear to me on this to obey my last wishes, and I shall die happy!' he gasped. I swore. You came in that moment, my mother, arrayed in your laces and jewels, and you heard the last words uttered by my father. 'You swear it, Simone,' he said. 'All the income, if you choose, but only the income. The capital is the ransom of the Maillefert honour.'"

Unable to restrain her daughter, the duchess sank into her chair choking with rage. "This, then, is the motive of your conduct?" she exclaimed as soon as Simone paused.

"Yes."

"The mere ravings of a dying man."

So terrible were the girl's eyes that her mother shrank from them. "The dying man was my father," said Simone, "and the approach of death, far from bedimming his noble intellect, only made the future clearer to him."

Raymond still stood listening and praying to heaven to grant him an inspiration. "So prayers, remonstrances, and commands are useless?" resumed Madame de Maillefert.

"Perfectly so."

"You hope that your hypocritical obstinacy will triumph over my legitimate determination?"

"I hope nothing, madame."

The duchess did not seem to realize how ignoble and debasing this conversation was carried on in Raymond's presence. "Then it is settled?" she added in the same hoarse voice.

"Yes."

Madame de Maillefert turned to Raymond. "This," said she, "is the timid, submissive virgin whom you wish for a wife! How does she strike you now? Answer, sir, if you please."

Raymond choked down his indignation. "It is in vain," he said, "that I try to find terms to express the admiration I feel for the heroic devotion and noble courage shown by Mademoiselle de Maillefert."

The duchess had staked all her hopes on one single chance—and she had lost. Like the foolish player who tears up his cards and tramples on them when he has lost, she now quite ceased to curb her tongue. "Very well," she said. "Since that is your opinion I will detain you no longer, and I beg that in future you will not trouble me with your society."

Raymond bowed and was about to leave, when Simone raised her slender hand. "Stay!" she said; and turning to her mother she added: "I have not finished. You desired that the explanation should be full and complete"

The duchess replied by extending her arm to the bell-rope. "Take care!" said her daughter, in an excited tone. "If you ring, some one will come; and I swear to you that I will say all I have to say in presence of your servants, your guests, and my brother—in fact before all the people whom, without my consent, you bring into my house; for I alone have the right to give orders here, to receive whom I choose, and dismiss those whom I please." The duchess's arm fell to her side. Was this her submissive daughter who had now turned upon her? To what or to whom was she indebted for this new energy? "I shall speak," continued Simone, with strange vehemence, "because I owe certain duties to myself, and I wish it to be known how I have fulfilled my father's dying wishes. You and my brother have only too well justified his gloomy apprehensions. Three years had not elapsed before the enormous fortune my father left you was scattered to the four winds of heaven. In what mysterious gulf you buried it I cannot tell. You have not—for you could not—have spent it. There are reigning princes with a court and an army, who possess less means than you had. And yet when I spend twenty-four hours in your house in Paris, I cannot find among your fifty valets a servant to carry a letter—and your maids make me ashamed or afraid. One morning your cook came to me, saying that he could not give me any breakfast unless I gave him some money—that he had lent you eighteen thousand francs, and that none of the shops in the neighbourhood would give you any further credit."

"This is too much!" said the duchess, "too much!"

But undismayed the young girl still went on—"My father said that Philippe and you were mad. Millionaires as you were, you never seemed to have any money. You were always in debt and you borrowed at sixty per cent. when your creditors pressed you. To gratify a whim, you mortgaged your property. To pay a gambling debt you sold the best meadows in Anjou, far below their value. In one single night, Philippe lost one hundred and sixty thousand francs at *baccarat*; on another occasion, his losses exceeded ten thousand louis; and at the same time such were your personal difficulties that you sent your diamonds to the Mont de Piété. You have brought ridicule and shame on our heads—"

"Silence!" cried her mother. "You are mad!"

"I hear of you through the newspapers," continued Simone. "I never read them, but the people about here take a malicious pleasure in congratulating me on what they call your brilliant successes; and so through them and in this way I have heard a very great deal. I have heard my brother, the Duke de Maillefert, spoken of as a jockey, a vain and uncultivated fop, a gambler and profligate, and the dupe of all the adventurers who choose to flatter him. You, my mother, I have heard named as one of the queens of society, one of those who, as the milliners say, set the fashions—whose toilettes are described by journalists—whose beauty, taste, and elegance are lauded to the skies; and whose adventures and witticisms are in everybody's mouth. I have asked myself, on hearing all this, what sort of a mother you were to endure your son's conduct, and what sort of a son Philippe could be to tolerate his mother's behaviour."

Terrified at the sight of these two angry women, Raymond was almost tempted to try and silence Simone. Would she not injure herself and her own cause by this display of violence? "You shall pay dearly for this humiliation!" muttered the duchess.

But still undaunted, Simone threw back her head. Like a slave who has cast off his fetters, she seemed incapable of restraining herself. "At last,"

she continued, drawing a long breath, "your last louis was gone. You were ruined—your son and yourself. All your property that was not sold was mortgaged, money-lenders refused you anything more, tradesmen denied you credit, and, in utter bewilderment, you turned to me. For three years you had not answered one of my letters, but you came here one winter's morning—you did not recognise me—and you said, 'How you are changed, my poor child!'"

Raymond stood by the chimney, and he could see that the duchess's eyes were flashing with hatred. "I was changed indeed!" continued Simone. "I came here three months after my father's death, accompanied by Miss Dodge and Tardif, my father's man of business. I was only a child—I was ignorant of the value of money, and I knew nothing of the management of a large landed estate. You fancy that this exile cost me nothing. You are mistaken, for my tastes were then much like those of other girls of my age and station. I loved society, travelling, pictures, music, and pretty things. But I had a mission to fulfil—I wished to become the manager of Maillefert.

"Under Maître Tardif's guidance I learned the details of agricultural life. I rose at daybreak and overlooked my men. I learned the value of my crops, and, in short, in less than two years, when Maître Tardif died, I had made very great progress."

The duchess raised her hands to heaven. "How happy I ought to be," she said, "To have such an accomplished daughter!"

This was also the opinion of Raymond, who was touched almost to tears by the self-abnegation which the frail, delicate creature before him had displayed.

"The people about me," Simone resumed, "could not understand my conduct. I became the heroine of the most preposterous romances, while some persons considered me a phenomenon of Avarice."

"Let me congratulate you on the choice you have made, Monsieur Delorge," hissed the duchess at this point.

"And it was true," said Simone, "I was avaricious. I denied myself every superfluity or luxury, I economized, for I expected you, and you came. You were humble on that occasion. You made no allusion to complete and absolute ruin, you only talked of being momentarily inconvenienced. But I, who knew the truth, listened to you in sorrow. I entreated you to economize—to lessen your expenditure. I advised several things. You listened, and you promised a total reform, and ended by asking for four hundred thousand francs, which would release you from all your difficulties. It was an enormous sum, it constituted the savings of two years, and my reason told me that as for freeing you it was a mere grain of sand. However you were my mother, I was weak, and I gave you the money."

"And made me pay dearly enough for it afterwards," muttered the duchess.

To Raymond's surprise, tears came to Simone's eyes:

"The next day," she said, "I was obliged to go out very early. When I returned at noon, joyfully thinking of seeing you, I was told that you had gone. I could not believe it, for only the evening before we were making arrangements together for your settling yourself at the château. But it was true, you were gone, and you had left behind you a note for me, saying that a telegram had summoned you to Paris for a great charity ball. A fortnight later my brother wrote to me to send him twenty thousand francs for a debt of his. I sent them. The next month you wanted a trifle for dress-making—

five hundred louis—and thus, week after week letters kept coming, sometimes from you, sometimes from my brother, on different pretexts, but all of them pressing and crying for money, money ! ”

Disturbed by Raymond's fixed look, Madame de Maillefert turned her back on him, and with her hands clasped on her knee, beat time with her head to a tune which she hummed through her set teeth.

“ This was the end of my peace,” resumed Simone. “ Correspondence was not enough. You began to draw on me at sight. I soon saw that this would not do, so I wrote to you that I should not pay your drafts, but you kept on. I did not flinch. I refused to pay, and I was then beset by your creditors. At all events, you and Philippe had still treated me with seeming kindness. Sharp recriminations, bitter reproaches, and hard words did not pass your lips. But one day everything became changed, and you appeared before me with angry eyes and threatening lips. You did not say, ‘ I beg of you,’ you said, ‘ You shall—I insist.’ However I was firm. You had taken three years' savings from me, and I asked myself if I ought to go on. I was even compelled to borrow for our needs here at the time. However, there then came other straits. You won some of the people of the neighbourhood on your side. They called me a child, and finally I agreed to send you ten thousand francs monthly.”

Madame de Maillefert wanted to seem deaf to her daughter's words, but these reproaches were too much for her, and she suddenly burst forth : “ This is disgraceful ! Ah ! Monsieur Delorge, you remained here against my will. This audacity shall cost you dear.”

Meanwhile Simone continued : “ Again your tactics changed : you were once more the tender, caressing mother, professing such fondness for me that you could not live without me. You sighed for the calm, peaceful life that might be yours if I would consent to live with you in Paris. You would be a changed woman, you said. I thought to myself that if I managed your house I could do more with two hundred thousand francs than you could with a million. My father had never spent two hundred thousand francs a year, and yet he lived like a true nobleman. However a few words dropped by one of the friends you brought down with you enlightened me in season, and I told you I could not leave the château. Your disappointment must have been very great, for your mask dropped, and you showed all your envy and hate. I saw that, in yours and Philippe's eyes, I was a legitimate prey. You pillaged me, you pillaged the château. You carried off all the pictures, rare tapestry, and carvings. ‘ What good are they to you ? ’ you said, as you took them. Philippe carried off the portraits of our ancestors, under the pretext that they belonged to him, the sole male heir. I did not realize at the time that as many of them represented celebrated persons, he would sell them at a high price.”

“ That is false,” cried the duchess.

“ No, madame, he did sell them, and I bought them back. But why so horrified ? You may surely traffic with the portraits, when you do so with the name you bear. Did not Philippe sell our name when he allowed it to be printed on the prospectus of some speculative enterprise ? Did you not sell it the day you came here on this mission ? You were paid, I know it ; and if ever the Tuileries are invaded by a revolutionary crowd, your receipt will be found there.”

As pale as death the duchess now started to her feet. “ I will not hear another word,” she said.

She had been kept in her chair by her determination not to leave her

daughter and Raymond alone together; but now, realizing that all her efforts were useless, she turned towards him: "You insisted on remaining here," she said, "against my will. I am but a woman, and I yield the place. Were I a man I should act differently." So saying she opened the door of her bed-room, but before retiring she turned, for Simone had just exclaimed: "I have yet only spoken of the past."

"What do you mean?" quickly asked the duchess.

"I have something to say of the present—of this last visit to Maillefert—of your attempts for the last six weeks——"

"Take care, Simone, you do not know me yet," interrupted the duchess, but seeing that her daughter was determined to proceed, she abruptly returned to her chair.

"On the very evening of your arrival," said Simone, "you said to me, not in these words, but to all intents and purposes, 'Give us the half of all you have and we will let you rest.' And but for my oath, most gladly would I have yielded. Rest! How I long for it! I promised to give you a hundred thousand francs for your *début* at court this winter, and I promised to organize the *fête* which would propitiate your mission here."

Raymond had heard a great deal, but he felt that there was something even worse to come. In fact, he noticed that the duchess was now rather anxious than enraged.

"This was our position, my mother," continued Simone, "when, on the day after your arrival, an event took place which will affect all my future life." She stopped, her voice failed her, and colour rose to her cheeks.

"Mademoiselle!" cried Raymond.

But with a sad smile she shook her head, and continued: "A young man of the neighbourhood, dazzled by my fortune, had annoyed me by his attentions and letters, and ended by a proposal which I declined. This person, Monsieur Bizet de Chènehutte, having grossely insulted me, a stranger took up my defence; and an hour after the scene took place, it was reported to your friend Clélie by her maid. It was in this way I knew of it, and knew, too, that a duel would take place on the next day. The ardent imagination of the Duchess de Maumussy was fired by the idea of a man risking his life for a woman whom he did not know. She kept on saying to me that such devotion was unusual. I was moved, touched, and grateful. There was, then, I thought, one being in the world who was interested in the poor deserted Simone."

"Simone!" exclaimed her mother, "you are ill, my child; you are not yourself to talk like this."

"That evening," the girl continued, "my prayers were longer than usual. I could not sleep that night. I rose with the dawn, and I sent Saint-Jean to make inquiries, and I discovered that my defender was one of the engineers who had been here for some weeks."

"Of course," said her mother, with a nervous laugh, "it never occurred to you to ask yourself if your unknown defender had heard of your fortune. Do you think he would have fought for a dowerless girl?"

Simone did not condescend to notice this insult. "As was only too natural," she continued, "I earnestly desired to become acquainted with this stranger who had thus undertaken my defence. Your ball was to take place, so I ordered an invitation to be sent to him."

"Simone! unhappy girl! By the name you bear, I command you to stop!" cried Madame de Maillefert.

The girl shook her head. "Yes, I know I am passing the bounds of

propriety. But is this my fault? It is you—my own mother—who have compelled me to defend my honour at the price of modesty. But you have compelled me to it—I shall tell the truth—I shall own that the first time I saw Monsieur Delorge I felt an interest in him. He understood my sorrows, and when Philippe was at the card-table that dreadful night, he realized what I felt. However, Monsieur Delorge did not please you, and the last of your guests had not gone when you began reproaching me bitterly for having compromised myself by dancing with him after refusing others. Perhaps you were right, for I know nothing of society and its rules.”

The duchess was wild with impatience, and yet it was clear that she dared not retire. “How long is this to last?” she asked, contemptuously. “It seems to me that this explanation may go on for ever!”

“The next day, mamma, all your ideas were changed, or rather the night had inspired you with others. You were now delighted with Monsieur Delorge. The most fulsome praise now followed scornful jesting. You wished him to be a constant guest at the château. You went in search of him. And Philippe agreed with you, as did all your guests, with the exception—let me do her the justice to say so—of Madame de Maumussy. My heart told me that there was some conspiracy started. Do you remember the day when you took me aside, and with caresses and tender entreaties, drew my secret from me?—when you said: ‘Very well—marry him. Divide your property with your brother, and I will throw no obstacle in your path!’”

Raymond, the duchess, and Simone were so excited that they forgot to reflect upon the strangeness of their position and conversation. However, the girl went on: “After having trafficked with everything else, you now began to speculate on my affections. Poor fool that I was! I allowed you to read my heart like an open book. I allowed you to see that I felt I had found in M. Raymond Delorge an honest friend whose arm would sustain me. You know that I said to myself: ‘He will accept half of the burden which I find too heavy. For my sake he will work for my people. He will aid me with his advice and energy, and save us all!’”

Raymond could no longer contain himself. “Ah! mademoiselle,” he cried, “you judged me aright.”

But Simone did not seem to hear him. Still looking her mother straight in the face, she continued: “I would not listen to your bargaining. I told you that I would pay no such price. You would not believe me. My energetic protestations only brought a smile to your lips, and you said, in an ironical tone, ‘You will think better of it when you realize that you cannot become the wife of the man you love in any other way. Some day you will come on your knees to ask my consent, and may be my terms will be harder than now.’”

“Abominable!” muttered Raymond, “abominable!”

“All this time,” continued Simone, “you, my mother, did your best to encourage Monsieur Delorge. I ought to have spoken to him then; but to accuse my mother seemed a crime in my eyes, and so I could do nothing but try to avoid him. I felt all the time, however, that everything was not yet finished. I felt that you had only closed your door to this gentleman because you had not renounced the hope of conquering me. And if my own presentiments had not warned me, your friend, the Duchess de Maumussy, would have done so.”

Madame de Maillefert started. “Clélie! Did Clélie tell you that——”

She stopped short. “Tell me what?” asked her daughter. The mother

did not reply. Then in a clear, full voice, vibrating with lawful indignation, Simone resumed the recapitulation of her wrongs: "That a mother, basely jealous of her daughter, should overwhelm her with insults, has been occasionally seen. That an extravagant brother should ruin his sister and take her last louis from her, may be imagined. And that a mother and a brother should league together against a poor girl, and murder her to gain possession of her money, is a possibility. But that a brother and a mother should deliberately, methodically, and with patent premeditation, dishonour their sister and their daughter, is absolutely beyond belief."

The duchess tried to speak, but the words expired in her throat.

"And yet this is what you did—you, my mother, and Philippe, my brother. You thought that between my reputation and the oath I had sworn to my father I should not hesitate, and that to regain my honour, lost through you, I should abandon the prize you coveted. And you went about with an air of the most hypocritical grief, saying that I, Simone de Maillefert, your own daughter, was the mistress of Monsieur Raymond Delorge."

Shaken from head to foot by absolute convulsions of rage, Madame de Maillefert tore the lace from her *peignoir* in handfulls. "It is false!" she cried "it is an abominable calumny!" Never did Philippe or I say anything so atrocious!"

But Raymond walked straight towards her, and with flashing eyes exclaimed—"You did precisely say that to Madame de Larchère, and she repeated it."

"Madame de Larchère lied!"

"No one repeated it to me, mamma," retorted Simone, "I heard you say it."

"You heard it! Then why did you not deny it?"

The poor child shook her head. "What would have been the good? Because my honour was gone should I compromise yours? Who would believe that a mother could calumniate her daughter! I was silent, and if I have spoken to-day it is because you have compelled me to do so—it is because I wish Monsieur Raymond Delorge to know us as we are—you and I—before we separate for ever."

The duchess looked at Raymond and at Simone as they stood side by side. "You refuse your consent, do you?" she said. "Remember that the blame will be yours whatever may happen." And then she passed into her bedroom, slamming the door after her with such violence that a mirror was thrown down and shattered.

V.

SIMONE sank into a chair, hiding her face in her hands. "I am lost, indeed!" she cried.

Raymond repeated her words as if he did not understand their meaning "What a woman this duchess is!" he murmured; but suddenly remembering that these were the last moments he might ever pass with the woman he loved, he determined to avail himself of them. And he bent over her and tried to take her hand. She started and looked up at him with wild and haggard eyes. "You heard your mother?" he said.

"Alas! yes," gasped the poor child, between her sobs.

"She will never forgive your just indignation—she will never pardon you for having heard what she said."

"Never!"

"She will avenge herself in some way, and who can tell what terrible extremities her vindictive hatred will impell her to?"

"Alas!" the girl replied, "I have the worst to fear."

"Then, we must take a decisive step," said Raymond. "Do you trust me?"

She looked at him with grieved surprise and her face flushed. "After all that has passed," she murmured, "how can you ask that question?"

Raymond's heart beat quickly. "Then," he eagerly replied, "instead of acting on the defensive, attack. Madame de Maillefert desires your capital. Refuse her the income unless she gives her consent. Tell her firmly that she shall not have a louis until she had granted it."

Simone withdrew her hand. "No, I cannot do that," she cried.

"But it means safety."

"That may be, but it would also be answering their shameful behaviour by a shameful act. My property is not my own. I simply hold it in trust. It belongs by right to my mother and brother. I have no right to deprive them of it."

Hope fled from Raymond's heart. "You would not need to deprive them of it," he answered. "The very moment that your mother believes you to be in earnest, she will yield."

"Ah! you do not know my mother."

"I know that she must have money—that she must have it at any price."

"That is true; but her pride and her obstinacy are even greater than her covetousness."

"She will yield," repeated Raymond.

A bitter smile passed over Simone's lips. "You think me braver than I am," she said. "I could never have the courage to say that to my mother. I have never opposed her except passively. I ask myself even now how I have dared to speak as I have done to-day."

"Then you intend to remain here," asked Raymond.

"Alas!"

"In the power of a woman who hates you—whom no consideration can restrain——"

"Where should I go?"

A sudden inspiration, sent, as Raymond believed, directly from heaven, flashed through his mind. "Listen to me," he cried: "You can place this fortune in the hands of a man of business, who will manage it according to your directions, the proceeds to be devoted to your mother."

"And I——"

"You," repeated Raymond, and kneeling at Simone's feet he caught hold of her hands, and continued breathlessly, intoxicated with hope and love—"You," he said, "will take my arm, and this very moment, go with me out of the château."

"Go away with you?"

"Yes—I will take you to my mother, who is a good brave woman—to my sister, who is the best and purest of girls, and sustained by them, you will wait for the time when you will be able to dispose of your hand without your mother's consent." He forgot, poor boy, that only the evening before he had been filled with terror at thinking of what his mother would say when she heard of his marriage plans.

"It is utterly impossible!" said Simone,

"And why, in the name of heaven?"

"Because it would give to my mother's calumny an appearance of truth,—because these calumnies would follow me to your house—because Madame Delorge, who might be willing to give an asylum to her son's betrothed would refuse it to a woman who is called his mistress."

Hearing a door open, Raymond started to his feet. The duchess's maid stood on the threshold with a most detestable smile on her face, as she said: "I beg pardon—if I had known——"

"What do you want?" asked Raymond sternly.

"The Baron de Boursonne sent to ask, sir, if you had forgotten that he was waiting?"

"Tell the baron that I will be with him presently. Go at once."

She left the room, but her impudent smile stung Raymond like a poisoned arrow. "God only knows what this impudent creature will say," he remarked.

"My mother sent her, I am sure," rejoined Simone; and as her arms fell to her side with a weary gesture, she added—"What does it all matter?"

A conviction of his own powerlessness weighed like lead on Raymond's heart. "And it is I," he said, "who have brought all these cruel sufferings on you. It is I, who would give my very life for you, who brings these tears to your eyes. Oh! forgive me! I am mad and selfish. The very day when I saw you for the first time, that day when I knew I loved you with my whole heart, I ought to have turned and fled. Did I not know what fatal curse was on me? Has not experience shown me that I bring misery with me wherever I turn?"

Simone sat listening with colourless trembling lips, and a scarlet spot on either cheek.

"Yes, I ought to have gone at once," continued Raymond, "and one evening I said to myself I will go to-morrow. The morrow came, and I lacked the courage. My life had been one long agony. I saw all at once the sun of happiness rising for I loved you. I ventured to believe that I could win your love. I forgot all the past and the future in my new-born hope. At times, I unquestionably seemed very strange to you. I was strange—I was afraid of myself. I adored you, and I dreaded lest the secret should escape my lips, lest you should read it in my eyes."

Simone rose from her seat and stood leaning on the back of a chair. But he went on with growing vehemence—"I loved you and your mere presence paralyzed my brain. Under your eyes the words died away on my lips. The rustle of your dress sent the blood to my face. Ah! what violence I did myself not to fall at your feet and say, 'I love you! I love you!' Sometimes I fancied I could read in your eyes what I wished to read in them, and I left the château intoxicated with joy, to return and find but icy indifference, if not disdain." Simone tried to stop him. But he continued: "One evening we were with your mother driving, and she dropped me at the bridge. As I said good-night, you leaned from the carriage and extended your hand. I took it and fancied I felt a slight pressure, which I regarded as a promise and an oath. I stood in a sort of stupor watching the carriage drive off until you were out of sight, saying to myself: 'Is it true?'"

Blushing and confused, Simone's lips parted, and she cried: "Why should I be ashamed to own that I love you, Raymond? No, I am proud to own it."

Raymond turned pale.

"Great God!" he exclaimed, "I thank you. This moment makes amends for all the past." And delirious with happiness, he caught Simone in his arms and covered her fair hair with kisses.

But she quickly released herself. "Ah!" she cried, "do you not know that time is flying? Do you forget that my mother's hatred creates an unconquerable barrier between us?"

Raymond's face glowed with enthusiasm. "There are no insurmountable barriers to a love like ours."

Simone shook her head. "The doors of Maillefert are closed to you, and we are separated."

Raymond's face fell. "And you," he said, in a dreary tone, "are in the power of my enemies—in the same house as Combeldaine, Verdale, and the Maumussys. But why are they here?" he asked abruptly.

"For nothing specially, I believe. Monsieur de Maumussy comes for his wife, and his two friends accompany him."

Raymond shook his head. "Your mother is unscrupulous. These men may be her accomplices."

"Forewarned is forearmed," answered Simone. "I shall be on my guard." But she stopped short, for she could hear her mother and Philippe speaking in the next room. "Fly!" she said. Raymond threw back his head haughtily.

"Yes, instantly!" she added. "Will you agonize me by letting me see you and my brother armed against each other? I will write to you; we will meet again. But if you love me, you will go now."

Simone was quite right. Had he found himself just then face to face with Philippe, stimulated by the duchess, there would have been one of those quarrels which can end only in mortal combat. Still he did not move. The word "fly" nailed his feet to the floor—for it seemed suggestive of cowardice. There was evidently an angry discussion going on between the mother and son, for they spoke in loud voices. Trembling like a leaf, Simone clasped her hands entreatingly. "Raymond," she cried, piteously, "pray go! Listen to me rather than to the dictates of your own pride."

He yielded. "I obey you," he replied, not without some bitterness. "I go—carrying with me the conviction that your honour, your life, are imperilled. How am I to know how you are?"

"You shall have word from me every day."

"You promise it?"

"I swear it?" answered Simone, raising her hand and speaking in a grave and ringing voice.

"God help us!" said Raymond, as he kissed Simone's forehead; "for He alone can save us!" And then he left the room in which he had been raised to the heights of joy, only to be cast down again to the depths of despair.

He tried to compose himself, as he expected to meet the assassins of his father face to face, and he was going slowly down the marble stairs when at a turn he suddenly came upon Madame de Maumussy. She had just returned from riding; her complexion was bright from exercise, and her superb black eyes, full of life and energy, sparkled under the brim of the masculine hat she wore. With one hand she held up her riding-habit, while in the other she carried her gloves and whip. Raymond stood against the wall to allow her to pass. But she stood still, and looked at him earnestly. "Why," she said, abruptly—"why do you look like that?"

Was this woman Madame de Maillefert's accomplice, and what part did she play in the intrigue which was progressing around Simone? This was what Raymond could not divine. He simply knew that Madame de Maumussy had been taken into the duchesse's confidence, and that he therefore, had no reason to conceal the events of the morning from her. "I look like this, madame, because I have just asked the Duchess de Maillefert for the hand of her daughter."

"You have?" cried Madame de Maumussy, starting.

"Yes, madame."

"And the dear duchess refused you?"

"She made impossible conditions."

A disdainful smile curled the lady's lips. "Madame de Maillefert exacted her daughter's fortune, probably."

"Her daughter's capital—yes."

"And you would not relinquish it?"

"I would not? Good heavens, madame!"

"Then Simone would not——" insisted the young duchess. And with an air of disgust she continued: "I am perfectly astonished at the rapacity and love of money which this family exhibit. They care for nothing but money, think only of money, talk about it, quarrel over it, and then are only reconciled through it. It is simply revolting!"

Raymond could not bear this. "You know very well," he said, "that Mademoiselle Simone is unselfishness itself."

"Then why does she not divide her fortune with her brother?"

"She gives her entire income to her mother and brother, but she is bound by an oath not to dispose of her capital."

The duchess shrugged her shoulders. "Say, rather, that she is determined to manage and control, save and order. She is just like the others in her love of money. An oath, indeed! Women who love don't care much for oaths. Simone has too much head to be endowed with much heart. She is one of those girls who, according to the chances of life, become heroines or martyrs; but wives or mistresses—never!"

Raymond shuddered; but to all appearance he was unmoved. "You hate Mademoiselle Simone," he said.

"I hate her! Why on earth should I hate her?"

Raymond could not tell her why, although he had a clear perception of the truth. "If you do not hate her," he said, "why do you speak of her want of heart? Why do you not come to her assistance? She is wretched."

"About as wretched as this marble on which we stand!"

"Would it not be a noble act on your part to help this poor child who is so abominably persecuted? You are all-powerful with your hostess. She fears you, and wishes to be on good terms with you." He was entreating her. He, the son of General Delorge, was imploring a favour of the wife of the Duke de Maumussy. "I am filled with fear," he continued, "when I think of the covetousness of the duchess and her son."

Madame de Maumussy averted her eyes. "Perhaps," said she, "if this young lady's security and peace of mind are of such importance to you, you had better give her up entirely——"

"And why? Give me a reason."

"I have none to give; but believe me my advice is good."

Raymond darted at the young duchess one of those searching glances which are calculated to draw the truth from the innermost depths of the

soul. "Can I believe in the sincerity of advice coming from you?" he asked.

"And why not? Ah! because I am the Duchess de Maumussy, and because I know your story, Monsieur Delorge!" And snapping her whip with an air of superb insolence, she added: "Am I responsible for the acts of the Duke de Maumussy? He is my husband, to be sure, but did I choose him? Do his hates or his likings affect me in any way? I am not Mademoiselle Simone; I am Clélie! What do I care for the Duke de Maumussy? Let me meet to-morrow a man whom I love and who loves me and you will see, duchess as I am, that I will take his arm and boldly proclaim him as my lover."

Her hearer was confounded by her audacity, for she spoke very loudly, in a clear ringing voice, careless of the fact that the hall below was filled with servants. "Believe me, Monsieur Delorge," she continued, "it is a friend who speaks to you. Give up Simone; it is for her interest and for your own that you must forget her." And without waiting for his reply, she gathered up the ample folds of her skirt, rapidly ascended the few remaining steps and disappeared.

The young man looked after her, utterly bewildered by the events of the morning. Was the young duchess mocking him, or did she love him, and did she hate Simone on account of that? Plausible as this last explanation was, he did not care to admit it, on account of the ridiculous position in which it placed him. "I see distinctly that she has something against Simone," he muttered. "But what? Who can divine what detestable ideas may have been put in her head by her hostess?" He asked himself why he should not fight his enemies with their own weapons. What prevented him from promising, and not keeping his promises? What prevented him from pretending to give up Simone, and attaching himself to the young duchess and extracting her secret from her? Yes; but Simone, so proud and dignified, would never lend herself to this degrading comedy, and he would be left to play it alone. Disgust would overcome him, and he would drop his mask long before it was time to do so. "No—no," he said; "better be dupes ourselves than that." And, in haste to quit the château, he hurried down the stairs, and crossed the vestibule to the room, where he had left the baron, and the door of which was open.

Seeing that his friend was there with two other persons, he hesitated. Near one of the windows there sat a man who was carelessly reading a newspaper, now and anon casting an impatient glance out of doors, where the rain was falling slowly but persistently. It was De Maumussy. He had aged considerably. His hair was much thinner, and very gray; his eyes had lost their cynical flash; his cheeks hung loose; while the deep wrinkles on his temples and his compressed lips revealed the devouring cares and anxieties of his brilliant and envied existence. Raymond's heart swelled with rage at the sight of this man who was one of his father's murderers; and averting his glance and looking towards the centre of the room he espied Verdale, Roberjot's former friend, talking with the baron.

Verdale was no longer the lank unappreciated architect, who had once dragged his huge portfolio full of disdained plans and sketches about with him through Paris. Success glowed on his face, and at each movement he seemed to burst with prosperity, like a bag filled too plentifully with gold. M. de Boursonne was speaking to the architect in that tone of quiet impertinence which he always used with people who displeased him. "I have known you, sir, by reputation for a long time," he said. "The part you

played in the transformation of Paris is too considerable for you not to be well known. Besides, I have heard you spoken of by your early companions at school." Verdale's annoyance was very evident. "You have pulled down a great deal," continued the baron.

"Only where it was necessary, sir. Sunshine and air were needed—is it not health and wealth to let floods of light into the narrow, unhealthy, ill-smelling lanes of old Paris?"

"Yes, I know. I read that in the reports."

"Those reports were but the feeble expression of the truth."

"Oh! of course. I am inclined to think, however, that pulling down is better from a financial view than putting up. I mean it is more of a money-making business. I have built—Heaven knows how many bridges and viaducts, turned out any number of docks, and miles on miles of canals, but where am I? I have never made more than eight or ten thousand francs in a year."

"But you are an officer of the Legion of Honour!"

"And you will be one too."

"Very true; but——"

"Moreover, after pulling down more than I have ever built, you have made a fortune of several millions."

The baron thought he was teasing Verdale, in point of fact, he was positively torturing him. "Is success a crime?" asked the architect bitterly.

The engineer laughed. "Not in my eyes, I assure you; for I know nothing more respectable than a fortune honestly and laboriously acquired—one of those fortunes each silver-piece of which represents some task accomplished or some privation endured."

Raymond had heard steps behind him in the corridor. To have yielded to Simone's entreaties, and then to be found below by the young duke, was worse than to have remained up stairs. And surmounting the horror which M. de Maumussy inspired him, he entered the room.

The baron turned on hearing him enter, and exclaimed: "Ah! my dear Delorge, you have come at last? I really began to think you had forgotten me, and had gone off without me."

"Did not the maid tell you that I would be with you in a few moments?"

"What maid?"

"The same one you sent to me."

The baron looked quite wild. "I haven't sent a soul," he answered.

Simone was right, then. It was her mother who had despatched the impudent servant girl. But Raymond had no time for comment, for De Maumussy had laid down his newspaper, and coming forward said in a tone of the most studied politeness: "Monsieur Raymond Delorge, if I am not mistaken——"

Raymond recoiled involuntarily with the look of a man who sees a serpent rear its head in his path. "The son of General Delorge—yes, sir?" he replied. His tone was full of hatred, but the duke did not seem to notice it.

"Perhaps you do not recognize me?" he said, blandly.

"You are the friend of M. de Combeldaine, are you not? You are the Duke de Maumussy, I believe?"

"It is a long time since we met."

"It will be seventeen years the day after to-morrow that I saw you for the first time, sir, and under circumstances that I am not likely to forget. It was three days after the murder of my father!"

Instead of evincing the slightest indignation, the duke shook his head sadly. "Ah!" he muttered, "still the same unjust accusation."

Raymond did not notice these words. "You then had the unheard of audacity," he continued, "to present yourself before my mother to offer her a pension—the price of blood."

"I obeyed the voice of my conscience, sir. A great and terrible misfortune had come to you, and I sought to soften its consequences as far as lay in my power. I should have been glad to serve you."

"Yes, so you said then. It was easy to say it to a defenceless woman and helpless child."

A faint smile passed over the duke's lips. "Excuse me!" he replied, "you had one defender, and a terrible one he was, too—an old servant, who threatened me with a pistol, and who really wished to kill me."

"And who, but for my mother, would have done so. You will never see death so near you again but once."

The baron was struck by the fact that the more excited Raymond became, the more conciliatory his antagonist showed himself. "Nevertheless," said the duke, "my feelings towards you are still unchanged. I should be as glad to serve you to-day as I was then."

"Nor am I changed!" Raymond answered, fiercely; "I believe to-day, as I did then—in the future. The distance which separated us then has diminished—you are not so high, nor I so low."

M. de Maumussy replied in a gentle tone: "Heaven is my witness that I came to you with the kindest motives."

"Kindest motives!" cried Raymond. "Have you forgotten everything? Do you forget that to-day is the 1st of December, 1869. Has no voice ever awakened you in the middle of the night with threats of vengeance? Have you forgotten that seventeen years ago my father, General Delorge fell—murdered in the Garden of the Elysée?"

But the baron clutched his arm impatiently. "Come," he said, "Come."

Raymond followed him to the door; and when his hand was on the knob he turned and said, in a low voice to Maumussy: "As for myself, I tremble at the thought of the reappearance of Laurent Cornevin!"

The servants had heard something of this altercation, and they looked after the two gentlemen with a singular expression. The baron was furious, and as they went down the avenue he exclaimed: "I swear, Raymond, I am almost of De Maumussy's opinion. I think you are mad. What on earth is the use of this quarrel—and these threats?"

"There is none, I suppose—but the sight of this man puts me out of myself. Any one less cowardly than Combelaïne would send me a challenge."

The baron shrugged his shoulders. "First of all," he said, "tell me what took place while I was waiting for you." And when Raymond told him he remarked: "Do you realize that a reconciliation with this man would insure your marrying Simone?"

Raymond started. "I never thought of that. But at that price! Never! I would sooner renounce her!"

VI.

THE two friends were drenched to the skin when they reached the Rising Sun, and Master Béru declared that he could not understand why they had not been kept at the château, or at least sent back in a carriage. "If

Madame de Maillefert's friends came down to have any shooting," he added, "they will have their labour for their pains, for the weather threatens to be very bad!"

The innkeeper had touched on the very point which puzzled the baron. Why had these men come to the château in the month of December? They had certainly not abandoned Paris, and their interests there, for the mere pleasure of travelling together. In fact, De Combelaïne and Maumussy hated each other cordially, and were only bound together by their past complicity. Verdale, moreover, had too often refused to lend them money to seek their society with any especial eagerness. There was some milk in the cocoa-nut no doubt, and their presence suggested the possibility of a new combination devised by the duchess, and directed against her daughter's fortune. "Why, too," thought the baron, "should De Maumussy have been so patient under the accusations which Raymond flung so hotly in his face. It was very strange. He evidently had an idea or the hope of a reconciliation. Or it may be that he has reasons which you are ignorant of for fearing you."

"May it not be," asked Raymond, "that he thinks the empire stands less firmly than it did?"

Early in the month of December, 1869, the gilding on many of the imperial idols had been roughly effaced by the talented pamphleteer Henri Rochefort. The Duke de Maumussy and the Count de Combelaïne had each had their page in *La Lanterne*. A terrible page, which particularized little, but every phrase in which was an accusation, and each word a threat. De Combelaïne wished to challenge Rochefort, but De Maumussy, on the contrary, affected to laugh, for he well knew how necessary it was for him to keep quiet, and prompt no talk about himself. Again, "the black specks on the sky," to which the emperor had alluded in a celebrated speech, developed into terrible clouds, charged with thunder and flashes of lightning. Once more did the government feel the periodical necessity of "doing something." Some were eager for a *coup d'état* to sweep away all the liberties which had been conceded after seventeen years' struggle. Others, on the contrary, wished "to crown the edifice," hoping that this erection, the Second Empire, founded on the bloodshed of December, would be solid enough to support the crown of liberty.

After dinner at the Rising Sun, while the two engineers were sitting by the fire, the postman brought in an extremely bulky letter. It came from Jean Cornevin, and was dated Australia, having been sent on by the obliging lawyer, M. Roberjot. "It seems as if no emotion were to be spared me to-day," muttered Raymond.

The baron took up the letter. "Shall I read it to you?" he asked, and hardly waiting for a reply he tore it open, and began to peruse it aloud: "To all my dear Friends—At last after hundreds of disappointments—after months of anxiety and suspense, I have something positive to tell. Read and judge for yourselves. The last time I wrote I was at the hotel in Melbourne, awaiting the return of Pécheira, the banker, from the gold mines. Twice a day I went to his office to know if he had returned, but the answer was always the same. 'We have not heard from him,' said one or another of the clerks. 'He may be on the other side of Ballarat.' I was beginning to think seriously of going in search of my man, when yesterday morning who should call on me but the head clerk. 'My master came last night,' he said, 'and he is waiting for you.' In a moment I was ready, and rushing through the streets, as if I were crazy, I entered Pécheira's office. I found him to be a very handsome fellow, about forty, with a keen eye, and

abrupt manners, but still with every intention of being polite. As soon as I entered, he held out his hand as to an old acquaintance. 'You are Cornevin's son?' he said. 'Which are you? Léon or Jean?' I nearly fell from my chair at the idea of this man knowing our names. 'I am Jean, sir,' I said. He smiled. 'Then you are the painter?' 'How do you know that?' I asked. 'I do know it, and in the same way I know that your brother has been educated at the Polytechnic School, and is now an engineer; that your good, worthy mother has a dressmaking establishment in the Rue de la Chaussée d'Antin; and that you have three sisters, three charming young girls, called Clarisse, Eulalie, and Louise.' He then went on to speak of the noble courageous woman, the wife of General Delorge—of our friends Doucoudray and Roberjot. Upon my word, my dear friends, I did not know whether I was asleep or awake. 'You ask me,' continued Pécheira, 'how I know you all so well. Good heavens! how shouldn't I know something about the family of a man with whom I lived for years like a brother; with whom I have shared dangers and privations, hopes and success—particularly when this man lived, as your father did, only for his family.'

"I was confounded. 'Sir,' I said, 'when my father was taken from us, my mother was in profound distress; there were five of us—the eldest not ten.' Pécheira interrupted me. 'I know that,' he said, 'and this thought nearly killed your father during the two years he heard nothing of you—during the time he obtained no word of reply to all the letters he wrote to your mother.' 'We never received one,' I replied. 'That is just what Cornevin thought,' said Pécheira. As soon as possible he took the only means in his power to ascertain what had become of you. He learned that a providential hand had been extended to you, and that General Delorge's widow had been your salvation. 'Every drop of blood in my veins belongs to her!' he said to me often. He never lost sight of you after that. Day by day, so to speak, he heard of you. We were not together at that time, but he came to visit me every month. 'My wife is making money,' he said, rubbing his hands. 'Her business prospers, and God blesses her labours.' Another time, he remarked. 'My son Léon has just entered the Polytechnic School,' or 'My son Jean has decided talent—he has exhibited a picture which has had a great success.' You were his one thought, and presently I will show you the portraits of you all, with those of Madame Delorge and her son—of M. Ducoudray even; and you will find in my drawing-room the landscape which had such success at the exhibition, and which your father bought."

Great as had been Jean Cornevin's astonishment, it did not equal Raymond's. He, too, asked himself if he were wide awake. But it was no use for him to try to speak, for the baron would not bear any interruption, but hurried eagerly on, with the haste of a man who seeks the denouement he has foreseen.

"The more evidence I saw of my father's affection," wrote Jean, "the more puzzled I was that he should be willing to live apart from us. Pécheira read all this in my eyes. 'We have a great deal to say to each other,' he exclaimed, 'and I have an engagement now. Go back to your hotel and send your baggage here.' I demurred to this. 'Nonsense,' he said. 'The son of Laurent Cornevin can live under no other roof than mine while in Melbourne. My house is yours—do you understand? Do as I say, and make haste. At eleven o'clock I shall be at liberty, and we will breakfast together.' It was then nine. An hour later I had paid my bill and was installed in a comfortable room in Pécheira's house.

"We ate our breakfast, and when the servants had left the room and the doors were closed, my host said, 'Now I will tell you all I know. My father told you how Cornevin came to Talcahuana, under the name of Boutin. He was half famished and in rags, and he asked for work as if it had been alms; and having found it with us, he remained. Never had I seen such industry. To return to France was his one idea, and it was to enable him to do so that he worked with such fierce energy, depriving himself of even the necessities of life rather than diminish his small stock of coin. But money was not made quickly at Talcahuana, and poor Laurent remarked, 'I shall never get enough together to pay my passage.' He lost heart and even at one time, as he told me later, he was tempted to commit suicide. But he heard me say something about going to Australia, where, according to what was said at Valparaiso, nuggets lay like pebbles on the soil. I had had this idea of going to Australia for some time; but my father objected, saying that it was folly to go so far. But when I once get a thing into my head, it is not so easily got out again, and when my father saw this, he gave me leave to go. 'Very well,' I answered; 'I'll do so and I'll take Laurent with me.'

"On the Monday following we left Talcahuana. My father at the last moment regretted the counsel he had given, and did not fill my purse to repletion. He hoped, as he since wrote, that I should spend everything at Valparaiso, and return to him in a month's time. In fact, Laurent and I had but three hundred piasters between us. At Valparaiso we had the greatest difficulty in finding a ship that would take us. But when a man is determined on a thing he generally succeeds in achieving it. An English captain, half of whose crew had been killed by yellow fever, took us on board—Laurent as sailor and I as cook. We asked no wages; we only wanted to be landed in Australia, and six months later, indeed, we touched ground on the unfinished dock of Melbourne.

"'I wished to make money, so did your father, and he said to me the very first evening: 'We must not lose time in Melbourne—let us leave to-morrow for the mines.' We did so—and I will take you to the very spot, where Ballarat now stands, a town which sprang to life, as it were, at the whistle of a machinist, and which to-day numbers thirty thousand inhabitants, and which, like Melbourne, has its thoroughfares lighted with gas, its handsome shops, squares and exchange, its theatres and railway stations. As we saw it, however, it was a strange spot, dug and upheaved by the hand of man, with each little hillock turned over, and scrutinized, each grain of sand examined, washed and sifted—and all this to the roar of machinery, and the noise of pumps and hammers.

"In those days there was no railroad, so we trudged along a dusty highway dotted with horrible taverns noisy with drunken cries and songs. The whole valley of Ballarat was an immense camp, where all the miners herded together. Terrific looking creatures they were, too, covered with mud and dripping with sweat, wandering with a pick-axe in one hand and a revolver in the other, about the country. Neither Laurent nor I were very delicate. We were accustomed to lives of privation and fatigue. We had both been accustomed to the sight of the dregs of humanity, at least. Nevertheless we were frightened at what we now beheld and were forced to undergo. However, we heard that only the night before an old miner had found a nugget of gold weighing two thousand six hundred ounces and worth two hundred and sixty thousand francs. 'We must stay here,' we said to each other, 'and hope for that fellow's luck!' It is true that precisely

at the same moment a hundred thousand other miners said the very same thing, and that this terrible concurrence singularly complicated the task.

"At the beginning we were far from successful. All around us men were growing rich while we found nothing but gravel. But Laurent broke the charm that held us, and one night, after a hard and fruitless day's work, he found a nugget worth five thousand francs. He was overjoyed. 'Four like these,' he said, 'and I start for home.' He was then satisfied with the idea of making enough money at the mines to pay the expenses of the voyage and have a couple of thousand francs in his pocket when he arrived in Paris. 'With that much,' he said, 'I can do what I want.' However he spoke to me less often about his family than before. In despair at not having received any reply to the letters he had written, he had ceased to write himself. 'My poor wife,' he said bitterly, 'courageous and good as she has been, must be dead by now and my children are street vagabonds, if not in prison.' And he added with a frantic air: 'But they shall pay for it, the whole lot of them. To work! to work!'

"Three months later, and we had twenty thousand francs in our common purse, but we met with a terrible misfortune. Our treasure, which we were obliged to keep on our persons, had become a serious inconvenience, and it was decided that Laurent should place it in safety at Melbourne. He started, but was attacked on the road, wounded, robbed, and left half dead. We were ruined, and had to begin again. Another time I got carried away at the gambling table, and lost the fruit of six weeks labour. Nevertheless despite all these disasters we had forty-three thousand francs at the end of a year's time. We divided this sum, and Laurent started to Melbourne to find a vessel about to sail. He said to me, when I stood on the dock just before he went on board the 'Moravian': 'Read the French papers carefully. Before long there will be mention made of Laurent Cornevin.'"

Thus it came to pass that, by dint of careful researches, all these thousands of leagues away in Guyane, Chili, and Australia, Laurent Cornevin had been traced through the first four years of his disappearance.

"It is the hand of Providence;" said Raymond, but the baron made no reply. After taking breath, he continued to read Jean's letter "Pécheira went on to say: 'What Cornevin's plans were he never confided to me in so many words, but I thought I understood them. I knew that he was the one witness of a great crime, and that the authors of the crime had him transported to Guyana. Twenty times and more I had heard him swear vengeance. And knowing his energy and determination, I felt certain that he was meditating some tremendous punishment—as terrible as had been the crime, and that he was only awaiting his opportunity to strike at the scoundrels who had so long enjoyed impunity. It was, therefore, with the greatest attention that I read the Paris papers, the date of which according to my calculations, corresponded with Cornevin's arrival in Paris. But I found nothing in them whatever. I felt surprised at first, and then anxious. I knew that the 'Moravian' had made a very rapid passage, and that none of her passengers had died, so that Laurent must have reached Paris. What had happened to him? Knowing that the people he intended to attack were rich and powerful, and connected with the government, I said to myself: 'Laurent has been guilty of some gross imprudence in some way. He has been again arrested, and is, perhaps, at this very moment on his way back to the Devil's Island with such especial directions that he will certainly never again be able to escape.' I cannot say that I forgot him. That I never can do; but as the months went by he was naturally less in my mind."

"He had been gone nearly a year, when one morning the door opened, and in he walked. I cannot attempt to describe my astonishment. 'Laurent!' I exclaimed, 'havn't you been to France?'"

"'Yes,' said he, 'and staid there four months.' 'And your wife and children?' I asked. 'God has taken care of them. They are well and happy,' he answered. 'You have brought them out here with you?' I asked again. 'I! I have not even spoken to them or embraced them.'

"Knowing the great love Laurent Cornevin felt towards his wife, whose very name made him turn pale, and his children, whom he never spoke of without tears in his eyes, I thought he was jesting. 'What on earth do you mean?' I asked. 'It is exactly this,' he replied, : 'My family all think me dead, and my wife wears widow's weeds.' I saw that he was not in jest, and then all at once I made up my mind that his reason was gone. 'If you have done this thing,' I exclaimed, 'you are certainly mad.' 'I am not mad,' answered Laurent, 'and yet I have done precisely as I told you. It was with the greatest difficulty that I refrained from going to them. But I had the courage to forego the happiness of pressing my wife and my children once more to my heart!' I was petrified with astonishment. 'But why?' I finally exclaimed, 'why?' 'It was necessary, friend Pêcheira; and when you know all you will say the same. I rely on you to keep my secret.'

"It was the first time that Laurent Cornevin had fully opened his heart to me. I listened to him with increasing amazement. And even now, after all these years—so great was my attention—I can repeat Laurent's very words. 'One night,' he said 'I was the witness of a cowardly assassination, and the murdered man, before he breathed his last, had time to write a line, which was the proof of the crime. This proof I have done my best to utilize. My conscience commanded it. And this is why the assassins, having done their best to have me shot, carried me off to the Devil's Island, under a name that was not my own. They were powerful, and I was but a poor groom. No one would be disturbed by my disappearance or by my death. This new crime condemned a poor young woman and five children to death, or perhaps to infamy. But what did these wretches care for that, provided all proof of their crime was destroyed? When I left Australia I felt certain that my wife and children were dead, and I had but one idea, one desire—to avenge myself at any price. I still had the line written by the dying man in my possession; but I was situated so low, and the assassins so high, that I felt little hopes that this would avail me much.

"'I felt that it would be almost useless to cry out "I am Laurent Cornevin!" The police would prove that I was Boutin, who had escaped from the Devil's Island. And to tell the truth, I counted as much on my revolver as on this paper. But I determined on the greatest circumspection and prudence. I adopted every precaution and utilized every resource I possessed. No one could live as I have done, among political exiles, without having received much of their confidence—without being initiated into their secret associations—without knowing their meeting places, their chiefs, and their mysterious signs. In fact I had hardly reached Paris at ten in the evening when I met an old companion of mine at Guyana, who offered me hospitality at his house, and placed his funds and his abilities at my disposal. At daybreak I started forth, in quest of my wife and children. It was a difficult task, friend Pêcheira, to look for them in the midst of that great city of Paris. If I had only been able to act openly, I might have simplified the task. But, alas!

I was compelled to hide myself, for my enemies were more powerful than ever; and I knew very well that if they once knew of my existence, they would make short work of me. Fortunately, I was greatly changed. Time, privations, misery, and grief, had done their work. I had left Paris a young man; I came home an old one. My new garments also disguised me, and my beard was full and long. I went first to the house I had lived in at the time I was arrested. Not only did the people there know nothing of my wife, but they had never heard the name of Cornevin. Not one of the persons who had lived in the house at my time now remained there. At the very first step, therefore, the clew I held in my hand broke, and I was bewildered. I could not apply to my wife's family—first, because one of my sisters-in-law was the mistress of one of the murderers of General Delorge; nor could I go to the police, as it would have been tantamount to denouncing myself, and throwing myself into the jaws of the wolf.

"I was desperate. For a week I wandered through the poorest parts of the city with the mad hope that I might meet my wife face to face. Sometimes, amid the crowd, I saw a figure which reminded me of her; I said: "It is she!" and rushed off in pursuit. But I was always deceived. Sometimes I was utterly overwhelmed with despair, and I asked myself what was the good of looking on the earth for those who were asleep below it? I had never suffered so much, and with renewed bitterness I swore to be revenged on the people who had inflicted such cruel tortures on me. They were happy, rich, and honoured. They lived in palaces and rolled about in their carriages. I grew wild at the thought that they were, after all, beyond my reach. I could, to be sure, put a ball through the head of one of the wretches. But what was this chastisement compared to the crime? What was this sudden death compared to my years of agony? I had the letter, but where should I take it? I doubted everybody, and trembled to confide it to anyone.

"One Sunday I went into a café to breakfast, and while waiting to be served I carelessly turned over a huge volume which lay on the table near me. It proved to be a directory, and mechanically I looked for my own name, and sat as if stunned when I read: MADAME JULIE CORNEVIN, *Modes et Confections*, Rue de la Chaussée-d'Antin.

"Julie was my wife's name! How could I believe that the poor woman, whom I had left without resources, could have established herself in one of the most fashionable streets in Paris! However, I dashed out of the café, and jumping into a cab I was driven to the address indicated. The drive was a long one, fortunately, for I thus had time to collect myself, and it was with the greatest caution that I questioned the porter of the house. His answers left me without a doubt. It was, indeed, my wife who owned this establishment. I ran up the stairs and rang at the door, which was opened by a young maid, who told me that her mistress had gone out with the young ladies. Then, as I insisted on knowing when I could see Madame Cornevin on important business, she added: "You can go and ask for her in the Rue Blanche, at her friend's, Madame Delorge; she always spends her Sundays there." And, apparently frightened by my strange manner, she shut the door in my face.

"But I was not the same man. All my plans had been changed by these few words—"Madame Cornevin is with her friend Madame Delorge." To think that my wife, the wife of the groom Cornevin, was an intimate friend of the widow of General Delorge! Was it possible? I was perfectly well aware that Julie was my superior in intelligence, but she had no more educa-

tion than I had. How, then, could it have happened that a distinguished lady should receive her on terms of such intimacy? How on earth had my wife been able to get together money enough to establish herself in a part of Paris where the smallest apartments cost an absurdly high rental? These reflections and many others decided me to wait a little before I showed myself. Friend Pécheira, I had been ungrateful enough to doubt God's goodness. To save my wife and my children a miracle was necessary. Was it not? Very well, the miracle had taken place. The day when I was dragged away from my family they found a better friend—the noble, generous widow of General Delorge, the very man whom I had seen assassinated under my very eyes.

“Indeed, Madame Delorge had received my wife—consoled her, encouraged her, and given her the means to live and set up in business. She had taken charge of my eldest son Léon, and had brought him up as if he had been her own child. She had induced a retired merchant, Ducoudray, to take charge of Jean. In short, if Fate had done her worst as regards my own misfortunes, my family now possessed advantages which I could never have given them. It was not in one day, friend Pecheria, that I learned all this. Having determined to give no signs of life, I proceeded with the very greatest circumspection, questioning the shop-keepers and the neighbours with extreme care. I suffered, certainly, in this strange situation, and yet I was not altogether unhappy. Everybody believed me dead. I was like a man risen from the tomb to satisfy himself about those whom he had left behind. I snatched every opportunity to see my wife and children afar off, to meet them in the street, and I felt more strangely than I can describe.

“How sweet were the tears that sprang to my eyes when seeing my wife still robed in her widow's mourning. I said to myself, ‘What would she say if she knew that this man whom she elbowed as she passed by is her husband, Laurent Cornevin?’ But how changed they all were. Guided and instructed by Madame Delorge, my wife carried herself like a true lady. When I saw her so calm and dignified, so imposing in her silk and crape, I could hardly believe that she was the same poor, tired wife I had seen coming home so often from the public wash-house, with her sleeves rolled up to her elbows and carrying her wet linen over her shoulder. My daughters, each with a look of bright intelligence, and wearing fresh dresses and pretty hats, were like young ladies, born and bred. But my two sons astonished me even more. I never tired of following them about and of admiring them when they came from college, with their books under their arms, gay and well-dressed, and always accompanied by an old servant, as if they belonged to the family of some rich merchant.

“I made all sorts of inquiries, and was told that Jean was a demon, and that he was the torment of all the professors. Léon, on the contrary, was a determined student. Always the first in his class—always carrying off the prizes. Amid all these changes, I was the only one who was unaltered. I had fifteen thousand francs in my belt, but I was still the groom of other days—honest and proud of his honesty, but without education or breeding, common in manner and coarse of speech. I asked myself, when the first shock of seeing me was past, if my wife would not suffer on finding me like this, if my children would not be ashamed of their father's inferiority, and if I, in my own turn, would not be humiliated and irritated by their superior attainments. These reflections were very possibly unjust, but they were natural, and they moderated the ardent desire I felt to resume my place among my family

“Other considerations also influenced me. Thanks to one of my political friends—the one who had given me shelter on my arrival in Paris—I had been informed of the events which had followed the death of General Delorge. I was told that his widow had moved heaven and earth to obtain justice and the punishment of his assassins. I knew that she had done all in her power to find me. I knew, too, that she acted under the advice of her lawyer and friend, M. Roberjot. An inquiry had been started, but it had been promptly suppressed, or rather, it had had been so superficially conducted that the murderers came out of it whiter than snow. But I learned also, and from a certain source, that Madame Delorge had not relinquished her intention and her hopes, but—always on the *qui vive* and armed for a contest—she was quietly awaiting the time when political events would enable her to move. All this was so perfectly well known to the imperial police, that this lady’s house was watched as well as every step she took, and the people with whom she corresponded.

“I decided, after great perplexity, that as our enemies were in the height of success, this was no time to dream of using the weapon in my possession against them. The next thing to decide upon was, whether I should present myself to Madame Delorge and say nothing of the letter. Could I live on my wife’s earnings? The idea filled me with horror. She never ought to be the master, the head of the house. And to prevent this I must be the main support of the family. How could I be that? What could I do with myself? Should I not be an incessant care and humiliation to my wife?

“Finally these reflections inspired me with an heroic determination—a determination that cost me agonies. I said that, as Madame Delorge could wait for the propitious hour, so could I. I swore that I would spend the intervening years in amassing a fortune and improving myself. And effectively I crushed every tender impulse that urged me to make myself known to my family, and I left Paris as I had gone there—secretly; and now I have come to you, friend Pécheira, for counsel and assistance. In six years I must be rich and worthy of my wife.”

VII.

M. DE BOURSONNE paused. The veil which had covered Laurent Cornevin’s life and motives for so long was now torn aside.

“Now I understand!” muttered Raymond. And truly enough all that had been surprising in Cornevin’s conduct was now explained.

The course he had selected might not have been the best, nor yet the wisest, nor that calculated to most surely lead to the revenge he dreamed of, but it was easy to see why he had selected it. It was easy to imagine how his distrust of himself had worked upon him, and how, above all, his pride as a husband and a father had induced him to conceal himself until his return would really prove a material blessing.

“Let us see the end,” said the old engineer. And he resumed the reading of the manuscript.

“From your own emotions, my dear friends,” continued Jean, “you can form some idea of my sensations on hearing this narrative. Poor dear father; I had always known his inflexible honesty, and I know that, humble as was his position, his heart was great. But suddenly he loomed before me in a new light, and with heroic proportions. I could not prevent myself from saying so to Pécheira, but he checked me.

" 'Wait a moment,' he said, with a kind smile; 'wait till I have finished! I was bewildered with what your father told me. I was not surprised at his wishing to be rich; young or old, intelligent or stupid, a man always desires that. But that he should educate himself, metamorphose himself, become, in short, a perfect gentleman, to use his own expression, appeared to me a most formidable undertaking. It is not by a mere effort of will that a man of forty can change his skin. And, to tell the truth, your father had a hard task before him, for although he was the best of men, he was also rough, and absolutely without elementary education. I was enough his friend to express my opinion. 'Nevertheless,' he answered, coldly, 'I shall succeed.' There was no use in argument, and I determined to help him. The first thing he wished to do was to find a way of investing, or, rather, of utilizing the ten thousand francs which still remained to him, and it was of no use thinking of the existence we had formerly led, and which had given us our first gains.

" 'Things move rapidly in a new country. Australia had already entered into a new phase of her history. Something like order had followed wild confusion, excitement, and extravagance. The days of delirious emotions and priceless nuggets, were over. The sands had given up their richest treasures, and gold must now be sought for in the depths of the earth. Civilization was at work at the mines. Companies were formed—associations which, having large capital at their disposal, with machinery and steam-power, sterilized individual efforts. So the search for gold had now become a trade, like any other—less lucrative, however; for while at Melbourne a carpenter earned his sixteen shillings, or his sovereign per day, a miner did not get more than ten shillings for eight hours' hard work.

" 'The game, which aroused hot fevers of anxiety with its sudden changes, was now played on 'Change, where men were enriched or impoverished in a brief hour, by buying and selling the stock of these companies, managing the mines. As the company struck good veins or otherwise, its shares fluctuated from a hundred to two hundred pounds in five minutes. It was in speculations of this kind that I had within one month quadrupled the capital which my division with Laurent had left me. Since then, terrified at my good fortune, and fearing to lose in one day what I had made in a month I contented myself with buying gold for export. I explained all this to Laurent. 'Ah!' he said, 'can it be possible that I came back in vain!'

" 'However, in addition to her mines, Australia possesses another source of wealth, a rich and inexhaustible one—her boundless prairies. The most intelligent emigrants had already abandoned gold seeking for stock-raising, foreseeing that in less than ten years their exports of wools and hides would become enormous. 'That's your business,' I said to Laurent, and he agreed with me.

" 'Adding to his own ten thousand francs twenty thousand more which I lent to him, he obtained from government the concession of a 'run,' that is to say, of an immense stretch of country on the shores of the Murray. Then he bought sheep and set to work—work which is very difficult and which requires iron health, invincible energy, boundless patience, and rare qualities of foresight and observation to yield a good result. Laurent had all these, and with them full knowledge of animals, which was due to his early career. His run prospered. His speculation, which was intended to furnish food to the miners, succeeded admirably; he paid me what he had borrowed, and in four years possessed half a million of francs to my certain knowledge. It was clear that he had carried out the first part of his programme, which was to make his fortune. To realize the second, to acquire

the instruction he needed, and become a gentleman, was the next. He went to work, and discovered a man belonging to a good family, and possessed of great culture and learning.

"Having found him, they became inseparable companions. This man, who was about forty years old, had left France on account of the misconduct of his wife. He was literally dying of hunger when Laurent found and offered him a home and fifty dollars per month. I was often tempted to laugh when I saw Laurent, always accompanied by his tutor, who said to him, 'You must not do this—you must not do that.' 'Take care—you uttered an oath then.' It was singular, and would have been ridiculous but for the intense gravity shown by your father, and his stubborn determination. Almost insensibly Laurent's manners softened. His ignorance was enlightened. His brain was awakened. He was able to reason and express himself. Laurent lived on his run, a hundred leagues up country, while my affairs kept me at Melbourne, so that I was struck by the increasing change whenever I saw him.

"At each of his visits I recognized a positive improvement. He always came with his tutor when the European mail arrived, and hurried to the post-office, and returned laden with papers, letters, and packages. I do not know whom he had intrusted while he was in Paris with the task of acting as eyes and ears for him; but to say the truth, he was admirably served. Everything was reported—every act of his wife and children, Roberjot and Madame Delorge, and from time to time photographs were sent of those he loved.

"Time passed, and, in addition to my former esteem for Laurent, I now felt a real admiration for the qualities which were developing in him. One morning he rushed into my office pale and out of breath. 'What is it?' I cried much startled. 'A terrible misfortune,' he replied. I thought of that curse of a stock-raiser, a pestilence among his cattle. I thought of an inundation. 'Are you ruined?' I asked. 'No—no—not that,' he answered, in a hoarse voice, as he threw a letter on the table. 'I have news from France,' he added, 'My son Jean has just been arrested!' I was amazed. 'Arrested!' I cried. 'And put in prison,' he rejoined. 'They have sent him to Brest, then to Guyana. 'They? Whom do you mean by they?' 'The wretches, who, after having murdered General Delorge, next disembarrassed themselves of me, the witness of their crime.'

"Were I ever to see such hate in an enemy's eyes as I now read in Laurent's, I should know that my life was in danger. 'But,' he shouted, these ruffians will find their match, and they shall learn what it costs to attack my son.' I tried to calm him, but in vain. 'What do you mean to do?' I asked. 'To go at once. There's an English steamer in port now, the 'Duncan.' 'Yes, but she won't leave for a fortnight.' 'Yes, she will; she will be under weigh in six hours; she is coaling now.' I looked at him in utter stupefaction. 'Have you hired this steamer,' I asked. 'Yes, and had the captain refused it on hire, I should have bought it; and if that one had not been for sale, I would have found another.' 'But it will cost you an enormous sum,' said I. He shrugged his shoulders disdainfully. 'What of that!' he answered. 'I know too well what a man suffers on the Devil's Island to let Jean die there. Am I not rich?'

"He was indeed. Three or four times better off than myself. This I knew very well. At the beginning of this last year, he had told me that his net profits were two hundred thousand francs per annum. And your 'run,' I said, 'do you intend to give it up? Do you intend to sacrifice that

and the immense number of sheep you have?' 'What do I care,' he cried, and then pointing to his friend and tutor, he added: 'This gentleman understands my business; he will take care of it, and in return I will give him half the profits, which will amount this year to over two hundred and fifty thousand francs. Give me pen, ink, and paper, and we will draw up a contract.'

"His eager haste terrified me. 'At least,' I said, 'tell me your plans?' 'I have none,' was his reply. 'I shall decide on my way.' Nothing could detain him. However, just as he was leaving, he handed me a folded paper. 'Everything must be provided for,' he said. 'If you do not hear from me for a year, open this envelope, and you will find my will inside together with certain instructions.' A boat lay at the wharf. He entered it. I called out, 'good luck to you,' and ten minutes later the steamer was under weigh."

Raymond clapped his hand to his forehead. "This, then, is the meaning of the mysterious influence by which Jean got away from the island," he said.

"That is precisely what your brother says," answered the baron. And displeased by the interruption, he added: "Pray let me go on."

"And I," continued Jean, "attributed the cordial welcome of the good merchant at Cayenne entirely to my own merits. It was to my father that I owed these powerful protectors, these amateurs, who bought my smallest sketches with such avidity. I ought to have felt my father's hand in each friendly grasp which was extended to me. But why did he not reveal himself? How had he such astonishing courage, when I was so crushed with loneliness and despair as not to open his arms and cry out to me: 'I am your father, and I have come to your aid?' Answer me this, I said to Pécheira. But he would not answer; nothing could move him. 'Your questions trouble me,' he said, 'let me tell my story in my own way. Laurent, as I was saying, went off and I remained in a state of great anxiety. It was five months before I had a line from him. He wrote that his enemies were so powerful that it would be the height of folly to attack them, as it would simply be the old story of the earthen and the iron pot. Not wishing to be broken, he determined to defer his vengeance yet a little longer only asking that God might allow his enemies to live until that time should come. He had assisted you, Jean,' he said, but in such a way that you had no suspicion of the source of this aid. He added that, when I received this letter, he should already be far away from France, and that he should speedily follow his missive."

"Soon afterwards I received another note from Cayenne, containing only the words: 'Expect me by the next steamer.' And he arrived, and it was with the heartiest pleasure I grasped his hand. We had not been more than a quarter of an hour together when he realised the curiosity that tormented me. 'Ask me no questions,' he said, 'for friend Pécheira, I dare not tell the truth, and I should be compelled to lie, which would be a disgrace to you and to me. I will tell you all I can——' 'which, my dear boy,' so Pécheira continued, 'was precious little indeed.'

"He said that on his arrival in Paris he was startled by some news he learnt from his political friends. They told him how a man who like himself possessed some compromising political secrets, had been carried off one evening and shut up in a lunatic asylum. 'And,' said Laurent, 'the poor fellow ended by losing his reason, and all the while I was in France the fear of a similar disaster hung over me. Maybe my enemies believe me

to be dead, but I may be mistaken. It is possible they have never lost sight of me, but are only waiting for an occasion to punish me for my escape.' Laurent then went on to tell me what he had done for you, and how he had succeeded in placing you in a family at Cayenne, who would treat you as a son. All that he could do he had done, and he was comforted by finding that your health had not suffered from the climate.

"'And now,' he concluded, 'the first part of my task is completed. I have educated myself and I have made a fortune. I have my weapons at last and can begin the contest. Let the villains tremble! God, who has so visibly protected me, will assist me once more. It is no common personal revenge which will satisfy me. The fellows must be brought to justice. They shall be made to shed tears of blood for their crime before they die. I am going to dispose of my property here and return to France. The hour is propitious. The Imperial Government is not what it was. The surface presents the same aspect—nothing is modified—but the foundations have been sorely shaken—one more shock and the edifice crumbles, and I intend to assist with all my strength in achieving this end. Not that I hate this *régime*. This or another is all the same to me. But this *régime* protects my enemies, and I shall assist in overthrowing it, so that they may be crushed under the ruins!'

"From that day forth Laurent had but one idea—to turn all his property into gold—which in a new country like ours is always a delicate operation, for very little capital is lying idle. And in Laurent's case the undertaking was especially complicated for he was involved in large freshly started enterprises, all excellent in themselves and apparently prosperous, but not likely to yield results for months. For this he could not wait. He wanted money, and he said to me, 'I must have all I own in such a form that I can use it instantly.'

"Under such circumstances he was naturally bound to make great sacrifices, and he made them without hesitation. He had about eight thousand cattle on his run, and if time had been of no consequence, he could have obtained one million four hundred thousand francs for them. However, he sold them *en bloc* for nine hundred thousand francs. He sold his sheep, which were worth fifteen francs each, for eight, and the whole of them only brought in three hundred and fifty thousand francs. For his right to his run, for his buildings and fences, for a thousand cows and a hundred horses, he only obtained one hundred and sixty-five thousand francs, and that with a vast deal of trouble.

"I was sorry to see him throw away a fortune which had been accumulated with such labour—and sell in this style, what had cost him two millions for fourteen hundred and twenty-five thousand francs, for, with time, his run would have developed into one of the most important in all Australia. But he laughed at what he called my jeremiades. 'Haven't I more than twenty times as much as my wildest fancy ever pictured?' he asked. And thereupon he went on making new sacrifices. He sold all his stock in industrial enterprises—his interest in certain mines, which it is true, had momentarily fallen in value, but were certain to rise again, and naturally he disposed of these at a heavy loss, being anxious to finish with the matter, for he kept on repeating, 'I feel that I am losing time.'

"He had been back in Australia for ten months or so when, one evening he came to me and said with a sigh of relief: 'I have sold everything—I am free!' And brandishing an enormous pocket-book—one which he could manage, however, to carry on his person—he added: 'There's all my for-

ture, in bills of exchange on Vienna, London, and Paris.' 'And you are going?' I asked. 'On Monday next—four days hence,' he replied.

"I knew that this separation must be eternal, and I also trembled for him. He divined my thoughts, for he took my hand, and with a voice full of resolution, such as might have imparted courage to an arrant coward, he exclaimed: 'Let your mind be easy, old friend; for more than a year I have been maturing all my plans, and I have applied every ray of intelligence I possess to avoid the perils of the step I am now taking. I have carefully weighed all contingencies, and I am prepared for everything.' 'Your enemies are very powerful,' I urged. 'I know it,' he said, 'but what have I to fear from them? You say that it is probable that they know of my existence and keep me in view. I think I should have found this out if it were the case. Still, as it is possible, I now intend to send them off the track. I shall not take the mail steamer, but leave in an American clipper bound for Liverpool, but which calls at several ports between here and there. At one of these ports I shall leave it, and take passage in another vessel. After that my identity will be lost. I leave Australia under the name of Boutin, but no Boutin will land in America, France, or England.' So saying he tapped his big pocket-book: 'These are my weapons,' he added gaily 'Nothing is impossible to a man with plenty of money!' And he was right.

"I never asked him the precise amount of his fortune—nor did he ever tell me; but I knew that everything together it could not have been far from five millions. Instances of fortunes made with such rapidity are rare even in Melbourne, but I can mention twenty or so: Barclay, Tidal, Colt, Latour, and Davison, became millionaires in a shorter time even than Laurent Cornevin. He was not spoiled by prosperity. He never forgot that it was through me he had left Talcahuana. He remembered, too, that it was I who had been the source of his wealth. Brave, good Laurent! How many times, when he saw my affairs less prosperous than his own, had he come to me and said: 'Zounds! man let us go into partnership.'

"It was on a small estate that I own, on the shores of the Murray, that we passed the last four days of his sojourn in Australia together. It was very sweet for us both to look back on the past, to the strong friendship which had never been shaken, and to swear that we would meet again. At last the hour came for him to leave. He promised to send me news of himself, and told me how to send him intelligence of my own welfare from time to time. And once more, on board the clipper, we grasped each other's hands, and neither of us was ashamed that tears stood in our eyes. This was on January 10th, 1869——"

"A year ago," murmured Raymond, "and I——"

"Let me go on," said the baron.

"You alone, dear friends," continued Jean, "you alone can imagine how greatly I was disturbed by Pécheira's narrative. And so I said to myself, 'Just as I hoped to ascertain that I was close on my father's track, I have lost him. We might have crossed each other on mid-ocean. Perhaps I saw him on the deck of a vessel that passed mine under full sail. Where was he now?' When I asked this question of Pécheira, he said he knew nothing, for certain, save that Laurent Cornevin had arrived safely in Europe. 'You had news of him, then?' I asked. 'Yes, once—five months after his departure, that is to say at the end of May—I received a letter from him, dated from Brussels. His voyage had been remarkably rapid, and his health was excellent. He had destroyed his track behind and his hopes

were high.' 'He said that?' 'Yes; I will show you the letter.' 'And since then?' 'Nothing—not one word. But were I in your place I should look for your father in Paris, not far from the *Chausée d'Antin*.'

"Now then, my friends, my task is over; yours is to begin. It is for you to finish my work—for you to decide what system of investigation shall be adopted in view of finding out my father. Only, my dear friends, be prudent. We know the infinite trouble my father has taken to attain his aims. Try to find him, but never forget that the least indiscretion on your part will arouse his enemies, reveal his existence, destroy all his hopes, and place his very life in peril.

"This is all the information I can give you: First, that according to my father's instructions, *Pécheira* addressed his letters to *F. Thompson, Esq., Charing Cross, District Post Office, London, W. C.* Secondly, *Pécheira* possessed a good photograph of our father, which I shall take to a photographer's and have copied to-day. I will send you one of the copies at once.

"Now, shall we communicate the result of my investigations to my mother and *Madame Delorge*? I think not. Why should we trouble their peaceful lives by loading them with our anxieties? Then, too, we can by no means feel certain that while we have been indulging in these illusions our enemies have not succeeded in suppressing my unfortunate father for the second time. Would it not be a most awful thing to open wounds, now partly healed? I have not another minute if this letter is to go to-day. So I only add the words—hope and courage.

"JEAN CORNEVIN."

"And this is all!" said the baron, in a disappointed tone. Then, after a moment's silence, and as if enlightened by an inspiration, he exclaimed: "Now we have it! This is the meaning of *Maumussy's* humble and conciliatory attitude!"

"Impossible!"

"And why impossible? Who can say that *De Maumussy* and *Combelaine* have not penetrated the secret of your father's existence. May it not be that as long as they could watch him they felt at ease, but as soon as they lost all clue to him, they became frightened? The empire totters, their power escapes them, and it is precisely at this moment that they scent this mysterious danger."

The two friends then proceeded to read the letter from *M. Roberjot* which accompanied *Jean's*.

This was what the lawyer wrote: "You have a right to be hopeful, my dear *Raymond*, for it is clear to me that *Cornevin* is in Paris. But, in my opinion, to try and find him would be both foolish and unkind. We have no right to act contrary to his wishes. If this man, who loves his family so much, chooses to live apart from wife and children, it must be because he has powerful reasons for doing so. In my opinion, as in that of all sensible persons, dark days are close at hand. Wait! I say, wait!"

VIII.

WAIT! Had *Raymond* done anything else for years? No matter what projects he had formed, what hopes had crept into his heart, all were crushed by this advice. "It's killing me," he cried, "happy or miserable, other men fight and conquer, attack and defend themselves, triumph or perish in the effort while I——"

The baron interrupted him in a compassionate tone. "What would you do?" he asked

"What would I do. I don't know. Act at all events."

"You mean you would look for Cornevin?"

"Very possibly."

"That is to say, you would run the risk of compromising this worthy, noble man—this heroic fellow to whom your father confided his last wishes? That is to say, you would destroy the fruit of his ten years' patient toil."

"Why did Jean tell us to continue his task?"

"Because Jean is six thousand leagues from Paris, and does not know how near the finish may be."

Raymond rose, and began walking up and down the room in a state of great agitation. "The finish of it!" he exclaimed; "the finish! For years it has been promised me. I have been told that the hour was close at hand, and I have foolishly held my breath in momentary expectation."

The baron's face darkened. "Then," he said, "It is the mere desire for revenge upon your father's murderers which impels you to try and find Cornevin?"

"Of course."

"I fancied that Simone de Maillefert might count for something in your eagerness; I fancied that you were in haste to close the past so as to open the future, and that you hoped Cornevin would release you from the difficulties of your present position."

Raymond coloured. "I will follow your advice, sir," he replied. "What ought I to do? Speak, and I will obey!"

The old engineer smiled. "I shall make you very angry," he answered, "for I shall repeat just what you have so often heard. You must be patient."

"Yes, but Simone's peril is imminent."

"I know that, but you have so far done everything in your power. And by making a formal application for her hand you have silenced the vile slander which was in circulation."

"But her mother will devise some new combination."

"That is only too likely. But at the same time that is all the more reason why you should wait to see your adversary's cards. Ah! why were you not skilful enough to interest that beautiful young duchess in your game?"

Raymond had repelled this idea with horror when it had occurred to him. "Would it have been possible?" he asked.

"Possible! Nothing was easier—with a little skill and audacity. She held her hand out to you, my dear boy. To behave as I suggest would not have been very chivalrous, nor even quite loyal, but it would have been adroit. And after all her conduct has been most equivocal. But the opportunity is lost and cannot return." Then rising abruptly, the baron exclaimed "The government certainly does not pay us for smoothing your suit with Mademoiselle de Maillefert, and we must get to bed or we shall not be able to do anything to-morrow!" And refusing to listen to another word from Raymond, he added: "Good-night, good-night—sleep well."

This was capital advice to give, but long after the baron was sleeping soundly Raymond was still restlessly pacing his apartment, recapitulating in his mind the decisive events of the day. This day, the anniversary of his father's death, had begun by his interview with the Duchess de Maillefert and had ended by the letter from Jean Cornevin. What most disturbed him

was that he could not sufficiently detach his thoughts from Simone to reflect upon the fate of Laurent. "Heaven grant," he said in an undertone, "that to-day's step will have the result predicted by the baron."

On this point he was enlightened the next day in the public room of the Rising Sun. Master Bérú knew the whole matter; that was clear from the attention he bestowed on Raymond, and by the sympathetic tone of his voice. After a short time, he carelessly mentioned that ever since the duchess's arrival, the young lady had been raising money all over the province—that she was asking for advances from her tenants—that she had borrowed from the notaries at Angers—that she was stripping herself, and would end by being left without a sou. And then, with a knowing glance at Raymond, he added: "It is said that the Duchess does not wish her daughter to marry, and that she has said the most awful things about her to prevent any one from asking for her hand. A husband would defend the poor thing."

"What did I tell you?" muttered the baron in Raymond's ears, as he rubbed his hands gleefully.

But Master Bérú also knew other things of which the two engineers were quite ignorant. "She has borrowed everywhere," he said, "and now she is going to sell."

"Do you really think that?" interrupted M. de Boursonne.

The worthy innkeeper looked about him to be certain that no one could hear, and then, with a mysterious air, he said: "Some people know more than you think!"

"I dare say; but what do they know?"

"Well, sir, when you see crows flying about and massing together, what do you fancy? Why, that there is something for them to peck at—some carcass. This is the way folks are gathering about poor Mademoiselle Simone's property."

"What folks?" cried the two engineers at the same moment.

"First, one of those gentlemen who came to the château the other evening—the stout, rosy-faced man with the big gold chain, who looks at people in a lofty way, as if he were seated up among the clouds."

"M. Verdale!" muttered Raymond.

"But what has he done?" asked the baron.

"Nothing personally. But yesterday he came to Rosiers in a carriage. He went to the café, and there he met a certain man from Saint-Mathurin, who was once employed by Mademoiselle Simone on the estate. The pair then proceeded to a notary's—not to mademoiselle's notary, you understand—and then to the tax-collector's office, where they were joined by an old *huissier*."

The baron smiled lightly. "Is that all?" he asked, with feigned indifference.

"Ah! wait a minute. They all went over the De Maillefert property—very carefully, too, as if they were going to purchase. And then I heard the stout man say: 'It is worth a good deal of money, certainly, but not as much as you think.'"

This was all the innkeeper had to tell, but it was not without its importance, and as soon as he had withdrawn, the baron exclaimed: "Now we arrive at the real reason which has brought these gentlemen to the château. The duchess has discovered some way of getting hold of her daughter's fortune, and they have come here to commence operations. They feel so sure of success that they are already dividing the poor child's property."

"But she has sworn never to sell any of the land."

"Unquestionably; but these men are here to compel her to break this oath of her's."

There lay the danger, evidently; and Raymond and the baron were busily engaged in discussing it when a tilbury appeared in sight, driven by fascinating M. Bizet de Chenehutte in person. He jumped out and darted towards Raymond with extended hands, at the same time declaring that he had been looking for him everywhere. For he knew everything, he said, absolutely everything—both what Raymond had done and the answer he had received. Madame de Larchère had told him and everybody else about the duchess's abominable conduct in trying to disgrace her own child. "But she has only succeeded in disgracing herself," added Bizet. "The whole province has turned against her, and I honestly believe she would be hissed if she were to show herself at Saumur or Angers. Every door would be shut against her, and so she had better return to Paris with all possible speed. I must really go, gentlemen," he continued. "I have at least twenty visits to pay. I intend to spread this intelligence; but if I get through in season I shall come and ask you to give me some dinner." And then off he went.

"Nice young man," muttered the baron; "a most merciful Providence has ordained that fools have their uses in this world. And this one is doing us a service that no sensible man would dream of. If he comes to-night I shall take the greatest pleasure in offering him a good glass of wine."

But Bizet did not appear again. The old gardener from the château came, however, about nine o'clock to the Rising Sun with a letter for Raymond from Simone.

The young fellow poured all the silver in his pocket into the gardener's hand, and then tore open the letter which ran as follows:—"Things have gone better since you left than I ventured to hope. No one would imagine that anything had happened. My mother behaves to me exactly as she did before that horrible scene. I am certain, from some orders I heard her give her maid, that she will leave Maillefert to-morrow. SIMONE."

The next morning, when the two engineers were on the point of sitting down to breakfast, a great noise called them to the window just in time to see several carriages dash by. Master Béru came in at the same moment. "Well! well!" he said. "Madame de Maillefert is off with all her friends. Good riddance to them!"

The baron triumphed. "What did I tell you!" he cried.

And in truth this departure was so like a complete rout, that it was difficult to attribute it to anything else but the step taken by Raymond, which was known, commented upon, and understood by all the people round about.

But Raymond did not dare to triumph. He had known too much disappointment and sorrow not to be very distrustful of good fortune. He felt that it would be the height of madness to conclude from the duchess's abrupt departure that she had renounced her designs on her daughter's fortune. It was clear that her needs were as pressing, her avarice as imperative as ever, and Simone's position was consequently quite as hazardous. Ah! if Madame de Maillefert's departure had only opened the château door to Raymond once more. But this could not be. By returning to Maillefert he would simply provoke a revival of the scandal, and rehabilitate the unworthy mother at her daughter's expense. And so having to comply with the proprieties which were even more than exacting than the duchess's will, he found himself separated from Simone. "I shall not even try to see her," he said, sadly.

And in justice to him, we must say that he did not; but a happy chance

brought them together. Simone was out a great deal; Raymond was rarely indoors; and it came to pass that the very next day they stood face to face on the highway near the bridge. They both stood still, silent and hesitating. Both heard the voice of reason bid them hurry past each other. But in spite of all the efforts of Miss Dodge, they stood with clasped hands, while Simone hurriedly told Raymond what, in her opinion, had sent her mother off. The duchess had called on a lady of the highest position—one of her relatives, in fact—who had come to the top of the stairs, and said, aloud, in the hearing of all her servants: "Excuse me, I am not at home to the mother of my poor little Simone."

The insult was excessive, and all the more so coming from such a source. "And the worst of it is," added the young girl, sadly, "that my mother holds you, that is to say, us, responsible for the affront. She will never forgive us!"

Simone had not the smallest idea what new plan her mother had in her head. And when Raymond told her he believed that De Combelaïne and Maumussy had come down respecting her property, she merely gave him a dreary smile and said, "This is not the first time that my brother and mother have brought people down to inspect my property. But what does that matter—as I am not going to sell it?"

Raymond and Simone were not together for ten minutes, and not a human being passed them as they stood together. And yet such was the system of espionage in this little town of Rosiers, that two hours later, when Raymond entered the Rising Sun, the baron at once cried out to him: "So you have seen Simone?"

"Yes," the young man answered, with a flush.

"A mistake—a great mistake," said the worthy old engineer. "But I suppose it will do no especial harm," he added, "as we must so soon go away."

Their work had gradually advanced, and before many days elapsed they would have to shift their head-quarters. The baron had deferred doing so as long as possible, knowing what a blow it would be to Raymond. "Yes," he continued, "you have but four days more before we start, so make the most of them."

Raymond had determined that, come what might, his Sundays should be spent at Rosiers for some time to come, so he bore up bravely on the last evening they were to spend at the Rising Sun. That very same evening the baron received a letter enclosed in a huge envelope with official seals. "What have we here?" he asked, as he broke the seals; and scanning the missive, "Merciful God!" he exclaimed, "what does this mean?"

Raymond's heart contracted with a sharp pang of apprehension. "What is it?" he asked.

The baron was pale with rage. "It is this," he said, "that you are no longer on my staff. You are sent to the Department of the Bouches-du-Rhône. You are allowed eight days to get there, and your commission will arrive to-morrow!"

Raymond stood as if turned to stone. "It isn't possible," he stammered. "Some one has complained of me. How have I failed in my duty?"

The baron shrugged his shoulders. "I am your *chef*," he said, "and I have always shown you the letters I have sent to the authorities, so——"

By this time Raymond had recovered from his astonishment, and anger had asserted its sway, "In that case," he remarked, "I am the victim of an exceptional measure."

"Ah ! Madame de Maumussy warned you—," began the baron.

"True—I have enemies, and powerful ones. But this is not 1852; it is 1869. The press has regained its right to speak. I can write to the newspapers and expose this abominable conduct."

With a gesture the baron silenced him. "I am sorry for it," he said, "but even this satisfaction will be denied to you. You are shamefully treated. Of that there is no question, for it is against all precedent. But, one thing is certain. Read the letter again and you will see that your change of position is in reality promotion."

This was true. This precaution at least had been taken. "I am inclined to believe that the authorities are perfectly innocent in the matter. Do you think that any one went to them and said : 'Look here ! There's a fellow at Rosiers, in the Department of Maine-et-Loire, who is in our way. Send him off, will you ? Send him to the Bouches-du-Rhône, for instance.' No, indeed ; your enemies are not quite so simple. They said : 'He is a very charming young man, in whom we are all deeply interested, and we should be infinitely obliged if you would give him a position in the South, where he has certain interests.' And so the authorities thought they were doing you a favour."

"That is to say," cried Raymond, striking the table with his clenched fist, "that I, the son of General Delorge, have been put in the light of soliciting a favour from the empire. That is to say that I am dishonoured for ever ! No, it shall not be ! The wretches shall not have everything their own way. I shall resign. Yes, and this very moment !"

More saddened than surprised the baron watched Raymond as he took his seat at the desk and prepared to write. "Reflect, my dear Delorge," he said, gently. "When your resignation is dispatched, what will you do ?"

"I neither know nor care."

"Take care. A man should be able to offer a home to the woman he loves—"

"I shall always find something to do." And the young fellow folded his letter and began to direct it.

"And your mother ?" asked the baron.

Raymond turned a little pale, but he did not lay down his pen. "Poor woman !" he muttered, "if she only knew— But I do not belong to myself. I seem the very foot-ball of fate—my destiny must be accomplished."

"Do you mean to remain at Rosiers ?" asked the baron.

"Yes ; I do indeed."

"And what will be said here when it becomes known that you have resigned such a position to linger at the side of the heiress of Maillefert ? Do you think her reputation won't suffer ? In your place I should ask her opinion before deciding."

But Raymond had had enough of uncertainty and perplexity—of perpetual indecisions and wearying alternations of hope and despair. "No," he said ; "I will not consult her. She would tell me to yield—she would tell me to obey my orders and go." Thereupon, with a firm hand he signed the resignation he had written—a resignation from which there was no possibility of appeal.

"Who would ever have believed, my dear Delorge," said the baron, "that I should finish this work, which will be the success of my life, without you ?"

The evening that they passed together was not demonstratively sad, for

they both struggled to display a stoicism they were really far from feeling. However, the next morning the baron fairly broke down as he bade his young friend farewell. "You must come and pay me a visit," he said; "and above all don't commit any folly. If I can serve you, if you need me, you have only to write and say so."

The train puffed off, and Raymond stood gazing at the trailing smoke. A tap on his shoulder at last aroused him from his sad thoughts. It was Bérú who was guilty of this familiarity—Master Bérú, who had just said good-bye to the baron on the platform, and who now remarked to Raymond: "Let us go home."

"Home!" It was without the least afterthought that the innkeeper spoke this word. However, after celebrating the merits of the baron, and thanking God that one of his customers was still left, he exclaimed: "But is it true, sir, that you are no longer an engineer?"

Raymond turned round quickly.

"Why do you ask me that?"

"Because—because I heard some of the workmen say yesterday that you had sent in your resignation," replied Master Bérú, much embarrassed—the fact is, he had listened to Raymond and the baron. "People are talking about it in the town. I declared, though, that it must be a joke."

It was hardly worth while for Raymond to make a mystery of what must soon be known, and so he quietly answered: "No, it was not a joke."

"Ah!" said Master Bérú, with a knowing wink—"ah! I understand."

Master Bérú gave Raymond the exact idea of what would be thought respecting his prolonged sojourn at Rosiers. A hundred other people would say "I understand," just as he had done. And there is no worse public to face than that of a little country town when its curiosity is aroused.

"Now I will consult Simone," thought Raymond to himself.

He had met her before on the highroad, and he repaired again to the same spot, which was not far from the old château. The weather had been glorious for a couple of days; the sky was clear and frosty; and the pale December sun shone on the denuded branches covered with hoar frost. With his face exposed to the north wind, Raymond stood under a spreading oak and waited. From this point of vantage he could contemplate one of the most beautiful landscapes along the Loire—a landscape of which the greater part belonged to Mademoiselle de Maillefert. Her's was all that spreading meadow-land—her's those forests and vineyards on the sunny hillsides. And he thought sadly enough that it was this immense fortune which raised such a barrier between himself and Simone. Ah! would that she were only poor like those peasant girls, who, with their faces purple with the cold, trudged past him as they returned from the market at Trèves, with their baskets on their hips and their wooden shoes striking the frozen earth like hammers! "Then," thought Raymond, "no one could dispute my love for her."

But time was passing, and he had become very uneasy, when all at once he perceived two women coming rapidly in his direction. He recognized Simone, in a large brown cloak, and Miss Dodge, the English governess, swathed in furs, with her hands buried in her muff. "At last," he muttered.

But almost immediately a terrible fear assailed him. Suppose Simone should be so astonished by his audacity as to reject the protection which he wished to afford her, this being his motive for remaining at Rosiers; and suppose she bade him go away? What could he do in that case?

Mademoiselle Simone and Miss Lydia were still quietly approaching the

spot where he was stationed, partially concealed by the drooping branches. All at once he stepped forward. "Good heavens!" cries the governess, who did not know this man for a moment, so suddenly did he appear. But Simone knew him, and went straight to meet him, exclaiming in a strange unusual tone—"You have allowed the Baron de Boursonne to go away alone? You have sent in your resignation?"

"Yes; I have done both these things."

Never did Simone and Raymond meet without an earnest protest from Miss Dodge, who declared these meetings to be most improper. However the young girl checked her governess on this occasion. "One moment if you please," she said. "That will do, thank you, Lydia." And addressing Raymond, she remarked: "I thought your position was all you had to rely upon."

"And you were right, I am sorry to say. My mother has some little means, but these are for herself and my sister."

Simone coloured, and looking at Raymond as if all at once a startling suspicion had assailed her, she asked: "But what do you mean to do?"

Raymond, too, turned crimson. He shuddered at the idea that Simone would imagine him capable of such shameless calculation. "Modest as my resources are," he answered, "they must suffice for the present, and before they are exhausted fate will perhaps look more kindly upon me. There is nothing to alarm me in the future."

The young girl's suspicions vanished as she looked into his eyes. "But I cannot accept such a sacrifice!" she said.

This phrase was Raymond's reward. "Why do you speak of sacrifices?" he exclaimed. "There was no time to consult with you—no time for hesitation. Our enemies wished to send me away; and so it was clearly my duty to remain."

While these words were being exchanged the poor governess had been shivering among her furs, and her nose stood out redder and redder on her long pale face. "Do let us walk on!" she said to Simone.

"Very well," answered the girl. And as they followed the road, she said to Raymond: "Do you intend to remain at Rosiers?"

He shook his head. "I have decided on nothing yet," he answered in an agitated voice. "I came to consult you. Dispose of me. Your will is mine. I will obey your orders without a murmur. My sojourn at Rosiers may be wrongly interpreted."

"It will be, certainly," sighed Miss Lydia.

Mademoiselle Simone stopped short. "Alas!" she said sadly. "Has not injury enough been already done to my reputation. A young girl's honour withers like a flower under the hot blast of calumny." Then, as if determined not to yield to her emotion, she suddenly exclaimed: "I must have time for reflection. To-morrow, Monsieur Raymond, at the same hour—here."

And taking the arm of her governess, she drew her into a little path which led through the wood towards the château.

The next day, some little time before the appointed hour, Raymond betook himself with a feverish step to the place of meeting, inventing a thousand plans and turning them over in his head—adopting and then rejecting them one after the other. The clock in the church tower struck two, and Simone appeared, accompanied by Miss Dodge, as on the previous afternoon. In three bounds Raymond stood beside her, as breathless with anxiety as if he expected a sentence of life or death.

As soon as Simone's eyes met his, she shook her head gently, and said, with a sad smile: "I am no nearer a decision than I was yesterday. I am not like myself. I feel weak, irresolute, and I cannot make up my mind."

"Then I am not to go away!" cried Raymond.

"Sometimes," answered the girl, in her clear, sweet voice, "I am almost frightened; I shiver without knowing why, and yet I cannot see any tangible ground for fears. My mother took a considerable sum away with her, and until that is exhausted I shall, no doubt, be at peace. My mother is not wicked, nor is Philippe. Their hearts are not bad; it is their heads that are weak."

Raymond was astonished at so much indulgence, not understanding that Simone urged these extenuating circumstances for herself as well as for him. "Alas!" he said, "it is not Madame de Maillefert nor your brother whom I fear; I distrust M. de Maumussy, De Combelaine, and Verdale. Why did they come here?" He hesitated for a moment, coloured slightly, and then added, "I am afraid, too, of Madame de Maumussy. Half a dozen times words have trembled on her lips which I am convinced were the avowal of some abominable treason—some treason against you in which she plays her part."

Simone did not lose her beautiful serenity. "What can they do against me?" she asked. And then after a moment's hesitation she added, "If this be your idea, perhaps, you had better stay."

But Miss Lydia Dodge had also reflected, and she curtailed Raymond's expressions of gratitude. "Why not try some conciliatory method? A little prudent management never spoils anything. This gentleman might seem to go away, and yet remain. He could go, in fact, and then return and establish himself in some neighboring farm-house, and only go out in the evening."

Simone's beautiful face flushed. "Hide! and lie? No, never! It is not in that way one can release oneself from a false position. We will not transform a misfortune into a disgrace. If Raymond stays, he must stay openly, acknowledging with equal openness that he stays for me. My reputation would suffer perhaps, but in an infinitely less degree. Raymond has a right to shield me and my reputation, for if I am not his wife I shall never marry!"

Never was a person so thunderstruck as Miss Dodge by Simone's sudden vehemence. This fashion of facing the situation absolutely routed what she called her ideas. Her tall, bony frame—her thin lips and long, yellow teeth—her pale face, red nose, and round eyes did not make her a prepossessing being; but, despite her physical presentment, the worthy governess, to her own detriment, possessed a very sensitive nature and a most vivid and romantic imagination. She was the seventh daughter of a poor Protestant clergyman having an incumbency in the neighbourhood of London, and she had spent her youth in waiting, like the princesses in fairy tales, for the young and handsome hero who would realize her dreams. He never came, but poverty did. The clergyman died, his numerous family were scattered, and Miss Lydia was compelled to accept a situation as a governess. The trial had been a great one for her, and it was not without a fearful struggle that she buried all her illusions in the depths of her soul as in a tomb. Since then many years had passed by in silent resignation; but under her cold, rigid demeanour as a governess, there was still a warm heart beating. In the evening, when she was alone in her bedroom, she bolted her door and made up for all the annoyance of the day by plunging

eagerly into novel-reading. She devoured everything she could lay hands on, weeping hot tears over the persecuted and innocent heroines, and shivering with emotion as she read of the gallant deeds achieved by the heroes. She fancied that she had acquired from these nocturnal studies a thorough knowledge of the world, life, and passion, and above all she believed she had stored her mind with all sorts of valuable expedients, and was thus always ready to meet any emergency. - It was thus, the most natural thing in the world for her to be deeply interested in Raymond and Simone's love. She said all sorts of reasonable things to them, for she considered that a part of her duty as a governess; but, in the depths of her heart, she was their devoted accomplice, thinking at the same time, that they were foolish children, and that if she had been in their place she would soon have found a way out of the dilemma in which they were involved.

However Raymond agreed with Simone. "No, no," he replied; "we have nothing to conceal. Dissimulation would dishonour our love."

"And besides," added Simone, "this will only last a little while. I shall find some way of winning my mother over, and bringing my duty and my wishes into harmony."

The day was drawing to a close and reminded of this by Miss Lydia, the young people reluctantly separated, but not without promising to see each other again at the same time and place.

The next week they were several times seen and met by people on the high road "It was certainly very odd!" according to M. Bizet de Chenehutte; and many people declared it was somewhat too bold; while others of Madame de Maillefert's circle smiled, and said: "This young Delorge is really too good. Were I in his place I should make short work of the matter, and run off with the young lady."

All these cheerful remarks were at once reported to Raymond by M. Bizet, who having constituted himself his agent and advocate, ran about the country gathering up all he could for or against him, and forming public opinion, as he loftily remarked.

Simone and Raymond cared but little for all this gossip. Overjoyed by the peace so unexpectedly granted them by this respite of even a few weeks' duration, they hastened to take advantage of it, forgetting in the joy of the present both the storms of the past and the clouds of the future. And by degrees, at the end of the week, they quite forgot themselves, and spent nearly all their time together, although always accompanied by Miss Lydia. One day Raymond offered Simone his arm as they walked along the road overlooking the Loire, followed by the governess. The next day the weather was atrocious; it was impossible for Simone to walk about, and so Raymond sent to ask if she would not come to the ruins of the old château. "Why not receive Monsieur Delorge here, in the new château?" objected Miss Lydia.

This would have been far wiser, only Raymond and Simone did not think so. As long as the rain lasted, they spent their afternoons among the ruins, where there was a large arched hall, in which all sorts of *débris* had been accumulated. It was here that the lovers met. Once when Simone's feet were wet, Raymond went off and collected an armful of dry wood, with which he lighted a fire in the big chimney. "How delightful!" cried the girl. "I wish we always had one!" and these simple words were as an order to Raymond, so that when Simone arrived at the ruins the next day there was a bright fire already crackling and roaring up the chimney.

Raymond never received any letters from Paris, and he never opened a newspaper. He heard that affairs were going badly—that the empire was

hesitating between a liberal ministry and a new *coup d'état*. But what did this matter to him? All he thought of was of persuading Simone to purchase her mother's sanction to the marriage, by abandoning part of her fortune. She had rejected the plan when he first unfolded it; but, by degrees, she listened more patiently, her firm will shaken by the calm and gentle life they now led.

One day in December they were sitting close by the fire talking, and Miss Lydia was reading a little apart, when all at once they heard some stones rolling, and quick steps approaching through the ruins. "Who is that?" cried Raymond, starting up. But before he had time to go and ascertain, M. Bizet de Chenehutte appeared before him. "May I ask—" began Raymond, haughtily, thinking that Bizet's curiosity had brought him there. But the young provincial gave him no time to proceed, "Monsieur Philippe! the Duke!" he cried. "Take care. He arrived an hour ago, and he is close at my heels now."

Simone rose to her feet. "My brother!" she gasped.

"Yes, your brother," answered a mocking voice. And M. Philippe stepped upon the scene, looking just as usual. He put his glass to his eye, and took in each detail of the strange scene—Miss Lydia crouching on a broken column, with her book open on her knees, Simone leaning against the chimney, Bizet, red and out of breath, and finally, Raymond, who stood with head erect and defiant eyes. "A most singular place really to meet a lover," drawled the duke, "particularly when one possesses the most beautiful château in all Anjou!" Then, turning to Simone, he added; "I am by no means without pity for the faults of others, dear sister. We all have our weaknesses——"

"Not another word!" interrupted Raymond, fiercely.

The duke mechanically started back. "Ah! a duel," he said.

But Raymond snatched up a heavy branch of oak and went towards him. "No—not a duel!" he answered, in a hoarse voice. "But if any man that breathes is wanting in respect to this lady, I will kill him like a dog."

Philippe believed him. "You are mistaken, my dear Delorge. My sister is quite old enough to know what she is about; and I myself need far too much indulgence to have any right to be severe towards her. If I have disturbed you, it is simply because I came down from Paris to see Simone respecting a matter which involves the honour of our house. On inquiring for her, I was told that I should find her here."

It was clear that something fresh was a-foot. His conciliatory words and deferential manner proved this conclusively. "Will you go with me to the château, Simone?" he asked.

His sister slowly moved to his side.

"Mademoiselle!" implored Raymond, following her.

"Excuse me," said the duke; "you are not as yet one of the family, and we have some dirty linen to wash." And he drew Simone along, followed by Miss Lydia, who trembled at each step.

"Well! well!" exclaimed Bizet, and then he continued: "It is perfectly evident, my dear Delorge, that the duke has had some spies down here. He came straight to this spot, and never spoke to a human being on his way."

But Raymond paid no attention to what his companion said. "What on earth does the young duke want?" he muttered. "What sinister intrigue is on foot now?"

Bizet, who was by no means a bad-hearted fellow, had the greatest difficulty in getting him back to Rosiers and into his own room. And not being

the person to abandon a friend in trouble, the young squire took a seat near the window at the Rising Sun. Suddenly he uttered an exclamation. He had just seen Philippe driving rapidly towards the station. He had come by the noon express and left by the four o'clock train.

"I must know what has happened!" cried Raymond. And springing up, he dashed down the stairs and hurried off to Maillefert.

He found the doors wide open. He entered and called, and heard no answer. With a terrible fear at his heart, he hastened up the staircase. In the small blue drawing-room which was lighted by one solitary candle, Simone was lying on a sofa—looking so pale, so frightfully changed, that he thought her dead at first. But she was alive, and she opened her eyes when he spoke to her, but would only say, "For pity's sake, leave me. To-morrow! to-morrow!"

He hesitated at first and then, as she repeated her request, he went away with death in his heart. He had never before endured such intolerable anguish. By noon on the following day he had heard nothing, and he was on the point of starting for the château, when Bérú entered the room with a letter.

With a sick feeling of apprehension, Raymond broke the seal and read as follows: "When you receive these lines I shall have left Maillefert for ever. Honour itself is lost. If you love me, I implore you, in the name of that love, not to try to find me. I am the most miserable of women. Farewell, my only friend, farewell."

Raymond tottered and caught at the wall. "While we slept, the others watched!" he muttered. "Blind fools that we have been!" Then all at once he exclaimed, "This is Maumussy's and Combelaïne's plot. They have stolen Simone from me. Ah! the wretches! God punishes me for having forgotten my duty to my father."

That evening he was on his way to Paris.

Part V.

THE RACE FOR MILLIONS

I.

It was on Wednesday, December 29th, 1869, that Raymond Delorge reached the capital. What he meant to do—what his hopes were—he would have found it difficult to say. Mademoiselle Simone de Maillefert had been taken to Paris, and he had followed, ready for anything. But the journey—one of some ten hours' duration—had considerably cooled him down, and he had regained much of his usual *sang-froid*.

The clock was striking nine when he rang at his mother's door "it is Master Raymond," cried old Krauss, as he opened it. For the faithful trooper was still in the service of Madame Delorge, and years seemed to have left the strength and vigour of his wiry form undiminished.

"My brother!" cried a sweet youthful voice, and Pauline flew down the stairs. She was a great beauty, tall and fair, with chestnut hair, bright intelligent eyes and smiling lips. After giving her brother a dozen energetic hugs and as many kisses, she exclaimed: "You came just in time, for Ducoudray has sent us some delicious oysters from Marennes."

But she was interrupted by Madame Delorge who, recognizing her son's voice, now hurried down stairs in her turn. "How glad I am to see you, my dear son," she said, in a trembling voice; and, after kissing him, she drew him into the drawing-room, so as to look at him in a better light.

The room was just as Raymond had left it. His father's portrait faced him as he entered, and the sealed sword worn by the general on the day of his death still hung across the canvas. "So you decided, then, to come and pass the holidays with your mother and sister?" said the widow, while Pauline clapped her hands joyously.

But Raymond slowly answered, "I have come for longer than that, I fancy—for I have resigned."

"Resigned your position!" cried his mother. "And why?"

Raymond hesitated. The words he uttered now would have, as he well knew, a most decisive effect on his future. Why should he not tell his mother the entire truth? Was he not certain of her sympathy? However courage failed him. He knew the pain he would cause her, and he was quite as much afraid of tears as reproaches. "I was not willing to submit to an arbitrary measure of the authorities," he said, "a measure which was exceptionally unjust."

His mother's eyes flashed. "I knew it would come to this," she said; "I always expected it. I have been astonished that you were allowed to follow your career in peace without being interfered with, like poor Jean and Léon."

Raymond rejoiced at the interpretation his mother put on his words, for no further explanation on his part was necessary. It was clear that his supposed wrongs only fanned the flame of his mother's hatred. "They don't intend to let us forget them," she said bitterly. And extending her hand toward her husband's portrait, she added: "Do they indeed think it possible for us to forget?"

Raymond undoubtedly hated his father's cowardly murderers with a mortal hatred, and, at the same time, he abhorred Messrs. de Maumussy and de Combelaïne for being, as he judged, the accomplices of the Duchess de Maillefert. "No, I have not forgotten them, mother," he replied, "and the wretches shall make amends sooner or later for all that they have made me endure!"

Never had Madame Delorge heard her son speak in such tones of concentrated rage. She snatched his hands in hers and held them in a firm grasp. "You have spoken well, my dear boy! At times I have thought you pre-occupied, and indifferent to our interests, possibly. I doubted, I must confess, not your courage, but your perseverance; and I trembled lest I should see you turn from the path leading to what should be the sole aim of our existence. I was mistaken, and I beg your pardon."

Raymond turned away, ashamed to have deceived his mother, and to be obliged to listen to her praise which he knew he was unworthy of.

"You are free," continued Madame Delorge—"so much the better. You will see M. Roberjot to-day, and you will learn from him, better than from me, that the hour we have been waiting for is near at hand."

She stopped speaking, for at this moment the door of the drawing-room opened and in walked M. Ducoudray who had come to eat the oysters which he had sent the previous evening. The worthy man was not far from eighty, and yet no one would have suspected it, so straight was his figure and alert his step. Mentally and morally he was precisely the same as when we met him in 1852—a thorough Parisian *bourgeois*—a carper and jester. Skeptical and credulous at one and the same time; adventurous, yet timid—always ready to help on a revolution, and equally ready to hide in a cellar, when once the revolution came. "Upon my life!" he exclaimed, "here is our engineer!" and, after shaking hands with Raymond vigorously, so as to show that his manly strength was unimpaired, he began to tell all he had been doing since he rose that morning at seven o'clock.

Krauss came to say that breakfast was on the table; but nothing stopped the old gentleman when he was once fairly started. He continued to talk and mentioned that on his way to the Rue de Douai, he had dropped in at Madame Cornevin's where he had admired a truly royal *trousseau* she had prepared for the daughter of one of those great Russian noblemen, whose fabulous wealth reminds one of the "Arabian Nights." According to the old gentleman's story, Madame Cornevin would make a very large profit on this one *trousseau* alone, and he went on so say that she had accumulated a handsome fortune, of which he could speak with authority, as he managed all her investments.

However although she was now rich, she was still prudent and economical, and rarely partook of any recreation, save a Sunday walk, after which she usually dined with Madame Delorge. Madame Cornevin had never ceased to lament her husband: she talked of him incessantly. In vain did Ducoudray tell her that Laurent must have been dead for years—she had never entirely abandoned the hope of seeing him again. As Raymond listened he saw that the secret of Jean's letters had been well guarded, and that no one suspected that Cornevin was, at that very moment, in Paris.

After this mention of Madame Cornevin's affairs, garrulous M. Ducoudray proceeded to pass all the interesting Parisian news in review. First, the Princess d'Eljonsen was about to give a superb *fête* at her grand mansion in the Champs Elysées and the newspapers were already full of particulars. Then the Duke de Maumussy was selling several of his race-horses, not

because he was ruined, but because he had too many; and a passion for pictures, curiosities, and china, had followed his taste for the turf. Next, for the twentieth time, no doubt, there was a report of M. de Combelaïne's marriage to Madame Flora Misri; but this time it was true, at least, so Ducoudray said. After all these *can-cans* came particulars respecting Tropicmann, the assassin—the wild beast with a human face—whose trial had just begun.

Each word spoken by Ducoudray ought to have been full of meaning for Raymond, who had just spent a couple of months without once looking at the newspapers. What the worthy old gentleman said was to be sure the mere echo of the Boulevard; but it showed what people thought of all the men whom he was burning to attack. However the truth was, his thoughts were elsewhere—he hardly heard what was said. He was seated between his mother and sister, and it was a miracle that neither of them noticed that he ate nothing, and could barely play with his knife and fork. All that Madame Delorge remarked was that he was very pale. "Are you ill, Raymond?" she asked. But he protested that he had never been better in his life; and, when breakfast was over, he left the room, saying he would dress and then go and see M. Roberjot. However Pauline had been more observant than her brother supposed, and hardly had he entered his room than she was by his side, and, with her arm round his neck, softly asked him: "What is the matter, dear brother?"

He started. "What should be the matter?" he replied, with a forced smile. "I am only a little tired."

She shook her head. "I know better," she answered, petulantly. "That is what you said to mamma, and she believed you, but I watched you all through breakfast. Your body was with you, but your mind was far away."

Raymond kissed his sister. "Dear little spy!" he said, with an attempt at gaiety.

"But that is no answer," she sighed.

"What do you wish me to say?"

"I wish to know why you are so harassed,—why, you look ten years older than you did when you went away!"

"I suppose it is because I am anxious about my future, having sent in my resignation."

"I wish I could believe you," she answered. "In your eyes I am still a little girl, no doubt. But when you have been at home a little while you will see that I can keep a secret." And so saying she went out.

"Poor little Pauline!" thought Raymond, "Simone and she would love each other like two sisters." But could he trust her? He had not even decided to confide everything that had happened to M. Roberjot—nor was he any nearer a decision when he went up the lawyer's staircase.

Roberjot had become quite a personage—a deputy and influential orator—but he had kept his simple home, and his one servant, who recognized Raymond as soon as he saw him, and at once opened the door of his master's room. Nothing was changed there. The same pictures hung on the walls, the same paper-weight secured what looked like the same notes and papers, on the same desk. Time had blackened the wood of the furniture, faded the curtains and wall-paper, but that was the only difference. However the lawyer himself was more changed than his surroundings. His hair, once so black, was now thickly sprinkled with gray, and ambition and politics had furrowed his brows with deep wrinkles. He was also much heavier; his

former *embonpoint* had resolved itself into obesity; his features had lost their delicacy of outline and his mouth had almost a sensual expression. Nothing was the same with him except his eyes, as keen and bright as ever, his sarcastic voice and graceful gestures.

"At last!" he exclaimed, as Raymond appeared. "I knew very well that you would think that it was worth your while to come here as soon as you knew how things were going."

"What things?"

The lawyer looked at him. "May I ask you where you come from?"

"From Rosiers, in Maine-et-Loire."

"Well! you can get the newspapers there, I presume?"

"I have not opened one for two months!"

The lawyer raised his arms to heaven as if he heard a blasphemy. "Car that be so?" he exclaimed; "then listen to me." And he proceeded to recapitulate certain events of a public character which had just taken place, and were of the greatest possible weight.

The very evening before a paragraph, which ran as follows, had appeared in the *Journal Officiel*: "The ministers have sent in their resignations, which have been accepted by the Emperor. They will remain, however, in charge of their respective departments until their successors are appointed." Then followed a letter from the Emperor himself, applying "with confidence to the patriotism" of M. Emile Ollivier, and intrusting him with the formation of a new cabinet.

M. Roberjot was radaint, and laughed aloud with delight. "So you see," he said, "the task of saving this threatened dynasty is imposed on Ollivier. Does he think he will succeed? Of course he does. But he will need more shoulders than his own to uphold an edifice which is cracking and crumbling on all sides. He will promise to move mountains—and we will give him two or three, even six months to make vain efforts, but what then? Remember what I say to you this 29th day of December, 1869. The Ollivier cabinet will be the last cabinet of the Second Empire."

Raymond listened to these words with an emotion which can be easily understood, for was not his own fate involved in political events? "And then?" he asked.

Roberjot snapped his fingers. "Then will come the hour of justice for those who have waited eighteen years. A simpleton like Barban d'Avranchel won't question De Combelaïne and De Maumussy then—no, the garden of the Elysée will be made to give up its secret."

"But it is Laurent Cornevin alone who knows that secret," said Raymond.

"And he will tell it!"

"Do you really believe him to be in Paris?"

The lawyer looked amazed. "But did you not read Jean's letter?" he cried.

"Of course I did."

"Was it not perfectly clear?"

Struck by Roberjot's certainty, Raymond at once agreed to the probability of Cornevin's presence in the capital, and this fact once admitted, he began to realize the precious assistance this man might afford him, thanks to his indomitable courage and energy. "Had we not better look for him?" he ventured to say. "We might use the greatest caution."

"Are you utterly mad?" cried the lawyer. "Would you put the police on his track? Would you denounce him and have him arrested? How do you know that he may not be at the head of one of the hundred revolutionary

movements which are now being projected? No, be careful not to interfere with him. Let him manage the matter as he chooses; he is certainly entitled to do that. You may be certain that he will appear when he is needed. What has been a question of years is now but a question of months, or even weeks perhaps."

How could Raymond listen without a pang to people who talked to him of months, weeks, and even days, when the very minutes which were slipping by so rapidly bore Simone's fate, happiness, and life, away on their wings!

He said no more, but his face became so gloomy that M. Roberjot was struck by it, and asked, in a tone of friendly anxiety: "What has gone wrong with you? I am your friend, as you well know. What is it?"

"I no longer belong to the government corps of engineers," said Raymond. "I have sent in my resignation."

Pauline, with her quick girlish instinct, had had a glimpse of the truth, but Roberjot took the same view of the matter as Madame Delorge had done. "They were troubling you, then?"

"They chose to change my quarters——"

The lawyer began laughing. "I suppose," he said, "that the son of some great personage wanted your place—that's a very simple explanation. But console yourself. There is a great card for you to play. When the empire falls you will have the most undisputed rights to advancement. And besides you find yourself at leisure at the right time, for we need men——"

He was interrupted by his servant, who appearing at the door, announced that he had just shown a visitor into the waiting-room. "And who is it?" asked the lawyer.

"Monsieur Verdale."

Roberjot's face changed. "What!" he exclaimed, raising his voice as if he hoped to be heard in the next room, "is my dear friend Baron Verdale there?"

"No, sir, not the baron; a young man."

"His son, possibly?"

"I don't know, sir."

Accustomed as Roberjot was to restraining all outward signs of emotion, he nevertheless, on this occasion clearly evinced his curiosity. "Well," he said to his servant, without seeming to remember Raymond's presence, "show the gentleman in."

A moment later the door communicating with the waiting-room opened, and a young man who looked about Raymond's age appeared.

"You are the son of Baron Verdale, sir?" asked Roberjot, abruptly.

If the visitor had answered no, he would have been believed, for there was nothing in his appearance at all suggestive of the architect. He was tall and slender of build and elegantly but very simply dressed. However, before he could reply, Roberjot continued, "And you come from the baron?"

The young man smiled faintly. "You know very well, sir, that my father has not the smallest right to the title of baron which is engraved on his visiting-card. It is a weakness of his, which, however, it is unbecoming for me to criticise——" He did not say so in words, but the gesture he now made clearly signified: "Spare me the worry of the title."

Then after a pause he added, "The fact is, sir, I come to you on my own account, not on my father's." He hesitated, for he had just seen Raymond, who had withdrawn on one side. "But you are not alone, sir. I fear I am intruding, as what I have to say will take some time."

Although Raymond was very pre-occupied he saw that his presence was

embarrassing to the young visitor. So he hastily exclaimed, "I am going," and then addressing the lawyer, added: "Now that I am once more in Paris I shall trouble you very often; but for this morning I bid you good-bye!"

II.

HARDLY a day elapses in this great city of Paris, where so many human interests centre, and so many human passions ferment, without one meeting some unhappy-looking person who paces the sidewalk in a somnambulist fashion, talking to himself. Much in this style did Raymond walk along on leaving the lawyer's office. Instinct rather than volition led him to the neighbourhood of the mansion occupied by the Duchess de Maillefert. "But for what?" cried his good sense. "Who knows?" replied the voice of Hope, which had not yet been stifled in his breast. "Perhaps just as you pass a curtain may be raised, and you may catch a glimpse of Mademoiselle Simone."

The Maillefert mansion stands at the corner of the Rue de Grenelle-St. Germain and the Rue de La Chaise. It is approached by a court-yard as cold and dreary as that of a prison. On either side are the domestic offices and servants' quarters. The porter's lodge is in front, and its exaggerated dimensions show that it dates from those good old days when even noblemen of the highest rank allowed their *suisse* to keep a wine shop, and even hang out a sign. The great charm of the Maillefert mansion is its garden, adjoining that of the Duc de Sairmeuse, stretching as far as the Rue de Varennes, and with its ancient trees o'ertopping the roofs of the adjoining houses. The great gate was wide open as Raymond passed by, and certainly no one would have imagined, on looking in, that the Duchess de Maillefert was ruined, and so besieged by creditors that she had to resort to the worst expedients to keep up an appearance of luxury. Three or four carriages, drawn by magnificent horses, stood waiting in the yard, while the coachmen and footmen lounged hard by and gossiped about their masters.

"What can Roberjot mean?" said Raymond to himself. "How can he say that the empire is tottering when all this luxury is still kept up?"

At this moment a brougham whisked round the corner, and Raymond only had just time to draw aside for it to enter the court-yard; a moment later he saw the Duchess de Maumussy slowly ascend the steps.

"And she will see Simone!" he thought.

He clenched his hands at the idea that the doors of this house were closed to him alone—this house which so many persons entered with smiles on their lips—and that Simone was somewhere under that roof at this moment. What was she doing? Who was torturing her now? What did they want of her, and what means would they employ to bend her to their ends? "And to think that I know nothing of the intrigue that tore her from me?" he groaned. "Why did she not allow me to die with her if I could not save her?"

He was vainly tasking his brain in an effort to think of some question he might ask to find one of the servants, when suddenly he heard a voice behind him: "Monsieur Raymond Delorge, I think?"

He hastily turned and found himself face to face with the young duke, who, with a cigar in his mouth, a glass in his eye, and a light riding-whip in his hand, was looking at him from head to foot in the most impertinent

manner. The blood rushed to Raymond's face. No man should look at him in that way, and he started forward. Suddenly, however, he checked himself. "You wish to speak to me?" he asked.

"Certainly I do," answered M. Philippe, "and I am delighted to see you—on my honour I am. You are an admirer of my sister's, I believe?"

"With the encouragement of the duchess, sir, as well as your own."

"I don't dispute that. I now simply desire to say that you must relinquish all hope."

"Do you say this from Mademoiselle Simone, sir?"

"By no means. I say it from my mother and myself; but Simone ought to have written it to you." Raymond did not reply. "I believe, in fact," resumed the duke, "that my sister did write it. That being the case, it would surely be better taste on your part to give up the idea. You agree with me, I'm sure. At Maillefert it did not so much matter; but now, having formed plans for her marriage——"

"Plans for her marriage!"

"Yes, sir, with your permission," and the duke bowed with ironical politeness. "And so," he continued, "you will do me the favour not to let me find you prowling round my house again;" and thereupon Philippe turned his back and went into the house.

Raymond was boiling over with indignation, but as he looked after Philippe he muttered to himself: "Poor fool! No, it is not at you, that I ought to strike."

It was true this last scion of the De Maillefert race was one of those persons whose utter nullity offers no salient point for hatred. Vain with the puerile vanity of imbeciles, devoured by a mad desire for show, worried by the thousand-and-one pitiful contrivances which he was forced to resort to in his wish to keep up the appearance of possessing a princely fortune, Philippe was the accomplice and the dupe of the first man who held the glittering bait of gold before his eyes. It was perfectly certain that what he had just done was in obedience to the mandates of others. Here, as at the ruins of Maillefert, he was clearly the submissive slave of some stronger will—the mere tool of an intrigue, the profits of which would not be pocketed by him.

Nevertheless, one piece of information had been gained by Raymond, namely—that they intended to marry Simone. Was this the answer to the enigma; the explanation of all the strange events which so rapidly followed one another? Was this the explanation of Simone's own mysterious conduct? But, of course, no such projects could be carried out without her consent. She was not one of those girls who could be dragged to the altar, and from whom mingled caresses and threats could elicit the irrevocable "Yes." She had proved her strength of character. So would she consent, after all her promises and oaths? Was it possible, even probable?

On the other side—perhaps the Duchess de Maillefert, aided by the Duchess de Maumussy and advised by Combelaine—had succeeded in devising some combination by which her daughter should be compelled to make this terrible sacrifice? A sentence which had dropped from Philippe's lips, as he drew his sister that day from the ruins, was full of import. "We have dirty linen to wash in the family," he had said. Now, was it not a natural inference that he had some painful and shameful confession, to make, which would require a supreme act of devotion on his sister's part? This supposition was so plausible, that Raymond's heart thrilled with hope. And yet, there was one great objection to this idea—for how could the duchess and her son, dependent as they were on Simone's income, think of

her marriage, and much less arrange it? Why had they changed their plans and their opinions so entirely? What abject calculation, what new infamy was concealed under this abrupt change of tactics? "It matters not," said Raymond to himself, "I will save Simone in spite of herself! But see her and speak to her I will."

It was now late, and the shops were closed. While thinking, he walked up and down the street opposite the Maillefert mansion, and at last espied a placard announcing "Unfurnished Rooms to let," at one of the houses on the opposite side of the way. A new idea suddenly struck him, and he rang the bell. "You want to look at the rooms to-night, at this hour?" said the *concierge*, whom he politely addressed. "No, indeed. You can come to-morrow."

But Raymond carried in his pocket certain arguments before which the man's sulkiness vanished like mist before the sun. He became all smiles, and, lighting a candle, he led the young man to a small room on the third floor, which he declared was worth a thousand francs a year. It was a most preposterous price, for the room was dirty, and so damp that the paper was peeling from the walls. However, this was of no consequence to Raymond, for on looking out of the window, he discovered that from this third floor he could see every one who entered or left the De Maillefert mansion.

"The apartment suits me," he said, "and I will take it; and drawing a twenty-franc piece from his pocket he handed it to the *concierge*, who then began to ask a multitude of questions. "Who was the gentleman? What was his name? Was he married? Had he any children? What were his references?"

These questions came so rapidly that Raymond had no time to shape his answers. He knew very well that the name of Delorge must never be mentioned in that neighbourhood; so he promptly assumed his mother's name and called himself Paul de Lespéran. He said he was employed in a lawyer's office, and unmarried; that he had always lived with his parents, and had no furniture, but would buy some. He offered to pay a quarter in advance, and this being arranged he went to a furniture dealer in the Rue Jacob, who sold him a certain amount of furniture for about double its value and engaged to install it in the room before midnight.

"I wonder if he has kept his word!" said Raymond, the next morning, as he left his mother's house. It was eight o'clock on the 30th of December, the weather was very cold, and the pavement slippery. But at all the corners groups of people were standing and talking with considerable animation.

Raymond stopped near one of them and found that the chatters were talking of Tropmann, whose trial was then going on, and the political situation also. Forty-eight hours had elapsed since the emperor had commissioned Emile Ollivier to form a ministry in "the interests of Order and Liberty," and the Parisians were anxious to know what had been done, or what was to be done.

The most absurd rumours, such as are only heard in Paris, were in circulation. According to some, Emile Ollivier had been checkmated, and his overtures repulsed—and he was about to abandon his mission. According to others, he had insisted on the emperor's acceptance of a cabinet formed of his old friends of the popular party, while others again affirmed that M. Rouher would come back with flying colours. It was clear that there was a great deal of dissatisfaction. Since the last election, the uncertainty of the future had paralyzed business—postponed projected industrial enterprises, and intimidated capitalists, who are by nature cowards, and always ready

to hide at the least alarm. However, the uncertain state of affairs did not seem to affect the retail business of the week. The New Year, with its gifts was close at hand, and Paris outwardly seemed very gay. Early as it was, the shop windows were already decked with articles suitable for presents, from things of great intrinsic worth down to trifles which only owed their value to the exquisite delicacy, skill, and taste of the workman. Seeing all this apparent prosperity, how could Raymond place unbounded faith in Roberjot's sombre prophecies? "It is precisely the same thing to-day that it has been for years" he thought. "People take their desires for realities, and I should be very foolish to count on the fall of the empire as the only means of crushing my enemies."

When he reached the room he had taken, he was pleased to find that the upholsterer had kept his promises. Everything was in readiness. He knew—for he had discovered this the evening before—that his view from his window commanded the Maillefert mansion. He opened the window and closed the shutters in such a way that he could see through them perfectly without being seen himself. Then drawing his opera glass from his pocket he scanned the mansion from top to bottom. It seemed as yet hardly awake. In the court-yard the grooms were rubbing down the horses, washing the carriages, and cleaning the harness. On the first floor the windows were open, and footmen in red vests and white aprons were shaking carpets, beating cushions, or dusting the thousand costly ornaments which were as frail and as brilliant as the Second Empire itself.

"Can this luxury be paid for?" said Raymond to himself, thinking of the duchess's extravagance and the constant manner in which she drained poor Simone.

But at this moment he heard the hoofs of a horse resounding on the pavement of the courtyard. He looked down, and beheld a gentleman who was managing a magnificent animal with consummate dexterity. As he dismounted, and threw the reins to a groom, Raymond recognized him. It was Combelaïne. What could he want there at this early hour? And Raymond watched the windows on the second floor, all of which were as yet hermetically closed, and hoped that the blinds of one of them would open and furnish him with some clew.

In this expectation he was not deceived. For, less than a minute after De Combelaïne's entrance, two windows were thrown open by a servant whom Raymond had often seen at Rosiers, and who was no less a personage than the valet of the young duke. And in the brief moment that the windows remained open Raymond caught sight of Philippe in a black velvet dressing-gown standing in front of a mirror, and of De Combelaïne seated in a large arm-chair. But he had no time to see more, for a rumble of wheels was heard, and a dark brougham, drawn by a horse that had cost at least five hundred louis, drove into the court-yard, and, making a semi-circle, drew up before the steps. The porter rang twice. Was the visit expected? At all events a window of the young duke's apartment was hastily thrown open, and De Combelaïne leaned out to see who had arrived. A footman opened the door of the brougham, from which there now alighted a stout man whom Raymond easily recognized as M. Verdale, or rather Baron Verdale. He said something to his coachman, and, like De Combelaïne, entered the mansion.

"Verdale also!" muttered Raymond. "De Maumussy will be here presently."

But he was mistaken. Ten minutes later Philippe de Maillefert left the

house. Contrary to his usual habit, the young man was dressed in black from head to foot, and, as well as Raymond could see, he was extremely pale. Behind him walked Verdale and De Combelaïne in an attitude of solemn dignity, which Raymond was inclined to regard as feigned, for at one moment he noticed a glance and smile exchanged between them, which certainly suggested amusement and satisfaction. They spoke to the young duke as they took their positions, one on each side of him, and went down the steps, much as if they had been his jailers, or rather two surgeons comforting and encouraging a patient about to undergo some hideous operation.

"What on earth are they doing?" said Raymond.

All the servants seemed to be thrilled and mystified. They stood aside and pretended to be busy, but their ears and eyes were on the alert. Could it be a duel? No; for Philippe would not have required encouragement or urging were that the question involved, for, with all his faults, the young duke was no coward. To a last observation of De Combelaïne's he finally snapped his fingers—a gesture which among all nations signifies—"The dice are thrown!—come what will!"

A footman now opened the door of the brougham, Verdale and the duke took their seats, De Combelaïne jumped on the box, and the carriage drove off. But in vain did Raymond watch for its return. One by one the windows of the second floor were opened. The house assumed a look of life, and carriages rolled in and out of the court-yard all day long. Philippe was seen no more—and the duchess and Simone remained invisible.

Tired out at last, Raymond, when night drew near, determined on going back to his mother's, when, all at once, he espied a woman's figure in the court-yard of the mansion. "Miss Lydia Dodge!" he cried. And snatching up his hat he flew down the stairs. It was, indeed, Miss Lydia. She had just turned the corner, when Raymond overtook her. "Miss Lydia! Miss Lydia!" he cried. She turned and stopped short on recognising Raymond. "You here!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, I'm here. Did you think I should stay at Rosiers?" And as she did not answer, he continued, hastily: "Where is Simone?"

"At home. But pray excuse me—this is not at all proper."

She bowed, and turned to leave him, but Raymond detained her by her sleeve.

"Dear Miss Dodge," he said, in a supplicating voice, "I implore you not to leave me like this." He knew the nature of the woman whom he addressed, and so he added gravely: "It may be that my very life depends on your telling me what has taken place."

Miss Dodge reflected, and the expression of her face betrayed that she was having a great struggle with herself. To speak was to violate the principles of her life. "Alas!" she ultimately sighed, "what do you wish me to tell you?"

"Why did Simone leave Maillefert in such haste?"

"I do not know."

"She may not have told you, but haven't you found out?"

"No."

"It must have been a terrible trial to her to come to Paris."

"Terrible!"

It was in a door-way in the Rue de La Chaise that these words were exchanged, and the spot was a most propitious one for a quiet chat, as few persons pass that way. "But come," urged Raymond gently, "there must

have been some explanation between the duke and his sister when they left me alone in the ruins."

"There was," answered Miss Dodge, sententiously. But a moment later the worthy woman seemed to have come to a heroic resolution. "I will tell you all I know, Monsieur Delorge," she said, "and you will see that it is very little. When the duke and his sister left the ruins she took his arm. I was a little in the rear, feeling heartily ashamed, for I knew myself to be in fault. However in my presence they did not exchange one word. When they reached the château they at once went to mademoiselle's little blue sitting-room, where they remained for two hours. I heard the duke's voice, sometimes supplicating, sometimes threatening. To hear the words he spoke it would have been necessary to apply my ear to the key hole; and, for the first time in my life, I was tempted to do so."

"And what did you hear?"

"I heard nothing, for I resisted the temptation. The door at last opened and Monsieur Philippe appeared. He was very pale. As he stood on the threshold he turned and said to his sister: 'I can rely on you, then?' She answered, 'I must have twenty-four hours for reflection.' Whereupon he rejoined, 'So be it—you will telegraph your decision. Don't forget that the honour of our house is in your hands.'"

This narrative confirmed all Raymond's suspicions, but it told him nothing new, nothing which threw any light on the situation. "And then?" he asked.

"The duke left. I ran into the sitting-room and I knelt down beside the poor child, and as I kissed her hands, I asked her to tell me what had happened. I shall never forget her look. I really thought her mind had gone. Then I asked her if I might send for you. She opened her lips as if to speak, but fell back on the sofa. 'No, no,' she said; 'it is not possible; I must not even think of it!' Then she said she wished to be alone, and I left the room."

In this determination to face her sorrow in solitude, Raymond recognised Simone. "And was it then that I got there?" he asked.

"Oh! no, sir, you did not come until long after that, not until after mademoiselle had rang for lights. Hearing some one speak on the stairs, I went out, and then I knew your voice. I was overjoyed, for I felt that God had sent you. But alas! you did not seem to do her any more good than I did; your presence, instead of calming her, only increased her agitation, and after your departure, I saw that your grief had added to hers, for she exclaimed over and over again, 'Poor fellow! poor fellow;' She would not let me remain with her, but I was in the next room, and I heard her walking about all night. It was most distressing. About half-past four she called to me. I ran to her, and when I saw her I caught my breath. Her tears were dried, her eyes glittered, and her face shone with the sublime resolution of a Christian martyr. I knew that her mind was made up. 'Make preparations at once for our departure,' she said. 'What!' I cried 'are we to leave Maillefert?' 'Yes, this very morning, by the eight o'clock train. You see, there is not a minute to lose. Call the servants at once.' At six o'clock everything was ready. Then mademoiselle called the gardener, who is in her confidence, and she told him to harness a vehicle to drive her to the station. He asked her for instruction as to certain matters while she was away; but she said that she had no especial orders to give, that she would probably cease to retain any active charge of her property, and that, in all probability, she should never return to Maillefert. All the

servants were in the passage when she said this, and they heard her. She called them all to her, and gave each of them something as a souvenir, and then some money. The tears came to my eyes, for I likened her to a dying woman distributing her little treasures, which she would never use again. Everybody cried, and everybody crowded round her. Mademoiselle Simone was the only one who retained her self-possession. At last the clock struck seven. 'It is time,' she exclaimed, 'our trunks were brought down,' and, at the last moment, she said to the old gardener: 'Here is a letter for Monsieur Raymond Delorge. I confide it to your care. You are to give it into his hands, but not until this afternoon, you understand me—not before that time.' In another hour we were on our way to Paris in the morning express."

Each word of this narrative showed Simone's indomitable energy. Duty ordered her, she believed, to execute a certain task, and she did so, albeit, with a crushed and bleeding heart. Raymond was the only person in the world who understood all she suffered. "And on arriving in Paris," he asked, "did Simone drive at once to her mother's house?"

"Yes sir, directly. And her arrival was greeted with transports of joy. A queen couldn't have been more *feted*."

"And since then, what life has she led?"

"She has spent all her mornings with lawyers."

"And later in the day?"

"With her mother or mother's friends, Madame de Maumussy and the Baronne de Trigault."

"But does she never go out?"

"I went with her yesterday to Sainte Clotilde to hear mass."

Raymond stored this fact in his memory. "Is she free to go where she chooses?" he asked.

"Free. Of course she is; quite as much mistress of her actions as when at Maillefert. Who would interfere with her?"

"But does she never speak of me?"

"Never, sir. Once, however, I dared to say something to her, and for the first time since I have known her, mademoiselle was quite harsh to me. 'If you mention that name again,' she said, 'I shall be forced to part from you.'"

It was with a despairing gesture that Raymond received this reply "But, Miss Dodge," he exclaimed, "I implore you to tell her that I have met you, that I am desperate, and that I must see her, if it be only for five minutes."

The good-hearted woman stopped him, and carried away by his emotion, and the thought of this great passion, such a one, as she herself had never inspired, she said: "In spite of her injunction I will this very night tell her what you say. Good-bye!"

III.

It was a formidable step for Miss Dodge to take; not that she ran any risk of losing the support of her old age, for she was sure that Simone could never allow her to want for anything; but she felt it possible that Simone might separate from her, and, to her mind, this separation was worse than death. Raymond had left her without giving her any indication of where

she might see him to tell him the result of her step. He had taken no pains to do this, as thanks to the lodgings he occupied, he knew he could always join the governess whenever she went out. He was too much absorbed in wondering what would be Simone's decision to think of much else. Would she consent to this interview which he asked for so earnestly? He was still persuaded that it was only the poor child's fortune that her family coveted, and that if he entreated her to let them have it, he might perhaps win her consent. In fact, he felt so hopeful on this point that when he went home to dinner, his mother said: "You have had a successful day, my son, I see. You have seen our friends, and have learned that we have a firm foundation for our hopes."

"I have seen Monsieur Roberjot," he answered, merely for the sake of saying something.

His mother paid little heed to his vague responses, but such was not the case with Pauline, who, when alone with him after dinner, pressed his hand, and said: "Poor dear Raymond! You are very unhappy!"

He could not restrain a movement of impatience, for he was intensely annoyed by his sister's perseverance in trying to find out his thoughts. "Tell me, child," he said, abruptly, "what notion have you got in your head?"

He looked her straight in the eyes as he spoke. She turned crimson, and trying to conceal her embarrassment under a light laugh, replied: "I don't know, but Monsieur Roberjot takes his political difficulties very differently to you." Her brother did not speak, and the girl added in a serious tone. "I won't insist—and yet, I might perhaps give you some confidences in return."

At another time, Raymond would have asked for an explanation of these words, which were, to say the least, a little singular. But the selfishness of passion restrained him. He merely said to himself: "So Mademoiselle Pauline loves somebody, and this is what renders her so clear-sighted."

He thought nothing more of the matter during the rest of the evening which he spent with his mother and sister, and on retiring to his room his only reflection was that the next day was the 1st of January, and he probably should not have a couple of hours to himself to run to the Rue de Grenelle-Saint-Germain. Madame Delorge, in fact, was in the habit every New Year's Day of receiving the small number of friends who had remained faithful to her. At nine o'clock Madame Cornevin and her daughters arrived, followed by M. Ducoudray, whose eyes were as bright as the brilliants in a pair of ear-rings which he presented to Pauline. M. Roberjot also soon appeared, weighed down by boxes of *bonbons*; and as he entered the room he shouted out: "All hail to 1870, which will give liberty and happiness to France!"

"Amen!" answered Ducoudray.

Raymond went to greet the lawyer, who continued: "In a year from now you will tell me if you can what has become of all these people—the Count de Combelaïne, the Duke de Maumussy, the dear Princess d'Eljensen, to say nothing of my excellent friend Verdale. To-morrow the *Officiel* will speak, and you will see what the new ministry is."

The next day, as Roberjot stated, the *Journal Officiel* published the names of the men chosen by Emile Ollivier, as his colleagues in the administration, which will always be known in history as the "Ministry of the 2nd of January." The truth is that France had a flash of hope and liberty that day. On reading the names of the men who were to take the helm of the State,

the public believed that the ruin which had seemed so imminent would be avoided. They hoped that the horrors of a contest would be averted. "We can breathe once more!" people said to each other. And a general feeling of confidence arose, and a return of commercial prosperity was anticipated.

What became of the theories indulged in by Madame Delorge, who had so long looked forward to the fall of the empire—the fall which would hurl her enemies from the positions they had so long occupied, and place her husband's murderers in her power? And Raymond himself realized that he, too, had been lulled by the deceitful hope that some great political catastrophe, would detach Madame de Maillefert from her new friends, and save Simone. That very evening a letter came from his old friend the baron which confirmed his fears and bade him hasten on with his task. "There are strange reports here," wrote the old engineer. "I am told that Mademoiselle Simone will never return to Maillefert, but has decided to sell all her property, even to the château itself. According to Bizet, who is not such a bad fellow, after all, the sale will take place early in February. But the people about here are quite in despair, as they are told that everything will no doubt be bought up by a great Parisian capitalist. I spare you all comments. You ought to know the truth. Let me hear it, that I may preserve my reputation of being a well-informed man. And pray tell me a little about yourself at the same time."

Alas! Raymond knew no more than did the baron. After reading this letter he started for the Rue de Grenelle-Saint-Germain, where an immense surprise awaited him, for as he took his key from the concierge, the woman exclaimed: "Some one came here for you this morning, sir."

Who could know that he had taken this apartment, and by what name had they asked for him? "Who came for me?" he asked.

"A gentleman, sir. I was just sweeping the stairs when he called."

"And what did he say?"

"He said, 'Is my friend in?' And then I said, 'What friend?' He replied, 'The one who moved in three days ago.' 'Ah! you mean Monsieur de Lespéran?' said I, and he answered, 'Precisely.' When I told him you were out, he seemed very much annoyed, and went away, saying he would call again."

Raymond did not like this, for the mysterious visitor had carefully managed to find out by what name he was known in the house; and this had no doubt been his only object. However Raymond wished to discover if the woman had any suspicions. "It was one of my friends, I presume," he said with affected carelessness. "But why didn't he leave his name?"

"I don't know, I am sure."

"And you didn't ask it? No? Well, that's a great pity. Perhaps you can describe him. Let's see. Was he young or old?"

"Neither the one nor the other."

"Thin or stout?"

"Medium."

"Dark or light?"

"Oh! light; very light."

Raymond felt that this sort of thing might go on interminably, so he made no further questions. "Another time," he said to the woman, "you had better ask the names of the people who come to see me."

But his indifference was affected, for he clearly realised that he was watched. He thought of Laurent Cornevin, but rejected the idea as the wildest folly. "If Laurent wished to speak to me," he said to himself, "he

would have written to my mother's to appoint a rendezvous." So a new care was added to his life, and a sharp one, too, for he did not take a step without imagining that some one was at his heels; that he was incessantly being watched, and that each of his actions had an invisible witness. This sort of infamy was very like Philippe, and still more characteristic of De Combelaïne.

This day which began so badly, was not destined to end very favourably either. It was in vain that he sat looking out of the window; neither Simone nor Miss Dodge gave any sign of life. Nor was he any more fortunate on the following day, when he literally did not leave his observatory. By the end of the week he did not know what to think. Had Miss Dodge deceived him? Had she pretended to be moved by his entreaties merely to get rid of him? Or had she kept her promise, and been pitilessly dismissed in consequence?

However, on Sunday morning, while Raymond was eating his heart out in despair, he suddenly saw Simone come down the steps. But faithful Lydia Dodge was not with her. She was accompanied by a maid whose face was new to Raymond, and who carried a prayer-book. He hurried down stairs so rapidly that Simone was still in sight when he reached the street. But she was far away, and walking rapidly. It was evident that she was going to Ste. Clotilde. Raymond passed her and looked back. Their eyes met. She started, but went on and entered the church.

"And yet she saw me," he thought. "All hope isn't lost." He was now in an agony to know by which door Simone would leave, so that he might meet her face to face.

Mass being over, she did not immediately rise from her knees, but at last she crossed the nave and went towards the main portal opening on the square.

Raymond who was watching her, thereupon went out by one of the side doors, and reached the bottom of the steps just as she did. He hesitated to speak to her on account of the maid, but she came straight towards him. "You are not acting right, Monsieur Delorge," she said.

He was startled to see how thin and pale she looked. She was the very shadow of herself.

But in a firm, clear voice she continued: "Did you not receive my last letter? Did I not bid you forget me?"

Raymond shook his head. "In that last letter," he replied, "you told me that you were a most unhappy woman. I have therefore come to tell you that my life is devoted to you. Ought I not to know what has happened to you? Have I not a right to ask this? I must see you. I must speak to you."

She hesitated. And then, in a quiet low voice, she said: "Very well. Here. To-morrow. Four o'clock."

There was nothing in Simone's manner, nothing in her words or looks, which could encourage Raymond's hopes. But he would have preferred almost anything to this horrible uncertainty and mystery.

The next day, long before the appointed hour, he was outside Ste. Clotilde, walking slowly round the square. The sky was gray, the weather cold. The garden was deserted, hardly a human being to be seen. Night was coming on earlier than usual on account of the thick fog. At last the clock struck four, and two women appeared—Simone and Miss Lydia. So the poor governess had not been sent away. Simone saw Raymond at a distance and walked towards him. "Give me your arm," she said, as they

met, "and let us walk on." He complied: and after a moment's silence, she said abruptly: "You have had your own way—I am here; you insisted on it."

"I insisted!"

"Certainly; in such a way, too, that it almost amounted to a persecution. Didn't my brother meet you close to our house and was it not owing to his moderation that no altercation took place?"

An exclamation of anger, mingled with regret, escaped from Raymond's lips. "True!" he said, bitterly; "Monsieur Philippe was good enough not to strike me."

"And this is not all. You have won my governess over to your side, and induced her to disobey my orders."

Was this really Simone who spoke? "I wished so much to see you," said Raymond, penitently.

"And why, pray?" asked the young girl, in a cold, constrained tone. "Was it to hear me say what I wrote? Very well then, I will repeat it. We are forever separated. We must forget each other; I choose it to be so."

She spoke clearly and without hesitation, and in such a loud voice that it was fortunate the square was deserted.

"And I," said Raymond, "wish to know your reasons for this separation."

"My reasons!" repeated the young girl, in a tone the haughtiness of which would have done credit to her mother. "Since when, pray, have I ceased to be mistress of my own actions? I do what I please to do!"

Fortunately, there are exaggerations which so exceed all limits that it is easy to divine they are contrary to truth. The more sternly Simone treated Raymond, the better satisfied he was. He stopped short and looked full into the girl's eyes. "You are sublime!" he said.

"Sir!" she stammered, bitterly disconcerted. "Raymond!"

But he went on. "Do you consider me, then, so poor of comprehension that I cannot understand you? Undeceive yourself. You are doing your best to make me love you less. And now that their abominable intrigue tears you from me, you wish to seem as if you renounced me voluntarily. You show your heroism by trying to make me feel a certain contempt for you, thinking that in that way I shall regret you less."

She tried to protest, but her words died away on her lips.

"You forgot the oath we swore to each other," continued Raymond. "We were to fight this battle together, we were to conquer or perish together."

Simone had relied too much on her own strength. "I entreat you," she murmured, "not to speak in this way."

"It must be, for you owe me the truth."

"Then listen," she began; but checking herself with a nervous start, she exclaimed: "No, never! never!"

Raymond felt that victory was about to escape him.

"Must I then save you in spite of yourself?" he cried.

She turned upon him like a flash. "How do you know that I wish to be saved?" she asked. "I ought not to be, and I will not be. It is too late, besides. All that you do now will only tend to render the horrible sacrifice which I have made a useless one. I ought not to have come here. But I trust that you will carry away with you a recollection of poor Simone that will not be without sweetness. For this is the last time we shall ever meet."

"No; I will not allow you to go with those words on your lips."

But she had taken Miss Lydia's arm. "I entreat you," she cried, "don't rob me of my courage; I need it all. Farewell."

When Raymond knew what he was doing, after wandering for hours through Paris, he found himself on one of the boulevards, near a group of men, who were listening to a person who said:

"Victor Noir has been killed by Prince Pierre Bonaparte. I am sure of what I say, for I have just come from Auteuil."

IV.

THIS report was true, and darting like a train of gunpowder along the boulevard it spread all over Paris.

On that same afternoon—it was Monday, January 10th, 1870—two journalists, Victor Noir and Ulrich de Fonvielle, called on Prince Pierre Bonaparte, who then lived at Auteuil, in the house once occupied by the philosopher Helvétius. They came at the request of one of their friends, Pascal Grousset, to ask the meaning of certain articles published by the Prince in a journal called *L'Avenir*. The Prince was, that day, expecting the seconds of Henri Rochefort, and these gentlemen were received. Ten minutes later several detonations resounded through the house. Almost immediately a man rushed out, pale and with both hands clasped over his breast. He fell on the sidewalk outside. He was dead. This was Victor Noir.

A moment later another man appeared, pale and terrified, with a revolver in hand. "Let no one enter that house," he cried, "for a murderer lives there." This man was Ulrich de Fonvielle.

Such were the facts which were circulated from mouth to mouth. But what had taken place in the house? No one seemed to know. Public opinion was perplexed, for two parties instantly formed, each claiming to know the truth. According to one account Pierre Bonaparte, attacked and insulted under his own roof, had, in killing Victor Noir, only availed himself of the right which every man possesses to defend himself. According to others, and to the majority of people, there had not been the smallest provocation, and Victor Noir had fallen a victim to a most cowardly attack. Between the two opposing parties there were certain sensible persons who tried to make themselves heard. "Suppose we ascertain the exact truth before we decide?" they said.

But their eloquence was thrown away, for Paris was in a fever. The boulevards were crowded, the cafés vociferous; groups gathered at the corners, and angry murmurs arose while an ominous agitation reigned in the faubourgs.

When Raymond saw his mother that evening he found that she had heard of this event, and was greatly agitated by it. "Is not the finger of God distinctly visible in this?" she exclaimed. "At the very moment when the empire appeared to be gaining strength once more, is there not something absolutely startling in the death of this young man, whose name, yesterday totally unknown, may to-morrow prove a watchword and the rallying-cry of a revolution?"

But Prince Pierre was arrested, and the investigation began. Paris learnt this by the morning papers, which published a statement from the Minister of Justice.

"What's the use?" said Roberjot to Raymond—"what magistrate is

capable of eliciting the truth in this most wretched affair " Then, shaking his head, he added : " Don't you see that this is the beginning of the end ? "

Raymond saw that the *Marseillaise* newspaper came out in mourning, with a leading article, written by Rochefort—a cry of hatred and anger calculated to penetrate into the most secluded workshops. But there was no need of trying to increase the excitement. The greatest optimist must have felt the burning blast of this terrific storm. The 11th was employed in preparations for the funeral, and all day long pilgrimages were made to Neuilly, where Victor Noir's body had been removed. The interment was fixed to take place at the cemetery of Père La Chaise, on the following day, when a cold, icy rain set in.

" If it rains—there will be no trouble," Pétion remarked on a famous occasion during the great Revolution ; but this time there was too much excitement for people to care for the weather. Before daybreak the army, commanded by Marshal Canrobert, was on foot. The garrison from Versailles had been brought into Paris. Troops had been massed on the Champ de Mars, and round about the Palais de l'Industrie, while brigades of police were scattered all along either side of the Avenue de la Grand Armée. An immense crowd surged towards Neuilly, and, amid the throng, circulated a number of newspaper vendors, selling *La Marseillaise* and *L'Eclipse*. The latter journal represented Victor Noir dead, and the hawkers cried aloud : " Two sous for the body !—two sous ! "

It was then one o'clock in the afternoon. The critical moment was approaching. Would there be any military demonstration as the bier entered the cemetery ? Must the friends of Victor Noir take the bier on their shoulders and revolvers in their hands ? Pushed on by the crowd, Raymond found himself in the very front, and almost inside the house of mourning. He saw all the chiefs of this movement pass before him—all those who possessed, or thought they possessed, any influence—all those who were expected to give an order or a signal. It was half-past one when Henri Rochefort, the famous pamphleteer, arrived : he was paler than usual, and his face bore signs of violent emotion. As he entered a small anteroom, next to the apartment where the body lay, he sank on to a chair, and said : " Give me a glass of water ; I am utterly exhausted ! "

In the same room there was an Englishman, who seemed cold, stiff, and impassible. He drew a flask from his pocket, and handed it to Rochefort. " Drink this," he said, " it is rum. "

" Thanks ! " replied Rochefort, " I never take anything of the kind. "

The Englishman returned the flask to his pocket, and, shrugging his shoulders, said : " You are wrong ; a little rum is a good thing when a man is at the head of a movement like this, and when he is as agitated as you are ; " and, turning to Raymond, who had just entered, he added : " Don't you agree with me, sir ? "

Raymond had no time to reply to this singular person, for people crowded round Rochefort, crying : " What shall be done ? What have you decided on ? "

He hesitated. No doubt he said to himself that if a collision were to take place, this great crowd would be slaughtered ; and that one word from his lips might be the signal for terrible bloodshed.

A man came in with eager eyes—" Shall we march towards Paris ? " he asked.

" Who gave you the right to question me ? " rejoined Rochefort.

" The people, whose representative you are. "

"I have no orders to receive from you."

"So much the worse, then!" And jamming his hat down over his eyes, the man went out, pushing his way through the crowd on the staircase.

A moment more and Rochefort followed him. Victor Noir's brother had come for him, and implored him not to allow any bloodshed. The discussion was most violent, but finally the advice of Delescluze* was asked, and it was decided that the interment should take place in the cemetery at Neuilly.

Standing at a window, Rochefort announced this determination to the crowd, saying it was the wish of the family, and should be respected as such. Around the house these words met with approval. But Raymond heard a man in the crowd mutter, "What have the family to do with it? The body belongs to the Democracy. It ought to be borne through Paris!"

The coffin was removed from the house and placed on a funeral car. As soon as it appeared there was a rush and a push among the crowd. Raymond was near the hearse, and a man in a blouse caught him by the throat and threw him back against the wheel. He would have fallen to the ground had not the same Englishman whom he had seen with the flask of rum come to his assistance. He dealt the man in the blouse a formidable blow on the chest, and helped Raymond up again. "In a crowd like this," he said, coldly, "you ought never to allow yourself to be hustled and grasped like that."

"You have in all probability, sir, saved my life——" said young Delorge.

"I should be glad if it were so," interrupted the Englishman; "but it's nothing, I assure you—nothing worth talking about. But excuse me for leaving you so abruptly, the hearse is moving, and I don't wish to lose one detail of the ceremony."

The hearse moved through the immense crowd, and slowly took its way towards the little cemetery of Neuilly. Behind it walked Rochefort and Ulrich de Fonvielle, whose overcoat was literally in rags. And thousands followed—Raymond among them. He had been separated from the Englishman, but he had not lost sight of him for a moment. "What a strange person!" thought Raymond, who was much puzzled.

But he had no time for further reflection. The procession had suddenly halted. "What is the matter?" asked the people round about him; "what has happened?"

Rochefort had succumbed to his emotions, and, fainting away, had been carried into a neighbouring shop. "He's dead," cried the mob.

No; he had but fainted, and it was not long before he recovered. But this incident put an end to all idea of carrying the bier through Paris to Père La Chaise, and lassitude and discouragement began working on this crowd, which had been on foot all day in the mud and rain. It moved on more rapidly to the cemetery at Neuilly, where some friends of Victor Noir uttered a few hot words of vengeance.

When Rochefort was better, he sent for a cab, and ordered the coachman to drive back to Paris. Then those who had declared for war regained heart. In fact, the scene was a terrible one. It was growing dark. The light fog which had followed the rain imparted vague form to everything. The clouds, massed in the west, were tinged by the setting sun with an angry glow. At least two hundred thousand people of all ages and classes were

* The famous agitator who, becoming a member of the Commune in 1871, was shot down behind a barricade when the Versailles troops entered Paris.—*Trans.*

slowly marching towards the Arc de Triomphe, singing revolutionary songs at the top of their voices, and uttering occasional roars like wild beasts. What would happen when this crowd met the police massed around the Arc de Triomphe? Nothing at all happened—the police withdrew and calmly watched the black mass march past them.

"Where are we going?" people asked each other

The column went down the Champs Elysées, and the songs were louder than ever, when all at once, on approaching the open space near the Palais de l'Industrie, the mob came to a stand-still. Here several regiments of cavalry were drawn up, and soon, above the tumult of voices and songs, one could hear the rolling of drums. Rochefort leaped from his cab, and, followed by two friends, approached a commissary of police, who, with his scarf round his waist, stood in advance of the troops, and barred the avenue.

"I wish to pass," said Rochefort.

"You cannot go any farther," answered the commissary.

"But I am Henri Rochefort, a deputy of the Corps Legislatif."

"If you go on," was the reply, "you will be the first man cut down, that's all!"

And thereupon there was a second roll of the drums, and a squadron of cavalry advanced. This time Rochefort had no decision to take. One of those panics which at times sweep through armies like a cloud of dust through the streets, had seized hold of this crowd, whose imprecations had rent the air but a moment before, and, in the twinkling of an eye, it was dispersed. And when Raymond went home again, Paris was as quiet as he had ever known it.

"Well?" cried worthy old Ducoudray, who, owing to a severe cold, had to his great despair, been unable to go to Neuilly.

"Paris is calm," answered the young man, in a gloomy tone; "it's all over—this was but a false alarm!"

Such, however, was not the opinion of M. Roberjot, who, that same evening, called on Madame Delorge, and related how stormy the sitting of the Chamber had been, the new prime minister having exclaimed: "We have been all justice and moderation so far. Now we will use force, if need be." And thereupon Roberjot added that a request for authority to commence proceedings against Rochefort had been sent to the President of the Corps Legislatif, and that it would certainly be granted. "Then we shall see!" he added, rubbing his hands.

Raymond listened, frowning. It was not mere curiosity which had taken him to that day's funeral. He knew that a revolution was his only salvation. If the imperial *régime* crumbled, De Combelaïne and De Maumussy would surely be crushed by its fall, the duchess and her son would be checked in their wild career, and Simone might perhaps be his. So with the idea of watching the movement, and, perhaps, of assisting in its success, he had gone to Neuilly. He did not repent having done so, but at the close of this terrible day he felt utterly worn out, physically and mentally. Was not Simone lost to him? He knew her well enough to realise that he need never try to change her determination again. He knew that she would heroically and nobly accomplish her sacrifice, without condescending to spare herself a single pang. "I don't choose to be saved," she had said. "Besides, it is too late; you will only render my sacrifices useless."

What sacrifices had she alluded to? He might have submitted to a known and measured catastrophe, but to bend under a mysterious, nameless misfortune struck him as the height of misery and shame.

He loved Simone, and she loved him, and yet they were separated. He was not thirty, but he thought his life finished—his present without hope, his future without promise. Assuredly, but for the thought of his mother, he would have put an end to an existence which had grown well nigh intolerable to him. But had he the right to dispose of himself like that? Would it not be an act of utter baseness to abandon this noble woman, who only lived for the sake of her children? One night her murdered husband had been brought home to her. Was the body of her son, killed by his own hand, also to be carried through her door. "I must continue to live," thought Raymond.

His father's murder had not been avenged. And the murderers, were they not the same wretches whom he suspected of having originated this dark intrigue which was killing Simone by inches?

The empire was still audacious in its iniquity, and Raymond determined to enroll himself among the dissaffected—among those who were always plotting, and always ready for a rising, arms in hand.

As M. Roberjot had foreseen, the shock caused by Victor Noir's death, and the scenes at his funeral, increased rather than diminished. The Cabinet of the 2nd of January had not perceived this event on the cards the day it undertook to rule France. The force of events led Emile Ollivier on a fatal descent, from which he could not rise again, and he slipped lower and lower without the smallest idea what he should find at the end of his fall. The Chamber authorized proceedings against Rochefort on account of his article in *La Marseillaise*—and he was condemned to six months' imprisonment and to three thousand francs fine. This occurred on January 22nd. No one supposed, however, that this judgment would be carried into execution. People were mistaken. On the 7th of February, Raymond had gone to the Chamber to hear what was going on, when he met Roberjot, who, heated by debate, had come outside for fresh air. "It is a vote, and no mistake," he said. "The Chamber authorizes the arrest and fine."

"It's terrible," rejoined Raymond.

It was certainly a very bold proceeding to arrest a man whose popularity was then literally boundless. Many revolutions have often succeeded which had less to start from. However, the ministry were committed to this course, and the order for arrest was given.

That same evening, as Rochefort was passing along through the Rue de Flandres, on the way to the printing office of *La Marseillaise*, he was arrested and carried off in a cab, hastily summoned from the stand hard by.

He was perfectly calm, and begged his friends to make no appeal to the people. The request was futile. There was a public meeting that night at the Café Favié in the Rue de Menilmontant, and Flourens, who presided, jumped upon a bench and summoned his adherents to arms, after which, pointing a revolver at a commissary of police, who chanced to enter the establishment, he exclaimed: "I arrest you! not one word, or I shoot you where you stand!"

For the second time within a month Raymond held his breath, waiting for the explosion which he expected would follow. Indeed a formidable uproar succeeded Flourens's words, and folks applauded the desperate act by which he tried to set the ball a rolling. There were three hundred men in that café, and all swore with frightful oaths that there must and should be a change of government. Outside, the crowd was constantly increasing. Most of the street lamps had been extinguished, and groups of men and even women had gathered at all the corners. Flourens, who was always

ready to believe what he wished, always prepared to accept the chimeras of his imagination for facts, considered that Paris was ripe for a revolution. He left the café, and still holding his revolver pointed at the commissary, he went through the faubourg. Some sixty young men followed him. They were unarmed, but they kept up their courage by bellowing wild songs.

Carried away by his own private wrongs, Raymond began himself to address the crowd, and proposed to march on Sainte Pélagie, and deliver Rochefort, when all at once a hoarse voice interrupted him with the words: "That is a nice proposal indeed. This fellow wishes to get us out of the faubourg to deliver us up to the police. But we know him."

Raymond began to protest, but very uselessly. His air and manner, clothes, voice and way of speaking were all against him. "You are a spy!" said a stout young fellow, elbowing him roughly.

It was so dark that Raymond could not see the faces of those around him. Quite new to these scenes of tumult, he tried to make himself heard. But suddenly the cry was raised: "Let us settle the spy!" And at the same moment he was caught round the shoulders and by the legs by lithe vigorous arms. "To the canal with him! To the canal!" cried the crowd. Raymond realized his danger. With a sudden effort he loosened the arms round his shoulders, with a kick he sent the fellow who had him by the legs rolling in the gutter, and then setting himself firmly, he clenched his fists and cried: "Look out!"

There were ten seconds' hesitation, but the group was like tinder, these words were a match, and the affair would have ended disastrously had not a tall fellow in a blouse sprang before young Delorge exclaiming: "I know the citizen. He's as true as steel!"

"He's a spy!" howled the crowd.

"A spy," repeated the man with an oath. "Where's the fellow who dares to say that a friend of mine is a spy? Just let him come forward and say it to me!"

There was no reply, whereupon the man drew Raymond out of the crowd and as soon as they were beyond hearing, exclaimed: "Be off with you! Your place isn't here."

"And yet——"

"Keep your courage for a better occasion."

"What! Hasn't the the contest already begun?"

The man shrugged his shoulders, and, in a tone of utter contempt, replied, "The contest! You believe in one, do you?"

He turned away, but Raymond stopped him. "At least tell me your name, so that I may know to whom I am indebted."

The man seemed to consider this question a very natural one. "I am called Tellier," he said, "I'm a workman at the Entrepot."

"My name is Raymond Delorge, and I should like——"

"To pay for drinks! Oh, yes, I see. But all the wine shops are shut." And darting off, he was soon lost in the darkness.

Raymond stood still looking and listening. The excitement in the faubourg seemed to him to be too great to be easily calmed. Men were hurrying past seemingly on their way to some rendezvous, and the cab-drivers were whipping up their animals, as if they feared that their vehicles would be seized to form a barricade.

"I must see some more," said Raymond to himself. "I cannot go home now!" And he hurried towards a spot where a loud din was being kept up.

It was Flourens and his little band, all singing the "Marseillaise" at the top of their voices. Flourens himself was beginning to feel that he was the victim of his own illusions, for, although the windows were thrown open as he passed, and inquisitive heads peered out of the houses, only imprecations answered his stormy appeals. He obtained no fresh support, and indeed his followers were steadily decreasing, as they fell off to answer the questions of lookers on. He had confidently expected to find an army at Belleville, but he merely met about a hundred men insufficiently equipped, "If we only had some arms!" was the cry.

Then the singular idea struck him there would, at least, be some guns in the property-room at the Belleville theatre. But when he arrived there all his followers had slunk away, and, but for one boy of seventeen, he would have been altogether alone. Quite desperate, he regained the street, his overcoat over his arm, a revolver in one hand, and a sword in the other. He then began to rush about in search of combatants and paving stones. However, he found the police, who were dispersing the last remnants of the crowd, and, with difficulty escaped from their clutches. And when, about midnight, Raymond returned to his mother's house, he said to Ducoudray, who was waiting there: "Things are all smooth again!"

The worthy old man shrugged his shoulders. "In my time," he replied, "in 1830, it would have ended very differently."

V.

But things were not so smooth as Raymond fancied. If February 8th passed off quietly enough during the daylight, at nightfall the fever began again. A dozen barricades were thrown up in the Rue de Paris, at Belleville, in the Rue Saint Maur, the Rue de la Douane, and the Faubourg du Temple. And, on the next evening, fresh scenes of disorder occurred. The riots was confined, however, to Belleville and the Faubourg du Temple. And, as during the previous summer, loungers went out with cigars in their mouths, after dinner, to look on and amuse themselves. But their amusement was of short duration, for, on the 10th, after three or four hundred arrests, the streets resumed their usual aspect, and it seemed probable that Rochefort would spend his six months in prison.

"Probable, of course," said Roberjot: "but by no means certain." And although frankly confessing that such scenes detached timid souls from the cause of liberty, he complacently proceeded to enumerate all the storms which were gathering on the Imperial horizon; speaking of the trial of Prince Pierre Bonaparte, by the High Court of Justice, the strikes which were being constantly organized among the working classes, the stagnation of trade, and the general uneasiness felt in regard to the future.

But Raymond had other cares. Reasoning carefully, he had begun to suspect a connection between the mysterious visitor, who had called at the Rue de Grenelle and certain events of the preceding days. At Neuilly, at the funeral of Victor Noir, he would have been thrown down and trampled upon but for the interference of an unknown individual, an Englishman of most eccentric appearance. On the evening of Rochefort's arrest, a workman had appeared at the very nick of time, and rescued him from a group of furious malcontents.

These two circumstances which had not struck him at the time now assumed the greatest possible significance in his eyes; and he asked himself

If the mysterious visitor, the Englishman at Neuilly, and the workman in the blouse were not one and the same person. And who could this person be, if not Laurent Cornevin? He possessed a means, a method of verifying the exactitude of his conjectures, at least up to a certain point. The workman had told him that his name was Tellier, and that he was employed at the Entrepot. "I will at once ascertain," said Raymond, "if this man is to be found: but I feel certain he is not there. If my suspicions are correct he gave me a false name and a false address."

An hour later he alighted from a cab in the Rue de Flandres, and patiently began his investigations. He found that the name of Tellier was utterly unknown at the Entrepot. In vain did he question every one, from the foremen to the lowest workmen. No one had ever seen or heard of a man named Tellier. "That's precisely what I imagined," said Raymond to himself as he turned his face homewards.

Now, the question arose how he might put himself into communication with Laurent Cornevin, and finally, after long meditation, Raymond thought he had found a means. "If Laurent is thus watching over me," he said, "it is because he feels a sincere and deep affection for me. If he knew my unhappiness, he would do his best to assist me; so I have only to acquaint him with it."

Accordingly young Delorge wrote this letter: "You came to inquire for Monsieur de Lespéran. Are you the man I suppose—the old friend and partner of Monsieur Pécheira? If so, I entreat you, in the name of Heaven, to let me see you and speak to you. Need I swear the most profound secrecy? My happiness—my very life—are at stake!" Raymond placed this urgent entreaty in an envelope, and, after sealing it in a way to defy prying curiosity, he confided it to the concierge of the Rue de Grenelle-Saint-Germain, and begged her to hand it to the first person who came to ask for him by name.

Of course this was a very frail chance on which to fasten his hopes, but at all events it gave him courage to seem interested in the new arrangements which were contemplated by his mother, who, delighted that her son would now be with her in Paris, had rented a small apartment adjoining her own, and opened doors of communication. This gave her two rooms for Raymond's especial use; and she arranged them charmingly, decorating them with many of the pictures and art treasures she had inherited from the Baron de Glorière. To these same rooms she also carried the portrait of General Delorge. "It belongs to you by right, my son," she said, "it will remind you of the past and of your duty, if you are ever in danger of forgetting it."

But there was little danger of forgetfulness on Raymond's part. Each hour of the last month had added another drop of bitterness to the fury that raged in his heart. To crush Combelaïne and Maumussy was the one idea that haunted him. It was with this idea, indeed, that he joined one of the secret societies which were undermining the empire. This society met at a little house in the Rue des Cinq Moulins, at Montmartre, and was called "The Society of the Friends of Justice." An ex-representative was at its head, and a large number of lawyers, artists, and medical students, were among its members. They met in the evening, twice or three times in the week. The avowed aim of the society, in case the police discovered its existence, was the propagation of democratic journals and books, but its real object was to recruit and arm a body of men in the provinces, which, at the first signal, would appear and assist the Parisians in winning the victory.

Raymond never knew the precise strength of this society, but once he heard the president say: "We have over fifty thousand guns."

Was this the truth? Raymond could not answer this question to his own satisfaction. He was not long in seeing, however, that his new friends had no great confidence in immediate success, and that if he achieved his own ends, it would not be through them.

With all his thoughts directed toward the mysterious visitor—whom he steadfastly imagined to be Cornevin—he repaired each day to the Rue de Grenelle to ask the concierge if anyone had been there. "No one," she replied, for four days in succession.

But on the fifth, as soon as Raymond opened the door, she exclaimed: "He has been here!"

Raymond's surprise was so great that he turned pale. "And you gave him my letter?" he asked.

"Of course."

"And what did he say?"

"He seemed very much astonished at your leaving a letter for him; and he turned it over and over in his hand. At last he opened it, and turned as red as a beet when he read it. He exclaimed: 'Good God!' and went right off."

Raymond was greatly disturbed, but he preserved an unmoved countenance; for he felt that the keen black eyes of the concierge were rivetted on him. "And is that all my friend said?" he asked.

"Yes, sir; every word."

"And did he say nothing about leaving an answer?"

"No."

"Nor did he ask at what hour he would find me in?"

"Not he. He swore like a trooper, and ran away like a madman."

Raymond did not dare ask another question, for the woman's curiosity was evidently aroused, and he had no means of judging whether she would prove an ally or an enemy. So he laughed carelessly as he turned away, saying: "I will arrange all that."

He took his key and locked himself in his room, where he could abandon himself to the terrible apprehensions which assailed him. If the story told by the concierge was correct—and he had every reason to believe it was—the man to whom his letter was given was not Laurent Cornevin. Was it possible he had been unfortunate enough to assist his mortal enemies by revealing Cornevin's existence to them. "I fear I am fatal to everyone who is interested in me!" he muttered, as he paced the room in agony of mind.

He scarcely glanced at the Maillefert mansion that day, but towards evening he went and looked out. The weather was mild; the windows of the mansion were open, and, some six or eight men, white-cravated, pale, and solemn, were seated round a table covered with papers. What did this gathering mean? wondered Raymond. However, soon afterwards lamps were brought in, and the servants closed the windows. He could see no more.

"I shall not come again," he thought, as, utterly depressed and discouraged, he started homewards. But he had scarcely turned the corner than he heard himself called. It was the voice of Miss Dodge, and on recognising it he rushed towards her.

She seemed very much startled by her own audacity, and trembled like a leaf, looking round her with a frightened gaze. "For three days," she said, "I have been trying to see you."

On hearing this, Raymond felt that some new misfortune awaited him. 'Did Mademoiselle Simone send you?' he asked.

"No; it is entirely without her knowledge that I have been watching for you."

"What has happened. Tell me at once."

"Mademoiselle is to be married. I heard her give her promise to her mother."

This frightful intelligence, after all that Simone had said, was quite unexpected by Raymond. "Simone to be married!" he gasped—"and to whom?"

"Ah! that I don't know. But I do know that it will kill her. She is dying, Monsieur Delorge—I tell you she is dying! And realizing this as I do, I determined to find you. What is to be done?"

This was the problem which had faced Raymond now for months, and to the elucidation of which he had applied all his intelligence—all his energy. "What is to be done?" he exclaimed, wildly. "Ah! who knows? To live in this way—to be always struggling in the darkness, without one ray of light to guide me; to be surrounded by enemies, and yet never meet them face to face; to be constantly struck at, and yet never see where the blows come from. Ah! if Simone would only have consented! But, no! It is she who has tied my hands and reduced me to this miserable position, to this humiliating existence, to this endless contest! It pleased her to sacrifice herself, and she has done so! I shall perish with her, but little does she care! No, no, Miss Dodge, Simone never loved me!"

With an indignant gesture, as if she heard an absolute blasphemy, the governess exclaimed: "You have not understood me! I tell you, mademoiselle will not live until the marriage!"

Raymond checked himself suddenly. The very violence of his emotion ended by giving him that lucidity peculiar to mad men, and which often imparts an appearance of logic to their acts. "Let us consult," he said, in a constrained voice, "for we are only losing our time in vain words. Have you the slightest idea of the stratagem that was employed to bring Simone to Paris?"

"I only know that M. Philippe was in some way compromised, and that she alone could save him by making great sacrifices."

"Then she has abandoned her fortune to him?"

"I think so."

"Then I understand perfectly. But the marriage?"

"It seems it is as essential to M. Philippe's welfare as the money was."

"And you have no idea who the miserable coward may be who wishes to marry Simone?"

"None whatever."

Raymond little thinking of the spies who might be hanging round about, had raised his voice. He saw nothing that was going on near him. He did not notice that a man of suspicious appearance was smoking his pipe under a doorway close by. "When did you first hear of the marriage?" he asked.

"On the day before yesterday."

"And in what way?"

The poor Englishwoman was on pins and needles. "I declare," she exclaimed, "I don't know what I ought to do or say. My profession has sacred obligations. Certain confidence has been placed in me."

Raymond stamped his foot impatiently. "Tell me at once," he said.

"Well, then, the day before yesterday M. Philippe went out early in a carriage."

"With whom?"

"Alone, sir—and when he came in, about eleven, to breakfast, he was so pale and agitated that I felt, when I met him on the stairs, that something bad was impending. He called his valet, and said to him, 'Go to the duchess and beg her to receive me at once.' I divined that an explanation was about to take place, and I instantly went up to the suite of rooms occupied by Madame de Maillefert, and entered the sitting-room next her bedchamber. Hardly had I got there than I heard M. Philippe talking with his mother. His first words were, 'Are we being abominably fooled!' And then he went on talking so fast that I could scarcely distinguish a word—only here and there disconnected phrases. He said that it was an abuse of confidence; that all was lost; that it was the height of impudence, and that he would blow out his brains. The duchess all the while uttered angry exclamations. I heard her say over and over again, 'It must and shall be done.' She rang her bell, and when one of her maids appeared she dispatched her with a message for Simone to come to her at once. And mademoiselle obeyed; but what took place then I don't know, for they all spoke in whispers. I can only tell you that when my poor young lady left the room she was as white as a lily, and she said to me: 'I am to be married—but I shall not live!'"

Now that Miss Dodge was well started with her tale it was best to allow her to go on until she stopped of herself; but Raymond nevertheless interrupted her.

"You love Simone," he said, "you are really attached to her. Do you wish to save her?"

"Oh! sir——"

"Then take me to her this moment."

Miss Lydia started back, looking at Raymond in absolute horror. "I," she answered,—“I take you to my young lady?"

"Yes."

"To the house, do you mean?"

"Precisely."

"But it is an utter impossibility."

"Nothing is easier. You will take my arm, and we will boldly enter the house. When the servants see me with you they will not ask a question."

"But madame——"

"She is always out at this hour."

"M. Philippe may be there."

Raymond with difficulty repressed a threatening gesture. "If he be there so much the better."

"What are you saying? Great heavens!" replied the poor governess, and she throw up her arms in despair, forgetting the impropriety of such a gesture in the open street. "You are mad!" she exclaimed.

Perhaps she was not far wrong, for Raymond had reached a point when he cared for nothing. "I must see Simone—I intend to see her," he resumed, in that harsh fierce tone which men use in decisive moments, "and there is no time to lose."

"She will not allow you to finish one sentence, She will be displeased by your audacity, and bid you leave her at once."

"Come, Miss Dodge."

But the poor woman rejected the arm which Raymond offered, and

looked as if she were about to fly off. "And what do you think will become of me?" she asked. "My young lady will send me away from her at once."

"Do you prefer she should die?"

"I shall be disgraced."

To discuss this subject would only show the poor woman all the risks she ran. Raymond saw this at once. "Miss Dodge," he said, peremptorily, "take my arm. Time is passing."

Subjugated and losing her head, she obeyed him and took a few steps, but when she reached the open gateway of the house, she hastily withdrew her hand. "I cannot," she cried, "I will not!"

Raymond did not speak. He caught her hand, drew it once more through his arm, and dragged her into the court-yard. Two or three servants looked round with an astonished air. But he went up the steps, and once in the vestibule, he released the poor woman's arm. "Now," he said, "show me where to go."

She no longer made the smallest attempt at resistance. She tottered up the grand staircase, and on the second landing said to Raymond: "Wait here for me; I will go and tell her."

"By no means," answered Raymond. "Go on; I'll follow."

"But——"

"Go on, I say. Would you give her time for reflection?"

More dead than alive she obeyed; and turning into a dark passage she opened the door of a small sitting-room where a lamp was burning. "Mademoiselle," she began.

But Raymond did not allow her to say any more. He pushed her aside, and entered the room.

"It is I!" he exclaimed.

Simone was sitting at a small table, looking through a pile of papers. At the sound of Raymond's voice she started up with such violence that her chair was overturned. She receded to the very wall, with her arms extended. "Raymond," she murmured.

Alas! it was only necessary to look at her to understand Miss Lydia's fears. The poor girl was a mere shadow of herself. Marble was never whiter than her face. Her slender hands were transparent like wax. Nothing was left of her former self except her magnificent eyes. They had all their former clearness, with the addition of pure glitter. The colour at last rose to her cheeks; and having recovered in some measure from her surprise, she exclaimed in a haughty tone: "By what right do you intrude here? You must surely be mad!" and she pointed to the door.

Raymond did not move. "Perhaps I am mad," he answered, with great bitterness. "I am told that you are about to marry."

She looked at him full in the face, and in a voice that did not even tremble, she replied: "And you have been told the truth."

When Raymond entered the house, he still doubted, in spite of what Miss Dodge had told him, and even at this very moment, with Simone's voice ringing in his ear, he had a vague feeling of wonder. He asked himself if he were not dreaming. "I will not allow it!" he cried.

Simone drew her slender figure erect. "By what right will you interfere?" she asked.

"By the right given to me by your love and your promises. Have you forgotten that you said to me, with your head on my heart, 'A girl like myself loves but once in her life. She is the wife of the man she loves, or she dies unmarried.'"

When Miss Dodge had entered the room, she had sank almost fainting on the chair nearest the door. By degrees, however, her senses had come back to her. She was shocked at Raymond's violence, and terrified that he should speak so loud, at the risk of been heard all over the house.

"In the name of heaven, sir!" she exclaimed.

But, with a gesture, Simone stopped her. "Let him speak," she said, "it is only right that not one pang should be spared me!"

But her tone betrayed such agony of suffering that Raymond checked himself, ashamed of his own vehemence. "You will never know what I have endured," he murmured.

"I know that you are inflicting the most useless torture on me, and that it would be more generous on your part to leave me."

"Not until I have spoken, and said what I came to say." With these words he approached her, and in a voice that vibrated with passion, he resumed: "I have come to show you the position in which we both stand. Above all conventional rules, there is the sacred right—the duty which belongs equally to all of God's creatures—of defending their lives and happiness. We have a right to do so. Give me your hand, and leave this house now with me. It is only to obtain your fortune that they clamour for your person. Give them your millions. Money! What is that to us—to you and me? Can I not work and give you a home? Come! If you are not falser than any woman that breathes, you will come."

Simone's serenity was only comparable to that of a martyr, standing, resigned, in the arena, and offering her soul to God while wild beasts tear out her entrails. "My destiny is fixed," she said. "No one in the wide world can change it now. I devote myself to an interest that I regard as superior to my life. Do not be jealous. I have broken no promises, for no other man will ever take me in his arms. Death will hold me in its cold grasp, Raymond. An abyss of shame has opened, and my poor body is needed to fill it up. Do you see now?"

Raymond did not speak. The oppressive silence was only broken by the sobs of poor Miss Dodge.

"Very well," he said, "I will go as soon as you tell me what sacred cause it is, to which you thus sacrifice yourself. I have a right to know and judge it. Do you not sacrifice my life as well as your own?"

"It is a secret that must be buried with me."

Raymond's anger was becoming uncontrollable. "And this is all you will say," he replied. "I have but one thing more to do."

"And what is that?"

"I shall find your brother, and hold him accountable for the horrible wrong he is doing you."

Mademoiselle de Maillefert started forward.

"No—you will not do that?" she said.

"I will do it—so truly as there is a God in heaven. Who will prevent me?"

"I will," said Simone; and she grasped Raymond's hand and pressed it with a strength of which he had not believed her capable. "I will," she repeated, "if my voice has still any power to reach your heart. I will pray to you on my bended knees to relinquish this intention. Would you embitter my dying moments by compelling me to feel that I have sacrificed myself uselessly?"

He did not reply to this question. "At least," he said, "you can tell me the name of the man you are to marry?"

"Would it make any difference to you?" she stammered; "would you be more or less unhappy according to the name of the person I married?"

"I choose to know."

At this moment a voice behind him replied: "Mademoiselle de Maillefert marries the Count de Combelaïne."

With a great start, as if he had received a sword thrust in his back, Raymond turned round, and found himself face to face with the duchess and her son. They had returned home together, and as they came up the stairs they had heard Raymond's ringing voice, and had hurried to the room.

"I repeat," said the duchess, "that my daughter marries Monsieur de Combelaïne."

Raymond had heard her the first time she said this—had heard her only too distinctly—and if he did not speak, it was because words were powerless to express his feelings. "It is a lie!—a disgraceful lie!" he said, at last.

"Ask my sister," said Philippe, with that peculiar motion of the body which amounted in him almost to a nervous affection. This time he shook from head to foot, and his teeth fairly chattered.

Raymond turned to Simone. "Am I to believe your mother?" he asked.

"Yes," she answered feebly but distinctly.

Raymond tottered—the room grew dark to him—and he grasped his head with both hands. "Thou hearest, O God of Love and Mercy! Thou hearest! She consents to become the wife of Combelaïne!—she!—Simone!" Then all at once, blinded by the blood that rushed to his head, he snatched hold of Simone's arm. "Do you know who this man is?" he asked.

"Yes, I know," she replied, faintly.

"Do you know that it is this very man who basely murdered my father, General Delorge?"

Simone sank back in her chair. "You told me all that," she said.

"And you will marry him?"

"Yes."

Dizzy with horror, Raymond stood still for a moment, and then turning to the duchess, said: "And you madame—will you give your daughter to such a man?"

The duchess hesitated. Then: "In families like ours," she replied, "necessities—reasons—often arise which are all paramount. My daughter has told you that it is of her own free will that she devotes herself—"

"Of her own free will!" interrupted Raymond.

Madame de Maillefert stopped him, and in a tone, the sincerity of which struck him even at that moment, she said: "I assure you that if it were in my power to break off this marriage I would do so."

"In your power!" repeated Raymond. And turning to the young duke, he said: "What Madame la Duchesse cannot do you, Monsieur le Duc, the head of this noble house, the depository of the unsullied honour of twenty generations—"

"You heard my mother, sir."

"Madame la Duchesse is a woman, while you are a man. Has the sword bequeathed to you by your ancestors, become so rusty in the scabbard, that you must accept this humiliation?"

"Philippe flushed scarlet. "Sir!" he stammered; "sir——."

"Philippe!" exclaimed the duchess.

"It is true," continued Raymond, with intense sarcasm, "it is true that the Count de Combelaïne is looked upon as a man greatly to be feared. He was once accustomed to the daily use of a sword."

The duke started forward and his glass fell from his eye. "You must account to me for these words, sir!" he cried.

But Simone advanced like a spectre and passed between the two young men. "Not another word, Philippe," she said.

"What! not when I am insulted like that?"

"I wish it. And I have paid dearly enough for the right to express my wishes. And you, Raymond, will admit that it would be unworthy of you to taunt a man who will not answer."

Raymond was silenced. He had begun to notice the extraordinary patience shown by the duchess, and to wonder at it.

"It is not generous, sir," she said gently, "to add to our trials. I understand and feel for your sorrow, and I can excuse it so entirely that I do not even ask you to account for your presence here. Believe me, when I tell you, that we suffer also. But life has inexorable necessities. If it were even to kill us all at one blow this marriage must take place."

"It must take place," repeated the young duke.

Raymond looked drearily round in the room, and in an icy tone, which contrasted strangely with his previous violence, he said: "And I, by all that I hold most sacred in this world—by the memory of my murdered father—assure you that this marriage will never come to pass."

"What do you—what can you hope to do?"

"That is my secret. Only, the solemn oath I have just sworn, you may repeat to Monsieur de Combelaïne. Perhaps it will cause him to reflect."

He knelt beside Simone, who had lost all consciousness. He took both of her hands and kissed them, murmuring some words that were inaudible, and then staggering to his feet he left the room.

VI.

THERE must have been an enormous interest at stake to compel the Duchess de Maillefert, usually so haughty and violent, to the constraint of the last twenty minutes.

"Well!" said Philippe, as Raymond's footsteps died away on the staircase. "Well."

"Well!" answered the duchess. "Did I not warn you that such a scene as this would surely take place? Did you not expect it?"

"And I have been insulted under my own roof by a man whom I could not call to account. Ah! why did I not listen to you?"

Madame de Maillefert sighed impatiently. "It is true," she said, "that we have been trifled with."

"But who would ever have expected such an amount of impudence?" said Philippe. "Let him look out, though, for I have not said my last word."

"True," said the duchess, "you have still some reason to hope. Everything depends on the next few days."

The duke interrupted his mother with a long, irreverent whistle. "Meanwhile M. Delorge will set everything and everybody by the ears," he exclaimed. "Combelaïne is quite capable of believing that he does it at our instigation."

"M. Delorge will not carry his threats into execution."

"You are mistaken, mother. The fellow is simple and sentimental, but he is in deadly earnest."

Miss Dodge, hurrying to Simone's assistance, recalled the duchess to circumspection.

"Hush!" she said, lowering her voice; "Simone will soon change all that. Her empire over M. Delorge is absolute. She will even be able to induce him to leave Paris. Perhaps she had better write to him to come and see her again."

"And if Delorge finds Combelaïne here to-night?"

"He won't, I'm sure. Now go and I will speak to your sister."

But the duchess was wrong. Raymond, on leaving the Maillefert mansion, was a very different man to what he had been on entering it. He understood that De Combelaïne and the De Mailleferts hated each other, as is often the case when booty has to be divided, and so he had arranged a simple plan, which he was determined to carry out with all the *sang-froid* of a man to whom life is utterly valueless. He would go the Count de Combelaïne and say to him: "I love Mademoiselle de Maillefert, and she is utterly indifferent to you. I am beloved by her. She hates you. It is her fortune you want—take it. But as for marrying her, you need not dream of it, for I will blow out your brains first. And I will do it!" Raymond said to himself, "just as I would blow out those of a mad dog!"

While reflecting in this manner he reached the Champs Elysées, and turned his steps towards the charming mansion for which De Combelaïne was indebted to imperial generosity. Raymond rang at the bell, and when the door was opened, he asked: "Is the count at home?"

"No, sir."

"I have come on most important business. I must see him."

The servant had no time to answer, for at this moment an elegant brougham drew up outside, and a lady alighted and went up the steps as if she were at home.

But the servant stepped forward and barred her passage, saying firmly but respectfully: "The count is not at home, madame."

The lady looked at him from head to foot, and replied: "You are new in this house, I see, and probably do not know who I am."

"You are mistaken, madame, I know very well."

"Then move aside, so that I may pass."

"I cannot, madame, for I have received my orders from my master."

"The woman stood in such a position that the light fell on her face. She was one of those persons who are only found in Paris, and who are indebted to incessant care and mysterious secrets of the toilette table for the privilege of prolonging their summer into autumn. She was over thirty. But how much—five, ten, or fifteen years? This question was a difficult one to decide on. However, the more Raymond examined her, the more convinced he was that he had seen her before.

"Call Leonard," she said, in a tone of command.

This was the Count de Combelaïne's confidential servant. "Monsieur Leonard is no longer here, madame," said the servant.

"Leonard not here!"

"No, madame, he has left the count's employment for that of an English lord, who pays him enormous wages."

The lady tore her gloves off her hands in a rage. "Then go you to the count and tell him that I am here—here at his door, waiting."

"But he is out, madame. I swear to you that he is out," the poor man replied. "Just as you drove up, I was telling this gentleman the same."

The lady turned, and as she scanned Raymond she uttered a startled

exclamation. "I will come back," she said. And then addressing Raymond, she added: "Will you have the kindness to assist me to my carriage?"

Raymond complied; and when she had settled herself among her cushions, she said to him in a low voice: "If I am not mistaken, you are M. Raymond Delorge?"

"I am, madame."

"The general's son?"

"Yes."

She hesitated for a moment, and then resumed: "Tell my coachman to drive home by the Champ Elysées, and then take a seat by my side."

Raymond's situation had become so desperate that he was ready for anything. He would even have entered the carriage of his infernal majesty in the mood in which he then found himself. So he obeyed this woman, who, when the door was shut and the carriage had started, said: "You do not know me, I see."

"I am sure you are not unknown to me," he replied. And indeed he had been cudgeling his memory most ineffectually concerning her.

"I must put you on the track, I fear," she remarked. "You have not seen me for years—sixteen or eighteen, perhaps. How time passes! I was then a young woman and you a child. Still my name has been mentioned too often at your mother's for you to have forgotten me, I am sure." But Raymond was by no means enlightened. "In those days your friends—Monsieur Roberjot especially—fancied that I must be able to serve you all. Now do you know? Not yet! Did not the mother of one of your school-friends have a sister?"

Raymond started to his feet so hastily that his hat was crushed against the top of the carriage. "Flora Misri!" he cried.

In a tone of annoyance his companion replied: "I was called so, certainly, some years ago, but now and for some time past my friends have spoken of me as '*Madame Misri*.'"

Raymond stammered forth an excuse, which she quickly interrupted.

"That will do," she said. "If I asked you to take a seat in my carriage it was because I had something to tell you which could not fail to interest you."

"Madame!"

"You need not be so astonished. Without your suspecting it, your interests and mine are the same just now. Listen to me: You have been wishing to marry for the last three months, have you not?"

For the last minute or two Raymond had been expecting a question of this kind, so he was on his guard, and answered in a tolerably cool tone: "That is a difficult question to answer."

"Why dispute about words?" answered Madame Misri, with a frown.

"There has certainly been some talk of your marriage."

"You are right, madame," he replied; for, after all, what was the use of denying it.

"The young lady is rich, I hear."

"Enormously so."

"She is Mademoiselle de Maillefert, I believe?"

Raymond's embarrassment was increased by the darkness which concealed the woman's countenance. There is nothing so trying as a conversation in the dark. The speakers are like two duelists who fight in the dark, sword in hand. He felt certain that she was in a state of rage, and he realized that he was himself in a most critical position, and that every-

thing depended on his prudence and skill. And so measuring each word he uttered, he slowly said: "I certainly had reason to hope that Mademoiselle de Maillefert would be my wife."

"Does she love you?"

"I think so."

"And her family repels you?"

"Absolutely."

"In order that she may marry a man whom she ought to hate?"

"I fear so."

Madame Misri, in her turn, wished she could see Raymond's face; but being unable to do so, she did what would never have occurred to a man. She leaned forward and took his hand. "Do you know the man who proposes to rob you of the woman you love?"

"No," he answered, boldly.

"Why tell this falsehood? You know perfectly well that your rival is Monsieur de Combelaïne."

Raymond did not reply.

"What were you going to see him for?"

Still he did not speak. He fancied he saw a ray of hope in the horizon.

"You meant to quarrel with him," she said—"to challenge him?"

"Monsieur de Combelaïne would not fight with me, madame."

She started. "To be sure. I remember that once you sent your seconds to him, and that he positively refused to meet you. You must hate him?"

"Is it not natural to hate the man who robs me of the girl I love?"

"And that is not all," said Madame Misri, slowly.

"What then?"

"It is said that it was not in a duel that he killed General Delorge."

A cold dew of agony broke out on Raymond's brow. "And are people wrong in saying that?" he asked, in a constrained voice.

It was Madame Misri's turn now to weigh her words; and instead of replying to the question she said: "What would you do to punish this man?"

Thanks to his amazing self-control, Raymond choked down the exclamation of joy which rose to his lips. This woman who spoke to him of vengeance, and who seemed willing to sign a compact of hatred, was Flora Misri, so long the associate and confidante of M. de Combelaïne. To ruin the count, Raymond felt certain this woman had only to lift her little finger. Was she loyal? Could he trust her? "I have but one thought madame," he said, slowly. "I impatiently look forward to the time when I may punish this man."

The brougham had just reached the Arc de Triomphe de l'Etoile, that is to say, the summit of the rising ground, and the coachman drove at a spanking pace down the Avenue de la Reine-Hortense. Noticing this Madame Misri hastily lowered the front window of the carriage. "Turn round," she said to her coachman. "Take the Avenue de l'Impératrice, and walk your horses."

Then turning to Raymond she continued: "You distrust me, Monsieur Delorge? I can see that very plainly. Do not deny it. I am thoroughly well informed. You distrust me because you know that for twenty years I have been the Count de Combelaïne's friend."

Raymond did not speak.

"Know, then," she continued, "that I now hate this man more than you do."

"Madame!"

"Yes; I mean what I say; for I have every reason to hate him. He has deceived me. He has trifled with me. You know his past—you know his relations with me. I was a mere child when I first knew him. He led a most miserable existence. He was flouted by all, respected by none. He lived on his wits, by his sword, and by the gaming-table. But he pleased me. His cynicism frightened me. His impudence dazzled me. I worshipped his very vices. In a short time I became his slave. I thought and felt only as he wished me to think and feel. What days those were! One by one his resources became exhausted, and it was on me that he then depended for his cigars and coffee, and the money he gambled with. If I could not supply his needs he beat me. Why did I remain with him? I did not love him? I hated him; still I stayed."

Was it to give Raymond more confidence that Madame Misri raised the veil from her indignation? "She is sincere," said Raymond to himself.

Meanwhile she continued: "Then came the *coup d'état*, and all at once Combelaïne became quite an important person. How was it that he did not break with me? I fancied it was because he was really attached to me—fool that I was! But he had simply decided that it was his interest not to separate. He has a very long head. He thought this prosperity of his was a fleeting thing, that the day might come when Flora would be again useful to him. He was never able to put any money by. With imperial revenues at his control, he was always embarrassed and always in debt. Millions on millions have passed through his hands, and been lavished on women, play and horses. His friends all say he will end in an alms-house; but I have always thought he would end in the assize court, knowing that when he needs money he will procure it at any cost, and that he hates those who are better off than himself."

Raymond was more and more impressed by this woman's sincerity, but he was anxious to know the cause of her hatred.

"At that time," she said, "I did my best to keep him within bounds. But he would not listen; he simply said, 'Pshaw! While I am ruining myself just you get rich; and when you are a millionaire I will marry you.' He said that so many times that finally the idea did not leave my brain: the thought of being Madame la Comtesse, after being—what I have been—was naturally very agreeable to me. So I began to save, and I was actually miserly. My only happiness was to look at Combelaïne, and say to myself: 'Go on—spend—throw your money to the dogs. My store is growing, and the day is not far off when you will implore me on bended knees to be your wife.'"

One by one all Raymond's doubts had vanished. No art was capable of feigning such anger as Madame Misri's. "Two years elapsed, Monsieur Delorge," she continued, "before I found myself justified in my anticipations. I was right though, for one day Combelaïne had spent his last farthing, and then he thought of me. I saw him come in. His face was very pale and his eyes bloodshot, which with him was a sign of very great emotion. 'You are rich, Flora?' he said. 'I have a million,' I answered. He walked up and down the room several times, and then he came towards me and said: 'Look here—I am drowning—give me half of what you have; it will save me.' I looked him full in the face, and I replied, 'As soon as we are married all I have will be yours.' He jumped three feet. 'You are not in earnest?' he asked. 'Indeed I am.' 'Do you expect me to marry you?' 'Most assuredly.' But here let me tell you, Monsieur Delorge, that in

reality I had no such anticipations. I felt that when my gun was ready it would miss fire. And I was right. 'A woman like you!' he cried. 'What sort of a man are you?' said I. Once upon a time if I had said such a thing, the count would have beaten me black and blue. But as I had money he swallowed his rage. 'Ah! my poor girl,' he went on to say, 'to marry you would be to lead you a most dreadful life.' 'And why?' I asked. 'Because each day would usher in new mortifications. If you were Madame la Comtesse de Combelaïne you would be none the less Flora Misri, and to Flora Misri all doors would be closed.' I had foreseen all these objections. 'My dear,' I said, 'I shall never ask for what is impossible. What you have done for yourself is all I wish you to do for me. You know very well that you have been despised, loathed and condemned, but did anybody tell you so? By no means. You never missed your man on the duelling ground—everybody knew that, and you were treated civilly. For the same reasons folks will treat your wife in the same way, and whomsoever she may be she will be received!' On hearing this, he asked, 'Is that all you have to say?' 'Yes, all. No marriage, no money.' He left the house, calm, to all appearance, but I knew very well that he wanted to strangle me.

"I was beginning to feel a little uneasy at the result of this affair, when his confidential servant came and asked to see me. This fellow Leonard, who has not his equal for shrewdness, had listened at the door and heard the whole conversation. 'Bravo, little one!' he said to me. 'You have netted your prey. Tie the knot while you can, and he is yours.' I knew what Leonard wanted, and so I said to him: 'There will be ten thousand francs for you on the day I become the Countess de Combelaïne.' 'Good!' he cried. 'Count on me, and get your money ready.' All that week Victor—Victor is De Combelaïne, you know—came to see me every evening; and, managed by me and Leonard, he got used to the idea. 'I don't say no,' he remarked at last, 'only you understand that, so far as the public goes, your money ought to be settled on yourself, for I don't propose to pay my creditors with your money.' I was getting on. To put Victor in a good humour I lent him twenty thousand francs. I ordered my wedding outfit, but it was thrown away. One morning I received an envelope containing twenty thousand francs and a note from Victor, in which he said that, as fortune was smiling once more upon him, he should prefer to remain a bachelor. This was at the time of the Mexican war. That same evening I saw Leonard, who exclaimed: 'We are done for, this time. My master has just made an enormous fortune in speculation. His creditors offer him boundless credit. Your day is only put off.' I was raving, as you may believe, and I really fancied I should have a brain fever. Nevertheless, I thought with Leonard that my day would come at last. I determined to double my fortune while Victor was losing his, and I had little difficulty in doing so, through my friends Coutanceau, the banker, and Verdale, the great architect. One of them speculated for me at the Bourse, and the other in land."

Raymond had at first objected to the obscurity; but he now rejoiced at it, for he feared to show the disgust on his countenance, which was inspired by this loathsome story. He could not conceal his anger at the thought that this wretch, Combelaïne, had dared to aspire to the hand of Simone, that high-born maiden. Meanwhile the vehicle had reached the end of the Avenue de l'Impératrice and the coachman, not receiving any orders, turned again; but Madame Misri did not notice it.

With increasing vehemence she began to speak again. "As regards money, the first hundred thousand francs are those that are difficult to

accumulate; and to make a million afterwards is a very simple thing. In less than eighteen months I have done it. One single operation in some houses near the Théâtre Français brought me in four hundred thousand francs. Verdale is a good old soul, and always ready to oblige his friends. In short, I was in the enjoyment of an immense income, when one evening I walked Victor—pale, thin, and harrassed. ‘Not a farthing,’ he said, as he fell into a chair. ‘Not a farthing, and no credit either.’ The fellow had not been near me for more than a year, but Leonard had kept me informed of everything he did. I knew that his immense fortune had again melted in his hands like so much snow, and that he had resumed his old life of shifts and expedients. Lawyers were at his heels—his house was seized, and all his pictures had been sold one after the other. If he retained any vestiges of his past splendour, he owed them to Leonard, who held the horses and carriages in his own name, and to me, who, from time to time had secretly advanced a hundred louis or so, because it did not suit my views that he should fall too low. Seeing him under my roof again, I was, I must admit, considerably disturbed. But, during the two years of his neglect, I had had time to prepare my little revenge, and so with my most lofty air I said: ‘You are ruined, then! You had better blame those friends of yours who gave you the eight hundred thousand francs which induced you to remain a bachelor!’ If a pitcher of cold water had been poured down his back, he could not have made a worse face. ‘And you desert me, too,’ he said, dismally. ‘In all my troubles I thought you, at least, would stick to me.’ He then began to excuse and accuse himself. He said he had behaved like a great rascal, but he loved me, and should always do so. I laughed, and made him a courtesy. ‘Too late, my dear sir!’ I cried.

“He looked utterly confounded, while I went on to say that I had reflected, that I liked my independence, that if I should take it into my head to marry, there were four or five men far better off than he who would give me their names; that my money ought to buy me the title of a duchess, for, thanks to my common sense, I now possessed not one million, but two. On hearing this, he glanced at me in such a way that I was half tempted to ring the bell for my servants to come to my assistance. ‘And you don’t love me;’ he repeated, ‘you don’t love me?’ I did not answer, not that I wished to discourage him entirely, but I thought it was best not to go too fast.

“He knew very well that I had not said all I had to say, and with his own peculiar art he tried to reconquer me. He knows women perfectly well. No honest man would know how to play the comedy he played for a month. I knew he was lying, and yet there were moments when I allowed myself to believe him. At last I yielded to his entreaties, and the day of our marriage was fixed. The press announced, and at his request, you understand, that the Count de Combelaïne was about to marry Madame Flora Misri. Then, in order that he might return to his club, I gave him enough to pay his debts of honour (sixty thousand francs), and I distributed more than that amount among his creditors. All was so well arranged that I was not at all disturbed when, in November, Victor asked me to postpone our marriage until he could succeed in inducing a certain great lady to be present at it. In December he, with Verdale and Maumussy, went off on a journey, to which I did not make the slightest objection. There was a bandage over my eyes, but one morning I received an anonymous letter to this effect:—‘You are very simple, little Flora. Aided by the money you gave him, Combelaïne is paying his addresses to a lady whom he wishes to

marry. He will do this before another month is over. He will marry an heiress as young as you are old, as noble as you are the contrary, adorably pretty, and four times as rich as yourself. This young lady's name is Simone de Maillefert."

Even now, after the lapse of weeks, Madame Misri's voice broke, as she spoke of this letter. "My first idea," she continued, "was that a practical joke had been played upon me. How was it possible for me to believe that a great family would consent to give their heiress to a man like Combelaïne, ruined both in honour and pocket—and utterly used up in short. Finally, doubts began to creep in. I thought of Victor's wonderful skill in transforming himself. I reflected that he was keen and clever to a degree—that even his enemies admitted this. I remembered the journey which he and his friends had taken together, when they had spent several days at the Château de Maillefert. I determined to know the truth, and that night, when I was alone with Victor, I suddenly asked, in an indifferent tone:

"Who is Mademoiselle de Maillefert?"

"I must admit that I never saw a person with such self-command as that man. When his interests are at stake, I really believe that you might put a red-hot iron on the back of his neck and he would not start, but continue to smile. However, he may deceive others, but he can't hoodwink me. I know when he is moved. His moustache quivers, and his ears, which are generally red, turn white. I detected both these symptoms, though he answered me very quietly: 'Mademoiselle de Maillefert is the heiress of the family of that name.' I have not the same gift as Victor, and I had great difficulty in concealing my emotion.

"Do you know this young lady?' I asked. 'I have seen her,' he said. 'Is she pretty?' I asked again. 'Well enough,' he retorted. 'And rich?' I asked. 'Passably so. She has an elder brother, and as you know, in most families of importance, the elder son, despite the law, is apt to have the lion's share.' Then I inquired: 'Do you know this family?' To which he answered: 'Not at all.' This last falsehood settled the matter. It was now perfectly clear that my dear Victor was doing his very best to betray me, and that if I were not on my guard, he would again escape me, and I should find myself foiled and deserted. 'Not if I know myself,' I thought."

For some moments Raymond had eagerly waited for a chance to ask a question, and when Flora Misri stopped to draw breath, he laid his hand on her arm. "One word, madame. Have you endeavoured to discover the origin of this anonymous letter?"

"Do you take me for an idiot?"

"And what have you found out?"

"Nothing at all. Combelaïne has so many enemies, you know."

"But, you have kept it?"

"Of course."

"Will you allow me to examine it?"

"Most certainly. To-night, if you choose."

VII.

THE two occupants of the brougham were so absorbed that they did not notice the flight of time. But the coachman on his box did not like the coolness of the evening air, and so he determined to remind his mistress of the hour. He stopped his horse, and opening the front window, without

any ceremony, "Are we never going home?" he asked, in a tone that merited immediate dismissal.

"Not yet," answered Madame Misri; "drive on!"

"Where?"

"Wherever you choose. Along the outer boulevard."

The coachman thereupon vented his ill-humour on the poor horses.

"Until I received that anonymous letter," resumed Madame Misri, "I was perfectly frank with Victor, like the simpleton I am. I promised myself, if he shared his name with me, to divide my money loyally with him, and I felt certain that would delight his soul. But I now made up my mind that if I married him he should never have a farthing! As you may imagine, the desire for revenge made me all the more eager to succeed. I determined to find out something from Verdale and Maumussy, but I threw away my time. The one laughed at me, and the other scoffed. I saw they were in the plot, and that if I insisted, they would tell Combelaïne, who had no idea that I knew anything. I then went to Coutanceau, whom you probably know—the old banker, who is apparently on good terms with Combelaïne, but who, I found, hates him heartily. Coutanceau promised to find out the truth for me. While I was waiting I wrote out a full account of Combelaïne's life. I had this paper copied by a friend, and I sent the pleasing letter to the Duchess de Maillefert, adding at the bottom, 'For further information, apply to Madame Flora Misri, such a street, and such a number.'"

"Good heavens!" thought Raymond, "why did I not come across you the day after my arrival in Paris!"

But Flora allowed him little time for reflection, and it was necessary he should give all his attention to her, for the coachman was driving fast, and many of her words were lost in the rattle of the wheels. "I suppose you wonder why Leonard told me nothing of all this. I confess that at first I was greatly astonished; but, after all, I thought that as he had once betrayed his master to me, he might now betray me to his master? But I did him an injustice, for at my first words he was perfectly aghast. For the first time in his life Combelaïne had kept a secret from his valet. 'Now, then,' exclaimed Leonard, 'we will just prevent this marriage from taking place! Knowing what we know, we shall be great fools if we don't. You work your own way, and I'll go mine.'

"I told him what I had done already. I told him of the letter I had written to the Duchess de Maillefert, whereat he was greatly pleased, and said I had done a good day's work.

"For the next three days I hardly dared put my nose out-of-doors. Each time the bell rang I thought it must be the duchess. But she did not come. I wondered if my revelations had missed their mark, and if her confidence in Combelaïne was unshaken. I feared that my letter had been intercepted. Victor is very cunning, and I thought it quite possible that he had spies at the Maillefert mansion, who would see that nothing reached the duchess without his inspection. He was quite capable of buying the *concierge*, the valets and the maids. I was hesitating as to what step to take next, when Coutanceau called on me one morning. 'I am worn out,' he said, 'for I have been running about for five days playing the detective for your benefit.' 'Have you found out anything?' I asked. 'To be sure I have, and plenty, too,' he replied. 'I dare say, Monsieur Delorge, that you have heard a great many hard things said of Monsieur Coutanceau. He is called a usurer, a skinflint, a robber of the poor, &c. I dare say all this may be

true, but at all events he is the best of the whole band—he is always ready to do a kindness—I mean when it costs him nothing.’ So he began: ‘You have been rightly informed—Combelaïne is to be married almost immediately.’ ‘Not so,’ I answered. ‘He won’t be married without the consent of Madame Flora Misri, and she won’t give it.’ ‘He will marry without it, my child,’ said Coutanceau. ‘Do you think so?’ I rejoined. ‘Do you think if the duchess learns what sort of son-in-law she will have in Combelaïne she will agree to accept him?’ ‘Certainly I do,’ replied Coutanceau. ‘You mean that she will not believe me?’ I retorted. ‘But I can support every statement I made with irrefutable proofs—proofs which have been gathering up for years, and which I have guarded as carefully as my bonds and mortgages. I have papers which would send Combelaïne to the galleys to-morrow.’ Coutanceau shrugged his shoulders. ‘Send him there then, my dear,’ he said; ‘for that is the only way I can see of preventing his marriage!’

“I burst out at this. ‘I mean what I say,’ he replied; ‘the Mailleferts and your Victor are playing a deep game, and they quite agree.’ ‘You are sure of what you say?’ I asked. ‘Certainly,’ he resumed, ‘and I have obtained my information from the young duke himself. You will tell me that I don’t know him; that’s true. I have not spoken to him four times in my life, but I know a woman who has cost him a fortune, and he promised to give her a carriage and pair the day after his sister became the Countess de Combelaïne. As to his creditors, when they beset him for money, he invariably replies that he will pay them when his sister is married. What is to be concluded from this? Simply that the illustrious De Maillefert family, instead of ruining themselves to give the young lady a dowry, expect a fortune from the son-in-law. Coutanceau’s story struck me as almost incredible—I really thought he was laughing at me. ‘Combelaïne with a fortune!’ I cried. ‘Do you tell me such a thing as that! If he needed ten thousand francs to keep his head on his shoulders he wouldn’t know where to get them unless he stole them.’ Thereupon Coutanceau began to whistle, and said, ‘I happen to know that your Combelaïne has opened an account with Verdale. Not longer ago than yesterday I saw the cashier give him thirty-five thousand francs against his simple receipt.’”

Never in his life had Raymond so exerted every faculty of his mind. He was eager to take advantage of this most unexpected chance that had presented itself, and lost all knowledge of time and place. Madame Misri, on her side, was equally oblivious, and continued her lengthy narration:

“I distrusted every one except Coutanceau,” she said. “I knew that he hated Combelaïne, Verdale, and Maumussy. You know Coutanceau staked every farthing he had in the world at the time of the *coup d’état*, and he was called the 2nd December usurer. But this name was really most unjust, for he stipulated for no interest. He simply asked that some position of importance should be given him in case of success. This promise was made. He was told that he could have anything he asked for. But when the time came, Coutanceau’s pretensions were ridiculed. They said he was too old, that his education was inferior, that he lacked prestige, and had no courtliness of manner. The end of it all was that he got no appointment, which enraged him so much that I have heard him say twenty times that he would give all he owned to demolish the Empire he had helped to build. You can readily judge, Monsieur Delorge, that I was glad I could depend on Coutanceau, now that I had determined to punish Combelaïne. So I said to him: ‘Pray tell me more, and don’t keep me in suspense any longer.’ ‘I understand

little one!' he answered; you will just go and repeat everything to Combelaïne.' 'I! Do you think I would denounce you?' I cried. 'I hate him! I loathe him!' Coutanceau looked at me. 'Very well,' he said, 'then I will tell you a little story:

"Once upon a time a beautiful young lady lived in Anjou. She was pretty and good, and lived all alone in a great château. Her name was Simone. This young lady was as rich as the defunct Marquis of Carabas. All the country round about belonged to her. Her property was worth millions, and she took care of her land herself, just like any good old farmer. But the young lady's mother and brother ate up their own fortune, and then they wanted hers. They tried every way to dispossess her, but all in vain, and then they got very angry. However, all at once they had an idea, and that was, to marry Simone to a man who would agree to divide the cake with them—that is to say, the dowry. They were looking about for some such amiable and accommodating youth, when the Duchess de Maumussy proposed the Count de Combelaïne. At a sign from the duchess, Victor left for Anjou with Maumussy and Baron Verdale. He saw these people, and in three days all was settled. Promises were exchanged, and now nothing was wanting but the girl's consent, which was not a very easy thing to procure, as she had a lover whom she wished to marry; but the Duchess de Maumussy was rich in expedients. I don't know exactly what she said or did. I do know, however, that at the end of the year Mademoiselle Simone left her château and came to her mother's house in Paris, and also that everything is now arranged.'"

Innumerable questions surged to Raymond's lips, but Madame Misri would not allow him to speak. "Wait until I have finished!" she cried, in a hoarse voice. "Wait!" And at the memory of all her wrongs, the blood rushed to her head, and the veins in her throat swelled with rage.

"Old Coutanceau," she continued, "had told me all he knew. For an hour I turned him round as I might turn an old glove, and I got nothing more—not one solitary detail—so I dismissed him. I was eager to be alone, so that I might give way to my rage. I am no fool, you understand, and I knew very well that I, Flora Misri, thirty-five years old, could hardly stand against the attractions of a girl of twenty. If she had only been poor! but no, she was rich—so rich that I, with my two millions, was a beggar beside her. Yes, it was clear that I was betrayed. I knew that all hope of aid from the Mailleferts was gone, and I saw that I had only myself to rely upon. I felt, too, that there was no time to waste. So I determined to attack Combelaïne at once. That very evening he appeared about ten o'clock, smoking his cigar, smiling, and as insolent as usual. I had thought over what I should say, but the sight of him made me forget all my fine phrases. I grew very angry, and went straight towards him. 'Coward!' I cried. 'Tell me if it is true that you are going to be married!' If you think he was disconcerted, you are greatly mistaken. He answered very coldly: 'I came to-night to announce my marriage to you.' 'Indeed!' I cried; 'this marriage will never take place.' 'And why, pray?' he asked. 'Because I will not allow it!'"

Madame Misri's voice was raised to such a pitch by this time that the curiosity of the coachman was evidently aroused, and Raymond saw him lean towards the window, as if to see what was going on inside the carriage.

"Victor and I," said Madame Misri, "had certainly had several disputes during the twenty years we had known each other, but never such an one as that evening. 'You say I shall not marry Mademoiselle Simone?' he asked.

'You shall not,' I replied. 'And why, if you please?' he asked again. 'Because you belong to me. Because I, by the sacrifice of my youth, purchased the right to become your wife; because I have your word; because I am tired of being fooled, and finally because I could never endure——' 'Good heavens!' sneered Combelaïne; 'do you mean that you are jealous?' 'And why should I not be?' I answered. His face softened. 'You are foolish,' he answered, 'very foolish. Let me tell you that I candidly prefer you, who have been the sunshine of my life, always gay and cheerful, to that lachrymose virgin named Simone de Maillefert. Does she understand me? Do we even speak the same language? This marriage is a sacrifice I make for projects of future ambition and happiness. We are growing old, my poor Flora—we must win comforts for our declining years. Millions are lying in my path, which only need my stooping to pick them up. Ah! if I could only have the money without the woman. But this doesn't seem to be the custom. Let us swallow this bitter pill, Flora; but no jealousy, for that would be the height of absurdity. You don't know this girl. She won't live a year. By that time I shall be free, with an enormous fortune, and a far steadier position than now. Then I will return to you, and bring you, not the title of countess, but that of duchess. Our two fortunes united will enable us to have one of the finest establishments in Paris—and all the world will be at our feet. It is true I do belong to you, but when such great interests are involved, you might lend me for a few weeks to a poor girl to gratify her sick fancy.'

"This is what Victor said to me, not perhaps as I have repeated it, but at greater length, gently and tenderly, with loving voice and eyes. 'I have only four words to say to all this,' I answered, 'and they are, "No, I will not." 'You regard me then, it seems, as your absolute property,' he said, with raised eyebrows. 'Yes,' I cried; and then, utterly distracted, I began to shower insults and epithets upon him. I told him what I knew, and what I suspected of his various infamies. He waited until I had finished, and then said: 'It seems to me that you are presenting your bill.' 'Yes,' I rejoined, 'and I intend to be paid.' He shrugged his shoulders. 'I am tired out with all this nonsense,' he said, 'and I certainly shall not yield to your caprices.' 'Take care, Victor,' I said, 'you forget something!' I went to the chimneypiece, where I could reach the bell before I spoke again. 'What do I forget?' he asked. 'The papers,' I replied. His face became very pale, but he said quietly: 'What papers?'

"I was about to play my last card. 'You know as well as I do,' I replied. 'A man who for twenty years has meddled in every political intrigue is often compelled to keep most dangerous and compromising papers. You were too wise to keep them in your own rooms, where they might be discovered in your absence, if your house was searched, as Father Coutanceau's was, so you intrusted me with all those papers which you regarded as particularly dangerous. You said to me, "Preserve them carefully." So I did; but as I like to know the value of what I have under my charge, I read them.' He had the greatest difficulty in restraining himself. 'Yes, I read them,' I repeated. 'I am stupid, I know, but I can read.' 'And if I asked you to return these papers?' he asked. 'I should say that I should give them to my husband.' 'So that if I marry Mademoiselle Simone——' 'I should utilize them.' 'You!' he exclaimed. I took the bell-rope in my hand. 'Yes, I,' I answered. 'And if you wish to know what I will do, I will tell you. I will classify and arrange them. Some I shall send to one person, others to another, and some to the emperor. One I shall give to my sister,

and others to Madame Delorge. In reference to the last ones, from Berlin, I shall decide later on.' I thought he would turn on me and choke me, but I was much mistaken. He took up his hat, and opening the door, he said: 'You ought to understand that after this I shall never willingly look on your face again. You think you will betray me. We shall see about that.' And then he went away."

Madame Flora laughed a nervous laugh, such as a lunatic might have given vent to, and then she leant towards Raymond. "Well," she asked, "what have you to say now?"

Raymond literally could not speak; he was dazzled by the vista which this woman's bitter desire for vengeance opened before him, and he trembled lest some unwary word of his should recall her to prudence.

"You are astonished at Victor," she said. "What would you be if you knew the contents of the papers in my possession, and where they might place him if I chose to make them known? But he knew me to be as weak as a child, so far as he was concerned, as cowed as a dog that has been whipped and then returns to kiss its master's hand. Many a time I had been tempted to break my chains and fly. Many a time I had threatened to avenge myself for all he had made me suffer. All to no purpose, however, and he unquestionably said to himself when he left me, 'It will be just as it has always been—Flora will never do what she says she will.' But I said to myself, 'Hold your head up in the air, and look as contemptuous as you please. Before the end of the week, not having any letter from me, you will begin to feel uneasy.'

"I felt it was now safe to rest on my laurels, certain that Victor would go no further without another explanation with me. Then, if he persisted, it would be time to act. But so that I might not be taken by surprise, and in order to keep myself informed of Combelaïne's daily acts, I sent for Leonard, who appeared with a rather crestfallen air. 'We have been fooled, madame,' he said, 'my master is certainly going to marry the heiress. 'What!' said I, in spite of us, and in spite of the arms we hold?' 'We cannot prevent it. If the affair could have been broken off the Mailleferts would do so,' he replied. 'What, the people who are in league with him?' I asked. 'They may have been,' said Leonard. 'But they have quarreled now, although they see each other still, visit and go out together; however, there is no love—no liking between them. I know what I say. Only the day before yesterday the young duke appeared at the door and said he must see my master at once. I went to tell my master, who said: 'The deuce take the fool—let him in though!' I went out, but I took good care not to go far—and I listened with all my ears. The two then began to talk, both at once, and such things I never heard gentlemen say to each other—no two rag-pickers could have said worse. Master Philippe asked for some money, which he said my master had stolen—enormous sums in fact! My master said, "So much the worse for you, then! Apply to the courts for redress."

"I hardly knew, Monsieur Delorge, what to make of the account Leonard gave me—but he declared it was true. 'And yet the marriage will not be broken off?' I asked. 'It is more decided on than ever,' he replied. 'But that is nonsense,' I rejoined. Leonard shrugged his shoulders. 'I confess,' he answered, 'that I can't make it out. There is, of course, some devilry of my master's underneath it all. But what? I have worried myself into fiddle-sticks thinking, and now I give it up.'

"The situation became more and more complicated; so that I did not know what to think. I even began to doubt Leonard, and watched him

carefully, wondering if he were not bought over by Victor. 'Perhaps,' I said, at last; 'perhaps the young lady loves some one else!' On hearing this Leonard uttered an exclamation, and went on to say that the poor young lady did love some one. He told me that everyone knew it—and knew you to be the person; and that you would have become her husband if Victor had not been brought forward by Madame de Maumussy. I was struck by this strange fatality, for I at once remembered your father's name, and said to myself: 'That's a man who won't easily let Combeldaine tread on him.'"

Did Madame Misri fancy that it was necessary to add coals to the fire of Raymond's burning hatred before she laid a sure plan of revenge before him? She knew nothing of his resolutions and his desperation when she asked him to enter her brougham; and he had sat by her side, apparently calm and undisturbed by what she had said, though it was strongly calculated to arouse his anger. One great consideration had entailed this reserve and caution upon him. Although he had entire faith in the present sincerity of Madame Misri, he distrusted her in regard to the future. Without having had much experience of passion, he was clever enough to see that in spite of her vehement protestations of hate, Madame Misri still loved the Count de Combeldaine more than ever. She had thrown off her chains, but she might slip them on again and resume her old habits of blind submission. A visit from him, a word, or even a look might prove sufficient. It was, therefore, all the more necessary that he should improve the present occasion and obtain these papers.

"Well?" he said, interrogatively.

"There ended Leonard's information," Flora replied. "But we agreed to remain allies, both pursuing the same end—I openly, and he in secret. And I awaited events, with information from Coutanceau sometimes, and sometimes from Leonard. According to Coutanceau all hope was lost, and I ought to utilize my weapons immediately. According to Leonard, on the contrary, I ought to wait, as he was convinced that Victor and the duke would end their dispute by a duel. Unfortunately, however, things looked to me as if Coutanceau were right. I heard of Combeldaine's marriage on all sides. Everybody was amazed, but still no doubts were expressed. In this extremity, I determined to influence Victor through one of his old friends. Among his papers, I had found those which would frightfully compromise some of the highest persons in the land, and the Duke de Maumussy especially. I addressed him first. After clearly explaining the position of affairs—although he probably knew it as well as I did—I said: 'I cannot attack Victor without attacking you at the same time. I regret this, but it cannot be helped. Use your influence, therefore, not to make him marry me—I do not exact that—but to break off this marriage, which I am resolved to prevent at any cost.' I expected to see Maumussy arrive out of breath, or, at all events, I looked for an immediate answer. Not at all. I then wrote in succession to Verdale and the Princess d'Eljensen. Not a word."

"They laughed at my anger. They mocked at my threats. This was so evident, that I should have felt certain I had over-estimated the importance of my papers if Coutanceau had not examined them and taken advantage of the opportunity to carry away those which concerned himself. He regarded this silence as most extraordinary, and said that it concealed some deep plot. 'Take care!' he said to me over and over again. 'Take care!' And I, who knew better than he did what Victor is capable of, I shuddered with fear. I fancied that everything I ate had a strange taste. I hardly dared

leave the house, and at night time I barricaded my door as if I feared attack. Ah! those horrible papers. Twenty times I put them into envelopes and directed them—twenty times I was horrified at what I had done, and took them out, saying: ‘I cannot—no, I cannot.’ Then, Monsieur Delorge, do you know what I did? Poor silly fool that I am! I wrote to Victor and asked to see him, saying that our quarrel had risen from a misunderstanding, which could be easily explained.”

If Madame Misri thought she should astonish Raymond by this confession she was mistaken, for he had foreseen it, and now congratulated himself on his penetration.

“Yes, I did just that,” she resumed, “and in an agony of suspense I waited, but not for long. For that very evening Victor returned my letter unopened. On the outside was written with a red pencil: ‘Enough of this, or I shall be obliged to ask the prefect of police to relieve me from threats and demands which are equally ridiculous.’ He threatened me with the police! He! What a bitter sarcasm; And I hesitated to expose him! I cried. But I hesitate still, Monsieur Delorge, and this is why you met me to-night at the gate of the Count de Combelaïne’s house, for I wished to offer him one last chance of safety—and you heard the answer. He shut his door on me, this man who owes me everything; who has lived at my expense; who has robbed me and ruined me; who owes me the very money which he gives to these footmen who insulted me. And Leonard is no longer there.

“Why, without letting me know, has he suddenly left the count, whom he served for so many years, and who, as he told me but twenty-four hours ago, owes him more than twenty thousand francs? And who is this Englishman who has offered him such fabulous wages?”

Madame Misri paused to draw breath; and then, with convulsive violence, she exclaimed: “My cup is full; his door is shut upon me, and I was asking myself how my vengeance would be swiftest and surest when I saw and recognized you. I have told you all. I am but a woman and do not know how to use the weapons I hold in my hand—they are too heavy for me, possibly. Will you avenge me and yourself at the same time? Are you ready to swear that you will do your best to crush this man?”

Never had Raymond found so much difficulty in retaining his self-control. “Do you mean to say that you will give me these papers?” he asked.

“I will give them to you.”

“When?”

Imperceptible as was Flora’s indecision, it did not escape Raymond’s observation. “To-morrow,” she answered; “To-morrow morning.”

“And why not to-night?”

“To night?”

“Yes, this very moment. Bid your coachman drive home—take me to your rooms—give me the papers. I will examine them to-night, and to-morrow I will open fire.”

A sudden shock interrupted him. The brougham had drawn up in the centre of the Avenue d’Eylau, and the coachman, as before, dropped the glass. “Madame!” he said, anxiously; “madame!”

She, with her thoughts far away, answered him with an impatient command to drive on.

“Very well, madame,” he replied; “But I think you ought to know that we are followed.”

She started, and instinctively grasped Raymond’s arm. “Is it possible?” she exclaimed.

"Yes; I am as sure of it as I am of my life," said the coachman. "Haven't you noticed the queer turns I have made? Well, it was because I wished to find out the truth. I suspected it in the Champs Elysées. Seeing a carriage going in the same direction, and keeping close to us, turn as I turned, to the right, or to the left, I said to myself, 'Somebody is watching madame! Then I drove on, sometimes at a gallop, and sometimes at a walk; the carriage was behind, and now, while I am standing still, that same carriage isn't a hundred feet away.'"

The darkness was too great for the coachman to see the profound effect produced by his report. But while he spoke, Flora clung to Raymond, trembling like a leaf. "Do you hear?" she gasped.

"Perfectly."

"It is Combelaïne who is following us."

"Either Combelaïne or some one else."

"No—it is he—I know his ways, and the traitor he is! While I was talking with his servant he was hidden behind the curtains. He saw us speak to each other, and then enter my brougham. He asked who you were, and when he was told he jumped into a carriage and started in pursuit."

Raymond felt that victory was escaping his grasp—the victory which he had regarded for the last hour as certain and decisive; for he saw that Flora was frightened at her own audacity, and that nervous prostration had now succeeded her previous excitement.

"Perhaps you are right," he said, "but what of it?"

"What of it! Don't you see that if Combelaïne is following us, it is because he is shrewd enough to divine what we mean to do. If he is watching us, it is because he guesses that I have told you everything, offered you the papers, and that we have signed a treaty of revenge."

Raymond did not place complete reliance on the coachman's statement, as he thought it quite possible that the man had invented the tale in his desire to be ordered "home." So he turned to the driver: "Where is the carriage which you say is following us!"

The coachman straightened himself up so as to see the better. "It is just in the same place," he replied, "near a café. The light from the windows is on it now, sir. If you will look out at the back you will see it yourself."

Raymond did so, and about a hundred feet in the rear he distinguished a carriage standing motionless. But what did that prove?

"My good fellow," he said to Madame Misri's servant, "it is not always well to trust to appearances. Drive on while I watch, and take sharp turns and go round enough corners to make the thing certain."

"Very well, sir," and the coachman at once touched up his horse.

"What do you think?" asked Flora, eagerly.

"I think that your man is right. The carriage follows us all the time, turning just as we turn, and carefully keeping the same distance behind us."

When Raymond was perfectly certain, he told the coachman to draw up. "I believe," he said to Flora, "that Combelaïne is in that carriage. I mean to make sure of it."

"What do you intend to do?"

"I intend to get out, and go and ask the occupant of the vehicle, no matter whom he may be, by what right he follows us."

He opened the door as he spoke, but Madame Misri grasped him by the arm. "You must not do that," she cried; "I cannot stay here alone. I am afraid. Besides, if it is Victor in the carriage, what will happen?"

Was it for Raymond that she feared, or for De Combelaine? It was hard to decide. At all events, Delorge began to lose his temper.

"What do you want then?" he said, with an oath he was unable to restrain. "Have you any idea?"

"Yes."

"What is it, then?"

"It is this. My horse is tired, I know, but he is a splendid animal, and will do what we want. Let us drive very fast and straight on, keeping on a wide road. The other carriage won't follow us long."

"And after that?"

"After that we will drive back, and I will go home, or spend the night with one of my friends."

This plan offered Raymond the advantage of not leaving Madame Misri, and the prospect of going home with her and getting the papers. "That is a good idea!" he said; and addressing the coachman: "You must get away from that carriage. Take the Avenue de la Grande Armée, then the Avenue de Neuilly, and finally the road to Saint Germain."

"But the horse is tired."

"Never mind! it must be done," said his mistress.

The coachman shrugged his shoulders. "What queer fancy is this!" he muttered, as he whipped up his horse.

"Our spies will have their trouble for nothing," said Raymond.

Madame Misri made no remark. No doubt she was already repenting of what she had done, and would have gladly recalled her confidence could she have done so. Was this fear of Combelaine, or regret at having compromised him? It was difficult to decide. The relations of people like Madame Misri and De Combelaine are not easy to analyze. Passion is often complicated by circumstances which are mysterious and not to be avowed. Their connection was founded on shameful ties, which are really harder to break than those of social force.

"We are not gaining ground!" she murmured.

Raymond looked out; it was true, the other lanterns were at the same distance.

Tears came to Flora's eyes. "Now," she sobbed, at if in answer to the objections in her own mind—"now I understand the silence and security of the count and his friends. They are very powerful, you see, very powerful. They have friends everywhere, and at the prefecture of police more than anywhere else. Since the day I first threatened them, I have been surrounded by spies. I have suspected every servant in my house. Who can say that this very man, my coachman, is not in their employment, and not paid to watch me; and Leonard, he has probably betrayed me. I dare say, Coutanceau himself ridicules me!" And as she spoke she tore her hair, "Now," she continued, "I understand Victor's obstinacy; he knows that if I hand you these papers he is lost, and he determined that you shall not have them. Fool that I have been! Why did I threaten him? Why did I not strike first?"

Raymond saw that this inconsequent, capricious creature was escaping him; but he had not lost all hope. He swore that he would have the papers that very night, even if he were compelled to resort to threats and violence. But he must first of all attend to that confounded carriage. "Stop," he cried; and as Madame Misri drew up, he sprang to the ground.

Madame Misri held him back. "What are you going to do?" she asked. "To see if I can't make your horse go faster than your coachman does."

She dared not oppose him, and, in another minute, Raymond was on the box with the reins in his hand. "Don't be troubled," he called out to Flora, "it will be all right."

But he changed his route. Instead of going along the Avenue de Neuilly, he turned to the left into the Allée de Longchamps, which crosses the Bois de Boulogne diagonally. The other carriage did the same; but Madame Misri's equipage this time made a perceptible advance.

"Another half hour like this and the animal will be foundered," grumbled the coachman.

"We shan't want another half hour," said Raymond, as he extinguished the lamps of the brougham. "That will make it harder work for them," he muttered.

When he reached the spot where the Allée de la Reine Marguerite crosses the Allée de Longchamps, he turned a short corner into a path only intended for foot passengers; and, in spite of the absolute darkness, and at the risk of some great disaster, he kept the horse up to a gallop. At last, however, he suddenly stopped, and for five minutes listened, almost holding his breath. Not a sound, not a light.

"We are all right," cried Raymond, leaping to the ground and throwing open the door of the brougham. But no one answered him. He called again and felt in the darkness. The vehicle was empty. Madame Misri had disappeared.

VIII.

STUPEFIED and yet furious, Raymond could not at first believe in this strange disappearance, and he looked around him incredulously. The coachman laughed as if he would die, and as he rubbed down the quivering flanks of the poor animal with a woollen cloth, he said: "It isn't worth while to look, sir; madame is a good way off, if she is still running."

"Far off! You don't suppose she jumped out while I was driving at that furious rate?"

"Oh! no—madame is not so imprudent. But when you stopped the horse and listened a little while ago, I heard the door of the brougham open and shut softly, and I said to myself, 'what is going on now?'"

Raymond was sorely tempted to thrash the fellow—but what good would it do?

"That's enough," he interrupted. "But what on earth will Madame Misri do here at this hour, and in this darkness?"

"She will get back to town, sir, and very easily, for madame knows the Bois at all hours of the day and night, better than anyone in the world."

"Very well," said Raymond. "Then we will return also."

The coachman was only too glad to hear this decision. In another minute he had relighted the lamps, and as he shut the door, after Raymond had taken his seat, he asked, "Where shall I drive you, sir?"

"To the Boulevard des Italiens, at the corner of the Chaussée d'Antin."

They started, and, half stupefied by the motion of the carriage, Raymond apathetically reviewed the strange events of the evening. What a cruel disappointment! With his hand fairly on the very help he wanted, it had eluded his grasp, and probably for ever. Madame Flora's conduct irritated more than impressed him. In her low cunning he recognized the creature he had suspected—the low-born, debased woman, who was accustomed to

tremble and obey, incapable of open resistance, but always ready to betray and deceive. Where was she?

Once in her own apartments again, would she pack the papers all together and send them to Combelaïne, thus hoping to win his pardon?

"Miserable creature," thought Raymond—"creature without heart or brains!"

Although he had been exceedingly cautious, he had allowed her to see that, if he was ignorant of the precise nature of the intrigue which had placed Simone in the count's power, he at least knew that such an intrigue existed, and that he had made up his mind to battle with it. This was unfortunate, particularly as Raymond remembered Madame Misri's own words: "Such men as Combelaïne should never be threatened. Strike first." And now Combelaïne would be on his guard, and very possibly hurry on his marriage with Simone. In conclusion, Raymond saw that his meeting with Madame Misri had complicated the situation, and done him harm rather than good.

The carriage stopped on the boulevard, and when the coachman threw open the door with the announcement that they had arrived, Raymond gave him a louis, and, alighting from the brougham, stood for a moment uncertain what to do. He had no reason for going to one place rather than another, and he hesitated as to his course, when suddenly he thought of Madame Cornevin, who lived only a few steps off. "I will see her," he said.

Thus, suddenly, without reflection, a man often does a thing which is calculated to have the most serious influence on his life. For months Raymond had seen himself condemned to all sorts of painful dissimulation, in order to conceal the secret of his love for Simone from his mother and his friends, and yet he was now going to reveal it—or, rather, allow it to be divined by the subtle intuition of a woman. One fact dazed and blinded him. Madame Cornevin was Flora Misri's sister: and Madame Cornevin had once exercised a powerful influence over her sister, and had tried to use it when they were seeking Laurent Cornevin, after the death of General Delorge. To be sure, she had then failed. But Flora, at that time, was in all the brilliancy and insolence of youth, and at the age when vice has not lost its gilding. She was intoxicated with the sudden and prodigious fortune of the audacious adventurer with whom she had associated her life, while now—! Old and weary, having drained her cup of bitterness to the very dregs, she might be touched by considerations which then would not have moved her. Was it not possible that she would listen to her sister now, and gladly turn to her for comfort and advice? So Raymond simply intended to say to Madame Cornevin: "I know that Madame Flora Misri has important papers in her hands belonging to the Count de Combelaïne. If we could get hold of them, the wretch would be in our power. We should hold the proofs of his infamy, of his intrigues, and crimes. My father and your husband would be avenged. See your sister, and try to obtain them from her."

It was with these ideas that Raymond hurried along the *Chaussée d'Antin*. It was late; the shops were closed, the passers-by were few in number, and even the cafés were shutting. Raymond had eaten nothing since morning, but he was not aware of it. He was in that state when physical needs are dormant, and over-exerted nerves suffice for all. It was as he feared—Madame Cornevin had retired. "At least, I suppose so," said the concierge, "for all the workwomen went away very early to-night."

No matter! Raymond climbed the stairs, and rang a sharp, imperative peal at the bell. No answer—no one came.

But as he leaned against one of the windows on the landing, he saw a light which he knew must come from Madame Cornevin's bedroom. She was not asleep then. He rang a second time; then a third. He had about decided to abandon the attempt when he heard footsteps approaching. And from behind the door sounded a voice: "Who is there?"

"I—Raymond Delorge."

The door instantly opened. Madame Cornevin stood there with a candle in her hand. "What is the matter?" she exclaimed; "is there anyone ill at your house?"

"No one, thank Heaven, madame."

She was pale and agitated, as any man less absorbed than Raymond would have instantly seen. And with that volubility which one ordinarily adopts when embarrassed, she said: "Pray forgive me for keeping you waiting so long; but I sent my workwomen away at six, my servant and my daughters have retired, and I was just going to bed myself."

She was, however, dressed as carefully as when she received her customers during the day time.

"I must say a few words to you," interrupted Raymond.

"To-night."

"Yes—at once—respecting a very important matter."

Madame Cornevin's embarrassment became so great that he noticed it. "I fear that I am giving you a great deal of trouble," he said.

"No, indeed," she answered. "You give me no more trouble—disturb me no more when you come here than Jean and Léon would. Come in—come in!"

He followed her; but instead of showing him, as usual, into her own parlour, she took him into the work-room. Placing her candle on the table, she sank on to a chair, and, with ill-conceived impatience, exclaimed, "I am listening."

Raymond's observation was aroused. Her manner was certainly peculiar. However, he gave her in rapid words a clear and accurate account of the events of the evening, but omitting any hint of his interest in Simone, and attributing his hatred of Combelaine entirely to the old enmity. He expected that Madame Cornevin would make some objections. However, she simply said: "Very well. I will see my sister to-morrow before noon."

"And when shall I know the result of your step?"

"Come to-morrow night at this same hour."

This was more than Raymond had hoped. "I have something else to ask, madame."

"And what is that?"

"I must beg you not to mention to my mother that I have seen you."

"I will keep your secret."

When a person is in a hurry to get rid of an unwelcome guest, his or her answers are apt to be summary. Raymond was aware of this, and strange conjectures flitted through his mind. Just then he felt certain that he heard a chair moved in the next room. "If we had these papers," he said.

"Yes, it would be a great help," answered Madame Cornevin, quickly rising as she spoke.

This was such a positive request for him to withdraw, that Raymond dared not linger. "To-morrow evening, then?" he said, as he turned to the door.

"Yes," said Madame Cornevin—"yes; that is understood."

And she took up her candle and preceded Raymond on to the landing. Hardly had his foot touched the stairs than he heard the door close again. If any other woman had been in question Raymond would have been forced to the most singular suspicions. Misconduct is confined to no age among women; but Madame Cornevin's reputation had never been breathed upon. "And yet," he said to himself, "her agitation was apparent, and she literally put me out-of-doors. What was that noise I heard? Was she not alone? Not alone! Who could have been at that hour in a room occupied by her three daughters? Who could she have an interest in concealing? Her husband, Laurent Cornevin?" As this idea flashed through his mind, Raymond started. "And why not?" he said to himself. "Laurent Cornevin is a man of prodigious courage, but he is human all the same. Who could say that in some moment of profound discouragement he has not revealed himself to his wife, and that he sometimes comes to visit her in secret?"

The more Raymond thought of this, the more convinced he became of the correctness of his supposition. He was almost tempted to rush back, ring until she opened the door, and then say to her: "Your husband is here—I must speak to him. My happiness and my life depend on it." If he were right, Madame Cornevin would not have the presence of mind to contradict him. Yes, but if he were mistaken? "Clearly," he muttered, "clearly I cannot risk that!" But, as he walked along, he said to himself: "To-morrow, when I go to see her again, I shall be very unfortunate or very stupid if I don't get hold of something which will confirm or dispel this idea."

It was past midnight when he entered his mother's presence, for with his sister she was waiting for him. "I have been very anxious," said Madame Delorge, "for Monsieur Roberjot told me this very evening that a determined resistance is to be made against the empire. Do your duty, my son, but be very prudent; remember that you will be especially watched—and think of the triumph it will be for our enemies if you furnish them with an excuse for involving you in trouble."

He reassured his mother, and bade her good-night. His sister murmured, as he kissed her: "Poor Raymond! Why will you not trust me?"

The fatigues of this harassing day had one good result—they brought him slumber. He slept until ten o'clock, when he was awakened by old Krauss coming in with two letters. At the sight of one of them Raymond started for he recognized Simone's writing. His hands trembled to that degree, that it was almost impossible for him to break the seal.

This is what he read at last: "I had lost all consciousness of what was going on about me, when, as my mother said, you broke out into violent denunciations of the Count de Combeldaine. I must repeat to you, therefore, my best and only friend, what I have already said—that any violence at this hour will render all that I have suffered utterly useless, and at the same time, do no good. I have taken it upon myself to promise the Duchess de Maillefert that you will resign yourself to our sad fate. It is a horrible sacrifice, I know; but it is on my knees that I ask for it, and in the name of the Past. Will you refuse me? Am I wrong in my reliance on your affection? Answer me.

SIMONE."

Hot tears, as burning as molten lead, fell from Raymond's eyes. "She has been compelled to write!" he muttered. "And how am I to reply to these prayers dictated by her relatives?"

The other letter was from the Society of the Friends of Justice—which he had neglected for some time: “Be at the Rue des Cinq-Moulins, at Montmartre to-night at nine o’clock, without fail. Matters of the highest importance will be brought before the Society.” Then followed the forms only known by members of the Society, and which guaranteed the authenticity of all documents.

Nine o’clock! and it was at eleven that Raymond was to be at Madame Cornevin’s. “Nevertheless, I will go,” he said to himself. And at half-past eight he started.

The weather was foggy, and the pavements covered with mud. The outer boulevards presented their usual animated appearance at that hour of the evening. The cafés and taverns were crowded, and the rattle and clink of glasses could be heard. Groups of young men and women passed by, laughing and talking loudly, and grisettes wrapped in cloaks hurried to a rendezvous or a ball. Then came a drunken man. Alas! Raymond was tempted to envy this drunken man, for he was weary of the state of perpetual anxiety in which his life was spent.

“At this very moment,” he thought, “according to Madame Cornevin’s success or failure with Flora Misri, my last chance is assured or it has escaped me altogether.”

His mind was so absorbed in this idea that he had paid little attention to the summons of his secret society. It only recurred to him on reaching the house, which he found to be lighted up. He gave the pass-word to the “brother” who mounted guard at the door, and then went up the stairs. About fifteen “Friends of Justice” were already assembled, and one of them, a physician—a stout, ruddy faced man, better known by his advanced opinions than by his medical attainments—was drawing in forcible language an exact picture, as he swore, of the moral and material state of Paris. After this orator came another, who with a dozen journals open in his hand, undertook to prove that the Provinces only awaited a signal from Paris to rise in a body and put an end to the imperial *regime*. Immediately two other members started up to announce their wishes and opinions. They disputed; and their words became so sharp that the chairman called them both to order.

Thereupon Raymond requested permission to say a few words. “Citizens,” he began, “allow me to remind you that it is nearly ten o’clock, and that it is time to bring forward the important matters which have called us together.”

“What matters?” asked the chairman in surprise.

“Why those respecting which I was summoned here.”

“Summoned!”

“Yes, this morning—by a letter.”

Every face was turned toward the chairman, whose countenance evinced considerable astonishment. “You received a letter?” he said to Raymond; “and from whom?”

“I thought it was from you, sir,” said Raymond, as drawing it from his pocket, he added: “Here it is!”

Not a word was spoken after the chairman took the letter. He began by examining the paper, the seal and post-mark, after which he looked at the writing. “This is amazing!” he exclaimed. Twenty questions were addressed to him from every part of the room, but he did not answer any of them. “There has been no communication sent for days,” he continued. “Neither I, nor the secretary, nor a member of the committee has written.”

“No one!”

"And yet you have received a letter which presents every indication of having been sent from me. These are all my private signs."

The chairman handed the letter to the person next to him. It circulated from hand to hand, and everybody muttered in turn: "Incredible! I should have been taken in myself."

"Yes; so would everybody," cried the chairman, "and that is the worst feature in the case!"

It was not necessary for him to say this, for every one understood him.

"Where does this letter come from?" he continued. "Is it a joke? I don't think so. Is there a traitor among us who has written it? If so, what could be his motive? Must we consider it as the work of the police?"

This last word fell on the assembly like a shower-bath. Faces became pale, and glances were turned to the doors and windows as if in search of a means of escape. More than one Friend of Justice fancied he already heard the doors of his prison cell creak on its hinges. "The police," continued the chairman, "has apparently discovered the existence of our association. To many of us that means exile or imprisonment. But let us look at this more closely. Why should the police write this letter?"

This question was the signal for a violent discussion. Some of the members insisted that their plans should be more speedily put into execution, others proposing that the society should be dissolved until a more propitious season. At midnight the assembly had resolved on nothing, except that they would call a general meeting at once. Two members were then sent out to reconnoitre, and returned to say that there were no suspicious signs to be detected. Then one by one the members filed out, Raymond among the last, just as the clock was striking one.

The night was very dark, and, seen through the fog, the street lamps were no brighter than lighted cigar tips. Raymond knew it would simply be folly to look around him, to try and ascertain if he were followed, and he did not think of it for a moment. He had far more reasons for alarm than his political friends had, as he was well aware. He recognized Combelaïne's treacherous hand in this last blow. And a presentiment told him that this letter concealed a snare. What did his enemies now propose to do? To get rid of him probably. After Flora Misri's confidences, he had become too dangerous not to trouble the slumber of all these scoundrels. What, then, would be more simple than to arrest him "in the very act"—that is, at the place where the secret society met—to sentence and dispatch him to Cayenne?

His knowledge of the circumstances imposed on him certain obligations which he was too honest to evade. Before the meeting broke up he had told his political friends all he could to put them on the right track, but without imparting to them secrets which were not his own. However, they paid little attention to his words, for he was a very unimportant member of the society; and they thought him rather conceited to imagine that the police had concocted this false letter for himself alone. So little did they attend to his remarks that no one offered to accompany him home.

But he did not dream of danger. As he walked along the outer boulevard, now silent and deserted, he only thought of Madame Cornevin, who had been expecting him, and of the suspense she would endure until he could with decency present himself in the morning. He had just reached the end of the Boulevard de la Chapelle, when two or three men ran hastily past him. He hardly noticed them, being still absorbed in wonder as to the result of Madame Cornevin's application to her sister. Of course a great deal depended on what Flora Misri had done after her flight. Had she seen the

Count de Combelaïne either that night, or in the morning? If she had, there was not a vestige of hope. If she had not, then all depended on Madame Cornevin's tact.

He was walking slowly, when about midway down the Boulevard Rochechouart he heard some moans. They seemed to come from a bench a few steps off. He peered through the darkness, and fancied he could see a black mass on the ground. He hesitated, and then moved on as the moans grew louder.

The most ordinary prudence enjoined him to observe great caution; for every Parisian knows this to be a common device of scoundrels to get their victims into their power. But Raymond was not prudent. He advanced until he found himself standing over a man who seemed to be in terrible convulsions. Moved by pity, he stooped down.

And at the same moment a terrible blow, such a blow as a butcher would fell an ox with, struck him on his neck, at the base of his head. A hair's breadth higher and he would have been killed. But he was only partially stunned, and a moment later he shouted "Help! Help!"

The summons to the secret society was now explained. He knew that he was trapped. Only those who have seen death so near can ever know the world of thoughts which surged through his brain in that brief moment. "Poor mother!" he murmured, thinking of the unhappy woman who was waiting for his return at that very moment, and who at dawn would receive his body. Then Simone's name escaped his lips. In his pocket there was a letter from her, the last he had received. He knew that it would be found and read, and that it would perhaps compromise her, or at all events warrant her being summoned as a witness. So he took the letter and conveyed it to his lips, intending to swallow it.

This was the last act he was conscious of. Three men surrounded him, and he was unable to defend himself, for he was dizzy from the terrible blow he had received. "Help!" he cried once more. But at the same moment he received a thrust from the blade of a knife between his shoulders. A mortal chill seemed to strike his heart, and he fell, stiff and unconscious, face downwards, on the ground.

When his senses came back he found himself in an unknown place, stretched out on the billiard table of a café. A man about his own age was leaning over him examining his wound with the dexterity of a medical practitioner.

Two other men were curiously watching the process, while the waiter of the café, in his white apron, held the candle to afford the doctor the light he required. Near a table, moreover, a stout little woman was tearing an old napkin into strips.

Raymond saw all this as if in a dream, and so indistinctly that his eyes closed again. The first idea he was conscious of was one of wonder that he was still living. If, as he believed, he had been assailed by the Count de Combelaïne's paid assassins, how was it that the miscreants had not finished him? Had they learned their trade so poorly that they had believed him dead? He did not know the gravity of his wound, but he felt quite certain that his life was not in danger. He heard the physician say, moreover, as he put on the bandages, "He will be on his feet again in less than a month."

Raymond felt very thankful on hearing this, and with a mighty effort he asked to be told what had happened. He was then informed that the café was called the Café de Péricle's, and was kept by a worthy Prussian, Justus

Putzenhofer, with the assistance of his wife and a cousin named Adonis. The gentlemen who had come to his aid were the habitués of this café, Dr. Valentin Legris, M. Rivet, a merchant in the neighbourhood, and an enthusiastic journalist, M. Aristide Peyrolas. These three gentlemen, indifferent to police regulations, were finishing their game of whist, when they heard a shout for help, which is not an agreeable sound after midnight on the outer boulevards. They rushed out at once, but they were too late to prevent the crime, as Raymond already lay on the ground; and they could hear the flying feet of the assassins far down the street.

Raymond listened in silent wonder. Could it be, after all, that he had been attacked by ordinary thieves? He asked to have his clothes examined, and found that his watch and pocket-book were gone. He had been robbed! Did it therefore follow that the assassins were not in the pay of M. de Combelaïne and his friends? By no means. For it is the A B C of the spadassini's profession to rob the man who is killed, in order to lead investigation astray.

Then Raymond remembered the men who had run past him. They had gone on undoubtedly to prepare their ambush. But his certainty as to their character was not absolute—and so he murmured aloud: "Were they really robbers?"

This was not much to say—but it was enough to arouse the attention of a quick-witted person like Dr. Legris. So, when Raymond had given an account of what had happened, the doctor remarked, in a tone which was too easy and careless to be altogether natural: "You will have to say all this before a commissary of police."

"No, indeed!" exclaimed Raymond; "by no means!"

And, in fact, how could he file a complaint—and against whom? To provoke an inquiry without naming Combelaïne, would be simply to put the investigators off the track. To give Combelaïne's name would involve the Duchess de Maillefert, her son, and even Simone herself—and at the same time provoke the Duke de Maumussy, M. Verdale, and Flora Misri. Then again, one of the first questions addressed to Raymond would be: "Where did you pass the evening? Where were you coming from?" To name the Rue des Cinq Moulins would be simply betraying the Friends of Justice. And that the police knew and watched over this association was proved by this forged letter, which could only have been procured through some traitor's aid. All these considerations presented themselves with relentless logic to Raymond's mind. And so, in the tone with which a man asks an enormous favour, he entreated his rescuers to keep this attack, of which he had been the victim, absolutely secret.

It was asking a great deal, particularly without giving any explanation. Every one, however, followed the example of Dr. Legris, and promised silence and secrecy. Then Raymond breathed more freely; and after giving his name and address, and a promise to call at the café as soon as he was better, he started to leave. He got on his clothes without much difficulty; but when he attempted to stand, he tottered and would have fallen but for the doctor's assistance. "I must have a cab," he said.

At all hours of the night cabs are to be found on the outer boulevards, going back to their stables or to the railway stations. Adonis went out, and soon returned with one, the driver of which was tempted by the promise of a large gratuity.

When Raymond was installed on the cushions, the doctor insisted on going with him, saying that he could not allow him to go off alone in such

a state. Raymond would not have submitted to this from any other person, but he was attracted by the physician's face, which was both keen and frank in expression ; and besides, he felt that he needed him. He was determined to conceal his misadventure from his mother, and he proposed to feign a cold or lumbago. But if he were obliged to remain in bed for some days, who would take care of him? Dr. Legris was the very man, of course. As to the rest, he could trust in old Krauss.

This was all settled in his mind when the cab stopped at his mother's door. The air and increasing fever lent him certain strength which he knew would be needed to prevent his mother feeling any alarm. He excused himself to the doctor for not inviting him to come in, for at that hour it would have disturbed Madame Delorge. "The banisters will help me up," he said.

He then shook hands with the doctor, and entered the house. But it is one thing to drag one's legs over a level surface and another to climb stairs, as Raymond quickly found out. However he set his teeth firmly, and although the pain was atrocious, he succeeded. Fortunately old Krauss was alone, and when he saw Raymond, whiter than a spectre, with his disordered garments covered with mud, advancing towards him, he lifted his arms to heaven, and, in a husky voice, exclaimed, "Wounded!"

Faint and exhausted from the exertions he had made, Raymond could only nod.

"By Combelaïne or Maumussy?" asked the old servant.

"By their people, probably."

The old man took his young master in his arms, and carried him rather than helped him to his room; and then as he undressed him, he said:

"Your coat is wet with blood, and your overcoat too; both have been cut through by a knife. You were struck in the back, then. I know the handiwork of the villains who killed my general." But when he discovered that the wound had been dressed—"Ah! you have seen a doctor," he exclaimed. "Yes, and a good one; the bandage is put on as it ought to be. Our own surgeon in my time couldn't have done better."

Raymond was obliged to ask him not to talk any more. "Hide my clothes," he said, "and when my mother is up in the morning, tell her I came in very tired, and that I need rest. But mind you come to me at nine o'clock, whether I am asleep or awake. I have a letter to send to Madame Cornevin. It is a secret which I confide to you, and you are not to speak of it to anyone. Now go. You see this wound is nothing."

His wound, it is true, presented no bad symptoms; but it was painful enough to prevent him from closing his eyes all night. He lay thinking, and in the silence and darkness he applied all his penetration to analyse this last event. How dared Combelaïne, this prudent, cunning man, resort to an attack of this nature in the public streets of Paris? It was certainly a most decisive step to take, and an efficacious one, so far as disposing of an enemy went, but it left a most uncomfortable piece of evidence—the body—behind. Moreover, it required accomplices, who, in nine cases out of ten, turn on the instigator, and expose the plot. "It must be," concluded Raymond, "that his situation, which I believed impregnable, is really horribly compromised—that he knows himself to be on the verge of ruin."

And it was at this moment that Raymond saw himself down on his bed, and for a week, at the least, prevented from acting. What could not Combelaïne achieve during these days of security—particularly if he had prepared

everything for a rapid denouement? A week! Why in that time he could marry Simone, and Raymond could not oppose it, as he had sworn to do, even by violence, even by crime. A cold perspiration broke out on his forehead at this frightful thought, and, fever doing its work, a slight delirium set in, and he seemed to see the Duchess de Maumussy, Madame de Maillefert, Baron Verdale, and Flora Misri all bending over him with sneers and laughs.

When Krauss entered the room in the morning, Raymond was sleeping quietly; but, true to his word, the old soldier awoke his master. "I told madame that you had a severe cold, and that you would remain in bed, you thought. How do you feel?"

Raymond was suffering intensely. He said, however, that he was better, and told Krauss to give him a pencil and paper. He wrote to Madame Cornevin as follows:—"An unforeseen circumstance, and one quite independent of my will, prevented me, dear madame, from keeping the engagement which you were kind enough to allow me to make with you. To-day I am kept in my bed by an attack of lumbago, so that it is impossible for me to go and see you to ask for the result of your application to Madame —. Pray let me know it without delay. You can easily imagine the suspense in which I am. I rely on your promise to keep the secret. It is now more indispensable than ever. R."

He folded and sealed this letter. "Krauss," he said, "I wish you would find an excuse for going to Madame Cornevin's."

"Oh! that's easy enough. I have to take back some patterns which she sent to my young lady."

"Very well—then you can easily manage so that no one shall see you give her this letter. Wait for an answer; and, Krauss, make all possible dispatch."

Krauss still lingered. "I think, sir, I ought to say one thing to you."

"And what is that?"

"Last night, about midnight, a man, in a blouse—a big fellow—with a fresh coloured face, came to the concierge, and asked if you were in. He said he was one of your old workmen."

"What did the concierge say?"

"That you were out, of course. The man seemed very much annoyed, and said he would call again. And about one o'clock he came to the door. The concierge had gone to bed. He pulled the cord, and in a minute more heard a voice call out, 'Well, has he come in?' The concierge flew into a rage. 'Bless my soul!' he cried, 'is this an hour to come here after any of our people? No, Monsieur Delorge has not come in, and you had better take yourself off!' Upon which the man decamped." Raymond listened attentively. "In my opinion," resumed Krauss, shaking his head gravely—"in my opinion, that animal was a spy—an accomplice of the fellows who attacked you."

"Very possibly," said Raymond, although he thought precisely the contrary.

By the light of recent events he clearly saw that two intrigues were going on about him. For some time he had been quite certain that he was watched and followed. He had also decided that the surveillance was double. One watcher had saved his life at Neuilly and La Villette; the other had prepared the snare into which he had fallen on the Boulevard Rochechouart. Combelaïne managed one of these surveillances. But the other? Who could pay for that except Laurent Cornevin? And in his

own heart he believed that the man who had incurred the wrath of the concierge by inquiring for him was Laurent himself, and, moreover, that it was he who had been with Madame Cornevin. "He expected me," thought Raymond, "and, knowing the immense interest I had in being punctual, he was astonished at not seeing me at the appointed hour, and so he came here to find out about me."

All this seemed so plausible that he said to Krauss, hastily, "Give me that letter again."

And the old soldier having done so, Raymond hastily wrote a postscript. "I know," he said, "the cause of your trouble the last time I saw you. In the name of Heaven confide in me!"

Whether he was right or wrong in his conjectures, he could see no harm in writing as he did. But the tedium of waiting was dreadful. Krauss certainly could not have arrived at his destination when Raymond began to expect him back, and said to himself, "Deuce take the old fellow! He ought to be here by now."

Suddenly a slight noise was heard. It was his mother, who cautiously opened the door and looked in.

"I am not asleep!" he exclaimed.

She thereupon came to his bedside and stood looking at him. "How pale you are!" she said. "I think it would be best to send for a physician."

"By no means," he answered decidedly. "I shall be on my feet again in three days."

Madame Delorge shook her head. "Do as you think best," she answered simply. But she said this in such a tone that Raymond was troubled to the very depths of his soul.

For the first time the suspicion occurred to him that his mother was not deceived, and that if she chose to appear so, it was out of that delicacy which mothers often evince. What did she think then, however? But he could read nothing in her face, which had quickly resumed its ordinary calmness of expression.

"Remember, my dear boy," she said, as she kissed his brow, "that I have no other reliance than you in this world, and that all my hopes rest upon you."

With his sister Pauline, Raymond found that he must be still more on his guard. She looked at him so keenly that he turned away his head, "Is it politics," she asked, "that have made you ill?" Fortunately, she was called, and hastily departed, leaving Raymond in a state of excessive irritation.

Dr. Legris was ushered in at this moment. "Well! How are you?" he said, when he reached Raymond's bedside.

"I am in absolute agony."

The door was shut, so that there was no imprudence in speaking like this. "Is it your wound?" asked Dr. Legris.

"What else should it be, pray?"

The doctor did not reply directly. "It is difficult to understand," he said, as if uttering an axiom of general utility, "the precise influence which the mind has over wounds."

From any other person Raymond would not have accepted this infliction very calmly, but Dr. Legris had already inspired him with that confidence which precedes friendship.

"What wouldn't I give to be able to rise!" he sighed.

"You must not think of such a thing," answered the doctor, imperiously, "under five or six days—and not even then, possibly."

He had seated himself, and begun to write a prescription, when the door suddenly opened, and Krauss appeared. The old soldier, taking it for granted that his master was alone, had drawn a letter from his pocket, but he quickly thrust it back on seeing a stranger. "Did you not ring, sir?" he asked, anxious to find an excuse for his appearance.

"No," answered Raymond, "I did not ring, but you come just in season. This gentleman is a friend and a physician, and he will tell you what you are to do for me."

The doctor was acute enough to see that he was in the way, and so in a very few minutes he departed. As soon as he had gone, Raymond exclaimed: "Did you give my letter to Madame Cornevin?"

"As soon as I was alone with her," said Krauss.

"Did she read it in your presence?"

"Yes."

"And how did she look while she read it?"

From the glance that the old soldier gave his master, it was clear that he had an idea in his head. "At the beginning," he answered, "she was just the same as usual, but all at once she started."

"You are sure of it?"

"Certain—and she turned as white as a sheet."

"But she said nothing?"

"No; she only drew a long breath, and looked round as if she were frightened. Then she wrote this answer."

Raymond thought no more of his wound. He snatched hold of the letter, and turned it over and over, hesitating to open it, as he felt certain that it contained words which would influence his whole destiny:—"Faithful to my promise, dear Raymond," wrote Madame Cornevin, "I went to Madame Misri's yesterday, at nine o'clock. I found her in despair, sobbing and tearing her hair. She had just returned home, having spent the night with one of her friends. During her absence all the papers in her possession had been stolen. My visit was useless, and so I withdrew. Yours faithfully.—J. CORNEVIN."

"P.S.—I do not understand your strange postscript. What do you mean? There was no trouble but yours the other night, my poor child!"

One by one Raymond had seen all the hopes he cherished fade away. He had come to regard misfortune as the law of his life. So this letter did not surprise him. "She distrusts me," he thought. But his opinion was in no degree changed, and he felt more than ever convinced that Laurent was with his wife. But why should Madame Cornevin distrust him? Might it not be that her husband had dictated this reply—and if so, why should he persist in this impenetrable incognito? What terrible revenge was he maturing for all his wrongs?

These preoccupations at first rendered Raymond oblivious of the intelligence that Flora Misri's papers were stolen. The thief, of course, was De Combelaïne. And yet, if he had obtained possession of these dangerous documents, why should he have had recourse to the assistance of assassins? "I shall see Madame Cornevin on Sunday, at last," sighed Raymond, worn out by thinking, "and I will make her explain herself."

Vain project. For the first time for eighteen years Madame Cornevin failed to spend Sunday with Madame Delorge. "She is afraid of me," said Raymond, "which shows me I am correct in my suspicions. Good heavens! how long must I lie here?"

It was not until six days had elapsed that Legris ceased his professional visits and came as a friend. It was clear that the sharp-eyed doctor had scented a mystery, and that he would have been happy to solve it. But Raymond did not care about this. After so many years of absolute solitude, he experienced a feeling of positive relief in the companionship of a man of his own age—of a man who was evidently so superior in all respects—whose practical good sense was apparent in all he did, and who had that peculiar experience of life in general, and of Paris in particular, to be acquired in the medical profession. The hour which M. Legris spent every day by Raymond's bedside was the most agreeable of the twenty-four to our young hero—the only one, in fact, in which he was in the least relieved of his own affairs and melancholy thoughts. All the rest of the day was inexpressibly weary. And yet everybody seemed to believe in the reality of the ailment he professed, and both Roberjot and Ducoudray paid him such constant visits that he was rarely left alone. Through M. Ducoudray he heard all the gossip of Paris, while M. Roberjot acquainted him with all the details of Pierre Bonaparte's affair.

But Raymond listened with an inattentive ear. What did he care for Prince Pierre? What were politics to him? It was to the Maillefert mansion that his thoughts had flown. What was going on there? What had become of the quarrel which had seemed on the point of occurring between Philippe and the Count de Combelaïne? Whom could he trust to make enquiries? He thought of sending Krauss, and then of Dr. Legris. Should he send one of them to Miss Lydia Dodge? Would she not refuse to receive them? Or, if they succeeded in reaching her, would she not refuse to speak? Raymond at last became anxious about the apartment he had taken in the name of Paul de Lespéran. Would not the concierge begin to gossip if his absence lasted any longer?

In this way the days passed on. On Wednesday Raymond sat up for a few hours. On Saturday he was up all day. On Sunday he had at last decided to go out, when Krauss appeared with a letter which had just been left. The dirty envelope, the writing, the orthography, the ink, and the words written across the corner, "Personal and Immediate," all bespoke the anonymous letter, the most cowardly, shameful, disgusting weapon that can be used. Raymond was on the point of throwing it into the fire. But he suddenly remembered that he was not in a position to neglect anything, and so he broke the seal.

It was, indeed, an anonymous letter. An unknown individual, who signed himself a friend, begged him to go that same night, at midnight, to the ball at La Reine Blanche. There a man would accost him and take him to a place where a scene which he ought to view would take place. "It is a mere mystification," murmured Raymond, as he crushed the letter in his hand and flung it on the floor.

But five minutes had not elapsed before he asked himself if he were not hasty in his decision. He picked up the letter, smoothed it out; and read it again. He noticed one strange point which at first had escaped his observation, but which now struck him with astonishment. The person who gave him the rendezvous at La Reine Blanche, said, "I come from the Garden of the Elysée." Was it mere chance which had caused this terribly significant phrase in the letter? And some lines further on: "If Monsieur Delorge is not willing to do this for his own sake, he will do it for her's." She—who could she be, if it were not Simone de Maillefert? Raymond must indeed have been an utter simpleton not to see that the person who

wrote this letter was thoroughly acquainted with his life, with all his sorrows, his hatred, and love. And to whom among all those who knew his life could he attribute this anonymous letter if not to Combeldaine? Yes, to Combeldaine or to Laurent Cornevin. If it were Laurent, Raymond had everything to hope. But if it came from the Count de Combeldaine, he had everything to fear. "No matter," he said, "I will go."

And yet, was it not, in his present state of weakness, an act of the most absolute temerity to go alone into the lion's den? But who could accompany him? There was no one but Krauss. "And why not Dr. Legris?" said the young fellow with a start. And indeed, when the doctor came in, Raymond, without the slightest preamble, handed him the letter to read.

The doctor was at first absolutely stupefied, but presently expressed his opinion that this was a snare. Raymond admitted that such had been his own idea. He said, however, that he was fully determined to go to La Reine-Blanche, and to go alone, if need be. The doctor accepted this indirect invitation, and it was all the more meritorious on his part as no explanation was given him. Raymond and M. Legris accordingly repaired to the ball-room, where they were at last approached by a man who, having pronounced the words, "I come from the Garden of the Elysée," bade them follow him.

They did so. They were introduced into the Montmartre Cemetery, and by the light of the moon they witnessed that strange scene, in which five persons—four men and a woman, whom the others called Madame la Duchesse—audaciously scaled the walls of the burial-ground and violated a grave to ascertain if a coffin were empty! The watchers' guide abandoned them and fled, and all their efforts to find him and compel him to give an explanation of his conduct utterly failed, so that they remained face to face with an absolutely startling problem.

Never had Dr. Legris' curiosity been so highly excited. But subtle as was his penetration, he was so entirely ignorant of Raymond's antecedents, that he had no basis on which to found any conclusions. Besides, had he known anything of Raymond's past, it is doubtful if the knowledge would have been of use to him. Indeed it was in vain that Raymond himself tried to connect this scene in the cemetery with any circumstance in his life.

However, he felt that he had no right to ask the assistance of Dr. Legris without explaining the whole situation. Accepting the services of a friend in this way was to incur certain tacit obligations. Raymond now, more than ever, realized how useful a friend could be to him as the hour of the dénouement gradually approached. So he begged the doctor to come and dine with him at his mother's that night, adding that they would talk afterwards, and that he would open his whole heart.

Part VI.

LAURENT CORNEVIN.

I.

DR. VALENTIN LEGRIS was not of those gay students who, after years of beer and absinthe, carry off their diplomas through sheer audacity of good luck. Sprung from a poor family—his father had been a carpenter—Dr. Legris owed his modest position entirely to his own intelligence and industry.

He had been irregularly educated in various directions—at one time at a school which clothed and fed him on the express condition that he would win the state prizes at the end of the year ; and he was usher in another establishment at the time he took his bachelor's degree. The next year he made enough by giving lessons to buy a few books, and pay for his entrance fee at the medical school. He often suffered ; for young fools round about him, kept in idle luxury by their wealthy families, regarded poverty as a crime, or as a folly worthy of ridicule. But he was not of the stuff that is seriously affected by such things, or by jests anent the shabbiness of his boots and the old-fashioned cut of his coat. His natural gaiety was not embittered ; it was simply sharpened to that point of sceptical irony which becomes men who realize their own value, and who intend to scale all obstacles in their path.

He could never be induced to affect a pedantic gravity far from his natural character, nor to find an element of success in patient hypocrisy, like others. He was not adverse to pleasure, and he proved it whenever, by some lucky chance, a few unexpected gold pieces fell into his hands. Several of his professors considered him too independent, and even went so far as to reproach him for evincing at times a spirit of contradiction and insubordination. His examination was none the less a triumph, however, and one of so brilliant a nature that the faculty looked forward to great things from him in the future. Unfortunately, his diploma did not bring him a large income ; and after receiving this parchment, he found himself as often as before face to face with the dismal problem of how to live.

For weeks his life was very hard. He could be seen then with a care-worn brow and lingering step, wandering about in the halls of the medical school, or standing in front of the panel, which hangs on the right on entering, and bears mention of all applications and offers. On one side was the advertisement of a ship about to sail for the Polar Seas, and wanting a surgeon ; that of a rich foreigner, old and sick, who desired the exclusive care of a competent physician ; that of a country village, where the old practitioner had just died, and which took this means of making its wants known. On the other side there were five, ten, fifteen young men, who, with diplomas, but without money, offered to accompany some young and interesting invalid to Italy, or even to give advice in the back shop of some apothecary.

"People must have food, you know." This was what Dr. Legris said to himself more and more bitterly each day, and he had almost decided to apply for the ship and the Polar Seas, where at least he should sit down at table twice a-day, when one of his comrades presented him to the celebrated

English physician, Harvey. Dr. Harvey was then residing in Paris for the winter, and had just issued his famous work on poisons. He needed an assistant, and took a great fancy to the young medical student. At the end of a year, Dr. Harvey had become so much attached to him, indeed, that he made him an offer to accompany him to London, with an assurance that he would answer for his future.

Although Legris was profoundly touched by this kindness, he refused the offer, and was installed a few months later as nurse-surgeon at the Paris hospital of La Pitié. The years that then elapsed were monotonous, but interesting ones. He brought to his work, and to the exercise of his profession, all that passionate obstinacy which alone makes a man superior. He expended all his energy in struggles against illness, suffering, and death; and displayed alike a sagacity and fecundity of resources and a boldness and patience which astonished the oldest practitioners. This was no reason why all these men should be his friends, and yet they were so. They knew him to be poor, and they took every opportunity of calling him in for consultation, and also sent him patients whenever it was possible.

Never did the celebrated Professor B——meet a difficult or obstinate case in his practice without calling in his assistant. This situation under one of the shining lights of science brought Dr. Legris into relation with a great many persons. Some of these connections were simple and agreeable; others were flattering; again, others were important enough to be of use to him whenever he left La Pitié. It was in this way he became acquainted with the Duke de Maumussy, when the latter thought he had been poisoned in 1866; with the Princess d'Eljonsen, when she was thrown from her carriage at the races; and with Madame Verdale, after that famous ball given by the baron, when the poor woman was so cruelly burned by a fire that broke out in the midst of the entertainment.

But as Dr. Legris' friends said, he did not possess the faculty of utilizing these people. The fact was, he did not care to do so. One of those all-absorbing passions, which the wisest of men cannot control, had taken possession of him. He had fallen in love with a young girl of the working classes, and she trifled with him. He was poor, and she coveted toilettes, diamonds, and carriages; all the brutal splendour which torments the brains of poor girls and speedily leads them to the prison of Saint Lazare or the hospital. However, the doctor loved her, and he struggled to give her what she desired. So his existence during the last few months he spent at the hospital was a perfect hell. Still he bore everything until positive knowledge of her infidelity was forced upon him—and then he broke with her. He had saved a little money, and with this he established himself at Montmartre, on the Place du Théâtre. In less than six months his practice was larger than he could attend to. It was not an especially lucrative one, no doubt, but still it was amply sufficient for his needs.

Toil and time did their work, and by degrees he recovered from the shock he had experienced; the past faded away, his old ambition resumed its sway, and he determined, as soon as he had saved a few thousand francs, to establish himself in central Paris. Such, then, was the man in whom Raymond, in his extreme distress, had decided to confide without restriction.

On taking leave, young Delorge had said: "To-night at six o'clock," and as he returned to the Rue Blanche he discovered a thousand reasons for applauding his resolution. This time, thanks to Krauss, Madame Delorge was ignorant that her son had passed the night out of doors, and

so she received him as usual. "I have taken the liberty, dear mother," he said, as he embraced her, "to invite one of my friends to dinner, and I beg of you to receive him cordially."

It was the first time since his return to Paris that he had introduced a guest to the house, and so his mother evinced a little surprise. "Do I know this friend?" she asked.

"I think not, my dear mother, but he is an extremely clever person; some four or five years older than myself—Dr. Legris."

"You never spoke of him to me," said Madame Delorge, as she rang the bell. "But that makes no difference; if he is your friend, it is quite sufficient. And as he is a physician, he is probably something of an epicure. I must interview Françoise in order to give him a good dinner."

Françoise was the cook. She soon appeared, and while Madame Delorge gave her orders, Mademoiselle Pauline approached her brother, and fixing her eyes on him, said: "Is not this Dr. Legris the gentleman who came to see you every day while you were in bed?"

"Precisely."

"Then—I understand."

"And what, pray?"

"I understand what the cold was which confined you to your bed, and why it was so promptly cured."

"Raymond concealed his impatience. "How exasperating this little girl is!" he thought, at the same time feeling somewhat mortified at being caught in his falsehood. However, he replied aloud: "Is it so extraordinary that one of my friends, who is a physician, should come and see me when I'm ill?" He rose as he said this to leave the room.

"Are you going?" exclaimed her sister.

"I am busy."

But as he reached the door she said: "What! not one moment longer? We have great news for you."

"News?"

"Yes; of Jean." Raymond looked at his sister, and detected a strange tremor in her voice. "This morning," she continued, "Madame Cornevin received a long letter from her son."

"Which she came to read to you?"

"Oh, no! she sent it. She has so much work to do, and is so busy, that it was impossible for her to get away from her workroom for an hour."

Raymond's suspicions quickened. "Poor Madame Cornevin," he said, in a low voice, "must be indeed crushed by work. On Sunday she could not come to dine with us—she was not here yesterday—and to-day she deprives herself of the pleasure of reading a letter from Jean. Don't you think this a little singular?"

Pauline coloured. "No, it does not strike me as singular," she said.

"You know, then, what important matters detain her?"

"Certainly. Is not this the gayest season of the year? Isn't to-morrow Shrove Tuesday? Are there not ball-dresses, fancy costumes, and the like to be made?" Pauline's blushes grew deeper as she spoke; her mother had heard her last words.

"I am sure," she interposed, "that Julia"—for she now always spoke of Madame Cornevin by her Christian name—"has a great deal to do; and yet I am a little surprised that she has not been able to find an hour to spend with us all the week."

Raymond shook his head, while watching his sister out of the corner of

his eye. He thought that it was himself that Madame Cornevin avoided, and that Pauline certainly suspected something. "I kept Jean's letter," continued Madame Delorge, "for you to see, my son."

This letter, as Raymond knew in advance, would give him no information. He was right; for Jean, faithful to this decision, breathed not one word of his journey, nor of his discoveries, nor of his father. He spoke of M. Pécheira, but only as a charming man, as a friend whose acquaintance he had made in Melbourne, and who had shown him all that was worth seeing there. He concluded by saying that his passage for Liverpool was taken on board a vessel which would leave Melbourne three weeks after the one which carried this letter.

"And so," said Raymond to his mother, as he handed her back the letter, "we may hope to see our traveller at almost any moment. He may not perhaps come for a month, but at the same time he may walk in to-morrow morning."

"You forget that he is on board a sailing vessel," said Pauline.

Raymond looked at her in astonishment. "How do you know that Jean took passage in a sailing vessel?" he asked.

She burst out laughing, with that nervous little laugh which sounds almost like a cough, and which is the resource of women in embarrassment. "Does he not say so in his letter?" she rejoined.

"No; he says nothing of the kind."

She shrugged her shoulders, and remarked, with feigned carelessness: "I must have dreamed it, then!"

Madame Delorge might be deceived by this remark, but Raymond was not. "Ah! ah!" he thought; "my sister is in direct communication with Master Jean."

But he was not displeased by this discovery, so constant and close was the intimacy between the two families. Only, if Jean had been in communication with Pauline since his departure, she had unquestionably been informed of all that had been hidden with such infinite care from her mother and Madame Cornevin. A man of twenty-five has no secrets from the woman he loves. This discovery gave Raymond a clue to the singular conduct of his sister—to the significant manner in which she spoke, and to her entreaties that he should trust in her. "It is clear," he thought, "that she knows all I know of Laurent Cornevin's existence!"

But this was no time to question Pauline. It was late, he was worn out with fatigue, and Dr. Legris might come earlier than was expected. So he took refuge in his little study, and had not been there very long lying on the sofa before he fell asleep, and dreamed that his dear doctor was sitting by him.

Dr. Legris, however, was at that moment in his own apartment, where he was hurrying through a consultation—hurrying through is the expression to use. He was not by any means naturally amiable, but his patients had never seen him in this exasperated, impatient mood. The fact is, that he knew himself to be expected in the Rue Blanche at six o'clock, and he not only had eight or ten visits to make, but he was eager to find himself alone for ten minutes, that he might reflect on the strange events which were about to interfere with the monotony of his life. "Yes," he thought, "this is certainly a most extraordinary story; for if any one had told me yesterday that it was possible for such an event as I witnessed in that cemetery to happen in the city of Paris, in the year 1870, in the midst of a great army of guardians and policemen, I should have laughed aloud!"

With all his anxiety and preoccupation, it was wonderful that the doctor, as he attended to patient after patient, was able to retain all his keen medical perception and *sang-froid*; but thanks to what Professor Bechat once called "the habits of the profession," he certainly succeeded in doing so. When the last visit was accomplished he uttered a sigh of relief, and dressed in haste to drive to the Rue Blanche.

Dr. Legris pleased Madame Delorge at first sight—and Madame Delorge was not easily pleased. She found him, as she told her son the next day, both acute and frank, which is a rare thing, as acuteness almost always precludes frankness. As for the doctor, he was struck by the distinguished bearing of Madame Delorge, and by Pauline's surprising beauty. The dinner, however, would not have been very cheerful had not the doctor possessed that precious faculty which allows a man to lay aside his most pressing and harassing cares, just as he lays aside his cigar on entering a drawing-room. He had seen too much and with too observant eyes for his conversation to be deficient of that delicate savour which is only imparted by a full knowledge of Parisian life. He wished to please and be pleased, so that considerable time elapsed after the dinner, and coffee had long since been served, when Raymond rose and said: "We are forgetting our business, dear doctor. Come, my mother and sister will excuse you."

And a moment later they were seated in Raymond's study, before a good fire, with the doors closed. The doctor had lighted his cigar and ensconced himself in a comfortable chair in front of the portrait of General Delorge, which puzzled him so much whenever he looked at that sword with its scabbard sealed with large red seals, and hanging right across the canvas.

This was the time selected by Raymond to disclose the history of his life to his new friend. At table, while Dr. Legris had talked to the ladies, Raymond had had time to reflect and decide how to condense this tale. His narrative was therefore remarkably clear, and yet precise enough not to leave out a single detail of any value. And when at last it was completed, he said: "Now, doctor, you know my life as thoroughly as I know it myself! and you are far better able than I to judge if my game be not irretrievably lost, and if it is not utter folly for me to continue to hope and keep up this contest any longer."

Dr. Legris did not reply immediately, but smoked on in silence until his cigar was exhausted. That he was thunderstruck was clear. He had expected something strange, but this exceeded his conjectures. His thoughts then flew back to himself. He remembered that he, too, had loved; that he, too, had had his days of despair and distrust, and yet what a difference there was between the unhappy passion which had blasted his life and the pure and noble love which he had just heard spoken of!

As Raymond spoke again he started, and in a voice that quivered with emotion, he said: "Upon my life, my dear Delorge, in my opinion, your position has never been better. I honestly believe that you have never been so near success."

After the events of the last few days and such a succession of disappointments, these words fell on Raymond's ears almost like mockery. "Doctor," he said reproachfully, "doctor!"

But Legris answered: "It is not my usual habit to preach optimism, but what have I to do with a result which is still in the future? A man of brain and heart must act as if he had everything to expect, and console himself if he fails as if he had never had anything to hope! It is Maistre who said that."

He rose as he spoke, and approaching the chimney-piece remained standing. His eyes flashed fire, and every feature bespoke energy and manly strength. He looked as he appeared at times at the bed-side of some patient suddenly struck down by a terrible malady, and on whom he felt he ought to try some heroic remedy. And after all was this not a consultation? "My dear Delorge," he cried, "we will give your enemies the rope with which they will hang themselves, I trust. They may instead of that, crush us—of course I admit this possibility—but we will show fight all the same!"

If fear be contagious, assurance is none the less so. On hearing the doctor express himself in this way, Raymond's courage and hopes rose fast.

"To begin with," said Dr. Legris, "who is the author, the instigator of this mysterious and altogether abominable intrigue which has taken Mademoiselle Simone from you, and by which it is proposed to give her to a scoundrel like Combelaine? The facts are patent to the most ordinary intelligence; the instigator is the Duchess de Maumussy."

"I am certain of that."

"And so am I. Had she any interest in preventing your marriage? Evidently, and the most natural, and at the same time the most powerful in the world. You pleased her and she was rash enough to allow you to see it."

Raymond coloured. "I am not a conceited man," he muttered; "and it is a most painful thing for me to say—but——"

The doctor smiled. "I am aware," he said, "that a man is always supposed to occupy a ridiculous position when a woman loves him like that—in spite of himself. But here the fact is clear, and is not to be got over. And you—how did you reply to her significant advances? Like a simpleton, like an honest man as you are. A different man would have managed this dear duchess. He would have recognized the necessity of so doing, and would have soon managed her as he pleased. But the past is past. You are not aware, perhaps, that I have the pleasure of knowing this lady."

Raymond looked amazed. "You know Madame de Maumussy?" he asked.

"Indeed I do, though I am as yet but a little way up the ladder of medical fame." And, lighting a cigar, Legris continued: "When Monsieur de Maumussy fancied he had taken poison, which was about two years ago, I spent, I may say, some three weeks in his bed-room. Persuaded that some people wished his death, so that they might get possession of certain documents relating to the *coup d'état*, documents that he had steadily declined to give up—this noble person was literally dying of fear. He was frightfully afraid of poison, and thought he should find it even in plain boiled eggs. My especial duty was to examine every dish that was sent in. When he saw that I partook of them, and yet lived through that experience, he ventured to taste them himself—often before a mirror, to see if he turned pale, and with his hand on his stomach ready to ask me for an emetic at the slightest suspicion of colic. In the beginning I admit that the duke's terror and talk amused me, but at the end of four days I had become weary, more weary than I can tell you, and I should have deserted at once, had I not been as poor as Job, and if my dear and respected master had not stipulated that I should receive five louis per day. On account of this money I remained in the house; and merely to amuse myself I began to study the Duchess de Maumussy."

"She was quite as much bored with all these proceedings as myself."

Still she never left the little parlour next her husband's room; she took care of him, and tasted his food, but she never ceased laughing at him, and telling him that after all a man can die but once, to which he replied, 'that might be, but he should like to make it as late as possible.' She had never seen me before—I was not one of her acquaintances, but she felt the necessity of talking—and then you know a physician is of no consequence. She simply thought aloud in my presence, and let me here assure you that she thought some very strange things. She astonished even me—and yet I had received many strange confidences in my time. When she talked to me of her beauty, of that rare and almost fatal beauty you know of, she frightened me. It was, she said, an exceptional power that had been given to her, and which she should not deserve, if she did not use it to achieve some great end—or even some crime—according to the occasion. Also to turn the heads of fools, or simply to please the man who should please her. I never saw the shadow of a scruple about her, but under all her languid grace I divined a soul of fire, and the eccentric imagination of an opium smoker. My dear fellow, this is the woman who loved you madly enough to throw herself at your head. So you can draw your own conclusions as to her feelings towards you when you disdained her, and towards Mademoiselle Simone, whom you preferred."

Raymond was silent! Was this not almost precisely what the baron had said to him so long ago? "Then," continued the doctor, "it is to Madame de Maumussy that we must attribute this plan of Mademoiselle Simone's marriage, and the choice of the husband also. Does not this very choice betray the hatred of a woman who believes herself scorned? Who in fact did she choose? A scoundrel utterly without honour or reputation. The man whom she loathes and despises more than any other man in the world—Combelaïne himself."

Of this last point Raymond was utterly ignorant. "Do you mean," he exclaimed, "that the Duchess de Maumussy dislikes Combelaïne?"

"She told me so," answered the doctor with emphasis. "She told me so over and over again, and she also told me why. Do you know that it was the Count de Combelaïne whom the Duke de Maumussy suspected of trying to poison him?"

"Is it possible?"

"And the duke himself openly spoke of his suspicions."

"Oh!"

"And he bade me increase my watchfulness on the days that Combelaïne entered the room."

"But do you mean that he dared to come?"

"Most certainly."

"And was received?"

"Of course. How could De Maumussy and De Combelaïne afford to come to an open rupture?—two men who had been so closely connected—two such friends! It would have been scandalous."

Raymond was confounded.

"Then you can see that to make her vengeance all the more sure the duchess precisely chose this man. The difficulty was to induce Mademoiselle Simone to marry him—to give him her hand and fortune. Madame de Maillefert at first failed in the accomplishment of the task, but Madame de Maumussy determined to succeed."

Raymond started up. "Yes," he exclaimed, "she succeeded! And how? That is just what I want to know."

The doctor shrugged his shoulders. "After all," he said, "what does it matter? We know that they made Mademoiselle Simone believe, in some way or another, that this marriage alone could save the honour of the illustrious house of Maillefert. That is all we need to know at present. Now let us see what happened next. At first De Combelaïne and the Mailleferts, mother and son, were dazzled with their good luck, and consequently were much pleased with each other. When they came to the question of dividing the spoils, however, there was a change. According to what you have been told, the Mailleferts have been fooled, and I must confess that I am not surprised. Now, they would like to break off this marriage, but it is impossible. Combelaïne wishes it—and Combelaïne is master of the situation."

The doctor began to grow a little excited. He was as yet only conjecturing on these points, but he seemed to discern the light which announced the truth as Aurora heralds the dawn. "Yes," he resumed, "Combelaïne holds the young duke in some way, and through him the duchess. You can do nothing against him. He has, I am convinced, very little fear of Flora Misri. Besides, he will do his best to hasten a marriage which will give him, the tarnished adventurer, an assured position as a member of one of the oldest families in the kingdom, as well as the possession of immense wealth. However, Combelaïne is not as completely victorious as we have been led to believe. Between him and the object at which he aims there is some obstacle, which as yet is hidden from us; of this I am convinced. He knows something that we don't."

"But I will know!" exclaimed Raymond; "I will find out!"

"I shall not look for it," said the doctor, gaily, "for the obstacle, I am certain, is none other than Laurent Cornevin."

The conclusion was perhaps erroneous, but it was so logical that Raymond could not contradict it. "In that case," he said, "Combelaïne is aware of the existence of Laurent and his presence in Paris."

"Perhaps," answered the doctor, slowly, "And then, after a moment or two of reflection, he continued: 'I am certain that Combelaïne knows of the existence of some enemy, and a powerful one, too, who is lurking in ambush ready to profit by the slightest mistake he may make, to pounce upon him. Adventurers like himself, whose existence is a perpetual defiance to society, have always a sixth sense which warns them of danger. He has felt the earth tremble under his feet. This valet who has served him so long—who has been his confidant, and his accomplice in many of his infamous schemes—what has become of him? How could he leave a master who owed him so much money? Madame Misri herself could not understand it. Neither can I. And who is this Englishman who gave him such fabulous wages? May not this Englishman be a Frenchman like you and me? May he not have made a fortune in Australia? The letters that Madame Misri possessed have been stolen. By whom? It is by no means certain that it was by Combelaïne. It seems to me that if he had these famous letters in his possession—these papers which are so compromising—he would never have tried to murder you, Raymond Delorge, the other night.'"

Raymond had been duped by all these hopes and illusions too often to be much exhilarated by his friend's words. "Do you mean to say"—he said speaking very slowly—"that you believe the person who carried off Flora Misri's papers to be Laurent Cornevin?"

"That is precisely what I mean."

"But how could he know of their existence? How——"

Dr. Legris stopped his friend with a gesture. "You forget," he said,

"this valet who possessed all Combelaïne's and Flora's secrets. This Leonard—do you think that it was only yesterday that he was bought by the Englishman whom I choose to call Laurent?"

Raymond was as if struck by lightning. "Merciful heavens?" he cried, "that would be indeed our salvation. Do you know, doctor, that Madame Misri told me that these papers would not only ruin Combelaïne, but also his accomplices Maumussy, Verdale, and the Princess d'Eljonsen?" But a sudden reflection chilled his enthusiasm. "If Monsieur de Combelaïne knows nothing of Laurent's existence," he asked, "who can he suppose has taken the papers?"

"Why, you, of course!"

"That is to say, he believes me to be the inexorable enemy who crosses his path all the time, and defeats his combinations?"

"Precisely."

"Then this would explain the assassination?"

"And also why you are surrounded by spies, my dear friend, and why Laurent watches over you."

Thus it was that the doctor answered all the objections made to his theory.

"And yet," resumed Raymond, "one thing which passes my comprehension is, why Laurent should so persistently avoid me."

Legris smiled. "But I understand it very well," he replied. "Let us see. Has not Laurent every reason for turning the attention of these people, whom he wishes to attack, on you? If they believe you to be their only enemy, is he not free to carry out his plans. While they watch you, Laurent watches them. Were he to consent to see you, and to combine his plans with yours, twenty-four hours would not elapse before they discovered his identity."

Leaving Raymond to meditate on these words, Dr. Legris slowly drank a cup of tea, which had just been brought in by Krauss. After which, lighting another cigar, which he smoked contemplatively, he continued expounding his theories as follows:

"Now," he said, "let us look at our adventure in the cemetery. Let us try to find the author of that anonymous letter. Is it Combelaïne? No, certainly not. It was through a forgery that we entered the cemetery, and Combelaïne would not have been compelled to resort to any such means. With one word to the Prefect, he would have been able to obtain any permits he desired, and would not have used the forged ones which our guide had. The conclusion is therefore inevitable. It was Laurent Cornevin who wrote the letter, and it was one of his agents who joined us at La Reine-Blanche. But he left us most treacherously, you say? Certainly, and that was because Laurent was determined to avoid you."

"I see!"

"Now then, we have to ask who the people are that we saw climb over the cemetery wall and violate the tomb of Marie Sidonie. Were they Combelaïne's people? No; for it was clear they were in connivance with our guide. So the man, who appeared to us to be a man of the world, was an agent of Cornevin's, if not Cornevin himself."

Raymond caught his breath. "But the woman," he exclaimed, "who was the woman whom the others called 'Madame la Duchesse?'"

"I must confess," answered Legris, "that I did not recognize the Duchess de Maumussy; but, of course, this woman, who ever she was, disguised herself as far as in her power, for an expedition like that; so we have

no means of judging who she might be from her appearance. The next point is to ascertain the meaning of this scene, that escaped me utterly, and I am not ashamed to say so. I can discover nothing in your past which seems to have the smallest connection with this violation of a grave, and yet you were summoned in such a way that it is evident your presence was regarded as indispensable. Cornevin is not a man to take such a step without an adequate motive; for, as I said before, I feel certain that he was the author of the anonymous letter. Again: this letter said, 'Come for her sake, if not for your own.' The 'her' could, of course, only refer to Mademoiselle Simone. So the conclusion is inevitable that the woman we did not recognize was the Duchess de Maillefert."

Raymond's face lighted up with hope. Was Fate weary at last? he wondered. But the doctor was buried in thought, and his contracted brows indicated that his reflections were not altogether pleasing in character. "Softly—softly!" he said at last; "we won't shout victory just yet;" and as Raymond was about to speak, he added: "I see one black spot on the horizon. You are, I think you said, a member of a secret society?"

"Yes; and I was returning from one of its meetings when I was attacked."

"Precisely; and what did your friends think of the forged summons you had received?"

"It disturbed them very much."

"Do they know what happened to you on your return home?"

"I wrote to them the next day."

"And then?"

"Our chairman came to ask me all the particulars, which I gave, but without mentioning the name of De Maillefert, which would have been saying that I attributed the forgery to the Count de Combelaïne."

"And what did the chairman say?"

"That as it was a personal enmity he was reassured. Still to guard against the police having penetrated our secret, he had deemed it advisable to take immediate measures to change the place of meeting as well as the pass-words and signals."

"These people are simpletons," answered Legris impatiently. "Haven't they yet learned that these conspiracies are the very best traps which the government can possibly have for the people they find inconvenient? If the government had no other enemies than these it would last for centuries." Then suddenly he added: "And that, my dear fellow, is your great danger. Your secret society is Combelaïne's great weapon against you. As soon as he is ready to use it, he will."

"What can he do?"

"Only send you to Cayenne."

"True," answered Raymond. "But what can I do?"

"You can conceal yourself."

"My dear doctor!"

"It is the word that repels you. Call it disappearance, then, if you like that better, and do it to-night or to-morrow. What prevents you? Your mother? Not at all, for you have only to tell her that you believe the police to be on your track, and she will be the first to approve of your determination. How do you think Combelaïne would look if some fine morning his spies told him that Delorge had disappeared totally and entirely?"

"Concealment would mean condemning myself to utter powerlessness."

"What would you do if you did not conceal yourself?"

"I don't know; but it seems to me——"

"You are wrong. You can do literally nothing now. It is between Combelaïne and Cornevin that the struggle is now going on. Who will be the conqueror? I will bet on Cornevin. If he triumphs, the woman you love will be yours. But if he fails, believe me when I say that you would not have won."

Raymond still continued to urge further objections. "Were I to disappear now, I might hopelessly complicate Cornevin's plans," he said.

"I believe that you would, on the contrary, serve them. Don't you think that you are a fearful care to him? Don't you think that, knowing as he must, that your life is in constant danger, and that you have already once escaped an assassin's knife, he is absorbed, in trying to protect you?"

What was there to say to such reasoning as this?

"I would not hesitate," answered Raymond, "if the opinion we have was based on anything more than conjectures."

Legris stopped him. "Suppose I brought you," he said, "the undisputable proof that the papers stolen from Madame Misri are not in Combelaïne's hands?"

"Then it would be very different. But how could you do so?"

"There is a way, perhaps," answered the doctor. And after a little hesitation, he said, in a changed voice: "Once I was madly in love with a woman who turned out very badly. I had the strength to break with her but I have not had strength to forget her. A man does not tear a passion from his heart as he tears out a tooth. In spite of everything, I still feel, I shall always feel, the greatest interest in this poor creature, who has now become a celebrity in her wretched circle. I have watched her from afar, and she has become a great friend of Flora Misri. Through her we have a chance of getting at the truth."

"Oh! doctor," murmured Raymond.

"For a year it would have been a great act of imprudence on my part to face this woman," said the doctor. "I was not cured. But now I am sure of myself. To see her again will be a frightful shock to me. I know this, but I am willing to endure it. I think she will do what I ask. To-morrow, before twelve o'clock, I will go to her and ask her to make Flora Misri talk."

II.

It was on the Boulevard Malesherbes, at the corner of the Rue de Su-resnes, and two steps from the Champs Elysées, that the woman whom Dr. Legris had formerly loved, resided. She called herself Lucy Bergam. To say that the doctor's heart did not beat a little quicker when he was fairly on his way to her rooms, would not be true. But he had promised Raymond to go there. He fulfilled a duty, he thought, and one that was all the more sacred since he had told the entire truth to his friend. He had not said, however, this Lucy Bergam was precisely the famous actress who had cost the young Duke de Maillefert so much money.

"Madame Lucy Bergam," said the concierge of the house, "lives on the second floor, the first door on the right. But she is probably out at this time of day."

M. Legris climbed the stairs very slowly, summoning all his strength to control the evidence of any emotion. He rang two or three times before the door was opened, which was finally done, in the slow, cautious style which people who fear an incursion from an enemy are apt to adopt. A chamber-

maid, with a sly, impudent expression, thrust her head out and examined the doctor from head to foot. "What do you want?" she said,

"I wish to speak to Madame Bergam."

"She is out."

It was easy to see that the girl was lying, although she did so in a most facile manner. Dr. Legris did not argue the point, but simply took out his card-case. "Hand this card," he said, "to Madame Bergam. I will go away; but I shall go down the stairs so slowly that you can recall me, if she should desire to receive me."

He had not descended ten steps when the maid rushed after him: "Madame will see you, sir," she exclaimed.

He turned back, and was shown into a drawing-room which was furnished in the most detestable taste, crowded with ill-assorted articles, some of them very valuable, and others simply ridiculous. However, this did not astonish the doctor; but he was surprised to see signs of a sudden departure scattered round the room. There were two huge trunks half-packed, and several bags and bonnet-boxes standing round about. On the tables, chairs, and floor lay a profusion of articles of clothing—cashmere shawls and linen, dresses, bonnets, petticoats—in fact, all that prodigious accumulation of raiment which a fashionable woman feels called on to drag about with her.

However, before Dr. Legris had time to reflect, a door was thrown open and Madame Lucy Bergam appeared wrapped in a once superb dressing-gown which was now tumbled and dirty, and with her hair streaming over her shoulders.

"Valentin!" she cried, as she advanced with open arms.

But the doctor drew back and said, coldly, "Yes—it is I."

He felt none of the emotion he had feared, and he knew that all was over, and that Madame Lucy could disturb him no more.

"I knew you had not forgotten me," she continued, breathlessly, "and that you would come to me if I were in trouble."

"Are you in trouble?" he asked.

"She seemed to be utterly astonished. 'What!' she exclaimed; 'didn't you know it?'"

"I know nothing."

"Why! all Paris is talking about it. The papers are full of it. Philippe is in prison."

The doctor started. "Philippe," he repeated, "Do you mean the young Duke de Maillefert?"

"Yes, he was arrested at five o'clock yesterday evening. We had gone to dine, together, with some of his friends, at the Café Anglais, when two gentlemen suddenly appeared and asked to see the duke for a moment. It was a nice moment, indeed, for as soon as they were shown into the room, they exclaimed—'Sir, we arrest you in the name of the law!'"

"It's most extraordinary," muttered the doctor.

"Had I been in Philippe's place," continued Madame Bergam, "I should have let these men know that a duke could not be arrested with impunity. But he was as meek as a lamb. He turned deadly pale and trembled so much that I really thought he would fall. He rolled his eyes about as he declared, over and over again, 'There is some mistake. I give you my word there is some mistake!' However, the others said they knew very well what they were about, and they had a warrant, and indeed they even showed it to him."

"And then he followed them?"

"Not immediately. He first asked for a vehicle. They said there was one at the door. He next asked permission to write some letters. They replied that their orders were that he should communicate with no one. He then said, 'Very well—let us go.' And they went off; but as Philippe reached the landing he turned and came to me, and whispered in my ear: 'Go and see Verdale and Combelaïne at once, and tell them that I consent to everything.'"

"To everything! To what?"

"Ah! I don't know."

"And you did as he told you?"

"I tried to do so; but I could not find M. de Combelaïne, and when I went to see Verdale there was no one there but his son, who received me as if I had come out of the gutter."

Dr. Legris was more and more astonished. All his previous ideas and theories were totally upset by this new and most extraordinary incident.

"But why was M. Philippe de Maillefert arrested?" he asked.

"I know no more about it than you," rejoined the young woman, "but there are some particulars in one of the newspapers. Wait a moment till I find it."

She looked about and finally discovered the paper she was in search of, and the doctor then read aloud the paragraph she pointed out to him:—"Yesterday at the Bourse a rumour was in circulation of the arrest of one of our most conspicuous young noblemen, one who has already been celebrated for his constant ill-luck at the gambling-table and his falls upon the turf. Incredible as the rumour at first appeared, it was soon ascertained to be true, and we have been to obtain the following information, which we lay before our readers:—The young Duke de M—— was arrested at the house of a person of his acquaintance, and immediately taken before the investigating magistrate, M. Barban d'Avranchel, to whom the management of the affair is confided. Subsequently he was removed to the prison of the Conciergerie, where he still remains in custody."

"A person of his acquaintance, indeed!" grumbled Madame Bergam greatly offended. "They mean me of course, although he was not arrested at my house, and I think it would have been much better to have said so."

However, the doctor went on: "The young duke, it would appear has lately been the chairman of an important financial company, and we are assured that he has been guilty of some great irregularities, or if he has not himself committed them, he has allowed others to do so. However we will abstain to-day from repeating any of the stories in circulation; and our readers will naturally understand our reserve. We prefer to appear less well-informed than our contemporaries rather than add to the grief of a great family, by propagating a report which we trust may yet prove to be a mere misunderstanding."

"What an extraordinary thing!" muttered the doctor, as he slowly read this paragraph over again, trying to find out if there were nothing between the lines, and paying little or no attention to Madame Bergam, who was giving vent to a steady stream of words, expressive of her grief and anger.

"This is just my luck," she sighed. "Such things never happen to any one but me. Philippe arrested! And at what a time—just as I find myself in a dreadful fix, utterly overwhelmed with debts and without a sou. Philippe had paid no one for months, and has kept on saying to his creditors that before three months, he would be in possession of millions!"

At this moment the noise of a loud discussion was heard in the ante-room. "What can that be!" she asked, impatiently, and with heightened colour.

She was about to ring, when the impudent-looking maid appeared, and, in a sulky tone, exclaimed: "It's Monsieur Grollet."

"The livery stable-keeper?"

"Yes."

"Tell him to call again."

"Tell him so yourself, then, madame; for I can't."

Madame Bergam stamped her foot angrily.

"Bid him come in then."

Dr. Legris sheltered himself behind the newspaper. This name of Grollet had startled him, for was it not that of the groom at the Elysée Palace, who had been so audaciously substituted for Laurent Cornevin, and whose false swearing before M. Barban d'Avranchel had contributed to save De Combeldaine?

Grollet came in and looked the very type of a prosperous horsey character—impudent and swaggering—a gold chain dangling from his waistcoat, and his hat on his head.

"What, is it you, M. Grollet," began Madame Lucy, in most dulcet tones, "who has come to torment me?"

"I need my money."

"Don't you know what has happened to me?"

"Monsieur de Maillefert in prison, do you mean?"

"Precisely."

The man gesticulated vehemently, as he said: "My money is lost, then, I suppose! Confound all these nobles! they are greater cheats and swindlers than any others. But I won't stand it, and you will please understand that it is no use to send to me for carriages any more, for you won't have them!"

He swore and raved, but somehow his anger did not strike Dr. Legris as altogether sincere.

"Dear M. Grollet!" supplicated Madame Lucy.

"What is it?"

"You will surely let me have a single horse-brougham with——?"

"Pay me some money on account then."

"Alas, I can't!"

"Then you will have no carriages."

"But what shall I do?"

"Do," sneered Grollet—"you will do like honest women. You will have to go about in omnibuses."

Madame Lucy looked at the doctor imploringly. Perhaps she vaguely hoped that he would take some bank-notes from his pocket and relieve her feelings by throwing them in the man's face. But in that case she was mistaken.

Dr. Legris only had eyes for Grollet. It struck him as very extraordinary that this man, whose establishment was one of the best known and most lucrative in Paris, should come in person to make a scene—a disagreeable proceeding which is usually left to a subordinate or a lawyer. Was he not obeying orders?

"Very well," replied Madame Lucy, tired of waiting for some interference from the doctor; "I will go about in omnibuses, then. Only don't be uneasy—I will pay you sooner or later."

"Take your time," replied the man roughly; "only if you don't pay me, I shall seize your furniture." And thereupon he went off.

Madame Bergam seemed inclined to have a fit of hysterics. "Just think of it," she sobbed; "as soon as these people know you to be in trouble, they fall on you tooth and nail. Upholsterer, milliner, and dressmaker, they have come in steady procession ever since the morning. I shall be arrested for debt, I'm sure of it. Oh! if Philippe were only here! But if ever he comes out of prison he shall pay me for this! The idea of leaving a woman in such a position!"

It was not only on Philippe's head that Madame Lucy poured out her anathemas; a considerable proportion of them were directed to the doctor, who had not interfered. But he was determined not to understand her, and so with the most careless air in the world, he said: "Then it is this fracas that causes your departure?"

"What departure?"

With a gesture he pointed to the disordered room, the trunks and bags.

"True," replied the young woman, "true! I forgot. Unfortunately, it isn't I who am going. I have a great many beautiful things—cashmeres, worth a thousand crowns a piece, laces at twenty-five louis a yard, and diamonds valued at more than a hundred thousand francs. But my furniture is not entirely paid for, so that I have nothing to depend upon but my clothes and jewellery. And the brigands will take them from me! They will say that I have ruined Philippe, and I shall have to let them say so, because it is somewhat flattering, after all. But just look at it yourself. How can I ruin a man who has nothing? Philippe has'n't a farthing; we have been living on credit everywhere. He told me that, the day after his sister's marriage we should roll in gold. Only his sister doesn't seem inclined to marry, and I am left in the lurch like this, and expected to keep his creditors at bay. Ah; if I had only known, I should have remained a shop girl in the Faubourg Saint-Jacques."

Perhaps there was some truth in what she said. Perhaps Dr. Legris was more cruelly avenged than he dreamed. But what did it matter to him now?

"Do you mean," he asked, "that all these things lying about here are not yours?"

"No, indeed—they don't belong to me. They belong to Flora Misri, a friend of mine, who has been hiding here with me for nearly a fortnight."

The doctor's eyes gleamed. "Hiding? Why, what was the poor woman afraid of?"

"Of Combelaïne. Ah! if she had only believed me. But no, the man has bewitched her. She is really afraid to go to her own rooms. All those things you see there were fetched piece by piece, by my maid. She, who was once so covetous and suspicious, now trusts her keys, and even those of her secretaire to the first comer. We were just going to pack her trunks when you came in. She intends to go off to England this very night, and thence to America."

No one knew better than Dr. Legris how much reliance could be placed in this woman's statements, but he smiled doubtfully. "A pretty story," he said, cheerfully, "a capital one!"

He wished to pique Madame Bergam, and he succeeded the more easily as she thought that he doubted the reality of her distress.

"You think I am lying," she cried; "well, wait a bit, you shall see for yourself." So saying she opened a door and called out: "Flora! Flora!"

Madame Misri instantly appeared. Her pallor and the circles round her eyes showed how little she had slept, as did her nervous, frightened glance and fluttering hands. There was no mistaking her age now. However, the doctor went towards her and abruptly said: "Madame, I am the intimate friend of M. Raymond Delorge."

A faint colour rose to Madame Misri's face. "M. Delorge has behaved," she said, "in the most dishonourable way. I had the weakness to reveal to him the existence of certain papers, and he profited by this knowledge to enter my rooms and steal them."

She evidently believed what she said.

"You are mistaken, madame," answered the doctor; "I swear to you that my friend never touched your papers."

"Who did then?"

"The one person who had the greatest interest in taking them—the Count de Combelaïne."

Madame Bergam listened in astonishment to this conversation, and began to suspect that Dr. Legris had not come for her sake after all.

"No, it was not Combelaïne who robbed me," said Madame Misri.

"How do you know?" asked the doctor.

"He told me so."

"Did he never lie to you?"

She shivered at some recollection, and then eagerly added: "At all events, he did not lie on this occasion. On the day after I had met Monsieur Delorge, in despair at what I had done, I came here to pass the night on a sofa."

"Yes," interposed her friend, "that's true."

"At eight o'clock in the morning I sent for a cab and drove home. I had decided on what I would do. I had resolved to give Victor back all his papers without any conditions whatever. I opened my secretaire for them, and they were gone! I questioned my servants. They had seen and heard nothing. I lost my head, and I don't know what I did. My sister came in the midst of all the hubbub. I really think I was crazy."

"That was what Madame Cornevin said," interrupted the doctor.

"My sister had just gone," continued Madame Flora, "when Victor appeared. He knew of my leaving his house with young Delorge, and he was furious. He shut the door of my room, and locked it behind him. 'Now then,' he said, 'give me those papers this moment.' I had hoped till then that it was he who had them. 'But you know,' I said, 'that I have not got them any longer!' At this he became absolutely livid, and without one word he darted to my secret drawer, where he supposed I kept them. But they were not there. 'Ah! miserable woman,' he cried, 'you have sold them to the son of General Delorge!' He looked so awful that I fell on my knees, and swore to him that I had not done so. But he would not listen to me. He caught me by the throat. 'You will see,' he cried, 'how I treat traitors!' And he would certainly have killed me, if one of my servants, hearing my cries, had not burst the door open and saved my life."

It was with the greatest difficulty that Dr. Legris concealed the immense satisfaction he felt on hearing all this. "And after that?" he asked.

"After that, I thought Victor would go crazy with rage. 'I have not succeeded this time,' he said, setting his teeth, 'but your hour will come.' Then, before going away, he added: 'Your friends, Raymond Delorge, and all the scoundrels who have paid you for your infernal treason are no doubt

triumphant. But they crow too soon. I am possibly lost; but they are not saved, and I don't intend to perish alone. They don't know what a man like myself can do when he is pushed to extremities.' I tried to undeceive him—I tried to convince him that I had been a victim, as well as himself. But he would not listen. 'Go and find your Delorge,' he said, with a sneer 'and let him protect you, if he can!' and then he went away."

She stopped. She was in such a pitiful state that Madame Lucy, whose tears were always ready to flow, now began to weep. "Poor Flora!" she sobbed.

However, Madame Misri continued: "When Victor had gone I fell on the floor unconscious. When I recovered myself I found Dr. Buiron leaning over me. You know him, perhaps?"

Yes, M. Legris knew him. Dr. Buiron was the very physician who, eighteen years before, had been called to the Elysée to see General Delorge, when he was already stiff and cold. "M. Buiron is a fellow practitioner," said Raymond's friend simply.

"He is a very sagacious man," rejoined Madame Flora, "as is proved by the fact that he is rich, both in purse and honours. And yet, when my eyes met his, I shuddered with horror, for I knew this Dr. Buiron; he often came to pass the evening with Victor. There was a letter from him among the papers which were stolen. So my first idea was: 'This man has come to poison me!'"

Poor Madame Misri! Big tears rolled down her pale cheeks. "I knew very well," she sobbed, "that it would be a very easy thing to get rid of me, and that it would be a crime unattended by much risk. Who would take any trouble about a woman like myself? Men ruin themselves for us—they give us diamonds and flatter us; but when it comes to anything more, they give us the cold shoulder and pass on."

Dr. Legris watched Madame Bergam out of the corners of his eyes. She sat pale and trembling, struck dumb by the despair of this woman whose life she had thought so enviable. "Of course," continued Madame Misri, "I did not allow Dr. Buiron to perceive my suspicions. 'If he realizes that I distrust him,' I said to myself, 'my life would not be worth a moment's purchase!'" So I thanked him, and promised to follow all his prescriptions with the utmost fidelity. But as soon as he had gone, I threw everything he had sent me from the chemist's away, and then I came here. I knew that Lucy had a good heart, and that she would never abandon a friend in trouble, nor betray me, even if they offered her my weight in gold."

"I would die sooner than betray a friend," interrupted Madame Bergam.

"I know that," continued Flora. "I know that very well. Poor darling, I have bored you to death, and given you no end of trouble; but I will show you that I am not ungrateful."

"I ask for nothing, Flora."

"No, but I shall not forget what I owe you, all the same. You are in trouble, and your creditors take advantage of the duke's arrest to worry you. But I am here. I don't choose that my friend Lucy should be arrested, nor that they should make her cry. I have money of my own, and you shall have enough from me, as a gift, to get clear of your creditors."

With one common impulse the women rose and embraced each other with an effusion which would have touched the doctor if he had not under-

stood the true sense of this touching scene. It was now quite clear that Madame Bergam had fully intended to utilize her friend's secrets, and it was equally evident that Madame Flora's sudden and unexpected outburst of generosity was intended to prevent any treason.

As soon as Madame Misri was seated again, the doctor asked: "And now, my dear madame, would it be an indiscretion on my part if I were to ask what you propose to do?"

She looked at him suspiciously. "I have not yet decided," she answered.

The doctor touched one of her trunks with his foot. "I thought you were about to start on a long journey," he said.

"Perhaps."

He expected this cautious reserve. "I am unknown to you, madame—" he began.

But Madame Bergam interrupted him.

"Oh! you may speak out before Valentin," she cried. "I will answer for him."

"I trust, madame, that you will not continue to distrust me when you remember that I am the intimate friend of Raymond Delorge."

"Yes, I forgot—you are his friend."

"His most intimate friend," answered the doctor—"which is to say that our interests, fears, and hopes are one and the same."

At this moment he was interrupted by a great noise of doors, and by a voice in the anteroom, shouting in an angry tone: "I tell you she is here, and I bid you go and tell her that Baron Verdale wishes to see her."

On hearing this name, Flora Misri turned deadly pale. "Verdale!" she gasped. "Victor has sent him—and I am lost!"

To judge what Combelaine was capable of, it was only necessary to note the terror of this poor woman, who knew him so well. "You have nothing to fear, madame," said the doctor; "at least not while I am here."

"Can you not hide her somewhere?" proposed Madame Lucy, eager to serve the friend who had come to her rescue financially. And so saying she opened the door of her sleeping-room. "Go in there," she added, "this gentleman and I will receive your visitor for you."

It was time indeed for, indignant at the obstinate resistance of the servant, Baron Verdale pushed his way past her into the room.

He was the same man as of old, with all the intolerable insolence of a *parvenu*. He was redder than usual, too. Without noticing the doctor, who had retired into a corner, he exclaimed, addressing Lucy: "I knew very well you were at home. What by Jupiter do you mean by shutting yourself up in this way so that people can't get at you?"

"Then you wish to speak to me, sir?"

"Of course I do."

Then it was not for Madame Misri he came, and the luckless woman who heard this in the next room now breathed more freely.

Without deigning to sit down, and in the same rude manner, the architect exclaimed: "You called on me last evening?"

"Yes, sir, I did."

"And as I was absent you asked to see my son?"

"Not at all—your servant showed me into the room where a young man was."

"Very well, that young man was my son."

A little shrug of Madame Lucy's shoulders was her sole reply.

Verdale's ill humour increased. "Do you know," he said, "that it was a most underhand way of getting into a house to tell tales?"

"Sir——!"

Although Madame Lucy was not in the habit of being treated with exaggerated respect, she was not disposed to submit to this sort of thing. "I am not in the habit of telling tales, sir," she replied, drawing herself up haughtily.

"But at all events you did so. What did you mean by talking to my son? When I came in I found him as disagreeable as possible."

It was evident to Dr. Legris that M. Verdale, like many other fathers of the same stamp and style, had found a most inconvenient censor in his son.

"I told him nothing at all," rejoined Madame Lucy. "The young man, who was anything but civil, did not even give me time to repeat what Philippe had told me to say to M. de Combeldaine and yourself. That is, the duke told me to tell you that he consented to everything."

"Upon my word! Does he, indeed! And when did he intrust you with this commission?"

"When he was arrested."

Verdale made an impatient gesture, and rejoined: "Then the story is true, which I read in the papers this morning about the arrest?"

"Most true, unfortunately. But haven't you seen Monsieur de Combeldaine?"

"Combeldaine! Does one ever see him? Does one ever hear him? Does one ever know what he is manouevring for?"

The angry blood rose to the architect's face. He forgot that he was not alone. "He is in hiding," he said; "and it is as well he should be, after what he has done. The idea of arresting the Duke de Maillefert! Was there ever such folly seen—to attract inquisitive eyes to our affairs? How can he now expect to stop these investigations just when and where he pleases? I have only just got what I deserved, for I knew De Combeldaine thoroughly. Don't I know that he would burn down the house of his best friend to warm water for a foot-bath for himself? To think of his not warning me—of his saying nothing to me—of exposing me to this sort of thing!"

If Dr. Legris had had any further doubts, they would have been removed by this explosion. An audacious inspiration came to him. He approached Verdale, and said, in an easy tone: "Perhaps you would not blame M. de Combeldaine so much if you knew the reasons of his conduct."

It was with a look of consternation that the architect now eyed this stranger, whom he had not at first perceived, and who struck him as having risen through the floor. He choked a bit, and then remarked: "You know these reasons, then, sir, do you?"

"I think I know them."

"Ah!"

"An accident has happened to M. de Combeldaine."

"An accident?"

"Yes; or call it an annoyance, if you like—and this hastened his resolutions. M. de Combeldaine is a prudent man, and he knows that he must take fortune at its highest tide now. He had collected and placed, in what he considered a very safe place, a quantity of documents which seriously compromised his very best friends—all people of influence and fortune. These papers were intended, as one may say, to provide for his old age."

The architect became impatient: "To the point, sir, if you please."

"Well, sir, M. de Combelaïne no longer has these precious documents."

"Do you mean those papers he was foolish enough to trust to Flora?"

"They have been stolen."

The color faded from Verdale's face. "I knew that would happen," he said, in a tone of consternation. "Yes, I foresaw it. The day that Flora Misri first threatened us with those papers, I said to Combelaïne, 'Take care! Take care!' But he laughed in my face. Flora, in his opinion, was his property, who would think, feel, and act according to his bidding, and he had nothing to fear from her; but this is the end of it!"

He relapsed into silence, probably measuring the extent of his peril; then, addressing the doctor, he said: "Have you any idea who could have stolen these papers?"

This question was just what the doctor anticipated, and he flattered himself that his reply would serve Cornevin. "It is supposed they were carried off by young Delorge."

"The son of General Delorge?"

"Precisely."

"But for what object?"

"To prevent Mademoiselle de Maillefert from marrying M. de Combelaïne."

"M. Delorge cannot do that," Verdale replied.

"Who knows?"

"I assure you that is impossible. As for Flora, she won't enjoy her treachery, I fancy, without some alloy. And I bid you both good morning."

And, thereupon he went off without having once lifted his hat from his head and shrugging his shoulders as if he reproached himself for taking the trouble to waste his precious time about such frivolous matters.

"He is in a nice temper!" cried Madame Bergam, "and I am inclined to believe there will be a famous scene between him and Combelaïne;" and at the thought she laughed with glee. "The result will be Philippe's release," she continued. "Poor boy! He is too stupid to be a rascal."

She could not continue, for Madame Flora now came out of the room where she had taken refuge on Verdale's arrival. She had knelt with her ear at the keyhole, and had not lost one word of the conversation. "You see," she said to the doctor, "you deceived me, for it was M. Delorge who took the papers."

"Excuse me——"

"You have just told M. Verdale that it was he who took them."

"No, madame."

"You did—I heard you."

"Not precisely; but I wished him to think so, that I admit, for I had my reasons."

She interrupted him in a violent tone! "That is to say, you betray me, too, as all the others have done!"

To dispute with a woman, whose brain is disturbed by anger and fear, is to lose one's time. But Dr. Legris had determined to conquer Madame Flora. So arming himself, with patience, he replied: "Think of what you are saying. How could I betray you? Why should I betray you? For the advantage of De Combelaïne, who is our mortal enemy, who has already assassinated Raymond's father, and who now wishes to rob him of the woman he loves and who loves him? That's foolish. You ought to know that."

Whether she realized it or not, was not certain. At all events, her features softened.

"Your life is threatened by De Combelaïne," continued the doctor, who warmed up to his work. "Between himself and you there is a contest which will, and must last, until one of you shuffles off this mortal coil. This is also precisely my friend's situation. So you and Raymond, whose interests and views are so similar, ought to act together, and aid each other."

"That's true," murmured Madame Misri—"that's true, but——"

"You complain of having no allies and friends. Whose fault is it? You are in a state of indecision between the man whom you have every reason to fear, and the man from whom you have so much to hope. For Heaven's sake take one side or the other."

Madame Lucy here spoke, with a little sneer. "You are losing your time, my dear," she said to the doctor. "Flora will promise all you ask; and your back will no sooner be turned, than she will write to Combelaïne to tell him everything and implore his pardon."

She did not believe one word she said; but she had reflected a great deal during Verdale's visit, and she saw that it was to her interest to declare herself against the people who had arrested Philippe, in order, as she believed, to get hold of his millions—those millions respecting which she had herself formed many agreeable plans. Her raillery, she thought, would be the stinging lash which would decide her friend; and she was not mistaken.

Madame Misri started up with blazing cheeks and flashing eyes; and, in a tone of the fiercest hatred, she exclaimed: "I have been base and cowardly in the past, but that is gone by now. So long as Victor lives I shall tremble for my life. If I knew what words to utter in order to send him to the scaffold, my lips should speak them within the hour." And so saying, she extended her hand to the doctor. "I am with you, sir—with M. Delorge—with my sister. You may rely on me. What do you want of me? Speak!"

A smile of triumph passed over the doctor's lips. "Before anything else," he began, "I should like to know your plans."

"I intend to leave Paris to night, sir."

"Leave Paris? But where would you be any safer?"

"I must go to some place where Combelaïne will not follow me; or, rather, where he won't know I am."

"That is to say, you wish him to lose all trace of you—you hope to escape from the spies which you consider are now around you?"

"I hope so; for all my plans are laid, and my measures are taken with that object. Judge for yourself; my preparations for departure are nearly completed. To night, at eight o'clock, I shall send for a cab on which my luggage will be placed. This cab will convey my dear Lucy and her maid Ernestine, dressed in such a way that the latter will be taken for me, to the Western Railway station, where Ernestine will procure a ticket for London, where she will await my orders at a hotel agreed upon. In the meantime, I shall dress in Ernestine's clothes and go down and see the concierge; I shall offer him ten, twenty, a hundred louis, if it be necessary, to give me the means of climbing over the wall which separates the court-yard of this house from the next one, the entrance of which is in the Rue de Suresnes. Will the concierge refuse? I think not. I shall climb this wall, and shall then be in the street, wearing a servant's costume and carrying a large wicker basket. I shall take the first cab I see, and arrive at the Montparnasse station in time to catch the train for Brest. Thence I go to New York by a steamer, on which my passage is taken under a false name, thanks to

a passport procured for me by M. Coutanceau. Once in America I shall communicate with Ernestine, and have my trunks sent to me without allowing her, however, to suspect where I am. If I cannot do this, that is to say if I lose my trunks, it can't be helped, that's all. Coutanceau will watch over all my interests here. When he came to see me on the day before yesterday I gave him a full power of attorney."

Never did a woman's face express more astonishment and disgust than Madame Lucy's. "Do you mean, Flora," she cried, "that you have arranged this programme yourself?"

"Yes, with Coutanceau's help."

"And you never said a word about it to me!"

"What was the good? Am I not sure of you? Would you refuse a service to a friend, who will release you from all embarrassment, before she leaves?"

"Of course not."

"And would Ernestine hesitate to go to London if I gave her five or six thousand louis?"

"Ernestine would go round the world for that."

"You see, then, that I have foreseen everything," said Madame Flora. And repressing a shiver, she added. "After all, it makes one rather ingenious when one is fighting for life."

She was right. Her plan, moreover, was simple enough and sufficiently well conceived to have ninety-nine chances out of a hundred of success. But in Dr. Legris' eyes it was totally wrong, for he meant to keep Madame Misri within reach, just as one keeps a loaded pistol. "And so madame," he said, "you would desert us at a most critical moment?"

"I would, indeed."

"Is this very—generous?"

"Perhaps not," answered Madame Flora, with the cynical frankness imparted by fear; "but, after all, in this world, every one for oneself. I can't live here; Combelaïne told me that he had doomed me, and I know very well what that means, for I have heard him use that expression of three persons, and in less than a month they were carried to the cemetery."

The doctor saw that he had made a mistake, so he ceased to argue the point. "Go, then, dear madame," he said; "only I——"

"Only what?"

"Only that I believe Paris to be the only city where you can live in security. Here you might escape De Combelaïne's spies, who will follow Ernestine, to be sure, when they take her for you; but in twenty-four hours they will have discovered their error, and before two days are over they will be on your track. When you arrive in America one of Combelaïne's agents who has been warned by cable, will be at the docks.

Poor Flora grew deadly pale. "Oh!" she said, faintly.

Sure of having touched her now, the doctor went on coldly: "America is a great and powerful land, but the people are peculiar. They respect liberty, even to excess. They would never tolerate such a police as ours, whose paternal solicitude is carried to excess."

"You mean, then——"

"I mean that if I were desirous of getting rid of an enemy, I should try and induce him to go to America."

Resolved to serve Dr. Legris', cause, Madame Lucy now interfered. "Ah! dear Flora," she cried, "listen to Valentin. Don't go to that horrible country."

Madame Misri's pale face was expressive of perplexity. "What would you advise me to do, then?" she asked the doctor.

"Remain in Paris."

"But I should die of fear and——"

Legris interrupted her. "I don't advise you to remain here openly."

"Ah!"

"I will agree to hide you."

"Alas! and how?"

"In the most simple way. Execute your plan to a certain extent. The first part of it is excellent. Ernestine will go to London, and you, dear madame, will climb your wall. Only, instead of taking the first cab you meet in the Rue de Suresnes, you will go straight to a vehicle where a friend is waiting for you. This friend, who is wise and prudent, will have prepared a safe retreat for you, he will take you there, and you can wait the progress of events patiently."

"And you think——"

"I think nothing—I am certain that this would be far better."

Madame Misri reflected. "But where," she said; "am I to find a devoted friend?"

"You have me, madame, and I am ready to save you."

"Ah! Flora, were I in your place I shouldn't hesitate," said Madame Lucy.

However, Madame Misri continued to weep silently, and the doctor was arming himself with new arguments, when all at once she exclaimed: "Well, you may expect me to-night in the Rue de Suresnes."

"This evening! no; for I wish to prepare a place of safety for you. You had better say to-morrow."

But she was firm. "No; to-night—and now, the hour?"

"I will be in a cab at eight o'clock, opposite number 20. So that you may run no risk of a mistake, the corner of a white handkerchief will hang out of the window of the cab."

"It is understood then, sir, that I confide myself entirely to you?"

"You shall never have occasion to repent of your confidence, I swear it to you, madame."

When Dr. Legris retired shortly afterwards, Madame Lucy went to the door with him, and on reaching the ante-room she laid her hand on his arm.

"And so," she said, "it was not for me that you came."

"I admit it," he answered, with a smile.

She sighed, and in a husky voice she said, "You have forgotten me, then? and yet——" He did not reply. "All right," she said; "it is better as it is—particularly for you. But we remain friends, do we not? You see that my sympathies are on your side. Adieu!"

III.

As he went down the stairs Dr. Legris said to himself:

"Yes—it is indeed better for me!"

And yet it was not without a certain surprise that he found his heart so light and untroubled. It was, indeed, all over. He had been totally unmoved by the voice and the eyes of Madame Lucy. His only sensation had been a sort of shame that he had ever loved her. The prism was broken, and he saw her as she really was—beautiful, to be sure, but silly, common-

place and vulgar—perverse, heartless and unscrupulous. "And this is the end," he said, "of a passion which I believed would be life-long."

But it was neither the place nor the hour to philosophise, and as he could see no cabs in the neighbourhood, he hurried off on foot, eagerly anticipating the effect of the good news he was taking to Raymond. He knew that he had a great deal to tell, and he felt that the result of his visit to Madame Bergam would be enormous. He had proved to his own satisfaction that no one but Laurent Cornevin could have carried away Flora's papers, and he said to himself that a man possessing such weapons should be invincible. Then was it not a wise plan to induce Madame Misri to remain in Paris? It certainly was; but still he was somewhat embarrassed to keep his promise to find a safe retreat for her.

He remembered among his clients, however, the widow of an officer of engineers, to whom he had rendered one of those services which can never be forgotten. This woman was past middle age, intelligent and energetic, and lived in a little house at Batignolles. It was there he decided to take Madame Misri, feeling certain that no person would ever go there to look for her. And the widow was precisely the person to sustain, encourage, and forbid imprudence on the part of a woman like Flora.

As deeply interested as if he were pursuing his own affairs rather than those of a friend of a fortnight's standing, M. Legris followed the steep ascent of the Rue Blanche. Just as he passed the Rue Moncey he heard himself called by name. "Dr. Legris! doctor!"

It was old Krauss who came towards him with despairing gestures. "What is the matter?" asked Dr. Legris.

"A great misfortune," answered the old soldier. "M. Raymond was dressing to go out after breakfast when a gentleman called to see him. I have seen this gentleman before—that is, he has been at the house. He looked pale and frightened. I showed him into my master's study, but he did not stay more than five minutes, and then went away in great haste. Monsieur Raymond next told his mother and me that a secret society, of which he was a member, had been discovered; that the lists of members were seized, and many members already arrested. Oh! sir, what a woman my mistress is! She didn't lose time in lamenting, but simply said, 'Very well; you must fly. Conceal yourself in Belgium. Fortunately I have three or four thousand francs on hand. Take them, and go at once.'"

"And he has gone?"

"Yes, sir; but before he left he bade me search for you, and prevent you from going near the house, which is watched. I was to tell you that he wished to speak to you, and would wait at the *café* where you took such good care of him—the *Café de Périclès*."

Dr. Legris had predicted all this, and it needed but small foresight to do so, inasmuch as this complication was the natural sequence of the forged summons sent to Raymond as coming from the Society of the Friends of Justice. Having a weapon ready at hand, De Combelaïne used it. Nothing could have been more simple. The only thing singular about the transaction was that this blow had been so long in coming. Why had Raymond not been arrested at the outset?

"I really cannot understand that," muttered M. Legris.

"That is precisely what M. Raymond said when he left the house," Krauss replied.

"How long ago was that?"

"About an hour. You will go and meet him at once, will you not, sir?"

"Yes, at once."

The old soldier's voice trembled. "Then tell him, I beg of you, to keep his eyes open. Tell him to distrust his own shadow. With cowards and assassins there's no disgrace in being prudent."

"You may rely on me, my good Krauss," answered the doctor. And after pressing the hand of the faithful servant, he, instead of following the Rue Blanche, turned into the Rue Boursault, in order to reach the outer boulevard more quickly.

He hurried along with considerable apprehension. Might not Raymond be arrested already? "What utter folly!" he muttered, "to appoint such a well-known place to meet me as the Café de Périclès, which is known, too, as a place where he often goes."

However, he reached the café, which, as usual at this hour, was quiet and almost deserted. Three persons were there—two artists, who were playing at billiards, and the journalist Peyrolas, who, seated at a table, with his ink-bottle beside him, wrote on in a sort of rage. "No Raymond!" said the doctor to himself, turning pale.

Softly as he entered, the furious journalist looked up. "Doctor," he cried, "come here!" And as the doctor meekly obeyed, the journalist continued—"I have written two articles which will make a great stir. I risk having the paper suppressed. I know it, and my liberty is at stake; but no matter! I shall have at least the consciousness of having raised my voice when fear closed all other lips!"

"But what has gone wrong?" asked Dr. Legris, in an absent sort of way.

"The journals announce the discovery of a grand conspiracy."

Legris started. "Does it concern the Friends of Justice?"

"Precisely. There have been fifty arrests already, while to-morrow there will be a thousand. Before the end of the week five hundred citizens will be sent to Cayenne, under the fallacious pretext that they have attempted to disturb order and peace. Do you know, doctor, what I have written, and what I intend to print?" He struck his breast as he spoke. "I intend," he cried, "to prove that this plot never existed—that there has never been any such society, that it is the grossest invention of the police, an abject machination, and an ignoble trap."

The doctor was on thorns. "I must leave you," he said, to the foaming penman, who, however, was not so easily disposed of.

"One moment. I have kept the best till the end. Have you heard nothing of yesterday's scandal?"

"What scandal?"

"Ah! doctor, what hospital do you come from? Are you really ignorant of the fact that the Duke de Maillefert, a real *bona fide* duke, has been arrested?"

Although he wrote the hottest, maddest articles, M. Peyrolas had certain qualities which made him valuable in his line. His facts were usually authentic, as Legris was well aware. So he controlled every sign of anxiety, and quietly asked: "Have you the details?"

The journalist threw back his head haughtily. "Who should have them but me? I have pumped the concierge at the Maillefort mansion, the concierge at the house where a certain actress resides, two employés of the Rural Bank Company, and the cashier at Verdale's. I can even give you the *menu* of the duke's dinner in prison."

"I assure you that I don't care for it," protested the doctor. "I simply

wished to know how a nobleman like the Duke de Maillefert could be mixed up with these rascally financial operations."

Peyrolas pulled up his shirt-collar with an air of importance. "Really, nothing can be more simple," he said, "for a year or two the duke has traded on his ancestors. He was well known at the Bourse. Whoever wanted a high-sounding name on a prospectus knew where to find one, but they had to pay for it, as they would for any article of merchandize. After breathing the fumes of all these financial cook-shops, our young friend took a notion of putting his own hand to the sauce. So one fine morning he joined a company, organized by a cunning rascal whom I have heard you speak of, a certain Baron Verdale, who is about as much of a baron as that waiter is in the corner."

Dr. Legris expected to hear this name. "And then?" he asked.

"Then, when De Maillefert saw that the strong-box was pretty full, he said to himself, 'This money ought to belong to me'—and, to be brief, he employed these funds precisely as he might have done had they been his own."

"But how was the discovery made?"

"In pretty much the same style, I fancy, as all thefts are discovered. Verdale cried out, 'Where is the money?' and as the duke was the only person who could possibly have taken it, he filed a complaint against the young nobleman."

To reconcile this statement and Verdale's surprise at Madame Lucy's was difficult. "Are you sure of what you say, my dear Peyrolas?" asked the doctor.

"Sure? I tell you I have interviewed Verdale's cashier, and have my information from him."

"And haven't you heard that De Combelaine was mixed up in the affair?"

The journalist seemed much astonished. "De Combelaine!" he repeated. "No, I haven't heard his name, and I really don't see——" But he checked himself, and then vehemently exclaimed: "You are right, doctor; Combelaine is about to marry Mademoiselle de Maillefert. Not a week ago, I myself wrote an article on the deterioration of the national character—stating that one of the oldest families of France was about to give their daughter to a miserable adventurer, without either money or honour."

He did not speak; he roared, and Adonis, the waiter, awoke with a start. Recognizing the doctor, he rose with a cheerful "good-morning," and then, drawing M. Legris aside, he explained that Raymond was waiting for him in a small room up-stairs.

Hastily deserting the journalist, who seemed quite shocked at his abruptness, Dr. Legris was up-stairs in three seconds. Raymond was smoking a cigar beside a table on which stood an untouched glass of beer.

"What!" cried the doctor, utterly exasperated, "you sit here calm and comfortable, and yet you know the police to be at your heels. Come with me—this house has a rear door that I know of."

But Raymond did not move. "Oh! there is no hurry," he said in a strange sort of way.

"No hurry! But do you not know that one hundred and fifty at least of your friends are already arrested?"

"It is because I know it, that I am not alarmed."

"Oh! Come now!"

"Permit me to explain. Don't you think it strange that I was not the first one arrested, when in reality the expedition was directed against me?"

"Very strange, and so I said to Krauss."

"I did not think of it until this morning, when a member of the society came to me and said: 'All is discovered—fly!'"

"I did fly, but I reflected later. The police are not such fools. If I were warned, it was because they intended me to be. I am convinced that they do not wish to imprison me."

"But, my dear fellow——"

"Wait a moment; let me show you. Would my arrest rid De Combelaïne and his honourable associates of me? By no means? It would expose them, on the contrary to most dangerous revelations. But if, on the contrary, they induced me to fly to Belgium, I should leave the field clear, and they would be quiet to do as they pleased."

The doctor rubbed his forehead. "Ah!" he muttered, "I did not think of that."

"Let me finish. Combelaïne, undoubtedly, supposes me to be the person who carried off his papers. Of course, if that were the case, I should have them about me, so that was why he set his banditti upon me at once. They would attack me again at their very first opportunity. But a conspirator who is obliged to keep himself concealed is about the least dangerous enemy a man can have, and one that he will find the easiest to get rid of. Let him be found some morning dead in the gutter, with a dagger in his breast, and no one will take the trouble to make any inquiry."

He expressed himself with such cold indifference that the doctor was struck by it. "What a tone you speak in!" he exclaimed.

"I say it simply like a man who has nothing to fear or dread in life would be likely to say it. It would be a great favour, on M. de Combelaïne's part, if he would have me assassinated."

Legris was confounded. "I wish," he said, "you wouldn't talk in that way. When I left you yesterday you were full of hope."

Raymond's eyes flashed. "Haven't you noticed," he said, "that I have not even taken the trouble to ask the result of your inquiries?" As he spoke he drew a letter from his pocket and threw it on the table. "I received this note this morning," he continued. "Read it, and you will understand my present mood."

It was a letter from Simone. "So prayers, tears, and supplications are useless," she wrote "You act, you have acted, and all is lost. My sacrifice—the saddest which a woman can ever make—is rendered useless. I shall have given my life for nothing. I shall not have saved the honour of the house and the name which my father so prized, and which will now be for ever blasted. And it is you who have done this!—you who claim to be my best, my only friend! So isn't your love the most selfish of passions? Do not try to write to me and excuse yourself. Never again will my lips pronounce your name, while God allows me to live on earth. As for the few days which remain to me I shall spend them in tearing from my heart a love which now fills me with horror. Rejoice at your work, and, if you can, forget

"SIMONE DE MAILLEFERT."

"What do you think of that?" asked Raymond, bitterly, as Dr. Legris laid down the letter.

"This letter," was the reply, "is the result of yesterday's events."

"I don't see that."

"You will see it when I tell you that Philippe is in prison, accused embezzlement."

As in a vision Raymond at once recalled the young Duke de Maillefert as he had seen him one morning on the steps of the mansion, pale, undecided, and agitated, between Verdale and Combelaïne. "It is abominable!" he cried. "Philippe is a fool, and selfish to a degree, but he is incapable of crime."

"So Madame Bergam says."

"He is the victim of some diabolical conspiracy!"

"I am sure of it. I can almost prove it."

Raymond's colour rose, and he answered eagerly: "All is not lost, then!"

Dr. Legris smiled. "I feel certain," he replied, "that our triumph is at hand, for I am positive that Laurent Cornevin keeps in the background, and strikes these blows from out of the shade. Listen to what I have done to-day."

He then rapidly related his visit to Madame Bergam, mentioning the appearance of Grollet, and M. Verdale, the latter's treatment of Madame Lucy, and what he said to her, and, finally, the story of the duke's arrest, as he had heard it from Peyrolas."

Raymond was stunned. "Yes," he said at last, "light is breaking. But will Simone retract her words?"

"Yes, if we save her brother."

"Alas! what can we do for him?"

"Who can tell? Have I not told you that discord is in your enemies' camp? for it was not Verdale who denounced the duke—that's clear. It was Combelaïne. Verdale wished to confine himself to threats, but Combelaïne has gone on ahead, and carried the threats into execution. Now we must find some one who has influence over Verdale. Who could that be? Have we any such person near us? Yes; for one day when you wanted to call Combelaïne out, Verdale and Roberjot met, by accident, in your presence. What happened then? Did you not tell me that Verdale, on seeing Roberjot, became as white as linen, although naturally so red, and humble even to servility, although usually so arrogant? This shows that there is some secret between them. Come—we will go and see Roberjot."

Nothing was more trying to Raymond than this step. Nothing was more humiliating than to confess to Roberjot, now that he needed his help, all that he had so long concealed from him. But as M. Roberjot was the only person to whom he could turn in his extremity, he was forced to submit. "Let us go," he said, after the hesitation of a moment. "I shall be followed, I know; but what does that matter, since I am certain they won't arrest me? It will be time to-night to decide how to throw them off the track."

Roberjot was just sitting down to dinner when his servant told him that M. Delorge was there and wished to see him. "Show him in!" cried the lawyer, and he darted to meet his young friend with his napkin in his hand. "Is it you?" he said; "your mother thinks you far on your way to Belgium. Have you lost your head, or do you prefer incarceration to liberty?"

"I believe myself to be running no possible danger," answered Raymond; "and when I have made you master of the whole affair, you will understand my conduct." He moved aside as he said this, and added, "My friend, Dr. Legris, and I have come to you for advice and assistance."

Roberjot did not seem particularly charmed by this preamble—nor by the presence of this stranger whom he had not seen at first. But putting a

good face on the matter, he invited the two friends into the dining-room. As soon as they were seated, Dr. Legris opened his batteries, and told Roberjot precisely in what position Raymond stood, and all that had happened.

So interested was the lawyer that he forgot to eat. From time to time he exclaimed: "Ah! yes, I see. Now I understand this young man's low spirits."

But when the doctor got as far as the arrest of the Duke de Maillefert, and at the part probably played in it by Verdale, the lawyer exclaimed: "Raymond! Raymond! You simpleton, if you had only trusted me." And his brow grew dark. "Unfortunately," he continued, "what I could have done three months ago is impossible for me to do to-day. Raymond, do you remember that visit you paid me when you first came back to Paris? Do you remember that Verdale's son came in? He never acknowledged it, nor did I allow him to think I suspected it, but I am convinced now, as I was then, that it was his worthy father who sent him to me. Do you know what he came for? It was to implore me to give him a letter which I possessed—only ten lines long, but which made Verdale my abject slave. The young man expressed himself in words which seemed to spring straight from his heart, and a noble one too. He touched me and —"

"And what?" breathlessly asked the doctor.

"And I gave him the letter!"

Roberjot started up with such violence that the table was nearly overturned. "All is not lost," he cried; "no, I possess a weapon that my good friend Verdale does not even suspect. Decidedly there is a Providence which watches over honest people."

Raymond and the doctor would have liked to have had him explain himself more clearly, but, to all their questions, he would only say: "Patience! I don't want you to be disappointed again. I hope, but I am not by any means sure of my facts. Everything depends on a friend of mine who was a stock broker in 1852."

He then rang for his servant, had plates laid for Raymond and the doctor, and insisted on their sharing his meal. At eight o'clock the three men left table, and, entering a cab, they drove to the Rue Taitbout, where Roberjot's old friend resided. The lawyer went into the house alone, but he did not remain there more than ten minutes, and when he came out his face was radiant. "Victory!" he cried to the two young men. "We will now see Verdale. Driver—to No. 72 Avenue d'Antin?" he added, "and drive sharp."

IV.

It was in the Avenue d'Antin, in the centre of the Champs Elysées, that Verdale, the millionaire, now resided. He had built the palace of his dreams, the most magnificent of all the plans which had grown musty in his portfolio in the days when he was "unappreciated." Any one who glanced at the front of the house, one mass of ornamentation and sculpture, would have immediately said: "There lives a parvenu!"

Nine o'clock had just struck when the cab conveying Roberjot, Raymond, and Dr. Legris drew up before the door.

"The baron is certainly at home," answered the porter, "but I doubt if he will receive you. Apply to one of those footmen."

There were several lacqueys, in a most brilliant livery, lounging about the vestibule, and one of them said that his master was very much occupied but would perhaps see them if they would wait and take the trouble to follow him. They did follow him, and he led them up a stately marble staircase, and after conducting them through several magnificently furnished reception-rooms, ushered them into a small apartment, hung with green velvet and lighted by a single lamp. "Please be seated," said the servant, "and as soon as my master is disengaged he will send here and tell you so."

Roberjot frowned—all this ceremony annoyed him. "If Verdale knew what was in store for him," he muttered, "he would not keep us kicking our heels in this way."

A bright light came from under one of the velvet door hangings. Evidently, the door behind was open, and some one had just entered the next room. "That is probably the dear baron's study," thought the doctor. And as if to emphasize this supposition, a sharp commanding ring was heard, and as soon as steps were heard on the parquetry, some one asked, imperiously: "Where is the chevalier?"

"With Madame la Baronne," answered a humble voice.

"Go and tell him I wish to see him for a few minutes."

Roberjot leaned toward the doctor. "That is Verdale's voice," he said.

A silence of three or four minutes ensued. Then a door opened and shut, and the voice which Roberjot had said was that of his old companion, was heard again. "You know why I sent for you, chevalier?"

"I suspect the reason, my dear father," answered a full, well-modulated voice.

"I am extremely displeased."

"And I am far from satisfied."

Roberjot smiled. Now that he knew it was father and son in the next room, he found infinite amusement in hearing Verdale address his son in all seriousness as the "chevalier."

"Ah! you are not satisfied?" replied Verdale in a tone of intense irritation.

"I am not, indeed, sir."

"And why?"

"Because if I am not on my guard you will end by making me utterly ridiculous."

"I make you ridiculous?"

"Yes, sir."

"And how, if you please, how?"

"By persisting in calling me by the title of chevalier, to which I have no possible right. You, my dear father—you assume the title of baron; I deplore it, but I cannot prevent it. But, now, that you are trying to impose on me this ridiculous appellation of 'chevalier,' I desire to inform you that I will not bear it. And every time that in your notes of invitation you call me the Chevalier Verdale, I will do precisely what I did yesterday: I will send notes everywhere, saying that the word chevalier was a printer's blunder."

Raymond, Legris, and the lawyer looked at each other in considerable astonishment.

"My son, it strikes me that you are extremely philosophical," exclaimed Verdale, who was evidently losing his temper.

"I try to be," answered the young man.

"And you are a democrat, too, of course?"

"In a way, I am."

The architect stamped his foot. "You are proud of our origin?" he asked, sneeringly.

"And why not? Our ancestors were honest people, and that is all I care about. But if I had your ideas, father, and really wished people to forget my origin, I should not do my best to remind them of it. As long as you were only Verdale, nobody cared, or asked, whence you came or your parents either; but the very day you placed "baron" on your visiting card they took pains to ask who your father was. Then they went further, and they discovered what? That my grandmother—your mother—sold fish at the central markets."

"Lucien!"

"It's useless to deny it. I know twenty persons whom she always served; besides our name is still on a sign there. Go yourself and you can see it, 'Binjard, successor to Verdale.'"

"But no one would ever have known this but for you; you shouted it from the house tops."

"Excuse me; I boasted of it, as it were, so that I might not be laughed at. Dining with my friends, if I said, 'Give me some of that fish; I know when fish is good, for my grandmother used to sell it'—no one laughed at me; I was not ridiculous. But what should I be if some one maliciously remarked; 'Have some fish, chevalier? you ought to be a good judge of it.'"

Verdale interrupted his son with a terrible oath. "You are making a great mistake," he cried.

"And how?"

"It is a mistake to oppose me in this way. You have your own opinion, so be it; then have courage too. If you reject the title, be brave enough to reject the fortune which I place at your disposal—the one was to sustain the other."

"My dear father!"

"Select a profession—earn your own bread, and then you will have a right to your ideas and opinions. Until then——"

"But you know that it is your own fault if I have not done so long ago. You know that in remaining with you, under your roof, I have only yielded to the prayers and entreaties of my mother. You know, too, that I don't spend the fifth part of the income which your generosity has placed at my disposal."

"Say then—as you are so near it—that if I were to die, you would reject the fortune I should leave behind me."

There was a long pause, and then, in a voice that evinced considerable agitation, the young man slowly replied: "I would not accept it!"

The situation was a most awkward one for our three friends—for it was evident that their presence in the little room was quite unsuspected. "Are we to descend to this degradation?" muttered Raymond—"are we to steal the secrets of these people?"

"We should have some fine ones," murmured the doctor.

But Raymond's decision was taken and he calmly overturned a heavy chair. "They will hear that, I fancy!" he said, aloud.

Almost at the same moment the heavy, velvet door curtain, which separated the two rooms, was drawn aside, and the intelligent head and face of the younger Verdale appeared. He seemed utterly stupefied at the sight of these three men, and more stupefied still when he recognized the lawyer. "Monsieur Roberjot!" he cried.

At this name his father appeared, and for a moment he did not speak. His eyes wandered from his old friend to Raymond Delorge and then to Dr. Legris; in whom he recognized the person he had seen at Madame Lucy Bergam's. "How long have you been here, gentlemen?" he asked at last.

"About twenty minutes," replied the doctor, in the most urbane manner.

An oath betrayed the architect's indignation. "This is the manner in which my servants behave!" he cried. "This is the way they attend to their duties!"

He rushed to the bell-rope, and pulled it with such frantic vehemence that it came off in his hand. All the doors flew open, and in poured a number of servants.

"Who opened the door to these gentlemen?" asked Verdale, in a most threatening tone.

"It was I, sir——" replied one of the footmen, piteously.

"Did you not ask for their cards?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then, why did you not bring them to me?"

"Because you were engaged, sir."

"Is that any reason why you should show visitors into one of the rooms without informing me?"

"But, sir——"

"That will do. You are no longer in my service. You will receive a month's wages and leave the house to-morrow morning."

Verdale was purple with rage. He gesticulated and shouted and went on like a madman. Roberjot, who knew him well, watched him calmly, and soon made up his mind that his anger was feigned, and that the whole scene was a little comedy enacted to gain time for resisting the attack which the architect saw was coming. When the servants had withdrawn, Verdale, indeed, suddenly changed his tone. "Excuse me, gentlemen," he said, "but this reproof and summary execution were absolutely essential. It is absolutely lamentable the way we are served nowadays." So speaking, he raised the velvet door-curtain again. "Do me the honour to walk this way," he added.

The room they now entered was M. Verdale's favourite apartment, the sanctuary to which he resorted for meditation, if not for prayer. It was there he always received his friends, and everything was arranged with the deliberate intention of dazzling the beholder, from the carpet to the ceiling, and to the splendid curtains of the three windows. In the most gracious way he rolled easy-chairs towards his guests, and then addressing his son: "I will release you now, Lucien," he said.

But this did not suit M. Roberjot. The conversation he had overheard between the father and son convinced him of the truth of his old suspicions—that they were not of the same opinion on many subjects. So he hastily rose: "I should be glad, my dear baron," he exclaimed, "if your son would consent to be present at our interview."

Verdale restrained a movement of impatience with difficulty. "Stay, then!" he said to his son.

And turning to his former friend, he continued: "Pray have the goodness to tell me to what I owe the pleasure of your visit?"

Roberjot had prepared a little speech—not so much what he wished to say, as the order in which he should bring matters forward. "These are the

facts," he began in a dry tone, "and I desire you to understand, my dear baron, that I speak in my own name as well as in the name of my friend, M. Raymond Delorge."

The architect bowed ceremoniously.

M. Roberjot then went on speaking slowly, emphasizing each word: "We have come in a friendly spirit to beg you to set the young Duke de Maillefert at liberty. We know, of course, that you have nothing to do with his arrest. We understand that he was arrested contrary to your wishes. Oh! certainly, for we know that you mentioned this fact in the presence of Dr. Legris. We know that the duke was arrested on a complaint preferred by the Count de Combelaïne."

Although Verdale had expected something of this kind, he grew very pale. "Unfortunately," he answered, "you over-estimate my influence. Now that the law has taken the affair in hand, I can do nothing. The duke, whether he be innocent or guilty——"

"You know better than anyone that he is not guilty," interrupted Roberjot, coldly; and then, with a gesture that imposed silence on the discomfited architect, he went on. "I have not finished. M. de Combelaïne wishes to marry Mademoiselle Simone de Maillefert, who is loved by Raymond Delorge, and who loves him. This marriage would be the death of this unfortunate girl, and so we have come—in a friendly spirit, you understand—to prevent this marriage."

Perhaps it was to conceal his agitation that Verdale now rose. "This is the sheerest folly," he cried.

Dr. Legris and Raymond hardly dared breathe, so fully did they realize the importance of each word exchanged by these two men. They scarcely looked at Lucien Verdale, who, very pale with compressed lips, stood leaning against the mantelpiece.

"We rely on you, baron," repeated Roberjot, after a long pause.

A spasm of anger contracted the features of the architect, and, in a hoarse voice, he said: "I can only repeat what I have just told you."

"What is that?"

"That it is folly to come and ask a man to interfere with matters which are no concern of his, and for which he really cares not one straw."

"Is that the truth?" asked Roberjot, in an ironical tone.

Verdale did not reply, and after a moment the lawyer continued: "Believe me, it is unwise to spend our time in disputing. An intrigue exists, and you are the prime mover in it. Do not deny it—it is useless. Who went to Rosiers to examine the property of the young heiress? Who was it who placed an enormous credit at the disposal of De Combelaïne, when twenty-four hours before he would not have lent him ten louis to save his life? Who was it who pushed poor Philippe to the edge of the precipice over which he rolled? Was it not you, M. Verdale? Then show me, if you please, that there is no connection between Combelaïne's marriage and the duke's arrest."

These accusations were preferred in two forcible a manner for Verdale to deny them. "And what if there were?" he finally asked.

"I have only to say," continued Roberjot, without answering this question, "that what you have done, you must undo. Now? Ah! that is not for me to say. Within forty-eight hours, however, you must see that the Duke de Maillefert is restored to liberty, and that M. de Combelaïne has renounced the hand—that is to say, the millions—of Mademoiselle Simone."

"I must! Did you say must?"

"Yes. Absolutely."

The architect took from his desk a paper knife, which, silver as it was, he twisted and broke in his convulsed, angry fingers. "You are mad, Roberjot, I tell you. If you are the friend of M. Delorge, I am the friend of M. de Combeldaine; I have sustained him, against everything and everybody."

The lawyer leaned forward in his chair. "Take care, M. Verdale," he said, "reflect a little before you commit yourself."

It was not the architect who replied. His son stepped forward, and said gently, but firmly: "No human being shall speak in that way to my father in my presence, and in his house."

So threatening was his attitude that Raymond and Legris started up. But Roberjot was one of those men whom nothing disconcerts, and who never lose their presence of mind. He at once saw the benefit he could derive from this interference, and quite pleased thereat, he answered: "I should not be driven to the necessity, sir, of threatening your father in this way, had you not urged me to give you a letter which would have insured my safety, and that of my friends."

The poor fellow's eyes dropped.

"Have you forgotten," continued the lawyer, pitilessly, "what happened on the day of your visit. What did you tell me? That you wished to marry a young girl whom you adored, and that your father had said he would never give his consent until he was in possession of a certain letter which I had obstinately refused to give him. And upon this you came to me, as you said, without his knowledge."

"Which was true, sir."

"Then what did I do? Moved by your grief and touched by your prayers, I said, 'Here, take the letter, I will give it to you;' and I did so—so that you might hand it to your father—and I placed it in a sealed envelope."

"It is true," murmured the young man, "it is true."

Anyone who knew Roberjot would have read in his eyes the certainty of success. "Undoubtedly," he continued, "you asked yourself the reason of this precaution. I will tell you, sir. I wished to spare you the terrible sorrow of despising your father." He stopped for a moment as if to allow his words to produce their full effect, and then continued more slowly: "You may therefore understand that I act to-day under the influence of inexorable necessity. It deeply pains me to afflict you, but I have duties to fulfil. I wish to save the honour of the Duke de Maillefert and the lives of his sister and my friend, Raymond Delorge. I have to defend the happiness of all the people I love, so I must speak."

"What do you mean, Sir?"

"Ask your father what that letter contained, and under what circumstances it was written."

The architect had grown deadly pale. "Roberjot!" he murmured, with parched lips.

"Do what I ask then," the lawyer replied.

Frightful indecision was apparent on Verdale's face. Then all at once he exclaimed. "No, I won't! It were better that my son should know the contents of that letter, that he should know it was but the simple admission of one of those reckless escapades which youth is so prone to."

"One of those reckless escapades has landed poor Philippe de Maillefert in prison."

Verdale tried to resist. "I do not admit the comparison," he said.

"And you are right," answered the lawyer in a tone of ironical politeness.

less. "I can recall the very words of your letter. I will repeat them and see if our friends will believe that you looked on the affair at that time as lightly as you do to-day: 'Friend Roberjot,' you wrote, 'if on the receipt of this letter you should show it to the public prosecutor, he would at once issue a warrant for my arrest. I should be judged and condemned. For I have appropriated, through a forgery, the title deed you intrusted to me.' And it was signed with your name, in full—Verdale."

Crushed by this terrible revelation, poor Lucien staggered to a chair.

But Verdale was above all this weakness. "It is true," he said, in a hoarse voice, "that, to my great misfortune, I borrowed one hundred and sixty thousand francs from you, for eight days. But you were my friend. Did I not repay you on the appointed day?"

"Yes."

"Did I not, moreover, offer you half of the immense amount which, thanks to Contanceau, I had just realized?"

"Yes."

"Very well, then—what more do you want? And why do you come here and insult me?"

Verdale, who had been so white, had recovered his habitual audacity with such suddenness that Raymond and Dr. Legris were petrified. The reason of this change, however, was a most simple one. The architect had always dreaded that his son should learn the ignominious source of his fortune. But Lucien knew it now—the apprehension was removed from his father's mind, and fate had done its worst—he had nothing more to dread.

"To any one but yourself, Roberjot," he continued, "I should say: We are quits; go your way, and I will go mine. But we—my old friend—we have an account to settle, an account that has been running eighteen years." As he spoke the colour had returned to his cheeks, and his voice grew fuller and more pompous. "Having faith in your friendship," he continued, "I most foolishly gave myself into your hands, bound hand and foot by that stupid letter, of which you have retained so exact a recollection. How did you reward my confidence? For eighteen years you held this fatal proof suspended over my head. I ceased to belong to myself—I had no will of my own. I was afraid to undertake anything. If an idea came to me, before I could decide on it, I was reduced to saying to myself, 'What will Roberjot think of it?' Were you not my master? For eighteen years, as I told you, I lived with the atrocious idea that there was a man who was my master in this world—a man who by one single act of his could overturn the edifice I had raised with such infinite labour—who could leave me without honour or money, and, moreover, rob me of my son's affection."

Lucien Verdale looked up. "Father!" he murmured.

But his voice was not heard. The architect continued with rapidly increasing excitement: "And it is of this man—this man, on whom you have inflicted such intolerable suffering and humiliation—that you, Roberjot, whom I have heard called clever, have come to ask a service. Have you lost your head? Don't you understand that it is my revenge you have offered me at last? Ah! you are interested in Philippe de Maillefert, are you? In Mademoiselle Simone and M. Raymond Delorge? Then that is quite sufficient reason for me to swear implacable hatred against them and against you. Merely because you execrate Combelaïne, I will remain his faithful and devoted friend. I will sustain him with my money and my credit. Now it is irrevocable. The Duke de Maillefert shall go to a convict's prison, and his sister shall marry the Count de Combelaïne."

His tone indicated such mortal hatred and such firmness, that Dr. Legris and Raymond could not help shuddering. But Roberjot was calm. "Take care, Verdale," he said coldly, "take care."

The architect was furious. "Take care! Why should I take care?" he exclaimed. "The time is past when your threats could make me tremble. That letter, which, for eighteen years you held like a knife at my throat, is no longer in existence. It is burned."

Roberjot slowly rose from his chair, and leaning on the back of it, quietly said: "Are you sure that this letter was the only proof against you?"

"I am, indeed."

"Allow me, then, to inform you that you are very much mistaken."

Verdale started—and his eyes wavered. But speedily recovering himself: "Fool that I am!" he cried, "not to see that you are trying to frighten me."

Roberjot shook his head. "Yes, you are foolish," he said, "not to understand that I should never have said to you, 'I insist' and 'you must' unless I had the means of compelling you. No; I have not lost my head. I knew your feelings towards me perfectly well." And without allowing the architect time to speak, he continued: "The letter in which you admitted your forgery is destroyed. Very well. But the forgery itself—where is that?"

"The forgery itself," stammered Verdale.

"Yes—listen to me—I will tell you its story. When I received that letter from you my first movement was to hurry to my broker's. How had he ventured to take such a step without consulting me? On investigation I learned the truth. You had forged an order from me to him, directing him to pay the whole amount of the sale over to you. When I saw the signature I was confounded, it was so like my own. The agent saw by my surprise that something was wrong. He questioned me. I might have denounced you, but I did not do so. I begged my friend, however, to preserve this forgery with the greatest care, telling him I might some day need it."

"Well?"

"I have just seen my friend. He has the document, and holds it at my disposal."

The architect bore up bravely under this blow, and drove away the sinister apprehensions which assailed him. "Do you call that a proof?" he finally asked.

"It would not be considered one, possibly in a court; besides you are safe through the statutes of limitation. But it will serve my purposes very well——"

The architect listened. He was trying to fully understand those new dangers.

"I shall call in your old friend Coutanceau, and if that's not enough, I can bring forward another witness——"

"And who may that be?"

"Your son."

Verdale started back as if he had seen a ghost. "And do you think," he cried, "that my son would raise his voice to accuse his father, and dishonour the name he bears?"

"I have his word," said Roberjot coldly. And addressing Lucien, he added, "Do you remember our agreement, when I gave you that letter?"

"Oh! sir," stammered the young man, "I remember it, but——"

"I said to you then in almost these words, 'Your father hates me. When

he knows me to be without weapons against him he will seek to be revenged.' Then what did you say? 'If ever my father attempts anything against you—you or your friends—I will stand beside you and against him, I give you my word of honour.' Did you not say this?"

"Yes; I said it."

"And if I summoned you to keep your word."

The young man hesitated and then in a husky voice replied: "I should keep it."

Verdale, on hearing these words, swayed to and fro and caught at the table. He seemed to be stifling; he gasped for breath, and tore his waistcoat open. "He would keep his word! He, my son!" And as the unfortunate young man went towards him, he repelled him, and with a superhuman effort turned to Roberjot: "You have won the day," said he, "I am in your power—do what you choose with me."

Dr. Legris, Raymond, and Roberjot were deeply moved; but the lawyer proceeded to take advantage of the situation. "You know me well enough, sir," he said, gently, "to be certain that I shall act only at the last extremity. I have no hatred against you; do what we ask of you—will you not?"

The architect shrugged his shoulders despairingly. "How can I?" he cried; and after a little reflection he said hastily: "Suppose, when you received that letter of mine, in which I denounced myself, suppose you had laid it before the authorities. What would have happened? I should have been arrested and a trial would have been ordered as soon as possible. Suppose that my wife had then come and thrown herself at your feet, entreating you to save me, what would you have said?"

"That it was too late, that the matter was out of my hands, and that I could do nothing."

"Very well; that is precisely my position."

"But Philippe de Maillefert is innocent."

"So he is to a certain extent. But not in appearance."

"An infamous snare had been laid for him."

"I do not deny it."

"You see then——"

"I see nothing. If forgeries exist, they are the work of M. de Maillefert, and so M. de Maillefert is a forgerer."

"Oh!"

"I simply use the words employed by M. Barban d'Avranchel."

Verdale was right, and Roberjot knew it. His contracted brows showed this. However, after a moment of meditation he went on: "Do you think that the duke knew what he was doing?"

"Oh! perfectly."

"Do you mean that he knew himself to be running the risk of a convict's cell?"

"No. He simply thought he appeared to risk it."

It was so difficult to reconcile these replies that Raymond and Legris looked at each other interrogatively. Roberjot himself was a little bewildered, but he presently said: "I do not doubt your sincerity, M. Verdale. But let us lay our cards on the table. Let us cease questioning, and you, tell us all you know."

Verdale hesitated. It was very evident that he was suffering acutely.

"Go on, father," said Lucien, gently.

Verdale started at these words. "To save myself here, is not necessarily to lose myself with the others," he muttered.

Then all at once his lips parted, and in the tone of a man who was utterly desperate: "You know as well as I," he began, "the situation of Madame de Maillefert and her son during the last few years. Ruined, head over heels in debt, they had not a farthing except what was given them by Mademoiselle Simone. But they were far from being grateful, for the income did not suffice them; they wanted the capital. They tried a score of times to induce the young lady to consent to their wishes; but they never succeeded. However, the Duchess de Maumussy came to their help. 'Suppose,' she said, 'that the duke formed or joined a company of some kind, some financial enterprise. Suppose Philippe, in order to raise money, could be induced to commit a forgery. Would not Mademoiselle Simone give her whole fortune to shield him from the consequences of his act? Of course she would. Very well, then; Philippe must pretend to do just what he is incapable of doing. He must be at the head of some company; he must pretend to have committed forgery, and he must fly to his sister and implore her to save him. She will give him everything he asks for, and the matter will be settled.'

"Knowing Simone's character as they did, the duchess and her son grasped at Madame de Maumussy's suggestion. But they could not execute this plan alone; they required assistants and accomplices, not so easy to find. But Madame de Maumussy helped them. Having supplied the idea, she felt herself called upon to supply the man—and this man was the Count de Combelaïne. Summoned by her, Combelaïne went secretly to Saumur, where his first interview with Madame de Maillefert and her son took place. As soon as he understood what was wished, he promptly said he would undertake the transaction, and answer for its success, providing they gave him Mademoiselle Simone's hand with a dowry which he fixed. We must do Madame de Maillefert the justice to say that she hesitated. This condition seemed frightfully hard, not for her daughter so much as for herself. She knew M. de Combelaïne, and the prospect of having him for a son-in-law was particularly disagreeable to her. Not daring to refuse point blank, she pleaded prior engagements of her daughter's and her own. She declared that Simone loved some one else—that she would never give her consent—that her character was too absolute to submit to advice or control. But De Combelaïne was not dismayed, he declared that he would undertake to obtain Simone's consent himself. So the treaty was finally signed, thanks to the Duchess de Maumussy, who had some especial enmity against Simone."

Verdale was evidently about to throw a strong light on this dark intrigue. It was with pale faces that Dr. Legris, Raymond, and Roberjot listened, forgetting the presence of Lucien Verdale, who stood by the chimney-piece, looking very much like a criminal before his judges.

"You see, of course," continued the architect, "that Combelaïne could not act alone. He came to me—and I assure you, on my honour, that the truth was not revealed to me. Had I ever suspected it, I should not be where I am now. But Combelaïne simply told me that some friends of his, a noble lady and her son were in trouble—from which he wished to release them—and, at the same time, to arrange his own marriage with a daughter of the same family. What he proposed to do, he said, was not altogether correct, but he added that, after all, there was no harm in it. In the end, I promised him my assistance."

Raymond here hastily intervened: "Do not forget your visit to Maillefert," he said.

But Roberjot nudged his elbow and checked his words. Was it not natural for M. Verdale to try and exculpate himself, and throw all this.

odious intrigue on his accomplices? And what did it matter whether he were a little less or a little more guilty?

"I went to Maillefert," replied the architect, "but only to assure myself that M. de Combelaïne had not deceived me, and that the affair he proposed to me was really a serious one. He had fooled me several times, he owed me a great deal of money, and I distrusted him. I told him, however, that up to a certain point I was at his disposal. He had often drawn me into speculations which necessitated delicate negotiations. I had had the imprudence to write to him, he had preserved all our correspondence, and often threatened me with it."

The architect began to wander from the point. "Let us get back to Philippe de Maillefert," said Roberjot, gently.

Verdale frowned angrily, but continued: "The fortune once ascertained, the execution of the plan was by no means difficult. I was then as I am now the head of a financial society, 'The Rural Bank.' Combelaïne was, and is, one of the directors. I nominated Philippe de Maillefert, first as a member of the council, next as one of the board. This position gave him certain opportunities of which he availed himself. Encouraged by Combelaïne—for he hesitated at the last moment—Philippe carried off about three million five hundred thousand francs' worth of title-deeds, etc., and concealed this abstraction by forged entries, which were as awkward and as authentic as possible. Was he a thief and a forgerer? Not in the usual sense of the word. His idea was that he was simply playing a part in a comedy enacted to deceive his sister, and he never dreamed of incurring the smallest possible risk. Nor did he attempt to dispose of these deeds, but left them in Combelaïne's hands. Whenever Combelaïne or the duke required any money, I advanced it. And when this was done Philippe started for Maillefert, there to play the great scene on which success depended, and which I felt to be utterly odious. But I had now gone too far to retreat. Taking his sister aside, Philippe told her that, in sore distress, harassed by gambling debts, and urged by treacherous friends, he had speculated on the Bourse and lost considerable sums which did not belong to him. He added that all must now be discovered, and that, preferring death to dishonour, he should blow out his brains if his sister did not come to his assistance. Simone never doubted her brother. She instantly declared that she would arrange everything, even if her whole fortune were sacrificed. So Philippe came back to us in high delight, saying: 'It is all right; my sister will be here to-morrow.'"

The uneasy glance which Verdale gave his son indicated that all he had said was as nothing to what was coming. "If Combelaïne had been a man like other people," he continued, "everything would have gone smoothly. Mademoiselle Simone sold out property to the amount of four millions, and our purpose was accomplished. But Combelaïne was not the person to renounce the fortune which, after this sacrifice, still remained in the young lady's hands. When she sent for him he told her that this business of the duke's was by no means so simple or so easily concluded. He would use all his influence to bring it to a happy conclusion, he added, on one condition, namely, that if he succeeded, Mademoiselle Simone would consent to become his wife. I was present at this scene, and nothing could equal the poor girl's horror. But, in the gentlest tone she replied that she no longer belonged to herself—having arranged her future. However, Combelaïne continued to insist, and so brutally and awkwardly, that Mademoiselle de Maillefert, wounded and angry, at last exclaimed, in a tone of the most

crushing contempt: 'I understand, sir—the millions that still remain to me excite your cupidity. Very well; save the honour of our house and you shall have them, but as to becoming your wife—never.'

"By this single sentence she made an enemy for life of a man who never forgets nor forgives. Before she said this, he only cared for her dowry—nothing for herself. But now the woman, quite as much as her fortune, became the object of his desires. 'That haughty creature,' he said to me, 'shall be my wife, or else her ducal brother shall go to a convict's cell!' I endeavoured to pacify him, but all in vain. And when, two or three days later, I threatened him, and said that I should go over to Mademoiselle Simone's side, he answered with a sneer: 'You are late in the day. I hold you under my thumb quite as securely as I hold Philippe. You don't suppose, do you, that I have allowed all those papers to get mouldy in my drawer? I did my best to get ten thousand francs from you, but you refused. I had creditors. Draw your own inferences!'"

Did Verdale speak the truth? At all events his voice was wrathful, and seemed to indicate the natural indignation of a man who knows himself to have been duped. "The count's sarcasms opened my eyes even more than his threats," he continued. "I understood that I had been fooled and made a tool of by one of those traitors who, for a very small consideration, do not hesitate to betray their companions. I discovered that his intention was to get possession of this poor girl's entire fortune, and that he would never return the deeds which had been entrusted to him, and for which poor Philippe would sooner or later pay with his honour and liberty."

Lucien Verdale, who had been looking at his father in a kind of stupor, now interrupted, in a hoarse tone; "But this is monstrous!"

"Yes, monstrous," repeated the architect. "But Combelaïne held me tight. Had he not my correspondence in his mistress's keeping—and, besides, such was the position of the Rural Bank that a disturbance, a public scandal, would have brought bankruptcy on my head at once."

"It is disgraceful," muttered Lucien. "Oh! I don't pretend to excuse myself," continued his father. "I merely wish to explain why I stood and gazed with folded arms at the horrible drama enacted at the Maillefert mansion. Debased as were the characters of the duchess and her son, they were not altogether so heartless as to witness the poor girl's agony unmoved. They began to realize that this marriage would be her death, and tried to dissuade De Combelaïne. Then when they saw that he was unmoved by their entreaties, they ended by declaring that they would withdraw their consent. 'Just as you please,' he replied, coldly; 'but in that case France will have the pleasure of seeing something strange—the Duke de Maillefert standing in the criminal's dock. However, as I am not utterly hard-hearted, I grant you forty-eight hours for reflection!' I was there, and I assure you that had I seen any way of aiding these people I should have done so. But I was threatened as well, and it was with a bitter sense of my own powerlessness that I looked on at the scene which followed Combelaïne's departure. Philippe himself was wild with grief and anger. He is not altogether corrupt, this young fellow. He is headstrong and thoughtless, but the situation to which he had reduced his sister awoke in him every manly, honourable instinct which had been lying dormant. He swore that this marriage should never take place, and declared, as it was he who had been the first and only one to do wrong, he alone would bear the penalty. He knew, he said, that Combelaïne would not listen to him, and so he should blow out his brains."

"Were I to live for centuries I shall never forget the tone in which Mademoiselle Simone replied to her brother: 'If your death, Philippe, would save your honour, I myself would load your pistols. But your death would not end the matter. People would still say that a Duke de Maillefert had been a thief and forgerer. And this must not be. No; you must not raise your hand against yourself. I shall do my duty!' As for the Duchess de Maillefert she was wild with rage. Without understanding as I did Combelaïne's entire game, she saw that if her daughter's fortune ever became his, he would keep it for himself alone. She found herself caught in her own net. For, to allow Simone to be robbed of the millions, the income of which she had always enjoyed, meant ruining herself irretrievably—leaving herself without a farthing. Perhaps it was this that decided her to disclose the facts to her daughter; to tell her that Philippe was only guilty in appearance, that the theft and forgery were, in the beginning, only a most unworthy ruse. The poor young girl was revolted by this revelation, and I heard her sob that to feign a crime was in her eyes worse than to have committed it.

"Meanwhile, before taking any decisive steps, she adopted an idea that I suggested, and which was, that they should try and interest the Duchess de Maumussy in their cause. I knew that Combelaïne had rewarded the duke and the duchess with mere promises for the help they had given him, and that he had taken no pains to keep his promises. I believed that they were very discontented with him, and I hoped to take advantage of their displeasure. However, I was mistaken; for Combelaïne seeing my hesitation, and suspecting that I might fail them at the last moment, had secretly compromised with the Maumussys, and presented them with some of the documents stolen from the Rural Bank. And time had only added increased bitterness to the hatred the duchess felt for Simone. When the De Mailleferts understood this, the following note was received from Mademoiselle Simone:—'I am waiting to see you,' she wrote. 'On one condition—which I will tell you—I will consent!'

"The condition was that, before the marriage, the deficit of the Rural Bank should be made up, and that everything should be destroyed which could directly or indirectly tend to criminate her brother. Combelaïne promised all she desired, with the deliberate intention, as he told me, of breaking his promises. I could, therefore, only heartily approve of Philippe's step, when he declared that he had but one choice, and that was to compel Combelaïne to fight him. Unfortunately, the poor boy had neither the patience or the ability to carry out this design. One evening Combelaïne said to him: 'I have come to tell you that if you challenged me, I should at once send your letter to the public prosecutor. I intend to marry your sister, and we must be friends. Do you understand?'"

On hearing this a bandage fell from Raymond's eyes. He now understood the contradictions in Simone's conduct—her tears and indignation—her alternate hope and despair.

Drawing a long breath, Verdale continued: "I have told you all these facts abruptly, but of course you understand that their development was gradual, and that Combelaïne advanced with the most adroit management and hypocrisy. For instance, he kept the De Maillefert mansion going with money that he lent. The expenses of the duchess and her son were something enormous, in spite of their precarious position and melancholy anticipations. So it came to pass that these people, who hated each other so intensely, seemed to be on the most excellent terms. They were polite in

their daily intercourse, and were often seen together in public. Made-moiselle Simone, among the various conditions she made, had stipulated that she should not be obliged to receive De Combelaine until the day of the marriage. She never left her apartments, and it was only through the talk of one of her maids that we knew her health to be seriously affected. This exasperated Combelaine to such a degree that I asked myself if it were possible that he, who had never really loved any one, could now be passionately in love with this girl? At least the idea of her dying with grief because she was to be his wife filled him with rage. Sometimes, in speaking of her, he used the most violent and opprobrious epithets, and sometimes he declared that he would give millions to be in the place of Raymond Delorge. 'No matter,' he cried, 'she will be mine, all the same!'

"The wedding day was not yet fixed, and I was astonished to see Combelaine, near as he was to his triumph, so very gloomy and preoccupied. Whenever I asked what this meant, his reply was invariably, 'Nothing!' And when I asked why he did not hasten his marriage, he shrugged his shoulders and answered, 'Because!' A letter which reached me from Flora Misri at last explained this enigma. This woman, who for twenty years had been Combelaine's slave, and whom Coutanceau and I had amused ourselves with enriching, did not wish her lover to marry. He had sworn to her that she should be his wife, and she declared that she would compel him to keep his promise. She wrote to me with the hope of interesting me in her cause, telling me that she had all Combelaine's papers, that she would make them public, and, adding, that among these papers there were several letters of my own, which were particularly compromising. I knew that what she said was true, for these very letters were the sole cause of my compliance with Combelaine's plans. So I hastened to see the count, and with him I found the Duke de Maumussy and the Princess d'Eljonsen, both compromised in the same way, and both threatened by Flora with the publication of their correspondence in the newspapers.

"However, Combelaine's calmness and scornful air reassured us. He declared that there was really no danger, for Flora belonged to him so entirely, and was so utterly his slave, that she would never dare to put her threats into execution. Still this certainly did not prevent him from taking proper precautions. Flora was watched night and day, by half-a-dozen of the most skilful private detectives, who were ordered—at the least appearance of danger—to obtain possession of these papers even by force, if it were necessary. Finally he gave us his word of honour not to marry until he had all these letters and papers safely in his desk again. I went off somewhat quieted, when a most unexpected circumstance put me on the *qui vive* once more. The Duchess de Maillefert, who had so far been as submissive as possible to Combelaine, now became very restless. Combelaine spoke one morning of fixing the day for the marriage. 'Oh, there is no hurry!' she said; 'we will discuss it later.' She said this in so singular a tone, that when I was alone with Combelaine I alluded to it. He laughed at me at first, but when I persisted, he confessed that he was by no means at ease respecting it, and that he was greatly harassed on all sides. He imagined some enemy to be at work, and had begun to suspect his valet, Leonard, who had so far been in his full confidence.

"And what enemy had he bold enough, or persistent enough, to attack him now, except Raymond Delorge, whose father he had killed, and whose betrothed he had stolen? 'But he shall repent of his boyish meddling!' he said

fiercely, 'for I hold the proof of his connection with a secret society which will send him to prison, or Cayenne, whenever I say the word.' Still, despite his apparent confidence, the count was not easy in mind, for he said he should go and see Flora, obtain the letters, and then marry at once. The next morning he came in looking like death, and in a husky voice, he gasped : 'We are lost ! The papers are stolen !'

After beginning with rage and resistance, Verdale now seemed willing to make a clean breast of it, and resign himself to the situation. He watched his son out of the corner of his eye, and tried to read on the faces of the three friends what impression was made by his fluent eloquence. He continued as follows : "There is no need of describing my fright on hearing that all our correspondence was in the hands of an enemy. I felt that there was but one resource—flight ! Ten years ago this would not have been necessary, for the empire was strong enough to protect its servants—to prove their innocence or throw the indulgent veil of forgetfulness over their peccadilloes. But in 1870, under the Ollivier Ministry—which one day pelted the working-classes with mud, and in the next breath sang the praises of honesty, its charms and its advantages, with a patronizing air—it was difficult to know whom to trust, or what to lean on.

"My advice was, to take to our heels and await events in Belgium. Combelaïne, however, was always as obstinate as a mule, and he declared that he would not yield one inch—that audacity alone could save us now. Audacity ! He must have found it very difficult to talk in this way, for the very night before his valet, Leonard, had left him to join the service of an Englishman, and everything indicated that this sudden step concealed some treason. No matter. Combelaïne declared that the game was still in our own hands, and that by a most lucky chance he knew when and by whom these papers had been stolen. 'The author of this bold blow was Raymond Delorge,' he said : 'Fortunately,' he continued, 'he is in my power, and this very night, his account will be settled.'"

"And," interrupted Roberjot, "that very evening some spadassine attacked Raymond and injured him severely."

Did Verdale know this ? One would have said not, by the manner in which he raised his arms to Heaven. "Combelaïne," he cried, "is stronger than I thought, for he never gave me the smallest hint of this cowardly crime ! The very next day he dragged me into the presence of Madame de Maillefert, and signified to her that he must marry her daughter with the briefest possible delay. 'People are not generally married in Lent,' she answered, gravely ; 'but as you are the master, you must do as you choose.' I have hardly seen Combelaïne since that day, as he has been so occupied in purchasing the wedding presents, which he wishes to be more magnificent than anything ever seen before ; but when I have had a moment's chat with him, he has hastily said that things would go on smoothly. Delorge had the letters no doubt, but could not use them, so strictly was he watched. I was therefore, utterly thunderstruck when I heard last night, through my son, that Philippe de Maillefert had been arrested."

Calm as Verdale was in appearance, he was, in reality growing very nervous, for he was clear-headed enough to see that the most difficult moment of the explanation was yet to come.

"And so," began Roberjot, "you did nothing towards the arrest of the duke ?"

Verdale, with an indignant gesture, replied : "Do you doubt me ?"

"I——" began Dr. Legris,

"Then I have explained myself badly, gentlemen, very badly. Don't you see that throughout this deplorable affair I have been most outrageously imposed upon and sacrificed?"

"I don't see that."

"Yes, sacrificed, for Combelaïne cannot injure the duke without injuring me. Ever since this arrest I have felt as if I were going mad. It may have the most disastrous consequences. Philippe stands next to me in the Rural Bank, but as he is under me, the responsibility of his appointment falls on me. I shall be examined and cross questioned until all my most secret affairs are known."

This was plausible enough.

"And yet," asked Roberjot, "how does it happen that when De Maillefert was arrested he sent to you as well as to Combelaïne, to say that he consented to everything?"

"Because he thinks me the accomplice of Combelaïne."

"What is it he consents to?"

"I have no idea—on my word of honour—I can only say," the architect added, after a brief pause, "that four days ago the marriage was as firm as ever, so firm that I agreed to let the duchess have thirty thousand francs for Mademoiselle Simone's outfit. The same evening, however, Combelaïne was so displeased with the manner in which the duke had treated him that afternoon, that he said to me: 'This idiot adopts a tone that I won't stand. I think he is meditating some grand stroke.' I told him if he wanted to get the upper hand of the young man, he had only to refuse to give him money. 'The deuce of it is,' he replied, 'that he has plenty of it, and for the life of me, I can't understand where he gets it from.'"

Legris, Raymond, and Roberjot exchanged a quick glance. One name was on the lips of all three—that of Laurent Cornevin.

"I admit your explanations, my dear sir," said Roberjot ceremoniously, "only I don't see that there can be any mystery about the young duke's having money, as you say that Mademoiselle Simone has sold all her property?"

"But," replied the architect, with visible embarrassment—"But——"

"Did Mademoiselle Simone keep the proceeds of the sale of her estate?"

"I don't say that."

"Then where are they? We know that she has sold her property through the Baron de Boursonne, and it is through him, too, that we heard you were the purchaser."

Verdale started. "Excuse me, I did buy the land, but not in my own name. I bought it in the name of the Rural Bank, as I believed it would be a safe investment for the funds of that concern."

"That was very generous on your part, but whether the purchase was made in your name or that of the Rural Bank, you paid, I presume, and where is that money?"

Verdale became more and more agitated. "Nothing has been paid yet, for Combelaïne wished to retain his power over Philippe—a power which he would have lost if the duke had covered the deficit."

Roberjot nodded with cheerful acquiescence. But to himself he murmured: "What new villainy are we going to unearth here?"

Such, too, was Lucien Verdale's opinion, for he started forward. "De Combelaïne is a villain!" he exclaimed; "but you, my dear father, you will return what De Maillefert abstracted to the Rural Bank to-morrow."

"Three million five hundred thousand francs?"

"What does the amount matter?"

"Are you mad?" exclaimed Verdale, now livid with anger and fear. "That would do no good. Don't you understand that it was certificates and bonds that were stolen? And, besides, where should I get three million five hundred thousand francs from?"

"You are very rich, and if it were to take your whole fortune, this must be done. You understand what I say—it must be done—even if I, your own son, be compelled to come forward to testify against you. I may be the son of a dishonest man, but I will not be his accomplice."

"He will do as he says!" muttered the architect. "I know Lucien—he means it." And then with sudden violence, he burst forth: "You are like all the others, Lucien. You think me rich. Poor simpleton! Did ever a millionaire play the desperate game I have played, and which will perhaps throw me into a convict's cell? I was a millionaire once—I am so no longer. You look at me as you did not believe me. You ask what I have done with my fortune? I don't know. It went as it came. My speculations and investments have recently turned out badly. I lost my head, and lost my money. It is the story of us all—the men of the second empire, as we are called. Look at those we know—those whose prosperity has been most dazzling. Combelaïne stole with a gauntleted hand, Maumussy owes ten millions, the Princess d'Eljensen resorts to the most revolting devices in order to keep up a semblance of luxury. If I stand firm as yet, to all appearance, it is because no one suspects my real situation. But open the window and proclaim it; and by to-morrow I should have nothing more to do but to start for Belgium and join the millionaires who have lost every halfpenny by disastrous speculations. We are all tottering, and we can get no help from the empire. The empire!" Why, it has given us all it has to give, and now that the strong boxes are empty, and there is nothing to pour into the eager hands which are held out, the empire will perish, crumble into dust—and no one knows this better than the ministers, the prefects and the emperor!"

Lucien Verdale's features betrayed astonishment and dismay. As long as he had believed his father to be wealthy, he had relied on a great pecuniary sacrifice bringing things right at last. But now! "Monsieur de Maillefert must, nevertheless, be rescued," he said, firmly.

The architect angrily replied: "Why do you repeat those words in that senseless way? Have I not laid the whole situation before you? Is it on me that the duke should rely, when I am quite as much involved as himself?"

"On whom, then, should he rely?"

"On whom? Why on the man who has Combelaïne's papers in his possession. On M. Raymond Delorge."

These words betrayed the secret of Verdale's feeble resistance. He believed that Raymond had these important papers in his possession.

"Then, according to you," said Roberjot, "M. Delorge is master of the situation?"

"Absolutely."

"How is that?"

Verdale shrugged his shoulders. "You can answer that question as well as I can," he replied.

This would have been true if Raymond had had the papers; but such was not the case, and to allow Laurent Cornevin to be suspected would have been a fatal mistake. So the lawyer found himself in a most delicate position. "No matter what I know," he answered, "but if you have no objection give me your ideas."

"I have none. I have nothing to fear from Combelaine now. And it strikes me that these papers place these people in your power. Threaten them with the publication of their correspondence and they will move heaven and earth. Still justice, you know, does not easily relinquish its prey, and M. Barban d'Avranchel is a most determined man. But the government would never allow so many of their own people to be compromised, particularly as that would hasten their own fall."

Roberjot thought the same. "So then," he said, "you think the whole affair can be stopped just where it is if the deficit were made up?"

Verdale hesitated, and then suddenly exclaimed: "Combelaine may not have disposed of all the certificates and bonds!"

"It is best not to count on that."

"Well, then, I, as chairman of the Rural Bank, and through the claim I have on a portion of Mademoiselle Simone's estate, might advance the date of payment for it."

Roberjot looked at his old school-friend as if anxious to read his very soul. "Would you do that?" he asked.

"And you," said the architect, "would you in return promise to restore me any letters of mine which are among these papers of Combelaine's?"

Unfortunately Roberjot could not give this promise, and he was trying to avoid a decisive reply, when Lucien Verdale interfered. "Be easy, gentlemen," he said, in a firm voice; "my father will do all that an honourable man should do without any conditions whatever."

Neither Raymond nor Dr. Legris, nor even M. Roberjot had any occasion to linger longer with the architect. They therefore took their leave, escorted to the door by Lucien, who told them that his father would do what they desired.

Verdale listened until not a sound of their steps could be heard. Then he rang the bell with a strange expression on his face. His own valet, a man who had served him for fifteen years, and whom he believed to be devoted to his interests, appeared. "Have you finished all your preparations?" asked the architect.

"I have forgotten nothing," answered the servant. "I have filled fifteen huge boxes, which I have placed in a store-house, hired under a feigned name."

Verdale smiled. "Then," he said, "to-morrow you will convey your boxes to the railway station, and proceed to Brussels with them. You will wait for me there. It is time to take to our heels."

V.

THE clock struck twelve as Raymond and his two friends left Verdale's sumptuous mansion. The doctor went out first in order to reconnoitre, and he was so extremely prudent that he even crossed the street to look into two particularly dark doorways. This was no time for rashness. He knew—they all knew—that Raymond's life hung on a thread. Persuaded finally that the street was deserted, the doctor made a sign to his companions to join him, and, as the weather was fair, they walked to the Champs Elysées, which was silent and deserted at this hour.

The interview which had just taken place had been so different to what they had anticipated, and had opened before them such a new horizon, that they wished to exchange their views and decide on the course to adopt.

Roberjot thought that it would be infinitely better for Raymond to disappear entirely. "Your cause, my dear fellow," he said, "is evidently in the hands of an able man, who has such means at his command that he is able to buy Combelaïne's valet and Madame Flora's household. Let him work in his own way, and don't expose him to the additional worry of watching over you at the same time, or the risk of being defeated just as he reaches the result he has been striving to achieve for so many years."

Dr. Legris entirely agreed with the lawyer. "Besides," he said, "you need have no anxiety. Verdale told you what could be done with those papers. You may be sure that Laurent Cornevin will know how to use them. Philippe is in prison, to be sure, but he will be released. Combelaïne's marriage is fixed, but it will never take place." And as Raymond did not speak, Dr. Legris exclaimed, impatiently: "What can you hope to do? What could you do, when you may be arrested at any moment?"

"I can prevent the marriage."

"In what way? By killing Combelaïne, you mean?"

"Yes, if there is no other way."

"Well, there is plenty of time for that when we are certain that there is nothing else to be done. And in the meanwhile look out that you are not landed in prison."

When they reached the Place de la Concorde, Raymond had yielded to the entreaties of his friends, and agreed that he would conceal himself in Dr. Legris's rooms while waiting for an opportunity to make a safe retreat. They exchanged a last shake of the hand, and when Roberjot crossed the Pont de la Concorde to return to the Rue Jacob, Raymond and the doctor went towards Montmartre. They went at a quick step along the deserted streets, turning innumerable corners and constantly looking round to see that they were not followed. They were very much astonished that Combelaïne did not watch the man whom he believed to be in possession of his correspondence, with more vigilance.

"Is it a snare?" said the doctor to himself.

When they reached the Place du Théâtre, where Dr. Legris resided, he redoubled his attention, and his vigilance was not lost, for suddenly he pressed his companion's arm. "There is my house," he said; "look."

Raymond obeyed, and in front of the house he saw a tall man walking up and down, with that unmistakable air of a person who had been waiting a long time and is beginning to grow impatient. "It is Krauss!" cried Raymond.

"At this hour?" asked the doctor. "Are you sure?"

"Oh, perfectly." And he called: "Krauss!"

The old soldier started, looked round, and when he saw the two young men, he hurried towards them. "At last!" he said. "I was beginning to despair."

"What is the matter?" asked Raymond, anxiously.

"Monsieur Jean Cornevin is in London, and has telegraphed that he will be here at the end of the week."

"Ah!"

"And one of your friends, the Baron de Boursonne, is very anxious to see you. He says he can do you a great service. I told him I should know to-morrow how he could get at you."

"He is a firm friend—give him the address of Dr. Legris."

But the doctor knew there was something more than this. "I told you, my good fellow, not to come here except at the last extremity."

"Yes, sir, and there is something else now. Only as it was such a particular thing I did not know——"

"You can speak before the doctor," said Raymond.

The faithful servant hesitated for a second; and then he said, in a low voice: "A young lady, sir, has been to see you."

"A young lady?"

"Yes, sir; she was very pretty, but she looked frightened to death. I think you must have spoken to her of me—for she knew me. Let me tell you all about it. I was just going to bed when the concierge came up, and said somebody wanted to see me. I went down and I found two ladies. The younger one said, hastily, that she wanted to see you at once, that your life and her's depended on it. I was considerably embarrassed. But she begged me so hard to take her where she could see you, that I——"

"You brought her?"

"Yes, sir; and she is just round the corner in a cab."

Raymond uttered an exclamation, and dashed off towards the vehicle which stood in the shade. It was Simone de Maillefert who was waiting for him, with her governess, Miss Lydia Dodge. Simone heard his step, and recognized it, for she leaned out of the window. "You!" he said; "you! Here at this hour!"

"Why should I heed hours now?" she answered, in that quick, harsh voice, natural to those who are conscious of mortal peril. "What have I to fear or love now? I was obliged to see you, and I came. You received my letter, did you not?"

"I received it, and fail to understand what I have done to merit it."

"I was mad when I wrote it. But why did you not answer it?"

"If you knew what I had been doing you would not ask that question——"

"I do know. You are mixed up with conspirators; you are discovered, and you are in concealment."

They spoke without the slightest precaution, so that the driver, considerably puzzled by the words he caught, slyly alighted from his box and approached the window. Fortunately, Krauss and Dr. Legris were watching. They called the driver, under the pretext of wanting a light for their cigars, and kept him far enough away from the vehicle so that he could hear nothing.

"When your letter reached me," said Raymond, "I had not heard of the terrible misfortune——"

"Which I would have averted at the price of life itself! A Duke de Maillefert accused of robbery—accused of forgery!"

She was sublime in her indignation. Never had Raymond loved her so passionately; never had he so fully realized that life without her was impossible. "But your brother is not guilty!" he cried.

Simone looked at him. "How did you know?" she asked.

"I know that all your brother did was, in his eyes, a pure fiction. It was you only whom he intended to pillage and deceive."

Simone hid her face in her hands, and sobbed convulsively. "Alas!" she said, "the odious farce he fancied he was enacting is more odious than the crime itself. This is his punishment. My mother went to see him, but the jailers refused to open his door for her. And yet it is possible that the crowning disgrace of a trial may be avoided. It is for that I came. Can I rely on your aid?"

"My body and soul belong to you—you know that."

"I believe it, and it is that belief which gives me courage to say to you: Raymond, my best beloved, sacrifice for me the sacred memory of your murdered father—the hopes of your whole life—your legitimate vengeance—"

"What do you mean?" he stammered, faint and sick at heart.

She leaned toward him. "Give me those papers," she whispered, "those papers that belonged to M. de Combeldaine."

"Gracious heavens!" he exclaimed.

She misunderstood the meaning of his exclamation, for she added, with her hands clasped in an agony of supplication: "I know the extent of the sacrifice, Raymond. With these papers—for he told me so himself—you can ruin Combeldaine and all his associates. But do you know what he promises me in exchange? For my brother, a restoration of his forfeited honour, and liberty for myself. You hear," she continued, "liberty—liberty to dispose of my own hand. If not—as the honour of the house of De Maillefert must be preserved—I shall marry this man on Tuesday next."

"On Tuesday?"

"Yes, it is a settled thing. And De Combeldaine has arranged matters so adroitly that no one knows it."

Then Raymond cried out desperately: "But I have not got them. I don't possess those papers which would be our salvation."

Truth was in his tone, and Simone sank back in the carriage. "All is over, then," she murmured. "And yet, they were carried off. Who has them?"

The name of Laurent Cornevin was on Raymond's lips, but he had the courage—courage almost superhuman under the circumstances—not to utter it. "I don't know," he replied.

It was easy to see what it cost Simone to renounce the hope by which she had been sustained. "But Combeldaine," she said, "thinks you have these letters, for it was he who sent me to you."

"He sent you?"

"He told me, moreover, that it was owing to him that you were not yet arrested."

"Not yet arrested! Excuse me—but was it in your mother's presence that he gave you this advice?"

"No; he even begged me to conceal it from her."

Raymond caught at this gleam of light. "Combeldaine distrusts your mother, then. And why? What does she say to you of this marriage?"

"Nothing. After several days of intense depression, she all at once regained her carelessness. Even my brother's arrest did not depress her. Sometimes I have asked myself if she is in full possession of her reason. In talking about Philippe, she says: 'Nonsense! It will all come right, and to me, 'You are not yet married. Even at the mayor's door you need not renounce hope.'"

Raymond reflected. "This indifference," he thought to himself, "can only prove that the duchess and Cornevin understand each other. Have they a decisive blow in reserve?" And then he added aloud: "I will be more explicit than your mother, Simone, and I swear to you that you shall never marry that man."

"What do you hope to do, then?"

He gently replied. "Allow me to keep my secret a little longer."

The driver was summoned, mounted his box, and gathered up his reins, while Simone said, in a low, faint voice: "Farewell, Raymond! My last

hope is gone. It has sustained my strength for a few hours. And now I must tell M. de Combelaïne the result of this interview with you."

"At this hour."

"Yes; he must be awaiting my return before our house in his brougham. God have pity on us."

Then extending her hand to Raymond, who pressed it to his lips, she said once more: "Farewell."

"Until Tuesday," murmured Raymond, as the cab drove off, and almost immediately Dr. Legris' honest voice was heard in his ear.

"Well, you are pleased, I trust? This step strikes me as pretty significant."

"Did you hear what she said?"

"Not a word. Nor did Krauss."

"No, sir," and the old soldier touched his hat.

"But it does not need any excessive brilliancy to know that she came for the papers which Combelaïne thinks you took from Flora Misri."

"Precisely, that's what she came for, and if I had the papers——"

"You would have given them to her?"

"Instantly."

The doctor took off his hat and made a profound bow. "My compliments to you! Fortunately these blessed papers are in firmer hands than yours and will not escape from them until the right moment."

"Not until too late, probably. Do you know that the wedding is fixed for Tuesday."

"What does that prove? Simply that Laurent Cornevin is master of the situation, and that he will be ready."

"But if he is not?"

"Then I shall be the first to say: Take the matter into your own hands. But I am not afraid. Cornevin is on the lookout."

Dr. Legris had been absent all day with Raymond, and it is not with impunity that a physician, with a practice like his, steals so many hours for his own affairs. Twenty patients had called, and some of them had returned three or four times; and he could read their names on a slate which lay on his table. But it was not this which attracted his attention. On his table lay a folded paper all by itself, as if to indicate its importance. It was, in fact, a summons to appear before the investigating magistrate, M. Barban d'Avranchel, in his private office, but without the least indication why.

"Barban d'Avranchel! is not that the magistrate who has poor Philippe's case in hand?" asked the doctor.

"Yes," replied Raymond, "and it is he, too, who, at the time of my father's death, managed the inquest, and carried Combelaïne out triumphantly."

This summons puzzled Legris so much that he could hardly close his eyes, and at daybreak he walked into Raymond's room, and said:

"I would give ten louis this minute if it were time to present myself before this M. Barban d'Avranchel."

He saw a number of patients, and at nine o'clock was ready to make his round of visits, of which he selected the most pressing ones.

"I shall try to find an asylum for you," he said to Raymond, "for we must run no risks. As soon as Combelaïne knows that you have not got the papers, he will have you arrested." And as Raymond began to thank him, he added: "Never mind that now. To-day I haven't a second to spare. I

must go at once to Batignolles to prepare a place for Madame Flora. But don't show yourself to anyone here. My servant, who has her orders, will not allow anyone to come in except the Baron de Boursonne, whom you expect."

Less than half an hour had elapsed after the doctor's departure, when the servant opened the door, and said, mysteriously: "This is the gentleman, sir."

At the same moment M. de Boursonne brushed passed the woman, and exclaimed: "Here you are at last. Do you know that I made this journey for your sake alone. I bring you some great news."

Surprising, indeed, was the intelligence brought from Anjou by the old nobleman. A fortnight after Raymond's departure, huge yellow placards had burst out all over walls and fences, announcing the sale by auction of the De Maillefert property. The conditions of the sale were so peculiar, that everybody was astonished at the awkwardness of the men who had this important business in hand. The baron made up his mind at once that this awkwardness was intentional, and intended to drive away purchasers, and would, therefore, tend to the disposal of the property at two-thirds of its value. "Who could profit by this manoeuvre?" This question the baron at once applied himself to solve. "A Parisian—a certain Baron Verdale—had announced that he had determined to buy everything belonging to Mademoiselle Simone in the name of the Rural Bank, a flourishing financial concern, of which he was the chairman. The most moderate calculations set down the profits of this Verdale at a million or fifteen hundred thousand francs. People admired his cunning and skill, but all at once a rumour arose. After the sale had taken place, during the forty-eight hours' grace that elapse before it is final, a stranger—an Englishman—appeared at the notary's office, and claimed the legal privilege of the highest bidder, insisting on the surrender of the property to him, or on a new sale taking place. "To write all this would have been too long, my dear Delorge," said the baron in conclusion. "So I preferred to come and tell it, and at the same time enjoy your astonishment."

But Raymond was not astonished. Verdale's reticence the evening before had prepared him for the discovery of any manoeuvres, destined to throw part of Mademoiselle de Maillefert's property into the architect's hands. And as to the Englishman who had appeared so opportunely on the scene, with his millions in his hand, who could he be, except Laurent Cornevin?

This was also the baron's idea, when Raymond laid the position of things before him. They then proceeded to calculate the consequences of these events, when all at once the door was thrown open and Dr. Legris entered, out of breath from having run up three stairs at a time, and quite radiant with joy. "Victory!" he cried; "Victory! This time Combeldaine won't escape!" But he stopped short, for he saw the old engineer, whom he had not at first perceived.

"Go on!" said Raymond; "this gentleman is the Baron de Boursonne, from whom I have no secrets."

Dr. Legris complied. "I have just come from M. Barban d'Avranchel," he said, "and through him I learned—but let me begin at the beginning."

He then dropped onto a chair and wiped his forehead. "I was punctual," he said; "and precisely at five minutes to one I presented myself at the Palais de Justice, with my summons in my hand. I was kept waiting some ten minutes, and was beginning to feel impatient, when I saw—well come! whom do you think I saw appear?"

"Combeldaine!" cried Raymond.

"No; a fellow practitioner—Dr. Buiron. Was he delighted to see me? By no means. On the contrary, he exclaimed: 'What the deuce are you here for?' 'I am waiting my turn for examination,' I said, 'and you?' 'I!' he answered; 'oh, I was summoned by the magistrate, and heaven only knows what for.' I assure you I was never so much astonished in my life, but I said with a laugh: 'You must have committed some crime.' He turned deadly pale—and then, merely to annoy him, I added: 'Or, if you haven't committed one yourself, you have helped somebody else.'

"My little jest did not seem to amuse him; however, he looked very embarrassed. Just then the door of the magistrate's private room opened and a man came out. I recognized him at once as that fellow Grollet who was once a groom at the Elysée stables. He now has a large livery establishment of his own, and is very well off. I saw him the other evening at the house of the actress who has got the young Duke de Mallefert into so much trouble. But he was not at the Palais as a witness—for two police agents took him between them and walked him off."

"Grollet arrested!" murmured Raymond. "Grollet—the false witness!"

"Yes! and to tell the truth I looked so astonished that Buiron asked me what the matter was. Before I could reply, however, I heard my name shouted. My turn had come, and with a bow to my *confrère* I entered the room. I found the magistrate to be a man of the most perfect breeding, polite to a fault, but icy and pompous to a degree.

"Do you know what he wanted?"

"The particulars of the attempt to murder you on the outer boulevard, near the Café de Périclès."

"How do they know anything about it?"

"I can't tell you that; but they certainly know it all, and the magistrate said he was on the track of the criminals."

"Did he mention Combeldaine?"

Dr. Legris shook his head. "D'Avranchel is not an eagle," he said; "but he is too cunning to name the count. However, after I had answered all his questions, I wished to know if he suspected the truth. With an easy, indifferent air I said: 'It seems to me quite impossible that the law can reach the guilty parties in this case.' 'The law,' he answered, 'always reaches the guilty parties. It is slow to strike sometimes, but it strikes all the more terribly at last.' 'Yes,' I interrupted; 'except when the criminals are covered by the statute of limitation.'

"M. d'Avranchel rose as he spoke to me. 'You are right,' he said. 'Only it may so happen that a man who has committed one crime which has remained unpunished, commits another, and then it is that Justice interferes.'"

VI.

THE ideas advanced by the investigating magistrate were open to argument, but not the meaning of his allusions. So victory might be near at hand, and this was all the more reason why Raymond should conceal himself from Combeldaine. Dr. Legris had found a place of safety for him, but he refused to go there. He said he should prefer to take refuge in the apartment he had rented in the Rue de Grenelle.

"They will never look for me there," he simply said; "because it seems the height of madness for me to go there."

This was good reasoning to a certain extent, but the doctor was not satisfied nor duped. "Acknowledge," he said, impatiently, "that you wish to watch the Maillefert mansion, so as to be sure that the wedding won't take place without your knowledge."

"You are right," Raymond replied, in a determined tone—but he nevertheless took some precautions in going to his room, which he reached about seven in the evening.

"Don't leave the house," Dr. Legris had said to him. "I will come once every day to bring you some news; but I must be off now, for I am expected elsewhere."

Dr. Legris was to meet Madame Flora Misri, who arrived out of breath long after the appointed hour, at their rendezvous in the Rue de Suresnes. "I have had great difficulty getting here," she said to Legris. "I have so much to tell you——"

"Go on," exclaimed the doctor.

"Combelaïne has come back to me! He thought I was with Lucy, and so he sent a letter by one of his friends. And what do you think he proposes?"

"Tell me!"

"He writes that he is half crazy; that he has never cared for any one but me, that he is in despair, and will break off the marriage, if I say so. In short, he proposes that we should leave France and get married in America."

The doctor shuddered. "And what did you say?" he quickly asked.

"I hesitated," she replied, "because this man has occupied so much of my life, that it seems to me at times as if I belonged to him. If he had come himself—if I had heard his voice—if he had bidden me follow him, I know myself so well, that I feel certain I should have obeyed him. Fortunately, he did not come. And Lucy was by my side. Lucy pointed out to me that if I were to go away with Victor, he would not hesitate to poison me to get hold of my money."

"And so?"

"And so I have come to implore you to conceal me!"

In another hour Madame Misri was safe in the little house of the widow, at Batignolles; and Dr. Legris was at home again, reflecting on these strange and rapid events. Flora Misri, the millionaire, was Combelaïne's last card, and that he played it now, showed that he believed the game lost.

The next day Dr. Legris told all this to Raymond, hoping that he would take it as a small consolation. But Raymond chose to look at it in a very different light. "That will not prevent the marriage," he said. "Quite the contrary. Combelaïne will carry it out just the same. The whole mansion has been in confusion to-day. I have watched it attentively. Tradespeople have been going in with enormous packages. They are preparing for the wedding."

The doctor began to argue the point.

"I will wait until the last minute," interrupted Raymond, "for so I promised you; but I swear to you that Simone shall never bear the name of my father's murderer." And as he spoke he pointed to the table, where lay a pair of revolvers.

This was Saturday. The next day, about eight o'clock, Raymond saw Simone leave the house on foot, with Miss Dodge, undoubtedly to go to mass. About four o'clock Combelaïne entered the mansion. On Monday in the afternoon the doctor arrived, all out of breath. He brought an astonishing

piece of news, which had been in circulation at the Bourse, and which was generally believed.

The chairman of the Rural Bank, Baron Verdale, had disappeared, carrying an immense sum away with him. Some said he had gone to England, while, according to others, he had been arrested on the Belgian frontier.

"Yes, this is an important piece of information," said Raymond; "but all the same, it will not prevent Combelaine's marriage. To-morrow is Tuesday, and there is nothing to indicate any change in the arrangements."

The doctor did not speak; he was beginning to feel anxious. Where was Cornevin? Would he not appear? Still he hesitated to say to Raymond, "Act!"

The night was one long agony to Delorge, and the day had hardly broken when he was behind his blinds watching the Maillefert mansion. There was a certain bustle of preparations in the court-yard. At nine o'clock several carriages drove up, and out of them stepped the Princess d'Eljonsen, Dr. Buiron, the Duke and Duchess de Maumussy, with a few other members of their set; and, finally, all in black, except his cravat and gloves, which were snowy white, there appeared the Count de Combelaine. There was no room for further doubt.

"Come!" said Raymond, solemnly, "let my destiny be accomplished." So saying, he slipped the two revolvers into his pocket and hurried towards the mairie adjoining the Palais Bourbon.

There also a great deal of bustle was apparent, and a number of attendants were hurrying through the passages with carpets and chairs. Raymond stopped one of the servants and asked him: "What is going on?"

"A wedding—a count marries the daughter of a duchess." And then the fellow mentioned by which stairs and passages these people would reach the mayor's rooms, and in which apartment the civil ceremony of marriage would take place.

"Thank you, my friend," said Raymond, who calmly proceeded to select the spot most favourable for his design.

His sufferings were over, for he had ceased to reflect; he said to himself, simply and wearily, that all would soon be finished. He stretched out his arm mechanically to see that it did not tremble, and then stood still like stone.

He lost his immobility, however, when he heard the carriages dash up; for at the sound he darted to a window. "It is they!" he said to himself.

Then as he turned to regain the position he had selected, he found himself face to face with a stalwart man whose face was bright with intelligence and energy, and who wore the same livery as the grooms attached to the president's palace in 1851. This man caught him by the arm, and exclaimed, in an undertone: "Madman! what are you going to do?"

Raymond felt as if he were choking. He knew this man. He knew him to be the Englishman who had come to his rescue on the day of Victor Noir's funeral, and he recognized him also as the same person who had saved him on the evening of Rochefort's arrest. "It is you," he stammered.

"Yes," said the stranger, simply; "yes, it is I." And in a peremptory tone, he added, "Why do you carry those weapons in your pocket?"

Raymond made no attempt at denial. "I could not see any other way,"

he answered slowly, "of preventing my father's murderer from marrying the woman I love."

With an imperious gesture the stranger interrupted him. "Didn't you know that I was watching over you?"

"Forgive me, but——"

"Do you think I would allow another crime to be added to the long catalogue?"

Raymond shook his head sadly. "You have undertaken a most formidable task, sir," he said. "You don't know that this love of mine has been my very existence. I tried to meet you——"

Again did the man check him. "Events," he said, "were stronger than my will. Had I been discovered, all would have been lost, and I was determined—more especially for your own sake—to conquer."

At the bottom of the great staircase the sounds of many feet could be distinguished.

"Do you hear," murmured Raymond.

"Yes, I hear; but we have a minute still. One day, eighteen years ago, I was carried off, and suppressed as it were. I left behind me in Paris a wife and five children whom I adored. They were without friends and without money, and all of them might have perished, but, thanks to your mother, they were saved. I am here to-day, so that Madame Delorge, the noble woman who saved my children, may in her turn be made happy."

The noise on the staircase increased. Raymond began to speak.

"Silence," said the stranger. "No matter what you see or what you hear, no matter how far things seem to be going, remember that you are not to move nor speak—I am here!" And he drew Raymond into the recess of a window, where the two stood together.

It was time they drew back. The wedding-party was on the staircase. First came Mademoiselle Simone de Maillefert, whiter than her white raiment, whiter than the virginal wreath upon her brow. She leaned on the arm of the Duke de Maumussy, whose breast was covered with decorations. At the sight of Simone, Raymond felt all the blood in his body surge to his brain, and he caught at the wall for support. And yet pale as was the woman he loved, he fancied he detected in her eyes and on her lips a faint smile of hope.

She passed on, and after her came Combelaine, looking frightfully calm, and the Princess d'Eljonsen, and the Duchess de Maillefert; then Madame de Maumussy and Dr. Buiron, followed by two or three other persons, for it was impossible to give any solemnity to this marriage, when the heir of the name—the last of the Dukes de Maillefert—was in prison, accused of forgery and embezzlement.

"Come," said the stranger, drawing Raymond into the mayor's room, where they hid themselves in the rear of the sightseers.

The mayor arrived, wearing his tricolour sash of office. He was a tall old man, bald and thin, and as grave as the law he represented. He took up his position behind a desk covered with green baize, with his right hand resting on a large volume—the code Napoléon—yellow and worn from use.

"What are you waiting for?" whispered Raymond, anxiously.

"Hush," said the stranger.

The mayor, in a paternal voice, made a little speech, in which he spoke of the peaceful joys of a well-assorted union and the reciprocal duties of husband and wife. He glanced about for approval, but as the wedding

party remained stiff and cold, he got entangled in his discourse, and hastily passed on to the ordinary formulas. At last he put the usual questions "Monsieur le Comte de Combelaine, do you consent to take Mademoiselle Simone de Maillefert, here present, for your wedded wife?"

The count was on the point of replying affirmatively, when suddenly Raymond's companion stepped forward, and in a loud voice exclaimed: "This marriage is impossible!"

De Combelaine turned at once, and seeing this man dressed in the livery formerly worn by the grooms of the Elysée, he cried: "What, Laurent Cornevin!"

But the count was a formidable adversary. He gathered together enough energy to keep down all signs of concern, and regaining his superb impudence: "By what right," he asked, "does this man interrupt this solemnity?"

"By the right," answered Cornevin, "that all honest men have to prevent a scoundrel who is already married from committing bigamy!"

The mayor's embarrassment was very great. "The Count de Combelaine has been married," he said, "but we have the certificate of the death of his first wife, Marie Sidonie, in good form."

Cornevin advanced, towering above all the people about him, his bright face shining with honesty. "You may have a certificate of death, sir," he said, "but it is none the less true that the coffin of Marie Sidonie, at the Montmartre cemetery, is empty. There are witnesses who can testify to these facts. I call on Madame de Maillefert and on Raymond Delorge, here present."

Combelaine protested loudly. "My wife died in Italy——" he began.

"Enough!" interrupted Cornevin, in a tone of authority; "enough! And now, if you please, M. de Combelaine, I will tell you the story of your marriage. Finding yourself in one of those seasons of shameful poverty, which have been so frequent in your life, you married an unfortunate orphan simply to get possession of the hundred thousand francs which were hers. Did you dream, even at that time, of denying the marriage? Very possibly—for even your most intimate friends were ignorant of it, and no one ever knew the Countess de Combelaine. At the end of six months the hundred thousand francs were gone, and you were bound to her for life. But you are a man of expedients, and the law has prodigious latitude and strange indulgences. In less than a year you succeeded in corrupting your wife and throwing her into the arms of a lover. Then, one night you appeared, armed with that terrible clause of the code which gives an outraged husband the right of life and death. You talked very loud, declaring that the law was on your side. To purchase her life, Marie Sidonie consented to leave France and to die in the eyes of the world. A few months later you received a coffin from Italy which contained some sand, with a false certificate of death."

The ground was crumbling away under Combelaine's feet—and yet he persisted in struggling. "This man is an imposter," he cried.

But Cornevin laughed. "Do you want proofs?" he asked. "Very well, I have them, for I know all your life, since the day that Madame d'Eljanson launched you into the world. I know how you were ignominiously dismissed from the army for cheating at cards. I was present when you assassinated General Delorge. I can prove that you were the guilty party in the forgeries that have been attributed to Philippe de Maillefert. If Marie Sidonie's testimony is required, be easy, I know where to find her."

A wild beast seeking escape in a sudden extremity, might look like Combelaïne looked while Laurent Cornevin was speaking. But, suddenly, the count turned to the mayor, who was almost stupefied, and said : " Sir, I wish to speak to you in private."

" Follow me into my study, then," replied the municipal magistrate. And he and the count at once passed through a small door.

Almost immediately, however, the mayor reappeared alone, and with a most disturbed air exclaimed : " He has gone—my study has another door which leads out on to the stairs."

" The wretch has fled, has he ?" said Cornevin, quietly. " What does that matter ? The judge, Barban d'Avranchel, has issued a warrant against him."

He laughed aloud—Cornevin did—as he saw the marriage guests slink towards the door—the Duke de Maumussy and Dr. Buiron, then the Princess d'Eljonson, Madame de Maumussy, and the others ; so that no one was left with him, except the mayor, the Duchess de Maillefert, Mademoiselle Simone, and Raymond. For the first time in her life, perhaps, Madame de Maillefert was sincerely moved. Seizing Cornevin's hands, she exclaimed : " What do I not owe you, sir ? Thank God that I confided in you ! You have kept all your promises. My unhappy son alone——"

" Monsieur Philippe, madame, will be released to-day. Justice recognizes the fact that in this matter he has only been very imprudent. The deficit of the Rural Bank has been made good."

" And by you, sir. You have restored us our honour, life, and fortune. How shall we ever repay you ?"

As Cornevin listened he glanced at Raymond, who, with Simone, had retreated to the embrasure of a window. If Simone were weeping it was certainly with joy. " You know what you promised, madame ?" remarked Laurent.

" Before a month, sir, my daughter will be Madame Delorge," answered the duchess.

Cornevin triumphed, but his strong mind was not disturbed by his success. He now went towards Raymond. " All is not settled yet," he said. " As long as Combelaïne is not under bolts and bars, so long I tremble. I must leave you. You are in trouble respecting your connection with the ' Friends of Justice,' but here is a safe conduct from the judge. Go home at once ; your mother is dying of suspense. In a couple of hours I will be with you."

When Raymond was in the street, he asked himself if he was dreaming. Was this blessed tranquillity real, which had come to him after such intolerable anguish ? On reaching the Rue Blanche, he embraced his mother and sister with such evident agitation that at first they were alarmed, but they soon saw that it was not sorrow that excited him.

" It is all right, then," murmured Pauline.

Raymond looked at her, and seeing her colour deeply, he asked : " You know then ?"

" Yes, Jean wrote to me, so that—— But I have just told mamma all about it."

" It looks to me," said Raymond, " as if there would be two marriages instead of one."

But his joy did not make him forget Dr. Legris. He hastened to write, and beg him to come to him at once.

After dispatching Krauss with this note, he felt that he must be alone to regain his equilibrium, and accustom himself to his new happiness. He had

been about an hour in his room, when suddenly he heard a man talking very loudly in the passage. He seemed to be arguing with the old servant. Raymond rose to see what it meant, when the door of his study was thrown open.

De Combelaïne came in. He still wore his wedding garments, but in what a disordered condition! His cravat was torn, and his gloves hung in strips on his hands. He shut the door and locked it, and then standing in front of Raymond with his arms folded and his eyes blood-shot—"It is I," he said, in a husky voice. "Not content with ruining me, you have deprived me of my last resource. Flora Misri has disappeared; Verdale is in prison. While I was in the mayor's rooms, the police seized all I had in the world in the way of money and valuables, so that flight is impossible. This is too much. There are some people who are too dangerous not to be allowed to fly."

"What do you want?" asked Raymond, who saw his revolver on the writing-table within his reach.

Combelaïne went closer to him and hissed in his ear: "Over and over again you have wished me to fight with you. I am here to say that I am ready to meet you now."

The impudence of this man was incredible. How did he dare, now that he was unmasked, to propose a duel, the supreme expedient of men of honour?

"You forget," said Raymond, coldly, "that I have only to call out aloud to bring in the officers who are bidden to arrest you."

A spasm of rage contracted Combelaïne's features. "We are alone," he said, and his violence increased, "before anyone comes— There are weapons here! Are you afraid? What can I say to stir up your blood? Shall I recall the Garden of the Elysée to you? Shall I remind you that less than an hour ago the woman you love leaned on my arm? that she was to have been mine, and that I adore her?"

On hearing this, Raymond snatched a sword from a trophy of weapons on the wall, and threw it at Combelaïne's feet. Then tearing down the one which hung across his father's portrait, he drew it from its scabbard, shivering the red seals, and placed himself on guard, crying: "So be it! Let God Himself decide between us?"

De Combelaïne attacked him with blind fury. This mortal contest between these two men in this narrow space was something terrible. The clash of steel rang through the house; furniture was overthrown, glass was broken, and Combelaïne's hoarse cries—for he had acquired the habit of shouting with the foils when a fencing master—were most formidable. Raymond was slightly wounded in the neck; and his blood flowed profusely, when, all at once, violent blows were heard on the door, and it was burst open by herculean shoulders. In the passage outside stood Laurent Cornevin, Krauss, Dr. Legris, the baron, Madame Delorge, and the worthy old Ducoudray.

"Let no one come in!" cried Raymond, in a terrible voice. "This man belongs to me. Cornevin, see that no one interferes!"

These few words nearly cost him his life, for Combelaïne gave a tremendous thrust. But Raymond parried it, and as he sprang aside he found himself just under his father's portrait. Then when Combelaïne, determined on killing him, made another lunge forward, it was the face of General Delorge he saw, and it was the eyes of the man he had assassinated that his own gaze met.

"The general!" he cried, recoiling as before a spectre.

He did not utter another word. Raymond's sword pierced his breast and passed out between his shoulders. The sword of the dying wretch dropped from his hand, foam gathered on his lips, a last blasphemy was strangled in his throat, he fell with his face on the ground. He was dead!

VII.

THUS did Laurent Cornevin accomplish his task. What energy and patience he had needed to reconstruct piece by piece the whole life of Combelaïne and his accomplices, and overthrow so silently and certainly the complicated edifice raised by their intrigues!

However, he had been aided in his perilous task by his courageous wife. For on his last return to Paris he could no longer resist his ardent desire to see her, and it was in her house that he had been hidden during these last months of contest. But he was avenged. And it was from his lips that Madame Delorge and Raymond learned all that had taken place in the garden of the Elysée, on the fatal night preceding the *coup d'état*.

This was his story: "I was on duty one Sunday night, when at about one o'clock I was suddenly called. I ran forward and found myself in the presence of M. de Maumussy. 'Take a lantern,' he said, 'and follow me.' I obeyed him, and we turned into the broad avenue behind the hedge. Two men, General Delorge and the Count de Combelaïne, were disputing, the general being very calm, while De Combelaïne was furious. At last De Combelaïne drew his sword. 'You shall swear,' he cried, 'on your honour as a soldier, not to say one word of the secret you have wrung from me.' 'It was entirely without my own consent that I became your confidant,' answered the general, 'so I shall say just as much and just as little as I choose. I shall speak if honour commands it.'

"M. de Maumussy here interfered. 'But we cannot allow you to leave us in this way,' he said. 'What do you mean?' asked the general. 'I have my sword,' cried De Combelaïne: 'you have yours.' But the general answered—'I will not fight with you; let me pass, if you please.' Then De Combelaïne threw himself across his path, and cried out, passionately. 'You shan't go! You shall fight, I tell you!' The general drew himself up to his full height. 'And I,' he said, 'I repeat to you that I will not fight with a man who has been dismissed from the army for cheating at cards.' On hearing this, De Combelaïne drew back and made a tremendous lunge at the general, exclaiming: 'That will prevent you from betraying us.' The general immediately dropped, and Maumussy and Combelaïne fled from the spot.

"I knelt by the general's side, and heard the rattle in his throat. 'I have had my death blow,' he murmured; 'prop me up against a tree.' I did what he asked, and then he said: 'Feel my pocket and give me my note-book.' I gave it to him, and he tore out a leaf and wrote in pencil by the light of my lantern 'I am dying—murdered by Combelaïne with the connivance of Maumussy, because I found out that to-morrow——.' But at this point his strength failed him—he could not finish the phrase—still he added his signature, and then in an almost inaudible voice he said: 'Swear to give that paper to my wife!'

"I swore—but he was too far gone to hear me, I think; and he had indeed just breathed his last when De Combelaïne and De Maumussy reappeared. They took counsel together in low voices; and then they drew the general's sword from the scabbard and threw it on the ground. I helped them carry the body into a large hall, which had not been used for some time. I thought

they had forgotten me, but I was mistaken. The next day I went to Passy to obey the general's orders, but unfortunately Madame Delorge could not receive me. As I left her house two men, whom I did not know, approached me and asked what I wanted with the general's widow. I answered that it was none of their business. 'In that case,' they said, 'we arrest you.' The general's note-book lying on the ground had put the assassins on the track of the note in my possession, and they were determined to have it at any price. However, I have it still." And Cornevin, as he spoke, handed Madame Delorge the lines written by her dying husband.

Death came to De Combelaïne in altogether too gentle a form, but it had the immense advantage of putting an end to the scandalous suit from which the honour of the house of Maillefert could not have emerged without a smirch.

The next day, when the deficit in the Rural Bank was made good, the young duke was set free, and went off to Italy. He declared that he had received a lesson which he should never forget; but all the same, he took Madame Lucy Bergam with him on his trip.

Verdale, arrested at the Belgian frontier, was less fortunate; he stood his trial and was acquitted, to be sure, but he was ruined in reputation and pocket. Grollet, who was proved by Barban d'Avranchel to have been Combelaïne's accomplice in the attempt on Raymond's life—Grollet, the perjured witness of 1851—was condemned to ten years' imprisonment; while the day after Combelaïne's death the Duke de Maumussy took to his bed, and after a fortnight's illness died. Again was the word, poison, whispered. Was there any truth in the report? Only the duchess could have answered this question. But she was occupied with very different matters, having just signed an engagement with the manager of an American theatre.

The Duchess de Maillefert kept her word, and the unhappy Simone de Maillefert became the happy Madame Raymond Delorge. The day they were married Pauline Delorge, moreover, became Madame Jean Cornevin.

Poor Flora Misri had a terrible blow at this time. She wished to settle a handsome fortune on her nephew, but Dr. Legris and Ducoudray were obliged to explain to her that her money was such as honest people could not touch, and that she now ought to have but one aim, that of making herself forgotten. "Good God!" she cried, "what am I to do with my millions?"

Dark days were approaching. The empire, with dizzy swiftness, rolled close to the edge of the abyss. After plots, counter-plots, and riots there came the plebiscitum; and then followed war, declared with a light heart, but culminating in defeat and revolution. It was all over. All the lying prosperity of eighteen years ended in unexampled disaster and invasion.

Raymond, Jean, and Léon joined the same regiment, and shut up at Belfort, they were spared the shame of a capitulation. M. Philippe, too, felt the blood of his ancestors grow hot in his veins. He was placed at the head of a battalion of Mobiles, and one day received orders to attack a Prussian barricade. His men hesitated. "I will bet you a hundred louis that I am killed!" he cried, and urging his horse on, he fell dead, riddled with bullets. But the barricade was taken.

If you go to Rosiers you will certainly stop at the inn of the Rising Sun, and M. Bizet de Chenehutte, after you have told him this story, will no doubt suggest that you should visit the Château de Maillefert, which has been magnificently restored; Bizet has charge of the property and keeps the keys; and it is the glory of his life that he is the friend of Raymond and his wife, as well as of the Cornevin family, the Baron de Boursonne and Dr. Legris.

MISSING!

I.

ONE Sunday afternoon, not long ago, the whole district of the Marais—that busy quarter of Paris which now-a-days is but one vast workshop from the Temple to the Rue Saint Antoine, from the Bastille to the Rue Turbigo—was in a state of most unwonted excitement. Bustling as it may be on week-days, when all the bronze factories re-echo to the sound of toil, when the heavy vans roll over the pavement from druggist's to toy-dealer's, taking at each halt some fresh consignment for despatch by rail, when work-people and customers crowd the thousand and one establishments where every description of "*article de Paris*" is produced for a value of many millions of francs per annum—on Sundays, at least, the Marais usually relapses into silence. Were it not for the multitudinous inscriptions which cover all the houses from garret to basement chronicling the names of manufacturers, dealers and commission agents, one might fancy oneself in the old times, when the Marais was inhabited solely by the *rentier* class, by worthy old couples retired from business on fairly decent incomes, or by relics of the ancient nobility, scarcely wealthy enough to reside in the Faubourg St. Germain. Such, indeed, was the Marais fifty years ago—a quiet and secluded district—and thus have Honoré de Balzac and Paul de Kock described it in their novels. But, now-a-days, it is a vast hive of industry, whence peace and quiet are utterly banished during the six days set apart for toil. It is only on the Sabbath, when workshops and store-rooms are closed, when the week-day toilers are making merry in their native Belleville, or chinking glasses in the *bosquets* of Montreuil, that it regains a semblance of its old tranquillity.

And yet, on the particular Sunday we have mentioned, the usual "Sabbath-hush" was wanting. True enough, no heavily laden vans were rolling through the narrow streets; no din of hammers and anvils came from the closed *ateliers*. The foot-ways were not bestrewn with packing cases, and no crowd of commissionnaires and receivers, clerks and commercial travellers, hurried hither and thither peripatetically proving the truth of the axiom that "Time is money." But then, there were unusually animated groups of customers in all the wine shops, unwonted knots of people at the street corners, gatherings of housewives in front of the fruiterers' stores, and conclaves of door-keepers and kindred scandal-mongers in every convenient alley.

Something very extraordinary must have happened, as passers-by correctly opined. The fact is, that one of the most honourable manufacturers of the Rue du Roi de Sicile had disappeared, and all efforts to find him had so far proved unsuccessful. The grocer at the corner of the Rue St. Louis possessed full information on the subject—information obtained first hand from the cook of the missing gentleman—and his shop was most extensively patronised that afternoon, even by people who pretended that he mixed dust with his pepper, and sweetened his jam with glucose. For once in a way, they put up with his adulterations to enjoy the benefit of his conversation. "It was yesterday evening," repeated the worthy grocer over and over again, as he assisted in weighing pounds of sugar and penn'orths of salt, "yesterday evening just after dinner, our neighbour M. Jandidier went down to his cellar to get up a bottle of old wine, and since then no one has seen him. The cellar door was found wide open, but M. Jandidier had disappeared, vanished, evaporated !"

From time to time it happens that mysterious disappearances are spoken of. Alarm is spread in various directions, and prudent people invest money in sword sticks and revolvers. But as a rule the police shrug their shoulders when these occurrences are mentioned. They are acquainted with the "seamy side" of the cunningly embroidered canvas. They start an investigation and discover the truth, so different to popular exaggeration : in lieu of a romance, they come upon some sad story.

However, to a certain extent the grocer of the Rue Saint Louis spoke the truth. It was a fact that M. Jandidier, who did a most extensive business as a manufacturer of imitation jewellery, had altogether disappeared since the previous night.

M. Théodore Jandidier was some fifty-eight years old. He was very tall and very bald, gifted with fairly good manners and deportment, and according to popular report, possessed of a very considerable fortune. This was not to be wondered at, for in Paris the trade in imitation jewellery is simply enormous, and some manufacturers like the Bourguignons and others, whose creations are exported all over the world, are simply millionaires. One could not say as much concerning M. Jandidier, but he was, nevertheless, a man of means. A pretty little collection of scrip and bonds were said to yield him an income of twenty thousand francs a year, and his business brought him an average annual profit of another fifty thousand. He was esteemed and liked in the neighbourhood, for his probity was above all question, and his morals perfectly exemplary. When five-and-thirty, he had married a portionless cousin, who had proved a happy and faithful wife.

This worthy couple possessed an only daughter named Thérèse, who was literally idolised by her father. At one time it had been said that she was to marry M. Gustave Schmidt, the eldest son of the senior partner in the great banking house of Schmidt, Gubenheim, and Worb, but somehow or other—no one knew why—the marriage had been broken off ; and this had caused all the more surprise, as the young folks were apparently very much in love with each other.

Some friends of the Jandidier family pretended that old Schmidt, the father, the most avaricious of all our Parisian financiers, and an in-

veterate "fleece," had required that Mademoiselle Thérèse should bring her husband a preposterously large dowry, such as her father could not possibly furnish despite his comparative wealth. However, this was only a rumour which nothing had so far authenticated.

On this Sunday afternoon, when the news of M. Jandidier's disappearance spread through the Marais, all the incidents of his past life which the gossips were acquainted with, were duly recorded and submitted to public appreciation. A hundred stories of his honesty and good nature were told. He had been an honour to the district, an excellent worthy man in every respect. Given his rigid morals, it was altogether impossible to imagine that he had "gone off on the loose." His family ties were too strong for him to have abandoned his wife and daughter. No, he must have fallen a victim to some base scoundrel—he must have received a foul blow; and the honour of the Marais required that his remains should be recovered and fittingly interred, and that his murderer should be brought to justice.

So thus, during that Sunday afternoon, the rumours flew through the district, spreading in every ear and growing on every tongue, till, at last, having learned the reports from his agents, the district commissary of police considered it his duty to repair to the missing gentleman's residence with the view of obtaining precise information.

He was ushered into the grand drawing-room which was in a state of semi-obscurity, the shutters being half closed and the curtains drawn. Both Madame Jandidier and her daughter were distracted with grief, and he had considerable difficulty in calming them and inducing them to answer his questions. However, he was at length placed in possession of these particulars.

On the previous evening (Saturday) M. Jandidier had dined as usual with his family. He had made, however, but a poor meal, for he was troubled with a bad headache. After dinner he had gone down stairs—not to the wine cellar as the grocer of the Rue Saint Louis pretended—but to his warehouse, where a couple of *employés* were still at work. Having given them some orders, he retired for a short time into his private-room, occupied himself, no doubt, with various business matters, and then came up stairs again and told his wife that he was going out for a stroll. From that stroll he had never returned.

The commissary of police carefully noted down these particulars, and then asked Madame Jandidier if he could not speak with her alone for a few minutes. She looked at him with some surprise but finally signified her assent, and Mademoiselle Thérèse discreetly left the room.

"You must excuse the question I am about to ask you, madame," exclaimed the commissary, as the young lady closed the door behind her. "But this is a serious affair, and if we, the officials of justice, are to clear up the mystery, we must know the whole truth. Excuse my indiscretion, I beg you, but can you tell me whether M. Jandidier, your husband, ever had—to your knowledge—what shall I say? Well, any passing fancy, any feminine acquaintance away from home?"

Madame Jandidier sprang to her feet as if impelled by a spring. Anger had dried her tears, and it was in a snappish voice that she answered, "I have been married three-and-twenty years, monsieur. Never on any one occasion has my husband given cause for such a sup-

position. If I was not with him of an evening, he never returned home later than ten o'clock."

"Well, madame, was your husband in the habit of frequenting any club?" asked the commissary. "Had he any special café where he met his friends?"

"I should not have allowed such habits," curtly replied the lady.

"Do you know if he was accustomed to carry large sums about his person, madame?"

"On that point I can give you no information. I have always attended to my household, and not to my husband's business affairs."

The commissary found it impossible to obtain any further information, for the worthy dame's grief was now blended with a strong admixture of anger and resentment. The supposition that her husband might have a mistress revolted her feelings as a wife, and the barely veiled insinuation that he might frequent a club, and no doubt gamble there, incensed her as an attack on his recognised probity and integrity. However, despite Madame Jandidier's stiff air, the commissary thought it only right to try and assuage her affliction by repeating a few hackneyed "compliments of condolence," and then, with a profound bow, he retired.

Before leaving the house, however, he considered it his duty to question the servants, and their statements which generally corroborated Madame Jandidier's, made him feel somewhat anxious. He began to think that a crime had really been committed.

A few hours later he sent his report to the Prefecture of Police, and the same evening the case was submitted to the consideration of the Public Prosecutor. The latter, in his turn, delegated an investigating magistrate to examine the affair, and on the Monday morning the famous detective Retiveau, better known in the Rue de Jérusalem by his nickname of "Maitre Magloire," received orders to scour Paris, and if needs be, the provinces, in search of M. Jandidier—or his corpse. A capital photograph of the manufacturer, taken only a short time previously, was handed to the detective, who at once commenced his difficult task.

II.

MAÎTRE MAGLOIRE was a man of no little energy, and a fervent believer in the value of time. His alacrity was proverbial, so that the investigating magistrate, intrusted with the Jandidier affair, was by no means surprised when, on the Monday afternoon, his usher announced that the detective wished to speak with him, having already obtained some important information.

The magistrate at once gave orders for the police agent to be admitted. "Here already, M. Magloire," said he. "So you have fresh news, eh?"

"I am on the scent, monsieur."

"Well, tell me what you have ascertained."

"To begin, monsieur, I have learned that M. Jandidier did not leave home at half-past six on Saturday evening, but at seven o'clock precisely."

"Precisely?"

"Well, yes. My information comes from a clock-maker, in the immediate neighbourhood of M. Jandidier's house. This clock-maker knew him well, and noticed that he paused in front of his shop. In fact, M. Jandidier pulled out his watch and compared time with the clock above the door. The circumstance induced the clock-maker to look at the time himself, and he recollects perfectly well that it was then exactly two minutes past seven. Those two minutes would have amply sufficed for M. Jandidier to walk from his house as far as this shop. It is fortunate that he should have paused to compare time, for this apparently trivial circumstance has guided me to all my subsequent discoveries. For instance, the clock-maker noticed that M. Jandidier was munching an unlighted cigar. It occurred to me that he must ultimately have lighted it, and I asked myself where and how? Had he a box of lucifers in his pocket? No; for I learned at his house that a little silver-plated box he usually carried about with him, had been found on the mantel-shelf in his room since his disappearance. In this case, I reasoned, he must probably have gone into some tobacconist's shop to get a light."

"Yes, no doubt," opined the magistrate.

"I had considerable difficulty in finding the shop in question," resumed the detective; "but as the course taken by M. Jandidier from his residence to the clock-maker's shop seemed to indicate that he was going towards the boulevards, I went in that direction. To my delight, just as I reached the Boulevard du Temple, sure enough I came upon a tobacconist's shop. I went in and made inquiries. The woman behind the counter was well acquainted with M. Jandidier, and she recollects perfectly that he came in on Saturday evening to get a light. She was all the more certain on the point for, at the same time, he purchased a packet of *londrès extra*, which greatly surprised her, as he usually smoked very cheap cigars."

"How did he seem?"

"The woman told me that he looked pre-occupied. I obtained from her an important piece of information, which shows that Madame Jandidier was altogether wrong when she told the commissary of police that her husband did not go to any particular café. However, husbands don't always tell everything to their wives; and according to the tobacconist, M. Jandidier frequently went to the Café Turc, which is hard-by. I went there and questioned the waiters. Two of them remembered having seen him on Saturday evening. He drank two small glasses of brandy neat, and talked with some friends who were there. He seemed sad. The waiter who served at his table told me that he and his friends talked all the while about life insurances. It was half-past eight when he went away, accompanied by one of his friends, M. Blandureau, a merchant of the neighbourhood. I immediately went to M. Blandureau's warehouse and questioned him. He told me that on Saturday evening he walked down the boulevards with M. Jandidier, as far as the corner of the Rue de Richelieu, where M. Jandidier left him, saying that he had business to attend to. He was not at all in his usual frame of mind, M. Blandureau tells me; he seemed out of sorts and worried with melancholy presentiments."

"Very good, so far," muttered the magistrate.

"On leaving M. Blandureau," continued Maître Magloire, "I returned to the Rue du Roi de Sicile to inquire of the people of the house if M. Jandidier had, to their knowledge, any customers or friends, might he even a mistress, in the Rue de Richelieu. I more particularly questioned the man-servant who generally did his master's errands, but all he could tell me was that M. Jandidier's tailor lived in that street. I thought it, after all, advisable to go and see this tailor. 'Yes,' said he, 'M. Jandidier came to see me on Saturday. He came to order a pair of trousers. It was past nine o'clock.' It seems that whilst he was being measured a button fell from his waistcoat, and he asked the tailor to sew it on again. For this to be done, he took off his coat, and at the same time removed a packet of papers and a note-book from the breast-pocket. Holding these papers in his hand he half sorted them, and the tailor noticed that they comprised several bank notes?"

"Ah! That's a clue. So he had a large sum on his person?"

"Large? Well not so, perhaps, for a man of his position; but still a fair amount. The tailor thinks there must have been twelve or fourteen hundred francs in notes."

"Continue," said the investigating magistrate.

"While the button of his waistcoat was being sewn on again, M. Jandidier suddenly left off sorting his papers and complained of indisposition. The tailor had already noticed that he looked far from well; and at his customer's request he dispatched an apprentice to fetch a cab. M. Jandidier said that he had to go as far as the Halle aux Vins to see one of his work people who lived hard-by. Unfortunately the apprentice could not tell me the number of the cab he fetched, but on the other hand he recollected that it had yellow wheels, and was drawn by a big black horse. The yellow wheels proved that the vehicle did not come from the stables of the Cab Company, but that it belonged to some petty job-master. I sent a circular note to all the authorised cab-keepers, and a few hours ago I had the satisfaction of learning that the vehicle in question was No. 6,007. The driver remembered that on Saturday evening he was hailed by a lad in the Rue de Richelieu, and that for ten minutes or so he waited outside the shop of a tailor named Gouin. I asked him if he would be able to recognise the gentleman he drove to the Halle aux Vins, and he told me that he thought he would. Thereupon, I showed him five photographs, and he at once picked out M. Jandidier's portrait. There was a bright moonlight on Saturday evening, he said, and whilst the gentleman was counting out the money to pay his fare he had a good look at him."

Maître Magloire paused and noted with satisfaction the approbative expression on the magistrate's face.

"Well," said he, "this cabby drove M. Jandidier to the immediate vicinity of the Halle aux Vins, to No. 48, in the Rue d'Arras-Saint-Victor; and in this house there lives a workman, whom M. Jandidier employed, a workman of the name of Jules Tarot."

The significant manner in which Maître Magloire articulated these words "Jules Tarot" was well calculated to impress the investigating magistrate.

"Have you any suspicions?" asked the latter, giving the detective a keen look.

"Not precisely; but still here are the facts. On reaching the Rue d'Arras, M. Jandidier discharged his cab. He asked the doorkeeper if Tarot was at home, and on receiving an affirmative reply he went upstairs. It was then about ten o'clock. Half an hour afterwards the doorkeeper went to bed, and he was just falling asleep when he heard Tarot come down stairs. Tarot called to him to pull the rope which opens the door, and, thanks to the night light, the doorkeeper perceived that the workman was accompanied by the gentleman who had called. They went out together; and shortly after midnight Tarot returned home alone."

"And M. Jandidier?" asked the magistrate.

"Ah! I have been unable to trace him any further," replied Maître Magloire.

"That seems significant; suspicious even."

"Yes, monsieur. I fancy it's a bad job. Of course I could not question Tarot; it would have put him on his guard."

"Have you found out what kind of man this fellow Tarot is?"

"Oh! On that point I questioned the doorkeeper. Tarot, he told me, is a mother-of-pearl worker. He polishes the shells, and is most skilful in imparting the proper nacreous iridescence. Altogether, he seems to be a clever fellow, and he and his wife together—for he has taught her the work—earn at times as much as a hundred francs a week."

"So they are well off, for people of their class."

"Well, no, monsieur. They are both of them young, both of them Parisians born and bred, they have no children, and so they amuse themselves. Not content with Sunday relaxation and pleasure, they habitually make Monday a fête day, after the fashion of so many work-people, and the result is, that long before pay day arrives they are desperately hard up."

"H'm," said the magistrate, stroking his chin with a pensive air. "All this seems very suspicious—very suspicious indeed. So the Tarots lead rather a loose life? Their purse is often empty; and very likely they are in debt. Those twelve hundred francs that M. Jandidier had about him, no doubt, excited their covetousness. He probably called on Tarot to intrust him with some work, and no doubt pulled out his pocket-book to make a memorandum. Tarot must have seen the bank notes. And no trace, you say, can be found of M. Jandidier after he left the house with his workman at eleven o'clock at night?"

"No, monsieur, no trace at all," answered the detective. "I have made diligent inquiries in all directions but without result."

"Very strange, very suspicious," muttered the magistrate; and then in a louder key he added: "I must say, M. Magloire, that you have conducted this inquiry admirably. Guided by M. Jandidier's unlighted cigar, you have traced him to—well, to the man who is probably his murderer. Yes, his murderer, I have very strong suspicions on the point."

A brief pause ensued, and then the magistrate asked: "Was Tarot at home when you made these inquiries this afternoon?"

"Oh, no, monsieur. He and his wife had gone off. It's Monday, remember."

"Are you certain that they had merely gone off holiday-making?"

"Why, yes, monsieur; the doorkeeper said they had left early in the morning with a couple of friends, two of Tarot's comrades, I believe. They were going to picnic near Chaville."

"Ah! That was a splendid opportunity to make a perquisition in their absence, Maître Magloire."

"Certainly, monsieur, but I had no search warrant, and besides, it was only an hour or so ago that I went to the Rue d'Arras."

"I suppose that doorkeeper is to be depended upon?"

"Oh, yes, monsieur. He's affiliated at the Prefecture, No. 920."*

"Then he's safe. Did you leave him any instructions as to what he ought to do, if the Tarots returned home before you saw him again?"

"I did better than that, monsieur, I left a comrade at the house to wait and watch."

"Very good. Well, M. Magloire, we must have a perquisition; and here are a couple of warrants which you can use if occasion requires. Be here at eight o'clock to-morrow morning."

So saying, the magistrate returned to some documents he had been perusing when the detective arrived. The latter pocketed the warrants, made a deep bow, and hastened out of the room.

III.

It was already six o'clock, and before repairing to the Rue d'Arras-Saint-Victor it was necessary that Maître Magloire should call at the office of the district commissary of police, show him his instructions, and request him to preside at the perquisition. As the commissary was away at his dinner, some little time was lost. "We must have a locksmith," the detective reflected, "for the Tarots will hardly have returned, and it will be necessary to force open the door." A locksmith was accordingly procured, a couple of *gardiens de la Paix* were summoned to serve as an escort, and on the commissary's return the party set off.

At the corner of the street the detective asked his companions to wait a moment, and then went ahead. It was necessary that he should reconnoitre the ground, and ascertain from the comrade whom he had left with the doorkeeper if anything noteworthy had occurred during his absence.

As he entered the house he heard heavy steps climbing the stairs, and a man and a woman singing a gay refrain. "Have they returned?" thought Maître Magloire, and he hurried into the doorkeeper's room.

His comrade was there, and on perceiving him raised his fore-finger to his lips: "Hush, they've just come home. They are only halfway up stairs."

"They are singing loud enough," rejoined Maître Magloire in an undertone. "I must say that they are unusually gay for—for murderers."

"Oh!" replied his comrade. "The wine has got into their heads. As for their gaiety we'll see about that by-and-bye."

* It should be remembered that a very large number of Parisian doorkeepers or *concierges* are secret agents of the Prefecture de Police.—[Trans.]

Despite this rejoinder Magloire remained for a moment pensive. "Am I mistaken?" he asked himself. "But, then——" However, his hesitation was of short duration. "At all events we must clear up the mystery," he added, and leaving the house he went in search of the commissary.

Joyful the Tarots had certainly seemed as they climbed the stairs, singing a popular ditty. They were laden with field flowers, which the wife tastefully arranged in two large blue vases as soon as they had entered their lodging.

"Now, Clementina," called the husband, "you must make haste with the supper, or else the concert will be over by the time we get there."

Both Tarot and his wife were very partial to the entertainments given at a little *café concert* in the neighbourhood, and it was with the view of going there that evening, that they had returned so early from their excursion.

"Oh ! I've only the stew to warm," answered the wife ; "but, Eugène, while I light the fire would you mind running down to fetch a quart of wine?"

The husband took an empty bottle from a corner in the kitchen and went toward the outer door of the apartment, but when only halfway he paused with surprise.

Rat-tat-tat, rat-tat-tat. Some very noisy visitor indeed demanded admittance.

"Who's there?" cried Tarot.

"Open, in the name of the law," answered a stern voice.

Husband and wife turned pale with terror.

"Open, in the name of the law," repeated the same voice.

Still Tarot did not budge. Fear seemed to root him to the spot.

There was no further parleying, for at that moment Maître Magloire perceived that the key had been left in the door outside. So he just turned it and walked in, followed by his comrade and the commissary of police.

On perceiving the latter functionary, whose stomach was spanned with his broad tricolour sash of office, Tarot and his wife were seized with a nervous trembling, of which Maître Magloire took careful note.

"Why didn't you open the door?" sternly asked the commissary of police.

"I was so surprised—monsieur—I didn't know—I—" stammered Tarot.

"Ah, you look as if you had something on your conscience," retorted the functionary, "I suppose you know what has brought us here?"

Tarot gave the commissary an anxious look, and stammered an incomprehensible answer.

"We have come to make a perquisition," said Maître Magloire. "Do you know that your employer, M. Jandidier of the Rue du Roi de Sicile, has disappeared? He was last seen in your company late on Saturday night."

Both Tarot and his wife were too overwhelmed to speak.

"Come give us the keys of all your drawers and cupboards," said the commissary ; and as the wife timidly drew them from her pocket he

added, turning to the detective : "There you are, Maître Magloire, you may set about your task."

The search was a protracted and a difficult one, for dusk had now set in, and a careful scrutiny could scarcely be made by lamp light. However, all the drawers were turned out, and all the cupboards carefully explored. Magloire ferreted in every nook and corner, ripped up the mattresses and pillows on the bed, tried the stuffing of the chairs, but all to no avail. Nothing suspicious could be found.

"It's singular," muttered the detective ; and he once more asked himself, "Have I been mistaken after all?"

At this moment it occurred to him to look at the Tarots who stood by, watching the proceedings in silence. Perhaps their demeanour might give him a clue ; otherwise he and his companions would have no other resource but to apologise and withdraw. At first he observed nothing particular, save an expression of affright in their looks, but as he carefully followed the direction of the wife's glance, he noticed that it was fixed on a birdcage hanging near the window. "Eureka !" he cried, "I have it !"

Springing towards the cage he unhooked it, and careless of the canary roosting on the perch, he examined it in every sense. As in most cages there was a movable floor which drew out to admit of proper cleansing, and sure enough, between the thin boards, Maître Magloire found a sum of twelve hundred francs in bank notes.

The Tarots exchanged looks of terror. The husband seemed overwhelmed, but the wife broke out into piteous lamentations, repeating again and again that she and her husband were innocent.

However, the commissary and Magloire paid little or no attention to her wailings. "You had much better make a clean breast of it," exclaimed the detective, "instead of kicking up that row." Whereupon both husband and wife answered in piteous tones : "Oh ! we are innocent, sir, we are innocent !"

This time the detective shrugged his shoulders. "In the name of the law, I arrest you," said he. "I charge you with the murder of M. Jandidier." And he called to the two *gardiens de la Paix*, waiting below, to come upstairs.

The Tarots showed no signs of resistance, but as they were charged with a capital offence, the commissary thought it prudent to have them hand-cuffed. They passively allowed themselves to be removed to a cab which was sent for, and half an hour later they crossed the threshold of the Dépôt, and were duly locked into separate cells.

Magloire was fairly elated, and, forgetful of discipline, hurried off to the private residence of the investigating magistrate, to acquaint him with the capture and the recovery of M. Jandidier's money. The magistrate was pleased to express his approval, and renewed the appointment for the following morning at his office at the Palais de Justice.

The Tarots were interrogated separately. They both looked pale and careworn when they entered the magistrate's office, but, after passing the night under lock and key in a prison cell, this was only natural. However, they had both found their tongues again, and apparently they had preconcerted a system of defence, for their answers were identical.

They admitted that M. Jandidier had called on them on the Saturday evening. He seemed very poorly, and they asked him if he would not like to take a drop of something, but he refused the offer.

"What was the object of his visit?" asked the magistrate.

"He wished us to execute an important order, and proposed that we should take workpeople on our own account."

"That's singular. Had he not numerous workmen of his own?"

"Yes, but he said that his health was failing him, that he could no longer give his usual attention to business, and should prefer to transfer the order to us."

"And what was your answer?"

"We told him that we lacked the capital to execute it."

"Ah!—ah! And what then?"

"Why, he replied, 'Oh, that's of no consequence. I'll advance you enough money;' and he pulled out his pocket-book, and laid twelve hundred francs in bank notes on the table."

"Had he so much confidence as that in you?"

"Well, he knew we worked fairly well."

"Yes, but you have dissipated habits. You spend your money faster than you earn it. Your story is altogether improbable. M. Jandidier must have known how prodigal you both were. Well, did you at least give him a receipt?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Who signed it?"

"We both did."

"H'm, and what then?"

"After that," answered Tarot, "M. Jandidier asked me to see him further on. He said he was going in the direction of the Faubourg St. Antoine."

"And where did you leave him?"

"At the Place de la Bastille. We crossed the Constantine foot bridge and followed the canal."

"Ah! you followed the canal?" exclaimed the magistrate, eyeing Tarot attentively. "And you reached the Place de la Bastille safely?"

"Certainly we did, monsieur," answered the workman, with a flushed face.

Naturally enough, the magistrate asked both the husband and the wife to explain why they had hidden the money in the birdcage, and they each gave the same answer. On the Sunday night, as they were going home, Tarot met a comrade who, while he was playing cards in a wine-shop in the Marais during the afternoon, had heard of M. Jandidier's disappearance. The news greatly frightened them, and Tarot said to his wife, "If it were known that he came here on Saturday night, it would be a bad job for us. Didn't we cross the bridge together, and walk along the banks of the canal? The police would certainly suspect me, and if those twelve hundred francs were found in our possession, we should be altogether lost."

"We didn't sleep all Sunday night," said Tarot's wife; "we lay awake thinking about M. Jandidier. And we certainly shouldn't have gone out on the Monday, if one of my husband's cousins hadn't come to

fetch us according to arrangement. However, in the country we almost forgot about the matter, and as the detective says, we were no doubt gay when we came home. Before going out, I wanted to burn the bank notes, but Tarot wouldn't let me. He meant to refund the money to M. Jandidier's family, he said ; and besides, as he explained, we might have put ourselves in a bad position by destroying the notes, for, even if M. Jandidier were dead, his body might be found with our receipt in his pocket, and then we should have to refund the money ; and how could we do so if the notes were destroyed ? ”

The magistrate listened attentively to this explanation, which was plausible if not probable, and the prisoners' line of defence struck him as a very artful one. “ How did you know,” he asked at length, “ how did you know that M. Jandidier's body had not been found when the police searched your place ? It might have been recovered, and the detectives might have had your receipt with them. It was your duty to produce that money at once. Why didn't you do so ? ”

“ We didn't know what to do or what to think, monsieur ; we were too frightened. ”

“ Innocent persons have no reason to feel frightened,” sententiously retorted the magistrate. “ Justice knows how to distinguish between the innocent and the guilty. ”

He said this, and yet, at that very moment, he was asking himself in sore perplexity, “ Are these people culpable or not ? ” After all, there was nothing to corroborate the explanation of the Tarots, and it was utterly impossible for him to content himself with their mere word. A further search must be made for M. Jandidier. Perhaps his body might be found, and then it would be possible to form a positive opinion. In the meanwhile, the workman and his wife must be retained in custody.

IV.

A WEEK elapsed, and the magistrate was still in the same perplexity. The Tarots had each been re-examined three times, but nothing fresh had been elicited from them, and their later statements failed to contradict their earlier version. Were they innocent, then ? Or had they merely cleverly preconceived a plausible system of defence ?

M. Jandidier's remains had been searched for far and wide. The Seine and the canal had been dragged. The missing manufacturer's photograph had been sent all over France, but utterly without result. In this situation, the magistrate asked himself what course he ought to pursue. If he sent the prisoners to the assizes they would very likely be acquitted for want of sufficient proofs, especially if they were defended by a skilful advocate. No doubt there was the circumstance of those twelve hundred francs found in their possession ; but would that suffice to ensure a conviction ? The prisoners explained their possession of this money in a most artful fashion, and, besides, the true *corpus delicti* was wanting. What should the magistrate do then ?

He was asking himself this question for the hundredth time, when a strange, almost incredible report reached his ears. The well known firm of Jandidier *ainé* had suspended payment, and was going into

bankruptcy ! "Who would have expected that !" grumbled the magistrate. "Well, perhaps, we are coming to the truth."

On the morrow a detective who had been duly instructed, brought him a full report of circumstances which none of M. Jandidier's family had ever dreamed of. The revelation was an astounding one, and had caused immense surprise throughout the district of the Marais where M. Jandidier had been so respected and esteemed. In fact, the man whom the denizens of the Ruc du Roi de Sicile so delighted to honour, the idol of the trade in imitation jewellery, had fallen from his pedestal with a crash. People had imagined he was wealthy, and yet in reality he was ruined—utterly ruined : and during the last three years he had only kept up his credit by means of expedients. Less than a thousand francs had been found in his safe, and on the Saturday after his disappearance, bills for sixty-seven thousand five hundred francs were presented for payment by the Bank of France. Yes, Jandidier, the man of severe morality, gambled at the Bourse ; the virtuous husband kept a mistress !

The magistrate could scarcely believe his ears, and was giving vent to his astonishment when Maître Magloire appeared, quite out of breath.

"You know the news, monsieur ?" asked the detective as he crossed the threshold.

"Yes, I have just been told everything."

"The Tarots are innocent !"

"I think so—and yet that visit Jandidier paid them—how do you explain that visit ?"

The detective sighed. "Ah, monsieur," said he, "I was a fool, as my colleague, Monsieur Lecoq, has just shown me. You will recollect that at the Café Turc, Jandidier and his friends talked all the time about life assurances ?"

"Yes, I remember ; but what connection—"

"Ah ! monsieur, that was the point I ought to have kept in mind ! Jandidier's life was assured for 200,000 francs."

"Indeed !"

"Yes, and as you are aware, monsieur, in France assurance companies don't pay when the holder of a policy commits suicide. Now, Jandidier was no doubt anxious to provide for his family ; and so he made it appear as if he had been murdered, in hopes that the companies would pay his wife."

"Do you think he has destroyed himself ?"

"I cannot say, monsieur, At all events we cannot find his remains. May be he has simply taken himself off. And yet I don't know ; he can only have had very little money with him, and at his age a man scarcely has the courage to begin life over again. At all events, he certainly laid a trap for poor Tarot, and would have sent him to the guillotine for the sake of his policies being paid."

"What a scamp !" growled the magistrate ; and he took up his pen to sign an order for the release of the workman and his wife.

* * * * *

Thanks to M. Gustave Schmidt—of the great house of Schmidt, Gubenheim, and Worb—the firm of Jandidier did not go into bankruptcy. Old Schmidt had just died, most opportunely, and M. Gustave

was able to dispose of the paternal inheritance as he pleased, and more than that, he means to dispose of himself as well, for the papers announce that he and Mademoiselle Thérèse Jandidier are to be married next month.

Tarot and his wife have set up in business, thanks to the twelve hundred francs returned to them at M. Gustave's request ; and, mindful of the investigating magistrate's reproaches anent their "prodigality" and "dissipated habits," they have quite given up "merry-making" on Mondays.

But what has become of M. Jandidier ? Is he dead, or has he gone to America ? If any of our readers are acquainted with his whereabouts, they may communicate with the authorities, who offer a thousand francs reward !

IN PERIL OF HIS LIFE.

PART I.

FIRE AT VALPINSON.

I.

THE facts were these :—

Towards one o'clock on the morning of the 23rd of June, 1871, the Faubourg de Paris, the principal and most densely populated of the outlying districts of the pretty town of Sauveterre was startled by the furious gallop of a horse dashing over the pointed paving-stones. A number of peaceful citizens at once rushed to their bedroom windows. The dark night only allowed them to see a bare-headed peasant, riding a large gray, saddleless mare which he steadily belaboured with his heels and stick. Man and steed eventually turned into the Rue Nationale—formerly Rue Imperiale—crossed the Place du Marche-Neuf, and stopped at last before the fine house which stands at the corner of the Rue du Chateau. This was the residence of the mayor of Sauveterre, M. Seneschal, a former lawyer, and now a member of the General Council of the department.

Having alighted, the peasant seized the bell-knob, and began to ring so furiously, that, in a few moments, the whole house was in an uproar. A minute later, a big, stout, man-servant, his eyes heavy with sleep, came and opened the door, crying out in an angry voice,—“Who are you, my man? What do you want? Have you taken too much wine? Don't you know at whose house you are making such a row?”

"I wish to see the mayor instantly," replied the peasant. "Wake him up!"

M. Seneschal was already wide awake. Dressed in a large dressing-gown of gray flannel, a candlestick in his hand, nervous, and unable to disguise his nervousness, he had just come down into the hall, and had heard all that was said. "Here is the mayor," he exclaimed in a disagreeable tone. "What do you want of him at this hour, when all honest people are in bed?"

Pushing the servant aside, the peasant stepped forward, and without the slightest attempt at politeness, said:—"I come to tell you to send the fire-engine."

"The engine!"

"Yes; at once. Make haste!"

The mayor shook his head. "Hm!" he said, according to a habit he had when he was at a loss what to say or do; "hm, hm!"

And who would not have been embarrassed in his place? To get the engine out, and to assemble the firemen, he had to rouse the whole town; and to do this in the middle of the night was nothing less than to frighten the poor people of Sauveterre, who had heard the drums beating the alarm but too often during the war with the Germans, and then again during the reign of the Commune. Therefore M. Seneschal asked,—“Is it a serious fire?”

"Serious!" exclaimed the peasant. "How could it be otherwise with such a wind as this,—a wind that would blow off the horns of our oxen."

"Hm!" uttered the mayor again. "Hm, hm!"

It was not exactly the first time, since he was mayor of Sauveterre, that he was thus roused by a peasant, who came and cried under his window, "Help! Fire, fire!" At first, filled with compassion, he had hastily called out the firemen, put himself at their head, and hurried to the spot. And when they reached it, out of breath, and perspiring, after having made two or three miles at double-quick pace, they found what? A wretched heap of straw, worth about fifty francs, and almost consumed by the fire. They had had their trouble for nothing. The peasants in the neighbourhood had cried "Wolf!" so often, when there was no reason for it, that, even when the wolf really was there, the townspeople were slow in believing it.

"Let us see," said M. Seneschal; "what is there burning?"

The peasant seemed to be furious at all these delays, and bit his long whip. "Must I tell you again and again," he said, "that everything is on fire,—barns, outhouses, haystacks, the houses, the old castle, and everything? If you wait much longer, you won't find one stone upon another at Valpinson."

The effect produced by this name was prodigious. "What?" asked the mayor in a half-stifled voice, "Valpinson is on fire?"

"Yes."

"At the Count de Chaudieuse's?"

"Of course."

"Fool! why did you not say so at once?" exclaimed the mayor, who hesitated no longer. "Quick!" he said to his servant, "go and get me my clothes. Wait, no! my wife can help me. There is no time to be lost. You run to Bolton, the drummer, and tell him from me to beat the alarm instantly all over the town. Then you run to Captain Parenteau's, and explain to him what is the matter. Ask him to get the keys to the engine-house.—Wait!—when you have done that, come back and put the horse in.—Fire at Valpinson! I shall go with the engine. Go, run, knock at every door, cry, 'Fire! Fire!' Tell everybody to come to the Place du Marche-Neuf."

When the servant had run off as fast as he could, the mayor turned to the peasant, and said,—“As for you, my good man, get on your horse, and reassure the count. Tell them all to take courage, and that we are coming to help them.”

Still the peasant did not move. "Before going back to Valpinson," he said, "I have another commission to attend to in town."

"Why? What is it?"

"I must get the doctor to go back with me."

"The doctor? Why? Has anybody been hurt?"

"Yes, our master, the Count de Claudieuse."

"How imprudent! I suppose he rushed into danger as usual."

"Oh no! He has been shot at twice!"

The mayor of Sauveterre nearly dropped his candlestick. "Shot? Twice?" he said. "Where? when? by whom?"

"Ah! I don't know."

"But —"

"All I can tell you is this. They have carried him into a little barn that was not yet on fire. There I saw him myself lying on the straw, pale like a linen sheet, his eyes closed, and bloody all over."

"Great God! They have not killed him?"

"He was not dead when I left."

"And the countess?"

"Our lady," replied the peasant with an accent of profound veneration, "was in the barn on her knees by the count's side, washing his wounds with fresh water. The two little ladies were there too."

M. Seneschal trembled with excitement. "It is a crime that has been committed, I suppose."

"Why, of course!"

"But by whom? With what motive?"

"Ah! that is the question."

"The count is very passionate, to be sure, violent even; but still he is the best and fairest of men, everybody knows that."

"Everybody knows it."

"He never did any harm to anybody."

"That is what all say."

"As for the countess —"

"Oh!" said the peasant eagerly, "she is a saint of saints."

The mayor tried to come to some conclusion. "The criminal must then be a stranger," observed he. "We are overrun with vagabonds and beggars on the tramp. Not a day passes without a lot of ill-looking fellows appearing at my office, asking for help to get away."

The peasant nodded his head, and said, "That is just what I think. And the proof of it is, that as I came along I made up my mind I would first get the doctor, and then report the crime to the police."

"Don't bother about that," said the mayor. "I will do so myself. In ten minutes I shall see the public prosecutor. Now be off. Don't spare your horse, and tell your mistress that we are all coming after you."

In his whole official career M. Seneschal had never been so terribly shocked. He was losing his head, just as he had done on that unlucky day during the war, when, all of

a sudden, nine hundred *mobiles* fell upon him, and asked to be fed and lodged. Without his wife's help he would never have been able to dress himself. Still he was ready when his servant returned. The good fellow had done all he had been told to do, and at that moment the beat of the drum was heard in the upper part of the town.

"Now put the horse in," said M. Seneschal: "let me find the carriage at the door when I come back."

In the streets he found all in an uproar. From every window a head popped forth, with features expressive either of curiosity or terror; on all sides house-doors were opened, and promptly closed again. "Great God!" thought the mayor, "I hope I shall find Daubigeon at home!" M. Daubigeon, who, after being public prosecutor under the Empire, now served the Republic in the same capacity, was one of M. Seneschal's best friends. He was a man of some forty years of age, with a cunning look in his eye, and a permanent smile on his face. He prided himself, moreover, on being a confirmed bachelor. The good people of Sauveterre scarcely considered him stern and solemn enough for his profession. To be sure, he was very highly esteemed; but his optimism was not popular: he was reproached with being too kind-hearted towards the criminals he had to prosecute, thus indirectly encouraging offences against the law.

On his own side he accused himself of not being inspired with the "holy fire" and, as he expressed it in his own way, "of robbing Themis of all the time he could, to devote it to the friendly Muses." He was a passionate lover of fine books, rare editions, costly bindings, and fine illustrations; and much the larger part of his annual income of about ten thousand francs went in buying them. A scholar of the old-fashioned type, he professed boundless admiration for Virgil and Juvenal, but, above all, for Horace, towards whom he proved his devotion by constant quotations.

Roused, like everybody else, in the midst of his slumbers, this excellent man was hastily putting on his clothes, when his old housekeeper came in, quite excited, and told him that M. Seneschal was there, and wished to see him. "Show him in!" said M. Daubigeon, "show him in!"

And, as soon as the mayor entered, he continued: "Now

tell me the meaning of all this noise, this beating of drums,—

‘Clamorque virum, clangorque tubarum.’”

“A terrible misfortune has happened,” answered the mayor. From the tone of his voice one might have imagined it was he himself who had been afflicted.

The lawyer was so strongly impressed in a similar sense that he exclaimed, “My dear friend, what is the matter? *Quid?* Courage, my friend, keep cool! Remember that the poet advises us, in misfortune never to lose our balance of mind:—

‘Æquam, memento, rebus in arquis,
Servare mentem.’”

“Some scoundrel has set Valpinson on fire?” broke in the mayor.

“You do not say so? Great God!

‘O Jupiter,
Quod verbum audio.’”

“More than that. The Count de Claudieuse has been shot at, and by this time he is probably dead.”

“Oh!”

“You hear the drummer beating the alarm. I am going to the fire; and I have only come here to report the matter officially to you, and to ask you to see that justice be done promptly and energetically.”

There was no need of such a serious appeal to stop at once all the lawyer’s classical quotations. “Enough!” he said eagerly. “Come, let us take measures to catch the wretches.”

When they reached the Rue Nationale, it was as full as at mid-day, for Sauveterre is one of those provincial towns in which an excitement is too rare a treat to be neglected. The sad event had by this time become fully known everywhere. At first the news had been doubted; but when the doctor’s cab had passed the crowd at full speed, escorted by a peasant on horseback, the reports were believed. Nor had the firemen lost time. As soon as the mayor and M. Daubigeon appeared on the Place du Mar

che-Neuf, Captain Parenteau rushed up to them, and, touching his helmet with a military salute, exclaimed: "My men are ready."

"All?"

"There are hardly ten absentees. When they heard that the Count and Countess de Claudieuse were in need, great heavens! they were all ready in a moment."

"Well, then, start and make haste," commanded M. Seneschal. "We shall overtake you on the way: M. Daubigeon and I are going to pick up M. Galpin-Daveline, the investigating magistrate."

They had not far to go.

The magistrate in question had already been looking for them all over the town: he had just reached the place and saw them at once.

In striking contrast with the public prosecutor, M. Galpin-Daveline was a professional man in the full sense of the word, and perhaps a little more. He was the magistrate all over, from head to foot, from the gaiters encasing his ankles to the light auburn whiskers encircling his face. Although he was quite young, no one had ever seen him smile, or heard him make a joke. He was so very stiff, that M. Daubigeon suggested that he had been impaled alive on the sword of justice. At Sauveterre M. Galpin was looked upon as a superior man. He certainly believed himself to be so: hence he was very impatient at being confined to so narrow a sphere of action, considering his brilliant ability wasted upon the prosecution of a chicken-thief or a poacher. But his almost desperate efforts to secure a better office had always been unsuccessful. In vain he had enlisted a host of friends in his behalf. In vain he had thrown himself into politics, ready to serve any party that would serve him. Still M. Galpin's ambition was not easily discouraged; and lately, after a journey to Paris, he had thrown out hints of a great match, which would shortly procure him an influence in high places which he had so far been unable to obtain. When he joined M. Daubigeon and the mayor, he exclaimed, "Well, this is a horrible affair! It will make a tremendous noise."

The mayor wished to give him full details, but he added, "Don't trouble yourself. I know all you know. I met the peasant who had been sent in, and I have ex

amined him." Then turning to the public prosecutor, he remarked, "I think we ought to proceed at once to the place where the crime has been committed."

"I was going to suggest it to you," replied M. Daubignon.

"The gendarmes ought to be warned."

"M. Seneschal has just sent them word."

The investigating magistrate was so much excited, that his cold impassiveness actually threatened to give way for once. "There has been an attempt at murder," he said.

"Evidently."

"Then we can act in concert, and side by side, each one following his own line of duty, investigating the case and preparing for the trial."

An ironical smile passed over the lips of the public prosecutor. "You ought to know me well enough," he said, "to be sure I never interfere with your duties and privileges. I am nothing but a good old fellow, a friend of peace and study :

' Sum piger et senior, Pieridumque comes.'"

"Then," exclaimed M. Seneschal, impatient to be off, "nothing keeps us here any longer; my carriage is ready, let us go!"

II.

As the crow flies there is but a mile from Sauveterre to Valpinson; still that mile is as long as any two elsewhere. M. Seneschal, however had a good horse, "the best, perhaps, in the *arrondissement*," he said, as he got into his carriage. In ten minutes they had overtaken the firemen, who had left some time before them. And yet these good people, all of them master workmen of Sauveterre, masons, carpenters, and tilers, were hurrying along as fast as they could. They had half a dozen smoking torches with them to light them on the way. They walked, puffing and blowing, along the bad road, pushing before them as they went the two fire-engines, together with a cart on which they had piled their ladders and other tools.

"Keep up, my friends!" said the mayor, as he passed them, "keep up!" Three minutes farther on, a peasant on horseback appeared in the dark, riding along like some forlorn knight of romance. M. Daubigeon at once ordered him to halt.

"You come from Valpinson?" asked M. Seneschal.

"Yes," replied the peasant.

"How is the count?"

"He has come to at last."

"What does the doctor say?"

"He says he will live. I am going to the druggist to get some medicines."

M. Galpin, to hear better, was leaning out of the carriage. He asked,—*"Do they accuse any one?"*

"No."

"And the fire?"

"They have water enough," replied the peasant, "but no engines: so what can they do? And the wind is rising again? Oh, what a misfortune!"

He rode off as fast as he could, while M. Seneschal belaboured his poor horse, which, unaccustomed to such treatment, reared instead of going any faster, and jumped from side to side. The excellent man was in despair. He looked upon this crime as if it had been committed on purpose to disgrace him, and to do the greatest possible injury to his administration.

"For after all," he said, for the tenth time to his companions, "is it natural, I ask you, is it sensible, that a man should think of attacking the Count and the Countess de Claudieuse, the first, the most distinguished and esteemed man in the whole department, the second a lady whose name is synonymous with virtue and charity?" And, without minding the ruts and stones in the road, M. Seneschal went on repeating all he knew about the owners of Valpinson.

The Count Trivulce de Claudieuse was the last scion of one of the oldest families of France. About 1829, when some sixteen years of age, he had entered the navy as ensign, and for many years his visits to Sauveterre were few and far between. In 1859 he had become a captain, and was on the point of being made rear-admiral, when all of a sudden he sent in his resignation, and took up his residence at the chateau of Valpinson, which of all

its former splendour could only show two crumbling towers, and an immense mass of ruin and rubbish. During two years he had lived here alone, building up the old house as well as could be done, and by dint of energy and labour imparting to it the more essential characteristics of modern comfort and luxury. It was thought he would finish his life in this way, when one day it was rumoured that he was going to be married. This report proved true.

One fine morning the Count de Claudieuse left for Paris; and, a few days later, his friends were informed by letter that he had married the daughter of one of his former colleagues, Mademoiselle Genevieve de Tassar. The amazement was universal. The count looked every inch a gentleman, and was very well preserved; but he was at least forty-seven years old, whereas Mademoiselle Genevieve was hardly twenty. Now, if the bride had been poor, people would have understood the match, and approved it: it is but natural that a poor girl should sacrifice her heart to her daily bread. But here it was not so. The Marquis de Tassar was considered wealthy; and report said that his daughter had brought her husband two hundred and fifty thousand francs. Next it was imagined that the bride must be fearfully ugly, infirm, perhaps hunchback, possibly idiotic, or, at all events, of frightful temper. By no means. She had come down from Paris, and every body was amazed at her noble, quiet beauty. She had conversed with her husband's friends and charmed all of them. Was it then really a lovematch, as people called it at Sauveterre? Perhaps so. Nevertheless there was no lack of old ladies who shook their heads, and said twenty-seven years difference between husband and wife was too much, and that such a match could not possibly turn out well. All these dark forebodings came to nought. The fact was, that, for miles and miles around, there was not a happier couple to be found than the Count and Countess de Claudieuse; and two children, girls, who had appeared at an interval of four years, seemed to have cemented the happiness of the house for ever.

It is true the count retained some of the haughty reserve and imperious language which he had acquired during the time he controlled the destinies of certain important colonies. He was, moreover, naturally so passionate, that the

slightest excitement made him turn purple in the face. But the countess was as gentle and as sweet as he was violent; and as she never failed to step in between her husband and the object of his wrath, and as both he and she were naturally just, kind and generous, they were beloved by everybody. There was only one point on which the count remained rather unmanageable, namely, the game laws. He passionately fond of sport, and watched all the year round with almost painful restlessness over his preserves, to protect which he employed an extravagant number of keepers. He moreover prosecuted poachers with such energy, that people said he would rather lose a hundred napoleons than a single bird.

The count and the countess lived a retired life, and gave their whole time, he to agricultural pursuits, and she to the education of her children. They seldom gave an entertainment, and did not come to Sauveterre more than four times a year, to visit either the Demoiselles de Lavarande, or the old Baron de Chandore. Every summer, towards the end of July, they went to the seaside at Royan, where they had a chalet. When the shooting season began and the count was busy with his rifle, the countess habitually paid a visit to her relatives in Paris.

It required a storm like that of 1870 to upset so peaceful an existence. When the old ship's captain heard that the Prussians were on French soil, he felt all the instincts of a soldier and a Frenchman awake in his heart. Although of royalist opinions, he did not hesitate a moment to offer his sword to Gambetta, whom he politically detested. Having been appointed to the colonelcy of a regiment, he fought like a lion, from the first day to the last, being thrown down and trodded under foot in that fearful rout by which Chanzy's army was virtually destroyed. When the armistice was signed, he returned to Valpinson; but no one except his wife ever succeeded in making him say a word concerning the campaign. He was asked to become a candidate for the National Assembly, and he would have certainly been elected; but he refused, saying that he knew how to fight, but not how to talk.

The public prosecutor and the investigating magistrate listened but very carelessly to these details, with which they were perfectly familiar. Suddenly M. Galpin asked,

—"Are we not getting near? I look and look; but I see no trace of a fire."

"We are in a deep valley," replied the mayor. "But we are quite near now, and, at the top of that hill before us, you will see enough."

This hill, well known in the whole province, is frequently called the mountain of Sauveterre. It is so steep, and consists of such hard granite, that the engineers who laid out the great highway from Bordeaux to Nantes turned miles out of their way to avoid it. It overlooks the whole country; and, when M. Seneschal and his companions had reached the summit they could not control their excitement.

"Horresco!" murmured the public prosecutor.

The chateau itself was hidden from view by the tall trees surrounding it, but columns of fire rose above the highest branches, flooding the whole region with glaring light. The excitement extended for many miles around. The big bell, set in the short square tower of the church at Brechy, sounded the alarm in sonorous notes, and in the distant shade one heard the strange noise produced by the shells which people hereabouts ordinarily employ to summon the labourers from the fields at meal time. From all the high roads and byeways came the clatter of hurried footsteps, and peasants continually rushed by, each with a bucket in either hand.

"It is too late for help," exclaimed M. Galpin-Dave-line.

"Such a fine property!" said the mayor, "and so well managed!" And, regardless of danger, he dashed forward, down the hill; for Valpinson lies in a deep valley nearly half a mile from the river. Here all was terror, disorder, and confusion; and yet there was no lack of hands or of good-will. At the first alarm, all the people of the neighbourhood had hurried to the scene, and fresh helpers were coming every moment; still there was no one there to assume the command. The peasants were mainly engaged in saving the furniture. The boldest tried to get into the rooms, and, in a kind of rage, threw everything they could lay hold of out of the windows. Thus the courtyard was already half full of beds and mattresses, chairs, and tables, books, linen, and clothes.

A loud shout greeted the arrival of the mayor and his companions.

"Here comes the mayor!" cried the peasants, encouraged by his presence, and all of them ready to obey him.

M. Seneschal took in the whole situation at a glance. "Yes, here I am, my friends," he said, "and I thank you all for the zeal you are showing. Now, we must try not to waste our efforts. The farm buildings and the workshops are lost: we must give them up. Let us try to save the dwelling-house. The river is not far. We must form a chain. Everybody in line,—men and women! And now for water, water! Here come the engines!"

The engines indeed came thundering up; the firemen now appeared on the scene, Captain Parenteau in command. Then only was the mayor at leisure to inquire after Count de Claudieuse.

"Master is down there," replied an old woman, pointing towards a little cottage with a thatched roof. "The doctor has had him carried there."

"Let us go and see how he is," said the mayor to his two companions. They stopped at the door of the only room of the cottage. It was a large apartment with a floor of beaten clay; the working tools and parcels of seeds hanging from the blackened beams overhead. Two old beds with twisted columns and curtains of a dirty yellow stood on one side. On that on the left hand lay a little girl, four years old, fast asleep, and rolled up in a blanket. Her sister, some two or three years older, was watching over her. On the other bed, the Count de Claudieuse was reclining, the back propped up by some pillows that had been saved from the fire. His chest was bare, and covered with blood; and a man, Dr. Seignebos, with his coat off, and his sleeves rolled up above the elbows, was bending over him, and, holding a sponge in one hand and a probe in the other, seemed to be engaged in some delicate and dangerous operation. The countess, in a light muslin dress, was standing at the foot of her husband's bed, pale, but to all appearance admirably composed and resigned. She was holding a lamp, which she moved to and fro as the doctor directed. In a corner two servant-women, sitting on a box, were crying, with their aprons turned over their heads.

At last the mayor of Sauveterre overcame his painful feelings, and entered the room. The Count de Claudieuse at once perceived him, and exclaimed, "Ah here is our good M. Seneschal. Come nearer, my friend; come nearer. You see the year 1871 is a fatal year. It will soon leave me nothing but a few handfuls of ashes of all I possessed."

"It is a great misfortune," replied the excellent mayor; "but after all, it is less than we apprehended. God be thanked, you are safe!"

"Who knows? I am suffering terribly."

The countess trembled. "Trivulce!" she whispered in a tone of entreaty. "Trivulce!"

Never did lover glance at his betrothed with more tenderness than Count Claudieuse did at his wife. "Pardon me, my dear Genevieve," he said, "pardon me, if I show any want of courage."

A nervous spasm suddenly seized him; and in a loud voice, which sounded like a trumpet, he exclaimed—"Sir! Doctor! Thunder and lightning! You are killing me!"

"I have some chloroform here," replied the physician coldly.

"I won't have any."

"Then you must make up your mind to suffer, and keep quiet now; for every motion adds to your pain." Then sponging a jet of blood which spurted out from under his knife, the doctor added, "However, you shall have a few minutes' rest now. My eyes and my hand are exhausted. I see I am no longer young."

Dr. Seignebois was indeed sixty years old. He was a small, thin man, with a bald head and a bilious complexion, carelessly dressed, and wearing a pair of large gold spectacles, which he was continually taking off, wiping and putting on again. His reputation was widespread; and people talked of wonderful cures which he had accomplished. Still he had not many friends. The working classes disliked his bitterness; the peasants, his strictness in demanding his fees; and the townspeople, his political views. There was a story current that one evening, at a public dinner, he had got up and said, "I drink to the memory of the only physician of whose pure and chaste renown I am envious,—to the memory of my countryman, Dr. Guillotin of Saintes!" Had he really proposed such

a toast? The fact is, he pretended to be a fierce radical, and was certainly the soul and the oracle of the small socialistic gatherings in the neighbourhood. People looked aghast when he began to talk of the reforms which he thought necessary; and they trembled when he proclaimed his convictions, that "the sword and the torch ought to explore the rotten foundations of society." These opinions, combined with certain utilitarian views of like eccentricity, and still stranger experiments which he openly carried on before the whole world, had led people more than once to doubt the soundness of his mind. The most charitable said, "He is an oddity." This eccentric man had naturally no great fondness for M. Seneschal, the mayor, who was a Legitimist. Neither did he think much of the public prosecutor, who in his eyes was but a useless book-worm. In addition he detested M. Galpin-Daveline. Still he bowed to all three, and, quite regardless of his patient's presence, remarked:—

"You see, gentlemen, Count Claudieuse is in a bad plight. He has been fired at with a gun loaded with small shot; and wounds made in that way are very puzzling. I trust no vital part has been injured; but I cannot answer for anything. I have often in my practice seen very small injuries, wounds caused by a small-sized shot, which, nevertheless, proved fatal, and only showed their true character twelve or fifteen hours after the accident had happened."

He would have gone on in this way for some time, if the investigating magistrate had not suddenly interrupted him, saying, "Doctor, you know I am here because a crime has been committed. The criminal has to be found out, and to be punished; hence I claim your assistance, from this moment, in the name of the law."

III.

By this single phrase M. Galpin-Daveline made himself master of the situation, and reduced not merely the doctor and the mayor, but also the public prosecutor, to an inferior position. There was nothing now to be thought of, but the crime that had been committed. In vain, however, did he try to assume a purely rigid official air, in vain did he

strive to express by his attitude that contempt for human feelings which has made justice so hateful to thousands. He could not conceal the intense satisfaction which animated his whole being.

"Well, doctor," he asked, "first of all, have you any objection to my questioning your patient?"

"It would certainly be better for him to be left alone," growled Dr. Seignebos. "I have made him suffer enough this last hour; and I shall soon have to resume extracting the small pieces of lead which have honeycombed his flesh. But if it must be—"

"It must be."

"Well, then, make haste; for the fever will set in presently."

M. Daubigeon looked very annoyed, but his colleague paid no attention. Having taken a note-book and a pencil from his pocket, he drew up close to the sick man's bed, and asked him in an undertone, "Are you strong enough, count, to answer my questions?"

"Oh, perfectly!"

"Then, pray tell me all you know of the sad events of to-night."

With the aid of his wife and Dr. Seignebos, the count raised himself on his pillows, and began thus: "Unfortunately, the little I know will be of no use in aiding justice to discover the guilty man. It may have been eleven o'clock, but I am not even quite sure of the hour; however, I had gone to bed, and just blown out my candle, when suddenly a bright light fell upon my window. I was both amazed and confused; for I was in that state of drowsiness, which if not sleep, is still very much like it. I said to myself, 'What can this be?' but I did not get up at once: I was only roused by a loud noise, like the crash of a falling wall; on hearing which I jumped out of bed, and said to myself, 'The house is on fire!' What increased my anxiety was the fact, which I at once recollected, that there were in the courtyard, and all around the house, some sixteen thousand bundles of dry wood, which had been cut last year. Half dressed, I rushed down stairs. I was very much bewildered, I confess, and could hardly succeed in opening the outer door: still I did open it at last. I had barely put my foot on the threshold, when I felt in my

right side, a little above the hip, a fierce pain, and heard at the same time, quite close to me, the report of a gun."

The magistrate interrupted him by a gesture. "Your statement, count, is certainly remarkably clear. But there is one point we must try to establish. Were you really fired at the moment you showed yourself at the door?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then the murderer must have been quite near on the watch. He must have known that the fire would bring you out; and he was lying in wait for you."

"That was and still is my impression," declared the count.

M. Galpin-Daveline turned to M. Daubigeon. "Then," said he, "the murder is the principal matter with which we have to deal; and the fire is only an aggravating circumstance—the means which the criminal employed in order to succeed the better in perpetrating his crime." Then, returning to the count, he added, "Pray go on."

"When I felt I was wounded," continued the Count de Claudieuse, "my first impulse was instinctively to rush forward to the place from which the gun seemed to have been fired at me. I had not proceeded three yards, however, when I felt the same pain once more in the shoulder and in the neck. The second wound was more serious than the first; for I lost my consciousness, my head began to swim, and I fell."

"You had not seen your assailant?"

"I beg your pardon. At the moment when I fell, I thought I saw a man rush forth from behind a pile of fagots, cross the courtyard, and disappear in the fields."

"Would you recognise him?"

"No."

"But you saw how he was dressed: you can give me some kind of description of him?"

"No, I cannot. I felt as if there was a veil before my eyes; and he passed me like a shadow."

The magistrate could hardly conceal his disappointment. "Never mind," he said "we'll find him out. But go on, sir!"

The count shook his head. "I have nothing more to say," he replied. "I had fainted, and when I recovered consciousness, some hours later, I found myself here, lying on this bed."

M. Galpin-Daveline noted down the count's answers with scrupulous exactness: when this was done he asked again, "We must return to the details of the attack, and examine them minutely. Now, however, it is important to know what happened after you fell. Who could tell us that?"

"My wife, sir."

"I thought so. The countess, no doubt, got up when you rose."

"My wife had not gone to bed."

The magistrate turned suddenly to the countess; and at a glance he perceived that her costume was not that of a lady who had been suddenly roused from slumber by the burning of her house.

"Bertha," the count went on to state, "our youngest daughter, who is lying there on that bed, under the blanket, has the measles, and is suffering terribly. My wife was sitting up with her. Unfortunately the windows of her room look upon the garden, on the side opposite to that where the fire broke out."

"How, then, did the countess become aware of the accident?" asked the magistrate.

Without waiting for a more direct question, the countess came forward and said, "As my husband has just told you, I was sitting up with our little Bertha. I was rather tired; for I had sat up the night before also, and I was beginning to nod, when a sudden noise aroused me. I was not quite sure whether I had really heard such a noise; but just then a second shot was heard. I left the room more astonished than frightened. Ah, sir! the fire had already made such headway that the staircase was as light as in broad day. I hurried downstairs. The outer door was open. I went out; and there, some five or six yards from me, I saw, by the light of the flames, the body of my husband lying on the ground. I threw myself upon him; but he did not even hear me: his heart had ceased to beat. I thought he was dead; I called for help; I was in despair."

M. Seneschal and M. Daubigeon trembled with excitement. "Well, very well!" said M. Galpin-Daveline, with an air of satisfaction,—*"very well done!"*

"You know," continued the countess, "how hard it is to rouse country-people. It seems to me I remained ever

so long, alone there, kneeling by the side of my husband. At last the brightness of the fire awakened some of the farm-hands, the work-men, and our servants. They rushed out, crying, 'Fire!' When they saw me they ran up and helped me to carry my husband to a place of safety; for the danger was increasing every minute. The fire was spreading with terrific violence, owing to a furious wind. The barns were one vast mass of fire; the outbuildings were burning, the distillery was in a blaze; and the flames escaped through the roof of the dwelling-house in various places. There was not one cool head among all the people there. I was so utterly bewildered that I forgot all about my children; and their room was already in flames, when a brave, bold fellow rushed in, and snatched them from the very jaws of death. I did not come to myself till Dr. Seignebos arrived and spoke to me words of hope. This fire will probably ruin us; but what matters that, so long as my husband and my children are safe."

During this recital the mayor, the public prosecutor, and and even the servants had hardly been able to suppress their excitement. Dr. Seignebos, however, had more than once given utterance to contemptuous impatience. He did not appreciate these preliminary steps. He shrugged his shoulders, and growled between his teeth, "Mere formalities! How petty! How childish!" After having taken off his spectacles, wiped them and replaced them twenty times, he had sat himself down before a rickety table in one corner of the room, and amused himself with arranging the fifteen or twenty shot which he had extracted from the count's wounds, in long lines or small circles. But, when the countess uttered her last words, he rose, and turning to M. Galpin, said in a curt tone, "Now, sir, I hope you will let me have my patient again."

The magistrate was not a little incensed, and with some reason surely. Frowning fiercely, he exclaimed, "I appreciate, sir, the importance of your duties; but mine are, I think, by no means less solemn nor less urgent."

"Oh!"

"Consequently, you will be pleased, sir, to grant me five minutes more."

"Ten, if it must be, sir. Only I warn you that every minute henceforth may endanger the life of my patient."

They had drawn near to each other, and stood close

together, exchanging defiant glances, which betrayed the bitterest animosity. But surely they would not quarrel at the bedside of a dying man. Still the countess seemed to fear such a thing; for she said reproachfully—"Gentlemen, I pray, gentlemen—"

Perhaps her intervention would have been of no avail, if M. Seneschal and M. Daubigeon had not stepped in, each addressing one of the two adversaries. M. Galpin-Daveline was apparently the most obstinate of the two; for, in spite of all, he turned again towards the count, and said—"I have only one more question to ask you, sir: Where and how were you standing, where and how do you think the murderer was standing, at the moment when the crime was committed?"

"Sir," replied the count, evidently with a great effort, 'I was standing, as I told you, on the threshold of my door, facing the courtyard. The murderer must have been standing some twenty yards off, on my right, behind a pile of wood."

When he had written down this answer, the magistrate turned once more to the physician, and exclaimed, "You heard what was said, sir. It is now for you to assist justice by telling us at what distance the murderer must have been when he fired."

"I don't guess riddles," replied the physician coarsely.

"Ah, have a care, sir!" said M. Galpin-Daveline. "Justice, whom I here represent, has the right and the means to enforce respect. You are a physician, sir; and your science is able to answer my question with almost mathematical accuracy.

The physician laughed, and replied, "Ah, indeed! Science has reached that point, has it? Which science? Medical jurisprudence, no doubt,—that part of our profession which is at the service of the courts, and obeys the judges' behests."

"Sir!"

But the doctor was not a man to allow himself to be defeated a second time. He went on coolly, "I know what you are going to say; there is no handbook of medical jurisprudence which does not peremptorily settle the question you ask me. I have studied these handbooks, these formidable weapons which you gentlemen of the law know so well how to handle. I know the opinions of Devergie

and Orfila, I know even what Casper and Tardieu, and a host of others teach on the subject. I am fully aware that these gentlemen claim to be able to tell you by the inch at what distance a shot has been fired. But I am not so skilful. I am only a poor country practitioner, a simple healer of diseases. And before I give an opinion which may cost some poor devil his life, innocent though he be, I must have time to reflect, to consult data, and to compare other cases in my practice."

The doctor was so evidently right in reality, if not in form, that M. Galpin-Daveline gave way. "It is merely as a matter of information that I request your opinion, sir," he observed. "Your real and carefully-considered professional opinion will, of course, be given in a special statement."

"Ah, if that is the case!"

"Pray, inform me, then unofficially, what you think of the nature of the Count de Claudieuse's wounds."

Dr. Seignebos first settled his spectacles ceremoniously on his nose, and then replied, "My impression, so far as I am now able to judge, is, that the count has stated the facts precisely as they were. I am quite ready to believe that the murderer was lying in ambush behind one of the piles of wood, and at the distance which has been mentioned. I am able to affirm, moreover, that the two shots were fired at different distances,—one much nearer than the other. The proof of it lies in the nature of the wounds, one of which, near the hip, may be scientifically called—"

"But we know at what distance a ball is spent," broke in M. Seneschal, whom the doctor's dogmatic tone began to annoy.

"Ah, do we know that, indeed? You know it, M. Seneschal? Well, I declare I don't. To be sure, I bear in mind, what you seem to forget, that we have no longer, as in former days, only three or four kinds of guns. Have you thought of the immense variety of firearms, French and English, American and German, which are now-a-days found in everybody's hands? Do you not see, you who have been a lawyer and a magistrate, that the whole legal question will be based upon this great and all-important point?" So saying, the physician took up his instruments, resolved to give no other answer, and he was about to resume work, when fearful cries were heard without. The

magistrates, the mayor, and the countess herself rushed at once to the door. These cries were unfortunately not uttered without cause. The roof of the main building had just fallen in, burying under its ruins the poor drummer who had beaten the alarm a few hours ago, together with one of the firemen, a highly-esteemed Sauveterre carpenter, father of five children.

Captain Parenteau seemed to be maddened by this disaster; and all vied with each other in efforts to rescue the poor fellows, whose shrieks of despair rose high above the crash of the falling timbers. But all endeavours proved unavailing. One of the gendarmes and a farmer, who had nearly succeeded in reaching the sufferers, barely escaped being burnt themselves, and were only rescued after having been dangerously injured. Then only did the spectators seem fully aware of the abominable crime committed by the incendiary; and, as the clouds of smoke and columns of fire rose high into the air, fierce cries of vengeance broke forth: "Death to the incendiary! Death!"

At this moment M. Seneschal was inspired with a sudden thought. He knew well enough how cautious all peasants are as a rule, and how difficult it is to make them tell the whole of what they know. He climbed, therefore, upon a heap of fallen beams, and exclaimed in a clear loud voice,—"Yes, my friends, you are right: death to the incendiary! Yes, the unfortunate victims of the basest of crimes must be avenged. We must find out the incendiary; we must! You want us to do so, don't you? Well, it depends only on you. There must be some one among you who knows something about this matter. Let him come forward and tell us what he has seen or heard. Remember, that the smallest trifle may be a clue to the crime. You would be as bad as the incendiary himself, if you tried to screen him. Just think it over, consult one another, my friends."

A murmur ran through the crowd; then suddenly a voice exclaimed, "There is one person who can tell us something."

"Who?"

"Cocoleu. He was there from the beginning. It was he who went and brought the children out of their room. What has become of him?—Cocoleu, Cocoleu!"

The excitement became intense, and eager questions

were exchanged as to the possible whereabouts of the individual in question. For many years he had been well known to everybody present. There was not one among them who had not given him a piece of bread, or a bowl of soup, when he was hungry; not one of them who had ever refused him a night's rest on the straw in his barn, when it was raining or freezing, and the poor fellow wanted a shelter. For Cocoléu was one of those unfortunate beings who labour under a grievous physical or moral deformity.

Some twenty years previously a wealthy land-owner of Brechy had sent to the nearest town for half a dozen painters, who remained painting and decorating his newly-built house during well-nigh the entire summer. One of these men seduced a girl of the neighbourhood, whom he bewitched by his long white blouse, his handsome brown moustache, his good spirits, gay songs, and flattering speeches. But, when the work was done, the tempter departed with the others, without thinking any more of the poor girl than of the last cigar he had smoked. And yet she was expecting a child. When she could no longer conceal her condition, she was turned out of the house in which she was employed; and her parents, scarcely able to support themselves, drove her away without mercy. Overcome with grief, shame, and remorse, poor Colette wandered from farm to farm, begging her bread, insulted, laughed at, beaten even at times. Thus it came about, that in a dark wood, one dismal winter evening, she gave life to a little boy. No one ever understood how mother and child managed to survive. Still both lived; and for many a year they were seen in and around Sauveterre, clad in rags, and living upon the scanty generosity of the peasants.

At length the mother died, unsuccoured as she had lived. Her body was found one morning in a ditch by the wayside.

The child remained alone. He was then eight years old, and both strong and tall for his age. A farmer took pity on him, and led him home. But the little wretch was not fit for anything; he could not even keep his master's cows. During his mother's lifetime, his silence, his wild looks, and his savage appearance, had been attributed to his wretched mode of life. But now it was found out

that his intellect had never been aroused. He was an idiot, and, besides, subject to one of those terrible nervous affections which at times shake the whole body, and disfigure the face by the violence of uncontrollable convulsions. He was not a deaf-mute; but he could only stammer with intense difficulty a few disjointed syllables. Sometimes the country people would say to him,—“Tell us your name, and you shall have a sou.”

But it took him five minutes' hard work and a thousand painful contortions to articulate his mother's name. “Co-co-co-lette.” Hence came his name Cocoleu. When it had been ascertained that he was utterly unable to do anything, people ceased to interest themselves in his behalf. In consequence, he was abandoned to his former vagabond life.

It was about this time that Dr. Seignebos met him one day on the high road. This excellent man had, among other extraordinary notions, the conviction that idiocy is nothing more than a defective state of the brains, which may be remedied by the administration of certain well-known substances, such as phosphorus, for instance. He lost no time in seizing upon this admirable opportunity to test his theory. Cocoleu was sent for, and installed in his house. He subjected him to a treatment which he kept secret; and only a local druggist, who was also well known for his extraordinary notions, knew exactly what happened. At the end of eighteen months, Cocoleu had lost flesh considerably: he talked, perhaps, a little more fluently, but his intellect had not been perceptibly improved. Dr. Seignebos was discouraged. He made up a parcel of things which he had given to his patient, put it into his hands, pushed him out of his door, and told him never to come back again. The doctor had rendered Cocoleu a sad service. The poor idiot was no longer accustomed to privation: he had forgotten how to beg his way from door to door; and he would surely have perished, if his good fortune had not led him to the Chateau of Valpinson.

The Count de Claudieuse and his wife were touched by his wretchedness, and determined to take charge of him. They gave him a room and a bed in one of the farm buildings; but they could never induce him to stay there. He was by nature a vagabond, and could not control his vaga-

bond instincts. At winter time the frost and snow kept him indoors for a little while ; but, as soon as the first leaves came out, he went wandering again through forest and field, remaining absent often for weeks together. At last, however, some instinct seemed aroused in him, resembling that of a domesticated animal. His attachment to the countess was like that of a dog, down to the capers and cries with which he greeted her whenever they met. Often, when she went out, he would accompany her, running and frolicking just like a dog. He was also very fond of the little girls, and seemed to resent being kept away from them as he was at times ; for people were afraid his nervous attacks might affect the children. With time he had also become capable of performing some simple services. He could be intrusted with easy messages, water the flowers, summon a servant, or even carry a letter to the post-office at Brechy. His progress in this respect was so marked, that some of the more cunning peasants began to suspect that Cocoleu was not so "innocent," after all, as he looked, and that he was cleverly playing the fool in order to enjoy life easily.

Such was the individual whom it was asserted knew something of the cause of the catastrophe which had visited Valpinson and its owners. "We have him at last," cried several voices suddenly. "Here he is; here he is!" The crowd made way promptly ; and almost immediately a young man appeared, led or pushed forward by several persons. Cocoleu's clothes, all in disorder, showed clearly that he had opposed a stout resistance to his captors. He was a youth of about eighteen, very tall, quite beardless, excessively thin, and so loosely jointed, that he looked like a hunchback. A mass of reddish hair fell over his low retreating forehead. His small eyes, his enormous mouth bristling with sharp teeth, his broad flat nose, and immense ears gave him a strange, idiotic, brutish air.

"What must we do with him?" asked the peasants of the mayor.

"Take him before the magistrate, my friends," replied M. Seneschal,— "down there in that cottage, where you carried the count."

"And we'll make him talk," threatened his captors. "Come! Go on, quick!"

IV.

BOTH M. Galpin-Daveline and the doctor seemingly considered that professional dignity required them to retain an air of perfect indifference. Hence they did not evince the least apparent curiosity as to what was going on out of doors. Dr. Seignebos quietly resumed his operation ; and, as coolly as if he had been in his own rooms at home, proceeded to wash the sponge which he had just used, and to wipe his instruments. The magistrate, on the other hand, stood in the centre of the room, his arms crossed, and his eyes apparently fixed upon the infinite. It may be he was thinking of his star, which had at last brought him a famous criminal case, such as he had ardently longed for many a year.

The Count de Claudieuse, however, was very far from sharing this reserve. He tossed about on his bed ; and as soon as the mayor and M. Daubigeon reappeared, looking quite upset, he exclaimed,—“What does that uproar mean ?”

Then when he had heard of the calamity, he added,—“Great God ! And I was complaining of my losses. Two men killed ! That is a real misfortune. Poor fellows ! Bolton was hardly thirty years old ; Guillebault, a father of a family, will leave five children quite penniless.”

The countess heard these last words. “As long as we have a mouthful of bread,” she said, in a voice full of deep emotion, “neither Bolton’s mother, nor Guillebault’s children, shall ever know what want is.”

She had not time to speak further ; for at that moment the peasants crowded into the room, pushing the prisoner before them. “Where is the investigating magistrate ?” they asked. “Here is a witness !”

“What, Cocoleu !” exclaimed the count.

“Yes, he knows something : he said so himself. We want him to tell it to the magistrate. We want the incendiary to be caught.”

Dr. Seignebos had frowned fiercely. He execrated Cocoleu, whose sight recalled to him that great experimental failure which the good people of Sauveterre were not likely soon to forget. “You do not really mean to examine him ?” he asked, turning to M. Galpin-Daveline.

"Why not?" answered the magistrate dryly.

"Because he is an imbecile, sir, an idiot. Because he cannot possibly understand your questions, or the importance of his answers."

"He may give us a valuable hint, nevertheless."

"He? A man who has no sense? You don't really think so. The law cannot attach any importance to the evidence of a fool."

M. Galpin betrayed his impatience by an increase of stiffness, as he replied,—*"I know my duty, sir."*

"And I," replied the physician,—*"I also know what I have to do. You have summoned me to assist you in this investigation. I obey; and I declare officially, that the mental condition of this unfortunate man makes his evidence utterly worthless. I appeal to the public prosecutor."*

He had hoped for a word of encouragement from M. Daubigeon; but nothing came. Accordingly Dr. Seigne-bos continued: *"Take care, sir, or you may get yourself into trouble. What would you do if this poor fellow should make a formal charge against any one? Could you attach any weight to his word?"*

One of the peasants who were listening with open mouths, hereupon exclaimed—*"Oh! Cocoleu is not so innocent as he looks."*

"He can say very well what he wants to say, the scamp!" added another.

"At all events, I am indebted to him for the life of my children," said the count gently. "He thought of them when I was unconscious, and when no one else remembered them.—Come, Cocoleu, come nearer, my friend, don't be afraid: there is no one here to hurt you."

There was need for the count to use such kind words: for Cocoleu was thoroughly terrified by the brutal treatment he had experienced, and was trembling in all his limbs. "I am—not—a—afraid," he stammered out.

"Once more I protest," said the physician. He had found out that he was alone in his opinion. Indeed, the Count de Claudieuse came to his assistance, saying,—*"I really think it might be dangerous to question Cocoleu."*

But the magistrate was master of the situation, fully conscious of all the powers conferred upon him by the law. "I must beg, gentlemen," he said in a tone which did not

allow of any reply,—“I must beg to be permitted to act in my own way.” And then sitting down, he asked Cocoleu,—“Come, my boy, listen to me, and try to understand what I say. Do you know what has happened at Valpinson?”

“Fire,” replied the idiot.

“Yes, my friend, fire, which burns down the house of your benefactor,—fire, which has killed two good men. But that is not all: they have tried to murder the count. Do you see him there in his bed, wounded, and covered with blood? Do you see the countess, how she suffers?”

Did Cocoleu understand? At all events his distorted features betrayed nothing of what might be going on within him.

“What nonsense!” growled the doctor, “what obstinacy! what folly!”

M. Galpin-Daveline overheard these ejaculations, and angrily remarked,—“Sir, do not force me to remind you that I have, not far from here, men whose duty it is to see that my authority is respected.” Then, turning again to the poor idiot, he went on,—“All these misfortunes are the work of a vile incendiary. You hate him, don’t you? you detest him, the rascal!”

“Yes,” said Cocoleu.

“You want him to be punished, don’t you?”

“Yes, yes!”

“Well, then, you must help me to find him out, so that the gendarmes may catch him and put him in jail. You know who it is; you have told these people—”

He paused for a moment, then, as Cocoleu kept silent, he asked,—“But, now I think of it, who has this poor fellow talked to?”

Not one of the peasants could tell. They inquired; but no answer came. Perhaps Cocoleu had never said what he was reported to have said.

“The fact is,” remarked one of the Valpinson tenants, “that the poor devil, so to say, never sleeps, and that he is roaming about all night around the house and the farm-buildings.”

This was a new light for M. Galpin: suddenly changing the form of his interrogatory, he asked Cocoleu,—“Where did you spend the night?”

“In—in—the—court—yard.”

"Were you asleep when the fire broke out?"

"No."

"Did you see it commence?"

"Yes."

"How did it commence?"

The idiot looked fixedly at the Countess Claudieuse with the timid and abject expression of a dog trying to read something in his master's eyes.

"Tell us, my friend," said the countess gently,—*"tell us."*

A flash of intelligence shone in Cocoleu's eyes. *"They—they set it on fire,"* he stammered.

"On purpose?"

"Yes."

"Who?"

"A gentleman."

There was not a person present at this extraordinary scene who did not anxiously hold his breath as the last answer came. The doctor alone kept cool, and exclaimed—*"Such an examination is sheer folly!"*

But the magistrate did not seem to hear his words. Turning to Cocoleu, he asked in a deeply-agitated tone of voice: *"Did you see the gentleman?"*

"Yes."

"Do you know who he is?"

"Very—very—well."

"What is his name?"

"Oh yes!"

"What is his name? tell us."

Cocoleu's features betrayed a fearful anguish of mind. He hesitated, but finally making a violent effort, he answered,—*"Bois—Bois—Boiscoran!"*

The name was received with murmurs of indignation and incredulous laughter. There was not a shadow of doubt or suspicion. The peasants murmured, *"M. de Boiscoran an incendiary! Who does he think will believe that story?"*

"It is absurd!" said Count Claudieuse.

"Nonsense!" repeated the mayor and his friend.

Dr. Seignebos had taken off his spectacles, and was wiping them with an air of intense satisfaction.

"What did I tell you?" he exclaimed. *"But the in*

investigating magistrate did not condescend to attach any importance to my suggestions."

The magistrate in question was by far the most excited man of all present. He had turned excessively pale, and was visibly making the greatest efforts to preserve his equanimity. The public prosecutor leaned towards him, and whispered, "If I were in your place, I would stop here, and consider the answer as not given."

But M. Galpin-Daveline was one of those men so blinded by self-conceit that they would rather be cut to pieces than admit they have been mistaken. He answered, "I shall go on."

Then turning once more to Cocoleu, in the midst of so deep a silence that the buzzing of a fly would have been distinctly heard, he asked, "Do you know, my boy, what you say? Do you know that you are accusing a man of a horrible crime?"

Whether Cocoleu understood, or not, he was evidently deeply agitated. Big drops of perspiration rolled slowly down his forehead, while nervous shocks agitated his limbs, and convulsed his features. "I, I—am—telling the—truth!" he said at last.

"It was M. de Boiscoran who set Valpinson on fire?"

"Yes."

"How did he do it?"

Cocoleu's restless eyes wandered incessantly from the count, who looked indignant, to the countess, who seemed to listen with painful surprise. The magistrate repeated,—"Speak!"

After another moment's hesitation, the idiot began to explain what he had seen; and it took him many minutes to state, amid countless contortions, and painful efforts to speak, that he had perceived M. de Boiscoran pull out some papers from his pocket, light them with a match, put them under a rick of straw near by, and push the burning mass towards two enormous piles of wood which were in close contact with a vat full of spirits.

"This is sheer nonsense!" cried the doctor, thus giving words to what they all seemed to feel.

But M. Galpin-Daveline had mastered his excitement. "At the first sign of applause or of displeasure," said he, "I shall send for the gendarmes, and have the room cleared." Then turning once more to Cocoleu, he added, "Since you

saw M. de Boiscoran so distinctly, tell us how he was dressed."

"He had light trousers on," replied the idiot, still stammering most painfully, "a dark-brown shooting-jacket, and a big straw hat. His trousers were stuffed into his boots."

Two or three peasants looked at each other, as if they had at last hit upon a suspicious fact. The costume which Cocoleu had so accurately described was well known to them all.

"And when he had kindled the fire," said the magistrate again, "what did he do next?"

"He hid behind the woodpile."

"And then?"

"He loaded his gun, and, when master came out, he fired."

Count Claudieuse was so indignant that he forgot the pain which his wounds caused him, and raised himself on his bed. "It is monstrous," he exclaimed, "to allow an idiot to charge an honourable man with such a crime! If he really saw M. de Boiscoran set the house on fire, and hide himself in order to murder me, why did he not come and warn me?"

M. Galpin repeated the question submissively, to the great amazement of the mayor and M. Daubigeon. "Why did you not give warning?" he asked Cocoleu.

But the efforts which the idiot had made during the last half-hour had exhausted his little strength. He broke out into stupid laughter; and almost instantly one of his fearful attacks overcame him: he fell down yelling, and had to be carried away.

The magistrate had risen, pale and deeply excited, but evidently meditating on what was to be done next. The public prosecutor asked him in an undertone what he was going to do; whereupon he replied: "I shall pursue this investigation."

"What?"

"Can I act otherwise in my position? God is my witness that I tried my best, by urging this poor idiot, to prove the absurdity of his accusation. But the result has disappointed me."

"And now?"

"Now I can no longer hesitate. There have been ten witnesses present at the examination. My honour is at

stake. I must establish either the guilt or the innocence of the man whom Cocoleu accuses." Immediately, walking up to the count's bed, he asked, "Will you have the kindness to tell me the nature of your acquaintance with M. de Boiscoran?"

Surprise and indignation caused the wounded man to blush deeply. "Can it be possible, sir, that you believe the words of that idiot?"

"I believe nothing," answered the magistrate. "My duty is to unravel the truth; and I mean to do it."

"The doctor has told you what the state of Cocoleu's mind is?"

"Count, I beg you will answer my question."

The Count de Claudieuse looked angry; still he replied promptly—"My acquaintance with M. de Boiscoran is neither good nor bad. We do not frequent each other's society."

"It is reported, I have heard so myself, that you are on bad terms."

"On no terms at all. I never leave Valpinson, and M. de Boiscoran spends nine months of the year in Paris. He has never called at my house, and I have never been in his."

"You have been overheard speaking of him in unmeasured terms."

"That may be. We are neither of the same age, nor have we the same tastes or the same opinions. He is young; I am old. He likes Paris and fashionable society. I am fond of solitude and hunting. I am a Legitimist; he used to be an Orleanist, and now he is a Republican. I believe that the descendant of our ancient kings alone can save the country: and he is convinced that the happiness of France is only possible under a Republic. But two men may be enemies and yet esteem each other. M. de Boiscoran is an honourable man; he did his duty bravely during the war, he fought well, and was wounded."

M. Galpin-Daveline noted down these answers with extreme care. When he had done so, he continued,—“The question is not one of political opinions only. You, have had personal difficulties with M. de Boiscoran.”

“Of no importance.”

“I beg pardon: you have been at law.”

“Our estates adjoin each other. There is an unlucky

brook between us, which is a source of constant trouble."

M. Galpin-Daveline shook his head, and added,—“ These are not the only difficulties you have had with each other. Everybody knows that you have had violent altercations together.”

The Count de Claudieuse seemed to be in great distress. “ It is true,” he answered, “ we have used hard words. M. de Boiscoran had two wretched dogs, that were continually escaping from his kennels, and breaking into my estate. You can not imagine how much game they destroyed.”

“ Exactly. And one day you met M. de Boiscoran and warned him that you would shoot his dogs.”

“ I must confess I was furious. But I was wrong, a thousand times wrong ; I did threaten—”

“ That is it. You were both of you armed. You threatened one another : he actually aimed at you. Don't deny it. A number of persons saw it ; and I know it for a fact. He told me so himself.”

V.

EVERY one in the district was acquainted with the fearful disease from which poor Cocoleu was suffering ; and everybody believed that it was perfectly useless to try and help him. The two men who had carried him out merely laid him, therefore, on a pile of wet straw, and then returned to see and hear what was going on. It must be said, in justice to the several hundred peasants who were crowding around the smoking ruins of Valpinson, that they began by shrugging their shoulders in utter disbelief when they heard that M. de Boiscoran was accused of the crime. Unfortunately, first impulses, which are apt to be good impulses, do not last long. One of those idle, envious, besotted good-for-nothings, who are found in every community, in the country as well as the town, suddenly cried out,—“ And after all, why not ? ”

These few words at once opened a door to all kinds of venturesome guesses. Everybody had heard something about the quarrel between the Count de Claudieuse and M. de Boiscoran. It was well known, moreover, that provocation had always come from the count, and that his young neighbour had invariably given way in the end. But

might not M. de Boiscoran, impatient at last, have resorted to this means of avenging himself on a man whom they all thought he must needs hate, and whom he probably feared at the same time? The next step was, of course, to find a justification for a theory, and the opportunity was not lacking. Two men and a woman soon declared aloud that they could astonish the world if they only chose to talk. They were urged to tell what they knew; and, of course, they refused. But they had said too much already. Willing or unwilling, they were led to the cottage, where M. Galpin-Daveline was then examining the Count de Claudieuse. The excited crowd made such a disturbance, that M. Seneschal, trembling at the idea of a new accident, rushed to the door. "What is it now?" he asked.

"More witnesses," replied the peasants. "Here are some more witnesses."

The mayor turned round, and after exchanging glances with M. Daubigeon, he said to the investigating magistrate, "They are bringing you more witnesses, sir."

No doubt M. Galpin-Daveline was little pleased at the interruption; but he was sufficiently well acquainted with the folks of the district, to know that, unless he took them at the moment when they were willing to talk, he might never be able to get anything out of them.

"We shall return some other time to our conversation," he said to the Count de Claudieuse. Then, replying to M. Seneschal, he added, "Let the witnesses come in, but only one by one."

The first who entered was the only son of a well-to-do farmer of Brechy, named Ribot. He was a young fellow of about twenty-five, broad shouldered, with a very small head, a low brow, and formidable crimson ears. Still for twenty miles around, he was reputed to be an irresistible beau,—a reputation of which he was very proud. After having asked him his name, and his age, M. Galpin-Daveline inquired, "Well, what is it that you want?"

The young man straightened himself, and with a marvelously conceited air, which set all the peasants a-laughing, answered, "I was out to-night on some little private business of my own. I had to go beyond the chateau of Boiscoran. Somebody was waiting for me, and I was behind time: so I cut right across the marshes. I knew the rains of the last days would have filled all the ditches; but when

a man is out on such important business as mine, his legs don't fail him—"

"Spare us those tedious details," said the magistrate coldly.

The village Lovelace looked more surprised than offended by the interruption. "As you like, sir," said he. "Well, it was about eight o'clock, or a very little more, and it was growing dark, when I reached the Seille swamps. They were overflowing; and the water was two inches above the stonework of the canal. I was wondering how to get across without spoiling my clothes, when I saw M. de Boiscoran coming towards me from the other side."

"Are you quite sure it was he?"

"Why, I should think so! I talked to him. But stop, he was not afraid of getting wet. Without much ado, he rolled up his trousers, stuffed them into the tops of his tall boots, and went right through. Just then he saw me, and seemed surprised. I was as much so as he was. 'Why, is it you, sir?' I said. He replied, 'Yes: I have to see somebody at Brechy.' 'You have chosen a queer way,' said I. He laughed. 'I did not know the swamps had overflowed,' he answered, 'and I thought I would shoot some waterfowl on the way.' As he said this, he showed me his gun. At that moment I had nothing to say; but now, when I think it over, it looks rather queer."

M. Galpin had written down this statement as fast as it was given. He next asked, "How was M. de Boiscoran dressed?"

"He had grayish trousers on, a shooting-jacket of brown velveteen, and a broad-brimmed panama hat."

The count and the countess looked most distressed, while the mayor and M. Daubigeon appeared equally troubled. One circumstance in Ribot's evidence seemed to have struck them with peculiar force,—the fact that he had seen M. de Boiscoran tuck his trousers inside his boots.

"You can go," said M. Galpin to the young man. "Let another witness come in."

An old man of bad reputation who lived alone in an old hut two miles from Valpinson now entered. He was called Father Gaudry. Unlike young Ribot, who had shown great assurance, the new comer stood humble and cringing in his dirty, ill-smelling rags. After having

given his name, he said,—“It might have been eleven o’clock at night, and I was going through the forest of Rochepommier, along one of the little by-paths—”

“You were stealing wood!” said the magistrate sternly.

“Great God, what an idea!” cried the old man, raising his hands to heaven. “How can you say such a thing! I steal wood! No, my dear sir, I was very quietly going to sleep in the forest, so as to be up with daylight, to gather mushrooms to sell at Sauveterre. Well, I was trotting along, when, all of a sudden, I heard footsteps behind me. Naturally, I was frightened.”

“Because you were stealing.”

“Oh, no, my good sir; only at night you understand. . . . Well, I hid behind a tree; and almost at the same moment I saw M. de Boiscoran pass by. I recognised him perfectly in spite of the dark; for he seemed to be in a great rage, talking aloud to himself, swearing, gesticulating and tearing handfuls of leaves from the trees.”

“Did he have a gun?”

“Yes, my good sir; for that was the very thing that frightened me so. I thought at first he was a keeper.”

The third and last witness proved to be an old woman, Madame Courtois, whose little farm lay on the other side of the Rochepommier. After some little hesitation she spoke as follows; “I do not know much; but I will tell you all I do know. As we expected to have a house full of workmen a few days hence, and as I had to bake bread to-morrow, I set off with my ass to the mill on the mountain to fetch some flour. The miller had not any ready; but he told me if I could wait, he would let me have some; and so I stayed to supper. About ten o’clock they gave me a sack full of flour. The boys put it on the donkey, and I came away. It was, perhaps, eleven o’clock, when, just at the edge of the forest of Rochepommier, my ass stumbled, and the sack fell off. I had a great deal of trouble, for I was not strong enough to lift it alone, when I saw a man come out of the wood close by. I called to him, and he came. It was M. de Boiscoran. I asked him to help me, and at once, without losing a moment, he puts his gun down, lifts the bag from the ground and puts it on my ass. I thank him. He says, ‘Welcome,’ and—that is all.”

All this time the mayor had been standing by the door

of the cottage, barring the entrance to the eager inquisitive crowd outside. When Madame Courtois retired, quite bewildered by her own words, and already regretting what she had said, M. Seneschal inquired, "Is there any one else who knows anything?"

As nobody appeared, he closed the door, saying curtly, "Well, then, you can go home now, my friends. Let the law have free course."

The law, represented by the investigating magistrate, was a prey at that moment to the most cruel perplexity. M. Galpin-Daveline was utterly overcome by consternation. He sat at the little table, on which he had been writing, his head resting on his hands, thinking, apparantly, how he could find a way out of this labyrinth. All of a sudden he rose, and forgetting for a moment his customary rigidity, letting his mask of icy impassiveness drop from his face, he ejaculated, "Well?" as if in his despair he had hoped for some help or advice. "Well?" he asked again.

No answer came. All the others were as much bewildered as he was. They all tried to shake off the overwhelming impression made by this accumulation of evidence; but in vain. At last, after a moment's silence, the magistrate said with strange bitterness, "You see, gentlemen, I was right in examining Cocoleu. Oh! don't attempt to deny it: you share my doubts and my suspicions, I see it. Is there one among you who would dare assert that the terrible excitement of this poor fellow has not restored to him for a time the use of his reason! When he told you that he had witnessed the crime, and when he gave the name of the criminal, you looked incredulous. But then other witnesses came, and their united evidence corresponding without a missing link, constitutes a terrible presumption."

He became animated again. Professional habits stronger than everything else, obtained once more the mastery. "M. de Boiscoran was at Valpinson to-night: that is clearly established. Well, how did he get here? By concealing himself. Between his own house and Valpinson there are two public roads—one by Brechy, and another around the swamps. Does M. de Boiscoran take either of the two? No. He cuts straight across the marshes, at the risk of sinking in, or of getting wet from

head to foot. On his return he chooses, in spite of the darkness, the forest of Rochemommier, unmindful of the risk he runs of losing his way, and of wandering about till daybreak. What was he doing this for? Evidently, in order not to be seen. And, in fact, whom does he meet?—a loose fellow, Ribot, who is himself in hiding on account of some love intrigue; a wood-stealer, Gaudry, whose only anxiety is to avoid the gendarmes; an old woman, finally Madame Courtois, who has been belated by an accident. All his precautions were well chosen; but Providence was watching.”

“O Providence!” growled Dr. Seignebos,—“Providence!”

M. Galpin-Daveline did not even hear the interruption. Speaking faster and faster, he continued, “Would it at least be possible to plead on M. de Boiscoran’s behalf a difference in time? No. At what time was he seen coming in this direction? At nightfall. ‘It was half-past eight,’ says Ribot, ‘when M. de Boiscoran crossed the canal at the Seille swamps.’ He might, therefore, have easily reached Valpinson at half-past nine. At that hour the crime had not yet been committed. When was he seen returning home? Gaudry and the woman Courtois have told you the hour,—after eleven o’clock. At that time the Count de Claudieuse had been shot at and Valpinson was on fire. Do we know anything of M. de Boiscoran’s temper at that time? Yes, we do. When he came this way he was quite cool. He is very much surprised at meeting Ribot; but he explains to him very fully how he happens to be going that way, and also why he has a gun. He says he is on his way to meet somebody at Brechy, and he thought he would shoot some waterfowl. Is that admissible? Is it even likely? However, let us look at him on his way back. Gaudry says he was walking very fast: he seemed to be furious, and was pulling handfuls of leaves from the branches. What does Madame Courtois say? Nothing. When she calls him, he does not venture to run; that would have been a confession, but he is in a great hurry to help her. And then! His way for a quarter of an hour is the same as the woman’s: does he keep her company? No. He leaves her hastily. He goes ahead, and hurries home; for he thinks the Count de Claudieuse is dead: he knows Val-

pinson is in flames; and he fears he will hear the bells ring, and see the fire raging."

M. Galpin-Daveline had evidently been carried away by the rapidity of events. Since the first question addressed to Cocoleu, up to the present moment, he had not had time to consider. His proceedings had moreover been public, hence he naturally felt tempted to cast aside his habitual magisterial reserve and to explain his line of conduct.

"And you call this a legal inquiry?" asked Dr. Seignebos, who had taken off his spectacles, and was wiping them furiously. "An inquiry founded upon what?" he went on with such vehemence that no one dared interrupt him,—“founded upon the evidence of an unfortunate creature, whom I, a physician, testify to be not responsible for what he says. Reason does not go out and become lighted again, like the gas in a street-lamp. A man is an idiot, or he is not an idiot. He has always been one and he always will be one. But you say, the other statements are conclusive. Say, rather, that you think they are. Why? Because you are prejudiced by Cocoleu's accusation. But for it, you would never have troubled yourselves about what M. de Boiscoran did, or about what he didn't do. He walked about the whole evening. He has a right to do so. He crossed the marshes. He went through the woods. Why shouldn't he? People meet him. Is not that quite natural? But no: an idiot accuses him, and forthwith all he does looks suspicious. He talks. It is the insolence of a hardened criminal. He is silent. It is the remorse of a guilty man trembling with fear. Instead of naming M. de Boiscoran, Cocoleu might just as well have named me, Dr. Seignebos. At once, all my doings would have appeared suspicious; and I am quite sure a thousand evidences of my guilt would have been discovered. It would have been an easy matter. Are not my opinions more radical even than those of M. de Boiscoran? For there is the key to the whole matter M. de Boiscoran is a Republican; M. de Boiscoran acknowledges no sovereignty but that of the people—"

"Doctor," broke in the public prosecutor, "you speak without reflection."

"I don't, I assure you—"

But he was once more interrupted, and this time by the

Count de Claudieuse, who remarked, "For my part, I admit all the arguments brought forward by the magistrate. But above all probabilities, I place a fact,—the character of the accused. M. de Boiscoran is a man of honour. He is incapable of committing such a mean and odious crime."

The others assented; M. Seneschal adding, "And I, I will tell you another thing. What could be the purpose of such a crime? Ah! if M. de Boiscoran had nothing to lose! But do you know among your friends a happier man than he is?—young, handsome, in excellent health, immensely wealthy, esteemed and popular with everybody. Finally, there is another fact, which is still a family secret, but which I may tell you, and which will remove at once all suspicions,—M. de Boiscoran is desperately in love with Mademoiselle Denise de Chandore. She returns his love; and only the day before yesterday the wedding was fixed for the 20th of next month."

In the meantime the hours had sped on. Half-past four struck at the clock of Brechy church. Day was breaking; and the light of the lamps grew pale. At last the morning mists evaporated, and an early sun-ray fell upon the window-panes. But no one noticed it: all these men gathered around the bed of the wounded man were too deeply excited. M. Galpin-Daveline had listened to the objections made by the others, without a word or a gesture. He had so far recovered his self-control, that it was difficult to see what impressions they had made upon his mind. At last, shaking his head gravely, he said,—

"More than you, gentlemen, I feel a desire to believe M. de Boiscoran innocent. M. Daubigeon, who knows what I mean, will tell you so. In my heart I pleaded his cause. But I am the representative of the law; and my duty is above my affections. Does it depend on me to set aside Cocoleu's accusation, however stupid, however absurd, it may be? Can I undo the three statements made by the witnesses, and confirming so strongly the suspicions aroused by the first charge?"

The Count de Claudieuse seemed distressed beyond expression. At last he said, "The worst thing about it is that M. de Boiscoran thinks I am his enemy. I should not wonder if he went and imagined that these charges and vile suspicions have been suggested by my wife or by

myself. If I could only get up! At least let M. de Boiscoran know distinctly that I am ready to answer for him, as I would answer for myself. Cocoleu, the wretched idiot! Ah, Genevieve, my darling wife! why did you induce him to talk? If you had not insisted, he would have kept silent for ever."

The countess was giving way at last to the anxieties of this terrible night. At first she had been supported by that exaltation which is apt to follow a great crisis; but now prostration had come in its turn. She had sunk upon a stool, near the bed on which her two daughters were lying; and, her head hid in the pillow, she seemed to sleep. But she was not slumbering. When her husband reproached her thus, she rose, pale, with swollen eyes and distorted features, and cried in a piercing voice,—“What! They have tried to kill my Trivulce; our children have been near unto death in the flames; and I should have allowed any means to be unused by which the guilty one might be found out? No! I have only done what it was my duty to do. Whatever may come of it, I regret nothing.”

“But, Genevieve, M. de Boiscoran is not guilty: he can not possibly be guilty. How could a man who has the happiness of being loved by Denise de Chandore, whose wedding day is so nigh,—how could he devise such a hideous crime?”

“Let him prove his innocence,” replied the countess mercilessly.

The doctor pouted in the most impertinent manner. “There is a woman’s logic for you,” he murmured.

“Certainly,” said M. Seneschal, “M. de Boiscoran’s innocence will be promptly established. Nevertheless, suspicion will remain. And our people are so constituted, that this suspicion will overshadow his whole life. Twenty years hence, they will meet him, and think, “Ah, there’s the man who set Valpinson on fire!”

This time it was not M. Galpin who replied, but the public prosecutor who said sadly, “I cannot share your views; but that does not matter. After what has passed, our friend M. Galpin cannot retrace his steps: his own duty and the interests of the accused make that impossible. What would all these people, who have heard Cocoleu’s deposition, and the evidence given by the wit

nesses, say, if the inquiry were stopped? They would certainly consider M. de Boiscoran was guilty, and attribute his not being prosecuted to the fact that he is rich and of noble birth. Upon my honour I believe him to be innocent. But precisely because this is my conviction, I maintain that his innocence must be clearly established. No doubt he will enable us to do so. When he met Ribot, he told him he was on his way to see somebody at Brechy."

"But suppose he never went there?" objected M. Seneschal. "Suppose he did not see anybody there? Suppose it was only a pretext to satisfy Ribot's impertinent curiosity?"

"Well, then, he would only have to tell the truth in court. And look! here's an important point which in itself almost exculpates M. de Boiscoran. Would he not have loaded his gun with ball, if he had really thought of murdering the count? whereas we know it was loaded with nothing but small-shot."

"And he would never have missed me at ten yards' distance," said the count.

At this moment somebody was heard knocking furiously at the door. "Come in!" cried M. Seneschal. The door opened, and three peasants appeared, looking bewildered, but evidently pleased.

"We have just found something curious," said one of them.

"What is it?" asked M. Galpin-Daveline.

"Pitard says it is a cartridge-case."

The Count de Claudieuse raised himself on his pillows, and said eagerly,—“Let me see it. During these last days I have fired several times near the house to frighten away the birds that eat our fruit. I want to see if the case is one of mine.”

The peasant gave it to him. It was a very thin lead case like those of the cartridges used in American breech-loading guns. Singularly enough it was blackened by burnt powder, although it had not been torn, nor had it blazed up in the discharge. It was so perfectly uninjured, that the embossed letters of the manufacturer's name, Clebb, could be read.

"That cartridge never belonged to me," said the count, who, as he uttered these words, turned deadly pale, so

pale, that his wife looked at him with a glance full of terrible anguish.

"Well?"

He made no reply. But at that moment such silence was so eloquent, that the countess felt sick at heart, and whispered in his ear,—“Then Cocoleu was right, after all!”

Not one feature of this dramatic scene had escaped M. Galpin-Daveline's watchful eye. He had surprised signs of terror on every face; still he made no remark. He took the metal case from the count's hands, knowing that it might become an important piece of evidence; and for nearly a minute he turned it round and round, looking at it from all sides, and examining it in the light with the utmost attention. Then turning to the peasants, who were standing respectfully near the door, he asked them,—“Where did you find this cartridge, my friends?”

“Close by the old ivy-grown tower, where the tools are kept.”

M. Seneschal, who had in the mean time succeeded in recovering his self-control, now remarked,—“Surely the murderer cannot have fired from there. You cannot even see the door of the house from the old tower.”

“That may be,” replied the magistrate; “but the cartridge-case does not necessarily fall to the ground at the place where the gun is discharged. It falls as soon as the gun is cocked to reload.”

This was so true, that even Dr. Seignebos had nothing to say.

“Now, my friends,” asked M. Galpin-Daveline, “which of you found this cartridge-case?”

“We were all together when we saw it, and picked it up.”

“Well, then, all three of you must give me your names and addresses, so that I can send for you when you are wanted.”

This had just been done, when the furious gallop of a horse was heard approaching the house; the next moment a man who had been sent to Sauveterre for medicines, came in. He was furious. “That rascal of a druggist!” he exclaimed, “I thought he would never open his shop!”

Dr. Seignebos eagerly seized hold of the things now brought him, and then, bowing with mock respect to the

magistrate, he remarked,—“I know very well, sir, how pressing is the necessity to have a culprit’s head cut off; but I think it is almost as pressing to save the life of an injured man. I have probably delayed the binding-up of the count’s wounds longer than I ought to have done; and I beg you will now leave me alone, so as to enable me to do my duty to him.”

VI.

THERE was nothing more to be done by the investigating magistrate, the public prosecutor, or the mayor. Accordingly they took their departure, promising to send the count immediate news of anything that might be discovered.

The fire was now dying out for want of fuel. A few hours had sufficed to destroy all that the hard work and incessant care of many years had accomplished. The once charming and envied mansion presented nothing but a few blackened walls, with adjacent heaps of ashes, and smouldering timbers, from which columns of smoke were slowly rising. By Captain Parenteau’s direction, all the objects saved had been stored under the shelter of the ruins of the old castle, where furniture, articles of vertu, agricultural implements, carts, casks, and sacks of oats and rye were huddled together pell-mell. Here also were the horses, cattle, and sheep, rescued from their burning stalls with infinite labour, and at great risk of life. Few of the people had left as yet. With greater zeal than ever, the firemen, aided by the peasants, deluged the remains of the dwelling-house with water. They had nothing to fear from the fire; but they desired to keep the bodies of their unfortunate companions from being entirely consumed.

“What a terrible scourge fire is!” exclaimed M. Seneschal.

Neither M. Galpin-Daveline nor the mayor made any answer, though they felt their hearts oppressed by the sad sight before them.

The firemen recognised the mayor, and greeted him with cheers. He went rapidly towards them; and, for the first time since the alarm had been raised, the investigating magistrate and the public prosecutor were left alone together. They kept silent for a moment, each trying to read

in the other's eyes the secret of his thoughts. At last M. Daubigeon asked,—“Well?”

“This is a fearful calamity,” replied M. Galpin-Daveline.

“What is your opinion?”

“Ah! do I know it myself? I have lost my head: the whole thing seems to me like a nightmare.”

“You cannot really believe that M. de Boiscoran is guilty?”

“I believe nothing. My reason tells me he is innocent. I feel he must be innocent; and yet I see terrible evidence rising against him.”

The public-prosecutor seemed overwhelmed. “Alas!” he said, “why did you, contrary to everybody's opinion, insist upon examining Cocoleu, a poor idiotic wretch?”

“You do not mean to reproach me, sir, for having followed the impulses of my conscience?”

“I reproach you with nothing.”

“A horrible crime has been committed; and my duty compelled me to do all that lies in the power of man to discover the culprit.”

“Yes; and the man who is accused of the crime is your friend, and only yesterday you spoke of his friendship as your best chance of success in life.”

“Sir?”

“Are you surprised to find me so well informed? Have you forgotten that nothing escapes the idle curiosity of a little town. I know that your fondest hope was to become a member of M. de Boiscoran's family, and that you counted upon him to back you in your efforts to obtain the hand of one of his cousins.”

“I do not deny it.”

“Unfortunately you have been tempted by the prestige you might gain in a great and famous trial. You have laid aside all prudence: and your projects are forgotten. Whether M. de Boiscoran be innocent or guilty, his family will never forgive you your interference. If he is guilty, they will blame you for having handed him over to justice; if he is innocent, they will blame you even more for having suspected him.”

M. Galpin hung his head as if to conceal his trouble. At last he asked,—“And what would you do in my place?”

"I would leave the case to others, although it is rather late."

"If I did so, I should compromise my career."

"Even that would be better for you than to engage in an affair in which you cannot preserve the calmness and impartiality which are the first and indispensable virtues of an upright magistrate."

M. Galpin-Daveline was growing impatient. "Do you think," he said, "that I am a man to be turned aside from my duty by considerations of friendship or personal interest?"

"I said nothing of the kind."

"Did you not see just now how I carried on the inquiry? Did you not see me start when Cocoleu first mentioned M. de Boiscoran's name? If he had denounced any one else, I should probably have let the matter rest there. But precisely because M. de Boiscoran is a friend of mine, and because I have great expectations from him, I have insisted and persisted, and I do so still."

The public prosecutor shrugged his shoulders. "That is it exactly," he said. "Because M. de Boiscoran is a friend of yours, you are afraid of being accused of weakness; and you are going to be hard, pitiless, unjust even, against him. Because you had great expectations from him, you will insist upon finding him guilty. And you call yourself impartial?"

M. Galpin-Daveline had reassumed all his usual rigidity as he solemnly replied, "I am sure of myself."

"Have a care!"

"My mind is made up, sir."

At this moment M. Seneschal joined them again: he was accompanied by Captain Parenteau. "Well, gentlemen," he asked, "what have you resolved?"

"We are going to Boiscoran," replied the magistrate.

"What! Immediately?"

"Yes: I wish to find M. de Boiscoran in bed. I am so anxious about it that I shall do without my clerk."

Captain Parenteau bowed and exclaimed,—"Your clerk is here, sir; he was but just inquiring for you. Here, Mechinet, Mechinet!"

A fat, little, gray-headed man, of jovial mien, at once came running up, and informed the party that a neighbour having told him what had happened, he had started after

his superior, the investigating magistrate, on foot, walking as fast as he could.

"How do you propose going to Boiscoran?" asked the mayor.

"I do not know yet. Mechinet will have to find some conveyance."

The clerk was starting off, when M. Seneschal held him back, exclaiming, "My horse and carriage are at your disposal. Any one of these peasants can drive you. Captain Parenteau and I will get back to Sauveterre in some farmer's waggon; we ought to be there as soon as possible. I have just heard alarming news. There may be some disorder. The peasant-women who attend the market have circulated exciting reports, exaggerating the night's calamities. They have asserted that ten or twelve men have been killed, and that the incendiary, M. de Boiscoran, has been arrested. The crowd has gone to condole with poor Guillebault's widow; and there has been a demonstration before the house of the demoiselles de Lavarande, where Made-moiselle de Chandore, M. de Boiscoran's betrothed, is stopping."

In ordinary times, M. Seneschal would not have intrusted his famous horse, Caraby, which he considered the best in the province, to the hands of a stranger, for anything in the world. But he was evidently terribly upset, as could be plainly seen despite the efforts he made to reassume official dignity and self-possession.

He made a sign, and the carriage was at once got ready. But when he asked for a driver, no one came forward. All these good people who had spent the night abroad were anxious to return home, where their cattle required their presence. Eventually, however, young Ribot offered his assistance, and seizing hold of the whip and the reins, took his seat on the box, while the investigating magistrate, the public prosecutor, and the clerk got into the vehicle.

"Above all, take care of Caraby," begged M. Seneschal, who at the last moment felt almost overcome with anxiety for his favourite.

"Don't be afraid, sir," replied the young man as he started the horse. "If I strike too hard, M. Mechinet will stop me."

This Mechinet, the investigating magistrate's clerk, was almost a power in Sauveterre; and the greatest person-

ages there paid their court to him. His official duties were not merely of a very humble nature, but also ill-paid. However, he knew how to eke out his income by other occupations, of which the court took no notice; these adding largely both to his means and to his importance in the community. Being a skilful lithographer, he printed all the visiting-cards which the people of Sauveterre ordered at the principal printing office, that where the local journal, *L'Independant*, was published. An able accountant, moreover, he kept several tradespeople's books. Some of the country people, fond of litigation, also came to him for legal advice; and he was an adept at drawing up agreements. In addition, he had been director of the fireman's band, and manager of the choral society during several years; while, as correspondent of the Parisian Dramatic Authors' Society, he obtained free admission to the theater, not only to the house, but also to the sacred precincts behind the scenes. Finally, he was always ready to give lessons in writing or grammar to children, besides teaching amateurs how to play on the flute and the horn. These varied talents had not unnaturally won him the hostility of all the other teachers and public servants of the community, such as the mayor's clerk, the tax-collector's clerk, and kindred individuals. But he had gradually conquered all these enemies by the unmistakable superiority of his talents. In time they themselves fell in with the universal habit, and, when anything special happened, said to each other, "Let us go and consult Mechinet." He himself concealed, under an appearance of imperturbable good nature, the ambition by which he was devoured: he wanted to become rich, and to rise in the world. In fact, Mechinet was a diplomat, working in secret, but as cunning as Talleyrand. He had already succeeded in making himself the one really great personage of Sauveterre. The town was full of his fame; nothing was done without him; and he had not a declared enemy in the place.

In fact, people were afraid of him, and dreaded his terrible tongue. Not that he had ever injured anybody, he was too wise for that; but they knew the harm he might do, if he chose, for he was master of every important secret in Sauveterre, being the best informed man in the town as regarded all their little intrigues, private foibles,

and dark antecedents. This knowledge of his gave him quite an exceptional position. As he was unmarried, he lived with his sisters, the devout Demoiselles Mechainet, the best dressmakers in the town, through whom he heard all that was going on in society; comparing their gossip with what he heard in court, or at the newspaper office. Thus he would at times exclaim:—How could anything escape me, when I have the church and the press, the court and the theater, to keep me informed?"

Such a man would have considered himself disgraced if he had not known every detail of M. de Boiscoran's private affairs. He did not hesitate, therefore, while the carriage was rolling along, to explain to his companions the position of the accused nobleman.

M. Jacques de Boiscoran seldom spent more than a few weeks a year on his estate near Sauveterre. He lived mostly in Paris, where his family owned a mansion in the Rue de l'Universite. His parents were still alive. His father, the Marquis de Boiscoran, was the owner of considerable property. He had been a deputy under Louis Philippe, a representative of the people in 1848, and had withdrawn from public life when the Second Empire was established. Since that time he employed all his money and all his energies in collecting rare books and costly porcelain. The Marquis's wife, a Chalusse by birth, had enjoyed the reputation of being one of the most beautiful and most gifted ladies at the court of the Citizen King. At a certain period in her life, unfortunately, slander had attacked her; in 1845 or 1846, her name was coupled with that of a young lawyer of distinction, who had since become an eminent judge. As she grew old, the marchioness devoted herself to politics, just as other women turn their attention to religion. While her husband boasted that he had not read a newspaper for ten years, she made her *salon* a kind of parliamentary centre, not without its influence on political affairs.

Although Jacques de Boiscoran's parents were still alive, he possessed a small fortune of his own, representing 30,000 francs a year—which income was mainly derived from the estate of Boiscoran left him in 1868 by one of his uncles, his father's oldest brother, who had died a childless widower in 1868. Jacques de Boiscoran was at this moment about twenty-six or twenty-seven years old, of

a dark complexion, tall, strong, and well made; though not exactly a handsome man, he had one of those frank, intelligent faces which please one at first sight. His character was not so well known at Sauveterre as his person. Those who had had dealings with him, however, described him as an honourable upright man: while his companions spoke of him as witty and generous, fond of pleasure, and always in a good humour. At the time of the German invasion, he had been made a captain of one of the companies of mobiles raised in the district, and he had behaved so bravely under fire, that General Chanzy rewarded him, when wounded, with the cross of the legion of honour.

"And such a man committed that crime at Valpinson," said M. Daubigeon to the investigating magistrate. "No, it is impossible! I am sure he will soon scatter all our doubts to the four winds."

"Oh, that may be done at once," remarked young Ribot; "for here we are."

In many provinces of France the name of *chateau* is given to well-nigh every little country house with a weathervane on its pointed roof. • Boiscoran, however, is a real chateau, built towards the end of the seventeenth century, in wretched taste it is true, but in the massive style of a fortress. Its position is superb. It stands in the midst of woods and pasture lands; while at the foot of the sloping pleasure-grounds there flows a little river, merrily splashing over its pebbly bed, and called "*La Pibole*"—the Magpie—on account of its perpetual babbling.

VII.

It was seven o'clock when the carriage containing the judicial functionaries drove into the courtyard at Boiscoran,—a vast paved square planted with lime-trees, and surrounded by farm-buildings. The chateau was wide awake. Before her house-door, the farmer's wife was cleaning the huge cauldron in which she had prepared the morning soup; the maids were coming and going to and fro, while just outside the stable a groom was energetically rubbing down a handsome, thorough-bred horse.

On the front steps stood Master Anthony, M. de Boisco-

ran's valet, smoking a cigar in the bright sunlight, and overlooking the farm operations. He was a man of nearly fifty, still very active, who had been bequeathed to his new master, together with the estate. He was a widower, his only daughter being in the marchioness' service. As he had been born in the family, and had never left it, he looked upon himself as almost a Boiscoran, and saw no difference between his own interests and those of his master. In fact, he was treated less like a servant than like a friend; and he fancied he knew everything about M. de Boiscoran's affairs.

When he saw the investigating magistrate and the public prosecutor step out of the carriage, he threw away his cigar, hurried down the steps, and, bowing deeply, said to them with his most engaging smile,—“Ah, gentlemen! what a pleasant surprise! My master will be delighted.”

With strangers, Anthony would not have allowed himself such familiarity, for he believed in etiquette; but he had seen M. Daubigeon more than once at the chateau; and he knew the plans that had been discussed between M. Galpin-Daveline and his master. Hence he was not a little amazed at the embarrassed stiffness of the two gentlemen, and at the tone of voice in which the magistrate asked him,—“Is M. de Boiscoran up?”

“Not yet,” he replied; “and I have orders not to wake him. He came home late last night, and wanted to make up this morning.”

Instinctively the magistrate and the public prosecutor averted their heads, each fearing to meet the other's eyes.

“Ah! M. de Boiscoran came home late last night?” repeated M. Galpin.

“Towards midnight, a little later perhaps.”

“At what time had he gone out?”

“He left here about eight.”

“How was he dressed?”

“As usual. He wore light gray trousers, a shooting-jacket of brown velveteen, and a large straw hat.”

“Did he take his gun?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Do you know where he went?”

But for the respect which he felt for his master's friends, Anthony would not have answered these questions, which he thought were extremely impertinent. But this last

question seemed to him to go beyond all fair limits. He replied, therefore, in a tone of injured self-respect,—“ I am not in the habit of asking my master where he goes when he leaves the house, nor where he has been when he comes back.”

M. Daubigeon understood perfectly the honourable feelings which actuated the faithful servant. Accordingly he said to him with an air of unmistakable kindness,—“ Do not imagine, my friend, that we ask you these questions out of mere idle curiosity. Tell us what you know; for your frankness may be more useful to your master than you have any idea of.”

Anthony looked in turn at the magistrate, at the public prosecutor, at Mechinet, and finally at Ribot, who was securing Caraby to a tree. The old servant was plainly stupefied. “ I assure you, gentlemen,” said he, “ I do not know where M. de Boiscoran spent the evening.”

“ You have no suspicion ? ”

“ No.”

“ Perhaps he went to Brechy to see a friend ? ”

“ I do not know of any friends he has at Brechy.”

“ What did he do after he came home ? ”

At this question the old servant showed evident signs of embarrassment. “ Let me think,” he said. “ My master went up to his bed-room, and remained there four or five minutes. Then he came down, ate a piece of *pate*, and drank a glass of wine. Then he lit a cigar, and told me to go to bed, adding that he meant to take a little walk, and would undress without my help.”

“ And then you went to bed ? ”

“ Of course.”

“ So that you do not know what your master did ? ”

“ I beg your pardon. I heard him open the garden gate.”

“ He did not appear to you different from usual ? ”

“ No ; he was as he always is,—quite cheerful : he was singing.”

“ Can you show me the gun he took with him ? ”

“ No. My master probably took it to his room.”

M. Daubigeon was about to make a remark, when the magistrate stopped him by a gesture, and eagerly asked,—“ How long is it since your master and Count Claudieuse have ceased seeing each other ? ”

Anthony trembled, as if a dark presentiment had entered his mind. He replied,—“A long time : at least I think so.”

“You are of course aware that they are on bad terms together?”

“Oh !” . . .

“They have had violent altercations?”

“Something unpleasant happened, I know ; but it was not much. “As they do not visit each other, they cannot well hate each other. Besides, I have heard master say a hundred times, that he looked upon Count Claudieuse as one of the best and most honourable men, and that he respected him highly.”

For a minute or so M. Galpin-Daveline kept silent, thinking whether he had forgotten anything. Then he asked suddenly, “How far is it from here to Valpinson?”

“Three miles, sir,” replied Anthony.

“If you were going there, what road would you take?”

“The high road which passes by Brechy.”

“You would not go across the marshes?”

“Certainly not.”

“Why not?”

“Because the Seille is out of its banks, and the ditches are full of water.”

“Is not the way much shorter through the forest?”

“Yes, the way is shorter ; but it would take more time. The paths are very indistinct, and overgrown with briars.”

The public prosecutor could hardly conceal his disappointment. Anthony’s answers seemed to become worse and worse.

“Now,” asked the investigating magistrate again, “if fire broke out at Valpinson, would you see it from here?”

“I don’t think so, sir. There are hills and woods between us.”

“Can you hear the Brechy bells from here?”

“When the wind is north, yes, sir.”

“And last night, how was it?”

“The wind was from the west, as it always is when we have a storm.”

“So that you heard nothing? You do not know what a terrible calamity—”

“A calamity? I do not understand you, sir.”

The conversation had been going on in the court-yard

into which at this moment there rode two gendarmes on horseback, whom M. Galpin-Daveline had sent for just before leaving Valpinson. When old Anthony perceived them, he exclaimed, "Great God! what is the meaning of this? I must wake my master."

But the magistrate stopped him, saying harshly,—“Not a step! Not a word!” And then, pointing out Ribot to the gendarmes, he added, “Keep your eyes on that lad, and don’t let him communicate with anybody.” Finally, turning again to Anthony, M. Galpin said,—“Now show us to M. de Boiscoran’s bedroom.”

VIII.

IN spite of its grand feudal air, the chateau of Boiscoran was, after all, little more than a bachelor’s modest home, and in a very bad state of preservation. Of the eighty or a hundred rooms which it contained, no more than eight or ten were furnished, and this only in the simplest possible manner. Indeed a drawing-room, a dining-room, and a few bedrooms for friends were all that M. de Boiscoran required during his short visits to the place. He himself occupied a small room on the second floor.

When they reached the door of this apartment, guided by old Anthony, the magistrate ordered the servant to knock. He obeyed: and immediately a youthful, hearty voice replied from within, “Who’s there?”

“It is I,” said Anthony. “I should like—”

“Go to the devil!” broke in the voice.

“But, sir—”

“Let me sleep, rascal. I have not been able to close an eye till now.” The magistrate, becoming impatient, pushed the servant aside, and, seizing the door-knob tried to open it: it was locked inside. But he lost no time in saying, “It is I, M. de Boiscoran: open, if you please!”

“What is it, dear M. Galpin?” asked the voice cheerfully.

“I must speak to you.”

“And I am at your service, illustrious jurist. Just give me time to veil my Apollonian form in a pair of trousers, and I appear”

—most immediately, the door opened; and M. de Bois-

coran presented himself; his hair dishevelled, his eyes heavy with sleep, but looking bright in his youth and full health, with smiling lips and open hands. "Upon my word!" he said. "That was a happy inspiration you had, my dear Galpin. You come to join me at breakfast?" And, bowing to M. Daubigeon, he added, "Not to say how much I thank you for bringing our excellent public prosecutor with you. This *is* a judicial visit!—"

But he paused, chilled as he was by M. Daubigeon's icy face, and amazed at M. Galpin-Daveline's refusal to take his proffered hand. "Why," he said, "what is the matter, my dear friend?"

The magistrate had never been stiffer in his life, when he replied, "We shall have to forget our acquaintance, sir. It is not as a friend I come to-day, but as a magistrate."

M. de Boiscoran looked confounded; but not a shadow of trouble appeared on his frank and open face. "I'll be hanged," he said, "if I understand—"

"Let us go in," interrupted M. Galpin-Daveline.

They went in; and, as they passed the door, Mechinot whispered into the public prosecutor's ear,—“Sir, that man is certainly innocent. A guilty man would never have received us thus.”

"Silence, sir!" said the public prosecutor, despite the fact that he was probably of the clerk's opinion. "Silence!"

And he gravely walked towards one of the windows, leaving M. Galpin-Daveline standing in the center of the room, trying to see everything in it, and to fix its appearance in his memory, down to the smallest details. The prevailing disorder showed clearly how hastily M. de Boiscoran had gone to bed the night before. His clothes, his boots, his shirt, and his straw hat lay scattered about on the chairs and the floor. He had worn those very light gray trousers, which had been successively seen and recognised by Cocoleu, Ribot, Gaudry, and Madame Courtois.

"Now, sir," began M. de Boiscoran with that tone of annoyance which shows that a man thinks a joke has been carried far enough, "will you please tell me what procures me the honour of this early visit?"

Not a muscle in M. Galpin's face moved. As if the question had been addressed to some one else, he said coldly,—“will you please show us your hands, sir?”

M. de Boiscoran's cheeks turned crimson; and his eyes assumed an expression of strange perplexity. "If this is a joke," he said, "it has perhaps lasted long enough."

He was evidently getting angry. M. Daubigeon thought it better to interfere, and accordingly remarked,—“Unfortunately, sir, the question is a most serious one. Do what the magistrate desires.”

More and more amazed, M. de Boiscoran looked rapidly around him. Near the door stood Anthony, his faithful old servant, with anguish written on his face. Near the fireplace, the clerk had improvised a table, and put his paper, his pens, and his horn inkstand in readiness. Then, with a shrug of his shoulders, which showed that he failed to understand, M. de Boiscoran showed his hands. They were perfectly clean and white: there was not even a speck of dirt under the long polished nails.

“When did you last wash your hands?” asked M. Galpin, after having examined them minutely.

At this question, M. de Boiscoran's face brightened up; and breaking out into a hearty laugh, he said,—“Upon my word! I confess you nearly caught me. I was on the point of getting angry. I almost feared—”

“And there was good reason for fear,” said M. Galpin-Daveline; “for a terrible charge has been brought against you. And it may be, that on your answer to my question, ridiculous as it seems to you, your honour may depend, and perhaps your liberty.”

This time there was no mistake possible. M. de Boiscoran felt that kind of terror which the law inspires even in the best of men, when they find themselves suddenly accused of a crime. He turned pale, and then he said in a troubled voice,—“What! A charge has been brought against me, and you, M. Galpin-Daveline, come to my house to examine me?”

“I am a magistrate, sir.”

“But you were also my friend. If any one had dared to accuse you of a crime, a mean act, anything infamous, in my presence, I should have defended you, sir, with all my energy, without hesitation, and without a doubt. I should have defended you, till absolute, undeniable evidence was brought forward of your culpability; and even then I should have pitied you, remembering that I had esteemed you so highly as to favour your alliance with my family.

But you—I am accused, I do not know of what, falsely, wrongly; and at once you hasten hither, you believe the charge, and consent to become my judge. Well, let it be so! I washed my hands last night after coming home.”

M. Galpin-Daveline had uttered a vain boast in praising his self-possession and his perfect control over himself. He did not move when these words fell upon his ear; but he asked again in the same calm tone,—“What has become of the water you used for that purpose?”

“It is probably still there, in my dressing-room.”

The magistrate at once went in. On the marble table stood a basin full of water. That water was black and dirty. At the bottom lay particles of charcoal. On the top, mixed with the soapsuds, were swimming some extremely slight but unmistakable fragments of charred paper. With infinite care the magistrate carried the basin to the table at which Mechainet had taken a seat; and, pointing at it, he asked M. de Boiscoran,—“Is that the water in which you washed your hands last night after coming home?”

“Yes,” replied the other with an air of careless indifference.

“You had been handling charcoal, or some inflammable material.”

“You can see so yourself.”

Standing face to face, the public prosecutor and the clerk exchanged rapid glances. They both experienced the same feeling. If M. de Boiscoran was not innocent, he must be a marvellously cool and energetic man, carrying out a long premeditated plan of action; for every one of his answers seemed to tighten the net in which he was taken. The investigating magistrate himself seemed to be struck by this; but it was only for a moment, for, turning to the clerk, he said,—“Write that down!”

He dictated to him the whole evidence, most minutely and accurately, correcting himself every now and then to substitute a better word, or to improve his style. When he had read it over he said, “Let us go on, sir. You were out last night?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Having left the house at eight, you returned only about midnight.”

“After midnight.”

"You took your gun?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where is it?"

With an air of indifference, M. de Boiscoran pointed to the corner of the fireplace, exclaiming, "There it is!"

M. Galpin took it up quickly. It was a superb double-barrelled weapon. On the beautifully carved woodwork the manufacturer's name, Clebb, was engraved. "When did you last fire this gun?" asked the magistrate.

"Some four or five days ago."

"What for?"

"To shoot some rabbits infesting my woods."

M. Galpin raised and lowered the cock with all possible care: he noticed that it resembled the Remington patent. He next opened the chamber, and ascertained that the gun was loaded. Each barrel had a cartridge in it. Then he put the gun back in its place, and, pulling from his pocket the leaden cartridge-case which Pitard had found, he showed it to M. de Boiscoran, and asked him,—"Do you recognise this?"

"Perfectly!" replied the other. "It is a case of one of my cartridges which I probably threw away as useless."

"Do you think you are the only person in the neighbourhood who has a gun of this kind?"

"I do not think it: I am quite sure of it."

"So that you must, as a matter of course, have been at the spot where such a cartridge-case as this has been found?"

"Not necessarily. I have often seen children pick up these things, and play with them."

The investigating magistrate took a seat. "If that is so," he began again, "I beg you to give me an account of how you spent the evening after eight o'clock: do not hurry, consider, take your time; for your answers are of the utmost importance."

M. de Boiscoran had so far remained quite cool; but his calmness betrayed a terrible storm within. This warning, and, even more so, the tone in which it was given, revolted him as an odious hypocrisy. Breaking out all of a sudden, he cried,—"After all, sir, what do you want of me? What am I accused of?"

M. Galpin did not stir. "You will know at the proper time," he replied. "First answer my question, and believe

me in your own interest. Answer frankly, What did you do last night?"

"How do I know? I walked about."

"That is no answer."

"Still it is so. I went out with no specific purpose: I walked at haphazard."

"Your gun on your shoulder?"

"I always take my gun: my servant can tell you so."

"Did you cross the Seille marshes!"

"No."

The magistrate shook his head gravely. "You are not telling the truth," he said. "your boots there at the foot of the bed speak against you. Where does the mud come from with which they are covered?"

"The meadows around Boiscoran are very wet."

"Don't deny any further. You were seen there. Young Ribot met you at the moment when you were crossing the canal."

M. de Boiscoran made no reply.

"Where were you going?" asked the magistrate.

For the first time a real air of embarrassment appeared on the features of the accused,—the embarrassment of a man who suddenly sees an abyss opening before him. He hesitated; and, seeing that it was useless to deny, he said—"I was going to Brechy."

"What for?"

"To see my wood-merchant, to settle about this year's wood. I did not find him at home, and came back by the high road."

M. Galpin stopped him by a gesture. "That is not so," he said severely. "You never went to Brechy."

"I beg your pardon."

"And the proof is, that, about eleven o'clock, you were hurriedly crossing the forest of Rochepommier."

"I?"

"Yes, you! And do not say 'No;' for there are your trousers torn to pieces by the thorns and briars through which you must have made your way."

"There are briars elsewhere besides the forest."

"To be sure: but you were seen there."

"By whom?"

"By Guadry the poacher. And he saw so much of you, that he could tell us in what a bad humour you were. You

were very angry. You were talking aloud, swearing, and pulling the leaves from the trees."

"So saying, the magistrate got up and took the shooting-jacket, which was lying on a chair not far from him. He searched the pockets, and pulled out of one a handful of leaves. "Look here! you see Gaudry has told the truth."

"There are leaves everywhere," muttered M. de Bois-coran.

"Yes; but a woman, Madame Courtois, saw you come out of the forest of Rochepommier. You helped her to put a sack of flour on her ass, which she could not lift alone. Do you deny it? No, you are right; for, look here! on the sleeve of your coat I see something white, which, no doubt, is flour."

M. de Boiscoran hung his head. The magistrate went on,—“You confess, then, that last night, between ten and eleven o'clock, you were at Valpinson?”

“No, sir, I do not.”

“But this cartridge-case which I have just shown you was picked up at Valpinson, close by the ruins of the old castle.”

“Well, sir, have I not told you before that I have a hundred times seen children pick up these cases to play with? Besides, if I had really been at Valpinson, why should I deny it?”

M. Galpin rose to his full height, and exclaimed in the most solemn manner,—“I will tell you why! Last night, between ten and eleven, Valpinson was set on fire; and it has been burnt to the ground.”

“Oh!”

“Last night the Count de Claudieuse was fired at twice.”

“Great God!”

“And it is thought, in fact there are strong reasons to think, that you, Jacques de Boiscoran, are the incendiary and the assassin.”

IX.

M. DE BOISCORAN looked around him, like a man suddenly seized with vertigo—pale, as if all the blood in his veins had rushed to his heart. He saw nothing but mournful, dismayed faces. Old Anthony leant against the

door, as if he feared to fall. The clerk held his pen in the air, overcome with amazement. M. Daubigeon hung his head. "This is horrible!" he murmured: "this is horrible!"

He fell heavily into a chair, pressing his hands on his heart, as if to keep down the sobs that threatened to rise. M. Galpin alone seemed to remain perfectly cool. The law, which he imagined he was representing in all its dignity, knows nothing of emotions. His thin lips even trembled a little, as if a slight smile was about to burst forth; it was the cold smile of the ambitious man, pleased with the manner in which he has played his little part. Did not everything tend to prove that Jacques de Boiscoran was the guilty man, and that, he—Galpin—had acted rightly in sacrificing his friendship to the opportunity of gaining high distinction? After a minute's silence, which seemed to last a century, the investigating magistrate crossed his arms over his chest, and, walking towards the accused, exclaiming:—"Do you confess?"

M. de Boiscoran drew himself up to his full height, as he cried, "What? What do you want me to confess?"

"That you committed the crime at Valpinson."

The young man pressed his hands convulsively on his brow. "What, I! the author of that fearful, cowardly crime?" he said. "Is it possible! Is it likely? I might confess, and you would not believe me. No! I am sure you would not believe my own words."

He would have moved the marble mantelpiece sooner than M. Galpin-Daveline, who merely replied in icy tones,—"I am not in question. Why refer to relations which must be forgotten? It is no longer the friend who speaks to you, not even the man, but simply the magistrate. You were seen."

"What wretch has said so?"

"Cocoleu!"

M. de Boiscoran seemed to be overwhelmed. "Cocoleu!" he stammered. "That poor epileptic idiot whom the Countess de Claudieuse has been taking care of?"

"The same."

"And upon the strength of the senseless words of an imbecile I am charged with incendiarism, with murder?"

The magistrate made an evident effort to assume an

air of impassive dignity, as he replied,—“For an hour, at least, poor Cocoleu has been in the full enjoyment of his faculties. The ways of Providence are inscrutable.”

“But, sir—”

And what does Cocoleu depose? He says he saw you kindle the fire with your own hands, then conceal yourself behind a pile of wood and fire twice at Count Claudieuse.”

“And all that appears quite natural to you?”

“No! At first it shocked me, as it shocked everybody. You seem to be so far above suspicion. But a moment afterwards the cartridge-case, which can only have belonged to you, was found. Then, upon my unexpected arrival here, I find the water in which you have washed your hands, black with coal, and with little pieces of charred paper swimming on the top of it.”

“Yes,” said M. de Boiscoran in an undertone; “it is fate.”

“And that is not all,” continued the magistrate, raising his voice, “I question you, and you admit having been out from eight o’clock till after midnight. I ask what you were doing, and you refuse to tell me. I insist, and you tell a falsehood. In order to confound you I am forced to quote the evidence of young Ribot, of Gaudry, and Madame Courtois, who saw you at the very places where you deny having been. That circumstance alone condemns you. Why not tell me what you were doing during these four hours? You claim to be innocent. Help me, then, to establish your innocence. Speak, tell me what you were doing between eight o’clock and midnight.”

Before M. de Boiscoran had time to answer, a gendarme entered the room, and, turning to the judicial functionaries, excitedly exclaimed, “Gentlemen, there are more than a hundred peasants, men and women, in the yard, who clamour for M. de Boiscoran. They threaten to drag him down to the river. Some of the men are armed with pitchforks; but the women are the maddest. My comrade and I have done our best to keep them quiet.”

For some time past a growing buzz of voices had been heard, and now, in confirmation of the gendarme’s statement, distinct phrases fell upon the ear, “Drown Boiscoran! Let us drown the incendiary!”

“Return, and tell these people,” said M. Daubigeon to

the gendarme, "that the authorities are this moment examining the accused; that they interrupt us; and that if they persist, they will have to deal with me."

The gendarme obeyed his orders. M. de Boiscoran had turned deadly pale, and muttered, "What! do these unfortunate people believe me guilty?"

"Yes," said M. Galpin-Daveline, who had overheard the words, "and you would understand their rage if you knew all that has happened."

"What else?"

"Two Sauveterre firemen, one the father of five children, have perished in the flames. Two other men, a farmer of Brechy, and a gendarme who tried to rescue them, have been so seriously injured that their lives are in danger." M. de Boiscoran remained silent.

"And it is you," continued the magistrate, "whom the people charge with all these calamities. You see how important it is for you to exculpate yourself."

"Ah, how can I?"

"If you are innocent, nothing is easier. Tell us how you employed your time last night."

"I have told you all I can say."

The magistrate seemed to reflect for a minute. "Take care, M. de Boiscoran," he ultimately said: "I shall be forced to have you arrested."

"Do so."

"I shall be obliged to order your arrest at once, and to send you to Sauveterre prison."

"Very well."

"Then you confess your guilt?"

"I confess that I am the victim of an unheard of combination of circumstances; I confess that you are right, and that certain fatalities can only be explained by the belief in Providence: but I swear by all that is holy in the world, I am innocent."

"Prove it."

"Ah! would I not do so if I could!"

"Be good enough then to finish dressing, sir, and prepare to follow the gendarmes."

Without a word, M. de Boiscoran went into his dressing-room, followed by his servant carrying his clothes. M. Galpin-Daveline was so busy dictating to the clerk the latter part of the examination, that he seemed to forget his

prisoner. Old Anthony availed himself of this opportunity. "Sir," he whispered into his master's ear while helping him to put on his clothes.

"What?"

"Hush, don't speak so loud! The other window is open. It is only about twenty feet to the ground; the ground is soft. Close by is one of the cellar openings; and in there, you know, is the old hiding-place. It is only five miles to the coast, and I will have a good horse ready for you to-night at the park-gate."

A bitter smile crossed M. de Boiscoran's lips, as he replied, "And you, too, my old friend: you think I am guilty?"

"I entreat you," said Anthony, "I answer for everything. It is barely twenty feet. . . . In your mother's name—"

But, instead of answering him, M. de Boiscoran turned round, and called M. Galpin-Daveline, saying, "Look at that window, sir! I have money, fast horses; and the sea is only five miles off. A guilty man would have fled; but I stay; for I am innocent."

In one point at least M. de Boiscoran was quite right. Nothing would have been easier for him than to get into the garden, and reach the hiding-place which his servant had suggested. But after that? With old Anthony's assistance, he had, to be sure, some chance of escaping altogether. Still, he might have been discovered in his hiding-place, or overtaken in his ride to the coast. Even if he had succeeded, what would have become of him? His flight would necessarily have been looked upon as a confession of his guilt. Under such circumstances, the fact of his having resisted the temptation to escape, and of having formally called the magistrate's attention to the point, was rather a proof of great cleverness than a token of innocence.

M. Galpin, at all events, looked upon it in that light; for he judged others by himself. Carefully and cunningly calculating every step he took in life, he did not believe in sudden inspirations. It was, therefore, with an ironical smile that he answered—"Very well, sir. This circumstance shall be mentioned, as well as the others, at the trial."

M. Daubigeon had not spoken since addressing the *gendarme* in reference to the mob outside. However, when M. de Boiscoran came out of his dressing-room, fully

dressed and ready, he rose from his chair and said,—“One more question, sir.”

The unfortunate fellow bowed. He was pale, but calm and self-possessed. “I am ready to reply,” he said.

“You seemed surprised and indignant at any one’s daring to accuse you. That was weakness. Justice is but the work of man, and must needs judge by appearances. If you reflect, you will see that appearances are all against you.”

“I see it but too clearly.”

“If you were on a jury, you would not hesitate to pronounce a man guilty upon such evidence.”

“No, sir, no.”

“You are not sincere!” exclaimed the public prosecutor.

M. de Boiscoran sadly shook his head, and replied,—“I speak without the slightest hope of convincing you, but in all sincerity. No, I should not condemn a man as you say, if he asserted his innocence, and if I did not see any reason for his crime. For, after all, unless a man is mad, he does not commit a crime for nothing. Now I ask you, how could I, upon whom fortune has always smiled; I who am on the eve of marrying one whom I love passionately,—how could I, why should I, set Valpinson on fire, and try to murder the Count de Claudieuse?”

M. Galpin had scarcely been able to disguise his impatience, when he saw the public prosecutor take part in the affair. Seizing, therefore, the opportunity to interfere, he said,—“Your reason, sir, was hatred. You hated the count and the countess mortally. Do not protest: it is of no use. Everybody knows it and you yourself have told me so.”

It was in a tone of crushing disdain that M. de Boiscoran rejoined, “Even if that were so, I do not see what right you have to abuse the confidence of a friend, after having declared, upon your arrival here, that all friendship between us had ceased. But it is not so. I never told you any such thing. I have told you that the count was a troublesome neighbour, very jealous of his rights, and almost absurdly attached to his preserves. I have also told you, that if he declared my public opinions to be abominable, I looked upon him as ridiculous and dangerous. As for the countess, I have simply said, half in jest, that so perfect a person was not to my taste; and that I should be very unhappy if my wife were a Madonna, who hardly ever deigned to set her foot upon the ground.”

"And that was the only reason why you once pointed your gun at the Count de Claudieuse? A little more blood rushing to your head would have made you a murderer on that day."

A terrible spasm betrayed M. de Boiscoran's fury, but he checked himself, and replied—"My passion was less fiery than it may have appeared. I have the most profound respect for the count's character. It is an additional grief to know that he has accused me."

"But he has not accused you!" broke in M. Daubigeon. "On the contrary, he was the first and the most eager to defend you."

And in spite of the signs which M. Galpin-Daveline made, the public prosecutor continued,—“Unfortunately that has nothing to do with the force of the evidence against you. If you persist in keeping silent, you must look forward to a criminal trial, to the punishment of the law. If you are innocent, why not explain the matter? What do you wait for? What do you hope?”

"Nothing."

Mechinet had, in the mean time, completed the official report.

"We must go," said M. Galpin-Daveline.

"Am I at liberty," asked M. de Boiscoran, "to write a few lines to my father and mother? They are old, such an event may kill them."

"Impossible!" said the magistrate, who turned towards Anthony, and added, "I am going to seal up this room, and I shall leave it in your keeping. You know your duty, and the penalties to which you would be subject, if, at the proper time, everything is not found in the condition in which it is now left. Now, how shall we get back to Sauveterre?"

After mature deliberation, it was decided that M. de Boiscoran should go in a carriage of his own, accompanied by one of the gendarmes, while M. Daubigeon, the investigating magistrate, and the clerk returned in the mayor's carriage driven by Ribot, who was furious at being kept under surveillance.

When the last formalities had been fulfilled, M. de Boiscoran came slowly down-stairs. He knew the court was full of furious peasants; and he expected a hostile reception. At first the crowd kept quiet, but when the accused

had taken his seat in the carriage, and the horse went off at a trot, fierce curses arose, and a shower of stones fell, one of them striking a gendarme on the head.

"Upon my word, you bring ill luck, prisoner," said the man, a friend of the other gendarme who had been so much injured at the fire.

M. de Boiscoran made no reply. He sank back into a corner, and seemingly fell into a kind of stupor from which he was not roused till the carriage drove into the yard of the prison at Sauveterre. On the threshold stood Master Blangin, the jailor, smiling with delight at the idea of receiving so distinguished a prisoner.

"I am going to give you my best room," he said ; "but first I have to give a receipt to the gendarme, and to enter you in my book." Thereupon he took down his huge greasy register, and wrote the name of Jacques de Boiscoran beneath that of Trumence Cheminot, a vagabond who had just been arrested for breaking into a garden.

It was all over. Jacques de Boiscoran was a prisoner, to be kept in solitary confinement until further orders.

PART II.

THE BOISCORAN TRIAL.

I.

VIEWED from outside, the Paris residence of the Boiscoran family—No. 216, Rue de l'Universite—is a house of modest appearance. The court-yard in front of it is small ; and the few square yards of damp soil in the rear hardly deserve the name of a garden. But the exterior aspect is exceedingly deceptive ; for inside the house each room is marvellously comfortable ; and on all sides the upholstery and decorations present an air of substantial luxury in full keeping with the Boiscorans' wealth and lineage. The most striking apartment in the mansion is the marquis's cabinet of curiosities, situated on the topmost story, and lighted from above like a huge *atelier*. Immense glass cases, standing against the walls, contain the marquis's treasures, his priceless enamels, ivories, bronzes, unique manuscripts, matchless porcelains, and, above all, his *faïences*, his dear *faïences*, the pride and torment of his old age.

Though sixty-one years old at the epoch of this story, the marquis was as straight as ever, and most aristocratically lean. He had a really magnificent nose, which absorbed vast quantities of snuff ; and in his brilliant eyes gleamed the restless cunning of the amateur collector, constantly striving to get the best of crafty dealers in so called curiosities and articles of vertu.

In 1845 the marquis almost reached the summit of political renown by a great speech on the question of public meetings, but at that same hour his watch seemed to have stopped. All his ideas were those of an Orleanist. His general appearance, his clothes, his high cravat, his whiskers, and the way he brushed his hair, all betrayed an ad

mirer and partisan of the so-called Citizen King. However, since the latter's fall, the marquis had not troubled himself about politics; in fact, he troubled himself about nothing at all. Devoting all his time to the accumulation of curiosities, he allowed the marchioness to rule supreme in the house, to administer her large fortune, govern her only son, and decide all family questions without appeal. It was perfectly useless to ask the marquis anything, for his answer was invariably, "Ask my wife."

One afternoon, about three o'clock, while he was busy, magnifying-glass in hand, examining his dishes and plates, the door of his cabinet was suddenly opened and the marchioness entered, holding a blue paper in her hand. Six or eight years younger than her husband, she seemed the very companion for such an idle, indolent man. Her walk, her manner, and her voice, showed her to be a woman of energy and determination. Traces were still apparent of her once celebrated beauty, but she had wisely refrained from trying to conceal the ravages of time, and accepted old age with a good grace.

When she entered her husband's cabinet, she seemed so painfully excited, that the marquis, forgetting that for many a year he had made it a rule of his life to show no emotion, anxiously inquired—"What is the matter? What has happened?"

"A terrible misfortune."

"Is Jacques dead?" cried the old collector.

The marchioness shook her head. "No! it is something worse, perhaps—"

The old man, who had risen at the sight of his wife, sank slowly back into his chair. "Tell me," he stammered—"tell me. I have courage."

She handed him the blue paper she held, and said slowly—"Look at this telegram, which I have just received from old Anthony, our son's valet."

With trembling hands the old marquis unfolded the paper, and read as follows,—*"Terrible misfortune! Jacques accused of having set the chateau at Valpinson on fire, and murdered Count Claudieuse. Terrible evidence against him. When examined, hardly any defense. Just arrested and carried to jail. In despair. What must I do?"*

The marchioness had feared lest the marquis would be

crushed by this despatch, which in its laconic terms betrayed Anthony's abject terror. But it was not so. He put it back on the table in the calmest manner, and said, shrugging his shoulders—"It is absurd!"

His wife did not understand him. She began again,—
"You have not read it carefully, my friend—"

"I understand," he broke in, "that our son is accused of a crime which he has not and can not have committed. You surely do not doubt his innocence? What a mother you would be! On my part, I assure you I am perfectly at ease. Jacques an incendiary! Jacques a murderer! It is nonsense!"

"Ah! you did not read the telegram," exclaimed the marchioness.

"I beg your pardon."

"You did not see that there was evidence against him."

"If there had been none he would not have been arrested. Of course, the matter is disagreeable: it is painful."

"But he did not defend himself."

"Upon my word! Do you think that if somebody accused me of having robbed a shopkeeper's till, I should take the trouble to defend myself?"

"But do you not see that Anthony evidently thinks our son is guilty?"

"Anthony is an old fool!" declared the marquis. Then pulling out his snuff-box, and stuffing his nose full of snuff, he added,—
"Besides, let us consider. Did you not tell me that Jacques is in love with little Denise de Chandore?"

"Desperately. Like a real child."

"And she?"

"She adores Jacques."

"Well. And did you not also tell me that the wedding-day was fixed?"

"Yes, three days ago."

"Has Jacques written to you on the matter?"

"An excellent letter."

"In which he tells you he is coming to Paris?"

"Yes, he wanted to purchase his wedding presents himself."

With a gesture of magnificent indifference, the marquis tapped the top of his snuff-box, and exclaimed,—
"And

you think a boy like our Jacques, a Boiscoran, in love, and beloved, who is about to be married, and has his head full of wedding presents, could have committed such a horrible crime? Such things are not worth discussing, and, with your leave, I shall return to my occupation."

If doubt is contagious, confidence is still more so. Gradually the marchioness's apprehensions gave way in presence of her husband's perfect assurance. The blood came back to her pale cheeks; and she said in a stronger voice:—"After all, I may have been too easily frightened."

"Yes, much too easily," assented the marquis. "And between us, I would not say much about it. How could the law officers help accusing Jacques, if his own mother suspects him?"

The marchioness had taken up the telegram, and was reading it over once more. "And yet," she said, answering her own objections, "who in my place would not have been frightened? This name of Claudieuse especially—"

"What about it? It is the name of an excellent and most honourable gentleman,—the best man in the world, in spite of his sea-dog manners."

"Jacques hates him, my dear."

"Oh, Jacques does not bother himself about him."

"But they have repeatedly quarrelled."

"I dare say. Claudieuse is a furious legitimist; and as such he always talks with the utmost contempt of those who have served the Orleans family."

"Jacques has been at law with him."

"Quite right, too; only he ought to have carried the matter through. Claudieuse lays claims to the Pibole, which divides our lands,—absurd claims. He wants to impede the passage of the water whenever he thinks fit, at the risk of inundating the meadows at Boiscoran, which are lower than his own. Even my brother, who was an angel in patience and gentleness, had his troubles with this tyrant."

The marchioness was still not convinced.

"There was another trouble," she said.

"What?"

"Ah! I should like to know myself."

"Has Jacques hinted at anything?"

"No. All I know is that last year at the Duchess of Champdoce's I met the Countess de Claudieuse and her

children. The young woman is perfectly charming; and, as we were going to give a ball the week after, it occurred to me to invite her at once. She refused, and did so in such an icy, formal manner, that I did not insist."

"She probably does not like dancing," muttered the marquis.

"That same evening I mentioned the matter to Jacques. He seemed very angry, and told me that I had acted very wrongly, and that he had his reasons for not desiring to come in contact with those people."

The marquis considered himself so completely in the right that he only listened with partial attention, looking all the time aside at his precious *faiences*. "Well," he said at last, "Jacques detests the Claudieuse. What does that prove? God be thanked, we do not murder all the people we detest!"

His wife did not insist any further, but only asked, "What must we do?"

She was so little in the habit of consulting her husband that he was quite surprised. "The first thing is to get Jacques out of prison," he answered. "We must see—we ought to ask for advice."

At this moment a light knock was heard at the door, and a servant entered carrying a second telegram which had just arrived. The marquis tore open the envelope. As he glanced at the contents he became extremely pale and cried,—“Great God!”

Quick as lightning, the marchioness seized the paper from his hands, and read as follows,—“Come quick. Jacques in prison; solitary confinement: accused of horrible crime. The whole town says he is guilty, and has confessed. Infamous calumny! His judge is his former friend, Galpin, who was to marry cousin Lavarande. Know nothing, except that Jacques is innocent. Abominable intrigue! Grandpa Chandore and I will do everything possible. Your help indispensable. Come, come!”

“DENISE DE CHANDORE.”

“Ah, my son is lost!” cried the marchioness, with tears in her eyes.

But the marquis had already recovered from the shock. “And I,” he exclaimed, “I say more than ever, with Denise, who is a brave girl, that Jacques is innocent. But I see

he is in danger. A criminal prosecution is always an ugly affair. A man in solitary confinement may be made to say anything."

"We must do something," said the mother, nearly mad with grief.

"Yes, and without losing a minute. We have friends let us see who among them can help us."

"I might write to M. de Margeril."

The marquis, already pale, now became livid. "What!" he cried, "you dare utter that name in my presence!"

"He is all powerful; and my son is in danger."

The marquis stopped his wife with a threatening gesture, exclaiming with an accent of bitter hatred,—"I would a thousand times rather my son should die innocent on the scaffold than owe his safety to that man."

The marchioness seemed on the point of fainting. "Good heavens!" she said, "and yet you know very well that I was only indiscreet."

"No more!" said the marquis harshly. Then, recovering his self-control by a powerful effort, he continued,

"Before we attempt anything, we must know how the matter stands. You will leave for Sauveterre this evening."

"Alone?"

"No. I will procure an able lawyer,—a reliable jurist, who is not a politician,—if such a one can be found now-a-days. He will tell you what to do, and will write to me, so that I can do here whatever may be best. Denise is right. Jacques must be the victim of some abominable intrigue. Nevertheless, we shall save him; but we must keep cool, perfectly cool." Saying these words he rang the bell so violently, that a number of servants rushed in at once.

"Quick," cried M. de Boiscoran, "fetch my lawyer, M. Chapelain. Take a carriage." The order was immediately obeyed, and in less than twenty minutes, M. Chapelain arrived.

"Ah! we require all your experience, my friend," said the marquis to him. "Look here. Read these telegrams."

Fortunately, the lawyer had such control over himself, that he did not betray what he felt; for he believed Jacques guilty, knowing how reluctant the public prosecutors generally are to order the arrest of a merely sus-

pected person. "I know the man for the marchioness," he eventually replied, "a young man whose modesty alone has kept him from distinguishing himself so far, although I know he is one of the best jurists at the bar, and an admirable speaker."

"What is his name?"

"Manuel Folgat. I will send him to you at once."

Two hours later, M. Chapelain's protege arrived. He was a man of thirty-one or thirty-two, whose whole appearance was typical of intelligence and energy. He pleased the marquis, who, after having told him all he knew about Jacques's position, gave him a sketch of Sauveterre society, mentioning who would most likely prove friends, and who would remain enemies; recommending him, above all, to trust M. Seneschal, an old friend of the family, and a most influential man.

"Whatever is humanly possible shall be done, sir," said the advocate.

And that same evening, at a quarter-past eight, the Marchioness de Boiscoran and Manuel Folgat took their seats in the train for Sauveterre, via Orleans.

II.

THE Sauveterre railway station is situated some two miles from the town, with which it is connected by a well kept road, having on either side numerous inns and taverns, where on market days the peasants congregate, trying to rob each other with glass in hand, and lips overflowing with protestations of honesty. On week days, even, the road is quite lively, being a favourite promenade. People go to the station to see the trains start or come in, to examine the new arrivals, or to comment upon the motives which have induced M. or Madame So-and-so to travel.

It was nine o'clock in the morning when the train conveying the marchioness and Manuel Folgat at last reached Sauveterre. The former was overcome by fatigue and anxiety, having spent the whole night in discussing the chances in her son's favour. She was all the more exhausted, as the lawyer had taken care not to encourage any extravagant hopes. For he also shared, in secret at least, M. Chapelain's doubts. He, also, had said to himself,

that such a man as M. de Boiscoran is not likely to be arrested, unless there are strong reasons, and almost overwhelming proofs, of his guilt in the hands of the authorities.

The train was slackening speed, as the marchioness remarked, "I hope Denise and her father have thought of sending a carriage to meet us."

"Why so?" asked Manuel Folgat.

"Because I do not wish to be seen, I do not want all the world to see my grief and tears."

The young lawyer shook his head and rejoined, "You will neither keep in hiding, nor exhibit a tearful face, madame, if you are disposed to follow my advice."

The marchioness seemed amazed; but in a few words M. Folgat rapidly pointed out to her what a mistake it would be if she did not show herself, or if she appeared at all downcast in presence of the Sauveterre folks, who would unfailingly attribute her hiding to shame, or consider her grief as significant of a belief in her son's culpability.

The marchioness saw that the advocate was right; so drawing a comb from her dressing-case, she quickly repaired the disorder of her hair; next, with a few skilful touches, she smoothed her dress; her features, by a supreme effort of will, resumed their usual serenity; she forced her lips to smile without betraying the effort it cost her to do so; and finally, in a clear, firm voice, she exclaimed: "Look at me, sir. Can I show myself now?"

The train had just stopped. Manuel Folgat jumped out of the carriage; and, offering the marchioness his hand, to assist her in alighting, he said,—“You will be pleased with yourself, madame. Your courage will not be useless. All Sauveterre seems to be here.”

This was really true. Ever since the night before, a report had been current,—no one knew how it originated,—that the “murderer’s mother,” as they charitably called her, would arrive by the nine o’clock train; and forthwith everybody had determined to be at the station at that hour.

It was not merely public curiosity that dictated this resolution, for public opinion was running strongly against M. de Boiscoran. The fire at Valpinson and the attempt upon the Count de Claudieuse were now looked upon as small matters. But then the fire had had terrible conse-

quences. Two men had perished in it; and two others had been so severely wounded as to be in danger of death. The evening before, a sad procession had passed through the streets of Sauveterre. The almost carbonised remains of Bolton the drummer, and of poor Guillebault, had been brought home in a cart covered with a black cloth, and followed by two priests. The whole town, moreover, had seen the widow go to the mayor's office, holding her youngest child in her arms, while the four others clung to her dress. All these misfortunes were traced back to Jacques, who was loaded with curses; and people now thought of manifesting their resentment by receiving his mother, the marchioness, in a hostile manner.

"There she is, there she is!" exclaimed the crowd, as she appeared on the threshold of the station, leaning upon M. Folgat's arm.

Not another word, however, was uttered, so great was every one's surprise at her assured mien. "She puts a bold face on it," said some, while others declared, "She is convinced of her son's innocence."

At all events, she had presence of mind enough to see what an impression she produced, and how well she had done to follow M. Folgat's advice. It gave her additional strength. On perceiving in the crowd some people she knew, she at once went up to them, and with a smile exclaimed, "Well, of course, you know what has happened to us. It is unheard of! Here is the liberty of a man like my son at the mercy of the first foolish notion that enters a magistrate's head. I heard the news yesterday by telegram, and came down at once with this gentleman a friend of ours, and one of the first advocates in Paris.

M. Folgat knit his brows; he would have liked the marchioness to measure her words. Still he was bound to support her.

"These gentlemen of the court," he said in measured tones, "will perhaps be sorry for what they have done."

Fortunately a young man, wearing a gold-laced cap, came up to them at this moment, announcing that M. de Chandore's carriage was waiting.

"Very well," replied the marchioness. And bowing to the good people of Sauveterre, who were quite dumb-founded by her assurance, she added: "Pardon me if I leave you so soon; but M. de Chandore expects us. I

shall, however, be happy to call upon you soon on my son's arm."

The Chandore family reside on the other side of the Place du Marche Neuf, in a large, massive, ugly, modern house, having a conical-capped corner tower, which Dr. Seignebos had described as threatening Sauveterre with a revival of the feudal system. It is true the Chandores were once upon a time great feudal lords, exhibiting both a profound contempt for all who could not boast of noble ancestors and a deep hatred of revolutionary ideas. But, if they had ever been formidable, they had long since ceased to be so. Of this once greater and numerous family, only one member survived, the old Baron de Chandore, and his granddaughter, Jacques de Boiscoran's promised bride, Denise, was an orphan. She was barely three years old, when, within five months, she lost her father, killed in a duel, and her mother, who had not the strength to survive the man she loved. This was certainly a terrible misfortune; but the little one was not left uncared for, nor unloved. Her grandfather bestowed all his affection upon her; and her mother's two sisters, the Demoiselles de Lavarande, determined never to marry, so as to devote themselves exclusively to their niece, and with this object in view, they suggested to the baron that they should live with him and his little grandchild; but he persistently refused to listen to their propositions, asserting that he was quite competent to look after Denise, and adding that he wished to have her all to himself. All he would grant was, that the ladies might spend the day with Denise whenever they chose.

Hence arose a certain rivalry between the aunts and the grandfather, each being eager to win the affections of the little girl at any price. At five years of age Denise had every toy that had ever been invented. At ten she was dressed like the first lady of the land, and possessed jewellery in abundance.

Her grandfather, formerly rough, rigid and severe, had been metamorphosed from head to foot. The fierce look had vanished from his eyes, the scorn from his lips giving place to soft glances and smooth words. He might be seen every day hurrying along the streets, and going from shop to shop on errands for his grandchild. He invited her little friends, arranged children's parties, taught her to

drive her hoop, and willingly took part in all her games. If Denise was out of sorts, he trembled. If she coughed, he turned pale. Once she was really ill, having caught the measles. He stayed up for twelve nights in succession, and sent to Paris for famous doctors, who laughed in his face.

And yet the two old ladies found means to exceed his folly. If Denise learned anything at all, it was only because she herself insisted upon it, otherwise the writing-master and the music-master would have been sent away at the slightest sign of weariness.

Sauveterre shrugged its shoulders at this spectacle. "What a wretched education!" said the ladies of the town. "Such weakness is absolutely unheard of. The child's relatives are rendering her a sorry service."

No doubt this almost incredible spoiling, blind devotion, and perpetual worship, might have made Denise the most disagreeable little person that ever lived. But fortunately she had one of those happy dispositions which cannot be perverted; and besides, she was perhaps saved from the danger by its very excess. As she grew older, she would say with a laugh,—“Grandpapa Chandore, my aunts Lavarande, and I, we do just what we choose.” This, however, was only a joke. Never did a young girl repay such intense affection with rarer and nobler qualities.

She was leading a happy life, free from all care, being just seventeen years old, when a great event occurred. One morning, M. de Chandore met Jacques de Boiscoran, whose uncle had been a friend of his, and invited him to dinner. Jacques accepted the invitation, and came. Denise saw him, and loved him at once. Now, for the first time in her life, she had a secret unknown to Grandpapa Chandore and to her aunts; and for two years the birds and the flowers were the only confidants of this love of hers, which grew up in her heart, sweet like a dream, idealised by absence, and fed by memory. For Jacques's eyes remained blind during two years. But on the day when they were opened he felt that his fate was sealed. Nor did he hesitate a moment; and in less than a month afterward, the Marquis de Boiscoran came to Sauveterre, and with all due form asked Denise's hand for his son.

Ah! it was a heavy blow for Grandpapa Chandore. He had, of course, often thought of his grandchild's future mar-

riage, he had even at times spoken of it, and told her that he was getting old, and should feel very much relieved, when he had found her a good husband. But he talked of the matter as a distant thing, very much as we speak of dying. M. de Boiscoran's application revealed the true nature of his feelings. He shuddered at the idea of no longer living with Denise, of seeing her prefer another man to himself, and of loving her children best of all. He was indeed quite inclined to throw the envoy out of the window. Still he checked his feelings and replied that he could give no reply till he had consulted his granddaughter.

Poor grandpapa ! At the very first words he uttered, she exclaimed,—“ Oh, I am so happy ! But I expected it.”

M. de Chandore bent his head to conceal a tear which burned in his eyes. “ Then the thing is settled,” he murmured.

Soon comforted by the joy that was sparkling in his grandchild's eyes, he began reproaching himself for his selfishness, and for being unhappy when Denise showed no signs of grief. Jacques was of course allowed to visit the house, and pay his court ; and on the very day before the fire at Valpinson, the date of the wedding had been finally fixed.

Thus Denise was in the very height of happiness, when she suddenly heard of the terrible charges brought against M. de Boiscoran, and of his arrest. Overwhelmed by the news, gently broken as it was, she had lain nearly ten minutes unconscious in her aunt's arms. The good ladies, like her grandfather, were themselves utterly overcome with terror. Denise's despair only lasted, however, the space of a fainting fit, for as she came to, she exclaimed :—“ Am I mad to give way thus ? Is it not evident he is innocent ? ”

First she sent a telegram to the marquis, knowing that, before taking any steps, it was all important to come to an understanding with Jacques's family. Then she begged to be left alone ; and spent the night in counting the minutes that must pass till the help she hoped for arrived by the train from Paris.

At eight o'clock she came down stairs and gave orders that a carriage should be sent to the station for the marchioness, adding that the coachman must drive back as fast as possible. Then she joined her grandfather and her

aunts in the drawing room. It was in vain, however, that they talked to her ; for her thoughts were elsewhere.

At last a rumble of wheels and the clatter of horses' hoofs was heard. The Chandore carriage halted before the house. Quick as lightning, Denise arose, and rushing into the hall, exclaimed,—

“ Here is Jacques's mother ! ”

III.

WE cannot do violence to our natural feelings with impunity. The marchioness was utterly overcome by the great effort she had made to meet the curious people of Sauveterre with a smiling face and calm features.

“ What a horrible comedy,” she murmured as she sank back on the cushions of the carriage sent to fetch her.

“ Admit, at least, madame,” said the lawyer, “ that it was necessary. You have won over, perhaps, a hundred persons to your son's side.”

Hardly had the carriage stopped before M. de Chandore's residence, than the house-door opened, and Denise threw herself into the marchioness's arms, too deeply moved to speak. At last she broke forth, “ Oh, my mother, my mother ! what a terrible misfortune ! ”

M. de Chandore, who had rejoined his granddaughter quickly, drew her and the marchioness into the drawing-room. Poor M. Folgat was sorely embarrassed what to do with himself. No one seemed to be aware of his existence. He followed the others, however, entering the room, and standing by the door, he looked by turns at Denise, M. de Chandore, and the two spinsters.

Denise was then twenty years old. It could not be said that she was uncommonly beautiful ; but no one who had once seen her could ever forget her again. Though small in form, she was grace personified ; and all her movements were exquisitely perfect. Her black hair contrasted strangely with her blue eyes and fair complexion. Her skin was indeed of dazzling whiteness. Her features suggested angelic goodness of mind, and at the same time excessive timidity. And yet, from certain movements of her lips and her eyebrows, one might have suspected no lack of energy.

By her side Grandpapa Chandore looked unusually tall and imposing. He did not show his seventy-two years, but was as straight as ever, and seemed built to defy all the storms of life. What struck strangers most, perhaps, was his ruddy brown complexion, which gave him the appearance of an Indian chieftain, being all the more prominent owing to his white beard and hair. Although his features usually wore an air of benevolence, a glance at his eyes showed that the gentle smile on his lips was not to be taken alone. There were flashes in those gray eyes which made people aware that a man who dared, for instance, to offend Denise, would have to pay for it pretty dearly.

As to the two aunts, the Demoiselles de Lavarande, they were as tall and thin as a couple of willow-rods, pale, discreet, ultra-aristocratic in their reserve and their coldness; but they bore in their faces an expression of happy peace and sentimental tenderness, such as is often seen in old maids whose temper has not been soured by celibacy. They dressed absolutely alike, as they had done now for forty years, preferring neutral colours and modest fashions, such as suited their simple taste.

They were crying bitterly when the party entered the drawing-room; and M. Folgat felt instinctively that they were capable of any sacrifice for their beloved niece's sake. "Poor Denise!" they whispered.

The girl heard them, and drawing herself up, exclaimed:—"We are behaving shamefully. What would Jacques say, if he could see us from his prison? Why should we be so sad? Is he not innocent?" Her eyes shone with unusual brilliancy, and her voice had a ring which moved Manual Folgat deeply.

"I can at least, in justice to myself," she continued, "assure you that I have never doubted him for a moment. And how should I ever have dared to doubt? The very night on which the fire broke out, Jacques wrote me a letter of four pages, which he sent me by one of his tenants and which reached me at nine o'clock. I showed it to grandpapa. He read it, and said I was a thousand times right, because a man who had been meditating such a crime could never have written that letter."

"I said so, and I still think so," added M. de Chandore; "and every sensible man will think so too; but—"

His granddaughter did not let him finish. "It is evident,

therefore," said she, "that Jacques is the victim of an abominable intrigue; and we must unravel it. We have cried enough: now let us act!"

Then, turning to the marchioness she added, "And my dear mother, I sent for you, because we want you to help us in this great work."

"And here I am," replied the old lady, "not less certain of my son's innocence than you are."

Evidently M. de Chandore had been hoping for something more; for he interrupted her, asking, "And the marquis?"

"My husband remained in Paris."

The old gentleman's face assumed a curious expression. "Ah, that is just like him," he said. "Nothing can move him. His only son is wickedly accused of a crime, arrested, and thrown into prison. He is informed of it; it is hoped he will come at once. By no means. Let his son get out of trouble as he can. He has his *faïences* to attend to. Oh, if I had a son!"

"My husband," pleaded the marchioness, "thinks he can be more useful to Jacques in Paris than here. There will be much to be done there."

"Haven't we the railway?"

"Moreover," she resumed, not answering the query, "he intrusted me to this gentleman, M. Manuel Folgat, who has promised us the assistance of his experience, his talents, and his devotion."

So saying the marchioness pointed to the advocate, who, being thus formally introduced, bowed and said, "I am all hope. But I think, with Mademoiselle de Chandore, that we must go to work without losing a second. Before I can decide, however, upon what is to be done, I must know all the facts."

"Unfortunately we know nothing," replied M. de Chandore, "nothing, except that Jacques is kept in close confinement."

"Well, then, we must try to find out. You know, no doubt, all the law officers of Sauveterre?"

"Very few. I know the public prosecutor."

"And the investigating magistrate?"

At these words the elder of the Demoiselles Lavarande rose, exclaiming, "That man, M. Galpin-Daveline, is a monster of hypocrisy and ingratitude. He called himself

Jacques's friend ; and Jacques liked him well enough to induce us, my sister and myself, to give our consent to a marriage between him and one of our cousins, a Lavarande. Poor child ! When she learned the sad truth, she cried, ' God be blessed that I escaped the disgrace of becoming the wife of such a man ! ' "

" Yes," added the other old lady, " if all Sauveterre thinks Jacques guilty, it is because his own friend has become his judge."

M. Folgat shook his head, and said, " I must have more minute information. The marquis mentioned to me a M. Seneschal, who is mayor of Sauveterre."

M. de Chandore looked at once for his hat, exclaiming, " To be sure ! He is a friend of ours ; and, if any one is well informed, he is. Let us go to him. Come ! "

M. Seneschal was indeed a friend of the Chandores, the Lavarandes, and also of the Boiscorans, whose confidential adviser he had been for more than twenty years, and to whom he had naturally become attached after so long a connection. It was in a measure, thanks to the protection of these families, that eventually he had become mayor of Sauveterre and member of the departmental general council.

He was well-nigh overcome with fatigue and anxiety when he returned to Sauveterre on the morning after the fatal fire at Valpinson. Still he had to discharge numerous and troublesome duties, which left him no time for rest or for dwelling on painful reflections. He had to provide for the recovery and removal of the remains of the two unfortunate victims of the fire ; he had to receive the mother of one, and the widow and children of the other, and to listen to their complaints, and try to console them by promising the former a small pension, and the latter some help in the education of her children. Then he had to give directions to have the wounded men brought home : and afterwards to go in search of a house for the Count de Claudieuse and his wife, a matter which had given him much trouble. Finally, a large part of the afternoon was taken up by an angry discussion with Dr. Seignebois. The doctor, in the name of " outraged society," in the name of justice and humanity, demanded the immediate arrest of Cocoleu, the wretch whose unconscious statement formed the basis of the accusation against

M. de Boiscoran. He demanded with a furious oath that the epileptic idiot should be sent to the hospital, and kept there so as to be professionally examined by experts. The mayor for some time refused to grant the request, which seemed to him unreasonable; but the doctor talked so loud, and insisted so strongly, that at last two gendarmes were sent to Brechy with orders to bring Cocoleu to Sauveterre.

They returned several hours later with empty hands. The idiot had disappeared; and no one in the whole district had been able to give any information as to his whereabouts.

"And do you think that natural?" asked Dr. Seignebos, whose eyes were glaring at the mayor from under his spectacles. "To me it looks like an absolute proof that a plot has been hatched to ruin M. de Boiscoran."

"But can't you be quiet?" said M. Seneschal angrily. "Do you think Cocoleu lost? He will turn up again, sure enough."

The doctor left without insisting any further; but, before going home, he dropped in at his club, and in the presence of twenty people, declared he had positive proof of a plot formed against M. de Boiscoran, whom the Monarchists had never forgiven for having left them; adding that the Jesuits were certainly mixed up in the business.

This interference was more injurious than useful to Jacques, as was soon apparent. That same evening, when M. Galpin crossed the Place du Marche Neuf, he was wantonly insulted. Naturally enough he hurried to the mayor, reproaching him and holding him responsible for this insult offered to justice in his person, and asking for energetic punishment. M. Seneschal promised to take the proper measures, and hastened to the office of the public prosecutor to act in concert with him. Then it was that he learnt what had happened at Boiscoran, and the terrible result of Jacques's examination.

Distressed at M. de Boiscoran's situation, he spent a bad night, and in the morning displayed such fearful temper that his wife hardly dared to say a word to him. There was more to come, however. At two o'clock precisely, Bolton and Guillebault's funeral was to take place and he had promised Captain Parenteau to be present in his

official costume, and accompanied by the whole municipal council. He had just given orders to have his uniform got ready, when a servant announced visitors—"M. de Chandore and a friend."

"That was ail that was wanting!" exclaimed the distracted mayor. But after a pause he added, "Well, it had to come sooner or later. Show them in!"

M. Seneschal expected a heart-rending scene, and consequently he was amazed at the easy, almost cheerful manner with which M. de Chandore introduced his companion.

"M. Manuel Folgat, my dear Seneschal, a famous lawyer from Paris, who has been kind enough to come down with the Marchioness de Boiscoran."

"I am a stranger here, M. Seneschal," said Folgat; "I do not know the manner of thinking, the customs, the interests, the prejudices, of the province; in fact, I am totally ignorant, and I know I should commit many a grievous blunder, unless I secured the assistance of an able and experienced counsellor. M. de Boiscoran and M. de Chandore have both encouraged me in the hope that I might find such a man in you."

"Certainly, sir, and with all my heart," replied M. Seneschal, bowing politely, and evidently flattered by this deference on the part of the Parisian advocate.

He offered seats, and then sat down himself, resting his elbow on the arm of his big office-chair, and rubbing his clean-shaven chin with his hand. "This is a very serious matter, gentlemen," he said at last.

"A criminal charge is always serious," replied M. Folgat.

"Upon my word," cried M. de Chandore, "you are not in doubt about Jacques's innocence?"

M. Seneschal did not answer at first; but after a pause he remarked: "How can we know what may be going on in the young brains of five and twenty when they are set on fire by the remembrance of certain insults; wrath is a dangerous counsellor."

Grandpapa Chandore refused to hear any more. "What! do you talk to me of wrath?" he broke in. "What do you see of wrath in this Valpinson affair? I see nothing in it, for my part, but the meanest crime—a crime long prepared and coolly carried out."

The mayor shook his head, and replied—"You do not know all that has happened."

"Sir," added M. Folgat, "it is precisely for the purpose of hearing what has happened that we come to you."

"So be it," said M. Seneschal, who thereupon went to work to describe the events he had himself witnessed at Valpinson, and those which had taken place at Boiscoran, as described by the public prosecutor; he did this with all the lucidity of an experienced old lawyer, accustomed to unravel the mysteries of complicated suits. He wound up at length by saying—"Finally, do you know what Daubigeon said to me? He said, 'Galpin was obliged to order M. de Boiscoran's arrest. Is he guilty? I don't know what to think of it. The accusation is overwhelming. He swears by all the gods that he is innocent, but he will not tell us how he spent the night.'"

M. de Chandore, robust as he was, nearly fainted; albeit his face remained as crimson as ever. Nothing on earth could make him turn pale. "My God!" he murmured, "what will Denise say?" Then, turning to M. Folgat, he said aloud—"And yet Jacques had something on his mind that evening."

"Do you think so?"

"I am sure of it. But for that, he would certainly have come to the house, as he has done every evening for a month. Besides, he said so himself in the letter which he sent Denise by one of his tenants, and which she mentioned to you. He wrote, 'I curse from the bottom of my heart the business which prevents me from spending the evening with you; but I cannot possibly defer it any longer.'"

"You see!" cried M. Seneschal.

"The letter is, however, of such a nature," continued the old gentleman, "that I repeat, no man who premeditated such a hideous crime could possibly have written it. Nevertheless, I confess, that, when I heard the fatal news, this very allusion to some pressing business impressed me painfully."

The young lawyer seemed far from being convinced. "It is evident," he said, "that M. de Boiscoran will on no account tell us where he went."

"He told a falsehood, sir," insisted M. Seneschal. "He commenced by denying that he had gone where the witnesses met him."

“Very naturally, since he desired to keep his destination unknown.”

“He did not say anything more when he was told he was under arrest.”

“Because he hoped to get out of this trouble without betraying his secret.”

“If that were so, it would be very strange.”

“Stranger things than that have happened.”

“To allow himself to be accused of incendiarism and murder when he is innocent ! ”

“To be innocent, and to allow one’s self to be condemned, is still stranger ; and yet there are instances—”

The young lawyer spoke in that short, imperious tone which is, so to say, the privilege of his profession, and with such an accent of assurance, that M. de Chandore felt his hopes revive. M. Seneschal was sorely troubled. “And what do you think, sir ? ” he asked.

“That M. de Boiscoran must be innocent,” replied the young advocate. And without leaving time for objections, he continued,—

“That is the opinion of a man who is not influenced by any personal consideration. I come here without any preconceived notions. I do not know the Count de Claudieuse any more than I know M. de Boiscoran. A crime has been committed ; I am told the circumstances ; and I at once come to the conclusion that the reasons which led to the arrest of the accused would lead me to set him at liberty.”

“Oh ! ”

“Let me explain. If M. de Boiscoran is guilty, he showed by the way in which he received M. Galpin at his house, a perfectly unheard of self-control, together with a matchless genius for comedy. Therefore, if he is guilty, he is immensely clever—”

“But—”

“Allow me. Still supposing him to be guilty, he showed a marvellous want of self-control, and to be brief, immeasurable stupidity during his subsequent examination : therefore if he is guilty, he is also immensely stupid—”

“But—”

“Allow me to finish. Can one and the same person be at once so unusually clever and so unusually stupid ? Judge yourself. But again : if M. de Boiscoran is guilty,

he ought to be sent to the insane asylum, and not to prison; for who but a madman would not have poured away the dirty water in which he had washed his blackened hands? Mad indeed must he be not to have concealed that famous breech-loader, of which the prosecution now makes such good use."

"Jacques is safe!" exclaimed M. de Chandore.

M. Seneschal was not so easily won over. "That is specious pleading," he said. "Unfortunately, we want something more than a logical conclusion to encounter a jury who will be beset with an abundance of witnesses on the other side."

"We shall find more on our side."

"What do you propose to do?"

"I don't know. I have just told you my first impression. Now I must study the case, and examine the witnesses, beginning with old Anthony."

M. de Chandore had risen. "We can reach Boiscoran in an hour," he said. "Shall I send for my carriage?"

The young advocate nodded assent, and a quarter of an hour later, the pair were driving along the highroad in the direction of Jacques's chateau.

IV.

IF M. Seneschal's horse was one of the best in the whole province, M. de Chandore's was still better. In less than fifty minutes, during which M. de Chandore and M. Folgat did not exchange fifty words, they reached Boiscoran, where they found the court-yard silent and deserted. Doors and windows alike were hermetically closed. On the steps of the porch, however, there sat a stout young peasant, who, at the sight of the new-comers, rose, and carried his hand to his cap.

"Where is Anthony?" asked M. de Chandore.

"Up stairs, sir."

The old gentleman tried to open the door: it resisted.

"Oh, sir! I forgot. Anthony has barricaded the door from the inside."

"A curious idea," said M. de Chandore, knocking with the butt-end of his whip. He had to knock harder and

harder before Anthony's voice was heard asking from within, "Who is there?"

"It is I, the Baron de Chandore."

The bars were removed instantly, and the old valet appeared on the threshold. He looked pale and dejected. The disordered condition of his beard, hair, and dress, showed that he had not been to bed.

M. de Chandore was so struck that he exclaimed, "What is the matter with you, my good Anthony?"

Instead of replying, Anthony drew the baron and his companion inside. When he had refastened the door, he crossed his arms, and said,—“The matter is—well, I am afraid.”

The old gentleman and the lawyer looked at each other. They evidently both thought the poor man had lost his mind. Anthony saw it, and said quickly,—“No, I am not mad, although, certainly, there are things passing here which could make one doubt one's own senses. If I am afraid, it is for good reasons.”

“You do not doubt your master?” asked M. Folgat.

The servant cast such fierce, threatening glances at the lawyer, that M. de Chandore hastened to interfere. “My dear Anthony,” he said, “this gentleman is a friend of mine, a lawyer, who has come down from Paris with the marchioness to defend Jacques. You need not mistrust him, nay, more than that, you must tell him all you know, even if—”

The trusty old servant's face brightened up, as he exclaimed,—“Ah! the gentleman is a lawyer. Welcome, sir. Now I can say all that weighs on my heart. No, most assuredly I do not think M. Jacques guilty. It is impossible he should be so: it is absurd to think of it. But what I do believe, what I am sure of, is, that there is a plot to charge him with all the horrors perpetrated at Valpinson.”

“A plot?” broke in M. Folgat, “whose? how? what for?”

“Ah! that is more than I know. But I am not mistaken; and you would think so too, if you had been present at the examination, as I was. It was fearful, gentlemen, it was so unbearable, that I was stupefied for a moment, and even thought my master guilty, and advised him to flee. The like has never been heard of before I am sure.

Everything went against him. Every answer he made sounded like a confession."

In broken words Anthony next related the various phases of Jaques's examination. As soon as he paused, M. de Chandore hastily exclaimed, "Why did you not come and tell me all that immediately?"

The old servant ventured to shrug his shoulders slightly, and replied, "How could I? When the examination was over, that man, Galpin, put the seals everywhere,—strips of linen fastened on with sealing-wax, as they do with dead people. He put one on every door and window, and on some of them two. He put three on the outer door. Then he told me that he appointed me keeper of the house, that I should be paid for it, but that I should be sent to the galleys if any one touched the seals even with the tip of a finger. When he had handed master over to the gendarmes, that man, Galpin, went away, leaving me here alone, dumbfounded, like a fellow who has been knocked on the head. Nevertheless, I should have come to you, sir, but I had an idea that gave me the shivers."

Grandpapa Chandore stamped his foot and cried, "Come to the point, to the point!"

"It was this: you must know, gentlemen, that, in the examination, that breechloading gun played a prominent part. Galpin looked at it carefully, and asked master when he had last fired it off. Master said, 'About five days ago.' You hear, I say, five days. Thereupon, that man, Galpin, puts the gun down, without looking at the barrels."

"Well?" asked M. Folgat.

"Well, sir, I—Anthony—I had the evening before—I say the evening before—cleaned the gun, washed it, and—"

"Upon my word," cried M. de Chandore, "why did you not say so at once? If the barrels are clean, that is an absolute proof that Jacques is innocent."

The old servant shook his head, and said,—“To be sure, sir. But are they clean?”

"Oh!"

"Master may be mistaken as to the time when he last fired the gun, and then the barrels would be soiled; and, instead of helping him, my evidence might ruin him definitely. Before I say anything I ought to be sure."

"Yes," said Folgat, approvingly, "and you have done

well to keep silence, my good man. I cannot urge you too earnestly not to say a word of the matter to any one. That fact may become a decisive argument for the defence."

"Oh! I can hold my tongue, sir. Only you may imagine how impatient I have been with these confounded seals which prevent me from looking at the gun. Oh, if I had dared to break one of them!"

"Poor fellow!"

"I thought of doing it; but I checked myself. Then it occurred to me that other people might think of the same thing. The rascals who had formed this abominable plot against M. Jacques are capable of anything, don't you think so? Why might not they come some night, and break the seals? I put the steward on guard in the garden, under the windows. I put his son as a sentinel in the courtyard; and I have myself stood watch before the seals with arms in my hands all the time. Let the rascals come on, they will find somebody to receive them."

Hour by hour since his arrival at Sauveterre, M. Folgat's faith in Jacques's innocence had steadily increased, and old Anthony's tale was not calculated to shake his growing conviction. He did not admit the existence of a plot, however; though he was not disinclined to believe in the cunning calculations of some rascal, who, availing himself of circumstances known to him alone, had managed to let suspicion fall upon M. de Boiscoran, instead of on himself.

There were many other questions to be asked; but Anthony was in such a state of feverish excitement, that it was difficult to induce him to answer. However, after a moment's pause, M. Folgat began once more, saying,—
"My good Anthony, I cannot praise your conduct in this matter too highly. However, we have not done with it yet. But I have eaten nothing since I left Paris last night, and I hear the bell strike twelve o'clock—"

M. de Chandore seemed heartily ashamed, and broke in with profuse excuses for his neglect. At the same time Anthony turned away with the view of having a *dejeuner* prepared, and after a brief interval invited the visitors to enter the dining-room, where the cloth was laid.

The two gentlemen had taken their seats, and old Anthony had placed himself, napkin in hand, behind them;

when M. de Chandore exclaimed,—“Put another plate Anthony, and breakfast with us.”

“Oh, sir,” protested the old servant,—“sir—”

“Sit, down,” repeated the baron: “if you eat after us you will make us lose time, and an old servant like you is a member of the family.”

Anthony obeyed, quite overcome, but blushing with delight at the honour that was done him: for the Baron de Chandore did not usually distinguish himself by familiarity. When the ham and eggs prepared by the housekeeper had been disposed of, M. Folgat remarked:—“Now let us go back to business. Keep cool, my dear Anthony, and remember that unless we get the prosecution office to say there is no case, your answers may become the basis of our defence at the trial. What were M. de Boiscoran’s habits when he was here?”

“When he was here, sir, he had, so to say, no habits. We came here very rarely, and only for a short time.”

“Never mind; what did he do here?”

“He used to rise late; he walked about a good deal; sometimes he went out shooting; he sketched; he read, for master is a great reader, and is as fond of his books as the marquis, his father, is of his porcelain.”

“Who came here to see him?”

“M. Galpin-Daveline most frequently, Dr. Seignebois, the priest from Brechy, M. Seneschal, and M. Daubigeon.”

“How did he spend his evenings?”

“At M. de Chandore’s who can tell you all about them.”

“He had no other relatives in the neighbourhood?”

“No.”

“You do not know if he had any lady friend?”

Anthony looked as if he would have blushed. “Oh sir,” he said, “you don’t know, I presume, that master is engaged to Mademoiselle Denise?”

The Baron de Chandore was not a baby, as he himself was wont to say. Albeit deeply interested, he rose and said, “I feel the want of a little fresh air.” A minute later he had left the room, understanding very well that the fact of his being Denise’s grandfather might keep Anthony from telling the truth.

“That is a sensible man,” thought M. Folgat, adding aloud:—“Now we are alone, my dear Anthony, you can speak frankly. Did M. de Boiscoran keep a mistress?”

"No, sir."

"Did he ever have one?"

"Never. They will tell you, perhaps, that once upon a time he was partial to a great, big red-haired woman, the daughter of a miller in the neighbourhood, and that she came more frequently to the chateau than was needful,—now on one pretext, and now on another. But that was mere child's play. Besides, that was five years ago, and the woman has been married these three years to a basket-maker at Marennés."

"You are quite sure of what you say?"

"As sure as I am of myself. And you would be as sure of it yourself, if you knew the country as I know it, and the abominable tongues the people have. There is no concealing anything from them. I defy a man to talk three times to a woman without their finding it out and concocting some scandal. I say nothing of Paris—"

M. Folgat, who had listened attentively, at once asked,—*"Ah! was there anything of the kind in Paris?"*

Anthony hesitated; at last he said,—*"You see, master's secrets are not mine, and, after the oath I have sworn—"*

"It may be, however, that his safety depends upon your frankness in telling me everything," said the lawyer. *"You may be sure he will not blame you for having spoken."*

During a brief interval the old servant remained seemingly undecided; but eventually he remarked,—*"It is said that master had a great love affair."*

"When?"

"I don't know. It was before I entered his service. All I know is that, for the purpose of meeting the person he loved, master bought a beautiful house at Passy, at the end of the Rue des Vignes. It stood in a large garden, and he furnished it magnificently."

"Ah!"

"It was a secret, of course, and neither master's father nor his mother knows it to this day; and I only know it, because one day master fell down the steps and dislocated his foot, so that he had to send for me to nurse him. He may have bought the house under his own name; but he was not known by it there. He passed for an Englishman, a Mr. Burnett; and he had an English maid servant."

"And the person who met them there?"

"Ah, sir! I not only don't know who she is, but I can't even guess. She took such extraordinary precautions! As I mean to tell you everything, I will confess to you that I had the curiosity to question the English servant. She told me that she knew no farther than I did; that she knew, to be sure, that a lady came there from time to time; but she had never seen even the end of her nose. Master so managed it that the girl was invariably out on some errand or other when the lady came and when she went away. While she was in the house, master waited upon her himself. And when they wanted to walk in the garden, they sent the servant away on some fool's errand to Versailles or Fontainebleau; and she was in a rage I can tell you."

M. Folgat began to twirl his beard, as he was in the habit of doing when specially interested. For a moment he thought he saw the woman,—the inevitable woman who is always at the bottom of every great event in a man's life; but then she vanished from his sight; and he tortured his mind in vain to discover a possible if not probable connection between the mysterious visitor to the house in the Rue des Vignes, and the events that had happened at Valpinson. He could not see a trace. Accordingly, rather discouraged, he asked once more, "After all, my dear Anthony, this great love affair of your master's has come to an end?"

"It seems so, sir, since M. Jacques was going to marry Mademoiselle Denise."

The reason was perhaps not quite as conclusive as the old servant imagined; still the young advocate made no remark on the point, merely asking, "And when do you think it came to an end?"

"During the war, master and the lady must have parted, for master did not stay in Paris. He commanded a company of *mobiles*; and after being wounded in the head, obtained the cross."

"Does he still own the house in the Rue des Vignes?"

"I believe so."

"Why?"

"Because, some time ago, when master and I went to Paris for a week, he said to me one day, 'The war and the commune have cost me dear. My shanty has been struck by more than twenty shells, and it has been occupied by

Francs-tireurs, Communists, and Regulars. The walls are pierced, and there is not a piece of furniture uninjured. My architect tells me, that, all in all, the repairs will cost some forty thousand francs.' ”

“What? Repairs? Then he thought of going back there?”

“At that time, sir, master's marriage was not settled.”

“Still that would go to prove that he had met the mysterious lady once more, and that the war had not broken off their relations.”

“That may be.”

“And has he never mentioned the lady since?”

“Never.”

At this moment M. de Chandore's cough was heard in the hall, a cough such as men affect when they wish to announce their coming. A minute later he re-appeared, M. Folgat remarking, to show that his presence was no longer inconvenient, “Upon my word, sir, I was just going in search of you, for fear that you really felt unwell.”

“Thank you,” replied the old gentleman, “the fresh air has done me good.”

He sat down, and the young advocate turned again to Anthony, saying, “Well, let us go on. How was he the day before the fire?”

“Just as usual.”

“What did he do before he went out?”

“He dined as usual with a good appetite; then he went up stairs, and remained there for an hour. When he came down, he had a letter in his hand, which he gave to Michael, our tenant's son, telling him to carry it to Sauverterre to Mademoiselle de Chandore.”

“Yes, that was so, and in that letter M. de Boiscoran told Mademoiselle Denise that he was detained here by a matter of great importance.”

“Ah!”

“Have you any idea what that could have been?”

“Not the least, sir, I assure you.”

“Yet let us see. M. de Boiscoran must have had powerful reasons to deprive himself of the pleasure of spending the evening with Mademoiselle Denise?”

“Yes, indeed.”

“He must also have had his reasons for taking to the

marshes, on his way out, instead of going by the turnpike, and also for coming back through the woods."

Old Anthony literally tore at his hair as he exclaimed, "Ah, sir! these are the very words M. Galpin said."

"Unfortunately, every man in his senses will say so."

"I know it, sir: I know it but too well. And M. Jacques himself knew it so well that at first he tried to find some pretext; but he has never told a falsehood—M. Jacques can't tell a falsehood. And clever as he is, he could not find a pretext that had any sense in it. He said he had gone to Brechy to see his wood-merchant."

"And why shouldn't he?"

Anthony shook his head and replied, "Because the wood-merchant at Brechy is a thief, and everybody knows that master kicked him out of the house some three years ago. We sell all our wood at Sauveterre."

M. Folgat had taken out a note-book, in which he wrote down some of Anthony's statements, preparing thus the outline of his defence. This being done, he resumed again. "Now we come to Cocoleu," said he.

"Ah, the wretch!" cried Anthony.

"You know him?"

"How could I help knowing him, having lived all my life here at Boiscoran in the service of master's uncle?"

"Then what kind of a man is he?"

"An idiot, sir, or, as they here call it an '*innocent*,' who has Saint Vitus's dance into the bargain, and epilepsy moreover."

"Then it is perfectly notorious that he is imbecile?"

"Yes, sir, although I have heard people insist that he is not quite so stupid as he looks, and that, as they say here, he plays the ass in order to get his oats—"

At this point M. de Chandore exclaimed, "On this subject Dr. Seignebois can give you all the information you may want: he kept Cocoleu for nearly two years at his own house."

"I mean to see the doctor," replied M. Folgat. "But first of all we must find this unfortunate idiot."

"You heard what M. Seneschal said: he has put the gendarmes on his track."

"Oh," exclaimed Anthony, "if the gendarmes have taken Cocoleu, he must have given himself up voluntarily."

"Why?"

"Because there is no one who knows the by-paths and out-of-the-way corners of the country so well as that idiot; for he has been hiding all his life like a savage in the holes and thickets of the district; and as he can live well enough on roots and berries, maybe he will stay away three months without being seen by any one."

"Is it possible?" exclaimed M. Folgat angrily.

"I only know one man," continued Anthony, "capable of finding Cocoleu—our tenant's son, Michael—the young man you saw down-stairs."

"Send for him," said M. de Chandore.

Michael appeared promptly, and, when acquainted with what he was expected to do, replied, "The thing can be managed, certainly, though not very easily. Cocoleu hasn't a man's sense, but the instincts of a brute. However, I'll try."

There was nothing to keep either M. de Chandore or M. Folgat any longer at Boiscoran; and accordingly they left the chateau, after warning Anthony to watch the seals well, and to get a glimpse, if possible, of Jacques's gun, when the offices came for the different articles required by the prosecution. It was five o'clock when the pair drove into town again. Denise was waiting for them in the drawing-room. She rose as they entered, looking quite pale, her eyes being dry and brilliant.

"What! You are alone here?" said M. de Chandore. "Why have they left you alone?"

"Don't be angry, grandpapa. I have just prevailed on the marchioness, who was exhausted with fatigue, to lie down for an hour or so before dinner."

"And your aunts?"

"They have gone out, grandpapa. They are probably by this time at M. Galpin-Daveline's."

M. Folgat started, giving vent to an exclamation of surprise.

"It is a foolish step!" exclaimed the old gentleman; but Denise closed his lips with a single phrase.

"I asked them to go," she said.

V.

YES, the step taken by the Demoiselles de Lavarande was foolish. At this point of affairs their visit to M. Galpin might perhaps supply him with the means to crush Jacques. Still it was M. de Chandore's and M. Folgat's joint fault. Had they not left Sauveterre without any other precaution than sending word through M. Seneschal's servant, that they would be in for dinner, and that Denise, her aunts, and Jacques's mother need not be troubled about them?

Not be troubled!—such a message to the Marchioness de Boiscoran and Denise, to Jacques's mother, and Jacques's promised wife!

Certainly, at first, the two wretched women preserved in a measure, their self-control, trying to surpass each other in courage and confidence. But as the hours passed by, their anxiety became intolerable; and gradually, on confiding their apprehensions to each other, their grief broke out beyond all restraint. They thought of Jacques, innocent, and yet treated like one of the worst criminals, alone in his prison cell, given up to the most horrible inspirations of despair. What had been his feelings during the twenty-four hours which had brought him no news from his friends? Must he not fancy himself despised and abandoned?

"It is an intolerable thought!" exclaimed Denise at last "We must get to him at any price."

"How?" asked the marchioness.

"I don't know; but there must be some way. There are things which I would not have ventured upon so long as I was alone; but, with you by my side, I can risk anything. Let us go to the prison."

The old lady promptly donned her mantle, simply saying, "I am ready; let us go."

They had both repeatedly heard that Jacques was kept in "solitary confinement;" but neither of them realised fully the meaning of that expression. They had no idea of this atrocious measure, which, so to say, immures a man alive, leaving him in his cell alone with the crime with which he is charged, and utterly at the mercy of another man, the investigating magistrate, whose duty it is to extort the truth from him. The two ladies were only cognisant of the want of liberty, the cell with its dismal fittings, the barred win-

dow, the bolted door, the jailer shaking his bunch of keys, and the tramp of the sentinel in the passage.

"They cannot," said the old lady, "refuse me permission to see my son."

"They cannot," repeated Denise. "And, besides, I know the jailer, Blangin: his wife was formerly in our service."

When the young girl, therefore, raised the heavy knocker at the prison-door, she was full of cheerful confidence. It was Blangin himself who opened the latter. At the sight of the two women, his features displayed the utmost astonishment.

"We come to see M. de Boiscoran," said Denise boldly.

"Have you a permit, ladies?" asked the keeper.

"From whom?"

"From M. Galpin-Daveline."

"We have no permit."

"Then I am very sorry to have to tell you, that you cannot possibly see M. de Boiscoran. He is kept in solitary confinement, and I have the strictest orders."

Denise's glance was threatening, as she sharply said,—
"Your orders cannot apply to this lady, the Marchioness de Boiscoran."

"My orders apply to everybody, mademoiselle."

"You would not, I am sure, keep a poor, distressed mother from seeing her son?"

"Ah! but—mademoiselle—it does not rest with me. I! Who am I? Nothing more than one of the bolts, drawn or pushed at will."

For the first time, it entered the poor girl's head that her effort might fail: still she tried once more, with tears in her eyes,—
"But I, my dear M. Blangin, think of me! You would not refuse me? Don't you know who I am? Have you never heard your wife speak of me?"

The jailer was certainly touched. "I know," said he, "how much my wife and myself are indebted to your kindness, mademoiselle. But—I have my orders, and you surely would not wish me to lose my place."

"If you lose your place, M. Blangin, I, Denise de Chandore, promise you another place twice as good."

"Mademoiselle!"

"You do not doubt my word, M. Blangin, do you?"

"God forbid! But it is not my place only. If I did what you want me to do, I should be severely punished."

The marchioness judged from the jailer's tone that Denise was not likely to prevail over him, and so she said,—“Don't insist, my child. Let us go back.”

“What? Without finding out what is going on behind these pitiless walls; without knowing even whether Jacques is dead or alive?”

There was evidently a great struggle going on in the jailer's heart. All of a sudden he cast a rapid glance around, and then speaking hurriedly, exclaimed,—“I ought not to tell you—but never mind—I cannot let you go away without telling you that M. de Boiscoran is quite well.”

“Ah!”

“Yesterday, when they brought him here, he was, so to say, overcome. He threw himself upon his bed, and he remained there without stirring for over two hours. I think he must have been crying.”

A sob, which Denise could not suppress, made Blangin start. “Oh, reassure yourself, mademoiselle,” he added quickly. “That state of things did not last long. Soon M. de Boiscoran got up, and said, ‘Why, I am a fool to despair!’”

“Did you hear him say so?” asked the old lady.

“Not I. It was Frumence Cheminot who heard it.”

“Frumence?”

“Yes, one of our jail-birds. Oh! he is only a vagabond, not at all a bad fellow. He has been ordered to stand guard at the door of M. de Boiscoran's cell, and not to lose sight of it for a moment. It was M. Galpin who had the idea, because sometimes, in their first despair, the prisoners . . . a misfortune happens so easily—they become weary of life, you know. . . . Well, Frumence would be there to prevent it.”

The old lady trembled with horror. This precautionary measure, more than anything else, gave her the full measure of her son's situation.

“However,” continued Blangin, “there is nothing to fear. M. de Boiscoran became quite calm again, and even cheerful, if I may so. When he got up this morning, after having slept all night like a dormouse, he sent for me, and asked me for paper, ink, and pen. All the prisoners ask for that the second day. I had orders to let him have them, and so I gave them to him. When I carried him his breakfast, he handed me a letter for Mademoiselle Chandore.”

"What!" cried Denise, "You have a letter for me, and yet don't give it me?"

"I haven't got it now, madame. I had to hand it, as is my duty, to M. Galpin-Daveline, when he came accompanied by his clerk, Méchainet, to examine M. de Boiscoran."

"And what did he say?"

"He opened the letter, read it, put it into his pocket, and said, 'all right.'"

Tears of anger sprang from Denise's eyes, as she cried,—"What a shame! This man reads a letter written by Jacques to me! It is infamous!" And not thinking of thanking Blangin, she drew the old lady away, and walked home without saying another word.

"Ah, poor child, you did not succeed," exclaimed the two old aunts, when they saw their niece return. But on hearing what had happened, they added;—"Well, we'll go and see this little magistrate, who, but the day before yesterday, was paying us abject court to obtain our cousin's hand. And we'll tell him the truth; and, if we cannot make him give us back Jacques at liberty, we will at least trouble him in his triumph, and crush his pride."

How could poor Denise help adopting the old ladies' notions, when their project offered such immediate satisfaction to her indignation, at the same time serving her secret hopes? "Oh, yes! You are right, dear aunts," she said. "Quick, don't lose any time; go at once!"

Unable to resist her entreaties, they started instantly, without listening to the timid objections made by the marchioness. But the good ladies were sadly mistaken as to M. Galpin's state of mind. Their cousin's ex-lover was not bedded on roses by any means. At the beginning of this extraordinary affair he had gone into it eagerly, looking upon it as an admirable opportunity, long hoped for, and likely to open wide the doors to his burning ambition. Then, having once begun—the investigation being under way—he had been carried along by the current, without having time to reflect. He had even felt a kind of unhealthy satisfaction at seeing the evidence increase, until he was literally compelled to order his former friend to be sent to prison. At that moment he was fairly dazzled by the most magnificent expectations. This preliminary inquiry, which in a few hours already had led to the discovery of a culprit

the most unlikely of all men in the province, could not fail to establish his superior ability and matchless skill.

A few hours later, however, M. Galpin-Daveline looked no longer with the same eye upon these events. Reflection had come; and he had begun to doubt his ability, and to ask himself if he had not, after all, acted rashly. If Jacques were guilty, so much the better. He was sure, in that case, to obtain brilliant promotion immediately after the verdict. Yes, but if Jacques should be innocent? When that thought occurred to M. Galpin for the first time it made him shiver to the marrow of his bones. Jacques innocent!—that was his own condemnation, his career blighted, his hopes destroyed, his prospects ruined for ever. Jacques innocent!—that meant certain disgrace. He would be sent away from Sauveterre, where he could not remain after such a scandal. He would be banished to some out-of-the-way locality, without hope of any possible promotion.

In vain he tried to reason that he had only done his duty. People would answer, if they condescended at all to answer, that there are flagrant blunders, scandalous mistakes, which a magistrate must not commit. People would say that for the honour of justice, and in the interest of the law, it is better, under certain circumstances, to let a guilty man escape, than to punish an innocent one. With such anxiety on his mind,—the most cruel that can tear the heart of an ambitious man,—M. Galpin-Daveline found his pillow stuffed with thorns. He had been up since six o'clock. At eleven, he had sent for his clerk, Mechinet; and they had gone together to the jail to recommence the examination. It was then that the jailer handed him the prisoner's letter to Denise. It was a short note, such as a sensible man would write knowing full well that a prisoner cannot count upon the secrecy of his correspondence. It was not even sealed, a fact which M. Blangin had failed to notice.

"Denise, my darling," wrote M. de Boiscoran, "the thought of the terrible grief I cause you is my most cruel, and almost my only sorrow. Need I stop to assure you that I am innocent? I am sure it is not needed. I am the victim of a fatal combination of circumstances, which could not but mislead justice. But be re-assured, be hopeful. When the time comes, I shall be able to set matters right.

JACQUES."

M. Galpin-Daveline had certainly exclaimed "all right" after reading this letter. Nevertheless it had stung him to the quick. "What assurance!" he muttered to himself.

Still he regained courage while mounting the prison-steps. Jacques had evidently not imagined that his note would reach its destination direct; hence it might be fairly presumed that he had written for the eyes of justice as well as for his lady-love. The fact that the letter was not sealed even gave some weight to this presumption.

"After all, we shall see," said M. Galpin-Daveline, while Blangin was unlocking the door.

But he found Jacques as calm as if he had been in his chateau at Boiscoran, haughty moreover and even scornful. It was impossible to get anything out of him. When he was pressed, he became obstinately silent, or said that he needed time to consider. The magistrate returned home more troubled than ever. The position assumed by Jacques puzzled him. Ah, if he could have retraced his steps! But it was too late. He had burnt his vessels, and condemned himself to go on to the finish. For his own safety, for his future life, it was henceforth necessary that Jacques de Boiscoran should be found guilty; that he should be tried in open court, and there be sentenced. It must be. It was a question of life or death for him.

He was in this state of mind when the Demoiselles de Lavarande called, and asked to see him. "What could the two old ladies want?" he asked.

"Show them in," he said at last, strangely puzzled by this visit.

They entered, and haughtily declined the chairs he offered.

"I hardly expected to have the honour of a visit from you, *mesdames*," began the magistrate, whose remarks were, however, speedily cut short by Mademoiselle Adelaide, the elder of Denise's aunts.

"I suppose not, after what has passed," ejaculated the old lady, who, speaking with all the eloquence of a pious woman trying to wither an impious man, next poured upon him a stream of reproaches for what she called his infamous treachery. "What? How could he appear against Jacques, who was his friend, and who had actually aided him in obtaining the promise of a great match? By that one hope he had become, so to say, a member of the family.

Did he not know that among kinsmen it was a sacred duty to set aside all personal feelings for the purpose of protecting that sacred patrimony called family honour?"

M. Galpin felt like a man upon whom a handful of stones falls from a fifth floor. Still he preserved his self-control, and even asked himself what advantage he might obtain from this extraordinary scene. Might it open a door for reconciliation?

As soon, therefore, as Mademoiselle Adelaide paused, he began justifying himself, painting in hypocritical colours the grief it had given him to carry out his duties, swearing that he was not able to control events, and that Jacques was as dear to him now as ever.

"If he is so dear to you," broke in Mademoiselle Adelaide, "why don't you set him free?"

"Ah! how can I?"

"At least give his family and his friends leave to see him."

"The law will not allow me. If he is innocent, he has only to prove it. If he is guilty, he must confess. In the first case, he will be set free; in the other case he can see whom he wishes."

"If he is so dear to you, how could you dare read the letter he wrote to Denise?"

"It is one of the most painful duties of my profession to do so."

"Ah! And does that profession also prevent you from giving us that letter after reading it?"

"Yes. But I can tell you what it says."

He took the letter in question out of a drawer; and the younger of the two sisters, Mademoiselle Elizabeth, copied it in pencil. When this was finished they both withdrew, almost without saying good-bye.

M. Galpin was furious. "Ah, the old witches!" he exclaimed, "I see clearly you don't believe in Jacques's innocence, or why is his family so very anxious to see him? No doubt they want to enable him to escape the punishment of his crimes by suicide. But, by heavens, that shall not be, if I can help it!"

As we have seen, M. Folgat was excessively annoyed at this step taken by the Demoiselles de Lavarande; still he did not let his annoyance be seen. It was necessary that he should retain perfect presence of mind and calmness in

this cruelly-trying family. M. de Chandore, on the other hand, could not conceal his dissatisfaction so well; and, in spite of his deference to his grandchild's wishes, he remarked: "I am sure, my dear child, I don't wish to blame you. But you know your aunts and their disposition. They are quite capable of exasperating M. Galpin."

"What does it matter?" asked the young girl haughtily. "Circumspection is all very well for guilty people; but Jacques is innocent."

"Mademoiselle de Chandore is right," said M. Folgat. "Whatever the ladies may have done, they cannot make matters worse. M. Galpin will be none the less our bitter enemy."

Grandpapa Chandore started.

"Oh! I do not blame him," continued the young lawyer; "but I blame the laws which make him act as he does. How can a magistrate remain perfectly impartial in certain very important cases such as this, when his whole future career depends upon success? A man may be an upright magistrate, incapable of partiality, conscientious in fulfilling all his duties, and yet he is but a man. He has his interest at stake. He does not like the court to find out that there is no case. Great rewards are not always given to the lawyer who has taken most pains to find out the truth."

"But M. Galpin-Davelin was a friend of ours, sir."

"Yes; and that is what makes me fear. What will be his fate when M. Jacques's innocence is established?"

"Well, at all events, we shall soon know what the ladies have accomplished."

At that precise moment they entered the drawing-room quite proud of their achievement, and triumphantly waving the copy of Jacques's letter. Denise seized upon it; and, while she read it in a corner, Mademoiselle Adelaide described the interview, stating how haughty and disdainful she had been, and how humble and repentant M. Galpin had appeared.

"He was completely undone," said the two old ladies with one voice; "he was crushed, annihilated."

"Yes, you have done a nice thing," growled the old baron; "and you have much reason to boast, forsooth."

"My aunts have acted rightly," declared Denise. "Just see what Jacques has written! It is clear and pre-

cise. What can we fear when he says, 'Be re-assured: when the time comes, I shall be able to set matters right?'"

M. Folgat took the letter, read it, and shook his head, "There was no need of this letter," he said, "to confirm my opinion. At the bottom of this affair there is a secret which none of us have yet found out. Still M. de Boiscoran acts very rashly in playing with a criminal prosecution in this manner. Why did he not explain at once? What was easy yesterday may be less easy to-morrow, and perhaps impossible in a week."

"Jacques, sir, is a superior man," cried Denise, "and whatever he says is perfectly sure to be the right thing."

At this moment Madame de Boiscoran entered the room, greatly refreshed by the rest she had taken. She suggested that a telegram should be sent to her husband to acquaint him with what had transpired.

The despatch had been drawn up and sent, and dinner was just over when M. Seneschal arrived, with a full budget of news. The firemen's funeral had passed off quietly, although amid deep emotion. No disturbance had taken place, as was feared; and Dr. Seignebos had not spoken at the graveyard. Both a disturbance and a row would have been badly received, said M. Seneschal; for he was sorry to say, the immense majority of the people of Sauveterre did not doubt M. de Boiscoran's guilt. In several groups he had heard people say, "And still you will see they won't condemn him. If a poor devil committed such a horrible crime he would be guillotined sure enough; but the son of the Marquise de Boiscoran will come out of it as white as snow." The mayor was speaking in this strain when a vehicle was heard stopping at the door.

"Who can that be?" asked Denise, half frightened.

Suddenly a noise of steps and voices, something like a scuffle, was heard in the passage, and directly afterwards Michael, Jacques's tenant's son, pushed open the drawing-room door. "I've got him!" he cried. "Here he is!" And with these words he pushed in Cocolieu, who struggled wildly, and looked around him with frightened eyes like some wild beast caught in a trap.

"Upon my word, my good fellow," said M. Seneschal, "you have done better than the gendarmes!"

Michael winked significantly as if to imply that he had not a very exalted opinion of the cleverness of the gendarmes. "I promised the baron," he said, "to get hold of Cocoleu somehow or other. I knew that at times he went and buried himself, like a wild beast that he is, in a hole scratched out by himself under a rock in the forest of Rochepommier. I had discovered this den of his one day by accident; for a man might pass by a hundred times, and never dream of its existence. But, as soon as the baron told me that the *innocent* had disappeared, I said to myself, 'I'm sure he's in his hole: let us go and see.' So I hastened down to the rocks: and there I found Cocoleu. But it was not so easy to pull him out of his den. He wouldn't come; and while defending himself, he bit me in the hand, like the mad dog that he is." And Michael held up his left hand, wrapped round with a bloody piece of linen.

"It was pretty hard work," he continued, "to get the madman here. I was compelled to tie him hand and foot, and to carry him bodily to my father's house. There we put him into the gig, and now here he is. Just look at the pretty fellow!"

The idiot was truly hideous at that moment, with his livid face covered with red spots, his brutish glances, and his hanging lips fringed with white foam.

"Why would you not come?" asked M. Seneschal.

The idiot looked as if he did not hear.

"Why did you bite Michael?" continued the mayor.

Cocoleu made no reply.

"Do you know that M. de Boiscoran is in prison because of what you said?"

Still no reply.

"Ah!" said Michael, "it is of no use questioning him. You might beat him till to-morrow, and he would rather give up the ghost than say a word."

"I am—I am hungry," stammered Cocoleu.

M. Folgat looked indignant. "And to think," he said, "that upon the testimony of such a being, a capital charge has been made!"

Grandpapa Chandore seemed seriously embarrassed. "But now, what in the world," said he, "are we to do with this idiot?"

"I will take him to the hospital," said M. Seneschal,

"and let Dr. Seignebois and the public prosecutor know *A* his capture."

Dr. Seignebois was an eccentric man, beyond doubt; and the absurdities which his enemies attributed to him were not all unfounded. But he had, at all events, the rare quality of professing for his art a respect nearly akin to enthusiasm. Indeed, according to his views, the faculty possessed that infallibility which he denied the pope. In confidence he certainly admitted that some of his colleagues were amazing donkeys; but he would never have allowed any one else to say so. From the moment a man acquired the famous diploma which gives him the right over life and death, that man became in his eyes an august personage for the world at large. It was a crime, he thought, not to submit blindly to a physician's decision. Hence his obstinacy in opposing M. Galpin-Daveline, hence the bitterness of his contradictions, and the rudeness with which he had requested the "gentlemen of the law" to leave the room in which *his* patient was lying.

"For these devils," he said, "would kill the one in order to get the means of cutting off the other's head."

And thereupon, he had set to work once more, and with the aid of the countess, dug out, grain by grain, the lead which had honeycombed the count's flesh. At nine o'clock the work was finished.

"Not that I fancy I have got all the shot out," he said modestly; "but, if there are any left, they are out of reach and I shall have to wait for certain symptoms to tell me where they are."

As he had foreseen, the count had grown rather worse. His first excitement had given way to perfect prostration; and he seemed insensible to what was going on around him. Fever began to show itself; and, considering the count's constitution, it was easily to be foreseen that delirium would set in before the day was over.

"Nevertheless, I think there is hardly any danger," said the doctor to the countess, after having pointed out all the probable symptoms, so as to keep her from being alarmed. Then he recommended her to let no one approach her husband's bed, and M. Galpin-Daveline least of all.

This recommendation was not useless; for almost at the same moment a peasant entered to say that a man from

Sauveterre wished to see the count. "Show him in," said the doctor: "I'll speak to him."

The visitor was a M. Tetard, a former *huissier*, who had given up his profession and become a dealer in stones. Besides being an ex-officer of justice and a merchant, he was also the agent of a fire insurance company. It was in this capacity that he presumed, as he told the countess, to present himself in person. He had been informed that the farm-buildings at Valpinson, which were insured in his company, had been destroyed by fire; that they had been purposely set on fire by M. de Boiscoran; and that he wished to confer with the Count de Claudieuse on the subject. He had no idea, he added, of contesting the responsibility of his company: he only wished to establish the facts which would enable him to fall back upon M. de Boiscoran, who was a man of fortune, and would certainly be condemned to make compensation for the injury done. For this purpose, certain formalities had to be gone through; and he had called in order to arrange the necessary measures.

"And I," said Dr. Seignebos,—“I request you to take to your heels, and,” he added, “I think it very bold of you to dare speak in that way of M. de Boiscoran.”

M. Tetard disappeared without saying another word; and the doctor, very much excited by this scene, turned to the youngest daughter of the countess, the one with whom she was sitting up when the fire broke out, and who was now decidedly better. As there was accordingly nothing more to retain him at Valpinson, the doctor carefully pocketed the pieces of lead which he had removed from the count's wounds, and then, drawing the countess to the door, said, "Before I go away, madame, I should like to know what you think of these events."

The unfortunate lady, who looked as pale as death itself, could hardly hold up any longer. There seemed to be nothing alive in her but her eyes, which shone with unusual brilliancy. "Ah! I do not know, sir," she replied in a feeble voice. "How can I collect my thoughts after such terrible shocks?"

"Still you questioned Cocoleu."

"Who would not have done so, when the truth was at stake?"

"And were you not surprised at the name he mentioned?"

"You must have seen that yourself, sir."

"I saw it; and that is exactly why I ask you, and why I want to know what you really think of that poor creature's state of mind."

"Don't you know that he is idiotic?"

"I know it; and that is why I was so surprised to see you insist upon making him talk. Do you really think, that, in spite of his habitual imbecility, he may have glimpses of sense?"

"He had, a few moments before, saved my children from death."

"That proves his devotion for you."

"He is very much attached to me indeed, just like some poor animal I might have picked up and cared for."

"Perhaps so. And still he showed more than mere animal instinct."

"That may be. I have more than once noticed flashes of intelligence in Cocoleu."

The doctor had taken off his spectacles, and was wiping them furiously. "It is a great pity," said he, "that one of these flashes of intelligence did not enlighten him when he saw M. de Boiscoran make a fire and prepare to murder the Count de Claudieuse."

The countess, who was leaning against the door-post, seemed as if about to faint. "But," she replied, "it is precisely to his excitement at the sight of the flames, and at hearing the shots fired, that I ascribe Cocoleu's return to reason."

"May be," said the doctor, "may be." Then putting on his spectacles again, he added, "That is a question to be decided by the professional men who will have to examine the poor imbecile."

"What! Is he going to be examined?"

"Yes, and very thoroughly, madame, I assure you. And now I have the honour of wishing you good-bye. However, I shall come back to-night, unless you should succeed during the day in finding lodgings at Sauveterre,—an arrangement which would be very desirable for myself, in the first place, and not less so for your husband and your daughter. They are not comfortable in this cottage."

Thereupon he lifted his hat, returned to the town, and

immediately asked M. Seneschal to have Cocoleu arrested. Unfortunately the gendarmes had been unsuccessful; and Dr. Seignebos, who saw how unfortunate all this was for Jacques, was growing terribly impatient, when, on Saturday night, towards ten o'clock, M. Seneschal darted into his room, exclaiming, "Cocoleu is found."

The doctor would have hurried off at once to see the idiot, if M. Seneschal had not pointed out the lateness of the hour, and the inconvenience of waking up the sisters at the hospital, where Cocoleu had been conveyed. Accordingly M. Seignebos resolved to postpone his visit till the morrow.

VI.

It was a little before eight o'clock on Sunday morning, when Dr. Seignebos entered the courtyard of the Sauve-terre hospital. He was walking faster than usual, with his hat over his eyes, and his hands thrust deep into his pockets. He went straight to the room of the lady superior, and, after the usual salutations, observed, "They brought you, my sister, last night, a patient, an idiot, called Cocoleu."

"Yes, doctor."

"Where has he been put?"

"The mayor had him installed in the room opposite the linen room."

"And how has he behaved?"

"Perfectly well: the sister who kept watch did not hear him stir."

"Thanks, my sister!" said Dr. Seignebos.

He was already at the door, when the lady superior recalled him. "Are you going up to see the poor fellow, doctor?" she asked.

"Yes, my sister: why?"

"Because you cannot see him."

"I cannot?"

"No. The public prosecutor has sent orders not to let any one, except the sister who nurses him, come near Cocoleu,—no one, doctor, not even the physician, in case of urgency, of course, excepted."

Dr. Seignebos smiled ironically. Then he said, laughing scornfully,—“Ah, these are your orders, are they?”

Well, I tell you that I do not mind them in the least. Who can prevent me from seeing my patient? Tell me that! Let the public prosecutor give his orders in his court-house as much as he chooses! But in my hospital! My sister, I am going to Cocoleu's room."

"Doctor, you cannot go there. There is a gendarme at the door."

"A gendarme?"

"Yes, he came this morning with the strictest orders."

For a moment the doctor seemed thunderstruck. Then he suddenly broke out with unusual violence, and in a voice that made the windows shake he cried, "This is unheard of! This is an abominable abuse of power! And by the hundred thousand thunders of heaven, I'll have my rights, and justice shall be done me, if I have to go to Thiers!"

So saying he rushed out without ceremony, crossed the yard, and disappeared like an arrow, in the direction of the court-house. A moment later he fell into M. Daubignon's room like a bombshell.

"I know what brings you, doctor," said the public prosecutor. "You come about that order I have given concerning Cocoleu."

"Yes, indeed, sir! That order is an insult."

"I have been asked to give it as a matter of necessity, by M. Galpin-Daveline."

"And why did you not refuse? You alone are responsible for it in my eyes. You are the public prosecutor, and M. Galpin is but your subordinate."

M. Daubignon shook his head, replying, "There you are mistaken, doctor. In such a case the investigating magistrate is independent of myself and of the court. He is not even bound to obey the advocate-general, who may make suggestions to him, but who cannot give him orders. M. Galpin Daveline, in his capacity as examining magistrate, has his independent jurisdiction, and is armed with almost unlimited power. No one in the world can repeat so well as an examining magistrate the poet's famous phrase:—

'Hoc volo, sic jubeo, sit pro ratione voluntas.'"

For once Dr. Seignebos seemed convinced by M. Daubi

geon's words. "Then," said he, "M. Galpin-Daveline has even the right to deprive a sick man of his physician's assistance."

"If he assumes the responsibility, yes. But he does not mean to go so far. He was, on the contrary, about to ask you, although it is Sunday, to be present at a second examination which Cocoleu is to undergo. I am surprised you have not received his note, and that you did not meet him at the hospital."

"Well, I will go there again at once," said the doctor, hurrying down stairs.

This time, as he reached the door of the hospital, he came face to face with M. Galpin-Daveline, who was just arriving, accompanied by his faithful clerk, Mechinet. "You come in the nick of time, doctor," began the magistrate, with his usual solemnity.

But, short and rapid as the doctor's walk had been, it had given him time to reflect and to grow cool. Instead of breaking out into recriminations, he replied in a tone of mock politeness,—“Yes, I know. We have to see the poor devil to whom you've given a gendarme for nurse. Let us go up: I am at your service.”

Cocoleu occupied a large white-washed room, furnished with a bed, a table, and two chairs. The bed was no doubt a good one; but the idiot had taken off the bedding and blankets, and lain down in his clothes on the straw mattress. It was thus that the magistrate and the physician found him as they entered. He rose at their appearance; but, on seeing the gendarme, he uttered a cry, and tried to hide under the bed. M. Galpin-Daveline promptly ordered the gendarme to pull him out again.

This being done, the magistrate stepped forward and said:—“Don't be afraid, Cocoleu. We mean you no harm; only you must answer our questions. Do you recollect what happened the other night at Valpinson?”

Cocoleu laughed,—an idiot's laugh—but he made no reply. During a complete hour, begging, threatening, and promising by turns, the magistrate tried in vain to get him to speak, but not even the name of the Countess de Claudieuse had any effect on him. At last, utterly out of patience, M. Galpin-Daveline exclaimed,—“Let us go. The wretch is worse than a brute.”

"Was he any better," asked the doctor, "when he denounced M. de Boiscoran?"

The magistrate pretended not to hear; but as they were about to leave the room, he said to the doctor,—“You know that I expect your report?”

“In forty-eight hours I shall have the honour to hand it to you,” replied the practitioner, who mentally added:—“And that report is going to give you some trouble, my good man.”

In point of fact the report was already drawn up: but the doctor was of opinion that the longer he could delay its delivery, the more chance he would probably have of defeating the plan of the prosecution.

“As I mean to keep it two days longer,” he thought on his way home, “why should I not show it to this Paris lawyer who has come down with the marchioness? Nothing need prevent me, as far as I see, since Galpin, in his utter confusion, has forgotten to put me under oath.”

But he paused. According to the laws of medical jurisprudence, had he the right, or not, to communicate such a document to the prisoner’s counsel? This question troubled him; for, although he boasted that he did not believe in God, he believed firmly in professional duty, and would have allowed himself to be cut to pieces rather than break its laws.

However, the result of his meditation was, that as soon as he had breakfasted, he put his report in his pocket, and went by the side streets to M. de Chandore’s house. The marchioness and the two aunts were still at church, where they had thought it best to show themselves; and there was no one in the drawing-room but Denise, the baron, and M. Folgat. The old gentleman was very much surprised to see the doctor. The latter was his family physician, it is true; but, except in cases of sickness, the two never saw each other, their political opinions being so very different.

“If you see me here,” said the physician, “it is simply because, upon my honour and my conscience, I believe that M. de Boiscoran is innocent.”

Denise would have liked to embrace the doctor for these words. With the greatest eagerness she pushed a large easy-chair towards him, and in her sweetest voice, exclaimed,—“Pray sit down, my dear doctor.”

"Thanks," he answered curtly. Then turning to M. Folgat, he added,—*"I am convinced that M. de Boiscoran is the victim of the Republican opinions which he has so boldly professed ; for, baron, your future son-in-law is a Republican."*

Grandpapa Chandore made no reply. If they had come and told him that Jacques had been a member of the Commune, he would not have been any more moved. Denise loved Jacques. That was enough for him.

"Well," continued the doctor, *"I am a Radical, I, M.—"*

"Folgat," said the young lawyer.

"Yes M. Folgat, I am a Radical ; and it is my duty to defend a man whose political opinions so closely resemble mine. I come, therefore, to show you my medical report, to see if you can make any use of it in your defence of M. de Boiscoran, or suggest to me any ideas."

"Ah!" exclaimed the young man. *"That is a very valuable service."*

"But let us understand each other," said the physician earnestly. *"If I speak of listening to your suggestions, I take it for granted that they are based upon facts. If I had a son, and he were to die on the scaffold, I would not use the slightest falsehood to save him."*

He had, meanwhile, drawn the report from his coat pocket, and now placed it on the table with these words,—*"I shall call for it again to-morrow morning. In the mean time, you can think it over. I should like, however, to point out to you the main point, the culminating point, if I may say so."*

The doctor spoke with much hesitation, and looked fixedly at Denise, as if to make her understand that he would like her to leave the room. Seeing that she did not take the hint, he added,—*"A medical and legal discussion would hardly interest the young lady."*

"Why, sir, why, should I not be deeply, passionately interested in anything that regards the man who is to be my husband?"

"Because ladies are generally very sensitive," said the doctor uncivilly.

"Don't think so, doctor. For Jacques's sake, I promise you I will show quite masculine energy."

The doctor knew Denise well enough to see she did not mean to go; accordingly he growled,—“As you will.”

Then, turning again to M. Folgat, he said,—“You know there were two shots fired at the Count de Claudieuse. One, which hit him in the side, nearly missed him; the other, which struck his shoulder and his neck, was well aimed.”

“I know it,” said the advocate.

“The difference in the effect shows that the two shots were fired from different distances, the second much nearer than the first.”

“I know, I know!”

“Excuse me. If I refer to these details, it is because they are important. When I was sent for in the middle of the night to come and see the Count de Claudieuse, I at once set to work extracting the particles of lead that had lodged in the flesh. While I was thus engaged, M. Galpin-Daveline arrived. I expected he would ask me to show him the shot: but no, he did not think of it; he was too full of his own ideas. He thought only of the culprit—of *his* culprit. I did not recall to him the A B C of his profession; that was none of my business. The physician has to obey the directions of justice, but not to anticipate them.”

“Well, then?”

“Then M. Galpin went off to Boiscoran, and I completed my work. I extracted fifty-seven shot from the count’s wound in the side, and a hundred and nine from the wound on the shoulder and the neck; and, when I had done that, do you know what I found out?”

He paused, waiting to see the effect of his words; and everybody’s attention seeming fully roused, he added,—“I found out that the shot in the two wounds was not alike.”

M. de Chandore and M. Folgat gave vent simultaneously to exclamations of surprise.

“The shot that was first fired,” resumed Dr. Seignebos, “and which has touched the side, is the very smallest-sized ‘dust.’ That in the shoulder, on the other hand, is quite large-sized; such as I think is used in shooting hares. However, I have some samples.”

And with these words he opened a piece of white paper, in which were ten or twelve pieces of lead, stained with

coagulated blood, and showing at once a considerable difference in size. M. Folgat looked puzzled. "Could there have been two murderers?" he asked half aloud.

"I rather think," said M. de Chandore, "that the murderer had, like many sportsmen, one barrel ready for birds, and another for hares or rabbits."

"At all events, this fact puts all premeditation out of question. A man does not load his gun with small-shot in order to commit murder."

Dr. Seignebos thought he had said enough, and rose to take his leave.

"Well?" asked Denise and M. de Chandore, as soon as they had heard the street-door close behind him.

"Before giving an opinion," replied M. Folgat cautiously, "I must study this estimable doctor's report."

Unfortunately, the report contained nothing that the doctor had not mentioned. In vain did the young advocate try all the afternoon to find something in it that might be useful for the defence. There were arguments in it, to be sure, which might be very valuable when the trial came on, but nothing that could be used to induce the prosecution to give up the case. The whole household, therefore, were cruelly disappointed and dejected, when, about five o'clock, old Anthony arrived from Boiscoran, looking very sad.

"I have been relieved of my duties," he said. "At two o'clock, M. Galpin-Daveline came to take off the seals. He was accompanied by his clerk, Mechinot, and brought M. Jacques with him, and guarded by two gendarmes in civilian's clothes. When the room was opened, that unlucky man Galpin asked M. Jacques if those were the clothes which he wore the night of the fire, his boots, his gun, and the water in which he had washed his hands. When he had acknowledged everything, the water was carefully poured into a bottle, which they sealed, and handed to one of the gendarmes. Then they put master's clothes in a large trunk, together with his gun, several parcels of cartridges and some other articles, which the magistrate said were needed for the trial. The trunk was sealed like the bottle, and put on to the box of the carriage; and then Galpin went off, and told me I was free."

"And Jacques," asked Denise eagerly—"how did he look?"

"Master, madame, laughed contemptuously."

"Did you speak to him?" asked M. Folgat.

"Oh, no, sir! M. Galpin would not allow me."

"And did you have time to look at the gun?"

"I could but just glance at the cock."

"And what did you see?"

The brow of the old servant grew still darker, as he replied sadly,—*"I saw that I had done well to keep silent. The lock is black. Master must have used his gun since I cleaned it."*

Grandpapa Chandore and M. Folgat exchanged looks of distress. One more hope was lost.

"Now," said the young lawyer, "tell me how M. de Boiscoran usually charged his gun."

"He used cartridges, sir, of course. They sent him, I think, two thousand with the gun,—some ball cartridges, some charged with large shot, and others with shot of every size. At this season, when shooting is prohibited, master could shoot nothing but rabbits, or birds of passage in the marshes; so he always loaded one barrel with tolerably large shot, and the other with small-shot."

At this point Anthony stopped suddenly short, shocked at the impression which his statement seemed to produce.

"That is terrible!" cried Denise, "everything is against us!"

M. Folgat did not give her time to say anything more. "My dear Anthony," he asked, "did M. Galpin take all your master's cartridges away with him?"

"Oh, no, certainly not."

"Well, you must instantly go back to Boiscoran, and bring me three or four cartridges of each number."

"All right," said the old man. "I'll be back in a short time." He started immediately; and such was his diligence that he reappeared at seven o'clock, just as the family was finishing dinner.

M. de Chandore and M. Folgat had soon opened several of the cartridges contained in a large package which had been placed on the table; and, after a few failures, they found two numbers of shot which corresponded exactly with the samples left by the doctor.

"There is an incomprehensible fatality in all this," said the old gentleman in an undertone.

The young lawyer, also, looked discouraged. "It is madness," he said, "to try and establish M. de Boiscoran's innocence without having first communicated with him."

"And if you could do so to-morrow?" asked Denise.

"Then, mademoiselle, he might give us the key to this mystery which we are in vain trying to solve; or, at least, he might tell us the way to find it all out. But that is not to be thought of. M. de Boiscoran is kept in solitary confinement; and you may rest assured M. Galpin will prevent all communication with his prisoner."

"Who knows?" said the young girl. And immediately drawing M. de Chandore aside into one of the little card-rooms adjoining the salon, she asked him,—*"Grandpapa, am I rich?"*

Never in her life before had such a question entered her head, and she was to a certain extent utterly ignorant of the value of money.

"Yes, you are rich, my child," replied the old gentleman.

"How much have I?"

"You have in your own right, coming to you from your father and mother, twenty-six thousand francs a year, or a capital of about eight hundred thousand francs."

"And is that a good deal?"

"It is so much, that you are one of the richest heiresses of the district; but you have, besides, considerable expectations."

Denise was so preoccupied, that she did not appear to notice. She went on asking,—*"What do they mean here, when they speak of being well off?"*

"That depends, my child. If you will tell me—"

She interrupted him, stamping her foot impatiently: *"Nothing. Please answer me!"*

"Well, in our little town, an income of from four to eight thousand francs makes anybody very well off."

"Let us say six thousand."

"Well, six thousand would make a man very comfortable."

"And what capital would produce such an income?"

"At five per cent, it would take a hundred and twenty thousand francs."

"That is to say, rather more than one-eighth of my fortune."

"Exactly."

"Never mind. I presume it is a large sum, and it would be rather difficult for you, grandpa, to get it together by to-morrow morning?"

"Naturally it would, still I have by me as much as this in railway bonds, which are just as good as current money."

"Ah, do you mean to say, that, if I gave anybody a hundred and twenty thousand francs in those bonds it would be just the same to him as if I gave him that sum in bank notes?"

"Just so."

Denise smiled. She thought she saw light. "If that is so," she continued. "I must ask you, grandpa, to give me a hundred and twenty thousand francs in railway bonds."

The old gentleman started. "You are joking," he said. "What do you want with so much money? You are surely joking."

"Not at all. I was never more serious in my life," replied Denise in a tone of voice which could not be mistaken. "I beseech you, grandpa, if you love me, give me these hundred and twenty thousand francs this evening. You hesitate? O my God! You may kill me if you refuse."

M. de Chandore hesitated no longer. "Since you so anxiously desire it," he said, "I am going up stairs to fetch them."

Denise clapped her hands with joy. "That's right," cried she. "Make haste and dress; for I have to go out, and you must go with me. Then returning to her aunts and the marchioness, she said, "I hope you will excuse me, if I leave you; but I must go out."

"At this hour?" cried Aunt Elizabeth. "Where are you going?"

"To my dressmakers, the Demoiselles Mechinnet. I want a dress."

"Good heavens!" cried Aunt Adelaide, "the child is losing her mind!"

"I assure you I am not, aunt."

"Then let me go with you."

"Thank you, no. I shall go alone; that is to say, merely with dear grandpapa."

At that moment M. de Chandore returned, his pockets

full of bonds, his hat on his head, and his cane in his hand. Denise instantly carried him off, exclaiming,—“Come quick, dear grandpapa, we must make haste.”

VII.

ALTHOUGH M. de Chandore literally worshipped his grandchild on bended knees, although he had transferred to her,—the sole survivor of his once large family,—all his hopes, all his affections, still it was not without some scruples that he had gone upstairs to take so large an amount of securities from his strong box. Accordingly, as soon as they were outside the house, he exclaimed,—“Now we are alone, my dear child, will you tell me what you mean to do with all this money?”

“That is my secret,” replied Denise.

“And you have not confidence enough in your old grandfather to tell him what it is, darling?”

He stopped a moment; but she urged him onward, saying,—“You shall know everything, and in less than an hour. But, oh! you mustn’t be angry, grandpa. I have a plan, is no doubt very foolish. If I told you, I am afraid you would stop me; and if you succeeded, and then something happened to Jacques, I should not survive the misery. And consider what you yourself would feel, if you were to think afterwards, ‘If I had only let her have her way!’”

“Denise, you are cruel!”

“On the other hand, if you didn’t induce me to abandon my project, you would certainly take away all my courage; and I need it all, I tell you, grandpa, for what I am going to risk.”

“You see, my dear child, and you must pardon me for repeating it once more, a hundred and twenty thousand francs is a large sum of money; and there are many excellent and clever people who work hard, and deny themselves everything a whole life long, without putting by as much.”

“Ah, so much the better!” cried Denise. “So much the better. I do hope there will be enough, so as to meet with no refusal!”

Grandpapa Chandore began to comprehend. “After

all," he said, "you have not told me where we are going."

"To my dressmakers."

"To the Demoiselles Mechinet?"

"Yes."

M. de Chandore was sure now. "We shall not find them at home," he said. "To-day is Sunday, and they are no doubt at church."

"We shall find them, grandpa; for they always take tea at half-past seven with their brother, the examining magistrate's clerk. But we must make haste."

The old gentleman did make haste, but it is a long way from the Rue de la Rampe to the Place du Marche Neuf, where the sisters Mechinet lived, in a house of their own if you please,—a house which was intended to be the delight of their days, but which had become the terror of their nights. They had bought this house the year before the Franco-German war, acting upon their brother's advice, and going halves with him in the purchase, which represented a sum of forty-seven thousand francs. It seemed such a capital bargain, the basement and first floor being rented at a high figure by the leading grocer of the town, that the sisters did not hesitate about paying the sum of ten thousand francs in hard cash, and binding themselves to pay the remainder in three annual instalments. Everything went well enough during the first year, but then came the war and its disastrous consequences. Both the brother's and the sisters' income was much reduced, and it was only by dint of excessive economy and with the assistance of a timely loan that they managed to pay the second instalment. However, peace had now returned, and as the brother was one of the hardest working men in the town, and as his sisters were patronised by all the aristocracy of the district, it seemed probable that, after a little delay, they would manage to get over their difficulties.

"Grandpapa, they are at home," said Denise, as she and M. de Chandore reached the Place du Marche Neuf.

"Do you think so?"

"I am sure, for I see lights in their windows."

M. de Chandore stopped. "What am I to do next?" he asked.

"You must give me the bonds, grandpa, and wait for

me here, walking up and down, whilst I go up to the Demoiselles Mechinet. I would ask you to come up too, but they would be frightened at seeing you. Moreover, if my enterprise does not succeed, coming merely from a girl it could not have any after consequences."

The old gentleman's last doubts had now vanished. "You won't succeed, my poor child," he said.

"Good heavens!" she replied, checking her tears with difficulty, "why do you discourage me?"

M. de Chandore made no rejoinder. Suppressing a sigh, he pulled the papers out of his pockets, and helped Denise to cram them, as well as she could, into a little bag she carried in her hand. As soon as this was over, she bid her grandfather good-bye, adding that she should soon have done; and then with a lightsome step she crossed the street, and entered the abode of the Demoiselles Mechinet. The old ladies and their brother were just finishing their supper, consisting of a small piece of pork and a light salad, with an abundance of vinegar. At the unexpected entrance of Mademoiselle de Chandore, with a smile on her lips, they all started up.

"You, mademoiselle," cried the elder of the two,—
"you!"

Denise understood perfectly well the meaning of that simple "you." Combined with the tone of voice in which it was uttered, it plainly signified, "What? your betrothed is charged with an abominable crime; there is overwhelming evidence against him; he is in jail, in close confinement; everybody says he will be tried at the assizes, and he will be condemned—and you are here?"

Still Denise did not cease smiling. "Yes," she replied, "it is I. I must have two dresses for next week; and I came to ask you to show me some patterns."

The Demoiselles Mechinet, always acting upon their brother's advice, had made an arrangement with a large house at Bordeaux, to receive samples of goods, being allowed a discount on whatever they sold.

"I will do so with pleasure," said the elder sister. "Just allow me to light a lamp. It is almost dark." While she was wiping the glass, and trimming the wick, she asked her brother,—
"Are you not going to the Orpheon meeting?"

"Not to-night," he replied.

"Are you not expected there?"

"No: I sent word I could not come. I have two plates to lithograph for the printer, and some urgent copying to do for the court."

While speaking, Mechinet had folded up his napkin, and lighted a candle. "Good night!" he said to his sisters. "I shan't see you again this evening," and then bowing deeply to Mademoiselle de Chandore, he left the room, candle in hand.

"Where is your brother going?" asked Denise eagerly.

"To his room, mademoiselle, just opposite, on the other side of the stair-case."

Denis coloured as red as fire. Was she to let her opportunity slip,—an opportunity such as she had never dared to hope for? Summoning up all her courage, she exclaimed:—"But, now, I think of it, I want to say a few words to your brother, my dear demoiselles. Wait for me a moment, I shall be back very soon. So saying, Denise rushed from the room, leaving the stupefied dressmakers gazing after her with open mouths, and asking themselves if Mademoiselle de Chandore was not bereft of her reason.

The clerk was still on the landing, fumbling in his pocket for the key of his room. "I want to speak to you instantly," said Denise to him.

Mechinet was so utterly amazed, that he could not utter a word. He made a movement as if desirous of returning to his sisters, but Denise stopped him, saying, "No, in your room. We must not be overheard. Open the door, sir, please. Open, somebody might come."

The fact was, he was so completely upset that it took him half a minute to insert the key in the keyhole: At last, when the door was opened, he moved aside to let Denise pass first, but she declined to do so, exclaiming:—"No, go in."

He obeyed. She followed him, and, as soon as she was in the room, she shut the door again, even fastening a little bolt, which she had noticed. Mechinet, the clerk, was famous in Sauveterre for his coolness. Denise, on the other hand, was timidity personified, and blushed for the smallest trifle. At this moment, however, it was certainly

not she who was embarrassed. "Sit down, M. Mechainet," she said, "and listen to me."

He put his candlestick on the table, and sat down.

"You know me, don't you?" asked Denise.

"Certainly I do, mademoiselle."

"You have surely heard that I am to be married to M. de Boiscoran?"

The clerk started up as if he had been moved by a spring, pressed his hand to his forehead, and cried:—"Ah, what a fool I was! Now I see!"

"Yes, you are right," replied the girl. "I come to talk to you about M. de Boiscoran, my betrothed, my husband."

She paused; and for minute Mechainet and Denise remained there face to face silent and motionless, looking at each other, he asking himself what she could want of him, and she trying to guess how far she might venture.

"You can no doubt imagine, M. Mechainet, what I have suffered, since M. de Boiscoran has been sent to prison charged with the worst of crimes!"

"Oh, surely I do!" replied Mechainet. And carried away by his emotion, he added, "But I can assure you, mademoiselle, that I, who have been present at all the examinations, and who have no small experience in criminal matters,—that I believe M. de Boiscoran innocent. I know M. Galpin-Daveline does not think so, nor M. Daubigeon, nor any of the gentlemen of the bar, or the town; but, nevertheless, that is my conviction. You see, I was there when they fell upon M. de Boiscoran, asleep in his bed. Well, the very tone of his voice, as he cried out, 'Oh, my dear Galpin!' told me the man was not guilty."

"Oh, sir," stammered Denise, "thanks, thanks!"

"There is nothing to thank me for, mademoiselle; for time has only confirmed my conviction. As if a guilty man ever bore himself as M. de Boiscoran does! You ought to have seen him just now, when we went to remove the seals, calm, dignified, answering coldly all the questions that were asked. I could not help telling M. Galpin-Daveline what I thought. He said I was a fool. Well, I maintain the contrary. The more I see of M. de Boiscoran, the more he gives me the impression that he has only a word to say to clear up the whole matter."

Denise listened with such absorbing interest, that she

well-nigh forgot the object of her visit. "Then M. de Boiscoran is not much overcome?" she eventually asked.

"I should lie if I said he did not look sad, mademoiselle," was the reply. "But he is not overcome. After the first astonishment, his presence of mind returned; and since then M. Galpin has vainly tried all his ingenuity and cleverness—"

Here Mechinet suddenly paused, as a drunken man recovering his consciousness for a moment on becoming aware that he had said too much in his cups might have done. "Great God!" he exclaimed, "what am I talking about? For heaven's sake, madame, do not let anybody know what my respectful sympathy led me to tell you just now."

Denise felt that the decisive moment had now arrived. "If you knew me better, sir," said she, "you would know that you can rely upon my discretion. You need not regret having given me some little comfort in my great sorrow. You need not; for—" Her voice nearly failed her, and it was only with a great effort she could add,—"For I come to ask you to do even more than that for me, oh, yes, much more."

Mechinet had turned painfully pale. "Not another word, mademoiselle," he exclaimed vehemently, "your hope is in itself an insult. You ought surely to know that by my profession, as well as by my oath, I am bound to be as silent as the very cells in which the prisoners are confined. If I, the clerk, were to betray the secret of a criminal prosecution—"

Denise trembled like an aspen-leaf; but her mind remained clear and decided. "You would rather let an innocent man perish," she said.

"Mademoiselle!"

"You would let an innocent man be condemned although you might know he was the victim of a mistake? You would say to yourself, 'It is unlucky; but I have sworn not to speak'? And with a quiet conscience you would see him mount the scaffold? No, I cannot believe it! No, that cannot be true!"

"I told you, mademoiselle, I do not believe M. de Boiscoran to be guilty."

"And you refuse to assist me in establishing his innocence? O God! what ideas men form of their duty! How can I move you? how can I convince you? Must I

remind you of the torture endured by this man whom they charge with being an assassin? Must I tell you what horrible anguish we suffer, we, his friends, his relatives,—how his mother weeps, how I weep, I, his promised wife! We know he is innocent: and yet we cannot establish his innocence for want of a friend!”

The clerk had never heard such burning words in all his life. He was moved to the bottom of his heart. At last in trembling tones he asked Denise what she wanted him to do.

“Oh! very little, sir, very little,—just to send M. de Boiscoran ten lines, and to bring us his reply.”

The boldness of the request seemed to stun the clerk. “Never!” he replied.

“You will not have pity?”

“I should forfeit my honour.”

“And, if you let an innocent man be condemned, what would that be?”

Mechinet’s anguish of mind was evident. Amazed, overcome, he did not know what to say, what to do. At last, however, he thought of a reason for refusing: “And if I were found out?” he stammered. “I should lose my place, ruin my sisters, destroy my career for life.”

With trembling hands, Denise drew from her pocket the bonds her grandfather had given her, and threw them in a heap on the table. “There are a hundred and twenty thousand francs,” she began.

The clerk drew back frightened. “Money!” he cried. “You offer me money!”

“Oh don’t be offended!” began the girl again, in a voice that would have moved a stone. “How could I want to offend you, when I ask of you more than my life? There are services which can never be paid. But, if the enemies of M. de Boiscoran should find out that you have aided us, their rage might turn against you.”

Instinctively the clerk unloosened his cravat. The struggle going on within him was, no doubt, terrible. “A hundred and twenty thousand francs!” he said in a low voice.

Is it not enough?” asked the young girl. “Yes, you are right: it is very little. But I have as much again for you, twice as much!”

With troubled eyes, Mechinnet approached the table.

and convulsively handling the pile of papers, he repeated, "A hundred and twenty thousand francs! six thousand francs a year!"

"No, double that amount!" answered Denise, "and, moreover, our gratitude, our devoted friendship, all the influence of the two families of Boiscoran and Chandore; in a word, fortune, position, respect."

But by this time, thanks to a supreme effort of will, the clerk had recovered his self-control. "No more, mademoiselle, say no more!" he exclaimed. And with a determined, though still trembling voice, he continued, "Take your money back again, mademoiselle. If I were to do what you want me to do, if I were to betray my duty for money, I should be the basest of men. If, on the other hand, I am actuated only by a sincere conviction and an interest in the truth, I may be looked upon as a fool; but I shall always be worthy of honest men's esteem. Take back that fortune which has made my conscience waver for a moment. I will do what you ask, but for nothing."

If Grandpapa Chandore was getting tired of walking up and down the Place du Marche Neuf, Mechinet's sisters found time pass still more slowly in their work-room. Denise's visit and her mysterious manner had aroused all their feminine curiosity, and at length, unable to wait any longer, they ventured out on to the landing and knocked at the clerk's door.

"Ah, leave me alone!" cried Mechinet, angry at being thus interrupted. But after a moment's reflection he partially opened the door, and added in a gentle tone: "Go back to your room, my dear sisters, and, if you wish to spare me a very serious embarrassment, never tell anybody that Mademoiselle de Chandore has been here talking with me."

Trained to obey, the two sisters quickly retreated, not, however, without casting an astonished look at the pile of bonds which Denise had thrown upon the table. Mademoiselle de Chandore had meanwhile sunk on to a chair, and was crying bitterly. The clerk shut the door again and looked at her for a moment, then, having overcome his own emotion, he proceeded to discuss Denise's application with relative calm. He expatiated on the precautions which M. Galpin-Daveline had taken with the view of preventing any communication with his prisoner; and

despite Mademoiselle de Chandore's renewed appeals it was evident that Mechinet was in great perplexity.

"I really don't see," he said, "how I am to let M. de Boiscoran have your note? If he knew of its coming beforehand, the matter would be tolerably easy. But he is unprepared. And then he is just as suspicious as M. Galpin. He is always afraid lest a trap is being prepared for him. If I make him a sign, I fear he will not understand me; and, if I make him a sign, may not M. Galpin see it? That man is lynx-eyed."

"Are you never alone with M. de Boiscoran?" asked Denise.

"Never for an instant, mademoiselle. I only go in and come out with the magistrate. You will say, perhaps, that in leaving, as I am behind, I might cleverly drop the note. But, when we leave, the jailer is there, and he has good eyes. Besides, I should have to fear M. de Boiscoran's own suspicions. If he saw a letter coming to him in that way, from me, he is quite capable of handing it at once to M. Galpin."

After a moment's meditation, Mechinet continued,—
"The safest way would probably be to win the confidence of M. Blangin, the jail-keeper, or that of the prisoner who waits on M. de Boiscoran, and watches him."

"Frumence!" exclaimed Denise.

"What!" asked the clerk with evident surprise. "You know his name?"

"Yes, for Blangin mentioned him to me the day when I went with M. de Boiscoran's mother to the jail, not knowing what was meant by 'solitary confinement.'"

"That step was a great mistake," said Mechinet. "I now understand a great deal of M. Galpin-Daveline's anxiety; he fancies you want to rob him of his prisoner. Still never mind! I'll see what can be done. Write your letter, mademoiselle, here are *petits* and ink."

Without a word, Denise sat down at Mechinet's table; but at the moment she was putting her pen to paper, she asked,—
"Has M. de Boiscoran any books in his prison?"

"Yes, mademoiselle. At his request M. Galpin-Daveline obtained for him some books of travels, together with some of Cooper's novels."

Denise uttered a cry of delight. "O Jacques!" she said, "how glad am you counted upon me!" and, with

out noticing Mechinet's intense surprise at this remark, she instantly wrote as follows :—

"We are sure of your innocence, Jacques, and yet we are in despair. Your mother is here, a Paris lawyer, M. Folgat, who is devoted to your interests. What must we do? Give us your instructions. You can reply without fear, as you have *our* book. DENISE."

"Read this," she said to the clerk, when she had finished. But he did not avail himself of the permission. He folded the paper, and slipped it into an envelope, which he sealed.

"Oh, you are very kind!" said the girl, touched by his delicacy.

"Not at all, mademoiselle. I only try to do a dishonest thing in the most honest way possible. To-morrow, mademoiselle, you shall have your answer."

"I will call for it."

Mechinet trembled. "Do not think of doing so," he said. "The good people of Sauveterre are too cunning not to know that just now you have something more important than dress to occupy your mind. Your visits here would look suspicious. Leave me to forward you M. de Boiscoran's answer."

While Denise was writing, the clerk had made a parcel of the bonds. "Take them back, mademoiselle," he said. "If I want money for Blangin, or Frumence, I will ask you for it. And now you must go: you need not see my sisters. I will explain your visit to them."

VIII.

"WHAT can have happened to Denise, that she does not come back?" murmured Grandpapa Chandore, as he walked up and down the Place, and looked for the twentieth time at his watch. For some time the fear of displeasing his grandchild, kept him where she had told him to wait for her; but at last, her delay proved too much for him, and, crossing the road, he entered Mechinet's house. He was just putting his foot on the first step of the stairs, when he saw a light above. At the same moment he dis-

tinguished his granddaughter's voice, and then her light step.

"At last!" he thought. And swiftly, like a schoolboy who hears his teacher coming, and fears to be caught in some act of disobedience, he slipped back into the Place. Denise was there almost at the same moment, and as she rained a shower of kisses upon the old gentleman's furrowed cheek, exclaimed, "Dear Grandpapa, I bring you back your bonds!"

M. de Chandore, although amazed at any one having the audacity to resist his grandchild's entreaties, at once jumped to the conclusion that she had failed in her attempt. However, he was speedily undeceived, and as they walked swiftly home, Denise gave him all the details of the interview. "That clerk is a good man," he said, "he has won our eternal gratitude." Then, after a pause, he declared, in all earnest, that he did not know which to admire most,—Denise's presence of mind, or Mechinot's disinterestedness.

"All the more reason," said Denise, "why we should not add to the danger in which he will find himself placed. I promised him to tell nobody, and I mean to keep my promise. If you believe me, dear grandpa, we had better not speak of it to anybody, not even to my aunts."

"You might just as well declare at once, little scamp, that you want to save Jacques quite alone, without anybody's help."

"Ah, if I could but do that! Unfortunately, we must take M. Folgat into our confidence; for we cannot do without his advice."

And so it was arranged. The poor aunts, and even the marchioness, had to remain content with Denise's not very plausible explanation of her visit. A few hours afterwards, M. de Chandore, his granddaughter, and M. Folgat held a private council in the baron's study. The young lawyer was even more surprised at Denise's idea, and her bold proceedings, than her grandfather had been. He would never have imagined that she was capable of such a step, she looked so timid and so innocent, and was seemingly a mere child. He was about to compliment her when she interrupted him eagerly, saying,—“There is nothing to boast of. I ran no risk.”

“A very substantial risk, mademoiselle, I assure you.”

"Pshaw!" exclaimed M. de Chandore.

"To bribe an official," continued M. Folgat, "is a very grave offence. The Criminal Code has a certain paragraph No. 179, which punishes the person who bribes, as well as the person who is bribed."

"Well, so much the better!" cried Denise. "If poor M. Méchinét has to go to prison, I'll go with him!" And, without noticing her grandfather's dissatisfied expression, she added, turning to M. Folgat,—"After all, sir, you see your wishes have been fulfilled. We shall be able to communicate with M. de Boiscorán: he will give us his instructions."

"Perhaps so, mademoiselle."

"How? Perhaps? You said yourself—"

"I told you, mademoiselle, it would be useless, perhaps even imprudent, to take any steps before we knew the truth. But shall we know it? Do you think that M. de Boiscorán, who has good reasons for being suspicious of everything, will at once tell us everything in a letter which must needs pass through several hands before it can reach us?"

"He will tell us all, sir, without reserve, without fear, and without danger."

"Oh!"

"I have taken my precautions. You will see."

"Then we have only to wait."

Alas, yes! They had to wait, and that was what most distressed Denise. She hardly slept that night. The next day was one of unbroken torment. At each ring of the bell she trembled, and ran to see who was at the door. At last, towards five o'clock, nothing having come, she exclaimed, "It is not to be to-day. I pray, O God! that poor Méchinét has not been caught."

And, perhaps in order to escape for a time the anguish of her fears, she agreed to accompany Jacques's mother who had to pay some visits. Ah, if she had but known! She had not left the house ten minutes, when a street-boy arrived with a letter addressed to her. The missive was taken to M. de Chandore, who happened to be walking in the garden with M. Folgat.

"A letter for Denise!" exclaimed the old gentleman, as soon as the servant had disappeared. "Here is the answer we have been waiting for!"

He boldly tore it open. Alas! it was useless to have done so. The note within the envelope ran as follows:—

“31 : 9, 17, 19, 23, 25, 28, 32, 101, 102, 129, 137, 504,
515—37 : 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10, 11, 13, 14, 24, 27, 52, 54,
118, 119, 120, 200, 201,—41 : 7, 9, 17, 21, 22, 44, 45,
46—”

And so on, for two pages.

“Look at this, and try and make it out,” said M. de Chandore, handing the letter to M. Folgat.

The lawyer actually did try; but, after five minutes’ useless efforts, he remarked, “I understand now why Mademoiselle de Chandore promised that we should know the truth. M. de Boiscoran and she have formerly corresponded with each other in cipher.”

Grandpapa Chandore raised his hands to heaven. “Just think of these little girls!” he said. “Here we are utterly helpless without her, for she alone can translate these hieroglyphics.”

If Denise had hoped, by accompanying the marchioness on her visits, to escape from the sad presentiments that oppressed her, she was cruelly disappointed; for all the people they saw received then in the most gloomy fashion, offering to condole with them in their grief, but studiously refraining from uttering a single word of hope or encouragement. Indeed, it seemed as if they all believed Jacques to be guilty. To crown everything a boy in the street exclaimed:—“O mamma, come quick! Here are the murderer’s mother and his sweetheart!”

Thus Denise returned home more downcast than ever. But on hearing that her grandfather and the lawyer from Paris were waiting for her in the baron’s study, she hastened there without stopping to take off her bonnet; and it was with a cry of delight that she heard M. de Chandore exclaim:—“Here is your answer.”

Rapidly touching the letter with her lips, she repeated;—“Now we are safe, quite safe!”

M. de Chandore smiled at his granddaughter’s happiness. “But, Miss Hypocrite,” he said, “it seems you had great secrets to communicate to M. de Boiscoran, since you resorted to cipher, like an arch conspirator;

M. Folgat and I tried to read your answer ; but it was all Greek to us."

Now only did Denise remember M. Folgat's presence, and, blushing deeply, she said,—“Latterly Jacques and I had been discussing various methods of secret correspondence, and he taught me one of them out of fun. Two people choose any book they like, and each takes a copy of the same edition. The writer looks in his volume for the words he wants, and numbers them ; his correspondent finding them out by the aid of these numbers. Thus in Jacques's letters, the numbers followed by a colon refer to the page, and the others to the order in which the words come.”

“Ah, ah !” said Grandpapa Chandore, “I might have looked a long time.”

“It is a very simple method,” replied Denise, “very well known, and still quite safe. How could an outsider guess what book has been chosen ? Then there are other means to mislead indiscreet people. It may be agreed upon, for instance, that the numbers shall never have their apparent value, or that they shall vary according to the day of the month or the week. Thus to-day is Monday, the first day of the week. Well, I have to deduct one from each number of a page, and add one to each number of a word.”

“And you will be able to make it all out ?” asked M. de Chandore.

“Certainly, dear grandpapa. Ever since Jacques explained it to me, I have tried to learn it as a matter of course. We chose a book which I am very fond of, Cooper's ‘Spy ;’ and we amused ourselves by writing endless letters. Oh ! it is very amusing, but it takes time, because one does not always find the words that are needed, and then they have to be spelled letter by letter.”

“And has M. de Boiscoran a copy of Cooper's novel in his prison ?” asked M. Folgat.

“Yes, sir, M. Mechinet told me so. As soon as Jacques found he was to be kept in solitary confinement, he asked for some of Cooper's novels ; and M. Galpin, who is so cunning, so smart, and so suspicious, went himself and got them for him. Jacques was counting upon me.”

“Then, dear child, go and read your letter, and solve the riddle,” said M. de Chandore, who, when she had left, added to his companion,—“How she loves him ! How

she loves this man Jacques ! Sir, if anything should happen to him, she would die."

M. Folgat made no reply ; and nearly an hour passed, before Denise, shut up in her room, had succeeded in finding all the words of which Jacques's letter was composed. When she returned to her grandfather's study, her face bore an expression of most profound despair. "This is horrible," she said.

Had Jacques confessed?—That same idea at once crossed the minds of M. de Chandore and M. Folgat.

"Look, read yourself !" said Denise, handing them the translation, which ran as follows :—

"Thanks for your letter, my darling. A presentiment had warned me, and I had asked for a copy of 'The Spy.' I understand but too well how grieved you must be at seeing me kept in prison without my making an effort to establish my innocence. I kept silence, because I hoped the proof of my innocence would come from outside. I see that it would be madness to hope so any longer, and that I must speak. I shall speak. But what I have to say is so very serious, that I shall keep silent until I shall have had an opportunity of consulting with some one in whom I can feel perfect confidence. Prudence alone is not enough now ; skill also is required. Until now I felt secure, relying on my innocence. But the last examination has opened my eyes, and I now see the danger to which I am exposed.

"I shall suffer terribly until I can see a lawyer. Thank my mother for having brought one. I hope he will pardon me, if I apply first to another man. I want a man who knows our district and its customs.

"That is why I have chosen M. Magloire ; and I beg you will tell him to hold himself ready for the day when, the examination being complete, I shall be relieved from solitary confinement.

"Until then, nothing can be done, nothing unless you can get the case taken out of M. G. D.—'s hands, and given to some one else. That man acts infamously. He wants me to be guilty. He would himself commit a crime in order to fasten it on me, and there is no kind of trap he does not lay for me. I have the greatest difficulty in con-

trolling myself every time I see this man, who was my friend and is now my accuser, enter my cell.

"Ah, dear ones ! I pay a heavy price for a fault of which I have been, until now, almost unconscious.

"And you, my only friend, will you ever be able to forgive me the terrible anxiety I cause you ?

"I should like to say much more ; but the prisoner who has handed me your note says I must be quick, and it takes so much time to pick out the words ! J."

When the letter had been read, M. de Folgat and M. de Chandore sadly turned their heads aside, fearing lest Denise should read in their eyes the secret of their thoughts.

She perceived the gesture and guessed its meaning ; "You cannot doubt Jacques, grandpapa !" she cried.

"No," murmured the old gentleman feebly, "no."

"And you, M. Folgat—are you hurt by Jacques's desire to consult another lawyer ?"

"I should have been the first, mademoiselle, to advise him to consult a member of the local bar."

Denise had to summon all her energy to check her tears. "Yes," she said, "this letter is terrible ; but how can it be otherwise ? Don't you see that Jacques is in despair, that his mind wanders after all these fearful shocks ?"

Somebody knocked gently at the door. "It is I," said the marchioness.

Grandpapa Chandore, M. Folgat, and Denise looked at each other for a moment. Then the advocate suddenly said,—“The situation is too serious : we must consult the marchioness.” He rose to open the door, and Madame de Boiscoran entered the room. A servant had informed her that M. de Chandore, his granddaughter, and the lawyer were closeted together in the study, and fearing some fresh complication, she had hastened downstairs.

"I mean to know all !" she exclaimed, crossing the threshold.

Denise at once stepped forward and replied :—“Whatever you may hear, my dear mother, pray remember, that if you mention a single word to any one, you may ruin an honest man, who has put us all under obligations that can never be fully discharged. I have been fortunate enough

to establish a correspondence with Jacques. I have written to him, and I have received his answer. Here it is."

The marchioness was almost beside herself, and eagerly snatched at the letter. But, as she read it, the blood receded from her face, her eyes grew dim, her lips turned pale, and at last her breath failed to come. The letter slipped from her trembling hands; she sank into a chair, and stammered, "It is useless to struggle any longer: we are lost!"

There was something superb in Denise's gesture, and the admirable accent of her voice, as she replied:—"Why not say at once, my mother, that Jacques is an incendiary and an assassin?" Then raising her head with an air of dauntless energy, with trembling lips, and eyes full of wrath and disdain, she added,—“And do I really remain the only one to defend him,—to defend one, who, in his days of prosperity, had so many friends? Well, so be it!”

Naturally, M. Folgat had been less deeply moved than either the marchioness or M. de Chandore; hence he was also the first to recover his calmness. “We shall be two, mademoiselle, at all events,” he said; “for I should never forgive myself, if I allowed myself to be influenced by that letter. I know by experience what your heart has told you instinctively. Imprisonment may affect the strongest and firmest of minds. The days spent in prison are interminable, and the nights have nameless terrors. The innocent man in his lonely cell feels as if he were becoming guilty, just as the man of the soundest intellect would begin to doubt himself in a madhouse—”

Denise did not let him conclude. “That is exactly what I felt, sir,” she cried, “but I could not express it as clearly as you do.”

Ashamed at their lack of courage, M. de Chandore and the marchioness made an effort to recover from the doubts which, for a moment, had well-nigh overcome them. “But what is to be done?” asked the old lady.

“Your son tells us, madame, we have only to wait for the end of the preliminary examination.”

“I beg your pardon,” said M. de Chandore, “we have to try to get the case handed over to another magistrate.”

M. Folgat shook his head. “Unfortunately, that is not to be dreamt of. A magistrate acting in his official capacity cannot be rejected like a simple jurymen. Thus Article 542

of the Criminal Code says, that any demand to change an examining magistrate can only be entertained by a Court of Appeal, because the magistrate, within his legitimate sphere, is a court in himself. Besides, a demand for M. Galpin's removal would not prevent him from carrying on his proceedings? He would go on until the decision came from the Court of Appeal. He could, it is true, issue no final order; but that is the very thing M. de Boiscoran ought to desire, since such an order would put an end to his solitary confinement, and enable him to see an advocate."

"That is atrocious!" murmured M. de Chandore.

"It is atrocious, indeed; but such are the laws of France."

"I understand you perfectly now," observed Denise, "and to-morrow your objections shall be made known to M. de Boiscoran."

"Above all," said the lawyer, "explain to him clearly that any such steps as he proposes to take will turn to his disadvantage. M. Galpin-Daveline is our enemy; but we can make no specific charge against him. People would always reply, 'If M. de Boiscoran is innocent, why doesn't he speak out?'"

Grandpapa Chandore would not admit this. "Still," he said, "what if we could bring influential men to help us?"

"Can you?"

"Certainly! The marquis has old friends, who, no doubt, are still all-powerful under the present government. He was, in former years, very intimate with M. de Margeril."

M. Folgat's face brightened. "Ah," he said, "if M. de Margeril would give us a lift! But he is not easily approached."

"We might at least send the marquis to see him, since he remained in Paris for the purpose of assisting us there; now he will have his opportunity. I will write to him to-night."

At the mention of M. de Margeril, the marchioness had become, if possible, paler than ever. At the old gentleman's last words she rose, exclaiming: "Do not write: it would be useless. I do not wish it."

Her embarrassment was so evident, that the others were

quite surprised. "Have the marquis and M. de Margeril quarrelled?" asked M. de Chandore.

"Yes."

"But," cried Denise, "it is a matter of life and death for Jacques."

Alas! The poor woman could not reveal what suspicions had darkened her husband's life. "If it is absolutely necessary," she said, with a half-stifled voice, "if that is our very last hope, then I will go and see M. de Margeril myself."

M. Folgat was the only one who suspected that the marchioness might be harassed by some painful memory. He interposed, therefore, saying,—“At all events, my advice is to await the end of the preliminary investigation. I may be mistaken, however; and, before any answer is sent to M. Jacques, I desire that the advocate to whom he alludes should be consulted.”

"That is certainly the wisest plan," said M. de Chandore. And, ringing for a servant, he at once sent him to ask M. Magloire to call after dinner.

In selecting this lawyer as his counsel, Jacques de Bois-coran had acted wisely. M. Magloire was looked upon in Sauveterre as the most eloquent and most skilful advocate, not only of the district, but of the whole province of Poitou. He had, besides, the reputation of being unsurpassed in integrity and a sense of honour. It was well known that he never consented to plead a doubtful cause, unless convinced of his client's innocence, and there were stories of his having thrown clients out of the window, for coming to him, money in hand, and asking him to undertake an unclean case.

Marrying at an early age, M. Magloire had lost his wife after a few months' wedlock, and had never recovered from the loss. Regularly, on certain days, he was seen wending his way to the cemetery, to place flowers on his wife's modest grave. The folks of Sauveterre would have laughed at any one else for displaying such attachment; but with M. Magloire it was different. Young and old knew and revered the tall man with the calm, serene face, the clear, bright eyes, and eloquent lips, which, in their well-cut, delicate lines, expressed scorn, tenderness, or disdain by turns.

Like Dr. Seignebos, M. Magloire was also a Republi-

can; and, at the last elections under the Empire, the Bonapartists had had the greatest trouble to keep him out of the Chamber, despite all the government influence of which they disposed. Nor would they have been successful after all, but for the Count de Claudieuse, who prevailed upon a number of electors to abstain from voting.

This, then, was the man, who, towards nine o'clock, presented himself at M. de Chandore's house, where he was anxiously expected by all the inmates. His greeting was affectionate, but at the same time so sad, that it touched Denise's heart painfully. She thought she saw that M. Magloire was not far from believing Jacques guilty. And she was not mistaken; for M. Magloire let them see it clearly, in the most delicate manner, to be sure, but still so as to leave no doubt. He had spent the day in court, and had heard the opinions of both bench and bar, which were by no means favourable to the accused. Under such circumstances, it would have evidently been a great blunder to apply for M. Galpin's removal.

"But the investigation will last a year," cried Denise, "since M. Galpin is determined to make Jacques confess a crime which he has not committed."

M. Magloire shook his head. "I believe, on the contrary," he replied, "that the investigation will be very soon concluded."

"But if Jacques keeps silent?"

"Neither the silence of an accused, nor any other caprice or obstinacy of his, can interfere with the regular course. Called upon to produce his justification, if he refuses to do so, the law proceeds without him."

"Still, sir, if an accused person has reasons—"

"There are no reasons which can force a man to let himself be accused unjustly. But even that case has been foreseen. The accused is at liberty not to answer a question which may inculpate him. *Nemo tenetur prodere se ipsum*. But you must admit that such a refusal to answer justifies a judge in believing that the charges which the accused does not refute are true."

The distinguished lawyer's calmness terrified all his listeners, except M. Folgat. When they heard him make use of technical terms, they felt chilled through and through, like the friends of a wounded man who hear the grating of the surgeon's knife.

"My son's situation appears very serious, sir, to you?" suggested the marchioness in a feeble voice.

"I said it was dangerous, madame."

"You think, as M. Folgat does, that every day adds to the danger to which he is exposed?"

"I am but too sure of that. And if M. de Boiscoran is really innocent—"

"Ah, M. Magloire!" cried Denise, "how can you, one of Jacques's friends, speak thus?"

M. Magloire looked at Denise with an air of deep and sincere pity. "It is precisely because I am his friend," he said, "that I am bound to tell you the truth. Yes, I know and I appreciate all the noble qualities which distinguish M. de Boiscoran. I have loved him, and I love him still. But this is a matter which we have to look at with the mind, and not with the heart. Jacques is a man: and he will be judged by men. There is clear, public, and absolute evidence of his guilt on hand. What evidence has he to offer of his innocence? Moral evidence only."

"My God!" murmured Denise.

"I think, therefore, with my honourable brother"—and here M. Magloire bowed to M. Folgat. "I think, that, if M. de Boiscoran is innocent, he has adopted an unfortunate system. Ah! if luckily there should be an *alibi*, he ought to make haste to establish it. He ought not to allow matters to go on till he is sent into court. Arrived there, the accused is three-fourths condemned already."

For once it seemed as if the crimson in M. de Chandore's cheeks was growing pale. "And yet," he exclaimed, "Jacques will not change in system: any one who knows his mulish obstinacy might be quite sure of that."

"And unfortunately he has made up his mind," said Denise, "as M. Magloire, who knows him so well, will see from this letter of his."

Until now nothing had transpired to let the Sauveterre lawyer suspect that communications had been opened with the prisoner. The letter, however, having been alluded to, it became necessary to take him into confidence at first he was astonished, then he looked displeased; and, when he had been told everything, he exclaimed,—“This is a great imprudence! This is too daring!” Then looking at M. Folgat, he added,—“Our profession has certain rules

which cannot be broken without causing trouble. To bribe a clerk, to profit by his weakness and his sympathy—”

The Parisian advocate blushed imperceptibly,—“I should never have advised such imprudence,” he interposed, “but, when it was once committed, I did not feel bound to insist upon its being abandoned : and even if I should be blamed for it, or more, I mean to profit by it.”

M. Magloire made no reply ; but, after reading Jacques’s letter, he said,—“ I am at M. de Boiscoran’s disposal ; and will go to him as soon as he is no longer in solitary confinement. I think, with Mademoiselle Denise, that he will persist in saying nothing. However, as we have the means of reaching him by letter,—well, here I am myself ready to profit by the imprudence that has been committed !—beseech him, in the name of his own interest, in the name of all that is dear to him, to speak, explain, and prove his innocence.”

Thereupon M. Magloire bowed, and abruptly withdrew, leaving his audience in consternation ; for it was evident that his sudden departure was meant to conceal the painful impression which Jacques’s letter had produced upon him.

“Certainly,” said M. de Chandore, “we will write to him ; but we might just as well whistle. He will wait for the end of the investigation.”

“Who knows ?” murmured Denise, and, after a moment’s reflection, she added,—“We can try, however.” Then, without vouchsafing any further explanation, she left the room, and hastened to her own apartment, where she wrote the following letter :—

“I must speak to you. There is a little gate in our garden which opens into the Ruelle de la Charite. I will wait for you there. However late it may be when you get these lines, come !—
DENISE.”

Having put this note into an envelope, she called the old nurse who waited on her, and, with all the recommendations which prudence could suggest, instructed her to let M. Mechinet, the clerk, have it that very night without loss of time.

IX.

DURING the last twenty-four hours, Mechinet had changed so much, that his sisters recognised him no longer. Immediately after Denise's departure, they had hurried to his room, hoping to hear all about that mysterious interview; but at the first word they ventured, he cried out in a tone of voice which quite frightened them,—“That is none of your business! That is nobody's business!” Left alone, he remained quite overcome by his adventure, and pondered as to how he should make good his promise without ruining himself. It was indeed no easy matter.

When the decisive moment arrived, he discovered that he should never be able to get the note into M. de Boiscoran's hands, without being caught by the lynx-eyed M. Galpin-Daveline, and as the letter was burning in his pocket, he found himself compelled, after long hesitation, to appeal for help to the man who waited on Jacques—in a word, to Frumence Cheminot. The latter was, after all, not such a bad fellow; his only besetting sin being unconquerable laziness, and his only crime, in the eyes of the law, perpetual vagrancy. He was attached to Mechinet, who upon former occasions, when he was in jail, had given him tobacco, or a few coppers to buy a glass of wine. He made no objections, therefore, when the clerk asked him to give M. de Boiscoran a letter, and bring back an answer. He acquitted himself, moreover, faithfully and honestly of his errand. But, because everything had gone well once, it did not follow that Mechinet felt quite at peace. Besides being tormented by the thought that he had betrayed his duty, he felt wretched in being at the mercy of an accomplice. How easily might he not be betrayed! An indiscretion, a blunder, an accident, might ruin him!

He would lose his place and all his other employments, one by one. He would lose confidence and consideration. Farewell to all ambitious dreams, all hopes of wealth, all dreams of an advantageous marriage. And still, by an odd contradiction, Mechinet did not repent what he had done, and felt quite ready to do it over again. He was in this state of mind when the old nurse brought him Denise's letter.

“What again?” he exclaimed, but when he had read

the note, he replied,—“Tell your mistress I will be there!” In his heart he thought some untoward event must have happened.

The little gate was ajar, and he had only to push it back to enter M. de Chandore's garden. There was no moon; but the night was clear, and under the trees, at a short distance from him, he recognised Denise, and went towards her. “Pardon me, sir,” she at once said, “for having ventured to send for you.”

Mechinet's anxiety vanished instantly. He no longer thought of his strange position. His vanity was flattered by the confidence shown him by this young lady, whom he knew very well as the noblest, the most beautiful, and the richest heiress in the province. “You were quite right to send for me, mademoiselle,” he remarked, “if I can be of any service to you.”

In a few words, she had told him all, and then asked his advice.

“I am entirely of M. Folgat's opinion,” he replied. “I think that grief and isolation begin to have their effect upon M. de Boiscoran's mind.”

“Oh, that thought is maddening!” murmured the poor girl.

“I think, as M. Magloire does, that M. de Boiscoran, by his silence, only makes his situation worse. I have a proof of it. M. Galpin, who, at first, was all doubt and anxiety, is now quite re-assured. The attorney-general has written him a letter, in which he compliments his energy.”

“And then?”

“Then we must induce M. de Boiscoran to speak. I know very well that he is firmly resolved not to speak; but if you were to write to him, since you can write to him—”

“A letter would be useless.”

“But—”

“Useless, I tell you. But I know a means.”

“You must use it promptly, mademoiselle. Do not lose a moment. There is no time—”

The night was clear, but not clear enough for the clerk to see how very pale Denise was. “Well, then, I must see M. de Boiscoran: I must speak to him,” she said.

She expected the clerk to start, to cry out, to protest.

Far from it : he observed in the quietest tone,—“ Yes, to be sure ; but how ? ”

“ Blangin, the keeper, and his wife, retain their places only because they are dependent on them for support. Why might I not offer them, in return for an interview with M. de Boiscoran, the means to go and live in the country ? ”

“ Why not ? ” asked the clerk. And in a lower voice, replying to the voice of his conscience, he went on,—“ The jail in Sauveterre is not at all like the police-stations and prisons of larger towns. The prisoners are few in number : they are scarce guarded. When the doors are shut, Blangin is master within.”

“ I will go and see him to-morrow,” declared Denise.

Once on certain slopes, you are impelled downwards. Having yielded to Denise’s first suggestions, Mechinet had, unconsciously, bound himself to her forever. “ No, do not go there, mademoiselle,” he said. “ You could not make Blangin believe that he runs no danger : nor could you sufficiently arouse his cupidity. I will speak to him myself.”

“ Oh, sir ! ” exclaimed Denise, “ how can I ever ?—”

“ How much may I offer him ? ” asked the clerk.

“ Whatever you think proper—anything.”

“ Then, mademoiselle, I will bring you an answer to-morrow, here, and at the same hour.”

And away he went, leaving Denise so buoyed up by hope, that all the evening, and the next day, her aunts and the marchioness, not being in the secret, asked each other incessantly,—“ What can be the matter with the child ? ”

She, on her side, was thinking that, if the answer were favourable, ere twenty-four hours had gone by, she would see Jacques ; and she kept on saying to herself,—“ If only Mechinet is punctual ! ”

He was so. At ten o’clock precisely, he pushed open the little gate, just as on the night before, and hastily exclaimed,—“ It is all right ! ”

Denise was so terribly excited that she had to lean for support against a tree.

“ Blangin agrees,” the clerk went on. “ I promised him sixteen thousand francs. It is a good deal.”

“ It is very little.”

“ He insists upon having it in gold.”

"So he shall."

"Finally, he makes certain conditions with regard to the interview which will appear rather hard to you."

By this time Denise had quite recovered. "What are they?" she asked.

"Blangin has to take all possible precautions against detection, although, of course, he is quite prepared for the worst. He has arranged matters in this way: To-morrow evening at six o'clock you will pass by the jail. The door will be open, and Blangin's wife, whom you know very well, as she was formerly in your service, will be standing on the threshold. If she does not speak to you, keep on your way, something will have happened. If she does speak to you, go in with her, quite alone, and she will show you into a small room adjoining her own. There you will stay, till Blangin, perhaps at a late hour, thinks he can safely take you to M. de Boiscoran's cell. When the interview is over, you must come back into the little room, where a bed will be ready for you, and you must spend the night there; this is the hardest part of it; you cannot leave the prison till the next day."

This was certainly terrible; still, after a moment's reflection, Denise replied,—“Never mind! I accept. Tell Blangin that it is all right.”

That Denise should accept all Blangin's conditions was perfectly natural; but to obtain M. de Chandore's consent was a far more difficult task. Denise understood this so well, that, for the first time in her life, she felt embarrassed in her grandfather's presence. She hesitated, she prepared her little speech, and she selected her words carefully. But in spite of all her skill, in spite of the art with which she managed to present her strange request, M. de Chandore had no sooner understood her project than he exclaimed,—“Never, never, never!”

Perhaps in his whole life the old gentleman had never expressed himself in so positive a manner. His brow had never looked so dark. Usually, when his granddaughter had a petition to present, his lips might say “No;” but his eyes always said “Yes.”

“Impossible!” he repeated, and in a tone of voice which seemed to admit of no reply.

Surely, in all these painful events he had not spared himself, and he had done for Denise all that she could possibly

expect of him. Her will had been his will. As she had prompted, he had said "Yes," or "No." What more could he have said or done?

Without telling him what they were wanted for, Denise had asked him to give her a hundred and twenty thousand francs, and he had given them to her—large as the sum would have been anywhere, immense as it surely was in a little town like Sauveterre. And he was quite ready to give her as much again, or twice as much, without asking any more questions. But for Denise to leave her home one evening at six o'clock, and not return till the next morning—"That I cannot permit," he repeated.

For Denise to spend a night in the Sauveterre jail, in order to have an interview with her betrothed, who was accused of incendiarism and murder; to remain there all night, alone, absolutely at the mercy of the keeper, a hard, coarse, covetous man—"That I will never permit," exclaimed the old gentleman once more.

Denise remained calm, and let the storm pass by. When her grandfather became silent, she said, "But if I must?"

M. de Chandore shrugged his shoulders, whereupon she repeated in a louder tone,—“If I must, in order to decide Jacques to abandon this system that will ruin him, to induce him to speak before the investigation is completed?”

"That is not your business, my child," said the old gentleman.

"Oh!"

"That is the business of his mother, the Marchioness de Boiscoran. Whatever Blangin agrees to venture for your sake, he will do for hers. Let the marchioness go and spend the night at the jail. I agree to that. Let her see her son. That is her duty."

"But surely she will never shake Jacques's resolution?"

"And you think you have more influence over him than his mother?"

"It is not the same thing, dear grandpapa."

"Never mind!"

This "never mind" of Grandpapa Chandore's was as positive as his "impossible;" but he had begun to discuss the question, and to discuss means to listen to arguments on the other side. "Do not insist, my dear child," he said again. "My mind is made up; and I assure you—"

"Don't say so, grandpapa," said the young girl. And her attitude was so determined, and her voice so firm, that the old gentleman was quite overwhelmed for a moment.

"But, if I am not willing," he said.

"You will consent, dear grandpapa, you will certainly not force your little granddaughter, who loves you so dearly, to the painful necessity of disobeying you for the first time in her life."

"Because, for the first time in her life, I am not doing what my granddaughter wants me to do?"

"Dear grandpa, let me tell you—"

"Rather listen to me, poor dear child, and let me show you to what dangers, to what misfortunes, you expose yourself. To go and spend a night at that prison would be risking (understand me well) your honour,—that tender delicate honour, which is tarnished by a breath, which involves the happiness and peace of your whole life."

"But Jacques's honour and life are at stake."

"Poor imprudent girl! How do you know but that he would be the very first to blame you cruelly for such a step?"

"He?"

"Men are so made: the most perfect devotion irritates them at times."

"Be it so. I would rather endure Jacques's unjust reproaches than the idea of not having done my duty."

M. de Chandore began to despair. "And if instead of commanding I were to beg of you, Denise? If your old grandfather were to beseech you on his knees to abandon your fatal project?"

"You would cause me much anguish, grandpapa: but it would be all in vain; for I must resist your prayers, as I must resist your orders."

"Inexorable!" murmured the old gentleman. "She is immovable!" Then suddenly changing his tone, he cried,—
—"But, after all, I am master here."

"Grandpapa, pray!"

"And since nothing can move you, I will speak to Mechainet, I will let Blangin know my will."

Denise, turning as pale as death, but with burning eyes, drew back a step, and said,—
—"If you do that, grandpapa, if you destroy my last hope—"

"Well?"

"I swear to you by the sacred memory of my mother, that I will be in a convent to-morrow, where you would never see me again in your life, not even if I should die, which would certainly soon happen—"

M. de Chandore, raising his hands to heaven, and with an accent of genuine despair, exclaimed,—*"Ah, my God ! Are these our children ? And is this what is in store for us old people ? We have spent a lifetime in watching over them : we have submissively gratified all their fancies ; they have been our greatest anxiety, and our sweetest hope ; we have given them our life day by day, and we should not hesitate to give them our life's blood drop by drop ; they are everything to us, and we imagine they love us—poor fools that we are ! One fine day, a man goes by, a careless thoughtless man, with a bright eye and a ready tongue, and it is all over. Our child is no longer our own ; our child no longer knows us. Go, old man, and die in your corner."*

Overwhelmed by his grief, the old man staggered, and sank into a chair, as an old oak, cut by the woodman's axe, might tremble and fall.

"Ah, this is fearful !" murmured Denise. "What you say, grandpapa, is too fearful. How can you doubt me ?"

She had knelt down. She was weeping ; and her hot tears fell upon the old gentleman's hands. He started up as he felt them ; and making one more effort, he said,—*"Poor, poor child ! And suppose Jacques is guilty, and when he sees you, confesses his crime, what then ?"*

Denise shook her head. "That is impossible," she said ; "and still, even if it were so, I ought to be punished as much as he is ; for I know, if he had asked me, I should have acted in concert with him."

"She is mad !" exclaimed M. de Chandore, falling back into his chair. "She is mad ?"

But he was overcome ; and the next day, at five in the afternoon, his heart torn by unspeakable grief, he went down the steep street with his daughter on his arm. Denise had chosen her simplest and plainest dress ; and the little bag she carried on her arm contained not sixteen but twenty thousand francs. As a matter of course, it had been necessary to take the marchioness into their confidence : but neither she nor the Demoiselles de Lavarande, nor M. Folgat, had raised an objection. Grandfather and

grandchild walked down to the prison without exchanging a word : but as they approached their destination Denise exclaimed :—"I see Madame Blangin at the door : let us be careful."

They came nearer, Madame Blangin saluted them.

"Come, it is time," said Denise. "Till to-morrow, dear grandpapa ! Go home quickly, and don't be anxious about me."

Then joining the keeper's wife, she disappeared inside the prison.

X

THE prison of Sauveterre forms part of the castle at the upper end of the town, in a poor and almost deserted quarter. This castle, once of great importance, was dismantled at the time of the siege of La Rochelle ; and all that now remains of it are the ruined ramparts with their filled-up moats, an old gate surmounted by a small belfry, a chapel converted into a magazine, and finally two huge towers connected by a large building, the lower rooms of which are vaulted. Nothing can be more mournful than these ruins, enclosed with an ivy-covered wall ; and nothing would indicate the use that is made of them, were it not for the sentinel standing day and night at the gate. Ancient elm-trees overshadow the vast courts ; and enough flowers to rejoice a hundred prisoners bloom on the old walls. Still this romantic prison is without prisoners.

"It is a cage without birds," says the jailer often in his most melancholy voice. He takes advantage of this circumstance to raise his vegetables all over the courts, and the aspect is so favourable that he is always ready the first in Sauveterre with his green peas. With the leave of the authorities, he has also fitted up very comfortable lodgings for himself in one of the towers. He has two rooms below, and a chamber on the first floor, reached by a narrow staircase in the wall. It was to this chamber that the keeper's wife conducted Denise with all the promptness of fear. The poor girl was out of breath. Her heart was beating violently ; and, as soon as she reached the room she sank into a chair.

"Good heavens !" cried the woman. "You are not ill, my dear young lady ? Wait, I'll run for some vinegar."

"Never mind," replied Denise in a feeble voice. "Stay here, my dear Colette ; don't go away!"

Colette was nearly forty-five, as dark as gingerbread, moreover, and with a decided moustache on her upper lip. "Poor young lady!" she said. "You feel unwell at being here."

"Yes," replied Denise. "But where is your husband?"

"Down stairs, on the look-out, mademoiselle. He will come up directly."

As she spoke, a heavy step was heard on the stairs : and Blangin entered, looking pale and anxious, like a man who feels that he is running a great risk. "Neither seen nor known," he cried. "No one is aware of your presence here. I was only afraid of that dog of a sentinel ; and, just as you came by, I had managed to get him round the corner by offering him a drop of something to drink. I begin to hope I shall not lose my place."

Denise accepted these last words as a summons to speak out. "Ah!" she said, "never mind your place : you know I have promised you a better one?" And then with affected gaiety she opened her little bag, and put the rolls that it contained upon the table.

"Ah, that is gold!" said Blangin with eager eyes.

"Yes. Each one of these rolls contains a thousand francs ; and here are sixteen."

The keeper was seized with an irresistible temptation. "May I look at them?" he asked.

"Certainly!" replied Denise. "Examine and count for yourself."

She had misunderstood him. Blangin did not care about counting them, not he. What he wanted was to feast his eyes on this gold, to hear its sound, and to handle it.

With feverish eagerness he tore the paper open, and let the pieces fall upon the table ; and, as the heap increased, his lips became blanched, and a cold perspiration broke out on his temples. "And all that is for me?" he said with a stupid laugh.

"Yes, it is all yours," replied Denise.

"I did not know how sixteen thousand francs would look. How beautiful gold is. Come and see, wife."

But Colette turned her head away. She was quite as covetous as her husband, and perhaps even more excited, but she was a woman, and knew how to dissemble. "Ah,

my dear young lady!" she said, "never would my old man and myself have asked you for money, if we had only ourselves to think of. But we have children."

"Your duty is to think of your children," replied Denise.

"I know sixteen thousand francs is a big sum. Perhaps you will be sorry to give us so much money."

"I am not sorry at all: I would even add to it willingly." And she showed them one of the other four rolls in her bag.

"Then, to be sure, what do I care for my place!" cried Blangin. And, intoxicated by the sight and the touch of the gold he added, "You are at home here, mademoiselle; and the jail and the jailer are at your disposal. What do you desire? Just speak. I have nine prisoners, not counting M. de Boiscoran and Frumence. Do you want me to set them all free?"

"Blangin!" said his wife reprovingly.

"What? Am I not free to let the prisoners go?"

"Before you play the master, wait, at least, till you have rendered our young lady the service she expects from you."

"Certainly."

"Then go and conceal this money," said the prudent woman; "or it might betray us."

And, drawing from her cupboard a woollen stocking, she handed it to her husband, who slipped the sixteen thousand francs into it, retaining about a dozen gold pieces, which he put in his pocket, so as always to have some tangible evidence of his new wealth. When the stocking, full to overflowing, had been put back in the cupboard under a pile of linen, Madame Blangin ordered her husband to go down again, as some one might come, and if he were not there to open the gate, it might look suspicious.

Like a well-trained husband, Blangin obeyed without saying a word; and then his wife bethought herself how to entertain Denise. She hoped, she said, her dear young lady would do her the honour to take something. That would strengthen her, and, besides, help her to pass the time: for it was only seven o'clock, and Blangin could not take her to M. de Boiscoran's cell before ten, without great danger.

"But I have dined," Denise objected. "I do not want anything."

The woman insisted all the more. She remembered (God be thanked!) her dear young lady's taste; and she had prepared her an admirable broth, and some beautiful dessert. And, while thus talking, she set the table, having made up her mind that Denise must eat at all hazards. The woman's eager zeal had, at least, this advantage,—it prevented Denise from giving way to her painful thoughts.

Night at length arrived. It was nine o'clock; then it struck ten. At last, the watch came round to relieve the sentinels, and a quarter of an hour afterwards, Blangin reappeared, carrying a lantern and an enormous bunch of keys.

"I have sent Frumence to bed," he said. "You can come now, mademoiselle."

"Let us go," Denise simply said; and rising from her seat she followed the jailer along interminable passages, through a vast vaulted hall, in which their steps resounded as in a church, and finally down a long gallery, where, pointing at a massive door, through the cracks of which gleamed a ray of light, Blangin eventually exclaimed: "Here we are."

Denise seized his arm, and in an almost inaudible voice, she murmured: "Wait a moment." She was, in fact, almost overcome by so many successive emotions. She felt her legs give way under her, and her eyes become dim. In her heart she preserved all her usual energy; but if the spirit was willing, the flesh was weak, and seemed to fail her at the last moment.

"Are you ill?" asked the jailer. "What is the matter?"

She prayed God for courage and strength. Then when her prayer was finished she said, "Now, let us go in." A great noise of keys and bolts ensued, and then Blangin opened the door leading into Jacques de Boiscoran's cell.

Jacques was no longer counting the days, but the hours. He had been imprisoned on Friday morning, June 23, and this was Wednesday night, June 28. During a hundred and thirty two hours, he had been—according to Ayrault's terrible expression—"living, but struck off the roll of the living, and buried alive."

Each one of these hundred and thirty-two hours had weighed upon him like a month. He was so pale and

haggard, his hair and beard were so disordered, and his eyes shone so brightly—illuminated with the glow of fever—that one would hardly have recognised in him the happy lord of Boiscoran, free from care and trouble, upon whom fortune had ever smiled,—that haughty, sceptical young man, who from the height of the past seemed to defy the future.

The fact is that modern law has invented no more fearful suffering than what is called “solitary confinement.” Nothing is more calculated to demoralise a man, crush his will, and utterly conquer the most powerful energy. There is no struggle more distressing than that between a man accused of a crime of which he is innocent, and the examining magistrate, prepossessed in favour of his guilt—the struggle of a helpless being held by an enemy armed with unlimited power.

Stunned at first by his sudden arrest and incarceration, Jacques had soon recovered; and by Friday he had grown quiet and confident, talkative, and almost cheerful. But Sunday was a fatal day. Two gendarmes carried him off to Boiscoran to be present at the removal of the seals; and on his way he was overwhelmed with insults and curses by the people, who recognised him. He came back terribly distressed. During the whole of Monday he was tortured by the magistrate, and after six hours’ examination, when they brought him his dinner, he declared that his health could not stand it, and that they might just as well kill him at once. On Tuesday he received Denise’s letter, and answered it. This excited him fearfully, and during a part of the night Frumence saw him walk up and down his cell, with the gestures and incoherent imprecations of a madman.

He hoped for a letter on Wednesday, but none came, and he sunk into a kind of stupor, during which M. Galpin-Daveline was quite unable to draw a word from him. When the magistrate left him, he sat down facing the window, and resting his head on his elbows he remained motionless, so deeply absorbed in reverie that he took no notice when the jailer entered his cell with lights. He was still in this state, when, a little after ten o’clock, he heard the bolts of his cell being drawn back. He had become so well acquainted with the prison that he knew all its regulations. He knew at what hours his meals

were brought, at what time Frumence came to clean his room, and when he might expect the magistrate. After nightfall he knew he was his own master till the next morning. So late a visit, therefore, must needs bring him some unexpected news, his liberty, perhaps,—that visitor for whom all prisoners look so anxiously.

He started up, and as soon as he distinguished the jailer's rugged face, he asked eagerly,—“Who wants me?”

Blangin bowed, for he was a polite jailer. “Sir, I bring you a visitor,” he replied. And, moving aside, he made way for Denise, or, rather, he pushed her into the room, for she seemed to have lost all power of motion.

“A visitor?” repeated M. de Boiscoran. But the jailer had raised his lantern, and Jacques instantly recognised his betrothed. “What, you?” he cried, “you here!” And saying this he drew back, as though afraid of being deceived by a dream, or by one of those fearful hallucinations which announce the coming of insanity, and seize hold of people's brains in times of over-excitement. “Denise!” he barely whispered, “Denise!”

If Jacques's life, not her own (for she cared nothing for it), had at that moment depended on a single word, Denise could not have uttered it. Her throat was parched, and her lips refused to part. The jailer accordingly took upon himself to answer. “Yes,” he said, “it is Mademoiselle Chandore.”

“At this hour, in my prison!”

“She had something important to communicate to you. She came to me—”

“O Denise!” stammered Jacques, “what a precious friend—”

“And I agreed,” said Blangin in a paternal tone of voice, “to bring her in secretly. It is a great sin I commit; and if it should ever become known— But let one be ever so much a jailer, one has a heart, after all. I tell you so merely because the young lady might not think of it. If the secret is not kept carefully, I should lose my place, and I am a poor man, with wife and children!”

“You are the best of men!” exclaimed M. de Boiscoran, far from suspecting the price that had been paid for Blangin's sympathy, “and the day I regain my liberty, I will

prove to you that we whom you have obliged are not ungrateful."

"I am always at your service," replied the jailer modestly.

Gradually, however, Denise had recovered her self-possession. "Leave us now, my good friend," she said gently to Blangin. And as soon as the jailer had disappeared, and without allowing M. de Boiscoran to say a word, she added, speaking very low,—*"Jacques, grandpapa, has told me, that by coming thus to you at night, alone, and in secret, I run the risk of losing your affection, and of diminishing your respect."*

"Ah, you did not think so!"

"Grandpapa has more experience than I have, Jacques. Still I did not hesitate. Here I am; and I should have run much greater risks; for your honour is at stake, and your honour is my honour, as your life is my life. Your future is at stake, *our* future, our happiness, all our hopes here below."

Inexpressible joy had illumined the prisoner's face. "O God!" he cried, "one such moment repays for years of torture."

But Denise had sworn to herself, that nothing should turn her aside from her purpose. So she continued, "By my mother's sacred memory, I assure you, Jacques, I have never for a moment doubted your innocence."

The unhappy man looked distressed. "You," he said: "but the others! but M. de Chandore?"

"Do you think I should be here, if he thought you were guilty? My aunts and your mother are as sure of your innocence as I am."

"And my father? You said nothing about him in your letter."

"Your father remained in Paris in case some influence in high quarters should have to be appealed to."

Jacques looked downcast. "I am in prison at Sauverre," he said, "accused of a fearful crime, and my father remains in Paris! It must be true he never really loved me. And yet I have always been a good son to him down to this terrible catastrophe. He has never had to complain of me. No, my father does not love me."

Denise could not allow him to continue in this strain. "Listen to me, Jacques," she said; "let me tell you why

I ran the risk of taking this serious step, that may cost me so dearly. I come to you in the name of all your friends, in the name of M. Folgat, the advocate whom your mother has brought down from Paris, and in the name of M. Magloire, in whom you put so much confidence. They all agree you have adopted an abominable system. By refusing obstinately to speak, you rush voluntarily into the gravest danger. Listen well to what I tell you. If you wait till the examination is over, you are lost. If you are once handed over to the court, it is too late for you to speak. You will, innocent as you are, only make one more on the list of judicial murders."

Jacques de Boiscoran had listened in silence, his head bowed down, as if to conceal the pallor of his face from Denise. "Alas!" he murmured, when she had finished speaking, "Everything you tell me I have told myself more than once."

"And you did not speak?"

"I did not."

"Ah, Jacques, you are not aware of the danger you run! You do not know—"

"I know," he said, interrupting her in a harsh, hoarse voice,— "I know that the scaffold, or the galleys, are at the end."

Denise was petrified with horror. Poor girl! She had imagined that she would only have to show herself to triumph over Jacques's obstinacy, and that he would speedily reassure her. But matters were taking a very different course. "What a misfortune!" she cried. "You will not abandon your fearful notion; but why not? Why not speak out?"

"I cannot."

"You cannot. You have not considered—"

"Not considered," he repeated, and in a lower tone he added,— "And what do you think I have been doing during the hundred and thirty mortal hours I have been alone in this prison,—alone in the face of a terrible accusation, and a still more terrible emergency?"

"That is the difficulty, Jacques: you are the victim of your own imagination. And who could help it in your place? M. Folgat said so only yesterday. There is no man living, who, after four days' solitary confinement, can keep his mind calm. Grief and solitude are bad counsel

lors. Jacques, come to yourself; listen to your dearest friends, who speak to you through me. Jacques, your Denise beseeches you. Speak!"

"I cannot."

"Why not?" She waited for some seconds; and, as he did not reply, she asked, not without a slight accent of bitterness in her voice,—“Is it not the first duty of an innocent man to establish his innocence?"

The prisoner, with a movement of despair, clasped his hands over his brow. Then bending forward towards Denise, so that she felt his breath in her hair, he said,—“And when he cannot, when he cannot establish his innocence?"

She drew back, pale unto death, tottering so that she had to lean against the wall, and cast upon Jacques de Boiscoran a glance in which the whole horror of her soul was clearly expressed. “What do you say?" she stammered. “O God!"

He laughed, the wretched man! with that laugh which is the last utterance of despair. And then he replied,—“I say that there are circumstances which upset our reason; unheard-of circumstances, which make one doubt one's self. I say that everything accuses me, that everything overwhelms me, that everything turns against me. I say, that if I were in M. Galpin's place, and he were in mine, I should act just as he does."

"That is insanity!" cried Denise.

But Jacques de Boiscoran did not hear her. All the bitterness of the last days rose within him; and his flushed face revealed his intense excitement. “Establish my innocence!" he cried with gasping voice, “Ah! that is easily said. But how? No, I am not guilty: but a crime has been committed; and for this crime justice will have a culprit. If it is not I who fired at the Count de Claudieuse, and set Valpinson on fire, who is it? ‘Where were you,’ they ask me, ‘at the time of the murder?’ Where was I? Can I tell them? To clear myself is to accuse others. And if I should be mistaken? or if, not being mistaken, I should be unable to prove the truth of my accusation? The murderer and the incendiary, of course, took all possible precautions to escape detection, and to let punishment fall upon me. I was warned beforehand. Ah, if we always could foresee, could know beforehand! How can I

defend myself? On the first day I said, 'Such a charge cannot reach me: it is a cloud that a breath will scatter, Madman that I was! The cloud has become an avalanche, and I may be crushed. I am neither a child nor a coward; and I have always met phantoms face to face. I have measured the danger, and I know it is fearful.'

Denise shuddered. "What will become of us?" she cried.

This time, M. de Boiscoran heard her speak and felt ashamed of his weakness. But, before he could master his feelings, Denise spoke again. "But never mind," she said. "These are idle thoughts. Truth soars invincible, unchangeable, high above the ablest calculations and the most skilful combinations. Jacques, you must tell the truth, the whole truth, without subterfuge or concealment."

"I can do so no longer," murmured he.

"Is it such a terrible secret?"

"It is improbable."

Denise looked at him almost with fear. She did not recognise his old expression or the habitual tone of his voice. She drew nearer to him, and taking his hand in hers, she said,—“But you can tell it to me, your friend, your—”

He trembled, and drew back: "To you less than anybody else," he replied. Then, feeling how mortifying such an answer must be, he added,—“Your mind is too pure to understand such wretched intrigues. I do not want your wedding-dress to be stained by a speck of the mire with which they have covered me.”

Was she deceived? No; but she had the courage to appear deceived.

"Very well, then," she resumed quietly. "But the truth will have to be told, sooner or later."

"Yes, to M. Magloire."

"Well, then, Jacques, write down at once what you mean to tell him. Here are pen and ink: I will carry your statement to him faithfully."

"There are things, Denise, which cannot be written."

She felt herself vanquished; she understood that nothing would bend that resolute will, and yet she said once more,—“But if I were to beseech you, Jacques, by our past and our future, by the great and eternal love which you have sworn me?”

"Do you really wish to make my prison hours a thousand times harder than they are? Do you want to deprive me of my last remnant of strength and courage? Have you really no longer any confidence in me? Could you not believe me for a few days more?"

He paused. There was a knock at the door; and almost at the same time Blangin the jailer was heard exclaiming,—“Time is getting on. I want to be downstairs when they relieve the guard. I am running a great risk. I am the father of a family.”

“Go home now, Denise,” said Jacques eagerly, “go home, I cannot think of your being seen here.”

She had paid dear enough to know that she was quite safe in remaining; still she did not object. She offered her brow to Jacques, who touched it with his lips; and half dead, holding on to the walls, she went back to the jailer’s little room. They had made up a bed for her, and she threw herself on it, dressed as she was. There she remained immovable, as if dead, overcome by a kind of stupor, which deprived her even of the faculty of suffering.

It was bright day light, it was eight o’clock, when she felt somebody pull her sleeve, and the jailor’s wife said to her,—“My dear young lady, this would be a good time for you to slip away. Perhaps people will wonder at seeing you alone in the street; but they will think you are returning home from seven o’clock mass.”

Without saying a word, Denise sprang from the bed, and in a moment she had arranged her hair and dress. Just then Blangin entered anxious for her to leave the prison. Giving him one of the thousand-franc rolls that were still in her bag,—“This is for you,” she said. I want you to remember me, if I should need you again.” And then dropping her veil over her face, she took her departure.

XI.

THE BARON DE CHANDORE had had one terrible night in his life—a night during which he had counted each passing minute by the ebbing pulse of his only son. The physicians declared the old gentleman’s anguish to have been great on the occasion, and now, the night which Denise had passed away from the house had proved almost

as full of suffering to him. He knew very well that Blangin and his wife were honest people, in spite of their avarice and covetousness; he knew, moreover, that Jacques de Boiscoran was an honourable man. Still, all night long his old servant heard him walking up and down his room; and at seven o'clock in the morning he was at the door, looking anxiously up and down the street. Towards half-past seven M. Folgat arrived, but the baron hardly wished him good-morning, and certainly did not hear a word of what the lawyer said with the view of re-assuring him. At last, however, the old man cried,—“Ah, there she is!”

He was not mistaken. Denise was coming round the corner. She approached the house in feverish haste, as if she had known that her strength was at an end, and would barely suffice to carry her to the door.

Grandpapa Chandore met her with a kind of fierce joy, pressed her in his arms, and said over and over again,—“O Denise! oh, my darling child, how I have suffered! How long you have been! But it is all over now. Come, come, come!”

And he almost carried her into the drawing-room, and placed her tenderly on a large easy-chair. He knelt by her side, smiling with happiness; but, when he had taken her hands in his, he exclaimed:—“Your hands are burning, you are feverish!” He looked at her: she had raised her veil. “You are as pale as death!” he continued. “Your eyes are red and swollen!”

“I have been crying, dear grandpapa,” she replied gently.

“Crying! Why?”

“Alas, I have failed!”

As if moved by a sudden shock M. de Chandore sprang to his feet. “By God’s holy name,” he cried, “the like has not been heard since the world was created. What! you went, you, Denise de Chandore, to him in his prison; you begged him—”

“And he remained inflexible. Yes, dear grandpapa. He will say nothing till after the preliminary investigation is over.”

“We were mistaken in the man: he has no courage and no feeling.”

Denise had risen painfully, and said feebly,—“Ah, dear

grandpapa ! do not blame him, do not accuse him ! he is so unhappy ! ”

“ But what reasons does he give ? ”

“ He says the facts are so very improbable that he should certainly not be believed, and would ruin himself if he were to speak as long as he is kept in solitary confinement, and has no advocate. He says his position is the result of a wicked conspiracy ; that he thinks he knows the guilty person, and will denounce him, since he is forced to do so in self-defence. ”

M. Folgat, who had hitherto remained a silent witness of the scene, now approached,—“ Are you quite sure,” he asked, “ that this was what M. de Boiscoran said ? ”

“ Oh, quite certain, sir ! ”

“ But surely, my dear child,” said M. de Chandore, “ Jacques told you—you—something more precise ? ”

“ No. ”

“ You did not ask him even what those improbable facts were ? ”

“ Oh, yes ! But he said that I was the very last person who could be told. ”

“ That man ought to be burnt over a slow fire,” said M. de Chandore to himself. Then he added in a louder voice,—“ And you do not think all this very strange, very extraordinary ? ”

“ It seems to me horrible ! ”

“ I understand. But what do you think of Jacques ? ”

“ I think, dear grandpapa, that he cannot act otherwise, or he would do so. Jacques is too intelligent and too courageous to deceive himself easily. As he alone knows everything, he alone can judge. I, of course, am bound to respect his will more than anybody else. ”

But the old gentleman did not think himself bound to respect it ; and exasperated by his grandchild’s resignation, he was on the point of telling her his mind fully, when she rose with some effort, and said, in an almost inaudible voice,—“ I am so tired ! Excuse me, grandpapa, if I go to my room. ”

M. de Chandore accompanied her to the door, and watched her mount the stairs, assisted by her maid. Then he returned to M. Folgat. “ They are going to kill me, sir ! ” he cried, with an explosion of wrath and despair which was almost frightful in a man of his age. “ She

had in her eyes the same look as her mother had when she told me, after her husband's death, 'I shall not survive him.' And she did not survive my poor son. And then I, old man, was left alone with that child; and who knows but she may have in her the germ of the same disease which killed her mother? Alone! And for these twenty years I have held my breath to listen if she is still breathing naturally and regularly—"

"You are needlessly alarmed," began the advocate,

But Grandpapa Chandore shook his head. "No, no," he continued. "I fear my child has been hurt in her heart's heart. Did you not see how pale she looked, and how feeble her voice was? Great God! wilt thou leave me all alone here upon earth? For mercy's sake, call me home before she who is the joy of my life also leaves me. And I can do nothing to turn aside this fatality—stupid, insane old man that I am! And this Jacques de Boiscoran, if he were guilty, after all? Ah, the wretch! I would hang him with my own hands!"

Deeply moved, M. Folgat had silently watched the old gentleman's grief. At length he ventured to speak again,—"Do not blame M. de de Boiscoran, sir," said he, "now that everything is against him! Of all of us, he suffers the most; for he is innocent."

"Do you still think so?"

"More than ever. Little as he has said, he has told Mademoiselle Denise quite enough to confirm a conjecture I made the day we went to Boiscoran."

"I do not recollect," said the baron.

"Don't you remember," resumed the lawyer, "that you left us, so as to allow Anthony to answer my questions more freely?"

"To be sure?" cried M. de Chandore, "to be sure! And then you thought—?"

"I thought I had guessed right, you, sir; still I am not going to do anything at present. M. de Boiscoran tells us that the facts are improbable. I should, therefore, most likely soon be astray; but, since we are now bound to wait till the investigation is completed, I shall employ the time in examining the country-people, who will, probably, tell me more than Anthony did. You have, no doubt, among your friends, some who are well informed,—M. Seneschal, Dr. Seignebois, for instance,

By a singular coincidence, scarcely had the doctor's name been mentioned, than his voice was heard in the hall, and a second later, he fell like a bombshell into the room. Four days had now elapsed since he had last presented himself; for he had sent a messenger to fetch away his report and the shot he had left in M. Folgat's hands. He had spent nearly the whole of these last four days at the hospital, with one of his brother-practitioners, who had been appointed to assist him in examining Cocoleu's mental condition. "And that is what brings me here," he cried, as he entered M. de Chandore's *salon*; "for this examination, if not looked after, may deprive M. de Boiscoran of his best and surest chance of escape."

After what Denise had told them, neither M. de Chandore nor M. Folgat attached much importance to the state of Cocoleu's mind: still this word "escape" attracted their attention. There is nothing unimportant in a criminal trial. "Is there anything new?" asked the advocate.

The doctor first closed the door, and then, placing his cane and broad-brimmed hat upon the table, he replied:—"No, there is nothing new. They still insist upon ruining M. de Boiscoran, and shrink from nothing in order to do so."

"They! who are they?" asked M. de Chandore.

The doctor shrugged his shoulders contemptuously. "Are you really still in doubt, sir?" he replied. "And yet the facts speak clearly enough. In this department, as well as others, there are, I am sorry to say, several physicians who are by no means an honour to their profession, who are, to tell the truth, perfect asses. There is one of these donkeys, who, in length of ears and thickness of hide, surpasses all the others. Well, he is the very one chosen to act as my colleague. Briefly, my learned brother is fully persuaded that his duty as a physician employed by a court of justice is to say 'Amen' to all the inventions of the prosecution. 'Cocoleu is an idiot,' says M. Galpin. 'He is an idiot, or ought to be one,' re-echoes my learned brother. 'If he spoke on the night of the crime, it was by an inspiration from on high,' adds the magistrate. 'Evidently,' says my *confrere*, 'there was an inspiration from on high.' For this is the conclusion at which my learned brother arrives in his report: 'Cocoleu is an idiot provi-

dentially inspired with a flash of reason.' He does not say it in these words; but it amounts to the same thing."

Dr. Seignebos paused, quite out of breath, and, taking off his spectacles, proceeded to wipe them with furious gestures.

"But what do you think, doctor?" asked M. Folgat.

"My opinion, which I have fully developed in my report, is, that Cocoleu is not idiotic at all."

M. de Chandore started: the proposition seemed to him monstrous. He knew Cocoleu very well, and had often seen him wandering through the streets of Sauveterre during the eighteen months which the poor creature had spent under the doctor's treatment. "What! Cocoleu not idiotic?" exclaimed the baron.

"No!" peremptorily replied the doctor; "and you have only to look at him to be convinced. Has he a large flat face, a disproportioned mouth, a yellow, tanned complexion, thick lips, defective teeth, and squinting eyes? Does his deformed head sway from side to side, as too heavy to be supported by his neck? Is his body deformed, and his spine crooked? Is his stomach enlarged and pendent, do his hands drop upon his thighs, are his legs awkward, and the joints unusually large? These are the symptoms of idiocy, gentlemen, and they are not to be found in Cocoleu. I, for my part, believe him to be a scamp, with an iron constitution, very clever with his hands, climbing trees like a monkey, and leaping ditches ten feet wide. To be sure, I don't pretend that his intellect is normal; but I maintain that he is one of those imbeciles who have certain faculties very fully developed, while others, more essential are missing."

While M. Folgat listened with the most intense interest, M. de Chandore, growing impatient, exclaimed:—"The difference between an idiot and an imbecile—"

"Is immense," cried the doctor. And with overwhelming volubility, he continued,—*"The imbecile preserves some fragments of intelligence. He can speak, make his wants known, express his feelings. He associates ideas, compares impressions, remembers things, and acquires experience. He is capable of cunning and dissimulation. He hates and likes and fears. If he is not always sociable, he is susceptible of being influenced by others. You can easily obtain perfect control over him.*

His inconsistency is remarkable ; and still he shows, at times, invincible obstinacy. Finally, imbeciles are, on account of this semi-lucidity, often very dangerous. You find among them almost all those monomaniacs whom society is compelled to shut up in asylums, because they cannot master their instincts."

"Very well said," observed M. Folgat, who found in these remarks some elements of a plea,—“very well said."

The doctor bowed. "Such a creature is Cocoleu. Does it follow that I hold him responsible for his actions? By no means! But it follows that I look upon him as a false witness, brought forth to ruin an honest man."

It was evident that such views did not please M. de Chandore. "Formerly," he said, "you did not think so."

"No, I even said the contrary," replied Dr. Seignebos. "I had not studied Cocoleu sufficiently, and I was taken in by him: I confess it openly. But this avowal of mine is an evidence of the cunning and astute obstinacy displayed by these wretched creatures, and of their capacity to carry out a design. After a year's experience, I sent Cocoleu away, declaring, and certainly believing, that he was incurable. The fact is, he did not want to be cured. The country people, who observe carefully and shrewdly, were not taken in: they will tell you, almost to a man, that Cocoleu is more artful than foolish. That is the truth. He has found out, that, by exaggerating his imbecility, he could live without work; and he has acted on the discovery. When the Count de Claudieuse took pity on him, he was sufficiently clever to show just enough intelligence to be supported without having to do any work."

"In a word," said M. de Chandore incredulously, "Cocoleu is a great actor."

"Great enough to have deceived me," replied the doctor: "yes, sir." Then turning to M. Folgat, he added,—“All this I have told my learned brother, before taking him to the hospital. There we found Cocoleu more obstinately silent than ever. All our efforts to obtain a word from him were fruitless, although it was evident to me that he understood very well. I proposed to resort to quite legitimate means, which are employed to discover feigned defects and diseases; but my learned brother refused, and was encouraged in his resistance by M. Galpin-

Daveline. On what grounds I don't know. When I asked that the Countess de Claudieuse should be sent for, as she has a talent for making him talk, M. Galpin would not permit it—and there we are."

It happens almost daily, that two physicians employed as experts differ in their opinions. Law courts would have a terrible task before them if they had to make the rival practitioners agree. Accordingly they are content to appoint a third expert, whose opinion is decisive. This was necessary to be done in Cocoleu's case. Now Dr. Seignebos, already convinced that his brother expert was a fool, was moreover afraid that by M. Galpin-Daveline's influence, a second fool would be appointed to decide the question finally. Accordingly he wished the two families interested in the defence to exert all their influence so as to obtain the appointment of a committee of physicians chosen out of the district, and if possible in Paris, with the object of having Cocoleu carefully examined, and his condition reported on by men of incontestable authority. A long discussion ensued on the subject between the doctor, the advocate and the Baron de Chandore,—M. Folgat displaying determined opposition to the doctor's suggestion—remarking that if Cocoleu was found to be sane—the discovery might prove more injurious than beneficial to M. de Boiscoran's cause. "Cocoleu's idiocy," he said, "is, perhaps the most serious difficulty in the way of the prosecution, and the most powerful argument for the defence. What can M. Galpin say, if M. de Boiscoran charges him with basing a capital charge upon the incoherent words of a creature void of intelligence, and, consequently, irresponsible. If, on the contrary, it is established that Cocoleu really knows what he says, all is changed. The prosecution is supported by an opinion of the faculty in saying to M. de Boiscoran, 'You need not deny any longer. You have been seen; here is a reliable witness.'"

Dr Seignebos seemed struck by these arguments, but he nevertheless returned to the charge, maintaining that whatever might be the result it was his duty to see the truth established. Moreover, in point of fact, the question affected him personally. He believed that Cocoleu had deceived him while under his treatment; and assuredly the idiot had been the cause of innumerable petty witticisms

launched against the doctor,—witticisms which had made him suffer cruelly, offending him not so much as a man as in his professional capacity. Now, if he could unmask Cocoléu, he would have his revenge, and be able to cast upon his enemies some of the ridicule with which they had overwhelmed him. "I have made up my mind," he said, at last, "and, whatever you may resolve, I mean to go to work at once, and try to obtain the appointment of a commission."

"Before doing anything," said M. Folgat, "it might be prudent to consult M. Magloire."

"I do not want to consult Magloire when duty tells me what course I should adopt."

"You will grant us twenty-four hours, I hope."

Dr. Seigneboš frowned, "Not an hour," he replied; "I am going from here to the office of the public prosecutor."

Thereupon, taking up his hat and cane, he bowed and walked out of the room, without stopping even to answer M. de Chandore, who asked him how the Count de Claudieuse was getting on. It was generally rumoured that the chief victim of the Valpinson catastrophe was in a most precarious condition.

"Hang the old original!" cried M. de Chandore as the doctor walked through the hall. Then, turning to M. Folgat, he added,— "I must, however, confess that you received the news which he brought rather coldly."

"The very fact of the news being so very grave," replied the advocate, "made me wish for time to consider. If Cocoléu pretends to be imbecile, or, at least, exaggerates his incapacity, then we have a confirmation of what M. de Boiscoran told Mademoiselle Denise last night. It would be the proof of an odious conspiracy, of a long premeditated vengeance. Here is the turning-point of the affair evidently."

"What!" cried M. de Chandore, "you think so, and yet you refused to support Dr. Seigneboš, who is certainly an honest man?"

The young lawyer shook his head. "I wanted to have twenty-four hours' delay, because we must absolutely consult M. de Boiscoran. Could I tell the doctor so? Had I a right to take him into the secret?"

"You are right," murmured M. de Chandore, "you are right."

Accordingly, when Denise came downstairs again in the afternoon, looking still very pale, but evidently armed with new courage, M. Folgat dictated to her certain questions to ask the prisoner. She hastened to right them in cipher; and about four o'clock the letter was sent to Mechinot, the clerk. The next evening the answer came. "Dr Seignebos is no doubt right, my dear friends," wrote Jacques. "I have good reasons to be sure that Cocoleu's imbecility is partly assumed, and that his evidence has been prompted by others. Still I must beg you will take up no steps that would lead to another medical investigation. The slightest imprudence may ruin me. For heaven's sake wait till the end of the preliminary investigation, which is now near at hand, from what Galpin tells me."

This letter was read in the family circle, and the poor mother uttered a cry of despair as she heard her son's words of resignation. "Are we going to obey him," she cried, "when we all know that he is ruining himself by his obstinacy?"

"Jacques alone can judge his situation," replied Denise rising from her seat, and he alone, therefore, has the right to command. Our duty is to obey. I appeal to M. Folgat."

The young advocate nodded his head. "Everything has been done that could be done," he said. "Now we can only wait."

XII.

THE famous fire at Valpinson had been a godsend to the good people of Sauveterre. Ever since its occurrence they had had an inexhaustible topic of discussion, ever new and ever rich in unexpected conjectures,—the Bois-coran case, which promised to become a *cause celebre*. Thus it happened that whenever M. Galpin-Daveline walked from the court-house to the prison, or came stiffly striding up the Rue Nationale, twenty good house-wives peeped from behind their curtains trying to read in his face some of the secrets of the investigation. They dis-

covered, however, nothing but traces of intense anxiety, and a pallor which became daily more marked.

In point of fact this Boiscoran case was a thorn in the ambitious magistrate's side—more than a thorn indeed, a festering wound fraught with incessant and intolerable irritation. Every day he saw more clearly that he was in a false position; although public opinion was strongly against M. de Boiscoran, it was not, on that account, very favourable to M. Galpin-Daveline. Everybody believed Jacques guilty, and wanted him to be punished with all the rigour of the law; but, on the other hand, people were astonished that M. Galpin-Daveline should choose to act as examining magistrate in such a case. There was a touch of treachery in this proceeding against a former friend, in searching for evidence against him, in driving him into court, that is to say, towards the galleys or the scaffold; and the public conscience was revolted at such conduct. The very way in which people returned the magistrate's greeting, or avoided him altogether, made him aware of the feelings entertained towards him. This only increased his wrath against Jacques, and, with it, his trouble. He had been congratulated, it is true, by the attorney-general; but there is no certainty in a trial, as long as the accused refuses to confess. The charges against Jacques, to be sure, seemed so overwhelming, that his being sent before the court was beyond question. But once in court what would the jury say?

"And in fine," the public prosecutor remarked, "you have not a single eye-witness. And from time immemorial an eye-witness has been looked upon as worth a hundred hearsays."

"I have Cocoleu," said M. Galpin-Daveline impatiently.

"Have the doctors decided that he is not an idiot?"

"No; Dr Seignebois alone maintains that doctrine."

"Well, at least Cocoleu is willing to repeat his evidence?"

"No."

"Why, then, you have virtually no witness!"

Yes such was the case, M. Galpin-Daveline understood it but too well, and hence his anxiety. The more he studied *his* accused, the more he found him to be a threatening enigma ominous of evil. "Can he have an *alibi*?" he thought. "Or does he hold in reserve one of those un-

foreseen revelations, which at the last moment destroy the whole edifice of the prosecution, and cover the prosecution itself with ridicule?" Whenever these thoughts occurred to him, big drops of perspiration would run down his temples, and he would treat his poor clerk Mechinet like a dog. Nor was this all. Many a report reached him from the Chandore family, and although he was far from imagining the truth, being quite ignorant of Denise's correspondence with Jacques and her visit to the prison, still he knew that she was surrounded by devoted and intelligent men, including M. de Chandore, M. Seneschal, Dr. Seignebos, M. Magloire, and, finally, the advocate whom the Marchioness de Boiscoran had brought down with her from Paris, M. Folgat. And heaven alone knew what they would not try to rescue the guilty man from the hands of justice! With this thought in his mind, M. Galpin devoted all his energies to the case, and each of the points upon which the prosecution relied became for him the subject of special study. In less than a fortnight he examined sixty-seven witnesses. He summoned the fourth part of the population of Brechy. He would have summoned the whole country, if he had dared. But all his efforts were fruitless. After weeks of laborious investigations, the inquiry was still at the same point, the mystery was still impenetrable. The prisoner had not refuted any of the charges made against him; but, on the other hand, the magistrate had not obtained a single additional piece of evidence.

Matters could not remain in this condition for ever. One warm afternoon in July, as M. Galpin-Daveline walked along the Rue Nationale, the housewives who observed him from behind their window-curtains, thought that he looked even more anxious than usual. They were right. After a long conference with the public prosecutor and the presiding judge, the investigating magistrate had taken a serious determination. Proceeding to the prison, he went to Jacques's cell and announced that his "painful duty" was drawing to a close. The inquiry was finished, and on the morrow the papers, with a list of the objects to be used as evidence, would be sent to the attorney-general, to be submitted to the court.

Jacques de Boiscoran did not move. "Well, what then?" he simply asked.

"Have you nothing to add, sir?" asked M. Galpin-Daveline in his turn.

"Nothing, except that I am innocent."

The magistrate found it difficult to repress his impatience. "Then, prove it," he exclaimed. "Refute the charges which have been brought against you, which overwhelm you, which induce me, the court, and everybody else, to consider you guilty. Speak, and explain your conduct."

Jacques kept obstinately silent.

"Your resolution is fixed," said the magistrate once more, "you refuse to say anything?"

"I am innocent."

M. Galpin saw clearly that it was useless to insist any further. "From this moment," he said, "you are no longer in solitary confinement. You can receive the visits of your family in the prison parlour. The advocate you choose will be admitted to your cell to consult with you."

"At last!" exclaimed Jacques with explosive delight, "Am I at liberty to write to M. de Chandore?"

"Yes," replied M. Galpin-Daveline, "and, if you choose to write at once, my clerk will carry your letter to its destination this evening."

Jacques de Boiscoran immediately availed himself of this permission; and a couple of minutes later he handed the following note to Mechinnet:—

"I shall expect M. Magloire to-morrow morning at nine.
"J."

Ever since Jacques's friends had come to the conclusion that a false step might have the most fatal consequences, they had carefully abstained from taking any action. Besides, what would have been the use of any efforts they might make? Dr. Seignebo's request, though unsupported, had been at least partially granted; and the court had summoned a physician from Paris, a great authority on insanity, to examine Cocoleu's mental condition. It was on a Saturday that Dr. Seignebo came triumphantly to announce the good news; but on the following Tuesday he had to report absolute discomfiture. The Paris physician had proved as great a fool as his Sauveterre confrere—siding with the authorities and proclaiming Cocoleu to be an absolute idiot.

Dr. Seignebo was in a furious passion when he called

on the Baron de Chandore to acquaint Jacques's friends with this result. Still he added that he did not yet despair proving that Cocoleu was a miserable impostor, exclaiming, moreover, in stentorian tones: "And M. de Bois-coran may count on me. I have my reasons for saying so. I have formed very singular suspicions, very singular indeed."

M. Folgat, Denise, and the marchioness urged him to explain; but he declared that the moment had not yet arrived for him to do so. He left the house in his usual abrupt fashion, vowing that he was over-worked, and that he must hurry off to see the Count de Claudieuse who was getting worse and worse.

"What can the old fellow suspect?" asked Grandpapa Chandore, as the hall door closed behind the doctor. M. Folgat might have replied that the medical man's suspicions were no doubt similar to his own, only perhaps better founded and more fully developed. Still it was not for him to say so. Was not all inquiry prohibited, had they not been told that a single imprudent word might ruin everything? Why then excite new hopes when they must needs wait patiently till M. Galpin-Daveline thought fit to put an end to this melancholy suspense.

Some days had elapsed without any news from Jacques, when, one afternoon, Mechinot the clerk boldly presented himself at M. de Chandore's house. This fact alone intimated that there was something new, and when M. Galpin's subordinate handed Jacques's brief note to Denise, who met him in the hall, she, reading it by a single glance, ran at once to acquaint her grandfather and M. Folgat with the good news that the prisoner was no longer in solitary confinement. At the same time she instructed a servant to go in search of M. Magloire. In less than an hour, the eminent advocate of Sauveterre arrived. Jacques's letter was handed to him, and when he had perused it, he remarked, with some embarrassment, "I have promised M. de Boiscoran my assistance, and he shall certainly have it. I shall be at the prison to-morrow morning as soon as the doors open, and I will tell you the result of our interview."

He would say nothing more. It was very evident that he did not believe in the innocence of his client; and, as

soon as he had left, M. de Chandore exclaimed, " Jacques is mad to intrust his defence to a man who doubts him."

" M. Magloire is an honourable man," said Denise, " and, if he thought he might compromise Jacques, he would not undertake the task."

Yes, indeed, M. Magloire was an honourable man, and quite accessible to tender sentiments ; for he felt very reluctant to go and see the prisoner, who had been his friend, and whom he could not help loving still, although he really believed that he was justly charged. He could not sleep for it that night ; and all noticed his anxious air as he walked through the town next morning on his way to the jail. Slowly, and with his heart beating quick, the famous advocate went up the narrow stairs. He crossed the long passage ; Blangin opened a door ; and the next moment M. Magloire was in Jacques de Boiscoran's cell.

" At last you are here," exclaimed the unhappy young man, throwing himself into the advocate's arms. " At last, I see an honest face, and hold a trusty hand. Ah ! I have suffered cruelly, so cruelly, that I am surprised my mind has not given way. But now you are here by my side, I am safe."

The lawyer could not speak. He was terrified by the havoc which grief had caused in his friend's noble and intelligent face. He was shocked at the distortion of his features, the unnatural brilliancy of his eyes, and the convulsive smile on his lips. " Poor man ! " he murmured at last.

Jacques misunderstood him ; he stepped back, as white as the walls of his cell. " You do not think me guilty ? " he exclaimed ; and as he spoke, an inexpressibly sad expression came into his eyes. " To be sure," he continued with a convulsive laugh, " the charges must be overwhelming indeed, if they have convinced my best friends. Alas ! why did I refuse to speak that first day ? My honour !— what a phantom ! And still, victimised as I am by an infamous conspiracy, I should still refuse to speak, if my life alone were at stake. But my honour is at stake, Denise's honour, the honour of the Boiscorans. I shall speak. You, M. Magloire, shall know the truth : you shall see my innocence in a word."

And, seizing the advocate's hand, he pressed it almost

painfully, adding in a hoarse voice,—“One word will explain the whole thing to you ; I was the lover of the Countess de Claudieuse !”

XIII.

IF he had been less distressed, Jacques de Boiscoran would have seen how wisely he had acted in choosing the great advocate of Sauveterre for his defender. A stranger, M. Folgat for instance, would have heard him silently, and would have seen in this revelation nothing but a fact submitted to his personal appreciation. But M. Magloire, on the contrary, was bound to express the feelings of the whole district ; and when the advocate heard Jacques declare that the Countess de Claudieuse had been his mistress, he gave him an indignant glance and exclaimed,—“That is impossible.”

Jacques was certainly not surprised. He had been the first to say that people would refuse to believe him when he did speak ; and this conviction had largely influenced him in keeping silent so long. “It is improbable, I know,” he said ; “and still it is so.”

“Give me proofs !” said M. Magloire.

“I have no proofs.”

The great lawyer’s melancholy and sympathising expression changed instantly. He glanced sternly at the prisoner ; and the gleam in his eyes spoke of amazement and indignation. “There are things,” he said, “which it is rash to affirm when one is not able to support them with proof. Consider—”

“My situation forces me to tell everything.”

“Why, then, did you wait so long ?”

“I hoped I should be spared such a fearful extremity.”

“By whom ?”

“By the countess.”

M. Magloire’s expression became darker and darker. “I am not often accused of partiality,” he said. “The Count de Claudieuse is, perhaps, the only enemy I have in the province, but he is a fierce bitter enemy. To keep me out of the Chamber, and to prevent my obtaining many votes, he stooped to acts unworthy of a gentleman. I do not like him. But in justice I must say that I look upon

the countess as the loftiest, purest, the noblest type of a woman, a wife, and a mother."

A bitter smile played on Jacques's lips. "And still I was her lover," he said.

"When? How? The countess lived at Valpinson, and you in Paris."

"Yes; but every year the countess came and spent the month of September in Paris; and I came occasionally to Boiscoran."

"It is very singular that such an intrigue should never have been suspected even."

"We managed to take our precautions."

"And no one ever suspected anything?"

"No one."

But Jacques was at last becoming impatient at the attitude which M. Magloire had assumed. He forgot that he himself had foreseen all the suspicions to which he was now exposed. "Why do you ask all these questions?" he said. "You do not believe me. Well, be it so! Let me at least try to convince you. Will you listen to me?"

M. Magloire drew forward a chair, and sitting down, not in the usual fashion, but astride it, and resting his arms on the back, he said—"I am listening."

Jacques de Boiscoran, hitherto almost livid, now grew crimson with anger. His eyes flashed fire! To be treated thus indeed! Never had M. Galpin's haughtiness offended him so acutely, as M. Magloire's apparently disdainful condescension. It occurred to him to request the advocate to leave his room. But what then? He was condemned to drain the bitter cup to the dregs: for he must save himself; he must extricate himself from this abyss. "You are cruel, Magloire," he said, in a voice of ill-suppressed indignation, "and you make me feel all the horrors of my situation to the full. Ah, do not apologise! It does not matter. Let me speak."

Jacques took a few hasty steps up and down his cell, passing his hand repeatedly over his brow, as if to rack his memory. Then, in a calmer tone of voice, he began—"It was in the first days of the month of August, in 1866, and at Boiscoran, where I was on a visit to my uncle, that I saw the Countess de Claudieuse for the first time. The Count de Claudieuse and my uncle were, at that time, on very bad terms with each other, owing to that unlucky

little stream which crosses our estates ; and a common friend, M. de Besson, had undertaken to reconcile them at a dinner to which both were invited. My uncle had taken me with him. The countess had come with her husband. I was just twenty years old ; she was twenty-six. It was a case of love at first sight. It seemed to me that I had never in my life met a woman so perfectly beautiful and graceful ; that I had never seen so charming a face, such beautiful eyes, and such a sweet smile. She did not seem to notice me. I did not speak to her ; and still I felt a kind of presentiment that this woman would play a great, a fatal part in my life. This impression was so strong, that, as we left the house, I could not help mentioning it to my uncle. He only laughed, and said that I was a fool, and that, if my existence should ever be troubled by a woman, it would certainly not be by the Countess de Claudieuse. He was apparently right. It was hard to imagine that anything should ever again bring me in contact with the countess. M. de Besson's attempt at reconciliation had utterly failed ; the countess continued to live at Valpinson ; and I went back to Paris. Still I was unable to shake off the impression ; and the memory of the dinner at M. de Besson's house was still in my mind, when, a month later, at the *soiree* given by M. de Chalusse, I thought I recognised the Countess de Claudieuse. It was she. I bowed, and, seeing that she recognised me, I went up to her, and she allowed me to sit down beside her. She told me then that she had come to Paris for a month ; as she did every year, and that she was staying with her father, the Marquis de Tassar de Bruc. She had come to this *soiree* much against her inclination, as she disliked going out. She did not dance ; and thus I remained talking with her till the moment she left. I was madly in love when we parted ; and still I made no effort to see her again. It was mere chance once more which brought us together."

Jacques paused for a moment ; then continuing, "One day," said he, "I had business at Melun, and reaching the station rather late, I had but just time to jump into the nearest carriage. The countess was in that identical compartment. She told me—and that is all I ever recollected of the whole conversation—that she was on her way to Fontainebleau to see a friend, with whom she spent

every Tuesday and Saturday. Usually she took the nine o'clock train. This was on a Tuesday; and during the next three days a great struggle went on in my heart. I was desperately in love with the countess, and still I was afraid of her. But my evil star conquered; and the next Saturday, at nine o'clock, I was at the station again. The countess has since confessed to me that she expected me. When she saw me, she made a sign; and, opening the door, I managed to secure a place by her side."

M. Magloire had for some minutes given signs of great impatience. "This is too improbable!" he now exclaimed.

At first Jacques de Boiscoran made no reply. It was no easy task for a man, tried as he had been of late, to stir up the ashes of the past. He was amazed at finding on his lips a secret which he had so long buried in his innermost heart. Besides, he had loved, loved in good earnest; and his love had been returned. And there are certain sensations which come to us only once in life, and which can never again be effaced. He was moved to tears. But as the eminent advocate of Sauveterre repeated his words, even adding that Jacques's story was not credible, the prisoner gently answered: "I do not ask you to believe me, I only ask you to hear me." Then overcoming with all his energy the torpor which was mastering him, he continued, "This trip to Fontainebleau decided our fate. Other trips followed. The countess spent her days with her friend, and I passed the long hours in roaming through the woods. But in the evening we met again at the station. We took a *coupe*, which I had engaged beforehand, and I accompanied her in a carriage to her father's house. Finally, one evening, she left her friend's house at the usual hour; but she did not return to her father's house till the day after."

"Jacques!" broke in M. Magloire, shocked, as if he had heard a curse,— "Jacques!"

M. de Boiscoran remained unmoved. "I know you must think it strange," he replied. "You fancy there is no excuse for the man who betrays a woman who has surrendered herself to him. Wait, before you judge me." And he continued in a firmer tone: "At that time I thought I was the happiest man on earth; and my heart was full of the most absurd vanity at the thought that she

was mine, this beautiful woman, whose purity was high above all calumny. I had tied around my neck one of those fatal ropes which death alone can sever, and, fool that I was, I considered myself happy. Perhaps she really loved me at that time. At least she did not hesitate, and, overcome by the only real great passion of her life, she told me all that was in her innermost heart. At that time she had not yet thought of making me her slave. She told me the secret of her marriage, which had at one time created such a sensation. After her father, the Marquis de Tassar de Bruc, resigned, he soon felt his inactivity weigh upon him, and at the same time grew impatient at the narrowness of his means. He ventured upon hazardous speculations. He lost everything he had; and even his honour was at stake. In his despair he was thinking of suicide, when chance brought to his house a former comrade, the Count de Claudieuse. In a moment of confidence, the marquis confessed, everything; and the other promised to save him from disgrace. It was noble and grand to do so. It must have cost an immense sum. And the friends of our youth who are capable of rendering us such services are rare indeed now-a-days. Unfortunately, the Count de Claudieuse did not display entire disinterestedness. He saw Genevieve de Tassar. He was struck with her beauty; and overcome by a sudden passion—forgetting that she was twenty, while he was nearly fifty—he made his friend aware that he was willing to render him all the services in his power, but that he desired to obtain Genevieve's hand in return. That very evening the ruined nobleman entered his daughter's room, and, with tears in his eyes, explained to her his terrible situation. She did not hesitate a moment. 'Above all,' she said to her father, 'let us save our honour, which even your death would not restore. The Count de Claudieuse is cruel to forget that he is thirty years older than I am. From this moment I hate and despise him, but tell him I am willing to be his wife.' And when her father, overcome with grief, told her that the count would never accept her hand in this form, she replied, 'Oh, do not trouble yourself about that! Your friend will have no right to complain. But I know what I am worth; and you must remember hereafter, that, whatever service he may render you, you owe him nothing.'

"Less than a fortnight after this scene," continued Jacques; "Genevieve had allowed the count to perceive that she was not insensible to his flattery, and a month later she became his wife. The count, on his side, had acted with considerable tact; so that no one suspected the Marquis de Tassar's cruel position. M. de Claudieuse had placed two hundred thousand francs in his hands to settle his most pressing debts. In his marriage-contract he acknowledged having received with his wife a dower of the same amount; and finally, he bound himself to pay his father-in-law an annual income of ten thousand francs. This arrangement absorbed more than half of all M. de Claudieuse possessed."

M. Magloire no longer thought of protesting. Sitting stiffly on his chair, with eyes wide open, like a man who asks himself whether he is asleep or awake, he murmured,—"This is incomprehensible! Unheard of!"

Jacques was becoming gradually excited. "At all events," he continued, "it is what the countess told me in her first hours of enthusiasm. But she told it to me calmly, coldly, like a thing that was perfectly natural. 'Certainly,' she said, 'the Count de Claudieuse has never had to regret the bargain he made. If he has been generous, I have been faithful. My father owes his life to him; but I have given him years of happiness to which he was not entitled. If he has received no love, he has had all the appearance of it, and an appearance far more pleasant than the reality.' When I could not conceal my astonishment, she added, laughing heartily,—'Only I brought to the bargain a mental reservation. I reserved to myself the right to claim my share of earthly happiness whenever it came within my reach. That share is yours, Jacques; and do not fancy that I am troubled by remorse. As long as my husband thinks he is happy, I am within the terms of the contract.' That was how she spoke at the time, Magloire; and a man of more experience would have been frightened. But I was a child: I loved her with all my heart. I admired her genius; I was overcome by her sophisms. However, a letter from the Count de Claudieuse aroused us from our dreams. The countess had committed the only and the last imprudence of her life; she had remained three weeks longer in Paris than was agreed upon; and her impatient husband threatened

to come for her. 'I must go back to Valpinson,' she said; 'for there is nothing I would not do to keep up the reputation I have managed to make for myself. My life, your life, my daughter's life—I would give them all, without hesitation, to protect my reputation. I cannot remain longer than a month,' she added, 'without seeing you. A month from to-day, that is to say, on the 12th November, at three o'clock precisely; you must be in the forest of Rochepommier, at the Carrefour des Hommes Rouges: I will be there.' And then she left Paris. I was in such a state of delirium, that I scarcely felt the pain of parting. The thought of being loved by such a woman filled me with extreme pride; and, no doubt, saved me from many an excess. Ambition was rising within me whenever I thought of her. I wanted to work, to distinguish myself, to become eminent in some way. 'I want her to be proud of me,' I said to myself, ashamed of being nothing at my age, but a rich father's son."

Ten times, at least, M. Magloire had risen from his chair, and moved his lips, as if about to make some objection. But he had pledged himself, in his own mind, not to interrupt Jacques, and he did his best to keep his pledge.

"In the mean time," Jacques went on, "the day fixed by the countess was drawing near. I went down to Bois coran; and on the appointed day, I was in the forest near the Carrefour. I was somewhat behind time, and I was extremely sorry for it; but I did not know the forest very well, and the place chosen by the countess for our rendezvous is in its densest part. The weather was unusually severe for the season. The night before, a heavy snow had fallen: the paths were all white; and a sharp wind blew the flakes from the heavily-loaded branches. From afar off, I distinguished the countess, as she was walking up and down in a kind of feverish excitement, confining herself to a narrow space, where the ground was dry, and where she was sheltered from the wind by enormous masses of rock. In three minutes I was by her side. But she did not draw her hand from her muff to offer it to me; and, without giving me time to apologise for the delay, she said in a dry tone;—'When did you reach Bois coran?' 'Last night.' 'How childish you are!' she exclaimed, stamping her foot. 'Last night. And on what pretext?' 'I need

no pretext to visit my uncle.' 'And was he not surprised to see you drop from the clouds at this time of the year?' 'Why, yes, a little,' I answered foolishly, incapable as I was of concealing the truth. Her dissatisfaction increased visibly. 'And how did you get here?' she commenced again. 'Did you know this Carrefour?' 'No, I inquired about it.' 'Of whom?' 'Of one of my uncle's servants; but his information was so imperfect, that I lost my way.' She looked at me with such a bitter ironical smile, that I stopped short. 'And you think all that very simple,' she said. 'Do you really imagine people will think it natural that you should fall like a bombshell upon Boiscoran, and immediately set out for the Carrefour des Hommes Rouges in the forest? Who knows but you have been followed? Who knows but that behind one of these trees there may be eyes watching us even now?' Then as she looked around with all the signs of genuine fear, I answered, 'And what are you afraid of? Am I not here?'"

Jacques paused once more; his rapid recital had taken away his breath, "I think," he eventually resumed, "I think I can even now see the look in her eyes as she said,—'I fear nothing in the world—do you hear me? nothing in the world, except being suspected; for I must not be compromised. I like to do as I do; I like to have a lover. But I do not want it to be known; because, if it became known, there would be mischief. Between my reputation and my life I have no choice. If I were to be surprised here by any one, I would rather it should be by my husband than a stranger. I have no love for the count, and I shall never forgive him for having married me; but he has saved my father's honour, and I owe it to him to keep his honour unimpaired in the eyes of the world. He is my husband, besides, and the father of my children: I bear his name, and it must be respected. I should die with grief and shame and rage, if I had to give my arm to a man at whom people might look and smile. Still I do not love the count, Jacques, I love you. But remember, that, between him and you, I should not hesitate a moment, and that I should sacrifice your life and your honour, with a smile on my lips—even though my heart should break—if I could, by so doing, spare him the shadow of a suspicion.' I was about to reply: but she added,—'No more!' Every minute we stay here increases the danger. What pretext will

you plead for your sudden appearance at Boiscoran?’ ‘I do not now,’ I replied. ‘You must borrow some money from your uncle,’ she rejoined, ‘a considerable sum, to pay your debts. He will be angry, perhaps; but that will explain your sudden fancy for travelling in the month of November. Good-bye, good-bye!’ ‘What!’ I cried, all amazed. ‘You will not let me see you again, at least from afar?’ ‘During this visit it would be the height of imprudence. But, stop! remain at Boiscoran till Sunday. Your uncle never stays away from high mass; go with him to church. But be careful, control yourself. A single imprudence, one blunder, and I should despise you. Now we must part. You will find in Paris a letter from me.’”

Again did Jacques pause, trying to read in M. Magloire’s face what impression his recital had produced so far. But the famous lawyer remained impassive. The prisoner sighed, and then once more continued,—‘I have entered into all these details, Magloire, because I want you to know what kind of a woman the countess is, so that you may understand her conduct. You see that she did not treat me like a traitor: she had given me fair warning, and shown me the abyss into which I was going to fall. Alas! so far from being terrified, these dark sides of her character only attracted me the more. I admired her imperious air, her courage, and her prudence, even her total lack of principle, which contrasted so strangely with her fear of public opinion. I said to myself with foolish pride,—‘She certainly is a superior woman!’ She must have been pleased with my obedience at church; for I managed to check even a slight trembling which seized me when, seeing her pass, I bowed, being so close to her that my hand touched her dress. I obeyed her in other ways also. I asked my uncle for six thousand francs, and he gave them to me, laughing; for he was the most generous man on earth: but at the same time he remarked,—‘I thought you had not come to Boiscoran merely for the purpose of exploring the forest of Rochepommier.’ This trifling circumstance increased my admiration for the Countess de Claudieuse. How well she had foreseen my uncle’s astonishment, when I had not even dreamed of it! ‘She has a genius for prudence,’ I thought. Yes, indeed she had a genius for it, and a genius for calculation also, as I soon discovered. When I reached Paris, I found a letter from her waiting for me but it was

nothing more than a repetition of all she had told me at our meeting. This letter was followed by several others, which she begged me to keep for her sake, and which all had a number in the upper corner. The first time I saw her again, I asked her,—"What do these numbers mean?"

"My dear Jacques," she replied, "a woman ought always to know how many letters she has written to her lover. Up till now you must have had nine." This occurred in May, 1867, at Rochefort, where she had gone to be present at the launching of a frigate, and where I had followed her, at her suggestion, with a view of our spending a few hours in each other's company. Like a fool, I laughed at the idea of this epistolary responsibility, and then thought no more about it. I was at that time too busy in other ways. She reminded me of the fact that time was passing, and that the month of September, her month of freedom, was drawing near: Should we be compelled again, like the year before, to resort to these perilous trips to Fontainebleau? Why not get a house in some remote quarter of Paris? Each of her wishes was an order for me. My uncle's liberality knew no end. I bought a house."

At last, for the first time in Jacques's recital, there appeared a circumstance which might furnish tangible evidence. M. Magloire started, and asked eagerly,—“Ah, you bought a house?”

“Yes, a nice house with a large garden in the Rue des Vignes at Passy.”

“And you own it still?”

“Yes.”

“Of course you have the title deeds?” Jacques looked in despair. “Here, again, fate is against me. There is quite a tale connected with that house.”

The Sauveterre lawyer's look grew dark again, much quicker than it had brightened up just before. “Ah?” he said,—“a tale, ah!”

“I was scarcely of age,” resumed Jacques, “when I wished to purchase this house. I dreaded difficulties. I was afraid my father might hear of it; in fine, I wanted to be as prudent as the countess was. I therefore asked one of my English friends, Sir Francis Burnett, to purchase it in his name. He agreed, and handed me, with

the necessary bills of sale, a paper in which he acknowledged my right as proprietor."

"But then—"

"Oh! wait a moment. I did not take these papers to my rooms in my father's house. I put them into a drawer at Passy. When the war broke out, I forgot them. I had left Paris before the German siege began, as you know, and during the two sieges my house was successively occupied by the National Guards, the soldiers of the Commune, and the regular troops. When I went back there, I found the four walls pierced with holes; and, moreover, all the furniture had disappeared, and with it the papers."

"And Sir Francis Burnett?"

"He left France directly war broke out; and I don't know what has become of him. Two friends of his in England, to whom I wrote, replied,—the one, that he was probably in Australia; the other that he was dead."

"And you have taken no other steps to secure your rights to a piece of property which legally belongs to you?"

"No, not till now."

"You mean to say virtually that there is in Paris a house which has no owner, is forgotten by everybody, and unknown even to the tax-gatherer?"

"I beg your pardon! The taxes have always been regularly paid; and the whole neighbourhood knows that I am the owner. But the individuality is not the same. I have unceremoniously assumed the identity of my friend. In the eyes of the neighbours, the shopkeepers, the workmen and contractors whom I employed, and to the servants and the gardener, I am Sir Francis Burnett. Ask them about Jacques de Boiscoran, and they will reply, 'Don't know him.' Ask them about Sir Francis Burnett, and they will answer, 'Oh, very well!' and they will give you my portrait."

M. Magloire shook his head as if he were not fully convinced. "Then," he asked again, "you declare that the Countess de Claudieuse has been at this house?"

"More than fifty times in three years."

"If that is so, she must be known there."

"But Paris is not like Sauveterre, my dear friend; and people are not solely occupied with their neighbours'

doings. The Rue des Vignes is quite a deserted street, and the countess took the greatest precautions in coming and going."

"Well, granted, as far as the outside world is concerned. But within? You must have had somebody to stay in the house and keep it in order when you are away and to wait upon you when you were there?"

"I had an English maid-servant."

"Well, this girl must know the countess?"

"She never caught a glimpse of her even, for when the countess was coming, or when she was going away, or when we wanted to walk in the garden, I sent the girl on some errand. I have sent her as far as Orleans to get rid of her for twenty-four hours. The rest of the time we staid upstairs, and waited upon ourselves."

M. Magloire was evidently suffering. "You must be under a mistake," he said. "Servants are curious, and if you hide anything from them they become mad with curiosity. That girl watched you, believe me. That girl found means to see the countess when she came there. She must be examined. Is she still in your service?"

"No, she left me when the war broke out, wishing to return to England, and it would be difficult to find her."

"We must give her up, then. But your man-servant? Old Anthony was in your confidence. Did you never tell him anything about it?"

"Never. Only once did I send for him to come to the Rue des Vignes, when I sprained my foot in coming downstairs."

"So that it is impossible for you to prove that the Countess de Clandieuse ever came to your house in Passy? You have no evidence of it, and no eye-witness?"

"I used to have evidence. She had brought a number of small articles for her private use; but they disappeared during the war."

"Ah yes!" said M. Magloire, "always the war! It has to answer for everything."

Never had any of M. Galpin-Daveline's examinations been half so painful to Jacques as M. Magloire's questions, which betrayed such distressing incredulity. "Did I not tell you, Magloire," he resumed, "that the countess had a genius for prudence? You can easily conceal yourself when you can spend money without counting it.

Would you blame me for not having any proofs to furnish? Is it not the duty of every man of honour to do all he can to keep even a shadow of suspicion from her who has confided herself to his hands? I did my duty, and whatever may come of it, I shall not regret it. Could I foresee such unheard-of emergencies? Could I foresee that : day might come when I, Jacques de Boiscoran, should have to denounce the Countess de Claudieuse, and should be compelled to search for evidence and witnesses against her?"

The eminent advocate of Sauveterre looked aside; and, instead of replying to these questions he merely exclaimed, "Well, what else have you to say?"

Jacques de Boiscoran tried to overcome his discouragement. "It was on the 2nd September, 1867," he said "that the Countess de Claudieuse entered this house at Passy for the first time. During the five weeks she spent that year in Paris, she came almost every day, and spent several hours there. At her father's house she enjoyed, absolute and almost uncontrolled independence. She left her daughter—for she had at that time but one child—with her mother, the Marchioness de Tassar; and she was free to go and come as she liked. When she wanted still greater freedom, she went to see her friend at Fontainebleau; and every time she did this, she secured twenty-four or forty eight hours over and above the time for the journey. I, for my part, was as perfectly free from all control. Ostensibly, I had gone to Ireland: in reality, I lived in the Rue des Vignes. These five weeks passed like a dream; and yet I must confess, the parting was not as painful as might have been supposed. Not that the bright prism was broken; but I always felt humiliated at the necessity of being concealed. I began to be tired of these incessant precautions; and I was quite ready to give up being Sir Francis Burnett, and to resume my identity. We had, besides, mutually promised never to remain a month without seeing each other, at least for a few hours; and she had invented a number of expedients by which we could meet without danger. A family misfortune came just then to our assistance. My father's eldest brother, the kind uncle who had furnished me with the means to purchase my house at Passy, died, and left me his entire fortune. As the owner of Boiscoran, I could, henceforth, live as

much as I chose in the province ; and at all events come there whenever I liked, without anybody inquiring the reason."

XIV.

JACQUES DE BOISCORAN was evidently anxious to make this part of his recital as brief as possible and to come at last to the Valpinson catastrophe, that he might learn from his legal adviser what he had to hope or fear. After a moment's silence, for his breast was well-nigh exhausted, he resumed in a bitter tone, " But why trouble you with all these details, Magloire ? Would you believe me any more than you do now, if I were to enumerate to you all my meetings with the Countess de Claudieuse, or if I were to repeat all her most trifling words. We had gradually learnt to calculate all our movements, and made our preparations so accurately that we met constantly, and feared no danger. We said to each other at parting, or she wrote to me, ' On such a day, at such an hour, at such a place ; and however distant the day, or the hour, or the place, we were sure to meet. I had soon learned to know the country as well as the cleverest of poachers ; and nothing was so useful to us as this familiarity with all the unknown hiding-places. The countess, on her side, never let three months pass by without discovering some urgent motive which carried her to Rochelle, Angoulême, or Paris ; and I was there to meet her. Nothing kept her from these excursions ; even when indisposed, she braved the fatigues of the journey. It is true, my life was well-nigh spent in travelling ; and at any moment, when least expected, I disappeared for whole weeks. This will explain to you the restlessness at which my father sneered, and for which you yourself, Magloire, used to blame me."

" That is true," replied the latter. " I remember."

Jacques de Boiscoran did not seem to notice the encouragement. " I should not tell the truth," he continued, " if I were to say that this kind of life was unpleasant to me. Mystery and danger always add zest to the charms of love. Difficulty only increases passion. But my infatuation was bound to come to an end. It had not taken me long to find out that I had given myself a master, the most imperious and exacting master that ever lived. I had almost

ceased to belong to myself. I had become her property ; and I lived and breathed and thought and acted for her alone. She did not mind my tastes and my dislikes. She wished a thing, and that was enough. At first I accepted her despotism with joy ; but gradually I became tired of this perpetual abdication of my own will. I disliked to have no control over myself, to be unable to dispose of twenty-four hours in advance. I began to feel the pressure of the halter around my neck. I thought of flight. One of my friends was to set out on a voyage around the world, which was to last eighteen months or two years, and I had an idea of accompanying him. There was nothing to retain me. I was, by fortune and position, perfectly independent. Why should I not carry out my plan ? Ah, why ? The prism was not broken yet. I cursed the countess's tyranny, but I still trembled when I heard her name mentioned. I thought of escaping from her ; but a single glance moved me to the bottom of my heart. I was bound to her by the thousand tender threads of habit and complicity—those threads which seem to be more delicate than gossamer, but which are harder to break than a ship's cable.

"When I uttered the word 'separation' for the first time in her presence, asking her what she would do if I left her, she looked at me with a strange air, and asked me, after a moment's hesitation, if I were serious, if it were a warning ! I dared not carry matters any farther, and, making an effort to smile, I replied that it was only a joke. 'Then,' she said, 'let us not say anything more about it. If you should ever come to that, you would soon see what I would do.' I did not insist ; but her look remained long in my memory, and made me feel that I was far more closely bound than I had thought. From that day it became my fixed idea to break with her."

"Well, you ought to have made an end of it," said Magloire.

Jacques de Boiscoran shook his head. "That is easily said," he replied. "I tried it ; but I could not do it. Ten times I went to her, determined to say, 'Let us part ;' and ten times, at the last moment, my courage failed me. She irritated me. I almost began to hate her ; but I could not forget how much I had loved her, and how much she had risked for my sake. Then—why should I not confess it ?

—I was afraid of her. This inflexible character, which I had so much admired, terrified me; and I shuddered, seized with vague and sombre apprehensions, when I thought what she was capable of doing. I was thus in the utmost perplexity, when my mother spoke to me of a match she had long hoped for. This might be the pretext which I had so far failed to find. At all events, I asked for time to consider; and, on the next occasion when I saw the countess, I gathered all my courage together, and told her that my mother wished me to marry. She turned as pale as death; and looking me fixedly in the eyes, as if to read my innermost thoughts, she asked me if my mother's wish were mine. I replied with a forced laugh that I did not wish to marry at present, but that I should have to consider the matter by and by. A terrible scene ensued. She reproached me with having loved her as a pastime, with having made her the amusement of my youth, and asked me what was to become of her if I married. I was suffering terribly. 'You have your husband,' I stammered, 'your children'—She stopped me. 'Yes,' she said. 'I shall go back to live at Valpinson, in a district full of associations, where every spot recalls a rendezvous. I shall live with my husband, whom I have betrayed; with daughters, one of whom— That cannot be, Jacques.' I had a fit of courage. 'Still,' I said, 'I may have to marry. What would you do?' 'Oh, very little,' she replied, 'I should hand all your letters to the Count de Claudieuse.'"

During the thirty years which he had spent at the bar, M. Magloire had heard many a strange confession; but never in his life had he listened to so strange a recital. "That is utterly confounding," he murmured.

But Jacques went on,—“Was this threat meant in earnest? I don't know, but at all events I told her that I didn't believe it; still she swore by all she held dear and sacred in the world that such would be her line of conduct. She overwhelmed me with reproaches and declared that the bonds which bound us together—bonds riveted by long years of complicity—would not be easily broken. She declared that I belonged to her, and that thus I must remain, adding that, on the eve of my wedding-day, her husband would know all. 'I shall not survive the loss of my honour,' she said, 'but at least I shall have my revenge. Even if you escape the Count de Claudieuse's vengeance

your name will be bound up with such a tragic affair that your life will be ruined for ever.' That was the way she spoke, Magloire, and with a passion of which I can give you no idea. It was absurd, it was insane, I admit. But is not all passion absurd and insane? Besides, it was by no means a sudden inspiration of her pride, which made her threaten me with such vengeance. The precision of her phrases, the deliberation of her language, all made me feel that she had long meditated such a blow, and carefully calculated the effect of every word. I was thunderstruck, and eventually I told her that the marriage which I had mentioned had never existed as yet, except in my mother's imagination. She hesitated to believe me, but at last she seemed to be convinced of my veracity. I left her with fury in my heart. She had evidently deemed that I was to carry a halter round my neck for ever—a halter which held me tighter day by day. It was plain that at the slightest effort to free myself, I must be prepared for a terrible scandal; for one of those overwhelming adventures which destroy a man's whole life. Could I ever hope to make her listen to reason? No, I was quite sure I could not."

"I knew but too well that I should lose my time, if I were to recall to her that I was not quite as guilty as she tried to make me out; if I were to show her that her vengeance would fall less upon myself than upon her husband and her children; and that, although she might blame the count for the conditions of their marriage, her daughters, at least, were innocent. I looked in vain for an opening out of this horrible difficulty. Upon my honour Magloire, there were moments when I thought I would pretend getting married, for the purpose of inducing the countess to act, and of bringing about the execution of her threats. I fear no danger; but knowing it to exist, I cannot bear to wait for it with folded hands. I must go forth to meet it. Deliverance came for a time with a great calamity—the war. I lost sight of the countess, and when I returned to Boiscoran, after the conclusion of peace, she gave no signs of life. I began to feel reassured, and to recover possession of myself, when one day M. de Chandore asked me to dinner. I accepted his invitation, and met his granddaughter, Mademoiselle Denise, whom I had already seen. My knowledge of her then was perhaps an indirect reason for me to break off all connection with the countess.

Still I had hitherto studiously avoided Mademoiselle de Chandore, for fear lest the countess's vengeance should fall upon her, but when I was brought in contact with her by her grandfather, I had no longer the heart to avoid her ; and the day that I thought I read in her eyes that she loved me, I made up my mind, and declared myself. At the same time I was not without anxiety concerning the Countess de Claudieuse. I had no news of her, and yet I said to myself, she must have heard of my contemplated marriage, which was already currently reported throughout the province. Her silence really frightened me."

Exhausted and out of breath, Jacques de Boiscoran paused here, pressing both of his hands against his chest, as if to check the irregular beating of his heart. He was approaching the catastrophe. And yet he looked in vain for a word or a sign of encouragement from the advocate. M. Magloire remained impenetrable : his face was as impassive as an iron mask.

At last, with a great effort, Jacques resumed,—“ Yes, this calm frightened me more than a storm would have done. To win Denise's love was too great a piece of happiness. I expected a catastrophe, something terrible. I expected it with such absolute certainty, that I had actually made up my mind to confess everything to M. de Chandore. You know him, Magloire. The old gentleman is a pure type of honour and loyalty. I could intrust my secret to him with as perfect safety as I formerly intrusted Genevieve's name to the breezes of the night. Alas ! why did I hesitate ? why did I delay ? One word might have saved me ; and I should not be here, charged with an atrocious crime, innocent, and yet forced to see how plainly you doubt the truth of my words. But fate was against me.

“ After every day postponing my confession until the morrow, during an entire week, I went home one evening, saying :—‘ Within four and twenty hours it shall be done.’ But next morning, while out of doors in the neighbourhood of Boiscoran, I met the cure of Brechy, who is a friend of mine. He asked me to accompany him a short distance, and in reality we walked together as far as the cross-road which passes by Valpinson and the forest of Rochepommier. I was retracing my steps through the wood, when, all on a sudden, some twenty yards off, I saw the Countess

de Claudieuse coming towards me. Despite of my emotion, I kept on my way, determined to bow to her, but to pass without speaking. I did so, and had gone on a little distance, when I heard her call after me. I stopped, or, rather, I was nailed to the spot by that voice which for a long time had so entirely controlled my heart. She walked towards me, looking even more excited than I was. Her lips trembled, and her eyes wandered to and fro. 'Well,' she said, 'it is no longer a fancy : this time you are going to marry Mademoiselle de Chandore.' The time for half-measures had gone by. I answered 'Yes.' 'Then it is really true,' she said again. 'It is all over now. I suppose it would be in vain to remind you of those vows of eternal love which you used to repeat over and over again. Look at those old oaks. They are the same trees, this is the same landscape, and I am still the same woman ; but your heart has changed.' I made no reply. 'You love her very much, do you?' she asked me. I kept obstinately silent. 'I understand,' she said, 'I understand you but too well. And Denise? She loves you so much she cannot keep it to herself. She stops her friends to tell them all about her marriage, and to assure them of her happiness. Oh, yes, indeed, very happy ! The love which was my disgrace is her honour.' I was forced to conceal it like a crime : she can display it as a virtue. Social forms are, after all, very absurd and unjust ; but he is a fool who tries to defy them.' Tears, the very first tears I had ever seen her shed, glittered in her long silky eyelashes."

The recollection seemed to move Jacques even now. His speech faltered, but after a moment he resumed again :—" 'And you,' she said after a short pause,—'are you happy?' I answered that I could not be completely happy as long as I knew that she was unhappy ; still there is no sorrow which time does not heal. You will forget' —'Never,' she cried. And, lowering her voice, she added,—'Can I forget you? Alas ! my crime is fearful ; but the punishment is still more so.' After a moment she said again,—'Well, and when is the wedding?' I hesitated. She herself insisted upon an explanation. 'No day has yet been fixed,' I replied : 'had I not to see you first? You uttered some grave threats once upon a time.' 'And you were afraid?' she asked. I told her 'no,' adding that I believed I knew her too well to fancy she would punish

me for having loved her. 'Besides,' said I, 'so many things have happened since the day when you made those threats!' 'Yes,' she replied, 'many things indeed! My poor father is incorrigible. Once more he has committed himself fearfully; and once more my husband has been compelled to sacrifice a large sum to save him. Ah, the Count de Claudieuse has a noble heart; and it is a great pity I should be the only one towards whom he has failed to show generosity. Such kindness as he shows me is a fresh grievance for me; and yet, by my tacit acceptance of his affection, I have forfeited the right to strike him, as I intended to do. You may marry Denise, Jacques: you have nothing to fear from me.'"

At this point of his recital M. de Boiscoran took two or three hasty strides up and down his cell. "Ah! I had not hoped for so much, Magloire," he said. "Overcome with joy, I seized her hand, and, raising it to my lips, I exclaimed,—'You are the kindest of friends!' But promptly, as if my lips had burnt her hand, she drew it back, and replied, turning very pale,—'No, don't do that!' Then, overcoming her emotion to a certain degree, she added,—'But we must meet once more. You have my letters, I dare say.' 'I have them all,' I answered. 'Well,' she said, 'you must bring them to me. But where? and how? I can hardly absent myself at this time. My youngest daughter—our daughter, Jacques—is very ill. Still, an end must be made. Let us see, on Thursday—are you free then? Yes? Very well, then, come on Thursday evening to Valpinson at about nine o'clock. You will find me at the edge of the wood, near the towers of the old castle.' I asked her if she thought this prudent; she replied that there was no danger. We then parted, and I returned to Sauveterre. It had now become useless for me to confide my secret to M. de Chandore. I felt so happy, and my face bore such evident signs of relief, that Denise exclaimed 'Something very pleasant must have happened to you, Jacques.' 'Oh, yes, very pleasant!' I answered. For the first time I breathed freely as I sat by her side. I could love her now, without fear of my love proving fatal to her. But this security did not last long. On consideration, I thought it very singular that the countess should have chosen such a place for our meeting. 'Can it be a trap?' I asked myself; and all day long on

Thursday I had the most painful presentiments. If I had known how to warn the countess, I should certainly not have gone. But I had no means to send her word ; and I knew her well enough to be sure that if I broke my word I should expose myself to her vengeance. I dined at the usual hour ; and, when I had finished, I went up to my room and wrote to Denise not to expect me that evening, as I should be detained by a matter of the utmost importance. This note was taken to Sauveterre by Michael, one of my tenant's sons, and then I tied all of the countess's letters together, put them in my pocket, took my gun, and went out. It might have been eight o'clock ; but it was still light."

Whether M. Magloire accepted everything that the prisoner said as truth, or not, he was evidently deeply interested. He had drawn up his chair, and uttered some fresh exclamation at every statement.

"Under any other circumstances," said Jacques, "I should have taken one of the two public roads in going to Valpinson. But troubled, as I was, by vague suspicions, I thought only of concealing myself, and cut across the marshes. They had partly overflowed ; but I counted upon my intimate familiarity with the ground, and my agility. I thought, moreover, that by taking this route I should certainly not be seen. In this I was mistaken. When I reached the Seille Canal, and was just about to cross it, I found myself face to face with young Ribot, the son of a Brechy farmer. He looked so surprised at seeing me in such a place, that I thought I ought to give him some explanation ; and, rendered stupid by my troubles, I told him I had business at Brechy, and was crossing the marshes to shoot some birds. 'If that is so,' he replied, laughing, 'we are not after the same kind of game.' He went his way ; but this accident annoyed me seriously. I continued on my way, swearing, I fear, at young Ribot, and found that the path became more and more and dangerous. It was long past nine when at last I reached Valpinson. The spot which the countess had chosen for our meeting was about two hundred yards from the chateau and the farm buildings, and quite close to the wood through which I approached it. Hidden among the trees, I was examining the ground, when I noticed the countess standing near one of the old towers ; she wore a simple

costume of light muslin, which could be seen at a distance. Finding everything quiet, I went up to her. She told me that she had been waiting for me nearly an hour; whereupon I explained the difficulty I had had in coming, and asked after her husband. She told me that he was laid up with the rheumatism, but that he would not wonder at her absence, presuming that she was sitting up with her youngest child. She added that she had left the house by the laundry door, and then at once asked me for her letters. She counted them, remarking that there ought to be eighty-four. Such conduct was insulting on her part, but she did not seem to notice it. When she had ascertained that all her notes were there she drew a packet from her bosom. This packet comprised the letters I had written to her. I expected her to give them to me, but to my surprise, she proposed that we should burn both packages together. I argued that this would be most imprudent, as a fire might be seen. Still she persisted in her idea and asked me if I had any matches. I found I had none, whereupon she stamped her foot vehemently. 'Since that is the case,' she said, 'I'll go indoors and get some.' This would have delayed us, and might have proved an additional imprudence. I saw that I must do what she wanted, and accordingly I took a cartridge out of my gun and emptied it of its shot, which I replaced with a piece of paper. Then, resting my gun on the ground, so as to prevent a loud report, I made the powder flash. We had fire at once; and the letters were immediately ignited. A few minutes later nothing was left of them but a few blackened fragments, which I crumbled in my hands, and scattered to the winds. Immovable, like a statue, the countess had watched my operations. 'And those ashes are all,' she said, 'that remain of five years of our life, of our love, and of your vows.' I replied by a commonplace remark; for I was in a hurry to be gone—a circumstance which she noticed, for she suddenly exclaimed with great vehemence, 'Ah, I inspire you with horror!' The scene which followed was distressing in the extreme. She overloaded me with reproaches, and at last in a spasm of agony she cried, 'Confess that you never really loved me.' I replied that she knew the contrary. 'And Denise?' she asked. 'You are married,' said I. 'You cannot be my wife.' 'But supposing I was free,' she resumed; 'if I

had been a widow?' 'Ah, Genevieve,' I cried, 'then you would have been my wife.' At these words she raised her arms to heaven, and in a voice which I thought could be heard in the house, cried, 'His wife! If I were a widow, I should be his wife! O God! Luckily, that thought, that terrible thought, never occurred to me before.'"

All of a sudden, as Jacques repeated these words, M. Magloire rose from his chair, and placing himself in front of the prisoner, on whom he darted one of those glances which pierce a man's innermost soul, he asked, "And then?"

Jacques had to summon all his remaining energy before he was able to reply,—“Then I tried everything in the world to quiet the countess, to move her, and bring her back to the generous feelings of former days. I was so completely upset that I hardly knew what I was saying. I hated her bitterly, and still I could not help pitying her. I am a man; and there is no man living who would not have been moved at seeing himself the object of such bitter regrets and such terrible despair. Besides, my happiness and Denise's honour were at stake. How do I know what I said? I am not a hero of romance. No doubt I was mean. I humbled myself, I besought her, I told falsehoods, I vowed to her that it was my family, mainly, who made me marry. I hoped I should be able, by great kindness and caressing words, to soften the bitterness of the parting. She remained as impassive as a block of ice; and when I paused she said with a sinister laugh,—‘And you tell me all that! Your Denise! Ah! if I were a woman like other women, I should say nothing to-day, and, before the year was over, you would again be at my feet.’ She must have been thinking of our meeting at the cross-roads. Or was this the last outburst of passion at the moment when the final ties were broken off? I was going to speak again; but she interrupted me brusquely, saying, ‘Oh, that is enough! Spare me, at least, the insult of your pity! I’ll see. I promise nothing. Good-bye!’ So saying she ran towards the house, while I remained rooted to the spot, almost stupefied, and asking myself if she was not, perhaps at that moment, telling the Count de Claudieuse everything that had transpired. It was at that moment I drew the burnt cartridge from my gun almost

mechanically, and inserted a fresh one. Then, as nothing stirred, I went off with a rapid stride."

"What time was it?" asked M. Magloire

"I could not tell you precisely. My state of mind was such, that I had lost all idea of time. I went back through the forest of Rochepommier."

"And you saw nothing?"

"No."

"Heard nothing?"

"Nothing."

"Still, from your statement, you could not have been far from Valpinson when the fire broke out."

"That is true, and in the open country I should certainly have seen the fire; but I was in a dense wood: the trees cut off all view."

"And these same trees prevented the sound of the two shots fired at Count Claudieuse from reaching your ear?"

"They might have helped to prevent it; but there was no need for that. I was walking against the wind which was very high; and it is an established fact, that under such circumstances the sound of a gun is not heard beyond fifty yards."

M. Magloire once more could hardly restrain his impatience; and, utterly unconscious that he was even harsher than the magistrate, he said, "And you think your statement explains everything?"

"I believe that my statement, which is founded upon the most exact truth, explains the charges brought against me by M. Galpin Daveline. It explains how I tried to keep my visit to Valpinson a secret: how I was met in going and coming back, at hours which correspond with the time of the fire. It explains, finally, why at first I refused to speak, how one of my cartridge-cases was found near the ruins, and why I had to wash my hands when I reached home."

Nothing seemed to be able to shake the lawyer's conviction. "And the day after, when they came to arrest you," he asked, "what was your first impression?"

"I thought at once of Valpinson."

"And when you were told that a crime had been committed?"

"I said to myself, 'The countess wants to be a widow.'"

All M. Magloire's blood seemed to rush to his face

"Unhappy man!" he cried. "How can you dare to accuse the Countess de Claudieuse of such a crime?"

Indignation gave Jacques strength to reply, "Whom else should I accuse? A crime has been committed, and under such circumstances that it can only have been committed by her or by myself. I am innocent; consequently she is guilty."

"Why did you not say so at once?"

Jacques shrugged his shoulders, and replied in a tone of bitter irony,—“How many times, and in how many ways, do you want me to give you my reasons? I kept silent the first day, because I did not then know the circumstances of the crime, and because I was reluctant to accuse a woman who had given me her love, and who had become criminal from passion; because, in fine, I did not think at that time that I was in danger. Afterwards I kept silent because I hoped that justice would succeed in discovering the truth, or that the countess would be unable to bear the idea that I, the innocent one, should be accused. Still later, when I saw my danger, I was afraid.”

“You do not tell the truth,” urged the advocate impatiently, “and I will tell you why you kept silent. It is difficult to make up a story that shall account for everything. But you are a clever man: you thought the matter over, and concocted this story in which there is nothing lacking except probability. You might tell me that the Countess de Claudieuse has unfairly enjoyed the reputation of a saint, and that she has given you her love; perhaps I might be willing to believe it. But when you say she set her own house on fire, and took up a gun to shoot her husband, that I can never, never credit.”

“Still it is the truth.”

“No; for the evidence of the Count de Claudieuse is precise. He saw his murderer: it was a man who fired at him.”

“And who tells you that the Count de Claudieuse does not know everything, and wants to save his wife and ruin me? There would be a vengeance for him.”

This objection took the advocate by surprise; but he rejected it at once, “Ah! be silent,” he cried, “or prove what you say.”

“All the letters are burned.”

"When one has been a woman's lover for five years, there are always proofs."

"But you see there are none."

"Do not insist," repeated M. Magloire. And, in a voice full of pity and emotion, he added, "Unhappy man! Do you not feel that, in order to escape from one crime, you are committing another which is a thousand times worse?"

Jacques wrung his hands. "It is enough to drive me mad," he cried.

"And even if I, your friend," continued M. Magloire, "should believe you, how would that help you? Would any one else believe it? Look here, I will tell you exactly what I think. Even if I were perfectly sure of all the facts you mention, I should never plead them in my defence, unless I had proofs. To plead them, understand me well, would be to ruin yourself inevitably."

"Still they must be pleaded; for they are the truth."

"Then," said M. Magloire, "you must look for another advocate." So saying he walked towards the door. He was on the point of leaving, when Jacques cried out, almost in agony,—*"Great God, he forsakes me!"*

"No," replied the advocate; "but I cannot discuss matters with you in the state of excitement in which you now are. You will think the matter over, and I will come again to-morrow." With these words he left the cell. Utterly undone, Jacques sank down on one of the prison chairs. "It is all over," he stammered: "I am lost!"

XV.

IN the meanwhile all the inmates of M. de Chandore's house were suffering intense anxiety. At eight o'clock in the morning the two aunts, the old gentleman, the marchioness, and M. Folgat assembled in the drawing-room, where they remained waiting to know the result of M. Magloire's interview with the prisoner. Denise, who came downstairs somewhat later, was, as every one remarked, more carefully dressed than usual, having actually persuaded herself that one word from Jacques would suffice to convince the celebrated lawyer, and that he would re-appear triumphant on M. Magloire's arm. After a couple of

hours had been passed, in anxious expectation, the party were joined by M. Seneschal, and subsequently by Dr. Seignebos, but it was not until a few minutes past eleven o'clock that a servant opened the door, and announced, "M. Magloire."

The eminent advocate looked so gloomy that every one shared the thought which, crossing Denise's mind, led her to exclaim, "Jacques is lost!"

"I believe he is in danger," replied M. Magloire.

"Jacques," murmured the old marchioness, "my son!"

"I said in danger," repeated the advocate; "but I ought to have said, that he is in a strange, almost incredible, unnatural position."

"Let us hear," exclaimed the marchioness.

The lawyer was evidently very much embarrassed, and looked with unmistakable distress, first at Denise, and then at the two aunts. Nobody noticing his glance, he at length remarked, "I must ask to be left alone with these gentlemen."

The Demoiselles de Lavarande rose in the most docile manner and led their niece and Jacques's mother, the latter of whom was evidently near fainting, out of the room with them. As soon as the door was shut, Grandpapa Chandore, oppressed with grief, excitedly exclaimed, "Thanks, M. Magloire, thanks for having given me time to prepare my poor child for the terrible blow. I see but too well what you are going to say. Jacques is guilty."

"Stop," replied the advocate: "I have said nothing of the kind. M. de Boiscoran still protests energetically that he is innocent; but his defence is based on a fact which is so entirely improbable, so utterly inadmissible—"

"But what does he say?" asked M. Seneschal impatiently.

"He says that the Countess de Claudieuse was his mistress, and accuses her of being the guilty party."

Dr. Seignebos started, and, re-adjusting his spectacles, cried triumphantly, "I said so! I guessed it!"

Naturally enough, M. Folgat had no deliberative voice on this occasion. He came from Paris with Parisian ideas; and, whatever he might have been told, the name of the Countess de Claudieuse had for him no particular signification. From the effect which it produced upon the others, however, he could judge what Jacques's accu-

sation meant. Far from being of the doctor's opinion, M. de Chandore and M. Seneschal both seemed to be quite as much shocked as M. Magloire.

"It is incredible," said the first.

"It is impossible," added the other. M. Magloire shook his head. "That is exactly what I told Jacques," he remarked. Regardless, however, of what others might say, the doctor was not the man to forego his personal opinion.

"Don't you hear what I say?" he exclaimed. "Don't you understand me? The proof that the thing is neither so incredible nor so impossible is, that I suspected it. And there were signs of it, moreover. Why on earth should a man like Jacques, young, rich, and handsome, in love with a charming girl, and beloved by her, why should he amuse himself with setting houses on fire, and killing people? You tell me he did not like the Count de Claudieuse. Upon my word! If everybody who does not like Dr. Seignebos were to come and fire at him forthwith, my my body would look like a sieve! Among you all, M. Folgat is the only one who has not been absolutely blind." The young lawyer would have protested: but the doctor cut him short. "Yes, sir," he said, turning to M. Folgat, "you saw it all; and the proof of it is, that you at once went to work in search of the real motive of this crime—the heart,—in search of the woman who was at the bottom of the riddle. The proof of it is, that you moreover went and asked everybody,—Anthony, M. de Chandore, M. Seneschal, and myself,—if M. de Boiscoran had not now, or had not previously had, some love-affair in the district. Every one said No, being far from suspecting the truth. I alone, without giving you a positive answer, told you that I thought as you did, and told you so in M. de Chandore's presence."

"That is true!" replied the old gentleman and M. Folgat.

Dr. Seignebos was radiant with triumph. Still gesticulating, he added,—“You see I have learnt to mistrust appearances; and hence I had my misgivings from the beginning. I watched the Countess de Claudieuse the night of the fire; and I saw that she looked embarrassed, troubled, suspicious. I wondered at her readiness to yield to M. Galpin's whim, and to allow Cocoleu to be exam-

ined ; for I knew that she was the only one who could ever make that so-called idiot talk. You see I have good eyes, gentlemen, in spite of my spectacles. Well, I swear by all I hold most sacred, on my Republican faith, I am ready to affirm upon oath, that when Cocoleu uttered Jacques de Boiscoran's name, the countess exhibited no sign of surprise. On the contrary, her eyes expressed fierce, bitter hatred, joy and vengeance. And that is not all. When the Count de Claudieuse was roused by the fire, was the countess with him? No, she was nursing her youngest daughter, who had the measles. *Hm!* what do you think of measles which make sitting up at night-time necessary? And when the two shots were fired, where was the countess then? Still with her daughter, on the opposite side of the house where the conflagration commenced."

"I beg you will notice, doctor," retorted M. Seneschal, "that the Count de Claudieuse himself deposed, that when he ran to the fire, he found the door shut from within, just as he had left it a few hours before."

Dr. Seignebos bowed ironically. "Is there really only one door in the chateau at Valpinson?" he asked.

"To my knowledge," said M. de Chandore, "there are at least three."

"And I must say," added M. Magloire, "that, according to M. de Boiscoran's statement the countess went out by the laundry-door when she came to meet him that evening."

"What did I say?" exclaimed the doctor. Then, wiping his glasses in a perfect rage, he added,—*"And the children! Does M. Seneschal think it natural that the Countess de Claudieuse,—this incomparable mother in his estimation—should forget her children in the height of the fire?"*

"What! The poor woman is called out by the discharge of fire-arms; she sees her house on fire, stumbles over the lifeless body of her husband, and you blame her for not having preserved all her presence of mind."

"That is one view of it; but it is not the one I take. I rather think that the countess, having been delayed out of doors, was prevented by the fire from re-entering the house. I think also that Cocoleu came by very opportunely; and that it was very lucky Providence should in

spire his mind with that sublime idea of saving the children at the risk of his life. Supported by all these facts," continued the doctor, seeing that M. Seneschal didn't venture to raise any fresh objection, "my suspicions became so strong that I determined to ascertain the truth if I could. The next day I questioned the countess, and, I must confess, rather treacherously. Her replies and her looks were not such as to modify my views. When I asked her looking straight into her eyes, what she thought of Cocoleu's mental condition, she nearly fainted; and I could scarcely hear her when she said that she had occasionally caught glimpses of intelligence in him. When I asked her if Cocoleu was fond of her, she said, in a most embarrassed manner, that his devotion was that of an animal which is grateful for the care taken of him. What do you think of that, gentlemen? To me it appeared that Cocoleu was at the bottom of the whole affair; that he knew the truth; and that I should be able to save Jacques, if I could prove Cocoleu's imbecility to be assumed, and his speechlessness to be an imposture. And I would have proved it, if they had associated with me any one else but an ass of Sauverterre and a jackanapes from Paris." The doctor paused for a few seconds; but, before any one had time to reply, he went on again. "Now, let us go back to our point of departure, and draw our conclusions. Why do you think it so improbable and impossible that the Countess de Claudieuse should have betrayed her duties? Because she has a world-wide reputation for purity and prudence? Well, but was not Jacques de Boiscoran's reputation as a man of honour also above all doubt? According to your views, it is absurd to suspect the countess of having had a lover. According to my notions, it is absurd that Jacques should, within a few hours, have become a scoundrel."

"Oh! that is not the same thing," said M. Seneschal.

"Certainly not!" replied the doctor, "and there you are right for once. If M. de Boiscoran had committed this offence, it would be one of those absurd crimes which revolt us; but, if committed by the countess, it is only the catastrophe prepared by the Count de Claudieuse himself on the day when he married a woman thirty years younger than he was."

The doctor had said quite enough to make his friends very thoughtful. "You would have converted me, doctor,"

remarked M. Folgat, "if I had not been of your opinion before."

"I am sure," added M. de Chandore, "the thing no longer looks impossible."

"Nothing is impossible," said M. Seneschal, like a philosopher.

The eminent advocate of Sauveterre alone remained unmoved. "Well," said he, "I would rather admit one hour of utter insanity even than five years of such monstrous hypocrisy. Jacques may have committed the crime, and be nothing but a madman; but, if the countess is guilty, one might despair of mankind, and renounce all faith in this world. I have seen her, gentlemen, with her husband and her children. No one can feign such looks of tenderness and affection."

"He will never give her up!" growled Dr. Seignebos, and touching his friend on the shoulder,—for M. Magloire had been his bosom companion for many years,—he added:—"Ah! There I recognise my friend, the strange lawyer, who judges others by himself, and refuses to believe in anything bad. Oh, do not protest! for we love and honour you for that very faith, and are proud to see you among us Republicans. But I must confess you are not the man to enlighten such a dark intrigue. At twenty-eight you married a girl whom you loved dearly: you lost her, and ever since you have remained faithful to her memory, and lived so far from all passions that you no longer believe in their existence. Happy man! Your heart is still at twenty; and with your gray hair you still believe in woman's tender looks."

There was much truth in this; but there are certain truths which we are not over-fond of hearing. "My simplicity has nothing to do with the matter," said M. Magloire. "I affirm and maintain that a man who has been a woman's lover for five years must possess some proof of the intimacy."

"Well, there you are mistaken, sir," said the physician, arranging his spectacles with an air of self-conceit, which, under other circumstances, would, have been irresistibly ludicrous.

"When women determine to be prudent and suspicious," remarked M. de Chandore, "they never are so by halves."

"It is evident, besides," added M. Folgat, "that the Countess de Claudieuse would never have determined upon so bold a crime, if she had not been quite sure, that after the burning of her letters, no proof could be brought against her."

"That's it!" cried the doctor.

M. Magloire did not conceal his impatience. "Unfortunately, gentlemen," he said dryly, "it does not depend on you either to acquit or condemn M. de Boiscoran. I am not here to convince you, or to be convinced: I came to discuss our line of conduct, and the basis of our defence."

M. Magloire was evidently right in this estimate of his duty. Rising from his chair he went and leant against the mantelpiece; then, when the others had taken their seats around him, he began,—“In the first place, I will admit M. de Boiscoran's allegations. He is innocent. He has been the Countess de Claudieuse's lover, but he has no proof of it. This being granted, what is to be done? Shall I advise him to send for the investigating magistrate, and to confess it all!”

No one replied at first. It was only after a long silence that Dr. Seignebois said, "That would be a very serious step."

"Very serious, indeed," repeated the advocate. "Our own feelings give us the measure of what M. Galpin will think. First of all, he also will ask for proof, the evidence of a witness, anything, in fact. And, when Jacques tells him that he has nothing to give but his word, M. Galpin will tell him that he does not speak the truth."

"He might, perhaps, consent to extend the investigation," said M. Seneschal. "He might possibly summon the countess."

M. Magloire nodded affirmatively. "He would certainly summon her," he said. "But, then, would she confess? It would be madness to expect that. If she is guilty, she is far too strong-minded to let the truth escape her. She would deny everything, haughtily, magnificently, and in such a manner as not to leave a shadow of doubt."

"That is only too probable," growled the doctor. "Galpin is not the strongest of men."

"What would be the result of such a step?" asked M. Magloire. "M. de Boiscoran's case would be a hundred

times worse ; for the odium of the meanest, vilest, calumny would be added to his crime."

M. Folgat was following with the utmost attention. "I am very glad to hear my honourable colleague give utterance to that opinion," he said. "We must give up all idea of delaying the proceedings, and let M. de Boiscoran go into court at once."

M. de Chandore raised his hands to heaven, as if in sheer despair. "But Denise will die of grief and shame," he exclaimed.

"Well," continued M. Magloire, regardless of this last interruption, "suppose we are before the court at Sauvetterre, before a jury composed of people from the district, incapable of prevarication, I am sure, but, unfortunately, under the influence of that public opinion which has long since condemned M. de Boiscoran. The proceedings begin ; the judge questions the accused. Will he say what he told me,—that, after having been the Countess de Claudieuse's lover he went to Valpinson to carry her back her letters, and to get his own, and that they are all burnt? Suppose he says so. Immediately there will arise a storm of indignation ; and he will be overwhelmed with curses and contempt. Well, thereupon, the president of the court uses his discretionary powers, suspends the trial, and sends for the Countess de Claudieuse. Since we look upon her as guilty, we must needs endow her with supernatural energy. She will have foreseen what is coming, and will have prepared her part. When summoned, she appears, pale, dressed in black ; and a murmur of respectful sympathy greets her entrance. You see her before you, don't you? The president explains to her why she has been sent for, and she does not comprehend. She cannot possibly comprehend such an abominable calumny. But when she has comprehended it? Do you not see the lofty look by which she crushes Jacques, and the grandeur with which she replies, 'When this man had failed in his endeavour to murder my husband, he tried to disgrace his wife. I entrust to your keeping my honour as a mother and a wife, gentlemen. I shall not answer the infamous charges of this abject calumniator.'"

"And that means the galleys for Jacques," exclaimed M. de Chandore, "or even the scaffold!"

"That would be the maximum, at all events," replied

the advocate of Sauveterre. "But the trial goes on; the public prosecutor demands an overwhelming punishment; and at last the prisoner's counsel is called upon to speak. Gentlemen, you were impatient at my persistence. I confess I do not credit M. de Boiscoran's statement. But my young colleague here does credit it. Well, let him tell us candidly. Would he dare to plead this statement, and assert that the Countess de Claudieuse had been Jacques's mistress?"

M. Folgat looked annoyed. "I don't know," he said in an undertone.

"Well, I know you would not," exclaimed M. Magloire: "and you would be right, for you would risk your reputation without the slightest chance of saving Jacques. Yes, no chance whatever! for after all, let us suppose, even if you did prove that Jacques has told the truth, that he was the countess's lover, what would happen then? They would arrest the countess. Would they release M. de Boiscoran on that account? Certainly not! They would keep him in prison, and say to him, 'This woman has tried to murder her husband; she was your mistress, and you are her accomplice.' That is the situation, gentlemen!"

Grandpapa Chandore was terrified by this *expose*. He rose, and in an almost inaudible voice exclaimed, "Ah, all is over indeed! Innocent, or guilty, Jacques de Boiscoran will be condemned." M. Magloire made no reply. "And that," continued the old gentleman, "is what you call justice!"

"Alas!" sighed M. Seneschal, "it is useless to deny it: trials by jury are a lottery—"

M. de Chandore, driven nearly crazy by his despair, interrupted him,—“In other words, Jacques's honour and life depend at this hour on a chance,—on the weather on the day of his trial, or the health of a juror. And if Jacques were the only one! but there is Denise, gentlemen, my poor child's life, is also at stake. If you strike Jacques, you strike Denise!”

M. Folgat could hardly restrain himself. M. Seneschal, and even the doctor, sympathised with the old man's grief. Was he not threatened in his nearest, his dearest affection—in his one great love upon earth? He had taken the hand of the great advocate of Sauveterre, and, pressing it convulsively, "You will save him, Magloire,

won't you?" he stammered. "What does it matter whether he be innocent or guilty, since Denise loves him? You have saved so many in your life! It is well known the judges cannot resist the weight of your words. You will find means to save a poor, unhappy man who was once your friend."

The eminent lawyer looked cast down, as if he had been guilty himself. Dr. Seignebos saw this, and exclaimed, "What do you mean, friend Magloire? Are you no longer the man whose marvellous eloquence is the pride of our country? Hold your head up: for shame! Never was a nobler cause entrusted to you."

But the advocate shook his head, and murmured,—“I have no faith in it, as I have already explained to you; and I cannot plead when my conscience does not furnish the arguments,” then in a more embarrassed tone he added,—“Seignebos was right in saying just now, that I am not the man for such a cause. All my experience would be of no use. It will be better to intrust it to my young brother here.”

For the first time in his life, M. Folgat had met with a case such as enables a man to rise to eminence—a case which might ensure him a great future. In the Valpinson affair all the elements of supreme interest were united—magnitude of crime, eminence of the victim, character of the accused, mystery, variation of opinion, difficulty of defence, and uncertainty of issue,—in a word it was one of those cases to which an advocate devotes all his energies, and in which he shares all his client's anxiety and hopes. He would readily have sacrificed five years' income to be entrusted with the management of the defence; but he was, above all, an honest man. Accordingly, he asked, “You would not think of abandoning M. de Boiscoran, M. Magloire?”

“You will be more useful to him than I can be,” was the reply.

Perhaps M. Folgat was inwardly of the same opinion. Still he said,—“You have not considered what an effect this would have. What would the public think if they heard all of a sudden that you had withdrawn? They would say, ‘M. de Boiscoran's affair must be a very bad one indeed for M. Magloire to refuse to plead for him’—And such a comment would prove an additional blow for the prisoner.”

At this point the doctor interposed. "Magloire is not at liberty to withdraw," he said; "but he has the right to associate a brother-lawyer with himself. He must remain M. de Boiscoran's advocate and counsel, but M. Folgat can lend him the assistance of his advice, the support of his youth, his activity, and eloquence."

A passing blush coloured the young lawyer's cheeks. "I am entirely at M. Magloire's service," he said.

The famous advocate of Sauveterre considered a while. After a few moments he turned to his young colleague, and asked him,—“Have you any plan? any idea? What would you do?”

Then it was that to every one's astonishment, M. Folgat revealed in a measure his true character. He looked taller, his face brightened up, his eyes shone, and his voice had a sonorous metallic ring, as he replied, "First of all, I should go and see M. de Boiscoran with the view of arriving at a final decision. Still I have already formed a plan. I, gentlemen, I have faith, as I told you before. I do not believe the man whom Mademoiselle Denise loves to be a criminal. You ask, what would I do?—I would prove the truth of M. de Boiscoran's statement. Can that be done? I hope so. He tells us that there are no proofs nor witnesses of his intimacy with the Countess de Claudieuse. I am sure he is mistaken. She has shown, he says, extraordinary care and prudence. That may be. But mistrust challenges suspicion; and when you take the greatest precautions, you are most likely to be watched. You want to hide, and you are discovered. You see nobody; but others see you. If I were charged with the defence, therefore, I should commence to-morrow a counter-investigation. We have money, the Marquis de Boiscoran has influential connections; and we should have help everywhere. Before forty-eight hours are over, I should have experienced agents at work. I know the Rue des Vignes at Passy: it is a lonely street; but it has eyes, as all streets have. Why should not some of those eyes have noticed the countess's mysterious visits? My agents would inquire from house to house. Nor would it be necessary to mention names. They would not be charged with a search after the Countess de Claudieuse, but after an unknown lady, dressed so and so; and, if they should discover any one who had seen her, and who could

identify her, that man would be our first witness. In the mean time, I should go in search of M. de Boiscoran's friend, the Englishman, whose name he assumed; and the London police would aid me in my efforts. If that Englishman is dead, we should hear of it, and it would be a misfortune. If he is only at the other end of the world, the transatlantic cable enables us to question him, and to be answered in a week. I should, at the same time, send detectives after the English maid-servant who attended to the house at the Rue des Vignes. M. de Boiscoran declares that she never even caught a glimpse of the countess. I do not believe it. A servant is naturally curious, and, despite the obstacles thrown in her way, is bound to have seen the woman who visits her master. And that is not all. There were other people who came to the house in the Rue des Vignes. I should examine them one by one,—the gardener and his help, the water-carrier, the upholsterer, the trades-people's errand boys. Who can say whether one of them is not in possession of the facts which we are seeking? Finally, when a woman has spent so many days in a house, it is almost impossible that she should not have left some traces of her passage behind her. Since then, you will say, there has been the war, and afterwards the Commune. Nevertheless, I should examine the ruins, every tree in the garden, every pane in the windows if necessary: I should compel the very mirrors that have escaped destruction to give me back the image which they have so often reflected."

"Ah, I call that speaking!" cried the doctor full of enthusiasm.

The others trembled with excitement. They felt that the struggle was commencing. But, unmindful of the impression he had produced, M. Folgat went on,—“Here, in Sauveterre the task would be more difficult; but, in case of success, the result, also, would be more decisive. I should bring down from Paris one of those keen, subtle detectives who have made their profession an art, and I should know how to stimulate his vanity. He, of course, would have to be told everything, even the names; but there would be no danger in that. His desire to succeed, the splendour of the reward, even his professional habits, would be our security. He would come down secretly, concealed under whatever disguise would appear to him

most useful for his purpose ; and he would recommence, for the benefit of the defence, the investigation carried on by M. Galpin for the benefit of the prosecution. Would he discover anything? We can but hope so. I know detectives, who, by the aid of smaller material, have unravelled far deeper mysteries."

Grandpapa Chandore, M. Seneschal, Dr. Seignebos, and even M. Magloire, were literally drinking in the Paris advocate's words.

"But that is not all, gentlemen," he continued. "By no means! Thanks to his great experience, Dr. Seignebos had, on the very first day, instinctively guessed who was the most important personage of this drama, Cocoleu! Whether he be actor, confidant, or eye-witness, Cocoleu has evidently the key to this mystery. This key we must make every effort to obtain from him. Medical experts have declared him idiotic; nevertheless, we protest. We claim that the imbecility of this wretch is partly assumed. We maintain that his obstinate silence is a vile imposture. What! he should have intelligence enough to testify against us, and yet not have enough of it now left to explain, or even to repeat his evidence? That is inadmissible. We maintain that he keeps silence now just as he spoke that night,—by order. If his silence were less profitable for the prosecution, they would soon find some means to break it. We demand that such means should be employed. We demand that the person who has before been able to loosen his tongue should be sent for, and ordered to try the experiment over again. We call for a new examination by experts: for it is not possible in forty-eight hours to judge of a man's true mental condition, especially when that man is suspected of being an impostor. And we require, above all, that the new experts should be duly qualified by knowledge and experience."

Dr. Seignebos was quivering with excitement. He heard all his own ideas repeated in a concise, energetic manner. "Yes," he cried, "that is the way to accomplish it! Let me have full power, and in less than a fortnight Cocoleu is unmasked."

Less expansive than Dr. Seignebos, the eminent advocate of Sauveterre simply shook hands with M. Folgat. "You see," said he, "M. de Boiscoran's case ought to be placed in your hands."

The young lawyer made no effort to protest. When he began to speak, his determination was already formed. "Whatever can humbly be done," he replied, "I will do. If I accept the task, I shall devote heart and soul to it. But I insist, and it must be publicly announced, that M. Magloire does not withdraw from the case, and that I act only as his junior."

"Agreed," said the old advocate.

"Well. When shall we go and see M. de Boiscoran?"

"To-morrow morning."

"I can, of course, take no steps till I have seen him."

"No; and you cannot be admitted, except by a special permission from M. Galpin; and I doubt if we can procure one to-day."

"That is provoking."

"No, since we have our work all cut out for to-day. We have to go over all the papers of the proceedings, which the magistrate has placed in my hands."

Dr. Seignebos was boiling over with impatience. "Oh, what words!" he interrupted. "Go to work, Mr. Advocate, to work, I say. Come, shall we be off?"

They were leaving the room when M. de Chandore summoned them back by a gesture. "So far, gentlemen," he said, "we have thought of Jacques alone. What about Denise?" The others looked at him, full of surprise.

"What am I to say if she questions me concerning the result of M. Magloire's interview with Jacques, and why you would say nothing in her presence?"

"You will tell her the truth," said Dr. Seignebos.

"What! How can I tell her that Jacques was the Countess de Claudieuse's lover?"

"She will hear of it sooner or later. Mademoiselle Denise is a sensible, energetic girl."

"Yes; but Mademoiselle Denise is as innocent as an angel," broke in M. Folgat eagerly, "and she loves M. de Boiscoran. Why should we trouble her purity and happiness? Is she not unhappy enough? M. de Boiscoran is no longer kept in close confinement. He will see his betrothed, and, if he thinks proper, he can tell her. He alone has the right to do so. I shall, however, dissuade him. From what I know of Mademoiselle de Chandore's character, it would be impossible for her to control herself, if she should meet the Countess de Claudieuse."

"M. de Chandore ought not to say anything," observed M. Magloire decisively. "It is too much, already, to have to intrust the marchioness with the secret; for you must not forget, gentlemen, that the slightest indiscretion would certainly ruin all M. Folgat's delicate plans."

Thereupon they all left the room, with the exception of M. de Chandore, who mused to himself,—“Yes, they are right; but what am I to say?” He was thinking the matter over almost painfully, when a maid came to tell him that Denise wished to see him. He followed the girl with hesitating steps, trying to compose his features so as to efface all traces of the emotion through which he had just passed. The two aunts had taken Denise and the marchioness to a room on the upper floor. Here M. de Chandore found them all assembled,—the marchioness, pale and overcome, extended in an easy-chair; Denise walking up and down with burning cheeks and blazing eyes. As soon as he entered, she asked him in a sharp, sad voice,—“Well, there is no hope, I suppose?”

“More hope than ever, on the contrary,” he replied, trying to smile.

“Then why did M. Magloire send us all out of the room?”

The old gentleman had had time to prepare a fib. “Because M. Magloire had a piece of bad news to communicate. There is no chance of a true bill not being found. Jacques will have to appear in court.”

The marchioness sprung up like a piece of mechanism. “What! Jacques before the assizes?” she cried. “My son! A Boiscoran!” And so saying she fell back into her chair.

Not a muscle in Denise's face had moved, but it was in a strange tone of voice that she remarked,—“I was prepared for something worse. It is possible to avoid the court.”

With these words she left the room, shutting the door so violently, that both the Demoiselles de Lavarande hastened after her. M. de Chandore thought he might now speak freely. He went towards the marchioness, and gave vent to that pent up wrath which had been rising within him for some time past. “Your son,” he cried, “your Jacques, I wish he were dead a thousand times! The wretch killing my child; you see he is killing her.”

And, without pity, he told her the whole story of Jacques's connection with the Countess de Claudieuse. The marchioness was overcome. She even ceased to sob, and had not strength enough left to ask him to have pity on her, but whom he had finished, she murmured to herself with an expression of unspeakable suffering,—“My God! what a punishment!”

XVI.

ON leaving the Baron de Chandore's house, M. Folgat and M. Magloire went at once to the offices of the public prosecutor to examine the various papers relating to the case, permission to do so having been granted by M. Galpin-Daveline. On their arrival they immediately began to search for any documents concerning Cocoleu, but to their surprise they found none. There was not a trace of the idiot's statement on the night of the fire, of the efforts since made to obtain from him the confirmation of his original evidence, or of the experts' reports. Evidently M. Galpin-Daveline had thought fit to drop Cocoleu altogether. Of course he had a right to do so; for the prosecution need only call the witnesses it considers useful, having the right to ignore all the others. “Ah, that investigating magistrate's a clever fellow,” growled M. Magloire, as he glanced at the various documents. And, in truth, it was really very well managed. By this step M. Galpin deprived the defence of a most valuable instrument, and of a sure means of provoking an incident at the trial, by which the jury might be influenced in the prisoner's favour; for although the defence itself might summon the supposed idiot before the court, yet in that case the effect would no longer be the same. If Cocoleu appeared for M. Galpin, as a witness for the prosecution, the defence could exclaim with indignation,—“What! You accuse the prisoner upon such a creature's testimony?” But, if he had to be summoned by the defence, as prisoner's evidence, that is to say as one of those witnesses whom the jury always suspect, then the prosecution in its turn would be able to exclaim,—“What do you hope for from a poor idiot, whose mental condition is such, that we refused his evidence when it might have been most useful? The entire character of the case appears to be changed,” murmured M. Folgat. “But then how can M. Galpin prove Jacques de Boiscoran's guilt?”

Oh! in the simplest possible manner. He would start with the fact that the Count de Claudieuse was able to give the precise hour at which the crime was committed. Thence he would pass on immediately to the evidence of young Ribot, who met M. de Boiscoran crossing the marshes, on his way to Valpinson, before the crime; next to that of Gaudry, who had seen him come back from Valpinson through the woods, after the conflagration. Three others witnesses who had turned up during the investigation would confirm this evidence; and, by these means alone, and by comparing the hours, M. Galpin would succeed in proving, almost beyond doubt, that the accused had gone to Valpinson, and nowhere else, and that he had been there at the time the crime was committed. What was he doing there? To this question the prosecution would reply by the evidence taken on the first day of the inquiry, by the water in which Jacques washed his hands, the cartridge-case found near the house, and the identity of the shot extracted from the count's wounds with those seized with the gun at Boiscoran. Everything would be plain, precise, and formidable, admitting of no discussion, no doubt, no suggestion. It would look like a mathematical deduction.

"Whether he be innocent or guilty," said M. Magloire to his young colleague, "Jacques is lost if we cannot get hold of some evidence against the Countess de Claudieuse. And even if it should be established that she is guilty, Jacques will always be looked upon as her accomplice."

Nevertheless, they spent a part of the night in going over all the papers carefully, and in studying every point made by the prosecution. Next morning, about nine o'clock, having had only a few hours sleep, they went together to the prison.

The night before, the jailer had said to his wife, at supper,—“I am tired of the life I am leading here. They have paid me for my place, haven't they? Well, I mean to go.”

“You are a fool!” his wife had replied. “As long as M. de Boiscoran is a prisoner, there is a chance of profit. You don't know how rich those Chandores are. You ought to stay.”

Like many other husbands, Blangin fancied he was master in his own house. He remonstrated. He swore

enough to make the ceiling fall down upon him. He even appealed to the strength of his arm, and yet, notwithstanding all this, Madame Blangin having decided that he should stay, he did stay. Sitting in front of the jail, and absorbed in the most dismal thoughts, he was smoking his pipe, when M. Magloire and M. Folgat appeared at the prison gate, and handed him M. Galpin's order for admission. He rose as they approached, for he was afraid of them, not knowing whether they were in Denise's secret or not. He therefore politely doffed his worsted cap, took his pipe from his mouth, and said, "Ah! You come to see M. de Boiscoran, gentlemen? I will show you in: just give me time to go for my keys."

M. Magloire held him back. "First of all," he said, "how is M. de Boiscoran?"

"Only so-so," replied the jailer.

"What is the matter?"

"Why what is the matter with all the prisoners when they see that things are likely to turn out badly for them?"

The two lawyers looked at each others sadly. It was clear that Blangin thought Jacques guilty, and that was a bad omen. Those who guard prisoners have generally a keen scent; and not unfrequently lawyers consult them, very much as an author consults the actors of the theatre at which his piece is to appear. "Has he told you anything?" asked M. Folgat.

"Personally, I have heard nothing," replied the jailer. And, shaking his head, he added,— "But you know we have our experience. After a prisoner has been with his counsel, I generally go to see him, to offer him something,—some little trifle to set him right again. So, yesterday, after M. Magloire had been here, I went to M. de Boiscoran's cell and found him in a pitiful condition. He was lying on his bed, his head on the pillow, as stiff as a corpse. It was some time before he heard me. I shook my keys, I stamped and coughed. No use. As I was growing frightened, I went up to him, and took him by the shoulder. 'Eh, sir!' said I. Good heavens! he sprang up as if shot, and exclaimed, 'What do you want?' Of course, I tried to console him, to explain to him that he ought to speak out; that it is rather unpleasant to appear in court, but that people don't die of it; that they even come out of it as white as snow, if they have a good advocate. But I might

just as well have been singing. The more I talked, the fiercer he looked, and at last he cried, without letting me finish, 'Get out, get out! Leave me!'"

Blangin paused a moment to take a whiff at his pipe; but it had gone out: accordingly he put it in his pocket, and then continued,—“I might have told him that I had a right to come into the cells whenever I liked, and to stay there as long as it pleases me. But prisoners are like children: you must not worry them. Still I opened the wicket of the door and remained outside watching him. Ah, gentlemen, I have been here twenty years, and I have seen many despairing men; but I never saw any despair like this young man's. He had jumped up as soon as I turned my back, and was walking up and down, sobbing aloud. He looked as pale as death; and big tears were running down his cheeks.

M. Magloire felt pained at listening to each one of these details. His opinion had not materially changed since the day before; but he had had time to reflect and to reproach himself for his harshness.

“I was at my post for an hour at least,” continued the jailer, “when all of a sudden M. de Boiscoran throws himself against the door, and begins to knock at it with his feet, and to call as loud as he can. I keep him waiting a little while, so that he should not know I was so near by, and then I open, pretending to have hurried up ever so fast. As soon as I show myself he says, ‘I have the right to receive visitors, haven't I? And nobody has been to see me?’—‘No one.’—‘Are you sure?’—‘Quite sure.’ I thought I had killed him. He put his hands to his forehead like this; and then he said, ‘No one!—no mother, no betrothed, no friend! Well, it is all over! I am no longer in existence. I am forgotten, abandoned, disowned.’ He said this in a voice that would have drawn tears from a stone; whereupon I suggested to him to write a letter, which I would send to M. de Chandore. But he at once became furious again, and cried, ‘No, never! go away! There is nothing left for me but death.’”

M. Folgat had not uttered a word; but his pallor betrayed his emotion.

“You will understand, gentlemen,” continued Blangin, that I did not feel quite satisfied. The cell in which M. de Boiscoran is staying has a bad reputation. Since I have

been at Sauveterre, one man has killed himself in it, and another has tried to commit suicide. So I called Frumence Cheminot, a poor vagrant who assists me in the jail; and we arranged that one of us would always be on guard, never losing sight of the prisoner for a moment. But it was a useless precaution. At night, when M. de Boiscoran's supper was brought him, he was perfectly calm again; and he even said he would try to eat something to keep up his strength. Poor fellow! If he has no other strength than what his meal gave him, he won't go far. He had not swallowed four mouthfuls, when he almost choked; and at one time Frumence and I thought he would die in our hands; I almost thought it might be fortunate. However, at about nine o'clock he got a little better, and remained all night long sitting by the window."

M. Magloire could stand it no longer. "Let us go up," he said to his colleague.

They entered, and as they reached the passage conducting to Jacques's cell, they noticed Frumence, who made them a sign to step lightly. "What is the matter?" they asked in an undertone.

"I believe he is asleep," replied the vagrant. "Poor fellow! Who knows but what he dreams he is free, at home in his chateau?"

M. Folgat walked on tiptoe towards the door, but Jacques was already awake, the noise of the footsteps and the voices having disturbed his agitated slumber. Blangin opened, and at once M. Magloire stepped forward and speaking to the prisoner, exclaimed, "I bring you reinforcements,—M. Folgat, my colleague, who has come down from Paris with your mother."

Coolly, and without saying a word, M. de Boiscoran bowed.

"I see you are angry with me," continued M. Magloire. "I was too quick yesterday, much too quick."

Jacques shook his head, and in an icy tone replied, "I on my side was angry; but I have reflected since, and now I thank you for your candour. At least, I know my fate: Innocent though I be, if I go into court, I shall be condemned as an incendiary and a murderer. I prefer not going into court at all."

"My poor fellow! all hope is not lost."

"Yes, it is. Who would believe me, if you, my friend, cannot believe me?"

"I would," said M. Folgat promptly. "I, who, without knowing you, have from the beginning believed in your innocence,—I who, now that I have seen you, adhere to my conviction."

Quicker than thought, M. de Boiscoran seized the young advocate's hand, and, pressing it convulsively,—*"Thanks, oh, thanks for that word alone!"* he cried, *"I thank you, sir, for the faith you have in me!"*

This was the first time, since his arrest, that the unfortunate fellow felt a ray of hope. Alas! it died away in a second. His eyes became dim again; a cloud re-settled on his brow and he said in a hoarse voice—*"Unfortunately, nothing can be done for me now. No doubt M. Magloire has told you my sad history and my statement. I have no proof; or, at least, to furnish proof, I should have to enter into details which the court would refuse to admit; or, if by a miracle they were admitted, I should be ruined for ever by them. There are confidences which can not be spoken of, secrets which can not be revealed, veils which must not be lifted. It is better to be condemned innocent than to be acquitted infamous and dishonoured. Gentlemen, I decline being defended."*

What was his desperate purpose that he should have come to such a decision? His counsel trembled, thinking they guessed it. *"You have no right to give yourself up,"* said M. Folgat.

"Why not?"

"Because you are not alone in your trouble, sir. Because you have relations, friends, and—"

A bitter ironical smile crossed Jacques de Boiscoran's lips, as he rejoined, *"What do I owe them, if they have not even the courage to wait until sentence is pronounced before they condemn me? Their merciless verdict has actually anticipated that of the jury. It is to an unknown person, to you, M. Folgat, that I am indebted for the first expression of sympathy."*

"Ah, that is not so," exclaimed M. Magloire, *"you know very well."*

But Jacques seemed not to hear him. *"Friends!"* he went on. *"Oh yes! I had friends in my days of prosperity. There was M. Galpin Daveline and M. Daubigeon: they were my friends. One has become my judge, the most cruel and pitiless of judges; and the other, who is public*

prosecutor, has not even made an effort to come to my assistance. M. Magloire also used to be a friend of mine, and told me a hundred times that I could count upon him as I counted upon myself, and that was my reason in choosing him as my counsel; yet, when I endeavoured to convince him of my innocence, he told me I lied!"

Once more the eminent advocate of Sauveterre tried to protest; but it was in vain.

"Relations!" continued Jacques in a voice trembling with indignation,—*"oh, yes! I have relations, a father and a mother. Where are they when their son, victimised by unheard-of fatality, is struggling in the meshes of a most odious and infamous plot? My father stays quietly in Paris, devoted to his pursuits and usual pleasures. My mother has come down to Sauveterre. She is here now; and she has been told that I am at liberty to receive visitors; but in vain! I was hoping for her yesterday; but the wretch who is accused of a crime is no longer her son! She never came. No one came. Henceforth I stand alone in the world; and now you see why I have a right to dispose of myself."*

M. Folgat did not think for a moment of discussing the point. It would have been useless. Despair never reasons. He merely observed, *"You forget Mademoiselle de Chandore, sir."*

Jacques turned crimson, and murmured, trembling in all his limbs, *"Denise!"*

"Yes, Denise," said the young advocate. *"You forget her courage, her devotion, and all she has done for you. Can you say that she abandons you,—she who set aside all her maidenly reserve and timidity for your sake, she who came and spent a whole night in this prison! She was risking nothing less than her maiden honour; for she might have been discovered or betrayed. She knew it very well, and yet she did not hesitate."*

"Ah! you are cruel, sir," broke in Jacques. And, pressing the lawyer's arm, he added, *"And do you not understand that her memory kills me, and that my misery is all the greater, as I know but too well what bliss I am losing? Do you not see that I love Denise as woman never was loved before? Ah, if my life alone were at stake! I, at least, I have to make amends for a great wrong; but she—Great God, why did I ever cross her*

path?" He remained for a moment buried in thought; then he continued once more, "And yet she, too, did not come yesterday. Why? Oh! no doubt they have told her all. They have told her how I came to be at Valpinson the night of the crime."

"You are mistaken, Jacques," said M. Magloire. "Mademoiselle de Chandore knows nothing."

"Is it possible?"

"M. Magloire did not speak in her presence," added M. Folgat; "and we have bound M. de Chandore to secrecy. I insisted that you alone had the right to tell the truth to Mademoiselle Denise."

"Then how does she explain to herself that I am not set free?"

"She cannot explain it."

"My God! she does not think me guilty also?"

"If you were to tell her so yourself, she would not believe you."

"And yet she never came here yesterday."

"She could not. Although they told her nothing your mother had to be told. The marchioness was literally thunderstruck. She remained for more than an hour unconscious in Mademoiselle Denise's arms. When she recovered her senses, her first words were for you; but it was then too late to be admitted here."

In mentioning Mademoiselle de Chandore's name M. Folgat had found the surest, and perhaps the only means of turning Jacques from his desperate purpose. "How can I ever sufficiently thank you, sir?" asked the prisoner.

"By promising me that you will for ever abandon the fatal resolve you had formed," replied the young advocate. "If you were guilty, I should be the first to say, 'Be it so!' and I would supply you with the means you wish for. Suicide would be an expiation. But as you are innocent, you have no right to kill yourself: suicide would be a confession."

"What am I to do?"

"Defend yourself. Fight."

"Without hope?"

"Yes, even without hope. When you faced the Prussians, did you ever think of blowing out your brains? No! And yet you knew that they were superior in numbers, and would conquer, in all probability. Well, you are once

more in face of the enemy ; and even if you were certain of defeat, that is to say, of condemnation, I should still say, 'Fight.' If you were condemned, and had to mount the scaffold within twenty-four hours, I should still say 'Fight.' You must live on ; for until the last hour has arrived something may happen which will enable us to discover the guilty one. And, if no such event should happen, I should nevertheless repeat, 'You must wait for the executioner in order to protest from the scaffold against judicial murder, and affirm your innocence once more.'

While M. Folgat was speaking Jacques had recovered his bearing. "Upon my honour, sir," he now said, "I promise you I will hold out to the bitter end. Still let me ask you what is to be done ?"

"First of all," replied M. Folgat, "I mean to recommence, for our benefit, the investigation which M. Galpin leaves incomplete. To-night your mother and I will start for Paris. I have come to ask you for the necessary information, and the means to explore your house in the Rue des Vignes, to discover the friend whose name you assumed, and the servant who waited upon you."

The bolts were drawn as he said this ; and Blangin's rubicund face appeared at the open wicket. "The Marchioness de Boiscoran," he said, "is in the parlour, and begs you will come down as soon as you have done with these gentlemen."

Jacques had turned very pale. "My mother," he murmured. Then he added, speaking to the jailer,—“Do not go yet.—We have nearly done.” His agitation was so great he could not master it. "We must stop here for to-day," he said to the two lawyers. "I cannot think now."

But M. Folgat had declared he would leave for Paris that very night ; and he was determined to do so. He therefore exclaimed, "Our success depends on the rapidity of our movements. I beg you will let me insist upon your giving me at once the few items of information which I need for my purpose."

Jacques shook his head sadly. "The task is beyond your power, sir," he began.

"Nevertheless, do what my colleague asks you," urged M. Magloire : and then, without any further opposition, and (who knows ?) perhaps with a secret hope which he would not confess to himself, Jacques gave the young advocate

the most minute details concerning his relations with the Countess de Claudieuse. He told him at what hour she used to come to the house, what road she took, and how she was usually dressed. The keys of the house were at Boiscoran, in a drawer which Jacques described. M. Folgat would only have to ask Anthony for them. Then the prisoner mentioned how they might find out what had become of the Englishman whose name he had borrowed. Sir Francis Burnett had a brother in London. Jacques did not know his precise address; but he knew he had important business relations with India, and had, once upon a time, been connected with the celebrated firm of Gilmour and Benson. As for the English servant-girl who attended to his house in the Rue des Vignes, Jacques had taken her on the recommendation of a neighbouring agency; and he had had nothing to do with her, except to pay her her wages, and occasionally give her some gratuity besides. All he could say, was, that the girl's name was Suky Wood; that she was a native of Folkstone, where her parents kept a sailors' tavern; and that, before coming to France, she had been a chambermaid at the Adelphi hotel in Liverpool.

M. Folgat carefully noted down this information, observing. "This is more than enough to begin the campaign. Now you must give me the names and addresses of your tradesmen in Passy."

"You will find a list in a small pocket-book which is in the same drawer with the keys," replied Jacques. "There also are the deeds and other papers concerning the house. Finally, you might take Anthony with you: he is devoted to me."

"I shall certainly take him, if you will allow me," replied the lawyer. Then, gathering up his notes, he added,—"I shall not be absent more than three or four days; as soon as I return, we will prepare our plan of defence. Till then, my dear client, keep up your courage."

They called Blangin to open the door for them; and then, having shaken hands with Jacques de Boiscoran, M. Folgat and M. Magloire went away.

"Well, are we going to the parlour now?" added the jailer.

Jacques made no reply. He had most ardently longed for his mother's visit; and now, when he was about to see

her, he felt assailed by all kinds of vague and gloomy apprehensions. The last time he had kissed her was in Paris, in their family mansion. He had left her, his heart swelling with hope and joy, to go to Denise; and his mother, as he remembered distinctly, had said to him, "I shall not see you again till the day before the wedding." And in lieu thereof she was to see him again in a jail-parlour, accused of an abominable crime. And perhaps she was doubtful of his innocence.

"Sir, the marchioness is waiting for you," said the jailer once more.

Jacques trembled. "I am ready," he replied; "let us go!" And, descending the stairs, he tried his best to compose his features, and to arm himself with courage and calmness. "For," said he, "she must not learn how horrible my position is."

At the foot of the steps, Blangin pointed to a door, and exclaimed. "There's the parlour. When the marchioness wants to go, please call me."

On the threshold, Jacques paused once more. The parlour of the Sauveterre jail is an immense vaulted hall, lighted by two narrow windows with heavy iron gratings. There is no furniture save a coarse bench fastened to the damp, discoloured wall; and on this bench, in the full sunlight sat, or rather lay, apparently bereft of all strength, the Marchioness de Boiscoran. When Jacques saw her, he could hardly suppress a cry of horror and grief. Was that really his mother,—that thin old lady with the sallow complexion, red eyes, and trembling hands? "O God, O God!" he murmured.

She heard him, for she raised her head; and when she recognised him she wished to rise; but her strength forsook her, and she sunk back upon the bench, crying—"O Jacques, my son!"

She, also, was terrified when she saw how two months of anguish and sleeplessness had changed Jacques. He was kneeling at her feet upon the unclean pavement, and, in a barely intelligible voice, he exclaimed, "Can you pardon me the great grief I cause you?"

She looked at him for a moment with a bewildered air; and then, all of a sudden took his head in her two hands, kissed him with passionate vehemence, and replied, "Will I pardon you? Alas, what have I to pardon? If you

were guilty, I should love you still ; and you are innocent."

Jacques breathed more freely. By the tone of his mother's voice he felt that she, at least, was sure of him. "And my father?" he asked.

There was a faint blush on the marchioness's pale cheeks. "I shall see him to-morrow," she replied ; "for I leave to-night with M. Folgat."

"What! In this state of weakness !"

"I must."

"Could not my father leave his collections for a few days? Why did he not come down? Does he think I am guilty?"

"No ; it is just because he is so sure of your innocence, that he remains in Paris. He does not believe you are in danger. He insists that justice cannot err."

"I hope not," replied Jacques with a forced smile. Then, changing his tone, he added, "And Denise? Why did she not come with you?"

"Because I would not have it. She knows nothing. It has been agreed upon that the name of the Countess de Claudieuse is not to be mentioned in her presence ; and I wanted to speak to you about that abominable woman. Jacques, my poor child, where has that unlucky passion brought you?" He made no reply. "Did you love her?" asked the marchioness again.

"I thought I did."

"And she?"

"Oh, she! God alone knows the secret of her strange heart."

"There is nothing to hope from her, then, no pity, no remorse?"

"Nothing. I have given her up. She has had her revenge. She had forewarned me."

The marchioness sighed. "I thought so," she said. "Last Sunday, when I knew nothing about this, I happened to be close to her at church, and unconsciously admired her profound devotion, the purity of her looks, and her calm nobility of manner. Yesterday, when I heard the truth I shuddered. I felt how formidable the woman must be who can affect such calmness when her lover is in prison, accused of the very crime which she has committed."

"Nothing in the world would trouble her, mother."

"Still she ought to tremble; for she must know that you have told us everything. How can we unmask her?"

But time was passing; and Blangin came to tell the marchioness that she must withdraw. She therefore went away after having kissed her son once more, and that same evening, according to their arrangement, she left for Paris, accompanied by M. Folgat and old Anthony.

XVII.

EVERY one at Sauveterre,—M. de Chandore, like Jacques himself—blamed the Marquis de Boiscoran for remaining in Paris. If he did so, however, it was certainly not from indifference; for he was dying with anxiety. He had shut himself up in the family mansion, and refused to see any one. His oldest friends, even the usually welcome dealers in curiosities, were refused admittance to the house. He never went out; the dust accumulated among his collections; and nothing could arouse him from his prostration, except a letter from Sauveterre. Every morning he received one or more,—from the marchioness or M. Folgat, from M. Seneschal or M. Magloire, from M. de Chandore, Denise, or perhaps Dr. Seignebois. Thus he could follow at a distance all the phases of the proceedings. Despite the news that reached him, however, despite the appeals made to him, there was still one thing he would not do: he would not go to Sauveterre. Once only when he received, through Denise's agency, a letter from Jacques himself, did he order his servant to get his trunks ready for the same evening. But at the last moment he gave counter-orders, saying that on reconsideration he would not leave.

"There is something extraordinary going on in the marquis's mind," said the servants to each other. The fact is, he spent his days, and a part of his nights, in his study, half-buried in an arm-chair, eating little, and sleeping still less, insensible to all that went on around him. On his table he had arranged all his letters from Sauveterre; and he read and re-read them incessantly, phrase by phrase, trying, ever in vain, to disengage the truth from a mass of conflicting statements. He was no longer as sure of his son as he had been at first, far from

it! Each day had brought him a new doubt; every letter, additional uncertainty. Hence he was all the time a prey to the most harassing apprehensions. He would have banished them from his mind; but ever and ever they returned, stronger and more irresistible than before, like the waves of the rising tide.

He was in this state of mind one morning in his study. It was still early, and he was suffering acutely from anxiety, for M. Folgat had written, "To-morrow all uncertainty will end. To-morrow the solitary confinement will cease, and M. Jacques will see M. Magloire, the counsel he has chosen. We will write immediately." It was for the news this promised letter might bring that the marquis was now waiting. Twice already he had rung to inquire if the post had not come, when all of a sudden his valet entered the room, and with a frightened air exclaimed: "The marchioness has just arrived with Anthony, M. Jacques's own man."

Hardly were these words spoken than Madame de Bois-coran herself entered, looking even worse than when Jacques saw her in the prison parlour; for she was overcome by the fatigue of a night spent in travelling. The marquis started to his feet, and as soon as the servant had left the room, he asked in a trembling voice, as if wishing for an answer, and still fearing to hear it, "Has anything unusual happened?"

"Yes."

"Good or bad?"

"Sad."

"Good heavens! Jacques has not confessed?"

"How could he confess when he is innocent?"

"Then he has explained?"

"As far as I am concerned, and M. Folgat, Dr. Seignebos, and all those who know him and love him, yes, but not for the public, his enemies, or the law. He has explained everything; but he has no proofs."

The marquis's mournful features settled into still deeper gloom. "In other words, he has to be believed on his word?" he asked.

"Don't you believe him?"

"My opinion is not in question, we have to think of the jury."

"Well, for the jury proof will be found; at least such is

the hope of M. Folgat, who has come in the same train with me, and whom you will see to-day."

"What proof will he find?"

Perhaps the marchioness was not unprepared for such a reception; still she was evidently disconcerted. "Jacques," she began, "was the Countess de Claudieuse's lover."

"Ah, ah!" broke in the marquis. And, in a tone of offensive irony, he added, "What, another story of equivocal intercourse, eh?"

The marchioness did not answer, but quietly proceeded: "When the countess heard of Jacques's intended marriage, she became exasperated, and determined to be avenged."

"And, in order to be avenged, she tried to murder her husband, eh?"

"She wished to be free."

The Marquis de Boiscoran interrupted his wife with a formidable oath. "And that is all Jacques could invent!" he cried. "If he kept so obstinately silent it was to finish by telling us this improbable story."

"You don't let me conclude. Our son is the victim of unparalleled coincidences."

"Of course! Unparalleled coincidences! That is what every one of the the thousand or two thousand rascals, sentenced every year, say. Do you think they confess? Not they! Ask them, and they will prove to you that they are victims of fate, of some dark plot, or finally, of an error of judgment. As if justice could err in these days of ours, after all these preliminary examinations, long inquiries, careful investigations."

"You will see M. Folgat. He will tell you what hope there is."

"And if all hope fails?" and seeing that the marchioness hung her head, "What then?" asked her husband.

"All would still not be lost. But then we should have to endure the pain of seeing our son in the dock."

The old gentleman's tall figure rose once more to its full height; his face grew red; and wrath flashed from his eyes. "Jacques in the dock!" he cried with a formidable voice. "And you come and tell me that coolly, as if it were a simple natural matter! And what will happen then, if he is in the dock? He will be condemned; and a Boiscoran will go to the galleys. But no, that cannot be! I do not say that a Boiscoran may not commit a crime, passion makes us

do strange things; but a Boiscoran, when he regains his senses, knows what he should do. Blood washes out all stains. Jacques prefers the executioner; he waits; he is cunning; he means to plead. If he but save his head, he is quite content. A few years hard labour, I suppose, will be a trifle to him. And to think that coward should be a Boiscoran; that my blood should flow in his veins! Come, come, madame, Jacques is no son of mine."

Crushed as the marchioness had seemed to be till now, she rose under this atrocious insult. "Sir!" she cried.

But M. de Boiscoran was not in a state to listen to her. "I know what I am saying," he went on. "I remember everything, if you have forgotten. Come, let us go back to the past. Remember the time when Jacques was born, and tell me in what year it was that M. de Margeril refused my challenge."

Indignation restored the marchioness's strength. "And you tell me this to-day," she cried, "after thirty years, and under such circumstances!"

"Yes, after thirty years. Eternity might pass over these recollections, and it would not efface them. Still, but for these circumstances to which you refer, I should never have said anything. At the time to which I allude, I had to choose between two evils—either to be ridiculous, or hated. I preferred to keep silent, and not to inquire too far. My happiness was gone; but I wished to save my peace of mind. We have lived together on excellent terms; but there has always been between us the high wall of suspicion. As long as I was doubtful, I kept silent. But now, when the facts confirm my doubts, I say again, 'Jacques is no son of mine!'"

The Marchioness de Boiscoran wrung her hands, overcome with grief, shame, and indignation. "What a humiliation!" she exclaimed. "What you are saying is too horrible. It is unworthy of you to add this terrible suffering to the martyrdom which I am enduring."

M. de Boiscoran laughed convulsively. "Did I bring about this catastrophe?" he asked.

"Well, then, yes! One day I was imprudent and indiscreet. I was young; I knew nothing of life; the world worshipped me; and you, my husband, my guide, gave yourself up to your ambition, and left me to myself. I could not foresee the consequences of a very inoffensive piece of coquetry."

"Then you see those consequences now. After thirty years I disown the child that bears my name ; and I say, that, if he is innocent, he suffers for his mother's sins. Fate would have it that your son should covet his neighbour's wife, and, having taken her, it is but justice that he should die the death of the adulterer."

"But you know very well that I have never forgotten my duty."

"I know nothing."

"You have acknowledged it, because you refused to hear the explanation which would have justified me."

"True, I did shrink from an explanation, which, with your unbearable pride, would necessarily have led to a rupture, and thus to a fearful scandal."

The marchioness might have told her husband, that, by refusing to hear her explanation, he had forfeited all right to utter a reproach ; but she felt it would be useless.

"All I do know is," continued the marquis, "that there is somewhere in this world a man whom I wanted to kill. Gossiping people betrayed his name to me. I went to him, and demanded satisfaction, saying, that I hoped he would conceal the real reason for our encounter even from our seconds. He refused to give me satisfaction, on the ground that he did not owe me any, that you have been calumniated, and that he would only meet me if I should insult him publicly."

"Well ?"

"What could I do after that ? Investigate the matter ? You had no doubt taken your precautions, and it would have amounted to nothing. Watch you ? I should only have demeaned myself uselessly ; for you were no doubt on your guard. Should I ask for a separation ? The law afforded me that remedy. I might have dragged you into court, held you up to the sarcasms of my counsel, and exposed you to the jests of your own. I had a right to humble you, to dishonour my name, to proclaim your disgrace, to publish it in the newspapers. Ah, I would sooner have died !"

The marchioness seemed to be puzzled. "That is the explanation of your conduct ?" she asked.

"Yes, that was my reason for giving up public life, ambitious as I was. That was the reason why I withdrew from the world ; for I thought everybody smiled as I

passed. That is why I gave you the management of our house and education of your son, why I became a passionate collector, a half-mad original. And you only find out to-day that you have ruined my life?"

There was more compassion than resentment in the manner in which the marchioness looked at her husband. "You mentioned to me your unjust suspicions," she replied; "but I felt strong in my innocence, and I was in hope that time and my conduct would efface them."

"Faith once lost never comes back again."

"The fearful idea that you could doubt of your paternity had never even occurred to me."

The marquis shook his head. "Still it was so," he replied. "I have suffered terribly. I loved Jacques. Yes, in spite of all, in spite of myself, I loved him. Had he not all the qualities which are a father's pride and joy? Was he not generous and noble-hearted, open to all lofty sentiments, affectionate, and always anxious to please me? I never had to complain of him. And even lately, during that abominable war, did he not show his courage, and valiantly earn the cross they gave him? At all times, and from all sides, I have been congratulated on his account. People have praised his talents and his assiduity. Alas! at the very moment when they told me what a happy father I was, I was the most wretched of men. How many times would I not have drawn him to my heart had not that horrible doubt risen within me—'if he should not be my son.' And then I pushed him back, and looked in his face for a trace of another man's features."

By the time the marquis had finished speaking his wrath had cooled down, perhaps by reason of its excess. He felt a certain tenderness in his heart, and sinking into his chair, and hiding his face in his hands, he murmured,—“If he should be my son, however; if he should be innocent! Ah, this doubt is intolerable! And I who would not move from here,—I who have done nothing for him,—I might have done everything at first. It would have been easy for me to obtain a change of venue to free him from this Galpin-Daveline, formerly his friend, and now his enemy.”

M. de Boiscoran was right when he said his wife's pride was unmanageable. And yet, cruelly wounded as she was, she suppressed her pride, and, thinking only of her son,

remained quite humble. Drawing from her bosom the letter which Jacques had sent to her the day before she left Sauveterre, she handed it to her husband, saying,—“Will you read what our son says?”

The marquis's hand trembled as he took the letter. After a short pause he opened it and read. “Do you forsake me too, father, when everybody forsakes me? And yet I have never needed your love as much as now. The peril is imminent. Everything is against me. Never has such a combination of fatal circumstances been seen before. I may not be able to prove my innocence; but you,—you surely cannot think your son guilty of such a monstrous and heinous crime? Oh, no! surely not. My mind is made up. I shall struggle to the bitter end. To my last breath I shall defend, not my life, but my honour. Ah, if you but knew! But there are things which cannot be written, and which only a father can be told. I beseech you come to me, let me see you, let me hold your hand in mine. Do not refuse this last and greatest comfort to your unhappy son.”

The marquis started up. “Oh, yes, very unhappy indeed!” he said. And, bowing to his wife, he added,—“I interrupted you. Now, pray tell me all.”

Maternal love conquered womanly resentment. Without a shadow of hesitation, and as if nothing had taken place, and marchioness gave her husband a full account of Jacques's statement just as it was made to M. Magloire.

The marquis seemed amazed. “That is unheard of!” he said. And, when his wife had finished, he added,—“Then that was the reason why Jacques was so very angry when you spoke of inviting the Countess de Claudieuse, and why he told you, that, if he saw her enter at one door, he would walk out of the other. We did not understand his aversion.”

“Alas! it was not aversion. Jacques only obeyed at that time the countess's cunning lessons.”

In less than a minute the most contradictory resolutions seemed to flit across the marquis's countenance. He evidently hesitated, but at last he said,—“Whatever can be done to make up for the past inaction, shall now be done. I will go to Sauveterre. Jacques must be saved. M. de Margeril is all-powerful. Go to him. I permit it. I beg you will do so.”

The eyes of the marchioness filled with tears, hot tears, the first she had shed since the beginning of this scene. "Do you not see," she asked, "that what you wished me to do is now impossible? Anything, yes, anything in the world but that. But Jacques and I—we are innocent. God will have pity on us. M. Folgat will save us."

XVIII.

M. FOLGAT was already at work. He had confidence in his cause, a firm conviction of his client's innocence, a desire to solve the mystery, a love of contention, and an intense thirst for success: all reasons to stimulate his activity. And, above all this, Denise had inspired him with a mysterious and indefinable sentiment. Indeed he had succumbed to her charms, like everybody else. It was not love, for love means hope; and he knew perfectly well that Denise belonged to Jacques for ever. It was a sweet and all-powerful sentiment, which had seized hold of him and made him wish to devote himself to her, and to count for something to her life and happiness. It was for her sake that he had sacrificed all his business, and forgotten his clients, in order to stay at Sauveterre. It was for her sake, above all, that he wished to save Jacques.

He had no sooner arrived at the Paris terminus, and left the Marchioness de Boiscoran in old Anthony's care, than he jumped into a cab, and had himself driven to his house, where, having sent a telegram the day before, his servant was ready waiting for him. He made a hasty toilette and then returned to his vehicle, being determined to start at once in search of the man, who, he thought, was most likely to be able to fathom the mystery. This was an individual named Goudar, who was connected with the police department in some capacity or other, and who enjoyed an income large enough to render him very comfortable. He was one of those agents whom the authorities employ for specially delicate tasks—such as require great tact and keen scent, an intrepidity beyond all doubt, and imperturbable self-possession. M. Folgat had had opportunities of knowing and appreciating Goudar in connection with the famous case of the Mutual Discount Society,

when he was instructed to track the cashier who had fled, leaving a deficit of several millions. Goudar had caught him in Canada, after pursuing him for three months all over America; but, on the day of his arrest, the cashier had only some forty thousand francs with him. What had become of the millions? When he was questioned, he said he had spent them. He had gambled in stocks, he had been unfortunate, &c.; and everybody believed him, excepting Goudar. Stimulated by the promise of a magnificent reward, the latter began his campaign once more; and, in less than six weeks, he had secured sixteen hundred thousand francs which the cashier had deposited in London with a woman of doubtful character.

The story is well known, though the general public has always remained ignorant of the genius, and fertility of resources and expedients, which Goudar displayed in obtaining such a success. M. Folgat, however, was fully aware of the detective's merit; for he had been the counsel of the stockholders of the Mutual Discount Society: and he had always thought, that, if ever the opportunity offered, he would employ this marvellously skilful man.

Goudar, who was married, and had a child, lived out of the world, on the road to Versailles, not far from the fortifications. He occupied with his family a small house of his own,—a veritable philosopher's home, with a little garden in front, and a large one behind, in which latter he raised vegetables and fruit, and bred all kinds of animals. For it is a remarkable fact that police agents who constantly have to rake among the dung-heaps of society, love the country, and, no doubt disgusted with man, are passionately fond of flowers and animals.

When M. Folgat stepped out of the vehicle he had hired, in front of this pleasant home, a graceful young woman of twenty-five, with a fresh healthy face, was playing in the front-garden with a pretty little girl some three or four years old. "M. Goudar, madam?" asked M. Folgat raising his hat.

The young woman blushed slightly, and answered modestly, but without embarrassment, and in a most pleasing voice.—"My husband is in the garden behind, you will easily find him, if you will walk down this path to the back of the house."

The young advocate followed the direction, and soon

saw his man at a distance with an old straw hat on his head, slippers on his feet, and a huge blue apron fastened behind him. Goudar was perched half way up a ladder busily engaged in slipping horse hair bags over a number of magnificent branches of chasselas grapes, hanging from a trellis running along the wall. Hearing the gravel grate under the footsteps of the new-comer, he instantly turned his head, and exclaimed, "Why, it's M. Folgat! Good-morning, sir!"

The young advocate was not a little surprised to see himself immediately recognised. He should certainly not have known the detective, for it was more than three years since they had seen each other; and how often had they seen each other then? Twice, and not an hour each time. It is true that Goudar was one of those men whom nobody remembers. Of medium height, he was neither stout nor thin, neither dark nor light haired, neither young nor old. A clerk in a passport office would certainly have written him down thus: Forehead ordinary; nose, ordinary; mouth, ordinary; eyes, neutral colour; special marks, none. It could not be said that he looked stupid; but neither did he look intelligent. Everything in him was ordinary, indifferent, and undecided. Not one marked feature. He would necessarily pass unobserved, and be forgotten as soon as he had passed. "You find me busy securing my crops for the winter," he said to M. Folgat. "A pleasant job. However, I am at your service. Let me put these three bunches into their three bags, and I'll come down to you." This was the work of an instant; and, as soon as he had reached the ground, he turned to the young advocate and asked,—“Well, and what do you think of my garden?”

Then without waiting for a reply he begged M. Folgat to visit his domain, and, with all a landowner's enthusiasm, he proceeded to praise the flavour of his duchess pears, the bright colours of his dahlias, the new arrangements in his poultry-yard, and rabbit-houses, not forgetting the beauty of his pond, with its ducks of all colours and varieties. In his heart, M. Folgat cursed this enthusiasm; for time was being lost. But, when you expect a man to do you a service, you must at least flatter his weak side. Accordingly the young advocate did not spare his praises—he even pulled out his cigar-case, and, still with the view

of winning the detective's good graces, he offered it to him, saying,—“Will you accept one?”

“Thanks! I never smoke,” replied Goudar. And seeing the astonishment of the advocate, he added, “At least not at home.—I am inclined to think my wife dislikes the smell of tobacco.”

Positively, if M. Folgat had not known the man, he would have taken him for some simple inoffensive retired grocer, and, bowing to him politely, would have taken his leave. But he had seen him at work, knew his capacity and was anxious to profit by it; thus he followed him to his greenhouse, melonhouse, and marvellous asparagus-beds.

At last, however, Goudar conducted his guest to the end of the garden, to an arbour furnished with seats, saying,—“Now let us sit down, and tell me your business; for I know you did not come solely for the pleasure of seeing my domain.”

Goudar was one of those men who have heard in their lives more confessions than ten priests, ten lawyers, and ten doctors all together. You could tell him everything. Without a moment's hesitation, therefore, and without a break, M. Folgat related the whole story of Jacques's intrigue with the Countess de Claudieuse. The detective listened, without saying a word, without moving a muscle in his face. When the lawyer had finished, he simply ejaculated:—“Well?”

“First of all,” replied M. Folgat, “I should like to hear your opinion. Do you believe M. de Boiscoran's statement?”

“Why not? I have seen much stranger cases than that.”

“Then you think, that, in spite of the evidence against him, we must believe in his innocence?”

“Pardon me, I think nothing at all. Why, you must study a matter before you can give an opinion.” He smiled; and, looking at the young advocate, he added, “But why all these preliminaries? What do you want of me?”

“Your assistance to arrive at the truth.”

The detective evidently expected something of the kind. After a minute's reflection, he looked fixedly at M. Folgat, and said,—“If I understand you correctly, you would like

to begin a counter-investigation for the benefit of the defence?"

"Exactly."

"And unknown to the prosecution?"

"Precisely."

"Well I cannot possibly serve you."

The young advocate was prepared for a certain amount of resistance; and he had thought of the means to overcome it. "That is not your final decision, my dear Goudar!" he said.

"Pardon me. I am not my own master. I have my duty to fulfil, and my daily occupations to attend to."

"You can at any time obtain leave of absence for a month."

"So I might; but they would certainly wonder at such a furlough at headquarters. They would probably have me watched; and if they found out that I was doing police work for private individuals, they would scold me grievously, and deprive themselves henceforth of my services."

"Oh!"

"There is no 'oh!' about it. They would do what I tell you, and they would be right; for after all what would become of us, and what would become of the safety and liberty of us all, if any one could come and use the agents of the police for his private purposes? And what would become of me if I should lose my place?"

"M. de Boiscoran's family is very rich, and they would prove their gratitude magnificently to the man who saved him."

"And if I did not save him? And if, instead of gathering proof of his innocence, I should only meet with more evidence of his guilt?"

The objection was so well founded, that M. Folgat preferred not to discuss it. "I might," he said, "hand you at once, and as a retainer, a considerable sum, which you could keep, whatever the result might be."

"What sum? A hundred napoleons? Certainly a hundred napoleons are not to be despised; but what would they do for me if I were turned out? I have somebody beside myself to think of. I have a wife and a child; and my whole fortune consists of this little cottage, which is not even entirely paid for. My place is not a goldmine; but, with the special rewards which I receive, it

brings me, good years and bad years, seven or eight thousand francs, and I can lay by two or three thousand."

The young lawyer stopped him by a friendly gesture, and said, "If I were to offer you ten thousand francs?"

"A year's income."

"If I offered you fifteen thousand?"

Goudar made no reply; but his eyes spoke.

"M. de Boiscoran's is a most interesting case," continued M. Folgat, "and such as does not often occur. The man who exposed the errors of the accusation would make a great reputation for himself."

"Would he make friends also at the public prosecution offices?"

"I admit he wouldn't."

The detective shook his head. "Well, I confess," he said, "I do not work for glory, nor from love of my art I knew very well that vanity is the great motive-power with some of my colleagues; but I am more practical. I have never liked my profession; and if I continue to practise it, it is because I have not the money to go into any other. It drives my wife to despair, besides: she is only half alive as long as I am away; and she trembles every morning for fear I may be brought home with a knife between my shoulders."

M. Folgat had listened attentively: but at the same time he had produced a pocket-book, which looked decidedly plethoric. "With fifteen thousand francs," he said, "a man may do something."

"That is true. There is a piece of land for sale adjoining my garden, which would suit me exactly. Flowers bring a good price in Paris, and that business would please my wife. Fruit, also, yields a good profit."

The advocate knew now that he had caught his man. "Remember, too, my dear Goudar, that, if you succeed, these fifteen thousand francs would only be a part payment. They might, perhaps, double the sum. M. de Boiscoran is the most liberal of men, and he would take pleasure in royally rewarding the man who saved him." As he spoke, he opened the pocketbook, and drew from it fifteen thousand-franc notes, which he spread out before him. "To any one but you," he went on, "I should hesitate to pay such a sum in advance. Another man might take the money, and never trouble himself about the affair."

But I know your uprightness ; and, if you give me your word in return for the notes, I shall be satisfied. Come, shall it be so ?”

The detective was evidently not a little excited ; for, self-possessed as he ordinarily was, he had turned somewhat pale. He hesitated, handled the bank-notes, and then, all of a sudden, exclaimed,—“ Wait two minutes.”

He got up instantly, and ran towards the house. “ Is he going to consult his wife ?” M. Folgat asked himself. Such was indeed his purpose, and the next moment the pair appeared at the other end of the garden walk engaged in a lively discussion. However, their talk did not last long, and Goudar came back to the arbour, exclaiming,—“ Agreed ! I am your man !”

The advocate was delighted, and shook his hand. “ Thank you,” he cried ; “ for, with your assistance, I am almost sure of success. Unfortunately, we have no time to lose. When can you go to work ?”

“ This moment. Give me time to change my clothes ; and I am at your service. You will have to give me the keys of the house at Passy.”

“ I have them here in my pocket.”

“ Well, then, let us go there at once ; for I must, first of all, reconnoitre the ground. And you shall see if it takes me long to dress.”

In less than fifteen minutes he re-appeared in a long overcoat, looking, for all the world, like one of those retired grocers who have made a fortune, and settled somewhere outside the fortifications of Paris, displaying their idleness in broad daylight, and for ever repenting that they have given up their business. “ Let us go,” he said to the lawyer, and then having bowed to Madame Goudar, who accompanied them to the front gate with a radiant smile, they got into the cab, and bid the driver to take them to No. 23 Rue des Vignes at Passy.

This Rue des Vignes is a curious street, leading nowhere, little known, and so deserted that the grass grows all over it. Long and dreary, hilly, muddy, scarcely paved, and full of holes, it looks much more like a wretched village lane than like a Parisian street. There are no shops, and indeed only a few houses intervening here and there between interminable walls, overtopped by lofty trees. “ Ah ! the place is well chosen for a mysteri-

ous rendezvous," growled Goudar. "Too well chosen, I dare say; for we shall pick up no information here."

The vehicle stopped before a small door, in a thick wall, which bore numerous traces of the two sieges and their destructive effects. "Here is No. 23," said the driver; "but I see no house."

It could not be seen from the street; but on opening the door, M. Folgat and Goudar perceived it, rising in the centre of an immense garden, looking simple and pretty, with a double porch, a slate roof, and newly-painted shutters. "By Jove!" exclaimed the detective, "what a place for a gardener!"

M. Folgat detected so keenly the man's ill-concealed desire, that he at once replied,—“If we save M. de Boiscoran, I am sure he will not keep this house.”

"Let us go in," cried the detective, in a voice which revealed his intense desire to succeed.

Unfortunately, Jacques de Boiscoran had spoken but too truly, when he said that no trace was left of former days. Furniture, carpets, everything was new; and Goudar and M. Folgat in vain explored the four rooms on the ground floor, and the four rooms up stairs, together with the basement, where the kitchen was, and finally the garret. "We shall find nothing," declared the detective. "Though, to satisfy my conscience, I will come and spend an afternoon here: but now we have more important business. Let us go and see the neighbours!"

There are not many residents in the Rue des Vignes. A schoolmaster and a nurseryman, a locksmith, a jobmaster, five or six people of independent means, and last but not least, the keeper of a wine shop and eating-house, these constituted the entire population.

"We shall soon make the rounds," said Goudar, after having ordered the coachman to wait for them at the end of the street. On inquiring they found that neither the schoolmaster nor his assistants knew anything. The nurseryman had heard say that No. 23 belonged to an Englishman; but he had never seen him, and did not even know his name. The locksmith knew, however, that he was called Francis Burnett. He had done some work for him, and had frequently seen him; but it was so long since, that he did not think he would recognise him again. "We are unlucky," said M. Folgat, after this visit.

Fortunately, however, the livery stable-keeper had a somewhat more retentive memory. He said he knew the Englishman of No. 23 very well, having driven him three or four times; and the description he gave of his person fully corresponded with that of Jacques de Boiscoran. He also remembered that one evening in wretched weather, "Sir Burnett" came himself to order a carriage. It was for a lady, who got in alone, and was driven to the Place de la Madeleine. But it was a dark night; the lady wore a thick veil; he had not been able to distinguish her features, and all he could say was that she looked above medium height.

"It is always the same story," exclaimed Goudar. "But the wine-seller ought to be better informed. If I were alone, I would breakfast at his place."

"I will breakfast with you," said M. Folgat, and accordingly they both entered the tavern. The landlord did not know much himself, but his waiter, who had been with him some five or six years, knew "Sir Burnett," as everybody called the Englishman, by sight, and had been well acquainted with the servant-girl, Suky Wood. As he laid the cloth, he told the advocate and the detective all he knew. Suky, he said, was a tall, strapping girl, with hair red enough to set her bonnet on fire, and graceful enough to be mistaken for a heavy dragoon in female disguise. He had often had long talks with her when she had come to fetch some ready-made dish, or to buy some beer, of which she was very fond. She told him she was very pleased with her place, as she got plenty of money, and had, so to say, nothing to do, being left alone in the house for nine months in the year. From her the waiter had also learnt that "Sir Burnett" must have another house, as he only came to the Rue des Vignes to receive visits from a lady. This lady bothered Suky, who declared she had never been able to see the end of her nose even, so very cautious was she in all her movements, still she meant to try and get a glimpse of her face, if it were only possible.

"And you may be sure she managed to do so some time or other," whispered Goudar, who immediately gave vent to an exclamation of satisfaction on hearing from the waiter, that Suky had been very intimate with the servant of an old gentleman, living alone at No. 27. "That ser-

vant must be seen," observed the detective, and, directly the meal was finished, M. Folgat and he walked towards the house in question.

Luckily the girl was alone, her master having just gone out. At first she was a little frightened at being called upon and questioned by two unknown men; but the detective knew how to reassure her very quickly, and then, being naturally a great talker, she speedily confirmed all the waiter had said, besides imparting some fresh information. She had been very intimate with Suky, who had not hesitated to tell her that Burnett was not an Englishman, that his name was not Burnett, and that he concealed himself in the Rue des Vignes under a false name, for the purpose of meeting his lady-love, who was a grand lady of marvellous beauty. Finally, at the outbreak of the war, Suky had told her that she was going back to England to her relations.

"We have obtained but little information," said Goudar to M. Folgat at the conclusion of this interview, "and the jury would pay little attention to it; still there is enough to confirm, at least in part, M. de Boiscoran's statement. We can prove that he met here a lady who had the greatest interest in remaining unknown. Was she the Countess de Claudieuse? We must find this out from Suky; for she has seen her, beyond all doubt. Hence we must hunt up Suky. And now let us get back to the cab, and go to headquarters. You can wait for me at the cafe opposite the Palais de Justice. I shall not be away more than a quarter of an hour."

He was absent, however, a good hour and a half; and M. Folgat was growing nervous, when at last he reappeared with a smile on his face. Sitting down in front of the advocate, he said,—“I have been away rather long; but I have not lost any time. In the first place, I have procured a month's leave of absence; and next I have put my hand upon the very man I wanted to send after ‘Sir Burnett’ and Miss Suky. He is a good fellow, named Barousse, and speaks English like a native. He asks twenty-five francs a day, his travelling-expenses, and a gratuity of fifteen hundred francs if he succeeds. I have agreed to meet him at six to give him a definite answer. If you accept his conditions, he will leave for England to-night.”

By way of reply, M. Folgat drew a thousand-franc note from his pocket book, and said,—“Here is something to begin with.”

“Well, then, I must now leave you,” remarked Goudar, pocketing the note. “I am going to hang about the house where Madame de Claudieuse’s father, M. de Tassar, resides, and make inquiries. Perhaps I may pick up something. To-morrow I shall spend in searching the house in the Rue des Vignes, and in questioning all the tradesmen on your list. The day after I shall probably have finished here. So that in four or five days’ time I shall be at Sauveterre. I will do my best to save M. de Boiscoran. I will and must do so. He has too nice a house. Well, we shall see each other at Sauveterre.”

It was now four o’clock. M. Folgat left the cafe immediately after Goudar, and walked along the quay towards the Rue de l’Universite. He was anxious to see the Marquis and the Marchioness de Boiscoran. He found the former in his study, still under the effects of the painful interview which he had had with his wife in the morning. He had not said anything to the marchioness that he did not really feel; but he was distressed at having spoken as he had under such circumstances. And yet it was a kind of relief to him; for, to tell the truth, he felt as if the terrible doubts which he had kept secret so many years had vanished as soon as they were revealed. He gave M. Folgat a mournful reception, and the young advocate repeated the marchioness’s story in detail; adding, however, one thing of which she was in total ignorance, viz.,—the desperate resolution Jacques had formed. At this revelation the marquis appeared utterly overcome. “The unhappy fellow!” he cried. “What, he actually thought of killing himself!”

“Yes,” added M. Folgat, “and M. Magloire and myself had the greatest difficulty in overcoming his resolution, the greatest trouble to make him understand that under no circumstances ought an innocent man to think of committing suicide.”

A big tear rolled down the old gentleman’s furrowed cheek. “Ah! I have been cruelly unjust,” he murmured. “Poor, unhappy boy!” Then he added aloud,—“But I intend to see him. I have determined to accompany the marchioness to Sauveterre. When do you propose to leave?”

"Nothing keeps me here in Paris. I have done all that can be done, and I might return this evening. But I am really too tired. I think I shall take the 10.45 train to-morrow morning."

"If you do so, we will travel in company. I will meet you to-morrow at ten o'clock at the Orleans station. We shall reach Sauveterre by midnight."

XIX

WHEN the Marchioness de Boiscoran went to see her son in prison prior to her departure for Paris, Denise had asked if she might accompany her. The marchioness however preferred to go alone, and the young girl did not insist. "I see they are trying to conceal something from me," she said to herself, "but it does not matter."

During the whole day she remained meditating; and her thoughtfulness was so evident that her grandfather and aunts grew quite nervous, wondering what new idea had got possession of her mind. On the morrow they were still in the same perplexity when Denise suddenly insisted on going to her dressmakers', where, finding Mechin the clerk, she remained in conference with him for a full half-hour. Then in the evening, as Dr. Seignebos was leaving the drawing-room, after a short visit, she hastened after him, and kept him engaged in conversation for a long time at the hall-door. Finally, on the day after, she asked once more to be allowed to go and see Jacques. This sad satisfaction could be no longer refused her, and it was arranged that she should visit the prison in company with the elder of the Demoiselles de Lavarande, Mademoiselle Adelaide.

It was two o'clock in the afternoon when they knocked at the prison gate, and asked the jailer to be allowed to see Jacques. "I'll go for him at once, madame," replied Blangin. "In the meantime pray step into my room: the prison parlour is rather damp, and the less you stay in it the better it will be."

Denise followed the jailer's advice, or rather she did a great deal more; for leaving her aunt downstairs, she drew Madame Blangin into the upper room, having something to say to her as she pretended. When they came down-

stairs again, Blangin announced that M. de Boiscoran was waiting.

"Come!" said Denise to her aunt. But she had not taken ten steps along the narrow passage leading to the parlour before she stopped short. She even tottered, and had to lean against the wall, reeking as it was with moisture.

"Good heavens, you are ill!" cried Mademoiselle Adelaide.

Denise signalled her to be silent. "Oh, it is nothing!" she said. "Be quiet!" And gathering up all her strength, and resting her little hand upon the old lady's shoulder, she added, "My darling aunty, you must render us an immense service. It is all important that I should speak to Jacques alone. It would be very dangerous for us to be overheard. I know they often set spies to listen to a prisoner's talk. Please, dear aunt, do remain in the passage, and give us warning if anybody should come."

"Do not think of such a thing, dear child. Would it be proper?"

"Was it proper when I came and spent a night here?" asked Denise in reply. "Alas! in our position, everything is proper that may be useful." Aunt Adelaide making no rejoinder, Mademoiselle de Chandore felt sure of her perfect submission, and walked on towards the parlour.

"Denise!" cried Jacques as soon as she entered,—
"Denise!" He was standing in the centre of this mournful room, looking whiter than the whitened walls, but apparently calm and almost smiling. It required a powerful effort of will to control the thoughts which battled in his breast; but he could not allow his betrothed to see his despair; on the contrary, he was bound to do everything he could to reassure her. So he advanced towards her, took her hands in his, and said, "Ah, it is so kind of you to come! I have looked for you ever since the morning. I have been watching and waiting, and listening at each noise I heard. But will you ever forgive me for causing you to come to a place like this, untidy and ugly, without even the fatal poetry of horror about it?"

Denise looked at him with such obstinate fixity, that the words died on his lips. "Why hide the truth?" she asked sadly.

"Hide the truth!"

"Yes. Why do you affect this gaiety and tranquillity, which are so far from your heart? Have you no longer confidence in me? Do you think I am a child, from whom the truth must be concealed, or so feeble and worthless that I cannot bear my share of your troubles? Do not smile, Jacques, for I know you have no hope."

"You are mistaken, Denise, I assure you."

"No, Jacques. They are concealing something from me, I know, and I do not ask you to tell me what it is. I know quite enough. You will have to appear in court."

"I beg your pardon. That question has not yet been decided."

"But it will be decided, and against you."

Jacques knew very well it would be so and dreaded it; but he still insisted on playing his part. "Well," he said, "even if I do appear in court, I shall be acquitted."

"Are you quite sure of that?"

"I have ninety-nine chances out of a hundred for me."

"There is one, then, against you," cried the young girl. And seizing Jacques's hands, and pressing them with a force of which he would never have suspected her, she added,—*"You have no right to run that one chance."*

Jacques trembled in all his limbs. Was it possible? Did he understand her? Did Denise herself come and suggest to him that act of supreme despair, from which his counsel had so strongly dissuaded him? "What do you mean?" he asked with trembling voice.

"You must fly."

"Fly?"

"Nothing is easier. I have considered the whole matter thoroughly. The jailers are in our pay. I have just come to an understanding with Blangin's wife. One evening, as soon as night falls, they will open the doors to you. A horse will be ready for you outside the town, and relays will be prepared. In four hours you can reach La Rochelle. There, one of those pilot-boats which can stand any storm will take you on board, and carry you to England."

Jacques shook his head. "That cannot be," he replied. "I am innocent. I cannot abandon all I hold dear,—you, Denise."

A deep flush covered the girl's cheeks. "I have ex

pressed myself badly," she stammered. "You shall not go alone."

He raised his hands to heaven. "My God!" he cried, "Thou grantest me this consolation!"

Meanwhile Denise continued in a firmer voice :—"Did you think I would be base enough to forsake my friend even if he should be abandoned by everybody else? No, no! Grandpapa and my aunts will accompany me, and we will meet you in England. You will change your name, and go to America; and far in the West, we will find some new country where we can establish ourselves. True, it will not be France. But the country for us, Jacques, is where we can be free, where we are beloved, where we are happy."

At these words, Jacques de Boiscoran was moved to his innermost heart. How could he retain any longer his mask of impressive indifference? Was there a man upon the earth who could receive a more glorious proof of love and devotion? And from whom! From a young girl, who united in herself all those qualities, a single one of which would make others proud,—intelligence and grace, high rank and fortune, beauty and angelic purity. Ah! she did not hesitate, as another had done; she did not make a science of duplicity, nor practise hypocrisy as though it were a virtue. She yielded up herself, without the slightest reserve. And all this at the very moment when Jacques saw everything else around him crumble to pieces, when he was on the very brink of despair! This happiness was indeed so great, so unexpected, that it well-nigh paralysed him.

For a moment he could not move, he could not think. Then all of a sudden drawing his betrothed to him, pressing her convulsively to his bosom and covering her hair with kisses, he cried,—“I bless you, oh, my darling! I bless you, my well-beloved! I shall mourn no longer. Whatever may happen, I have had my share of heavenly bliss.”

She thought he consented. Palpitating like a bird in a child's hand, she drew back, and looking at Jacques with ineffable love and tenderness, exclaimed :—“Let us fix the day!”

“What day?”

“The day for your flight.”

This word alone recalled Jacques to a sense of his fearful position. He was soaring in the supreme heights of bliss, and he was plunged down into the cold depths of reality. His face, radiant with joy, grew dark in an instant, and he said sadly,—“That dream is too beautiful to be realised.”

“What do you say?” she stammered.

“I cannot, I must not, escape!”

“You refuse me, Jacques?” continued Denise. “You refuse me, when I swear to you that I will join you, and share your exile? Do you doubt my word? Do you fear that my grandfather or my aunts might keep me here in spite of myself?”

As this suppliant voice fell upon his ears, Jacques felt as if all his energy were abandoning him, and his will was shaken. “I beseech you, Denise,” he said, “do not insist, do not deprive me of my courage.”

She was evidently suffering intolerable agony. There was a gleam of fire in her eyes, and her parched lips quivered. “You will submit to being brought up in court?” she asked.

“Yes!”

“And if you are condemned?”

“I may be, I know.”

“This is madness!” cried Denise, wringing her hands in despair,—“My God,” she added, “inspire me! How can I bend him? What must I say? Jacques, do you love me no longer? For my sake, if not for your own, I beseech you let us fly! You escape disgrace; you secure liberty. Can nothing touch you? What more do you want? Must I throw myself at your feet?” While saying this, she let herself sink in reality to the ground. “Fly!” she repeated again and again. “Oh, fly!”

Like all truly energetic men, Jacques recovered his self-possession, by the very excess of his emotion. Gathering together his bewildered thoughts, he raised Denise, and carried her, almost fainting, to the rough prison bench; then, kneeling down by her side, and taking her hands, he said,—“Denise, for pity’s sake, come to yourself and listen to me. I am innocent; and to fly would be to confess that I am guilty.”

“Ah! what does that matter?”

“Do you think that my escape would stop the trial?”

No. Although absent, I should be tried, and found guilty without any opposition : I should be condemned, disgraced irrevocably dishonoured."

"What does it matter?"

He felt that his arguments would never bring her back to reason. He rose, therefore, and said in a firm voice,—
"Let me tell you what you do not know. To fly would be easy I agree. I think, as you do, I could reach England readily enough, and we might even take ship there without trouble. But what then? The cable is faster than the fastest steamer; and, upon landing on American soil, I should, no doubt, be met by agents with orders to arrest me. But suppose even I should escape this first danger. Do you think there is in all this world an asylum for incendiaries and murderers? There is none. At the extreme confines of civilisation I should still meet with police-agents and soldiers, who, with an extradition treaty in hand, would give me up to the government of my country. If I were alone, I might possibly escape all these dangers. But I should never succeed if I had you near me, as well as Grandpapa Chandore, and your two aunts."

Denise was forcibly struck by these objections, of which she had had no idea. She said nothing, but let her lover continue speaking—"Still, suppose we might possibly escape all such dangers. What would our life be! I should have to hide and fly incessantly; to avoid the looks of every suspicious stranger; to tremble, constantly, at the thought of discovery! With me, Denise, your existence would be like that of some bandit's wife. And you ought to know that such a life is so intolerable, that hardened criminals have been unable to endure it, and have given themselves up simply to secure the boon of one night's quiet sleep."

Big tears were rolling down the poor girl's cheeks. "Perhaps you are right, Jacques," she murmured, "but, O Jacques, if they should condemn you!"

"Well, I should at least have done my duty. I should have met fate, and defended my honour. And, whatever the sentence may be, it will not overwhelm me; for, as long as my heart beats, I mean to defend myself. And, if I die before I succeed in proving my innocence, I shall leave it to you, Denise, to your kindred, and to my friends, to continue the struggle, and to restore my honour."

She fully comprehended and appreciated these sentiments. "I was wrong, Jacques," she said, offering him her hand; "you must forgive me."

So saying, she rose, and was about to leave the room, when Jacques retained her, exclaiming, "I do not mean to fly; but would not the people who have agreed to favour my escape be willing to furnish me with the means for passing a few hours outside the prison?"

"I think they would," replied Denise; "and if you wish, I will make sure of it."

"Yes. That might be a last resort."

With these words they parted, exhorting each other to keep up their courage, and promising to meet again in a day or two.

In the passage Denise found her poor aunt Lavarande very tired from her long watch; and they hastened home together. "How pale you are!" exclaimed M. de Chandore, when he saw his granddaughter; "and how red your eyes are! What has happened?"

In reply she told him everything; and the old gentleman felt a chill run through him, when he learnt that if Jacques had chosen he might have carried Denise away. Still he had not done so. "Ah, Boiscoran's an honest man!" said the baron, and pressing his lips to Denise's brow, he added,—“And you love him more than ever?"

"Alas!" she replied, "is he not more unhappy than ever?"

XX.

ALL Sauveterre soon knew that Mademoiselle de Chandore had been to see Jacques de Boiscoran in prison; and many and varied were the comments exchanged concerning this "surprising" event. The ladies of society were inexpressibly shocked and scandalised. Indeed, the Sauveterre folks claim to be exceedingly virtuous, and consequently fancy they have the right to be extremely severe when any question of propriety has to be decided. Thus any person who defies public opinion is lost. Now, public opinion was decidedly against Jacques de Boiscoran. He was down, and everybody was ready to kick him. "Would he get out of it?" was a question discussed day

after day at the Cercle Litteraire—a question which had called forth torrents of eloquence, fostered interminable discussions, and even provoked two or three serious quarrels, one of which had resulted in a duel. Still people no longer asked themselves, “Is he innocent?” Dr. Seignebos’s eloquence, M. Seneschal’s influence, and Mechinet’s cunning plots had all failed. “Ah, what an interesting trial it will be!” said many people who were all eagerness to know who would be the presiding judge, in order to apply for tickets of admission to the court. Day by day the interest in the case became more intense, and all who were in any way connected with it were watched with the greatest curiosity. Everybody wanted to know what they were doing, what they thought, and what they said.

An additional proof of Jacques’s guilt was found in the fact of the Marquis de Boiscoran’s continued absence from Sauveterre: while M. Folgat’s prolonged presence created no small wonder. His extreme reserve, which people ascribed to an excessive, ill-placed pride, had made him generally disliked; and it was remarked that he must have little enough to do in Paris, since he could spend all his time at Sauveterre.

The editor of the local newspaper—*L’Independent de Sauveterre*—naturally found the affair a veritable gold-mine. He forgot his old feud with the editor of *L’Impartial de la Saône* on the score of political differences, and filled his journal with speculations concerning the “Boiscoran Affair”—printing, moreover, in large type any trifling information that came to his knowledge, such as the state of the Count de Claudieuse’s health, which still remained precarious; the visits Jacques had received in prison since his solitary confinement had terminated, and finally the sudden departure of Madame de Boiscoran and M. Folgat for Paris. Never had “*L’Independent*” been read with so much interest. And, as everybody wished to be better informed than his neighbour, a number of idle fellows assumed the duty of watching Jacques’s friends, spending their time in trying to find out what was going on at M. de Chandore’s house. Thus it happened that on the evening of the day when Denise visited Jacques in prison the street was full of curious people, who, at about half-past ten, saw M. de Chandore’s carriage come out of the courtyard, and drawn up at the door. At eleven o’clock M. de

Chandore and Dr. Seignebois got in, the coachman whipped the horses, and the vehicle disappeared down the street. "Where can they be going?" asked the sight-seers. Full of curiosity they followed the carriage, which took the road leading to the railway station. A telegram from M. Folgat had apprised M. de Chandore of the young advocate's return with the Marquis and Marchioness de Boiscoran. According to the time-tables the travellers should have reached their destination at five minutes before midnight, but the branch service which connects Sauveterre with the main Orleans line is not noted for punctuality, and, when half-past twelve struck, the train had not yet been signalled. Everything around was silent and deserted. Through the office windows the station master might be seen fast asleep in his huge leather-seated chair. Clerks and porters also were resting, stretched out on the benches of the waiting-room. But people are accustomed to such delays at Sauveterre; they are prepared for being kept waiting; and the doctor and M. de Chandore walked up and down the platform, without displaying either astonishment or impatience. Nor would they have been much surprised if they had been told they were being closely watched, for they knew their good town, its singularities and foibles.

At last, towards one o'clock, the telegraph gave notice, a bell rang, and the station seemed to start into life. The station-master opened his door; the porters stretched themselves and rubbed their eyes: there was a brisk exchange of orders and exclamations; doors were slammed to, trucks wheeled right and left, and then a low roar was heard approaching and a fierce red light some distance up the line shone out in the dark night like a ball of fire. At the same moment M. de Chandore and the doctor hastened to the waiting room. The train stopped. A carriage door opened, and the marchioness appeared, leaning on M. Folgat's arm. The marquis, a travelling-bag in hand, followed behind.

"So that is what they were waiting for!" exclaimed the volunteer spies, who had flattened their noses against the window panes. And as the train brought no other passengers for Sauveterre, they hastened back to the town, being eager to proclaim the arrival of the prisoner's father. The hour was unfavourable, for most people were abed; still

there was of course a chance that somebody would be found at the club, where late hours are kept, owing to the gambling proclivities of several of the members. Among these latter the indefatigable newshunters would in all probability find willing ears to listen to the interesting information which they were so eager to spread. Still had they not been in such a hurry to hawk it all over the town, they might have witnessed, perhaps not entirely unmoved, this first interview between M. de Chandore and the Marquis de Boiscoran.

By a natural impulse they both stepped forward, and warmly grasped each other's hand. Tears stood in their eyes, and their lips parted as if to speak, still they said nothing. Indeed there was no need of words between them, for that mutual grasp had fully revealed their sufferings. They remained thus standing motionless, looking at each other, when Dr. Seignebos, who could not continue still for any length of time, came up to them and exclaimed, "The trunks are on the carriage: shall we go?"

They at once left the station. The night was clear; and against the pale blue starlit sky on the horizon, far above the dark mass of the sleeping town, there rose the towers of the old castle, which now served as the prison of Sauveterre. "So that is the place where my Jacques is kept," murmured the marquis. "There he is imprisoned, accused of horrible crimes."

"We will get him out of it," replied the doctor cheerfully, as he helped the old gentleman into the carriage. But in vain did he try to rouse the spirits of his companions. His hopes found no echo in their distressed hearts. M. Folgat inquired after Denise, whom he had been surprised not to see at the station, and M. de Chandore replied that she had stopped at home, with the Demoiselles de Lavarande, to keep M. Magloire company. Meanwhile the marquis had enough to do to suppress the spasmodic sobs which would every now and then rise in his throat. He was upset by the thought that he was at Sauveterre. Whatever may be said to the contrary, distance does weaken our emotions. Shaking hands with M. de Chandore in person had moved him more deeply than all the letters he had received in Paris. And when he saw Jacques's prison from afar, he had the first clear notion of the moral tortures endured by his son. As for the mar-

chioness she was utterly exhausted ; it seemed as if her system were giving way. M. de Chandore trembled when he looked at the unhappy father and mother and contemplated their despair. If they were so downcast what could he hope for,—he, who knew how indissolubly Denise's fate in life was linked with Jacques's ?

At length the carriage stopped before the house. The door was opened instantly, and the marchioness found herself in Denise's arms, and soon afterwards she was comfortably seated in an easy-chair. The others had followed her. It was past two o'clock in the morning, but every minute now was valuable. Accordingly, Dr. Seignebos, after adjusting his spectacles, exclaimed, "I propose that we exchange our information. I, for my part, am still at the same point. But you know my views. I do not give them up. Cocolou is an impostor, and it shall be proved. I appear to notice him no longer ; but in reality I watch him more closely than ever."

At this point Denise interrupted him saying,—“Before anything is decided, there is one fact which you all ought to know. Listen.” Then, pale as death, for it cost her a great struggle to reveal the secret of her heart, but in a voice full of energy, and with an eye full of fire, she told them what she had already confessed to her grandfather, viz., the propositions she had made to Jacques, and his obstinate refusal to accede to them.

“Well done, mademoiselle !” cried Dr. Seignebos, full of enthusiasm. “Well done ! Jacques is very unfortunate, but still he is to be envied.”

Denise finished her recital. Then, turning with a triumphant air to M. Magloire, she added, “After that, is there any one who could yet believe that Jacques is a vile assassin ?”

The eminent advocate was not one of those men who set their opinions above the truth itself. “I confess,” he said, “that if I were to go and see Jacques to-morrow for the first time, I should not speak to him as I did before.”

“And I,” exclaimed the Marquis de Boiscoran,—“I declare that I answer for my son as for myself, and I mean to tell him so to-morrow.” Then turning towards his wife and speaking so low, that she alone could hear him, he added, “And I hope you will forgive me those suspicions the mere idea of which now fills me with horror.”

But the marchioness did not reply. She had no strength left: she fainted, and had to be removed, accompanied by Denise and the Demoiselles de Lavarande. As soon as they were out of the room, Dr. Seignebos locked the door, rested his elbow on the chimney-piece, and taking off his spectacles to wipe them, said to M. Folgat, "Now we can speak freely. What news do you bring us?"

XXI.

ELEVEN o'clock had just struck that same morning, when Blangin, the jailer, entered Jacques's cell in the most excited manner, exclaiming, "Sir, your father is down-stairs."

The prisoner jumped up as if he had received the shock of an electric battery. The night before he had had a note from M. de Chandore, informing him of the marquis's arrival; and his whole time had since been spent in preparing himself for the interview. How would it tend? Did his father doubt him, or did he believe in his innocence? Jacques had been left in ignorance of the marquis's sentiments. Accordingly, he had resolved to retain an attitude of reserve; and as he followed Blangin along the dismal passage and down the interminable steps, he tried to compose respectful phrases, and to look self-possessed. But before he could utter a single word he was in his father's arms. He felt himself pressed against the marquis's heart, and heard him stammer, "Jacques, my dear son, my unfortunate boy!"

In all his life, long and stormy as it had been, the marquis had not been tried so severely. Drawing Jacques to one of the parlour-windows, and leaning back a little, so as to see him better, he was amazed that he could ever have doubted his son. It seemed to him that he was standing there himself. He recognized his own features and bearing, his own frank but rather haughty expression, his own clear, bright eye. Then suddenly noticing details, he was shocked to perceive that Jacques looked so fearfully pale, and that more than one silvery hair peered forth amid his thick black curls. "Poor fellow!" said the marquis, "how you must have suffered!"

"I thought I should lose my senses," replied Jacques

simply. And with a tremour in his voice he asked, "But, dear father, why did you give no sign of life? Why did you stay away so long?"

The marquis was not unprepared for such a question. But how could he answer it? Could he ever tell Jacques the true secret of his hesitation? Turning his eyes aside, he answered, "I hoped I should be able to serve you better by remaining in Paris."

His embarrassment was too evident to escape Jacques's notice. "You did not doubt your own son, father?" he asked sadly.

"Never!" cried the marquis, "I never doubted a moment. Ask your mother, and she will tell you it was this proud assurance that I felt which kept me from coming down with her. When I heard of what they accused you, I said at once 'It is absurd!'"

Jacques shook his head and rejoined, "The accusation was absurd; and yet you see what it has brought me to."

Two big tears, which he could no longer retain, rolled down the old gentleman's cheeks. "You blame me, Jacques," he said. "You blame your father."

The man is rare who could see his father shed tears, and not feel his heart melt within him. All the resolutions Jacques had formed vanished in an instant. Pressing his father's hand in his own, he said,—“No, I do not blame you, father. And still I have no words to tell you how much your absence has added to my sufferings. I thought I was abandoned, disowned.”

For the first time since his imprisonment, the unfortunate man found a friend to whom he could confide all the bitterness that filled his heart. With his mother, and with Denise, honour forbade him to show his despair. M. Magloire's incredulity had made all confidence impossible, and M. Folgat, although as sympathetic as man could be, was, after all, a perfect stranger. But now he had near him a friend, the dearest and most precious friend that a man can ever have,—his father; now he had nothing to fear. "Is there a human being in this world," he said, "whose misfortunes equal mine? To be innocent, and not to be able to prove it! To know the guilty one, and not to dare mention the name. Ah! at first I did not take in the whole horror of my situation. I was frightened, to be sure; but I trusted that justice would discover the

truth. Justice! It was my friend Galpin-Daveline who represented it, and he cared little enough for the truth: his only aim was to prove that the man whom he accused was guilty. Read the papers, father, and you will see how I have been victimised by the most unheard-of combination of circumstances. Everything is against me. Never has that mysterious, blind, and absurd power, that awful power which we call fate, manifested itself so clearly. At first a sense of honour kept me from mentioning the Countess de Claudieuse's name, and then prudence. The first time I mentioned it to M. Magloire he told me I lied. Then I thought everything lost, I saw no other end but the court, and, after trial, the galleys or the scaffold. I wanted to kill myself. My friends made me understand that I did not belong to myself, and that, as long as I had a spark of energy and a ray of intelligence left me, I had not the right to dispose of my life."

"Poor, poor boy!" said the marquis. "No, you have no such right."

"Yesterday," continued Jacques, "Denis came to see me. Do you know what brought her here? She offered to fly with me. Father, the temptation was almost irresistible. Once free, with Denise by my side, what should I care for the world? She insisted, like the matchless girl that she is; and on the very spot where you now stand, she threw herself at my feet, imploring me to fly. I doubt whether I can save my life; still I would not go."

He felt deeply moved, and sank upon the rough bench, hiding his face in his hands, perhaps to conceal his tears. Suddenly however, he was seized with one of those attacks of passion which had mastered him but too often during his imprisonment, and he exclaimed,—“But what have I done to deserve this punishment?”

The marquis's brow suddenly darkened; and he replied in a solemn tone,—“You coveted your neighbour's wife, my son.”

Jacques shrugged his shoulders. “I loved the Countess de Claudieuse,” he said, “and she loved me.”

“Adultery is a crime, Jacques.”

“A crime? True, Magloire said the same thing. But, father, do you really consider it is? Then it is a crime which has certainly nothing appalling about it—a crime of which everybody is inclined to boast, and at which the

world smiles. The law, it is true, gives the husband the right of life and death; but, if you appeal to the law, it simply gives the guilty man six months' imprisonment, or makes him pay a few thousand francs."

Ah, if he had known his father's secret, he would never have spoken thus!

"Jacques," said the marquis, "the Countess de Claudieuse hints, as you say, that her youngest daughter is your child?"

"It may be so."

The Marquis de Boiscoran shuddered. Then he exclaimed bitterly,—*"It may be so! You say that carelessly, indifferently, madman that you are! Did you never think of the grief the Count de Claudieuse would feel if he should learn the truth? Or even if he merely suspected it! Can you not comprehend that such a suspicion is quite sufficient to embitter a whole life? Have you never realised that the harbouring of such a doubt inflicts a more cruel punishment than anything you have yet suffered?"* He paused. A few words more, and he would probably have betrayed his secret. Checking his excitement by a sustained effort, he added,—*"But I did not come here to discuss this question: I came to tell you, that, whatever may happen, your father will stand by you, and that, if you must undergo the disgrace of appearing in court, I will take a seat by your side."*

In spite of his own great trouble, Jacques had not been able to avoid noticing his father's unusual excitement and sudden vehemence. For a second he had a vague perception of the truth; but, before the suspicion could take form, it had vanished in presence of his father's promise to sit beside him and face the humiliation of a trial in open court. This self-abnegation and display of paternal love touched Jacques deeply. *"Ah, father!"* exclaimed he, *"I ought to ask your pardon for ever having doubted your heart one single moment."*

M. de Boiscoran tried his best to recover his self-possession. At last in an earnest voice he said,—*"Yes, I love you, my son: still you must not make me more of a hero than I am. I yet hope we may be spared an appearance in court."*

"Has anything new been discovered?"

"M. Folgat has found some traces which justify legiti

mate hopes, although, as yet, no real success has been achieved."

Jacques looked rather discouraged. "Traces?" he asked.

"Be patient. They are feeble traces, I admit, and such as could not be produced in court; but from day to day they may become decisive. And already they have had one good effect: they have brought us back M. Magloire."

"O if I could only be saved!"

"I shall leave to M. Folgat," continued the marquis, "the satisfaction of telling you the result of his efforts. He can explain their bearing better than I could. And you will not have long to wait; for last night, or rather this morning, when we separated, he and M. Magloire agreed to meet here at the prison before two o'clock."

A few minutes later a rapid step was heard in the passage; and Frumence Cheminot, the prisoner of whom Blangin had made an assistant, and whom Mechinet had employed to carry Jacques's letters to Denise, entered the parlour. He was a tall, strapping fellow of five or six and twenty, whose large mouth and small eyes were perpetually smiling. Although to-day a vagabond, without hearth or home, Frumence had once been a landowner. At his parents' death, when he was eighteen years old, he had come into possession of a house, flanked by a yard and garden, together with several acres of arable land, and a salt meadow, the whole worth about fifteen thousand francs. Unfortunately, the conscription was near; and when Frumence plunged his hand into the urn to decide whether he would have to go soldiering or not, to his horror and consternation, he drew out a bad number. As, despite his health and his muscles, he had an intense dislike for military service, he resolved to raise some money with the object of buying a substitute. Being a landowner, he soon met with an obliging person who agreed to lend him 3,500 francs for the space of two years in return for a first mortgage on his property. When the papers were signed, and Frumence had the money in his pocket, he set out for Rochefort, where dealers in substitutes abounded; and for two thousand francs, exclusive of some smaller items, he was provided with a substitute of the first quality. Delighted with the operation, Frumence was about to return home, when his evil star led

him to sup with a countryman, a former schoolmate, and now a sailor on board a coal-barge. Of course, when countrymen meet they must drink. And to be brief, Frumence indulged in such numerous potations that, after a fortnight's carouse, he was glad to borrow five francs from the stage-driver to enable him to get home. He had lost all taste for work, and acquired a real passion for tavern life and card play. He got more deeply into debt, sold all he possessed that was saleable, and being unable to pay the 3,500 francs he owed, his lands were sold, and one fine day he found himself in the street, possessing literally nothing in the world but the wretched clothes on his back. He might easily have found employment; for he was a good workman, and people were fond of him in spite of all. But he was even more afraid of work than he was fond of drink. So he became a vagabond, a loafer, dependent for subsistence on such kind-hearted toppers and hospitable housewives as he came across, and little by little, hunger being ever at hand, he turned marauder, pilfering some orchard of fruit, or digging potatoes in strangers' fields and cooking them in the corner of a wood. And such being his destitute condition, if he found neither potatoes in the fields, nor apples in the orchards, what else was left for him to do but to leap a fence, or scale a wall?

Relatively speaking, he was an honest man, incapable of stealing a piece of money; but with vegetables, fruit, poultry, and so on, he was not so particular. Thus it had come about that he was twice arrested, and condemned to several days' imprisonment; and each time he solemnly vowed that he would never be caught at it again, and that for the future he intended to work hard. And yet, unfortunately, he *had* been caught again. He had told his misfortunes to Jacques; and the latter, grateful to him for having facilitated his correspondence with Denise, felt kindly disposed towards him. When he saw him enter the prison parlour, cap in hand, he inquired,—“What's the matter, Frumence?”

“Sir,” replied the vagrant, “M. Blangin sends you word that the two advocates wish to see you.”

Hearing these words the marquis embraced his son once more. “Do not let them wait,” he said, “and above all keep up your courage.”

XXII.

THE Marquis de Boiscoran had not been mistaken about M. Magloire, who, already shaken by Denise's statement, had been completely overcome by M. Folgat's explanations. He now came to the jail, with the expressed determination to do his utmost to prove Jacques's innocence. "But I doubt very much whether he will ever forgive me for my previous incredulity," said he to M. Folgat, while they were waiting for the prisoner in his cell.

Jacques entered, still deeply moved by the interview he had just had with his father. M. Magloire at once approached him, saying—"I have never been able to conceal my thoughts. When I fancied you were guilty, and that you accused the Countess de Claudieuse falsely, I told you so with almost brutal candour. I have since found out my error, and am now convinced of the truth of your statement: so I come to tell you frankly, Jacques, that I was wrong to have had more faith in a woman's reputation than in a friend's honest word. Will you give me your hand."

Jacques did so instantly, joyfully exclaiming:—"Since you believe in my innocence, others may be induced to believe in it too. My salvation is drawing near."

While these words were being exchanged, M. Folgat had spread out on the table all the papers he had brought with him,—copies of official documents furnished by Mechin, and notes taken during his rapid journey. "First of all, my dear client," he said, "I must inform you of what has been done." He then recounted in detail the steps that Goudar and he had taken, concluding as follows:—"Let us sum up. We are able to prove three things: 1. That the house in the Rue des Vignes belongs to you; and that you and Sir Francis Burnett, who is known there, are one and the same person; 2. That you were visited at this house by a lady, who, judging by the precautions she took, had powerful reasons to remain unknown; 3. That this lady's visits took place at certain epochs every year, coinciding with the journeys which the Countess de Claudieuse made to Paris. Then for ourselves, we have another certainty,—that Suky Wood, the servant of the false Sir Francis Burnett, watched the mysterious lady

that she saw her, and consequently would know her again. This is evident from the deposition of the girl's friend. Consequently, if we discover Suky Wood, the Countess de Claudieuse is unmasked."

"If we discover her," said M. Magloire. "But here, unfortunately, we enter into the region of suppositions."

"Suppositions!" said M. Folgat. "Well, call them so; but they are based upon positive facts, and supported by a hundred precedents. Why should we not find this Suky Wood, whose birthplace and family we know, and who has no motive for concealment? Goudar has often ferreted out very different people to her; and you may be sure that Goudar will not sleep. I have held out to him a hope which will make him accomplish miracles,—the hope of receiving the house in the Rue des Vignes as a reward, should he only be successful. The stakes are so magnificent: he must win the game,—he who has won so many already. Who knows what he may not have discovered since I left him?"

Older than either M. Folgat or Jacques, the eminent advocate of Sauveterre was less ready to feel enthusiasm. "Yes," he observed, "what you say is true enough; and, if we only had time, I might say with you, 'We shall win the day!' But there is no time for Goudar's investigations: the assizes are at hand, and I fear it would be very difficult to obtain a postponement."

"Besides, I do not wish the case to be postponed," said Jacques.

"But—"

"On no account, Magloire, never! What? I should have to endure three months more of this torture? I could not do it; my strength is exhausted. This uncertainty has been too much for me. I could bear no more suspense."

"Do not trouble yourself about that," interrupted M. Folgat, "a postponement is out of question. On what pretext could we ask for it? The only way would be to introduce an entirely new element into the case. We should have to summon the Countess de Claudieuse."

The greatest surprise was apparent on Jacques's face. "Shall we not summon her anyhow?" he asked.

"That depends."

"I do not understand you."

"It is very simple, however. If Goudar should succeed, before the trial, in collecting sufficient evidence against her, I should summon her certainly; and then the case would naturally change entirely; the whole proceedings would begin anew; and you would probably appear only as a witness. If, on the contrary, we obtain, before the trial begins, no other proof but what we now have, I shall not mention her name even; for that would, in my and in M. Magloire's opinion, ruin your cause irrevocably."

"Yes," said the great advocate, "that is my opinion."

Jacques's amazement was great. "Still," he said, "if I am brought up in court, I must, in self-defence, speak of my connection with the Countess de Claudieuse."

"No."

"But that is my only explanation. Do you think you could defend me, do you think you could save me, without telling the truth?"

M. Folgat shook his head. "In court," said he, "the truth, as we are at present situated, is the last thing to be thought of. Do you fancy the jury would credit allegations which M. Magloire did not credit? No. Well, then, we had better not speak of them any more, and try to find some explanation which will meet the charges brought against you. Do you think we should be the first to act thus? By no means. There are very few cases in which the prosecution says all it knows, and still fewer in which the defence calls for everything it might call for. Out of ten criminal trials, there are at least three in which side-issues are raised. What will be the charge in court against you? The substance of the romance which the magistrate has invented in order to prove your guilt. You must meet him with another romance which proves your innocence."

"But the truth—"

"Is dependent on probability, my dear client. Ask M. Magloire. The prosecution only relies on probability: hence probability is all the defence has to care for. Human justice is feeble, and limited in its attributes; it cannot dive to the very bottom of things; it cannot judge motives, and fathom consciences. It can only judge from appearances, and decide by plausibility; there is hardly a case which has not some unexplored mystery, some undiscovered secret. The truth! Ah! do you think M. Galpin

has looked for it? If he did, why did he not summon Cocoleu? But no, as long as he can produce a criminal, who may be responsible for the crime, he is quite content. The truth! Which of us knows the real truth? Your case, M. de Boiscoran, is one of those in which neither the prosecution, nor the defence, not even the accused himself, knows the truth of the matter."

There followed a long silence, so perfect that one could hear the sentinel pacing up and down under the prison-windows. M. Folgat had said all he thought proper to say: he feared, in saying more, to assume too great a responsibility. But, after all, it was Jacques's life and Jacques's honour which were at stake. Therefore, it was for him alone to decide the basis of his defence. If counsel controlled his judgment too forcibly, he would have a right to say thereafter:—"Why did you not leave me free to choose? I should not have been condemned." M. Folgat had this fact in mind. Hence he spoke once more:—"The advice I give you, my dear client, is, in my eyes, the best; it is the advice I would give my own brother. But, unfortunately, I cannot say it is infallible. You must decide yourself. Whatever you may resolve, I am still at your service."

Jacques made no reply. His elbows resting on the table, his face in his hands, he remained motionless, absorbed in thought. What should he do? Should he follow his first impulse, tear the veil aside, and proclaim the truth? That was a doubtful policy, but, also, what a triumph if he succeeded! Should he adopt the views of his counsel, employ subterfuges and falsehoods? That was more certain of success; but to be successful in this way—was that a real victory? Jacques was in a terrible perplexity. The decision he formed would decide his fate. Suddenly he raised his head, and asked, "What is your advice, M. Magloire?"

The great advocate of Sauveterre looked grave. "I have had the honour to place before your mother all that my young colleague has just told you," he said somewhat curtly. "M. Folgat has but one fault,—he is too cautious. The physician must not ask his patient what he thinks of his remedies: he must prescribe them. It may be that our prescriptions do not meet with success; but, if you do not follow them, you are most assuredly lost."

Jacques hesitated for some minutes longer. These prescriptions, as M. Magloire called them, were painfully repugnant to his chivalrous and open character. "Would it be worth while," he murmured, "to be acquitted on such terms? Should I really be exculpated by such proceedings? Would not my after life be disgraced by unjust suspicions? I should not come out from the trial with a clear acquittal: I should have escaped by a mere chance."

"That would still be better than to go, by a clear judgment, to the galleys," said M. Magloire brutally.

This word, "galleys," made Jacques bound. He rose, took several strides up and down his cell, and then, stopping short in front of his two advocates, exclaimed,—“I put myself in your hands, gentlemen. Tell me what I must do.” Jacques had at least this merit—if he once formed a resolution, he was sure to adhere to it. Calm now, and self-possessed, he sat down, and said, with a melancholy smile,—“Let us hear the plan of battle.”

This plan had been for well-nigh a month M. Folgat's one great thought. All his intelligence, all his sagacity and knowledge of the world, had been brought to bear upon this case, which he had made his own, so to say, by the almost passionate interest he felt in it. He knew the tactics of the prosecution as well as M. Galpin-Daveline himself, and he knew its weak and its strong side even better than the investigating magistrate. "We shall proceed," he began, "as if no such person as the Countess de Claudieuse existed. We know nothing of her. We shall say nothing of the meeting at Valpinson, nor of the burnt letters. That being so, we must next look, not for the manner in which we spent our time, but for our purpose in going out the evening of the crime. Ah! If we could only suggest a plausible, a probable purpose, I should almost guarantee our success; for this is the turning-point of the entire case, on which all the discussion will take place"

Jacques did not seem to be fully convinced of this fact. "You think it will be so," he said.

"Unfortunately, it is but too certain; and, if I say unfortunately, it is because here we have to meet a formidable argument, the most decisive, in all respects, that has been raised, one on which M. Galpin has not insisted (he

is much too clever for that), but one which, in the hands of the prosecution, may become a terrible weapon."

"I must confess," said Jacques, "I do not very well see—"

"Have you forgotten the letter you wrote to Mademoiselle Denise the evening of the crime?" broke in M. Magloire.

Jacques looked first at one, and then at the other of his counsel. "What," he said, "that letter?"

"Overwhelms us, my dear client," rejoined M. Folgat. "Don't you remember it? In that note you told your betrothed that you would be prevented from spending the evening with her owing to business of the greatest importance, which could not be delayed? Thus, you see, you had predetermined, after mature consideration, to spend that evening in doing a certain thing. What was it? The prosecution says that this important business was to 'murder the Count de Claudieuse.' Now what can we say? Mademoiselle Denise has not handed your letter to the prosecution, but the latter is aware of its existence. M. de Chandore and M. Seneschal have spoken of it in the hope of exculpating you, and have even mentioned its contents. And M. Galpin knows it so well, that he has repeatedly mentioned it to you, and you have confessed all that he could desire." So saying, the young advocate looked among his papers; and referring to the reports of Jacques's examinations by the investigating magistrate, speedily showed him that such was the case.

Jacques was dumbfounded. But all prisoners are equally surprised when they are told of what they have stated in their examinations. There is not one who does not exclaim,—*"What, I said that? Never!"* And yet he *has* said it, and there is no denying it; for there it is written, and its authenticity is guaranteed by the culprit's own signature.

Such now proved the case with Jacques. The questions referring to the note he had written to Denise, and the "important business" he had had to transact on the night of the crime had been put to him so skilfully, and at such long intervals of time, that he had totally forgotten them; and yet now, when he recalled his answers, he had to acknowledge that he had confessed his purpose to devote that evening to a matter of great importance. "This

is fearful!" he cried. And overcome by the terrible reality of M. Folgat's apprehension, he added,—“How can we get out of it?”

“I told you,” replied M. Folgat, “we must find some plausible explanation.”

“I am sure I am incapable of that.”

The young lawyer seemed to reflect a moment, and then remarked,—“You have been a prisoner while I have been free. For a month now I have thought that matter over. Tell me where was your wedding to be?”

“At my house at Boiscoran.”

“Where was the religious ceremony to take place?”

“At the church at Brechy.”

“Have you ever spoken about it to the priest?”

“Several times. One day especially, when we discussed the matter in a pleasant way, he said jestingly to me, ‘I shall have you, after all, in my confessional.’”

M. Folgat almost trembled with satisfaction, and Jacques saw it. “Then the priest at Brechy was your friend?”

“An intimate friend. He sometimes came to dine with me without any ceremony, and I never passed him without shaking hands with him.”

The young lawyer's joy sparkled in his eyes:—“Well,” he said, “my explanation is growing quite plausible. Just hear what I have positively ascertained for a fact. From nine to eleven o'clock, on the night of the crime, there was not a soul at the parsonage at Brechy. The priest was dining with M. Besson, at his house; and his servant had gone out to meet him with a lantern. Now why should you not have gone to see the priest at Brechy, my dear client? In the first place, you had to arrange the details of the ceremony with him; then, as he is your friend, and a man of experience, and a priest, you wanted to ask him for his advice before taking so grave a step, and, finally, you intended to fulfil the religious duty of which he had spoken, and which you were rather reluctant to comply with.”

“Well said!” observed the eminent lawyer of Sauveterre approvingly,—“very well said!”

“So, you see, my dear client,” continued M. Folgat, “it was for the purpose of consulting the priest at Brechy that you deprived yourself of the pleasure of spending the evening with your betrothed. Now let us see how that

answers the allegations of the prosecution. They ask you why you took to the marshes. Why? Because it was the shortest way, and you were afraid of finding the priest in bed. Nothing more natural; for it is well known that the good man is in the habit of going to bed at nine o'clock. Still you had put yourself out in vain; for, when you knocked at the door of the parsonage, nobody came to open it."

Here M. Magloire interrupted his colleague, saying,—
"So far, all is very well. But now there comes a very great improbability. No one would think of going through the forest of Rochepommier in order to return from Brechy to Boiscoran. If you knew the country—"

"I know it; for I have carefully explored it. And the proof of it is, that, having foreseen the objection, I have found an answer. While M. de Boiscoran knocked at the door, a little peasant-girl passed by, and told him that she had just met the priest at a spot called the *Ca-fourche des Marechaux*. As the parsonage stands quite isolated, at the end of the village, such an incident is probable. As for the priest, chance led me to learn this: precisely at the hour when M. de Boiscoran would have been at Brechy, a priest passed by the spot I have mentioned: and this priest, whom I have seen, belongs to the next parish. He also dined at M. Besson's, and had just been sent for to attend a dying woman. The little girl, therefore, did not tell a story: she only made a mistake."

"Excellent!" said M. Magloire.

"Still," continued M. Folgat, "after this information, what did M. de Boiscoran do? He followed the wood; and hoping every moment to meet the priest, he walked as far as the forest of Rochepommier. Finding, at last, that the peasant-girl had—purposely or not—led him astray, he determined to return to Boiscoran through the woods. But he was in a very bad humour at having thus lost an evening which he might have spent with his betrothed: and this made him swear and curse, as the witness Gaudry has testified."

The famous lawyer of Sauveterre shook his head. "That is ingenious, I admit; and I confess, in all humility, that I could not have suggested any thing as good. But—for there is a 'but'—your story sins by its very

simplicity. The prosecution will say, 'If that is the truth, why did not M. de Boiscoran say so at once? what need was there for him to consult his counsel?'

M. Folgat's expression indicated that he was making a great effort to meet this objection. After a while, he replied,—“I know but too well that that is the weak point,—and a very weak point too; for it is quite clear, that, if M. de Boiscoran had given this explanation on the day of his arrest, he would have been released instantly. But what better can be found? What else can be found? However, this is only a rough sketch of my plan, and I have never put it into words till now. With your assistance, M. Magloire, and with the aid of Mechinet, to whom I am already indebted for very valuable information, with the aid of all our friends, in fine, I cannot help hoping that I may be able to improve my plan by adding some mysterious secret which may help to explain M. de Boiscoran's reticence. I thought, at one time, of calling in politics, and of pretending that, on account of the peculiar views of which he is suspected, M. de Boiscoran preferred keeping his connection with the priest at Brechy a secret.”

“Oh that would have been most unfortunate!” broke in M. Magloire. “We are not only religious at Sauveterre, we are devout, my good colleague,—excessively devout.”

“And I have given up that idea.”

Jacques, who had hitherto kept silent and motionless, now suddenly raised himself to his full height, and cried, in a voice of suppressed indignation, “Is it not too bad, is it not atrocious, that we should be compelled to concoct a falsehood! And I am innocent! What more could be done if I were a murderer?”

He was perfectly right: it was monstrous that he should be absolutely forced to conceal the truth. But his counsel took no notice of his indignation: they were too deeply absorbed in minutely examining their system of defence.

“Let us go on to the other points of the accusation,” said M. Magloire.

“If my version is accepted,” replied M. Folgat, “the rest follows as a matter of course. But will they accept it? On the day he was arrested, M. de Boiscoran, trying to find an excuse for having been out that night, said he had gone to see his wood-merchant at Brechy. That was

a disastrous imprudence. And here is the true danger; for the rest amounts to nothing. There is the water in which M. de Boiscoran washed his hands when he came home, and in which they have found traces of burnt paper. We have only to modify the facts very slightly to explain the circumstance. We have but to state what M. de Boiscoran really did, with a slight change in the motive. M. de Boiscoran is a passionate smoker: that is well-known. He had taken with him a good supply of cigarettes when he set out for Brechy; but he had no matches. And that is a fact. We can furnish proof, we can produce witnesses, that we had no matches; for we had forgotten our match-box, the day before, at M. de Chandore's—the box which we always carry about us, which everybody knows, and which is still lying on the mantel-piece in Mademoiselle Denise's little boudoir. Well, having no matches we found that we could go no farther without a smoke. We had gone some distance; and it was a question whether we should go on without smoking or return? No need of either! There was our gun; and we knew very well what sportsmen do under such circumstances. We took the shot out of one of our cartridges, and, in setting the powder on fire, we lighted a piece of paper. This is an operation in which you cannot help blackening your fingers. As we had to repeat it several times, our hands became very much soiled and very black, and our finger nails were full of little fragments of burnt paper."

"Ah! now you are right," exclaimed M. Magloire. "Well done!"

His young colleague became more and more animated; and always employing the professional "we," which his brethren affect, he continued,—“This water, which you dwell upon so much, is the clearest evidence of our innocence. If we had been an incendiary, we should certainly have poured it away as hurriedly as the murderer tries to wash out the blood-stains which betray him. The charge would have the same weight. Why refer to our letter to Mademoiselle Denise? we should ask. Because you pretend it proves our premeditation? Ah! there I hold you. Are we really so stupid, so bereft of common sense? That is not our reputation. What! we premeditate a crime, and ignore the fact that we shall certainly be convicted unless we prepare an *alibi*! Again: What! we

leave home with the fixed purpose of killing a man, and we load our gun with small shot! Really, you make the defence too easy; for your charges will not stand the test of being examined."

It was Jacques's turn this time to testify his approbation. "That is what I have told Galpin over and over again," he said. "And he never had anything to say in reply. We must insist on that point."

M. Folgat was consulting his notes. "I now come to a very important circumstance," he resumed, "and one which, at the trial, I should make a decisive question, if it should be favourable to our side. Your valet, my dear client,—your old Anthony—told me that he cleaned and washed your breech-loader the night before the crime."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Jacques.

"Well, I see you appreciate the importance of the fact. Did you fire your gun between that cleaning and the time when you set the cartridge on fire, in order to burn the Countess de Claudieuse's letters? If you did, we must say nothing more about it. If you did not, one of the barrels of the breech-loader must be clean, and then you are safe."

For more than a minute Jacques remained silent, trying to recall the facts; at last he replied, "It seems to me certain that I fired at a rabbit on the morning of that fatal day."

M. Magloire looked disappointed. "Fate again!" he said.

"Oh, wait!" cried Jacques. "I am quite sure, at all events, that I killed that rabbit at the first shot. Consequently, I can have only fouled one barrel of the gun. If I used the same barrel at Valpinson, to get a light, I am safe. With a double gun, one almost instinctively uses the right-hand barrel first."

M. Magloire's face grew darker. "Never mind," he said, "we cannot possibly make an argument upon such an uncertain chance—a chance, which, in case of error, would almost fatally turn against us. But at the trial, when they show you the gun, examine it, and tell me how that matter stands."

Thus they had sketched the outlines of their plan of defence. There remained nothing now but to perfect the details; and to this task the two lawyers were still devoted.

ing themselves when Blangin, the jailer, called to them through the wicket, that the prison doors were about to be closed.

"Five minutes more, my good Blangin!" cried Jacques. And drawing his two friends aside, as far from the wicket as he could, he said to them in a low and distressed voice, "A thought has occurred to me, gentlemen, which I think I ought to mention to you. I am sure that the Countess de Claudieuse must be suffering terribly since I am in prison. However certain she may be that she has left no traces behind her that could betray her, still she must tremble at the idea that I may, after all, tell the truth in self defence. She would deny it, I know; for she is doubtless confident that she is so sure of her prestige, that my accusations would not injure her marvellous reputation. Nevertheless, she cannot but shrink from the scandal. Who knows if she might not furnish us with the means to escape from the trial, so as to avoid this exposure? Could not one of you gentlemen make an attempt to influence her?"

M. Folgat was a man of quick resolution. "I will try," he answered, "if you will give me a line of introduction." Jacques immediately sat down, and wrote as follows:—

"I have told my counsel, M. Folgat, everything. Save me, and I swear to you eternal silence. Will you let me perish, Genevieve, when you know I am innocent?"

"JACQUES."

"Is that enough?" he asked, handing the lawyer the note.

"Yes; and I promise you I will see the Countess de Claudieuse within the next forty-eight hours."

Blangin was already growing impatient; and the two advocates had to leave the prison without further delay. As they crossed the place du Marche Neuf they noticed a number of boys and girls following a wandering musician, who, strumming on a wretched fiddle, sang, with all the local accent, an old ballad of Saintonge:—

"In the spring, mother Redbreast
In the bushes made her nest,
The good lady!
In the bushes made her nest,
The good lady!"

Instinctively M. Folgat fumbled in his pocket for some souz, when the musician came up to him, held out his hat as if to ask for alms, and whispered, "You do not recognise me?"

The advocate started. "You here!" he said.

"Yes, I myseif. I came this morning, I was watching for you; for I must see you this evening at nine o'clock. Let me in by the little garden-gate at the back of M. de Chandore's house." Then, taking up his fiddle again, the minstrel wandered off listlessly, singing as he went:—

"And a few, a few weeks later,
She had a wee, a wee bit birdy."

XXIII.

THE great lawyer of Sauveterre had been far more astonished than M. Folgat at this unexpected and extraordinary meeting. As soon as the wandering minstrel had left them, he said to his young colleague, "You know that individual?"

"That individual," replied M. Folgat, "is none other than the agent whose services I have engaged, and whom I mentioned to you."

"Goudar?"

"Yes, Goudar."

"And you did not recognise him?"

The young advocate smiled. "Not until he spoke," he replied. "The Goudar whom I know is tall, thin, beardless, and wears his hair cut like a brush. This street-musician is short, full bearded, and his long, smooth hair falls over his shoulders. How could I recognise my man in that vagabond costume, with a violin in his hand, and a provincial song set to music?"

M. Magloire smiled too as he said, "After all, what are professional actors in comparison with these men! Here is one who pretends having reached Sauveterre only this morning, and who knows the country as well as Frumence Cheminot himself. He has not been here twelve hours, and he speaks already of M. de Chandore's little garden-gate."

"Oh! I can explain that circumstance now, although,

at first, it surprised me very much. When I told Goudar the whole story, I no doubt mentioned the little gate in connection with Mechinet."

While chatting they had reached the upper end of the Rue Nationale. Here they stopped having different roads to take to return home. Before separating, M. Magloire inquired of his colleague if he were quite resolved to see the Countess de Claudieuse; and on receiving an affirmative reply he advised him to be very prudent, no matter what might happen. "Above all," he added, "do not lose your temper. Remember that a scene with her would compel us to change our whole line of defence, and that that is the only one which promises any success."

"Oh, do not fear!" replied M. Folgat, and then, having shaken hands once more, they parted.

On reaching the Baron de Chandore's residence, M. Folgat found every one waiting for him in the drawing-room. He was surprised to see how mournful and dejected all the prisoner's relatives and friends appeared to be. "Have we any bad news?" he asked with a hesitating voice.

"The worst we had to fear," replied the Marquis de Boiscoran. "We had all foreseen it; and still, as you see, it has surprised us like a clap of thunder. In a word, the court has ordered the trial!"

"It is still a great secret," added Denise; "and we only know it, thanks to the indiscretion of kind, devoted Mechinet. Jacques will have to appear before the assizes."

At this moment she was interrupted by a servant, who entered to announce that dinner was on the table. They went into the dining-room; but, under such circumstances, none of them had any appetite to eat, and, with the exception of Denise and M. Folgat, no one seemed inclined to talk. From Mademoiselle de Chandore the young advocate learned that the Count de Claudieuse was decidedly worse, and that he would have received the last sacraments that very day had it not been for Dr. Seignebos's decided opposition; for the physician had declared that the slightest excitement might kill his patient. "And if he dies," added M. de Chandore, "that is the finishing stroke. Public opinion, already incensed against Jacques, will become implacable."

However, the meal came to an end; and M. Folgat then

immediately acquainted Denise with Goudar's arrival and requested her to give him the key of the little garden-gate. Nine o'clock was just striking when the spurious minstrel was heard approaching down the lane; M. Folgat at once set the door ajar, and a minute later Goudar, still carrying his violin, slipped into the garden. "A day lost!" he exclaimed, without thinking of saluting the young lawyer,—“a whole day; for I could do nothing till I had seen you.”

He seemed so angry that M. Folgat tried to sooth him by complimenting him on his disguise. On this occasion, however, Goudar was not open to praise. "What would a detective be worth," he replied, "if he could not disguise himself! A great merit, forsooth! And I tell you, I hate it! But I could not think of coming to Sauveterre as a detective. Ugh! Everybody would have run away; and what a pack of lies they would have told me! So I had to act that hideous masquerade. To think that I once took six months' lessons from a music-teacher merely to fit myself for the character! A wandering musician, you see, can go anywhere, and nobody is surprised; he goes about the streets, or he travels along the high-road; he enters yards, and slips into houses; he begs for alms: and in so doing, he accosts everybody, speaks to them, follows them. And as for my precious dialect, you must know I was here once before, engaged during six months in hunting after a gang of coiners; and if you don't catch a provincial accent in six months, you don't deserve to belong to the police. And I do belong to it, to my wife's great distress and my own disgust."

"If your ambition is really what you say, my dear Goudar," said M. Folgat, interrupting him, "you may be able to leave your profession very soon—if you succeed in saving M. de Boiscoran, he will give you his house in the Rue des Vignes with all his heart?"

The detective looked up. "That house in the Rue des Vignes," he ejaculated, "that little paradise! An immense garden, a soil of marvellous fertility! And what an aspect! There are walls there on which I could raise finer peaches than they have at Montreuil, and richer chasselas grapes than those of Fontainebleau!"

"Did you find anything there?" asked M. Folgat.

Goudar, thus recalled to business, became serious again.

"Nothing at all," he replied. "Nor did I learn anything from the tradesmen. I am no farther advanced than I was the first day."

"Let us hope you will have more luck here."

"I hope so; but I need your assistance to commence operations. I must see Dr. Seignebos, and Mechinet the clerk! Ask them to meet me at the place I shall assign in a note which I will send them. On the other hand, if you want my *incognito* to be respected, you must get a permit from the mayor, for Goudar, street musician, to go about the town, I keep my own name, because here nobody knows me. But I must have that permit this evening. Wherever I might present myself, asking for a bed, they would call for my papers."

"Wait here for a quarter of an hour, there is a bench," said M. Folgat, "and I'll go at once to the mayor." And in fact a quarter of an hour later, Goudar had his permit in his pocket, and went to take lodgings at the "Mouton Rouge," the worst tavern in all Sauveterre.

When a painful unavoidable duty has to be performed, a man's real character is apt to appear in its true light. Some people postpone the task before them as long as they can, like those pious persons who keep the biggest sin for the end of their confession: others, on the contrary, are in a hurry to be relieved of their anxiety, and make an end of it as soon as possible. M. Folgat belonged to this latter class. When he awoke the next morning, he instantly resolved to call upon the Countess de Claudieuse that very day. At eight o'clock he left the house, dressed more carefully than usual, and told the servant that he did not wish to be waited for, if he should not be back at breakfast-time. He went first to the Palais de Justice, where he found Mechinet the clerk already hard at work, writing with the feverish haste of a man who has to pay for a piece of property he wants to call his own. Seeing M. Folgat enter, he rose, and asked him if he had heard the decision of the court concerning the order for the trial. The advocate replied affirmatively, adding that he was not surprised. He next asked what was the opinion current in the judicial world, to which Mechinet rejoined that every one expected a condemnation. Lowering his voice, M. Folgat then acquainted the clerk with Goudar's arrival and the latter's desire for an interview. Mechinet at once agreed

to meet the detective wherever the latter might appoint; and the advocate, having accomplished his mission, turned to leave, saying as he did so:—"One more suggestion. Goudar desires to remain unknown. Do not speak of him to any living soul, and especially show no surprise at the costume in which you will see him."

M. Folgat's next visit was to Dr. Seignebos. To his intense surprise he learnt that the latter had already seen Goudar. Indeed the detective had grown so tired of losing his time in his garret at the Mouton Rouge, that it occurred to him to pretend illness, and send for the doctor. The latter, on his arrival, found himself in face of a street minstrel who seemed to be in the enjoyment of perfect health, and he was at a loss to know in what way his services were required, when Goudar suddenly revealed himself, asked for the doctor's opinion concerning the Boiscoran case and imparted his own ideas. "Then there is an end of that matter," said M. Folgat, when Dr. Seignebos had given him this information. "But now let me speak to you of another affair. M. de Boiscoran has charged me with a message for the Countess de Claudieuse."

"The deuce!"

"I must try to obtain from her the means for our acquittal."

"Do you expect she will provide it?"

M. Folgat could hardly retain an impatient gesture. "I have accepted the mission," he said dryly, "and I mean to carry it out."

"I understand, my dear sir. But you will not see the countess. The count is very ill. She does not leave his bedside, and does not even receive her most intimate friends."

"And still I must see her. I must at any hazard give her a note which my client has confided to me. And look here, doctor, I mean to be frank with you. It was exactly because I foresaw there would be difficulties, that I came to ask your assistance in overcoming or avoiding them."

"Why come to me?"

"Are you not the count's physician?"

"Ten thousand devils!" cried Dr. Seignebos. "You do not mince matters, you lawyers!" And then speaking in a lower tone, and replying apparently to his own objec

tions rather than to M. Folgat, he added,—“Certainly, I attend the Count de Claudieuse, whose illness, by the way, upsets all my theories, and defies all my experience : but for that very reason I can do nothing. Our profession has certain rules which cannot be infringed without compromising the whole medical world.”

“But it is a question of life and death for Jacques, who is your friend !”

“And a fellow Republican, moreover. But I cannot help you without abusing the confidence of the Countess de Claudieuse.”

“Ah, sir ! Has not that woman committed a crime for which M. de Boiscoran, though innocent, will be arraigned in court ?”

“I think so ; but still”—The doctor paused, reflected a moment, and then suddenly snatched up his broad-brimmed hat, drew it over his head, and cried,—“After all so much the worse for her ! There are sacred interests which claim priority. Come !”

XXIV.

THE Count de Claudieuse and his wife had installed themselves, on the day after the fire, in a handsome house standing in the Rue Mautrec, which M. Seneschal, the mayor, had succeeded in renting for them. For more than a century it had been in the possession of the De Juliac family, and is still considered one of the finest and most magnificent mansions in Sauveterre. In less than ten minutes Dr. Seignebois and M. Folgat were there. From the street, nothing was visible but a tall wall of great antiquity, overgrown with parasitic plants and fringed above with wild flowers. Entering by a huge gateway pierced in the wall, you cross a large garden, in which a dozen statues, covered with green moss, are falling to pieces on their pedestals, under the shade of some magnificent old limes. The house has only two stories. From the large vestibule which extends from end to end of the ground floor, a wide staircase with stone steps and a superb wrought iron railing leads up stairs. Dr. Seignebois and M. Folgat passed through the garden, mounted the steps, and entered the hall. Here the doctor opened

a door on the right hand. "Step in here and wait," he said to M. Folgat. "I will go up stairs and see the count, whose room is on the next floor, and I will send you the countess."

The young advocate did as he was told, and found himself in a large room, lighted by three tall windows looking out upon the garden. This room must once have been superb. The panelled walls were painted white, with gilt mouldings and arabesques, while on the ceiling there appeared a vast allegorical composition representing a number of fat little angels sporting in a sky dotted with golden stars. Time had, however, half effaced the colours, and tarnished the gilding, while on the other hand the appointments of the chamber were altogether in a dilapidated condition. The windows had no curtains. On the mantelpiece stood a worn-out clock, flanked by a pair of half broken candelabras; and here and there about the room stood various pieces of furniture, which had been rescued from the fire at Valpinson,—chairs, sofas, arm-chairs, and a round table, more or less scorched and blackened by the flames.

M. Folgat paid little attention, however, to these details. He only thought of the grave step on which he was venturing, the extreme boldness of which he now realized for the first time. Thoughts of retreat had entered his head when he suddenly heard a light, rapid step in the hall. Almost immediately afterward the Countess de Claudieuse entered. He recognised her at once, thanks to Jacques's description. Far from diminishing her exquisite beauty, the terrible events of the last months seemed, as it were, to have hallowed her charms. Perhaps she had grown rather thin, and the dark semicircle under her eyes, and the disorder of her hair certainly betrayed the fatigue and the anxiety of long nights spent by her husband's bedside. As M. Folgat bowed, she asked him,—“You are M. de Boiscoran's counsel?”

“Yes, madam,” replied the young advocate.

“The doctor tells me you wish to speak to me.”

“Yes, madame.”

With a queenly air, she pointed to a chair, and, sitting down herself, added,—“I am listening, sir.”

M. Folgat began with beating heart, but in a firm voice,—

"I ought, first of all, madame, to state to you my client's true position."

"That is useless, sir. I know it."

"You know, madame, that he has been summoned for trial and that he may be condemned?"

She shook her head with a painful gesture, and replied softly,—*"I know, sir, that the Count de Claudieuse has been the victim of a most infamous attempt at murder; that he is still in danger, and that, unless God works a miracle, I shall soon be without a husband, and my children without a father."*

"But M. de Boiscoran is innocent, madame."

The features of the countess assumed an expression of profound surprise. "And who, then, is the murderer?" she said, looking fixedly at M. Folgat.

Ah! It cost the young advocate no small effort to prevent his lips from uttering the fatal "You" prompted by his indignant conscience. But he had to think of the success of his mission; and, instead of replying, he said,—*"To a prisoner, madame, to an unfortunate man on the eve of judgment, an advocate is a confessor, to whom he tells everything. I must add that the counsel of the accused is like a priest; he must forget the secrets confided to him."*

"I do not understand you, sir."

"My client, madame, had a very simple means of proving his innocence. He had only to tell the truth. He has preferred risking his own honour, rather than to betray another person's honour."

The countess looked impatient. "My moments are limited, sir," she exclaimed hastily. "May I beg you to be more explicit?"

But M. Folgat had gone as far as he well could go. "Madame," he said, "I am desired by M. de Boiscoran to hand you a letter."

The Countess de Claudieuse seemed to be overwhelmed with surprise. "A letter to me?" she said. "On what ground?"

Without adding a word, M. Folgat drew Jacques's letter from his pocketbook, and gave it to her. "Here it is!" he said.

She took it with a perfectly steady hand, and opened it slowly. But, as soon as she had run her eye over it, she

rose, her face turned crimson, and, with flaming eyes, she cried,—“Do you know, sir, what this letter contains?”

“Yes.”

“Do you know that M. de Boiscoran dares to call me by my christain name, Genevieve, as my husband and my father do!”

The decisive moment had now come. M. Folgat had retained all his self-possession. “M. de Boiscoran,” said he, “claims that he used to call you so in former days,—in the Rue des Vignes—in days when you called him Jacques.”

The countess seemed utterly bewildered. “But that is sheer infamy, sir,” she stammered. “What! M. de Boiscoran should have dared to tell you that I, the Countess de Claudieuse, was his—mistress?”

“He certainly said so, madame; and he affirms, that a few moments before the fire broke out, he was near you, and that, if his hands were blackened, it was because he had burned your letters and his.”

She rose at these words, and in a penetrating voice replied,—“And you could believe that,—you? Ah! M. de Boiscoran’s other crimes are nothing in comparison with this? He is not satisfied with having burnt our house, with having ruined us: he means to dishonour us as well. He is not satisfied with having nearly murdered my husband: he must ruin the honour of his wife also.”

She spoke so loud, that her voice must have been distinctly heard in the vestibule. “Lower, madame, I pray you speak lower,” said M. Folgat.

She cast upon him a withering glance; and, raising her voice still higher, she went on,—“Yes, I understand very well that you are afraid of being heard. But I—what have I to fear? I could wish the whole world to hear us, and to judge between us. Lower, you say? Why should I speak less loud? Do you think that if the Count de Claudieuse were not on his death-bed, this letter would not have long since been in his hands? Ah, *he* would soon obtain satisfaction for such an infamous letter. But I am a poor woman, and the world thinks that my husband is lost already. I am alone without a protector, without a friend.”

“But, madame, M. de Boiscoran pledges himself to the most perfect secrecy.”

“Secrecy! what secrecy? For your cowardly insults,

your abominable plots, of which this, no doubt, is but a beginning?"

M. Folgat turned livid under this insult. "Ah, take care, madame," he said in a hoarse tone of voice: "we have proof, absolute, overwhelming proof."

The countess stopped him with an imperious gesture, and then with the haughtiest disdain replied,—“Well, then, produce your proof. Go, hasten, act as you like. We shall see if the vile calumnies of an incendiary can stain an honest woman’s pure reputation. We shall see if a single speck of the mire in which you wallow can reach me.” And, throwing Jacques’s letter at M. Folgat’s feet, she went towards the door.

“Madame,” said M. Folgat once more,—“madame!” But she did not even condescend to turn round: she disappeared, leaving him standing in the middle of the room, so overcome with amazement, that he could not collect his thoughts. Fortunately Dr. Seignebos came in.

“Upon my word!” he said, “I never thought the countess would take my treachery so coolly. When she came out from you just now, she asked me, in the same tone as usual, how I had found her husband, and what was to be done. I told her—” The rest of the sentence remained unspoken, for the doctor had become aware of M. Folgat’s utter consternation. “Why, what on earth is the matter?” he asked.

The young advocate looked at him with an utterly bewildered air. “This is the matter: I ask myself whether I am awake or dreaming. This is the matter; that, if this woman is guilty, she possesses an audacity beyond all belief.”

“How, if? Have you changed your mind about her guilt?”

M. Folgat looked altogether disheartened. “Ah!” he said, “I hardly know myself. Do you not see that I have lost my head, that I do not know what to think, and what to believe? And yet, doctor, I am not a simpleton. I have now been pleading five years in criminal courts: I have had to dive down into the lowest depths of society; I have seen strange things, met with exceptional specimens of human nature, and heard fabulous stories—”

It was the doctor’s turn, now, to be amazed; and he

actually forgot to trouble his gold spectacles. "Why? What did the countess say?" he asked.

"I might tell you every word," replied M. Folgat, "and you would be none the wiser. You ought to have been here, and seen her and heard her! What a woman! Not a muscle in her face moved; her eye remained limpid and clear; there was no emotion in her voice. And with what an air she defied me! But come, doctor, let us go!"

They went out, and were already a third of the way down the long garden avenue, when they saw the countess's elder daughter coming towards them, on her way to the house, accompanied by her governess. Dr. Seignebos stopped, and pressing the young advocate's arm, he whispered into his ear,—*"Mind! say nothing. You know that truth comes out of children's mouths."*

"What do you expect?" murmured M. Folgat.

"To settle a doubtful point. Hush! Let me manage it."

By this time the little girl had reached them. She was a graceful child, eight or nine years old, light haired, with large blue eyes, tall for her age, and evidently intelligent. *"How are you, my little Martha?"* said the doctor in his gentlest voice.

"Good morning, gentlemen!" she replied with a nice little courtesy.

Dr. Seignebos bent down to kiss her rosy cheeks, and then, looking at her, he said,—*"You look sad, Martha?"*

"Yes, because papa and little sister are ill," she replied with a deep sigh.

"And also because you miss Valpinson?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Still it is very pretty here, and you have a large garden to play in."

She shook her head, and, lowering her voice, replied,—*"It is certainly very pretty here; but—I am afraid."*

"Afraid of what, my little one?"

She pointed to the statues, and shuddering, replied,—*"In the evening, when it grows dark, I fancy they are moving. I think I see people hiding behind the trees, like the man who wanted to kill papa."*

"You ought to drive away those ugly notions, Mademoiselle Martha," said M. Folgat.

But Dr. Seignebos did not allow him to go on. *"What*

Martha?" he said, "I did not know you were so timid. I thought, on the contrary, you were very brave. Your papa told me that on the night of the fire you were not afraid of anything."

"Papa was right."

"And yet, when you were aroused by the flames, it must have been terrible."

"Oh! it was not the flames that woke me, doctor."

"Still the fire had broken out."

"I was not asleep, doctor. I woke when mamma slammed the bedroom door as she came in."

One and the same presentiment made M. Folgat and the doctor tremble. "You must be mistaken, Martha," said the practitioner. "Your mamma had not gone out at the time of the fire."

"Oh, yes, sir!"

"No, you are mistaken."

The little girl drew herself up with that solemn air which children are apt to assume when their statements are doubted. "I am quite sure of what I say," she replied, "and I remember everything perfectly. I had been put to bed at the usual hour, and, as I was very tired with playing, I fell asleep at once. While I was asleep, mamma had gone out; but her coming back woke me up. As soon as she came in, she bent over little sister's bed, and looked at her for a moment so sadly, that I thought I should cry. Then she went, and sat down by the window; and from my bed, where I lay watching her, I saw the tears running down her cheeks, when all of a sudden a shot was fired."

M. Folgat and Dr. Seignebos looked anxiously at each other. "Then, my little one," insisted Dr. Seignebos, "you are quite sure your mamma was in your room when the first shot was fired?"

"Certainly, doctor. And mamma, when she heard it, rose up straight, and lowered her head, like one who listens. Almost immediately afterwards, the second shot was fired, and mamma raised her hands to heaven, and cried, 'Great God!' And then she went out very quickly."

"You have dreamed all that, Martha," said, Dr. Seignebos.

"But the governess here interposed. 'The young lady did not dream it,' she said. 'I, also, heard the shots fired,

and I had just opened the door of my room to know what was going on, when I saw madame cross the landing swiftly, and rush down stairs."

"Oh! I do not doubt it," said the doctor, in the most indifferent tone he could assume, "the circumstance is very unimportant."

But the little girl was bent upon finishing her story. "When mamma left," she continued, "I was very frightened, and sat up in bed to listen. Soon I heard a noise I did not know,—cracking and snapping of wood, and then cries at a distance. I got more frightened, jumped out of bed, and ran to open the door. But I nearly fell down, there was such a cloud of smoke and sparks. Still I did not lose my head. I woke my little sister, and tried to get on to the staircase, when Cocoleu rushed in like a madman, and took us both out."

"Martha," called a voice from the house, "Martha!"

The child stopped short at once. "Mamma is calling me," she said. And, dropping another little courtesy, she added,—"Good-bye, gentlemen!"

She had disappeared; and Dr. Seignebos and M. Folgat were still standing on the same spot, looking at each other in utter distress. "We have nothing more to do here," said M. Folgat.

"No, indeed! Let us make haste and get back; for perhaps they are waiting for me. You must breakfast with me."

They went away very much disheartened, and so absorbed in their defeat, that they forgot to return the salutations with which they were greeted in the street,—a circumstance carefully noticed by several watchful observers.

When the doctor reached home, he showed the advocate into his study, and asked,—"And now what do you think of your adventure?"

M. Folgat looked completely undone. "I cannot understand it," he murmured.

"Is it possible the countess could have schooled the child to say what she told us?"

"No."

"And her governess?"

"Still less. A woman of that character trusts nobody. She struggles; she triumphs or succumbs alone."

"Then the child and the governess have told us the truth?"

"I am convinced of that."

"So am I. Then she had no share in her husband's murder?"

"Alas!"

M. Folgat did notice that his "Alas!" was received by Dr. Seignebois with an air of triumph. The practitioner had taken off his spectacles, and, wiping them vigorously observed, "If the countess is innocent, Jacques must be guilty, you think? Jacques must have deceived us all then?"

M. Folgat shook his head. "I pray you, doctor, do not press me just now. Give me time to collect my thoughts. I am bewildered by all these conjectures. No, I am sure M. de Boiscoran has not told a falsehood. The countess has been his mistress. No, he has not deceived us; and on the night of the crime he really had an interview with the countess. Did not Martha tell us that her mother had gone out? And where could she have gone, if not to meet M. de Boiscoran?"

He paused a moment. "Oh, come, come!" said the physician, "you need not be afraid of me."

"Well it may be possible, that after the countess left M. de Boiscoran, Fate stepped in. Jacques has told us how the letters which he was burning suddenly blazed up, with such fury that he was alarmed. Who can tell whether some burning fragments may not have set a straw-rick on fire? You can judge yourself. On the point of leaving the place, M. de Boiscoran sees this fire ignited. He hastens to put it out. His efforts are unsuccessful. The fire increases step by step: it lights up the whole front of the chateau. At that moment the Count de Claudieuse comes out. Jacques thinks he has been watched and detected; he sees his marriage broken off, his life ruined, his happiness destroyed; he loses his head, aims, fires, and flies instantly. Thus one might explain his missing the count the first time, and also the fact, that the gun was loaded with small-shot a circumstance which seems to preclude the idea of premeditated murder."

"Good God!" cried the doctor.

"What, what have I said?"

"Take care never to repeat it! The suggestion you make is so fearfully plausible, that, if it becomes known, no one will ever believe you when you tell the real truth."

"The truth? Then you think I am mistaken?"

"Most assuredly," and fixing his spectacles on his nose, Dr. Seignebos added, "I never admitted that the countess had fired at her husband. I now see that I was right. She did not perpetrate the crime herself; but she instigated it."

"Oh!"

"She would not be the first woman who has acted in this manner. What I imagine is that the countess had made up her mind and arranged her plan, before meeting Jacques. The murderer was already at his post. If she had succeeded in winning Jacques back, her accomplice would have put away his gun, and quietly gone to bed. As she could not induce Jacques to give up his marriage, she made a sign, the fire was lighted, and the count was shot."

The young advocate did not seem fully convinced. "In that case, there would have been premeditation," he objected; "and how, then, came the gun to be loaded with small-shot?"

"The accomplice had not sense enough to know better."

Seeing the doctor's drift, M. Folgat started up,—*"What?"* he said, *"always Cocoleu?"*

Dr. Seignebos tapped his forehead with his finger, and replied, "When an idea has once made its way in there—there it remains fixed. Yes, the countess had an accomplice, and that accomplice was Cocoleu; and if he has no sense, you see the wretched idiot at least carries his devotion and discretion very far."

"If what you say is true, doctor, we shall never get the key of this affair; for Cocoleu will not confess."

"Don't swear to that. There is a way—" He paused, being interrupted by the sudden entrance of his servant who announced that there was a gendarme down stairs, with a man who ought to be sent to the hospital at once.

"Show them up," said the doctor. And, while the servant went to do his bidding, Dr. Seignebos added, "And here *is* the way. Now mind!"

A heavy step was heard shaking the stairs; and almost immediately afterwards a gendarme appeared, holding in one hand a violin, and with the other supporting an individual who seemed unable to walk alone.

"Goudar!" exclaimed M. Folgat, and Goudar it was.

but in what a state! His clothes were muddy and torn, his face pale, his eyes haggard, his beard and lips covered with white foam.

"The story is this," said the gendarme. "This individual was playing his fiddle in the court-yard of the barracks and we were looking out of the window at him, when all of a sudden he fell on to the ground, rolled about, twisted and writhed, uttering fearful howls, and foaming like a mad dog. We picked him up; and I bring him to you."

"Leave us alone with him," said the physician.

The gendarme went out; and as soon as the door was shut, Goudar cried with a voice full of intense disgust,—
"What a profession! Just look at me! What a disgrace if my wife should see me in this state! Phew!" And pulling a handkerchief from his pocket, he wiped his face and drew from his mouth a small piece of soap.

"But the point is," said the doctor, "that you have played the epileptic so well that the gendarmes have been taken in."

"A fine trick indeed, and very creditable."

"An excellent trick, since you can now safely go to the hospital. They will put you in the same ward with Cocoleu, and I shall come and see you every morning. You are free to act now."

"Never mind me," said the detective, "I have my plan." Then turning to M. Folgat, he added, "I am a prisoner now; but I have taken my precautions. The agent whom I have sent to England will report to you. I have a favour to ask besides. I have written to my wife to send her letters to you: you can send them to me by the doctor. And now I am ready to become Cocoleu's companion, and to earn the house in the Rue des Vignes."

Having signed an order of admission, Dr. Seignebos recalled the gendarme; and, after praising his compassion, asked him to take "the poor devil" to the hospital. When he was alone once more with M. Folgat, he said,—
"Now, my dear friend, let us consult. Shall we speak to any one of what little Martha told us, or of Goudar's plan? I think not; for M. Galpin Daveline is watching us; and, if a mere suspicion of what is going on reaches the prosecution, all is lost. Let us content ourselves, then, with reporting your interview with the countess to Jacques. As for the rest, Silence!"

XXV.

LIKE all very clever men, Dr. Seignebos made the mistake of thinking other people as cunning as himself. M. Galpin-Daveline was, of course, watching him, but by no means with the attention which one would have expected from so ambitious a man. He had naturally been the first to receive notification that the case would be tried in open court. And from that moment he felt relieved of all anxiety. As for remorse he had none. There was nothing he regretted. He did not reflect that the prisoner had once been his friend,—a friend of whom he was proud, whose hospitality he had enjoyed, and whose favour he had eagerly sought in his matrimonial aspirations. No. He only saw one thing,—that he had engaged in a dangerous affair, on which his whole future depended, and that he was now going to win triumphantly.

Of course he was not relieved of all responsibility; but the zeal he had shown in preparing the case for trial was no longer requisite. He need not appear at the trial itself; and, whatever might be the result, he trusted that he should now always escape the blame, which would have certainly fallen on his shoulders if the accusation chamber, failing to support the conclusions of his report, had decided that there was not sufficient evidence for the case to go before the jury. He was aware that many people said he had betrayed his friend; that his social relations were well-nigh broken off, and that nobody shook hands with him heartily. But that gave him no concern. After all, what was Sauveterre?—a miserable little town of five thousand inhabitants! He hoped he should not remain there much longer, and that a brilliant preferment would repay him for his courage, and relieve him from all foolish reproaches. Besides, once in the large city to which he would be promoted, distance would attenuate and, perhaps, even efface the impression made by his conduct at Sauveterre. All that would be remembered, after a time, would be his reputation as one of those famous magistrates, who, according to the stereotyped phrase, “sacrifice everything to the sacred interests of justice, who set inflexible duty high above all the considerations that trouble and disturb the vulgar mind, and whose heart is like a rock, against which all human

passions are helplessly shattered." With such a reputation, with his knowledge of the world, and eagerness to succeed, opportunities would not be wanting to push himself forward, to make himself known, to become useful, indispensable even. He saw himself already on the highest steps of the official ladder—a judge at Bordeaux, at Lyons, or even in Paris itself!

With such rose-coloured dreams he fell asleep one night, and the next morning, as he walked along the streets, his bearing—haughtier and stiffer than ever—his firmly closed lips, and the cold and severe gleam in his eyes, told the curious observers that there must be something new. "M. de Boiscoran's case must be very bad indeed," they said, "or M. Galpin would not look so proud."

He went first to the private residence of the public prosecutor. The truth is, he was still smarting under M. Daubigeon's severe reproaches, and thought he would now enjoy his revenge. He found the old collector, as usual, among his beloved books, and in a worse humour than ever. Ignoring this circumstance, he handed him a number of papers to sign; and this business being over, he carefully replaced the documents in a large leather case with his monogram on the outside, remarking, with an air of indifference, "Well, my dear sir, you have heard the decision of the court? Which of us was right?"

M. Daubigeon shrugged his shoulders. "Of course I am nothing but an old fool, a maniac," he said angrily, "I give it up; and I say, like Horace's man,—

*"Stultum me fateor, liceat concedere veris
Atque etiam insanum."*

"You are joking. But what would have happened if I had listened to you?"

"I don't care to know."

"M. de Boiscoran would have been sent to a jury all the same."

"May be."

"Anybody else would have collected the proofs of his guilt just as well as I have done."

"That's a question."

"And if I had backed out of the affair I should have injured my reputation very seriously; for they would have

called me one of those timid magistrates who are frightened at a trifle."

"That is as good a reputation as some others," broke in the public prosecutor. He had vowed he would answer only in monosyllables; but his anger made him forget his resolution, and he added in a severe tone,—“Another man would not have been exclusively bent upon proving that M. de Boiscoran was guilty.”

“I certainly have proved it.”

“Another man would have tried to solve the mystery.”

“But I have solved it, I imagine.”

M. Daubigeon bowed ironically. “I congratulate you,” he said. “It must be delightful to know the secret of all things, ‘*Felix qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas.*’ Only remember you may be mistaken. You are an excellent hand at such investigations; but I am an older man than you in the profession. The more I think of this case, the less I understand it. If you know everything so perfectly well, I wish you would tell me what could have been the motive for the crime, for, after all, we do not run the risk of losing our head without some very powerful tangible reason. What was Jacques’s reason? You will tell me he hated the Count de Claudieuse. But is that an answer? Come, dive for a moment into your own conscience,—But stop! No one likes to do that. ‘*Nemo in se tentat descendere.*’”

M. Galpin was beginning to regret that he had ever come. He had hoped to find M. Daubigeon quite penitent, and here he was worse than ever.

“The accusation chamber has had no such scruples,” he said dryly.

“No; but the jury may feel some. They are, occasionally, men of sense.”

“The jury will condemn M. de Boiscoran without hesitation.”

“I would not swear to that.”

“You would if you knew who will plead for the prosecution.”

“Who?”

“The advocate general, M. du Lopt de la Gransiere himself.”

“Oh, oh!”

“You will not deny that he is a first-class man?”

The investigating magistrate was evidently growing

angry; though, on the other hand, M. Daubigeon seemed to have regained his calmness. "God forbid that I should deny M. de la Gransiere's eloquence," he said. "He is a powerful speaker, and rarely misses his man. But then, you know, cases are like books: they have their luck or ill luck, *habent sua fata*. Jacques will be well defended."

"I am not afraid of M. Magloire."

"But M. Folgat?"

"A young man with no weight. I should be far more afraid of M. Lachaud."

"Do you know the plan of defence?"

This was evidently where the shoe pinched; but M. Galpin-Daveline took care not to let it be seen as he replied, "I don't know it; but it does not matter. M. de Boiscoran's friends at first thought of making capital out of Cocoleu; but they have given that up. I am sure of it! The police-agent whom I have charged to keep his eyes on the idiot tells me that Dr. Seignebos does not trouble himself about the man any more."

M. Daubigeon smiled sarcastically, and, more with the view of teasing his visitor than because he believed such to be the case, exclaimed, "Take care! do not trust appearances. You have to deal with very clever people. I have always told you Cocoleu is probably the mainspring of the whole case. The very fact that M. du Lopt de la Gransiere will speak ought to make you tremble. If he should not succeed, he would, of course, blame you, and never forgive you as long as he lived. Now, you know he may fail, for 'There is many a slip between the cup and the lip.' And I am disposed to think with old Villon,—*'Rien ne m'est seur que la chose incertaine.'*"

M. Galpin saw very well that he could gain nothing by prolonging the discussion, hence he merely said, "Happen what may, I am contented with the approbation of my own conscience." Having thus spoken he hastened to take leave for fear another answer should come from M. Daubigeon. Leaving the room, he remarked to himself as he went downstairs, "It is losing time to reason with an old fogey who sees in the events of the day only so many opportunities for making quotations."

But he struggled in vain against his own feelings: he had lost his self-confidence. M. Daubigeon had revealed to him a new danger he had not foreseen. And what a

danger!—the resentment of one of the most eminent men of the French official bar, one of those bitter, bilious men who never forgive. M. Galpin-Daveline had, no doubt, thought of the possibility of failure, that is to say, of acquittal; but he had not fully considered the consequences of such a check. Who would suffer for it? The counsel for the prosecution first and foremost, for in France the prosecuting counsel makes the accusation a personal matter, and considers himself insulted and humiliated if he misses his man. Now, what would happen in such a case? No doubt M. du Lopt de la Gransiere would hold the investigating magistrate responsible. He would say,—“I had to draw my arguments from your part of the work. I did not obtain a condemnation, because your work was imperfect. A man like myself ought not to be exposed to such a humiliation, and, least of all, in a case which is sure to create an immense sensation. You do not understand your business.”

Such words would mean a public disgrace. Instead of the hoped-for promotion, they would bring him exile, to Corsica, or Algiers. M. Galpin-Daveline shuddered at the idea. He saw himself buried under the ruins of his castles in the air. And in dismay he once more went over all the papers of the investigation, analysing the evidence he had obtained, like a soldier, who, on the eve of a battle, furbishes up his arms. However, he only found one objection, the same which M. Daubigeon had made,—what interest could Jacques have had in committing so great a crime? “There,” he said, “is evidently the weak part of the armour; and I should do well to point it out to M. de la Gransiere. Jacques’s counsel are capable of making that the turning-point of their plea.”

And, in spite of all he had said to M. Daubigeon, he was very much afraid of the counsel for the defence, knew perfectly well the prestige which M. Magloire derived from his integrity and disinterestedness. It was no secret to him that a cause which M. Magloire espoused was at once considered a good one; for people said of him,—“He may be mistaken; but whatever he says he believes.” Hence he was bound to have a powerful influence, not on the judges who came into court with well-established opinions, but with the jurymen who would be under the influence of the moment, and might be carried off by the

eloquence of a speech. It is true, M. Magloire did not possess that burning eloquence which thrills a crowd; but M. Folgat possessed it, and in an uncommon degree. M. Galpin-Daveline had made inquiries; and one of his Paris friends had written to him,—“Mistrust Folgat. He is a far more dangerous logician than Lachaud, and possesses the same skill in troubling the consciences of jurymen, in moving them, in drawing tears from them, and forcing them into an acquittal. Mind, especially, any incidents that may arise during the trial; for he has always some kind of surprise in reserve.”

“These are my adversaries,” thought M. Galpin. “What surprise, I wonder, is there in store for me? Have they really given up all idea of using Cocoleu?”

He had no reason for mistrusting his agent; and yet his apprehensions became so serious, that he went out of his way to look in at the hospital. The lady superior received him as a matter of course, with all the signs of profound respect; and, when he inquired after Cocoleu, she added,—“Would you like to see him?”

“I confess I should be very glad to do so.”

“Come with me, then,” she replied, leading him into the garden, where Cocoleu was seated on the ground, playing with the gravel. He had doffed the rags with which he was clothed when he was admitted, and wore the regular hospital dress, including the long gray coat and cotton cap. He did not look any the more intelligent for the change, but, at all events, he was less repulsive.

“Well, my boy,” asked M. Galpin, “how do you like this?”

He raised his inane face, and fixed his dull eye on the lady superior; still he made no reply.

“Would you like to go back to Valpinson?” asked the magistrate this time.

Cocoleu shuddered, but did not open his lips.

“Look here,” said M. Galpin, “answer me, and I’ll give you a franc.”

No; Cocoleu would not answer. He was at his play again.

“That is his usual way,” declared the lady superior. “Since he is here, no one has ever got a word out of him. Promises, threats, nothing has any effect. One day I thought I would try an experiment; and, instead of let

ting him have his breakfast, I said to him, 'You shall have nothing to eat till you say, "I am hungry."' At the end of twenty-four hours I had to give him his pittance; for he would have starved himself sooner than utter a word."

"What does Dr. Seignebos think of him?"

"The doctor does not want to hear his name mentioned," replied the lady superior. And, raising her eyes to heaven, she added,—“And that is a clear proof, that, but for the direct intervention of providence, the poor creature would never have denounced the crime he witnessed.” Immediately, however, she turned to earthly things, and asked,—“But will you not relieve us soon of this poor idiot, who is a heavy charge on the hospital? Why not send him back to his village, where he found his support before? We have such a number of sick and poor, and such very little room.”

"We must wait, sister, till M. de Boiscoran's trial is finished," replied the magistrate.

The lady superior looked resigned. "That is what the mayor told me," she remarked, "and it is very provoking, I must say: however, they have allowed me to turn him out of the room which they gave him at first, and I have sent him to the insane ward."

At this moment she was interrupted by the hospital porter, who, cap in hand, came to announce that a gendarme had just arrived with a patient sent by Dr. Seignebos.

"Epileptic, and somewhat idiotic," said the lady superior, reading the order for admission. "As if we wanted any more! And a stranger into the bargain! Really, Dr. Seignebos is too yielding. Why does he not send all these people to their own parish to be taken care of?" So saying, and, with a very elastic step for her age, she went to the hospital parlour, followed by M. Galpin and the janitor. There sat the new patient, looking the picture of utter idiocy. Giving him a glance, the lady superior hastily ordered his removal to the insane ward, saying that he could keep Cocoleu company. Then asking M. Galpin-Daveline to excuse her, she took herself off to attend to her usual avocations.

The investigating magistrate felt somewhat reassured. "There is no danger here," he said to himself, as he walked away. "And, if M. Folgat counts upon any inci

dent during the trial, Cocoleu, at all events, will not provide it."

XXVI.

AT this very same moment, Dr. Seignebos and M. Folgat, having partaken of a frugal breakfast, were shaking hands prior to separating, the one having to visit his patients, and the other to go to the prison. The young advocate was very perplexed. He hung his head as he went down the street; and the diplomatic citizens who compared his dejected appearance with M. Galpin's victorious air, came to the conclusion that Jacques de Boiscoran was irrevocably lost. M. Folgat was for the time almost of their opinion. He was passing through one of those attacks of discouragement, to which the most energetic men succumb at times, when they are bent upon pursuing an uncertain end which they ardently desire.

The declarations made by little Martha and the governess had literally overwhelmed the young advocate. Just when he thought he had the end of the thread in his hand, the tangle had become worse than ever. And so it had been from the commencement. At each step he took, the problem had become more complicated than ever. At each effort he made, the darkness, instead of being dispelled, had grown deeper. Not that he as yet doubted Jacques's innocence. No! The suspicion which for a moment had flashed through his mind had passed away instantly. He admitted, with Dr. Seignebos, the possibility that there was an accomplice, and that it was Cocoleu, in all probability, who had been charged with the execution of the crime. But how could that fact be made useful to the defence? He saw no way. Of course Goudar was an able fellow, and the manner in which he had introduced himself into the hospital was masterly in the extreme. But however cunning he was, however experienced in all the tricks of his profession, how could he ever hope to extort confession from a man who intrenched himself behind the rampart of feigned imbecility? If he had only had an abundance of time before him! But the days were counted, and he would have to precipitate the finish.

"I feel like giving it up," thought the young lawyer, who, while following this train of thought, had reached the

prison. He felt the necessity of concealing his anxiety, and while Blangin went before him through the long passages, rattling his keys, he endeavoured to impart an expression of hopeful confidence to his countenance.

"At last you come!" cried Jacques. The latter had evidently suffered considerable anxiety during the last few hours. Feverish restlessness had distorted his features, and rendered his eyes bloodshot; and he shook all over with nervous tremour. Still he waited till the jailer had shut the door: and then asked in an agitated voice,—
"What did she say?"

M. Folgat gave him a minute account of his mission, quoting the countess's words almost literally.

"That is just like her!" exclaimed the prisoner. "I think I can hear her! What a woman! To defy me in this way!" And in his anger he clenched his fists so closely that his finger-nails almost pierced his flesh.

"You see," said the young advocate, "there is no use in trying to get outside of our circle of defence. Any new effort would be useless."

"No!" replied Jacques. "No, I shall not stop there!" And after a few moments' reflection,—if he can be said to have been able to reflect, he added, "I hope you will pardon me, my dear sir, for having exposed you to such insults. I ought to have foreseen this result, or, rather, I did foresee it. I knew that was not the way to begin the battle. But I was a coward, I was afraid, I drew back, fool that I was. As if I had not known that we should at any rate have to proceed to the last extremity! Well, I am ready now, my mind is made up!"

"What do you mean to do?"

"I shall go and see the Countess de Claudieuse. I shall tell her—"

"Oh!"

"You do not think she will deny it to my face? When once I have her under my eye, I shall make her confess the crime of which I am accused."

M. Folgat had promised Dr. Seignebois not to mention what Martha and her governess had said; but he felt no longer bound to conceal these statements. "And if the countess should not be guilty?" he asked.

"Who, then, *could* be guilty?"

"If she had an accomplice?"

"Well, she will tell me who it was. I will insist upon it, I will make her tell me. I will not be disgraced. I am innocent, I will not go to the galleys!"

To try and make Jacques listen to reason would have been madness at that moment. "Have a care," said the young lawyer, however. "Our defence is difficult enough already; do not make it still more so."

"I shall be careful."

"A scene might ruin us irrevocably."

"Don't be afraid!"

M. Folgat said nothing more. He thought he could guess by what means Jacques would try to get out of prison. Still he did not ask him for details. In his position it was his duty to ignore, or at any rate to seem to ignore certain things.

"Now, my dear sir," said the prisoner, "will your render me a service, will you tell me as accurately as possible, how the house in which the countess lives is arranged?"

Without saying a word, M. Folgat produced a sheet of paper, and drew on it a plan of the house as far as he knew it—including the garden, the entrance-hall, and the sitting-room.

"And the count's room," asked Jacques, "where is that?"

"On the upper floor."

"You are sure he cannot get up?"

"Dr. Seignebois told me so."

The prisoner seemed delighted. "Then all is right," he said, "and I have only to ask you to tell Denise that I must see her to-day, as soon as possible. I wish her to come with one of her aunts only. And, I beseech you, make haste."

M. Folgat did hasten; and, twenty minutes later, he was at M. de Chandore's house. Denise was in her room. He sent word to her that he wished to see her; and as soon as she heard that Jacques desired to speak with her, she determined to start at once. Accompanied by her aunt Elizabeth, she set out for the prison, which she reached quite out of breath from having walked so fast. Jacques met her in the parlour and pressing her hands to his lips, exclaimed, "Oh, my darling! how shall I ever thank you for your sublime fidelity in my misfortune! If I escape, my whole life will not suffice to prove my grati

tude." Then trying to master his emotion, he turned to Mademoiselle de Lavarande and added, "Will you pardon me if I beg you to render me once more the service you performed before? It is all important that no one should hear what I am going to say to Denise, I know I am watched."

Accustomed to passive obedience, the good lady did not dare to raise the slightest objection, and she instantly left the room with the view of keeping watch in the passage. Denise was very much surprised; but Jacques did not give her time to utter a word. He said at once,—“You told me in this very place, that, if I wished to escape, Blangin would furnish me with the means.”

The girl drew back, and stammered with an air of utter bewilderment,—“You do not want to fly?”

“Never! Under no circumstances! But you ought to remember, that, while resisting all your arguments, I told you, that perhaps, some day or other, I might require a few hours’ liberty.”

“I remember.”

“I begged you to sound the jailer on that point.”

“I did so. For money he will always be ready to do your bidding.”

Jacques seemed to breath more freely. “Well, then,” he said again, “the time has come. To-morrow I shall have to be away all the evening. I should like to leave about nine; and I shall be back by midnight.”

Denise stopped him. “Wait,” she said: “I want to call Blangin’s wife.”

The jailer’s household was like many others. Out of doors the husband was brutal, imperious, and tyrannical: he talked loud and positively, and thus made it appear that he was the master. The wife on the contrary was humble, submissive, apparently resigned, and always ready to obey; but in reality she ruled by intelligence far more surely than he ruled by force. When the husband promised anything, his wife’s consent had still to be obtained; but, when the wife made any arrangement, the husband was bound through her. Denise was aware of this, and knew very well that first of all she must win over the wife. Madame Blangin on entering the parlour was full of hypocritical assurances of good-will. She vowed that she was heart and soul at her dear mistress’s command, and re-

called with delight the happy days when she was in M. de Chandore's service,—days she was always regretting.

"I know you are attached to me," interrupted Denise. "But listen!" And then she promptly explained what she wanted; while Jacques, standing a little aside in the shade, watched the impression on the woman's face. Gradually she raised her head; and, when Denise had finished, she remarked in a very different tone,—“I understand perfectly, and, if I were the master, I should say, ‘All right!’ But Blangin is master of the jail. Well, he is not a bad fellow; but he insists upon doing his duty. We have nothing but our place to live upon.”

“Have I not paid you as much as your place is worth?”

“Oh, I know you don't mind paying.”

“You promised me to speak to your husband about this matter.”

“I have done so: but—”

“I would give as much as I did before.”

“In gold?”

“Well be it so, in gold.”

A flash of covetousness peered forth from under the woman's thick brows, still she retained all her self-possession as she rejoined, “In that case, my man will probably consent. I will go and put him right, and then you can talk to him.”

She went out hastily, and, as soon as she had disappeared, Jacques asked Denise how much she had paid the Blangins so far. Learning that she had expended as much as seventeen thousand francs, he could not refrain from stigmatising the jailer's conduct as downright robbery. But Denise interrupted him with the remark that money did not matter so long as he were only free. Just then Blangin's heavy tread was heard in the passage; and almost immediately afterwards he entered, cap in hand and looking obsequious and restless. “My wife has told me every thing,” he said, “and I consent. Only we must understand each other. This is no trifle you are asking for.”

“Let us not exaggerate the matter,” interrupted Jacques. “I do not mean to escape: I only want to leave for a time. I will come back, I give you my word of honour.”

“Upon my life that is not what troubles me. If the question were only to let you run off altogether, I should open the doors wide, and say, ‘Good by!’ A prisoner

who runs away—that happens every day; but a prisoner who leaves for a few hours, and comes back again—Suppose anybody were to see you in the town? Or if any one came and wanted to see you while you were gone? Or if they saw you come back again? What could I say? I am quite ready to be turned of for negligence. I have been paid for that. But to be tried as an accomplice, and to be put into jail myself. Stay! That is not what I mean to do.”

This was evidently but a preface. “Oh! why lose so many words!” asked Denise. “Explain yourself clearly.”

“Well, M. de Boiscoran cannot leave by the gate. Atattoo at eight o’clock, the soldiers on guard at this season of the year go inside the prison, and until *reveille* in the morning, or, in other words, till five o’clock, I can neither open nor shut the gates without calling the sergeant in command of the post.”

Did he want to extort more money? Did he make the difficulties out greater than they really were? Jacques did not know. Still he remarked, “After all, if you consent, there must be a way.”

The jailer could dissemble no longer. “If the thing is to be done,” he replied, “you must get out as if you were escaping in good earnest. To my knowledge, the wall between the two towers is in one place not over two feet thick; and on the other side, where there are nothing but bare grounds and the old ramparts, a sentinel is never put. I will get you a crowbar and a pickaxe, and you can make a hole in the wall.”

Jacques shrugged his shoulders. “And next day,” he said, “when I come back, how will you explain that hole?”

Blangin smiled. “You may be sure,” he replied, “I shan’t say the rats did it. I have thought of that too. Another prisoner will run off with you, and he won’t come back.”

“What prisoner?”

“Why, Frumence, to be sure. He will be delighted to get away, and he will help you in making the hole in the wall. You must make your bargain with him, but, of course, without letting him know that I am in the secret. In this way happen what may, I shall not be in danger.”

The plan was really a good one; only Blangin ought not

to have claimed the honour of inventing it; for the idea came from his wife.

"Well," replied Jacques, "that is settled. Get me the pickaxe and the crowbar, show me the place where we must make the hole, and I will take charge of Frumence. To-morrow you shall have the money."

He was on the point of following the jailer, when Denise held him back: raising her beautiful eyes, she said in a trembling voice,—“You see, Jacques, I have not hesitated to dare everything in order to procure you a few hours' liberty. May I not know what you are going to do?” And, as he made no reply, she repeated,—“Where are you going?”

The blood rushed to the prisoner's face. “I beseech you, Denise,” he replied, “do not insist upon my telling you. Permit me to keep this secret, the only one I have ever kept from you.”

Two tears trembled for a moment in the girl's long lashes, and then silently rolled down her cheeks. “I understand you,” she stammered, “I understand but too well. Although I know so little of life, I had a presentiment, as soon as I saw that they were hiding something from me. Now I cannot doubt any longer. You mean to go and see some woman to-morrow—”

“Denise,” Jacques said with folded hands,—“Denise, I beseech you!”

She would not hear him. Gently shaking her head, she went on,—“A woman whom you have loved, or whom you love still, at whose feet you have probably murmured the same words that you whispered at mine. How could you think of her in the midst of all these anxieties? She cannot love you, I am sure. Why did she not come to you when she found that you were in prison, falsely accused of an abominable crime?”

Jacques could bear it no longer. “Great God!” he cried, “I would a thousand times rather tell you everything than allow such a suspicion to remain in your heart! Listen, and forgive me.”

But she stopped him, placing her hand before his lips. “No, I do not wish to know anything,” she answered,—“Nothing at all. I believe in you. Only you must remember that you are everything to me,—hope, life, happiness. Even if you should have deceived me, I know but

too well—poor me!—that I could not cease loving you; but I should not have long to suffer.”

Jacques was overcome with grief. “Denise, Denise, my darling,” he pleaded, “let me confess to you who this woman is, and why I must see her.”

“No,” she interrupted, “no! Do what your conscience bids you to do. I believe in you.” And instead of offering to let him kiss her forehead, as usual, she hurried away with her aunt, so swiftly, that, when he rushed after her, he only saw, as it were, a shadow at the end of the long passage.

Never until this moment had Jacques really found himself ready to hate the Countess de Claudieuse with that blind and furious hatred which dreams of nothing but vengeance. Many a time, no doubt, he had cursed her in the solitude of his prison; but even when he was most furious against her, a feeling of pity had risen in his heart for one whom he had once loved so dearly; for he did not disguise it to himself, he had once loved her to distraction. And even in prison he had trembled as he thought of some of his first meetings with her; as in his mind’s eye he had conjured up a vision of her features, or in fancy heard her silvery voice, or inhaled her favourite perfume. True enough she had exposed him to the danger of losing his position, his future, his honour, his life even: and still he had felt inclined to forgive her. But now she threatened him with the loss of his betrothed, with the loss of the pure chaste love which glowed in Denise’s heart, and this he could not endure. “I will spare her no longer,” he cried, mad with wrath. “I will no longer hesitate!” He was more than ever determined to risk the adventure on the next day, feeling certain that his courage would not fail him now.

It so happened that night—perhaps by the jailer’s skilful management—that Frumence was ordered to take the prisoner back to his cell, and “curl him up.” Jacques called him in, and plainly told him what he wanted him to do. Upon Blangin’s assurance, he expected that the vagabond would jump at the mere idea of escaping from jail. But by no means. Frumence’s smiling features grew dark; and, scratching himself behind the ear, he replied,—“You see—excuse me, I don’t want to run away at all.”

Jacques was amazed. If Frumence refused his assistance, he could not go out, or, at least, he would have to wait. "Are you in earnest?" he asked.

"Certainly I am, sir. You see I am not so badly off here. I have a good bed, I have two meals a day, I have nothing to do, and now and then, from one man or another, I pick up a few coppers to buy a pinch of tobacco or a glass of wine."

"But your liberty?"

"Well I shall get that too. I have committed no crime. I may have got over a wall into an orchard; but people are not hanged for that. I have consulted M. Magloire, and he told me precisely how I stand. They will try me in a police-court, and they will give me three or four months. Well, that is not so bad. But, if I run away, they will put the gendarmes on my track; they will bring me back here; and then I know how they will treat me. Besides, to break out of jail is a grave offence!"

Jacques was greatly perplexed as to how he could overcome such wise conclusions and excellent reasons. "Why should the gendarmes take you again?" he asked.

"Because they are gendarmes, sir. And then, that is not all. If it were spring, I should say at once, 'I am your man.' But we are in autumn now; we are going to have bad weather, and work will be scarce." Although an incurable idler, Frumence had always a good deal to say about work.

"So you won't help them in the vintage?" asked Jacques.

The vagabond looked somewhat glum. "To be sure, the vintage must have commenced," he said. "But then," added he more cheerfully, "it only lasts a fortnight, and then comes winter. And winter is no man's friend: it's my enemy. I have been without a place to lie down when it has been freezing hard enough to split stones, and when the snow was a foot deep. Now here one has a stove and warm clothes."

"Yes; but there are no merry evenings here, Frumence, eh? None of those merry evenings, when the hot wine goes round, and you tell the girls all sorts of stories, by the light of the blazing logs?"

"Oh! I know. I'd enjoy those evenings. But where should I go, not having so much as a sou?"

That was exactly where Jacques wanted to lead him. "I have money," he said.

"I know you have."

"You do not think I would let you go off with empty pockets? I would give you anything you may ask."

"Really?" cried the vagrant. And looking at Jacques with a mingled expression of hope, surprise, and delight, he added,— "You see I should want a good deal. Winter is long. I should want—let me see, I should want fifty napoleons!"

"You shall have them," said Jacques.

Frumence's eyes began to dance. He probably had a vision of those irresistible taverns at Rochefort, where he had led such a merry life. But he could not believe such happiness to be real. "You are not making fun of me?" he asked timidly.

"Do you want the whole sum at once?" replied Jacques. "Wait." And from the drawer in his table he drew a thousand-franc note. At the sight of it, the vagrant drew back the hand which he had promptly stretched out to take the money.

"Oh, that kind?" said he, "No! I know what that paper is worth: I have had some of them myself. But what could I do with one of them now? To me it would not be worth more than a blade of straw; for, at the first place where I tried to get it changed, they would arrest me."

"That is easily remedied. By to-morrow I can obtain gold, or small notes, so you can have your choice."

This time Frumence clapped his hands with joy. "Give me some of one kind, and some of the other," he said, "and I'm your man! Hurrah for liberty! Where is the wall that we are to go through?"

"I will show you to-morrow; and till then, Frumence, silence."

It was only the next day that Blangin showed Jacques the place where the wall was least thick. It was in a kind of cellar, where nobody ever came, and where cast-off tools were stored away. "In order that you may not be interrupted," said the jailer, I will ask two of my comrades to dine with me, and I shall invite the sergeant on duty. They will enjoy themselves, and never think of the prisoners. My wife will keep a sharp lookout; and, if any of

the rounds should come this way, she'll warn you, and quick as lightening, you'll be back in your room."

All was settled; and, as soon as night came, Jacques and Frumence, taking a candle with them, slipped into the cellar, and went to work. It was a hard task to get through the old wall, and Jacques would never have been able to accomplish it alone. The thickness was even less than what Blangin had stated it to be; but the hardness was far beyond expectation. Our forefathers were good masons, and in course of time the cement had become one with the stone, acquiring the same solidity. It was as if they had attacked a block of granite. Fortunately the vagrant had a strong arm; and, in spite of the precautions which they had to take to prevent being heard, he had, in less than an hour, made a hole through which a man could pass. He put his head in: and, after a moment's examination, exclaimed, "It's all right! The night is dark, and the place is deserted. Upon my word, I'll risk it!"

So saying he went through; Jacques followed: and instinctively they hastened towards a dark place shaded by several trees. Once there, Jacques handed Frumence a package of five-franc notes. "Add this to the napoleons I have already given you," he said. "And thank you besides: you are a good fellow, and if I get out of my trouble, I won't forget you. Now let us part. Make haste, be careful not to be discovered, and good luck to you!"

After these words he went off rapidly. Frumence, however, did not march away in the opposite direction, as had been agreed upon. "This is a curious story about this poor gentleman," he muttered to himself. "Where on earth can he be going?" And, curiosity getting the better of prudence, he followed Jacques.

XXVII.

M. DE BOISCORAN knew with what horror he was looked upon by the population of Sauveterre, and in order to avoid being recognised, and perhaps arrested, he did not take the most direct route from the prison to the Rue Mautrec, nor did he choose the more frequented streets. He went a long way round, and well-nigh lost himself in the dark winding lanes of the old town. He walked along

in feverish haste, turning aside from the rare passers-by, pulling his felt hat down over his eyes, and, for still greater safety, holding his handkerchief over his face. It was nearly half-past nine when he at last reached the house inhabited by the Count and Countess de Claudieuse. The gate was closed. This circumstance did not affect him, however, for he had his plan, and boldly rang the bell. A maid, who did not know him, came to open.

"Is the Countess de Claudieuse indoors?" he asked.

"The countess does not see anybody," replied the girl. "She is sitting up with the count, who is very ill to-night."

"But I must see her."

"Impossible."

"Tell her that a gentleman who has been sent by M. Galpin-Daveline desires to see her for a moment. It is about the Boiscoran affair."

"Why did you not say so at once?" said the servant. "Come in." And forgetting, in her hurry, to close the gate again, she walked in front of Jacques through the garden, showed him into the vestibule, and then opened the door of the sitting room, where she asked him to wait, while she fetched Madame de Claudieuse. Before doing so, however, she lit one of the candles on the mantelpiece. So far, everything had gone well for Jacques, and even better than he could have expected. Nothing now remained to be done, but to prevent the countess from escaping should she try to do so when she recognised him. Fortunately the door opened into the room: and accordingly standing so that he should be behind it when the countess entered, Jacques anxiously awaited her approach.

For twenty-four hours he had prepared himself for this interview, and arranged in his head the very words he would use. But now, at the last moment, all his ideas flew away, like dry leaves before the flash of a tempest. His heart beat with such violence, that he fancied it filled the whole room with the noise. He imagined he was cool, but in fact he only possessed that lucidity which gives an appearance of sense to certain mad actions. He was growing surprised at being kept waiting so long, when, at last, a light footfall, and the rustling of a dress, warned him that the countess was coming. She entered, dressed in a long, dark robe, and took a few steps forward into the room, astonished at not seeing the person who was waiting for

her. It was exactly as Jacques had foreseen. With a violent push he closed the door; and standing in front of it, exclaimed, "At last we meet!"

Madame de Claudieuse turned round at the noise. One swift glance and she had recognised him. "Jacques!" she shrieked, and then, as terrified as if she had seen a ghost, she looked around her, eager to discover some means of flight. One of the tall windows of the room reaching to the ground was half open, and she rushed towards it; but Jacques anticipated her. "Do not attempt to escape;" he said, "for I swear I should pursue you even into your husband's room, to the very foot of his bed."

She looked at him as if she did not comprehend. "You," she stammered,—*"you here!"*

"Yes," he replied, "I am here. You are astonished, are you? You said to yourself, 'He is in prison, well kept under lock and key: I can sleep in peace. No evidence can be found. He will not speak. I have committed the crime, and he will be punished for it. I am guilty; but I shall escape. He is innocent, and he is lost.' You thought it was all settled? Well, no, it is not. I am here!"

An expression of unspeakable horror contracted the countess's beautiful features. "This is monstrous!" she said.

"Monstrous, indeed!"

"Murderer! Incendiary!"

He burst out laughing, a strident, convulsive, terrible laugh. "And you," he said, *"you call me thus?"*

By one great effort the Countess de Claudieuse recovered her energy. "Yes," she replied, "yes, I do! You cannot deny your crime to me. I know, I know the motives which the judges do not even guess. You thought I would carry out my threats, and you were frightened. When I left you in such haste, you said to yourself, 'It is all over. she will tell her husband.' And then you kindled that fire in order to draw my husband out of the house, you incendiary! And then you fired at him, you murderer!"

He was still laughing. "And that is your plan?" he broke in. "Who do you think will believe such an absurd story? Our letters were burnt; and, if you deny having been my mistress, I can just as well deny having been your lover. And, besides would the exposure do me any harm? You know very well it would not. You are perfectly aware

that, as society is constituted, the same thing which disgraces a woman rather raises a man in the estimation of the world. And as to my being afraid of the Count de Claudieuse, it is well known that I am afraid of nobody. At the time when we were concealing our love in the house in the Rue des Vignes, yes, at that time, I might have been afraid of your husband; for he might have surprised us there, the code in one hand, a revolver in the other, and have availed himself of that stupid and savage law which makes the husband the judge of his own case, and the executor of the sentence which he himself pronounces. But setting aside such a case,—the case of being taken in the act—which allows a man to kill another man like a dog, what did I care for the Count de Claudieuse? What did I care for your threats or for his hatred?" Jacques uttered these words with perfect calmness, but in a cold, cutting tone, as sharp as a sword.

The countess tottered, and in an almost inaudible voice, she stammered, "Who could imagine such a thing? Is it possible!" Then suddenly raising her head, she added more calmly: "But I am losing my senses. If you are innocent, who, then, could be guilty?"

Jacques seized her hands almost madly, and pressing them painfully, and bending over her so closely that she felt his hot breath like a flame touching her face, he hissed into her ear, "You, wretched creature, you!" Then pushing her from him with such violence that she fell into a chair, he continued, "You, who wanted to be a widow in order to prevent me from breaking the chains in which you held me. At our last meeting, when I thought you were crushed by grief, and felt overcome by your hypocritical tears, I was weak enough, I was stupid enough, to say that I only married Denise because you were not free. Then you cried, 'O God, how happy I am; that idea never occurred to me before!' What idea was that, Genevieve? Come, answer me and confess that it occurred to you too soon after all, since you have carried into execution!" He paused for a second and then repeated with crushing irony the words just uttered by the countess. "If you are innocent, who, then, could be guilty?"

Quite beside herself, she sprang from her chair, and casting at Jacques one of those glances which penetrate through our eyes into our very heart, she asked, "Is it really possi-

ble that you did not commit this abominable crime?" Seeing that he shrugged his shoulders, she added, almost panting, "But then, is it true, can it really be true, that you think I committed it?"

"Perhaps you only ordered it to be committed."

With a wild gesture she raised her arms to heaven: "O God, O God!" she cried in a heart-rending voice. "He believes it! he really believes it!"

There followed a great silence, a dismal, formidable silence, such as in nature follows the crash of the thunderbolt. Standing face to face, Jacques and the Countess de Claudieuse looked at each other, feeling that the fatal hour in their lives had come at last. Each had the same growing, sure conviction. There was no need of explanations. They had been misled by appearances: they acknowledged it; they were certain of it. And this discovery was so fearful, so overwhelming, that neither thought who the really guilty one might be.

"What is to be done?" asked the countess.

"The truth must be told," replied Jacques.

"What truth?"

"That I was your lover; that I went to Valpinson by appointment with you; that the cartridge-case which was found there was used by me to get a light; that my blackened hands were soiled by the half-burnt fragments of our letters, which I had tried to scatter."

"Never!" cried the countess.

Jacques's face turned crimson, as he said with an accent of merciless severity, "It shall be told! I will have it so, and it must be done!"

"Never!" the countess cried again, "never!" And with convulsive haste she added, "Do you not see that the truth cannot possibly be told? They would never believe in our innocence. They would only look upon us as accomplices."

"Never mind. I am not willing to die."

"Say that you will not die alone."

"Be it so."

"To confess everything would never save you but would most assuredly ruin me. Is that what you want? Would your fate appear less cruel to you, if there were two victims instead of one?"

He stopped her with a threatening gesture. "Are

you always the same?" he cried. "I am sinking, I am drowning; and she calculates, she bargains! And she said she loved me!"

"Jacques!" interrupted the countess. And drawing close to him she said, "Ah! I calculate, I bargain. Well, listen. Yes, it is true. I did value my reputation as an honest woman more highly, a thousand times more, than my life; but, above my life and my reputation, I valued you. You are drowning, you say. Well, then, let us fly. One word from you, and I leave all,—honour, country, family, husband, children. Say one word, and I follow you without turning my head, without a regret, without a pang of remorse."

She was shivering from head to foot; her bosom rose and fell; her eyes shone with unbearable brilliancy. Owing to the violence of her action, her dress, put on in great haste, had unfastened, and her dishevelled hair flowed in golden masses over her bosom and shoulders. It was in a voice trembling with pent-up passion, now sweet and soft like a tender caress, and now deep and sonorous like a bell, that she next spoke. "What keeps us? Since you have escaped from prison, the greatest difficulty is overcome. I thought at first of taking our girl, your girl, Jacques; but she is very ill; and besides a child might betray us. If we go alone they will never overtake us. We shall have money enough, I am sure, Jacques. We will fly to one of those distant countries of whose fairy-like beauty one reads in books of travel. There, unknown, unnoticed, forgotten, our life will be one unbroken enjoyment. You will never again say that I bargain. I will be yours, entirely and solely yours, body and soul, your wife, your slave."

She threw her head back, and looking at him with half-closed eyes, she added, "Say, Jacques, will you? Jacques!"

He pushed her aside with a fierce gesture. It seemed to him almost a sacrilege that she also, like Denise, should propose to him to fly. "Rather the galleys!" he cried.

She turned deadly pale; a spasm of rage convulsed her features; and drawing back, stiff and stern, she asked, "What else do you want?"

"Your help to save me," he replied.

"At the risk of ruining myself?"

He made no reply, and then she, who had just been all humility, raised herself to her full height, and in a tone of

bitter sarcasm said, "In other words, you want me to sacrifice myself, and at the same time all my family. For your sake? Yes, but even more for Mademoiselle de Chandore's sake. And you think that is a simple matter. I am the past to you—satiety, disgust. She is the future,—desire, happiness. And you think it quite natural that the discarded woman should make a footstool of her love and honour for her rival? You think little of my being disgraced, providing she be honoured; of my weeping bitterly, if she but smile? Ah, no, no! It is madness for you to come and ask me to save you, so that you may throw yourself into another's arms. It is madness, when, in order to tear you away from Denise, I am ready to ruin myself, provide only that you give her up!"

"Wretch!" cried Jacques.

She looked at him with a mocking air, and her eyes beamed with infernal audacity. "You do not know me yet," she cried. "Go, speak, denounce me! M. Folgat, no doubt, has told you how I can deny and defend myself."

Maddened by indignation, and excited to a point when reason loses all power over us, Jacques de Boiscoran moved with uplifted hand towards the countess; but, as he did so, a stern voice exclaimed, "Do not strike that woman!"

Jacques and the countess turned round together, and uttered, both at the same instant, a sharp, terrible cry, which must have been heard at a great distance. On the threshold of the room stood the Count de Claudieuse, a revolver in his hand, and ready to fire. He looked as pale as a ghost; and the white flannel dressing-gown which he had hastily thrown over his shoulders hung like a pall around his lean limbs. The countess's first shriek when she recognised Jacques had reached the room where he lay, apparently dying. A terrible presentiment had seized him. He had risen from his bed, and, dragging himself slowly along, clinging painfully to the balusters he had come downstairs. "I have heard everything," he said, casting crushing looks at both the guilty ones.

With a deep, hoarse groan, the countess sank into a chair. But Jacques drew himself up to his full height. "My life is yours, sir," he said. "Avenge yourself."

The count shrugged his shoulders. "The assize court will avenge me," he replied.

"My God, you will allow me to be condemned for a crime which I have not committed. Ah, that would be the meanest cowardice."

The count was so feeble that he had to lean against the door-post. "Would it be cowardly?" he asked. "Then, what do you call the act of a man who meanly, disgracefully robs another man of his wife, and palms off his own children upon him? It is true you are neither an incendiary nor an assassin. But what is fire in my house in comparison with the ruin of all my faith? What are the wounds in my body in comparison with that wound in my heart, which can never heal? I leave you to the court, sir."

Jacques was terrified: he saw the abyss open that was to swallow him up. "Rather death," he cried,—*"death."* And, baring his breast, he added, "But why do you not fire, sir? why do you not fire? Are you afraid of blood? Shoot? I have been your wife's lover; your youngest daughter is my child." . . .

The count lowered his weapon. "The assize court is more certain," he said. "You have robbed me of my honour; now I want yours. And, if it be necessary, so that you may be condemned, I shall swear that I recognised you. . . . You shall go to the galleys, M. de Bois-oran!"

He was on the point of advancing, but his strength was exhausted, and he fell forward, face downward, and arms outstretched. Overcome with horror, maddened by despair, Jacques fled from the spot.

XXVIII.

M. FOLGAT was dressing. Standing before his mirror, he had just finished shaving himself, when the door of his room was suddenly opened, and old Anthony presented himself, evidently distressed. "Ah, sir, what a terrible thing!" he said.

"What?"

"Run away, disappeared!"

"Who?"

"M. Jacques!"

M. Folgat's surprise was so great, that he nearly let his

razor drop : however, he peremptorily replied, "That's false !"

"Alas, sir !" rejoined the old servant, "everybody talks of it in the town. All the details are known. I have just seen a man who says he met master last night, at about eleven o'clock running like a madman down the Rue Nationale."

"How absurd !"

"I told Mademoiselle Denise about it, and she sent me to you. You ought to go and make inquiries."

The advice was not needed. Wiping his face hastily, the young advocate immediately finished his toilette. He hurried downstairs, and was crossing the passage, when he heard somebody call his name. Turning round, he perceived Denise, who signed to him to come into the boudoir and speak with her.

Those two alone knew what a desperate venture Jacques had determined on the night before. In answer to Denise's inquiries the young advocate replied that the report of M. de Boiscoran's running away must be false.

"Who knows ?" she asked.

"His evasion would be a confession of his crime," he answered. "It is only the guilty who try to escape ; and M. de Boiscoran is innocent. You can rest quite assured, madame, it is not so. I pray you be quiet."

Denise needed comforting words, for she was as pale as death ; while big tears rolled from her eyes, and at each word a violent sob rose in her throat. "You know where Jacques went last night ?" she asked again.

She turned her head a little aside, as she heard M. Folgat answer, "Yes," and then continued in a scarcely audible voice, "He went to see a person whose influence over him is, probably, all-powerful. It may be that she has upset him, unnerved him. Might she not have prevailed upon him to escape from the disgrace of appearing in court, charged with such a crime ?"

"No, madame, no !"

"This person has always been Jacques's evil genius. She loves him, I am sure. She must have been incensed at the idea of his becoming my husband. Perhaps, in order to induce him to escape, she has fled with him."

"Ah, do not be afraid, madame : the Countess de Claudieuse is incapable of such devotion."

Denise threw herself back in utter amazement ; and, gazing at the young advocate with open eyes, she repeated with an air of stupefaction,—“The Countess de Claudieuse !”

M. Folgat saw his indiscretion. He had been under the impression that Jacques had told his betrothed everything ; and her very manner of speaking had confirmed him in his conviction.

“Ah, it is the Countess de Claudieuse,” she went on,—“that lady whom all revere as if she were a saint. And yet only the other day I marvelled at her fervour,—I pitied her with all my heart,—I—Ah ! now I see what they were hiding from me.”

The young advocate was distressed at having made such a blunder. “I shall never forgive myself, madame,” said he, “for having mentioned that name in your presence.”

Denise smiled sadly. “Perhaps you have rendered me a great service, sir, but I pray, go and try and learn the truth about this report.”

M. Folgat had not walked half way down the street, before he became aware that something extraordinary must really have happened. The whole town was in an uproar. People stood at their doors, talking with unusual animation, and here and there on the footways groups were engaged in lively discussion. Hastening his steps, he was just turning into the Rue Nationale, when he was stopped by three or four gentlemen, whose acquaintance he had made in some way or other during his sojourn in the town. “Well, sir,” said one of these amiable friends, “it seems your client is running about nicely.”

“I do not understand you,” replied M. Folgat in a frigid tone.

“What ? Don’t you know your client has run off ?”

“Are you quite sure of it ?”

“Certainly. The wife of a workman whom I employ was the person through whom the escape became known. She had gone on to the old ramparts to cut grass for her goat ; and coming to the prison wall, she perceived a big hole in it. She gave the alarm at once ; the guard came up ; and the matter was immediately reported to the public prosecutor.”

This statement was not sufficient for M. Folgat : “And M. de Boiscoran ?” he asked.

"He cannot be found," was the reply. "Ah, I tell you, it is just as I say. I know it from a friend who heard it from a clerk at the mayor's office. They say that Blangin the jailer is seriously implicated."

The young advocate quitted his acquaintances abruptly, leaving them somewhat offended by such treatment; but that was of little consequence for M. Folgat, who hurried as fast as he could across the Place du Marche Neuf. He was growing apprehensive. He did not fear an evasion, but thought some fearful catastrophe might have occurred. At least, a hundred persons were assembled near the prison gate, gaping with open mouths and gazing with eager eyes; and the sentinels had considerable trouble in keeping them back. M. Folgat made his way through the crowd, and entered the court-yard. Here he found the public prosecutor, the chief of the police service, the captain of gendarmes, M. Seneschal the mayor, and finally M. Galpin-Daveline, all standing in front of Blangin's lodge, engaged in animated conversation. M. Galpin-Daveline looked especially pale. He had heard of the reports even before M. Folgat, and had hastened to the prison with the view of ascertaining the truth. On his way he had met with unmistakable evidence that if public opinion was fiercely roused against the accused, it was as deeply excited against himself. On all sides he had been greeted with ironical salutations, mocking smiles, and even expressions of condolence. Indeed two persons whom he suspected of being in close connection with Dr. Seignebos, had even murmured, as he passed, "Cheated, Mr. Bloodhound." He was the first to notice the young advocate, and at once asked if he came for news.

"I have heard all kinds of reports," replied M. Folgat, "but they do not affect me. M. de Boiscoran has too much confidence in the excellence of his cause and the justice of his countrymen to think of escaping. I only came to confer with him."

"And you are right!" exclaimed M. Daubigeon. "M. de Boiscoran is in his cell, utterly unaware of all the rumours that are afloat. It is Frumence who has run off,—Frumence, the light-footed. He was kept in prison for form's sake only, and helped the keeper as a kind of assistant jailer. He it is who made a hole in the

wall, and escaped, thinking, no doubt, that the heavens are a better roof than the finest prison."

Just behind the group of officials, stood Blangin, the jailer, affecting a contrite air. M. Galpin turned towards him. "Take the counsel to the prisoner Boiscoran," he said dryly, fearing, perhaps, that M. Daubigeon might regale the public with all the bitter epigrams with which he had visited him in private."

The jailer bowed to the ground, and prepared to obey the order; but, as soon as he was alone with M. Folgat inside the building, he blew up his cheek, and tapping it, cried, "Cheated all round." Immediately afterwards he burst out laughing. The young advocate pretended not to understand him. It was but prudent that he should appear ignorant of what had happened the night before, and thus avoid all suspicion of a complicity which substantially did not exist. "And still," continued Blangin, "this is not the end of it yet. The gendarmes are out, and if they catch poor Frumence, why he is such a fool, that the most stupid judge would worm his secret out of him in five minutes!"

M. Folgat still made no reply; but the jailer did not seem to mind his reticence,—“I only want to do one thing,” he said, “and that is to give up my keys as soon as possible. I am tired of this profession. Besides, I shan’t be able to stay here much longer. This escape has worried the authorities, and they are going to give me an assistant, an ex-police sergeant, a real watch-dog. Ah! M. de Boiscoran’s good days are over; no more stolen visits, no more promenades. He is to be watched day and night.” Blangin had given all these explanations at the foot of the stairs. “Let us go up,” he now said, seeing that M. Folgat showed signs of impatience.

The young advocate found Jacques lying on the bed, and at the first glance he saw that a great misfortune had happened. “One more hope gone?” he asked.

The prisoner raised himself up with difficulty, and then replied in a voice of utter despair,—“I am lost, and this time hopelessly.”

“Oh!”

“Just listen!”

The young advocate could not help shuddering as he heard Jacques’s account of what had happened the night

before. When it was finished, he remarked,—“You are right. If the Count de Claudieuse carries out his threat, it may be a condemnation.”

“It must be a condemnation, you mean. You need not doubt, for I know he will carry out his threat.”

M. Folgat seemed greatly distressed. “Tell me,” he said, “what did you do after leaving the house?”

Jacques passed his hand mechanically over his forehead, as if to collect his scattered thoughts. “I fled precipitately,” he answered, “just like a man who has committed a crime. The garden-gate was open, and I rushed out. I could not tell you with certainty in what direction I ran or through what streets I passed. I had but one fixed idea,—to get away from that house as quickly and as far as possible. I did not know what I was doing. I went on and on. When I came to myself, I was several miles away from Sauveterre, on the road to Boiscoran. An animal instinct had led me towards my house. At the first moment I could not comprehend how I had got there. I felt like a drunkard whose head is filled with the vapours of alcohol, and who, when roused, tries to remember what has happened during his intoxication. Alas! I recalled the fearful reality but too soon. I knew that I ought to go back to prison, that it was an absolute necessity; and yet I felt at times so weary, so exhausted, that I was afraid I should not be able to get back. Still I did reach the prison. Blangin was waiting for me, all anxiety; for it was nearly two o’clock. He helped me to get up here. I threw myself, all dressed as I was, on the bed, and fell fast asleep in an instant. But my sleep was a miserable sleep, broken by terrible dreams, in which I saw myself chained by the leg, or mounting the scaffold with a priest by my side; and even at this moment I hardly know whether I am awake or asleep, and whether I am not still suffering from a fearful nightmare.”

M. Folgat could hardly restrain himself. “Poor fellow,” he murmured.

“Yes, poor fellow!” repeated Jacques. “Why did I not follow my first inspiration last night when I found myself on the high-road? I should have gone on to Boiscoran, and blown out my brains. I should have had no more suffering then.”

Was he once more giving himself up to that fatal idea of suicide? thought M. Folgat. "And your parents?"

"My parents! And do you think they will survive my condemnation?"

"And Mademoiselle de Chandore?"

Jacques shuddered. "Ah! it is for her sake first of all that I ought to make an end of it," he fiercely replied. "Poor Denise! Certainly she would grieve terribly when she heard of my death. But she is not twenty yet. My memory would soon fade from her heart; and as the weeks grew to months, and the months to years, she would find comfort. 'To live' means 'to forget.'"

"You cannot really believe what you are saying!" interrupted M. Folgat. "You know very well that she—she would never forget you!"

Tears stood in the prisoner's eyes. "You are right," he murmured. "If I struck myself I should strike her also. But what would life be after condemnation? Can you imagine what her sensations would be, if day after day she had to say to herself, 'The only man I love upon earth is at the galleys mingling with the lowest of criminals, disgraced for life, dishonoured.' Ah! death would be a thousand times preferable."

"Jacques, M. de Boiscoran, do you forget that you have given me your word of honour?"

"The proof that I have not forgotten it is that you see me here. But, never mind, the day is not far off when you will see me so wretched that you yourself will be the first to put a weapon in my hands."

The young advocate was one of those men whom difficulties only excite and stimulate, instead of discouraging. He had already somewhat recovered from the first great shock and accordingly replied,—“Before you throw down your hand, wait, at least, till the game is lost. You are not sentenced yet. Far from it! You are innocent, and divine justice corrects the blunders of earthly justice. Who knows that the Count de Claudieuse will really give evidence? Perhaps at this very moment he is already dead!”

Jacques turned deadly pale. "Ah! don't say that!" he exclaimed. "The fatal thought has already occurred to me, and yet I trust it is not so, for then I should really be responsible for his death. When I woke up, all my

anxiety was for him, and I thought of getting Blangin to make inquiries; but I did not dare do so. M. Folgat fully shared the prisoner's anxiety. "We cannot remain in this uncertainty," he said. "We can do nothing as long as we do not know the count's fate, for on his fate our own depends. Allow me to leave you now. I will let you know as soon as I hear anything positive. And, above all, keep up your courage, whatever may happen."

The young advocate was sure of obtaining reliable information at Dr. Seignebo's house. He hastened there; and, as soon as he entered, the physician called out,—
"Ah, you have come at last! I give up twenty of my worst patients to see you, and you keep me waiting for hours. Still I was sure you would come. What happened last night at the Count de Claudieuse's house?"

"Then you know—"

"I know nothing. I have seen the results; but I do not know the cause. The result was this: last night, about eleven o'clock, I had just gone to bed, tired to death, when, all of a sudden, somebody rings at my bell as if he were determined to break it. I do not like people to perform so violently at my door; and I was getting up to let the man know my mind, when the Count de Claudieuse's servant rushed in, pushing my own servant unceremoniously aside, and called to me to come instantly, as his master had just died."

"Good heavens!"

"That is what he said, and my surprise was infinite, for although I knew the count was very ill, I did not think he was so near death."

"Then he is really dead?"

"Not at all. But, if you interrupt me continually, I shall never be able to tell you." And taking off his spectacles, wiping them, and putting them on again, the doctor continued,—
"I dressed at once, and in a few minutes I was at the house. They asked me to go into the sitting-room down stairs. There, to my great amazement, I found the Count de Claudieuse, lying on a sofa. He was pale and stiff, his features fearfully distorted, and on his forehead, I found a slight wound, from which a thread of blood was trickling. Upon my word, I thought it was all over."

"And the countess?"

‘The countess was kneeling by her husband; and with the help of her women, she was trying to resuscitate him by rubbing him, and putting hot napkins on his chest. But for these wise precautions she would be a widow at this moment; whilst, as it is, he may live a long time yet, I really believe this precious count has as many lives as a cat. Four of us carried him up stairs, and put him to bed. He soon began to move, and opened his eyes; and a quarter of an hour later he had recovered consciousness, and spoke readily, though in a somewhat feeble voice. Of course, I asked what had happened, and for the first time in my life I saw the countess’s marvellous self-possession forsake her. She stammered pitifully, looking at her husband with a most frightened air, as if she wished to read in his eyes what she should say. He undertook to answer me; but he, also, was evidently very much embarrassed. He said, that being left alone, and feeling better than usual, he had taken it into his head to try his strength. He had risen, put on his dressing-gown, and gone down stairs, but, in the act of entering the room, he had become dizzy, and had unfortunately fallen so as to hurt his forehead against the sharp corner of a table. I pretended to believe him, and replied, ‘You have done a very imprudent thing, and it must not happen again.’ Then he looked at his wife in a very singular way, and answered, ‘Oh! you may be sure I shall not be guilty of a similar imprudence. I do so want to get well. I have never wished it so much as now.’”

M. Folgat was on the point of speaking, but the doctor raised his hand. “Waite, I have not done yet,” he said. And, manipulating his spectacles most assiduously, he continued,—“I was about returning home, when suddenly a chambermaid came in with a frightened air to tell the countess that her elder daughter, little Martha, had just been seized with terrible convulsions. Of course I went to see her, and found her suffering from a truly fearful nervous attack. It was only with great difficulty that I could quiet her; and when I thought she had recovered, suspecting that there might be some connection between her attack and the accident that had befallen her father, I said in the most paternal tone I could assume, ‘Now, my child, you must tell me what was the matter.’ She hesitated a while, but eventually replied, ‘I was fright-

ened.' — 'Frightened at what, my darling?' She raised herself on the bed, trying to consult her mother's eyes; but I had placed myself between them, so that they could not see each other. When I repeated my question, she said, 'Well, you see, I had just gone to bed, when I heard the bell ring. I got up, and went to the window to see who could be coming so late. I saw the servant go and open the gate, and come back to the house, followed by a gentleman whom I did not know.' The countess interrupted her here, saying, 'It was a messenger from the court, who was sent to me with an urgent letter.' I pretended not to hear her; and still turning towards Martha, I asked again, 'And it was this gentleman who frightened you so?' — 'Oh, no!' — 'What, then?' I paused for a reply, and glanced aside at the countess. She seemed to be terribly embarrassed. Still she did not dare to stop her daughter. 'Well, doctor,' said the little girl, 'no sooner had the gentleman gone into the house than I saw one of the statues under the trees there come down from its pedestal, and glide very quietly along the avenue.'"

M. Folgat here interposed with the remark, "Do you remember, doctor, the day we were questioning little Martha, she said she was terribly frightened by the statues in the garden?"

"Yes, indeed!" replied the doctor. "But wait a while. The countess promptly interrupted her daughter, saying to me, 'But, dear doctor, you ought to forbid the child to have such notions in her head. At Valpinson she never was afraid, and used to go at night time all over the house quite alone and even without a light. Here, however, she is frightened at everything; and as soon as night comes, she fancies the garden is full of ghosts. You are too big now, Martha, to think that statues, which are made of stone, can come to life and walk about.' The child was shuddering. 'The other times, mamma,' she said, 'I was not quite sure; but this time I am sure. I wanted to go away from the window, and couldn't. I saw it all, saw it perfectly. I saw the statue,—the ghost,—come up the avenue slowly and cautiously, and then place itself behind the last tree, the one that is nearest to the parlour-window. Next I heard a loud cry, and then nothing more. The ghost remained all the time behind the tree, and I saw all it did; it turned to the left and to the

right; it drew itself up; and it crouched down. Then, all of a sudden, I heard two terrible cries; O mamma, such cries! Then the ghost raised one arm, this way, and the next moment it had gone; but immediately afterwards another one came out, and disappeared too.' ”

M. Folgat seemed overcome with amazement. “Oh, these ghosts!” he said.

“You suspect them, do you? I suspected them at once. Still I pretended to turn Martha’s whole story into a joke, and tried to explain to her how the darkness makes us liable to all kinds of optical illusions; so that when I left, the countess was evidently quite sure I had no suspicions. In fact I had none, my ideas were not suspicions but certainties. Accordingly, as soon as I got into the garden, I dropped a piece of money which I had kept in my hand on purpose. Of course I set to work looking for it at the foot of the tree nearest to the parlour-window, while the servant who was showing me out helped me with his lantern. Well, M. Folgat, I can assure you that it was not a ghost that had been walking about under the trees; and, if the footmarks which I found there were made by a statue, that statue must have enormous feet, and wear huge iron-shod shoes.”

The young advocate was prepared for this conclusion. “There is no doubt about it,” he remarked. “The scene had a witness.”

XXIX.

“WHAT scene? What witness? That is what I wanted to hear from you, and why I was waiting for you, so impatiently,” said Dr. Seignebos. “I have seen and stated the results: now it is for you to give me the cause.”

Nevertheless, he did not seem to be in the least surprised when the young advocate recounted Jacques’s desperate enterprise, and the scene it gave rise to. As soon as he had heard all, he exclaimed,—“I thought so: yes, upon my word! By racking my brains all night long, I very nearly guessed the whole story. And who in Jacques’s place, would not have been desirous of making one last effort? But fate is certainly against him.”

“Who knows?” said M. Folgat. And, without giving the doctor time to reply, he proceeded,—“In what are our

chances worse than they were before ! In no way. To-day, just as well as yesterday we can lay our hands upon the proofs which we know to exist, and which would save us. Who knows but that at this moment Sir Francis Burnett and Suky Wood may not have been found ? Is your confidence in Goudar shaken ? ”

“ Oh, as to that, not at all ! I saw him this morning at the hospital, when I paid my usual visit ; and he found an opportunity to tell me that he was almost certain of success. I feel persuaded Cocoleu will speak. But will he speak in time ? That is the question. Ah, if we had but a month before us, I should say Jacques is safe. But our hours are numbered you know. The case will come on next week. I am told the presiding judge has already arrived, and M. du Lopt de la Gransiere has engaged rooms at the hotel. What do you mean to do if nothing fresh occurs in the mean time ? ”

“ We shall adhere to the plan of defence we formed.”

“ And if the Count de Claudieuse carries out his threat, and declares that he recognised Jacques in the act of firing at him ? ”

“ We shall say he is mistaken.”

“ And Jacques will be condemned.”

“ So be it ! ” said the young advocate. And lowering his voice, as if he did not wish to be overheard, he added, — “ Only the sentence will not be a final one. Ah, do not interrupt me, doctor, and upon your life, upon Jacques’s life, do not say a word of what I am going to tell you. If a suspicion crossed M. Galpin’s mind my last hope would be destroyed. He would have the opportunity for correcting a blunder which he has committed, and which justifies me in saying that, even if the court should give evidence, even if sentence should be passed, nothing would be lost yet.” M. Folgat was growing more and more animated, and his accent and his gestures indicated that he was sure of himself. “ No,” he repeated, “ nothing would be lost ; and then we should have time before us, while waiting for a second trial, to hunt up our witnesses, and force Cocoleu to tell the truth. Let the count say what he chooses, I like it all the better : I shall thus be relieved of my last scruples. It seemed to me odious to betray the countess, because I thought the one most cruelly punished would be the count. But, if the count attacks us, we must defer

ourselves; and public opinion will be on our side. More than that, people will admire us for having sacrificed our honour for a woman's honour, and for having allowed ourselves to be condemned rather than disclose her name.

The physician did not seem to be convinced; but the young advocate paid no regard to the point. "Our success in a second trial would be almost certain," he resumed. "The scene in the Rue Mautrec has had a witness: his iron-shod shoes have left, as you say, their marks under the linden-tree nearest to the parlour-window, and little Martha watched his movements. Who can this witness be, but Frumence? Well we shall lay hands upon him. He was standing so that he could see everything, and hear every word. He will tell what he saw and what he heard. He will tell how the Count de Claudieuse called out to M. de Boiscoran, 'No, I do not want to kill you! I have a surer vengeance than that: you shall go to the galleys.'"

Dr. Seignebos shook his head as he rejoined, "I hope your expectations may be realized, my dear sir."

At this moment a servant knocked at the door. One of the doctor's patients had sent for him to come at once. Accordingly M. Folgat took his leave and hurried home as fast as he could. He found two letters waiting for him, one from Madame Goudar, and the other from the agent who had been sent to England. The former was of no importance, for Madame Goudar only asked him to give her husband a note, which she enclosed. The second, on the other hand, was of great interest, for the agent wrote, "Not without many difficulties, and especially not without a heavy outlay of money, I have at length discovered Sir Francis Burnett's brother in London, he who was formerly connected with the firm of Gilmour and Benson. Our Sir Francis is not dead. He has gone to Madras, to attend to important financial matters, and is expected home by the next mail steamer. We shall be informed of his arrival on the very day he lands. I have had less trouble in discovering Suky Wood's family. They keep a sailors' tavern at Folkestone. They had news from their daughter about three weeks ago; but, although they profess to be very much attached to her, they could not tell me accurately where she was just now. All they know is, that she is in Jersey, acting as a barmaid in a public-house. Still that is

enough for me. The island is not large ; and I know it very well, having gone there once before in pursuit of a notary, who had absconded with his client's money. Consequently you may consider Suky as safe. When you receive this letter, I shall already be on my way to Jersey.

"Send some money there to the Golden Apple Hotel, St. Heliers, where I propose to lodge. Living is amazingly dear in London ; and I have very little left to the sum you gave me on starting."

In this direction at least, everything seemed going well, and, elated by this first success, M. Folgat slipped a thousand-franc note into an envelope, directed it as desired, and sent it at once to the post-office. Then he asked M. de Chandore to lend him his carriage, and went over to Bois-coran where he wished to see Michael the tenant's son—the young fellow who had been so prompt in finding Cocoléu, and bringing him to town. He found him, fortunately, just coming home, with a cart laden with straw ; and taking him aside, he at once asked him to render M. de Bois-coran a great service.

"What is it ?" asked the young fellow, in a tone of voice which implied that he was ready to do anything.

"Do you know Frumence Cheminot ?" asked M. Folgat.

"He who used to live at La Tremblade ?"

"Exactly."

"Then upon my word I do know him ! He has stolen enough of our apples, the scamp ! But I don't blame him so much, after all ; for he is a good fellow in spite of his vagabond ways."

"He was in prison at Sauveterre."

"Yes, I know : he had broken down a gate near Brechy, and—"

"Well, he has escaped."

"Ah, the scamp !"

"And we must find him again. They have put the gendarmes on his track ; but will they catch him ?"

Michael burst out laughing. "Never !" he said. "Frumence will make his way to Oleron, where he has friends : the gendarmes will look for him in vain."

M. Folgat slapped Michael amicably on the shoulder, and said,—“But you, if you choose ? Oh ! don't look angry. We don't want to have him arrested. All I want you to

do is to hand him a letter from me, and to bring back his answer."

"If that's all, then I'm your man. Just give me time to change my clothes, and to let father know, and I'll be off."

Thus it was that M. Folgat prepared for future action, trying to counterbalance the cunning measures of the prosecution by such combinations as his experience and skill suggested.

Meanwhile everybody around him was in despair; and M. de Chandore's house, once so full of life and merriment, had become as silent and gloomy as a tomb. The last two months had made the baron an old man in good earnest. He looked bent and broken; he walked with difficulty, and his hands began to tremble. The change in the Marquis de Boiscoran was even greater. He, who a few weeks before had looked robust and hearty, now appeared almost decrepit. He scarcely ate, and hardly slept at all. He was growing frightfully thin, and it pained him to speak. As for the marchioness, she lived in agony. She had heard M. Magloire say that Jacques's safety would have been assured beyond all doubt if they had succeeded in obtaining a change of venue, or an adjournment of the trial. And the thought that it was her fault such a change had not been applied for, was death to her. She had hardly strength enough left to drag herself every day as far as the jail to see her son. The two Demoiselles de Lavarande had to bear with all the difficulties arising from the state of things, and they went about looking as pale as ghosts, conversing in whispers, and walking on tiptoe, as if there had been a death in the house.

Denise alone showed greater energy as the troubles increased; though at the same time she did not indulge in much hope. "I know Jacques will be condemned," she said to M. Folgat. But she added that despair belonged only to criminals, and that the fatal mistake for which Jacques was likely to suffer ought to inspire his friends with nothing but indignation against his accusers. While her grandfather and the Marquis de Boiscoran went out as little as possible, she took pains to show herself in the town, astonishing the ladies in good society by the calm way in which she received their false expressions of sympathy. Still it was evident that fever alone sustained

her, imparting a slight colour to her cheeks, and brilliancy to her eyes. It was mainly for her sake that M. Folgat longed to end the uncertainty which preyed more and more on everybody's mind.

The time was drawing near. As Dr. Seignebos had announced, the presiding judge of the assizes, M. Domini, had already arrived at Sauveterre. He was one of those men whose character is an honour to the bench, a man impressed with the dignity of his profession, though not considering himself infallible. Firm without useless rigour, apparently cold and yet kind-hearted, his only mistress was justice, and his only ambition was to establish the truth. He had examined Jacques, as he was bound to do; but the examination had been, as it always is, a mere formality, and had led to no result. The next step was the selection of the jury. Those liable to serve in the box had already begun to arrive from various parts of the department. They mostly lodged at the Hotel de France, taking their meals in common in the large back dining-room, which is always specially reserved for their use at session time. In the afternoon they might be seen walking together in groups on the Place du Marche Neuf, or round about the old ramparts. M. du Lopt de la Gransiere had also arrived. But he kept strictly in retirement in his room at the Hotel de la Poste, where, he spent several hours every day in close conference with M. Galpin-Daveline.

The assizes were to open on the Monday, three days being devoted to a number of minor cases. At the conclusion of these the presiding judge had decided to deal with the Valpinson affair. The townsfolk brought great pressure to bear on all who were in any way connected with the court, with the view of obtaining tickets of admission to witness the trial; and people who had latterly avoided M. Galpin-Daveline, now stopped him in the street, and begged for cards. Some few tickets fell into the hands of speculators who boldly sold them for money; and one family actually had the audacity to write to the Marquis de Boiscoran for three admissions, promising in return to contribute to his son's acquittal "by their attitude in court."

While all this was going on, the town was somewhat surprised by the distribution of a subscription list on behalf of the families of the unfortunate firemen who had per-

ished in the fire at Valpinson. Who had originated this proceeding, no one could say. M. Seneschal tried in vain to discover, but the secret of the treacherous move was well kept. It was evidently designed to revive on the very eve of the trial the mournful memories and bitter hatred which had been allowed to slumber until that moment. "That man Galpin has had a hand in it," said Dr. Seignebos. "And to think that he may after all be triumphant! Ah, why did not Goudar commence his experiment a little sooner?"

For Goudar, while still maintaining that he was certain of success, asked for time. To disarm the mistrust of an idiot like Cocoleu was not the work of a day or of a week. He declared that, if he were over-hasty, failure would inevitably ensue.

Regarding other points it should be mentioned that the Count de Claudieuse was getting rather better; while the agent in Jersey had telegraphed that he was on Suky's track, and that he should certainly find her, but could not say when. Finally, Michael had been all over the isle of Oleron, but contrary to his expectations no one had been able to give him any news of Frumence.

Such was the situation when, on the opening day of the assizes, a general council was held by Jacques's intimate friends and relatives. It was here resolved that his advocates should not mention the name of the Countess de Claudieuse, and that, even if the count offered to give evidence, they should adhere to the plan of defence suggested by M. Folgat. Alas! the chances of success seemed to diminish every hour, for the jury—contrary to the general rule at Sauveterre—were showing themselves excessively severe to all the accused. A man who had killed another after receiving great provocation, could not even obtain the plea of "extenuating circumstances," and was condemned to death. Meanwhile it was decided that M. de Chandore and the Marquis and the Marchioness de Bois-coran should attend the trial. They wished to spare Denise the terrible excitement she would necessarily undergo if she were present; but she declared that if they refused to take her with them, she would go to the Palace de Justice by herself; and they were forced to submit to her will.

Thanks to an order from M. Domini, M. Folgat and M.

Magloire were able to spend the last evening with Jacques in order to settle all matters of detail. The prisoner looked excessively pale, but he was quite composed. And when his counsel left him, telling him to keep up both his hope and his courage, he replied, "Hope I have none; but courage—I assure you that will not fail me!"

XXX.

AT last through the single grated window of his dark cell, Jacques de Boiscoran saw the day break that was to decide his fate.

No fuller account of the events which transpired on this occasion could be given than that which appeared in the columns of the "*Independant de Sauveterre*." Although a morning paper, it published, "owing to the gravity of the circumstances," a special evening edition, which a dozen newsboys hawked about the streets till midnight, and wherein one read as follows:—

THE SAUVETERRE ASSIZES.

Presiding Judge.—M. Domini.

ASSASSINATION! INCENDIARISM!

[*From our Special Reporter.*]

Whence arises this unusual commotion, uproar, and excitement, in our ordinarily peaceful town? Whence these gatherings on our public squares, these groups before all the houses? Whence this agitation on all faces, this anxiety in all eyes? It is because the terrible Valpinson drama, which has for so long disturbed our peace, is at last to be publicly investigated. To-day the man charged with these fearful crimes is to take his seat in the dock. Hence all steps are eagerly turned towards the Palais de Justice, which long before daylight is surrounded by an eager multitude, whom the constables and gendarmes can only control with difficulty. The people press and crowd and violently push. Coarse words fly to and fro. Gestures follow and then blows. A disturbance is imminent. Women cry, men swear, and two peasants from Brechy are eventually arrested. It is well known that only a few people will be fortunate enough to secure admission. The

great Place itself cannot contain all these curious people, who have come from every part of the district : and how could it be expected that the court-room would hold them ?

And still the authorities have resorted to heroic measures ; and have even had two partition walls taken down, so that a part of the great hall is added to the court-room proper. M. Lautier, the town architect, who is a good judge in such matters, assures us that this immense space will accommodate twelve hundred persons. But what are twelve hundred persons ? Long before the hour fixed for the opening of the sitting, the court is full to overflowing. A pin might be thrown into the room, and it could not fall to the ground. Not an inch of space is lost. All around, along the wall, men are standing in close ranks. On both sides of the platform are chairs occupied by a large number of ladies belonging to the best society, not only of Sauveterre, but of all the neighbouring localities. Some of these representatives of the fair sex appear in magnificent toilettes.

A thousand reports are current, a thousand conjectures are formed, but these we need not report. Let us say, however, that the accused has not availed himself of his right to reject a certain number of jurymen. He has accepted all the names which were drawn by lot, and which the prosecuting attorney did not object to. We obtain this information from a legal gentleman, a friend of ours, who has scarcely spoken when a great noise arises at the door, followed by a rapid moving of chairs, and half-smothered exclamations. All eyes are turned to witness the entrance of the prisoner's relatives and friends, who walk towards the seats assigned them close by the platform.

The Marquis de Boiscoran accompanies Mademoiselle de Chandore, who wears a dark gray dress, trimmed with cherry-coloured ribbons ; and M. de Chandore escorts the Marchioness de Boiscoran. Both the marquis and the baron look cold and reserved ; while the prisoner's mother appears utterly overcome. Mademoiselle Chandore on the contrary, is in good spirits. She does not seem in the least concerned, and returns with a bright smile the few greetings she receives from various parts of the court-room. But the party are soon no longer an object of curiosity. Everybody's attention is directed towards a large table in front of where the judges sit, and on which are a

number of articles covered by a large red cloth. These articles are to be used as evidence against the prisoner. In the meantime it strikes eleven o'clock. The ushers move about, seeing that everything is in order; then all of a sudden a little door on the left hand opens, and the counsel for the defence enter the court. Our readers know them. One is M. Magloire, the ornament of our bar; the other, an advocate from the capital, M. Folgat, young, but already famous. M. Magloire looks at his best, and smilingly converses with the mayor of Sauveterre; while M. Folgat opens his leather case, and consults his papers.

It is half-past eleven, and an usher announces in stentorian tones, "The court." M. Domini takes the presidential chair, while M. du Lopt de la Gransiere occupies the seat reserved to the prosecuting counsel. Behind them sit the jurymen, looking grave and solemn.

All of a sudden a great tumult arises. The spectators hurriedly spring to their feet; those occupying the back places even mount upon their chairs. All eyes are turned towards a door facing the bench. This sensation has been caused by an order of the presiding judge. He has instructed the chief usher to have the prisoner brought in.

At last Jacques de Boiscoran appears. He is dressed in black from head to foot, and it is noticed that he wears in his buttonhole the ribbon of the Legion of Honour. He looks pale: but his glance is clear and open, full of confidence, yet not defiant. His carriage is proud, though melancholy. Scarcely has he taken his seat than a gentleman passes over three rows of chairs, and, in spite of the officers of the court, succeeds in shaking hands with him. This is Dr. Seignebo.

The president orders the ushers to proclaim silence: and, after having reminded the audience that all expression of approbation or disapprobation are strictly prohibited, he turns to the accused, saying,—“Tell me your christian names, your family name, your age, your profession, and your place of residence.”

The accused replies,—“Louis Trivulce Jacques de Boiscoran, twenty-seven years old, land-owner, residing at Boiscoran, district of Sauveterre.”

“Sit down, and listen to the charges which are brought against you,” rejoined the presiding judge, whereupon the clerk, M. Mechinet, proceeded to read the charges, which,

in their terrible simplicity, cause a shudder to pass through the whole audience. We shall not repeat them here, as all the incidents are well known. Directly they are read, the prisoner's examination begins as follows :

President.—"Accused, rise and answer clearly. During the preliminary investigation, you refused to answer several questions. Now the matter must be cleared up. And I am bound to tell you that it is to your interest to answer frankly."

Accused.—"No one desires more than I do that the truth be known. I am ready to answer."

"Why were you so reticent in your first examination?"

"—I thought it important for my own interests to answer only in court."

"You have heard the crimes of which you are accused?"

"—I am innocent. And, first of all, allow me to say one thing. The crime committed at Valpinson is an atrocious, cowardly crime; but it is at the same time an absurdly insensate one, resembling the unconscious act of a madman. Now, it has never been denied that I possess the ordinary measure of intelligence."

"You discuss, you do not answer."—"But, Monsieur!"

"Hereafter you will have full liberty to argue. For the present, you must content yourself with answering my questions. Were you not about to be married soon?"—At this question all eyes are turned towards Mademoiselle de Chandore, who although she blushes till she is as red as a poppy, does not lower her eyelids. The accused replies in a low voice, "Yes, I was."

"Did you not write to your betrothed a few hours before the crime was committed?"—"Yes, sir; and I sent my letter by one of my tenants' sons named Michael."

"What was it that you wrote to her?"—"That important business would prevent me from spending the evening with her."

"What was that business? Tell us the truth. You were asked this same question during the preliminary investigation, and you replied that you went to Brechy to see your wood merchant."—"I did indeed make that reply on the spur of the moment, it was not correct."

"Why did you tell a falsehood?"—(With an expression of indignation, which is noticed by all)—"I could not be

lieve that I was in danger. It seemed to me impossible that I should be the object of an accusation, which, nevertheless, has brought me into this court. Hence I did not deem it necessary to make my private affairs public."

"But you very soon found out that you were in danger?"—"Yes, I did."

"Why did you not tell the truth then?"—"Because the magistrate who carried on the investigation had been too intimate a friend of mine to inspire me with confidence."

"Explain yourself more fully."—"I must ask leave to say no more. In speaking of M. Galpin-Davelin, I might be found wanting in moderation."

A low murmur ensues at this reply, drawing from the president the remark, "Such murmurs are improper, and I remind the audience of the respect due to the court."

M. du Lopt de la Gransiere, the advocate-general, then rises,—“We cannot,” he says, “tolerate such recriminations against a magistrate who has nobly performed his duty, despite the grief it caused him. If the accused had well-founded objections to this magistrate, why did he not make them known? He cannot plead ignorance: he knows the law, he has passed the legal examination necessary to be called to the bar. His counsel, moreover are men of experience.”

These observations draw forth a retort from M. Magloire. “We were of opinion,” says he, “that the accused ought to ask for a change of venue. He declined to follow our advice, being confident that his cause was a good one.”

“The jury will know how to appreciate this system,” remarks the advocate-general, resuming his seat.

Then the president turns again to the accused. “And now,” asks he, “are you ready to tell the truth concerning the business which prevented you from spending the evening with your betrothed?”—"Yes, sir. My wedding was to take place at Brechy church, and I had to make the necessary arrangements for the ceremony with the priest. I had, besides, to fulfil certain religious duties. The priest of Brechy, who is a friend of mine, will tell you, that, although no day had been fixed, it had been agreed between us, since he insisted upon it, that I should go to confession one evening that week.”

The audience, which had been expecting some exciting

revelation, seems much disappointed by this reply, and ironical laughter is heard in various parts of the court. "This laughter is indecent and objectionable," exclaimed the president severely, "usher, remove the persons who presume to laugh. And once more I give notice, that, at the first interruption, I shall order the court to be cleared." Then turning again to the accused, he adds, "Proceed!"—"That evening, therefore, I went to call on the priest at Brechy. Unluckily there was no one at home at the parsonage when I got there. I was ringing the bell for the third or fourth time, when a little peasant-girl who came by, told me that she had just met the priest at the Ca-fourche des Marechaux. I hastened at once in that direction, thinking to find him. But I walked more than four miles without meeting him, and then coming to the conclusion that the girl must have been mistaken, I went home again."

"Is that your explanation?"—"Yes."

"And you think it is a plausible one?"—"I have not promised to say what is plausible, but what is true. I may confess, however, that, precisely because the explanation is so simple, I did not venture to give it at first. And yet if no crime had been committed, and I had said the day afterwards, 'Yesterday, I went to see the priest at Brechy, and did not find him at home,' who would have discovered anything remarkable in my statement?"

"And, in order to fulfil so simple a duty, you chose a roundabout way, which is not only difficult, but actually dangerous, right across the swamps?"—"I chose the shortest way."

"Then, why were you so frightened when meeting young Ribot at the Seille Canal?"—"I was not frightened, but simply surprised, as one is apt to be when suddenly meeting a man where no one is expected. And, if I was surprised, young Ribot was not less so."

"You say that you hoped to meet no one?"—"Pardon me, I did not say so. To expect is not the same as to hope."

"Why, then, did you take such pains to explain your being there?"—"I gave no explanations. It was young Ribot who at first told me, laughingly, where he was going, and then I replied that I was bound for Brechy."

"You told him, also, that you were going through the

marshes to shoot birds; and at the same time you showed him your gun?"—"That may be. But is that any proof against me? I think just the contrary. If I had had such criminal intentions as the prosecution suggests, I should certainly have gone back after meeting any one, knowing that having been seen; I was necessarily exposed to great danger. But I was only going to see my friend, the priest."

"And for such a visit you took your gun with you?"—"My land extends through the woods and marshes, and there was not a day I did not bag a rabbit or a waterfowl. Everybody in the neighbourhood will tell you that I never went out without a gun."

"And on your way back, why did you go through the forest of Rochepommier?"—"Because from the spot I had reached it was probably the shortest way to Boiscoran. I say probably, because just then I did not think much about it. A man who is taking a walk would be very much embarrassed, in the majority of cases, if he had to give a precise account why he took one road rather than another."

"You were seen in the forest by a woodcutter, called Gaudry?"—"So I was told by the magistrate."

"That witness declares that you were in a state of great excitement. You were tearing the leaves from the branches of the trees, and talking loudly."—"I certainly was very much vexed at having lost my evening, and particularly so at having relied on the little peasant girl. It is quite possible I may have exclaimed, as I walked along, 'Plague upon my friend, the priest, who goes and dines in town!' or some such words."

There is a smile in the assembly, but not such as to attract the president's attention. "You know then," he says, "that the priest at Brechy was dining out that day?"

At these words, M. Magloire rises from his seat—"It is through us, sir," he replied, "that the accused has learnt this fact. When he informed us how he had spent the evening, we went to see the priest at Brechy, who told us how it came about that neither he nor his old servant was at the parsonage. At our request the priest has been summoned. We shall also produce another priest, who at that time passed by the Cafourché des Marechaux, and who was the one of the little girl had seen."

Having made a sign to the counsel to sit down again, the president once more turns to the accused and remarks, "The woman Courtois who met you deposes that you looked very strange. You did not speak to her: in fact you were in great haste to get away from her."—"The night was much too dark for the woman to see my face. She asked me to render her a slight service, and I did so. I did not speak to her, because I had nothing to say. I did not leave her suddenly, but only got ahead of her because her ass walked very slowly."

At a sign from the president, the ushers now remove the red cloth which had hitherto covered the objects on the table. Great curiosity is manifested by the whole audience; people rise from their seats and stretch their necks so as to see the better. On the table are displayed various articles of clothing, a pair of gray velveteen trousers, a shooting-jacket of maroon velveteen, an old straw hat, and a pair of dun-coloured leather boots. By their side lie several packages of cartridges, a double-barrelled gun, two bowls filled with small-shot, and, finally, a large china basin, with a dark sediment at the bottom. Pointing to these objects the president now asks the prisoner, "Are those the clothes which you wore the evening of the crime?"—"Yes, sir."

"A curious costume in which to visit a venerable ecclesiastic, and to perform religious duties."—"The priest at Brechy was my friend. Our intimacy will explain, even if it does not justify, the liberty I took."

"Do you also recognise this basin? The water has been allowed to evaporate, and the residue alone remains at the bottom."—"It is true, that, when the investigating magistrate arrived at my house, he found this basin full of dark water, which was thick with half-burnt *debris*. He asked me about this water, and I did not hesitate a moment to tell him that I had washed my hands in it the evening before, after my return home. Is it not evident, that, if I had been guilty, my first effort would have been to do away with all traces of my crime? And yet this circumstance is looked upon as the strongest evidence of my guilt, and the prosecution produces it as the most serious charge against me."

"It is very strong and most serious."—"Well, nothing admits of an easier explanation. I am a great smoker.

When I left home the evening of the crime, I took several cigars with me ; but, when I wanted to light one, I found I had no matches.

At this moment, M. Magloire rises again, and says,—“ I wish to point out that this is not one of those explanations which are invented, after the fact, to meet the necessities of a double cause. We have absolute and overwhelming proof of its truth, M. de Boiscoran did not have the little match-box which he usually carries about him, for he had left it at M. de Chandore’s house, on the mantel-piece, where I have seen it, and where it still is.”

“ That is sufficient, M. Magloire. Let the prisoner proceed.”—“ I wanted to smoke ; and so I resorted to an expedient, which all sportsmen are familiar with. I tore one of my cartridges open, removed the lead, put a piece of paper inside, and set it on fire.”

“ And you get a light by this means ? ”—“ Not always, but certainly in one instance out of three.”

“ And the operation blackens the hands ? ”—“ Not the operation itself. But, when I had lit my cigar, I could not throw away the burning paper as it was : I might have kindled a regular fire.”

“ In the marshes ? ”—“ But, sir, remember I have smoked five or six cigars during the evening, which means that I had to repeat the operation a dozen times at least, and in different places,—in the woods and on the high-road. Each time I had to extinguish the fire with my fingers ; and, as the powder is always greasy, my hands naturally soon became as black as a charcoal-burner’s.”

The accused gives this explanation in a perfectly natural but rather excited manner, which makes a great impression. The examination proceeds.

“ Let us deal with your gun. Do you recognise it ? ”—“ Yes, sir. May I look at it ? ”

Receiving an affirmative reply, the accused eagerly takes up the gun, snaps the two cocks, and puts one of his fingers inside the barrels. He turns crimson, and, bending down to his counsel, says a few words to them so quickly and so low, that they do not reach us.

“ What is the matter ? ” inquires the president.

M. Magloire rising, replies, “ A fact has now been ascertained which at once establishes M. de Boiscoran’s innocence. By providential intercession, his servant Anthony

cleaned this gun two days before the crime was committed. It appears now that one of the barrels is still clean, and in good condition. Hence it cannot be M. de Boiscoran who fired twice at the Count de Claudieuse."

While his advocate is speaking the accused advances to the table on which his clothes and the other objects are lying. He wraps his handkerchief round the ramrod, slips it into one of the barrels, draws it out again, and shows that it is hardly soiled. The whole audience becomes greatly excited. The president orders him to do the same thing with the other barrel. The accused obeys. His handkerchief remains clean.

"You see," says the president, "you have told us that you burnt, perhaps, a dozen cartridges to light your cigars. But the prosecution had foreseen this objection, and they are prepared to meet it. Usher, call the witness, Maucroy."

Our readers all know this gentleman, whose fine collection of fire arms, sporting-articles, and fishing tackle is one of the ornaments of the Place du Marche Neuf. Directly he has taken the oath, the president calls on him to repeat the statements he has made regarding M. de Boiscoran's gun. He declares that it is an excellent weapon. Thanks, however, to a peculiar arrangement of the cartridges and to the special nature of the fulminating material, the barrels hardly ever become foul.—Hereupon the accused eagerly exclaims, "You are mistaken, sir. I have myself cleaned my gun frequently: and I have, contrary to what you say, found the barrels extremely foul.

Witness.—"Because you had fired too many charges. But I mean to say that you can use two or three cartridges without a trace being left in the barrels."

Accused.—"I deny that positively."

President to witness.—"And if a dozen cartridges were burnt?"—"Oh, then, the barrels would be very foul."

"Examine the barrels, and tell us what you find."—*After a minute examination.* "I declare that two cartridges cannot have been used since the gun was cleaned."

President to the accused.—"Well, then, what becomes of the dozen cartridges you used to light your cigars, and which blackened your hands so much?" At these words, the prisoner, whose firmness and composed manner have hitherto been the subject of general comment, grows ex-

tremely pale, and does not answer. It is M. Magloire who speaks,—“The question,” says he, “is too serious to be left entirely in the hands of a single witness.”

“We only desire the truth,” responds the advocate-general. “It is easy to make an experiment.”

Witness.—“Oh, certainly!”

President.—“Then let it be done.”

The witness puts a cartridge into each barrel, and goes to the window. The sudden explosion is followed by the screams of several ladies. The witness returns and shows that the barrels are no more foul than they were before. “Well, you see that I was right,” he says.

The president now addresses himself to the accused: “This circumstance on which you relied so securely, far from helping you, only proves that your explanation of the blackened state of your hands was a falsehood.” M. Domino then orders the witness to retire and the examination of the accused is continued.

“What were your relations with Count de Claudieuse?”
—“We had no intercourse with each other.”

“But your aversion to him was well known all over the country?”—“That is a mistake. I declare, upon my honour, that I always looked upon him as the best and most honourable of men.”

“There, at least, you agree with all who know him. Still you are at law with him?”—“I have inherited a suit from my uncle, together with his fortune. I have carried it on, but very quietly. I asked for nothing better than a compromise.”

“And, when the Count de Claudieuse refused, you were incensed?”—“No.”

“Yes, you were, indeed you were so irritated that you once actually pointed your gun at him. At another time you said, ‘He will not leave me alone till I put a bullet into his head.’ Do not deny! You will hear what the witnesses say.”

In obedience to the president's orders, the accused now resumes his seat. He looks as confident as ever, and carries his head high. He has entirely overcome any feeling of discouragement, and converses with his counsel in the most composed manner. Undoubtedly at this stage of the proceedings, public opinion is on his side. He has won the good-will even of those who came here strongly prej-

udiced against him. No one can help being impressed by his proud but mournful expression of countenance ; and all are touched by the extreme simplicity of his answers. Although the discussion concerning the gun has not turned out to his advantage, it does not seem to have injured him. People are eagerly discussing the fouling of guns. A number of incredulous persons, whom the experiment has not convinced, maintain that M. Maucroy has been too rash in his statements.

The proceedings are not exactly suspended ; but there is a pause, whilst the ushers cover the articles on the table once more with the red cloth, and, after several comings and goings, roll a large arm chair into the well of the court—in front of the judges' seat. At last one of the ushers approaches the president, and whispers something into his ear. M. Domini only nods his head, but when the usher has left the hall he says, "We have now to hear the witnesses, and we propose to begin with the Count de Claudieuse. Although seriously indisposed, he has preferred to appear in court."

At these words, Dr. Seignebos is seen to start up, as if he wished to address the court ; but one of his friends, sitting beside him, pulls him down by his coat. M. Folgat makes a sign to him, and he soon resumes his seat. Almost immediately afterwards the Count de Claudieuse enters, supported, indeed, almost carried, by his man-servant. He is greeted by a murmur of sympathetic pity. He is frightfully thin and haggard ; and the whole vitality of his system seems to have centred in his eyes, which shine with extraordinary brilliancy. He takes the oath in an almost inaudible voice. But the silence is so deep, that when the president asks him the usual question, "Do you swear to tell the whole truth ?" and he answers, "I swear," the words are distinctly heard all over the court-room.

President (in a kind tone).—"We are very much obliged to you, sir, for the effort which you have made in coming here. That chair has been brought in for you ; please sit down."

The Count de Claudieuse.—"I thank you, sir ; but I am strong enough to stand."

"Please tell us, then, what you know of the attempt made on your life."—"It might have been eleven o'clock. I had gone to bed a little while before and blown out my

light. I was in that half state which is neither wakefulness nor sleep, when I saw my room lighted up by a dazzling glare. I conjectured it was fire, jumped out of bed, and, only lightly dressed, rushed down the stairs. I found some difficulty in opening the outer door, which I had locked myself. At last I succeeded. But I had no sooner put my foot on the threshold than I felt a terrible pain in my right side, and at the same time I heard an explosion of fire-arms. Instinctively I rushed towards the place whence the shot seemed to have been fired ; but, before I had taken three steps, I was struck once more in the shoulder, and fell down unconscious."

"How long a time was there between the first and the second shot?"—"Almost three or four seconds."

"Was that time enough to distinguish the assassin!"—"Yes, and I saw him run from behind a woodpile, where he had been lying in ambush, and escape into the country."

"You can tell us, no doubt, how he was dressed?"—"Certainly. He had on a pair of light gray trousers, a dark coat, and a large straw hat."

At a sign from the president, and in the midst of the most profound silence, the ushers remove the red cloth from the table. The president points to the garments of the accused and asks, "Does the costume which you describe correspond with those clothes?"—"Yes; for they appear to be the same."

"Did you recognise the assassin?"—"The fire at that moment had made so much progress that it was as bright as daylight, and I recognised M. Jacques de Boiscoran."

This answer was waited for with deep anxiety by every one in the vast audience. Those who glanced at the prisoner perceived that not a muscle in his face moved. Neither did his counsel betray any signs of surprise or emotion. The president and the advocate-general had been intently watching the accused and his lawyers. Did they expect a protest, an answer; probably so. However, as none came, the president turned to the witness and exclaimed, "Your declaration is a most serious one, sir."—"I know its weight," rejoined the count.

"It is entirely different from your first deposition made before the investigating magistrate."—"It is."

"When you were examined a few hours after the crime,

you declared that you had not recognised the assassin. More than that, when M. de Boiscoran's name was mentioned you seemed to be indignant at such a suspicion, and almost offered to guarantee his innocence."—"That was contrary to truth. Imbued with a natural sentiment of commiseration, I tried to save a man who belongs to a highly esteemed family, from disgraceful punishment."

"But now?"—"Now I see that I was wrong, and that the law ought to have its course. And this is my reason for coming here to-day, when I am on the point of appearing before God, in order to tell you that M. de Boiscoran is guilty. I recognised him."

To the accused.—"Do you hear?"

The accused rises. "By all that is dear and sacred to me in the world," he exclaims, "I swear that I am innocent. The Count de Claudieuse says he is about to appeal before God; it is to the justice of God that I appeal."

Sobs almost drown his voice. The Marchioness de Boiscoran is overcome by a nervous attack. She is carried out stiff and inanimate; and Dr. Seignebos and Mademoiselle de Chandore hasten after her. Then turning to the Count de Claudieuse the prisoner cries, "My mother is dying, sir."

Certainly, all those who looked forward to a scene of thrilling interest are not disappointed. Everybody appears overcome with excitement; and many of the ladies shed tears. And yet those who watch the glances which are exchanged between M. de Boiscoran and the Count de Claudieuse cannot help asking themselves, if there is not something else between these two men, besides what the trial has made known. We cannot explain to ourselves the singular tone of these remarks, nor does any one understand the silence observed by M. de Boiscoran's counsel. Do they abandon their client? No; for we see them go up to him, shake hands with him, and lavish upon him every sign of friendly consolation and encouragement. We may even be permitted to say, that, to all appearances, the president himself and the advocate-general are for a moment perfectly overcome with surprise. At all events such is our impression. However the president continues, "I had just been asking the accused, count, whether there was any ground of enmity between you."

The count replies in a steadily declining voice, "I

know no other than our lawsuit about a little stream of water."

"Did not the accused once threaten to fire at you?"—"Yes; but I did not think he was in earnest, and I never resented the matter."

"Do you persist in your declaration?"—"I do. And once more, upon my oath, I declare solemnly that I recognised M. Jacques de Boiscoran in such a manner as to prevent any possible mistake."

It is evidently time that the Count de Claudieuse should conclude his evidence. He begins to totter; his eyes close; his head rolls from side to side and two ushers have to come to his assistance to enable him, with the help of his own servant, to leave the hall. Is the Countess de Claudieuse to be called next? So people think, but it is not so. The countess being kept by the bedside of one of her daughters, who is most dangerously ill, will not be called at all; and the clerk of the court is ordered to read her deposition. Although her description of the terrible event is very graphic, it contains no new facts, and will remain without influence on the proceedings.

The next witness is a young fellow named Ribot,—a good-looking stalwart "village cock," with a pink-and-blue cravat round his neck, and a huge gold chain dangling from his watch-pocket. He seems to be very proud of his appearance, and looks around him with an air of the most perfect self-satisfaction. He relates the circumstances of his meeting with the accused in a tone of great importance. He knows everything and explains everything. With a little encouragement he would, no doubt, declare that the accused had confided to him all his plans of incendiarism and murder. His answers are almost all received with great hilarity, which draw upon the audience another severe reprimand from the president. The witness Gaudry, who succeeds Ribot, is a little wretched-looking man, with a false would-be-timid glance, who exhausts himself in bowing and scraping. Unlike Ribot, he seems to have forgotten everything. It is evident he is afraid of committing himself. He praises the count; but he does not speak the less well of M. de Boiscoran. He assures the court of his profound respect for the bench—for all the ladies and gentlemen present, indeed for every one. The woman Courtois, who comes next, evidently wishes she

were a thousand miles away. The president has to make the greatest efforts to obtain, word by word, her evidence, which after all, amounts to next to nothing.

Then follow two farmers from Brechy, who were present at the violent altercation which ended in M. de Boiscoran aiming his gun at the Count de Claudieuse. The account, interrupted by numberless parentheses, is very obscure. The counsel for the defence requests them to be more explicit: and thereupon they become utterly unintelligible. Besides, they contradict each other. One looked upon the conduct of the accused as a mere jest: while the other considered it so serious that he threw himself between the two noblemen in order to prevent M. de Boiscoran from killing his adversary then and there. Once more the accused energetically protests that he had no animosity against the Count de Claudieuse: there was no reason why he should have. The obstinate peasant insists, however, that a lawsuit is always a sufficient reason for hating a man. And thereupon he undertakes to explain the lawsuit, and how the Count de Claudieuse, by damming the waters of the Seille, overflowed M. de Boiscoran's meadows.

The president at last puts an end to the discussion, and orders another witness to be brought in. This man swears he heard M. de Boiscoran once say, that sooner or later, he would put a ball into the Count de Claudieuse's head. He adds, that the accused is a terrible fellow, who has threatened to shoot people upon the slightest provocation. And, to support his evidence, he states that once before, to the knowledge of the country, M. de Boiscoran really did fire at a man he disliked.

The accused undertakes to explain this circumstance. A scamp—he says—perhaps the very witness in the box, came every night and stole his tenants' fruit and vegetables. One night he kept watch, and gave the thief a load of salt. He does not know whether he hit him. At all events, the rascal never complained, and thus was never found out.

The next witness is a Brechy huissier, who deposes that the Count de Claudieuse, by damming the waters of the Seille, once caused M. de Boiscoran a loss of twenty tons of first-rate hay. He confesses that such a bad neighbour would certainly have exasperated him. The advocate-general does not deny the facts, but adds that the Count de Claudieuse offered to pay damages. However, M. de

Boiscoran refused the offer with insulting haughtiness. The accused replies, that he refused upon his lawyer's advice, but that he did not use insulting words.

Next come the witnesses summoned by the defence. The first is the reverend priest from Brechy, who confirms the statement made by the accused. On the evening of the crime he was dining at the house of M. de Besson; his servant had come for him; and the parsonage was deserted. He states that he had really arranged with M. de Boiscoran that the latter should come some evening that week to fulfil the religious duties which the church requires before it allows a marriage to be consecrated. He has known Jacques de Boiscoran since he was a child, and knows no better and no more honourable man. In his opinion, the hatred, of which so much has been said, never had any existence. He cannot believe, and does not believe, that the accused is guilty. The second witness is the priest of an adjoining parish. He states, that between nine and ten o'clock, he was on the road, near the Cafourche des Marechaux. The night was quite dark. He is of the same height as the priest of Brechy: and the little girl might very well have taken him for the latter and thus have misled M. de Boiscoran. Three other minor witnesses are next heard, and then it is that the advocate-general begins his speech.

M. du Lopt de la Gransiere's eloquence is so widely known, and so justly appreciated, that we need not refer to it here. We will only say that he surpassed himself on this occasion; for during more than an hour his address held the large assembly in anxious and breathless suspense, and caused all hearts to vibrate with the most intense excitement. He commences with a description of Valpinson, this poetic and charming residence, where the noble old trees of Rochepommier are mirrored in the crystal waters of the Seille. "There," he exclaims,—“there lived the Count and the Countess de Claudieuse,—he one of those noblemen of a past age who worshipped honour, and were devoted to duty; she one of those women who are the glory of their sex, and the perfect model of all domestic virtues. Heaven had blessed their union, and given them two children, to whom they were tenderly attached. Fortune smiled upon their wise efforts. Esteemed by all, cherished, and revered, they lived happy.

and might have counted upon long years of prosperity. But no. It was not to be. Hate was hovering over them.

"One evening, a fatal glare arouses the count. He rushes out; he hears the report of a gun. He hears it a second time, and he sinks down, bathed in his life's blood. The countess also is alarmed by the explosion, and hastens to the spot: she stumbles; she sees the lifeless body of her husband, and sinks unconscious to the ground. Are the children also to perish? No. Providence watches. A flash of intelligence pierces an idiot's brain. He rushes through the flames, and snatches the children from the fire that was already threatening their couch. The lives of the inmates are saved; but the fire continues its destructive march. At the sound of the terrible fire-bell, all the inhabitants of the neighbouring villages hurry to the spot. But there is no one to direct their efforts; there are no engines, and they can do nothing. But suddenly a distant rumble revives hope in their hearts. The fire-engines are approaching. They reach the spot; and whatever men can do is done at once.

"But great God! What are those cries of horror which suddenly arise on all sides? The roof of the house is falling, it buries under its ruins two zealous and courageous men,—Bolton the drummer, who but just now summoned his neighbours to come to the rescue, and Guillebauld, a father with five children. High above the crash and the hiss of the flames rise their heart-rending cries. They call for help. Will they be allowed to perish? A *gendarme* rushes forward, and with him a farmer from Brechy. But their heroism is useless; the monster will not forego its prey. The would-be rescuers are also apparently doomed; and it is only by unheard-of efforts, and at great peril of life, that they are at last saved. Still they are so grievously wounded, that they will remain infirm for the rest of their lives, compelled to appeal to public charity for their subsistence."

Then the prosecuting counsel proceeds to paint the disaster at Valpinson in the darkest colours, and with all the resources of his well-known eloquence. He describes the Countess de Claudieuse as she kneels by the side of her dying husband, while the crowd is eagerly pressing around the wounded man and struggling with the flames for the charred remains of the unfortunate firemen. With

increasing vehemence, he proceeds :—" And during all this time what becomes of the author of these fearful misdeeds? When his hatred is gratified, he flees through the wood, and returns to his home. Remorse, there is none. As soon as he reaches the house, he eats, he drinks, he smokes his cigar. His position in the country is such, and the precautionary measures he has taken appear to him so well chosen, that he thinks he is above suspicion. He is calm. He feels so perfectly safe, that he neglects the commonest precautions, and does not even take the trouble of pouring out the water in which he has washed his hands, blackened as they are by the fire he has just kindled. He forgets that the torch of Providence illumines and guides human justice. For, how, indeed, could the law ever have expected to find the guilty man in one of the most magnificent chateaux of the country, had it not been for a direct intervention of Providence?

" For the incendiary and the assassin was actually there, at the Chateau de Boiscoran. And let no one come and tell us that Jacques de Boiscoran's past life is such as to protect him against the formidable charges that are brought against him. We know his past life, one of those idle young men who spend in riotous living a fortune painfully amassed by their forefathers. Jacques de Boiscoran had not even a profession. Useless to society, a burden to himself, he passed through life like a ship without a rudder and without a compass, indulging in all kinds of unhealthy pastime, in order to occupy the hours that weighed so heavily upon him. And yet he was ambitious; but his ambition lay in the direction of those dangerous and wicked intrigues which inevitably lead men to crime. Hence we see him mixed up in all those sterile and wanton party movements which discredit our days, hence we see him uttering over and over again hollow phrases in condemnation of all that is noble and sacred, appealing to the most execrable passions of the multitude—"

" At these words M. Magloire springs to his feet,—“ If this is a political affair,” he cries, “ we ought to have been informed beforehand.”

The advocate-general.—“ There is no question of politics

here. We speak of the life of a man who has been an apostle of strife."

M. Magloire.—"Does the advocate-general fancy he is preaching peace?"

President.—"I request the counsel for the defence not to interrupt."

Advocate-general.—"And it is in this ambition of the accused that we must look for the motive of the terrible hatred which led him to commit such crimes. That lawsuit about a stream of water is a matter of comparatively little importance. But Jacques de Boiscoran was preparing to become a candidate for election."

"I never dreamed of it," ejaculates the accused, but the advocate-general, disregarding the interruption, proceeds:—"He did not say so: but his friends said it for him, and stalked the district, repeating that by his position, his wealth, and his opinions, he was the man most worthy of Republican votes. And he would have had an excellent chance, if there had not stood between him and the object of his desires the Count de Claudieuse, who had already more than once succeeded in defeating similar plots."

M. Magloire—(warmly).—"Do you refer to me?"

Advocate-general.—"I allude to no one."

M. Magloire.—"You might, just as well say at once, that my friends as well as myself are all M. de Boiscoran's accomplices; and that we have employed him to rid us of a formidable adversary."

Advocate-general.—"Gentlemen, I have indicated to you the real motive of the crime. Hence that hatred which the accused is unable to conceal any longer, which overflows in invectives, which breaks forth in threats of death, and which actually carries him so far that he points his gun at the Count de Claudieuse."

The advocate-general next proceeds to examine the charges, which, he declares are overwhelming and irrefutable. "But what need is there of such inquiry," he exclaims, "after the crushing evidence of the Count de Claudieuse? You have heard it. On the point of appearing before God, he has spoken. His first impulse was to follow the generous nature of his heart, and to pardon the man who had attempted his life. He desired to save him; but, as he felt death come nearer and nearer,

he saw that he had no right to shield a criminal from the sword of justice; he remembered that there were other victims beside himself. And then, rising from his bed of agony, he dragged himself here into court, in order to tell you, 'That is the man! By the light of the fire which he had kindled, I saw him and recognised him. He is the guilty one!'

"Gentlemen of the jury, can you hesitate after this evidence? No! I can not and will not believe it. After such crimes, society expects that justice should be done,—justice in the name of the Count de Claudieuse, who is dying,—justice in the name of those who are already dead—justice in the name of Bolton's mother, and of Guillebault's widow and her five children."

A murmur of approbation accompanies M. de la Gransierre's last words, and continues for some time after he has concluded. There is not a woman in the whole assembly who does not shed tears.

As M. Magloire has so far alone taken an active part in the defence, it is generally believed that he will next speak. But it is not so, for M. Folgat now rises from his seat. The Sauveterre court-house has at various times re-echoed the words of almost all our great masters of forensic eloquence. We have heard Berryer, Dufaure, Jules Favre, and others; but, even after these illustrious orators, M. Folgat still succeeds in astonishing and moving us deeply. We can, of course, report here only a few of his phrases; and we must utterly abandon all hope of giving an idea of his proud and disdainful attitude, his admirable manner, full of authority, and especially of his full rich voice, which finds its way into every heart.

"To defend certain men against certain charges," he begins, "would be to insult them. They cannot be touched. To the portrait drawn by the prosecution, I shall simply oppose the answer given by the venerable priest of Brechy. What did he tell you? That M. de Boiscoran is the best and most honourable of men. There is the truth; our adversaries wish to make out that he is a political intriguer. He had, it is true, a desire to be useful to his country, But, while others debated, he acted. The militia of Sauveterre will tell you to what passions he appealed before the enemy, and by what intrigues he won the cross which General Chanzy himself

fastened to his breast. He coveted power, you say. No: he wished for happiness. You speak of a letter written by him on the evening of the crime, to his betrothed. I challenge you to read it. It covers four pages: before you have read two, you will be forced to abandon the case."

Then the young advocate repeats the evidence given by the accused; and really under the influence of his eloquence all the charges seem to fall to the ground. "And now," he continues, "what other evidence does there remain? The evidence given by the Count de Claudieuse. It is crushing, you say. I say it is singular. What? here is a witness who sees his last hour drawing nigh, and who yet waits for the final minutes of his life before he speaks. And you think that is natural? You pretend that it was generosity which kept him silent. I—I ask you how the most cruel enemy could have acted more atrociously? 'Never was a case clearer,' says the prosecution. On the contrary, I maintain that never was a case more obscure; and that, so far from fathoming the secret of this affair, the prosecution has not sounded its first depth."

M. Folgat resumes his seat, and the ushers have to interfere to prevent applause from breaking out. If the verdict had been taken at that moment, M. de Boiscoran would have been acquitted. But the proceedings are suspended for a quarter of an hour; and in the meantime the lamps are lighted, for night begins to fall. When the president resumes his chair, he calls upon the advocate-general.

"I shall not reply as I had at first proposed," says M. du Lopt de la Gransiere. "The Count de Claudieuse is about to pay with his life for the effort he made to give his evidence in person. He cannot even be carried home. He is perhaps at this very moment drawing his last breath upon earth in the adjoining room."

The counsel for the defence do not desire to address the jury; and, as the accused also declares that he has nothing more to say, the president sums up, and the jury-men withdraw to deliberate. The heat is overwhelming, the restraint almost unbearable; and all faces bear the marks of oppressive fatigue: still nobody thinks of leaving the hall. A thousand contradictory reports circulate through the excited crowd. Some say that the Count de

Claudieuse is dead; others, on the contrary, report him better, and add that he has sent for the priest from Brechy.

At last, at a few minutes after nine o'clock, the jury reappear. They declare Jacques de Boiscoran guilty, and, on the score of extenuating circumstances, he is sentenced to twenty years' hard labour.

PART III.

COCOLEU.

I.

THUS M. Galpin-Daveline triumphed, and M. du Lopt de la Gransiere had reason to be proud of his eloquence. Jacques de Boiscoran had been found guilty. But he looked calm, and even haughty, when the president, M. Domini, pronounced the sentence of the law. That very morning, a few moments before the beginning of the trial, at a last interview with Denise, he had said,—“I know what is in store for me; but I am innocent. They shall not see me turn pale, nor hear me ask for mercy.”

And, gathering up all the energy of which the human heart is capable, he had made a supreme effort at the decisive moment, and kept his word. Turning quietly to his counsel at the instant when the last words of the president were lost among the din of the crowd, he said,—“Did I not tell you that the day would come when you yourself would be the first to put a weapon into my hands?”

M. Folgat rose promptly. He showed neither the anger nor the disappointment of an advocate who has just lost a cause which he knew to be just. “That day has not yet come,” he replied. “Remember your promise. As long as there remains a ray of hope, we shall fight. Now we have much more than mere hope at this moment. In less than a month, in a week, perhaps to-morrow, we shall have our revenge.”

The unfortunate man shook his head. “I shall nevertheless have undergone the disgrace of a condemnation,” he murmured. Then taking the ribbon of the Legion of Honour from his button hole, he handed it to M. Folgat saying,—“Keep this in memory of me, and if I never regain the right to wear it—”

But he was interrupted, by a sergeant of gendarmes—one of those appointed to guard him:—"We must go, sir," said the soldier, "Come, come! You need not despair. You need not lose courage. All is not over yet. There is still the appeal to the Cour de Cassation, and then the petition for pardon, not to speak of what may happen, and cannot be foreseen."

M. Folgat being allowed to accompany the prisoner, was getting ready to do so; but Jacques interposed, and in a mournful voice exclaimed, "No, my friend; please leave me alone. Others have more need of your presence than I have. Denise, my poor father, my mother. Go to them. Tell them that the horror of my condemnation lies in the thought of their sufferings. May they forgive me for the affliction and disgrace I cause them." Then, pressing his counsels' hands he added,—“And you, my friends, how shall I ever express to you my gratitude? Ah! if incomparable talents, and matchless zeal and ability had sufficed, I know I should be free. But instead of that”—in saying this he pointed to the little door through which he was about to pass, and in a heart-rending tone, continued, “Instead of that, there is the door to the galleys. Henceforth—”

A sob cut short his words. His strength was exhausted; for if there are, so to say, no limits to the spirit's power of endurance, the body's energy has its bounds. Still refusing the arm which the sergeant offered him, he left the hall unsupported. M. Magloire was well-nigh beside himself with grief. “Ah! why could we not save him?” he said to his young colleague. “Let them come and speak to me again of the power of conviction. But we must not stay here: let us go!”

They threw themselves into the crowd, which was slowly dispersing, still under the influence of the excitement undergone that day. A strange re-action was already beginning to set in,—a re-action perfectly illogical, and yet intelligible, and by no means rare under similar circumstances. Jacques de Boiscoran, an object of general execration as long as he was only suspected, regained the sympathy of all directly he was condemned. It was as if the fatal sentence had wiped out the horror of the crime. He was pitied; his fate was deplored; and as people thought of his family, his mother, and his betrothed, they almost cursed

the severity of the judges. Besides, even the least observant among those present had been struck by the singular course which the proceedings had taken. There was not one, probably, in the vast assembly, who did not feel that there was a mysterious and unexplored side of the case, which neither the prosecution nor the defence had chosen to approach. Why had Cocoleu been mentioned only once and then quite incidentally? He was an idiot, to be sure; but it was nevertheless through his evidence alone that suspicions had been aroused against M. de Boiscoran. Why had he not been summoned either by the prosecution or by the defence?

The Count de Claudieuse's evidence, although apparently so conclusive at the moment it was given, was also now severely criticised. The most indulgent of the speakers remarked:—"That was not well done. Why did he not speak out before? People do not wait for a man to be down before they strike him."

Others added,—“And did you notice how M. de Boiscoran and the Count de Claudieuse looked at each other? Did you hear what they said to each other? One might have sworn that there was something else, something very different from a mere lawsuit, between them.”

On all sides moreover people repeated,—“At all events, M. Folgat is right. The whole matter is far from being cleared up. The jury were a long while before they agreed. Perhaps M. de Boiscoran might have been acquitted, if, at the last moment, M. de la Gransiere had not announced the impending death of the Count de Claudieuse in the adjoining room.”

As M. Magloire and M. Folgat passed through the crowd they listened to these remarks, with great satisfaction; for, despite all the assertions to the contrary, public opinion will always find an echo in court; and, more frequently than we think, public opinion dictates the verdict of the jury. “And now,” said M. Magloire to his young colleague, “now we may be content. I know Sauveterre by heart. I tell you public opinion is henceforth on our side.”

By dint of perseverance they had just made their way out of the court, when one of the ushers stopped them, saying that the prisoner's family wished to see them in M. Mechinet's office, where the Marchioness de Boiscoran had been carried, when she was taken ill. There indeed

it was that MM. Magloire and Folgat found Jacques's mother reclining in an easy-chair, with closed eyes and parted lips. Her livid pallor and her stiff limbs gave her a death-like aspect; but, from time to time, spasms shook her whole body, from head to foot. M. de Chandore stood on one side, and the marquis, her husband, on the other, watching her with mournful eyes and in perfect silence. They seemed thunderstruck; indeed from the moment when the fatal sentence fell upon their ears, neither of them had uttered a word. Denise alone seemed to have preserved the faculty of reasoning and the power of motion. But her face was well-nigh purple; while her dry eyes shone with a painful light; and her body shook as with fever.

As soon as the two advocates appeared, she cried to them,—“And you call this human justice?” Finding they did not reply,—she added,—“Here is Jacques condemned to hard labour; that is to say, judicially dishonoured, lost, disgraced, for ever cut off from human society. He is innocent; but that does not matter. His best friends will know him no longer; no hand will touch his hand hereafter; and even those who were most proud of his affection will pretend to have forgotten his name.”

“I understand your grief but too well, mademoiselle,” said M. Magloire.

“My grief is not as great as my indignation,” she retorted. “Jacques must be avenged, and he shall be avenged! I am only twenty, and he is not thirty yet: we can devote the life before us to his rehabilitation; for I do not mean to abandon him. His undeserved misfortunes make him a thousand times dearer to me. I was his betrothed this morning; this evening I am his wife. His condemnation was our nuptial benediction. And if it is true, as grandpapa says, that the law prohibits a prisoner to marry the woman he loves, well, I will be his without marriage.”

Denise spoke so loud that it seemed as if she wanted all the world to hear what she was saying. “Ah! let me reassure you by a single word, mademoiselle,” said M. Folgat. “We have not yet come to that. The sentence is not final.”

The Marquis de Boiscoran and M. de Chandore started. “What do you mean?”

"An oversight which M. Galpin has committed makes the whole proceedings null and void. You will ask how a man of his character, so painstaking and so formal, should have made such a blunder. Probably because he was blinded by passion. Why has nobody noticed this oversight? Because fate owed us this compensation. There can be no question about the matter. The defect is a defect of form; and the law provides expressly for the case. The sentence must be declared void, and we shall have another trial."

"And you never told us anything of it!" exclaimed Denise.

"We hardly dared to think of it," replied M. Magloire. "It was one of those secrets which we dared not confide to our own pillows. Remember, that, in the course of the proceedings, the error might have been corrected at any time. Now it is too late. We have time before us; and the conduct of the Count de Claudieuse relieves us from all restraint of delicacy. The veil shall be torn aside now."

He was interrupted by the opening of the door. Red with anger, and darting fiery glances from over his gold spectacles, Dr Seignebos darted into the room. "And the Count de Claudieuse?" asked M. Folgat, eagerly.

"He is in the room close by," replied the doctor. "They have laid him on a mattress, and his wife is by his side. What a profession ours is! Here is a man, a wretch, whom I should be most happy to strangle with my own hands; and I am compelled to do all I can to recall him to life: I must lavish my attentions upon him, and have to seek every means to relieve his sufferings."

"Is he any better?"

"Not at all! Unless a special miracle should be performed on his behalf, he will only leave the court-house, feet forward, and that in twenty-four hours. I have not concealed it from the countess; and I have told her, that, if she wishes her husband to die in peace with heaven, she has only just time to send for a priest."

"And has she sent for one?"

"Not at all! She told me her husband would be terrified by the appearance of a priest, that it would hasten his end. Even when the good priest from Brechy came of his own accord, she sent him off unceremoniously."

"Ah, the miserable woman!" cried Denise. And, after a moment's reflection, she added, as if speaking to herself, "And yet, that may be our salvation. Yes, certainly. Why should I hesitate? Wait for me here: I shall soon be back."

She hurriedly left the room. Her grandfather was about to follow her; but M. Folgat stopped him. "Let her go," he said,—“let her do what she wishes!”

It had just struck ten o'clock. The Sauveterre court-house, but a few minutes previous as full and as noisy as a bee-hive, was now silent and deserted. In the immense waiting hall, badly lighted by a smoky lamp, there were only two men to be seen. One was the priest from Brechy, who was praying on his knees close to a door; the other was one of the official attendants who walked slowly to and fro. Denise went towards the latter. "Where is the Count de Claudieuse?" she asked.

"There, mademoiselle," replied the man, pointing to the door before which the priest was praying,—“there, in the public prosecutor's private office.”

"Who is with him?"

"His wife, mademoiselle, and a servant."

"Well, go in and tell the Countess de Claudieuse,—but so that her husband does not hear you,—that Mademoiselle de Chandore desires to see her for a few moments."

The attendant made no objection, and went in. Quickly returning, he exclaimed, "Madame, the countess sends word that she cannot leave her husband, who is very weak."

Denise stopped him by an impatient gesture. "Never mind! Go back and tell the countess, that, if she does not come out, I shall go in this moment; that, if it must be, I shall force my way in; that I shall call for help; that nothing will keep me away, for I must absolutely see her."

"But, mademoiselle."

"Go! Don't you see that it is a question of life and death?"

There was such authority in her voice, that the attendant no longer hesitated. He went in once more, and reappeared a moment after, telling her to enter. She did so, and found herself in a little ante-room which preceded the public prosecutor's private office. A large lamp stood on the table. The door leading to the chamber in which the

count was lying was closed. In the centre of this ante room stood the Countess de Claudieuse. All these successive blows had not broken her indomitable energy. She looked pale, but calm. "Since you insist upon it, mademoiselle," she began, "I come to tell you myself that I cannot listen to you. Are you not aware that I am standing between two open graves,—that of my poor girl, who is dying at my house, and that of my husband, who is breathing his last in there?"

She stepped back as if to retire; but Denise stopping her by a threatening look, exclaimed in a trembling voice, "If you go back into that room where your husband is, I shall follow you, and I shall speak before him. I shall ask you in his presence, how you dare order a priest away from his bedside at the moment of death, and whether, after having robbed him of all his happiness in life, you mean to make him unhappy in all eternity."

Instinctively the countess drew back again. "I do not understand you," she said.

"Yes, you do understand me, madame. Why deny it? Do you not see that I know everything, and that I have guessed what they have not told me? Jacques was your lover; and your husband has had his revenge."

"Ah!" cried the countess, "that is too much; that is too much!"

"And you permitted it," continued Denise, with breathless haste; "and you did not come and cry out in open court that your husband was a false witness! What a woman you must be! You do not care if your love carries a poor unfortunate man to the galleys. You mean to live on with the thought in your heart that the man whom you love is innocent, and, nevertheless, disgraced for ever, and cut off from human society. A priest might induce the count to retract his statement, as you know very well; hence you refuse to let the priest from Brechy come to his bedside. And what is the end and aim of all your crimes? To save your false reputation as an honest woman. Ah! how miserable, how mean, how infamous!"

The countess was roused at last. What all M. Folgat's skill and ability had not been able to accomplish, Denise obtained in an instant by the force of her passion. Throwing aside her mask, Madame de Claudieuse exclaimed with a perfect burst of rage, "Well, then, no, no! I have not

acted so, and permitted all this to happen because I care for my reputation. My reputation!—what does it matter? Only a week ago, when Jacques succeeded in escaping from prison, I offered to fly with him. He had only to say a word, and I would have given up my family, my children, my country, everything, for him. He answered, ‘Rather the gaileys!’”

In the midst of all her suffering, Denise’s heart filled with unspeakable happiness as she heard these words. Ah! now she could doubt Jacques no longer!

“He has condemned himself, you see,” continued the countess. “I was quite willing to ruin myself for him, but certainly not for another woman.”

“By that other woman—no doubt, you mean me!”

“Yes!—you for whose sake he abandoned me,—you whom he was going to marry,—you with whom he hoped to enjoy long years of happiness—not furtive and sinful like ours, but a legitimate, honourable happiness.”

Tears stood in Denise’s eyes. She was beloved, she knew it, and thought of her rival’s sufferings. “And yet I should have been more generous,” she murmured; and not noticing the savage smile in which the countess indulged, she added, “The proof of it is, that I came to propose a bargain to you.”

“A bargain?”

“Yes. Save Jacques’s life, and, by all that is sacred to me in the world, I promise I will enter a convent: I will disappear, and you shall never hear my name any more.”

The countess’s astonishment was evidently intense, and she looked at Denise with a glance full of doubt and mistrust. Such devotion seemed to her too sublime not to conceal some snare. “You would really do that?” she asked.

“Unhesitatingly.”

“You would make so great a sacrifice for my benefit?”

“For yours? No, madame, for Jacques’s.”

“You love him very dearly, do you?”

“I love him dearly enough to prefer his happiness to my own a thousand times over. Even if I were, so to say, buried in some convent, I should still have the consolation of knowing that he owed his restoration to me; and the thought that he belonged to another would be less terrible to bear than the idea that he is innocent, and yet condemned.”

But, in proportion as Denise thus confirmed her sincerity, the countess's glance grew darker and sterner, and passing blushes mantled her cheek. At last she exclaimed with haughty irony, "Admirable!"

"Madame!"

"You condescend to give up all claim to M. de Boiscoran. Will that make him love me? You know very well he will not. You know that he loves you alone. Heroism with such conditions is easy enough. What have you to fear? Buried in a convent, he will love you only all the more ardently, and he will execrate me all the more fervently."

"He shall never know anything of our bargain!"

"Ah! What does that matter? He will guess it, if you do not tell him. No: I know what awaits me. For two years I have felt positive agony at seeing him grow daily more estranged from me. What have I not done to keep him near me! How I have stooped to meanness, to falsehood, to keep him a single day longer, perhaps a single hour! But all was useless. I was a burden to him. He loved me no longer; and my love became to him a heavier load than the cannon-ball which they will fasten to his convict's chains."

Denise shuddered. "That is horrible!" she murmured.

"Horrible! yes, but true. You look amazed. That is because you have as yet only seen the dawn of love: wait for the dark evening, and you will understand me. Is not every woman's story the same? I have seen Jacques at my feet as you see him at yours: the vows he swears to you, he once swore to me; and he swore them to me with the same voice, tremulous with passion, and with the same burning glances. But you are his betrothed, and I never was. Still what does that matter? What does he tell you? That he will love you for ever, because his love is under the protection of God and men. He told me, precisely because our love was not thus protected, that we should be united by indissoluble bonds,—bonds stronger than all others. You have his promise: so had I. And the proof of it is that I gave him everything,—my honour and the honour of my family, and that I would have given him still more, if there had been any more to give. And now to be betrayed, forsaken, despised, to sink lower and lower, until at last I must become the object of your pity! To have

fallen so low, that you should dare come to me and offer to give up Jacques for my benefit! Ah, that is maddening! And I should let the vengeance I hold in my hands slip from me at your bidding! I should be stupid enough, blind enough, to allow myself to be touched by your hypocritical tears! I should secure your happiness by the sacrifice of my reputation! No, no, cherish no such hope!" Her voice expired in her throat in a kind of toneless rattle. She took a few hasty steps up and down the ante-room. Then placing herself in front of Denise, and looking fixedly into her eyes, she asked, "Who suggested to you this plan of coming here, this supreme insult which you have tried to inflict upon me?"

Denise was seized with unspeakable horror, and hardly found heart to reply. "No one," she murmured.

"M. Folgat?"

"He knows nothing of it."

"And Jacques?"

"I have not seen him. The thought occurred to me quite suddenly, like an inspiration from heaven. When Dr. Seignebos told me that you had refused to admit the priest from Brechy, I said to myself, 'This is the last misfortune and the greatest of all! If the Count de Claudieuse dies without retracting, Jacques's innocence can never be fully established, whatever may happen hereafter, whatever proof of it we may find.' Then I made up my mind to come to you. Ah! it was a hard task. But I was in hopes I might touch your heart, or that you might be moved by the greatness of my sacrifice."

And the countess *was* moved. As she listened to Denise's passionate entreaties her resolution seemed to waver. "Would it be such a very great sacrifice?" she asked.

Tears sprang to Denise's eyes. "Alas!" she said, "I offer you my life. I know very well you will not long be jealous of me."

She was interrupted by groans, coming from the room in which the count was lying. The countess set the door ajar, and immediately a feeble, and yet imperious voice was heard exclaiming,—*"Genevieve, Genevieve!"*

"I am coming, in a moment," replied the countess. Then closing the door again she turned to Mademoiselle de Chandore, and added in a hard, stern voice, "What security can you give me, that if Jacques's innocence were

established, and he restored to society, you would not forget your promises?"

"Ah, madame! upon what shall I swear that I am ready to disappear? Choose your own securities, I will do whatever you require." Then, sinking down on her knees before the countess, she continued,—“Here I am at your feet, madame, humble and suppliant,—I whom you accuse of a desire to insult you. Have pity on Jacques! Ah! if you loved him as much as I do, you would not hesitate.”

The countess raised her quickly, and, holding her hands in her own, looked at her for a moment without saying a word, but with heaving bosom and trembling lips. At last in a voice which was so deeply affected, that it was hardly intelligible, she asked,—“What do you want me to do?”

“To induce the Count de Claudineuse to retract.”

The countess shook her head. “It would be useless to try. You do not know the count. He is a man of iron. You might tear his flesh with hot iron pincers, and he would not take back even one of his words. You cannot conceive what he has suffered, nor the depth of the hatred, rage, and thirst for vengeance, which have accumulated in his heart. It was to torture me that he brought me here to his bedside. Only five minutes ago he told me that he died content, since Jacques was declared guilty, and condemned through his evidence.” Madame de Claudieuse was conquered; her energy was exhausted; tears came to her eyes. “He has been so cruelly tried!” she added. “He loved me to distraction, he loved nothing in the world but me. And I— Ah, if we could know, if we could foresee! No, I shall never be able to induce him to retract.”

Denise almost forgot her own great grief, in presence of the countess's agony. “Nor do I expect you to obtain that result,” she said very gently.

“Who then could obtain it?”

“The priest from Brechy. He will surely find words to shake even the firmest resolution. He can speak in the name of that God, who, even on the cross, forgave those who crucified him.”

For one moment longer the countess hesitated; and then finally overcoming the last rebellious impulses of pride, she said,—“Well, I will call the priest.”

“And I, madame, swear I will keep my promise,” answered Denise; but the countess stopped her, and making

a supreme effort over herself, rejoined,—“No : I will try to save Jacques without making conditions. Let him be yours. He loves you, and you were ready to sacrifice your life for his sake. He forsakes me ; but I sacrifice my honour to him. Farewell !”

And hastening to the door, while Denise returned to her friends, she called the priest from Brechy.

II.

M. DAUBIGEON, the public prosecutor, learnt next morning from his substitute that the proceedings in the Boiscoran case were null and void on account of a fatal error in form. The counsel of the defence had lost no time, for after spending the whole night in consultation, they had already made an application for a new trial. Worthy M. Daubigeon took no pains to conceal his satisfaction. “Ah” cried he, “this will worry my friend Galpin, and clip his wings considerably ; and yet I frequently called his attention to the lines of Horace, in which he speaks of Phaeton’s sad fate, and says,—

‘Terret ambustus Phaeton avaras
Spes. . .’

But he would not listen to me, forgetting, that, without prudence, force is a danger.

‘Vis consilii expers mole ruit sua.’ . .

So there he is now, in great difficulty, I am sure.”

Speaking in this fashion, the public prosecutor hastened to dress, intending to go and see M. Galpin-Daveline without delay, ostensibly with the object of accurately learning all the details, but, in reality, in order to enjoy to his heart’s content the ambitious investigating magistrate’s discomfiture.

He found him in a furious rage. “I am disgraced,” exclaimed M. Galpin-Daveline ; “I am ruined ; I am lost. All my prospects, all my hopes are gone. I shall never be forgiven for such an oversight.”

To look at M. Daubigeon, you would have thought he was sincerely distressed. “Is it really true,” he said with

an air of assumed pity,—“is it really true, that you made this unlucky mistake?”

“Yes, alas it is! I forgot one of those wretched details which a schoolboy knows by heart. Can you understand it? And to say that no one noticed my inconceivable blindness! Neither the accusation chamber, nor the advocate-general, nor the presiding judge, ever said a word about it. It is my fate. And that is to be the result of all my labours. Everybody no doubt, said, ‘Oh! M Galpin has the case in hand; he knows all about it: no need to look after the matter when such a man has to deal with it.’ And here I am. Oh! I could almost kill myself.”

“The more so,” replied M. Daubigeon, “since the case hung on a mere thread yesterday.”

The investigating magistrate gnashed his teeth. “Yes, on a mere thread,” he replied, “thanks to M. Domini! whose weakness I cannot comprehend, and who did not at all know, or was not willing to know, how to make the most of the evidence. But it was Du Lopt de la Gransiere’s fault quite as much. Why did he drag politics into the affair? And whom did he want to hit? Why M. Magloire, a man whom everybody respects, and who had three warm personal friends among the jurymen. I told him beforehand that he would get into trouble. But there are people who won’t listen. M. de la Gransiere wants to be elected himself. It is the monomania of the hour: everybody wants to be a deputy. I wish heaven would confound all ambitious men!”

For the first time in his life, and no doubt for the last time also, the public prosecutor sincerely rejoiced at another’s misfortune. Apparently taking a savage pleasure in probing his colleague’s wounds, he now remarked,—“No doubt M. Folgat’s speech had something to do with it.”

“Oh no! nothing at all.”

“But he was brilliantly successful.”

“He merely took people by surprise with his big voice, and grand, rolling sentences.”

“But still—”

“Why, what did he say, after all? That the prosecution did not know the real secret of the case. That is absurd!”

“The new judges may not think so, however.”

"We shall see."

"This time M. de Boiscoran's defence will be very different. He will spare nobody. He is down now, and cannot fall any lower.

'Qui jacet in terra non habet unde cadat.'"

"That may be. But he also risks having a less indulgent jury, and not getting off with twenty years."

"What do his counsel say?"

"I don't know. But I have just sent my clerk to find out; and, if you choose to wait—"

M. Daubigeon did wait, and he did well; for M. Mechainet came in soon afterwards, outwardly with a long face, but inwardly much delighted. "Well?" asked M. Galpin eagerly. The clerk shook his head, and, in a melancholy voice, replied,—“I have never seen anything like this. How fickle public opinion is, after all! The day before yesterday M. de Boiscoran could not have passed through the town without being mobbed. If he should show himself to-day, they would carry him in triumph. He has been condemned, and now he is a martyr. It is known already that the sentence is void, and people are delighted. My sisters have just told me that the ladies of Sauveterre propose to give the Marchioness de Boiscoran and Mademoiselle de Chandore some public proof of their sympathy. The members of the bar too will invite M. Folgat to a public dinner.”

"How monstrous!" exclaimed M. Galpin Daveline.

"Don't you know," said M. Daubigeon, "'the opinions of mankind are more fickle and changeable than the waves of the sea.'"

But, interrupting the quotation, M. Galpin asked his clerk,—“Well, what else?”

"I gave M. de la Gransiere the letter you sent me with."

"What did he say?"

"I found him in consultation with the president, M. Domini. He took the letter, glanced at it rapidly, and said in a cold tone, 'All right.' To tell the truth, I thought that he was in reality furious, in spite of his calm stiff air."

The magistrate looked utterly dismayed. "I can't stand it," he said with a deep sigh, "These men with poison, not blood in their veins, never forgive one."

"But the day before yesterday, you thought very highly of him."

"Oh, the day before yesterday he did not look upon me as the cause of a great misfortune."

M. Mechinet now spoke again. "After leaving M. de la Gransiere," he said, "I went to the court-house, and heard the great news, which has set all the town agog. The Count de Claudieuse is dead."

M. Daubigeon and M. Galpin-Daveline exchanged a glance, and exclaimed, in the same breath, "Good heavens! Is that true?"

"He breathed his last this morning, just before six o'clock. I saw his body in the advocate-general's private room. The priest from Brechy was there, with two priests of the town. They were waiting for a bier to have him carried to his house."

"Poor man!" murmured M. Daubigeon.

"But I heard a great deal more," Mechinet added, "from the attendant who was on duty last night. He told me, that when the trial was over, and it became known that the Count de Claudieuse was likely to die, the priest from Brechy came, and asked to be allowed to offer him the last consolations of his church. However the countess refused to admit him to her husband's bedside. The attendant was amazed at this; but suddenly Mademoiselle de Chandore appeared, and sent word to the countess that she wanted to speak with her."

"Is it possible?"

"Quite certain. They remained together for more than a quarter of an hour. What did they say? The attendant told me he was dying with curiosity to know; but he could hear nothing, because the priest from Brechy was all the while kneeling before the door and praying. When Mademoiselle de Chandore came away, she looked terribly excited. Then the countess called in the priest, and he stayed with the count till he died."

M. Daubigeon and M. Galpin-Daveline had not yet recovered from the amazement into which this story had thrown them, when somebody knocked timidly at the door. "Come in!" cried Mechinet.

The door opened, and a sergeant of gendarmes appeared. "I have been sent by the advocate-general," he said; "to tell you we have just caught Frumence Cheminot."

1

"The fellow who escaped from jail?"

"Yes. We were about to carry him back there, when he told us that he had a secret to reveal, a very important, urgent secret, concerning the condemned prisoner, Boiscoran."

"Indeed!"

"Yes. So we took him to the court-house and I have come for orders."

"Run and say, I am coming to see him!" cried M. Daubigeon. "Make haste! I am coming after you." Then turning to M. Galpin-Daveline he added excitedly, "We must know what this means at once."

"You will permit me to accompany you, I hope?" asked the investigating magistrate; who, receiving an affirmative reply, hastily donned his hat and overcoat. Then off they went, Mechinet following them as they hastened down the street, where the townsfolk, surprised by their flurried demeanour, opined that something very important must have happened. On drawing near to the court-house they were forced to slacken their pace; for a dense crowd—waiting for the removal of the Count de Claudieuse's remains—occupied all the approaches. Suddenly the hubbub caused by four or five hundred excited voices was hushed; hats were raised, the crowd divided; and a passage was opened.

On the threshold of the palace appeared the priest from Brechy with two of his colleagues, behind whom came various attendants from the hospital, carrying a bier covered with black cloth. Beneath the latter the outlines of a human body could be seen. Several women in the crowd began to cry; and those who had room enough knelt down. "Poor countess!" one of them murmured. "Here is her husband dead, and they say one of her daughters is dying at home."

M. Daubigeon, the investigating magistrate, and Mechinet were too preoccupied with other matters to think of stopping here. They made their way into the building, and hastened to the clerk's office, where the gendarmes who had taken Frumence were now guarding him.

He rose as soon as he recognised the officials and respectfully took off his cap. It was really Frumence; but the vagrant did not have his usual careless appearance. He looked pale, and was evidently very excited.

"Well," said M. Daubigeon, "so you have allowed yourself to be captured?"

"I beg your pardon," replied the poor fellow, "I was not retaken. I came of my own accord."

"Involuntarily, you mean?"

"Quite by my own free will! Just ask the sergeant."

The sergeant stepped forward, touched his cap, and reported,—*"That's the truth. Frumence came himself to the barracks and said, 'I surrender as a prisoner. I wish to speak to the public prosecutor, and give important evidence.'"*

The vagabond drew himself up proudly,—*"You see, sir,"* said he, *"I did not lie. While these gentlemen were galloping all over the country in search of me, I was snugly ensconced in a garret at the Mouton Rouge, and did not think of coming out again, till it was entirely forgotten,"*

"Yes; but people who lodge at the Mouton Rouge have to pay, and you have no money."

Frumence quietly drew from his pocket a handful of napoleons, together with several five-and-twenty-franc notes. *"You see that I had the wherewithal to pay for my room,"* he said. *"But I surrendered, because, after all, I am an honest man, and I would rather suffer some trouble myself than see an innocent gentleman go to the galleys."*

"M. de Boiscoran?"

"Yes. He is innocent! I know it; I am sure of it and I can prove it. And, if he will not tell the truth, I will tell it—tell everything!"

M. Daubigeon and M. Galpin were utterly astounded. *"Explain yourself,"* they both said in the same breath.

But the vagrant shook his head, pointing to the gendarmes. and, like one fully acquainted with all the formalities of the law, he replied,—*"But it is a great secret; and, when one confesses, one does not like anybody else but the priest to know what one has to say. Besides, I should like my deposition to be taken down in writing."*

Upon a sign made by M. Galpin-Daveline, the gendarmes withdrew; and Mechinet took his seat at the table, with a blank sheet of paper before him.

"Now we can talk," said Frumence: *"that's the way I like it. I myself did not think of running away from jail. I was pretty well off there; winter is coming, I hadn't a*

sou ; and, besides I knew, that, if I were recaptured, I should fare rather badly. But M. Jacques de Boiscoran had a notion to spend a night in town."

"Mind what you are saying," interrupted M. Galpin-Daveline, severely. "You cannot play with the law, and get off unpunished."

"May I die if I do not tell the truth!" cried Frumence. "M. Jacques spent a whole night out of jail."

The investigating magistrate trembled. "What an invention!" he exclaimed.

"I have my proof," replied Frumence coldly, "and you shall hear. Well, as he wanted to leave, M. Jacques came to me, and, in consideration of a sum of money which he paid me, and of which you have just seen all that's left, we agreed that I should make a hole in the wall, and run off altogether, while he came back when he had finished his business."

"And the jailer?" asked M. Daubigeon.

Like a true peasant, Frumence was far too cunning to expose Blangin unnecessarily. Assuming, therefore, the whole responsibility of the escape, he replied,—“The jailer knew nothing. We had no need of him. Was not I, so to say, under-jailer? Had not I been charged by you yourself, M. Galpin, to keep watch over M. Jacques? Was it not I who opened and locked his door, who took him to the parlour, and brought him back again?”

This was the exact truth. "Go on!" said M. Galpin harshly.

"Well," continued Frumence, "everything was done as agreed upon. One evening, about nine o'clock, I made a hole in the wall, and there we were, M. Jacques and I, on the ramparts. He slipped a package of bank notes into my hand, and told me to run for it, while he went about his business. I thought he was innocent then, though perhaps that, after all, he meant to go off altogether. I felt very curious on the point, and after hesitating a moment, I determined to find out the truth, and with that object I followed him!"

Although the public prosecutor and the investigating magistrate were accustomed, by the nature of their profession, to conceal their feelings, they could hardly restrain now,—one, the hope trembling within him, and the other, the vague apprehensions which began to fill his heart.

Mechinet, who already knew all that was coming, laughed in his sleeve while his pen flew rapidly over the paper.

"He was afraid he might be recognised," continued the vagrant, "and so he ran ever so fast, keeping close to the wall, and choosing the narrowest lanes. Fortunately I have a pair of good legs. He went through Sauveterre like a race-horse; and, when he reached the Rue Maurec, he rang the bell at a large gate!"

"At the Count de Claudieuse's house!"

"I know now what house it was; but I did not know then. Well, he rings. A servant came and opened. He spoke to her, and immediately she asked him in, and that so eagerly, that she forgot to close the gate again."

At this point M. Daubigeon intervened, and filling up a blank form lying on the table, he rang the bell, and said to an usher who hastened in, "I want this to be taken immediately. Make haste; and not a word!"

Then Frumence was directed to continue. "There I was," said he, "standing in the middle of the street, feeling like a fool. I thought the only thing left was to be off. But that wretched, half-open gate attracted me. I said to myself, 'If you go in, and they catch you, they will think you have come to steal, and you'll have to pay for it.' That was true; but the temptation was too strong; so 'Come what may, I'll risk it,' I said. I pushed the huge gate just wide enough open to let me in, and there I was in a large garden. It was pitch dark; but three windows on the ground floor of the house were lighted up. I had ventured too far now to go back. So I went on, creeping as stealthily as possible until I reached a tree quite close to one of the lighted windows, which belonged to a beautiful room. Hiding behind the tree I looked and saw M. de Boiscoran in the room. As there were no curtains to the windows, I could see him as well as I now see you. His face had a terrible expression, and I was asking myself who he could be waiting for, when I saw him hide behind the open door of the room, like a man lying in wait for somebody, with evil intentions. This troubled me very much; but the next moment a lady came in. Instantly M. Jacques shut the door behind her; the lady turned round, saw him, and wanted to run, uttering at the same time a loud cry. That lady was the Countess de Claudieuse!"

Frumence looked as if he wished to pause so as to watch the effect of his revelation. But Mechinnet was so impatient, that he forgot the modest character of his duty, and said hastily,—“Go on; go on!”

“One of the windows was half open,” continued the vagrant, “and thus I could hear almost as well as I saw. I crouched down on all fours, and kept my head on a level with the ground, so as not to lose a word. Oh, it was fearful. At the first word I understood everything: M. Jacques and the Countess de Claudieuse had been lovers.”

“That’s madness!” cried M. Galpin-Daveline.

“Well, I tell you I was amazed. The Countess de Claudieuse—such a pious lady! But I have ears; haven’t I? M. Jacques reminded her of the night of the crime, how they had been together a few minutes before the fire broke out, having agreed some days before to meet near Valpinson that very evening. At this meeting they had burnt their love-letters, and M. Jacques had blackened his fingers badly in burning them.”

“Did you really hear that?” asked M. Daubigeon.

“As I hear you, sir.”

“Write it down, Mechinnet,” said the public prosecutor with great eagerness,—“write that down carefully.” There was no fear of the clerk’s neglecting to do so.

Frumence then continued his narrative, describing in full detail the scene he had witnessed, with which the reader is already acquainted. He was frequently interrupted by the ejaculations of the public prosecutor and the investigating magistrate, both of whom could scarcely control their excitement. When the vagrant had finished—having recounted the final episode, when M. de Claudieuse declared that with the view of making Jacques condemnation sure he would swear he had recognised him—there followed a solemn pause. At last in a tremulous voice M. Daubigeon asked, “Why did you not come and tell us all that at once?”

The vagabond shook his head. “I meant to do so,” he replied, “but I was afraid. You ought to understand what I mean. I was afraid I might be punished very severely for having run off.

“Your silence has led the court to commit a grievous mistake.”

"I had no idea M. Jacques would be found guilty. Big people like him, who can pay great lawyers, always get out of trouble. Besides, I did not think the Count de Claudieuse would carry out his threat. To be betrayed by one's wife is hard; but to send an innocent man to the galleys—"

"Still you see—"

"Ah, if I could have foreseen! My intentions were good; and I assure you, although I did not come at once to denounce the whole thing, I was firmly resolved to make a clean breast of it if M. Jacques should get into trouble. And the proof of it is, that instead of running off, and going far away, I very quietly lay concealed at the Mouton Rouge, waiting for the sentence to be published. As soon as I heard what was done last night, I did not lose an hour, and surrendered at once to the gendarmes."

In the meantime M. Galpin had overcome his amazement, and now furiously cried, "This man is an impostor. The money he showed us was paid him to give false evidence. How can we credit his story?"

"We must investigate the matter," replied M. Daubigeon. He rang the bell; and when the usher came in he asked, "Have you done what I told you?"

"Yes, sir," was the reply. "M. de Boiscoran and the Count de Claudieuse's servant are here."

"Bring in the woman: when I ring again, send me M. de Boiscoran."

A tall country-girl, plain of face, and square of figure, now entered. She seemed to be very much excited, and looked very red. "Do you remember," asked M. Daubigeon, "that one night last week a man came to your house, and asked to see your mistress?"

"Oh, yes!" replied the girl. "I did not want to let him in at first; but he said he came from the court, and then I let him enter."

"Would you recognise him?"

"Certainly."

The public prosecutor rang again; the door opened, and Jacques entered, amazement plainly written on his face.

"That's the man!" cried the servant.

"May I know?" asked the prisoner.

"Not yet!" replied M. Daubigeon. "Go back, and be of good hope!"

But Jacques remained standing where he was, looking around him with amazed eyes, and evidently unable to comprehend. How could he have comprehended what was going on? They had taken him out of his cell without warning; they had carried him to the court-house; and here he was confronted with Frumence, whom he thought he should never see again, and with the Countess de Claudieuse's servant. M. Galpin-Daveline looked the picture of consternation; and M. Daubigeon, radiant with delight, bade him be of good hope. Hopeful of what? Why? With what object? He could not tell, but gazed wonderingly at Mechinet, who made him all kinds of signs. At last the usher who had brought him in had actually to push him out of the room.

The public prosecutor then turned again to the servant-girl and said,—“Now, my good girl, can you tell me if anything special happened in connection with this gentleman's visit to your house?”

“There was a quarrel between him, master, and madame.”

“Were you present?”

“No. But I am quite certain of what I say.”

“How so?”

“Well, I will tell you. When I went upstairs to tell the countess that there was a gentleman below who came from the court, she was in a great hurry to go down, and told me to stay with the count, my master. Of course I did what she said. But no sooner was she downstairs than I heard a loud cry. Master heard it too: he raised himself on his pillow and asked me where my mistress was. I told him, and he was just settling down to try and fall asleep again, when the sound of loud voices came up to us. ‘This is very singular,’ said master. I offered to go and see what was the matter, but he told me sharply not to stir an inch. And when the voices became louder and louder he said, ‘I will go down myself. Give me my dressing-gown.’ Sick as he was, exhausted, and almost on his death-bed, it was very imprudent for him to do so; it might easily have cost him his life. I ventured to speak to him; but he swore at me, and told me to keep still, and do as he ordered. I obeyed him. Poor man! He was so weak he could hardly stand up, and had to hold on to a chair while I helped him just to hang his dressing-gown over his

shoulders. Then I asked him if he would not let me help him downstairs. But, looking at me with awful eyes, he said, 'You will do me the favour to stay here, and, whatever may happen, if you dare so much as open the door while I am away, you shall not stay another hour in my service.'

"Then he went out, holding on to the wall; and I remained alone in the chamber, trembling all over, and feeling as sick as if I had known that a great misfortune was going to happen. However, I heard nothing more for a time; and as the minutes passed away, I was just beginning to reproach myself for having been so foolishly alarmed, when I heard two cries; but, O sir! two such fearful, sharp cries, that I felt cold shivers running all over me.

"As I did not dare leave the room, I put my ear to the door, and distinctly heard the count's voice. He was quarrelling with another gentleman. But I did not catch a single word, and could only make out that they were very angry. All of a sudden there was a loud thud, like the fall of some heavy body, and then came another awful cry. I had not a drop of blood left in my veins at that moment. Fortunately the other servants, who were in bed, had heard the noise. They had got up and were now coming down the passage. I left the room at all risks, and went downstairs with the others, and there we found madame fainting in an armchair, and master stretched out at full-length, lying on the floor like a corpse."

"What did I say!" cried Frumence.

But the public prosecutor made him a sign to keep quiet; and turning again to the girl he asked, "And the visitor?"

"He was gone, sir. He had vanished."

"What did you do then?"

"We raised the count; we carried him upstairs and laid him on his bed. Then we brought madame round again; and the valet went in haste to fetch Dr. Seignebois."

"What did the countess say when she recovered her consciousness?"

"Nothing. Mistress looked like a person who had been knocked on the head."

"Was there anything else?"

"Oh, yes, sir!"

"What?"

"The eldest of the young ladies, Mademoiselle Martha, was seized with terrible convulsions."

"How was that?"

"Why, I only know what she told us herself."

"Let us hear what she said."

"Ah! It is a very singular story. When the gentleman whom I have just seen here rang the bell at our gate, Mademoiselle Martha, who had already gone to bed, got up again, and went to the window to see who it was. She saw me go and open the gate, with a candle in my hand, and come back again with the gentleman behind me. She was just going to bed again, when she thought she saw one of the statues in the garden move, and walk right off. We told her it could not be so; but she did not mind us. She told us over and over again that she was quite sure that she saw a statue come up the avenue, and stand behind the tree, which is nearest to the salon-window."

Frumence smiled triumphantly. "That was I!" he cried.

The girl looked at him, and said, only moderately surprised, "That may be quite true."

"What do you know about it?" asked M. Daubigeon.

"I know it must have been a man who had stolen into the garden, and who frightened Mademoiselle Martha so terribly, because in going out, Dr. Seignebos dropped a five-franc piece just at the foot of the tree, where mademoiselle said she had seen the statue standing. The valet who showed the doctor out helped him to look for his money; and during their search they saw the footprints of a man who must have worn iron-shod shoes."

"The marks of my shoes!" interrupted Frumence again; and sitting down, and raising his legs, he said to the magistrate, "Just look at my soles, and you will see there is no lack of iron nails in them!"

"We believe you," said M. Daubigeon with a brief glance, and then turning to the servant he asked, "Can you tell us if, after these occurrences, the Count de Claudieus had any explanation with your mistress?"

"No, I do not know. Only I saw that the count and the countess were no longer as they used to be with each other."

That was all she knew. She was asked to sign her deposition; and then M. Daubigeon told her she might go.

Turning to Frumence he said to him, "You will be taken to jail now. But you are an honest man, and you need not worry."

The investigating magistrate and the public prosecutor remained alone, for a clerk counts for nothing. "Well," said M. Daubigeon, "what do you think of it?"

M. Galpin was dumbfounded. "It is enough to make one crazy," he murmured.

"Do you begin to see now that M. Folgat was right when he said the case was far from being so clear as you pretended?"

"Ah! who would not have been deceived as I was? You yourself, at one time at least, were of my opinion. And yet, if the Countess de Claudieuse and M. de Boiscoran are both innocent, who is the guilty one?"

"That is what we shall know very soon; for I am determined I will not allow myself a moment's rest till I have found out the truth of the whole matter. How fortunate it was that this fatal error in form should have made the sentence null and void!" M. Daubigeon was so excited that he forgot his never-failing quotations. Turning to the clerk he added, "But we must not lose a minute. Put your legs into active motion, my dear Mechanet, and run and ask M. Folgat to come here. I will wait for him."

III.

WHEN Denise, after leaving the Countess de Claudieuse, came back to Jacques's parents and friends, she said, radiant with hope,—*"Now victory is on our side!"*

Her grandfather and the Marquis de Boiscoran urged her to explain; but she refused to speak, and only later in the evening did she confess to M. Folgat what she had done, adding that it was more than probable the count would retract his evidence before he died.

"That alone would save Jacques," said the young advocate, and buoyed up by this hope, he prepared for still greater efforts. Overcome as he was by his labours and the emotions of the day, he nevertheless spent the night in Grandpapa Chandore's study, preparing with M. Magloire the application they proposed to make for a new trial. When they finished, it was already broad daylight.

and as M. Folgat did not then care to go to bed, he installed himself in a large easy-chair for the purpose of getting a few hours' rest. He had, however, not taken more than forty winks, when old Anthony roused him with the news that there was an unknown man downstairs who wished to see him instantly.

M. Folgat rubbed his eyes, and at once went down; in the passage he found himself face to face with a somewhat suspicious looking individual, a man about fifty years of age, who wore a moustache and imperial, and was dressed in a tight coat, and baggy trousers, such as old soldiers affect. "Are you M. Folgat?" asked this man, who, on receiving an affirmative reply, rejoined:—"Well, I—I am the agent whom friend Goudar sent to England."

The young lawyer started, and asked—"When did you arrive here?"

"Only this morning. I came by express. Twenty-four hours too late, I know; for I bought a newspaper at the station. M. de Boiscoran has been found guilty. And yet, I swear I did not lose a minute; and I have well earned the gratuity I was promised in case of success."

"You have been successful, have you?"

"Of course. Did I not tell you in my letter from Jersey that I was sure of success?"

"You have found Suky Wood?"

"Yes. Twenty-four hours after I wrote to you,—in a public house at Bouly Bay. She would not come, the wretch!"

"You have brought her, however?"

"Of course. She is at the Hotel de France, where I have left her till I could come and see you."

"Does she know anything?"

"Everything."

"Make haste and bring her here."

When M. Folgat first hoped to find this servant-girl, he determined to make the most of her evidence, whenever she came to hand. Among other things he had slipped a portrait of the Countess de Claudieuse into one of Denise's albums, where there were some thirty other photographs. He now fetched this album, and had just laid it upon the centre-table in the drawing-room, when the agent came back with his captive.

She was a tall, stout woman, some forty years old, with

hard features, and masculine manners; and dressed, like all common Englishwomen, with great pretensions to fashion. When M. Folgat questioned her, she answered in very fair, intelligible French, which was only marred by a strong English accent,—“ I stayed four years at the house in the Rue des Vignes, and I should be there still, but for the war. As soon as I entered upon my duties, I became aware that I was put in charge of a house where two lovers had their meetings. I was not exactly pleased, because, you know, one has one's own self-respect; but it was a good place. I had very little to do, and so I stopped. However, my master mistrusted me; I saw that very clearly. When a meeting was to take place, he always sent me on some errand to Versailles, to Saint Germain, or even to Orleans. This worried me so much that I determined I would find out what they tried so hard to conceal from me. It was not very difficult; and the very next week I knew that my master was no more Sir Francis Burnett than I was: and that he had borrowed the name from one of his friends.”

“ How did you contrive to find this out ? ”

“ Oh! very simply. One day, when my master went away on foot, I followed him, and saw him go into a house in the Rue de l'Universite. Across the road some servants were standing and talking. I asked them who that gentleman was; and they told me he was the son of the Marquis de Boisecoran.”

“ So much for your master; but the lady.”

Suky Wood smiled. “ As for the lady,” she replied, “ I did the same thing to find her out. It cost me, however, a great deal more time and a great deal more patience, because she took such great precautions; and I lost more than one afternoon in watching her. But, the more she tried to hide, the more curious I was to know, as a matter of course. At last, one evening, when she left the house in her carriage, I took a cab and followed her. I thus traced her home, and the next morning I talked to the servants there, and they told me that she was a lady who lived in the provinces, but who came every year to Paris to spend a month with her parents, and that her name was the Countess de Claudieuse.”

And yet Jacques had imagined and strongly maintained

that Suky would not know anything; in fact, that she could not know anything! what an error!

"But did you ever see this lady?" asked M. Folgat.

"As well as I see you."

"Would you recognise her?"

"Among thousands."

"And if you saw her portrait?"

"I should know it at once."

M. Folgat handed her the album.

"Well, look for her," he said.

She had found the likeness in a moment. There was no doubt any longer.

"But now, Miss Suky," said the young advocate, "you will have to repeat all that before a magistrate."

"I will do so with pleasure. It is the truth."

"If that is so, they will send for you to your lodgings, and you will please stay there till you are called. You need not trouble yourself about anything. You shall have whatever you want, and they will pay you your wages as if you were in service."

M. Folgat had not time to say any more; for Dr. Seignebos rushed in with hurricane violence, and cried out at the top of his voice,—*"Victory! We are victorious now! Great victory!"*

Then as soon as Suky and the agent had left the room, he added,—*"I am just from the hospital. I have seen Goudar. He has done it. He made Cocoleu talk."*

"And what does he say?"

"Well, exactly what I knew he would say, as soon as they could loosen his tongue. But you will hear it all; for it is not enough that Cocoleu should confess to Goudar; there must be witnesses present to certify to his statements."

"He will not talk before witnesses."

"He must not see them; they can be concealed. The place is admirably adapted for such a purpose."

"But how, if Cocoleu refuses to talk after the witnesses have been introduced?"

"He won't refuse. Goudar has found out a way to make him talk whenever he likes. Ah! what a clever fellow he is! How thoroughly he understands his business. Have you full confidence in him?"

"Oh, entirely."

"Well, he says he is sure he will succeed. 'Come to-day,' he said to me, 'between one and two, with M. Folgat, the public prosecutor, and M. Galpin-Daveline; put yourselves where I will show you, and then let me go to work.' Then he showed me the place where he wants us to remain, and told me how to let him know when we are all ready."

M. Folgat did not hesitate. "We have not a moment to lose. Let us go at once to the court-house."

But they were hardly in the passage, when they were met by Mechinot, who came up out of breath, and half mad with delight. "M. Daubigeon sends me to say you must come to him at once," he cried. "Great news! Great news!" And immediately he related in a few words the circumstances of Frumence's statement, and the deposition made by the Countess de Claudieuse's maid.

"Ah, now we are safe!" cried Dr. Seignebois.

M. Folgat was pale with excitement. Still he proposed to let the marquis and Denise know what was going on before leaving the house. "No," said the doctor, "no! Let us wait till everything is quite safe. Let us go quickly; let us hasten at once."

They were right to make haste. The investigating magistrate and the public prosecutor were waiting for them with the greatest impatience. As soon as they entered the clerk's office, M. Daubigeon exclaimed,—“Well, I suppose Mechinot has told you all.”

"Yes," replied M. Folgat; "but we have some information which you do not possess." He then told the officials that Suky Wood had arrived, and gave a brief account of her evidence.

M. Galpin had sunk into a chair, completely crushed by the weight of so many proofs of his misapprehension of the case. There he sat without saying a word, without moving a muscle. M. Daubigeon was radiant, however. "Most assuredly," he cried, "Jacques must be innocent!"

"Most assuredly he is innocent!" said Dr. Seignebois; "and the proof of it is, that I know who is guilty."

"Oh!"

"And you will know too, if you will take the trouble to follow me to the hospital."

It was just striking one o'clock, and not one of them had eaten anything that morning. But they had no time to think of breakfast. Without a shadow of hesitation, M. Daubigeon turned to M. Galpin-Daveline, and asked him if he would form one of the party. The luckless investigating magistrate rose mechanically, after the manner of an automaton, and they then left the court-house, creating no small sensation among the good people of Sauveterre, when they thus appeared all together in a group.

M. Daubigon spoke first to the lady superior of the hospital; and, when he had explained to her the purpose of their visit, she raised her eyes heavenward, and said with a sigh of resignation,—“Well, gentlemen, do as you like, and I hope you will be successful; for it is a sore trial for us poor sisters to have these continual visitations in the name of the law.”

“Then, please follow me, gentlemen, to the insane ward,” said the doctor.

What is called the insane ward at the Sauveterre hospital is a little, low building, divided into six cells each of which has two doors,—one opening into a special courtyard reserved to the lunatics, and the other communicating with the main part of the hospital. It was to one of these latter doors—used by the servants and keepers—that Dr. Seignebos led his friends. And after recommending them to keep perfect silence, so as not to rouse Cocoleu's suspicions, he invited them into a cell, the door of which, leading into the lunatics' court-yard, had been closed. There was, however, a small grated window in the upper part of this door, so that, without being perceived, they could easily see and hear all that transpired in the court-yard, where Goudar and Cocoleu were sitting on a wooden bench in the bright sunlight.

By long study and a great effort of will, Goudar had succeeded in giving his face a most perfect expression of stupidity: and even the people belonging to the hospital thought he was more idiotic than his comrade. He held in his hand his violin, the doctor had ordered to be left him; and he accompanied himself with a few notes, as he repeated the song he had sung on the Place du Marche Neuf, when he first accosted M. Folgat.

Cocoleu, a large piece of bread-and-butter in one hand, and a big clasp-knife in the other, was finishing his meal.

But the music delighted him so intensely, that he actually forgot to eat, and with hanging under lip, and half-closed eyes, rocked himself to and fro, keeping time with the measure.

"They look hideous!" murmured M. Folgat. At that moment Goudar, warned by a preconcerted signal, finished his song. He bent forward, and drew from under the bench an enormous bottle, which he put to his lips, imbibing a considerable quantity of some evidently agreeable beverage. A moment afterwards he passed the bottle to Cocoleu, who took a long, eager pull, his face wearing, the while, an expression of idiotic beatitude. Then patting his stomach with his hand, he stammered, "That's—that's—that's good!"

"Ah, I begin to see!" whispered M. Daubigeon to Dr. Seignebos, "I notice from Cocoleu's eyes, that this practice with the bottle must have been going on for some time already. Cocoleu is drunk."

Goudar again took up his violin and repeated his song.

"I—I—want—want to—to drink!" stammered Cocoleu.

Goudar kept him waiting a little while, and then handed him the bottle. The idiot threw back his head, and drank till he had lost his breath.

"Ah! you did not have such good wine to drink at Valpinson?" ejaculated Goudar.

"Oh, yes I did!" replied Cocoleu.

"But, as much as you wanted?"

"Yes. Quite—enough." And laughing with some difficulty, he stammered, "I got—got into the cellar through one of the windows; and I drank—drank through—through a—a straw."

"You must be sorry you are no longer there?"

"Oh, yes!"

"But, if you were so well off at Valpinson, why did you set it on fire?"

The witnesses of this strange scene crowded to the little window of the cell, and held their breath with eager expectation.

"I only wanted to burn some faggots, to make the count come out. It was not my fault, if the whole house got on fire."

"And why did you want to kill the count?"

"Because I wanted the great lady to marry M. de Bois-coran."

"Ah! She told you to do it, did she?"

"Oh, no! But she cried so much; and then she told me she should be so happy if her husband were dead. And she was always kind to Cocoleu; and the count was always bad; and so I shot him."

"Well! But why, then, did you say it was M. de Bois-coran who shot the count?"

"They said at first it was me. I did not like that. I would rather they cut off *his* head than mine." He shuddered as he said this, and Goudar, afraid of having gone rather too fast, took up his violin, and gave him a verse of his song to quiet him. Then still accompanying his words with a few notes, and after allowing Cocoleu to caress the bottle once more, he asked again,—“Where did you get a gun?”

“I—I had taken it from the count to shoot birds; and I—I have it still—still. It is hid in the hole where Michael found me.”

Poor Dr. Seignebos could not stand it any longer. He suddenly pushed open the door, and, rushing into the court-yard, exclaimed,—“Bravo, Goudar! well done!”

At the noise, Cocoleu had started up. He evidently understood it all; for terror instantly drove away the fumes of the wine he had absorbed, and he looked frightened to death. “Ah, you scoundrel!” he howled. And, throwing himself upon Goudar, he plunged his knife twice into him.

The movement was so rapid and so sudden, that it was impossible to prevent it. Pushing M. Folgat violently back as he tried to disarm him, Cocoleu leapt into a corner of the court, and there, looking like some wild beast at bay, with bloodshot eyes and foaming mouth, he threatened with his formidable knife to kill any one who came near him.

Hearing the cries uttered by M. Daubigeon and M. Galpin-Daveline, the hospital assistants came rushing in. The struggle would, however, probably have been a long one, notwithstanding their numbers, if one of the keepers had not, with great presence of mind, climbed to the top of the wall, and caught Cocoleu's arm in a noose. By these means he was thrown down in a moment, disarmed, and rendered harmless. “You—you may—may do—do

what you—you choose; I—I won't say—say another w-w-word!" he stammered.

In the mean time, poor Dr. Seignebos, who had unwillingly caused this catastrophe, was distressed beyond measure; still he hastened to the assistance of Goudar, who lay insensible on the gravel of the court-yard. The two wounds which the detective had received were serious, but not fatal, nor even very dangerous, as the knife had been turned aside by the ribs. He was at once carried into one of the private rooms of the hospital, and soon recovered his consciousness. When he saw all four gentlemen bending anxiously over his bed, he murmured with a mournful smile,—“Well, was I not right when I said that my profession is a rascally one?”

“But you are at liberty now to give up,” replied M. Folgat, “provided always a certain house in the Rue des Vignes should not prove too small for your ambition.”

The detective's pale face was tinged by a passing blush. “Will they really give it to me?” he asked.

“Since you have discovered the real criminal, and handed him over to justice.”

“Well, then, I will bless these wounds: I feel that I shall be right again in a fortnight. Give me pen and ink at once, that I may write my resignation, and tell my wife the good news.”

He was interrupted by the entrance of one of the officers of the court, who came to tell the public prosecutor that the priest of Brechy was waiting to see him at his office.

“I am coming directly,” replied M. Daubigeon. And, turning to his companions, he said,—“Let us go, gentlemen.”

The worthy priest rose quickly from his chair when he saw M. Daubigeon enter, accompanied by M. Galpin-Daveline, M. Folgat, and Dr. Seignebos.

“Perhaps you wish to speak to me alone, sir?” asked M. Daubigeon.

“No, sir,” replied the priest, “no! The words of reparation which have been entrusted to me must be uttered publicly.” And, handing him a letter, he added,—“Read this. Please read it aloud.”

The public prosecutor tore open the envelope with a tremulous hand, and then read as follows:—

"Being about to die in the Christian faith, as I have lived, I owe it to myself, to God whom I have offended, and to those I have deceived, to declare the truth."

"Influenced by hatred, I gave false evidence in court, and wrongfully stated that M. de Boiscoran was the man who shot at me, and that I recognised him in the act.

"I did not recognise him, however, and moreover I know that he is innocent. I am sure of it; and I swear it by all I hold sacred both in this world which I am about to leave, and in that other sphere where I must now appear before my sovereign Judge.

"May M. de Boiscoran forgive me as I myself forgive.

"TRIVULCE DE CLAUDIEUSE."

"Unfortunate man!" murmured M. Folgat.

But the priest had already resumed speaking: "You see, gentlemen, the Count de Claudieuse withdraws his charge unconditionally. He asks for nothing in return: he only wants the truth to be established. And yet I beg leave to express the last wishes of a dying man. I beseech you, in the new trial, to make no mention of the countess's name."

Tears were seen in all eyes.

"Rest assured, reverend father," said M. Daubigeon, "the Count de Claudieuse's last wishes shall be respected. The countess's name shall not be mentioned. There will be no need for it. The secret of her fault shall be religiously kept by those who know it."

It was now four o'clock. An hour later Michael, the Boiscoran tenant's son, who with a gendarme had been sent to ascertain the truth of Cocoleu's statements, returned to Sauveterre with the gun the wretch had employed to perpetrate his crime. As Cocoleu had declared, it was found concealed in the den he had dug out for himself in the forest of Rochepommier, and where Michael had discovered him the day after the crime.

Henceforth Jacques's innocence was as clear as daylight; and, although he had to bear the burden of his sentence till the judgment was declared void, it was decided, with the consent of the president of the court, M. Domini, and the active co-operation of M. du Lopt de la Gransiere, that he should be set free that same evening. M. Folgat and M. Magloire were charged with the pleasant

duty of acquainting the prisoner with this good news. They found him walking up and down his cell like a madman, devoured by unspeakable anguish, and not knowing what to make of the hopeful words which M. Daubigeon had spoken to him in the morning. He was hopeful, it is true; and yet when he was told that he was safe, that he was free, he sank, an inert mass, into a chair, being less able to bear joy than sorrow. But such emotions are not apt to last long. A few moments later and Jacques de Boiscoran, arm in arm with his counsel, left the prison, wherein he had for several months suffered all that an innocent man can suffer. He had paid a fearful penalty for what, in the eyes of so many men, is but a trifling wrong.

When they reached the street in which the Chandores lived M. Folgat said to his client,—“They do not expect you, I am sure. Walk slowly, while I go ahead to prepare them.”

The young advocate found Jacques's parents and friends assembled in the salon suffering great anxiety; for they had not been able to ascertain what truth there was in the vague rumours which had reached them. M. Folgat employed the utmost caution in preparing them for the truth; but at the first words Denise interrupted him asking:—“Where is Jacques?”

Jacques was kneeling at her feet, overcome with gratitude and love.

V.

ON the following day the funeral of the Count de Claudieuse took place. His youngest daughter was buried at the same time; and in the evening the Countess left Sauveterre, to make her home henceforth with her father in Paris.

In the proper course of the law, the sentence which condemned Jacques was declared null and void; and Cocoleu, found guilty of having committed the crime at Valpinson, was sentenced to hard labour for life.

A month later, Jacques de Boiscoran and Denise de Chandore were married at the church at Brechy. The bridegroom's witnesses were M. Magloire and Dr. Seigne-

bos; the bride's—M. Folgat and M. Daubigeon. Even the excellent public prosecutor laid aside some of his usual gravity for the occasion, and continually repeated,—

“Nunc est bibendum, nunc pede libero
Pulsanda tellus.”

And, obedient to the quotation, he gaily drank his glass of wine, and opened the ball with the bride.

M. Galpin-Daveline, already sent in exile to Algeria, was not present at the wedding. But M. Mechinet was there, all smiles and happiness, for, thanks to Jacques, he was now quite free from all pecuniary troubles.

By this time the two Blangins, husband and wife, have well-nigh spent the whole of the money they extorted from Denise. Frumence, as park-keeper at Boiscoran, is the terror of all vagrants: while Goudar, in his garden in the Rue des Vignes, grows the finest peaches in Paris.

THE END.

OTHER PEOPLE'S MONEY

PART I.

I.

THERE is not, perhaps, in all Paris, a quieter street than the Rue St. Gilles in the Marais, within a step of the Place Royale. No carriages there; never a crowd. Hardly is the silence broken by the regulation drums of the Minims Barracks near by, by the chimes of the Church of St. Louis, or by the joyous clamors of the pupils of the Massin School during the hours of recreation.

At night, long before ten o'clock, and when the Boulevard Beaumarchais is still full of life, activity, and noise, every thing begins to close. One by one the lights go out, and the great windows with diminutive panes become dark. And if, after midnight, some belated citizen passes on his way home, he quickens his step, feeling lonely and uneasy, and apprehensive of the reproaches of his *concierger*, who is likely to ask him whence he may be coming at so late an hour.

In such a street, every one knows each other: houses have no mystery; families, no secrets,—a small town, where idle curiosity has always a corner of the veil slyly

raised, where gossip flourishes as rankly as the grass on the street.

Thus on the afternoon of the 27th of April, 1872 (a Saturday), a fact which anywhere else might have passed unnoticed was attracting particular attention.

A man some thirty years of age, wearing the working livery of servants of the upper class,—the long striped waistcoat with sleeves, and the white linen apron,—was going from door to door.

"Who can the man be looking for?" wondered the idle neighbors, closely watching his evolutions.

He was not looking for any one. To such as he spoke to, he stated that he had been sent by a cousin of his, an excellent cook, who, before taking a place in the neighborhood, was anxious to have all possible information on the subject of her prospective masters. And then, "Do you know M. Vincent Favoral?" he would ask.

Concierges and shop-keepers knew no one better; for it was more than a quarter of a century before, that M. Vincent Favoral, the day after his wedding, had come to settle in the Rue St. Gilles; and there his two children were born,—his son M. Maxence, his daughter Mlle. Gilberte.

He occupied the second story of the house No. 38,—one of those old-fashioned dwellings, such as they build no more, since ground is sold at twelve hundred francs the square metre; in which there is no stinting of space. The stairs, with wrought iron balusters, are wide and easy, and the ceilings twelve feet high.

"Of course, we know M. Favoral," answered every one to the servant's questions; "and, if there ever was an honest man, why, he is certainly the one. There is a man whom you could trust with your funds, if you had

any, without fear of his ever running off to Belgium with them." And it was further explained, that M. Favoral was chief cashier, and probably, also, one of the principal stockholders, of the Mutual Credit Society, one of those admirable financial institutions which have sprung up with the second empire, and which had won at the Bourse the first installment of their capital, the very day that the game of the *Coup d'Etat* was being played in the street.

"I know well enough the gentleman's business," remarked the servant; "but what sort of a man is he? That's what my cousin would like to know."

The wine-man at No. 43, the oldest shop-keeper in the street, could best answer. A couple of *petits-verres* politely offered soon started his tongue; and, whilst sipping his Cognac:—

"M. Vincent Favoral," he began, "is a man some fifty-two or three years old, but who looks younger, not having yet a single gray hair. He is tall and thin, with neatly-trimmed whiskers, thin lips, and small yellow eyes; not talkative. It takes more ceremony to get a word from his throat than a dollar from his pocket. 'Yes,' 'no,' 'good-morning,' 'good-evening;' that's about the extent of his conversation. Summer and winter, he wears gray pantaloons, a long frock-coat, laced shoes, and lisle-thread gloves. 'Pon my word, I should say that he is still wearing the very same clothes I saw upon his back for the first time in 1845, did I not know that he has two full suits made every year by the *conciergerie* at No. 29, who is also a tailor."

"Why, he must be an old miser," muttered the servant.

"He is above all peculiar," continued the shop-keeper, "like most men of figures, it seems. His own life is

ruled and regulated like the pages of his ledger. In the neighborhood they call him Old Punctuality; and, when he passes through the Rue Turenne, the merchants set their watches by him. Rain or shine, every morning of the year, on the stroke of nine, he appears at the door on the way to his office. When he returns, you may be sure it is between twenty and twenty-five minutes past five. At six he dines; at seven he goes to play a game of dominoes at the Café Turc; at ten he comes home and goes to bed; and, at the first stroke of eleven at the Church of St. Louis, out goes his candle."

"Hem!" grumbled the servant with a look of contempt, "the question is, Will my cousin be willing to live with a man who is a sort of walking clock?"

"It isn't always pleasant," remarked the wine-man; "and the best evidence is, that the son, M. Maxence, got tired of it."

"He does not live with his parents any more?"

"He dines with them; but he has his own lodgings on the Boulevard du Temple. The falling-out made talk enough at the time; and some people do say that M. Maxence is a worthless scamp, who leads a very dissipated life; but I say that his father kept him too close. The boy is twenty-five, quite good looking, and has a very stylish mistress: I have seen her. . . . I would have done just as he did."

"And what about the daughter, Mlle. Gilberte?"

"She is not married yet, although she is past twenty, and pretty as a rosebud. After the war, her father tried to make her marry a stock-broker, a stylish man who always came in a two-horse carriage; but she refused him outright. I should not be a bit surprised to hear that she has some love-affair of her own. I have noticed lately a young gentleman about here who looks up quite

suspiciously when he goes by No. 38." The servant did not seem to find these particulars very interesting.

"It's the lady," he said, "that my cousin would like to know most about."

"Naturally. Well, you can safely tell her that she never will have had a better mistress. Poor Madame Favoral! She must have had a sweet time of it with her maniac of a husband! But she is not young any more; and people get accustomed to every thing, you know. The days when the weather is fine, I see her going by with her daughter to the Place Royale for a walk. That's about their only amusement."

"The mischief!" said the servant, laughing. "If that is all, she won't ruin her husband, will she?"

"That is all," continued the shop-keeper, "or rather, excuse me, no: every Saturday, for many years, M. and Mme. Favoral receive a few of their friends: M. and Mme. Desclavettes, retired dealers in bronzes, Rue Turenne; M. Chapelain, the old lawyer from the Rue St. Antoine, whose daughter is Mlle. Gilberte's particular friend; M. Desormeaux, head clerk in the Department of Justice; and three or four others; and as this just happens to be Saturday"—

But here he stopped short, and pointing towards the street,—

"Quick," said he, "look! Speaking of the—you know— It is twenty minutes past five, there is M. Favoral coming home."

It was, in fact, the cashier of the Mutual Credit Society, looking very much indeed as the shop-keeper had described him. Walking with his head down, he seemed to be seeking upon the pavement the very spot upon which he had set his foot in the morning, that he might set it back again there in the evening.

With the same methodical step, he reached his house, walked up the two pairs of stairs, and, taking out his pass-key, opened the door of his apartment.

The dwelling was fit for the man; and every thing from the very hall, betrayed his peculiarities. There, evidently, every piece of furniture must have its invariable place, every object its irrevocable shelf or hook. All around were evidences, if not exactly of poverty, at least of small means, and of the artifices of a respectable economy. Cleanliness was carried to its utmost limits: every thing shone. Not a detail but betrayed the industrious hand of the housekeeper, struggling to defend her furniture against the ravages of time. The velvet on the chairs was darned at the angles as with the needle of a fairy. Stitches of new worsted showed through the faded designs on the hearth-rugs. The curtains had been turned so as to display their least worn side.

All the guests enumerated by the shop-keeper, and a few others besides, were in the parlor when M. Favoral came in.

But, instead of returning their greeting,—

“Where is Maxence?” he inquired.

“I am expecting him, my dear,” said Mme. Favoral gently.

“Always behind time,” he scolded. “It is too trifling.”

His daughter, Mlle. Gilberte, interrupted him,—

“Where is my bouquet, father?” she asked.

M. Favoral stopped short, struck his forehead, and with the accent of a man who reveals something incredible, prodigious, unheard of,—

“Forgotten,” he answered, scanning the syllables: “I have for-got-ten it.”

It was a fact. Every Saturday, on his way home, he

was in the habit of stopping at the old woman's shop in front of the Church of St. Louis, and buying a bouquet for Mlle. Gilberte. And to-day—

"Ah! I catch you this time, father!" exclaimed the girl.

Meantime, Mme. Favoral, whispering to Mme. Desclavettes,—

"Positively," she said in a troubled voice, "something serious must have happened to my husband. He to forget! He to fail in one of his habits! It is the first time in twenty-six years."

The appearance of Maxence at this moment prevented her from going on. M. Favoral was about to administer a sound reprimand to his son, when dinner was announced.

"Come," exclaimed M. Chapelain, the old lawyer, the conciliating man *par excellence*,—"come, let us to the table."

They sat down. But Mme. Favoral had scarcely helped the soup, when the bell rang violently. Almost at the same moment the servant appeared, and announced,

—
"The Baron de Thaller!"

More pale than his napkin, the cashier stood up.

"The manager," he stammered, "the director of the Mutual Credit Society."

II.

CLOSE upon the heels of the servant M. de Thaller came.

Tall, thin, stiff, he had a very small head, a flat face, pointed nose, and long reddish whiskers, slightly shaded

with silvery threads, falling half-way down his chest. Dressed in the latest style, he wore a loose overcoat of rough material, pantaloons that spread nearly to the tip of his boots, a wide shirt-collar turned over a light cravat, on the bow of which shone a large diamond, and a tall hat with rolled brims.

With a blinking glance, he made a rapid estimate of the dining-room, the shabby furniture, and the guests seated around the table. Then, without even condescending to touch his hat, with his large hand tightly fitted into a lavender glove, in a brief and imperious tone, and with a slight accent which he affirmed was the Alsatian accent,—

"I must speak with you, Vincent," said he to his cashier, "alone and at once."

M. Favoral made visible efforts to conceal his anxiety.

"You see," he commenced, "we are dining with a few friends, and"—

"Do you wish me to speak in presence of everybody?" interrupted harshly the manager of the Mutual Credit.

The cashier hesitated no longer. Taking up a candle from the table, he opened the door leading to the parlor, and, standing respectfully to one side,—

"Be kind enough to pass on, sir," said he: "I follow you."

And, at the moment of disappearing himself,—

"Continue to dine without me," said he to his guests, with a last effort at self-control. "I shall soon catch up with you. This will take but a moment. Do not be uneasy in the least."

They were not uneasy, but surprised, and, above all, shocked at the manners of M. de Thaller.

"What a brute!" muttered Mme. Desclavettes.

M. Desormeaux, the head clerk at the Department of Justice, was an old legitimist, much imbued with reactionary ideas.

"Such are our masters," said he with a sneer, "the high barons of financial feudality. Ah! you are indignant at the arrogance of the old aristocracy; well, on your knees, by Jupiter! on your face, rather, before the golden crown on field of gules."

No one replied: every one was trying his best to hear.

In the parlor, between M. Favoral and M. de Thaller, a discussion of the utmost violence was evidently going on. To seize the meaning of it was not possible; and yet through the door, the upper panels of which were of glass, fragments could be heard; and from time to time such words distinctly reached the ear as dividend, stockholders, deficit, millions, etc.

"What can it all mean? great heaven!" moaned Mme. Favoral.

Doubtless the two interlocutors, the director and the cashier, had drawn nearer to the door of communication; for their voices, which rose more and more, had now become quite distinct.

"It is an infamous trap!" M. Favoral was saying. "I should have been notified"—

"Come, come," interrupted the other. "Were you not fully warned? did I ever conceal any thing from you?"

Fear, a fear vague still, and unexplained, was slowly taking possession of the guests; and they remained motionless, their forks in suspense, holding their breath.

"Never," M. Favoral was repeating, stamping his foot so violently that the partition shook,—“never, never!”

"And yet it must be," declared M. de Thaller. "It is the only, the last resource"—

"And suppose I will not!"

"Your will has nothing to do with it now. It is twenty years ago that you might have willed, or not willed. But listen to me, and let us reason a little."

Here M. de Thaller dropped his voice; and for some minutes nothing was heard in the dining-room, except confused words, and incomprehensible exclamations, until suddenly,—

"That is ruin," he resumed in a furious tone: "it is bankruptcy on the last of the month."

"Sir," the cashier was replying,— "sir!"

"You are a forger, M. Vincent Favoral; you are a thief!"

Maxence leaped from his seat.

"I shall not permit my father to be thus insulted in his own house," he exclaimed.

"Maxence," begged Mme. Favoral, "my son!"

The old lawyer, M. Chapelain, held him by the arm; but he struggled hard, and was about to burst into the parlor, when the door opened, and the director of the Mutual Credit stepped out.

With a coolness quite remarkable after such a scene, he advanced towards Mlle. Gilberte, and, in a tone of offensive protection,—

"Your father is a wretch, mademoiselle," he said; "and my duty should be to surrender him at once into the hands of justice. On account of your worthy mother, however, of your father himself, above all, on your own account, mademoiselle, I shall forbear doing so. But let him fly, let him disappear, and never more be heard from."

He drew from his pocket a roll of bank-notes, and, throwing them upon the table,—

“Hand him this,” he added. “Let him leave this very night. The police may have been notified. There is a train for Brussels at five minutes past eleven.”

And, having bowed, he withdrew, no one addressing him a single word, so great was the astonishment of all the guests of this house, heretofore so peaceful.

Overcome with stupor, Maxence had dropped upon his chair. Mlle. Gilberte alone retained some presence of mind.

“It is a shame,” she exclaimed, “for us to give up thus! That man is an impostor, a wretch; he lies! Father, father!”

M. Favoral had not waited to be called, and was standing up against the parlor-door, pale as death, and yet calm.

“Why attempt any explanations?” he said. “The money is gone; and appearances are against me.”

His wife had drawn near to him, and taken his hand.

“The misfortune is immense,” she said, “but not irreparable. We will sell everything we have.”

“Have you not friends? Are we not here,” insisted the others,—M. Desclavettes, M. Desormeaux, and M. Chapelain.

Gently he pushed his wife aside, and coldly.

“All we had,” he said, “would be as a grain of sand in an ocean. But we have no longer anything; we are ruined.”

“Ruined!” exclaimed M. Desormeaux,—“ruined! And where are the forty-five thousand francs I placed into your hands?”

He made no reply.

"And our hundred and twenty thousand francs?" groaned M. and Mme. Desclavettes.

"And my sixty thousand francs?" shouted M. Chapelain, with a blasphemous oath.

The cashier shrugged his shoulders.

"Lost," he said, "irrevocably lost!"

Then their rage exceeded all bounds. Then they forgot that this unfortunate man had been their friend for twenty years, that they were his guests; and they commenced heaping upon him threats and insults without name.

He did not even deign to defend himself.

"Go on," he uttered, "go on. When a poor dog, carried away by the current, is drowning, men of heart cast stones at him from the bank. Go on!"

"You should have told us that you speculated," screamed M. Desclavettes.

On hearing these words, he straightened himself up, and with a gesture so terrible that the others stepped back frightened.

"What!" said he, in a tone of crushing irony, "it is this evening only, that you discover that I speculated? Kind friends! Where, then, and in whose pockets, did you suppose I was getting the enormous interests I have been paying you for years? Where have you ever seen honest money, the money of labor, yield twelve or fourteen per cent? The money that yields thus is the money of the gaming table, the money of the *bourse*. Why did you bring me your funds? Because you were fully satisfied that I knew how to handle the cards. Ah! If I was to tell you that I had doubled your capital, you would not ask how I did it, nor whether I had stocked the cards. You would virtuously pocket the money. But I have lost: I am a thief. Well, so be it. But, then, you

are all my accomplices. It is the avidity of the dupes which induces the trickery of the sharpers."

Here he was interrupted by the servant coming in. "Sir," she exclaimed excitedly, "O sir! the courtyard is full of police agents. They are speaking to the *concierge*. They are coming up stairs: I hear them!"

.III.

ACCORDING to the time and place where they are uttered, there are words which acquire a terrible significance. In this disordered room, in the midst of these excited people, that word, the "police," sounded like a thunderclap.

"Do not open," Maxence ordered; "do not open, however they may ring or knock. Let them burst the door first."

The very excess of her fright restored to Mme. Favoral a portion of her energy. Throwing herself before her husband as if to protect him, as if to defend him,—

"They are coming to arrest you, Vincent," she exclaimed. "They are coming; don't you hear them?"

He remained motionless, his feet seemingly riveted to the floor.

"That is as I expected," he said.

And with the accent of the wretch who sees all hope vanish, and who utterly gives up all struggle,—

"Be it so," he said. "Let them arrest me, and let all be over at once. I have had enough anxiety, enough unbearable alternatives. I am tired always to feign, to deceive, and to lie. Let them arrest me! Any misfortune will be smaller in reality than the horrors of uncertainty.

I have nothing more to fear now. For the first time in many years I shall sleep to-night."

He did not notice the sinister expression of his guests.

"You think I am a thief," he added: "well, be satisfied, justice shall be done."

But he attributed to them sentiments which were no longer theirs. They had forgotten their anger, and their bitter resentment for their lost money.

The imminence of the peril awoke suddenly in their souls the memories of the past, and that strong affection which comes from long habit, and a constant exchange of services rendered. Whatever M. Favoral might have done, they only saw in him now the friend, the host whose bread they had broken together more than a hundred times, the man whose probity, up to this fatal night, had remained far above suspicion.

Pale, excited, they crowded around him.

"Have you lost your mind?" spoke M. Desormeaux. "Are you going to wait to be arrested, thrown into prison, dragged into a criminal court?"

He shook his head, and in a tone of idiotic obstinacy,—

"Have I not told you," he repeated, "that every thing is against me? Let them come; let them do what they please with me."

"And your wife," insisted M. Chapelain, the old lawyer, "and your children!"

"Will they be any the less dishonored if I am condemned by default?"

Wild with grief, Mme. Favoral was wringing her hands.

"Vincent," she murmured, "in the name of Heaven, spare us the harrowing agony to have you in prison."

Obstinately he remained silent. His daughter, Mlle.

Gilberte, dropped upon her knees before him, and, joining her hands,—

“I beseech you, father,” she begged.

He shuddered all over. An unspeakable expression of suffering and anguish contracted his features; and, speaking in a scarcely intelligible voice,—

“Ah! you are cruelly protracting my agony,” he stammered. “What do you ask of me?”

“You must fly,” declared M. Desclavettes.

“Which way? How? Do you not think that every precaution has been taken, that every issue is closely watched?”

Maxence interrupted him with a gesture,—

“The windows in sister’s room, father,” said he, “open upon the courtyard of the adjoining house.”

“Yes; but here we are up two pairs of stairs.”

“No matter: I have a way.”

And turning towards his sister,—

“Come, Gilberte,” went on the young man, “give me a light, and let me have some sheets.”

They went out hurriedly. Mme. Favoral felt a gleam of hope.

“We are saved!” she said.

“Saved!” repeated the cashier mechanically.

“Yes; for I guess Maxence’s idea. But we must have an understanding. Where will you take refuge?”

“How can I tell?”

“There is a train at five minutes past eleven,” remarked M. Desormeaux. “Don’t let us forget that.”

“But money will be required to leave by that train,” interrupted the old lawyer. “Fortunately, I have some.”

And, forgetting his hundred and sixty thousand francs lost, he took out his pocket-book. Mme. Favoral stopped him. “We have more than we need,” said she.

She took from the table, and held out to her husband, the roll of bank-notes which the director of the Mutual Credit Society had thrown down before going.

He refused them with a gesture of rage.

"Rather starve to death!" he exclaimed. "'Tis he, 'tis that wretch"—

But he interrupted himself, and more gently,—

"Put away those bank-bills," said he to his wife, "and let Maxence take them back to M. de Thaller to-morrow."

The bell rang violently.

"The police!" groaned Mme. Desclavettes, who seemed on the point of fainting away.

"I am going to negotiate," said M. Desormeaux. "Fly, Vincent: do not lose a minute."

And he ran to the front-door, whilst Mme. Favoral was hurrying her husband towards Mlle. Gilberte's room.

Rapidly and stoutly Maxence had fastened four sheets together by the ends, which gave a more than sufficient length. Then, opening the window, he examined carefully the courtyard of the adjoining house.

"No one," said he: "everybody is at dinner. We'll succeed."

M. Favoral was tottering like a drunken man. A terrible emotion convulsed his features. Casting a long look upon his wife and children,—

"O Lord!" he murmured, "what will become of you?"

"Fear nothing, father," uttered Maxence. "I am here. Neither my mother nor my sister will want for any thing."

"My son!" resumed the cashier, "my children!"

Then, with a choking voice,—

"I am worthy neither of your love nor your devotion, wretch that I am! I made you lead a miserable existence, spend a joyless youth. I imposed upon you every trial of poverty, whilst I—And now I leave you nothing but ruin and a dishonored name."

"Make haste, father," interrupted Mlle. Gilberte.

It seemed as if he could not make up his mind.

"It is horrible to abandon you thus. What a parting! Ah! death would indeed be far preferable: What will you think of me? I am very guilty, certainly, but not as you think. I have been betrayed, and I must suffer for all. If at least you knew the whole truth. But will you ever know it? We will never see each other again."

Desperately his wife clung to him.

"Do not speak thus," she said. "Wherever you may find an asylum, I will join you. Death alone can separate us. What do I care what you may have done, or what the world will say? I am your wife. Our children will come with me. If necessary, we will emigrate to America; we'll change our name; we will work."

The knocks on the outer door were becoming louder and louder; and M. Desormeaux's voice could be heard, endeavoring to gain a few moments more.

"Come," said Maxence, "you cannot hesitate any longer."

And, overcoming his father's reluctance, he fastened one end of the sheets around his waist.

"I am going to let you down, father," said he; "and, as soon as you touch the ground, you must undo the knot. Take care of the first-story windows; beware of the *concierge*; and, once in the street, don't walk too fast. Make for the Boulevard, where you will be sooner lost in the crowd."

The knocks had now become violent blows; and it was evident that the door would soon be broken in, if M. Desormeaux did not make up his mind to open it.

The light was put out. With the assistance of his daughter, M. Favoral lifted himself upon the window-sill, whilst Maxence held the sheets with both hands.

"I beseech you, Vincent," repeated Mme. Favoral, "write to us. We shall be in mortal anxiety until we hear of your safety."

Maxence let the sheets slip slowly: in two seconds M. Favoral stood on the pavement below.

"All right," he said.

The young man drew the sheets back rapidly, and threw them under the bed. But Mlle. Gilberte remained long enough at the window to recognize her father's voice asking the *concierge* to open the door, and to hear the heavy gate of the adjoining house closing behind him.

"Saved!" she said.

It was none too soon. M. Desormeaux had just been compelled to yield; and the commissary of police was walking in.

IV.

THE commissaries of police of Paris, as a general thing, are no simpletons; and, if they are ever taken in, it is because it has suited them to be taken in.

Their modest title covers the most important, perhaps, of magistracies, almost the only one known to the lower classes; an enormous power, and an influence so decisive, that the most sensible statesman of the reign of

Louis Philippe ventured once to say, "Give me twenty good commissaries of police in Paris, and I'll undertake to suppress any government : net profit, one hundred millions."

Parisian above all, the commissary has had ample time to study his ground when he was yet only a peace-officer. The dark side of the most brilliant lives has no mysteries for him. He has received the strangest confidences : he has listened to the most astounding confessions. He knows how low humanity can stoop, and what aberrations there are in brains apparently the soundest. The workwoman whom her husband beats, and the great lady whom her husband cheats, have both come to him. He has been sent for by the shop-keeper whom his wife deceives, and by the millionaire who has been blackmailed. To his office, as to a lay confessional, all passions fatally lead. In his presence the dirty linen of two millions of people is washed *en famille*.

A Paris commissary of police, who after ten years' practice, could retain an illusion, believe in something, or be astonished at any thing in the world, would be but a fool. If he is still capable of some emotion, he is a good man.

The one who had just walked into M. Favoral's apartment was already past middle age, colder than ice, and yet kindly, but of that commonplace kindliness which frightens like the executioner's politeness at the scaffold.

He required but a single glance of his small but clear eyes to decipher the physiognomies of all these worthy people standing around the disordered table.

And beckoning to the agents who accompanied him to stop at the door,—

"Monsieur Vincent Favoral?" he inquired.

The cashier's guests, M. Desormeaux excepted,

seemed stricken with stupor. Each one felt as if he had a share of the disgrace of this police invasion. The dupes who are sometimes caught in clandestine "hells" have the same humiliated attitudes.

At last, and not without an effort,—

"M. Favoral is no longer here," replied M. Chapelain, the old lawyer.

The commissary of police started.

Whilst they were discussing with him through the door, he had perfectly well understood that they were only trying to gain time; and, if he had not at once burst in the door, it was solely owing to his respect for M. Desormeaux himself, whom he knew personally, and still more for his title of head clerk at the Department of Justice. But his suspicions did not extend beyond the destruction of a few compromising papers. Whereas, in fact,—

"You have helped M. Favoral to escape, gentlemen?" said he.

No one replied.

"Silence means assent," he added. "Very well: which way did he get off?"

Still no answer. M. Desclavettes would have been glad to add something to the forty-five thousand francs he had just lost, to be, together with Mme. Desclavettes, a hundred miles away.

"Where is Mme. Favoral?" resumed the commissary, evidently well informed. "Where are Mlle. Gilberte and M. Maxence Favoral?"

They continued silent. No one in the dining-room knew what might have taken place in the other room; and a single word might be treason.

The commissary then became impatient.

"Take up a light," said he to one of the agents who

had remained at the door, "and follow me. We shall see."

And without a shadow of hesitation, for it seems to be the privilege of police-agents to be at home everywhere, he crossed the parlor, and reached Mlle. Gilberte's room just as she was withdrawing from the window.

"Ah, it is that way he escaped!" he exclaimed.

He rushed to the window, and remained long enough leaning on his elbows to thoroughly examine the ground, and understand the situation of the apartment.

"It's evident," he said at last, "this window opens on the courtyard of the next house."

This was said to one of his agents, who bore an unmistakable resemblance to the servant who had been asking so many questions in the afternoon.

"Instead of gathering so much useless information," he added, "why did you not post yourself as to the outlets of the house?"

He was "sold;" and yet he manifested neither spite nor anger. He seemed in no wise anxious to run after the fugitive. Upon the features of Maxence and of Mlle. Gilberte, and more still in Mme. Favoral's eyes, he had read that it would be useless for the present.

"Let us examine the papers, then," said he.

"My husband's papers are all in his study," replied Mme. Favoral.

"Please lead me to it, madame."

The room which M. Favoral called loftily his study was a small room with a tile floor, white-washed walls, and meanly lighted through a narrow transom.

It was furnished with an old desk, a small wardrobe with grated door, a few shelves upon which were piled

some bandboxes and bundles of old newspapers, and two or three deal chairs.

"Where are the keys?" inquired the commissary of police.

"My father always carries them in his pocket, sir," replied Maxence.

"Then let some one go for a locksmith."

Stronger than fear, curiosity had drawn all the guests of the cashier of the Mutual Credit Society, M. Desormeaux, M. Chapelain, M. Desclavettes himself; and, standing within the door-frame, they followed eagerly every motion of the commissary, who, pending the arrival of the locksmith, was making a flying examination of the bundles of papers left exposed upon the desk.

After a while, and unable to hold in any longer,—
"Would it be indiscreet," timidly inquired the old bronze-merchant, "to ask the nature of the charges against that poor Favoral?"

"Embezzlement, sir."

"And is the amount large?"

"Had it been small, I should have said theft. Embezzling commences only when the sum has reached a round figure."

Annoyed at the sardonic tone of the commissary,—

"The fact is," resumed M. Chapelain, "Favoral was our friend; and, if we could get him out of the scrape, we would all willingly contribute."

"It's a matter of ten or twelve millions, gentlemen."

Was it possible? Was it even likely? Could any one imagine so many millions slipping through the fingers of M. de Thaller's methodic cashier?

"Ah, sir!" exclaimed Mme. Favoral, "if any thing could relieve my feelings, the enormity of that sum

would. My husband was a man of simple and modest tastes."

The commissary shook his head.

"There are certain passions," he interrupted, "which nothing betrays externally. Gambling is more terrible than fire. After a fire, some charred remnants are found. What is there left after a lost game? Fortunes may be thrown into the vortex of the *bourse*, without a trace of them being left."

The unfortunate woman was not convinced.

"I could swear, sir," she protested, "that I knew how my husband spent every hour of his life."

"Do not swear, madame."

"All our friends will tell you how parsimonious my husband was."

"Here, madame, towards yourself and your children, I have no doubt; for seeing is believing: but elsewhere"—

He was interrupted by the arrival of the locksmith, who, in less than five minutes, had picked all the locks of the old desk.

But in vain did the commissary search all the drawers. He found only those useless papers which are made relics of by people who have made order their religious faith,—uninteresting letters, grocers' and butchers' bills running back twenty years.

"It is a waste of time to look for any thing here," he growled.

And in fact he was about to give up his perquisitions, when a bundle thinner than the rest attracted his attention. He cut the thread that bound it; and almost at once,—

"I knew I was right," he said. And holding out a paper to Mme. Favoral,—

"Read, madame, if you please."

It was a bill. She read thus:—

"Sold to M. Favoral an India Cashmere, fr. 8,500.

Received payment, FORBE & TOWLER."

"Is it for you, madame," asked the commissary, "that this magnificent shawl was bought?"

Stupefied with astonishment, the poor woman still refused to admit the evidence.

"Madame de Thaller spends a great deal," she stammered. "My husband often made important purchases for her account."

"Often, indeed!" interrupted the commissary of police; "for here are many other receipted bills,—earrings, sixteen thousand francs; a bracelet, three thousand francs; a parlor set, a horse, two velvet dresses. Here is a part, at least, if not the whole, of the ten millions."

V.

HAD the commissary received any information in advance? or was he guided only by the scent peculiar to men of his profession, and the habit of suspecting every thing, even that which seems most unlikely?

At any rate he expressed himself in a tone of absolute certainty.

The agents who had accompanied and assisted him in his researches were winking at each other, and giggling stupidly. The situation struck them as rather pleasant.

The others, M. Desclavettes, M. Chapelain, and the worthy M. Desormeaux himself, could have racked their brains in vain to find terms wherein to express the immensity of their astonishments. Vincent Favoral, their

old friend, paying for cashmeres, diamonds, and parlor sets! Such an idea could not enter in their mind. For whom could such princely gifts be intended? For a mistress, for one of those redoubtable creatures whom fancy represents crouching in the depths of love, like monsters at the bottom of their caves!

But how could any one imagine the methodic cashier of the Mutual Credit Society carried away by one of those insane passions which knew no reason? Ruined by gambling, perhaps, but by a woman!

Could any one picture him, so homely and so plain here, Rue St. Gilles, at the head of another establishment, and leading elsewhere, in one of the brilliant quarters of Paris, a reckless life, such as strike terror in the bosom of quiet families?

Could any one understand the same man at once miserly-economical and madly-prodigious, storming when his wife spent a few cents, and robbing to supply the expenses of an adventuress, and collecting in the same drawer the jeweler's accounts and the butcher's bills?

"It is the climax of absurdity," murmured good M. Desormeaux.

Maxence fairly shook with wrath. Mlle. Gilberte was weeping.

Mme. Favoral alone, usually so timid, boldly defended, and with her utmost energy, the man whose name she bore. That he might have embezzled millions, she admitted: that he had deceived and betrayed her so shamefully, that he had made a wretched dupe of her for so many years, seemed to her insensate, monstrous, impossible.

And purple with shame,—

"Your suspicions would vanish at once, sir," she

said to the commissary, "if I could but explain to you our mode of life."

Encouraged by his first discovery, he was proceeding more minutely with his perquisitions, undoing the strings of every bundle.

"It is useless, madame," he answered in that brief tone which made so much impression upon M. Desclavettes. "You can only tell me what you know; and you know nothing."

"Never, sir, did a man lead a more regular life than M. Favoral."

"In appearance, you are right. Besides, to regulate one's disorder is one of the peculiarities of our time. We open credits to our passions, and we keep account of our infamies by double entry. We operate with method. We embezzle millions that we may hang diamonds to the ears of an adventuress; but we are careful, and we keep the receipted bills."

"But, sir, I have already told you that I never lost sight of my husband."

"Of course."

"Every morning, precisely at nine o'clock, he left home to go to M. de Thaller's office."

"The whole neighborhood knows that, madame."

"At half-past five he came home."

"That, also, is a well-known fact."

"After dinner he went out to play a game, but it was his only amusement; and at eleven o'clock he was always in bed."

"Perfectly correct."

"Well, then, sir, where could M. Favoral have found time to abandon himself to the excesses of which you accuse him?"

Imperceptibly the commissary of police shrugged his shoulders.

"Far from me, madame," he uttered, "to doubt your good faith. What matters it, moreover, whether your husband spent in this way or in that way the sums which he is charged with having appropriated? But what do your objections prove? Simply that M. Favoral was very skilful, and very much self-possessed. Had he breakfasted when he left you at nine? No. Pray, then, where did he breakfast? In a restaurant? Which? Why did he come home only at half-past five, when his office actually closed at three o'clock? Are you quite sure that it was to the Café Turc that he went every evening. Finally, why do not you say any thing of the extra work which he always had to attend to, as he pretended, once or twice a month? Sometimes it was a loan, sometimes a liquidation, or a settlement of dividends, which devolved upon him. Did he come home then? No. He told you that he would dine out, and that it would be more convenient for him to have a cot put up in his office; and thus you were twenty-four or forty-eight hours without seeing him. Surely this double existence must have weighed heavily upon him; but he was forbidden from breaking off with you, under penalty of being caught the very next day with his hand in the till. It is the respectability of his official life here which made the other possible,—that which has absorbed such enormous sums. The harsher and the closer he were here, the more magnificent he could show himself elsewhere. His household in the Rue St. Gilles was for him a certificate of impunity. Seeing him so economical, every one thought him rich. People who seem to spend nothing are always trusted. Every privation which he imposed

upon you increased his reputation of austere probity, and raised him farther above suspicion."

Big tears were rolling down Mme. Favoral's cheeks.

"Why not tell me the whole truth?" she stammered.

"Because I do not know it," replied the commissary; "because these are all mere presumptions. I have seen so many instances of similar calculations!"

Then regretting, perhaps, to have said so much,—

"But I may be mistaken," he added: "I do not pretend to be infallible." He was just then completing a brief inventory of all the papers found in the old desk. There was nothing left but to examine the drawer which was used for a cash drawer. He found in it in gold, notes, and small change, seven hundred and eighteen francs.

Having counted this sum, the commissary offered it to Mme. Favoral, saying,—

"This belongs to you madame."

But instinctively she withdrew her hand.

"Never!" she said.

The commissary went on with a gesture of kindness,—

"I understand your scruples, madame, and yet I must insist. You may believe me when I tell you that this little sum is fairly and legitimately yours. You have no personal fortune."

The efforts of the poor woman to keep from bursting into loud sobs were but too visible.

"I possess nothing in the world, sir," she said in a broken voice. "My husband alone attended to our business-affairs. He never spoke to me about them; and I would not have dared to question him. Alone he disposed of our money. Every Sunday he handed me the amount which he thought necessary for the expenses of the week, and I rendered him an account of it. When

my children or myself were in need of any thing, I told him so, and he gave me what he thought proper. This is Saturday: of what I received last Sunday I have five francs left: that is our whole fortune."

Positively the commissary was moved.

"You see, then, madame," he said, "that you cannot hesitate: you must live."

Maxence stepped forward.

"Am I not here, sir?" he said.

The commissary looked at him keenly, and in a grave tone,—

"I believe indeed, sir," he replied, "that you will not suffer your mother and sister to want for any thing. But resources are not created in a day. Yours, if I have not been deceived, are more than limited just now."

And as the young man blushed, and did not answer, he handed the seven hundred francs to Mlle. Gilberte, saying,—

"Take this, mademoiselle: your mother permits it."

His work was done. To place his seals upon M. Favoral's study was the work of a moment.

Beckoning, then, to his agents to withdraw, and being ready to leave himself,—

"Let not the seals cause you any uneasiness, madame," said the commissary of police to Mme. Favoral. "Before forty-eight hours, some one will come to remove these papers, and restore to you the free use of that room."

He went out; and, as soon as the door had closed behind him,—

"Well?" exclaimed M. Desormeaux.

But no one had any thing to say. The guests of that house where misfortune had just entered were making haste to leave. The catastrophe was certainly terrible

and unforeseen; but did it not reach them too? Did they not lose among them more than three hundred thousand francs?

Thus, after a few commonplace protestations, and some of those promises which mean nothing, they withdrew; and, as they were going down the stairs,—

“The commissary took Vincent’s escape too easy,” remarked M. Desormeaux. “He must know some way to catch him again.”

VI.

At last Mme. Favoral found herself alone with her children and free to give herself up to the most frightful despair.

She dropped heavily upon a seat; and, drawing to her bosom Maxence and Gilberte,—

“O my children!” she sobbed, covering them with her kisses and her tears,—“my children, we are most unfortunate.”

Not less distressed than herself, they strove, nevertheless, to mitigate her anguish, to inspire her with sufficient courage to bear this crushing trial; and kneeling at her feet, and kissing her hands,—

“Are we not with you still, mother?” they kept repeating.

But she seemed not to hear them.

“It is not for myself that I weep,” she went on. “I! what had I still to wait or hope for in life? Whilst you, Maxence, you, my poor Gilberte!—If, at least, I could feel myself free from blame! But no. It is my weakness and my want of courage that have brought on this catastrophe. I shrank from the struggle. I purchased my domestic peace at the cost of your future in

the world. I forgot that a mother has sacred duties towards her children."

Mme. Favoral was at this time a woman of some forty-three years, with delicate and mild features, a countenance overflowing with kindness, and whose whole being exhaled, as it were, an exquisite perfume of noblesse and distinction.

Happy, she might have been beautiful still,—of that autumnal beauty whose maturity has the splendors of the luscious fruits of the later season.

But she had suffered so much! The livid paleness of her complexion, the rigid fold of her lips, the nervous shudders that shook her frame, revealed a whole existence of bitter deceptions, of exhausting struggles, and of proudly concealed humiliations.

And yet every thing seemed to smile upon her at the outset of life.

She was an only daughter; and her parents, wealthy silk-merchants, had brought her up like the daughter of an archduchess destined to marry some sovereign prince.

But at fifteen she had lost her mother. Her father, soon tired of his lonely fireside, commenced to seek away from home some diversion from his sorrow.

He was a man of weak mind,—one of those marked in advance to play the part of eternal dupes. Having money, he found many friends. Having once tasted the cup of facile pleasures, he yielded readily to its intoxication. Suppers, cards, amusements, absorbed his time, to the utter detriment of his business. And, eighteen months after his wife's death, he had already spent a large portion of his fortune, when he fell into the hands of an adventuress, whom, without regard for his daughter, he audaciously brought beneath his own roof.

In provincial cities, where everybody knows everybody

else, such infamies are almost impossible. They are not quite so rare in Paris, where one is, so to speak, lost in the crowd, and where the restraining power of the neighbor's opinion is lacking.

For two years the poor girl, condemned to bear this illegitimate stepmother, endured nameless sufferings.

She had just completed her eighteenth year, when, one evening, her father took her aside.

"I have made up my mind to marry again," he said; "but I wish first to provide you with a husband. I have looked for one, and found him. He is not very brilliant perhaps; but he is, it seems, a good, hard-working, economical fellow, who'll make his way in the world. I had dreamed of something better for you; but times are hard, trade is dull: in short, having only a dowry of twenty thousand francs to give you, I have no right to be very particular. To-morrow I'll bring you my candidate."

And, sure enough, the next day that excellent father introduced M. Vincent Favoral to his daughter.

She was not pleased with him; but she could hardly have said that she was displeased.

He was, at the age of twenty-five, which he had just reached, a man so utterly lacking in individuality, that he could scarcely have excited any feeling either of sympathy or affection.

Suitably dressed, he seemed timid and awkward, reserved, quite diffident, and of mediocre intelligence. He confessed to have received a most imperfect education, and declared himself quite ignorant of life. He had scarcely any means outside his profession. He was at this time chief accountant in a large factory of the Faubourg St. Antoine, with a salary of four thousand francs a year.

The young girl did not hesitate a moment. Any thing appeared to her preferable to the contact of a woman whom she abhorred and despised.

She gave her consent ; and, twenty days after the first interview, she had become Mme. Favoral.

Alas ! six weeks had not elapsed, before she knew that she had but exchanged her wretched fate for a more wretched one still.

Not that her husband was in any way unkind to her (he dared not, as yet) ; but he had revealed himself enough to enable her to judge him. He was one of those formidably selfish men who wither every thing around them, like those trees within the shadow of which nothing can grow. His coldness concealed a stupid obstinacy ; his mildness, an iron will.

If he had married, 'twas because he thought a wife a necessary adjunct, because he desired a home wherein to command, because, above all, he had been seduced by the dowry of twenty thousand francs.

For the man had one passion,—money. Under his placid countenance revolved thoughts of the most burning covetousness. He wished to be rich.

Now, as he had no illusion whatever upon his own merits, as he knew himself to be perfectly incapable of any of those daring conceptions which lead to rapid fortune, as he was in no wise enterprising, he conceived but one means to achieve wealth, that is, to save, to economize, to stint himself, to pile penny upon penny.

His profession of accountant had furnished him with a number of instances of the financial power of the penny daily saved, and invested so as to yield its maximum of interest.

If ever his blue eye became animated, it was when he calculated what would be at the present time the capital

produced by a simple penny placed at five per cent interest the year of the birth of our Saviour.

For him this was sublime. He conceived nothing beyond. One penny! He wished, he said, he could have lived eighteen hundred years, to follow the evolutions of that penny, to see it grow tenfold, a hundred-fold, produce, swell, enlarge, and become, after centuries, millions and hundreds of millions.

In spite of all, he had, during the early months of his marriage, allowed his wife to have a young servant. He gave her from time to time, a five-franc-piece, and took her to the country on Sundays.

This was the honeymoon; and, as he declared himself, this life of prodigalities could not last.

Under a futile pretext, the little servant was dismissed. He tightened the strings of his purse. The Sunday excursions were suppressed.

To mere economy succeeded the niggardly parsimony which counts the grains of salt in the *pot-au-feu*, which weighs the soap for the washing, and measures the evening's allowance of candle.

Gradually the accountant took the habit of treating his young wife like a servant, whose honesty is suspected; or like a child, whose thoughtlessness is to be feared. Every morning he handed her the money for the expenses of the day; and every evening he expressed his surprise that she had not made better use of it. He accused her of allowing herself to be grossly cheated, or even to be in collusion with the dealers. He charged her with being foolishly extravagant; which fact, however, he added, did not surprise him much on the part of the daughter of a man who had dissipated a large fortune.

To cap the climax, Vincent Favoral was on the worst

possible terms with his father-in-law. Of the twenty thousand francs of his wife's dowry, twelve thousand only had been paid, and it was in vain that he clamored for the balance. The silk-merchant's business had become unprofitable; he was on the verge of bankruptcy. The eight thousand francs seemed in imminent danger.

His wife alone he held responsible for this deception. He repeated to her constantly that she had connived with her father to "take him in," to fleece him, to ruin him.

What an existence! Certainly, had the unhappy woman known where to find a refuge, she would have fled from that home where each of her days was but a protracted torture. But where could she go? Of whom could she beg a shelter?

She had terrible temptations at this time, when she was not yet twenty, and they called her the beautiful Mme. Favoral.

Perhaps she would have succumbed, when she discovered that she was about to become a mother. One year, day for day, after her marriage, she gave birth to a son, who received the name of Maxence.

The accountant was but indifferently pleased at the coming of this son: It was, above all, a cause of expense. He had been compelled to give some thirty francs to a nurse, and almost twice as much for the baby's clothes. Then a child breaks up the regularity of one's habits; and he, as he affirmed, was attached to his as much as to life itself. And now he saw his household disturbed, the hours of his meals altered, his own importance reduced, his authority, even ignored.

But what mattered now to his young wife the ill-humor which he no longer took the trouble to conceal? Mother, she defied her tyrant.

Now, at least, she had in this world a being upon whom she could lavish all her caresses so brutally repelled. There existed a soul within which she reigned supreme. What troubles would not a smile of her son have made her forget?

With the admirable instinct of an egotist, M. Favoral understood so well what passed in the mind of his wife, that he dared not complain too much of what the little fellow cost. He made up his mind bravely; and when four years later, his daughter Gilberte was born, instead of lamenting,—

“Bash!” said he: “God blesses large families.”

VII.

BUT already, at this time, M. Vincent Favoral's situation had been singularly modified.

The revolution of 1848 had just taken place. The factory in the Faubourg St. Antoine, where he was employed, had been compelled to close its doors.

One evening, as he came home at the usual hour, he announced that he had been discharged.

Mme. Favoral shuddered at the thought of what her husband might be, without work, and deprived of his salary.

“What is to become of us?” she murmured.

He shrugged his shoulders. Visibly he was much excited. His cheeks were flushed; his eyes sparkled.

“Bash!” he said: “we shan't starve for all that.”

And, as his wife was gazing at him in astonishment,—

“Well,” he went on, “what are you looking at? It

is so: I know many a one who affects to live on his income, and who are not as well off as we are."

It was, for over six years since he was married, the first time that he spoke of his business otherwise than to groan and complain, to accuse fate, and curse the high price of living. The very day before, he had declared himself ruined by the purchase of a pair of shoes for Maxence. The change was so sudden and so great, that she hardly knew what to think, and wondered if grief at the loss of his situation had not somewhat disturbed his mind.

"Such are women," he went on with a giggle. "Results astonish them, because they know nothing of the means used to bring them about. Am I a fool, then? Would I impose upon myself privations of all sorts, if it were to accomplish nothing? Parbleu! I love fine living too, I do, and good dinners at the restaurant, and the theatre, and the nice little excursions in the country. But I want to be rich. At the price of all the comforts which I have not had, I have saved a capital, the income of which will support us all. Eh, eh! That's the power of the little penny put out to fatten!"

As she went to bed that night, Mme. Favoral felt more happy than she had done since her mother's death. She almost forgave her husband his sordid parsimony, and the humiliations he had heaped upon her.

"Well, be it so," she thought. "I shall have lived miserably, I shall have endured nameless sufferings; but my children shall be rich, their life shall be easy and pleasant."

The next day M. Favoral's excitement had completely abated. Manifestly he regretted his confidences.

"You must not think on that account that you can

waste and pillage every thing," he declared rudely. " Besides, I have greatly exaggerated."

And he started in search of a situation.

To find one was likely to be difficult. Times of revolution are not exactly propitious to industry. Whilst the parties discussed in the Chamber, there were on the street twenty thousand clerks, who, every morning as they rose, wondered where they would dine that day.

For want of any thing better, Vincent Favoral undertook to keep books in various places,—an hour here, an hour there, twice a week in one house, four times in another.

In this way he earned as much and more than he did at the factory ; but the business did not suit him.

What he liked was the office from which one does not stir, the stove-heated atmosphere, the elbow-worn desk, the leather-cushioned chair, the black alpaca sleeves over the coat. The idea that he should on one and the same day have to do with five or six different houses, and be compelled to walk an hour, to go and work another hour at the other end of Paris, fairly irritated him. He found himself out of his reckoning, like a horse who has turned a mill for ten years, if he is made to trot straight before him.

So, one morning, he gave up the whole thing, swearing that he would rather remain idle until he could find a place suited to his taste and his convenience ; and, in the mean time, all they would have to do would be to put a little less butter in the soup, and a little more water in the wine.

He went out, nevertheless, and remained until dinner-time. And he did the same the next and the following days.

He started off the moment he had swallowed the last

mouthful of his breakfast, came home at six o'clock, dined in haste, and disappeared again, not to return until about midnight. He had hours of delirious joy, and moments of frightful discouragement. Sometimes he seemed horribly uneasy.

"What can he be doing?" thought Mme. Favoral.

She ventured to ask him the question one morning, when he was in fine humor.

"Well," he answered, "am I not the master? I am operating at the *bourse*, that's all!"

He could hardly have owned to any thing that would have frightened the poor woman as much.

"Are you not afraid," she objected, "to lose all we have so painfully accumulated? We have children"—

He did not allow her to proceed.

"Do you take me for a child?" he exclaimed; "or do I look to you like a man so easy to be duped? Mind to economize in your household expenses, and don't meddle with my business."

And he continued. And he must have been lucky in his operations; for he had never been so pleasant at home. All his ways had changed. He had had clothes made at a first-class tailor's, and was evidently trying to look elegant. He gave up his pipe, and smoked only cigars. He got tired of giving every morning the money for the house, and took the habit of handing it to his wife every week, on Sunday. A mark of vast confidence, as he observed to her. And so, the first time,—

"Be careful," he said, "that you don't find yourself penniless before Thursday."

He became also more communicative. Often during the dinner, he would tell what he had heard during the day, anecdotes, gossip. He enumerated the persons with whom he had spoken. He named a number of people

whom he called his friends, and whose names Mme. Favoral carefully stored away in her memory.

There was one especially, who seemed to inspire him with a profound respect, a boundless admiration, and of whom he never tired of talking. He was, said he, a man of his age,—M. de Thaller, the Baron de Thaller.

“This one,” he kept repeating, “is really mad: he is rich, he has ideas, he’ll go far. It would be a great piece of luck if I could get him to do something for me!”

Until at last one day,—

“Your parents were very rich once?” he asked his wife.

“I have heard it said,” she answered.

“They spent a good deal of money, did they not? They had friends: they gave dinner-parties.”

“Yes, they received a good deal of company.”

“You remember that time?”

“Surely I do.”

“So that if I should take a fancy to receive some one here, some one of note, you would know how to do things properly?”

“I think so.”

He remained silent for a moment, like a man who thinks before taking an important decision, and then,—

“I wish to invite a few persons to dinner,” he said.

She could scarcely believe her ears. He had never received at his table any one but a fellow-clerk at the factory, named Desclavettes, who had just married the daughter of a dealer in bronzes, and succeeded to his business.

“Is it possible?” exclaimed Mme. Favoral.

“So it is. The question is now, How much would a first-class dinner cost, the best of every thing?”

“That depends upon the number of guests.”

"Say three or four persons."

The poor woman set herself to figuring diligently for some time; and then timidly, for the sum seemed formidable to her,—

"I think," she began, "that with a hundred francs"—
Her husband commenced whistling.

"You'll need that for the wines alone," he interrupted.
"Do you take me for a fool? But here, don't let us go into figures. Do as your parents did when they did their best; and, if it's well, I shall not complain of the expense. Take a good cook, hire a waiter who understands his business well."

She was utterly confounded; and yet she was not at the end of her surprises.

Soon M. Favoral declared that their table-ware was not suitable, and that he must buy a new set. He discovered a hundred purchases to be made, and swore that he would make them. He even hesitated a moment about renewing the parlor furniture, although it was in tolerably good condition still, and was a present from his father-in-law.

And, having finished his inventory,—

"And you," he asked his wife: "what dress will you wear?"

"I have my black silk dress"—

He stopped her.

"Which means that you have none at all," he said.
"Very well. You must go this very day and get yourself one,—a very handsome, a magnificent one; and you'll send it to be made to a fashionable dressmaker. And at the same time you had better get some little suits for Maxence and Gilberte. Here are a thousand francs."

Completely bewildered,—

"Who in the world are you going to invite, then?" she asked.

"The Baron and the Baroness de Thaller," he replied with an emphasis full of conviction. "So try and distinguish yourself. Our fortune is at stake."

That this dinner was a matter of considerable import, Mme. Favoral could not doubt when she saw her husband's fabulous liberality continue without flinching for a number of days.

Ten times of an afternoon he would come home to tell his wife the name of some dish that had been mentioned before him, or to consult her on the subject of some exotic viand he had just noticed in some shop-window. Daily he brought home wines of the most fantastic vintages,—those wines which dealers manufacture for the special use of verdant fools, and which they sell in odd-shaped bottles previously overlaid with secular dust and cobwebs.

He subjected to a protracted cross-examination the cook whom Mme. Favoral had engaged, and demanded that she should enumerate the houses where she had cooked. He absolutely required the man who was to wait at the table to exhibit the dress-coat he was to wear.

The great day having come, he did not stir from the house, going and coming from the kitchen to the dining-room, uneasy, agitated, unable to stay in one place. He breathed only when he had seen the table set and loaded with the new china he had purchased and the magnificent silver he had gone to hire in person.

And when his young wife made her appearance, looking lovely in her new dress, and leading by the hands the two children, Maxence and Gilberte, in their new suits,—

"That's perfect," he exclaimed, highly delighted.

"Nothing could be better. Now, let our four guests come!"

They arrived a few minutes before seven, in two carriages, the magnificence of which astonished the Rue St. Gilles.

And, the presentations over, Vincent Favoral had at last the ineffable satisfaction to see seated at his table the Baron and Baroness de Thaller, M. Saint Pavin, who called himself a financial editor, and M. Jules Jottras, of the house of Jottras & Brother.

It was with an eager curiosity that Mme. Favoral observed these people whom her husband called his friends, and whom she saw herself for the first time.

M. de Thaller, who could not then have been much over thirty, was already a man without any particular age.

Cold, stiff, aping evidently the English style, he expressed himself in brief sentences, and with a strong foreign accent. Nothing to surprise on his countenance. He had the forehead prominent, the eyes of a dull blue, and the nose very thin. His scanty hair was spread over the top of his head with labored symmetry; and his red, thick, and carefully-trimmed whiskers seemed to engross much of his attention.

M. Saint Pavin had not the same stiff manner. Careless in his dress, he lacked breeding. He was a robust fellow, dark and bearded, with thick lips, the eye bright and prominent, spreading upon the table-cloth broad hands ornamented at the joints with small tufts of hair, speaking loud, laughing noisily, eating much and drinking more.

By the side of him, M. Jules Jottras, although looking like a fashion-plate, did not show to much advantage. Delicate, blonde, sallow, almost beardless, M. Jottras dis-

tinguished himself only by a sort of unconscious impudence, a harmless cynicism, and a sort of spasmodic giggle, that shook the eye-glasses which he wore stuck over his nose.

But it was above all Mme. de Thaller who excited Mme. Favoral's apprehensions.

Dressed with a magnificence of at least questionable taste, very much *décolletée*, wearing large diamonds at her ears, and rings on all her fingers, the young baroness was insolently handsome, of a beauty sensuous even to coarseness. With hair of a bluish black, twisted over the neck in heavy ringlets, she had skin of a pearly whiteness, lips redder than blood, and great eyes that threw flames from beneath their long, curved lashes. It was the poetry of flesh; and one could not help admiring. Did she speak, however, or make a gesture, all admiration vanished. The voice was vulgar, the motion common. Did M. Jouras venture upon a *double-entendre*, she would throw herself back upon her chair to laugh, stretching her neck, and thrusting her throat forward.

Wholly absorbed in the care of his guests, M. Favoral remarked nothing. He only thought of loading the plates, and filling the glasses, complaining that they ate and drank nothing, asking anxiously if the cooking was not good, if the wines were bad, and almost driving the waiter out of his wits with questions and suggestions.

It is a fact, that neither M. de Thaller nor M. Jottras had much appetite. But M. Saint Pavin officiated for all; and the sole task of keeping up with him caused M. Favoral to become visibly animated.

His cheeks were much flushed, when, having passed the champagne all around, he raised his froth-tipped glass, exclaiming,—

"I drink to the success of the business."

"To the success of the business," echoed the others, touching his glass.

And a few moments later they passed into the parlor to take coffee.

This toast had caused Mme. Favoral no little uneasiness. But she found it impossible to ask a single question; Mme de Thaller dragging her almost by force to a seat by her side on the sofa, pretending that two women always have secrets to exchange, even when they see each other for the first time.

The young baroness was fully *au fait* in matters of bonnets and dresses; and it was with giddy volubility that she asked Mme. Favoral the names of her milliner and her dressmaker, and to what jeweller she intrusted her diamonds to be reset.

This looked so much like a joke, that the poor house-keeper of the Rue St. Gilles could not help smiling whilst answering that she had no dressmaker, and that, having no diamonds, she had no possible use for the services of a jeweller.

The other declared she could not get over it. No diamonds! That was a misfortune exceeding all. And quick she seized the opportunity charitably to enumerate the *parures* in her jewel-case, and laces in her drawers, and the dresses in her wardrobes. In the first place, it would have been impossible for her, she swore, to live with a husband either miserly or poor. Hers had just presented her with a lovely *coupé*, lined with yellow satin, a perfect *bijou*. And she made good use of it too; for she loved to go about. She spent her days shopping, or riding in the Bois. Every evening she had the choice of the theatre or a ball, often both. The *genre* theatres were those she preferred. To be sure, the opera and the

Italiens were more stylish ; but she could not help gaping there.

Then she wished to kiss the children ; and Gilberte and Maxence had to be brought in. She adored children, she vowed : it was her weakness, her passion. She had herself a little girl, eighteen months old, called Césarine, to whom she was devoted ; and certainly she would have brought her, had she not feared she would have been in the way.

All this verbiage sounded like a confused murmur to Mme. Favoral's ears. " Yes, no," she answered, hardly knowing to what she did answer.

Her head heavy with a vague apprehension, it required her utmost attention to observe her husband and his guests.

Standing by the mantel-piece, smoking their cigars, they conversed with considerable animation, but not loud enough to enable her to hear all they said. It was only when M. Saint Pavin spoke that she understood that they were still discussing the " business ;" for he spoke of articles to publish, stocks to sell, dividends to distribute, sure profits to reap.

They all, at any rate, seemed to agree perfectly ; and at a certain moment she saw her husband and M. de Thaller strike each other's hand, as people do who exchange a pledge.

Eleven o'clock struck.

M. Favoral was insisting to make his guests accept a cup of tea or a glass of punch ; but M. de Thaller declared that he had some work to do, and that, his carriage having come, he must go.

And go he did, taking with him the baroness, followed by M. Saint Pavin and M. Jottras.

And when, the door having closed upon them, M. Favoral found himself alone with his wife,—

“Well,” he exclaimed, swelling with gratified vanity, “what do you think of our friends?”

“They surprised me,” she answered.

He fairly jumped at that word.

“I should like to know why?”

Then, timidly, and with infinite precautions, she commenced explaining that M. de Thaller's face inspired her with no confidence; that M. Jottras had seemed to her a very impudent personage; that M. Saint Pavin appeared low and vulgar; and that, finally, the young baroness had given her of herself the most singular idea.

M. Favoral refused to hear more.

“It's because you have never seen people of the best society,” he exclaimed.

“Excuse me. Formerly, during my mother's life”—

“Eh! Your mother never received but shop-keepers.”

The poor woman dropped her head.

“I beg of you, Vincent,” she insisted, “before doing any thing with these new friends, think well, consult”—

He burst out laughing.

“Are you not afraid that they will cheat me?” he said,—“people ten times as rich as we are. Here, don't let us speak of it any more, and let us go to bed. You'll see what this dinner will bring us, and whether I ever have reason to regret the money we have spent.”

VIII.

WHEN, on the morning after this dinner, which was to form an era in her life, Mme. Favoral woke up, her husband was already up, pencil in hand, and busy figuring.

The charm had vanished with the fumes of the champagne; and the clouds of the worst days were gathering upon his brow.

Noticing that his wife was looking at him,—

“It’s expensive work,” he said in a bluff tone, “to set a business going; and it wouldn’t do to commence over again every day.”

To hear him speak, one would have thought that Mme. Favoral alone, by dint of hard begging, had persuaded him, into that expense which he now seemed to regret so much. She quietly called his attention to the fact, reminding him that, far from urging, she had endeavored to hold him back; repeating that she augured ill of that business over which he was so enthusiastic, and that, if he would believe her, he would not venture.

“Do you even know what the project is?” he interrupted rudely.

“You have not told me.”

“Very well, then: leave me in peace with your sentiments. You dislike my friends; and I saw very well how you treated Mme. de Thaller. But I am the master; and what I have decided shall be. Besides, I have signed. Once for all, I forbid you ever speaking to me again on that subject.”

Whereupon, having dressed himself with much care, he started off, saying that he was expected at breakfast

by Saint Pavin, the financial editor, and by M. Jottras, of the house of Jottras & Brother.

A shrewd woman would not have given it up so easy, and, in the end, would probably have mastered the despot, whose intellect was far from brilliant. But Mme. Favoral was too proud to be shrewd; and besides, the springs of her will had been broken by the successive oppression of an odious stepmother and a brutal master. Her abdication of all was complete. Wounded, she kept the secret of her wound, hung her head, and said nothing.

She did not, therefore, venture a single allusion; and nearly a week elapsed, during which the names of her late guests were not once mentioned.

It was through a newspaper, which M. Favoral had forgotten in the parlor, that she learned that the Baron de Thaller had just founded a new stock company, the Mutual Credit Society, with a capital of several millions.

Below the advertisement, which was printed in enormous letters, came a long article, in which it was demonstrated that the new company was, at the same time, a patriotic undertaking and an institution of credit of the first class; that it supplied a great public want; that it would be of inestimable benefit to industry; that its profits were assured; and that to subscribe to its stock was simply to draw short bills upon fortune.

Already somewhat re-assured by the reading of this article, Mme. Favoral became quite so when she read the names of the board of directors. Nearly all were titled, and decorated with many foreign orders; and the remainder were bankers, office-holders, and even some ex-ministers.

"I must have been mistaken," she thought, yielding unconsciously to the influence of printed evidence.

And no objection occurred to her, when, a few days later, her husband told her,—

“I have the situation I wanted. I am head cashier of the company of which M. de Thaller is manager.”

That was all. Of the nature of this society, of the advantages which it offered him, not one word.

Only by the way in which he expressed himself did Mme. Favoral judge that he must have been well treated; and he further confirmed her in that opinion by granting her, of his own accord, a few additional francs for the daily expenses of the house.

“We must,” he declared on this memorable occasion, “do honor to our social position, whatever it may cost.”

For the first time in his life, he seemed heedful of public opinion. He recommended his wife to be careful of her dress and of that of the children, and re-engaged a servant. He expressed the wish of enlarging their circle of acquaintances, and inaugurated his Saturday dinners, to which came assiduously, M. and Mme. Desclavettes, M. Chapelain the attorney, the old man Desormeaux, and a few others.

As to himself he gradually settled down into those habits from which he was nevermore to depart, and the chronometric regularity of which had secured him the nickname of Old Punctuality, of which he was proud.

In all other respects never did a man, to such a degree, become so utterly indifferent to his wife and children. His house was for him but a mere hotel, where he slept, and took his evening meal. He never thought of questioning his wife as to the use of her time, and what she did in his absence. Provided she did not ask him for money, and was there when he came home, he was satisfied.

Many women, at Mme. Favoral's age, might have

made a strange use of that insulting indifference and of that absolute freedom.

If she did avail herself of it, it was solely to follow one of those inspirations which can only spring in a mother's heart.

The increase in the budget of the household was relatively large, but so nicely calculated, that she had not one cent more that she could call her own.

With the most intense sorrow, she thought that her children might have to endure the humiliating privations which had made her own life wretched. They were too young yet to suffer from the paternal parsimony; but they would grow; their desires would develop; and it would be impossible for her to grant them the most innocent satisfactions.

Whilst turning over and over in her mind this distressing thought, she remembered a friend of her mother's, who kept, in the Rue St. Denis, a large establishment for the sale of hosiery and woollen goods. There, perhaps, lay the solution of the problem. She called to see the worthy woman, and, without even needing to confess the whole truth to her, she obtained sundry pieces of work, ill paid as a matter of course, but which, by dint of close application, might be made to yield from eight to twelve francs a week.

From this time she never lost a minute, concealing her work as if it were an evil act.

She knew her husband well enough to feel certain that he would break out, and swear that he spent money enough to enable his wife to live without being reduced to making a workwoman of herself.

But what joy, the day when she hid away down at the bottom of a drawer the first twenty-franc-piece she had earned, a beautiful gold-piece, which belonged to her

without contest, and which she might spend as she pleased, without having to render any account to any one!

And with what pride, from week to week, she saw her little treasure swell, despite the drafts she made upon it, sometimes to buy a toy for Maxence, sometimes to add a few ribbons or trinkets to Gilberte's toilet!

This was the happiest time of her life, a halt in that painful journey through which she had been dragging herself for so many years. Between her two children, the hours flew light and rapid as so many seconds. If all the hopes of the young girl and of the woman had withered before they had blossomed, the mother's joys, at least should not fail her. Because, whilst the present sufficed to her modest ambition, the future had ceased to cause her any uneasiness.

No reference had ever been made, between herself and her husband, to that famous dinner-party: he never spoke to her of the Mutual Credit Society; but now and then he allowed some words or exclamations to escape, which she carefully recorded, and which betrayed a prosperous state of affairs.

"That Thaller is a tough fellow!" he would exclaim, "and he has the most infernal luck!"

And at other times,—

"Two or three more operations like the one we have just successfully wound up, and we can shut up shop!"

From all this, what could she conclude, if not that he was marching with rapid strides towards that fortune, the object of all his ambition?

Already in the neighborhood he had that reputation to be very rich, which is the beginning of riches itself. He was admired for keeping his house with such rigid

economy ; for a man is always esteemed who has money, and does not spend it.

"He is not the man ever to squander what he has," the neighbors repeated.

The persons whom he received on Saturdays believed him more than comfortably off. When M. Desclavettes and M. Chapelain had complained to their hearts' contents, the one of the shop, the other of his office, they never failed to add,—

"You laugh at us, because you are engaged in large operations, where people make as much money as they like."

They seemed to hold his financial capacities in high estimation. They consulted him, and followed his advice.

M. Desormeaux was wont to say,—

"Oh! he knows what he is about."

And Mme. Favoral tried to persuade herself, that, in this respect at least, her husband was a remarkable man. She attributed his silence and his distractions to the grave cares that filled his mind. In the same manner that he had once announced to her that they had enough to live on, she expected him, some fine morning, to tell her that he was a millionaire.

IX.

BUT the respite granted by fate to Mme. Favoral was drawing to an end: her trials were about to return more poignant than ever, occasioned, this time, by her children, hitherto her whole happiness and her only consolation.

Maxence was nearly twelve. He was a good little

fellow, intelligent, studious at times, but thoughtless in the extreme, and of a turbulence which nothing could tame.

At the Massin School, where he had been sent, he made his teachers' hair turn white; and not a week went by that he did not signalize himself by some fresh misdeed.

A father like any other would have paid but slight attention to the pranks of a schoolboy, who, after all, ranked among the first of his class, and of whom the teachers themselves, whilst complaining, said,—

“Bash! What matters it, since the heart is sound and the mind sane?”

But M. Favoral took every thing tragically. If Maxence was kept in, or otherwise punished, he pretended that it reflected upon himself, and that his son was disgracing him.

If a report came home with this remark, “execrable conduct,” he fell into the most violent passion, and seemed to lose all control of himself.

“At your age,” he would shout to the terrified boy, “I was working in a factory, and earning my livelihood. Do you suppose that I will not tire of making sacrifices to procure you the advantages of an education which I lacked myself? Beware. Havre is not far off; and cabin-boys are always in demand there.”

If, at least, he had confined himself to these admonitions, which, by their very exaggeration, failed in their object! But he favored mechanical appliances as a necessary means of sufficiently impressing reprimands upon the minds of young people; and therefore, seizing his cane, he would beat poor Maxence most unmercifully, the more so that the boy, filled with pride, would

have allowed himself to be chopped to pieces rather than utter a cry, or shed a tear.

The first time that Mme. Favoral saw her son struck, she was seized with one of those wild fits of anger which do not reason, and never forgive. To be beaten herself would have seemed to her less atrocious, less humiliating. Hitherto she had found it impossible to love a husband such as hers: henceforth, she took him in utter aversion: he inspired her with horror. She looked upon her son as a martyr for whom she could hardly ever do enough.

And so, after these harrowing scenes, she would press him to her heart in the most passionate embrace; she would cover with her kisses the traces of the blows; and she would strive, by the most delirious caresses, to make him forget the paternal brutalities. With him she sobbed. Like him, she would shake her clinched fists in the vacant space, exclaiming, "Coward, tyrant, assassin!" The little Gilberte mingled her tears with theirs; and, pressed against each other, they deplored their destiny, cursing the common enemy, the head of the family.

Thus did Maxence spend his boyhood between equally fatal exaggerations, between the revolting brutalities of his father, and the dangerous caresses of his mother; the one depriving him of every thing, the other refusing him nothing.

For Mme. Favoral had now found a use for her humble savings.

If the idea had never come to the cashier of the Mutual Credit Society to put a few sous in his son's pocket, the too weak mother would have suggested to him the want of money in order to have the pleasure of gratifying it.

She who had suffered so many humiliations in her life, she could not bear the idea of her son having his pride wounded, and being unable to indulge in those little trifling expenses which are the vanity of school-boys.

"Here, take this," she would tell him on holidays, slipping a few francs into his hands.

Unfortunately, to her present she joined the recommendation not to allow his father to know any thing about it; forgetting that she was thus training Maxence to dissimulate, warping his natural sense of right, and perverting his instincts.

No, she gave; and, to repair the gaps thus made in her treasure, she worked to the point of ruining her sight, with such eager zeal, that the worthy shop-keeper of the Rue St. Denis asked her if she did not employ working girls. In truth, the only help she received was from Gilberte, who, at the age of eight, already knew how to make herself useful.

And this is not all. For this son, in anticipation of growing expenses, she stooped to expedients which formerly would have seemed to her unworthy and disgraceful. She robbed the household, cheating on her own marketing. She went so far as to confide to her servant, and to make of the girl the accomplice of her operations. She applied all her ingenuity to serve to M. Favoral dinners in which the excellence of the dressing concealed the want of solid substance. And on Sunday, when she rendered her weekly accounts, it was without a blush that she increased by a few centimes the price of each object, rejoicing when she had thus scraped a dozen francs, and finding, to justify herself to her own eyes, those sophisms which passion never lacks.

At first Maxence was too young to wonder from what

sources his mother drew the money she lavished upon his schoolboy fancies. She recommended him to hide from his father: he did so, and thought it perfectly natural.

As he grew older, he learned to discern.

The moment came when he opened his eyes upon the system under which the paternal household was managed. He noticed there that anxious economy which seems to betray want, and the acrimonious discussions which arose upon the inconsiderate use of a twenty-franc-piece. He saw his mother realize miracles of industry to conceal the shabbiness of her toilets, and resort to the most skilful diplomacy when she wished to purchase a dress for Gilberte.

And, despite all this, he had at his disposition as much money as those of his comrades whose parents had the reputation to be the most opulent and the most generous.

Anxious, he questioned his mother.

"Eh what does it matter?" she answered, blushing and confused. "Is that any thing to worry you?"

And, as he insisted,—

"Go ahead," she said: "we are rich enough."

But he could hardly believe her, accustomed as he was to hear every one talk of poverty; and, as he fixed upon her his great astonished eyes,—

"Yes," she resumed, with an imprudence which fatally was to bear its fruits, "we are rich; and, if we live as you see, it is because it suits your father, who wishes to amass a still greater fortune."

This was hardly an answer; and yet Maxence asked no further question. But he inquired here and there, with that patient shrewdness of young people possessed with a fixed idea.

Already, at this time, M. Favoral had in the neighborhood, and even among his friends, the reputation to be worth at least a million. The Mutual Credit Society had considerably developed itself: he must, they thought, have benefited largely by the circumstance; and the profits must have swelled rapidly in the hands of so able a man, and one so noted for his rigid economy.

Such is the substance of what Maxence heard; and people did not fail to add ironically, that he need not rely upon the paternal fortune to amuse himself.

M. Desormeaux himself, whom he had "pumped" rather cleverly, had told him, whilst patting him amiably on the shoulder,—

"If you ever need money for your frolics, young man, try and earn it; for I'll be hanged if it's the old man who'll ever supply it."

Such answers complicated, instead of explaining, the problem which occupied Maxence.

He observed, he watched; and at last he acquired the certainty that the money he spent was the fruit of the joint labor of his mother and sister.

"Ah! why not have told me so?" he exclaimed, throwing his arms around his mother's neck. "Why have exposed me to the bitter regrets which I feel at this moment?"

By this sole word the poor woman found herself amply repaid. She admired the *noblesse* of her son's feelings and the kindness of his heart.

"Do you not understand," she told him, shedding tears of joy, "do you not see, that the labor which can promote her son's pleasure is a happiness for his mother?"

But he was dismayed at his discovery.

"No matter!" he said. "I swear that I shall no longer scatter to the winds, as I have been doing, the money that you give me."

For a few weeks, indeed, he was faithful to his pledge. But at fifteen resolutions are not very stanch. The impressions he had felt wore off. He became tired of the small privations which he had to impose upon himself.

He soon came to take to the letter what his mother had told him, and to prove to his own satisfaction that to deprive himself of a pleasure was to deprive her. He asked for ten francs one day, then ten francs another, and gradually resumed his old habits.

He was at this time about leaving school.

"The moment has come," said M. Favoral, "for him to select a career, and support himself."

X.

To think of a profession, Maxence Favoral had not waited for the paternal warnings.

Modern schoolboys are precocious: they know the strong and the weak side of life; and, when they take their degree, they already have but few illusions left.

And how could it be otherwise? In the interior of the colleges is fatally found the echo of the thoughts, and the reflex of the manners, of the time. Neither walls nor keepers can avail. At the same time, as the city mud that stains their boots, the scholars bring back on their return from holidays their stock of observations and of facts.

And what have they seen during the day in their families, or among their friends?

Ardent cravings, insatiable appetites for luxuries, comforts, enjoyments, pleasures, contempt for patient labor, scorn for austere convictions, eager longing for money, the will to become rich at any cost, and the firm resolution to ravish fortune on the first favorable occasion.

To be sure, they have dissembled in their presence; but their perceptions are keen.

True, their father has told them in a grave tone, that there is nothing respectable in this world except labor and honesty; but they have caught that same father scarcely noticing a poor devil of an honest man, and bowing to the earth before some clever rascal bearing the stigma of three judgments, but worth six millions.

Conclusion? Oh! they know very well how to conclude; for there are none such as young people to be logical, and to deduce the utmost consequences of a fact.

They know, the most of them, that they will have to do something or other; but what? And it is then, that, during the recreations, their imagination strives to find that hitherto unknown profession which is to give them fortune without work, and freedom at the same time as a brilliant situation.

They discuss and criticise freely all the careers which are open to youthful ambition. And how they laugh, if some simple fellow ventures upon suggesting some of those modest situations where they earn one hundred and fifty francs a month at the start! One hundred and fifty francs!—why, it's hardly as much as many a boy spends for his cigars, and his cab-fares when he is late.

Maxence was neither better nor worse than the rest. Like the rest he strove to discover the ideal profession

which makes a man rich, and amuses him at the same time.

Under the pretext that he drew nicely, he spoke of becoming a painter, calculating coolly what painting may yield, and reckoning, according to some newspaper, the earnings of Corot or Gérôme, Ziem, Bouguereau, and some others, who are reaping at last the fruits of unceasing efforts and crushing labors.

But, in the way of pictures, M. Vincent Favoral appreciated only the blue vignettes of the Bank of France.

"I wish no artists in my family," he said, in a tone that admitted of no reply.

Maxence would willingly have become an engineer, for it's rather the style to be an engineer now-a-days; but the examinations for the Polytechnic School are rather steep. Or else a cavalry officer; but the two years at Saint Cyr are not very gay. Or chief clerk, like M. Desormeaux; but he would have to begin by being supernumerary.

Finally after hesitating for a long time between law and medicine, he made up his mind to become a lawyer, influenced above all, by the joyous legends of the Latin quarter.

That was not exactly M. Vincent Favoral's dream.

"That's going to cost money again," he growled.

The fact is, he had indulged in the fallacious hope that his son, as soon as he left college, would enter at once some business-house, where he would earn enough to take care of himself.

He yielded at last, however, to the persistent entreaties of his wife, and the solicitations of his friends.

"Be it so," he said to Maxence: "you will study law. Only, as it cannot suit me that you should waste your

days lounging in the billiard-rooms of the left bank, you shall at the same time work in an attorney's office. Next Saturday I shall arrange with my friend Chapelain."

Maxence had not bargained for such an arrangement; and he came near backing out at the prospect of a discipline which he foresaw must be as exacting as that of the college.

Still, as he could think of nothing better, he persevered. And, vacations over, he was duly entered at the law-school, and settled at a desk in M. Chapelain's office, which was then in the Rue St. Antoine.

The first year every thing went on tolerably. He enjoyed as much freedom as he cared to. His father did not allow him one centime for his pocket-money; but the attorney, in his capacity of an old friend of the family, did for him what he had never done before for an amateur clerk, and allowed him twenty francs a month. Mme. Favoral adding to this a few five-franc pieces, Maxence declared himself entirely satisfied.

Unfortunately, with his lively imagination and his impetuous temper, no one was less fit than himself for that peaceful existence, that steady toil, the same each day, without the stimulus of difficulties to overcome, or the satisfaction of results obtained.

Before long he became tired of it.

He had found at the law-school a number of his old schoolmates whose parents resided in the provinces, and who, consequently, lived as they pleased in the Latin quarter, less assiduous to the lectures than to the Spring Brewery and the Closerie des Lilas.*

He envied them their joyous life, their freedom without control, their facile pleasures, their furnished rooms,

* A noted dancing-garden.

and even the low eating-house where they took their meals. And, as much as possible, he lived with them and like them.

But it is not with M. Chapelain's twenty francs that it would have been possible for him to keep up with fellows, who, with superb recklessness, took on credit every thing they could get, reserving the amount of their allowance for those amusements which had to be paid for in cash.

But was not Mme. Favoral here?

She had worked so much, the poor woman, especially since Mlle. Gilberte had become almost a young lady; she had so much saved, so much stinted, that her reserve, notwithstanding repeated drafts, amounted to a good round sum.

When Maxence wanted two or three napoleons, he had but a word to say; and he said it often. Thus, after a while, he became an excellent billiard-player; he kept his colored meerschaum in the rack of a popular brewery; he took absinthe before dinner, and spent his evenings in the laudable effort to ascertain how many mugs of beer he could "put away." Gaining in audacity, he danced at Bullier's, dined at Foyd's, and at last had a mistress.

So much so, that one afternoon, M. Favoral having to visit on business the other side of the water, found himself face to face with his son, who was coming along, a cigar in his mouth, and having on his arm a young lady, painted in superior style, and harnessed with a toilet calculated to make the cab-horses rear.

He returned to the Rue St. Gilles in a state of indescribable rage.

"A woman!" he exclaimed in a tone of offended modesty. "A woman!—he, my son!"

And when that son made his appearance, looking quite sheepish, his first impulse was to resort to his former mode of correction.

But Maxence was now over nineteen years of age.

At the sight of the uplifted cane, he became whiter than his shirt; and, wrenching it from his father's hands, he broke it across his knees, threw the pieces violently upon the floor, and sprang out of the house.

"He shall never again set his foot here!" screamed the cashier of the Mutual Credit, thrown beside himself by an act of resistance which seemed to him unheard of. "I banish him. Let his clothes be packed up, and taken to some hotel: I never want to see him again."

For a long time Mme. Favoral and Gilberte fairly dragged themselves at his feet, before he consented to recall his determination.

"He will disgrace us all!" he kept repeating, seeming unable to understand that it was himself who had, as it were, driven Maxence on to the fatal road which he was pursuing, forgetting that the absurd severities of the father prepared the way for the perilous indulgence of the mother, unwilling to own that the head of a family has other duties besides providing food and shelter for his wife and children, and that a father has but little right to complain who has not known how to make himself the friend and the adviser of his son.

At last, after the most violent recriminations, he forgave, in appearance at least.

But the scales had dropped from his eyes. He started in quest of information, and discovered startling enormities.

He heard from M. Chapelain that Maxence remained whole weeks at a time without appearing at the office. If he had not complained before, it was because he had

yielded to the urgent entreaties of Mme. Favoral; and he was now glad, he added, of an opportunity to relieve his conscience by a full confession.

Thus the cashier discovered, one by one, all his son's tricks. He heard that he was almost unknown at the law-school, that he spent his days in the *cafés*, and that, in the evening, when he believed him in bed and asleep, he was in fact running out to theatres and to balls.

"Ah! that's the way, is it?" he thought. "Ah, my wife and children are in league against me,—me, the master. Very well, we'll see."

XI.

FROM that morning war was declared.

From that day commenced in the Rue St. Gilles one of those domestic dramas which are still awaiting their Molière,—a drama of distressing vulgarity and sickening realism, but poignant, nevertheless; for it brought into action tears, blood, and a savage energy.

M. Favoral thought himself sure to win; for did he not have the key of the cash, and is not the key of the cash the most formidable weapon in an age where every thing begins and ends with money?

Nevertheless, he was filled with irritating anxieties.

He who had just discovered so many things which he did not even suspect a few days before, he could not discover the source whence his son drew the money which flowed like water from his prodigal hands.

He had made sure that Maxence had no debts; and yet it could not be with M. Chapelain's monthly twenty francs that he fed his frolics.

Mme. Favoral and Gilberte, subjected separately to

a skilful interrogatory, had managed to keep inviolate the secret of their mercenary labor. The servant, shrewdly questioned, had said nothing that could in any way cause the truth to be suspected.

Here was, then, a mystery ; and M. Favoral's constant anxiety could be read upon his knitted brows during his brief visits to the house ; that is, during dinner.

From the manner in which he tasted his soup, it was easy to see that he was asking himself whether that was real soup, and whether he was not being imposed upon. From the expression of his eyes, it was easy to guess this question constantly present to his mind :—

“ They are robbing me evidently ; but how do they do it ? ”

And he became distrustful, fussy, and suspicious, to an extent that he had never been before. It was with the most insulting precautions that he examined every Sunday his wife's accounts. He took a book at the grocer's, and settled it himself every month : he had the butcher's bills sent to him in duplicate. He would inquire the price of an apple as he peeled it over his plate, and never failed to stop at the fruiterer's and ascertain that he had not been deceived.

But it was all in vain.

And yet he knew that Maxence always had in his pocket two or three five-franc pieces.

“ Where do you steal them ? ” he asked him one day.

“ I save them out of my salary,” boldly answered the young man.

Exasperated, M. Favoral wished to make the whole world take an interest in his investigations. And one Saturday evening, as he was talking with his friends, M. Chapelain, the worthy Desclavettes, and old man Desormeaux, pointing to his wife and daughter,—

"Those d—d women rob me," he said, "for the benefit of my son; and they do it so cleverly that I can't find out how. They have an understanding with the shopkeepers, who are but licensed thieves; and nothing is eaten here that they don't make me pay double its value."

M. Chapelain made an ill-concealed grimace; whilst M. Desclavettes sincerely admired a man who had courage enough to confess his meanness.

But M. Desormeaux never minced things.

"Do you know, friend Vincent," he said, "that it requires a strong stomach to take dinner with a man who spends his time calculating the cost of every mouthful that his guests swallow?"

M. Favoral turned red in the face.

"It is not the expense that I deplore," he replied, "but the duplicity. I am rich enough, thank Heaven! not to begrudge a few francs; and I would gladly give to my wife twice as much as she takes, if she would only ask it frankly."

But that was a lesson.

Hereafter he was careful to dissimulate, and seemed exclusively occupied in subjecting his son to a system of his invention, the excessive rigor of which would have upset a steadier one than he.

He demanded of him daily written attestations of his attendance both at the law-school and at the lawyer's office. He marked out the itinerary of his walks for him, and measured the time they required, within a few minutes. Immediately after dinner he shut him up in his room, under lock and key, and never failed, when he came home at ten o'clock to make sure of his presence.

He could not have taken steps better calculated to exalt still more Mme. Favoral's blind tenderness.

When she heard that Maxence had a mistress, she had been rudely shocked in her most cherished feelings. It is never without a secret jealousy that a mother discovers that a woman has robbed her of her son's heart. She had retained a certain amount of spite against him on account of disorders, which, in her candor, she had never suspected. She forgave him every thing when she saw of what treatment he was the object.

She took sides with him, believing him to be the victim of a most unjust persecution. In the evening, after her husband had gone out, Gilberte and herself would take their sewing, sit in the hall outside his room, and converse with him through the door. Never had they worked so hard for the shop-keeper in the Rue St. Denis. Some weeks they earned as much as twenty-five or thirty francs.

But Maxence's patience was exhausted; and one morning he declared resolutely that he would no longer attend the law-school, that he had been mistaken in his vocation, and that there was no human power capable to make him return to M. Chapelain's.

"And where will you go?" exclaimed his father. "Do you expect me eternally to supply your wants?"

He answered that it was precisely in order to support himself, and conquer his independence, that he had resolved to abandon a profession, which, after two years, yielded him twenty francs a month.

"I want some business where I have a chance to get rich," he replied. "I would like to enter a banking-house, or some great financial establishment."

Mme. Favoral jumped at the idea.

"That's a fact," she said to her husband. "Why couldn't you find a place for our son at the Mutual Credit? There he would be under your own eyes. In-

telligent as he is, backed by M. de Thaller and yourself, he would soon earn a good salary."

M. Favoral knit his brows.

"That I shall never do," he uttered. "I have not sufficient confidence in my son. I cannot expose myself to have him compromise the consideration which I have acquired for myself."

And, revealing to a certain extent the secret of his conduct,—

"A cashier," he added, "who like me handles immense sums cannot be too careful of his reputation. Confidence is a delicate thing in these times, when there are so many cashiers constantly on the road to Belgium. Who knows what would be thought of me, if I was known to have such a son as mine?"

Mme. Favoral was insisting, nevertheless, when he seemed to make up his mind suddenly.

"Enough," he said. "Maxence is free. I allow him two years to establish himself in some position. That delay over, good-by: he can find board and lodging where he please. That's all. I don't want to hear any thing more about it."

It was with a sort of frenzy that Maxence abused that freedom; and in less than two weeks he had dissipated three months' earnings of his mother and sister.

That time over, he succeeded, thanks to M. Chapelain, in finding a place with an architect.

This was not a very brilliant opening; and the chances were, that he might remain a clerk all his life. But the future did not trouble him much. For the present, he was delighted with this inferior position, which assured him each month one hundred and seventy-five francs.

One hundred and seventy-five francs! A fortune.

And so he rushed into that life of questionable pleasures, where so many wretches have left not only the money which they had, which is nothing, but the money which they had not, which leads straight to the police-court.

He made friends with those shabby fellows who walk up and down in front of the Café Riche, with an empty stomach, and a tooth-pick between their teeth. He became a regular customer at those low *cafés* of the Boulevards, where plastered girls smile to the men. He frequented those suspicious *table d'hôtes* where they play baccarat after dinner on a wine-stained table-cloth, and where the police make periodical raids. He ate suppers in those night restaurants where people throw the bottles at each other's heads after drinking their contents.

Often he remained twenty-four hours without coming to the Rue St. Gilles; and then Mme. Favoral spent the night in the most fearful anxiety. Then, suddenly, at some hour when he knew his father to be absent, he would appear, and, taking his mother to one side,—

"I very much want a few louis," he would say in a sheepish tone.

She gave them to him; and she kept giving them so long as she had any, not, however, without observing timidly to him that Gilberte and herself could not earn very much.

Until finally one evening, and to a last demand,—

"Alas!" she answered sorrowfully, "I have nothing left, and it is only on Monday that we are to take our work back. Couldn't you wait until then?"

He could not wait: he was expected for a game. Blind devotion begets ferocious egotism. He wanted his mother to go out and borrow the money from the

grocer or the butcher. She was hesitating. He spoke louder.

Then Mlle. Gilberte appeared.

"Have you, then, really no heart?" she said. "It seems to me, that, if I were a man, I would not ask my mother and sister to work for me."

XII.

GILBERTE FAVORAL had just completed her eighteenth year. Rather tall, slender, her every motion betrayed the admirable proportions of her figure, and had that grace which results from the harmonious blending of liteness and strength. She did not strike at first sight; but soon a penetrating and indefinable charm arose from her whole person; and one knew not which to admire most,—the exquisite perfections of her figure, the divine roundness of her neck, her aerial carriage, or the placid ingenuousness of her attitudes. She could not be called beautiful, inasmuch as her features lacked regularity; but the extreme mobility of her countenance, upon which could be read all the emotions of her soul, had an irresistible seduction. Her large eyes, of velvety blue, had untold depths and an incredible intensity of expression; the imperceptible quiver of her rosy nostrils revealed an untamable pride; and the smile that played upon her lips told her immense contempt for every thing mean and small. But her real beauty was her hair,—of a blonde so luminous that it seemed powdered with diamond-dust; so thick and so long, that to be able to twist and confine it, she had to cut off heavy locks of it to the very root.

Alone, in the house, she did not tremble at her father's voice. The studied despotism which had subdued Mme.

Favoral had revolted her, and her energy had become tempered under the same system of oppression which had unnerved Maxence.

Whilst her mother and her brother lied with that quiet impudence of the slave, whose sole weapon is duplicity, Gilberte preserved a sullen silence. And if complicity was imposed upon her by circumstances, if she had to maintain a falsehood, each word cost her such a painful effort, that her features became visibly altered.

Never, when her own interests were alone at stake, had she stooped to an untruth. Fearlessly, and whatever might be the result,—

“That is the fact,” she would say.

Accordingly, M. Favoral could not help respecting her to a degree; and, when he was in fine humor, he called her the Empress Gilberte. For her alone he had some deference and some attentions. He moderated, when she looked at him, the brutality of his language. He brought her a few flowers every Saturday.

He had even allowed her a professor of music; though he was wont to declare that a woman needs but two accomplishments,—to cook and to sew. But she had insisted so much, that he had at last discovered for her, in an attic of the Rue du Pas-de-la-Mule, an old Italian master, the Signor Gismondo Pulei, a sort of unknown genius, for whom thirty francs a month were a fortune, and who conceived a sort of religious fanaticism for his pupil.

Though he had always refused to write a note, he consented, for her sake, to fix the melodies that buzzed in his cracked brain; and some of them proved to be admirable. He dreamed to compose for her an opera that would transmit to the most remote generations the name of Gismondo Pulei.

"The Signora Gilberte is the very goddess of music," he said to M. Favoral, with transports of enthusiasm, which intensified still his frightful accent.

The cashier of the Mutual Credit Society shrugged his shoulders, answering that there is no harmony for a man who spends his days listening to the exciting music of golden coins. In spite of which his vanity seemed highly gratified, when on Saturday evenings, after dinner, Mlle. Gilberte sat at the piano, and Mme. Desclavettes, suppressing a yawn, would exclaim,—

"What remarkable talent the dear child has!"

The young girl had, then, a positive influence; and it was to her entreaties alone, and not to those of his wife, that he had several times forgiven Maxence. He would have done much more for her, had she wished it; but she would have been compelled to ask, to insist, to beg.

"And it's humiliating," she used to say.

Sometimes Mme. Favoral scolded her gently, saying that her father would certainly not refuse her one of those pretty toilets which are the ambition and the joy of young girls.

But she,—

"It is much less mortification to me to wear these rags than to meet with a refusal," she replied. "I am satisfied with my dresses."

With such a character, surrounded, however, by a meek resignation, and an unalterable *sang-froid*, she inspired a certain respect to both her mother and her brother, who admired in her an energy of which they felt themselves incapable.

And when she appeared, and commenced reproaching him in an indignant tone of voice, with the baseness of his conduct, and his insatiate demands, Maxence was almost stunned.

"I did not know," he commenced, turning as red as fire.

She crushed him with a look of mingled contempt and pity; and, in an accent of haughty irony,—

"Indeed," she said, "you do not know whence the money comes that you extort from our mother!"

And holding up her hand, still remarkably handsome, though slightly deformed by the constant handling of the needle; the fourth finger of the right hand bent by the thread, and the fore-finger of the left tattooed and lacerated by the needle,—

"Indeed," she repeated, "you do not know that my mother and myself, we spend all our days, and the greater part of our nights, working?"

Hanging his head, he said nothing.

"If it were for myself alone," she continued, "I would not speak to you thus. But look at our mother! See her poor eyes, red and weak from her ceaseless labor! If I have said nothing until now, it is because I did not as yet despair of your heart; because I hoped that you would recover some feeling of decency. But no, nothing. With time, your last scruples seem to have vanished. Once you begged humbly; now you demand rudely. How soon will you resort to blows?"

"Gilberte!" stammered the poor fellow, "Gilberte!"

She interrupted him,—

"Money!" she went on, "always, and without time, you must have money; no matter whence it comes, nor what it costs. If, at least, you had, to justify your expenses, the excuse of some great passion, or of some object, were it absurd, ardently pursued! But I defy you to confess upon what degrading pleasures you lavish our humble economies. I defy you to tell us what

you mean to do with the sum that you demand to-night, —that sum for which you would have our mother stoop to beg the assistance of a shop-keeper, to whom we would be compelled to reveal the secret of our shame."

Touched by the frightful humiliation of her son,—

"He is so unhappy!" stammered Mme. Favoral.

"He unhappy!" she exclaimed. "What, then, shall we say of us? and, above all, what shall you say of yourself, mother? Unhappy!—he, a man, who has liberty and strength, who may undertake every thing, attempt any thing, dare any thing. Ah, I wish I were a man! I! I would be a man as there are some, as I know some; and I would have avenged you, O beloved mother! long, long ago, from father; and I would have begun to repay you all the good you have done me."

Mme. Favoral was sobbing.

"I beg of you," she murmured, "spare him."

"Be it so," said the young girl. "But you must allow me to tell him that it is not for his sake that I devote my youth to a mercenary labor. It is for you, adored mother, that you may have the joy to give him what he asks, since it is your only joy."

Maxence shuddered under the breath of that superb indignation. That frightful humiliation, he felt that he deserved it only too much. He understood the justice of these cruel reproaches. And, as his heart had not yet spoiled with the contact of his boon companions, as he was weak, rather than wicked, as the sentiments which are the honor and pride of a man were not dead within him,—

"Ah! you are a brave sister, Gilberte," he exclaimed; "and what you have just done is well. You have been harsh, but not as much as I deserve. Thanks for your courage, which will give me back mine. Yes, it is a

shame for me to have thus cowardly abused you both."

And, raising his mother's hand to his lips,—

"Forgive, mother," he continued, his eyes overflowing with tears, "forgive him who swears to you to redeem his past, and to become your support, instead of being a crushing burden"—

He was interrupted by the noise of steps on the stairs, and the shrill sound of a whistle.

"My husband!" exclaimed Mme. Favoral,—“your father, my children!”

"Well," said Mlle. Gilberte coldly.

"Don't you hear that he is whistling? and do you forget that it is a proof that he is furious? What new trial threatens us again?"

XIII.

MME. FAVORAL spoke from experience. She had learned, to her cost, that the whistle of her husband, more surely than the shriek of the stormy petrel, announces the storm. And she had that evening more reasons than usual to fear. Breaking from all his habits, M. Favoral had not come home to dinner, and had sent one of the clerks of the Mutual Credit Society to say that they should not wait for him.

Soon his latch-key grated in the lock; the door swung open; he came in; and, seeing his son,—

"Well, I am glad to find you here," he exclaimed with a giggle, which with him was the utmost expression of anger.

Mme. Favoral shuddered. Still under the impression of the scene which had just taken place, his heart heavy, and his eyes full of tears, Maxence did not answer.

"It is doubtless a wager," resumed the father, "and you wish to know how far my patience may go."

"I do not understand you," stammered the young man.

"The money that you used to get, I know not where, doubtless fails you now, or at least is no longer sufficient, and you go on making debts right and left,—at the tailor's, the shirt maker's, the jeweller's. Of course, it's simple enough. We earn nothing; but we wish to dress in the latest style, to wear a gold chain across our vest, and then we make dupes."

"I have never made any dupes, father."

"Bah! And what, then, do you call all these people who came this very day to present me their bills? For they did dare to come to my office! They had agreed to come together, expecting thus to intimidate me more easily. I told them that you were of age, and that your business was none of mine. Hearing this, they became insolent, and commenced speaking so loud, that their voices could be heard in the adjoining rooms. At that very moment, the manager, M. de Thaller, happened to be passing through the hall. Hearing the noise of a discussion, he thought that I was having some difficulty with some of our stockholders, and he came in, as he had a right to. Then I was compelled to confess every thing."

He became excited at the sound of his words, like a horse at the jingle of his bells. And, more and more beside himself,—

"That is just what your creditors wished," he pursued. "They thought I would be afraid of a row, and that I would 'come down.' It is a system of blackmailing, like any other. An account is opened to some young rascal; and, when the amount is reasonably large, they

take it to the family, saying, 'Money, or I make row.' Do you think it is to you, who are penniless, that they give credit? It's on my pocket that they were drawing,—on my pocket, because they believed me rich. They sold you at exorbitant prices every thing they wished; and they relied on me to pay for trousers at ninety francs, shirts at forty francs, and watches at six hundred francs."

Contrary to his habit, Maxence did not offer any denial.

"I expect to pay all I owe," he said.

"You!"

"I give my word I will!"

"And with what, pray?"

"With my salary."

"You have a salary, then?"

Maxence blushed.

"I have what I earn at my employer's."

"What employer?"

"The architect in whose office M. Chapelain helped me to find a place."

With a threatening gesture, M. Favoral interrupted him.

"Spare me your lies," he uttered. "I am better posted than you suppose. I know, that, over a month ago, your employer, tired of your idleness, dismissed you in disgrace."

Disgrace was superfluous. The fact was, that Maxence, returning to work after an absence of five days, had found another in his place.

"I shall find another place," he said.

M. Favoral shrugged his shoulders with a movement of rage.

"And in the mean time," he said, "I shall have to pay. Do you know what your creditors threaten to do?—to commence a suit against me. They would lose it, of course, they know it; but they hope that I would yield before a scandal. And this is not all: they talk of entering a criminal complaint. They pretend that you have audaciously swindled them; that the articles you purchased of them were not at all for your own use, but that you sold them as fast as you got them, at any price you could obtain, to raise ready money. The jeweller has proofs, he says, that you went straight from his shop to the pawnbroker's, and pledged a watch and chain which he had just sold you. It is a police matter. They said all that in presence of my superior officer,—in presence of M. de Thaller. I had to get the janitor to put them out. But, after they had left, M. de Thaller gave me to understand that he wished me very much to settle every thing. And he is right. My consideration could not resist another such scene. What confidence can be placed in a cashier whose son behaves in this manner? How can a key of a safe containing millions be left with a man whose son would have been dragged into the police-courts? In a word, I am at your mercy. In a word, my honor, my position, my fortune, rest upon you. As often as it may please you to make debts, you can make them, and I shall be compelled to pay."

Gathering all his courage,—

"You have been sometimes very harsh with me, father," commenced Maxence; "and yet I will not try to justify my conduct. I swear to you, that hereafter you shall have nothing to fear from me."

"I fear nothing," uttered M. Favoral with a sinister

smile. "I know the means of placing myself beyond the reach of your follies; and I shall use them."

"I assure you, father, that I have taken a firm resolution."

"Oh! you may dispense with your periodical repentance."

Mlle. Gilberte stepped forward.

"I'll stand warrant," she said, "for Maxence's resolutions."

Her father did not permit her to proceed.

"Enough," he interrupted somewhat harshly. "Mind your own business, Gilberte! I have to speak to you too."

"To me, father."

"Yes."

He walked up and down three or four times through the parlor, as if to calm his irritation. Then planting himself straight before his daughter, his arms folded across his breast,—

"You are eighteen years of age," he said; "that is to say, it is time to think of your marriage. An excellent match offers itself."

She shuddered, stepped back, and, redder than a peony,—

"A match!" she repeated in a tone of immense surprise.

"Yes, and which suits me."

"But I do not wish to marry, father."

"All young girls say the same thing; and, as soon as a pretender offers himself, they are delighted. Mine is a fellow of twenty-six, quite good looking, amiable, witty, and who has had the greatest success in society."

"Father, I assure you that I do not wish to leave mother."

"Of course not. He is an intelligent, hard-working man, destined, everybody says, to make an immense fortune. Although he is rich already, for he holds a controlling interest in a stock-broker's firm, he works as hard as any poor devil. I would not be surprised to hear that he makes half a million of francs a year. His wife will have her carriage, her box at the opera, diamonds, and dresses as handsome as Mme. de Thaller's."

"Eh! What do I care for such things?"

"It's understood. I'll present him to you on Saturday."

But Mlle. Gilberte was not one of those young girls who allow themselves, through weakness or timidity, to become engaged, and so far engaged, that later, they can no longer withdraw. A discussion being unavoidable, she preferred to have it out at once.

"A presentation is absolutely useless, father," she declared resolutely.

"Because?"

"I have told you that I did not wish to marry."

"But if it is my will?"

"I am ready to obey you in every thing except that."

"In that as in every thing else," interrupted the cashier of the Mutual Credit in a thundering voice.

And, casting upon his wife and children a glance full of defiance and threats,—

"In that, as in every thing else," he repeated, "because I am the master; and I shall prove it. Yes, I will prove it; for I am tired to see my family leagued against my authority."

And out he went, slamming the door so violently, that the partitions shook.

"You are wrong to resist your father thus," murmured the weak Mme. Favoral.

The fact is, that the poor woman could not understand why her daughter refused the only means at her command to break off with her miserable existence.

"Let him present you this young man," she said. "You might like him."

"I am sure I shall not like him."

She said this in such a tone, that the light suddenly flashed upon Mme. Favoral's mind.

"Heavens!" she murmured. "Gilberte, my darling child, have you then a secret which your mother does not know?"

XIV.

YES, Mlle. Gilberte had her secret,—a very simple one, though, chaste, like herself, and one of those which, as the old women say, must cause the angels to rejoice.

The spring of that year having been unusually mild, Mme. Favoral and her daughter had taken the habit of going daily to breathe the fresh air in the Place Royale. They took their work with them, crotchet or knitting; so that this salutary exercise did not in any way diminish the earnings of the week. It was during these walks that Mlle. Gilberte had at last noticed a young man, unknown to her, whom she met every day at the same place.

Tall and robust, he had a grand look, notwithstanding his modest clothes, the exquisite neatness of which betrayed a sort of respectable poverty. He wore his full beard; and his proud and intelligent features were lighted up by a pair of large black eyes, of those eyes whose straight and clear look disconcerts hypocrites and knaves.

He never failed, as he passed by Mlle. Gilberte, to

look down, or turn his head slightly away; and in spite of this, in spite of the expression of respect which she had detected upon his face, she could not help blushing.

"Which is absurd," she thought; "for after all, what on earth do I care for that young man?"

The infallible instinct, which is the experience of inexperienced young girls, told her that it was not chance alone that brought this stranger in her way. But she wished to make sure of it. She managed so well, that each day of the following week, the hour of their walk was changed. Sometimes they went out at noon, sometimes after four o'clock.

But, whatever the hour, Mlle. Gilberte, as she turned the corner of the Rue des Minimes, noticed her unknown admirer under the arcades, looking in some shop-window, and watching out of the corner of his eye. As soon as she appeared, he left his post, and hurried fast enough to meet her at the gate of the Place.

"It is a persecution," thought Mlle. Gilberte.

How, then, had she not spoken of it to her mother? Why had she not said any thing to her the day, when, happening, to look out of the window, she saw her "persecutor" passing before the house, or evidently looking in her direction?

"Am I losing my mind?" she thought, seriously irritated against herself. "I will not think of him any more."

And yet she was thinking of him, when one afternoon, as her mother and herself were working, sitting upon a bench, she saw the stranger come and sit down not far from them. He was accompanied by an elderly man with long white mustaches, and wearing the rosette of the Legion of Honor.

"This is an insolence," thought the young girl, whilst

seeking a pretext to ask her mother to change their seats.

But already had the young man and his elderly friend seated themselves, and so arranged their chairs, that Mlle. Gilberte could not miss a word of what they were about to say. It was the young man who spoke first.

"You know me as well as I know myself, my dear count," he commenced,—“you who were my poor father's best friend, you who dandled me upon your knees when I was a child, and who has never lost sight of me.”

“Which is to say, my boy, that I answer for you as for myself,” put in the old man. “But go on.”

“I am twenty-six years old. My name is Yves-Marius-Genost de Trégars. My family, which is one of the oldest of Brittany, is allied to all the great families.”

“Perfectly exact,” remarked the old gentleman.

“Unfortunately, my fortune is not on a par with my nobility. When my mother died, in 1856, my father, who worshipped her, could no longer bear, in the intensity of his grief, to remain at the Château de Trégars where he had spent his whole life. He came to Paris, which he could well afford, since we were rich then, but unfortunately, made acquaintances who soon inoculated him with the fever of the age. They proved to him that he was mad to keep lands which barely yielded him forty thousand francs a year, and which he could easily sell for two millions; which amount, invested merely at five per cent, would yield him an income of one hundred thousand francs. He therefore sold every thing, except our patrimonial homestead on the road from Quimper to Audierne, and rushed into speculations. He was rather lucky at first. But he was too honest and too loyal to be lucky long. An operation in which he be-

came interested early in 1869 turned out badly. His associates became rich; but he, I know not how, was ruined, and came near being compromised. He died of grief a month later."

The old soldier was nodding his assent.

"Very well, my boy," he said. "But you are too modest; and there's a circumstance which you neglect. You had a right, when your father became involved in these troubles, to claim and retain your mother's fortune; that is, some thirty thousand francs a year. Not only you did not do so; but you gave up every thing to his creditors. You sold the domain of Trégars, except the old castle and its park, and paid over the proceeds to them; so that, if your father did die ruined, at least he did not owe a cent. And yet you knew, as well as myself, that your father had been deceived and swindled by a lot of scoundrels who drive their carriages now, and who, perhaps, if the courts were applied to, might still be made to disgorge their ill-gotten plunder."

Her head bent upon her tapestry, Mlle. Gilberte seemed to be working with incomparable zeal. The truth is, she knew not how to conceal the blushes on her cheeks, and the trembling of her hands. She had something like a cloud before her eyes; and she drove her needle at random. She scarcely preserved enough presence of mind to reply to Mme. Favoral, who, not noticing any thing, spoke to her from time to time.

Indeed, the meaning of this scene was too clear to escape her.

"They have had an understanding," she thought, "and it is for me alone that they are speaking."

Meantime, Marius de Trégars was going on,—

"I should lie, my old friend, were I to say that I was indifferent to our ruin. Philosopher though one may

be, it is not without some pangs that one passes from a sumptuous hotel to a gloomy garret. But what grieved me most of all was that I saw myself compelled to give up the labors which had been the joy of my life, and upon which I had founded the most magnificent hopes. A positive vocation, stimulated further by the accidents of my education, had led me to the study of physical sciences. For several years, I had applied all I have of intelligence and energy to certain investigations in electricity. To convert electricity into an incomparable motive-power which would supersede steam,—such was the object I pursued without pause. Already, as you know, although quite young, I had obtained results which had attracted some attention in the scientific world. I thought I could see the last of a problem, the solution of which would change the face of the globe. Ruin was the death of my hopes, the total loss of the fruits of my labors; for my experiments were costly, and it required money, much money, to purchase the products which were indispensable to me, and to construct the machines which I contrived.

“And I was about being compelled to earn my daily bread.

“I was on the verge of despair, when I met a man whom I had formerly seen at my father's, and who had seemed to take some interest in my researches, a speculator named Marcolet. But it is not at the *bourse* that he operates. Industry is the field of his labors. Ever on the lookout for those obstinate inventors who are starving to death in their garrets, he appears to them at the hour of supreme crisis: he pities them, encourages them, consoles them, helps them, and almost always succeeds in becoming the owner of their discovery. Some-

times he makes a mistake ; and then all he has to do is to put a few thousand francs to the debit of profit or loss. But, if he has judged right, then he counts his profits by hundreds of thousands ; and how many patents does he work thus ! Of how many inventions does he reap the results which are a fortune, and the inventors of which have no shoes to wear ! Every thing is good to him ; and he defends with the same avidity a cough-sirup, the formula of which he has purchased of some poor devil of a druggist, and an improvement to the steam-engine, the patent for which has been sold to him by an engineer of genius. And yet Marcolet is not a bad man. Seeing my situation, he offered me a certain yearly sum to undertake some studies of industrial chemistry which he indicated to me. I accepted ; and the very next day I hired a small basement in the Rue des Tournelles, where I set up my laboratory, and went to work at once. That was a year ago. Marcolet must be satisfied. I have already found for him a new shade for dyeing silk, the cost price of which is almost nothing. As to me, I have lived with the strictest economy, devoting all my surplus earnings to the prosecution of the problem, the solution of which would give me both glory and fortune."

Palpitating with inexpressible emotion, Mlle. Gilberte was listening to this young man, unknown to her a few moments since, and whose whole history she now knew as well as if she had always lived near him ; for it never occurred to her to suspect his sincerity.

No voice had ever vibrated to her ear like this voice, whose grave sonorousness stirred within her strange sensations, and legions of thoughts which she had never suspected. She was surprised at the accent of sim-

plicity with which he spoke of the illustriousness of his family, of his past opulence, of his obscure labors, and of his exalted hopes.

She admired the superb disregard for money which beamed forth in his every word. Here was then one man, at least, who despised that money before which she had hitherto seen all the people she knew prostrated in abject worship.

After a pause of a few moments, Marius de Trégars, still addressing himself apparently to his aged companion, went on,—

“I repeat it, because it is the truth, my old friend, this life of labor and privation, so new to me, was not a burden. Calm, silence, the constant exercise of all the faculties of the intellect, have charms which the vulgar can never suspect. I was happy to think, that, if I was ruined, it was through an act of my own will. I found a positive pleasure in the fact that I, the Marquis de Trégars, who had had a hundred thousand a year,—I must the next moment go out in person to the baker’s and the green-grocer’s to purchase my supplies for the day. I was proud to think that it was to my labor alone, to the work for which I was paid by Marcolet, that I owed the means of prosecuting my task. And, from the summits where I was carried on the wings of science, I took pity on your modern existence, on that ridiculous and tragical medley of passions, interests, and cravings; that struggle without truce or mercy, whose law is, woe to the weak, in which whosoever falls is trampled under feet.

“Sometimes, however, like a fire that has been smouldering under the ashes, the flame of youthful passions blazed up within me. I had hours of madness, of discouragement, of distress, during which solitude was

loathsome to me. But I had the faith which raises mountains,—faith in myself and my work. And soon, tranquilized, I would go to sleep in the purple of hope, beholding in the vista of the distant future the triumphal arches erected to my success.

“Such was my situation, when, one afternoon in the month of February last, after an experiment upon which I had founded great hopes, and which had just miserably failed, I came here to breathe a little fresh air.

“It was a beautiful spring day, warm and sunny. The sparrows were chirping on the branches, swelled with sap: bands of children were running along the alleys, filling the air with their joyous screams.

“I was sitting upon a bench, ruminating over the causes of my failure, when two ladies passed by me; one somewhat aged, the other quite young. They were walking so rapidly, that I hardly had time to see them.

“But the young lady's step, the noble simplicity of her carriage, had struck me so much, that I rose to follow her with the intention of passing her, and then walking back to have a good view of her face. I did so; and I was fairly dazzled. At the moment when my eyes met hers, a voice rose within me, crying that it was all over now, and that my destiny was fixed.”

“I remember, my dear boy,” remarked the old soldier in a tone of friendly raillery; “for you came to see me that night, and I had not seen you for months before.”

Marius proceeded without heeding the remark.

“And yet you know that I am not the man to yield to a first impression. I struggled: with determined energy I strove to drive off that radiant image which I carried within my soul, which left me no more, which haunted me in the midst of my studies.

"Vain efforts. My thoughts obeyed me no longer: my will escaped my control. It was indeed one of those passions that fill the whole being, overpower all, and which make of life an ineffable felicity or a nameless torture, according that they are reciprocated, or not. How many days I spent there, waiting and watching for her of whom I had thus had a glimpse, and who ignored my very existence! And what insane palpitations, when, after hours of consuming anxiety, I saw at the corner of the street the undulating folds of her dress! I saw her thus often, and always with the same elderly person, her mother. They had adopted in this square a particular bench, where they sat daily, working at their sewing with an assiduity and zeal which made me think that they lived upon the product of their labor."

Here he was suddenly interrupted by his companion. The old gentleman feared that Mme. Favoral's attention might at last be attracted by too direct allusions.

"Take care, boy!" he whispered, not so low, however, but what Gilberte overheard him.

But it would have required much more than this to draw Mme. Favoral from her sad thoughts. She had just finished her band of tapestry; and, grieving to lose a moment,—

"It is perhaps time to go home," she said to her daughter. "I have nothing more to do."

Mlle. Gilberte drew from her basket a piece of canvas, and, handing it to her mother,—

"Here is enough to go on with, mamma," she said in a troubled voice. "Let us stay a little while longer."

And, Mme. Favoral having resumed her work, Marius proceeded,—

"The thought that she whom I loved was poor delighted me. Was not this similarity of positions a link

between us? I felt a childish joy to think that I would work for her and for her mother, and that they would be indebted to me for their ease and comfort in life.

“But I am not one of those dreamers who confide their destiny to the wings of a chimera. Before undertaking any thing, I resolved to inform myself. Alas! at the first words that I heard, all my fine dreams took wings. I heard that she was rich, very rich. I was told that her father was one of those men whose rigid probity surrounds itself with austere and harsh forms. He owed his fortune, I was assured, to his sole labor, but also to prodigies of economy and the most severe privations. He professed a worship, they said, for that gold that had cost him so much; and he would never give the hand of his daughter to a man who had no money. This last comment was useless. Above my actions, my thoughts, my hopes, higher than all, soars my pride. Instantly I saw an abyss opening between me and her whom I love more than my life, but less than my dignity. When a man's name is Genost de Trégars, he must support his wife, were it by breaking stones. And the thought that I owed my fortune to the woman I married would make me execrate her.

“You must remember, my old friend, that I told you all this at the time. You thought, too, that it was singularly impertinent, on my part, thus to flare up in advance, because certainly a millionaire does not give his daughter to a ruined nobleman in the pay of Marcolet, the patent-broker, to a poor devil of an inventor, who is building the castles of his future upon the solution of a problem which has been given up by the most brilliant minds.

“It was then that I determined upon an extreme resolution, a foolish one, no doubt, and yet to which you,

the Count de Villegré, my father's old friend, you have consented to lend yourself.

"I thought that I would address myself to her, to her alone, and that she would at least know what great, what immense love she had inspired. I thought I would go to her and tell her, 'This is who I am, and what I am. For mercy's sake, grant me a respite of three years. To a love such as mine there is nothing impossible. In three years I shall be dead, or rich enough to ask your hand. From this day forth, I give up my task for work of more immediate profit. The arts of industry have treasures for successful inventors. If you could only read in my soul, you would not refuse me the delay I am asking. Forgive me! One word, for mercy's sake, only one! It is my sentence that I am awaiting.'"

Mlle. Gilberte's thoughts were in too great a state of confusion to permit her to think of being offended at this extraordinary proceeding.

She rose, quivering, and addressing herself to Mme. Favoral,—

"Come, mother," she said, "come: I feel that I have taken cold. I must go home and think. To-morrow, yes, to-morrow, we will come again."

Deep as Mme. Favoral was plunged in her meditations, and a thousand miles as she was from the actual situation, it was impossible that she should not notice the intense excitement under which her daughter labored, the alteration of her features, and the incoherence of her words.

"What is the matter?" she asked, somewhat alarmed. "What are you saying?"

"I feel unwell," answered her daughter in a scarcely audible voice, "quite unwell. Come, let us go home."

As soon as they reached home, Mlle. Gilberte took

refuge in her own room. She was in haste to be alone, to recover her self-possession, to collect her thoughts, more scattered than dry leaves by a storm wind.

It was a momentous event which had just suddenly fallen in her life so monotonous and so calm,—an inconceivable, startling event, the consequences of which were to weigh heavily upon her entire future.

Staggering still, she was asking herself if she was not the victim of an hallucination, and if really there was a man who had dared to conceive and execute the audacious project of coming thus under the eyes of her mother, of declaring his love, and of asking her in return a solemn engagement. But what stupefied her more still, what confused her, was that she had actually endured such an attempt.

Under what despotic influence had she, then, fallen? To what undefinable sentiments had she obeyed? And if she had only tolerated! But she had done more: she had actually encouraged. By detaining her mother when she wished to go home (and she had detained her), had she not said to this unknown?—

“Go on, I allow it: I am listening.”

And he had gone on. And she, at the moment of returning home, she had engaged herself formally to reflect, and to return the next day at a stated hour to give an answer. In a word, she had made an appointment with him.

It was enough to make her die of shame. And, as if she had needed the sound of her own words to convince herself of the reality of the fact, she kept repeating loud,—

“I have made an appointment,—I, Gilberte, with a man whom my parents do not know, and of whose name I was still ignorant yesterday.”

And yet she could not take upon herself to be indignant at the imprudent boldness of her conduct. The bitterness of the reproaches which she was addressing to herself was not sincere. She felt it so well, that at last,—

“Such hypocrisy is unworthy of me,” she exclaimed, “since now, still, and without the excuse of being taken by surprise, I would not act otherwise.”

The fact is, the more she pondered, the less she could succeed in discovering even the shadow of any offensive intention in all that Marius de Trégars had said. By the choice of his confidant, an old man, a friend of his family, a man of the highest respectability, he had done all in his power to make his step excusable. It was impossible to doubt his sincerity, to suspect the fairness of his intentions.

Mlle. Gilberte, better than almost any other young girl, could understand the extreme measure resorted to by M. de Trégars. By her own pride she could understand his. No more than he, in his place, would she have been willing to expose herself to a certain refusal. What was there, then, so extraordinary in the fact of his coming directly to her, in his exposing to her frankly and loyally his situation, his projects, and his hopes?

“Good heavens!” she thought, horrified at the sentiments which she discovered in the deep recesses of her soul, “good heavens! I hardly know myself any more. Here I am actually approving what he has done!”

Well, yes, she did approve him, attracted, fascinated, by the very strangeness of the situation. Nothing seemed to her more admirable than the conduct of Marius de Trégars sacrificing his fortune and his most legitimate aspirations to the honor of his name, and condemning himself to work for his living.

"That one," she thought, "is a man; and his wife will have just cause to be proud of him."

Involuntarily she compared him to the only men she knew,—to M. Favoral, whose miserly parsimony had made his whole family wretched; to Maxence, who did not blush to feed his disorders with the fruits of his mother's and his sister's labor.

How different was Marius! If he was poor, it was of his own will. Had she not seen what confidence he had in himself. She shared it fully. She felt certain, that, within the required delay, he would conquer that indispensable fortune. Then he might present himself boldly. He would take her away from the miserable surroundings among which she seemed fated to live: she would become the Marchioness de Trégars.

"Why, then, not answer, Yes!" thought she, with the harrowing emotions of the gambler who is about to stake his all upon one card. And what a game for Mlle. Gilberte, and what a stake!

Suppose she had been mistaken. Suppose that Marius should be one of those villains who make of seduction a science. Would she still be her own mistress, after answering? Did she know to what hazards such an engagement would expose her? Was she not about rushing blindfolded towards those deceiving 'perils where a young girl leaves her reputation, even when she saves her honor?

She thought, for a moment, of consulting her mother. But she knew Mme. Favoral's shrinking timidity, and that she was as incapable of giving any advice as to make her will prevail. She would be frightened; she would approve all; and, at the first alarm, she would confess all.

"Am I, then, so weak and so foolish," she thought,

"that I cannot take a determination which affects me personally?"

She could not close her eyes all night; but in the morning her resolution was settled.

And toward one o'clock,—

"Are we not going out mother?" she said.

Mme. Favoral was hesitating.

"These early spring days are treacherous," she objected: "you caught cold yesterday."

"My dress was too thin. To-day I have taken my precautions."

They started, taking their work with them, and came to occupy their accustomed seats.

Before they had even passed the gates, Mlle. Gilberte had recognized Marius de Trégars and the Count de Villegré, walking in one of the side alleys. Soon, as on the day before, they took two chairs, and settled themselves within hearing.

Never had the young girl's heart beat with such violence. It is easy enough to take a resolution; but it is not always quite so easy to execute it, and she was asking herself if she would have strength enough to articulate a word. At last, gathering her whole courage,—

"You don't believe in dreams, do you mother?" she asked.

Upon this subject, as well as upon many others, Mme. Favoral had no particular opinion.

"Why do you ask the question?" said she.

"Because I have had such a strange one."

"Oh!"

"It seemed to me that suddenly a young man, whom I did not know, stood before me. He would have been most happy, said he to me, to ask my hand, but he dared

not, being very poor. And he begged me to wait three years, during which he would make his fortune."

Mme. Favoral smiled.

"Why it's quite a romance," said she.

"But it wasn't a romance in my dream," interrupted Mlle. Gilberte. "This young man spoke in a tone of such profound conviction, that it was impossible for me, as it were, to doubt him. I thought to myself that he would be incapable of such an odious villainy as to abuse the confiding credulity of a poor girl."

"And what did you answer him?"

Moving her seat almost imperceptibly, Mlle. Gilberte could, from the corner of her eye, have a glimpse of M. de Trégars. Evidently he was not missing a single one of the words which she was addressing to her mother. He was whiter than a sheet; and his face betrayed the most intense anxiety.

This gave her the energy to curb the last revolts of her conscience.

"To answer was painful," she uttered; "and yet I dared to answer him. I said to him, 'I believe you, and I have faith in you. Loyal and faithfully I shall await your success; but until then we must be strangers to one another. To resort to ruse, deceit, and falsehood would be unworthy of us. You surely would not expose to a suspicion her who is to be your wife.'"

"Very well," approved Mme. Favoral; "only I did not know you were so romantic."

She was laughing, the good lady, but not loud enough to prevent Gilberte from hearing M. de Trégars's answer.

"Count de Villegré," said he, "my old friend, receive the oath which I take to devote my life to her who has not doubted me. It is to-day the 4th of May, 1870:

on the 4th of May, 1873, I shall have succeeded: I feel it, I will it, it must be!"

XV.

It was done: Gilberte Favoral had just irrevocably disposed of herself. Prosperous or wretched, her destiny henceforth was linked with another. She had set the wheel in motion; and she could no longer hope to control its direction, any more than the will can pretend to alter the course of the ivory ball upon the surface of the roulette-table. At the outset of this great storm of passion which had suddenly surrounded her, she felt an immense surprise, mingled with unexplained apprehensions and vague terrors.

Around her, apparently, nothing was changed. Father, mother, brother, friends, gravitated mechanically in their accustomed orbits. The same daily facts repeated themselves monotonous and regular as the tick-tack of the clock.

And yet an event had occurred more prodigious for her than the moving of a mountain.

Often during the weeks that followed, she would repeat to herself, "Is it true, is it possible even?"

Or else she would run to a mirror to make sure once more that nothing upon her face or in her eyes betrayed the secret that palpitated within her.

The singularity of the situation was, moreover, well calculated to trouble and confound her mind.

Mastered by circumstances, she had in utter disregard of all accepted ideas, and of the commonest propriety, listened to the passionate promises of a stranger, and

pledged her life to him. And, the pact concluded and solemnly sworn, they had parted without knowing when propitious circumstances might bring them together again.

"Certainly," thought she, "before God, M. de Trégars is my betrothed husband; and yet we have never exchanged a word. Were we to meet in society, we should be compelled to meet as strangers: if he passes by me in the street, he has no right to bow to me. I know not where he is, what becomes of him, nor what he is doing."

And in fact she had not seen him again: he had given no sign of life, so faithfully did he conform to her expressed wish. And perhaps secretly, and without acknowledging it to herself, had she wished him less scrupulous. Perhaps she would not have been very angry to see him sometimes gliding along at her passage under the old Arcades of the Rue des Vosges.

But, whilst suffering from this separation, she conceived for the character of Marius the highest esteem; for she felt sure that he must suffer as much and more than she from the restraint which he imposed upon himself.

Thus he was ever present to her thoughts. She never tired of turning over in her mind all he had said of his past life: she tried to remember his words, and the very tone of his voice.

And by living constantly thus with the memory of Marius de Trégars, she made herself familiar with him, deceived to that extent, by the illusion of absence, that she actually persuaded herself that she knew him better and better every day.

Already nearly a month had elapsed, when one afternoon, as she arrived on the Place Royale, she recog-

nized him, standing near that same bench where they had so strangely exchanged their pledges.

He saw her coming too: she knew it by his looks. But, when she had arrived within a few steps of him, he walked off rapidly, leaving on the bench a folded newspaper.

Mme. Favoral wished to call him back and return it; but Mlle. Gilberte persuaded her not to.

"Never mind, mother," said she, "it isn't worth while; and, besides, the gentleman is too far now."

But while getting out her embroidery, with that dexterity which never fails even the most *naïve* girls, she slipped the newspaper in her work-basket.

Was she not certain that it had been left there for her?

As soon as she had returned home, she locked herself up in her own room, and, after searching for some time through the columns, she read at last,—

"One of the richest and most intelligent manufacturers in Paris, M. Marcolet, has just purchased in Grenelle the vast grounds belonging to the Lacoche estate. He proposes to build upon them a manufacture of chemical products, the management of which is to be placed in the hands of M. de T——.

"Although still quite young, M. de T—— is already well known in connection with his remarkable studies on electricity. He was, perhaps, on the eve of solving the much controverted problem of electricity as a motive-power, when his father's ruin compelled him to suspend his labors. He now seeks to earn by his personal industry the means of prosecuting his costly experiments.

"He is not the first to tread this path. Is it not to the invention of the machine bearing his name, that the

engineer Giffard owes the fortune which enables him to continue to seek the means of steering balloons? Why should not M. de T——, who has as much skill and energy, have as much luck? ”

“ Ah! he does not forget me,” thought Mlle. Gilberte, moved to tears by this article, which, after all, was but a mere puff, written by Marcolet himself, without the knowledge of M. de Trégars.

She was still under that impression, thinking that Marius was already at work, when her father announced to her that he had discovered a husband, and enjoined her to find him to her liking, as he, the master, thought it proper that she should.

Hence the energy of her refusal.

But hence also, the imprudent vivacity which had enlightened Mme. Favoral, and which made her say,—

“ You hide something from me, Gilberte? ”

Never had the young girl been so cruelly embarrassed as she was at this moment by this sudden and unforeseen perspicacity.

Would she confide to her mother?

She felt, indeed, no repugnance to do so, certain as she was, in advance, of the inexhaustible indulgence of the poor woman; and, besides, she would have been delighted to have some one at last with whom she could speak of Marius.

But she knew that her father was not the man to give up a project conceived by himself. She knew that he would return to the charge obstinately, without peace, and without truce. Now, as she was determined to resist with a no less implacable obstinacy, she foresaw terrible struggles, all sorts of violence and persecutions.

Informed of the truth, would Mme. Favoral have strength enough to resist these daily storms? Would

not a time come, when, called upon by her husband to explain the refusals of her daughter, threatened, terrified, she would confess all?

At one glance Mlle. Gilberte estimated the danger; and, drawing from necessity an audacity which was very foreign to her nature,—

“You are mistaken, dear mother,” said she, “I have concealed nothing from you.”

Not quite convinced, Mme. Favoral shook her head.

“Then,” said she, “you will yield.”

“Never!”

“Then there must be some reason you do not tell me.”

“None, except that I do not wish to leave you. Have you ever thought what would be your existence if I were no longer here? Have you ever asked yourself what would become of you, between my father, whose despotism will grow heavier with age, and my brother?”

Always prompt to defend her son,—

“Maxence is not bad,” she interrupted: “he will know how to compensate me for the sorrows he has inflicted upon me.”

The young girl made a gesture of doubt,—

“I wish it, dear mother,” said she, “with all my heart; but I dare not hope for it. His repentance to-night was great and sincere; but will he remember it to-morrow? Besides, don’t you know that father has fully resolved to separate himself from Maxence? Think of yourself alone here with father.”

Mme. Favoral shuddered at the mere idea.

“I would not suffer very long,” she murmured.

Mlle. Gilberte kissed her.

“It is because I wish you to live to be happy that I refuse to marry,” she exclaimed. “Must you not have your share of happiness in this world? Let me manage.

Who knows what compensations the future may have in store for you? Besides, this person whom father has selected for me does not suit me. A stock-jobber, who would think of nothing but money, who would examine my house-accounts as papa does yours, or else who would load me with cashmeres and diamonds, like Mme. de Thaller, to make of me a sign for his shop? No, no! I want no such man. So, mother dear, be brave, take sides boldly with your daughter, and we shall soon be rid of this would-be husband."

"Your father will bring him to you: he said he would."

"Well, he is a man of courage, if he returns three times."

At this moment the parlor-door opened suddenly.

"What are you plotting here again?" cried the irritated voice of the master. "And you, Mme. Favoral, why don't you go to bed?"

The poor slave obeyed, without saying a word. And, whilst making her way to her room,—

"There is trouble ahead," thought Mlle. Gilberte. "But bash! If I do have to suffer some, it won't be great harm, after all. Surely Marius does not complain, though he gives up for me his dearest hopes, becomes the salaried employé of M. Marcolet, and thinks of nothing but making money,—he so proud and so disinterested!"

Mlle. Gilberte's anticipations were but too soon realized. When M. Favoral made his appearance the next morning, he had the sombre brow and contracted lips of a man who has spent the night ruminating a plan from which he does not mean to swerve.

Instead of going to his office, as usual, without saying a word to any one, he called his wife and children to the

parlor; and, after having carefully bolted all the doors, he turned to Maxence.

"I want you," he commenced, "to give me a list of your creditors. See that you forget none; and let it be ready as soon as possible."

But Maxence was no longer the same man. After the terrible and well-deserved reproaches of his sister, a salutary revolution had taken place in him. During the preceding night, he had reflected over his conduct for the past four years; and he had been dismayed and terrified. His impression was like that of the drunkard, who, having become sober, remembers the ridiculous or degrading acts which he has committed under the influence of alcohol, and, confused and humiliated, swears never more to drink.

Thus Maxence had sworn to himself to change his mode of life, promising that it would be no drunkard's oath, either. And his attitude and his looks showed the pride of great resolutions.

Instead of lowering his eyes before the irritated glance of M. Favoral, and stammering excuses and vague promises,—

"It is useless, father," he replied, "to give you the list you ask for. I am old enough to bear the responsibility of my acts. I shall repair my follies: what I owe, I shall pay. This very day I shall see my creditors, and make arrangements with them."

"Very well, Maxence," exclaimed Mme. Favoral, delighted.

But there was no pacifying the cashier of the Mutual Credit.

"Those are fine-sounding words," he said with a sneer; "but I doubt if the tailors and the shirt-makers will take them in payment. That's why I want that list."

"Still"—

"It's I who shall pay. I do not mean to have another such scene as that of yesterday in my office. It must not be said that my son is a sharper and a cheat at the very moment when I find for my daughter a most unhoped-for match."

And, turning to Mlle. Gilberte,—

"For I suppose you have got over your foolish ideas," he uttered.

The young girl shook her head.

"My ideas are the same as they were last night."

"Ah, ah!"

"And so, father, I beg of you, do not insist. Why wrangle and quarrel? You must know me well enough to know, that, whatever may happen, I shall never yield."

Indeed, M. Favoral was well aware of his daughter's firmness; for he had already been compelled on several occasions, as he expressed it himself, "to strike his flag" before her. But he could not believe that she would resist when he took certain means of enforcing his will.

"I have pledged my word," he said.

"But I have not pledged mine, father."

He was becoming excited: his cheeks were flushed; and his little eyes sparkled.

"And suppose I were to tell you," he resumed, doing at least to his daughter the honor of controlling his anger,—“suppose I were to tell you that I would derive from this marriage immense, positive, and immediate advantages?"

"Oh!" she interrupted with a look of disgust, "oh, for mercy's sake!"

"Suppose I were to tell you that I have a powerful

interest in it; that it is indispensable to the success of vast combinations?"

Mlle. Gilberte looked straight at him.

"I would answer you," she exclaimed, "that it does not suit me to be made use of as an earnest to your combinations. Ah! it's an operation, is it? an enterprise, a big speculation? and you throw in your daughter in the bargain as a bonus. Well, no! You can tell your partner that the thing has fallen through."

M. Favoral's anger was growing with each word.

"I'll see if I can't make you yield," he said.

"You may crush me, perhaps. Make me yield, never!"

"Well, we shall see. You will see—Maxence and you—whether there are no means by which a father can compel his rebellious children to submit to his authority."

And, feeling that he was no longer master of himself, he left, swearing loud enough to shake the plaster from the stair-walls.

Maxence shook with indignation.

"Never," he uttered, "never until now, had I understood the infamy of my conduct. With a father such as ours, Gilberte, I should be your protector. And now I am debarred even of the right to interfere. But never mind, I have the will; and all will soon be repaired."

Left alone, a few moments after, Mlle. Gilberte was congratulating herself upon her firmness.

"I am sure," she thought, "Marius would approve, if he knew."

She had not long to wait for her reward. The bell rang: it was her old professor, the Signor Gismondo Pulei, who came to give her his daily lesson.

The liveliest joy beamed upon his face, more shriv-

elled than an apple at Easter ; and the most magnificent anticipations sparkled in his eyes.

" I knew it, signora ! " he exclaimed from the threshold : " I knew that angels bring good luck. As every thing succeeds to you, so must every thing succeed to those who come near you."

She could not help smiling at the appropriateness of the compliment.

" Something fortunate has happened to you, dear master ? " she asked.

" That is to say, I am on the high-road to fortune and glory," he replied. " My fame is extending ; pupils dispute the privilege of my lesson."

Mlle. Gilberte knew too well the thoroughly Italian exaggeration of the worthy *maestro* to be surprised.

" This morning," he went on, " visited by inspiration, I had risen early, and I was working with marvellous facility, when there was a knock at my door. I do not remember such an occurrence since the blessed day when your worthy father called for me. Surprised, I nevertheless said, ' Come in ; ' when there appeared a tall and robust young man, proud and intelligent-looking."

The young girl started.

" Marius ! " cried a voice within her."

" This young man," continued the old Italian, " had heard me spoken of, and came to apply for lessons. I questioned him ; and from the first words I discovered that his education had been frightfully neglected, that he was ignorant of the most vulgar notions of the divine art, and that he scarcely knew the difference between a sharp and a quaver. It was really the A, B, C, which he wished me to teach him. Laborious task, ungrateful labor ! But he manifested so much shame at his ignorance,

and so much desire to be instructed, that I felt moved in his favor. Then his countenance was most winning, his voice of a superior tone; and finally he offered me sixty francs a month. In short, he is now my pupil."

As well as she could, Mlle. Gilberte was hiding her blushes behind a music-book.

"We remained over two hours talking," said the good and simple *maestro*, "and I believe that he has excellent dispositions. Unfortunately, he can only take two lessons a week. Although a nobleman, he works; and, when he took off his glove to hand me a month in advance, I noticed that one of his hands was blackened, as if burnt by some acid. But never mind, signora, sixty francs, together with what your father gives me, it's a fortune. The end of my career will be spared the privations of its beginning. This young man will help making me known. The morning has been dark; but the sunset will be glorious."

The young girl could no longer have any doubts: M. de Trégars had found the means of hearing from her, and letting her hear from him.

The impression she felt contributed no little to give her the patience to endure the obstinate persecution of her father, who, twice a day, never failed to repeat to her,—

"Get ready to properly receive my *protégé* on Saturday. I have not invited him to dinner: he will only spend the evening with us."

And he mistook for a disposition to yield the cold tone in which she answered,—

"I beg you to believe that this introduction is wholly unnecessary."

Thus, the famous day having come, he told his usual

Saturday guests, M. and Mme. Desclavettes, M. Chapelain, and old man Desormeaux,—

“Eh, eh! I guess you are going to see a future son-in-law!”

At nine o'clock, just as they had passed into the parlor, the sound of carriage-wheels startled the Rue St. Gilles.

“There he is!” exclaimed the cashier of the Mutual Credit.

And, throwing open a window,—

“Come, Gilberte,” he added, “come and see his carriage and horses.”

She never stirred; but M. Desclavettes and M. Chapelain ran. It was night, unfortunately; and of the whole equipage nothing was visible but the two lanterns that shone like stars. Almost at the same time the parlor-door flew open; and the servant, who had been properly trained in advance, announced,—

“Monsieur Costeclar.”

Leaning toward Mme. Favoral, who was seated by her side on the sofa,—

“A nice-looking man, isn't he? a really nice-looking man,” whispered Mme. Desclavettes.

And indeed he really thought so himself. Gesture, attitude, smile, every thing in M. Costeclar, betrayed the satisfaction of self, and the assurance of a man accustomed to success. His head, which was very small, had but little hair left; but it was artistically drawn towards the temples, parted in the middle, and cut short around the forehead. His leaden complexion, his pale lips, and his dull eye, did not certainly betray a very rich blood; but he had a great long nose, sharp and curved like a sickle; and his beard, of undecided color, trimmed in

the Victor Emmanuel style, did the greatest honor to the barber who cultivated it. Even when seen for the first time, one might fancy that he recognized him, so exactly was he like three or four hundred others who are seen daily in the neighborhood of the Café Riche, who are met everywhere where people run who pretend to amuse themselves,—at the *bourse* or in the *bois*; at the first representations, where they are just enough hidden to be perfectly well seen at the back of boxes filled with young ladies with astonishing chignons; at the races; in carriages, where they drink champagne to the health of the winner.

He had on this occasion *hoisted* his best looks, and the full dress *de rigueur*,—dress-coat with wide sleeves, shirt cut low in the neck, and open vest, fastened below the waist by a single button.

“Quite the man of the world,” again remarked Mme. Desclavettes.

M. Favoral rushed toward him; and the latter, hastening, met him half way, and, taking both his hands into his,—

“I cannot tell you, dear friend,” he commenced, “how deeply I feel the honor you do me in receiving me in the midst of your charming family and your respectable friends.”

And he bowed all around during this speech, which he delivered in the condescending tone of a lord visiting his inferiors.

“Let me introduce you to my wife,” interrupted the cashier. And, leading him towards Mme. Favoral,—

“Monsieur Costeclar, my dear,” said he,—“the friend of whom we have spoken so often.”

M. Costeclar bowed, rounding his shoulders, bending

his lean form in a half-circle, and letting his arms hang forward.

"I am too much the friend of our dear Favoral, madame," he uttered, "not to have heard of you long since, nor to know your merits, and the fact that he owes to you that peaceful happiness which he enjoys, and which we all envy him."

Standing by the mantel-piece, the usual Saturday-evening guests followed with the liveliest interest the evolutions of the pretender. Two of them, M. Chapelain and old Desormeaux, were perfectly able to appreciate him at his just value; but, in affirming that he made half a million a year, M. Favoral had, as it were, thrown over his shoulders that famous ducal cloak which concealed all deformities.

Without waiting for his wife's answer, M. Favoral brought his *protégé* in front of Mlle. Gilberte.

"Dear daughter," said he, "Monsieur Costeclar, the friend of whom I have spoken."

M. Costeclar bowed still lower, and rounded off his shoulders again; but the young lady looked at him from head to foot with such a freezing glance, that his tongue remained as if paralyzed in his mouth, and he could only stammer out,—

"Mademoiselle! the honor, the humblest of your admirers."

Fortunately Maxence was standing three steps off: he fell back in good order upon him, and seizing his hand, which he shook vigorously,—

"I hope, my dear sir, that we shall soon be quite intimate friends. Your excellent father, whose special concern you are, has often spoken to me of you. Events, so he has confided to me, have not hitherto responded to

your expectations. At your age, this is not a very grave matter. People, now-a-days, do not always find at the first attempt the road that leads to fortune. You will find yours. From this time forth I place at your command my influence and my experience; and, if you will consent to take me for your guide"—

Maxence had withdrawn his hand.

"I am very much obliged to you, sir," he answered coldly; "but I am content with my lot, and I believe myself old enough to walk alone."

Almost any one would have lost countenance. But M. Costeclar was so little put out, that it seemed as though he had expected just such a reception. He turned upon his heels, and advanced towards M. Favoral's friends with a smile so engaging as to make it evident that he was anxious to conquer their suffrages.

This was at the beginning of the month of June, 1870. No one as yet could foresee the frightful disasters which were to mark the end of that fatal year. And yet there was everywhere in France that indefinable anxiety which precedes great social convulsions. The plebiscitum had not succeeded in restoring confidence. Every day the most alarming rumors were put in circulation; and it was with a sort of passion that people went in quest of news.

Now, M. Costeclar was a wonderfully well-posted man. He had, doubtless, on his way, stopped on the Boulevard des Italiens, that blessed ground where nightly the street-brokers labor for the financial prosperity of the country. He had gone through the Passage de l'Opéra, which is, as is well known, the best market for the most correct and the most reliable news. Therefore he might safely be believed.

Placing his back to the chimney, he had taken the lead

in the conversation; and he was talking, talking, talking. Being a "bull," he took a favorable view of every thing. He believed in the eternity of the second empire. He sang the praise of the new cabinet: he was ready to pour out his blood for Émile Ollivier. True, some people complained that business was dull and slow; but those people, he thought, were merely "bears." Business had never been so brilliant. At no time had prosperity been greater. Capital was abundant. The institutions of credit were flourishing. Securities were rising. Everybody's pockets were full to bursting. And the others listened in astonishment to this inexhaustible prattle, this "gab," more filled with gold spangles than Dantzig cordial, with which the commercial travellers of the *bourse* catch their customers.

Suddenly,—

"But you must excuse me," he said, rushing towards the other end of the parlor.

Mme. Favoral had just left the room to order tea to be brought in; and, the seat by Mlle. Gilberte being vacant, M. Costeclar occupied it promptly.

"He understands his business," growled M. Desormeaux.

"Surely," said M. Desclavettes, "If I had some funds to dispose of just now."

"I would be most happy to have him for my son-in-law," declared M. Favoral.

He was doing his best. Somewhat intimidated by Mlle. Gilberte's first look, he had now fully recovered his wits.

He commenced by sketching his own portrait.

He had just turned thirty, and had experienced the strong and the weak side of life. He had had "successes," but had tired of them. Having gauged the emp-

tininess of what is called pleasure, he only wished now to find a partner for life, whose graces and virtues would secure his domestic happiness.

He could not help noticing the absent look of the young girl; but he had, thought he, other means of compelling her attention. And he went on, saying that he felt himself cast of the metal of which model husbands are made. His plans were all made in advance. His wife would be free to do as she pleased. She would have her own carriage and horses, her box at the Italiens and at the Opera, and an open account at Worth's and Van Klopen's. As to diamonds, he would take care of that. He meant that his wife's display of wealth should be noticed, and even spoken of in the newspapers.

Was this the terms of a bargain that he was offering?

If so, it was so coarsely, that Mlle. Gilberte, ignorant of life as she was, wondered in what world it might be that he had met with so many "successes."

And, somewhat indignantly,—

"Unfortunately," she said, "the *bourse* is perfidious; and the man who drives his own carriage to-day, to-morrow may have no shoes to wear."

M. Costeclar nodded with a smile.

"Exactly so," said he. "A marriage protects one against such reverses."

"Ah!"

"Every man in active business, when he marries, settles upon his wife a reasonable fortune. I expect to settle six hundred thousand francs upon mine."

"So that, if you were to meet with an—accident?"

"We should enjoy our thirty thousand a year under the very nose of the creditors."

Blushing with shame, Mlle. Gilberte rose.

"But then," said she, "it isn't a wife that you are looking for: it is an accomplice."

He was spared the embarrassment of an answer, by the servant, who came in, bringing in tea. He accepted a cup; and after two or three anecdotes, judging that he had done enough for a first visit, he withdrew, and a moment later they heard his carriage driving off at full gallop.

XVI.

It was not without mature thought that M. Costeclar had determined to withdraw, despite M. Favoral's pressing overtures. However infatuated he might be with his own merits, he had been compelled to surrender to evidence, and to acknowledge that he had not exactly succeeded with Mlle. Gilberte. But he also knew that he had the head of the house on his side; and he flattered himself that he had produced an excellent impression upon the guests of the house.

"Therefore," had he said to himself, "if I leave first, they will sing my praise, lecture the young person, and make her listen to reason."

He was not far from being right. Mme. Desclavettes had been completely subjugated by the grand manners of this pretender; and M. Desclavettes did not hesitate to affirm that he had rarely met any one who pleased him more.

The others, M. Chapelain and old Desormeaux, did not, doubtless, share this optimism; but M. Costeclar's annual half-million obscured singularly their clear-sightedness.

They thought, perhaps, they had discovered in him

some alarming features; but they had full and entire confidence in their friend Favoral's prudent sagacity.

The particular and methodic cashier of the Mutual Credit was not apt to be enthusiastic; and, if he opened the doors of his house to a young man, if he was so anxious to have him for his son-in-law, he must evidently have taken ample information.

Finally there are certain family matters from which sensible people keep away as they would from the plague; and, on the question of marriage especially, he is a bold man who would take side for or against.

Thus Mme. Desclavettes was the only one to raise her voice. Taking Mlle. Gilberte's hands within hers,—

"Let me scold you, my dear," said she, "for having received thus a poor young man who was only trying to please you."

Excepting her mother, too weak to take her defence, and her brother, who was debarred from interfering, the young girl understood readily, that, in that parlor, every one, overtly or tacitly, was against her. The idea came to her mind to repeat there boldly what she had already told her father,—that she was resolved not to marry, and that she would not marry, not being one of those weak girls, without energy, whom they dress in white, and drag to church against their will.

Such a bold declaration would be in keeping with her character. But she feared a terrible, and perhaps degrading scene. The most intimate friends of the family were ignorant of its most painful sores. In presence of his friends, M. Favoral dissembled, speaking in a mild voice, and assuming a kindly smile. Should she suddenly reveal the truth?

"It is childish of you to run the risk of discouraging

a clever fellow who makes half a million a year," continued the wife of the old bronze-merchant, to whom such conduct seemed an abominable crime of lese-money.

Mlle. Gilberte had withdrawn her hands.

"You did not hear what he said, madame."

"I beg your pardon: I was quite near, and involuntarily"—

"You have heard his—propositions?"

"Perfectly. He was promising you a carriage, a box at the opera, diamonds, freedom. Isn't that the dream of all young ladies?"

"It is not mine, madame!"

"Dear me! What better can you wish? You must not expect more from a husband than he can possibly give."

"That is not what I shall expect of him."

In a tone of paternal indulgence, which his looks belied,—

"She is mad," suggested M. Favoral.

Tears of indignation filled Mlle. Gilberte's eyes.

"Mme. Desclavettes," she exclaimed, "forgets something. She forgets that this gentleman dared to tell me that he proposed to settle upon the woman he marries a large fortune, of which his creditors would thus be cheated in case of his failure in business."

She thought, in her simplicity, that a cry of indignation would rise at these words. Instead of which,—

"Well, isn't it perfectly natural?" said M. Desclavettes.

"It seems to me more than natural," insisted Mme. Desclavettes, "that a man should be anxious to preserve from ruin his wife and children."

"Of course," put in M. Favoral.

Stepping resolutely toward her father,—

“Have you, then, taken such precautions yourself?” demanded Mlle. Gilberte.

“No,” answered the cashier of the Mutual Credit.

And, after a moment of hesitation,—

“But I am running no risks,” he added. “In business, and when a man may be ruined by a mere rise or fall in stocks, he would be insane indeed who did not secure bread for his family, and, above all, means for himself, wherewith to commence again. The Baron de Thaller did not act otherwise; and, should he meet with a disaster, Mme. de Thaller would still have a handsome fortune.”

M. Desormeaux was, perhaps, the only one not to admit freely that theory, and not to accept that ever-decisive reason, “Others do it.”

But he was a philosopher, and thought it silly not to be of his time. He therefore contented himself with saying,—

“Hum! M. de Thaller’s creditors might not think that mode of proceeding entirely regular.”

“Then they might sue,” said M. Chapelain, laughing. “People can always sue; only when the papers are well drawn”—

Mlle. Gilberte stood dismayed. She thought of Marius de Trégars giving up his mother’s fortune to pay his father’s debts.

“What would he say,” thought she, “should he hear such opinions!”

The cashier of the Mutual Credit resumed,—

“Surely I blame every species of fraud. But I pretend, and I maintain, that a man who has worked twenty years to give a handsome dowry to his daughter has the right to demand of his son-in-law certain conservative

measures to guarantee the money, which, after all, is his own, and which is to benefit no one but his own family."

This declaration closed the evening. It was getting late. The Saturday guests put on their overcoats; and, as they were walking home,—

"Can you understand that little Gilberte?" said Mme. Desclavettes. "I'd like to see a daughter of mine have such fancies! But her poor mother is so weak!"

"Yes; but friend Favoral is firm enough for both," interrupted M. Desormeaux; "and it is more than probable that at this very moment he is correcting his daughter of the sin of sloth."

Well, not at all. Extremely angry as M. Favoral must have been, neither that evening, nor the next day, did he make the remotest allusion to what had taken place.

The following Monday only, before leaving for his office, casting upon his wife and daughter one of his ugliest looks,—

"M. Costeclar owes us a visit," said he; "and it is possible that he may call in my absence. I wish him to be admitted; and I forbid you to go out, so that you can have no pretext to refuse him the door. I presume there will not be found in my house any one bold enough to ill receive a man whom I like, and whom I have selected for my son-in law."

But was it probable, was it even possible, that M. Costeclar could venture upon such a step after Mlle. Gilberte's treatment of him on the previous Saturday evening?

"No, a thousand times no!" affirmed Maxence to his mother and sister. "So you may rest easy."

Indeed they tried to be, until that very afternoon the sound of rapidly-rolling wheels attracted Mme. Favoral

to the window. A *coupé*, drawn by two gray horses, had just stopped at the door.

"It must be he," she said to her daughter.

Mlle. Gilberte had turned slightly pale.

"There is no help for it, mother," she said: "You must receive him."

"And you?"

"I shall remain in my room."

"Do you suppose he won't ask for you?"

"You will answer that I am unwell. He will understand."

"But your father, unhappy child, your father?"

"I do not acknowledge to my father the right of disposing of my person against my wishes. I detest that man to whom he wishes to marry me. Would you like to see me his wife, to know me given up to the most intolerable torture? No, there is no violence in the world that will ever wring my consent from me. So, mother dear, do what I ask you. My father can say what he pleases: I take the whole responsibility upon myself."

There was no time to argue: the bell rang. Mlle. Gilberte had barely time to escape through one of the doors of the parlor, whilst M. Costeclar was entering at the other.

If he did have enough perspicacity to guess what had just taken place, he did not in any way show it. He sat down; and it was only after conversing for a few moments upon indifferent subjects, that he asked how Mlle Gilberte was.

"She is somewhat—unwell," stammered Mme. Favoral.

He did not appear surprised; only,—

"Our dear Favoral," he said, "will be still more pained than I am when he hears of this mishap."

Better than any other mother, Mme. Favoral must have understood and approved Mlle. Gilberte's invincible repugnance. To her also, when she was young, her father had come one day, and said, "I have discovered a husband for you." She had accepted him blindly. Bruised and wounded by daily outrages, she had sought refuge in marriage as in a haven of safety.

And since, hardly a day had elapsed that she had not thought it would have been better for her to have died rather than to have riveted to her neck those fetters that death alone can remove. She thought, therefore, that her daughter was perfectly right. And yet twenty years of slavery had so weakened the springs of her energy, that under the glance of Costeclar, threatening her with her husband's name, she felt embarrassed, and could scarcely stammer some timid excuses. And she allowed him to prolong his visit, and consequently her torment, for over an half an hour; then, when he had gone,—

"He and your father understand each other," said she to her daughter, "that is but too evident. What is the use of struggling?"

A fugitive blush colored the pale cheeks of Mlle. Gilberte. For the past forty-eight hours she had been exhausting herself, seeking an issue to an impossible situation; and she had accustomed her mind to the worst eventualities.

"Do you wish me, then, to desert the paternal roof?" she exclaimed.

Mme. Favoral almost dropped on the floor.

"You would run away," she stammered, "you!"—

"Rather than become that man's wife, yes!"

"And where would you go, unfortunate child? what would you do?"

"I can earn my living."

Mme. Favoral shook her head sadly. The same suspicions were reviving within her that she had felt once before.

"Gilberte," she said in a beseeching tone, "am I, then, no longer your best friend? and will you not tell me from what sources you draw your courage and your resolution?"

And, as her daughter said nothing,—

"God alone knows what may happen!" sighed the poor woman.

Nothing happened, but what could have been easily foreseen. When M. Favoral came home to dinner, he was whistling a perfect storm on the stairs. He abstained at first from all recrimination; but towards the end of the meal, with the most sarcastic look he could assume,—

"It seems," he said to his daughter, "that you were unwell this afternoon?"

Bravely, and without flinching, she sustained his look; and, in a firm voice,—

"I shall always be indisposed," she replied, "when M. Costeclar calls. You hear me, don't you, father,—always!"

But the cashier of the Credit Mutual was not one of those men whose wrath finds vent in mere sarcasms. Rising suddenly to his feet,—

"By the holy heavens!" he screamed forth, "you are wrong to trifle thus with my will; for, all of you here, I shall crush you as I do this glass."

And, with a frenzied gesture, he dashed the glass he held in his hand against the wall, where it broke in a thousand pieces. Trembling like a leaf, Mme. Favoral staggered upon her chair.

XVII.

"BETTER kill her at once," said Mlle. Gilberte coldly. "She would suffer less."

It was by a torrent of invective that M. Favoral replied. His rage, dammed up for the past four days, finding at last an outlet, flowed in gross insults and insane threats. He spoke of throwing out in the street his wife and children, or starving them out, or shutting up his daughter in a house of correction; until at last, language failing his fury, beside himself, he left, swearing that he would bring M. Costeclar home himself, and then they would see.

"Very well, we shall see," said Mlle. Gilberte.

Motionless in his place, and white as a plaster cast, Maxence had witnessed this lamentable scene. A gleam of common-sense had enabled him to control his indignation, and to remain silent. He had understood, that, at the first word, his father's fury would have turned against him; and then what might have happened? The most frightful dramas of the criminal courts have often had no other origin.

"No, this is no longer bearable!" he exclaimed.

Even at the time of his greatest follies, Maxence had always had for his sister a fraternal affection. He admired her from the day she had stood up before him to reproach him for his misconduct. He envied her her quiet determination, her patient tenacity, and that calm energy that never failed her. .

"Have patience, my poor Gilberte," he added: "the day is not far, I hope, when I may commence to repay you all you have done for me. I have not lost my time since you restored me my reason. I have arranged with

my creditors. I have found a situation, which, if not brilliant, is at least sufficiently lucrative to enable me before long to offer you, as well as to our mother, a peaceful retreat."

"But it is to-morrow," interrupted Mme. Favoral, "to-morrow that your father is to bring M. Costeclar. He has said so, and he will do it."

And so he did. About two o'clock in the afternoon M. Favoral and his *protégé* arrived in the Rue St. Gilles, in that famous *coupé* with the two horses, which excited the wonder of the neighbors.

But Mlle. Gilberte had her plan ready. She was on the lookout; and, as soon as she heard the carriage stop, she ran to her room, undressed in a twinkling, and went to bed.

When her father came for her, and saw her in bed, he remained surprised and puzzled on the threshold of the door.

"And yet I'll make you come into the parlor!" he said in a hoarse voice.

"Then you must carry me there as I am," she said in a tone of defiance; "for I shall certainly not get up."

For the first time since his marriage, M. Favoral met in his own house a more inflexible will than his own, and a more unyielding obstinacy. He was baffled. He threatened his daughter with his clinched fists, but could discover no means of making her obey. He was compelled to surrender, to yield.

"This will be settled with the rest," he growled, as he went out.

"I fear nothing in the world, father," said the girl.

It was almost true, so much did the thought of Marius de Trégars inflame her courage. Twice already she had heard from him through the Signor Gismondo Pulei,

who never tired talking of this new pupil, to whom he had already given two lessons.

"He is the most gallant man in the world," he said, his eye sparkling with enthusiasm, "and the bravest, and the most generous, and the best; and no quality that can adorn one of God's creatures shall be wanting in him when I have taught him the divine art. It is not with a little contemptible gold that he means to reward my zeal. To him I am as a second father; and it is with the confidence of a son that he explains to me his labors and his hopes."

Thus Mlle. Gilberte learned through the old *maître*, that the newspaper article she had read was almost exactly true, and that M. de Trégars and M. Marcolet had become associated for the purpose of working, in joint account, certain recent discoveries, which bid fair to yield large profits in a near future.

"And yet it is for my sake alone that he has thus thrown himself into the turmoil of business, and has become as eager for gain as that M. Marcolet himself."

And, at the height of her father's persecutions, she felt glad of what she had done, and of her boldness in placing her destiny in the hands of a stranger. The memory of Marius had become her refuge, the element of all her dreams and of all her hopes; in a word, her life.

It was of Marius she was thinking, when her mother, surprising her gazing into vacancy, would ask her, "What are you thinking of?" And, at every new vexation she had to endure, her imagination decked him with a new quality, and she clung to him with a more desperate grasp.

"How much he would grieve," thought she, "if he knew of what persecution I am the object!"

And very careful was she not to allow the Signor Gismondo Pulei to suspect any thing of it, affecting, on the contrary, in his presence, the most cheerful serenity.

And yet she was a prey to the most cruel anxiety, since she observed a new and most incredible transformation in her father.

That man so violent and so harsh, who flattered himself never to have been bent, who boasted never to have forgotten or forgiven any thing, that domestic tyrant, had become quite a *debonair* personage. He had referred to the expedient imagined by Mlle. Gilberte only to laugh at it, saying that it was a good trick, and he deserved it; for he repented bitterly, he protested, his past brutalities.

He owned that he had at heart his daughter's marriage with M. Costeclar; but he acknowledged that he had made use of the surest means for making it fail. He should, he humbly confessed, have expected every thing of time and circumstances, of M. Costeclar's excellent qualities, and of his beautiful, darling daughter's good sense.

More than of all his violence, Mme. Favoral was terrified at this affected good nature.

"Dear me!" she sighed, "what does it all mean?"

But the cashier of the Mutual Credit was not preparing any new surprise to his family. If the means were different, it was still the same object that he was pursuing with the tenacity of an insect. When severity had failed, he hoped to succeed by gentleness, that's all. Only this assumption of hypocritical meekness was too new to him to deceive any one. At every moment the mask fell off, the claws showed, and his voice trembled with ill-suppressed rage in the midst of his most honeyed phrases.

Moreover, he entertained the strangest illusions.

Because for forty-eight hours he had acted the part of a good-natured man, because one Sunday he had taken his wife and daughter out riding in the Bois de Vincennes, because he had given Maxence a hundred-franc note, he imagined that it was all over, that the past was obliterated, forgotten, and forgiven.

And, drawing Gilberte upon his knees,—

“Well, daughter,” he said, “you see that I don’t importune you any more, and I leave you quite free. I am more reasonable than you are.”

But on the other hand, and according to an expression which escaped him later, he tried to turn the enemy.

He did every thing in his power to spread in the neighborhood the rumor of Mlle. Gilberte’s marriage with a financier of colossal wealth,—that elegant young man who came in a *coupé* with two horses. Mme. Favoral could not enter a shop without being covertly complimented upon having found such a magnificent establishment for her daughter.

Loud, indeed, must have been the gossip; for its echo reached even the inattentive ears of the Signor Gismondo Pulei.

One day, suddenly interrupting his lesson,—

“You are going to be married, signora?” he inquired.

Mlle. Gilberte started.

What the old Italian had heard, he would surely ere long repeat to Marius. It was therefore urgent to undeceive him.

“It is true,” she replied, “that something has been said about a marriage, dear *maestro*.”

“Ah, ah!”

"Only my father had not consulted me. That marriage will never take place: I swear it."

She expressed herself in a tone of such ardent conviction, that the old gentleman was quite astonished, little dreaming that it was not to him that this energetic denial was addressed.

"My destiny is irrevocably fixed," added Mlle. Gilberte. "When I marry, I will consult the inspirations of my heart only."

In the mean time, it was a veritable conspiracy against her. M. Favoral had succeeded in interesting in the success of his designs his habitual guests, not M. and Mme. Desclavettes, who had been seduced from the first, but M. Chapelain and old Desormeaux himself. So that they all vied with each other in their efforts to bring the "dear child" to reason, and to enlighten her with their counsels.

"Father must have a still more considerable interest in this alliance than he has allowed us to think," she remarked to her brother. Maxence was also absolutely of the same opinion.

"And then," he added, "our father must be terribly rich; for, do not deceive yourself, it isn't solely for your pretty blue eyes that this Costeclar persists in coming here twice a week to pocket a new mortification. What enormous dowry can he be hoping for? I am going to speak to him myself, and try to find out what he is after."

But Mlle. Gilberte had but slight confidence in her brother's diplomacy.

"I beg of you," she said, "don't meddle with that business!"

"Yes, yes, I will! Fear nothing, I'll be prudent."

Having taken his resolution, Maxence placed himself

on the lookout; and the very next day, as M. Costeclar was stepping out of his carriage at the door, he walked straight up to him.

"I wish to speak to you, sir," he said.

Self-possessed as he was, the brilliant financier succeeded but poorly in concealing a surprise that looked very much like fright.

"I am going in to call on your parents, sir," he replied; "and whilst waiting for your father, with whom I have an appointment, I shall be at your command."

"No, no!" interrupted Maxence. "What I have to say must be heard by you alone. Come along this way, and we shall not be interrupted."

And he led M. Costeclar away as far as the Place Royal. Once there,—

"You are very anxious to marry my sister, sir," he commenced.

During their short walk M. Costeclar had recovered himself. He had resumed all his impertinent assurance. Looking at Maxence from head to foot with any thing but a friendly look,—

"It is my dearest and my most ardent wish, sir," he replied.

"Very well. But you must have noticed the very slight success, to use no harsher word, of your assiduities."

"Alas!"

"And, perhaps, you will judge, like myself, that it would be the act of a gentleman to withdraw in presence of such positive—repugnance?"

An ugly smile was wandering upon M. Costeclar's pale lips.

"Is it at the request of your sister, sir, that you make me this communication?"

"No, sir."

"Are you aware whether your sister has some inclination that may be an obstacle to the realization of my hopes?"

"Sir!"

"Excuse me! What I say has nothing to offend. It might very well be that your sister, before I had the honor of being introduced to her, had already fixed her choice."

He spoke so loud, that Maxence looked sharply around to see whether there was not some one within hearing. He saw no one but a young man, who seemed quite absorbed reading a newspaper.

"But, sir," he resumed, "what would you answer, if I, the brother of the young lady whom you wish to marry against her wishes,—I called upon you to cease your assiduities?"

M. Costeclar bowed ceremoniously,—

"I would answer you, sir," he uttered, "that your father's assent is sufficient for me. My suit has nothing but is honorable. Your sister may not like me: that is a misfortune; but it is not irreparable. When she knows me better, I venture to hope that she will overcome her unjust prejudices. Therefore I shall persist."

Maxence insisted no more. He was irritated at M. Costeclar's coolness; but it was not his intention to push things further.

"There will always be time," he thought, "to resort to violent measures."

But when he reported this conversation to his sister,—

"It is clear," he said, "that, between our father and that man, there is a community of interests which I am unable to discover. What business have they together. In what respect can your marriage either help or injure

them. I must see, try and find out exactly who is this Costeclar: the deuse take him!"

He started out the same day, and had not far to go.

M. Costeclar was one of those personalities which only bloom in Paris, and are only met in Paris,—the same as cab-horses, and young ladies with yellow chignons.

He knew everybody, and everybody knew him.

He was well known at the *bourse*, in all the principal restaurants, where he called the waiters by their first names, at the box-office of the theatres, at all the pool-rooms, and at the European Club, otherwise called the Nomadic Club, of which he was a member.

He operated at the *bourse*: that was sure. He was said to own a third interest in a stock-broker's office. He had a good deal of business with M. Jottras, of the house of Jottras and Brother, and M. Saint Pavin, the manager of a very popular journal, "The Financial Pilot."

It was further known that he had, Rue Vivienne, a magnificent apartment, and that he had successively honored with his liberal protection Mlle. Sidney of the *Varieties*, and Mme. Jenny Fancy, a lady of a certain age already, but so situated as to return to her lovers in notoriety what they gave her in good money.

So much did Maxence learn without difficulty. As to any more precise details, it was impossible to obtain them. To his pressing questions upon M. Costeclar's antecedents,—

"He is a perfectly honest man," answered some.

"He is simply a speculator," affirmed others.

But all agreed that he was a "sharp one," who would surely make his fortune, and without passing through the police-courts, either.

"How can our father and such a man be so intimately connected?" wondered Maxence and his sister.

And they were lost in conjectures, when suddenly, at an hour when he never set his foot in the house, M. Favoral appeared.

Throwing a letter upon his daughter's lap,—

"See what I have just received from Costeclar," he said in a hoarse voice. "Read."

She read, "Allow me, dear friend, to release you from your engagement. Owing to circumstances absolutely beyond my control, I find myself compelled to give up the honor of becoming a member of your family."

What could have happened?

Standing in the middle of the parlor, the cashier of the Mutual Credit held, bowed down beneath his glance, his wife and children, Mme. Favoral trembling, Maxence starting in mute surprise, and Mlle. Gilberte, who needed all the strength of her will to control the explosion of her immense joy.

Every thing in M. Favoral betrayed, nevertheless, much more the excitement of a disaster than the rage of a deception.

Never had his family seen him thus,—livid, his cravat undone, his hair wet with perspiration, and clinging to his temples.

"Will you please explain this letter?" he asked at last.

And, as no one answered him, he took up that letter again from the table where Mlle. Gilberte had laid it, and commenced reading it again, scanning each syllable, as if in hopes of discovering in each word some hidden meaning.

"What did you say to Costeclar?" he resumed, "what did you do to him to make him take such a determination?"

"Nothing," answered Maxence and Mlle. Gilberte.

The hope of being at last rid of that man inspired Mme. Favoral with something like courage.

"He has doubtless understood," she meekly suggested, "that he could not triumph over our daughter's repugnance."

But her husband interrupted her,—

"No," he uttered, "Costeclar is not the man to trouble himself about the ridiculous caprices of a little girl. There is something else. But what is it? Come, if you know it, any of you, if you suspect it even, speak, say it. You must see that I am in a state of fearful anxiety."

It was the first time that he thus allowed something to appear of what was passing within him, the first time that he ever complained.

"M. Costeclar alone, father, can give you the explanation you ask of us," said Mlle. Gilberte.

The cashier of the Mutual Credit shook his head.

"Do you suppose, then, that I have not questioned him? I found his letter this morning at the office. At once I ran to his apartments, Rue Vivienne. He had just gone out; and it is in vain that I called for him at Jottras', and at the office of 'The Financial Pilot.' I found him at last at the *bourse*, after running three hours. But I could only get from him evasive answers and vague explanations. Of course he did not fail to say, that, if he does withdraw, it is because he despairs of ever succeeding in pleasing Gilberte. But it isn't so: I know it; I am sure of it; I read it in his eyes. Twice his lips moved as if he were about to confess all; and then he said nothing. And the more I insisted, the more he seemed ill at ease, embarrassed, uneasy, troubled, the more he appeared to me like a man

who has been threatened, and dares not brave the threat."

He directed upon his children one of those obstinate looks which search the inmost depths of the conscience.

"If you have done any thing to drive him off," he resumed, "confess it frankly, and I swear I will not reproach you."

"We did not."

"You did not threaten him?"

"No!"

M. Favoral seemed appalled.

"Doubtless you deceive me," he said, "and I hope you do. Unhappy children! you do not know what this rupture may cost you."

And, instead of returning to his office, he shut himself up in that little room which he called his study, and only came out of it at about five o'clock, holding under his arm an enormous bundle of papers, and saying that it was useless to wait for him for dinner, as he would not come home until late in the night, if he came home at all, being compelled to make up for his lost day.

"What is the matter with your father, my poor children?" exclaimed Mme. Favoral. "I have never seen him in such a state."

"Doubtless," replied Maxence, "the rupture with Costeclar is going to break up some combination."

But that explanation did not satisfy him any more than it did his mother. He, too, felt a vague apprehension of some impending misfortune. But what? He had nothing upon which to base his conjectures. He knew nothing, any more than his mother, of his father's affairs, of his relations, of his interests, or even of his life, outside the house.

And mother and son lost themselves in suppositions as

vain as if they had tried to find the solution of a problem, without possessing its terms.

With a single word Mlle. Gilberte thought she might have enlightened them.

In the unerring certainty of the blow, in the crushing promptness of the result, she thought she could recognize the hand of Marius de Trégars.

She recognized the hand of the man who acts, and does not talk. And the girl's pride felt flattered by this victory, by this proof of the powerful energy of the man whom, unknown to all, she had selected. She liked to imagine Marius de Trégars and M. Costeclar in presence of each other,—the one as imperious and haughty as she had seen him meek and trembling; the other more humble still than he was arrogant with her.

"One thing is certain," she repeated to herself, "and that is, I am saved."

And she wished the morrow to come, that she might announce her happiness to the very involuntary and very unconscious accomplice of Marius, the worthy Maëstro Gismondo Pulei.

The next day M. Favoral seemed to have resigned himself to the failure of his projects; and, the following Saturday, he told as a pleasant joke, how Mlle. Gilberte had carried the day, and had managed to dismiss her lover.

But a close observer could discover in him symptoms of devouring cares. Deep wrinkles showed along his temples; his eyes were sunken; a continued tension of mind contracted his features. Often during the dinner he would remain motionless for several minutes, his fork aloft; and then he would murmur, "How is it all going to end?"

Sometimes in the morning, before his departure for

his office, M. Jottras, of the house of Jottras and Brother, and M. Saint Pavin, the manager of "The Financial Pilot," came to see him. They closeted themselves together, and remained for hours in conference, speaking so low, that not even a vague murmur could be heard outside the door.

"Your father has grave subjects of anxiety, my children," said Mme. Favoral: "you may believe me,—me, who for twenty years have been trying to guess our fate upon his countenance."

But the political events were sufficient to explain any amount of anxiety. It was the second week of July, 1870; and the destinies of France trembled, as upon a cast of the dice, in the hands of a few presumptuous incapables. Was it war with Prussia, or was it peace, that was to issue from the complications of a childish astute policy?

The most contradictory rumors caused daily at the *bourse* the most violent oscillations, which endangered the safest fortunes. A few words uttered in a corridor by Émile Ollivier had made a dozen heavy operators rich, but had ruined five hundred small ones. On all hands, credit was trembling.

Until one evening when he came home,—

"War is declared," said M. Favoral.

It was but too true; and no one then had any fears of the result for France. They had so much exalted the French army, they had so often said that it was invincible, that every one among the public expected a series of crushing victories.

Alas! the first telegram announced a defeat. People refused to believe it at first. But there was the evidence. The soldiers had died bravely; but the chiefs had been incapable of leading them.

From that time, and with a vertiginous rapidity, from day to day, from hour to hour, the fatal news came crowding on. Like a river that overflows its banks, Prussia was overrunning France. Bazaine was surrounded at Metz; and the capitulation of Sedan capped the climax of so many disasters.

At last, on the 4th of September, the republic was proclaimed.

On the 5th, when the Signor Gismondo Pulei presented himself at Rue St. Gilles, his face bore such an expression of anguish, that Mlle. Gilberte could not help asking what was the matter.

He rose on that question, and, threatening heaven with his clinched fist,—

“Implacable fate does not tire to persecute me,” he replied. “I had overcome all obstacles: I was happy: I was looking forward to a future of fortune and glory. No, the dreadful war must break out.”

For the worthy *maestro*, this terrible catastrophe was but a new caprice of his own destiny.

“What has happened to you?” inquired the young girl, repressing a smile.

“It happens to me, signora, that I am about to lose my beloved pupil. He leaves me; he forsakes me. In vain have I thrown myself at his feet. My tears have not been able to detain him. He is going to fight; he leaves; he is a soldier!”

Then it was given to Mlle. Gilberte to see clearly within her soul. Then she understood how absolutely she had given herself up, and to what extent she had ceased to belong to herself.

Her sensation was terrible, such as if her whole blood had suddenly escaped through her open arteries. She turned pale, her teeth chattered; and she seemed so near

fainting, that the Signor Gismondo sprang to the door, crying, "Help, help! she is dying."

Mme. Favoral, frightened, came running in.

But already, thanks to an all-powerful projection of will, Mlle. Gilberte had recovered, and, smiling a pale smile,—

"It's nothing, mamma," she said. "A sudden pain in the head; but it's gone already."

The worthy *maestro* was in perfect agony. Taking Mme. Favoral aside,—

"It is my fault," he said. "It is the story of my unheard-of misfortunes that has upset her thus. Monstrous egotist that I am! I should have been careful of her exquisite sensibility."

She insisted, nevertheless, upon taking her lesson as usual, and recovered enough presence of mind to extract from the Signor Gismondo everything that his much-regretted pupil had confided to him.

That was not much. He knew that his pupil had gone, like anyone else, to Rue de Cherche Midi; that he had signed an engagement, and had been ordered to join a regiment in process of formation near Tours.

And, as he went out,—

"That is nothing," said the kind *maestro* to Mme. Favoral. "The signora has quite recovered, and is as gay as a lark."

The signora, shut up in her room, was shedding bitter tears. She tried to reason with herself, and could not succeed. Never had the strangeness of her situation so clearly appeared to her. She repeated to herself that she must be mad to have thus become attached to a stranger. She wondered how she could have allowed that love, which was now her very life, to take posses-

sion of her soul. But to what end? It no longer rested with her to undo what had been done.

When she thought that Marius de Trégars was about to leave Paris to become a soldier, to fight, to die perhaps, she felt her head whirl; she saw nothing around her but despair and chaos.

And, the more she thought, the more certain she felt that Marius could not have trusted solely to the chance gossip of the Signor Pulei to communicate to her his determination.

'It is perfectly inadmissible,' she thought. "It is impossible that he will not make an effort to see me before going."

Thoroughly imbued with the idea, she wiped her eyes, took a seat by an open window; and, whilst apparently busy with her work, she concentrated her whole attention upon the street.

There were more people out than usual. The recent events had stirred Paris to its lowest depths, and, as from the crater of a volcano in labor, all the social *scoria* rose to the surface. Men of sinister appearance left their haunts, and wandered through the city. The workshops were all deserted; and people strolled at random, stupor or terror painted on their countenance.

But in vain did Mlle. Gilberte seek in all this crowd the one she hoped to see. The hours went by, and she was getting discouraged, when suddenly, towards dusk, at the corner of the Rue Turenne,—

"'Tis he," cried a voice within her.

It was, in fact, M. de Trégars. He was walking towards the Boulevard, slowly, and his eyes raised.

Palpitating, the girl rose to her feet. She was in one of those moments of crisis when the blood, rushing

to the brain, smothering all judgment. Unconscious, as it were, of her acts, she leaned over the window, and made a sign to Marius, which he understood very well, and which meant, "Wait, I am coming down."

"Where are you going, dear?" asked Mme. Favoral, seeing Gilberte putting on her bonnet.

"To the shop, mamma, to get a shade of worsted I need."

Mlle. Gilberte was not in the habit of going out alone; but it happened quite often that she would go down in the neighborhood on some little errand.

"Do you wish the girl to go out with you?" asked Mme. Favoral.

"Oh, it isn't worth while!"

She ran down the stairs; and once out, regardless of the looks that might be watching her, she walked straight to M. de Trégars, who was waiting on the corner of the Rue des Minimes.

"You are going away?" she said, too much agitated to notice his own emotion, which was, however, quite evident.

"I must," he answered.

"Oh!"

"When France is invaded, the place for a man who bears my name is where the fighting is."

"But there will be fighting in Paris too."

"Paris has four times as many defenders as it needs. It is outside that soldiers will be wanted."

They walked slowly, as they spoke thus, along the Rue des Minimes, one of the least frequented in Paris; and there were only to be seen at this hour five or six soldiers talking in front of the barracks gate.

"Suppose I were to beg you not to go," resumed Mlle. Gilberte. "Suppose I beseeched you, Marius!"

"I should remain then," he answered in a troubled voice; "but I would be betraying my duty, and failing to my honor; and remorse would weigh upon our whole life. Command now, and I will obey."

They had stopped; and no one seeing them standing there side by side affectionate and familiar could have believed that they were speaking to each other for the first time. They themselves did not notice it, so much had they come, with the help of all-powerful imagination, and in spite of separation, to the understanding of intimacy.

After a moment of painful reflection,—

"I do not ask you any longer to stay," uttered the young girl.

He took her hand, and raised it to his lips.

"I expected no less of your courage," he said, his voice vibrating with love.

But he controlled himself, and, in a more quiet tone,—

"Thanks to the indiscretion of Pulei," he added, "I was in hopes of seeing you, but not to have the happiness of speaking to you. I had written"—

He drew from his pocket a large envelope, and, handing it to Mlle. Gilberte,—

"Here is the letter," he continued, "which I intended for you. It contains another, which I beg you to preserve carefully, and not to open unless I do not return. I leave you in Paris a devoted friend, the Count de Villegre. Whatever may happen to you, apply to him with all confidence, as you would to myself."

Mlle. Gilberte, staggering, leaned against the wall.

"When do you expect to leave?" she inquired.

"This very night. Communications may be cut off at any moment."

Admirable in her sorrow, but also full of energy,

the poor girl looked up, and held out her hand to him.

"Go then," she said, "O my only friend! go, since honor commands. But do not forget that it is not your life alone that you are going to risk."

And, fearing to burst into sobs, she fled, and reached the Rue St. Gilles a few moments before her father, who had gone out in quest of news.

Those he brought home were of the most sinister kind.

Like the rising tide, the Prussians spread and advanced, slowly, but steadily. Their marches were numbered; and the day and hour could be named when their flood would come and strike the walls of Paris.

And so, at all the railroad stations, there was a prodigious rush of people who wished to leave at any cost, in any way, in the baggage-car if needs be, and who certainly were not, like Marius, rushing to meet the enemy.

One after another, M. Favoral had seen nearly every one he knew take flight.

The Baron and Baroness de Thaller and their daughter had gone to Switzerland; M. Costeclar was travelling in Belgium; the elder Jottras was in England, buying guns and cartridges; and if the younger Jottras, with M. Saint Pavin of "The Financial Pilot," remained in Paris, it was because, through the gallant influence of a lady whose name was not mentioned, they had obtained some valuable contracts from the government.

The perplexities of the cashier of the Mutual Credit were great. The day that the Baron and the Baroness de Thaller had left; —

"Pack up our trunks," he ordered his wife. "The

bourse is going to close; and the Mutual Credit can very well get along without me."

But the next day he became undecided again. What Mlle. Gilberte thought she could guess, was, that he was dying to start alone, and leave his family, but dared not do it. He hesitated so long, that at last, one evening,—

"You may unpack the trunks," he said to his wife. "Paris is invested; and no one can now leave."

XVIII.

IN fact, the news had just come, that the Western Railroad, the last one that had remained open, was now cut off.

Paris was invested; and so rapid had been the investment, that it could hardly be believed.

People went in crowds on all the culminating points, the hills of Montmartre, and the heights of the Trocadero. Telescopes had been erected there; and every one was anxious to scan the horizon, and look for the Prussians.

But nothing could be discovered. The distant fields retained their quiet and smiling aspect under the mild rays of the autumn sun.

So that it really required quite an effort of imagination to realize the sinister fact, to understand that Paris, with its two millions of inhabitants, was indeed cut off from the world and separated from the rest of France, by an insurmountable circle of steel.

Doubt, and something like a vague hope, could be traced in the tone of the people who met on the streets, saying,—

"Well, it's all over: we can't leave any more. Letters, even, cannot pass. No more news, eh?"

But the next day, which was the 19th of September, the most incredulous were convinced.

For the first time Paris shuddered at the hoarse voice of the cannon, thundering on the heights of Chatillon. The siege of Paris, that siege without example in history, had commenced.

The life of the Favorals during these interminable days of anguish and suffering, was that of a hundred thousand other families.

Incorporated in the battalion of his ward, the cashier of the Mutual Credit went off two or three times a week, as well as all his neighbors, to mount guard on the ramparts,—a useless service perhaps, but which those that performed it did not look upon as such,—a very arduous service, at any rate, for poor merchants, accustomed to the comforts of their shops, or the quiet of their offices.

To be sure, there was nothing heroic in tramping through the mud, in receiving the rain or the snow upon the back, in sleeping on the ground or on dirty straw, in remaining on guard with the thermometer twenty degrees below the freezing-point. But people die of pleurisy quite as certainly as of a Prussian bullet; and many died of it.

Maxence showed himself but rarely at Rue St. Gilles: enlisted in a battalion of sharpshooters, he did duty at the advanced posts. And, as to Mme. Favoral and Mlle. Gilberte, they spent the day trying to get something to live on. Rising before daylight, through rain or snow, they took their stand before the butcher's stall, and, after waiting for hours, received a small slice of horse-meat.

Alone in the evening, by the side of the hearth where a few pieces of green wood smoked without burning, they started at each of the distant reports of the cannon. At each detonation that shook the window-panes, Mme. Favoral thought that it was, perhaps, the one that had killed her son.

And Mlle. Gilberte was thinking of Marius de Trégar. The accursed days of November and December had come. There were constant rumors of bloody battles around Orleans. She imagined Marius, mortally wounded, expiring on the snow, alone, without help, and without a friend to receive his supreme will and his last breath.

One evening the vision was so clear, and the impression so strong, that she started up with a loud cry.

"What is it?" asked Mme. Favoral, alarmed.
"What is the matter?"

With a little perspicacity, the worthy woman could easily have obtained her daughter's secret; for Mlle. Gilberte was not in condition to deny anything. But she contented herself with an explanation which meant nothing, and had not a suspicion, when the girl answered with a forced smile,—

"It's nothing, dear mother, nothing but an absurd idea that crossed my mind."

Strange to say, never had the cashier of the Mutual Credit been for his family what he was during these months of trials.

During the first weeks of the siege he had been anxious, agitated, nervous; he wandered through the house like a soul in trouble; he had moments of inconceivable prostration, during which tears could be seen rolling down upon his cheeks, and then fits of anger without motive.

But each day that elapsed had seemed to bring calm to his soul. Little by little, he had become to his wife so indulgent and so affectionate, that the poor helot felt her heart touched. He had for his daughter attentions which caused her to wonder.

Often, when the weather was fine, he took them out walking, leading them along the quays towards a part of the walls occupied by the battalion of their ward. Twice he took them to St. Onen, where the sharpshooters were encamped to which Maxence belonged.

Another day he wished to take them to visit M. de Thaller's house, of which he had charge. They refused, and instead of getting angry, as he certainly would have done formerly, he commenced describing to them the splendors of the apartments, the magnificent furniture, the carpets and the hangings, the paintings by the great masters, the objects of arts, the bronzes, in a word, all that dazzling luxury of which financiers make use, somewhat as hunters do of the mirror with which larks are caught.

Of business, nothing was ever said.

He went every morning as far as the office of the Mutual Credit; but, as he said, it was solely as a matter of form. Once in a long while, M. Saint Pavin and the younger Jottras paid a visit to the Rue St. Gilles. They had suspended,—the one the payments of his banking house; the other, the publication of "The Financial Pilot."

But they were not idle for all that; and, in the midst of the public distress, they still managed to speculate upon something, no one knew what, and to realize profits.

They rallied pleasantly the fools who had faith in the defence, and imitated in the most laughable manner

the appearance, under their soldier's coat, of three or four of their friends who had joined the marching battalions. They boasted that they had no privations to endure, and always knew where to find the fresh butter wherewith to dress the large slices of beef which they possessed the art of finding. Mme. Favoral heard them laugh; and M. Saint Pavin, the manager of "The Financial Pilot," exclaimed,—

"Come, come! we would be fools to complain. It is a general liquidation, without risks and without costs."

Their mirth had something revolting in it; for it was now the last and most acute period of the siege.

At the beginning the greatest optimists hardly thought that Paris could hold out longer than six weeks. And now the investment had lasted over four months. The population was reduced to nameless articles of food. The supply of bread had failed; the wounded, for lack of a little soup, died in the ambulances; old people and children perished by the hundred; on the left bank the shells came down thick and fast, the weather was intensely cold, and there was no more fuel.

And yet no one complained. From the midst of that population of two millions of inhabitants, not one voice rose to beg for their comfort, their health, their life even, at the cost of a capitulation.

Clear-sighted men had never hoped that Paris alone could compel the raising of the siege; but they thought, that by holding out, and keeping the Prussians under its walls, Paris would give to France time to rise, to organize armies, and to rush upon the enemy. There was the duty of Paris; and Paris was toiling to fulfil it to the utmost limits of possibility, reckoning as a victory each day that it gained.

Unfortunately, all this suffering was to be in vain.

The fatal hour struck, when, supplies being exhausted, it became necessary to surrender.

During three days the Prussians camped in the Champs Elysées, gazing with longing eyes upon that city, object of their most eager desires,—that Paris within which, victorious though they were, they had not dared to venture. Then, soon after, communications were reopened; and one morning, as he received a letter from Switzerland,—

“It is from the Baron de Thaller!” exclaimed M. Favoral.

Exactly so. The manager of the Mutual Credit was a prudent man. Pleasantly situated in Switzerland, he was in nowise anxious to return to Paris before being quite certain that he had no risks to run.

Upon receiving M. Favoral's assurances to that effect, he started; and, almost at the same time the elder Jottras and M. Costeclar made their appearance.

XIX.

It was a curious spectacle, the return of those braves for whom Parisian slang had invented the new and significant expression of *franc-fileur*.

They were not so proud then as they have been since. Feeling rather embarrassed in the midst of a population still quivering with the emotions of the siege, they had at least the good taste to try and find pretexts for their absence.

“I was cut off,” affirmed the Baron de Thaller. “I had gone to Switzerland to place my wife and daughter in safety. When I came back, good-by! the Prussians had closed the doors. For more than a week, I

wandered around Paris, trying to find an opening. I became suspected of being a spy. I was arrested. A little more, and I was shot dead!"

"As to myself," declared M. Costeclar, "I foresaw exactly what has happened. I knew that it was outside, to organize armies of relief, that men would be wanted. I went to offer my services to the government of defence; and everybody in Bordeaux saw me booted and spurred, and ready to leave."

He was consequently soliciting the Cross of the Legion of Honor, and was not without hopes of obtaining it through the all-powerful influence of his financial connections.

"Didn't So-and-so get it?" he replied to objections. And he named this or that individual whose feats of arms consisted principally in having exhibited themselves in uniforms covered with gold lace to the very shoulders.

"But I am the man who deserves it most, that cross," insisted the younger M. Jottras; "for I, at least, have rendered valuable services."

And he went on telling how, after searching for arms all over England, he had sailed for New York, where he had purchased any number of guns and cartridges, and even some batteries of artillery.

This last journey had been very wearisome to him, he added and yet he did not regret it; for it had furnished him an opportunity to study on the spot the financial morals of America; and he had returned with ideas enough to make the fortune of three or four stock companies with twenty millions of capital.

"Ah, those Americans!" he exclaimed. "They are the men who understand business! We are but children by the side of them."

It was through M. Chapelain, the Desclavettes, and old Desormeaux, that these news reached the Rue St. Gilles.

It was also through Maxence, whose battalion had been dissolved, and who, whilst waiting for something better, had accepted a clerkship in the office of the Orleans Railway, where he earned two hundred francs a month. For M. Favoral saw and heard nothing that was going on around him. He was wholly absorbed in his business: he left earlier, came home later, and hardly allowed himself time to eat and drink.

He told all his friends that business was looking up again in the most unexpected manner; that there were fortunes to be made by those who could command ready cash; and that it was necessary to make up for lost time.

He pretended that the enormous indemnity to be paid to the Prussians would necessitate an enormous movement of capital, financial combinations, a loan, and that so many millions could not be handled without allowing a few little millions to fall into intelligent pockets.

Dazzled by the mere enumeration of those fabulous sums, "I should not be a bit surprised," said the others, "to see Favoral double and treble his fortune. What a famous match his daughter will be!"

Alas! never had Mlle. Gilberte felt in her heart so much hatred and disgust for that money, the only thought, the sole subject of conversation, of those around her,—for that cursed money which had risen like an insurmountable obstacle between Marius and herself.

For two weeks past, the communications had been completely restored; and there was as yet no sign of M. de Trégars. It was with the most violent palpita-

tions of her heart that she awaited each day the hour of the Signor Gismondo Pulei's lesson: and more painful each time became her anguish when she heard him exclaim,—

“ Nothing, not a line, not a word. The pupil has forgotten his old master ! ”

But Mlle. Gilberte knew well that Marius did not forget. Her blood froze in her veins when she read in the papers the interminable list of those poor soldiers who had succumbed during the invasion,—the more fortunate ones under Prussian bullets; the others along the roads, in the mud or in the snow, of cold, of fatigue, of suffering and of want.

She could not drive from her mind the memory of that lugubrious vision which had so much frightened her; and she was asking herself whether it was not one of those inexplicable presentiments, of which there are examples, which announce the death of a beloved person.

Alone at night in her little room, Mlle. Gilberte withdrew from the hiding-place, where she kept it precious, that package which Marius had confided to her, recommending her not to open it until she was sure that he would not return. It was very voluminous, enclosed in an envelope of thick paper, sealed with red wax, bearing the arms of Trégars; and she had often wondered what it could possibly contain. And now she shuddered at the thought that she had perhaps the right to open it.

And she had no one of whom she could ask for a word of hope. She was compelled to hide her tears, and to put on a smile. She was compelled to invent pretexts for those who expressed their wonder at seeing her exquisite beauty withering in the bud,—for her

mother, whose anxiety was without limit, when she saw her thus pale, her eyes inflamed, and undermined by a continuous fever.

True, Marius, on leaving, had left her a friend, the Count de Villegré; and, if any one knew any thing, he certainly did. But she could see no way of hearing from him without risking her secret. Write to him? Nothing was easier, since she had his address,—Rue Turenne. But where could she ask him to direct his answer? Rue St. Gilles? Impossible! True, she might go to him, or make an appointment in the neighborhood. But how could she escape, even for an hour, without exciting Mme. Favoral's suspicions?

Sometimes it occurred to her to confide in Maxence, who was laboring with admirable constancy to redeem his past.

But what! must she, then, confess the truth,—confess that she, Gilberte, had lent her ears to the words of a stranger, met by chance in the street, and that she looked forward to no happiness in life save through him? She dared not. She could not take upon herself to overcome the shame of such a situation.

She was on the verge of despair, the day when the Signor Pulei arrived radiant, exclaiming from the very threshold, "I have news!"

And at once, without surprise at the awful emotion of the girl, which he attributed solely to the interest she felt for him,—him Gismondo Pulei, he went on,—

"I did not get them direct, but through a respectable signor with long mustaches, and a red ribbon at his buttonhole, who, having received a letter from my dear pupil, has deigned to come to my room, and read it to me."

The worthy *maestro* had not forgotten a single word

of that letter; and it was almost literally that he repeated it.

Six weeks after having enlisted, his pupil had been promoted corporal, then sergeant, then lieutenant. He had fought in all the battles of the army of the Loire without receiving a scratch. But at the battle of the Maus, whilst leading back his men, who were giving way, he had been shot twice, full in the breast. Carried dying into an ambulance, he had lingered three weeks between life and death, having lost all consciousness of self. Twenty-four hours after, he had recovered his senses; and he took the first opportunity to recall himself to the affection of his friends. All danger was over, he suffered scarcely any more; and they promised him, that, within a month, he would be up, and able to return to Paris.

For the first time in many weeks Mlle. Gilberte breathed freely. But she would have been greatly surprised, had she been told that a day was drawing near when she would bless those wounds which detained Marius upon a hospital cot. And yet it was so.

Mme. Favoral and her daughter were alone, one evening, at the house, when loud clamors arose from the street, in the midst of which could be heard drunken voices yelling the refrains of revolutionary songs, accompanied by continuous rumbling sounds. They ran to the window. The National Guards had just taken possession of the cannon deposited in the Place Royale. The reign of the Commune was commencing.

In less than forty-eight hours, people came to regret the worst days of the siege. Without leaders, without direction, the honest men had lost their heads. All the braves who had returned at the time of the armistice had again taken flight. Soon people had to hide or to

fly to avoid being incorporated in the battalions of the Commune. Night and day, around the walls, the fusillade rattled, and the artillery thundered.

Again M. Favoral had given up going to his office. What's the use? Sometimes, with a singular look, he would say to his wife and children,—

“This time it is indeed a liquidation. Paris is lost!”

And indeed they thought so, when at the hour of the supreme struggle, among the detonations of the cannon and the explosion of the shells; they felt their house shaking to its very foundations; when in the midst of the night they saw their apartment as brilliantly lighted as at mid-day by the flames which were consuming the Hôtel de Ville and the houses around the Place de la Bastille. And, in fact, the rapid action of the troops alone saved Paris from destruction.

But towards the end of the following week, matters had commenced to quiet down; and Gilberte learned the return of Marius.

XX.

“AT last it has been given to my eyes to contemplate him, and to my arms to press him against my heart!”

It was in these terms that the old Italian master, all vibrating with enthusiasm, and with his most terrible accent, announced to Mlle. Gilberte that he had just seen that famous pupil from whom he expected both glory and fortune.

“But how weak he is still!” he added, “and suffering from his wounds. I hardly recognized him, he has grown so pale and so thin.”

But the girl was listening to him no more. A flood of

life filled her heart. This moment made her forget all her troubles and all her anguish.

"And I too," thought she, "shall see him again to-day."

And, with the unerring instinct of the woman who loves, she calculated the moment when Marius would appear in Rue St. Gilles. It would probably be about nightfall, like the first time, before leaving; that is, about eight o'clock, for the days just then were about the longest in the year. Now it so happened, that, on that very day and hour, Mlle. Gilberte expected to be alone at home. It was understood that her mother would, after dinner, call on Mme. Desclavettes, who was in bed, half dead of the fright she had had during the last convulsions of the Commune. She would therefore be free, and would not need to invent a pretext to go out for a few moments. She could not help, however, but feel that this was a bold and most venturesome step for her to take; and, when her mother went out, she had not yet fully decided what to do. But her bonnet was within reach, and Marius' letter was in her pocket. She went to sit at the window. The street was solitary and silent as of old. Night was coming; and heavy black clouds floated over Paris. The heat was overpowering: there was not a breath of air.

One by one, as the hour was approaching when she expected to see Marius, the hesitations of the young girl vanished like smoke. She feared but one thing,—that he would not come, or that he may already have come and left, without succeeding in seeing her.

Already did the objects become less distinct; and the gas was being lit in the back-shops, when she recognized him on the other side of the street. He looked up as he went by; and, without stopping, he addressed her a

rapid gesture, which she alone could understand, and which meant, "Come, I beseech you!"

Her heart beating loud enough to be heard, Mlle. Gilberte ran down the stairs. But it was only when she found herself in the street that she could appreciate the magnitude of the risk she was running. *Concierges* and shopkeepers were all sitting in front of their doors, taking the fresh air. All knew her. Would they not be surprised to see her out alone at such an hour? Twenty steps in front of her she could see Marius. But he had understood the danger; for, instead of turning the corner of the Rue des Minimes, he followed the Rue St. Gilles straight, and only stopped on the other side of the Boulevard.

Then only did Mlle. Gilberte join him; and she could not withhold an exclamation, when she saw that he was as pale as death, and scarcely able to stand and to walk.

"How imprudent of you to have returned so soon!" she said.

A little blood came to M. de Trégars' cheeks. His face brightened up, and, in a voice quivering with suppressed passion,—

"It would have been more imprudent still to stay away," he uttered. "Far from you, I felt myself dying."

They were both leaning against the door of a closed shop; and they were as alone in the midst of the throng that circulated on the Boulevards, busy looking at the fearful wrecks of the Commune.

"And besides," added Marius, "have I, then, a minute to lose? I asked you for three years. Fifteen months have gone, and I am no better off than on the first day. When this accursed war broke out, all my arrangements were made. I was certain to rapidly accumulate

a sufficient fortune to enable me to ask for your hand without being refused. Whereas now"—

"Well?"

"Now every thing is changed. The future is so uncertain, that no one wishes to venture their capital. Marcolet himself, who certainly does not lack boldness, and who believes firmly in the success of our enterprise, was telling me yesterday, 'There is nothing to be done just now : we must wait.'"

There was in his voice such an intensity of grief, that the girl felt the tears coming to her eyes.

"We will wait then," she said, attempting to smile.

But M. de Trégars shook his head.

"Is it possible?" he said. "Do you, then, think that I do not know what a life you lead?"

Mlle. Gilberte looked up.

"Have I ever complained?" she asked proudly?

"No. Your mother and yourself, you have always religiously kept the secret of your tortures; and it was only a providential accident that revealed them to me. But I learned every thing at last. I know that she whom I love exclusively and with all the power of my soul is subjected to the most odious despotism, insulted, and condemned to the most humiliating privations. And I, who would give my life for her a thousand times over,—I can do nothing for her. Money raises between us such an insuperable obstacle, that my love is actually an offence. To hear from her, I am driven to accept accomplices. If I obtain from her a few moments of conversation, I run the risk of compromising her maidenly reputation."

Deeply affected by his emotion—

"At least," said Mlle. Gilberte, "you succeeded in delivering me from M. Costeclar."

"Yes, I was fortunately able to find weapons against that scoundrel. But can I find some against all others that may offer? Your father is very rich; and the men are numerous for whom marriage is but a speculation like any other."

"Would you doubt me?"

"Ah, rather would I doubt myself! But I know what cruel trials your refusal to marry M. Costeclar imposed upon you: I know what a merciless struggle you had to sustain. Another pretender may come, and then— No, no, you see that we cannot wait."

"What would you do?"

"I know not. I have not yet decided upon my future course. And yet Heaven knows what have been the labors of my mind during that long month I have just spent upon an ambulance-bed,—that month during which you were my only thought. Ah! when I think of it, I cannot find words to curse the recklessness with which I disposed of my fortune."

As if she had heard a blasphemy, the young girl drew back a step.

"It is impossible," she exclaimed, "that you should regret having paid what your father owed."

A bitter smile contracted M. de Trégars' lips.

"And suppose I were to tell you," he replied, "that my father in reality owed nothing?"

"Oh!"

"Suppose I told you they took from him his entire fortune, over two millions, as audaciously as a pick-pocket robs a man of his handkerchief? Suppose I told you, that, in his loyal simplicity, he was but a man of straw in the hands of skilful knaves? Have you forgotten what you once heard the Count de Villegré say?"

Mlle. Gilberte had forgotten nothing.

"The Count de Villgré," she replied, "pretended that it was time enough still to compel the men who had robbed your father to disgorge."

"Exactly!" exclaimed Marius. "And now I am determined to make them disgorge."

In the mean time night had quite come. Lights appeared in the shop-windows; and along the line of the Boulevard the gas-lamps were being lit. Alarmed by this sudden illumination, M. de Trégars drew off Mlle. Gilberte to a more obscure spot, by the stairs that lead to the Rue Amelot; and there, leaning against the iron railing, he went on,—

"Already, at the time of my father's death, I suspected the abominable tricks of which he was the victim. I thought it unworthy of me to verify my suspicions. I was alone in the world: my wants were few. I was fully convinced that my researches would give me, within a brief time, a much larger fortune than the one I gave up. I found something noble and grand, and which flattered my vanity, in thus abandoning every thing, without discussion, without litigation, and consummating my ruin with a single dash of my pen. Among my friends the Count de Villegré alone had the courage to tell me that this was a guilty piece of folly; that the silence of the dupes is the strength of the knaves; that my indifference, which made the rascals rich, would make them laugh too. I replied that I did not wish to see the name of Trégars dragged into court in a scandalous law-suit, and that to preserve a dignified silence was to honor my father's memory. Treble fool that I was! The only way to honor my father's memory was to avenge him, to wrest his spoils from the scoundrels who had caused his death. I see it clearly to-day. But, before undertaking any thing, I wished to consult you."

Mlle. Gilberte was listening with the most intense attention. She had come to mingle so completely in her thoughts her future life and that of M. de Trégars, that she saw nothing unusual in the fact of his consulting her upon matters affecting their prospects, and of seeing herself standing there deliberating with him.

"You will require proofs," she suggested.

"I have none, unfortunately," replied M. de Trégars; "at least, none sufficiently positive, and such as are required by courts of justice. But I think I may find them. My former suspicions have become a certainty. The same good luck that enabled me to deliver you of M. Costeclar's persecutions, also placed in my hands the most valuable information."

"Then you must act," uttered Mlle. Gilberte resolutely.

Marius hesitated for a moment, as if seeking expression to convey what he had still to say. Then,—

"It is my duty," he proceeded, "to conceal nothing from you. The task is a heavy one. The obscure schemers of ten years ago have become big financiers, intrenched behind their money-bags as behind an impregnable fort. Formerly isolated, they have managed to gather around them powerful interests, accomplices high in office, and friends whose commanding situation protects them. Having succeeded, they are absolved. They have in their favor what is called public consideration,—that idiotic thing which is made up of the admiration of the fools, the approbation of the knaves, and the concert of all interested vanities. When they pass, their horses at full trot, their carriage raising a cloud of dust, insolent, impudent, swelled with the vulgar fatuity of wealth, people bow to the ground, and say, 'Those are smart fellows!' And in fact, yes, skill or

luck, they have hitherto avoided the police-courts where so many others have come to grief. Those who despise them fear them, and shake hands with them. Moreover, they are rich enough not to steal any more themselves. They have employés to do that. I take Heaven to witness that never until lately had the idea come to me to disturb in their possession the men who robbed my father. Alone, what need had I of money? Later, O my friend! I thought I could succeed in conquering the fortune I needed to obtain your hand. You had promised to wait; and I was happy to think that I should owe you to my sole exertions. Events have crushed my hopes. I am to-day compelled to acknowledge that all my efforts would be in vain. To wait would be to run the risk of losing you. Therefore I hesitate no longer. I want what's mine: I wish to recover that of which I have been robbed. Whatever I may do,—for, alas! I know not to what I may be driven, what *rôle* I may have to play,—remember that of all my acts, of all my thoughts, there will not be a single one that does not aim to bring nearer the blessed day when you shall become my wife.”

There was in his voice so much unspeakable affection, that the young girl could hardly restrain her tears.

“Never, whatever may happen, shall I doubt you, Marius,” she uttered.

He took her hands, and, pressing them passionately within his,—

“And I,” he exclaimed, “I swear, that, sustained by the thought of you, there is no disgust that I will not overcome, no obstacle that I will not overthrow.”

He spoke so loud, that two or three persons stopped. He noticed it, and was brought suddenly from sentiment to the reality,—

"Wretches that we are," he said in a low voice, and very fast, "we forget what this interview may cost us!"

And he led Mlle. Gilberte across the Boulevard; and, whilst making their way to the Rue St. Gilles, through the deserted streets,—

"It is a dreadful imprudence we have just committed," resumed M. de Trégars. "But it was indispensable that we should see each other; and we had not the choice of means. Now, and for a long time, we shall be separated. Every thing you wish me to know, say it to that worthy Gismondo, who repeats faithfully to me every word you utter. Through him, also, you shall hear from me. Twice a week, on Tuesdays and Fridays, about nightfall, I shall pass by your house; and, if I am lucky enough to have a glimpse of you, I shall return home fired with fresh energy. Should any thing extraordinary happen, beckon to me, and I'll wait for you in the Rue des Minimes. But this is an expedient to which we must only resort in the last extremity. I should never forgive myself, were I to compromise your fair name."

They had reached the Rue St. Gilles. Marius stopped.

"We must part," he began.

But then only Mlle. Gilberte remembered M. de Trégars' letter, which she had in her pocket. Taking it out, and handing it to him,—

"Here," she said, "is the package you deposited with me."

"No," he answered, repelling her gently, "keep that letter: it must never be opened now, except by the Marquise de Trégars."

And raising her hand to his lips, and in a deeply agitated voice,—

"Farewell!" he murmured. "Have courage, and have hope."

XXI.

Mlle. GILBERTE was soon far away; and Marius de Trégars remained motionless at the corner of the street, following her with his eyes through the darkness.

She was walking fast, staggering over the rough pavement. Leaving Marius, she fell back upon the earth from the height of her dreams. The deceiving illusion had vanished, and, returned to the world of sad reality, she was seized with anxiety.

How long had she been out? She knew not, and found it impossible to reckon. But it was evidently getting late; for some of the shops were already closing.

Meantime, she had reached the house. Stepping back, and looking up, she saw that there was light in the parlor.

"Mother has returned," she thought, trembling with apprehension.

She hurried up, nevertheless; and, just as she reached the landing, Mme. Favoral opened the door, preparing to go down.

"At last you are restored to me!" exclaimed the poor mother, whose sinister apprehensions were revealed by that single exclamation. "I was going out to look for you at random,—in the streets, anywhere."

And, drawing her daughter within the parlor, she clasped her in her arms with convulsive tenderness, exclaiming,—

"Where were you? Where do you come from? Do you know that it is after nine o'clock?"

Such had been Mlle. Gilberte's state of mind during the whole of that evening, that she had not even thought of finding a pretext to justify her absence. Now it was too late. Besides, what explanation would have been plausible? Instead, therefore, of answering,—

"Why, dear mother," she said with a forced smile, "has it not happened to me twenty times to go out in the neighborhood?"

But Mme. Favoral's confiding credulity existed no longer.

"I have been blind, Gilberte," she interrupted; "but this time my eyes must open to evidence. There is in your life a mystery, something extraordinary, which I dare not try to guess."

Mlle. Gilberte drew herself up, and, looking her mother straight in the eyes, with her beautiful, clear glance,—

"Would you suspect me of something wrong, then?" she exclaimed.

Mme. Favoral stopped her with a gesture.

"A young girl who conceals something from her mother always does wrong," she uttered. "It is a long while since I have had for the first time the presentiment that you were hiding something from me. But, when I questioned you, you succeeded in quieting my suspicions. You have abused my confidence and my weakness."

This reproach was the most cruel that could be addressed to Mlle. Gilberte. The blood rushed to her face, and, in a firm voice,—

"Well, yes," said she: "I have a secret."

"Dear me!"

"And, if I did not confide it to you, it is because it is also the secret of another. Yes, I confess it, I have been

imprudent in the extreme; I have stepped beyond all the limits of propriety and social custom; I have exposed myself to the worst calumnies. But never,—I swear it,—never have I done any thing of which my conscience can reproach me, nothing that I have to blush for, nothing that I regret, nothing that I am not ready to do again to-morrow.”

“Gilberte!”

“I said nothing, ’tis true; but it was my duty. Alone I had to suffer the responsibility of my acts. Having alone freely engaged my future, I wished to bear alone the weight of my anxiety. I should never have forgiven myself for having added this new care to all your other sorrows.”

Mme. Favoral stood dismayed. Big tears rolled down her withered cheeks.

“Don’t you see, then,” she stammered, “that all my past suffering is as nothing compared to what I endure to-day? Good heavens! what have I ever done to deserve so many trials? Am I to be spared none of the troubles of this world? And it is through my own daughter that I am the most cruelly stricken!”

This was more than Mlle. Gilberte could bear. Her heart was breaking at the sight of her mother’s tears,—that angel of meekness and resignation. Throwing her arms around her neck, and kissing her on the eyes,—

“Mother,” she murmured, “adored mother, I beg of you do not weep thus! Speak to me! What do you wish me to do?”

Gently the poor woman drew back.

“Tell me the truth,” she answered.

Was it not certain that this was the very thing she would ask; in fact, the only thing she could ask? Ah! how much would the young girl have preferred one of

her father's violent scenes, and brutalities which would have exalted her energy, instead of crushing it!

Attempting to gain time,—

"Well, yes," she answered, "I'll tell you every thing, mother, but not now, to-morrow, later."

She was about to yield, however, when her father's arrival cut short their conversation.

The cashier of the Mutual Credit was quite lively that night. He was humming a tune, a thing which did not happen to him four times a year, and which was indicative of the most extreme satisfaction. But he stopped short at the sight of the disturbed countenance of his wife and daughter.

"What is the matter?" he inquired.

"Nothing," hastily answered Mlle. Gilberte,— "nothing at all, father."

"Then you are crying for your amusement," he said.

"Come, be candid for once, and confess that Maxence has been at his tricks again!"

"You are mistaken, father: I swear it!"

He asked no further questions, being in his nature not very curious, whether because family matters were of so little consequence to him, or because he had a vague idea that his general behavior deprived him of all right to their confidence.

"Very well, then," he said in a gruff tone, "let us all go to bed. I have worked so hard to-day, that I am quite exhausted. People who pretend that business is dull make me laugh. Never has M. de Thaller been in the way of making so much money as now."

When he spoke, they obeyed. So that Mlle. Gilberte was thus going to have the whole night before her to resume possession of herself, to pass over in her mind the events of the evening, and deliberate coolly upon the

decision she must come to; for, she could not doubt it, Mme. Favoral would, the very next day, renew her questions.

What should she say? All? Mlle. Gilberte felt disposed to do so by all the aspirations of her heart, by the certainty of indulgent complicity, by the thought of finding in a sympathetic soul the echo of her joys, of her troubles, and of her hopes.

Yes. But Mme. Favoral was still the same woman, whose firmest resolutions vanished under the gaze of her husband. Let a pretender come; let a struggle begin, as in the case of M. Costeclar,—would she have strength enough to remain silent? No!

Then it would be a fearful scene with M. Favoral. He might, perhaps, even go to M. de Trégars. What scandal! For he was a man who spared no one; and then a new obstacle would rise between them, more insurmountable still than the others.

Mlle. Gilberte was thinking, too, of Marius's projects; of that terrible game he was about to play, the issue of which was to decide their fate. He had said enough to make her understand all its perils, and that a single indiscretion might suffice to set at nought the result of many months' labor and patience. Besides, to speak, was it not to abuse Marius's confidence. How could she expect another to keep a secret she had been unable to keep herself?

At last, after protracted and painful hesitation, she decided that she was bound to silence, and that she would only vouchsafe the vaguest explanations.

It was in vain, then, that, on the next and the following days, Mme. Favoral tried to obtain that confession which she had seen, as it were, rise to her daughter's lips. To her passionate adjurations, to her tears, to her

ruses even, Mlle. Gilberte invariably opposed equivocal answers, a story through which nothing could be guessed, save one of those childish romances which stop at the preface,—a schoolgirl love for a chimerical hero.

There was nothing in this very re-assuring to a mother ; but Mme. Favoral knew her daughter too well to hope to conquer her invincible obstinacy. She insisted no more, appeared convinced, but resolved to exercise the utmost vigilance. In vain, however, did she display all the penetration of which she was capable. The severest attention did not reveal to her a single suspicious fact, not a circumstance from which she could draw an induction, until, at last, she thought that she must have been mistaken.

The fact is, that Mlle. Gilberte had not been long in feeling herself watched ; and she observed herself with a tenacious circumspection that could hardly have been expected of her resolute and impatient nature. She had trained herself to a sort of cheerful carelessness, to which she strictly adhered, watching every expression of her countenance, and avoiding carefully those hours of vague revery in which she formerly indulged.

For two successive weeks, fearing to be betrayed by her looks, she had the courage not to show herself at the window at the hour when she knew Marius would pass. Moreover, she was very minutely informed of the alternatives of the campaign undertaken by M. de Trégars.

More enthusiastic than ever about his pupil, the Signor Gismondo Pulei never tired of singing his praise, and with such pomp of expression, and so curious an exuberance of gesticulation, that Mme. Favoral was much amused ; and, on the days when she was present at her daughter's lesson, she was the first to inquire,—

"Well, how is that famous pupil?"

And, according to what Marius had told him,—

"He is swimming in the purest satisfaction," answered the candid *maestro*. "Every thing succeeds miraculously well, and much beyond his hopes."

Or else, knitting his brows,—

"He was sad yesterday," he said, "owing to an unexpected disappointment; but he does not lose courage. We shall succeed."

The young girl could not help smiling to see her mother assisting thus the unconscious complicity of the Signor Gismondo. Then she reproached herself for having smiled, and for having thus come, through a gradual and fatal descent, to laugh at a duplicity at which she would have blushed in former times. In spite of herself, however, she took a passionate interest in the game that was being played between her mother and herself, and of which her secret was the stake. It was an ever-palpitating interest in her hitherto monotonous life, and a source of constantly-renewed emotions.

The days became weeks, and the weeks months; and Mme. Favoral relaxed her useless surveillance, and, little by little, gave it up almost entirely. She still thought, that, at a certain moment, something unusual had occurred to her daughter; but she felt persuaded, that, whatever that was, it had been forgotten.

So that, on the stated days, Mlle. Gilberte could go and lean upon the window, without fear of being called to account for the emotion which she felt when M. de Trégars appeared. At the expected hour, invariably, and with a punctuality to shame M. Favoral himself, he turned the corner of the Rue Turenne, exchanged a rapid glance with the young girl, and passed on.

His health was completely restored; and with it he

had recovered that graceful virility which results from the perfect blending of suppleness and strength. But he no longer wore the plain garments of former days. He was dressed now with that elegant simplicity which reveals at first sight that rarest of objects,—a “perfect gentleman.” And, whilst she accompanied him with her eyes as he walked towards the Boulevard, she felt thoughts of joy and pride rising from the bottom of her soul.

“Who would ever imagine,” thought she, “that this young gentleman walking away yonder is my affianced husband, and that the day is perhaps not far, when, having become his wife, I shall lean upon his arm? Who would think that all my thoughts belong to him, that it is for my sake that he has given up the ambition of his life, and is now prosecuting another object? Who would suspect that it is for Gilberte Favoral’s sake that the Marquis de Trégars is walking in the Rue St. Gilles?”

And, indeed, Marius did deserve some credit for these walks; for winter had come, spreading a thick coat of mud over the pavement of all those little streets which are always forgotten by the street-cleaners.

The cashier’s home had resumed its habits of before the war, its drowsy monotony scarcely disturbed by the Saturday dinner, by M. Desclavette’s *naïvetés* or old Desormeaux’s puns.

Maxence, in the mean time, had ceased to live with his parents. He had returned to Paris immediately after the Commune; and, feeling no longer in the humor to submit to the paternal despotism, he had taken a small apartment on the Boulevard du Temple; but, at the pressing instance, of his mother, he had consented to come every night to dine at the Rue St. Gilles.

Faithful to his oath, he was working hard, though

without getting on very fast. The moment was far from propitious; and the occasion, which he had so often allowed to escape, did not offer itself again. For lack of any thing better, he had kept his clerkship at the railway; and, as two hundred francs a month were not quite sufficient for his wants, he spent a portion of his nights copying documents for M. Chapelain's successor.

"What do you need so much money for?" his mother said to him when she noticed his eyes a little red.

"Every thing is so dear!" he answered with a smile, which was equivalent to a confidence, and yet which Mme. Favoral did not understand.

He had, nevertheless, managed to pay all his debts, little by little. The day when, at last, he held in his hand the last receipted bill, he showed it proudly to his father, begging him to find him a place at the Mutual Credit, where, with infinitely less trouble, he could earn so much more.

M. Favoral commenced to giggle.

"Do you take me for a fool, like your mother?" he exclaimed. "And do you think I don't know what life you lead?"

"My life is that of a poor devil who works as hard as he can."

"Indeed! How is it, then, that women are constantly seen at your house, whose dresses and manners are a scandal in the neighborhood?"

"You have been deceived, father."

"I have seen."

"It is impossible. Let me explain."

"No, you would have your trouble for nothing. You are, and you will ever remain, the same; and it would be folly on my part to introduce into an office where I enjoy the esteem of all, a fellow, who, some day or other,

will be fatally dragged into the mud by some lost creature."

Such discussions were not calculated to make the relations between father and son more cordial. Several times M. Favoral had insinuated, that, since Maxence lodged away from home, he might as well dine away too. And he would evidently have notified him to do so, had he not been prevented by a remnant of human respect, and the fear of gossip.

On the other hand, the bitter regret of having, perhaps, spoiled his life, the uncertainty of the future, the penury of the moment, all the unsatisfied desires of youth, kept Maxence in a state of perpetual irritation.

The excellent Mme. Favoral exhausted all her arguments to quiet him.

"Your father is harsh for us," she said; "but is he less harsh for himself? He forgives nothing; but he has never needed to be forgiven himself. He does not understand youth, but he has never been young himself; and at twenty he was as grave and as cold as you see him now. How could he know what pleasure is?—he to whom the idea has never come to take an hour's enjoyment."

"Have I, then, been guilty of any crimes, to be thus treated by my father?" exclaimed Maxence, flushed with anger. "Our existence here is an unheard-of thing. You, poor, dear mother!—you have never had the free disposition of a five-franc-piece. Gilberte spends her days turning her dresses, after having had them dyed. I am driven to a petty clerkship. And my father has fifty thousand francs a year!"

Such, indeed, was the figure at which the most moderate estimated M. Favoral's fortune. M. Chapelain, who was supposed to be well informed, insinuated freely

that his friend Vincent, besides being the cashier of the Mutual Credit, must also be one of its principal stockholders. Now, judging from the dividend which had just been paid, the Mutual Credit must, since the war, have realized enormous profits. All its enterprises were successful; and it was on the point of negotiating a foreign loan which would infallibly fill its exchequer to overflowing.

M. Favoral, moreover, defended himself feebly from these accusations of concealed opulence. When M. Desormeaux told him, "Come, now, between us, candidly, how many millions have you?" he had such a strange way of affirming that people were very much mistaken, that his friends' convictions became only the more settled. And, as soon as they had a few thousand francs of savings, they promptly brought them to him, imitated in this by a goodly number of the small capitalists of the neighborhood, who were wont to remark among themselves,—

"That man is safer than the bank!"

Millionaire or otherwise, the cashier of the Mutual Credit became daily more difficult to live with. If strangers, those who had with him but a superficial intercourse, if the Saturday guests themselves, discovered in him no appreciable change, his wife and his children followed with anxious surprise the modifications of his humor.

If outwardly he still appeared the same impassible, precise, and grave man, he showed himself at home more fretful than an old maid,—nervous, agitated, and subject to the oddest whims.

After remaining three or four days without opening his lips, he would begin to speak upon all sorts of subjects with amazing volubility. Instead of watering his

wine freely, as formerly, he had begun to drink it pure; and he often took two bottles at his meal, excusing himself upon the necessity that he felt the need of stimulating himself a little after his excessive labors.

Then he would be taken with fits of coarse gayety; and he related singular anecdotes, intermingled with slang expressions, which Maxence alone could understand.

On the morning of the first day of January, 1872, as he sat down to breakfast, he threw upon the table a roll of fifty napoleons, saying to his children,—

“Here is your New Year’s gift! Divide, and buy any thing you like.”

And as they were looking at him, staring, stupid with astonishment,—

“Well, what of it?” he added with an oath. “Isn’t it well, once in a while, to scatter the coins a little?”

Those unexpected thousand francs Maxence and Mlle. Gilberte applied to the purchase of a shawl, which their mother had wished for for ten years.

She laughed and she cried with pleasure and emotion, the poor woman; and, whilst draping it over her shoulders,—

“Well, well, my dear children,” she said: “your father, after all, is not such a bad man.”

Of which they did not seem very well convinced.

“One thing is sure,” remarked Mlle. Gilberte: “to permit himself such liberality, papa must be awfully rich.”

M. Favoral was not present at this scene. The yearly accounts kept him so closely confined to his office, that he remained forty-eight hours without coming home. A journey which he was compelled to undertake for M. de Thaller consumed the balance of the week.

But on his return he seemed satisfied and quiet. Without giving up his situation at the Mutual Credit, he was about, he stated, to associate himself with the Messrs. Jottras, M. Saint Pavin of "The Financial Pilot," and M. Costeclar, to undertake the construction of a foreign railway.

M. Costeclar was at the head of this enterprise, the enormous profits of which were so certain and so clear, that they could be figured in advance.

And whilst on this same subject,—

"You were very wrong," he said to Mlle. Gilberte, "not to make haste and marry Costeclar when he was willing to have you. You will never find another such match,—a man who, before ten years, will be a financial power."

The very name of M. Costeclar had the effect of irritating the young girl.

"I thought you had fallen out?" she said to her father.

"So we had," he replied with some embarrassment, "because he has never been willing to tell me why he had withdrawn; but people always make up again when they have interests in common."

Formerly, before the war, M. Favoral would certainly never have condescended to enter into all these details. But he was becoming almost communicative. Mlle. Gilberte, who was observing him with interested attention, fancied she could see that he was yielding to that necessity of expansion, more powerful than the will itself, which besets the man who carries within him a weighty secret.

Whilst for twenty years he had, so to speak, never breathed a word on the subject of the Thaller family, now he was continually speaking of them. He told his

Saturday friends all about the princely style of the baron, the number of his servants and horses, the color of his liveries, the parties that he gave, what he spent for pictures and objects of art, and even the very names of his mistresses; for the baron had too much respect for himself not to lay every year a few thousand napoleons at the feet of some young lady sufficiently conspicuous to be mentioned in the society newspapers.

M. Favoral confessed that he did not approve the baron; but it was with a sort of bitter hatred that he spoke of the baroness. It was impossible, he affirmed to his guests, to estimate even approximately the fabulous sums squandered by her, scattered, thrown to the four winds. For she was not prodigal, she was prodigality itself,—that idiotic, absurd, unconscious prodigality which melts a fortune in a turn of the hand; which cannot even obtain from money the satisfaction of a want, a wish, or a fancy.

He said incredible things of her,—things which made Mme. Desclavettes jump upon her seat, explaining that he learned all these details from M. de Thaller, who had often commissioned him to pay his wife's debts, and also from the baroness herself, who did not hesitate to call sometimes at the office for twenty francs; for such was her want of order, that, after borrowing all the savings of her servants, she frequently had not two cents to throw to a beggar.

Neither did the cashier of the Mutual Credit seem to have a very good opinion of Mademoiselle de Thaller.

Brought up at hap-hazard, in the kitchen much more than in the parlor, until she was twelve, and, later, dragged by her mother anywhere,—to the races, to the first representations, to the watering-places, always escorted by a squadron of the young men of the *bourse*,

Mlle. de Thaller had adopted a style which would have been deemed detestable in a man. As soon as some questionable fashion appeared, she appropriated it at once, never finding any thing eccentric enough to make herself conspicuous. She rode on horseback, fenced, frequented pigeon-shooting matches, spoke slang, sang Theresa's songs, emptied neatly her glass of champagne, and smoked her cigarette.

The guests were struck dumb with astonishment.

"But those people must spend millions!" interrupted M. Chapelain.

M. Favoral started as if he had been slapped on the back.

"Bash!" he answered. "They are so rich, so awfully rich!"

He changed the conversation that evening; but on the following Saturday, from the very beginning of the dinner,—

"I believe," he said, "that M. de Thaller has just discovered a husband for his daughter."

"My compliments!" exclaimed M. Desormeaux. "And who may this bold fellow be?"

"A nobleman, of course," he replied. "Isn't that the tradition? As soon as a financier has made his little million, he starts in quest of a nobleman to give him his daughter."

One of those painful presentiments, such as arise in the inmost recesses of the soul, made Mlle. Gilberte turn pale. This presentiment suggested to her an absurd, ridiculous, unlikely thing; and yet she was sure that it would not deceive her,—so sure, indeed, that she rose under the pretext of looking for something in the side-board, but in reality to conceal the terrible emotion which she anticipated.

"And this gentleman?" inquired M. Chapelain.

"Is a marquis, if you please,—the Marquis de Trégars."

Well, yes, it was this very name that Mlle. Gilberte was expecting, and well that she did; for she was thus able to command enough control over herself to check the cry that rose to her throat.

"But this marriage is not made yet," pursued M. Favoral. "This marquis is not yet so completely ruined, that he can be made to do any thing they please. Sure, the baroness has set her heart upon it, oh! but with all her might!"

A discussion which now arose prevented Gilberte from learning any more; and as soon as the dinner, which seemed eternal to her, was over, she complained of a violent headache, and withdrew to her room.

She shook with fever; her teeth chattered. And yet she could not believe that Marius was betraying her, nor that he could have the thought of marrying such a girl as M. Favoral had described, and for money too! Poor, ah! No, that was not admissible. Although she remembered well that Marius had made her swear to believe nothing that might be said of him, she spent a horrible Sunday, and she felt like throwing herself in the Signor Gismondo's arms, when, in giving her his lesson the following Monday,—

"My poor pupil," he said, "feels miserable. A marriage has been spoken of for him, for which he has a perfect horror; and he trembles lest the rumor may reach his intended, whom he loves exclusively."

Mlle. Gilberte felt re-assured after that. And yet there remained in her heart an invincible sadness. She could hardly doubt that this matrimonial scheme was a part of the plan planned by Marius to recover his

fortune. But why, then, had he applied to M. de Thaller? Who could be the man who had despoiled the Marquis de Trégars?

Such were the thoughts which occupied her mind on that Saturday evening when the commissary of police presented himself in the Rue St. Gilles to arrest M. Favoral, charged with embezzling ten or twelve millions.

XXII.

THE hour had now come for the *dénouement* of that home tragedy which was being enacted in the Rue St. Gilles.

The reader will remember the incidents narrated at the beginning of this story,—M. de Thaller's visit and angry words with M. Favoral, his departure after leaving a package of bank-notes in Mlle. Gilberte's hands, the advent of the commissary of police, M. Favoral's escape, and finally the departure of the Saturday evening guests.

The disaster which struck Mme. Favoral and her children had been so sudden and so crushing, that they had been, on the moment, too stupefied to realize it. What had happened went so far beyond the limits of the probable, of the possible even, that they could not believe it. The too cruel scenes which had just taken place were to them like the absurd incidents of a horrible nightmare.

But when their guests had retired after a few commonplace protestations, when they found themselves alone, all three, in that house whose master had just fled, tracked by the police,—then only, as the disturbed equilibrium of their minds became somewhat restored,

did they fully realize the extent of the disaster, and the horror of the situation.

Whilst Mme. Favoral lay apparently lifeless on an arm-chair, Gilberte kneeling at her feet, Maxence was walking up and down the parlor with furious steps. He was whiter than the plaster on the walls; and a cold perspiration glued his tangled hair to his temples.

His eyes glistening, and his fists clinched,—

“Our father a thief!” he kept repeating in a hoarse voice, “a forger!”

And in fact never had the slightest suspicion arisen in his mind. In these days of doubtful reputations, he had been proud indeed of M. Favoral's reputation of austere integrity. And he had endured many a cruel reproach, saying to himself that his father had, by his own spotless conduct, acquired the right to be harsh and exacting.

“And he has stolen twelve millions!” he exclaimed.

And he went on, trying to calculate all the luxury and splendor which such a sum represents, all the cravings gratified, all the dreams realized, all it can procure of things that may be bought. And what things are not for sale for twelve millions!

Then he examined the gloomy home in the Rue St. Gilles,—the contracted dwelling, the faded furniture, the prodigies of a parsimonious industry, his mother's privations, his sister's penury, and his own distress. And he exclaimed again,—

“It is a monstrous infamy!”

The words of the commissary of police had opened his eyes; and he now fancied the most wonderful things. M. Favoral, in his mind, assumed fabulous proportions. By what miracles of hypocrisy and dissimulation had he succeeded in making himself ubiquitous as it were,

and, without awaking a suspicion, living two lives so distinct and so different,—here, in the midst of his family, parsimonious, methodic, and severe; elsewhere, in some illicit household, doubtless facile, smiling, and generous, like a successful thief.

For Maxence considered the bills found in the secretary as a flagrant, irrefutable and material proof.

Upon the brink of that abyss of shame into which his father had just tumbled, he thought he could see, not the inevitable woman, that incentive of all human actions, but the entire legion of those bewitching courtesans who possess unknown crucibles wherein to swell fortunes, and who have secret filters to stupefy their dupes, and strip them of their honor, after robbing them of their last cent.

“And I,” said Maxence,—“I, because at twenty I was fond of pleasure, I was called a bad son! Because I had made some three hundred francs of debts, I was deemed a swindler! Because I love a poor girl who has for me the most disinterested affection, I am one of those rascals whom their family disown, and from whom nothing can be expected but shame and disgrace!”

He filled the parlor with the sound of his voice, which rose like his wrath.

And at the thought of all the bitter reproaches which had been addressed to him by his father, and of all the humiliations that had been heaped upon him,—

“Ah, the wretch!” he fairly shrieked, “the coward!”

As pale as her brother, her face bathed in tears, and her beautiful hair hanging undone, Mlle. Gilberte drew herself up.

“He is our father, Maxence,” she said gently.

But he interrupted her with a wild burst of laughter.

"True," he answered; "and, by virtue of the law which is written in the code, we owe him affection and respect."

"Maxence!" murmured the girl in a beseeching tone.

But he went on, nevertheless,—

"Yes, he is our father, unfortunately. But I should like to know his titles to our respect and our affection. After making our mother the most miserable of creatures, he has imbittered our existence, withered our youth, ruined my future, and done his best to spoil yours by compelling you to marry Costeclar. And, to crown all these deeds of kindness, he runs away now, after stealing twelve millions, leaving us nothing but misery and a disgraced name.

"And yet," he added, "is it possible that a cashier should take twelve millions, and his employer know nothing of it? And is our father really the only man who benefited by these millions?"

Then came back to the mind of Maxence and Mlle. Gilberte the last words of their father at the moment of his flight,—

"I have been betrayed; and I must suffer for all!"

And his sincerity could hardly be called in question; for he was then in one of those moments of decisive crisis in which the truth forces itself out in spite of all calculation.

"He must have accomplices then," murmured Maxence.

Although he had spoken very low, Mme. Favoral overheard him. To defend her husband, she found a remnant of energy, and, straightening herself on her seat,—

"Ah! do not doubt it," she stammered out. "Of his own inspiration, Vincent could never have committed an evil act. He has been circumvented, led away, duped!"

"Very well; but by whom?"

"By Costeclar," affirmed Mlle. Gilberte.

"By the Messrs. Jottras, the bankers," said Mme. Favoral, "and also by M. Saint Pavin, the editor of 'the Financial Pilot.'"

"By all of them, evidently," interrupted Maxence, "even by his manager, M. de Thaller."

When a man is at the bottom of a precipice, what is the use of finding out how he has got there,—whether by stumbling over a stone, or slipping on a tuft of grass! And yet it is always our foremost thought. It was with an eager obstinacy that Mme. Favoral and her children ascended the course of their existence, seeking in the past the incidents and the merest words which might throw some light upon their disaster; for it was quite manifest that it was not in one day and at the same time that twelve millions had been subtracted from the Mutual Credit. This enormous deficit must have been, as usual, made gradually, with infinite caution at first, whilst there was a desire, and some hope, to make it good again, then with mad recklessness towards the end when the catastrophe had become inevitable.

"Alas!" murmured Mme. Favoral, "why did not Vincent listen to my presentiments on that ever fatal day when he brought M. de Thaller, M. Jottras. and M. Saint Pavin to dine here? They promised him a fortune."

Maxence and Mlle. Gilberte were too young at the time of that dinner to have preserved any remembrance of it; but they remembered many other circum-

stances, which, at the time they had taken place, had not struck them. They understood now the temper of their father, his perpetual irritation, and the spasms of his humor. When his friends' were heaping insults upon him, he had exclaimed,—

“Be it so! let them arrest me; and to-night, for the first time in many years, I shall sleep in peace.”

There were years, then, that he lived, as it were upon burning coals, trembling at the fear of discovery, and wondering, as he went to sleep each night, whether he would not be awakened by the rude hand of the police tapping him on the shoulder. No one better than Mme. Favoral could affirm it.

“Your father, my children,” she said, “had long since lost his sleep. There was hardly ever a night that he did not get up and walk the room for hours.”

They understood, now, his efforts to compel Mlle. Gilberte to marry M. Costeclar.

“He thought that Costeclar would help him out of the scrape,” suggested Maxence to his sister.

The poor girl shuddered at the thought, and she could not help feeling thankful to her father for not having told her his situation; for would she have had the sublime courage to refuse the sacrifice, if her father had told her? —

“I have stolen! I am lost! Costeclar alone can save me; and he will save me if you become his wife.”

M. Favoral's pleasant behavior during the siege was quite natural. Then he had no fears; and one could understand how in the most critical hours of the Commune, when Paris was in flames, he could have exclaimed almost cheerfully,—

“Ah! this time it is indeed the final liquidation.”

Doubtless, in the bottom of his heart, he wished

that Paris might be destroyed, and, with it, the evidences of his crime. And perhaps he was not the only one to form that impious wish.

"That's why, then," exclaimed Maxence,—“that's why my father treated me so rudely: that's why he so obstinately persisted in closing the offices of the Mutual Credit against me.”

He was interrupted by a violent ringing of the door-bell. He looked at the clock: ten o'clock was about to strike.

"Who can call so late?" said Mme. Favoral.

Something like a discussion was heard in the hall,—a voice hoarse with anger, and the servant's voice.

"Go and see who's there," said Gilberte to her brother.

It was useless; the servant appeared.

"It's M. Bertan," she commenced, "the baker"—

He had followed her, and, pushing her aside with his robust arm, he appeared himself. He was a man about forty years of age, tall, thin, already bald, and wearing his beard trimmed close.

"M. Favoral?" he inquired.

"My father is not at home," replied Maxence.

"It's true, then, what I have just been told?"

"What?"

"That the police came to arrest him, and he escaped through a window."

"It's true," replied Maxence gently.

The baker seemed prostrated.

"And my money?" he asked.

"What money?"

"Why, my ten thousand francs! Ten thousand francs which I brought to M. Favoral, in gold, you hear? in ten rolls, which I placed there, on that very ta-

ble, and for which he gave me a receipt. Here it is,—his receipt.”

He held out a paper ; but Maxence did not take it.

“ I do not doubt your word, sir,” he replied ; “ but my father’s business is not ours.”

“ You refuse to give me back my money ? ”

“ Neither my mother, my sister, nor myself, have any thing.”

The blood rushed to the man’s face, and, with a tongue made thick by anger,—

“ And you think you are going to pay me off in that way ? ” he exclaimed. “ You have nothing ! Poor little fellow ! And will you tell me, then, what has become of the twenty millions your father has stolen ? for he has stolen twenty millions. I know it : I have been told so. Where are they ? ”

“ The police, sir, has placed the seals over my father’s papers.”

“ The police ? ” interrupted the baker, “ the seals ? What do I care for that ? It’s my money I want : do you hear ? Justice is going to take a hand in it, is it ? Arrest your father, try him ? What good will that do me ? He will be condemned to two or three years’ imprisonment. Will that give me a cent ? He will serve out his time quietly ; and, when he gets out of prison, he’ll get hold of the pile that he’s got hidden somewhere ; and while I starve, he’ll spend my money under my very nose. No, no ! Things won’t suit me that way. It’s at once that I want to be paid.”

And throwing himself upon a chair his head back, and his legs stretched forward,—

“ And what’s more,” he declared, “ I am not going out of here until I am paid.”

It was not without the greatest efforts that Maxence managed to keep his temper.

"Your insults are useless, sir," he commenced.

The man jumped up from his seat.

"Insults!" he cried in a voice that could have been heard all through the house. "Do you call it an insult when a man claims his own? If you think you can make me hush, you are mistaken in your man, M. Favoral, jun. I am not rich myself: my father has not stolen to leave me an income. It is not in gambling at the *bourse* that I made these ten thousand francs. It is by the sweat of my body, by working hard night and day for years, by depriving myself of a glass of wine when I was thirsty. And I am to lose them? By the holy name of heaven, we'll have to see about that! If everybody was like me, there would not be so many scoundrels going about, their pockets filled with other people's money, and from the top of their carriage laughing at the poor fools they have ruined. Come, my ten thousand francs, canaille, or I take my pay on your back."

Maxence, enraged, was about to throw himself upon the man, and a disgusting struggle was about to begin, when Mlle. Gilberte stepped between them.

"Your threats are as cowardly as your insults, Monsieur Bertan," she uttered in a quivering voice. "You have known us long enough to be aware that we know nothing of our father's business, and that we have nothing ourselves. All we can do is to give up to our creditors our very last crumb. Thus it shall be done. And now, sir, please retire."

There was so much dignity in her sorrow, and so imposing was her attitude, that the baker stood abashed.

"Ah! if that's the way," he stammered awkwardly; "and since you meddle with it, mademoiselle"—

And he retreated precipitately, growling at the same time threats and excuses, and slamming the doors after him hard enough to break the partitions.

"What a disgrace!" murmured Mme. Favoral.

Crushed by this last scene, she was choking; and her children had to carry her to the open window. She recovered almost at once; but thus, through the darkness, bleak and cold, she had like a vision of her husband; and, throwing herself back,—

"O great heavens!" she uttered, "where did he go when he left us? Where is he now? What is he doing? What has become of him?"

Her married life had been for Mme. Favoral but a slow torture. It was in vain that she would have looked back through her past life for some of those happy days which leave their luminous track in life, and towards which the mind turns in the hours of grief. Vincent Favoral had never been aught but a brutal despot, abusing the resignation of his victim. And yet, had he died, she would have wept bitterly over him in all the sincerity of her honest and simple soul. Habit! Prisoners have been known to shed tears over the grave of their jailer. Then he was her husband, after all, the father of her children, the only man who existed for her. For twenty-six years they had never been separated: they had sat at the same table: they had slept side by side.

Yes, she would have wept over him. But how much less poignant would her grief have been than at this moment, when it was complicated by all the torments of uncertainty, and by the most frightful apprehensions!

Fearing lest she might take cold, her children had removed her to the sofa, and there, all shivering,—

"Isn't it horrible," she said, "not to know any thing of your father?—to think that at this very moment, perhaps, pursued by the police, he is wandering in despair through the streets, without daring to ask anywhere for shelter."

Her children had no time to answer and comfort her; for at this moment the door-be¹¹ rang again.

"Who can it be now?" said Mme. Favoral with a start.

This time there was no discussion in the hall. Steps sounded on the floor of the dining-room; the door opened; and M. Desclavettes, the old bronze-merchant, walked, or rather slipped into the parlor.

Hope, fear, anger, all the sentiments which agitated his soul, could be read on his pale and cat-like face.

"It is I," he commenced.

Maxence stepped forward.

"Have you heard any thing from my father, sir?"

"No," answered the old merchant, "I confess I have not; and I was just coming to see if you had yourselves. Oh, I know very well that this is not exactly the hour to call at a house; but I thought, that, after what took place this evening, you would not be in bed yet. I could not sleep myself. You understand a friendship of twenty years' standing! So I took Mme. Desclavettes home, and here I am."

"We feel very thankful for your kindness," murmured Mme. Favoral.

"I am glad you do. The fact is, you see, I take a good deal of interest in the misfortune that strikes you,—a greater interest than any one else. For, after all, I, too, am a victim. I had intrusted one hundred and twenty thousand francs to our dear Vincent."

"Alas, sir!" said Mlle. Gilberte.

But the worthy man did not allow her to proceed.

"I have no fault to find with him," he went on,—
"absolutely none. Why, dear me! haven't I been in business myself? and don't I know what it is? First, we borrow a thousand francs or so from the cash account, then ten thousand, then a hundred thousand. Oh! without any bad intention, to be sure, and with the firm resolution to return them. But we don't always do what we wish to do. Circumstances sometimes work against us, if we operate at the *bourse* to make up the deficit we lose. Then we must borrow again, draw from Peter to pay Paul. We are afraid of being caught: we are compelled, reluctantly of course, to alter the books. At last a day comes when we find that millions are gone, and the bomb-shell bursts. Does it follow from this that a man is dishonest? Not the least in the world: he is simply unlucky."

He stopped, as if awaiting an answer; but, as none came, he resumed,—

"I repeat, I have no fault to find with Favoral. Only then, now, between us, to lose these hundred and twenty thousand francs would simply be a disaster for me. I know very well that both Chapelain and Desormeaux had also deposited funds with Favoral. But they are rich: one of them owns three houses in Paris, and the other has a good situation; whereas I, these hundred and twenty thousand francs gone, I'd have nothing left but my eyes to weep with. My wife is dying about it. I assure you our position is a terrible one."

To M. Desclavettes, as to the baker a few moments before,—

"We have nothing," said Maxence.

"I know it," exclaimed the old merchant. "I know it as well as you do yourself. And so I have come to

beg a little favor of you, which will cost you nothing. When you see Favoral, remember me to him, explain my situation to him, and try to make him give me back my money. He is a hard one to fetch, that's a fact. But if you go right about it, above all, if our dear Gilberte will take the matter in hand"—

"Sir!"

"Oh! I swear I sha'n't say a word about it, either to Desormeaux or Chapelain, nor to any one else. Although reimbursed, I'll make as much noise as the rest,—more noise, even. Come, now, my dear friends, what do you say?"

He was almost crying.

"And where the deuse," exclaimed Maxence, "do you expect my father to take a hundred and twenty thousand francs? Didn't you see him go without even taking the money that M. de Thaller had brought?"

A smile appeared upon M. Desclavettes' pale lips.

"That will do very well to say, my dear Maxence;" he said, "and some people may believe it. But don't say it to your old friend, who knows too much about business for that. When a man puts off, after borrowing twelve millions from his employers, he would be a great fool if he had not put away two or three in safety. Now, Favoral is not a fool."

Tears of shame and anger started from Mlle. Gilberte's eyes.

"What you are saying is abominable, sir!" she exclaimed.

He seemed much surprised at this outburst of violence.

"Why so?" he answered. "In Vincent's place, I should not have hesitated to do what he has certainly done. And I am an honest man too. I was in business

for twenty years; and I dare any one to prove that a note signed Desclavettes ever went to protest. And so, my dear friends, I beseech you, consent to serve your old friend, and, when you see your father"—

The old man's tone of voice exasperated even Mme. Favoral herself.

"We never expect to see my husband again," she uttered.

He shrugged his shoulders, and, in a tone of paternal reproach,—

"You just give up all such ugly ideas," he said. "You will see him again, that dear Vincent; for he is much too sharp to allow himself to be caught. Of course, he'll stay away as long as it may be necessary; but, as soon as he can return without danger, he will do so. The Statute of Limitations has not been invented for the Grand Turk. Why, the Boulevard is crowded with people who have all had their little difficulty, and who have spent five or ten years abroad for their health. Does any one think any thing of it? Not in the least; and no one hesitates to shake hands with them. Besides, those things are so soon forgotten."

He kept on as if he never intended to stop; and it was not without trouble that Maxence and Gilberte succeeded in sending him off, very much dissatisfied to see his request so ill received. It was after twelve o'clock. Maxence was anxious to return to his own home; but, at the pressing instances of his mother, he consented to remain, and threw himself, without undressing, on the bed in his old room.

"What will the morrow bring forth?" he thought.

XXIII.

AFTER a few hours of that leaden sleep which follows great catastrophes, Mme. Favoral and her children were awakened on the morning of the next day, which was Sunday, by the furious clamors of an exasperated crowd. Each one, from his own room, understood that the apartment had just been invaded. Loud blows upon the door were mingled with the noise of feet, the oaths of men, and the screams of women. And, above this confused and continuous tumult, such vociferations as these could be heard:—

“I tell you they must be at home!”

“Canailles, swindlers, thieves!”

“We want to go in: we will go in!”

“Let the woman come, then: we want to see her, to speak to her!”

Occasionally there were moments of silence, during which the plaintive voice of the servant could be heard; but almost at once the cries and the threats commenced again, louder than ever. Maxence, being ready first, ran to the parlòr, where his mother and sister joined him directly, their eyes swollen by sleep and by tears. Mme. Favoral was trembling so much that she could not succeed in fastening her dress.

“Do you hear?” she said in a choking voice.

From the parlor, which was divided from the dining-room by folding-doors, they did not miss a single insult.

“Well,” said Mlle. Gilberte coldly, “what else could we expect? If Bertan came alone last night, it is because he alone had been notified. Here are the others now.”

And, turning to her brother,—

“You must see them,” she added, “speak to them.”

But Maxence did not stir. The idea of facing the insults and the curses of these enraged creditors was too repugnant to him.

“Would you rather let them break in the door?” said Mlle. Gilberte. “That won’t take long.”

He hesitated no more. Gathering all his courage, he stepped into the dining-room. The disorder was beyond limits. The table had been pushed towards one of the corners, the chairs were upset. They were there some thirty men and women,—*concierges*, shop-keepers, and retired *bourgeois* of the neighborhood, their cheeks flushed, their eyes staring, gesticulating as if they had a fit, shaking their clinched fists at the ceiling.

“Gentlemen,” commenced Maxence.

But his voice was drowned by the most frightful shouts. He had hardly got in, when he was so closely surrounded, that he had been unable to close the parlor-door after him, and had been driven and backed against the embrasure of a window.

“My father, gentlemen,” he resumed.

Again he was interrupted. There were three or four before him, who were endeavoring before all to establish their own claims clearly.

They were speaking all at once, each one raising his own voice so as to drown that of the others. And yet, through their confused explanations, it was easy to understand the way in which the cashier of the Mutual Credit had managed things.

Formerly it was only with great reluctance that he consented to take charge of the funds which were offered to him; and then he never accepted sums less than ten thousand francs, being always careful to say, that,

not being a prophet, he could not answer for any thing, and might be mistaken, like any one else. Since the Commune, on the contrary, and with a duplicity, that could never have been suspected, he had used all his ingenuity to attract deposits. Under some pretext or other, he would call among the neighbors, the shop-keepers; and, after lamenting with them about the hard times and the difficulty of making money, he always ended by holding up to them the dazzling profits which are yielded by certain investments unknown to the public.

If these very proceedings had not betrayed him, it is because he recommended to each the most inviolable secrecy, saying, that, at the slightest indiscretion, he would be assailed with demands, and that it would be impossible for him to do for all what he did for one.

At any rate, he took every thing that was offered, even the most insignificant sums, affirming, with the most imperturbable assurance, that he could double or treble them without the slightest risk.

The catastrophe having come, the smaller creditors showed themselves, as usual, the most angry and the most intractable. The less money one has, the more anxious one is to keep it. There was there an old newspaper-vender, who had placed in M. Favoral's hands all she had in the world, the savings of her entire life,—five hundred francs. Clinging desperately to Maxence's garments, she begged him to give them back to her, swearing, that, if he did not, there was nothing left for her to do, except to throw herself in the river. Her groans and her cries of distress exasperated the other creditors.

That the cashier of the Mutual Credit should have embezzled millions, they could well understand, they

said. But that he could have robbed this poor woman of her five hundred francs,—nothing more low, more cowardly, and more vile could be imagined; and the law had no chastisement severe enough for such a crime.

“Give her back her five hundred francs;” they cried.

For there was not one of them but would have wagered his head that M. Favoral had lots of money put away; and some went even so far as to say that he must have hid it in the house, and, if they looked well, they would find it.

Maxence, bewildered, was at a loss what to do, when, in the midst of this hostile crowd, he perceived M. Chapelain's friendly face.

Driven from his bed at daylight by the bitter regrets at the heavy loss he had just sustained, the old lawyer had arrived in the Rue St. Gilles at the very moment when the creditors invaded M. Favoral's apartment. Standing behind the crowd, he had seen and heard every thing without breathing a word; and, if he interfered now, it was because he thought things were about to take an ugly turn. He was well known; and, as soon as he showed himself,—

“He is a friend of the rascal!” they shouted on all sides.

But he was not the man to be so easily frightened. He had seen many a worse case during twenty years that he had practised law, and had witnessed all the sinister comedies and all the grotesque dramas of money. He knew how to speak to infuriated creditors, how to handle them, and what strings can be made to vibrate within them. In the most quiet tone,—

“Certainly,” he answered, “I was Favoral's intimate friend; and the proof of it is, that he has treated me

more friendly than the rest. I am in for a hundred and sixty thousand francs."

By this mere declaration he conquered the sympathies of the crowd. He was a brother in misfortune; they respected him: he was a skilful business-man; they stopped to listen to him.

At once, and in a short and trenchant tone, he asked these invaders what they were doing there, and what they wanted. Did they not know to what they exposed themselves in violating a domicile? What would have happened, if, instead of stopping to parley, Maxence had sent for the commissary of police? Was it to Mme. Favoral and her children that they had intrusted their funds? No! What did they want with them then? Was there by chance among them some of those shrewd fellows who always try to get themselves paid in full, to the detriment of the others?

This last insinuation proved sufficient to break up the perfect accord that had hitherto existed among all the creditors. Distrust arose; suspicious glances were exchanged; and, as the old newspaper woman was keeping up her groans,—

"I should like to know why you should be paid before us," two women told her roughly. "Our rights are just as good as yours!"

Prompt to avail himself of the dispositions of the crowd,—

"And, moreover," resumed the old lawyer, "in whom did we place our confidence? Was it in Favoral the private individual? To a certain extent, yes; but it was much more to the cashier of the Mutual Credit. Therefore that establishment owes us, at least, some explanations. And this is not all. Are we really so badly

burned, that we should scream so loud? What do we know about it? That Favoral is charged with embezzlement, that they came to arrest him, and that he has run away. Is that any reason why our money should be lost? I hope not. And so what should we do? Act prudently, and wait patiently for the work of justice."

Already, by this time, the creditors had slipped out one by one; and soon the servant closed the door on the last of them.

Then Mme. Favoral, Maxence, and Mlle. Gilberte surrounded M. Chapelain, and, pressing his hands,—

"How thankful we feel, sir, for the service you have just rendered us!"

But the old lawyer seemed in no wise proud of his victory.

"Do not thank me," he said. "I have only done my duty,—what any honest man would have done in my place."

And yet, under the appearance of impassible coldness, which he owed to the long practice of a profession which leaves no illusions, he evidently felt a real emotion.

"It is you whom I pity," he added, "and with all my soul,—you, madame, you, my dear Gilberte, and you, too, Maxence. Never had I so well understood to what degree is guilty the head of a family who leaves his wife and children exposed to the consequences of his crimes."

He stopped. The servant was trying her best to put the dining-room in some sort of order wheeling the table to the centre of the room, and lifting up the chairs from the floor.

"What pillage!" she grumbled. "Neighbors too,—people from whom we bought our things! But they

were worse than savages ; impossible to do any thing with them."

"Don't trouble yourself, my good girl," said M. Chapelain: "they won't come back any more!"

Mme. Favoral looked as if she wished to drop on her knees before the old lawyer.

"How, very kind you are!" she murmured: "you are not too angry with my poor Vincent!"

With the look of a man who has made up his mind to make the best of a disaster that he cannot help, M. Chapelain shrugged his shoulders.

"I am angry with no one but myself," he uttered in a bluff tone. "An old bird like me should not have allowed himself to be caught in a pigeon-trap. I am inexcusable. But we want to get rich. It's slow work getting rich by working, and it's so much easier to get the money already made out of our neighbor's pockets! I have been unable to resist the temptation myself. It's my own fault; and I should say it was a good lesson, if it did not cost so dear."

XXIV.

So much philosophy could hardly have been expected of him.

"All my father's friends are not as indulgent as you are," said Maxence,— "M. Desclavettes, for instance."

"Have you seen him?"

"Yes, last night, about twelve o'clock. He came to ask us to get father to pay him back, if we should ever see him again."

"That might be an idea!"

Mlle. Gilberte started.

"What!" said she, "you, too, sir, can imagine that my father has run away with millions?"

The old lawyer shook his head.

"I believe nothing," he answered. "Favoral has taken me in so completely,—me, who had the pretension of being a judge of men,—that nothing from him, either for good or for evil, could surprise me hereafter."

Mme. Favoral was about to offer some objection; but he stopped her with a gesture.

"And yet," he went on, "I'd bet that he has gone off with empty pockets. His recent operations reveal a frightful distress. Had he had a few thousand francs at his command, would he have extorted five hundred francs from a poor old woman, a newspaper-vender? What did he want with the money? Try his luck once more, no doubt."

He was seated, his elbow upon the arm of the chair, his head resting upon his hands, thinking; and the contraction of his features indicated an extraordinary tension of mind.

Suddenly he drew himself up.

"But why," he exclaimed, "why wander in idle conjectures? What do we know about Favoral? Nothing. One entire side of his existence escapes us,—that fantastic side, of which the insane prodigalities and inconceivable disorders have been revealed to us by the bills found in his desk. He is certainly guilty; but is he as guilty as we think? and, above all, is he alone guilty? Was it for himself alone that he drew all this money? Are the missing millions really lost? and wouldn't it be possible to find the biggest share of them in the pockets of some accomplice? Skilful men do not expose themselves. They have at their command poor wretches,

sacrificed in advance, and who, in exchange for a few crumbs that are thrown to them, risk the criminal court, are condemned, and go to prison."

"That's just what I was telling my mother and sister, sir," interrupted Maxence.

"And that's what I am telling myself," continued the old lawyer. "I have been thinking over and over again of last evening's scene; and strange doubts have occurred to my mind. For a man who has been robbed of a dozen millions, M. de Thaller was remarkably quiet and self-possessed. Favoral appeared to me singularly calm for a man charged with embezzlement and forgery. M. de Thaller, as manager of the Mutual Credit, is really responsible for the stolen funds, and, as such, should have been anxious to secure the guilty party, and to produce him. Instead of that, he wished him to go, and actually brought him the money to enable him to leave. Was he in hopes of hushing up the affair? Evidently not, since the police had been notified. On the other hand, Favoral seemed much more angry than surprised by the occurrence. It was only on the appearance of the commissary of police that he seems to have lost his head; and then some very strange things escaped him, which I cannot understand."

He was walking at random through the parlor, apparently rather answering the objections of his own mind than addressing himself to his interlocutors, who were listening, nevertheless, with all the attention of which they were capable.

"I don't know," he went on. "An old traveller like me to be taken in thus! Evidently there is under all this one of those diabolical combinations which time even fails to unravel. We ought to see, to inquire"—

And then, suddenly stopping in front of Maxence,—
“How much did M. de Thaller bring to your father last evening?” he asked.

“Fifteen thousand francs.”

“Where are they?”

“Put away in mother's room.”

“When do you expect to take them back to M. de Thaller?”

“To-morrow.”

“Why not to-day?”

“This is Sunday. The offices of the Mutual Credit must be closed.”

“After the occurrences of yesterday, M. de Thaller must be at his office. Besides, haven't you his private address?”

“I beg your pardon, I have.”

The old lawyer's small eyes were shining with unusual brilliancy. He certainly felt deeply the loss of his money; but the idea that he had been swindled for the benefit of some clever rascal was absolutely insupportable to him.

“If we were wise,” he said again, “we'd do this. Mme. Favoral would take these fifteen thousand francs, and we would go together, she and I, to see M. de Thaller.”

It was an unexpected good-fortune for Mme. Favoral, that M. Chapelain should consent to assist her. So, without hesitating,—

“The time to dress, sir,” she said, “and I am ready.”

She left the parlor; but as she reached her room, her son joined her.

“I am obliged to go out, dear mother,” he said; “and I shall probably not be home to breakfast.”

She looked at him with an air of painful surprise.

"What," she said, "at such a moment!"

"I am expected home."

"By whom? A woman?" she murmured.

"Well, yes."

"And it is for that woman's sake that you want to leave your sister alone at home?"

"I must, mother, I assure you; and, if you only knew"—

"I do not wish to know any thing."

But his resolution had been taken. He went off; and a few moments later Mme. Favoral and M. Chapelain entered a cab which had been sent for, and drove to M. de Thaller's.

Left alone, Mlle. Gilberte had but one thought,—to notify M. de Trégars, and obtain word from him. Any thing seemed preferable to the horrible anxiety which oppressed her. She had just commenced a letter, which she intended to have taken to the Count de Villegré, when a violent ring of the bell made her start; and almost immediately the servant came in, saying,—

"It is a gentleman who wishes to see you, a friend of monsieur's,—M. Costeclar, you know."

Mlle. Gilberte started to her feet, trembling with excitement.

"That's too much impudence!" she exclaimed.

She was hesitating whether to refuse him the door, or to see him, and dismiss him shamefully herself, when she had a sudden inspiration. "What does he want?" she thought. "Why not see him, and try and find out what he knows? For he certainly must know the truth."

But it was no longer time to deliberate. Above the servant's shoulder M. Costeclar's pale and impudent face showed itself.

The girl having stepped to one side, he appeared, hat in hand. Although it was not yet nine o'clock, his morning toilet was irreproachably correct. He had already passed through the hair-dresser's hands; and his scanty hair was brought forward over his low forehead with the usual elaborate care.

He wore a pair of those ridiculous trousers which grow wide from the knee down, and which were invented by Prussian tailors to hide their customers' ugly feet. Under his light-colored overcoat could be seen a velvet-faced jacket, with a rose in its buttonhole.

Meantime, he remained motionless on the threshold of the door, trying to smile, and muttering one of those sentences which are never intended to be finished.

"I beg you to believe, mademoiselle—your mother's absence—my most respectful admiration"—

In fact, he was taken aback by the disorder of the girl's toilet,—disorder, which she had had no time to repair since the clamors of the creditors had started her from her bed.

She wore a long brown cashmere wrapper, fitting quite close over the hips, setting off the vigorous elegance of her figure, the maidenly perfections of her waist, and the exquisite contour of her neck. Gathered up in haste, her thick blonde hair escaped from beneath the pins, and spread over her shoulders in luminous cascades. Never had she appeared to M. Costeclar as lovely as at this moment, when her whole frame was vibrating with suppressed indignation, her cheeks flushed, her eyes flashing.

"Please come in, sir," she uttered.

He stepped forward, no longer bowing humbly as formerly, but with legs outstretched, chest thrown out, with an ill-concealed look of gratified vanity.

"I did not expect the honor of your visit, sir," said the young girl.

Passing rapidly his hat and his cane from the right hand into the left, and then the right hand upon his heart, his eyes raised to the ceiling, and with all the depth of expression of which he was capable,—

"It is in times of adversity that we know our real friends, mademoiselle," he uttered. "Those upon whom we thought we could rely the most, often, at the first reverse, take flight forever!"

She felt a shiver pass over her. Was this an allusion to Marius?

The other, changing his tone, went on,—

"It's only last night that I heard of poor Favoral's discomfiture, at the *bourse* where I had gone for news. It was the general topic of conversation. Twelve millions! That's pretty hard. The Mutual Credit Society might not be able to stand it. From 580, at which it was selling before the news, it dropped at once to 300. At nine o'clock, there were no takers at 180. And yet, if there is nothing beyond what they say, at 180, I am in."

Was he forgetting himself, or pretending to?

"But please excuse me, mademoiselle," he resumed: "that's not what I came to tell you."

"Ah!"

"I came to ask if you had any news of our poor Favoral."

"We have none, sir."

"Then it is true: he succeeded in getting away through this window?"

"Yes."

"And he did not tell you where he meant to take refuge?"

"No."

Observing M. Costeclar with all her power of penetration, Mlle. Gilberte fancied she discovered in him something like a certain surprise mingled with joy.

"Then Favoral must have left without a sou!"

"They accuse him of having carried away millions, sir; but I would swear that it is not so."

M. Costeclar approved with a nod.

"I am of the same opinion," he declared, "unless—but no, he was not the man to try such a game. And yet—but again no, he was too closely watched. Besides, he was carrying a very heavy load, a load that exhausted all his resources."

Mlle. Gilberte, hoping that she was going to learn something, made an effort to preserve her indifference.

"What do you mean?" she inquired.

He looked at her, smiled, and, in a light tone,—

"Nothing," he answered, "only some conjectures of my own."

And throwing himself upon a chair, his head leaning upon its back,—

"That is not the object of my visit either," he uttered. "Favoral is overboard: don't let us say any thing more about him. Whether he has got 'the bag' or not, you'll never see him again: he is as good as dead. Let us, therefore, talk of the living, of yourself. What's going to become of you?"

"I do not understand your question, sir."

"It is perfectly limpid, nevertheless. I am asking myself how you are going to live, your mother and yourself?"

"Providence will not abandon us, sir?"

M. Costeclar had crossed his legs, and with the end

of his cane he was negligently tapping his immaculate boot.

"Providence!" he giggled: "that's very good on the stage, in a play, with low music in the orchestra. I can just see it. In real life, unfortunately, the life which we both live, you and I, it is not with words, were they a yard long, that the baker, the grocer, and those rascally landlords, can be paid, or that dresses and shoes can be bought."

She made no answer.

"Now, then," he went on, "here you are without a penny. Is it Maxence who will supply you with money? Poor fellow! Where would he get it? He has hardly enough for himself. Therefore, what are you going to do?"

"I shall work, sir."

He got up, bowed low, and, resuming his seat,—

"My sincere compliments," he said. "There is but one obstacle to that fine resolution: it is impossible for a woman to live by her labor alone. Servants are about the only ones who ever get their full to eat."

"I'll be a servant, if necessary."

For two or three seconds he remained taken aback, but, recovering himself,—

"How different things would be," he resumed in an insinuating tone, "if you had not rejected me when I wanted to become your husband! But you couldn't bear the sight of me. And yet, 'pon my word, I was in love with you, oh, but for good and earnest! You see, I am a judge of women; and I saw very well how you would look, handsomely dressed and got up, leaning back in a fine carriage in the Bois"—

Stronger than her will, disgust rose to her lips.

"Ah, sir!" she said.

He mistook her meaning.

"You are regretting all that," he continued. "I see it. Formerly, eh, you would never have consented to receive me thus, alone with you, which proves that girls should not be headstrong, my dear child."

He, Costeclar, he dared to call her, "My dear child." Indignant and insulted, "Oh!" she exclaimed.

But he had started, and kept on,—

"Well, such as I was, I am still. To be sure, there probably would be nothing further said about marriage between us; but, frankly, what would you care if the conditions were the same,—a fine house, carriages, horses, servants"—

Up to this moment, she had not fully understood him. Drawing herself up to her fullest height, and pointing to the door,—

"Leave this moment," she ordered.

But he seemed in no wise disposed to do so: on the contrary, paler than usual, his eyes bloodshot, his lips trembling, and smiling a strange smile, he advanced towards Mlle. Gilberte.

"What!" said he. "You are in trouble, I kindly come to offer my services, and this is the way you receive me! You prefer to work, do you? Go ahead then, my lovely one, prick your pretty fingers, and red-den your eyes. My time will come. Fatigue and want, cold in the winter, hunger in all seasons, will speak to your little heart of that kind Costeclar who adores you, like a big fool that he is, who is a serious man and who has money,—much money."

Beside herself,—

"Wretch!" cried the girl, "leave, leave at once!"

"One moment," said a strong voice.

M. Costeclar looked around.

Marius de Trégars stood within the frame of the open door.

"Marius!" murmured Mlle. Gilberte, rooted to the spot by a surprise hardly less immense than her joy.

To behold him thus suddenly, when she was wondering whether she would ever see him again; to see him appear at the very moment when she found herself alone, and exposed to the basest outrages,—it was one of those fortunate occurrences which one can scarcely realize; and from the depth of her soul rose something like a hymn of thanks.

Nevertheless, she was confounded at M. Costeclar's attitude. According to her, and from what she thought she knew, he should have been petrified at the sight of M. de Trégars.

And he did not even seem to know him. He seemed shocked, annoyed at being interrupted, slightly surprised, but in no wise moved or frightened.

Knitting his brows,—

"What do you wish?" he inquired in his most impertinent tone.

M. de Trégars stepped forward. He was somewhat pale, but unnaturally calm, cool, and collected. Bowing to Mlle. Gilberte,—

"If I have thus ventured to enter your apartment, mademoiselle," he uttered gently, "it is because, as I was going by the door, I thought I recognized this gentleman's carriage."

And, with his finger over his shoulder, he was pointing to M. Costeclar.

"Now," he went on, "I had reason to be somewhat astonished at this, after the positive orders I had given him never to set his feet, not only in this house, but

in this part of the city. I wished to find out exactly. I came up: I heard"—

All this was said in a tone of such crushing contempt, that a slap on the face would have been less cruel. All the blood in M. Costeclar's veins rushed to his face.

"You!" he interrupted insolently: "I do not know you."

Imperturbable, M. de Trégars was drawing off his gloves.

"Are you quite certain of that?" he replied. "Come, you certainly know my old friend, M. de Villegré?"

An evident feeling of anxiety appeared on M. Costeclar's countenance.

"I do," he stammered.

"Did not M. Villegré call upon you before the war?"

"He did."

"Well, 'twas I who sent him to you; and the commands which he delivered to you were mine."

"Yours?"

"Mine. I am Marius de Trégars."

A nervous shudder shook M. Costeclar's lean frame. Instinctively his eye turned towards the door.

"You see," Marius went on with the same gentleness, "we are, you and I, old acquaintances. For you quite remember me now, don't you? I am the son of that poor Marquis de Trégars who came to Paris, all the way from his old Brittany with his whole fortune,—two millions."

"I remember," said the stock-broker: "I remember perfectly well."

"On the advice of certain clever people, the Marquis de Trégars ventured into business. Poor old man! He was not very sharp. He was firmly persuaded that he

had already more than doubled his capital, when his honorable partners demonstrated to him that he was ruined, and, besides, compromised by certain signatures imprudently given."

Mlle. Gilberte was listening, her mouth open, and wondering what Marius was aiming at, and how he could remain so calm.

"That disaster," he went on, "was at the time the subject of an enormous number of very witty jokes. The people of the *bourse* could hardly admire enough these bold financiers who had so deftly relieved that candid marquis of his money. That was well done for him: what was he meddling with? As to myself, to stop the prosecutions with which my father was threatened, I gave up all I had. I was quite young, and, as you see, quite what you call, I believe, 'green.' I am no longer so now. Were such a thing to happen to me to-day, I should want to know at once what had become of the millions: I would feel all the pockets around me. I would say, 'Stop thief!'"

At every word, as it were, M. Costeclar's uneasiness became more manifest.

"It was not I," he said, "who received the benefit of M. de Trégars' fortune."

Marius nodded approvingly.

"I know now," he replied, "among whom the spoils were divided. You, M. Costeclar, you took what you could get, timidly, and according to your means. Sharks are always accompanied by small fishes, to which they abandon the crumbs they disdain. You were but a small fish then: you accommodated yourself with what your patrons, the sharks, did not care about. But, when you tried to operate alone, you were not shrewd enough: you left proofs of your excessive appetite for

other people's money. Those proofs I have in my possession."

M. Costeclar was now undergoing perfect torture.

"I am caught," he said, "I know it: I told M. de Villegré so."

"Why are you here, then?"

"How did I know that the count had been sent by you?"

"That's a poor reason, sir."

"Besides, after what has occurred, after Favoral's flight, I thought myself relieved of my engagement."

"Indeed!"

"Well, if you insist upon it, I am wrong, I suppose."

"Not only you are wrong," uttered Marius still perfectly cool, "but you have committed a great imprudence. By failing to keep your engagements, you have relieved me of mine. The pact is broken. According to the agreement, I have the right, as I leave here, to go straight to the police."

M. Costeclar's dull eye was vacillating.

"I did not think I was doing wrong," he muttered. "Favoral was my friend."

"And that's the reason why you were coming to propose to Mlle. Favoral to become your mistress? There she is, you thought, without resources, literally without bread, without relatives, without friends to protect her: this is the time to come forward. And thinking you could be cowardly, vile, and infamous with impunity, you came."

To be thus treated, he, the successful man, in presence of this young girl, whom, a moment before, he was crushing with his impudent opulence, no M. Costeclar could not stand it. Losing completely his head,—

"You should have let me know, then," he exclaimed, "that she was your mistress."

Something like a flame passed over M. de Trégars' face. His eyes flashed. Rising in all the height of his wrath, which broke out terrible at last,—

"Ah, you scoundrel!" he exclaimed.

M. Costeclar threw himself suddenly to one side.

"Sir!"

But at one bound M. de Trégars had caught him.

"On your knees!" he cried.

And, seizing him by the collar with an iron grip, he lifted him clear off the floor, and then threw him down violently upon both knees.

"Speak!" he commanded. "Repeat,—'Mademoiselle'"—

M. Costeclar had expected worse from M. de Trégars' look. A horrible fear had instantly crushed within him all idea of resistance.

"Mademoiselle," he stuttered in a choking voice.

"I am the vilest of wretches," continued Marius.

M. Costeclar's livid face was oscillating like an inert object.

"I am," he repeated, "the vilest of wretches."

"And I beg of you"—

But Mlle. Gilberte was sick of the sight.

"Enough," she interrupted, "enough!"

Feeling no longer upon his shoulders the heavy hand of M. de Trégars, the stock-broker rose with difficulty to his feet. So livid was his face, that one might have thought that his whole blood had turned to gall.

Dusting with the end of his glove the knees of his trousers, and restoring as best he could the harmony of his toilet, which had been seriously disturbed,—

"Is it showing any courage," he grumbled, "to abuse one's physical strength?"

M. de Trégars had already recovered his self-possession; and Mlle. Gilberte thought she could read upon his face regret for his violence.

"Would it be better to make use of what you know?"

M. Costeclar joined his hands.

"You would not do that," he said. "What good would it do you to ruin me?"

"None," answered M. de Trégars: "you are right. But yourself?"

And, looking straight into M. Costeclar's eyes,—

"If you could be of service to me," he inquired, "would you be willing?"

"Perhaps. That I might recover possession of the papers you have."

M. de Trégars was thinking.

"After what has just taken place," he said at last, "an explanation is necessary between us. I will be at your house in an hour. Wait for me."

M. Costeclar had become more pliable than his own lavender kid gloves: in fact, alarmingly pliable.

"I am at your command, sir," he replied to M. de Trégars.

And, bowing to the ground before Mlle. Gilberte, he left the parlor; and, a few moments after, the street-door was heard to close upon him.

"Ah, what a wretch!" exclaimed the girl, dreadfully agitated.

"Marius, did you see what a look he gave us as he went out?"

"I saw it," replied M. de Trégars.

"That man hates us: he will not hesitate to commit

a crime to avenge the atrocious humiliation you have just inflicted upon him."

"I believe it too."

Mlle. Gilberte made a gesture of distress.

"Why did you treat him so harshly?" she murmured.

"I had intended to remain calm, and it would have been politic to have done so. But there are some insults which a man of heart cannot endure. I do not regret what I have done."

A long pause followed; and they remained standing, facing each other, somewhat embarrassed. Mlle. Gilberte felt ashamed of the disorder of her dress. M. de Trégars wondered how he could have been bold enough to enter this house.

"You have heard of our misfortune," said the young girl at last.

"I read about it this morning, in the papers."

"What! the papers know already?"

"Every thing."

"And our name is printed in them?"

"Yes."

She covered her face with her two hands.

"What disgrace!" she said.

"At first," went on M. de Trégars, "I could hardly believe what I read. I hastened to come; and the first shopkeeper I questioned confirmed only too well what I had seen in the papers. From that moment, I had but one wish,—to see and speak to you. When I reached the door, I recognized M. Costeclar's equipage, and I had a presentiment of the truth. I inquired from the *concierge* for your mother or your brother, and heard that Maxence had gone out a few moments before, and

that Mme. Favoral had just left in a carriage with M. Chapelain, the old lawyer. At the idea that you were alone with Costeclar, I hesitated no longer. I ran up stairs, and, finding the door open, had no occasion to ring."

Mlle. Gilberte could hardly repress the sobs that rose to her throat.

"I never hoped to see you again," she stammered; "and you'll find there on the table the letter I had just commenced for you when M. Costeclar interrupted me."

M. de Trégars took it up quickly. Two lines only were written. He read: "I release you from your engagement, Marius. Henceforth you are free."

He became whiter than his shirt.

"You wish to release me from my engagement!" he exclaimed. "You"—

"Is it not my duty? Ah! if it had only been our fortune, I should perhaps have rejoiced to lose it. I know your heart. Poverty would have brought us nearer together. But it's honor, Marius, honor that is lost too! The name I bear is forever stained. Whether my father is caught, or whether he escapes, he will be tried all the same, condemned, and sentenced to a degrading penalty for embezzlement and forgery."

If M. de Trégars was allowing her to proceed thus, it was because he felt all his thoughts whirling in his brain; because she looked so beautiful thus, all in tears, and her hair loose; because there arose from her person so subtle a charm, that words failed him to express the sensations that agitated him.

"Can you," she went on, "take for your wife the daughter of a dishonored man? No, you cannot. Forgive me, then, for having for a moment turned away

your life from its object; forgive the sorrow which I have caused you; leave me to the misery of my fate; forget me!"

She was suffocating.

"Ah, you have never loved me!" exclaimed Marius.

Raising her hands to heaven,—

"Thou hearest him, great God!" she uttered, as if shocked by a blasphemy.

"Would it be easy for you to forget me then? Were I to be struck by misfortune, would you break our engagement, cease to love me?"

She ventured to take his hands, and, pressing them between hers,—

"To cease loving you no longer depends on my will," she murmured with quivering lips. "Poor, abandoned of all, disgraced, criminal even, I should love you still and always."

With a passionate gesture, Marius threw his arm around her waist, and, drawing her to his breast, covered her blonde hair with burning kisses.

"Well, 'tis thus that I love you too!" he exclaimed, "and with all my soul, exclusively, and for life! What do I care for your parents? Do I know them? Your father—does he exist? Your name—it is mine, the spotless name of the Trégars. You are my wife! mine, mine!"

She was struggling feebly: an almost invincible stupor was creeping over her. She felt her reason disturbed, her energy giving way, a film before her eyes, the air failing to her heaving chest.

A great effort of her will restored her to consciousness. She withdrew gently, and sank upon a chair, less strong against joy than she had been against sorrow.

"Pardon me," she stammered, "pardon me for having doubted you!"

M. de Trégars was not much less agitated than Mlle. Gilberte: but he was a man; and the springs of his energy were of a superior temper. In less than a minute he had fully recovered his self-possession, and imposed upon his features their accustomed expression. Drawing a chair by the side of Mlle. Gilberte,—

"Permit me, my friend," he said, "to remind you that our moments are numbered, and that there are many details which it is urgent that I should know."

"What details?" she asked, raising her head.

"About your father."

She looked at him with an air of profound surprise.

"Do you not know more about it than I do?" she replied, "more than my mother, more than any of us? Did you not, whilst following up the people who robbed your father, strike mine unwittingly? And 'tis I, wretch that I am, who inspired you to that fatal resolution; and I have not the heart to regret it."

M. de Trégars had blushed imperceptibly.

"How did you know?" he began.

"Was it not said that you were about to marry Mlle. de Thaller?"

He drew up suddenly.

"Never," he exclaimed, "has this marriage existed, except in the brain of M. de Thaller, and, more still, of the Baroness de Thaller. That ridiculous idea occurred to her because she likes my name, and would be delighted to see her daughter Marquise de Trégars. She has never breathed a word of it to me; but she has spoken of it everywhere, with just enough secrecy to give rise to a good piece of parlor gossip. She went so

far as to confide to several persons of my acquaintance the amount of the dowry, thinking thus to encourage me. As far as I could, I warned you against this false news through the Signor Gismondo."

"The Signor Gismondo relieved me of cruel anxieties," she replied; "but I had suspected the truth from the first. Was I not the confidante of your hopes? Did I not know your projects? I had taken for granted that all this talk about a marriage was but a means to advance yourself in M. de Thaller's intimacy without awaking his suspicions."

M. de Trégars was not the man to deny a true fact.

"Perhaps, indeed, I have not been wholly foreign to M. Favoral's disaster. At least I may have hastened it a few months, a few days only, perhaps; for it was inevitable, fatal. Nevertheless, had I suspected the real facts, I would have given up my designs—Gilberte, I swear it—rather than risk injuring your father. There is no undoing what is done; but the evil may, perhaps, be somewhat lessened."

Mlle. Gilberte started.

"Great heavens!" she exclaimed, "do you, then, believe my father innocent?"

Better than any one else, Mlle. Gilberte must have been convinced of her father's guilt. Had she not seen him humiliated and trembling before M. de Thaller? Had she not heard him, as it were, acknowledge the truth of the charge that was brought against him? But at twenty hope never forsakes us, even in presence of facts.

And when she understood by M. de Trégars' silence that she was mistaken,—

"It's madness," she murmured, dropping her head:

"I feel it but too well. But the heart speaks louder than reason. It is so cruel to be driven to despise one's father!"

She wiped the tears which filled her eyes, and, in a firmer voice,—

"What happens is so incomprehensible!" she went on. "How can I help imagining some one of those mysteries which time alone unravels. For twenty-four hours we have been losing ourselves in idle conjectures, and, always and fatally, we come to this conclusion,—that my father must be the victim of some mysterious intrigue.

"M. Chapelain, whom a loss of a hundred and sixty thousand francs has not made particularly indulgent, is of that opinion."

"And so am I," exclaimed Marius.

"You see, then"—

But without allowing her to proceed and taking gently her hand,—

"Let me tell you all," he interrupted, "and try with you to find an issue to this horrible situation. Strange rumors are afloat about M. Favoral. It is said that his austerity was but a mask, his sordid economy a means of gaining confidence. It is affirmed that in fact he abandoned himself to all sorts of disorders; that he had, somewhere in Paris, an establishment, where he lavished the money of which he was so sparing here. Is it so? The same thing is said of all those in whose hands large fortunes have melted."

The young girl had become quite red.

"I believe that is true," she replied. "The commissary of police stated so to us. He found among my father's papers receipted bills for a number of costly

articles, which could only have been intended for a woman."

M. de Trégars looked perplexed.

"And does any one know who this woman is?" he asked.

"No."

"Whoever she may be, I admit that she may have cost M. Favoral considerable sums. But can she have cost him twelve millions?"

"Precisely the remark which M. Chapelain made."

"And which every sensible man must also make. I know very well that to conceal for years a considerable deficit is a costly operation, requiring purchases and sales, the handling and shifting of funds, all of which is ruinous in the extreme. But, on the other hand, M. Favoral was making money, a great deal of money. He was rich: he was supposed to be worth millions. Otherwise, Costeclar would never have asked your hand."

"M. Chapelain pretends that at a certain time my father had at least fifty thousand francs a year."

"It's bewildering."

For two or three minutes M. de Trégars remained silent, reviewing in his mind every imaginable eventuality, and then,—

"But no matter," he resumed. "As soon as I heard this morning the amount of the deficit, doubts came to my mind. And it is for that reason, dear friend, that I was so anxious to see you and speak to you. It would be necessary for me to know exactly what occurred here last night."

Rapidly, but without omitting a single useful detail, Mlle. Gilberte narrated the scenes of the previous night,—the sudden appearance of M. de Thaller, the

arrival of the commissary of police, M. Favoral's escape, thanks to Maxence's presence of mind. Every one of her father's words had remained present to her mind; and it was almost literally that she repeated his strange speeches to his indignant friends, and his incoherent remarks at the moment of flight, when, whilst acknowledging his fault, he said that he was not as guilty as they thought; that, at any rate, he was not alone guilty; and that he had been shamefully sacrificed. When she had finished,—

“That's exactly what I thought,” said M. de Trégars.

“What?”

“M. Favoral accepted a *rôle* in one of those terrible financial dramas which ruin a thousand poor dupes to the benefit of two or three clever rascals. Your father wanted to be rich: he needed money to carry on his intrigues. He allowed himself to be tempted. But whilst he believed himself one of the managers, called upon to divide the receipts, he was but a scene-shifter with a stated salary. The moment of this *dénouement* having come, his so-called partners disappeared through a trap-door with the cash, leaving him alone, as they say, to face the music.”

“If that's the case,” replied the young girl, “why didn't my father speak?”

“What was he to say?”

“Name his accomplices.”

“And suppose he had no proofs of their complicity to offer? He was the cashier of the Mutual Credit; and it is from his cash that the millions are gone.”

Mlle. Gilberte's conjectures had run far ahead of that sentence. Looking straight at Marius,—

“Then,” she said, “you believe, as M. Chapelain does, that M. de Thaller”—

"Ah! M. Chapelain thinks"—

"That the manager of the Mutual Credit must have known the fact of the frauds."

"And that he had his share of them?"

"A larger share than his cashier, yes."

A singular smile curled M. de Trégars' lips.

"Quite possible," he replied: "that's quite possible."

For the past few moments Mlle. Gilberte's embarrassment was quite evident in her look. At last, overcoming her hesitation,—

"Pardon me," said she, "I had imagined that M. de Thaller was one of those men whom you wished to strike; and I had indulged in the hope, that, whilst having justice done to your father, you were thinking, perhaps, of avenging mine."

M. de Trégars stood up, as if moved by a spring.

"Well, yes!" he exclaimed. "Yes, you have correctly guessed. But how can we obtain this double result? A single misstep at this moment might lose ail. Ah, if I only knew your father's real situation; if I could only see him and speak to him! In one word he might, perhaps, place in my hands a sure weapon,—the weapon that I have as yet been unable to find."

"Unfortunately," replied Mlle. Gilberte with a gesture of despair, "we are without news of my father; and he even refused to tell us where he expected to take refuge."

"But he will write, perhaps. Besides, we might look for him, quietly, so as not to excite the suspicions of the police; and if your brother Maxence was only willing to help me"—

"Alas! I fear that Maxence may have other cares. He insisted upon going out this morning, in spite of mother's request to the contrary."

But Marius stopped her, and, in the tone of a man who knows much more than he is willing to say,—

“Do not calumniate Maxence,” he said: “it is through him, perhaps, that we will receive the help that we need.”

Eleven o'clock struck. Mlle. Gilberte started.

“Dear me!” she exclaimed, “mother will be home directly.”

M. de Trégars might as well have waited for her. Henceforth he had nothing to conceal. Yet, after duly deliberating with the young girl, they decided that he should withdraw, and that he would send M. de Villegré to declare his intentions. He then left, and, five minutes later, Mme. Favoral and M. Chapelain appeared.

The ex-attorney was furious; and he threw the package of bank-notes upon the table with a movement of rage.

“In order to return them to M. de Thaller,” he exclaimed, “it was at least necessary to see him. But the gentleman is invisible; keeps himself under lock and key, guarded by a perfect cloud of servants in livery.”

Meantime, Mme. Favoral had approached her daughter.

“Your brother?” she asked in a whisper.

“He has not yet come home.”

“Dear me!” sighed the poor mother: “at such a time he forsakes us, and for whose sake?”

XXV.

MME. FAVORAL, usually so indulgent, was too severe this time; and it was very unjustly that she accused her

son. She forgot, and what mother does not forget, that he was twenty-five years of age, that he was a man, and that, outside of the family and of herself, he must have his own interests and his passions, his affections and his duties. Because he happened to leave the house for a few hours, Maxence was surely not forsaking either his mother or his sister. It was not without a severe internal struggle that he had made up his mind to go out, and, as he was going down the steps,—

“Poor mother,” he thought. “I am sure I am making her very unhappy; but how can I help it?”

This was the first time that he had been in the street since his father's disaster had been known; and the impression produced upon him was painful in the extreme. Formerly, when he walked through the Rue St. Gilles, that street where he was born, and where he used to play as a boy, every one met him with a friendly nod or a familiar smile. True he was then the son of a man rich and highly esteemed; whereas this morning not a hand was extended, not a hat raised, on his passage. People whispered among themselves, and pointed him out with looks of hatred and irony. That was because he was now the son of the dishonest cashier tracked by the police, of the man whose crime brought disaster upon so many innocent parties.

Mortified and ashamed, Maxence was hurrying on, his head down, his cheek burning, his throat parched, when, in front of a wine-shop,—

“Halloo!” said a man; “that's the son. What cheek!”

And farther on, in front of the grocer's.

“I tell you what,” said a woman in the midst of a group, “they still have more than we have.”

Then, for the first time, he understood with what

crushing weight his father's crime would weigh upon his whole life; and, whilst going up the Rue Turenne,—

“It's all over,” he thought: “I can never get over it.”

And he was thinking of changing his name, of emigrating to America, and hiding himself in the deserts of the Far West, when, a little farther on, he noticed a group of some thirty persons in front of a newspaper-stand. The vender, a fat little man with a red face and an impudent look, was crying in a hoarse voice,—

“Here are the morning papers! The last editions! All about the robbery of twelve millions by a poor cashier. Buy the morning papers!”

And, to stimulate the sale of his wares, he added all sorts of jokes of his own invention, saying that the thief belonged to the neighborhood; that it was quite flattering, etc.

The crowd laughed; and he went on,—

“The cashier Favoral's robbery! twelve millions! Buy the paper, and see how it's done.”

And so the scandal was public, irreparable. Maxence was listening a few steps off. He felt like going; but an imperative feeling, stronger than his will, made him anxious to see what the papers said.

Suddenly he made up his mind, and, stepping up briskly, he threw down three sous, seized a paper, and ran as if they had all known him.

“Not very polite, the gentleman,” remarked two idlers whom he had pushed a little roughly.

Quick as he had been, a shopkeeper of the Rue Turenne had had time to recognize him.

“Why, that's the cashier's son!” he exclaimed.

“Is it possible?”

“Why don't they arrest him?”

Half a dozen curious fellows, more eager than the

rest, ran after him to try and see his face. But he was already far off.

Leaning against a gas-lamp on the Boulevard, he unfolded the paper he had just bought. He had no trouble looking for the article. In the middle of the first page, in the most prominent position, he read in large letters,—

“ANOTHER FINANCIAL DISASTER.

“At the moment of going to press, the greatest agitation prevails among the stock-brokers and operators at the *bourse* generally, owing to the news that one of our great banking establishments has just been the victim of a theft of unusual magnitude.

“At about five o'clock in the afternoon, the manager of the Mutual Credit Society, having need of some documents, went to look for them in the office of the head cashier, who was then absent. A memorandum forgotten on the table excited his suspicions. Sending at once for a locksmith, he had all the drawers broken open, and soon acquired the irrefutable evidence that the Mutual Credit had been defrauded of sums, which, as far as now known, amount to upwards of twelve millions.

“At once the police was notified; and M. Brosse, commissary of police, duly provided with a warrant, called at the guilty cashier's house.

“That cashier, named Favoral,—we do not hesitate to name him, since his name has already been made public,—had just sat down to dinner with some friends. Warned, no one knows how, he succeeded in escaping through a window into the yard of the adjoining house, and up to this hour has succeeded in eluding all search.

“It seems that these embezzlements had been going on for years, but had been skilfully concealed by false entries.

“M. Favoral had managed to secure the esteem of all who knew him. He led at home a more than modest existence. But that was only, as it were, his official life. Elsewhere, and under another name, he indulged

in the most reckless expenses for the benefit of a woman with whom he was madly in love.

"Who this woman is, is not yet exactly known.

"Some mention a very fascinating young actress, who performs at a theatre not a hundred miles from the Rue Vivienne; others, a lady of the financial high life, whose equipages, diamonds, and dresses are justly famed.

"We might easily, in this respect, give particulars which would astonish many people; for *we know all*; but, at the risk of seeming less well informed than some others of our morning contemporaries, we will observe a silence which our readers will surely appreciate. We do not wish to add, by a premature indiscretion, any thing to the grief of a family already so cruelly stricken; for M. Favoral leaves behind him in the deepest sorrow a wife and two children,—a son of twenty-five, employed in a railroad office, and a daughter of twenty, remarkably handsome, who, a few months ago, came very near marrying M. C.—

"Next"—

Tears of rage obscured Maxence's sight whilst reading the last few lines of this terrible article. To find himself thus held up to public curiosity, though innocent, was more than he could bear.

And yet he was, perhaps, still more surprised than indignant. He had just learned in that paper more than his father's most intimate friends knew, more than he knew himself. Where had it got its information? And what could be these other details which the writer pretended to know, but did not wish to publish as yet? Maxence felt like running to the office of the paper, fancying that they could tell him there exactly where and under what name M. Favoral led that existence of pleasure and luxury, and who the woman was to whom the article alluded.

But in the mean time he had reached his hotel,—the Hôtel des Folies. After a moment of hesitation,—

“ Bash ! ” he thought, “ I have the whole day to call at the office of the paper.”

And he started in the corridor of the hotel, a corridor that was so long, so dark, and so narrow, that it gave an idea of the shaft of a mine, and that it was prudent, before entering it, to make sure that no one was coming in the opposite direction. It was from the neighboring theatre, *des Folies-Nouvelles* (now the Theatre Déjazet), that the hotel had taken its name.

It consists of the rear building of a large old house, and has no frontage on the Boulevard, where nothing betrays its existence, except a lantern hung over a low and narrow door, between a *café* and a confectionery-shop. It is one of those hotels, as there are a good many in Paris, somewhat mysterious and suspicious, ill-kept, and whose profits remain a mystery for simple-minded folks. Who occupy the apartments of the first and second story? No one knows. Never have the most curious of the neighbors discovered the face of a tenant. And yet they are occupied; for often, in the afternoon, a curtain is drawn aside, and a shadow is seen to move. In the evening, lights are noticed within; and sometimes the sound of a cracked old piano is heard.

Above the second story, the mystery ceases. All the upper rooms, the price of which is relatively modest, are occupied by tenants who may be seen and heard,—clerks like Maxence, shop-girls from the neighborhood, a few restaurant-waiters, and sometimes some poor devil of an actor or chorus-singer from the Theatre Déjazet, the Circus, or the Château d'Eau. One of the great advantages of the Hôtel des Folies—and Mme.

Fortin, the landlady, never failed to point it out to the new tenants, an inestimable advantage, she declared—was a back entrance on the Rue Béranger.

“And everybody knows,” she concluded, “that there is no chance of being caught, when one has the good luck of living in a house that has two outlets.”

When Maxence entered the office, a small, dark, and dirty room, the proprietors, M. and Mme. Fortin were just finishing their breakfast with an immense bowl of coffee of doubtful color, of which an enormous red cat was taking a share.

“Ah, here is M. Favoral!” they exclaimed.

There was no mistaking their tone. They knew the catastrophe; and the newspaper lying on the table showed how they had heard it.

“Some one called to see you last night,” said Mme. Fortin, a large fat woman, whose nose was always besmeared with snuff, and whose honeyed voice made a marked contrast with her bird-of-prey look.

“Who?”

“A gentleman of about fifty, tall and thin, with a long overcoat, coming down to his heels.”

Maxence imagined, from this description, that he recognized his own father. And yet it seemed impossible, after what had happened, that he should dare to show himself on the Boulevard du Temple, where everybody knew him, within a step of the Café Turc, of which he was one of the oldest customers.

“At what o’clock was he here?” he inquired.

“I really can’t tell,” answered the landlady. “I was half asleep at the time; but Fortin can tell us.”

M. Fortin, who looked about twenty years younger than his wife, was one of those small men, blonde, with scanty beard, a suspicious glance, and uneasy smile,

such as the Madame Fortins know how to find, Heaven knows where.

"The confectioner had just put up his shutters," he replied: "consequently, it must have been between eleven and a quarter-past eleven."

"And didn't he leave any word?" said Maxence.

"Nothing, except that he was very sorry not to find you in. And, in fact, he did look quite annoyed. We asked him to leave his name; but he said it wasn't worth while, and that he would call again."

At the glance which the landlady was throwing toward him from the corner of her eyes, Maxence understood that she had on the subject of that late visitor the same suspicion as himself.

And, as if she had intended to make it more apparent still,—

"I ought, perhaps, to have given him your key," she said.

"And why so, pray?"

"Oh! I don't know, an idea of mine, that's all. Besides, Mlle. Lucienne can probably tell you more about it; for she was there when the gentleman came, and I even think that they exchanged a few words in the yard."

Maxence, seeing that they were only seeking a pretext to question him, took his key, and inquired,—

"Is Mlle. Lucienne at home?"

"Can't tell. She has been going and coming all the morning, and I don't know whether she finally staid in or out. One thing is sure, she waited for you last night until after twelve; and she didn't like it much, I can tell you."

Maxence started up the steep stairs; and, as he reached the upper stories, a woman's voice, fresh and

beautifully toned, reached his ears more and more distinctly.

She was singing a popular tune,—one of those songs which are monthly put in circulation by the singing *cafés*:—

“To hope! O charming word,
Which, during all life,
Husband and children and wife
Repeat in common accord!
When the moment of success
From us ever further slips,
'Tis Hope from its rosy lips
Whispers, To-morrow you will bless.
'Tis very nice to run,
But to have is better fun.”

“She is in,” murmured Maxence, breathing more freely.

Reaching the fourth story, he stopped before the door which faced the stairs, and knocked lightly.

At once, the voice, which had just commenced another verse stopped short, and inquired, “Who’s there?”

“I, Maxence!”

“At this hour!” replied the voice with an ironical laugh. “That’s lucky. You have probably forgotten that we were to go to the theatre last night, and start for St. Germain at seven o’clock this morning.”

“Don’t you know then?” Maxence began, as soon as he could put in a word.

“I know that you did not come home last night.”

“Quite true. But when I have told you”—

“What? the lie you have imagined? Save yourself the trouble.”

“Lucienne, I beg of you, open the door.”

"Impossible, I am dressing. Go to your own room: as soon as I am dressed, I'll join you."

And, to cut short all these explanations, she took up her song again:—

"Hope, I've waited but too long
For thy manna divine!
I've drunk enough of thy wine,
And I know thy siren song:
Waiting for a lucky turn,
I have wasted my best days:
Take up thy magic-lantern
And elsewhere display its rays.
'Tis very nice to run,
But to have is better fun!"

XXVI.

It was on the opposite side of the landing that what Mme. Fortin pompously called "Maxence's apartment" was situated.

It consisted of a sort of antechamber, almost as large as a handkerchief (decorated by the Fortins with the name of dining-room), a bedroom, and a closet called a dressing-room in the lease. Nothing could be more gloomy than this lodging, in which the ragged paper and soiled paint retained the traces of all the wanderers who had occupied it since the opening of the Hôtel des Folies. The dislocated ceiling was scaling off in large pieces; the floor seemed affected with the dry-rot; and the doors and windows were so much warped and sprung, that it required an effort to close them. The furniture was on a par with the rest.

"How everything does wear out!" sighed Mme.

Fortin. "It isn't ten years since I bought that furniture."

In point of fact it was over fifteen, and even then she had bought it secondhanded, and almost unfit for use. The curtains retained but a vague shade of their original color. The veneer was almost entirely off the bedstead. Not a single lock was in order, whether in the bureau or the secretary. The rug had become a nameless rag; and the broken springs of the sofa, cutting through the threadbare stuff, stood up threateningly like knife-blades.

The most sumptuous object was an enormous China stove, which occupied almost one-half of the hall-dining-room. It could not be used to make a fire; for it had no pipe. Nevertheless, Mme. Fortin refused obstinately to take it out, under the pretext that it gave such a comfortable appearance to the apartment. All this elegance cost Maxence forty-five francs a month, and five francs for the service; the whole payable in advance from the 1st to the 3d of the month. If, on the 4th, a tenant came in without money, Mme. Fortin squarely refused him his key, and invited him to seek shelter elsewhere.

"I have been caught too often," she replied to those who tried to obtain twenty-four hours' grace from her. "I wouldn't trust my own father till the 5th, he who was a superior officer in Napoleon's armies, and the very soul of honor."

It was chance alone which had brought Maxence, after the Commune, to the Hôtel des Folies; and he had not been there a week, before he had fully made up his mind not to wear out Mme. Fortin's furniture very long. He had even already found another and more suitable lodging, when, about a year ago, a certain meeting on

the stairs had modified all his views, and lent a charm to his apartment which he did not suspect.

As he was going out one morning to his office, he met on the very landing a rather tall and very dark girl, who had just come running up stairs. She passed before him like a flash, opened the opposite door, and disappeared. But, rapid as the apparition had been, it had left in Maxence's mind one of those impressions which are never obliterated. He could not think of any thing else the whole day; and after business-hours, instead of going to dine in Rue St. Gilles, as usual, he sent a despatch to his mother to tell her not to wait for him, and bravely went home.

But it was in vain, that, during the whole evening, he kept watch behind his door, left slyly ajar: he did not get a glimpse of the neighbor. Neither did she show herself on the next or the three following days; and Maxence was beginning to despair, when at last, on Sunday, as he was going down stairs, he met her again face to face. He had thought her quite pretty at the first glance: this time he was dazzled to that extent, that he remained for over a minute, standing like a statue against the wall.

And certainly it was not her dress that helped setting off her beauty. She wore a poor dress of black merino, a narrow collar, and plain cuffs, and a bonnet of the utmost simplicity. She had nevertheless an air of incomparable dignity, a grace that charmed, and yet inspired respect, and the carriage of a queen. This was on the 30th of July. As he was handing in his key, before leaving,—

“My apartment suits me well enough,” said Maxence to Mme. Fortin: “I shall keep it. And here are fifty francs for the month of August.”

And, while the landlady was making out a receipt,—
“You never told me,” he began with his most indifferent look, “that I had a neighbor.”

Mme. Fortin straightened herself up like an old war-horse that hears the sound of the bugle.

“Yes, yes!” she said,—“Mademoiselle Lucienne.”

“Lucienne,” repeated Maxence: “that’s a pretty name.”

“Have you seen her?”

“I have just seen her. She’s rather good looking.”

The worthy landlady jumped on her chair.

“Rather good looking!” she interrupted. “You must be hard to please, my dear sir; for I, who am a judge, I affirm that you might hunt Paris over for four whole days without finding such a handsome girl. Rather good looking! A girl who has hair that comes down to her knees, a dazzling complexion, eyes as big as this, and teeth whiter than that cat’s. All right, my friend. You’ll wear out more than one pair of boots running after women before you catch one like her.”

That was exactly Maxence’s opinion; and yet with his coldest look,—

“Has she been long your tenant, dear Mme. Fortin?” he asked.

“A little over a year. She was here during the siege; and just then, as she could not pay her rent, I was, of course, going to send her off; but she went straight to the commissary of police, who came here, and forbade me to turn out either her or anybody else. As if people were not masters in their own house!”

“That was perfectly absurd!” objected Maxence, who was determined to gain the good graces of the landlady.

“Never heard of such a thing!” she went on.

"Compel you to lodge people free! Why not feed them too? In short, she remained so long, that, after the Commune, she owed me a hundred and eighty francs. Then she said, that, if I would let her stay, she would pay me each month in advance, besides the rent, ten francs on the old account. I agreed, and she has already paid up twenty francs."

"Poor girl!" said Maxence.

But Mme. Fortin shrugged her shoulders.

"Really," she replied, "I don't pity her much; for, if she only wanted, in forty-eight hours I should be paid, and she would have something else on her back besides that old black rag. I tell her every day, 'In these days, my child, there is but one reliable friend, which is better than all others, and which must be taken as it comes, without making any faces if it is a little dirty: that's money.' But all my preaching goes for nothing. I might as well sing."

Maxence was listening with intense delight.

"In short, what does she do?" he asked.

"That's more than I know," replied Mme. Fortin. "The young lady has not much to say. All I know is, that she leaves every morning bright and early, and rarely gets home before eleven. On Sunday she stays home, reading; and sometimes, in the evening, she goes out, always alone, to some theatre or ball. Ah! she is an odd one, I tell you!"

A lodger who came in interrupted the landlady; and Maxence walked off, dreaming how he could manage to make the acquaintance of his pretty and eccentric neighbor.

Because he had once spent some hundreds of napoleons in the company of young ladies with yellow chignons, Maxence fancied himself a man of experience,

and had but little faith in the virtue of a girl of twenty, living alone in a hotel, and left sole mistress of her own fancy. He began to watch for every occasion of meeting her; and, towards the last of the month, he had got so far as to bow to her, and to inquire after her health. But, the first time he ventured to make love to her, she looked at him head to foot, and turned her back upon him with so much contempt, that he remained, his mouth wide open, perfectly stupefied.

"I am losing my time like a fool," he thought.

Great, then, was his surprise, when the following week, on a fine afternoon, he saw Mlle. Lucienne leave her room, no longer clad in her eternal black dress, but wearing a brilliant and extremely rich toilet. With a beating heart he followed her.

In front of the Hôtel des Folies stood a handsome carriage and horses.

As soon as Mlle. Lucienne appeared, a footman opened respectfully the carriage-door. She went in; and the horses started at a full trot.

Maxence watched the carriage disappear in the distance, like a child who sees the bird fly upon which he hoped to lay hands.

"Gone," he muttered, "gone!"

But, when he turned around, he found himself face to face with the Fortins, man and wife, who were laughing a sinister laugh.

"What did I tell you?" exclaimed Mme Fortin. "There she is, started at last. Get up, horse! She'll do well, the child."

The magnificent equipage and elegant dress had already produced quite an effect among the neighbors. The customers sitting in front of the *café* were laughing among themselves. The confectioner and his wife were

casting indignant glances at the proprietors of the Hôtel des Folies.

"You see, M. Favoral," replied Mme. Fortin, "such a girl as that was not made for our neighborhood. You must make up your mind to it; you won't see much more of her on the Boulevard du Temple."

Without saying a word, Maxence ran to his room, the hot tears streaming from his eyes. He felt ashamed of himself; for, after all, what was this girl to him? "She is gone!" he repeated to himself. "Well, good-by, let her go!"

But, despite all his efforts at philosophy, he felt an immense sadness invading his heart: ill-defined regrets and spasms of anger agitated him. He was thinking what a fool he had been to believe in the grand airs of the young lady, and that, if he had had dresses and horses to give her, she might not have received him so harshly. At last he made up his mind to think no more of her,—one of those fine resolutions which are always taken, and never kept; and in the evening he left his room to go and dine in the Rue St. Gilles.

But, as was often his custom, he stopped at the *café* next door, and called for a drink. He was mixing his absinthe when he saw the carriage that had carried off Mlle. Lucienne in the morning returning at a rapid gait, and stopping short in front of the hotel. Mlle. Lucienne got out slowly, crossed the sidewalk, and entered the narrow corridor. Almost immediately, the carriage turned around, and drove off.

"What does it mean?" thought Maxence, who was actually forgetting to swallow his absinthe.

He was losing himself in absurd conjectures, when, some fifteen minutes later, he saw the girl coming out again. Already she had taken off her elegant clothes,

and resumed her cheap black dress. She had a basket on her arm, and was going towards the Rue Charlot. Without further reflections, Maxence rose suddenly, and started to follow her, being very careful that she should not see him. After walking for five or six minutes, she entered a shop, half-eating house, and half wine-shop, in the window of which a large sign could be read: "*Ordinary at all hours for forty centimes. Hard boiled eggs, and salad of the season.*"

Maxence, having crept up as close as he could, saw Mlle. Lucienne take a tin box out of her basket, and have what is called an "ordinaire" poured into it; that is, half a pint of soup, a piece of beef as large as the fist, and a few vegetables. She then had a small bottle half-filled with wine, paid, and walked out with that same look of grave dignity which she always wore.

"Funny dinner," murmured Maxence, "for a woman who was spreading herself just now in a ten-thousand-franc carriage."

From that moment she became the sole and only object of his thoughts. A passion, which he no longer attempted to resist, was penetrating like a subtle poison to the innermost depths of his being. He thought himself happy, when, after watching for hours, he caught a glimpse of this singular creature, who, after that extraordinary expedition, seemed to have resumed her usual mode of life. Mme. Fortin was dumfounded.

"She has been too exacting," she said to Maxence, "and the thing has fallen through."

He made no answer. He felt a perfect horror for the honorable landlady's insinuations; and yet he never ceased to repeat to himself that he must be a great simpleton to have faith for a moment in that young lady's virtue. What would he not have given to be able to

question her? But he dared not. Often he would gather up his courage, and wait for her on the stairs; but, as soon as she fixed upon him her great black eye, all the phrases he had prepared took flight from his brain, his tongue clove to his mouth, and he could barely succeed in stammering out a timid,—

“Good-morning, mademoiselle.”

He felt so angry with himself, that he was almost on the point of leaving the Hôtel des Folies, when one evening:—

“Well,” said Mme. Fortin to him, “all is made up again, it seems. The beautiful carriage called again to-day.”

Maxence could have beaten her.

“What good would it do you,” he replied, “if Lucienne were to turn out badly?”

“It’s always a pleasure,” she grumbled, “to have one more woman to torment the men. Those are the girls, you see, who avenge us poor honest women!”

The sequel seemed at first to justify her worst provisions. Three times during that week, Mlle. Lucienne rode out in grand style; but as she always returned, and always resumed her eternal black woolen dress,—

“I can’t make head or tail of it,” thought Maxence. “But, never mind, I’ll clear the matter up yet.”

He applied, and obtained leave of absence; and from the very next day he took up a position behind the window of the adjoining *café*. On the first day he lost his time; but on the second day, at about three o’clock, the famous equipage made its appearance; and, a few moments later, Mlle. Lucienne took a seat in it. Her toilet was richer, and more showy still, than the first time. Maxence jumped into a cab.

“You see that carriage,” he said to the coachman.

"Wherever it goes, you must follow it. I give ten francs extra pay."

"All right!" replied the driver, whipping up his horses.

And much need he had, too, of whipping them; for the carriage that carried off Mlle. Lucienne started at full trot down the Boulevards, to the Madeleine, then along the Rue Royale, and through the Place de la Concorde, to the Avenue des Champs-Élysées, where the horses were brought down to a walk. It was the end of September, and one of those lovely autumnal days which are a last smile of the blue sky and the last caress of the sun.

There were races in the Bois de Boulogne; and the equipages were five and six abreast on the avenue. The side-alleys were crowded with idlers. Maxence, from the inside of his cab, never lost sight of Mlle. Lucienne.

She was evidently creating a sensation. The men stopped to look at her with gaping admiration: the women leaned out of their carriages to see her better.

"Where can she be going?" Maxence wondered.

She was going to the Bois; and soon her carriage joined the interminable line of equipages which were following the grand drive at a walk. It became easier now to follow on foot. Maxence sent off his cab to wait for him at a particular spot, and took the pedestrians' road, that follows the edge of the lakes. He had not gone fifty steps, however, before he heard some one call him. He turned around, and, within two lengths of his cane, saw M. Saint Pavin and M. Costeclar. Maxence hardly knew M. Saint Pavin, whom he had only seen two or three times in the Rue St. Gilles, and execrated M. Costeclar. Still he advanced towards them.

Mlle. Lucienne's carriage was now caught in the file; and he was sure of joining it whenever he thought proper.

"It is a miracle to see you here, my dear Maxence!" exclaimed M. Costeclar, loud enough to attract the attention of several persons.

To occupy the attention of others, anyhow and at any cost, was M. Costeclar's leading object in life. That was evident from the style of his dress, the shape of his hat, the bright stripes of his shirt, his ridiculous shirt-collar, his cuffs, his boots, his gloves, his cane, every thing, in fact.

"If you see us on foot," he added, "it is because we wanted to walk a little. The doctor's prescription, my dear. My carriage is yonder, behind those trees. Do you recognize my dapple-grays?" And he extended his cane in that direction, as if he were addressing himself, not to Maxence alone, but to all those who were passing by.

"Very well, very well! everybody knows you have a carriage," interrupted M. Saint Pavin.

The editor of "The Financial Pilot" was the living contrast of his companion. More slovenly still than M. Costeclar was careful of his dress, he exhibited cynically a loose cravat rolled over a shirt worn two or three days, a coat white with lint and plush, muddy boots, though it had not rained for a week, and large red hands, surprisingly filthy.

He was but the more proud; and he wore, cocked up to one side, a hat that had not known a brush since the day it had left the hatter's.

"That fellow Costeclar," he went on, "he won't believe that there are in France a number of people who live and die without ever having owned a horse or a

coupé; which is a fact, nevertheless. Those fellows who were born with fifty or sixty thousand francs' income in their baby-clothes are all alike."

The unpleasant intention was evident; but M. Costeclar was not the man to get angry for such a trifle.

"You are in bad humor to-day, old fellow," he said.

The editor of "The Financial Pilot" made a threatening gesture.

"Well, yes," he answered, "I am in bad humor, like a man who for ten years past has been beating the drum in front of your d——d financial shops, and who does not pay expenses. Yes, for ten years I have shouted myself hoarse for your benefit: 'Walk in, ladies and gentlemen, and, for every twenty-cent-piece you deposit with us, we will return you a five-franc-piece. Walk in, follow the crowd, step up to the office: this is the time.' They go in. You receive mountains of twenty-cent-pieces: you never return anything, neither a five-franc-piece, nor even a centime. The trick is done, the public is sold. You drive your own carriage; you suspend diamonds to your mistress' ears; and I, the organizer of success, whose puffs open the tightest closed pockets, and start up the old louis from the bottom of the old woolen stocking,—I am driven to have my boots half-soled. You stint me my existence; you kick as soon as I ask you to pay for the big drums bursted in your behalf."

He spoke so loud, that three or four idlers had stopped. Without being very shrewd, Maxence understood readily that he had happened in in the midst of an acrimonious discussion. Closely pressed, and desirous of gaining time, M. Costeclar had called him in the hopes of effecting a diversion.

Bowing, therefore, politely,—

"Excuse me, gentlemen," he said: "I fear I have interrupted you."

But M. Costeclar detained him.

"Don't go," he declared; "you must come down and take a class of Madeira with us, down at the Cascade."

And, turning to the editor of "The Pilot"—

"Come, now, shut up," he said: "you shall have what you want."

"Really?"

"Upon my word."

"I'd rather have two or three lines in black and white."

"I'll give them to you to-night."

"All right, then! Forward the big guns! Look out for next Sunday's number!"

Peace being made, the gentlemen continued their walk in the most friendly manner, M. Costeclar pointing out to Maxence all the celebrities who were passing by them in their carriages.

He had just designated to his attention Mme. and Mlle. de Thaller, accompanied by two gigantic footmen, when, suddenly interrupting himself, and rising on tiptoe,—

"*Sacre bleu!*" he exclaimed: "what a handsome woman!"

Without too much affectation, Maxence fell back a step or two. He felt himself blushing to his very ears, and trembled lest his sudden emotion were noticed, and he were questioned; for it was Mlle. Lucienne who thus excited M. Costeclar's noisy enthusiasm. Once already she had been around the lake; and she was continuing her circular drive.

"Positively," approved the editor of "The Financial

Pilot," "she is somewhat better than the rest of those ladies we have just seen going by."

M. Costeclar was on the point of pulling out what little hair he had left.

"And I don't know her!" he went on. "A lovely woman rides in the Bois, and I don't know who she is! That is ridiculous and prodigious! Who can post us?"

A little ways off stood a group of gentlemen, who had also just left their carriages, and were looking on this interminable procession of equipages and this amazing display of toilets.

"They are friends of mine," said M. Costeclar: "let us join them."

They did so; and, after the usual greetings,—

"Who is that?" inquired M. Costeclar,— "that dark person, whose carriage follows Mme. de Thaller's?"

An old young man, with scanty hair, dyed beard, and a most impudent smile, answered him,—

"That's just what we are trying to find out. None of us have ever seen her."

"I must and shall find out," interrupted M. Costeclar. "I have a very intelligent servant"—

Already he was starting in the direction of the spot where his carriage was waiting for him. The old beau stopped him.

"Don't bother yourself, my dear friend," he said. "I have also a servant who is no fool; and he has had my orders for over fifteen minutes."

The others burst out laughing.

"Distanced, Costeclar!" exclaimed M. Saint Pavin, who, notwithstanding his slovenly dress and cynic manners, seemed perfectly well received.

No one was now paying any attention to Maxence; and he slipped off without the slightest care as to what

M. Costeclar might think. Reaching the spot where his cab awaited him,—

“Which way, boss?” inquired the driver.

Maxence hesitated. What better had he to do than to go home? And yet—

“We’ll wait for that same carriage,” he answered; “and we’ll follow it on the return.”

But he learned nothing further. Mlle. Lucienne drove straight to the Boulevard du Temple, and, as before, immediately resumed her eternal black dress; and Maxence saw her go to the little restaurant for her modest dinner.

But he saw something else too.

Almost on the heels of the girl, a servant in livery entered the hotel corridor, and only went off after remaining a full quarter of an hour in busy conference with Mme. Fortin.

“It’s all over,” thought the poor fellow. “Lucienne will not be much longer my neighbor.”

He was mistaken. A month went by without bringing about any change. As in the past, she went out early, came home late, and on Sundays remained alone all day in her room. Once or twice a week, when the weather was fine, the carriage came for her at about three o’clock, and brought her home at nightfall. Maxence had exhausted all conjectures, when one evening, it was the 31st of October, as he was coming in to go to bed, he heard a loud sound of voices in the office of the hotel. Led by an instinctive curiosity, he approached on tiptoe, so as to see and hear every thing. The Fortins and Mlle. Lucienne were having a great discussion.

“That’s all nonsense,” shrieked the worthy landlady; “and I mean to be paid.”

Mlle. Lucienne was quite calm.

"Well," she replied: "don't I pay you? Here are forty francs,—thirty in advance for my room, and ten on the old account."

"I don't want your ten francs!"

"What do you want, then?"

"All,—the hundred and fifty francs which you owe me still."

The girl shrugged her shoulders.

"You forget our agreement," she uttered.

"Our agreement?"

"Yes. After the Commune, it was understood that I would give you ten francs a month on the old account; as long as I give them to you, you have nothing to ask."

Crimson with rage, Mme. Fortin had risen from her seat.

"Formerly," she interrupted, "I presumed I had to deal with a poor working-girl, an honest girl."

Mlle. Lucienne took no notice of the insult.

"I have not the amount you ask," she said coldly.

"Well, then," vociferated the other, "you must go and ask it of those who pay for your carriages and your dresses."

Still impassible, the girl, instead of answering, stretched her hand towards her key; but M. Fortin stopped her arm.

"No, no!" he said with a giggle. "People who don't pay their hotel-bill sleep out, my darling."

Maxence, that very morning, had received his month's pay, and he felt, as it were, his two hundred francs trembling in his pockets.

Yielding to a sudden inspiration, he threw open the

office-door, and, throwing down one hundred and fifty francs upon the table,—

“Here is your money, wretch!” he exclaimed.

And he withdrew at once.

XXVII.

MAXENCE had not spoken to Mlle. Lucienne for nearly a month. He tried to persuade himself that she despised him because he was poor. He kept watching for her, for he could not help it; but as much as possible he avoided her.

“I shall be miserable,” he thought, “the day when she does not come home; and yet it would be the very best thing that could happen for me.”

Nevertheless, he spent all his time trying to find some explanations for the conduct of this strange girl, who, beneath her woolen dress, had the haughty manners of a great lady. Then he delighted to imagine between her and himself some of those subjects of confidence, some of those facilities which chance never fails to supply to attentive passion, or some event which would enable him to emerge from his obscurity, and to acquire some rights by virtue of some great service rendered.

But never had he dared to hope for an occasion as propitious as the one he had just seized. And yet, after he had returned to his room, he hardly dared to congratulate himself upon the promptitude of his decision. He knew too well Mlle. Lucienne's excessive pride and sensitive nature.

“I should not be surprised if she were angry with me for what I've done,” he thought.

The evening being quite chilly, he had lighted a few sticks; and, sitting by the fireside, he was waiting, his mind filled with vague hopes. It seemed to him that his neighbor could not absolve herself from coming to thank him; and he was listening intently to all the noises of the house, starting at the sound of footsteps on the stairs, and at the slamming of doors. Ten times, at least, he went out on tiptoe to lean out of the window on the landing, to make sure that there was no light in Mlle. Lucienne's room. At eleven o'clock she had not yet come home; and he was deliberating whether he would not start out in quest of information, when there was a knock at the door.

"Come in!" he cried, in a voice choked with emotion.

Mlle. Lucienne came in. She was somewhat paler than usual, but calm and perfectly self-possessed. Having bowed without the slightest shade of embarrassment, she laid upon the mantel-piece the thirty five-franc-notes which Maxence had thrown down to the Fortins; and, in her most natural tone,—

"Here are your hundred and fifty francs, sir," she uttered. "I am more grateful than I can express for your prompt kindness in lending them to me; but I did not need them."

Maxence had risen from his seat, and was making every effort to control his own feelings.

"Still," he began, "after what I heard"—

"Yes," she interrupted, "Mme. Fortin and her husband were trying to frighten me. But they were losing their time. When, after the Commune, I settled with them the manner in which I would discharge my debt towards them, having a just estimate of their worth, I made them write out and sign our agreement. Being in the right, I could resist them, and was resisting them

when you threw them those hundred and fifty francs. Having laid hands upon them, they had the pretension to keep them. That's what I could not suffer. Not being able to recover them by main force, I went at once to the commissary of police. He was luckily at his office. He is an honest man, who already, once before, helped me out of a scrape. He listened to me kindly, and was moved by my explanations. Notwithstanding the lateness of the hour, he put on his overcoat, and came with me to see our landlord. After compelling them to return me your money, he signified to them to observe strictly our agreement, under penalty of incurring his utmost severity."

Maxence was wonderstruck.

"How could you dare?" he said.

"Wasn't I in the right?"

"Oh, a thousand times yes! Still"—

"What? Should my right be less respected because I am but a woman? And, because I have no one to protect me, am I outside the law, and condemned in advance to suffer the iniquitous fancies of every scoundrel? No, thank Heaven! Henceforth I shall feel easy. People like the Fortins, who live of I know not what shameful traffic, have too much to fear from the police to dare to molest me further."

The resentment of the insult could be read in her great black eyes; and a bitter disgust contracted her lips.

"Besides," she added, "the commissary had no need of my explanations to understand what abject inspirations the Fortins were following. The wretches had in their pocket the wages of their infamy. In refusing me my key, in throwing me out in the street at ten o'clock at night, they hoped to drive me to seek the assistance of the base coward who paid their odious treason. And

we know the price which men demand for the slightest service they render to a woman."

Maxence turned pale. The idea flashed upon his mind that it was to him, perhaps, that these last words were addressed.

"Ah, I swear it!" he exclaimed, "it is without after-thought that I tried to help you. You do not owe me any thanks even."

"I do not thank you any the less, though," she said gently, "and from the bottom of my heart"—

"It was so little!"

"Intention alone makes the value of a service, neighbor. And, besides, do not say that a hundred and fifty francs are nothing to you: perhaps you do not earn much more each month."

"I confess it," he said, blushing a little.

"You see, then? No, it was not to you that my words were addressed, but to the man who has paid the Fortins. He was waiting on the Boulevard, the result of the manœuvre, which, they thought, was about to place me at his mercy. He ran quickly to me when I went out, and followed me all the way to the office of the commissary of police, as he follows me everywhere for the past month, with his sickening gallantries and his degrading propositions."

The eye flashing with anger,—

"Ah, if I had known!" exclaimed Maxence. "If you had told me but a word!"

She smiled at his vehemence.

"What would you have done?" she said. "You cannot impart intelligence to a fool, heart to a coward, or delicacy of feeling to a boor."

"I could have chastised the miserable insulter."

She had a superb gesture of indifference.

“ Bash ! ” she interrupted. “ What are insults to me ? I am so accustomed to them, that they no longer have any effect upon me. I am eighteen : I have neither family, relatives, friends, nor any one in the world who even knows my existence ; and I live by my labor. Can't you see what must be the humiliations of each day ? Since I was eight years old, I have been earning the bread I eat, the dress I wear, and the rent of the den where I sleep. Can you understand what I have endured, to what ignominies I have been exposed, what traps have been set for me, and how it has happened to me sometimes to owe my safety to mere physical force ? And yet I do not complain, since through it all I have been able to retain the respect of myself, and to remain virtuous in spite of all.”

She was laughing a laugh that had something wild in it.

And, as Maxence was looking at her with immense surprise,—

“ That seems strange to you, doesn't it ? ” she resumed. “ A girl of eighteen, without a sou, free as air, very pretty, and yet virtuous in the midst of Paris. Probably you don't believe it, or, if you do, you just think, ‘ What on earth does she make by it ? ’ ”

“ And really you are right ; for, after all, who cares, and who thinks any the more of me, if I work sixteen hours a day to remain virtuous ? But it's a fancy of my own ; and don't imagine for a moment that I am deterred by any scruples, or by timidity, or ignorance. No, no ! I believe in nothing. I fear nothing ; and I know as much as the oldest libertines, the most vicious, and the most depraved. And I don't say that I have not been tempted sometimes, when, coming home from work, I'd see some of them coming out of the restaurants, splen-

didly dressed, on their lover's arm, and getting into carriages to go to the theatre. There were moments when I was cold and hungry, and when, not knowing where to sleep, I wandered all night through the streets like a lost dog. There were hours when I felt sick of all this misery, and when I said to myself, that, since it was my fate to end in the hospital, I might as well make the trip gayly. But what! I should have had to traffic my person, to sell myself!"

She shuddered, and in a hoarse voice,—

"I would rather die," she said.

It was difficult to reconcile words such as these with certain circumstances of Mlle. Lucienne's existence,—her rides around the lake, for instance, in that carriage that came for her two or three times a week; her ever renewed costumes, each time more eccentric and more showy. But Maxence was not thinking of that. What she told him he accepted as absolutely true and indisputable. And he felt penetrated with an almost religious admiration for this young and beautiful girl, possessed of so much vivid energy, who alone, through the hazards, the perils, and the temptations of Paris, had succeeded in protecting and defending herself.

"And yet," he said, "without suspecting it, you had a friend near you."

She shuddered; and a pale smile flitted upon her lips. She knew well enough what friendship means between a youth of twenty-five and a girl of eighteen.

"A friend!" she murmured.

Maxence guessed her thought; and, in all the sincerity of his soul,—

"Yes, a friend," he repeated, "a comrade, a brother."

And thinking to touch her, and gain her confidence,—

"I could understand you," he added; "for I, too, have been very unhappy."

But he was singularly mistaken. She looked at him with an astonished air, and slowly,—

"You unhappy!" she uttered,—“you who have a family, relations, a mother who adores you, a sister.”

Less excited, Maxence might have wondered how she had found this out, and would have concluded that she must feel some interest in him, since she had doubtless taken the trouble of getting information.

"Besides, you are a man," she went on; "and I do not understand how a man can complain. Have you not the freedom, the strength, and the right to undertake and to dare any thing? Isn't the world open to your activity and to your ambition? Woman submits to her fate: man makes his."

This was hurting the dearest pretensions of Maxence, who seriously thought that he had exhausted the rigors of adversity.

"There are circumstances," he began.

But she shrugged her shoulders gently, and, interrupting him,—

"Do not insist," she said, "or else I might think that you lack energy. What are you talking of circumstances? There are none so adverse but that can be overcome. What would you like, then? To be born with a hundred thousand francs a year, and have nothing to do but to live according to your whim of each day, idle, satiated, a burden upon yourself, useless, or offensive to others? Ah! If I were a man, I would dream of another fate. I should like to start from the Foundling Asylum, without a name, and by my will, my intelligence, my daring, and my labor, make something and

somebody of myself. I would start from nothing, and become every thing!"

With flashing eyes and quivering nostrils, she drew herself up proudly. But almost at once, dropping her head,—

"The misfortune is," she added, "that I am but a woman; and you who complain, if you only knew"—

She sat down, and with her elbow on the little table, her head resting upon her hand, she remained lost in her meditations, her eyes fixed, as if following through space all the phases of the eighteen years of her life.

There is no energy but unbends at some given moment, no will but has its hour of weakness; and, strong and energetic as was Mlle. Lucienne, she had been deeply touched by Maxence's act. Had she, then, found at last upon her path the companion of whom she had often dreamed in the despairing hours of solitude and wretchedness? After a few moments, she raised her head, and, looking into Maxence's eyes with a gaze that made him quiver like the shock of an electric battery,—

"Doubtless," she said, in a tone of indifference somewhat forced, "you think you have in me a strange neighbor. Well, as between neighbors, it is well to know each other. Before you judge me, listen."

The recommendation was useless. Maxence was listening with all the powers of his attention.

"I was brought up," she began, "in a village of the neighborhood of Paris,—in Louveciennes. My mother had put me out to nurse with some honest gardeners, poor, and burdened with a large family. After two months, hearing nothing of my mother, they wrote to her: she made no answer. They then went to Paris, and called at the address she had given them. She had just

moved out; and no one knew what had become of her. They could no longer, therefore, expect a single sou for the cares they would bestow upon me. They kept me, nevertheless, thinking that one child the more would not make much difference. I know nothing of my parents, therefore, except what I heard through these kind gardeners; and, as I was still quite young when I had the misfortune to lose them, I have but a very vague remembrance of what they told me. I remember very well, however, that according to their statements, my mother was a young working-woman of rare beauty, and that, very likely, she was not my father's wife. If I was ever told the name of my mother or my father, if I ever knew it, I have quite forgotten it. I had myself no name. My adopted parents called me the Parisian. I was happy, nevertheless, with these kind people, and treated exactly like their own children. In winter, they sent me to school; in summer, I helped weeding the garden. I drove a sheep or two along the road, or else I went to gather violets and strawberries through the woods.

"This was the happiest, indeed, the only happy time of my life, towards which my thoughts may turn when I feel despair and discouragement getting the better of me. Alas! I was but eight, when, within the same week, the gardener and his wife were both carried off by the same disease,—inflammation of the lungs.

"On a freezing December morning, in that house upon which the hand of death had just fallen, we found ourselves, six children, the oldest of whom was not eleven, crying with grief, fright, cold, and hunger.

"Neither the gardener nor his wife had any relatives; and they left nothing but a few wretched pieces of furniture, the sale of which barely sufficed to pay

the expenses of their funeral. The two younger children were taken to an asylum: the others were taken charge of by the neighbors.

"It was a laundress of Marly who took me. I was quite tall and strong for my age. She made an apprentice of me. She was not unkind by nature; but she was violent and brutal in the extreme. She compelled me to do an excessive amount of work, and often of a kind above my strength.

"Fifty times a day, I had to go from the river to the house, carrying on my shoulders enormous bundles of wet napkins or sheets, wring them, spread them out, and then run to Rueil to get the soiled clothes from the customers. I did not complain (I was already too proud to complain); but, if I was ordered to do something that seemed to me too unjust, I refused obstinately to obey, and then I was unmercifully beaten. In spite of all, I might, perhaps, have become attached to the woman, had she not had the disgusting habit of drinking. Every week regularly, on the day when she took the clothes to Paris (it was on Wednesdays), she came home drunk. And then, according as, with the fumes of the wine, anger or gayety rose to her brain, there were atrocious scenes or obscene jests.

"When she was in that condition, she inspired me with horror. And one Wednesday, as I showed my feelings too plainly, she struck me so hard, that she broke my arm. I had been with her for twenty months. The injury she had done me sobered her at once. She became frightened, overpowered me with caresses, begging me to say nothing to any one. I promised, and kept faithfully my word.

"But a physician had to be called in. There had been witnesses who spoke. The story spread along the river,

as far as Bougival and Rueil. And one morning an officer of gendarmes called at the house; and I don't exactly know what would have happened, if I had not obstinately maintained that I had broken my arm in falling down stairs."

What surprised Maxence most was Mlle. Lucienne's simple and natural tone. No emphasis, scarcely an appearance of emotion. One might have thought it was somebody's else life that she was narrating.

Meantime she was going on,—

"Thanks to my obstinate denials the woman was not disturbed. But the truth was known; and her reputation, which was not good before, became altogether bad. I became an object of interest. The very same people who had seen me twenty times staggering painfully under a load of wet clothes, which was terrible, began to pity me prodigiously because I had had an arm broken, which was nothing.

"At last a number of our customers arranged to take me out of a house, in which, they said, I must end by perishing under bad treatment.

"And, after many fruitless efforts, they discovered, at last, at La Jonchère, an old Jewess lady, very rich, and a widow without children, who consented to take charge of me.

"I hesitated at first to accept these offers; but noticing that the laundress, since she had hurt me, had conceived a still greater aversion for me, I made up my mind to leave her.

"It was on the day when I was introduced to my new mistress that I first discovered I had no name. After examining me at length, turning me around and around, making me walk, and sit down,—

"‘Now,’ she inquired, ‘what is your name?’

"I stared at her in surprise; for indeed I was then like a savage, not having the slightest notions of the things of life.

" 'My name is the Parisian,' I replied.

"She burst out laughing, as also another old lady, a friend of hers, who assisted at my presentation; and I remember that my little pride was quite offended at their hilarity. I thought they were laughing at me.

" 'That's not a name,' they said at last. 'That's a nickname.'

" 'I have no other.'

"They seemed dumfounded, repeating over and over that such a thing was unheard of; and on the spot they began to look for a name for me.

" 'Where were you born!' inquired my new mistress.

" 'At Louveciennes.'

" 'Very well,' said the other: 'let us call her Louvecienne.'

"A long discussion followed, which irritated me so much that I felt like running away; and it was agreed at last, that I should be called, not Louvecienne, but Lucienne; and Lucienne I have remained.

"There was nothing said about baptism, since my new mistress was a Jewess.

"She was an excellent woman, although the grief she had felt at the loss of her husband had somewhat deranged her faculties.

"As soon as it was decided that I was to remain, she desired to inspect my trousseau. I had none to show her, possessing nothing in the world but the rags on my back. As long as I had remained with the laundress, I had finished wearing out her old dresses; and I had never worn any other under-clothing save that which I

borrowed, 'by authority,' from the clients,—an economical system adopted by many laundresses.

"Dismayed at my state of destitution, my new mistress sent for a seamstress, and at once ordered wherewith to dress and change me.

"Since the death of the poor gardeners, this was the first time that any one paid any attention to me, except to exact some service of me. I was moved to tears; and, in the excess of my gratitude, I would gladly have died for that kind old lady.

"This feeling gave me the courage and the constancy required to bear with her whimsical nature. She had singular manias, disconcerting fancies, ridiculous and often exorbitant exactions. I lent myself to it all as best I could.

"As she already had two servants, a cook and a chambermaid, I had myself no special duties in the house. I accompanied her when she went out riding. I helped to wait on her at table, and to dress her. I picked up her handkerchief when she dropped it; and, above all, I looked for her snuff-box, which she was continually mislaying.

"She was pleased with my docility, took much interest in me, and, that I might read to her, she made me learn to read, for I hardly knew my letters. And the old man whom she gave me for a teacher, finding me intelligent, taught me all he knew, I imagine, of French, of geography, and of history.

"The chambermaid, on the other hand, had been commissioned to teach me to sew, to embroider, and to execute all sorts of fancy-work; and she took the more interest in her lessons, that little by little she shifted upon me the most tedious part of her work.

"I would have been happy in that pretty house at La Jonchère, if I had only had some society better suited to my age than the old women with whom I was compelled to live, and who scolded me for a loud word or a somewhat abrupt gesture. What would I not have given to have been allowed to play with the young girls whom I saw on Sundays passing in crowds along the road!

"As time went on, my old mistress became more and more attached to me, and endeavored in every way to give me proofs of her affection. I sat at table with her, instead of waiting on her, as at first. She had given me clothes, so that she could take me and introduce me anywhere.

"She went about repeating everywhere that she was as fond of me as of a daughter; that she intended to set me up in life; and that certainly she would leave a part of her fortune to me.

"Alas! She said it too loud, for my misfortune,—so loud, that the news reached at last the ears of some nephews of hers in Paris, who came once in a while to La Jonchère.

"They had never paid much attention to me up to this time. Those speeches opened their eyes: they noticed what progress I had made in the heart of their relative; and their cupidity became alarmed.

"Trembling lest they should lose an inheritance which they considered as theirs, they united against me, determined to put a stop to their aunt's generous intentions by having me sent off.

"But it was in vain, that, for nearly a year, their hatred exhausted itself in skilful manœuvres.

"The instinct of preservation stimulating my perspicacity I had penetrated their intentions, and I was strug-

gling with all my might. Every day, to make myself more indispensable, I invented some novel attention.

“They only came once a week to La Jonchère: I was there all the time. I had the advantage. I struggled successfully, and was probably approaching the end of my troubles, when my poor old mistress was taken sick. After forty-eight hours, she was very low. She was fully conscious, but for that very reason she could appreciate the danger; and the fear of death made her crazy.

“Her nieces had come to sit by her bedside; and I was expressly forbidden to enter the room. They had understood that this was an excellent opportunity to get rid of me forever.

“Evidently gained in advance, the physicians declared to my poor benefactress that the air of La Jonchère was fatal to her, and that her only chance of recovery was to establish herself in Paris. One of her nephews offered to have her taken to his house in a litter. She would soon get well, they said; and she could then go to finish her convalescence in some southern city.

“Her first word was for me. She did not wish to be separated from me, she protested, and insisted absolutely upon taking me with her. Her nephews represented gravely to her that this was an impossibility; that she must not think of burdening herself with me; that the simplest thing was to leave me at La Jonchère; and that, moreover, they would see that I should get a good situation.

“The sick woman struggled for a long time, and with an energy of which I would not have thought her capable.

“But the others were pressing. The physicians kept

repeating that they could not answer for any thing, if she did not follow their advice. She was afraid of death. She yielded, weeping.

"The very next morning, a sort of litter, carried by eight men, stopped in front of the door. My poor mistress was laid into it; and they carried her off, without even permitting me to kiss her for the last time.

"Two hours later, the cook and the chambermaid were dismissed. As to myself, the nephew who had promised to look after me put a twenty-franc-piece in my hand saying, 'Here are your eight days in advance. Pack up your things immediately, and clear out!'"

It was impossible that Mlle. Lucienne should not be deeply moved whilst thus stirring the ashes of her past. She showed no evidence of it, however, except, now and then, a slight alteration in her voice.

As to Maxence, he would vainly have tried to conceal the passionate interest with which he was listening to these unexpected confidences.

"Have you, then, never seen your benefactress again?" he asked.

"Never," replied Mlle. Lucienne. "All my efforts to reach her have proved fruitless. She does not live in Paris now. I have written to her: my letters have remained without answer. Did she ever get them? I think not. Something tells me that she has not forgotten me."

She remained silent for a few moments, as if collecting herself before resuming the thread of her narrative. And then,—

"It was thus brutally," she resumed, "that I was sent off. It would have been useless to beg, I knew; and, moreover, I have never known how to beg. I piled

up hurriedly in two trunks and in some bandboxes all I had in the world,—all I had received from the generosity of my poor mistress; and, before the stated hour, I was ready. The cook and the chambermaid had already gone. The man who was treating me so cruelly was waiting for me. He helped me carry out my boxes and trunks, after which he locked the door, put the key in his pocket; and, as the American omnibus was passing, he beckoned to it to stop. And then, before entering it,—

“ ‘ Good luck, my pretty girl!’ he said with a laugh.

“ This was in the month of January, 1866. I was just thirteen. I have had since more terrible trials, and I have found myself in much more desperate situations: but I do not remember ever feeling such intense discouragement as I did that day, when I found myself alone upon that road, not knowing which way to go. I sat down on one of my trunks. The weather was cold and gloomy: there were few persons on the road. They looked at me, doubtless wondering what I was doing there. I wept. I had a vague feeling that the well-meant kindness of my poor benefactress, in bestowing upon me the blessings of education, would in reality prove a serious impediment in the life-struggle which I was about to begin again. I thought of what I suffered with the laundress; and, at the idea of the tortures which the future still held in store for me, I desired death. The Seine was near: why not put an end at once to the miserable existence which I foresaw?

“ Such were my reflections, when a woman from Rueil, a vegetable-vender, whom I knew by sight, happened to pass, pushing her hand-cart before her over the muddy pavement. She stopped when she saw me; and, in the softest voice she could command,

“‘What are you doing there, my darling?’ she asked.

“In a few words I explained to her my situation. She seemed more surprised than moved.

“‘Such is life,’ she remarked,—‘sometimes up, sometimes down.’

“And, stepping up nearer,—

“‘What do you expect to do now?’ she interrogated in a tone of voice so different from that in which she had spoken at first, that I felt more keenly the horror of my altered situation.

“‘I have no idea,’ I replied.

“After thinking for a moment,—

“‘You can’t stay there,’ she resumed: ‘the gendarmes would arrest you. Come with me. We will talk things over at the house; and I’ll give you my advice.’

“I was so completely crushed, that I had neither strength nor will. Besides, what was the use of thinking? Had I any choice of resolutions? Finally, the woman’s offer seemed to me a last favor of destiny.

“‘I shall do as you say, madame,’ I replied.

“She proceeded at once to load up my little baggage on her cart. We started; and soon we arrived ‘home.’

“What she called thus was a sort of cellar, at least twelve inches lower than the street, receiving its only light through the glass door, in which several broken panes had been replaced by sheets of paper. It was revoltingly filthy, and filled with a sickening odor. On all sides were heaps of vegetables,—cabbages, potatoes, onions. In one corner a nameless heap of decaying rags, which she called her bed; in the centre, a small cast-iron stove, the worn-out pipe of which allowed the smoke to escape in the room.

“‘Anyway,’ she said to me, ‘you have a home now!’

"I helped her to unload the cart. She filled the stove with coal, and at once declared that she wanted to inspect my things.

"My trunks were opened; and it was with exclamations of surprise that the woman handled my dresses, my skirts, my stockings.

" 'The mischief!' she exclaimed, 'you dressed well, didn't you?'

"Her eyes sparkled so, that a strong feeling of mistrust arose in my mind. She seemed to consider all my property as an unexpected godsend to herself. Her hands trembled as she handled some piece of jewelry; and she took me to the light that she might better estimate the value of my ear-rings.

"And so, when she asked me if I had any money, determined to hide at least my twenty-franc-piece, which was my sole fortune, I replied boldly, 'No.'

" 'That's a pity,' she grumbled.

"But she wished to know my history, and I was compelled to tell it to her. One thing only surprised her,—my age; and in fact, though only thirteen, I looked fully sixteen.

"When I had done,—

" 'Never mind!' she said. 'It was lucky for you that you met me. You are at least certain now of eating every day; for I am going to take charge of you. I am getting old: you'll help me to drag my cart. If you are as smart as you are pretty, we'll make money.'

"Nothing could suit me less. But how could I resist? She threw a few rags upon the floor; and on them I had to sleep. The next day, wearing my meanest dress, and a pair of wooden shoes which she had bought for me, and which bruised my feet horribly, I had to harness myself to the cart by means of a leather strap, which cut

my shoulders and my chest. She was an abominable creature, that woman; and I soon found out that her repulsive features indicated but too well her ignoble instincts. After leading a life of vice and shame, she had, with the approach of old age, fallen into the most abject poverty, and had adopted the trade of vegetable-vender, which she carried on just enough to escape absolute starvation. Enraged at her fate, she found a detestable pleasure in ill-treating me, or in endeavoring to stain my imagination by the foulest speeches.

"Ah, if I had only known where to fly, and where to take refuge! But, abusing my ignorance, that execrable woman had persuaded me, that, if I attempted to go out alone, I would be arrested. And I knew no one to whom I could apply for protection and advice. And then I began to learn that beauty, to a poor girl, is a fatal gift. One by one, the woman had sold every thing I had,—dresses, underclothes, jewels; and I was now reduced to rags almost as mean as when I was with the laundress.

"Every morning, rain or shine, hot or cold, we started, wheeling our cart from village to village, all along the Seine, from Courbevoie to Pont-Marly. I could see no end to this wretched existence, when one evening the commissary of police presented himself at our hovel, and ordered us to follow him.

"We were taken to prison; and there I found myself thrown among some hundred women, whose faces, words, and gestures frightened me. The vegetable-woman had committed a theft; and I was accused of complicity. Fortunately I was easily able to demonstrate my innocence; and, at the end of two weeks, a jailer opened the door to me, saying, 'Go: you are free!'"

Maxence understood now the gently ironical smile

with which Mlle. Lucienne had heard him assert that he, too, had been very unhappy. What a life hers had been! And how could such things be within a step of Paris, in the midst of a society which deems its organization too perfect to consent to modify it!

Mlle. Lucienne went on, speaking somewhat faster,—

“I was indeed free; but of what use could my freedom be to me? I knew not which way to go. A mechanical instinct took me back to Rueil. I fancied I would be safer among people who all knew me, and that I might find shelter in our old lodgings. But this last hope was disappointed. Immediately after our arrest, the owner of the building had thrown out every thing it contained, and had rented it to a hideous beggar, who offered me, with a giggle, to become his house-keeper. I ran off as fast as I could.

“The situation was certainly more horrible now than the day when I had been turned out of my benefactress’ house. But the eight months I had just spent with the horrible woman had taught me anew how to bear misery, and had nerved up my energy.

“I took out from a fold of my dress, where I had kept it constantly hid, the twenty-franc-piece I had received; and, as I was hungry, I entered a sort of eating and lodging house, where I had occasionally taken a meal. The proprietor was a kind-hearted man. When I had told him my situation, he invited me to remain with him until I could find something better. On Sundays and Mondays the customers were plenty; and he was obliged to take an extra servant. He offered me that work to do, promising, in exchange, my lodging and one meal a day. I accepted. The next day being Sunday, I commenced the arduous duties of a bar-maid in a low drinking house. My *pourboires* amounted sometimes to

five or ten francs ; I had my board and lodging free ; and at the end of three months I had been able to provide myself with some decent clothing, and was commencing to accumulate a little reserve, when the lodging-house keeper, whose business had unexpectedly developed itself to a considerable extent, concluded to engage a man-waiter, and urged me to look elsewhere for work. I did so. An old neighbor of ours told me of a situation at Bougival, where she said I would be very comfortable. Overcoming my repugnance, I applied, and was accepted. I was to get thirty francs a month.

“ The place might have been a good one. There were only three in the family,—the gentleman and his wife, and a son of twenty-five. Every morning, father and son left for Paris by the first train, and only came home to dinner at about six o'clock. I was therefore alone all day with the woman. Unfortunately, she was a cross and disagreeable person, who, never having had a servant before, felt an insatiable desire of showing and exercising her authority. She was, moreover, extremely suspicious, and found some pretext to visit regularly my trunks once or twice a week, to see if I had not concealed some of her napkins or silver spoons. Having told her that I had once been a laundress, she made me wash and iron all the clothes in the house, and was forever accusing me of using too much soap and too much coal. Still I liked the place well enough ; and I had a little room in the attic, which I thought charming, and where I spent delightful evenings reading or sewing.

“ But luck was against me. The young gentleman of the house took a fancy to me, and determined to make me his mistress. I discouraged him in a way ; but he persisted in his loathsome attention, until one night he

broke into my room, and I was compelled to shout for help with all my might, before I could get rid of him.

"The next day I left that house; but I tried in vain to find another situation in Bougival. I resolved then to seek a place in Paris. I had a big trunk full of good clothes, and about a hundred francs of savings; and I felt no anxiety.

"When I arrived in Paris, I went straight to an intelligence-office. I was extremely well received by a very affable old woman who promised to get me a good place, and, in the mean time, solicited me to board with her. She kept a sort of boarding-house for servants out of place; and there were there some fifty or sixty of us, who slept at night in long dormitories.

"Time went by, and still I did not find that famous place. The board was expensive, too, for my scanty means; and I determined to leave. I started in quest of new lodgings, followed by a porter, carrying my trunk; but as I was crossing the Boulevard, not getting quick enough out of the way of a handsome private carriage which was coming at full trot, I was knocked down, and trampled under the horses's feet."

Without allowing Maxence to interrupt her,—

"I had lost consciousness," went on Mlle. Lucienne. "When I came to my senses, I was sitting in a drug-store; and three or four persons were busy around me. I had no fracture, but only some severe contusions, and a deep cut on the head.

"The physician who had attended me requested me to try and walk; but I could not even stand on my feet. Then he asked me where I lived, that I might be taken there; and I was compelled to own that I was a poor servant out of place, without a home or a friend to care for me.

“ ‘In that case,’ said the doctor to the druggist, ‘we must send her to the hospital.’

“ And they sent for a cab.

“ In the mean time, quite a crowd had gathered outside, and the conduct of the person who was in the carriage that had run over me was being indignantly criticised. It was a woman; and I had caught a glimpse of her at the very moment I was falling under the horses’ feet. She had not even condescended to get out of her carriage; but, calling a policeman, she had given him her name and address, adding, loud enough to be heard by the crowd, ‘I am in too great a hurry to stop. My coachman is an awkward fellow, whom I shall dismiss as soon as I get home. I am ready to pay any thing that may be asked.’

“ She had also sent one of her cards for me. A policeman handed it to me; and I read the name, *Baronne de Thaller*.

“ ‘That’s lucky for you,’ said the doctor. ‘That lady is the wife of a very rich banker; and she will be able to help you when you get well.’

“ The cab had now come. I was carried into it; and, an hour later, I was admitted at the hospital, and laid on a clean, comfortable bed.

“ But my trunk!—my trunk, which contained all my things, all I had in the world, and, worse still, all the money I had left. I asked for it, my heart filled with anxiety. No one had either seen or heard of it. Had the porter missed me in the crowd? or had he basely availed himself of the accident to rob me? This was hard to decide.

“ The good sisters promised that they would have it looked after, and that the police would certainly be able to find that man whom I had engaged near the intelli-

gence-office. But all these assurances failed to console me. This blow was the finishing one. I was taken with fever; and for more than two weeks my life was despaired of. I was saved at last: but my convalescence was long and tedious; and for over two months I lingered with alternations of better and of worse.

"Yet such had been my misery for the past two years, that this gloomy stay in a hospital was for me like an oasis in the desert. The good sisters were very kind to me; and, when I was able, I helped them with their lighter work, or went to the chapel with them. I shuddered at the thought that I must leave them as soon as I was entirely well; and then what would become of me? For my trunk had not been found, and I was destitute of all.

"And yet I had, at the hospital, more than one subject for gloomy reflections. Twice a week, on Thursdays and Sundays, visitors were admitted; and there was not on those days a single patient who did not receive a relative or a friend. But I, no one, nothing, never!

"But I am mistaken. I was commencing to get well, when one Sunday I saw by my bedside an old man, dressed all in black, of alarming appearance, wearing blue spectacles, and holding under his arm an enormous portfolio, crammed full of papers.

" 'You are Mlle. Lucienne, I believe,' he asked.

" 'Yes,' I replied, quite surprised.

" 'You are the person who was knocked down by a carriage on the corner of the Boulevard and the Faubourg St. Martin?'

" 'Yes sir.'

" 'Do you know whose equipage that was?'

" 'The Baronne de Thaller's, I was told.'

"He seemed a little surprised, but at once,—

"'Have you seen that lady, or caused her to be seen in your behalf?'

"'No.'

"'Have you heard from her in any manner?'

"'No.'

"A smile came back upon his lips.

"'Luckily for you I am here,' he said. 'Several times already I have called; but you were too unwell to hear me. Now that you are better, listen.'

"And thereupon, taking a chair, he commenced to explain his profession to me.

"He was a sort of broker; and accidents were his specialty. As soon as one took place, he was notified by some friends of his at police headquarters. At once he started in quest of the victim, overtook her at home or at the hospital, and offered his services. For a moderate commission he undertook, if needs be, to recover damages. He commenced suit when necessary; and, if he thought the case tolerably safe, he made advances. He stated, for instance, that my case was a plain one, and that he would undertake to obtain four or five thousand francs, at least, from Mme. de Thaller. All he wanted was my power of attorney. But, in spite of his pressing instances, I declined his offers; and he withdrew, very much displeased, assuring me that I would soon repent.

"Upon second thought, indeed, I regretted to have followed the first inspiration of my pride, and the more so, that the good sisters whom I consulted on the subject told me that I was wrong, and that my reclamation would be perfectly proper. At their suggestion, I then adopted another line of conduct, which, they thought, would as surely bring about the same result.

"As briefly as possible, I wrote out the history of

my life from the day I had been left with the gardeners at Louveciennes. I added to it a faithful account of my present situation; and I addressed the whole to Mme. de Thaller.

“ ‘ You’ll see if she don’t come before a day or two,’ said the sisters.

“ They were mistaken. Mme. de Thaller came neither the next nor the following days; and I was still awaiting her answer, when, one morning, the doctor announced that I was well enough to leave the hospital.

“ I cannot say that I was very sorry. I had lately made the acquaintance of a young workwoman, who had been sent to the hospital in consequence of a fall, and who occupied the bed next to mine. She was a girl of about twenty, very gentle, very obliging, and whose amiable countenance had attracted me from the first.

“ Like myself, she had no parents. But she was rich, very rich. She owned the furniture of the room, a sewing-machine, which had cost her three hundred francs, and, like a true child of Paris, she understood five or six trades, the least lucrative of which yielded her twenty-five or thirty cents a day. In less than a week, we had become good friends; and, when she left the hospital,—

“ ‘ Believe me,’ she said: ‘ when you come out yourself, don’t waste your time looking for a place. Come to me: I can accommodate you. I’ll teach you what I know; and, if you are industrious, you’ll make your living, and you’ll be free.’

“ It was to her room that I went straight from the hospital, carrying, tied in a handkerchief, my entire baggage,—one dress, and a few undergarments that the good sisters had given me.

“ She received me like a sister, and after showing

me her lodging, two little attic-rooms shining with cleanliness,—

“ ‘ You’ll see,’ she said, kissing me, ‘ how happy we’ll be here.’ ”

It was getting late. M. Fortin had long ago come up and put out the gas on the stairs. One by one, every noise had died away in the hotel. Nothing now disturbed the silence of the night save the distant sound of some belated cab on the Boulevard. But neither Maxence nor Mlle. Lucienne were noticing the flight of time, so interested were they, one in telling, and the other in listening to, this story of a wonderful existence. However, Mlle. Lucienne’s voice had become hoarse with fatigue. She poured herself a glass of water, which she emptied at a draught, and then at once,—

“ Never yet,” she resumed, “ had I been agitated by such a sweet sensation. My eyes were full of tears; but they were tears of gratitude and joy. After so many years of isolation, to meet with such a friend, so generous, and so devoted: it was like finding a family. For a few weeks, I thought that fate had relented at last. My friend was an excellent workwoman; but with some intelligence, and the will to learn, I soon knew as much as she did.

“ There was plenty of work. By working twelve hours, with the help of the thrice-blessed sewing-machine, we succeeded in making six, seven, and even eight francs a day. It was a fortune.

“ Thus several months elapsed in comparative comfort.

“ Once more I was afloat, and I had more clothes than I had lost in my trunk. I liked the life I was leading; and I would be leading it still, if my friend had not one day fallen desperately in love with a young man she had

met at a ball. I disliked him very much, and took no trouble to conceal my feelings: nevertheless, my friend imagined that I had designs upon him, and became fiercely jealous of me. Jealousy does not reason; and I soon understood that we would no longer be able to live in common, and that I must look elsewhere for shelter. But my friend gave me no time to do so.

"Coming home one Monday night at about eleven, she notified me to clear out at once. I attempted to expostulate: she replied with abuse. Rather than enter upon a degrading struggle, I yielded, and went out.

"That night I spent on a chair in a neighbor's room. But the next day, when I went for my things, my former friend refused to give them, and presumed to keep every thing. I was compelled, though reluctantly, to resort to the intervention of the commissary of police.

"I gained my point. But the good days had gone. Luck did not follow me to the wretched furnished house where I hired a room. I had no sewing-machine, and but few acquaintances. By working fifteen or sixteen hours a day, I made thirty or forty cents. That was not enough to live on. Then work failed me altogether, and, piece by piece, every thing I had went to the pawnbroker's. On a gloomy December morning, I was turned out of my room, and left on the pavement with a ten-cent-piece for my fortune.

"Never had I been so low; and I know not to what extremities I might have come at last, when I happened to think of that wealthy lady whose horses had upset me on the Boulevard. I had kept her card. Without hesitation, I went into a grocery, and calling for some paper and a pen, I wrote, overcoming the last struggle of my pride,—

"Do you remember, madame, a poor girl whom

your carriage came near crushing to death? Once before she applied to you, and received no answer. She is to-day without shelter and without bread; and you are her supreme hope.'

"I placed these few lines in an envelope, and ran to the address indicated on the card. It was a magnificent residence, with a vast court-yard in front. In the porter's lodge, five or six servants were talking as I came in, and looked at me impudently, from head to foot, when I requested them to take my letter to Mme. de Thaller. One of them, however, took pity on me,—

" 'Come with me,' he said, 'come along!'

"He made me cross the yard, and enter the vestibule; and then,—

" 'Give me your letter,' he said, 'and wait here for me.' "

Maxence was about to express the thoughts which Mme. de Thaller's name naturally suggested to his mind, but Mlle. Lucienne interrupted him,—

"In all my life," she went on, "I had never seen any thing so magnificent as that vestibule with its tall columns, its tessellated floor, its large bronze vases filled with the rarest flowers, and its red velvet benches, upon which tall footmen in brilliant livery were lounging.

"I was, I confess, somewhat intimidated by all of this splendor; and I remained awkwardly standing, when suddenly the servants stood up respectfully.

"A door had just opened, through which appeared a man already past middle age, tall, thin, dressed in the extreme of fashion, and wearing long red whiskers falling over his chest."

"The Baron de Thaller," murmured Maxence.

Mlle. Lucienne took no notice of the interruption.

"The attitude of the servants," she went on, "had

made me easily guess that he was the master. I was bowing to him, blushing and embarrassed, when, noticing me, he stopped short, shuddering from head to foot.

“ ‘ Who are you ? ’ he asked me roughly.

“ I attributed his manner to the sad condition of my dress, which appeared more miserable and more dilapidated still amid the surrounding splendors ; and, in a scarcely intelligible voice, I began,—

“ ‘ I am a poor girl, sir ’—

“ But he interrupted me.

“ ‘ To the point ! What do you want ? ’

“ ‘ I am awaiting an answer, sir, to a request which I have just forwarded to the baroness.’

“ ‘ What about ? ’

“ ‘ Once sir, I was run over in the street by the baroness’s carriage : I was severely wounded, and had to be taken to the hospital.’

“ I fancied there was something like terror in the man’s look.

“ ‘ It is you, then, who once before sent a long letter to my wife, in which you told the story of your life ? ’

“ ‘ Yes, sir, it was I. ’

“ ‘ You stated in that letter that you had no parents, having been left by your mother with some gardeners at Louveciennes ? ’

“ ‘ That is the truth.’

“ ‘ What has become of these gardeners ? ’

“ ‘ They are dead.’

“ ‘ What was your mother’s name ? ’

“ ‘ I never knew.’

“ To M. de Thaller’s first surprise had succeeded a feeling of evident irritation ; but, the more haughty and brutal his manners, the cooler and the more self-possessed I became.

“ ‘And you are soliciting assistance?’ he said.

“ ‘I drew myself up, and, looking at him straight in the eyes,—

“ ‘I beg your pardon,’ I replied: ‘it is a legitimate indemnity which I claim.’

“ ‘Indeed, it seemed to me that my firmness alarmed him. With a feverish haste, he began to feel in his pockets. He took out their contents of gold and bank-notes all in a heap, and, thrusting it into my hands without counting,—

“ ‘Here,’ he said, ‘take this. Are you satisfied?’

“ ‘I observed to him, that, having sent a letter to Mme. de Thaller, it would perhaps be proper to await her answer. But he replied that it was not necessary, and, pushing me towards the door,—

“ ‘You may depend upon it,’ he said, ‘I shall tell my wife that I saw you.’

“ ‘I started to go out; but I had not gone ten steps across the yard, when I heard him crying excitedly to his servants,—

“ ‘You see that beggar, don’t you? Well, the first one who allows her to cross the threshold of my door shall be turned out on the instant.’

“ ‘A beggar, I! Ah the wretch! I turned round to cast his alms into his face; but already he had disappeared, and I only found before me the footman, chuckling stupidly.

“ ‘I went out; and, as my anger gradually passed off, I felt thankful that I had been unable to follow the dictates of my wounded pride.

“ ‘Poor girl,’ I thought to myself, ‘where would you be at this hour? You would only have to select between suicide and the vilest existence; whereas now you are above want.’

"I was passing before a small restaurant. I went in; for I was very hungry, having, so to speak, eaten nothing for several days past. Besides, I felt anxious to count my treasure. The Baron de Thaller had given me nine hundred and thirty francs.

"This sum, which exceeded the utmost limits of my ambition, seemed inexhaustible to me: I was dazzled by its possession.

" 'And yet,' I thought, 'had M. de Thaller happened to have ten thousand francs in his pockets he would have given them to me all the same.'

"I was at a loss to explain this strange generosity. Why his surprise when he first saw me, then his anger, and his haste to get rid of me? How was it that a man whose mind must be filled with the gravest cares had so distinctly remembered me, and the letter I had written to his wife? Why, after showing himself so generous, had he so strictly excluded me from his house?

"After vainly trying for some time to solve this riddle, I concluded that I must be the victim of my own imagination; and I turned my attention to making the best possible use of my sudden fortune. On the same day, I took a little room in the Faubourg St. Denis; and I bought myself a sewing-machine. Before the week was over, I had work before me for several months. Ah! this time it seemed indeed that I had nothing more to apprehend from destiny; and I looked forward, without fear, to the future. At the end of a month, I was earning four to five francs a day, when, one afternoon, a stout man, very well dressed, looking honest and good-natured, and speaking French with some difficulty, made his appearance at my room. He was an American, he stated, and had been sent to me by the woman for whom I worked. Having need of a skilled Parisian

work-woman, he came to propose to me to follow him to New York, where he would insure me a brilliant position.

"But I knew several poor girls, who, on the faith of dazzling promises, had expatriated themselves. Once abroad, they had been shamefully abandoned, and had been driven, to escape starvation, to resort to the vilest expedients. I refused, therefore, and frankly gave him my reasons for doing so.

"My visitor at once protested indignantly. Whom did I take him for? It was a fortune that I was refusing. He guaranteed me in New York board, lodging, and two hundred francs a month. He would pay all travelling and moving expenses. And, to prove to me the fairness of his intentions, he was ready, he said, to sign an agreement, and pay me a thousand down.

"These offers were so brilliant, that I was staggered in my resolution.

" 'Well,' I said, 'give me twenty-four hours to decide. I wish to see my employer.'

"He seemed very much annoyed; but, as I remained firm in my purpose, he left, promising to return the next day to receive my final answer.

"I ran at once to my employer. She did not know what I was talking about. She had sent no one, and was not acquainted with any American.

"Of course, I never saw him again; and I couldn't help thinking of this singular adventure, when, one evening during the following week, as I was coming home at about eleven o'clock, two policemen arrested me, and, in spite of my earnest protestations, took me to the station-house, where I was locked up with a dozen unfortunates who had just been taken up on the Boulevards. I spent the night crying with shame and an-

ger; and I don't know what would have become of me, if the justice of the peace, who examined me the next morning, had not happened to be a just and kind man. As soon as I had explained to him that I was the victim of a most humiliating error, he sent an agent in quest of information, and having satisfied himself that I was an honest girl, working for my living, he discharged me. But, before permitting me to go,—

“ ‘Beware, my child,’ he said to me: ‘it is upon a formal and well-authenticated declaration that you were arrested. Therefore you must have enemies. People have an interest in getting rid of you’ ”

Mademoiselle Lucienne was evidently almost exhausted with fatigue: her voice was failing her. But it was in vain that Maxence begged her to take a few moments of rest.

“ No,” she answered, “ I'd rather get through as quick as possible.”

And, making an effort, she resumed her narrative, hurrying more and more.

“ I returned home, my mind all disturbed by the judge's warnings. I am no coward; but it is a terrible thing to feel one's self incessantly threatened by an unknown and mysterious danger, against which nothing can be done.

“ In vain did I search my past life: I could think of no one who could have any interest in effecting my ruin. Those alone have enemies who have had friends. I had never had but one friend, the kind-hearted girl who had turned me out of her home in a fit of absurd jealousy. But I knew her well enough to know that she was incapable of malice, and that she must long since have forgotten the unlucky cause of our rupture.

“ Weeks after weeks passed without any new incident.

I had plenty of work and was earning enough money to begin saving. So I felt comfortable, laughed at my former fears, and neglected the precautions which I had taken at first; when, one evening, my employer, having a very important and pressing order, sent for me. We did not get through our work until long after midnight.

"She wished me to spend the rest of the night with her; but it would have been necessary to make up a bed for me, and disturb the whole household.

"'Bash!' I said, 'this will not be the first time I cross Paris in the middle of the night.'

"I started; and I was going along, walking as fast as I could, when, from the angle of a dark, narrow street, a man sprang upon me, threw me down, struck me, and would doubtless have killed me, but for two brave gentlemen who heard my screams and rushed to my assistance. The man ran off; and I was able to walk the rest of the way home, having received but a very slight wound.

"But the very next morning I ran to see my friend, the justice of the peace. He listened to me gravely, and, when I had concluded,—

"'How were you dressed?' he inquired.

"'All in black,' I replied, 'very modestly, like a workwoman.'

"'Had you nothing on your person that could tempt a thief?'

"'Nothing. No watch-chain, no jewelry, no earrings even.'

"'Then,' he uttered, knitting his brows, 'it is not a fortuitous crime: it is another attempt on the part of your enemies.'

"Such was also my opinion. And yet—

"'But, sir,' I exclaimed, 'who can have any interest

to destroy me,—a poor obscure girl as I am? I have thought carefully and well, and I have not a single enemy that I can think of.' And, as I had full confidence in his kindness, I went on telling him the story of my life.

" 'You are a natural child,' he said as soon as I had done, 'and you have been basely abandoned. That fact alone would be sufficient to justify every supposition. You do not know your parents; but it is quite possible that *they* may know you, and that they may never have lost sight of you. Your mother was a working-girl, you think? That may be. But your father? Do you know what interests your existence may threaten? Do you know what elaborate edifice of falsehood and infamy your sudden appearance might tumble to the ground?'

"I was listening dumfounded.

"Never had such conjectures crossed my mind; and, whilst I doubted their probability, I had, at least, to admit their possibility.

" 'What must I do, then?' I inquired.

The peace-officer shook his head.

" 'Indeed, my poor child, I hardly know what to advise. The police is not omnipotent. It can do nothing to anticipate a crime conceived in the brain of an unknown scoundrel.'

"I was terrified. He saw it, and took pity on me.

" 'In your place,' he added, 'I would change my domicile. You might, perhaps, thus make them lose your track. And, above all, do not fail to give me your new address. Whatever I can do to protect you, and insure your safety, I shall do.'

"That excellent man has kept his word; and once again I owed my safety to him. 'Tis he who is now commissary of police in this district, and who protected me

against Mme. Fortin. I hastened to follow his advice, and two days later I had hired the room in this house in which I am still living. In order to avoid every chance of discovery, I left my employer, and requested her to say, if any one came to inquire after me, that I had gone to America.

"I soon found work again in a very fashionable dress-making establishment, the name of which you must have heard,—Van Klopen's. Unfortunately, war had just been declared. Every day announced a new defeat. The Prussians were coming; then the siege began. Van Klopen had closed his shop, and left Paris. I had a few savings, thank heaven; and I husbanded them as carefully as shipwrecked mariners do their last ration of food, when I unexpectedly found some work.

"It was one Sunday, and I had gone out to see some battalions of National Guards passing along the Boulevard, when suddenly I saw one of the *vivandières*, who was marching behind the band, stop, and run towards me with open arms. It was my old friend from the Batignolles, who had recognized me. She threw her arms around my neck, and, as we had at once become the centre of a group of at least five hundred idlers,—

"‘I must speak to you,’ she said. ‘If you live in the neighborhood, let's go to your room. The service can wait.’

"I brought her here; and at once she commenced to excuse herself for her past conduct, begging me to restore her my friendship. As I expected, she had long since forgotten the young man, cause of our rupture. But she was now in love, and seriously this time, she declared, with a furniture-maker, who was a captain in the National Guards. It was through him that she had become a *vivandière*; and she offered me a similar po-

sition, if I wished it. But I did not wish it; and, as I was complaining that I could find no work, she swore that she would get me some through her captain, who was a very influential man.

"Through him, I did in fact obtain a few dozen jackets to make. This work was very poorly paid; but the little I earned was that much less to take from my humble resources. In that way I managed to get through the siege without suffering too much.

"After the armistice, unfortunately, M. Van Klopen had not yet returned. I was unable to procure any work; my resources were exhausted; and I would have starved during the Commune, but for my old friend, who several times brought me a little money, and some provisions. Her captain was now a colonel, and was about to become a member of the government; at least, so she assured me. The entrance of the troops into Paris put an end to her dream. One night she came to me livid with fright. She supposed herself gravely compromised, and begged me to hide her. For four days she remained with me. On the fifth, just as we were sitting down to dinner, my room was invaded by a number of police-agents, who showed us an order of arrest, and commanded us to follow them.

"My friend sank down upon a chair, stupid with fright. But I retained my presence of mind, and persuaded one of the agents to go and notify my friend the justice. He happened luckily to be at home, and at once hastened to my assistance. He could do nothing, however, for the moment; the agents having positive orders to take us straight to Versailles.

"‘Well,’ said he, ‘I shall accompany you.’

"From the very first steps he took the next morning, he discovered that my position was indeed grave.

But he also and very clearly recognized a new device of the enemy to bring about my destruction. The information filed against me stated that I had remained in the service of the Commune to the last moment; that I had been seen behind the barricades with a gun in my hand; and that I had formed one of a band of vile incendiaries. This infamous scheme had evidently been suggested by my relations with my friend from the Batignolles, who was still more terribly compromised than she thought, the poor girl; her colonel having been captured, and convicted of pillage and murder, and herself charged with complicity.

"Isolated as I was, without resources, and without relatives, I would certainly have perished, but for the devoted efforts of my friend the justice, whose official position gave him access everywhere, and enabled him to reach my judges. He succeeded in demonstrating my entire innocence; and after forty-eight hours' detention, which seemed an age to me, I was set at liberty.

"At the door, I found the man who had just saved me. He was waiting for me, but would not suffer me to express the gratitude with which my heart overflowed.

" 'You will thank me,' he said, 'when I have deserved it better. I have done nothing as yet that any honest man wouldn't have done in my place. What I wish is to discover what interests you are threatening without knowing it, and which must be considerable, if I may judge by the passion and the tenacity of those who are pursuing you. What I desire to do is to lay hands upon the cowardly rascals in whose way you seem to stand.'

"I shook my head.

" 'You will not succeed,' I said to him.

“ ‘ Who knows? I’ve done harder things than that in my life.’

“ And taking a large envelope from his pocket,—

“ ‘ This,’ he said, ‘ is the letter which caused your arrest. I have examined it attentively; and I am certain that the handwriting is not disguised. That’s something to start with, and may enable me to verify my suspicions, should any occur to my mind. In the mean time, return quietly to Paris, resume your ordinary occupations, answer vaguely any questions that may be asked about this matter, and above all, never mention my name. Remain at the Hôtel des Folies: it is in my district, in my legitimate sphere of action; besides, the proprietors are in a position where they dare not disobey my orders. Never come to my office, unless something grave and unforeseen should occur. Our chances of success would be seriously compromised, if they could suspect the interest I take in your welfare. Keep your eyes open on every thing that is going on around you, and, if you notice any thing suspicious, write to me. I will myself organize a secret surveillance around you. If I can bag one of the rascals who are watching you, that’s all I want.

“ ‘ And now,’ added this good man, ‘ good-by. Patience and courage.’

“ Unfortunately he had not thought of offering me a little money: I had not dared to ask him for any, and I had but eight sous left. It was on foot, therefore, that I was compelled to return to Paris.

“ Mme. Fortin received me with open arms. With me returned the hope of recovering the hundred and odd francs which I owed her, and which she had given up for lost. Moreover, she had excellent news for me. M.

Van Klopen had sent for me during my absence, requesting me to call at his shop. Tired as I was, I went to see him at once. I found him very much downcast by the poor prospects of business. Still he was determined to go on, and offered to employ me, not as workwoman, as heretofore, but to try on garments for customers, at a salary of one hundred and twenty francs a month. I was not in a position to be very particular. I accepted; and there I am still.

"Every morning, when I get to the shop, I take off this simple costume, and I put on a sort of livery that belongs to M. Van Klopen,—wide skirts, and a black silk dress.

"Then whenever a customer comes who wants a cloak, a mantle, or some other 'wrapping,' I step up, and put on the garment, that the purchaser may see how it looks. I have to walk, to turn around, sit down, etc. It is absurdly ridiculous, often humiliating; and many a time, during the first days, I felt tempted to give back to M. Van Klopen his black silk dress.

"But the conjectures of my friend the peace-officer were constantly agitating my brain. Since I thought I had discovered a mystery in my existence, I indulged in all sorts of fancies, and was momentarily expecting some extraordinary occurrence, some compensation of destiny. And I remained.

"But I was not yet at the end of my troubles."

Since she had been speaking of M. Van Klopen, Mlle. Lucienne seemed to have lost her tone of haughty assurance and imperturbable coolness; and it was with a look of mingled confusion and sadness that she went on.

"What I was doing at Van Klopen's was exceedingly painful to me; and yet he very soon asked me to do something more painful still. Gradually Paris was fill-

ing up again. The hotels had re-opened; foreigners were pouring in; and the Bois Boulogne was resuming its wonted animation. Still but few orders came in, and those for dresses of the utmost simplicity, of dark color and plain material, on which it was hard to make twenty-five per cent profit. Van Klopen was disconsolate. He kept speaking to me of the good old days, when some of his customers spent as much as thirty thousand francs a month for dresses and trifles, until one day,—

“ ‘You are the only one,’ he told me, ‘who can help me out just now. You are really good looking; and I am sure that in full dress, spread over the cushions of a handsome carriage, you would create quite a sensation, and that all the rest of the women would be jealous of you, and would wish to look like you. There needs but one, you know, to give the good example.’ ”

Maxence started up suddenly, and, striking his head with hand,—

“Ah, I understand now!” he exclaimed.

“I thought that Van Klopen was jesting.” went on the young girl. “But he had never been more in earnest; and, to prove it, he commenced explaining to me what he wanted. He proposed to get up for me some of those costumes which are sure to attract attention; and two or three times a week he would send me a fine carriage, and I would go and show myself in the Bois.

“I felt disgusted at the proposition.

“ ‘Never!’ I said.

“ ‘Why not?’

“ ‘Because I respect myself too much to make a living advertisement of myself.’

“He shrugged his shoulders.

“ ‘You are wrong,’ he said. ‘You are not rich, and I would give you twenty francs for each ride. At the

rate of eight rides a month, it would be one hundred and sixty francs added to your wages. Besides,' he added with a wink, 'it would be an excellent opportunity to make your fortune. Pretty as you are, who knows but what some millionaire might take a fancy to you!'

"I felt indignant.

"'For that reason alone, if for no other,' I exclaimed, 'I refuse.'

"'You are a little fool,' he replied. 'If you do not accept, you cease being in my employment. Reflect!'

"My mind was already made up, and I was thinking of looking out for some other occupation, when I received a note from my friend the peace-officer, requesting me to call at his office.

"I did so, and, after kindly inviting me to a seat,—

"'Well,' he said, 'what is there new?'

"'Nothing. I have noticed no one watching me'

"He looked annoyed.

"'My agents have not detected any thing, either,' he grumbled. 'And yet it is evident that your enemies cannot have given it up so. They are sharp ones: if they keep quiet, it is because they are preparing some good trick. What it is I must and shall find out. Already I have an idea which would be an excellent one, if I could discover some way of throwing you among what is called good society.'

"I explained to him, that, being employed at Van Klopen's, I had an opportunity to see there many ladies of the best society.

"'That is not enough,' he said.

"Then M. Van Klopen's propositions came back to my mind, and I stated them to him.

"'Just the thing!' he exclaimed, starting upon his

chair : ' a manifest proof that luck is with us. You must accept.'

" I felt bound to tell him my objections, which reflection had much increased.

" ' I know but too well,' I said, ' what must happen if I accept this odious duty. Before I have been four times to the Bois, I shall be noticed, and every one will imagine that they know for what purpose I come there. I shall be assailed with vile offers. True, I have no fears for myself. I shall always be better guarded by my pride than by the most watchful of parents. But my reputation will be lost.'

" I failed to convince him.

" ' I know very well that you are an honest girl,' he said to me ; ' but, for that very reason, what do you care what all these people will think, whom you do not know ? Your future is at stake. I repeat it, you must accept.'

" ' If you command me to do so,' I said.

" ' Yes, I command you ; and I'll explain to you why.' "

For the first time, Mlle. Lucienne manifested some reticence, and omitted to repeat the explanations of the peace-officer. And, after a few moments' pause,—

" You know the rest, neighbor," she said, " since you have seen me yourself in that inept and ridiculous *rôle* of living advertisement, of fashionable lay-figure ; and the result has been just as I expected. Can you find any one who believes in my honesty of purpose ? You have heard Mme. Fortin to-night ? Yourself, neighbor—what did you take me for ? And yet you should have noticed something of my suffering and my humiliation the day that you were watching me so closely in the Bois de Boulogne."

"What!" exclaimed Maxence with a start, "you know?"

"Have I not just told you that I always fear being watched and followed, and that I am always on the lookout? Yes, I know that you tried to discover the secret of my rides."

Maxence tried to excuse himself.

"That will do for the present," she uttered. "You wish to be my friend, you say? Now that you know my whole life almost as well as I do myself, reflect, and tomorrow you will tell me the result of your thoughts."

Whereupon she went out.

XXVIII.

FOR about a minute Maxence remained stupefied at this sudden *dénouement*; and, when he had recovered his presence of mind and his voice, Mlle. Lucienne had disappeared, and he could hear her bolting her door, and striking a match against the wall.

He might also have thought that he was awaking from a dream, had he not had, to attest the reality, the vague perfume which filled his room, and the light shawl, which Mlle. Lucienne wore as she came in, and which she had forgotten, on a chair.

The night was almost ended: six o'clock had just struck. Still he did not feel in the least sleepy. His head was heavy, his temples throbbing, his eyes smarting. Opening his window, he leaned out to breathe the morning air. The day was dawning pale and cold. A furtive and livid light glanced along the damp walls of the narrow court of the Hôtel des Folies, as at the bottom of a well. Already arose those confused noises

which announce the waking of Paris, and above which can be heard the sonorous rolling of the milkmen's carts, the loud slamming of doors, and the sharp sound of hurrying steps on the hard pavement.

But soon Maxence felt a chill coming over him. He closed the window, threw some wood in the chimney, and stretched himself on his chair, his feet towards the fire. It was a most serious event which had just occurred in his existence; and, as much as he could, he endeavored to measure its bearings, and to calculate its consequences in the future.

He kept thinking of the story of that strange girl, her haughty frankness when unrolling certain phases of her life, of her wonderful impassibility, and of the implacable contempt for humanity which her every word betrayed. Where had she learned that dignity, so simple and so noble, that measured speech, that admirable respect of herself, which had enabled her to pass through so much filth without receiving a stain?

"What a woman!" he thought.

Before knowing her, he loved her. Now he was convulsed by one of those exclusive passions which master the whole being. Already he felt himself so much under the charm, subjugated, dominated, fascinated; he understood so well that he was going to cease being his own master; that his free will was about escaping from him; that he would be in Mlle. Lucienne's hands like wax under the modeller's fingers; he saw himself so thoroughly at the discretion of an energy superior to his own, that he was almost frightened.

"It's my whole future that I am going to risk," he thought.

And there was no middle path. Either he must fly at once, without waiting for Mlle. Lucienne to awake, fly

without looking behind, or else stay, and then accept all the chances of an incurable passion for a woman who, perhaps, might never care for him. And he remained wavering, like the traveller who finds himself at the intersection of two roads, and, knowing that one leads to the goal, and the other to an abyss, hesitates which to take.

With this difference, however, that if the traveller errs, and discovers his error, he is always free to retrace his steps; whereas man, in life, can never return to his starting-point. Every step he takes is final; and if he has erred, if he has taken the fatal road, there is no remedy.

"Well, no matter!" exclaimed Maxence. "It shall not be said that through cowardice I have allowed that happiness to escape which passes within my reach. I shall stay." And at once he began to examine what reasonably he might expect; for there was no mistaking Mlle. Lucienne's intentions. When she had said, "Do you wish to be friends?" she had meant exactly that, and nothing else,—friends, and only friends.

"And yet," thought Maxence, "if I had not inspired her with a real interest, would she have so wholly confided unto me? She is not ignorant of the fact that I love her; and she knows life too well to suppose that I will cease to love her when she has allowed me a certain amount of intimacy."

His heart filled with hope at the idea.

"My mistress," he thought, "never, evidently, but my wife. Why not?"

But the very next moment he became a prey to the bitterest discouragement. He thought that perhaps Mlle. Lucienne might have some capital interest in thus making a confidant of him. She had not told him the ex-

planation given her by the peace-officer. Had she not, perhaps, succeeded in lifting a corner of the veil which covered the secret of her birth? Was she on the track of her enemies? and had she discovered the motive of their animosity?

"Is it possible," thought Maxence, "that I should be but one of the powers in the game she is playing? How do I know, that, if she wins, she will not cast me off?"

In the midst of these thoughts, he had gradually fallen asleep, murmuring to the last the name of Lucienne.

The creaking of his opening door woke him up suddenly. He started to his feet, and met Mlle. Lucienne coming in.

"How is this?" said she. "You did not go to bed?"

"You recommended me to reflect," he replied. "I've been reflecting."

He looked at his watch: it was twelve o'clock.

"Which, however," he added, "did not keep me from going to sleep."

All the doubts that besieged him at the moment when he had been overcome by sleep now came back to his mind with painful vividness.

"And not only have I been sleeping," he went on, "but I have been dreaming too."

Mlle. Lucienne fixed upon him her great black eyes.

"Can you tell me your dream?" she asked.

He hesitated. Had he had but one minute to reflect, perhaps he would not have spoken; but he was taken unawares.

"I dreamed," he replied, "that we were friends in the noblest and purest acceptance of that word. Intelligence, heart, will, all that I am, and all that I can,—I laid every thing at your feet. You accepted the most entire devotion the most respectful and the most tender

that man is capable of. Yes, we were friends indeed; and upon a glimpse of love, never expressed, I planned a whole future of love." He stopped.

"Well?" she asked.

"Well, when my hopes seemed on the point of being realized, it happened that the mystery of your birth was suddenly revealed to you. You found a noble, powerful, and wealthy family. You resumed the illustrious name of which you had been robbed; your enemies were crushed; and your rights were restored to you. It was no longer Van Klopen's hired carriage that stopped in front of the Hôtel des Folies, but a carriage bearing a gorgeous coat of arms. That carriage was yours; and it came to take you to your own residence in the Faubourg St. Germain, or to your ancestral manor."

"And yourself?" inquired the girl.

Maxence repressed one of those nervous spasms which frequently break out in tears, and, with a gloomy look,—

"I," he answered, "standing on the edge of the pavement, I waited for a word or a look from you. You had forgotten my very existence. Your coachman whipped his horses; they started at a gallop; and soon I lost sight of you. And then a voice, the inexorable voice of fate, cried to me, 'Never more shalt thou see her!'"

With a superb gesture Mlle. Lucienne drew herself up.

"It is not with your heart, I trust, that you judge me, M. Maxence Favoral," she uttered.

He trembled lest he had offended her.

"I beseech you," he began.

But she went on in a voice vibrating with emotion,—

"I am not of those who basely deny their past. Your dream will never be realized. Those things are only

seen on the stage. If it did realize itself, however, if the carriage with the coat-of-arms did come to the door, the companion of the evil days, the friend who offered me his month's salary to pay my debt, would have a seat by my side."

That was more happiness than Maxence would have dared to hope for. He tried, in order to express his gratitude, to find some of those words which always seem to be lacking at the most critical moments. But he was suffocating; and the tears, accumulated by so many successive emotions, were rising to his eyes.

With a passionate impulse, he seized Mlle. Lucienne's hand, and, taking it to his lips, he covered it with kisses.

Gently but resolutely she withdrew her hand, and, fixing upon him her beautiful clear gaze,—

"Friends," she uttered.

Her accent alone would have been sufficient to dissipate the presumptuous illusions of Maxence, had he had any. But he had none.

"Friends only," he replied, "until the day when you shall be my wife. You cannot forbid me to hope. You love no one?"

"No one."

"Well since we are going to tread the path of life, let me think that we may find love at some turn of the road."

She made no answer. And thus was sealed between them a treaty of friendship, to which they were to remain so strictly faithful, that the word "love" never once rose to their lips.

In appearance there was no change in their mode of life.

Every morning, at seven o'clock, Mlle. Lucienne went

to M. Van Klopen's, and an hour later Maxence started for his office. They returned home at night, and spent their evenings together by the fireside.

But what was easy to foresee now took place.

Weak and undecided by nature, Maxence began very soon to feel the influence of the obstinate and energetic character of the girl. She infused, as it were, in his veins, a warmer and more generous blood. Gradually she imbued him with her ideas, and from her own will gave him one.

He had told her in all sincerity his history, the miseries of his home, M. Favoral's parsimony and exaggerated severity, his mother's resigned timidity, and Mlle. Gilberte's resolute nature.

He had concealed nothing of his past life, of his errors and his follies, confessing even the worst of his actions; as, for instance, having abused his mother's and sister's affection to extort from them all the money they earned.

He had admitted to her that it was only with great reluctance and under pressure of necessity, that he worked at all; that he was far from being rich; that although he took his dinner with his parents, his salary barely sufficed for his wants; and that he had debts.

He hoped, however, he added, that it would not be always thus, and that, sooner or later, he would see the termination of all this misery and privation; for his father had at least fifty thousand francs a year and some day he must be rich.

Far from smiling, Mlle. Lucienne frowned at such a prospect.

"Ah! your father is a millionaire, is he?" she interrupted. "Well, I understand now how, at twenty-five, after refusing all the positions which have been offered

to you, you have no position. You relied on your father, instead of relying on yourself. Judging that he worked hard enough for two, you bravely folded your arms, waiting for the fortune which he is amassing, and which you seem to consider yours."

Such morality seemed a little steep to Maxence.

"I think," he began, "that, if one is the son of a rich man"—

"One has the right to be useless, I suppose?" added the girl.

"I do not mean that; but"—

"There is no but about it. And the proof that your views are wrong, is that they have brought you where you are, and deprived you of your own free will. To place one's self at the mercy of another, be that other your own father, is always silly; and one is always at the mercy of the man from whom he expects money that he has not earned. Your father would never have been so harsh, had he not believed that you could not do without him."

He wanted to discuss: she stopped him.

"Do you wish the proof that you are at M. Favoral's mercy?" she said. "Very well. You spoke of marrying me."

"Ah, if you were willing!"

"Very well. Go and speak of it to your father."

"I suppose"—

"You don't suppose any thing at all: you are absolutely certain that he will refuse you his consent."

"I could do without it."

"I admit that you could. But do you know what he would do then? He would arrange things in such a way that you would never get a centime of his fortune."

Maxence had never thought of that.

"Therefore," the young girl went on gayly, "though there is as yet no question of marriage, learn to secure your independence; that is, the means of living. And to that effect let us work."

It was from that moment, that Mme. Favoral had noticed in her son the change that had surprised her so much.

Under the inspiration, under the impulsion, of Mlle. Lucienne, Maxence had been suddenly taken with a zeal for work, and a desire to earn money, of which he could not have been suspected.

He was no longer late at his office, and had not, at the end of each month, ten or fifteen francs' fines to pay.

Every morning, as soon as she was up, Mlle. Lucienne came to knock at his door. "Come, get up!" she cried to him.

And quick he jumped out of bed and dressed, so that he might bid her good-morning before she left.

In the evening, the last mouthful of his dinner was hardly swallowed, before he began copying the documents which he procured from M. Chapelain's successor.

And often he worked quite late in the night whilst by his side Mlle. Lucienne applied herself to some work of embroidery.

The girl was the cashier of the association; and she administered the common capital with such skilful and such scrupulous economy, that Maxence soon succeeded in paying off his creditors.

"Do you know," she was saying at the end of December, "that, between us, we have earned over six hundred francs this month?"

On Sundays only, after a week of which not a minute had been lost, they indulged in some little recreation.

If the weather was not too bad, they went out together, dined in some modest restaurant, and finished the day at the theatre.

Having thus a common existence, both young, free, and having their rooms divided only by a narrow passage it was difficult that people should believe in the innocence of their intercourse. The proprietors of the Hôtel des Folies believed nothing of the kind; and they were not alone in that opinion.

Mlle. Lucienne having continued to show herself in the Bois on the afternoons when the weather was fine, the number of fools who annoyed her with their attentions had greatly increased. Among the most obstinate could be numbered M. Costeclar, who was pleased to declare, upon his word of honor, that he had lost his sleep, and his taste for business, since the day when, together with M. Saint Pavin, he had first seen Mlle. Lucienne.

The efforts of his valet, and the letters which he had written, having proved useless, M. Costeclar had made up his mind to act in person; and gallantly he had come to put himself on guard in front of the Hôtel des Folies.

Great was his surprise, when he saw Mlle. Lucienne coming out arm in arm with Maxence; and greater still was his spite.

"That girl is a fool," he thought, "to prefer to me a fellow who has not two hundred francs a month to spend. But never mind! He laughs best who laughs last."

And, as he was a man fertile in expedients, he went the next day to take a walk in the neighborhood of the Mutual Credit; and, having met M. Favoral by chance, he told him how his son Maxence was ruining himself for a young lady whose toilets were a scandal, insinua-

ating delicately that it was his duty, as the head of the family, to put a stop to such a thing.

This was precisely the time when Maxence was endeavoring to obtain a situation in the office of the Mutual Credit.

It is true that the idea was not original with him, and that he had even vehemently rejected it, when, for the first time, Mlle. Lucienne had suggested it.

"What!" had he exclaimed, "be employed in the same establishment as my father? Suffer at the office the same intolerable despotism as at home? I'd rather break stones on the roads."

But Mlle. Lucienne was not the girl to give up so easily a project conceived and carefully matured by herself.

She returned to the charge with that infinite art of women, who understand so marvellously well how to turn a position which they cannot carry in front. She kept the matter so well before him, she spoke of it so often and so much, on every occasion, and under all pretexts, that he ended by persuading himself that it was the only reasonable and practical thing he could do, the only way in which he had any chance of making his fortune; and so, one evening overcoming his last hesitations,—

"I am going to speak about it to my father," he said to Mlle. Lucienne.

But whether he had been influenced by M. Costeclar's insinuations, or for some other reason, M. Favoral had rejected indignantly his son's request, saying that it was impossible to trust a young man who was ruining himself for the sake of a miserable creature.

Maxence had become crimson with rage on hearing

the woman spoken of thus, whom he loved to madness, and who, far from ruining him, was making him.

He returned to the Hôtel des Folies in an indescribable state of exasperation.

"There's the result," he said to Mlle. Lucienne, "of the step which you have urged me so strongly to take."

She seemed neither surprised nor irritated.

"Very well," she replied simply.

But Maxence could not resign himself so quietly to such a cruel disappointment; and, not having the slightest suspicion of Costeclar's doings,—

"And such is," he added, "the result of all the gossip of these stupid shop-keepers who run to see you every time you go out in the carriage."

The girl shrugged her shoulders contemptuously.

"I expected it," she said, "the day when I accepted M. Van Klopen's offers."

"Everybody believes that you are my mistress."

"What matters it, since it is not so?"

Maxence did not dare to confess that this was precisely what made him doubly angry; and he shuddered at the thought of the ridicule that would certainly be heaped upon him, if the true state of the case was known.

"We ought to move," he suggested.

"What's the use? Wherever we should go, it would be the same thing. Besides, I don't want to leave this neighborhood."

"And I am too much your friend not to tell you, that your reputation in it is absolutely lost."

"I have no accounts to render to any one."

"Except to your friend the commissary of police, however."

A pale smile flitted upon her lips.

"Ah!" she uttered, "he knows the truth."

"You have seen him again, then?"

"Several times."

"Since we have known each other?"

"Yes."

"And you never told me anything about it?"

"I did not think it necessary."

Maxence insisted no more; but, by the sharp pang that he felt, he realized how dear Mlle. Lucienne had become to him.

"She has secrets from me," thought he,— "from me who would deem it a crime to have any from her."

What secrets? Had she concealed from him that she was pursuing an object which had become, as it were, that of her whole life. Had she not told him, that with the assistance of her friend the peace-officer, who had now become commissary of police of the district, she hoped to penetrate the mystery of her birth, and to revenge herself on the villains, who, three times, had attempted to do away with her?

She had never mentioned her projects again; but it was evident that she had not abandoned them, for she would at the same time have given up her rides to the *bois*, which were to her an abominable torment.

But passion can neither reason nor discuss.

"She mistrusts me, who would give my life for her," repeated Maxence.

And the idea was so painful to him, that he resolved to clear his doubts at any cost, preferring the worst misery to the anxiety which was gnawing at his heart.

And as soon as he found himself alone with Mlle. Lucienne, arming himself with all his courage, and looking her straight in the eyes,—

"You never speak to me any more of your enemies?" he said.

She doubtless understood what was passing within him.

"It's because I don't hear any thing of them myself," she answered gently.

"Then you have given up your purpose?"

"Not at all."

"What are your hopes, then, and what are your prospects?"

"Extraordinary as it may seem to you, I must confess that I know nothing about it. My friend the commissary has his plan, I am certain; and he is following it with an indefatigable obstinacy. I am but an instrument in his hands. I never do any thing without consulting him; and what he advises me to do I do."

Maxence started upon his chair.

"Was it he, then," he said in a tone of bitter irony, "who suggested to you the idea of our fraternal association?"

A frown appeared upon the girl's countenance. She evidently felt hurt by the tone of this species of interrogatory.

"At least he did not disapprove of it," she replied.

But that answer was just evasive enough to excite Maxence's anxiety.

"Was it from him too," he went on, "that came the lovely idea of having me enter the Mutual Credit?"

"Yes, it was from him."

"For what purpose?"

"He did not explain."

"Why did you not tell me?"

"Because he requested me not to do so."

From being red at the start, Maxence had now become very pale.

"And so," he resumed, "it is that man, that police-agent, who is the real arbiter of my fate; and if to-morrow he commanded you to break off with me"—

Mlle. Lucienne drew herself up.

"Enough!" she interrupted in a brief tone, "enough! There is not in my whole existence a single act which would give to my bitterest enemy the right to suspect my loyalty; and now you accuse me of the basest treason. What have you to reproach me with? Have I not been faithful to the pact sworn between us. Have I not always been for you the best of comrades and the most devoted of friends? I remained silent, because the man in whom I have the fullest confidence requested me to do so; but he knew, that, if you questioned me, I would speak. Did you question me? And now what more do you want? That I should stoop to quiet the suspicions of your morbid mind? That I do not mean to do."

She was not, perhaps, entirely right; but Maxence was certainly wrong. He acknowledged it, wept, implored her pardon, which was granted; and this explanation only served to rivet more closely the fetters that bound him.

It is true, that, availing himself of the permission that had been granted him, he kept himself constantly informed of Mlle. Lucienne's doings. He learnt from her that her friend the commissary had held a most minute investigation at Louveciennes, and that the footman who went to the *bois* with her was now, in reality, a detective. And at last, one day,—

"My friend the commissary," she said, "thinks he is on the right track now."

XXIX.

SUCH was the exact situation of Maxence and Mlle. Lucienne on that eventful Saturday evening in the month of April, 1872, when the police came to arrest M. Vincent Favoral, on the charge of embezzlement and forgery.

It will be remembered, how, at his mother's request, Maxence had spent that night in the Rue St. Gilles, and how, the next morning, unable any longer to resist his eager desire to see Mlle. Lucienne, he had started for the Hôtel des Folies, leaving his sister alone at home.

He retired to his room, as she had requested him, and, sinking upon his old arm-chair in a fit of the deepest distress,—

"She is singing," he murmured: "Mme. Fortin has not told her any thing."

And at the same moment Mlle. Lucienne had resumed her song, the words of which reached him like a bitter raillery,—

"Hope! O sweet, deceiving word!
Mad indeed is he,
Who does think he can trust thee,
And take thy coin can afford.
Over his door every one
Will hang thee to his sorrow,
Then saying of days begone,
'Cash to-day, credit to-morrow!'
'Tis very nice to run;
But to have is better fun!"

"What will she say," thought Maxence, "when she learns the horrible truth?"

And he felt a cold perspiration starting on his temples when he remembered Mlle. Lucienne's pride, and

that honor has her only faith, the safety-plank to which she had desperately clung in the midst of the storms of her life. What if she should leave him, now that the name he bore was disgraced !

A rapid and light step on the landing drew him from his gloomy thoughts. Almost immediately, the door opened, and Mlle. Lucienne came in.

She must have dressed in haste ; for she was just finishing hooking her dress, the simplicity of which seemed studied, so marvellously did it set off the elegance of her figure, the splendors of her waist, and the rare perfections of her shoulders and of her neck.

A look of intense dissatisfaction could be read upon her lovely features ; but, as soon as she had seen Maxence, her countenance changed.

And, in fact, his look of utter distress, the disorder of his garments, his livid paleness, and the sinister look of his eyes, showed plainly enough that a great misfortune had befallen him. In a voice whose agitation betrayed something more than the anxiety and the sympathy of a friend,—

“ What is the matter ? What has happened ? ” inquired the girl.

“ A terrible misfortune,” he replied.

He was hesitating : he wished to tell every thing at once, and knew not how to begin.

“ I have told you,” he said, “ that my family was very rich.”

“ Yes.”

“ Well, we have nothing left, absolutely nothing.”

She seemed to breathe more freely, and, in a tone of friendly irony,—

“ And it is the loss of your fortune,” she said, “ that distresses you thus ? ”

He raised himself painfully to his feet, and, in a low hoarse voice,—

“Honor is lost too,” he uttered.

“Honor?”

“Yes. My father has stolen: my father has forged!”

She had become whiter than her collar.

“Your father!” she stammered.

“Yes. For years he has been using the money that was intrusted to him, until the deficit now amounts to twelve millions.”

“Great heavens!”

“And, notwithstanding the enormity of that sum, he was reduced, during the latter months, to the most miserable expedients,—going from door to door in the neighborhood, soliciting deposits, until he actually basely swindled a poor newspaper-vender out of five hundred francs.”

“Why, this is madness! And how did you find out?”

“Last night they came to arrest him. Fortunately we had been notified; and I helped him to escape through a window of my sister’s room, which opens on the yard of an adjoining house.”

“And where is he now?”

“Who knows?”

“Had he any money?”

“Everybody thinks that he carries off millions. I do not believe it. He even refused to take the few thousand francs which M. de Thaller had brought him to facilitate his flight.”

Mlle. Lucienne shuddered.

“Did you see M. de Thaller?” she asked.

“He got to the house a few moment in advance of the commissary of police; and a terrible scene took place between him and my father.”

"What was he saying?"

"That my father had ruined him."

"And your father?"

"He stammered incoherent phrases. He was like a man who has received a stunning blow. But we have discovered incredible things. My father, so austere and so parsimonious at home, led a merry life elsewhere, spending money without stint. It was for a woman that he robbed."

"And—do you know who that woman is?"

"No. But I can find out from the writer of the article in this paper, who says that he knows her. See!"

Mlle. Lucienne took the paper which Maxence was holding out to her: but she hardly condescended to look at it.

"But what's your idea now?"

"I do not believe that my father is innocent; but I believe that there are people more guilty than he,—skilful and prudent knaves, who have made use of him as a man of straw,—villains who will quietly digest their share of the millions (the biggest one, of course), while he will be sent to prison."

A fugitive blush colored Mlle. Lucienne's cheeks.

"That being the case," she interrupted, "what do you expect to do?"

"Avenge my father, if possible, and discover his accomplices, if he has any."

She held out her hand to him.

"That's right," she said. "But how will you go about it?"

"I don't know yet. At any rate, I must first of all run to the newspaper office, and get that woman's address."

But Mlle. Lucienne stopped him.

"No," she uttered: "it isn't there that you must go. You must come with me to see my friend the commissary."

Maxence received this suggestion with a gesture of surprise, almost of terror.

"Why, how can you think of such a thing?" he exclaimed. "My father is fleeing from justice; and you want me to take for my confidant a commissary of police,—the very man whose duty it is to arrest him, if he can find him!"

But he interrupted himself for a moment, staring and gaping, as if the truth had suddenly flashed upon his mind in dazzling evidence.

"For my father has not gone abroad," he went on. "It is in Paris that he is hiding: I am sure of it. You have seen him?"

Mlle. Lucienne really thought that Maxence was losing his mind.

"I have seen your father—I?" she said.

"Yes, last evening. How could I have forgotten it? While you were waiting for me down stairs, between eleven and half-past eleven a middle-aged man, thin, wearing a long overcoat, came and asked for me."

"Yes, I remember."

"He spoke to you in the yard."

"That's a fact."

"What did he tell you?"

She hesitated for a moment, evidently trying to tax her memory; then,—

"Nothing," she replied, "that he had not already said before the Fortins; that he wanted to see you on important business, and was sorry not to find you in. What surprised me, though, is, that he was speaking as if he knew me, and knew that I was a friend of yours."

Then, striking her forehead,—

“Perhaps you are right,” she went on. “Perhaps that man was indeed your father. Wait a minute. Yes, he seemed quite excited, and at every moment he looked around towards the door. He said it would be impossible for him to return, but that he would write to you, and that probably he would require your assistance and your services.”

“You see,” exclaimed Maxence, almost crazy with subdued excitement, “it was my father. He is going to write, to return, perhaps; and, under the circumstances, to apply to a commissary of police would be sheer folly, almost treason.”

She shook her head.

“So much the more reason,” she uttered, “why you should follow my advice. Have you ever had occasion to repent doing so?”

“No, but you may be mistaken.”

“I am not mistaken.”

She expressed herself in a tone of such absolute certainty, that Maxence, in the disorder of his mind, was at a loss to know what to imagine, what to believe.

“You must have some reason to urge me thus,” he said.

“I have.”

“Why not tell it to me then?”

“Because I should have no proofs to furnish you of my assertions. Because I should have to go into details which you would not understand. Because, above all, I am following one of those inexplicable presentiments which never deceive.”

It was evident that she was not willing to unveil her whole mind; and yet Maxence felt himself terribly staggered.

"Think of my agony," he said, "if I were to cause my father's arrest."

"Would my own be less? Can any misfortune strike you without reaching me? Let us reason a little. What were you saying a moment since? That certainly your father is not as guilty as people think; at any rate, that he is not alone guilty; that he has been but the instrument of rascals more skilful and more powerful than himself; and that he has had but a small share of the twelve millions?"

"Such is my absolute conviction."

"And that you would like to deliver up to justice the villains who have benefited by your father's crime, and who think themselves sure of impunity?"

Tears of anger fell from Maxence's eyes.

"Do you wish to take away all my courage?" he murmured.

"No; but I wish to demonstrate to you the necessity of the step which I advise you to take. The end justifies the means; and we have not the choice of means. Come, 'tis to an honest man and a tried friend that I shall take you. Fear nothing. If he remembers that he is commissary of police, it will be to serve us, not to injure you. You hesitate? Perhaps at this moment he already knows more than we do ourselves."

Maxence took a sudden resolution.

"Very well," he said: "let us go."

In less than five minutes they were off; and, as they went out, they had to disturb Mme. Fortin, who stood at the door, gossiping with two or three of the neighboring shop-keepers.

As soon as Maxence and Mlle. Lucienne were out of hearing,—

"You see that young man," said the honorable pro-

priestess of the Hôtel des Folies to her interlocutors. "Well, he is the son of that famous cashier who has just run off with twelve millions, after ruining a thousand families. It don't seem to trouble him, either; for there he is, going out to spend a pleasant day with his mistress, and to treat her to a fine dinner with the old man's money."

Meantime, Maxence and Lucienne reached the commissary's house. He was at home; they walked in. And, as soon as they appeared,—

"I expected you," he said.

He was a man already past middle age, but active and vigorous still. With his white cravat and long frock-coat, he looked like a notary. Benign was the expression of his countenance; but the lustre of his little gray eyes, and the mobility of his nostrils, showed that it should not be trusted too far.

"Yes, I expected you," he repeated, addressing himself as much to Maxence as to Mlle. Lucienne. "It is the Mutual Credit matter which brings you here?"

Maxence stepped forward,—

"I am Vincent Favoral's son, sir," he replied. "I have still my mother and a sister. Our situation is horrible. Mlle. Lucienne suggested that you might be willing to give me some advice; and here we are."

The commissary rang, and, on the bell being answered,—

"I am at home for no one," he said.

And then turning to Maxence,—

"Mlle. Lucienne did well to bring you," he said; "for it may be, that, whilst rendering her an important service, I may also render you one. But I have no time to lose. Sit down, and tell me all about it."

With the most scrupulous exactness Maxence told the

history of his family, and the events of the past twenty-four hours.

Not once did the commissary interrupt him; but, when he had done,—

“Tell me your father’s interview with M. de Thaller all over again,” he requested, “and, especially, do not omit any thing that you have heard or seen, not a word, not a gesture, not a look.”

And, Maxence having complied,—

“Now,” said the commissary, “repeat every thing your father said at the moment of going.”

He did so. The commissary took a few notes, and then,—

“What were,” he inquired, “the relations of your family with the Thaller family?”

“There were none.”

“What! Neither Mme. nor Mlle. de Thaller ever visited you?”

“Never.”

“Do you know the Marquis de Trégars?”

Maxence stared in surprise.

“Trégars!” he repeated. “It’s the first time that I hear that name.”

The usual clients of the commissary would have hesitated to recognize him, so completely had he set aside his professional stiffness, so much had his freezing reserve given way to the most encouraging kindness.

“Now, then,” he resumed, “never mind M. de Trégars: let us talk of the woman, who, you seem to think, has been the cause of M. Favoral’s ruin.

On the table before him lay the paper in which Maxence had read in the morning the terrible article headed: “Another Financial Disaster.”

“I know nothing of that woman,” he replied; “but

it must be easy to find out, since the writer of this article pretends to know."

The commissary smiled, not having quite as much faith in newspapers as Maxence seemed to have.

"Yes, I read that," he said.

"We might send to the office of that paper," suggested Mlle. Lucienne.

"I have already sent, my child."

And, without noticing the surprise of Maxence and of the young girl, he rang the bell, and asked whether his secretary had returned. The secretary answered by appearing in person.

"Well?" inquired the commissary.

"I have attended to the matter, sir," he replied. "I saw the reporter who wrote the article in question; and, after beating about the bush for some time, he finally confessed that he knew nothing more than had been published, and that he had obtained his information from two intimate friends of the cashier, M. Costeclar and M. Saint Pavin."

"You should have gone to see those gentlemen."

"I did."

"Very well. What then?"

"Unfortunately, M. Costeclar had just gone out. As to M. Saint Pavin, I found him at the office of his paper, 'The Financial Pilot.' He is a coarse and vulgar personage, and received me like a pickpocket. I had even a notion to"—

"Never mind that! Go on."

"He was closeted with another gentleman, a banker, named Jottras, of the house of Jottras and Brother. They were both in a terrible rage, swearing like troopers, and saying that the Favoral defalcation would ruin them; that they had been taken in like fools, but that they were

not going to take things so easy, and they were preparing a crushing article."

But he stopped, winking, and pointing to Maxence and Mlle. Lucienne, who were listening as attentively as they could.

"Speak, speak!" said the commissary. "Fear nothing."

"Well," he went on, "M. Saint Pavin and M. Jottras were saying that M. Favoral was only a poor dupe, but that they would know how to find the others."

"What others?"

"Ah! they didn't say."

The commissary shrugged his shoulders.

"What!" he exclaimed, "you find yourself in presence of two men furious to have been duped, who swear and threaten, and you can't get from them a name that you want? You are not very smart, my dear!"

And as the poor secretary, somewhat put out of countenance, looked down, and said nothing,—

"Did you at least ask them," he resumed, "who the woman is to whom the article refers, and whose existence they have revealed to the reporter?"

"Of course I did, sir."

"And what did they answer?"

"That they were not spies, and had nothing to say. M. Saint Pavin added, however, that he had said it without much thought, and only because he had once seen M. Favoral buying a three thousand francs bracelet, and also because it seemed impossible to him that a man should do away with millions without the aid of a woman."

The commissary could not conceal his ill humor.

"Of course!" he grumbled. "Since Solomon said, 'Look for the woman' (for it was King Solomon who

first said it), every fool thinks it smart to repeat with a cunning look that most obvious of truths. What next?"

"M. Saint Pavin politely invited me to go to—well, not here."

The commissary wrote rapidly a few lines, put them in an envelope, which he sealed with his private seal, and handed it to his secretary, saying,—

"That will do. Take this to the prefecture yourself."

And, after the secretary had gone out,—

"Well, M. Maxence," he said, "you have heard?"

Of course he had. Only Maxence was thinking much less of what he had just heard than of the strange interest this commissary had taken in his affairs, even before he had seen him.

"I think," he stammered, "that it is very unfortunate the woman cannot be found."

With a gesture full of confidence,—

"Be easy," said the commissary: "she shall be found. A woman cannot swallow millions at that rate, without attracting attention. Believe me, we shall find her, unless"—

He paused for a moment, and, speaking slowly and emphatically,—

"Unless," he added, "she should have behind her a very skilful and very prudent man. Or else that she should be in a situation where her extravagance could not have created any scandal."

Mlle. Lucienne started. She fancied she understood the commissary's idea, and could catch a glimpse of the truth.

"Good heavens!" she murmured.

But Maxence didn't notice any thing, his mind being

wholly bent upon following the commissary's deductions.

"Or unless," he said, "my father should have received almost nothing for his share of the enormous sums subtracted from the Mutual Credit, in which case he could have given relatively but little to that woman. M. Saint Pavin himself acknowledges that my father has been egregiously taken in."

"By whom?"

"Maxence hesitated for a moment.

"I think," he said at last, "and several friends of my family (among whom M. Chapelain, an old lawyer) think as I do, that it is very strange that my father should have drawn millions from the Mutual Credit without any knowledge of the fact on the part of the manager."

"Then, according to you, M. de Thaller must be an accomplice."

Maxence made no answer.

"Be it so," insisted the commissary. "I admit M. de Thaller's complicity; but then we must suppose that he had over your father some powerful means of action."

"An employer always has a great deal of influence over his subordinates."

"An influence sufficiently powerful to make them run the risk of the galleys for his benefit! That is not likely. We must try and imagine something else."

"I am trying; but I don't find any thing."

"And yet it is not all. How do you explain your father's silence when M. de Thaller was heaping upon him the most outrageous insults?"

"My father was stunned, as it were."

"And at the moment of escaping, if he did have any

accomplices, how is it that he did not mention their names to you, to your mother, or to your sister?"

"Because, doubtless, he had no proofs of their complicity to offer."

"Would you have asked him for any?"

"O. sir!"

"Therefore such is not evidently the motive of his silence; and it might better be attributed to some secret hope that he still had left."

The commissary now had all the information, which, voluntarily or otherwise, Maxence was able to give him. He rose, and in the kindest tone,—

"You have come," he said to him, "to ask me for advice. Here it is: say nothing, and wait. Allow justice and the police to pursue their work. Whatever may be your suspicions, hide them. I shall do for you as I would for Lucienne, whom I love as if she were my own child; for it so happens, that, in helping you, I shall help her."

He could not help laughing at the astonishment, which at those words depicted itself upon Maxence's face; and gayly,—

"You don't understand," he added. "Well, never mind. It is not necessary that you should."

XXX.

Two o'clock struck as Mlle. Lucienne and Maxence left the office of the commissary of police, she pensive and agitated, he gloomy and irritated. They reached the Hôtel des Folies without exchanging a word. Mme. Fortin was again at the door, speechifying in the midst of a group with indefatigable volubility. Indeed, it was

a perfect godsend for her, the fact of lodging the son of that cashier who had stolen twelve millions, and had thus suddenly become a celebrity. Seeing Maxence and Mlle. Lucienne coming, she stepped toward them, and, with her most obsequious smile,—

“Back already?” she said.

But they made no answer; and, entering the narrow corridor, they hurried to their fourth story. As he entered his room, Maxence threw his hat upon his bed with a gesture of impatience; and, after walking up and down for a moment, he returned to plant himself in front of Mlle. Lucienne.

“Well,” he said, “are you satisfied now?”

She looked at him with an air of profound commiseration, knowing his weakness too well to be angry at his injustice.

“Of what should I be satisfied?” she asked gently.

“I have done what you wished me to.”

“You did what reason dictated, my friend.”

“Very well: we won’t quarrel about words. I have seen your friend the commissary. Am I any better off?”

She shrugged her shoulders almost imperceptibly.

“What did you expect of him, then?” she asked.

“Did you think that he could undo what is done? Did you suppose, that, by the sole power of his will, he would make up the deficit in the Mutual Credit’s cash, and rehabilitate your father?”

“No, I am not quite mad yet.”

“Well, then, could he do more than promise you his most ardent and devoted co-operation?”

But he did not allow her to proceed.

“And how do I know,” he exclaimed, “that he is not trifling with me? If he was sincere, why his reticence and his enigmas? He pretends that I may rely on him,

because to serve me is to serve you. What does that mean? What connection is there between your situation and mine, between your enemies and those of my father? And I—I replied to all his questions like a simpleton. Poor fool! But the man who drowns catches at straws; and I am drowning, I am sinking, I am foundering."

He sank upon a chair, and, hiding his face in his hands,—

"Ah, how I do suffer!" he groaned.

Mlle. Lucienne approached him, and in a severe tone, despite her emotion,—

"Are you, then, such a coward?" she uttered.

"What! at the first misfortune that strikes you,—and this is the first real misfortune of your life, Maxence,—you despair. An obstacle rises, and, instead of gathering all your energy to overcome it, you sit down and weep like a woman. Who, then, is to inspire courage in your mother and in your sister, if you give up so?"

At the sound of these words, uttered by that voice which was all-powerful over his soul, Maxence looked up.

"I thank you, my friend," he said. "I thank you for reminding me of what I owe to my mother and sister. Poor women! They are wondering, doubtless, what has become of me."

"You must return to them," interrupted the girl.

He got up resolutely.

"I will," he replied. "I should be unworthy of you if I could not raise my own energy to the level of yours."

And, having pressed her hand, he left. But it was not by the usual route that he reached the Rue St. Gilles.

He made a long *détour*, so as not to meet any of his acquaintances.

"Here you are at last," said the servant as she opened the door. "Madame was getting very uneasy, I can tell you. She is in the parlor, with Mlle. Gilberte and M. Chapelain."

It was so. After his fruitless attempt to reach M. de Thaller, M. Chapelain had breakfasted there, and had remained, wishing, he said, to see Maxence. And so, as soon as the young man appeared, availing himself of the privileges of his age and his old intimacy,—

"How," said he, "dare you leave your mother and sister alone in a house where some brutal creditor may come in at any moment?"

"I was wrong," said Maxence, who preferred to plead guilty rather than attempt an explanation.

"Don't do it again then," resumed M. Chapelain. "I was waiting for you to say that I was unable to see M. de Thaller, and that I do not care to face once more the impudence of his valets. You will, therefore, have to take back the fifteen thousand francs he had brought to your father. Place them in his own hands; and don't give them up without a receipt."

After some further recommendations, he went off, leaving Mme. Favoral alone at last with her children. She was about to call Maxence to account for his absence, when Mlle. Gilberte interrupted her.

"I have to speak to you, mother," she said with a singular precipitation, "and to you also, brother."

And at once she began telling them of M. Costeclar's strange visit, his inconceivable audacity, and his offensive declarations.

Maxence was fairly stamping with rage.

"And I was not here," he exclaimed, "to put him out of the house!"

But another was there; and this was just what Mlle. Gilberte wished to come to. But the avowal was difficult, painful even; and it was not without some degree of confusion that she resumed at last,—

"You have suspected for a long time, mother, that I was hiding something from you. When you questioned me, I lied; not that I had any thing to blush for, but because I feared for you my father's anger."

Her mother and her brother were gazing at her with a look of blank amazement.

"Yes, I had a secret," she continued. "Boldly, without consulting any one, trusting the sole inspirations of my heart, I had engaged my life to a stranger: I had selected the man whose wife I wished to be."

Mme. Favoral raised her hands to heaven.

"But this is sheer madness!" she said.

"Unfortunately," went on the girl, "between that man, my affianced husband before God, and myself, rose a terrible obstacle. He was poor: he thought my father very rich; and he had asked me a delay of three years to conquer a fortune which might enable him to aspire to my hand."

She stopped: all the blood in her veins was rushing to her face.

"This morning," she said, "at the news of our disaster, he came"—

"Here?" interrupted Maxence.

"Yes, brother, here. He arrived at the very moment, when, basely insulted by M. Costeclar, I commanded him to withdraw, and, instead of going, he was walking towards me with outstretched arms."

"He dared to penetrate here!" murmured Mme. Favoral.

"Yes, mother: he came in just in time to seize M. Costeclar by his coat-collar, and to throw him at my feet, livid with fear, and begging for mercy. He came, notwithstanding the terrible calamity that has befallen us. Notwithstanding ruin, and notwithstanding shame, he came to offer me his name, and to tell me, that, in the course of the day, he would send a friend of his family to apprise you of his intentions."

Here she was interrupted by the servant, who, throwing open the parlor-door, announced,—

"The Count de Villegré."

If it had occurred to the mind of Mme. Favoral or Maxence that Mlle. Gilberte might have been the victim of some base intrigue, the mere appearance of the man who now walked in must have been enough to disabuse them.

He was of a rather formidable aspect, with his military bearing, his bluff manners, his huge white mustache, and the deep scar across his forehead.

But in order to be re-assured, and to feel confident, it was enough to look at his broad face, at once energetic and debonair, his clear eye, in which shone the loyalty of his soul, and his thick red lips, which had never opened to utter an untruth.

At this moment, however, he was hardly in possession of all his faculties.

That valiant man, that old soldier, was timid; and he would have felt much more at ease under the fire of a battery than in that humble parlor in the Rue St. Gilles, under the uneasy glance of Maxence and Mme. Favoral.

Having bowed, having made a little friendly sign to Mlle. Gilberte, he had stopped short, two steps from the door, his hat in his hand.

Eloquence was not his forte. He had prepared himself well in advance; but though he kept coughing: hum! broum! though he kept running his finger around his shirt-collar to facilitate his delivery, the beginning of his speech stuck in his throat.

Seeing how urgent it was to come to his assistance,—

“I was expecting you, sir,” said Mlle. Gilberte.

With this encouragement, he advanced towards Mme. Favoral, and, bowing low,—

“I see that my presence surprises you, madame,” he began; “and I must confess that—hum!—it does not surprise me less than it does you. But extraordinary circumstances require exceptional action. On any other occasion, I would not fall upon you like a bombshell. But we had no time to waste in ceremonious formalities. I will, therefore, ask your leave to introduce myself: I am General Count de Villegré.”

Maxence had brought him a chair.

“I am ready to hear you, sir,” said Mme. Favoral.

He sat down, and, with a further effort,—

“I suppose, madame,” he resumed, “that your daughter has explained to you our singular situation, which, as I had the honor of telling you—hum!—is not strictly in accordance with social usage.”

Mlle. Gilberte interrupted him.

“When you came in, general, I was only just beginning to explain the facts to my mother and brother.”

The old soldier made a gesture, and a face which showed plainly that he did not much relish the prospect of a somewhat difficult explanation—broum! Nevertheless, making up his mind bravely,—

"It is very simple," he said: "I come in behalf of M. de Trégars."

Maxence fairly bounced upon his chair. That was the very name which he had just heard mentioned by the commissary of police.

"Trégars!" he repeated in a tone of immense surprise.

"Yes," said M. de Villegré. "Do you know him, by chance?"

"No, sir, no!"

"Marius de Trégars is the son of the most honest man I ever knew, of the best friend I ever had,—of the Marquis de Trégars, in a word, who died of grief a few years ago, after—hum!—some quite inexplicable—broum!—reverses of fortune. Marius could not be dearer to me, if he were my own son. He has lost his parents: I have no relatives; and I have transferred to him all the feelings of affection which still remained at the bottom of my old heart.

"And I can say that never was a man more worthy of affection. I know him. To the most legitimate pride and the most scrupulous integrity, he unites a keen and supple mind, and wit enough to get the better of the toughest rascal. He has no fortune for the reason that—hum!—he gave up all he had to certain pretended creditors of his father. But whenever he wishes to be rich, he shall be; and—broum!—he may be so before long. I know his projects, his hopes, his resources."

But, as if feeling that he was treading on dangerous ground, the Count de Villegré stopped short, and, after taking breath for a moment,—

"In short," he went on, "Marius has been unable to see Mlle. Gilberte, and to appreciate the rare qualities

of her heart, without falling desperately in love with her."

Mme. Favoral made a gesture of protest,—

"Allow me, sir," she began.

But he interrupted her.

"I understand you, madame," he resumed. "You wonder how M. de Trégars can have seen your daughter, have known her, and have appreciated her, without your seeing or hearing any thing of it. Nothing is more simple, and, if I may venture to say—hum!—more natural."

And the worthy old soldier began to explain to Mme. Favoral the meetings in the Place-Royale, his conversations with Marius, intended really for Mlle. Gilberte, and the part he had consented to play in this little comedy. But he became embarrassed in his sentences, he multiplied his hum! and his broum! in the most alarming manner; and his explanations explained nothing.

Mlle. Gilberte took pity on him; and, kindly interrupting him, she herself told her story, and that of Marius.

She told the pledge they had exchanged, how they had seen each other twice, and how they constantly heard of each other through the very innocent and very unconscious Signor Gismondo Pulei.

Maxence and Mme. Favoral were dumbfounded. They would have absolutely refused to believe such a story, had it not been told by Mlle. Gilberte herself.

"Ah, my dear sister!" thought Maxence, "who could have suspected such a thing, seeing you always so calm and so meek!"

"Is it possible," Mme. Favoral was saying to herself, "that I can have been so blind and so deaf?"

As to the Count de Villegré, he would have tried in

vain to express the gratitude he felt towards Mlle. Gilberte for having spared him these difficult explanations.

"I could not have done half as well myself, by the eternal!" he thought, like a man who has no illusions on his own account.

But, as soon as she had done, addressing himself to Mme. Favoral,—

"Now, madame," he said, "you know all; and you will understand that the irreparable disaster that strikes you has removed the only obstacle which had hitherto stood in the way of Marius."

He rose, and in a solemn tone, without any hum or broum, this time,—

"I have the honor, madame," he uttered, "to solicit the hand of Mlle. Gilberte, your daughter, for my friend Yves-Marius de Genost, Marquis de Trégars."

A profound silence followed this speech. But this silence the Count de Villegré doubtless interpreted in his own favor; for, stepping to the parlor-door, he opened it, and called, "Marius!"

Marius de Trégars had foreseen all that had just taken place, and had so informed the Count de Villegré in advance.

Being given Mme. Favoral's disposition, he knew what could be expected of her; and he had his own reasons to fear nothing from Maxence. And, if he mistrusted somewhat the diplomatic talents of his ambassador, he relied absolutely upon Mlle. Gilberte's energy.

And so confident was he of the correctness of his calculations, that he had insisted upon accompanying his old friend, so as to be on hand at the critical moment.

When the servant had opened the door to them, he had ordered her to introduce M. de Villegré, stating that

he would himself wait in the dining-room. This arrangement had not seemed entirely natural to the girl; but so many strange things had happened in the house for the past twenty-four hours, that she was prepared for any thing.

Besides recognizing Marius as the gentleman who had had a violent altercation in the morning with M. Costeclar, she did as he requested, and, leaving him alone in the dining-room, went to attend to her duties.

He had taken a seat, impassive in appearance, but in reality agitated by that internal trepidation of which the strongest men cannot free themselves in the decisive moments of their life.

To a certain extent, the prospects of his whole life were to be decided on the other side of that door which had just closed behind the Count de Villegré. To the success of his love, other interests were united, which required immediate success.

And, counting the seconds by the beatings of his heart,—

“How very slow they are!” he thought.

And so, when the door opened at last, and his old friend called him, he jumped to his feet, and collecting all his coolness and self-possession, he walked in.

Maxence had risen to receive him; but, when he saw him, he stepped back, his eyes glaring in utter surprise.

“Ah, great heavens!” he muttered in a smothered voice.

But M. de Trégars seemed not to notice his stupor. Quite self-possessed, notwithstanding his emotion, he cast a rapid glance over the Count de Villegré, Mme. Favoral and Mlle. Gilberte. At their attitude, and at the expression of their countenance, he easily guessed the point to which things had come.

And, advancing towards Mme. Favoral, he bowed with an amount of respect which was certainly not put on.

"You have heard the Count de Villegré, madame," he said in a slightly altered tone of voice. "I am awaiting my fate."

The poor woman had never before in all her life been so fearfully perplexed. All these events, which succeeded each other so rapidly, had broken the feeble springs of her soul. She was utterly incapable of collecting her thoughts, or of taking a determination.

"At this moment, sir," she stammered, taken unawares, "it would be impossible for me to answer you. Grant me a few days for reflection. We have some old friends whom I ought to consult."

But Maxence, who had got over his stupor, interrupted her.

"Friends mother!" he exclaimed. "And who are they? People in our position have no friends. What! when we are perishing, a man of heart holds out his hand to us, and you ask to reflect? To my sister, who bears a name henceforth disgraced, the Marquis de Trégare offers his name, and you think of consulting"—

The poor woman was shaking her head.

"I am not the mistress, my son," she murmured; "and your father"—

"My father!" interrupted the young man,— "my father! What rights can he have over us hereafter?"

And without further discussion, without awaiting an answer, he took his sister's hand, and, placing it in M. de Trégare's hand,—

"Ah! take her, sir," he uttered. "Never, whatever she may do, will she acquit the debt of eternal gratitude which we this day contract towards you."

A tremor that shook their frames, a long look which they exchanged, betrayed alone the feelings of Marius and Mlle. Gilberte. They had of life a too cruel experience not to mistrust their joy.

Returning to Mme. Favoral,—

“You do not understand, madame,” he went on, “why I should have selected for such a step the very moment when an irreparable calamity befalls you. One word will explain all. Being in a position to serve you, I wished to acquire the right of doing so.”

Fixing upon him a look in which the gloomiest despair could be read,—

“Alas!” stammered the poor woman, “what can you do for me, sir? My life is ended. I have but one wish left,—that of knowing where my husband is hid. It is not for me to judge him. He has not given me the happiness which I had, perhaps, the right to expect; but he is my husband, he is unhappy: my duty is to join him wherever he may be, and to share his sufferings.”

She was interrupted by the servant, who was calling her at the parlor-door, “Madame, madame!”

“What is the matter?” inquired Maxence.

“I must speak to madame at once.”

Making an effort to rise and walk, Mme. Favoral went out. She was gone but a minute; and, when she returned, her agitation had further increased.

“It is the hand of Providence, perhaps,” she said.

The others were all looking at her anxiously. She took a seat, and, addressing herself more especially to M. de Trégars,—

“This is what happens,” she said in a feeble voice. “M. Favoral was in the habit of always changing his coat as soon as he came home. As usual, he did so last evening. When they came to arrest him, he forgot to

change again, and went off with the coat he had on. The other remained hanging in the room, where the girl took it just now to brush it, and put it away; and this portfolio, which my husband always carries with him, fell from its pocket."

It was an old Russia leather portfolio, which had once been red, but which time and use had turned black. It was full of papers.

"Perhaps, indeed," exclaimed Maxence, "we may find some information there."

He opened it, and had already taken out three-fourths of its contents without finding any thing of any consequence, when suddenly he uttered an exclamation.

He had just opened an anonymous note, evidently written in a disguised hand, and at one glance had read,—

"I cannot understand your negligence. You should get through that Van Klopen matter. There is the danger."

"What is that note?" inquired M. de Trégars.

Maxence handed it to him.

"See!" said he, "but you will not understand the immense interest it has for me."

But having read it,—

"You are mistaken," said Marius. "I understand perfectly; and I'll prove it to you."

The next moment, Maxence took out of the portfolio, and read aloud, the following bill, dated two days before.

"Sold to — two leather trunks with safety locks at 220 francs each; say, francs 440."

M. de Trégars started.

"At last," he said, "here is doubtless one end of the

thread which will guide us to the truth through this labyrinth of iniquities."

And, tapping gently on Maxence's shoulders,—

"We must talk," he said, "and at length. To-morrow, before you go to M. de Thaller's with his fifteen thousand francs, call and see me: I shall expect you. We are now engaged upon a common work; and something tells me, that, before long, we shall know what has become of the Mutual Credit's millions."

PART II.

FISHING IN TROUBLED WATERS.

I.

“WHEN I think,” said Coleridge, “that every morning, in Paris alone, thirty thousand fellows wake up, and rise with the fixed and settled idea of appropriating other people’s money, it is with renewed wonder that every night, when I go home, I find my purse still in my pocket.”

And yet it is not those who simply aim to steal your portemonnaie who are either the most dishonest or the most formidable.

To stand at the corner of some dark street, and rush upon the first man that comes along, demanding, “Your money or your life,” is but a poor business, devoid of all prestige, and long since given up to chivalrous natures.

A man must be something worse than a simpleton to still ply his trade on the high-roads, exposed to all sorts of annoyances on the part of the *gensdarmes*, when manufacturing and financial enterprises offer such a magnificently fertile field to the activity of imaginative people.

And, in order to thoroughly understand the mode of proceeding in this particular field, it is sufficient to open from time to time a copy of “The Police Gazette,” and to read some trial, like that, for instance, of one Lefur-

teux, ex-president of the *Company for the Drainage and Improvement of the Orne Swamps*.

This took place less than a month ago in one of the police-courts.

The Judge to the Accused.—Your profession?

M. Lefurteux.—President of the company.

Question.—Before that what were you doing?

Answer.—I speculated at the *bourse*.

Q.—You had no means?

A.—I beg your pardon: I was making money.

Q.—And it was under such circumstances that you had the audacity to organize a company with a capital stock of three million of francs, divided in shares of five hundred francs?

A.—Having discovered an idea, I did not suppose that I was forbidden to work it up.

Q.—What do you call an idea?

A.—The idea of draining swamps, and making them productive.

Q.—What swamps? Yours never had any existence, except in your prospectus.

A.—I expected to buy them as soon as my capital was paid in.

Q.—And in the mean time you promised ten per cent to your stockholders.

A.—That's the least that draining operations ever pay.

Q.—You have advertised?

A.—Of course.

Q.—To what extent?

A.—To the extent of about sixty thousand francs.

Q.—Where did you get the money?

A.—I commenced with ten thousand francs, which a friend of mine had lent me; then I used the funds as they came in.

Q.—In other words, you made use of the money of your first dupes to attract others?

A.—Many people thought it was a good thing.

Q.—Who? Those to whom you sent your prospectus with a plan of your pretended swamps?

A.—Excuse me. Others too.

Q.—How much money did you ever receive?

A.—About six hundred thousand francs, as the expert has stated.

Q.—And you have spent the whole of the money?

A.—Permit me? I have never applied to my personal wants any thing beyond the salary which was allowed me by the By-laws.

Q.—How is it, then, that, when you were arrested, there were only twelve hundred and fifty francs found in your safe, and that amount had been sent you through the post-office that very morning? What has become of the rest?

A.—The rest has been spent for the good of the company.

Q.—Of course! You had a carriage?

A.—It was allowed to me by Article 27 of the By-laws.

Q.—For the good of the company too, I suppose.

A.—Certainly. I was compelled to make a certain display. The head of an important company must endeavor to inspire confidence.

The Judge, with an Ironical Look.—Was it also to inspire confidence that you had a mistress, for whom you spent considerable sums of money?

The Accused, in a Tone of Perfect Candor.—Yes, sir.

After a pause of a few moments, the judge resumes,—

Q.—Your offices were magnificent. They must have cost you a great deal to furnish.

A.—On the contrary, sir, almost nothing. The furniture was all hired. You can examine the upholsterer.

The upholsterer is sent for, and in answer to the judge's questions,—

“What M. Lefurteux has stated,” he says, “is true. My specialty is to hire office-fixtures for financial and other companies. I furnish every thing, from the book-keepers' desks to the furniture for the president's private room: from the iron safe to the servant's livery. In twenty-four hours, every thing is ready, and the subscribers can come. As soon as a company is organized, like the one in question, the officers call on me, and, ac-

cording to the magnitude of the capital required, I furnish a more or less costly establishment. I have a good deal of experience, and I know just what's wanted. When M. Lefurteux came to see me, I gauged his operation at a glance. Three millions of capital, swamps in the Orne, shares of five hundred francs, small subscribers, anxious and noisy.

" 'Very well,' I said to him, 'it's a six-months' job. Don't go into useless expenses. Take reps for your private office: that's good enough.' "

The Judge, in a tone of Profound Surprise.—You told him that?

The Upholsterer, in the Simple Accent of an Honest Man.—Exactly as I am telling your Honor. He followed my advice; and I sent him red hot the furniture and fixtures which had been used by the River Fishery Company, whose president had just been sent to prison for three years.

When, after such revelations, renewed from week to week, with instructive variations, purchasers may still be found for the shares of the Tiffia Mines, the Bretonche Lands, and the Forests of Formanoid, is it to be wondered that the Mutual Credit Company found numerous subscribers?

It had been admirably started at that propitious hour of the December *coup d'état*, when the first ideas of mutuality were beginning to penetrate the financial world.

It had lacked neither capital nor powerful patronage at the start, and had been at once admitted to the honor of being quoted at the *bourse*.

Beginning business ostensibly as an accommodation bank for manufacturers and merchants, the Mutual Credit had had, for a number of years, a well-determined specialty.

But gradually it had enlarged the circle of its operations, altered its by-laws, changed its board of directors;

and at the end the original subscribers would have been not a little embarrassed to tell what was the nature of its business, and from what sources it drew its profits.

All they knew was, that it always paid respectable dividends; that their manager, M. de Thaller, was personally very rich; and that they were willing to trust him to steer clear of the code.

There were some, of course, who did not view things in quite so favorable a light; who suggested that the dividends were suspiciously large; that M. de Thaller spent too much money on his house, his wife, his daughter, and his mistress.

One thing is certain, that the shares of the Mutual Credit Society were much above par, and were quoted at 580 francs on that Saturday, when, after the closing of the *bourse*, the rumor had spread that the cashier, Vincent Favoral, had run off with twelve millions.

"What a haul!" thought, not without a feeling of envy, more than one broker, who, for merely one-twelfth of that amount would have gayly crossed the frontier.

It was almost an event in Paris.

Although such adventures are frequent enough, and not taken much notice of, in the present instance, the magnitude of the amount more than made up for the vulgarity of the act.

Favoral was generally pronounced a very smart man; and some persons declared, that to take twelve millions could hardly be called stealing.

The first question asked was,—

"Is Thaller in the operation? Was he in collusion with his cashier?"

"That's the whole question."

"If he was, then the Mutual Credit is better off than ever: otherwise, it is gone under."

"Thaller is pretty smart."

"That Favoral was perhaps more so still."

This uncertainty kept up the price for about half an hour. But soon the most disastrous news began to spread, brought, no one knew whence or by whom; and there was an irresistible panic.

From 425, at which price it had maintained itself for a time, the Mutual Credit fell suddenly to 300, then 200, and finally to 150 francs.

Some friends of M. de Thaller, M. Costeclar, for instance, had endeavored to keep up the market; but they had soon recognized the futility of their efforts, and then they had bravely commenced doing like the rest.

The next day was Sunday. From the early morning, it was reported, with the most circumstantial details, that the Baron de Thaller had been arrested.

But in the evening this had been contradicted by people who had gone to the races, and who had met there Mme. de Thaller and her daughter, more brilliant than ever, very lively, and very talkative.

To the persons who went to speak to them,—

"My husband was unable to come," said the baroness. "He is busy with two of his clerks, looking over that poor Favoral's accounts. It seems that they are in the most inconceivable confusion. Who would ever have thought such a thing of a man who lived on bread and nuts? But he operated at the *bourse*; and he had organized, under a false name, a sort of bank, in which he has very foolishly sunk large sums of money."

And with a smile, as if all danger had been luckily averted,—

"Fortunately," she added, "the damage is not as great as has been reported, and this time, again, we shall get off with a good fright."

But the speeches of the baroness were hardly sufficient to quiet the anxiety of the people who felt in their coat-pockets the worthless certificates of Mutual Credit stock.

And the next day, Monday, as early as eight o'clock, they began to arrive in crowds to demand of M. de Thaller some sort of an explanation.

They were there, at least a hundred, huddled together in the vestibule, on the stairs, and on the first landing, a prey to the most painful emotion and the most violent excitement; for they had been refused admittance.

To all those who insisted upon going in, a tall servant in livery, standing before the door, replied invariably, "The office is not open, M. de Thaller has not yet come."

Whereupon they uttered such terrible threats and such loud imprecations, that the frightened *concierge* had run, and hid himself at the very bottom of his lodge.

No one can imagine to what epileptic contortions the loss of money can drive an assemblage of men, who has not seen a meeting of shareholders on the morrow of a great disaster, with their clinched fists, their convulsed faces, their glaring eyes, and foaming lips.

They felt indignant at what had once been their delight. They laid the blame of their ruin upon the splendor of the house, the sumptuousness of the stairs, the candelabras of the vestibule, the carpets, the chairs every thing.

"And it is our money too," they cried, "that has paid for all that!"

Standing upon a bench, a little short man was exciting transports of indignation by describing the magnificence of the Baron de Thaller's residence, where he had once had some dealings.

He had counted five carriages in the carriage-house, fifteen horses in the stables, and Heaven knows how many servants.

He had never been inside the apartments, but he had visited the kitchen; and he declared that he had been dazzled by the number and brightness of the saucepans, ranged in order of size over the furnace.

Gathered in a group under the vestibule, the most sensible deplored their rash confidence.

"That's the way," concluded one, "with all these adventurous affairs."

"That's a fact. There's nothing, after all, like government bonds."

"Or a first mortgage on good property, with subrogation of the wife's rights."

But what exasperated them all was not to be admitted to the presence of M. de Thaller, and to see that servant mounting guard before the door.

"What impudence," they growled, "to leave us on the stairs!—we who are the masters, after all."

"Who knows where M. de Thaller may be?"

"He is hiding, of course."

"No matter: I will see him," clamored a big fat man, with a brick-colored face, "if I shouldn't stir from here for a week."

"You'll see nothing at all," giggled his neighbor. "Do you suppose they don't have back-stairs and private entrances in this infernal shop?"

"Ah! if I believed any thing of the kind," exclaimed the big man in a voice trembling with passion. "I'd soon break in some of these doors: it isn't so hard, after all."

Already he was gazing at the servant with an alarming air, when an old gentleman with a discreet look, stepped up to him, and inquired,—

"Excuse me, sir: how many shares have you?"

"Three," answered the man with the brick-colored face.

The other sighed.

"I have two hundred and fifty," he said. "That's why, being at least as interested as yourself in not losing every thing, I beg of you to indulge in no violent proceedings."

There was no need of further speaking.

The door which the servant was guarding flew open. A clerk appeared, and made sign that he wished to speak.

"Gentlemen," he began, "M. de Thaller has just come; but he is just now engaged with the examining judge."

Shouts having drowned his voice, he withdrew precipitately.

"If the law gets its finger in," murmured the discreet gentleman, "good-by!"

"That's a fact," said another. "But we will have the precious advantage of hearing that dear baron condemned to one year's imprisonment, and a fine of fifty francs. That's the regular rate. He wouldn't get off so cheap, if he had stolen a loaf of bread from a baker."

"Do you believe that story about the judge?" interrupted rudely the big man.

They had to believe it, when they saw him appear, followed by a commissary of police and a porter, carrying on his back a load of books and papers.

They stood aside to let them pass; but there was no time to make any comments, as another clerk appeared immediately who said,—

"M. de Thaller is at your command, gentlemen. Please walk in."

There was then a terrible jamming and pushing to see who would get first into the directors' room, which stood wide open.

M. de Thaller was standing against the mantel-piece, neither paler nor more excited than usual, but like a man who feels sure of himself and of his means of action.

As soon as silence was restored,—

'First of all, gentlemen,' he began, 'I must tell you that the board of directors is about to meet, and that a general meeting of the stockholders will be called.'

Not a murmur. As at the touch of a magician's wand, the dispositions of the shareholders seemed to have changed.

'I have nothing new to inform you of,' he went on. 'What happens is a misfortune, but not a disaster. The thing to do was to save the company; and I had first thought of calling for funds.'

'Well,' said two or three timid voices, 'If it was absolutely necessary'—

'But there is no need of it.'

'Ah, ah!'

'And I can manage to carry every thing through by adding to our reserve fund my own personal fortune.'

This time the hurrahs and the bravos drowned the voice.

M. de Thaller received them like a man who deserves them, and, more slowly,—

'Honor commanded it,' he continued. 'I confess it, gentlemen, the wretch who has so basely deceived us had my entire confidence. You will understand my apparent blindness when you know with what infernal skill he managed.'

Loud imprecations burst on all sides against Vincent

Favoral. But the president of the Mutual Credit proceeded,—

“For the present, all I have to ask of you is to keep cool, and continue to give me your confidence.”

“Yes, yes!”

“The panic of night before last was but a stock-gambling manœuvre, organized by rival establishments, who were in hopes of taking our clients away from us. They will be disappointed, gentlemen. We will triumphantly demonstrate our soundness; and we shall come out of this trial more powerful than ever.”

It was all over. M. de Thaller understood his business. They offered him a vote of thanks. A smile was beaming upon the same faces that were a moment before contracted with rage.

One stockholder alone did not seem to share the general enthusiasm: he was no other than our old friend, M. Chapelain, the ex-lawyer.

“That fellow, Thaller, is just capable of getting himself out of the scrape,” he grumbled. “I must tell Maxence.”

II.

WE have every species of courage in France, and to a superior degree, except that of braving public opinion. Few men would have dared, like Marius de Trégars, to offer their name to the daughter of a wretch charged with embezzlement and forgery, and that at the very moment when the scandal of the crime was at its height. But, when Marius judged a thing good and just, he did it without troubling himself in the least about what others would think. And so his mere presence in the

Rue. St. Gilles had brought back hope to its inmates. Of his designs he had said but a word,—“ I have the means of helping you : I mean, by marrying Gilberte, to acquire the right of doing so.”

But that word had been enough. Mme. Favoral and Maxence had understood that the man who spoke thus was one of those cool and resolute men whom nothing disconcerts or discourages, and who know how to make the best of the most perilous situations.

And, when he had retired with the Count de Villegré,—

“ I don't know what he will do,” said Mlle. Gilberte to her mother and her brother : “ but he will certainly do something ; and, if it is humanly possible to succeed, he will succeed.”

And how proudly she spoke thus ! The assistance of Marius was the justification of her conduct. She trembled with joy at the thought that it would, perhaps, be to the man whom she had alone and boldly selected, that her family would owe their salvation. Shaking his head, and making allusion to events of which he kept the secret,—

“ I really believe,” approved Maxence, “ that, to reach the enemies of our father, M. de Trégars possesses some powerful means ; and what they are we will doubtless soon know, since I have an appointment with him for to-morrow morning.”

It came at last, that morrow, which he had awaited with an impatience that neither his mother nor his sister could suspect. And towards half-past nine he was ready to go out, when M. Chapelain came in. Still irritated by the scenes he had just witnessed at the Mutual Credit office, the old lawyer had a most lugubrious countenance.

"I bring bad news," he began. "I have just seen the Baron de Thaller."

He had said so much the day before about having nothing more to do with it, that Maxence could not repress a gesture of surprise.

"Oh! it isn't alone that I saw him," added M. Chapelain, "but together with at least a hundred stockholders of the Mutual Credit."

"They are going to do something, then?"

"No: they only came near doing something. You should have seen them this morning! They were furious; they threatened to break every thing; they wanted M. de Thaller's blood. It was terrible. But M. de Thaller condescended to receive them; and they became at once as meek as lambs. It is perfectly simple. What do you suppose stockholders can do, no matter how exasperated they may be, when their manager tells them?—

"Well, yes, it's a fact you have been robbed, and your money is in great jeopardy; but if you make any fuss, if you complain thus, all is sure to be lost.' Of course, the stockholders keep quiet. It is a well-known fact that a business which has to be liquidated through the courts is gone; and swindled stockholders fear the law almost as much as the swindling manager. A single fact will make the situation clearer to you. Less than an hour ago, M. de Thaller's stockholders offered him money to make up the loss."

And, after a moment of silence,—

"But this is not all. Justice has interfered; and M. de Thaller spent the morning with an examining-magistrate."

"Well?"

"Well, I have enough experience to affirm that you

must not rely any more upon justice than upon the stockholders. Unless there are proofs so evident that they are not likely to exist, M. de Thaller will not be disturbed."

"Oh!"

"Why? Because, my dear, in all those big financial operations, justice, as much as possible, remains blind. Not through corruption or any guilty connivance, but through considerations of public interest. If the manager was prosecuted he would be condemned to a few years' imprisonment; but his stockholders would at the same time be condemned to lose what they have left; so that the victims would be more severely punished than the swindler. And so, powerless, justice does not interfere. And that's what accounts for the impudence and impunity of all these high-flown rascals who go about with their heads high, their pockets filled with other people's money, and half a dozen decorations at their button-hole."

"And what then?" asked Maxence.

"Then it is evident that your father is lost. Whether or not he have accomplices, he will be alone sacrificed. A scapegoat is needed to be slaughtered on the altar of credit. Well, they will give that much satisfaction to the swindled stockholders. The twelve millions will be lost; but the shares of the Mutual Credit will go up, and public morality will be safe."

Somewhat moved by the old lawyer's tone,—

"What do you advise me to do, then?" inquired Maxence.

"The very reverse of what, on the first impulse, I advised you to do. That's why I have come. I told you yesterday, 'Make a row, act, scream. It is impossible that your father be alone guilty; attack M. de Thaller.'

To-day, after mature deliberation, I say, 'Keep quiet, hide yourself, let the scandal drop.' "

A bitter smile contracted Maxence's lips.

"It is not very brave advice you are giving me there," he said.

"It is a friend's advice,—the advice of a man who knows life better than yourself. Poor young man, you are not aware of the peril of certain struggles. All knaves are in league and sustain each other. To attack one is to attack them all. You have no idea of the occult influences of which a man can dispose who handles millions, and who, in exchange for a favor, has always a bonus to offer, or a good operation to propose. If at least I could see any chance of success! But you have not one. You never can reach M. de Thaller, henceforth backed by his stockholders. You will only succeed in making an enemy whose hostility will weigh upon your whole life."

"What does it matter?"

M. Chapelain shrugged his shoulders.

"If you were alone," he went on, "I would say as you do, 'What does it matter?' But you are no longer alone: you have your mother and sister to take care of. You must think of food before thinking of vengeance. How much a month do you earn? Two hundred francs! It is not much for three persons. I would never suggest that you should solicit M. de Thaller's protection; but it would be well, perhaps, to let him know that he has nothing to fear from you. Why shouldn't you do so when you take his fifteen thousand francs back to him? If, as every thing indicates, he has been your father's accomplice, he will certainly be touched by the distress of your family, and, if he has any heart left, he will manage to make you find, without appearing to have any

thing to do with it, a situation better suited to your wants. I know that such a step must be very painful; but I repeat it, my dear child, you can no longer think of yourself alone; and what one would not do for himself, one does for a mother and a sister."

Maxence said nothing. Not that he was in any way affected by the worthy old lawyer's speech; but he was asking himself whether or not he should confide to him the events which in the past twenty-four hours had so suddenly modified the situation. He did not feel authorized to do so.

Marius de Trégars had not bound him to secrecy; but an indiscretion might have fatal consequences.

And, after a moment of thought,—

"I am obliged to you, sir," he replied evasively, "for the interest you have manifested in our welfare; and we shall always greatly prize your advice. But for the present you must allow me to leave you with my mother and sister. I have an appointment with—a friend."

And, without waiting for an answer, he slipped M. de Thaller's fifteen thousand francs in his pocket, and hurried out. It was not to M. de Trégars that he went first, however, but to the Hôtel des Folies.

"Mlle. Lucienne has just come home with a big bundle," said Mme. Fortin to Maxence, with her pleasantest smile, as soon as she had seen him emerge from the shades of the corridor.

For the past twenty-four hours, the worthy hostess had been watching for her guest, in the hopes of obtaining some information which she might communicate to the neighbors. Without even condescending to answer, a piece of rudeness at which she felt much hurt, he crossed the narrow court of the hotel at a bound, and started up stairs.

Mlle. Lucienne's room was open. He walked in, and, still out of breath from his rapid ascension,—

“I am glad to find you in,” he exclaimed.

The young girl was busy, arranging upon her bed a dress of very light colored silk, trimmed with ruches and lace, an overdress to match, and a bonnet of wonderful shape, loaded with the most brilliant feathers and flowers.

“You see what brings me here,” she replied. “I came home to dress. At two o'clock the carriage is coming to take me to the *bois*, where I am to exhibit this costume, certainly the most ridiculous that Van Klopen has yet made me wear.”

A smile flitted upon Maxence's lips.

“Who knows,” said he, “if this is not the last time you will have to perform this odious task? Ah, my friend! what events have taken place since I last saw you!”

“Fortunate ones?”

“You will judge for yourself.”

He closed the door carefully, and, returning to Mlle. Lucienne,—

“Do you know the Marquis de Trégars?” he asked.

“No more than you do. It was yesterday, at the commissary of police, that I first heard his name.”

“Well, before a month, M. de Trégars will be Mlle. Gilberte Favoral's husband.”

“Is it possible?” exclaimed Mlle. Lucienne with a look of extreme surprise.

But, instead of answering,—

“You told me,” resumed Maxence, “that once, in a day of supreme distress, you had applied to Mme. de Thaller for assistance, whereas you were actually en-

titled to an indemnity for having been run over and seriously hurt by her carriage."

"That is true."

"Whilst you were in the vestibule, waiting for an answer to your letter, which a servant had taken up stairs, M. de Thaller came in; and, when he saw you, he could not repress a gesture of surprise, almost of terror."

"That is true too."

"This behavior of M. de Thaller always remained an enigma to you."

"An inexplicable one."

"Well, I think that I can explain it to you now."

"You?"

Lowering his voice; for he knew that at the Hôtel des Folies there was always to fear some indiscreet ear,—

"Yes, I," he answered; "and for the reason that yesterday, when M. de Trégars appeared in my mother's parlor, I could not suppress an exclamation of surprise, for the reason, Lucienne, that, between Marius de Trégars and yourself, there is a resemblance with which it is impossible not to be struck."

Mlle. Lucienne had become very pale.

"What do you suppose, then?" she asked.

"I believe, my friend, that we are very near penetrating at once the mystery of your birth and the secret of the hatred that has pursued you since the day when you first set your foot in M. de Thaller's house."

Admirably self-possessed as Mlle. Lucienne usually was, the quivering of her lips betrayed at this moment the intensity of her emotion.

After more than a minute of profound meditation,—

"The commissary of police," she said, "has never told me his hopes, except in vague terms. He has told me enough, however, to make me think that he has already had suspicions similar to yours."

"Of course! Would he otherwise have questioned me on the subject of M. de Trégars?"

Mlle. Lucienne shook her head.

"And yet," she said, "even after your explanation, it is in vain that I seek why and how I can so far disturb M. de Thaller's security that he wishes to do away with me."

Maxence made a gesture of superb indifference.

"I confess," he said, "that I don't see it either. But what matters it? Without being able to explain why, I feel that the Baron de Thaller is the common enemy,—yours, mine, my father's, and M. de Trégars'. And something tells me, that, with M. de Trégars' help, we shall triumph. You would share my confidence, Lucienne, if you knew him. There is a man! and my sister has made no vulgar choice. If he has told my mother that he has the means of serving her, it is because he certainly has."

He stopped, and, after a moment of silence,—

"Perhaps," he went on, "the commissary of police might readily understand what I only dimly suspect; but, until further orders, we are forbidden to have recourse to him. It is not my own secret that I have just told you; and, if I have confided it to you, it is because I feel that it is a great piece of good fortune for us; and there is no joy for me, that you do not share."

Mlle. Lucienne wanted to ask many more particulars.

But, looking at his watch,—

"Half-past ten!" he exclaimed, "and M. de Trégars waiting for me."

And he started off, repeating once more to the young girl,—

“I will see you to-night: until then, good hope and good courage.”

In the court, two ill-looking men were talking with the Fortins. But it happened often to the Fortins to talk with ill-looking men: so he took no notice of them, ran out to the Boulevard, and jumping into a cab,—

“Rue Lafitte 70,” he cried to the driver, “I pay the trip,—three francs.”

When Marius de Trégars had finally determined to compel the bold rascals who had swindled his father to disgorge, he had taken in the Rue Lafitte a small, plainly-furnished apartment on the *entresol*, a fit dwelling for the man of action, the tent in which he takes shelter on the eve of battle; and he had to wait upon him an old family servant, whom he had found out of place, and who had for him that unquestioning and obstinate devotion peculiar to Breton servants.

It was this excellent man who came at the first stroke of the bell to open the door. And, as soon as Maxence had told him his name,—

“Ah!” he exclaimed, “my master has been expecting you with a terrible impatience.”

It was so true, that M. de Trégars himself appeared at the same moment, and, leading Maxence into the little room which he used as a study,—

“Do you know,” he said whilst shaking him cordially by the hand, “that you are almost an hour behind time?”

Maxence had, among others the detestable fault, sure indication of a weak nature, of being never willing to be in the wrong, and of having always an excuse ready. On this occasion, the excuse was too tempting to al-

low it to escape; and quick he began telling how he had been detained by M. Chapelain, and how he had heard from the old lawyer what had taken place at the Mutual Credit office.

"I know the scene already," said M. de Trégars.

And, fixing upon Maxence a look of friendly rail-lery,—

"Only," he added, "I attributed your want of punctuality to another reason, a very pretty one this time, a brunette."

A purple cloud spread over Maxence's cheeks.

"What!" he stammered, "you know?"

"I thought you must have been in haste to go and tell a person of your acquaintance why, when you saw me yesterday, you uttered an exclamation of surprise."

This time Maxence lost all countenance.

"What," he said, "you know too?"

M. de Trégars smiled.

"I know a great many things, my dear M. Maxence," he replied; "and yet, as I do not wish to be suspected of witchcraft, I will tell you where all my science comes from. At the time when your house was closed to me, after seeking for a long time some means of hearing from your sister, I discovered at last that she had for her music-teacher an old Italian, the Signor Gismondi Pulei. I applied to him for lessons, and became his pupil. But, in the beginning, he kept looking at me with singular persistence. I inquired the reason; and he told me that he had once had for a neighbor, at the Batignolles, a young working-girl, who resembled me prodigiously. I paid no attention to this circumstance, and had, in fact, completely forgotten it; when, quite lately, Gismondo told me that he had just seen his former neighbor again, and, what's more, arm in arm with you,

and that you both entered together the Hôtel des Folies. As he insisted again upon that famous resemblance, I determined to see for myself. I watched, and I stated, *de visa*, that my old Italian was not quite wrong, and that I had, perhaps, just found the weapon I was looking for."

His eyes staring, and his mouth gaping, Maxence looked like a man fallen from the clouds.

"Ah, you did watch!" he said.

M. de Trégars snapped his fingers with a gesture of indifference.

"It is certain," he replied, "that, for a month past, I have been doing a singular business. But it is not by remaining on my chair, preaching against the corruption of the age, that I can attain my object. The end justifies the means. Honest men are very silly, I think, to allow the rascals to get the better of them under the sentimental pretext that they cannot condescend to make use of their weapons."

But an honorable scruple was tormenting Maxence.

"And you think yourself well-informed, sir?" he inquired. "You know Lucienne?"

"Enough to know that she is not what she seems to be, and what almost any other would have been in her place; enough to be certain, that, if she shows herself two or three times a week riding around the lake, it is not for her pleasure; enough, also, to be persuaded, that, despite appearances, she is not your mistress, and that, far from having disturbed your life, and compromised your prospects, she set you back into the right road, at the moment, perhaps, when you were about to branch off into the wrong path."

Marius de Trégars was assuming fantastic proportions in the mind of Maxence.

"How did you manage," he stammered, "thus to find out the truth?"

"With time and money, every thing is possible."

"But you must have had grave reasons to take so much trouble about Lucienne."

"Very grave ones, indeed."

"You know that she was basely forsaken when quite a child?"

"Perfectly."

"And that she was brought up through charity"—

"By some poor gardeners at Louveciennes: yes, I know all that."

Maxence was trembling with joy. It seemed to him that his most dazzling hopes were about to be realized. Seizing the hands of Marius de Trégars,—

"Ah, you know Lucienne's family!" he exclaimed. But M. de Trégars shook his head.

"I have suspicions," he answered; "but, up to this time, I have suspicions only, I assure you."

"But that family does exist; since they have already, at three different times, attempted to get rid of the poor girl."

"I think as you do; but we must have proofs: and we shall find some. You may rest assured of that."

Here he was interrupted by the noise of the opening door.

The old servant came in, and advancing to the centre of the room with a mysterious look,—

"Madame la Baronne de Thaller," he said in a low voice.

Marius de Trégars started violently.

"Where?" he asked.

"She is down stairs in her carriage," replied the servant. "Her footman is here, asking whether monsieur is at home, and whether she can come up."

"Can she possibly have heard any thing?" murmured M. de Trégars with a deep frown.

And, after a moment of reflection,—

"So much the more reason to see her," he added quickly. "Let her come. Request her to do me the honor of coming up stairs."

This last incident completely upset all Maxence's ideas. He no longer knew what to imagine.

"Quick," said M. de Trégars to him: "quick, disappear; and, whatever you may hear, not a word!"

And he pushed him into his bedroom, which was divided from the study by a mere tapestry curtain.

It was time; for already in the next room could be heard a great rustling of silk and starched petticoats. Mme. de Thaller appeared.

She was still the same coarsely beautiful woman, who, sixteen years before, had sat at Mme. Favoral's table. Time had passed without scarcely touching her with the tip of his wing. Her flesh had retained its dazzling whiteness; her hair, of a bluish black, its marvellous opulence; her lips, their carmine hue; her eyes, their lustre. Her figure only had become heavier, her features less delicate; and her neck and throat had lost their undulations, and the purity of their outlines.

But neither the years, nor the millions, nor the intimacy of the most fashionable women, had been able to give her those qualities which cannot be acquired,—grace, distinction, and taste.

If there was a woman accustomed to dress, it was she: a splendid dry-goods store could have been set up with

the silks and the velvets, the satins and cashmeres, the muslins, the laces, and all the known tissues, that had passed over her shoulders.

Her elegance was quoted and copied. And yet there was about her always and under all circumstances, an indescribable flavor of the *parvenue*. Her gestures had remained trivial; her voice, common and vulgar.

Throwing herself into an arm-chair, and bursting into a loud laugh,—

“Confess, my dear marquis,” she said, “that you are terribly astonished to see me thus drop upon you, without warning, at eleven o'clock in the morning.”

“I feel, above all, terribly flattered,” replied M. de Trégars, smiling.

With a rapid glance she was surveying the little study, the modest furniture, the papers piled on the desk, as if she had hoped that the dwelling would reveal to her something of the master's ideas and projects.

“I was just coming from Van Klopen's,” she resumed; “and passing before your house, I took a fancy to come in and stir you up; and here I am.”

M. de Trégars was too much a man of the world, and of the best world, to allow his features to betray the secret of his impressions; and yet, to any one who had known him well, a certain contraction of the eyelids would have revealed a serious annoyance and an intense anxiety.

“How is the baron?” he inquired.

“As sound as an oak,” answered Mme. de Thaller, “notwithstanding all the cares and the troubles, which you can well imagine. By the way, you know what has happened to us?”

“I read in the papers that the cashier of the Mutual Credit had disappeared.”

"And it is but too true. That wretch Favoral has gone off with an enormous amount of money."

"Twelve millions, I heard."

"Something like it. A man who had the reputation of a saint too; a puritan. Trust people's faces after that! I never liked him, I confess. But M. de Thaller had a perfect fancy for him; and, when he had spoken of his Favoral, there was nothing more to say. Any way, he has cleared out, leaving his family without means. A very interesting family, it seems, too,—a wife who is goodness itself, and a charming daughter: at least, so says Costeclar, who is very much in love with her."

M. de Trégars' countenance remained perfectly indifferent, like that of a man who is hearing about persons and things in which he does not take the slightest interest.

Mme. de Thaller noticed this.

"But it isn't to tell you all this," she went on, "that I came up. It is an interested motive brought me. We have, some of my friends and myself, organized a lottery—a work of charity, my dear marquis, and quite patriotic—for the benefit of the Alsatians. I have lots of tickets to dispose of; and I've thought of you to help me out."

More smiling than ever,—

"I am at your orders, madame," answered Marius, "but, in mercy, spare me."

She took out some tickets from a small shell pocket-book.

"Twenty, at ten francs," she said. "It isn't too much, is it?"

"It is a great deal for my modest resources."

She pocketed the ten napoleons which he handed her, and, in a tone of ironical compassion,—

“Are you so very poor, then?” she asked.

“Why, I am neither banker nor broker, you know.”

She had risen, and was smoothing the folds of her dress.

“Well, my dear marquis,” she resumed, “it is certainly not me who will pity you. When a man of your age, and with your name, remains poor, it is his own fault. Are there no rich heiresses?”

“I confess that I haven’t tried to find one yet.”

She looked at him straight in the eyes, and then suddenly bursting out laughing,—

“Look around you,” she said, “and I am sure you’ll not be long discovering a beautiful young girl, very blonde, who would be delighted to become Marquise de Trégars, and who would bring in her apron a dowry of twelve or fifteen hundred thousand francs in good securities,—securities which the Favorals can’t carry off. Think well, and then come to see us. You know that M. de Thaller is very fond of you; and, after all the trouble we have been having, you owe us a visit.”

Whereupon she went out, M. de Trégars, going down to escort her to her carriage.

But as he came up,—

“Attention!” he cried to Maxence; “for it’s very evident that the Thallers have wind of something.”

III.

It was a revelation, that visit of Mme. de Thaller’s; and there was no need of very much perspicacity to

guess her anxiety beneath her bursts of laughter, and to understand that it was a bargain she had come to propose. It was evident, therefore, that Marius de Trégars held within his hands the principal threads of that complicated intrigue which had just culminated in that robbery of twelve millions. But would he be able to make use of them? What were his designs, and his means of action? That is what Maxence could not in any way conjecture.

He had no time to ask questions.

"Come," said M. Trégars, whose agitation was manifest,—“come, let us breakfast: we have not a moment to lose.”

And, whilst his servant was bringing in his modest meal,—

“I am expecting M. d’Escajoul,” he said. “Show him in as soon as he comes.”

Retired as he had lived from the financial world, Maxence had yet heard the name of Octave d’Escajoul.

Who has not seen him, happy and smiling, his eye bright, and his lip ruddy, notwithstanding his fifty years, walking on the sunny side of the Boulevard, with his royal blue jacket and his eternal white vest? He is passionately fond of everything that tends to make life pleasant and easy; dines at Bignon’s, or the Café Anglais; plays baccarat at the club with extraordinary luck; has the most comfortable apartment and the most elegant *coupé* in all Paris. With all this, he is pleased to declare that he is the happiest of men, and is certainly one of the most popular; for he cannot walk three blocks on the Boulevard without lifting his hat at least fifty times, and shaking hands twice as often.

And when any one asks, “What does he do?” the invariable answer is, “Why he operates.”

To explain what sort of operations, would not be, perhaps, very easy. In the world of rogues, there are some rogues more formidable and more skilful than the rest, who always manage to escape the hand of the law. They are not such fools as to operate in person,—not they! They content themselves with watching their friends and comrades. If a good haul is made, at once they appear and claim their share. And, as they always threaten to inform, there is no help for it but to let them pocket the clearest of the profit.

Well, in a more elevated sphere, in the world of speculation, it is precisely that lucrative and honorable industry which M. d'Escajoul carries on. Thoroughly master of his ground, possessing a superior scent and an imperturbable patience, always awake, and continually on the watch, he never operates unless he is sure to win.

And the day when the manager of some company has violated his charter or stretched the law a little too far, he may be sure to see M. d'Escajoul appear, and ask for some little—advantages, and proffer, in exchange, the most thorough discretion, and even his kind offices.

Two or three of his friends have heard him say,—

“Who would dare to blame me? It's very moral, what I am doing.”

Such is the man who came in, smiling, just as Maxence and Marius de Trégars had sat down at the table.

M. de Trégars rose to receive him.

“You will breakfast with us?” he said.

“Thank you,” answered M. d'Escajoul. “I breakfasted precisely at eleven, as usual. Punctuality is a politeness which a man owes to his stomach. But I will accept with pleasure a drop of that old Cognac which you offered me the other evening.”

He took a seat; and the valet brought him a glass, which he set on the edge of the table. Then,—

“I have just seen our man,” he said.

Maxence understood that he was referring to M. de Thaller.

“Well?” inquired M. de Trégars.

“Impossible to get any thing out of him. I turned him over and over, every way. Nothing!”

“Indeed!”

“It’s so; and you know if I understand the business. But what can you say to a man who answers you all the time, ‘The matter is in the hands of the law; experts have been named; I have nothing to fear from the most minute investigations’?”

By the look which Marius de Trégars kept riveted upon M. d’Escajoul, it was easy to see that his confidence in him was not without limits. He felt it, and, with an air of injured innocence,—

“Do you suspect me, by chance,” he said, “to have allowed myself to be hoodwinked by Thaller?”

And as M. de Trégars said nothing, which was the most eloquent of answers,—

“Upon my word,” he insisted, “you are wrong to doubt me. Was it you who came after me? No. It was I, who, hearing through Marcolet the history of your fortune, came to tell you, ‘Do you want to know a way of swamping Thaller?’ And the reasons I had to wish that Thaller might be swamped: I have them still. He trifled with me, he ‘sold’ me, and he must suffer for it; for, if it came to be known that I could be taken in with impunity, it would be all over with my credit.”

After a moment of silence,—

"Do you believe, then," asked M. de Trégars, "that M. de Thaller is innocent?"

"Perhaps."

"That would be curious."

"Or else his measures are so well taken that he has absolutely nothing to fear. If Favoral takes everything upon himself, what can they say to the other? If they have acted in collusion, the thing has been prepared for a long time; and, before commencing to fish, they must have troubled the water so well, that justice will be unable to see anything in it."

"And you see no one who could help us?"

"Favoral"—

To Maxence's great surprise, M. de Trégars shrugged his shoulders.

"That one is gone," he said; "and, were he at hand, it is quite evident that if he was in collusion with M. de Thaller, he would not speak."

"Of course."

"That being the case, what can we do?"

"Wait."

M. de Trégars made a gesture of discouragement.

"I might as well give up the fight, then," he said, "and try to compromise."

"Why so? We don't know what may happen. Keep quiet, be patient; I am here, and I am looking out for squalls."

He got up and prepared to leave.

"You have more experience than I have," said M. de Trégars; "and, since that's your opinion"—

M. d'Escajoul had resumed all his good humor.

"Very well, then, it's understood," he said, pressing

M. de Trégars' hand. "I am watching for both of us; and if I see a chance, I come at once, and you act."

But the outer door had hardly closed, when suddenly the countenance of Marius de Trégars changed. Shaking the hand which M. d'Escajoul had just touched,—

"Pouah!" he said with a look of thorough disgust,—
"pouah!"

And noticing Maxence's look of utter surprise,—

"Don't you understand," he said, "that this old rascal has been sent to me by Thaller to feel my intentions, and mislead me by false information? I had scented him, fortunately; and, if either one of us is dupe of the other, I have every reason to believe that it will not be me."

They had finished their breakfast. M. de Trégars called his servant.

"Have you been for a carriage?" he asked.

"It is at the door, sir."

"Well, then, come along."

Maxence had the good sense not to over-estimate himself. Perfectly convinced that he could accomplish nothing alone, he was firmly resolved to trust blindly to Marius de Trégars.

He followed him, therefore; and it was only after the carriage had started, that he ventured to ask,—

"Where are we going?"

"Didn't you hear me," replied M. de Trégars, "order the driver to take us to the court-house?"

"I beg your pardon; but what I wish to know is, what we are going to do there?"

"You are going, my dear friend, to ask an audience of the judge who has your father's case in charge, and deposit into his hands the fifteen thousand francs you have in your pocket."

"What! You wish me to"—

"I think it better to place that money into the hands of justice, which will appreciate the step, than into those of M. de Thaller, who would not breathe a word about it. We are in a position where nothing should be neglected; and that money may prove an indication."

But they had arrived. M. de Trégars guided Maxence through the labyrinth of corridors of the building, until he came to a long gallery, at the entrance of which an usher was seated reading a newspaper.

"M. Barban d'Avranchel?" inquired M. de Trégars.

"He is in his office," replied the usher.

"Please ask him if he would receive an important deposition in the Favoral case."

The usher rose somewhat reluctantly, and, while he was gone,—

"You will go in alone," said M. de Trégars to Maxence. "I shall not appear; and it is important that my name should not even be pronounced. But, above all, try and remember even the most insignificant words of the judge; for, upon what he tells you, I shall regulate my conduct."

The usher returned.

"M. d'Avranchel will receive you," he said.

And, leading Maxence to the extremity of the gallery, he opened a small door, and pushed him in, saying at the same time,—

"That is it, sir: walk in."

It was a small room, with a low ceiling, and poorly furnished. The faded curtains and threadbare carpet showed plainly that more than one judge had occupied it, and that legions of accused criminals had passed through it. In front of a table, two men—one old,

the judge; the other young, the clerk—were signing and classifying papers. These papers related to the Favoral case, and were all indorsed in large letters: Mutual Credit Company.

As soon as Maxence appeared, the judge rose, and, after measuring him with a clear and cold look:—

“Who are you?” he interrogated.

In a somewhat husky voice, Maxence stated his name and surname.

“Ah! you are Vincent Favoral’s son,” interrupted the judge. “And it was you who helped him escape through the window? I was going to send you a summons this very day; but, since you are here, so much the better. You have something important to communicate, I have been told.”

Very few people, even among the most strictly honest, can overcome a certain unpleasant feeling when, having crossed the threshold of the palace of justice, they find themselves in presence of a judge. More than almost any one else, Maxence was likely to be accessible to that vague and inexplicable feeling; and it was with an effort that he answered,—

“On Saturday evening, the Baron de Thaller called at our house a few minutes before the commissary. After loading my father with reproaches, he invited him to leave the country; and, in order to facilitate his flight, he handed him these fifteen thousand francs. My father declined to accept them; and, at the moment of parting, he recommended to me particularly to return them to M. de Thaller. I thought it best to return them to you, sir.”

“Why?”

“Because I wished the fact known to you of the money having been offered and refused.”

M. Barban d'Avranchel was quietly stroking his whiskers, once of a bright red, but now almost entirely white.

"Is this an insinuation against the manager of the Mutual Credit?" he asked.

Maxence looked straight at him; and, in a tone which affirmed precisely the reverse,—

"I accuse no one," he said.

"I must tell you," resumed the judge, "that M. de Thaller has himself informed me of this circumstance. When he called at your house, he was ignorant, as yet, of the extent of the embezzlements, and was in hopes of being able to hush up the affair. That's why he wished his cashier to start for Belgium. This system of helping criminals to escape the just punishment of their crimes is to be bitterly deplored; but it is quite the habit of your financial magnates, who prefer sending some poor devil of an employé to hang himself abroad, than run the risk of compromising their credit by confessing that they have been robbed."

Maxence might have had a great deal to say; but M. de Trégars had recommended him the most extreme reserve. He remained silent.

"On the other hand," resumed the judge, "the refusal to accept the money so generously offered does not speak in favor of Vincent Favoral. He was well aware, when he left, that it would require a great deal of money to reach the frontier, escape pursuit, and hide himself abroad; and, if he refused the fifteen thousand francs, it must have been because he was well provided for already."

Tears of shame and rage started from Maxence's eyes.

"I am certain, sir," he exclaimed, "that my father went off without a sou."

"What has become of the millions, then?" he asked coldly.

Maxence hesitated. Why not mention his suspicions? He dared not.

"My father speculated at the *bourse*," he stammered.

"And he led a scandalous conduct, keeping up, away from home, a style of living which must have absorbed immense sums."

"We knew nothing of it, sir; and our first suspicions were aroused by what the commissary of police told us."

The judge insisted no more; and in a tone which indicated that his question was a mere matter of form, and he attached but little importance to the answer,—

"You have no news from your father?" he asked.

"None whatever."

"And you have no idea where he has gone?"

"None in the least."

M. d'Avranchel had already resumed his seat at the table, and was again busy with his papers.

"You may retire," he said. You will be notified if I need you."

Maxence felt much discouraged when he joined M. de Trégars at the entrance of the gallery.

"The judge is convinced of M. de Thaller's entire innocence," he said.

But as soon as he had narrated, with a fidelity that did honor to his memory, all that had just occurred,—

"Nothing is lost yet," declared M. de Trégars.

And, taking from his pocket the bill for two trunks, which had been found in M. Favoral's portfolio,—

"There," he said, "we shall know our fate."

IV.

M. DE TREGARS and Maxence were in luck. They had a good driver and a fair horse; and in twenty minutes they were at the trunk store. As soon as the cab stopped,—

“Well,” exclaimed M. de Trégars, “I suppose it has to be done.”

And, with the look of a man who has made up his mind to do something which is extremely repugnant to him, he jumped out, and, followed by Maxence, entered the shop.

“It was a modest establishment; and the people who kept it, husband and wife, seeing two customers coming in, rushed to meet them, with that welcoming smile which blossoms upon the lips of every Parisian shop-keeper.

“What will you have, gentlemen?”

And, with wonderful volubility, they went on enumerating every article which they had for sale in their shop,—from the “indispensable-necessary,” containing seventy-seven pieces of solid silver, and costing four thousand francs, down to the humblest carpet-bag at thirty-nine cents.

But Marius de Trégars interrupted them as soon as he could get an opportunity, and, showing them their bill,—

“It was here, wasn’t it,” he inquired, “that the two trunks were bought which are charged in this bill?”

“Yes, sir,” answered simultaneously both husband and wife.

“When were they delivered?”

“Our porter went to deliver them, less than two hours after they were bought.”

"Where?"

By this time the shopkeepers were beginning to exchange uneasy looks.

"Why do you ask?" inquired the woman in a tone which indicated that she had the settled intention not to answer, unless for good and valid reason.

To obtain the simplest information is not always as easy as might be supposed. The suspicion of the Parisian tradesman is easily aroused; and, as his head is stuffed with stories of spies and robbers, as soon as he is questioned he becomes as dumb as an oyster.

But M. de Trégars had foreseen the difficulty.

"I beg you to believe, madame," he went on, "that my questions are not dictated by an idle curiosity. Here are the facts. A relative of ours, a man of a certain age, of whom we are very fond, and whose head is a little weak, left his home some forty-eight hours since. We are looking for him, and we are in hopes, if we find these trunks, to find him at the same time."

With furtive glances, the husband and wife were tacitly consulting each other.

"The fact is," they said, "we wouldn't like, under any consideration, to commit an indiscretion which might result to the prejudice of a customer."

"Fear nothing," said M. de Trégars with a reassuring gesture. "If we have not had recourse to the police, it's because, you know, it isn't pleasant to have the police interfere in one's affairs. If you have any objections to answer me, however, I must, of course, apply to the commissary."

The argument proved decisive.

"If that's the case," replied the woman, "I am ready to tell all I know."

"Well, then, madame, what do you know?"

"These two trunks were bought on Friday afternoon last, by a man of a certain age, tall, very thin, with a stern countenance, and wearing a long frock coat."

"No more doubt," murmured Maxence. "It was he."

"And now," the woman went on, "that you have just told me that your relative was a little weak in the head, I remember that this gentleman had a strange sort of way about him, and that he kept walking about the store as if he had fleas on his legs. And awful particular he was too! Nothing was handsome enough and strong enough for him; and he was anxious about the safety-locks, as he had, he said, many objects of value, papers, and securities, to put away."

"And where did he tell you to send the two trunks?"

"Rue du Cirque, to Mme. —wait a minute, I have the name at the end of my tongue."

"You must have it on your books, too," remarked M. de Trégars.

The husband was already looking over his blotter.

"April 26, 1872," he said. "26, here it is: 'Two leather trunks, patent safety-locks: Mme. Zélie Cadelle, 49 Rue du Cirque.'"

Without too much affectation, M. de Trégars had drawn near to the shopkeeper, and was looking over his shoulder.

"What is that," he asked, "written there, below the address?"

"That, sir, is the direction left by the customer 'Mark on each end of the trunks, in large letters, "Rio de Janeiro."'"

Maxence could not suppress an exclamation. "Oh!"

But the tradesman mistook him; and, seizing this magnificent opportunity to display his knowledge,—

"Rio de Janeiro is the capital of Brazil," he said in a tone of importance. "And your relative evidently intended to go there; and, if he has not changed his mind, I doubt whether you can overtake him; for the Brazilian steamer was to have sailed yesterday from Havre."

Whatever may have been his intentions, M. de Trégars remained perfectly calm.

"If that's the case," he said to the shopkeepers, "I think I had better give up the chase. I am much obliged to you, however, for your information."

But, once out again,—

"Do you really believe," inquired Maxence, "that my father has left France?"

M. de Trégars shook his head.

"I will give you my opinion," he uttered, "after I have investigated matters in the Rue du Cirque."

They drove there in a few minutes; and, the cab having stopped at the entrance of the street, they walked on foot in front of No. 49. It was a small cottage, only one story in height, built between a sanded court-yard and a garden, whose tall trees showed above the roof. At the windows could be seen curtains of light-colored silk,—a sure indication of the presence of a young and pretty woman.

For a few minutes Marius de Trégars remained in observation; but, as nothing stirred,—

"We must find out something, somehow," he exclaimed impatiently.

And noticing a large grocery store bearing No. 62, he directed his steps towards it, still accompanied by Maxence.

It was the hour of the day when customers are rare. Standing in the centre of the shop, the grocer, a big

fat man with an air of importance, was overseeing his men, who were busy putting things in order.

M. de Trégars took him aside, and with an accent of mystery,—

“I am,” he said, “a clerk with M. Drayton, the jeweller in the Rue de la Paix; and I come to ask you one of those little favors which tradespeople owe to each other.”

A frown appeared on the fat man's countenance. He thought, perhaps, that M. Drayton's clerks were rather too stylish-looking; or else, perhaps, he felt apprehensive of one of those numerous petty swindles of which shopkeepers are constantly the victims.

“What is it?” said he. “Speak!”

“I am on my way,” spoke M. de Trégars, “to deliver a ring which a lady purchased of us yesterday. She is not a regular customer, and has given us no references. If she doesn't pay, shall I leave the ring? My employer told me, ‘Consult some prominent tradesman of the neighborhood, and follow his advice.’”

Prominent tradesman! Delicately tickled vanity was dancing in the grocer's eyes.

“What is the name of the lady?” he inquired.

“Mme. Zélie Cadelle.”

The grocer burst out laughing.

“In that case, my boy,” he said, tapping familiarly the shoulder of the so-called clerk, “whether she pays or not, you can deliver the article.”

The familiarity was not, perhaps, very much to the taste of the Marquis de Trégars. No matter.

“She is rich, then, that lady?” he said.

“Personally no. But she is protected by an old fool, who allows her all her fancies.”

“Indeed!”

"It is scandalous; and you cannot form an idea of the amount of money that is spent in that house. Horses, carriages, servants, dresses, balls, dinners, card-playing all night, a perpetual carnival: it must be ruinous!"

M. de Trégars never winced.

"And the old man who pays?" he asked; "do you know him?"

"I have seen him pass,—a tall, lean, old fellow, who doesn't look very rich, either. But excuse me: here is a customer I must wait upon."

Having walked out into the street,—

"We must separate now," declared M. de Trégars to Maxence.

"What! You wish to"—

"Go and wait for me in that *café* yonder, at the corner of the street. I must see that Zélie Cadelle and speak to her."

And without suffering an objection on the part of Maxence, he walked resolutely up to the cottage-gate, and rang vigorously.

At the sound of the bell, one of those servants stepped out into the yard, who seem manufactured on purpose, heaven knows where, for the special service of young ladies who keep house,—a tall rascal with sallow complexion and straight hair, a cynical eye, and a low, impudent smile.

"What do you wish, sir?" he inquired through the grating.

"That you should open the door, first," uttered M. de Trégars, with such a look and such an accent, that the other obeyed at once.

"And now," he added, "go and announce me to Mme. Zélie Cadelle."

"Madame is out," replied the valet.

And noticing that M. de Trégars shrugged his shoulders,—

"Upon my word," he said, "she has gone to the *bois* with one of her friends. If you won't believe me, ask my comrades there."

And he pointed out two other servants of the same pattern as himself, who were sitting at a table in the carriage-house, playing cards, and drinking.

But M. de Trégars did not mean to be imposed upon. He felt certain that the man was lying. Instead, therefore, of discussing,—

"I want you to take me to your mistress," he ordered, in a tone that admitted of no objection; "or else I'll find my way to her alone."

It was evident that he would do just as he said, by force if needs be. The valet saw this, and, after hesitating a moment longer,—

"Come along, then," he said, "since you insist so much. We'll talk to the chambermaid."

And, having led M. de Trégars into the vestibule, he called out, "Mam'selle Amanda!"

A woman at once made her appearance who was a worthy mate for the valet. She must have been about forty, and the most alarming duplicity could be read upon her features, deeply pitted by the small-pox. She wore a pretentious dress, an apron like a stage-servant, and a cap profusely decorated with flowers and ribbons.

"Here is a gentleman," said the valet, "who insists upon seeing madame. You fix it with him."

Better than her fellow servant, Mlle. Amanda could judge with whom she had to deal. A single glance at this obstinate visitor convinced her that he was not one who can be easily turned off.

Putting on, therefore, her pleasantest smile, thus displaying at the same time her decayed teeth,—

“The fact is that monsieur will very much disturb madame,” she observed.

“I shall excuse myself.”

“But I’ll be scolded.”

Instead of answering, M. de Trégars took a couple of twenty-franc-notes out of his pocket, and slipped them into her hand.

“Please follow me to the parlor, then,” she said with a heavy sigh.

M. de Trégars did so, whilst observing everything around him with the attentive perspicacity of a deputy sheriff preparing to make out an inventory.

Being double, the house was much more spacious than could have been thought from the street, and arranged with that science of comfort which is the genius of modern architects.

The most lavish luxury was displayed on all sides; not that solid, quiet, and harmonious luxury which is the result of long years of opulence, but the coarse, loud, and superficial luxury of the *parvenu*, who is eager to enjoy quick, and to possess all that he has craved from others.

The vestibule was a folly, with its exotic plants climbing along crystal trellises, and its Sèvres and China *jardinières* filled with gigantic azaleas. And along the gilt railing of the stairs marble and bronze statuary was intermingled with masses of growing flowers.

“It must take twenty thousand francs a year to keep up this conservatory alone,” thought M. de Trégars.

Meantime the old chambermaid opened a satinwood door with silver lock.

"That's the parlor," she said. "Take a seat whilst I go and tell madame."

In this parlor everything had been combined to dazzle. Furniture, carpets, hangings, every thing, was rich, too rich, furiously, incontestably, obviously rich. The chandelier was a masterpiece, the clock an original and unique piece of work. The pictures hanging upon the wall were all signed with the most famous names.

"To judge of the rest by what I have seen," thought M. de Trégars, "there must have been at least four or five hundred thousand francs spent on this house."

And, although he was shocked by a quantity of details which betrayed the most absolute lack of taste, he could hardly persuade himself that the cashier of the Mutual Credit could be the master of this sumptuous dwelling; and he was asking himself whether he had not followed the wrong scent, when a circumstance came to put an end to all his doubts.

Upon the mantelpiece, in a small velvet frame, was Vincent Favoral's portrait.

M. de Trégars had been seated for a few minutes, and was collecting his somewhat scattered thoughts, when a slight grating sound, and a rustling noise, made him turn around.

Mme. Zélie Cadelle was coming in.

She was a woman of some twenty-five or six, rather tall, lithe, and well made. Her face was pale and worn; and her heavy dark hair was scattered over her neck and shoulders. She looked at once sarcastic and good-natured, impudent and *naïve*, with her sparkling eyes, her turned-up nose, and wide mouth furnished with teeth, sound and white, like those of a young dog. She had wasted no time upon her dress; for she wore a

plain blue cashmere wrapper, fastened at the waist with a sort of silk scarf of similar color.

From the very threshold,—

“Dear me!” she exclaimed, “how very singular!”

M. de Trégars stepped forward.

“What?” he inquired.

“Oh, nothing!” she replied,—“nothing at all!”

And without ceasing to look at him with a wondering eye, but suddenly changing her tone of voice,—

“And so, sir,” she said, “my servants have been unable to keep you from forcing yourself into my house!”

“I hope, madame,” said M. de Trégars with a polite bow, “that you will excuse my persistence. I come for a matter which can suffer no delay.”

She was still looking at him obstinately.

“Who are you?” she asked.

“My name will not afford you any information. I am the Marquis de Trégars.”

“Trégars!” she repeated, looking up at the ceiling, as if in search of an inspiration. “Trégars! Never heard of it!”

And throwing herself into an arm chair,—

“Well, sir, what do you wish with me, then? Speak!”

He had taken a seat near her, and kept his eyes riveted upon hers.

“I have come, madame,” he replied, “to ask you to put me in the way to see and speak to the man whose photograph is there on the mantelpiece.”

He expected to take her by surprise, and that by a shudder, a cry, a gesture, she might betray her secret. Not at all.

"Are you, then, one of M. Vincent's friends?" she asked quietly.

M. de Trégars understood, and this was subsequently confirmed, that it was under his Christian name of Vincent alone, that the cashier of the Mutual Credit was known in the Rue du Cirque.

"Yes, I am a friend of his," he replied; "and if I could see him, I could probably render him an important service."

"Well, you are too late."

"Why?"

"Because M. Vincent put off more than twenty-four hours since?"

"Are you sure of that?"

"As sure as a person can be who went to the railway station yesterday with him and all his baggage."

"You saw him leave?"

"As I see you."

"Where was he going?"

"To Havre, to take the steamer for Brazil, which was to sail on the same day; so that, by this time, he must be awfully seasick."

"And you really think that it was his intention to go to Brazil?"

"He said so. It was written on his thirty-six trunks in letters half a foot high. Besides, he showed me his ticket."

"Have you any idea what could have induced him to expatriate himself thus, at his age?"

"He told me he had spent all his money, and also some of other people's; that he was afraid of being arrested; and that he was going yonder to be quiet, and try to make another fortune."

Was Mme. Zélie speaking in good faith? To ask the question would have been rather *naïve*; but an effort might be made to find out.

Carefully concealing his own impressions, and the importance he attached to this conversation,—

“I pity you sincerely, madame,” resumed M. de Trégars; “for you must be sorely grieved by this sudden departure.”

“Me!” she said in a voice that came from the heart. “I don’t care a straw.”

Marquis de Trégars knew well enough the ladies of the class to which he supposed that Mme. Zélie Cadelle must belong, not to be surprised at this frank declaration.

“And yet,” he said, “you are indebted to him for the princely magnificence that surrounds you here.”

“Of course.”

“He being gone, as you say, will you be able to keep up your style of living?”

Half raising herself from her seat,—

“I haven’t the slightest idea of doing so,” she exclaimed. “Never in the whole world have I had such a stupid time as for the last five months that I have spent in this gilded cage. What a bore, my beloved brethren! I am yawning still at the mere thought of the number of times I have yawned in it.”

M. de Trégars’ gesture of surprise was the more natural, that his surprise was immense.

“You are tired being here?” he said.

“To death.”

“And you have only been here five months?”

“Dear me, yes! and by the merest chance, too, you’ll see. One day at the beginning of last December, I was coming from—but no matter where I was coming from.

At any rate, I hadn't a cent in my pocket, and nothing but an old calico dress on my back; and I was going along, not in the best of humor, as you may imagine, when I feel that some one is following me. Without looking around, and from the corner of my eye, I look over my shoulder, and I see a respectable-looking old gentleman, wearing a long frock-coat."

"M. Vincent?"

"In his own natural person, and who was walking, walking. I quietly begin to walk slower; and, as soon as we come to a place where there was hardly any one, he comes up alongside of me."

Something comical must have happened at this moment, which Mme. Zélie Cadelle said nothing about; for she was laughing most heartily,—a frank and sonorous laughter.

"Then," she resumed, "he begins at once to explain that I remind him of a person whom he loved tenderly, and whom he has just had the misfortune to lose, adding, that he would deem himself the happiest of men if I would allow him to take care of me, and insure me a brilliant position."

"You see! That rascally Vincent!" said M. de Trégars, just to be saying something.

Mme. Zélie shook her head.

"You know him," she resumed. "He is not young; he is not handsome; he is not funny. I did not fancy him one bit; and, if I had only known where to find shelter for the night, I'd soon have sent him to the old Nick,—him and his brilliant position. But, not having enough money to buy myself a penny-loaf, it wasn't the time to put on any airs. So I tell him that I accept. He goes for a cab; we get into it; and he brings me right straight here."

Positively M. de Trégars required his entire self-control to conceal the intensity of his curiosity.

"Was this house, then, already as it is now?" he interrogated.

"Precisely, except that there were no servants in it, except the chambermaid Amanda, who is M. Favoral's confidante. All the others had been dismissed; and it was a hostler from a stable near by who came to take care of the horses."

"And what then?"

"Then you may imagine what I looked like in the midst of all this magnificence, with my old shoes and my fourpenny skirt. Something like a grease-spot on a satin dress. M. Vincent seemed delighted, nevertheless. He had sent Amanda out to get me some under-clothing and a ready-made wrapper; and, whilst waiting, he took me all through the house, from the cellar to the garret, saying that everything was at my command, and that the next day I would have a battalion of servants to wait on me."

It was evidently with perfect frankness that she was speaking, and with the pleasure one feels in telling an extraordinary adventure. But suddenly she stopped short, as if discovering that she was forgetting herself, and going farther than was proper.

And it was only after a moment of reflection that she went on,—

"It was like fairyland to me. I had never tasted the opulence of the great, you see, and I had never had any money except that which I earned. So, during the first days, I did nothing but run up and down stairs, admiring everything, feeling everything with my own hands, and looking at myself in the glass to make sure that I was not dreaming. I rang the bell just to make

the servants come up ; I spent hours trying dresses ; then I'd have the horses put to the carriage, and either ride to the *bois*, or go out shopping. M. Vincent gave me as much money as I wanted ; and it seemed as though I never spent enough. I shout, I was like a mad woman."

A cloud appeared upon Mme. Zélie's countenance, and, changing suddenly her tone and her manner,—

"Unfortunately," she went on, "one gets tired of every thing. At the end of two weeks I knew the house from top to bottom, and after a month I was sick of the whole thing ; so that one night I began dressing. 'Where do you want to go?' Amanda asked me. 'Why, to Mabille, to dance a quadrille, or two.'—'Impossible!'—'Why?'—'Because M. Vincent does not wish you to go out at night.'—'We'll see about that!' The next day, I tell all this to M. Vincent ; and he says that Amanda is right ; that it is not proper for a woman in my position to frequent balls ; and that, if I want to go out at night, I can stay. Get out ! I tell you what, if it hadn't been for the fine carriage, and all that, I would have cleared out that minute. Any way, I became disgusted from that moment, and have been more and more ever since ; and, if M. Vincent had not himself left, I certainly would."

"To go where?"

"Anywhere. Look here, now ! do you suppose I need a man to support me ! No, thank Heaven ! Little Zélie, here present, has only to apply to any dressmaker, and she'll be glad to give her four francs a day to run the machine. And she'll be free, at least ; and she can laugh and dance as much as she likes."

M. de Trégars had made a mistake : he had just discovered it.

Mme. Zélie Cadelle was certainly not particularly vir-

tuous; but she was far from being the woman he expected to meet.

"At any rate," he said, "you did well to wait patiently."

"I do not regret it."

"If you can keep this house"—

She interrupted him with a great burst of laughter.

"This house!" she exclaimed. "Why, it was sold long ago, with every thing in it,—furniture, horses, carriages, every thing except me. A young gentleman, very well dressed, bought it for a tall girl, who looks like a goose, and has far over a thousand francs of red hair on her head."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Sure as I live, having seen with my own eyes the young swell and his red-headed friend counting heaps of bank-notes to M. Vincent. They are to move in day after to-morrow; and they have invited me to the house-warming. But no more of it for me, I thank you! I am sick and tired of all these people. And the proof of it is, I am busy packing my things; and lots of them I have too,—dresses, underclothes, jewelry. He was a good-natured fellow, old Vincent was, anyhow. He gave me money enough to buy some furniture. I have hired a small apartment; and I am going to set up dress-making on my own hook. And won't we laugh then! and won't we have some fun to make up for lost time! Come, my children, take your places for a quadrille. Forward two!"

And, bouncing out of her chair, she began sketching out one of those bold cancan steps which astound the policemen on duty in the ball-rooms.

"Bravo!" said M. de Trégars, forcing himself to smile,—"bravo!"

He saw clearly now what sort of woman was Mme. Zélie Cadelle; how he should speak to her, and what cords he might yet cause to vibrate within her. He recognized the true daughter of Paris, wayward and nervous, who in the midst of her disorders preserves an instinctive pride; who places her independence far above all the money in the world; who gives, rather than sells, herself; who knows no law but her caprice, no morality but the policeman, no religion but pleasure.

As soon as she had returned to her seat,—

“There you are dancing gayly,” he said, “and poor Vincent is doubtless groaning at this moment over his separation from you.”

“Ah! I’d pity him if I had time,” she said.

“He was fond of you?”

“Don’t speak of it.”

“If he had not been fond of you, he would not have put you here.”

Mme. Zélie made a little face of equivocal meaning.

“What proof is that?” she murmured.

“He would not have spent so much money for you.”

“For me!” she interrupted,—“for me! What have I cost him of any consequence? Is it for me that he bought, furnished, and fitted out this house? No, no! He had the cage; and he put in the bird,—the first he happened to find. He brought me here as he might have brought any other woman, young or old, pretty or ugly, blonde or brunette. As to what I spent here, it was a mere bagatelle compared with what the other did,—the one before me. Amanda kept telling me all the time I was a fool. You may believe me, then, when I tell you that M. Vincent will not wet many handkerchiefs with the tears he’ll shed over me.”

“But do you know what became of the one before

you, as you call her,—whether she is alive or dead, and owing to what circumstances the cage became empty?”

But, instead of answering, Mme. Zélie was fixing upon Marius de Trégars a suspicious glance. And, after a moment only,—

“Why do you ask me that?” she said.

“I would like to know.”

She did not permit him to proceed. Rising from her seat, and stepping briskly up to him,—

“Do you belong to the police, by chance?” she asked in a tone of mistrust.

If she was anxious, it was evidently because she had motives of anxiety which she had concealed. If, two or three times she had interrupted herself, it was because, manifestly, she had a secret to keep. If the idea of police had come into her mind, it is because, very probably, they had recommended her to be on her guard.

M. de Trégars understood all this, and, also, that he had tried to go too fast.

“Do I look like a secret police-agent?” he asked.

She was examining him with all her power of penetration.

“Not at all, I confess,” she replied. “But, if you are not one, how is it that you come to my house, without knowing me from this side of sole leather, to ask me a whole lot of questions, which I am fool enough to answer?”

“I told you I was a friend of M. Favoral.”

“Who’s that Favoral?”

“That’s M. Vincent’s real name, madame.”

She opened her eyes wide.

“You must be mistaken. I never heard him called any thing but Vincent.”

“It is because he had especial motives for concealing

his personality. The money he spent here did not belong to him: he took it, he stole it, from the Mutual Credit Company where he was cashier, and where he left a deficit of twelve millions."

Mme. Zélie stepped back as though she had trodden on a snake.

"It's impossible!" she cried.

"It is the exact truth. Haven't you seen in the papers the case of Vincent Favoral, cashier of the Mutual Credit?"

And, taking a paper from his pocket, he handed it to the young woman, saying, "Read."

But she pushed it back, not without a slight blush.

"Oh, I believe you!" she said.

The fact is, and Marius understood it, she did not read very fluently.

"The worst of M. Vincent Favoral's conduct," he resumed, "is, that, while he was throwing away money here by the handful, he subjected his family to the most cruel privations."

"Oh!"

"He refused the necessities of life to his wife, the best and the worthiest of women; he never gave a cent to his son; and he deprived his daughter of every thing."

"Ah, if I could have suspected such a thing!" murmured Mme. Zélie.

"Finally, and to cap the climax, he has gone, leaving his wife and children literally without bread."

Transported with indignation,—

"Why, that man must have been a horrible old scoundrel" exclaimed the young woman.

This is just the point to which M. de Trégars wished to bring her.

"And now," he resumed, "you must understand the enormous interest we have in knowing what has become of him."

"I have already told you."

M. de Trégars had risen, in his turn. Taking Mme. Zélie's hands, and fixing upon her one of those acute looks, which search for the truth down to the innermost recesses of the conscience,—

"Come, my dear child," he began in a penetrating voice, "you are a worthy and honest girl. Will you leave in the most frightful despair a family who appeal to your heart? Be sure that no harm will ever happen through us to Vincent Favoral."

She raised her hand, as they do to take an oath in a court of justice, and, in a solemn tone,—

"I swear," she uttered, "that I went to the station with M. Vincent; that he assured me that he was going to Brazil; that he had his passage-ticket; and that all his baggage was marked, 'Rio de Janeiro.'"

The disappointment was great: and M. de Trégars manifested it by a gesture.

"At least," he insisted, "tell me who the woman was whose place you took here."

But already had the young woman returned to her feeling of mistrust.

"How in the world do you expect me to know?" she replied. "Go and ask Amanda. I have no accounts to give you. Besides, I have to go and finish packing my trunks. So good-by, and enjoy yourself."

And she went out so quick, that she caught Amanda, the chambermaid, kneeling behind the door.

"So that woman was listening," thought M. de Trégars, anxious and dissatisfied.

But it was in vain that he begged Mme. Zélie to return, and to hear a single word more. She disappeared; and he had to resign himself to leave the house without learning any thing more for the present.

He had remained there very long; and he was wondering, as he walked out, whether Maxence had not got tired waiting for him in the little *café* where he had sent him.

But Maxence had remained faithfully at his post. And when Marius de Trégars came to sit by him, whilst exclaiming, "Here you are at last!" he called his attention at the same time with a gesture, and a wink from the corner of his eye, to two men sitting at the adjoining table before a bowl of punch.

Certain, now, that M. de Trégars would remain on the lookout, Maxence was knocking on the table with his fist, to call the waiter, who was busy playing billiards with a customer.

And when he came at last, justly annoyed at being disturbed,—

"Give us two mugs of beer," Maxence ordered, "and bring us a pack of cards."

M. de Trégars understood very well that something extraordinary had happened; but, unable to guess what, he leaned over towards his companion.

"What is it?" he whispered.

"We must hear what these two men are saying; and we'll play a game of piquet for a subterfuge."

The waiter returned, bringing two glasses of a muddy liquid, a piece of cloth, the color of which was concealed under a layer of dirt, and a pack of cards horribly soft and greasy.

"My deal," said Maxence.

And he began shuffling, and giving the cards, whilst M. de Trégars was examining the punch-drinkers at the next table.

In one of the two, a man still young, wearing a striped vest with alpaca sleeves, he thought he recognized one of the rascally-looking fellows he had caught a glimpse of in Mme. Zélie Cadelle's carriage-house.

The other, an old man, whose inflamed complexion and blossoming nose betrayed old habits of drunkenness, looked very much like a coachman out of place. Baseness and duplicity bloomed upon his countenance; and the brightness of his small eyes rendered still more alarming the slyly obsequious smile that was stereotyped upon his thin and pale lips.

They were so completely absorbed in their conversation, that they paid no attention whatever to what was going on around them.

"Then," the old one was saying, "it's all over."

"Entirely. The house is sold."

"And the boss?"

"Gone to America."

"What! Suddenly, that way?"

"No. We supposed he was going on some journey, because, every day since the beginning of the week, they were bringing in trunks and boxes; but no one knew exactly when he would go. Now, in the night of Saturday to Sunday, he drops in the house like a bombshell, wakes up everybody, and says he must leave immediately. At once we harness up, we load the baggage up, we drive him to the Western Railway Station, and good-by, Vincent!"

"And the young lady?"

"She's got to get out in the next twenty-four hours;

but she don't seem to mind it one bit. The fact is we are the ones who grieve the most, after all."

"Is it possible?"

"It is so. She was a good girl; and we won't soon find one like her."

The old man seemed distressed.

"Bad luck!" he growled. "I would have liked that house myself."

"Oh, I dare say you would!"

"And there is no way to get in?"

"Can't tell. It will be well to see the others, those who have bought. But I mistrust them: they look too stupid not to be mean."

Listening intently to the conversation of these two men, it was mechanically and at random that M. de Trégars and Maxence threw their cards on the table, and uttered the common terms of the game of piquet,—

"Five cards! Tierce, major! Three aces."

Meantime the old man was going on,—

"Who knows but what M. Vincent may come back?"

"No danger of that!"

"Why?"

The other looked carefully around, and, seeing only two players absorbed in their game,—

"Because," he replied, "M. Vincent is completely ruined, it seems. He spent all his money, and a good deal of other people's money besides. Amanda, the chambermaid, told me; and I guess she knows."

"You thought he was so rich!"

"He was. But no matter how big a bag is: if you keep taking out of it, you must get to the bottom."

"Then he spent a great deal?"

"It's incredible! I have been in extravagant houses;

but nowhere have I ever seen money fly as it has during the five months that I have been in that house. A regular pillage! Everybody helped themselves; and what was not in the house, they could get from the tradespeople, have it charged on the bill; and it was all paid without a word."

"Then, yes, indeed, the money must have gone pretty lively," said the old one in a convinced tone.

"Well," replied the other, "that was nothing yet. Amanda the chambermaid, who has been in the house fifteen years, told us some stories that would make you jump. She was not much for spending, Zélie; but some of the others, it seems"—

It required the greatest effort on the part of Maxence and M. de Trégars not to play, but only to pretend to play, and to continue to count imaginary points,—"One, two, three, four."

Fortunately the coachman with the red nose seemed much interested.

"What others?" he asked.

"That I don't know any thing about," replied the younger valet. "But you may imagine that there must have been more than one in that little house during the many years that M. Vincent owned it,—a man who hadn't his equal for women, and who was worth millions."

"And what was his business?"

"Don't know that, either."

"What! there were ten of you in the house, and you didn't know the profession of the man who paid you all?"

"We were all new."

"The chambermaid, Amanda, must have known."

"When she was asked, she said that he was a merchant. One thing is sure, he was a queer old chap."

So interested was the old coachman, that, seeing the punch-bowl empty, he called for another. His comrade could not fail to show his appreciation of such politeness.

"Ah, yes!" he went on, "old Vincent was an eccentric fellow; and never, to see him, could you have suspected that he cut up such capers, and that he threw money away by the handful."

"Indeed!"

"Imagine a man about fifty years old, stiff as a post, with a face about as pleasant as a prison-gate. That's the boss! Summer and winter, he wore laced shoes, blue stockings, gray pantaloons that were too short, a cotton necktie, and a frock-coat that came down to his ankles. In the street, you would have taken him for a hosier who had retired before his fortune was made."

"You don't say so!"

"No, never have I seen a man look so much like an old miser. You think, perhaps, that he came in a carriage. Not a bit of it! He came in the omnibus, my boy, and outside too, for three sous; and when it rained he opened his umbrella. But the moment he had crossed the threshold of the house, presto, pass! complete change of scene. The miser became pacha. He took off his old duds, put on a blue velvet robe; and then there was nothing handsome enough, nothing good enough, nothing expensive enough for him. And, when he had acted the *my lord* to his heart's content, he put on his old traps again, resumed his prison-gate face, climbed up on top of the omnibus, and went off as he came."

"And you were not surprised, all of you, at such a life?"

"Very much so."

"And you did not think that these singular whims must conceal something?"

"Oh, but we did!"

"And you didn't try to find out what that something was?"

"How could we?"

"Was it very difficult to follow your boss, and ascertain where he went, after leaving the house?"

"Certainly not; but what then?"

"Why," he replied, "you would have found out his secret in the end; and then you would have gone to him and told him, 'Give me so much, or I peach.'"

V.

THIS story of M. Vincent, as told by these two honest companions, was something like the vulgar legend of other people's money, so eagerly craved, and so madly dissipated. Easily-gotten wealth is easily gotten rid of. Stolen money has fatal tendencies, and turns irresistibly to gambling, horse-jockeys, fast women, all the ruinous fancies, all the unwholesome gratifications.

They are rare indeed, among the daring cut-throats of speculation, those to whom their ill-gotten gain proves of real service,—so rare, that they are pointed out, and are as easily numbered as the girls who leap some night from the street to a ten-thousand-franc apartment, and manage to remain there.

Seized with the intoxication of sudden wealth, they

lose all measure and all prudence. Whether they believe their luck inexhaustible, or fear a sudden turn of fortune, they make haste to enjoy themselves, and they fill the noted restaurants, the leading *cafés*, the theatres, the clubs, the race-courses, with their impudent personality, the clash of their voice, the extravagance of their mistresses, the noise of their expenses, and the absurdity of their vanity. And they go on and on, lavishing other people's money, until the fatal hour of one of those disastrous liquidations which terrify the courts and the exchange, and cause pallid faces and a gnashing of teeth in the "street," until the moment when they have the choice between a pistol-shot, which they never choose, the criminal court, which they do their best to avoid, and a trip abroad.

What becomes of them afterwards? To what gutters do they tumble from fall to fall? Does any one know what becomes of the women who disappear suddenly after two or three years of follies and of splendors?

But it happens sometimes, as you step out of a carriage in front of some theatre, that you wonder where you have already seen the face of the wretched beggar who opens the door for you, and in a husky voice claims his two sous. You saw him at the *Café Riche*, during the six months that he was a big financier.

Some other time you may catch, in the crowd, snatches of a strange conversation between two crapulous rascals.

"It was at the time," says one, "when I drove that bright chestnut team that I had bought for twenty thousand francs of the eldest son of the Duke de Sermeuse."

"I remember," replies the other; "for at that mo-

ment I gave six thousand francs a month to little Cabriole of the Varieties."

And, improbable as this may seem, it is the exact truth; for one was manager of a manufacturing enterprise that sank ten millions; and the other was at the head of a financial operation that ruined five hundred families. They had a house like the one in the Rue du Cirque, mistresses more expensive than Mme. Zélie Cadelle, and servants like those who were now talking within a step of Maxence and Marius de Trégars. The latter had resumed their conversation; and the oldest one, the coachman with the red nose, was saying to his younger comrade,—

"This Vincent affair must be a lesson to you. If ever you find yourself again in a house where so much money is spent, remember that it hasn't cost much trouble to make it, and manage somehow to get as big a share of it as you can."

"That's what I've always done wherever I have been."

"And, above all, make haste to fill your bag, because, you see, in houses like that, one is never sure, one day, whether, the next, the gentleman will not be at Mazas, and the lady at St. Lazares."

They had done their second bowl of punch, and finished their conversation. They paid, and left.

And Maxence and M. de Trégars were able, at last, to throw down their cards.

Maxence was very pale; and big tears were rolling down his cheeks.

"What disgrace!" he murmured. "This, then, is the other side of my father's existence! This is the way in which he spent the millions which he stole; whilst, in

the Rue St. Gilles, he deprived his family of the necessities of life!"

And, in a tone of utter discouragement,—

"Now it is indeed all over, and it is useless to continue our search. My father is certainly guilty."

But M. de Trégars was not the man thus to give up the game.

"Guilty? Yes," he said, "but dupe also."

"Whose dupe?"

"That's what we'll find out, you may depend upon it."

"What! after what we have just heard?"

"I have more hope than ever."

"Did you learn any thing from Mme. Zélie Cadelle, then?"

"Nothing more than you know by those two rascals' conversation."

A dozen questions were pressing upon Maxence's lips; but M. de Trégars interrupted him.

"In this case, my friend, less than ever must we trust appearances. Let me speak. Was your father a simpleton? No! His ability to dissimulate, for years, his double existence, proves, on the contrary, a wonderful amount of duplicity. How is it, then, that latterly his conduct has been so extraordinary and so absurd? But you will doubtless say it was always such. In that case, I answer you, No; for then his secret could not have been kept for a year. We hear that other women lived in that house before Mme. Zélie Cadelle. But who were they? What has become of them? Is there any certainty that they have ever existed? Nothing proves it.

"The servants having been all changed, Amanda, the chambermaid, is the only one who knows the truth; and

she will be very careful to say nothing about it. Therefore, all our positive information goes back no farther than five months. And what do we hear? That your father seemed to try and make his extravagant expenditures as conspicuous as possible. That he did not even take the trouble to conceal the source of the money he spent so profusely; for he told Mme. Zélie that he was at the end of his tether, and that, after having spent his own fortune, he was spending other people's money. He had announced his intended departure; he had sold the house, and received its price. Finally, at the last moment, what does he do?

"Instead of going off quietly and secretly, like a man who is running away, and who knows that he is pursued, he tells every one where he intends to go; he writes it on all his trunks, in letters half a foot high; and then rides in great display to the railway station, with a woman, several carriages, servants, etc. What is the object of all this? To get caught? No, but to start a false scent. Therefore, in his mind, every thing must have been arranged in advance, and the catastrophe was far from taking him by surprise; therefore the scene with M. de Thaller must have been prepared; therefore, it must have been on purpose that he left his pocketbook behind, with the bill in it that was to lead us straight here; therefore all we have seen is but a transparent comedy, got up for our special benefit, and intended to cover up the truth, and mislead the law."

But Maxence was not entirely convinced.

"Still," he remarked, "those enormous expenses."

M. de Trégars shrugged his shoulders.

"Have you any idea," he said, "what display can be made with a million? Let us admit that your father

has spent two, four millions even. The loss of the Mutual Credit is twelve millions. What has become of the other eight?"

And, as Maxence made no answer,—

"It is those eight millions," he added, "that I want, and that I shall have. It is in Paris that your father is hid, I feel certain. We must find him; and we must make him tell the truth, which I already more than suspect."

Whereupon, throwing on the table the pint of beer which he had not drunk, he walked out of the *café* with Maxence.

"Here you are at last!" exclaimed the coachman, who had been waiting at the corner for over three hours, a prey to the utmost anxiety.

But M. de Trégars had no time for explanations; and, pushing Maxence into the cab, he jumped in after him, crying to the coachman,—

"24 Rue Joquelet. Five francs extra for yourself."

A driver who expects an extra five francs, always has, for five minutes at least, a horse as fast as Gladiateur.

Whilst the cab was speeding on to its destination,—

"What is most important for us now," said M. de Trégars to Maxence, "is to ascertain how far the Mutual Credit crisis has progressed; and M. Latterman of the Rue Joquelet is the man in all Paris who can best inform us."

Whoever has made or lost five hundred francs at the *bourse* knows M. Latterman, who, since the war, calls himself an Alsatian and curses with a fearful accent those "parparous Broossians." This worthy speculator modestly calls himself a money-changer; but he would be a simpleton who should ask him for change: and it is

certainly not that sort of business which gives him the three hundred thousand francs' profits which he pockets every year.

When a company has failed, when it has been wound up, and the defrauded stockholders have received two or three per cent in all on their original investment, there is a prevailing idea that the certificates of its stocks are no longer good for any thing, except to light the fire. That's a mistake. Long after the company has foundered, its shares float, like the shattered *débris* which the sea casts upon the beach months after the ship has been wrecked. These shares M. Latterman collects, and carefully stores away; and upon the shelves of his office you may see numberless shares and bonds of those numerous companies which have absorbed, in the past twenty years, according to some statistics, twelve hundred millions, and, according to others, two thousand millions, of the public fortune.

Say but a word, and his clerks will offer you some "Franco-American Company," some "Steam Navigation Company of Marseilles," some "Coal and Metal Company of the Asturias," some "Transcontinental Memphis and El Paso" (of the United States), some "Caumart Slate Works," and hundreds of others, which, for the general public, have no value, save that of old paper, that is from three to five cents a pound. And yet speculators are found who buy and sell these rags.

In an obscure corner of the *bourse* may be seen a miscellaneous population of old men with pointed beards, and overdressed young men, who deal in every thing salable, and other things besides. There are found foreign merchants, who will offer you stocks of merchandise, goods from auction, good claims to recover, and

who at last will take out of their pockets an opera-glass, a Geneva watch (smuggled in), a revolver, or a bottle of patent hair-restorer.

Such is the market to which drift those shares which were once issued to represent millions, and which now represent nothing but a palpable proof of the audacity of swindlers, and the credulity of their dupes. And there are actually buyers for these shares, and they go up or down, according to the ordinary laws of supply and demand; for there is a demand for them, and here comes in the usefulness of M. Latterman's business.

Does a tradesman, on the eve of declaring himself bankrupt, wish to defraud his creditors of a part of his assets, to conceal excessive expenses, or cover up some embezzlement, at once he goes to the Rue Joquelet, procures a select assortment of "Cantonal Credit," "Rossdorff Mines," or "Maumusson Salt Works," and puts them carefully away in his safe.

And, when the receiver arrives,—

"There are my assets," he says. "I have there some twenty, fifty, or a hundred thousand francs of stocks, the whole of which is not worth five francs to-day; but it isn't my fault. I thought it a good investment; and I didn't sell, because I always thought the price would come up again."

And he gets his discharge, because it would really be too cruel to punish a man because he has made unfortunate investments.

Better than any one, M. Latterman knows for what purpose are purchased the valueless securities which he sells; and he actually advises his customers which to take in preference, in order that their purchase at the time of their issue may appear more natural, and more likely. Nevertheless, he claims to be a perfectly honest

man, and declares that he is no more responsible for the swindles that are committed by means of his stocks than a gunsmith for a murder committed with a gun that he has sold.

"But he will surely be able to tell us all about the Mutual Credit," repeated Maxence to M. de Trégars.

Four o'clock struck when the carriage stopped in the Rue Joquelet. The *bourse* had just closed; and a few groups were still standing in the square, or along the railings.

"I hope we shall find this Latterman at home," said Maxence.

They started up the stairs (for it is up on the second floor that this worthy operator has his offices); and, having inquired,—

"M. Latterman is engaged with a customer," answered a clerk. "Please sit down and wait."

M. Latterman's office was like all other caverns of the same kind. A very narrow space was reserved to the public; and all around, behind a heavy wire screen, the clerks could be seen busy with figures, or handling coupons. On the right, over a small window, appeared the word, "CASHIER." A small door on the left led to the private office.

M. de Trégars and Maxence had patiently taken a seat on a hard leather bench, once red; and they were listening and looking on.

There was considerable animation about the place. Every few minutes, well-dressed young men came in with a hurried and important look, and, taking out of their pocket a memorandum-book, they would speak a few sentences of that peculiar dialect, bristling with figures, which is the language of the *bourse*. At the end of fifteen or twenty minutes,—

"Will M. Latterman be engaged much longer?" inquired M. de Trégars.

"I do not know," replied a clerk.

At that very moment, the little door on the left opened, and the customer came out who had detained M. Latterman so long. This customer was no other than M. Costeclar. Noticing M. de Trégars and Maxence, who had risen at the noise of the door, he appeared most disagreeably surprised. He even turned slightly pale, and took a step backwards, as if intending to return precipitately into the room that he was leaving; for M. Latterman's office, like that of all other large operators, had several doors, without counting the one that leads to the police-court. But M. de Trégars gave him no time to effect this retreat. Stepping suddenly forward,—

"Well?" he asked him in a tone that was almost threatening.

The brilliant financier had condescended to take off his hat, usually riveted upon his head, and, with the smile of a knave caught in the act,—

"I did not expect to meet you here, my lord-marquis," he said.

At the title of "marquis," everybody looked up.

"I believe you, indeed," said M. de Trégars. "But what I want to know is, how is the matter progressing?"

"The plot is thickening. Justice is acting."

"Indeed!"

"It is a fact. Jules Jottras, of the house of Jottras and Brother, was arrested this morning, just as he arrived at the *bourse*."

"Why?"

"Because, it seems, he was an accomplice of Favoral;

and it was he who sold the bonds stolen from the Mutual Credit."

Maxence had started at the mention of his father's name; but, with a significant glance, M. de Trégars bid him remain silent, and, in a sarcastic tone,—

"Famous capture!" he murmured. "And which proves the clear-sightedness of justice."

"But this is not all," resumed M. Costeclar. "Saint Pavin, the editor of 'The Financial Pilot,' you know, is thought to be seriously compromised. There was a rumor, at the close of the market, that a warrant either had been, or was about to be, issued against him."

"And the Baron de Thaller?"

The employés of the office could not help admiring M. Costeclar's extraordinary amount of patience.

"The baron," he replied, "made his appearance at the *bourse* this afternoon, and was the object of a veritable ovation."

"That is admirable! And what did he say?"

"That the damage was already repaired."

"Then the shares of the Mutual Credit must have advanced."

"Unfortunately, not. They did not go above one hundred and ten francs."

"Were you not astonished at that?"

"Not much, because, you see, I am a business-man, I am; and I know pretty well how things work. When they left M. de Thaller this morning, the stockholders of the Mutual Credit had a meeting; and they pledged themselves, upon honor, not to sell, so as not to break the market. As soon as they had separated, each one said to himself, 'Since the others are going to keep their stock, like fools, I am going to sell mine.' Now, as

there were three or four hundred of them who argued in the same way, the market was flooded with shares."

Looking the brilliant financier straight in the eyes,—

"And yourself?" interrupted M. de Trégars.

"I!" stammered M. Costeclar, so visibly agitated, that the clerks could not help laughing.

"Yes. I wish to know if you have been more faithful to your word than the stockholders of whom you are speaking, and whether you have done as we had agreed."

"Certainly; and, if you find me here"—

But M. de Trégars, placing his own hand over his shoulder, stopped him short.

"I think I know what brought you here," he uttered; "and in a few moments I shall have ascertained."

"I swear to you."

"Don't swear. If I am mistaken, so much the better for you. If I am not mistaken, I'll prove to you that it is dangerous to try any sharp game on me, though I am not a business-man."

Meantime M. Latterman, seeing no customer coming to take the place of the one who had left, became impatient at last, and appeared upon the threshold of his private office.

He was a man still young, small, thick-set, and vulgar. At the first glance, nothing of him could be seen but his abdomen,—a big, great, and ponderous abdomen, seat of his thoughts, and tabernacle of his aspirations, over which dangled a double gold chain, loaded with trinkets. Above an apoplectic neck, red as that of a turkey-cock, stood his little head, covered with coarse red hair, cut very short. He wore a heavy beard, trimmed in the form of a fan. His large, full-moon face

was divided in two by a nose as flat as a Kalmuck's, and illuminated by two small eyes, in which could be read the most thorough duplicity.

Seeing M. de Trégars and M. Costeclar engaged in conversation,—

“Why! you know each other?” he said.

M. de Trégars advanced a step,—

“We are even—intimate friends,” he replied. “And it is very lucky that we should have met. I am brought here by the same matter as our dear Costeclar; and I was just explaining to him that he has been too hasty, and that it would be best to wait three or four days longer.”

“That's just what I told him,” echoed the honorable financier.

Maxence understood only one thing,—that M. de Trégars had penetrated M. Costeclar's designs; and he could not sufficiently admire his presence of mind, and his skill in grasping an unexpected opportunity.

“Fortunately there is nothing done yet,” added M. Latterman.

“And it is yet time to alter what has been agreed on,” said M. de Trégars. And, addressing himself to Costeclar,—

“Come,” he added, “we'll fix things with M. Latterman.”

But the other, who remembered the scene in the Rue St. Gilles, and who had his own reasons to be alarmed, would sooner have jumped out of the window.

“I am expected,” he stammered. “Arrange matters without me.”

“Then you give me *carte blanche*?”

Ah, if the brilliant financier had dared! But he felt

riveted upon him such threatening eyes, that he dared not even make a gesture of denial.

"Whatever you do will be satisfactory," he said in the tone of a man who sees himself lost.

And, as he was going out of the door, M. de Trégars stepped into M. Latterman's private office. He remained only five minutes; and when he joined Maxence, whom he had begged to wait for him,—

"I think that we have got them," he said as they walked off.

Their next visit was to M. Saint Pavin, at the office of "The Financial Pilot." Every one must have seen at least one copy of that paper with, its ingenious vignette, representing a bold mariner steering a boat, filled with timid passengers, towards the harbor of Million, over a stormy sea, bristling with the rocks of failure and the shoals of ruin. The office of "The Pilot" is, in fact, less a newspaper office than a sort of general business agency.

As at M. Latterman's, there are clerks scribbling behind wire screens, small windows, a cashier, and an immense blackboard, on which the latest quotations of the Rente, and other French and foreign securities, are written in chalk.

As "The Pilot" spends some hundred thousand francs a year in advertising, in order to obtain subscribers; as, on the other hand, it only costs three francs a year,—it is clear that it is not on its subscriptions that it realizes any profits. It has other sources of income: its brokerages first; for it buys, sells, and executes, as the prospectus says, all orders for stocks, bonds, or other securities, for the best interests of the client. And it has plenty of business.

To the opulent brokerages, must be added advertising and puffing,—another mine. Six times out of ten, when a new enterprise is set on foot, the organizers send for Saint Pavin. Honest men, or knaves, they must all pass through his hands. They know it, and are resigned in advance.

“We rely upon you,” they say to him.

“What advantages have you to offer?” he replies.

Then they discuss the operation, the expected profits of the new company, and M. Saint Pavin’s demands. For a hundred thousand francs he promises bursts of lyricism; for fifty thousand he will be enthusiastic only. Twenty thousand francs will secure a moderate praise of the affair; ten thousand, a friendly neutrality.

And, if the said company refuses any advantages to “The Pilot”—

“Ah, you must beware!” says Saint Pavin.

And from the very next number he commences his campaign. He is moderate at first, and leaves a door open for his retreat. He puts forth doubts only. He does not know much about it. “It may be an excellent thing; it may be a wretched one: the safest is to wait and see.”

That’s the first hint. If it remains without result, he takes up his pen again, and makes his doubts more pointed.

He knows how to steer clear of libel suits, how to handle figures so as to demonstrate, according to the requirements of the case, that two and two make three, or make five. It is seldom, that, before the third article, the company does not surrender at discretion.

All Paris knows him; and he has many friends. When M. de Trégars and Maxence arrived, they found the office full of people—speculators, brokers, go-be-

tweens—come there to discuss the fluctuations of the day and the probabilities of the evening market.

“M. Saint Pavin is engaged,” one of the clerks told them.

Indeed, his coarse voice could be distinctly heard behind the screen. Soon he appeared, showing out an old gentleman, who seemed utterly confused at the scene, and to whom he was screaming,—

“No, sir, no! ‘The Financial Pilot’ does not take that sort of business; and I find you very bold to come and propose to me a twopenny rascality.” But, noticing Maxence,—

“M. Favoral!” he said. “By Jove! it is your good star that has brought you here. Come into the private office, my dear sir: come, we’ll have some fun now.”

Many of the people who were in the office had a word to say to M. Saint Pavin, some advice to ask him, an order to transmit, or some news to communicate. They had all stepped forward, and were holding out their hands with a friendly smile. He set them aside with his usual rudeness.

“By and by. I am busy now: leave me alone.”

And pushing Maxence towards the office-door, which he had just opened,—

“Come in, come in!” he said in a tone of extraordinary impatience.

But M. de Trégars was coming in too; and, as he did not know him,—

“What do you want, you?” he asked roughly.

“The gentleman is my best friend,” said Maxence, turning to him; “and I have no secret from him.”

“Let him walk in, then; but, by Heaven, let us hurry!”

Once very sumptuous, the private office of the editor

of "The Financial Pilot" had fallen into a state of sordid dilapidation. If the janitor had received orders never to use a broom or a duster there, he obeyed them strictly. Disorder and dirt reigned supreme. Papers and manuscripts lay in all directions; and on the broad sofas the mud from the boots of all those who had lounged upon them had been drying for months. On the mantelpiece, in the midst of some half-dozen dirty glasses, stood a bottle of Madeira, half empty. Finally, before the fireplace, on the carpet, and along the furniture, cigar and cigarette stumps were heaped in profusion.

As soon as he had bolted the door, coming straight to Maxence,—

"What has become of your father?" inquired M. Saint Pavin rudely.

Maxence started. That was the last question he expected to hear.

"I do not know," he replied.

The manager of "The Pilot" shrugged his shoulders.

"That you should say so to the commissary of police, to the judges, and to all Favoral's enemies, I understand: it is your duty. That they should believe you, I understand too; for, after all, what do they care? But to me, a friend, though you may not think so, and who has reasons not to be credulous"—

"I swear to you that we have no idea where he has taken refuge."

Maxence said this with such an accent of sincerity, that doubt was no longer possible. M. Saint Pavin's features expressed the utmost surprise.

"What!" he exclaimed, "your father has gone without securing the means of hearing from his family?"

"Yes."

"Without saying a word of his intentions to your mother, or your sister, or yourself?"

"Without one word."

"Without leaving any money, perhaps?"

"We found only an insignificant sum after he left."

The editor of "The Pilot" made a gesture of ironical admiration. "Well, the thing is complete," he said; "and Vincent is a smarter fellow than I gave him credit for; or else he must have cared more for those infernal women of his than any one supposed."

M. de Trégars, who had remained hitherto silent, now stepped forward.

"What women?" he asked.

"How do I know?" he replied roughly. "How could any one ever find out any thing about a man who was more hermetically shut up in his coat than a Jesuit in his gown?"

"M. Costeclar"—

"That's another nice bird! Still he may possibly have discovered something of Vincent's life; for he led him a pretty dance. Wasn't he about to marry Mlle. Favoral once?"

"Yes, in spite of herself even."

"Then you are right: he had discovered something. But, if you rely on him to tell you anything whatever, you are reckoning without your host."

"Who knows?" murmured M. de Trégars.

But M. Saint Pavin heard him not. Prey to a violent agitation, he was pacing up and down the room.

"Ah, those men of cold appearance," he growled, "those men with discreet countenance, those close-shaving calculators, those moralists! What fools they do make of themselves when once started! Who can im-

agine to what insane extremities this one may have been driven under the spur of some mad passion!"

And stamping violently his foot upon the carpet, from which arose clouds of dust,—

"And yet," he swore, "I must find him. And, by thunder! wherever he may be hid, I shall find him."

M. de Trégars was watching M. Saint Pavin with a scrutinizing eye.

"You have a great interest in finding him, then?" he said.

The other stopped short.

"I have the interest," he replied, "of a man who thought himself shrewd, and who has been taken in like a child,—of a man to whom they had promised wonders, and who finds his situation imperilled,—of a man who is tired of working for a band of brigands who heap millions upon millions, and to whom, for all reward, they offer the police-court and a retreat in the State Prison for his old age,—in a word, the interests of a man who will and shall have revenge, by all that is holy!"

"On whom?"

"On the Baron de Thaller, sir! How, in the world, has he been able to compel Favoral to assume the responsibility of all, and to disappear? What enormous sum has he given to him?"

"Sir," interrupted Maxence, "my father went off without a sou."

M. Saint Pavin burst out in a loud laugh.

"And the twelve millions?" he asked. "What has become of them? Do you suppose they have been distributed in deeds of charity?"

And without waiting for any further objections,—

"And yet," he went on, "it is not with money alone

that a man can be induced to disgrace himself, to confess himself a thief and a forger, to brave the galleys, to give up everything,—country, family, friends. Evidently the Baron de Thaller must have had other means of action, some hold on Favoral”—

M. de Trégars interrupted him.

“ You speak,” he said, “ as if you were absolutely certain of M. de Thaller’s complicity.”

“ Of course.”

“ Why don’t you inform on him, then? ”

The editor of “ The Pilot ” started back.

“ What ! ” he exclaimed, “ draw the fingers of the law into my own business! You don’t think of it! Besides, what good would that do me? I have no proofs of my allegations. Do you suppose that Thaller has not taken his precautions, and tied my hands? No, no! without Favoral there is nothing to be done.”

“ Do you suppose, then, that you could induce him to surrender himself? ”

“ No, but to furnish me the proofs I need, to send Thaller where they have already sent that poor Jottras.”

And, becoming more and more excited,—

“ But it is not in a month that I should want those proofs,” he went on, “ nor even in two weeks, but to-morrow, but at this very moment. Before the end of the week, Thaller will have wound up the operation, realized, Heaven knows how many millions, and put every thing in such nice order, that justice, who in financial matters is not of the first capacity, will discover nothing wrong. If he can do that, he is safe, he is beyond reach, and will be dubbed a first-class financier. Then to what may he not aspire! Already he talks of having himself elected deputy; and he says everywhere that he has

found, to marry his daughter, a gentleman who bears one of the oldest names in France,—the Marquis de Trégars.”

“Why, this is the Marquis de Trégars!” exclaimed Maxence, pointing to Marius.

For the first time, M. Saint Pavin took the trouble to examine his visitor; and he, who knew life too well not to be a judge of men, he seemed surprised.

“Please excuse me, sir,” he uttered with a politeness very different from his usual manner, “and permit me to ask you if you know the reasons why M. de Thaller is so prodigiously anxious to have you for a son-in-law.”

“I think,” replied M. de Trégars coldly, “that M. de Thaller would not be sorry to deprive me of the right to seek the causes of my father’s ruin.”

But he was interrupted by a great noise of voices in the adjoining room; and almost at once there was a loud knock at the door, and a voice called,—

“In the name of the law!”

The editor of “The Pilot” had become whiter than his shirt.

“That’s what I was afraid of,” he said. “Thaller has got ahead of me; and perhaps I may be lost.”

Meantime he did not lose his wits. Quick as thought he took out of a drawer a package of letters, threw them into the fireplace, and set fire to them, saying, in a voice made hoarse by emotion and anger,—

“No one shall come in until they are burnt.”

But it required an incredibly long time to make them catch fire; and M. Saint Pavin, kneeling before the hearth, was stirring them up, and scattering them, to make them burn faster.

“And now,” said M. de Trégars, “will you hesi-

tate to deliver up the Baron de Thaller into the hands of justice?"

He turned around with flashing eyes.

"Now," he replied, "if I wish to save myself, I must save him too. Don't you understand that he holds me?"

And, seeing that the last sheets of his correspondence were consumed,—

"You may open now," he said to Maxence.

Maxence obeyed; and a commissary of police, wearing his scarf of office, rushed into the room; whilst his men, not without difficulty, kept back the crowd in the outer office,—

The commissary, who was an old hand, and had perhaps been on a hundred expeditions of this kind, had surveyed the scene at a glance. Noticing in the fireplace the carbonized *débris*, upon which still fluttered an expiring flame,—

"That's the reason, then," he said, "why you were so long opening the door?"

A sarcastic smile appeared upon the lips of the editor of "The Pilot."

"Private matters," he replied; "women's letters."

"This will be moral evidence against you, sir."

"I prefer it to material evidence."

Without condescending to notice the impertinence, the commissary was casting a suspicious glance on Maxence and M. de Trégars.

"Who are these gentlemen who were closeted with you?" he asked.

"Visitors, sir. This is M. Favoral."

"The son of the cashier of the Mutual Credit?"

"Exactly; and this gentleman is the Marquis de Trégars."

"You should have opened the door when you heard a knocking in the name of the law," grumbled the commissary.

But he did not insist. Taking a paper from his pocket, he opened it, and, handing it to M. Saint Pavin,—

"I have orders to arrest you," he said. "Here is the warrant."

With a careless gesture, the other pushed it back.

"What's the use of reading?" he said. "When I heard of the arrest of that poor Jottras, I guessed at once what was in store for me. It is about the Mutual Credit swindle, I imagine."

"Exactly."

"I have no more to do with it than yourself, sir; and I shall have very little trouble in proving it. But that is not your business. And you are going, I suppose, to put the seals on my papers?"

"Except on those that you have burnt."

M. Saint Pavin burst out laughing. He had recovered his coolness and his impudence, and seemed as much at ease as if it were the most natural thing in the world.

"Shall I be allowed to speak to my clerks," he asked, "and to give them my instructions?"

"Yes," replied the commissary, "but in my presence."

The clerks, being called, appeared, consternation depicted upon their countenances, but joy sparkling in their eyes. In reality they were delighted at the misfortune which befell their employer.

"You see what happens to me, my boys," he said. "But don't be uneasy. In less than forty-eight hours, the error of which I am the victim will be recognized,

and I shall be liberated on bail. At any rate, I can rely upon you, can't I?"

They all swore that they would be more attentive and more zealous than ever.

And then addressing himself to his cashier, who was his confidential and right-hand man,—

"As to you, Bernard," he said, "you will run to M. de Thaller's, and advise him of what's going on. Let him have funds ready; for all our depositors will want to draw out their money at once. You will then call at the printing-office: have my article on the Mutual Credit kept out, and insert in its place some financial news cut out from other papers. Above all, don't mention my arrest, unless M. de Thaller should demand it. Go ahead, and let 'The Pilot' appear as usual: that's important."

He had, whilst speaking, lighted a cigar. The honest man, victim of human iniquity, has not a firmer and more tranquil countenance.

"Justice does not know," he said to the commissary, who was fumbling in all the drawers of the desk, "what irreparable damage she may cause by arresting so hastily a man who has charge of immense interests like me. It is the fortune of ten or twelve small capitalists that is put in jeopardy."

Already the witnesses of the arrest had retired, one by one, to go and scatter the news along the Boulevard, and also to see what could be made out of it; for, at the *bourse*, news is money.

M. de Trégars and Maxence left also. As they passed the door,—

"Don't you say any thing about what I told you," M. Saint Pavin recommended to them.

M. de Trégars made no answer. He had the con-

tracted features and tightly-drawn lips of a man who is maturing a grave determination, which, once taken will be irrevocable.

Once in the street, and when Maxence had opened the carriage-door,—

“We are going to separate here,” he told him in that brief tone of voice which reveals a settled plan. “I know enough now to venture to call at M. de Thaller’s. There only shall I be able to see how to strike the decisive blow. Return to the Rue St. Gilles, and relieve your mother’s and sister’s anxiety. You shall see me during the evening, I promise you.”

And, without waiting for an answer, he jumped into the cab, which started off.

But it was not to the Rue St. Gilles that Maxence went. He was anxious, first, to see Mlle. Lucienne, to tell her the events of that day, the busiest of his existence; to tell her his discoveries, his surprises, his anxieties, and his hopes.

To his great surprise, he failed to find her at the Hôtel des Folies. She had gone riding at three o’clock, M. Fortin told him, and had not yet returned; but she could not be much longer, as it was already getting dark. Maxence went out again then, to see if he could not meet her. He had walked a little way along the Boulevard, when, at some distance off, on the Place du Château d’Eau, he thought he noticed an unusual bustle. Almost immediately he heard shouts of terror. Frightened people were running in all directions; and right before him a carriage, going at full gallop, passed like a flash.

But, quick as it had passed, he had time to recognize Mlle. Lucienne, pale, and clinging desperately to the seat. Wild with fear, he started after it as fast as he could run. It was clear that the driver had no control

over his horses. A policeman who tried to stop them was knocked down. Ten steps farther, the hind-wheel of the carriage, catching the wheel of a heavy wagon, broke to splinters; and Mlle. Lucienne was thrown into the street, whilst the driver fell over on the sidewalk.

VI.

THE Baron de Thaller was too practical a man to live in the same house, or even in the same district, where his offices were located. To dwell in the midst of his business; to be constantly subjected to the contact of his employés, to the unkindly comments of a crowd of subordinates; to expose himself to hourly annoyances, to sickening solicitations, to the reclamations and eternal complaints of his stockholders and his clients! Pouah! He'd have given up the business first. And so, on the very days when he had established the offices of the Mutual Credit in the Rue de Quatre-Septembre, he had purchased a house in the Rue de la Pépinière, within a step of the Faubourg St. Honoré.

It was a brand-new house, which had never yet been occupied, and which had just been erected by a contractor who was almost celebrated, towards 1866, at the moment of the great transformations of Paris, when whole blocks were levelled to the ground, and rose again so rapidly, that one might well wonder whether the masons, instead of a trowel, did not make use of a magician's wand.

This contractor, named Parcimieux, had come from the Limousin in 1860, with his carpenter's tools for all fortune, and, in less than six years, had accumulated, at the lowest estimate, six millions of francs. Only he

was a modest man, and took as much pains to conceal his fortune, and offend no one, as most *parvenus* do to display their wealth, and insult the public.

Though he could hardly sign his name, yet he knew and practised the maxim of the Greek philosopher, which is, perhaps, the true secret of happiness,—hide thy life. And there were no expedients to which he did not resort to hide it. At the time of his greatest prosperity, for instance, having need of a carriage, he had applied to the manager of the Petites Voitures Company, and had had built for himself two cabs, outwardly similar in every respect to those used by the company, but within, most luxuriously upholstered, and drawn by horses of common appearance, but who could go their twenty-five miles in two hours any day. And these he had hired by the year.

Having his carriage, the worthy builder determined to have, also, his house, his own house, built by himself. But this required infinitely greater precautions still.

“For, as you may imagine,” he explained to his friends, “a man does not make as much money as I have, without also making many cruel, bitter, and irreconcilable enemies. I have against me all the builders who have not succeeded, all the sub-contractors I employ, and who say that I speculate on their poverty, and the thousands of workmen who work for me, and swear that I grind them down to the dust. Already they call me brigand, slaver, thief, leech. What would it be, if they saw me living in a beautiful house of my own? They’d swear that I could not possibly have got so rich honestly, and that I must have committed some crimes. Besides, to build me a handsome house on the street would be, in case of a mob, setting up windows for the

stones of all the rascals who have been in my employment."

Such were M. Parcimieux's thoughts, when, as he expressed it, he resolved to build.

A lot was for sale in the Rue de la Pépinière. He bought it, and at the same time purchased the adjoining house, which he immediately caused to be torn down. This operation placed in his possession a vast piece of ground, not very wide, but of great depth, stretching, as it did, back to the Rue Labaume. At once work was begun according to a plan which his architect and himself had spent six months in maturing. On the line of the street arose a house of the most modest appearance, two stories in height only, with a very high and very wide carriage-door for the passage of vehicles. This was to deceive the vulgar eye,—the outside of the cab, as it were. Behind this house, between a spacious court and a vast garden was built the residence of which M. Parcimieux had dreamed; and it really was an exceptional building both by the excellence of the materials used, and by the infinite care which presided over the minutest details. The marbles for the vestibule and the stairs were brought from Africa, Italy, and Corsica. He sent to Rome for workmen for the mosaics. The joiner and locksmithing work was intrusted to real artists.

Repeating to every one that he was working for a great foreign lord, whose orders he went to take every morning, he was free to indulge his most extravagant fancies, without fearing jests or unpleasant remarks.

Poor old man! The day when the last workman had driven in the last nail, an attack of apoplexy carried him off, without giving him time to say, "Oh!" Two days after, all his relatives from the Limousin were swooping

into Paris like a pack of wolves. Six millions to divide: what a godsend! Litigation followed, as a matter of course; and the house was offered for sale under a judgment.

M. de Thaller bought it for two hundred and seventy-five thousand francs,—about one-third what it had cost to build.

A month later he had moved into it; and the expenses which he incurred to furnish it in a style worthy of the building itself was the talk of the town. And yet he was not fully satisfied with his purchase.

Unlike M. Parcimieux, he had no wish whatever to conceal his wealth.

What! he owned one of those exquisite houses which excite at once the wonder and the envy of passers-by, and that house was hid behind such a common-looking building!

"I must have that shanty pulled down," he said from time to time.

And then he thought of something else; and the "shanty" was still standing on that evening, when, after leaving Maxence, M. de Trégars presented himself at M. de Thaller's.

The servants had, doubtless, received their instructions; for, as soon as Marius emerged from the porch of the front-house, the porter advanced from his lodge, bent double, his mouth open to his very ears by the most obsequious smile.

Without waiting for a question,—

"The baron has not yet come home," he said. "But he cannot be much longer away; and certainly the baroness is at home for my lord-marquis. Please, then, give yourself the trouble to pass."

And, standing aside, he struck upon the enormous

gong that stood near his lodge a single sharp blow, intended to wake up the footman on duty in the vestibule, and to announce a visitor of note. Slowly, but not without quietly observing every thing, M. de Trégars crossed the courtyard, covered with fine sand,—they would have powdered it with golden dust, if they had dared,—and surrounded on all sides with bronze baskets, in which beautiful rhododendrons were blossoming.

It was nearly six o'clock. The manager of the Mutual Credit dined at seven; and the preparations for this important event were everywhere apparent. Through the large windows of the dining-room the steward could be seen presiding over the setting of the table. The butler was coming up from the cellar, loaded with bottles. Finally, through the apertures of the basement arose the appetizing perfumes of the kitchen.

What enormous business it required to support such a style, to display this luxury, which would shame one of those German princelings, who exchanged the crown of their ancestors for a Prussian livery gilded with French gold!—other people's money.

Meantime, the blow struck by the porter on the gong had produced the desired effect; and the gates of the vestibule seemed to open of their own accord before M. de Trégars as he ascended the stoop.

This vestibule with the splendor of which Mlle. Lucienne had been so deeply impressed, would, indeed, have been worthy the attention of an artist, had it been allowed to retain the simple grandeur and the severe harmony which M. Parcimieux's architect had imparted to it.

But M. de Thaller, as he was proud of boasting, had a perfect horror of simplicity; and, wherever he discov-

ered a vacant space as big as his hand, he hung a picture, a bronze, or a piece of china, any thing and anyhow.

The two footmen were standing when M. de Trégars came in. Without asking any question, "Will M. le Marquis please follow me?" said the youngest.

And, opening the broad glass doors, he began walking in front of M. de Trégars, along a staircase with marble railing, the elegant proportions of which were absolutely ruined by a ridiculous profusion of "objects of art" of all nature, and from all sources. This staircase led to a vast semicircular landing, upon which, between columns of precious marble, opened three wide doors. The footman opened the middle one, which led to M. de Thaller's picture-gallery, a celebrated one in the financial world, and which had acquired for him the reputation of an enlightened amateur.

But M. de Trégars had no time to examine this gallery, which, moreover, he already knew well enough. The footman showed him into the small drawing-room of the baroness, a *bijou* of a room, furnished in gilt and crimson satin.

"Will M. le Marquis be kind enough to take a seat?" he said. "I run to notify Mme. le Baronne of M. le Marquis's visit."

The footman uttered these titles of nobility with a singular pomp, and as if some of their lustre was reflected upon himself. Nevertheless, it was evident that "Marquis" jingled to his ear much more pleasantly than "Baronne."

Remaining alone, M. de Trégars threw himself upon a seat. Worn out by the emotions of the day, and by an extraordinary contention of mind, he felt thankful for this moment of respite, which permitted him, at the mo-

ment of a decisive step, to collect all his energy and all his presence of mind.

And after two minutes he was so deeply absorbed in his thoughts, that he started, like a man suddenly aroused from his sleep, at the sound of an opening door. At the same moment he heard a slight exclamation of surprise, "Ah!"

Instead of the Baroness de Thaller, it was her daughter, Mlle. Céсарine, who had come in.

Stepping forward to the centre of the room, and acknowledging by a familiar gesture M. de Trégars' most respectful bow,—

"You should warn people," she said. "I came here to look for my mother, and it is you I find. Why, you scared me to death. What a crack! Princess dear!"

And taking the young man's hand, and pressing it to her breast,—

"Feel," she added, "how my heart beats."

Younger than Mlle. Gilberte, Mlle. Céсарine de Thaller had a reputation for beauty so thoroughly established, that to call it in question would have seemed a crime to her numerous admirers. And really she was a handsome person. Rather tall and well made, she had broad hips, the waist round and supple as a steel rod, and a magnificent throat. Her neck was, perhaps, a little too thick and too short; but upon her robust shoulders was scattered in wild ringlets the rebellious hair that escaped from her comb. She was a blonde, but of that reddish blonde, almost as dark as mahogany, which Titian admired, and which the handsome Venetians obtained by means of rather repulsive practices, and by exposing themselves to the noonday sun on the terraces of their palaces. Her complexion had the gilded hues of

amber. Her lips, red as blood, displayed as they opened, teeth of dazzling whiteness. In her large prominent eyes, of a milky blue, like the Northern skies, laughed the eternal irony of a soul that no longer has faith in any thing. More anxious of her fame than of good taste, she wore a dress of doubtful shade, puffed up by means of an extravagant *pannier*, and buttoned obliquely across the chest, according to that ridiculous and ungraceful style invented by flat or humped women.

Throwing herself upon a chair, and placing cavalierly one foot upon another, so as to display her leg, which was admirable,—

“Do you know that it’s perfectly stunning to see you here?” she said to M. de Trégars. “Just imagine, for a moment, what a face the Baron Three Francs Sixty-eight will make when he sees you!”

It was her father whom she called thus, since the day when she had discovered that there was a German coin called thaler, which represents three francs and sixty-eight centimes in French currency.

“You know, I suppose,” she went on, “that papa has just been badly stuck?”

M. de Trégars was excusing himself in vague terms; but it was one of Mlle. Cézarine’s habits never to listen to the answers which were made to her questions.

“Favoral,” she continued, “papa’s cashier, has just started on an international picnic. Did you know him?”

“Very little.”

“An old fellow, always dressed like a country sexton, and with a face like an undertaker. And the Baron Three Francs Sixty-eight, an old bird, was fool enough to be taken in by him! For he was taken in. He had a face like a man whose chimney is on fire, when he

came to tell us, mamma and myself, that Favoral had gone off with twelve millions."

"And has he really carried off that enormous sum?"

"Not entire, of course, because it was not since day before yesterday only that he began digging into the Mutual Credit's pile. There were years that this venerable old swell was leading a somewhat—variegated existence, in company with rather—funny ladies, you know. And as he was not exactly calculated to be adored at par, why, it cost papa's stockholders a pretty lively premium. But, anyhow, he must have carried off a handsome nugget."

And, bouncing to the piano, she began an accompaniment loud enough to crack the window-panes, singing at the same time the popular refrain of the "Young Ladies of Pautin:"—

"Cashier, you've got the bag;
Quick on your little nag,
And then, ho, ho, for Belgium!"

Any one but Marius de Trégars would have been doubtless strangely surprised at Mlle. de Thaller's manners. But he had known her for some time already: he was familiar with her past life, her habits, her tastes, and her pretensions. Until the age of fifteen, Mlle. Cézarine had remained shut up in one of those pleasant Parisian boarding-schools, where young ladies are initiated into the great art of the toilet, and from which they emerge armed with the gayest theories, knowing how to see without seeming to look, and to lie boldly without blushing; in a word, ripe for society. The directress of the boarding-school, a lady of the *ton*, who had met with reverses, and who was a good deal more of a dressmaker

than a teacher, said of Mlle. Césarine, who paid her three thousand five hundred francs a year,—

“She gives the greatest hopes for the future; and I shall certainly make a superior woman of her.”

But the opportunity was not allowed her. The Baroness de Thaller discovered, one morning, that it was impossible for her to live without her daughter, and that her maternal heart was lacerated by a separation which was against the sacred laws of nature. She took her home, therefore, declaring that nothing, henceforth, not even her marriage, should separate them, and that she should finish herself the education of the dear child. From that moment, in fact, whoever saw the Baroness de Thaller would also see Mlle. Césarine following in her wake.

A girl of fifteen, discreet and well-trained, is a convenient chaperon; a chaperon which enables a woman to show herself boldly where she might not have dared to venture alone. In presence of a mother followed by her daughter, disconcerted slander hesitates, and dares not speak.

Under the pretext that Césarine was still but a child, and of no consequence, Mme. de Thaller dragged her everywhere,—to the *bois* and to the races, visiting and shopping, to balls and parties, to the watering-places and the seashore, to the restaurant, and to all the “first nights” at the Palais Royal, the Bouffés, the Varietés, and the Délassements. It was, therefore, especially at the theatre, that the education of Mlle. de Thaller, so happily commenced, had received the finishing touch. At sixteen she was thoroughly familiar with the *répertoire* of the *genre* theatres, imitated Schneider far better than ever did Silly, and sang with surprising intonations and

astonishing gestures Blanche d'Autigny's successful moods, and Theresa's most wanton verses.

Between times, she studied the fashion papers, and formed her style in reading the "Vie Parisienne," whose most enigmatic articles had no allusions sufficiently obscure to escape her penetration.

She learned to ride on horseback, to fence and to shoot, and distinguished herself at pigeon-matches. She kept a betting-book, played *Trente et Quarante* at Monaco; and *Baccarat* had no secrets for her. At Trouville she astonished the natives with the startling novelty of her bathing-costumes; and, when she found herself the centre of a reasonable circle of lookers-on, she threw herself in the water with a pluck that drew upon her the applause of the bathing-masters. She could smoke a cigarette, empty nearly a glass of champagne; and once her mother was obliged to bring her home, and put her quick to bed, because she had insisted upon trying absinthe, and her conversation had become somewhat too eccentric.

Leading such a life, it was difficult that public opinion should always spare Mme. and Mlle. de Thaller. There were sceptics who insinuated that this steadfast friendship between mother and daughter had very much the appearance of the association of two women bound together by the complicity of a common secret. A broker told how, one evening, or one night rather, for it was nearly two o'clock, happening to pass in front of the Moulin-Rouge, he had seen the Baroness and Mlle. Césarine coming out, accompanied by a gentleman, to him unknown, but who, he was quite sure, was not the Baron de Thaller.

A certain journey which mother and daughter had un-

dertaken in the heart of the winter, and which had lasted not less than two months, had been generally attributed to an imprudence, the consequences of which it had become impossible to conceal. They had been in Italy, they said when they returned; but no one had seen them there. Yet, as Mme. and Mlle. de Thaller's mode of life was, after all, the same as that of a great many women who passed for being perfectly proper, as there was no positive or palpable fact brought against them, as no name was mentioned, many people shrugged their shoulders, and replied,—

“Pure slanders.”

And why not, since the Baron de Thaller, the most interested party, held himself satisfied?

To the ill-advised friends who ventured some allusions to the public rumors, he replied, according to his humor,—

“My daughter can play the mischief generally, if she sees fit. As I shall give a dowry of a million, she will always find a husband.”

Or else, “And what of it? Do not American young ladies enjoyed unlimited freedom? Are they not constantly seen going out with young gentlemen, or walking or travelling alone? Are they, for all that, less virtuous than our girls, who are kept under such close watch? Do they make less faithful wives, or less excellent mothers? Hypocrisy is not virtue.”

To a certain extent, the Manager of the Mutual Credit was right.

Already Mlle. de Thaller had had to decide upon several quite suitable offers of marriage. She had squarely refused them all.

“A husband!” she had answered each time. “Thank you, none for me. I have good enough teeth to eat up

my dowry myself. Later, we'll see,—when I've cut my wisdom teeth, and I am tired of my bachelor life."

She did not seem near getting tired of it, though she pretended that she had no more illusions, was thoroughly *blasée*, had exhausted every sensation, and that life henceforth had no surprise in reserve for her. Her reception of M. de Trégars was, therefore, one of Mlle. Césarine's least eccentricities, as was also that sudden fancy to apply to the situation one of the most idiotic rondos of her *répertoires*:—

"Cashier, you've got the bag;
Quick on your little nag."

Neither did she spare him a single verse; and, when she stopped,—

"I see with pleasure," said M. de Trégars, "that the embezzlement of which your father has just been the victim does not in any way offend your good humor."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Would you have me cry," she said, "because the stockholders of the Baron Three Francs Sixty-eight have been swindled? Console yourself: they are accustomed to it."

And, as M. de Trégars made no answer,—

"And in all that," she went on, "I see no one to pity except the wife and daughter of that old stick Favoral."

"They are, indeed, much to be pitied."

"They say that the mother is a good old thing."

"She is an excellent person."

"And the daughter? Costeclar was crazy about her once. He made eyes like a carp in love, as he told us, to mamma and myself, 'She is an angel, mesdames, an angel! And when I have given her a little *chic*!' Now tell me, is she really as good looking as all that?"

"She is quite good looking."

"Better looking than me?"

"It is not the same style, mademoiselle."

Mlle. de Thaller had stopped singing; but she had not left the piano. Half turned towards M. de Trégars, she ran her fingers listlessly over the keys, striking a note here and there, as if to punctuate her sentences.

"Ah, how nice!" she exclaimed, "and, above all, how gallant! Really, if you venture often on such declarations, mothers would be very wrong to trust you alone with their daughters."

"You did not understand me right, mademoiselle."

"Perfectly right, on the contrary. I asked you if I was better looking than Mlle. Favoral; and you replied to me, that it was not the same style."

"It is because, mademoiselle, there is indeed no possible comparison between you, who are a wealthy heiress, and whose life is a perpetual enchantment, and a poor girl, very humble, and very modest, who rides in the omnibus, and who makes her dresses herself."

A contemptuous smile contracted Mlle. Césarine's lips.

"Why not?" she interrupted. "Men have such funny tastes!"

And, turning around suddenly, she began another rondo, no less famous than the first, and borrowed, this time, from the third act of the *Petites-Blanchisseuses*:—

"What matters the quality?

Beauty alone takes the prize:

Women before man must rise,

And claim perfect equality."

Very attentively M. de Trégars was observing her. He had not been the dupe of the great surprise she had manifested when she found him in the little parlor.

"She knew I was here," he thought; "and it is her mother who has sent her to me. But why? and for what purpose?"

"With all that," she resumed, "I see the sweet Mme. Favoral and her modest daughter in a terribly tight place. What a 'bust,' marquis!"

"They have a great deal of courage, mademoiselle."

"Naturally. But, what is better, the daughter has a splendid voice: at least, so her professor told Costeclar. Why should she not go on the stage? Actresses make lots of money, you know. Papa'll help her, if she wishes. He has a great deal of influence in the theatres, papa has."

"Mme. and Mlle. Favoral have friends."

"Ah, yes! Costeclar."

"Others besides."

"I beg your pardon; but it seems to me that this one will do to begin with. He is gallant, Costeclar, extremely gallant, and, moreover, generous as a lord. Why should he not offer to that youthful and timid damsel a nice little position in mahogany and rosewood? That way, we should have the pleasure of meeting her around the lake."

And she began singing again, with a slight variation:—

"Manon, who, before the war,
Carried clothes for a living,
Now for her gains is trusting
To that insane Costeclar."

"Ah, that big red-headed girl is terribly provoking!" thought M. de Trégars.

But, as he did not as yet understand very clearly what she wished to come to, he kept on his guard, and remained cold as marble.

Already she had again turned towards him.

"What a face you are making!" she said. "Are you jealous of the fiery Costeclar, by chance?"

"No, mademoiselle, no!"

"Then, why don't you want him to succeed in his love? But he will, you'll see! Five hundred francs on Costeclar! Do you take it? No? I am sorry. It's twenty-five napoleons lost for me. I know very well that Mlle.—what's her name?"

"Gilberte."

"Halloo! a nice name for a cashier's daughter! I am aware that she once sent that poor Costeclar and his offer to—Chaillot. But she had resources then; whilst now— It's stupid as it can be; but people have to eat!"

"There are still women, mademoiselle, capable of starving to death."

M. de Trégars now felt satisfied. It seemed evident to him that they had somehow got wind of his intentions; that Mlle. de Thaller had been sent to feel the ground; and that she only attacked Mlle. Gilberte in order to irritate him, and compel him, in a moment of anger, to declare himself.

"Bash!" she said, "Mlle. Favoral is like all the others. If she had to select between the amiable Costeclar and a charcoal furnace, it is not the furnace she would take."

At all times, Marius de Trégars disliked Mlle. Céсарine to a supreme degree; but at this moment, without the pressing desire he had to see the Baron and Baroness de Thaller, he would have withdrawn.

"Believe me, mademoiselle," he uttered coldly.

"Spare a poor girl stricken by a most cruel misfortune. Worse might happen to you."

"To me! And what the mischief do you suppose can happen me?"

"Who knows?"

She started to her feet so violently, that she upset the piano-stool.

"Whatever it may be," she exclaimed, "I say in advance, I am glad!"

And as M. de Trégars turned his head in some surprise,—

"Yes, I am glad!" she repeated, "because it would be a change; and I am sick of the life I lead. Yes, sick to be eternally and invariably happy of that same dreary happiness. And to think that there are idiots who believe that I amuse myself, and who envy my fate! To think, that, when I ride through the streets, I hear girls exclaim, whilst looking at me, 'Isn't she lucky?' Little fools! I'd like to see them in my place. They live, they do. Their pleasures are not all alike. They have anxieties and hopes, ups and downs, hours of rain and hours of sunshine; whilst I—always dead calm! the barometer always at 'Set fair.' What a bore! Do you know what I did to-day? Exactly the same thing as yesterday; and to-morrow I'll do the same thing as to-day.

"A good dinner is a good thing; but always the same dinner, without extras or additions—pouah! Too many truffles. I want some corned beef and cabbage. I know the bill of fare by heart, you see. In winter, theatres and balls; in summer, races and the seashore; summer and winter, shopping, rides to the *bois*, calls, trying dresses, perpetual adoration by mother's friends, all of them brilliant and gallant fellows to whom the mere thought of my dowry gives the jaundice. Excuse me, if I yawn: I am thinking of their conversations.

"And to think," she went on, "that such will be my existence until I make up my mind to take a husband! For I'll have to come to it too. The Baron Three Sixty-eight will present to me some sort of a swell, attracted by my money. I'll answer, 'I'd just as soon have him as any other;' and he will be admitted to the honor of paying his attentions to me. Every morning he will send me a splendid bouquet: every evening, after bank-hours, he'll come along with fresh kid gloves and a white vest. During the afternoon, he and papa will pull each other's hair out on the subject of the dowry. At last the happy day will arrive. Can't you see it from here? Mass with music, dinner, ball. The Baron Three Sixty-eight will not spare me a single ceremony. The marriage of the manager of the Mutual Credit must certainly be an advertisement. The papers will publish the names of the bridesmaids and of the guests.

"To be sure, papa will have a face a yard long, because he will have been compelled to pay the dowry the day before. Mamma will be all upset at the idea of becoming a grandmother. The bridegroom will be in a wretched humor, because his boots will be too tight; and I'll look like a goose, because I'll be dressed in white; and white is a stupid color, which is not at all becoming to me. Charming family gathering, isn't it? Two weeks later, my husband will be sick of me, and I'll be disgusted with him. After a month, we'll be at daggers' points. He'll go back to his club and his mistresses; and I—I shall have conquered the right to go out alone; and I'll begin again going to the *bois*, to balls, to races, wherever my mother goes. I'll spend an enormous amount of money on my dress, and I'll make debts which papa will pay."

Though any thing might be expected of Mlle. César.

ine, still M. de Trégars seemed visibly astonished. And she, laughing at his surprise,—

“That’s the invariable programme,” she went on; “and that’s why I say I’m glad at the idea of a change, whatever it may be. You find fault with me for not pitying Mlle. Gilberte. How could I, since I envy her? She is happy, because her future is not settled, laid out, fixed in advance. She is poor; but she is free. She is twenty; she is pretty; she has an admirable voice; she can go on the stage to-morrow, and be, before six months, one of the pet actresses of Paris. What a life then! Ah, that is the one I dream, the one I would have selected, had I been mistress of my destiny.”

But she was interrupted by the noise of the opening door.

The Baroness de Thaller appeared. As she was, immediately after dinner, to go to the opera, and afterwards to a party given by the Viscountess de Bois d’Ardon, she was in full dress. She wore a dress, cut audaciously low in the neck, of very light gray satin, trimmed with bands of cherry-colored silk edged with lace. In her hair, worn high over her head, she had a bunch of fuchsias, the flexible stems of which, fastened by a large diamond star, trailed down to her very shoulders, white and smooth as marble.

But, though she forced herself to smile, her countenance was not that of festive days; and the glance which she cast upon her daughter and Marius de Trégars was laden with threats. In a voice of which she tried in vain to control the emotion,—

“How very kind of you, marquis,” she began, “to respond so soon to my invitation of this morning! I am really distressed to have kept you waiting; but I was dressing. After what has happened to M. de Thaller, it

is absolutely indispensable that I should go out, show myself: otherwise our enemies will be going around tomorrow, saying everywhere that I am in Belgium, preparing lodgings for my husband."

And, suddenly changing her tone,—

"But what was that madcap Césarine telling you?" she asked.

It was with a profound surprise that M. de Trégars discovered that the *entente cordiale* which he suspected between the mother and daughter did not exist, at least at this moment.

Veiling under a jesting tone the strange conjectures which the unexpected discovery aroused within him,—

"Mlle. Césarine," he replied, "who is much to be pitied, was telling me all her troubles."

She interrupted him.

"Do not take the trouble to tell a story, M. le Marquis," she said. "Mamma knows it as well as yourself; for she was listening at the door."

"Césarine!" exclaimed Mme. de Thaller.

"And, if she came in so suddenly, it is because she thought it was fully time to cut short my confidences."

The face of the baroness became crimson.

"The child is mad!" she said.

The child burst out laughing.

"That's my way," she went on. "You should not have sent me here by chance, and against my wish. You made me do it: don't complain. You were sure that I had but to appear, and M. de Trégars would fall at my feet. I appeared, and—you saw the effect through the keyhole, didn't you?"

Her features contracted, her eyes flashing, twisting her lace handkerchief between her fingers loaded with rings,—

"It is unheard of," said Mme. de Thaller. "She has certainly lost her head."

Dropping her mother an ironical courtesy,—

"Thanks for the compliment!" said the young lady. "Unfortunately, I never was more completely in possession of all the good sense I may boast of than I am now, dear mamma. What were you telling me a moment since? 'Run, the Marquis de Trégars is coming to ask your hand: it's all settled.' And what did I answer? 'No use to trouble myself: if, instead of one million, papa were to give me two, four millions, indeed all the millions paid by France to Prussia, M. de Trégars would not have me for a wife.'"

And, looking Marius straight in the face,—

"Am I not right, M. le Marquis?" she asked. "And isn't it a fact that you wouldn't have me at any price? Come, now, your hand upon your heart, answer."

M. de Trégars' situation was somewhat embarrassing between these two women, whose anger was equal, though it manifested itself in a different way. Evidently it was a discussion begun before, which was now continued in his presence.

"I think, mademoiselle," he began, "that you have been slandering yourself gratuitously."

"Oh, no! I swear it to you," she replied; "and, if mamma had not happened in, you would have heard much more. But that was not an answer."

And, as M. de Trégars said nothing, she turned towards the baroness,—

"Ah, ah! you see," she said. "Who was crazy,—you, or I? Ah! you imagine here that money is every thing, that every thing is for sale, and that every thing can be bought. Well, no! There are still men, who, for all the gold in the world, would not give their name

to Césarine de Thaller. It is strange; but it is so, dear mamma, and we must make up our mind to it.”

Then turning towards Marius, and bearing upon each syllable, as if afraid that the allusion might escape him,—

“The men of whom I speak,” she added, “marry the girls who can starve to death.”

Knowing her daughter well enough to be aware that she could not impose silence upon her, the Baroness de Thaller had dropped upon a chair. She was trying hard to appear indifferent to what her daughter was saying; but at every moment a threatening gesture, or a hoarse exclamation, betrayed the storm that raged within her.

“Go, on, poor foolish child!” she said, —“go on!”

And she did go on.

“Finally, were M. de Trégars willing to have me, I would refuse him myself, because, then”—

A fugitive blush colored her cheeks, her bold eyes vacillated, and, dropping her voice,—

“Because, then,” she added, “he would no longer be what he is; because I feel that fatally I shall despise the husband whom papa will buy for me. And, if I came here to expose myself to an affront which I foresaw, it is because I wanted to make sure of a fact of which a word of Costeclar, a few days ago, had given me an idea,—of a fact which you do not, perhaps, suspect, dear mother, despite your astonishing perspicacity. I wanted to find out M. de Trégars’ secret; and I have found it out.”

M. de Trégars had come to the Thaller mansion with a plan well settled in advance. He had pondered long before deciding what he would do, and what he would say, and how he would begin the decisive struggle. What

had taken place showed him the idleness of his conjectures, and, as a natural consequence, upset his plans.

To abandon himself to the chances of the hour, and to make the best possible use of them, was now the wisest thing to do.

"Give me credit, mademoiselle," he uttered, "for sufficient penetration to have perfectly well discerned your intentions. There was no need of artifice, because I have nothing to conceal. You had but to question me, I would have answered you frankly, 'Yes, it is true I love Mlle. Gilberte; and before a month she will be Marquise de Trégars.'"

Mme. de Thaller, at those words, had started to her feet, pushing back her arm-chair so violently, that it rolled all the way to the wall.

"What!" she exclaimed, "you marry Gilberte Favoral,—you!"

"I—yes."

"The daughter of a defaulting cashier, a dishonored man whom justice pursues and the galleys await!"

"Yes!" And in an accent that caused a shiver to run over the white shoulders of Mme. de Thaller,—

"Whatever may have been," he uttered, "Vincent Favoral's crime; whether he has or has not stolen, the twelve millions which are wanting from the funds of the Mutual Credit; whether he is alone guilty, or has accomplices; whether he be a knave, or a fool, an impostor, or a dupe,—Mlle. Gilberte is not responsible."

"You know the Favoral family, then?"

"Enough to make their cause henceforth my own."

The agitation of the baroness was so great, that she did not even attempt to conceal it.

"A nobody's daughter!" she said.

"I love her."

“Without a sou!”

Mlle. Césarine made a superb gesture.

“Why, that’s the very reason why a man may marry her!” she exclaimed. And, holding out her hand to M. de Trégars,—

“What you do here is well,” she added, “very well.”

There was a wild look in the eyes of the baroness.

“Mad, unhappy child!” she exclaimed. “If your father should hear!”

“And who, then, would report our conversation to him? M. de Trégars? He would not do such a thing. You? You dare not.”

Drawing herself up to her fullest height, her breast swelling with anger, her head thrown back, her eyes flashing,—

“Césarine,” ordered Mme. de Thaller, her arm extended towards the door,—“Césarine, leave the room: I command you.”

But, motionless in her place, the girl cast upon her mother a look of defiance.

“Come, calm yourself,” she said in a tone of crushing irony, “or you’ll spoil your complexion for the rest of the evening. Do I complain? do I get excited? And yet whose fault is it, if honor makes it a duty for me to cry ‘Beware!’ to an honest man who wishes to marry me? That Gilberte should get married; that she should be very happy, have many children, darn her husband’s stockings, and skim her *pot-au-feu*,—that is her part in life. Ours, dear mother,—that which you have taught me,—is to laugh and have fun, all the time, night and day, till death.”

A footman who came in interrupted her. Handing a card to Mme. de Thaller,—

"The gentleman who gave it to me," he said, "is in the large parlor."

The baroness had become very pale.

"Oh!" she said turning the card between her fingers,— "oh!"—

Then suddenly she ran out exclaiming,—

"I'll be back directly."

An embarrassing, painful silence followed, as it was inevitable that it would, the Baroness de Thaller's precipitate departure.

Mlle. Céсарine had approached the mantel-piece. She was leaning her elbow upon it, her forehead on her hand, all palpitating and excited. Intimidated for, perhaps, the first time in her life, she turned away her great blue eyes, as if afraid that they should betray a reflex of her thoughts.

As to M. de Trégars, he remained at his place, not having one whit too much of that power of self-control, which is acquired by a long experience of the world, to conceal his impressions. If he had a fault, it was certainly not self-conceit; but Mlle. de Thaller had been too explicit and too clear to leave him a doubt. All she had said could be comprised in one sentence,—

"My parents were in hopes that I would become your wife: I had judged you well enough to understand their error. Precisely because I love you, I acknowledge myself unworthy of you; and I wish you to know, that if you had asked my hand,—the hand of a girl who has a dowry of a million,—I would have ceased to esteem you."

That such a feeling should have budded and blossomed in Mlle. Céсарine's soul, withered as it was by vanity, and blunted by pleasure, was almost a miracle. It was, at any rate, an astonishing proof of love which

she gave ; and Marius de Trégars would not have been a man, if he had not been deeply moved by it.

Suddenly,—

“ What a miserable wretch I am ! ” she uttered.

“ You mean unhappy,” said M. de Trégars gently.

“ What can you think of my sincerity ? You must, doubtless, find it strange, impudent, grotesque.”

He lifted his hand in protest ; for she gave him no time to put in a word.

“ And yet,” she went on, “ this is not the first time that I am assailed by sinister ideas, and that I feel ashamed of myself. I was convinced once that this mad existence of mine is the only enviable one, the only one that can give happiness. And now I discover that it is not the right path which I have taken, or, rather, which I have been made to take. And there is no possibility of retracing my steps.”

She turned pale, and, in an accent of gloomy despair,—

“ Every thing fails me,” she said. “ It seems as though I were rolling into a bottomless abyss, without a branch or a tuft of grass to cling to. Around me, emptiness, night, chaos. I am not yet twenty ; and it seems to me that I have lived thousands of years, and exhausted every sensation. I have seen every thing, learned every thing, experienced every thing ; and I am tired of every thing, and satiated and nauseated. You see me looking like a brainless hoyden. I sing, I jest, I talk slang. My gayety surprises everybody. In reality, I am literally tired to death. What I feel I could not express ; there are no words to render absolute disgust. Sometimes I say to myself, ‘ It is stupid to be so sad. What do you need ? Are you not young, handsome, rich ? ’ But I must need something, or else

I would not be thus agitated, nervous, anxious, unable to stay in one place, tormented by confused aspirations, and by desires which I cannot formulate. What can I do? Seek oblivion in pleasure and dissipation? I try, and I succeed for an hour or so; but the re-action comes, and the effect vanishes, like froth from champagne. The lassitude returns; and, whilst outwardly I continue to laugh, I shed within tears of blood which scald my heart. What is to become of me, without a memory in the past, or a hope in the future, upon which to rest my thought?"

And bursting into tears,—

"Oh, I am wretchedly unhappy!" she exclaimed; "and I wish I was dead."

M. de Trégars rose, feeling more deeply moved than he would, perhaps, have liked to acknowledge.

"I was laughing at you only a moment since," he said in his grave and vibrating voice. "Pardon me, mademoiselle. It is with the utmost sincerity, and from the innermost depths of my soul, that I pity you."

She was looking at him with an air of timid doubt, big tears trembling between her long eyelashes.

"Honest?" she asked.

"Upon my honor."

"And you will not go with too poor an opinion of me?"

"I shall retain the firm belief that when you were yet but a child, you were spoiled by insane theories."

Gently and sadly she was passing her hand over her forehead.

"Yes, that's it," she murmured. "How could I resist examples coming from certain persons? How could I help becoming intoxicated when I saw myself, as it were, in a cloud of incense when I heard nothing but

praises and applause? And then there is the money, which depraves when it comes in a certain way."

She ceased to speak; but the silence was soon again broken by a slight noise, which came from the adjoining room.

Mechanically, M. de Trégars looked around him. The little parlor in which he found himself was divided from the main drawing-room of the house by a tall and broad door, closed only by heavy curtains, which had remained partially drawn. Now, such was the disposition of the mirrors in the two rooms, that M. de Trégars could see almost the whole of the large one reflected in the mirror over the mantelpiece of the little parlor. A man of suspicious appearance, and wearing wretched clothes, was standing in it.

And, the more M. de Trégars examined him, the more it seemed to him that he had already seen somewhere that uneasy countenance, that anxious glance, that wicked smile flitting upon flat and thin lips.

But suddenly the man bowed very low. It was probable that Mme. de Thaller, who had gone around through the hall to reach the grand parlor, must be coming in; and in fact she almost immediately appeared within the range of the glass. She seemed much agitated; and, with a finger upon her lips, she was recommending to the man to be prudent, and to speak low. It was therefore in a whisper, and such a low whisper that not even a vague murmur reached the little parlor, that the man uttered a few words.

They were such that the baroness started back as if she had seen a precipice yawning at her feet; and by this action it was easy to understand that she must have said,—

"Is it possible?"

With the voice which still could not be heard, but with a gesture which could be seen, the man evidently replied,—

“It is so, I assure you!”

And leaning towards Mme. de Thaller, who seemed in no wise shocked to feel this repulsive personage's lips almost touching her ear, he began speaking to her.

The surprise which this species of vision caused to M. de Trégars was great, but did not keep him from reflecting what could be the meaning of this scene. How came this suspicious-looking man to have obtained access, without difficulty, into the grand parlor? Why had the baroness, on receiving his card, turned whiter than the laces on her dress? What news had he brought, which had made such a deep impression? What was he saying that seemed at once to terrify and to delight Mme. de Thaller?

But soon she interrupted the man, beckoned to him to wait, disappeared for a minute; and, when she came in again, she held in her hand a package of bank-notes, which she began counting upon the parlor-table.

She counted twenty-five, which, so far as M. de Trégars could judge, must have been hundred-franc notes. The man took them, counted them over, slipped them into his pocket with a grin of satisfaction, and then seemed disposed to retire.

The baroness detained him, however; and it was she now, who, leaning towards him, commenced to explain to him, or rather, as far as her attitude showed, to ask him something. It must have been a serious matter; for he shook his head, and moved his arms, as if he meant to say, “The deuse, the deuse!”

The strangest suspicions flashed across M. de Trégars' mind. What was that bargain to which the mirror made

him thus an accidental witness? For it was a bargain: there could be no mistake about it. The man, having received a mission, had fulfilled it, and had come to receive the price of it. And now a new commission was offered to him.

But M. de Trégars' attention was now called off by Mlle. Césarine. Shaking off the torpor which for a moment had overpowered her,—

"But why fret and worry?" she said, answering, rather, the objections of her own mind than addressing herself to M. de Trégars. "Things are just as they are, and I cannot undo them.

"Ah! if the mistakes of life were like soiled clothes, which are allowed to accumulate in a wardrobe, and which are all sent out at once to the wash. But nothing washes the past, not even repentance, whatever they may say. There are some ideas which should be set aside. A prisoner should not allow himself to think of freedom.

"And yet," she added, shrugging her shoulders, "a prisoner has always the hope of escaping; whereas I"—

Then, making a visible effort to resume her usual manner,—

"Bash!" she said, "that's enough sentiment for one day; and instead of staying here, boring you to death, I ought to go and dress; for I am going to the opera with my sweet mamma, and afterwards to the ball. You ought to come. I am going to wear a stunning dress. The ball is at Mme. de Bois d'Ardon's,—one of our friends, a progressive woman. She has a smoking-room for ladies. What do you think of that? Come, will you go? We'll drink champagne, and we'll laugh. No Zut then, and my compliments to your family."

But, at the moment of leaving the room, her heart failed her.

"This is doubtless the last time I shall ever see you, M. de Trégars," she said. "Farewell! You know now why I, who have a dowry of a million, I envy Gilberte Favoral. Once more farewell. And, whatever happiness may fall to your lot in life, remember that Césarine has wished it all to you."

And she went out at the very moment when the Baroness de Thaller returned.

VII.

"CESARINE!" Mme. de Thaller called, in a voice which sounded at once like a prayer and a threat.

"I am going to dress myself, mamma," she answered.

"Come back!"

"So that you can scold me if I am not ready when you want to go? Thank you, no."

"I command you to come back, Césarine."

No answer. She was far already.

Mme. de Thaller closed the door of the little parlor, and returning to take a seat by M. de Trégars,—

"What a singular girl!" she said.

Meantime he was watching in the glass what was going on in the other room. The suspicious-looking man was there still, and alone. A servant had brought him pen, ink and paper; and he was writing rapidly.

"How is it that they leave him there alone?" wondered Marius.

And he endeavored to find upon the features of the baroness an answer to the confused presentiments which

agitated his brain. But there was no longer any trace of the emotion which she had manifested when taken unawares. Having had time for reflection, she had composed for herself an impenetrable countenance. Somewhat surprised at M. de Trégars' silence,—

"I was saying," she repeated, "that Césarine is a strange girl."

Still absorbed by the scene in the grand parlor,—

"Strange, indeed!" he answered.

"And such is," said the baroness with a sigh, "the result of M. de Thaller's weakness, and above all of my own."

"Ah!"

"We have no child but Césarine; and it was natural that we should spoil her. Her fancy has been, and is still, our only law. She has never had time to express a wish: she is obeyed before she has spoken."

She sighed again, and deeper than the first time.

"You have just seen," she went on, "the results of that insane education. And yet it would not do to trust appearances. Césarine, believe me, is not as extravagant as she seems. She possesses solid qualities,—of those which a man expects of the woman who is to be his wife."

Without taking his eyes off the glass,—

"I believe you madame," said M. de Trégars.

"With her father, with me especially, she is capricious, wilful, and violent; but, in the hands of the husband of her choice, she would be like wax in the hands of the modeller."

The man in the parlor had finished his letter, and, with an equivocal smile, was reading it over.

"Believe me, madame," replied M. de Trégars, "I

have perfectly understood how much *naïve* boasting there was in all that Mlle. Céсарine told me."

"Then, really, you do not judge her too severely?"

"Your heart has not more indulgence for her than my own."

"And yet it is from you that her first real sorrow comes."

"From me?"

The baroness shook her head in a melancholy way, to convey an idea of her maternal affection and anxiety.

"Yes, from you, my dear marquis," she replied,—
"from you alone. On the very day you entered this house, Céсарine's whole nature changed."

Having read his letter over, the man in the grand parlor had folded it, and slipped it into his pocket, and, having left his seat, seemed to be waiting for something. M. de Trégars was following, in the glass, his every motion, with the most eager curiosity. And nevertheless, as he felt the absolute necessity of saying something, were it only to avoid attracting the attention of the baroness,—

"What!" he said, "Mlle. Céсарine's nature did change, then?"

"In one night. Had she not met the hero of whom every girl dreams?—a man of thirty, bearing one of the oldest names in France."

She stopped, expecting an answer, a word, an exclamation. But, as M. de Trégars said nothing,—

"Did you never notice any thing then?" she asked.

"Nothing."

"And suppose I were to tell you myself, that my poor Céсарine, alas!—loves you?"

M. de Trégars started. Had he been less occupied with the personage in the grand parlor, he would certainly not have allowed the conversation to drift in this channel. He understood his mistake; and, in an icy tone,—

“Permit me, madame,” he said, “to believe that you are jesting.”

“And suppose it were the truth.”

“It would make me unhappy in the extreme.”

“Sir!”

“For the reason which I have already told you, that I love Mlle. Gilberte Favoral with the deepest and the purest love, and that for the past three years she has been, before God, my affianced bride.”

Something like a flash of anger passed over Mme. de Thaller’s eyes.

“And I,” she exclaimed,—“I tell you that this marriage is senseless.”

“I wish it were still more so, that I might the better show to Gilberte how dear she is to me.”

Calm in appearance, the baroness was scratching with her nails the satin of the chair on which she was sitting.

“Then,” she went on, “your resolution is settled.”

“Irrevocably.”

“Still, now, come, between us who are no longer children, suppose M. de Thaller were to double Césarine’s dowry, to treble it?”

An expression of intense disgust contracted the manly features of Marius de Trégars.

“Ah! not another word, madame,” he interrupted.

There was no hope left. Mme. de Thaller fully realized it by the tone in which he spoke. She remained pensive for over a minute, and suddenly, like a person who has finally made up her mind, she rang.

A footman appeared.

"Do what I told you!" she ordered.

And as soon as the footman had gone, turning to M. de Trégars,—

"Alas!" she said, "who would have thought that I would curse the day when you first entered our house?"

But, whilst she spoke, M. de Trégars noticed in the glass the result of the order she had just given.

The footman walked into the grand parlor, spoke a few words; and at once the man with the alarming countenance put on his hat and went out.

"This is very strange!" thought M. de Trégars.

Meantime, the baroness was going on,—

"If your intentions are to that point irrevocable, how is it that you are here? You have too much experience of the world not to have understood, this morning, the object of my visit and of my allusions."

Fortunately, M. de Trégars' attention was no longer drawn by the proceedings in the next room. The decisive moment had come: the success of the game he was playing would, perhaps, depend upon his coolness and self-command.

"It is because I did understand, madame, and even better than you suppose, that I am here."

"Indeed!"

"I came, expecting to deal with M. de Thaller alone. I have been compelled, by what has happened, to alter my intentions. It is to you that I must speak first."

Mme. de Thaller continued to manifest the same tranquil assurance; but she stood up. Feeling the approach of the storm, she wished to be up, and ready to meet it.

"You honor me," she said with an ironical smile.

There was, henceforth, no human power capable of

turning Marius de Trégars from the object he had in view.

"It is to you I shall speak," he repeated, "because, after you have heard me, you may perhaps judge that it is your interest to join me in endeavoring to obtain from your husband what I ask, what I demand, what I must have."

With an air of surprise marvellously well simulated, if it was not real, the baroness was looking at him.

"My father," he proceeded to say, "the Marquis de Trégars, was once rich: he had several millions. And yet when I had the misfortune of losing him, three years ago, he was so thoroughly ruined, that to relieve the scruples of his honor, and to make his death easier, I gave up to his creditors all I had in the world. What had become of my father's fortune? What filter had been administered to him to induce him to launch into hazardous speculations,—he, an old Breton gentleman, full, even to absurdity, of the most obstinate prejudices of the nobility? That's what I wished to ascertain."

"Ah!"

"And now, madame, I—have ascertained."

She was a strong-minded woman, the Baroness de Thaller. She had had so many adventures in her life, she had walked on the very edge of so many precipices, concealed so many anxieties, that danger was, as it were, her element, and that, at the decisive moment of an almost desperate game, she could remain smiling like those old gamblers whose face never betrays their terrible emotion at the moment when they risk their last stake. Not a muscle of her face moved; and it was with the most imperturbable calm that she said,—

"Go on, I am listening: it must be quite interesting."

That was not the way to propitiate M. de Trégars. He resumed, in a brief and harsh tone,—

“When my father died, I was young. I did not know then what I have learned since,—that to contribute to insure the impunity of knaves is almost to make one's self their accomplice. And the victim who says nothing and submits, does contribute to it. The honest man, on the contrary, should speak, and point out to others the trap into which he has fallen, that they may avoid it.”

The baroness was listening with the air of a person who is compelled by politeness to hear a tiresome story.

“That is a rather gloomy preamble,” she said.

M. de Trégars took no notice of the interruption.

“At all times,” he went on, “my father seemed careless of his affairs: that affectation, he thought, was due to the name he bore. But his negligence was only apparent. I might mention things of him that would do honor to the most methodical tradesman. He had, for instance, the habit of preserving all the letters of any importance which he received. He left twelve or fifteen boxes full of such. They were carefully classified; and many bore upon their margin a few notes indicating what answer had been made to them.”

Half suppressing a yawn,—

“That is order,” said the baroness, “if I know any thing about it.”

“At the first moment, determined not to stir up the past, I attached no importance to those letters; and they would certainly have been burnt, but for an old friend of the family, the Count de Villegré, who had them carried to his own house. But later, acting under the influence of circumstances which it would be too long

to explain to you, I regretted my apathy ; and I thought that I should, perhaps, find in that correspondence something to either dissipate or justify certain suspicions which had occurred to me."

"So that, like a respectful son, you read it?"

M. de Trégars bowed ceremoniously.

"I believe," he said, "that to avenge a father of the imposture of which he was the victim during his life, is to render homage to his memory. Yes, madame, I read the whole of that correspondence, and with an interest which you will readily understand. I had already, and without result, examined the contents of several boxes, when in the package marked 1852, a year which my father spent in Paris, certain letters attracted my attention. They were written upon coarse paper, in a very primitive handwriting and wretchedly spelt. They were signed sometimes Phrasie, sometimes Marquise de Javelle. Some gave the address, 'Rue des Bergers, No. 3, Paris-Grenelle.'

"Those letters left me no doubt upon what had taken place. My father had met a young working-girl of rare beauty: he had taken a fancy to her; and, as he was tormented by the fear of being loved for his money alone, he had passed himself off for a poor clerk in one of the departments."

"Quite a touching little love-romance," remarked the baroness.

But there was no impertinence 'that could affect Marius de Trégars' coolness.

"A romance, perhaps," he said, "but in that case a money-romance, not a love-romance. This Phrasie, or Marquise de Javelle, announces in one of her letters, that in February, 1853, she has given birth to a daughter, whom she has confided to some relatives of hers in the

south, near Toulouse. It was doubtless that event which induced my father to acknowledge who he was. He confesses that he is not a poor clerk, but the Marquis de Trégars, having an income of over a hundred thousand francs. At once the tone of the correspondence changes. The Marquise de Javelle has a stupid time where she lives; the neighbors reproach her with her fault; work spoils her pretty hands. Result: less than two weeks after the birth of her daughter, my father hires for his pretty mistress a lovely apartment, which she occupies under the name of Mme. Devil; she is allowed fifteen hundred francs a month, servants, horses, carriage."

Mme. de Thaller was giving signs of the utmost impatience. Without paying any attention to them, M. de Trégars proceeded,—

"Henceforth free to see each other daily, my father and his mistress cease to write. But Mme. Devil does not waste her time. During a space of less than eight months, from February to September, she induces my father to dispose—not in her favor, she is too disinterested for that, but in favor of her daughter—of a sum exceeding five hundred thousand francs. In September, the correspondence is resumed. Mme. Devil discovers that she is not happy, and acknowledges it in a letter, which shows, by its improved writing and more correct spelling, that she has been taking lessons.

"She complains of her precarious situation: the future frightens her: she longs for respectability. Such is, for three months, the constant burden of her correspondence. She regrets the time when she was a working-girl: why has she been so weak? Then, at last, in a note which betrays long debates and stormy discussions, she announces that she has an unexpected offer of marriage; a fine fellow, who, if she only had two hundred

thousand francs, would give his name to herself and to her darling little daughter. For a long time my father hesitates; but she presses her point with such rare skill, she demonstrates so conclusively that this marriage will insure the happiness of their child, that my father yields at last, and resigns himself to the sacrifice. And in a memorandum on the margin of a last letter, he states that he has just given two hundred thousand francs to Mme. Devil; that he will never see her again; and that he returns to live in Brittany, where he wishes, by the most rigid economy, to repair the breach he has just made in his fortune."

"Thus end all these love-stories," said Mme. de Thaller in a jesting tone.

"I beg your pardon: this one is not ended yet. For many years, my father kept his word, and never left our homestead of Trégars. But at last he grew tired of his solitude, and returned to Paris. Did he seek to see his former mistress again? I think not. I suppose that chance brought them together; or else, that, being aware of his return, she managed to put herself in his way. He found her more fascinating than ever, and, according to what she wrote him, rich and respected; for her husband had become a personage. She would have been perfectly happy, she added, had it been possible for her to forget the man whom she had once loved so much, and to whom she owed her position.

"I have that letter. The elegant hand, the style, and the correct orthography, express better than any thing else the transformations of the Marquise de Javelle. Only it is not signed. The little working-girl has become prudent: she has much to lose, and fears to compromise herself.

"A week later, in a laconic note, apparently dictated

by an irresistible passion, she begs my father to come to see her at her own house. He does so, and finds there a little girl, whom he believes to be his own child, and whom he at once begins to idolize.

"And that's all. Again he falls under the charm. He ceases to belong to himself: his former mistress can dispose, at her pleasure, of his fortune and of his fate.

"But see now what bad luck! The husband takes a notion to become jealous of my father's visits. In a letter which is a masterpiece of diplomacy, the lady explains her anxiety. 'He has suspicions,' she writes; 'and to what extremities might he not resort, were he to discover the truth!' And with infinite art she insinuates that the best way to justify his constant presence is to associate himself with that jealous husband.

"It is with childish haste that my father jumps at the suggestion. But money is needed. He sells his lands, and everywhere announces that he has great financial ideas, and that he is going to increase his fortune tenfold.

"There he is now, partner of his former mistress's husband, engaged in speculations, director of a company. He thinks that he is doing an excellent business: he is convinced that he is making lots of money. Poor honest man! They prove to him, one morning, that he is ruined, and, what is more, compromised. And this is made to look so much like the truth, that I interfere myself, and pay the creditors. We were ruined; but honor was safe. A few weeks later, my father died broken-hearted."

Mme. de Thaller half rose from her seat with a gesture which indicated the joy of escaping at last a merciless bore. A glance from M. de Trégars riveted her

to her seat, freezing upon her lips the jest she was about to utter.

"I have not done yet," he said rudely.

And, without suffering any interruption,—

"From this correspondence," he resumed, "resulted the flagrant, irrefutable proof of a shameful intrigue, long since suspected by my old friend, General Count de Villegre. It became evident to me that my poor father had been most shamefully imposed upon by that mistress, so handsome and so dearly loved, and, later, despoiled, by the husband of that mistress. But all this availed me nothing. Being ignorant of my father's life and connections, the letters giving neither a name nor a precise detail, I knew not whom to accuse. Besides, in order to accuse, it is necessary to have, at least, some material proof."

The baroness had resumed her seat; and every thing about her—her attitude, her gestures, the motion of her lips—seemed to say,—

"You are my guest. Civility has its demands; but really you abuse your privileges."

M. de Trégars went on,—

"At this moment I was still a sort of savage, wholly absorbed in my experiments, and scarcely ever setting foot outside my laboratory. I was indignant; I ardently wished to find and to punish the villains who had robbed us: but I knew not how to go about it, nor in what direction to seek information. The wretches would, perhaps, have gone unpunished, but for a good and worthy man, now a commissary of police, to whom I once rendered a slight service, one night, in a riot, when he was close pressed by some half-dozen rascals. I explained the situation to him: he took much interest

in it, promised his assistance, and marked out my line of conduct."

Mme. de Thaller seemed restless upon her seat.

"I must confess," she began, "that I am not wholly mistress of my time. I am dressed, as you see: I have to go out."

If she had preserved any hope of adjourning the explanation which she felt coming, she must have lost it when she heard the tone in which M. de Trégars interrupted her.

"You can go out to-morrow."

And, without hurrying,—

"Advised, as I have just told you," he continued, "and assisted by the experience of a professional man, I went first to No. 3, Rue des Bergers, in Grenelle. I found there some old people, the foreman of a neighboring factory and his wife, who had been living in the house for nearly twenty-five years. At my first question, they exchanged a glance, and commenced laughing. They remembered perfectly the Marquise de Javelle, which was but a nickname for a young and pretty laundress, whose real name was Euphrasie Taponnet. She had lived for eighteen months on the same landing as themselves: she had a lover, who passed himself off for a clerk, but who was, in fact, she had told them, a very wealthy nobleman. They added that she had given birth to a little girl, and that, two weeks later she had disappeared, and they had never heard a word from her. When I left them, they said to me, 'If you see Phrasie, ask her if she ever knew old Chandour and his wife. I am sure she'll remember us.'"

For the first time Mme. de Thaller shuddered slightly; but it was almost imperceptible.

"From Grenelle," continued M. de Trégars, "I went to the house where my father's mistress had lived under the name of Mme. Devil. I was in luck. I found there the same *concierge* as in 1853. As soon as I mentioned Mme. Devil, she answered me that she had not in the least forgotten her, but, on the contrary, would know her among a thousand. She was, she said, one of the prettiest little women she had ever seen, and the most generous tenant. I understood the hint, handed her a couple of napoleons, and heard from her every thing she knew on the subject. It seemed that this pretty Mme. Devil had, not one lover, but two,—the acknowledged one, who was the master, and footed the bills; and the other an anonymous one, who went out through the back-stairs, and who did not pay, on the contrary. The first was called the Marquis de Trégars: of the second, she had never known but the first name, Frederic. I tried to ascertain what had become of Mme. Devil; but the worthy *concierge* swore to me that she did not know.

"One morning, like a person who is going abroad, or who wishes to cover up her tracks, Mme. Devil had sent for a furniture-dealer, and a dealer in second-hand clothes, and had sold them every thing she had, going away with nothing but a little leather satchel, in which were her jewels and her money."

The Baroness de Thaller still kept a good countenance. After examining her for a moment, with a sort of eager curiosity, Marius de Trégars went on,—

"When I communicated this information to my friend, the commissary of police, he shook his head. 'Two years ago,' he told me, 'I would have said, That's more than we want to find those people; for the public records would have given us at once the key of this enigma. But we have had the war and the Commune; and

the books of record have been burnt up. Still we must not give up. A last hope remains ; and I know the man who is capable of realizing it.'

"Two days after, he brought me an excellent fellow, named Victor Chupin, in whom I could have entire confidence ; for he was recommended to me by one of the men whom I like and esteem the most, the Duke de Champdoce. Giving up all idea of applying at the various mayors' offices, Victor Chupin, with the patience and the tenacity of an Indian following a scent, began beating about the districts of Grenelle, Vargirard, and the Invalids. And not in vain ; for, after a week of investigations he brought me a nurse, residing Rue de l'Université, who remembered perfectly having once attended, on the occasion of her confinement, a remarkably pretty young woman, living in the Rue des Bergers, and nicknamed the Marquise de Javelle. And as she was a very orderly woman, who at all times had kept a very exact account of her receipts, she brought me a little book in which I read this entry : 'For attending Euphrasie Taponnet, *alias* the Marquise de Javelle (a girl), one hundred francs.' And this is not all. This woman informed me, moreover, that she had been requested to present the child at the mayor's office, and that she had been duly registered there under the names of Euphrasie Cézarine Taponnet, born of Euphrasie Taponnet, laundress, and an unknown father. Finally she placed at my disposal her account-book and her testimony."

Taxed beyond measure, the energy of the baroness was beginning to fail her ; she was turning livid under her rice-powder. Still in the same icy tone,—

"You can understand, madame," said Marius de Trégars, "that this woman's testimony, together with

the letters which are in my possession, enables me to establish before the courts the exact date of the birth of a daughter whom my father had of his mistress. But that's nothing yet. With renewed zeal, Victor Chupin had resumed his investigations. He had undertaken the examination of the marriage-registers in all the parishes of Paris, and, as early as the following week, he discovered at Notre Dame des Lorettes the entry of the marriage of Euphrasie Taponnet with Frederic de Thaller."

Though she must have expected that name, the baroness started up violently and livid, and with a haggard look.

"It's false!" she began in a choking voice.

A smile of ironical pity passed over Marius' lips.

"Five minutes' reflection will prove to you that it is useless to deny," he interrupted. "But wait. In the books of that same church, Victor Chupin has found registered the baptism of a daughter of M. and Mme de Thaller, bearing the same names as the first one,—Euphrasie Césarine."

With a convulsive motion the baroness shrugged her shoulder.

"What does all that prove?" she said.

"That proves, madame, the well-settled intention of substituting one child for another; that proves that my father was imprudently deceived when he was made to believe that the second Césarine was his daughter, the daughter in whose favor he had formerly disposed of over five hundred thousand francs; that proves that there is somewhere in the world a poor girl who has been basely forsaken by her mother, the Marquise de Javelle, now become the Baroness de Thaller."

Beside herself with terror and anger,—

"That is an infamous lie!" exclaimed the baroness. M. de Trégars bowed.

"The evidence of the truth of my statements," he said, "I shall find at Louveciennes, and at the Hôtel des Folies, Boulevard du Temple, Paris."

Night had come. A footman came in carrying lamps, which he placed upon the mantelpiece. He was not all together one minute in the little parlor; but that one minute was enough to enable the Marquise de Thaller to recover her coolness, and to collect her ideas. When the footman retired, she had made up her mind, with the resolute promptness of a person accustomed to perilous situations. She gave up the discussion, and, drawing near to M. de Trégars,—

"Enough allusions," she said: "let us speak frankly, and face to face now. What do you want?"

But the change was too sudden not to arouse Marius's suspicions.

"I want a great many things," he replied.

"Still you must specify."

"Well, I claim first the five hundred thousand francs which my father had settled upon his daughter,—the daughter whom you cast off."

"And what next?"

"I want besides, my own and my father's fortune, of which we have been robbed by M. de Thaller, with your assistance, madame."

"Is that all, at least?"

M. de Trégars shook his head.

"That's nothing yet," he replied.

"Oh!"

"We have now to say something of Vincent Favoral's affairs."

An attorney who is defending the interests of a client

is neither calmer nor cooler than Mme. de Thaller at this moment.

"Do the affairs of my husband's cashier concern me, then?" she said with a shade of irony.

"Yes, madame, very much."

"I am glad to hear it."

"I know it from excellent sources, because, on my return from Louveciennes, I called in the Rue du Cirque, where I saw one Zélie Cadelle."

He thought that the baroness would at least start on hearing that name. Not at all. With a look of profound astonishment,—

"Rue du Cirque," she repeated, like a person who is making a prodigious effort of memory,—*"Rue du Cirque! Zélie Cadelle! Really, I do not understand."*

But, from the glance which M. de Trégars cast upon her, she must have understood that she would not easily draw from him the particulars which he had resolved not to tell.

"I believe, on the contrary," he uttered, "that you understand perfectly."

"Be it so, if you insist upon it. What do you ask for Favoral?"

"I demand, not for Favoral, but for the stockholders who have been impudently defrauded, the twelve millions which are missing from the funds of the Mutual Credit."

Mme. de Thaller burst out laughing.

"Only that?" she said.

"Yes, only that!"

"Well, then, it seems to me that you should present your reclamations to M. Favoral himself. You have the right to run after him."

"It is useless, for the reason that it is not he, the poor fool! who has carried off the twelve millions."

"Who is it, then?"

"M. le Baron de Thaller, no doubt."

With that accent of pity which one takes to reply to an absurd proposition,—“You are mad, my poor marquis,” said Mme. de Thaller.

"You do not think so."

"But suppose I should refuse to do any thing more?"

He fixed upon her a glance in which she could read an irrevocable determination; and slowly,—

"I have a perfect horror of scandal," he replied, "and, as you perceive, I am trying to arrange every thing quietly between us. But, if I do not succeed thus, I must appeal to the courts"

"Where are your proofs?"

"Don't be afraid: I have proofs to sustain all my allegations."

The baroness had stretched herself comfortably in her arm-chair,

"May we know them?" she inquired.

Marius was getting somewhat uneasy in presence of Mme. de Thaller's imperturbable assurance. What hope had she? Could she see some means of escape from a situation apparently so desperate? Determined to prove to her that all was lost, and that she had nothing to do but to surrender,—

"Oh! I know, madame," he replied, "that you have taken your precautions. But, when Providence interferes, you see, human foresight does not amount to much. See, rather, what happens in regard to your first daughter,—the one you had when you were still only Marquise de Javelle."

And briefly he called to her mind the principal incidents of Mlle. Lucienne's life from the time that she had left her with the poor gardeners at Louveciennes, without giving either her name or her address,— the injury she had received by being run over by Mme. de Thaller's carriage; the long letter she had written from the hospital, begging for assistance; her visit to the house, and her meeting with the Baron de Thaller; the effort to induce her to emigrate to America; her arrest by means of false information, and her escape, thanks to the kind peace-officer; the attempt upon her life as she was going home late one night; and, finally, her imprisonment after the Commune, among the *petroleuses*, and her release through the interference of the same honest friend."

And, charging her with the responsibility of all these infamous acts, he paused for an answer or a protest.

And, as Mme. de Thaller said nothing,—

"You are looking at me, madame, and wondering how I have discovered all that. A single word will explain it all. The peace-officer who saved your daughter is precisely the same to whom it was once my good fortune to render a service. By comparing notes, we have gradually reached the truth,—reached you, madame. Will you acknowledge now that I have *more* proofs than are necessary to apply to the courts?"

Whether she acknowledged it or not, she *did* not condescend to discuss.

"What then?" she said coldly.

But M. de Trégars was too much on his guard to expose himself, by continuing to speak thus, to reveal the secret of his designs.

Besides, whilst he was thoroughly satisfied as to the

manœuvres used to defraud his father he had, as yet, but presumptions on what concerned Vincent Favoral.

"Permit me not to say another word, madame," he replied. "I have told you enough to enable you to judge of the value of my weapons."

She must have felt that she could not make him change his mind, for she rose to go.

"That is sufficient," she uttered. "I shall reflect; and to-morrow I shall give you an answer."

She started to go; but M. de Trégars threw himself quickly between her and the door.

"Excuse me," he said; "but it is not to-morrow that I want an answer: it is to-night, this instant!"

Ah, if she could have annihilated him with a look.

"Why, this is violence," she said in a voice which betrayed the incredible effort she was making to control herself.

"It is imposed upon me by circumstances, madame."

"You would be less exacting, if my husband were here."

He must have been within hearing; for suddenly the door opened, and he appeared upon the threshold.

There are people for whom the unforeseen does not exist, and whom no event can disconcert. Having ventured every thing, they expect every thing. Such was the Baron de Thaller. With a sagacious glance he examined his wife and M. de Trégars; and in a cordial tone,—

"We are quarreling here?" he said.

"I am glad you have come!" exclaimed the baroness.

"What is the matter?"

"The matter is, that M. de Trégars is endeavoring to

take an odious advantage of some incidents of our past life."

"There's woman's exaggeration for you!" he said laughing.

And, holding out his hand to Marius,—

"Let me make your peace for you, my dear marquis," he said: "that's within the province of the husband."

But, instead of taking his extended hand, M. de Trégars stepped back.

"There is no more peace possible, sir, I am an enemy."

"An enemy!" he repeated in a tone of surprise which was wonderfully well assumed, if it was not real.

"Yes," interrupted the baroness; "and I must speak to you at once, Frederic. Come: M. de Trégars will wait for you."

And she led her husband into the adjoining room, not without first casting upon Marius a look of burning and triumphant hatred.

Left alone, M. de Trégars sat down. Far from annoying him, this sudden intervention of the manager of the Mutual Credit seemed to him a stroke of fortune. It spared him an explanation more painful still than the first, and the unpleasant necessity of having to confound a villain by proving his infamy to him.

"And besides," he thought, "when the husband and the wife have consulted with each other, they will acknowledge that they cannot resist, and that it is best to surrender." The deliberation was brief. In less than ten minutes, M. de Thaller returned alone. He was pale; and his face expressed well the grief of an honest man who discovers too late that he has misplaced his confidence.

"My wife has told me all, sir," he began.

M. de Trégars had risen. "Well?" he asked.

"You see me distressed. Ah, M. le Marquis! how could I ever expect such a thing from you?—you, whom I thought I had the right to look upon as a friend. And it is you, who, when a great misfortune befalls me, attempts to give me the finishing stroke. It is you who would crush me under the weight of slanders gathered in the gutter."

M. de Trégars stopped him with a gesture.

"Mme. de Thaller cannot have correctly repeated my words to you, else you would not utter that word 'slander.'"

"She has repeated them to me without the least change."

"Then she cannot have told you the importance of the proofs I have in my hands."

But the Baron persisted, as Mlle. Césarine would have said, to "do it up in the tender style."

"There is scarcely a family," he resumed, "in which there is not some one of those painful secrets which they try to withhold from the wickedness of the world. There is one in mine. Yes, it is true, that before our marriage, my wife had had a child, whom poverty had compelled her to abandon. We have since done every thing that it was humanly possible to find that child, but without success. It is a great misfortune, which has weighed upon our life; but it is not a crime. If, however, you deem it your interest to divulge our secret, and to disgrace a woman, you are free to do so: I cannot prevent you. But I declare it to you, that fact is the only thing real in your accusations. You say that your father has been duped and defrauded. From whom did you get such an idea?"

"From Marcolet, doubtless, a man without character,

who has become my mortal enemy since the day when he tried a sharp game on me, and came out second best. Or from Costeclar, perhaps, who does not forgive me for having refused him my daughter's hand, and who hates me because I know that he committed forgery once, and that he would be in prison but for your father's extreme indulgence. Well, Costeclar and Marcolet have deceived you. If the Marquis de Trégars ruined himself, it is because he undertook a business that he knew nothing about, and speculated right and left. It does not take long to sink a fortune, even without the assistance of thieves.

"As to pretend that I have benefited by the embezzlements of my cashier that is simply stupid; and there can be no one to suggest such a thing, except Jottras and Saint Pavin, two scoundrels whom I have had ten times the opportunity to send to prison and who were the accomplices of Favoral. Besides, the matter is in the hands of justice; and I shall prove in the broad daylight of the court-room, as I have already done in the office of the examining judge, that, to save the Mutual Credit, I have sacrificed more than half my private fortune."

Tired of this speech, the evident object of which was to lead him to discuss, and to betray himself,—

"Conclude, sir," M. de Trégars interrupted harshly.

Still in the same placid tone,—

"To conclude is easy enough," replied the baron. "My wife has told me that you were about to marry the daughter of my old cashier,—a very handsome girl, but without a sou. She ought to have a dowry."

"Sir!"

"Let us show our hands. I am in a critical position: you know it, and you are trying to take advantage of it. Very well: we can still come to an understanding.

What would you say, if I were to give to Mlle. Gilberte the dowry I intended for my daughter? ”

All M. de Trégars' blood rushed to his face.

“ Ah, not another word! ” he exclaimed with a gesture of unprecedented violence.

But, controlling himself almost at once,—

“ I demand,” he added, “ my father's fortune. I demand that you should restore to the Mutual Credit Company the twelve millions which have been abstracted.”

“ And if not? ”

“ Then I shall apply to the courts.”

They remained for a moment face to face, looking into each other's eyes. Then,—

“ What have you decided? ” asked M. de Trégars.

Without perhaps, suspecting that his offer was a new insult,—

“ I will go as far as fifteen hundred thousand francs,” replied M. de Thaller, “ and I pay cash.”

“ Is that your last word? ”

“ It is.”

“ If I enter a complaint, with the proofs in my hands, you are lost.”

“ We'll see about that.”

To insist further would have been puerile.

“ Very well, we'll see, then,” said M. de Trégars.

But as he walked out and got into his cab, which had been waiting for him at the door, he could not help wondering what gave the Baron de Thaller so much assurance, and whether he was not mistaken in his conjectures.

It was nearly eight o'clock, and Maxence, Mme. Favoral and Mlle. Gilberte must have been waiting for him with a feverish impatience; but he had eaten noth-

ing since morning, and he stopped in front of one of the restaurants of the Boulevard.

He had just ordered his dinner, when a gentleman of a certain age, but active and vigorous still, of military bearing, wearing a mustache, and a vari-colored ribbon at his buttonhole, came to take a seat at the adjoining table.

In less than fifteen minutes M. de Trégars had despatched a bowl of soup and a slice of beef, and was hastening out, when his foot struck his neighbor's foot, without his being able to understand how it had happened.

Though fully convinced that it was not his fault, he hastened to excuse himself. But the other began to talk angrily, and so loud, that everybody turned around.

Vexed as he was, Marius renewed his apologies.

But the other, like those cowards who think they have found a greater coward than themselves, was pouring forth a torrent of the grossest insults.

M. de Trégars was lifting his hand to administer a well-deserved correction, when suddenly the scene in the grand parlor of the Thaller mansion came back vividly to his mind. He saw again, as in the glass, the ill-looking man listening, with an anxious look, to Mme. de Thaller's propositions, and afterwards sitting down to write.

"That's it!" he exclaimed, a multitude of circumstances occurring to his mind, which had escaped him at the moment.

And, without further reflection, seizing his adversary by the throat, he threw him over on the table, holding him down with his knee.

"I am sure he must have the letter about him," he said to the people who surrounded him.

And in fact he did take from the side-pocket of the villain a letter, which he unfolded, and commenced reading aloud,—

“I am waiting for you, my dear major, come quick, for the thing is pressing,—a troublesome gentleman who is to be made to keep quiet. It will be for you the matter of a sword-thrust, and for us the occasion to divide a round amount.”

“And, that’s why he picked a quarrel with me,” added M. de Trégars.

Two waiters had taken hold of the villain, who was struggling furiously, and wanted to surrender him to the police.

“What’s the use?” said Marius. “I have his letter: that’s enough. The police will find him when they want him.”

And, getting back into his cab,—

“Rue St. Gilles,” he ordered, “and lively, if possible.”

VIII.

IN the Rue St. Gilles the hours were dragging, slow and gloomy. After Maxence had left to go and meet M. de Trégars, Mme. Favoral and her daughter had remained alone with M. Chapelain, and had been compelled to bear the brunt of his wrath, and to hear his interminable complaints.

He was certainly an excellent man, that old lawyer, and too just to hold Mlle. Gilberte or her mother responsible for Vincent Favoral’s acts. He spoke the truth when he assured them that he had for them a sincere affection, and that they might rely upon his devotion. But he was losing a hundred and sixty thousand francs;

and a man who loses such a large sum is naturally in bad humor, and not much disposed to optimism.

The cruellest enemies of the poor women would not have tortured them so mercilessly as this devoted friend.

He spared them not one sad detail of that meeting at the Mutual Credit office, from which he had just come. He exaggerated the proud assurance of the manager, and the confiding simplicity of the stockholders. "That Baron de Thaller," he said to them, "is certainly the most impudent scoundrel and the cleverest rascal I have ever seen. You'll see that he'll get out of it with clean hands and full pockets. Whether or not he has accomplices, Vincent will be the scapegoat. We must make up our mind to that."

His positive intention was to console Mme. Favoral and Gilberte. Had he sworn to drive them to distraction, he could not have succeeded better.

"Poor woman!" he said, "what is to become of you? Maxence is a good and honest fellow, I am sure, but so weak, so thoughtless, so fond of pleasure! He finds it difficult enough to get along by himself. Of what assistance will he be to you?"

Then came advice.

Mme. Favoral, he declared, should not hesitate to ask for a separation, which the tribunal would certainly grant. For want of this precaution, she would remain all her life under the burden of her husband's debts, and constantly exposed to the annoyances of the creditors.

And always he wound up by saying,—

"Who could ever have expected such a thing from Vincent,—a friend of twenty years' standing! A hundred and sixty thousand francs! Who in the world can be trusted hereafter?"

Big tears were rolling slowly down Mme. Favoral's withered cheeks. But Mlle. Gilberte was of those for whom the pity of others is the worst misfortune and the most acute suffering.

Twenty times she was on the point of exclaiming,—

“Keep your compassion, sir: we are neither so much to be pitied nor so much forsaken as you think. Our misfortune has revealed to us a true friend,—one who does not speak, but acts.”

At last, as twelve o'clock struck, M. Chapelain withdrew, announcing that he would return the next day to get the news, and to bring further consolation.

“Thank Heaven, we are alone at last!” said Mlle. Gilberte.

But they had not much peace, for all that.

Great as had been the noise of Vincent Favoral's disaster, it had not reached at once all those who had intrusted their savings to him. All day long, the belated creditors kept coming in; and the scenes of the morning were renewed on a smaller scale. Then legal summonses began to pour in, three or four at a time. Mme. Favoral was losing all courage.

“What disgrace!” she groaned. “Will it always be so hereafter?”

And she exhausted herself in useless conjectures upon the causes of the catastrophe; and such was the disorder of her mind, that she knew not what to hope and what to fear, and that from one minute to another she wished for the most contradictory things.

She would have been glad to hear that her husband was safe out of the country, and yet she would have deemed herself less miserable, had she known that he was hid somewhere in Paris.

And obstinately the same questions returned to her lips,—

“Where is he now? What is he doing? What is he thinking about? How can he leave us without news? Is it possible that it is a woman who has driven him into the precipice? And, if so, who is that woman?”

Very different were Mlle. Gilberte's thoughts.

The great calamity that befell her family had brought about the sudden realization of her hopes. Her father's disaster had given her an opportunity to test the man she loved; and she had found him even superior to all that she could have dared to dream. The name of Favoral was forever disgraced; but she was going to be the wife of Marius, Marquise de Trégars.

And, in the candor of her loyal soul, she accused herself of not taking enough interest in her mother's grief, and reproached herself for the quivers of joy which she felt within her.

“Where is Maxence?” asked Mme. Favoral. “Where is M. de Trégars? Why have they told us nothing of their projects?”

“They will, no doubt, come home to dinner,” replied Mlle. Gilberte.

So well was she convinced of this, that she had given orders to the servant to have a somewhat better dinner than usual; and her heart was beating at the thought of being seated near Marius, between her mother and her brother.

At about six o'clock, the bell rang violently.

“There he is!” said the young girl, rising to her feet.

But no: it was only the porter, bringing up a summons ordering Mme. Favoral, under penalty of the law,

to appear the next day, at one o'clock precisely, before the examining judge, Barban d'Avranchel, at his office in the Palace of Justice.

The poor woman came near fainting.

"What can this judge want with me? It ought to be forbidden to call a wife to testify against her husband," she said.

"M. de Trégars will tell you what to answer, mamma," said Mlle. Gilberte.

Meantime, seven o'clock came, then eight, and still neither Maxence nor M. de Trégars had come.

Both mother and daughter were becoming anxious, when at last, a little before nine, they heard steps in the hall.

Marius de Trégars appeared almost immediately.

He was pale; and his face bore the trace of the crushing fatigues of the day, of the cares which oppressed him, of the reflections which had been suggested to his mind by the quarrel of which he had nearly been the victim a few moments since.

"Maxence is not here?" he asked at once.

"We have not seen him," answered Mlle. Gilberte.

He seemed so much surprised, that Mme. Favoral was frightened.

"What is the matter again, good God!" she exclaimed.

"Nothing, madame," said M. de Trégars,—“nothing that should alarm you. Compelled, about two hours ago, to part from Maxence, I was to have met him here. Since he has not come, he must have been detained. I know where; and I will ask your permission to run and join him.”

He went out; but Mlle. Gilberte followed him in the hall, and, taking his hand,—

"How kind of you!" she began, "and how can we ever sufficiently thank you?"

He interrupted her.

"You owe me no thanks, my beloved; for, in what I am doing, there is more selfishness than you think. It is my own cause, more than yours, that I am defending. Any way, every thing is going on well."

And, without giving any more explanations, he started again. He had no doubt that Maxence, after leaving him, had-run to the Hôtel des Folies to give to Mlle. Lucienne an account of the day's work. And, though somewhat annoyed that he had tarried so long, on second thought, he was not surprised.

It was, therefore, to the Hôtel des Folies that he was going. Now that he had unmasked his batteries and begun the struggle, he was not sorry to meet Mlle Lucienne.

In less than five minutes he had reached the Boulevard du Temple. In front of the Fortins' narrow corridor a dozen idlers were standing, talking.

M. de Trégars was listening as he went along.

"It is a frightful accident," said one,— "such a pretty girl, and so young too!"

"As to me," said another, "it is the driver that I pity the most; for after all, if that pretty miss was in that carriage, it was for her own pleasure; whereas, the poor coachman was only attending to his business."

A confused presentiment oppressed M. de Trégars' heart. Addressing himself to one of those worthy citizens,—

"Have you heard any particulars?" he inquired.

Flattered by the confidence,—

"Certainly I have," he replied. "I didn't see the thing with my own proper eyes; but my wife did. It

was terrible. The carriage, a magnificent private carriage too, came from the direction of the Madeleine. The horses had run away; and already there had been an accident in the Place du Château d'Eau, where an old woman had been knocked down. Suddenly, here, over there, opposite the toy-shop, which is mine, by the way, the wheel of the carriage catches into the wheel of an enormous truck; and at once, *patata!* the coachman is thrown down, and so is the lady, who was inside,—a very pretty girl, who lives in this hotel."

Leaving there the obliging narrator, M. de Trégars rushed through the narrow corridor of the Hôtel des Folies. At the moment when he reached the yard, he found himself in presence of Maxence.

Pale, his head bare, his eyes wild, shaking with a nervous chill, the poor fellow looked like a madman. Noticing M. de Trégars,—

"Ah, my friend!" he exclaimed, "what misfortune!"

"Lucienne?"

"Dead, perhaps. The doctor will not answer for her recovery. I am going to the druggist's to get a prescription."

He was interrupted by the commissary of police, whose kind protection had hitherto preserved Mlle. Lucienne. He was coming out of the little room on the ground-floor, which the Fortins used for an office, bedroom, and dining-room.

He had recognized Marius de Trégars, and, coming up to him, he pressed his hand, saying, "Well, you know?"

"Yes."

"It is my fault, M. le Marquis; for we were fully notified. I knew so well that Mlle. Lucienne's existence

was threatened, I was so fully expecting a new attempt upon her life, that, whenever she went out riding, it was one of my men, wearing a footman's livery, who took his seat by the side of the coachman. To-day my man was so busy, that I said to myself, ' Bash, for once ! ' And behold the consequences ! "

It was with inexpressible astonishment that Maxence was listening. It was with a profound stupor that he discovered between Marius and the commissary that serious intimacy which is the result of long intercourse, real esteem, and common hopes.

" It is not an accident, then," remarked M. de Trégars.

" No."

" The coachman has spoken, doubtless? "

" No: the wretch was killed on the spot."

And, without waiting for another question,—

" But don't let us stay here," said the commissary. " Whilst Maxence runs to the drug-store, let us go into the Fortins' office."

The husband was alone there, the wife being at that moment with Mlle. Lucienne.

" Do me the favor to go and take a walk for about fifteen minutes," said the commissary to him. " We have to talk, this gentleman and myself." .

Humbly, without a word, and like a man who does himself justice, M. Fortin slipped off.

And at once,—" It is clear, M. le Marquis, it is manifest, that a crime has been committed. Listen, and judge for yourself. I was just rising from dinner, when I was notified of what was called our poor Lucienne's accident. Without even changing my clothes, I ran. The carriage was lying in the street, broken to pieces. Two policemen were holding the horses, which had been stopped.

I inquire. I learn that Lucienne, picked up by Maxence, has been able to drag herself as far as the Hôtel des Folies, and that the driver has been taken to the nearest drug-store. Furious at my own negligence, and tormented by vague suspicions, it is to the druggist's that I go first, and in all haste. The driver was in a back-room, stretched on a mattress.

"His head having struck the angle of the curbstone, his skull was broken; and he had just breathed his last. It was, apparently, the annihilation of the hope which I had, of enlightening myself by questioning this man. Nevertheless, I give orders to have him searched. No paper is discovered upon him to establish his identity; but, in one of the pockets of his pantaloons, do you know what they find? Two bank-notes of a thousand francs each, carefully wrapped up in a fragment of newspaper."

M. de Trégars had shuddered.

"What a revelation!" he murmured.

It was not to the present circumstance that he applied that word. But the commissary naturally mistook him.

"Yes," he went on, "it was a revelation. To me these two thousand francs were worth a confession: they could only be the wages of a crime. So, without losing a moment, I jump into a cab, and drive to Brion's. Everybody was upside down, because the horses had just been brought back. I question; and, from the very first words, the correctness of my presumption is demonstrated to me. The wretch who had just died was not one of Brion's coachmen. This is what had happened. At two o'clock, when the carriage ordered by M. Van Klopen was ready to go for Mlle. Lucienne, they had been compelled to send for the driver and the footman, who had forgotten themselves drink-

ing in a neighboring wine-shop, with a man who had called to see them in the morning. They were slightly under the influence of wine, but not enough so to make it imprudent to trust them with horses; and it was even probable that the fresh air would sober them completely. They had then started; but they had not gone very far, for one of their comrades had seen them stop the carriage in front of a wine-shop, and join there the same individual with whom they had been drinking all the morning"—

"And who was no other than the man who was killed?"

"Wait. Having obtained this information, I get some one to take me to the wine-shop; and I ask for the coachman and the footman from Brion's. They were there still; and they are shown to me in a private room, lying on the floor, fast asleep. I try to wake them up, but in vain. I order to water them freely; but a pitcher of water thrown on their faces has no effect, save to make them utter an inarticulate groan. I guess at once what they have taken. I send for a physician, and I call on the wine-merchant for explanations. It is his wife and his barkeeper who answer me. They tell me, that, at about two o'clock, a man came in the shop, who stated that he was employed at Brion's, and who ordered three glasses for himself and two comrades, whom he was expecting.

"A few moments later, a carriage stops at the door; and the driver and the footman leave it to come in. They were in a great hurry, they said, and only wished to take one glass. They do take three, one after another; then they order a bottle. They were evidently forgetting their horses, which they had given to hold to a commissionaire. Soon the man proposes a game. The others ac-

cept; and here they are, settled in the back-room, knocking on the table for sealed wine. The game must have lasted at least twenty minutes. At the end of that time, the man who had come in first appeared, looking very much annoyed, saying that it was very unpleasant, that his comrades were dead drunk, that they will miss their work, and that the boss, who is anxious to please his customers, will certainly dismiss them. Although he had taken as much, and more than the rest, he was perfectly steady; and, after reflecting for a moment,—

“ ‘I have an idea,’ he says. ‘Friends should help each other, shouldn’t they? I am going to take the coachman’s livery, and drive in his stead. I happen to know the customer they were going after. She is a very kind old lady, and I’ll tell her a story to explain the absence of the footman.’

“Convinced that the man is in Brion’s employment, they have no objection to offer to this fine project.

“The brigand puts on the livery of the sleeping coachman, gets up on the box, and starts off, after stating that he will return for his comrades as soon as he has got through the job, and that doubtless they will be sober by that time.”

M. de Trégars knew well enough the *savoir-faire* of the commissary not to be surprised at his promptness in obtaining precise information.

Already he was going on,—

“Just as I was closing my examination, the doctor arrived. I show him my drunkards; and at once he recognizes that I have guessed correctly, and that these men have been put asleep by means of one of those narcotics of which certain thieves make use to rob their victims. A potion, which he administers to them by forcing their teeth open with a knife, draws them from this

lethargy. They open their eyes, and soon are in condition to reply to my questions. They are furious at the trick that has been played upon them; but they do not know the man. They saw him, they swear to me, for the first time that very morning; and they are ignorant even of his name."

There was no doubt possible after such complete explanations. The commissary had seen correctly, and he proved it.

It was not of a vulgar accident that Mlle. Lucienne had just been the victim, but of a crime laboriously conceived, and executed with unheard-of audacity,—of one of those crimes such as too many are committed, whose combinations, nine times out of ten, set aside even a suspicion, and foil all the efforts of human justice.

M. de Trégars knew now what had taken place, as clearly as if he had himself received the confession of the guilty parties.

A man had been found to execute that perilous programme,—to make the horses run away, and then to run into some heavy wagon. The wretch was staking his life on that game; it being evident that the light carriage must be smashed in a thousand pieces. But he must have relied upon his skill and his presence of mind, to avoid the shock, to jump off safe and sound; whilst Mlle. Lucienne, thrown upon the pavement, would probably be killed on the spot. The event had deceived his expectations, and he had been the victim of his rascality; but his death was a misfortune.

"Because now," resumed the commissary, "the thread is broken in our hands which would infallibly have led us to the truth. Who is it that ordered the crime, and paid for it? We know it, since we know who

benefits by the crime. But that is not sufficient. Justice requires something more than moral proofs. Living, this bandit would have spoken. His death insures the impunity of the wretches of whom he was but the instrument."

"Perhaps," said M. Trégars.

And at the same time he took out of his pocket, and showed the note found in Vincent Favoral's pocket-book,—that note, so obscure the day before, now so terribly clear:—

"I cannot understand your negligence. You should get through with that Van Klopen affair: there is the danger."

The commissary of police cast but a glance upon it, and, replying to the objections of his old experience rather more than addressing himself to M. de Trégars,—

"There can be no doubt about it," he murmured. "It is to the crime committed to-day that these pressing recommendations relate; and, directed as they are to Vincent Favoral, they attest his complicity. It was he who had charge of finishing the Van Klopen affair; in other words, to get rid of Lucienne. It was he, I'd wager my head, who had treated with the false coachman."

He remained for over a minute absorbed in his own thoughts, then,—

"But who is the author of these recommendations to Vincent Favoral? Do you know that, M. le Marquis?" he said.

They looked at each other; and the same name rose to their lips,—

"The Baroness de Thaller!"

This name, however, they did not utter.

The commissary had placed himself under the gas-

burner which gave light to the Fortin's office; and, adjusting his glasses, he was scrutinizing the note with the most minute attention, studying the grain and the transparency of the paper, the ink, and the handwriting. And at last,—

“This note,” he declared, “cannot constitute a proof against its author: I mean an evident, material proof, such as we require to obtain from a judge an order of arrest.”

And, as Marius was protesting,—

“This note,” he insisted, “is written with the left hand, with common ink, on ordinary foolscap paper, such as is found everywhere. Now all left-hand writings look alike. Draw your own conclusions.”

But M. de Trégars did not give it up yet.

“Wait a moment,” he interrupted.

And briefly, though with the utmost exactness, he began telling his visit to the Thaller mansion, his conversation with Mlle. Césarine, then with the baroness, and finally with the baron himself.

He described in the most graphic manner the scene which had taken place in the grand parlor between Mme. de Thaller and a worse than suspicious-looking man,—that scene, the secret of which had been revealed to him in its minutest details by the looking-glass. Its meaning was now as clear as day.

This suspicious-looking man had been one of the agents in arranging the intended murder: hence the agitation of the baroness when she had received his card, and her haste to join him. If she had started when he first spoke to her, it was because he was telling her of the successful execution of the crime. If she had afterwards made a gesture of joy, it was because he had just informed her that the coachman had been killed at the

same time, and that she found herself thus rid of a dangerous accomplice.

The commissary of police shook his head.

"All this is quite probable," he murmured; "but that's all."

Again M. de Trégars stopped him.

"I have not done yet," he said.

And he went on saying how he had been suddenly and brutally assaulted by an unknown man in a restaurant; how he had collared this abject scoundrel, and taken out of his pocket a crushing letter, which left no doubt as to the nature of his mission.

The commissary's eyes were sparkling,—

"That letter!" he exclaimed, "that letter!"

And, as soon as he had looked over it,—

"Ah! This time," he resumed, "I think that we have something tangible. 'A troublesome gentleman to keep quiet,'—the Marquis de Trégars, of course, who is on the right track. 'It will be for you the matter of a sword-thrust.' Naturally, dead men tell no tales. 'It will be for us the occasion of dividing a round amount.' An honest trade, indeed!"

The good man was rubbing his hand with all his might.

"At last we have a positive fact," he went on,—“a foundation upon which to base our accusations. Don't be uneasy. That letter is going to place into our hands the scoundrel who assaulted you,—who will make known the go-between, who himself will not fail to surrender the Baroness de Thaller. Lucienne shall be avenged. If we could only now lay our hands on Vincent Favoral! But we'll find him yet. I set two fellows after him this afternoon, who have a superior scent, and understand their business.”

He was here interrupted by Maxence, who was returning all out of breath, holding in his hand the medicines which he had gone after.

"I thought that druggist would never get through," he said.

And regretting to have remained away so long, feeling uneasy, and anxious to return up stairs,—

"Don't you wish to see Lucienne?" he added, addressing himself to M. de Trégars rather more than to the commissary.

For all answer, they followed him at once.

A cheerless-looking place was Mlle. Lucienne's room, without any furniture but a narrow iron bedstead, a dilapidated bureau, four straw-bottomed chairs, and a small table. Over the bed, and at the windows, were white muslin curtains, with an edging that had once been blue, but had become yellow from repeated washings.

Often Maxence had begged his friend to take a more comfortable lodging, and always she had refused.

"We must economize," she would say. "This room does well enough for me; and, besides, I am accustomed to it."

When M. de Trégars and the commissary walked in, the estimable hostess of the Hôtel des Folies was kneeling in front of the fire, preparing some medicine.

Hearing the footsteps, she got up, and, with a finger upon her lips,—

"Hush!" she said. "Take care not to wake her up!"

The precaution was useless.

"I am not asleep," said Mlle. Lucienne in a feeble voice. "Who is there?"

"I," replied Maxence, advancing towards the bed.

It was only necessary to see the poor girl in order to

understand Maxence's frightful anxiety. She was whiter than the sheet; and fever, that horrible fever which follows severe wounds, gave to her eyes a sinister lustre.

"But you are not alone," she said again.

"I am with him, my child," replied the commissary. "I come to beg your pardon for having so badly protected you."

She shook her head with a sad and gentle motion.

"It was myself who lacked prudence," she said; "for to-day, while out, I thought I noticed something wrong; but it looked so foolish to be afraid! If it had not happened to-day, it would have happened some other day. The villains who have been pursuing me for years must be satisfied now. They will soon be rid of me."

"Lucienne," said Maxence in a sorrowful tone

M. de Trégars now stepped forward.

"You shall live, mademoiselle," he uttered in a grave voice. "You shall live to learn to love life."

And, as she was looking at him in surprise,—

"You do not know me," he added.

Timidly, and as if doubting the reality,—

"You," she said, "the Marquis de Trégars!"

"Yes, mademoiselle, your brother."

Had he had the control of events, Marius de Trégars would probably not have been in such haste to reveal this fact.

But how could he control himself in presence of that bed where a poor girl was, perhaps, about to die, sacrificed to the terrors and to the cravings of the miserable woman who was her mother,—to die at twenty, victim of the basest and most odious of crimes? How could he help feeling an intense pity at the sight of this unfortunate young woman who had endured every thing that a

human being can suffer, whose life had been but a long and painful struggle, whose courage had risen above all the woes of adversity, and who had been able to pass without a stain through the mud and mire of Paris.

Besides, Marius was not one of those men who mistrust their first impulse, who manifest their emotion only for a purpose, who reflect and calculate before giving themselves up to the inspirations of their heart.

Lucienne was the daughter of the Marquis de Trégars: of that he was absolutely certain. He knew that the same blood flowed in his veins and in hers; and he told her so.

He told her so, above all, because he believed her in danger; and he wished, were she to die, that she should have, at least, that supreme joy.

Poor Lucienne! Never had she dared to dream of such happiness. All her blood rushed to her cheeks; and, in a voice vibrating with the most intense emotion,—

“Ah! now, yes,” she uttered, “I would like to live.”

The commissary of police, also, felt moved.

“Do not be alarmed, my child,” he said in his kindest tone. “Before two weeks you will be up. M. de Trégars is a great physician.”

In the mean time, she had attempted to raise herself on her pillow; and that simple effort had wrung from her a cry of anguish.

“Dear me! How I do suffer!”

“That’s because you won’t keep quiet, my darling,” said Mme. Fortin in a tone of gentle scolding. “Have you forgotten that the doctor has expressly forbidden you to stir?”

Then taking aside the commissary, Maxence, and M. de Trégars, she explained to them how imprudent it was to disturb Mlle. Lucienne’s rest. She was very ill,

affirmed the worthy hostess; and her advice was, that they should send for a sick-nurse as soon as possible.

She would have been extremely happy, of course, to spend the night by the side of her dear lodger; but, unfortunately, she could not think of it, the hotel requiring all her time and attention. Fortunately, however, she knew in the neighborhood a widow, a very honest woman, and without her equal in taking care of the sick.

With an anxious and beseeching look, Maxence was consulting M. de Trégars. In his eyes could be read the proposition that was burning upon his lips,—

“Shall I not go for Gilberte?”

But that proposition he had no time to express. Though they had been speaking very low, Mlle. Lucienne had heard.

“I have a friend,” she said, “who would certainly be willing to sit up with me.”

They all went up to her.

“What friend,” inquired the commissary of police.

“You know her very well, sir. It is that poor girl who had taken me home with her at Batignolles when I left the hospital, who came to my assistance during the Commune, and whom you helped to get out of the Versailles prisons.”

“Do you know what has become of her?”

“Only since yesterday, when I received a letter from her, a very friendly letter. She writes that she has found money to set up a dressmaking establishment, and that she is relying upon me to be her forewoman. She is going to open in the Rue St. Lazare; but, in the mean time, she is stopping in the Rue du Cirque.”

M. de Trégars and Maxence had started slightly.

"What is your friend's name?" they inquired at once.
"Zélie Cadelle."

Not being aware of the particulars of the two young men's visit to the Rue du Cirque, the commissary of police could not understand the cause of their agitation.

"I think," he said, "that it would hardly be proper now to send for that girl."

"It is to her alone, on the contrary, that we must resort," interrupted M. de Trégars.

And, as he had good reasons to mistrust Mme. Fortin, he took the commissary outside the room, on the landing; and there, in a few words, he explained to him that this Zélie was precisely the same woman whom they had found in the Rue du Cirque, in that sumptuous mansion where Vincent Favoral, under the simple name of Vincent, had been living, according to the neighbors, in such a princely style.

The commissary of police was astounded. Why had he not known all this sooner? Better late than never, however.

"Ah! you are right, M. le Marquis, a hundred times right!" he declared. "This girl must evidently know Vincent Favoral's secret, the key of the enigma that we are vainly trying to solve. What she would not tell to you, a stranger, she will tell to Lucienne, her friend."

Maxence offered to go himself for Zélie Cadelle.

"No," answered Marius. "If she should happen to know you, she would mistrust you, and would refuse to come."

It was, therefore, M. Fortin who was despatched to the Rue du Cirque, and who went off muttering, though he had received five francs to take a carriage, and five francs for his trouble.

"And now," said the commissary of police to Max-

ence, "we must both of us get out of the way. I, because the fact of my being a commissary would frighten Mme. Cadelle; you because, being Vincent Favoral's son, your presence would certainly prove embarrassing to her."

And so they went out; but M. de Trégars did not remain long alone with Mlle. Lucienne. M. Fortin had had the delicacy not to tarry on the way.

Eleven o'clock struck as Zélie Cadelle rushed like a whirlwind into her friend's room.

Such had been his haste, that she had given no thought whatever to her dress. She had stuck upon her uncombed hair the first bonnet she had laid her hand upon, and thrown an old shawl over the wrapper in which she had received Marius in the afternoon.

"What, my poor Lucienne!" she exclaimed. "Are you so sick as all that?"

But she stopped short as she recognized M. de Trégars; and, in a suspicious tone,—

"What a singular meeting!" she said.

Marius bowed.

"You know Lucienne?"

What she meant by that he understood perfectly.

"Lucienne is my sister, madame," he said coldly.

She shrugged her shoulders. "What humbug!"

"It's the truth," affirmed Mlle. Lucienne; "and you know that I never lie."

Mme. Zélie was dumbfounded.

"If you say so," she muttered. "But no matter: that's queer."

M. de Trégars interrupted her with a gesture,—

"And, what's more, it is because Lucienne is my sister that you see her there lying upon that bed. They attempted to murder her to-day!"

"Oh!"

"It was her mother who tried to get rid of her, so as to possess herself of the fortune which my father had left her; and there is every reason to believe that the snare was contrived by Vincent Favoral."

Mme. Zélie did not understand very well; but, when Marius and Mlle. Lucienne had informed her of all that it was useful for her to know,—

"Why," she exclaimed, "what a horrid rascal that old Vincent must be!"

And, as M. de Trégars remained dumb,—

"This afternoon," she went on, "I didn't tell you any stories; but I didn't tell you every thing, either."

She stopped; and, after a moment of deliberation,—

"Well, I don't care for old Vincent," she said. "Ah! he tried to have Lucienne killed, did he? Well, then, I am going to tell every thing I know. First of all, he wasn't any thing to me. It isn't very flattering; but it is so. He has never kissed so much as the end of my finger. He used to say that he loved me, but that he respected me still more, because I looked so much like a daughter he had lost. Old humbug! And I believed him too! I did, upon my word, at least in the beginning. But I am not such a fool as I look. I found out very soon that he was making fun of me; and that he was only using me as a blind to keep suspicion away from another woman."

"From what woman?"

"Ah! now, I do not know! All I know is that she is married, that he is crazy about her, and that they are to run away together."

"Hasn't he gone, then?"

Mme. Cadelle's face had become somewhat anxious, and for over a minute she seemed to hesitate.

"Do you know," she said at last, "that my answer is going to cost me a lot? They have promised me a pile of money; but I haven't got it yet. And, if I say anything, good-by! I sha'n't have any thing."

M. de Trégars was opening his lips to tell her that she might rest easy on that score; but she cut him short.

"Well, no," she said: "Old Vincent hasn't gone. He got up a comedy, so he told me, to throw the lady's husband off the track. He sent off a whole lot of baggage by the railroad; but he staid in Paris."

"And do you know where he is hid?"

"In the Rue St. Lazare, of course: in the apartment that I hired two weeks ago."

In a voice trembling with the excitement of almost certain success, "Would you consent to take me there?" asked M. de Trégars.

"Whenever you like,—to-morrow."

IX.

As he left Mlle. Lucienne's room,—

"There is nothing more to keep me at the Hôtel des Folies," said the commissary of police to Maxence. "Every thing possible will be done, and well done, by M. de Trégars. I am going home, therefore; and I am going to take you with me. I have a great deal to do; and you'll help me."

That was not exactly true; but he feared, on the part of Maxence, some imprudence which might compromise the success of M. de Trégars' mission.

He was trying to think of every thing to leave as little as possible to chance; like a man who has seen the best combined plans fail for want of a trifling precaution.

Once in the yard, he opened the door of the lodge where the honorable Fortins, man and wife, were deliberating, and exchanging their conjectures, instead of going to bed. For they were wonderfully puzzled by all those events that succeeded each other, and anxious about all these goings and comings.

"I am going home," the commissary said to them; "but, before that, listen to my instructions. You will allow no one, you understand,—no one who is not known to you, to go up to Mlle. Lucienne's room. And remember that I will admit of no excuse, and that you must not come and tell me afterwards, 'It isn't our fault, we can't see everybody that comes in,' and all that sort of nonsense."

He was speaking in that harsh and imperious tone of which police-agents have the secret, when they are addressing people who have, by their conduct, placed themselves under their dependence.

"We are going to close our front-door," replied the estimable hotel-keepers. "We will comply strictly with your orders."

"I trust so; because, if you should disobey me, I should hear it, and the result would be a serious trouble to you. Besides your hotel being unmercifully closed up, you would find yourselves implicated in a very bad piece of business."

The most ardent curiosity could be read in Mme. Fortin's little eyes.

"I understood at once," she began, "that something extraordinary was going on."

But the commissary interrupted her,—

"I have not done yet. It may be that to-night or to-morrow some one will call and inquire how Mlle. Lucienne is."

“And then?”

“You will answer that she is as bad as possible; and that she has neither spoken a word, nor recovered her senses, since the accident; and that she will certainly not live through the day.”

The effort which Mme. Fortin made to remain silent gave, better than any thing else, an idea of the terror with which the commissary inspired her.

“That is not all,” he went on. “As soon as the person in question has started off, you will follow him, without affectation, as far as the street-door, and you will point him out with your finger, here, like that, to one of my agents, who will happen to be on the Boulevard.”

“And suppose he should not be there?”

“He shall be there. You can make yourself easy on that score.”

The looks of distress which the honorable hotel-keepers were exchanging did not announce a very tranquil conscience.

“In other words, here we are under surveillance,” said M. Fortin with a groan. “What have we done to be thus mistrusted?”

To reply to him would have been a task more long than difficult.

“Do as I tell you,” insisted the commissary harshly, “and don’t mind the rest, and, meantime, good-night.”

He was right in trusting implicitly to his agent’s punctuality; for, as soon as he came out of the Hôtel des Folies, a man passed by him, and without seeming to address him, or even to recognize him, said in a whisper,—

“What news?”

"Nothing," he replied, "except that the Fortins are notified. The trap is well set. Keep your eyes open now, and spot any one who comes to ask about Mlle. Lucienne."

And he hurried on, still followed by Maxence, who walked along like a body without soul, tortured by the most frightful anguish.

As he had been away the whole evening, four or five persons were waiting for him at his office on matters of current business. He despatched them in less than no time; after which, addressing himself to an agent on duty,—

"This evening," he said, "at about nine o'clock, in a restaurant on the Boulevard, a quarrel took place. A person tried to pick a quarrel with another."

"You will proceed at once to that restaurant; you will get the particulars of what took place; and you will ascertain exactly who this man is, his name, his profession, and his residence."

Like a man accustomed to such errands,—

"Can I have a description of him?" inquired the agent.

"Yes. He is a man past middle age, military bearing, heavy mustache, ribbons in his buttonhole."

"Yes, I see: one of your regular fighting fellows."

"Very well. Go then. I shall not retire before your return. Ah, I forgot; find out what they thought tonight on the 'street' about the Mutual Credit affair, and what they said of the arrest of one Saint Pavin, editor of 'The Financial Pilot,' and of a banker named Jottras."

"Can I take a carriage?"

"Do so."

The agent started; and he was not fairly out of the

house, when the commissary, opening a door which gave into a small study, called, "Felix!"

It was his secretary, a man of about thirty, blonde, with a gentle and timid countenance, having, with his long coat, somewhat the appearance of a theological student. He appeared immediately.

"You call me, sir?"

"My dear Felix," replied the commissary, "I have seen you, sometimes, imitate very nicely all sorts of hand-writings."

The secretary blushed very much, no doubt on account of Maxence, who was sitting by the side of his employer. He was a very honest fellow; but there are certain little talents of which people do not like to boast; and the talent of imitating the writing of others is of the number, for the reason, that, fatally and at once, it suggests the idea of forgery.

"It was only for fun that I used to do that, sir," he stammered.

"Would you be here if it had been otherwise?" said the commissary. "Only this time it is not for fun, but to do me a favor that I wish you to try again."

And, taking out of his pocket the letter taken by M. de Trégars from the man in the restaurant,—

"Examine this writing," he said. "and see whether you feel capable of imitating it tolerably well."

Spreading the letter under the full light of the lamp, the secretary spent at least two minutes examining it with the minute attention of an expert. And at the same time he was muttering,—

"Not at all convenient, this. Hard writing to imitate. Not a salient feature, not a characteristic sign! Nothing to strike the eye, or attract attention. It must be some old lawyer's clerk who wrote this."

In spite of his anxiety of mind, the commissary smiled.

"I shouldn't be surprised if you had guessed right."

Thus encouraged,—

"At any rate," Felix declared, "I am going to try." He took a pen, and, after trying a dozen times,—

"How is this?" he asked, holding out a sheet of paper.

The commissary carefully compared the original with the copy.

"It is not perfect," he murmured; "but at night, with the imagination excited by a great peril— Besides, we must risk something."

"If I had a few hours to practise!"

"But you have not. Come, take up your pen, and write as well as you can, in that same hand, what I am going to tell you."

And after a moment's thought, he dictated as follows:—

"All goes well. T., drawn into a quarrel, is to fight in the morning with swords. But our man, whom I cannot leave, refuses to go ahead, unless he is paid two thousand francs before the duel. I have not the amount. Please hand it to the bearer, who has orders to wait for you."

The commissary, leaning over his secretary's shoulder, was following his hand, and, the last word being written,—

"Perfect!" he exclaimed. "Now quick, the address: Mme. le Baronne de Thaller, Rue de le Pépinière."

There are professions which extinguish, in those who exercise them, all curiosity. It is with the most complete indifference, and without asking a question, that the secretary had done what he had been requested.

"Now, my dear Felix," resumed the commissary, "you will please get yourself up as near as possible like a restaurant-waiter, and take this letter to its address."

"At this hour!"

"Yes. The Baroness de Thaller is out to a ball. You will tell the servants that you are bringing her an answer concerning an important matter. They know nothing about it; but they will allow you to wait for their mistress in the porter's lodge. As soon as she comes in, you will hand her the letter, stating that two gentlemen who are taking supper in your restaurant are waiting for the answer. It may be that she will exclaim that you are a scoundrel, that she does not know what it means: in that case, we shall have been anticipated, and you must get away as fast as you can. But the chances are, that she will give you two thousand francs; and then you must so manage, that she will be seen plainly when she does it. Is it all understood?"

"Perfectly."

"Go ahead, then, and do not lose a minute. I shall wait."

Away from Mlle. Lucienne, Maxence had gradually been recalled to the strangeness of the situation; and it was with a mingled feeling of curiosity and surprise that he observed the commissary acting and bustling about.

The good man had found again all the activity of his youth, together with that fever of hope and that impatience of success, which usually disappear with age.

He was going over the whole of the case again,—his first meeting with Mlle. Lucienne, the various attempts upon her life; and he had just taken out of the file the letter of information which had been intrusted to him, in

order to compare the writing with that of the letter taken from his adversary by M. de Trégars, when the latter came in all out of breath.

"Zélie has spoken!" he said.

And, at once addressing Maxence,—

"You, my dear friend," he resumed, "you must run to the Hôtel des Folies."

"Is Lucienne worse?"

"No. Lucienne is getting on well enough. Zélie has spoken; but there is no certainty, that, after due reflection, she will not repent, and go and give the alarm. You will return, therefore, and you will not lose sight of her until I call for her in the morning. If she wishes to go out, you must prevent her."

The commissary had understood the importance of the precaution.

"You must prevent her," he added, "even by force; and I authorize you, if need be, to call upon the agent whom I have placed on duty, watching the Hôtel des Folies, and to whom I am going to send word immediately."

Maxence started off on a run.

"Poor fellow!" murmured Marius, "I know where your father is. What are we going to learn now?"

He had scarcely had time to communicate the information he had received from Mme. Cadelle, when the first of the commissary's emissaries made his appearance.

"The commission is done," he said, in that confident tone of a man who thinks he has successfully accomplished a difficult task.

"You know the name of the individual who sought a quarrel with M. de Trégars?"

"His name is Corvi. He is well known in all the

tables d'hôte, where there are women, and where they deal a healthy little game after dinner. I know him well too. He is a bad fellow, who passes himself off for a former superior officer in the Italian army."

"His address?"

"He lives at Rue de la Michodiere, in a furnished house. I went there. The porter told me that my man had just gone out with an ill-looking individual, and that they must be in a little *café* on the corner of the next street. I ran there, and found my two fellows drinking beer."

"Won't they give us the slip?"

"No danger of that: I have got them fixed."

"How is that?"

"It is an idea of mine. I just thought, 'Suppose they put off?' And at once I went to notify some policemen, and I returned to station myself near the *café*. It was just closing up. My two fellows came out: I picked a quarrel with them; and now they are in the station-house, well recommended."

The commissary knit his brows.

"That's almost too much zeal," he murmured. "Well, what's done is done. Did you make any inquiries about the Saint Pavin and Jottras matter?"

"I had no time, it was too late. You forget, perhaps, sir, that it is nearly two o'clock."

Just as he got through, the secretary who had been sent to the Rue de la Pépinière came in.

"Well?" inquired the commissary, not without evident anxiety.

"I waited for Mme. de Thaller over an hour," he said. "When she came home, I gave her the letter. She read it; and, in presence of a number of her servants, she handed me these two thousand francs."

At the sight of the bank notes, the commissary jumped to his feet.

"Now we have it!" he exclaimed. "Here is the proof that we wanted."

X.

It was after four o'clock when M. de Trégars was at last permitted to return home. He had minutely, and at length, arranged every thing with the commissary: he had endeavored to anticipate every eventuality. His line of conduct was perfectly well marked out, and he carried with him the certainty that on the day which was about to dawn the strange game that he was playing must be finally won or lost. When he reached home,—

"At last, here you are, sir!" exclaimed his faithful servant.

It was doubtless anxiety that had kept up the old man all night; but so absorbed was Marius's mind, that he scarcely noticed the fact.

"Did any one call in my absence?" he asked.

"Yes, sir. A gentleman called during the evening, M. Costeclar, who appeared very much vexed not to find you in. He stated that he came on a very important matter that you would know all about: and he requested me to ask you to wait for him to-morrow, that is to-day, by twelve o'clock."

Was M. Costeclar sent by M. de Thaller? Had the manager of the Mutual Credit changed his mind? and had he decided to accept the conditions which he had at first rejected? In that case, it was too late. It was no longer in the power of any human being to suspend

the action of justice. Without giving any further thought to that visit,—

“I am worn out with fatigue,” said M. de Trégars, “and I am going to lie down. At eight o’clock precisely you will call me.”

But it was in vain that he tried to find a short respite in sleep. For forty-eight hours his mind had been taxed beyond measure, his nerves had been wrought up to an almost intolerable degree of exaltation.

As soon as he closed his eyes, it was with a merciless precision that his imagination presented to him all the events which had taken place since that afternoon in the Place-Royale when he had ventured to declare his love to Mlle. Gilberte. Who could have told him then, that he would engage in that struggle, the issue of which must certainly be some abominable scandal in which his name would be mixed? Who could have told him, that gradually, and by the very force of circumstances, he would be led to overcome his repugnance, and to rival the ruses and the tortuous combinations of the wretches he was trying to reach?

But he was not of those who, once engaged, regret, hesitate, and draw back. His conscience reproached him for nothing. It was for justice and right that he was battling; and Mlle. Gilberte was the prize that would reward him.

Eight o’clock struck; and his servant came in.

“Run for a cab,” he said: “I’ll be ready in a moment.”

He was ready, in fact, when the old servant returned; and, as he had in his pocket some of those arguments that lend wings to the poorest cab-horses, in less than ten minutes he had reached the Hôtel des Folies.

"How is Mlle. Lucienne?" he inquired first of all of the worthy hostess.

The intervention of the commissary of police had made M. Fortin and his wife more supple than gloves, and more gentle than doves.

"The poor dear child is much better," answered Mme. Fortin; "and the doctor, who has just left, now feels sure of her recovery. But there is a row up there."

"A row?"

"Yes. That lady whom my husband went after last night insists upon going out; and M. Maxence won't let her: so that they are quarreling up there. Just listen."

The loud noise of a violent altercation could be heard distinctly. M. de Trégars started up stairs, and on the second-story landing he found Maxence holding on obstinately to the railing, whilst Mme. Zélie Cadelle, redder than a peony, was trying to induce him to let her pass, treating him at the same time to some of the choicest epithets of her well-stocked repertory. Catching sight of Marius,—

"Is it you," she cried, "who gave orders to keep me here against my wishes? By what right? Am I your prisoner?"

To irritate her would have been imprudent.

"Why did you wish to leave," said M. de Trégars gently, "at the very moment when you knew that I was to call for you?"

But she interrupted him, and, shrugging her shoulders,—

"Why don't you tell the truth?" she said. "You were afraid to trust me."

"Oh!"

"You are wrong! What I promise to do I do. I

only wanted to go home to dress. Can I go in the street in this costume?"

And she was spreading out her wrapper, all faded and stained.

"I have a carriage below," said Marius. "No one will see us."

Doubtless she understood that it was useless to hesitate.

"As you please," she said.

M. de Trégars took Maxence aside, and in a hurried whisper,—

"You must," said he, "go at once to the Rue St. Gilles, and in my name request your sister to accompany you. You will take a closed carriage, and you'll go and wait in the Rue St. Lazare, opposite No. 25. It may be that Mlle. Gilberte's assistance will become indispensable to me. And, as Lucienne must not be left alone, you will request Mme. Fortin to go and stay with her."

And, without waiting for an answer,—

"Let us go," he said to Mme. Cadelle.

They started; but the young woman was far from being in her usual spirits. It was clear that she was regretting bitterly having gone so far, and not having been able to get away at the last moment. As the carriage went on, she became paler and a frown appeared upon her face.

"No matter," she began: "it's a nasty thing I am doing there."

"Do you repent then, assisting me to punish your friend's assassins?" said M. de Trégars.

She shook her head.

"I know very well that old Vincent is a scoundrel,"

she said; "but he had trusted me, and I am betraying him."

"You are mistaken, madame. To furnish me the means of speaking to M. Favoral is not to betray him; and I shall do every thing in my power to enable him to escape the police, and make his way abroad."

"What a joke!"

"It is the exact truth: I give you my word of honor."

She seemed to feel easier; and, when the carriage turned into the Rue St. Lazare, "Let us stop a moment," she said.

"Why?"

"So that I can buy old Vincent's breakfast. He can't go out to eat, of course; and so I have to take all his meals to him."

Marius's mistrust was far from being dissipated; and yet he did not think it prudent to refuse, promising himself, however, not to lose sight of Mme. Zélie. He followed her, therefore, to the baker's and the butcher's; and when she had done her marketing, he entered with her the house of modest appearance where she had her apartment.

They were already going up stairs, when the porter ran out of his lodge.

"Madame!" he said, "madame!"

Mme. Cadelle stopped.

"What is the matter?"

"A letter for you."

"For me?"

"Here it is. A lady brought it less than five minutes ago. Really, she looked annoyed not to find you in. But she is going to come back. She knew you were to be here this morning."

M. de Trégars had also stopped.

"What kind of a looking person was this lady?" he asked.

"Dressed all in black, with a thick veil on her face."

"All right. I thank you."

The porter returned to his lodge. Mme. Zélie broke the seal. The first envelope contained another, upon which she spelt, for she did not read very fluently,—

"To be handed to M. Vincent."

"Some one knows that he is hiding here," she said in a tone of utter surprise. "Who can it be?"

"Who? Why, the woman whose reputation M. Favoral was so anxious to spare when he put you in the Rue du Cirque house."

There was nothing that irritated the young woman so much as this idea.

"You are right," she said. "What a fool he made of me, the old rascal! But never mind. I am going to pay him for it now."

Nevertheless when she reached her story, the third, and at the moment of slipping the key into the keyhole, she again seemed perplexed.

"If some misfortune should happen," she sighed.

"What are you afraid of?"

"Old Vincent has got all sorts of arms in there. He has sworn to me that the first person who forced his way into the apartments, he would kill him like a dog. Suppose he should fire at us?"

She was afraid, terribly afraid: she was livid, and her teeth chattered.

"Let me go first," suggested M. de Trégars.

"No. Only, if you were a good fellow, you would do what I am going to ask you. Say, will you?"

"If it can be done."

"Oh, certainly! Here is the thing. We'll go in to-

gether; but you must not make any noise. There is a large closet with glass doors, from which every thing can be heard and seen that goes on in the large room. You'll get in there. I'll go ahead, and draw out old Vincent into the parlor, and at the right moment, *v'lan!* you appear."

It was after all, quite reasonable.

"Agreed!" said Marius.

"Then," she said, "every thing will go on right. The entrance of the closet with the glass doors is on the right as you go in. Come along now, and walk easy."

And she opened the door.

XI.

THE apartment was exactly as described by Mme. Cadelle. In the dark and narrow ante-chamber, three doors opened,—on the left, that of the dining-room; in the centre, that of a parlor and bedroom which communicated; on the right, that of the closet. M. de Trégars slipped in noiselessly through the latter, and at once recognized that Mme. Zélie had not deceived him, and that he would see and hear every thing that went on in the parlor. He saw the young woman walk into it. She laid her provisions down upon the table, and called,—
"Vincent!"

The former cashier of the Mutual Credit appeared at once, coming out of the bedroom.

He was so changed, that his wife and children would have hesitated in recognizing him. He had cut off his beard, pulled out almost the whole of his thick eyebrows, and covered his rough and straight hair under a

brown curly wig, He wore patent-leather boots, wide pantaloons, and one of those short jackets of rough material, and with broad sleeves which French elegance has borrowed from English stable-boys. He tried to appear calm, careless, and playful; but the contraction of his lips betrayed a horrible anguish, and his look had the strange mobility of the wild beasts' eye, when, almost at bay, they stop for a moment, listening to the barking of the hounds.

"I was beginning to fear that you would disappoint me," he said to Mme. Zélie.

"It took me some time to buy your breakfast."

"And is that all that kept you?"

"The porter detained me too, to hand me a letter, in which I found one for you. Here it is."

"A letter!" exclaimed Vincent Favoral.

And, snatching it from her, he tore off the envelope. But he had scarcely looked over it, when he crushed it in his hand, exclaiming,—

"It is monstrous! It is a mean, infamous treason!"

He was interrupted by a violent ringing of the door-bell.

"Who can it be?" stammered Mme. Cadelle.

"I know who it is," replied the former cashier.

"Open, open quick."

She obeyed; and almost at once a woman walked into the parlor, wearing a cheap, black woollen dress. With a sudden gesture, she threw off her veil; and M. de Trégars recognized the Baroness de Thaller.

"Leave us!" she said to Mme. Zélie, in a tone which one would hardly dare to assume towards a bar-maid.

The other felt indignant.

"What, what!" she began. "I am in my own house here."

"Leave us!" repeated M. Favoral with a threatening gesture. "Go, go!"

She went out but only to take refuge by the side of M. de Trégars.

"You hear how they treat me," she said in a hoarse voice.

He made no answer. All his attention was centred upon the parlor. The Baroness de Thaller and the former cashier were standing opposite each other, like two adversaries about to fight a duel.

"I have just read your letter," began Vincent Favoral.

Coldly the baroness said, "Ah!"

"It is a joke, I suppose."

"Not at all."

"You refuse to go with me?"

"Positively."

"And yet it was all agreed upon. I have acted wholly under your urgent, pressing advice. How many times have you repeated to me that to live with your husband had become an intolerable torment to you! How many times have you sworn to me that you wished to be mine alone, begging me to procure a large sum of money, and to fly with you!"

"I was in earnest at the time. I have discovered, at the last moment, that it would be impossible for me thus to abandon my country, my daughter, my friends."

"We can take Césarine with us."

"Do not insist."

He was looking at her with a stupid, gloomy gaze.

"Then," he stammered, "those tears, those prayers, those oaths!"

"I have reflected."

"It is not possible! If you spoke the truth, you would not be here."

"I am here to make you understand that we must give up projects which cannot be realized. There are some social conventionalities which cannot be torn up."

As if he scarcely understood what she said, he repeated,—

"Social conventionalities!"

And suddenly falling at Mme. de Thaller's feet, his head thrown back, and his hands clasped together,—

"You lie!" he said. "Confess that you lie, and that it is a final trial which you are imposing upon me. Or else have you, then, never loved me? That's impossible! I would not believe you if you were to say so. A woman who does not love a man cannot be to him what you have been to me: she does not give herself up thus so joyously and so completely. Have you, then, forgotten every thing? Is it possible that you do not remember those divine evenings in the Rue de Cirque?—those nights, the mere thought of which fires my brain, and consumes my blood."

He was horrible to look at, horrible and ridiculous at the same time. As he wished to take Mme. de Thaller's hands, she stepped back, and he followed her, dragging himself on his knees.

"Where could you find," he continued, "a man to worship you like me, with an ardent, absolute, blind, mad passion? With what can you reproach me? Have I not sacrificed to you without a murmur every thing that a man can sacrifice here below,—fortune, family, honor,—to supply your extravagance, to anticipate your slightest fancies, to give you gold to scatter by the handful. Did I not leave my own family struggling

with poverty. I would have snatched bread from my children's mouths in order to purchase roses to scatter under your footsteps. And for years did ever a word from me betray the secret of our love? What have I not endured? You deceived me. I knew it, and I said nothing. Upon a word from you I stepped aside before him whom your caprice made happy for a day. You told me, 'Steal!' and I stole. You told me, 'Kill!' and I tried to kill."

"Fly. A man who has twelve hundred thousand francs in gold, bank-notes, and good securities, can always get along."

"And my wife and children?"

"Maxence is old enough to help his mother. Gilberte will find a husband: depend upon it. Besides, what's to prevent you from sending them money?"

"They would refuse it."

"You will always be a fool, my dear!"

To Vincent Favoral's first stupor and miserable weakness now succeeded a terrible passion. All the blood had left his face: his eyes was flashing.

"Then," he resumed, "all is really over?"

"Of course."

"Then I have been duped like the rest,—like that poor Marquis de Trégars, whom you had made mad also. But he, at least saved his honor; whereas I— And I have no excuse; for I should have known. I knew that you were but the bait which the Baron de Thaller held out to his victims."

He waited for an answer; but she maintained a contemptuous silence.

"Then you think," he said with a threatening laugh, "that it will all end that way?"

"What can you do?"

"There is such a thing as justice, I imagine, and judges too. I can give myself up, and reveal every thing."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"That would be throwing yourself into the wolf's mouth for nothing," she said. "You know better than any one else that my precautions are well enough taken to defy any thing you can do or say. I have nothing to fear."

"Are you quite sure of that?"

"Trust to me," she said with a smile of perfect security.

The former cashier of the Mutual Credit made a terrible gesture; but, checking himself at once, he seized one of the baroness's hands. She withdrew it quickly, however, and, in an accent of insurmountable disgust,—

"Enough, enough!" she said.

In the adjoining closet Marius de Trégars could feel Mme. Zélie Cadelle shuddering by his side.

"What a wretch that woman is!" she murmured; "and he—what a base coward!"

The former cashier remained prostrated, striking the floor with his head.

"And you would forsake me," he groaned, "when we are united by a past such as ours! How could you replace me? Where would you find a slave so devoted to your every wish?"

The baroness was getting impatient.

"Stop!" she interrupted,— "stop these demonstrations as useless as ridiculous."

This time he did start up, as if lashed with a whip, and, double locking the door which communicated with

the ante-chamber, he put the key in his pocket; and, with a step as stiff and mechanical as that of an automaton, he disappeared in the sleeping-room.

"He is going for a weapon," whispered Mme. Cadelle.

It was also what Marius thought.

"Run down quick," he said to Mme. Zélie. "In a cab standing opposite No. 25, you will find Mlle. Gilberte Favoral waiting. Let her come at once."

And, rushing into the parlor,—

"Fly!" he said to Mme. Thaller.

But she was as petrified by this apparition.

"M. de Trégars!"

"Yes, yes, me. But hurry and go!"

And he pushed her into the closet.

It was but time. Vincent Favoral reappeared upon the threshold of the bedroom. But, if it was a weapon he had gone for, it was not for the one which Marius and Mme. Cadelle supposed. It was a bundle of papers which he held in his hand. Seeing M. de Trégars there, instead of Mme. de Thaller, an exclamation of terror and surprise rose to his lips. He understood vaguely what must have taken place; that the man who stood there must have been concealed in the glass closet, and that he had assisted the baroness to escape.

"Ah the miserable wretch!" he stammered with a tongue made thick by passion, "the infamous wretch! She has betrayed me; she has surrendered me. I am lost!"

Mastering the most terrible emotion he had ever felt,—

"No, no! you shall not be surrendered," uttered M. de Trégars.

Collecting all the energy that the devouring passion

which had blasted his existence had left him, the former cashier of the Mutual Credit took one or two steps forward.

"Who are you, then?" he asked.

"Do you not know me? I am the son of that unfortunate Marquis de Trégars of whom you spoke a moment since. I am Lucienne's brother."

Like a man who has received a stunning blow, Vincent Favoral sank heavily upon a chair.

"He knows all," he groaned.

"Yes, all!"

"You must hate me mortally."

"I pity you."

The old cashier had reached that point when all the faculties, after being strained to their utmost limits, suddenly break down, when the strongest man gives up, and weeps like a child.

"Ah, I am the most wretched of villains!" he exclaimed.

He had hid his face in his hands; and in one second, —as it happens, they say, to the dying on the threshold of eternity,—he reviewed his entire existence.

"And yet," he said, "I had not the soul of a villain. I wanted to get rich, but honestly, by labor, and by rigid economy. And I should have succeeded. I had a hundred and fifty thousand francs of my own when I met the Baron de Thaller. Alas! why did I meet him? 'Twas he who first gave me to understand that it was stupid to work and save, when, at the *bourse*, with moderate luck, one might become a millionaire in six months."

He stopped, shook his head, and suddenly,—

"Do you know the Baron de Thaller?" he asked.

And, without giving Marius time to answer,—

"He is a German," he went on, "a Prussian. His father was a cab-driver in Berlin, and his mother waiting-maid in a brewery. At the age of eighteen, he was compelled to leave his country, owing to some petty swindle, and came to take up his residence in Paris. He found employment in the office of a stock-broker, and was living very poorly, when he made the acquaintance of a young laundress named Euphrasie, who had for a lover a very wealthy gentleman, the Marquis de Trégars, whose weakness was to pass himself off for a poor clerk. Euphrasie and Thaller were well calculated to agree. They did agree, and formed an association,—she contributing her beauty; he, his genius for intrigue; both, their corruption and their vices. Soon after they met, she gave birth to a child, a daughter, whom she intrusted to some poor gardeners at Louveciennes, with the firm and settled intention to leave her there forever. And yet it was upon this daughter, whom they firmly hoped never to see again, that the two accomplices were building their fortune.

"It was in the name of that daughter that Euphrasie wrung considerable sums from the Marquis de Trégars. As soon as Thaller and she found themselves in possession of six hundred thousand francs, they dismissed the marquis, and got married. Already, at that time, Thaller had taken the title of baron, and lived in some style. But his first speculations were not successful. The revolution of 1848 finished his ruin, and he was about being expelled from the *bourse*, when he found me on his way,—I, poor fool, who was going about everywhere, asking how I could advantageously invest my hundred and fifty thousand francs."

He was speaking in a hoarse voice, shaking his

clinchd fist in the air, doubtless at the Baron de Thaller.

"Unfortunately," he resumed, "it was only much later that I discovered all this. At the moment, M. de Thaller dazzled me. His friends, Saint Pavin and the bankers Jottras, proclaimed him the smartest and the most honest man in France. Still I would not have given my money, if it had not been for the baroness. The first time that I was introduced to her, and that she fixed upon me her great black eyes, I felt myself moved to the deepest recesses of my soul. In order to see her again, I invited her, together with her husband and her husband's friends, to dine with me, by the side of my wife and children. She came. Her husband made me sign every thing he pleased; but, as she went off, she pressed my hand."

He was still shuddering at the recollection of it, the poor fellow!

"The next day," he went on, "I handed to Thaller all I had in the world; and, in exchange, he gave me the position of cashier in the Mutual Credit, which he had just founded. He treated me like an inferior, and did not admit me to visit his family. But I didn't care: the baroness had permitted me to see her again, and almost every afternoon I met her at the Tuileries; and I had made bold to tell her that I loved her to desperation. At last, one evening, she consented to make an appointment with me for the second following day, in an apartment which I had rented.

"The day before I was to meet her, and whilst I was beside myself with joy, the Baron de Thaller requested me to assist him, by means of certain irregular entries, to conceal a deficit arising from unsuccessful specula-

tions. How could I refuse a man, whom, as I thought, I was about to deceive grossly! I did as he wished. The next day Mme. de Thaller became my mistress; and I was a lost man."

Was he trying to exculpate himself? Was he merely yielding to that imperious sentiment, more powerful than the will or the reason, which impels the criminal to reveal the secret which oppresses him?

"From that day," he went on, "began for me the torment of that double existence which I underwent for years. I had given to my mistress all I had in the world; and she was insatiable. She wanted money always, any way, and in heaps. She made me buy the house in the Rue du Cirque for our meetings; and, between the demands of the husband and those of the wife, I was almost insane. I drew from the funds of the Mutual Credit as from an inexhaustible mine; and, as I foresaw that some day must come when all would be discovered, I always carried about me a loaded revolver, with which to blow out my brains when they came to arrest me."

And he showed to Marius the handle of a revolver protruding from his pocket.

"And if only she had been faithful to me!" he continued, becoming more and more animated. "But what have I not endured! When the Marquis de Trégars returned to Paris, and they set about defrauding him of his fortune, she did not hesitate a moment to become his mistress again. She used to tell me, 'What a fool you are! all I want is his money. I love no one but you.' But after his death she took others. She made use of our house in the Rue du Cirque for purposes of dissipation for herself and her daughter Césarine. And I—miserable coward that I was!—I suffered all, so much did I tremble to lose her, so much did I fear to be weaned

from the semblance of love with which she paid my fearful sacrifices. And now she would betray me, forsake me! For every thing that has taken place was suggested by her in order to procure a sum wherewith to fly to America. It was she who imagined the wretched comedy which I played, so as to throw upon myself the whole responsibility. M. de Thaller has had millions for his share: I have only had twelve hundred thousand francs."

Violent nervous shudders shook his frame: his face became purple. He drew himself up, and, brandishing the letters which he held in his hand,—

"But all is not over!" he exclaimed. "There are proofs which neither the baron nor his wife know that I have. I have the proof of the infamous swindle of which the Marquis de Trégars was the victim. I have the proof of the farce got up by M. de Thaller and myself to defraud the stockholders of the Mutual Credit!"

"What do you hope for?"

He was laughing a stupid laugh.

"I? I shall go and hide myself in some suburb of Paris, and write to Euphrasie to come. She knows that I have twelve hundred thousand francs. She will come; and she will keep coming as long as I have any money. And when I have no more"—

He stopped short, starting back, his arms outstretched as if to repel a terrifying apparition. Mlle. Gilberte had just appeared at the door.

"My daughter!" stammered the wretch. "Gilberte!"

"The Marquise de Trégars," uttered Marius.

An inexpressible look of terror and anguish convulsed the features of Vincent Favoral: he guessed that it was the end.

"What do you want with me?" he stammered.

"The money that you have stolen, father," replied the girl in an inexorable tone of voice,—“the twelve hundred thousand francs which you have here, then the proofs which are in your hands, and, finally your weapons.”

He was trembling from head to foot.

"Take away my money!" he said. "Why, that would be compelling me to give myself up! Do you wish to see me in prison?"

"The disgrace would fall back upon your children, sir," said M. de Trégars. "We shall, on the contrary, do every thing in the world to enable you to evade the pursuit of the police."

"Well, yes, then. But to-morrow I must write to Euphrasie: I must see her!"

"You have lost your mind, father," said Mlle. Gilberte. "Come, do as I ask you."

He drew himself up to his full height.

"And suppose I refuse?"

But it was the last effort of his will. He yielded, though not without an agonizing struggle and gave up to his daughter the money, the proofs and the arms. And as she was walking away, leaning on M. de Trégars' arm,—

"But send me your mother, at least," he begged. "She will understand me: she will not be without pity. She is my wife: let her come quick. I will not, I can not remain alone."

XII.

It was with convulsive haste that the Baroness de Thaller went over the distance that separated the Rue St. Lazare from the Rue de la Pépinière. The sudden

intervention of M. de Trégars had upset all her ideas. The most sinister presentiments agitated her mind. In the courtyard of her residence, all the servants, gathered in a group, were talking. They did not take the trouble to stand aside to let her pass; and she even noticed some smiles and ironical gigglings. This was a terrible blow to her. What was the matter? What had they heard? In the magnificent vestibule, a man was sitting as she came in. It was the same suspicious character that Marius de Trégars had seen in the grand parlor, in close conference with the baroness.

"Bad news," he said with a sheepish look.

"What?"

"That little Lucienne must have her soul riveted to her body. She is only wounded; and she'll get over it."

"Never mind Lucienne. What about M. de Trégars?"

"Oh! he is another sharp one. Instead of taking up our man's provocation, he collared him, and took away from him the note I had sent him."

Mme. de Thaller started violently.

"What is the meaning, then," she asked, "of your letter of last night, in which you requested me to hand two thousand francs to the bearer?"

The man became pale as death.

"You received a letter from me," he stammered, "last night?"

"Yes, from you; and I gave the money."

The man struck his forehead.

"I understand it all!" he exclaimed.

"What?"

"They wanted proofs. They imitated my handwriting, and you swallowed the bait. That's the reason why I spent the night in the station-house; and, if they

let me go this morning, it was to find out where I'd go. I have been followed, they are shadowing me. We are gone up, Mme. le Baronne. *Sauve qui peut!*"

And he ran out.

More agitated than ever Mme. de Thaller went up stairs. In the little red-and-gold parlor, the Baron de Thaller and Mlle. Césarine were waiting for her. Stretched upon an arm-chair, her legs crossed, the tip of her boot on a level with her eye, Mlle. Césarine, with a look of ironical curiosity, was watching her father, who, livid and trembling with nervous excitement, was walking up and down, like a wild beast in his cage. As soon as the baroness appeared,—

"Things are going badly," said her husband, "very badly. Our game is devilishly compromised."

"You think so?"

"I am but too sure of it. Such a well-combined stroke too! But every thing is against us. In presence of the examining magistrate, Jottras held out well; but Saint Pavin spoke. That dirty rascal was not satisfied with the share allotted to him. On the information furnished by him, Costeclar was arrested this morning. And Costeclar knows all, since he has been your confidant, Vincent Favoral's, and my own. When a man has, like him, two or three forgeries in his record, he is sure to speak. He will speak. Perhaps he has already done so, since the police has taken possession of Latterman's office, with whom I had organized the panic and the tumble in the Mutual Credit stock. What can we do to ward off this blow?"

With a surer glance than her husband, Mme. de Thaller had measured the situation.

"Do not try to ward it off," she replied: "It would be useless."

“ Because? ”

“ Because M. de Trégars has found Vincent Favoral; because, at this very moment, they are together, arranging their plans.”

The baron made a terrible gesture.

“ Ah, thunder and lightning! ” he exclaimed. “ I always told you that this stupid fool, Favoral, would cause our ruin. It was so easy for you to find an occasion for him to blow his brains out.”

“ Was it so difficult for you to accept, M. de Trégars' offers? ”

“ It was you who made me refuse.”

“ Was it me, too, who was so anxious to get rid of Lucienne? ”

For years, Mlle. Césarine had not seemed so amused; and, in a half whisper, she was humming the famous tune, from “ The Pearl of Poutoise,”—

“ Happy accord! Happy couple! ”

M. de Thaller, beside himself, was advancing to seize the baroness: she was drawing back, knowing him, perhaps to be capable of any thing, when suddenly there was a violent knocking at the door.

“ In the name of the law! ”

It was a commissary of police.

And, whilst surrounded by agents, they were taken to a cab.—

“ Orphan on both sides! ” exclaimed Mlle. Césarine, “ I am free, then. Now we'll have some fun! ”

At that very moment, M. de Trégars and Mlle. Gilberte reached the Rue St. Gilles.

Hearing that her husband had been found,—

“ I must see him! ” exclaimed Mme. Favoral.

And, in spite of any thing they could tell her, she threw a shawl over her shoulders, and started with Mlle. Gilberte.

When they had entered Mme. Zélie's apartment, of which they had a key, they found in the parlor, with his back towards them, Vincent Favoral sitting at the table, leaning forward, and apparently writing. Mme. Favoral approached on tiptoe, and over her husband's shoulder she read what he had just written,—

“Euphrasie, my beloved, eternally-adored mistress, will you forgive me? The money that I was keeping for you, my darling, the proofs which will crush your husband—they have taken every thing from me, basely, by force. And it is my daughter—”

He had stopped there. Surprised at his immobility, Mme. Favoral called,—

“Vincent!”

He made no answer. She pushed him with her finger. He rolled to the ground. He was dead.

Three months later the great Mutual Credit suit was tried before the Sixth Court. The scandal was great; but public curiosity was strangely disappointed. As in most of these financial affairs, justice, whilst exposing the most audacious frauds, was not able to unravel the true secret.

She managed, at least, to lay hands upon every thing that the Baron de Thaller had hoped to save. That worthy was condemned to five years' prison; M. Costeclar got off with three years; and M. Jottras with two. M. Saint Pavin was acquitted.

Arrested for subornation of murder, the former Marquise de Javelle the Baroness de Thaller, was released for want of proper proof. But, implicated in the

suit against her husband, she lost three-fourths of her fortune, and is now living with her daughter, whose *debut* is announced at the *Bouffes-Parisiens*, or at the *Délassements-Comiques*.

Already, before that time, Mlle. Lucienne, completely restored, had married Maxence Favoral.

Of the five hundred thousand francs which were returned to her, she applied three hundred thousand to discharge the debts of her father-in-law, and with the rest she induced her husband to emigrate to America.

Paris had become odious to both.

Marius and Mlle. Gilberte, who has now become Marquise de Trégars, have taken up their residence at the Château de Trégars, three leagues from Quimper. They have been followed in their retreat by Mme. Favoral and by General Count de Villegré.

The greater portion of his father's fortune, Marius had applied to pay off all the personal creditors of the former cashier of the Mutual Credit, all the trades-people, and also M. Chapelain, old man Désormeaux, and M. and Mme. Desclavettes.

All that is left to the Marquis and Marquise de Trégars is some twenty thousand francs a year, and if they ever lose them, it will not be at the *bourse*.

The Mutual Credit is quoted at 467.25!

THE END.